

DJIBOUTI & SOMALILAND

4 – 25 SEPTEMBER 2010

TOUR REPORT

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Warlords, pirates, chaos and lawlessness are all associated with Somalia. What isn't always appreciated is that what was once British Somaliland has, since 1991, been the Republic of Somaliland, and this peaceful enclave doesn't take kindly to being associated with the eastern half of the country's descent into anarchy. The tiny country of Djibouti is also quite stable forming as it does an important port to the Horn of Africa at the narrowest part of the Red Sea and at the mouth of the Rift Valley. Our adventurous group set off on this pioneering tour to these countries in order to look for some of the endemics and specialties of the region that had until recently been considered unattainable. Little ornithological work has been carried out in the country since the late 1980's but there had already been a small number of intrepid birders set foot within the country's borders this year. However, our tour was aiming to be the most thorough and exhaustive yet and we succeeded remarkably well in finding some long lost species and making some significant ornithological discoveries. We amassed a total of 324 species of birds of which all but two were seen and 23 species of mammals. The mouth-watering endemics and near-endemics that were tracked down and all seen well were Archer's Buzzard, Djibouti Francolin, Little Brown Bustard, Somali Pigeon, Somali Lark, Lesser Hoopoe-lark, Somali Wheatear, Somali Thrush, Somali Starling, Somali Golden-winged Grosbeak and Warsangli Linnet. We rediscovered Collared Lark in the red sand country east of Burco, Sombre Rock Chat in both Djibouti and Somaliland, problematic seedeaters in Djibouti and an owl in the Daallo Forest in Somaliland that appears to be vocally similar to Arabian Scops Owl but perhaps represents an undescribed taxon. Amongst this impressive list were also a number of other wonderful highlights that included Archer's Francolin, Heuglin's and Arabian Bustards, Somali Courser, White-eyed Gull, White-cheeked and Saunders's Terns, Spotted Sandgrouse, African Collared Dove, Donaldson Smith's Nightjar, Somali Bee-eater, Black-billed Wood-hoopoe, Hemprich's Hornbill, Yellow-breasted Barbet, Gillett's Lark, Blanford's, Somali Short-toed and Short-tailed Larks, Chestnut-headed Sparrow Lark, Somali and Dodson's Bulbuls, African and Black Scrub Robins, White-crowned Black and Abyssinian Black Wheatears, Little Rock Thrush, Mangrove Warbler, Yellow-vented Eremomela, Philippa's and Somali Crombecs, Arabian Warbler, Ménétries's Warbler, Pale Prinia, Gambaga Flycatcher, Grey-headed Batis, Scaly Chatterer, Nile Valley Sunbird, Rosy-patched and Red-naped Bush-shrikes, Three-streaked Tchagra, Dwarf Raven, Golden-breasted,

Shelley's, White-crowned and Magpie Starlings, Swainson's, Somali and Arabian Golden Sparrows, Rüppell's Weaver, Northern Grosbeak Canary and Brown-rumped Seedeater. A selection of very special mammals were also seen including the beautiful little Beira as well as Dorcas (here of the *pelzelni* race) and Speke's Gazelles, Desert Warthog and the very cute Speke's Pectinator.

Our tour began in Djibouti where we arrived on a hot afternoon only to find that our luggage had stayed behind in Addis Ababa courtesy of Ethiopian Airlines! We had originally intended to head into Somaliland that very afternoon but because of the lack of luggage we had to amend our plans and rest over in Djibouti that night when we were promised the missing bags would arrive.

We made our way to the sleepy Siesta Hotel on the seafront and checked into deliciously well air-conditioned rooms. However even the comfort of cool air couldn't hold us inside and we were soon out on the street where toothy dogs snarled and an array of people were dotted along the depressingly filthy beach that provided perfect scavenging habitat for hundreds of House Crows. Western Reef Egrets dashed through the shallows and a few ragged White-eyed Gulls and the odd Sooty Gull were seen. The old railway embankment behind the hotel was covered with bushes shabbily decorated with remnants of plastic bags and assorted rubbish. The stench of urine filled the air as we picked our way through the drying faeces in order to see a flock of Arabian Golden Sparrows that had chosen to make this place their home. Here also were Somali Bulbul, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Graceful Prinia, Shining Sunbird, Rüppell's Weaver and Red-billed Firefinch. This certainly wasn't the most salubrious place to begin our exotic adventure but the sparrows were a worthwhile attraction and a great African tick! We spent the rest of the afternoon in slightly more pleasant surroundings watching shorebirds and some migrants on the coast. Much of the salt marsh here is being drained and reclaimed for building purposes but it was high tide and huge numbers of waders were gathering on the foreshore. A Striated Heron picked its way through some resting Black Herons, Sacred Ibis and the *archeri* race of Eurasian Spoonbill. Rose-ringed Parakeets screeched overhead and a few migrants included Western Osprey, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, European Roller and a Rufous-tailed Shrike. A dapper male Black-crowned Sparrow Lark was found on the sandy wastes but it was the impressive number and variety of waders that really grabbed our attention. The cream of the crop had to be a roost of over 300 Crab-plovers but there were also Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Common Ringed, Kentish and Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers, Pacific Golden and Grey Plovers, Spur-winged Plover, Sanderling, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Ruff, Bar-tailed Godwit, Eurasian Whimbrel, Eurasian Curlew, Common Redshank, Common Greenshank, Red Knot, Wood, Terek and Common Sandpipers and Ruddy Turnstone. A selection of terns included Gull-billed, Caspian, Lesser Crested, Common and White-winged Terns.

That evening a few of our errant bags drifted into Djibouti with the evening flight but some still remained missing but we were promised their return the next afternoon. Sadly time was now being wasted so we decided on a plan to leave for Somaliland in the morning and whilst we were birding on the other side of the border Abdi could nip back and collect the bags if indeed they arrived.

Djibouti doesn't wake early and in the morning a line of taxis were parked along the beach and the drivers were laid out sleeping in the open on the sand, kept a little cooler by the onshore breeze. Slowly they stirred themselves and underwent their morning ablutions as a pair of Abdim's Storks flapped lazily by. The tide was right up so the shorebirds were absent although Greater Crested Tern was seen out at sea. The hotel garden was a little more active and we added Speckled Pigeon, Laughing Dove, European Bee-eater, Nile Valley Sunbird and African Silverbill. Here also some Somali Sparrows were clearly associating with presumably hybrid House Sparrows! A pool near the border held some Garganey, our first Southern Grey Shrikes were seen and a Black Scrub Robin was watched while the passports were being attended to. The border crossing was completely hassle-free

although a little tedious and we were warmly welcomed into Somaliland by the officials and interested bystanders whilst we were able to study some 'pure' House Sparrows breeding alongside hybrids and presumably with the Somali Sparrows.

The afternoon was spent exploring the coast between the border and Zeila. In particular we were interested in finding the little known *avicenniae* reed warbler known as Mangrove Warbler and certainly short-winged birds were seemingly very common in the mangroves although we only managed to hear a gurgle from a Clamorous Reed Warbler. We also scratched our heads over some 'mangrove' Eastern Olivaceous Warblers that were also present and have been mooted as a separate taxon. Were our birds indeed *alulensis* or just some migrants? They did not look unusually small and were also very pale as the individual seen in Djibouti the previous day and so we were very unsure as to which race we were actually looking at. The surrounding dry bush country surrendered some very fine Arabian Bustards, approachable Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse and showy Rosy-patched Bush-shrikes as well as Yellow-necked Spurfowl, Namaqua and Ring-necked Doves, White-throated Bee-eater, Eurasian Hoopoe and Red-billed Oxpecker. The sea and mudflats continued to impress with the numbers of birds and we added Pink-backed Pelican, Greater Flamingo, Eurasian Oystercatcher and Saunders's Tern. A dark Western Marsh Harrier flew in from the sea and in the sandy slacks we found the first of what was to become a showcase of larks with some fine views of both Crested Lark and Greater Hoopoe-lark, the latter with fledged young. The day ended with a pair of Spotted Thick-knees and thankfully the arrival of the rest of our luggage before we continued on to Zeila where we were supposed to camp the night.

Strong winds were to be something of a problem throughout the trip and as we entered the town we were told that our beach camp was not ready as it kept blowing down and indeed we couldn't actually reach there at the present time as it was being set up on an island and the sea was too rough for the boat to cross the short distance! We were assured that the winds would subside relatively quickly and so we ate a delicious fish meal in a restaurant in town and when we were finished the scenario unfolded as promised and we were ferried over to our desert island where beds had been set up under the stars and we spent a peaceful night there in the cooler air.

The next day took a long time to get started, as we had to dismantle the camp and then ship it to shore only to find we had to undergo a 12 hours journey to get to Hargeisa! Our excellent sturdy and comfortable landcruisers were up to the job but in order to try to get to our destination this side of midnight was a tall order and in future it would be obviously much more sensible to break the journey over two days. Eventually we were all ferried back to shore with a solitary Grey Heron being the only new bird and we set off on the long drive that initially took us at speed across some dry sandy wastes. The wind was whipping itself up again and we found ourselves blasted by hot air and innumerable grains of sand. Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse squeezed their eyes shut and hunkered down behind any sheltering vegetation they could find. By mid-day things were calmer Dwarf Ravens had replaced the House Crows and a Heuglin's Bustard sheltering in a wadi and a male Soemmering's Gazelle were about the only highlights of the morning. The cars doubled up as mobile canteens and there was always a good selection of jam, peanut butter and cheese as well as various pasta dishes to keep starvation at bay. Better still a few birds were found in the trees where we found some shade for a lunch break and we noted some Black-headed Plovers here at the edge of their range as well as Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Central African Hoopoe, Rufous Scrub Robin, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Pale Prinia, African Grey Flycatcher, Somali Fiscal, Northern White-crowned Shrike, Brubru and Fork-tailed Drongo.

As we climbed up from the plains the terrain became rather more interesting and it was rather frustrating that we couldn't explore as species such as Buff-crested Bustard, Nyanza Swift, Blue-naped

Mousebird, Gillett's Lark, Barn Swallow, Isabelline Wheatear, Golden-breasted, Superb and White-crowned Starlings and White-headed Buffalo-weaver flashed past us. In the absence of a road we drove up a wide dry river bed for kilometres until finally some minor problems with one of the vehicles brought us to a halt in a lush valley with water in the river. Taking advantage of the time to escape from the vehicles and search for a few birds we were watched over by our attentive police guards as we managed to get great views of Yellow-breasted and Black-throated Barbets and Lesser Masked and Vitelline Masked Weavers. The day was drawing to a close and we stopped for prayers and a supper break as the sun set. An African Hawk Eagle perched in a nearby tree and an unidentified nightjar glided around us and then we drove on through what seemed like an eternity until we eventually espied the bright lights of Hargeisa in the distance and finally collapsed exhausted into our hotel for the night.

We were rather slow getting away the next morning and waited patiently inside the hotel until everything was ready. Hooded Vultures and Little Swifts were the only new birds to be seen although as we left town there were also African Mourning Dove, Greater Blue-eared Starling and Swainson's Sparrow. A large troop of Sacred Baboons and our first Desert Warthogs were also seen on the outskirts. It seems in Somaliland that birds and animals are generally not persecuted with the result that many species were both tame and approachable. Our first port of call this morning was to be a stakeout for Beira, a rare and beautiful little antelope that was being monitored by Abdi's scouts and had already been located. We arrived at the site as the day was heating up but the scout was there waiting and our first birds were the dapper Somali Wheatear, some sleek Somali Bee-eaters and a pair of migrant Ménétries's Warblers. Our man on the spot informed us that there was a small group of six Beira but they had moved over the brow of the hill and were no longer in sight. Expecting a long walk or climb we started off after them but found them closer than expected as we startled them out of a sheltered hollow and they started running up the ridge. Thankfully they soon settled again and we were treated to some fine scope views for as long as we wished. A family of Desert Larks and then some Gerenuks drew us away and the bush country here held a small number of new species for the trip. African Orange-bellied Parrot shrieked from the acacias that also held White-bellied Go-away Bird, Banded Parisoma, Northern Grey Tit, Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit, White-bellied Canary and migrant Spotted Flycatchers. Sheltering under the trees for lunch we found ourselves in the company of noisy Crested Francolins and Slate-coloured Boubous. An Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Greater Honeyguide and a small flock of Eurasian Golden Orioles were also found.

During the afternoon we motored onwards through an interesting succession of open plains. Raptors now came to our notice and we had some amazing views of a confiding Gabar Goshawk as well as the first of many Eastern Chanting Goshawks. Our first stop on the plains delivered one of the most wanted species of the trip the subtly attractive Little Brown Bustard. These particular individuals were somewhat shy but we were promised plenty more to come and so we turned our attention to the larks and noted both Somali Short-toed Lark and Thekla Lark feeding in the degraded grasslands. Smart Crowned Plovers and both Somali and Double-banded Coursers were very much in evidence along with plenty of Tawny Pipits. Unassuming Desert Cisticolas lurked in the taller grasses and there were also Wattled Starling, Red-billed Buffalo-weaver and even a Green Sandpiper wading in a small puddle. Another plain provided views of a group of magnificent Kori Bustards being harassed by a spectacular Lanner Falcon. As the sun was setting we headed on past Speke's Gazelles to our camp for the night hidden inside a thorny thicket.

Sadly despite the late hour the camp had still not been completely set up. The 'tents' were actually very solid iron frame affairs more like portable huts than tents. Each had its own bed and tables and even attached toilet facilities and the process of erecting and disassembling the camp was far from rapid. However our evening meal was well underway and our cook is to be congratulated on doing a

really fine job in difficult circumstances through the tour. The food was deliciously spiced and was normally vegetarian as the difficulties of transporting and keeping meat fresh in this hot land were obvious. That night it seemed that every bug in Somaliland was being attracted to the lights of the camp in the darkness. Finally the tents were prepared and we settled down for a comfortable nights sleep.

The following morning the sweet repetitive whistles of a White-browed Scrub Robin told us sunrise was on the way. We spent the early morning exploring the thorn-bush environs of the camp and found species such as the distinctive *viridiceps* race of Brown-tailed Apalis, tail-wiggling Red-fronted Warblers, Somali Crombec and the striking Magpie Starling. Dodson's Bulbul had by now taken over from Somali Bulbul and other familiar East African species here included Northern Red-billed and Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbills, Red-and-yellow Barbet, Grey Wren-warbler, Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird, Yellow-spotted Petronia and Somali Bunting.

We were back in the cars after breakfast heading for another plain taking in some Rufous-crowned Rollers on the way. Shortly we found ourselves on the edge of the Tuuyo Plains where hundreds of Chestnut-headed Sparrow Larks were very much in evidence. Greater Kestrel and a wandering Sand Martin were also seen and within a short space of time we also came upon one of the key birds of the tour the large and somewhat long-billed Somali Lark (but see the annotated checklist for further discussions on these birds). This lark seemed quite fearless and allowed close approach as it perched on top of the low bushes and sang its clear sweet song out loud. We studied it for sometime until a Lesser Hoopoe-lark appeared in the same field of view and took our attention away. We had our fill of both larks and once again it was time to move on. A sheltered spot with taller trees was home to both Little and Madagascar Bee-eaters and a Nubian Woodpecker and our chosen lunch stop in a very degraded area produced our first of many Short-tailed Larks. Further on the Aroori Plains held another Somali Lark and some very obliging Little Brown Bustards, although our only new birds here were a Steppe Grey Shrike and some Blanford's Larks of the race *daroodensis*. We rolled into the town of Burco at the end of the day where large numbers of Chestnut Weavers were going to roost in our hotel garden.

We managed a quick getaway the next morning and found ourselves eating our bush breakfast in an area that was supposed to be good for the diminutive Philippa's Crombec. It took a bit of searching but we ended up finding about five confiding individuals and also a couple of Arabian Warblers although most other species at this site were already familiar to us. Further on a stakeout was almost instant success for the splendid Red-naped Bush-shrike, although we need not have worried, as this handsome bird appeared to be very common in this area.

We arrived at our next campsite in the middle of the red sand country to the east of Burco where we were to stay for the next two nights. This time the camp was well underway and the stay proved very comfortable indeed. The main reason for visiting this area was to try and rediscover the rather elusive Collared Lark. This striking lark seems to have very precise habitat requirements and had evaded the recent searches by the previous groups into the area. We had budgeted for extra time on these plains for this bird but as luck turned out we did not need it. The number of new species added daily had obviously dropped dramatically and in one sense that was good because it allowed us to focus our search. However there were some new species that included colourful species such as Hunter's Sunbird, Green-winged Pytilia, Northern Carmine Bee-eater and Lilac-breasted Roller, here of the distinctive *lorti* 'Blue-breasted' form. Fierce little Pygmy Falcons stood sentinel atop of the spiky thorn bushes and we much enjoyed a family of Little Owls sunning themselves in the early morning on top of their termitaria homes. Elsewhere we also found the rufous *alopex* form of Foxy Lark although it looked somewhat different from the illustrations in the book, Ethiopian Swallow, African Scrub

Robin, Upcher's Warbler, Pygmy Batis, Alpine Swift, Yellow-vented Eremomela and Straw-tailed Whydah.

The Collared Lark was spotted by chance by Nik as we were driving through the countryside looking for something that looked different enough to be the home of this perhaps truly enigmatic lark. The species is only known to occur in some of the most remote and potentially dangerous parts of the Horn of Africa and little is known of it and it has only been seen by a small number of birders, most notably in recent years in extreme north-east Kenya. We had been puzzling why the other groups in Somaliland had not found it but we were convinced that it still had to be there and when a rufous lark with black flight feathers was spotted dropping into cover the cars came screeching to a stop.

Some time was wasted as Abdi's car had to be called back and when we finally started to walk to where the bird had disappeared there was nothing to be found. We set off on a careful hunt of the area and after a while Angie relocated it for us all to see. The bird itself was rather sneaky choosing to run rather than fly and favoured hiding under small low bushes but would occasionally sit on top when it could be seen from some distance. We were able to watch this well-marked bird for as long as we wished and it is true to say that we had some amazing views.

Instead of spending another day in this red sand area we opted to move on towards the next problematic birds located way over on the coast in the escarpment forests at Daallo. As we left the red sands we squeezed in a couple more excellent species in the shape of some Scaly Chatterers and a very fine pair of Donaldson Smith's Nightjars perched out in broad daylight.

It was perhaps over optimistic to believe that the camp could be taken down and moved such a great distance in one day and so it was perhaps no great surprise that we reached the allocated spot on the Ban Cade Plains only to find an empty wilderness and the news that the truck was still on its way. Perhaps the most amazing thing about Somaliland is that there is pretty good telephone coverage all over the country so we were able to know that the rescue team really was coming! Darkness fell on the plains and finally we saw the lights of the truck slowly zigzagging towards us. It seemed like an eternity before it arrived but once it did a circle of beds was arranged for another night under the stars and the cook was busy whipping up another tasty meal.

The short grasses of Ban Cade did not support many species but we woke next morning to find Short-tailed and Blanford's Larks inspecting our campsite. As the sun rose, so the first sandgrouse were seen winging their way overhead to their drinking pools. Most were Chestnut-bellied but large numbers scattered amongst them were Spotted Sandgrouse and later we stood next to where the birds were coming to drink and this spectacle was definitely one of the highlights of the whole trip. Flock after flock came and went under a brilliant blue sky in the clear desert air. Lesser Hoopoe-larks were far more common here and we also found more Somali Larks somewhat subtly different from the western birds that we had seen earlier but they responded strongly to recordings of the bird from Tuuyo. Some new migrants put in an appearance and although Desert Wheatear and Common Whitethroat were to be expected, Cream-coloured Courser was a little more of a surprise. As we neared Ceerigaabo, Cape Rooks and a Lappet-faced Vulture were seen and both Egyptian Vulture and Tawny Eagle became more numerous. A daytime Verreaux's Eagle Owl was an impressive find and our very first Somali Starlings entered the stage.

We spent the night in a basic hotel in the town but it had electricity and we managed to charge up essential electric equipment and get clean under the cold-water showers. It wasn't particularly easy leaving town the next morning for despite having our police escort and all the correct papers the police still carefully examined all the relevant documents before allowing permission for our trip to

go ahead. There were Blackstarts around the hotel to keep us company and eventually we received the green light and we travelled the short distance left into Daallo Forest. The camp here was set up on the top of the escarpment overlooking the forest below all the way down through the coastal deserts to the sea in the distance. This idyllic situation although wonderful during the daytime changed in the night when temperatures plummeted, the wind rose and the rain fell.

Daallo Forest is home to a number of the specialties and in particular Warsangli Linnet and Somali Golden-winged Grosbeak. We knew that both of these might be problematic and so we were glad to have the extra time to look for them. On the way to the forest we had some excellent views of Grassland Pipit and Grey-headed Batis. Once inside the remnant forest there were Abyssinian White-eyes absolutely everywhere and Brown-rumped Seedeater and the blackbird-like Somali Thrush were very easy to see. A brief view of a juvenile Archer's Buzzard for some was deeply unsatisfying. Raptors were quite well represented and we found Yellow-billed Kite, Steppe Buzzard, Verreaux's Eagle, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Common Kestrel and Barbary Falcon. Probably the best other bird of the first two days were the little covey of Archer's Francolin (split from Orange River Francolin) that allowed some great views before they disappeared into the undergrowth. Of the linnet and the grosbeak there was sadly no sign and we had to content ourselves with more common fare. However the Abyssinian Black Wheatears here were of the endemic race *vauriei*, Hemprich's Hornbill, Little Rock Thrush and Brown Woodland Warbler were all enjoyed and other species included African Olive Pigeon, Common Cuckoo, Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Red-rumped Swallow, Common House Martin, Long-billed and Tree Pipits, Common Nightingale, Northern Wheatear, Common Rock Thrush, Common Chiffchaff, Grey-backed Camaroptera, African Paradise Flycatcher, Isabelline Shrike, Black-crowned Tchagra, Fan-tailed Raven and Cinnamon-breasted Rock Bunting.

A third day searching the same places was postponed in favour of a day outing to the seaside and the tiny settlement at Maydh. A boat had been organised to take us to Rabshie Island (=Jasiira Maydh or Mait Island) some 13 kilometres off shore and home to hopefully huge numbers of breeding seabirds. This excursion was originally planned to take two days but the drivers assured us that Maydh was only four hours drive away and Abdi said that the boat trip would only last two hours. The reality of course was unsurprisingly slightly different. We had to stop on the way down first for some Warsangli Linnets that shot over the car to sing briefly from a prominent tree only to disappear again before everyone could see them. Then further down there was a magnificent adult Archer's Buzzard and of course some Frankincense trees to admire and we finally reached the coast at lunchtime with a keen wind blowing in off of the sea whipping the water up into white caps. The prospect of a boat trip now taking place seemed unlikely and we gazed wistfully at the pink peak of the island shimmering in the sea haze. African Collared Doves in the trees and a European Nightjar flying in off from the sea did a little to lift the mood as we ate our lunch. As we were finishing the boatman declared that the wind was dropping and we could make the voyage. I questioned whether this was because he saw his windfall of cash disappearing with us up the escarpment back to Daallo but Abdi assured me that this was not the case as he had agreed to pay him whatever the outcome. It could have been imagination but the seas did look a bit calmer and so those who chose to brave the adventure jumped on board our little open top, twin-engine boat and set off for our mini pelagic.

The seas were a bit choppy and we all got a little wet or completely soaked depending on your luck but as time passed the winds did indeed subside but the two hours trip lasted three and a half hours! The seas were almost black with large numbers of Bridled Terns, Brown Noddys, smaller numbers of Sooty Tern and the odd White-cheeked Tern. Once at the island the air was also full of birds and we could watch nesting Masked Booby and also found Red-billed Tropicbird and Brown Booby. Our pelagic also turned up a Wedge-tailed Shearwater, Wilson's Storm-petrel and a few Red-necked

Phalaropes. The boat hit every wave with a bang and we returned to shore a bit battle weary and bruised.

We only had one day left in Daallo Forest and our focus was on the linnet and the grosbeak. We now knew where a linnet was presumably holding territory and so we headed down to the spot as early as we could after breakfast but we never even reached there because another repeated the previous days performance by flying over the car. We all piled out and very shortly after we had relocated the bird and we all had great scope views. One of the cars had to leave us in order to buy more supplies and so we were now basically on foot for the rest of the morning. We were dropped off at a place where Abdi had last seen the grosbeak with a previous group and as if by magic a female arrived almost immediately and we watched it heartily tucking into juniper berries. The job was finally complete and indeed the only other birds added to the list that day were Bruce's Green Pigeon, Red-eyed Dove, White-browed Coucal, Grey Wagtail and 'Caspian' Reed Warbler.

Each night of our stay at Daallo a pair of scops owls had been in residence around our camp. By voice they were quite clearly not African Scops Owls of the widespread race *senegalensis* and the birds looked rather more like a Striated Scops Owl so recordings and photographs were taken in the hope that light could be shed on the mystery once we were home. In the light of research it would seem that the vocalisations are almost identical with Arabian Scops Owl *Otus pamela* a form previously lumped in African Scops Owl. It therefore seems likely that our birds are a colour form of this species or perhaps an undescribed taxon. This would be a new species for Africa and all those of us that wished to study the birds had fantastic eyeball-to-eyeball views!

It was now time to leave and retrace our steps through Ceerigaabo, across the Ban Cade Plains and back to the hotel in Burco. A 12 hours journey was promised us and this is about how long it took with a few birding leg stretches and a minor car breakdown thrown in. Another Archer's Buzzard was seen as we left but there was nothing at all new for this travel day.

The next day we explored the Burco to Berbera road making numerous stops along the way. Just outside town we were somewhat surprisingly adding new species to the list. A Black-chested Snake Eagle sat and posed for us, Purple Grenadier and Northern Grosbeak Canaries were found and a smart adult Eurasian Hobby dashed past. Further on we were treated to excellent views of Shelley's Starling and more amazingly a Three-streaked Tchagra that virtually flaunted itself. The lava flows that covered the pass were home to a juvenile Sombre Rock Chat, a species only previously known from one old specimen in this country. A male Red-headed Weaver was present further down the hillside. We finally got to Abdi's site for Somali Pigeon in the late afternoon. There was not a sound to be heard and the light was perfect as it played over the picturesque inland cliffs that are home to this localised species. We stumbled over the loose rocks up a small valley riddled with caves. Hardly anything stirred apart from the hybrid Dodson's X Somali Bulbuls present and a few Striolated Buntings. As we crashed and clattered up the little canyon a pigeon flew out from its cave but fortunately another was spotted sitting in full view upon a favoured rock and we watched it for a long period of time until it felt that it had been stared at a little too much and flew off. Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse came in to drink after dark at a waterhole and we carried on to Berbera to a hotel for the night.

There is not a lot to recommend Berbera to the casual visitor although we did eat a very tasty fish supper in a harbour side restaurant. The town was still sleeping when we left and it was well after daybreak. Everywhere there were House Crows and dogs and the ubiquitous tattered plastic bags that catch on anything they meet rattling listlessly in the hot breeze until pieces break off to form new colonies. We took the main road back to Hargeisa taking in some Pied Crows en route and paid a

brief gut-churning visit to the abattoir dump that was overrun with Common Jackals, Hooded Vultures and Marabou Storks. A very tasty brunch revived us and we embarked on the last leg of our tour around the country. We were still on a search for the mysterious "Sharpe's Lark", a bird that looks very similar to a shorter billed version of Somali Lark but was placed – perhaps inexplicably – as a race of Rufous-naped Lark. This bird it seems has also disappeared off the radar in recent years so we aimed to visit another of the collection localities in order to see what was going on there although at this stage we were really unaware that we had already unwittingly seen it on the Tuuyo plains.

A series of plains run along the Ethiopian border and include the Ban Sayla and Wajaale, the latter the once known haunt of the even more mysterious Archer's Lark. We planned to visit both these plains. We came to the edge of the first at a place called Qoyladey and for the final time met up with our camping crew. The plan had been another night under the stars but a storm was brewing and so it was all hands on deck in order to erect the tents as quickly as possible. This was successfully done in record time and congratulations to everyone!

There is still a lot of wild open space here and the plains stretch it seems forever but no matter where one looks there are the small rounded bumps of the huts in their bomas scattered at regular intervals as far as the eye can see and goats and sheep are grazing everywhere. However there are also plenty of birds but the grass is cropped close to the ground by constantly nibbling teeth. We walked and scanned and walked again for even longer than we intended due to a visitation by the local authorities. They had arrived in the middle of the night and they still hadn't left even though we still had our papers and we still had our own police guards. The new birds were really few and far between but we had found Little Grebe, Common Moorhen and Common Snipe on a small reservoir near Hargeisa. A large flock of Helmeted Guineafowl, Cardinal Woodpecker and Marico Sunbird inhabited more wooded environs and Common Swifts were passing over in good numbers. Quartering over the plains themselves a few Pallid and Montagu's Harriers were spotted. Leggy Plain-backed Pipits pumped their tails, a few Common Quail were flushed and a very nice flock of Caspian Plovers was watched for some time until the authorities once again decided we were allowed to move on. Although the people of Somaliland appear poor almost everyone appears to have a mobile phone and the sight of a group of white people with strange equipment traversing the plains was enough to get every phone dialling into the nearest police authority!

We continued our drive but gradually acacia woodland invaded the plains and our original plan of driving to Wajaale cross-country was not as easy as it first seemed. We therefore headed back to the main road adding a few species en route such as Black-headed Heron, Pied Wheatear, Common Redstart, Red-billed Quelea, Northern Red Bishop and Cut-throat Finch. At the main road a Brown Snake Eagle was found and then we drove directly to Wajaale town situated right on the Ethiopian border. We were told to get inside as quickly as possible so as not to attract attention, which we duly did. The hotel was certainly not to everyone's taste but seemed quite reasonable taking into account where it was and at least each rather stark little cell-like room had the benefits of electricity.

We were up and out early the next morning and a minor assault on Wajaale Plains was planned. There wasn't much time as we were scheduled to fly out of Hargeisa that afternoon at some unspecified hour. Although the open plains are still there it seems that they have been completely cultivated at some time in recent years and weeds and acacia have now invaded the once extensive grasslands. Recent searches for Archer's Lark have all drawn a blank and we didn't expect to do any better ourselves. Singing Bush larks were displaying everywhere and Harlequin Quails were noisy and we flushed a number. Also found were Western Cattle Egret, Egyptian Goose, Chestnut-backed Sparrow Lark and Zitting and Pectoral-patch Cisticolas. We paused for breakfast but alarming news

told us the flight had been put forward to 13.00 hours and we only had two hours to get to the check-in desk. Fortunately we were exactly two hours drive away so the panic was not as great as it could have been even allowing for a puncture along the way. The security check-in was done by hand and incredibly thorough with the formalities being done by hand in the open air under the hot Somaliland sun that illuminated the internal turmoil of our luggage admirably.

Amazingly enough the plane left on time but this short journey in an ancient Russian plane was not to be recommended to the faint-hearted. For a start there seemed not to be enough seats but somehow everyone found a place as new seats were erected. There were no luggage racks and so hand luggage overflowed into the aisles. An accident victim with broken leg and severe facial injuries was carried on board on an old mattress and then unceremoniously dropped onto the floor where she bounced a few times and then stayed for the entire flight. Children screamed and the temperature shot upward but mercifully it was only a short flight and we were soon safely down on the ground in Djibouti again.

The earlier than expected arrival back at the hotel enabled us to search for a few new birds in the harbour area and we indeed added Yellow-billed Stork, Lesser Flamingo and Slender-billed and Heuglin's Gulls to the list. However the next day we were up as the taxi drivers that had been all sleeping along the beach again were waking up and folding up their cardboard bedding or rolling up their mats in the more affluent areas of the beach. Our landrovers arrived that were to take us up to the Forêt du Day and we embarked on a very fine road that more or less followed the coast through some very dramatic lava desert scenery. We made a number of stops en route and enjoyed some White-crowned Black Wheatears and large mixed flocks of White-cheeked and Lesser Crested Terns feeding close offshore.

We arrived at the simple Campement de Touristique with its local styled huts and delicious food for lunch. However no sooner had we sat down and the food was on the table but C-G alerted us to the presence of a Gambaga Flycatcher outside and so lunch was postponed until we had our fill of this tasty little appetiser. We need not have panicked too much for there appeared to be a pair in residence in the Campement 'garden' and we had ample opportunity to study this little bird well.

After lunch we moved into what is left of the forest which is in a sad and sorry state not only because of extensive tree felling but more disastrously that most of the junipers are now either dead or dying, reportedly through some mysterious fungal disease that has not been identified and seems too late to stop. Twisted stumps and whole trees stand like tortured skeletons making this one of the eeriest places to go birding! Perhaps it is due to the lack of trees and understorey but the endemic Djibouti Francolins proved easy to see and we saw up to 10 individuals during our stay. The initial ones were the most elusive but the following morning it would have been pretty hard to miss seeing them!

The rest of the afternoon and all the following morning were spent in the environs of the forest. The ringing bell-like notes of Ethiopian Boubous sounded across the hillsides and the valleys had channelled through a small number of Palearctic migrants such as Eurasian Wryneck, White-throated Robin, Whinchat, Blackcap and large flocks of Oortolan Buntings. However we also made two significant discoveries the first being yet another Sombre Rock Chat – a first for Djibouti but this species must surely have been overlooked in the past. The second discovery robs Ethiopia and Eritrea of one of their 'endemics' and places White-throated Seedeater tentatively on the Djibouti map. However see the systematic list for full details on this rather unsatisfactory 'find'.

After lunch our incredible tour of Somaliland and Djibouti drew to a close and all we had to do was drive back down to the airport (squeezing in Booted Eagle and Blue Rock Thrush along the way) where we sat patiently waiting for our connecting flights home.

One of the biggest surprises of all was how safe and welcoming Somaliland had been. At no time did we feel threatened or unsafe in the country and throughout the trip we were attentively watched over by our police guards and local officials who all made sure that we were able to enjoy the birds and mammals without fear or worry. Abdi did a grand job of housing and feeding us throughout the tour and apart from the tardiness of the camp on occasions the logistics went remarkably smoothly and we were able to alter the itinerary as we went along in the light of what we had seen. This flexibility added to the whole pioneering excitement of the tour. We had seen things that had been out of bounds to western eyes for so long and we had also made some genuine ornithological discoveries. The birds were often tame and approachable and there were photographic opportunities at every stop. The scenery was always overwhelming with wide open vistas, spectacular skies, mountains and deserts and of course we managed an interesting peek into a colourful, vibrant and totally different culture. One hopes that the international community will one day finally recognise Somaliland and help revitalise this part of the world that clearly wants to belong to a wider world.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

The essential reference books referred to in the report are *Birds of Somalia* by J. S. Ash and J. E. Miskell, *The Birds of British Somaliland and the Gulf of Aden* by G. F. Archer and E. M. Godman and *Birds of the Horn of Africa* by Nigel Redman, Terry Stevenson and John Fanshawe.

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from *Threatened Birds of the World*, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/index.html>

PROCELLARIDAE

Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus* (NL): One was seen disappearing fast during our mini pelagic to Rabshie Island (=Jasiira Maydh or Mait Island) on 16/9. There are very few records for Somaliland and the species only seems to have been recorded from this area.

HYDROBATIDAE

Wilson's Storm-petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*: One was seen disappearing fast during our mini pelagic to Rabshie (Maydh) Island on 16/9. There are very few records for Somaliland and the species only seems to have been recorded from this area although most sightings have been in the spring. This petrel was named after Alexander Wilson (1766-1813) a Scottish weaver and poet who immigrated to the New World, fell in love with the new and exciting avifauna and became a committed ornithologist. Wilson collected specimens of this storm-petrel during a journey in the Gulf of Mexico. He presumed them to be European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* and it wasn't until some years later that Charles Bonaparte realised that they were a distinct species and so named it after its discoverer. Unfortunately Bonaparte was in turn unaware that Heinrich Kuhl had already described the species earlier in 1820.

PODICIPEDIDAE

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*: A small number were present on a reservoir near Hargeisa.

PHAETHONTIDAE

Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*: Three were seen during our mini pelagic to Rabshie (Maydh) Island on 16/9. The only records for Somaliland come from this area.

SULIDAE

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*: Pairs with well grown young were scattered all around the lower slopes of Rabshie (Maydh) Island on 16/9. The only records for Somaliland come from this area when 240 nests were counted in November in the 1980's.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*: At least two were seen on Rabshie (Maydh) Island on 16/9. There are no known records later in the year than this.

PELECANIDAE

Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens*: No more than four individuals during each visit were seen in Djibouti. A singleton was seen in Berbera, Somaliland.

ARDEIDAE

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*: Most numerous at Wajaale with just a few seen in Djibouti.

Striated Heron *Butorides striata*: Also known as Green-backed Heron, just one of the dark race *brevipes* was seen in Djibouti.

Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca*: Four were seen in Djibouti on 5/9. This would appear to be an unusual record for the country.

Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis*: Both white and dark morphs of the distinctive race *asha* were common and easy to see in Djibouti and the Zeila region of Somaliland.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*: Very few sightings of this non-breeding visitor with one at Zeila, three on Rabshie Island and one at Berbera.

Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala*: Small numbers were seen in the Wajaale area where they are known to breed.

SCOPIIDAE

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*: Three were seen at a small dam during the drive to Wajaale.

CICONIIDAE

Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis*: Two were seen feeding in the harbour in Djibouti.

Abdim's Stork *Ciconia abdimii*: Small numbers were seen in Djibouti and also in Berbera where they were still at the nest on 20/9. Surprisingly there are no records for this square in *Birds of Somalia*. Bey El-Arnaut Abdim (1780-1827) was a Turkish governor of Dongola in Sudan who was of great help to Rüppell during his northeast African expedition.

Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumeniferus*: Only seen on the Hargeisa abattoir tip.

THRESKIORNITHIDAE

Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus*: Good numbers in Djibouti but only seen at Berbera and Wajaale in Somaliland. This species was revered and even mummified by the ancient Egyptians as the incarnation of Thoth, the god of wisdom and knowledge.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*: Described by the Arabs as "Father of the Spoon" this species was only seen for certain in Djibouti where it is represented by the small race *archeri*. Four unidentified spoonbills flying over Wajaale Plains on 22/9 were either this species or possibly African Spoonbill *P. alba*.

PHOENICOPTERIDAE

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*: A maximum of 16 birds was seen in the sea in the Zeila region with nine near the town the next day. This is a non-breeding visitor to this area.

Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*: Our only sightings were in Djibouti harbour where 125 were counted. The species is sometimes placed in the genus *Phoenicopterus* and is classified as 'Near-Threatened' by Birdlife International. The world population is estimated at no more than 3,240,000 birds and decreasing. There are only three main breeding sites all situated in East Africa with three far smaller sites in West Africa, southern Africa and India and Pakistan. Soda-ash mining, hydroelectric power schemes, land reclamation and general disturbance are all major threats.

ANATIDAE

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca*: At least one pair was seen at Wajaale.

Garganey *Anas querquedula*: A pair of these Palearctic migrants was seen on a seasonal roadside pool near the Loyada border in Djibouti on 6/9 and another on a small reservoir near Hargeisa on 20/9. This would be in an empty square in *Birds of Somalia* and the earliest arrival date given is 17th September.

PANDIONIDAE

[Redman *et al.* lump this family in ACCIPITRIDAE.]

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*: Small numbers were seen daily in coastal Djibouti and the Zeila area in Somaliland.

ACCIPITRIDAE

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*: Remarkably scarce but recorded in small numbers in both countries. We did not ascertain the racial identity of these birds but they were probably the resident nominate race rather than wandering *parasitus*. Archer referred to these local birds as *arabicus* in his day.

Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*: This vulture first put in an appearance on the Ban Cade Plains and stayed with us all the way to Maydh resurfacing again in Djibouti.

Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*: Our only sightings were in Hargeisa.

Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus*: Three individuals were seen on the Ban Cade Plains in an empty square in *Birds of Somalia* and another for some as we left Berbera. The various described races of this species are not always recognised, often considered monotypic and sometimes placed in the genus *Aegyptius*. Classed as 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International, the world population is estimated at 8,500 individuals and falling. Poisoning, persecution and disturbance are all reasons given for the decline. A lappet is a little flap and refers to the folds of skin on the sides of the head and neck.

Short-toed Snake-Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*: Two sightings of this Palearctic migrant were obtained on the Daallo escarpment on 16/9 and 17/9 (probably the same well-marked individual) and another was photographed on the Ban Cade Plains on 18/9. These appear to be the first certain records for Somaliland and Somalia.

Black-chested Snake-Eagle *Circaetus pectoralis*: Singletons near Burco, Hargeisa and three en route to Sayla.

Brown Snake-Eagle *Circaetus cinereus*: One was seen as we rejoined the tarmac road on our way to Wajaale from Sayla on 21/9. *Birds of Somalia* treats this species as a vagrant to the area but this sighting would only be a very slight extension of range across the border from Ethiopia.

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*: Two sightings of juveniles of this Palearctic migrant in the Sayla region on 21 & 22/9. The earliest arrival dates given in *Birds of Somalia* are 29th September. Classified as 'Near-threatened' by Birdlife International this species has a world population of no more than 30,000. It is threatened by the destruction of its steppe grassland habitat of its breeding grounds. Pesticide use in Africa may also be a problem.

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*: About five of these Palearctic migrants were seen in the Sayla region on 21/9. The earliest arrival dates given in *Birds of Somalia* are 20th September. After George Montagu (1735-1815) was court-marshalled from the Wiltshire militia, he dedicated his life to his mistress and ornithology. He collected the harrier in 1803 near his Devonshire home.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*: Also known as Eurasian Marsh Harrier, a very dark individual was seen on the coast near Zeila on 6/9. There do not appear to be any previous records for this square in *Birds of Somalia*.

Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar*: Widespread sightings in small numbers over much of Somaliland. In this case the word Gabar is derived from two French words *garde* (guard) and *barré* (barred).

Eastern Chanting Goshawk *Melierax poliopterus*: The most commonly seen raptor during the trip with widespread sightings in small numbers over much of Somaliland.

Steppe Buzzard *Buteo [buteo] vulpinus*: Two sightings of this Palearctic migrant in the Daallo area on 14 and 17/9. The latter bird, a juvenile was photographed. Strangely there is only one modern record of this species for the whole of Somalia and therefore these sightings would apparently be the first records for Somaliland.

Archer's Buzzard *Buteo archeri*: A presumed juvenile of this Somali endemic was seen very briefly from our campsite in Daallo Forest but fortunately we all saw a very fine adult flying overhead as we drove down to Maydh. The cars screeched to a halt and we all had great views. Some of us also saw a perched bird on the morning that we left the forest but the views were directly into the sun and hence a little disappointing. Birdlife International sadly do not treat this form as a separate species and this is perhaps a little worrying as it is clearly not as common within its localised range as suggested both by Archer and in *Birds of Somalia*. Sir Geoffrey Francis Archer (1882-1964) was an explorer and Governor and Commander-in-Chief of British Somaliland between 1919-22 moving then to Sudan from 1924-26. He is co-author of *The Birds of British Somaliland and the Gulf of Aden* in four volumes published between the years 1937 – 1961.

Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*: Particularly common in the Ceerigaabo area but astonishingly absent from most of the country and not seen at all in Djibouti.

Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxi*: Also known as Black Eagle, a pair was in residence on the escarpment in Daallo Forest and put on a mighty fine display for us during our stay. The French Verreaux family was a business run by the father and his three sons. They owned 'Maison Verreaux' the largest ever known 'Natural History Emporium'! The eagle is named after one of the sons, Jean Baptiste Edouard Verreaux (1810-68).

African Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus spilogaster*: Both an adult and a juvenile were seen as we drove from Zeila to Hargeisa. In Djibouti we recorded what appeared to be a juvenile (showing pale panels in the primaries visible in both the upper and underwing) and later an adult over Forêt du Day. Both birds appeared to show features of this species rather than Bonelli's Eagle *H. fasciatus* which is the species supposedly breeding in the country. Unfortunately we did not see the diagnostic upperside of the adult and so our sightings remain inconclusive.

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*: A pale phase bird was seen by some of us as we left the Forêt du Day in Djibouti.

FALCONIDAE

Pygmy Falcon *Polihierax semitorquatus*: Rather scarce with just a few sightings in the red sand country southeast of Burco and during the journeys from Berbera to Wajaale.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*: Somewhat pale and brightly coloured males (possibly the same bird) were seen on the Daallo escarpment. The resident race here is supposed to be *rufescens* but the appearance of our birds did not fit this form at all and were therefore probably Palearctic migrants of the nominate race. Another, presumably of the race *archeri* was seen on the pass as we descended towards Berbera, another was seen on the drive to Wajaale and a pair was watched over Forêt du Day in Djibouti.

Greater Kestrel *Falco rupicoloides*: Nine individuals of the race *fieldi* were noted on wide-open plains in Somaliland during the tour.

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*: One rather dapper adult was seen very well in flight near Burco on 19/9. *Birds of Somalia* only gives five autumn records of this species all falling between the 29th September – 12th October.

Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*: Just two sightings in Somaliland. The first was watched harassing Kori Bustards on the plains near our first 'proper' campsite and the second was on the Ban Cade Plains.

Barbary Falcon *Falco peregrinoides*: One was seen briefly on the Daallo escarpment. The status of this species is still not well understood in Somaliland.

NUMIDIDAE

Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris*: We all saw the large flock of the race *somaliensis* near the Qoladey Plains.

PHASIANIDAE

Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix*: Two of these Palearctic migrants were flushed and seen and heard well in flight on the Qoladey Plains on 21/9 (a new square in *Birds of Somalia*). There are only five published historical records between the years 1900 – 1956.

Harlequin Quail *Coturnix delagorguei*: Very noisy and presumably breeding on the Wajaale Plains with at least seven individuals flushed there. Published breeding records for the country are all between May – July and November – January.

Archer's Francolin *Scleroptila gutturalis*: C-G did well to spot a small covey on the Daallo escarpment and we all got some excellent views of this isolated population *lorti* of Orange River Francolin that is here treated as part of a separate species.

Crested Francolin *Dendroperdix sephaena*: We had great views of this francolin as we had lunch in the wadi near the Beira Hills.

Djibouti Francolin *Pternistis ochropectus*: This endemic francolin was far easier to see than we had expected in the Forêt du Day and we probably saw at least nine individuals although the future for the species looks bleak. Classified as 'Critical' by Birdlife International this species has a maximum population of 831 individuals and is only known from the Forêt du Day and the nearby Mabla Mountains. It has been estimated that 95% of the juniper forest there is now dead or dying but the species continues to persist in this arboreal graveyard. It is thought that a fungal disease is linked to the decimation of the forest but over-grazing and tree felling were also much in evidence during our visit.

Yellow-necked Spurfowl *Pternistis leucoscepus*: First seen in the Zeila area but most numerous in the Daallo Forests.

RALLIDAE

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*: Two were seen on a small reservoir near Hargeisa in an empty square in *Birds of Somalia*. This species is perhaps under-recorded in Somaliland.

OTIDIDAE

Heuglin's Bustard *Neotis heuglini*: No fewer than eight individuals of these impressive bustards were seen in Somaliland. The majority were in female or juvenile plumage. Theodor von Heuglin (1824-76) was a German explorer and ornithologist with a specialist interest in African birds.

Arabian Bustard *Ardeotis arabs*: Four or five individuals were seen in the Zeila area where it is thought just to be a visitor with no more than five historical published records.

Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori*: Good numbers were present on the plains near our first 'proper' campsite and a couple were seen in flight over the Wajaale Plains. Kori is a Tswana (southern African Bantu) name for this bird.

Buff-crested Bustard *Lophotis gindiana*: Often seen and heard in suitable bush country in Somaliland.

Little Brown Bustard *Eupodotis humilis*: One of the much-wanted birds of the tour was this species whose range also creeps into hostile regions of Ethiopia so that it is in essence almost out of bounds there and certainly not available on the circuit of our regular tour. In Somaliland it was refreshingly common and easy to see, sometimes allowing very close approach preferring to hunker down rather than run or fly.

DROMADIDAE

Crab-plover *Dromas ardeola*: This remarkable bird is always such a pleasure to see and we were treated to some marvellous views of hundreds both in Djibouti and Somaliland.

HAEMATOPODIDAE

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*: About 10 of these Palearctic migrants were seen along the coastline near Zeila.

RECURVIROSTRIDAE

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*: Small numbers were seen in Djibouti.

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avoetta*: Seven flew overhead during our first day in Djibouti.

BURHINIDAE

Spotted Thick-knee *Burhinus capensis*: A pair of the coastal race *dodsoni* was seen in the Zeila area. Another pair presumably of the race *maculosus* was seen inland from Ceerigaabo.

GLAREOLIDAE

Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor*: A pair of these Palearctic migrants was seen on the Ban Cade Plains on 13/9. Sadly we were trying to unravel the mysteries of Somali Larks at the time and they didn't get the full attention that they perhaps deserved. *Birds of Somalia* gives only five records for the country all to the west of our birds and only between 13th December and 8th May.

Somali Courser *Cursorius somalensis*: This courser was delightfully common throughout the Somaliland plains.

Double-banded Courser *Rhinoptilus africanus*: This courser was delightfully common throughout the Somaliland plains.

CHARADRIIDAE

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*: This Palearctic migrant was common on the beaches of Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*: Just a couple of these Palearctic migrants were noted in Djibouti but more were seen in the Zeila area of Somaliland.

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii*: This Palearctic migrant was very common on the beaches of Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.

Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*: Small numbers of this Palearctic migrant were identified on the beaches of Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.

Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus*: Two small flocks of this Palearctic migrant were seen on the plains between Qoyladey and Sayla with about 30 birds in total.

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva*: Small numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and one was seen feeding on a rubbish tip in Berbera.

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*: Small numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.

Black-headed Plover *Vanellus tectus*: Three were seen on the long drive from Zeila to Hargeisa on 7/9. There are only two old records of the nominate race from the northwest in *Birds of Somalia* and this represents a very slight extension of range. The name lapwing is usually now preferred for the members of the genus *Vanellus*.

Spur-winged Plover *Vanellus spinosus*: This striking lapwing was easy to see in Djibouti and from the Zeila to Hargeisa areas in Somaliland.

Crowned Plover *Vanellus coronatus*: A very common lapwing of the open areas throughout Somaliland.

SCOLOPACIDAE

Red Knot *Calidris canutus*: Two of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti on 5/9. There are no records at all from neighbouring Somaliland.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*: Small numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*: Good numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland with smaller numbers at scattered localities inland.

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*: A very common Palearctic migrant in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland with one inland near Ceerigaabo.

Dunlin *Calidris alpina*: One of these Palearctic migrants was seen in Djibouti on 5/9. There are very few records at all from neighbouring Somaliland.

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*: Small numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and two inland records in Somaliland.

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*: Singletons of this Palearctic migrant were seen at three localities in Somaliland on 15th, 20th and 21st. The earliest arrival date in *Birds of Somalia* is given as 25th September.

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*: Good numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*: Good numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.

Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*: Small numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*: A common Palearctic migrant in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*: Good numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland with a few at scattered localities inland.

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*: Small numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen at scattered inland localities in Somaliland.

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*: Small numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti.

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*: Small numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*: Small numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland with smaller numbers at scattered localities inland.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*: Good numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*: Three of these Palearctic migrants were seen during our mini pelagic to Rabshie (Maydh) Island on 16/9. There are no records of this species from this square in *Birds of Somalia*.

LARIDAE

Sooty Gull *Larus hemprichii*: Small numbers were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.

White-eyed Gull *Larus leucophthalmus*: Small numbers were seen in Djibouti.

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*: One was seen in Djibouti on 22/9. Strangely enough there are no records of this species from Somaliland.

Heuglin's Gull *Larus [fuscus] heuglini*: Four of these gulls were seen in Djibouti on 22/9.

STERNIDAE

- Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica*: Small numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.
- Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*: Small numbers were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.
- Greater Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*: Also known as Swift Tern, singletons were noted in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.
- Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*: Small numbers were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland.
- Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*: We only made one positive identification of this Palearctic migrant in Djibouti but there were many terns both here and in Somaliland that had to be left unidentified.
- White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa*: Small numbers were seen in Somaliland but there was a large congregation in Ghoubet Kharab in Djibouti of mainly adults beginning to moult out of breeding plumage.
- Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*: Hundreds were breeding on Rabshie (Maydh) Island and seemed to be the most common tern at sea there.
- Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*: Although only small numbers were seen at sea this appeared to be the most common tern breeding on the lower slopes of Rabshie (Maydh) Island.
- Saunders's Tern *Sterna saundersi*: This small tern was commonly seen off the shore in the Zeila area of Somaliland. Howard Saunders (1835-1907) was an English ornithologist who traveled widely and became an authority on gulls and terns.
- White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus*: Small numbers of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Djibouti and the Zeila area of Somaliland. A few more were on a small reservoir near Hargeisa (an empty square for this species in *Birds of Somalia*).
- Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*: Hundreds were breeding on Rabshie (Maydh) Island.

PTEROCLIDAE

- Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*: This was the most commonly seen sandgrouse throughout Somaliland.
- Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus*: Hundreds of this handsome sandgrouse were watched on the Ban Cade Plains. The spectacle of the sheer numbers of this and the previous species coming to drink at a waterhole near our campsite had to be one of the highlights of the tour.
- Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse *Pterocles lichtensteinii*: First seen well near Zeila (an empty square for this species in *Birds of Somalia*) we then saw more coming to drink after dark near the Somali Pigeon site. Martin Heinrich Carl Lichtenstein (1780-1857) was a German ornithologist with an interest in South African birds.

COLUMBIDAE

- Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia*: A fruiting fig tree was full of these attractive pigeons below the Daallo escarpment. James Bruce was a Scottish explorer interested in birds. He discovered the source of the Blue Nile at Lake Tana in Ethiopia.
- Emerald-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur chalcospilos*: One was seen where we had lunch near the Beira hills.
- Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*: This attractive dove was commonly seen throughout Somaliland. Namaqualand is part of southern Namibia and coastal southwest South Africa.
- African Olive Pigeon *Columba arquatrix*: Also known as Rameron Pigeon we saw small numbers in Daallo Forest and a singleton in Forêt du Day.

Somali Pigeon *Columba oliviae*: We saw this endemic well thanks to some great detective work by Abdi who had relocated a small colony of these subtly coloured doves at one of Archer's collecting localities here at the westernmost edge of their range. Classified as 'Data Deficient' by Birdlife International this species has an unknown population but is presumed to be locally common.

Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea*: A common and widespread species often associated with human habitation throughout the tour. Sightings included around Ceerigaabo where the species apparently has not been previously recorded.

Feral Pigeon (Rock Dove) *Columba livia*: Feral birds were particularly abundant in Djibouti and also present in northwest Somaliland.

Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata*: Just one was seen below the Daallo escarpment.

African Mourning Dove *Streptopelia decipiens*: A few sightings in the Hargeisa and Burco areas and even around our camp in the red sands country to the southwest. This represents an easterly range extension.

Ring-necked Dove *Streptopelia capicola*: A very common dove throughout Somaliland.

African Collared Dove *Streptopelia roseogrisea*: Also known as Rose-grey Dove our only sightings were at Maydh and Berbera.

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*: A common and widespread dove seen throughout Djibouti and Somaliland.

PSITTACIDAE

African Orange-bellied Parrot *Poicephalus rufiventris*: Just a few widespread sightings in Somaliland.

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*: Our only sightings were in Djibouti town.

MUSOPHAGIDAE

White-bellied Go-away Bird *Corythaixoides leucogaster*: This strange creature was commonly seen in thorn bush country in Somaliland.

CUCULIDAE

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*: An adult of this Palearctic migrant was seen in the Daallo Forest (there is no previous record from this square in *Birds of Somalia*) and a juvenile was seen on the Wajaale Plains.

CENTROPIDAE

[Redman *et al.* lump this family in CUCULIDAE.]

White-browed Coucal *Centropus superciliosus*: We had good views of a pair below the escarpment in Daallo Forest.

STRIGIDAE

African Scops Owl *Otus senegalensis* (H): Although somewhat distant it sounded like this species of owl calling near our campsite near Qoyladey just before light.

Arabian Scops Owl *Otus pamela*: A pair of scops owls frequented our campsite in Daallo Forest during our stay between 15/9 – 17/9. Their calls were quite unlike African Scops Owl although similar enough to identify them as a scops owl. We had great views of these birds as they were very responsive to playback. The general appearance in the bright white torchlight was apparently even greyer than African Scops Owl showing much stronger black streaks and blotches on the underparts with little sign of any significant cross barring. The calls were recorded and are very similar if not identical to those of Arabian Scops Owl *O. pamela* from Oman and Yemen. Some authors have recently split this form from African Scops Owl, with further revisions in the various world lists to be

expected. Based on the vocalisations it is certain that our birds were either this species or a very closely related undescribed taxon. John Ash collected a scops owl from Daallo Forest in May 1989 as *O. s. senegalensis* and we await news of what has happened to the specimen although it is feared it is lost in Mogadishu as it cannot be traced either in Tring or in USA. There are four specimens of African Scops Owl from Somaliland in the trays at Tring all collected at elevations of between 1200 – 1500 metres. Our campsite in Daallo was at about 2150 metres. Three of these specimens are Archers and the fourth bears a Meinertzhagen label. Archer suggests that the scops owl in Somaliland is a montane form as he only collected specimens from high altitudes at Mount Wagar and elsewhere. I have examined these four specimens and they are consistent with those of *pamelae* although perhaps somewhat greyer. This would represent the first records of this taxon for the African continent.

Verreaux's Eagle-Owl *Bubo lacteus*: One of these impressively large owls with its trademark pink eyelids was flushed and seen well during daylight as we drew closer to Ceerigaabo. There are no records for this square in *Birds of Somalia* and our sighting constitutes an extension of its range. The owl is named after one of the sons of the family, Jules Pierre Verreaux (1807-73) who was also married to Pierre Antoine Delalande's sister.

Little Owl *Athene noctua*: A family of three obliging birds were watched sunning themselves on the impressive termitaria in the red sand country southeast of Burco. The colouration is much darker and grey-brown than the pale yellowish colour shown in BHOA.

CAPRIMULGIDAE

Donaldson Smith's Nightjar *Caprimulgus donaldsoni*: Fantastic views of a pair in broad daylight in the red sand country southeast of Burco. Our record occupies another empty square in *Birds of Somalia*. Arthur Donaldson Smith (1864-1939) was an American traveller and hunter with an interest in East Africa.

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*: One of these Palearctic migrants was seen flying in off from the sea at mid-day at Maydh on 16/9. There are no records from this square in *Birds of Somalia*. At least three more frequented the Campement in the Forêt du Day and probably represented the race *unwini*.

APODIDAE

Nyanza Swift *Apus niansae*: These very pale grey birds of the race *somalicus* look rather different from the darker, browner birds found in Ethiopia and Kenya. Historically this race was once placed as a subspecies of Pallid Swift *A. pallidus* and although measurements average somewhat smaller they look virtually identical. They were most easy to study over the Daallo escarpment. Nyanza is a province in western Kenya and a Bantu word meaning "lake".

Common Swift *Apus apus*: Good numbers of the eastern race *pekinensis* of this Palearctic migrant were seen between Hargeisa and Wajaale between 20th – 22nd. This marks a slight easterly range extension and increases the number of sightings substantially as there is only one certain old record of two birds on 15th September 1918 for Somaliland.

Little Swift *Apus affinis*: Perhaps surprisingly scarce in Somaliland and only numerous in Hargeisa reflecting its affinity with man-made structures.

Alpine Swift *Apus melba*: First seen in the red sand country southeast of Burco and thereafter seen regularly until Qoyladey.

COLIIDAE

Blue-naped Mousebird *Urocolius macrourus*: Widespread sightings throughout the bush country in Somaliland although most often were seen flying past at a rate of knots! The colour of the nape is quite unreal. These unique and ancient birds belong to the Coliiformes, the only order that is endemic to the Afrotropics.

MEROPIDAE

Little Bee-eater *Merops pusillus*: Small numbers of the colourful race *cyanostictus* were seen in an area centred around Burco from the Aroori Plains through to the Ban Cade Plains thus extending the range more to the south and east than is suggested in *Birds of Somalia*.

Somali Bee-eater *Merops revoilii*: This was the more widespread and common bee-eater with most individuals looking rather less scruffy than they can do in Ethiopia and Kenya.

White-throated Bee-eater *Merops albicollis*: Small numbers were seen in the coastal areas near Zeila and again in the Wajaale area.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*: Just a few were seen in Djibouti and the coastal areas near Zeila in Somaliland.

Madagascar Bee-eater *Merops superciliosus*: Widespread sightings but only in small numbers throughout Somaliland reaching Daallo. This substantially extends the range eastwards from that given in *Birds of Somalia*.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*: Small numbers in Djibouti and four were seen in the coastal areas near Zeila in Somaliland thus filling a new square in *Birds of Somalia*.

Northern Carmine Bee-eater *Merops nubicus*: Small numbers including young birds were seen in the red sand country southeast of Burco. These sightings fill in a nice gap in the map in *Birds of Somalia*.

CORACIIDAE

Rufous-crowned Roller *Coracias naevia*: Also known as Purple Roller we obtained sightings near Oodweyne and in the Ceerigaabo area.

European Roller *Coracias garrulus*: This Palearctic migrant was first seen in Djibouti and more were seen near Maydh, Berbera and in the Sayla area.

Lilac-breasted Roller *Coracias caudata*: Small numbers were seen in bush country in Somaliland. The blue-breasted form here is *lorti* that may be specifically distinct.

PHOENICULIDAE

Black-billed Wood-hoopoe *Phoeniculus somaliensis*: First seen in Daallo Forest and again in the Sayla area.

RHINOPOMASTIDAE

[Sibley and Monroe treat the genus *Rhinopomastus* as a separate family, Rhinopomastidae but this treatment does not seem to have been widely accepted.]

Abyssinian Scimitarbill *Rhinopomastus minor*: This jaunty little bird was seemingly quite common in bush country in Somaliland.

UPUPIDAE

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa [epops] epops*: Palearctic migrants were not uncommon throughout both countries from 6/9 onwards. The earliest date for arrivals in *Birds of Somalia* is 23rd September.

Central African Hoopoe *Upupa [epops] senegalensis*: This more brightly coloured resident form was perhaps most in evidence in the Daallo area although many hoopoe sightings went unspecified.

BUCEROTIDAE

Northern Red-billed Hornbill *Tockus erythrorhynchus*: Small numbers were seen in suitable bush country throughout Somaliland.

Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill *Tockus flavirostris*: Small numbers were seen in suitable bush country throughout Somaliland.

Hemprich's Hornbill *Tockus hemprichii*: Small numbers were encountered in Daallo Forest and again in the Forêt du Day in Djibouti. Friedrich Wilhelm Hemprich (1796 - 1825) was a Prussian naturalist who had a specialist interest in Egypt and Abyssinia.

CAPITONIDAE

[Sibley and Monroe place the African barbets in their own family, Lybiidae.]

Red-fronted Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus pusillus*: Small numbers were seen in Daallo Forest.

Black-throated Barbet *Tricholaema melanocephala*: Very few sightings of the race *blandi* and only between our drive to Hargeisa and the country east of Burco.

Red-and-yellow Barbet *Trachyphonus erythrocephalus*: A conspicuous bird but only seen between our first campsite and the country east of Burco.

Yellow-breasted Barbet *Trachyphonus margaritatus*: First seen en route to Hargeisa and then in the Forêt du Day in Djibouti.

INDICATORIDAE

Greater Honeyguide *Indicator indicator*: Also known as Black-throated Honeyguide we obtained four sightings including immatures at our lunch stop near the Beira Hills, in the Daallo Forest and near Sheikh. This honeyguide is known to parasitise no fewer than thirty-nine hole-nesting species.

PICIDAE

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*: Angie found one of these Palearctic migrants for us in the Forêt du Day on 24/9.

Nubian Woodpecker *Campethera nubica*: Scattered sightings of ones and twos in suitable bush country in Somaliland.

Cardinal Woodpecker *Dendropicos fuscescens*: First seen amongst the Frankincense trees below the Daallo escarpment. Several more were seen between Hargeisa and Wajaale and again in the Forêt du Day in Djibouti.

ALAUDIDAE

Singing Bush Lark *Mirafra cantillans*: Very much in evidence on the Wajaale Plains with many birds in full song display.

Somali Lark *Mirafra somalica*: Individuals were found without too much trouble when we looked for them but this certainly does not appear to be a numerous species. We first encountered birds of this appearance on the Tuuyo Plains but these individuals differed subtly from those later seen on the Ban Cade Plains in that the undertail coverts were significantly plain (Tuuyo) rather than streaked with strong dark markings (Ban Cade). The outer-tail feathers of the Tuuyo bird only showed white at the basal outer edge of the outer web. The outer webs of the outer tail feathers of the Ban Cade birds were completely white throughout their length. The breast markings of the Tuuyo birds were slightly more blotched and the Ban Cade birds more streaked. There was also a difference in song with the eastern Ban Cade bird possessing a sweeter, cleaner voice however in experiments with playback the Ban Cade bird responded very aggressively to the Tuuyo bird. It therefore seemed likely at the time that the two types despite the subtle differences were

in fact the same species. I have now examined the skins collected by Archer of *M. somalica* and the *sharpii* race of Rufous-naped Lark *M. africana*. The stronghold of this peculiar isolated outpost form was supposedly on the plains between Sayla and Tuuyo but as we discovered the former are now intensively grazed and maybe the bird is now lost there. Archer writes that the species favours waving white grasses a foot or more high and it seems the intensive grazing may have destroyed this habitat. According to the available literature the *sharpii* race supposedly looks like a shorter and thicker billed version of our Tuuyo bird. Apart from the bill length all other features fit very closely. Of the four *sharpii* specimens, three were collected on the Tuuyo plains and one from the Sayla plains. One is a juvenile and therefore very short billed, one is in a terrible mess and the bill is broken and the other two have a bill that isn't as short as the literature suggests. Both of these populations behaved in exactly the same manner and were fond of perching and singing from the top of low rounded bushes and tussocks and would always allow very close approach. I am suggesting that the birds we saw on the Tuuyo plains are in fact what have been named as *sharpii*. The birds from Ban Cade are classic *somalica* matching the specimens at Tring perfectly. I think that Rufous-naped Lark *M. africana sharpii* is conspecific with *M. s. somalica* thus representing a third subspecies of Somali Lark *M. somalica sharpii*. Thus *M. africana sharpii* becomes a synonym of *M. somalica sharpii*. The described bill lengths are possibly misleading but more westerly (and more easterly) birds seem to have shorter bills although nowhere as short as other populations of Rufous-naped Lark. It would explain why the two forms are supposed to overlap on the Tuuyo Plains and this feature has perhaps been wrongly stressed over and above other features.

- Collared Lark *Mirafra collaris*: One of the biggest successes of the tour was the rediscovery of this attractive species that perhaps hadn't been seen since the 1980's. Recent searches for this elusive bird by other groups with Abdi had drawn a blank and although we had budgeted extra time in the red sand country to the southeast of Burco we actually found our prize during the first morning! A bird in flight spotted by Nik was soon hunted down and relocated and incredible views were had by all of us. In flight the rufous lark with black flight feathers was immediately recognisable but it must be very localised in this region.
- Foxy Lark *Mirafra alopex*: A bird seen well and photographed in the red sand country to the south-east of Burco was indeed this species but showed the dark breast markings more expected of the western race *macdonaldi*. We found no sign of any plain, unstreaked birds anywhere that looked like the illustration in BHoA. Examination of the four specimens at Tring collected by Archer showed that although one bird was unmarked on the breast, one was exactly like our bird, one was intermediate and the fourth was in too much of a mess to tell. It would seem that the literature too date has placed emphasis on the plainer birds and ignored the well-marked individual. All other features pointed to our bird being a Foxy Lark of the race *alopex*. The illustration in BHoA is therefore misleading.
- Gillett's Lark *Mirafra gilletti*: This seems to be a very common and widespread lark in bush country throughout Somaliland and it is easily located if the thin but far-carrying song is known. Major F. A. Gillett (1872-1944) hunted big game in Somalia in 1894.
- Greater Hoopoe-lark *Alaemon alaudipes*: A small number of birds with fledged young were seen well in the coastal region around Zeila. A singleton was seen at Maydh.
- Lesser Hoopoe-lark \diamond *Alaemon hamertoni*: Both the western race *tertia* and the eastern *altera* were seen well. This is apparently a common lark of the plains and has a very distinctive song and display flight.

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*: Somewhat confusing as the illustrations in BHoA do not match what we saw very closely but there is no doubt that we saw Desert Larks. The birds were encountered in a variety of semi-desert habitats often quite well vegetated. They ranged from dusky in the Djibouti lava fields to plain and pale pinkish south of Hargeisa. More streaked birds were found around the Beira hills. Meinertzhagen himself commented that it was impossible to separate further subspecies as the birds plumage readily reflected the soil colour from the locality they lived in and any markings were readily lost by wear.

Blanford's Lark *Calandrella blanfordi*: Not as common as expected but we saw small numbers of the distinctive race *daroodensis* on the Aroori and Ban Cade Plains. William Thomas Blanford (1832-1905) was a British geologist and zoologist who worked for a short time in Ethiopia.

Somali Short-toed Lark *Calandrella somalica*: Easy to see and often in large flocks on the plains of Somaliland.

Short-tailed Lark *Pseudalaemon fremantlii*: This lark was seen in busy little flocks relentlessly digging up the more degraded plains of Somaliland.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*: Only seen in the coastal area of Somaliland around Zeila.

Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae*: The spiky crested race *elliotti* proved common and easy to see on many of the better vegetated plains in Somaliland.

Chestnut-backed Sparrow Lark *Eremopterix leucotis*: Nik saw a pair as we speeded away from the Wajaale Plains on a dash to the airport.

Black-crowned Sparrow Lark *Eremopterix nigriceps*: Our first was in Djibouti but the species was most common in the coastal area of Somaliland around Zeila.

Chestnut-headed Sparrow Lark *Eremopterix signatus*: This lark was abundant on Tuuyo Plains with smaller numbers elsewhere in Somaliland.

HIRUNDINIDAE

Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*: Two sightings of this Palearctic migrant over the Tuuyo Plains and near Ceerigaabo.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*: A few were seen over the Daallo escarpment. Specimens collected here resemble migrant *rufula* but might actually represent an undescribed but similar resident race.

Rock Martin *Hirundo fuligula*: First seen on the Ban Cade Plains but the species was common and easy to see on the Daallo escarpment and over the Forêt du Day. Some birds at Daallo were collecting mud for their nests but breeding is supposed to be in March to May according to *Birds of Somalia*. As suggested in this work, it was confusing because it sometimes seemed that both paler (*obsoleta*) and darker (*arabica*) birds were present.

Ethiopian Swallow *Hirundo aethiopica*: Only recorded in the areas centred around Burco and also between there and Berbera and Hargeisa.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*: The numbers of this Palearctic migrant increased greatly during the duration of the tour

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum*: Small numbers of this Palearctic migrant were seen over Daallo Forest. There are no records for this square in *Birds of Somalia*.

MOTACILLIDAE

Blue-headed Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] flava*: Although 'flava type' wagtails were recorded at widespread localities throughout the tour we rarely had a chance to study them and as a result their subspecific identity could not be confirmed or even guessed at. This form however was present on the Wajaale Plains.

Yellow-headed Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] lutea* (NL): C-G recorded this form on the Ban Cade Plains.

Grey-headed Wagtail *Motacilla [flava] thunbergi* (NL): C-G recorded this form on the Tuuyo Plains.

- Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*: Just a few widespread sightings of this Palearctic migrant were obtained during the tour. One was seen below the Daallo escarpment that lies in an empty square in *Birds of Somalia*.
- Grassland Pipit *Anthus cinnamomeus*: Also called African Pipit and first seen near Ceerigaabo it was actually most common on the plains around Sayla and Wajaale.
- Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*: Good numbers of this mainly Palearctic migrant (there are also breeding records) were seen on the plains near our first campsite and a few more were on the Ban Cade Plains.
- Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis*: Easy to see on the Daallo escarpment but also present on the pass near Sheikh and again at Forêt du Day in Djibouti.
- Plain-backed Pipit *Anthus leucophrys*: Easy to see on the plains around Sayla.
- Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*: Sightings of this Palearctic migrant were obtained in Daallo Forest (an empty square in *Birds of Somalia*) and Forêt du Day in Djibouti.
- Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* (H): One was heard flying over the Wajaale Plains on 22/9. There are no records for this square in *Birds of Somalia*.

PYCNONOTIDAE

- Somali Bulbul *Pycnonotus somaliensis*: Common and easy to see in Djibouti and the coastal area of Somaliland around Zeila. At the pass near Sheikh and Berbera the birds were clearly hybrids with the species showing the white vent of *somaliensis* but also possessing white tail tips distinctive of *dodsoni*.
- Dodson's Bulbul *Pycnonotus dodsoni*: Exceedingly common in bush country from Burco eastwards. W. Dodson was a taxidermist collecting in the Middle East and Morocco at the end of the 19th century and the bulbul was probably named after this man.

TURDIDAE

[The genera *Luscinia*, *Irania*, *Cercotrichas*, *Phoenicurus*, *Saxicola*, *Oenanthe*, *Cercomela* and *Monticola* are sometimes placed in the family Muscicapidae.]

- Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos*: There seemed to be plenty of these Palearctic migrants in Daallo Forest. There are no records for this square in *Birds of Somalia*.
- White-throated Robin *Irania gutturalis*: Also known as *Irania* we had good looks at one of these Palearctic migrants in Forêt du Day.
- White-browed Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas leucophrys*: First seen at our first 'proper' campsite and quite common in the thorn bush country and the red sand country that surrounds Burco. This complex group is split into two forms, the 'red-backed' and the 'white-winged' which have historically been treated as separate species. We encountered the race *leucoptera* one of the 'white-winged' forms.
- Rufous Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*: Palearctic migrants of the greyer races either *familiaris* or *syriacus* were not uncommon in bush country through Somaliland.
- African Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas minor*: Possibly overlooked but this form, which is often lumped in the previous species, was by far the less common species in similar habitat.
- Black Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas podobe*: Seen at the border at Loyada in no-man's land and again in Djibouti.
- Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* (NL): C-G and Roger saw one in the Forêt du Day.
- Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*: A male in Daallo Forest on 21/9 with more in the Forêt du Day and all individuals seen appeared to represent the distinctive eastern race *samamisticus*. The record for Somaliland extends the range given in *Birds of Somalia* well to the east.
- Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra*: Just one of these Palearctic migrants was seen in the Forêt du Day.

- White-crowned Black Wheatear *Oenanthe leucopyga*: This striking wheatear was easy to see as we drove around Ghoubet Kharab.
- Somali Wheatear *Oenanthe phillipsi*: This handsome and very desirable species showed a strong preference for thorn bush in rocky countryside where it proved easy to see but not so easy to photograph.
- Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*: C-G and Angie saw one of these Palearctic migrants along the coast near Zeila. Everyone saw another near Ceerigaabo. This record for Somaliland extends the range given in *Birds of Somalia* well to the east.
- Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*: Just one of these Palearctic migrants was seen as we drove to Wajaale.
- Abyssinian Black Wheatear *Oenanthe lugubris*: The distinctive race *vauriei* proved easy to see around Daallo Forest it is only presumed to be a resident but our records confirm its presence until 17th September.
- Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*: This Palearctic migrant was first seen on the Ban Cade Plains but was also seen at Maydh, near Burco and en route to Wajaale. The Maydh record adds to the squares in *Birds of Somalia*.
- Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*: This was by far the most common wheatear seen during our travels and all Palearctic migrants. The name refers to a dirty yellowish buff colour and according to modern myth could refer to two separate women with similar fixations. The most recent would be Isabella, Archduchess of Austria (1566-1633). Her husband Albert VII laid siege to Ostend in 1601 and Isabella who expected a quick victory vowed not to change her underwear until the city was won. This would have all been so well and good if the siege hadn't lasted for over three years! The earlier Isabella I of Castile (1451-1504) was a victim of an eight-month long siege of Granada in 1491-2 and she, also is said to have vowed not to change her knickers during this time!
- Sombre Rock Chat *Cercomela dubia*: One of the biggest surprises of the trip was the discovery of this rarity in both countries. An immature was found on the pass near Sheikh on 19/9 where it was seen well and photographed. There is only one old previous record from a nearby location. At least one adult was found in a rocky valley in the Forêt du Day on 24/9 and was again photographed. This record constitutes the first for Djibouti. Classified as 'Data Deficient' by Birdlife International this species has an unknown population.
- Blackstart *Cercomela melanura*: Also known as Black-tailed Rock Chat small numbers were recorded in suitable habitat throughout the tour in both countries.
- Little Rock Thrush *Monticola rufocinereus*: This attractive tail-quivering species was numerous and easy to see in Daallo Forest.
- Common Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*: Also known as Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush we encountered a small number of these Palearctic migrants mainly around Daallo Forest but also near Sheikh. Our earliest sighting was 15/9 that predates the earliest given in *Birds of Somalia* on 20th September.
- Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* (NL): Geoffrey saw one of these Palearctic migrants as we left Forêt du Day.
- Somali Thrush *Turdus ludoviciae*: This endemic was common and very easy to see in Daallo Forest. Classified as 'Vulnerable' by Birdlife International this species has a population of estimate of between 10,000 – 19,999 and decreasing. Forest destruction is clearly the most important threat to the species survival.

SYLVIIDAE

[The genera *Acrocephalus*, *Iduna* and *Hippolais* are sometimes placed in a separate family, Acrocephalidae. The genus *Phylloscopus* is sometimes placed in a separate family, Phylloscopidae. The genus *Sylvia* is sometimes placed in a separate family, Sylviidae.]

Caspian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus [scirpaceus] fuscus*: A reed warbler seen in Daallo Forest on 17/9 was assumed to be this form as it is the only Palaearctic migrant race known to move through the Horn of Africa. There are no previous records from this square in *Birds of Somalia*. Suggested at one time to be worthy of specific status this is now widely discredited.

Mangrove Warbler *Acrocephalus avicenniae*: Very short-winged reed warblers were apparently very common in the mangroves in the Zeila area of Somaliland. There is some debate about the taxonomy of this form that was described as recently as 1989 and some taxonomists prefer to treat it as a race of African Reed Warbler. However this species in turn is lumped in Eurasian Reed Warbler *A. scirpaceus*.

Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* (H): Heard in the mangroves in the Zeila area of Somaliland.

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais pallida*: This species was recorded in small numbers throughout the tour and was only absent from Daallo Forest so the map in *Birds of Somalia* seems to show it as being under-recorded. The race most likely to occur is *elaieica* and although we saw and heard Olivaceous Warblers in the mangroves near Zeila it was not clear whether they were of the newly described race *alulensis* or simply migrants.

Upcher's Warbler *Hippolais languida*: One was seen in the red sand country southeast of Burco (an empty square in *Birds of Somalia*) and two were seen between Burco and Sheikh. Sir Henry Morris Upcher JP (1839-1921) was Deputy-Lieutenant of the County of Norfolk, England. He was a friend of Tristram who redescribed the warbler after the original 'rather vague' description by Ehrenberg.

Yellow-bellied Eremomela *Eremomela icteropygialis*: Commonly seen in suitable bush country in Somaliland.

Yellow-vented Eremomela *Eremomela flavicrissalis*: A few were seen in the red sand country southeast of Burco on 11/9. These sightings extend the range very slightly northwards from that given in *Birds of Somalia*.

Northern Crombec *Sylvietta brachyura* (NL): Werner saw one near the Beira hills.

Philippa's Crombec *Sylvietta philippae*: Also known as Somali Short-billed Crombec this species was one of the most site specific birds of the trip and we only saw it at a stake out east of Burco. Classified as 'Data Deficient' by Birdlife International this species has an unknown population. John G Williams (1913-97) collected the crombec in 1954 and named after his wife Philippa. He was the author of a field guide to the birds of East Africa.

Somali Crombec *Sylvietta isabellina*: Also known as Somali Long-billed Crombec we saw our first at our first campsite and more in the red sand country south-east of Burco.

Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*: Two sightings of this Palearctic migrant were obtained below the escarpment at Daallo on 15 and 17/9. The earliest date for returning migrants in *Birds of Somalia* is 5th November and there are only ten historic records.

Brown Woodland Warbler *Phylloscopus umbrovirens*: Small numbers of this cute little *Phylloscopus* warbler were seen in Daallo Forest and Forêt du Day.

Arabian Warbler *Sylvia leucomelaena*: We obtained two sightings of pairs both were seen east of Burco.

Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*: A male of this Palearctic migrant was seen in the Forêt du Day.

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*: Small numbers of this Palearctic migrant were seen from the Ban Cade Plains through to Daallo Forest and again in the Forêt du Day. Our earliest sighting was 13/9 that predates the earliest given in *Birds of Somalia* on 22nd September.

Ménétries's Warbler *Sylvia mystacea*: A pair of these Palearctic migrants was seen at the Beira site on 8/9. Edouard P. Ménétries (1802-1861) was a French zoologist who collected in Russia between 1829-30. The earliest given in *Birds of Somalia* is not until 18th December.

Banded Parisoma *Parisoma boehmi*: A common bird in suitable bush country in Somaliland.

CISTICOLIDAE

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*: Seen and heard on the Wajaale Plains on 22/9. There are no records in *Birds of Somalia* for Somaliland. However the species is well known from the Ethiopian side of the border in this area.

Desert Cisticola *Cisticola aridulus*: Seen in the grassy plains near our first 'proper' campsite and again on the plains near Sayla.

Pectoral-patch Cisticola *Cisticola brunnescens*: Seen and heard on the Wajaale Plains.

Pale Prinia *Prinia somalica*: First seen at our lunch stop en route to Hargeisa. The species seemed to be very common in the thorn bush country surrounding Burco down onto the red sand plains.

Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis*: Common and easy to see in Djibouti town and along the coast near Zeila in Somaliland. The strange cisticola-like bird on the Daallo escarpment was probably also this species.

Red-fronted Warbler *Spiloptila rufifrons*: This tail-wiggling little warbler was easy to find in any suitable bush country in Somaliland.

Brown-tailed Apalis *Apalis viridiceps*: The nominate race of this version of Yellow-breasted Apalis *A. flavida* was common and very easy to see in any suitable bush country surrounding Burco in Somaliland.

Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brevicaudata*: Common but heard more than seen in Daallo Forest.

Grey Wren-Warbler *Calamonastes simplex*: Heard more than seen in any suitable bush country surrounding Burco in Somaliland.

MUSCICAPIDAE

African Grey Flycatcher *Bradornis microrhynchus*: Very common in any suitable bush country in Somaliland.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*: Numbers of this common Palearctic increased during the tour and these birds could almost be expected anywhere. Our earliest sighting was 8/9 that predates the earliest main arrivals given in *Birds of Somalia* as 23rd September.

Gambaga Flycatcher *Muscicapa gambagae*: Probably at least two pairs of this unassuming flycatcher were seen around the Forêt du Day. The name derives from the type locality in northern Ghana.

MONARCHIDAE

African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis*: Small numbers in Daallo Forest included a predominantly pied individual complete with white tail. This morph is apparently rare in Somaliland.

PLATYSTEIRIDAE

Grey-headed Batis *Batis orientalis*: First encountered at our first 'proper' campsite the species became much more common in the Daallo area.

Pygmy Batis *Batis perkeo*: Seemingly not uncommon in the red sand bush country southeast of Burco. The females showed extensive white and more than was to be expected around the eye. This feature does not seem to be illustrated in the literature. The species is obviously far more common in this area than suggested *Birds of Somalia*.

TIMALIIDAE

Scaly Chatterer *Turdoides aylmeri*: Small family groups were seen in the red sand bush country southeast of Burco (an empty square in *Birds of Somalia*) and again just northeast of town

PARIDAE

Northern Grey Tit *Parus thruppi*: Small numbers were seen in suitable habitat in Somaliland.

REMIZIDAE

Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit *Anthoscopus musculus*: Small numbers were seen in any suitable bush country surrounding Burco in Somaliland filling some suitable gaps in *Birds of Somalia*.

NECTARINIIDAE

Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes orientalis*: Our only sightings were had in the bush country around our first 'proper' campsite.

Hunter's Sunbird *Nectarinia hunteri*: Small numbers were seen in any suitable bush country surrounding Burco in Somaliland.

Nile Valley Sunbird *Anthreptes metallicus*: Seen well in Djibouti and again en route to Burco at the beginning of the tour. However none of the males were in breeding plumage.

Marico Sunbird *Nectarinia mariquensis*: Just one male in full breeding plumage was seen near Qoyladey. The Marico River forms the border between South Africa and Botswana.

Shining Sunbird *Nectarinia habessinica*: A very common bird in Djibouti and along the coastal escarpments. Many males were in full breeding plumage and in full song.

Variable Sunbird *Nectarinia venusta*: Common in suitable habitat in Somaliland.

ZOSTEROPIDAE

Abyssinian White-eye *Zosterops abyssinicus*: This white-eye was a common to abundant bird in Daallo Forest and Forêt du Day.

LANIIDAE

Somali Fiscal *Lanius somalicus*: The common shrike through the interior areas of Somaliland.

Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*: Small numbers of the race *aucheri* were seen well in Djibouti and inland as far as Burco in Somaliland.

Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius [meridionalis] pallidirostris*: One of these Palearctic migrants was seen on the Aroori Plains on 9/9 (an empty square in *Birds of Somalia*). There are only five previous records of this form given in *Birds of Somalia* the earliest being on 16th September.

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius [isabellinus] isabellinus*: We had two sightings of individuals that appeared to show characteristics of this form. The first was near Maydh on 15/9 and the second between Burco and Sheikh on 19/9.

Rufous-tailed Shrike *Lanius [isabellinus] phoenicuroides*: Also known as Turkestan Shrike. This was positively identified at widespread localities through Djibouti and Somaliland.

Northern White-crowned Shrike *Eurocephalus rueppelli*: Just three sightings at our lunch stop en route from Zeila to Hargeisa, in the red sand bush country south-east of Burco (a range extension) and en route to Qoyladey.

MALACONOTIDAE

Rosy-patched Bush-shrike *Rhodophoneus cruentus*: The far-reaching whistles of these striking birds were a feature of the Somaliland bush country.

Three-streaked Tchagra *Tchagra jamesi*: Amazing views of a very showy individual near Sheikh (an empty square in *Birds of Somalia*).

Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegalus*: Seen in Daallo Forest and heard in Forêt du Day.

Slate-coloured Boubou *Laniarius funebris*: Several were seen between the Beira hills and around our first campsite.

Red-naped Bush-shrike *Laniarius ruficeps*: By voice this species is presumably much more common in Somaliland than previously supposed. We heard and saw them commonly from northeast of Burco through the red sand country to the southeast. This extends the range in a more south-easterly direction than mapped in *Birds of Somalia* confirming its presence in several empty squares.

Ethiopian Boubou *Laniarius aethiopicus*: Seen and heard well in Forêt du Day in Djibouti.

Brubru *Nilus afer*: Seen in any suitable bush country in Somaliland. The name is presumably based on an onomatopoeic rendering of the call.

ORIOLIDAE

Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*: Widespread sightings of these Palearctic migrants were obtained in both countries.

DICRURIDAE

Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*: Also known as Common Drongo this was a common and widespread species seen in any suitable habitat throughout the tour.

CORVIDAE

Cape Rook *Corvus capensis*: Small numbers were seen as we neared Ceerigaabo.

Dwarf Raven *Corvus edithae*: Also known as Somali Crow this species was common throughout much of Somaliland but did not appear to be in any areas that held House Crow.

Pied Crow *Corvus albus*: Surprisingly scarce and we only saw a few birds in Berbera and Hargeisa.

Fan-tailed Raven *Corvus rhipidurus*: Seen well in Daallo Forest and again in the Forêt du Day.

House Crow *Corvus splendens*: Incredibly abundant in Djibouti and Berbera in Somaliland. These birds first turned up in Somalia in 1972 - this bird is taking on the world!

STURNIDAE

Somali Starling *Onychognathus blythii*: Also known as Somali Chestnut-winged Starling this bird became incredibly common as soon as we reached Ceerigaabo and then the Daallo escarpment. The species resurfaced in the Forêt du Day in Djibouti.

Greater Blue-eared Starling *Lamprotornis chalybaeus*: Our only sightings were in the Hargeisa area.

Golden-breasted Starling *Cosmopsarus regius*: This absolutely gorgeous bird was seen well in the bush country centred on Burco.

Shelley's Starling *Lamprotornis shelleyi*: Small numbers with youngsters were seen near Sheikh. The species is known to migrate south in September. Captain George Ernest Shelley (1840-1910) was the nephew of the famous poet and a geologist with an interest in ornithology. He collected in Africa and had a specialist interest in sunbirds writing "A Monograph of the *Nectarinidae*" in 1880.

Superb Starling *Lamprotornis superbus*: This familiar East African species was no stranger in bush country in Somaliland either.

- White-crowned Starling *Spreo albicapillus*: Seen in pretty much the same areas as the previous species and often associating with it.
- Magpie Starling *Speculipastor bicolor*: Just a few were seen around our first campsite and again at our camp in the red sand country southeast of Burco.
- Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea*: Widespread but scattered sightings throughout Somaliland. Although absent from Daallo Forest it was present near Maydh thus confirming its presence in an empty square in *Birds of Somalia*.

BUPHAGIDAE

[Redman *et al.* lump this family in Sturnidae.]

- Red-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus erythrorhynchus*: Scattered sightings throughout Somaliland.

PASSERIDAE

- Swainson's Sparrow *Passer swainsonii*: Small numbers were noted mainly associated with human habitation through the interior of Somaliland. William Swainson (1789-1855) was an English naturalist and artist and was responsible for the idea of arranging specimens in drawers rather than stands in the scientific collections.
- House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*: After having seen what looked like hybrid House X Somali Sparrows at our hotel in Djibouti we saw fully plumaged pure House Sparrows at the border crossing at Loyada on 6/9.
- Somali Sparrow *Passer castanopterus*: This species was most common with hundreds of birds involved in the red sand country southeast of Burco. Throughout the country the yellow in the males was often absent and some birds had bright white cheeks but these invariably turned out to be hybrids.
- Arabian Golden Sparrow *Passer euchlorus*: Our best views were along the disgusting railway embankment behind our hotel in Djibouti but perhaps we should have been grateful for the area to have what it takes to attract them!
- Yellow-spotted Petronia *Petronia pyrgita*: Small numbers were seen in the red sand country southeast of Burco.

PLOCEIDAE

- Red-billed Buffalo-weaver *Bubalornis niger*: Flocks were seen in Somaliland between our first campsite and the red sands southeast of Burco.
- White-headed Buffalo-weaver *Dinemellia dinemelli*: Good numbers of these strikingly patterned birds were seen in Somaliland between our first campsite and the red sands southeast of Burco.
- Red-headed Weaver *Anaplectes rubriceps*: A male was seen at the pass near Sheikh.
- Lesser Masked Weaver *Ploceus intermedius*: Small numbers were seen between Hargeisa and Burco.
- Vitelline Masked Weaver *Ploceus vitellinus*: This weaver was most common in the red sand country south-east of Burco. The word 'vitelline' pertains to the yolk of an egg and presumably refers to the yellow colour of the bird.
- Rüppell's Weaver *Ploceus galbula*: A common and widespread weaver that didn't penetrate into the deep interior. Many birds were in breeding plumage. Wilhelm Peter Eduard Simon Rüppell (1794-1884) was a German explorer, cartographer and zoologist, best known for ornithological discoveries in Ethiopia and the interior of northeast Africa.
- Chestnut Weaver *Ploceus rubiginosus*: A large flock roosted in the hotel garden in Burco during our first stay there but there was no sign of them on our return. This locality is a significant range extension eastwards. The birds were very numerous in the Wajaale area and were in the process of breeding.
- Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea*: Our only sightings were in the Wajaale area.

Northern Red Bishop *Euplectes franciscanus*: Our only sightings were in the Wajaale area.

ESTRILDIDAE

Purple Grenadier *Uraeginthus ianthinogaster*: First seen in the Burco area we saw them again at Qoladey.

Green-winged Pytilia *Pytilia melba*: Also known as Melba Finch we encountered small numbers in the red sand country south-east of Burco and en route to Qoladey.

Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala*: Our only sightings were in Djibouti town.

Cut-throat Finch *Amadina fasciata*: Five were seen coming to drink at a small dam in the Sayla area.

African Silverbill *Lonchura cantans*: A few were seen in Djibouti town and two were seen by some of the group east of Burco.

VIDUIDAE

Straw-tailed Whydah *Vidua fischeri*: A female was seen in the red sand country south-east of Burco.

FRINGILLIDAE

White-throated Seedeater *Serinus xanthopygius*: At least one singing male resembling this species was seen in a stony valley at the Forêt du Day. Although we couldn't see any yellow on the throat of our bird, photos of individuals taken earlier in the year by members of another group show at least a spot of yellow on one bird suggesting Yellow-throated Seedeater *S. flavigula*. Examination of skins at Tring has not helped in sorting out this problem due to lack of specimens but observations of the species in Eritrea and unconfirmed reports of *flavigula* in the Jemma Valley in Ethiopia suggest that at least some *xanthopygius*, possibly juveniles can show some yellow on the throat and some birds actually have brown throats! There are many specimens of Reichenow's Seedeater *S. reichenowi* in Tring and some specimens (possibly juveniles) show a yellow wash to the underparts. This streaky species has been reported from Djibouti but we saw no sign of this bird. White-throated Seedeater was previously thought to be endemic to Ethiopia and Eritrea whilst Yellow-throated was purely an Ethiopian endemic. The two are obviously very closely related and have very similar songs and may even be conspecific. Either 'species' would be new for the country. It probably needs more documentation and study before the true identity of these birds can be confirmed.

White-bellied Canary *Serinus dorsostriatus*: Small numbers were seen well in the bush country centred on Burco.

Northern Grosbeak-canary *Serinus donaldsoni*: We had great looks at a male and at least three female or juvenile birds near Burco filling an empty square in *birds of Somalia*.

Brown-rumped Seed-eater *Serinus tristriatus*: Good views were had of this rather dowdy seedeater in Daallo Forest and at the pass near Sheikh.

Somali Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus louisae*: A female was seen well gorging on juniper berries below the Daallo escarpment. This Somali endemic is classified as 'Near-threatened' by Birdlife International. The population is estimated at between 2,500 – 9,999 individuals and decreasing. Drought and habitat loss are given as the major threats.

Warsangli Linnet *Carduelis johannis*: It was hard work finding this one in Daallo Forest but in the end we saw several individuals and a pair of these striking birds was enjoyed through the scope. This Somali endemic is classified as 'Endangered' by Birdlife International, and the population is estimated at between 250 – 999 individuals and decreasing. Contrary to the 1998 reports published on the Birdlife website that the juniper forest at Daallo has been cleared, the forest in fact appears to be in a reasonable state and efforts are in place there to counter erosion. We saw little evidence of tree felling, however habitat loss is one of

the biggest threats. The Warsangeli is a Somali clan inhabiting the Maakhir region of northern Somalia. The name means “bringer of good news”.

EMBERIZIDAE

Somali Bunting *Emberiza poliopleura*: Also known as Somali Golden-breasted Bunting this attractive species was common and easy to see in the bush country centred around Burco.

Cinnamon-breasted Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi*: Several were seen between Ceerigaabo and Daallo Forest.

Striolated Bunting *Emberiza striolata*: Two were seen in the Somali Pigeon gorge.

Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*: Good numbers, perhaps more than 100 of these Palearctic migrants were seen in Forêt du Day.

MAMMALS

Sacred Baboon *Papio hamadryas*: We saw good numbers in scattered localities in both Somaliland and Djibouti. Also known, as Hamadryas this species distribution is limited to eastern Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Suakin in Sudan through Somaliland to SW Arabia. The species hybridises with *P. anubis* in the Kereyou Gorge, Ethiopia. The species is listed as ‘Vermin’ in the African Convention.

Yellow-winged Bat *Lavia frons*: One was seen in the red sand country south-east of Burco.

Somali Elephant Shrew *Elephantulus revoili*: Two were seen near Burco. This is an endangered species.

Cape Hare *Lepus capensis*: The small desert-dwelling race *habessinicus* was common and widespread in Somaliland. It seemed to be active day and night.

Unstriped Ground Squirrel *Xerus rutilus*: Very common and easy to see throughout the tour.

Speke’s Pectinator *Pectinator spekei*: Small numbers of this endearing creature were seen on the Daallo escarpment.

Common Jackal *Canis aureus*: Also known as Golden Jackal, this mammal was regularly encountered throughout the tour.

Bat-eared Fox *Otocyon megalotis*: Just three encounters on the Somaliland plains.

Banded Mongoose *Mungos mungo*: A group of about 15 animals was watched in Daallo Forest.

White-tailed Mongoose *Ichneumia albicauda*: Seen by some at night as we returned to Burco.

Spotted Hyaena *Crocuta crocuta*: Those in one of the cars saw two at night as we journeyed to Hargeisa.

Caracal *Felis caracal*: Those in one of the cars saw were fortunate to see one as we travelled to Wajaale.

Ethiopian Rock Hyrax *Procavia habessinica*: Seen in Daallo Forest and again at the Somali Pigeon site.

Yellow-spotted Hyrax *Heterohyrax brucei*: Seen in Daallo Forest and again in Djibouti.

Desert Warthog *Phacochoerus aethiopicus*: Widespread sightings at scattered localities throughout Somaliland.

Klipspringer *Oreotragus oreotragus*: One was seen in Forêt du Day.

Beira *Dorcatragus megalotis*: A herd of six of these absolutely delightful and endangered little antelopes was seen between Hargeisa and Berbera.

Salt’s Dikdik *Madoqua saltiana*: Very common throughout Somaliland.

Guenther’s Dikdik *Madoqua guentheri*: A few were seen at one locality east of Burco.

Dorcas Gazelle *Gazella dorcas*: The form *pelzelni* was seen in coastal parts of Somaliland.

Speke’s Gazelle *Gazella spekei*: This form replaced the previous species further inland.

Soemmering's Gazelle *Gazella soemmeringi*: One was seen as we drove through the deserts away from Zeila and a herd of 21 were seen on the Aroori Plains which came as a shock to Abdi who thought that they were extinct there.

Gerenuk *Litocranius walleri*: Two were seen near the Beira hills.



(left to right) **Djibouti Francolin** (*Pternistis ochropectus*), **Somali Starling** (*Onychognathus blythii*), **Somali Thrush** (*Turdus ludoviciae*), **Somali Golden-winged Grosbeak** (*Rhynchostruthus louisae*), **Archer's Buzzard** (*Buteo archeri*), **Somali Wheatear** (*Oenanthe phillipsi*).



(left to right) **Little Brown Bustard** (*Eupodotis humilis*), **Somali Lark** (*Mirafrā somalica*), **Lesser Hoopoe-lark** (*Alaemon hamertoni*), **Somali Pigeon** (*Columba oliviae*), **Short-tailed Lark** (*Pseudalaemon fremantlii*), **Collared Lark** (*Mirafrā collaris*).



(left to right) **Blanford's Lark** (*Calandrella blanfordi*), **Desert Lark** (*Ammomanes deserti*), **Greater Hoopoe-lark** (*Alaemon alaudipes*), **Foxy Lark** (*Mirafra alopex*), **Gillett's Lark** (*Mirafra gilletti*), **Singing Bush Lark** (*Mirafra cantillans*).



(left to right) **Crested Lark** (*Galerida cristata*), **Thekla Lark** (*Galerida theklae*), **Somali Short-toed Lark** (*Calandrella somalica*), **Arabian Scops Owl?** (*Otus pamela?*), **Somali Bunting** (*Emberiza poliopleura*), **Donaldson Smith's Nightjar** (*Caprimulgus donaldsoni*).



(left to right) **Somali Sparrow** (*Passer castanopterus*), **Somali Bee-eater** (*Merops revoilii*), **Philippa's Crombec** (*Sylvietta philippae*), **Brown-tailed Apalis** (*Apalis viridiceps*), **Pygmy Batis** (*Batis perkeo*), **Grey-headed Batis** (*Batis orientalis*).



(left to right) **Little Owl** (*Athene noctua*), **Sombre Rock Chat** (*Cercomela dubia*), **Abyssinian Black Wheatear** (*Oenanthe lugubris*), **Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse** (*Pterocles lichtensteinii*), **Spotted Sandgrouse** (*Pterocles senegallus*), **Shelley's Starling** (*Lamprotornis shelleyi*).



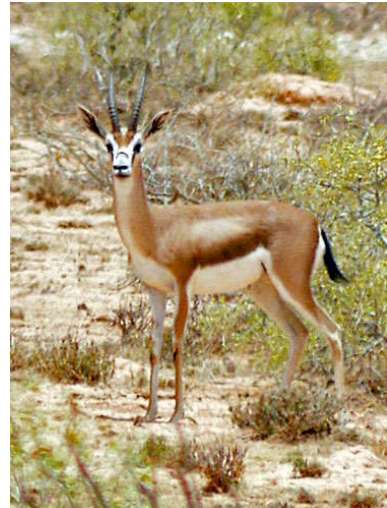
(left to right) **Yellow-breasted Barbet** (*Trachyphonus margaritatus*), **Red-and-yellow Barbet** (*Trachyphonus erythrocephalus*), **Eastern Chanting Goshawk** (*Melierax poliopterus*), **Scaly Chatterer** (*Turdoides aylmeri*), **Red-naped Bush-shrike** (*Laniarius ruficeps*), **Rosy-patched Bush-shrike** (*Rhodophoneus cruentus*).



(left to right) **Three-streaked Tchagra** (*Tchagra jamesi*), **Shining Sunbird** (*Nectarinia habessinica*), **Brown-rumped Seedeater** (*Serinus tristriatus*), **Verreaux's Eagle Owl** (*Bubo lacteus*), **White-crowned Starling** (*Spreo albigapillus*), **Bruce's Green Pigeon** (*Treron waalia*).



(left to right) **Somali Courser** (*Cursorius somalensis*), **Spotted Thick-knee** (*Burhinus capensis*), **Caspian Plover** (*Charadrius asiaticus*), **Double-banded Courser** (*Rhinoptilus africanus*), **Gambaga Flycatcher** (*Muscicapa gambagae*), **White-crowned Black Wheatear** (*Oenanthe leucopyga*).



(left to right) **Crab-plover** (*Dromas ardeola*), **Masked Booby** (*Sula dactylatra*), **Beira** (*Dorcatragus megalotis*), **Desert Warthog** (*Phacochoerus aethiopicus*), **Speke's Pectinator** (*Pectinator spekei*), **Speke's Gazelle** (*Gazella spekei*).
(All photos taken on this tour by Nik Borrow)