

Appendix 1: Detailed Journal

Saturday 27th November 1999

Driving a slow old Landrover, I have found it essential to leave as early as possible, so one doesn't have to push too hard - which also saves a lot of petrol. So, at 02:00, I set out from Johannesburg, taking the main road north past Pretoria to Pietersburg and then on to Messina. Arriving at the border post at 08:00 it is still relatively cool, and in less than 20 minutes I was across and leaving Beit Bridge for Harare. After changing some US dollars for Zimbabwe dollars at one of the new service stations, I was able to reach Harare comfortably by 15:00, and so continued to Chinhoyi on the road to Lusaka. Stayed at the Orange Grove Motel, which has an excellent campsite.

Sunday 28th November 1999

This time I could afford a somewhat later start, and so left at 06:00, reaching the border post at Chirundu at about 09:00. Here it was already getting warm, and arriving much later can be very uncomfortable indeed. Again the border post was very easy, and I was through in under 30 minutes. Luckily it was a Sunday, because otherwise the traffic jams in Lusaka are dreadful, so it took less than 20 minutes to get through. On the northern edge of Lusaka one hits some nasty potholes, but the road soon improves again, with only scattered potholes on the road to Kapiri Mposhi. If you are looking for Zambia's only endemic - Chapin's Barbet - an hour's side-trip off this road will give you an excellent opportunity to find it

Turning east just after Kapiri Mposhi, there is an excellent new road, and I was able to reach the Forest Inn at Mkushi by 15:00. The Inn has a very nice camp site, with hot showers, etc. Bird-watching in the garden as I relaxed, I started to see the first species not covered by the South African field-guides, such as African Thrush. If one has time, there is a superb miombo woodland in the Mkushi FR approximately 30 km to the north, which is well worth a day's excursion - if you can't afford longer and camp in the forest itself (no facilities).

Monday 29th November 1999

Another reasonably early start was required to get to Shiwa Ngandu as early as possible to get in some bird-watching in the miombo on the entrance road. The road from Mkushi past Serenje to the turnoff towards Lake Mweru is excellent. After that the tar deteriorates a bit, although until Mpika all potholes had been filled, and crews were busy filling the rest to the north. Zambian potholes are the most frustrating of any I have come across. The road is virtually perfect for 10 km, when suddenly there is 20 to 50 m of potholes that you have to slow to walking pace for. This is fine in the dry, but as I drove north there was scattered rain, which meant that you couldn't tell how deep the puddles were - 1 cm or 50 cm. This resulted in my having to slow right down, and cruise along at about 40 km/h, hoping that I could spot the bad potholes - not always successfully. In the dry, one can easily cruise along at 100 km/h! There were many police road blocks - although on the trip north, they only wanted to know where I was going. Pale-billed Hornbill was seen flying across the road at one point.

I arrived at Shiwa Ngandu (the turnoff is well sign-posted), and started down the gravel road. After a few km one reaches the boundary fence, and some well-developed miombo woodland. This is an excellent spot where I found Miombo Pied Barbet, White-headed Saw-wing, Böhm's Flycatcher & Miombo Grey Tit, as well as many other southern African birds. Of course, the Anchieta's Barbet and Bar-winged Weavers that I really wanted were in hiding.

Before dark I continued to the Kapishya campsite, which is rather basic, but is right next to the hot springs. After a very relaxing time in there, I wandered over to the adjacent lodge for a cold beer and a chance to look out over the river which often has Peter's Finfoot on it.

Tuesday 30th November 1999

Woken up by the incessant calling of a Broadbill, which allowed yet another 06:00 start. The road continued in its frustratingly potholed state, but with no rain, I could drive much faster. By 10:00 I had reached the border post. This border crossing took about 45 minutes, but only because there was a lot of walking to do between the various desks. I was most disappointed to learn that they understood the GP number-plate to stand for "Gangster's Paradise" - although this was made up on my return when GP was now thought to be "Great Place". One has to remember to move one's watch forward by one hour at this point.

On leaving the border post at Nakonde, the road is slightly pot-holed on the way to Mbeya, where one can change money at the bank - which generally offers a better rate than at the border post. From Mbeya one continues east on an excellent tar road, which only suffers from corrugations on steep hills. This road passes through the Mikumi NP, which is worth spending some time viewing from the road (don't enter unless you are really rich) - but I continued without stopping as this was another full days' drive. However, several Bare-faced Go-Away Birds were seen.

Passing Iringa, I continued another 20 km to reach the new Riverside campsite, which has hot showers and a great riverside setting. Ross's Turaco were heard calling in the morning. The campsite has been started up by David Moyer, who heads the Tanzanian office of the Wildlife Society. I spent a couple of hours chatting with him, and making sure I had all the necessary information for my (probable) next trip, which will be to the eastern arc mountains of Tanzania. As a small sideline, David is currently involved in setting up tours that will cover all the endemics, so is the expert on the birds of this area.

Wednesday 1st December 1999

Another lengthy day's driving was ahead, so it was yet another 06:00 start. Soon after leaving the campsite one drives along the northern boundary of the Udzungwa Mountains NP. On the few times I have driven along this road, the most common bird to be seen is the Ashy Starling. However, if one has the time, there would be many more specials to find.

Continuing eastwards through Morogoro to Chelince, the road remained excellent. From here one must turn north towards Tanga, and on reaching Segera, turn north-west towards Arusha. Along this road I had noticed several policemen, but only one stopped me for doing 61 km/h in a 50 zone. Many others were caught speeding - they have very efficient radar traps - but I had no problems talking my way out of this one..

Before reaching Moshi, I kept my eye out for suitable weaver habitat, but nothing was visible. I suspect that to see the very localized Taveta Golden Weaver, one actually needs to take the road east to Taveta.

From Moshi the road is quite heavily used, and progress slows considerably as one approaches Arusha. Also, on entering the town, a significant number of potholes appeared - although to be fair, they had all been repaired by the time I returned. The road to the excellent Masai campsite remains in terrible condition, but it is well worth putting up with. The campsite not only has good hot showers, but an excellent "fast food" restaurant. Invariably you will find two or more overland trucks - but I have never experienced any of the problems normally found with them at this campsite. What I was able to do was to talk with about 10 different groups of people who have travelled extensively throughout eastern Africa. Here was my chance to find out about the current situation in northern Kenya and Ethiopia. However, no-one present had been there, or even heard of anyone travelling there recently! However, it was still an excellent chance to meet new people and discuss current travelling experiences.

Thursday 2nd December 1999

Again I left at 06:00, but from hereon I was able to start bird-watching, although this was to be another day requiring a lot of driving. Apart from a (temporarily) badly potholed road for a few km north of Arusha, the road returned to a good tarred surface. Here the acacia bush seems to hold a greater number of birds than comparable habitats elsewhere I have visited, and Pied Wheatear, White-headed Buffalo-Weaver and Purple Grenadier were quite common, while a single Mourning Wheatear was also seen.

Since I had no idea of what arrangements I needed to make for the convoy through the northern Kenyan deserts, I continued without stopping to the border at Namanga. Again the only delay was the walking between the various desks - which seem unending. However, it probably took less than 40 minutes.

Once in Kenya, the roads are no longer pothole-free - just the opposite. It is necessary to reduce speed as it is impossible to dodge them all. Continuing north from the border, one reaches the main Mombasa - Nairobi road, and turns left into Nairobi. I doubt it is possible to get through the traffic jams here in less than an hour, but in the end (with the aid of a decent map) I was able to get onto the Thika road, and continued north, keeping to the west of Mount Kenya. Along this stretch of road many birds were seen including the local race of Pale Chanting Goshawk, Red-rumped Swallow and Northern Anteater-Chat, but not the few target species I was looking for (Jackson's Whydah, Grasshopper Buzzard, etc).

I was able to reach Isiolo by 16:00, giving me time to continue to the road-block. Here I was able to find out that on payment of 1 000 KSh, I would be assigned a soldier, who would travel with me right through to Moyale. Although I didn't need to join the convoy, it was suggested that I do so for greater safety.

Having got this ready, I returned to stay at the Bomen Hotel, there being no easy place to camp. At the hotel, an American woman called Deirdre asked for a lift to Ethiopia, as she was hitching, and had spent the previous 4 days recovering from Malaria, and there had been no alternative transport in that time other than paying for a lift on the back of one of the trucks. This was to prove one of the more interesting experiences of the trip.

Friday 3rd December 1999

Deirdre and myself managed to get to the police checkpoint at 06:00 ready for the convoy - except there wasn't one. So we set off with the soldier on the road to Samburu GR. I had travelled this road previously and was praying that someone might have done something to fix it. No such luck. The first 40 km took 3 hours, as it was still raining and the road was very muddy. It was not actually necessary to get into 4-wheel drive, but the vehicle slid around a lot as one avoided the worst of the potholes and mud.

After this first section of the road, it looked as if it might get better. However, just as I thought it was safe to speed up a bit (to 30 km/h), there was a sudden bad patch, or corrugations. After a few hours of going slowly, with occasional times when I would speed up, only to hit heavy corrugations again, I decided to try the faster option (which all the other smaller vehicles were doing - OK all was only 3, but 3 out of 3 seemed a reasonable percentage). It was probably here that I made a mistake - although that is pure hindsight. With bad corrugations, one has the choice of going very slowly - approximately 10 km/h and just suffering as the vehicle vibrates itself to pieces, or taking it at about 50 km/h in which case the vehicles travels more smoothly, but the suspension is worked very hard. It only took a few minutes before an ominous thumping started.

At first it was not clear what the problem was, but after stopping a few times and checking the springs and drive shaft, the problem was spotted. It took a bit of finding, simply because it was (to me) so unexpected. I had broken the shackle mounting on the rear left spring. This meant that the rear spring was simply bouncing on the chassis, which was, of course, the source of the noise. Anyway, there was nothing to do but to slow right down, and just get to Marsabit, where I might be able to get it fixed - nothing less than a full welding job would handle this one.

Eventually (as it seemed) we reached Marsabit - at about 15:00, i.e. taking 9 hours to cover 280 km. Stopping at the first garage, we asked if they could help. Quiet laughter, followed by a team of "mechanics" who removed the wheel and springs in a matter of seconds. Before I knew it, the shackle mount was welded back on, and the spring re-attached, discarding the U-bolts as they had been twisted with the movement of the axle over the worst of the bumps. OK, it did take about 2½ hours and 500 KSh, but I doubt many people could fix it that quickly - obviously I wasn't their first client with this type of problem. Anyway, I have to say that this repair lasted for the remainder of the trip.

From the garage, it was a short trip up to the National Park campsite. The soldier wandered off to stay with a friend, while Deirdre decided that she wasn't prepared to risk camping in a national park, and so found a cheap hotel to sleep in. The drive to the campsite confirmed my opinion that the Kenyan road authorities are completely mad. Driving along a muddy deeply pot-holed gravel road at the reckless speed of 10 km/h, I had to cross about 5 speed-humps, all of which were so high and steep that it was necessary to slow down! Anyway, after two km I reached the gate to the park, where there was a very pleasant camp site, with running water (no-one else I have met believes this, because it appears that to find running water there is a very rare event).

Ostrich, Long-tailed Fiscal & Superb Starling were seen near Samburu and Vulturine Guinea-fowl were common along the road, but not much else of note (given I was concentrating on the road).

Saturday 4th December 1999

While I managed to wake at dawn, it was cold, wet and misty. Not what one expects when camping on a small mountain in the middle of the desert - but that is what makes Marsabit such a special place.

On leaving the park, I needed to pay the required fees (having arrived after the office was closed). Here started one of the most embarrassing moments of the trip. When last in Kenya, the fees were US\$ 30 per person, US\$ 20 to camp and US\$ 30 for a foreign registered vehicle - making US\$ 70 to stay one night in a national park. Then it used to be possible to camp at a park entrance camp site for just the camping fee - which was still ludicrously expensive, but safer than anywhere else. Anyway, they wanted 200!. Big argument about how

they must be joking. 10 minutes of discussion, and the manager arrived. Further argument until one minor issue was clarified - they were talking KSh! The government had dropped the price, so the total package for entry with a foreign vehicle and camping was now 200 KSh - i.e. about US\$ 3. Much apologizing and laughter, and I left at about 06:30.

This was about half an hour after I had promised to meet Deirdre and the soldier. Deirdre wasn't a problem - there was no-one else she was going to get a lift with - but the soldier was - we needed him to get through the next road-block. Luckily we saw him climbing onto a truck just as it pulled out from town, so we were able to attract his attention and he jumped off - travelling on the front seat of a Landrover is infinitely more comfortable than sitting / standing on the back of an overloaded truck.

The remainder of the road to Moyale was just as rough and boring as the trip from Isiolo, and took nearly as long - we arrived in Moyale at 14:00. However, this was the first opportunity to stop for some serious bird-watching (ignoring the fact that the reason we had a soldier was to stop armed bandits attacking us). Soon after leaving Marsabit one reaches an area of red soils with extensive black lava rocks. This is the habitat for some of the rare desert larks in Kenya. Just after entering the habitat, I stopped having seen some small lark fly off and land close to the verge. Finding it was not at all hard, and to my complete surprise - a William's Lark. This endemic literally only occurs in this small area of desert. There were quite a few other larks around, but none would allow a close enough approach to identify properly. Anyway, a good start. Sadly, though, the state of the road meant that I had to concentrate much too much on the road thereafter, and didn't find anything other than D'Arnaud's Barbet just before reaching Moyale new (although a lot of the more "common" desert species were seen).

Once in Moyale, we drove straight on to the border post, which took about 10 minutes for the Kenyan side. On entering Ethiopia, the first problem was to drive on the right. It was fine on the tarred roads where there was traffic, but once onto the gravel roads where one simply drove on the least potholed line, it was often a problem to remember which side to drive when one met the only vehicle of the day.

The Ethiopian officials were very friendly, and we got through immigration with no problem. Customs took a bit longer, with the official filling in a lengthy form in quintuplicate (?). He was OK, he had plenty of sheets of carbon paper. However, when he asked me to write my name, address and profession, he carefully removed all the carbons, so I had to write it out 5 times. Then he read the letter from the Ethiopian Embassy in Pretoria - which was in Amharic (I often wondered what it actually said) - and finally asked me to pay for the honour of importing my vehicle into Ethiopia. US\$ 1. As I was to learn, Ethiopian officials are strongly into bureaucratic procedures, but not into trying to take as much of your money as possible. The same cannot be said of Ethiopian businessmen.

At the border one must declare all currency being brought in, and then keep careful records which will be checked before leaving. I had no problems, but Deirdre (having changed some money at the border), was trying to persuade the official that she could manage on US\$ 4 and a credit card. He clearly knew she had changed some money illegally, but I think was being very cruel when he allowed her in anyway.

While it is a prerequisite that all vehicles entering Ethiopia be thoroughly searched, an old Landrover filled with dirt, dust & bird-watching equipment didn't appeal to the official. After the first two metal trunks he gave up, and we were on our way. The whole process had taken less than an hour.

The road north from Moyale is tarred on the Ethiopian side (a fact that they are enormously proud - as are the Tanzanians to the south - it really is a serious indictment of Kenya, which is supposedly so much richer than either country that it cannot maintain its roads). Although the road was tarred, and there were virtually no potholes, it is not a very smooth road, since Ethiopians do not believe in levelling the tar they use to patch potholes. This leaves a very rough surface. In this respect, the standard of the road deteriorated steadily from Moyale through to south of Addis Ababa, where the new road is slowly progressing southwards.

We passed through Mega without actually realizing it was Mega, and there was no hope of reaching Yavello before dark, so I decided to camp in what looked like a small abandoned village. Later I realized it was probably a small market, which would only be occupied during market days. Anyway, it provided a reasonable campsite for me. It was now that Deirdre announced that she had never camped in the bush before - although she had back-packed throughout the world over the previous 10 years. So, out of the kindness of my heart, I let her sleep in the back of the Landrover - why should I worry, I was perfectly safe in the roof-top tent.

Sunday 5th December 1999

Having slept perfectly, I was somewhat surprised to find Deirdre had spend the night unable to sleep through sheer fright. Her worst fears were apparently realized when a couple of herdsmen passed by in the early hours of the morning. Not that they did anything, but the fact that they could have attacked us was the problem. Deirdre, for all her worldwide travelling experience was not a "bush-person".

An hour birding around the village produced a variety of species including Orange-bellied Parrot, Black-billed Wood-Hoopoe, Spotted Palm-Thrush, Grey Wren-Warbler, Northern Black Flycatcher, African Grey Flycatcher, Northern White-crowned Shrike, Shelley's Starling, Grey-headed Sparrow, White-headed Buffalo-Weaver & Baglafaecht Weaver. Driving slowly to Yavello, several flocks of Stresemann's Bush Crow were found, and the birds were remarkably tame, so could be approached quite close. White-crowned Starlings and Brown-rumped Bunting were also seen on a couple of occasions. Phillips' Dik-Dik were seen regularly on this stretch of road (and regularly thereafter).

After passing Yavello, the road started to deteriorate, but this was irrelevant as I was keeping more of an eye out for birds. However, just before reaching Dila, there was an almighty crash and the vehicle stopped rather suddenly. The U-bolts on the right-hand rear axle had snapped - presumably from the additional strain put on them when the shackle mounting broke on the other side. This was my chance to prove that I really knew how to fix a Landrover - and within seconds there was a crowd of about 20 to watch. So, out with the hi-lift jack, carry it round to the side of the vehicle and - put my foot on the edge of a pothole, and twist the ankle. Brilliant start. After walking around for 10 minutes to try and ensure it didn't swell up too much, I continued. To my own surprise - and I am sure everyone else's - it took me only 20 minutes to replace the U-bolts, using all 3 jacks to position the springs.

Continuing on towards Awasa, we reached it at about 15:00. About 10 km outside Awasa, the brakes failed - the brake-fluid pipe had broken loose when the U-bolts had snapped, and the pipe got caught near the shock-absorber. No big problem, it was just a matter of using the gears to slow down, and the handbrake to stop. The roads in close to Awasa were very potholed, but in the town they were basically OK. What was a surprise was the existence of traffic lights. Not only that they were there, but also that they worked. Probably 90% of all Ethiopian traffic lights worked (and most towns had them). The quirk is that they allow only one road to move at a time - not a bad idea given the general standard of driving in Africa.

The hotel we camped at was the Wabe Shabele #2 Hotel, and was not too impressive, with the "campsite" no better. The facilities were limited to long-drop toilets with 3 walls but no door, and a shower in the open. The food was very basic, but OK, and I got a chance to start sampling the local beer. With about 10 brews available round the country, I was able to conduct a thorough survey over the next few weeks.

There were virtually no water-birds around, and few waterside birds. However, the large trees in the hotel gardens and the neighbouring area were excellent. Thick-billed Raven were common and tame in the hotel grounds, as were Abyssinian Grivet and Guereza, both of which enjoyed playing on the Landrover.

Monday 6th December 1999

The following morning I spent a couple of hours wandering around the environs - but rather slowly and gingerly. My ankle had swollen up quite badly, but was not too painful. During this period Black-winged Lovebird were found just outside the grounds - although its call is not anything like the calls of lovebirds on southern Africa. Other species seen were Nubian & Grey Woodpeckers, Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Orphean Warbler, Lesser Whitethroat, White-breasted White-eye, Northern Puffback Shrike, Splendid Glossy Starling & African Citril.

Leaving Awasa at about 08:00, I was able to reach Shashamene by 09:00, where I found a local garage to fix the brakes. I also used the opportunity to change a large sum of US dollars to Birr, which was supposed to keep me going for a month or so. The brake pipe was fixed after someone brazed the pipe back together again.

Leaving Shashamene with working brakes, we reached Lake Langano about an hour later. On this road, Carmine Bee-eaters were very common. We stayed at the Bekele Mola Hotel on the southern part of the Lake. This was an infinitely more pleasant camp site - and the best I found in Ethiopia. Not only that, it produced some of the best birds of the trip. On reflection, I should have spent more time at Lake Awasa & Lake Langano. However, since it was the first stop on the trip - I assumed things would get better, so continued on.

After relaxing by the lake for a few hours, and having White Wagtail walk along the beach in front of me, with Black-headed Gull and Gull-billed Terns flying nearby, I hobbled around the hotel gardens. I found that the

really good spot was behind the hotel, in the bush near the escarpment. This area produced Banded Barbet in the staff area, White-bellied Go-Away Bird, Blue-naped Mousebird, Whinchat, Mountain Rock-Thrush, Buff-bellied Warbler, Northern Crombec, Grey-headed Batis, Black-capped Social-Weaver and Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu. Olive Baboons were to be found near the cliffs.

During this time Deirdre set up her tent, and retreated into it to read a book. She only emerged when I left for Addis, two days later. I really wonder what people who travel for the sake of travelling get out of it - she never wandered around, or looked at the scenery, or even met people to talk to. Weird.

The only other people at the campsite - and the only people who I met camping during the whole time I was in Ethiopia - were Rob and a friend, who had driven down from London, heading for South Africa. We discussed where they had been and the problems, including being harassed in Egypt, and so having to ship their vehicle by sea to Mombasa, before driving back north to Addis Ababa. However, they didn't travel beyond there, and were on their way back to Moyale, and then through Kenya southwards over the next few months. So I still got no more information on travelling in Ethiopia - I was definitely feeling information deprived.

Tuesday 7th December 1999

This was a truly lazy day, and was a good chance to let my ankle recover. After this it no longer hurt, and swelling was very minor. Started off by returning to the base of the escarpment and found a lot more acacia grassland birds, including Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Red-fronted Barbet, African Thrush, Rüppell's Robin-Chat, Olive-tree Warbler, Nightingale, Ashy & Stout Cisticolas, Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit, Village Indigobird, Three-streaked Tchagra, Slate-coloured Boubou, Speckle-fronted Weaver, Purple Grenadier and Ortolan Bunting. There were quite a number of weavers, and after a lot of effort, I found one male which was still in sufficient breeding plumage to identify it as a Rüppell's Weaver. On returning to the front of the hotel, I decided to have a breakfast there. I was continually distracted by a chat of some sort flitting around the base of the bougainvillea next to the beach. Finally it showed itself properly, and I was delighted to realize it was an Irania.

At about 09:00, I drove the 5 km to return to the main road, and drove across to the Abiata - Shala NP. I took a guide simply because there were no maps, and he might be of some use. While he didn't speak any English, he did know which was the passable track, and the areas where tourists were able to travel.

As with almost all National Parks in Ethiopia, there were many people living there with their goats and cattle. The internal roads were a bit dusty but otherwise quite driveable. Lake Shala was a disappointment with no water-birds visible at all, so I continued straight on to Lake Abiata. Again there were no waterfowl (except a few Northern Shovelers), but the waders made up for this. There were a few "southern African" waders, but also Redshank, Temminck's Stint, and several Lesser Golden Plover. At another point on the shoreline were a few Flamingos and pelicans, but also Lesser Black-backed and Greater Black-headed Gulls, and some Fire-crowned Bishop.

In the adjacent acacia bush were the usual species, as well as Red-winged Bush-Lark, Northern & Isabelline Wheatears, White-winged Black Tit, Woodchat Shrike, Rüppell's Long-tailed Starling and Speke's Weaver. However, what really stood out was the incredible numbers of Yellow and Grey Wagtails. They were literally in flocks like locusts, probably numbering in the tens or even hundreds of thousands. Although I tried to identify as many sub-species as possible, the individual variations in colours amongst the three sub-species identified was quite remarkable.

By early afternoon, I returned to the campsite, but stopped on the main tarred road to watch an Imperial Eagle scavenging a carcass on the road. I spent the rest of the afternoon relaxing. Deirdre didn't emerge from her tent.

Wednesday 8th December 1999

We left the campsite quite early (at around 07:00) to drive north to Lake Ziway in order to get there at a reasonable hour. Although easy to reach the fishing jetty on the lake, it proved to be another disappointment in terms of waterfowl - although Pygmy Goose and Spur-winged Goose were present - with some Yellow-billed Ducks. Spent some time searching the adjacent wetland areas, but found nothing further of interest.

On continuing north from Ziway, the tar road continued to deteriorate further, but this was partly due to the road construction crews who were working from the north rebuilding the road. Much of the road-works were centred around the Koka Dam area, with extensive wetlands on either side of the road as it crosses the Awash river. Regular stops (not easy with all the road-works) failed to produce any new palearctic waterfowl,

although a Little Ringed Plover was found right next to the road. One curiosity on entering a small village was to be met by approximately 300 camels which were being herded into town, by just a few young boys. Considering the value this must have represented, it seemed surprising that no adults appeared to be supervising.

From just north of Koka, the new road is open, and the excellent tar continues all the way to Addis Ababa, with just one minor diversion around an incomplete bridge near Nazret. On reaching the outskirts of Addis Ababa, there were some delays where major road-works were being carried out. Surprisingly, navigation proved surprising easy within Addis Ababa, the maps provided in Philip Briggs' book being more than adequate.

I managed to arrive at the Department of Immigration at the first attempt at 12:15, only to discover that Ethiopian lunch-break is from 12:00 to 13:00. However, the office re-opened promptly at 13:00, whereupon I suffered a major setback. While the Ethiopian embassy staff in Pretoria had said they couldn't provide me with a multiple re-entry visa there, I had got the impression that I would be able to obtain one in Addis Ababa. This was to prove wrong - unless a permanent resident, it is not possible to get a visa without first leaving the country. This seemed to rule out any chance of getting to Djibouti. However, I must say that the officials were very friendly in explaining this situation - an attitude I was to find over and over again, even when we were not able to communicate properly because I didn't speak Amharic.

After that disappointment, I continued to find the Sanford English School (first attempt again - but mainly by luck this time), and there met Steve Spawls. I had been given Steve's name through the African Bird Club contacts database, and he made me very welcome. I was able to camp at the school for three nights while I sorted myself out for the rest of the trip.. The first thing I discovered was that it was winter - there was no way I could sleep under a light duvet in Addis Ababa - the sleeping bag was required.

Thursday 9th December 1999

I spent the whole day getting the Landrover fixed up, checking the shackle attachment, welding other potential trouble spots and replacing all the rear U-bolts which were damaged. We had problems getting the vehicle level (partly because the shackle mount may have been re-welded a few millimetres out of place), so we changed the old shackle to a longer forward-control one on left side. This left the vehicle in good shape, and ready to continue with the trip. Although I was unable to get any bird-watching done, I was still able to find Brown-rumped Seed-eaters - in Addis Ababa they replace the House Sparrow in the urban niche.

Friday 10th December 1999

After a latish start, I spent much of the morning trying to find another set of forward-control shackles, before visiting a couple of the local birding spots. First, I headed out east on the Nekempt road, where after about 20 km I reached the Gefersa Reservoir. There were plenty of Egyptian Geese and Yellow-billed Duck. After some searching I found a pair of Blue Geese, and then at the eastern end of the reservoir a flock of about 50 Green-winged Teal. Fawn-breasted Waxbill were common here.

Continuing eastwards for a further 5 km or so, I turned south on a road to the forestry college and the Menagesha-Suba National Forest. On the drive south, Wattled Ibis, White-collared Pigeon and large numbers of Black-winged Plover were easily seen, and Red-breasted Wheatears were in abundance. The National Forest would have been a pleasant place to camp, although there were no facilities other than one tap. I believe the forest has a good avifauna, with roosting Yellow-fronted Parrots regularly seen in the late evenings. However, since I arrived late (at around 14:00, and needed to return to Addis Ababa early, I failed to find anything of note.

From the forest, I continued south to the Jima route and then back to Addis Ababa. Although the roads weren't good, the suspension and other repairs held up well, so I was feeling much happier about the rest of the trip. Moreover, Mourning Wheatear, White-fronted Black-Chat and White-billed Buffalo-Weaver were seen. That evening we had an excellent Italian meal at one of the local restaurants.

Saturday 11th December 1999

Having said farewell to the Spawls, I left Addis along the main road to the north at about 09:00 and drove to the Solulta Plains, an area of grassland that is extensively harvested as fodder. This grass is loaded as very bulky loads onto donkeys, which are then driven along the main road into Addis together with many other donkeys carrying firewood. This, as can be imagined, causes huge problems for any vehicular traffic, which has to dodge both potholes and donkeys, resulting in some of the most erratic driving I have even done. The plains are only about 20 km north of Addis, but allow an hour for the trip.

Solulta had a variety of species of birds, including Wattled Ibis, Pallid & Montagu's Harriers, Black-winged Plover, Yellow Wagtail, and plenty of Red-throated Pipits, a variety of Wheatears as well as Groundscraper Thrushes - a bird of open grassy plains in Ethiopia.

Here the two main "specials" are the Red-chested Swallow and White-winged Flufftail. The former was seen at a small bridge over one of the small streams. Many more of these Swallows may have been seen on the rest of the trip, but they require careful identification to separate them from European Swallows, so although I know that I should have made the effort, I never specifically identified any more such swallows. White-winged Flufftails were not searched for, but the species appears to be quite common (i.e. several hundred pairs) in the area, with the only other known population being summer visitors to a few small wetlands in the South African highveld.

From Solulta, I continued north on the Bahir Dar road for a further 60 km until reaching the village of Muka Turi, where I turned right onto a gravel road to the north-east. This road is in good condition, being one of the few genuinely gravel roads travelled on. This made the going easy, and one could comfortably cruise along at 40-50 km/h, without risk of damaging the vehicle, and still being able to watch the scenery and keep an eye out for birds. After approximately 80 km, one reaches the edge of the Jemmu valley, and the latter part of the good road running right alongside the escarpment. At this point the altitude is around 2700m, while the bottom of the valley is at 1200m - so a 1.5 km near-vertical drop.

Bird-watching along the escarpment produced a variety of excellent birds, including Erkel's Francolin, Rüppell's Black Chat, White-billed Starling, Little & Blue Rock Thrush, Crag Martin, Thekla Lark and Black-eared Wheatear. However, to me, the most memorable site was my first views of Lammergeier as one cruised along the escarpment, often no more than 5 metres away from me - a truly memorable sight.

Once you pass through a small village on the escarpment, you face the road down. Although used by trucks and busses, don't think it is an easy drive. It takes less than 10 km to drop the 1.5 km vertically, and the road is extremely rocky - and only levelled to allow the busses and trucks to pass. This means that great care had to be exercised with a Landrover, and even then, I still scraped the bottom of the vehicle and U-bolts a couple of times. This is definitely a road to be travelled in first-gear low-ratio to ensure that the optimal track can be navigated - both going down and driving back up (the road continues to a village a further 40 km on called Alem Ketema, but not much further than that).

Obviously there had to be a reason for me to want to drive down this bad road, and then back again. Quite simply it is that this valley is an excellent spot for bird-watching, and the easiest place to find one of Ethiopia's most restricted endemic birds - Harwood's Francolin. It appears to be entirely restricted to reed-beds in the Jemmu and Blue Nile valleys, of which this road provides the best access.

On arrival in the early afternoon, I realized that there was an excellent spot at which to camp just beyond the bridge on the left of the road - a nice flat area, approximately 30m from the road itself. The evening was warm enough, that the light duvet was quite sufficient.

During the remainder of the afternoon, I wandered around the area of the river, trying to identify optimal areas for the Francolin - it appears that it is only likely to be found in the early morning, and even then not for long. During this period, I found a variety of species including Senegal Thick-knee, Spur-winged Plover, European Hoopoe, Black Redstart, Mocking Chat (but not the endemic White-winged Cliff Chat), and Streaky-headed Seed-eater.

Sunday 12th December 1999

On waking up at dawn, I found one of the local herdsmen watching over the Landrover from the rocks above with his rifle held at the ready. As soon as he saw I was awake, and had climbed down from the tent, and approached me to shake my hand. Having done so he just wandered off. It was at moments like this that I wished I could speak Amharic - I would love to know what he expected from me.

Having walked back over the bridge, I wandered upstream to the areas of reeds which looked promising for the Francolin. An early excitement turned to disappointment when the Francolin was identified as a Crested Francolin. However, the real thing started calling a few moments later, so Harwood's Francolin was seen briefly before hiding quietly in the reeds for the remainder of the day. At around the same time I heard a call that was clearly that of a Stone Partridge, although I was unable to actually see it.

Thereafter I continued looking for birds for another few hours, but with few new species found other than Northern Red Bishop. I considered staying for another night to find more species that had been seen in the valley by others (European Griffon, Masked Shrike, Black-faced Firefinch & White-throated Seedeater). However, since this was still early in the trip, I reckoned that I had a good chance of seeing them elsewhere. I was right for all these, except for the Masked Shrike.

Having struggled my way back up the escarpment, I continued through the village at the top of the escarpment, and on through the next, after which there was a gravel track to the left heading eastwards. This is a "new" road, only completed in the early 90's, and so does not appear on any map I have seen. However, it is an excellent gravel road, and goes almost straight to Debre Birhan. Along the way, many families of Common Cranes were seen, invariably a pair with one, or occasionally two, young in attendance. Red-capped Lark and Black-headed Siskin were also common.

Having reached Debre Birhan, I turned left to the north-east through the town, and then turned to the right just beyond the end of the houses, to continue east further up into the highlands towards Ankober. Again, the aim was to find a specific species of bird, namely the Ankober Serin, for which very few localities are known. I was aiming for the original site from which the first specimen was collected. Richard Webb's Ethiopian Trip Report provided excellent directions, but just before reaching the point, something went wrong on the Landrover.

Without warning, or any strange noises, I was simply not travelling forwards. After trying all the gears, I was still getting no joy. I then tried low ratio, and that seemed fine - everything was OK again, except I wasn't likely to be travelling too quickly. After a bit more experimentation, I tried high-range and four-wheel-drive. This also worked, although the traction appeared to be rather poor. This was when my brain finally started working. I had broken a rear half-shaft - or even the main drive shaft. A quick inspection revealed that it wasn't the latter, so I only had front-wheel drive. Well, since I was only a few km from the Ankober Serin site, why let trivia like a broken half-shaft stop me? While I had no problems continuing to the site, I had that nasty nagging feeling that while it is easy to drive down steep inclines, how easy was it going to be to get back up them with only front-wheel-drive and a heavily laden Landrover?

Having reached the site, I wandered up the steep hillsides looking for the ground-feeding Serins. Of course, there was no sign of them anywhere appropriate, so I continued wandering round the hillside, having attracted a small following of local children who were clearly trying to work out what this *faranji* was up to. Not only could I not find the Serin, but there was literally no bird life at all, except some small brown bird hiding in the only shrub in sight. After a further 20 minutes there was still no sign of anything, and my return path took me back past the isolated shrub. Determined not to fail to see anything at all on this stop, I approached the shrub, only to find the bird emerge and start singing from the top of the bush. It was, of course, the Ankober Serin.

While my original plan was to continue along this road for a further 20 km to a small village called Melka Ghebdu, where another species of Serin occurred (Yellow-throated), this was likely to be pushing my luck - and the species could also be found at Awash National Park - my next port of call anyway. Although Richard Webb indicated it was possible to drive from Melka Ghebdu direct to Awash, this road no longer exists, and so there is no option but to proceed to Awash via Addis Ababa. Hence I was able to return to Addis to effect repairs without missing out on any birds.

Of course, first I had to return to Debre Birhan. And I was right - those steep declines were OK, but now that they were inclines, travel wasn't all that easy - in fact in a couple of instances I was forced down into first-gear low-ratio spinning the front wheels to get any traction on the dusty road. However, in the end I succeeded in getting back up to the top, from which it was an easy cruise back to the town. I stayed the night in one of the local hotels which was supposedly recommended. I cannot fathom why, since the Hotel Helen, was neither particularly clean, nor offered hot water, nor even any food. Since I got there by about 16:00, I used the opportunity to try and identify the problem with the vehicle. Much local advice was offered, including a most earnest "mechanic" who was convinced the problem was in the handbrake. Before he did any real damage I persuaded him that I knew what I was doing (which he could clearly - and correctly - see was not true).

Monday 13th December 1999

With no reason to stay in Debre Birhan, I left at 06:00 heading for Addis Ababa and back to Selassie Teklu's garage. The road was good tar, and the 130 km was covered in two hours, so I was able to arrive at the garage as it opened. It didn't take long to locate the fault, which was that the right rear half-shaft flange was stripped, as well as the half-shaft itself showing some signs of wear (although it was not broken). Clearly this was caused by the previous problems with the rear springs, which must have forced the rear axle into a slight angle

to the prop-shaft and hence the angle of the wheels themselves. If this was the case, then I could expect a similar failure from the left half-shaft as well. Consequently I decided to replace both half-shaft flanges as well as both the half-shafts themselves. However, since this was Addis, the expense was very considerable - approximately US\$ 750 for the four components. This expense was to impact on the trip later on, but at the time it seemed like a sensible precaution.

By late afternoon, everything was fixed up (again) and I was ready to set off for Awash National Park. However, although the road was good, I was unable to reach the Park before dark, so decided to break the journey at Nazret, staying at the Bekele Mola Hotel. While the hotel was OK - good, clean room with pleasant (cold) shower - no food was available.

Tuesday 14th December 1999

Again, an early start was possible, so I was able to descend into the eastern Rift Valley by 07:00, and reach Lake Beseka soon thereafter. The road was still an excellent tar road, except near the Lake, where extensive road-works were taking place. They appeared to be having to completely rebuild the road through the lake (it runs through a causeway at the northern end). I am not sure whether this had any effect on the bird-life, but it was immediately obvious that absolutely no waterfowl were present - not even a single Egyptian Goose. This, following on from Lake Ziway, was a major disappointment, and still one of the major puzzles of the trip - where were the ducks?

I didn't bother to stay too long at Lake Beseka, and so continued on to the national park itself. This proved much more rewarding, with a large variety of both mammals and birds seen. Entrance was 80 Birr for two nights - very reasonable for Ethiopia's premier national park. The camp sites are all based along the Awash River just above the falls, and is in a very pleasant setting within the riverine forest. There are about 6 separate camping areas within 300m, each quite nicely secluded. However, absolutely no facilities are provided, although the rangers will sell firewood - although there is nothing stopping you collecting your own.

There is a lodge further down-river, where it is possible to get cold beers, food and toilets. There is occasionally running water, but management only turns it on when paying guests request it for a shower. The restaurant is beautifully placed on a balcony over the river gorge - probably the best site to find the Ethiopian Cliff Swallow - a species seen quite often but has yet to be collected, and so not formally given a scientific name.

The southern part of the reserve had a wide variety of animals, including Swayne's Hartebeest (an endemic and rare species), as well as Beisa Oryx, Grevy's Zebra, Soemmering's Gazelle and Egyptian & White-tailed Mongooses. A pleasant surprise was to find African Cat near to the lodge in the evening. This area has three predominant vegetation types, with a variety of woodland species occurring adjacent to the river, including Von der Decken's Hornbill, Olivaceous & Upcher's Warblers and African Collared Dove. The thorn bush holds a variety of species of interest including Ostrich, Red-crested and White-bellied Korhaans, European Turtle Dove, Abyssinian Roller, Black-throated Barbet, Menetries' Warbler, Northern Crombec, Silverbird, Black-headed Batis, Fulvous Chatterer and Reichenow's Seedeater. Black-shouldered Kite is also common. The third habitat type is more open grassland, which holds African Swallow-tailed Kite, Arabian Bustard, Common and Harlequin Quail in considerable numbers, Ethiopian Swallow, as well as Red-tailed, Grey-backed, Somali & Great Grey Shrikes.

It is possible to do a night drive, since campers are allowed to have dinner at the lodge, and drive back afterwards. Although I failed to actually have dinner (a couple of cold beers were, however, consumed), I then took the long route back to the campsite. Although this totally failed to produce a single nightjar, it was fully compensated for by a Little Owl sitting in the middle of the track, allowed fabulous views.

Wednesday 15th December 1999

A relatively early start allowed me to collect the armed guard / guide at the entrance gate before proceeding to the northern section of the park. The need for this is simply to find the right track, as even the track is not always clearly marked, and in some cases in such bad condition that description as a track is not merited.

Starting off to the east along the main road, we passed Lake Beseka again - still no waterfowl. Just beyond this we turned north along a good track through overgrazed grassland. Skirting the eastern base of the lava flows, there is a turnoff to the right. This 10 km track leads up to the crater rim of the volcano. Should one get to the top before dawn, the lava flows glow red, but if - like me - you arrive after sunrise, the steam can be seen rising from various points. The crater is a very impressive sight, but I suspect it is not practical to descend into the crater without ropes and the necessary climbing gear.

Bird-watching on this part of the park should be one of the most rewarding to the endemic hunter. Just after turning off the main track, at the edge of the lava field is a good place for Gillett's Lark. On the way up to the crater there are good chances to find Black-tailed Rock-Chat, Sombre Rock-Chat and Yellow-throated Seed-eater, with a second opportunity for these species at the crater rim itself. Also at the crater top, Boran Cisticola is to be found.

This was my nightmare spot. I only managed to find the Boran Cisticola, missing out on all the others. Some compensation was to be had in finding Rüppell's Griffon, Hemprich's Hornbill, Tawny Pipit, African Grey Flycatcher and Somali Chestnut-winged Starling at the crater.

One should not underestimate the condition of the track up to the crater, and the 10 km cannot be covered in less than an hour - and care must be taken in "bouncing" the vehicle up the lava flows. It was here that I sheared the windscreen hinges, which was to have such a devastating effect when I got to Djibouti. However, if possible, this trip should be tackled. Rock Hyrax were common in this area, with some Hamadryas Baboons also to be seen.

After the crater, one must return down the same track, along which Black-billed Barbets and Shining & Beautiful Sunbirds were common. From the base I continued northwards up to the Filwoha hot-springs. At first it is easy to be disappointed at the springs, since huge numbers of cattle mill around the area - but don't be fooled - the "swimming" pool is not here, but a few yards further on into the palms. Once found, the pool is almost indescribable - a beautiful white sand floored pool of absolute perfect clarity - I only wish I could keep my swimming pool looking as good!

From the springs, one follows the track south through Kudu valley, where Gillett's Lark can be found (I, of course, didn't), and several Kori Bustards were to be seen, as well as a few Kudu (glimpsed through dense bush, and assumed to be Lesser Kudu). We finally got back to the main road at 15:00, so it was back to the cold beers overlooking the gorge - but still no sign of the Ethiopian Cliff Swallows. A pair of Fan-tailed Ravens perched on the balcony railings hoping for food. Unstriped Ground Squirrel were seen near the gorge. On returning to the vehicle I found a flat tyre - so quickly changed it.

Thursday 16th December 1999

At his point I was still uncertain of my goal for the day, so left early in order to reach the Djibouti border in time to turn back if required. This was to be decision time. Although all the indications were that there would be no problem getting in to Djibouti, what would happen if I couldn't get a second visa for Ethiopia? If this was to happen, I could try and go north into Eritrea - but sadly, Djibouti seemed to also be at war with Eritrea, so not very practical. Alternatively, I could go south-east into Somalia - which was little more appealing. Hence the only other choice would be to ship the vehicle back to South Africa and abandon the remainder of the trip. I decided to make my final decision at the border post after evaluating the attitude of the border officials.

The drive from Awash northwards was on good tar, with road-works underway on the few areas which had pot-holes. Hence it was an easy drive, with several Arabian Bustards occurring along the road. After a approx 100 km one enters the Yangudi-Rassa National Park (although there is no indication of this). It is one of the few areas that the Wild Ass still occurs, although there are also many feral donkeys in the same area. I saw one herd of donkeys, which had very notable striped legs, indicating that they could have been the true wild asses, but I am not sure how this could be verified. It was near here that I passed an area of grassland which held a remarkable number of raptors, with hundreds of Pallid & Montagu's Harriers as well as over 50 Long-legged Buzzards. Salt's Dik-Dik were seen along this road.

Continuing along the road towards Djibouti, the countryside became more and more arid, although recent rains had left many small pans still holding plenty of water. The wildlife also changed dramatically, with fewer donkeys and cattle, their place being taken by camels. In terms of birds, larks became more common, and on the last stretch east of Serdo, Egyptian Vultures became abundant, with virtually every telephone pole having one or more vultures perching on them - and many juveniles were also present. There must have been nearly 1000 over a distance of around 20 km. This was also an excellent place for larks, with Bimaculated and Desert Larks being seen. White-rumped Babblers were also quite common.

As one drops down the escarpment to the Djibouti lowlands (from about 700m to 150m above sea-level, the road started to deteriorate seriously, although improvements were being undertaken. By 16:00 I had reached the border. I spent a while chatting with the immigration & customs officials, and they convinced me that

there was unlikely to be a problem with a return visa - and I got the feeling that even if it was refused, I might still be able to get back. Hence I took the plunge and crossed over. No problems on the Ethiopia side, but then it was matter of the Djibouti border.

The only other people using this road are the commercial vehicles bringing all of Ethiopia's imports from Djibouti - its sole road access from (and to) the outside world. Given the nature of the economy, the only traffic was empty fuel-tankers going to Djibouti, and full ones returning. Hence, the border post was orientated towards such drivers who simply produced their driving license, and were waved through.

I produced my South African passport to baffled looks, and so after a few moments I showed them my visa which was studied for several minutes - upside-down. In the end they decided it was OK and spent 15 minutes searching for a suitable stamp to use - and I was through. Now came customs. That got a blank look, so I tried "Douane". Same reaction. So I just drove on. There are no customs on the Djibouti side of the border.

Apart from the fuel tankers, no other traffic was seen on the road. Hence the road had adapted to this traffic, and although the road used to be tarred, it has degraded into an endless series of large potholes. For a Landrover this meant that one had to travel at around 15 km/h and allow the vehicle to roll from one hole to the next, leaning 20° to the right in one, and then swing through an arc to be at 20° to the left a few metres later. Although the road was not too rocky, it was this constant rolling that took its toll, and it was totally exhausting because one had to hold on tight to the steering wheel or be tossed around the cab.

Leaving the border about an hour before dusk, I was hoping to stop and camp quite soon. But there was just no-where where this was safe, especially since some trucks decided it was better to drive off the road, and drive across the desert itself. This took great courage, since the quantity of dust meant that visibility was very poor at best - and when returning in daylight I saw a distressing number of vehicles that had been involved in serious accidents. Consequently I ended up having to continue the 100 km to Dikhil - the first town on the main road - a four hour drive.

The only hotel that I could find in the dark was the Auberge de Palmeriae, and for a very mediocre room with no hot water, the price was 5000 Djibouti Francs (approx US\$ 30). Of course, there was no opportunity to change any money into Djibouti francs, so after some serious haggling (an interesting experience as I only spoke English, and they only French), they agreed to a price of 150 Birr (i.e. approx US\$ 23). No food was available, and the only beer was Stella d'Artois - there is no local brew - costing 750 DFr (US\$ 4) for a standard 375 ml bottle. This was my introduction to what was to prove a very expensive segment of the trip.

Friday 17th December 1999

Leaving Dikhil at dawn, I continued towards Djibouti. The road was a little better, in that rather than 5% tar, it now reached about 60%, so speeds of over 30 km/h were still impractical, but at least one could avoid the majority of potholes, and just slow down in the fairly obvious areas where potholes were unavoidable. After another 80 km I reached the turn-off to Arta, at which point the road actually became driveable, so the last 40 km into Djibouti city was quite reasonable, and speeds of 50 km/h were reached.

My first destination was the Ethiopian Embassy, so I could get my application for a visa in before the weekend, and collect it on Monday. Unfortunately, this was another miscalculation, since Djibouti is a Muslim country. Friday is the equivalent of our Sunday, with all banks, shops, etc closed, while Saturday is a half day, with some businesses opening on Saturday afternoon. Sunday is a normal working day. Hence, I would need to return on Sunday morning. As I result I decided to head around the Gulf of Tadjoura, and try and find the Djibouti Francolin in the Forêt du Day.

First I changed some US\$ to Francs, where the best rates were offered on the street rather than the banks and hotels. However, money doesn't go far with petrol costing nearly US\$ 1 per litre. Before leaving Djibouti city, I spent some time studying the tidal wetlands just south of the main road within the city limits. This produced many new species, including Western Reef Heron, Eurasian Spoonbill, Hemprich's, Herring and Slender-billed Gull, Dunlin and many other waders.

I imagined the road to the Forêt du Day to be another tough drive, so rather than continue birding in the city environs, left to return west nearly halfway back to Dikhil. To my complete surprise, this - the only other "tarred" road in Djibouti - turned out to be in excellent condition, with the few areas of potholes being actively repaired (at least on the Sunday when I retraced my route).

The drive was through a real desert, not always of sand, but much of the area is simply covered by black lava flows, on which nothing grows, and reaches incredible temperatures in the mid-day sun. However, even the lava had some bird-life, with White-crowned Black Wheatear being regularly seen there. The sandier areas held Black Scrub-Robin, Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike, Desert and Red-tailed Wheatears, Hoopoe Lark, Singing & Greater Short-toed Larks and Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark.

By noon I had reached the turn-off to Randa, the (supposed) starting point for the Forêt du Day NP. This road started off OK, but soon deteriorated as it ran next to a wadi - which clearly could flow quite seriously, as the road was completely washed out in places. This meant having to drive up the wadi, which was very rough.

On reaching Randa, the road almost vanished, and a local offered to guide me up a small track to the Forêt. After half an hour of following little more than animal tracks, we reached the end of the road, on a plateau overlooking some steep sided valleys, with some trees growing in the valley bottoms. This was the northern edge of the Forêt, and totally inaccessible by vehicle or on foot. Clearly the maps weren't as accurate as one would have wished. The only wildlife seen on this trip were a small herd of Lesser Kudu.

However, I had noticed a small sign post a few kilometres from the good tar road, indicating a tourist camp 13 km away, and this might be close to the southern end of the Forêt. Before returning, my guide offered to take me to his house, and provide me with tea. Knowing that quite a ceremony surrounds coffee and tea in Ethiopia, I agreed, with the hope of experiencing some new cultural ritual. Sadly, the tea was just poured out of a plastic thermos flask - not quite what I had in mind!

The sign-post indicated Dittilou, one of the spots mentioned in Nigel Wheatley's "Where to watch birds in Africa". This short 13 km track had to be the most challenging of the trip. Initially it crossed the large wadi, and so no track existed *per se*, rather a series of cairns indicated the "best" route. After about 5 km of zig-zagging along the wadi, the track headed off the valley floor, and up into the hills. The altitude over the last 8 km went from sea-level to around 800m, but not in a nice steady climb. On several occasions, the track climbed up 400 metres of rock, before dropping back down 300 metres to cross a small wadi. I hardly got out of first-gear low-ratio on this stretch. Overall, the 13 km trip took nearly 2½ hours. This trip further exacerbated the loose windscreen, with the heavy roof-top tent and roof-rack now starting to tear the roof of the rest of the bodywork.

The tourist camp proved to be a couple of basic huts, with no running water, and no other facilities. For this, the charge (even if I were to camp - which I did, it looked more comfortable) was 8000 DFr (US\$ 45).

The day ended with a fascinating duet - from Scops Owls. Both African and European Scops Owls were clearly heard calling.

Saturday 18th December 1999

All the problems of the previous day were put away as I was woken by the call of the Djibouti Francolin. Although I could not see them initially, it was never going to be practical to try and walk through the hills (vertical rock faces would be a better description) to find it - the topography meant that it would have required a serious climbing expedition to reach the relevant areas. However, over the next hour a series of birds were heard to call, and there was absolutely no doubt as to the identification. Also around the campsite were large numbers of Rüppell's Weavers - in full breeding condition. Another interesting comparative observation was to see both races of Common Redstart within metres of each other. Sadly, the cloud level was very low, so the chance of seeing raptors was low - although what chance there really was of finding Bonelli's Eagle I am not sure - it is referred to by Nigel Wheatley as a bird of the forest, but I found no other reference indicating that the Eagle occurred any further south than the Morocco / Algeria highlands.

By mid-morning I started heading back down the track, with the roof clearly having little connection to the rest of the vehicle - and all too clearly being held in place solely by the glass in the side windows. Continuing back towards Djibouti city, I had plenty of time to bird-watch, and was able to find Red Sea, Orphean & Menetries Warblers, Yellow-breasted Barbet, White-crowned Black Wheatear and a variety of waders.

Since there was no point in returning to Djibouti city too soon, I decided to visit one of the beaches I had seen people wind-surfing from on the previous day. Although there was no-one there now, and was surrounded by the black lava, I thought it would be a good spot to relax for a bit. To my amazement, it also produced some good birds, including Osprey, Kentish Plover and White-crowned Black Wheatear. It was such a pleasant spot (with good areas to swim in), that I decided to stay the night there, camping on the beach. While it was pleasant enough, the wind got up in the evening, and was blowing strongly on-shore all night.

Sunday 19th December 1999

Leaving early in the morning, I headed straight back to Djibouti city to get to the embassy as early as possible. The Embassy only opens for visas from 09:00 to 11:00, so it was lucky I made the early start. However, the visa would take 24 hours to be issued.

This gave me plenty of time to bird the city environs, especially the harbour, which I reached at low tide, so all the mud-flats were exposed. This area comprises six huge areas of mud-flats with good road access, before the area used by the freighters is reached. I spent around 3 hours birding the area, finding many more species, including White-eyed Gull, White-cheeked, Saunder's and Little Terns, European Oystercatcher (surprisingly nowhere near rocks), Crab Plover, Redshank and a flock of Buff-breasted Sandpipers.

From here I took the road to Dorale, north-west of the city, which provided the only bush south of the Gulf of Tadjoura. Although I was hoping to find the Arabian Golden Sparrow, this eluded me. However, I did find European Turtle Dove, Black-tailed Rock-Chat, Graceful Prinia, Pale Rock Sparrow and many Great Grey Shrikes. There were also considerable numbers of Rock Doves, but it was not possible to determine if these were the genuine wild birds settling just south of their range, or feral birds. Yellow Mongoose were seen in the area.

After lunch at the Hotel Plein Ciel - which served probably the best pizza I have ever eaten - I went to the extreme eastern side of Djibouti city and to the coast. It was very hard to reach the sea-shore, since a variety of what can only be described as palaces had been built along there, with plenty of armed guards patrolling the vicinity. However, I managed to see more European Oystercatchers, Greater Sandplover and various other waders.

From there I returned to the Menelik Hotel to stay the night in comfort - air-conditioning is not a luxury in Djibouti. In fact I was surprised how apparently dead the whole town was, until after sunset. Then all the shops opened, and people came out onto the streets - really quite a practical arrangement in such a climate. I again decided to eat at the Hotel Plein Ciel, which was just one block away from the Menelik Hotel, and the food was, again, up to the very best French standards - and prices.

Monday 20th December 1999

Having waited for the Ethiopian Embassy to open at 09:00, I was only able to leave Djibouti city at about 10:00. Without further delay I headed straight back to Ethiopia. The gravel road from Dikhil to the border was no better in daylight - and the large wide potholes may have been easy for the petrol tankers to negotiate, but the Landrover just wallowed in them, swaying 20° from side to side as one went from one to the next. It was this that caused the final collapse of the roof. However, before I was distracted by this problems, I was able to see plenty of flocks of Spotted (not Burchell's) and Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse.

Although not quite that dramatic as a total collapse, the two left hand side windows of the canopy came loose as the sides of the canopy loosened. Luckily both fell inwards, so were not damaged. I tried to fit them back, but the roof was just too loose, and they wouldn't stay in. This weakened the structure even more, so I had to slow down still further. Even so I was able to reach the border by about 15:00, and passed back into Ethiopia without problems. Once back up the escarpment, the tarred road made travelling much easier.

My next problem was petrol. Given the price of petrol (three times the price in Ethiopia), I had not filled up in Djibouti, so was planning on filling up at one of the four or five petrol-stations I had seen driving from Mille on my way eastwards. The first was a Serdo, but they had no petrol, only diesel. The next was at Logia, but they had the same story. So the next target was the Total petrol station where I was planning to stay the night. However, this was leaving it as late as possible, as I was literally out of fuel. I made it to the station as sunset to find the same story - they normally had petrol, but had run out recently. The only help they could offer was that they knew black-market petrol was available in Logia - 8 km back to the east.

So, back I went - and after just 2 km I ran out of fuel. With a total fuel capacity of nearly 200 litres, that was slightly embarrassing. Anyway, now I had a real problem, as I couldn't really afford to leave the Landrover unattended while two side windows were missing. But I was convinced petrol would be easy to get hold of, as there were so many tankers driving past. I waved down the first to pass travelling eastwards, and luckily the driver spoke good English. However, he said that to the best of his knowledge, no petrol was being imported at the moment, which was why none was available - so I wouldn't get any from the passing tankers. Very kindly, he said they would look after the vehicle, while he flagged down the next tanker, and arranged for me to get a lift to Logia. 10 minutes later I was dropped off in Logia at the place where petrol could be bought. It

took another five minutes to fill the 25 litre (ex-water) container (the petrol costing Birr 4.00 rather than the normal 3.00), and I flagged down the next tanker. Again, the first one stopped and gave me a lift back. The driver laughed when he saw who was looking after my vehicle - he knew the driver well.

After filling up my Landrover and checking that it was running OK, I was off again. One cannot express the friendliness and helpfulness of the local Ethiopians than in this example. At no stage did anyone ask for money (except for the petrol), and were all willing to help. I wonder how many other places in the world one would get this type of assistance?

The fuel got me back to the Total garage for the night, where I refitted the two side windows.

Tuesday 21st December 1999

Leaving early in the morning, I drove westwards to Mille, a bigger town with petrol available. Or so I thought. Even here none of the garages had any petrol, so again I had to buy some more petrol on the black-market, to get me to Dese. After passing the turnoff to the south towards Awash, the road became gravel - although in good condition. However, there were enough bumps and potholes to shift the roof enough for the windows to fall out again. Both fell outwards onto the gravel while I was travelling at about 40 km/h - and amazingly neither broke. While picking up the glass, I saw several Bush Petronias near the roadside - about the only birds I saw on this stretch of road. Slowing down again, I continued to Dese, where I quickly found a garage with a welding kit. Here we welded steel supports from the chassis to the roof-rack - hence securing the roof in position. With that fixed, we refitted the windows again.

From here I continued north on the gravel road to Heyk, seeing Blue-headed Coucal near some woodland just off the road. In Heyk I turned off to the west to try and find the lake. Initially I went round the southern side of the lake, but the road remained about 1 km from the lake, so I returned to try driving round the northern shore. Here the road approached the lake, but at a monastery. I could find no details of this monastery, which was clearly not orientated towards visitors of any kind, and the armed guard would not allow me to camp nearby (it being dusk by this time). I was able to find a good spot to camp about 1 km back along the road. There seemed to be no problem for me to camp here - and there were encouraging bird noises from the nearby lake.

Wednesday 22nd December 1999

The early morning showed a large number of water-birds on the lake - probably around 400 in total. Of these 397 were Tufted Ducks, with just 3 Common Pochards amongst them. There were also quite a few other birds around, including White-rumped Babbler, Streaky Seed-eater and Eurasian Reed-Warbler heard calling at the water's edge.

From here I returned to Heyk town, before continuing north to Weldiya. On the way, the scenery was quite beautiful with a variety of valleys with high ridges separating them. From one of these I found a pair of Greater Spotted Eagles soaring along a valley, and at another point found four European Griffons soaring above a ridge. Pectoral-patch Cisticolas were also quite common along this road.

On reaching Weldiya, I turned west on the "Chinese" road, which had recently been finished, and was certainly in good condition. However, as with all roads in Ethiopia, it was quite rocky, and at one point drove a splinter of rock through the tyre, deflating it instantly. While inspecting it, I noticed that terrible smell of petrol. On investigation, I discovered that the rear tank had broken some of its mountings, and the filler pipe had slightly broken, with a very small leak of fuel. This must have been caused by the continual vibration from the roads. Clearly it could not be fixed without welding, and I was not too keen on welding a fuel tank without the proper facilities. Since I still had two independent petrol tanks left, and with a capacity of around 150 litres, this was not going to be a major crisis.

Having changed the wheel, I used up the remainder of the fuel in the rear tank, and probably only lost a couple of litres from the leak. On reaching Dilbe the road turned "north" to Lalibela. I had read the road was only passable in the dry season, but it didn't seem to be in too bad a condition. On the way I saw a variety of species similar to those at the Jemmu escarpment, including Clapperton's Francolin, White-billed Starling, Rüppell's Black-Chat, Blue-naped Mousebird, Moorland Chat and Great Grey Shrike. White-winged Cliff-chats were also common here.

Confusingly, the road is marked on the Michelin maps as going south to north, yet the GPS clearly showed I was travelling east to west. Only the Ethiopian Mapping Agency map indicated this correctly. I can only assume that it is due to the "Chinese" road following a very different alignment to the old road. However, after

travelling on the road for about 70 km I reached a T-junction with a tarred road. This had me totally perplexed, since no-one had indicated anything about a tarred road in this area. Turning right (i.e. north) I soon reached Lalibela.

In the centre of the town is the Seven Olives hotel, which had been recommended as the best in the area - and the only one where it was possible to camp. However, while the camp site was in a nice spot below the hotel, it was not accessible to vehicles, so I had to camp in the car-park. I spent the afternoon relaxing in the hotel grounds, and was quickly able to find Banded Barbet and Abyssinian Slaty Flycatcher.

On inquiring about the tarred road, I was informed that the Dilbe road had been closed the year before as too dangerous, and the new one opened. While you are not supposed to drive along it, it is an excellent road for birding along (until it deteriorates further) and much more productive than the new route.

Thursday 23rd December 1999

I spent the day with Eshetu Bedane, a very knowledgeable guide who showed me the 12 monolithic churches in Lalibela, and we then travelled to visit a couple of cave churches much further out, before finishing off with another cave church nearby the town itself.

It is almost impossible to describe the monolithic churches for, while they are not large, the very quality of the workmanship, the artifacts, paintings, etc were unlike anything else I have ever seen. The history behind each church, and the numbers of pilgrims visiting them all, gave such an incredible insight into Ethiopian life. I am not going to try and put into words what I experienced during the day.

While I did not take my binoculars while walking round the churches, Rüppell's Black-Chat and White-winged Cliff-chats were common. On the way to the Yemrehana Christos cave church, I was able to find quite a number of flocks of White-throated Serin along the road-side. On the final cave church a few km to the south of Lalibela I found a Rufous Sparrow of the race *shelleyi* - far outside its normal range.

Other common birds of the area were White-billed Starlings, Tacazze Sunbird, and the pure-white-headed form of the White-rumped Babbler.

Friday 24th December 1999

Leaving early, I set off back along the new tar road towards the airport, and turned left over a bridge after about 10 km. This road, which was also new, lead back to the "Chinese" road some distance from Dilbe. The drive towards Lake Tana was relatively uneventful, although there was some beautiful scenery, and an impressive view as one reaches the final flood plains. Black-backed Cisticolas were found on one stop.

On reaching the Bahir Dar - Gonder road, I turned north, passing extensive cultivated flood-plains, which held plenty of birds. Herons were very common, with one area holding approximately 30 Black Herons within 100m of each other - all feeding in the cultivated land and not in the water itself. Nearby was a flock of around 100 Common Cranes. I also caught a brief glimpse of a bird that I could only identify as Abyssinian Longclaw, and while the habitat was right, I wasn't expecting it this far north. Continuing round the eastern edge of Lake Tana, the area continued to be heavily cultivated, and heavily populated.

On reaching the southern part of Gonder, I turned south to reach Gorgora, a small "resort" on the northern end of Lake Tana. There was a very pleasant hotel there, although I was amazed to find myself the only guest for the two nights I stayed there. They had no food or restaurant in operation at the time, but this was not problem to me. I did wonder how more other foreign tourists who hired a vehicle and travelled independently managed.

Relaxing in the late afternoon with a cold beer (nowhere in Africa are they in short supply), I found a Song Thrush near the lake shore in the hotel gardens.

Saturday 25th December 1999

Christmas Day - according to the Gregorian calendar. However, since Ethiopia remains on the Julian calendar, everyone else was waiting until January 7th. Hence, while I had an easy day of relaxing and bird-watching in the hotel gardens, it was a good time to get the Landrover serviced. A local mechanic from the Marine Authority (in whose grounds the hotels sit) was happy to do the necessary oil changes, etc.

The gardens (as with all Ethiopian government-run hotels) were impressive in the variety of habitats they provided, and a large range of birds were found, including African Collared Dove, European Turtle Dove,

Eastern Grey Plantain-eater, Yellow-breasted Barbet, Short-winged Cisticola, Blackcap, White-headed Buffalo Weavers and the *albiventris* race of the Variable Sunbird – called Yellow-bellied Sunbird in southern Africa, but this was the white-bellied race, so I finally appreciated why it has a different name in the rest of Africa. Geoffroy's Ground Squirrel were seen nearby.

However, the great excitement of the day was caused when a Saker Falcon weaved through the trees between the hotel and lake shore. A beautiful falcon, which I had not expected to find, and was a delight to watch once the opportunity presented itself.

Sunday 26th December 1999

Leaving very early, I was able to reach Gonder by 7:00 am, and briefly visited the Royal Enclosure area. I am not quite sure why, but I found this to be one of the most disappointing areas, and didn't live up to expectations at all. I suppose this was partly due to the constant shouting of the locals at the sight of a *faranji*, this being the first (and last) area where it was a real problem. As a result I only stayed about an hour before leaving. I am sure that it is possible to enjoy Gonder, but I failed.

From here I drove out north and upwards into the highlands, and reached Dabat by about 12:00, stopping to repair another puncture. Again I was heckled, but couldn't help enjoying it this time. Instead of the continual shouts of "You" and "*faranji*", the cry was "hello breakfast". I would love to know how they got this refrain, but it was certainly different, and a welcome change.

Another hour brought me to Debark, the headquarters of the Simien Mountains National Park. Here you must hire a guard, and also a guide if they can persuade you. I turned down the guide (to their obvious disappointment). Once the guard had collected his rifle and small blanket, we drove west out of town up into the mountains. Curiously, the climb up isn't too steep or long, as one is already on the highland plateau, and the dramatic scenery is the escarpment from this plateau down to adjacent valleys. However, the scenery is quite stunning, and in the late afternoon the sunlight cast shadows that enhanced the effect.

Stopping of at several view points along the road, Red-rumped Swallow and White-billed Starling were common, as were many crows. At one point we were able to get fabulous views of the endemic - but very rare - *Walia Ibex*. I couldn't work out why I could see it so clearly at first, since it was some way down the escarpment (probably 1000m below us, even though only 200m away horizontally). Then I realized it was lying flat on the ground with its legs stuck out sideways - once it stood up, it was very hard to see.

Walking out to the waterfall - quite a spectacular sight - we passed a mixed flock of birds feeding near some White-rumped Babblers. I spent a long time studying the Babblers since the only reliable characteristic was their white rump - a diagnostic feature. Apart from that, they were unlike any other illustration I have ever seen of the species. However, equally interesting was the fact that Ethiopian Catbird and Abyssinian Woodpecker were also feeding nearby. Twice more during the afternoon I found parties of Babblers, and both times Catbirds and the Woodpeckers were feeding nearby. I can find no reference to this association, and am not sure if it was just coincidence. Chiffchaffs were also to be found in the bush areas, and I disturbed several Klippespringer.

Just before sunset I watched the crows I had seen previously circling and making quite a noise - except that it wasn't really a crow noise. That was when I realized that Red-billed Choughs are actually quite large birds - I had somehow assumed they were more blackbird size. There must have been over 100 in the flock I was watching.

Gelada Baboons were common in several areas, especially around the rangers camp. That night I camped next to the rangers camp at Sankaba.

Monday 27th December 1999

By sunset the temperature was dropping rapidly, and by morning the temperature must have been close to freezing, with a heavy dew covering everything. Consequently I was stunned to find that my Guard was not allowed to sleep in any of the nearby huts (where he had been chatting with the other rangers during the evening), but had simply laid down on the ground, and covered himself with his blanket. He then explained that this was part of his duties, so he wasn't complaining - his job was to guard me. Against what I never worked out.

Originally I was planning to stay up in the mountains for much of the day, and even for a second night. However, having already seen the target birds and animals (I wasn't expecting to see the Simien Fox here), the

extreme cold which continued for a couple of hours after sunrise, I decided to get down to a warmer altitude, and drove back down to Debar. As it happened I had to take it very slowly, since a leak on the brake master-cylinder developed, resulting in very mushy brakes - and I didn't have enough brake fluid to bleed the brakes.

After buying some extra brake fluid, I then continued south back through Gonder to Bahir Dar. The cultivated wetlands near Lake Tana continued to produce plenty of birds. I also found a pair of Black Crowned Cranes on the outskirts of Bahir Dar.

I stayed at the camp site at the Tana Hotel. This was the first hotel where I met tourist groups. While there were 2 Europeans walking in the Simien mountains, and another two at Lalibela, I hadn't met another tourist since Awash NP. The hotel has excellent facilities, and a beautiful terrace overlooking the lake. Black-headed Gull were seen on the lake, and Yellow-fronted Parrots heard in the grounds. Ethiopian Grivet were found in the trees.

Tuesday 28th December 1999

In the morning, I started by driving along the east bank of the Nile just south of its source, and found a single White-cheeked Turaco. Then I drove down the west side of the river to the Tis Abay falls. The falls were impressive, but - in my opinion - not as impressive as either the Victoria or Murchison Falls. There was surprising little bird-life along the road or the path near the falls.

From here, I returned towards Bahir Dar, before taking a new road west towards the main Addis Ababa road. This road was in reasonable condition (gravel still - the last tar road I had travelled on for any distance was in Djibouti). After reaching Bure, I turned south, continuing towards Nekempte. This road was significantly worse, having less gravel portions than the previous roads, and several areas of bad potholes. This meant slowing down, but even then it was still impossible not to hit the occasional pothole quite heavily.

Quite soon after leaving Bure, the road started dropping rapidly down into the Nile valley. Curiously the most notable species was the African Reed-Warbler. The local race was a beautiful rich cinnamon colour, and the bird was common foraging around the roadsides, and even on the road itself. It took a little bit of identifying, as its behaviour was very chat-like.

I wasn't able to reach Nekempte that evening, so started looking for a place to camp for the night. As I started to descend the next major river valley (the Anger river) I saw a Stone Partridge just next to the road. Shortly afterwards I found a suitable place to camp and pulled off the road. There was absolutely no-one around this area, so I couldn't even ask permission.

Wednesday 29th December 1999

The first sounds I heard in the morning were the calls of the Stone Partridge. However, after that there were few birds to be found. However, the road did not improve, and by the time I had reached Nekempte, I had broken a couple of leaves on the front springs. This was easily repaired in Nekempte, but I realized that should I have a more serious failure I was going to run short of cash. So at this point, I decided to quickly divert to Addis Ababa where I would try and top up my wallet.

The road from Nekempte to Addis Ababa was tarred, and in quite reasonable condition, so even though I only left after midday, I was in Addis Ababa by 17:00. Stopping at Gefersa Reservoir, I failed to see the Green-winged Teal, but there were several Northern Pintail there instead.

On arrival in Addis Ababa I stayed at the Wanza Hotel, on the road towards the airport. This was a very pleasant hotel, and relatively cheap, but didn't serve food. However, there are many good restaurants within walking distance.

Thursday 30th December 1999

In the morning, I went to the main branch of the Commercial Bank of Ethiopia, hoping that there might be some way of using my credit card to obtain cash. They assured me that there was absolutely no way of doing this, and even the airport was unable to handle credit cards. Not only that, they were unable to change any currency other than US \$ or one of the major European currencies - certainly no African currency - even though they had brochures on the walls stating that they changed Kenya Shillings. Apparently this was out-of-date. This was intensely frustrating, since I had nearly US \$500 worth of Kenyan & Tanzanian Shillings, etc - for buying petrol on my return journey. Clearly changing the money early (so I wouldn't have to bother changing any on the way back) was a serious error. The only advice they could offer was to try the Hilton Hotel.

Arriving at the Hilton in the late morning, I was politely received by the Financial Manager, who said that limited arrangements could be made. They were able to advance me US \$100 in cash, and I was able to pay for the room, etc on the credit card. While there I was able to contact some South Africans staying at the hotel, one of whom was prepared to change my SA Rands (of which I was still carrying approximately R500). Given the price of Birr 2.80 per litre, this would allow me to travel west to Gambela, and then back to Bale, and the complete planned trip in Ethiopia. - and leave a bit of spare cash for emergencies.

Having now sorted out my problems, I enjoyed the facilities of the Hilton for the remainder of the day.

Friday 31st December 1999

Another early start, and I was able pass Gefersa Reservoir just after sunrise, but there was such a heavy mist over the water that I couldn't see much at all, other than large numbers of Dusky Turtle Doves and Red-rumped Swallows. Continuing back along the road to Nekempte was uneventful, and I reach there by noon. However, my luck was really running out. On filling up with petrol, I discovered that the Government had raised the fuel price by 20% overnight. My money problems were now back where they were before I took the excursion to Addis Ababa. However, having got this far, I decided to continue on to Gambela, and play it by ear thereafter.

On leaving Nekempte to the south, the road reverted to gravel (rock), and I slowed right down again. Travelling along this stretch with occasional stops I found Shikra, Little Sparrowhawk, and Foxy Cisticola. After passing through Bedele, the road heads west. After about 20 km, the tar road degrades quickly, and as it turned to gravel I found a reasonable spot to camp for the night.

Saturday 1st January 2000

Not having bothered to wait up for the new millennium (it was not due until 11 September 2007 in the Julian calendar), I awoke without a hang-over, and to the call of approximately 5 Stone Partridges.

Continuing through Metu and down to Gambela, I stopped frequently, as a wide variety of species were seen. Abyssinian Ground Hornbills were regular, Gymnogene - not having been seen yet on the trip - became common, with 5 seen within an hour, all hunting close by the side of the road. A little further on, in an area of open farmland a European Sparrowhawk was seen, and when returning to a more wooded area Violet Woodhoopoe and Black Saw-wing (race *blandfordi*) were seen. Red-breasted Wheatear and Red-winged Pytilia were quite common, and in one spot I found a small flock of Black-faced Firefinches.

Once past Gore and Bure, the road dropped down into the soudian lowlands, with the temperature and humidity increasing dramatically. The scenery was stunning, especially as the road approached the Baro river. While virtually no water-birds were to be seen (the river was full and fast-flowing), there were a number of other species around, including the Exclamatory Paradise Whydah, which was quite common. Other birds seen on the road to Gambela included Vinaceous Dove, Black-billed Wood-Dove, Blue-naped Mousebird, Singing Bush-Lark, African Thrush, Grey-headed Batis and Red-pate Cisticola.

Gambela town itself was not an impressive site, and had little to offer. The local government hotel (the Ethiopia Hotel) was asking US \$10 to camp. Given my cash shortage, I decided to try camping in the bush. However, before I left I noticed that there were Tantalus Grivets in the grounds. Leaving town on the Gog road, I found that travel in this area was not going to be easy. At first the road was in excellent condition, but after passing the grader, I found that it was little more than a small track, and so decided to camp in the woodland nearby. I had seen little near the town, and even after walking around the area, found little in the way of bird-life.

By this time the flies were becoming a serious pest, and given the heat and humidity, I realized that this area was not going to be one of the nicest places to stay. After dark the flies departed, but the heat remained throughout the night, dropping to perhaps about 25°C by dawn, when the flies reappeared. I could only be grateful I was there in mid-winter.

Sunday 2nd January 2000

Given the paucity of bird-life near Gambela town, I returned towards the escarpment as quickly as possible. However, once some distance beyond the town, the bird-life improved again, and I was able to find Northern Black Flycatcher, flocks of Brown Babblers, White-rumped Babblers and Cinnamon-breasted Bush-Shrikes within a matter of a few hundred metres. By about 08:00, the heat was building up again, so I started up the

escarpment to Metu, finding Scaly Francolin, Crimson-rumped Waxbill and Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-weaver on the way.

Once back up to a reasonable altitude at Bure, I continued back through Gore and Metu to Bedele. From here I continued east to Jima. En route I saw a few Black Saw-wing (race *oleaginea*) and Matschie's Grivet. Luckily the local government hotel in Jima was very cheap, and provided better food and facilities than many of the more expensive ones I had camped at before. A nice shower was most welcome after Gambela.

Monday 3rd January 2000

By this point it might seem that I was not seeing much in the way of bird-life, but that is not true. On these latter stages, I was still seeing plenty of species, but finding new species was becoming progressively harder, given my considerable luck during the early part of the trip. However, the novelty of the country was obviously reduced, as was the ability to ignore the *faranji* situation. In many respects it was no worse here than at the beginning, but after a month, it does become quite wearing to be the centre of attention everywhere you go.

Although the maps indicate that there are "roads" between Jima and Sodo, none of the locals had ever heard of them. So it was necessary to follow the tar road to Addis Ababa, turning off to the south just after Welkite. On leaving Jima I was very surprised to find Rouget's Rail crossing the road - with no apparently suitable habitat in sight. On the way one passes through the Gibe gorge, which is supposedly the nearest place to the "normal" birding route to find various western species. I have to say I saw no sign of suitable habitat or the species themselves that I had seen in Gambela. I suspect one would need to be very lucky indeed to find them here.

From Welkite, there was another gravel road to Sodo, which was also very rocky indeed. On this road, a small woodland patch provided a single Neumann's Colobus. By the time I had reached Sodo, the front springs were again in very bad condition, with several leaves broken. On reaching Sodo, the new tar road to Arba Minch was virtually complete. There was one short stretch of 2 km near to Arba Minch that was incomplete, and a deep 50 cm wide trench across the road, which if not seen timeously would have done catastrophic damage to the suspension. Obviously there were no warning signs.

On reaching Arba Minch, I turned off to the Nechisar National Park, and camped in the woodland at the river near the entrance gate. This official campsite had no facilities of any sort. The only major life in the area were several (presumed) Lesser Galago's calling in the evening.

Tuesday 4th January 2000

The morning was quite quiet, with few species encountered in the woodland area, although Bushpig and (presumed) Gambian Sun Squirrel were seen. Not wanting to risk damaging the springs further, I did not drive anywhere until it was late enough to return to Arba Minch and fix up the springs. However, I slightly misjudged it, and just as I turned into the first garage, there was a sickening thud as a spring completely broke - still, it could have happened in a worse place! After a couple of hours we had welded it up as strongly as was practical, but yet more money was used up doing it. It was just a matter of trying to avoid any more repairs before reaching Kenya.

On returning to the park, I drove past the campsite, and on towards the plains themselves. The road quickly deteriorated, to a level that was almost as bad as any I had encountered. It was definitely a first-gear low-ratio effort. However, by taking it very slowly, I was able to get over the hills and reach the plains themselves, where the road was quite reasonable. On the way, many groups of Rufous Chatterers were passed. On crossing the plains the first time there was little bird-life, other than finding a couple of White-tailed Bush Larks at the northern edge.

On the southern end of the plains the road enters a hilly bush area, which lead to the hot-springs. There was little bird-life even there - and as usual for any pleasant tourist spot in Ethiopia, several families were living right at the edge of the springs, and allowed no peace.

I continued along the road to swing back onto the plains close to Lake Chamo, but no signs of any bird-life near the lake edge. Returning towards to the bush close to the hot-springs several Secretary Bird and Kori Bustards were seen, as well as several herds of Burchell's Zebra, as well as Thomson's Gazelle, Greater Kudu and Spotted Hyaena. In the late afternoon, bird-life started to appear, and a few Rufous Scrub-Robin were found, as well as Dark Chanting Goshawk, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, a flock of Red-billed Wood-hoopoe, a single Black Wood-hoopoe, White-rumped Babbler and Orange-winged Pytilia.

Remaining there until it was dark, I then drove across the plains towards Lake Chamo, and then back to the northern edge of the plains. During this time I saw several Spotted Dikkops and a few Nightjars, mainly Dusky, but one Plain Nightjar was also identified. As always, there were many that "got away". I camped just off the side road leading to Lake Abaya, under the happy impression that not much traffic would be expected. During the night several hundred people passed by, at least 8 groups before 10:00 p.m., and many more throughout the night. I saw no sign of them during the day, so am not sure where they came from, or went to.

Wednesday 5th January 2000

The dawn chorus was notably absent. After a brief walk which produced almost nothing at all, I returned to the park entrance. No new birds were found on the way, although White-rumped Babblers were in evidence.. From Arba Minch, I returned to Sodo and then eastwards to Shashamene, all on good tar. On reaching Shashamene, I took the short road to the edge of the rift valley at Wondo Genet.

The Hotel allows camping in the flat grass area next to the parking lot, under a number of large trees. I spent some time sitting on the roof area of the restaurant, which gives an excellent view into the canopies. Here I was able to find a variety of birds including Yellow-fronted Parrot, Brown Woodland-Warbler, Brown Parisoma and Black-headed Forest Oriole.

I then visited the hot-springs, which are genuinely hot, and you need to be careful not to get too close to the water inflow into the pools. Afterwards I walked up along a nearby path, past a quarry, and reached a wooded valley, one area of which comprised endemic forest. White-cheeked Turaco's were very common here, as were Rameron Pigeon, Abyssinian Ground-Thrush and Yellow-bellied Sunbird.

Thursday 6th January 2000

Early next morning I returned to the forest, and found a whole range of species, including Double-toothed Barbet, White-cheeked Turaco, Red-shouldered Cuckoo-Shrike, Ethiopian Hill-Babbler, Slender-billed Chestnut-winged Starling, Ethiopian Crimson-wing and African Citril. In the small quarry just below the forest, Black Saw-wing (race *antinorii*) and Green Sandpiper occurred. Before leaving Wondo Genet I returned to the hot-springs, and while relaxing in the water, saw several Sharpe's Starlings in the trees nearby.

On leaving Wondo Genet, I returned to Shashamene, before taking the road west up towards the Bale mountains. The first part was uneventful, and I continued until I reached the Long-eared Owl site at Kofele. The moment I stopped in the location indicated by Richard Webb, about 20 children and young adults raced towards me screaming, while a comparable number ran over to a particular tree. Clearly there was no doubt about where the Owls were, but it was not a very comfortable form of bird-watching. Sadly, it was the type of environment where, once one has seen the bird, one leaves. However, there was just no way of continuing bird-watching with everyone milling about screaming. It didn't affect the owls.

From there the road started to climb up towards the mountains, and I encountered quite large numbers of Spot-breasted Plovers, most of which were on the road itself. Further on I encountered a flock of about 8 large Steppe Eagles circling low.

Given the relatively poor quality of the road, and the steady climb (by now the road was at over 3500m, I was travelling quite slowly. I reached Dinsho, and considered turning off and camping there for the night, but my cash reserves were so low, I decided to continue and find somewhere to camp by the road further on. However, after passing Dinsho, there was a lot more agricultural activity, and I even saw my first combine-harvesters, all other harvesting having been carried out by hand.

Near to Robe, I pulled off into a small area of woodland, having first checked with some of the locals as to whether this was OK. Since there seemed to be no problem, I prepared to camp there. It was only later in the evening that some soldiers came along and asked to move on, although they couldn't suggest where to. So they posted a soldier to keep an eye on me over night, saying there were many "insurgents" in the area. I must admit, there was much gunfire that night, but it sounded rather like the "celebratory" gunfire to be expected on a night such as this - Christmas Eve.

Several Mountain Nightjars called in the evening and early morning from the ground around the Landrover, and a Brown Parisoma was seen the following morning.

Friday 7th January 2000

In the light of dawn, I discovered why the military were so concerned at my presence. I had camped within 50m of a bridge, which had a permanent guard post.. In the dusk, I had not seen this. Anyway, the soldiers

had behaved in a very friendly manner, and even refused any payment for their duty - an attitude that is hard to believe anywhere, let alone Africa.

From here, I drove on through Robe to Sof Omar. The trip took about 3 hours, and was through mechanically farmed areas, and there was minimal bird-life. Once at Sof Omar, I walked down to the dry river bed, and started searching for the Salvadori's Seed-eater, which is virtually restricted to this area. While I failed to find any here, the following species were seen: European Snake Eagle, European Turtle Dove, Orange-bellied Parrot, Blue-naped Mousebird, Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Pied Wheatear, Brown-tailed Rock-chat, Yellow-breasted Apalis and Northern Grey Tit.

While down in the river valley, I walked downstream to the caves, an amazing sight, but since I hadn't brought the necessary torches and other gear, I was unable to explore them. I suspect one could spend a day exploring these fascinating caves, although I am not sure how far one can explore without proper diving gear.

Since the time was then getting on, and the temperature was approaching 40°C - the altitude was around 1000m - I decided to leave in order to get onto the Bale mountains by evening. Once back up to the top of the ravine, I had just started to leave, when I saw three small birds fly off from beside the road - and they appeared to have whitish rumps. To my surprise, these turned out to be the Salvadori's Serins that I was looking for. Looking at the references I have, I wonder if they don't stay in the valley bottom in early morning, and "migrate" up to the cooler farmland during the heat of day.

I then returned to Goba, arriving at around 15:00. Here I hit my next problem. The fact that there was no petrol station open since it was Christmas Day was not totally disastrous. The fact that there was no petrol at all was. I was advised to go back to Shashamene where the nearest petrol would be available. If I were to do that, I would not be able to afford enough petrol to return, and complete the journey. After some inquiries, I was advised that it might be able to purchase petrol on the black-market, but only in bulk. Even this was going to give me problems - I was very short of money. I dropped in on the Goba Ras Hotel, hoping to find some advice on where to find some cheaper petrol. No such luck, but I was fortunate enough to meet a local Scandinavian UN official (although I stupidly forgot to get his name). He was prepared to change some Kenyan Shillings into Birr, since he was soon going to be leaving Ethiopia, and so could change the money once he had left. I reckoned I had just enough money to get out of Ethiopia.

Returning to the trader, I purchased a 200 litre drum of petrol. Having filled both front tanks (I still hadn't fixed the rear tank), I had to put the rest in my empty water containers - hence ruining them for future water usage. I was left with no Birr at all! I was now totally dependent on looking after myself until I could get to Moyale - and be able to use my remaining Kenyan Shillings.

On this note, I left Goba at about 16:00, and reached the Sanetti plateau within an hour. By now the altitude was around 4300 m. On reaching the top, there were several small mountain lakes, which were searched for Ruddy Shelduck, but without luck. There were Blue winged Goose, Thekla Larks, Moorland Chats and Black-headed Siskins. There were also a few groups of both Moorland and Chestnut-naped Francolins seen both in the afternoon and the next morning. Otherwise, bird-life was very restricted. Amazingly, the first raptor seen was a Golden Eagle, which had only been discovered there within the last 10 years (Steven Spawls photographed one - which was rejected as a valid record - the year before one was first confirmed by a sight record).

By this time, the sun was setting, and the temperature started dropping, so I put on some long trousers over my shorts. I decide to camp just off the main road, in a flat area next to one of the lakes. By dusk, the temperature was dropping fast, and by 20:00 it appeared to be freezing. A hot evening meal was very welcome. I retreated to my tent, where I used the sleeping bag, with the duvet as a blanket.

Saturday 8th January 2000

I was woken up sometime during the night by a scuffling sound, but I couldn't work out what it was. However, once woken, I could not get back to sleep since it was seriously cold. At dawn, I tried to get up - but the tent was frozen solid!

After some effort, I managed to unzip the tent and carefully fold the flap up so I could get out. The temperature at this point was approximately -12°C - not a very African temperature! Even though I was wearing 3 pairs of trousers, 2 shirts, 2 jerseys & a jacket, I was still very cold, so decided to go for a walk to warm up. First, I checked around the vehicle, and found what I was later to identify as Simien Fox tracks - but no sign of them now. On this walk I visited all the nearby lakes, and saw a pair of Wattled Cranes and some

European Wigeon - but no sign of Ruddy Shelducks. Somehow, the latter did not surprise me, since the last time I had seen them was in the Guadaquivir area of Spain, whose climate is much warmer.

By 09:00, the sun was up and had melted the ice on the tent to allow me to fold it away, and leave. I had no intention of staying for another night of this type of torture. After a few minutes I came across 2 pairs of Simien Fox right next to the road, and Red-billed Chough and Abyssinian Longclaw were seen in the same area.

Continuing on across the plateau, I reached the southern side very quickly - the plateau was much smaller than I had expected. From here the road started to drop down through the different vegetational zones (which were not clearly demarcated on the Goba side of the plateau). The number of species increased quite quickly as one went down, and Rouget's Rails were very common on the upper slopes. Even before I reached the larger trees, I had already come across several parties of White-backed Black Tits, and several Rüppell's Robin-Chats, as well as a single Mountain Nyala. Even at this point there was still over 1 cm of ice on some of the puddles in the road.

The drive to Mesio was relatively uneventful, and then I continued towards the Genale River. Soon I reached a bridge over quite a large river that looked somewhat dubious - and when I looked carefully I noticed there were no tyre tracks over it - and the locals were pointing upstream - presumably indicating a crossing-point. On reaching it, I had grave reservations, since the river was approximately 50m wide, and the bottom was quite rocky - although no more than about 30 to 40 cm deep. Having walked across and back, a local asked if I would give him a lift to Bitata. After some discussion, he convinced me it was fordable, although there were no tracks visible.

In reality, I shouldn't have tried to cross it, but to turn back would have meant crossing back to Goba, Shashamene, etc - and I would not have had enough petrol to drive round. So I tried it. Although my feet got a bit wet, the crossing was feasible, but if the water level had been just a bit higher, I would have flooded the engine. As always, it was only having reached the next town that I discovered the road was closed and no through traffic is now allowed. I would not advise using this route in future, as the crossing could easily be impassable due to the water levels.

On reaching the Genale River, I found the wadi referred to in Julian Francis's trip report, and wandered downstream looking for the Ruspoli's Turaco. Within minutes, Adem Dube ran up to me waving the trip report, showing me his name in it, and offered to show me the bird. Since he was pointing in the opposite direction to where I thought the right habitat was, I was not sure, but he convinced me that he could find the bird, so I acquiesced. We walked up the valley for nearly 30 minutes, and then spent a further 30 minutes searching before finding one - except it turned round and became a Narina Trogon. Normally I love these birds, but this one wasn't too popular at that time. However, a few minutes later, Adem said he heard the Turaco calling, and tracked it down. I have no doubt I would never have seen it without Adem's help.

Since it was still only around 16:00, I continued to Negele, in order to find out if there were any problems getting to Bokol Manyo. A few km before Negele I came across a small party of Scaly Babblers. I had done all my calculations and had worked out that I had sufficient petrol to get there and back, and could then make Moyale via Yavello. However, on arrival at Negele I discovered that, the road south from Negele was completely cordoned off by the army. It wasn't just that they were searching vehicles, etc - they were allowing no-one through - including locals. The reason turned out to be that a local election was being held in the Bokol Manyo area, and they were expecting major problems. Also, to complicate things further, the road beyond Bokol Manyo was mined, and there was much armed banditry, as this route was being (or rather had been) the main route for delivering aid to the SE of Somalia. They didn't even want to let me through so that I could turn east to Yavello, but in the end I was able to get past.

However, by now it was nearly dark, so I looked for a place to camp. Just before the turnoff to the west, I saw some farm-workers returning home to their houses, and asked where I could camp. They allowed me to camp outside their homestead, and we spent several hours talking.

Sunday 9th January 2000

Having camped at the T-junction, it was only a matter of a few hundred metres to reach the "site" for the Sidamo Lark. It only took a few minutes to start finding them - and I must have seen about 10 within as many minutes. In the same area were Tiny Cisticola and Rufous Sparrow.

As I travelled on towards Wachile I stopped regularly, finding a variety of different species, the most notable being Black-faced Sandgrouse, Bare-eyed Thrush, Somali Long-billed Crombec and Pygmy Batis. This stretch of road was in relatively poor condition, but on reaching Melka Ghuba, I met a grader, which meant that the remainder of the road to Yavello was in excellent condition, and I was able to travel far further than I expected when I set out.

Walking upstream along the river at Melka Ghuba there were few species to be seen, but those that were found were all well worth the effort. The first bird seen was a Pringles' Puffback, followed immediately by the *dodsoni* race of the Common Bulbul. After only about 250 m I had seen several African White-winged Doves, and then settled down to search for the Jubaland Weaver. After about 1 km I found a colony of weavers, but all were in transition between breeding & non-breeding plumage. This made identification very problematic, as the Jubaland Weaver in full breeding plumage looks exactly like other weavers in this transitional phase. After about 10 minutes at this colony, I found one male that was in full-breeding plumage, and so I was finally certain of my identification. On the way back, I found a Smaller Black-bellied Sunbird.

Continuing on towards Yavello, I kept my eye out for the White-tailed Swallow, this being the optimal area. On the way I came across several White-crowned Starlings, Long-tailed Shrike, Crested Lark and Golden-breasted Starling. It was only when I was within 10 km of Yavello that I found a single swallow in the distance, and then a moment later came across 6 Swallows circling a tree right next to the road.

On reaching Yavello, it was still early afternoon, so I decided to head straight south to the border, so I could cross over first thing the next morning. However, there was still time for bird-watching on the trip, and Chestnut-naped Francolin, Yellow-necked Francolin and Vulturine Guineafowl were all found just south of Mega.

I arrived in Moyale at around 17:00, by which time the border post had closed, so I stayed at the local government hotel - which was prepared to accept Kenya Shillings.

Monday 10th January 2000

The border post only opened at 08:30, so there was no rush in the morning. Passing through Immigration and Customs took about 20 minutes for both sides, and I should still have time to make the convoy. First, though, I needed to use my credit card to get some cash. But it was a new unpublished holiday - I couldn't even find out what it was celebrating. Hence I was going to have to stay an additional day in Moyale.

While the banks might have been closed for the day, mechanics were still prepared to work, so I decided to carry out a thorough check of the Landrover. This resulted in me getting rid of the front springs which had now been re-welded 4 times, and probably wouldn't survive the next couple of days. The difference between Ethiopia and Kenya was again highlighted: In Ethiopia 95% of all 4x4's are Toyota Landcruisers while 95% are Landrovers in Kenya.

I stayed the night in the best hotel available in Moyale - which was worse than any I had found in Ethiopia. Another sad reflection on Kenya.

Tuesday 11th January 2000

I could only leave after visiting the bank to get cash to pay for the Landrover repairs and to fill up with petrol. I then joined the "convoy". Since I had previously arranged to start a bit late (the convoy leaves at 09:00), I was allowed through to catch up with the other vehicles. When I asked how many were in the convoy, the response was "none"! So I set off by myself, without any guard, to travel to Marsabit at my leisure.

This allowed me to stop whenever I saw bird activity - which on this road is not often. Nevertheless, I found D'Arnaud's Barbet (in exactly the same spot I saw it on the way north), Yellow-vented Eremomela, Masked Lark and Magpie Starling.

On arriving at Marsabit, I had to replace the front U-bolts, since the old ones we used in Moyale had cracked when a stone had hit them. I camped that night at the Marsabit NP, and the water worked again.

Wednesday 12th January 2000

Leaving Marsabit early, I was allowed through the police check-point without a guard, and so continued back to Isiolo. Amazingly, the new U-bolts snapped after just 50 km, and so I had to continue with a chain holding the springs to the axle - but it actually worked fine, and got me back to South Africa.

I continued through Isiolo, and reached Mt Kenya by evening, camping in a very pleasant campsite at the Timau River lodge.

Thursday 13th January 2000

I continued through to Arusha without incident, or seeing any new notable species. However, I was still struggling to drive on the correct side of the road - curiously, it was much harder to revert to driving on the left than to start driving on the right.

Friday 14th January 2000

In Arusha, I tried to obtain more money using a credit card, but failed here, so again realized I had a cash shortage. Since I had enough money to fill up the tanks, I just hoped I could get to Iringa, and fall on the mercy of Dave Moyer - if he was there.

En route I finally found Grasshopper Buzzard, a species which I had expected to see easily in Ethiopia. By dusk I had reached Iringa, and reckoned I was totally out of fuel. My luck was in, and Dave very kindly lent me a considerable sum of money, which was enough to cover my petrol costs right down to Lusaka, where I knew I could buy petrol with a credit card.

Saturday 15th January 2000

I fill up with fuel in Iringa, and drive on the Zambian border, and then head south. I camped beside the road just before reaching Mpika, because there are no campsites in the area.

Sunday 16th January 2000

Continuing on, I filled up with petrol to discover that I have been tricked again. Zambian petrol has increased by approximately 50% in the two months since I drove north. Yet again, I am short of cash. So I drive as far as I know I can reach, and stay the night in a hotel in Kabwe.

Monday 17th January 2000

As soon as the bank opens, I get cash with my credit card, pay the hotel and fill up with fuel. I then drive on through Lusaka, and on to the Zimbabwean border. I reach Chinhoyi by late afternoon, and decide to spoil myself on my last day of holiday, and stay in the Orange Grove Motel rather than camping there.

Tuesday 18th January 2000

Setting off early in the morning, I pass through Harare by 08:00, and then the engine starts misfiring- a spark plug lead has failed. Get a local mechanic to make me up a temporary one, and I am on my way again. By now it is into the fourth day of heavy rains (it has hardly stopped since reaching northern Zambia) and the rivers are all very full - I am used to seeing them dry. I can imagine how bad it must have been after the February 2000 floods.

I reach the South African border at about 16:00, and am amazed to find an elephant quietly roaming around the truck parking area just next to the border post. After crossing through the South African side, I think I have finally made it back - except that I suffer the indignity of having my fourth flat tyre just as I pull out of the border post. I finally reach home at 01:00 the next morning.

Aftermath

Of course, given my luck, that wasn't the end of it. The next day the Landrover refused to move - the gearbox selector had jammed, and I had to remove the floor to fix it.

More seriously (as far as I was concerned) was that the ankle I had twisted on my second day in Ethiopia started to swell up once I was back at work and sitting "inactively" at my desk. Taking it to the doctor caused some amusement from him, but none from me after the X-rays - I had broken one of the bones, and although it had repaired OK, I now had to have it bandaged up, and rest it for 3 months. Thank God I didn't realize that when I thought I had just twisted it!