

Tour Report

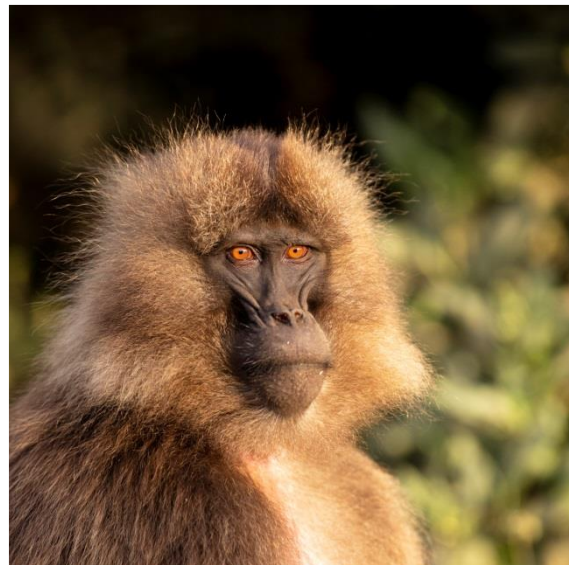
Ethiopia – A Unique Wonder

7-21 February 2020

Ethiopian wolf



Gelada



Chameleon



Starry night



Compiled by Ben Cherry

Tour Leader: Ben Cherry with 10 participants

Day 1: Depart UK

Friday 7 February 2020

Day 2: Arrive Addis Ababa

Saturday 8 February 2020

I picked up members of our group from the airport, amongst a flurry of activity related to the African Union Conference, as delegates from across the continent gathered in Addis. After some time relaxing in the hotel we headed out to Lucy's restaurant for our first taste of Ethiopian food and the traditional coffee ceremony.

Afterwards we headed to the national museum and the university; however, unfortunately a power outage limited our opportunity to explore these locations. Ahead of our early start the following morning and after the overnight flight, we had dinner at the hotel and an early night.

Day 3: Travel to Simien Lodge, Simien Mountains

Sunday 9 February 2020

Up promptly, we flew to Gondar, where we stopped in the centre of the city for coffee before continuing our journey to Debark, taking in the views en route. We ate our lunch in Debark, which had been ordered in advance (while national park paperwork was being sorted), after which we went quickly on our way. We continued our climb to the Simien Mountains. After quickly checking into the lodge we headed out into the surrounding area and found a troop of geladas to spend the rest of the afternoon with, until they eventually headed down the cliff faces to their sleeping sanctuaries.

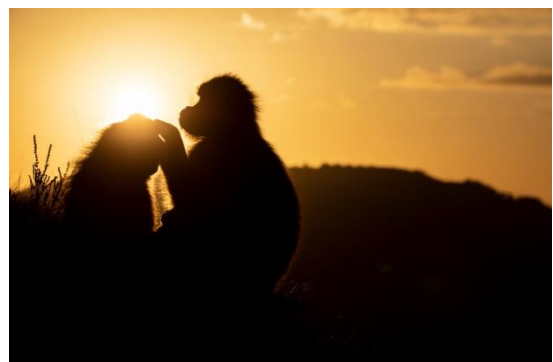
Day 4: Full day exploring, Simien Mountains

Monday 10 February 2020

We headed out before dawn to a nearby viewpoint which looks out over the dramatic plateau edge and watched the sunrise. Focusing on big-vista landscape photography and also floral details, we started to get a feel for this special environment. Returning to Simien Lodge for breakfast and a well-earned coffee, our next task was to head out and find a group of geladas to spend much of the morning with.

We stopped briefly to talk and photograph a farmer we encountered high up on the plateau, and who was using horses to separate the grain from the crops. Pressing on, we found a group of geladas to spend a few hours with, watching their behaviour. Building on this interaction, at 11am we met up with American researchers who are studying the geladas and gave us an insight into their behaviour. We then returned to the lodge for lunch.

In the early afternoon we laid out some bones and were quickly rewarded with circling lammergeier, lappet-faced vulture, steppe eagle and thick-billed ravens coming in to land and feed. As we meandered back towards the lodge we found another group of geladas to spend the rest of the afternoon with, taking in a beautiful sunset with a troop which were grooming before moving to their sleeping sanctuary. Ahead of our evening meal the gelada researchers gave a presentation to our group about their work and offered up further geladas insights.



Day 5: Full day exploring, Simien Mountains

Tuesday 11 February 2020

This morning we drove to Debark, a journey of about 3 hours or so, including a few stops on the way to take in the views as we explored more of the Simiens. Above Debark campsite we came across five rare walia ibex amongst the stunning high-altitude vista. They were a real treat to witness. Our picnic location

was surrounded by circling thick-billed ravens and lammergeiers which gave the group further time to photograph these beautiful birds as they came down to feed.



As we neared the lodge we found another group of geladas to spend some time with, before a relaxing evening at the lodge.

Day 6: Gondar experience

Wednesday 12 February 2020

A prompt morning getaway meant that we had descended to Gondar Hills Resort in time for lunch. Meandering down to the city we explored in and around Fasilides' Castle and Fasilides' Bath, learning about Gondar's history. We also visited the enchanting Debre Birhan Selassie Church which gave us a taster of the cultural experiences yet to come in Lalibela. For dinner we ate at the Four Sisters restaurant, which offers a wide range of delicious Ethiopian food.

Day 7: Exploring Lalibela

Thursday 13 February 2020

We had a direct morning flight to Lalibela and then a coaster bus to our hotel. With lunch at the hotel we were then given a tour around six of the rock-hewn churches by a local guide who provided us with a valuable insight into their history and uniqueness. These UNESCO sites were truly something to behold. Amongst the tourists are dedicated priests and pilgrims coming from all across Ethiopia to pray here. Dinner was at the fantastic Ben Ababa restaurant.



Day 8: Full day, Lalibela**Friday 14 February 2020**

An early getaway got us to Yemrehanna Kristos Church in a cave 1.5 hours away via our coaster bus. The half-hour walk uphill and early start was worth it as we had the church to ourselves – a truly memorable experience. This gave the group time and space to set up photographs and have a more relaxed experience.

On our return journey to Lalibela we stopped at a settlement and had a fantastic experience gaining an insight into countryside life. The guests loved this genuine experience as it was reciprocated by our hosts who enjoyed the novelty of it.

Returning to Lalibela we had a buffet lunch at a nearby restaurant. We then visited the remaining churches in Lalibela, enjoying a more relaxed experience than the afternoon before, with some great photographic opportunities. For dinner we headed back to Ben Ababa restaurant.

Day 9: Fly to Awassa**Saturday 15 February 2020**

Today we took a flight from Lalibela to Addis, where we had a 4-hour layover. I gave some of the group photography lessons as we waited. Our connecting flight arrived in Hawassa about 4pm. We opted to drive straight to a black colobus monkey location, allowing the guests to get a rare intimate view of a habituated group. We remained there until sunset and then went to our hotel for dinner.

Day 10: Drive to Bale Mountains**Sunday 16 February 2020**

In the morning we took in the fish market at Awassa, where marabou storks walk amongst fishermen, as people feed scraps to pelicans patiently waiting nearby. We then continued with our long drive to the Bale Lodge. Once there, we stopped at the park headquarters to eat the packed lunch that had been made for us by the hotel. We spotted some endemic antelope during our travels, and caught brief views of mountain nyala, olive baboons and warthog, as well as some swarms of locusts. We arrived at the lodge in the late afternoon. The group then settled into their rooms before returning to the main building for dinner.

Day 11: Full day, Bale National Park**Monday 17 February 2020**

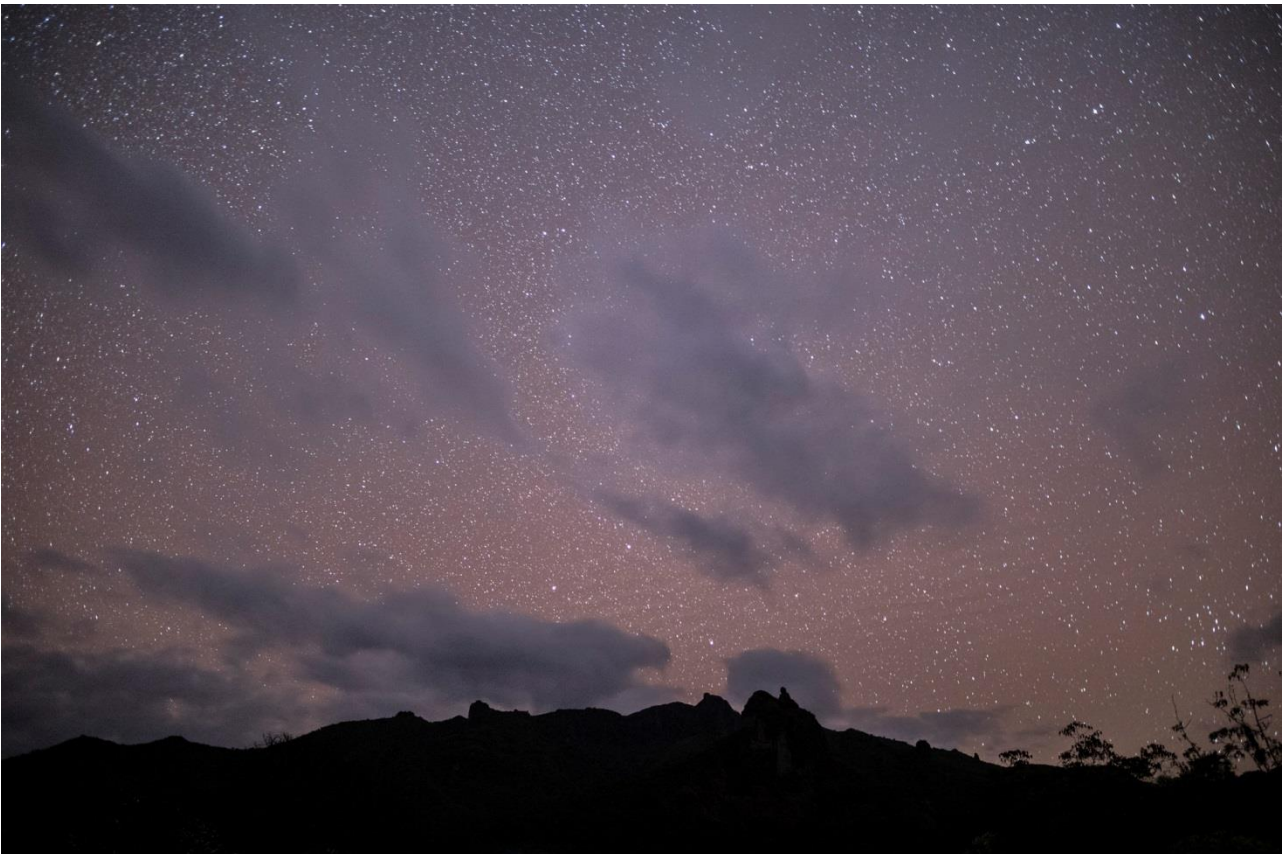
We drove up to the Sanetti Plateau, spotting black colobus monkeys and taking in the dramatic vistas en route. We also saw various other endemics, including blue-winged geese, white-collared pigeon, black-headed siskin and ruddy shelduck. We returned to the lodge for a late lunch. The afternoon was then spent around the lodge, either doing some personal exploring, or with me doing some landscape photography, with a particular focus on long-exposure photography.

Day 12: Full day, Bale National Park**Tuesday 18 February 2020**

Today we enjoyed a full day up on the plateau. We met up with two members of EWCP (Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Programme) who walked around with us on the plateau, helping us to spot and shadow two wolves. It was on the way to meeting the EWCP members though that we had my best wolf encounter, as one individual walked alongside the road and past all of our vehicles – a special moment. We found out that the population has fallen by an estimated 75% in under a year due to canine distemper and rabies spread by domestic dogs which are coming up to the plateau with herders who are illegally grazing livestock in the area. We had a packed lunch on the plateau, where Mustafa, a community outreach officer, gave us an eye-opening insight into the Ethiopian wolf population and situation.



We returned to the lodge mid-afternoon to relax after our high-altitude exertion (4,000 metres). We enjoyed the beautiful views as we descended from the plateau and the cloud cover broke up. A spontaneous macro-shoot with an obliging chameleon was a welcome surprise. After dinner a number of the group joined me for some astrophotography, taking advantage of the incredible clear night sky.



Day 13: Full day, Bale National Park**Wednesday 19 February 2020**

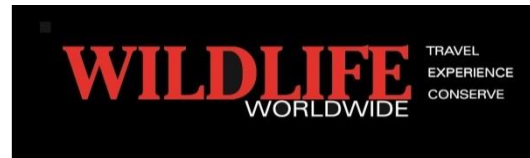
We had an early start this morning, for a dawn chorus walk around the lodge with local guides who offered expert birding knowledge. Mid-morning many of the group went to a nearby waterfall, taking in a pleasant walk and trying waterfall photography. We had lunch at the lodge, and many members of the group went to watch honey-collecting – a man climbed a tree to a manmade hive, smoking out the bees and collecting fresh honeycomb for the guests to try; they also created a photo-story of the event. Three members of the group went back to the plateau and were lucky with further wolf sightings.

Day 14: Drive back to Addis Ababa & depart**Thursday 20 February 2020**

Leaving at 7am it took us all day to drive back to Addis, with various brief stops along the way and a packed lunch made by the lodge. We had a final evening meal at a restaurant close to the airport where we watched traditional dance and music before heading to the airport and flying back to the UK, arriving early the following day.



Checklist



	Common Name	Comments
	BIRDS	
1	Abdim's stork	
2	Abyssinian catbird	Endemic, Bale Mountain lodge
3	Abyssinian ground thrush	Bale Mountain Lodge
4	Abyssinian oriole	Endemic Bale Mountains
5	Abyssinian slaty flycatcher	Endemic, Bale Mountain Lodge
6	Abyssinian wheatear	Endemic. Gondar hotel grounds
7	Abyssinian woodpecker	Bale Mountain Lodge
8	African Black duck	Bale Mountain Lodge
9	African citril	Bale Mountains
10	African dusky flycatcher	
11	African Emerald cuckoo	Bale Mountain Lodge
12	African fish eagle	Awassa
13	African jacana	Awassa
14	African olive pigeon	Bale Mountain Lodge
15	African stonechat	Journey to Bale Mountains
16	Augur buzzard	
17	Baglafecht weaver	Gondar Hotel, Roha Hotel Lalibela
18	Barn swallow	
19	Beautiful sunbird	Roha Hotel, Lalibela
20	Black saw-wing	Bale Mountain Lodge
21	Black-billed barbet	Gondar Fasilides' Bath
22	Black-billed barbet	Gondar Fasilides' Bath
23	Black-billed wood-hoopoe	Gondar Fasilides' Bath
24	Black-eared wheatear	
25	Black-shouldered kite	
26	Black-winged lapwing	Awassa
27	Black-winged lovebird	Endemic. Roha Hotel. Lalibela
28	Black-winged stilt	Awassa
29	Blue-breasted bee-eater	Near endemic, Yemrehanna Kristos near Lalibela
30	Blue-winged goose	Endemic, Bale Mountains
31	Brown-rumped seedeater	
32	Bruce's green pigeon	Gondar Fasilides' Bath
33	Cape crow	
34	Carmin bee-eater	



35	Cattle egret	
36	Chestnut-naped francolin	Endemic, Bale Mountains,
37	Cinnamon bracken warbler	Heard in Simien Mountains
38	Common bulbul	
39	Common fiscal	
40	Common kestrel	
41	Common sandpiper	
42	Crag martin	
43	Dark-chanting goshawk	
44	Dusky Turtle dove	
45	Eastern imperial eagle	Bale Mountain Lodge
46	Egyptian goose	Awassa
47	Egyptian vulture	Gondar
48	Erckel's francolin	Near endemic, Simien Mountains
49	Erlanger's lark	Simien Mountains
50	Ethiopian (black-headed) siskin	Endemic, Bale Mountains
51	Ethiopian boubou	Near endemic, Roha Hotel Lalibela
52	Ethiopian cisticola	
53	Fan-tailed raven	
54	Flamingo spp	Road journey back to Addis
55	Golden eagle	
56	Great cormorant	Awassa
57	Great egret	
58	Great white pelican	Awassa
59	Greater blue-eared starling	Roha Hotel, Lalibela
60	Grey wagtail	Bale Mountain Lodge
62	Grey woodpecker	Bale Mountain Lodge
63	Grey-headed gull	Awassa
64	Groundscraper thrush	
65	Hadada ibis	Awassa
66	Hamerkop	Awassa
67	Hemprich's hornbill	Roha Hotel Laibela, Gondar Fasilides' Castle
68	Hooded vulture	
69	Lammergeier	Simien Mountains
70	Lanner falcon	
71	Lappet-faced vulture	Simien Mountains
72	Laughing dove	
73	Lesser kestrel	
74	Lesser whitethroat	Roha Hotel, Lalibela
75	Little bee-eater	
76	Little egret	

77	Long-legged buzzard	
78	Malachite kingfisher	Awassa
79	Marabou stork	Awassa
80	Marsh harrier	
81	Mocking cliff chat	Gondar Hills Resort hotel
82	Montane white-eye	Bale Mountain Lodge
83	Moorland chat	
84	Mountain buzzard	
85	Mountain thrush	
86	Namaqua dove	Road journey back to Addis
87	Nightjar spp	Ben Ababa restaurant Lalibela
88	Northern pintail	Bale Mountains
89	Paradise flycatcher	Roha Hotel, Lalibela
90	Pied crow	
91	Pied kingfisher	Awassa
92	Red-billed chough	
93	Red-billed fire-finch	Roha Hotel, Lalibela
94	Red-billed oxpecker	Road journey back to Addis
95	Red-billed quelea	Road journey back to Addis
96	Red-breasted wheater	
97	Red-cheeked cordon-blue	Roha Hotel, Laibela. Gondoar Fasilides' Castle
98	Red-chested cuckoo	Bale Mountain Lodge
99	Red-fronted tinkerbird	Roha Hotel, Lalibela
100	Red-knobbed coot	Bale Mountains
101	Red-throated pipit	
102	Red-throated wryneck	Heard near Gondar hotel
103	Red-winged starling	
104	Ring-necked dove	
105	Rock (female) thrush	Churches Lalibela
106	Rock martin	
107	Rouget's rail	Endemic, Dinsho, Bale Mountains
108	Rüppell's black chat	Endemic Lalibela Churches
109	Rüppell's robin-chat	Addis Ababa
110	Rüppell's starling	
111	Rüppell's vulture	Simien Mountains
112	Sacred ibis	Addis Ababa
113	Scarlet-chested sunbird	Roha Hotel, Lalibela
114	Slender-billed starling	Bale Mountains
115	Speckled mousebird	Addis Ababa
116	Speckled pigeon	
117	Spot-breasted lapwing	Endemic, Simien Mountains

118	Spur-winged goose	Awassa
119	Squacco heron	Awassa
120	Steppe eagle	Simien Mountains, first feeding spot
121	Streaky seedeater	
122	Superb starling	Road journey back to Addis
123	Swainson's sparrow	Near endemic
124	Tacazze sunbird	Roha Hotel, Lalibela
125	Tawny eagle	Simien Mountains, second feeding spot
126	Thekla lark	
127	Thick-billed raven	
128	Variable sunbird	Roha Hotel, Lalibela
129	Verreaux's eagle	Simien Mountains, first feeding spot, distant view
130	Village indigobird	Yemrehanna Kristos near Lalibela
131	Village weaver	Roha Hotel, Lalibela
132	Wattled crane	Bale Mountains
133	Wattled ibis	Endemic, Simien & Bale Mountains
134	White stork	
135	White-backed vulture	Simien Mountains
136	White-billed starling	Endemic
137	White-browed sparrow-weaver	Awassa
138	White-cheeked turaco	Near endemic, Bale Mountains
139	White-collared pigeon	Endemic Simien and Bale Mountains
140	White-winged cliff chat	Endemic, Simien Mountains,
141	White-winged tern	Awassa
142	Willow warbler	
143	Woodland kingfisher	Awassa
144	Yellow-bellied waxbill	Bale Mountain Lodge
145	Yellow-billed duck	Bale Mountains
146	Yellow-billed kite	
	MAMMALS	
1	Blick's grass rat	Bale Mountains
2	Bohor reedbuck	Bale Mountains
3	Ethiopian wolf	Bale Mountains
4	Gelada	Simien Mountains
5	Giant mole rat	Bale Mountains
6	Golden jackal	Simien Mountains
7	Grivet monkey	Roha Hotel Lalibela, Awassa
8	Guereza colobus	Awassa, Bale Mountains
9	Hyrax spp	Bale Mountain Lodge, we were told they were Tree Hyrax but the distribution and behaviours do not seem right so more likely

		to be Bush Hyrax
10	Klipspringer	Simien Mountains
11	Menelik's bushbuck	Simien Mountains
12	Mountain nyala	Bale Mountains
13	Olive baboon	Bale Mountains
14	Rock hyrax	Bale Mountains
15	Walia ibex	Simien Mountains
16	Warthog	Bale Mountains, probably common warthog rather than Desert
	REPTILES	
1	Chameleon spp	Bale Mountains

List compiled by Helen & Philip Mugridge