



**BIRDING TOUR GHANA: UPPER GUINEA
FOREST TO THE SAHEL**

1 - 22 MARCH 2019



White-necked Rockfowl is one of our special targets on this Ghana birding tour.

Ghana is arguably the best and easiest country in which to start one's West African birding career, as its huge range of habitats is easily accessible and all the special birds (including the charismatic **White-necked Rockfowl** (Yellow-headed Picathartes) are amazingly well staked-out. While a lot of birders start their West African birding with a visit to the tiny Gambia, the larger and more varied Ghana has a great deal more to offer, including 180 of the "Guinea-Congo Rainforest" birds (which will basically all be life-birds for anyone who has not yet been to West Africa) and 12 of the 15 Upper Guinea Forest endemics (which are restricted to a much smaller part of West Africa, i.e. part of the Bulge of Africa). These Upper Guinea endemics can be found in neighboring countries, but birding gen is lacking compared with Ghana, and travel for English-speakers is more difficult in the other countries.

Ghana certainly does have a wide range of different habitats, and we look not only for forest birds at sites including one of Africa's most impressive canopy walkways, but we also look for some charismatic arid-area birds. **Standard-winged Nightjar** is almost guaranteed, as is the incomparable **Egyptian Plover**.

This tour can be combined with our preceding **Birding Tour São Tomé and Príncipe: 10-day Birding Adventure 2019** (18 – 27 February 2019) and, preceding that, our **Birding Tour Gabon: 14-day Birding Adventure 2019** (3 – 16 February 2019).

Please note that the detailed itinerary below cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Itinerary (22 days/21 nights)

Day 1. The birding starts around Accra

Most flights into Accra arrive in the late evening, but if you do arrive earlier, birding the hotel grounds can be quite productive. Either way, our guide will fetch you at the airport and transfer you to the hotel so you can check in.

Overnight: Tulip Inn near Kotoka International Airport, Accra

Days 2 – 4. Birding the fabulous Kakum National Park

After a probable late arrival on Day 1 and to avoid the notorious Accra rush hour traffic, we'll fetch you at 9 a.m. today, after you've enjoyed a leisurely breakfast at the hotel. We'll accumulate a respectable bird list pretty fast, as we stop for new bird after new bird. But our focus this morning will be the Winneba lagoon, which usually has many species of migrant shorebirds and terns. We'll be sure to arrive in Jukwa, where we'll spend the next three nights, early enough for birding. **Bar-breasted Firefinch**, the extravagant **Yellow-mantled Widowbird**, **Compact Weaver**, **Red-headed Quelea**, **Copper Sunbird**, the aptly-named **Splendid Sunbird**, **Whistling Cisticola**, and **Red-faced Cisticola** are some of the many possibilities in the scrub and subsistence farmland around here.

We'll spend a good amount of time birding the nearby canopy walkway of Kakum National Park, which makes some of the canopy birds much easier than usual! These often include the

likes of **Blue Cuckooshrike**, **Grey Parrot** (it's truly wonderful seeing this popular cage bird in the wild!), three *Nigrita* species (interesting West African finches), the truly magnificent **Long-tailed Hawk**, **Congo Serpent Eagle**, **Violet-backed Hylia**, the beautiful **Yellow-spotted Barbet** and the strangely-named **Hairy-breasted Barbet**, **Brown-cheeked Hornbill** and the monstrous **Black-casqued** and **Yellow-casqued Hornbills** (it's quite something to hear their amazingly heavy wingbeats), two different **Wood Hoopoe** species (**White-headed** and **Forest**), **Rufous-crowned Eremomela**, **Chestnut-capped Flycatcher**, and a host of other tantalizing West African birds.

We'll also be sure to spend enough time at the Antwikwaa section of the national park. One of the biggest stars is always **Rosy Bee-eater**, the beauty of which almost defies belief. Once we've become desensitized to this gorgeous bird, we'll be less blasé about two other marvels of the bird world, **Black Bee-eater** and **White-throated Bee-eater**. **Blue-throated Roller**, **Forest Robin**, **Red-billed Helmetshrike**, and **Yellow-billed Turaco** are also wonderfully colorful. It's a paradise for hornbills, and we hope to get acquainted with **Black Dwarf Hornbill**, **Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill**, **Piping Hornbill**, and others. Two species of bristlebill (unusually good-looking greenbuls) are usually present. **White-spotted Flufftail** skulks on the forest floor but it not quite as elusive as most other flufftail species. **Melancholy Woodpecker**, **Fire-bellied Woodpecker**, and various cuckoos, including the brilliant **Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo** and the equally amazing (rather tiny) **Yellow-throated Cuckoo**, are quite possible. **White-tailed Alethe** is often seen on the forest floor. Two bat-like swift species, **Sabine's Spinetail** and **Cassin's Spinetail**, flutter over the forest. The list continues, though, as we might also see **Purple-throated Cuckooshrike**, **Forest Penduline Tit**, **Black-bellied Seedcracker**, **Willcocks's Honeyguide**, and plenty more.

Night birding in this area can generate **Long-tailed Nightjar**, **Brown Nightjar**, and **Fraser's Eagle-Owl**.

Overnight Rainforest Lodge, Jukwa

Day 5. Nsuta Forest

We continue westward for some of Ghana's trickiest, but most desirable, birds. A lot of luck is needed, but the possibilities include **Spot-breasted Ibis**, **Akun Eagle-Owl**, and **Rufous Fishing Owl**! Easier birds we'll be looking for around here include some of the bright-red forest weavers called malimbos, **Chestnut-winged Starling**, **Copper-tailed Starling**, and **Swamp Palm Bulbul**.

Overnight D & A Guesthouse, Sekondi, which is a basic place but gives access to some of the most exciting possible birds of the tour

Days 6 – 8. Ankasa National Park

This is the most pristine forest of the trip, and it's worthwhile for the star birds we find here. **White-breasted Guineafowl** might put in an appearance, but this is another extremely difficult bird to pin down. **Nkulengu Rail** will get a lot of attention from us, and hopefully we'll manage to get decent visuals on this species. **Grey-throated Rail** is also possible. Very beautiful kingfishers abound. We might see **Shining-blue Kingfisher** beside a quiet pond, and we usually also find **White-bellied Kingfisher** and **Chocolate-backed Kingfisher**. We have stacks of greenbuls to find, including **Red-tailed Greenbul**, **Plain Greenbul**, **Yellow-bearded Greenbul**, **Western Bearded Greenbul**, and two bristlebill species. We might also see three illadopsis species with their pleasant, liquid calls, not to mention **Black-throated Coucal**, **Yellow-billed**

Turaco, the truly huge **Great Blue Turaco**, **Blue-headed** and **Dusky Crested Flycatchers**, and **Crowned Eagle**. **Red-fronted Antpecker** is always one of the biggest stars, and **Red-chested Owlet** is sometimes seen. Near water, the interesting West African forest duck, **Hartlaub's Duck**, is often found, along with **Dwarf Bittern** and the elusive **African Finfoot**.

Overnight: Frenchman's Guest House, Ankasa

Day 9. Brenu Beach and other sites

We'll likely spend the morning birding (depending on what we still "need") before we start heading back eastwards. On our route back to the Kakum area we'll be sure to stop for some mangrove specialists in the form of two **Sunbirds** (**Blue-throated Brown** and **Reichenbach's**). We also look for the beautiful **Orange Weaver**. Naturally, we're likely to find other more widespread water-associated birds as well, which at this site often includes the magnificent **Giant Kingfisher**. Next on the agenda are some desirable species such as **Preuss's Cliff Swallow**, the brightly-colored, absolutely brilliant, rather strange **Oriole Warbler**, **Red-winged Pytilia**, **Marsh Tchagra**, and **Viillot's Barbet**.

Overnight Rainforest Lodge, Jukwa

Day 10. White-necked Rockfowl (Picathartes) – the most exciting day of the trip

The two species of charismatic, cave-roosting, and cave-nesting rockfowl (picathartes) are both West African endemics and both Vulnerable (partly due to their need for caves within rainforest, not a common combo). Needless to say, seeing either of the two representatives of this family is high on the wish list of many a birder. The site we visit is arguably the best place on earth to find **White-necked Rockfowl** – we've had a 100 % success rate so far.

Overnight: Royal Basin Resort, Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti region (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashanti_Empire)

Days 11 – 13. And now for something completely different: Mole National Park

En route to the savanna and dry woodlands of Mole National Park, a brilliant game reserve that has a whole new suite of birds awaiting us along with elephant, crocodiles, and a lot of other good animals, we stop at Offinsu Forest. Here **Blue-moustached Bee-eater** is always a real highlight, but other pickings include at least three possible bushshrikes, the names describing these fabulous birds well (e.g., **Many-colored Bushshrike** and **Fiery-breasted Bushshrike**). We might see **Thick-billed Honeyguide** or its smaller relative, **Cassin's Honeybird**. **Rufous-sided Broadbill** and **Capuchin Babbler** are also possible.

The truly spectacular **Standard-winged Nightjar** is one of Mole's most famous avian specials, which we look for around the airstrip at dusk. **Pel's Fishing Owl** is also possible in the park. The West and Central African endemic, **Forbes's Plover**, is also sought here, as are **African Spotted Creeper** (more of a miombo woodland bird in southern Africa), **Pygmy Sunbird** (a stunner with its incredible, long tail), **Beautiful Sunbird**, several woodpeckers, **Senegal Batis**, **Red-throated Bee-eater**, **Abyssinian Ground Hornbill**, the interesting **Stone Partridge**, and some pretty **Waxbills** in the form of **Orange-cheeked** and **Lavender**.

Overnight: Mole Motel with a view over Mole National Park's savanna

Day 14. Tongo Hills via Bolgatanga

Targets today, as the vegetation becomes increasingly arid, include **Cinnamon-breasted Bunting**, the good-looking **Fox Kestrel**, the nicely named **Rock-loving Cisticola**, and the striking **White-crowned Cliff Chat**.

Overnight: Premier Lodge, Bolgatanga

Day 15. Egyptian Plover

Tono Dam on the northern border is where we look for what is usually regarded as one of the top two or three birds of our Ghana birding tour, the spectacularly-plumaged and quite localized **Egyptian Plover**. The habitat is different from anything we will have encountered so far, meaning we're bound to add a lot of other birds to our growing list. The pickings include a number of seedeaters such as **White-billed Buffalo Weaver**, **Black-bellied Firefinch**, **African Silverbill**, the aptly-named **Cut-throat Finch**, etc. However, it is the stunning **Abyssinian Roller** with its spectacular tail streamers and bright colors and the even more dazzling **Northern Carmine Bee-eater** that are in general the most admired. **Black-headed Lapwing** and **Four-banded Sandgrouse** are also very popular, though.

Overnight: Premier Lodge, Bolgatanga

Day 16. Bobiri Forest Reserve

Here we'll try for some owls and other night birds we might still be missing, and also for **Latham's Francolin**.

Overnight: Royal Basin Resort, Kumasi

Days 17 – 18. Bobiri Butterfly Reserve to Atewa Range Forest Reserve

We'll look at the amazing butterfly spectacle, but Bobiri Butterfly Reserve also happens to be one of the best places to find some forest birds we won't have seen yet, including **Yellow-footed Honeyguide**, the wonderful, tiny woodpecker called **African Piculet** (a massively important West African endemic, despite its diminutive size), **Tit Hylia** (Africa's smallest bird, and another fine West African endemic to see), **Black-capped Apalis**, **Golden Greenbul**, and **Tessmann's Flycatcher**. Duetting pairs of **Black-throated Coucal** might also be seen.

Our afternoon birding will be at the Atewa Range Forest Reserve, where we might be able to acquaint ourselves with a different **Coucal**, **Blue-headed**, along with **Buff-spotted Woodpecker**, **Baumann's Olive Greenbul**, and **Red-cheeked Wattle-eye**. There are many different sunbirds here, including **Johanna's Sunbird**, **Tiny Sunbird** (even smaller than most sunbirds), and **Fraser's Sunbird**. **Forest Scrub Robin**, **Rufous-winged Illadopsis**, and, importantly, **Nimba Flycatcher** are often around. **Western Bronze-naped Pigeon** and the gorgeous **Narina Trogon** will also likely entertain us.

Overnight: Nelsban Palace Hotel, Koforidua

Days 19 – 20. Atewa to Kalakpa Resource Reserve

The very large **Thick-billed Cuckoo** with its aerial display and the very small **Yellow-throated Cuckoo** (one of the many West and Central African endemics we'll be seeking on this tour) are two of the targets today, if we have not already seen them. **Puvel's Illadopsis** usually needs a bit of patience to be seen well, as does the skulking **Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat**. **Pied-winged Swallow** and **Yellow-throated Leaflove** are more conspicuous.

On one of the evenings we plan to look for the tiny **African Scops Owl** (its incessant call is one of the characteristic sounds of the African savanna at night) as well as for **Black-shouldered Nightjar**.

Overnight: Chances Hotel, Ho

Day 21. Back to Accra via Shai Hills

We plan to clean up on any missing birds in the morning, and then we usually have lunch along the lovely Volta River. Our final birding for the day, as well as for the next morning, is at Shai Hills Resource Reserve, which is good for **Piapiac**, the colorful, historic **Violet Turaco**, its very different cousin (one of the green turacos), **Guinea Turaco**, the dazzling **Yellow-crowned Gonolek**, **Blue-bellied Roller**, and, last but not least, yet another brightly-colored bird, **Double-toothed Barbet**. Two parrots are also likely to be seen, the tiny **Red-headed Lovebird** and **Senegal Parrot**. **Stone Partridge** often occurs here.

Overnight: Tulip Inn near Kotoka International Airport, Accra

Day 22. Final birding before departure from Accra

We'll still bird today until your flight leaves.

Duration: 22 days
Limit: 2 - 9
Date: 1 – 22 March 2019
Start: Accra
End: Accra

Price: US\$5915 per person sharing based on 6 – 9 participants
 US\$6597 per person sharing based on 4 – 5 participants
 UD\$7650 per person sharing based on 2 – 3 participants

Single supplement: US\$618

Price includes:

Accommodation (Please be aware that accommodation on this tour can be more basic than on most of our tours, but we generally use the best places available and stay as close to where the birds are as possible.)

Airport transfers

All meals: breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks

Mineral water

International tour leader and local guide

Park entrance fees

All guide fees

Excursion costs

Professional care and attention

Transportation in and around Ghana

Fuel

Price excludes:

Flights

Travel insurance
Ghana entry visas
Soft and alcoholic drinks
Gratuities
Gifts and other items of a personal nature