



GHANA BIRDING TOUR: UPPER GUINEA FOREST TO THE SAHEL

**15 JANUARY–03 FEBRUARY 2028
15 JANUARY–03 FEBRUARY 2029**



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

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Overview

Ghana is arguably the best country in which to begin your birding in West Africa. 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 a mammoth 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 access and birding infrastructure and information are less developed compared with Ghana, and travel for English-speakers is significantly more difficult.



*Ghana must rank as one of the best countries to find the incredible **Standard-winged Nightjar** (photo Don Cowan (past tour participant)).*

Ghana certainly has 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 in Kakum National Park, but we also look for some charismatic arid-area birds. We spend several days exploring the mosaic of open wooded savannas of the fabulous Mole National Park. This is the country’s premier wildlife reserve, and megafauna such as **African Elephant** are a regular feature (often bathing at the pools visible in front of our hotel).

We also dip our toes into the Sahel zone (and some of its specials) up on the White Volta River along the border with Burkina Faso. Both **Standard-winged Nightjar** and the incomparable

Egyptian Plover are other highly-desirable and major targets on this tour, that is likely to feature a further 400 species of birds.

Detailed Itinerary (20 days/19 nights)

Day 1. Arrival into Accra

This is your arrival day into Accra, and you can arrive at your leisure. There are no formal plans for birding today as most flights tend to arrive in the evening.

Overnight: Accra hotel



*While common, the gaudy **Yellow-crowned Gonolek** is sure to be an early tour highlight.*

Day 2. Birding Shai Hills, and transfer to the Atewa Range

Our first day birding in Ghana will be spent at the fabulous Shai Hills Resource Reserve, on the outskirts of Accra. Covering a wide mix of open, wooded habitats, it is an excellent place to begin the tour, with good views of many species likely and an easy introduction to African birding. We will familiarize ourselves with common species such as **Western Plantain-eater**, **Green Wood Hoopoe**, **African Grey Hornbill**, **White-throated Bee-eater**, **Blue-bellied Roller**, **Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird**, **Yellow-crowned Gonolek**, **Northern Puffback** and **Northern Black Flycatcher**. We should also be exposed to the first of the more special birds of the tour, with the likes of **Violet Turaco**, **Bearded Barbet**, **Senegal Parrot**, **Oriole Warbler** and **Splendid Sunbird** all possible, while this is also arguably the best place in the country to see the shy **Stone**

Partridge and Mocking Cliff Chat. All in all, we're going to see many species during the course of the day with our daily list likely to be more than 100 species.

In the afternoon, we will make the transfer to the Atewa Range, and we should arrive with some time to spare in the afternoon. Should we have enough time, we'll likely have a short walk in the farmbrush and scrubby habitat on the edge of the forest, where we'll be on the lookout for the likes of specials such as **Marsh Tchagra**, **Orange-cheeked Waxbill** and **Compact Weaver**, amongst more widespread species.

Overnight: Atewa Range hotel

Day 3. Full day hike up the Atewa Range

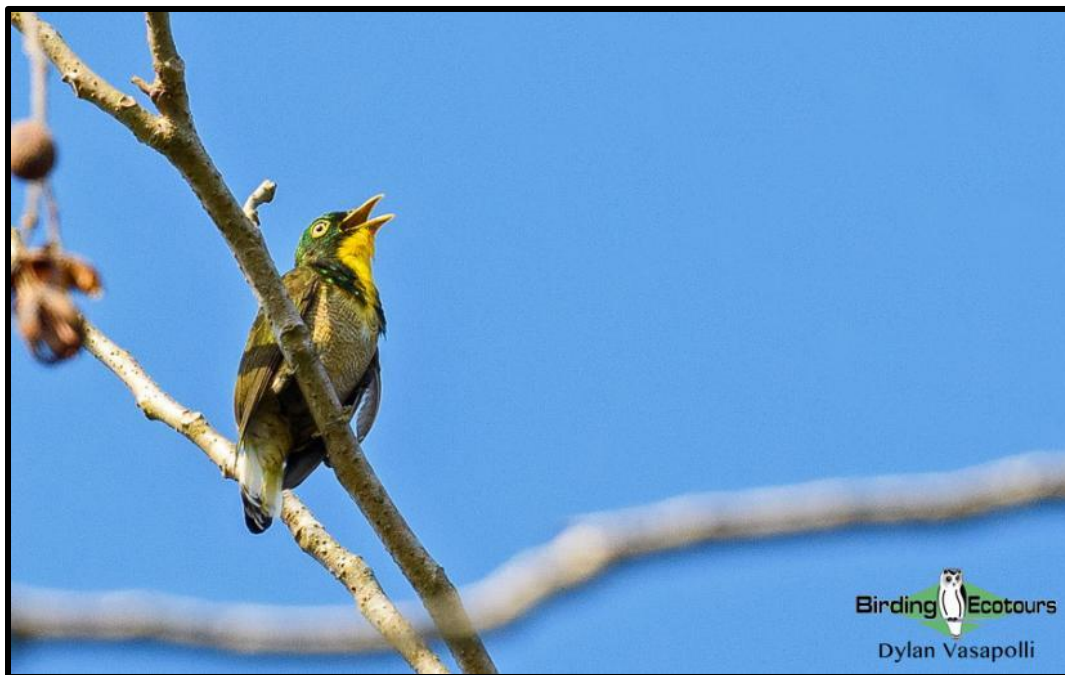
We set off early to maximize the cooler hours of the day, as we embark on a full day hike up the Atewa Range. Note that this is a challenging hike, both in terms of distance and terrain. The hike takes us through varying types of forest habitat, beginning in more open forest-edge habitat before gradually ascending into taller, more mature stands of forest. The more mature stands of forest hold such prized specials as **Nimba** and **Tessmann's Flycatchers**, and the scarce **Yellow-footed Honeyguide**. We will also seek out the stunning **Blue-moustached Bee-eater**, arguably the best site in the country for this bird, along with **Yellow-throated Cuckoo**, **Chocolate-backed Kingfisher**, **Red-cheeked Wattle-eye**, **Kemp's Longbill**, **Violet-backed Hyliota**, **Finsch's Rufous Thrush** and **White-tailed Alethe**.



*The scarce **Blue-moustached Bee-eater** occurs in the Atewa Range forests.*

Keeping an eye to the skies overhead often reveals **Cassin's Hawk-Eagle**. Forest birding can be challenging, with the forest often quiet for long periods before suddenly bursting into life as a flock moves through that leaves us scrambling to pick out all the different birds as quickly as possible. As this will be our first exposure to West African forest birding, new birds of all sorts will be seen, and we're going to encounter a wide range of other species including various tinkerbirds, greenbuls, sunbirds and flycatchers (and so much more). After a long, but exciting day hiking up and down the Atewa Range, we'll return to our hotel for some much-needed rest (and a cold beer) in the afternoon, reflecting on an exciting day of forest birding!

Overnight: Atewa Range hotel



*The diminutive **Yellow-throated Cuckoo** can play 'hide-and-seek' at times.*

Day 4. Birding back to Accra

We have a fairly flexible day, as we ultimately transfer back to Accra. Our morning will likely be spent around the always-birdy farmbrush and scrubby habitat, on the outskirts of the Atewa Range – and we may even venture into the forest edge habitat on the beginning of the trail – all depending on the birds we're still searching for. We will have the likes of **Lowland Sooty Boubou**, **Blue Malkoha**, **Black Bee-eater**, **Red-billed Helmetshrike** and **Puvel's Illadopsis** firmly on our radar. We will also have repeat opportunities for species such as the dazzling **Red-cheeked Wattle-eye** and **Kemp's Longbill** should we have missed them during our full-day hike.

We will also try to spend a bit of time in the afternoon at the Sakumono Lagoon, on the beachfront in Accra, where we're likely to add a great number of various waterbirds to our burgeoning list. The tides will determine what shorebirds/waders we see, but the possibilities are many and include several godwits, stints, sandpipers, shanks and plovers. Several terns and gulls are usually present,

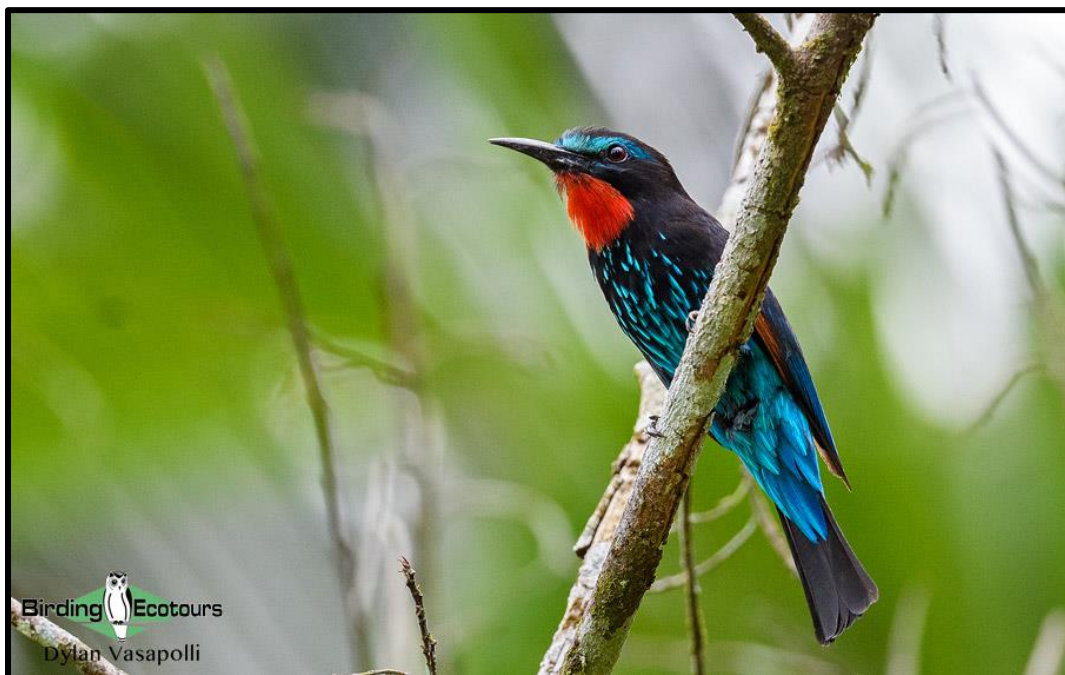
and we're also all but guaranteed to find our first **Western Reef Herons** and **Pied Kingfishers**. Content after another good day's birding, we'll make our way to our city hotel and settle in for the evening.

Overnight: Accra hotel

Day 5. Transfer to Kakum National Park, birding Winneba en-route

We have an early start to help avoid the notorious Accra traffic, as we make our way westwards to the mighty Kakum National Park, where we will spend three nights. This is a fairly long drive, but we will break it up with birding stops at the Winneba Lagoon and the surrounding Winneba Plains. The lagoon is also tidal, and much will depend on the times of the tides when we're present there, but a wide range of waterbirds are possible. The Winneba Plains support a slightly different suite of birds, and in particular we'll be on the lookout for **Moustached Grass Warbler**, **Red-winged Prinia**, **Flappet Lark**, **Copper Sunbird**, **Yellow-mantled Widowbird** and **Yellow-throated Longclaw**, amongst others. Time permitting, we're also likely to get a short spell of birding in the scrubby areas surrounding our lodge, where various weavers and greenbuls are possible, along with the above-mentioned Winneba Plains species, while we may even get our first views of the spectacular **Rosy Bee-eater** as they fly about acrobatically overhead.

Overnight: Rainforest Lodge, Jukwa (or similar)



*Many bright and colorful bee-eaters can be seen on this tour – this **Black Bee-eater** (surely the most attractive!) can be seen in most forest patches throughout the tour.*

Days 6–7. Birding the fabulous Kakum National Park

We'll spend a good amount of time birding the nearby canopy walkway of Kakum National Park, which makes seeing some of the canopy birds much easier than usual! Please be aware that it is a very steep, rocky ascent to get to the walkway (and return from it). Our time spent on the canopy walkway usually includes 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 Hyliota**, **Forest Penduline Tit**, **Tit Hylia**, the beautiful **Yellow-spotted Barbet** and the strangely named **Hairy-breasted Barbet**, **Brown-cheeked Hornbill** and the monstrous **Black-casqued Hornbill** (it's quite something to hear their heavy wingbeats), **White-headed** and **Forest Wood Hoopoes**, **Rufous-crowned Eremomela**, **Chestnut-capped Flycatcher**, **Sharpe's Apalis**, **West African Batis** and a host of other West African birds. **Ussher's Flycatcher** is often present as they hawk insects from the wires keeping the walkway upright.



Sunrise on the canopy walkway in Kakum National Park provides unparalleled views.

We'll also be sure to spend enough time birding from the forest floor in the surrounding sections of the park, and in the general area. One of the biggest stars is always **Rosy Bee-eater**, the beauty of which almost defies belief. **Blue-headed Wood Dove**, **Blue-throated Roller**, **Orange-breasted 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 **Western Long-tailed** and **Piping Hornbills**, in addition to the other species mentioned above. Two species of bristlebill (unusually good-looking greenbuls) are usually present. **White-spotted Flufftail** skulks on the forest floor but is not quite as elusive as most other flufftail species. **Melancholy**

and **Fire-bellied Woodpeckers**, 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** and **Cassin's Spinetails**, flutter over the forest, and if we're very lucky, we may see the rare **Black Spinetail** as well. The list continues, though, as we might also see **Black-winged Oriole**, **Purple-throated Cuckooshrike**, **Black-bellied Seedcracker**, **Willcocks's Honeyguide**, and plenty more. Night birding in this area can generate **Long-tailed** and **Brown Nightjars**, and both **Akun** and **Fraser's Eagle-Owls**.

Overnight: Rainforest Lodge, Jukwa (or similar)



Red-fronted Antpecker is a tough and highly desired forest dweller.

Days 8–10. Ankasa National Park – supreme West African forest birding

The still wild Ankasa National Park has the most pristine forest of the trip, and it's worthwhile for the star birds we find here. Our accommodation and the food here are also excellent. **White-breasted Guinea fowl** might put in an appearance, but this is an extremely difficult bird to pin down and we'll need a good dose of luck. **Nkulengu Rail** will get a lot of attention from us, and hopefully we'll manage to get decent visuals on this species (usually at night on their roosts). **Grey-throated Rail** and the scarce **Spot-breasted Ibis** are 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**. These waterbodies inside the forest may also produce **Hartlaub's Duck**, **African Finfoot** or **White-crested Tiger Heron**.

We have stacks of greenbuls to find, including the sought-after **Yellow-bearded** and **Western Bearded Greenbuls**, and two bristlebill species. We will also attempt to see the ultra-shy **Rufous-winged** and **Blackcap Illadopsis**, with their pleasant, liquid calls, not to mention **Black-throated Coucal**, the truly huge **Great Blue Turaco**, **Lagden's Bushshrike**, **Blue-headed** and **Dusky Crested Flycatchers**, and **Crowned Eagle**. **Red-fronted Antpecker** is always a big star should we be lucky enough to find it, as are groups of **Red-billed Dwarf Hornbills** and the displaying **Rufous-sided Broadbill**. With some dedicated searching, **Red-chested Owlet** can be seen, and the shy **Orange-breasted Forest Robin**, while common, will take much patience to see well.



Nkulengu Rail is a mega African species we'll try very hard for during our time at Ankasa.

Akun and **Fraser's Eagle-Owls** occur, and should we still need these species, we'll be sure to put some time in during evenings to track them down. We might even get really lucky while spotlighting and find something unusual like a roosting **Latham's Francolin**!

Overnight: Ankasa Reserve Lodge, Ankasa (or similar)

Day 11. Ebi Mangroves and Brenu Beach en-route to Jukwa

We'll likely spend the morning birding in the Ankasa National Park (depending on what we still need) before we start heading back eastward to Jukwa. Nearby wetland areas usually deliver further prized species including **African Pygmy Goose**, **Hartlaub's Duck**, **Allen's Gallinule**, **Orange Weaver** and both **Reichenbach's** and **Mangrove Sunbirds**. Next on the agenda are some desirable species in the Brenu Beach area, such as **Pied-winged** and **Preuss's Cliff Swallow**, the brightly colored, absolutely brilliant, rather strange **Oriole Warbler**, **Marsh Tchagra**, and

Baumann's Olive Greenbul. Depending on how we've done with the owls on the trip so far, we have further chances for the sought-after **Akun** and **Fraser's Eagle-Owls** after dinner.

Overnight: Rainforest Lodge, Jukwa (or similar)



*Night time searches during the trip will hopefully turn up the scarce **Akun Eagle-Owl** (pictured) along with others like **Fraser's Eagle-Owl**.*

Day 12. White-necked Rockfowl (Picathartes) vigil – the most anticipated day of the trip

The two species of charismatic, cave-roosting and cave-nesting rockfowl (picathartes) are both restricted to the rainforests of West and Central Africa and belong to a unique bird family, making them highly sought-after targets for birders. The site we visit is arguably the best place on earth to find **White-necked Rockfowl** – we have had a 100% success rate so far – as we patiently wait in the late afternoon for the birds to come to their roosting and nesting site deep in the forest.

While this is easily the main target for the day (and probably the trip!), it is a day that will likely feature many other birding stops as we make our way up to the Bonkro village for the rockfowl. Birding nearer Kakum National Park in the morning may yield the likes of **White-spotted Flufftail**, **Red-cheeked Wattle-eye**, **Tit Hylia**, **Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat** and **Black-bellied Seedcracker**, amongst others. A stop further along at the Pra River will also hopefully yield the 'West African race' of **Rock Pratincole**, along with **White-bibbed Swallow**. We'll arrive in the afternoon at Bonkro, and make our way to their roost towards the end of the day.

Overnight: Picathartes Guesthouse, Bonkro (or similar)



*The highly sought-after (and very shy) **Long-tailed Hawk** is difficult to pin-down. Bonkro and Bobiri Butterfly Reserves are two of the better sites to find this bird.*

Day 13. Birding Bonkro and Bobiri Butterfly Reserve

After our memorable evening watching the strange and incomparable **White-necked Rockfowl**, we have the morning to spend birding and exploring this excellent forest patch. While the rockfowls are unlikely to be seen this morning, we will focus our efforts on trying to find the other tricky species that occur. **Blue Cuckooshrike** whistles from the canopy, while **Red-billed Helmetshrike** flop lazily over clearings and, with some careful searching, both the tiny **Lemon-bellied Crombec** and scarce **Kemp's Longbills** can be coaxed from the thickets. Several forest weavers, namely the localized **Preuss's Weaver** along with **Maxwell's Black** and **Yellow-mantled Weavers** are also reliably sought here.

We will make the transfer to the sprawling town of Kumasi, where we will spend the night – but not before ensuring we get some quality time in at the local Bobiri Butterfly Reserve. While the butterfly show is good, the birding is even better here, and slowly walking along the road will be sure to net us many exciting species. Foremost of our targets is likely to be **Black Dwarf Hornbill** and the tiny **African Piculet**. This is also a great site for the mega **Long-tailed Hawk**, and it should give us further chances for the likes of **Narina Trogon**, **Forest Wood Hoopoe**, **Yellow-footed Honeyguide**, **Chestnut-capped Flycatcher** and **White-tailed Alethe**, amongst others. Difficult-to-see **Latham's Francolins** are also possible here, but seeing this shy ground-dwelling bird requires a big dose of luck.

Overnight: Kumasi hotel



*The scarce **Red-billed Helmetshrike**, like other members of the helmetshrike family, are always entertaining and well enjoyed by the group.*

Days 14–16. Mole National Park – from forests to savanna

En route to the savannas and dry woodlands of Mole National Park, we stop at Opra Forest, where the massive **Fiery-breasted Bushshrike** is a real highlight. Other possibilities include the hulking **Thick-billed Cuckoo** and tiny **Cassin's Honeybird**, along with a variety of other species. The drive to Mole takes up much of the day, and we expect to arrive during the afternoon. This superb game reserve in northern Ghana offers a whole new suite of birds, as well as elephants, crocodiles, and plenty of other wildlife.

The truly spectacular **Standard-winged Nightjar** is one of Mole's most famous avian specials and requires dedicated night drives to find. The West and Central African endemic, **Forbes's Plover**, is also sought here, sometimes alongside the scarce **Sun Lark**. If we're lucky, **White-throated Francolin**, **Abyssinian Ground Hornbill**, **Four-banded Sandgrouse** and the nomadic **Rufous-rumped Lark** can be seen in these more open areas as well.

We will be sure to spend some time birding the more mature wooded areas, both around the hotel, and further afield. Core targets in this environment will be the scarce **African Spotted Creeper** (more of a miombo woodland bird in southern Africa), **White-fronted Black Chat**, the difficult trio of **Emin's Shrike**, and **Rufous** and **Dorst's Cisticolas**, along with **Fine-spotted Woodpecker**, **White-crested Helmetshrike**, **White-breasted Cuckooshrike** and **Brown-rumped Bunting**. More common and beautiful species also abound, and we're likely to see **Red-throated Bee-eater**, **Bearded Barbet**, **Grey-headed Kingfisher**, **African Golden Oriole**, the extravagant **Long-tailed Glossy Starling**, **White-crowned Robin-Chat**, both **Pygmy** and **Beautiful Sunbirds** (with their extravagantly long tails) and a number of colorful finches

including **Red-winged Pytilia**, **Orange-cheeked** and **Lavender Waxbills**, **Black-faced** and **Bar-breasted Firefinches** and if we're lucky an **Exclamatory Paradise Whydah**.

The wetland in front of our hotel regularly brings in **African Elephants** and often has a wide range of birds, including **African Openbill** and **Senegal Thick-knee** in attendance. Raptors can also be sought in the park, and we'll be sure to keep an eye out for **Beaudouin's Snake Eagle**, **Western Banded Snake Eagle**, **White-headed Vulture**, **Bateleur** and the dry-country specialist, **Grasshopper Buzzard**. Our night time searches for **Standard-winged Nightjar** are likely to produce other species, and in particular, we'll keep an eye out for **African Scops** and **Northern White-faced Owls** and **Greyish Eagle-Owl**, along with **Long-tailed Nightjar**.

Overnight: Mole Motel, (or similar) with a view over Mole National Park's savanna



Forbes's Plover is a special of equatorial West Africa, occurring on the dry plains in Mole.

Day 17. Transfer to Bolgatanga, via Tongo Hills

After two full days, and a final morning today, of safari drives and walks in Mole National Park, we'll bid farewell to this fine reserve, and journey right the way to the Burkina Faso border in the far north of the country. While we have a fair drive ahead, there'll be time for birding stops, with targets in the increasingly arid vegetation including **Red-necked Falcon**, the good-looking **Fox Kestrel**, the well-named **Rock-loving Cisticola**, **Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark**, striking **Mocking Cliff Chat** and **Gosling's Bunting**.

Overnight: Bolgatanga hotel

Day 18. Egyptian Plover on the White Volta River

We make an excursion right to the northern border of the country, where we look for what is usually regarded as another of the top birds of our Ghana birding tour – the spectacularly plumaged Sahelian special, **Egyptian Plover**. The dry and arid habitats up here are 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**, **African Silverbill**, the aptly named **Cut-throat Finch**, **White-rumped Seedeater** etc. However, the stunning **Abyssinian Roller**, with its spectacular tail streamers and bright colors, and the even more dazzling **Northern Carmine Bee-eater** are generally the most admired. **Black-headed Lapwing** and **Four-banded Sandgrouse** are usually very popular, though, and if we're lucky, we may also find **Greater Painted-snipe**, **African Green Bee-eater** and **Yellow Penduline Tit**, amongst many more.

Overnight: Bolgatanga hotel



Egyptian Plovers are usually present on the White Volta River in the north of the country. This is another big attraction for birders and make this one of the most desired species on the trip.

Day 19. Flight to Accra

We have a final morning of birding available to us in the Bolgatanga area – searching for any species we may still need (which might include **African Green Bee-eater**), before we make the drive to Tamale. From Tamale, we will catch a domestic flight back to Accra in the afternoon (cutting out an otherwise long and arduous two-day drive).

Once back in Accra, we'll settle in at our comfortable hotel, and reminisce about the good times and excellent birds we'll have found.

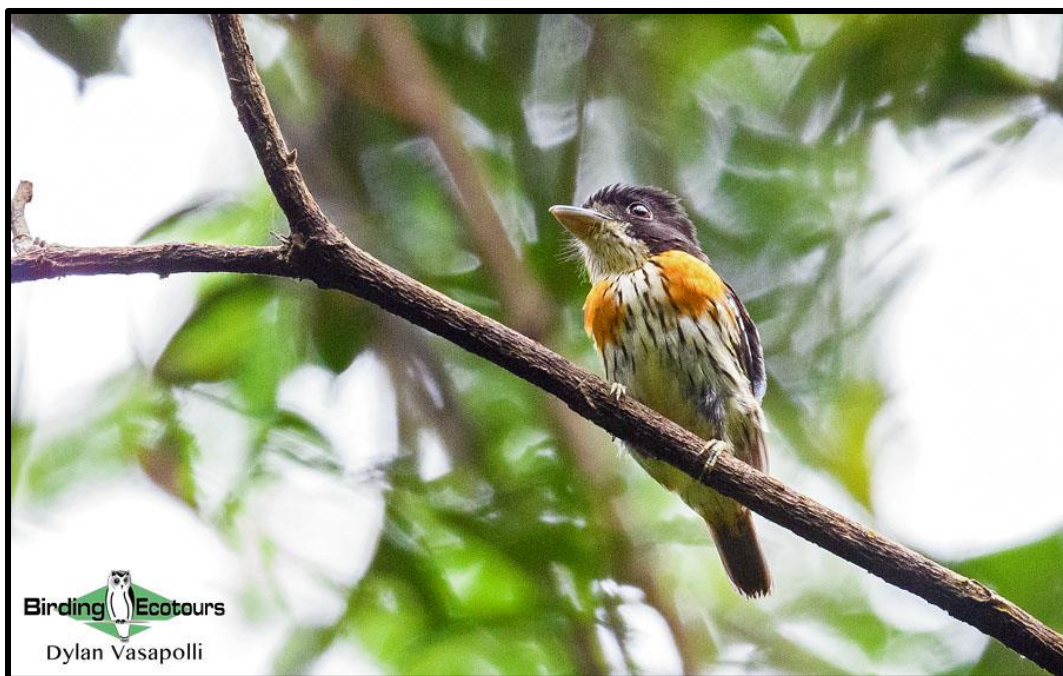
Overnight: Accra hotel

Day 20. Departure from Accra

The day is set aside for your departure, and you are welcome to depart at your leisure. The tour officially ends after breakfast with no birding activity included.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually only 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. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling or other factors.



*Watching a **Rufous-sided Broadbill** displaying is a highlight in the forests of Ghana. This is one of many sought-after species we'll be searching for on this exciting and comprehensive Ghana birding tour.*

Tour Details

Duration:	20 days
Group size:	5–8
Dates:	15 January–03 February 2028 15 January–03 February 2029
Start:	Accra
End:	Accra
Price:	US\$ 8,600 per person sharing (2028) US\$ 9,250 per person sharing (2029)
Single supplement:	US\$ 1,200 (2028) US\$ 1,320 (2029)

Price includes:

All 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)

Meals (from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 20)

Unlimited bottled water

Expert tour leader and local guides

All entrance and conservation fees

All ground transport

Airport pick-up and drop-off (on arrival and departure days only)

Domestic flight required within tour (Tamale to Accra)

Price excludes:

International flights (to/from Accra)

Visas

Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access etc.

Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding excursions

Soft/alcoholic drinks

Personal travel and medical insurance

Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))