



BIRDING TOUR GHANA: UPPER GUINEA FOREST TO THE SAHEL

29 FEBRUARY – 19 MARCH 2024

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

Ghana is easily the ‘best’ country in which to start one’s West African birding career. 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 staged-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 gen is lacking compared with Ghana, and travel for English-speakers is significantly more difficult.

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 in Kakum National Park, but we also look for some charismatic arid-area birds. We ensure we have several days to spend exploring the mosaic of open wooded savannas of the fabulous Mole National Park. This is the country’s premier wildlife reserve, and megafauna like 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 Burkino 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.



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

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

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 more open wooded habitats, this is an excellent place to begin the tour as we're likely to get good views of the many birds in this more open environment, allowing you to settle into the African birding. We will familiarize ourselves with common species such as **Western Plantain-eater**, **Green Wood Hoopoe**, **African Grey Hornbill**, **White-throated Bee-eater**, **Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird**, **Yellow-crowned Gonolek**, **Northern Puffback**, **Glossy-backed Drongo** 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 **White-crowned 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.



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

In the afternoon, we will make the transfer to the Atewa Range, and it should see us arriving with 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 **Orange-cheeked Waxbill** and **Compact Weaver**, amongst more widespread species.

Overnight: Linda Dor hotel (or similar), Atewa Range

Day 3. Full day hike up the Atewa Range

We set off early to maximise 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 distance covered and terrain. This hike takes us through varying degrees of forest habitat; first we start off with more open, forest edge habitat, before we gradually ascend into much taller and 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**. The general nature of forest birding is difficult, with the forest often quiet for long periods of time, before bursting to life with a flock moving 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: Linda Dor hotel (or similar), Atewa Range

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 also have repeat opportunities for the likes of the dazzling **Red-cheeked Wattle-eye** and **Kemp's Longbill**, should we have missed these species on 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 birding, we'll make our way to our city hotel and settle in for the evening.

Overnight: Erata Hotel, Accra

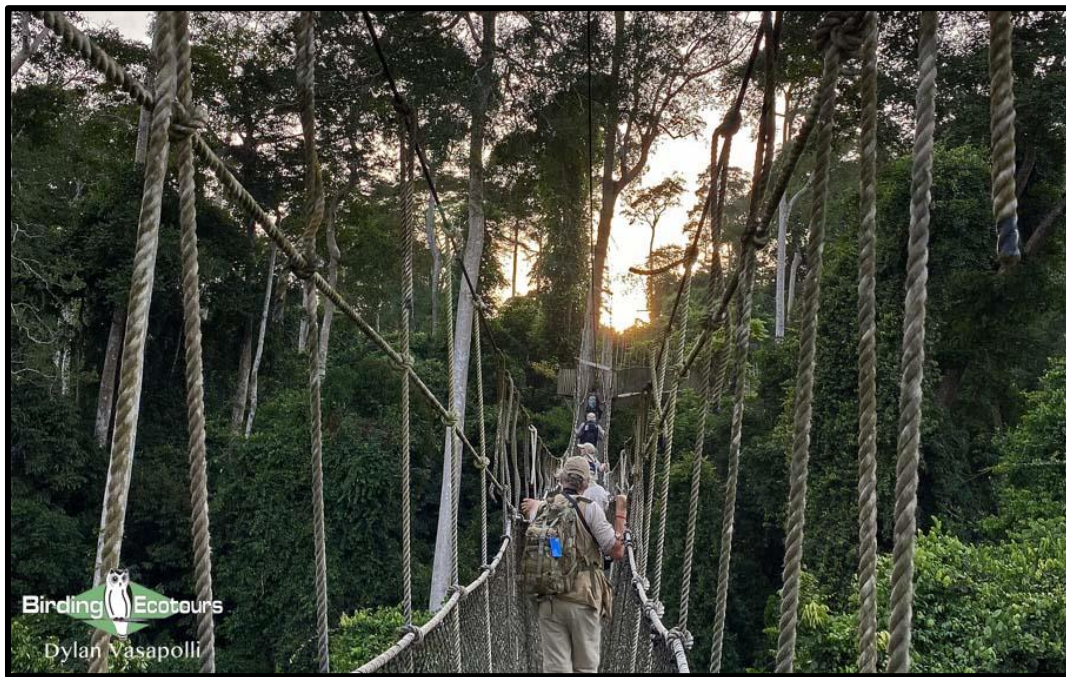


*Many bright and colorful bee-eaters can be seen on this tour – this **Black Bee-eater** (surely the most attractive!) can be seen in most forest patches throughout the tour.*

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

We have an early start to best try and negate 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



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

Days 6 – 7. Birding the fabulous Kakum National Park

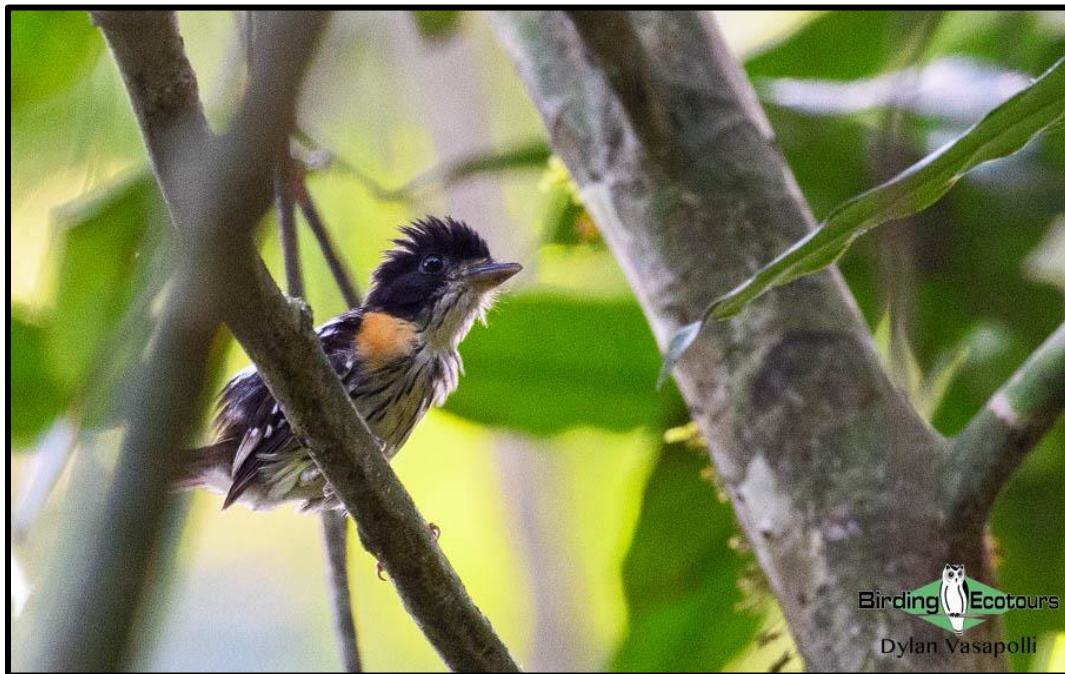
We'll spend a good amount of time birding the nearby canopy walkway of Kakum National Park, which makes seeing some of the canopy birds much easier than usual! Please be aware that it is a very steep, rocky ascent to get to the walkway. Our time spent on the canopy walkway usually includes the likes 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 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**, **Sharpe's Apalis**, **West African Batis** and a host of other tantalizing West African birds. **Ussher's Flycatcher** are always present as they hawk insects from the wires keeping the walkway upright.

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**, **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 **White-crested** 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 **Purple-throated Cuckooshrike**, **Forest Penduline Tit**, **Tit Hylia**, **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



*Watching a **Rufous-sided Broadbill** displaying is a highlight in the forests of Ghana.*



*Night time searches will hopefully turn up the scarce **Akun** and **Fraser's** (pictured) **Eagle-Owls**.*

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

The still very wild Ankasa National Park easily has 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 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**. 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**, **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** is also sometimes seen, and the shy **Forest Robin**, while common, will take much patience to see well. **Akun** and **Fraser's Eagle-Owls** occur, and should we still need these species, we'll be sure to put a bit of time in evenings to track them down.

Overnight: Ankasa Reserve Lodge, Ankasa



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

Day 11. Ebi Mangroves and Brenu Beach en-route to Kakum National Park

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 our familiar lodge on the outskirts of the Kakum National Park from a few days ago. 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 **Preuss's Cliff Swallow**, the brightly colored, absolutely brilliant, rather strange **Oriole Warbler**, **Marsh Tchagra**, and **Baumann's Olive Greenbul**.

Overnight: Rainforest Lodge, Jukwa

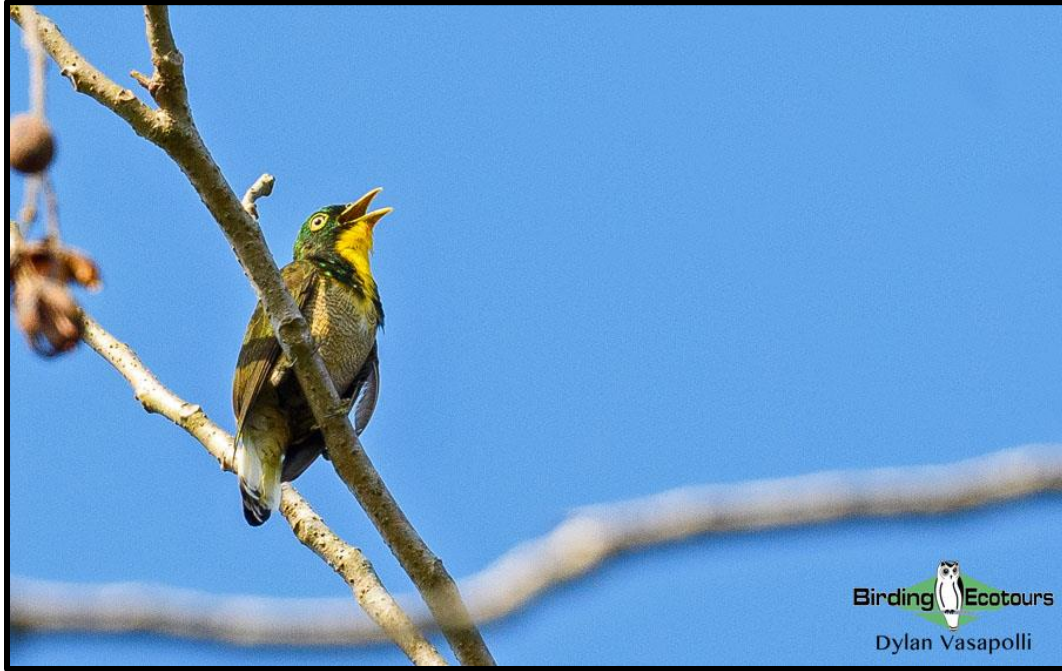
Day 12. White-necked Rockfowl (*Picathartes*) vigil – *The most anticipated day of the trip*

The two species of charismatic, cave-roosting, and cave-nesting rockfowl (*picathartes*) are both 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 – 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 many others. A stop further along at the Pra River will also hopefully yield the unique 'West African race' of **Rock Pratincole**, along with **White-bibbed Swallow**.

Overnight: Picarthartes Guesthouse, Bonkro, in the Ashanti region



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

Day 13. Birding Bonkro and Bobiri Butterfly Reserve

Content from our previous 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. The forest birding generally is excellent, and this site serves as an excellent backup for many species that are becoming trickier elsewhere. 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**, **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: Royal Basin Resort, Kumasi



Black Dwarf Hornbill is a scarce resident in the Bobiri Butterfly Reserve.

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

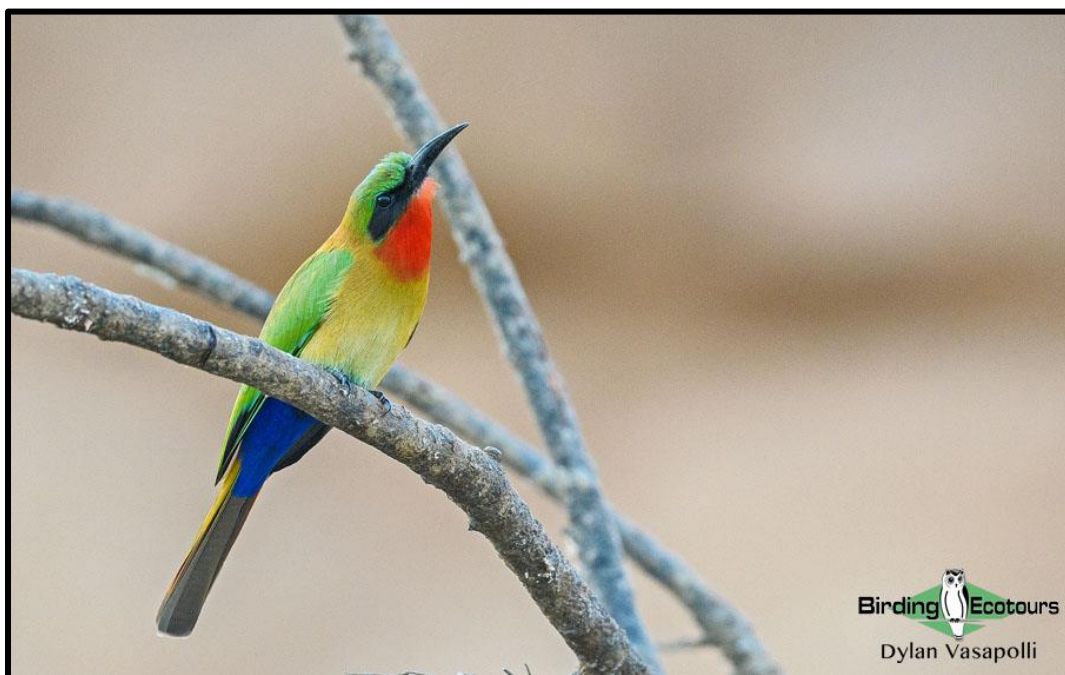
En route to the savanna and dry woodlands of Mole National Park, a brilliant game reserve in the north of the country that has a whole new suite of birds awaiting us along with elephant, crocodiles, and a lot of other good animals, we stop at Opra Forest. Here the massive **Fiery-breasted Bushshrike** is a real highlight. We might see the hulking **Thick-billed Cuckoo** or the tiny **Cassin's Honeybird**, along with several other species. This is a long drive, and will take the bulk of the day, and we anticipate rolling into Mole during the afternoon.

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 of our targets in this environment will be the scarce **African Spotted Creeper** (more of a miombo woodland bird in southern Africa), **White-fronted Black Chat**, difficult **Rufous** and **Dorst's Cisticolas**, **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**.



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



Delightful Red-throated Bee-eaters are abundant in Mole National Park.

The wetland in front of our hotel regularly brings in **African Elephants** (along with other mammals including **Roan Antelope**), and often has a wide range of birds, including **African Openbill** and **Senegal Thick-knee** in attendance. Many raptors can also be sought in the park, and

we'll be sure to keep an eye out for **Beaudouin's Snake Eagle**, **White-headed Vulture**, **Bateleur** and the dry-country specialist, **Grasshopper Buzzard**. Our night time searches for **Standard-winged Nightjar** are also likely to produce other night birds, 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, with a view over Mole National Park's savanna

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, we'll have enough time for some birding stops, and targets as the vegetation becomes increasingly arid, include **Red-necked Falcon**, the good-looking **Fox Kestrel**, the nicely named **Rock-loving Cisticola**, **Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark**, striking **White-crowned Cliff Chat** and **Gosling's Bunting**.

Overnight: Blue Sky Hotel, Bolgatanga



***Egyptian Plovers** are usually present on the White Volta River in the north of the country – our main reason for trekking up to the north.*

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 habitat up here 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**, **African Silverbill**, the aptly named **Cut-throat Finch**, **White-rumped Seedeater** 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, and if we're lucky, we may also find **Greater Painted-snipe**, **African Green Bee-eater** and the incredibly localized **Black-backed Cisticola**, amongst many more.

Overnight: Blue Sky Hotel, Bolgatanga

Day 19. Flight to Accra

We have a final morning of birding available to us in the Bolgatanga area – where we can visit some of the dry scrub areas, searching for any possible species we may still be needing (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), following which we'll settle in at our comfortable hotel, and reminisce about the good times, and excellent birds we'll have found along our comprehensive tour to this country.

Overnight: Erata Hotel, Accra



Preuss's Cliff Swallow are restricted to equatorial West Africa, and will feature on this tour.

Day 20. Departure from Accra

The day is set aside for your departure, and you are welcome to depart at your leisure. Morning birding can be arranged for those departing later in the evening, but kindly note that the tour officially ends after breakfast.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary 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. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration:	20 days
Limit:	4 - 9
Dates:	29 February – 19 March 2024 28 February – 19 March 2025
Start:	Accra
End:	Accra
Price:	US\$7,650 per person sharing based on 4 – 9 participants (2024) US\$8,490 per person sharing based on 4 – 9 participants (2025)
Single supplement:	US\$1,050 (2024) US\$1,165 (2025)

Price includes:

Accommodation as listed (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 from lunch on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 20

Mineral water

International tour leader and local guide

Park entrance fees

All guide fees

Excursion costs

Transportation and fuel in and around Ghana

Domestic flight cost (Tamale – Accra)

Price excludes:

International flights to/from Accra

Travel insurance

Ghana entry visas

Soft and alcoholic drinks

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

Gifts and other items of a personal nature