

Ghana



17th to 25th February, 2016



Thursday 18 th	Nasia Bridge Bridge over the White Volta	10.15 – 11.00 16.00 – 18.00
Friday 19 th	Tono Dam	7.00 – 11.00 16.15 – 18.00
Saturday 20 th	Tongo Hills Nasia Bridge Bridge over the Volta, Yiabie Mole	6.45 – 9.10 10.30 – 11.00 14.30 – 15.00 16.50 – 19.15
Sunday 21 st	Mole	6.45 – 11.00 16.15 – 19.15
Monday 22 nd	Mole	6.45 – 10.30 15.30 – 19.15
Tuesday 23 rd	Mole	6.30 – 10.00
Wednesday 24 th	Opuro Forest Picathartes site	8.00 – 10.45 16.15 – 19.00
Thursday 25 th	Shai Hills	7.00 – 10.00

NORTHERN GHANA

17th to 25th February, 2016

Introduction

We had visited Ghana 2 years previously, covering the "coastal strip" of the Gold Coast and part of the Ashanti region for a week. The birding and the experience of the country in general were superb, so we decided on another week back in the country, this time focusing on the North. Much of the birding in the South is forest birding, at locations such as Kakum and Bobiri, although it is not quite as difficult or time consuming as some forest birding elsewhere in the world. The habitat in the North offers more open bush, with a chance to see a different mix of species, and also many more mammals than further down. Some, if not many, groups take more time and cover both areas in one. This would give a great blend of species and habitats, as well as an impressive 300-400 list, but the downside is the distance that would often need to be covered. This would in effect traverse the whole of the country, from the coast to the far North-eastern birder with Burkina Faso.



Many of the roads are in good condition, although you need to expect a multitude of potholes, and very rough tracks in some places. The far North-east, when based at Bolgatanga for sites such as Tono Dam are good examples of this, and reaching them on a morning or late afternoon can take an hour or two.

As last time, we employed the services of Kalu Afasi (or the World Famous Kalu as we renamed him following his appearance in the Big Year). We found him previously on the Birdingpaltours website (birdingpaltours.com), and he was excellent. He organised everything including vehicle, driver, accommodation, food, drink, park fees, etc. No Ghanaian Cedis are necessary, apart from the odd tip you get tripped on in local washrooms, etc). Apart from when he is leading a tour, which is understandable, he is good at replying to emails, and will adjust the itinerary to both suit yourselves, and also the prevailing conditions and presence of the birds. For our tour, he was in the Northern area for a few days beforehand, and had also scouted out new sites some months previously. Previously we had been driven round in an open back Nissan truck 4x4 with 4



seats, but had found our rear seats too confining for longer drives, so he listened and hired a 7 seater van this time. Loads of room! With the concentration on the North, the best plan was to land at Accra (early evening for us), kip there overnight, and then take an internal flight to Tamale, the main airport for the locations we were to cover. Two airlines are available – Starbow and South African Airways. Both seem to run a morning service, so we plumped for Starbow, booking in ourselves on their website from the UK, and paying the princely sum of £60 each for a 7am flight landing at 8.10am. Straight out of the wonderful little airport, into the awaiting van with Kalu and Jonathan the driver, and we were roadside birding on the way to our first accommodation by morning. No return journey was booked – we made our way down via birding sites through the week.



Kalu Afasi, your local Birdingpal guide (from Birdingpaltours website)

Kalu Afasi is a highly experienced tour guide and has led tours for many companies in Ghana. His love of birds and his identification skills of the birds of West African are exceptional, as is his knowledge of where to find them.

Kalu was taught the science and art of birdwatching by a Danish birdwatcher by name Jens Byskov. After receiving his first lesson from Jens, Kalu attached himself to David Daramani, who himself has birded in Ghana for close to 40 years. His youthfulness and sense of humour makes him the best.

kalu_afasi@yahoo.com

Accommodation

The two main places we stayed were Bolgatanga in the North, and within Mole National Park. Other hotels were purely functional, but Kalu tries to arrange for air conditioning and food on site. The Accra hotel we used for the first and last nights had the added convenience of WiFi and a shower which had a decent force and hot water.

Hotel Ex-Tee Crystal, Bolgatanga



Bolgatanga seems to be the optimum place to stay for the north-easternmost sites, since the border with Burkina Faso isn't much further. It is set just back from the main road through the town, with a little open land surrounding it, although there is only limited bird life here. The rooms are certainly a step up from basic, with electricity sockets in each, and free wifi. We also had a functioning air conditioning unit which was more than workable. We were promised request breakfast to go for 6am both mornings, and while the pack containing bacon, veg, boiled egg and

bread was more than adequate, it predictably came well after 6.

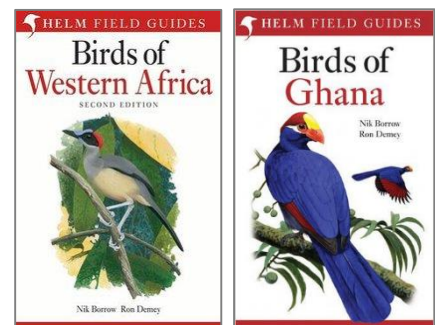
Mole Hotel



Up until recently, this was probably the only option for accommodation at Mole – Kalu had even had a phone call the day before checking if we were still coming, presumably in case they had more late bookings. The location in the park is excellent, situated high above part of the park and looking down on a large pool (usually occupied by Elephant, Kob, and Baboons) surrounded by the typical bush of the park. The reception and restaurant sit next to a pool, but this is backed by the edge of the bush and trees leading down the hill – some good birds were found here during our post lunch breaks. The rooms are again comfortable, with reasonable air conditioning. The water was probably more off than on, hence the extra buckets of clean water on standby in the bathroom, with the shower no more than a trickle. No WiFi this time though. While there is an electric fence around the front car park and reception, this doesn't enclose the whole of the hotel, so no surprise at the through traffic of Baboons, Green Monkeys, Wart-hogs, and the occasional Bushbuck. The food is okay here, but the two downsides are the cost (£10 for a pizza) and the amount of time it takes to come. A useful tip is to order the food before going out on a trip. That being said the portions are huge – we found a pizza was enough for 2 on an evening, and sharing sandwiches on a lunchtime also good planning.

ID Guides

I have had the Birds of Western Africa by Borrow and Demey (Helm field guides) for some time, and used this. It needs sifting through for the likely species, since it by definition covers a large area. The map areas for each bird concerning their distribution in Ghana is thus small, and while usually quite accurate, can't always be totally relied on accuracy when compiling a list of likely birds. A much better bet is the Helm Guide to the Birds of Ghana, which is much more accurate having maps dedicated to the country, and slightly more embellished descriptions.



Tips

- The plugs for electricity are the UK 3 pin type
- Biting insects weren't too much of a problem in the far North, and little more of a nuisance in the South. The Mole sweat bees are a different matter. They come out to pester late afternoon and can be persistent around the head. They don't sting but they, along with other attendant flies etc, are a nuisance. 50% deet seemed to keep them at bay
- Drinking water should be by the bottle, especially when the first tap we used offered brown coloured liquid. Kalu supplied plenty of this
- We did our birding up to about 11am and started again 4pm plus. During other parts of the day, it was very hot (low 30'sC) and the birds didn't come out to play
- Police checks are a nuisance – get used to them because they are a plague. Although they aren't usually checking for our type of vehicle, carrying your passport is useful (we were asked once)

Diary

Day 1 - Thursday 18th

Nasia Bridge

After departing the small but functional Tamale airport, and not realising that the first bird we saw from the tarmac was a Grey Woodpecker, we made our way North along a more than reasonable road for an hour or so. Our first birding proper was parked up next to a bridge overlooking a small lagoon, fringed by reeds, and with typical bush as a backdrop. This was to the regular noise of passing traffic, some of which find it normal to further spoil the peace by using their not too unimpressive horns. The earlier temperature of 24°C, albeit at 8am getting off the plane, was increasing, but not too much to be uncomfortable. The task here was to keep an eye on the goings on around the water and reedbeds, and also spend a little more time searching through the undergrowth and bushes nearer to the bridge.

The former was the easier task of the two, since the Marsh Harriers coursing around, along with Grasshopper Buzzards and Black-winged Kite, were simple quarries. African Jacanas on the water, and a fly through Green Sandpiper were similarly easy fare. More satisfaction came from closer to. Early Chestnut-backed Sparrow Lark and bunches of Yellow-fronted Canary and Blue-cheeked Cordon Bleu prefaced a static Grasshopper Buzzard and Abyssinian Rollers on the wires.



Wire-tailed Swallows plied to and fro under the bridge structure, and a group of nondescript out of breeding plumaged weavers/wydahs contained a Grey-headed Sparrow. Perhaps the major prize was a skulking African Moustached Warbler, initially behaving in a by the book skulking manor, then to defy all odds and feed in the open for quite some time. This was one of the species we had had a hopeful eye on for some time. Perhaps only because it is the first warbler in the guide books, or even that it is one of the few in the family that show some distinctive markings, the real bird is a lot more stunning than the books would suggest, with rich rufous panels on the body, and well marked head patterns. Beautiful Sunbird and a pair of Senegal Eremomelas fed actively in the larger bushes next to the road itself.



Bridge over the River Volte

After checking into our gaff for the next two nights – the Ex-tee Crystal at Bolgatanga – we had lunch (our first full meal excluding airline offerings) since the night before leaving the UK, unpacked of sorts, and set off for our afternoon excursion. This was to be a drive of one and a half hours to where the main road crosses the River Volte. The distance isn't particularly long, but some of the roads are not exactly up to standard, many of which were the better surface is actually off the tarmac. Surprisingly, only one minor stop was made, when after an hour of driving a trio of Yellow-billed Oxpeckers were spotted hanging on to the back of a cow. The pursuit of the quarry was made all the more difficult by the shyness of the bovine hosts which tried to keep their distance from us.



Once at the bridge, we spent two hours not moving a great distance – not even leaving the span of the bridge in fact. The river is quite wide even here, and there was the usual accompaniment of engines from motor scooters to lorries and buses. Why do they think it's acceptable or friendly to constantly blow horns when passing when we are obviously trying to get some peace and quiet while seeking out birds? This didn't detract from the star attractions of the site – Egyptian Plovers. There are one or two locations around here for these enigmatic birds, and we were lucky enough to pick up two flying over the river to land just below the bridge almost immediately. I counted 4, although there were also claims for a fifth bird. Whatever the actual number, they didn't disappoint, mainly being together on the sandy banks below the bridge, and often plying to and fro between banks on opposite sides of the river. A surprise addition while scanning through a group of Senegal Thick-knees was a lone African Skimmer further on down the same sand spit. Every now and again it would stretch the wings and head for the water, but still didn't show off its skimming skills. On the opposite side of the bank to a group of Long-tailed Glossy Starlings, a couple of Purple & single Lesser Blue-eared Glossies were up and down from the trees. Apart from the usual Yellow-billed Kites, singles of Dark Chanting Goshawk and Grey Kestrel put in appearances, with a group of 4 Senegal Parrots over in the distance. As the afternoon wore on, it was obvious that a sizeable collection of weavers/wydahs were amassing in the riverside bushes below. Unfortunately, breeding plumage hadn't yet emerged to save our identification woes, but they seemed to be mainly Village Weavers and Pin-tailed Wydahs. A skulking Yellow-crowned Gonolek was more obvious. We left the bridge with the light starting to fade, but only 5 minutes down the road was the opportunity to get close to a colony of White-billed Buffalo Weavers which were forming the colony in one of the villages. The dying light indicated a good time to catch them returning to the



trees of choice, almost directly above a busy bus stop and most definitely next to the noisy road.

Day 2 - Friday, 19th

Tono Dam (morning)

This morning's trek over potholed and bumpy roads (only part of the way to be fair) for an hour or so was to Tono Dam. The visualisation was of exactly that – an expanse of water and some bush birding around the water's edges. The reality was entirely different, since although the water was briefly scanned fruitlessly, the main plan here is to work the bush area down the bank from the reservoir walls. The bush and semi savannah here is very inviting, since the vegetation isn't too dense, leading to more accessible views of the birds. The counter to this is the temperature, starting very comfortably at around 20°C early on, but hitting the 30°C mark remarkably quickly, which takes it out on you after 4 hours. The reward is a constant supply of birds on tap.

As usual, there are specialities here that can be found. I was a bit blasé about finding a couple of Chestnut-bellied Starlings until Kalu mentioned that they were THE bird to see in the area. I was also impressed by the overall appearance of Speckle-fronted Weavers, which certainly are one of those birds better seen in real life than in the book, when again we were informed these were a target bird for here. However, we also got our own back on Kalu for "specialities". We picked out a Green Bee-eater which shortly flew off, and discovered he hadn't seen one before (it doesn't actually appear in the Ghana field guide). A little bit of searching relocated the bird (two as it turned out), and images were taken for the relevant birding authorities here. Many more "expected" birds were turned up throughout the 4 hour walk. Initially, we were bombarded with numerous mixed finch type flocks, which mainly consisted of non breeding plumaged Pin-tailed WYdahs, Red-cheeked Cordon-Bleu, and Vitelline Masked Weaver. Sorting through did pick out Black-rumped Waxbill, and, not associated with the flocks, Black-backed Cisticola (& probable Dorst's), Senegal Batis and Green-backed Cameroptera. The Hornbill seen most here is Red-billed, with the regular sound of calling Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird (the Viellot's Barbets seen were silent). Plenty of Sunbirds were around, although restricted to the trio of Scarlet-chested, Pygmy & Beautiful. Towards the end of the walk, Kalu managed to lure in a Red-winged Warbler.



Tono Dam (afternoon)

After a welcome lunchtime/early afternoon siesta, where some of our lives had been sapped by the hot morning excursion, we landed back again at the dam area in the much more pleasant late afternoon balm. This time we covered the bush a bit further along from that in the morning, completing a small semi circle in two hours. This first passed a very small pool, inhabited by a few Cattle Egrets, Senegal Thick-knees, and a single African Jacana. We then skirted the edge of one of the concrete run off ditches full of water from the reservoir, and completed by tramping through some small farmer's fields bounded by trees.

Apart from the small finch flocks which again abounded, first interest was of the *Cisticola* variety. What seemed like an easy Zitting confounded a little by the light colour on the tail, but was that very species. After fun with Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, a pair of Little Bee-eaters, and a handful of Black-rumped Waxbills, a group of 6 or so Singing Cisticolas were having a real party with themselves in a small clearing. A pair of Viellot's Barbets and a Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird ushered us closer to the main track. After spotting a couple of Bearded Barbets flying over here and into the trees, African Thrushes joined in the commotion, the culprit being a Greyish Eagle Owl, which unfortunately only showed as a shape flying from us. The closing event of the evening was provided by African Paradise Flycatcher. The first of two was a standard dark male, which spent some time circling us in the open area of a small holding. A notch up in the fading light was a stunning long tailed white male, which repeated the antics of its darker brethren by constantly flying around a second clearing. This bird was a bit more accommodating by often perching in less concealed branches. Appropriately, a Yellow-winged Bat was located hanging from a branch as the last light departed the scene.

Day 3 - Saturday 20th

Tongo Hills



The first stop of the day, and on the way to Mole, was Tongo Hills. Two welcome surprises were that it was only a short hop from the hotel, which we had just checked out of, and also on relatively even roads. The small area is bisected by a local road well used by the local villagers, but we covered what in effect was a very small area just off the road. The habitat here is very slightly elevated rocky terrain, with small hills alongside. There looks to have been some collecting of the rocks in the past, judging by the drill marks on some of the larger split ones. Specialities here are unsurprisingly the rock loving birds, as evidenced by the numerous Cinammon-breasted Rock Buntings which are seemingly everywhere, while remaining quite skittish and not too approachable. The now expected finch flocks were also almost constant, but sifting through the common Cordon-bleus, Pin-tailed Wydahs, Black-rumped Waxbills and Red-billed Firefinches did uncover Lavender Waxbill, Village Indigobird, Bar-breasted Firefinch, and one or two Bush Petronias overhead. Two of the birds which this location is good for are Fox Kestrel and Rock-loving *Cisticola*. The latter came first, with a single bird quietly making its way along the ground in the shade of the rocks. The Fox Kestrel landed in a bush favoured by other birds – I had been creeping closer to a pair of Bearded Barbets in it when the falcon landed alongside. It unfortunately didn't seek out a favoured perch on the nearby rocks, but was joined in the air by a further two later. The same tree then hosted a Western Grey Plantain-eater for quite some time, and while here, a pair of Rock-loving *Cisticolas* had a sing off in front of us, with the backdrop of a Klaas's Cuckoo just beyond.

Nasia Bridge

On the first stage of the journey to Mole, we stopped off again for a shorter time at Nasia Bridge, overlooking the smallish lagoon and reedbed. The usual crowd was here again – Abyssinian Rollers on the wires, Marsh Harrier, at least 6 Grasshopper Buzzards, and the small finch flock. This time the aforementioned flock also contained a couple of African Silverbills, a new addition to the trip. On the opposite side of the road, a Winding Cisticola obliged by perching just in front of the bridge for a short time. Back to the other side, and only a short wait relocated the African Moustached Warbler again, just as secretive this time, but with what looked like a second bird in tow. While waiting for it to show better (didn't happen!) a Singing Cisticola returned to the bush just in front a few times, albeit finding comfort within the branches rather than on the outer ones.



Bridge over the White Volta near Yiabie



After a filling lunch in Tamale, we got back on the road again and turned off East after crossing the River Volta here. We thought we were going to do some birding along the banks of the river, but were wrong. First order of business, however, was to tick off 2 overflying Northern Carmine Bee-eaters, another of those mythical birds from my youth which was a lifetime dream. After they had gone, we continued down the dirt track for a short way, and parked next to a very small pool. Kalu had been here a couple of days ago, and sadly said it

was alive with small birds then, but admitted, while we were under the baking heat, that this didn't seem to be the case anymore. Spirits lifted when we found a couple of Chestnut-backed Sparrow Larks, and then Winding Cisticola. Then the fun started, with small collections of finches breaking from what seemed nowhere – in truth hidden amongst the cut vegetation stems. After the expected Cordon-bleu, a group of Orange-bellied Waxbills included a couple of stunning males. Quailfinch were much harder to pin down, breaking at the last second from unseen hiding places, until a pair were pinned down happily squatting under a grass tussock. The almost regular Grasshopper Buzzard put in an appearance, along with Grey Kestrel, and a Malachite Kingfisher spent a short time in the centre of the pool.

Mole

We finally reached Mole National Park by late afternoon, and rather than enter the gates, we diverted just before and took a short track to an old disused airfield. It was here, and in fact on immediately leaving the car, that we were introduced to the dark experience that is the Sweat Bee. Mole is well known for these, since they have a tendency to flit around you in some numbers – no stings, just annoyance. Kalu and Jonathan the driver were not at ease with these, while we stuck on a bit of insect repellent which certainly helped, although the larger flies were more of a nuisance. We walked the length of the old runway, where the birding was slow. Highlights were to be saved until the light started to go later

on. Stone Partridge across the entrance track (confounding Kalu's efforts to lure out White-throated Francolin!) and Senegal Parrots over were the preface to a surprise appearance – a pair of Grey-headed Bristlebills in a nearby tree, uttering a very distinctive call. The main reason for being here at this time was to search for Standard-winged Nightjar. They have been known to make their entrance in full light, but we were made to wait until well past dusk for the first of two to land a stone's throw away. The second bird was located by driving a short way down the airfield – the bird didn't seem to mind being the centre of attention in the vehicle headlights.



Day 4 - Sunday 21st

Mole

First morning in Mole NP, and the first order of the day was to return to the disused airstrip to search for White-throated Francolin again. Kalu seemed to have a thing about finding these birds, constantly trying to lure them out – we only assume they are a speciality that tour groups aim for, but weren't hugely personally disappointed when we failed to find them again. Too many other good birds to see.

The morning was spent parking up here and there in the bush, looking for known water holes where the birds should be concentrated. While the heat of the morning wasn't as high as expected, and no real evidence of annoying flies, there had apparently been a lot less rain than would normally fall over the last few months, leaving the bush very dry and parched, and the water courses drained. This made the birding a little harder work, with some good birds spaced out. The bush itself wasn't too difficult to walk through, since it wasn't too dense, although every now and again we would come across very rough areas where the elephants had trodden in mud, leaving large holes.



First stop was outstanding, however. We walked a little way up the track, picking up the first of many Red-throated Bee-eaters, with Greater Honeyguide and Golden-tailed Woodpecker overhead. A sharp turn to the left and only a few metres from the road was a

standing pool, likely to be part of a stream in wetter days, but now a magnet of around 20 metres long by 2 metres, and surrounded by bushes. We must have spent around 45 minutes sat at the open end watching the plethora of birds making their way down to drink, and they generally weren't too perturbed by our presence. Initially drawn in by the groups of small finches, the more common Red-billed Firefinches and Cordon Bleus were found to also contain Red-winged Pytilia, and Orange-cheeked Waxbill & Black-faced Firefinch. An African Blue Flycatcher hung around in the overhanging branches, while a Swamp Flycatcher was busy feeding around the water. A couple of African Golden Orioles were initially at the back of the pool, but ventured to the water's edge eventually. Oriole Warbler was overhead, but Spur-winged Francolin and Hamerkop stayed to the rear. Walking around towards the back of the pool also unearthed a Blue-breasted Kingfisher and Brown-throated Wattle-eye, with Striated Heron flying up to the trees above, and Violet Turaco on flypast. The drier area behind held a large group of small finches, all in non-breeding plumage, but sifting through turned up Yellow-mantled Widowbird, and Northern & Black-winged Red Bishop.

After looking for a once promising area for Pel's Fishing Owl, but finding the stream bone dry, we visited the largish pool with viewing hide viewable from the hotel. This held the star attraction for the non birding guests – a couple of Elephants, and some Kob, Green Monkeys, and Olive Baboons in the vicinity. Main birdlife here were Black-crowned Night Heron, Hamerkop, Squacco Heron, and a Blue-breasted Kingfisher.



The last pool we visited was almost dry, with a few fish clinging on to their existence with the last bit of life giving water. Kalu mentioned that only 5 days ago there was significantly more water here, but it was going quickly. A Lizard Buzzard didn't seem to mind too much, plying to and fro between perches around the clearing. This seemed to be the only bird worth noting but a quick search in the margins unearthed Gambaga Flycatcher and Green-backed Cameroptera.

Mole Hotel



After lunch and a cool down, the grounds of the hotel were covered for a while. Still hot, but with a slightly cooling wind, some good birds were found. The grounds seem unexciting at first glance, with a pool centrepiece and attendant sun worshippers, alongside the restaurant area and couple of accommodation blocks. But these are bounded by trees, which run down to the bush and natural pools below. Birds seemed to keep popping up when all seemed quiet. Initial standards were African Grey Woodpecker, Senegal Batis, Green-backed

Cameroptera, and Northern Black Flycatcher. However, with patience a couple of Greater Honeyguides and Northern Puffback came into view for some time. These seemed to be

part of a small bird party, with a couple of Senegal Eremomelas added in. A tree containing three more Black Flycatchers then stumped up a couple of Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weavers, and the same tree a short while later a White-shouldered Black Tit. Finishing off the mêlée before going back to the room was a Blue-breasted Kingfisher.

This late afternoon / evenings look out was a little strange in some ways, in that Kalu wanted to look for a couple of local speciality birds, which failed to materialise, but the late show was impressive. We headed back into the bush again, at a location a little further along from this morning, passing the recently opened Zaina Lodge hotel in the park on the way (3 Elephants and a Violet Turaco near the artificial pool here). A short way along the track within the bush, Kalu asked if we had seen Brown-rumped Bunting? This was to be the bird to find here, but we were out of the car for only minutes when he called the search off (it did seem very quiet). So the next plan was to look for Forbes's Plover, at a site where there is a collection of open expanses, ostensibly grassland but with very little on the parched earth. We drove around here searching for the quarry but only picked up a few Sun Larks. Plodding further on in the quest, we spotted a pair of Northern Carmine Bee-eaters perched on top of one of the larger trees. After a couple of tree hops, we finally managed to get some images. At this time, the sweat bees were proving more than a nuisance – I found later that 50% deet is less to their liking than the earlier Incognito. After searching another area for Forbes's Plover without success, we headed back to the first area again. This yet again turned up no plovers, but a Martial Eagle gliding behind the nearby treeline was adequate recompense. Shortly after, an African Scops Owl was successfully lured in. The fun didn't end here – the return journey in the car shone 6 separate Long-tailed Nightjars in the headlights on the track in front of us.



Day 5 - Monday 22nd

Mole

It was probably a foregone conclusion that Kalu would be chasing after some of the birds we missed so far, and we were right, but also with a successful outcome this time. The morning started well, with a couple of Elephants just outside of the hotel gate. We headed back to the tracks we had covered the previous evening, and stopped just after the Zaina Lodge pool. A short walk found yet another dry watercourse, save for a small area of wet mud. Even this was a haven for a small party of finches, mainly consisting of Orange-cheeked Waxbills and Firefinches (both Red-billed & Black-faced). The only



unusual bird we found here was an African Moustached Warbler. The morning continued with the van regularly stopping and us walking a short distance, either along the track, or into the bush. Kalu constantly played a recording of Scops Owl, with the theory that many small birds may seek it out for a good old mobbing. Perhaps it wasn't too much of a surprise when we spotted a real live African Scops Owl instead, perchance being mobbed by some of the birds we were looking for. We had hoped for Brown-rumped Bunting here, and were initially a little disappointed when one was heard singing, and almost pinned down before it flew off – brief flight views not good enough I'm afraid. However, a bit of perseverance found a second and then a third bird, each showing better than the last. While hunting them down, we also had brief views of the first of three separate White-fronted Black Chats (oddly without the white front!), and the much greater prize of a Spotted Creeper. Moving on, the van pulled up sharply for a Flappet Lark which had been perched briefly as we approached. Since this was a bird I hadn't seen, I would have appreciated more than the brief flight views which gave away nothing. We did try to relocate it, and followed the small wood through to a clearing. Scanning then found the third White-fronted Black Chat, and nearby – a couple of Forbes's Plovers! An even more pleasing bird than the one we had stopped for! Thank you Flappet Lark, I'll catch up properly another day! The last short walk turned up another African Moustached Warbler, behaving just as shyly as its predecessors, and a Winding Cisticola in breeding plumage, which was quite a contrast to the previous non breeding bird seen, warranting a consultation of the field guide. On the way back, 6 Elephants were putting on a bit of a mini show bathing fully in the Zaina Lodge pool, with a pair of Grey-headed Kingfishers as spectators.



The late afternoon excursion was a slightly strange one. We had overtaken another vehicle on the track early on, but then let it pass while we were parked up. This was so that they couldn't see us divert on to a lesser known track – Kalu had information about the location of White-backed Heron but felt it wasn't to be broadcast. The track was a little tight, with the vegetation constantly scraping along the sides and underchassis of the van. At one point Kalu admitted to being uncomfortable, since this was a new area for him. We picked our way along until we met an open area, with the spectacular sight of lines of Kob streaming along in front of us. Our park ranger took this as a sign that they were funnelling away from a drinking source, so we followed where they had come from, to find the aforementioned site, and disturbing a few Chestnut-backed Sparrow Larks on the way. The bad news was that there was no sign of the quarry, but a couple of Black Scimitar-bills later on made up. The open pool we had found still contained some water within the narrow muddy margins, and there was a sprinkling of birds around. Wood & Common Sandpipers were feeding with a trio of juvenile African Jacanas, and a single male Yellow Wagtail was located. Overhead were Bateleur, Hooded Vulture and Grasshopper Buzzard. We departed the scene to drive to the Haraba pool, which has an overlooking hide attached. This is probably better in the wet season, since the hide itself only really looks on to dry mud. However, there was an expanse of water stretching from this in both directions, so we circled this in one direction, and had a quick look at the other. While there was some birdlife here, I would have expected more for a decent amount of water in such a dry park overall. Pick here was a Gambaga Flycatcher, Snowy-crowned Robin Chat, and Black Crake, with a trio of Kingfishers – Malachite, Grey-headed & Blue-breasted in order of appearance.

As we were leaving a Fine-spotted Woodpecker was located, and Northern Carmine Bee-eater overhead.



The return journey wasn't without incident, since in addition to a few Long-tailed & single female Standard-winged Nightjars, we also spotted a dark snake of about a metre in length briefly on the road in the headlights. A good return for a pair of viviphiles.

Day 6 - Tuesday 23rd

Mognori steel bridge, Mole



The last morning in Mole, and Kalu had prepared us for a longer drive to get to the birding spot. A couple of minutes into travel, however, it wasn't a surprise when we stopped off again at the disused airfield – naturally to look for White-throated Francolin yet again. He seemed to have a bit of a thing about finding these, but they weren't playing ball. A pass through party of White-crested Helmet Shrikes was adequate recompense, even if they did perform true to form and stop for only seconds every 50 metres or so. The journey to the bridge was also not particularly far, and we spent the 3 hours in this area. The stagnant water next to the bridge was checked, but only a few small finches and Striped Ground Squirrel were. The main quarry was the vegetation fringed pool only a short walk through the bush, with a Northern Crombec on the way showing good signs. Creeping up to the pool still managed to flush the Hamerkops and Cattle Egrets, but these weren't the star attraction. That honour went to the 2 Carmine Bee-eaters which hung around the pool on and off while we were there. They have a penchant for perching on the tops of larger trees, but a bit of patience rewarded closer views, including one low down just over the water. Naturally, the area was well populated with Red-throated Bee-eaters, but the Yellow-crowned Gonoleks were more of a challenge to see well (despite the loud calls). Lizard Buzzard and a perched Brown Snake Eagle were close to, with Bateleur overhead. There was a lot of activity on the mud margins, mainly from the smaller finches and Village

Weavers (first full breeding male of the trip here), as well as a couple of Yellow-fronted Canaries. Sifting through them turned up a couple of Streaky-headed Seedeaters, a Eurasian Reed Warbler, and yet another African Moustached Warbler (the fifth of the trip). More typical water birds were 3 Malachite Kingfishers (with Grey-headed towards the outside just below a Broad-billed Roller), a few Jacanas, and a Black Crake.

There was another smaller pool a little further back, but didn't have nearly the same amount of vegetation around it, or the numbers of birds. Most interest was in the birds which flew up as we approached, with a single Woolly-necked Stork amongst the Grey Herons and Hamerkops.

The last search was in what remained of the now stagnant river to the other side of the bridge. This went on for some way, and held enough water to be of interest to species such as Finfoot and Fishing Owl. But not today. We gave it a good try, and came up with White-crowned Robin Chat, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Senegal Batis, and a trio of Yellow-breasted Apalis. Stars of the show remained the Carmine Bee-eaters of earlier!

Yet it wasn't a total shock when on the way back to the hotel, Kalu tried one last time to find White-throated Fancolin. Guess what? Again, the morning's compensation adequately delivered was a trio of White-crested Helmet Shrikes once more, but this time very much closer. Nice try Kalu but I'll take the Shrikes!

We then set off without paying the extortionate cost for lunch at the Mole Hotel, with the intention of reaching the next destination by late afternoon when the dreaded African curse struck once again. This was our fourth birding trip on the continent, and two of the previous three had included some form of mechanical breakdown. So it was that about 2 hours on, and another 30 minutes from the lunch stop, some odd noises from the engine turned out to be a problem with the air conditioning drive belt. Up went the bonnet, and some deft work with the Jonathan the driver's knife removed the almost shredded culprit. After a worrying lack of activity from the engine on turning the key – we were in a small village without much mechanical assistance – it started the second time. We managed to limp to the restaurant, which was only about 10 minutes short of the next big town. Kalu left us with a table and refreshments to see to the car. 4 hours later, and one visit by taxi to keep us informed, and we were then in a local taxi making the remainder of the journey (that of an hour or so, yet at the unbelievable cost of around £12!). Jonathan stayed with the van until the work was completed while we ate chicken noodles and watched a football match at the next hotel.



Day 7 - Wednesday 23rd

Opuro Forest

Good news this morning – the van problem had been fixed and it stood waiting outside ready to take us to more birding destinations. They could have given it a bit of a wash and valet while repairing though. We had arranged the night before to have breakfast at 6am (GMT) but it wasn't a great surprise when we began to tuck into the delightful omelette and bread at 6.40 (Ghana Maybe Time). The chef had to be called from his bed to get here even at that time. We headed further South for an hour to get to the forest, and turned down a track where we started birding the surrounding forest straight away. This site is notable for Capuchin's Babbler, but fires recently had destroyed a lot of the low vegetation they like to forage in, so seeing them was pretty nigh impossible. No problem for other

good birds though, with a Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike being the first bird we picked up. Then we had probably the bird of the morning, with a pair of Red-billed Helmet Shrikes, perching (not too closely unfortunately) then making short hops to nearby branches. As we walked the dusty track, it was obvious that there had been good snake activity earlier, with at least half a dozen distinctive tracks of different sizes and patterns across. We did try the likely area for the Babblers, but as suspected, it was bare from the fire, so nowhere for them to hide. This was a good spot though, kicked off by a couple of Guinea Turacos flying up to trees also containing African Green Pigeons. A Little Green Woodpecker was most obliging, sitting out on a bare branch for some time, with a Black-winged Oriole and African Pied Hornbill as backdrop. A pair of Black-and-white Flycatchers flew over, with a much closer yet briefer Red-billed Helmet Shrike nearby. Another great find was a Pangolin, unerringly nosing around the high thin branches of one of the taller trees, although it was mainly in the cover of the leaves. We slowly made our way along the track checking each side for signs of life, which became quieter as the morning progressed. Notable birds during this time were a stunning Western Nicator out in the open briefly, and Fraser's Forest Flycatcher singing from the tangle. A very strange bird was White-crested Hornbill. Stunning and distinctive in flight, one flew across the track a couple of times before clinging to the dense foliage and out of sight each time it landed.



Picathartes site



Following some excellent lunch in Kumasi (spiced chicken, fried plantain and beans for those asking), we eventually managed to crawl our way out of what is a sprawl of a town, with attendant traffic and general mayhem. We had visited the Picathartes site (White-necked Rockfowl, the official name, doesn't seem to give credence to this enigmatic and rather strange bird) during our last trip here, and had barely half reasonable views of them, so a return just had to be made. As before, we were required to have a guide from the village to accompany us for the princely sum of £5 per person. With another group here already, our guide ran ahead to find which of the two locations they were at. This turned out to be the more guaranteed one, but the other offered much closer and less obscured views of the birds when they make an appearance. So we took a punt and aimed for the less guaranteed group of rocks, hoping for a chance of better images. The standard time for the birds to come in to the nesting site is around 5.30pm. We arrived there before 5, with the trek of around 35 minutes to here seeming shorter than we remembered. 5.30 came and went, and 10 minutes later the guide decided the birds had probably gone to the more popular rocks, so we trudged at some pace to get there. This isn't easy considering

it is further than the first, hot, humid, and has some climbing involved. The former group was just leaving when we arrived, with the welcome, if not unexpected, news that the birds were there. They were indeed, and we spent another 20 minutes or so watching them on the rocks, entering the scene and even one perched just behind us until it was almost dark and time to go. The long walk back to the village (and air conditioned van) and shirts wet with sweat was made a whole lot easier by the thoughts of what we had just seen.

Day 8 - Thursday 25th

Shai Hills

As with our last trip, the last morning was again spent at Shai Hills. Last time it came as something of a surprise, since we weren't really aware of its presence or proximity to Accra. This time the surprise had gone, but the birding was at least as good if not better than the previous visit. Kalu had intended to miss it out this time, with his view that no birds could be added to those seen elsewhere, and instead bird some of the forest near to the Picathartes site, then travel on to Accra for departure. This was scuppered by the hotel he had booked for this giving our room to someone else, so we made the 3 hour journey to Accra that evening instead, arriving at 1.10am. The birding at Shai Hills necessitated leaving again at 5.30am. The theory that this location would turn up nothing was also misleading – I notched up 3 new lifers and quite a few new birds for the trip as well.

We were supposed to pick up a guide from the park to accompany us, but he probably slept in a bit, since he caught up a little later. First bit of the open bush area started well, with feeding Violet Turaco, Senegal Batis on the ground, Northern Black Flycatcher, Black-crowned Tchagra, and a perched Eurasian Hobby. The birds slowed down a little as we approached and walked between the wooded edges, but the cliffs were also above us now – time to look for Mocking Cliff Chat. This took a while, with close-ish views of the pair, but the interim paid dividends with Greyish Eagle Owl perched on a rock ledge, and Cuckoo Hawk over. Splendid Sunburn ushered our departure from this greenery, when the habitat changes to more open bush. This quickly provided Red-necked Buzzard soaring (then to be found perched) and small numbers of White-throated Bee-eaters. The van then picked us up to drive around the tracks of the bush. We had heard Kalu and the guide whisper about Bustard, but didn't ask the question. A short way in, I called for the van to stop at a distant Blue-bellied Roller, and on getting out of the car the guide spotted – Black-bellied Bustard. It was also a little distance away, and in and out of the long grass. One bird which had been spotted a couple of times through the week but which I hadn't seen before or had good enough views of this time was Flappet Lark, so enter the last bird of the morning, and a new one for me to boot! Good finish.



SPECIES SEEN

Helmeted Guineafowl

Numida meleagris

Mole - common in sporadic groups, sometimes up to 30-40 birds

Stone Partridge

Ptilopachus petrosus

Seen at Mole disused airfield twice, briefly in pairs, and another pair also briefly within the park

Double-spurred Francolin

Pternistis bicalcaratus

Tono Dam (2, 1); Mole (~8, ~10 in various locations); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (~30)



Woolly-necked Stork

Ciconia episcopus

Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)

Hadada Ibis

Bostrychia hagedash

Mole (5 at elephant pool, 3 elsewhere; 1 Haraba Pool, Mole; 2 Open Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole 2)



Glossy Ibis

Plegadis falcinellus

Tono Dam (3 flew over)

Black-crowned Night Heron

Nycticorax nycticorax

Mole (5 including 2 adults at the elephant pool; 1 at Haraba Pool, Mole)

Striated Heron

Butorides striata

Mole drinking pool (2 separate birds; 2 at Haraba Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole - 1 by river)



Squacco Heron

Ardeola ralloides

1 Tono Dam; Mole 1 at elephant pool; 3 at Haraba Pool, Mole

Western Cattle Egret

Bubulcus ibis

Occasional in small groups while driving in the North-east; Tono Dam (sporadic); Occasional on journey to Mole; Mole (~12 sporadic birds; 30 at various locations); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (~20); Few on Journey from Techiman to Picathartes site

Grey Heron

Ardea cinerea

1 over Ex-Tee hotel; Mole (2 at elephant pool; 2 at Open Pool); 6 at Haraba Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)

Black-headed Heron

Ardea melanocephala

1 Nasia Bridge; Mole - 1 at elephant pool

Purple Heron

Ardea purpurea

1 River Volta Bridge; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)

Great Egret*Ardea alba*

1 on lagoon on road to Mole

Little Egret*Egretta garzetta*

1 at the lagoon on way to River Volta Bridge, 1 River Volta Bridge; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1); 6 Sakumuno Lagoon, Accra

Hamerkop*Scopus umbretta*

1 River Volta Bridge; 1 at lagoon on way to River Volta Bridge; Mole drinking pool (2, with 2 elsewhere); 2 at Open Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (8)

Reed Cormorant*Microcarbo africanus*

1 River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (3 over)

Black-winged Kite*Elanus caeruleus*

1 perched on wires over marsh at Nasia Bridge on both visits

Palm-nut Vulture*Gypohierax angolensis*

Only seen flying - 2 flew over near Mole drinking pool; 1 at Open Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)

African Cuckoo-Hawk*Aviceda cuculoides*

1 flew over Shai Hills, where the long tail and rufous colouring on the underparts were distinctive

Hooded Vulture*Necrosyrtes monachus*

2 in village on way to River Volta Bridge; Mole (1 over); 4 over Open Pool, Mole

White-backed Vulture*Gyps africanus*

Only seen in flight - Mole on (~6; 2 from hotel): Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)

White-headed Vulture*Trigonoceps occipitalis*

1 juvenile flying over near Mole drinking pool. There didn't appear to be any white on the underwing, but the head shape and colouring were distinctive

Beudouin's Snake Eagle*Circaetus beudouini*

1 on route late morning from Mole. When seen well in flight, the dark chest band and light underparts along with overall shape are distinctive

Brown Snake Eagle*Circaetus cinereus*

1 perched on tree at around 100m distance or some time at Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole

Bateleur*Terathopius ecaudatus*

All birds seen in flight only - 1 adult near Mole drinking pool; 1 juvenile from Mole Hotel; 1 at Open Pool, Mole; a further adult 1 from Mole Hotel; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)

Martial Eagle*Polemaetus bellicosus*

Mole 1 in the evening, seen flying behind tree line while searching for Forbes's Plover

Lizard Buzzard*Kaupifalco monogrammicus*

Tono Dam (1); Mole (2 separate birds); 1 at Haraba Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)

**Gabar Goshawk***Micronisus gabar*

Surprisingly, only 1 was seen on the first morning, perched on roadside wires on the way to Nasia Bridge

Dark Chanting Goshawk*Melierax metabates*

1 flying around the area of the River Volta Bridge; Tongo Hills (1)

Shikra*Accipiter badius*

All birds seen were in flight - Tono Dam (1 over); 1 on road to Mole; 1 on Journey from Techiman to Picathartes site; 1 over Accra

Western Marsh Harrier*Circus aeruginosus*

2 at Nasia Bridge; Tono Dam (female on ground at small pool)

Yellow-billed Kite*Milvus aegyptius*

These were predictably a common site when travelling between destinations, with highest concentrations around habitation. Some were present at birding sites, but were only

occasional, with none at Mole



Grasshopper Buzzard

Butastur rufipennis

2 Nasia Bridge on first visit; Nasia Bridge (6 on second visit); Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (1); ~4 on journey to Mole; 1 at Open Pool, Mole; 1 on route from Mole South to Techiman

Red-necked Buzzard

Buteo auguralis

Shai Hills – 1 picked up in flight over the bush, and what may have been the same bird was found shortly after perched on a distant tree

Black-bellied Bustard

Lissotis melanogaster

Shai Hills – 1 spotted walking around a small area of thick grass at about 100m distance from the main track within the bush area

Black Crake

Amaurornis flavirostra

1 at Open Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)

Common Moorhen

Gallinula chloropus

1 at Open Pool, Mole

Senegal Thick-knee

Burhinus senegalensis

~20 next to the river at the White Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (1); 2 at pool below Zaina Lodge, Mole



Spur-winged Lapwing

Vanellus spinosus

6 River Volta Bridge; 2 lagoon on way to River Volta Bridge

African Wattled Lapwing

Vanellus senegallus

2 at lagoon on way to River Volta Bridge; 1 River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (~8); 5 at Open Pool, Mole

Forbes's Plover

Charadrius forbesi

The likely open areas at Mole were searched a few times without success, but 2 birds were chanced upon in a similar area while trying to pin down a Sun Lark which had flown from the tree cover into the same habitat

Egyptian Plover

Pluvianus aegyptius

At least 4 were at the River White Volta Bridge. They flew to and fro occasionally between the two banks of the river, but were generally almost directly underneath us on the wooded edged sandy banks



African Jacana

Actophilornis africanus

~10 Nasia Bridge; Tono Dam 1; 3 on lagoon on route to MX; 3 at elephant pool, Mole; 3 juveniles at Open Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (3)

Green Sandpiper*Tringa ochropus*

1 Nasia Bridge; 1 River Volta Bridge

Wood Sandpiper*Tringa glareola*

5 at Open Pool, Mole

Common Sandpiper*Actitis hypoleucos*

1 lagoon on way to River Volta Bridge; 2 River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (1 on channel); 6 at Open Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)

Collared Pratincole*Glareola pratincola*

3 in flight while passing Sakumuno Lagoon, Accra

African Skimmer*Rynchops flavirostris*

1 River White Volta Bridge

Four-banded Sandgrouse*Pterocles quadricinctus*

Tono Dam – 2 were flushed close by while walking the open bushy area

Speckled Pigeon*Columba guinea*

Quite common Ex-Tee Crysta Hotel, Bolgatanga and River Volta Bridge Tono

**Mourning Collared Dove***Streptopelia decipiens*

This seemed to be a bit of a decent sighting at this part of Ghana (we hadn't noticed any on the previous trip to the coastal areas - 2 River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (~15))

Vinaceous Dove*Streptopelia vinacea*

Very common and usually the most often seen species in most areas

Laughing Dove*Spilopelia senegalensis*

Tono Dam (Fairly common); Common on route to Mole; Fairly common Mole; 2 at Mole Hotel; Quite common Accra

Black-billed Wood Dove*Turtur abyssinicus*

1 Nasia Bridge; Tono Dam (~12); ~15 on route to Mole; Mole (12+, 40+); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (~10)

**Tambourine Dove***Turtur tympanistria*

1 Oपुरo Forest briefly in flight

Namaqua Dove*Oena capensis*

1 Nasia Bridge; Tono Dam (4); Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (3)

Bruce's Green Pigeon*Treron waalia*

Tono Dam (2); Mole (1)



African Green Pigeon

Treron calvus

Opuro Forest 6+ in one tree

Guinea Turaco

Tauraco persa

Opuro Forest (2)

Violet Turaco

Musophaga violacea

Tono Dam 1; Mole (1 perched in front of Zaina Lodge); Shai Hills (1)

Western Plantain-eater

Crinifer piscator

Tono Dam (1); Tongo Hills (1); 1 at restaurant on route to Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1); 1 on route South from Mole; Shai Hills (4)



Senegal Coucal

Centropus senegalensis

2 at lagoon on way to River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (2); Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (1); 1 at Haraba Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (2)

Klaas's Cuckoo

Chrysococcyx klaas

Tongo Hills (1); Opuro Forest (1)



African Scops Owl

Otus senegalensis

Mole (1 flying into nearby trees at dusk); Mole - 1 being mobbed by passerines

Greyish Eagle-Owl

Bubo cinerascens

Shai Hills - 1 on cliffs, found while searching same habitat for Mocking Cliff Chat



Long-tailed Nightjar

Caprimulgus climacurus

6 birds seen on consecutive evenings when travelling back to Mole Hotel from locations in Mole

Standard-winged Nightjar

Caprimulgus longipennis



A stunning male with wing standards appeared on the disused airstrip at Mole at duks, an a female was on the tracks on return from birding in the park two evenings later

African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*

~12 on journey to River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (very common); Tongo Hills (1); Mole (1); 6 over Open Pool, Mole; Fairly common over Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole

Little Swift *Apus affinis*

Tono Dam (Very common); 1 over Open Pool, Mole, 1 over Haraba Pool, Mole

Purple Roller *Coracias naevius*

Tono Dam (1 in the morning and 1 in the evening); Shai Hills (1); 1 on way back through Accra from Shai Hills

Abyssinian Roller *Coracias abyssinicus*

2 Nasia Bridge; 1 lagoon on way to River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (1); Mole (1 late afternoon)



Blue-bellied Roller *Coracias cyanogaster*

Mole (1 flying from track in forest); Shai Hills (2)

Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus*

Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1 perched for some time)

Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala*

Mole (2 at pool below Zaina Lodge); 1 Open Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)

Blue-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon malimbica*

Mole drinking pool (1); 1 at Mole Hotel; 1 at Haraba Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)



African Pygmy Kingfisher *Ispidina picta*

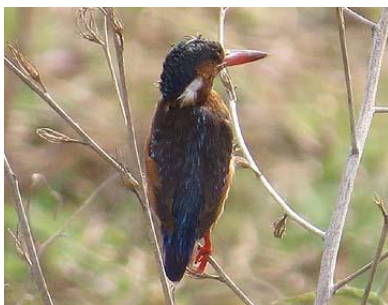
Opuro Forest (2); Shai Hills (1)

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*

2 at lagoon on way to River Volta Bridge; 2 River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (1)

Malachite Kingfisher *Corythornis cristatus*

Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (1); 1 at Open Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (3)



Little Bee-eater *Merops pusillus*

2 River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (6)

White-throated Bee-eater *Merops albicollis*

Opuro Forest (1); Shai Hills 4

Red-throated Bee-eater*Merops bulocki*

Mole - Common and widespread in the park

**Green Bee-eater***Merops orientalis*

The 2 birds at Tono Dam were a big surprise, since not only were they the first new bird for Kalu in 3 years, but they aren't even included in the Birds of Ghana field guide. They do occur in nearby Burkina Faso. We saw good but brief views initially, but pinned them down for much longer when trying to relocate for Kalu to see them

Rosy Bee-eater*Merops malimbicus*

Opuro Forest (3); Shai Hills (3). All birds were flying overhead

Northern Carmine Bee-eater*Merops nubicus*

This is another of those birds that we had wanted to see since childhood. While we didn't go to this part of Ghana to see them primarily, it has to be admitted that they were top of the list of want to see species. First ones were as we left the main road for the track just after the Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (2), then Mole (2) perched on top of tree in bush; 1 over Haraba Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1 from bridge then 2 at pool, perched in an accessible tree

**Black Scimitarbill***Rhinopomastus aterrimus*

2 at Open Pool, Mole

Northern Red-billed Hornbill*Tockus erythrorhynchus*

Tono Dam (~20); Mole (1 late afternoon, 3 in morning)

**African Pied Hornbill***Lophoceros fasciatus*

Opuro Forest (3)

African Grey Hornbill*Lophoceros nasutus*

3 on journey to River Volta Bridge; Tongo Hills (2); Mole (4); 1 at Haraba Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1); 2 on road from Mole South; Shai Hills (~14)

White-crested Hornbill*Horizocerus albocristatus*

For a large and quite spectacular bird, these tend to be rather secretive. Opuro Forest (1, which flew across the road in response to playing call, then to disappear in the thick vegetation)

Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird*Pogoniulus chrysoconus*

Tono Dam (5); Shai Hills (1)

 Vieillot's Barbet*Lybius vieilloti*

Tono Dam (1 in the morning and 2 in the afternoon; Tongo Hills (2)

Greater Honeyguide*Indicator indicator*

1 near Mole drinking pool, with separate male and female at Mole Hotel

Bearded Barbet*Lybius dubius*

Tono Dam (2); Tongo Hills (2); Mole drinking pool (2), and 1 elsewhere

**Fine-spotted Woodpecker***Campethera punctuligera*

1 at Haraba Pool, Mole

Golden-tailed Woodpecker*Campethera abingoni*

1 over Mole drinking pool

Little Green Woodpecker*Campethera maculosa*

Oporo Forest – 1 above us on one side of the track against the sun, and then encouraged to move to other side where the light was much better

African Grey Woodpecker*Dendropicos goertae*

Unbeknown to us, this was officially our first bird of the trip, since we saw one flying at the Tamale airport periphery after walking from the aeroplane. Kalu informed us later that this was what it was. Better views were at Mole - Mole Hotel (2 early morning, 2 behind hotel), then another 2 at Mole Hotel

Brown-backed Woodpecker*Dendropicos obsoletus*

1 Nasia Bridge

Fox Kestrel*Falco alopex*

Tongo Hills (3). 1 initially landed on a bush containing 2 Bearded Barbets, with all three Kestrels subsequently seen overhead

**Grey Kestrel***Falco ardosiaceus*

1 River Volta Bridge; Tongo Hills (1); Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (1); Shai Hills (1)

Red-necked Falcon*Falco chicquera*

1 overhead near Mole drinking pool

Eurasian Hobby*Falco subbuteo*

Shai Hills (1 perched)

Lanner Falcon*Falco biarmicus*

1 from Mole Hotel

Senegal Parrot*Poicephalus senegalus*

4 River Volta Bridge; Mole (4 and 5 early morning); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (2); Shai Hills 6

Rose-ringed Parakeet*Psittacula krameri*

Mole (4); 30+ Haraba Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (3). All were flying overhead

Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher*Bias musicus*

Oporo Forest (pair flying)

White-crested Helmetshrike*Prionops plumatus*

Mole - 5 in morning at disused airfield; 3 next to track on return from Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole

Red-billed Helmetshrike*Prionops caniceps*

Oporo Forest 2+1. We had been hopefully searching for Capuchin Babbler, unfortunately finding the area had been burned, but these were a more than adequate compensation we hadn't really expected

Senegal Batis*Batis senegalensis*

Tono Dam (1); 1 and subsequent pair at rear of Mole Hotel; 1 Mole drinking pool; Mognori

Steel Bridge, Mole (1); Shai Hills 2



Brown-throated Wattle-eye *Platysteira cyanea*

Mole drinking pool (1); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1 female)

Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegalus*

Tono Dam (2 separate birds); Mole (1); Shai Hills 1

Northern Puffback *Dryoscopus gambensis*

1 at rear of Mole Hotel; Oपुरo Forest (1)



Yellow-crowned Gonolek *Laniarius barbarous*

As usual, these preferred to be generally shy and retiring, although usually easy to be aware of due to loud call. A bit of patience was often rewarded with decent views. 1 River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (1); 1 at Mole Hotel; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (2); Shai Hills (1)

Brubru *Nilaus afer*

The presence of these is usually first given away by their characteristic nasal calls - 2 in trees at front of Mole Hotel; Mole (4 within the forest)

Yellow-billed Shrike *Corvinella corvine*

Tono Dam (2); Mole (3); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (2)

African Golden Oriole *Oriolus auratus*

Mole (1, and 1 on route to Mole); Mole drinking pool (2); Mole (1 on route to Mognori Steel Bridge)



Black-winged Oriole *Oriolus nigripennis*

Oपुरo Forest (2)

Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*

1 River Volta Bridge; Mole (1 + 1); Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (1); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1); Shai Hills (2)

Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone rufiventer*

Oपुरo Forest (1)

African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis*

Tono Dam (2 were seen just before dusk. The first one was typical, but the second a long tailed white morph, which flew around the area we were located)

Pied Crow *Corvus albus*

Quite common to common during journeys from one location to another, particularly around human habitation, with only the occasional bird within forest and bush habitats

Piapiac*Ptilostomus afer*

6 Ex-Tee Crysta Hotel, Bolgatanga; 3 on journey to River Volta Bridge; ~6 on route to Mole; Shai Hills (3)

**White-necked Rockfowl***Picathartes gymnocephalus*

We returned to this site having been here 2 years ago, with very average views of the birds. The nesting/roosting rocks are quite a walk into the forest (around three quarters of an hour) and there are 2 different locations here which can be visited. We initially chose the one with fewer birds and less likelihood of success, since they would be closer and with less obstruction for views if present. When they didn't show, we marched at a decent pace to the more reliable site, where at least 5 birds were seen, including one in the tree branches just behind us

African Blue Flycatcher*Elminia longicauda*

Mole drinking pool (1)

**White-shouldered Black Tit***Melaniparus guineensis*

Mole (1+1 late afternoon, with another bird early morning)

Western Nicator*Nicator chloris*

Opuro Forest (1)

Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark*Eremopterix leucotis*

Nasia Bridge (1); Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (2)

**Flappet Lark***Mirafraga rufocinnamomea*

Shai Hills (1)

Sun Lark*Galerida modesta*

Mole (2 + 4)

Common Bulbul*Pycnonotus barbatus*

2 Nasia Bridge; Tono Dam (2); Tongo Hills (~6); Mole - some around Mole Hotel; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (~4); Shai Hills (Common)

Slender-billed Greenbul*Stelgidillas gracilirostris*

Opuro Forest (2)

Grey-headed Bristlebill

Bleda canicapillus

Mole – 2 just before dusk at disused airfield while waiting for nightjars

Red-chested Swallow

Hirundo lucida

Tono Dam (10 + ~40)



Wire-tailed Swallow

Hirundo smithii

A few at Nasia Bridge, and a few at River Volta Bridge. None of the birds seemed to have the characteristic tail streamers

Moustached Grass Warbler

Melocichla mentalis

These are a skulking species, and the birds we saw on the whole kept to the inside of vegetation, but we were lucky enough to see them in the open for some time - Nasia Bridge (2); Mole (1 early am, another later); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)



Northern Crombec

Sylvietta brachyuran

Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1); Shai Hills (1 heard)

Eurasian Reed Warbler

Acrocephalus scirpaceus

Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)

Melodious Warbler

Hippolais polyglotta

Tono Dam (1)

Singing Cisticola

Cisticola cantans

Tono Dam (6); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)



Whistling Cisticola

Cisticola lateralis

Nasia Bridge (1); Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (2)

Rock-loving Cisticola

Cisticola emini

Tongo Hills (3)



Winding Cisticola*Cisticola marginatus*

Mole (1 in breeding plumage); Nasia Bridge (1 in non breeding plumage)

Croaking Cisticola*Cisticola natalensis*

Shai Hills 1

Dorst's Cisticola*Cisticola guinea*

Nasia Bridge 1. More seemed to be at Tono Dam, but the ID couldn't be 100%

Zitting Cisticola*Cisticola juncidis*

Tono Dam (1), and 1 heard at the open pool, Mole

Tawny-flanked Prinia*Prinia subflava*

2 Ex-Tee Crysta Hotel, Bolgatanga; Tono Dam (~8); Tongo Hills (3); Mole (2)

Red-winged Warbler*Heliolais erythropterus*

Tono Dam (1 singing at the tops of the bushes in the more open area)

**Yellow-breasted Apalis***Apalis flavida*

Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (3)

Oriole Warbler*Hypergerus atriceps*

Mole drinking pool 1, plus 1 nearby

**Green-backed Camaroptera***Camaroptera brachyuran*

Tono Dam (3); Mole (1 on walk, 3+ Mole Hotel); Shai Hills (2)

Senegal Eremomela*Eremomela pusilla*

3 Nasia Bridge; Mole (4+); 2 behind Mole Hotel; 2 at Mole Hotel; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1); Shai Hills (2)

**Brown Babbler***Turdoides plebejus*

Tono Dam (1); Mole (3)

African Yellow White-eye*Zosterops senegalensis*

Tono Dam (2); Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (2)

African Spotted Creeper*Salpornis salvadori*

Mole (1 seen when searching for Brown-rumped Bunting)

Lesser Blue-eared Starling*Lamprotornis chloropterus*

1 River Volta Bridge; 1 near Mole drinking pool

Splendid Starling*Lamprotornis splendidus*

Opuro Forest (2)

Purple Starling

Lamprotornis purpureus

2 River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (~50)

Long-tailed Glossy Starling

Lamprotornis caudatus

~23 River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (6); Mole (3 near elephant pool)



Chestnut-bellied Starling

Lamprotornis pulcher

Tono Dam (3) – this location apparently is one of the best spots to see this scarce species in Ghana

Violet-backed Starling

Cinnyricinclus leucogaster

1 at top of tree near Mole drinking pool

Yellow-billed Oxpecker

Buphagus africanus

3 at lagoon on way to River Volta Bridge, all 3 of which were perched on cattle; Tono Dam (18 at the top of a bare tree)



African Thrush

Turdus pelios

While quite common in certain locations, these were surprisingly difficult to approach, although they were always evident when present - Tono Dam (3); Tongo Hills (3); Mole Hotel (~10); Mole drinking pool (1); ~20 at Mole Hotel; Shai Hills ~20

Fraser's Forest Flycatcher

Fraseria ocreata

Opuro Forest – 1 singing in thick vegetation in the forest, but eventually perched in open high up

Northern Black Flycatcher

Melaenornis edolioides

4 behind Mole Hotel; 2 on walks at Mole; Shai Hills (~6)



Pale Flycatcher

Melaenornis pallidus

Mole (1)

Spotted Flycatcher

Muscicapa striata

Mole (1); Shai Hills (1)

Gambaga Flycatcher

Muscicapa gambagae

Very similar to Spotted Flycatcher, this species has the impression of being smaller, has very little spotting on the breast, and if seen well, the shorter primaries are evident - Mole (1); 1 at Haraba Pool, Mole

**Swamp Flycatcher***Muscicapa aquatica*

Mole drinking pool (1). The characteristic darker breast band was difficult to see on this bird

Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat*Cossypha niveicapilla*

1 at Haraba Pool, Mole

White-crowned Robin-Chat*Cossypha albicapillus*

Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1)

European Pied Flycatcher*Ficedula hypoleuca*

Mole (1), 1 behind Mole Hotel; Oपुरo Forest (1). All females

**Whinchat***Saxicola rubetra*

Oपुरo Forest (1)

Mocking Cliff Chat*Thamnolaea cinnamomeiventris*

Shai Hills – the resident pair at the cliff face here can be on and off, depending where on the territory they are. Last time we visited they were high up, but this time they eventually appeared at our level scampering through the bushes

White-fronted Black Chat*Oenanthe albifrons*

Mole (3). The white front on all three wasn't evident or present at all

Familiar Chat*Oenanthe familiaris*

1 behind Mole Hotel

**Collared Sunbird***Hedydipna collaris*

Oपुरo Forest (1 male)

Pygmy Sunbird*Hedydipna platura*

Tono Dam (~10); Mole (1); pair at Mole Hotel



Olive Sunbird

Cyanomitra olivacea

Opuro Forest – 1. This bird wasn't obvious, since the underparts had more of a creamy yellow cast than in the country field guides, although the Sunbirds monograph in the Helm series does indicate this type of difference on geographical subspecies

Scarlet-chested Sunbird

Chalcomitra senegalensis

A common sight and sound in some locations, making this the most common and regular Sunbird encountered - Tono Dam (20+); Mole (1+1); Mole (~20 during walks)



Beautiful Sunbird

Cinnyris pulchellus

1 Nasia Bridge; Tono Dam (2); Mole (1 on walks)

Splendid Sunbird

Cinnyris coccinigastrus

Shai Hills (1)

Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver

Plocepasser superciliosus

5 at Mole Hotel



Northern Grey-headed Sparrow

Passer griseus

2 Nasia Bridge; Common around habitation in Accra

Bush Petronia

Gymnoris dentate

Tongo Hills (3+); Mole drinking pool 2; pair behind Mole Hotel; Mole (common through day, with ~20 Open Pool); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (20+)

White-billed Buffalo Weaver

Bubalornis albirostris

Small colony at village South of River Volta Bridge



Vitelline Masked Weaver

Ploceus vitellinus

Tono Dam (Common – all in non breeding plumage)



Village Weaver*Ploceus cucullatus*

Good numbers River Volta Bridge; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole
Quite common including breeding male

**Speckle-fronted Weaver***Sporopipes frontalis*

Tono Dam (4)

Black-winged Red Bishop*Euplectes hordeaceus*

Mole - Some amongst mixed flocks, all in non breeding plumage

Northern Red Bishop*Euplectes franciscanus*

Mole - Some amongst mixed flocks, all in non breeding plumage

Yellow-mantled Widowbird*Euplectes macroura*

Mole (Some amongst mixed flocks); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (1 non breeding, which was the only male seen sporting the yellow coverts)

Red-winged Pytilia*Pytilia phoenicoptera*

Mole drinking pool (1)

Bar-breasted Firefinch*Lagonosticta rufopicta*

Tongo Hills (1 male)

Red-billed Firefinch*Lagonosticta senegala*

Regularly seen amongst mixed finch flocks - 1 River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (Common); Tongo Hills (Quite common); Mole drinking pool (6); Mole (Few early morning); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (~6)

**African Firefinch***Lagonosticta rubricata*

Pair Mole drinking pool

Black-faced Firefinch*Lagonosticta larvata*

Mole drinking pool (pair); Mole (3-4)

Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu*Uraeginthus bengalus*

Common and regularly seen in mixed finch flocks - ~12 Nasia Bridge; Tono Dam (Common); Tongo Hills (Common); Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (common); Drinking pool, Mole (Common); Mole (Fairly common)

**Lavender Waxbill***Estrilda caerulescens*

Tongo Hills (1+2); 1 at Mole Hotel

Orange-cheeked Waxbill*Estrilda melpoda*

Mole drinking pool (6); Mole (6-8 early morning)

Black-rumped Waxbill*Estrilda troglodytes*

Tono Dam (~12); Tongo Hills ~20

**Orange-breasted Waxbill***Amandava subflava*

Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (~15). This group of birds constantly flew around the area, but usually landed on ground covered by vegetation

Quailfinch*Ortygospiza atricollis*

Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (~15). Another group of birds which flew up at the last minute from thick cover to land again in the same, although two birds allowed very close views when their landing spot was pinpointed

**African Silverbill***Euodice cantans*

Nasia Bridge (2)

Bronze Mannikin*Lonchura cucullata*

Tono Dam (2); 8 at restaurant on route to Mole; Mole (~20); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (~12); Oपुरo Forest (10)

Village Indigobird*Vidua chalybeate*

Tono Dam (1 female); Tongo Hills (Pair)

**Pin-tailed Whydah***Vidua macroura*

Good numbers River Volta Bridge; Tono Dam (Abundant); Tongo Hills (Quite common); Mole (Common in mixed flocks); Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (Small numbers). All were in non breeding plumage, with some pink billed males amongst them

Western Yellow Wagtail*Motacilla flava*

1 at Open Pool, Mole

Yellow-fronted Canary*Crithagra mozambica*

~10 Nasia Bridge; Bridge over River Volta near Yiabie (2); Mole drinking pool (1); 1 at Mole Hotel; 3 at Open Pool, Mole; Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (2)



Streaky-headed Seedeater*Crithagra gularis*

Mognori Steel Bridge, Mole (4)

Cinnamon-breasted Bunting*Emberiza tahapisi*

Tongo Hills (Common); Mole (1 late afternoon)

**Brown-rumped Bunting***Emberiza affinis*

Mole (3 singing males in small area of the park)

Cabanis's Bunting*Emberiza cabanisi*

Mole drinking pool (1 female)

TOTAL SPECIES = 213**MAMMALS****African Bush Elephant***Loxodonta africana*

With around 600 in Mole national park, these are more or less a guaranteed sighting – we even saw them next to the hotel entrance. Mole (3+3), then 2 first thing next morning, 6 pool below Zaina Lodge, and 1 outside of Mole Hotel late afternoon

**Green Monkey***Chlorocebus sabaues*

Mole - Fairly common including in Mole Hotel grounds

Olive Baboon*Papio anubis*

Mole – Common, including in the hotel grounds

Striped Ground Squirrel*Xerus erythropus*

Mole (1+1)

Yellow-winged Bat*Lavia frons*

This bat is quite spectacular in flight, with obvious yellow on the wings - Tono Dam (1); Mole (1)

Long-tailed Pangolin*Manis tetradactyla*

This was one of the most unexpected finds of the trip, with a single animal being found slowly making its way through the leaved canopy of some of the taller trees at Oपुरo Forest

Hartebeest*Alcelaphus buselaphus*

Mole (1); 1 at Open Pool, Mole; 1 in bush at Mole

African Buffalo*Syncerus caffer*

Mole (2)

Bushbuck*Tragelaphus scriptus*

Mole (6; Mole 2 from van)

Kob

Kobus kob

Mole (Very common, including large herd of ~60 at Open Pool, Mole); Shai Hills ~8

Common Wart-hog

Phacochoerus africanus

Mole Hotel (3+1); Mole (2; 1 late pm)

