

Few notes on mammals of Ethiopia (11-26 November 2017)

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This trip was mainly a survey to look at the small declining relict golden eagle population found within the park but we were fortunate enough to come across a few mammal species. Most time was spent within the Bale Mountains National Park (13 days) and one extra day was spent at Debre Libanos (for a bit of extra birding).

Within the Bale National we camped throughout our stay at various camps (working our way up the Web valley from Sodota Camp to Sanetti, « BBC », camp). Our guide Tamane had good knowledge of the local wildlife and the area, would definitely recommend him if you going for a few days walking. Weather wise the best period to visit is from mid-October until the start of March (outside the rainy season), during our trip we were really lucky only having one morning with a little drizzle that quickly cleared. Day time temperatures were pleasant around 20°C, at night it a good sleeping bag is needed (two or three nights at -10/-15°C, rest around -5°C). The drive from Addis is a good couple of hours (5/6 if I remember correctly).

For Debre Libanos took a local guide (Merseret Mekuria), good with birds and also with mammals I believe (but didn't really get a chance to verify it in the field). Stayed overnight at the Ethio-German hotel, the only hotel in the area so no real choice. Drive from Addis is around 2 hours.



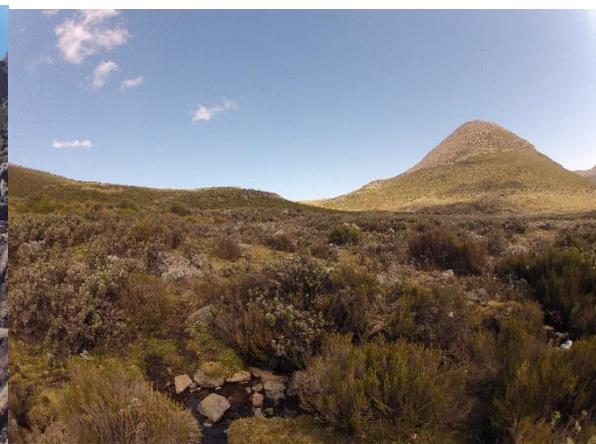
Karenza valley



Sanetti plateau



Orgoba valley



Worgoba valley

Species list Bale

Ethiopian wolf: one of the main reasons to visit the park. Best place to see them in the park is either in the Web valley or on the Sanetti Plateau. Had multiple encounters with single our groups of this lovely canid throughout our stay. Often seen around Sodota camp and some really close view of one adult on the Sanetti Plateau. One of the threats to these guys is disease transmitted from the numerous semi-feral dogs. Unfortunately during our trip we learned that some wolves had died from rabies so an active vaccination effort was underway as we left, can't find any news about it so hopefully they managed to contain the spread in the population. Would appear more tolerant to human presence on Sanetti Plateau and in the Web Valley (but always a bit wary), saw some in more secluded valleys (Batu, Worgoba) and could see they don't come into contact with humans as often as the others.

Giant molerat: another endemic found here. We saw some scattered around the Web valley (including at least one at Sodota camp site), with the highest density on the Sanetti plateau according to Tamane (where we also saw a couple). Being a favoured snack in these part for the wolves or the numerous eagles patrolling the skies, a bit of patience in front of an active burrow usually does the trick.

Klipspringer: Saw this species in good numbers across the Web valley in rocky outcrops or rocky cliffs.

Olive Baboon: First came across a small group at the entrance of Orgoba valley walking up from a stream back up towards the cliff. When driving back to Addis on the last day, a big group busy foraging around the road on the Gaysay Plains.

Serval: 2 sightings made in the Worgona valley in late afternoon and in the morning, unfortunately I was too busy looking for eagles that I didn't see the individual (but did find some nice tracks). Just as we were leaving spotted one individual on Gaysay plains walking between the bushes (around 10 in the morning).

Hyena: 2 individuals seen dead on the road during our drive to the park. Heard at night at Worgona valley. Gaysay plains is apparently a good place to look for them in the morning or late afternoon.

Starck's hare: this endemics species has seen its number declines over the last 20 years due to the increase in grazing pressure within the park. Took us 3 days to see one around Sodota camp given the lack of ground cover in the area. Much more numerous in the Orgoba valley (counted more than a dozen that I could see one evening) and on the Sanetti plateau.

Mountain nyala: Seen in Gaysay Plains on arrival on as we left. Can also be found around the parks headquarters.

Leopard: present, takes a lot of luck to see one I guess. I know it was heard calling in Orgoba valley in November 2016, and Tamane mentioned an old observation from a wolf watcher in Karenza valley of a pack of wolves chasing one (that must have been quite a sight). The closest we came were a couple of old scratch marks in an area of bushes deliberately burnt by the villagers to get rid of the cover for leopards.

African wildcat (possible): members of our team caught a quick view of what of possibly could have been this species according to Tamane.

Ratel: found some burrows in Orgoba valley and some skins of one individuals at the same area. Asking around they have been seen as high up as the Sanetti Plateau (may be spotlighting, if permitted, could yield some results).

Warthog: common in Gaysay grasslands, also seen at the entrance of the web valley.

Meneli's bushbuck: good to look for them in Gaysay grasslands and around the park headquarters.

Common duiker: one seen in Gaysay grasslands.

Blick's grass mouse: common throughout the web valley and Sanetti plateau, always hearing their alarm calls when walking and seeing them shot back into their burrows. Only species (with the giant mole rat) that I identified thanks to Tamane. Couple more rodents species can be found but couldn't really tell you which ones I'm afraid.

Genet sp. : one seen dead on the road coming from Addis.

Bat sp. : some individual bat seen at dusk at Goda Sanga camp hunting, species unknown. Tamane seemed to think they have 2 or 3 species up there.

Rock hyrax: on every rocky escarpment in the park.

Egyptian mongoose : one seen in the first evening next to Sodota camp trying to catch a pigeon before disappearing in the shrubs.

Vervet monkey: a few seen in a village during the drive from Addis.



Ethiopian wolf, Sodo Goda



Giant mole rat, Sanetti Plateau

Bale national Park is definitely worth a visit in my mind: interesting species (birds and mammals), incredible scenery and never seen so many rodents. The **Gayssay grasslands** (and forest around the headquarters) would appear to be the best place to come across large herbivores, some carnivores (hyena, serval) and baboons. I get the feeling most people just drive up to the **Sanetti plateau** and work the area up there to find the species but would definitely recommend walking through the **Web valley** (choosing one or two camps in the wilder valleys to increase chances of wildlife encounters; and an African sunrise/sunset will never disappoint nor will an African sky at night). Did not get a chance to visit the **Haremma forest** but possibility to see some nice species there (lion, wild dog, leopard and Bale monkey). Unfortunately we did notice the impact of the increase in human settlements within the park (especially at the entrance of the Web valley where the ground cover is non-existent due to

overgrazing), hopefully get it under control to avoid destruction of remaining good quality habitat in the park.

Species list Debre Libanos

Gelada: seen as soon as we entered the Ethio-german hotel. Then present all the time along the top of the escarpment heading down to sleep in the cliffs and back up in the morning. Also seen above Debre Libanos church on edge escarpment.

Olive baboon : seen above the Debre Libanos church on the escarpment.

Rock Hyrax : along the escarpment around the hotel.



Escarpment from the Ethio-German hotel



Male Gelada, Portuguese bridge

P.S. If you happen to visit the park and see a golden eagle, would really like to hear about the location.

