

CAMEROON 2008

Report by Michael Mills

Due to practical reasons, this year's itinerary was a slightly abbreviated version of our comprehensive Cameroon tour. All regular sites were visited, and despite having five fewer days than last year, we recorded a total of 585 species (over 550 seen by participants), finding almost all the Cameroon Mountains endemics and northern specials. We visited, in sequence, Mount Cameroon, the Mora area, Waza National Park and surrounds, Benoué National Park, Ngaoundaba Ranch, Yaounde, the Sanaga River, the Bamenda Highlands, the Bakossi Mountains, Mount Kupé and Korup National Park.

Highlights of our first day, on Mount Cameroon, included Brown-backed Cisticola, Oriole Finch, Green Longtail, Little Oliveback, Western Green Tinkerbird, Mountain Sawwing, Mountain Robin-Chat, Mount Cameroon Speirops, Red-faced Crimsonwing, Yellow-breasted Boubou and Cameroon Sunbird. The Northern tour included, in sequence seen: Bearded Barbet, White-headed Barbet, Fox Kestel, Rock Firefinch, White-crowned Cliff Chat, Yellow Penduline Tit, Black Scrub-Robin, Cricket Warbler, Quail-Plover, Black Crowned Crane, Egyptian Vulture, River Prinia, Arabian Bustard, African Swallow-tailed Kite, Grasshopper Buzzard, Yellow-crowned Gonolek, Four-banded Sandgrouse, Long-tailed Nightjar, Sennar Penduline Tit, Northern White-faced Owl, Black-faced Quail-finch, Egyptian Plover, Violet Turaco, Bar-breasted Firefinch, Adamawa Turtle Dove, Red-winged Grey Warbler, Greater Painted-Snipe, Grey-headed Oliveback, White-throated Francolin, Spotted Creeper, Black-faced Firefinch, Blue-bellied Roller, Dorst's Cisticola, Standard-winged Nightjar, White-crested Turaco, Willcock's Honeyguide, Oriole Warbler, Bamenda Apalis, Ross's Turaco, Brown Twinspot, Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, White-collared Starling, Bronze-tailed Starling, Dybowski's Twinspot, Red-headed Lovebird, Gambaga Flycatcher, Spotted Thrush-Babbler, Yellow-winged Pytilia and White-spotted Flufftail. The south produced Verreaux's Batis and Red-headed Picathartes on the first afternoon! The journey from Yaounde to Douala was made memorable by Sabine's Spinetail, Grey Pratincole, African Skimmer, White-throated Blue Swallow and Hartlaub's Duck. The Bamenda highlands produced Banded Wattle-eye, Bangwa Forest Warbler, Marsh Tchagra, Bannerman's Turaco, Cameroon Olive Greenbul, Bannerman's Weaver and Green-breasted Bush-Shrike. Mount Kupe and the Bakossi Mountains held White-tailed Warbler, Buff-spotted Flufftail, Black-capped Woodland Warbler, Grey-headed Greenbul, Bar-tailed Trogon, Grey-headed Broadbill, Crossley's Ground-Thrush, Black-necked Wattle-eye, Ursula's Sunbird, Johanna's Sunbird, Yellow-footed Flycatcher, Forest Swallow, Preuss's Weaver and West African Batis, and finally Korup and surrounds were memorable for Chestnut-breasted Nigrita, Red-vented Malimbe, Sjostedt's Honeyguide Greenbul, Yellow-casqued Hornbill, Black-casqued Hornbill, Bare-cheeked Trogon, Blue Cuckooshrike, Woodhouse's Antpecker, Forest Robin, Rock Pratincole, White-bellied Kingfisher, Blue-headed Bee-eater, White-crested Hornbill, Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill, Red-fronted Parrot and Black Guinea fowl.

In more detail, the trip went something like this...

9 MARCH: MOUNT CAMEROON (Bird of the day: Little Oliveback)

With a day to wait for our flight to the north, we decided to tackle the hard slog up Mount Cameroon on our first day in Cameroon. Mount Cameroon, West Africa's loftiest peak, is perhaps the best spot at which to kick off a Cameroon Mountains endemic quest, and would give us a taste of what was to come when we returned south again, ten days later. With its own endemics (speirops and francolin) and Mountain Sawwing shared with only Bioko, it is a very strategic destination indeed, and conveniently situated just an hour outside of Douala. By 0715 we were striding purposefully through the farmbrush on its lower slopes, pausing for Orange-cheeked Waxbill, Red-headed Quelea, Red-collared Widow and Black-crowned Waxbill. Both Chattering Cisticola and Brown-backed Cisticola, our first Cameroon Mountains endemic, were evident. Soon we reached the forest border, the calls of Green Longtail luring us upwards. Our first stop was for the bold Yellow-billed Turaco, followed shortly by Oriole Finch, Grey Apalis, Banded Prinia and Cameroon Sunbird. Next was our first sighting of Little Oliveback, a bird which we must have seen another 10 times during the day, but never grew tired of. Other forest birds we paused for on our speirops mission included Naked-faced Barbet, Western Green Tinkerbird, Western Mountain Greenbul, Cameroon Montane Greenbul, White-bellied Crested-Flycatcher, Mountain Sooty Boubou, Forest White-eye, Black-billed Weaver, Brown-capped Weaver, African Hill Babbler, Thick-billed Seedeater, Black-billed Weaver, Yellow-breasted Boubou, Thick-billed Honeyguide, Elliot's Woodpecker and Mountain Robin-Chat. Best of all were some perched and flying Mountain Saw-wing, which I was relieved to have under the belt considering how difficult they had been last year. By late morning we were entering the realm of speirops, and to everyone's great delight (and relief) a small flock of chattering Mount Cameroon Speirops was spotted in a large flowering tree, allowing prolonged views as they actively flitted about. With our main mission achieved, we moved back down to the forest edge for lunch, watching Black-crowned Waxbill and Red-faced Crimsonwing as we munched away at our tuna crackers. We took an easy walk down, eventually finding a cooperative (Cameroon) Evergreen Forest Warbler and spotting a Grey-chested Illadopsis for some. Overhead Eurasian Honey Buzzard and Red-necked Buzzard circled, but the distant calls of Green-breasted Bush-Shrike turned into nothing more and would have to wait for later in the trip. As we neared to bottom the skies opened and we scampered back to our car and on to Douala to rest our weary legs.

10 MARCH: TRAVEL TO GAROUA (Little Swift)

Bird of the day says it all! An incredibly frustrating day spent mostly waiting at Douala Airport for our Air Cameroon flight to take off. We eventually left 6 hours later than scheduled, arriving in Garoua just before sunset. Still, we were relieved to have made it and were consoled when we met another birding group who had waited the better part of two days to catch their flight north! Also, the prospect of taking the train back south suddenly seemed rather inviting.

11 MARCH: GAROUA TO WAZA (Quail-Plover)

Having lost several hours of birding the day before, we set off extra early. A roadside stop soon after sunrise, to give our legs a stretch, produced our first Yellow-billed Shrike and Abyssinian Roller of the trip. A short distance further we stopped near some large rocky outcrops to make the most of the cool morning temperatures. Around the base of the hills we found both Bearded Barbet and White-headed Barbet, joined by Bruce's Green-Pigeon, Veillot's Barbet and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird. The rocks themselves were favoured by Rock-loving Cisticola and White-crowned Cliff Chat, but the main prize was a pair of Rock Firefinch and a perched Fox Kestrel, expertly spotted by Martin. On the way back to the car we spotted Rose-ringed Parakeet feeding in a large tree, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-weaver, Speckle-fronted Weaver, Pygmy Sunbird, Northern Crombec, Black Woodhoopoe, and a surprise Yellow Penduline Tit, which gave excellent views. We paused in Maroua for lunch before continuing towards Mora, spotting a hovering Long-legged Buzzard just north of town and Booted Eagle a little further on. At Mora we found Crested Lark at the roadside before heading off on a long walk. Montague's Harrier, Chestnut-backed Sparrow-lark, Ethiopian Swallow, Rufous Scrub-Robin, Black Scrub-Robin, Red-pate Cisticola and Chestnut-bellied Starling all briefly diverted our attention, but we remained focused on the task at hand, although it was impossible to avoid a lengthy delay when we found a pair of Cricket Warbler. Eventually our persistence paid off as we flushed at least three Quail-Plover. Some tense minutes past as we flushed them several times without seeing them on the ground, but eventually we managed to spot a little master of deception where it fed on the ground, enjoying lengthy views. Much relieved and greatly pleased we returned to the vehicle, flushing a trio of White-bellied Bustard, and continued north to Waza. We stopped briefly for a colony of White-billed Buffalo Weaver and arrived at our campment shortly after dark, after a long, but very rewarding day.

12 MARCH: WAZA NATIONAL PARK (Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse)

As Waza National Park opened we made our way through the entrance gates and towards the plains beyond, stopping briefly for our only Northern Ant-eater Chat of the trip. As we drove, Clapperton's Francolin scurried from the roadside and several raptors were spotted, including Short-toed Eagle, Pallid Harrier, Gabar Goshawk, Dark Chanting Goshawk and Common Kestrel. We paused briefly to admire several Egyptian Vulture and Lappet-faced Vulture and a nearby Black-headed Lapwing, but our main quarry was proving typically tricky, so we soon continued, scanning the edge of the plains for its characteristic shape. A large flock of Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse feeding nearby provided some consolation and a singing River Prinia a brief diversion. After much persistence we eventually spotted the shape of an Arabian Bustard in the distance, towards which we cautiously made our way. With patience we managed to approach within 50 meters for everyone to enjoy excellent views, before turning back and visiting several waterholes where we found many Garganey, drinking Black-rumped Waxbill, Cut-throat and a male Sahel Paradise Whydah, a single Black-tailed Godwit, many storks, including Yellow-billed Stork, Woolly-necked Stork and a juvenile Saddle-billed Stork. As we left the park we spotted our first Grasshopper Buzzard and very elegant African Swallow-tailed Kite. In the afternoon we concentrated our efforts on the road south of Waza, where we found Yellow-crowned Gonolek, Northern Long-tailed Starling, Northern Carmine Bee-eater and Little Green Bee-eater. As the light faded we watched a pair of Four-banded Sandgrouse drinking at one of the pools (far fewer than normal, presumably due to the relative abundance of water still around), and after dark Long-tailed Nightjar and Spotted Thick-knee, but couldn't track down the Bronze-winged Courser that was calling. As we made our way back we watched carefully for mammals, finding several uncooperative genets before an obliging Sand Fox was spotted. But the best was to come... another Sand Fox was spotted foraging, and a short distance in trail was a Zorilla or Striped Polecat! As if this weren't enough, half an hour later we found one of Africa's least-seen carnivores, a striking Striped Hyaena! It loped along next to the road for a short while before pausing to have a good look at us, only 15 meters away, then crossed the road and disappeared off into the arid woodlands on the other side of the road. Wow!

13 MARCH: WAZA TO MAROUA (Black Crowned Crane)

With the main target bird missing from our list being Sennar Penduline-Tit we spent the early morning along the edge of the floodplain, carefully checking the *Acacia sahelica* woodland. As we went we spotted Masked Shrike and Isabelline Shrike, but soon found a pair of penduline-tit, that gave excellent views. We then decided to return to the park to enjoy some of the birds we gave so little attention the day before, and spent a while watching a group of Lappet-faced Vulture, Egyptian Vulture and Rueppell's Vulture. To our great surprise and amusement, an Arabian Bustard was visiting the very first waterhole, where it drank for almost half an hour, occasionally having a minor disagreement with an African Spoonbill. We returned to the campment for lunch and a siesta before heading south in the later afternoon. Birding again around Mora we found Blue-naped Mousebird, Rufous Scrub Robin, Yellow-bellied Eremomela and Tawny Pipit, plus further sightings of Quail Plover! On our way to Maroua Martin spotted a Red-necked Falcon perched in a roadside tree and in the town itself we found a Northern White-faced Owl feeding its recently-fledged youngster.

14 MARCH: MAROUA TO BENOUE (Egyptian Plover)

Mostly a travel day, we set off early for Benoue. Roadside stops before Garoua turned up Peregrine Falcon, Stone Partridge, Senegal Batis, Rufous-crowned Roller and Grey-backed Fiscal. At Garoua itself a walk along the river was rewarded with Senegal Thick-knee, Red-rumped Swallow, African Pipit (rare in Cameroon), Winding Cisticola and several confiding Black-faced Quail-Finch. Abdim's Stork joined several herons and cormorants on an island in the river, but it took some time to spot our main target, the very smart Egyptian Plover, again the work of Martin. After lunch we continued south, stopping for a circling Beaudouin's Snake Eagle near the Benoue turn-off. We arrived at camp as it was getting dark to find the camp in a miserable state – no running water and no electricity. Fortunately Victor rallied the troops and while we waited for buckets of water to arrive for our baths we watched a diminutive African Scops Owl calling just above our heads in the spotlight.

15 MARCH: BENOUE NATIONAL PARK (White-throated Francolin)

With one of the most productive walks of the trip to look forward to, we were eager to get going. On the outskirts of camp we spotted our first Tropical Boubou, noisy Western Grey Plantain-eater, a calling African

Cuckoo, excited groups of Senegal Eremomela, Red-throated Bee-eater, a pair of Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Northern Puffback and several sunbirds, including Western Violet-backed Sunbird. The adjacent woodlands produced our first Fine-spotted Woodpecker, Senegal Parrot, African Moustached Warbler and Siffling Cisticola, but it was the gallery forest that was of greatest interest. Here we soon found a purring Adamawa Turtle Dove, a busy pair of Red-winged Grey Warbler, both Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat and White-crowned Robin-Chat for comparison, and several Bar-breasted Firefinch in the densely-tangled under-storey. Along the river itself Nick spotted a striking female Greater Painted-Snipe, joined by Swamp Flycatcher and our only White-headed Lapwing of the trip. Many birds were coming to drink, including Black-billed Wood Dove, some Heuglin's Masked Weaver, Black-bellied Firefinch and, best of all, a bright Grey-headed Oliveback. The riverside thickets were home to Red-faced Cisticola and Black-headed Gonolek. We returned for a late breakfast before turning our attention to the surrounding woodlands before they became too hot and insect-ridden. Not far from camp the calls of White-throated Francolin rang through the air. As we set off on foot to find our quarry we flushed a pair of Four-banded Sandgrouse, which we managed to relocate on the ground before turning our attention to our francolin friends. We found a prominent vantage point and settled down quietly. After a short bout of playback we could hear distant rustling in the grass as soon afterwards a pair of White-throated Francolin came scuttling past, completely oblivious to our presence and making no attempt to hide themselves. Fantastic! After this we pushed on a bit further, adding to our list Croaking Cisticola, Brown-backed Woodpecker, Grey-rumped Swallow, an ever-popular Spotted Creeper, Cabanis's Bunting, Rufous Cisticola and Red-winged Warbler before the heat and flies eventually became too much and we returned to the coolness of our camp. Later we returned to the woodlands, this time successfully finding a pair of smart Black-faced Firefinch, our first Blue-bellied Roller and only Heuglin's Wheatear of the trip. As the light was fading we were back at the river, watching White-backed Night Heron and a very distant Freckled Nightjar, and listening to the distant calls of Pel's Fishing Owl from the opposite bank.

16 MARCH: BENOUE TO NGAOUNDABA RANCH (Standard-winged Nightjar)

Having found all the key species along the river we decided to make the most of the cooler morning to bird in the Guinea Woodlands between the campement and the main road. Setting off at first light we watched for foraging flocks, soon spotting a pair of White-breasted Cuckooshrike. But few birds moved in the woodland and we had added only Grey Tit-Flycatcher and Dorst's Cisticola to our list before we flushed a male Standard-winged Nightjar and relocated it perched on some burned ground. At the main road we turned south, pausing for a perched Brown Snake Eagle before starting to climb the Adamawa Plateau, with African Golden Oriole, Lesser Blue-eared Starling and Whistling Cisticola shouting encouragement as climbed. At the top we spotted Sooty Chat, a perched Grey Kestrel, and a flock of busy Piapiac before arriving in Ngaoundere for an excellent buffet lunch. We were pleased to arrive at Ngaoundaba Ranch and get off the heavily corrugated and dusty road, and were immediately welcomed by a trio of confiding Sun Lark. A short walk near the campement before sunset produced several goodies, including a striking pair of White-crested Turaco, European Golden Oriole, Blue-breasted Kingfisher, Broad-billed Roller, Willcock's Honeyguide, fantastic Oriole Warbler and two Scaly Francolin perched in a tree!

17 MARCH: NGAOUNDABA RANCH (Dybowski's Twinspot/Standard-winged Nightjar)

Shortly after sunrise we found ourselves on the edge of some gallery forest, watching a pair of Bamenda Apalis gleaning leaves and branches for insects. A pair of Ross's Turaco swooped past while Yellowbill skulked in some dense tangles, occasionally emerging out into the morning light. The under-storey was remarkably quiet, with few of the key skulkers calling, so we mostly remained on the forest margin watching for seedeaters. Several Brown Twinspot joined other seedeaters, including Black-bellied Firefinch, and with some patience we all got good views. Leaflove and Blackcap Babbler called noisily but it took some time to get satisfactory views, and some had to wait until the following morning! As we slowly meandered back towards our accommodation we steadily added to our list: a lone Abyssinian Ground Hornbill pacing through the woodland, Black-headed Batis, some very Splendid Sunbirds, an impressive Grey-headed Bush-Shrike, a male White-collared Starling perched on top of a tree and several Bronze-tailed Starling, and a pair of Double-toothed Barbet in a fruiting tree. We then concentrated our efforts on the surrounds of the lake, where we quickly located several very smart Dybowski's Twinspot, plus White-chinned Prinia and Petit's Sawwing. After a short break over lunch we headed out again, finding Red-headed Lovebird in the garden, followed by Square-tailed Drongo, a perched Western Banded Snake Eagle spotted by Nick, African Wattled Lapwing, and two pairs of Gambaga Flycatcher whose calls I managed to record. After dark we were enthralled by a displaying male Standard-winged Nightjar, and with some patience managed to track down a calling Black-shouldered Nightjar.

18 MARCH: NGAOUNDABA RANCH, EVENING TRAIN TO YAOUNDE (Spotted Thrush-Babbler)

With a morning to go and not a sniff of Thrush-Babbler the day before, we immediately headed for the best patch of gallery forest. Soon the peculiar call of Spotted Thrush-Babbler could be heard from the other side of the forest, so we fought our way through the dense tangles towards its source. We crept quietly into position and sat, listening and watching for movement. Brief glimpses were eventually converted to better views, but the bird seemed unusually unresponsive and we had to content ourselves with so-so views. Fortunately a nearby Grey-winged Robin-Chat proved more obliging, although still didn't give itself up in a hurry. Next was a pair of Yellow-winged Pytilia, of which the crimson-faced male sat obligingly on top of a tree without moving for almost five minutes. As soon as it flew we turned our attention to a nearby calling White-spotted Flufftail, which everyone successfully watched stalking through the leafy forest litter. With things going so smoothly we had some time to explore another patch of forest, where we enjoyed much-improved views of Spotted Thrush-Babbler, en route spotting a soaring African Hawk Eagle. An early lunch gave us plenty of time to get to Ngaoundere and Victor enough time to secure our two sleeping compartments on the train while we sipped pamplemousse at a restaurant in town. At 5 pm we transferred to the train, setting off at around 1830.

19 MARCH: YAOUNDE (Red-headed Picathartes)

As we woke to the click-clack of the train we found ourselves drifting through a mosaic of forest and savanna. Peering out of the windows we spotted Piping and White-thighed Hornbills on their early-morning commutes, but we were all pleased when we arrived in Yaounde at 10:30 and transferred to our nearby hotel. After an early lunch we made arrangements for our afternoon outing, where we hoped to look for Cameroon's most sought-after bird. Our departure from the trail head was delayed by a pair of soaring Cassin's Hawk Eagle, Buff-throated Apalis, Sooty Flycatcher and the clear piping calls of Verreaux's Batis, eventually spotted high up in the canopy. The walk in produced Grey-throated Barbet, but we were keen to position ourselves in good time at the nesting cave of Picathartes, where one nest was evident. After about a 30-minute wait a ghostly shape swept through the cave and suddenly the glowing red-and-blue of Red-headed Picathartes was right in front of us. Some nervous minutes passed as some battled to spot the bird, but it hopped back and forth for nearly half an hour and eventually landed right on the nest, where everyone had fantastic views. Feeling very privileged with our sighting we decided to leave the bird in peace and slunk quietly away from the nest. Well away from the nest we excitedly chatted about what we had seen, equally ecstatic and relieved. The walk back to the road was uneventful although our headlamps came in handy and we arrived back in Yaounde for a late supper, tired by immensely satisfied.

20 MARCH: YAOUNDE TO DOUALA (Grey Pratincole)

With our success the previous evening we had bought ourselves a spare day. A quick adjustment to our itinerary allowed us to visit the Sanaga River en route to Douala, which proved a good move. On the outskirts of Yaounde town we spotted Palm-nut Vulture, an uncharacteristically confiding Simple Greenbul and Mottled Spinetail. A slightly longer stop in some roadside forest produced African Emerald Cuckoo, an excited Red-rumped Tinkerbird, a female Honeyguide Greenbul, several groups of busy Spotted Greenbul, Green Hylia, Green Crombec, and some very low-flying Sabine's Spinetails. At the Sanaga River we quickly spotted several Grey Pratincole, White-fronted Plover and several hundred African Skimmer, while Red-breasted Swallow and Preuss's Cliff Swallow were seen overhead. A shady lunch turned up breeding Orange Weavers and on our way back to the main road we spotted a pair of White-throated Blue Swallow perched on some low vegetation. The last stop of the day was for Hartlaub's Duck, which were on duty and behaved well. On arrival in Douala we had to take Joseph, who was looking decidedly dehydrated and unhappy with his stomach, to a clinic.

21 MARCH: DOUALA TO BAMENDA (Banded Wattle-eye)

With Joseph's test results due only a little later we decided to make the most of the time we had to spend in Douala and headed for the Wouri River. There appeared to be too many football games on the go for Long-legged Pipit, but we did spot Royal Tern flying over the river and Grey Parrot overhead, and Brown Sunbird and Carmelite Sunbird in some riverside mangroves. Back at the clinic we were informed that Joseph should stay put and decided that Garry and Julie, our Cameroonian hostess, would remain with him with one vehicle, while the rest of us continued onwards in the other vehicle. We arrived in the Bamenda highlands in the mid-afternoon, having spotted Yellow-throated Tinkerbird over a lunch break, and decided to head straight for Lake Awing. The trend of forest clearance had continued since my last visit, but we managed to quickly spot a

confiding Bangwa Forest Warbler and several African Hill Babbler. The undoubted highlight however, was a Banded Wattle-eye expertly spotted by John.

22 MARCH: BAMENDA HIGHLANDS (Bannerman's Turaco)

Mount Oku and surrounds hold the only sizeable patch of remaining Afromontane forest in the Bamenda highlands, and this area was the subject of our attention for the better part of the day. As the sun rose we found ourselves bumping up its volcanic slopes. It was a cloudy day, and although the sun was doing its best to inject some life into the cool mountain air, it never quite made it. As we nearer the forest edge we spotted several Bannerman's Weavers, but in the forest things were happening much more slowly. Black-collared Apalis proved painfully uncooperative, only giving good views after much persistence, although it must be said that Oriole Finch and Red-faced Crimsonwing were better-behaved than usual. After much waiting we obtained some brief views of Bannerman's Turaco, although it was only much later that we actually had excellent sightings. We tried for a while to track down Cameroon Olive Pigeon (I'm still not sure whether I was hearing rumbling stomachs or distant pigeons) and eventually decided to head for the grasslands, where the birds proved much more friendly. In quick succession we found calling Cameroon Pipit (split from African Pipit) and Bannerman's Pipit (split from Long-billed Pipit), Common Kestrel and Pectoral-patch cisticola, before heading back into the forest. We continued our obsession with Cameroon Olive Pigeon, but unfortunately our best opportunity for a good sighting took flight as we flushed a pair perched in a tree right next to the trail! Not very satisfying... Back in the grasslands for the last time we were again rewarded with good birding, with African Yellow Warbler, Singing Cisticola and a pair of Marsh Tchagra producing some joy at the end.

23 MARCH: BAMENDA TO MOUNT KUPE AND BAKOSSI MOUNTAINS (Green-breasted Bush-Shrike)

With only a couple of hours of birding at our disposal, shortly after sunrise we found ourselves in upper Bamenda town, watching the scarp slopes for starlings. A Lanner Falcon flew past and perched, White-crowned Cliff-Chat was obvious, and eventually several Neumnsn's Starlings appeared. Next was a forest patch where we had an hour of birding. The calls of African Broadbill rang through our ears as we quietly stalked towards a displaying male, successfully spotting it as it performed its curious buzzing flight. In the undergrowth Cameroon Olive Greenbul was a welcome find, but it was the loud snapping of wings overhead that got our pulses racing, and eventually a silent but angry Green-breasted Bush-Shrike was spotted high up in the canopy. The scope swung in its direction and we were soon enjoying detailed and prolonged observations of it preening quietly. Fantastic! Very satisfied we returned to the car to start our drive to Nyasoso, where we paused briefly before moving on the Kodmin, another hour's drive away with Cassin's Flycatcher en route. With only one day in the Bakossis it was imperative to perform the required libation ceremonies this evening. This turned out to be a very wise move, especially considering that the community was split in its support for the chief and we had to buy two crates of beer and appease the ancestors not once, but twice, which took extra time. While we sat inside drinking beer and discussing village politics the rain pelted down noisily on the tin roofs, but as soon as it abated we made our way outside and spent an hour's productive birding in the surrounding farmlands, where we found Dusky-blue Flycatcher, an aptly-named male Superb Sunbird, Bocage's Bush-Shrike and Velvet-mantled Drongo.

24 MARCH: BAKOSSI MOUNTAINS (Black-necked Wattle-eye)

With all ceremonial requirements seen to the day before, we breezed through Kodmin village and west towards the Bakossi forests, this morning rejoined by Garry and Joseph. As we entered the forest the croaky complaints of a White-tailed Warbler came from the nearby undergrowth and not long after we were all enjoying views of a tail-twitching male in some dense tangles. A large foraging flock was moving nearby, so we quickly turned our attention to a chatty Grey-headed Greenbul, which lead the group. Patience and careful watching over the rest of the morning turned up Pink-footed Puffback, Dark-backed Weaver, a displaying male African Broadbill, smart Grey Cuckoo-shrike, male Tullberg's Woodpecker, Black-capped Woodland Warbler, a retiring Yellow Longbill, juvenile and adult Black-necked Wattle-eye, Blackcap Illadopsis, two male Black-faced Rufous Warbler, Black-winged Oriole, a male Bar-tailed Trogon (spotted by Martin) and an agitated Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher. Soon after lunch our concerns turned to the skies, as a Crowned Eagle passed low overhead and the approaching storm was now imminent. And then the skies opened; at first we decided to wait things out, but conditions deteriorated further, so we started to make our way back towards Kodmin, encouraged by sizeable hail stones. After an hour, once we had left the forest, the rain slowed and eventually stopped, giving everyone a chance to dry out. We watched a soggy female Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Broad-tailed Warbler, male Bouvier's Orange-tufted Sunbird and

several Baglafaecht Weaver as they attempted to do the same. We slowly started to move back towards the forest, spotting Black-shouldered Puffback, but the rain soon returned and we decided to cut our losses. Back at Nyasoso we changed into drier plumage and set off for a little evening birding, finding our first Green Turaco and watching a Black Sparrowhawk flying over the farmbush.

25 MARCH: MOUNT KUPE (Crossley's Ground-Thrush and Buff-spotted Flufftail)

We weighed up our options for our second day in the area and opted for the more "birdy" Max's Trail, rather than slogging hard and trying for Mount Kupe Bush-Shrike up Shrike Trail. This proved an excellent decision. The morning started off very misty, dampening bird activity. On our way up to the forest border we saw little besides a cooperative Western Nicator and a pair of Black-throated Apalis, but as the skies cleared activity picked up. We soon spotted our first African Piculet feeding quietly on some fine twigs, followed by the toy-like Chestnut Wattle-eye and shimmering Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye in the dark under-storey. Just above the forest border we paused to scan and listen. Chestnut-capped Flycatcher and Rufous-crowned Eremomela were active in a nearby treetop, but we quickly turned our attention to a singing Crossley's Ground-Thrush, which Joseph picked out on its well-concealed perch. Our attention was diverted by a female Grey-headed Broadbill feeding nearby. Higher up Joseph, clearly now fully recovered, spotted a calling Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo, and not long after a pair of White-throated Mountain-Babbler, which regrettably failed to show for the rest of the group. We paused for lunch on a flatter section, where Ursula's Sunbird, Cameroon Sunbird and Tullberg's Woodpecker were spotted, before turning to spend the better part of the afternoon in the farmbush. At one stage it looked like we may be in for a repeat of the previous day's afternoon storm, but fortunately the rain bypassed us, leaving us to spot Yellow-spotted Barbet, Cassin's Honeybird, an excited trio of Yellow-crested Woodpecker, a calling female Purple-throated Cuckooshrike, "Southern" Hyliota, Black-capped Apalis, Yellow-footed Flycatcher, a female West African Batis perched lower than I have seen before, a very bright male Johanna's Sunbird and White-breasted Nigrita. An ant-swarm put on an excellent show, with several Fire-crested Alethe and Brown-chested Alethe in attendance, plus a pair of excited Olive-green Camaroptera. In the evening we stalked after the eerie hoots of Buff-spotted Flufftail, successfully spotted a striking male, looking awkwardly inflated on its call perch in a palm tree.

26 MARCH: NYASOSO TO MUNDEMBA (Shining-blue Kingfisher)

With just a couple of hours of birding before having to depart for Korup, we opted for a short amble on the Nature Trail. Red-chested Goshawk displayed overhead as we left town. We made our way to the large rock and used it as a vantage point over the forest. Forest Swallow fed busily overhead, occasionally landing in a large dead tree. Gabon Woodpecker called just out of view, and was only seen later, but Preuss's Weaver was a good find, as was Ayres's Hawk-Eagle perched in a large tree. On our way back to Lucy's we tracked down Rufous Flycatcher Thrush and Bates's Paradise Flycatcher, before starting the long, bumpy, dusty drive to Mundemba. The minibus we had been sent was in a sorry state, making the drive even less comfortable, but fortunately we managed to secure an additional four-wheel drive for the return journey a couple of days later, making the trip not only much swifter, but more comfortable. Noteworthy stops produced Giant Kingfisher, Shining-blue Kingfisher and a pair of Long-legged Pipit, but it was mostly a day of driving and dust.

27 MARCH: KORUP NATIONAL PARK (Yellow-casqued Hornbill)

With just two days to make serious inroads into Africa's lowland forest avifauna, we made an early start across the impressive suspension bridge over the Mana River into Korup's dark green blanket. Forest Robin fed quietly on the path as we got to grips with our first greenbuls, Icterine Greenbul, White-bearded Greenbul, Lesser Bristlebill and Red-tailed Bristlebill. The loud wing beats of casqued hornbills flying overhead proved rather frustrating, and we had to settle for views of the gaudy Great Blue Turaco, our first Fraser's Sunbirds, the diminutive African Piculet, and Red-vented Malimbe and Blue-billed Malimbe. The area around the Iriba Inene River proved very productive and we spent several hours here, notching up White-bellied Kingfisher and Shining-blue Kingfisher. Fire-crested Alethe and White-tailed Ant-Thrush were found feeding at an ant swarm at the river's edge. Nearby clearings produced fine views of Willcocks's Honeyguide inspecting several nest cavities, perched Blue Cuckoo-shrike and close-range views of Blue-headed Bee-eater and Tiny Sunbird. Bates's Sunbird collected fine nesting material, a Chestnut-breasted Nigrita came to the water's edge to drink, and we managed to entice into view Sjostedt's Honeyguide Greenbul, Fraser's Forest Flycatcher and Hairy-breasted Barbet. The afternoon was rather slow, but produced the only Ansorge's Greenbul of the trip, as back at the Mana River we watched Rock Pratincole at close range, and just before dusk had a pair of Yellow-casqued Hornbill pass low over our heads and land in a large tree near the river bank.

28 MARCH: KORUP AND SURROUNDS (Black Guineafowl)

Having decided not to stay at Rengo camp the previous night we made an early start into the forest, arriving at Mana Bridge at 5 am. There was an eerie silence until the deep, rhythmic booming of an Nkulengu Rail could be heard in the distance. We hurried towards the calls as it was just starting to get light, but the bird stopped just too soon and we were left wondering where the source was hidden. We waited silently, without luck, and when it became lighter we moved to a nearby clearing where we watched Lemon-bellied Crombec calling from and Speckled Tinkerbird feeding in the treetops. A bit of trawling was in order, and we soon managed to get a Bare-cheeked Trogon to respond from across a river. We fought our way through the dense understorey, across the stream and stalked into the forest on the other side where we positioned ourselves near the calling bird. A couple of calls and the bright crimson of the bird was spotted, with patience giving everyone excellent views. After this our focus turned to the under-storey, with Xavier's Greenbul, Grey Longbill, Yellow-browed Camaroptera, Dusky Crested Flycatcher, Shining Drongo and Woodhouse's Antpecker spotted during the course of the day. Higher up a pair of White-spotted Wattle-eye showed well whereas a Crested Malimbe was less willing to leave its dense tangles. As we took a rest after lunch Joseph ambled ahead, finding a troop of monkeys, complete with a very confident White-crested Hornbill. We joined him later and managed to catch up with his hornbill. Given our early start, we agreed to head back towards town early, for a break at the hotel, so we turned for the entrance. Not far from the bridge four or five dark shapes scurried from the side of the trail. A couple of fortunate birders managed to focus their binoculars on the bizarre pink heads of Black Guineafowl, but some tense moments passed as the birds disappeared into the undergrowth with most of the group having seen nothing more than shapes. We patiently stalked in the direction they had moved, when suddenly one bird popped out onto the trail far enough ahead to be relaxed, and everyone enjoyed superb prolonged, unobstructed views! Spurred on by our success no-one wanted a rest, so we decided to explore some of the roads near town. A river crossing produced a pair of perched White-throated Blue Swallow, Martin spotted a pair of Yellow-billed Barbet and several White-thighed Hornbill were feeding in a large fruiting tree, ending off an excellent day of birding.

29 MARCH: MUNDEMBA TO DOUALA VIA LIMBE (Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill)

With a long drive back to Douala ahead of us, and some key hornbills still to be found, we made an early start down the bumpy, dusty road to Kumba. Our first stop, about 30 minutes outside Mundemba was rather uneventful, with a distant Hartlaub's Duck as the highlight. Our second stop was slightly better, with a Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill feeding in a large tree right at the roadside and a relentless Black Cuckoo (*gabonensis* subspecies). Our final stop, initiated by some probable (but unconfirmed) Blue-throated Rollers flying overhead was better yet, with a trio of large hornbills (White-thighed Hornbill, Yellow-casqued Hornbill and Black-casqued Hornbill), Golden Greenbul and a surprise Red-fronted Parrot perched in a large tree. Our progress to Kumba, where we paused for lunch, was better than expected and we arrived in Buea with time to spare. A brief detour via Limbe Botanical Gardens allowed us some last minute birding, with Reichenbach's Sunbird, Western Reef Heron and a pair of smart Pale-fronted Nigrita, before heading to Douala to freshen up and enjoy a farewell dinner.