Full Detailed Itinerary - Ghana: Picathartes and Egyptian Plover

Day 1: Arrival in Accra

After arrival in Accra, you will be transferred to a hotel for the night. The first tour activity will be a welcome dinner tonight in Ghana's culturally rich capital.

Day 2: Shai Hills to Kakum NP

In the morning we will visit Shai Hills on the Accra Plains. An area of stoic inselbergs (granite outcrops) surrounded by rich wooded grassland, which is home to more than 400 bird species. A significant site for Black-bellied Bustard and Senegal Parrot in particular, Shai Hills boasts an impressive bird list with many wonderful birds like Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Guinea and Violet Turacos, Viellot’s, Double-toothed and Bearded Barbets, Blue-bellied Roller, Blue-breasted and Woodland Kingfishers, Green Woodhoopoe, Black Scimitar-bill, Mocking Cliff-chat, Splendid Sunbird, and Purple Starling, as well as Stone Partridge, an anomalous African relative of the New World wood quail! But our main target is probably the tricky Chestnut Owlet, a taxonomically debated subspecies of African Barred Owlet, which might be split in the future. The afternoon will be spent forging our way towards southwest Ghana, to one of West Africa’s premier parks, Kakum. We will spend three nights just outside the park.

Days 3-4: Kakum N.P

This is one of Ghana’s flagship reserves, comprising lush verdant rainforest, and sporting Africa’s best canopy walkway (extending some 330m) as its centerpiece attraction. There are only a handful of walkways in the entire continent, and this is definitely the best of them. The park is recognized as an Important Bird Area, with over 360 species recorded near the walkway itself, but is crucial for butterflies and mammals too. An astounding 10 species of hornbill have been recorded from the walkway, including several seldom-seen in Africa, like Western Long-tailed, Brown-cheeked, Western Dwarf, and Yellow-casqued Hornbills. The diversity of birds is extremely impressive, with 10 species of kingfishers also featuring, including Chocolate-backed and Giant Kingfishers. Watching Rosy Bee-eaters sailing past the walkway is unforgettable. A remarkable 11 barbets occur there also, including specialties like Bristle-nosed, Hairy-breasted and Naked-faced Barbets, and Red-rumped Tinkerbird. Other birds we will be on the lookout for in Kakum will be other West African specialties like Yellow-billed Turaco, Fire-bellied and Melancholy Woodpeckers, Red-vented and Blue-billed Malimbe, Violet-backed Hyliota, Sharpe’s Apalis, and Johanna’s Sunbird. Our time will not only be spent on the walkway though, as we seek birds at ground level, walking forest trails that may lead us to a ton of greenbuls, Rufous-sided Broadbill or White-tailed Alethe to add to the intoxicating mix of canopy birds on site.

Day 5: Kakum N.P. to Ankasa N.P.

Continuing our exploration of southern Ghana and the rainforest belt, we continue west to a very special site indeed, Ankasa, right on the border with Ivory Coast. This treasured area has only opened up relatively recently and so is not as well developed for tourists as Kakum, but there is a great new naturalist hotel that hosts us. This enables us access to the best pristine primary lowland rainforest in Ghana, famed for holding

rare and local species like Nkulengu Rail, White-bellied Kingfisher, White-crested Tiger-Heron, Hartlaub's Duck, Spot-breasted Ibis and Akun Eagle-Owl. We will spend two nights near this exceptional forest reserve.

Day 6: Ankasa N.P.

A full day will be spent in Ankasa seeking some of the many rare and local species occurring there. The birdlist is mouth-watering, and we will be on the hunt for Red-thighed Sparrowhawk, Shining-blue Kingfisher, Black and Blue-moustached Bee-eaters, Red-fronted Parrot, Red-chested Owlet, Rufous-winged Illadopsis, Red-headed Malimbe, Western Bluebill, White-browed Forest-Flycatcher, White-tailed Alethe, Red-fronted Antpecker, and Carmelite Sunbird. A second night will be spent in the rainforest, we can search for night birds like Fraser's Eagle-owl and Long-tailed Nightjar.

Day 7: Ankasa to Kakum N.P

After much of the day in Ankasa we return to Kakum for another night, visiting a different sector of the park.

Day 8: Kakum N.P morning, then visit the "Picathartes site", then an evening drive to Kumasi

After a few days walking forest trails seeking rare deep forest birds, we will have a break by birding the more open Aboabo section of northern Kakum National Park during the morning; this offers easy roadside birding with a shot at some special birds in the process, most notably Long-tailed Hawk, the odd nutchatch-like Preuss's Weaver, and Black-capped Apalis a specialist of this forest biome. Other exciting possibilities include Red-billed Helmetshrike, Blue Cuckooshrike and the scarce and handsome Yellow-throated Cuckoo. In the afternoon, we will make the pilgrimage to a very special piece of rainforest that hosts vine tangled caves, where the White-necked Picathartes, one of the strangest of Earth's bird families, dwells. The visit is strategically timed in the late afternoon, when the "rockfowl" usually return to their caves to roost, after a day of foraging within the forest. This bird alone draws birders to Ghana from across the globe, as it is the most reliable site in the world to find this species and indeed African endemic family. At the end of this landmark day, we drive to the city of Kumasi for the night, in readiness to visit one of the final forest sites of the main tour.

Day 9: Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary to Mole National Park

This will be a day of contrasts. In the morning we will visit the butterfly reserve of Bobiri, seeking forest species like Red-billed Dwarf-Hornbill, a tiny woodpecker in the form of African Piculet, and one of Africa's smallest birds in the form of Tit-Hylia, as well as other species like Narina Trogon, Afep and Western Bronze-naped Pigeons, African Emerald Cuckoo, Forest Scimitarbill, White-headed Woodhoopoe, Sabine's Puffback, Red-headed and Crested Malimbes and Finschs's Flycatcher-Thrush. By the afternoon, however, we will journey north, leaving the southern rainforest belt and passing into dryer Upper Guinea Savanna, with its markedly different birds. We will spend three nights at a hotel inside Mole National Park.

Days 10-11: Mole N.P

On these days we will explore the savannas of northern Ghana in earnest. Here, large herds of elephants still roam, and we will quickly boost our birdlist with easy birding in more open habitat to what we have experienced previously on the tour. This large (4,800 km2) national park protects predominantly open Guinea savanna woodland, which is interspersed with grasslands, swamps, and escarpments. There are

two ephemeral rivers in the park, the Lovi and Mole, which dry out during the dry season and act as waterhole magnets for mammals and songbirds like finches. Mole is home to more than 330 bird species (90% of Ghana's savanna avifauna!) and over 90 mammals. Based at the park's main hotel, beautifully perched on an escarpment over-looking panoramic waterholes and savanna woodland below, there's always a chance of an exciting find. We will watch the waterholes, for the likes of elephants, Waterbuck, Kob and Bushbuck, and a slew of waterbirds, like Hamerkop, Woolly-necked and Saddle-billed Storks, Black-headed Heron and Hadada Ibis. Closer inspection may reveal flocks of radiant finches, like Lavender and Orange-cheeked Waxbills, firefinches (six species occur in the park), and Red-winged Pytillias. The skies are not to be ignored as there are an incredible 30 raptor species, including Palm-nut and White-backed Vultures, African Cuckoo-Hawk, Bateleur and Red-necked Buzzard, six bee-eaters (including Red-throated and Northern Carmine Bee-eaters), seven hornbills (including Abyssinian Ground-Hornbill and Northern Red-billed Hornbill), five rollers (including Abyssinian, Broad-billed and Purple Rollers), and ten kingfishers (including Blue-breasted and Gray-headed Kingfishers). Other notable species include Violet Turaco, Bearded Barbet, Yellow-billed Shrike, Senegal Eremomela, the gorgeous black-and-yellow Oriole Warbler, Purple Starling, White-crowned Robin-Chat, Splendid Sunbird, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver, and Sahel Bush Sparrow. Night birding is often productive with some amazing marquee nightbirds, including Grayish Eagle-Owl, African Scops-Owl, Northern White-faced Scops-Owl, and the stunning Standard-winged and Long-tailed Nightjars all possible. Two nights will also be spent inside the park, on the scenic escarpment.

Day 12: Mole N.P. to Bolgatanga

Departing Mole we forge farther north, moving into the Upper East Region of northern Ghana, close to the border with Burkina Faso. The habitat noticeably becomes drier, hillier and rockier. In the afternoon we visit Tongo Hills, an area of granite outcroppings, where we seek Fox Kestrel, Rock-loving Cisticola, Mocking Cliff-chat and Brown-rumped Bunting. Other birds include Gabar and Dark-chanting Goshawks, Piapiac, Pygmy and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, and Orange-cheeked and Black-rumped Waxbills. Two nights will be spent in Bolgatanga, a town that lies within the Red Volta River Valley, historically a major migration route for elephants, and a great strategic position to pursue another key West African bird family the following day...

Day 13:Tono Dam and Egyptian Plover

Today we skirt the Burkina Faso border, starting out at Tono Dam, where waterbirds mix with songbirds visiting the wetland' edge to slake their thirst. Targets include Spur-winged Goose, Forbes's Plover, Senegal and Spotted Thick-knees, Four-banded Sandgrouse, Namaqua Dove, Great Spotted Cuckoo, Yellow Penduline-Tit, African Silverbill, Cut-throat, Zebra Waxbill, Gosling's Bunting, and several starlings like Long-tailed Glossy, Chestnut-bellied, Lesser Blue-eared, Greater Blue-eared and Bronze-tailed Starlings. At this time we may also encounter some migratory Western Palearctic warblers too. In the afternoon we shift focus to a river where another spectacular African-endemic family can be found, the striking black-white-and-grey Egyptian Plover or Crocodile Bird, one of the major drawcards for this tour. Patrolling the river banks, if it takes flight we will be exposed to one of the neatest wing patterns in the avian world. We return to Bolgatanga for a second night.

Day 14: Tamale to Accra/Departures from Accra

After some final birding within the dry country of Northern Ghana, we retreat south, to the city of Tamale to connect with a domestic flight to the Ghanaian capital, Accra. This will be taken in the afternoon in order to

arrive in time for international departures from Accra this evening.

Tour Extension 1

Day 1: Arrival in Accra. Afternoon visit to Shai Hill

Day 2: Drive to Atewa area. Afternoon birding in secondary habitat

Day 3: Atewa Hills. Full day's hiking and birding

Day 4: Drive to Accra in morning. Arrival day of main tour

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