

GHANA TRIP REPORT: 02 MAY – 15 MAY 2016



Bare-headed Rock-fowl (Original name by BANNERMAN) Yellow-headed Picathartes (Suzy van de Reep)

Some of the participants arrived three days before the commencement of the tour to acclimatize and look around Accra before the other participants arrived on the evening of the 1 May. During this time two visits were made to the University Botanical Gardens (Legon Botanical Gardens) where several excellent and photographic opportunities were had by those present. All in all a very productive tour was had by all with a total of 313 species of birds being seen and a further 16 heard in the two weeks trip, a few others were seen only by the guide and thus not included. Although the hot humid conditions took a while to adapt to, everyone had some very good experiences from bird sightings, a visit to the largest open air market in West Africa in Kumasi and the most incredible butterflies of Bobiri Forest and Butterfly Sanctuary. The various vegetation types and forests were also spell bounding with many species of trees and shrubs not identifiable but nevertheless remaining interesting.



Yellow-billed Shrike on left and Bearded Barbet at Botanical Gardens, Accra (Louise Braine)



Senegal Parrot left and Senegal Thicknee at Botanical Gardens, Accra (Louise Braine)



Blue-bellied Roller left and Accra Botanical Gardens (Louise Braine)

The participants were mainly from Namibia: Jan and Suzi van de Reep from Huab Lodge (who had joined us on an Antarctic trip a few years ago), Katy Sharpe from Tutwa Travel, Katima Mulilo, Sue Roux, Louise, myself and Patty Hopp, who had travelled from the States. We travelled through the country in a

spacious air-conditioned and comfortable bus with an excellent driver and had a local bird guide (Victor) as well as a butterfly guide (Andy) employed by Ashanti tours for the entire trip. Fresh fruit mainly in the form of Watermelon, Pineapple, Mangoes and Bananas were purchased almost on a daily basis and enjoyed at breakfast and dinner. The meals throughout were typical Ghanaian dishes (Red Red, Gari Foto etc., edible and fairly spicy and sometimes hot). Most meals comprised of chicken, fish, rice, spaghetti with the occasional fresh salad. We rated the French fries (chips) the best we had ever had! Most accommodation was fairly basic as far as Namibian standards go and the two nights camping at Ankasa were extremely basic and not recommended! Ashanti tours are however in the process of constructing a camp at the entrance gate and this should make Ankasa far more attractive.

When travelling to Ghana for the first time, be warned it is Africa, however we found the people throughout to be very friendly and English is spoken widely, making it a lot easier travelling and communicating than Cameroon, Gabon, and Angola or for that matter any other West African state. It would be strongly advised not to attempt a self drive but rather use a reputable company such as Ashanti tours as they know the various routes, bird stake-outs and their organization was superb. The following day to day account of the tour is presented below with the highlights and species of birds and animals observed during the period.

Day 1:

After a leisurely breakfast at Sleepy Hippo we were met by Victor and Anim and transferred to the Erata Hotel. We spent the rest of the morning strolling around and buying adaptors and birding in the urban area. Patty arrived and joined us for lunch and we decided to return to the Botanical Gardens. After an early dinner and terrible Spanish wine we called it a day. The last participant arrived at midnight and the tour commenced officially on the morning of the 3 May 2016.



White-throated Bee-eater Accra Botanical Gardens Accra (Louise Braine)

Day 2:

After breakfast we strolled in the hotel's garden and encountered Bar-breasted Firefinch breeding in a disused Black-necked Weaver nest, also Common Bulbul, Yellow-billed Kites and Hooded Vultures flying overhead, Western Plantain-eater, Senegal Coucal, Black-necked Weaver and Pied Crows the latter turned out to be the most common bird seen throughout the trip both in the towns and urban areas.



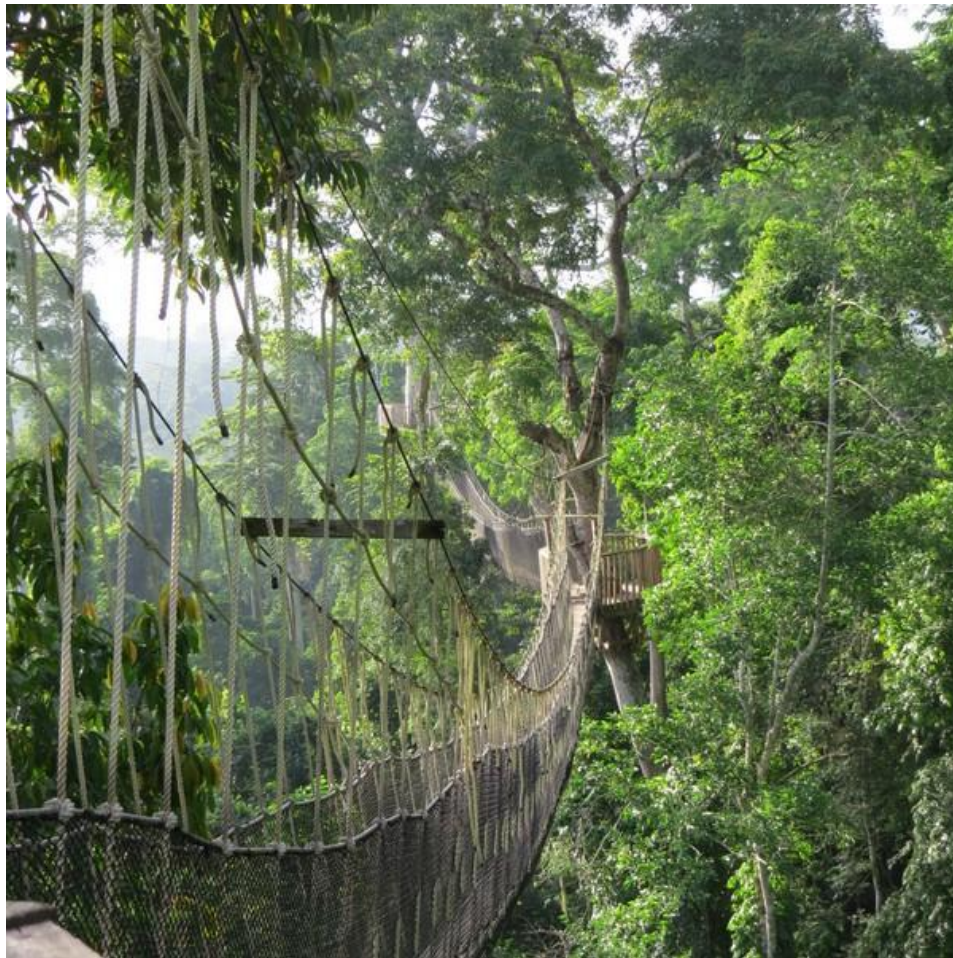
Western Reef Herons – Black & White forms at Winneba Lagoon (Louise Braine)

We then departed at 09:00 for the Cape Coast towards Winneba Lagoon and then on to our hotel for the next three nights, the Rainforest Lodge at Jukwa. En route we saw our first Northern Red and Black-winged Bishops in full breeding regalia, other species seen were Common Fiscal, a single Common Kestrel, Grey Kestrel, Yellow-billed Shrike, African Pied and Grey Hornbills, Hooded Vulture, Barn Swallow, Little and African Palm Swifts and many Cattle Egret as well as our first of many Ethiopian Swallows. A brief stop at Winneba Lagoon gave us stunning views of no less than 16 Western Reef Heron both the black and white forms as well as good views of Common Redshank of which one was in full breeding dress, Common Greenshank, a single Grey Heron, Pied Kingfisher a singled Spur-winged Lapwing, several Common Ringed Plovers, Black-winged Stilt, a Marsh Sandpiper, Ruff and Whimbrel. We also managed to have scoped views of a group of 12 distant Royal Terns. On the walk to the lagoon we had our first brief glimpse of the spectacular Yellow-crowned Gonolek as well as Village Weaver, Lesser-striped Swallow, Winding Cisticola and the familiar sound of Zitting Cisticola. We then continued to Jukwa and booked into our hotel where there were many Little Swifts and a pair of Mottled Spinetail flying overhead, this was our accommodation for the next three nights. After lunch we travelled a short distance to some degraded farm land where we all had our first 'real' taste of the forest species to come. Species here included more Mottled Spinetails flying overhead on arrival, the first of many Woodland Kingfishers, African Pygmy Kingfisher, Piping Hornbills, Red-rumped and Speckled Tinkerbird, Hairy-breasted Barbet, Broad-billed Roller, White-throated and Black Bee-eaters, Fire-bellied and Melancholy Woodpeckers, Grey Kestrel, Velvet-mantled Drongo, Square-tailed and Fanti Saw-wings, Slender-billed Greenbul, Little Grey and Little Greenbul, Common Bulbuls, Grey-backed and Yellow-browed Camaroptera, Whistling Cisticola, African Yellow White-eye,

African Thrush, Splendid, Glossy and Purple Glossy Starlings, Collared, Western Olive, Splendid, Johanna's and Copper Sunbirds, Red-vented Malimbe, Black-necked, Veillot's, and Village Weavers, Grey-headed and Chestnut-breasted Nigrita, Bronze and Black-and-white Manikins, Wilson's Indigobird and Pin-tailed Whydah and on our return journey many Northern Grey-headed Sparrows, Pied Crows and Yellow-billed Kites. A quick stop just before Jukwa after sunset produced good views of Long-tailed Nightjar feeding chicks and a calling Black-shouldered Nightjar nearby. We then returned to our lodge for the daily checklist and dinner before retiring for the night. Quite an overload for the first day had everyone rather 'pooped' but the nightly 'sleeping muti' in the form of red wine had everyone sleeping well.

Day 3:

An early breakfast was arranged at 05:00 after which we then set off to Kakum National Park to enter the park at first light. Here we spent the morning and late afternoon on and around the Canopy walkway which produced some lovely sightings as well as some 'fearful' moments for some traversing the various walkways!



Canopy walkway at Kakum (Sue Roux)



Forest as seen from the Canopy walkway (Louise Braine)



Western Black-headed Oriole left and Red-headed Malimbe at Kakum – Canopy Walkway (Louise Braine)

On arrival at the park entrance we had a scoped view of a pair of Brown-cheeked Hornbills and then from the walkway and platforms the following were seen; Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, Violet-backed Hyliota, Sharpe's Apalis, a brief White-crested Hornbill, but good views of Black Dwarf Hornbill, African Pied Hornbills, Spotted Greenbul, Yellowbill (Blue Malkoha), Western Black-headed Oriole, Chestnut Wattle-eye, Red-headed Malimbe, Green Hylia, African Green Pigeon, Forest Woodhoopoe, Cassin's Honeybird, Little Grey, Golden and Slender-billed Greenbuls, Rufous-crowned Eremomela and several sunbirds including the spectacular Buff-throated Sunbird, others included Green, Collared, Johanna's and Splendid. We also had stunning views of Yellow-billed Turaco, nesting Yellow-mantled Weavers and Preuss's Golden-backed Weavers. Several Naked-faced Barbets and a single Yellow-throated Tinkerbird were seen, a Sub-adult Cassin's Hawk Eagle was photographed from one of the platforms but not seen by all, the bird of the day was a Yellow-footed Honeyguide, the afternoon also produced a few Palmnut Vultures, African Harrier Hawk and in the early evening a wonderful view of a single Akun Eagle Owl at the park entrance before returning to our lodge for dinner and daily checklist.



Red-capped Flycatcher at Kakum (Sue Roux) and Yellow-mantled Weaver Kakum (Louise Braine)

Day 4:

Another early morning start after a breakfast had us travelling to another degraded forest in the Antwikwaa section of the park which produced a lot of good birds the White-spotted Flufftail being the main target and seen well by all participants. Other species seen in the surrounds were Little and White-throated Bee-eaters, Buff-spotted Woodpecker, Orange-cheeked Waxbills, Blue-billed Malimbe, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher, Olive-bellied, Little Green, Collared, Superb, Frasers, and Johanna's Sunbirds, Sooty Boubou, Simple Leaflove, the spectacular Red-billed Helmet Shrike, Black Spinetail, Dusky-blue Flycatcher, Forest Robin, Red-cheeked Wattle-eye, Rufous-sided Broadbill, Senegal Parrots, Puvell's Illadopsis, Tit Hylia, nesting Speckled Tinkerbird and great views of Veillot's Barbet, Sharpe's Apalis and Red-necked Buzzard.



Misty mood in Antwikwaa area (Louise Braine)

We then returned via a different route and at the Pra River we had good views of Rock Pratincole and some had brief views of White-bibbed Blue Swallow, here we also watched the dredging of the river bed for gold as well as the production of palm sap. On another small river there were dozens of Preuss's Cliff Swallows observed.



Extraction of palm oil 'factory' near Pra River (Louise Braine)

Day 5:

From the Rainforest Lodge after another early start and a visit to Abrafo, another forest section near the Kakum National Park, we returned for lunch and departed for our next destination.



Splendid Sunbird and Black Bee-eaters near Jukwa (Louise Braine)

En route we stopped in at a slave castle at Cape Coast, a remnant from the early slave trade and from here we travelled eastwards towards Ankasa Reserve, en route we stopped at a couple of spots one with breeding Orange and Veillot's (Black and Chestnut) Weavers, a Lesser (Allen's) Gallinule, and Green-backed (Striated) Heron.



Cape Coast Castle a remnant from the early Slave trade and Local artist Cape Coast (Louise Braine)



Orange Weaver (Louise Braine)

Further along at a Wetland next to the road we had a Western Reef Heron, Whimbrel, Pied and Giant Kingfisher, Purple and Grey Heron, African Long-tailed (Reed) Cormorants and distant Hartlaub's Ducks. Other species seen throughout were Yellow-billed kites, Hooded Vulture, African Harrier Hawks, Northern Grey-headed Sparrows, Red-eyed and Laughing Doves, and on arrival at Ankasa Tambourine Dove and African Green Pigeon, Western Nicator, Lesser striped and Mosque Swallows, Senegal Coucal, Mottled Spinetail and after dinner we had good views of African Wood Owl in the trees above the camp.



Red-billed Helmet Shrike near Jukwa left and Yellow-billed Turaco at Ankasa (Louise Braine)

Day 6:

This morning before dusk the Nkulengu Rails could be heard calling and our guides were out searching for these elusive birds. Unfortunately they were not located on both the nights at Ankasa and in general the birding here was not productive and far below average according to the local guides, we did not see any of the larger hornbills or Great Blue Turaco and dipped on the White-crested Tiger Heron which was seen by one of the guides but not by any of the participants. Birds seen on the walks in and around the forest produced better views of Hartlaub's Ducks, Western-bearded Greenbull, Yellow-spotted Barbet, Tiny Sunbird, Cassin's Flycatcher, Shining Blue Kingfisher, Fanti Saw-wings, and on the road a single brief glimpse of a Blue-headed Wood Dove was seen. Other species such as Pale-breasted and Blackcap Illadopsis, Green Bristlebill and several other species were only heard but not seen; generally the birding overall was disappointing in Ankasa.



Crested Malimbe building nest at Ankasa (Sue Roux)

Day 7:

Today after some brief birding around the camp we headed back towards the Rainforest Lodge doing some birding en route. At a lagoon we stopped for Brown (Mangrove) Sunbird and further along we stopped near Brenu Akyinim and did some excellent birding on the coastal savannah, (Brenu beach road) here in search of the Marsh Tchagra which we did not see! But we encountered our first Snowy-crowned Robin Chat and had good views of Yellow-crowned Gonolek, Black-crowned Tchagra, both Northern red and Black-winged Bishop, Yellow-mantled Widow, Orange-cheeked and Black-rumped Waxbills, Wilson's Indigobird, Red-billed and Bar-breasted Firefinches, Slender-billed Weavers, Double-spurred Spurfowl, Pin-tailed Whydah, African Wattled Lapwing, and African Harrier Hawk were also seen. We then continued on to Rainforest Lodge for the night.



Veillot's Barbet left and African Harrier Hawk (Gymnogene) at Brenu beach road (Louise Braine)

Day 8:

Once again we set off on an early start to first bird the area of Abrafo forest to catch up on any birds which we may have missed, birds seen were Icterine, Little, Slender and Simple Greenbuls, Tit Hylia, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Whistling Cisticola, Senegal Coucal (as well as the dark morph) and also various sunbirds which were seen previously.



Senegal Coucal – Normal and Black morph (Louise Braine)

We then stopped for lunch at Assin Fosu in the most 'kitsch' spot on the planet, but interesting nevertheless! BEFORE heading to Bonkro village where we stopped and walked to the nearest Picathartes breeding site. The forest here is still fairly intact and the butterflies were really good. We also had a brief sighting of Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo en route to the Picathartes site, also calling were Klaas's, Diderik, and Emerald Cuckoos. Shortly after arriving at the Picathartes site the birds arrived as if ordered, we all had over an hour of what must be the best bird watching in a long while, we watched several interactions and some superb behavior of one of the most peculiar birds that most of us had ever seen. Extremely satisfied and overwhelmed, we then returned to our accommodation in the Royal Basin Hotel in Kumasi. We had a glass of wine or two and then prepared for the next day after completing our daily log and dinner.



Green (Guinea) Turaco (Louise Braine)

Day 9:

Today we left Kumasi after breakfast and headed northwards to Mole National Park and did some roadside birding en route. We had lunch en-route at Techiman which was excellent and then continued our journey.



Rural scene en route to Mole National Park (Louise Braine)



Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu at the hide at Mole (Louise Braine)



Patas monkey (Louise Braine)

We visited Abrafo forest for a short while before continuing, here and along the road to Mole the following new birds were added to our growing list: Hammerkop, Beaudouin's Snake-eagle, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Grasshopper Buzzard, Shikra, Lizard Buzzard, Spotted Thicknee, Black-billed Wood Dove, Levallant's Cuckoo, Thick-billed Cuckoo, Diderik Cuckoo, Abyssinian and Blue-bellied Rollers, Double-toothed Barbet, Lanner, Rose-ringed Parrot, Senegal Parrot, White-crested Helmet Shrike, Eurasian Golden Oriole, Fork-tailed Drongo, Honeyguide Greenbul, Green Crombec, African Blue Flycatcher, White-shouldered Black Tit, Red-chested Swallow, Red-winged Warbler, Senegal Eremomela, Brown Babbler, White-fronted Black Chat, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Bush Petronia and Yellow-fronted Canary. Arrive at Mole (Ghana's biggest National Park) and book into Motel with Beautiful Sunbird on the flowers in the garden and Western Plantain Eaters calling nearby.



Abyssinian Roller, Mole (Louise Braine) left and Blue-throated Roller at Abrafo Forest (Sue Roux)



Forbes Plover left and Denham's Bustard middle at Mole and Red-rumped Lark (Rufous-rumped Lark) (Louise Braine)

Day 10 & 11:

Early morning drive and walk in park then return for lunch. First bird in the morning was a Northern Black Flycatcher calling, Grey Hornbills flying overhead and Hadedah calling in the distance. We saw our first animals here and they included Buffon's Kob, Olive Baboon, Elephant, Forest Buffalo and Red-flanked Duiker. Monkeys seen in the afternoon were Callithrix and Patas, as well as Warthog and Bushbuck in the camp at dusk. Bronze Mannikin, Red-cheeked Cordon-blue, Red-billed and Bar-breasted Firefinch were seen around the camp as well as Red-capped Sparrow Weavers. New birds on the drive/walk were Long-tailed Starling, African Thrush, Greater Blue-eared Glossy and Purple Starling, Violet-backed Starling, Red-headed Weaver, Little Weaver, Blue-breasted Kingfisher, Malachite Kingfisher, Scarlet-chested, and a single female Pygmy Sunbird. In the afternoon good views of Red-rumped Lark, Veillot's and Bearded Barbets, Red-throated Bee-eater, Pale and Swamp Flycatchers, Grey Tit Flycatcher, Oriole Warbler, Sun Lark, Double-spurred Spurfowl, Stone partridge, White-throated Francolin, Wire-tailed Swallow, Common Swift, African Paradise Flycatcher with white form male, African Golden Oriole, Northern Puffback, Red-shouldered and White-breasted Cuckoo Shrikes, Common (Brown-throated) Wattle-eye, Fine-spotted, Cardinal, Grey and Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Double-toothed and Bearded Barbets, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Lesser Honeyguide, Green Woodhoopoe, Black Scimitarbill, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Greyish Eagle Owl, Red-necked Nightjar and

Standard-winged (without his standards), Vinaceous Dove, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Violet Turaco, African Cuckoo, African Jacana, White-faced Whistling Duck, Forbes's Plover, Denham's Bustard, Squacco Heron, Helmeted Guineafowl, White-backed Vulture and Bateleur.



Violet Turaco seen at various localities (Louise Braine)



White-throated Francolin left and Red-throated Bee-eater at Mole (Louise Braine)

All in all a good few days were had in Mole where the viewing is not all that easy due to the dense bush, however at the Motel site there is a viewing area overlooking a waterhole which was reasonably productive, as were the birds in and around the camp.



Four bull elephants at Waterhole at Mole (Sue Roux) and Buffon's Kob (Louise Braine)

Day 12:

Leave Mole and bird along the route to Kumasi no new birds were seen and on reaching Kumasi most of the group opted to visit the open air market (the largest open air market in West Africa) for shopping, this turned out to be exhilarating to say the least, one of the participants said it made New York look tame!! We then returned to the Royal Basin Hotel for dinner and bird list before retiring for the night.



Blue-headed Coucal left and Black Dwarf Hornbill (Louise Braine)

Day 13:

Leave Kumasi at 06h15 for the Bobiri Forest and Butterfly Sanctuary, a big highlight for most of us. After a late lunch we eventually left for Accra, however we could all have stayed here for another day quite easily! Morning birding at Bobiri produced good Blue-headed Coucal on entering the forest, then several other species while walking to the butterfly centre. New birds seen were Narina Trogon, Emerald Cuckoo in the scope, Black Dwarf Hornbill and a beautiful Fire-footed Rope Squirrel. Folks on the walk had good views of White-crested Hornbill, Grey Longbill, White-browed Camaroptera and a few

other species seen previously. The butterflies here were absolutely mind boggling and those that remained spent their time photographing the large array of different species that were around in profusion feeding on mango's that had dropped from the trees. The experience then came to an end when we were shuttled into the bus and then drove off towards Accra for our last night in Ghana. Here we once again stayed in the Erata Hotel after our driver negotiated the most incredible Saturday evening traffic and driving we had encountered on the trip!!

Some of the butterflies of Bobiri and other areas along the route are pictured below:



Western Blue-Banded Forester Euphaedra eupalus



Lilac Beauty Salamis cacta



Bamboo Charaxes Charaxes bouti (Louise Braine)



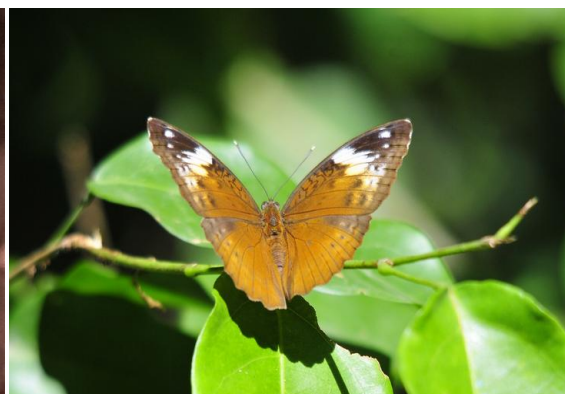
African Mapwing Cyrestis camillus (Louise Braine)



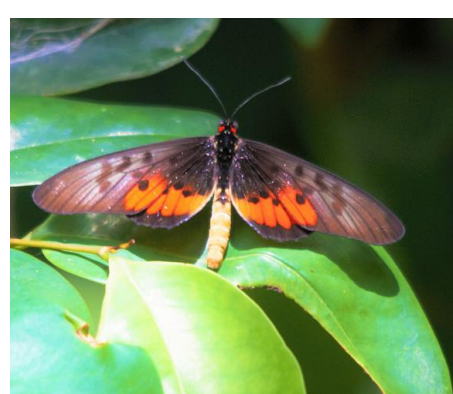
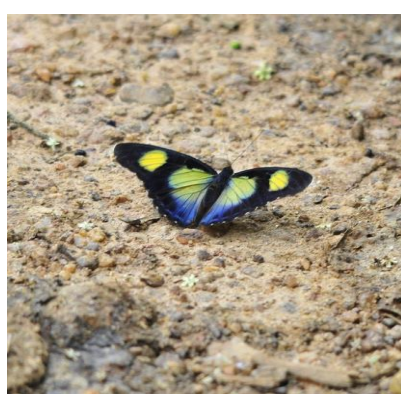
Common Yellow Glider *Cymothoe egesta* (Louise Braine)



Common Hairstreak *Hypolycaena philippus* (Steve Braine)



Common Palm Forester *Bebearia cocalia* (Louise Braine)



Flame-bordered Charaxes *Charaxes protoclea* left, Ghana Ceres Forester *Euphaedra ignota* middle, Elegant Acraea *Acraea egina* right (Louise Braine)



Soldier Pansy Junonia terea (Louise Braine)



Mocker Swallowtail Papilio dardanus (Louise Braine)



Blue Diadem Hypolius salmaccis (Louise Braine)



Western Nymph Euriphenes coerulea (Steve Braine)



Forest Mother of Pearl Protophormia parhassus (Louise Braine)



Black-Patch Hairstreak Hypolycaena liara (Louise Braine)



Common Red Glider Cymothoe coccinata (Louise Braine)



Herminia Glider Cymothoe herminia (Louise Braine)

Day 14:



Eastern Plantain Eaters left and Double-toothed Barbet (Louise Braine)

After our breakfast at the hotel we left to the Shai hills nearby Accra to look for the White-capped (Mocking Cliff) Chat which was briefly heard but not seen! En-route we saw two Black-shouldered Kites, Splendid Starlings, Common Bulbuls, and an array of various species which we had seen previously. On entering the Shai Hills area we encountered Callithrix and Lesser Spot-nosed Monkeys, here we also had further sightings of Violet Turaco, Veillot's and Bearded Barbets, Common (Brown-throated) Wattle-eye, African Pied and Grey Hornbills but nothing new. We were then warned that we should leave due to traffic when the churches come out and we then returned to our hotel and packed up, had lunch, completed the checklist and then took a slow drive through the University campus grounds for a last bit of birding. Here we saw Brown Babbler and at a termite emergence many Splendid Starlings, Pied Crows, Grey Hornbills, Broad-billed Rollers and a few other species previously seen.

Afterwards we drove to the Sleepy Hippo where Jan and Suzi were to stay for the next few days. We then had a farewell drink and dinner before ending our Ghana visit by returning to the airport and saying our goodbyes to the guides and driver, we were now pretty 'pooped' and marched into the Kotoka airport at Accra to complete the normal formalities while continuing to think how rapidly the time had gone by and reminiscing about those peculiar birds of the forest.. The Picathartes! A great trip had come to an end with great folks and many great stories!



Oleander Hawk Moth (Steve Braine) left, Giant Blue Skipper (Louise Braine) middle and Mekanorhinna torquata (Steve Braine)



Ankasa campsite, left Our favourite travelling companion, middle Getting ready for the Picathartes hike, right