

Birding in and around Hargeisa, Somaliland, April 2014

by Bram Piot

From March 29th to April 5th 2014 I visited Hargeisa for my work, and like last time (December 2010) managed to go out birding a bit. My stay coincided with the arrival of the first rains and the start of the breeding season for many species. On Friday April 4th I did a day trip with Abdi Jama from *NatureSomaliland*, who had also guided me in 2010, and the next day I visited an archeological site not too far out of town, where I spent a couple of hours birding.

Hargeisa bush country & Qool-Caday Plain

We set off at 5.40am for our day trip and did a loop starting from the airport area towards the SE, then turning west onto the Qool-Caday plain (see map 1). This site, also spelled Qoladay or Kool Adey, is known for Golden Pipit (during/after rains), larks and bustards but since it was mid-afternoon by the time we reached the plain and because of pretty windy (and sandy!) conditions we didn't spend much time here. We weren't after any particular species but I was generally keen on recording songs and calls of some of the local "specials". Most birding was done during opportunistic stops along the road, and quite a few species were spotted while driving on the tracks – most of which allow for a speed max. 20 to 30 km/h only; only the last 20 km of the loop is on tarmac road. Return to Hargeisa around 7.30pm.



Road near Xadhig-Xadhig

Some 90 species were recorded during this day trip, including breeding Greater Kestrel, 4 species of bustard (incl. Little Brown and Kori's), 3 species of courser (Somali, Heiglin's, Double-banded), Somali Bee-eater, Short-tailed and Blanford's Lark, Chestnut-headed Sparrow-Lark, Somali Wheatear, Pale Prinia, Dwarf Raven, White-crowned Starling, two Golden-breasted Starlings, Somali Fiscal, Somali Bunting, etc.



Settlement on the Qool-Caday plain

Las Geel

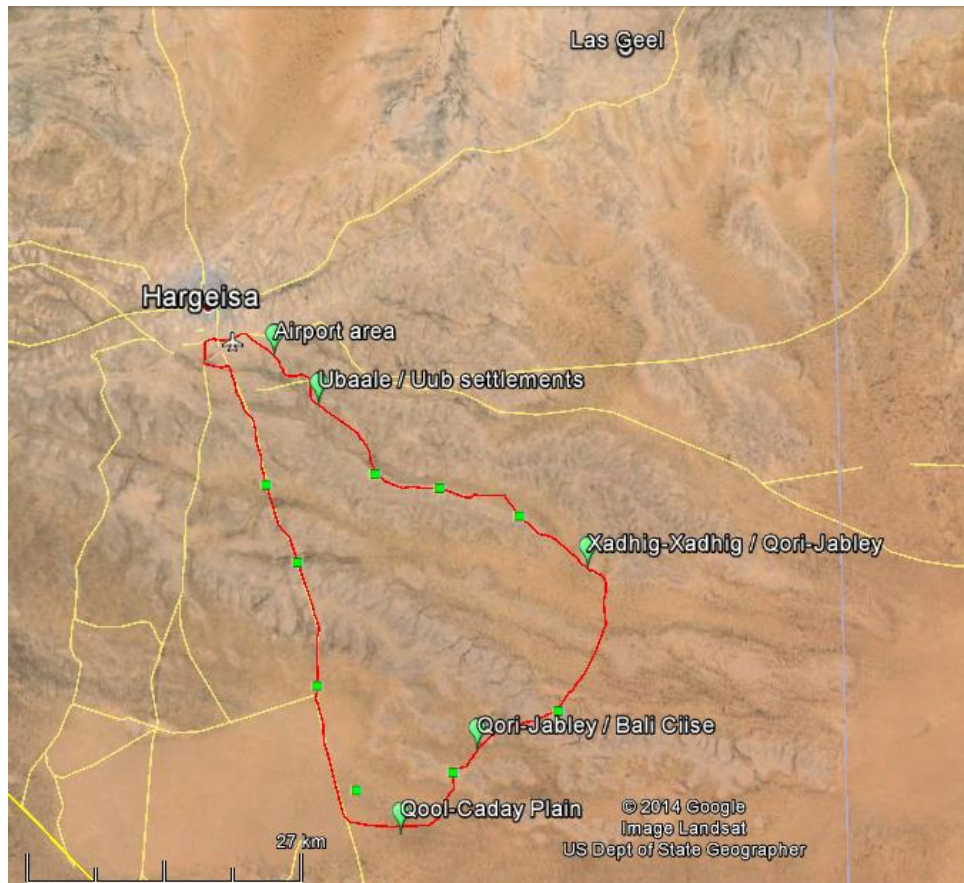
Located about 60 kms ENE of Hargeisa, the Las Geel caves are an important archeological site for its remarkable rock paintings dating from around 7000 BC. They are easily accessible from town (about 1 hr drive, last 5 km on dirt track) but access needs to be arranged beforehand as a permit from the Ministry of Tourism is required. Two hours spent at Las Geel produced a good number of additional species, with several singing Arabian Warblers, Black-throated Barbet, and Booted Eagle being the highlights there, plus two Magpie Starlings along the road on the way back to town – and much better sound-recording conditions than the previous day. I only explored the area between the archeological site and the wadi but one could easily spend half a day in this location.



View over wadi from Las Geel site

Route & GPS coordinates (in decimal degrees, WGS84) of main sites are the following:

Referring to Birds of Somalia (Ash & Miskell 1998), most records were obtained in atlas square 19c, which covers roughly the area between Hargeisa and the Ethiopian border to the south. Hargeisa and Las Geel are in square 19a. The latter is pretty well covered in BoS, but not 19c for which a lot of common species are lacking; some of these gaps have been filled since, particularly by John Miskell and Abdi on a visit to the Qool-Caday plain in May 2009. On my previous visit Abdi and I did a day trip to the Tuuyo plain to the SE of Hargeisa (square 19d) and we covered several areas in 19a.



- Hargeisa town, mostly on NW edge around N9.57° / E44.03° (BoS square 19a)
- Area SE of Hargeisa airport N9.5055° / E44.1263° (BoS 19a)
- Ubaale and Uub settlements N9.46224° / E44.1665 (BoS 19c)
- Between Sharmaak / Xadhig-Xadhig and Qori-Jabley N9.31604° / E44.4096° (BoS 19c)
- Between Qori-Jabley and Bali Ciise N9.15408° / E44.30953° (BoS 19c)
- Qool-Caday plain N9.0795° / E44.2401° (BoS 19c)
- Las Geel archeological site N9.78083° / E44.4457° (BoS 19a)

Annotated Species List

Note: unless stated otherwise, the records in the species list refer to the trip on April 4th, and all Las Geel observations are from April 5th. The 3 species that are marked with a * were new to me; those with a ° symbol are species that were not seen during my previous visit in December 2010.

ANATIDAE

1. Egyptian Goose° *Alopochen aegyptiacus*: one on the roadside, Hargeisa to Berbera road roughly 30km NE of Hargeisa

ARDEIDAE

2. Black-headed Heron° *Ardea melanocephala*: 3 records, all around Hargeisa with one suggesting breeding: one SW of town on 4th, one in town on 5th and another two flying over the center of town, one of which was carrying nest material suggesting that there is a colony in the area. Surprisingly, there are no records for 19a in BoS, and only breeding mentioned in Somaliland is at Wajaale (May 1995; also see by recent birding groups).

ACCIPITRIDAE

3. Black-shouldered Kite° *Elanus caeruleus*: one in "acacia country" between Xadhig-Xadhig and Qori-Jabley, approx. N9.30°/E44.42 (an uncommon species in Somaliland according to BoS, which mentions that there are no records from April and May).
4. Yellow-billed Kite° *Milvus aegyptius*: a single in Hargeisa on 05/04. Apparently scarce in the area.
5. Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*: Pretty common in Hargeisa, seen daily with up to a dozen birds together (03/04).
6. Black-chested Snake-Eagle° *Circaetus pectoralis*: an adult and subadult (2nd cy?) hunting together, Las Geel, 05/04.
7. Montagu's Harrier° *Circus pygargus*: a female near Uub settlement (N of Sharmaak) and an adult male and a female at Qool-Caday. No previous records from 19c, according to BoS.
8. Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar*: a dark morph near Qori-Jabley
9. Eastern (Pale) Chanting Goshawk *Melierax poliopterus*: one SW of the airport, one at Qool-Caday and one along the road back to Hargeisa
10. African Hawk-Eagle° *Hieraeetus (Aquila) spilogaster*: an imm. was seen hunting along the road from Qool-Caday back to Hargeisa, near Hundulli village.
11. Booted Eagle *Hieraeetus pennatus*: a pale adult was seen at close range from Las Geel caves, 05/04. This appears to be only the 2nd record from Somaliland, after my observation of one near Hargeisa in similar habitat, in December 2010. The species is no doubt frequent at least while passing through in spring and autumn, and possibly as a winter visitor.

FALCONIDAE

12. Lesser Kestrel° *Falco naumanni*: a single adult male just SE of the airport, 04/04. There are very few spring records in Somaliland (only 3 according to BoS, between 13-28 April).
13. Greater (White-eyed) Kestrel°* *F. rupicoloides*: a nesting pair was found in a lone tree on the NE edge of the Qool-Caday plain. One adult was on the nest, possibly incubating or sitting on young chicks. New record for BoS 19c square.



PHASIANIDAE

14. Yellow-necked Spurfowl° *Pternistis leucoscepus*: one along the road back from Qool-Caday to Hargeisa, S of Toon village. Missing from 19c in BoS.

NUMIDIDAE

15. Helmeted Guineafowl° *Numida meleagris*: a group of about 20 on 04/04, SE of Hargeisa (near Ubaale).

OTIDIDAE

16. Kori Bustard° *Ardeotis kori*: a large bustard with a pattern fitting this species was seen flying over the plain a far distance away, at Qool-Caday (where Arabian Bustard is unlikely to be present, as this species is restricted to the far NW of Somaliland, near Djibouti).
17. Buff-crested Bustard *Lophotis gindiana*: one near Hargeisa airport, two near Ubaale settlement and one heard near Qori-Jabley.
18. White-bellied Bustard° *Eupodotis senegalensis*: 5 together (a family?) along the track between Xadhig-Xadhig and Qori-Jabley.
19. Little Brown Bustard *E. humilis*: pairs seen twice in the Xadhig-Xadhig area, including one where the male was seen calling, head raised back while facing the female; call transcribed as “Kha-Kha-Kaah – Kah-Kak-Kaah”. Another pair (also calling) further SE on the edge of Xadhig-Xadhig area on the way to Qori-Jabley.

BURHINIDAE

20. Spotted Thick-knee° *Burhinus capensis*: one near the airport on 04/04, another along the access road to Las Geel the next day, approx. N9.76°/44.465°

GLAREOLIDAE

21. Somali Courser *Cursorius somalensis*: frequently seen on 04/04. Flight call recording: [XC172816](#)



22. Double-banded Courser *Rhinoptilus africanus*: two south of Hargeisa (near Ubaale settlement) and two at Qool-Caday, 04/04

23. Three-banded (Heuglin's) Courser°* *R. cinctus*: a presumed pair was well seen near our picnic spot in an area with rocky soil and low bushes and scrub.



CHARADRIIDAE

24. Spur-winged Plover *Vanellus spinosus*: one flying along the Hargeisa to Berbera road, roughly 20km NE of Hargeisa

25. Crowned Plover *V. coronatus*: a pair on the outskirts of Hargeisa on 30/03; several during the tour on 04/04. Recording: [XC171633](#)

26. Three-banded Plover° *Charadrius tricollaris*: three birds, including at least one adult and one juvenile (adult-sized, but in very fresh juvenile plumage) in the wadi at Las Geel, suggesting local breeding, which would hardly be surprising even though A&M do not list any breeding records (breeding “has yet to be proved in Somalia, but should occur April-June). Recording: [XC173075](#)

PTEROCLIDAE

27. Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse *Pterocles exustus*: 2x2 flying over between Ubaale and Uub settlements.

COLUMBIDAE

28. Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*: a few on 04/04; one along the Hargeisa-Berbera road on 05/04.
29. Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea*: common in town.
30. Feral Pigeon *C. livia*: a few seen in town.
31. Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata*: one or two at Maan Soor hotel, 29-30/03
32. African Mourning Dove *S. decipiens*: common in town, several on 04/04. Recording: [XC172188](#)
33. Ring-necked Dove *S. capicola*: common around Las Geel ([XC173077](#)) and in several locations on 04/04.
34. Laughing Dove *S. senegalensis*: common in and around Hargeisa; also on 04/04.
35. Emerald-spotted Wood-dove° *Turtur chalcospilos*: one or two at Las Geel

PSITTACIDAE

36. Orange-bellied Parrot *Poicephalus rufiventris*: one in town, 05/04.

MUSOPHAGIDAE

37. White-bellied Go-away Bird *Corythaixoides leucogaster*: regularly seen on 04/04; a few near Las Geel.

APODIDAE

38. Little Swift *Apus affinis*: one in Hargeisa on 2/04, also in town and at the airport on 5/04. A fairly large colony (+100 birds) exists in Las Geel, with clusters of nests scattered around the caves – nice to see this species breeding in its original natural habitat. Apparently the first breeding record(s) for 19a, even though the species surely breeds in town (e.g. near junction Road Nb 1 to airport, before the main bridge). Recordings at Las Geel colony: [XC173030](#), [XC173032](#), [XC173033](#)
39. Nyanza Swift° *A. niansae*: at least two mixed in the Little Swifts flocks at Las Geel.

COLIIDAE

40. Blue-naped Mousebird *Urocolius macrourus*: small flocks at several locations in town and seen during both field trips. New to BoS 19c. Recordings from Hargeisa: [XC172186](#), [XC172187](#)

MEROPIIDAE

41. Somali Bee-eater *Merops revoilii*: seen only twice on 04/04 (Xadhig-Xadhig and Qori-Jabley).
42. European Bee-eater° *M. apiaster*: a flock of 28 flying east on 03/04, just before the arrival of a rain front. Interesting record because BoS mention that “no spring passage has been noted in the north [= Somaliland and Puntland], whereas in the south it is in a brief period from 17 February to 3 March”.
43. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater° *M. persicus*: one on 29/03 at Maan Soor hotel; two flying east together with the preceding species on 03/04 may also have been this species though Olive Bee-eater can't be ruled out. Previous spring records of *persicus* in Somaliland have occurred between 26 April-12 May only.
44. White-throated Bee-eater° *M. albicollis*: one along the Las Geel access road. Earliest date mentioned by Ash & Miskell in the north is 20 April.

PHOENICULIDAE

45. Abyssinian Scimitarbill *Rhinopomastus minor*: a few seen near Qori-Jabley; two near Las Geel. New to BoS 19c. Recordings: [XC172865](#), [XC172866](#)

UPUPIDAE

46. Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*: one singing, pretty much without interruption, at Las Geel. Recording: [XC173495](#)

BUCEROTIDAE

47. Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill *Tockus flavirostris*: regularly seen on 04/04. Recording: [XC172864](#)
48. Northern Red-billed Hornbill° *T. erythrorhynchus*: 3-4 together just north of Qool-Cadey plain, along the road back to Hargeisa

LYBIIDAE

49. Black-throated Barbet° *Tricholaema melanocephala*: 4 or 5 birds at Las Geel, where quite conspicuous, often calling ([XC172903](#), [XC172905](#))

PICIDAE

50. Cardinal Woodpecker *Dendropicos fuscescens*: at least one at Las Geel
51. Nubian Woodpecker° *Campethera nubica*: one heard by Abdi, near Xadhig-Xadhig

ALAUDIDAE

52. Gillett's Lark° *Mirafra gilletti*: regularly heard and a few seen on 04/04. Recording: [XC172808](#)
53. Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*: a few near the airport on 4/04 and two near Las Geel the next day.
54. Blanford's Lark *Calandrella blanfordi*: 10-15 birds together at Qool-Cadey.

55. Short-tailed Lark^{°*} *Pseudalaemon fremantlii*: two together, presumably a pair, quite well seen on rocky soil with low bushes, along the way to Sharmaak village near a settlement named Uub. New to 19c.
56. Thekla Lark *Galerida theklae*: one on the outskirts of Hargeisa, 30/03; several near the airport on 04/04 ([XC172804](#)) and a few deeper in the bush, to the SE.
57. Chestnut-headed Sparrow-lark^{°*} *Eremopterix signatus*: about a dozen in a field along the road between Ubaale and Uub settlements, and a few further along the track.

HIRUNDINIDAE

58. Rock Martin *Ptyonoprogne fuligula*: one or two at Las Geel, where it could breed
59. Ethiopian Swallow *Hirundo aethiopica*: regularly seen in small numbers in and around Hargeisa; about 10 near Las Geel.
60. Barn Swallow *H. rustica*: on 04/04, several (up to 10-12) apparently migrating N/NW; a few at Las Geel.

MOTACILLIDAE

61. Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*: a few near the airport, at least one near Qori-Jabley and one at Qool-Caday on 04/04; one along the Hargeisa-Berbera road the following day.
62. Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris*: one near Sharmaak village
63. Plain-backed Pipit[°] *A. leucophrys*: at least one, most likely this species, on the Qool-Caday plain.

PYCNONOTIDAE

64. Somali Bulbul *Pycnonotus somaliensis*: common in town, also present at Las Geel. Recordings: [XC171635](#), [XC172819](#), [XC173036](#)

TURDIDAE

65. White-browed Scrub-Robin *Cercotrichas leucophrys*: seen or heard several times on 04/04 ([XC172909](#)) and at least one at Las Geel ([XC173080](#), [XC173081](#))
66. Common Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*: possibly twice the same male at the Maan Soor hotel in Hargeisa (29-31/3); one female on 04/04 (new to 19c).
67. Somali Wheatear *Oenanthe phillipsi*: seen several times on 04/04, including in 19c where apparently new.
68. Pied Wheatear *O. pleschanka*: around 5 seen on 04/04 (incl. 19c), and one near Las Geel on 05/04
69. Isabelline Wheatear *O. isabellina*: a probable ind. on 30/3 near Maan Soor hotel, several on 04/04.

70. Blackstart° *O. melanura*: several around Las Geel caves, including an adult feeding a recently fledged juv. (no previous breeding records mentioned for BoS 19a).

SYLVIIDAE

71. Yellow-bellied Eremomela *Eremomela icteropygialis*: 4-5 together between Xadhig-Xadhig and Qori-Jabley. No previous records from BoS 19c.
72. Northern Crombec *Sylvietta brachyura*: one on 2/04 in a Hargeisa garden; one at Las Geel. Ssp. in the region is the fairly distinctive *leucopsis*.
73. Arabian Warbler *Sylvia leucomelaena*: at least 4 birds at Las Geel, 3 of which singing (no records mentioned for 19a by Ash & Miskell, who refer to it as a fairly common presumed breeding resident, but I did see one in December 2010 in this square). Recordings of singing males (two different birds): [XC172898](#), [XC172901](#)
74. Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*: one or two in acacia woodland near Qori-Jabley (19c)
75. Banded Parisoma *Parisoma boehmi*: several encountered on 04/04 ([XC172867](#)); heard near Las Geel

CISTICOLIDAE

76. Pale Prinia *Prinia somalica*: recorded near the airport and at Qool-Caday.
77. Red-fronted Warbler *Urorhipis (Spiloptila) rufifrons*: regularly seen and heard on 04/04 (incl. 19c, where new), at least one at Las Geel the following day. Recording: [XC172812](#), [XC172810](#), [XC172869](#)
78. Yellow-breasted Apalis *Apalis (flavida) viridiceps*: heard and seen on several occasions on 04/04 (Xadhig-Xadhig, Qori-Jabley). New to BoS 19c. This subspecies is sometimes treated as a separate species, Brown-tailed Apalis. Recording: [XC172872](#) and [XC172873](#)
79. Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brevicaudata*: at least one in Hargeisa garden on 1st and 2nd April.
80. Grey Wren-Warbler *Calamonastes simplex*: heard by Adbi near Qori-Jabley.

MUSCICAPIDAE

81. African Grey Flycatcher *Bradornis microrhynchus*: regularly seen on 04/04.
82. Spotted Flycatcher° *Muscicapa striata*: one on 03/04, Hargeisa (ssp. *neumanni*).

PLATYSTEIRIDAE

83. Grey-headed Batis *Batis orientalis*: one near Ubaale (= new to 19c), 2-3 at Las Geel. Recording: [XC173028](#)

PARIDAE

84. Northern Grey (Somali) Tit *Parus thruppi*: a pair near Qori-Jabley (new to 19c); one at Las Geel.

NECTARINIIDAE

85. Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird *Anthreptes orientalis*: seen at least once between Hargeisa and Qool-Caday (Xadhig-Xadhig area).
86. Hunter's Sunbird* *Chalcomitra hunteri*: one near Qori-Jabley (new to 19c).
87. Shining Sunbird *Cinnyris habessinicus*: several at Maan Soor hotel and two at the guesthouse on 03/04
88. Variable Sunbird *Cinnyris venustus*: one near Maan Soor hotel, 30/03; one near Xadhig-Xadhig and several near Qori-Jabley; at least two at Las Geel ([XC173076](#)). The local subspecies is the white-bellied *albiventris*.

LANIIDAE

89. Somali Fiscal *Lanius somalicus*: singles and a few pairs seen regularly on 04/04; two near Las Geel, also along the Hargeisa-Berbera road. Recording: [XC172806](#)



90. Turkestan (Isabelline) Shrike° *Lanius phoenicuroides*: one or two males near the airport; one along the Hargeisa-Berbera road the next day.
91. Northern White-crowned Shrike° *Eurocephalus rueppelli*: two along the track near Xadhig-Xadhig.

MALACONOTIDAE

92. Rosy-patched Bush-shrike *Rhodophoneus cruentus*: frequently seen or heard on 04/04, but not near Las Geel. Recording: [XC172814](#)
93. Three-streaked Tchagra *Tchagra jamesi*: a few records on 04/04 (new to 19c).
94. Slate-coloured Boubou *Laniarius funebris*: heard near Uub settlement; a pair at Las Geel ([XC173035](#)).
95. Brubru *Nilaus afer*: 4 together on outskirts NW of town, 30/3; at several locations on 04/04, and at least one at Las Geel ([XC172906](#)).

DICRURIDAE

96. Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis*: several seen between Hargeisa and Qori-Jabley.

CORVIDAE

97. Dwarf Raven (Somali Crow) *Corvus edithae*: two together at Maan Soor hotel, 29/03; regularly encountered on 04/04.

STURNIDAE

98. Greater Blue-eared Glossy-Starling *Lamprotornis chalybaeus*: at least one in town on 02/04 and several on 05/04.
99. Golden-breasted Starling *Cosmopsarus regius*: just two were seen on 04/04, in acacia bush near Qori-Jabley.
100. Superb Starling *Lamprotornis superbus*: common on 04/04, a few on 05/04 along the main road.
101. White-crowned Starling *Spreo albicapillus*: fairly common on southern edge of town, particularly around the airport; also recorded around Sharmaak and Xadhig-Xadhig villages and along the track to Qori-Jabley; one on the eastern edge of town on 05/04. On 04/04, Recording: [XC172818](#)
102. Wattled Starling *Creatophora cinerea*: flocks up to 50-60 in several locations in town, with probably several hundreds present on most days. This may be following the passing through of a swarm of locusts on 27/03.
103. Magpie Starling^{o*} *Speculipastor bicolor*: two males flew over the main road roughly half-way between Hargeisa and Las Geel (05/04), approx. N9.675°/E44.28°. The species is present in Somaliland only from April to July.

PASSERIDAE

104. Swainson's Sparrow *Passer swainsonii*: Common in Hargeisa city and seen in several settlements on 04/04. Recording: [XC171542](#)
105. Somali Sparrow *P. castanopterus*: just seen at one settlement along the Hargeisa-Xadhig-Xadhig road

PLOCEIDAE

106. White-headed Buffalo-weaver *Dinemellia dinemelli*: regularly seen on 04/04; at least one near Las Geel. Recording: [XC172805](#)
107. Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver° *Bubalornis niger*: a few near Sharmaak village (new to 19c).
108. Vitelline Masked Weaver *Ploceus vitellinus*: a few at the Maan Soor hotel.
109. Rüppell's Weaver *P. galbula*: common on the hotel grounds and guesthouse garden; one recorded on 04/04 (where new to 19c). Recordings: [XC171605](#), [XC171734](#)
110. Chestnut Weaver°* *P. rubiginosus*: noisy flocks of up to around 50 at Maan Soor hotel and daily at guesthouse in town, where probably several hundreds if not thousands must have been present. Recordings: [XC171590](#), [XC172184](#), [XC172185](#)
111. Speke's Weaver° *P. spekei*: 4 together, landing briefly on an acacia tree, between Qori-Jabley and Bali-Ciise.

ESTRILDIDAE

112. Black-cheeked Waxbill *Estrilda chamosyna*: one in acacia bush country at same site as previous species. New to 19c; BoS mentions no April records. There are very few records from Somaliland; on my previous trip I recorded it twice near Hargeisa (19a).
113. Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala*: up to around 5 daily at guesthouse.

VIDUIDAE

114. Eastern (Long-tailed) Paradise-Whydah° *Vidua paradisaea*: a single male and a pair seen between Hargeisa and Xadhig-Xadhig. New to 19c.

FRINGILLIDAE

115. White-bellied Canary *Serinus dorsostriatus*: at least one near Uub settlement.

EMBERIZIDAE

116. Somali (Somali Golden-breasted) Bunting *Emberiza poliopleura*: just one on 04/04, near Xadhig-Xadhig; at least two singing around Las Geel caves ([XC173038](#))

Other animals

Desert Warthog
 Sacred Baboon
 Golden Jackal
 Salt's Dikdik
 Gerenook
 Cape Hare
 Unstriped Ground-Squirrel

 Leopard Turtle