Birding Trip Report

The Gambia
October 28th - November 5th 2023

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Flights
We flew from Brussels to Banjul with TUI flight TB 2051 (28/10/2023 - 05h55-11h00). Because of the very early departure time, we spent the night before in a budget hotel close to the airport (Ibis Budget Hotel Brussels Airport in Diegem).

For the return trip we used TAP flights TP1498 to Lisbon (05/11/2023 - 02h05-07h10) and TP670 to Amsterdam (09h50-12h50). The last leg of the trip was by train from Amsterdam to Antwerp.

All flights were on time and uneventful.

Itinerary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28/10/2023</td>
<td>Arrival Banjul at 11h00. Birding at Marakissa River Camp and along the road towards the bridge. Late afternoon boat trip. Stay at Marakissa River Camp.</td>
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<tr>
<td>29/10/2023</td>
<td>Morning birding at Marakissa and surrounding areas. Late morning birding at Tanji (coastal scrub) and Tanji village / beach. Afternoon birding at Brufut Woods. Stay at Marakissa River Camp.</td>
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<tr>
<td>30/10/2023</td>
<td>Morning birding at Marakissa and surrounding areas. Late morning birding at Farasuto. Mid afternoon birding at Pirang Forest. Drive to Tendaba + birding around the camp. Stay at Tendaba Camp.</td>
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<tr>
<td>31/10/2023</td>
<td>Morning walk south of Tendaba (soccer fields &amp; surrounding areas). Early afternoon trip to Tendaba Airfield and start of the Batteling track. Late afternoon boat trip to the mangroves. Stay at Tendaba Camp.</td>
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<tr>
<td>01/11/2023</td>
<td>Morning walk south of Tendaba (soccer fields &amp; surrounding areas). Drive to Wassu - Kuntaur via north bank (birding at Dasilameh wetlands, Dibba Kunda, Jakau-ur wetland, Wassu Stone Circles &amp; Wassu Quarry and various roadside stops) Stay at Kairoh Garden in Kuntaur.</td>
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<tr>
<td>02/11/2023</td>
<td>Morning boat trip on the river. Birding on the other side of the river (Black Coucal area). Birding at Wassu Quarry. Stay at Kairoh Garden in Kuntaur.</td>
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<tr>
<td>03/11/2023</td>
<td>Drive to Abca’s Creek Lodge. Birding en route at the Georgetown Ferry, Jakhaly Rice Fields, Kampanti Raptor Bridge, and various other stops.</td>
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### Logistics

We used the services of Burama Keita to help us plan and organize the trip. He also guided us during the trip, together with his driver Pa.

Burama came up with a productive itinerary, he managed to sort out all the logistics (lodges, car, food, money exchange). He also has great bird knowledge, and has all the contacts with the local guides about stakeouts, etc. All of this comes at a very reasonable price. In summary, we were very happy with his work and we can heartily recommend him if you would also like to visit Gambia on a birding trip.

Burama’s contact details are on his website: [http://www.birdsofgambia.net/](http://www.birdsofgambia.net/). He is most easily reached via WhatsApp on +2203296385 or via e-mail on keitaguide@yahoo.com.

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<tr>
<td>04/11/2023</td>
<td>Stay at Abca’s Creek Lodge. Morning birding along the access road at Abca’s Creek Lodge. Return visit to Pirang and Farasuto, with lunch at Sita Joyeh. Evening drive to the airport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/11/2023</td>
<td>Departure from Banjul at 02:05</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

We’d like to thank Peter Tibax for providing pre-trip information and for recommending the services of Burama Keita. Also a warm thank you to all the trip report writers on CloudBirders, and the people who have shared observations from Gambia on eBird and observation.org.

Contact info

For questions or comments feel free to reach out via e-mail on heylen.wim@gmail.com
Daily account

October 28th

After an uneventful flight we landed around 11 AM in Banjul. The Gambia border officials require you to pay an immigration fee of 20 EUR, but if you pay in local currency, the fee is only 1000 dalasi, which amounts to about 14 EUR. It is worth keeping this in mind and holding on to some local currency for when you leave, because you have to pay the same immigration fee again when you leave the country.

We were greeted by Burama and Pa in the arrivals hall, and soon we were on our way to Marakissa River Camp, our first birding lodge. I had planned to buy a local SIM card in the airport in order to have internet connectivity during the trip, but this turned out to be unnecessary: Burama’s bus has a very convenient WiFi hotspot device in the car!

At Marakissa we spent some time getting familiar with the common and some less common species (Lizard Buzzard, Lesser Honeyguide) before having lunch (our first of many chicken yassa dishes).

After lunch we went for a walk, birding along the road towards the bridge. This produced Levaillant’s Cuckoo, Little Bittern, Long-crested Eagle, a female Western Violet-backed Sunbird, and finally an Ovambo Sparrowhawk which gave very nice views. According to Burama, Marakissa is the only location in Gambia where Ovambo Sparrowhawk is regularly seen as it breeds near the camp.

Back at the lodge, we decided to do a late afternoon boat trip on the river. Some acrobacy was needed in order to cross under a low bridge, but we succeeded and were rewarded with 3 Greater Painted-Snipe.

Jef and Franky doing the aquatic limbo dance
October 29th

We started the day birding at Marakissa, again along the road towards the bridge. We saw plenty of new birds such as African Green-Pigeon, Violet Turaco, Dwarf Bittern, Northern Puffback, Piapiac, and many more.

After breakfast we headed towards Tanji. At a roadside stop we picked up our first Lanner Falcon, Bronze-tailed Starling, African Harrier-Hawk, and White-billed Buffalo-Weavers, and our first decent views of Yellow-throated Greenbul and Brown Babbler.

Around 11AM we arrived at Tanji and explored the coastal forest and dunes. Interesting birds included Swallow-tailed and Little Bee-eater, Vieillot’s and Bearded Barbet, Black-crowned Tchagra, Northern Crombec, Lesser Blue-eared Starling, many Osprey, and a variety of waders near the ocean.

Early afternoon we headed for the beach in the village of Tanji, where the activity of the fishermen attracts a lot of gulls, waders and terns. We were hoping to find West African Crested Terns here, but despite a thorough search of the area, we did not find any. According to Burama, we were quite early in the season, and they may still have been on the nesting grounds.

By 14h30 we arrived at Brufut Woods, where we spent some time at the waterhole (a man-made spot where birds come in to drink). Over lunch, we got to see a number of birds very well as they made an appearance, incl. Guinea and Violet Turaco, Black-headed Paradise-Flycatcher, African Pygmy Kingfisher, Yellow-throated Greenbul, Blackcap Babbler, African Thrush, Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat, Lavender Waxbill, and Olive-naped Weaver. In the open areas nearby we also connected with Whistling Cisticola, Fanti Sawwing, Stone Partridge (great views) and a Spotted Flycatcher.
Before heading back to Marakissa, we were taken on a short walk to a stakeout for Long-tailed Nightjar which was showing at close range. In the same area we also spotted both Klaas’ and Dideric Cuckoo and a pair of Cardinal Woodpeckers.

We ended the day with an owling session at Marakissa, which resulted in reasonable views of an African Scops Owl, and great views of a Pearl-spotted Owlet.

October 30th

On our final morning at Marakissa we birded the road towards the bridge for the last time. Even on our third visit we were still seeing new birds: a pair of dark morph Gabar Goshawks, a small group of West African Pied Hornbills, and a much appreciated Gray-headed Bushshrike.

After breakfast we left Marakissa for good and headed to Farasuto where we arrived around 10AM. We first birded the open areas, which produced many new species, most notably Red-winged Prinia, Singing Cisticola, Orange-cheeked Waxbill, Mottled Spinetail, and finally a Grayish Eagle-Owl staked out at a day roost. We then headed into the more dense forest where we managed to locate an elusive Western Bluebill and an African Goshawk. In the mangroves at the edge of the forest our local guide found one of our targets for the trip, a White-backed Night Heron.

By 3PM we had arrived at Pirang. We did not have a lot of time here, but during our rather brief visit, we managed to find Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Olive-naped Weaver, Collared Sunbird, Gray-headed Bristlebill (heard and very poor views), a pair of Verreaux’s Eagle-Owl and a Northern White-faced Owl (both owl species staked out on a day roost by the local guides).

Around 4.30PM we left Pirang and started our drive towards Tendaba. We made a few stops on the way, picking up our first Wahlberg’s Eagle, Dark Chanting-Goshawk, Bruce’s Green-Pigeon, Namaqua Dove, and Abyssinian Roller. We arrived at Tendaba around 6.30PM.
October 31st

We started our stay in Tendaba with a long morning walk south of the camp. In this open savannah habitat, we found plenty of new birds, such as Black Scimitarbill, Striped Kingfisher, Brown-backed Woodpecker, Brubru, White-shouldered Black-Tit, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Sahel Bush Sparrow and White-rumped Seedeater.

In the late morning we drove a few kilometers south along the main road, and spent some time at the former airfield, which is good for wetland birds (Gull-billed Tern, Black-winged Stilt) and birds of prey (Beaudouin’s Snake-Eagle, White-backed Vulture, African Hawk-Eagle, Wahlberg’s Eagle). We were hoping to see Bronze-winged Courser in this area but since we were just at the start of the dry season, the grass was still very long and green; this made it very difficult to explore the area freely and to find ground-dwelling birds.

The rainy season that had recently ended had also left many roads in rather poor condition, which means that we were not able to explore the track to Batteling very thoroughly. We ended up exploring the track on foot for just a few 100 meters, adding Western Olivaceous Warbler and Martial Eagle in the process.

We then headed back to the camp for lunch, making just 1 more quick stop to admire a flock of White Helmetshrike.

At 4PM we embarked on our evening boat trip through the famous mangroves. As expected we saw huge numbers of water birds, including Spur-winged Goose, African Darter, White-breasted Cormorant, all the usual herons and egrets, African Sacred Ibis, and Woolly-necked Storks. There were also many Blue-breasted Kingfishers, White-throated Bee-eater, Golden-tailed Woodpecker (heard and then taped into view), Mosque Swallow, Black-headed Weaver, and last but not least Mouse-brown Sunbird.
November 1st

This morning we had time to bird for just a few more hours in the Tendaba area before we had to move on. After considering our options we decided that the most target birds for us were in the location that we visited the previous morning as well, so we returned to that same area where we got a couple of new birds, such as Brown-rumped Bunting (a singing male), Fine-spotted Woodpecker, Senegal Batis, Northern Yellow White-eye, and a stunning female Red-winged Pytilia. We also got repeat views of the Black Scimitarbill and Brown-backed Woodpecker (a pair).

By 9:30AM we were back in the camp for breakfast, and then we set off for a day of roadside birding between Tendaba and Kuntaur, where we would spend the night. Still on the south bank, we spotted Beaudouin’s Snake-Eagle and African Hawk-Eagle, and by a gas station just after crossing the Senegambia bridge a pair of (light morph) Gabar Goshawks performed well.

Our first longer stop was at Dasilameh Fields, where Burama hoped to find us a Black-crowned Crane. Alas we did not find any, the very tall grass at this time of year again did not help us. We did see our first Black-headed Lapwings here.

We continued our journey, but not long after we had to make an emergency stop near Dibba Kunda as a spectacular male Sahel Paradise-Whydah had been spotted from the car. We also got our first Pygmy Sunbirds during the same stop, and heard a displaying Flappet Lark which unfortunately we did not manage to see.

A little bit before the Solomon Waterhole hotspot, we stopped at a place where Burama regularly sees Savile’s Bustard. We spent some time scanning the area, playing the call, and walking through fields, but no sign of the bustard. Best birds here were a Brown Snake-Eagle, our only African Green Bee-eater of the trip, and stunning views of a Grasshopper Buzzard.
By 3:30PM we reached the Jakau-ur Wetland, home to the star bird of our trip. We were not disappointed and found **Egyptian Plover** easily and at close range. Other birds here included a huge flock of **Collared Pratincoles**, a flock of about 175 **White Storks** with good numbers of **African Woolly-necked Storks** mixed in, another **Martial Eagle**, about 14 **White-crowned Lapwings**, and 2 **Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks**.

![Mixed flock of White and Woolly-necked Stork](image)

During the final leg of the trip, we made one more roadside for another **Sahel Paradise-Whydah**, and then headed down to the Wassu quarry. This site hosts a spectacular colony of **Red-throated Bee-eater**, as well as a variety of other birds, including more **Black-headed Lapwings** and **Bruce’s Green-Pigeons**.

During the last hour of daylight we visited the [Wassu stone circles](http://wassu.com), an important archeological site. The final new bird on this day was a **Northern Black-Flycatcher** along the dirt road to Kuntaur where we spent the night in the Kairoh Garden lodge.

### November 2nd

First new bird of the day was a much wanted **Oriole Warbler**, which we had only heard up until this point. It was showing quite well in the palm trees by the terrace of the lodge.

After breakfast we went on a boat trip on the Gambia river to the nearby river islands south of Kuntaur. Along the banks we spotted a **Little Bittern**, a few **Gray-headed Kingfishers**, 2 more **Oriole Warblers**, **Red-faced** and **Winding Cisticola**, **White-crowned Robin-Chat**, **Pygmy Sunbird**, and on our way back a **Shining-Blue Kingfisher** and finally an **African Pygmy-Goose**. On one of the islands a (reintroduced) **Chimpanzee** was enjoying the morning sun in the top of a tree; we also had great views of a family of **Temminck’s Red Colobus** monkeys jumping from tree to tree.
After our return in late morning, we crossed the river and birded along the road, looking mostly for Black Coucal. They were quite common here as we saw 4 different birds, as well as a Bateleur and a Whinchat.

After lunch and a short walk through Kuntaur village, we ended the day with a second visit to the Wassu quarry. We soon had great views of Northern Ant-eater Chat, Black-faced Quailfinch, several Bruce’s Green-Pigeons, a close-by Wahlberg’s Eagle (first in flight, then perched), and last but not least 5 Four-banded Sandgrouse.
November 3rd

Today was basically a roadside birding day, as we made our way from Kuntaur back west to Abca’s Creek Lodge.

Our first interesting sighting of the day were 2 obviously juvenile Village Indigobirds that were being fed by their host, a Red-billed Firefinch, still at the Kairoh Garden lodge.

After an hour’s drive, we reached the Georgetown ferry. As we were waiting for the ferry to return, a quick check of the mangroves revealed 2 Swamp Flycatchers.

![The Georgetown ferry](image)

After crossing the river, we started heading west and made several roadside stops, picking up Marabou Stork, White-headed Vulture, Beaudouin’s Snake-Eagle, Brown Snake-Eagle, Grasshopper Buzzard, and many more.

During a longer stop at the Kampanti Raptor Bridge, we added Yellow-billed Oxpecker to the list, and we saw another Wahlberg’s and a Tawny Eagle.

Finally we arrived at Abca’s Creek Lodge, where we got some good views of White-crowned Robin-Chat, and heard another African Scops-Owl at dusk.

November 4th

For our final day, Burama had planned for us to bird at and near Abca’s lodge. However we felt like there were very few target birds for us available there, and it made sense to head towards Farasuto and Pirang again for the last day instead. In the end we decided to still do a morning walk at Abca’s, then head to Farasuto and Pirang for the rest of the day.
Along the access road to the lodge, the most interesting birds that we encountered included Black Scimitarbill, Copper Sunbird, Black-crowned Tchagra, Whistling Cisticola, Green Woodhoopoe, African Golden Oriole, a big flock of White-throated Bee-eater, and Double-spurred Spurfowl calling from their roost up in a tree.

By 10:30 we arrived at Pirang, where we spent some more time in the dense forest, looking (unsuccessfully) for Brown-necked Parrot, picking up Green Hylia, African Paradise Flycatcher, Little Greenbul, and a pair of Buff-spotted Woodpeckers instead. The clearing on the far side of the forest was home to at least 6 Fanti Saw-wings. Also both the Verreaux’s Eagle-Owls and the Northern White-faced Owl were both still at the same roost as before. Inside the forest we also stumbled upon a swarm of bees.

We dropped in for lunch at Sita Joyeh Baobab Island Resort (which looked rather deserted), where a female Klaas’s Cuckoo was showing well.

To end the day, we paid a visit to a private waterhole near Farasutu Forest. Although it seemed rather quiet at first, it delivered a much wanted last minute lifer in the form of a Spotted Honeyguide. To our delight, this was followed a few minutes later by our best views of Greater Honeyguide as well.
The last notable observation of the trip was a Double-spurred Francolin, finally perched in plain view on the track in front of us, after many glimpses earlier in the trip.

Unfortunately, this was the end of our Gambia tour. Burama and Pa drove us back to the airport, where we said our goodbyes, and caught our 2AM flight to Amsterdam via Lisbon.
Birds

Detailed checklist with pictures available via the eBird trip report:
https://ebird.org/tripreport/171975

Other taxa

**West African Crocodile** (Marakissa)

African Crowned Bullfrog (Marakissa)
Broad-banded Grass Frog (Tendaba)

Common Subdesert Toad (Tendaba)

Nile Monitor (Kuntaur, Wassu Quarry, en route)
Western Dwarf Gecko (en route)
Common Agama (Brufut)

Temminck's Red Colobus (Kuntaur, Abca’s Creek Lodge)

Chimpanzee (Rehabilitation project - Kuntaur)
Guinea Baboon (Tendaba)
Patas Monkey (Tendaba)
African Green Monkey (Farasuto, Abca’s Creek Lodge, Sita Joyeh Baobab Island)
Gambian Epauletted Fruit Bat (Abca’s Creek Lodge)

Gambian Pouched Rat (Tendaba with camera trap)
Gambia Sun Squirrel (Pirang)
Atlantic Mudskipper (Tendaba, mangroves, Sita Joyeh Baobab Island)