

GAMBIA & SENEGAL BIRDING TRIP REPORT

4TH NOVEMBER – 19TH NOVEMBER 2023

ANDREW SLATER & KAREN CUNNINGHAM-
WALKER, guided by MUSA MANNEH



Introduction

Having never travelled to Africa but often talked about wanting to go birding there, Karen (a veteran African traveller) arranged a 60th birthday present trip to The Gambia & Senegal. Wow - what a superstar!

Itinerary

The basic trip was a combined birding tour of The Gambia and Senegal, with the idea being to drive inland along the main highway that follows the River Gambia east. This gave us easy access to all the main birding spots in The Gambia along with a visit to a remote national park in south-eastern Senegal. The disadvantage is that we had to follow the same route there and back, but we knew that in advance and decided to go with it as it allowed us to bird a variety of habitats relatively easily.

4 th NOV	Depart London Gatwick 16.35 for flight to Lisbon connecting to Banjul (Gambia).
5 th NOV	Arrive in Banjul 01:00, met by taxi driver and driven to Smiling Coast Hotel (Cape Point). Met Musa in the morning; first birding walk around the coastal area and then drive to bird at Koto Bridge.
6 th NOV	Birding the excellent Kartong reserve area (close to coast and border with southern Senegal) and Ganjul (Konoto Forest, including a bird hide Musa has built with support from 3 Dutch birders).
7 th NOV	Begin drive inland – stop to bird around Mandina Ba – arriving at Tendaba camp late afternoon. Evening birding.
8 th NOV	Drive to Janjanbureh (formerly Georgetown) – crossing over to the north bank of the River Gambia for several excellent birding stops.
9 th NOV	Continue driving east, reaching Gambia/Senegal border at midday. Slow transit through a number of military/customs checkpoints. Arrive at Wassadou camp in late afternoon. Outstanding birding around the camp and along the banks of the River Gambia.
10 th NOV	Short drive to Niokolo-Koba National Park. Birding all day.
11 th NOV	Birding Niokolo-Koba National Park.
12 th NOV	Return to Wassadou camp, further birding in the area.
13 th NOV	Drive west back across border to Janjanbureh. Boat trip to see chimpanzees on Baboon Island.
14 th NOV	Continue driving west, superb birding at Jahally rice fields; overnight at Tendaba camp.
15 th NOV	Birding Kiang West National Park, overnight at AbCa's Lodge in mangroves along River Gambia. Evening birding around hotel.
16 th NOV	Birding Killy fields (close to border with southern Senegal) and Farasutu forest area, overnight at Sita Joya Hotel on Baobab Island. Excellent location for gentle evening birding.
17 th NOV	Birding Pirang shrimp farm (one of the best birding spots visited) and Abuko nature reserve (disappointing as being increasingly overwhelmed by urban development). Overnight at Smiling Coast Hotel, Cape Point.
18 th NOV	Final day – relax by beach and visit Musa's family for lunch.
19 th NOV	Depart Gambia 02:30, landing at Gatwick on Sunday morning.

Bird guide

Karen did some research online and talked with several different local guides when planning our trip. She decided Musa Manneh was the most promising – and we were both very happy with her choice. Musa is an excellent birder – he has a deep knowledge of the birds of The Gambia, their behaviours, calls, when and where to find them etc. He arranged the logistics of the entire trip (including a comfortable vehicle with driver and all accommodation) and was fantastic company – always enthusiastic and full of energy. He was also so keen to go birding for his own enjoyment – which meant a lot to me as after a few days it was more like birding with a friend than a tour guide. I strongly recommend Musa to anyone thinking of birding in The Gambia and Senegal. [Contact details: +220 783 4098](tel:+2207834098), musaamaneh56@yahoo.com

Birding highlights

We saw a total of 263 species on the trip. We could certainly have pushed this over 300 if I had wanted to, but I was more interested in enjoying watching more common African birds I had never seen before than chasing European winter migrants/rare African species at the edge of their natural range.

Common birds seen almost every day in a variety of habitats:

Hooded Vulture, Yellow-billed Kite, Namaqua Dove (away from coastal region), Laughing Dove, Speckled Pigeon, Vinaceous Dove, Senegal Thick-knee, Little Swift, Senegal Coucal, Abyssinian Roller, Broad-billed Roller, Western Red-billed Hornbill, Western Plantain-eater, Beautiful Sunbird, Yellow-billed Shrike, Fork-tailed Drongo, Purple & Long-tailed Glossy Starling, Northern Grey-headed Sparrow, Village Weaver, Northern Red Bishop (males were moulting so plumage extremely variable), Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Red-billed Firefinch, Yellow-fronted Canary.

Birding highlights day by day (not a full list):

5 th NOV	<p><i>Cape Point (farmland/hotel gardens/coastal lagoon):</i> Hamerkop, Caspian Tern, Green Wood Hoopoe, Little/Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Pied Kingfisher, Broad-billed Roller, Bronze Mannikin, Red-billed Quelea</p> <p><i>Koto Bridge (estuary/farmland/woodland):</i> Palm-nut Vulture, African Harrier Hawk, Black Crake, Giant & Blue-breasted and Woodland Kingfisher, Fine-spotted Woodpecker, Wire-tailed Swallow, Yellow-crowned Gonolek, White-crowned Robin Chat, Oriole Warbler (lovely song!), Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird</p>
6 th NOV	<p><i>Kartong reserve area (coastal scrub/mangrove/woodland):</i> Black Heron, Green-backed Heron, Dwarf Bittern, African Darter, Great White & Pink Pelican, Lizard Buzzard, Royal Tern, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, White-throated & Little Bee-eater, Brubru Shrike, Mottled Spinetail, Variable, Splendid & Brown (Mangrove) Sunbird, Fine-spotted & Grey Woodpecker, Northern Crombec, Zitting & Whistling Cisticola, Senegal Batis, Bearded Barbet</p>

	<p><i>Ganjul, Konoto Forest area:</i> Pygmy Kingfisher, Snowy-crowned Robin Chat, Yellow White-eye, Green Hylia, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Common Wattle-eye, Green-headed Sunbird, Black-capped babbler, African Paradise Flycatcher, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher, Black-necked Weaver</p>
7 th NOV	<p><i>Mandina Ba area (farmland, scrub):</i> Beaudouin's Snake Eagle, Grasshopper Buzzard, African Wattled Lapwing, Violet Turacao, Piapric, Mottled Spinetail, White-throated & Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Northern Crombec, Yellow-throated Leaflove, Grey Camaroptera, Black-necked Weaver</p> <p><i>Killy Woods & Albert's hide (woodland, arid farmland):</i> African Harrier Hawk, Wahlberg's Eagle, Black-billed Wood Dove, Brown-backed Woodpecker, Little/Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Rufous-crowned Roller, Yellow-crowned Gonolek, Vieilott's Barbet, Variable/Splendid Sunbird, Village Indigo, Black-rumped Waxbill, Brown-rumped Bunting</p> <p><i>Tendaba camp (village, gardens, river bank):</i> African Golden Oriole, Vieilott's Barbet, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Melodious Warbler, White-rumped Seedeater, Vitelline Masked Weaver, Black-rumped Waxbill (plus Caspian Tern on the River Gambia in morning)</p>
8 th NOV	<p><i>North and South banks of the River Gambia (various roadside stops – arid farmland, wetland):</i> Black-headed Lapwing, Egyptian Plover, White Stork, Brown-necked Parrot, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Tawny Eagle, Grasshopper Buzzard, Dark-chanting Goshawk, Shikra, Grey Kestrel, Four-banded Sandgrouse, Green Wood Hoopoe, White-crested Helmet Shrike, Malachite Kingfisher, Great-spotted/Levaillant's Cuckoo, Blue-cheeked/White-throated Bee-eater, Red-throated Bee-eater (colony of approx. 60 pairs in a sand bank), Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Lavender Waxbill, Black-faced Quail Finch, Sahel Paradise Whydah</p>
9 th NOV	<p><i>Gambia-Senegal border area (roadside – arid farmland):</i> Dark Chanting Goshawk, African Hawk Eagle, Brown Snake Eagle, Grasshopper Buzzard, Levaillant's Cuckoo, Green Wood Hoopoe</p> <p><i>Wassadou camp (river bank incl. 1 hour boat trip):</i> Hadaba Ibis, Hamerkop, Green-backed Heron, Black Kite, African Fish Eagle, Egyptian Plover, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Red-throated/Little Bee-eater, Carmine Bee-eater (huge flock of > 150 birds), Blue-breasted/Giant Kingfisher, White-crowned Robin Chat, Yellow-crowned Gonolek, Northern Black Flycatcher, Common Wattle-eye, African Pied Wagtail, Red-billed Quelea</p>
10 th /11 th NOV	<p><i>Niokolo-Koba National Park (river bank, forest, scrub, wetland):</i> Double-spurred Francolin, Helmeted Guinea Fowl, Stone Partridge, Four-banded Sandgrouse, Hadaba Ibis, Woolly-necked Stork, Black-crowned Crane, White-headed Lapwing, Painted Snipe, Egyptian Plover, Bataleur, Bedouin Snake Eagle, Lizard/Grasshopper Buzzard, Gabor Goshawk, Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, African Scop's Owl, Verraux's Eagle Owl, Pearl-</p>

	<p>spotted Owlet, Adamawa Turtle Dove, Plain Nightjar, Long-tailed Nightjar, Cardinal Woodpecker, Woodland/Grey-headed/Malachite Kingfisher, Red-throated/Little/Carmine Bee-eater, Chestnut-backed Sparrow Lark, African Paradise Flycatcher, Swamp Flycatcher, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Little Weaver</p>
12 th NOV	<p><i>Wassadou camp (river bank):</i> African Finfoot, Hadaba Ibis, African Fish Eagle, African Harrier Hawk, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Northern White-faced Owl, Grey-headed/Malachite/Blue-breasted Kingfisher, Red-throated/Carmine Bee-eater, Black-crowned Tchagra, Northern Puffback, Northern Crombec, Little Greenbul, Red-winged/Oriole Warbler, Orange-cheeked Waxbill, Exclamatory Paradise Whydah</p>
13 th NOV	<p><i>Gambia-Senegal border area (roadside, arid farmland):</i> Dark Chanting Goshawk, Brown Snake Eagle, Grasshopper Buzzard, Red-necked Falcon, Levillant's Cuckoo</p> <p><i>River Gambia around Janjanbureh incl. 1 hour boat trip (river and bank):</i> African Darter, African Jacana, Black-crowned Night Heron, Yellow-crowned Gonolek, Oriole Warbler, Black-headed Weaver</p>
14 th NOV	<p><i>Jahally rice fields (farmland):</i> African Darter, Purple/Black-headed Heron, African Jacana, White-faced Whistling Duck, Spur-winged Goose, Bedouin's Snake Eagle, Grasshopper Buzzard, Marsh Harrier, African Harrier Hawk, Black Crane, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Woodchat Shrike, Black Coucal, Winding/Zitting Cisticola, African Golden Oriole, Black-faced Quail Finch</p> <p><i>Tendaba camp (village, gardens, river bank):</i> Fine-spotted Woodpecker, Black-crowned Tchagra, Senegal Batis, Bearded Barbet, Bush Petronia, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weaver, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Vitteline Masked Weaver, Brown-rumped Bunting</p>
15 th NOV	<p><i>Kiang West National Park (farmland, scrub):</i> Bataleur, Grasshopper Buzzard, Gabar Goshawk, Grey Kestrel, Vieillot's Barbet, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Striped/Woodland Kingfisher, European/Little/Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Black-crowned Tchagra, Senegal Batis, Chestnut-backed Sparrow Lark, Yellow Penduline Tit, Lesser Blue-eared Glossy Starling, Scarlet/Variable/Pygmy Sunbird, Bush Petronia, Cut-throat Finch, Gosling's Bunting, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weaver</p> <p><i>AbCa's Lodge (mangrove):</i> Double-spurred Francolin, Stone Partridge, Black Heron, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Violet Turacao, Grey Woodpecker, Green Wood Hoopoe, Black-capped Babbler, Northern Puffback, Northern Crombec, Yellow-crowned Gonolek, White-crowned Robin Chat, Red-billed Paradise Flycatcher</p>

16 th NOV	<p><i>Killy fields (farmland):</i> Tawny Eagle, Grey Kestrel, Didric/African Cuckoo, Pygmy Kingfisher, European/Little/White-eyed Bee-eater, Vieillot's/Bearded Barbet, Black-crowned Tchagra, Brubru, Subalpine/Willow/Reed/Red-winged Warbler, Zitting/Whistling Cisticola, White-shouldered Black Tit, Yellow Penduline Tit, Brown-rumped/Gosling's Bunting, Vitteline Masked Weaver, Black-rumped Waxbill</p> <p><i>Farasutu forest area:</i> Short-toed/Long-crested Eagle, Greyish Eagle Owl, Cardinal Woodpecker, Blue-bellied Roller, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher, Spotted Honeyguide, Common Wattle-eye, Common Redstart, Black-rumped/Lavendar Waxbill</p> <p><i>Baobab Island (mangrove):</i> Black Heron, Gull-billed Tern, Whimbrel, Greenshank, African Scop's Owl, Brown-necked Parrot, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird</p>
17 th NOV	<p><i>Pirang shrimp farm (wetland):</i> Black Heron, African Spoonbill, Greater Flamingo, African Darter, Green-backed Heron, White-faced Whistling Duck, African Wattled/Spur-winged Lapwing, Marsh/Curlew/Wood/Common Sandpiper, Little Stint, Ruff Marsh Harrier, Long-crested Eagle, Osprey, Grey-headed/Slender-billed Gull, Little/Gull-billed/Caspian Tern, Northern Crombec, Woodchat Shrike, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Malachite Kingfisher, Red-chested/Mosque/Wire-tailed Swallow, Crested Lark, Zitting Cisticola, Subalpine Warbler, Brown/Splendid Sunbird, Black-faced Quail Finch</p> <p><i>Abuku nature reserve (woodland in urban area):</i> Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Blue-breasted Kingfisher, African Grey Woodpecker, Oriole Warbler</p>
18 th NOV	<p><i>Cape Point (hotel garden):</i> Caspian Tern, Black-casqued Hornbill (long-staying vagrant well known to local bird guides)</p>

Mammals (incomplete list):

Bushbuck Antelope, Hippopotamus (tracks), Mongoose, Warthog, Ground Squirrel, African Yellow Bat, Velvet Green Monkey, Common Patas Monkey, Baboon, Chimpanzee

Reptiles:

Monitor Lizard, Nile Crocodile and a couple of snake species

