The Gambia
28 Feb - 7 March 2017
Helen & Michael Howard

We’d been keen to visit The Gambia after hearing about numerous trips our friend Allan Roffey, of Feather, Salehurst makes. So we are very grateful to him for all his advice and recommendations. As a result we used The Gambia Experience, selecting the smaller, quieter Bakotu Hotel and had Mustapha Manneh as our guide. Before leaving the UK we planned to have Mustapha for five mornings only, but ended up going out on six mornings and three late afternoons as we enjoyed his company, saw lots of species and wanted to see more. Mustapha was excellent; from his knowledge of birds, their calls and locations, his passion (when his eyes lit up when spotting a bird we knew it was a particularly special one!), his rapport - which is fundamental, his considerate driving and impeccable time-keeping. In short everything that, to us, makes a fantastic guide. Heartily recommended.

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He worked hard, always with a smile, positioning us to get the best views of the wonderful Gambian birds. As a result we were privileged to see 195 species. We enjoyed all aspects of Gambian wildlife, from butterflies to monkeys and would classify ourselves as keen but relaxed as we enjoyed watching birds we’d seen on many occasions - after all who can tire of watching Splendid Sunbirds feeding or kingfishers fishing?!

We’d like to thank Allan Roffey, without whom we’d never would have visited The Gambia, Fatou Colley & Eddie and all the staff at Bakotu Hotel for their smiles and helpfulness and Mustapha Manneh for being an outstanding guide. The Gambia has poverty and lots of litter (though the UK has far too much too) but the warm welcome we received from everyone we met and the wildlife we saw means we’d love to return, go inland and see more!

Purple Glossy Starling

Photos can be seen here

Itinerary

Tues 28 Feb
An hour late afternoon at Kotu bridge.
Wed 1 March
Morning at Kotu bridge, rice fields, Casino cycle track, sewage works and part of nature trail. Late afternoon at golf course.

Thurs 2 March
Morning at Brufut village and woodland.

Fri 3 March
Morning at Farasuto woodland.

Sat 4 March
Morning at Bakotu hotel. Late afternoon at Kotu hide.

Sun 5 March
Morning at Lamin rice fields and Abuko Nature Reserve.

Mon 6 March
Morning at Penjem, lunch at Marakissa River Lodge.

Tues 7 March
Morning at Tujereng (sometimes spelt Tujering) then onto Tanji beach.

More detail
Tues 28 Feb
We arrived mid-afternoon, so after settling in, to whet our appetite for the week ahead Mustapha took us for a stroll up to Kotu bridge, a short walk from the hotel. It overlooks a tidal creek with mangroves complete with waders and kingfishers: Senegal Thick-knee, Spurred-winged Lapwing, African Wattled Lapwing, Black-winged Stilt, African Darter, Western Reef Egret, Malachite Kingfisher and Pied Kingfisher among others. Plus Yellow-crowned Gonolek, Red-billed Firefinch, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Bronze Mannikin, and Beautiful Sunbirds - in just an hour we’d seen over 30 species. Back at the hotel, at the wooden platform that overlooks the creek (Kotu bridge within view) we saw our first Little Bee-eaters, busy catching insects. There are Green monkeys about, with one male a little feisty and ‘bitey’. We followed advice and always faced it so it didn’t get too close.

Pied Kingfisher
Wed 1 March
We generally met Mustapha for a morning’s birding at 7.30am. We began at Kotu bridge, adding Long-tailed Cormorant, Red Shank, Broad-billed Roller and Splendid Sunbird to the species seen yesterday, then moved onto the rice fields: Abyssinian Roller, African Harrier Hawk, Sacred Ibis and Squacco Heron standing out as highlights. Moved onto the Casino cycle track where the Pearl-spotted Owlet responded to Mustapha’s call - it came to investigate and we enjoyed a good view. Green Wood-hoopoe, African Jacana and Black Heron (the phrase ‘night-time day-time’ instantly springs to mind!) along with a Giant Kingfisher, Senegal Parrot, Yellow-billed Shrike and Hadada Ibis were all enjoyed. Back on the road a trio of Blue-bellied Rollers dazzled us with their stunning flight colours, then across to the Sewage works where a Pied Crow mobbed a Shikra. Back at the bridge saw a Hamerkop, then at the Bird Guide Association hut African Silverbill were drinking from the shallow pool then returned to the hotel around 1pm. Late afternoon Mustapha took us to the golf course where there were plenty of African Grey and Red-billed Hornbills. Highlights included Hoopoe, Violet Turaco, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Northern Puffback, Fork-tailed Drongo, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Fine-spotted and Grey Woodpecker and Variable Sunbird.

Thurs 2 March
Approx 30 min drive to Brufut. Here we parked up by the village rubbish dump, complete with chickens, donkeys, cattle and goats picking through the plastic. Met Abba, our local guide, who almost immediately spotted a Lanner Falcon perched a considerable distance away - it was a small silhouette and the only time we saw one. We ambled around the village fields, enjoying plenty of new species including: Lavender Waxbill, Lizard Buzzard, Black-shouldered Kite, Purple Glossy and Greater Blue-eared Starling, African Green Pigeon, Melodious Warbler, Singing Cisticola, and Bearded Barbet. Moving towards Brufut Woods we had a fleeting glimpse of a Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher but good views of the African Paradise Flycatcher. In the wood (shade being very welcome as it was becoming pretty hot!) we had a short look at a White-crowned Robin Chat. Abba got us into position, pointed upwards and we gasped at a Verreaux’s Eagle Owl. Then onto another reliable spot where we were challenged to locate Long-tailed Nightjar - so well camouflaged! We emerged at a ‘woodland bar’ - a few simple wooden benches set up a short distance from some water-troughs. Enjoyed a cold drink, in the shade while watching Orange-cheeked Waxbill, various doves, Black-winged Bishop and Blacked-necked Weaver. En-route back to the vehicle saw African Reed Warbler and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird.
Fri 3 March
An hour’s drive to another community forest, Farasuto. Met Bax, an excellent apprentice bird guide. Initially two Bearded Barbets caught our attention but Mustapha spotted a Klaas’s Cuckoo only a minute later - we had an excellent view for quite a time. Other new species included: Senegal Eremomela, Woodchat Shrike, Pin-tailed Whydah and Black-headed Lapwing. Into the forest where we instantly saw an African Golden Oriole. Further in, Mustapha pointed to an area we should look at, unusually not saying what we should be looking for - a male and female Greyish Eagle Owl permitted us a decent view before we moved on. Pretty much immediately Bax spotted another owl - an African Wood Owl. On to an area of open water where a pair of Pied Hornbills, Mottled Spinetail and Black Crake were new species. Sat at another ‘woodland bar’ watching Black-rumped Waxbill, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Little Greenbul and African Pygmy Kingfisher use the water-troughs.

Sat 4 March
Day ‘off’, watching birds in the small hotel gardens. Strolled up to Kotu bridge late afternoon and bumped into Mustapha. Walked through two hotel complexes to a well-hidden hide - rustic is probably the best term to describe it! We’d have never found it without him. A few new species: Palm-nut Vulture, Common Snipe and Greater Painted-
snipe (the reason the hide’s been built). En-route back saw a short but good view of Golden-tailed Woodpecker and the most tantalising fleeting glimpse of a Blue-breasted Kingfisher.

**Sun 5 March**

30 min drive to Lamin rice fields, admiring Red Colobus Monkeys nearby. Great views of Red-bellied and African Paradise Flycatcher. African Spoonbill and Osprey were the only new species but there were plenty of birds about, including Common Wattle-eye. Into Abuko Nature Reserve where the Green Turaco was particularly striking. Other new species included: Grey-headed Bristlebill and Scarlet-chested Sunbird. Within the reserve was a very sorry looking animal ‘orphanage’ with hyena pacing within the enclosures, we didn’t linger there. Carrying on more new species were Yellow-breasted Apalis, Hybrid Paradise Flycatcher then Lesser, Spotted and Greater Honeyguide. The highlight was an Avambo Sparrowhawk, giving us a good but short view. It was by far the hottest day we’d experienced - an energy-sapping 39°C.

**Mon 6 March**

Driven to Penjem, stopping en-route to admire a Grey Kestrel on a wire. We parked by the quiet main road, seemingly in the middle of nowhere! The area was open scrub, some of it burnt, and large trees. New species here
including: Black Scimitarbill, Northern Black Flycatcher, Eurasian Golden Oriole, Vieillots’ Barbet, Black-crowned Tchagra, Western Violet-backed Sunbird and White Helmetshrike. Driving onto Marakissa River Lodge we enjoyed stunning views of Blue-breasted Kingfisher (which had eluded us at Kotu). Watched a number of birds close up at the water-troughs, then walked through the lodge gardens to Kingfisher Lodge, with brief views of Fanti Saw-wing. The owner led us to a Northern White-faced Owl high in giant bamboo, then onto some trees to see an African Scops Owl deep in the undergrowth. We enjoyed an excellent lunch at Marakissa River Lodge (Mustapha having rung through beforehand).

**Tues 7 March**

A slightly earlier start, leaving at 7am, taking a packed breakfast with us. Off to Tujereng, which is another open area, with scrub (some of it burnt) and large trees. Rufous-crowned Roller and repeated fleeting glimpses of Common Buttonquail as it ran from bush to bush. Plenty of new species including: Senegal Batis, White-fronted Black Chat, Striped Kingfisher, Northern Wheatear, Red-winged Warbler, Temminck’s Courser, Brubru, Copper Sunbird, Pied-winged Swallows, Rufous Cisticola, Namaqua Dove, African Hobby and Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weaver. We left the tranquillity of Tujereng and went to the beach at Tanji - the exact opposite as it was bustling with people, with vast amounts of fish being hauled off pirogues, gutted and de-scaled only a few metres from the water, salted, dried and traded. Sea birds included: Pink-backed and Great White Pelican, Slender-billed, Lesser Black-backed, Yellow-legged, and Kelp Gull, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Grey Plover, Sanderling, Lesser Crested, Royal and Caspian Tern. While it was a fascinating insight into another side of The Gambia it was a bit of a shock to the system after the peace and calm of the rest of the week!
Striped Kingfisher

**Birds seen**

Follows ‘Birds of Senegal and The Gambia’ by Nik Borrow and Ron Demey.

- Little Grebe
- Great White Pelican
- Pink-backed Pelican
- Long-tailed Cormorant
- African Darter (Anhinga)
- Black-crowned Night Heron
- Green-backed Heron
- Squacco Heron
- Cattle Egret
- Black Heron
- Western Reef Egret
- Little Egret
- Intermediate Egret
- Great Egret
- Grey Heron
- Black-headed Heron
- Hamerkop
- Hadada Ibis
- Sacred Ibis
- African Spoonbill
- White-faced Whistling Duck
- Osprey
- Palm-nut Vulture
- Hooded Vulture
- Black-shouldered Kite
- Black Kite
- Yellow-billed Kite
African Harrier Hawk
Lizard Buzzard
Dark Chanting Goshawk
Ovambo Sparrowhawk
Shikra
Grey Kestrel
Red-necked Falcon
African Hobby
Lanner Falcon
Double-spurred Francolin
Common Buttonquail
Black Crake
African Jacana
Black-winged Stilt
Senegal Thick-Knee
Temminck's Courser
Common Ringed Plover
African Wattled Lapwing
Black-headed Lapwing
Spur-winged Lapwing
Grey Plover
Black-tailed Godwit
Whimbrel
Sanderling
Common Redshank
Common Greenshank
Green Sandpiper
Wood Sandpiper
Ruddy Turnstone
Greater Painted-snipe
Common Snipe
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Kelp Gull
Slender-billed Gull
Yellow-legged Gull
Grey-headed Gull
Caspian Tern
Royal Tern
Lesser-crested Tern
Blue-spotted Wood Dove
Black-billed Wood Dove
Namaqua Dove
Laughing Dove
African Green Pigeon
Speckled Pigeon
Red-eyed Dove
African Mourning Dove
Rose-ringed Parakeet
Senegal Parrot
Green Turaco
Violet Turaco
Western Grey Plantain-eater
Klaas's Cuckoo
Senegal Coucal
African Wood Owl
Greyish Eagle Owl
Verreaux's Eagle Owl
African Scops Owl
Pearl-spotted Owl
Northern White-faced Owl
Long-tailed Nightjar
Mottled Spinetail
White-rumped Swift
African Palm Swift
African Pygmy Kingfisher
Malachite Kingfisher
Striped Kingfisher
Blue-breasted Kingfisher
Pied Kingfisher
Giant Kingfisher
Little Bee-eater
Swallow-tailed Bee-eater
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater
European Bee-eater
Rufus-crowned Roller
Blue-bellied Roller
Abyssinian Roller
Broad-billed Roller
Green Wood-hoopoe
Black Scimitarbill
Hoopoe
Red-billed Hornbill
African Grey Hornbill
African Pied Hornbill
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird
Vieillot's Barbet
Bearded Barbet
Lesser Honeyguide
Spotted Honeyguide
Greater Honeyguide
Fine-spotted Woodpecker
Golden-tailed Woodpecker
Grey Woodpecker
Fanti Saw-wing
Pied-winged Swallow
Wire-tailed Swallow
Red-chested Swallow
Yellow Wagtail
Little Greenbul
Grey-headed Bristlebill
Yellow-throated Leaflove
Common Bulbul
Snowy-crowned Robin Chat
White-crowned Robin Chat
African Thrush
Northern Wheatear
White-fronted Black Chat
African Reed Warbler
Western Olivaceous Warbler
Melodious Warbler
Senegal Eremomela
Willow Warbler
Northern Crombec
Grey-backed Camaroptera
Singing Cisticola
Rufus Cisticola
Zitting Cisticola
Tawny-flanked Prinia
Red-winged Warbler
Yellow-breasted Apalis
Northern Black Flycatcher
African Paradise Flycatcher
Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher
Hybrid Paradise Flycatcher
Common Wattle-eye
Senegal Batis
Brown Babbler
Blackcap Babbler
Yellow White-eye
Western Violet-backed Sunbird
Scarlet-chested Sunbird
Beautiful Sunbird
Variable Sunbird
Splendid Sunbird
Copper Sunbird
Woodchat Shrike
Yellow-billed Shrike
Yellow-crowned Gonolek
Northern Puffback
Black-crowned Tchagra
Brubru
White Helmetshrike
African Golden Oriole
Eurasian Golden Oriole
Fork-tailed Drongo
Pied Crow
Piapiac
Purple Glossy Starling
Greater Blue-eared Starling
Long-tailed Glossy Starling
Northern Grey-headed Sparrow
House Sparrow
White-billed Buffalo Weaver
Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weaver
little Weaver
Black-necked Weaver
Village Weaver
Northern Red Bishop
Black-winged Bishop
Blue-cheeked Cordon-bleu
Lavender Waxbill
Orange-cheeked Waxbill
Black-rumped Waxbill
Red-billed Firefinch
Bronze Mannikin
African Silverbill
Pin-tailed Whydah
Yellow-fronted Canary