

The Gambia

A Taste of West Africa

Friday 05 November – Friday 19 November 2010

Leaders: Roger Lawrence and local guides

2010 Cost: £2,099 single room supplement £220



Our holidays to The Gambia, which we have visited over 30 times, provide an excellent opportunity to explore the avifauna of a range of different habitats contained within this small West African state. Not only do they provide an exciting introduction to the birds of Africa, but they also provide the chance to see many Western Palearctic breeding species on their wintering ground. The first week of the tour is spent on the coast, where we stay at the Senegambia Hotel. Its beautiful grounds constitute a bird reserve in their own right and provide a first-class introduction to the commoner West African species. The stretch of sandy shore belonging to the hotel provides a chance to observe at least five species of tern, as well as passing gulls and waders. The programme of local excursions will take us to different habitats within the coastal zone from mangrove swamp and estuarine wetland through savanna to rainforest and rice fields. During the second week of the tour, we move 'up river', staying in two different camps, each located on the banks of the Gambia River. As we travel eastwards, so we encounter drier and more open variants of savannah, which should allow us to see over 300 species of bird. We will make sure we are back at the Senegambia Hotel for our last night, so we celebrate the end of the holiday in style! One of the beauties of travel to The Gambia is that it is on the same time zone as the UK – therefore there is no jetlag after the six-hour flight.

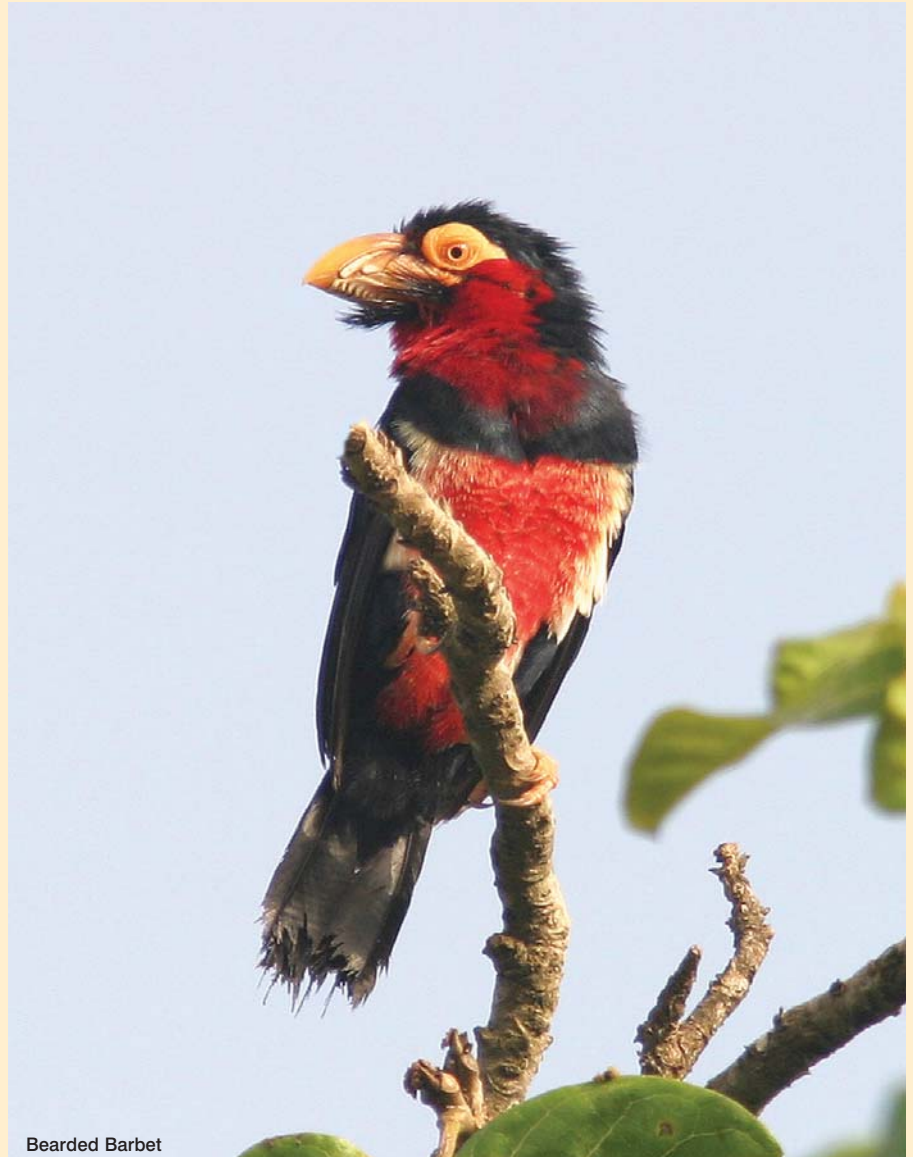
ITINERARY

Days 1 to 7

We leave London or Manchester in the morning by a direct charter flight, arriving at Yundum Airport near Banjul in the late afternoon. We transfer by coach to the Senegambia Hotel for a stay of seven nights. During our time here we shall make various excursions.

The early part of the next morning will be spent exploring the grounds of the Senegambia Hotel and the adjacent foreshore. This will be a lovely introduction to the birds of The Gambia, as the area holds an astonishing diversity of birds. There will be many doves, weavers and finches to identify, but the most striking bird we should find is the gaudy Common Gonolek. The foreshore holds waders, and passing terns can include Gull-billed, Royal, Caspian, Lesser Crested, Sandwich and Little, while the gulls are represented by Grey-headed, Slender-billed and Lesser Black-backed. Later, we will enter the nearby Bijillo Forest Reserve where we hope to find our first Little Bee-eaters, as well as African Grey Hornbill, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Black-crowned Tchagra and Shikra. An afternoon walk around the nearby Fajara Golf Course should provide encounters with such species as Black-headed and Wattled Lapwings, Green Woodhoopoe, Senegal Coucal, Piapiac, Brown Babbler and Yellow-billed Shrike. The mudflats at Kotu Creek can be relied upon to hold a good suite of waders, whilst the electricity poles and wires provide perches for Pied Kingfisher, Red-chested Swallow, Grey Kestrel and Broad-billed and Blue-bellied Rollers.

We need to have an early breakfast one day to ensure that we are at Abuko when the gates are opened. This reserve comprises a small relic of the forest that once prevailed in the coastal zone of The Gambia, together with a savanna extension. It is difficult to single out species for particular mention, so rich is the avifauna. For those impressed by size, there is the Palm-nut Vulture, Black-headed Heron and Hamerkop; but for colour the Guinea Turaco, Black-headed Paradise-Flycatcher, Abyssinian Roller and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater take a lot of beating. Lunch will be taken at Lamin Lodge, which is built on stilts at the mangrove margin of a creek leading into the Gambia River, before walking



Bearded Barbet

through the local rice fields. Here we hope to see Yellow-throated Longclaw, Yellow-shouldered Widowbird, Little Grey and Fine-spotted Woodpeckers. Black-winged Kite and Banded Snake-Eagle are among the raptors to be found in this area.

To the south is the Tanji Reserve with its open scrubland and areas of mud-fringed lagoons. Birds we may expect to see vary from Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird to Oriole Warbler, and from African Pygmy-Kingfisher to African Green-Pigeon. Wetland areas are a great attraction at

this part of the coast, and we shall make numerous visits to some favoured localities. Our stops at Camalou Corner, Cape Creek, Denton Bridge and the Bund Road will greatly increase the number of species we encounter. Waders will include Spur-winged Plover, Black-winged Stilt and Marsh Sandpiper. Western Reef-Heron and Cattle, Intermediate and Great Egrets abound, and there is always the chance of seeing Black Crowned-Crane and Marsh Owl. The potential raptor list is extensive, ranging from Lanner Falcon and African Hobby to Eurasian Marsh Harrier and African Harrier-Hawk.

One morning will be spent birdwatching around the fields at Yundum. This area holds wintering migrants, from Woodchat Shrike and Common Redstart to Western Olivaceous Warbler and Northern Wheatear. However, we shall perhaps be more intent upon other 'more difficult' species, such as Greater Honeyguide and White-fronted Black-Chat. This is a good area for seeing both Bearded and Vieillot's Barbets.

If you want to take time out from the birding there is always the pool and the beach at the Senegambia Hotel and you are always surrounded by birds.

Days 8 to 10

Today we make an early start for our journey eastwards to Georgetown and the camp at Janjanbureh. We take the ferry from Banjul to Barra arriving on the north bank of the river. We can make stops en route to check out various wetlands and ponds as we head eastwards. We can hope to spot eagles, storks, harriers, waders and terns as we move upriver. We should arrive at Boabolong Camp in the late afternoon, where we stay for three nights. The camp is located on the island that was chosen as the site for the colonial settlement. Birding near the camp we should find Oriole Warbler, African Golden Oriole, Yellow-throated Greenbul, Pearl-spotted Owllet, Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat and Swamp Flycatcher, as well as Village Indigobird and Black-rumped Waxbill. We can cross to the south bank of the river again, and make for Bassé. This is not the most beautiful town in West Africa, but it promises sightings of the beautiful Egyptian Plover and possibly another star bird, the Northern Carmine Bee-eater. This is also a good

area for vultures - Hooded, White-backed and Rüppell's Griffon. We shall make a boat trip to Kuntaur and Baboon Island - birds here may include Bruce's Green-Pigeon, Collared Pratincole, African Skimmer, Woodland and Grey-headed Kingfishers and Woolly-necked Stork. One of the highlights of our stay here will be a visit to Bansang to see the colony of Red-throated Bee-eaters, where we may also see Cinnamon-breasted Bunting.

Days 11 to 13

Today we transfer westwards to Tendaba, where we stay for three nights. We birdwatch en route stopping at wetlands and woodlands to see more Egyptian Plover, as well as Black Crake, Abyssinian Roller and Grasshopper Buzzard. Tendaba Camp is located on the south bank of the Gambia River and close to the borders of the Kiang West National Park. It affords a good level of comfort in an away-from-it-all setting. While here, we shall take two pirogue trips to the other side of the river and up the Kisi Bolon. Many birds occupy the creek's mudflats and mangrove fringe, ranging from African Fish-Eagle and Goliath Heron to Mouse-brown Sunbird and African Blue-Flycatcher. White-backed Night-Heron is often found and if we are very lucky, we might see an African Finfoot or a Pel's Fishing-Owl. Dry country birding can take us past the old Peanut Factory, where the fields hold Rose-ringed Parakeet, Brubru, Brown-rumped Bunting, Eurasian Hoopoe and Black Scimitar-bill. There is always much to see around the camp and the dry thorn scrub hold a diverse range of species from Abyssinian Ground Hornbill to Long-tailed Paradise-Whydah.

Day 14

After some final birding around the camp, perhaps seeing Four-banded Sandgrouse, Stone Partridge or Yellow-crowned Bishop, we return westwards back to the coast and the Hotel Senegambia, where we can relax and birdwatch in the grounds and on the beach. We have our final farewell dinner tonight.

Day 15

We have a final morning around the coast, revisiting one or two areas. Later we transfer to the airport for our return flight to London or Manchester, arriving there late in the evening.



Hooded Vulture

Outline Itinerary

Day 1	Fly to Banjul
Days 2-7	Banjul
Days 8-10	Georgetown
Days 11-13	Tendaba
Day 14	Banjul
Day 15	Depart Banjul

Party Size

Maximum of 14 clients.

Accommodation

Comfortable accommodation in twin/double and single rooms, with private facilities and air-conditioning in the Senegambia Hotel. The up-river accommodation (at Boabolong and Tendaba Camps) is basic but all rooms have private facilities.

Transport

By small coach and boat.

Includes

All flights, meals, accommodation, transport, entry fees, services of the leaders, airport taxes and tips.

Gradings

 Good/Basic

 300

 Hot

 Low

 Special

 Relaxed

 Good

 Easy

 Charter



Egyptian Plovers



Malachite Kingfisher