

ORNITHOLIDAYS' TOUR TO THE GAMBIA
A Taste of West Africa

06 – 20 November 2009



Northern Carmine Bee-eater

© *Mary Sullivan*

Leaders: Richard Coomber and Modou Colley

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A Personal Diary

Friday, 06 November

Most of the 2009 Ornitholidays' party to The Gambia had an early rendezvous at Gatwick, with just one of the group, Ted, flying directly from Manchester tomorrow. Our Monarch Airlines A330 Airbus left almost on time for Banjul, the capital of this tiny West African country.

It was a smooth flight and we were 25 minutes early arriving after a 5½-hour flight. The baggage carousel area at the airport was crowded, but eventually all our bags arrived safe and sound. Outside we were directed to one of the waiting coaches and gratefully received cold bottles of water. Our transfer to the Senegambia Hotel was efficiently handled and in addition to the Hooded Vultures over the airport a number of Speckled Pigeons, various doves and a few other species were seen during the 25 minute drive to the hotel.

Once our rooms were allocated we began birding in the grounds, but my time with the group was curtailed as I had a meeting with our guide and driver pre-arranged. However, some good birds were seen during the time available before dusk. A pair of Yellow-crowned Gonolek caused particular comment over the dining table later. Brown Babblers, Beautiful Sunbird and several starling species were amongst the smaller birds noted, whilst it proved to be a good start to the raptor list with a Shikra flying amongst the palms and *Casuarina* trees carrying prey. An African Harrier-Hawk seemed to have lost some of its mystique when its name changed from *Gymnogene*, but it still looked the same! Both African Grey and Red-billed Hornbill were found along with a quite confiding Senegal Coucal that was 'dealing' with a lizard it had just caught.

Overhead hawked African Palm and Little Swifts until dusk fell, when their place was taken by some 20 or so Broad-billed Rollers that swooped and wheeled over the grounds as if performing some well choreographed aerial ballet!

We met up in the bar for a round of well-deserved Julbrews, the local beer, courtesy of John before enjoying a good buffet dinner in the dining room, the checklist and a well-deserved early night.

Saturday, 7 November

Hot and sunny, but less humid than yesterday. 35°C.

We were ready for breakfast at 7 a.m. GMT out here means Gambian Maybe Time! Gradually the buffet appeared and by the time our guide Colley, driver Ali, and Abdullah arrived the spread was complete! Birding began at the breakfast table with further views of a flying Shikra over the trees in the gardens as high above circled African Palm and Little Swifts.

We started to explore the grounds with Colley, beginning with good views of a Broad-billed Roller perched near the dining area. In a tree beyond the swimming pool we had telescope views of a female Shikra. Nearby from a large bushy patch an Oriole Warbler sang. Immediately Colley responded with playback, which enabled us all to get a good, or reasonable view, over the following minutes. Two other good birds to see were Allen's Lavender Waxbill and a skulking White-crowned Robin-chat.

Colley and Ali suggested that we drove round to the nearby Bijilo Forest Reserve before it became too hot. As we entered a small corrugated iron hide a few hundred metres inside the entrance gate we all saw, or glimpsed, an Ahanta Francolin as it came out of the bushes only to disappear twice as quickly!

The sandy trail led us through remnant coastal forest, a habitat losing out to tourist developments nearby. In many places palms were the dominant trees. Near the sea, wind-sculpted baobabs pointed inland. During the course of the morning's walk we added a number of species to the list: a Black-billed Wood Dove waddled

along the path ahead of us at one point and out near the coast we had excellent views of a Vinaceous Dove, which takes the place of our Collared Dove in West Africa, and then there was the rather more colourful Laughing Dove.

There were several groups of stunning Little Bee-eaters perched on bushes near the beach and at one point we were able to compare female Village and Black-necked Weavers, although views of the smarter male Black-necked tended to be briefer than we would have liked. In the same area we enjoyed our first views of Bearded Barbet perched out on a palm frond. We had several more sightings of Shikra and of Piapiacs as they passed through the crowns of the palms. Small birds were at a premium, especially after 10 o'clock as the temperature rose steadily into the 30s again. Both Tawny-flanked Prinia and Grey-backed Camaroptera were seen, but neither terribly well in spite of Colley's best efforts. When we reached the thicker and more shady forest again Blackcap Babblers appeared in small groups.

Bijilo was not just about birds for we also enjoyed the company of monkeys - mainly Green Vervet, but we also had a couple of sightings of Red Colobus as they passed through the canopy. The Vervets fed near the path and watched us with inquisitive eyes. About a dozen species of butterflies and several dragonflies also caught our attention and most were eventually identified. None were in the same league as the palm spiders that wove webs between trees and bushes almost worthy of being called mist nets - alternatively they were well-constructed websites. Perhaps www.palmspider.com?

As we neared the entrance gate we returned to the hide in the hope of having better views of the francolin, but it wasn't to be. Instead Oriole Warbler and Snowy-capped Robin-chat responded to playback and we also had stunning views of African Pygmy Kingfisher and the much larger Blue-breasted Kingfisher, which was proposed as the bird of the day - the views were as BirdLine might have said - *sustained!*

We returned to the hotel for lunch and a siesta. Birds within the grounds included another Blue-breasted Kingfisher and White-capped Robin-chat. Pride of place went to Allan's seawatching that produced two Pomarine Skuas as well as Caspian, Royal and Sandwich Terns.

At 4 o'clock we met up with Colley and Ali for a birding session in the Kotu area, beginning with the creek, where large areas of mud were exposed amongst the mangroves. On the top of a crown-less, and therefore dead, palm a Blue-breasted Roller sat to be admired, whilst at the other end of the colourful scale a Western Olivaceous Warbler fed actively in an acacia tree beside the road. Nearby, along a small stream running through the mudflats, were some old friends - Grey and Ringed Plovers, Whimbrel, Common and Wood Sandpipers and Common Redshank. A touch of the exotic came in the form of Spur-winged and Wattled Plovers, a flock of a dozen or more Senegal Thick-knees and a fleeing party of Double-spurred Francolins.

Our first Pied Kingfishers were here as well as yet another Blue-breasted Kingfisher. Red-chested Swallows, a similar species to our Barn Swallow, lined the wires and a pair of chestnut-capped Wire-tailed Swallows probably had a nest beneath the bridge on which we stood. It was interesting to watch a local wading and casting his net in the muddy waters of the creek and to see another man coming back carrying the fruits of his efforts. Neither took any interest in the hundreds of fiddler crabs scattered across the mud, nor in the mud skippers along the water's edge.

A walk along the nearby cycle track gave us views of Squacco and Purple Herons in the adjacent rice fields as well as glimpses of White-faced Whistling Ducks as they flew from one pond to another or preened on the edge of a pool. A few Yellow-billed Kites circled the area in addition to the Hooded Vultures that appear to be everywhere and African Harrier-Hawks seem to be quite widespread as well. We had Shikra in the area, but a Grey Kestrel was not seen as well as those later during the tour.

Finally we made a brief visit to Kotu ponds as the shadows lengthened. We soon found Black-winged Stilts, Common Greenshank and an African Jacana. Along the track Spur-winged Plover complained at the intrusion, whilst on the main pool two Little Grebes were the only ones we were to see during the tour. As we were about to leave a Green Sandpiper dropped in for a brief appearance.

We were back at the Senegambia by 6.15 p.m., just in time for some of the party to see a Palm-nut Vulture gliding away over the trees in the hotel grounds.

After dinner and the checklist I stayed up to meet Ted who arrived soon after 11 pm having coming in from Manchester. Our group was now complete.

Sunday, 08 November

Hot and sunny once more. 35°C

We left at 7 o'clock with a picnic breakfast for Abuko Nature Reserve and set off on a walk that was to last more than four hours - thank goodness for the drinks supplied on the bus. In between we saw some good birds, although it wasn't easy.

We walked along a sandy track through the forest, but found very little until we reached the education centre. The elevated position of the verandah overlooked a large pool, from where we saw three Black-crowned Night-herons standing in the early morning sunshine and from where we watched one of two adult Palm-nut Vultures chasing away a Hooded Vulture. After a while two African Jacanas came out to feed amongst the emergent vegetation, a Wood Sandpiper flew away, a Green Sandpiper dropped in soon after and a Little Greenbul came out of the undergrowth to drink from an overhanging twig.

In the background we had the constant calls of a feeding Yellow-breasted Apalis, which after a while gave good views. Perched in a distant tree was the day's Wahlberg's Eagle. Later one or two others were seen passing over, accompanying the dozens of Hooded Vulture that rose on the thermals as the temperature increased.

Our first really good bird was a Western Bluebill, a secretive black finch with a red bib. It had not been seen on either of our previous two tours. From the high of such a good bird we went to the lows of the terminal failure of Colley's loudspeaker, without which there would be no playback and no playback meant we might miss some key species. We need not have worried for Ken's love of forest birding brought him to the fore. We attempted, unsuccessfully, to solve the problem. Even John's contribution of insulating tape was unable to reconnect the worn strands of electrical cable on the loudspeaker. Meanwhile the group found the first Common Wattle-eye, a forest species that resembles a large batis.

Little Greenbuls were more often heard than seen as we headed on to a small elevated hide. It didn't produce much, but the fruiting trees in the area were a prime food source for the many Western Grey Plantain-eaters in the area. We also managed brief views of a secretive punk-crested Green Turaco and prolonged ones of the stunning Violet Turaco, surely to be one of the birds of the day. Double-spurred Francolins were heard and earlier Colley had pointed out the calls of Ahanta Francolin to some of the party.

The path wound through forest into rather more open areas, where we enjoyed wonderful views of Beautiful Sunbirds feeding on the flowers of *Lantana* bushes in the company of numerous butterflies, although today there was not the variety we had found in the coastal Bijilo Forest. An Orange-cheeked Waxbill showed well, but the first of the day's Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters was just a head and shoulders effort. Parties of Bronze Manakins popped up here and there as we watched the squadrons of passing Hooded Vultures, but picking out a Booted Eagle as it passed across the crowded skies was easier said than done.

We retraced our steps with Ken turning up a Grey-headed Bristle-bill, one of the secretive forest-dwelling greenbul species. Later Allan was to find another. Ken's next bird, and perhaps the last good one before we reached the bus, was a Yellow-throated Leaflove high beneath the canopy of a spreading tree.

On leaving Abuko, we headed for Lamin Lodge set amongst the mangroves on the edge of the Gambia River. We had a lunch in the wooden building that stood on stilts above the mud, where mud skippers 'skipped' amongst the mangroves before the rising tide forced them to retreat. The tide was high and birds were at a premium, but soon a fishing immature Royal Tern was seen and was clearly much larger than the Sandwich Tern that fished nearby. A Goliath Heron flew by and later we added Osprey to the growing list. Birds became smaller after that lot! From the roofs of the building chirped Grey-headed Sparrow.

The tasty buffet lunch was followed by a siesta. Outside the sun beat down from a clear sky, but mad dogs and *Welshmen* go out in the midday sun, so when Allan came back in with tales of Green-backed Eremomela

near the car park we had to follow, as about the best passerine around the dining area was a male Red-billed Firefinch. In the car-park Colley joined us and when he started imitating the Pearl-spotted Owlet he got an immediate response from the Green-backed Eremomela party and their agitation seemed to attract other species to the scene. The highlight was a Mouse-brown Sunbird, a mangrove speciality.

On leaving Lamin Lodge we birded along the entrance track, seeing Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu and Orange-cheeked Waxbills in a mixed bird party that also included Bronze Mannikin and Red-billed Firefinches. Some were feeding on drying seedheads, but in turn they almost all came down to drink at a muddy puddle in the road.

A broken-down vehicle blocked our way a little further on, but it wasn't a problem as the track we took to reach a cultivated area began at the same spot. The fields were a mixture of small cultivated patches with rice paddies beyond. The area was particularly well served by small wells, that also provided good habitat for the many dragonflies that frequented the area. It was good relaxed birding with many birds, such as egrets and starlings, passing this way and that to roost. We had good views of Black-winged Kite, the same species that one might see in Spain and elsewhere in Africa. Ted was able to catch up with a number of species including a stunning Woodland Kingfisher seen shortly before we left the area. One might have been justified in thinking that the finale would have been the very obliging Pearl-spotted Owlet that answered the call and showed itself very well. Then as we walked back along the track a male African Golden Oriole appeared in a bare tree. Finally as we walked the last section of sandy track to where Ali had eventually parked the bus a flock of six Four-banded Sandgrouse belted by.

We returned to the hotel, where I was able to get Ted moved to a room in one of the blocks where some of the rest of the party were billeted. Dinner was a buffet as usual, followed by the checklist and an early night.

Monday, 09 November

Hot and sunny and perhaps a little more humid than the last couple of days 37°C

Following a 7 o'clock breakfast at the hotel we left with Colley, Ali and Abdul for Marakissa - an area close to Gambia's southern border with Senegal in the Western Division. Once off the main road we passed through villages where smartly dressed children walked to school and the villagers going about their chores.

The first new bird of the day was a smart male Black-winged Red Bishop - a larger edition of the Northern Red we saw yesterday with the red extending from the crown to the forehead. We stopped in an area of fields admiring smart male Village Weavers raiding someone's millet crop as soon as we alighted, before turning our attention to the tour's first Diederik Cuckoo. Both Stone Partridge and Double-spurred Francolins were heard during our morning's exploration of the area. The first new birds were Levaillant's Cuckoo and a pair of inquisitive Black Wood Hoopoes, much smaller than their red-billed Green cousins.

Across a rough field called a Lizard Buzzard and this time it was John who found the bird we were all looking for high in the top of a leafy tree, declaring that this land was his land. Later two more were seen, perhaps one was our first bird, but they had strayed into the territory of a Shikra that didn't really want them around. All the time Hooded Vultures were rising on the thermals, sometimes in quite large 'kettles' numbering 50 or more birds. Occasionally we saw Wahlberg's Eagles passing over or perhaps a Grey Kestrel, for the latter tended to be associated with the area's palm trees.

We heard Brubru and Black-crowned Tchagra during the morning, seeing the latter as we returned to the bus. Another shrike of the area was Northern Puffback, one of the black and white brigade with a beady red eye. Another of the same brigade was a male Pin-tail Whydah, but although he was looking good, he still hadn't grown a full tail.

The Pearl-spotted Owlet whistle brought a vocal response from one or two of the little fellows, but neither had any intention of being seen, unlike the Green-backed Eremomelas that came in to mob the impostor. At one time we found a great flowering tree full of sunbirds, where the familiar Beautiful Sunbirds were joined by at least two Western Violet-backed Sunbirds, a female Splendid Sunbird and a male Variable.

Eventually we reached the bus and were grateful for the water provided, before we drove just a kilometre or

two to River Lodge where an excellent lunch awaited us. The building and its flat roofed viewing area overlooked a bend in the river, where Common Greenshank, Common, Green and Wood Sandpipers were feeding along the muddy shores and a pair or two of Senegal Thick-knees were resting in the shade of bushes.

Having had a sufficiency some rested or watched from the roof, whilst Allan, Ken and I suffered from curiosity when we saw another birding group beneath a cluster of trees in the grounds and were rewarded with views of a Spotted Honeyguide. We tried again later when things had quietened down, but without success.

Village Weavers had built their nests in two colonies at the end of branches overhanging the river on the assumption that they would be safe from predators, but they hadn't anticipated an aerial attack from a hungry African Harrier-Hawk. Along the river were kingfishers ranging from Giant and Pied at the top of the scale to Malachite and African Pygmy at the other end. A pair of African Pied Hornbills flew over the river shortly before a gunshot disturbed a flock of White-faced Whistling Duck and our first Little Egret that flew off with a Western Reed Heron.

Soon after 3 o'clock we bade farewell to our hostess and returned to the field, well rice paddies actually, for the area was a major area of production much appreciated by a Purple Heron we stopped to see, but not perhaps by the backs of the local ladies planting young plants by hand a little further on. The rice fields attracted Northern and Black-winged Red Bishops, but later, in one small patch, Colley was pleased to show us a small party of Yellow-crowned Bishops. Overhead a Brown Snake-Eagle soared and, as so often happens, one bird led to another for when we checked some small pools hidden away from the road we found Blue-bellied Roller and flushed a Dwarf Bittern that on landing, posed for the telescopes before disappearing into thicker vegetation again.

A cuckoo was found by Arthur and eventually showed itself well enough for the identification of African Cuckoo to be confirmed. Ahead of us a male Double-spurred Francolin perched up on an earthen mound giving good views to those who missed yesterday's fleeing birds. The fields gave way to the margins of a sandy estuary, where mangroves were the dominant tree species. In some scantily-leaved bushes by the road we found a male Subalpine Warbler, down here for the winter from the Mediterranean. Senegal Thick-knees were very common in the area and we must have seen some 25+ before we boarded the bus to return to the hotel. As one would expect with an estuary there were Ospreys and a number of Palearctic shorebirds down for the winter and terns that included Gull-billed and Caspian. The best bird on the way back to the hotel was Rufous-crowned Roller, seen on a couple of occasions, although the best view was of one perched on a large hoarding.

Deirdre had opted for a day off today and had had a good time spent engaged in some retail therapy, that involved having a pair of shoes made, relaxing around the pool and beach area and going for a walk in the late afternoon with the hotel's bird guide during which she caught up with Bronze-tailed Starling.

Dinner this evening was by the beach and followed by the checklist in my room.

Tuesday, 10 November

Hot and sunny again. 35°C.

Birding began during breakfast with our best views yet of a Yellow-crowned Gonolek as it perched on a the purple bougainvillea in full sun - stunning.

With a 7.30 a.m. departure we headed north to an area known as Camaloo Corner, where we had excellent views of a Marsh Sandpiper feeding beside a Common Greenshank at the first pool we looked at. Also in the area were Northern Red and Yellow-crowned Bishops and a variety of heron species that included our first Black Egrets, a species that in fact we were to see somewhat better later in the morning. Ken spotted a Malachite Kingfisher, but it shot off before many could see it. Across the other side of the road tidal mudflats were well-vegetated by mangroves. The few species that we could see from the roadside were mostly familiar ones - Eurasian Whimbrel, Ringed Plover, Common Redshank and a lone Bar-tailed Godwit. A cisticola gave particularly good views, but remained silent, which was a shame as it was a Singing Cisticola.

After a while we moved round to Cape Creek. A party of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters obliged by perching on wires near the road, but it was the shorebirds and mixed tern and gulls we tended to concentrate on after our fix of glamour. Unfortunately all the gulls were Grey-headed (of various ages) and most of the terns were Caspian, in fact there were well over 100 of them. Careful sifting through the two or three flocks out in the mud produced Sandwich and Royal as a reward. Meanwhile Arthur was delighted to find a Intermediate Egret amongst one distant collection of *Larids*. High overhead passed about half a dozen Pallid Swifts as Hooded Vultures started to thermal upwards.

One bird we had hoped to see let us down - Yellow-throated Longclaw, but during our efforts to find one we saw several Zitting Cisticolas and found a splendid butterfly – *Abadima Acraea* and a skipper that turned out to be Lesser Millet Skipper.

The fabled Bund Road was our final stop, but sadly it was not what it used to be. There were no Greater Flamingos today and, with the mangroves growing ever larger, visibility from the busy road that serves the docks is not so good. Further on we had views over mudflats and the sea. A large flock of Grey-headed Gulls rested on the mud with a few Royal and Sandwich Terns amongst them as before. Single Slender-billed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls were additions to the list as were a small party of Black-tailed Godwits, a Eurasian Curlew and several Ruddy Turnstones were also new species. Other shorebirds such as Sanderlings had been seen earlier on the tour. With that we returned to the hotel, stopping just beyond the Bund Road to enjoy good views of Sacred Ibis, Black Egret and a number of very large Palm Spiders.

A siesta followed lunch during which some birded in the hotel grounds and others relaxed. The most notable bird was the Lesser Crested Tern fishing off the beach in the company of a Sandwich. Later as we made our way up to the bus just before 3 o'clock. I was able to show Ted the differences between three of the starlings - Greater and Lesser Blue-eared and Purple Glossy.

Brufut Forest was our destination this afternoon and once we began with two Northern White-faced Scops Owls at their daytime roosts in almost adjacent trees. A muddy patch in the track attracted a number of butterflies - Creamy Small Whites and Common Grass Yellows gathered moisture or salts, or perhaps both, whilst the spectacular Veined Swallowtail did little more than circuits and bumps - its landings were so brief.

With a local guide, well known to Colley, we left the track and took a path into the bush, passing one of the leaf-like butterflies, a Pearl Charaxes, resting beneath a shady overhang. The next bird was the largest owl in the Gambia, Verreaux's Eagle Owl. Its roost was right in the top of a large tree and almost too well hidden for us to see its pink eyelids, but eventually with careful positioning of John's scope we managed it, although we never did see its beak or neck!

In terms of rarity, or perhaps elusiveness, the pair of Green Crombecs that Colley enticed from the thick path-side vegetation were the best birds of the afternoon. These tiny tail-less warblers were very active for much of the time, but we all had good views in the end. If they had performed like the Grey-backed Camaroptera that sat preening in full sun in the same bushes it would have made life much easier. This was an especially good bird to see for it is not listed in the BOU Checklist No. 3 *The Birds of The Gambia* M. E. Gore (1990). At one point as we walked along the path an African Pygmy Kingfisher flew by only four feet off the ground and only centimetres from us! When our path looped round to the track where Ali and the bus were waiting, the local guide had a bird-bath made from a plastic container set up in a tree. African Thrush and two waxbills, Red-cheeked Cordon-blue and Lavender Waxbill gave great views, the latter being a catch-up bird for those who had missed the one seen a few days ago.

After driving on a little way we stopped by a deep ford and on the pool beyond we saw a family party of White-faced Whistling Ducks. Perched on a bare tree a Bearded Barbet gave us the best views yet of this striking species. We were in another area of cultivation, but the trees were rather few and far between. Colley's PSO whistle brought a Black-crowned Tchagra into one of the few trees by the path, and eventually his target bird, a Red-winged Warbler appeared and gave good views before returning to cover once more.

Well satisfied with another good day we returned to the hotel and the familiar routine of other evenings.

Wednesday, 11 November

Another very hot and sunny day. 38°C

On a day that was a little hotter than the others we headed east across a busy Gambia to Pirang, where down a sandy track beyond the village we stopped outside a fish farm that produced tiger prawns. Unfortunately the elderly gatekeeper ensured that the "Keep Out" notices were observed to the letter.

Amongst the rough grass along the track that led onto a large bund a small party of waxbills included our first Black-rumped Waxbills and when a pair of African Quail-finches flew over I didn't expect that a few minutes later we would have telescope views of the female as she fed on the track some 200 metres beyond the signs that limited our advance.

We could look into two partially dry ponds, where a few White Wagtails fed along the water's edge with a Common Sandpiper or two. On the whole there were few Palearctic shorebirds in sight - Common Greenshank and Redshank, a Eurasian Whimbrel or two and some distant Black-winged Stilts and that was about it. Patrolling Gull-billed Terns appeared from time to time and a small party of three or four Whiskered Terns came along a drainage channel. A little later Allan found a Little Tern. Over the active ponds we could see several flocks of Greater Flamingos in flight, one had a dozen or so Yellow-billed Storks following along behind. A pair or two of Spur-winged Geese flew by and on another bank separating the ponds stood a party of White-faced Whistling-ducks. In the air were a few birds of prey. The kites all had yellow bills, there were passing Shikra and Lizard Buzzard as well, but not all the day's parrots were Senegal for Colley picked up a pair of Brown-necked Parrots on call as they flew by. We have seen Mosque Swallows several times already, but along the drainage ditches at Pirang was the first time we were able to compare them flying with the more familiar Red-rumped Swallow. Nearby we watched a Crested Lark, the only one of the tour and another species occurring in continental Europe.

Having left Pirang to another birding group we headed on to our next destination. On the way we stopped to see our first Grasshopper Buzzard and a distant Beaudouin's Snake-Eagle. Further along country tracks we ended up by a small shelter, where there was another elderly gentleman, but this one was a local guide and glad to see us. We followed him through an area of bushy savannah towards a large shady tree. From the cover of an adjacent bush we set the scopes up on a Greyish Eagle Owl that was roosting there. This is a split from Spotted Eagle Owl with dark, not yellow eyes. A splendid bird, whose range extends across Africa south of the Sahara, but north of the Equator. It was first recorded from the Gambia in 1979. After excellent views we moved away quietly to a nearby fruiting fig tree that attracted a variety of passerines. We had good views of Purple Glossy Starlings and Yellow-fronted Canaries. An African Golden Oriole showed well and by using the Pearl-spotted Owlet call we brought in a Senegal Batis and a Yellow White-eye. Colley spotted a pair of Lanners, but they were flying away all the time.

Back at the shelter our local guide produced a cool box and sold much appreciated Cokes and other soft drinks at almost half the price of those at the hotel! This was where we had lunch and a siesta. We had some good birds, including a flock of White-crested Helmet-shrikes spotted by Ali, and passing raptors that included Dark Chanting Goshawk, Brown and Beaudouin's Snake-Eagles, African Harrier-Hawk, Grasshopper Buzzard and two Bateleurs – now that's Africa!

Our afternoon's birding involved a drive and then a walk along a bush-lined lane to a drying water-hole, where Colley hoped small birds would be coming to drink. It was very hot and birding was quiet with nothing coming to the water. Perhaps it was still too hot? The track was excellent for butterflies with a number of species being noted for the first time - Cream-bordered Charaxes, White Lady Swallowtail, Diadem, Yellow Pansy, Golden Pansy, Little Commodore and somewhat less colourful than the others – Vulgar Bush Brown! There were a few birds too – Common Redstart, Northern Puffback, African Paradise-flycatcher and Yellow-backed Weavers. Scarlet-chested and Variable Sunbirds responded to the PSO whistle.

The star bird was without doubt Ken's small covey of Stone Partridges. He had spotted them by systematically checking every footpath and game trail off the main track, and seeing them moments before they disappeared into cover, from which they were lured by Colley's judicious use of play-back. We all saw them but as with many furtive species, we might have wished for better views. At least it was better than

Helmeted Guineafowl, for the closest we got to that was finding a feather in the track and seeing the butterfly that's named after it.

Back on the bus, our next stop came sooner than anticipated when Ali spotted a White-breasted Cuckoo-shrike in tall trees on the left hand side of the road and fortunately we all managed to see this bird we had hoped to find near Marakissa the other day.

Although we were back before 6 o'clock this evening, a walk around the grounds produced nothing out of the ordinary. We had good views of White-crowned Robin-chat, but the Broad-billed Rollers that hawked the skies over the hotel a day or so back were absent tonight. Drinks in the bar were followed by dinner and the checklist as usual.

Thursday, 12 November

Overcast all day and more humid than of late. 28°C.

During breakfast this morning two Broad-billed Rollers were over the hotel as we ate on the terrace outside the restaurant. Leaving at 7.30 a.m. we headed south to Tanji, where we birded for most of the morning in an area of scattered trees and bushes. There were some really good birds around and with the overcast conditions avian activity held up well.

The first bird to admire was a Lizard Buzzard on the wires and then smaller species came steadily. Both Bearded and Vieillot's Barbets were seen through the scopes as were a colourful trio of bee-eaters - Little, Swallow-tailed and White-throated. The first two species were scattered through the bushy country, but the honour fell to John to spot a small party of four or five White-throated Bee-eaters perched in a tree that most of us had passed. Senegal Parrots are another colourful species, but one often perches on a distant tree, or is merely a fly-by. Today we had close telescope views of a small party. We also came across Melodious and Western Olivaceous Warblers in acacia trees.

African Palm and a number of Pallid Swifts, down from the north, passed frequently overhead along with a few Little Swifts, but only Allan picked up a lone White-rumped, the first of the tour. Most of the usual doves were present, but fruiting fig trees attracted African Green Pigeons and African Golden Orioles as well as barbets, a Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, several African Thrushes and Common Bulbuls. Another tree provided a resting place for a party of Fanti Saw-wings, whilst nearby a large one offered the same facilities to a dozen or more Red-chested Swallows. It was good to find a pair of Northern Black Flycatchers for they confirmed the birds that Ken had outside his room around breakfast time. The only woodpeckers we could manage all turned out to be the Grey ones.

Eventually we made our way to the shore of a lagoon behind the beach, where 50+ Grey-headed Gulls rested on the opposite shore. There were several Palearctic shorebirds - Common Sandpiper, Redshank, Whimbrel and the Eurasian Curlew found by Arthur and Mary that was a catch-up species for some of us.

On returning to the bus we drove a short distance to the northern bank of the river that flows into the sea just north of the fishing village of Tanji. Fish attract gulls and gulls attract birdwatchers, so it wasn't long before our scopes were being trained on the mixed flocks of Grey-headed and Lesser Black-backed Gulls in the hope of finding a Kelp Gull, a species that has recently colonised this part of West Africa from the southern hemisphere. We had expected one or two at best, but 10 or more with adults, sub-adults and first winter birds were more than we had dared hope for. A pair of immaculate adults in particular was much appreciated.

In some respects the gulls were easier than the terns we hoped to find. Caspian and Sandwich presented no problems, but sorting out Lesser Crested from Royal at rest was not always as clear cut as it might have been. Royal is the larger and Lesser Crested is about the size of a Sandwich. The bills differ in shape as well, but after lunch Mary, studying two Royal and one Lesser Crested resting on the gunwales of a pirogue moored at Sanyang, realised that there was something different about the backs of their necks. The black crest on the nape almost reached the grey mantle on a Lesser Crested, whereas on the larger Royal the white neck between the crest and mantle was far more apparent. There were also shorebirds along the beach - Whimbrel, Bar-tailed Godwits, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling and Grey Plover.

Before we reached the beach restaurant at Sanyang, we birded along the side of a couple of lagoons on the landward side of the small fishing village. More Grey-headed Gulls rested on the mud and beyond them a flock of 100+ Caspian Terns rose as a local walked too close to them. More Greenshank and Whimbrel were found, whilst on a fresh water pond surrounded by reeds and dotted with water lilies a Green Sandpiper was recorded. However the highlight there was a confiding Malachite Kingfisher - a real gem in the telescope.

Lunch in the unassuming restaurant was excellent, with the owner outlining the merits of the various dishes prepared for the buffet. He omitted to say that his were the best French fries in The Gambia, maybe the best in West Africa! After lunch half the party had a most satisfactory tern session on the beach as mentioned above, while the rest engaged in 40 winks on the sun loungers provided.

Afterwards we all wandered around the edge of the village adding House Sparrow to the growing list and having stunning views of Northern Red Bishops in an area of rank grass and of a pair of Black-crowned Tchagra with Orange-cheeked Waxbills in a small holding. By the freshwater pond were a few White Wagtails and a confiding pair of Senegal Thick-knees. Allan had a fly-over Black-headed Gull, but it had gone too far away for the rest of the group to get on to it. Seen better by the group was the soaring Tawny Eagle and an immature Palm-nut Vulture.

Colley took the afternoon off to prepare for going up river tomorrow. He entrusted finding the White-fronted Black Chat to a local bird guide, but although we all searched hard in amongst the trees of a cultivated area this localised species eluded us. The commonest Palearctic warbler in the area was Willow Warbler and one or two particularly grey individuals caused much discussion. Structurally, including wing length and primary projection, they were definitely Willows, but we had nothing in the books we had with us. Back home a quick look in the Collins Guide shows them to have been birds from the north of Fenno-Scandinavia *Phylloscopus trochilus acredula* – a race not mentioned in the BOU Checklist as occurring in the Gambia. We also had good views of Melodious Warbler and the afternoon's only new bird – Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-weaver.

We returned to the hotel, perhaps a little earlier than other days, and amongst birds seen in the gardens was Red-bellied Paradise-flycatcher.

Drinks in the bar were followed by dinner and the checklist as usual.

Friday 13 November

Light cloud early morning becoming hot and sunny with a refreshing breeze at times. 38°C

Friday the 13th lived up to its reputation this morning. We were to have had an early breakfast and take a picnic lunch from the Senegambia for our journey up river to Georgetown. The dining room was running on Gambian Maybe Time and those on duty yesterday forgot to tell the morning shift of the arrangements. When the boys and the bus arrived things became a bit fraught between them and the staff, but we did end up with a ham sandwich and a DIY cheese roll each!

We were booked on the 7 o'clock ferry from Banjul to Barra on the northern side of the Gambia River and the problems at the Senegambia made the journey across to the ferry terminal a bit of a rush for Jatta, our driver for the coming week. The area around the port was bustling with people and over-laden trucks. It might have looked as if we weren't going to get on, but after a few delashi exchanged hands here and there we were moved almost to the head of the queue!

We left about 7.15 a.m. on the crossing which lasted just over half an hour, but it was a good half an hour for birds. Black-headed Gull was added to the lists of those who missed the one yesterday. There were hundreds of Grey-headed Gulls milling around the shore and the fishing port that we passed. There were plenty of terns - Caspian, Royal, Lesser Crested and Sandwich were the commonest and additions were Common Tern (a few), Black Tern (2) and Roseate (1) - the latter being one of the last birds we saw before going down to the lower deck to reboard the bus. As there were terns there had to be skuas and as we sailed across the river we had eight or nine Pomarines fly by the boat coming from up river and heading towards the sea where the greatest concentration of terns were to be found.

Once ashore we headed east through Barra and along an excellent tarmac road all the way to Georgetown, courtesy of the People's Republic of Taiwan. The road passed numerous rice growing areas and shallow brackish wetlands. Those we passed later on the journey included water-lily covered ponds. It was all good birding and during the drive we added almost 30 species to the total seen over the last week.

Initially we were looking at shorebirds, soon adding Curlew Sandpiper and Little Ringed Plover on the mudflats and, more surprisingly, a Common Snipe feeding out in the middle of one pool in the company of a Wood Sandpiper. The area also produced a loose flock of Yellow Wagtails that included some smart males of the Spanish race *iberiae*.

At one of the first wetlands we found some distant Yellow-billed Storks and saw a lone Woolly-necked Stork in flight, but as the day progressed herons, egrets and other large waterbirds increased in numbers to the extent that from one causeway birds ran into thousands with Black Egrets in their hundreds and countless more white ones. That particular section produced a few Great White Pelicans in a large flock of Pink-backed. Great Cormorants were seen for the first time. Many African birders treat this distinctive sub-Saharan race as a separate species - White-breasted Cormorant *Phalacrocorax lucidus*.

We had an interesting stop in the busy town of Farafenni, where Abdullah and Colley brought the necessities for lunch, which we enjoyed in the shade of some bushes overlooking a waterhole some 30 kilometres further on. Non-breeding bishops, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus and other waxbills and weavers came and went constantly along with a succession of Black-billed Wood Doves and Namaqua Doves from the surrounding countryside. A few extras appeared in the form of Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Red-billed Quelea and Cut-throat Finch, but by far the most stunning of all were the two or three black and chestnut male Exclamatory Paradise-whydahs with their outsized tails. It was just as well we were amongst friends for eating the most delicious water melon could not be done with any degree of dignity!

We had been in the North Bank Division ever since we crossed the river early this morning, but shortly before we reached the wetlands to the west of Kaur we crossed into the Central River Division. On reaching the wetlands we were soon watching the day's star bird, if not the bird of the trip, for Egyptian Plover is always top of the list for anyone going up river. The main part of the species' range stretches across the Sahel to the Red Sea, but not Egypt nowadays. We came across 500+ Collared Pratincoles, wheeling over the wetlands after insects like overgrown swallows and then landing in muddy areas, where they blended with their background perfectly. We also found large flocks of Wattled (c250) and Spur-winged (300) Lapwings. Further on we stopped for the tours' first Little Green Bee-eaters, but we were looking into the light, so the views were not as good as they might have been.

We caught the 5 O'clock ferry to Georgetown, once a key centre during the dark days of the slave trade, but now one of the only places with accommodation this far up river. We stayed at Baobolong Lodge, which is not quite as grand as its name suggests, but the guys running it seemed to be making an effort with maintenance and constructing a proper reception area.

We had dinner outside and on our way back to our rooms afterwards several African Square-marked Toads had emerged for their nocturnal ramblings.

Saturday, 14 November

Hot and sunny again, but with a fresh northerly breeze. 34°C

After yesterday's long journey we spent a morning enjoying a lazy boat trip westwards to the small village of Sapu. Out on the river there was a pleasant breeze, which became a fresh one as the morning wore on. Birding was steady, but quietened down quite markedly from late morning. One of the first good birds was a Western Banded Snake-Eagle that perched in a tree alongside a pair of Hamerkop soon after we set off. The commonest herons were Squacco and Striated in the early stages, with Grey Heron and the white egrets appearing later. Pied Kingfishers were widespread and we had several sightings of Grey-headed and Woodland, but just one of a pair of Malachite Kingfishers. From a boat passerines were not easy unless they were weavers hanging from their nests or hirundines, such as the mixed flock of House and Sand Martins that crossed the river. Undoubtedly the best passerine was the dullest - the diminutive Swamp Flycatcher, and one on a number of 'wants' lists. Most of the swifts were African Palm Swifts with Mottled Spinetails

appearing from time to time. By far the most abundant dove was Mourning Dove, for they were on or in virtually every bush - a plethora as my learned friend said!

It was a particularly good morning for raptors with several additions. Although we have seen Palm-nut Vultures everyday so far, nowhere had they been as plentiful as along the river this morning, for including some of the more distant ones, we must have seen ten or a dozen. Unlike other days we only saw a few Hooded Vultures, but 20-30 White-backed Vultures were an addition to the list. We had splendid views of African Fish Eagles, often perched in the large baobabs that were such feature, along with palm trees, of the morning. There were a number of Red-necked Falcons, Shikra, African Harrier-Hawks and Eurasian Marsh Harriers and a single African Goshawk, that unfortunately was only seen by a few of us in good light, before it got too close to the sun.

Round about lunchtime, which was a very tasty buffet, we passed an island where large numbers of egrets and herons, including more than a dozen Black-crowned Night-herons, rested on the bushes, whilst at the eastern end 50+ Spur-winged Geese loafed in the shallows. It wasn't all birds for we saw Red Colobus and Green Vervet Monkeys and there were a couple of Hippos not far from the flock of Spur-winged Geese.

We returned to *terra firma* to find Jatta awaiting us. On the way back to Baobolong Lodge we caused a major traffic jam for a donkey and cart when we stopped to admire a colony of Yellow-backed Weavers, where the males were absolutely stunning. The only other good bird there was the Red-billed Quelea found by Ken. At a waterlily-covered lagoon we scanned for African Pygmy Geese, but they were as elusive as Finfoot on the river today, but we did have good views of African Jacanas at close range.

We returned to the hotel for a siesta during the early part of the afternoon with some opting to rest, while others sat around the dining table chatting. Allan chose to wander around birding outside the lodge grounds where most of the species had been seen earlier except for a Village Indigobird, which just happened to be about the first bird we saw on our afternoon excursion to the end of the island. It produced good views of Four-banded Sandgrouse at dusk, but earlier the search for Spotted Thick-knee was unsuccessful. It was good seeing a party of Pin-tailed Whydahs, although the males needed a few days more to grow their tails to the full. We had good views of Green-backed Eremomela and a female Pygmy Sunbird was also seen in the bushy area as we searched. Towards sunset a Red-throated Bee-eater flew over calling and soon after a number of Black-crowned Night-herons dropped into the nearby marsh, where Senegal Thick-knees and a genuine Pearl-spotted Owlet called.

As dinner came to an end an African Scops Owl called from the large tree above the table, once we had fetched our binocs we had excellent views, then another appeared, but just when things looked as if they were going to become intimate a third owl appeared from nowhere and chased the other two away. After that all was quite.

Sunday, 15 November

The hottest day so far. 43.7°C

During breakfast at Baobolong we admired a group of Gambian Epauletted Fruit Bats hang in one of the trees near the dining area, which didn't delay us for luckily we caught the 8 o'clock ferry to the south bank and headed east.

Soon we stopped to see a small colony of Red-throated Bee-eaters near the road. Birds weren't coming to the holes, but we had good views of some of as they sat in nearby trees or flew around. It was a good place for small birds as well with the first Cinnamon-breasted Bunting for most of us showing well. There was a large flock of some 40 Pin-tailed Whydahs and a restless party of Quail-finches.

On the way to Basse we stopped at a muddy waterhole where non-breeding bishops came to drink along with Yellow-fronted Canaries and a few Bush Petronias. Black-billed Wood Doves joined the Vinaceous Doves that ignored the presence of an immature African Harrier-Hawk that was taking tit-bits from the surface of the drier mud. Further on we stopped to check the vultures coming to feed on a carcass across a peanut field. It came as a surprise to see that there was about a dozen Ruppell's Griffon Vultures and that they were out-numbered by White-backed by 2:1, I was expecting the difference to be much greater when we first

stopped with just perhaps one or two Rüppell's present. Another stop was to look at the farming end of peanut production. The husks containing the peanuts do grow beneath the ground, hence *ground* nuts.

As we drove through Basse we passed a muddy creek that six years ago contained six Egyptian Plovers feeding amongst the accumulated detritus of urban life. Now the creek was just too *tyred* – home to a recent development of Michelin, Dunlop and Bridgestone! No plovers were seen during a brief stop at the nearby ferry crossing either, just people everywhere and an open-air laundry where the local women demoralised their colourful clothes!

We pressed on to the nearby brickworks and walked across to an area where we overlooked rice fields. Eurasian Marsh Harriers quartered the area where we hoped to find Northern Carmine Bee-eaters, but unfortunately not today. A Montagu's Harrier was seen by one or two of the party before it disappeared soon after Colley spotted it low over the horizon. We all had good views of a hovering Short-toed Eagle, but access to the second site not far away was limited by large puddles and soft mud, but all was not lost for thanks to Ken we enjoyed good views of the day's only Egyptian Plover.

After our picnic lunch with Arthur, our met. man, recorded a temperature of 43.7°C in the shade. It was still very hot when we made one last attempt to see bee-eaters around a low hill on the other side of town. No luck, but we did see the trip's first Brubru.

The journey back to Georgetown was relatively uneventful, except for a long-awaited Bruce's Green Pigeon and a brief view for some of a White-crested Helmet-shrike. Normally that species goes round in flocks, so one can only imagine it was Tail-end Charlie, for unusually there was no response to Colley's PSO whistle. Nearing the turn-off to the ferry we stopped to watch a troupe of Dark-faced Baboons as they prepared to settle down for the night.

The ferry to Georgetown has no power, only people power, so perhaps we should have sung sea shanties with something like "*Haul away me lads*" in the chorus. The sun was setting as we crossed and returned to Baobolong for our last evening.

Monday, 16 November

Still hot and sunny. 38°C

By 7.30 a.m. we had breakfasted, paid mess bills and loaded the bus and headed for the southern ferry crossing. Today we turned westwards for Tendaba on the southern side of the river, but the roads were not up to the standard we had on the northern side a few days ago. However all was not lost for in a year or three times the major roadworks currently taking place along the southern side might be completed, but that all hinges on Gambian Maybe Time of course.

The rice fields at Jahali Pachari were our first stop, but unfortunately the only coucals we were to find were Senegalese ones. Drying paddies tended to concentrate the fish for the herons, egrets, Hamerkops and shorebirds. The commonest egret at the first we looked at was Intermediate, which we were able to compare with the larger Great Egret. Amongst the shorebirds at that particular spot were two Spotted Redshank, a species recorded every trip to The Gambia. They shared the muddy corner with two Common Greenshank and several Wood Sandpipers. The Eurasian Marsh Harriers that quartered the area disturbed the feeding egret flocks, but they just flew from one area to the next, or as in the case of Purple Heron just lurked patiently in the long grass.

It seemed the perfect habitat for Black Crake, but when we did find one it behaved furtively and required playback for us to have any sort of worthwhile views. Not the case with the pair of Greater Painted-snipe found by Colley as they preened in the morning sunshine almost in the open. We had excellent views through the scopes, noting how much more colourful the female was than the male.

We left the area on a high and continued our journey southwards. A pale raptor seen in a small tree was an immature Western Banded Snake-Eagle and later we were treated to excellent views of an adult that posed perfectly. Another stop was perhaps not unexpected, for last time I was here we stopped to see a Verreaux's Eagle Owl in exactly the same tree as it was today! The bonus this time was the pair of African Hawk-Eagles

that soared overhead.

It was almost midday when we reached a series of waterlily-covered lagoons. A walk around the margins eventually brought us to a spot where a pair of African Pygmy Geese rested on the roots of a tree growing in the water and then a few minutes later another pair flew into the same area. Surely the smartest of Africa's wildfowl. This time we had a Short-toed Eagle soaring above us and as we made our way back to the bus a number of small bush birds were seen including a Willow Warbler and good views of a Common Chiffchaff. Another new species for the lists was less exciting - a pair of White-rumped Seed-eater in a country of many colourful birds was considered to be only marginally better than a LBJ!

We stopped for lunch at the border between Central River Division and Lower River Division, where the construction of a new bridge is part of the extensive roadworks to the west. There were few birds other than a flock of Spur-winged Geese. The baguettes from Baobolong were good and the watermelon the guys had bought from a girl at the roadside earlier was delicious.

We were watched by a boy and his younger brother and sister as they made their way home after their morning at school. Children in rural Gambia are always appreciative of empty water bottles and at that stage in the morning we could give them half a dozen. Allan produced three birros and then we noticed that the polythene bag carrying their books was virtually falling to pieces, so we were able to give them a new one and also the remains of the watermelon too. There were smiles all round and they willingly posed for pictures, but how much longer would all three be able to travel together on the same bicycle?

During a refuelling stop in Soma, Deidre bought a pair of flip-flops and on the outskirts of the busy town we reached a causeway where we enjoyed very good views of a single Egyptian Plover before it eventually flew back behind us. Further on, a detour along a country lane took us close to the river and there we found a flock of the hoped for Northern Carmine Bee-eaters - they were beautiful and with care and patience we were rewarded with very good views and some rather nice photos. As Ken so eloquently said "*Swaying gently on the warm zephyr with the sun catching its pastel iridescence!*" In other words - it was a hot day and cracking bird! Seriously though, it was a lovely area beside a shallow lagoon that was dotted with feeding Whimbrel, Greenshank and Common Redshanks, whilst Common and Green Sandpipers fed around the margins. Local species included Spur-winged and Wattled Lapwing and shortly before we continued our journey two Woolly-necked Storks flew in to the marshy area at the back of the lagoon.

It was round about 5 o'clock when we arrived at Tendaba and once we had been shown to our rooms we met up at the bar for well-deserved refreshments. The Gambia River was much wider here than at Georgetown, but today nothing of note was seen flying by. With dinner at 8 o'clock we did the checklist beforehand.

Tuesday, 17 November

Warm and sunny with increasing cloud from lunchtime onwards. 34°C

Following a 7 o'clock breakfast we wandered along the deep water pier beyond the settlement just outside the grounds of the lodge. Beneath the concrete structure Little Swifts were breeding. Then, in a locally made pirogue, we set-off up river on what turned out to be a delightful and leisurely cruise. The sun was rising and in the golden early morning light a large female Peregrine pursued and caught a small bird a few hundred metres ahead of us before she took it to the top of a large riverside tree - fast food from the local take-away.

Pink-backed Pelicans were crossing the river to the northern shore and when we spotted a feeding flock of spoonbills on that side of the river the skipper headed in across. Amongst the dozen or so African Spoonbills Allan noticed that one had black legs. It also lacked the bare skin between eye and bill and also had a pale bill, unlike the red-billed African species. It was indeed a Eurasian Spoonbill, the first of our trip.

Nearby we entered Tanku Bolon, a narrower mangrove-lined waterway, where oysters clung to the arching buttress roots of the mangroves. On muddy shores and banks mud skippers skipped and fiddler crabs did what they do best. Pied Kingfishers and Great Egrets were almost constant companions throughout the morning, but other herons and kingfishers put in regular appearances. Some of the Malachite Kingfishers we saw were very confiding and gave simply wonderful views. Blue-breasted were not quite so tame, but we had good views nevertheless and Woodland Kingfisher was also recorded. Another colourful group were the

bee-eaters, but we only had one stop for them - a pair of White-throated in one tree and two or three European Bee-eaters perched in the tree behind them. Our bee-eater list was now complete with all seven possible species seen.

Being a tidal creek, Western Reef Herons were seen regularly as were Grey Herons and Little Egrets. When we came across Intermediate Egrets they were usually in the company of other egrets, whereas Black Egrets were in single species flocks. Goliath and Purple Herons tended to be loners and from one large clump of mangroves we flushed several Black-crowned Night-herons. Star bird of the morning was probably White-backed Night-heron, a shy, retiring and often elusive bird of thick waterside trees and bushes. We were fortunate that the boatmen had known of a breeding pair and that they, and their recently fledged youngsters, were still only a bush or two away from the more open nest site. By looking through gaps between branches we all ended up with good views of these particularly large-eyed herons both on the way out and on the way back. Towards the end of the cruise yet another pair was seen along another water course. Other waterbirds seen included more Pink-backed Pelican, several Woolly-necked and Yellow-billed Storks, Sacred Ibis, Hadedra and Darter.

Shorebirds such as Whimbrel, Greenshank, Common Redshank and Common Sandpiper flew ahead of us from time to time and when we came across a shallow lagoon or two other shorebirds species such as Little Ringed Plover, Little Stint and Pied Avocet (7) were seen. An Osprey moved ahead of us for some and there were good views of Short-toed Eagle both at rest and in flight. Eurasian Marsh Harrier, Yellow-billed Kite and Hooded Vulture were also recorded, whilst passerines were few and far between in the trees and bushes, although Mouse-brown Sunbird was glimpsed a couple of times.

We returned to Tendaba for lunch and a siesta, seeing a Royal Tern over the river as we crossed back to shore. By the time we had freshened up lunch was ready. During the siesta Allan found a Wahlberg's Eagle whilst others caught up with diaries and postcards or perhaps watched mud skippers and dragonflies (Banded Groundlings and Violet Dropwings) around the riverside bar.

At 4 o'clock we left by bus to bird inland, beginning at the 'airport', where at the lagoon Pink-backed Pelicans, a lone Caspian Tern and Palearctic shorebirds were found. As Ken birded along the woodland edge he watched an African Golden Oriole. A drive of a few kilometres took us to Kiang West National Park, where a Stone Partridge scurried into the undergrowth as we approached. We found more European Bee-eaters perched on the scattered trees in the open woodland, vantage points they sometimes shared with Mosque Swallows and Common House Martins.

Colley's rendition of the Pearl-spotted Owlets' greatest hit bought in just sunbirds - Pygmy, Scarlet-chested and Variable. Moving on to pastures new, or rather a different peanut field, we found a smart male British Yellow Wagtail (*flavissima*), a pair of Eurasian Hoopoes and an African Golden Oriole. A disturbed Double-spurred Francolin winged its way to safety and later we found a Shikra looking for supper - perhaps one of the many Grey-headed Sparrows we saw going to roost. We had another Pygmy Sunbird, a smart male this time and an equally smart male Exclamatory Paradise-whydah.

The afternoon was dull and humid and whilst we waited for darkness on the outskirts of Jatta's village the plaintive calls of a Spotted Thick-knee came from the fields nearby. The point of waiting for darkness was that we might see a Violet-tipped Courser on the sandy track as we returned. There were a few moths around, but they only seemed to attract bats and no nightjars tonight.

Our late return to Tendaba meant we didn't have so long to wait for dinner, but afterwards competition for the checklist came from the floorshow of bongo drums and local dancers.

Wednesday, 18 November

Mainly overcast and cooler with a few spots of rain towards evening. 32°C

We returned to Kiang West this morning passing a couple of coveys of Stone Partridges soon after leaving Tendaba. Most of the morning was spent either working our way around fields and their margins or walking tracks within the forest reserve. Colley's mp3 player, or his imitation of the PSO whistle, worked well bring in a number of species with sunbirds often to the fore. There were some particularly smart male Pygmy and

Scarlet-chested Sunbirds with Beautiful and Variable being seen as well. It seemed a good area for Palearctic warblers with more Melodious than we have seen elsewhere along with Western Olivaceous, Subalpine and Willow Warblers, and Common Chiffchaff. The only other significant migrant down from the West Palearctic was a Common Redstart. Local warblers included Tawny-flanked Prinia, Green-backed Eremomela, Northern Crombec and Red-winged Warbler. At two spots Yellow Penduline Tit was recorded, with very good views on the second occasion when a pair showed well. Amongst the seed-eating species that came in to the call, it was good to see Vitelline Masked Weaver, for not all the party had seen it previously on this trip.

It wasn't just small birds, for on two occasions in different areas a pair of Brown-backed Woodpeckers came in and showed well, and although a pair of Eurasian Hoopoes arrived they showed almost no interest after the first few seconds. We had several parties of Senegal Parrots pass through the area, which was a particularly good one for Grasshopper Buzzard with at least six being noted. Apart from a Dark Chanting Goshawk or two, Shikra and a few Hooded Vultures it was a poor morning for raptors - the cooler weather was not conducive to thermalling.

Being overcast there were few butterflies around today, but during one of our birding walks we came across a pair of mating chaffers. They were quite smart black and white insects about an inch and a half long.

With the birding wrapped up for the morning it was time to visit the local school, Betelling Lower Basic School, the school that Jatta's son attends. What a reception! Anyone would have thought we were royalty, with all the children out of the class rooms and in the playground cheering. We were introduced to the staff and shown around the classrooms after the headmaster gratefully received our 'goodie' bag containing the pens, pencils and first aid supplies we had all brought out especially from the UK.

With that we returned to Tendaba for lunch and a siesta before embarking on another boat trip amongst the creeks along the northern side of the Gambia River. As we motored across we were overtaken by a smart male Montagu's Harrier. How different the trip was from yesterday morning. It was overcast for a start, and with the tide being high there were no arching mangrove roots to act as perches for Malachite Kingfisher or for teetering Common Sandpipers. The high water levels favoured the egrets and Palearctic shorebirds that were feeding out on the areas of saltmarsh. We soon came across some goodies - three Marsh Sandpipers and the Pied Avocet flock had increased to 10. Also seen were Little Ringed Plover and Ruff (6) as well as the usual Whimbrel, Greenshanks and Redshanks. No doubt they were the target for a passing hunting Peregrine.

In addition to the feeding egrets we found a flock of some 30 Sacred Ibis, which hadn't been around on our previous visit and when they flew off there was a lone Glossy Ibis with them – the first of the trip and another uncommon bird in the Gambia. The pair of White-backed Night-herons still attended their fledged youngsters and as we headed back towards the main river we enjoyed the sight and sounds of some 60 European Bee-eaters crossing the creek and perhaps heading to roost further inland.

After dinner we did the checklist out at the jetty bar and away from the entertainment laid on for the other guests.

Thursday, 19 November

Hot and sunny becoming overcast with thin cloud in afternoon. 34°C

Having settled bills and loaded our coach we set off on the run back to the Senegambia, birding en route. Ken brought his own bag to the bus - perhaps in the hope of 10 dalasi? He didn't even get one nor one of the *tender lassies* that helped with the rest of the bags either!

The first stop was around the drying lagoon near the airport, but there was nothing new, although we had good views of familiar species, including a pair of Fine-spotted Woodpeckers enjoying the warmth of the early sunshine on a bare branch. Pink-backed Pelicans flew out to fish in the river and a White-breasted (Great) Cormorant flew over – the first we had seen for several days. Tracks in the dust were interesting and included those of a snake that had crossed the open area, presumably under the cover of darkness.

It proved to be a good day for raptors with 17 species seen including at least 10 Grasshopper Buzzards and in

a spiral of White-backed Vultures soared a Rüppell's Griffon and the tour's only Martial Eagle, which seemed even larger than the vultures. Other species noted during the journey included Black-winged Kite, Brown Snake-Eagle, Bateleur, Lizard Buzzard and African Hawk-Eagle.

Our next stop involved a walk along an unassuming track in lightly wooded country, but it did produce some excellent birds and some amazing spiders. There was the chance of adding a few new species here, but the first to respond was one that we had only distant views previously – White-crested Helmet-shrike – an inquisitive flock that always appeared whenever Colley did his PSO whistle. The owl was heard but not seen. A pair of Woodland Kingfishers showed well during the walk and we also had Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Brown-backed Woodpecker and one of our target birds – Yellow-bellied Hyliota, an immaculate black and apricot–yellow warbler with white wing-patches – a real stunner. The track's last good bird was only seen by Allan, Ken and Ted – a smart male Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike, but it disappeared before the rest of the party reached the area and we were unable to call it back.

A juvenile cuckoo proved to be a bit of a conundrum. We had a good view of it being fed by a pair of Red-winged Warblers and thankfully John was able to get a digiscoped image. A quick look in the Barlow's book showed it looking most like a female Emerald Cuckoo, but back at the hotel Ken drew our attention to the rarity of Emerald Cuckoo breeding records in the Gambia and then only in the rains. Thank goodness for John's photo and that Arthur and Mary had the West African guide with them, for it was clearly a Klaas's Cuckoo – not so rare and one that parasitises warblers and not weavers like the Emerald Cuckoo.

Colley found us a place just off the road by some rice paddies for lunch. Compared with some other paddies there were relatively few birds around, three Yellow-throated Leafloves in a nearby mango tree, being the best. Down by the paddies there were a few egrets and Hamerkops and dozens of dragonflies including the distinctively patterned Portia (or African Black) Widow.

During the afternoon we continued our journey back to the Senegambia, where there was time for some birding in the grounds after we had checked-in to our new rooms. From the beach bar a few terns and a Pomarine Skua were seen.

Before dinner we enjoyed a round of Julbrews on Ornitholidays and after our days up river appreciated the ample buffet in the dining room!

Friday, 20 November

Hot and sunny with coastal breeze and hazy. 30°C

Broad-billed Rollers soared over the hotel during breakfast this morning. Afterwards the guys arrived and we set-off for Abuko, leaving Deirdre behind to enjoy a lazy morning around the hotel and walking on the beach.

Compared with the other day Abuko was quiet, both from a people and a bird point of view. African Jacana, Black-crowned Night-heron and Black-headed Herons were seen from the lookout, but as there was a forestry workshop taking place in the main part of the building we didn't hang around long. Views of Little Greenbul were only fleeting and Ahanta Francolin was only heard. Unlike the other day there was no sign of Grey-headed Bristle-bill, but after a lot of hard work using playback Colley eventually found us a Green Hylia, a small warbler of the forest canopy which reaches the northern limit of its range in this part of the world. The last addition to our birds of the Gambia and a good one too! There was a mammalian highlight too, for Colley had us peering through the undergrowth to see a pair of secretive Maxwell's Duikers (a tiny forest antelope) before they disappeared from sight.

We returned to the hotel to finish packing and to check-out of our rooms by 12 noon, before having lunch and our planned departure to the airport with Abdullah and our old friend Ali ahead of the other coaches. Well, that was the idea anyway, but not according to Monarch Airlines. Our plane damaged a cargo door yesterday and was running several hours late, having had to wait for a part to be flown into Gatwick from Germany. We ended up saying good-bye to Abdullah and Ali, when they arrived to collect us as they had another assignment and couldn't wait until o'clock. We were slightly aggrieved to be on the last coach to leave the hotel at about 4.15 p.m. We imagined the crowds ahead of us, but at the airport we were able to just

walk up to the Monarch Airlines desks. Our timing had been perfect for the desk had just opened and the masses were still milling around outside waiting! The plane arrived soon after 6 o'clock and just over an hour and a half later we were aboard and heading back to Europe. Europe, not the UK? Because of the delay our crew would be out of hours before they reached Gatwick, so we had to land at Malaga to take on a replacement one!

Saturday, 21 November

In the end we arrived at Gatwick at 2.40 a.m. instead of 10.40 last night – only four hours late, but in the middle of the night it seemed much worse, a fact compounded by the delay in the appearance of our bags on the carousel. Having said our farewells and wished one another a safe journey home we left the airport just after 4 a.m.!

Acknowledgments

Thank you all for coming, being such great company - it quickly became a group of friends travelling together. We had some good spotters in the party and with Colley's local expertise we saw more species than either of the previous two Ornitholidays' parties to the country. Thanks to the jovial Ali for driving us the first week (and for his spotting too!) and to Jatta for the second week – both were first class. In Colley we had the best birding guide I have been fortunate to work with in the Gambia and as a bonus we had Abdullah from the GamTours office along as well, who ensured the smooth running of the trip. Back at the Senegambia another Jatta, this one of Gambia Experience, was a great help with the late arrival of Ted and again at the end of the tour with the delays to the Monarch Airlines flight. Then there were the various waiters, porters and other hotel staff along the way. John, Ken and Mary have kindly let me use some of their photographs to help illustrate this report. Thank you one and all. I hope it won't be long before we meet up on another Ornitholidays tour – there are plenty to choose from in the brochure.

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December 2009

Itinerary and Weather

- 06 November** Morning departure to Banjul with Monarch Airlines from Gatwick arriving early p.m. and transferred to Senegambia Hotel. Hot, sunny & humid. 35°C
- 07 November** Morning birding in hotel grounds and nearby Bijilo Forest. Lunch & siesta at Senegambia. Afternoon excursion to Kotu Creek area. Hot, sunny, but less humid. 35°C
- 08 November** Morning excursion to Abuko Reserve, lunch at Lamin and afternoon birding nearby afterwards. Hot & sunny. 35°C
- 09 November** Day excursion to Marakissa area. Hot & sunny. 37°C
- 10 November** Morning birding at Camaloo Corner, Cape Creek and Bund Road. Lunch and siesta at Senegambia. Afternoon excursion to Brufut Forest. Hot & sunny 35°C
- 11 November** Pirang Fish Farm area in morning, birding inland during the rest of the morning and afternoon. Hot & sunny. 38°F
- 12 November** Tanji Bird Reserve during the morning, lunch at Sanyan, afternoon birding inland. Overcast all day, cooler. 28°C
- 13 November** Day transfer to Georgetown via ferry to Barra and through the Northern Division birding en route. Hot & sunny. 38°C
- 14 November** River cruise downstream to Sapu and return by road. Birding nr Georgetown in late afternoon. Hot & sunny. 34°C
- 15 November** Day excursion to Basse area. Very hot and sunny. 43.7°C
- 16 November** Transfer to Tendaba birding en route including Jahali Pachari. Lunch en route. Hot & sunny. 38°C
- 17 November** Morning boat trip to Tanku Bolon. Lunch & siesta at Tendaba. Afternoon to Kiang West. Hot & sunny becoming overcast in the afternoon. 34°C
- 18 November** Morning excursion to Kiang West & visit to Betelling School. Lunch & siesta at Tendaba. Afternoon boat trip to Tanku Bolon. Overcast all day & cooler. A few drops of rain p.m. 32°C
- 19 November** Transfer to Senegambia birding at Kiang West en route and at Bintang Bolon. Lunch en route. Hot & sunny. 34°C
- 20 November** Morning excursion to Abuko Reserve. Back to Senegambia for check-out, lunch and transfer to airport. Departure late as incoming flight late leaving UK. Hot & sunny. 34°C
- 21 November** 2.40 a.m. arrival at Gatwick having stopped at Malaga to change flight crew.

CHECKLIST OF BIRDS SEEN DURING TOUR

No of days recorded	Locations	Abundance Scale (max. seen on 1 day)
1 2h means seen on	W = Western River Division including crossing of the Gambia River to Barra	1 = 1-4
1 day and heard on	N = Northern	2 = 5-9
2 other days	C = Central River Division	3 = 10-99
	U = Upper River Division	4 = 100-999
	L = Lower River Division	5 = 1,000+

Species	No of days recorded	Locations	Abundance scale	Scientific Name
Little Grebe	1	W	1	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Great Cormorant	2	N	L 4	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Long-tailed Cormorant	12	W N C U	L 4	<i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i>
Darter	9	W N C	3	<i>Anhinga melanogaster rufa</i>
Great White Pelican	1	N	1	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>
Pink-backed Pelican	7	W N C	L 3	<i>Pelecanus rufescens</i>
Dwarf Bittern	1	W	1	<i>Ixobrychus sturmii</i>
White-backed Night Heron	2		L 2	<i>Gorsachius leuconotus</i>
Black-crowned Night Heron	7	W C	L 3	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
Squacco Heron	12	W N C U	L 3	<i>Ardea ralloides</i>
Cattle Egret	14	W N C U	L 4	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Striated Heron	12	W C U	L 3	<i>Butorides striatus</i>
Black Egret	5	W N C	L 4	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>
Western Reef Heron	11	W N	3	<i>Egretta gularis</i>
Little Egret	10	W N C U	L 3	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Intermediate Egret	7	W N C	L 3	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
Great White Egret	12	W N C U	L 4	<i>Egretta alba</i>
Purple Heron	7	W N C U	L 2	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
Grey Heron	12	W N C U	L 3	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
Black-headed Heron	11	W N C U	3	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>
Goliath Heron	3	W	L 1	<i>Ardea goliath</i>
Hamerkop	13	W N C U	L 3	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
Yellow-billed Stork	3	W N	L 3	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>
Woolly-necked Stork	4	N C	L 3	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
Marabou Stork	2	N C U	2	<i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i>
Glossy Ibis	1		L 1	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Hadada Ibis	1		L 1	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>
Sacred Ibis	4	W N	L 3	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>
European Spoonbill	1		L 1	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>
African Spoonbill	3	W	L 3	<i>Platalea alba</i>
Greater Flamingo	1	W	3	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>
White-faced Whistling Duck	7	W N C	3	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>
Spur-winged Goose	7	W N C	L 3	<i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>
African Pygmy Goose	1	C	1	<i>Nettapus auritus</i>
Black-winged (-shouldered) Kite	5	W	1	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
Black Kite	1	W	1	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
Yellow-billed Kite	15	W N C U	L 1	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>
African Fish Eagle	3	C	L 2	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>
Palm-nut Vulture	9	W N C	3	<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i>
Hooded Vulture	15	W N C U	L 4	<i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>
White-backed Vulture	4	C U	L 3	<i>Gyps africanus</i>
Rüppell's Griffon Vulture	2		U L 3	<i>Gyps rueppellii</i>
Short-toed Eagle	3		U L 1	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>
Beaudouin's Snake-Eagle	2	W	U 1	<i>Circaetus beaudouini</i>
Brown Snake-Eagle	7	W N	U L 1	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>
Western Banded Snake-Eagle	2	C	1	<i>Circaetus cinerascens</i>
Bateleur	3	W C	1	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>
African Harrier-Hawk	12	W N C	L 3	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>
Montagu's Harrier	2		U L 1	<i>Circus pygargus</i>

Eurasian Marsh Harrier	7		W	N	C	U	L	1	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>
Gabar Goshawk	2			N	C			1	<i>Micronisus gabar</i>
Dark Chanting Goshawk	11		W	N	C	U	L	1	<i>Melierax metabates</i>
African Goshawk	1				C			1	<i>Accipiter tachiro</i>
Shikra	15		W	N	C	U	L	2	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
Grasshopper Buzzard	5		W	N		U	L	3	<i>Butastur rufipennis</i>
Lizard Buzzard	4		W				L	1	<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>
Tawny Eagle	4		W	N	C		L	1	<i>Aquila rapax</i>
Wahlberg's Eagle	4		W	N	C			1	<i>Aquila wahlbergi</i>
African Hawk-Eagle	3				C		L	1	<i>Hieraaetus spilogaster</i>
Booted Eagle	1		W					1	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>
Martial Eagle	1						L	1	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>
Osprey	8		W				L	3	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
Grey Kestrel	12		W	N	C	U	L	2	<i>Falco ardosiaceus</i>
Red-necked Falcon	3				C			2	<i>Falco chicquera</i>
Lanner Falcon	1		W					1	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
Peregrine Falcon	2						L	1	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
Stone Partridge	4	1h	W		C		L	3	<i>Ptilopachus petrosus</i>
Ahanta Francolin	1	2h	W					1	<i>Francolinus ahantensis</i>
Double-spurred Francolin	7		W				L	2	<i>Francolinus bicalcaratus</i>
Black Crake	1				C			1	<i>Amauormis flavirostris</i>
Common Moorhen	2			N	C			1	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
African Jacana	9		W	N	C			3	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>
Greater Painted-Snipe	1				C			1	<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>
Black-winged Stilt	9		W	N	C	U	L	3	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Pied Avocet	2						L	3	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>
Senegal Thick-knee	12		W	N	C	U	L	3	<i>Burhinus senegalensis</i>
Spotted Thick-knee	1h							h	<i>Burhinus capensis</i>
Egyptian Plover	3				C	U		1	<i>Pluvianus aegyptius</i>
Collared Pratincole	1				C			4	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>
Little Ringed Plover	3			N			L	3	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>
Ringed Plover	5		W	N				3	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
Grey Plover	4		W				L	1	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
Wattled Lapwing	9		W	N	C	U	L	4	<i>Vanellus senegallus</i>
Black-headed Lapwing	3			N	C	U		1	<i>Vanellus tectus</i>
Spur-winged Plover	13		W	N	C	U	L	4	<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>
Sanderling	2		W					3	<i>Calidris alba</i>
Little Stint	1						L	3	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
Curlew Sandpiper	1			N				3	<i>Calidris ferruginea</i>
Ruff	3			N				3	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>
Common Snipe	1			N				1	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Black-tailed Godwit	4		W				L	3	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
Bar-tailed Godwit	2		W					1	<i>Limosa lapponica</i>
Eurasian Whimbrel	9		W	N	C		L	3	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
Eurasian Curlew	2		W					1	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Spotted Redshank	1				C			1	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>
Common Redshank	8	1h	W	N	C		L	3	<i>Tringa totanus</i>
Marsh Sandpiper	2		W				L	1	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
Common Greenshank	11		W	N	C		L	3	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Green Sandpiper	9		W	N	C			1	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Wood Sandpiper	7		W	N	C		L	3	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Sandpiper	11		W	N	C		L	3	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Ruddy Turnstone	3		W					2	<i>Arenaria interpres</i>
Pomarine Skua	3		W					2	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>
Grey-headed Gull	7		W	N				4	<i>Larus cirrocephalus</i>
Black-headed Gull	2		W					1	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>
Slender-billed Gull	2		W	N				3	<i>Larus genei</i>
Kelp Gull	1		W					3	<i>Larus dominicanus</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	3		W					3	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
Gull-billed Tern	7		W	N			L	2	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>
Caspian Tern	6		W	N			L	3	<i>Sterna caspia</i>
Royal Tern	8		W				L	3	<i>Sterna maxima</i>
Lesser Crested Tern	3		W					2	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>

Sandwich Tern	7		W					3	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>
Roseate Tern	1		W					1	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>
Common Tern	1		W					3	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Little Tern	1		W					1	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>
Whiskered Tern	2		W	N				1	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>
Black Tern	1		W					1	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>
Four-banded Sandgrouse	3		W		C		L	3	<i>Pterocles quadricinctus</i>
African Green Pigeon	1		W					3	<i>Treron calva</i>
Bruce's Green Pigeon	2				C			1	<i>Treron waalia</i>
Blue-spotted Wood Dove	3		W					2	<i>Turtur afer</i>
Black-billed Wood Dove	12		W	N	C	U	L	3	<i>Turtur abyssinicus</i>
Namaqua Dove	6		W	N		U	L	3	<i>Oena capensis</i>
Speckled Pigeon	14		W	N	C	U	L	3	<i>Columba guinea</i>
Red-eyed Dove	15		W	N	C	U	L	3	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>
African Mourning Dove	10		W		C		L	3	<i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>
Vinaceous Dove	14		W	N	C	U	L	3	<i>Streptopelia vinacea</i>
Laughing Dove	15		W	N	C	U	L	3	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
Brown-necked Parrot	1		W					1	<i>Poicephalus robustus</i>
Senegal Parrot	12		W		C	U	L	3	<i>Poicephalus senegalus</i>
Rose-ringed Parakeet	11		W		C	U	L	3	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
Green Turaco	2		W					1	<i>Tauraco persa</i>
Violet Turaco	5		W					1	<i>Musophaga violacea</i>
Western Grey Plantain-eater	13		W	N	C	U	L	3	<i>Crinifer piscator</i>
Levaillant's Cuckoo	2		W					1	<i>Clamator levaillantii</i>
African Cuckoo	2	1h	W				L	1	<i>Cuculus gularis</i>
Klaas's Cuckoo	1						L	1	<i>Chrysococcyx klaas</i>
Diederik Cuckoo	2		W				L	1	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>
Senegal Coucal	15		W	N	C	U	L	2	<i>Centropus senegalensis</i>
Barn Owl	-	1h					L	h	<i>Tyto alba</i>
African Scops Owl	3	1h			C			1	<i>Otus senegalensis</i>
Northern White-faced Scops Owl	1		W					1	<i>Otus leucotis</i>
Greyish Eagle Owl	1		W					1	<i>Bubo cinerascens</i>
Verreaux's Eagle Owl	2		W					1	<i>Bubo lacteus</i>
Pearl-spotted Owlet	2	4h	W		C	U		1	<i>Glaucidium perlatum</i>
Mottled Spinetail	5		W	N	C		L	3	<i>Telacanthura ussheri</i>
African Palm Swift	13		W		C	U	L	3	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>
Pallid Swift	3		W					3	<i>Apus pallidus</i>
Common Swift	1			N				1	<i>Apus apus</i>
White-rumped Swift	1		W					1	<i>Apus caffer</i>
Little Swift	13		W	N	C	U	L	3	<i>Apus affinis</i>
Grey-headed Kingfisher	5		W		C	U	L	1	<i>Halcyon leucocephala</i>
Blue-breasted Kingfisher	6		W				L	1	<i>Halcyon malimbica</i>
Woodland Kingfisher	9		W		C		L	1	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>
Striped Kingfisher	5		W		C		L	1	<i>Halcyon chelicuti</i>
African Pygmy Kingfisher	4		W					1	<i>Ceyx picta</i>
Malachite Kingfisher	8		W		C		L	3	<i>Alcedo cristata</i>
Giant Kingfisher	3		W	N				1	<i>Megaceryle maxima</i>
Pied Kingfisher	13		W	N	C	U	L	3	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
Little Bee-eater	8		W		C	U	L	3	<i>Merops pusillus</i>
Swallow-tailed Bee-eater	6		W			U	L	3	<i>Merops hirundineus</i>
Red-throated Bee-eater	1				C			3	<i>Merops bulocki</i>
White-throated Bee-eater	2		W				L	1	<i>Merops albicollis</i>
Little Green Bee-eater	2				C			3	<i>Merops orientalis</i>
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	3		W		C			3	<i>Merops persicus</i>
European Bee-eater	3						L	3	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
Northern Carmine Bee-eater	1						L	3	<i>Merops nubicus</i>
Rufous-crowned Roller	5		W	N	C		L	1	<i>Coracias naevia</i>
Blue-bellied Roller	8		W		C	U		3	<i>Coracias cyanogaster</i>
Abyssinian Roller	10		W	N	C	U		3	<i>Coracias abyssinica</i>
Broad-billed Roller	9		W		C			3	<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i>
Green Wood Hoopoe	12		W		C	U		3	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>
Black Wood Hoopoe	4		W	N				1	<i>Rhinopomastus aterrimus</i>
Eurasian Hoopoe	2						L	1	<i>Upupa epops</i>

Western Red-billed Hornbill	15		W	N	C	U		2	<i>Tockus kempii</i>
African Pied Hornbill	3		W					1	<i>Tockus fasciatus</i>
African Grey Hornbill	15		W	N	C	U	L	3	<i>Tockus nasutus</i>
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird	3	2h	W				L	1	<i>Pogoniulus chrysoconus</i>
Vieillot's Barbet	4		W			U	L	1	<i>Lybius vieilloti</i>
Bearded Barbet	12		W		C	U	L	1	<i>Lybius dubius</i>
Spotted Honeyguide	1		W					1	<i>Indicator maculatus</i>
Greater Honeyguide	2						L	1	<i>Indicator indicator</i>
Fine-spotted Woodpecker	7		W	N	C		L	1	<i>Campethera punctuligera</i>
Grey Woodpecker	6		W				L	1	<i>Dendropicos goertae</i>
Brown-backed Woodpecker	2						L	1	<i>Picoides obsoletus</i>
Crested Lark	1		W					1	<i>Galerida cristata</i>
Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark	1			N				3	<i>Eremopterix leucotis</i>
Fanti Saw-wing	6		W				L	2	<i>Psalidoprocne obscura</i>
Sand Martin	3			N	C			3	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Mosque Swallow	9		W	N		U	L	2	<i>Hirundo senegalensis</i>
Red-rumped Swallow	4		W	N			L	3	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
Wire-tailed Swallow	6		W	N	C			2	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>
Pied-winged Swallow	1		W					1	<i>Hirundo leucosoma</i>
Red-chested Swallow	11		W	N	C	U	L	3	<i>Hirundo lucida</i>
Common House Martin	4				C		L	2	<i>Delichon urbica</i>
Yellow Wagtail	4			N	C		L	3	<i>Motacilla flava</i>
White Wagtail	6		W	N			L	2	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike	1						L	1	<i>Campephaga phoenicea</i>
White-breasted Cuckoo-Shrike	1		W					1	<i>Coracina pectoralis</i>
Little Greenbul	2		W					1	<i>Andropadus virens</i>
Yellow-throated Leaflove	4	1h	W		C			1	<i>Chlorocichla flavicollis</i>
Grey-headed Bristle-bill	1		W					1	<i>Bleda canicapilla</i>
Common Bulbul	15		W	N	C	U	L	3	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat	3		W					1	<i>Cossypha niveicapilla</i>
White-crowned Robin-Chat	8		W					1	<i>Cossypha albicapilla</i>
Common Redstart	2		W				L	1	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
Northern Anteater Chat	1			N				1	<i>Myrmecocichla aethiops</i>
African Thrush	9		W					2	<i>Turdus pelios</i>
European Reed-Warbler	1	1h				U		1	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>
Western Olivaceous Warbler	7		W		C		L	1	<i>Hippolais opaca</i>
Melodious Warbler	3		W				L	5	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>
Singing Cisticola	1		W					1	<i>Cisticola cantans</i>
Zitting Cisticola	6		W	N		U		2	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Tawny-flanked Prinia	4		W				L	1	<i>Prinia subflava</i>
Red-winged Warbler	5		W				L	1	<i>Heliolais erythroptera</i>
Yellow-breasted Apalis	2		W					1	<i>Apalis flavida</i>
Grey-backed Camaroptera	9		W		C	U	L	1	<i>Camaroptera brachyura</i>
Green-backed Eremomela	8		W		C		L	2	<i>Eremomela pusilla</i>
Green Crombec	1		W					1	<i>Sylvietta virens</i>
Northern Crombec	6		W		C	U	L	1	<i>Sylvietta brachyura</i>
Oriole Warbler (Moho)	1	2h	W		C			1	<i>Hypergerus atriceps</i>
Yellow-bellied Hyliota	1						L	1	<i>Hyliota flavigaster</i>
Green Hylia	1		W					1	<i>Hylia prasina</i>
Willow Warbler	4		W		C		L	2	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Common Chiffchaff	3						L	1	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Subalpine Warbler	3		W				L	1	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>
Northern Black Flycatcher	1		W					1	<i>Melaenornis edolioides</i>
Swamp Flycatcher	1				C			1	<i>Muscicapa aquatica</i>
Senegal Batis	1		W					1	<i>Batis senegalensis</i>
Common Wattle-eye	2	1h	W				L	1	<i>Platysteira cyanea</i>
Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher	3		W					1	<i>Terpsiphone rufiventer</i>
African Paradise Flycatcher	3		W				L	1	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>
Brown Babbler	10		W		C		L	1	<i>Turdoides plebejus</i>
Blackcap Babbler	4		W			U		3	<i>Turdoides reinwardtii</i>
Yellow Penduline Tit	1						L	1	<i>Anthoscopus parvulus</i>
Mouse-brown Sunbird	3		W				L	1	<i>Anthreptes gabonicus</i>
Western Violet-backed Sunbird	1		W					1	<i>Anthreptes longuemarei</i>

Collared Sunbird	1	W					1	<i>Anthreptes collaris</i>		
Pygmy Sunbird	4				C		L	2	<i>Anthreptes platurus</i>	
Scarlet-chested Sunbird	9	W				U	L	3	<i>Nectarinia senegalensis</i>	
Variable Sunbird	8	W	N	C			L	2	<i>Nectarinia venusta</i>	
Splendid Sunbird	1	W						1	<i>Nectarinia coccinigaster</i>	
Beautiful Sunbird	14	W		C		U	L	3	<i>Nectarinia pulchella</i>	
Yellow White-eye	4	W		C			L	1	<i>Zosterops senegalensis</i>	
African Golden Oriole	6	1h	W					1	<i>Oriolus auratus</i>	
Yellow-billed Shrike	12	W	N	C		U	L	3	<i>Corvinella corvina</i>	
Brubru	3	1h	W				U	L	1	<i>Nilaus afer</i>
Northern Puffback	6	W		C			L	1	<i>Dryoscopus gambensis</i>	
Black-crowned Tchagra	5	2h	W				U	L	1	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>
Yellow-crowned Gonolek	10	W		C			L	2	<i>Laniarius barbarus</i>	
Sulphur-breasted Bush Shrike	1h	W						h	<i>Malaconotus sulfureopectus</i>	
White-crested Helmet Shrike	3	W		C			L	3	<i>Prionops plumatus</i>	
Fork-tailed Drongo	10	W	N	C		U	L	1	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>	
Piapiac	9	W	N	C				3	<i>Ptilostomus afer</i>	
Pied Crow	12	W	N			U	L	3	<i>Corvus albus</i>	
Purple Glossy Starling	11	W		C			L	2	<i>Lamprotornis purpureus</i>	
Bronze-tailed Glossy Starling	1	W						1	<i>Lamprotornis chalcurus</i>	
Greater Blue-eared Glossy Starling	8	W		C			L	3	<i>Lamprotornis chalybaeus</i>	
Lesser Blue-eared Glossy Starling	10	W					L	3	<i>Lamprotornis chloropterus</i>	
Long-tailed Glossy Starling	13	W	N	C		U	L	3	<i>Lamprotornis caudatus</i>	
Yellow-billed Oxpecker	6		N	C		U	L	3	<i>Buphagus africanus</i>	
House Sparrow	2	W	N					3	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	
Grey-headed Sparrow	13	W	N	C		U	L	4	<i>Passer griseus</i>	
Bush Petronia	6		N	C		U	L	3	<i>Petronia dentata</i>	
Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-weaver	1	W						1	<i>Plocepasser superciliosus</i>	
White-billed Buffalo Weaver	10	W					L	3	<i>Bubalornis albirostris</i>	
Little Weaver	2			C			L	1	<i>Ploceus luteolus</i>	
Black-necked Weaver	5	W					L	3	<i>Ploceus nigricollis</i>	
Heuglin's Masked Weaver	1	W						1	<i>Ploceus heuglini</i>	
Vitelline Masked Weaver	2						L	1	<i>Ploceus velatus</i>	
Village Weaver	15	W	N	C		U	L	4	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>	
Yellow-backed Weaver	5	W		C		U		3	<i>Ploceus melanocephalus</i>	
Red-billed Quelea	2		N	C				1	<i>Quelea quelea</i>	
Yellow-crowned Bishop	2	W						1	<i>Euplectes afer</i>	
Black-winged Red Bishop	4	W	N	C				1	<i>Euplectes hordeaceus</i>	
Northern Red Bishop	9	W	N	C		U	L	3	<i>Euplectes franciscanus</i>	
Yellow-shouldered Widowbird	1	W						1	<i>Euplectes macrourus</i>	
Western Bluebill	1	W						1	<i>Spermophaga haematina</i>	
Red-billed Firefinch	12	W	N	C		U	L	2	<i>Lagonosticta senegala</i>	
Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu	10	W	N	C			L	2	<i>Uraeginthus bengalus</i>	
Lavender Waxbill	5	W				U	L	1	<i>Estrilda caerulescens</i>	
Orange-cheeked Waxbill	2	W						3	<i>Estrilda melpoda</i>	
Black-rumped Waxbill	4	W	N	C				2	<i>Estrilda troglodytes</i>	
Quail-finch	3	W		C				1	<i>Ortygospiza atricollis</i>	
Bronze Mannikin	7	W						3	<i>Lonchura cucullata</i>	
Cut-throat Finch	2		N	C				2	<i>Amadina fasciata</i>	
Village Indigobird	6	W	N	C			L	1	<i>Vidua chalybeata</i>	
Pin-tailed Whydah	4	W		C				3	<i>Vidua macroura</i>	
Exclamatory Paradise Whydah	5		N	C			L	3	<i>Vidua interjecta</i>	
White-rumped Seed-eater	3						L	1	<i>Serinus leucopygius</i>	
Yellow-fronted Canary	6		N	C		U	L	3	<i>Serinus mozambicus</i>	
Cinnamon-breasted Bunting	2		N	C				1	<i>Emberiza tahapisi</i>	

MAMMALS

Western Red Colobus	4	W		C				1	<i>Colobus badius</i>
Dark-faced Baboon	2	1h		C				3	<i>Papio papio</i>
Red Patas Monkey	3		N	C				2	<i>Erythrocebus patas</i>
Green Vervet Monkey	10	W		C		U	L	3	<i>Cercopithecus aethiops</i>
Gambian Epauletted Fruit Bat	3	W		C				3	<i>Epomops gambianus</i>
Scrub Hare	1	W						1	<i>Lepus saxatilis</i>

Striped Ground Squirrel	2	W	C	1	<i>Euxerus erythropus</i>
Gambian Sun Squirrel	5	W	C	1	<i>Heliosciurus gambianus</i>
Brown Rat	1	W		1	<i>Rattus norvegicus</i>
Banded Mongoose	1	W		3	<i>Mungos mungo</i>
Hippopotamus	1		C	1	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>
Maxwell's Duiker	1	W		1	<i>Cephalophus maxwelli</i>

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS

Nile Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus niloticus</i>	Agama Lizard	<i>Agama agama</i>
Nile Monitor	<i>Varanus niloticus</i>	Square-marked Toad	<i>Bufo regularis</i>
Sand Snake			

BUTTERFLIES

Narrow Green-banded Swallowtail	<i>Papilio nireus</i>	Pearl Charaxes	<i>Charaxes varanes</i>
Citrus Swallowtail	<i>Papilio demodocus</i>	Cream-bordered Charaxes	<i>Charaxes epijasius</i>
White Lady Swallowtail	<i>Graphium angolanus</i>	Bush Charaxes	<i>Charaxes achaemenes</i>
Veined Swallowtail	<i>Graphium leonidas</i>	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>
African Emigrant	<i>Catopsilla florella</i>	Darker Commodore	<i>Precis antilope</i>
Common Grass Yellow	<i>Eurema hecabe</i>	Diadem	<i>Hypolimnas misippus</i>
Small Grass Yellow	<i>Eurema brigitta</i>	Dark-blue Pansy	<i>Junonia oenone</i>
Zebra White	<i>Pinacopteryx eriphia</i>	Yellow Pansy	<i>Junonia hierta</i>
Scarlet Tip	<i>Colotis danae</i>	Little Commodore	<i>Junonia sophia</i>
Tiny Orange Tip	<i>Colotis evagore</i>	Golden Pansy	<i>Junonia chorimene</i>
Caper or Brown-veined White	<i>Belenois aurota</i>	Guineafowl	<i>Hamanuida daedalus</i>
Pointed Caper White	<i>Belenois gidica</i>	African Tiger (Monarch)	<i>Danaus chrysippus</i>
Calypso Caper White	<i>Belenois calypso</i>	Small Orange Acraea	<i>Acraea eponina</i>
Creamy Small White	<i>Dixlea orbona</i>	Large Spotted Acraea	<i>Acraea zetes</i>
African Spirit (Wood White)	<i>Leptosia alcesta</i>	Abadima Acraea	<i>Acraea pseudogina</i>
Common Scarlet	<i>Axiocerses harpax</i>	Vulgar Bush Brown	<i>Bicyclus vulgaris</i>
Pea (Long-tailed) Blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i>	Angular Bush Brown	<i>Bicyclus angulosa</i>
Savannah Pied Pierrot	<i>Tuxentius cretosus</i>	Grizzled Skipper sp	<i>Spialia sp</i>
African Grass Blue	<i>Zizeeria knysna</i>	Lesser Millet Skipper	<i>Pelopidas mathias</i>
Swamp Ringlet	<i>Ypthimomorpha itonia</i>		

References

Common Butterflies of the Gambia *Barnet, L., Emms, C., and Newport, M.,* Makasutu Wildlife Trust (2003)

Fieldguide to the Butterflies of The Gambia, West Africa *Penny, Dr. D.,* Siri Scientific Press (2009)

A good website with a pictures of West African butterflies is:

http://lduhon.smugmug.com/gallery/3013365_S24Du/6/228686856_T5Ne6#463928198_wUQhH

DRAGONFLIES

Blue Emperor	<i>Anax imperator</i>	Common Wall Dragonfly	<i>Bradinopyga strachani</i>
Julia Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum julia</i>	Banded Groundling	<i>Brachythemis leucosticta</i>
Strong Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum brachiale</i>	Kirby's Dropwing	<i>Trithemis kirbyi</i>
Slender Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum sabina</i>	Red-veined Darter	<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>
Portia Widow	<i>Palpopleura portia</i>	Violet Dropwing	<i>Trithemis annulata</i>
Pied Spot	<i>Hemitigma albipunctum</i>	Pantala	<i>Pantala flavescens</i>
Black Percher	<i>Diplacodes lefebvrii</i>	Blue Basker	<i>Urothemis edwardsii</i>
Broad Scarlet	<i>Crocothemis erythraea</i>		

References

A field guide to the Dragonflies of South Africa *Tarboton, Warwick & Michèle* (published privately) 2002

Field Guide to the Dragonflies of Britain and Europe *Dijkstra, K-D. B., & Lewington, R.,* British Wildlife Publishing (2006)

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Western Red-billed Hornbill



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"How's your donkey?" – "Tired!"



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