

The Gambia – Senegal Birding Trip January 2023

My partner, Judy, and I traveled to Gambia-Senegal for a bird watching trip from 30 December 2022 to 21 January 2023. We flew from Chicago to Paris and then from Paris to Banjul, Gambia. There is a direct flight from JFK airport, New York to Dakar, Senegal, but we had flight credits on another airline that we had to use before they expired, so we took a more circuitous route. We allowed three days rest and adjustment to the 6-hour time difference before we began our birding tour with our guide. During these three days we did some casual birding to learn some of the more common species in the country. There are many places to stay in the Banjul area, including some fancy tourist-type hotels, which we tend to avoid. We stayed at the Bakotu Lodge for the first three days which had very good accommodations and good birding within walking distance of the lodge. We also allowed three days rest and casual birding once we completed the birding tour before returning home. The last three days in the Gambia we stayed at the Farakunka Lodge which also had very good accommodations and birding nearby.



Hooded Crow

Since not many Americans go to the Gambia or Senegal to bird, the first question one might ask is “why did we select the Gambia and Senegal for a bird-watching trip?” One reason was we had already birded in east and south Africa and wanted to see different birds in west Africa. The Gambia is a west-African country and is Africa’s smallest country. Despite its small size, over 560 species of birds have been recorded in the Gambia. Due to its geographical location, northern migrants from Europe come to the Gambia in October to spend the winter. Gambia is the first green habitat after the long flight south along the arid coast of northwest Africa. Birds from equatorial areas of Africa migrate to Gambia in June/July to breed there during the rainy season. Although the Gambia does not have any endemic species, it has many unique, birds. The Gambia is a well-known birding destination to European birders and they often visit there. Therefore, the country caters to birders and has many birding tours with very qualified birding guides. Be aware that the Gambia is a cash economy with little use of credit cards outside the metropolitan Banjul area. We had no problems carrying cash for our trip. Best yet, the travel distance is short between the birding sites in the Gambia and Senegal, so you can see many birds without days and days of travel between sites.



Little Bee-eater

Once we decided to go to the Gambia and Senegal, the next big question was who we would hire as our birding guide. We emailed three potential guides we found on the internet. They all responded promptly. After careful consideration, the person we chose was Karanta Camara. We were not disappointed. Karanta knows the birds and bird songs/calls of ALL the birds in the Gambia and Senegal, often identifying them in flight from long distances. He also knows where to find them in the most efficient manner. Being an excellent bird photographer himself, Karanta planned and positioned us so we got the best looks at birds and the best light for photographs.



*Blue-cheeked
Bee-eaters*

Karanta was the president of the Gambia Bird Watching Association, so he is well connected with the birding community in the Gambia and Senegal and was always aware of any unusual or rare sightings. He also knew most of the park staff or caretakers of the places we visited so we had easy access to these sites. Karanta made all



arrangements for our lodging and meals, for other local guides, had his own reliable vehicle, and provided a driver so he could focus on finding birds, even when we were driving from one site to another. One thing we liked about the itinerary was that we often stayed in a lodge for multiple nights and did day trips from the lodge instead of packing up our gear every morning before we set off birding. Karanta increased our efficiency in finding birds by not spending a lot of time looking for a bird if he knew there were other places we were going that the bird was much more common and easy to find. Karanta was very professional in his emails and communications and was serious about finding as many bird species as he could for us. He was also happy to answer any questions about the country, its people, and culture, which we found very interesting.

The only problem we ran into regarding guides happened when we were on our own before we started our tour with Karanta. An unscrupulous person who called himself a “guide” (Gambians call them “bumsters”) said he would show us a particular owl of interest. He could not find the owl but still wanted to be paid a fee for looking, which we refused to do.



The 14-day birding tour with Karanta was excellent. The accommodations were good, although somewhat basic in some parts of the countries. We loved the Gambian food and have since tried to make some of the Gambian recipes at home. The driver was safety-conscious and drove carefully and always got us to the places we wanted to go.

We visited almost all the birding habitats found in the Gambia and Senegal. From the Atlantic shores, to freshwater wetlands, to the Gambia river and its tributaries, to mangrove swamps, to open grasslands, to farmlands, to dry forests and brushlands, and to Niokolokoba National Park, the largest National Park in Senegal. In total, we saw over 260 species of birds of which 128 were life birds for us. We saw many herons and egrets, kingfishers, doves, shorebirds, raptors, sunbirds, bee-eaters, starlings, four different



species of owls as well as many unique birds found in the area. A complete bird list from our trip is attached. Some of the highlights of our trip are described below.

The first three days with Karanta we birded in the Banjul area at places such as Brufut Woods, Abuko Nature Reserve, Tambi Wetlands, the Kotu bridge area, and along the coast and lagoons next to the ocean. Interesting birds we saw in this area were Long-tailed Nightjar, White-spotted Flufftail, White-fronted Plover, Senegal Thick-knee, White-backed Heron, Hammerkop, Gull-billed Tern, Red-necked Falcon, Northern Carmine Bee-eater, Abyssinian Roller, African Scops Owl, Grayish Eagle Owl, Verreaux's Eagle Owl, Purple Starling, Snowy-crowned Robin-chat, Splendid Sunbird, as well as many others.



Next, we went to Morgan Kunda Lodge for three nights and visited Farasutu Forest, Kampanti rice fields, Jimmansar Katchan Woods, Baobolong Wetlands, and Farafenyi Woods and Wetlands, as well as other places. Many interesting birds were seen such as Savile's Bustard, Senegal Parrot, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Four-banded Sand Grouse, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Striped Kingfisher, Pygmy Sunbird, and many others. We also made a trip to the Kaolac area to a roosting site where hundreds of Scissor-tailed Kites came to roost just before dusk. It was an impressive and beautiful sight.



From Morgan Kunda Lodge, we headed east to Georgetown, Basse, and then Wassudu Camp in Senegal, stopping at Bansang for the night. We birded along the way and stopped at Bansang Quarry to see a colony of Red-throated Bee-eaters, and saw many other birds such as Greater Flamingo, Greater Painted Snipe, Temminck's Courser, Exclamatory Paradise-Wydah, and Sudan Golden Sparrow. We spent two nights at Wassudu Camp and birded around the camp, took a boat tour upriver to see kingfishers, African Fish Eagles, White-headed Plovers, plus many other birds, and spent a day in Niokolokoba National Park seeing Abyssinian Ground-Hornbill and some of the large mammals such as antelope and warthogs. There were many opportunities to see Egyptian Plovers here and we also saw other interesting birds such as Violet Turaco, Adamawa Pigeon, and Grey-headed Kingfisher.

Egyptian Plover



Grey-headed Kingfisher



Bushbuck



On the way back to Banjul we stopped for a night at Bansang again and then at Tandaba Camp for three nights to bird in that area. We birded around the camp, took a boat trip on the Gambia River and its tributaries, and visited some of the dry forest/bush habitat in the area. We had very good views of the African Finfoot, herons and egrets, cormorants, and many other birds on the boat trip. Other interesting birds we saw in the Tandaba area and on the drive back to Banjul included African Pygmy Goose, White Helmet-Shrike, Collared Pratincole, Banded Snake Eagle, Martial Eagle, and Long-crested Eagle. On the last day of our trip, we returned to the Banjul area and took a boat tour on Kotu Creek where we saw the Giant Kingfisher, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, and other water birds.

Long-crested Eagle



African Finfoot



White Helmetshrikes



Giant Kingfisher



In summary, we were very happy with the birding trip to Gambia and Senegal and we were very successful in finding the birds we hoped to see. The Gambian people were very friendly and helpful. The food was great. And Karanta was an excellent bird guide and companion throughout the trip. We would recommend this trip to anyone interested in African birds and would certainly recommend Karanta Camara as a birding guide and as the person to organize the entire trip.

Jerry Bartelt and Judy Sauer

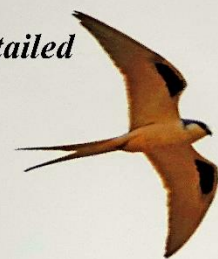
Black-headed Heron



Hammerkop



Scissor-tailed Kite



Gambia-Senegal Bird List January 2023

White-faced Whistling-Duck
Spur-winged Goose
African Pygmy-Goose
Helmeted Guineafowl
Double-spurred Francolin
Greater Flamingo
Rock Pigeon
Speckled Pigeon
Adamawa Turtle-Dove
Mourning Collared-Dove
Red-eyed Dove
Vinaceous Dove
Laughing Dove
Black-billed Wood-Dove
Blue-spotted Wood-Dove
Namaqua Dove
Bruce's Green-Pigeon
Four-banded Sandgrouse
Savile's Bustard
Guinea Turaco
Violet Turaco
Western Plantain-eater
Senegal Coucal
Great Spotted Cuckoo
Long-tailed Nightjar
Mottled Spinetail
Pallid Swift
Little Swift
African Palm-Swift
White-spotted Flufftail
Lesser Moorhen
Eurasian Moorhen
African Swamphen
Black Crake
African Finfoot
Senegal Thick-knee
Egyptian Plover
Black-winged Stilt
Eurasian Oystercatcher
Black-bellied Plover
Spur-winged Lapwing
Black-headed Lapwing

White-headed Lapwing
Wattled Lapwing
Kittlitz's Plover
Kentish Plover
Common Ringed Plover
Little Ringed Plover
White-fronted Plover
Greater Painted-Snipe
African Jacana
Whimbrel
Bar-tailed Godwit
Black-tailed Godwit
Ruddy Turnstone
Ruff
Sanderling
Common Snipe
Common Sandpiper
Green Sandpiper
Common Greenshank
Marsh Sandpiper
Wood Sandpiper
Common Redshank
Temminck's Courser
Collared Pratincole
Slender-billed Gull
Gray-hooded Gull
Lesser Black-backed Gull
Gull-billed Tern
Caspian Tern
Sandwich Tern
Lesser Crested Tern
Woolly-necked Stork
Yellow-billed Stork
African Darter
Long-tailed Cormorant
Great Cormorant
Pink-backed Pelican
Hamerkop
Gray Heron
Black-headed Heron
Purple Heron
Great Egret
Intermediate Egret
Little Egret

Western Reef-Heron
Black Heron
Cattle Egret
Squacco Heron
Striated Heron
Black-crowned Night-Heron
White-backed Night-Heron
African Sacred Ibis
Hadada Ibis
African Spoonbill
Osprey
Black-winged Kite
Scissor-tailed Kite
African Harrier-Hawk
Palm-nut Vulture
Hooded Vulture
White-backed Vulture
Rüppell's Griffon
Eurasian Griffon
Bateleur
Beaudouin's Snake-Eagle
Brown Snake-Eagle
Banded Snake-Eagle
Martial Eagle
Long-crested Eagle
Wahlberg's Eagle
Tawny Eagle
African Hawk-Eagle
Lizard Buzzard
Dark Chanting-Goshawk
Gabar Goshawk
Grasshopper Buzzard
Eurasian Marsh-Harrier
Pallid Harrier
Montagu's Harrier
Shikra
Black Kite
African Fish-Eagle
African Scops-Owl
Grayish Eagle-Owl
Verreaux's Eagle-Owl
Pearl-spotted Owllet
Eurasian Hoopoe
Green Woodhoopoe

Black Scimitarbill	Black-crowned Tchagra	Swamp Flycatcher
Abyssinian Ground-Hornbill	Yellow-crowned Gonolek	Pale Flycatcher
African Pied Hornbill	Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike	Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin
African Gray Hornbill	Gray-headed Bushshrike	Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat
Western Red-billed Hornbill	Glossy-backed Drongo	White-crowned Robin-Chat
Malachite Kingfisher	African Paradise-Flycatcher	Common Redstart
Gray-headed Kingfisher	Yellow-billed Shrike	White-fronted Black-Chat
Blue-breasted Kingfisher	Piapiac	Collared Sunbird
Striped Kingfisher	Pied Crow	Pygmy Sunbird
Giant Kingfisher	White-shouldered Black-Tit	Green-headed Sunbird
Pied Kingfisher	Yellow Penduline-Tit	Scarlet-chested Sunbird
Red-throated Bee-eater	Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark	Beautiful Sunbird
Little Bee-eater	Crested Lark cristata	Splendid Sunbird
Green Bee-eater	Northern Crombec	Variable Sunbird
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	Senegal Eremomela	White-billed Buffalo-Weaver
European Bee-eater	Yellow-breasted Apalis	Speckle-fronted Weaver
Northern Carmine Bee-eater	Tawny-flanked Prinia	Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver
Abyssinian Roller	Oriole Warbler	Black-necked Weaver
Rufous-crowned Roller	Singing Cisticola	Village Weaver
Blue-bellied Roller	Sedge Warbler	Red-billed Quelea
Broad-billed Roller	Barn Swallow rustica	Northern Red Bishop
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird	Red-chested Swallow	Bronze Mannikin
Vieillot's Barbet	Wire-tailed Swallow	Lavender Waxbill
Bearded Barbet	Pied-winged Swallow	Orange-cheeked Waxbill
Greater Honeyguide	Red-rumped Swallow	Black-rumped Waxbill
Cardinal Woodpecker	Mosque Swallow	Cut-throat
Brown-backed Woodpecker	Common House-Martin	Red-cheeked Cordonbleu
African Gray Woodpecker	Yellow-throated Greenbul	Green-winged Pytilia
Fine-spotted Woodpecker	Little Greenbul	Red-billed Firefinch
Golden-tailed Woodpecker	Common Bulbul	Pin-tailed Whydah
Lesser Kestrel	Western Bonelli's Warbler	Exclamatory Paradise-Whydah
Eurasian Kestrel	Common Chiffchaff	Village Indigobird
Gray Kestrel	Eurasian Blackcap	Northern Gray-headed Sparrow
Red-necked Falcon	Greater Whitethroat	Sudan Golden Sparrow
Lanner Falcon	Northern Yellow White-eye	Sahel Bush Sparrow
Peregrine Falcon minor	Brown Babbler	Western Yellow Wagtail
Rose-ringed Parakeet	Blackcap Babbler	African Pied Wagtail
Senegal Parrot	Yellow-billed Oxpecker	Tawny Pipit
African Golden Oriole	Long-tailed Glossy Starling	White-rumped Seedeater
Brown-throated Wattle-eye	Chestnut-bellied Starling	Yellow-fronted Canary
Senegal Batis	Lesser Blue-eared Starling	Brown-rumped Bunting
White Helmetshrike	Greater Blue-eared Starling	Gosling's Bunting
Brubru	Purple Starling	
Northern Puffback	African Thrush	