

## Gambia Bird Report 19-31 Jan 2024

My wife and I have been to The Gambia on two previous occasions. These were very much family holidays, but I did manage to sneak a couple of days with guides here and there. Previously we had stayed at the Senegambia Hotel but this time we were renting a house quite nearby for a month. We were also getting our friends, Paul and Debs and Michael and Michelle in on it for a two-week birding trip. Michael, Paul and I have been friends from school and it is always great when we get the six of us together. Paul and Debs have also had four previous visits, and they have done guided birding on both occasions. Paul and Debs wholeheartedly recommended Karanta for our time birding in The Gambia. He did not disappoint. He collected our friends from the airport on arrival, he booked a lodge we wanted for our last week of the holiday, we travelled in his lovely minibus which came with a driver he uses, a great guy with lots of character, it appeared nothing was too much trouble to ensure we enjoyed our trip. He also ensured we were returned to the airport at the required time for our flights home.

As for the birding, Karanta without doubt has outstanding knowledge of his craft. A faint call or a distant flash of a bird will bring identification. He picked out an itinerary shaped to our needs which showed off The Gambia and its birdlife to best effect. The trip was split into two parts. The first, after a day to settle in, was to cover the western areas of the country from the house we had rented. After that, we would transfer with Karanta to Abca's Creek Lodge, a fab find by Paul and Debs on their previous visit. Of course, during our day to settle in, we took our binoculars and cameras for a walk, I have recorded the birds we spotted around our house and the Senegambia Hotel separately, just for the record!

**19/01/24.** After the day to settle in, we were finally off birding with the first stop being **Kartong**. We were picked up from the house and I really enjoyed starting to see more of the country as we travelled. The van was lovely, plenty of room for the six of us plus all the bags, cameras, bins and a scope. A few birds were logged on the way and the beauty of all being in the van, is we could pull off the road to have a good look at whatever we had spotted. Abyssinian Roller was a fine way to start and soon added Shikra.



On arriving at Kartong, it became clear this was a special place. There were times when you did not know where to look first. Cracking birds like African Darter, African Spoonbill, Purple Heron, African Jacana and Palm Nut Vulture were making this a tremendous start to our trip. We even managed a few of 'our birds' enjoying their winter sun with Osprey, Northern Pintail, Western Marsh Harrier, Whimbrel, Sanderling, Redshank and Greenshank all showing well. After many more birds were observed, we paid a visit to **Gunjur Woods**. Here Green Headed, Beautiful and Variable Sunbirds looked fabulous in the sunshine as did African and Red-Bellied Paradise Flycatcher, Common Wattle-Eye and Northern Puffback. On the way back to the house, we stopped off at Ocean Lounge Bar & Restaurant and enjoyed a lovely meal and a couple of well-earned beers whilst the bird list for the day was finalised, after all, this had been a great first day's birding, bringing 98 fabulous birds.



**20/01/24.** Our next port of call was **Farasutu Forest**, which provided our first experience of the Flamboyant Tree. With its swathe of orange flowers, it attracted birds by the bus load. We stood for thirty minutes or more, watching African Golden Oriole, Yellow Penduline Tit and Yellow White Eye feeding along with all the usual Sunbirds. After dragging ourselves away from 'our special tree', walking around this lovely area we watched African Grey Hornbill, Copper Sunbird, Klaas's Cuckoo, had great views of Striped Kingfisher, Woodchat Shrike and African Goshawk. Star bird for me was a roosting Greyish Eagle Owl closely followed by Long Tailed Nightjar. After Farasutu, we travelled to **Brufut Woods**. Having visited Brufut Woods in 2017, I was disappointed to see how much of the woods had been taken for a road currently being created. Sadness aside, this was a targeted visit for a very special bird, Verreaux's Eagle Owl which was roosting just as Karanta had hoped for. We also managed to add Little Greenbul, Grey-headed Bristlebill and Leaflove.

**21/01/24. Tanji Fishing Village** is a great experience. As you approach you get the smell of the fish being smoked just behind the beach. If you look closely, you may spot a few children having a snooze on the BBQ style smokers after they have cooled sufficiently! On the beach, you will see the fishing fleet (those not out working) along with the catch being filleted and sold. The pools and shrubs behind the beach were very productive, bringing Slender-billed Gull, White-winged and Lesser Crested Tern, Bearded Barbet and Swallow-tailed Bee-eater. On the way back to the house, we popped into Kotu Creek, another place where you are questioning which of the great birds to actually watch. Blue-breasted, Malachite, Pied and Giant Kingfisher were all present. Green-backed and Black Heron, Hamerkop and Golden-tailed Woodpecker all took our attention.



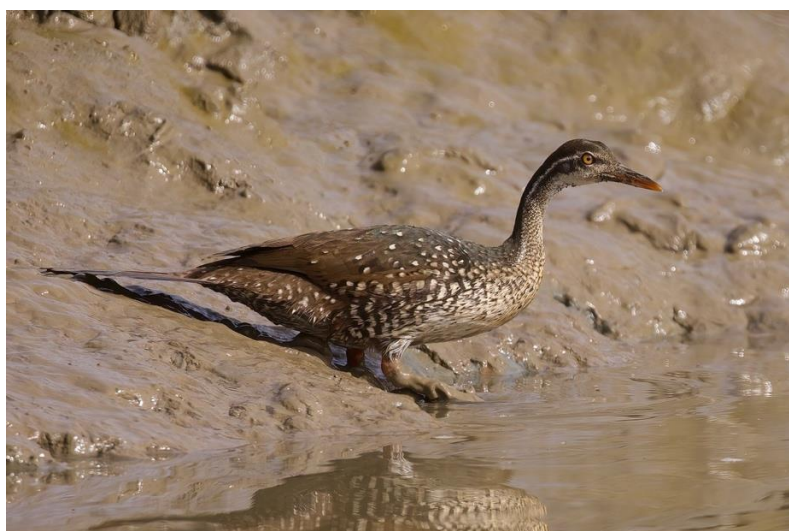
**22/01/24. Darsilami area**, by the southern border with Senegal, proved a productive visit for raptors. Lizard Buzzard, Tawny, Western Banded Snake and Wahlberg's Eagle all showed, as did Yellow-billed Oxpecker and Orange-cheeked Waxbill.

**24-31/01/24.** This week was spent at **ABCA's Creek Lodge** which is around an hour and a half upriver from the airport. En-route we popped in to **Pirang Forest** and were treated to African Green Pigeon, African Wood Owl, African Pygmy Kingfisher and Yellow-breasted Apalis. On arrival at ABCA's, we found a beautiful place where you can watch the birds and monkeys from lovely sun loungers, whilst sipping a well-earned drink from the bar. Best bird from the sun lounger was a Palm Nut Vulture soaring around the area, run close by Pearl-spotted Owlet calling at dawn and dusk. From this lovely base, we had visits to great birding locations.



**Albert Hide**, a cracking hide with a family in attendance selling very cold drinks, so welcome on a hot afternoon. Red Billed Quelea and Lavender Waxbill were noted at the hide pools, and in the surrounding walks we had Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Gabor Goshawk, Grasshopper Buzzard and Mosque and Rufous-chested Swallows. At **Kampantor**, we watched Brown-necked Parrots, Namaqua Doves and raptors, Brown Snake and African Hawk Eagle and Eurasian Griffon Vulture.

Our trip upriver started early to get to **Tendaba** to take the mangrove boat trip. It was fabulous to go onto The River Gambia and get a feel for the size of this giant of a river. Up the mangrove creek, we stopped at African Blue Flycatcher, Brown Sunbird, Yellow Billed Stork, Goliath Heron and Karanta ordered we hit reverse from a call of 'what's that little duck", it was African Finfoot, he knew it was the only bird on the creek for that description! Heading further east, we pulled over when we passed a donkey carcass by the roadside with Hooded Vultures doing their thing.





We then walked into the scrub as Karanta said it was looking good for Temminck's Courser, and sure enough, after a few minutes we were looking at the said birds. We added Woolly-necked Stork before getting back in the van and setting off for **Dalaba**, the furthest east we would go. The Red-throated Bee Eaters were a joy at Dalaba. It was a red-hot day but these birds made it all worthwhile. Also on this site were Little Green Bee Eater, Hoopoe, Bush Petronia and Beaudouin's Snake Eagle. **Sohm** brought Brown-backed Woodpecker, the road from **Sankandi** to **Jifarong** the most marvellous flock of White Helmetshrike. En route back to ABCA's we spotted some vultures from the van and pulled over in front of their flightpath. They were Ruppell's Griffon Vulture and African White-backed Vulture. Around ABCA's we added Vieillot's Barbet, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Grey Headed Kingfisher, Western Violet-backed Sunbird, Black Scimitarbill, oh and Bateleur and Ayres's Hawk Eagle.



Birdwatching in The Gambia is a match for anywhere on the planet. It is a friendly country with varied habitat and wonderful birds, the food is fab and if you avoid the rainy season, the weather is very reliably warm to hot. We had 26 to 38 degrees C across our two weeks. Karanta comes across as a genuinely lovely guy. He had a long stint as President of The Gambia Birdwatching Association, so as you can guess, his ID skills and knowledge of the habitats The Gambia has to offer are exemplary, as are his contacts. Paul and Debs gave Karanta a five-star recommendation to us and he lived up to it. I loved the relaxed nature of the trip, some days we would stop for food at a restaurant, some we would pull up at a market en-route to our destination, and pick up bananas, oranges, fresh bread sticks and fillings such as sardines to hams and cheeses. At all times whilst out and about, we felt safe and relaxed and able to enjoy the birds. A tremendous trip, organised by Karanta, aided by his top co-pilot driver.



### House and Senegambia area.

Sacred Ibis  
Lanner Falcon  
Spotted Thick-knee  
Senegal Coucal  
Grey Woodpecker  
Red-chested Swallow  
Brown Babbler  
Northern Grey-headed Sparrow    **8 BIRDS**

## **List with Karanta**

Little Grebe	Dark Chanting Goshawk
Great Cormorant	African Goshawk
Long Tailed Cormorant	Shikra
African Darter	Grasshopper Buzzard
Great White Pelican	Lizard Buzzard
Pink-backed Pelican	Tawny Eagle
White-backed Night Heron	African Hawk Eagle
Squacco Heron	Wahlberg's Eagle
Cattle Egret	Ayres's Hawk Eagle
Green-backed Heron	Long-crested Eagle
Black Heron	Grey Kestrel
Western Reef Egret	Red-necked Falcon
Little Egret	Helmeted Guineafowl
Intermediate Egret	Stone Partridge
Great Egret	Double-spurred Francolin
Grey Heron	Black Crake
Black-headed Heron	Purple Swamphen
Goliath Heron	African Finfoot
Hamerkop	African Jacana
Yellow-billed Stork	Eurasian Oystercatcher
Woolly-necked Stork	Black-winged Stilt
Hadada Ibis	Senegal Thick-knee
African Spoonbill	Temminck's Courser
White-faced Whistling Duck	Little Ringed Plover
Egyptian Goose	Common Ringed Plover
Mallard	White-fronted Plover
Northern Pintail	Grey Plover
Osprey	African Wattled Lapwing
Black-shouldered Kite	Spur-winged Lapwing
Black Kite	Sanderling
Yellow-billed Kite	Common Snipe
African Fish Eagle	Bar-tailed Godwit
Palm-nut Vulture	Whimbrel
Hooded Vulture	Common Redshank
African White-backed Vulture	Common Greenshank
Ruppell's Griffon Vulture	Green Sandpiper
Eurasian Griffon Vulture	Wood Sandpiper
Beaudouin's Snake Eagle	Common Sandpiper
Brown Snake Eagle	Ruddy Turnstone
Western Banded Snake Eagle	Grey-headed Gull
Bateleur	Slender-billed Gull
African Harrier Hawk	Lesser Black-backed Gull
Western Marsh Harrier	Gull-billed Tern
Gabar Goshawk	Caspian Tern

Lesser Crested Tern  
Sandwich Tern  
White-winged Tern  
Four-banded Sandgrouse  
African Green Pigeon  
Bruce's Green Pigeon  
Blue-spotted Wood Dove  
Black-billed Wood Dove  
Namaqua Dove  
Speckled Pigeon  
Red-eyed Dove  
African Mourning Dove  
Vinaceous Dove  
Laughing Dove  
Brown-necked Parrot  
Senegal Parrot  
Rose-ringed Parakeet  
Green Turaco  
Violet Turaco  
Western Grey Plantain-eater  
Klaas's Cuckoo  
Senegal Coucal  
African Scops Owl  
Greyish Eagle Owl  
Verreaux's Eagle Owl  
Pearl-spotted Owlet  
African Wood Owl  
Long-tailed Nightjar  
Standard-winged Nightjar  
Mottled Spinetail  
African Palm Swift  
Pallid Swift  
Grey-headed Kingfisher  
Blue-breasted Kingfisher  
Woodland Kingfisher  
Striped Kingfisher  
African Pygmy kingfisher  
Malachite Kingfisher  
Giant Kingfisher  
Pied kingfisher  
Little Bee-eater  
Swallow-tailed Bee-eater  
Red-throated Bee-eater  
White-throated Bee-eater  
Little Green Bee-eater  
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater  
European Bee-eater

Rufous-crowned Roller  
Blue-bellied Roller  
Abyssinian Roller  
Broad-billed Roller  
Green Wood-hoopoe  
Black Scimitarbil  
Hoopoe  
(Western) Red-billed Hornbill  
African Pied Hornbill  
African Grey Hornbill  
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird  
Vieillot's Barbet  
Bearded Barbet  
Spotted Honeyguide  
Greater Honeyguide  
Lesser Honeyguide  
Fine-spotted Woodpecker  
Golden-tailed Woodpecker  
Cardinal Woodpecker  
Brown-backed Woodpecker  
Rufous-chested Swallow  
Mosque Swallow  
Wire-tailed Swallow  
Pied-winged Swallow  
Yellow Wagtail  
Little Greenbul  
Leaflove  
Grey-headed Bristlebill  
Common Bulbul  
Snowy-crowned Robin Chat  
Whinchat  
Northern Wheatear  
African Thrush  
Western Olivaceous Warbler  
Melodious Warbler  
Senegal Eremomela  
Northern Crombec  
Common Chiffchaff  
Common Whitethroat  
Oriole Warbler  
Singing Cisticola  
Whistling Cisticola  
Short-winged Cisticola  
Rufous Cisticola  
Zitting Cisticola  
Tawney-flanked Prinia  
Red-winged Warbler



Yellow-breasted Apalis  
Grey-backed Camaroptera  
Northern Black Flycatcher  
African Blue Flycatcher  
African Paradise Flycatcher  
Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher  
Common Wattle-eye  
Senegal Batis  
Blackcap Babbler  
Yellow Penduline Tit  
Western Violet-backed Sunbird  
Brown Sunbird  
Green-headed Sunbird  
Scarlet-chested Sunbird  
Pygmy Sunbird  
Beautiful Sunbird  
Variable Sunbird  
Splendid Sunbird  
Copper Sunbird  
Yellow White-eye  
Woodchat Shrike  
Yellow-billed Shrike  
Grey-headed Bush-shrike  
Sulphur-breasted Bush-Shrike  
Black-crowned Tchagra  
Northern Puffback  
Yellow-crowned Gonolek  
Brubru  
White Helmetshrike  
African Golden Oriole  
Fork-tailed Drongo  
Pied Crow  
Piapiac  
Purple Glossy Starling  
Bronze-tailed Glossy Starling  
Splendid Glossy Starling  
Long-tailed Glossy Starling  
Yellow-billed Oxpecker  
House Sparrow  
Bush Petronia  
White-billed Buffalo Weaver  
Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weaver  
Little Weaver  
Black-necked Weaver  
Village Weaver  
Red-billed Quelea  
Northern Red Bishop

Lavender Waxbill  
Orange-cheeked Waxbill  
Black-Rumped Waxbill  
Western Bluebill  
Red-cheeked Cordon Bleu  
Red-billed Firefinch  
Black-faced Firefinch  
Bronze Mannikin  
Village Indigobird  
Yellow-fronted Canary  
Brown-Rumped Bunting

**240 BIRDS**

### **PHOTO GALLERY**



