



African Finfoot by Tour Participant Patrick Earith

TOUR REPORT

The Gambia

18TH – 28TH February 2025

W: www.oriolobirding.com

E: info@oriolobirding.com

T: 0800 999 3036

Tuesday 18th February

The group assembled as planned, at the Titan airways check in desk, for our early morning flight. After a slight delay, due to a technical cliche, we were soon checked in and heading for a bite to eat and drink prior to us heading to the gate for boarding. The flight took just short of six hours, and on landing we headed through immigration control then onto collect our luggage. Our transfer to the hotel took around twenty minutes, with new road system having cut the previous journey time in half. Our first taste of birding was restricted to spiralling groups of Hooded Vultures and Yellow-billed Kites, plus the odd roadside Pied crow.

On arrival at the hotel, we checked in and headed to our rooms to freshen up, before reassembling as a group in the reception area where we were to meet our Gambian Guide for the trip, Modou. We then spent an hour or so wandering around the extensive grounds of the hotel which was to prove a useful and productive insight into Gambian birding. An impressive list of birds was achieved, commoner species included birds such as Red-eyed Dove, Red-billed Hornbill, Village Weaver and Common Bulbul, along with more colourful species such as Beautiful Sunbird, White-crowned Robin-chat, Broad-billed Roller, Red-cheeked Cordonbleu, and Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher. A large foraging flock of Babblers were found to made up of both Blackcap and Brown, which offered a nice comparison, and the nearby fence line revealed a small 'gang' of Yellow-billed Shrikes.



One of the noisy and inquisitive Blackcap Babblers we saw.

A soaring Shikra attracted the attention of several Palm Swifts above us, and as the walk ended, we stopped to admire a selection of Hammerkop nests, with a bird sat on a branch nearby. Over dinner we managed to add Green Wood-hoopoe to the list, though sightings of the noisy Senegal Thick-knees that could be heard whilst we ate would have to wait until morning.

19th February

Our morning started with breakfast sat at the rear of the restaurant at dawn, and as the light improved species such as Common Bulbul, Broad-billed Roller and Yellow-billed kite were quickly added to the day list. After breakfast we met with Modou who'd arrived with our transport, and driver for the trip, Osman. Boarding the bus, we made a brief stop for water, before heading onto the renowned Gambian coastal birding hotspot of Kuto Bridge. We really hit the ground running, as one new species after another appeared, including familiar faces such as Whimbrel, Common, Green and Wood Sandpipers and Greenshank. Noteworthy new birds included three species of kingfisher, Great, Pied and Blue-breasted, with a fourth species Woodland seen later in the morning, a pair of Wire-tailed Swallows, Senegal Thick-knee and Wattled Plover. The nearby birdwatching guides centre building has a small drinking pool next to it, and with some seed scattered on the ground nearby we waited to see what appeared. First down were several Red-billed Firefinches, quickly followed by Bronze Mannikins and around forty Village Weavers, with closer inspection revealing a Little Weaver tucked in amongst them. We then headed off for a walk back over the bridge and along the creek, to eventually join the Casino cycle track, another popular birding spot on the coast. New birds as you'd expect appeared thick and fast, a diminutive Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, umbrella-ing Black Herons, sky-tumbling, Blue-bellied Rollers and a much hoped for Bearded Barbet, amongst the species seen. Owls are often group favourites and we managed nice views of two species, two roosting Northern White-faced Owls and a Pearl-spotted Owlet, the latter wide awake and clearly alert to our presence. Other noteworthy birds included Abyssinian Roller, Splendid Glossy Starling, Black Crake, African Spoonbill, Palm-nut Vulture and Lesser Honeyguide.



Northern White-faced Owl. one of the two roosting birds along the Casino cycle track.

Lunch was taken looking out over the sea at the hotel pool bar, with Sandwich Tern, Osprey and a marauding Arctic Skua all noted whilst we ate. An extended lunch break was very much a necessity in this part of the world due to the heat, followed by us heading out once again in the bus. A short drive took us along the main coastal highway towards Banjul and then onto Cape Point.

We disembarked from the bus and walked along the road, birding as we went. The adjacent area is largely wetland, and known as Camaloo Corner, though now largely overgrown with mangroves unfortunately making viewing difficult. That said the areas we could see, namely the mangrove edges and scattered trees, proved productive and a nice selection of birds followed. A flying group of four Great White Pelicans with a single Pink-backed in amongst them was intuitive, with several other small groups of Pink-backed seen too. Flying and perched Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters gave some great views, and other new additions included Wattled Plover, Senegal Parrot, African Grey Hornbill and Black-billed Wood-dove. Pairs of Little Bee-eater and Pygmy Sunbirds showed well for us too, and whilst watching these Senegal Eremomela, Yellow-crowned Gonolek, Western Olivaceous Warbler, Northern Puffback and Yellow-fronted Canary appeared too.

20th February

Our destination for today's birding was around an hour's drive from the hotel to an area called Farasutu forest. Arriving at the entrance to the site, we disembarked from the bus, choosing to first explore the area of savannah type habitat adjacent to the forest, which offered contrasting birding opportunities to the area we'd be visiting later. As is always the case our birding started from the off, with a perched male Woodchat Shrike the first bird found, and whilst watching this a Double-spurred Francolin appeared, closely followed by a Eurasian Hoopoe! More new birds followed, all of them brightly coloured, firstly three Violet Turracos, then a male African Golden Oriole, followed by both Bruce's and African Green Pigeons feeding together in a large fig tree. A distant Striped Kingfisher had also been seen, and a short walk took us right up to the tree the bird was in. It was seemingly totally unperturbed by our presence, allowing us some nice photography opportunities. Other nearby birds included three male Variable Sunbirds squabbling in a nearby bush, two *flavissima* type male Yellow Wagtails, and two Northern Grombecs. A short walk took us next to some old quarry workings, where we headed off into an area of denser scrub to search for our next species. It took a few minutes for Modou and the local guide to locate the birds, a pair of Long-tailed Nightjars, their camouflage made them difficult to see even when you knew they were there.



A cryptically coloured Long-tailed Nightjar

A short walk took us to another area where another roosting bird, Greyish Eagle Owl, would hopefully be found. Bonus birds on the way included a circling vocal Lizard Buzzard and a small group of three Cardinal Woodpeckers. We got lucky with the owl, with not just one but two birds present, both showing very nicely for us, with a non-bird highlight, a large male African Patas Monkey. We finally headed into the forest and with the temperature having risen we opted to start the visit in the shade overlooking a series of small drinking pots. Our first Blue-spotted Wood-doves of the trip quickly appeared, a species restricted almost completely to the woodland areas, unlike its more cosmopolitan cousin the Black-billed Wood-dove which we'd seen earlier in the more open savanna areas. Black-rumped Waxbills and Black-winged Bishops joined the Olive-naped Weavers coming down to drink and after a while realising little else was coming down, we set off to explore the nearby woodland. After short walk a flurry of birds appeared, the majority of these new for us, namely Little Greenbul, Grey-headed Bristlebill, African Paradise flycatcher, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Oriole warbler and Buff-spotted Woodpecker.

Carrying on along the path we found we'd re-emerged from the forest edge and we're now next to a series of large pools. Wattled Plovers and Senegal Thick-knees noisily announced their presence and another new kingfisher, Malachite, was found perched out over the water. We'd come here for another roosting bird, this time a White-backed Night Heron, and as we stood there a Night Heron flew out from the nearby bushes. Initially our thoughts where it was our target species, but in fact it was a commoner, Black-crowned Night-heron. As we were watching it, a second bird flew out and away from us, this time the White-backed. Fortunately, a second bird was found which remained sat quietly and in view at the base of some foliage opposite where we were standing. Another bird we'd hoped to see here was Guinea Turaco and after a few frustrating moments, largely down to looking for a green bird in a green tree, we all had nice views of one.



Guinea Turaco, a rather smart 'green' bird!

We returned to the bus and then took a short drive to our lunch venue, a restaurant situated on a small island. Accessing the island meant a short boat trip, with a pair of pontoon type wooden jetty's our route on and off the boat, which was probably the most challenging part! Lunch was excellent so well worth the effort, with the bonus of another new bird, a roosting African Scops Owl, found nearby in a small clump of riverside trees.

After returning to the mainland, and with the afternoon heat having risen considerably, our final part of the day was to be spent sitting undercover viewing a selection of water pots, waiting for the birds to come to us. This proved a good strategy, and we added a nice selection and variety of birds over the next hour or so. This selection included several familiar faces from home, Blackcap, Willow Warbler and Pied Flycatcher, along new birds in the form of Lavender Waxbill, Violet-backed Sunbird and Pygmy Kingfisher, the latter fishing in a small pool just in front of the hide. Three species of Honeyguide were a bonus, the rarer one, Spotted, was one we were particularly pleased to see.



Spotted Honeyguide, the rarer of the three Honeyguide species.

As we turned to head back to the bus calling Bee-eaters above us transpired to be Swallow-tailed, which fortunately landed in some nearby trees, giving us some nice views.

21st February

A change of venue today with us making our way to our next accommodation for the trip, Asami Villas, during the day. This meant luggage was loaded onto the bus after breakfast, then we set off to our birding destination for the morning, Sohm Woods. As is often the case in The Gambia the names don't make logical sense to the places you visit, and on our arrival, it was clear the habitat was more open Savannah than woodland. In many ways this worked to our advantage, primarily due to it making the birding easier and more productive. We made a series of stops during the morning and this enabled us to amass a respectable list of birds. Highlights included several Cisticola species, Whistling, Singing and Rufous, three Pale Flycatchers in the same bush, a soaring pale phase Booted Eagle, Whalberg's Eagle and a solitary, Yellow-billed Oxpecker on the back of a donkey. Three shrike species showed well for us, a pair of Northern Puffbacks, Black-crowned Tchagra and a Brubru. Two

species we'd hope for in the area were White-shouldered Black-Tit and Yellow Penduline Tit, again we were lucky and saw both well. As we headed back to reboard the bus a Wryneck was flushed off the track, returning after a short wait enabling us all to see it. Lunch was next, with us stopping enroute and piling off the bus to see our first Beaudouin's Snake-eagle, unfortunately a bit distant so we hoped there'd be more to come. Lunch was again excellent with the bonus of a pair of Black-shouldered Kites found nesting at the end of the garden, and a Lizard Buzzard and two more Booted Eagles noted whilst we ate. After lunch and a brief siesta, we headed off to our next destination, Pirang Forest, where to be fair here there is still a large swathe of reasonably dense woodland. The reason for our visit was primarily to look for another Owl species, this time Verreaux's Eagle Owl. On arrival we were told the birds had been disturbed, which meant they would have remained in the area, but we'd have to search for them. Luck was again on our side as we approached the area they normally favour to find somebody was photographing one of the birds, so the job was made much easier. We returned along the path to the bus, with again several new birds encountered on the way, namely Pied Hornbill and Yellow-breasted Apalis.

We decided to head on to our accommodation next, and on arrival we checked in and headed to our rooms. A few of us then re-grouped to head out for a short local walk, which was again worthwhile. A small flock of four Yellow-throated Leafloves were the first birds to greet us at the entrance to the villas, after which we took a track running directly in front of us. We only walked a couple of hundred yards, but we ended up with some nice birds, the highlights being a flock of White-crested Helmetshrikes and two flyover Violet Turacos.



White-crested Helmetshrikes, with their wacky haircuts.

22nd February

This morning saw us making an early start to head to Kartong Bird Observatory, with us needing to arrive at first light to get the best from the birding there. On arrival we were welcomed by Colin, who runs the observatory, and supplied with tea and coffee by Binta his wife. We then ate our packed breakfast, looking out over the large reed fringed wetland and surrounding scrub. It clearly had been advantageous to have arrived early, and we noted the first Marsh Harriers of the trip,

along with several African Swampheens and an adult Allen's Gallinule, the latter one of the sites more specialist species. After breakfast we walked down through the site, eventually ending at the sea. We birded as we walked, making numerous stops, to look out over the scrub and extensive flooded areas. This brought a us a wide range of species, Spur-winged Geese, Knob-billed Duck, Black Crape, African Jacana, Little Ringed Plover, Greenshank, Wood, Green and Common Sandpipers, and Common Snipe, all on the flooded areas. In the scrubber areas we noted Orange-cheeked Waxbills, Bronze-tailed Glossy Starlings and Woodchat Shrike. Several Kingfishers appeared, namely Blue-breasted, Malachite and Pied, along with a new one for the trip Grey-headed. We headed off into a larger, drier area in search of Pipits, which proved successful, with us finding both Plain-backed and Tree, along with other hoped for species such as Red-necked Falcon, Grey Kestrel, Zitting Cisticola and Whinchat. One of the activities that is carried out by the Observatory is bird ringing and we'd timed our visit on the first day of a ringing course there. This meant the ringers were active and we'd been invited to pop along and see them in action. On our arrival it was clear they were very busy, though they took time to show us a few birds. Village and Olive-naped Weavers made up the bulk of their catch, though the highlights for us were a Spur-winged Plover, complete with thorn shaped spurs on the bend of its wing, and a Eurasian Hoopoe. A walk along the beach followed next, with the first birds seen along the shoreline, a small flock of Oystercatchers, along with Caspian Terns and a single Slender-billed Gull. The temperature was now rising, but if we wanted to see a hoped-for species here, White-fronted Plover, we were going to have to put the work in. We set off along the beach to search, with it transpiring luck was on our side, as we'd only walked a few hundred yards when we stumbled upon a solitary bird stood along the tide edge. Pleased with our success we retraced our steps and were soon back on the bus heading to nearby Stala for lunch.



White-fronted Plover along the shoreline.

Birding from our lunchtime viewpoint revealed Giant Kingfisher and Osprey along the river and species such as Senegal Eremomela, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Olivaceous and Reed Warbler were

noted in the nearby Mangroves. A boat trip followed lunch, with us heading out first south along the river, before returning north. Both these routes took us to areas where mud banks were still exposed, even though the tide was at its highest. Birds seen during the trip, included our first African Fish Eagles and African Darters, the expected Ospreys and several African Spoonbills and Purple Herons. The exposed mud bars revealed a selection of familiar water species to us, such as large numbers of Grey and Ringed Plover, Whimbrel, Curlew Sandpiper and Bar-tailed Godwit. Gull-billed, Royal and Caspian terns were noted too, with a ringed Caspian Tern found to have been ringed Sweden in 2021, returning for its third winter to Kartong. The highlight of the trip though, was undoubtedly a Goliath Heron, that was found partially hidden under the mangrove canopy, eventually re-appearing to give us some nice views.



Goliath Heron, partially hidden under the mangroves.

We reboarded the bus and headed onto our next stop for the day, Tujereng. Our visit was rather brief, but was largely only for one key species, Chestnut-bellied Glossy Starling, and as we pulled up the birds were immediately found, sat in the top of a distant dead tree. As we watched we realised there was in fact a much closer bird, giving much better views, though unfortunately nursing an injured foot. We spent a short while in the area which gave us several new birds, Rufous-crowned (or Purple) Roller, White-billed Buffalo-weaver and Crested Lark. Our last destination of the day involved retracing our steps to a degree and heading to an area known as Gunjar Forest. Here we initially headed out through a series of paths and large clearings, before arriving at a raised view area to look out over a large, reed-filled wetland stretching towards the dunes and sea. Our hoped-for target species here was Northern Carmine Bee-eater and after some tense minutes searching the first birds were found, though unfortunately a long way off. As we looked though closer birds were found, these ones frequently re-landing in some dead trees. Scopes were trained on them, and as we 'got our eye in', decent, acceptable views were eventually achieved.

We retraced our steps and headed back the way we'd come, though we had one more area to visit at the site. This was a small hide overlooking a large drinking pool, which was where we were to

spend the remainder of the afternoon. As always, the water was proving a draw for the local birds, and we enjoyed a nice selection during our visit. Noteworthy species included Red-bellied and African Paradise Flycatchers, Little Greenbul, Snowy-Crowned Robin-chat, and two more secretive and always welcome species in the form of a Grey-headed Bristlebill and a family of Western Blue-bills.



A welcome Grey-headed Bristlebill, often not the easiest bird to see.

23rd February

Our birding day started with a calling African Scops Owl behind our rooms, followed by breakfast and us checking out. We said our goodbyes to our host Abdula, who was not only a top draw chef but also seemingly responsible for the day to day running of the camp. We then set off for our first stop of the day, Pirang Shrimp Farm. The farm is no longer operational, but the large waterbeds remain, though as we were to find most of the beds were in fact dry. As we climbed from the bus on our arrival, circling hirundines above us were found to be a mixture of House and Sand Martin and Red-chested, Wire-tailed and West African Swallows, the latter a species we would undoubtedly see more of as we headed further inland. A Black-shouldered Kite appeared too, quickly followed by a new weaver, Black-headed, though unfortunately in non-breeding plumage. We then took a long winding route around the edges of the extensive complex, to head to a large body of water visible in the distance which clearly had birds visible on it. Arriving at a suitable view point we were pleased to find there were healthy numbers of smaller wading birds present too, and we settled down to look through them. The majority of these were Little Stints and Curlew Sandpipers, along with smaller numbers of Avocet, Redshank, Whimbrel and Ringed and Grey Plover, with numbers conservatively estimated at close to a thousand birds in total. Looking through them as expected revealed a small number of other birds, namely Greenshank, Sanderling and Ruff. Larger birds we had seen were Greater Flamingos with a small flock of ten birds, all but one a juvenile, and a flock of twenty Spoonbills were found to be, other than two birds, European. A three-figure flock of Slender-billed Gulls were also nice to see. And as we'd walked round, we'd disturbed at least one Northern Wheatear. A flash of rufous brown across the track had left us head scratching for a while until the

bird was found and identified as an Isabelline Shrike, seemingly only the third record for The Gambia! Osman by now had moved the bus and driven round to meet us, so we topped up with water and checked out one last area nearby area which held some water and a healthy number of smaller waders on it. Birds were pretty much as previously seen, though two soaring Yellow-billed Storks, half a dozen Pink-backed Pelicans, at least three Little Terns and a solitary Kentish Plover were all welcome additions. Lunch was next, which was a return visit to the Lodge we'd eaten at on the 21st, with the food arguably even better than our previous visit! A road trip followed next, with us heading to our base for the night, Tendaba camp, though we made one more stop along the way. This was at an area known as Raptor Bridge with birds of prey known to pass regularly through and over the area, and often taking the opportunity to come down to drink at some small pools, fed by underground springs. We only stopped there for around half an hour but the list of birds, especially raptors, was impressive with Dark-chanting and Gabar Goshawk, Long-crested Eagle, Western Banded Snake Eagles, Whalberg's Eagle, Grasshopper Buzzard, Lanner Falcon, Palm Nut Vulture, African Harrier Hawk and Shikra all seen!



Grasshopper Buzzard, with its chestnut-coloured flight feathers.

Arriving at Tendaba, we checked in and enjoyed a more relaxed end to the day with our birding largely concentrated around the communal areas, with birds such as Red-billed Firefinches, Bronze Manikin, Village Indigobird and Namaqua Dove all easily seen.

24th February

With only a one-night stay at Tendaba we breakfasted early, then loaded the bags on the bus and set off for Georgetown, taking a route along the North bank road. Departure was delayed slightly due to appearance of several Bearded Barbets in some nearby trees, followed by a key that hadn't been handed in. Our first stop was a brief one at an area called Tendaba Airfield, a title bestowed on it after a broken political promise, though there was little of note there. Our next stop was a roadside area called Soma Wetlands, where there was much more to see. Our first White Wagtail was seen along the road edge and was followed by a nice selection of waterbirds. These including Yellow-billed Storks, Pink-backed and Great White Pelicans, African, and a single European, Spoonbill,

Hammerkop, Greenshank, Ringed plover and Gull-billed Tern. The Farafenni bridge crossing wasn't working as efficiently as it could with a technical hiccup with the toll tills, but fortunately Modou's advice to revert to pen and paper was eventually taken, and we continued on our way. The delay though, had revealed two perched Long-crested hawk-Eagles and a new bird for the trip, Greater Blue-eared Glossy Starling. A short drive took us onto Farafenni wetlands, with a group of three Black-crowned Cranes making this stop well worthwhile. Another stop between Farafenni and Kaur was again worthwhile, with us heading out initially in the bus across a dusty farm track. We then disembarked and spread out in a loose line to walk through the fields and adjacent scrub. We covered a fair distance, with the fruits of our labour four Saville's, and a single Black-bellied Bustard, several Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and a small flock of six Temminck's Coursers. We also regularly disturbed small groups of Chestnut-backed Sparrow-larks, and saw male Montague's and Marsh Harriers, Booted Eagle, Black-crowned Tchagra and Pygmy Sunbird. Also noteworthy were the Black-headed Lapwings, with several recently fledged juveniles accompanying the adult birds. A short drive further on, saw us stopping first for a Brown Snake-eagle and then for a nesting pair of African Hawk-eagles. The Hawk-Eagles were at a known nest site and on arrival there was no sign of the birds, though this was explained a short while later, when three birds appeared, seemingly two adults and a juvenile.



We had great views of three African Hawk-eagles.

Our Lunch stop was at Kauren river camp, situated at a lofty sixty-two metres above sea level. By now the temperature had increased, so after lunch we spent some time relaxing and watching the birds coming down to drink. Although it wasn't overly busy, we added several new birds, Gosling's Bunting, African Silverbill and Sahel Bush Sparrow, and had views again of birds such as Pygmy Sunbird, Black-rumped Waxbill, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and a young Vitelline Masked Weaver. A noisy band of Stone Partridges further down the hillside unfortunately stayed hidden from view, though we had more joy with a fly past Lanner Falcon. We continued along the North Bank Road,

making a short stop for a pair of Northern Anteater Chats on some roadside wires, followed by a stop at a small Wetland site, near Njau. It was a productive stop, with a solitary male African Pygmy Goose sat perfectly still for us in good light on the water, and half a dozen Red-throated Bee-eaters swooping down catching insects over the water to then perching right up in front of us. One species we weren't expecting here was Little Green Bee-eater, so it was a nice surprise when one also appeared. A Gabar Goshawk also made an appearance, flying at tree height over and through the site.



We enjoyed nice views of Red-throated Bee-eaters.

Our last stop of the day was the rice fields at Kuntaur, where we walked out along one of the tracks by the paddy fields, before retracing our steps to end up at small bridge. The first field was full of Plovers, Cattle Egrets, Mourning Doves, and a few Hammerkops and Squacco herons, with the nearby dykes' home to a healthy population of African Jacanas. The nearby scrub also revealed Winding Cisticolas, Red-billed Queleas and Yellow-crowned Bishops. Familiar faces included small numbers of Yellow Wagtails, the majority Blue-headed, and a European Turtle Dove. We retraced our steps to then head onto a small river bridge where the first bird seen was a new one, a Swamp Flycatcher, followed by two Malachite Kingfishers perched together. A steady stream of traffic was passing on the bridge, first some goats, then a bike and a van, followed by a donkey pulling a heavily laden cart, but the local cows didn't want to come on to the bridge with us there, so we moved off the bridge to let them past. Our last birds were a pair of Hadada Ibis found perched in a nearby tree, who started calling in typical fashion as we are leaving. Arriving, at our camp at Georgetown we were met by a call Grey-headed Bush-Shrike and whilst the bags were unloaded, we spent some time trying to see it. It wasn't keen to be seen, but it eventually it did show, with a few Orange-cheeked Waxbills and a Red-necked Falcon seen too.

25th February

The Georgetown part of the trip is our prime opportunity to see or at least look for, the elusive Egyptian Plover. Omens had not been good, with reports of the birds already having deserted their favoured wintering grounds, but with birds being birds it was felt it was still worth us making an effort to search for them. We'd been told of a site near Bansang which required a boat to access it, so we procured a boat and after breakfast we set off along the river from our accommodation. The trip took close to three hours and as expected we saw lots along the way. The best bird without doubt, was an African Finfoot, a bird we'd planned to look for later in day, so a real bonus. We regularly encountered the expected Kingfishers as we travelled, Pied and Blue-breasted, along with small flocks of Black-headed Weavers, no doubt a result of the nests seen hanging down over the water.



Blue-breasted Kingfisher, one of the commoner riverside Kingfishers.

Birds of prey regularly appeared African Fish Eagle, Harrier Hawks and Palm-nut Vultures the commonest. Two large roosting Vultures were identified as Rüppell's Griffon Vultures, and a large group of ten vultures in a large dead riverside tree transpired to be White-backed. Other interesting sightings during the trip included a flock of around forty white-faced whistling Ducks, twenty Spur-winged Geese, Marsh Harrier and African Hobby, the latter a new bird for us. Unfortunately, we were to draw a blank with the Egyptian Plover, so we made our way back to terra firma where we were reunited with Osman and the bus. We then headed further upriver to Basse, which was our last the last throw of the dice. On arrival in Basse, we wound our way through the busy streets to end up firstly by the river and latterly, a small section of the canal. Again, we found no sign of our target bird, though as consolation we again had some nice views of Red-throated Bee-eaters. A wing-tagged Hooded Vulture was also seen, a result of the ringers at Kartong, with the bird having been ringed at Saruja, which is midway along the Gambian River towards Banjul, in September 2023. We then drove straight back to our camp, making a quick stop for bananas to quell our hunger. Roadside birds along the way included several Dark chanted Goshawks, a Grey Kestrel and a Gabar Goshawk, the latter as we waited for the ferry. After lunch we set off for our second boat trip of the day, this time heading west along the river, a new direction, so you never know what you may see. Our first surprise was the number of European Turtle Doves along the riverbank, mixed in with the commoner

Mourning Doves. Several Palm-nut Vultures in the nearby trees and flying above us were appreciated too, as were the Kingfishers we saw, Blue-breasted and Pied, the latter present in particularly good numbers. Other, species seen included Black Crake, Hadada Ibis, Senegal Thick-knee and Swamp Flycatcher. We made one stop for a leg stretch, which was a touch of good fortune, with a Beaudouin's Snake Eagle, appearing in view above us. We then spent some time checking through the smaller birds in the immediate area, the majority familiar faces, but Bar-breasted Firefinch and Red-faced Cisticola were both new additions. This signalled the turning point for the trip, and on reboarding the boat we set off east back towards our camp. Even though we'd taken the same route previously we achieved a flurry of different birds, with an immature, Black-crowned Night Heron, a pair of Western Banded Snake Eagles, and a Whalburg's Eagle seen, though the biggest surprise was another African Finfoot! The Finfoot was a young bird so not as colourful as the mornings bird, on the plus side it was quite approachable and two Finfoot in one day is never a bad thing! Returning to the camp we showered and readied for dinner, assembling just before dusk to watch for Four-banded Sandgrouse coming in to drink at a nearby field edge, with the birds turning up as hoped, with seven seen in total.

26th February.

We enjoyed an idyllic start to the day as we sat eating breakfast, watching the sun rise over the Gambia river. As the bags were loaded on the bus we birded nearby, noting half a dozen Double-spurred Francolins and a pair of Bearded Barbets.



Sightings of Bearded Barbet were always appreciated.

The ferry crossing to Janjanbureh Island and Georgetown was next, which proved an entertaining half hour and added Red-throated Bee-eater and Yellow-throated Leaflove to the day list. We left Georgetown over the bridge on the other side of the island to start our journey along the south bank, pausing almost immediately to look at a troop of close to a hundred Guinea Baboons that

were making their way across the roadside fields. Birding from the bus produced both Western Banded and Beaudouin's Snake Eagles, which was followed by our first stop at some roadside scrub. Here we'd hoped to find Spotted Thick-knees, though unfortunately, even though we searched the area extensively, we couldn't locate them. Consolation came in the form of a Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin, another Black-bellied Bustard, Rufous-crowned Roller, African Golden Oriole and Dark Chanting Goshawk. A series of wetland areas on the outskirts of Kudang was our next stop, with the first of these clearly an attraction to the herons especially. The commonest was Squacco, with over one hundred and fifty counted, along with smaller numbers of Black, along with all four white Egret species. The next piece of wetland was larger, and whilst holding a smaller number of birds the diversity was more extensive. Birds encountered included a flock thirty-five Black Herons, forty Black-winged Stilt, Wood and Green Sandpipers, Greenshank, Purple Heron and Gull-billed Tern. We reboarded the bus and set off again, though we quickly came to a halt as a perched roadside Brown Snake Eagle was spotted. Lunch proved a little more challenging, with chef issues we were told at the restaurant we were due to use, so a picnic lunch was quickly assembled and a suitable spot found to eat. We continued on towards Tendaba noting several more Dark Chanting Goshawks perched out on the roadside along the way. We pulled over again just outside Buiba at another wetland area, where four Black-crowned Cranes showed reasonably well for us. Four circling Woolly-necked Storks were also seen, initially just dots in the sky they fortunately gradually moved closer. Another roadside stop followed, just outside the village of Soma, though there wasn't too much of note, the best birds, a Yellow-billed Stork, several Pink-backed Pelicans, Gull-billed Terns and Senegal Thick-knees. Arriving at Tendaba we checked into our rooms, then it was straight onto the dining area to catch up on emails and messages! Several of the group decided they were quite comfortable there, whilst the rest of us went out for a spot of local birding. This proved a wise move with us adding two new species, Vieillot's Barbet and White-rumped Seedeater, along with previously encountered species, which included Brubru, Northern Grombec, Village Indigo Bird and European Bee-eater.



Our second Barbet species of the trip, Vieillot's.

February 27th

Rising at dawn, we enjoyed breakfast sat looking out over the Gambian River again. A boat trip out over the river and into the mangroves was on our agenda for the morning, and we headed over to the jetty to meet our boat. On the way we saw several Cut-throat finches, a new bird for us, that were frequenting some old weavers' nests. We were soon on board a large wooden pirogue, heading out across the Gambian River towards the north bank, noting several Sacred Ibises feeding along the shoreline beneath the mangroves as we approached. We set off down a large channel, running into the mangroves, quickly adding newer, and largely hoped for species, to our lists. A pair of Golden-tailed Woodpeckers, quickly followed by a small group of at least four Mouse-brown Sunbirds and then two African Blue Flycatchers, the perfect start to our trip.



Mouse-brown Sunbird, a Mangrove specialist.

As we continued, we encountered a steady stream of birds, notably the commoner herons, egrets, and African Darters, plus again Blue-breasted, Malachite and Pied Kingfishers. Two Black-crowned Night-Herons appeared closely followed by a Marsh Mongoose seen running along the bank and through the base of the mangroves. Our next bird was hoped for, but as we'd already seen two it seemed unlikely, the bird, a male African Finfoot, with bird initially in the water then on seeing us retreated up the bank. We turned the boat around and sat and waited for the bird to return to the water. It did as we hoped but then chose to swim across the creek to then disappear up the other bank. We continued, noting five overflying Bruce's Green Pigeons, and then as the tide still hadn't climbed to the height we needed to complete our journey, we found a suitable spot to beach the boat and climb out for a walk. This was both welcome after sitting for two hours, and productive, with our route taking us across a large clearing to finally view a large wetland area. Two Warthogs were another non-avian addition and followed by a nice selection of wetland birds which included both Marsh Sandpiper and Spotted Redshank. A small noisy flock of White-throated Bee-eaters were discovered nearby, which was the last bee-eater species we needed to complete the set. Another Woodchat shrike was discovered, and the walk back gave us a nice view of a male Montague's Harrier. We climbed back on the boat and continued our journey, though we hadn't gone far before

a Woolly-necked Stork flew out of the trees and then across in front of us. More storks followed, this time Yellow-billed, fourteen in total sat along the grassy bank. Our trip finished with a young African Fish Eagle appearing above us with a fish, just as we rejoined the main Gambian River.

Lunch was next after which a few of us went for a short walk, again onto the hillside by the camp. It was very hot, so birding was hard work, though we did manage to find two Black Scimitarbills, three White-crested Helmetshrikes, a small flock of at least four Tree Pipits and an African Hobby. We'd hoped to find Red-winged Pyillia but we drew a blank, but our luck changed as soon as we got back to the camp, with three appearing in the trees by the entrance. We boarded the bus to then get a call to say two Bronze-winged Coursers had been found near the area we'd just returned from!

It wasn't a disaster though, as Osman found a route off the highway and up the hill for the bus, and we were soon stood watching the birds.



Bronze-winged Courser, very much a last-minute bonus at Tendaba.

Our luck didn't stop there as after only short drive along the highway an adult Bateleur appeared over the bus. We quickly brought the bus to a halt, and we were soon enjoying some nice views of it. We took the Batterling track next, in the hope of adding a few more birds but things were quiet, so we continued rejoining the highway and then on to our next stop, the Raptor Bridge we'd visited a few days previously. Climbing off the bus we immediately noted two Wahlberg's Eagles overhead, followed almost immediately by a Long-crested Eagle in flight over the road. We crossed the road to walk down towards the watering hole, only to disturb two Tawny Eagles, what a cracking last day we'd had!

28th February

A more relaxed morning for us all today, with us having a slightly later breakfast, before heading off round the grounds in a loose group, for some final birding around the hotel grounds. One species that had eluded us was Black Flycatcher and with a bit of inside info we headed onto its favourite spot, resulting in it successfully being added to our lists.



Black Flycatcher by Tour Participant Claire Bourne.

A host of other familiar faces were seen before we drifted off for showers and last-minute packing. Lunch time entertainment followed in typical Gambian fashion as we ordered and then tried and eventually managed to pay for our food. Ironically both the airport transfer and check in was straightforward and we were sat waiting in the departure area with an hour and a half still to go. We boarded the plane and set off on time, arriving at Gatwick on schedule.

1	White-faced Whistling-Duck
2	Knob-billed Duck
3	Spur-winged Goose
4	African Pygmy Goose
5	Stone Partridge
6	Double-spurred Francolin
7	African Finfoot
8	Little Grebe
9	Northern Gannet
10	Greater Flamingo
11	Black-crowned Crane
12	Yellow-billed Stork

13	African Woolly-necked Stork
14	African Sacred Ibis
15	Hadada Ibis
16	Pink-backed Pelican
17	Great White Pelican
18	European Spoonbill
19	African Spoonbill
20	Hamerkop
21	Grey Heron
22	Black-headed Heron
23	Goliath Heron
24	Purple Heron
25	Great White Egret
26	Intermediate Egret
27	Little Egret
28	Western Reef-Heron
29	Black Heron
30	Cattle Egret
31	Squacco Heron
32	Striated Heron
33	Black-crowned Night-Heron
34	White-backed Night-Heron
35	African Darter
36	Long-tailed Cormorant
37	Great Cormorant
38	Osprey
39	Yellow-billed Kite
40	Black Kite
41	African Harrier-Hawk
42	Palm-nut Vulture
43	Hooded Vulture
44	African White-backed Vulture
45	Ruppell's Griffon Vulture
46	Bateleur
47	Beaudouin's Snake Eagle
48	Brown Snake-eagle
49	Western-banded Snake-eagle
50	Long-crested Eagle
51	Wahlberg's Eagle
52	Booted Eagle
53	Tawny Eagle
54	African Hawk-eagle
55	Lizard Buzzard
56	Dark Chanting-Goshawk
57	Gabar Goshawk
58	Grasshopper Buzzard
59	Black-shouldered Kite
60	Western Marsh Harrier
61	Montagu's Harrier
62	Shikra
63	African Fish Eagle
64	Black Crake
65	African Swampphen

66	Allen's Gallinule
67	Common Moorhen
68	Senegal Thick-knee
69	Temminck's Courser
70	Bronze-winged Courser
71	Black-winged Stilt
72	Eurasian Oystercatcher
73	Pied Avocet
74	Spur-winged Lapwing
75	Black-headed Lapwing
76	Wattled Lapwing
77	Grey Plover
78	Kentish Plover
79	Common Ringed Plover
80	Little Ringed Plover
81	White-fronted Plover
82	Common Snipe
83	African Jacana
84	Whimbrel
85	Bar-tailed Godwit
86	Ruddy Turnstone
87	Sanderling
88	Curlew Sandpiper
89	Little Stint
90	Common Sandpiper
91	Green Sandpiper
92	Common Greenshank
93	Marsh Sandpiper
94	Wood Sandpiper
95	Common Redshank
96	Spotted Redshank
97	Ruff
98	Collared Pratincole
99	Arctic Skua
100	Slender-billed Gull
101	Grey-headed Gull
102	Lesser Black-backed Gull
103	Little Tern
104	Gull-billed Tern
105	Caspian Tern
106	Royal Tern
107	Sandwich Tern
108	Four-banded Sandgrouse
109	Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse
110	Saville's Bustard
111	Black-bellied Bustard
112	Speckled Pigeon
113	Mourning Collared Dove
114	Red-eyed Dove
115	Vinaceous Dove
116	Laughing Dove
117	Turtle Dove
118	Rock Dove

119	Black-billed Wood-Dove
120	Blue-spotted Wood-Dove
121	Namaqua Dove
122	African Green-Pigeon
123	Bruce's Green Pigeon
124	Guinea Turaco
125	Violet Turaco
126	Western Plantain-eater
127	Senegal Coucal
128	African Scops Owl
129	Northern White-faced Owl
130	Verreaux's Eagle Owl
131	Pearl-spotted Owlet
132	Greyish Eagle Owl
133	Long-tailed Nightjar
134	Mottled Spinetail
135	Pallid Swift
136	Little Swift
137	African Palm-Swift
138	Green Woodhoopoe
139	Black Scimitarbill
140	African Pied Hornbill
141	African Grey Hornbill
142	Western Red-billed Hornbill
143	Malachite Kingfisher
144	African Pygmy-Kingfisher
145	Grey-headed Kingfisher
146	Woodland Kingfisher
147	Blue-breasted Kingfisher
148	Striped Kingfisher
149	Giant Kingfisher
150	Pied Kingfisher
151	Little Bee-eater
152	Swallow-tailed Bee-eater
153	White-throated Bee-eater
154	Red-throated Bee-eater
155	African Green Bee-eater
156	Northern Carmine Bee-eater
157	Blue-cheeked Bee-eater
158	European Bee-eater
159	Abyssinian Roller
160	Rufous-crowned Roller
161	Blue-bellied Roller
162	Broad-billed Roller
163	Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird
164	Vieillot's Barbet
165	Bearded Barbet
166	Lesser Honeyguide
167	Spotted Honeyguide
168	Greater Honeyguide
169	African Grey Woodpecker
170	Fine-spotted Woodpecker
171	Cardinal Woodpecker

172	Buff-spotted Woodpecker
173	Golden-tailed Woodpecker
174	Wryneck
175	Grey Kestrel
176	Red-necked Falcon
177	Lanner Falcon
178	African Hobby
179	Ring-necked Parakeet
180	Senegal Parrot
181	Brown-throated Wattle-eye
182	Senegal Batis
183	White Helmetshrike
184	Brubru
185	Northern Puffback
186	Black-crowned Tchagra
187	Yellow-throated Leaflove
188	Yellow-crowned Gonolek
189	Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike
190	Grey-headed Bushshrike
191	Woodchat Shrike
192	Yellow-billed Shrike
193	Isabelline Shrike
194	European Hoopoe
195	African Golden Oriole
196	Fork-tailed Drongo
197	Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher
198	African Paradise-Flycatcher
199	Northern Black Flycatcher
200	African Blue Flycatcher
201	Swamp Flycatcher
202	Pied Flycatcher
203	Pale Flycatcher
204	Piapiac
205	Pied Crow
206	Crested Lark
207	Sand Martin
208	House Martin
209	Barn Swallow
210	Red-chested Swallow
211	Wire-tailed Swallow
212	Pied-winged Swallow
213	West African Swallow
214	Grey-headed Bristlebill
215	Little Greenbul
216	Common Bulbul
217	Northern Crombec
218	Western Bonelli's Warbler
219	Willow Warbler
220	Common Chiffchaff
221	Western Olivaceous Warbler
222	Reed Warbler
223	Sedge Warbler
224	Red-winged Warbler

225	Senegal Eremomela
226	Green-backed Camaroptera
227	Yellow-breasted Apalis
228	Tawny-flanked Prinia
229	Oriole Warbler
230	Singing Cisticola
231	Whistling Cisticola
232	Zitting Cisticola
233	Winding Cisticola
234	Siffling (short-winged) Cisticola
235	Rufous Cisticola
236	Red-faced Cisticola
237	Eurasian Blackcap
238	African Yellow White-eye
239	Blackcap Babbler
240	Brown Babbler
241	Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat
242	White-crowned Robin-Chat
243	Rufous Scrub Robin
244	Northern Anteater Chat
245	Whinchat
246	Northern Wheatear
247	African Thrush
248	Long-tailed Glossy Starling
249	Lesser Blue-eared Starling
250	Greater Blue-eared Starling
251	Bronze-tailed Starling
252	Splendid Glossy Starling
253	Chestnut-bellied Glossy Starling
254	Purple Glossy Starling
255	Yellow-billed Oxpecker
256	Mouse-brown Sunbird
257	Western Violet-backed Sunbird
258	Collared Sunbird
259	Scarlet-chested Sunbird
260	Beautiful Sunbird
261	Splendid Sunbird
262	Variable Sunbird
263	Pygmy Sunbird
264	Western Yellow Wagtail
265	White Wagtail
266	Plain-backed Pipit
267	Tree Pipit
268	Yellow-fronted Canary
269	House Sparrow
270	Northern Grey-headed Sparrow
271	Sahel Bush Sparrow
272	Chestnut-backed Sparrow-lark
273	White-billed Buffalo-Weaver
274	Little Weaver
275	Olive-backed Weaver
276	Vitelline Masked-Weaver
277	Village Weaver

278	Black-headed Weaver
279	Northern Red Bishop
280	Black-winged Bishop
281	Yellow-crowned Bishop
282	Lavender Waxbill
283	Orange-cheeked Waxbill
284	Cut-throat Finch
285	Western Bluebill
286	Red-cheeked Cordonbleu
287	Red-billed Firefinch
288	Bar-breasted Firefinch
289	Red-winged Pytilia
290	Bronze Mannikin
291	Village Indigobird
292	African Silverbill
293	Black-rumped Waxbill
294	White-rumped Seedeater
295	Red-billed Quelea
296	Gosling's Bunting
	Other Wildlife
1	Red Colobus Monkey
2	Green Vervet Monkey
3	African Patas Monkey
4	Guinea Baboon
5	Gambian Sun Squirrel
6	Gambian Ground Squirrel
7	Marsh Mongoose
8	Wharthog
9	Nile Crocodile
10	Agama Lizard
11	Brook's House Gecko
12	Brown-flanked Skink
13	Monitor Lizard
	Insects
1	Citrus Swallowtail
2	African Tiger
3	Banded Groundling Dragonfly