

Birding in Unknown West Africa

Benin is a small country situated in West Africa bordering Togo to the west, Nigeria to the east and Burkina Faso in the north. Benin, until recently, has been poorly known for birds but recent research and surveys have revealed a rich bird and mammal life within its borders. Our tour takes in all of the major areas for birds and wildlife at an optimum time of the year, with Inter-African migrants and winter visitors from Europe being present. It is possible on this tour that we can discover new birds for the country and enjoy the sheer spectacle of many species.

Day 1: Fly from the UK to Cotonou, the commercial capital of Benin. On arrival, we transfer to our hotel for a stay of two nights.

Day 2: We start our exploration of Benin with visits to Lake Nokoue and Porto Novo Lagoon complex, an area covering almost 90,000ha. Most of the habitats visited are only accessible by boat which we have access to throughout our stay at Cotonou. The large delta is a haven for birds, with interesting species being regularly recorded - African Pygmy Goose, African Crake, Allen's Gallinule, Lesser Moorhen, African Black and Blue-headed Coucals, Yellow-crowned Bishop and Zebra Waxbill. Rarities occur on a regular basis including the range-restricted Anambra Waxbill. In the afternoon, we visit Assoka, an old hotel complex where the gardens and wetlands attract Grey Woodpecker, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Scarlet-chested, Carmelite, Splendid and Variable Sunbirds

Days 3-4: An early start is essential as we travel northwest to the forest of Lama. En route, we visit the Oueme Valley, a reliable area for Grey Kestrel, Lizard Buzzard, Levaillant's Cuckoo, White-throated Bee-eaters and the localised Black-bellied Seedcracker. In the farmed areas Northern Fiscal, Yellow Wagtail and African Thrush are possible with wintering warblers from Europe. Late afternoon sees us heading towards Lama Forest, the largest complete area of forest remaining in Benin today. Walking slowly along the trail system should reveal African Cuckoo Hawk, Ahanta Francolin, Crested Guineafowl, Black-throat-

Dates

**Saturday January 7th – Saturday
January 21st 2017**

Leader: Isdeen Omolere and a guide
from Birdwatching Breaks

Birds: 220-260

Group Size: 8

ed Coucal, Narina Trogon, White-crested Hornbill, Yellow-throated and Speckled Tinkerbirds, Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrike, greenbul, Forest Robin, Buff-throated Apalis, African Cuckoo, Chestnut Wattle-eye, Red-billed Helmetshrike and Blue-billed Malimbe. Rarer species we may come across include Black Goshawk, Cassin's Hawk Eagle, Thick-billed Cuckoo, Fire-bellied Woodpecker and Ashy Flycatcher. A two-night stay in Abomey.

Day 5: Today we undertake the journey north to Natitingou with a stop at the inselbergs near Dassa. This unique habitat often has the localised Rock Martin, African Grey Hornbill and Rufous-crowned Rollers. The savanna habitats at Natitingou have Senegal Batis, Senegal Eremomela and African Golden Orioles. Night in Natitingou.

Days 6-9: Pendjari National park is a truly beautiful place with rocky cliffs, woodland and gallery forest. We have four full days in which to explore the varied habitats of the park which also has substantial numbers of mammals; African Elephant, Lion, Leopard, African Buffalo, Roan Antelope, Western Hartebeest, Topi, Buffon's Kob and



Palm-nut Vulture Photo: Roger Ridley

Waterbuck all occur in reasonable numbers. The park is remote, hence the rich birdlife and mammals. Species of interest which we may see during our stay include White-headed Vulture, Fox Kestrel, African Swallow-tailed Kite, Secretary Bird, Western Banded and Beaudouin's Snake Eagles, Yellow-billed and Saddle-billed Storks, Denham's Bustard, Northern White-faced and Spotted Eagle Owl, Kurrichane Buttonquail, Bronze-winged Courser, Freckled Nightjar, Pied-winged Swallow, Heuglin's Wheatear, Black-rumped Waxbill and Togo Paradise Whydah. The acacia woodlands attract Mottled Swift, Brown-backed and Fine-spotted Woodpeckers. Camp Numi and the Atacora Escarpment hold Freckled Rock Nightjar, Yellow-throated Leaflove, Rock-loving Cisticola, Oriole and Red-winged Warblers, Green-headed Sunbird Wilson's Indigobird and Cabanis's Bunting. Various streams at Tanougou harbour the uncommon African Finfoot and Shining Blue Kingfisher whilst estrildid finches include Black-bellied and Black-faced Firefinches and White-cheeked Oliveback.

Days 10-11: Morning birding before we depart from Pendjari and travel to Djougou in the centre of the country for a two-night stay. On one day we visit the Oueme river basin (northern sector). Our main focus is patches of forest and rocky woodland holding several species of interest. Strips of riparian forest attract Green and Violet Turacos whilst patches of savanna still have Martial Eagle, Bateleur and Blue-bellied Rollers. Woodland along the river systems may reveal the presence of Pel's Fish Owl,

Grey Pratincole, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Piping Hornbill, White-breasted and Red-shouldered Cuckooshrikes, African Blue Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Square-tailed Drongo and Western Violet-backed Sunbird.

Days 12-13: Transfer to Grand Popo, conveniently located for visiting AHEME Lake and Bouche du Roy, two internationally important areas for birds. The road towards Togo passes several coastal lagoons where we should find Greater Painted Snipe, Ringed Plover, Spotted Redshank, Common Redshank, Marsh, Green and Wood Sandpipers, the uncommon Forbes's Plover, White-throated and Rosy Bee-eaters and a chance of the poorly known Parasitic Weaver. The stands of mangroves hold the localised Brown Sunbird whilst the boat trip towards Bouche de Roy should be rewarding for Royal, Sandwich and, possibly, Damara Terns, Slender-billed Gulls, White-fronted Plover, wintering waders, Osprey, Eurasian Marsh Harrier, Black Crake and Pied Kingfisher. Two nights at Awale

Day 14: Return to Cotonou with a visit to Oueme en route. Later in the day, we stop at a hotel to freshen up before our late evening flight back to Europe. Arrival is on the following day.

Prices

Ground Price: £2,995
 Single room: £250
 Deposit: £250
 *Air Fare: £740

This holiday is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, transport, entrance and permit fees, guidance and tips.

Not included: drinks, insurance and items of a personal nature, a visa to enter Benin.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*