

Birds of The Sahel, Saloum Delta and Wassadoo

Senegal is one of West Africa's most stable countries with a heavy French influence dating back to colonial days. The coastline has two important wetlands of international importance which are protected in the form of national parks. The north of the country has a wide belt of Sahel holding several species which prefer sub-desert habitats while the south is primarily savannah dotted with stands of acacia trees and secondary forest. We visit Djoudj National Park which is a wetland where Palearctic migrants winter in their thousands. In the south we stay in Saloum National Park, an area of inter-tidal rivers, scrub and savannah. The range of bird species in this little known wetland is impressive; Arabian and Savile's Bustards, Goliath Heron, Saddle-billed Stork, African Swallow-tailed Kite, Little Grey Woodpecker and Cricket Longtail all being found regularly on past tours. The second half of the tour concentrates on the little-visited far east of the country on the border with Guinea Conakry at Niokolo Koba National Park and Wassadoo. The latter area is the most reliable in West Africa for the beautiful Egyptian Plover and the localised African Finfoot. Niokolo Koba also holds significant numbers of mammals and over 330 species of birds, making it one of the premier wildlife areas of West Africa.

■ Birdwatching Breaks has operated several tours to Senegal since the 1990s and is pleased to offer these unique birding tours at a peak time for birdlife.

Day 1: Fly to Dakar and transfer to Popenquigne for an overnight stay.

Days 2-5: Dawn visit to the coastal scrub reserve of Popenquigne where we should find Blue Rock Thrush and European Crag Martin, rare visitors from Europe. Yellow-billed Kite is abundant in the region and on our journey northwards birds of prey can be numerous and include Lappet-faced, Ruppell's Griffon, Hooded and White-backed Vultures. Near St Louis itself, we should find Red-necked Falcons in roadside palm trees. For the next few days we are based at Ranch de Bango and Djoudj National Park from where we explore sub-Saharan Senegal. The grounds of the ranch offer excellent birding with regularly seen species - Red-billed Hornbill, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Grey Woodpecker, Blue-naped Mousebird, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Red-billed Firefinch, Beautiful and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, African Silverbill, Sudan Golden Sparrow and Long-tailed Glossy Starlings. Wintering Palearctic migrants are common and include Melodious, Subalpine and Western Olivaceous Warblers, Common

Dates

Sunday February 26th - Sunday

March 12th 2017

Leader: Mark Finn and Ass Ndiaye

Group Size: 8

Birds: 260-320

Redstart, Red-throated and Tree Pipits. Our base, adjacent to the Senegal River, is a haven for waterbirds - Long-tailed Cormorant, Squacco and Purple Herons, Purple Swamphen, Spur-winged Lapwing, African Fish Eagle, Malachite and Pied Kingfishers African Jacana, Winding Cisticola, Abyssinian Roller and Senegal Coucal. A thorn forest regularly has roosting Long-tailed Nightjars. The drier ground is home to Senegal Thick-knee, Black-billed Wood Dove, Little Bee-eater and Northern Grey-headed Sparrow.

Marigot One: This is, in effect, a privately run nature reserve. Our main interest here is in locating the internationally scarce Savile's Bustard. Other sub-Saharan birds present



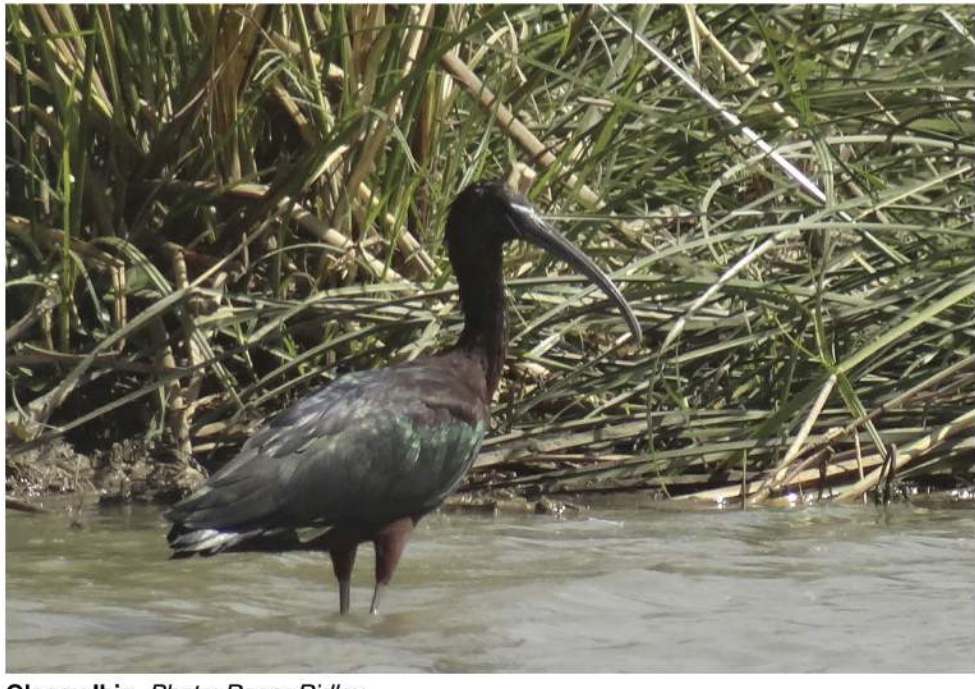
Black-headed Lapwing Photo: Roger Ridley

include Marsh, Montagu's and, occasionally, Pallid Harriers, Barbary Falcon, Cream-coloured and Temminck's Coursers, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, and Chestnut-backed Sparrow Lark. A lake attracts shorebirds and many species of heron, including Black Heron. A stop at dusk may give us Verreaux's Eagle Owl, a local resident.

Marigot Two and Three: We spend a day in this area and typical species include Northern Anteater-chat, Black and Rufous-tailed Scrub Robins, Senegal Batis, Long-tailed and Chestnut-bellied Starlings, Green Woodhoopoe and Blue-naped Mousebird. If cattle are present, we may find Yellow-billed Oxpeckers. Patches of acacia trees are home to specialised Sahelian birds - Cricket Warbler, Sennar Penduline Tit and Little Grey Woodpecker. Other birds may include Great, Intermediate and Little Egrets, Sacred and Glossy Ibis, Common Snipe, Ruff, Black-tailed Godwit, Black Crake and Collared Pratincole. We have further opportunities for bustards in this area.

Djoudj National Park: Djoudj National Park is the third most important wetland in the world. We have two nights here in a purpose built camp just outside the reserve. En route we travel through acacia forest looking

for Striped Kingfisher, Vieillot's Barbet, and Desert Wheatear. The hotel grounds attract many interesting species - Speckled Pigeon, Northern Crombec, Village Indigobird, Yellow-backed, Village and Little Weavers and wintering Eurasian Wryneck. We take a boat safari into one of nature's wonders. Our boat takes us along a branch of the Senegal River, which is alive with birds, to a colony of White Pelicans. This area usually holds large numbers of ducks and herons. Seasonal lakes in Djoudj attract Marsh Harriers and Striated Heron, kingfishers, Black Crake, and Yellow-billed Stork. Other highlights include Black-crowned Night Heron, White-faced and Fulvous Whistling-ducks, Osprey, Caspian, Gull-billed, Black and Whiskered Terns and the range-restricted River Prinia. Lac de Kahr and Grand Lac hold Greater and, sometimes, Lesser Flamingos. Grand Lac also holds thousands of Garganey with lesser numbers of Eurasian Teal, Northern Shoveler and Northern Pintail. Isolated trees on the surrounding desert landscape provide hunting perches for migrant Peregrine and Lanner Falcons. The park has what is possibly the only protected area for Arabian Bustard, a species under constant threat from hunting and, in this area of Africa, greatly endangered. On the return to Ranch de Bango, roadside lagoons may hold Eurasian and



Glossy Ibis Photo: Roger Ridley

African Spoonbills, Spur-winged and Egyptian Geese, Greater Painted Snipe and shorebirds including Avocet, Marsh Sandpiper, Temminck's Stint and Black-winged Stilt.

Day 6: Richard Toll and Podor: A new road running east towards the town of Richard Toll allows us to explore the extensive Senegal River floodplain and the Sahelian environment. Among the many birds that we may encounter here are African Pygmy Goose, Black-shouldered Kite, Montagu's and Pallid Harriers, Wahlberg's, Short-toed and Booted Eagles, Kittlitz's Plover, Common Quail, African Reed Warbler, Short-eared Owl, Black-crowned Sparrow Lark, Kordofan Lark, Singing Bush Lark, African Quailfinch, Desert Cisticola, Grey-backed Quailfinch and, occasionally, Hoopoe Lark. This is also a known area for Arabian and, in some years, Denham's Bustard. To the east of Richard Toll and towards the settlement of Podor several species occur which are hard to see elsewhere in the country. The dry grasslands

with scattered bushes are reliable for Cricket Warblers and the shy Fulvous Babbler. The habitats around Podor offer us the chance to observe the rarely seen Golden Nightjar, Little Grey Woodpecker and wintering Cream-coloured Coursers. Overnight in Podor

Day 7: Today we travel south towards Kaolack and stop in a baobab forest where Black-shouldered Kite and Short-toed Eagle can often be found. Senegal Parrot and Grey-headed Sparrow are local residents. From Kaolack we head to Saloum National Park. Woodland and savannah east and south of Kaolack are a stronghold of the beautiful African Swallow-tailed Kite. Rufous-crowned Roller and Bearded Barbet occur in open areas with large trees, a habitat which attracts Tawny Eagle, Lizard Buzzard, African Harrier Hawk and Lesser Kestrel. We arrive at our lodge on the Senegal River where we stay for three nights.

Days 8-9: Saloum National Park is an

extensive region of forests and mangrove swamps. As we approach our hotel, we expect to find Black Woodhoopoe, Fork-tailed Drongo, Fine-spotted Woodpecker, African and Bruce's Green Pigeons. On one morning, depending on tide times, we take a boat trip through mangrove swamps and visit isolated sandbars. The hotel quay sometimes has Blue-breasted Kingfisher and Goliath Heron. Shorebirds are numerous, and include White-fronted, Kentish, Common and Little Ringed Plovers, Curlew Sandpiper, Eurasian Curlew, Eurasian Oystercatcher and Greenshank. On previous visits, we have observed White-crested Bittern, White-backed Night Heron, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Shikra, Bronze Mannikin, Brown Babbler, Klass's Cuckoo, Western Grey Plantain-eater, Greater and Lesser Honeyguides, Lavender Waxbill and Brown Sunbird. An afternoon visit is planned to a forested area where birds of prey abound. We may find Grasshopper Buzzard, Brown and Baudouin's Snake Eagles, Short-toed Eagle, Grey Kestrel, African Hobby and Palm-nut Vulture. Open areas attract European, Blue-cheeked and, occasionally, Little Green and Northern Carmine Bee-eaters.

Day 10: From Saloum we travel eastwards to Wassadoo via Tambacounda, the largest city in eastern Senegal. En route we may encounter the beautiful African Swallow-tailed Kite, Dark Chanting Goshawk and, in the dry acacia woodland, Black-bellied Bustard, Black Scimitar-bill and Piapiac. Near Tambacounda we may locate Senegal Batis, Yellow Penduline Tit, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weaver and the uncommon and localised Brown-rumped Bunting. As dusk falls, we should encounter Four-banded Sandgrouse. Four nights at Wassadoo.

Days 11-13: The area is home to over 300 hundred species of bird with some of the more interesting species being Bateleur, Martial Eagle, Denham's Bustard, Egyptian Plover and Violet Turaco. The Gambia River meanders slowly through the region with extensive vegetation along the banks. Sandbars and banks attract Saddle-billed and Woolly-necked Storks, African Finfoot, Giant

and Shining-blue Kingfishers, White-headed Lapwing and Oriole Warbler. During our stay within the park, we make several excursions to birding hotspots. Savannah habitats offer us Helmeted Guineafowl, Stone Partridge, Black-headed Heron, Hadada Ibis, Palm-nut Vulture, Short-toed, Beaudouin's, Brown and Banded Snake Eagles, Bateleur and Black-crowned Crane. Also present in the savannah in lower numbers are Fox Kestrel, Sun Lark, Pied-winged Swallow and a wide range of estrilids - Black-bellied and Black-faced Firefinches and Black-faced and Black-rumped Waxbills. Wassadoo also has patches of gallery forest holding Red-thighed Sparrowhawk, Green Turaco, Spotted Honeyguide, Little Green and Buff-spotted Woodpeckers, Swamp Palm Bulbul, Green Crombec and Crimson Seedcracker. Wassadoo attracts many birds, with previous visits recording Red-throated, Green and Northern Carmine Bee-eaters, Greater Honeyguide, Grey-headed Bushshrike, Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike, Yellow-bellied and Senegal Eremomelas, Swamp Flycatcher, White-crowned Robin-chat, Blackcap and Brown Babblers, Lesser Blue-eared Starling, African Pied Wagtail, Orange-cheeked Waxbill, Broad-tailed Paradise Whydah, Vitelline Masked Weaver and Pygmy Sunbird.

Day 14: Today we return to Dakar for flights to Europe, with arrival early the next day.

Prices

Ground Price: £2,295

Single room: £220

Deposit: £250

*Air Fare: £500

This tour is fully inclusive of accommodation and meals, transport, park entrance fees and permits, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: drinks, insurance, items of a personal nature.

*Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights