



Honeyguide

WILDLIFE HOLIDAYS

36 Thunder Lane, Thorpe St Andrew, Norwich NR7 0PX

Telephone: 01603 300552

www.honeyguide.co.uk E-mail: chris@honeyguide.co.uk



The Gambia
3 – 13 December 2018

Participants

Ian Holmes
Mike and Jean Bishop
John Rumpus and Rosemary Macdonald

Howard and Sue Bayliss
Karin and Brennan Auger
Shirley Awcock

Leaders

Simon Tonkin and Niki Williamson
Local guide: Tijan Kante

Report by Niki Williamson. Photos by Simon Tonkin (unless noted otherwise) and Brennan Auger.
Cover: Malachite Kingfisher and Egyptian Plover.



A roadside stop always attracted enthusiastic onlookers; chalet at Picca Laa near Tanji (BA)



Group members meet the Gambia Bird Watchers' Association

This holiday, as for every Honeyguide holiday, also puts something into conservation in our host country by way of a contribution to the wildlife that we enjoyed. The conservation contribution this year of £40 per person was supplemented by gift aid through the Honeyguide Wildlife Charitable Trust.

£460 was given to the Gambia Bird Watchers' Association. The BWA was established in 2007 and provides a headquarters for the area's bird guides, trains the next generation of ornithologists and runs project-based conservation work. This includes using local volunteers in the restoration of mangrove swamp habitat. The GBA is instrumental in setting up community reserves, training bird guides in the villages and enabling them to benefit from the preservation of forest habitat through ecotourism.

The total for all conservation contributions through Honeyguide since 1991 was £126,580 to January 2019.

BIRDING WEST AFRICA'S 'SMILING COAST' – SUMMARY

It's hard to capture in words the resplendent riot of colour and life that was packed into our trip to this tiny West African gem!

As we followed the gleaming Gambia River inland, we left our European existences behind and ensconced ourselves in rural life, exploring sparkling coastal creeks, tranquil mangrove swamps teeming freshwater lakes, verdant forests and life-rich Sahelian heath, dotted with unimaginably ancient Baobab trees.

Our adventure brought us up close to stunning local specialities such as Egyptian Plover, African Finfoot, White-backed Night Heron, Adamawa Turtle Dove, Hadada Ibis, Northern Anteater Chat, White-shouldered Black Tit, Cinnamon-breasted Rock Bunting and Four-banded Sandgrouse.

Our days were filled with eye-poppingly colourful flora and fauna, including seven glittering species of Sunbirds, six glamorous species of Bee-eaters, four Rollers, six Kingfishers, Barbets, Turacos and Exclamatory Paradise Whydahs that sailed through the air like tiny shooting stars!



Laughing Dove (BA)

Rivers and jungles held Hippopotamus, Nile Crocodile, Guinea Baboons, Red Patas, Red Colobus and Green Vervet Monkeys.

Our 31 raptor species included Long-crested Eagle, Bateleur, African Hawk Eagle, Beaudouin's, Western Banded and Brown Snake Eagle, African Harrier Hawk, Shikra and Dark Chanting Goshawk, many of which were swirling in huge numbers around a raging bushfire!

Add to this the welcoming and generous Gambian people, the vibrancy of their culture, music and clothing, and the delicious West African food, and you may start to get a picture of why it's so easy to fall for 'Africa's Smiling Coast'!

DAILY DIARY

Day 1 Monday 3 December

Simon, Niki and Tijan met the group at Banjul airport and we were soon enjoying a cool welcome drink aboard our bus, before being whisked away to our first base near Tanji, a short drive away. As we made our way south, we passed through lively towns and villages interspersed by areas of Sahelian scrub. Hooded Vultures and Yellow-billed Kites drifted overhead, and huge Pied Crows called noisily from the roofs of single-story dwellings and shops.

On arrival at Picca Laa, our delightful eco-lodge accommodation, our host Alieu greeted us warmly, as did some flamboyant Long-tailed Glossy Starlings! The group relaxed with a refreshing local beer or two while the team of magical 'bag-fairies' arranged luggage into rooms.

After taking some time to unwind and refresh from our travels, we met up for an evening walk around the lodge's fantastic grounds. This simple, tranquil place adjoins the famous Tanji Bird Reserve and we didn't even have to move away from the open-air bar to enjoy our first Senegal Parrots, Double-spurred Francolins, Senegal Coucals and Blue-spotted Wood Doves. We took a short stroll to a creek which formed the boundary between mangrove and woodland habitat. Here we found Pied and Blue-breasted Kingfishers, Red-billed Hornbills, Broad-billed Roller and Black Scimitarbill, as well as African Palm Swifts flitting through the stunning sunset.

Day 2 Tuesday 4 December

After a fine breakfast featuring fresh bread, eggs and delicious locally-produced mangrove honey – not to mention a glimpse of a Giant Kingfisher and some great views of a fine African Golden Oriole – we headed out to explore coastal habitat at nearby Kotu Creek. Bronze Mannikins, Western Grey Plantain-eaters, Common Bulbuls, Brown Babblers and Village Weavers showed well in the scrub.

Over the rice fields at the village edge we enjoyed views of many dozens of Yellow-billed Kites soaring and perching in the palms. We spent some time familiarising ourselves with the area's beautiful and varied Columbidae species, including African Mourning, Vinaceous, Red-eyed and Laughing Doves and Speckled Pigeon. The warm air was full of African Grass White and Grass Yellow butterflies.



Little Bee-eater

In small pools, we could see Spur-winged Plovers and Black-winged Stilts, Reef, Black-headed and Squacco Herons, and enjoyed a Black Egret fishing under its own umbrella-like wings. We enjoyed superb close-up views of Senegal Coucals and a Yellow-billed Shrike.

Exploring the mouth of the creek itself, where rice fields meet mangrove swamp, we found a delightful group of Little Bee-eaters which posed for us obligingly. The area also gave us amazing views of Pied Kingfishers hunting and we encountered our first Long-tailed Cormorants, Senegal Thick-knees, and Hammerkops.

We paid a visit to the headquarters of the Gambian Bird Watchers' Association – an association of local guides and conservationists and Honeyguide's chosen charitable cause for this trip. They were kind enough to give us a short but informative talk about the impressive work they do protecting and restoring local habitats, training local ornithologists and raising awareness of The Gambia's precious natural capital.

Next it was time for a very special lunch. Tijan had invited us to eat at his home, where his wife Mariama had prepared several local specialities for us, with the help of other ladies of the family! In the shade of a Mango tree in the yard of their simple compound, we tucked into Chicken Domada, Vegetable Yassa, rice, chips and salad, while the children played around us.

Here at the unofficial 'RSPB Tahtey Office', Tijan has put up a large selection of bird baths and feeders. While we ate, we enjoyed views of Village, Little and Buffalo Weavers, African Thrush, Red-billed Firefinch, Lavender Waxbill, Village Indigobird, and Red-cheeked, Cordon Bleu and Beautiful sunbirds.

We had whiled away the hottest part of the day in this delightful relaxing setting, so we thanked the chefs and returned home via Tanji Beach and the thriving, gritty fishing port. Traditional fishing vessels bucked the Atlantic waves to land their catches, many of which are immediately processed *in situ*, for eating, selling or smoking right there in the beach's numerous small thatched smokehouses.

Caspian, Sandwich and Lesser Crested Terns were busy on the tideline, making the most of stray and discarded fish. On a pool we were enjoying close views of Grey-headed Gulls, some still in breeding plumage, when something different caught Simon's eye. He had found a Laughing Gull, a very rare American vagrant and one of a small handful ever recorded in the Gambia!

On that note we headed back the eco-lodge for much-welcome showers, drinks and a delicious evening meal of freshly-caught fish from just down the road!



Fishing boats at Tanji (BA)

Day 3 Wednesday 5 December

Today we set off on our journey upriver, although it was difficult to drag ourselves away from Picca-laa with further great views of Senegal Parrot, Long-tailed Glossy Starlings and a superb Pearl-spotted Owlet as we loaded the bus.

The drive to our next base at the famous Tendaba Camp was only 2½ hours, but there is much to see and experience throughout this tiny but fascinating country, so we took our time and made stops along the way. Our first was to pick up picnic supplies in the bustling market town of Brikama, with a super-strong coffee available on the colourful streets for those that wished!

By mid-morning we reached Farasutu Community Forest, where we picked out Mottled Spinetails from amongst the assembled Swifts and Hirundines and enjoyed views of Orange Acraea and Guineafowl butterflies. In the forest we were delighted with views of roosting Standard-winged Nightjar, Greyish Eagle Owl and African Wood Owl, while surrounded by the eerie sounds of Common Wattle-eye. Resting in the shade near to a bird bathing area, we added delightful Black-rumped Waxbills and Green-headed Sunbird to our list. With a little more patience and quiet, suddenly there was a stunning Green Turaco, just metres away from us!



Greyish Eagle Owl



Green Turaco

We stopped for our picnic lunch in the cool shade of trees next to Kampant ricefields. As thermals rose from the land, we started to experience the extraordinary festival of raptors that upriver Gambia has to offer! As well as the omnipresent resident Yellow-billed Kites and Hooded Vultures, we were now seeing many more species, including Palm Nut Vultures, African Harrier Hawks, Red-faced Falcon, Shikra, two distant African Hawk Eagles and a stunning Long-crested Eagle.

The fields themselves were alive with flurries of birds, including Green Wood-hoopoes, Woodland Kingfisher, Pia-piacs, Fork-tailed Drongos, White-crowned Bush Robin and Greater Blue-eared Glossy Starlings.

We arrived at Tendaba Camp in time for a drink at sunset on the banks of the Gambia river, and with only a short wait before the generator was turned on to provide the evening's scheduled electricity.

Day 4 Thursday 6 December

The friendly staff helped us with our hearty camp breakfast – fresh bread with butter, jam, cheese and eggs, as well as the inexplicably delicious Gambian instant coffee!

Then it was all aboard for the first of our boat trips, this one to explore the mysterious creeks and coves of Bao Bolong Wetland Reserve. We sped across the river – a half-mile or so wide at this point – our tiny, brightly painted boat accompanied by Caspian Terns and Pink-backed Pelicans. We spent a delightful couple of hours exploring a tiny corner of this vast 220-square kilometre Ramsar site.

The tangled swamps of Red and Black Mangrove gave fabulous views of African Darters snaking through the water, perching White-breasted Cormorants and wading Woolly-necked Storks. Brown Sunbirds and African Blue Flycatchers flitted amongst the branches accompanied by the eerie song of Common Wattle-eyes and Blue-breasted Kingfishers, of which we also got excellent views. Along the muddy shorelines we picked up Striated and Squacco Herons and Hammerkops. And against all odds our boatman picked up two incredibly well-hidden, ultra-rare White-backed Night Herons!

We passed through more open salt marshes whose shores were dominated by attractive succulent Shoreline Purslane, *Sesuvium portulacastrum*. Here we picked up numerous Woolly-necked Storks and a selection of waders including Senegal Thick-knee, Greenshank and Spur-winged Lapwing. In the taller trees visible from our boat, we could see Blue-cheeked and European Bee-eaters, Brown Snake Eagle, and a superb African Hawk Eagle.

We returned to the quay late morning, to be greeted by a sky full of Little Swifts, Wire-tailed and African Red-rumped Swallows.



Woolly-necked Stork

After freshening up, we took a very short drive to enjoy our picnic lunch in the shade at the wetland area known affectionately as 'Tendaba Airfield'. Unfortunately, today was not our day and on arrival our bus got stuck in the sand at 'Terminal 1'. We disembarked and, although we felt a little guilty, we were able to continue with our picnic and bird-watching while driver Alaji worked with a team of local farmers and their tractor to extract the bus!

Things do sometimes happen for a reason it seems – as well as an enjoyable selection of waterbirds including Great White and Pink-backed Pelican, Intermediate and Great White Egret, Sacred Ibis, Eurasian Spoonbill and a raft of roosting Caspian and Gull-billed Terns, we also unexpectedly ran into one of our much sought-after star species of the trip – the enormous yet elusive Abyssinian Ground Hornbill!

Time had passed and the sun was now strong, so we retired to our camp to relax by the river for the rest of the day, before enjoying another tasty selection of Gambian food.

Day 5 Friday 7 December

Today was spent exploring Kyang West National Park and the extraordinarily wildlife-rich farmland around it. The traditional long-rotation style of peanut production means fields are left fallow for years on end and alternate between cropping and grazing, so all the stages of succession from freshly cropped land to Sahelian scrub can be found. Many ancient feature trees such as Baobab, Kapok and Acacia are left untroubled, bringing even more food and nesting opportunities to the landscape.

The birding was quite simply mind-blowing and at times it was difficult to know where to look! Grasshopper Buzzards, Grey Kestrels, a Brown Snake-eagle and wintering Woodchat Shrikes hunted from their perches. Yellow-billed Oxpeckers adorned nearby cattle. Flitting between trees and feeding on the ground were Green Wood Hoopoes, Namaqua and Vinaceous Doves, Fork-tailed Drongos, Pia-piacs, Blue-bellied, Abyssinian and Rufous-crowned Rollers, Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks, Grey-headed Sparrows and Bush Petronias. Grey Woodpeckers passed through and we picked out the red eyes of Bronze-tailed Starlings amongst the flocks of iridescent Greater Blue-eared. Tijan and his son Bubacarr – a keen young ornithologist and guide-in-training – were as excited by this flurry of activity as the rest of the group! Moving on to a more wooded area, we hit upon a veritable tree of dreams! Among its seemingly unexceptional branches, we found Northern Crombec, White-shouldered Black Tit, Yellow Penduline Tit, Cardinal and Brown-backed Woodpecker, Bru-bru and Pygmy Sunbird!

Lunch was again in the shade and our simple but tasty picnic of fresh bread, cheese, spring onions, local tomatoes, cucumbers and sardines was accompanied by a stunning Dark Chanting Goshawk, Pygmy Sunbird and Green-backed Carmeroptera. As we left, we were also incredibly lucky to have a close encounter with a shy and secretive Spotted Thick-knee, which regarded us warily from its bushy hiding place.

As we alighted the bus at the National Park Headquarters, we looked up and there were not one but two enormous Bateleurs overhead! The enormous stunning raptors, one adult, one young bird, treated us to quite a show and were seen numerous times throughout the afternoon.

We headed to a little-known pool within the National Park which was a real drinking and bathing hotspot for birds. Black-billed Wood Doves, Village Indigo Birds, Yellow-fronted Canaries, Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks, Bush Petronias and Red-billed Queleas flitted busily to and fro, and we had our first view of the spectacular/ridiculous airborne punctuation mark that is the Exclamatory Paradise Whydah!



“The airborne punctuation mark that is the Exclamatory Paradise Whydah!”

With that we headed back to base to relax ahead of tomorrow’s journey farther upriver.

Day 6 Saturday 8 December

Our second travel day was upon us, and after a final breakfast with Tendaba’s Caspian Terns and Pink-backed Pelicans we boarded the bus and headed yet further inland. It was a lovely morning and we merrily called out dozens of bird species we could see from the bus as we drove along. A presumed wild Helmeted Guineafowl crossed our path and a Red Patas Monkey regarded us from the roadside.

We didn’t stop though until we reached the ferry at Farafenni, where our timely departure and Tijan’s local contacts and charm got us straight onto the first crossing. While waiting to board we saw Black-headed Heron and our first African Fish Eagle.

Crossing successfully completed, we topped up on picnic supplies at the small market town. While we grabbed a feisty coffee, we could see flocks of wintering White Storks overhead. The journey now was through completely unspoilt Sahelian habitat, full of enormous Baobab trees interspersed with low scrub and small farms. Northern Anteater Chats could be seen at village edges.

We had made excellent progress by the time we stopped for our first birding break of the day, exploring the area of Kaur wetlands. A small roadside watering hole proved to be an avian goldmine. Here we had excellent views of several Exclamatory Paradise Whydahs, both perched like tiny flags and in flight, dragging their enormous tail feathers behind them like tiny shooting stars. Among flocks of assorted finches and weavers we found Cinnamon-breasted Bunting.

Next we stopped by a wide expanse of reedy water, where Purple Swamphens could be heard calling and Marsh and Montagu’s Harriers drifted by. It wasn’t long before we came across our star species – the beautiful Egyptian Plover! The whole group got excellent views of this smart little wader at close hand. As we prepared to move on, a magnificent Beaudouin’s Snake Eagle gave us a fly-by.

We had lunch by a watering hole, where to our delight a further five Egyptian Plovers entertained us while we ate. A Western Osprey flew over and we found a Rüppell's Vulture with several Griffon Vultures. Amongst the lakeside trees were Red-throated Bee-eaters, Swamp Flycatcher, Pygmy Sunbird, Isabelline Warbler, Abyssinian Rollers, Red-billed Queleas, Yellow Wagtail and – at last – a Honeyguide (of the 'Greater' variety)! We were also intrigued by a male and female Exclamatory Paradise Whydah sitting side by side, contrasting his over-the-top glamour with her absolute drabness!

It's hard to comprehend the sheer wealth of life in the area, and our last pause among wetland pools interspersing drier scrub was simply to take a moment to try and absorb it all. All around us flocks of thousands of Red-billed Queleas whizzed through the landscape in every direction. We must have seen tens of thousands of them in just a few minutes. Long-tailed, Greater and Lesser Blue-eared Glossy Starlings squawked and shone in the fields. Every unimaginably ancient tree was resplendent with Grasshopper Buzzards, Shikras, and Dark Chanting Goshawks. It truly felt like a land before time, and just as the world ought to be!

At Janjanbureh, we were delighted to discover a shop selling cans of cold Vimto! We savoured them while waiting for the tiny car ferry, which would take us to our accommodation at Baobolong Camp, visible just across the river. After long showers, cold beers and a tasty meal, we were treated to some lively Gambian music and dancing by a local band.

Day 7 Sunday 9 December

The Gambia river truly is the lifeblood and backbone of the country. The availability of copious fresh water in a sub-Saharan region brings habitat more usually associated with the equatorial moist forests, and today we had another enjoyable day exploring this defining environmental feature.

Waiting on the quay for our boat, we enjoyed views of Palm Nut Vulture and African Harrier Hawk. Squacco and Striated Herons and Hammerkops mooched about on the muddy banks. An Oriole Warbler calling from the bushes remained frustratingly out of sight. In the trees, Hadada Ibis flashed white under-eye patches. A Maribou Stork flew over and we had lovely views of African Fish Eagle, Gabar Goshawk and Shikra.

Stealing the show though, was a single African Finfoot, which potted along the bank on its enormous orange feet before taking to the water!

We next disembarked on an island to explore Kunkilling Community Forest Reserve. Upon landing we had fabulous views of a Western Banded Snake Eagle and after some searching, we had incredible views of Adamawa Turtle Dove. This small population of around ten pairs is by far the most westerly, the rest being mostly in Nigeria and Cameroon.



Western Banded Snake Eagle and Adamawa Turtle Dove

We also had the disconcerting experience of being surrounded by Guinea Baboons that we couldn't see! They barked and made a racket from the undergrowth and we spotted a fleeing Red Colobus Monkey, presumably being pursued or harassed by these larger monkeys.

As we ate lunch, we were surrounded by many African Palm Swifts and Mottled Spinetails. A Violet Turaco called from a tree.

Once back at camp, the rest of the day was our own to relax in, and for those that wanted to there was an opportunity to explore the town with Tijan. Here we visited the local silversmith, saw some of the poignant remnants of the slave trade including the jail and the trading area, and took an African tea by the river.

Day 8 Monday 10 December

After breakfast, we spent some time exploring the riverbank immediately behind our accommodation. Many birds were busy there, including Common Bulbul, Black-capped Babbler, White-crowned Robin Chat, Pygmy Sunbird and a Pearl-spotted Owlet. We had incredible views of the ever-present but normally skulky Yellow-crowned Gonolek, vermilion red glowing in the morning sun.



Pearl-spotted Owlet

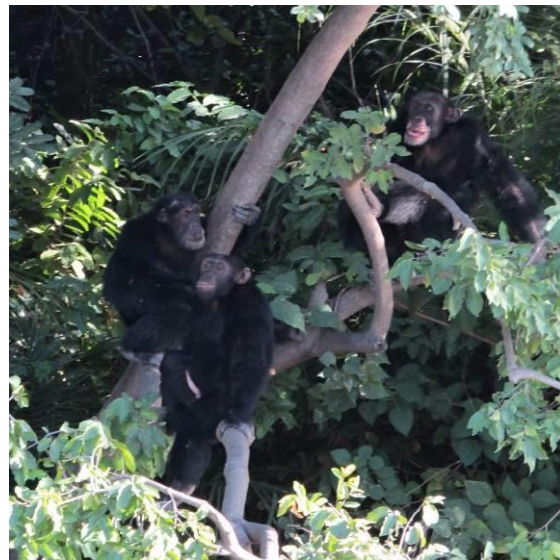
We hopped on the tiny ferry back across the river and made the short drive to Wassu quarry. Here many Red-throated and Little Green Bee-eaters bedecked the trees. We encountered several Black-headed Lapwings. Wahlberg's and African Hawk Eagle were overhead, and we had great extended views of Rüppells, Griffon and White-backed Vulture together, allowing comparison and ID practice. Flocks of Chestnut-backed Sparrowlarks came down to drink as we ate our picnic.

We whiled away the hotter part of the day in the shade at a delightful riverside café in Kuntaur, where we enjoyed the sounds of Yellow-crowned Gonoleks and Isabelline Warblers. Then, as the air began to cool a little, we set off on our afternoon boat trip.

We explored a different section of the river, passing close to Baboon Island, home to a Chimpanzee reintroduction programme. Chimps used to be resident in the Gambia. Other than extremely hands-off supplementary feeding, these rehabilitated chimps live as in the wild and form a self-sustaining population on three different islands. They appeared curious to see us, and we enjoyed watching them hang out in the trees at the water's edge.

Farther along we were thrilled when a large beached branch turned out to be an enormous Nile Crocodile, at least two metres long, which opened its mouth showing rows of terrifying teeth! Equally brilliant were views of a family group of Hippopotamus, basking in the shallows. The two adorable babies were wedged protectively between the two hulking adults, and no wonder with such fearsome predators around! Disconcertingly, as we started our return journey, the croc was no longer anywhere to be seen...

Along the shores, many Green-backed Vervet monkeys played in the trees. We had great views of Yellow-billed Stork and Black Crakes. We were soon back at Baobolong Camp in time for another amazing meal, this time featuring a buffet of eight delicious local dishes, somehow produced by Abdul, Moshe and the team from their tiny but highly talented kitchen.



Leaders Niki and Simon; chimpanzees (BA). We hope we have the captions the right way around, out of respect to the chimpanzees ...

Day 9 Tuesday 11 December

The start of a relaxed day saw us birding the quay again after breakfast, this time picking up Scarlet-breasted Sunbird, Bearded Barbet, Bruce's Green Pigeon and Fine-spotted Woodpecker, amongst others.

We headed to the local ricefields, which until recently were farmed by prisoners from the town jail. They were predominantly political prisoners, and since long-term President Jammeh was finally deposed last year they have all been released. Huge mixed flocks of Red-billed Queleas and Yellow-crowned Bishops were making the most of the bounty in these now-neglected fields, and a Shikra was in turn making the most of the bounty of Queleas!

A handsome Wahlberg's Eagle perched in a tree, and flocks of Spur-winged Geese and a Black-winged Kite flew by. From a bridge over the river we saw many herons included Black-headed and Squacco and had lovely views of a Striated Heron shining in the sun.

At midday we headed to the bustling local market to pick up some supplies for lunch, where the group could either get stuck into some lively bartering or take a delicious Gambian coffee in the shade. After our picnic at the tranquil annexe of Baobolong Camp where some of us were staying, we enjoyed a long siesta before our evening excursion.

As the afternoon cooled down, we headed to another local site, near an abandoned cemetery. Here in the undergrowth we found a group of very vocal Stone Partridge scampering by. As the sun set, two huge Violet Turacos crashed about in a nearby tree. And as dusk fell, we were thrilled to spot a group of Four-banded Sandgrouse on the track.

Day 10 Wednesday 12 December

This morning we said goodbye to the friendly helpful staff and wonderful setting at Janjanbureh and started back towards the coast. On the way we were lucky enough to be invited by Tijan to visit the family home of his wife. Here, an exchange of gifts took place as we met his family-in-law, sporting bright traditional fabrics and huge smiles. We were able to wander inside their rural mud and thatch compound and see first-hand how they lived.

We took an opportunity to stretch our legs and do a little birding at the lakes of Dali Ba – 'Big Water'. This large wetland is home to many wintering European Turtle Doves. Today we had lovely views of Painted Snipe, White-faced Whistling Duck, Ruff, Woodland Kingfisher and Marsh, Green and Wood Sandpiper. We made a brief stop at Farafenni again to pick up supplies, and treated ourselves to another fabulous roadside coffee, loaded with sugar and condensed milk!

As we neared the halfway point of our journey, something was different. The skies were dark and huge columns of smoke were rising from the land. The Dry Season's first bushfires had begun! Although threatening and dangerous in this tinderbox landscape, fire is an essential part of the ecosystem here, and brings great opportunities. The charred aftermath is essential nesting habitat for Temminck's Coursers and feeding Abyssinian Ground Hornbills among others. But right now, what was happening was a feeding frenzy!

Serendipity took us right back to the Batteling track at Kiang West, where we set up our picnic under a favourite Mango tree and watched the drama unfold. Even at this distance from the fire, the air was black with hirundines and swifts, and locusts, mantises and stick insects were highly visible as they fled the blaze. Closer to the crackling flames which we could clearly hear, European Bee-eaters were numerous, and there were clouds of raptors including Grasshopper Buzzards, Black Kites, Lizard Buzzard and Wahlberg's Eagle – a spectacular show.

We finished lunch and packed up as the smell of smoke was beginning to reach us, and headed swiftly back out to the main road!

Next stop was back in Brufut, to round the trip off with a touch of luxury! The lovely boutique hotel Hibiscus House was to be our final base, and what a send-off it was after the simplicity of upriver life! Hot water, TV and wifi were welcome but seemed a little incongruous after the modest way of life we had been privileged to experience upriver. The birding continued thanks to the hotel's copious foliage and numerous bird baths and we enjoyed views of Fanti Saw-wing and African Paradise Flycatcher.



Standard-winged Nightjar

That evening we celebrated our last evening in style with live music and a delicious buffet – not to mention wine and a choice of four kinds of gin! As well as our fabulous local team – Alaji, Tijan and Bubacarr – Tijan's wife Mariama and adorable baby Fatima also joined us for the party.

Day 11 Thursday 13 December

After a lie-in and a leisurely breakfast, it was sadly time to pack up and say goodbye to our hosts. Happily, the group's late afternoon flight gave us time to explore a section of Brufut Forest Reserve on route to the airport. Here we were shown roosting Long-tailed and Standard-winged Nightjars.

We also took a little time to get a final look at all the lovely frequenters of watering holes, and the group took delight in now being able to identify their own Bronze Mannikins, Lavender and Black-rumped Waxbills, Red-billed Firefinches, Red-cheeked Cordon Bleus, Beautiful, Variable and Splendid Sunbirds.

Then it was on to the airport, where we said our goodbyes to our good friends Tijan, Bubacarr and Alaji and wished farewell to Africa's Smiling Coast.

WILDLIFE LISTS

SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	3 rd	4 th	5 th	6 th	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	13 th
Great Cormorant - White Breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>				✓							
Long-tailed Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i>		10+		4	1	4+	5+	✓	✓	✓	
African Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>		1		50+	1	5+	✓	5+	2	1	
Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>			4	20+		10+					
Pink-backed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus rufescens</i>	1	4	10+	40+	13+	20+	✓	c.10	4	2	
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>								1			
White-backed Night Heron	<i>Gorsachius leuconotus</i>				2							
Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>								1			
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>		1	2	4		1	✓	c.15	3	2	
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	1	✓	✓	✓	✓
Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>				1			6	2	1		
Black Heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>		1						1		2	
Western Reef Heron	<i>Egretta gularis</i>		4	✓	✓		2		2	2		
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		1	1	1				3			
Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>		1		✓	1	✓	1	2	✓	✓	
Great White Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>		2	2	✓		✓		5+		2	
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>		2+			1		1	1	1		
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black-headed Heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>		1	2	1				1	2	1	
Hammerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>		5+	10+	6		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Yellow-billed Stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>				1				3			
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>						50+		1			
Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>				13							
Marabou Stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i>							1	1	2	1	
Hadada Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>							10+				
Sacred Ibis	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>		4	4	1							
Eurasian Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>				4							
White-faced Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>										4	
Spur-winged Goose	<i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>							5		28		
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		2				1		1			
Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>						1			1		
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>		1					1		2	1	
Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
African Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>						1	4	2	1	1	
Palm-nut Vulture	<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i>			1			1	3	6	3		
Hooded Vulture	<i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>	✓	✓	✓	2	✓	✓	5+	8	✓	✓	✓
White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>					1		20+	4	10+	5+	
Rüppell's Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps rueppellii</i>						1		3	2		
Eurasian Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>						10+		c.10		✓	
White-headed Vulture	<i>Trigonoceps occipitalis</i>										2	

Beaudouin's Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus beaudouini</i>						1		1	1		
Brown Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>				1	1	1					
Western Banded Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus cinerascens</i>							1		1		
Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>					3					2	
African Harrier Hawk	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>			5	1	1		2	1	2	2	
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>				1		2				2	
Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>				1		1	2	2	3	1	
Gabar Goshawk	<i>Micronisus gabar</i>						1	1				
Dark Chanting Goshawk	<i>Melierax metabates</i>					1	✓	2	2	1	✓	
Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>			1				3	1	2	5+	2
Grasshopper Buzzard	<i>Butastur rufipennis</i>			2	1	10+	15+		1	3+	✓	1
Lizard Buzzard	<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>										1	
Wahlberg's Eagle	<i>Aquila wahlbergi</i>			1	1			1	3	2	1	
African Hawk Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus spilogaster</i>			2	1				1			
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>					1						
Long-crested Eagle	<i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>			1								
Grey Kestrel	<i>Falco ardosiaceus</i>						1	2	1	3	4	✓
Red-necked Falcon	<i>Falco chicquera</i>			1								
Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>						1					
Stone Partridge	<i>Ptilopachus petrosus</i>					1					2+	
Double-spurred Francolin	<i>Francolinus bicalcaratus</i>	2	3	5	2	3	✓	3	1	2	1	✓
Black Crake	<i>Amauornis flavirostris</i>								5			
African Finfoot	<i>Podica senegalensis</i>							1				
African Jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>			3			1		4	✓	✓	
Greater Painted-snipe	<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>										4	
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>		20+		4		2		10+		2+	
Senegal Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus senegalensis</i>	1	4	2	10+	3	✓	8	✓	✓	✓	
Spotted Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus capensis</i>					2						
Egyptian Plover	<i>Pluvianus aegyptius</i>						7					
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>						4					
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>				10+							
African Wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus senegallus</i>		2	3	c.10				2+	✓	✓	✓
Black-headed Lapwing	<i>Vanellus tectus</i>								5+			
Spur-winged Lapwing	<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	3	✓	5+	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>								2		1	
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>									1		
Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>		6+	4	20+							
Spotted Redshank	<i>Tringa erythropus</i>								1			
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>				1							
Marsh Sandpiper	<i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>										1	
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>		20+		15+	2	✓		2	3		

Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>		2		1	1	2		1	✓	✓	
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>								11		✓	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	1	3		5+	1				1		
Grey-headed Gull	<i>Larus cirrocephalus</i>	✓	✓	✓		3						
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Larus genei</i>				20+	5						
Laughing gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>		1									
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	10+	2			6						
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Sterna nilotica</i>				80+	1						
Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>	20+	30+		30+	2	2					
Lesser Crested Tern	<i>Sterna bengalensis</i>		3									
Sandwich Tern	<i>Sterna sandvicensis</i>		2									
Four-banded Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles quadricinctus</i>									7		
Bruce's Green Pigeon	<i>Treron waalia</i>				2		2	5	2	2+	1	
Blue-spotted Wood Dove	<i>Turtur afer</i>	1			4							
Black-billed Wood Dove	<i>Turtur abyssinicus</i>			3		50+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>				1	10+	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Speckled Pigeon	<i>Columba guinea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
African Mourning Dove	<i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>	1	10+	✓	5+		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vinaceous Dove	<i>Streptopelia vinacea</i>		2	2	5+	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
African Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia roseogrisea</i>									✓		
European Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>							2				
Adamawa Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia hypopyrrha</i>							4				
Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Senegal Parrot	<i>Poicephalus senegalus</i>	10+	3	✓		2	4+	1	2	✓	✓	✓
Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	2	2	4	10+	4	✓	3	8	✓	✓	✓
Green Turaco	<i>Tauraco persa</i>			1								
Violet Turaco	<i>Musophaga violacea</i>							1		1		
Western Grey Plantain-eater	<i>Crinifer piscator</i>	3	2	✓	✓		2	✓	5+	✓	✓	✓
Senegal Coucal	<i>Centropus senegalensis</i>	1	5+	10+	3	2	3			4	10+	✓
African Scops Owl	<i>Otus senegalensis</i>									1		
Greyish Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo cinerascens</i>			2								
African Wood Owl	<i>Strix woodfordii</i>				1							
Pearl-spotted Owlet	<i>Glaucidium perlatum</i>			1					1	1	1	
Long-tailed Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus climacurus</i>											1
Standard-winged Nightjar	<i>Macrodipteryx longipennis</i>			1								1
Mottled Spinetail	<i>Telacanthura ussheri</i>			1+		10+	✓	3	✓	✓	✓	✓
African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pallid Swift	<i>Apus pallidus</i>				✓	✓	✓					
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>					1			2			
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>			4	30+	30+	✓			5+	✓	✓
Blue-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon malimbica</i>				10+				1			

Woodland Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>				2						1	
Striped Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon chelicuti</i>					1						
Malachite Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo cristata</i>							1	2			
Giant Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle maxima</i>				1							
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	4+	✓	✓	✓	
Little Bee-eater	<i>Merops pusillus</i>		6			4	✓	5+	10+	2		
Swallow-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops hirundineus</i>				4	3	2		1			
Red-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops bullocki</i>						20+	2	20+	5+	10+	
Little Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>								6		4	
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	<i>Merops persicus</i>				10+		✓	10+			1	
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>				5+	10+	2				20+	
Rufous-crowned Roller	<i>Coracias naevius</i>					1	1					
Blue-bellied Roller	<i>Coracias cyanogaster</i>		2	✓	2						1	✓
Abyssinian Roller	<i>Coracias abyssinicus</i>				1	20+	✓	10+	✓	✓	✓	✓
Broad-billed Roller	<i>Eurystomus glaucurus</i>	10	3	5+	2	3		2	4+	1		✓
Green Wood-hoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>					10+					4	
Black Scimitarbill	<i>Rhinopomastus aterrimus</i>				4				1			
Abyssinian Ground Hornbill	<i>Bucorvus abyssinicus</i>				2							
Red-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus erythrorhynchus</i>	4	2		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
African Pied Hornbill	<i>Tockus fasciatus</i>						1	1				
African Grey Hornbill	<i>Tockus nasutus</i>	2	1		2	2	✓	4	✓	✓	✓	
Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird	<i>Pogoniulus chrysoconus</i>				1	1						
Bearded Barbet	<i>Lybius dubius</i>							2	1	1	1	
Greater Honeyguide	<i>Indicator indicator</i>			1	1		1	1				
Fine-spotted Woodpecker	<i>Campethera punctuligera</i>				1				1	1		
Cardinal Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicos fuscescens</i>								1			
Grey Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicos goertae</i>					2						
Brown-backed Woodpecker	<i>Picoides obsoletus</i>					2						
Chestnut-backed Sparrow Lark	<i>Eremopterix leucotis</i>					1	1		5			
Fanti Saw-wing	<i>Psalidoprocne obscura</i>										2	1
Common Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>						2+	✓	2			
Brown-throated Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>										✓	
Mosque Swallow	<i>Cercropis senegalensis</i>										2	
Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cercropis daurica</i>				4	2	4+	2	1	✓	✓	
Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>				5+							
Red-chested Swallow	<i>Hirundo lucida</i>		1	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	1			5+	3	5+		✓	✓	✓	✓
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>							1				
Yellow-throated Leaf-love	<i>Chlorocichla flavicollis</i>				2			1				

Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
White-crowned Robin-Chat	<i>Cossypha albicapillus</i>					1		3	3	3	2	
Northern Anteater-Chat	<i>Myrmecocichla aethiops</i>						7		1			
African Thrush	<i>Turdus pelios</i>	1	1	1	1					1	2	2
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>			2	1							
Eurasian Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>										1+	
Isabelline Warbler	<i>Iduna opaca</i>				1		1		4	1	1	
Melodious Warbler	<i>Hippolais polyglotta</i>				1							
Senegal Eremomela	<i>Eremomela pusilla</i>					2						
Northern Crombec	<i>Sylvietta brachyura</i>				1	2						
Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>			1								
Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>						1					
Singing Cisticola	<i>Cisticola cantans</i>							1+				
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>			2								
Green-backed Camaroptera	<i>Camaroptera brachyura</i>					2						
Oriole Warbler	<i>Hypergerus atriceps</i>							2	2	1		
Swamp Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa aquatica</i>					1			2	4	2	
African Blue Flycatcher	<i>Elminia longicauda</i>					4						
African Paradise-Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>							3	2	1+		2
Red-bellied Paradise-Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone rufiventer</i>				1							
White-shouldered Black-tit	<i>Melaniparus guineensis</i>					✓						
African Yellow Penduline Tit	<i>Anthoscopus parvulus</i>					1						
Brown-throated Wattle-eye	<i>Platysteira cyanea</i>				2	4		1				
Brown Babbler	<i>Turdoides plebejus</i>	1	4		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
Blackcap Babbler	<i>Turdoides reinwardtii</i>				2+					✓	✓	
Brown Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes gabonicus</i>				✓							
Green-headed Sunbird	<i>Cyanomitra verticalis</i>				2							
Scarlet-chested Sunbird	<i>Chalcomitra senegalensis</i>									2+	4	
Pygmy Sunbird	<i>Hedydipna platyura</i>					4	1		1	1	2	
Beautiful Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris pulchellus</i>	2	5+	✓	2			✓	4+	✓	✓	✓
Variable Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris venustus</i>		2		2	1	2		1		1	✓
Splendid Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris coccinigaster</i>				2							1
Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>					2						
Yellow-billed Shrike	<i>Corvinella corvina</i>	1	5+	40+	✓	✓	✓		2	✓	c.5	✓
Northern Puffback	<i>Dryoscopus gambensis</i>										1	
Yellow-crowned Gonolek	<i>Laniarius barbarus</i>	2	4	2	✓	2	1+	2	8	✓	✓	✓
Brubru	<i>Nilaus afer</i>					3						
African Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus auratus</i>		1									
Fork-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>		2		2	4	4+		2	✓	✓	2
Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	✓		✓		✓	✓
Piapiac	<i>Ptilostomus afer</i>	✓			10+	2	3		2		4+	✓
Purple Starling	<i>Lamprotornis purpureus</i>				✓		10+	✓		✓	✓	✓
Greater Blue-eared	<i>Lamprotornis</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Starling	<i>chalybaeus</i>											
Lesser Blue-eared Starling	<i>Lamprotornis chloropterus</i>						✓	✓	✓			
Long-tailed Glossy Starling	<i>Lamprotornis caudatus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Bronze-tailed Starling	<i>Lamprotornis chalcurus</i>					6						
Yellow-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus africanus</i>		1	2	2	4	1					
Northern Grey-headed Sparrow	<i>Passer griseus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓							
Bush Petronia	<i>Petronia dentata</i>				✓	✓	✓					
White-billed Buffalo-Weaver	<i>Bubalornis albirostris</i>	2	10+		10+	4	4+					✓
Little Weaver	<i>Ploceus luteolus</i>		5+		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Black-necked Weaver	<i>Ploceus nigricollis</i>				4+							
Village Weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-billed Quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Northern Red Bishop	<i>Euplectes franciscanus</i>					2						
Lavender Waxbill	<i>Estrilda caerulescens</i>		1									✓
Black-rumped Waxbill	<i>Estrilda troglodytes</i>			✓		✓	3+	✓	✓	✓		✓
Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu	<i>Uraeginthus bengalus</i>		4		5+	2	✓	2	✓	✓	✓	✓
Red-billed Firefinch	<i>Lagonosticta senegala</i>	✓	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	2	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cut-throat Finch	<i>Amadina fasciata</i>						6					
Bronze Mannikin	<i>Lonchura cucullata</i>	✓	✓	10+			✓	✓		✓		✓
Pin-tailed Whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>				2							
Exclamatory Paradise-Whydah	<i>Vidua interjecta</i>					1	9	1	✓	4	✓	
Yellow-crowned Bishop	<i>Euplectes afer</i>										✓	
Village Indigobird	<i>Vidua chalybeata</i>		1		2	✓	✓	2	✓	5+		2
Yellow-fronted Canary	<i>Serinus mozambicus</i>					✓	✓		3+			
Cinnamon-breasted Bunting	<i>Emberiza tahapisi</i>						1					

MAMMALS

Gambian Sun Squirrel	Red Colobus Monkey	Chimpanzee	Guinea Baboons
Red Patas Monkey	Green-backed Vervet	Hippopotamus	

LEPIDOPTERA

African Tiger	African Tiger Blue	Elegant Acraea	Orange Acraea	Caper White
African Painted Lady	African Grass White	Scarlet Tip	Common Grass Yellow	Common Zebra Blue
Citrus Swallowtail	Blue Pansy	Tiny Orange Tip	Calypso Caper White	Guineafowl