

Limosa

SENEGAL

Specialities of the Sahel and Western Africa

TRIP REPORT

15-28 January 2026



Bronze-winged Courser is a difficult species to see anywhere and was one of the highlights of the tour © Frank Lambert

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Leader: Frank Lambert

Local Guide: Abdou Lo (Carlos)

Introduction

This tour provides an excellent opportunity to see most of the special birds that are largely or entirely confined to the Sahel, a narrow zone lying between the lush, more humid forests of the Sudanian Savanna to the south, and the mostly treeless landscape and sand dunes of the Sahara Desert to the north. This semi-desert zone is characterised by scattered thorny *Acacia* trees and sparse bushy vegetation and low herbage that is adapted to a hot, semi-arid climate and annual drought, and supports an assemblage of birds that include a significant proportion of species that are endemic to it.

The Sahel stretches across the southernmost part of North Africa, from northern Senegal and Mauritania on the Atlantic coast of Africa, eastwards to Eritrea and Sudan, bordering the Red Sea. Within the Sahel belt, only Senegal is considered to be sufficiently stable and safe to visit to search for these special birds, and moreover, it has excellent tourist infrastructure.



Cricket Longtail, one of the semi-desert specialities seen in Senegal © Frank Lambert

Whilst much of this region has been severely degraded by centuries of overgrazing by domestic livestock, in particular goats and cattle, and through the proliferation of alien plant species, most Sahelian endemics survive in parts of northern Senegal and are a primary focus for Limosa's tours to this fascinating country.

A main aim of this tour is to see the specialised birds that are largely confined to the Sahel, such as Little Grey Woodpecker, Sennar Penduline Tit, Golden Nightjar, Sudan Golden Sparrow, River Prinia, Sahel Paradise Wydah and Savile's Bustard. The Sahel and adjacent areas are not only important for the endemics that they support, but also very important for wintering Palearctic migrants, including a variety of warblers and raptors such as harriers and Osprey, Woodchat Shrike, Eurasian Hoopoe, European Turtle Dove, European Bee-eater, Western Bonelli's Warbler, Western Subalpine and Western Olivaceous Warblers.

Wetlands in and around the Sahel belt, for example the globally renowned Djoudj Bird Sanctuary in the northeast, are internationally important for the waterbirds that they support, many of which are Palearctic visitors. These species add greatly to the pleasure of visiting Senegal, as does the relative ease of finding charismatic species such as Egyptian Plover, White-crowned Lapwing and White-crested Tiger Heron, and other species that can often be tricky to see on most bird tours to Africa including Abyssinian Roller, Northern Carmine and Red-throated Bee-eaters and Adamawa Turtle Dove.



The charismatic Egyptian Plover was easy to find at Wassadou on the Senegal River © Frank Lambert

Limosa's third tour to Senegal was a great success, thanks largely to ensuring that we had the best local guide and agent for birding in the country, with nearly all our main targets seen very well. Senegal also provides amazing photographic opportunities, and even a bridge

camera can capture incredible images of birds and other wildlife (all the photos in this report were taken using a Sony RX10). Most bird species that readily flush are highly approachable in our comfortable tour minibus, whilst the sheer abundance of some species provided repeated excellent photographic opportunities.

Of the key birds we were targeting on the tour, we saw and had excellent photographic opportunities of almost all, including African Finfoot, White-crested Tiger Heron, various vultures, Savile's Bustard, Egyptian Plover, White-crowned Plover, Golden and Standard-winged Nightjars and Northern White-faced Owl in the daytime, Adamawa Turtle Dove, Little Grey Woodpecker, Atlas (Seebohm's) Wheatear, Cricket Longtail, Sudan Golden Sparrow, Sahel Paradise Wydahs in their spectacular full breeding plumage, and 'Black-faced' Quailfinch.

In addition, we witnessed thousands of Scissor-tailed Kites coming to a roost on an island in the Saloum River and got close to a truly spectacular Great White Pelican colony in the Djoudj Bird Sanctuary.



The spectacular Little Bee-eater was one of seven bee-eaters seen during our 2026 Senegal tour © Frank Lambert

Trip Diary

Thursday 15th January

Our mid-morning Iberia flight from London via Madrid, arrived in Dakar on time, where, after navigating immigration and customs, and withdrawing local currency from ATMs, we were met by our local guide and tour agent, Carlos. After loading the luggage into our comfortable minibus, we drove to our hotel in Thies, situated on the route north that we would be taking on our first full day.

Friday 16th January

Mainly sunny, dry, hot, but windy at times

After breakfast, we set off on the long journey towards the small town of Podor, on the border with Mauritania. As we left Thies, a stream of Black Kites (the yellow-billed race, *parasitus*) passed purposefully overhead, presumably leaving a large roost somewhere close by. We headed north towards San Louis at a comfortable speed, passing many commoner species along the roadside such as Chestnut-bellied Starlings, Mourning Collared Doves and Pied Crows, since we needed to reach Podor before dark to look for roosting Golden Nightjars.



Mourning Collared Dove was commonly seen throughout the tour © Frank Lambert

Whilst African countries are rapidly losing their vultures, and some species are severely threatened, Senegal still has a good vulture population, and we had the opportunity to compare Ruppell's, Griffon and White-backed Vultures at one stop on our route, as well as our only adult Purple Rollers of the tour, a group of African Grey Woodpeckers and a Yellow-

bellied Eremomela. At our riverside lunch stop in St Louis, we had amazing views of a spectacular Verreaux's Eagle-Owl roosting in the open in a huge tree in the hotel garden.



A roosting Verreaux's Eagle-Owl in the hotel garden at our lunch stop © Frank Lambert

As we drove further northwards, we began to appreciate which bird species were common in the drier habitats of the Sahel, with Sudan Golden Sparrows and Western Red-billed Hornbills all being particularly numerous. As we reached the far north, we stopped in an area frequented by Little Grey Woodpecker and Sennar Penduline Tit, both endemic to the Sahel. Using playback, Carlos soon found these special species which we all saw well at close range, as well as a few other species including Long-tailed Glossy Starling, some stunning African Green Bee-eaters, a pair of Brubru and the only Tree Pipit of the tour.

Instead of going straight to our hotel in Podor, we drove through the town towards a nearby area of thorn scrub where, after only 20 minutes, Carlos had located our main target species for the day, a pair of wonderful Golden Nightjars. The roosting birds were so well camouflaged, in the shade of a bush on a short slope covered with a thin layer of dead vegetation, that it took a whole five minutes for some members of our tour to finally pick them out with their binoculars. Although they did not move, we could clearly see that their eyelids were slightly open and that they were monitoring our every move.



A well-camouflaged pair of Golden Nightjars roosting during the day near Podor © Frank Lambert



A close-up of one of the Golden Nightjars seen on our first afternoon in Senegal © Frank Lambert

Before heading to our hotel, we spent a little time looking around the area, having nice views of a few species such as Black-headed Lapwing, Laughing and Namaqua Doves, Abyssinian Roller, Western Red-billed Hornbills, Northern Grey-headed Sparrow and White-billed Buffalo Weaver.



Black-headed Lapwing seemed to be more common than usual in northern Senegal in January 2026 © Frank Lambert

Saturday 17th January

Mainly sunny, dry, hot, but cold for the first few hours

As we awoke at our hotel in Podor, on the banks of the Senegal River, large numbers of Little Swifts swarmed over the hotel in the early morning light. After a 7am breakfast, we spent the entire day exploring areas within about an hour of the hotel, whilst returning to the hotel for lunch and a rest during the heat of the day. Birding in these areas provided our best chance to see some of the specialist species only easily found in the far north of Senegal, along with a good selection of West Palearctic migrants that winter in this part of Africa.

Species we found in the heavily grazed Acacia woodlands during the early morning included a superb Cricket Longtail, Fulvous Babblers, Black Scrub Robins, a Striped Kingfisher and Anteater Chats. We also saw our only Black Scimitarbill of the trip and groups of African Silverbills. Migrants in the woodlands included Hoopoes, Woodchat Shrikes, Western Olivaceous and Western Orphean Warblers, Northern Wheatears and Western Yellow Wagtails. Another migrant was a male Atlas Wheatear, which as its' name suggests breeds in the mountains of North Africa.

It was recognised as a separate species to Northern Wheatear relatively recently, based on striking plumage and bioacoustic differences. Wintering Northern Wheatears are also present in this part of Senegal but far more numerous.



A confiding Black Scimitarbill feeding in a large Acacia tree near Podor © Frank Lambert

A quick visit to the river near our hotel provided us with excellent views of Horus Swifts that were visiting unseen holes in the riverbank of the El Dour River. We also unexpectedly saw a Red-throated Bee-eater here, a species normally only encountered near the Gambia River during this tour, whilst Pied Kingfishers hovered nearby over the river.

After lunch, we visited a mostly agricultural area with some flooded areas of trees. This was teeming with small passerines as well as good numbers of waterbirds including Hamerkop, hundreds of migrant shorebirds such as Little Stints, Marsh Sandpipers and Wood Sandpipers, and a single Common Snipe. There were also good numbers of herons and egrets including both Squacco and Purple Herons.

This area also produced our first 'rarity', a Gabar Goshawk, as well as our only male Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark of the tour. The large trees in the area hosted at least 30 Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters along with a confiding pair of Yellow-crowned Gonoleks, Vieillot's Barbets, African Collared Doves and African Green Bee-eaters. A partially hidden Nile Monitor lizard was also seen on the side of a large tree above the water.



A pair of Yellow-crowned Gonoleks near Podor © Frank Lambert



Village Indigobird was a commonly encountered bird during the tour © Frank Lambert

Large groups of mixed seedeater flocks frequented the agricultural fields and edge of the wetlands including good numbers of non-breeding plumage Northern Red Bishops, Red-billed Queleas, Village Indigobirds, Little Weavers, Red-cheeked Cordon-Bleus, along with a few 'Spanish' Yellow Wagtails (*iberiae*) and 'Blue-headed' Yellow Wagtails (*flava*). We stayed in this very birdy area until dusk, before returning to our hotel in Podor.

Sunday 18th January

Mainly cloudy during the morning, relatively cool



Confiding Temminck's Coursers were seen near Richard Toll © Frank Lambert

This morning we left Podor to travel towards Richard Toll. En route, we stopped for more views of Little Grey Woodpecker, and a group of Anteater Chats, before heading into a mosaic of desert and agricultural areas. Here, we had prolonged views of at least 20 Chestnut-bellied

Sandgrouse and at least five wonderful Temminck's Coursers. Using our vehicle as a hide, we were able to get very close to both species.

The area also produced both Great Grey and Woodchat Shrikes, along with a few wintering Palearctic warblers and good numbers of Crested Larks. Heading onwards, we stopped to scan some hedgerows bordering small enclosures where we found a couple of Long-tailed Nightjars, along with a Standard-winged Nightjar and some wary Spotted Thick-knees. During lunch, we had more views of Verreaux's Eagle Owl sitting in the open at our restaurant.



Spotted Thick-knee, which are mostly crepuscular, often frequent hedgerows during the day © Frank Lambert

After lunch, we headed southwards, before heading inland near the coastal town of St Louis to an area of Acacia woodland near Trois Marigots. Here, after about 30 minutes, we found our main target in this area, a Savile's Bustard, which showed well for about 20 minutes. This is a species that is now very difficult to see outside of Senegal.



Male Savile's Bustard in the Acacia woodland near Trois Marigots, St Louis © Frank Lambert

After our success in finding the bustard, we travelled back to St Louis and checked into our hotel just outside of town. We spent the late afternoon looking around the hotel gardens.

Monday 19th January

Cool cloudy start, later becoming sunny, dry

Rising early, we had an excellent breakfast before dawn before departing for Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary, about 1.5 hours' drive to the north. Djoudj is undoubtedly the most important freshwater wetland in this part of Africa, supporting some 1.5 million waterbirds during the northern winter, and is a designated Ramsar Site as well as a UNESCO World Heritage Area. It has extensive reed beds, freshwater lakes and canals, and dry sandy areas with grassland and scattered bushes. Many of the wetland species here are northern migrants, which spend most of the winter in the safety of this protected area.

Arriving just outside the park just after dawn, we were immediately rewarded with incredible numbers of waterbirds, dominated by huge flocks of White-faced Whistling Duck. Other species included Northern Shoveler and Northern Pintail, whilst the shallows were occupied by Greater and Lesser Flamingos, and a variety of wintering waders such as Common Ringed Plover, Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint and a few Pied Avocets.

Entering the park, we spent the first couple of hours concentrating on finding Arabian Bustard, now down to only 1-2 pairs, but sadly, like most visiting birders, we failed to see any. During this time, the number of Sand Martins had been increasing, and soon there were hundreds of thousands, which through binoculars looked like swarms of mosquitos.



Good numbers of Long-tailed Cormorants are found in Djoudj Bird Sanctuary © Frank Lambert

Moving to the edge of the huge lake, we were again watching an impressive assemblage of waterbirds. Good numbers of Greater and Lesser Flamingos were present, along with herons, egrets, cormorants, and White Pelicans, many of which were circling above us. Waders along the lakes' edges included a Kentish and many Kittlitz's Plovers. Among the many ducks were Fulvous Whistling Duck and three Marbled Teal, spotted by Liz. We also saw Common Patas Monkeys, African Golden Wolves and Common Warthogs during the morning.



We saw several African Golden Wolves in the Djoudj Bird Sanctuary © Frank Lambert

Djoudj is a major tourist attraction, largely on account of its large colony of Great White Pelicans, which is easily approached by boat. This is where we headed next, prior to lunch. During the journey to the pelican colony, we saw a close African Fish Eagle, Western Marsh Harriers and Ospreys along with good numbers of herons, cormorants and African Darters plus at least 12 African Pygmy Geese and a few Caspian Terns.

After lunch just outside the reserve, we returned to the flat grassy areas near the lake, where we found a few Montagu's Harriers, Orange-breasted (Zebra) Waxbills, African Stonechats, Crested Larks, and at least 40 Black-crowned Cranes. We also had good flight views of a Peregrine Falcon of race *pelegrinoides*.

Whilst these species are to be expected, what we hadn't expected to see was an amazing swarm of locusts, streaming past some nearby dunes. Locusts were everywhere, and these had evidently attracted many Common Kestrels, with at least 250 seen including a kettle of about 130 birds feeding over the area where the locusts had gone. Kestrels were seen swooping down to the ground, picking off locusts each time. As the light faded, we headed back to our comfortable hotel near St Louis.



Great White Pelicans swarmed around our boat as we approached their breeding colony in Djoudj © Frank Lambert

Tuesday 20th January

Mainly sunny, dry, hot, but cool at first

After another excellent breakfast, we headed to the Senegal River estuary near St Louis. Here, in some tidal creeks, we had excellent close-up views of Eurasian Spoonbills and several species of egret, as well as Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers. The river itself, with its' tidal flats and sandbanks, was full of birds, including Slender-billed and Grey-headed Gulls, along with smaller numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Pink-backed Pelicans were relatively common, as were Western Reef Egrets and cormorants and an assortment of wintering shorebirds.



Marsh Sandpipers fed on the edge of Red Mangroves close to the Senegal River at St Louis © Frank Lambert

These including Eurasian Oystercatcher, Ruddy Turnstone, Whimbrel, Little Stint, Sanderling, Common Redshank, Grey Plover, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwits, Kentish and Common Ringed Plovers, whilst Gull-billed, Caspian, Little and Whiskered Terns were also moving up and down the river or sitting on the sandbanks.



Eurasian Spoonbills and Western Reef Herons feeding in the Senegal River delta © Frank Lambert

In the hotel garden late morning, we saw a pair of Senegal Batis, Beautiful and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, Western Plantain-eaters, Black-headed Weavers and Sudan Golden Sparrows. After lunch we again visited Trois Marigots, this time concentrating on the wetlands. Here, we were

soon watching species like Collared Pratincoles, Senegal Thick-knees and Western Yellow Wagtails, which were dispersed over a large area of open mud.

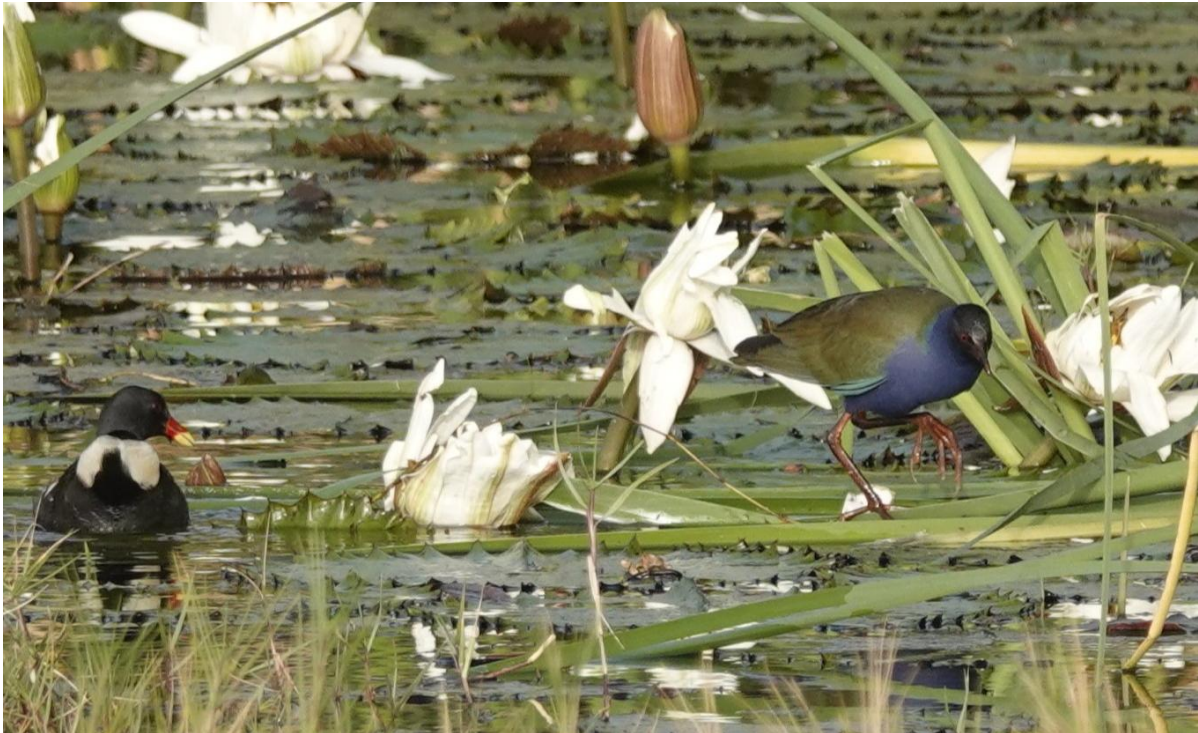


A Western Yellow Wagtail of the iberiae race seen at Trois Marigots © Liz Ackroyd

As we moved along the access road, we soon found a key target, River Prinia, which seems to like the abundant tamarisk bushes in the wetland. This prinia is a poorly-known species that is almost impossible to see outside of Senegal. The large open marshy vegetation bordering the reeds supported a myriad of species, including Black and Purple Herons, Black Crakes, African Purple Gallinules, African Jacanas and good numbers of the often-elusive Allen's Gallinule. Western Marsh Harriers and an Osprey were patrolling the marshes and Greater Swamp and Sedge Warblers were seen in the reedbeds.



River Prinia is relatively common in the wetlands of Trois Marigots © Frank Lambert



A Common Moorhen and an Allen's Gallinule in the wetlands of Trois Marigots © Frank Lambert

Wednesday 21st January

Mainly sunny, dry, hot

After breakfast, we headed towards Kaolack, with a few short stops on our route. Our aim today was to track down the enigmatic Quail-plover at a site where it had been seen to the east of Kaolack. As we headed southwards, it was noticeable that some species, like Chestnut-bellied Starlings were becoming rare, whilst others were much commoner.

En route we stopped to see a mixed assemblage of Rüppell's, Griffon and White-backed Vultures along with a single Lappet-faced Vulture that provided brief but close views in flight. During our journey, we also saw a Brown Snake Eagle and a confiding Pearl-spotted Owlet that was being mobbed by sunbirds and other smaller passerines. Also, a small group of one of the world's most unusual crows, Piapiac, were seen riding on the back of goats close to the road.

We checked into our hotel in Kaolack, on the banks of the Saloum River, where we had lunch, then headed onwards to our destination for the day about 30 minutes away. This area was typical of areas where Quail-plover is normally found, comprising a mosaic of small, scattered bushes and occasional Acacia trees, interspersed with short grasses or open soil, and mixed in with small agricultural plots that contained the remains of old crops such as maize. We began our search by slowly walking in an approximate line, spaced up to 10m apart, and quickly saw our first of several Desert Cisticolas, and a few Singing Bush Larks.



Piapiacs, a rather unusual corvid, were seen riding on goats on our journey to Kaolack © Frank Lambert



Singing Bush Lark (race chadensis) were common in the habitat frequented by Quail-plover © Frank Lambert

Unexpectedly, we also flushed three White-bellied Bustards on two occasions, getting excellent flight views. Finally, after some of the group had more or less given up, Carlos flushed a Quail-plover and, after getting everyone together, we made a concerted effort to find it on the ground before it flushed. This year, the higher density of bushes in the area made that more difficult, and although we had repeated views of the bird (perhaps two individuals) in flight, only a few of the group managed to see it on the ground. Nevertheless,

we had all seen it, and we returned to our hotel in Kaolack very satisfied with the birds seen on what had, essentially, been mostly a travel day.

Thursday 22nd January

Mainly sunny, dry, hot

As we were waiting for breakfast, we saw a Four-toed Hedgehog in the hotel grounds, a new species for everyone in our group, and rather a spectacular one. As we departed, remarkably tame herons, gulls, cormorants and Pink-backed Pelicans could be seen on the river adjacent to where we had our breakfast.

We continued our journey eastwards along the very busy main highway towards Tambacounda. We were now in the transition zone between the dry Sahel and the wetter Gambian forests to the south. The avifauna was changing, and during the day we began seeing species that would be commoner during the remainder of the trip, such as Western Plantain-eater, Black-billed Wood Dove, Senegal Parrot, Purple Starling and Senegal Eremomela.



A wonderful Four-toed Hedgehog seen as it was getting light at our hotel in Kaolack © Frank Lambert

A key bird that we encountered on the journey was Sahel Paradise Whydah, which parasitises Green-winged Pytilia. Two impressive breeding plumage males were seen near a watering hole that was attracting good numbers of weavers, sparrows and finches, including Cut-throat Finches, Sahel Bush Sparrows, Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks and several species of dove. We also found a Red-necked Falcon eating some prey nearby, perhaps a passerine caught near the watering hole.



A Vinaceous Dove near the watering hole where we stopped on route to Tambacounda © Frank Lambert

After a late lunch in Tambacounda, where we had amazing views of Speckled Pigeons, we headed to the final destination of the day, *Campement de Wassadou*, on the Gambia River, stopping to see our first group of Yellow-billed Shrikes on the way.



A very tame Speckled Pigeon seen during our lunch stop in Tambacounda © Frank Lambert



Yellow-billed Shrike near Wassadou © Frank Lambert

Shortly after arriving at Wassadou, most of the group boarded a small boat and headed upriver with Carlos. They spent the next hour enjoying close views of some greatly anticipated species, whilst the other group members birded near the camp.

Both groups saw Adamawa and Eurasian Turtle Doves during the afternoon – from the shore, the clients with Frank were able to count at least five Eurasian Turtle Doves and several Adamawa Turtle Doves coming to drink on a small island where bushes and short grasses were growing. As the light faded we enjoyed the peaceful location where we were staying and all agreed that, whilst rustic in nature, it was much better to stay here than to have to drive an hour back to a hotel in Tambacounda and then drive all the way back again very early in the morning.



Several species of kingfisher were seen on the Gambia River, including Grey-headed Kingfisher © Frank Lambert

Friday 23rd January

Sunny, dry, hot

Prior to breakfast, we looked for White-faced Owl, but didn't hear or see any. Then, following breakfast, after a large group of Northern Carmine Bee-eaters was seen overhead, we set off along the river trail. This produced good numbers and excellent views of Red-throated Bee-eaters, Brown Babblers, and our first Fine-spotted Woodpeckers.



An immature White-crowned Lapwing on the Gambia River at Wassadou © Frank Lambert

After about 40 minutes, the group split up, with most clients doing a boat trip on the Gambia River with Frank. A second trip was organised afterwards, so that everyone had an opportunity to do two trips on the river.

The boat rides produced an excellent selection of fantastic birds, including very tame Egyptian Plovers feeding on some small islands in the river. Whilst we had seen one the previous day, the views and light were far better in the morning. This is one of those species that is always exciting to see, especially when it is feeding less than five metres away! African Finfoot, another legendary bird, also provided superb views as did White-crowned and African Wattled Plovers. The most surprising sighting was a pair of colourful Violet Turacos that had come to the river edge to drink.



A pair of Violet Turaco's were seen coming to drink at the edge of the Gambia River at Wassadou © Liz Ackroyd

Again, lots of kingfishers were seen, including close views of the spectacular Giant Kingfisher, as well as good numbers of Blue-breasted, Grey-headed and Pied Kingfishers. Birds such as Hadada Ibis and Hamerkops all added interest to the river cruise, but sadly the Hippos we usually see here had gone down river, perhaps because the water level was considerably lower than usual. One mammal we did see very well, however, was a group of the restricted-range West African Red Colobus Monkeys.

When not on the river, clients spent time scanning for raptors and birding near the camp or along the river. Late afternoon we headed towards Tambacounda for the night, with some birding stops on route.

Overall, during the day, we saw a good selection of birds, including catch-up species for some people, with many birds giving excellent views and photographic opportunities. Newly encountered birds included species such as Double-spurred Spurfowl, Helmeted Guineafowl,

Hooded Vulture, Senegal Parrot, Black-winged Kite, Lizard Buzzard, Grasshopper Buzzard, Broad-billed Roller, Northern Puffback, Black-rumped Waxbill, Brown-throated Wattle-eye and a fantastic group of about 16 White-crested Helmetsrikes, surely one of Africa's most interesting social species. They, along with a lot of sunbirds, were mobbing a Pearl-spotted Owlet that we had called in.



An immature Black-winged Kite hunting from a perch near Tambacounda © Frank Lambert

Saturday 24th January

Sunny, dry, hot

We headed back west as soon as we had finished breakfast and after a few roadside stops, most notably for perched Wahlberg's Eagle and Dark Chanting Goshawk, drove down a dirt track where, after careful scanning, we found two pairs of Bronze-winged Coursers.



One of two pairs of Bronze-winged Coursers in a recently burnt area near Tambacounda © Frank Lambert

Not only was this a new bird for Frank (indeed, his last species of courser), but it was a species that we had never encountered on this tour before. We were able to watch them at close quarters from our vehicle without undue disturbance.

After lunch, we headed to Kousmar Island, a sanctuary in the middle of the Saloum River where tens of thousands of raptors spend the night. This is not only an amazing experience but also an adventure, since it involves walking a short distance, bare foot, through mud and then being paddled across the Saloum River in a small boat.

We arrived at the location for watching the Scissor-tailed Kites well before they had arrived and waited patiently in the shade. This year, the viewing area had moved significantly nearer to the bare trees where the kites and other raptors roost, and when the kites came, Frank had the impression that there were less birds than on previous visits, though there were still thousands of them.

As well as the Scissor-tailed Kites, both Common and Lesser Kestrels were seen sitting among the restless kites, with small numbers of Lesser Kestrels and Western Marsh Harriers seen passing overhead from time to time. Indeed, when we finally left near dusk, there were 150 or more Lesser Kestrels circling over the trees. As in previous years, even though the kites roost on this island in very large numbers, we never encountered any during our travels through the country.



Thousands of Scissor-tailed Kites flew in to roost on Kousmar Island in the Saloum River © Frank Lambert

Usually, a visit to Kousmar island does not produce other new birds for the tour, but on this occasion, we were delighted to see a superb roosting White-faced Owl, only 50m from where we were watching for the kites and other raptors.

Our final destination for the day was Toubakouta, which is where our guide, Carlos, lives and where we were based in a very pleasant hotel for the remainder of our tour.



A White-faced Owl on Kousmar Island © Frank Lambert

Sunday 25th January

Sunny, dry, hot

After a relaxed buffet breakfast, we boarded our boat from the hotel jetty to begin our exploration of the Saloum Delta, where we searched for the special birds that frequent this important wetland area. We soon reached the mangroves and, almost immediately, encountered an impressive Goliath Heron, one of several we would see during the morning. Our main target, however, was White-crested Tiger Heron, a species with a well-deserved reputation of being difficult to find, but that is probably easier to see in the Saloum Delta than anywhere else in the world.

We searched for this somewhat cryptic species by cruising slowly along the edges of the mangroves, especially along the taller stands along the smaller side channels in the estuary. Moving slowly, we concentrated our efforts on spotting one of these bulky herons waiting patiently for its prey whilst perching low in the mangroves as the tide dropped. Usually, it takes quite some time to find this species, but this year Carlos spotted one after only about ten minutes of searching. Initially, this individual was partly hidden, as is typical of the species, and sitting motionless on a larger horizontal branch, but careful manoeuvring of the boat soon provided us with unrestricted views.



This White-crested Tiger Heron gave amazing views as it perched on the roots of mangroves © Frank Lambert

Moving on, we found more Goliath Herons and another two tiger-herons in the next couple of hours, as well as Blue-breasted and Malachite Kingfishers and several Mangrove Sunbirds. Several waders were found along the mangrove edge, including Whimbrel, Common Redshank and Common Sandpiper.

Returning to the hotel for lunch, we then rested for a few hours. For those who weren't having a siesta, the gardens provided an opportunity to enjoy some of the commoner species such as Beautiful Sunbird, Grey-headed Sparrow, Village Indigobird, Village Weaver and Red-billed Firefinch.



Several Goliath Herons were seen in the mangroves of the Saloum Delta © Frank Lambert

In the late afternoon, we headed to an area not far from town, where we birded in an area on the edge of a large reedbed with scattered Cashew trees mixed with remnant native trees and scrub. Here we had excellent views of Yellow-billed Oxpeckers riding on the back of free-range domestic pigs, Senegal Coucal, Senegal Parrot, Rose-ringed Parakeet, White-crowned Robin-chat, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Brown Babbler, both Fine-spotted and African Grey Woodpeckers, Green Wood Hoopoe, Lavender Waxbill, African Golden Oriole, both Lesser and Greater Honeyguides, Yellow-billed Shrike, a partially hidden Verreaux's Eagle Owl and a wintering Melodious Warbler.

Monday 26th January

Sunny, dry, hot with a dusty haze caused by occasional strong winds

Prior to dawn, we spent almost an hour looking for Greyish Eagle Owl. Initially we heard one calling below the hotel, on the edge of the mangroves, but it was impossible to see within the dense vegetation. Walking around the area, we tried to call the owl or its mate in using playback, but it remained elusive. Finally, Carlos spotted one on the wall of a house near the edge of the mangroves, but it was slightly too far to illuminate properly in our torches. Nearing the hotel, we encountered some beautiful Bearded Barbets before having breakfast.

Later, we headed to the jetty for another boat trip, enjoying nice views of Red-chested and Wire-tailed Swallows around the jetty before departing. This time we were looking for birds on the mudflats rather than concentrating on the mangroves, but we still managed to see another White-crested Tiger Heron.

The extensive mudflats bordering the mangroves in the estuary support large numbers of birds, especially wintering Palearctic visitors. Whilst a lot of the smaller waders were too far to identify confidently with binoculars, there were still plenty of birds that were near enough. Whimbrel, Common Redshank, Common Ringed Plover, Grey Plover, Little Stint, Great Egret and Western Reef Heron were all common, whilst we also saw a few Greenshanks, Eurasian Oystercatchers, and a single Eurasian Curlew.

Also present in the estuary were small numbers of terns, including Caspian, Gull-billed and a couple of Sandwich Terns. A Palm-nut Vulture was also seen, feeding on what appeared to be a large dead fish on the mudflats, whilst we also had the bizarre sighting of a Purple Swamphen tiptoeing around on mangrove roots at the edge of the water.



Good numbers of Whimbrel were seen in the Saloum Estuary © Frank Lambert



A surprising find was a Purple Swamphen that seemed to be stranded on the edge of the mangroves © Frank Lambert

We also visited Sipo Island where we saw our first European and Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, a male Western Violet-backed Starling, Pallid Swift, and a Western Banded Snake Eagle.

After lunch, we visited some freshwater wetlands in an agricultural area near Keur Mama Lamina. Here, we began our search for Quailfinches, the speciality of this area, and after flushing a pair a few times, we eventually had excellent views of them on the ground.



The 'Black-faced' Quailfinches race atricollis are different to those to the south and east of the Congo Basin © Frank Lambert



African Jacanas were common in the wetlands near Keur Mama Lamina © Frank Lambert

Meanwhile, overhead good numbers of African Red-rumped Swallows and other hirundines hunted over the marshlands, whilst a diversity of waterbirds dotted the landscape. Birds in the wetlands included good numbers of African Jacanas, a few Green Sandpipers, African Sacred Ibis, Squacco Herons, 3-4 Yellow-billed Egrets, and a pair of Black-headed Heron.



Fine-spotted Woodpeckers were seen at a number of sites visited in the south © Frank Lambert

Tuesday 27th January

Mainly sunny, dry, hot. Dusty haze

After breakfast, we headed to some areas of scrubby 'wasteland' on the edge of town where we found good numbers of birds feeding in flowering bombax trees. These included Yellow-fronted Canaries, Northern Yellow White-eyes, Lavendar Waxbills and Senegal Parrots. Glossy starlings also frequented these trees, including Lesser Blue-eared Starlings which we were able to see alongside Purple Starlings.



Many Senegal Parrots were seen feeding at the flowers of large Bombax trees on our last morning © Frank Lambert

Other birds found during the morning included some confident African Golden Orioles, Bearded Barbets, Fine-spotted Woodpeckers, Northern Puffbacks, Lizard Buzzard, and Mottled Spinetails.

After lunch, we headed for Dakar, passing a few wetlands on route where we saw a lot of birds that had become familiar during the tour, such as Pink-backed Pelicans, Long-tailed Cormorants, Black-winged Stilts, Grey-headed Gulls, Western Reef Herons and other species that we had enjoyed during our visit. Likewise, we had our last views of roadside species like Chestnut-bellied Starling, Long-tailed Glossy Starlings, Senegal Coucal, Western Red-billed Hornbills, Abyssinian Rollers and a variety of doves, as Black Kites drifted gracefully in the skies above.



Abyssinian Rollers were seen on almost every day of the tour © Frank Lambert

Finally, we reached the international airport where we thanked our excellent local guide, Abdou Lo, and our extremely competent and helpful driver, before checking in for our flights to Madrid and onwards to Heathrow or Gatwick. Tomorrow we would be home, and probably missing the excitement of birding in Senegal, as well as the warm climate that we had experienced during this very successful tour to Senegal.



Searching for birds in the mangroves of the Saloum Delta © Frank Lambert