

Gambia

Naturetrek Tour Report

21 October - 1 November 2005

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Weather

Generally hot and humid, mostly sunny and still but overcast and surprisingly cool and breezy on the morning of day 4 after heavy overnight rain. The preceding rainy season had been rather average in strength and duration

Day 1

Friday 21st October

Our outbound flight from London Gatwick to Banjul was briefly delayed but we soon set off on a five and a half hour flight due south over Iberia, Morocco and the Sahara beyond. Yundum Airport was predictably hot and chaotic, not helped by the recent installation of a scanner for checking baggage leaving the airport (!) but we all eventually assembled with our bags, loaded the tour bus and drove the short distance to our accommodation at Paradise Inn, Tanji, the base for the first three nights. Several species were seen along roadside wires and in bushes and trees as we passed but all would be seen again in the coming days so we did not linger. While checking in, Sering, our superb local guide, began impersonating the calls of a Pearl-spotted Owlet which resulted in the tree above his head filling up with small birds, mostly Beautiful Sunbirds but, quite remarkably, also a very rare Green-headed Sunbird. There were still a couple of hours of daylight left which gave everyone a chance to settle in and wander in the leafy grounds. Inevitably, numerous new and interesting species were seen but the undoubted highlight was the discovery of a roosting White-faced Scops Owl just outside one of our chalets that allowed prolonged scope views and photo opportunities. The same bird was present each day we were at Paradise Inn and even came flying in through the open windows and around the restaurant on a couple of evenings, though other resemblances to the grand hall at Hogwarts were few.

Day 2

Saturday 22nd October

Birding in earnest began at Kotu Ponds, though early risers had already succeeded in seeing several good species in the gardens at Paradise Inn, including Snowy-crowned Robin Chats. At Kotu Ponds we were almost overwhelmed by the variety of species on show, migrant waders from the north mingled with noisy local Spur winged Plovers and African Jacanas and we had first views of numerous other species that would become familiar sights in the coming days. Highlights for many will have been the showy Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird before we soon moved on into the scrub and rice fields adjacent to nearby Kotu Creek. Here, a fine array of woodland species was found, including our first Common Gonoleks, Bearded Barbets, African Golden Orioles, Little Bee-eaters, African Silverbills and a Siffling Cisticola while the creek itself held some sleepy looking Senegal Thick-knees and several other waterbirds. A leisurely lunch break at the Sailor's Bar in Kotu was followed by a visit to a new site at Tujereng which promises to compensate for the loss of habitat in some traditionally visited areas. En route, a Levillant's Cuckoo sat on a post beside the bus and on disembarking we quickly saw both Tawny and Wahlberg's Eagles overhead. A short stroll along a recently cleared path (thanks Modou!) gave us great views of localised Red-winged Warblers, Orange-cheeked Waxbills, Pearl-spotted Owlets and superb pair of Red-necked Falcons before we emerged onto a more open track where three Yellow-billed Oxpeckers showed well. Retracing our steps to the bus found us watching a couple of Lavender Waxbills and two stunning Violet Turacos while back at the bus itself scanning around produced our first Didric Cuckoo and a Grey Kestrel. Back at Paradise Inn there was just time for a short potter about the gardens before darkness fell and some even saw a Giant Kingfisher flying past on the river. At no point had we been more than 30 minutes from base and in total we had barely walked two miles all day but the species total for the day came to a very respectable 121!

Day 3

Sunday 23rd October

First stop today was the famed Abuko Nature Reserve where a small fragment of the Gallery Forest that once covered most of this part of West Africa remains. A Common Wattle-eye on a nest above the ticket office was a good start to a bird rich morning. Along the first few hundred metres of path we succeeded in seeing a couple of ultra elusive Grey-headed Bristlebills and several other forest species while the view overlooking the crocodile pool at the visitors centre produced, among others, a few Black Crakes and a showy Red-billed Wood Dove. The rest of the morning was spent exploring the forest either side of the path just beyond the visitor's centre where several of the localised inhabitants of the forest eventually gave themselves up. Almost everyone managed views of a skulking Western Bluebill, several Little Greenbills and Violet Turacos were seen and, most uncharacteristically, a Green Hylia gave prolonged close views. A pair of Verreaux's Eagle Owls showed perfectly in the scope before we made our way back to the bus where a Snowy-crowned Robin Chat was bouncing along in the undergrowth as a Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher looked on. Leaving the shade of the forest revealed high temperatures but we soon reached the cover of Lamin Lodge where we had an extended lunch break, punctuated by the appearance of several Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters overhead. Batteries recharged, we set off for Mandina Fields, a short distance away, but not before stopping at a small marshy area near the lodge itself where Yellow-throated Longclaws have occasionally been seen. After a few minutes a Longclaw was seen in flight and shortly afterwards landed in full view where it remained for several minutes allowing everyone, including the local kids, to see it well in the scope. Just as we were about to leave, an immature Martial Eagle was spotted overhead amongst the abundant Hooded Vultures. Mandina Fields came to prominence last year when a pair of Greyish Eagle Owls were discovered there and we were pleased to find them still present and one showing exceptionally well. A very good variety of other species were found here including a Chestnut-headed

Sparrow Weaver, our first Black-crowned Tchagras, Vitelline Masked and Little Weavers and a Pied-winged Swallow that swooped down to drink from a puddle right next to the bus where an African Pygmy Kingfisher also briefly sat. However, the undoubted highlight after the owls was a good flight view of a very striking Black-bellied Bustard.

Day 4

Monday 24th October

Today saw the start of an up country journey that would take us virtually the full length of The Gambia in search of birds that do not occur near the coast. Delays in finding ice for the icebox and in collecting our sandwiches meant a later than planned departure but in unusually cool and overcast conditions the assembled group had an opportunity to see several good birds around the Paradise Inn car park, these included an obliging African Pygmy Kingfisher, a Levaillant's Cuckoo and several Pallid Swifts. After finally departing we found ourselves on good roads for about an hour before the surface suddenly disappeared altogether and we were on a bumpy dirt track, necessitating painfully slow progress, though heavy overnight rain meant that dust levels as we travelled along were much lower than the norm. Our first stop of consequence was at Kampant where we ate our sandwiches and scanned the skies for raptors. During an hour or so here we managed to see Wahlberg's, Tawny and Long-crested Eagles, a couple of Lanner Falcons and several African Harrier Hawks. The bus pulled to a sharp halt soon after as an immature Bateleur came drifting over the road and not too long after that we arrived at Brumen Bridge where another (more distant) Bateleur was on view and a small selection of waders and egrets kept us busy for half an hour. Grinding on towards Tendaba we finally arrived at the camp there and checked into our rooms before quickly re-boarding the bus for an evening visit to nearby Batelling Woods. The highlight at Batelling was the discovery of three Abyssinian Ground Hornbills but there was plenty else to see before we returned to camp for a welcome shower and a fine dinner.

Day 5

Tuesday 25th October

Soon after breakfast we were back on the bus for the long drive to Janjanbureh, though with several stops planned en route. The two hour journey to Soma is particularly tortuous due to the very heavily pot-holed roads but a good distraction came in the form of two more Abyssinian Ground Hornbills in a tree at about the half way point. We stopped at the floods just west of Soma for a leg stretch and found that our first two gorgeous Egyptian Plovers were on show, along with a Kentish Plover and a few Gull-billed Terns and Mosque Swallows; though a fly-by Brown-necked Parrot was a bit distant. The worst of the roads were nearly behind us and we made increasingly good progress beyond Soma and a leg stretch in a remote area of scrubby woodland west of our lunch stop at Sarebakary provided several good birds in the relatively short time we were there; a Brown-rumped Bunting was rather fleeting (though seen by several group members) but a couple of White-rumped Seedeaters and several Yellow-fronted Canaries were seen by all. Lunch was eaten under a large Mahogany tree at Sarebakary but plans for relaxation in the shade were thwarted somewhat by the appearance of a flock of White Helmet Shrikes and a Gabar Goshawk among several other interesting species. As the temperature began to subside just a little we set off once more with the intention of having no further stops until Kudang, but this being Gambia it wasn't long before we were stopping to look at an eagle in the top of a tree. This proved to be a Beaudouin's Snake Eagle, one of two in the area and while watching this attention was drawn to a mysterious burping noise that turned out to be a displaying Flappet Lark overhead. We eventually reached Kudang, or more accurately an area of parched scrub just outside the town, which we hoped would provide us with roosting Spotted Thick-knees. The Thick-knees were soon found hiding under a shady bush but not before our first-four

banded Sandgrouse had been seen. Positioning ourselves on a small hillock overlooking a rather bare Acacia, Sering and Osman began to imitate Pearl Spotted Owlets. The Acacia soon began to fill up with curious birds - and what birds! A pair of Red-winged Pytilias appeared almost immediately and gave good views and were shortly followed by their Green-winged cousin. While watching these a Yellow Penduline Tit popped up, as did several Northern Crombecs, a Melodious Warbler or two, our only Common Whitethroat and several Willow Warblers. We had stayed here far longer than intended but given the quality of the birds on offer the delay before leaving was fully justified. Soon afterwards we turned off the main road and entered the extensive rice fields and marshes of Jahally where waterbirds were abundant, especially herons and egrets, many of which were by now flying over to roost. A couple of Black-crowned Night Herons and Purple Herons were new, as were fleeting Reed and Sedge Warblers but the main highlights here were three African Pygmy Geese that flew past the parked bus and, just as we were leaving, a very rarely seen African Crake was spotted wandering along a track and gave quite prolonged views out in the open. A nearby waterhole contained a nice mix of plovers, including our first Black-headed but also a drinking African Hawk Eagle but we did not linger long as we wanted to be at our overnight accommodation at something like a reasonable hour. After racing along on good roads at dusk and a quick crossing by ferry onto McCarthy Island in darkness we were soon checking into Boabolong Camp at Janjanbureh (with all its 'rustic' charm!) for a one night stay.

Day 6

Wednesday 26th October

Breakfast at Boabolong Camp was interrupted by the appearance of a couple of Yellow-throated Leafloves and other species (including our only Garden Warbler) in trees around the garden. We soon boarded the bus once more however and set off on a day trip to Basse on, thankfully, very good roads. A flat tyre east of Bansang produced an enforced stop but provided us with good flight views of a Lizard Buzzard and a nice flock of White-throated Bee-eaters. We stopped very briefly in the centre of Basse to view a muddy and rubbish strewn stream where a single immaculate Egyptian Plover looked very out of place before pressing on to nearby Prufu Swamp. After some searching the hoped for Northern Carmine Bee-eaters were eventually discovered flying around at great distance. Through the scope it was just possible to make out the colour of the birds but the views were frankly disappointing. Several other bits and pieces were seen before we retired to the shade of Traditions Bar, overlooking the river and ferry crossing, to eat our sandwiches and sit out the heat of a particularly warm and sticky day. A couple of Western Olivaceous Warblers showed intermittently in a tree in the garden here and a Common Gonolek was rather showy hopping around on the lawn but a Rüppell's Griffon Vulture circling with Hooded Vultures was rather distant. Hitting the road back to Janjanbureh we soon found ourselves pulling up at a gathering of vultures at a carcass just outside Basse and enjoyed prolonged good views of several Rüppell's and White-backed Vultures at the roadside. Moving on we suffered another flat tyre and were briefly delayed while it was replaced with the second spare before arriving at Bansang Quarry and its splendid colony of Red-throated Bee-eaters. Plenty of time was spent admiring these great birds and a couple of Cinnamon-breasted Rock Buntings added extra spice to our visit to this very pleasant spot. Back at Janjanbureh our luggage had been loaded onto the boat that would ferry us for thirty minutes or so to Bird Safari Camp and we quickly set off there. The boat hugged the northern shore where African Finfoots have occasionally be seen but we were out of luck, though the journey was pleasantly relaxing as we sailed towards the setting sun and our first Swamp Flycatchers were seen in riverside vegetation. After an excellent dinner at Bird Safari Camp we went in search of the African Scops Owls that were calling all around and soon had a couple of good but rather brief views in the spotlight.

Day 7

Thursday 27th October

With the bus several kilometres away in Janjanbureh and Alhagi (our driver) enjoying a well deserved rest day, we were marooned at Bird Safari Camp for a day of birding on foot. An hour and a half before breakfast produced great views of a couple of Four-banded Sandgrouse and a couple of Northern Black Flycatchers among others but those who arrived back late for breakfast reported good views of Grey-headed Bush Shrikes too. We set off again straight after breakfast and found the Bush Shrikes attending a nest right next to the camp entrance where unusually good views of this normally difficult to see species were much appreciated. Other highlights before we returned for a lunch break (and for some a swim in the pool) were a Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike, at least three African Fish Eagles and a Didric Cuckoo, while a large flock of White-throated Bee-eaters circled overhead. Those who decided to sit overlooking the river during rest stops today enjoyed views of Hadada Ibis and, for one lucky person, a fly-by Shining Blue Kingfisher. Our evening walk followed the same general route as in the post-breakfast session and produced a Verreaux's Eagle Owl, an opportunity to get to grips with some tricky to identify Starlings (including Bronze-tailed) and good numbers of wintering European Turtle Doves before we returned to camp to enjoy the dusk gathering of Stone Partridges in the grounds.

Day 8

Friday 28th October

We departed Bird Safari Camp straight after breakfast with a long but interesting journey ahead of us before we reached Tendaba once more. Our boat transfer to Janjanbureh was rather action packed: an Oriole Warbler singing on the opposite bank to camp was eventually seen quite well, a Grey-headed Kingfisher was new and not long before we reached Janjanbureh the holy grail was found, an African Finfoot that we watched on and off for ten minutes at close range perched in mangrove roots and swimming in the open. Spirits were high. Alhagi was waiting for us on the north bank of the river and we soon loaded the bus and began to drive on flat dirt roads that allowed good progress to be made. A serendipitous short stop to pick up some water at Kuntaur saw us watching a flock of Northern Carmine Bee-eaters hawking low overhead and put the disappointing views at Basse well behind us - this really is a bird worth seeing well. By noon we were at Panchant, a wetland area with extensive reedbeds and open water either side of the road and some shady trees under which to eat lunch. A small flock of African Silverbills showed well here, as did a Subalpine Warbler and a few Black Crakes but pride of place went to the Giant Kingfisher, the first to be seen by all, that posed brilliantly on a roadside post. A couple of people also managed to see some Red-billed Queleas that Sering picked up in a distant weaver flock. A short distance away was Kaur wetland, one of the most spectacularly bird rich, but little visited, sites in the whole country. The shallow waters here attract many birds but have normally dried out completely by early to mid-November. We pulled up next to a huge flock of roosting Collared Pratincoles and began to scan through the assorted other waders present, very soon finding the first of several White-headed Lapwings at their only regular site in The Gambia. Like Egyptian Plovers, which were common here, sometimes running along the road, the Lapwings arrive in the rainy season when their breeding rivers further inland are in flood and return to the continent's scorching interior as soon as water levels begin to fall. Ruffs and Black-tailed Godwits were more familiar fare here but a Kittlitz's Plover was new, as was a juvenile Montagu's Harrier. A soaring flock of at least 50 Marabou Storks was a very high total for the time of year. At a small roadside waterhole nearby we encountered our first spectacular Paradise Whydahs and some saw a skulking Rufous Scrub Robin. Yet another flat tyre at Farafenni (three in one tour following none in the previous five tours!) resulted in a short delay before we reached the ferry to the south side of the river and began the final leg of our journey to Tendaba. Luck was on our side, a ferry had just arrived and had enough space for our bus so we made (by Gambian standards) rapid

progress to Soma. Here a short stop to get a spare repaired was followed by a gruelling couple of hours on the pot-holed roads between Soma and Tendaba where we arrived at 21.30 (having seen an African Civet en route) to find dinner waiting.

Day 9

Saturday 29th October

Despite our late arrival last night an early start was still required as today was the day of our Tendaba creek crawl, though this was hardly an energy sapping experience. We boarded our motorised pirogue at 0730 and headed off for a 4 and a half hour exploration of the mangrove creeks on the far side of the wide Gambia River. As the tide was rising we were able to enter the Mangroves at Tunku Bolon and negotiate our way through the flooded backwaters and exit at Kisi Bolon, always the preferred option here. A Goliath Heron at the mouth of Tunku Bolon was a bit skittish but before we eventually had good views of a perched bird several hours later some fantastic birds had been seen. Localised Mouse Brown Sunbirds (which only live in these *Rhizophorum* Mangroves) flitted about, though seldom lingered to allow good views and a Grey-headed kingfisher was seen before we rounded a corner to see an ultra rare White-crested Tiger Heron fly across the creek right in front of us. Soon after the hoped-for White-backed Night Herons were found, though they were roosting just out of reach. However, one very obligingly decided to get up and fly in a big circle around us so that all of its key features could be clearly seen. Soon after a couple of people had brief views of a perched owl just before it disappeared from view as the boat passed behind a wall of mangroves. By the time we got back it had sadly gone but by piecing together a description based on what different people had seen it seems that this may well have been a Pel's Fishing Owl - one that sadly got away. A singing African Blue Flycatcher was typically very elusive, showing well but briefly to just one group member but as we returned across the main river a flyover African Hobby was seen by all. After a quick lunch at Tendaba we were on the road again and undertaking the final leg of our upriver odyssey back to the coast, and Paradise Inn once more. Having already travelled this route coming the other way we knew what to expect from the roads - unlike some of the other drivers who had succeeded in running their vehicles right off the road or turning them on their sides, thankfully resulting in no serious injuries as far as we could tell. So, with Alhagi at the wheel we made slow but safe progress. A short stop at Brumen Bridge gave us a distant Giant Kingfisher and a close Bateleur as well as a flyover Long-crested Eagle. Our next stop for a leg stretch was near Sungajor where three African Pied Hornbill and our first Copper Sunbirds were seen, along with some more stunning White Helmet Shrikes, a couple of Yellow White-eyes and a showy male African Golden Oriole amongst others. We then pressed on as quickly as possible, reaching the surfaced roads near the coast soon after dark and arrived, finally, at Paradise Inn just before 8PM.

Day 10

Sunday 30th October

We still had two and a half days of birding at the coast ahead of us and this morning headed off to Pirang. Access here has been problematic for the last few years, sometimes possible and sometimes not since the area has once again become a working shrimp farm. It seems that the owners are cracking down still further and access to the roads around the ponds was impossible to negotiate. However, some local birders have set up a viewing post overlooking the area and most species can still be seen either from here or on paths around the perimeter and we enjoyed reasonable views of large numbers of Pelicans (including our first and only Eurasian White Pelicans), numerous herons and egrets (including our only Black Herons) and plenty of African Spoonbills and Yellow-billed Storks. Sadly, the local Black-crowned Cranes did not perform for us but given their suspected location may not have been accessible even if we had been allowed in to the shrimp farm proper. A Eurasian

Hobby showed well, quite a rarity in the Gambia, and Wire-tailed Swallows and Crested Larks were also new. A relaxing lunch break at Lamin Lodge was followed by a short visit to Yundum Woods, once a top site but now sadly degraded due to being built upon. The area still has some potential though and a Pied-winged Swallow and several Whistling Cisticolas showed that it is still attractive to some localised species but we decided to cut and run to Tanji in order to have a look at the Gulls, Terns and waders there for the rest of the afternoon. A roost was soon found and were able to compare Royal and Lesser-crested Terns side by side and see large numbers of Common, Sandwich and Caspian Terns too. Very distant views were had of a White-fronted Plover by a couple of people before it disappeared behind a ridge but Oystercatchers, Bar-tailed Godwits and Grey Plovers were all new for the list. At Tanji village itself we found numerous Sanderling on the beach but a fleeting Kelp Gull was followed by more prolonged views of a distant bird and a couple of Pomarine Skuas were watched before sunset approached and we drove the now very short distance back to Paradise Inn.

Day 11

Monday 31st October

Our final full day began with a visit to Marakissa, about 50 minutes drive away. During a couple hours strolling along the main track there we saw our first Black-Woodhoopoe and enjoyed excellent views of a perched Western Banded Snake Eagle along with a good selection of other woodland species, most of which posed well for the scope. At Marakissa Lodge we enjoyed cold drinks on the rooftop veranda and scanned the river for a Shining Blue Kingfisher reported by others the day before, unfortunately we failed to find it but a couple of Giant Kingfishers and at least six Malachite Kingfishers were a decent distraction. An extended lunch break back at Paradise Inn was followed by an evening visit to nearby Brufrut where we intended to stay late to look for Nightjars that had so far eluded us. Good numbers of Splendid Sunbirds were a particular feature of Brufrut but pride of place went to a superb Green Turaco that perched in full view for half a minute or more and up to half a dozen Violet Turacos that were similarly obliging. Other highlights before we took up our positions at an open area suitable for Nightjars were a Klaas's Cuckoo and a Pied-winged Swallow as well as up to four showy Fine-spotted Woodpeckers. Nightjars duly obliged with one Long-tailed showing well in the spotlight almost overhead but a couple of others defied certain identification though one was a suspected Standard-winged.

Day 12

Tuesday 1st November

With a final few hours to spare before packing and travelling to the airport, most of the group opted for a return visit to Tanji, though some decided to visit the Senegambia Hotel to see how the other half lived in Gambia and to take advantage of some excellent photographic opportunities offered by commoner species in the garden there. Tanji proved productive, our only Cardinal Woodpeckers were seen, along with a good range of other species in the trees and bushes, but most time was devoted to the shoreline and lagoon area. Terns were again present in good numbers and among a small collection of Lesser Black-backed Gulls a single adult Kelp Gull stood out prominently. Best of all though was a single White-fronted Plover that eventually gave very good views to those (most of us!) who had missed it on our earlier visit. Alhagi delivered us to the airport in time to miss the arrival of numerous tourist buses and after a quick check-in there was time for a spot of lunch and to sit and chat at the outside bar until our flight back to London was called.

Systematic List

Species order, taxonomy and nomenclature generally follows Barlow et al's A Field Guide to the Birds of The Gambia (Helm, 1997) unless the treatments there differ significantly from those in Demey and Borrow's The Birds of West Africa (Helm, 2002) which is then followed instead. Alternative names are given when confusion is possible. Figures in brackets refer to the number of full days on which each species was recorded.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis capensis* (1:10)

Only found at the regular site at Kotu Ponds where two (including a juvenile) were present

Long-tailed Cormorant *Phalacrocorax africanus africanus* (9:10)

Frequently seen at all wetlands of any size with over 100 at Pirang being the largest gathering

African Darter *Anhinga rufa* (9:10)

Small numbers were found at most wetlands visited

Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* (1:10)

At least 30, including about 10 juveniles, were seen at Pirang where they dwarfed the commoner Pink-backed Pelicans

Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens* (9:10)

Seen in generally small numbers at a few larger wetlands (though with about 200 at Pirang) and at a breeding colony near Tendaba, but most often seen soaring around while we were driving along

White-crested Tiger-Heron *Tigriornis leucolophus* (1:10)

One flew across the creek right in front of us at Tunku Bolon after being disturbed from a small creekside bush. This is a very seldom seen species that had not been recorded on a Naturetrek tour to The Gambia for at least five years, if ever

White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus* (1:10)

One of two present in a bush we just couldn't quite reach at Tunku Bolon obliged by flying around allowing its key features to be clearly seen

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (4:10)

Only seen well inland, particularly in the vicinity of Janjanbureh, in total about 15 were noted

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* (9:10)

Quite common in wetlands with plenty of emergent vegetation, over 150 were seen in total

Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis ibis* (8:10)

Locally common, usually seen in the company of livestock or when flying to roost, several hundred at Jahally was the highest count

Striated Heron *Butorides striatus atricapillus* (8:10)

One or two were seen at most wetland but about 10 were found at Pirang

Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca* (1:10)

Only seen at Pirang, and then mostly in flight but a couple on the ground gave decent scope views and one performed its canny little umbrella routine

Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis schistacea* (9:10)

All wetlands seemed to hold a few with at least 60 being present at Pirang. We identified no white-morph individuals but did not really try to

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta garzetta* (6:10)

Rather less common and widespread than the preceding species and some of those seen less well may actually have been white-morph Reef Egrets

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia brachyrhynchus* (5:10)

Localised, though some may have been overlooked. One was at Kotu Creek on our first morning but apart from a couple here and there the large majority were seen during the Tendaba creek crawl where they are always found.

Great Egret *Egretta alba melanorhynchos* (8:10)

Seen in small numbers at most larger wetlands with daily maxima of 10 at a few sites

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea purpurea* (3:10)

After three at Jahally, further singles were seen at Tendaba and Pirang, all were juveniles

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea cinerea* (10:10)

Common and widespread, found in almost all wetlands visited though with a maximum count of 20 at Pirang

Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala* (10:10)

Quite common and widespread though often in slightly lower numbers than the preceding species, over 70 were recorded

Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath* (2:10)

One was seen rather distantly in flight at Lamin Lodge by some of group but everyone had great views of a perched bird at Kisi Bolon, one of two seen during our Tendaba creek crawl

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta umbretta* (8:10)

A handful were present at almost all damper areas visited

Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis* (3:10)

Small groups were seen at Kampant and Kaur but over 20 gave good flight views at Pirang

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus microscelis* (2:10)

A couple at Brumen Bridge on our outward journey were followed by about 20 during the Tendaba creek crawl

Marabou Stork *Leptoptilos crumeniferus* (3:10)

A couple of soaring birds were seen between Tendaba and Georgetown during our outward journey, two were seen perched just north of Georgetown but about 50 soaring over Kaur was a notably large gathering

Hadada Ibis *Bostrychia hagedash brevirostris* (2:10)

One or two were seen by a few people on a couple of occasions at Bird Safari Camp

African Spoonbill *Platalea alba* (3:10)

After a couple of small flocks were seen in flight at Tendaba this was found to be quite common at Pirang where at least 25 were seen, again mostly in flight

White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata* (6:10)

A couple at Kotu Ponds on our first morning were followed by larger numbers at Brumen Bridge, Soma, Jahally, Tendaba and Pirang where a high count of 40 was made.

Spur-winged Goose *Plectropterus gambensis gambensis* (4:10)

A couple in flight at Tendaba Camp were followed by larger numbers (up to 50) at Kaur and especially during the Tendaba creek crawl; a couple more were at Pirang

African Pygmy Goose *Nettapus auritus* (1:10)

Three were seen in flight next to the parked bus at Jahally

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus haliaetus* (9:10)

Most conspicuous at the coast were at least a couple were seen each day though with others found right throughout the country

Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus caeruleus* (1:10)

One seen very briefly from the moving bus on day two was, surprisingly, the only one seen by the main group although those who visited the Senegambia Hotel on the final morning had good views of one there

Yellow-billed (Black) Kite *Milvus (migrans) parasitus* (3:10)

Scarce, singles were at Bird Safari Camp, Farafenni and Tendaba; all were adults of the African yellow-billed form that some regard as a separate species (Yellow-billed Kite) from migratory birds from Europe

African Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer* (3:10)

At least four birds (two adults, a sub-adult and a juvenile) were around Bird Safari Camp and further adults were at Tendaba and Farafenni Crossing

Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis* (9:10)

A total of 13 were seen at very widespread sites

Hooded Vulture *Necrosytes monachus monachus* (10:10)

Common, the most frequently seen large soaring bird by far with several hundred seen most days except around Bird Safari Camp where it was rather scarce

African White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* (5:10)

Encountered quite regularly inland, the highlight being about 15 settled birds at a carcass near Basse, most were young birds. About 50 were recorded in total

Rüppell's Griffon Vulture *Gyps rueppellii rueppellii* (2:10)

After a rather distant flying bird was watched from Traditions Bar at Basse, a gathering of at least thirty birds at a carcass just outside town were very welcome and gave excellent views. A couple of others were seen in flight near Bird Safari Camp

Beudouin's Snake Eagle *Circaetus beudouini* (1:10)

A pair showed very well in and above roadside trees west of Kudang

Brown Snake Eagle *Circaetus cinereus* (4:10)

Four singles were seen inland after the first at Kampant

Western Banded Snake Eagle *Circaetus cinerascens* (1:10)

A juvenile perched in a tree at Marakissa showed well and was a lucky find as this is an elusive species

Bateleur *Terathopius exaudatus* (4:10)

More than usual were seen. The first was a juvenile right over the road between Kampant and Brumen Bridge, a distant adult was at Brumen Bridge soon afterwards, another was at Soma, one was near Kudang and one near Basse before an adult showed very well over Brumen Bridge on our return there

African Harrier Hawk *Polyboroides typus pectoralis* (7:10)

One of the more frequently seen large raptors with about 30 seen in total at very widespread locations, in several cases adults were accompanying juveniles

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* (1:10)

A juvenile was watched at Kaur

(Western) Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus aeruginosus* (5:10)

In total five were recorded, mostly at wetter sites such as Pirang and Kaur

Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar* (4:10)

One showed well in the lunch tree at Sarebakary and another three were seen more briefly at scattered sites, mostly well inland

Dark Chanting Goshawk *Melierax metabates metabates* (6:10)

Fairly common inland where most were seen perched prominently as we drove along. Displaying birds were over Prufu Swamp and Panchant. In total just over 20 were recorded

Shikra *Accipiter badius sphenurus* (9:10)

Quite common and very widespread, seen in small numbers just about everywhere we went. About 25 were recorded though this may have included some duplication

Grasshopper Buzzard *Butastur rufipennis* (2:10)

One soaring over during lunch at Sarebakary was followed by good views of a perched bird as we approached Farafenni

Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus monogrammicus* (5:10)

Although quite often heard, this species often perches unobtrusively and remains unseen although we were able to enjoy good views of at least six birds, especially near the coast

Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax belisarius* (5:10)

At least six were seen after the first at Tujereng, most of which were found during the outward leg of our up-country trip

Wahlberg's Eagle *Aquila wahlbergi* (4:10)

The six seen were at very widespread locations

African Hawk Eagle *Hieraetus spilogaster* (2:10)

Four were seen well inland including an adult giving very good views on the ground at waterhole near Jahally

Long-crested Eagle *Lophaetus occipitalis* (3:10)

Singles were seen in flight at Kampant, near Bansang and at Brumen Bridge as we returned towards the coast

Martial Eagle *Polemaetus belliosus* (1:10)

The bus was quickly evacuated when Sering picked up a soaring juvenile near Lamin just as we were about to leave, it gave prolonged but somewhat distant views

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus tinnunculus* &/or *rufescens* (2:10)

Singles were seen from the moving bus near Lamin and Farafenni

Grey Kestrel *Falco ardosiaceus* (9:10)

Most frequently seen well inland where up to six per day were counted but seen throughout with a grand total of about 25 noted

Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera ruficollis* (3:10)

We enjoyed several excellent views of six of these attractive little falcons at various sites after the first at Tujereng

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo subbuteo* (1:10)

A juvenile flew right over us at Pirang allowing its white cheeks and heavily streaked belly to be clearly seen; this is a seldom seen species in The Gambia, having been seen only once before in the previous five Naturetrek tours

African Hobby *Falco cuvierii* (3:10)

Singles were seen at Tendaba on two occasions and one was near Boabolong Camp

Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus abyssinicus* (4:10)

A total of six were seen, mostly inland

Stone Partridge *Ptilopachus petrosus petrosus* (4:10)

More often heard than seen though several showed well in the grounds of Bird Safari Camp and one posed in a tree at Brufrut

[Ahanta Francolin *Francolinus achantensis achantensis*

As usual this species was heard but not seen, both at Abuko and, more unusually, at Tanji]

Double-spurred Francolin *Francolinus bicalcaratus bicalcaratus* (9:10)

Much more often heard than seen although at least a couple were seen on most days and several gave good views out in the open on woodland tracks

African Crane *Crex egregia* (1:10)

One walked along the verges of a track at Jahally just before sundown allowing us to watch it from the (relative) comfort of the bus, it even crossed the track a couple of times to ensure everyone could see it clearly. This species had not been seen on a Naturetrek tour to The Gambia for at least five years

Black Crane *Amaurornis flavirostra* (3:10)

Between two and four showed well at Abuko, one was at Jahally and a further three were at Panchant

African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis senegalensis* (1:10)

We were very fortunate to come across a showy female along the riverbank between Bird Safari Camp and Janjanbureh; always one of the most sought after of Gambia's birds but rarely seen, and even more rarely seen so well

Black-bellied Bustard *Eupodotis melanogaster melanogaster* (1:10)

Thanks to the persistence of Modou and Osman we were able to enjoy an extended flight view of a male of this difficult to find species

African Jacana *Actophilornis africana* (7:10)

Small numbers were seen at virtually all wetland sites with plenty of emergent vegetation, the highest count was of 10 at Jahally

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus ostralegus* (1:10)

Only seen at Tanji were a handful were present

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus himantopus* (7:10)

After 10 at Kotu on our first morning smaller numbers were seen at several wetlands throughout

Senegal Thick-knee *Burhinus senegalensis* (9:10)

Almost all wetlands of any size held several birds

Spotted Thick-knee *Burhinus capensis maculosis* (1:10)

Two were found roosting under bushes at a regular location near Kudang and one showed well in the scope

Egyptian Plover *Pluvialis (or Pluvianus) aegyptius* (3:10)

Despite its name this stunning species remains Gambia's signature species. Three at Soma were followed by a couple at Basse but the icing on the cake came at Kaur where up to 30 gathered, some of which ran along the road

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola pratincola* &/or *fuellerborni* (2:10)

A couple were high overhead at Soma but a gathering of about 4000 at Kaur showed to perfection. It seems likely that the birds that gather here each October are of the European race *pratincola* rather than intra-African migrants and if so this site therefore represents a major migration stopover for the rapidly declining European population

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* (4:10)

About 20 were at Brumen Bridge, the Tendaba creeks and Tanji with a single at Kaur

Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius pecuarius* (1:10)

One was among the Pratincoles at Kaur

Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus* (2:10)

One at Soma was followed by a couple at Brumen Bridge on our return there

White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus meadowi* (1:10)

After a fleeting and distant view by some during our first visit to Tanji it was nice to be able to watch one at leisure at much closer range on our return there

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* (1:10)

Only seen at Tanji where half a dozen were present

African Wattled Lapwing *Vanellus senegallus senegallus* (6:10)

The largest gathering was of 50 or more at Kaur, otherwise smaller numbers were found at widespread locations, always in the vicinity of water

White-headed Lapwing *Vanellus albiceps* (1:10)

At least 30 of these very striking birds were at Kaur, their only regular site in the country. All have normally left by the first few days of November so this species is hardly ever seen by visiting birders and is hard to access elsewhere in its range

Black-headed Lapwing *Vanellus tectus tectus* (5:10)

After the first 15 or so at a roadside waterhole near Jahally, small numbers of this dry country species were seen at a handful of sites well inland

Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus* (10:10)

Common and widespread with a peak count of 200 at Kaur

Sanderling *Calidris alba* (1:10)

A couple of hundred were chasing waves at Tanji

Little Stint *Calidris minuta* (1:10)

A couple at Brumen Bridge were the only ones seen

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* (2:10)

One was at Brumen Bridge and up to 20 were seen during the Tendaba creek crawl

Dunlin *Calidris alpina schinzii* (1:10)

Two were at Brumen Bridge when we returned there

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* (3:10)

10 at Kaur were followed by a couple opposite Tendaba and at Pirang

Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago gallinago* (2:10)

Three in flight at Jahally were followed by a couple at Pirang

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa limosa* (2:10)

Kaur and Pirang held four and nine respectively

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica lapponica* (1:10)

About 10 were at Tanji on each visit

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus phaeopus* (6:10)

Quite common at the coast but the highest count came from the creeks opposite Tendaba where at least 40 were present

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus totanus* (3:10)

One at Kotu Ponds was followed by about 10 at Tendaba and 20 at Pirang

Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatillis* (3:10)

Singles were at Soma, Kaur and Tendaba

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* (7:10)

Over 50 were seen at a wide range of wetlands visited

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* (7:10)

Just under 20 were seen at various wetlands

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* (2:10)

A couple were at Kotu Ponds and a flock of ten flew over at Jahally

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* (9:10)

About 40 were seen in total with birds present at almost all wetlands visited

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres interpres* (2:10)

Half a dozen at Pirang were followed by up to 100 at Tanji

Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* (1:10)

A couple of rather distant birds off Tanji were the only ones seen

Grey-headed Gull *Larus cirrocephalus poiocephalus* (5:10)

Only seen at the coast, especially around Tanji where several hundred were always present. Birds roosting in trees at the fishing village at Tanji were an odd sight!

Kelp Gull *Larus dominicanus vetula* (1:10)

Predictably enough all three sightings came from Tanji; two rather fleeting or distant views (of an adult and near adult) were followed by good views of an adult roosting with Lesser Black-backs on our final morning

Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus intermedius* & *gracilis* (2:10)

One was at Pirang but at least 30 assembled at Tanji on each of our visits

Gull-billed Tern *Sterna nilotica nilotica* (6:10)

Small numbers were seen at various wetlands away from the coast with a total of 15-20 noted

Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* (4:10)

Records of a couple at Brumen Bridge on both visits were eclipsed by a gathering of over 40 at Tanji. A couple more were seen at Pirang

Royal Tern *Sterna maxima albidorsalis* (1:10)

Up to 100 gathered to roost at Tanji on both visits

Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis* (1:10)

Small numbers were scattered amongst the commoner Terns at Tanji and some nice comparisons with Royal Terns were had, at least 5 were seen

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis sandvicensis* (3:10)

Up to 40 were in the large tern roost at Tanji, earlier a couple had been seen off Kotu and at Lamin Lodge

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo hirundo* (1:10)

Only seen at Tanji were up to 200 were roosting on both visits

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons albifrons* &/or *guinea* (2:10)

About 40 flew upriver at Tendaba on the evening of our first visit and about 10 were seen at Pirang

Black Tern *Chidonias niger niger* (2:10)

One was at Kotu ponds on our first morning and a handful were seen on each of our visits to Tanji

Four-banded Sandgrouse *Pterodes quadricinctus* (2:10)

After the first was seen at Kudang another two were at Jahally the same evening and particularly close views of a pair were enjoyed at Bird Safari Camp

African Green Pigeon *Treron calva nudirostris* (1:10)

A couple were seen briefly at Tujereng and singles were seen in flight at Paradise Inn on our first evening and at Tanji on our final morning

Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia* (4:10)

A total of just over 10 were noted well inland after the first at Batelling Woods

Red-billed (or Blue-spotted) Wood Dove *Turtur afer* (2:10)

Two were seen briefly at Tujereng but next day at Abuko we had good views of up to three birds

Black-billed Wood Dove *Turtur abyssinicus* (10:10)

Common and very widespread though more often heard than seen

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* (2:10)

Two or three at Kudang were followed by a couple that remained briefly at the waterhole near Kaur, this species is more common in drier years and can be completely absent until December in the wettest years, so, given that the rains had been average this year the numbers seen were typical

Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea guinea* (10:10)

Common and very widespread

Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* (10:10)

Common and very widespread

African Mourning Dove *Streptopelia decipiens shelleyi* (9:10)

Rather less common than Red-eyed or Vinaceous Doves but still seen frequently, at least when looked for

Vinaceous Dove *Streptopelia vinacea* (10:10)

Very common and very widespread, probably the most commonly seen of all species after Village Weaver

European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur turtur* &/or *areniola* (1:10)

Only seen near Bird Safari Camp where up to 30 were seen in flight and one in particular showed very well perched in a tree

Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis senegalensis* (10:10)

Very common and very widespread

Brown-necked Parrot *Poicephalus robustus fuscicollis* (1:10)

A distant flying bird at Soma was our only encounter with this rare and elusive species; views were good enough to see its tell-tale turquoise rump but not much else!

Senegal Parrot *Poicephalus senegalus senegalus* (10:10)

Quite common and very widespread, at least 60 were seen

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri krameri* (9:10)

Common and widespread with an average of about 20 per day seen

Green Turaco *Tauraco persa buffoni* (1:10)

One gave excellent views at Brufrut as it perched low down in a fairly sparsely vegetated tree. This excellent species is more usually found at Abuko, where views are seldom so good, but seems to be colonising Brufrut now that the vegetation there is being allowed to mature. Some authorities consider Gambian birds a separate species (Guinea Turaco) from Green Turacos further east as they have a different facial pattern and are probably geographically isolated

Violet Turaco *Musophaga violacea* (4:10)

This wonderful species was seen at Tujereng (2), Abuko (c6), Bird Safari Camp (1) and at Brufrut where up to six gave great views out in the open in perfect evening light

Western Grey Plantain-eater *Crinifer piscator* (10:10)

Very common and widespread

Levaillant's Cuckoo *Oxylophus levaillantii* (8:10)

After the first near Tujereng this species was seen regularly in small numbers with just under 20 being recorded in total

African Cuckoo *Cuculus gularis* (2:10)

Singles were seen near Soma and Panchant

Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* (2:10)

Singles of this easy to miss species showed well at Mandina Fields and Brufrut

Didric Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx captius* (2:10)

One showed well at Tujereng and two were near Bird Safari Camp

Senegal Coucal *Centropus senegalensis senegalensis* (10:10)

Common and widespread with at least 10 per day typically seen

African Scops Owl *Otus senegalensis senegalensis* (1:10)

About half a dozen were calling around Bird safari Camp where one was spotlighted briefly before we left it in peace

White-faced Owl *Ptilopsis leucotis leucotis* (6:10)

One was found roosting in a tree outside one of our chalets at Paradise Inn where it could be regularly found thereafter. What was presumably the same bird even came flying into and around the restaurant building on a couple of evenings

Greyish (Spotted) Eagle Owl *Bubo (africanus) cinerascens* (1:10)

One of a pair found only last year at the Mandina fields gave excellent views in its roost tree. Birds in West Africa (dark-eyed *cinerascens*) are now generally regarded as a separate species from pale-eyed Spotted Eagle Owls *Bubo africanus* from more eastern and southern areas although the two were long regarded as part of the same species. In its own right Greyish Eagle Owl is a rare and little known form.

Verreaux's Eagle Owl *Bubo lacteus* (2:10)

Two showed very well at Abuko and Sering conjured up another in a tree near Bird Safari camp

[Pel's Fishing Owl *Scotopelia peli*

Mixed emotions with this one. Some of the group had variable brief views of a perched bird that seems likely to have been this species just as our boat disappeared behind a wall of mangroves at Tunku Bolon, it was gone by the time we reversed to the place]

Pearl-spotted Owlet *Glaucidium perlatum perlatum* (5:10)

Almost all of the nine seen at widespread sites gave very good views

Long-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus dimacurus dimacurus* (2:10)

One seen very fleetingly as it flushed from the road near Soma was followed by good spotlight views of a flying bird at Brufut. Two other unidentified Nightjars were seen on the same evening

Mottled Spinetail *Telecanthura ussheri ussheri* (5:10)

Small numbers were seen at well scattered sites, though mainly inland

African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus parvus* (9:10)

Common and widespread

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus brehmorum* (3:10)

At least eight were seen at the coast in the first few days including a handful around Paradise Inn the morning after a night of heavy rain. Appearances by this species are very unpredictable

Little Swift *Apus affinis aerobates* (10:10)

Common and widespread, breeding colonies were noted at Traditions Bar, Basse and at Tendaba

Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala leucocephala* (3:10)

Singles were between Bird Safari Camp and Janjanbureh, at Tunku Bolon and at Marakissa Lodge

Blue-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon malimbica torquata* (4:10)

A total of just over 15 were seen after the first at Abuko, the largest concentration was of about 10 in the creeks opposite Tendaba

Woodland Kingfisher *Halcyon senegalensis senegalensis* (3:10)

Of the five noted three were at Batelling Woods near Tendaba with the others also well inland

Striped Kingfisher *Halcyon delicata delicata* (2:10)

Two at Mandina Fields were followed by one at Marakissa; others were heard at various sites

African Pygmy Kingfisher *Ceryx picta picta* (4:10)

An excellent haul with about eight of these diminutive beauties seen at scattered sites around the coast

Malachite Kingfisher *Alcedo cristata galerita* (6:10)

A little more common and widespread than the previous species and more obviously tied to water, about 15 were seen including six in the vicinity of Marakissa Lodge

Shining-blue Kingfisher *Alcedo quadibrachys quadibrachys* (1:10)

One group member had a clear view of a bird flying along the river at Bird Safari Camp. This species had not been seen on a Naturetrek tour to The Gambia for at least five years

Giant Kingfisher *Megaceryle maxima maxima* (4:10)

After the first was seen by just a couple of people flying down the river at Paradise Inn one gave superb views perched along the roadside at Panchant. Another was seen distantly at Brumen Bridge before two performed to perfection at Marakissa

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis rudis* (10:10)

Rather common and widespread with up to 20 per day seen at favoured wetland sites such as Tendaba and Pirang

Little Bee-eater *Merops pusillus pusillus* (6:10)

Most frequently seen near the coast where up to ten per day were found at Kotu, Tanji and Brufrut in particular. Inland birds were at the waterhole near Kaur and near Sungajor

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater *Merops hirundineus chrysolaimus* (3:10)

After the first at the waterhole near Kaur small numbers were then found at Lamin Lodge, Brufrut and Tanji

Red-throated Bee-eater *Merops bulocki bulocki* (3:10)

At least 100 were attending the spectacular breeding colony at Bansang Quarry with a couple more seen at Basse, Bird Safari Camp and near Kuntaur

White-throated Bee-eater *Merops albicollis* (4:10)

Over 70 were seen at various sites well inland, a surprisingly good total given that it had been quite a wet year as this species is primarily a dry season visitor from further north

Little Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis viridissimus* (2:10)

Two showed well on roadside wires as we returned to Janjanbureh from Basse and four were seen as we travelled towards Farafenni on the north bank of the river

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus chrysocercus* (1:10)

At least six were hawking over Lamin Lodge on our first visit there but thereafter birds were heard only at a couple of sites inland

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* (3:10)

About 20 were overhead at Soma, one was at our flat tyre stop en route to Basse and about ten were over the mangroves during the Tendaba creek crawl

Northern Carmine Bee-eater *Merops nubicus nubicus* (2:10)

Views of two birds in flight at Prufu Swamp (the only fairly reliable site for this species in October) were frankly disappointing due to the great distance involved so about 25 hawking around over the main street in Kuntaur as we pulled up to buy water there were a very welcome bonus

Rufous-crowned Roller *Coracias naevius naevius* (7:10)

About 20 were seen, making this the scarcest of the Rollers, at widespread sites but often along roadsides as we drove along

Blue-bellied Roller *Coracias cyanogaster* (6:10)

Quite common at the coast where about thirty were seen but absent further inland with the exception of a couple at Brumen Bridge

Abyssinian Roller *Coracias abyssinica* (6:10)

Common inland where about 10 per day were recorded, absent at the coast

Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus afer* (9:10)

Particularly prominent at the coast where a gathering of 15 at Brufut was a high total but seen everywhere in smaller numbers

Green Wood-hoopoe *Phoeniculus purpureus senegalensis* (8:10)

Quite common and widespread with about 60 recorded in total

Black Wood-hoopoe (or Black Scimitarbill) *Rhinoponastus aterrimus aterrimus* (1:10)

One responded to Sering's imitation of its call by flying to the top of a nearby tree allowing good views. Despite its common name and a clear (superficial) resemblance to Green Woodhoopoe, Scimitarbills are now thought not to be the closest relatives of the true Wood-hoopoes

Abyssinian Ground Hornbill *Bucorvus abyssinicus* (2:10)

This species is never easy to find, even in the dry season when ground vegetation is much sparser, so we were very lucky to come across three in trees at Batelling Woods and two more the next morning between Tendaba and Soma

Red-billed Hornbill *Tockus erythrorhynchus kenpi* (10:10)

Very common and widespread, particularly conspicuous at the coast but seen, and especially heard, everywhere. Some authorities regard the recently described race *kenpi* as deserving of specific status

African Pied Hornbill *Tockus fasciatus semifasciatus* (5:10)

A fleeting bird at Abuko was followed by good views of about ten more near Sungajor, Pirang and Brufrut

African Grey Hornbill *Tockus nasutus nasutus* (9:10)

Very common inland, where up to 30 per day were recorded, but much scarcer at the coast

Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus chrysoconus chrysoconus* (6:10)

Much more often heard than seen though half a dozen showed well at a range of wooded sites after the first at Kotu Ponds

Vieillot's Barbet *Lybius vieilloti buchmanii* (1:10)

A couple at the Mandina Fields were followed by two more at Tanji on our final morning

Bearded Barbet *Lybius dubius* (7:10)

Just over 20 of these spectacular birds were encountered in wooded contexts throughout

Greater Honeyguide *Indicator indicator* (2:10)

One seen briefly in flight at the Mandina Fields was far from satisfactory so it was nice when an immature perched in full view for a minute or so at Marakissa

Fine-spotted Woodpecker *Campethera punctuligera punctuligera* (2:10)

One at Tujereng was followed by a noisy group of four that showed very well at Brufrut, a couple of others were heard but not seen

Cardinal Woodpecker *Campethera fuscescens lafresnayi* (0:10)

A pair at Tanji on our final morning came as a welcome late bonus

Grey Woodpecker *Dendropicos goertae goertae* (8:10)

Around 20 were seen at widespread wooded sites

Flappet Lark *Mirafra rufocinnamomea buckleyi* (1:10)

One, perhaps two, birds were in display flight (including the diagnostic buzzing wing noise) over the road west of Kudang where we had stopped to look at Beaudouin's Snake Eagles. This species had not been seen on a Naturetrek tour to The Gambia for at least five years

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata senegallensis* (1:10)

Only seen at Pirang where half a dozen were present, some singing

Chestnut-backed Sparrow Lark *Eremopterix leucotis melanocephala* (1:10)

Four at Kaur were followed soon after by one at the waterhole near there

Fanti Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne obscura* (5:10)

Small numbers were seen in several wooded areas at the coast, especially Brufrut and Tanji where several perched for the scope

Mosque Swallow *Hirundo senegalensis senegalensis* (3:10)

One over Paradise Inn on our first evening was followed by another at Kampant before 10 gave good views coming down to drink at Soma, other distant birds may have been overlooked

Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo (daurica) domicella* (6:10)

Quite common inland, particularly around habitation, but absent at the coast. *H. d. domicella* differs from European birds in several small particulars of plumage and is sometimes regarded as a separate species, West African Swallow

Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii smithii* (3:10)

A couple were glimpsed from the moving bus at Kotu but about 30 at Pirang showed very well and next day about 10 were at Marakissa

Pied-winged Swallow *Hirundo leucosoma* (3:10)

Singles were seen at three sites: Mandina Fields, Yundum Woods and Brufrut. This species is easily missed, especially as it seems to be suffering from habitat loss and is very localised

Red-chested Swallow *Hirundo lucida lucida* (8:10)

Up to 10 per day were seen at widespread sites

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava flava, flavissima etc...* (3:10)

Localised; about 15 were at Panchant and Kaur with smaller numbers at Tendaba and Pirang. Subspecific identification in winter is difficult but males of *flavissima* were certainly seen as were presumed *flava*. None were heard giving the buzzy or rasping calls associated with southern European races

White Wagtail *Motacilla alba alba* (3:10)

One at Kotu was followed by eight at Farafenni Crossing and a couple at Pirang

[Plain-backed Pipit *Anthus leucophrys ansorgi*

Two flushed from a path at Pirang were unfortunately only seen by Sering]

Yellow-throated Longclaw *Macronyx croceus* (1:10)

One of these striking birds showed well near Lamin Lodge

Red shouldered Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina phoenicea* (1:10)

A male was watched for several minutes while foraging in a rather distant and very large tree near Bird Safari Camp

Little Greenbul *Andropadus virens erythropterus* (1:10)

As usual only seen in the dense dark Gallery Forest at Abuko were about half a dozen were seen, some rather well

Yellow-throated Leaflove *Chlorocichla flavicollis flavicollis* (2:10)

A couple showed to early risers at Boabolong Camp with others heard and glimpsed near Bird Safari Camp

Grey-headed Bristlebill *Bleda canicapilla morelorum* (1:10)

Two of these normally very skulking birds showed rather well at Abuko

Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus inornatus* (10:10)

Very common and widespread

[Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos megarhynchos*

Heard only at a couple of sites well inland]

Snowy-crowned Robin Chat *Cossypha niveicapilla niveicapilla* (2:10)

A couple were seen at Paradise Inn, Tanji with another at Abuko. Others were heard near Bird Safari Camp and at Brufrut

White-crowned Robin Chat *Cossypha albicapilla albicapilla* (3:10)

At least three were around Bird Safari Camp (where a pair were regularly found along the paths) and one was briefly at Marakissa

(Western) Rufous Scrub Robin *Cerotrichas (galactotes) galactotes or minor* (1:10)

One seen flying into a bush near the waterhole at Kaur gave a couple of decent glimpses to a few people and even burst into song briefly. This species had not been seen on a Naturetrek tour to The Gambia for at least five years

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* (1:10)

A single was at the Mandina Fields

African Thrush *Turdus pelios chiguanoides* (5:10)

A couple inhabited the grounds of Paradise Inn, Tanji with others at Abuko, Boabolong Camp, Bird Safari Camp and especially Brufrut where several emerged onto the track in the evening

Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* (1:10)

One showed quite well at Jahally and another was heard at Kaur

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus scirpaceus* (1:10)

One was seen briefly at Jahally

Western Olivaceous Warbler *Hippolais opaca* (2:10)

Two were seen intermittently in a tree in the grounds of Traditions Bar, Basse and two or three were in the vicinity of Bird Safari Camp the next day. At least one of the birds at Traditions Bar showed the heavy swollen bill base of this species as opposed to the finer bill of Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *H. elica* that may also occur occasionally in the Gambia (and which tends to habitually dip its tail while calling – a trait not seen in the birds we saw)

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta* (3:10)

At least four were seen well inland including one that showed very well at Kudang

Singing Cisticola *Cisticola cantans swanzii* (6:10)

Much more frequently heard than seen though birds gave good views at Mandina Fields, Yundum Woods, Prufu Swamp and Brufrut among other places

Whistling Cisticola *Cisticola lateralis lateralis* (3:10)

Small numbers were found at Tujereng, Yundum Woods and Brufrut

Short-winged or Siffling Cisticola *Cisticola brachypterus brachypterus* (1:10)

Just one was seen; a bird perched on top of a bare Acacia near Kotu ponds uttering its quiet lisp song

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis uropygialis* (4:10)

This species was heard quite often when we were travelling through agricultural areas but perched birds were seen at Pirang and Marakissa with birds in seen song flight at a few other locations

Tawny-flanked Prinia *Prinia subflava subflava* (10:10)

Common and very widespread though more were heard than seen

Red-winged Warbler *Helolais erythroptera erythroptera* (1:10)

At least three showed very well at Tujereng and one was heard distantly at Brufrut

Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brevicaudata brevicaudata* (6:10)

A handful were seen in almost all wooded areas visited and many more were heard

Senegal Eremomela *Eremomela pusilla* (4:10)

Small numbers were found at well scattered woodland sites

Northern Crombec *Sylvietta brachyura brachyura* (5:10)

Eight of these tail-less wonders were found at a variety of woodland sites

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus trochilus* (7:10)

About 20 were seen, the large majority were in dry scrub well inland but a couple were also noted at the coast

Oriole Warbler *Hypergerus atriceps*

This skulking species was heard at a couple of sites before one was seen quite well in low riverside vegetation opposite Bird Safari Camp as we travelled to Janjanbureh by boat

Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin borin* (1:10)

One was at Boabolong Camp

Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis communis* (1:10)

One was in an acacia at Kudang

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans cantillans* (4:10)

Males were found at Bird Safari Camp, Panchant, Pirang and Marakissa

Green Hylia *Hylia prasina prasina* (1:10)

A bird carrying nesting material at Abuko gave very uncharacteristically close and prolonged views, much more often than not this species is merely heard calling from the high, dense canopy

Northern Black Flycatcher *Melaeranis edoloides edoloides* (3:10)

In total at least seven were seen with a couple at Mandina Fields, four at Bird Safari Camp and at least one at Marakissa

Swamp Flycatcher *Muscicapa aquatica aquatica* (2:10)

Only seen in and around Bird Safari Camp and on the adjacent river where up to five were recorded. A pair had a nest with eggs at the Bird Safari Camp jetty

African Blue Flycatcher *Elminia longicauda longicauda* (1:10)

This is always a very difficult species to see, and even harder to see well, so it came as no surprise that only one group member achieved a clear view of a bird in dense mangrove cover at Kisi Bolon. Another was heard distantly at Tunku Bolon earlier on

African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis viridis* (2:10)

Singles were seen at Abuko and Bird Safari Camp

Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone rufiventer rufiventer* (3:10)

A pair was present in the gardens of the Paradise Inn from time to time with others recorded at Abuko

Common Wattle-eye *Platysteira cyanea cyanea* (3:10)

More often heard than seen though several gave good views at Abuko, where one was sitting on a nest above the ticket office, at Bird Safari Camp and during the Tendaba creek crawl

Brown Babbler *Turdoides plebejus platycircus* (5:10)

Quite common though more often heard than seen, several were always around the Paradise Inn car park in Tanji

Blackcap Babbler *Turdoides reinwardtii reinwardtii* (4:10)

Distribution and numbers were very similar to those of the previous species with, again, more heard than seen though plenty showed well

Yellow Penduline Tit *Anthoscopus parvulus senegalensis* (1:10)

One showed well at Kudang, only the second seen on this tour in the last five years

Brown Sunbird *Anthreptes gabonicus* (1:10)

Only seen in the mangroves at Tendaba where about 10 were noted, most were seen in flight but a couple perched briefly

Green-headed Sunbird *Cyanomitra verticalis verticalis* (0:10)

One appeared in a tree next to the restaurant at Paradise Inn as we were checking-in on day 1 and allowed most of the group to see it. Not surprisingly, no others were seen and this was the first for at least five years on this tour

Scarlet-chested Sunbird *Chalcomitra senegalensis senegalensis* (8:10)

Quite common inland where four or five were seen each day, scarcer near the coast

Beautiful Sunbird *Cinnyris pulchella pulchella* (9:10)

The most common and widespread of the sunbirds with multiple sightings every day except when in the mangroves at Tendaba and while travelling back to the coast later the same day

Variable Sunbird *Cinnyris venustus venustus* (7:10)

Quite frequently seen at the coast, especially at Tanji but with records inland as far east as Bird Safari Camp

Splendid Sunbird *Cinnyris occinogastra* (3:10)

A couple of singles at the coast in the early days were followed by good gatherings at Marakissa and especially Brufut (where 10 in a one tree were found) at the end of the tour

Copper Sunbird *Cinnyris cuprea* (2:10)

A couple near Sungajor were followed next day by a showy male at Pirang

Yellow White-eye *Zosterops senegalensis senegalensis* (2:10)

Most people managed views of an active and mobile bird at the waterhole near Kaur and next day three were fleetingly seen near Sungajor

Yellow-billed Shrike *Corvinella corvina corvina* (10:10)

Common and widespread, around 15 per day were noted, often involving groups of birds

Grey-headed Bush-shrike *Malaconotus blanchoti blanchoti* (1:10)

Some of the group saw a couple before breakfast at Bird Safari Camp but what may have been the same birds were found attending a nest right next to the camp entrance just after breakfast when they showed unusually well for this typically difficult to see but very striking species

Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegala senegala* (2:10)

Although several others were heard or seen briefly the best views were of obliging birds at Mandina Fields and Tanji

Northern Puffback *Dryoscopus gambensis gambensis* (4:10)

After the first two at Tujereng a further four were seen including a very showy individual at Marakissa

Yellow-crowned Gonolek *Laniarius barbarus barbarus* (7:10)

Commonly heard but less often seen though several showed very well at various sites, including one bouncing along on the ground at Traditions Bar, Basse

White Helmet Shrike *Prionops plumatus plumatus* (3:10)

Always a highlight, this fabulous looking species was encountered quite often this year with small flocks found at Sarebakary, near Sungajor and Brufrut

African Golden Oriole *Oriolus auratus auratus* (6:10)

The nine seen represent a better than average total, birds showed particularly well at Kotu and near Sungajor where a male sang from the bare branches of a tall tree near the roadside

Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis divaricatus* (7:10)

Rather common at the coast where 10 were noted on our first full day, generally scarcer inland

Pied Crow *Corvus albus* (8:10)

Very common at the coast but much scarcer or absent inland although a handful were seen around Basse

Piapiac *Ptilostomus afer* (7:10)

Quite common at the coast where up to 10 per day were noted (though often in flocks seen from the moving bus). Smaller numbers were found inland

Purple Glossy Starling *Lamprolornis purpureus purpureus* (7:10)

Very common inland where this was the commonest starling after Long-tailed though a few were also seen nearer the coast

Bronze-tailed Glossy Starling *Lamprotornis chalcurus chalcurus* (2:10)

After several possibilities that didn't linger long enough for all of the crucial details to be seen several were finally seen well around Bird Safari Camp

Greater Blue-eared Starling *Lamprotornis dalybaeus dalybaeus* (6:10)

Only a small proportion of the 'Blue-eared' Starlings seen were identified to species though Greater Blue-eared was marginally commoner than the next species and seen at sites throughout the country

Lesser Blue-eared Starling *Lamprotornis chloropterus chloropterus* (4:10)

As with the previous species only a few were positively identified although large numbers of either/or birds were seen

Long-tailed Glossy Starling *Lamprotornis caudatus* (10:10)

Very common and widespread with dozens seen most days; stunning birds!

Yellow-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus africanus africanus* (5:10)

Another species that was seen more often than usual with a total of 13 seen, most were associated with donkeys

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus indicus* (1:10)

Very localised, only recorded on the coast at Kotu during lunch and at Yundum Airport as we were leaving. House Sparrows in West Africa are believed to have arrived by ship from South Africa where, in turn, they arrived by ship from India. Some authorities regard Indian Sparrows (*indicus* group) as a separate species from birds found in Europe

Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus griseus* (10:10)

Very common and widespread

Bush Petronia *Petronia dentata dentata* (6:10)

This unassuming species was first seen at Mandina Fields then with some regularity when well inland although only about 10 were recorded in total

White-billed Buffalo Weaver *Bubalornis albirostris* (10:10)

Common and widespread, its prominent communal nests being a regularly seen feature of the landscape, especially near the coast

Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weaver *Plocepasser superciliosus* (1:10)

One showed well in the lower bare branches of a large tree at the Mandina Fields

Little Weaver *Ploceus luteolus luteolus* (3:10)

At least three showed well at Mandina Fields and a couple of singles were seen subsequently

Black-necked Weaver *Ploceus nigricollis brachypterus* (2:10)

This attractive forest Weaver was seen in small numbers at Abuko and Brufrut only

Vitelline (African) Masked Weaver *Ploceus (velatus) vitellinus* (5:10)

After the first at Mandina Fields this species was seen fairly regularly further inland. A large gathering was at Batelling Woods in the company of Northern Red Bishops and together they put on a fine and very colourful show in evening light

Village Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus cucullatus* (10:10)

Very common and widespread

Black-headed (or Yellow-backed) Weaver *Ploceus melanocephalus melanocephalus*

Found in good numbers in some inland wetlands, the common weaver at Farafenni Crossing where several were behaving like Village Weavers hopping on the slipway

Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea quelea* (1:10)

At least two showed rather distantly among a bustling group of Weavers at Panchant

Yellow-crowned Bishop *Euplectes afer afer* (4:10)

Found in suitable wetland habitat at, e.g. Brumen Bridge, Jahally, Pirang, Panchant and Kaur, several hundred gathered at the last site

Black-winged Red Bishop *Euplectes hordeaceus hordeaceus* (4:10)

Much scarcer than the next species and rather localised (occurring in pockets) though the 15 or so records were well scattered between inland and coastal sites

Northern Red Bishop *Euplectes franciscanus* (10:10)

Very common and widespread

Green-winged Pytilia *Pytilia melba ceterior* (1:10)

One at Kudang was briefly sharing the same bush as two of the next species

Red-winged Pytilia *Pytilia phoenicoptera phoenicoptera* (1:10)

A pair responded strongly to the imitated calls of a Pearl Spotted Owlet at Kudang during a very busy period of activity there

Western Bluebill *Spermophaga haematina haematina* (1:10)

One or two gave variably good views to most group members at Abuko, the same or others were heard later but were impossible to coax from the dense undergrowth

Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala senegala* &/or *rhodopsis* (9:10)

Quite Common and widespread though easily overlooked due to its unobtrusive habits, up to 10 per day was the norm

Lavender Waxbill *Estrilda caerulea* (6:10)

After the first at Tujereng this attractive species was occasionally found at a wide range of sites

Orange-cheeked Waxbill *Estrilda melpoda melpoda* (2:10)

Scarce; three showed well at Tujereng but the only other one seen was at Mandina Fields

Black-rumped Waxbill *Estrilda troglodytes* (6:10)

Quite common inland where about 30 were seen, scarcer at the coast although about ten showed particularly well at Pirang

Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu *Uraeginthus bengalus bengalus* (8:10)

Present in low densities throughout, though marginally more conspicuous at the coast

African Quailfinch *Ortyospiza atricollis atricollis* (3:10)

Birds were seen hurtling over calling in flight at the traditional sites of Jahally, Prufu Swamp and Pirang but sadly none were found settled.

African silverbill *Lonchura cantans cantans* (3:10)

Localised; at least four were at Kotu (a traditional location), three were between Soma and Kudang and a group of eight showed well at Panchant

Bronze Mannikin *Lonchura acullata* (3:10)

About 20 at Kotu on our first morning (including several juveniles) was the largest gathering, the only others were at scattered sites well inland

Cut-throat *Amadina fasciata fasciata* (1:10)

Four remained all too briefly in a bare tree top at the waterhole near Kaur though several people managed to see them

Village Indigobird *Vidua chalybeata chalybeata* (8:10)

Small numbers were encountered most days, often in the company of Red-billed Firefinches, their unwitting host species

Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura* (4:10)

A couple at Mandina Fields were followed by further birds at Basse, Bird Safari Camp and Yundum Woods, in all 10 males were seen

Exclamatory Paradise Whydah *Vidua interjecta* (1:10)

Paradise Whydahs were only seen around the waterhole near Kaur were up to 15 stunning males with full tails were seen in flight or perched. There is ongoing uncertainty about whether Exclamatory or Sahel Paradise Whydahs *Vidua orientalis acupum* are the commonest species on the north bank of the river but for the time being Barlow et al (1997) is followed and that text regards Sahel Paradise Whydah as of uncertain provenance in the country. Either way they are simply stunning bird

White-rumped Seedeater *Serinus leucopygus riggenbachi* (1:10)

Two were in roadside bushes between Soma and Sarebakary

Yellow-fronted Canary *Serinus mozambicus caniceps* (3:10)

A couple at Mandina Fields were followed by encounters further inland in arid scrub at Batelling Woods and near Sarebakary were 10 were seen well in roadside trees

Cinnamon-breasted Rock Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi goslignyi* (2:10)

A couple at Bansang Quarry showed well and a couple more were fleetingly at a waterhole near Kaur

Brown-rumped Bunting *Emberiza affinis nigeriae* (2:10)

A very brief bird seen by Sering only at Batelling Woods was followed by one that remained in view near Sarebakary just long enough for about half of the group to assemble in time to see it

Selected Other Fauna

African Civet *Civettictis civetta*

One of these rarely seen cat-like animals was at the roadside between Soma and Tendaba and gave good but fairly brief views in the spotlight. This species had not been seen on a Naturetrek tour to The Gambia for at least five years and perhaps never before

Gambian Sun Squirrel *Heliosciurus gambianus*

Striped Ground Squirrel *Xerus erythropus*

Nile Monitor *Varanus niloticus*