

Birding in little known areas of West Africa

This is a new tour which takes in the small West African country of Guinea-Bissau and the extreme southern area of Casamance in Senegal. Until now this region has been largely ignored by birders although it holds many range-restricted species in remnant patches of forest. The islands off the coast of Guinea-Bissau are an important wintering ground for many species from further north in Europe.

■ This tour can be combined with Senegal Pelagic Birds and the Sahel on page 53.

Day 1: Fly to the new airport in Dakar and transfer to the coastal village of Popeningue for an overnight stay. En route there is a good chance of seeing Black-headed Lapwing.

Day 2: An early morning flight to Ziguinchor, the largest city in Casamance. On arrival we travel south and cross the border into Guinea-Bissau and the capital Bissau for an overnight stay. Bissau has many interesting areas for birds within the city itself including substantial numbers of Black Heron, Western Reef Egret, Collared Pratincole, Grey and Kentish Plovers, Bar-tailed Godwit and Curlew Sandpiper. Patches of forest and cultivated land near the coast attract Violet Turaco, Red-throated Bee-eater, White-fronted Black Chat, Grey-headed Oliveback, Lavender Waxbill, Purple Glossy and Bronze-tailed Starlings and Piapiac.

Day 3: This morning our journey takes us towards Buba and the Cufada Lagoons, a series of freshwater wetlands bordered by forest. Before reaching Buba a stop at the Rio Corrubal may produce sightings of Rock Pratincole, Egyptian Plover and Preuss's Cliff Swallow. On reaching Cufada Lagoons the secondary woodland is home to the near-endemic Turati's Boubou. Other species inhabiting the forest include Red-thighed Sparrowhawk, Green Turaco, White-bellied Kingfisher, Black-and-white-casqued, Yellow-casqued, White-crested and African Pied Hornbills, Spotted Honeyguide, Gabon Woodpecker, Fanti Saw-wing, Red-tailed Leaflove, White-tailed Althea, Capuchin Babbler, Green Hylia,

Dates

TOUR A: Sunday October 31st – Saturday November 13th 2021

TOUR B: Sunday October 30th – Saturday November 12th 2022

Leaders: Mark Finn, Ass Ndiaye and local guides in Guinea-Bissau

Group size: 8

Birds: 220–260

White-browed Forest Flycatcher, Mangrove Sunbird, Crimson Seedcracker, Western Bluebill and Western Oriole. Cufada also has areas of savannah dotted with patches of bushes which attract Bearded Barbet, Oriole Warbler, Splendid Sunbird, Red-winged Pytilia and Sahel Bush Sparrow. Transfer to Buba for one night.

Days 4-5: An early start is essential to visit the Cantanhez Forests on the border with Guinea. This is a relatively new and little-visited area for birdlife. The habitat of semi-humid forest along with seasonal swamps, rivers and mangrove stands make it an interesting area for wildlife. In addition to the commoner forest birds we are on the lookout for Timneh Parrot, Little Green and Buff-spotted Woodpeckers, Western Bearded, Red-tailed and Spotted Greenbuls, Grey-chinned Sunbird, Chestnut-breasted Negrilo, Red-headed Malimbe and Black-faced Firefinch.

Day 6: Today we revisit sites around Cantanhez and on the road back towards Bissau, where we have an overnight stay.



Brown Babbler Photo: Roger Ridley

A sector of forest may have African Goshawk, Stone Partridge, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Brown-backed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Hylia, Red-winged Warbler, Western Violet-backed Sunbird, African Golden Oriole and Violet-backed Starling. We make a short diversion to Mansôa an important area for the endangered Black Crowned Crane. Night in Bissau

Days 7-9: On Day 7 we travel to Orango an island in the Bijagos Archipelago which has over 80 islands, of which around 20 are inhabited. Bijagos is the second-most important coastal site for birds in West Africa after the Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania. It takes around four hours in a speedboat from Bissau to our base in the islands. The lodge is located within secondary forest where the gardens hold White-throated Bee-eater, Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat, African Thrush, African Paradise Flycatcher, Western Violet-backed and Collared Sunbirds and Violet-backed Starling. Other species we may find include Hadada and African Sacred Ibis, Western Plantain-eater, Squacco, Black and Purple Herons, Great and Little Egrets, Hamerkop, African

Spoonbill, Pied, Woodland, Blue-breasted, Malachite and African Dwarf Kingfishers, Little Greenbul and Green-headed Sunbird. The archipelago is also an important area for five species of turtles which come ashore to lay their eggs in November. This in turn attracts Palm-nut Vultures to breed and feed on the hatchlings. Several species of waders winter in the region and number many thousands, including Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint, Sanderling, Eurasian Whimbrel and Common Redshank. Also present are Grey-hooded and Slender-billed Gulls, Black, Gull-billed, Caspian and African Royal Terns. On Day 9 we return to Bissau for an overnight stay.

Day 10: This morning we travel north to Casamance in Senegal. After crossing back into Senegal we head towards the small border town of Mpak which has a varied habitat of farmland, degraded forest and bush. Travelling along the main road we have a good chance of Long-crested Eagle perched on telegraph poles. In the forest patches we should find several skulking species including Western Bluebill, Grey-headed Bristlebill, Western Nicator,



Palm-nut Vulture Photo: Roger Ridley

Yellow-throated Leaflove, Puvel's Illadopsis and Yellow-breasted Apalis. The forest is also a good area for the range-restricted Blue Malkoha, and if the rains have been late in the season we may locate lingering cuckoo species – Diederik, Klaas's, African and Red-chested. Due to logging activity there is a good chance of finding the secretive Turati's Boubou which has recently colonised Senegal from Guinea Bissau. The farmland is a good area to find the attractive Red-winged Warbler, plus grass-loving Whistling and Singing Cisticolas. Transfer to Ziguinchor for four nights, where we will be ideally located to visit several areas with excellent birdlife.

Days 11-13: These three days have been set aside to explore and visit little-known areas of Casamance. Our main interest is exploring the marshes and remnant forest patches to the west of Ziguinchor. We travel west towards Oussouye and the forest of Boukitimigo – a known area for scarce species occurring in Senegal. With a little luck we should locate Ahanta Francolin, White-spotted Flufftail, Brown Illadopsis, Green Crombec and Olive Sunbird. The road towards the village of Elinkine may have Lanner Falcon, Piping

Hornbill, Northern Black Flycatcher and possibly Plain-backed Pipit. Further along the road the village of Kagnout has a wetland area where recent sightings have included the scarce Cuckoo-finch, Greater Painted-snipe, Lesser Moorhen, Yellow-throated Longclaw and the commoner wetland species. Also of interest are several species associated with wetlands, namely Yellow-crowned Bishop, Yellow-mantled Widowbird and Quailfinch. On the return to base another protected area of forest may have Black-throated Coucal, Western Square-tailed Drongo, Red-tailed Leaflove and maybe lingering cuckoos from the wet season. Kamobeul and the Essil Forest hold several interesting species including the recently split Grey-hooded Capuchin Babbler, Buff-spotted Woodpecker and Yellow-throated Leaflove. Boutoute is east of Ziguinchor and a good area for wetland birds with regular sightings of Allen's Gallinule, West African, Wire-tailed and Red-chested Swallows, Fanti Saw-wing and Short-winged Cisticola.

Day 14: Our last day in Casamance with birding close to Ziguinchor. In the afternoon we take a flight to Dakar and onward connections to Europe. Arrival is on the following day.

Prices

Ground Price: £2845
Tour B: £2995
Single room: £250
Deposit: £300
*Air Fare: £750

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

Not included: visa to enter Guinea-Bissau, drinks, insurance, items of a personal nature.

* Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights