

Birding in little known areas of West Africa

This is our third/fourth tours which takes in the 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.

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

Day 2: An early morning flight to Bissau, the capital city of Guinea-Bissau. On arrival we travel to 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 Alethe, Capuchin Babbler, Green Hylia, 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. As dusk falls we have a chance of observing Bat Hawk a scarce and rare resident of Guinea-Bissau. Stay at Buba for one night.

Day 3: An early start is essential to visit the Cantanhez Forests on the border with Guinea. En route it is possible to see Yellow-throated Leaflove, Slender-billed

Dates

TOUR A: Sunday November 26th – Saturday December 9th 2023

TOUR B: Sunday March 16th - Saturday March 29th 2025

Leaders: Mark Finn, Hamilton

Montiero and Ass Ndiaye

Group size: 8

Birds: 220–260

Greenbul and the secretive Turati's Boubou. Cantanhez has habitats of semi-humid forest along with seasonal swamps, rivers and mangrove stands making it an interesting area for wildlife. In addition to the commoner forest birds we are on the lookout for Little Green and Buff-spotted Woodpeckers, Western Bearded, Red-tailed and Spotted Greenbuls, Grey-chinned Sunbird, Chestnut-breasted Negrito, Red-headed Malimbe and Black-faced Firefinch. The gardens of the lodge attract the uncommon Red-tailed Greenbul, Olive-bellied Sunbird, Striped Kingfisher, Glossy-backed Drongo, Ahanta Francolin and Blue-breasted Kingfisher. Two nights at Cantanhez.

Days 4-5: After breakfast we set off to visit a remote part of the forest which is littered with small villages and stands of natural forest. On the outskirts of the village we should find Red-chested Swallow perched on wires. The forest here can be productive for Black Cuckoo a rare bird in West Africa plus Great Blue Turaco, Blue-spotted Wood Dove Tambourine Doves, Western Nicator,



Martial Eagle Jo Finn

Copper Sunbird and in grassy areas African Moustached Warbler, Black-crowned Tchagra and Yellow-mantled Widowbird. In large trees we may locate Chimpanzee a rare resident of the forest. Areas of grasslands often hold Plain-backed Pipit, Northern Red and Yellow-crowned Bishops and a chance of White-spotted Flufftail. In the dead trees we may find Lizard Buzzard and Western Banded Snake Eagle. Other species may include Splendid and Copper Sunbirds, Violet-backed and Purple Starlings. The mature forest is home to Blackcap and Capuchin Babblers, the scarce Willcock's Honeyguide, Puvel's Illadopsis and the poorly known White-browed Forest Flycatcher. The road enters a marshy area with long grasses which can be very productive for Village, Black-headed, Little, Grosbeak and Red-headed

Weavers, Winding Cisticola, Striated Heron and Hadada Ibis. Patches of forest and cultivated fields attract Guinea and Violet Turacos, Red-throated Bee-eater, White-fronted Black Chat, Grey-headed Oliveback, Lavender Waxbill, Purple and Bronze-tailed Starlings, and Piapiac. A sector of forest near Bissau 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. Return to Bissau the capital for a night stop.

Days 6-8: On Day 6 we travel to 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



Northern Carmine Bee-eaters Jo Finn

Banc d'Arguin in Mauritania. After spending the night in Bissau we made the short journey to Bissau docks for the crossing to Rubane Island. At the outer limits of the harbour a small island is important for Pink-backed Pelican, Western Reef, Great and Little Egrets and Black Heron. Once in the open ocean we should find Caspian, West African, Sandwich and Little Terns. Rubane Island is our base for two nights where the lodge and gardens attract Olive-bellied, Green-headed and Collared Sunbirds, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbirds and Blue Malkoha and a chance of African Wood Owl as dusk falls. On Day 7 a visit to the remote island of Joao Viera. The island is a stronghold for in the rare Timneh Parrot which are attracted to fruiting trees along with Purple and Lesser Blue-eared Starlings. Along the beach wintering waders include Whimbrel, Bar-tailed Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Common Sandpiper and Senegal Thick-

knees. On the forest edge we may find a wintering Common Redstart, African Grey Woodpecker, African Green Pigeon, Senegal Parrot and Dideric Cuckoo. The beach also has significant numbers of Palm-nut Vultures, Eurasian Curlew, Dunlin and Osprey.

Day 9: Today we leave Rubane and go back to Bissau for the night. In the afternoon a visit to Portobello a large marsh area used for rice production and more importantly it attracts birds to the large trees and pools. Interesting species include Piapiac, Fulvous Whistling Duck, Woodland and Pied Kingfishers, Dideric Cuckoo and Mosque Swallows. Large bushes and trees may have Whistling Cisticola and parties of Yellow-billed Shrikes. Sunbirds are well represented with Splendid, Collared, Copper, Green-headed and Beautiful being possible. As dusk approaches we have good chances of Gabar Goshawk, Shikra,

Purple and Broad-billed Rollers, Purple Starling, Brown Babbler, African Golden Oriole and Senegal Parrot.

Day 10: This morning we travel north to Casamance in Senegal. En route a stop at roadside lagoons for wetland species. 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, 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 – Dideric, 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 are 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. We take a flight to Dakar and onward connections to Europe. Arrival is on the following day.

Prices

Ground Price A: £2,995 B: £2,995
Single room: £250
Deposit: £300
*Air Fare: £1210

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