

Gambia

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Participants:

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Leader: Vaughan Ashby

Picture: African Quailfinch

Day 1: The flight left Gatwick only some 20 minutes late at 07.20, arriving at Yundum airport at 13.10. Even before touching down, the first birds seen were Cattle Egrets on the grass areas all around the runway. As we disembarked, the heat immediately struck us as it was nearly the hottest part of the day however, our attention was drawn to the skies where a number of Hooded Vultures were circling overhead obviously waiting for our imminent demise from heat exhaustion! The short coach journey to the Badala Park Hotel on the coast was somewhat frustrating as it passed by the gates of one of the best birdwatching sites in The Gambia, Abuko Nature Reserve. On arrival at the hotel, we were immediately distracted from the job of checking in by a superb Red-necked Falcon sat at the top of a dead tree above reception. Finally we were coerced into checking in & after locating our rooms, met at 15.00 in the hotel gardens for our initial introduction to Gambian birding. As all the birds were new, the first hour was extremely hectic with common species such as Village Weaver, Beautiful Sunbird, African Silverbill, Red-billed Hornbill, Olivaceous & Garden Warblers, Northern Red Bishop, Red-billed Firefinch & Grey-headed Sparrow. As we were running out of new species in the garden, we walked out of the complex & along the Casino Cycle Track across Kotu Bridge to the Golf Course. This significantly increased the number of new species seen with Long-tailed Cormorant, Western Reef-egret, Black (Yellow-billed) Kite, Palm-nut Vulture, African Harrier-hawk, Double-spurred Francolin, Senegal Thick-knee, Black-headed, Spur-winged & Wattled Lapwings, Grey-headed Gull, Speckled Pigeon, Palm, Red-eyed & Vinaceous Doves, Senegal Coucal, African Palm Swift, Little Bee-eater, Pied Kingfisher, Brown Babbler, Variable Sunbird, Yellow-billed Shrike, Piapiac, Pied Crow, Long-tailed Glossy-starling & Bronze Mannikin as well as many common Palearctic migrant waders. Well satisfied with our first days birding, we returned to the hotel for our evening meal & an early night in anticipation of the birding to come.

Day 2: An early start for breakfast, but the advertised 7.00 a.m. time was obviously the staff time of arrival as only over the course of the next 20 minutes were items gradually delivered one by one. First the jam then bread followed by cheese & cold meat & finally the butter, welcomed us to the laid back African attitude!! This state of affairs continued for our entire holiday & despite several requests for earlier service nothing could change things!! Nevertheless, by 07.45 we were walking out of the hotel & across the road to the Kotu sewerage ponds, a most smelly place, but definitely good for birds! New species again came thick & fast with many Western Grey Plantain Eaters, Green Wood-Hoopoe, African Grey Hornbill, Bearded Barbet, Fine-spotted & Grey Woodpeckers, Brown Babbler, Splendid Sunbird, Purple Glossy-starling, White-faced Whistling Duck & an excellent male greater Painted-snipe. Moving on down to the Kotu Creek, we added Hammerkop, Gull-billed Tern, a female Namaqua Dove, Rufous-crowned & Blue-bellied Rollers & Fork-tailed Drongo. By now it was getting rather hot & as we had yet to acclimatise, we returned to the hotel for a 3 hour break via the local supermarket. Enthusiasm was very high after our break (swim!) & a visit to the pond adjacent to the hotel gave us Black-headed, Purple, Squacco & Striated Herons, Great White & Intermediate Egrets & a breeding pair of African Jacana. Heading the opposite direction down the Casino cycle track, we reached the scrub where we continued to add more new species. Lizard Buzzard, Shikra, Striped Kingfisher, Moho, Black-crowned Tchagra, Spectacled Weaver during the walk and when we finally arrived at the beach, Caspian & Royal Terns & Crested Lark. As dusk fell, we were treated to excellent views of several Long-tailed Nightjars flying around & perched on a stump & had brief views of a Standard-winged Nightjar without but standards. The climax to another superb day.

Day 3: Today was the day for our eagerly anticipated first visit to Abuko Nature Reserve & we were joined by Adam Kellett who was on a family holiday. Almost immediately on arrival a Blue-breasted Kingfisher was seen by some of the group & on arrival at the

observation platform, several new species were soon added including Black-crowned Night-heron, Guinea & Violet Turacos, a roosting Barn Owl, Giant Kingfisher & a Shikra perched in a tree. Walking on down the trails & peering into the dense vegetation, we slowly added African Thrush, Common Wattle-eye, African & Red-bellied Paradise Flycatchers & White-crowned & Snowy Robin-chats whilst overhead were Pied-winged Swallow & Mottled Spinetail and Red Colobus Monkeys crashed around in the trees. By the time we reached the animal orphanage it was getting extremely hot so we took a well deserved break and purchase cold drinks, coffee & sardine sandwiches! Green Vervet Monkeys were ready to steal your food here but the highlight was a tame Black Crowned-crane which took a dislike to Bob & attacked him! A small photographic hide here overlooks a small drinking pool & despite being rather uncomfortable & home to several rather large spiders, it was very good for birds with Black-billed & Blue-spotted Wood-doves, African Pygmy & Woodland Kingfishers, Little Greenbul, Red-cheeked Cordon-blue & Orange-cheeked & Lavender Waxbills. By now, new birds were proving hard to find in the heat of the day so we moved on to the Lamin Rice Fields. Solomon knew just about everyone here which isn't surprising as his mother owns a lot of the fields! We disappointed in our search for Pearl-spotted Owlet which despite hearing we failed to see. We were however, more fortunate with White-faced Scops-Owl with 2 birds found roosting high up in a tree which proved extremely difficult to find the right vantage point to view them from. Further exploration around the fields added Northern Black-Flycatcher, African Golden Oriole, Yellow-billed Shrike, 6 Pin-tailed Wydah (including a superb male in breeding plumage) and Village Indigobird. On returning to the Land Rover a White-crowned Robin-chat was seen well on the path. Moving on to Lamin Lodge, we enjoyed a quite 2 hours in the shade with cold drinks, overlooking a lovely stretch of Mangrove creek where Fiddler Crabs & Mudskippers were abundant. Sandwich Tern & Osprey were the only birds of note seen here. Later in the afternoon we moved on to an area known as the Lamin Fields where we were extremely fortunate to have excellent views of our main target species, Temminck's Courser, with 5 birds seen at close range. Further exploration of the fields added several other new species including Black-shouldered Kite, Western Marsh Harrier, Grey Kestrel, Peregrine Falcon, Levaillant's Cuckoo, Abyssinian Roller, Tawny-flanked Prinia & Green-backed Eremomela. With another productive day under our belts we headed back to the hotel well satisfied.

Day 4: Off to Tanji today along a rather bumpy road & on arrival, our Land Rover decided to expire! We therefore decided to walk down to the freshwater pool close to the beach and retrospectively, this was very fortuitous as we stumbled across a superb immature Martial Eagle perched in a tree at quite close range. A Fanti Saw-wing was seen by a lucky few over the pool although there was little else of note probably because of our high spirits due to our discovery. We then walked along the main trail at Tanji which is frankly disappointing in view of the limited visibility. We did however, have excellent views of a large group of Red Mongoose. Things changed as soon as we arrived in the more open Savannah with excellent prolonged views of an African Hobby perched in a tree. At the other freshwater pools, African Golden Oriole & Swallow-tailed Bee-Eater kept us alert but other than a couple of African Grey Hornbills & a few common waders together with Spur-winged Plover & Senegal Thick-Knee, it was relatively quiet. Moving on to the saltwater lagoon, large numbers of waders & terns could be seen and on carefully checking them, we added Lesser-crested, Little & Common Terns together with a large number of Sanderling & 2 White-fronted Plover. Offshore Caspian, Royal & Sandwich Terns fished while in the scrub along the beach we heard a Nightingale singing. Moving back through the scrub towards the Savannah, 2 Four-banded Sandgrouse were flushed on 2 occasions & seen well by most of the party. By now, it was getting very hot so we started to move back to the road stopping again at the freshwater pools where we were surprised to see the Martial Eagle again. Back on the road, we waited while Solomon went to find the Land Rover & see if it was working! The wait here however, in the shade of a tree was most productive with 2 Tawny Eagle, 2 Broad-billed Roller, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Vieillot's Barbet, Northern Crombec, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Subalpine Warbler & Red-headed Quelea all seen well. This late flurry of birds was extremely good for the morale and we returned to the Senegambia hotel for a drink & snack. Meeting Adam here again, he obligingly showed us the birds in the extremely attractive grounds. We had exceptionally good views of a nesting pair of African Harrier-Hawk, Greater Honeyguide, Greater Blue-eared Glossy-starling, White-crowned Robin-chat, Northern Black Flycatcher & Common Gonolek as well as amazingly tame Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu. With the heat of the day well past, we headed into Bilijo Forest Park where the lower trail was fairly quiet at first. Then as is often the case in tropical birdwatching, we came across an area where we had several new species, the first of which was a superb pair of White-throated Bee-eater, a normally elusive species. These were in the company of a pair of Swallow-tailed Bee-eater and the female White-throated appeared to be feeding one of the Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters and while we were watching them a Northern Puffback was seen. By now dusk was starting to fall on us and with a long walk back, we set off only to find our first real hill in The Gambia! Some tired souls lagged behind and were rewarded with good views of several species including another Moho closely followed by a Cardinal Woodpecker which caused much mirth by getting stuck in its hole! Just as it was getting dark we had good views of a party of Stone Partridge lurking in the undergrowth but our late departure necessitated our having to walk back along the trail in virtual pitch darkness with every tree root seeming like a snake & toads unnervingly hopping about everywhere!

Day 5: Today we headed into Banjul as a prelude to the ferry crossing to Barra on the north bank of the river. On the way, we stopped at Camalou Corner where we saw at least 3 Mourning Collared-Doves whilst some of the group saw 2 Yellow-crowned Bishops. A number of traders vied for business around the ferry departure area selling virtually everything you could imagine & quite a lot that you couldn't!, giving us a diversion from watching the large numbers of Little Swift breeding under the pier. The ferry left rather late (as usual!) & we had some difficulty in getting the captain to agree to us climbing up to the highest deck so we could birdwatch. Eventually this was achieved however & we were treated to good views of large numbers of Black Terns together with a single Arctic Skua. On arrival at Barra we immediately headed east to the village of Essau to search for Northern Anteater-Chat. This was easily & quickly achieved with excellent views of at least 3 birds. As it was by now getting rather hot we took shelter under some trees from where we recorded several more good species including Collared Sunbird, Dark Chanting-Goshawk, Vieillot's Barbet, a pair of Chestnut-backed Finch-Lark, Scarlet-chested Sunbird & Red-billed Quelea. A near miss was a probable White-

breasted Cuckoo-Shrike which flew off before positive identification. A feature of this area is the new north bank up river road for which the earthworks have been completed for a few miles, and when finally completed, will be a great time saver for up-river journeys & open up new areas of the country to birdwatchers. Moving a little further east, we stopped at a small patch of woodland where Solomon managed to coax a Pearl-spotted Owlet out into the open. This also attracted a large number of other birds to mob it & as well as species already seen, we saw Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, a superb male Pygmy Sunbird & 3 Northern Puffback. Returning back to Barra, we spent some time around the old slave fort & scanning the waders & terns further up the beach. A number of species were seen well but as none of them were new, we returned to the ferry. This was by no means an easy matter as the ticket office is some 2 miles east of Barra so we had to retrace our steps, buy our tickets then return to the ferry terminal again! The return journey proved equally entertaining with large numbers of traders hawking their wares & as well as having good views of several Pink-backed Pelican, we were also fortunate to see a dark phase Pomarine Skua chasing the Black Terns. Unfortunately the tide was right in on the Bund Road but there were still plenty of birds about with large numbers of Pied Kingfishers sat on the telephone wires. While scanning over Mangrove creeks, we saw several Black Egrets in flight while a Wire-tailed Swallow put in a brief appearance & one lucky member of the group saw an African Crane whilst the rest of us had to make do with the African race of Great Cormorant on the wrecks in the bay. Our penultimate stop of the day was at the less than salubrious city rubbish dump whose foul appearance & smell attracted numerous Hooded Vultures as well as both Yellow & White Wagtails. Another Red-necked Falcon flew overhead, a Senegal Coucal obliged photographers and several Curlew Sandpipers & a Ruff all added to our lists. At Camalou Corner we were hoping for Marsh Owl but apparently they have not been seen recently due to disturbance. Nevertheless, we were pleased to see at least 4 African Darters whilst amongst the common herons & egrets were 2 Striated herons & a Hammerkop. A large flock of White-faced Whistling-Duck flew around whilst several Senegal Parrots passed overhead.

Day 6: Another different type of habitat was visited today, the woods at Brufut where there is an excellent series of ponds & streams. A Purple Heron showed well several times but the real prize was Black Crane which after several tantalisingly frustrating views, gave superb prolonged views right out in the open. Whilst chasing a large raptor which was only briefly seen, Yellow-fronted Canary & Bush Petronia were added to our lists. With new species becoming increasingly difficult to find, we changed habitat again & over an agriculture area recorded good views of Booted & Short-toed Eagle & a Lanner Falcon. A number of other raptors were present in the area together with Pied-winged, Red-chested & Wire-tailed Swallows & several Blue-bellied & a Broad-billed Roller. Being very hot again, we returned to the hotel for a long break followed by a walk to the Kotu Stream. This finally gave us Malachite Kingfisher as well as many other species previously seen. In the evening we made a return visit to the Casino Track scrub & were rewarded with more good views of Long-tailed Nightjar & brief views of Standard-winged Nightjar.

Day 7: Our first destination today was Pirang which is a series of artificial pools which was a failed attempt at a shrimp farm. Walking around the embankments there were small numbers of waders about but nothing we had not seen before. Our attention was however, drawn to a large plain pipit which coincidentally is called Plain-backed Pipit! Eventually we saw a total of 4 with White Wagtails. Reaching the far end of the complex we had still not found our quarry but several Gull-billed Terns were good value. Just as we were about to return however, 2 Black Crowned-Cranes flew over us rewarding us for our efforts. Back at the Land Rover, a small finch was flushed and after a considerable amount of effort, it was relocated & gave good views to everyone, a male of the elusive Quail Finch. While all this was going on, 2 Brown-necked Parrots flew over & a flock of swallows contained both Red-rumped & the enormous Mosque with House Martin & Pallid Swift also added to the list. Once again the heat was rising so we returned to Pirang village to look in the livestock pens for finches & weavers but with limited success. Although on a UK motorway the journey to the Seleti waterholes would have taken barely 15 minutes, on the rough tracks in The Gambia it is best not to hurry, especially as there are plenty of good birds to see. The journey therefore took several hours across the savannah dotted with small patches of dry woodland, during which time we saw our only Brown-backed Woodpecker of the tour. While looking for Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, we found a superb adult Martial Eagle in this raptor rich area. Two each of Brown Snake-Eagle & Short-toed Eagle & a Grasshopper Buzzard were the other highlights. Arriving at the border between Senegal & The Gambia we continued on the Seleti waterholes which although technically in Senegal do not require a passport or visa to visit. As it was still very hot we settled down under some trees to watch the birds coming down to drink in between the visits of herds of cows. There were plenty of finches, weavers & wydahs coming down to drink including 2 full plumaged male Long-tailed Paradise-Wydahs. Other highlights were single Red-winged Pytilia & a number of Bush Petronias. The sheer spectacle however, of seeing so many Red-billed Firefinch, Red-cheeked Cordonbleu, Orange-cheeked, Black-rumped & Lavender Waxbills, Yellow-fronted Canary & Northern Red Bishop was a very enjoyable experience. Reluctantly leaving the waterhole & returning into The Gambia (few formalities!), we stopped in the agricultural area around Yundum village, close to the airport. Unfortunately however, we failed to find our target species, White-fronted Black Chat, which closely resembles the wheatears. Nevertheless, there was a good selection of birds present including a few Heuglin's Masked Weavers & a Little Weaver in with the more common Village Weavers.

Day 8: After a quick look at the pool behind the hotel where the usual species were seen, we went to Abuko again. This time however, we worked the extension before it got too hot. The extension is an area of overgrown dry savannah but unfortunately several trees had fallen down & the path had become overgrown making progress slow. In fact, very few birds were seen with the exception of a Stone Partridge, a couple of Common Redstarts & a few other common species. By the time we reached the refreshment stall it was getting very hot & the previously low bird activity had dropped to almost zero! A couple of short excursions were made out into the heat but the results were very disappointing with only the occasional White-crowned Robin-Chat. As we were being met at 18.30 at the main entrance by Camera, we set off on the mile or so walk at about 17.00 in a rather despondent mood at our lack of success today. Then as is often the case in birdwatching and especially in the tropics, all hell was let loose with birds everywhere. From the situation earlier in the day when there was almost nothing to look at the position had now completely

reversed and there was too much to look at with only an hour and a half to do it! It all started with a pair of Red-shouldered Cuckoo-Shrikes & during the course of the next hour we barely moved more than 100 yards with so much to look at. A couple of Levillant's Cuckoo were totally eclipsed by a co-operative Klaas's Cuckoo. An African Pied Hornbill was an excellent find with Red-billed & African Grey Hornbills for comparison while 4 White Helemtshrikes passed through the trees in a family group. A Vitelline Masked-Weaver added to our growing list of this family but the real star however, was a Yellowbill, a species of Coucal, which is both rare & shy. In fact, it was such a good bird that it was even a tick for Solomon who had birded in Abuko for 10 years!

Day 9: Today was our day for the eagerly awaited 'up river' trip. The minibus arrived & looked almost new, a surprise for The Gambia! As we headed inland we made several stops looking for Abyssinian Ground Hornbill but new birds were conspicuous by their absence. As usual, suddenly everything changed on the outskirts of a small village where a flock of vultures contained African White-backed, White-headed & Ruppell's Griffon. Whilst engrossed in this spectacle, an immature Bataleur was spotted in the distance. As we continued along the road it was obvious that this was to be our day for raptors with a couple of Grasshopper Buzzards, Tawny Eagle, 2 Banded Snake-Eagles & a Long-crested Hawk-Eagle, wow! Being temporarily held up by a herd of cows was not such a bad thing as Yellow-billed Oxpeckers were on their backs! From Soma the road deteriorated very badly until we reached the ferry crossing point to the north bank. The scene here had to be seen to be believed but provided plenty of entertainment as we had a protracted wait for the ferry. A superb adult African Fish Eagle brought us back to the birding before we crossed the river & continued inland on ever worse roads. Eventually we reached our destination, a large marsh, where we were privileged to see some 13 Egyptian Plovers at close range. Other waders here included a large flock of Collared Pratincoles, a number of Kittlitz's Plover & single Kentish Plover amongst all the Spur-winged & Wattled Lapwings while Yellow Wagtails of the Blue-headed & Spanish races were common. Retracing our steps as it was a long way back to Tendaba, we stopped at a waterhole where good numbers of birds were coming down to drink. In amongst the commoner birds were Sudan Golden Sparrow, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver & Cut-throat whilst more splendid male Long-tailed Paradise-Wydah were present. A single European Turtle-Dove & Sand Martins made us feel more at home! Back to the ferry but by now it was getting dark & it had broken down. Eventually it was fixed but by then it was pitch dark so we were treated to the surreal experience of crossing the river guided by a torch from the other side! Finally reaching Tendaba after a long but extremely rewarding day, we settled into our thatched huts & had a most enjoyable meal serenaded by the Cicada's.

Day 10: Bad news, we were told that the presidents men were coming for a political rally & we had to give up our rooms for them. Protesting would have had no effect, this is Africa! The alternative was another camp some miles away but it was down a long exceedingly bad road & our minibus driver would not take us there. We therefore decided to make the best of the day at Tendaba & then return to our hotel on the coast where at least we had guaranteed rooms. We started the day with a walk to the old airfield where we saw our first Common Swifts & Montagu's Harriers of the tour. A brief view of a dark bird of prey was later resolved when we saw another pale Gabar Goshawk on the walk down to the groundnut factory. As we walked out on to the baked mud a flock of Spur-winged Geese flew overhead. There was very little water left but what was there held a number of waders including up to 50 Little Stints. Marsh vegetation yielded Purple & Squacco Herons & Intermediate Egret but little else so we returned towards the groundnut factory once again having failed to see Abyssinian Ground Hornbill! On the way however, a male African Quailfinch gave exceptional views & a few saw a very elusive Croaking Cisticola. On the track down to the groundnut factory another Pearl-spotted Owlet was found together with a nice mixed feeding flock of small birds which included a Red-winged Warbler. Reaching the river by the groundnut loading jetty we took a short break which was very productive. As we watched 2 African Hobbies chasing & catching an unfortunate Red-chested Swallow, a Marabou Stork was spotted perched high on a dead branch on the opposite side of the river. Whilst watching this impressive bird a total of 3 Sacred Ibises were seen flying along the river together with another African Fish Eagle, not a bad stop! Returning to Tendaba Camp we had an excellent lunch before taking a Pirogue trip across the river & along the tidal creeks. Except for the noisy German tourists in other boats this was a most enjoyable experience & very rewarding for birds. Many Malachite & Blue-breasted Kingfishers were seen together with our only Grey-headed Kingfisher of the tour. A small flock of great White Pelicans flew overhead & we had good views of several Mouse-brown Sunbirds. African Blue Flycatchers were somewhat less co-operative with brief views of 2 but the real highlight were 2 superb White-backed Night-Herons which were so well hidden that it took nearly half an hour for everyone to see them! We failed to see a Finfoot but this didn't seem to matter as everyone had such a good time. The return journey to our hotel on the coast was mainly in darkness & uneventful & we arrived in time for our evening meal.

Day 11: We spent the day in a relaxed fashion walking to the Medical Research Council grounds. Many birds such as Common Gonolek & Black-headed Lapwing are quite tame here & the sight of the latter's chicks showed that they can co-exist with man. In amongst all the common birds we had previously seen, we managed to find one new bird, Copper Sunbird. Returning to the hotel we took a long break until late afternoon when we returned to the Casino Cycle Track. The usual birds were at the hotel pond (including virtually every heron species in The Gambia) but a Black Egret was a nice find. Even better however, was a Yellow-throated Longclaw found in the cultivation next to the Kotu stream adjacent to the hotel. There were no more real surprises as we slowly walked down the cycle track & into the Casino Scrub, just lots of nice birds such as Shikra, Senegal Parrot, Bearded Barbet, Grey Woodpecker & Spectacled Weaver to look at in a very relaxed fashion. As it got dark, we Long-tailed & Standard-winged Nightjars again.

Day 12: Today we visited Kabafita Forest Park which is very good for raptors. We were not disappointed with good views of Lizzard Buzzard, Dark-chanting Goshawk, Red-necked Falcon & Grey Kestrel but best of all was the impressive African Hawk-Eagle. 2 African Pied hornbill but again, no sign of Abyssinian Ground Hornbill (becoming a joke by now). The road here are truly awful

but there was compensation in the form of villages unspoilt by tourism, where children are genuinely interested in you & not constantly asking 'give me one Dalasi'. Eventually we arrived at a tidal creek where they are building a new tourist lodge. Single Spotted Redshank & Marsh Sandpiper & a couple of Plain-backed Pipits were nice. Continuing on to the coast we spent a very relaxing couple of hours eating, drinking, swimming & watching the world go by. Seabirds included large numbers of gulls & single Caspian, Royal, Lesser Crested Terns but the most interesting birding was in the scrub at the back of the beach where we found Willow, Orphean & Western Bonelli's Warblers & a Green Crombec. The best find however, was an Icterine Warbler, a potential first for The Gambia. Resuming our journey along the rough tracks we had brief views of a Black-billed Wood-hoopoe before we arrive at the Tanji Bird Reserve again. Several Common Nightingales were heard singing & 2 Yellow-throated Leaf-loves & Mohos were seen but the highlight here were up to 11 Four-banded Sandgrouse coming in to drink at dusk. The return journey over appalling roads in the dark was interesting to say the least!

Day 13: We headed in towards Banjul today to the Bund Road. As we walked out onto the dry mudflats to scan the pools it was obvious that they were alive with gulls, terns & waders. Black-headed & Slender billed gulls were new for the trip but the surprise was an adult Mediterranean Gull, quite a rarity here. Terns included Gull-billed, Sandwich, Lesser Crested, Royal & Caspian whilst waders were represented by large numbers of Little Stint, Ruff & Curlew Sandpiper & a couple of Eurasian Oystercatchers which were new. Up to 10 Black Egrets were seen & both Blue-cheeked Bee-eater & Wire-tailed Swallows showed well in good numbers but a flyover Sacred Ibis was another surprise. Returning towards the hotel we stopped at Camalou Corner where 2 Yellow-crowned Bishops were located amongst the numerous Northern Red Bishops. A superb female Greater Painted-Snipe gave excellent views whilst a large flock of White-faced Whistling-Duck were disturbed by a Nile Crocodile, unusual here. There were plenty of other waders & herons about, the highlight of which were up to 10 Marsh Sandpipers. On the return journey to the hotel a Giant Kingfisher was seen from the inland Kotu bridge. After taking a break at the hotel, we walked across the road to the Kotu Sewerage Ponds again, seeing both Blackcap & Brown Babblers as we entered. Black-winged Stilts were everywhere & 2 Pearl-spotted Owlets were heard calling but by now it was becoming difficult to find new birds so we just enjoyed good views of many of the species we had already encountered.

Day 14: Our last full day & we started with a return visit to Lamin Lodge where we took a Pirogue trip around various creeks. Our target was Goliath Heron a species we had inexplicably missed so far & we were not disappointed with 7 seen. A Yellow-billed Stork was seen well together with Mouse-brown Sunbirds in the Mangroves but an unexpected bird was a female Pallid Harrier. Returning to Abuko for our last visit it was obviously a good day for eagles as we saw both Tawny & Wahlberg's within a few minutes for comparison & an African Hawk-Eagle. As usual, it was rather quiet during the middle of the day period but what was possibly the bird of the trip was located during this time, an enormous Verreaux's Eagle-Owl. Although it was initially disturbed it was quickly relocated & gave excellent views as it blinked it's pink eyelids at us. Just as we were about to leave, once again bird activity increased markedly. Klaas's Cuckoo, Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird & Red-shouldered Cuckoo-Shrike were all good birds but were totally eclipsed by a flock of Yellow-breasted Apalis, 2 Green Hylia & an unbelievably colourful Sulphur-breasted Bush Shrike. What an end to the day!

Day 15: The last morning was spent at leisure birding around the hotel grounds enjoying last views of many of the common birds of The Gambia. We left the hotel mid afternoon for an early evening flight back to the UK at the end of the tour.