

The GAMBIA: *short trip report 19th to 26th December 2008*

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This report is designed to complement the comprehensive report, by the same authors, of a 13 day trip to The Gambia in December 2007. It highlights species not recorded on the 2007 trip together with selected records of perhaps some of the other more sought-after species. The absence from the report of certain inland species merely reflects time constraints which prevented our visiting any areas upriver beyond Tendaba.

Some 260 species were recorded in the seven days of the 2008 trip, compared with around 315 in 2007. In particular, 22nd December 2008 at Tendaba will long remain as a red-letter day for those present!

Itinerary

19th Dec: early morning flight from Manchester on time, allowing a couple of hour's local birding before dusk. Night in hotel at Kololi.

20th Dec: early morning visit to Abuko NR, on to Lamin fields and then to Tujereng. Night in hotel at Kololi.

21st Dec: early start for Tendaba, stopping at likely places to bird *en route* including Kuloro and Kiang West NP. Night at Tendaba Camp.

22nd Dec: early boat trip along the inlets and mangrove creeks on the north side of the Gambia River - behind Tendaba Camp - the 'airfield' area - the start of the Batelling track - back to the 'airfield' at dusk. Night at Tendaba Camp.

23rd Dec: birded again behind Tendaba Camp - Quinella Batelling track – Kuloro. Night in hotel at Kololi.

24th Dec: Tujereng - Tanji beaches - Tanji NR. Night in hotel at Kololi.

25th Dec: Marakissa - Gunjur Wetland. Night in hotel at Kololi.

26th Dec: Abuko NR - Lamin Lodge & fields - airport perimeter - late afternoon return flight to UK.

*denotes species not recorded in December 2007

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

At least 60 at the Gunjur Wetland on 25th was a notable concentration.

***White-crested Tiger Heron** *Tigriornis leucolophus*

A female flew across low in front of the boat soon after the start of the 'creek crawl' from Tendaba in the early morning of 22nd. This was a much unexpected sighting of a rarely seen species.

White-backed Night Heron *Gorsachius leuconotus*

One, a juvenile, was at the base of bushes alongside a fish pond at Kuloro on 21st and two were roosting in mangroves on the Tendaba 'creek crawl' on 22nd.

***Black Crowned Crane** *Balearica pavonina*

On 22nd whilst searching the area around the 'airfield' at Tendaba for other species we had a chance encounter with some local girls who were tending cattle. They said that 'the cranes' had been there all day! Sure enough, after about a 3-4 km walk we discovered a group of seven browsing in grass fields and making occasional short flights.

***Martial Eagle** *Polemaetus bellicosus*

This was another star of the 'creek crawl' from Tendaba on 22nd. First seen on top of a distant tree, it remained there until the boat weaved its way closer. We were able to disembark and enjoy superlative views down to 50 m or so.

Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*

Several of these eagles gave fine views. Two were seen at Brumen Bridge en route to Tendaba on 21st then another further up at Kiang West NP); on 23rd two were on the Quinella Batteling track then two en route to Kololi, including one again at Brumen Bridge. One or two of these were immatures. In contrast, in 2007 our sighting was limited to one rather distant adult.

Ahanta Francolin *Francolinus ahantensis*

Abuko NR again came up trumps with this secretive species: three were viewed out in the open from one of the small hides on 20th. On 22nd, one was on view feeding near toilets and two more were seen off a side track further along

Stone Partridge *Ptilopachus petrosus*

Another species which can be difficult to see, indeed it was only heard in 2007. On 20th at Tujereng some calls were soon pinpointed to one giving reasonable views from the top of a low wall.

***Helmeted Guineafowl** *Numida meleagris*

Found at the second attempt in suitable thick cover in wooded grassland not far from Tendaba Camp on the morning of 23rd. On the previous day there was no sign but this time

an African Hawk Eagle in a tree drew noisy anxiety calls and eventually seven or eight flushed up.

***Yellow-legged Gull** *Larus michahellis*

(down as *Larus cachinnans* in the Barlow *et al* Field Guide). An adult was with the large gull and tern congregation at Tanji on 24th (the first seen by GB in four visits to The Gambia).

Four-banded Sandgrouse *Pterocles quadricinctus*

Five were watched at very close quarters in leaf litter near Tendaba Camp on 22nd, as they sheltered from the midday sun. Shortly afterwards a sixth bird was flushed from almost underfoot. In 2007 this species was seen only in flight towards dusk.

African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis*

One again gave excellent views on the 'creek crawl' from Tendaba.

***Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus*

Three were on the beach at Tanji on 24th.

***European Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia turtur*

One was seen on the 'creek crawl' from Tendaba on 22nd.

***Levaillant's Cuckoo** *Clamator levaillantii*

One showed well at close range in Abuko NR on 20th.

***Verreaux's Eagle Owl** *Bubo lacteus*

A return to Tendaba 'airfield' at dusk on 22nd soon revealed one of these magnificent owls on top of a tree less than 40 m away. It made one flight to another tree before disappearing into the night sky.

African Scops Owl *Otus senegalensis*

One roosting in the mangroves showed well on the 'creek crawl' from Tendaba on 22nd. This species was only heard during the night in 2007.

***Brown-necked Parrot** *Poicephalus robustus*

On 21st at Kiang West NP we staked out a known roost site for this shy species. According to the local ranger this was also a nesting site and the old nest could clearly be seen near the top of the principle tree. Sure enough at 1830 hrs a pair flew into the tree, calling loudly, but left after about two minutes probably owing to our presence. We therefore left straightaway.

***Abyssinian Ground Hornbill** *Bucorvus abyssinicus*

One appeared along the start of the Batelling Track, near Wurokang village, on the evening of 22nd. First seen in flight, it soon landed and walked about showing blue throat skin which identified it as a female. After a few minutes it jumped on to a termite mound before flying to roost in a nearby tree at 1850 hrs.

***Common Nightingale** *Luscinia megarhynchos*

One at Tujereng on 20th.

Plain-backed Pipit *Anthus leucophrys*

Two were at Tendaba 'airfield' on 22nd and one at Lamin Lodge on 26th.

***Leaflove** *Pyrrhurus scandens*

Two were heard calling (identified by Tijan) at Kuloro on 23rd but remained frustratingly out of view in deep cover.

***Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*

Three were at Tujereng on 20th and singles were seen on the 'creek crawl' on 22nd, near Tendaba on 23rd and at Tujereng on 24th.

***European Rock Thrush** *Monticola saxatilis*

A male in non-breeding plumage showed well in a burned compound at Tujereng on 24th.

Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*

One was on the edge of Gunjur wetland on 25th. Another was seen in reed beds near Lamin fields on 26th. Also, an *acrocephalus* warbler resembling this species was seen in atypical habitat at Tujereng on 20th. It was only heard in 2007.

***Singing Cisticola** *Cisticola cantans*

One perched up in the open long enough to be identified at Tujereng on 24th.

***Whistling Cisticola** *Cisticola lateralis*

One provided excellent views in a dead tree along the Quinella Batelling track on 23rd and one was at Tujereng on 24th.

[*Siffling Cisticola *Cisticola brachypterus*]

A small, plain cisticola with rufous in the wing at the Gunjur wetland on 25th was a good candidate for this species. Unfortunately, it disappeared before we could be 100% certain of the identification.

***Sedge Warbler** *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus*

One was in the fringes of Gunjur wetland on 25th.

***Green Crombec** *Sylvietta virens*

One, probably two, at Kuloro on 23rd. This is a very difficult species to pin down, even when calling, and this was our second attempt at the site, one being heard but not seen on 21st.

***African Blue Flycatcher** *Elminia longicauda*

One eventually revealed itself reasonably well on 22nd in the mangroves on the 'creek crawl' from Tendaba (on the Kisi bolon). Another was seen briefly high in mangroves before this one (on the Tunku bolon)

Yellow-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus africanus*

At least six were on cattle en route from Kuloro to Tendaba on 21st and five were in trees along the Quinella Batelling track on 23rd plus four further along the track on same day. The views had been brief, distant ones in 2007.

***Little Weaver** *Ploceus luteolus*

One showed well at Tujereng on 20th and two appeared in the hotel grounds at Kololi on the morning of 24th.

***Vitelline Masked Weaver** *Ploceus velatus*

About six were feeding along the Batelling Track on 23rd.