



SENEGAL: SUPREME WEST AFRICAN BIRDING

03 – 18 DECEMBER 2024



*The highly sought-after **Egyptian Plover** is one of our premier targets on this exciting tour – several boat trips are undertaken looking for them!*

Steeped in history, Senegal is a pleasantly delightful West African country that exceeds all expectations. Not only is the country safe, but also easy to visit, with a number of direct flights from Europe and North America. Most importantly for us however, are the birds. Located in the transitional Sahel zone, which is an otherwise difficult habitat type to access, Senegal offers what is easily the most accessible sites for such highly prized Sahel birds as **Quail-plover**, **Cricket Warbler** and **Golden Nightjar**. Not to mention the incredible **Egyptian Plover**, which is one of the most sought-after birds in Africa, along with the most important gathering of **Scissor-tailed Kite** in the world – all of which we readily seek.



***Cricket Warbler**, a Sahel special, is a highly prized bird we'll be seeking on this tour.*

This tour begins outside of the country's bustling capital, Dakar, following which we transit to the northern reaches of the country. Bordering on the edge of the mighty Sahara Desert, we look for the first of our important targets, namely **Golden Nightjar** and **Cricket Warbler**. We will also attempt to track down other specials such as **Sudan Golden Sparrow**, **Little Grey Woodpecker** and **Sennar Penduline Tit**. A short stop at the vast Djoudj wetlands breaks our journey southwards. This is a majorly important overwintering site for ducks and other waterbirds, with birds numbering well into the tens of thousands. A vast wetland oasis on the edge of the Sahara Desert is not to be taken lightly. If luck is on our side, we will hopefully come across both the scarce **Arabian** and **Savile's Bustards**, while also enjoying the likes of the majestic **Black Crowned Crane** and prized **River Prinia** in the surrounds.

We make a concerted effort to find the mega **Quail-plover** before we reach the south-eastern parts of the country. This is quite the change from the dry, sandy desert-like north, and exploring the massive Gambia River and the moist deciduous woodlands and riparian forests of Dindefelo will give us a large boost in species. This region hosts the incomparable **Egyptian Plover**, along with

scarce **Pel's Fishing Owl**, **African Finfoot**, **Neumann's Starling** and **Mali Firefinch**. We can also find more iconic species here, such as **Violet Turaco**, **Blue-bellied Roller**, **Northern Carmine Bee-eater** and **Narina Trogon**, amongst many others. We conclude the tour with several days exploring various bits of the extensive Saloum Delta from our comfortable lodge. A trip to the massive **Scissor-tailed Kite** roost on Kousmer Island, which numbers into the thousands, is sure to be a contender for 'bird of the trip', and we will also dedicate some time, and boat trips, to looking for the rare **White-crested Tiger Heron** in the mangroves.



Northern Carmine Bee-eaters are always a firm favorite on the tour!

Itinerary (16 days/15 nights)

Day 1. Arrival into Dakar

The day is set aside for your arrival into the capital city, Dakar. After arrival at its new Blaise Diagne International Airport, we will overnight in nearby Thiès. There are no formal plans for birding today, and you can arrive at your leisure.

Overnight: Thiès hotel

Day 2. Birding to St Louis

Our birding adventure in Senegal begins as we transit up to the historic coastal town of St Louis, where we call in for the night at our comfortable lodge. While we will mostly be driving today, we will be birding along the entire route up to St Louis, where we anticipate arriving in the late

afternoon. We expect new birds to come in thick and fast, and we will concentrate our birding in various (and bird-rich) acacia thornveld patches (almost reminiscent of southern Africa's Kalahari Desert). Here we will get acquainted quickly with some of Senegal's more common arid birds which include the likes of **Vinaceous Dove**, **Blue-naped Mousebird**, **Western Red-billed Hornbill** and the extravagant **Long-tailed Glossy Starling**. We also hope to come across a few more special birds which may include the bright **Abyssinian Roller**, **African Green Bee-eater**, **Vieillot's Barbet**, **Senegal Batis**, **Yellow-crowned Gonolek**, **Pygmy Sunbird**, and if we're lucky, the scarce **Little Grey Woodpecker**. This route also traverses the best region in Senegal for vultures, and we'll keep a beady eye on the sky for the likes of the rare **Lappet-faced** and **Rüppell's Vultures**, while both **White-backed Vulture** and **Griffon Vulture** are usually more obvious. Should time allow, we may also do our first bit of 'water birding' near St Louis. This is a slightly unique habitat on the tour, as we don't access any other coastal points on the route, and we will try to ensure we pick up as many of the shorebirds, gulls and terns as we can, the most important being the scarce **West African Crested Tern**.

Overnight: Ranch de Bango



Vibrant Yellow-crowned Gonoleks add much to the surrounding arid landscapes.

Days 3 – 4. Birding Podor, and the edge of the Sahara Desert

From St Louis, we transit north to the small village of Podor, right on the border with Mauritania, and on the edge of the Sahara Desert, for two nights. Here a slew of important key species awaits us, as we spend our time birding in the greater Senegal River valley with its mix of dry acacia woods, scrubby thickets and sandy dune fields. Foremost amongst our targets will be the iconic

Golden Nightjar and **Cricket Warbler** – arguably more easily accessed here than at any other point in their range. We will also ensure we dedicate some time to finding other specials from the dry north such as **African Collared Dove**, **Black Scimitarbill**, **Fulvous Babbler**, **Sennar Penduline Tit**, **Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark**, **Black Scrub Robin**, **Chestnut-bellied Starling** and **Sudan Golden Sparrow**. We also make time to spend at a few dedicated bird-photography hides, which provide us with unequaled views of many of the areas' birds. Here flocks of **Sudan Golden Sparrow** vie for attention, while dainty **Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu** and **African Silverbill** try to avoid getting overwhelmed by the sparrows. **Abyssinian Rollers** and **Western Red-billed Hornbills** drop down to disperse the smaller birds, and **Black Scrub Robins** dart out from the thickets. If we are extremely lucky and get our timing correct, we may even watch as a **Golden Nightjar** comes down to drink in front of us!

Overnight: Mbantou hotel



Sudan Golden Sparrows are a common sight in the far northern parts of Senegal.

Day 5. Transfer to the Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary

The Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and a wetland of major importance. Given its proximity to the massive Sahara Desert, this vast freshwater wetland system houses thousands of waterbirds, many of which overwinter here from Europe, and serves as an important breeding ground for many others. We anticipate arriving in good time, allowing for an afternoon excursion to the aptly named Grand Lac. Combined with the cooling of the temperatures in the afternoon, the waterbird viewing will be immense here, and we are sure to bear witness to a magnificent spectacle comprised of thousands of waterfowl (mostly consisting of **White-faced**

Whistling Duck, Garganey, Northern Shoveler and Northern Pintail), along with both **Greater** and **Lesser Flamingos**. These are just a few of a wide range of waterbirds we expect to see here. Additionally, the dry scrubby verges of Grand Lac is arguably the most reliable place in the country to find the rare **Arabian Bustard**, and the late afternoon period gives us a good attempt to hopefully find this scarce and declining bird.

Overnight: Campement Villageois du Djoudj



The Djoudj wetlands support vast numbers of birds.

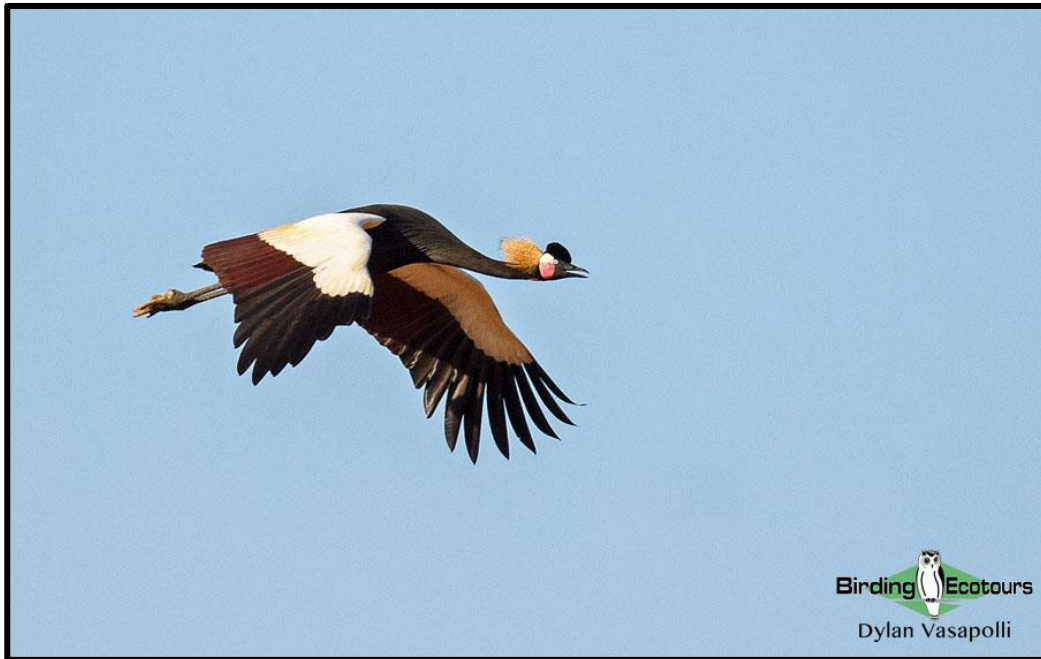
Day 6. Birding the Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary and Les Marigots

The full morning is spent within the Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary, as we seek out some of its other specials. **Black Crowned Cranes** are an important target species for us here, and with some dedicated scanning of the area we stand a good chance of finding them. We will need a bit of luck in finding the shy **Greater Painted-snipe**, as they stick to the reedy verges of the wetlands, while the incredibly localized and only recently described **River Prinia** fortunately shouldn't present us with too much of a challenge, as they abound here. We will also include a boat trip to view the massive **Great White Pelican** breeding colony. Seeing these birds up close and personal is a true highlight! Additionally, we have another chance to try for the rare **Arabian Bustard** should we still 'need' it. As usual, wetland areas are very birdy, and we expect to tally up to 100 species, with a wide range of shorebirds, cormorants, herons, egrets, spoonbills, kingfishers, bee-eaters and warblers present.

Following lunch in the sanctuary, we transfer back to our comfortable St Louis lodge for the night. We ensure we arrive in good time, allowing us to try for another important target bird nearby –

Savile's Bustard. Like many of these birds, they are very sensitive to habitat change, and this species is sadly declining due to habitat loss.

Overnight: Ranch de Bango



Black Crowned Crane are a feature within the Djoudj Bird Sanctuary.



River Prinia is another important target species here – fortunately they are common!

Day 7. Searching for the mega Quail-plover

We have a long transfer today, as we begin the journey to the south-eastern parts of Senegal – the next main area we'll be focusing our birding on. One important bird, however, lies in between – **Quail-plover**. This mega African bird is rare and highly nomadic, and therefore highly sought-after. Senegal is easily the best destination to see this species, and sightings have been quite reliable over the last few years. We anticipate arriving into the area in time for a dedicated afternoon search. Finding this species is somewhat reminiscent of finding a needle in a haystack, and it will involve the group walking through the arid scrubby vegetation in the hope of 'finding' it. Obviously, there is a lot more to it, with the bird favoring a very specific micro-habitat, which we hone in on and explore until we find it.

Overnight: Mbacké



*The unique **Quail-plover** is a mega African species, highly nomadic and thinly distributed. Senegal is arguably the easiest place to currently see this rare species (photo Nigel Voaden, Wikimedia Commons).*

Days 8 – 9. Birding and boat trips at Wassadou Camp

We have another opportunity in the morning of Day 8 to search for the enigmatic **Quail-plover** in the surrounding area, should we have failed to find it the previous afternoon. We will then settle in for the long drive to get to the famous (in birding terms!) Wassadou Camp, where we will spend two nights.

Scenically located on the Gambia River in south-eastern Senegal, this camp provides a great base from which to explore the surrounding area. We undertake several boat trips up and down the Gambia River as we seek out our primary target, the iconic **Egyptian Plover**. Fortunately, the plover is usually not too difficult to find, and being on the boat normally allows us to get up close and personal with them, enjoying unbeatable views! Other highly prized species to be found include **African Finfoot**, **White-backed Night Heron** and even **Pel's Fishing Owl** (rare). We visit colonies of the bright **Red-throated** and **Northern Carmine Bee-eaters** along the river here, and as we saunter slowly along the river, we are assured of coming across a great many kingfishers – **Pied**, **Malachite**, **Giant**, **Woodland**, **Blue-breasted**, **Grey-headed** and, more rarely, **Shining-blue Kingfishers**, can all be found. A wide range of other more common waterbirds are also likely.



***Egyptian Plover** is a majorly important target on this tour. Fortunately, they are normally easy to find on the Gambia River from Wassadou Camp.*

We will also explore the surrounding riverine vegetation, as it generally supports a wealth of other birdlife. First and foremost, we will try to track down the localized **Adamawa Turtle Dove**, and we will also have our first opportunity to see the spectacular **Violet Turaco** and the strange **Oriole Warbler**. **Western Plantain-eater** should be a dime a dozen, and we're also likely to bump into a number of other species such as **Broad-billed** and the spectacular **Blue-bellied Rollers**, **Brown-throated Wattle-eye**, **Northern Puffback**, **Red-shouldered Cuckooshrike**, **African Blue Flycatcher**, **Senegal Eremomela**, **Brown and Blackcap Babbler**, **Grey Tit-Flycatcher**, **Swamp Flycatcher**, **White-crowned Robin-Chat** and **Village Indigobird**. A number of starlings are usually in evidence, and we should come across **Bronze-tailed**, **Purple** and **Greater Blue-eared Starlings**, in addition to the extravagant **Long-tailed Glossy Starling**, which we should

already be familiar with. The area is also a magnet for raptors, and we need to keep an eye open for species such as **Brown** and **Western Banded Snake Eagles**, **Wahlberg's Eagle**, **African Hawk-Eagle** and **African Fish-Eagle**, along with **Shikra**, **Dark Chanting Goshawk** and even **Red-footed Falcon**.

Overnight: Wassadou Camp



Bright Red-throated Bee-eaters will also feature from our boat trips at Wassadou.

Days 10 – 11. Birding Dindefelo, and the remote south-east

We journey to Kédougou following our time at the wonderful Wassadou Camp, where we base ourselves for two nights. The main purpose of coming to this remote town, right on the southern border with Guinea, is to give ourselves the best chance at finding some more localized birds – namely: **Sun Lark**, **Neumann's Starling** and **Mali Firefinch**. We will concentrate our efforts around the Dindefelo waterfall, where the lush riverine forest seems a world away from all the dry habitat we've experienced so far throughout the rest of Senegal. The birding is excellent here and is likely to turn up other such specials as **Guinea Turaco** and **Narina Trogon**, while we will count ourselves fortunate if we come across the rare **Willcock's Honeyguide** or **Dybowski's Twinspot**. The wooded Guinea savannas blanketing this area are not to be ignored either, and it is within them that we'll keep an eye out for further specials, including **Fox Kestrel**, **Dorst's Cisticola**, **Yellow-bellied Hyliota**, **Western Violet-backed Sunbird**, **Chestnut-crowned Sparrow Weaver**, **Sahel Paradise Whydah** and **Gosling's Bunting**.

Overnight: Kédougou hotel



Fox Kestrel is one of the special birds of the Kédougou region we hope to come across.

Day 12. Birding to Tambacounda

We have a final morning of birding to spend in the greater Kédougou region, where we can search for scarce species we may not yet have seen, such as **Sun Lark**, before we'll need to move on. Our journey takes us through the massive Niokolo-Koba National Park once again (we also journey through it on our way to Kédougou on Day 10), and while stopping is prohibited in the national park, we'll hope to come across the massive **Abyssinian Ground Hornbill** and **Bateleur** whilst we're transiting through. Eventually, we'll reach our base at Tambacounda, where we'll spend the night – essentially breaking the drive to the Saloum Delta.

Overnight: Tambacounda hotel

Day 13. Birding to the Saloum Delta, and Scissor-tailed Kites!

We make the journey back to Senegal's coastline and the vast Saloum Delta. While we still have much driving to do today, we will have a full afternoon to spend birding around Ndiaffate. This arid area hosts many of the drier country birds we'll be familiar with from the far north, such as **Black-headed Lapwing**, **African Green Bee-eater**, **Desert Cisticola**, **Chestnut-bellied Starling** and **Pygmy Sunbird**, amongst others. Additionally, **Savile's Bustard** can sometimes be found. Our main purpose for birding around Ndiaffate is that it presents us with the opportunity to get to the nearby Kousmar Island. This site, located effectively in the middle of the Saloum River, houses the most important roosting area during the dry season for **Scissor-tailed Kite**, anywhere in their range. We ensure we arrive in good time in the later parts of the afternoon, and settle in as we watch first tens, then hundreds, and soon after, thousands of **Scissor-tailed Kites** gathering and

plunging into their roost trees for the evening. This is an incredible spectacle to witness. Vast numbers of **Lesser Kestrels** also join the kites roosting here. No good things come easily though, we first to wade through a tidal section of the river (effectively wet and muddy beach sand – ankle deep), before taking a canoe across a deeper channel to reach the island. Once we've had our fill of this amazing spectacle, we'll journey to Toubacouta, where we'll arrive in the early evening.

Overnight: Keur Saloum Hotel



*We make a trip to Kousmar Island, where vast numbers of **Scissor-tailed Kites** come to roost.*

Days 14 – 15. Birding and boat trips in the Saloum Delta

We have two full days to explore the wonderfully diverse birding in and around the Saloum Delta. Our primary target, and hopefully the last of our main Senegal specials, is the **White-crested Tiger Heron**. This is a rare resident of the sprawling mangroves on the delta, and we undertake several boat trips to best ensure we have every opportunity to see this special bird. As always, boat trips are generally excellent, and these ones are no different. Numbers of the comical **Western Reef Heron** typically overrun all the other species, but we'll search for the huge **Goliath Heron**, and similar-looking **Black Heron** as well. Shorebirds are well represented, and we're likely to get close-up views of common species such as **Eurasian Whimbrel** and **Grey Plover**, along with the likes of **Common Redshank** and **Bar-tailed Godwit**. **Caspian** and **Gull-billed Terns** patrol the waterways, and the peculiar **Hamerkop** is likely to feature as well. The boat trips also present us with a great opportunity to see the scarce and local **Mangrove Sunbird**. Raptors are well represented and, in particular, we'll look for the rather uncommon **Beaudouin's Snake Eagle**

amongst all the other species. Good numbers of **Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters** can often be seen moving about over the delta.



White-crested Tiger Heron will be sought out in the mangroves of the sprawling Saloum Delta – we undertake several boat trips to look for it.

We will also ensure we spend some time birding in the woodlands surrounding the Saloum Delta, along with some of the excellent freshwater wetlands. Coveys of **Stone Partridges** run about in the wooded areas, while small groups of **Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters** flit about quietly, and the hulking **Bearded Barbets** search out fruiting trees. Dainty **Lavender Waxbills** keep to the thicker areas, as **Fine-spotted Woodpeckers** explore the many large trees in the area, as noisy flocks of **Senegal Parrot** commute overhead. We'll also seek out **Four-banded Sandgrouse**, and the bright **Yellow Penduline Tit**, though both are scarce and difficult to find. More widespread African species on the limit of their ranges here can also be expected and include the likes of **Green Wood Hoopoe**, **Greater Honeyguide**, **Grey Kestrel**, **Yellow-billed Shrike**, **African Golden Oriole**, **Glossy-backed Drongo**, **Piapiac**, **Northern Crombec**, **Anteater Chat**, **Beautiful Sunbird** and **Bronze Mannikin**. This is also a good zone for over-wintering Palearctic migrants from Europe, and it is not uncommon to encounter many species, ranging from the numerous **Common Chiffchaff** to **Melodious Warbler** and **Common Redstart**. In the evenings, we may be serenaded by **African Scops Owls** and **Pearl-spotted Owlets**, as we enjoy our final dinners together.

Overnight: Keur Saloum Hotel



Senegal Parrots commute noisily through the woodlands surrounding the Saloum Delta.

Day 16. Transfer to Dakar, and evening departure

This is the last day of the tour, and while we may have a bit of time in the morning to spend birding around the Toubacouta area, we are likely to rather have a relaxed morning as we get ready for our departure later in the day. We make the drive back to Dakar, where the tour will come to an end at the Blaise Diagne International Airport, in the afternoon. We advise you to only book flights from this evening only.

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes must use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration:	16 days
Limit:	4 - 8
Dates:	03 – 18 December 2024
Start:	Dakar
End:	Dakar
Price:	€5,470 per person sharing based on 4 – 9 participants (2024)

Single supplement: €540 (2024)

Price includes:

All accommodation
All meals from dinner on Day 1 to lunch on Day 16
Mineral water
International tour leader and local guide
Park entrance fees
All guide fees
Excursion costs and boat trips as indicated

Price excludes:

International flights to/from Dakar, Senegal
Travel insurance
Entry visas
Soft and alcoholic drinks (except water)
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))
Gifts and other items of a personal nature