

Seawatching from Point des Almadies, Senegal, October 1994

By Gary A. Allport

Between 9-23 October 1994, I seawatched on five occasions off Point des Almadies, Dakar. The very useful notes of Baillon and Dubois¹ gave details of the best viewpoint but I found that access to the site has changed since their visits.

The site is a 30 minute taxi ride from Dakar town centre. Ask for the Hotel du President at Point des Almadies and agree a price before you set off.

A new boundary fence from the Hotel du President down to the shore makes northward access from the restaurants on the sea front, as suggested by Baillon and Dubois¹, very difficult. In autumn it is essential to reach a point north of these restaurants otherwise the reef will prevent you from seeing more than a fraction of the birds (it may be different in spring²). To reach the watchpoint ask the driver to take you into the hotel grounds. Walk down to the coast, go through the main hotel gates, cross the car park to the left, go round the back of the helipads and bear right over the golf course. You will merge on the coast at the small building shown on Baillon and Dubois¹ map.

In autumn the great majority of birds are heading south but the line of passage taken by skuas and shearwaters varies considerably. Watching from a location about 300 m north of the building you will find the closer birds hove into view earlier, are in sight for longer, and also fractionally closer. However, close birds are relatively few and the main streams are best scanned from the area immediately behind the building. I found the best position was on the slightly higher rocks just below the golf tee. Unfortunately views of close-in birds are poor from here since they are heading out round the reef when they come into view. Terns, particularly Royal/Lesser Crested, tend to fly along the shore and are very difficult to monitor whilst watching other pelagics.

At times, phenomenal seabird numbers pass Point des Almadies. Birds tend to come in groups and even sample counts failed to cover the movements adequately - a team of three or four watchers would be needed. The figures given in the table are minima.

Light was better in the morning but the passage was slower, except for *Calonectris* Shearwaters and 'Marsh' Terns (which passed well offshore). Passage was heaviest in late afternoon. The onshore winds, strongest late in the day, may have been the cause. The afternoon passage was most sparse on 22 October when the wind was very light. The idea of watching from here on a very windy day, particularly during a south-westerly when the wave troughs would be best aligned for sighting birds as they approach from the north, offers the prospect of a very impressive spectacle.

Counts of seabirds passing Point des Almadies, Senegal in October 1994

Date	15/10	15/10	16/10	16/10	22/10
Time	07.45-08.45	14.30-17.15	07.30-10.00	13.45-17.30	14.15-17.45
Total hours	1	2.75	2.5	3.75	3.5
Wind	NW 1-2	NW 1-3	NW 0-2	NW 1-3	NNW 1-2
Bulwer's Petrel <i>Bulweria bulwerii</i>	-	-	-	-	1
<i>Calonectris</i> Shearwaters	227	7	422	128	3
Sooty Shearwater <i>Puffinus griseus</i>	47	c.875	71	c.1250	c.445
Manx Shearwater <i>Puffinus puffinus</i>	-	1	-	-	3
Little Shearwater <i>Puffinus assimilis</i>	-	-	-	1	-
Northern Gannet <i>Morus bassanus</i>	1	3	-	-	1
Grey Phalarope <i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>	7	22	9	18	-
Great Skua <i>Catharacta skua</i>	1	-	1	-	1
Pomarine Skua <i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>	42	c.1150	c.275	c.1400	c.700
Pomarine/Arctic Skua <i>S. pomarinus/parasiticus</i>	15	c.425	c.185	c.600	c.500
Long-tailed Skua <i>Stercorarius longicaudus</i>	-	32+	3	c.70	5
Lesser Black-backed Gull <i>Larus fuscus</i>	1	3	-	1	-
Sabine's Gull <i>Larus sabini</i>	-	27	14	89	11
Royal/Lesser Crested Tern <i>S. maxima/bengalensis</i>	c.150	c.700	c.235	c.1000	c.870
Roseate/Common/Arctic Tern <i>S. dougalli/hirundo/paradisea</i>	c.275	c.7500	c.500	c.7000	c.4000
Sooty Tern <i>S. fuscata</i>	-	1	-	-	-
'Marsh' Terns <i>Chlidonias niger/leucopterus/hybridus</i>	c.700	c.2000	c.5000	c.2500	c.2000

References

1. Baillon, F. & Dubois, P. 1991. *Seawatching from Cape Verde, Senegal*. Birding World 4: 440-442
2. Marr, T. & Porter, R. 1992. *Spring seabird passage off Senegal*. Birding World 5: 391-394