

Seawatching from Cape Verde, Senegal

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Senegal is situated on the west coast of Africa, just to the south of the Western Palearctic, and Dakar, the capital, lies some 150 km north of the popular birding destination of the Gambia. During a study of terns along the coast of Senegal in August 1990, we discovered an excellent seawatching locality at Cape Verde (Cap Vert peninsula) Pointes des Almadies, Dakar.

We spent 40 hours seawatching from Pointes des Almadies between 28th August and 9th December 1990 (20 hours between 28th August and 2nd September) and saw many interesting species, some of them new to Senegal.

Bulwer's Petrel: seven on 27th October; the first official record for Senegal.

Calonectris Shearwaters: small flocks seen regularly, the largest numbers 80 on 2nd September and 442 on 1st November.

Sooty Shearwater: a total of 1.582 with most at the end of September and in early October (e.g. 282 in two hours on 23rd September and 956 in two hours on 7th October). This species was previously known as 'rather rare' off Senegal (Dupuy 1984).

Manx Shearwater: 41 between 30th August and 28th September.

Balearic Shearwater: one on 2nd September and three on 7th October. These were the first and second records for Senegal. This species can apparently reach more southern latitudes (Mackrill 1988).

Little Shearwater: three on 31st August (and possibly one on 1st September). Previously unknown in Senegal apart from a very few records far offshore.

Cape Gannet: a very probable subadult was seen on 30th August. Apparently the first record for Senegal. Very few Northern Gannets were observed during this period, although this species is not rare in winter.

Grey Phalarope: 452, mostly between 30th August and 2nd September (326 on this last date). This was the first time that such a passage has been noted in Senegal.

Skua sp.: a total of 954 skuas was recorded during the period, with 613 between early September and mid October; Arctic Skua was by far the most numerous species in late August. In winter, Pomarine Skua is the commonest species along the Senegalese coast (hundreds in March 1990, pers. obs.).

Long-tailed Skua: 104 were identified in the period, mainly at the end of August and into early September; 69 passed on 30th August. Recorded only three or four times previously.

Great Skua: one on 27th October.

Sabine's Gull: 734 recorded between 30th August and 7th October, with peaks on 2nd September (389 in 4 1/5 hours), 28th September (120 in two hours) and 7th October (95 in two hours). Previously only seen in very small numbers in spring (May).

Lesser Black-backed Gull: surprisingly few were seen.

Audouin's Gull: only two, on 18th November. This species is now fairly common in winter in Senegal (Delaporte and Dubois 1991), with more than 500 seen in January and February (pers. obs.).

Mediterranean Gull: 14 together on 18th November. This species is rare in winter.

Arctic Tern: About 3.000 counted, mostly between 28th August and 2nd September, but probably c. 10.000 passed during the period. This species was known from Senegal by just a few records (mainly in spring and recoveries), but the waters off Senegal are believed to be the meeting place for the European/Siberian and Nearctic populations (Vandewalle, 1998).

Sandwich Tern: 1.618 counted, mainly during September.

Other terns: Hundreds of Common and Little Terns passed, mainly during late September, while 610 Royal Terns, a few Caspian Terns and 1.300 Black Terns were mainly in September. One each of Gull-billed Tern and Lesser Crested Tern were also seen.

The number of seabirds noted during 40 hours of watching made Pointe des Almadies a very exciting place for seawatching, and it certainly seems to offer more birds than seawatching from, for example Mauritania (J. Trotignon *pers. comm.*), Morocco (G. Balança *in litt.*), northwestern Spain (Estaca de Bares, S. Bamière *in litt.*) or in Canary waters (Jolliffe 1990). Further study would undoubtedly be worthwhile, especially during September to November when small petrels are more likely to be seen.

Pointe des Almadies is also an excellent site for seeing Bottlenose Dolphin *Tursiops truncatus* and Striped Dolphin *Stenella coeruleoalba*, turtles, flying fish and mantas, as well as the wonderful Atlantic Blue Marlin *Makaira nigricans*.

Access

Pointe des Almadies is only 8 km from Yoff International Airport (Dakar). The track to the site is opposite the Club Méditerranée, on the righthand side of the road. The best place to seawatch from is near the last house at the end of the track. There is no official campsite close to Pointe des Almadies and the hotels nearby are rather expensive but, fortunately, the area seems very peaceful and there are few people about. It is worth hiring a car as there are other very good birding sites in and around Dakar, such as Parc National des Iles de la Madeleine (Red-billed Tropicbird and Bridled Tern nesting; permits available from Direction des Parcs Nationaux du Senegal), Hann beach (very good for terns and gulls, including records of Franklin's Gull and other rarities) and Malika Lake near Pikine (excellent for waders – including, occasionally, Nearctic species – herons, gulls and passerines).

We would be very pleased to give additional advice to anyone who would like to visit Pointe des Almadies and grateful to receive reports of further observations from the area.

References

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In 1991, a French team (Alain Ferchal, Frédéric and Emmanuel Gfeller and Olivier Laugero) spent a total of 145 hours seawatching from Pointe des Almadies between 30th July and 5th September. Their most interesting observations included totals of 10 Balearic Shearwaters, 756 Grey Phalaropes, 24 Long-tailed Skuas, 4 Great Skuas, 3.500 Royal Terns, 17 Lesser Crested Terns, 15.300 Arctic Terns and 15.800 Black Terns.

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