

Technopole – a great and easy birding site

By Betsy Hopkins, January 2005

Just outside the city of Dakar, on the north side of the Cap Vert Peninsula, is located a large area where excellent birding can be done year round. The site is easily reached from the N'Gor area within 20 minutes by taxi. In the 4 years members of the Senegal Birders Club have regularly birded the area, we literally have seen different birds and groups of birds each time we go. There's always something interesting! Our records document about 150 species sited in the area. We know there are more (specifically various kinds of warblers which pass through) which, due mainly to our own lack of expertise, are there at some time during the year.

This area is called the Technopole. It is what is locally referred to as a "Niayes" (a Wolof word), which means an area where water gathers in the rainy season, and reed pools and marshes remain year round. It is just a few kilometers inland from the ocean. Samples of this habitat zone extend along the coast of Senegal from the Sine Saloum Delta south of Dakar to Saint Louis in the north of the country. The area is surrounded on the south by the autoroute, and on all other sides by growing communities of several Dakar suburbs (Guedueye on the west and north, Pekine on the east). Pedestrian traffic through the area is very limited, due mainly to the security which the golf club has enforced since its opening.

The Technopole is recognized as an endangered environment, and is technically protected by the government. However, it is definitely a threatened environment due to encroaching construction and noise pollution from the surrounding neighborhoods, and also by the tendency of local farmers and fishermen to over-fish and pollute the waters on the property. Due mainly to the presence of the golf club, we are hopeful that the Technopole will remain protected, thus providing both an excellent place for birds to live, and rest as they migrate...as well as an excellent place where birders can enjoy a plethora of bird species in a small, easily accessible spot.

In the late 1990's, much change came to the area as major portions of it were dredged, flooded, and otherwise prepared for the golf course. Aside from the many small pools and canals which are seasonal according to the amount of rains, there is a large permanent lake around which the golf course is situated. This is a major draw for thousands of migrating birds in the spring and fall seasons. Flocks of hundreds of flamingos and pelicans have been seen. Tens of thousands of black terns, and myriads of gulls are also seen annually. Several species of ducks frequent the lake, with some resident year round and some migrating visitors.

The Technopole comprise a total of 200 hectares (approx. 450 acres), 80 of which are the golf course. It was set aside a number of years ago as a combination technological center/golf resort. The technological side of things didn't prosper, as is evidenced by several abandoned building compounds on the property. It does appear currently that at least one of the businesses is working, and there is construction going on at several sites. The 18 hole golf resort was finished in 2004, and seems to be doing well, at least in terms of the course, and grounds around the course, which are being well maintained and guarded.

Since 1998, individual birders and members of the Senegal Birders Club have regularly birded the Technopole. Records have been kept of what has been sited, and lists are available from me upon request, and are posted in part on this website. There is also a study done (in French), by a Belgian graduate student in cooperation with Orstom, of the "Grand Niayes de Pekine", of which the Technopole is part. This is in my possession for reference if desired. We have met with the succession of Golf Club managers, as each new one takes over. We have always been welcomed

by the managers, and encouraged to continue to keep track of the birds in the area. A poster of the common birds in West Africa has been presented to the Club to help with identification and encourage interest by those who play golf. Often we talk with the Senegalese guards and golf caddies who are employed there, and they show a continued friendliness to our being there and an interest in the birds as well.

It is easy to get to the Technopole, either from the city or from the airport. It is located about 4 kms from the intersection/traffic circle where the autoroute from the city meets the section which goes out to the airport. The autoroute section which is the only road off the peninsula, out to Rufisque and the rest of the country is the road to take for the Technopole. Since the main entrance of the Technopole is on the west side of the autoroute, you have to make a u-turn if you are headed east (off the peninsula). This can be done at the Pikine intersection (if you are in a taxi ask for this) or at the second possible left turn after the circle. You will know the Technopole as you pass it going east because it has a unusual decorative wall /fence bordering it, in front of which are numerous sellers of plants and flowers. As you make the u-turn and head back to the west, the large gated area where you enter is just about 50 yards from where you turned, marked by a small sign which indicates the golf course.

All the roads in the Technopole are hard-packed dirt. There are fields and dry areas to the left as you enter where there used to be marshes, but which were drained and diked when the golf course was being built. The road leading into the Technopole goes straight but you can take a detour to the first dirt road on the left to see if there are any birds over in what we call the South, Central and Central/West Areas. During the rainy season, after mid-July usually, there is standing water in much of that area and the waders tend to congregate there. We have seen up to 5 kinds of plovers in the area of puddles nearest the fence bordering the autoroute, as well as many other kinds of waders.

If you have a 4X4, you can take that first left, and then a right between the fields, behind the building compound. If you follow that path (which gets smaller and very sandy) there are gardens back in there, and fields. In the garden areas, the Senegal Firefinch, the Grey-headed Kingfisher, and the Red Bishop are often seen (in season), along with Senegal Coucals, various Doves, Little Bee-eaters and an occasional Red-billed or Grey Hornbill. Crested Larks, Spur-winged Plovers and (in season) several sub-species of Yellow Wagtails frequent the cultivated fields.

There are many canals and small lakes/puddles cut through the dry areas, which are frequented by Grey Herons, other egrets and herons and small waders. An Osprey is resident and frequently seen back there. Several Sacred Ibis were spotted there one time. An Avocet spent the summer there in 2002. It's always worth going back there, either on foot or with a 4X4 if you have the time. Never know what you'll see!

Returning to the main road is the best way to get to the other main sections of the Technopole. You can try it across country, but watch the areas which look dry – even in the dry season, they tend to be spongy!! We have gotten stuck (w/ a 4 wheel drive pick-up) several times on apparently dry ground!

As you drive north toward the Golf Clubhouse (about 2 km), you pass reed pools and marsh areas on both sides of the road. There are waders in the small ponds during much of the year. Pied Kingfishers often perch on the fence poles by the ponds. It's worth stopping by the fields when they are being cultivated because some of the more reclusive birds hang out on the borders of the fields. Common Moorhens, Black Crakes and Purple Gallinules can often be seen.

Just before the Golf Clubhouse tennis courts, you can turn to the right and drive back around the low building (part of which is a kennel for the guard dogs used on the property). There is a raised pond to your right which is a holding pond. Behind the low building, there is an inlet and many reed pools. This is what we call the Central/East area and where we do the bulk of our birding. Refer to the lists for birds commonly seen in this area. You can walk back in behind the reed pools, depending on how high the water is. There are sometimes fishermen using nets in the pools, or harvesting the reeds. A brief local greeting, "Nang – ga – def", will please people!

You can try to walk beyond the Golf Clubhouse to the north, between the greens (on designated paths, of course). Sometimes the staff will allow this and sometimes they won't. If you explain you are birding, this may help. Or if you rent golf clubs (total cost for fees and rentals about \$50) and play a few rounds, that'll help too! Many of the birds seen in the Central/West area are here also...in larger numbers. This is where you are most likely also to see the flamingos in significant numbers. In the far north corner, there are gardens and more reed pools.

From the Clubhouse, you can also walk over to the Central/West area and head south back along the greens. This area is drier, with hedges of bouganvillia and palm trees. Flocks of Red-billed Quelea, among others, are common in the low bushes.

There are 3 large ponds just to the south of the Clubhouse. Here salt is harvested by local people, as the water is briny and hosts micro-organisms which produce salt that collects on the bottom of the ponds. Many waders gather here, including Senegal Thickknees by the dozens. In the summer of 2003, many thousand Black Terns were observed resting in these ponds over a period of three weeks. If you walk around in this area, beware of dogs – there are occasionally groups of dogs that wander around and can be threatening. We've never had any trouble if we are careful to keep our distance.

Good luck with your birding at the Technopole!