

## **Trip report**

### **Birds recorded in the area of Dakar, Senegal – October 2005**

By Wouter Faveyts, Belgium

I visited Dakar, the capital of Senegal, from October 22 until October 29, 2005. It was a work trip so not specifically aimed at bird watching. However, I had my binoculars with me and whenever time permitted, I tried to do some spotting.

This was mostly done in the garden and on the adjoining golf course of the hotel where I was staying, and then usually in the early morning hours before the sessions of the conference which I attended were starting. The hotel in question was the Meridien President, situated at the north side of the Cap Vert Peninsula on which Dakar is situated. The hotel grounds are bordering the Atlantic Ocean and the combination of this and a well vegetated garden and golf course assured some fairly good birding, at least for a newcomer to African birds!

On October 26, a conference trip was made to the Lac Rose (the Pink Lake), a large salt water lagoon along the ocean. It was a trip by bus, during the hottest hours of the day, with other people attending the conference. Rather touristy but some nice birds were picked up nevertheless.

On the last day of my stay, October 29, I had a whole day to wait since my plane left only late in the evening. I used this opportunity to visit the Technopole area of Dakar. This place appears to be fairly well known to birders visiting Dakar. It's composed of freshwater lakes, a golf course and more vegetated areas, with a dirt road going through it. It's almost like a nature oasis inside of Dakar. I did not do the whole area but just along the broad dike that runs through, on the way to the golf club? Probably a lot more could have been found if the further lying bushes could have been checked. I got there by taxi, with the driver waiting for me until I was ready to go back – good deal! For the last night of my stay, I also switched to another hotel (Club le Calao – also along the coast, a little north of the Meridien) and while being there, I did some birding in the area of that hotel too.

Since the trip was not really aimed at birding, the observations below are merely supposed to give a brief view of birding in this part of West-Africa. This is not a comprehensive report by any means. I spent only little time on birding, I was birding on my own most of the time (some other people attending the conference joined in around the hotel occasionally) and I only had my binoculars and no telescope.

However, I hope to show that Dakar offers good birding opportunities for anyone who is in town and has only limited time for birding.

I had my digital camera with me and was able to get some good pictures of birds. Birds were definitely more tame than they are back in Europe, this making it a lot easier for taking pictures!

I used 10 x 42 Swarovski EL binoculars. I had one bird book with me, 'Birds of Western Africa', by Nik Borrow and Ron Demey. I had done some studying ahead of the trip so I was reasonably well prepared for birding in this part of the world. The book is a very good guide and I can totally advise the use of it to everyone who's birding in the area! It was my first time in Africa and I had great help from it.

Besides the book, I had gone through the very interesting website on birds in Senegal <http://senegal.seawatching.net>, managed by Niklas Holmström from Sweden. I hereby wish to thank him for having this great website, a real must for everyone interested in birds in the Dakar area!

Below, I will deal with every species I observed in the order of occurrence in the field guide mentioned above. I will use the following abbreviations for the places where almost all birding was done.

- HM: Hotel Meridien
- LR: Lac Rose area
- TE: Technopole
- CC: Club le Calao

I did not do any real counting of the birds since I didn't have much time anyway.

I hope you enjoy the report as much as I enjoyed watching the birds!

## SPECIES LIST

1. Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Heard at TE.

2. Long-tailed Cormorant *Phalacrocorax africanus*

A good number of birds seen at TE.

3. Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo lucidus*

Regularly seen along the coast (HM, CC). Adult birds of this race have a white throat and upper breast, clearly different from the European races.

4. Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*

During some seawatching from HM and CC on the last days of my stay, small parties were regularly seen migrating south off the coast. The birds were distant and no good looks were obtained, unfortunately.

5. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*

Common species. Seen flying along the coast at HM and CC and tens of birds at TE.

6. Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Two birds at TE, both first calendar year.

7. Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

One first calendar year bird flying over the golf course at HM.

8. Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Seemed fairly common outside of Dakar, on route to LR area. A low number of birds also in the area around HM and in TE. Flocks of >50 birds seen flying over, both at HM and at CC.

9. Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

At least a couple birds seen at TE. It proved out to be not too easy to separate these from white-morph Western Reef Egrets. I did not spend too much time trying to separate them since I didn't have to much time and I only watched egrets seen close by.

10. Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis*

A couple of birds along the coast at HM and CC, both dark and white morphs. Many birds at TE, both color morphs.

11. Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*

One bird seen at TE.

12. Great White Egret *Egretta alba* / *Casmerodius albus*

At least 2 birds seen at TE.

13. Green-backed Heron *Butorides striata*

Several birds seen at TE.

14. White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*

A flock of about 40 birds seen at TE, both adults and juveniles.

15. Osprey *Pandion Haliaetus*

Fairly common anywhere near water. Up to 3 birds from one point of view along the coast at HM and CC (fishing in the ocean); several birds at TE and several birds in the LR area. Birds often clearly in molt.

16. Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*

Fairly common in the wider Dakar area. Seemed to be more common away from build up areas, like Technopole.

17. Black Kite (Yellow-billed Kite) *Milvus migrans parasitus*

Very common almost everywhere, least in the LR area it seemed. Hundreds of birds in the TE area. All birds seen belonged to the race *parasitus*; no birds from the migrant palearctic race *migrans*.



Adult Black Kite soaring over Technopole.

18. Shikra *Accipiter badius*

Seemed to be fairly common, with several sightings around the HM and on around LR.



Shikra in the garden of the Meridien Hotel.

19. Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Two birds, both adults, male and female, around the large building of the hotel N'gor, near CC. Often perched on the ledges of the building. At some point, Pied Crows and Black Kites were harassing one of the birds when it sat on the hotel roof.

20. Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera*

Two birds over the golf course of HM in the morning of October 23.

21. Double-spurred Francolin *Francolinus bicalcaratus*

Two birds flushed in the dune area close to the ocean south of LR.

22. Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

At least 1 bird at one of the ponds at the golf course of HM.

23. African Jacana *Actophilornis africana*

Two birds at TE.

24. Senegal Thick-knee *Burhinus senegalensis*

A thick-knee in Senegal? Must be a Senegal Thick-knee! And yes, it was! ☺ At least 6 birds at TE.

25. Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

A couple of birds at a little rain pool along the road near HM. Some tens of birds at TE.

26. Spur-winged Lapwing *Vanellus spinosus*

Common and conspicuous species anywhere in suitable habitats.



S-W Lapwing on the roof of the Meridien Hotel.

27. Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

Fairly common in low numbers along the coast at HM and CC. Also a few seen at TE.

28. Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius*

One bird (non-breeding plumage) among other waders at TE.

29. Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Fairly common in low numbers along the coast at HM and CC and at TE.

30. Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*

At least 1 bird at TE.

31. American Golden Plover *Pluvialis dominica*

Very surely the least expected bird of the trip: 1 bird in winter plumage among other waders at TE!! Contact with Ron Demey and Guy Kirwan has learned that this constitutes only the second record for Senegal! A couple of pictures were taken as proof of this observation. Swedish birders had seen what was very probably the same bird some days before already.



Some record shots of the AG Plover, among a flock of other waders.

32. Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

One bird in a flock of Whimbrels at LR.

33. Whimbrel *Numenius Phaeopus*

Regular in small numbers along the coast at HM and CC. A small flock of about 10 birds at LR.

34. Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

At least 3 birds at LR. >20 birds at TE (not really counted).

35. Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Low numbers at the ocean coast near LR and at TE.



Sanderling at the beach near Lac Rose.

36. Dunlin *Calidris alpina*

At least 1 bird at LR. Several at TE.

37. Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

>20 birds at TE.

38. Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

A few birds seen at TE.

39. Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Fairly common in low numbers along the coast at HM and at CC. Also seen at LR and TE.

40. Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

One bird at TE.

41. Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

One bird seen at TE.

42. Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis*

One bird seen at TE. Three birds flying by along the coast at CC.

43. Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

One bird in flight at LR. One bird at TE.

44. Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*

A couple definite records off the coast at HM during an evening with good seabirds passage (particularly skuas) off the coast at HM. The majority of the skuas were flying too far offshore for identification with binoculars, but it appeared that most of the skuas belonged to this species.

45. Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*

Two birds fairly close to land off shore from HM. See remark about skuas under Pomarine Skua.

46. Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii*  
One bird (1<sup>st</sup> calendar year) flying by at the coast at LR.
47. Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*  
One bird (adult) flying by at the coast at LR.
48. Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*  
One bird at LR. At least 15 birds at TE.
49. Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*  
The most common tern species off the coast at HM and CC. Maximum some tens of birds together, resting on rocks off CC.
50. Lesser Crested Tern *Sterna bengalensis*  
Low numbers at the coast at HM and CC. Maximum a few birds together. Distant birds not always able to distinguish from Royal Tern.
51. Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*  
Low numbers at the coast at HM and CC; maximum a few birds together. See remark under Lesser Crested Tern.
52. Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*  
At least 2 sightings at the coast off HM.
53. Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*  
One bird resting among other terns on rocks off CC.
54. Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*  
About 15 birds at TE.
55. Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*  
At least 15 birds at TE.
56. Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea*  
A few sightings at HM, CC, TE and LR; also seen along the road. Not rare but not really common either.
57. Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata*  
A few birds seen in the LR area.
58. Vinaceous Dove *Streptopelia vinacea*  
One bird in the LR area.
59. Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*  
Common throughout.
60. Senegal Parrot *Poicephalus senegalus*  
Several observations of little flocks of 4-5 birds near HM.
61. Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*  
Regularly groups, of up to 50 birds, flying overhead.

62. Western Grey Plantain Eater *Crinifer piscator*

At least 5 birds seen at TE.

63. Senegal Coucal *Centropus senegalensis*

Several birds in the garden and gold course of HM, including fresh juveniles.

64. Little Swift *Apus affinis*

>30 birds around the N<sup>o</sup>gor hotel near CC. Several sightings from the bus en route to LR.

65. Blue-naped Mousebird *Urocolius macrourus*

At least 1 bird at CC. Some searching was needed to get good views since the species seems to behave rather inconspicuous. The call could be heard often, though, and was, to my ears at least, surprisingly similar to the call of European Golden Plover! If I would have closed my eyes, forgotten about the dripping sweat and imagined the temperatures 30° C down, I could have thought myself being in the Norwegian mountains with the plovers! ;)

66. Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*

Common at TE – up to 10 birds could be seen easily from one view point.

67. Little Bee-eater *Merops pusillus*

At least 10 birds at TE. At least 5 birds at CC. Very handsome and unwary birds – great targets to take pictures!



Plenty of Pied Kingfishers at Technopole!



Handsome Little Bee-Eaters at Technopole.

68. Abyssinian Roller *Coracias abyssinicus*

Common species; several near HM, at TE, around LR and along the road to LR.





Abyssinian Roller in the garden of the Meridien Hotel.

69. Green Wood-hoopoe *Phoeniculus purpureus*  
One bird seen in flight at HM.

70. Red-billed Hornbill *Tockus erythrofhynchus*  
Fairly common in most places: HM, LR, TE.

71. Crested Lark *Galerida cristata senegallensis*  
Common in suitable habitat; very common at TE! The birds of this subspecies are more rufous and warmer colored than birds in Europe.



Crested Lark at Technopole.

72. White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*  
At least one bird at TE.

73. Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava subspecies*  
Common at TE, with tens of birds foraging along the dirt road going through the area. Most birds were in drab non-breeding plumages, thus it was not able to identify to subspecies level. One male, however, in bright plumage was a 'Yellow Wagtail' of the subspecies *flavissima*.

74. Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*  
Regularly near habitation. Did not seem very common, though.

75. Northern Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*  
One bird at the coast at CC.



Northern Wheatear at the beach at Club le Calao.

76. Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*  
One bird seen at TE.

77. Tawny-flanked Prinia *Prinia subflava*  
A few birds at the golf course at HM. Two birds at TE.

78. Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*  
Easily found near water: at LR and at TE.

79. Variable Sunbird *Cinnyris venustus*  
One bird seen from the bus, nicely at eye height during a traffic jam! Thank you, chaotic Dakar traffic! ;)

80. Pied Crow *Corvus albus*  
Very common throughout. Behavior very similar to Carrion Crow in Europe.

81. Long-tailed Glossy Starling *Lamprotornis caudatus*  
Very common; noisy and conspicuous. Behavior similar to grackles in North America.

82. House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*  
Fairly common around building.

83. Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus*  
Fairly common near buildings. Call reminiscent to call of House Sparrow but seemed louder and fuller, 'more moist' if that's a good term.

84. Little Weaver *Ploceus luteolus*  
Easily seen at HM (breeding right at entrance) and CC. As a remark concerning all weaver species: adult males are easily identified but females and immatures are difficult, and given the short time I had for birding, I usually didn't bother about the later types.

85. Village Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus*

Regularly seen in the LR area and en route to there. Not really in the built up areas but more in village habitats – what's in a name! Obviously larger than the other weaver species.

86. Black-headed Weaver *Ploceus melanocephalus*

Regularly seen at HM.

87. White-billed Buffalo Weaver *Bubalornis albirostris*

Seen fairly well from the bus at crossroads; huge nests in trees.

88. Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea*

Noisy flocks of tens of birds at HM and at CC.

89. Northern Red Bishop *Euplectes franciscanus*

Several seen at LR. Males are stunning birds!

90. Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu *Uraeginthus bengalus*

Fairly common at HM, CC and TE.



Blue-cheeked Cordon Bleu in the garden of the Meridien Hotel.

91. Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonisticta senegala*

A few sightings but did not seem to be common.

92. Bronze Mannikin *Spermestes cucullata*

Easily seen at HM and CC.

93. Village Indigo Bird *Vidua chalybeta*

Male and female seen very well at CC.

94. White-rumped Seedeater *Serinus leucopygius*

Fairly common; seen at HM, LR and CC.

95. Yellow-fronted Canary *Serinus mozambicus*

Regularly seen, at HM and CC.

## SPECIES NOT RECORDED WITH CERTAINTY

Some species were possible/probably observed, but not good enough to be sure.

### 96. Cory's Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea*

At least one possible bird off the coast from HM, but way too far to determine with certainty, especially without a scope.

### 97. Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*

Possibly this species among considerable passage of skuas off HM in the evening of October 27.

### 98. African Scops Owl *Otus senegalensis*

A small owl hunting in the garden of HM one night could have been this species.

### 99. Rufous-crowned Roller *Coracias naevius*

One very probable bird seen from the bus en route from LR. Two seconds from a moving is a bit too short and fast to confirm a life bird though! ☺

### 100. Mosque Swallow *Hirundo senegalensis*

One possible bird seen very briefly from the moving bus en route to LR. I was surprised not to see any swallows of any species, not even palearctic migrants, in an area like TE, seemingly very suitable.

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