# Full Detailed Itinerary - Senegal: Sahelian Specialties with a French Twist

## Day 1: Arrival in Dakar

After arrival in Senegal's Capital, you will be transferred to a good hotel for the night, in nearby Thies or Saly, close to the airport. There is no birding on this day, which provides a good chance at downtime after the long flight in. The first group activity will be a welcome dinner in our hotel at 6:30pm, where the guide will brief participants on the activities of the opening days of the tour.

## Day 2: Dakar to Podor via Richard Toll

We will depart early from our hotel (5:00am) near Dakar's Blaise Diagne Airport, as we head north towards Podor, where we will spend the next two nights. However, our first port of call is likely to be Richard Toll, where we will take lunch at a hotel restaurant overlooking the Senegal River and staring into neighboring Maurirtania. After lunch, we will try and find some of the Sahelian specialties that are the focus during this northern part of the tour. We will especially be trying known local areas for Cricket Longtail, Little Gray Woodpecker, and Sennar Penduline-Tit. We will also check in on a communal roost of Long-tailed Nightjars where Black-crowned Sparrow-Larks, Spotted Thick-knees and Temminck's Coursers can sometimes also be found, before continuing east to Podor in the afternoon. We will arrive at the Diatar Track before dusk and try and find a roosting Golden Nightjar at one of its known haunts. If we do not manage to find one by day (that is often the case), we will linger until dusk and try and spotlight one then instead. Two nights will be spent in Podor.

## Day 3: Podor area (Mourkadie & Gamadji-Sare)

A full day will be spent within Dry Desert Thornscub in the Podor area, visiting Mourkadie and Gamadji-Sare to the east, as well as returning to Podor's Diatar Track (if needed) for more chances at the much-anticipated Golden Nightjar. Other specialties we will be on the lookout for by day will be wintering Atlas Wheatears and Western Orphean Warblers, Fulvous Chatterers, Sudan Golden Sparrows (that often occur in large flocks in the area), Black Scrub-Robin, Chestnut-bellied and Long-tailed Glossy Starlings, and African Green Bee-eater. We will also visit the only known colony of Horus Swifts in Senegal, situated right on the border with Mauritania. A second night will be spent in the northern town of Podor.

## Day 4: Podor to Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary via Richard Toll

The tour will remain in the north, although we will head back westwards as we travel to Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary for a two-night stay. In the morning, we can return to Richard Toll to check for any missing species like Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin, Vieillot's Barbet, Blue-naped Mousebird, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, or Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse. After lunch, we will continue our journey to Djoudj, staying just outside of the park for two nights.  We will arrive in time to start birding the entrance to the park where some large wetland areas are sure to keep us busy for the afternoon. In the reedbeds the scarce River Prinia and Greater Swamp Warbler can be found, while the muddy edges of the wetland host Greater Painted-Snipes, and the surrounding scrub are home to the scarce African Stonechat. Out on the water, we can expect to see a good variety of ducks, shorebirds and other wetland birds like spoonbills, egrets, and herons. Among

the species we might see here are Bar-tailed and Black-tailed Godwits, Little Stints, Ruffs, Collared Pratincoles, and White-faced Whistling-Ducks and Northern Shovelers.

## Day 5: Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary

Djoudj National Park or Bird Sanctuary is located on the floodplain of the Senegal River, within a basin of the Djoudj between the river itself and the Gorom bayou to the south of it. This is one of West Africa's most important sanctuaries, designated as both a World Heritage site and an Important Bird Area it is also of global significance too. The area is particularly important for hosting migrant waterbirds. As many as 3 million different migrants pass through Djouj each year, many of which have crossed the Sahara Desert to reach there! It comprises a series of wetland habitats, including lakes, ponds, and seasonally inundated areas on the Senegal River Delta. Our main targets here will be the impressive Black Crowned-Crane, rare Arabian Bustard (said to number only 6 birds in the park), Allen's Gallinule, as well as a host of other waterbirds. Djoudj is home to an incredible variety of wetland birds, including Spur-winged Goose, Knob-billed Duck, Garganey, Yellow-billed Stork, Slender-billed Gull, Squacco and Black Herons, Black Crake, African Jacana, Eurasian and African Spoonbills, Senegal Thick-knee, Spur-winged Lapwing, and Malachite and Pied Kingfishers. The sanctuary is also important for flamingos and pelicans. It is home to some 20,000 Greater Flamingos, which are often in company with Lesser Flamingos too. 10,000 Great White Pelicans also visit the reserve, which is also home to Pink-backed Pelicans too. It also lures in thousands of migrant shorebirds from the north too, including Common and Little Ringed Plovers, Black-tailed Godwit, Ruff, and Curlew Sandpiper. We will take a two-hour boat trip out on the water in the afternoon to view the remarkable Pelican Island, where thousands of Great White Pelicans are packed cheek-to-jowl on their breeding island, a very impressive sight indeed.

## Day 6: Djoudj NP to Trois Marigots

We will head southeast, returning to the coastal zone, as we visit Saint-Louis for the night. Saint-Louis was the former capital of Senegal during the French colonial period and is recognized as the origin for the country national dish, Thiéboudienne, a tasty mix of fish, vegetables and rice that has been marinated in garlic, lemon, and parsley. Our focus in this area will be to visit Les Trois Marigots in order to find a specialty bird species, Savile's Bustard, which inhabits lightly wooded areas, with low sand dunes, sometimes near marigots, in western Senegal. Other significant birds that we may encounter on our bustard quest, could include the colorul Zebra Waxbill, Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin, African Silverbill, or the striking Cut-throat, while the nearby marigots (wet areas) can host African Pygmy-Goose. A single night will be spent in Saint-Louis.

## Day 7: Mbacke to Kaolack

Our southward trajectory will continue on this day as we move from coastal western Senegal to inland southern Senegal, and the market town of Kaolack on the northern banks of the Saloum River. A major target for this day will be the enigmatic Quail-Plover, which is not found on all of the tours, as its presence and abundance depends on the rains of recent wet seasons. While searching for the Quail-Plover we may also find Desert Cisticola, White-billed Buffalo-Weaver, or Great Gray Shrike. In the afternoon, we will continue west Kaolack for the night, checking for any Sahelian Paradise-Whydahs along the route. We can check around our hotel at night for Four-toed Hedgehogs that occur there during quieter periods of the night.

## Day 8: Kaolack to Toubacouta

We will take a second shot at Quail-Plover, if needed, on this morning, with a pre-dawn start in order to do so. If we have already scored the Quail-Plover, we can visit some areas around Ndiaffate, which may hold Savile's or White-bellied Bustard, roosting Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, or Abyssinian Ground-Hornbill. In the afternoon, we will make our way southeast into the Fatick region, along the road that connects Senegal with The Gambia, culminating for us in the village of Toubacouta, dubbed as a paradise for nature lovers. We will test this firsthand in the afternoon, when we take a boat trip on the delta to look out for the localized White-crested Tiger-Heron among the tangled mangrove swamps. The boat ride may also produce the massive Goliath Heron or a specialty, West African Crested Tern. The night will be spent in Toubacouta.

## Day 9: Toubacouta to Tambacounda

If we did not manage to locate a White-crested Bittern the evening before, we will head back out on an early morning boat ride to do so once more. We may also land on Sipo Island, where in some years rare species like Bronze-winged Courser and Yellow Penduline-Tit are regular (though completely absent in other years). After that, we shall journey east to the town of Tambacounda, in order to break the long journey to Kedougou. On the journey, we will keep an eye out for Senegal Parrot, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Black Scimitarbill, Pygmy Sunbird, Sahelian Paradise-Whydah and its host species, Green-winged Pytillia, among others. A single night will be spent in Tambacounda.

## Day 10: Tambacounda to Kedougou via Niokola Koba National Park

Our purpose on this day will be to reach Kedougou, in far southeastern Senegal, close to the frontiers of both Mali and Guinea. This is a long travel day, though with our change into rich Guinea Savanna, we are likely to break up the journey with many new species, which could include birds like Blue-bellied Roller, Bearded Barbet, Yellow-crowned Gonolek, African Golden Oriole, Purple Starling, and the crowd-pleasing White-crested Helmetshrike. Part of the journey will be spent traversing through Niokola Koba National Park. Although it is not permitted to get out of your vehicle in this part of the park, we will drive slow as this can be a great place to find Abyssinian Ground-Hornbill. In the late afternoon, we will bird some areas around Kedegou, searching for some of the local species in the area, like Sun Lark, Dorst's Cisticola, or Mali Firefinch. This night will be spend in Kedougou.

## Days 11-12: Kedougou, Dindefelo and Bandafassi Cliffs

This area is located within the Senegalese foothills of the Fouta Djallon Mountains, which are largely located within Guinea to the south. This exciting corner of Senegal is well off the beaten track and offers up much for the adventurous birder. It has only relatively recently been explored by bird tours, so there is still the chance of a surprise or two. Before dawn, we will start traveling towards Dindefelo, hoping we might spook up a Standard-winged Nightjar off of the road in the early hours (some good fortune is required for this species). We will stop on the way there to search for Stone Partridge,  Black-faced and Mali Firefinches, Lavender and Orange-cheeked Waxbills, Dorst's Cisticolas. Once in Dindefelo itself, we will bird some gallery forest, which holds stunning species like Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Guinea and Violet Turacos, African Paradise-Flycatcher, and the scarce Narina Trogon, which was only discovered in Senegal fairly recently. The first night will be spent in a simple lodge in Dindefelo, and then the night of Day 12 will be back in Kedougou. On the morning of Day 12 will climb up to Dande Plateau, a rocky area that is home to Fox Kestrel, Gosling's Bunting, Familiar Chat, and the often-difficult Mali Firefinch. Other possibilities include Green-headed Sunbird, White-shouldered Black Tit, and Yellow-gorgeted Greenbul (Leaflove). In the afternoon, we will return to Kedougou and make a late afternoon visit to some cliffs where sometimes the rare Neumann's Starling can be seen, along with Mocking Cliff-Chat.

## Day 13: Kedougou to Wassadou Camp

After some final time around Kedegou, where we can target whatever we still need, like Dorst's Cisticola, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Mali Firefinch or Fox Kestrel, we will journey back west to Wassadou Camp. Wassadou is one of Senegal's best birding locales and so two nights have been planned for this area and two boat trips. We will plan the journey so that we get there in time for an afternoon boat trip to search for some key tour species, like the "crocodile bird", Egyptian Plover, White-crowned Lapwing, the scarce Shining-blue Kingfisher, Blue-breasted, Giant and Gray-headed Kingfishers, inconspicuous White-backed Night Heron, breeding colonies of Red-throated and Northern Carmine Bee-eaters, or retiring African Finfoot. While searching for them, we may also see Northern Carmine Bee-eaters or wallowing Hippos. At night, (after dinner), we can go out in search of some of the local nightbirds, which includes Northern White-faced Owl, African Scops-Owl and Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, and Standard-winged and Long-tailed Nightjars. We will be based at this amazing camp for two nights, which has a prime location for birds adjacent to Niokola Koba National Park, on the banks of the Gambia River, which hosts an impressive bird list exceeding 270 species.

## Day 14: Wassadou Camp

We will have a full day, and another two-hour boat ride in which to explore Wassadou Camp and its surrounds, which are a premier West African birding destination. Some of the long list of possibilities include Adamawa Turtle-Dove, Helmeted Guineafowl, Palm-nut Vulture, African Hawk-Eagle, Broad-billed Roller, Green Woodhoopoe, Gray-headed and Sulphur-breasted Bushshrikes, White-crowned Robin-Chat, Oriole Warbler, African Blue Flycatcher, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Senegal Batis, Blackcap Babbler, Swamp Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, African Pied Wagtail, Bronze-tailed Starling, Olive-naped and Heuglin's Masked Weavers, and Black-rumped Waxbill. At night, there will be another chance to go out for nightbirds after dinner for those who choose to do so.

## Day 15: Wassadou to Kousmar Island & Kaolack

We will break the journey at Kaolack and stay in the same hotel we stayed at before there. During the afternoon, we will take a short boat trip over to Kousmar Island for an epic late afternoon activity, watching the large roost of Lesser Kestrels and Scissor-tailed Kites. The kestrel roost numbers are in the hundreds although normally thousands of kites are seen. We will overnight in Kaolack once more.

## Day 16: Kaolack to Dakar area

After chasing some final birds around the Saloum River Delta in the morning, we shall drive back west towards Dakar for the final night of this amazing tour, spending the night at either Thies or Saly near the airport. If we are still missing West African Crested Tern, we can check somewhere not far from our final hotel. We will have a final farewell dinner, where the debate over the best birds of the trip are sure to be heated with such a heady selection on offer! PLEASE NOTE: It is often possible to depart on a late-night flight on this night, as we will be back at the hotel by 6pm (therefore flights after 9pm are usable).

## Day 17: Departure from Dakar area

There are no birding activities on this day, so you are free to depart when you wish.

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