

For our 2023 year-end vacations, my wife and I had only 10 days to spend so we were looking for ideas for mammal watching in a country that was not too far from France (and that we hadn't visited yet). After reading a few intriguing reports from Senegal and with some direct and not too long flights now operating between Marseille and Dakar, we decided that Senegal was worth a try.

After choosing the country, we faced two other challenges. The first one as I said before is that we only had some limited time, so we had to make some tough choices on the places to visit within the country for 10 days. The second challenge was to find a guide. Visiting Senegal alone is definitely possible but given the time constraint we had and in order to limit the hassle to rent a car, find and book hotels in the best places for a nature tour, we opted to use the service of a local guide and here comes the difficulty. Indeed, although Senegal is now popular among birders and several good bird guides can be contacted, finding one who would be knowledgeable about mammal watching proved to be not so easy. I contacted a few guides thanks to past trip reports I could find on the web and after agreeing on an itinerary to maximize our chance to see a decent diversity of mammals, I was then quite surprised by the very high price they were all asking for. Knowing that Senegal wildlife was not as rich as Southern or Eastern Africa, I was not so keen to spend a big amount of money for such a short visit of the country. I finally found a French speaking guide known among birders and who seemed to know quite well places for mammals as well. His name is Abdou Lo (aka Carlos, email: carlostoubacouta@yahoo.fr). Thanks to some adjustment on accommodation types and using only local guides at each place visited rather than having a guide with us all the time, he could propose a tour meeting our budget limit and for about half the price the other contacted guides were asking for. I must say that what Abdou organized worked out perfectly: the car and driver he booked were great, he was regularly in contact with us during the trip to make sure everything was going fine, and he could even adjust things at the last minute to meet our requests. I'd definitely recommend him for a nature trip in Senegal. The itinerary we agreed on brought us to the following places: Pointe Saint-George in Casamance for the African manatees; Wassadou; the Parc National du Niokolo-Koba (PNNK) that seemed to be the best place in Senegal to see a nice diversity of animals; the Fathala reserve (private and fenced but large – 6000 ha) to see Giant Elands I was not expecting to observe in PNNK; North of the Country in Richard Toll and the Geumbeul reserve for pale fox and Sahelian gazelles. Being also interested in birding, we added a couple of stops in Kousmar Island near Kaolack for the impressive scissor-tailed kite roost, and the famous Djoudj National Park.

We booked our international flights with Air Senegal because they had the most convenient schedules from Marseille. I was initially concerned because the feedbacks about this company were often negative with their flight to Dakar being often severely delayed. Since we had a 2h connection only in Dakar to fly to Cap Skirring on the first day and because of our short trip duration, missing the connection and losing a day would have led to bad consequences and missing the opportunity to see African manatees. However, all the Air Senegal flights we took were actually on time with a good service, so we were lucky after all.

We were also lucky with the weather with warm (if not hot) days and bright blue skies during the entire trip, except for one day. I had indeed read in past reports that the sky could be quite grey during that period of the year.

To be honest, I had no real expectation about Senegal in terms of mammal watching when I prepared this trip. Now I must admit that I was pleasantly surprised by what we could see as we eventually saw 27 different mammal species over 10 days, which doesn't look too bad based on past reports I could read on the web and we had some memorable misses that I will explain in details later on 😊. I found Senegal to be an interesting place for mammal watching but one needs to understand what could be expected and be well prepared so that there is no disappointment. Indeed, Senegal clearly doesn't have the wildlife of Kenya or Zambia but there are some very nice places and some nice species to observe there.

All the people and local guides we met during the trip were very friendly and I think genuinely tried to show us as many birds and mammals they could. The lodging was ok and sometimes basic (not to say worse 😊) but it was the price to pay to limit the travel cost. Anyway, it was always clean and comfortable enough for us. The food was always excellent and in large portions!

In addition to Abdou who organized the trip, I would also like to thank a lot Kenneth Coe (aka Safaridude on Safaritalk) and Thomas Clode from Pictus Safaris who gave me great feedback and advice while preparing this trip.

I'm giving below some details about the places we visited in Senegal and what we could observe there.

Southern Senegal / Casamance:

We arrived on the first day late afternoon in Cap Skirring where our local guide, Amadou Diémé, greeted us at the airport. We had dinner and slept Chez Campos, a nice little hotel who served wonderful shrimps. It was close to the very beautiful beach of Cap Skirring that we could reach just on time to enjoy the sunset. On the following day, we drove with Amadou and a taxi to Pointe Saint-George, the well-known place to see **African manatees**. The good news is that 2 months ago they entirely repaired the observation platform built on the beach near the freshwater stream where the manatees concentrate. This is very convenient for best observation opportunities, and we stayed there most of the day looking at the manatees. We looked for and easily found the large

tree in the village where tenths of **Gambian epauletted fruit bats** roost. They had many babies, which was nice for pictures. Besides many cool birds, we saw no other mammals like dolphins that are often observed along the Casamance river. There are 3 options nowadays for lodging in this nice and quiet village. We had lunch at Chez Clara that I found to be a nice little hotel and looked better than the older Campement du Lamentin that remains however very conveniently located just on the banks of the Casamance river. We then drove to Ziguinchor for the following night where we stayed at the hotel La Terrasse, brand new and very clean, but poorly located in the town that has no real visit interest anyway. We left our local guide there and met our driver for the rest of the trip: Modou. He was a very nice person, and we really enjoyed his company.

We left early on the following morning, and after a very long drive on a good, tared road between Ziguinchor and Tambacounda, we arrived in the Campement de Wassadou on time for an afternoon boat tour on the Gambia river. This place is very famous among birders because of the quality of bird sightings with several iconic species that can be easily observed there. We also did a boat tour on the following morning. In addition to a great number of cool birds, we also saw from the boat large groups of **Guinea baboons**, several **green monkeys**, a few **hippos**, some skittish and running mongooses that looked mostly like **banded mongooses** and a few **Western red colobus** in the beautiful morning light. We did a night walk along the main track to the Camp but we saw nothing... The location of the Camp over the Gambia river is gorgeous, and I found this camp to be one of the best accommodations we had in Senegal. The huts are basic, but comfortable and clean. The restaurant is also nice with a friendly staff. We came back to this camp after our visit to the Parc National du Niokolo-Koba where we spent an entertaining New Year's Eve party with musicians and dancers 😊 and even made a third boat tour because we liked so much the first ones. Drinking some white wine in relaxing chairs while enjoying sunset on the Gambia river was memorable. I would go back there if I had the opportunity and I must say I'm quite surprised about the number of negative feedback posted on TripAdvisor about this camp.

Near Wassadou lies the huge Parc National du Niokolo-Koba (PNNK): a real and truly wild piece of African nature. A lot has been said about this park in past reviews posted on the web and feedbacks are mixed to say the least 😊 Thomas Clode from Pictures Safaris spent a lot of time in this park and his trying hard to promote ecotourism there and I understand why. Indeed, I found this park very scenic with various landscapes: forests, waterholes ("mares") and the Gambian river. It is very wild with very few visitors: we barely saw a couple of other cars during the 2 full days and nights we spent there. Lodging options are quite limited in PNNK. You can stay in Der Salam at the entrance of the park but then you must consider the 1h30 to 2h long drive to get to the core zone of the park near Simenti where wildlife is more abundant. I'm not even talking about the Mont Assirik area that seems to be even more interesting for wildlife watching with best chance to see exciting species like lions, Giant Eland, wild dogs and even elephants or chimpanzees but it is very far and requires a full expedition to get there and sleeping in tents. North of Simenti, you now have the recent and very luxurious Niokolodge that we did not visit. The old Simenti hotel is in very poor state, but it is being repaired and you can actually sleep there but after having spent some time there during our visit, I would not recommend this option. The view on the Gambia river from the Simenti hotel is pretty nice though. Then remains the Campement du Lion where we stayed. This camp is very basic for sure and it's better to be aware of this before booking to avoid any disappointment: the huts are rustic with only a bed and a mosquito net but they are clean and the mattress comfortable; the shower and restroom are in the open with only cold water and no running water available but frankly I loved the place as it is superbly located next to the Gambia river where you can sit and relax during the hot hours of the day or to enjoy sunrise/sundowner. The staff is very friendly and the food they prepare is excellent. There is some electricity available in the restaurant area to charge your batteries. On top of that, there are lots of animals roaming in the camp during the day and even at night attracted by litters from the kitchen. Finally, the camp is located near several waterholes, so wildlife viewing is quite good. Bottom line, this place is a true wild experience that I would recommend for those who accepts a minimum level of comfort. Having said that, and this is why many people visiting the park are disappointed and give negative comments, the concentration of animals in PNNK is by far not comparable to Eastern or Southern Africa parks and in addition, the dense vegetation is limiting viewing opportunities. You also need to be extremely lucky to observe large carnivores like lions, leopards or even wild dogs but there are there for sure. Knowing all this before visiting PNNK is preferable so as not to spoil your visit. You also need to know that a local guide from GIE Niokolo is mandatory during your visit. Abdou booked a guide called Ibrahim Kouyaté who was excellent. We also visited the park with our 4x4 car and driver instead of using the old jeep from the park, which proved to be a good choice since it was much more comfortable, and we could go wherever and stop whenever we wanted during the game drives to observe animals and take pictures. The game drives were about 6h-long in the mornings, and after 4pm until dusk in the afternoons. Our driver and guide tried their best I believe to show us what the park had best to offer. Now let's talk about wildlife observations: as I said before, there was no miracle and we saw no lion, wild dog nor giant eland but this was expected to be honest. On the other hand, we saw a good diversity of ungulates with several nice observations of **oribis**, **common duikers**, **red-flanked duikers**, **bushbucks**, **waterbucks**, **Buffon's kobs** and beautiful **roan antelopes** we could see in small groups. We also observe many **green monkeys**, a few **patas monkeys**

but only heard Guinea baboons. Along the river, we did not see hippos but several large crocodiles. We saw many **warthogs** and several times groups of mongooses but always very skittish and running. I think they were all **banded mongooses**. In the camp after dinner at night when guests went to sleep and it became quiet, we stayed around the litters area where people mentioned some cool mammals could be observed. Indeed, we saw one night two **African civets** and the second night an unexpected **spotted hyena**. Genet and badger can apparently be seen as well but we didn't see any during our stay...

Central Senegal

After Wassadou and PNNK, we drove to the central part of Senegal. Our next destination was the private Fathala Reserve. After the long but nice road through Tambacounda to Kaolack, we drove South towards the Sine Saloum Delta and just before the boarder with Gambia we reached the Fathala reserve where we slept for one night in their lodge. This private reserve is owned by South African and Lebanese investors. The lodge design, management and game drive organization are very similar to what you can find in Southern Africa. The reserve is fenced but quite large: more than 6000ha, and contains some interesting wildlife, both local but also and unfortunately some transferred from South Africa like giraffes and rhino. I didn't see any feeding system and according to the guides, all the animals living in the reserve are not assisted so they could be considered wild. The lodge is luxurious and very comfortable for sure. It is also surrounded by animals as there is a waterhole that attracts both birds and mammals night and day (there is a spotlight). We booked two game drives with the main target to see giant elands we could not observe in PNNK, so this was our last chance to see them in a fairly wild environment. Fathala, like the Bandia reserve near Thiès, participates to the breeding programs launched to protect the endangered giant elands and reintroduce them in PNNK. We chose Fathala versus Bandia because it looked less like a zoo and indeed, thanks to its large size and fairly pristine vegetation, the Fathala reserve looked fairly wild, and the animals were not so easy to see. As a matter of fact, we did not see the **giant elands** well, except for a brief observation of the back of 2 individuals running inside the thick vegetation. On the other hand, we saw many **patas** and **green monkeys**, **warthogs** and **waterbucks**. On the more interesting side, we saw **roan antelopes**, a few **western red colobus**, **Gambia sun squirrels** and a group a **western African buffalos** with calves. I don't count the South African giraffes and the white rhino we could also observe well inside the reserve as there are obviously not local. I found it too bad that they didn't have instead white giraffes (*giraffa c. peralta*) that were present in Senegal in the past, but I guess they are more complicated to get from Niger where the last ones survive in the wild. Globally speaking, I found the Fathala reserve nice but the game drives disappointing, not only because they are very short (2h long only) but also because the guides/drivers mostly focus on finding the "exotic" animals like the rhino and giraffe to please the local visitors and not specifically the local wildlife that is as interesting. On top of that, they include a breakfast/sundowner pause during the game drives like what is commonly practiced in Southern Africa, which makes the time spent to search for animals even shorter.

After Fathala, we stopped for lunch at the very nice Keur Saloum hotel located in the Sine Saloum delta. Sometimes, marsh mongooses are observed there but we saw none, which was not so surprising given the very short time we spent there. We should have stayed overnight to give us a chance to observe them. We saw on the other hand a couple of **Gambia sun squirrels** and many birds. After lunch we continued towards Kaolack and Kousmar Island where we had a nice tour to see the impressive roost area where thousands of scissor-tailed kites spend the night. A nice place to visit. We spent the night at Le Relais hotel in Kaolack. It is quite well located and serve nice food but I was not impressed by the rooms and global service.

Northern Senegal

On the following day, we got up very early for the long drive to Richard Toll. The tarred roads we took were in good shape but there was quite a lot of traffic in that part of Senegal and as a consequence, it took us about 7h to cover the distance between Kaolack and Richard Toll. We left very early on purpose to save us some time to stop at a place near Mbacké where the strange quail plover is regularly observed by birding tours. We tried for a couple of hours but we saw none. On the other hand, we observed several large rodents that were most likely **African grass rats** while scanning the fields. After driving through Touba, Louga and Saint-Louis cities, we arrived late afternoon in Richard Toll where we slept at the Gite d'Etape, a nice hotel located on the banks of the Senegal River. The rooms were very clean, comfortable, and the restaurant serving excellent food. A nice place I recommend for those who visit the area. There was a group of what looked like **little free-tailed bats** roosting in a palm tree in the hotel garden. As suggested by several trip reports, we went specifically to Richard Toll with the objective to observe pale foxes near the abandoned airstrip (there are also some very interesting birds in the area). We first tried late afternoon and drove along the many tracks towards and around the airstrip, scanning the fields regularly with our binoculars, but we did not see any fox. We came back to the hotel for dinner and waited later at night to drove back to the airstrip. Things were a bit more active: we first saw a cat (not wild for sure), then a **spotted genet** but it was too far and too shy to allow us to conclude for sure which species it was. Then I had a very frustrating experience: we saw another mammal closer to the road that I think was a **pale fox** but because I stupidly forgot my binocular that night and got some

focus issues with the new lens I bought before this trip, I could not take a single picture that was good enough to be 100% sure it was a pale fox although I'm quite confident I saw a thick tail typical to foxes (could not be a dog, cat nor a genet). I can only blame myself for not being better prepared for this night session. After this missed opportunity, we of course did not see any other mammals, damned! but tenths of long-tailed nightjars. After a couple of hours, we decided to stop and go back to sleep.

On the following morning, we did some birding around Richard Toll. Only noticeable mammal is we sadly observed on the road a dead **striped polecat** killed by the traffic. We then drove West towards our next stop near the Parc National du Djoudj, a world famous place for birds. We stayed at the Campement Villageois Njagabaar for 2 nights. This camp is basic but here also clean, comfortable enough and the staff was very friendly and trying their best to please us. The food served in this camp was average on the other hand. They had in their premises a very nice water pond attracting many interesting waterbirds and **warthogs**. The other advantage of this camp was its location just outside of the park entrance, so very convenient to allow visits early mornings or late afternoons inside the park and avoid the long road/drive between the park and Saint-Louis where there are definitely more lodging options. There used to be a nice hotel near the park gate but it is closed since COVID time. We booked 2 guided tours inside the park. The main attraction were birds (waders and other migrating birds) that are present in impressive numbers, but we could also observe a few mammals like **striped ground squirrels**, **African savanna hares** or **African golden wolves**. The later looked very much like golden jackals to me and not wolves like the one we saw in Western Sahara for instance. Our guide also saw a mongoose when we arrived at a bird hide (most likely an Egyptian mongoose) but it ran away before we could see it. We also did a nice boat tour for birdwatching and visit to a huge pelican colony.

After Djoudj NP, we drove South towards Saint-Louis with a first stop in Les Trois Marigots, again mostly for birding but we also observed some **striped ground squirrels**. We made a second stop to the small Guembeul reserve located just South of Saint-Louis. This reserve is where several Sahelian antelope species are bred or habituated before releasing them in the wild. The reserve is small: 700ha only, fenced, and quite empty nowadays. It used to be a place where they had addax, Dorcas and Dama gazelles, and Scimitar oryx but this is not the case anymore. Indeed, when we were there and visited the reserve on foot with a local guide, he explained us that only the **Scimitar oryxes** we observed are now living and roaming freely inside the reserve. No more dama gazelle nor addax, and the Dorcas gazelles are only bred in small enclosures before their release in the Réserve de faune du Ferlo Nord close to Mali. Therefore, the visit was a bit disappointing. I think that visiting the Ferlo Nord reserve would be a much better option today so see Sahelian antelopes in Senegal: the park is huge, truly wild, and they now have Scimitar oryx, Dorcas gazelle and red-fronted gazelle in there. I'm not sure but possibly also addax. Main problem though with Ferlo Nord is its location in a remote part of the country, quite far away from the usual places visited and the accommodation options seem to be very limited. Probably quite an expedition to get there but probably worth paying a visit for mammal watchers.

After Guembeul, we had a last and long drive back to Thiès where we could take some rest, had a shower and dinner at the nice Massa Massa hotel before taking in the night our international flight back to France.

To conclude on this trip to Senegal, I found the Southern part of the country in Casamance and Niokolo-Koba really interesting for mammal watching and besides mammals, it is also full of birds and contains beautiful landscapes. On the other hand, I found the Northern part of the country less appealing with boring landscapes, much denser population and very dirty. For the short duration we stayed and the price we eventually paid, I found Senegal to be an interesting destination for a nature trip.

Mammals with photos or well seen (lifers in green)				
Species	Espèces	Latin Name	Where seen	Pic
African manatee	Lamantin d'Afrique	Trichechus senegalensis	5 or 6 different individuals observed very well in Pointe Saint-Georges	X
Patas monkey	Patas	Erythrocebus patas	Several seen in PNNK, Fathala reserve and Djoudj NP	X
Green monkey	Vervet vert	Chlorocebus sabaeus	Commonly observed in various places	X
Guinea baboon	Babouin de Guinée	Papio papio	Large groups observed in Wassadou	X
Western red colobus	Colobe bai	Procolobus badius	A group seen very well in Wassadou and another one in Fathala reserve	X
Striped ground squirrel	Écureuil fouisseur	Xerus erythropus	A few observed in the Northern part of Senegal	
Gambian sun squirrel	Héliosciure de Gambie	Heliosciurus gambianus	2 observed in PNNK + one in Fathala reserve	X
African grass rat	Rat roussard	Arvicanthis niloticus	Could not determine the exact species for sure but most likely a grass rat. Several observed near Touba while searching for Quail plover	X
African savanna hare	Lièvre de savane	Lepus microtis	Most likely this species observed in Richard Toll and Djoudj NP	X
Gambian epaulette fruit bat	Épomophore de Gambie	Epomophorus gambianus	A group with young observed in a roost tree in Pointe Saint-Georges	X
Little free-tailed bat	Petite tadaride	Mops pumilus	Looks like this species. Observed in a roost tree at Gite d'Etape in Richard Toll	X
African civet	Civette africaine	Civettictis civetta	2 individuals seen at night in Campement du Lion in PNNK	
(Common or Hausa) genet	Genette commune	Genetta genetta	One seen briefly at night in Richard Toll but impossible to determine exact species	
Banded mongoose	Mangouste rayée	Mungos mungo	Several groups observed in Wassadou and PNNK but very skittish. Size/shape suggests banded and not Gambian mongoose	
Spotted hyena	Hyène tachetée	Crocuta crocuta	One nice and unexpected observation at night in Campement du Lion in PNNK	X
African golden wolf	Loup doré africain	Canis lupaster	Apparently this species although they looked very much like golden jackals to me. Several individuals observed in Djoudj NP	X
Common warthog	Phacochère commun	Phacochoerus africanus	Commonly observed throughout Senegal	X
Hippopotamus	Hippopotame	Hippopotamus amphibius	6 observed in the river in Wassadou	X
Oribi	Ourébi	Ourebia ourebi	A few but very nice observations in PNNK	X
Western African buffalo	Buffle d'Afrique de l'Ouest	Syncerus c. brachyceros	A group observed in Fathala reserve – native in Senegal	X
Bushbuck	Guib harnaché	Tragelaphus scriptus	Commonly observed in PNNK	X
Red-flanked duiker	Céphalophe à flancs roux	Cephalophus rufilatus	Several observed in PNNK	X
Common duiker	Céphalophe de Grimm	Sylvicapra grimmia	Only 2 individuals observed in PNNK	X
Roan antelope	Antilope rouanne	Hippotragus equinus	Nice groups observed well in PNNK and Fathala reserve	X
Scimitar oryx	Oryx algazelle	Oryx dammah	Several observed in Guembeul reserve	X
Defassa Waterbuck	Cobe defassa	Kobus ellipsiprymnus	Common in PNNK and Fathala reserve	X
Buffon's Kob	Cobe de Buffon	Kobus kob	Common in PNNK	X
		Total Species Recorded = 27		
Below some other species that I don't count given the observation circumstances				
Pale fox	Renard pâle	Vulpes pallida	One probably seen near the airstrip in Richard Toll at night but being not prepared with my camera and flashlight, only saw a thick tail that looked like a fox one before it disappeared.	
Striped polecat	Zorille commune	Ictonyx striatus	Sadly one dead animal observed on the road near Richard Toll	X
Giant eland	Éland de Derby	Tragelaphus derbianus	Glimpse observation of 2 individuals running away into the thick bush in Fathala reserve – only saw rumps...	
Dorcas gazelle	Gazelle dorcas	Gazella dorcas	Only observed in the habituation enclosures inside the Guembeul reserve	X
White rhino	Rhinocéros blanc	Ceratotherium simum	1 male observed in Fathala reserve but translocated from South Africa	X
Giraffe	Girafe d'Afrique du Sud	Giraffa c. giraffa	A family observed in Fathala reserve but translocated from South Africa	X

I'm adding to this report pictures of some of the species we observed during that trip, especially those new to me.



African manatee



African manatee



Patas monkey



Green monkey



Guinea baboon



African golden wolf



Western red colobus



Gambian sun squirrel



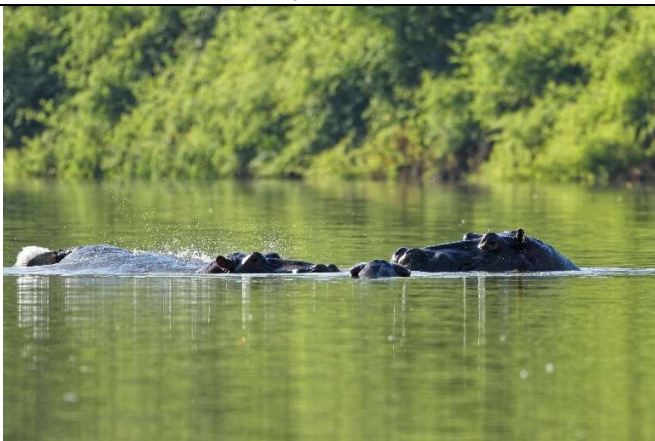
Gambian epauletted fruit bat



Gambian epauletted fruit bat



Little free-tailed bat



Hippopotamus



Western African buffalo



Oribi



Bushbuck



Red-flanked duiker



Common duiker



Buffon's Kob



Defassa Waterbuck



Roan antelope



Scimitar oryx

