

Senegal 16th – 27th March 2026

Participants Tim Bourne (TB); John Pilgrim (JP); John Wright (JW).

Trip report by John Wright (johnpwright1500@gmail.com)

Thanks go to JP for doing the taxonomic research on the hare and bats and to TB for his super photos.

Background

We have all visited other countries in Africa; however, this was the first time for all of us in Senegal. However, JW had been to Gambia which is surrounded by Senegal. We flew from London Heathrow to Dakar via Lisbon, on TAP Air. We flew from Heathrow on the 15th and arrived at Blaise Diagne Airport, Dakar at 02:00 on the 16th.

JW arranged the trip through Ashanti African Tours, the Ghana based tour company run by British ex-pat Mike Williams (CEO). Ashanti had arranged a Ghana trip for JW a few years ago, so he knew they were reliable and efficient. The ground arrangements were sorted out following the usual email ping-pong to get the itinerary we wanted and to ensure our guide and driver knew what to expect from us and what we expected from them.

Our guide was Abdou Lo aka Carlos and like all Senegal (and Gambian) guides he is a bird guide and not a mammal guide. Mind you, he is one of the top bird guides in the region and a very nice guy too. He comes thoroughly recommended by us. He speaks fluent English, French, Spanish and Senegalese of course. Our driver was Mamadou – a very safe and competent driver who spoke Senegalese and French.

Carlos has his own bird guiding business and will supply guides if he is not available, plus drivers. You can contact him direct if you want to arrange a mammal trip to Senegal. Please note they are all bird guides, but they also know all the areas where mammals can be found because often the mammal sites are also birding sites. I have to say that it helps if you have more than a passing interest in birds as the guides want to show you birds and aren't up on mammal identification. Not that the last point matters too much if they know exactly where to go to look for the mammals. Sort that out with whoever you book with in advance of travel. If Carlos is not available (he is in high demand from bird-watching tour groups) he will sort

out a guide and driver for you. The guide will more than likely be Gambian, but the driver will be Senegalese.

The most popular time to visit Senegal is during the dry season in November through to March but I guess other months are okay if you avoid the rainy season which is mainly June to September. The vegetation may be thick and high straight after the rains which might prove a problem mammal watching in some areas.

Abdou 'Carlos' can be contacted on email: carlostoubacouta@yahoo.fr and/or telephone: 00221.77.554.16.45.

Senegal has lost much of its fauna, particularly the larger mammals, so it isn't like mammal watching in African countries in the east or south. Niokolo Koba National Park being the only place we visited that had, Warthogs aside, wild ungulates. Our aim was to see target species such as Pale Fox, West African Manatee and Red-flanked Duiker. Nevertheless, Senegal is a good and enjoyable country to visit for mammal watching and we can recommend a visit. Some Senegalese fauna, including Red-fronted Gazelle and Giant Eland are held in some large, fenced enclosures such as Fathala. We made the decision not to visit the enclosures as the mammals behind the fence aren't tickable to us – but each to their own. However, they do good work breeding and releasing some species such as Red-fronted Gazelles and Giant Eland in suitable areas around Senegal.

The weather was hot and dry, although it was a little cooler at night on the coast when the breeze got up. It started getting light at 06:30 and fully light by 07:00, it was dark by 19:30. Areas along the roads and around towns/villages were heavily grazed mainly by goats but also donkeys, sheep and cows. Sadly, like the rest of the world there was lots of plastic pollution.

We each had binoculars, thermal imagers, spotlights/torches together with one shared telescope.

Itinerary.

Day 1 Dakar – St Louis

Day 2 St Louis – Podor

Day 3 Podor – Richard Toll

Day 4 Richard Toll – Kaolack

Day 5 Kaolack – Niokolo Koba National Park

Day 6 Niokolo Koba National Park

Day 7 Niokolo Koba National Park - Wassadou

Day 8 Wassadou – Ziguinchor

Day 9 Ziguinchor – Pointe-Saint-Georges

Day 10 Pointe-Saint-Georges

Day 11 Pointe-Saint-Georges – Dakar

Daily diary

Monday 16th

We met Carlos and Mamadou after our hotel breakfast and drove north to St Louis around 07:45. We made a stop to look at vultures at a roadkill carcass and a couple of other random stops for birds. At one such stop we saw 4 Striped Ground Squirrels. At Les Trois Marigots, near St Louis, we found 2 troops of Common Patas Monkeys, numbering about 20 animals in total. We did a night drive in the area and found 5 West Sahara Hares and an African Wildcat. Overnight we stayed in a hotel in St Louis.



Juvenile West Sahara Hare TB



Patas Monkey JW

Tuesday 17th

We departed our St Louis hotel at 06:15 and headed north to the huge wetland reserve of Djoudj. On route and just as it was getting light, we saw an African Wildcat. On arrival at Djoudj we came across 2 African Golden Wolves which showed well but were spooked by a couple of vehicles and so trotted off. There were also a few Warthogs snuffling about and we saw a single Patas Monkey. We then boarded our 09:00 private boat trip through the reserve. Lots of Warthogs (c30), a few Crocodiles and Nile Monitors and thousands of water birds.

After the boat trip we then headed east, hugging the Senegal River which forms the border with Mauritania. We stopped for lunch in Richard Toll before driving on to Podor. In the late afternoon, after dropping our bags off at our hotel - the Gite d'Etape - we walked around some local fields but didn't come across any mammals. These fields are a hot spot for birders as it is a good place to find a much sort after species – the Golden Nightjar.

After our evening meal back at the hotel, we went on a night drive from 21:00 to 23:15. First in the area north of Podor we found 5 West Sahara Hares and an African Wildcat. We also got our main target for this location - a Pale Fox - which turned out to be the only one we saw. Driving the area south of Podor close to the Golden Nightjar fields we found 1 Golden Wolf, 3 White-tailed Mongoose, 2 African Civets and 4 West Sahara Hares.



Golden Wolf

JW



White-tailed Mongoose

TB

Wednesday 18th

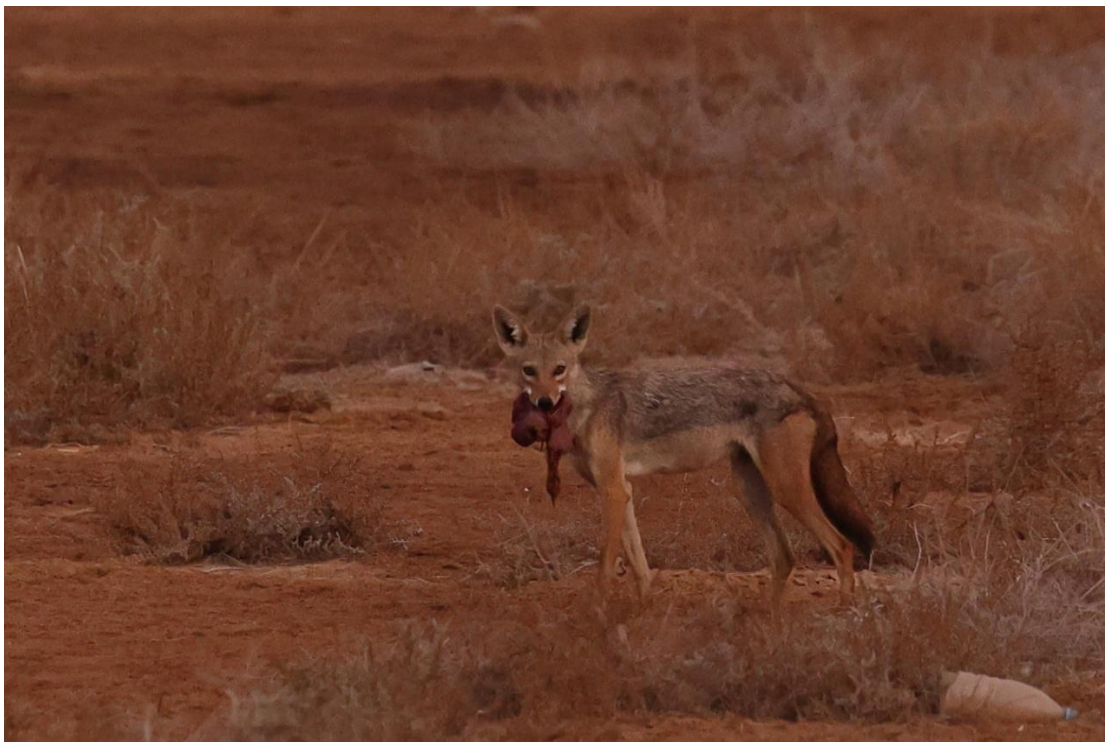
We departed our hotel in Podor at 07:30 and headed back west towards Richard Toll where we were staying the night. Although we stopped a couple of times on route we didn't find any mammals, neither did we find any mammals around the Richard Toll area in the afternoon.

Our night drive from 20:45 to 23:00 began around the Richard Toll airfield and continued around the surrounding area. We found around 20 West Sahara Hares, an African Civet, a Common Genet and 2 African Wildcats. Regarding African Wildcats we are only counting 4 cats as good specimen types for the species, but even so we can't be 100% certain they were pure-bred. We had multiple sightings of cats that were domestic or domestic/wildcat hybrids which wasn't surprising as we were never too far from human habitation. Also, on the night drive we saw quite a few very small gerbils. Based on size (which we are quite confident on, as we almost hand-caught one), tail length, and lack of any obvious tail pencil, these appear to be Pygmy Gerbils (the only other possibility being Sahelo-Sudanese (Gambian) Gerbils).

Thursday 19th

We left our hotel in Richard Toll at 06:30 for the long drive, via St Louis, to Kaolack in the centre of the country. Not long into our drive we saw 2 Golden Wolves at a roadkill, but they were very nervous and ran off as soon as we stopped to look at them. One ran off carrying a large chunk of roadkill meat. A Green Monkey was also seen briefly in the Les Trois Marigots area. Despite a few stops on route, we saw no other mammals.

In Kaolack we stayed at the Relais Kaolack which is a nice hotel. All the better for having Four-toed Hedgehogs in the grounds. We watched one about an hour after it got dark, but it was the only one that night. We also saw a Northern Giant Pouched Rat, but it decided to play hide and seek and was rather elusive.



Golden Wolf

TB

Friday 20th

Up and out by 06:00. We searched the hotel grounds and car park again as it was much quieter with no hotel guests wandering around. We found 4 hedgehogs and the Northern Giant Pouched Rat was more obliging.



Four-toed Hedgehog

TB

Northern Giant Pouched Rat

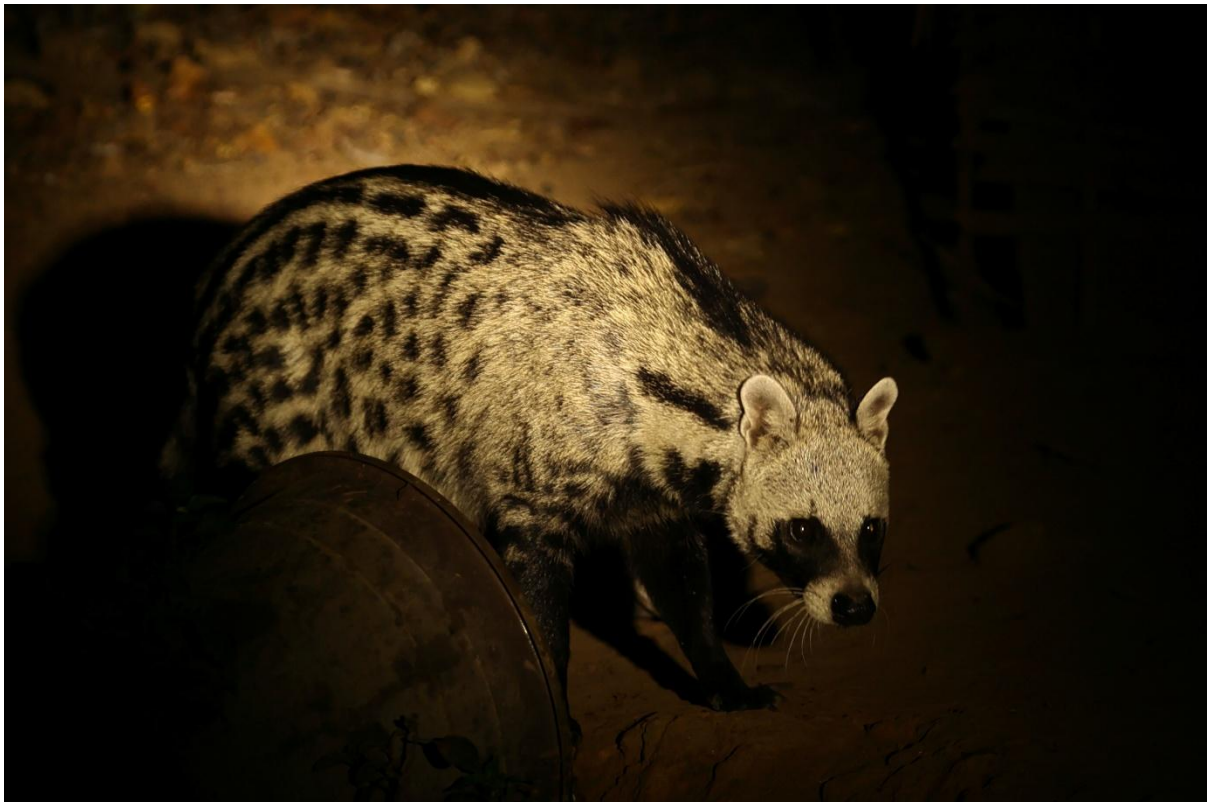
JP



After breakfast we headed east, stopping for lunch in Tambacounda, before continuing to Niokolo Koba National Park (PNNK). We made a couple of stops on route and found a Gambian Sun Squirrel and at least 5 Striped Ground Squirrels.

We entered PNNK via the Dar Salam gate at 17:00 and were joined by our obligatory local guide Ibrahim. Driving slowly along the tracks we encountered 1 Bush Duiker, 8 Waterbuck, 15 Kob, 20 Bushbuck, 1 Oribi, 12 Warthogs, an Egyptian Mongoose, which showed very briefly, 3 Banded Mongoose and then a troop of around 18 Banded Mongoose foraging on the edge of a mare (wetland).

We arrived at our accommodation at the Simenti Hotel at 19:00. As the hotel is long abandoned and mainly in disrepair we stayed in huts in the grounds. Although the food is still served in the old hotel restaurant area with its veranda overlooking the Gambian River. After dark we searched the grounds, along the periphery of the camp was an African Civet but that was the only mammal we found.



African Civet

Saturday 21st

A wander around camp before first light only produced a couple of mongoose in the forest along the edge of camp. They were only seen briefly in the thermals and unfortunately went unidentified.

At 08:00 we went on a 'game' drive in one of the parks open-topped vehicles driven by a PNNK driver. The vehicle is ideal for viewing wildlife. We saw lots of Kob, Waterbuck, Bushbuck, Oribi, Warthogs, Guinea Baboons, Green Monkeys, a Red-flanked Duiker, 2 Banded Mongoose plus a few Gambian Sun Squirrels and Striped Ground Squirrels. Many ungulates gather around the mares to graze giving good views from hides overlooking these wet areas. We got back to the Simenti at 12:30 and walked to a hide a couple of hundred metres from the grounds. Seeing much the same as earlier apart from a pair of Egyptian Mongoose which entertained us for 10 minutes or so before slinking off.



Green Monkey

TB



Kob

JW



Waterbuck

JW



Bushbuck

TB



Egyptian Mongoose

TB

Earlier in the day we found a colony of around 40 roundleaf bats in a room under the derelict swimming pool. In the afternoon we went in search of bats in the derelict rooms on the first floor of the hotel. We managed to enter about 6 rooms and found at least 200 roundleaf bats. While recognizing this genus is not fully resolved taxonomically, based on measurements of a dead one (notably forearm length of ~ 41 mm), at least some were Maghreb Roundleaf Bats, although they may have been mixed roosting with other species such as Noack's Roundleaf Bats.

If you are planning to stay at Simenti please note that some of the ground floor rooms have been refurbished recently and are now in use. Stacked up were bags of cement, new window frames and doors so more refurbishments could be made soon. The bats may be losing their roost sites. Whether the swimming pool also gets a makeover remains to be seen.



Maghreb Roundleaf Bat

TB



Maghreb Roundleaf Bat

TB

In the late afternoon a family group of Warthogs snuffled and rooted around the camp. At 17:00 we went on a boat ride for 1.5 hours along the Gambian River seeing 6 Hippopotamus, 11 Red Colobus and many Baboons.

We then drove to Camp du Lion where we were staying the night, arriving just as it got dark. It's a basic camp with no running water but a great place to stay. Our evening meal was at 20:00 which was interrupted by the arrival of 3 Pardine Genets and an African Civet snuffling around behind the

kitchen for food scraps. In the end we staked out the area till 01:00 but only the 3 Pardine Genets and 2 African Civets showed up during our vigil.



Hippopotamus

TB

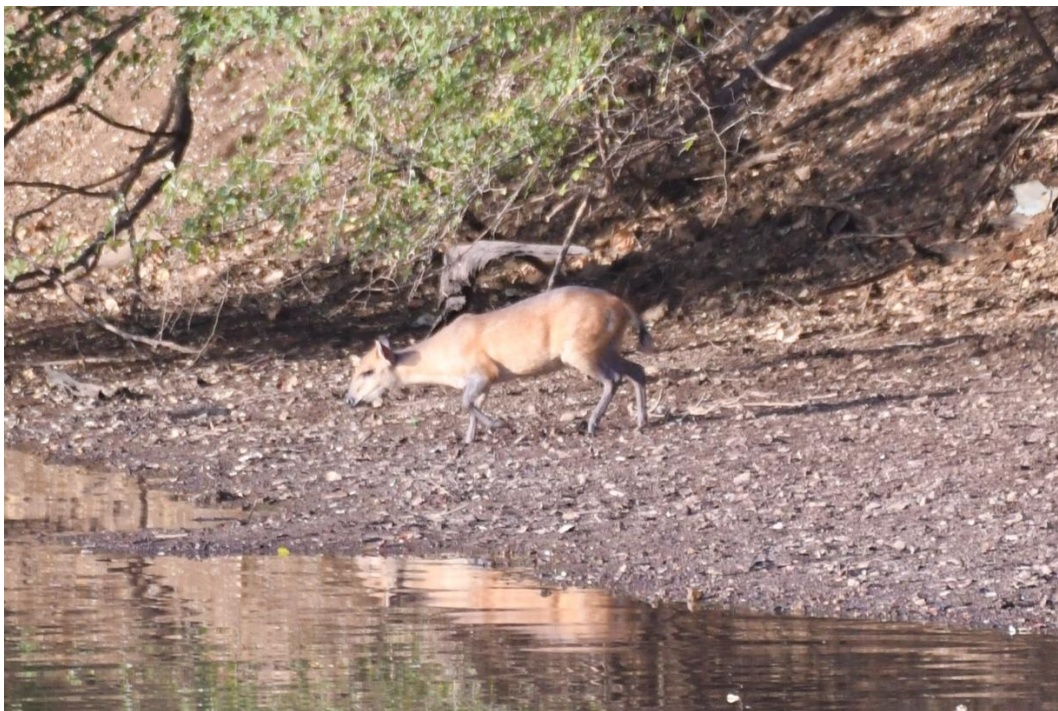
Sunday 22nd

We were back watching the area behind the kitchen an hour before first light, but no animals showed up. At breakfast we were scrutinised intently by a couple of Green Monkeys hoping for a handout. After breakfast, at 08:00, we went out in the game viewing vehicle again, visiting the mares and driving on some different tracks from yesterday. Seeing, in the main, the same suite of animals – Kob, Waterbuck, Bushbuck, Oribis, Warthogs, Baboons but also 3 Red-flanked Duikers, 2 Patas Monkeys and a couple of Gambian Sun Squirrels.



Red-flanked Duikers

JW



But best of all were Roan Antelope, first a small herd galloped past in front of our vehicle kicking dust as they went. Disappointingly they didn't stop and just kept running. However, 20 minutes later we came across another group which this time stayed and looked at us for a short while, giving great views before making off into thick bush.



Oribi

TB



Roan Antelope

TB



Above and below Pardine Genet

TB



Not far from the camp we got out of the vehicle and walked down to the Gambian River and watched a couple of hippos and a huge crocodile. We then went back to the camp for lunch around 12:15. On arrival we heard that at Simenti 2 Lions were lying in the shade alongside the Gambian River and were viewable from the Simenti Hotel veranda. Obviously, we abandoned any thoughts of lunch. Carlos quickly found Ibrahim and the driver, and we piled into the vehicle and off we went at a bit of a pace bumping along the tracks – the twitch was on! Would they still be there when we arrived, would they seek out shade deeper in cover as the sun moved round. We needn't have worried as 40 minutes later there they were loafing in the shade on the opposite bank of the river.



Lions

TB

Lions are rare in West Africa, in PNNK it was estimated that in 2025 there were 40 individuals which represent the only wild Lions in Senegal. We watched the Lions for about an hour before making our way back to Camp du Lion for our late lunch.



Lions

JW

After lunch we left PNNK and made our way to Wassadou camp. The camp is only about 15k from the PNNK Dar Salam gate and is also located beside the Gambian River.

Around Wassadou camp were Green Monkeys and in a riverside tree a few Red Colobus. At 17:00 we boarded a boat for a 2-hour river trip, seeing the same Red Colobus in the same tree we saw from the camp as well as lots of Baboons.

After dark we searched around the camp, around the area where the kitchen food scraps are thrown, we found 2 Common Genets but nothing else, we gave up and went to bed at 23:15.



Guinea Baboon

TB

Monday 23rd

A Red-flanked Duiker was on the riverbank for a short while early morning. After breakfast we again went for a boat ride from 08:30 – 10:30. Lots of birds and a very nice Banded Cobra but the only mammals were Baboons. Around the camp were the usual Green Monkeys and nearby lots of Baboons plus a small troop of Red Colobus that were a different troop from yesterday as these were on the opposite riverbank.

In the afternoon we drove out a little way and walked an area of Acacia scrub but didn't find any mammals. Back at camp and after our evening meal we did a night walk - and got a brief view of a Common Genet and found an African Civet around the kitchen food scraps area but that was all.

Tuesday 24th

In the morning we saw Green Monkeys, Red Colobus and Baboons. We left Wassadou camp around 07:30 for the long drive to Ziguinchor, in the Casamance region, where we were staying the night. We arrived at the

Hotel Kadiandoumagne, situated alongside the River Casamance, around 16:30. Just as it was getting dark, we found a roost of Gambian Epauletted Fruit Bats just outside the hotel reception office.



Gambian Epauletted Fruit Bat

JW

Wednesday 25th and Thursday 26th

We left the hotel in Ziguinchor at 05:45 for Pointe-Saint-Georges, also situated on the River Casamance or more correctly on the estuary. On arrival we went straight to the manatee tower and were watching West African Manatees before 08:00.



West African Manatees above and below

TB





Over the next 2 days we watched the manatees on many occasions, mainly from the tower but we could also see them distantly from the restaurant of our accommodation. There were at least 4 manatees showing on the 25th and 5 on the 26th. We were staying at Lamantin Camp (Lamantin is French for manatee) and is situated about 150 metres east of the tower. From the tower the views of the manatees were mixed with sometimes just a nose/head showing before they slowly submerged back under the water. The best views were when they came up for air and then rolled over showing the back and tail flukes. The best and most frequent views were on a receding tide although we did see them on high and low tides. As has been reported before, they loiter at this spot because of a freshwater spring bubbling up in the sea. It was good to see a boat exclusion zone marked out with buoys around the spot.

After getting our fill of manatees we checked out the large tree in the centre of the village, mentioned in other trip reports, to see the colony of roosting Gambian Epauletted Fruit Bats. We then walked the scrub and dry rice field to the east of the village but didn't see any mammals. However, we checked out some abandoned buildings near the beach which are only around 200 metres east of the village. In one room of a round building

(possibly a bar/diner in a former life) there were 15 slit-faced bats and in a larger, darker room, there were around 100 slit-faced bats. This round building can easily be seen on google maps if you are going to Pointe-Saint-Georges and want to look for the bats. Frustratingly, despite photos, and measurements of a dead one, it appears it is not possible to be confident on species-level identification in this genus in this area without skull measurements.

After our evening meal we went on a night drive for a couple of hours south of the village. Apart from some domestic goats and pigs we saw 11 West Sahara Hares and a few fruit bats flying around that looked bigger than Epauletted Fruit Bats. We had a great sighting of a Puff Adder on the track which hung around long enough for us to get out of the vehicle and get close views of it.

The next day followed much the same pattern as the previous day – in the morning manatee watching and a drive and walk this time south of the village. In the early evening, before dark, we walked around the village and found a couple more Gambian Epauletted Fruit Bat roosts in trees. Also, a roost of Straw-coloured Fruit Bats in Coconut Palms. No doubt this being the larger species of fruit bats we saw on the night drive the previous evening.



Slit-faced bat sp.



Straw-coloured Fruit Bats

TB

Something to bear in mind is that there is a military base on the western edge of the village – we got turned back by a soldier when we wandered a little too far in that direction.

Friday 27th

We left Pointe-Saint-Georges before it was light to make our way to Dakar. Between Pointe-Saint-Georges and Ziguinchor we saw a single West Sahara Hare and a troop of 10 Banded Mongoose crossed the road in front of our vehicle. Later during the drive, not sure where, we had a drive by view of a Patas Monkey. We drove back via Gambia, crossing the Gambian River over the Senegambia bridge. We had to complete the border control passport checks. Stamped leaving Senegal – stamped entering Gambia – stamped leaving Gambia – stamped entering Senegal. Fortunately, the whole process only took about an hour. We then continued to Kaolack where we stopped for lunch. We arrived at our hotel the African Queen on the outskirts of Dakar just after 17:00. We rested, showered, had an

evening meal and left for the airport at 23:00 for our 02:00 (Saturday 28th) flight back to the UK.

Some thoughts.

North Senegal/Richard Toll/Podor. It's worth staying in the area a day or two longer than we did. This is just in case the Pale Fox plays hard to get - you really don't want to miss this priority species of the area. Plus, if you aren't interested in birding early the following morning or don't have to leave early because of moving on you can continue night driving until the early hours as there will be no need to get up early the following day. Who knows what you might encounter by being in the area longer. We hoped we might find Red-fronted Gazelle in northern Senegal but given the heavily grazed areas we passed through I don't think we really stood a chance. There might be suitable habitats further east of Podor or maybe in the Ferlo North or Ferlo South reserves. However, our understanding is that there is little infrastructure and nowhere to stay around the reserves.

Niokolo Koba National Park. Apart from Warthogs at Djoudj this was the only site where we saw ungulates. It is probably worth spending more time than we had here. Although you will cover the same relatively small area even if you stay longer. It is a huge park but much of it is out of bounds without permission/permits. Nevertheless, you might still encounter a Leopard, Lion or Spotted Hyena but you won't see the Chimpanzees, Giant Eland or the few Wild Dogs that remain in the park. We hoped we would come across a Honey Badger; we didn't but to be fair they aren't that common in the park. However, Honey Badger has been seen at Camp du Lion coming to kitchen scraps. We can recommend staying at Camp du Lion and the Simenti hotel/camp. Stay at Camp du Lion first as there is no running water (cold water bucket wash) and then go to Simenti where you can have a shower. We can't really comment on the third option the Niokolo Lodge other than to say it's at the high/posh end of accommodation and expensive. There was no internet access in the camps but there was electricity, so you can charge mobiles, thermal imagers etc.

We were a little surprised that we didn't see or hear Northern Lesser Galago. They have been seen at Wassadou, but we had no luck there or anywhere else.

Bats. Apart from the fruit bats, roundleaf and slit-faced bats we also saw many micro bats which will, no doubt, stay unidentified. But we did record some of them, so you never know!

Mammals Systematic List – 33 species. Names follow those in the single volume All the Mammals of the World (Lynx).

1. West African Manatee (*Trichechus senegalensis*)
2. Green Monkey (*Chlorocebus sabaenus*)
3. Common Patas Monkey (*Erythrocebus patas*)
4. Guinea Baboon (*Papio papio*)
5. Upper Guinea Red Colobus (*Piliocolobus badius*)
6. West Sahara Hare (*Lepus saharae*)¹
7. Gambian Sun Squirrel (*Heliosciurus gambianus*)
8. Striped Ground Squirrel (*Heliosciurus rufobrachium*)
9. Pygmy Gerbil (*Gerbillus henleyi*)
10. Northern Giant Pouched Rat (*Cricetomys gambianus*)
11. Four-toed Hedgehog (*Atelerix albiventris*)
12. African Straw-coloured Fruit Bat (*Eidolon helvum*)
13. Gambian Epauletted Fruit Bat (*Epomophorus gambianus*)
14. Maghreb Roundleaf Bat (*Hipposideros tephros*)
15. African Golden Wolf (*Canis lupaster*)
16. Pale Fox (*Vulpes pallida*)
17. African Wildcat (*Felis lybica*)
18. Lion (*Panthera leo*)
19. Egyptian Mongoose (*Herpestes ichneumon*)
20. White-tailed Mongoose (*Ichneumia albicauda*)
21. Banded Mongoose (*Mungos mungos*)
22. Common (Small-spotted) Genet (*Genetta genetta*)

¹ The literature is quite confusing, in part owing to mixed use of common and scientific names for the various taxa over time, but the most recent research appears to show that *Lepus saharae* is the only taxon in northern Senegal, with *L. capensis* and *L. victoriae* absent after description of this species. The situation becomes much more confusing to the north of Senegal: Soria-Boix *et al.* (2019) Evolutionary ecology of hares (*Lepus* spp.) from northwest Africa: the existence of cryptic species and description of a new species (*Lepus saharae* sp. nov.) *Evolutionary Ecology Research* 20: 537–555.

23. Pardine Genet (*Genetta pardina*)
24. African Civet (*Civettictis Civetta*)
25. Common Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*)
26. Red-flanked Duiker (*Cephalophorus rufilatus*)
27. Oribi (*Ourebia ourebi*)
28. Bush Duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia*)
29. Roan Antelope (*Hippotragus equinus*)
30. Waterbuck (*Kobus ellipsiprymnus*)
31. Kob (*Kobus Kob*)
32. Northern Bushbuck (*Tragelaphus scriptus*)
33. Common Warthog (*Phacochoerus africanus*)

Selected Birds (we saw 280 species).

Golden Nightjar, Horus Swift, Savile's Bustard, Adamawa Turtle Dove, African Finfoot, Allen's Gallinule, Quail-plover, Egyptian Plover, Bronze-winged Courser, Saddle-billed Stork, Martial Eagle, Pel's Fishing Owl, Little Grey Woodpecker, Brown-necked Raven, Sennar Penduline Tit, River Prinia, Violet-backed Starling, Black Scrub Robin, Sudan Golden Sparrow, Brown-rumped Bunting.

Reptiles: West African Crocodile, Nile Monitor, West African Banded Cobra, Puff Adder, Senegal Mabuya, Peter's Rock Agama, Chevron-throated Dwarf Gecko.

More photos below.



Maghreb Roundleaf Bat

TB



Slit-faced Bat sp.

TB



Above and below Gambian Epauletted Fruit Bats

TB





Warthog and Kob (and Piapiacs)

JW



Northern Giant Pouched Rat

TB



Warthog and Red-flanked Duiker

JW





Pardine Genet

TB



Upper Guinea Red Colobus

TB