

## SENEGAL 2019

### 16 days in January/February

In March 2009 I spent 2 weeks in Senegal with a friend. We travelled by public transport and hired taxis and 4X4 when necessary to visit the parks. We were so much harassed and scammed that for the first time at the end of the trip we said : We will never come back in this country. But the guides we got in the Djoudj and the Niokolo Koba were good and honest. To visit the Niokolo Koba National Park we booked a guide, a driver and a 4X4. But the driver didn't want to drive to save km and petrol. He agreed to drive only to the Simenti Pond and Damantan Gué. At the beginning I wanted to hire the car for 3 days to look for large antelopes and specially Derby's Eland, but our guide told us take the car for 2 days and after you will decide if you want to stay more. The park was burning (I was told by the poachers). At the end our guide told me I think now you know why I told you to hire the car for 2 days only, you have seen in which state is the park. We left the country very disappointed. Below is what we saw in this trip:

Guembeul Reserve (a fenced area with half domestic animals): at least 15 Scimitar-horned Oryx, 6 Dama Gazelles, Patas Monkeys. They had also 6 Addax and 20 Dorcas Gazelles they wanted to release may be here or in the Ferlo Reserve which is also a fenced area.

Djoudj National Park: many Golden Jackal (called now African Wolf even they looked like more a Jackal than a Wolf) including a pair with 3 youngs, 15 Patas Monkeys, many Wart Hogs but no sign of Dorcas and Red Fronted Gazelles (as Djoudj is in a muslim area only Wart Hogs and Golden Jackals-African Wolves thought to be impure animals are not killed). The local guides told me it was a long time they had seen a gazelle.

Niokola Koba National Park: 40 Buffon's Kobs, 15 Defassa Waterbucks, 1 Red Flanked Duiker, many Warthogs, many Guinea Baboons, 3 Hippopotamus , 4 Green Monkeys.

Bandia Reserve: We went to this reserve with mostly south african species. But when we were told the Derby's Elands were in quarantine and it was not possible to see them we left.

Four years ago I was looking on the net where to see African Manatee and I found a paper written by the Oceanium of Dakar. They said that in Casamance, at the Pointe Saint Georges Manatees were used to come regularly, local people claiming that they come to drink freshwater at a source. I also found the owner of a hotel in Casamance that said they were exceptional and the chance to see one was very slim. I sent an email to the Oceanium of Dakar, but I never received any answer. I decided not to go: so many people lied to us when I was in Senegal that I thought it was just to attract tourists.

But last year when I saw the trip report of Cheryl Antonucci I decided to do a big effort to return in Senegal and that to see the Manatees. I bought immediately a flight for January 2019. I wanted also to look for Gambian Mongoose near the Niokolo Koba where they are common, Pale Fox in the north or elsewhere, Derby's Eland in Bandia Reserve and maybe Atlantic Humpback Dolphin in the Sine Saloum. Pale Fox was apparently easy in the north near Podor and Richard Toll (see Lehmsberg, Birdquest and recently Richard Webb), but also further south in Kedougou (Birdquest), Wassadou (Lehmsberg), the border of the Sine Saloum (Jeroen Verhoeff). As I didn't want to have the same experience in the Niokolo Koba I skipped it.

Before leaving home I looked to hire a car in St Louis, but it was impossible and I was offered a car with a driver, something I don't like, view my experiences in Senegal, Uganda and Madagascar. (in contrary I got an extraordinary guide-driver in Kenya). By the end I told me that to have a driver for 2 days was not too risky and I asked the price for 2 days going from St Louis, to Richard Toll and Podor and back to St Louis : it was a flat 515 Euros. Of course I didn't accept.

So I decided to travel by public transport. By this way you lose a lot of time. Taxis start when they are full. It took me once 5 hours to wait. Negotiating a car by yourself is not easy in this country and scams are regular. Many times when I wanted to buy something, I asked the price, gave a note and after I couldn't get my change, the price being inflated and that happened even in nice shops in Dakar. It was rare with the poorest people.

I arrived a Sunday in Dakar at 1am. But it was out of question that I leave the airport by night. Nobody accepted to tell me where was the place to take a bus

to the gare des Beaux Maraichers in Dakar (Dakar is now quite unsafe by night), even at the informations desks (they are 3). They lied to me telling it was very far. As I had given a tip at the person who sold me a sim card, I finally asked her where was the bus stop: it was less than 1mn from the exit of the airport. It was just the beginning of the hassles and scams. But I expected that. Several times different persons tried to scam me in order that I pay their own transport. I had just arrived in Dakar and it was decided: I have come for the manatees, I will have to support that everyday, but for sure I will never come back. Of course the country is poor and extremely dirty: rubbish is everywhere. But what I can't accept is the dishonesty of many people: not the poorest.

By taxi-brousse I arrived late afternoon in Richard Toll quite tired and had not time to find a car to look for Pale Fox. The following day I visited the area close to the airport, looking for birds and where to look for the fox. Late afternoon I couldn't find the taxi I wanted to hire for 2 hours by night. It meant no Pale Fox as the following day I had to approach Dakar. I slept in Thiés and after went to Dakar harbor where I had book a cabin in the ferry to Ziguinchor in Casamance. I left by 20h. The crossing was nice. I arrived in Ziguinchor by 11h30. Half an hour later I jumped in the public pirogue (nearly empty) to La Pointe St Georges. I had booked to sleep 2 nights at the Campement du Lamantin (Lamantin is Manatee in French). I disembarked at the place where a tower had been built to look at the Manatees. There were 4 French waiting. They told me they had not seen any. I went to my lodging where I was welcome. The lodging was perfect. Louis Dattia, the owner, told it was not a good day to see the Manatees. Nevertheless I rushed at the tower which has been damaged by the wind. Two minutes later I saw the tail of one. It was the beginning of low tide and I stayed here until night, seeing regularly them. Most of the time I saw only the nostrils and sometimes the tail. I was able to identify 4 ones by the shape or color of the tail. When the tide was very low they were at less than 30m from the shore. Glad I asked to stay 3 nights.

I had 2 low tides every day, and at each one I was at the tower. I finally saw 5 Manatees on my last morning. The pirogues arrive and leave by passing exactly where are the manatees, but it doesn't disturb them really. And it is the same with the noise the children did once as they were playing near the border of

the river. Once I saw the full body of one at the surface. When the tide was very low they were more active, showing more often their tail.

One night I went spotlighting in the fields at the back of the village. I saw many (Savanna?) Hares and an African Wild Cat trying to catch one.

In the village I was shown a large tree with a colony of Gambian Epaulette Fruit Bats. In another tree I saw 2 Gambian Sun Squirrels.

The food was very good and the people very nice. Never anybody in the village asked me for money or anything. The children came everyday to play with me, but never I heard "Give me". A little paradise. I can only recommend people to sleep there. It is good for the locals, but also for the protection of the manatees.

I left this place with the public pirogue, again nearly empty. It is a 2h30mn ride and a nice way to see the scenery. During the 2 rides and every day at the campement I saw Bottle Nose Dolphins. They are common. But apparently there is no Humpback Dolphin.

I slept in Ziguinchor. And early morning I left for the very long drive to Tambacounda, then to the junction of the road to Wassadou at the border of the Niokolo Koba. And finally I arrived by night at the campement by moto taxi. As I was getting my dinner I met Richard Web and Nigel Goodgame. Then I went for a short spotlighting, seeing nothing. I spent 1 full day at this place seeing interesting birds, plus 2 Hippopotamus, more than 200 hundreds Guinea Baboon, many Green Monkeys, 3 Red Colobus, 1 Gambian Mongoose and by night 3 Senegal Galagos and 2 African Civets (1 adult and a young one). In the Paillote in front of the garage there were 7 Slit-Faced Bats (I don't know which species)+4 Mauritian Tomb Bats.

Then I returned to Thiès and Richard Toll. Immediately I asked for a taxi to go by night at the airport. One hour later I was in the taxi. We went first on the airport and approached well several times 2 Pale Foxes. Except 2 rodents and several hares (Savanna?) I saw only nightjars (1 was a Long Tailed). By daylight I tried for an Egyptian Mongoose along the river and the canal, but without luck. Sudan Golden Sparrow was my best bird at this place.

After I returned to Thiès and then to Djiffer in the northwest of the Sine Saloum. I wanted to try for Humpback Dolphin. I didn't go on a boat ride as locals told me there was no dolphin in this area at this time of the year. Two French working there told me they saw dolphins everyday until September when they were going at the island in front of Djiffer. But which species was it? A local told me that Tambacouta was better to see dolphins! I had found a birdwatcher report with a sighting of "dolphins" near Missirah and a paper on the net in which it was told that Humpback are well known in the Sine Saloum, rare in the Senegal river and not known in the Casamance river.

After I spent one night in Popenguine where Greens Monkeys are common. My last day was spent at Bandia Rserve, a fenced reserve where 90% of the mammals were introduced from South Africa. Two large antelopes from Niokolo Koba NP have been introduced Derby's Eland of the rare western subspecies and Roan Antelopes where both breed. Since several years I read the work that some Czech scientists do for the protection of this Eland and was lucky to meet one of them: Marketa Grunova. She told me they are now 100 in semi captivity in Bandia and Fathala reserves, and even last year they have not seen any by plane in the Niokolo Koba, a group of 40-50 has been camera trapped recently in this park. I saw 2 males, plus many Roan Antelopes, Warthogs, Striped Ground Squirrels, Patas and Green Monkeys. I don't mention the south african species. It would have been more interesting to introduce only native species and not to mix Common Eland, and Derby's Elands. Hopefully thanks to the Czech the breeding Derby's are in a separate enclosure.

During my drives I saw several times Striped Ground Squirrels between Dakar and St Louis and between Tambacounda and Kaolack. It is this squirrel that you can find north of the Sahara in Morocco (only in the Souss south of Agadir where I saw it several times).

My best birds: Savile's Bustard, Adamawa Turtle Dove and Sudan Golden Sparrow.

Thanks to Jeroen Verhoeff who told me where he saw Pale Fox and all those doing trip reports in Mammalwatching.

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