



Rockjumper Birding Tours

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Sierra Leone I

22nd - 25th August 2006



Photos by David Hoddinott

Tour Report compiled by Tour Leader David Hoddinott

Tour summary

This first ever, birding tour of Sierra Leone started off in the Western Area Peninsula Forest. Our first goal was to find one of the most sought after birds in Africa, the pre-historic looking White-necked Picathartes. After some early morning rain and a short walk we arrived at the Picathartes colony. Here we waited patiently for an hour, you could just feel the suspense, and suddenly there they were, a magnificent pair of these incredible birds. We watched them for an amazing twenty minutes. Everyone was thrilled and it was especially memorable for Don & Donna as this was their last family of birds to see.

Thereafter we made our way to River No.2 where we enjoyed a wonderful lunch of fresh fish whilst enjoying the view over a pristine beach. We then took a boat trip through some extensive mangrove swamps, it was a little quite but we did see Osprey, Western Reef-Egret, Whimbrel, a large roost of Royal Terns and Mouse-brown Sunbird.

Further exploration of the Western Area Peninsula produced some great birds including Sabine's Spinetail, stunning Shining-blue and Blue-breasted Kingfisher, Pied-winged Swallow, Fanti Sawwing, Fire-crested Alethe, the lovely Oriole Warbler, Turati's Boubou and superb Crimson Seedcracker. The tour ended off in Freetown a thoroughly enjoyable and successful trip.

Annotated List of Bird Species recorded

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows J. F. Clements *Birds of the World: A Checklist* 5th Edition (2000) Ibis Publishing Company, with current updates.

61 species

Herons, Egrets & Bitterns Ardeidae

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

We found one on the golf course near Freetown.

Western Reef-Egret *Egretta [garzetta] gularis*

We had superb views of 3 at Aberdeen Creek.

Striated (Green-backed) Heron *Butorides striatus*

We found one near a coastal wetland.

NOTE: This species group is treated by Clements as 2 species, the nominate Striated Heron and B. virescens Green Heron of North America but he lumped B. sundevalli Lava Heron of the Galapagos. Other authorities lump all three forms into a single species, called Green-backed Heron (as per Handbook of Birds of the World.)

Swans, Geese & Ducks Anatidae

White-faced Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*

A pair was seen at River No.2 on the Western Area Peninsula.

Osprey Pandionidae

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

We had good views of one on River No.2 on the Western Area Peninsula.

Hawks, Eagles & Kites Accipitridae

Palmnut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis*

We had brief views of one at Lungi International Airport on arrival.

Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus*

Up to 20 were seen daily around Freetown.

African Harrier-Hawk *Polyboroides typus*

One adult was seen on the Western Area Peninsula.

Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus*

One was seen in secondary growth on the Western Area Peninsula.

Thick-knees Burhinidae

Senegal Thick-knee *Burhinus senegalensis*



We found 2 at Aberdeen Creek.

Sandpipers & Allies Scolopacidae

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

A total of 12 were seen at River No.2 on the Western Area Peninsula.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

We found one at Aberdeen Creek.

Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*

One was seen at River No.2 on the Western Area Peninsula.

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

We found one at River No.2 during the boat trip.

Terns Sternidae

Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis*

A total of 8 were seen in a large tern roost at River No.2 on the Western Area Peninsula.

Royal Tern *Sterna maxima*

A large roost of 200 was seen at River No.2 on the Western Area Peninsula.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

We found 3 in the tern roost at River No.2 on the Western Peninsula.

Doves & Pigeons Collumbidae

Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon) *Columba livia*

Common in Freetown and other large towns.

Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata*

A fairly common widespread species, we found one near Seedcracker gully, Freetown.

Laughing (Palm) Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*

A widespread, familiar species recorded in small numbers in Freetown.

Turacos Musophagidae

Western (Gray) Plantain-eater *Crinifer piscator*

This floppy-winged bird with a maniacal call was seen once near Freetown.

Cuckoos & Coucals Cuculidae

Senegal Coucal *Centropus senegalensis*

We had good views of 2 on the Western Area Peninsula.

Swifts Apodidae

Sabine's Spinetail *Rhaphidura sabini*

We found small numbers of this species in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

African Palm-Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*

We found small numbers daily on the Western Area Peninsula.

NOTE: The nominate African form of the Palm-Swift is considered to be distinct from the Malagasy form C. p. gracilis by some authorities. Clements does not as yet recognize this split.



Little Swift *Apus affinis*
This common urban swift was seen on every day of the tour.

Kingfishers *Alcedinidae*

Shining-blue Kingfisher *Alcedo quadribrachys*
We had good views of one at Seedcracker gully, Freetown.

Woodland Kingfisher *Halcyon senegalensis*

One of the characteristic sounds of moist African savanna, this bird was encountered on the telephone lines in Freetown.

Blue-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon malimbica*

This forest equivalent of the Woodland Kingfisher was seen exceptionally well at Seedcracker gully, Freetown.

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*

The world's commonest kingfisher, we found 2 at River No.2 on the Western Area Peninsula.

Hornbills *Bucerotidae*

African Pied Hornbill *Tockus fasciatus*

This species is common throughout forested and farmbrush areas in Sierra Leone. We found small numbers daily in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

Swallows *Hirundinidae*

Red-chested Swallow *Hirundo lucida*

We found 3 near some culverts in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii*

We found 2 on the Western Area Peninsula.

NOTE: This species complex is likely to be split based on the African nominate form which would become African Wire-tailed Swallow and the Asian Wire-tailed Swallow which would be H. filifera. Clements does not as yet recognize this split.

Pied-winged Swallow *Hirundo leucosoma*

We had superb views of 4 flying low over flooded grasslands.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*

We found small numbers daily on the Western Area Peninsula.

Fanti Sawwing *Psalidoprocne obscura*

A common species in secondary growth, we recorded up to 20 daily on the Western Area Peninsula.

Bulbuls *Pycnonotidae*

Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*

This ubiquitous species was one of the few birds to be recorded on every day of the trip, with high daily tallies.

NOTE: Another very confusing polytypic species complex. Several Asian and African forms have already been recognized as distinct species within the super-species. The form that we saw in Sierra Leone, P. b. inornatus may be split as White-vented Bulbul, Clements does not recognize this split.

Yellow-throated Greenbul *Chlorochicla flavicollis*

We found one at Seedcracker gully, Freetown.

Thrushes & Allies *Turdidae*

African Thrush *Turdus pelios*

We obtained good sightings of 3 at Seedcracker gully, Freetown.



Fire-crested Alethe*Alethe diademata*

This elusive, ant-swarm attending species was seen very well in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

NOTE: The East African form is sometimes split from the nominate White-tailed Alethe of West Africa (which we recorded in Sierra Leone), becoming *A. castanea*.

Cisticolas & Allies Cisticolidae**Red-faced Cisticola***Cisticola erythrops*

This moist grassland and swamp dwelling cisticola was seen well on the Western Area Peninsula.

Whistling Cisticola*Cisticola lateralis*

A secondary growth and cultivation species, we had good views of one on a telephone line on the Western Area Peninsula.

Tawny-flanked Prinia*Prinia subflava*

Another noisy and familiar African warbler, we recorded this species on the Western Area Peninsula.

Oriole Warbler*Hypergerus atriceps*

We had a superb sighting of one at Seedcracker gulley, Freetown.

Old World Flycatchers Muscicapidae**Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat***Cossypha niveicapilla*

We had a brief sighting of one on the Western Area Peninsula.

Rockfowl Picathartidae**White-necked Rockfowl***Picathartes gymnocephalus*

We had superb views of a pair of this pre-historic looking bird. Certainly the highlight of the trip!

Babblers Timaliidae**Rufous-winged Illadopsis***Illadopsis rufescens*

We heard one calling in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

Sunbirds & Spiderhunters Nectariniidae**Mouse-brown Sunbird***Anthreptes gabonicus*

We enjoyed great views of 3 at River No.2 on the Western Area Peninsula.

Variable Sunbird*Cinnyris venustus*

We had superb views of 3 on the Western Area Peninsula.

Copper Sunbird*Cinnyris (Nectarinia) cuprea*

We obtained good views of one in the Western Area Peninsula.

Bushshrikes & Allies Malaconotidae**Turati's Boubou***Laniarius turatii*

Roger and I saw one briefly at Peacock Farm, Freetown.

Crows, Jays & Magpies Corvidae**Pied Crow***Corvus albus*

A common and familiar crow, recorded in good numbers daily in the Freetown area.



Old World Sparrows *Passeridae*

(Northern) Gray-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus*

Sierra Leone's commonest sparrow was plentiful in the Freetown area.

NOTE: The Gray-headed Sparrow complex P. griseus has been split into five full species with the Sierra Leone form being retaining in the nominate grouping with the same nomenclature.

Weavers & Allies *Ploceidae*

Black-necked Weaver *Ploceus nigricollis*

A pair was seen at Seedcracker gulley, Freetown.

Village Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus*

One of Sierra Leone's most conspicuous birds, large colonies were found in several places.

NOTE: This widespread African complex is also a candidate for multi-species splitting and the nominate subspecies which we recorded in Sierra Leone will remain within the nominate Village Weaver P. cucullatus group. These splits are not as yet recognized by Clements.

Vieillot's (Black) Weaver *Ploceus nigerrimus*

Flocks of this beautiful species were noted at several localities near Freetown.

NOTE: The distinctive West African form of this weaver is sometimes split off as Black-and-chestnut Weaver P. castaneofuscus.

Black-winged (Red) Bishop *Euplectes hordeaceus*

This species was found to be common in secondary growth, we found many males in full breeding plumage.

Yellow-shouldered Widowbird *Euplectes macrourus*

We had good views of one of these attractive birds on the Western Area Peninsula.

NOTE: This species is an excellent candidate for a two-way split, the Sierra Leone nominate E. m. macrourus would be called Yellow-mantled Widowbird and the eastern E. m. macrocercus would acquire the common name of Yellow-shouldered Widowbird.

Waxbills & Allies *Estrildidae*

Gray-headed (-crowned) Negrofinch *Nigrita canicapilla*

We had good views of one in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

Crimson Seedcracker *Pyrenestes sanguineus*

We had superb views of one male at Seedcracker gulley, Freetown. This was one of the highlights of our trip.

Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala*

Small numbers were seen daily in the Freetown area.

Bronze Mannikin *Lonchura cucullata*

This ubiquitous species was seen daily in scrub throughout Sierra Leone.

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