



# Rockjumper Birding Tours

Worldwide Birding Adventures

## Sierra Leone

*1<sup>st</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> September 2006*



The group in the Western Area Peninsula Forest

**Tour Report compiled by Tour Leader David Hoddinott**

## Tour summary



This third ever, birding tour of Sierra Leone started off in the Western Area Peninsula Forest. Some birding highlights here included an obliging Melancholy Woodpecker, Chestnut Wattle-eye, Blue-throated Brown Sunbird, Shining Drongo and Gray's Malimbe.

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 later took a boat trip through some extensive mangrove swamps, it was a little quiet but we did see Osprey, Western Reef-Egret, Whimbrel, a large roost of Royal Terns and Mouse-brown Sunbird.

Our main goal though was to find one of the most sought after birds in Africa, the pre-historic looking White-necked Picathartes. We took a short walk in the afternoon and arrived at a known Picathartes colony. On arrival a magnificent pair of these incredible birds welcomed us and not long after we were watching two pairs for an amazing half hour. Everyone was thrilled and it was especially memorable for Clive as this was his second last world bird family.

Further exploration of the Western Area Peninsula produced some great birds including; superb views of a male White-spotted Flufftail, Black-shouldered Nightjar seen during the day, stunning Shining-blue and Blue-breasted Kingfishers, Pied-winged Swallow, Fanti Sawwing, the lovely Oriole Warbler, Turati's Boubou and superb Crimson Seedcracker (the last two mentioned being localized Upper Guinea endemics). 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* 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (2000) Ibis Publishing Company, with current updates.

### 109 species

#### Hérons, Egrets & Bitterns Ardeidae

##### **Gray Heron**

*Ardea cinerea*

A well-known, widespread heron, recorded in small numbers at Aberdeen Creek.

##### **Purple Heron**

*Ardea purpurea*

We found one on the golf course near Freetown.

##### **Little Egret**

*Egretta garzetta*

Two were seen at Aberdeen Creek near Freetown.

##### **Western Reef-Egret**

*Egretta [garzetta] gularis*

Small numbers were seen at Aberdeen Creek.

##### **Striated (Green-backed) Heron**

*Butorides striatus*

Recorded in small numbers daily at most wetlands.

*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. sudevalli 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.)*



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## Swans, Geese & Ducks *Anatidae*

**White-faced Whistling-Duck***Dendrocygna viduata*

Two were seen at Aberdeen Creek.

## Osprey *Pandionidae*

**Osprey***Pandion haliaetus*

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

## Hawks, Kites, Eagles & Vultures *Accipitridae*

**Palm-nut Vulture***Gypohierax angolensis*

We had good views of several daily including 2 stunning adults at Aberdeen Creek.

**Hooded Vulture***Necrosyrtes monachus*

The common vulture around human habitation, with large numbers recorded around Freetown.

**African Harrier-Hawk (Gymnogone)***Polyboroides typus*

Small numbers were seen daily.

**Lizard Buzzard***Kaupifalco monogrammicus*

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

**Red-chested Goshawk***Accipiter toussenelii*

We found 2 near the hotel, Freetown.

**Shikra (Little Banded Goshawk)***Accipiter badius*

We had a good sighting of one near our hotel, Freetown.

*NOTE: We recorded the Northern Shikra A. b. sphenurus, which some authorities consider distinct from the southern African Southern Shikra A. b. polyzonoides. These forms may also be split from the Asian nominate A. b. badius and other Asian forms. Clements does not as yet recognize any of these splits.*

## Rails, Gallinules & Coots *Rallidae*

**White-spotted Flufftail***Sarothrura pulchra*

This secretive, forest rail's hooting call was first heard at Peacock farm and later we observed a splendid male. One of the highlights of the trip !

## Plovers & Lapwings *Charadriidae*

**Black-bellied (Gray) Plover***Pluvialis squatarola*

We found up to 10 daily at Aberdeen Creek.

**Common Ringed Plover***Charadrius hiaticula*

We found 10 at Aberdeen Creek.

## Sandpipers & Allies *Scolopacidae*

**Bar-tailed Godwit***Limosa lapponica*

Up to 3 were seen at Aberdeen Creek.

**Whimbrel***Numenius phaeopus*

Up to 20 seen daily at Aberdeen Creek.

**Common Redshank***Tringa totanus*

One bird was seen at Aberdeen Creek.

**Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*

We found one at Aberdeen Creek.

**Common Sandpiper** *Actitis hypoleucos*

Small numbers were seen at Aberdeen Creek.

**Ruddy Turnstone** *Arenaria interpres*

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

**Sanderling** *Calidris alba*

A small flock of 6 were seen at Aberdeen Creek.

**Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea*

A total of 4 were seen at Aberdeen Creek.

### **Terns Sternidae**

**Caspian Tern** *Sterna caspia*

We had great views of 2 at Aberdeen Creek.

**Sandwich Tern** *Sterna sandvicensis*

Up to 6 were seen at Aberdeen Creek.

**Royal Tern** *Sterna maxima*

Small numbers were seen at Aberdeen Creek and a large roost of 200 at River No.2 on the Western Area Peninsula.

**Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger*

We had up to 8 at Aberdeen Creek.

### **Doves & Pigeons Collumbidae**

**Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)** *Columba livia*

Small numbers were seen daily in Freetown.

**Red-eyed Dove** *Streptopelia semitorquata*

This fairly common widespread species was seen daily in Freetown.

**Laughing (Palm) Dove** *Streptopelia senegalensis*

This widespread, familiar species was recorded in small numbers daily in Freetown.

**Blue-spotted Wood-Dove** *Turtur afer*

We found small numbers daily in moist woodland near Freetown.

**African Green-Pigeon** *Treron calva*

Another common pigeon in Sierra Leone, their distinctive lime-green bodies were seen perched atop a large tree near River No.2, Western Area Peninsula Forest.

### **Parrots, Macaws & Allies Psittacidae**

**Red-headed Lovebird** *Agapornis pullarius*

We found a superb male near Aberdeen Creek, Freetown.

**Senegal Parrot** *Poicephalus senegalus*

A pair of this stunning parrots was seen at our hotel near Freetown.

### **Turacos Musophagidae**

**Great Blue Turaco** *Corythaeola cristata*



We heard this species during the boat trip in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**Guinea (Green) Turaco***Tauraco persa*

A forest edge and secondary growth species, which we heard in the Western Area Peninsula.

**Western (Gray) Plantain-eater***Crinifer piscator*

This floppy-winged bird with a maniacal call was seen in small numbers near Freetown.

**Cuckoos *Cuculidae*****Dideric Cuckoo***Chrysococcyx caprius*

This widespread African bird was first seen at Peacock Farm, on the Western Area Peninsula.

**Senegal Coucal***Centropus senegalensis*

The most commonly encountered coucal and seen on virtually every day of the trip.

**Nightjars & Allies *Caprimulgidae*****Black-shouldered Nightjar***Caprimulgus nigriscapularis*

Whilst walking at Peacock Farm we flushed one and had excellent views of it sitting on the ground.

**Swifts *Apodidae*****African Palm-Swift***Cypsiurus parvus*

We found it to be plentiful around palms throughout Sierra Leone.

*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 2 at Seedcracker gully, Freetown.

**Malachite Kingfisher***Alcedo cristata*

The common, small kingfisher of aquatic habitats, we found small numbers at Seedcracker gully.

**Woodland Kingfisher***Halcyon senegalensis*

One of the characteristic sounds of moist African savanna, this bird was encountered in small numbers daily. They are especially common in secondary growth and cultivated areas.

**Blue-breasted Kingfisher***Halcyon malimbica*

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

**Hornbills *Bucerotidae*****African Pied Hornbill***Tockus fasciatus*

This species is fairly common throughout forested and farmbush areas in Sierra Leone. We found 2 in the Botanical Gardens.

**Barbets *Capitonidae*****Yellow-throated Tinkerbird***Pogoniulus subsulphureus*

We found one in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**Yellow (Golden) -rumped Tinkerbird** *Pogoniulus bilineatus*

This common forest-edge species was seen at Peacock Farm, Freetown.

### Woodpeckers & Allies *Picidae*

**Melancholy Woodpecker** *Dendropicus lugubris*

We had great views of one near River No.2 in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

### Swallows *Hirundinidae*

**Pied-winged Swallow** *Hirundo smithii*

We had superb views of one in a moist grassland area near Freetown.

**Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica*

We found small numbers daily.

**Fanti Sawwing** *Psalidoprocne obscura*

We enjoyed great views of up to 6 daily. This is a scarce bird elsewhere but particularly common in Sierra Leone.

### Wagtails & Pipits *Motacillidae*

**Yellow-throated Longclaw** *Macronyx croceus*

We found one in a flooded grassland near Freetown.

### 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.*

**Little Greenbul** *Andropadus virens*

This, the commonest forest edge greenbul was heard on several occasions and seen near Regent, Freetown.

**Ansorge's Greenbul** *Andropadus ansorgei*

We found one in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**Yellow-whiskered Greenbul** *Andropadus latirostris*

We found one in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**Simple Greenbul** *Chlorochicla simplex*

A secondary growth species; we had superb views of several at Peacock Farm, Freetown.

### Thrushes & Allies *Turdidae*

**White-tailed Ant-Thrush** *Neocossyphus poensis*

We heard one in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**African Thrush** *Turdus pelios*

We obtained good views of 2 at Seedcracker gully, Freetown.

### Cisticolas & Allies *Cisticolidae*



**Red-faced Cisticola***Cisticola erythrops*

This moist grassland and swamp dwelling cisticola was heard and seen on several occasions near Freetown.

**Whistling Cisticola***Cisticola lateralis*

A secondary growth and cultivation species, we had good views of one at Peacock Farm.

**Siffling (Short-winged) Cisticola***Cisticola brachypterus*

We had superb views of one displaying at Peacock Farm.

**Tawny-flanked Prinia***Prinia subflava*

Another noisy and familiar African warbler, we heard this species at Peacock Farm.

**Oriole Warbler***Hypergerus atriceps*

We had great views of 2 of these delightful songsters at Seedcracker gully, Freetown.

**Green-backed (Gray-backed) Camaroptera** *Camaroptera brachyura*

The bleating calls of this common bird were heard in moist wooded habitat throughout Sierra Leone, with sightings from Peacock Farm, Freetown.

*NOTE: Most authorities now recognize the nominate green-backed forms of this widespread African warbler as distinct from the grey-backed forms C. brevicaudata. We encountered the grey-backed form in Sierra Leone. Clements still lumps these two groups.*

**Old World Warblers *Sylviidae*****Moustached Grass-Warbler***Melocichla mentalis*

Heard on several occasions and finally seen well at Peacock Farm.

**Green Crombec***Sylvietta virens*

We found one in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**Gray Longbill***Macrosphenus concolor*

This is another secretive species, seen well in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**Green Hylia***Hylia prasina*

Its "HEE-lia!" call was heard and later seen in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**Wattle-eyes *Platysteiridae*****Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher***Bias musicus*

One female was seen at the forest edge in the Botanical Gardens.

**Chestnut Wattle-eye***Platysteira castanea*

We had superb views of a pair in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**Monarch Flycatchers *Monarchidae*****Black-headed Paradise-Flycatcher***Terpsiphone rufiventer*

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

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

We enjoyed incredible views of two pairs in the Western Area Peninsula Forest. This was certainly the highlight of the trip!

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

We found several at River No.2 on the Western Area Peninsula.



**Little Green Sunbird***Anthreptes seimundi*

We found several of these non-descript birds near River No.2 in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**Collared Sunbird***Hedydipna (Anthreptes) collaris*

We found one in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**Blue-throated Brown Sunbird***Cyanomitra cyanolaema*

We had great views of a male near River No.2 in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**Western Olive-Sunbird***Cyanomitra (Nectarinia) obscura*

We heard several in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

*NOTE: The Olive-Sunbird species complex has been split into two full species by Clements and other authorities, namely the nominate Eastern Olive-Sunbird *C. olivacea* and the form which we recorded in Sierra Leone, Western Olive-Sunbird. There has been a review of this split and several authorities are in doubt of the validity, which is based upon the presence, or lack there-of, of pectoral tufts in the females of the various subspecies within the complex.*

**Olive-bellied Sunbird***Cinnyris (Nectarinia) chloropygia*

This forest edge species was seen very well in Seedcracker gully, Freetown.

**Splendid Sunbird***Cinnyris (Nectarinia) coccinigaster*

This stunning bird was seen exceptionally well at Peacock Farm, Freetown.

**Variable Sunbird***Cinnyris venustus*

We had superb views of several at the hotel near Freetown and at Peacock Farm.

**Copper Sunbird***Cinnyris (Nectarinia) cuprea*

We obtained excellent views of several birds at our hotel near Freetown and at Peacock Farm.

**Shrikes *Laniidae*****Common Fiscal***Lanius collaris*

A widespread species of scrub and farmlands in Sierra Leone, we recorded it in small numbers daily in the Freetown area.

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

We heard several calling at Peacock Farm and some of us had brief views of one. This is a very localized species.

**Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike***Telophorus sulfureopectus*

This is another widespread African savanna species, heard on several occasions at Peacock Farm.

**Drongos *Dicruridae*****Shining Drongo***Dicrurus atripennis*

We found one of these noisy critters in an understorey flock in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**Velvet-mantled Drongo***Dicrurus modestus*

We found one in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

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

This common and familiar crow was recorded in good numbers daily in Freetown.

**Old World Sparrows *Passeridae***

**(Northern) Gray-headed Sparrow** *Passer griseus*

This is Sierra Leone's commonest sparrow and plentiful throughout the country.

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*

Small numbers were seen in the forest edges and moist scrub at Seedcracker gulley, Freetown.

**Village Weaver** *Ploceus cucullatus*

This is one of Sierra Leone's most conspicuous birds, with large colonies 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 many localities in Sierra Leone. We had great views of a particularly large nesting colony near Regent, Freetown.

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

**Compact Weaver** *Pachyphantes superciliosus*

Small numbers were seen at Peacock Farm.

**Gray's Malimbe** *Malimbus nitens*

We had superb views of one in a mixed species flock in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

**Black-winged (Red) Bishop** *Euplectes hordeaceus*

This species was found to be fairly common throughout Sierra Leone, we found several males in full breeding plumage.

**Yellow-shouldered Widowbird** *Euplectes macrourus*

Small numbers were seen in the Freetown area.

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*

**Chestnut-breasted Negrofinch** *Nigrita bicolor*

This attractive seedeater was seen very well at our hotel near Freetown.

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

Some of us saw one at Peacock Farm.

**Crimson Seedcracker** *Pyrenestes sanguineus*

We had magnificent views of a male at Seedcracker gulley, Freetown.

**Dybowski's Twinspot** *Euschistospiza dybowskii*

We had fantastic views of a pair at Peacock Farm, Freetown.

**Red-billed Firefinch** *Lagonosticta senegala*

We had great views of a pair at Seedcracker gulley, Freetown.

**Orange-cheeked Waxbill** *Estrilda melpoda*

This common and widespread species was seen in scrubby habitat throughout.

**Bronze Mannikin** *Lonchura cucullata*

This is a ubiquitous species in scrub throughout Sierra Leone. We found them daily.

**Black-and-white Mannikin** *Lonchura bicolor*

Small numbers were seen near Freetown.

NOTE: This complex may be split two-ways, the southern and eastern Brown-backed Mannikin *L. nigriceps* and the northern and western nominate group, which would remain as Black-and-white Mannikin. The latter is the form we recorded in Sierra Leone. Clements does not as yet recognize this split.



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### Indigobirds *Viduidae*

**Pin-tailed Whydah**

*Vidua macroura*

This familiar bird, which parasitises small seedeaters, was seen on several occasions.

### Siskins, Crossbills & Allies *Fringillidae*

**Yellow-fronted Canary**

*Serinus mozambicus*

We had good views of one at Peacock Farm.

## **Annotated List of Mammal Species recorded**

Taxonomy and nomenclature follows that of BirdArea/BirdBase software with taxonomic differences to ‘The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals’ by Jonathan Kingdon, Academic Press, 1997 highlighted.

### Squirrels *Sciuridae*

**Red-legged Sun Squirrel**

*Heliosciurus rufobrachium*

One was seen in the Western Area Peninsula Forest.

## **Annotated List of Reptile Species recorded**

**Red-headed Rock Agama**

*Agama agama*

We had wonderful views of several at Peacock Farm.

**Green Mamba**

*Dendroaspis angusticeps*

We had good views of an adult in the Botanical Gardens.

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