

*This new itinerary took us up into the Loma Mountains where at the forest edge on the high grasslands we found the highly desirable
Sierra Leone Prinia – a long awaited BirdQuest lifer! (Ken Berry)*

SIERRA LEONE

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LEADER: NIK BORROW

A series of terrible events have befallen Sierra Leone since our last visit and in the aftermath of Ebola the country has been struggling to once again find its feet and their tourist industry is keen to encourage visitors to the country. Even though new roads are being built and accommodation standards have improved since our last visit, our third tour to Sierra Leone was still pretty tough going. We built upon the successes of our previous tours and added a new destination to the itinerary - the beautiful Loma Mountains where we managed to find two new 'life' birds for Birdquest in the form of Sierra Leone Prinia and Black-headed Rufous Warbler. We also saw a suite of species not seen on any other of our tours that included an incredible pair of Rufous Fishing Owls at a daytime roost, duetting Turati's Boubous, gorgeous Emerald Starlings, rare Gola Malimbés, colourful Crimson Seedcrackers and Togo Paradise Whydah. Sierra Leone is a jewel of a country with pristine sandy beaches, glorious rain forest, picturesque mountains and rivers but sadly one has to battle with a poor infrastructure and some appalling roads in the remote areas that we visited during the tour. Normally we would have expected to see the amazing White-necked Rockfowl (or

Yellow-headed Picathartes) on this circuit but despite trying at two widely separated colonies we inexplicably failed in this achievement. Whether it was due to the fierce Harmattan blowing or the large troop of monkeys that detected our presence at the critical hour is not clear but the lack of sightings was obviously disappointing for the group. However this failure was offset by many other amazing encounters with some very little known and rarely seen species.

This was mainly a forest-based tour aimed at trying to find some of West Africa's most difficult birds and in particular focussing on those not found easily elsewhere and complimenting those found in Ghana. The timing is linked to the dry season, which may not be the best for the birds but it does facilitate getting round the country on roads that would become impassable quagmires in the rains. The journeys were often tedious and arduous necessities that got us from one birding site to another with potholes deeper than our vehicles often being the order of the day. The experience was punishing and sadly not without casualties as breakdowns became almost regular occurrences! Once free from the cars we were able to explore the forest during numerous walks. Using old logging trails and narrow footpaths we entered the dark interior where canopy birds were a neck-breaking challenge and mid canopy bird parties offered fleeting views of furtive species. Occasionally a shy denizen of the forest floor would put in an appearance. A lack of convenient hotels meant that we made regular camping stops and logistically these worked out well particularly as we had an excellent cook accompanying us and a surprisingly regular supply of beer was on tap! At Bumbuna and the Loma Mountains there was savannah and the chance of more open country birds such as The Emerald Starling but as temperatures regularly peaked at 38° Centigrade in the middle of the day the early mornings and late afternoons were the best times for bird activity. One of the breakdowns fortuitously allowed us to see Yellow-winged Pytilia, Dybowski's Twinspot, Cameroon Indigobird, Togo Paradise Whydah and displaying Standard-winged Nightjars whilst in the forest itself the discovery of a Lowland Akalat was a great prize. In the impressive Gola Forest we managed to get great views of Congo Serpent Eagle and Long-tailed Hawk as well as the brilliant Gola Malimbe and the challenging and ultra-elusive Forest Scrub Robin. At Tiwai Island we stayed in a permanent tented camp and on the river enjoyed excellent looks at African Finfoot and Rufous Fishing Owl with Rock Pratincoles on the rocks and the sublime Egyptian Plover on the sandbanks. At night we hunted out Nkulengu Rail and Brown Nightjar. Our search for other Upper Guinea Forest endemics produced Brown-cheeked and Yellow-casqued Hornbills, 'Western' Yellow-billed Barbet, Little Green and Melancholy Woodpeckers, Timneh Parrot, West African and Red-cheeked Wattle-eyes, Green-tailed and Grey-headed Bristlebills, Western Bearded and Yellow-bearded Greenbuls, Fanti Saw-wing, Kemp's Longbill, Sharpe's Apalis, Rufous-winged Illadopsis, Copper-tailed Starling, Finsch's Rufous Thrush, Ussher's Flycatcher, 'Orange-breasted' Forest Robin, 'Yellow-chinned' Grey-chinned and Buff-throated Sunbirds and Red-vented Malimbe. Other specialties and 'diamond' birds included Latham's Francolin (heard only), Red-chested Goshawk, Black-throated Coucal, Black-shouldered Nightjar, Standard-winged Nightjar, Blue-bellied Roller, White-bellied Kingfisher, Hairy-breasted Barbet (heard only), Spotted Honeyguide, Lagden's Bushshrike, Red-tailed Leaflove, West African Swallow, Preuss's Cliff Swallow, Puvel's Illadopsis, Mangrove Sunbird, Maxwell's Black Weaver and Gosling's Bunting.



'West African' Royal Terns were seen on the sandbanks of No 2 River on the Peninsula. This taxon is genetically closer to Lesser Crested Tern than to its North American counterpart. A recent split and it still awaits acceptance by the IOC. (Nik Borrow)

We arrived at Lungi airport around 20.30 and were met by a blast of warm humid air and as we left the plane and crossed the tarmac immediately the sweat began to gush from every pore. The passport and customs controls were relatively quick and easy but then we had to get to the capital, Freetown that is awkwardly situated on a peninsula across the bay from the airport with no easy road access so that most arriving visitors use the ferry or helicopter services. We opted for the former and despite the chaotic darkness the transfer was relatively painless and straightforward. It was some surprise to us that we were not brought to our expected hotel for the Sierra Leone Tourist Board had insisted that we stayed in the recently built Radisson Blu at their expense! Arriving in the middle of the night was not the happiest option and sadly the night was far too short but the little taste of luxury was a much appreciated as a buffer to the harsher realities of the country itself.

Our first birding site was the beach complex at the unimaginatively named 'River Number 2', which we reached before dawn. Here we were supposed to have breakfast but the party from the night before had scarcely finished by the look of the detritus on the supposedly trash free beach raked over by numerous Pied Crows. Bleary-eyed staff were shaken to attention by Kenneth, our energetic ground agent and multi-purpose Mr Fixit and as a grey day dawned we were served with omelettes as the endless waves crashed onto the sandy coastline. A flock of 'West African' Royal Terns a taxon that has been recently split but awaits adoption by the IOC kept us company and Mangrove (or Brown) Sunbirds fed their hungry youngster in the shadowy palms. We then transferred to small pirogues for a boat trip up the river where Whimbrel and Common Sandpipers were particularly common and we also noted Western Reef Egrets, Grey Heron, Common Ringed Plover, Common Greenshank and Sandwich Tern. White-throated and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters hawked over the waters and when the boats could go no further, we disembarked and clambered over the rocks and walked a short distance to the road through an area that is steadily being built upon. Here the ubiquitous Common Bulbul was much in evidence and Red-eyed Dove, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Whistling Cisticola, Melodious Warbler, Whinchat, Violet-backed Starling, Variable Sunbird, Village and 'Chestnut-and-black' Vieillot's Black Weavers, Grey-headed Nigrita and Plain-backed Pipit were also seen. Palearctic migrant Barn Swallows mixed with Lesser Striped Swallows and some Fanti Saw-wings whilst also in the skies were African Harrier-Hawk, Palm-nut Vulture, Yellow-billed Kite and African Palm Swift.



Our first morning allowed us an introduction to some typical Upper Guinea species such as the 'Chestnut-and-black' form of Vieillot's Black Weaver (left), which is sometimes treated as a separate species, and West African Wattle-eye (right). (Nik Borrow)

We then wandered along an overgrown track that is known as the 'nature trail' and here we were introduced to a succession of the more common forest birds including a few Upper Guinea endemics such as Melancholy Woodpecker, West African Wattle-eye and Sharpe's Apalis. 'West African' Pied Hornbills flapped lazily over the tall trees, Speckled, Yellow-throated, Yellow-rumped and Red-rumped Tinkerbirds pooped and trilled around us and some impressive Great Blue Turacos put on a good show. The guttural cries of Yellow-billed Turacos echoed through the hillsides and were persuaded to show themselves, as was the more wary Western Bronze-naped Pigeon. A Shining Drongo announced the presence of a bird party and although some were often frustratingly invisible to the eye we managed to tease a number of species from their hiding places and noted Blue Malkoha, Buff-spotted Woodpecker, Western Oriole, Red-bellied and African

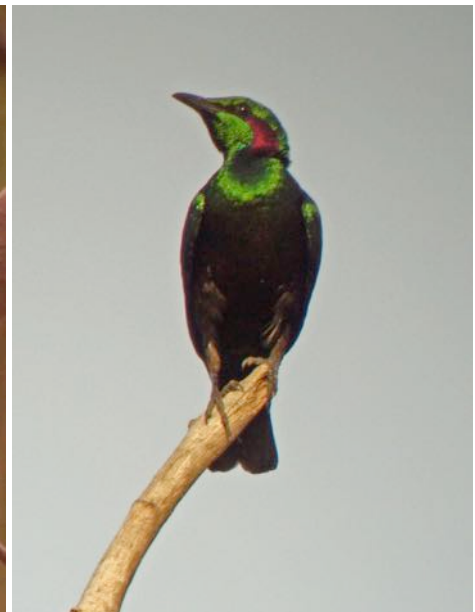
Paradise Flycatchers, Little, Yellow-whiskered, Simple and Icterine Greenbuls, Grey Longbill, Lemon-bellied Crombec, Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, Green Hylia and Collared, Blue-throated Brown and Olive Sunbirds. Other species seen in this tangled secondary growth included African Green Pigeon, Diederik and Klaas's Cuckoos, African Pygmy Kingfisher, African Yellow White-eye and Grey Tit-Flycatcher but temperatures were soaring and it was time to leave.



It was good to see showy Great Blue Turacos (left) leading apparently unmolested lives and an African Pygmy Kingfisher was a welcome sight (right). (Nik Borrow)

Back on the beach a fine lobster and fish lunch had been prepared for us and then we boarded our cars and set off on a drive northeastwards to the town of Makeni. There was little time for stops but along the way we noted Western Cattle Egrets, Black-winged Kite, Long-crested Eagle, Lizard, Grasshopper and Red-necked Buzzards, Senegal Thick-knee, Laughing Dove, Senegal Coucal, Lanner Falcon and Bronze Mannikin.

The next day the cook at the hotel decided not to turn up for breakfast but we found some boiled eggs and bread and managed to boil some water and then we were on our way again heading for Bumbuna on the edge of the Sula Mountains. The dirt road like all the others to come had deteriorated substantially since our last visit and it took longer to arrive than hoped for and our revised itinerary had only a morning to find some special birds in the open savannah.



In the Bumbuna area we found two very special birds currently not found on any of our other tours: Turati's Boubou (left) and the gorgeous Emerald Starling (right). (Nik Borrow)

A Double-spurred Francolin greeted us as we stepped out of the cars and there followed a flurry of new birds. A cacophony of Vinaceous Doves sounded through the air as we set off in search of our target species. The first gave itself up easily and we were soon watching a responsive pair of duetting Turati's

Boubou. This is a restricted range Upper Guinea endemic and currently only available on our Sierra Leone tours so it was pleasing to see it so easily. The grasslands were busy with Green-headed, Splendid and Copper Sunbirds and granivorous birds such as Common Waxbill, Black-and-white Mannikin, Pin-tailed Whydah and Yellow-fronted Canary. A pair of Guinea Turaco was called in and our first sighting of Red-vented Malimbe was popular. A smattering of Palearctic migrants were present and we noted Western Marsh Harrier, Common Swift, European Bee-eater, Sand Martin, Common House Martin, Eurasian Reed Warbler, Common Nightingale, European Pied Flycatcher and 'Blue-headed' Western Yellow Wagtail. After walking some distance we finally chanced on the star of the show – a flock of glittering Emerald Starlings. The first sighting was all too brief but fortunately we relocated the flock nearby and enjoyed some excellent scope views for as long as we wished. Continuing our walk we spotted a very fine African Cuckoo-Hawk and other species seen during the morning included Shikra, Tambourine Dove, Levillant's Cuckoo, Broad-billed Roller, Grey-headed and Striped Kingfishers, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, African Grey Woodpecker, Senegal Batis, Northern Puffback, Northern Fiscal, Black-winged Oriole, Yellow-throated Leaflove, Red-breasted Swallow, Tawny-flanked Prinia and African Thrush. Interestingly, both Fork-tailed Drongo and Velvet-mantled Drongo appeared to be present here the former in the savannah and the latter in the lush galleries. We ate a super cooked fish lunch at the Bumbuna Falls where there were Reed Cormorant, Western Osprey, White-bibbed Swallow, Cassin's Flycatcher and Campbell's Monkey to be seen.

In the afternoon we departed and headed for our next destination at the base of the Loma Mountains but the state of the roads were not good at all and progress was much slower than hoped for. We also lost our ground agent who was following in a taxi that we learned later had broken down and so we decided to overnight at a hotel in Koidu (Kono) and set off early the next morning, which seemed an infinitely better plan. Our ground agent and cook had abandoned their broken taxi and had now adopted motorbikes and these noble outriders accompanied us over all manner of road conditions throughout the rest of the trip as the bikes coped far better with the roads than our cars did! Predictably the drive was exceedingly slow going because of the state of the road and it was some six hours before we arrived at the village from where we were going to climb the mountain to the camp. Whilst we ate our lunch and waited for porters to be organised there were a few birds to be seen. Ussher's Flycatchers hawked from the treetops, a white Ayres's Hawk-Eagle circled overhead and a gathering of hirundines included Square-tailed Saw-wing, West African Swallow and Preuss's Cliff Swallow.



Little and large Upper Guinea endemics in the Loma Mountains; the stunning Red-cheeked Wattle-eye showed well for us (left) and prehistoric looking Yellow-casqued Hornbills were a constant presence (right) although seeing them in the dense canopy wasn't always easy! (Nik Borrow)

We had no choice but to start the walk in the hottest part of the day and it was to be a steep climb ahead of us. Firstly however we found that we had two muddy streams to cross and we either waded or were carried across before walking uphill for some distance through trashed habitat before we met the forest itself. At this season the dry and dusty northeasterly wind known as the Harmattan is blowing from the Sahara and although this often keeps temperatures bearable this year temperatures were unusually high with a peak of 38° Centigrade being recorded one afternoon. Climbing a steep mountain under such conditions is far from

easy and it took us six long hours to reach the campsite finally reaching our destination at twilight's last gleaming! It wasn't a total eyes down slog for we did add a few new Upper Guinea endemics; a pair of Red-cheeked Wattle-eyes proved unusually easy to see, Finsch's Rufous Thrush was present and the wailing cries and swish and whirr from the wings of the impressive Yellow-casqued Hornbills was a frequent sound of the forest. We also managed views of Blue-headed Wood Dove, Naked-faced Barbet, Dusky Crested Flycatcher and Red-tailed Leaflove.

Our campsite was pleasantly situated near a forest stream that was particularly convenient for cooling some refreshing bottles of beer and after a short sleep we were ready to climb again. We set off well before dawn in the dark forest at four in the morning in order to reach the treeline for dawn. Apart from some presumed Thomas's Galagos high in the canopy we saw little until we reached the top. The Loma Mountains are the highest mountain range in Sierra Leone and as we left the forest and entered the grasslands we could see the high peak of Mount Bintumani, which stands at 1,945 metres and even through the Harmattan haze the view (and the climb!) was breath-taking! The reason that we had struggled to reach such heights was a quest for a Birdquest lifer – the little known and endangered Sierra Leone Prinia. Recent surveys throughout the species range have suggested that this is a very rare bird indeed with a fragmented and localised distribution and an estimated population of 1,000-2,500 individuals. The preferred habitat is the transition zone between submontane forest and submontane grassland and this is exactly where we now found ourselves!



The Loma grasslands – home to Sierra Leone Prinia with a view over to the highest peak of Mount Bintumani. (Nik Borrow)

The cool of the morning was a relief and we headed to the area where our guide had seen the prinia on a previous visit and it wasn't too long before we had successfully located a pair although initially they were somewhat furtive. With persistence we all had repeated good views and target number one was firmly in the bag! We turned our attentions to other birds that were around us and found some handsome Double-toothed Barbets, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Moustached Grass Warbler, Senegal Eremomela, Eurasian Blackcap, Tree Pipit and Gosling's Bunting. An African Hobby passed overhead, a Black Bee-eater was seen

disappearing fast to somewhere else and as we were about to re-enter the forest a small group of Dybowski's Twinspots were discovered.

As the hot dry wind was picking up and the relentless sun was beating down we began our descent through the cooler forest where a busy bird party yielded Little Green Woodpecker, Wood Warbler and a selection of greenbuls that included Slender-billed, Ansorge's, Western Bearded and Red-tailed Greenbuls. However we were keen to get down to an area where our next target the skulking Black-headed Rufous Warbler was known to occur. This was to be 'make or break' attempt at seeing the bird as we had no other locality to see it on our itinerary and the local guide only knew of this one pair in the whole area! Classified as 'Near-threatened' by BirdLife International, this is a highly localised species with a very fragmented range. We tried playback at the site but there was no obvious response until we began to suspect that a very high-pitched call might belong to the bird. Then the guide informed us that he had glimpsed the bird and confirmed our suspicions so the battle was on to get everyone onto it. This took time but finally we did it and everyone had good views of this secretive warbler. Triumphant we returned to camp and on the way managed views of Mountain Wagtail and for some Many-coloured Bushshrike and Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat. As we rested by the river at the end of the day a super Lowland Akalat allowed repeated views.



The Upper Guinea endemic Western Bearded Greenbul (left, Nik Borrow) was commonly encountered in the forests. At our camp on the Loma Mountains we were fortunate to see this Lowland Akalat (right, Tom Fiore).

The following morning we were well rested although the incessant chat from the porters who were sharing our camp seemed to go on all night long! We woke to a Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo that was singing loudly but remained totally unresponsive but when we heard the distinctive cries from the rare Upper Guinea endemic Rufous-winged Illadopsis we acted quickly and were pleased when we had all seen this extremely special bird. A Pale-breasted Illadopsis was in the same area and also showed well but time was short and we had to get back down to the village so we started making our way down taking in a number of new species along the way that included the Upper Guinea endemic Yellow-bearded Greenbul as well as Yellow-spotted Barbet, Willcocks's Honeyguide, Purple-throated Cuckooshrike, Honeyguide Greenbul, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Little Green Sunbird and Black-capped Apalis. At one point we had to pass through a fire that was burning the dry forest and seemed to be spreading a little too easily. The guide insisted it was wind blown from a fire in the grasslands but we feared that it might have been a carelessly discarded cigarette from one of our porters. Whatever the reason it reminded us how vulnerable these forests are and the rare creatures that live in them.

Returning to the village we were led back through a single, clean sandy-bottomed river instead of the two muddy swamps on the outward walk; the reason for the other more difficult route was lost to us! We enjoyed a welcome lunch and then it was back in the cars to return to Koidu. Although, the sight of men from the village pushing one of the cars to get it started did not bode well and we were solemnly informed that there was a problem with the starter motor. As we drove on we realised it was a little more serious than that for the car had no power and having crossed a wooden bridge over a swamp at the base of a somewhat steep hill the life spluttered out of it. We disembarked allowing the driver to reverse for another run but sadly the driver

lost control of the car, which started sliding inexorably off of the road and towards the swamp at the bottom. The fact that it didn't quite enter the murky waters was a miracle but one thing was for sure it wasn't going anywhere in a hurry. So by now this was early afternoon and as the hours ticked away so many new plans were hatched to extricate the car but each one failed. This experience would have been totally miserable if the small swamp hadn't turned out to be a hot spot for some excellent birding so whilst all of the clamorous activity was going on we applied ourselves to trying to add new birds for the trip, which as it happened wasn't too difficult at all! Initially our attention was drawn to flocks of granivorous birds sitting in the shade of the overhanging vegetation, which turned out to be some Yellow-winged Pytilia, Blue-billed Firefinch, Orange-cheeked Waxbill and a male Cameroon Indigobird in plumage. This latter species parasitises Blue-billed Firefinch and Dybowski's Twinspots, which were also nearby. A pair of African Hawk Eagles with a juvenile was a good find for the trip and more Emerald Starlings were seen although the highlight of the afternoon had to be a male Togo Paradise Whydah in full breeding plumage. Other species noted during the afternoon included Woolly-necked Stork, Hamerkop, Little Bee-eater, Cardinal Woodpecker, White-shouldered Black Tit, Willow Warbler, Red-faced Cisticola, Blackcap Babbler, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Black-necked Weaver, Black-winged Red Bishop and Yellow-mantled Widowbird.



This breakdown looked fairly terminal but fortunately it was at a prime birding location! (left: Tonya Tromblee, right: Nik Borrow)

In the meantime despite an ever-growing workforce, our vehicle showed no sign of leaving the swamp and then we learned that there was a logging vehicle in the next village that could possibly be fetched to pull our car back onto the road. The hours of fruitless jacking, pushing and pulling were suddenly redundant and in the last hour of daylight the rescue vehicle arrived and with some solid engine power and a huge number of people pushing our car emerged in a cloud of dust and a spray of mud from its murky fate. While a flat tyre was being replaced we returned to our birding and were rewarded with a pair of Standard-winged Nightjar, the male in full breeding regalia displaying over its territory.

With the onset of night we were looking to at least a five hours drive to the nearest hotel and things had been going splendidly for at least twenty minutes before the car broke down again! There was nothing for it but to squeeze four people in one car to be sent off with outrider Massira (the cook) ahead to the hotel whilst outrider Kenneth (the ground agent), Nik and Ken remained behind with the dying car. We waved the 'good' car goodbye wondering if we'd ever meet again and resigned ourselves to a night by the roadside. However all was not lost as we managed to get the 'bad' car started again and juddered on for a little longer but only too soon the engine died again on us and we found ourselves alone in the darkness. I'm not sure how it happened or where he came from but Kenneth arrived on the bike with a mechanic who amazingly worked some magic on the fuel pump and pipes and managed to get the car going again and this time it kept going for good and we finally got to the hotel at 1:45 in the morning to re-join the rest of the group.

Despite the late night we were up and breakfasting in the company of Northern Grey-headed Sparrows shortly after sunrise. While we were doing this a replacement car was being searched out for us and amazingly we were on the road again before eleven. We made a roadside stop in a patch of secondary

forest and scarcely moved for a long time as the bird activity kept on coming. Swamp Palm Bulbuls cackled from the palms, Western Nicator showed well and the Upper Guinea endemic Grey-headed Bristlebill put in an appearance. Little Grey Greenbul, Yellow-browed and Olive-green Camaropteras, Rufous-crowned Eremomela, Blue-billed and Crested Malimbos and White-breasted Nigrita were all seen and a Red-chested Goshawk flashed low right past us into the shrubbery. A large Red Silk Cotton Tree (*Bombax buonopozense*) was in flower and was literally buzzing with activity and we enjoyed scope views of the stunning Upper Guinea endemic Buff-throated Sunbird and the endemic 'Yellow-chinned' form of Grey-chinned Sunbird that is sometimes treated as a separate species. Whilst having a picnic lunch by the side of the road some remarkably close views of Tit Hylia were gained and Lowland Sooty Boubou was heard but the heat meant that we had little chance of seeing it.

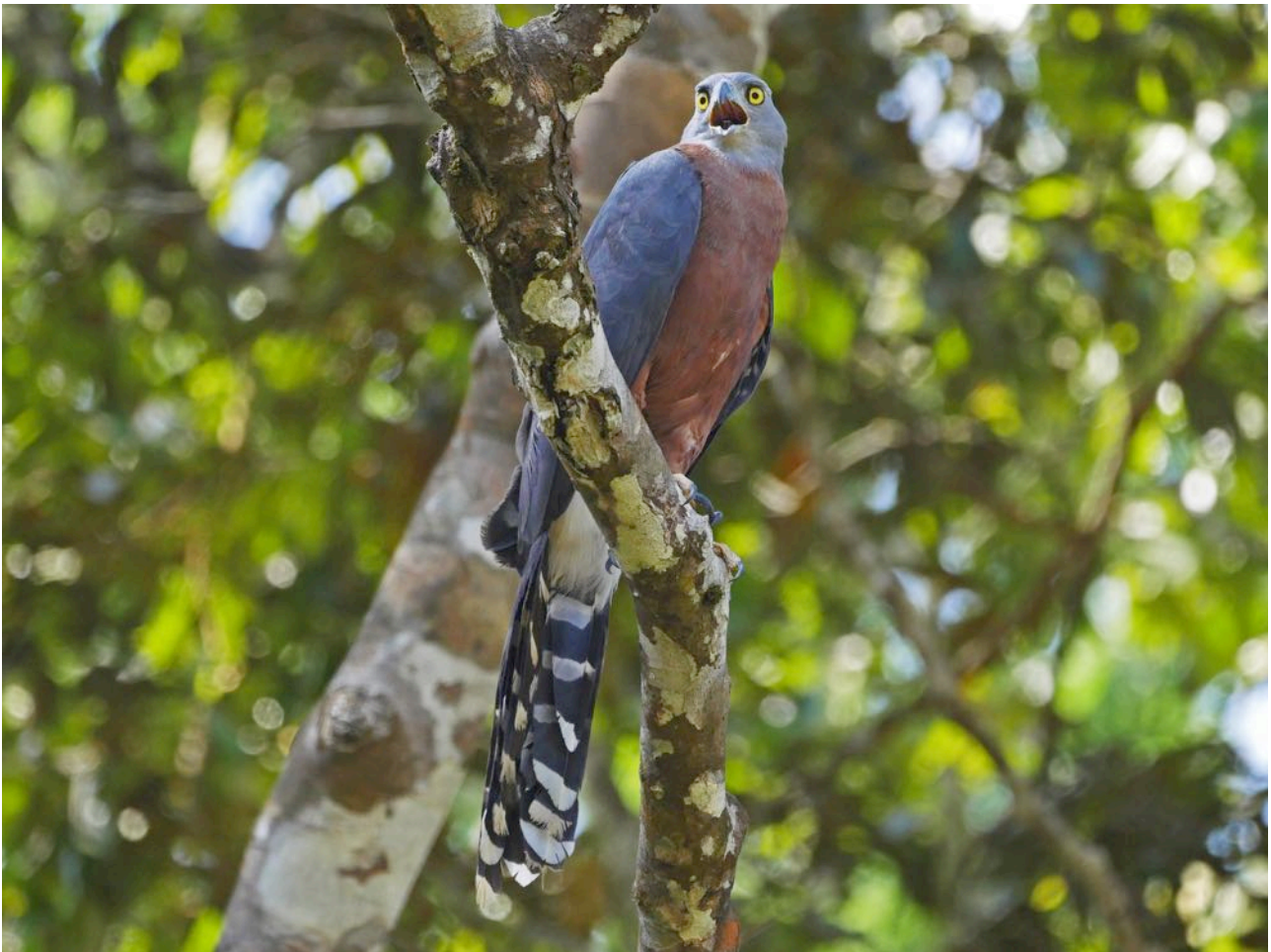


The 'Yellow-chinned' Grey-chinned Sunbird (left) and Buff-throated Sunbird (right) are both Upper Guinea endemics. The former is sometimes treated as a separate species. (Nik Borrow)

Driving on a bit further it seemed hardly believable and grossly unfair when our replacement vehicle also chose to break down and die. We were not too far from our destination so the simplest thing was to once again cram four people into one vehicle and leave two behind to await the return so that they could be ferried on later. For the two left behind it was a time to catch up with some laundry and a spot of birding and they managed to see some great species that included Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher, Lagden's Bushshrike and Red-shouldered Cuckooshrike! The rest of us drove on to where we were supposed to be setting up camp for the night in the Gori Hills. We had not gone an awful lot further when we found our way blocked by a large truck that had broken down inconveniently blocking the whole road! It was time to rethink and revise and as the campsite was only a couple of kilometres away we chose to walk the remaining distance whilst our 'good' vehicle went back and rescued the others. The walk was not particularly productive but we did add Plain Greenbul to the list. Eventually the rest of the group arrived and an evening watch over the forest turned up the Upper Guinea endemic Copper-tailed Starling as well as both Tiny and Superb Sunbirds. That night we were promised an owl-fest but were sadly disappointed as we only heard African Wood Owl but we did see a West African Potto. We were told that some weeks previously the Chinese had come along and shot all the owls which seemed a little unlikely and didn't make us feel any better about the situation.

The following morning we explored the surrounding farmbrush and forest a little more thoroughly. The area had been logged and cleared for cultivation in places and there were numerous gold digging activities very much in evidence. Of course we added a few new species; the Upper Guinea endemic Crimson Seedcracker was a leader only bird on this occasion but we all saw Little Grebe, European Honey Buzzard, African Shrike-flycatcher, Yellow-mantled Weaver, Chestnut-breasted Nigrita and a very handsome male Western Bluebill. Inside the forest a beautiful little Forest Robin posed for us, its bright orange breast literally glowing out in the gloom of the understorey. However it was back at camp that we had our biggest surprise for as we sat down to lunch a Long-tailed Hawk flew right past us! Leaping into action it wasn't long before we had lured it back for some of the most amazing views ever!

It was now time to reassess the vehicle situation and we were pleased to find that once again we had both of the original vehicles back with us and so we set off with business as usual for Kenema. As usual the track that scarcely passed for a road was particularly punishing on our vehicles and it was with some dismay that we learned that what had been the 'good' vehicle was now deeply in trouble. Fortunately we had just reached a major road and tarmac and with Kenema some thirty minutes away we once again split the group leaving two by the roadside promising to fetch them within the hour after we had been dropped at our lodgings. Well this was Sierra Leone and nothing of course was that straightforward for having reached Kenema quite quickly the road through the town itself was simply appalling and took much longer than anticipated to access. To add insult to injury our lodgings were all locked up and quiet, the housekeeper assumed that we were not coming and had left and of course by this time it was after dark and quite late. We managed to find a man with the key and then we were taken back into town to a restaurant where we waited for the others still somewhere by the roadside who could not understand why we had taken so long. It was a Muslim restaurant and the bar did not sell beer but the waitress would gladly send out to buy it in town if necessary. As a consequence food and drink took an age and with the result that the reunited group ended up virtually eating at the same time as each other! We were then ferried to the lodgings for some much needed sleep.



The incredible Long-tailed Hawk that flew into our camp in the Gori Hills. (Nik Borrow)

The next day we were up with the dawn in order to spend the day in a nearby forest that held picathartes. Our 'bad' car and a taxi took us to the site whilst the 'good' car (which was now the 'worse' car) was being mended. It was a very foggy morning with limited visibility and the walk took us through a river (as the bridge was broken) and then onwards through farmbrush where a pair of Puvel's Illadopsis showed very nicely indeed. A pair of Upper Guinea endemic Brown-cheeked Hornbills gave a great fly past, low overhead and as the fog cleared we added an Olive-bellied Sunbird to the list. The climb into the forest was uneventful and by now the sun was beating down and the shade of the tall trees was a relief. Our day in this forest was a very slow one for very little moved or called. We did manage some glimpses of Black-casqued Hornbill, White-tailed Ant Thrush and Upper Guinea endemic White-tailed Alethe but the pace was frustratingly slow. It seemed the best thing to do was to sit by the White-necked Rockfowl (aka Yellow-headed Picathartes)

colony for it was better to be there too early than too late. In the non-breeding dry season the birds usually visit the nest site at the end of the day, arriving from about 17:00 onwards to dusk when they then choose to roost in the nests, on the rocks or nearby. We arrived in good time and settled in front of the huge rock that normally holds about eight nests however, the previous rains had destroyed many of these and during our visit there was only one that remained intact. The monolithic rock overhung a small stream and the effect was like a natural theatre with a sandy beach as a stage; there surely could not be a better place to view the birds than this! Soon after we settled a Black Sparrowhawk flew in and perched in front of us but to our dismay, inexplicably no *Picathartes* came to visit that evening. The trudge back down the hill was enlivened by good views of a Plain Nightjar but the mood from the group that evening was not so good. Kenneth reassured us that evening as we drowned our sorrows that he had another site at the next location so we rearranged the itinerary again and hoped for the best but worryingly time was fast running out.



Puvel's Illadopsis (left) and *Plain Nightjar* (right) near Kenema. (Nik Borrow)

The following morning miraculously both cars in working order were restored to us and we began another tedious journey over undulating tracks to Lalehun at Gola Central. Some Piping Hornbills, Green Crombec and another Crimson Seedcracker was seen along the way and although we couldn't relocate it after stopping the cars we did find a pair of Hartlaub's Ducks instead. Arriving at Gola we claimed the simple rooms for one night and had the rest of the morning and afternoon to explore the forest. Although many species here were by now familiar there were a few new ones too and we spent a while struggling to see a beautiful Chocolate-backed Kingfisher in the tangles above our heads. The brilliant Johanna's Sunbird showed well but trying to see the Upper Guinea endemic Kemp's Longbill was yet another battle. In the afternoon we made our way to another *Picathartes* site, which was another climb and on the way we glimpsed a White-bellied Kingfisher as it dashed past. At the imposing rock there were more intact nests than the previous site and our hopes were raised but at the crucial hour a large troop of monkeys came by and having seen us caused a great commotion. The species hurling abuse at us seemed to be mostly Lesser Spot-nosed and Diana Monkeys and a flock of agitated Spotted Greenbuls also passed through. Perhaps it was the monkey's alarm calls or maybe it was just bad luck but we failed again to see the *Picathartes* and our guide was mortified, as he had never, ever missed them there before. It seemed quite simply that we were cursed and destined not to see this iconic bird on the trip. We went to our beds resigned to the fact and prayed that we would have better luck with the Gola Malimbe the next day.

The walk from the village to the 'tourist' camp is nine kilometres and the malimbe site is a little further which meant that we could not take too long as we only had one night at the camp and the aim was to see the malimbés today. A fine male Black-shouldered Nightjar interrupted our pre-dawn breakfast and gave excellent views as it fluttered over our heads and as dawn broke a pair of Blue-throated Rollers also passed over. It was then time to start our hike into the forest on a fairly good and level trail. Of course it was impossible to simply just route march into the forest for there were always new birds to see. Our first Upper Guinea endemic Timneh Parrots were watched flying overhead from their roosts to feeding areas. This taxon has been recently split from Grey Parrot and is darker with a maroon tail. A 'Western' Yellow-billed Barbet put in an appearance and we had good looks at a wonderful male Narina Trogon, this race complete with enormous yellow wattles which make it look like the extralimital Bare-cheeked Trogon. The forest was also alive with hornbills and we were pleased to add the diminutive Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill to our lists and watched it perched out on bare branches above our heads. Further on there were four White-crested Hornbills together which was certainly a sight worth seeing as they glided to and fro amongst the tall trees.

Elsewhere Brown Illadopsis allowed typical views but a Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher showed unusually well, Brown-eared Woodpecker was seen and a pair of Sabine's Puffback finally gave themselves up for everyone to see. We reached the camp in good time and took a short rest before setting off to the malimbos.

After our disappointments with the picathartes it was now time for a reversal of fortunes and as soon as we reached the nearest spot that we have seen the malimbos Nik tried playback using a recording he had made during previous trips. The response was immediate and absolute and we found ourselves watching Gola Malimbos perched right above our heads. Although they never ventured too low our views were unobscured and prolonged and we could not have asked for a more speedy response! Described by Wolters as recently as 1974 this bird is also known as Ballmann's Malimbe. Dr Peter Ballmann (1941-) is a German geoscientist studying fossils from Ivory Coast, one of which was amazingly the malimbe! The species occurs in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia and Ivory Coast and is classified as 'Endangered' by BirdLife International. Although there have been sightings in the other countries in the species range, it was only rediscovered in Sierra Leone as recently as 2007 and to this day the species remains little known. Habitat destruction appears to be the major threat as the bird seems to require primary forest, old secondary growth and only barely tolerates forests that have been logged. Flushed with success we realised that a pair of Lagden's Bushshrike was calling and although they were much higher in the canopy than the malimbos we also managed views of this hulking bushshrike. With our job completed and evening approaching it just left us time to return to camp, bathe in the stream or simply relax with a beer and once again all was well with the world.



In the Gola Forest at Lalehun we managed fine views of Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill (left) and the endangered Gola Malimbe (right). (Nik Borrow)

We left the camp early and embarked on the return walk back to Lalehun, which turned up a few more good birds. A superb pair of Congo Serpent Eagles flying back and forth and perching above us was surely the main highlight but we also managed views of the rare Green-tailed Bristlebill. A black-breasted Many-coloured Bushshrike put on a great show and there was also a Blue-breasted Kingfisher and a leader only Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye. A quick lunch and we were ready to go again and this time moving onto a different part of the Gola Forest and once again along the most awful roads which meant we didn't reach our simple bunkhouse until after dark. There was really no time to stop anywhere en route but we did note Intermediate Egret and a Malachite Kingfisher at some roadside swamps along the way and more people got onto a male Crimson Seedcracker, which was sadly on a mission to someplace else!

The forest at Sileti can be a good place to find the ultra-elusive White-breasted Guineafowl, so a morning walk in the forest was proposed to try for it but although we found scrapings and a feather there was no sign of the birds themselves. We did however manage to see an attractive male Rufous-sided Broadbill twirling round on his perch like a clockwork toy and a real coup was getting excellent views of Forest Scrub Robin, a bird that can be infuriatingly difficult to see.

After lunch we were moving again towards our final destination Tiwai Island. Crossing the Moa River on a hand-pulled ferry sipping fresh coconut milk watching African Fish Eagle, White-bibbed Swallows and Blue-

cheeked Bee-eaters, it seemed that nothing else could go wrong and it didn't until we got to Tiwai! All of the luggage was unloaded and we were waiting for the boatman to ferry us across to the island but when he arrived it was bad news, the boat was out of fuel and there was no fuel in the village. There was just enough to get us across to closest side and get back so we left the luggage and Kenneth to work out what to do next and were landed on the island on a path that was about a ten minutes walk from the camp. We had been scheduled to do a motorboat trip that afternoon for Egyptian Plover so the lack of fuel was most unfortunate. We couldn't even take a kayak because there was only one on the island and it only seated three persons. This meant that the promised excursion to look for Rufous Fishing Owl was fraught with problems and interim lots were drawn to see who could go first!



This lovely White-bibbed Swallow was perched on the ferry crossing the River Moa. (Nik Borrow)

However as these things seem to do the problems gradually became solved; fuel was found from somewhere, the luggage was transported, a second kayak was found and a boatman to go with it the only problem was that by now we were running out of daylight so without further ado we placed ourselves in the little boats and were paddled into the palm covered islands in search of the owl. There were Rock Pratincoles and African Pied Wagtail on the rocks, an African Finfoot in the river and as we shot some rapids our hearts were in our mouths! However the boys did a great job of keeping the boats together and as we entered another shady waterway so a Rufous Fishing Owl flew out right in front of us. The views were brief but we had all seen the bird clearly so we headed back to dry land in the gloom. As darkness fell a Brown Nightjar started calling, but only one person saw it as it glided past. We had reached the end of the tour but all of the logistical problems meant that we were behind schedule some scratching of the head ensued and questions were answered. Yes, we now had fuel, yes we still had many birds to search for; could we stay on Tiwai for two nights and leave early on our last morning in order to get back to Lungi for the International flights home? The answer was yes! That is unless something goes wrong – but what could go wrong?

So we woke the next morning with the prospect of a full day on Tiwai and it seemed sensible to try a forest walk in the morning in a last attempt to see White-breasted Guineafowl leaving the afternoon to look for Egyptian Plover, have another crack at the owl, see Brown Nightjar and look for the Nkulengu Rails that had

been calling around the camp. This was quite a shopping list and the morning walk never did turn up the guineafowl but we did see a displaying Red-chested Goshawk at the crack of dawn, Blackcap Illadopsis showed extremely well and also inside the forest we managed brief views of an African Dwarf Kingfisher as well as Spotted Honeyguide, Blue Cuckooshrike, Chestnut-winged Starling and Red-headed Malimbe. At lunchtime a flock of Maxwell's Black Weavers led us onto see a pair of skulking Black-throated Coucal and then it was out on the motorboat, which was a lovely way to view the island. A few White-browed Forest Flycatchers were seen and ultimately we enjoyed terrific views of an Egyptian Plover on a sandbank.



Egyptian Plover (left) and Rock Pratincole (right) were easy to see at Tiwai. (Nik Borrow)

The time had now come to transfer to the kayaks and go in search of the Rufous Fishing Owl again and hopefully see them before they saw us so that we got a chance to watch them at their roost. Amazingly this was achieved quite quickly and we were treated to great views of a pair tucked away in the palms. Ultimately our attentions were just a little too much for the birds and they disappeared to quieter reaches of the river but the job had been well done! Returning to camp we waited for night to fall and just after sunset the raucous cries of the Nkulengu Rail reached our ears and sounded as if they were very close to camp. We had a very short time to locate the birds in the failing light and in various states of disarray we ran into the bush but met with an impenetrable thicket wall so that our chances of seeing these birds were thwarted. We had almost given up but almost immediately another pair started calling on the other side of the camp and here the thicket was less tangled and we pushed through towards the source of the sound. We were almost upon them and the daylight had almost gone when the birds ceased calling and we found ourselves in the midst of the dark dense bush wondering what to do next. A few steps forward answered our question as a bird flew out of a tree above our heads followed by another. By some good fortune Nik had seen exactly where it had landed and the flashlight beam was focused on the backside of the rail, its bright red legs being the most prominent feature as it peered warily down at us. This was a real success and it only remained for us to find our way out of the pitch-black thicket, we swivelled round 180° and crawled out the way we had come in. The Brown Nightjar was calling by now but once again it refused to show itself and only decided to give itself up the following morning when we spotlighted it calling from a bare snag above us.

As we left the island in the morning an African Finfoot crossed our bows but then it was just drive, drive, drive back to Lungi although some of us did see a Yellow-throated Longclaw and a Blue-bellied Roller on the journey. Sadly one of our cars finally died by the roadside just over an hour away from the airport. Fortunately it happened at a place where a taxi was conveniently free and we managed to get to the airport in time for everyone's flights – the gamble had paid off! It was something of a blessed relief to get into air conditioning and reflect on the previous two weeks. One thing is for sure the country is definitely not for the faint hearted, nothing (including the birds!) is easy, accommodation is pretty grim but shows signs of improvement although camping is probably preferable and our fantastic cook produced some amazing food! The rural roads are often appalling and it is hot and humid with no respite. On the other hand some of the birds are amazing and cannot be seen easily anywhere else and we clung on to some brilliant snapshot memories of excitable Sierra Leone Prinias, skulking Black-headed Rufous Warblers, glowing Gola Malimbés, brilliant Emerald Starlings, Buff-throated Sunbirds, Crimson Seedcracker and of course the Rufous Fishing Owl and Nkulengu Rail. As time progresses conditions will certainly continue to improve and birding areas will become more accessible and well known. Birdquest will certainly be back!



One of a pair of Rufous Fishing Owl seen on their daytime roost on Tiwai Island. (Ken Berry)

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H).

Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO).

Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Conservation threat categories and information are taken from *Threatened Birds of the World*, BirdLife International's magnificent book on the sad status of the rarest 10% of the world's avifauna, and updates on the BirdLife website: <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/home>

CR = Critical, **E** = Endangered, **V** = Vulnerable, **NT** = Near Threatened, **DD** = Data Deficient.

BIRDS

Hartlaub's Duck *Pteronetta hartlaubii* Seen en route to Lalehun and again on Tiwai Island.

Latham's Francolin (L Forest F) *Peliperdix lathamii* (H) Heard in the Gola Forests mainly at night.

Double-spurred Francolin *Pternistis bicalcaratus* Seen at Bumbuna.

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* 1 on a pool in the Gori Hills.

Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* Widespread sightings.

Hadada Ibis *Bostrychia hagedash* Just seen on Tiwai Island.

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* A common and widespread species.

Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* Just 2 sightings during the tour.

Great Egret (Western G E) *Ardea alba* (NL) 1 seen en route to the Gori Hills.

Intermediate Egret (Yellow-billed E) *Ardea [intermedia] brachyrhyncha* 2 sightings in the Gola region.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* 1 in Kenema and another at Tiwai were the only definite sightings.

Western Reef Heron *Egretta gularis* 3 at No 2 River.

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* Singletons in the Loma Hills and en route to Lalehun.

Reed Cormorant (Long-tailed C) *Microcarbo africanus* Sightings at Bumbuna and Tiwai.

Western Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* 1 at Bumbuna.

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* 1 en route to Makeni and several at Bumbuna.

African Harrier-Hawk (Gymnogene) *Polyboroides typus* A commonly encountered raptor.

Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis* A commonly encountered raptor.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus* 1 of these Palearctic migrants in the Gori Hills.

African Cuckoo-Hawk *Aviceda cuculoides* Excellent views of 1 at Bumbuna.

Hooded Vulture *Necrosyrtes monachus* (CR) Smaller numbers than previous tours and only in urban areas.

Congo Serpent Eagle *Circaetus spectabilis* Fantastic views of a pair overhead in Gola Central.

Crowned Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus* (H, LO) (NT) 1 heard by Nik over Gola Central.

Long-crested Eagle *Lophaetus occipitalis* 3 sightings in the north.

Ayres's Hawk-Eagle *Hieraetus ayresii* A white-headed bird was seen in the Loma Mountains.

African Hawk-Eagle *Aquila spilogaster* A pair with a juvenile in the Loma area on 19/1. A rare bird in this country.

Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus* A commonly encountered species.

Long-tailed Hawk *Urotriorchis macrourus* 1 in the Gori Hills and a pair in Gola Central.

Red-chested Goshawk *Accipiter toussenelii* 1 near Koidu and another displaying over Tiwai.

Shikra *Accipiter badius* We all saw the birds at Bumbuna.

Black Sparrowhawk (Great S) *Accipiter melanoleucus* 1 seen at Baiyama.

Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* A female of this Palearctic migrant at Bumbuna.

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius* A commonly encountered species.

African Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer* Singletons at the Moa River crossing and on Tiwai.

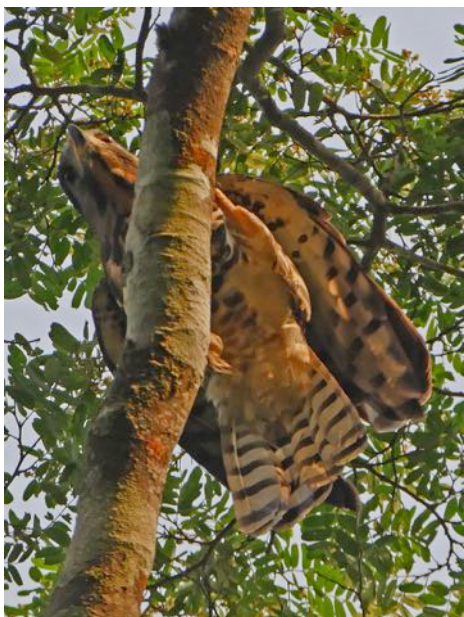
Grasshopper Buzzard *Butastur rufipennis* A number were seen at a bush fire en route to Makeni.

Red-necked Buzzard *Buteo auguralis* Widespread sightings throughout the tour.

White-spotted Flufftail *Sarothrura pulchra* (H) Sadly, none of the birds we heard were easily accessible.

African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis* 2 great sightings on Tiwai Island.

Nkulengu Rail *Himantornis haematopus* An amazing nocturnal encounter on Tiwai Island.



Excellent views of Congo Serpent Eagle (left) just above our heads in Gola Central. Nkulengu Rail on Tiwai (right) was a wonderful finale to the tour. (Nik Borrow)

Senegal Thick-knee *Burhinus senegalensis* Seen each time we crossed the Rokel River.

White-crowned Lapwing *Vanellus albiceps* 2 sightings on Tiwai Island.

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* 3 of these Palearctic migrants on No 2 River.

Egyptian Plover *Pluvianus aegyptius* Easily seen during a boat trip on Tiwai Island.

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* At least 30 of these Palearctic migrants on No 2 River.

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* At least 25 of these Palearctic migrants on No 2 River and a few elsewhere.

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* 1 of these Palearctic migrants on No 2 River.

Rock Pratincole *Glareola nuchalis* The rufous-collared race *liberiae* was seen at Tiwai.

Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus* About 20 of the distinctive form *albididorsalis* at River No 2.

Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* 2 of these Palearctic migrants at No 2 River.

Rock Dove (introduced) (Feral Pigeon) *Columba livia* Domestic birds only.

Western Bronze-naped Pigeon *Columba iriditorques* Seen on No 2 Nature trail and heard in all of the forests.

Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* Widespread sightings throughout the tour.

Vinaceous Dove *Streptopelia vinacea* Easily seen at Bumbuna.

Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis* Just 2 sightings en route to Makeni and at Koidu.

Blue-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur afer* A common and widespread bird.

Tambourine Dove *Turtur tympanistria* A common and widespread bird.

Blue-headed Wood Dove *Turtur brehmeri* Seen well in the Loma Mountains and heard in all of the forests.

African Green Pigeon *Treron calvus* Widespread sightings.

Great Blue Turaco *Corythaeola cristata* Commonly encountered throughout the tour.

Guinea Turaco *Tauraco persa* A pair was seen at Bumbuna.

Yellow-billed Turaco *Tauraco macrorhynchus* First seen on No 2 Nature trail and present in all of the forests.

Western Plantain-eater *Crinifer piscator* We all saw the bird at Lungi.

Black-throated Coucal *Centropus leucogaster* A skulking pair seen on Tiwai Island.

Senegal Coucal *Centropus senegalensis* Widespread sightings in farmbush.

Blue Malkoha *Ceuthmochares aereus* Commonly encountered throughout the tour.

Levaillant's Cuckoo *Clamator levaillantii* 4 widespread sightings of this large cuckoo during the tour.

Diederik Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius* Singletons at No 2 Nature Trail and on Tiwai Island.

Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas* Widespread sightings.

African Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx cupreus* (H) Seemingly never close enough to see!

Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo *Cercococcyx mechowi* (H) Very noisy in the Loma Mountains but unresponsive.

Rufous Fishing Owl *Scotopelia ussheri* A pair at a daytime roost on Tiwai Island was a major trip highlight.

African Wood Owl *Strix woodfordii* (H) Heard in the Gori Hills and Tiwai Island but would not show.

Brown Nightjar *Veles binotatus* Excellent views of a perched bird on our last morning on Tiwai Island.

Black-shouldered Nightjar *Caprimulgus nigriscapularis* Great looks at a male at Lalehun.

Plain Nightjar *Caprimulgus inornatus* A male at Baiyama.

Standard-winged Nightjar *Caprimulgus longipennis* A displaying pair at the 'breakdown swamp'.

African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus* A few widespread sightings.

Common Swift *Apus apus* A commonly encountered Palearctic migrant.

Narina Trogon *Apaloderma narina* A male of the yellow-wattled race *constantia* in Gola Central.

Blue-bellied Roller *Coracias cyanogaster* 1 seen by one car en route to Lungi.

Blue-throated Roller *Eurystomus gularis* (LO) 2 seen by Nik over Lalehun.

Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus* A few widespread sightings.

Chocolate-backed Kingfisher *Halcyon badia* Seen well in Gola Central and heard elsewhere.



Chocolate-backed Kingfisher (left) showed well in Gola Central. Striped Kingfisher (right) at Bumbuna. (Nik Borrow)

Grey-headed Kingfisher *Halcyon leucocephala* Most numerous at Bumbuna.

Striped Kingfisher *Halcyon chelicuti* 1 seen well at Bumbuna.

Blue-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon malimbica* Sightings in Gola Central and on Tiwai Island.

Woodland Kingfisher *Halcyon senegalensis* Just 2 sightings this tour.

African Dwarf Kingfisher *Ispidina lecontei* Brief looks on Tiwai Island.

African Pygmy Kingfisher *Ispidina picta* First seen well at No 2 River.

White-bellied Kingfisher *Corythornis leucogaster* Sightings in Gola Central and on Tiwai Island.

Malachite Kingfisher *Corythornis cristatus* Just 2 sightings en route to Gola East and on Tiwai Island.

Shining-blue Kingfisher *Alcedo quadribrachys* Just 2 sightings en route to Gola East and on Tiwai Island.

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* (NL) 1 for some at Tiwai.

Black Bee-eater *Merops gularis* 3 widespread sightings of 4 birds.

Swallow-tailed Bee-eater *Merops hirundineus* A pair was seen at Bumbuna.

Little Bee-eater *Merops pusillus* Small numbers in the Loma Mountains area.

White-throated Bee-eater *Merops albicollis* Common to abundant intra-African migrant.

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* Most numerous on the Moa River and around Tiwai.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* 2 of these Palearctic migrants at Bumbuna.

Black Scimitarbill *Rhinopomastus aterrimus* 1 for some at Bumbuna.

African Pied Hornbill (West African P H) *Lophoceros [fasciatus] semifasciatus* Commonly encountered.



The form of African Pied Hornbill in West Africa is sometimes treated as a separate species (left, Nik Borrow) The taxonomy of the Upper Guinea endemic Little Green Woodpecker is also debated (right, Ken Berry).

Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill *Lophoceros camurus* Excellent views in Gola Central.

Piping Hornbill (Western P H) *Bycanistes fistulator* Seen in Gola Central and at Tiwai.

Brown-cheeked Hornbill *Bycanistes cylindricus* (V) Seen at Baiyama and heard in Gola Central.

Black-casqued Hornbill (B-c Wattled H) *Ceratogymna atrata* Seen at Baiyama and Gola East.

Yellow-casqued Hornbill (Y-c Wattled H) *Ceratogymna elata* (V) Pleasingly common in Sierra Leone.

White-crested Hornbill (Western Long-tailed H) *Horizocerus albocristatus* 4 seen in Gola Central.

Naked-faced Barbet *Gymnobucco calvus* Common in the Loma Mountains.

Speckled Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus scolopaceus* Common in the forests but more often heard than seen.

Red-rumped Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus atrofasciatus* Common in the forests but more often heard than seen.

Yellow-throated Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus subsulphureus* Common in the forests but more often heard than seen.

Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus bilineatus* Recorded from the peninsula to the Gori Hills only.

Yellow-spotted Barbet *Buccanodon duchaillui* Common in the forests but more often heard than seen.

Hairy-breasted Barbet *Tricholaema hirsuta* (H) Heard in Gola Central and at Tiwai.

Double-toothed Barbet *Lybius bidentatus* 3 were seen on top of the Loma Mountains.

Yellow-billed Barbet (Western Y-b B) *Trachyphonus [purpuratus] goffinii* Seen well in Gola Central.

Willcocks's Honeyguide *Indicator willcocksi* Seen well in the Loma Mountains.

Thick-billed Honeyguide *Indicator conirostris* (H) Heard on 4 occasions but would not respond.

Spotted Honeyguide *Indicator maculatus* Seen well on Tiwai Island.

Little Green Woodpecker *Campethera maculosa* 2 sightings of this Upper Guinea endemic.

Buff-spotted Woodpecker *Campethera nivos* A few opportunities to see this small woodpecker.

Brown-eared Woodpecker *Campethera caroli* 1 seen in Gola Central.

Cardinal Woodpecker *Dendropicos fuscescens* A female seen at the breakdown swamp.

Melancholy Woodpecker *Dendropicos lugubris* A few opportunities to see this small Upper Guinea endemic.

African Grey Woodpecker *Dendropicos goertae* A pair was seen well at Bumbuna.

African Hobby *Falco cuvierii* 1 seen on top of the Loma Mountains.

Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus* A pair en route to Makeni and another in the Loma Mountains.

Timneh Parrot *Psittacus timneh* (E) Seen in flight over Gola Central and Tiwai Island.

Rufous-sided Broadbill *Smithornis rufolateralis* Brilliant views of a displaying male in Gola East.

African Shrike-flycatcher *Megabyas flammulatus* Seen from the Gori Hills, through Gola and Tiwai Island.



A male Rufous-sided Broadbill pauses during his display in Gola East (left). A male African Shrike-flycatcher (right) in Gola Central. (Nik Borrow)

Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher (Vanga F) *Bias musicus* (NL) Tonya and Tom saw 1 en route to the Gori Hills.

Senegal Batis *Batis senegalensis* (LO) Nik saw 1 at Bumbuna.

West African Wattle-eye *Platysteira hormophora* An Upper Guinea endemic regularly encountered during the tour.

Brown-throated Wattle-eye (Common W) *Platysteira cyanea* Heard more often than seen.

Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye *Platysteira concreta* (LO) Nik saw 1 in Gola Central.

Red-cheeked Wattle-eye *Platysteira blissetti* Great looks at this Upper Guinea endemic first in the Loma Mtns.

Grey-headed Bushshrike *Malaconotus blanchoti* (H) Heard at Bumbuna.

Lagden's Bushshrike *Malaconotus lagdeni* (NT) 1 for Tonya en route to Gori Hills and another in Gola Central.

Many-colored Bushshrike *Chlorophoneus multicolor* Sightings in the Loma Mountains and Gola Central.

Black-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra senegalus* (H) Heard in the Loma Mountains.

Sabine's Puffback (Large-billed P) *Dryoscopus sabini* Best views were of a pair in Gola Central.

Northern Puffback *Dryoscopus gambensis* Seen at Bumbuna and the 'breakdown swamp'.

Lowland Sooty Boubou *Laniarius leucorhynchus* (H) Heard en route to the Gori Hills.

Turati's Boubou *Laniarius turatii* A pair seen well at Bumbuna.

Brubru *Nilaus afer* (H) Heard at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Blue Cuckooshrike *Coracina azurea* Just 1 male on Tiwai Island.

Red-shouldered Cuckooshrike *Campephaga phoenicea* (NL) Views for some in the Loma Mountains area.

Purple-throated Cuckooshrike *Campephaga quiscalina* A pair in the Loma Mountains.

Northern Fiscal *Lanius humeralis* Noted in savannah areas, particularly on journeys.

African Golden Oriole *Oriolus auratus* (H) Heard en route to Makeni.

Western Oriole (W Black-headed O) *Oriolus brachyrynchus* Regularly encountered in the forests.

Black-winged Oriole *Oriolus nigripennis* Regularly encountered in the forests.

Shining Drongo *Dicrurus atripennis* A member of forest bird parties.

Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis* Only seen at Bumbuna.

Velvet-mantled Drongo *Dicrurus modestus* A forest species.

Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher *Trochocercus nitens* Seen well in Gola Central and Tiwai Island.

Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone rufiventer* A common forest species.

African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis* Widespread sightings, even entering the forest.

Pied Crow *Corvus albus* Abundant near human habitation.

Dusky Crested Flycatcher *Elminia nigromitrata* (LO) 1 for Nik in the Loma Mountains.

White-shouldered Black Tit *Melaniparus guineensis* 1 scoped at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Western Nicator *Nicator chloris* First seen well en route to the Gori Hills.

Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus* A common and widespread species.

Slender-billed Greenbul *Stelgidillas gracilirostris* Easily seen, often on the top of the canopy.

Little Greenbul *Eurillas virens* Common, but heard more often than seen.

Little Grey Greenbul *Eurillas gracilis* Common in secondary growth but heard more often than seen.

Ansorge's Greenbul *Eurillas ansorgei* Widespread sightings in the forests.

Plain Greenbul (Cameroon Sombre G) *Eurillas curvirostris* Seen in the Gori Hills and Gola Central.

Yellow-whiskered Greenbul *Eurillas latirostris* Common, but heard more often than seen.

Honeyguide Greenbul *Baeopogon indicator* Common, but heard more often than seen.

Spotted Greenbul *Ixonotus guttatus* Flocks were encountered in Gola Central.

Simple Greenbul *Chlorocichla simplex* A common farmbrush species.

Yellow-throated Leaflove *Atimastillas flavicollis* (LO) Nik saw 1 at Bumbuna and heard at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Swamp Palm Bulbul *Thescelocichla leucopleura* A large, handsome and common bulbul.

Red-tailed Leaflove *Phyllastrephus scandens* Easily seen in the Loma Mountains.

Icterine Greenbul *Phyllastrephus icterinus* A common member of the forest bird parties.

Red-tailed Bristlebill *Bleda syndactylus* (H) Surprisingly retiring and difficult to see.

Green-tailed Bristlebill *Bleda eximius* (NT) Great looks at this Upper Guinea endemic in Gola Central.



We had good views of two rare Upper Guinea endemic greenbuls; the Green-tailed Bristlebill (left) performed for us in Gola Central and we saw the Yellow-bearded Greenbul (right) in the Loma Mountains and Gola East. (Nik Borrow)

Grey-headed Bristlebill *Bleda canicapillus* A common Upper Guinea endemic but more often heard than seen.

Western Bearded Greenbul *Criniger barbatus* An Upper Guinea endemic with a spiky tuft of a yellow beard.

Red-tailed Greenbul *Criniger calurus* Confusingly the race concerned does not have a red tail!

Yellow-bearded Greenbul *Criniger olivaceus* (V) Excellent views of this Upper Guinea endemic with the puffy throat.

Square-tailed Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne nitens* Commonly seen flying over the forests.

Fanti Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne obscura* First seen well at No 2 River and then again in the Gori Hills.

Sand Martin (Bank Swallow) *Riparia riparia* This Palearctic migrant was seen at Bumbuna and again over Tiwai.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* An abundant Palearctic migrant.

White-bibbed Swallow (White-throated Blue S) *Hirundo nigrita* Glittering loveliness over the forest rivers.

Common House Martin *Delichon urbicum* Palearctic migrants at Bumbuna.

Lesser Striped Swallow *Cecropis abyssinica* First seen well on the Peninsula.

Red-breasted Swallow (Rufous-chested S) *Cecropis semirufa* Just 1 was seen at Bumbuna.

West African Swallow *Cecropis domicella* Good numbers were seen in the Loma Mountains.

Preuss's Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon preussi* Small numbers were seen in the Loma Mountains.

Moustached Grass Warbler *Melocichla mentalis* Seen in the Loma Mountains.

Kemp's Longbill *Macrosphenus kempii* Difficult to see in the tangles but seen in Gola Central and on Tiwai Island.

Grey Longbill *Macrosphenus concolor* More often heard than seen in farmbush and forest.

Green Crombec *Sylvietta virens* Often heard in the farmbush but only seen once by Nik.

Lemon-bellied Crombec *Sylvietta denti* A canopy bird at No 2 Nature Trail and en route to the Gori Hills.

Chestnut-capped Flycatcher *Erythrocercus mccallii* Sightings at No 2 Nature Trail and Gola Central.

Green Hylia *Hylia prasina* A very common bird judging by the number we heard but only small numbers seen.

Tit Hylia *Pholidornis rushiae* 3 seen at close quarters en route to Gori Hills.

Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus* 2 of these Palearctic migrants were seen at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Wood Warbler *Phylloscopus sibilatrix* 3 of these Palearctic migrants sightings in the forests.

Eurasian Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* A Palearctic migrant seen at Bumbuna and heard elsewhere.

Melodious Warbler *Hippolais polyglotta* Palearctic migrants seen at No 2 River and Bumbuna.

Red-faced Cisticola *Cisticola erythrops* A pair was seen at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Whistling Cisticola *Cisticola lateralis* A common bird of the farmbush.

Tawny-flanked Prinia *Prinia subflava* Widespread sightings in farmbush and savannah.

Sierra Leone Prinia *Schistolais leontica* (E) Excellent views of a pair in the Loma Mountains.

Red-winged Warbler *Heliolais erythropterus* (H) Heard only at Bumbuna.

Black-capped Apalis *Apalis nigriceps* 1 was seen in the Loma Mountains.

Sharpe's Apalis *Apalis sharpii* Very common judging by the number heard singing. Not so easy to see though!



Tit Hylia (left) lies claim to be Africa's smallest bird. A female Upper Guinea endemic Sharpe's Apalis (right). (Nik Borrow)

Oriole Warbler *Hypergerus atriceps* (H) Heard along No 2 River.

Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brevicaudata* Heard more often than seen in farmbush.

Yellow-browed Camaroptera *Camaroptera superciliaris* Excellent looks en route to the Gori Hills.

Olive-green Camaroptera *Camaroptera chloronota* Heard more often than seen in farmbush and forest.

Black-headed Rufous Warbler *Bathmocercus cerviniventris* (NT) Persistence paid off with a pair in the Loma Mtns.

Senegal Eremomela *Eremomela pusilla* A few in the Loma Mountains area.

Rufous-crowned Eremomela *Eremomela badiceps* A group seen well en route to the Gori Hills.

Blackcap Illadopsis *Illadopsis cleaveri* Excellent views on Tiwai Island.

Rufous-winged Illadopsis *Illadopsis rufescens* (NT) Wonderful views in the Loma Mountains.

Puvel's Illadopsis *Illadopsis puveli* Great views of a pair at Baiyama.

Pale-breasted Illadopsis *Illadopsis rufipennis* Seen well in the Loma Mountains and on Tiwai Island.

Brown Illadopsis *Illadopsis fulvescens* Skulking birds in the Gori Hills and on Tiwai Island.

Blackcap Babbler *Turdoides reinwardtii* Several seen at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Eurasian Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* A female of this Palearctic migrant in the Loma Mountains.

African Yellow White-eye *Zosterops senegalensis* Seen at No 2 River and at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Yellow-bellied Hyliota *Hyliota flavigaster* 1 was seen by some at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Copper-tailed Starling (C-t Glossy S) *Hylopsar cupreocauda* 5 of these Upper Guinea endemics in the Gori Hills.

Emerald Starling *Lamprotornis iris* An Upper Guinea endemic seen well at Bumbuna and the 'breakdown swamp'.

Violet-backed Starling *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster* Small numbers at No 2 River.

Chestnut-winged Starling (Forest C-w S) *Onychognathus [fulgidus] hartlaubii* A pair on Tiwai Island.

White-tailed Ant Thrush *Neocossyphus poensis* Seen at Baiyama and Gola Central.

Finsch's Rufous Thrush *Stizorhina finschi* Several chances to see this Upper Guinea endemic well.

African Thrush *Turdus pelios* Widespread sightings.

White-tailed Alethe *Alethe diademata* We made several attempts before seeing this Upper Guinea endemic well.

Forest Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas leucosticta* Amazing views of this notorious skulker in Gola East.



We finally saw White-tailed Alethe well on Tiwai Island (left). In Gola East we had incredible luck with a showy Forest Scrub Robin (right). (Nik Borrow)

White-browed Forest Flycatcher *Fraseria cinerascens* Several birds seen around Tiwai Island.

Grey Tit-Flycatcher (Lead-coloured F) *Myioparus plumbeus* 1 was seen at No 2 River.

Cassin's Flycatcher *Muscicapa cassini* Seen on the river at Bumbuna and again around Tiwai Island.

Ussher's Flycatcher *Muscicapa ussheri* An Upper Guinea endemic seen well in the Loma Mountains and Gori Hills.

Brown-chested Alethe *Chamaetylas poliocephala* (H) Heard in the Loma Mountains.

Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat *Cossypha cyanocampter* (NL) Seen by some in the Loma Mountains.

Forest Robin (Western F R) *Stiphrornis [erythrothorax] erythrothorax* Seen in Gori Hills and on Tiwai Island.

Lowland Akalat *Sheppardia cyornithopsis* Terrific views in the Loma Mountains.

Common Nightingale *Luscinia megarhynchos* This Palearctic migrant was heard more often than seen.

European Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula hypoleuca* Small numbers of this Palearctic migrant were noted.

Whinchat *Saxicola rubetra* Small numbers of this Palearctic migrant were noted.

Fraser's Sunbird (Scarlet-tufted S) *Deleornis fraseri* Regularly encountered in the forests.

Mangrove Sunbird (Brown S) *Anthreptes gabonicus* Seen at No 2 River and around Tiwai Island.

Little Green Sunbird *Anthreptes seimundi* Regularly encountered in the farmbush.

Grey-chinned Sunbird *Anthreptes rectirostris* This yellow-chinned form is an Upper Guinea endemic.

Collared Sunbird *Hedydipna collaris* Common and widespread.

Green-headed Sunbird (Olive-backed S) *Cyanomitra verticalis* 2 sightings at Bumbuna and in the Loma Mountains.

Blue-throated Brown Sunbird *Cyanomitra cyanoaema* Most numerous en route to the Gori Hills.

Olive Sunbird *Cyanomitra olivacea* A very common sunbird.

Buff-throated Sunbird *Chalcomitra adelberti* Great views of this beautiful Upper Guinea endemic.

Olive-bellied Sunbird *Cinnyris chloropygius* Only seen at Baiyama.

Tiny Sunbird *Cinnyris minullus* A male was seen in the Gori Hills.

Splendid Sunbird *Cinnyris coccinigastrus* Several seen at Bumbuna and again at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Johanna's Sunbird *Cinnyris johannae* Pairs in Gola Central and on Tiwai Island.

Superb Sunbird *Cinnyris superbus* Males seen in the Gori Hills and at Baiyama.

Variable Sunbird *Cinnyris venustus* Commonly encountered from Freetown to Koidu.

Copper Sunbird *Cinnyris cupreus* Common at Bumbuna.

Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus* Only seen at Koidu.

Black-necked Weaver *Ploceus nigricollis* Seen at the 'breakdown swamp' and en route to Gori Hills.

Village Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus* An abundant species breeding everywhere!

Vieillot's Black Weaver (Chestnut-and-black W) *Ploceus [nigerrimus] castaneofuscus* Common.

Yellow-mantled Weaver *Ploceus tricolor* Seen in the Gori Hills and on Tiwai Island.

Maxwell's Black Weaver *Ploceus albinucha* A small flock on Tiwai Island.

Gola Malimbe *Malimbus ballmanni* This rare Upper Guinea endemic showed well in Gola Central.

Red-vented Malimbe *Malimbus scutatus* Regular sightings of this Upper Guinea endemic.

Blue-billed Malimbe *Malimbus nitens* Regularly seen in the forests.

Red-headed Malimbe *Malimbus rubricollis* Just 1 pair was seen on Tiwai Island.



Malimbés are strikingly patterned forest weavers. Red-vented Malimbe (left) and Red-headed Malimbe (right). (Nik Borrow)

Crested Malimbe *Malimbus malimbicus* Just 1 was seen en route to the Gori Hills.

Black-winged Red Bishop *Euplectes hordeaceus* (NL) Seen by Tonya at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Yellow-mantled Widowbird *Euplectes macroura* 1 in non-breeding plumage was seen at the 'breakdown swamp'.

White-breasted Nigrita (W-b Negrofinch) *Nigrita fusconotus* Only seen en route to and at the Gori Hills.

Chestnut-breasted Nigrita (C-b Negrofinch) *Nigrita bicolor* Seen in the Gori Hills and Gola Central.

Grey-headed Nigrita (G-c Negrofinch) *Nigrita canicapillus* Heard more frequently than we saw it!

Yellow-winged Pytilia *Pytilia hypogrammica* Scope views at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Crimson Seedcracker *Pyrenestes sanguineus* 3 sightings of this Upper Guinea endemic but never for long!

Western Bluebill *Spermophaga haematina* A wonderful male in the Gori Hills.

Dybowski's Twinspot *Euschistospiza dybowskii* Seen on top of the Loma Mountains and the 'breakdown swamp'.

Red-billed Firefinch *Lagonosticta senegala* Just 2 sightings.

African Firefinch (Blue-billed F) *Lagonosticta rubricata* A male at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Orange-cheeked Waxbill *Estrilda melpoda* Good looks at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* A small flock at Bumbuna.

Bronze Mannikin *Lonchura cucullata* From Makeni to Bumbuna and again at Koidu.

Black-and-white Mannikin *Lonchura bicolor* Small numbers at Bumbuna.

Cameroon Indigobird *Vidua camerunensis* A male at the 'breakdown swamp' where its hosts were also present.

Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura* Flocks at Bumbuna and at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Togo Paradise Whydah *Vidua togoensis* A male in breeding plumage at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Western Yellow Wagtail (Blue-headed W) *Motacilla [flava] flava* Small numbers of this Palearctic migrant noted.

Mountain Wagtail *Motacilla clara* 1 in the Loma Mountains.

African Pied Wagtail *Motacilla aguimp* A couple were on the Moa River at Tiwai.

Yellow-throated Longclaw *Macronyx croceus* 1 for some as we left Tiwai.

Plain-backed Pipit *Anthus leucophrys* A pair at No 2 River.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis* Small numbers of this Palearctic migrant on top of the Loma Mountains.

Yellow-fronted Canary *Crithagra mozambica* Seen at Bumbuna and at the 'breakdown swamp'.

Gosling's Bunting *Emberiza goslingi* A male on top of the Loma Mountains.



The River Moa at Tiwai Island. (Nik Borrow)

MAMMALS

African Palm Civet *Nandinia binotata* 1 at night on Tiwai Island.

Western Tree Hyrax *Dendrohyrax dorsalis* (H) Heard at night in the forests.

Maxwell's Duiker *Philantomba maxwelli* A few glimpsed by some in Gola Central.

Demidoff's Dwarf Galago *Galagoides demidovii* Easy to see at night in the forests.

Thomas's Dwarf Galago *Galagoides thomasi* Presumably this species in the canopy in the Loma mountains.

West African Potto *Perodicticus potto* 1 seen in the Gori Hills.

Sooty Mangabey (White-naped M) *Cercocebus atys* Seen by some on Tiwai Island.

Green Monkey (Callithrix M) *Chlorocebus sabaeus* Seen at No 2 River by all.

Diana Monkey *Cercopithecus diana* Seen in Gola Central and perhaps responsible for the Picathartes no show!

Campbell's Monkey *Cercopithecus campbelli* Seen well at Bumbuna.

Spot-nosed Monkey *Cercopithecus petaurista* Seen in Gola Central mixed in with the Diana Monkeys.

King Colobus (Western Pied C) *Colobus polykomos* Good views on Tiwai Island.

Upper Guinea Red Colobus (West African R C) *Procolobus badius* Seen on Tiwai Island.

Chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes* (H) Heard in the Loma Mountains.

Lesser Anomalure *Anomalurus pusillus* Apparently this species in daylight in Gola Central.

Gambian Sun Squirrel *Heliosciurus gambianus* 1 in the Gori Hills.

Red-legged Sun Squirrel *Heliosciurus rufobrachium* (NL) 1 seen in Gola Central.

Forest Giant Squirrel (African G S) *Protoxerus stangeri* Singletons in the Loma Mountains and Gola East.

Slender-tailed Squirrel *Protoxerus aubinnii* 3 sightings in the Gola Forests.

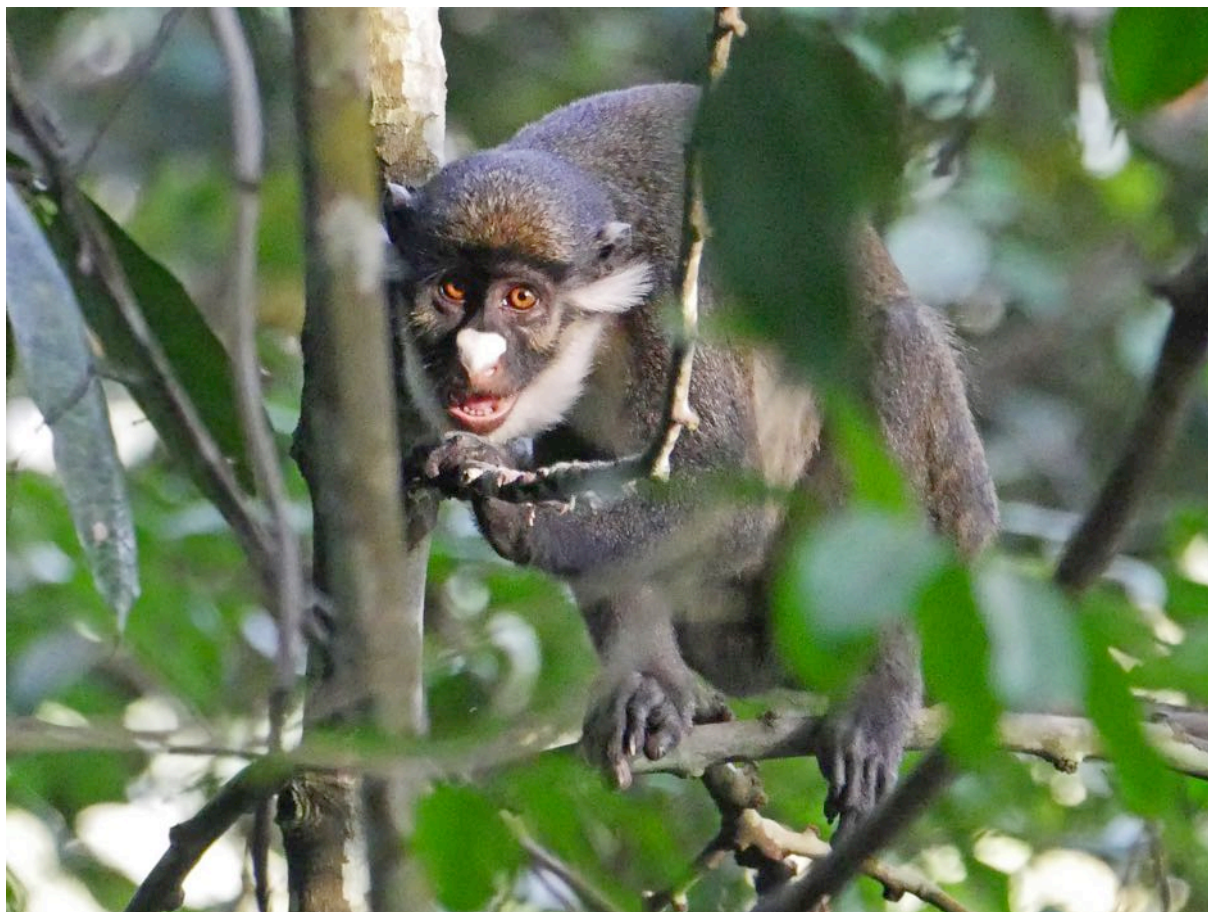
Fire-footed Rope Squirrel *Funisciurus pyrrhopus* 1 in the Loma Mountains.

Green Bush Squirrel *Paraxerus poensis* 1 at Baiyama.

Forest Giant Pouched Rat *Cricetomys emini* 1 for Nik and Ken during the breakdown journey.

African Straw-coloured Fruit-bat *Eidolon helvum* Seen in Freetown.

Hammer-headed Fruit-bat *Hypsignathus monstrosus* (H) Heard in the Gori Hills.



Spot-nosed Monkey in Gola Central – possibly the reason that the picathartes never showed! (Nik Borrow)