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Bird observations in Kaédi and Fouta Gleïta, southern Mauritania

by S.J. Farnsworth

Hammerkop, Frogmill, Hurley, Maidenhead, Berks SL6 5NL, U.K.

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Summary

An irrigation project adjacent to the Gorgol Noir River in southern Mauritania, completed in 1985, transformed an arid area into a much more verdant habitat. Bird observations from the project area and the nearby town of Kaédi in 1985 are presented, which demonstrate a possible new site for many waterbirds, including several range extensions.

Résumé

Un projet d'irrigation attenant au cours du Gorgol Noir, sud mauritanien, et achevé en 1985, a transformé un endroit aride en un habitat beaucoup plus verdoyant. L'article présente les observations d'avifaune sur cet aménagement et dans la cité voisine de Kaédi en 1985, ce qui permet d'envisager un nouveau site pour une nombreuse sauvagine et une extension d'habitat pour plusieurs espèces.

Study Area and Methods

I visited southern Mauritania from 24 February to 7 March and 20 March to 11 April 1985. Most of my work was carried out on the Gorgol Noir irrigation project (16°9'N, 12°43'W) near the village of Fouta Gleïta on the western side of the Massif de l'Assaba. The project is adjacent to the Gorgol Noir River about 35 km upstream of the confluence with the Gorgol Blanc River and some 80 km east of Kaédi and 20 km north-west of Mbout (see Fig. 1). During my visits it did not rain, although several violent dust storms occurred. Shade temperatures in the day rose to a maximum of about 50°C, night temperatures were sometimes as high as 32°C.

The irrigation project consists of a dam across a narrow rocky gorge through which the Gorgol Noir used to flow seasonally and which has now created a

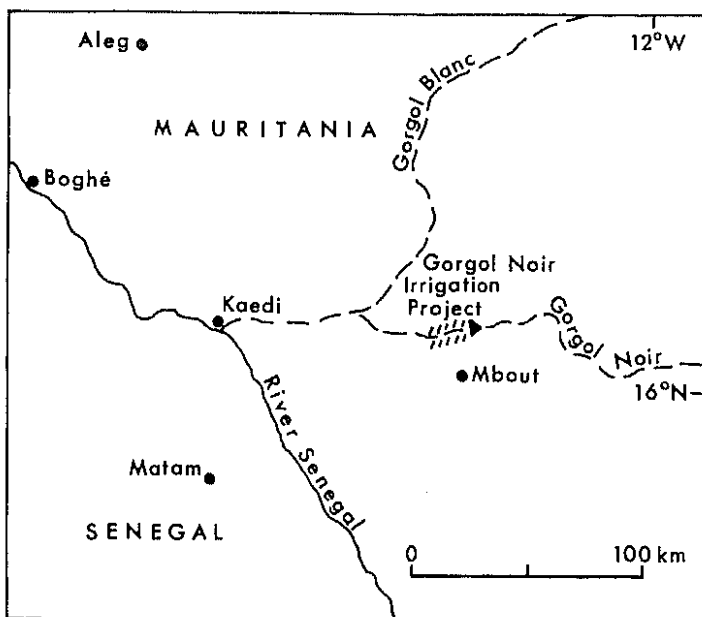


Figure 1. Map of study area.

permanent reservoir upstream, where previously only occasional seasonal flooding had taken place. Water from the new reservoir is conveyed downstream by surface earth canals over a distance of some 15 km, for distribution to irrigated fields. In 1985, the fully irrigated area covered 600 ha, preparatory work having also been completed for a further 2000 ha. Initial trials were being carried out on the efficiency of growing maize, sorghum, carrots and tomatoes.

Prior to the project, the terrain was generally arid, apart from the occasional seasonal flow in the Gorgol Noir, discharging into the Gorgol Blanc and eventually into the Senegal River at Kaédi. The completed part of the project area had been transformed by 1985 into a much more verdant habitat. In addition to irrigation, occasional releases of excess water are made from the canals onto lower ground, thus creating some small, shallow, marshy lakes. The recent change from an arid to a more verdant habitat is considered likely to influence bird species using the project area. Comments from colleagues, familiar with the original habitat, indicated that waterbirds were previously infrequent there.

During my visits I noted the presence of bird species, without carrying out precise counts.

Results

My observations are listed in Table 1 for the town of Kaédi, just north of the Senegal River (16°1'N, 13°30'W), and Table 2 for the irrigation project area near Fouta Djallon. Only two species (Abyssinian Roller *Coracias abyssinica* and Hoopoe *Upupa epops*) were recorded in both locations.

Table 1. Birds observed at Kaédi.

Speckled Pigeon <i>Columba guinea</i>
Mourning Dove <i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>
Vinaceous Dove <i>S. vinacea</i>
Blue-naped Mousebird <i>Urocolius macrourus</i>
Abyssinian Roller <i>Coracias abyssinica</i>
Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i>
Mosque Swallow <i>Hirundo senegalensis</i>
Pied Crow <i>Corvus albus</i>
Blue-eared Glossy Starling <i>Lamprolornis chalybaeus</i>
Long-tailed Glossy Starling <i>L. caudatus</i>
Grey-headed Sparrow <i>Passer griseus</i>
Vitelline Masked Weaver <i>Ploceus velatus</i>
Red-billed Firefinch <i>Lagonosticta senegala</i>

The Kaédi data are presented because little appears to have been published specifically for the area, although Lamarche (1988) indicates that more than ten ornithological visits have been made to the half-degree square encompassing the town.

The Fouta Djallon data are of interest not only because Lamarche (1988) indicated that the half-degree square encompassing the project had been little studied ornithologically but also because of the recent change in habitat. At Fouta Djallon, the Black Wood-Hoopoes and the Chestnut-backed Finch-Larks were in groups of maximum size 11 and five respectively; the Gabar Goshawk was a single bird seen over the reservoir.

Table 2. Birds observed in the Gorgol Noir irrigation project area (Fouta Djallon).

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- 1 Waterbird species, within range indicated by Lamarche (1988) but possibly a new site.
 - 2 Non-waterbird species, within range indicated by Lamarche (1988) and probably little influenced by the changed habitat.
 - 3 Probable range extension, as interpreted from Lamarche (1988).

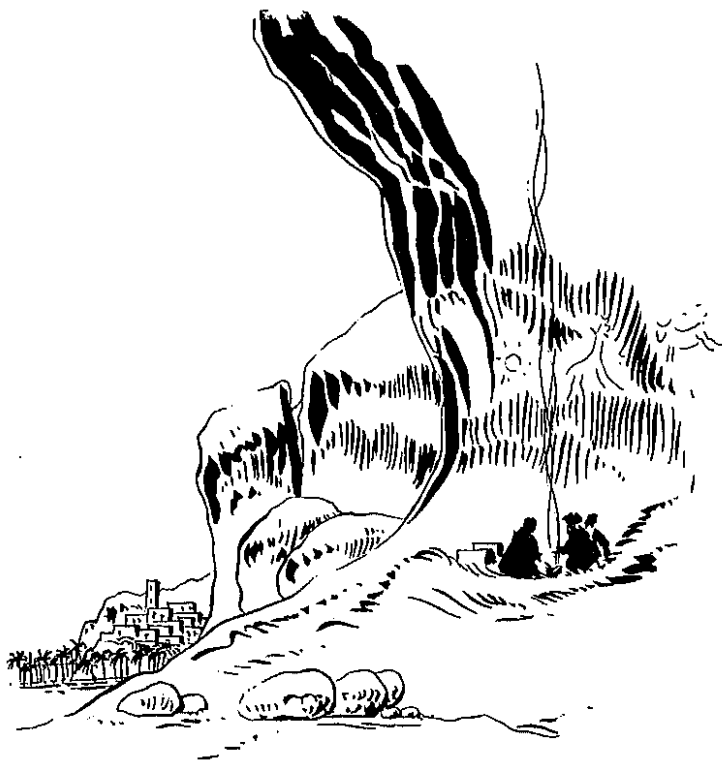
Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	1
White Pelican <i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	1
Squacco Heron <i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	3
Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	2
Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	3
Great White Egret <i>E. alba</i>	3
Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	1
Hamerkop <i>Scopus umbretta</i>	1
Yellow-billed Stork <i>Mycteria ibis</i>	3
Spoonbill <i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	1
Fulvous Whistling Duck <i>Anas acuta</i>	3
Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>	2
Garganey <i>A. querquedula</i>	1
Marsh Harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	2
Pallid Harrier <i>C. macrourus</i>	3
Gabari Goshawk <i>Melierax gabar</i>	3
Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	2
Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	3
Senegal Thick-knee <i>Burhinus senegalensis</i>	2
Common Pratincole <i>Glareola pratincola</i>	2
Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	1
Spur-winged Plover <i>Vanellus spinosus</i>	1
Common Snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	1
Spotted Redshank <i>Tringa erythropus</i>	3
Greenshank <i>T. nebularis</i>	3
Wood Sandpiper <i>T. glareola</i>	3
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	1
Little Stint <i>Calidris minuta</i>	1
Ruff <i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	1
Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse <i>Pterocles exultans</i>	2
Pied Kingfisher <i>Ceryle rudis</i>	3
Blue-cheeked Bee-eater <i>Merops superciliosus</i>	3
Abyssinian Roller <i>Coracias abyssinica</i>	2
Black Wood-Hoopoe <i>Phoeniculus aterrimus</i>	2
Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i>	2
Red-billed Hornbill <i>Tockus erythrorhynchus</i>	3
Grey Hornbill <i>T. nasutus</i>	2
Sand Martin <i>Riparia riparia</i>	2
Chestnut-backed Finch-Lark <i>Eremopterix leucotis</i>	2
Black Scrub Robin <i>Cercotrichas podobe</i>	2
Great Grey Shrike <i>Lanius excubitor</i>	2
Chestnut-bellied Starling <i>Spreo pulcher</i>	2

Acknowledgments

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Vues de la Mauritanie: Adrar – Views of Mauritania: Adrar
Bruno Lamarche