

# - Niger -

**Trip Report, August 1992**



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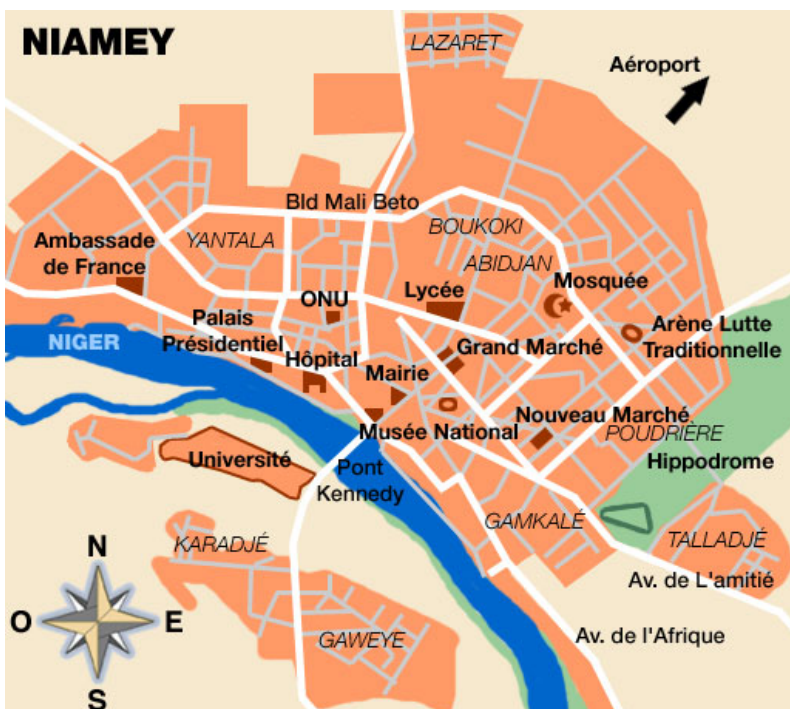
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## Introduction

Back in 1992, this was my first trip to Africa. As expected, the combination of heat and humidity was absolutely flabergasting when the plane landed in Niamey. Since I wrote this report 13 years later, I decided to provide the reader with a Systematic checklist, instead of a day-by-day report.



**Niamey** is divided in two by the famous Niger river. It is an airy city with broad, open spaces between buildings except along the few streets of the city center. The streets are heavy, red sand, though some of the main boulevards are macadam. There are good shade trees all around, and many varieties not much higher than the one- and two-story painted stucco buildings. Only a few blocks from Avenue Coulbaly, the city's main axis, you find vegetable gardens the size of small farms. These are fragrant, green places in the seared air and dazzling light of sub-Saharan Africa and are spread near the several creeks that course through the city and drain into the Niger River. Along the creeks you may also find outdoor pottery factories with huge piles of variously shaped and colored urns and jugs.



Along the river, there is a very accessible path. Try to start from the "Club Equestre of Niamey". Going along that path downstream you reach the barrage, where you may rent a pirogue-type canoe to go to the islands upstream and the reedbeds near the Nigerian embassy. Mamadou Tinni operates the pirogue, and knows the areas with birds and stops whenever asked. I have been recommended in the past by other birders, and can be found at the barrage.

Other sites of interest in town are:

"The National Museum", Avenue de la Mairie, T-Sun: Nov-Mar 9-12, 3:30 -6, April-Oct, 9-12, 4-6:30, admission 100 CFA francs. Exhibition pavilions, zoo, crafts center, village of Nigerien housing styles. Jewelry, weapons, handcrafts, musical instruments.

"The Grand Marché", Boulevard de la Liberté, daily until sunset. One of West Africa's finest markets with modern architecture and fountains, food, fabric, crafts.

"The Petit Marché", Rue du Président Luebké and Avenue de la Mairie. Mainly food, but also fabrics and crafts.

"Yantala Corniche", Along the Niger River, with Canoe rentals.

Grande Mosquée. One mile north of the Grand Marché, open to visitors. Intricate mosaics.



I also spent several hours sipping fresh sodas on the terrace of the "Grand Hotel" in Niamey, watching the sun going down. This spot gives you nice views on the river if you have a spotting scope. The air is parched, but on the patio deck of the Grand Hotel you can drench your throat in cold Bier Niger. Note that if you order a little kabob of grilled meat and dip each piece into the powdered spice that is served with it, you may find yourself drinking more Bier Niger than you had intended...

The most interesting species I saw here are: Mosque Swallow, Abdim's Stork, Glossy Ibis, Black-headed Heron, Night Heron, Purple Heron, Green-backed Heron, Long-tailed Shag, Shikra.

The other sites visited will be detailed here with highlights of the most remarkable species.

**Boubon Island:** 15 miles northwest of Niamey, on the road from Niamey to Tillabery, having exceeded Goudel, at approximately 15 miles from Niamey. Boubon's camp is indicated. By tumbling down a bad road, the valley of the river comes to light suddenly. The vegetation gets more and more dense, with huge trees sheltering small villages. At the edge of the first village, many jars are exposed, drying in the sun. These "canaries" are actually at the origin of Boubon's reputation.

It is necessary to go down another track and pass another village to discover Boubon, and you arrive at the marketplace, taking place every Wednesday. Then you reach a magnificent island, the island of *Cythère*, covered with mangoes, eucalyptus... and birds. This island has a camp, with a restaurant close to a swimming pool!

It is also possible to reach Boubon by the river, from Niamey. The stroll is supposed to be very nice, with many water birds. In any case, be extremely careful during the warm season: it is absolutely necessary to have a hat, a total sunblock protection, and a lot of water!!!



The Niger's water is brown with silt and fast and bumpy where it is shallow. Birds are everywhere. A constant sonorous tone drifts from reedy banks and spreads out over the water with an occasional cluck or chirp or whistle or shriek echoing down the river.

The most interesting species spotted here where: Egyptian Plover, Senegal Thick-knee, Levillant's Cuckoo, Black-Shouldered Kite and several Ardeidae.

**Kouré:** 36 miles from Niamey on the road to Dosso, some of the last giraffe herds in West Africa. Here – outside a national park – the last giraffes in West Africa are protected. People benefit from giraffes from giraffe tours, sales of curios, and they get external support for vegetable marketing as compensation for potential crop losses through wildlife, but local people also take increasingly pride in their giraffes, which have over the last 5 years considerably increased in numbers.

You will be in the middle of a genuine African savanna here, and the most looked-after species I found were: Long-tailed Nightjar, Chanting Goshawk, Grey Kestrel, Red-necked Kestrel, Gabar Goshawk, Senegal Fire-finch, Wire-tailed Swallow, Slender-billed Weaver, Senegal Indigo Finch.



### The road to Burkina

It is certainly recommended to follow the road linking the capitals of Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) and Niamey (Niger), to enjoy another landscape. I got several lifers there, such as the Spotted Eagle Owl, Brown Harrier Eagle, and Broad-billed Paradise Whydah.

We also experienced a true sand storm in this area.

The border areas between Niger and Burkina Faso however have increased in economic relevance during the last years due to several new discoveries of gold. Industrial gold mining is now to start on the Nigerian side of the border and has already started on the Burkinabe side. More gold bearing zones are expected to be found in the region, with some degree of industrialization.

### Recommended readings

Birds of Western Africa, by Nik Borrow & Ron Demey - February 2002 Christopher Helm , £55.

### Systematic checklist

Barbary Shrike	1	Lily-trotter	10
Black Magpie	25	Long-tailed Glossy Starling	5
Chanting Goshawk	3	Long-tailed Shrike	2
Chestnut-bellied Starling	50	Mosque Swallow	20
European Swallow	7	Pied Crow	20
Grey Hornbill	400	Purple Glossy Starling	6
Grey Kestrel	1	Red Bishop	2
Grey-breasted H. Guineafowl	2	Red-beaked Hornbill	1
Grey-headed Kingfisher	3	Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu	3
Knob-billed Goose	12	Red-necked Kestrel	1

Red-tailed Buzzard	1
Senegal Wood-hoopoe	1
Wire-tailed Swallow	8
Yellow-billed Oxpecker	4
Yellow-crowned Bishop	30
Black-shouldered Kite	1
Egyptian Plover	25
Levaillant's Cuckoo	2
Little Bee-eater	2
Senegal Thick-knee	25
White-faced Tree Duck	50
Abdim's Stork	50
Abyssinian Roller	50
African Hobby	1
Beautiful Long-tailed Sunbird	25
Black Kite	1
Black-headed Heron	5
Black-headed Weaver	30
Broad-billed Paradise Whydah	2
Buffalo Weaver	40
Cattle Egret	5
Common Garden Bulbul	5
Common Sandpiper	2
Gabar Goshawk	3
Abdim's Stork	35
Great White Egret	1
Green-backed Heron	5
Grey Heron	4
Grey-headed Sparrow	30
Hooded Vulture	5
Little African Swift	5
Little Egret	3
Long-tailed Shag	40
Night Heron	5
Olive-bellied Sunbird	5
Palm Swift	300
Pied Kingfisher	50
Pratincole sp.	5
Purple Heron	3
Reef Heron	10
Senegal Coucal	40
Senegal Fire-finch	40
Shikra	6
Slender-billed Weaver	5
Spur-winged Plover	80
Squacco Heron	20
Village Weaver	40
Warbling Silverbill	2
White-breasted Cormorant	2
Brown Harrier Eagle	1
Rock Bunting	4
Senegal Indigo Finch	1
Spotted Eagle Owl	1
Long-tailed Nightjar	1

## Acknowledgments

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