

# **São Tomé and Príncipe**

## **2024 Trip Report**



*Sao Tome Fiscal © Jonathan Newman*

***Text by Michael Mills***  
***Photographs by Jonathan Newman & Michael Mills***

## REPORT

Our 2024 São Tomé and Príncipe Tour was our first set-departure tour to tackle seeing all endemics without any camping. It was a pleasure to return to clean, comfortable rooms each night, and the birds played along well as we saw all the islands' endemics.

Having learnt the day before the tour started that São Tomé Airlines had cancelled our flights to/from Príncipe island, it was with great relief that we discovered that another airline was operating the internal flight between São Tomé and Príncipe, albeit on a different schedule. Fortunately we managed to reshuffle our itinerary and still get to Príncipe, although it meant that we had one less day on São Tomé island.

With that in mind we wasted no time on the first morning, heading straight up into the highlands at Bom Sucesso before first light. As we stepped out the car the sound of Harlequin Quail was ringing through our ears, and it wasn't long before we were watching a lovely male scurrying through an open field. We soon turned our attention to the first endemics around us, with Príncipe Seed eater and Newton's Sunbird falling first. We climbed a short distance, positioning ourselves in an open field where Forest Chestnut-winged Starlings fed in some tall trees and São Tome Spinetail fed overhead. Both São Tome White-eye and Black-capped Speirops were evident in the surrounding shrubbery, and we all enjoyed some good looks where they were joined by São Tome Prinia. A Giant Sunbird put in a welcome appearance too. We climbed slightly higher, adding São Tome Paradise Flycatcher, São Tome Thrush, São Tome Weaver and an adult and juvenile São Tome Oriole to our lists, and some São Tome Green Pigeons fed in some nearby trees although didn't show particularly well. After just a couple of hours we already had 12 endemics under the belt, and descended to São Tomé town for breakfast and to catch our flight to Príncipe island.

By early afternoon we were installed in our comfortable, air-conditioned rooms in the heart of Príncipe. Príncipe Weavers fed in a palm tree in the garden, Príncipe Speirops flitted around, and a Príncipe Malachite Kingfisher sat on the wires. Then it was off town for a late lunch, and onward

into the forest. Our departure from town was rather delayed, as we entertained ourselves with Western Reef Heron and Eurasian Whimbrel, before we finally set off into the forest in the late afternoon. After some time we reached our destination, now in the dark, and within seconds we could hear the call of Príncipe Scops Owl nearby. We scrambled after it, but it frustrated us by vanishing after a short while, so we returned to our starting point and this time immediately succeeded in spotting the scops owl, which gave good views. With the thermal scopes we also spotted roosting Dohrn's Thrush-Babbler and Príncipe Starling, bringing our endemics total of our first day to 18! Please with our first day we headed back to the hotel.

The next morning we started off on a trail to where we hoped to find Príncipe Thrush, but the trail was in such poor condition that we gave up after a while. Still, there were plenty of good birds around, and we picked out São Tome White-eye, Príncipe Seed eater and Príncipe Sunbird, conveniently leaving only the thrush to focus on the next day. Heading back to the hotel we found Velvet-mantled Drongo on the roadside and enjoyed Blue-breasted Kingfisher, before a relaxed stroll near the hotel in the late afternoon.

On our final full day on Príncipe we boarded a boat and made our way half way around the island, hugging the coast. We immediately started to search for our target, but the first area turned up no thrushes so we pushed on, upwards. Time was marching on and just as we made a plan for the quick walkers to go on ahead a Príncipe Thrush was spotted besides the trail, where it posed for ages. Happily we returned to the beach and boarded the boat back to town, detouring via some rocks where several Brown Boobies were perched.

A final stint of birding near the hotel turned up African Emerald Cuckoo, before we were back

at the airport and on our way back to São Tomé, where we wasted no time in heading to the south of the island. En route we paused to admire some roadside São Tome Bronze-naped Pigeons, and re-acquaint ourselves with São Tome Thrush and São Tome Weaver. A short detour before reaching our hotel gave us São Tome Malachite Kingfisher and a surprise Pied Kingfisher, and before dinner we found a lovely Western Barn Owl of the endemic São Tomé race. Then it was early to bed as we had a long day ahead of us.

Well before sunrise we breakfasted before heading to Monte Carmo, commending the climb in the dark. It wasn't long before we found São Tome Scops Owl and enjoyed some good views, and as the forest lightened we flushed our first Dwarf Olive Ibis. Unfortunately it flew off rather quickly, but during the course of the day we saw more than 25, and enjoyed some excellent views. Climbing further we quickly found São Tome Short-tail besides the trail, which allowed some good looks. Higher up still São Tome Grosbeak was heard, and seen briefly by Jonathan. But we pushed on up higher, where we enjoyed an excellent encounter with the lovely São Tome Fiscal, followed not long after by a Giant Weaver, before the rain started. We headed down the the campsite to wait out the rain, which eventually eased, and then spent the rest of the afternoon trying to unsuccessfully relocate the grosbeak. We saw many São Tome Paradise Flycatchers and São Tome Thrushes, and enjoyed some good looks at São Tome Green Pigeon before we arrived back at the car and made the short drive to our accommodation.

The next morning we awoke early again, but it was raining persistently so we decided to forgo a second shot at the grosbeak and went back to bed for a few hours, before driving to back into the highlands to search for the final remaining endemic, São Tome Olive Pigeon. It wasn't long before we could hear some calling nearby, but they remained high in the trees and well hidden by foliage. We climbed a bit further before the rain and mist set in, and although we waited a few hours it never cleared. Heading back down in the late afternoon we again heard several birds calling, but although we got close we couldn't see them. Fortunately we had one more attempt the next days, so we headed back to town.

The final day of the trip started off with a short pelagic trip, during which we enjoyed some excellent views of about 50 São Tome Storm Petrels (probably related to Cape Verde Storm Petrel). A couple of Sooty Terns were spotted too, before we headed up to the highlands one last time. Fortunately this time luck was on our side as we came across another birder who had been watching São Tome Olive Pigeon a bit further up the trail. The weather held as we climbed, and it wasn't long before we had a pair of São Tome Olive Pigeons firmly in our sights, rounding off the full complement of endemics. Happily we descended one last time to São Tomé town, the dense mist rolling in as we went, where we enjoyed a seaside lunch before the evening departure flight.

White-tailed Tropicbird © Michael Mills





# BIRDS RECORDED

## Phasianidae

**Red-necked Spurfowl** *Pternistis afer*—Heard at Bom Sucesso

**Harlequin Quail** *Coturnix delegorguei*—Good views at Bom Sucesso (*histrionica*)

## Apodidae

**Sao Tome Spinetail** *Zoonavena thomensis*—Seen daily, on both islands

**African Palm Swift** *Cypsiurus [p.] parvus*—Common (*brachypterus*)

**Little Swift** *Apus affinis*—Seen on São Tomé (bannermani)

## Cuculidae

**African Emerald Cuckoo** *Chrysococcyx cupreus*—Great views on Príncipe. Heard on São Tomé

## Columbidae

**Sao Tome Olive Pigeon** *Columba thomensis*—Two seen well at Bom Sucesso

**Sao Tome Bronze-naped Pigeon** *Columba malherbii*—Good views on São Tomé

**Lemon Dove** *Columba larvata*—Good views on Príncipe (principalis) and São Tomé (simplex)

**Laughing Dove** *Spilopelia senegalensis*—Common (*senegalensis*)

**African Green Pigeon** *Treron [c.] calvus*—Seen on Príncipe (virescens)

**Sao Tome Green Pigeon** *Treron sanctithomae*—Seen at Monte Carmo and Bom Sucesso

## Rallidae

**Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*—Heard at Rio Io Grande (*meridionalis*)

## Scolopacidae

**Eurasian Whimbrel** *Numenius [p.] phaeopus*—Seen on Príncipe

## Laridae

**Sooty Tern** *Onychoprion fuscatus*—Two on the pelagic off São Tomé (fuscatus)

## Phaethontidae

**White-tailed Tropicbird** *Phaethon lepturus*—Seen on Príncipe and São Tomé (ascensionis)

## Hydrobatidae

**Cape Verde Storm Petrel** *Hydrobates [castro] jabejabe*—Excellent views of about 50 off São Tomé

## Sulidae

**Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster*—Seen around Príncipe and São Tomé (leucogaster)

## Phalacrocoracidae

**Reed Cormorant | Long-tailed Cormorant** *Microcarbo africanus*—Seen at Rio Io Grande (*africanus*)

## Threskiornithidae

**Dwarf Olive Ibis** *Bostrychia bocagei*—At least 20 seen at Monte Carmo!

## Ardeidae

**Striated Heron** *Butorides [s.] striata*—Seen on São Tomé (atricapilla)

**Western Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus [i.] ibis*—Seen on São Tomé and Príncipe

**Western Reef Heron** *Egretta gularis*—Seen on São Tomé and Príncipe (gularis)

## Accipitridae

**Yellow-billed Kite** *Milvus [migrans] aegyptius*—Seen on São Tomé and Príncipe (parasitus)

## Tytonidae

**Western Barn Owl** *Tyto [a.] alba*—Great views on the south of São Tomé (thomensis)

## Strigidae

**Sao Tome Scops Owl** *Otus hartlaubi*—Excellent views at Monte Carmo. Heard at Bom Sucesso

**Príncipe Scops Owl** *Otus bikegila*—Excellent views on Príncipe

## Alcedinidae

**Blue-breasted Kingfisher** *Halcyon malimbica*—Several good sightings on Príncipe (dryas)

**Sao Tome Kingfisher** *Corythornis [cristatus] thomensis*—Seen at Rio Io Grande

**Príncipe Kingfisher** *Corythornis [cristatus] nais*—Great views on Príncipe

**Pied Kingfisher** *Ceryle rudis*—Seen at Rio Io Grande (*rudis*)

## Psittacidae

**Grey Parrot** *Psittacus [e.] erithacus*—Many on Príncipe (princeps)

## Laniidae

**Sao Tome Fiscal** *Lanius newtoni*—An excellent encounter at Monte Carmo

## Oriolidae

**Sao Tome Oriole** *Oriolus crassirostris*—Good views of an adult and juvenile at Bom Sucesso. Also seen at Monte Carmo

## Dicruridae

**Velvet-mantled Drongo** *Dicrurus [m.] modestus*—Two sightings on Príncipe (modestus)

## Monarchidae

**Sao Tome Paradise Flycatcher** *Terpsiphone atrochalybeia*—Many good sightings on São Tomé

## Cisticolidae

**Sao Tome Prinia** *Prinia mollerii*—Good views at Bom Sucesso, and elsewhere on São Tomé

## Sylviidae

**Dohrn's Thrush-Babbler** *Sylvia dohrni*—Great views on Príncipe

## Zosteropidae

**Príncipe White-eye** *Zosterops ficedulinus*—Good views on Príncipe

**Sao Tome White-eye** *Zosterops feae*—Good views at Bom Sucesso

**Black-capped Speirops** *Zosterops lugubris*—Seen daily on São Tomé

**Príncipe Speirops** *Zosterops leucophaeus*—Many on Príncipe

## Sturnidae

**Splendid Starling** *Lamprotornis splendidus*—Many on Príncipe

**Príncipe Starling** *Lamprotornis ornatus*—A few on Príncipe

**Forest Chestnut-winged Starling** *Onychognathus fulgidus*—About 10 at Bom Sucesso (*fulgidus*)

## Turdidae

**Sao Tome Thrush** *Turdus olivaceofuscus*—Widespread on São Tomé

**Príncipe Thrush** *Turdus xanthorhynchus*—Brilliant views on Príncipe

## Nectariniidae

**Príncipe Sunbird** *Anabathmis hartlaubii*—Fairly common on Príncipe

**Newton's Sunbird** *Anabathmis newtonii*—Seen at Bom Sucesso, and elsewhere on São Tomé

**Giant Sunbird** *Dreptes thomensis*—One at Bom Sucesso was a nice surprise. Also seen at Monte Carmo

**Olive Sunbird** *Cyanomitra olivacea*—Good views on Príncipe (obscura)

## Ploceidae

**Príncipe Weaver** *Ploceus princeps*—Lots seen well on Príncipe

**Southern Masked Weaver** *Ploceus velatus*—  
Several at Bom Sucesso

**Giant Weaver** *Ploceus grandis*—Great views at  
Monte Carmo. Also a female at Bom Sucesso

**Sao Tome Weaver** *Ploceus sanctithomae*—Seen  
at Bom Sucesso, and elsewhere on São Tomé

#### Estrildidae

**Chestnut-breasted Nigrita** *Nigrita bicolor*—  
Heard on Príncipe (*brunnescens*)

**Blue Waxbill** *Uraeginthus angolensis*—Seen on  
São Tomé (introduced)

**Common Waxbill** *Estrilda [a.] astrild*—  
Common (introduced)

**Bronze Mannikin** *Spermestes cucullata*—  
Common (introduced)

#### Motacillidae

**Sao Tome Shorttail** *Motacilla bocagii*—Good  
views at Monte Carmo

#### Fringillidae

**Príncipe Seed eater** *Crithagra rufobrunnea*—  
Good views on São Tomé (*thomensis*) and  
Príncipe (*rufobrunnea*)

**Sao Tome Grosbeak** *Crithagra concolor*—One  
for Jonathan at Monte Carmo

**Yellow-fronted Canary** *Crithagra  
mozambica*—Heard on southern São Tomé







Sao Tome Paradise Flycatcher © Jonathan Newman. Dwarf Olive Ibis and Giant Weaver © Michael Mills







*Giant Sunbird © Jonathan Newman. Harlequin Quail © Michael Mills*



*Newton's Sunbird and Principe Malachite Kingfisher © Michael Mills*







*Principe Seedeater, Principe Sunbird and Principe Scops Owl © Michael Mills*







*Principe Speirops and Sao Tome Bronze-naped Pigeon © Michael Mills*



*Principe White-eye and Sao Tome Fiscal © Michael Mills*







*Sao Tome Green Pigeon and Brown Booby* © Michael Mills



*Sao Tome Olive Pigeon* © Michael Mills. *Sao Tome Oriole* © Jonathan Newman.







*Sao Tome Weeaver and Sao Tome Thrush* © Michael Mills



*Sao Tome White-eye and Sao Tome Scops Owl* © Jonathan Newman







Principe Thrush © Michael Mills



Black-capped Speirops © Michael Mills





*Sao Tome Spinetail and Sao Tomean Cape Verden Storm Petrel © Michael Mills*





