

JJ's Story

For every trip the Rutland Osprey team have undertaken to look for ospreys in The Gambia Junkun Jadama better know as JJ, has been our guide, friend and “fixer”. His story is not typical of a Gambian, but will give an idea of what life is like in this tiny West African country.

As we sat in the shade sipping cool drinks during the heat of an afternoon in Tendaba Bird Camp, JJ told me his story.

JJ was born in a small hut in the village of Tendaba, half a day's drive from Banjul the capitol of The Gambia. He went to school in the village until he was 14 years old. Education ceases for most children at the age of 14, but JJ was clever and his parents wanted him to have more education. He was therefore sent to a school near to Banjul. JJ had no family near to this school, so from the age of 14 until 17 he lived with another family (which he did not know). During that time JJ only saw his own family every few months when he returned to his village during the holidays.

It was during one of those holidays that JJ had an experience that started him thinking about his future life. Like all Gambian boys JJ loved football. One night he and his friends were invited by the



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village chief to go and watch a football match on the chief's new television. This was the only TV in the village and JJ had never seen a one before. He was so excited, not only about watching the game but by the whole idea of a television. That night JJ could not sleep, he sat on the village jetty by the river and wondered what he could do with his life, so that one day he could have his own house with a television.

Once his education was over at 17 years old JJ returned to his parent's home in Tendaba. One day he was working in a vegetable garden when he was approached by two people who worked for the Peace Corps. They were looking for someone to assist them who could speak both good English and the local language Mandinka. JJ agreed to do the job. He did this job from 1992 until 1996, during that time he was paid 300 Dalasi a month, that is the equivalent of about £5. From this money JJ had to buy all of his food, clothes and pay for somewhere to live.

The job was useful and during the 4 years he did it JJ learned about gardening and the local trees and how to grow them. In 1996 JJ was asked to go and work at a nature reserve, the people there wanted JJ to teach them how to grow trees. From them JJ learned to identify the huge number of birds and other wildlife that are found in The Gambia.

JJ saw people coming to the reserve to see the wildlife and realised that he could make a living selling his services as a bird guide. He was good at this job, reliable and trustworthy, people recommended him and that is how the Rutland Osprey team made contact with him.

Now JJ heads the Gambian side of the Rutland Gambian Osprey Foundation. He goes into schools talks to pupils about ospreys and takes pupils and their teachers out on bird watching trips.

He now has his own house near to Banjul, where he and his wife not only have their own family but have several other children from Tendaba housed there so that they can go to school.

Oh and by the way, JJ also has a television in his house.