

## Cameroon, Congo and Central African Republic – September 2010

*Report by Sjeff Öllers, this amended version dates from March 2016*

### Introduction

This was the first trip to central Africa for my partner and me. Seeing mammals and in particular birds proved to be hard work, but in the end we were rewarded with some incredible sightings: about 30 different individuals of the western lowland gorilla, a lot of forest elephants, an uncommon sighting of wild chimpanzees, a host of other beautiful primate species, red river hog, forest buffalo, brush-tailed porcupine, sitatunga and three pottos on a single night walk were some of the mammal highlights. Biggest mammal dip was bongo. The birding had many ups and down: not seeing bare-cheeked trogon, Sangha robin and rufous-sided broadbill was very disappointing, but we had excellent views of Congo serpent eagle, African finfoot and many hornbill species. Undoubtedly, the birding highlight of the tour was a trip into unexplored territory with Rod Cassidy. At a magical place in the rainforest with a cascading waterfall and several steep rock faces we found an unknown and active breeding site for red-headed picathartes with at least seven active nests. We had unforgettable views of these near-mythical forest birds.



*Young Lowland Gorilla*

### Travel arrangements

I more or less accidentally found a tour to Congo and Central African Republic offered by Steppes Travel. The tour schedule looked excellent with almost two weeks spent in the Dzanga-Sangha area and the adjoining Nouabalé-Ndoki national park. Although normally we don't like joining group tours, the interesting tour schedule convinced us to give it a try. The booking was arranged through Steppes Travel in the UK. All was organized very well and we had a hassle-free trip. [This section has been shortened because the information on the local tour operator mentioned in the original report appears no longer correct; you can contact me at: [sollers@outlook.com](mailto:sollers@outlook.com)].

For any serious mammal- or bird watching 10-12 days in the region would be the bare minimum. If costs are less of an issue, travelling on a tailor-made private trip is definitely the way to go. Organizing your own trip and/or driving yourself is not impossible, but would require a lot of advance preparation for (self-sufficient) expedition-type travel and spending quite some time sorting out formalities in advance and en route.



## Itinerary

Day 1, September 4:	Flight Paris – Yaoundé
Day 2, September 5:	Yaoundé
Day 3, September 6	Drive to Yokadouma
Day 4, September 7	Yokadouma – Libongo by car, pirogue transfer to Bomassa
Day 5, September 8	Transfer to Mondika camp (Nouabalé-Ndoki national park area)
Day 6, September 9	Mondika camp
Day 7, September 10	Mondika camp
Day 8, September 11	Transfer to Mbeli camp in Nouabalé-Ndoki national park
Day 9, September 12	Mbeli camp
Day 10, September 13	Mbeli camp
Day 11, September 14	Transfer to Bayanga/Sangha Lodge
Day 12, September 15	Dzanga Sangha national park – Dzanga bai
Day 13, September 16	Dzanga Sangha national park – Bai Hoku
Day 14, September 17	Excursions near Sangha Lodge
Day 15, September 18	Dzanga Sangha national park – Dzanga bai
Day 16, September 19	Bayanga to Yokadouma
Day 17, September 20	Yokadouma to Bertoua
Day 18, September 21	Bertoua to Yaoundé
Day 19, September 22	Yaoundé – Mfou national park
Day 20, September 23	Yaoundé – Night Flight to Europe
Day 21, September 24	Arrival Paris – train home

## Day-to-Day Account

### **Day 1, September 4: Flight Paris – Yaoundé**

On the day before our flight we had taken the TGV train from Aachen (Germany) to Paris. We arrived at Charles de Gaulle around 8 pm. Our hotel reservation mentioned a free shuttle bus service leaving from hall 2D, gate 9. When we arrived there, there was an announcement that the shuttle bus did no longer depart from that gate. The lady at the information desk sent us to gate 8, which is a taxi stand and no bus ever stops there. So back to the information desk: her ladyship was now irritated. Surely she would know better where the shuttle busses leave than we. Ok, but where then? She advised us to wait for one hour at gate 8 and come back if no bus had appeared. Really? After having followed several other signs for shuttle busses, which all ended up nowhere or even contradicted each other, we accepted the Kafkaesque quality of it all and walked back to gate 9 and decided to phone the hotel. Just when we approached gate 9 and Anja was trying to phone the hotel, we saw our desired shuttle bus race by at high speed with no intention to stop. An older French lady jumped in front of the bus some 150 meters in front of us and forced the driver to stop. She was not pleased; she (and a whole bunch of other people) had been waiting for over an hour at gate 9. We ran like crazy and just made it to the bus before it raced off again. The bus driver claimed that he was not allowed to stop there. Even at the hotel we never found out where you would actually have to catch the bus, which according to the hotel was still gate 9. While checking in at the hotel, the phone was ringing constantly with people at the airport calling that they could not find the shuttle bus. Vive la France! The night at the hotel was pleasantly straightforward though and next morning at the hotel the shuttle bus service departed on time.

The flight to Yaoundé departed one hour late and had a few unpleasant turbulence-induced sheer drops above Niger, but was otherwise fine. At Yaoundé airport your yellow fever certificate *is* checked! After picking up the luggage, we were met by a representative of the Merina hotel and brought to the hotel. Merina Hotel is a standard business hotel with a practical, but unexciting location in the city centre. The rooms are fine if noisy (at least ours) and the restaurant is overpriced with acceptable food at European prices.

### **Day 2, September 5: Yaoundé**

We decided to have a lie in and take a late breakfast. Anja then checked out the supermarket around the corner, while I read a bit in the bird and mammal guides and listened to some of the bird calls. A woodland kingfisher checking out the pool from the rooftop of the hotel was the most entertaining sighting of the day. Most of the travel companions on the tour had already arrived so we chatted a bit about previous trips. Around sunset the local representative, Jean-Pierre Somon of Central African Safaris, arrived to do a briefing on the tour and tomorrow's drive to Yokadouma. Our group consisted of eight people: Marjorie from the UK, Elena from Russia, Dave from the USA, Tim from the UK, Angela and Mike from the UK, and Anja and me. After a first group dinner most of us went to bed fairly early.

### **Day 3, September 6: Drive to Yokadouma**

After an early breakfast we tried to leave early, but the staff in the Merina hotel had made a mess of the bills (no surprises there), so we left with a half hour delay. In the parking lot in front of the hotel we met Ulla and Pedro, two volunteers working in Dzanga Sangha, who had just finished a small conservation project and holiday near Kribi. They would travel with us to Libongo on the border with the Central African Republic. It was really nice to talk to them and get some inside information about living and working as a researcher inside Dzanga-Ndoki national park. We travelled in three 4x4

vehicles, so everybody had lots of space to sit. The main highway from Yaoundé to the east is excellent almost all the way up to Bertoua, only the last bit is an unpaved, but still decent road. This stretch takes about 5 hours. We stopped in Bertoua for lunch and then continued on the unpaved road to Batouri and Yokadouma. The road just after Bertoua is very rutted and has quite a bit of potholes, but overall it wasn't too bad. The stretch from Batouri to Yokadouma seems to take forever, just an endless string of towns, villages, small settlements and roadside huts. Pleasant for an hour or two but after that it gets a bit boring. We made a few pee stops, which allowed me to do some quick roadside birding, but I mostly saw common species such as village weaver, speckled mousebird, pin-tailed whydah, grey-headed sparrow, common bulbul, bronze manikin, pied crow, etc. The whole drive from Yaoundé to Yokadouma took us about 13 hours. We were lucky though that the road was in good condition and none of the bridges had collapsed. We arrived at hotel Elephant in Yokadouma around 7.30-8 pm. After a late dinner we went straight to bed.

#### **Day 4, September 7: Yokadouma – Libongo by car, pirogue transfer to Bomassa**

In the morning I did some bird watching a bit in the hotel garden. Lesser striped swallow and common waxbill were the only new species seen. Common species such as bronze manikin, village weaver, speckled mousebird, and common bulbul are always around.

We continued further south. The villages were getting smaller and better forest was slowly appearing, but it was clear that even here the settlements were continuously expanding along the main road and logging tracks. We stopped at Goumela, which was nothing more than a crossroads with 4-5 huts a few years back (Dave had already travelled down this road to visit Lobeké national park five years ago). It now had expanded to a little village with some two dozens of houses and two small shops. From Goumela we headed east towards the border town of Libongo. The forest along the road between Goumela and Libongo is owned by a logging company and there are almost no settlements along this road. Here you will see the best roadside forest of the entire route between Yaoundé and the border town Libongo.

In Libongo we stopped for lunch while Jean Pierre went looking for the police chief to take care of the formalities. Unfortunately, the police chief was not present, so in the end Jean Pierre decided that we would deal with this on our way back. We drove down to the Sangha riverbank where a pirogue was waiting for us. The luggage was unloaded from the cars and loaded onto the pirogue. We said goodbye to our drivers and Ulla and Pedro, and mid-afternoon we set course to Bomassa, about five hours downriver. Things were getting a lot more exciting as soon as we boarded the pirogue. Lizard buzzard and palmtree vultures were seen at the landing in Libongo.

Soon after our departure from Libongo the first hornbills (piping and white-thighed) were seen flying across the Sangha River. A large pigeon (in flight) turned out to be an Afep pigeon. Later about ten black-casqued wattled hornbills slowly flapped over the river. Impressive sight. Late afternoon the first Hartlaub's duck and three African grey parrots were seen. After enjoying a nice sunset on the boat we continued our way in the dark for the final stretch to Bomassa. Some 45 minutes before reaching Bomassa we spotlighted a Pel's fishing owl. The bird was initially perched on a rock with his back towards us but then flew in a tree, allowing us to have superb views.

Around 8-8.30 pm we arrived at Bomassa, where we flushed an owl while being led to our rooms, but unfortunately I did not have my hands free to see what it was. I later played a few owls (Red-chested Owlet, Sjöstedt's Barred Owlet, and African Wood Owl) on my MP 3 player but got no response. After a late dinner we had a briefing on the next days: the group was going to be split in two groups of four. We and Mike and Angela were first going to Mondika and then to Mbeli. By now it was pretty late and I was too tired to do any spotlighting, so I crashed into bed.

## **Day 5, September 8: Transfer to Mondika camp (Nouabalé-Ndoki national park area)**

I was up at dawn and not quite awake and organized enough to be immediately confronted with a black-casqued wattled hornbill the second I stepped outside. The hornbill landed in an open spot only some 6-7 meters from the ground, but it took me too long to get the camera in action mode and I only got some crappy out of focus shots, but I had spectacular views with the bins. Next my attention was drawn to the beautiful red-headed malimbos. A bit later I heard something crashing around the canopy and quickly found moustached monkeys moving in the treetops, but views were not great due to poor light and dense foliage. African green pigeons were found feeding in a fruiting tree in the station grounds.

I checked out the secondary forest a bit further from the station and found a forest giant squirrel at fairly close range. When I walked back to the WCS station I saw Tim in the garden and we now found the moustached monkeys in trees that were more open. Pretty good views were had, but the monkeys were too far (and too shy) for decent pictures. Tim and I made a short excursion into the secondary forest, but it was difficult to see anything in the dense vegetation. I saw a squirrel for a few moments, which was probably green bush squirrel, but little else. All in all, a fun morning.

While walking back to the WCS station, we met a guy in a sparkling white shirt, spotless jeans, and nice trendy shoes. Perfect attire for any disco worldwide, but here.....He introduced himself and it turned out that he was going to be our "tourist guide" at Mondika. We had a friendly chat and then headed back to have breakfast. After breakfast I quickly packed my luggage because I thought we would leave in a few minutes, but it took another hour before a car and drivers were found to take us to Mondika/Mbeli. After breakfast it was very busy and noisy in the camp (construction work), so little was seen, but the swamp palm bulbuls, a beautiful male scarlet-chested sunbird and a couple of black bee-eaters kept me entertained.

Around 9 we drove to the drop off point for Mondika Camp, which took about 40-50 minutes. After unloading our luggage and meeting some of the trackers and porters of Mondika Camp, we started the 2.5-hour walk to Mondika Camp. It is an easy and pleasant walk through various types of beautiful rainforest. The hike involves a 20-minute crossing of a swampy area, but this was good fun.

We arrived at Mondika Camp around 12.30; after installing ourselves in our tents we had lunch. There was nothing planned for this afternoon, so I explored the area in and around the camp a bit. Most noticeable and spectacular was the large variety of beautifully coloured butterflies. Birding proved to be extremely difficult and slow. The trees in the camp are very high and the undergrowth is very dense. Directly next to the camp there is a small river that is flanked by a swampy area on both sides. A boardwalk crosses this area. From the boardwalk green malkoha, Cassin's spinetail and a flushed kingfisher that must have been shining blue were seen. Anja decided to take a break and I explored the path that starts from the kitchen area and runs parallel to the river/swamp. Many beautiful butterflies were seen again. There were birds around but I managed to see almost nothing in the poor light. Nevertheless, I saw the attractive red-bellied flycatcher and I flushed a Peter's duiker that seemed to be resting on the forest floor only 200 meters from camp.

Late afternoon Anja and I slowly walked on one of the research trails on the other side of the swamp boardwalk. Elephant activity was very evident here. Eventually we located a small bird flock, which gave us good views of white-bearded greenbul and yellow longbill. By far the most commonly seen and heard birds around camp were little grey greenbul and little greenbul. On the way back we crossed the boardwalk again and had superb views of banded prinia and white-browed forest flycatcher.

At dinner we had a long and interesting discussion with camp manager, Patrice Mongo, and Michael,



a researcher from the USA, about the gorillas and life in the camp. Spotlighting around the camp at night was fruitless. It was surprisingly cold and I even had to put on my fleece at night.

### **Day 6, September 9: Mondika camp**

When I got out of the tent I heard a Western black-headed oriole sing quite close to the tent. I half-heartedly imitated the fluty whistle, and much to my surprise the bird landed on a large branch out in the open allowing great views. After breakfast Angela and Mike were the first to join the trackers to look for gorillas. Anja and I stayed in the camp on standby. I birded a bit around the swamp and the camp but birding was again extremely slow. Not that many birds were calling and even less birds were seen. Still, close to the kitchen area I had smashing views of two yellow-footed flycatchers that were remarkably cooperative. At the forest edge in camp I got good views of three black bee-eaters. I then noticed two small, busy and rather colourful birds racing through the canopy. Luckily they were calling and they indeed turned out to be black-capped apalises. Nice sighting, but it was difficult to keep track of them with the scope.



*Mondika Camp and the friendly whip spider (aka tail-less whip scorpion) keeping the toilet free from scary insects*

After about 1.5 hour one of the trackers returned and now it was our turn to start walking. The gorillas were some 4 km from the camp. When we arrived, we first saw one of the females with her week-old baby. The juveniles and the male Kingo were feeding high up in the trees. We found another female resting some 6-7 meters from the ground. After enjoying the females for a while, Kingo suddenly descended with amazing speed and agility and then crashed through the vegetation walking past us a mere 3-4 meters from where we standing. After walking another ten meters he sat down and started feeding on fallen fruits. We repositioned ourselves and now watched Kingo, one of the females, and two of the juveniles for a long time. They were all only some 5-15 meters away from us. As expected the hour passed much quicker than we hoped and after a last quick look at the female with her week-old baby we walked back to camp.

After an early lunch I explored the track that leads back to the parking lot. The forest is beautiful, but also very dense. A variety of greenbuls was heard but few of them were seen. Red-bellied flycatcher was again seen well and turned out to be one of the most approachable birds in the forest. Since it was rainy season I expected that birds would be breeding or preparing to breed, but much to my surprise most birds were still concentrated in flocks. This resulted in classic rainforest birding with long periods of total silence and the occasional outburst of activity. Response to tape play of the birds was also a bit haphazard: a few responded very well, some responded rather erratically, but many didn't respond at all. Back in the camp I stumbled on a small bird flock with a variety of greenbuls including Ansonge's greenbul and West-African batis.

Around 3.30 pm I joined the "forest walk". Mike, Angela, Anja and I were led through the forest by a

very experienced Ba'aka tracker and the tourist guide that Tim and I had met in Bomassa. The Ba'aka tracker was a really nice guy and he told a lot of things about the forest. Whether the information was interesting (I am pretty sure it was), we will never really know, because the tracker would often talk for a few minutes in one of the local languages and the tourist guide would translate and recap the Ba'aka's words as: "These fruits are eaten by chimps, gorillas, and elephants." This translation was repeated for just about everything the tracker told us, but when your mind had already gone on standby, our interpreter would sometimes surprise us with subtle plot changes such as: "These fruits are eaten by chimps, gorillas, and elephants, but not monkeys." or "These fruits are eaten by chimps, gorillas, elephants, and humans." To get things a bit more interactive, some of us would sometimes ask some more open-ended questions. The question was translated to the Ba'aka tracker, then the Ba'aka explained something for several minutes, and our interpreter replied back: "Yes". WCS's idea to have a tourist guide on site in Mondika is an excellent idea, because apart from bird watching there is not much to do in the camp after returning from gorilla tracking. Mondika is of course principally a research camp and it is a great privilege to be able to interact with researchers in this way. Both the camp manager, Patrice, and the researchers, shared a lot of information and we had lengthy discussions with them, which was great, but they also have work to do, so it is obvious they can't guide tourists around on forest walks or other activities. But it was beyond me why WCS hired a city dweller from Brazzaville without any forest knowledge and just dropped him in a remote forest camp in northern Congo without any training in tourism. I am sure that he was a nice guy, but clearly in the wrong place here. WCS should really try to train a few local people or at least somebody with an interest or affinity for the rainforest and its wildlife. Many of the local trackers spoke French and some of them even spoke some English, so basic communication is less of a problem; these guys seemed to have an impressive knowledge about the forest and its wildlife, but they would just need to receive some training to get a feel for what is interesting for tourists.

In the evening we heard from the researchers that the gorillas were heading towards a swamp located some six kilometres from the camp. This could mean that we have to make a longer walk through much more difficult terrain.

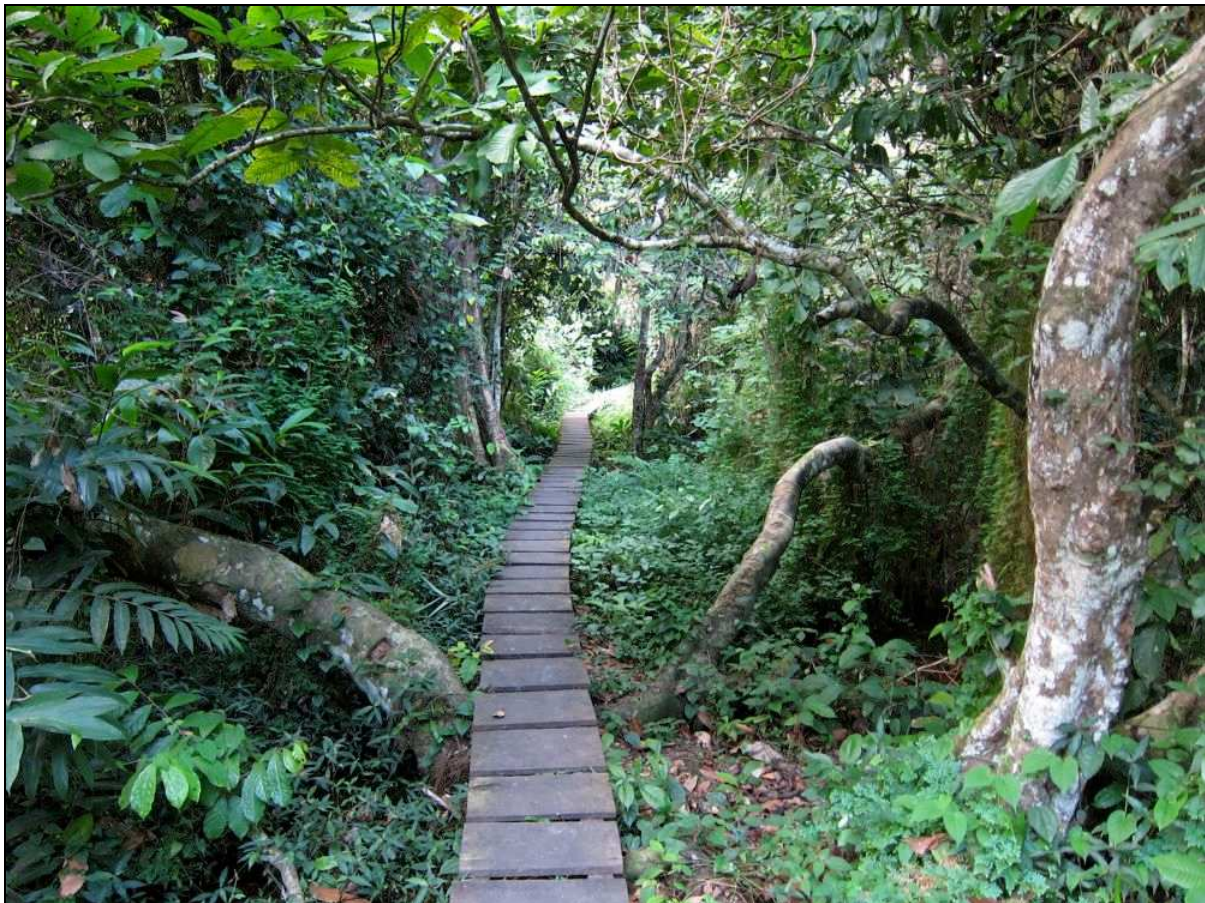
### **Day 7, September 10: Mondika camp**

Threatening dark clouds and very high humidity greet us when we wake up. After an early breakfast, it is now our turn to go out with the trackers. We walk at a fast pace and after some sixty minutes we locate the nests where the gorillas have been sleeping. Initially, there is some disagreement between the trackers where the gorillas have gone and after following some dead ends we eventually pick up their trail and then quickly find them. We are lucky: the gorillas are still heading in the direction of the swamp, but haven't yet quite made it to there. Apart from one juvenile and Kingo, all other gorillas are up in the trees. Kingo disappears for a long time in an area with very dense thickets, so we follow the activities of the female and juvenile gorillas in the trees. After a while they all descend and start moving again. We lose the gorillas for a few minutes, but after making a short detour to avoid very thick vegetation we meet up with the gorillas again and finally find most of the group feeding on the ground. At one point there are seven gorillas of all ages (including Kingo) in one view in front of us. Brilliant. After our hour with the gorillas we find Mike and Angela already waiting, and we head back to camp. Inevitably, the thick clouds and humidity lead to heavy rain late morning. When Mike and Angela return to camp they are completely soaked, but luckily it was still dry when they left the gorillas, so they had a good session with the gorillas as well. The rain continues for most of the day, but luckily it is mostly a drizzle with the occasional heavy shower.

In comparison to the mountain gorilla tracking in Bwindi, I found the gorilla tracking in Mondika a superior experience. You get a lot more (and more interesting) information from the researchers before and after the gorilla tracking, but also during the gorilla tracking explanations are given about what is going on. In Bwindi, in my experience, they just bring you to the gorillas, give you a minimum

of information and then at the end the guides and trackers ask/demand a handsome fee for less than fabulous guiding.

After lunch I again explored part of the trail that leads back to the parking lot/drop-off point. The forest was very quiet again, but just walking through this splendid forest was a joy. Red-bellied paradise flycatcher was very cooperative again. I heard grey-cheeked mangabeys calling and moving through the canopy but they were in an area with dense foliage where I could not see them well. I also heard a very odd and rather spectacular sound of a bird that stayed in very dense tangles. I only saw a dark silhouette of a bird about 15-16 cm in size moving in the tangles for a few seconds. I didn't recognize the sound and I couldn't find it on my MP3 player either, and this time I regretted not having equipment for recording the sound.



*Boardwalk Mondika*

In an area where the canopy was more broken I was lucky to stumble on a group of the pretty moustached monkeys. I saw about seven, but I think that a lot more were around. The monkeys were very shy and kept me at a distance of at least fifty metres. I tried to follow them for a bit along the trail, but they soon moved off to an area that would have required some serious off-trail walking. So I continued on the trail for another fifteen minutes, but it was getting rather late and a storm seemed to be building again, so I walked back to camp. On the edge of the camp I encountered a small bird flock that included a female chestnut wattle-eye, a possible icterine greenbul, red-bellied paradise flycatcher and a host of more common greenbuls. The thunderstorm did not quite develop and the sky actually cleared a bit, so a bit before dusk I took my torch and walked back into the forest. In the beginning visibility was quite good, but after some 20 minutes the sky quickly darkened again and almost turned black with thick rain-laden clouds. When I saw the clouds coming, I also heard a loud sound in the forest that seemed to come from the forest floor and not from monkeys above. I first



walked to a large tree for potential protection/hiding and then listened for a while; the sound of something crashing through the leaves and branches unfortunately seemed to come my way. Getting trapped in the forest around dusk with rain on its way seemed less appealing, so I turned around and walked back.

Before dinner Michael showed some of his own photos and videos including some very cool red river hog footage and gorillas feeding out in the open in the swamp. Around dinner we heard an elephant breaking some trees in the swamp not far from camp. This was exactly the area where I had been an hour earlier so I was glad that I had turned around. After dinner we watched the video of Mike Fay's Megatransect. I had already seen this documentary, but it was nice to see it again while I was actually there.

### **Day 8, September 11: Transfer to Mbeli camp in Nouabalé-Ndoki national park**

Around breakfast time I had superb views of a single grey-cheeked mangabey roosting midstorey on a bare branch at the edge of the swamp. Because we would be leaving camp directly after breakfast I had already packed my camera so I raced back to get the camera and warn the others. When we got back the mangabey unfortunately had moved up into the canopy, but we still got decent views. After breakfast we walked back to the drop-off point with the little car park. En route we heard a male gorilla calling very near and very loud. Unfortunately we didn't get to see him. In the same area we also saw a large group of grey-cheeked mangabeys. While I was still enjoying the mangabeys, Mike, Angela and one of the trackers had moved on a bit and saw red river hogs racing through the dense undergrowth. I only got poor views of them disappearing over a low ridge in the forest. After the crossing the swamp once more, we made it back on time to the drop-off point.

Only some 10 minutes after we had arrived at the drop-off point, the car with the other half of our group arrived. After a quick chat and luggage switch, we were on our way to Mbeli. From the drop-off point it is another 35-45 minute drive to the Ndoki Camp landing, where you board a pirogue to Mbeli. When we arrived at the Ndoki Camp jetty, the staff from Mbeli was already there and we quickly boarded the small pirogue. The 45 minute pirogue trip is absolutely fantastic. The first few hundred meters you paddle on the Ndoki River, but then you turn off on the much narrower Mbeli River. The river bed is only a few meters wide and all the way you have lush rainforest all around you only an arm length away. From the Mbeli landing you first walk for a few minutes on a boardwalk and then it is an easy 5-10 minute walk to the camp.

After lunch we headed straight to Mbeli bai. It is a very pleasant 30-40 minute walk to the bai. When we arrived at the bai we found five gorillas foraging on the edge of the bai. Elephants (mostly singles) regularly walk in and out of the bai. A forest buffalo appeared for a few minutes at the edge of the clearing and I did not even bother to get my camera, because I was convinced that we would see a lot more of them. It turned out to be the only buffalo sighting of the trip! Bird watching initially seemed disappointing. I was flabbergasted that during our stay at Mbeli we didn't see a single heron. African fish eagle, African jacana and chattering cisticola were the most commonly seen birds. In the sky gymnogenes and a variety of swifts and spinetails were regularly seen. Palmnut vulture and African pied hornbill were seen occasionally.

In Mbeli one sleeps in very nice stilted chalets with a balcony and good views over the surrounding forest. Every evening around dusk monkeys of various species would move through the canopy in the area in front of our balcony.

### **Day 9, September 12: Mbeli Bai**

Before breakfast I had a quick birding session around the restaurant. Grey-throated tit-flycatcher,

sooty flycatcher and green hylia were seen. After breakfast we walked to Mbeli bai but en route Gabi, our tracker, told us a bit more about the forest plants and trees, and how the Ba'aka and animals make use of the forest.

Around 9 we arrive at the bai. A male sitatunga and a young male gorilla are present, but then it remains rather quiet for a while. Anja and I walk to the toilet area where we see a female sitatunga at close range. After lunch things suddenly get busy, a family of gorillas emerges from the forest to feed in the bai and a big male elephant moves to the centre of the bai. We have a spectacular sighting of a great blue turaco flying past the mirador and landing at eye level only some 25 meters from the mirador. When I descend down the stairs of the mirador for a toilet stop I hear an animal crashing loudly through the dense vegetation next to the mirador. The others quickly join and after a few minutes of great anticipation we see a male gorilla feeding in the undergrowth. After foraging for a while in dense vegetation he finally emerges from the forest, sits down besides the boardwalk for a while and then crosses the boardwalk behind the mirador some 10-12 meters from where we are sitting. Unforgettable.

Meanwhile in the bai two elephants keep an eye on each other in order to occupy the best bathing locations in the bai. Things stay friendly though. There is regular primate activity on the edge of the bai. Gorillas are sometimes seen climbing through the trees. Other species seen in the afternoon are putty nosed monkeys and black-and-white colobus monkeys. Another walk along the boardwalk and a quick exploration of the forest around the toilet turns up a dusky crested flycatcher.



*Great Blue Turaco*

Today was even hotter and more humid than yesterday, and our way back to the camp a thunderstorm starts building. Around 6 pm we get the full load of a heavy thunderstorm with

lightning striking not far from our camp but luckily it moves on fairly quickly, but it rains all evening and part of the night.

### **Day 10, September 13: Mbeli Bai**

After last night's rain a thick mist hangs over the camp around dawn, so initially it is difficult to see any colour on the birds moving around. From our chalet I manage to see a group of eight great blue turacos fly off a fruiting tree and land on the trees above the restaurant. Apart from the turacos nothing of note was seen.

When we arrive at Mbeli bai we find a male and female sitatunga in the bai. A bit later an elephant appears, but otherwise it remains very quiet on the mammal front. Birding brings a few surprises: apart from the common olive-bellied sunbird, both green-headed and western olive sunbird turn up right next to the mirador. Even better is a male black-bellied seedcracker seen some eight meters away almost at eye level. Unfortunately the bird flies away quite quickly, but I manage to follow it across the bai where it perches nicely on a branch. Distant but clear views are had with the scope. Other birds seen are a distant crowned eagle above the far end of the bai and a black crane. White-spotted flufftail is heard, but does not come into view. With Jean Pierre I discuss the option of me leaving earlier and doing some birding back to camp after lunch in case the mammal activity stays moderate.



*Sitatunga and forest elephant at Mbeli Bai*

Because not that much is happening at the bai, Anja and I walk several times to the toilet area to check out the activity there. We see the female sitatunga that was in the bai earlier and finally get good views of red-cheeked rope squirrel. I decide to wait a bit longer and see if the mammal activity picks up, but just when I am about to leave, a single De Brazza monkey appears only some fifteen meters from the mirador while at the same time at the forest edge a gorilla emerges from the forest. Minutes later a group of eight black-and-white colobus monkeys appears on the other side of the bai



and a bit later six forest elephants move along the edge of the bai. After this burst of activity things get quiet again so I decide to walk back to camp slowly.



*Red-cheeked Rope Squirrel (yes, the leaf is annoying)*

*Adult female and juvenile gorilla*

Around 1.30-2 pm I leave the bai and walk back through the forest that surprisingly is alive with birds. First I see two white-thighed hornbills feeding on fruits. A bit further I turn around a blind corner where I have excellent views a couple of attractive forest francolins scurrying away only some 10 meters away from me in area with almost no undergrowth. About halfway down the trail in an open area with a few large gaps in the canopy but still with several very large trees, I get lucky with a massive bird wave passing through; initially the birds seem to move only through the canopy, but eventually birds pass at all levels. There are just too many to keep track of, so I focus on the most visible ones. In a large fruiting tree I find black dwarf hornbill, yellow-throated cuckoo, green malkoha and the silhouette of what must have been a dusky long-tailed cuckoo. At the same spot I also see a male blue-billed malimbe, two male chestnut wattle-eyes and a variety of greenbuls. In a different tree a bit further on I have pretty good scope views of a black cuckoo. Both long-tailed cuckoos are calling constantly, but it is amazing how difficult it is to locate their calls. I spent almost two hours on this 50-metre stretch in the forest, which provided the most rewarding birding of the trip in terms of variety. When I am packing up my gear to leave this wonderful spot, I hear that people are coming, but they can't see me because I am behind a blind corner. Gabi and his colleague tracker immediately grab their machete when they turn around the blind corner and hear the noise of me packing my backpack. Genuinely surprised and worried he asks me if I am OK. After explaining to him that the others are fine and at the bai, and that I am just bird watching and will be walking back to camp, he smiles and walks on.

After a short break at the camp I walked to the swamp boardwalk towards the boat landing. In the swamp itself it was very quiet, so I returned to the forest near the camp. Again a lot of movement in the dark understorey, but it was very difficult to lock onto the birds even when using tape playback. However, I did see chestnut-breasted nigrita, red-tailed bristlebill, and the ever-present little grey greenbul and little greenbul. The adrenaline starts rushing when I when I hear gorillas calling very loud and not that far from the trail. While I can hear and follow their movements, I unfortunately can't see them in the dense undergrowth.

In the evening we had dinner and a very interesting chat with the two researchers working in Mbeli bai. I was surprised to hear that that one of them had not yet seen bongos at all despite having been at the bai nearly daily for a year; the other researcher who had been there for two years had seen



them only twice (back at home I found a scientific paper that confirmed that bongos are rarely seen at Mbeli bai).

In the evening a message from Mondika reaches Jean Pierre that the other group in Mondika had not seen the gorillas today and that they might try again tomorrow morning, but the information Jean Pierre had received was a bit incoherent.

#### **Day 11, September 14: Transfer to Bayanga/Sangha Lodge**

Breakfast was late today, so I decided to get up around dawn and walk to the swamp boardwalk again. In the forest it was still rather dark, but several greenbul species were already active. Close to where the boardwalk starts, there is a clearing in the forest where I found a smallish bird flock with some nice species. Best of all was a stunning female western bluebill. Again I ran into Gabi, but now he smilingly said: "you really like watching those birds". Both green and great blue turacos were heard calling nearby, but tape play could not entice them to show themselves. After a pleasant birding session I walked back to have breakfast. We left Mbeli around 8 am and were paddled back to Ndoki Camp jetty, where the car was waiting for us to drive us back to Bomassa. At Bomassa it initially still was not quite clear when or if the other half of the group would return. So Anja and I walked around a bit. On the road towards Bomassa village we saw a group of moustached monkeys and a single Guereza colobus monkey. Around the WCS station we had excellent views of blue-billed malimbe and Cassin's malimbe, but a black-casqued wattled hornbill was less cooperative.

After an hour we checked with Jean Pierre and got to hear the good news that the other half of the group is on its way to Bomassa. While waiting for the others to arrive, I manage to see three De Brazza monkeys at the edge of the forest of the WCS station. A couple of pale-fronted nigratas and a female green-backed woodpecker are other nice additions. Around noon the Mondika troupe arrives and Jean Pierre urges everybody to get packed so that we can leave as soon as possible. Around 1 pm we finally all board the pirogue for the long but great upstream ride to Bayanga.

Quickly after leaving Bomassa we see several Cassin's flycatchers and a few white-throated blue swallows. At some point I suddenly see a bright red bill peak out of the water. It turns out to be a African finfoot!!



*African finfoot*

Unfortunately, the bird emerges from the water sideways from the boat and lets itself float quickly downstream and few seconds later it dives under water. When the finfoot surfaces again, it is much further away from us. Only lousy and distant pictures could be made.

While I am still on a high from the finfoot sighting, we notice some movement on the riverbank closest to us, and just when I put my bins on it, Jean Pierre calls “chimp” and indeed for a few seconds I am eye to eye with a wild chimp. I grab the camera and just click away at high speed hoping that I can get some footage. While taking the photos I notice that the chimp flees away quickly, but there is a lot of movement in the trees and it is difficult to make out what is moving through the dense foliage, even more so when we locate a few putty nosed monkeys feeding in the same area where we first had seen the chimp. After about 15-20 minutes we give up, because the chimps seem to have moved much deeper into the forest, and only the putty nosed monkeys stay along the river’s edge. (Back at home when I check the photos, it indeed turns out that more chimps were present: the face of a baby chimp and adult chimp and what looks like the arms of a third chimp are visible.)



*Record shot of the chimp baby and mother*

*Putty-nosed Monkey*

Around 5 pm we reach Libongo, but again the police chief is not around, so after a short stop we move on towards Bayanga. Luckily the immigration officials in Lidjombo in the C.A.R. let us continue quickly so after a short customs stop we start our last four hour stretch to Bayanga when it is already getting dark. For a few hours we ride in pitch black on the Sangha River, which is nothing less than spectacular. Jean Pierre and I do some spotlighting. About halfway I see fairly bright eye-shine in the trees with a vague outline of a medium-sized mammal, but the boat is moving too fast and I lose the eye-shine before I can get my bins on it.

Around 10 pm we finally reach Sangha Lodge and are greeted by Rod Cassidy and his staff. All of us are very tired, but the lovely three-course meal is nevertheless much appreciated. After dinner we all crash into our beds.

#### **Day 12, September 15: Dzanga Sangha national park – Dzanga Bai**

Because of the late arrival yesterday we departed to Dzanga Bai rather late today (8 am). So I decided to do some bird watching along the entrance road, which proved to be quite entertaining. I finally got good views of the beautiful blue-headed wood dove. This species was heard constantly in the forest at all sites, but I had not yet managed to see one. In the end I saw three different individuals feeding



on the road that morning. Another species finally seen well was spotted greenbul.

The drive to Dzanga Bai takes about one hour. On the way in we saw plumed guineafowl and white-crested hornbill. At the parking lot we were informed that there was an aggressive elephant around, so an armed guide had to join us. From the parking lot it is a 30-minute walk to the bai, but I found the forest walk to the bai a bit boring (definitely not as good as the Mbeli Bai or Bai Hoku area). At the beginning there is an excellent open area where you have to wade some water; this area seemed excellent for bird watching, but the guides were always a bit hysterical and tried to lead you out of there as quickly as possible because elephants like to pass through that area as well. When we arrived at the mirador, there were a few sitatungas in the bai and about twenty elephants, but their number built up throughout the day. The wide variety of interactions between all the elephants in the bai was interesting to watch. At some point two elephants bull in musht got engaged in a full-blown fight. Impressive and scary at the same time.



*Fight Club*

Mid-afternoon the heat and humidity had built up to such an extent that a thunderstorm was inevitable. First, some very heavy showers drove a few elephants back in the forest, but the sound of thunder did make most of them panic and stampede back into the forest. Quite funny. I had a little hope that the weather change and the disappearance of the elephants would entice some other mammals to come to the bai, but apart from a few female sitatungas that were still hanging around nothing happened. In the bai only a few bird species were seen: hamerkop, little egret, gymnogene, Forbes's plover and Hartlaub's duck. I had expected a bit more action along the forest edge, but it remained surprisingly quiet. Best birds along the forest edge were black bee-eater, red-eyed puffback and African grey parrot. Just when the light was getting really interesting for photography, we were told to pack and leave. Sigh. Because of the rather disappointing sightings at the bai today, we agreed that it would be better to combine both gorilla and mangabey tracking at Bai Hoku the next day, and have an optional full day left for a Dzanga Bai visit on September 18.

Back at the lodge I was eager to do a night walk, but the rain was too heavy so spotlighting had to be cancelled.

### **Day 13, September 16: Dzanga Sangha national park – Bai Hoku**

When I woke up in the morning and got out to do some birding I found Rod outside and was told that both Mike and Angela's and his chalet had been raided by ants. The ants were moving house and nothing stopped them on their way to a new nesting place. Unfortunately their travelling route went straight through the camp and raiding parties of the ants had "conquered" both Rod's and Mike and Angela's chalets and the kitchen. Mike and Angela woke up around 1 am and initially felt some itching, but when they turned on the light they found the bed and mosquito net completely covered in ants. The potentially redeeming escape to the shower was cut short when they found even more ants there, the showerhead being completely black with ants. There was no other option than just get out of the chalet and sit the raid out in the restaurant all night.

After breakfast we packed our daypacks and got into the cars to go to Bai Hoku. It is a 2-3 hour drive to Bai Hoku. The road is in appalling condition in several places. The car flipping on its side is a real possibility here as is being stranded for the night when a large tree falls on the road. The forest is spectacular though. We were stopped twice by a tree on the road (a small one and a medium-sized one, which cost us some 40-50 minutes extra travelling time). While the trackers and drivers were cutting and clearing the trees we did some bird- and mammal watching. Bird watching was fairly poor, but there was a lot of primate activity. Along a stretch of road I saw within 300 meters groups of grey-cheeked mangabeys, putty-nosed monkeys and moustached monkeys. Bare-cheeked trogon, one of my target birds, was annoyingly unresponsive again.

Around 10 am we arrived at Bai Hoku. When we arrived we were told that they had lost track of the mangabeys, so mangabey tracking was not possible. Well, either that or our unexpected request to have mangabey tracking now and not two days later proved too much for the park staff to arrange on the spot. The birding around the parking lot was excellent. The trees are very high, but the forest is quite open. A medium-sized flock was moving through just when we arrived. Among others I saw the following new species a male crested malimbe, shining drongo, least honeyguide, and a possible Willcock's honeyguide.

After a briefing by Jean-Pierre, Tim, Elena, Dave and Marjorie were sent out first with the Ba'aka to track down the gorillas. The two of us and Mike and Angela made a walk around Bai Hoku. We had only walked a few hundred meters down to the edge of the bai, when we saw a group of red river hogs racing along the (very dense) forest edge only some 40-50 meters away. I saw one hog quite well when it had to cross a break in the forest vegetation. As so often the Ba'aka tracker raced at high speed through the forest, but only a few hundred meters further on there was a lot of monkey activity so I asked the tracker to slow down and have a look for them. He brought us amazingly quickly to a little clearing where a large tree had fallen down. Here we had excellent views of a large troupe of grey-cheeked mangabeys, but I also found two crowned monkeys. Very beautiful monkeys. We continued and kept circling the bai where four elephants were feeding. A bit further on we crossed the muddy and swampy bai and a small river to explore another area of the bai. The scenery was beautiful, but there were only two hadada ibises feeding in that section of the bai. Unfortunately, we had to turn around again and walk back to Bai Hoku research camp. I could have spent all day in that area. It looked like anything could turn up in the bai or adjacent forest.

Back at the research camp we were told that we had to continue directly with the trackers to see the gorillas. After fuelling ourselves quickly with a few cookies and energy bars we went back into the forest. After about an hour we reached the spot where the gorillas were. It was interesting to see how different the approach to gorilla habituation here is in comparison to Mondika. In Mondika all



the group members have been habituated, so any of them can be approached very closely. In Bai Hoku only the silverback is fully habituated and the rest of the group is semihabituated. The other group members usually keep a larger distance and are more inclined to walk away from you than in Mondika. It depends on your personal preferences what is a better or more interesting gorilla tracking experience, but I preferred Mondika, but some may feel that Bai Hoku gives you more the feeling of encountering wild gorillas. Still, you will get very close views of a gorilla family group at both sites and at both sites you will have excellent opportunities to take pictures or record the gorillas on video.

When we walked back, it was only mid-afternoon, but some of the group already seemed bored, so unfortunately we left this spectacular area far too early. The drive back held no surprises and we were back at the lodge around 5 pm.

It was dry this evening and Rod, Tim, and I agreed to go for a night walk. We had barely entered the forest when we located our first potto!! The animal was fairly high up but we had good views. I would have been completely happy with this sighting, but on a very short side-trail where you overlook an area that steeply drops down to the river we found another potto but now at eye level and only some 10-15 meters away. Superb and long views were had of this animal. The distance was unfortunately a little too far to catch it with the camera's flash. In the same area Rod pointed out a calling Thomas's galago, but it called from a very dense area. We continued slowly and again did not get far. On a large pale-barked tree we found a Beecroft's anomalure!! At one point I could see the head and a major part of the body, but most of the time the animal hid at the back side of the tree. We waited for a while, but the animal would not come into view. Not perfect, but not bad either. A bit further on we found yet another potto, but the rest of the walk no new mammals were seen (but I guess it doesn't get much better than this on rainforest night walks). A nice finale and big surprise was a sleeping blackcap illadopsis along the trail.



*Sangha Lodge*

#### **Day 14, September 17: Excursions near Sangha Lodge**

Before breakfast I walked part of the entrance road with excellent views of Fraser's flycatcher, white-bearded greenbul, red-bellied paradise flycatcher, and Western black-headed oriole.

Today the others of the group joined the Ba'aka on a net hunting trip. The hunt was successful with one blue duiker caught. Rod, tracker Vincent, and Anja and I went upriver to a place where Rod had found two red-headed picathartes nests in a rocky area. The prospect of seeing the picathartes was just too tempting not to try. From the place where we landed it was just a short walk to the rocky overhang, but the nests were not attended and Rod said that the nest had been in better condition when he visited last month. The nests seemed inactive now. Very disappointing. We had a look with the torch in the darker areas of the overhang where bats were roosting. At the edge of the rock face there was a little pool, where we saw picathartes' footprints. We decided to sit down and wait for a while at the site, but absolutely nothing was happening. We discussed for a moment what to do: either come back later and be prepared for a potentially very long wait or just explore the surrounding area a bit more. We quickly agreed that the latter option was more interesting. Rod had already explored some parts in this area, so this time we headed in a direction that Rod had not visited yet. We walked for some 15-20 minutes before we heard the sound of water further ahead. We walked towards the area where the sound was coming from and out of the blue we were standing in front of a steep rock face with a beautiful cascading three-tier waterfall.

We skirted along a rocky area on the left side of the waterfall and climbed up towards the top of the waterfall. We explored the first cliff edge, but nothing of note was seen or heard. We climbed a bit higher and I saw Rod head off along a narrow cliff face in a very idyllic rainforest setting. Vincent followed Rod. Anja and I were lagging behind a bit because I wanted to photograph some very cool large mushrooms. When I returned from taking the mushroom pictures, Vincent made a gesture with his hand, which I completely misinterpreted. I thought he meant we would be leaving in a second (but what he actually meant was that we should come over to where Rod was). Because I expected that we would move on soon, I put down my camera and climbed a bit higher to make a pee stop. While this was going on, Rod was already in picathartes nirvana. From the cliff ledge one could look down from the top of the falls to one of the lower lying rocky platforms. From there Rod saw one picathartes fly in and out several times and was wondering what took us so long. When I returned from my pee stop, I now clearly saw that Vincent had a very restless look in his eyes and urged me to walk down where he was, so I headed down straight away to where Rod was. Because Anja is scared of heights, I told her to wait a second to let me check out what Rod was seeing. When I was walking along the cliff edge and looked downstairs I couldn't believe my eyes: a picathartes came hopping up the rock completely unconcerned. When I arrived at the spot where Rod sat, I had short but full bin views of the bird hopping on the rocks before disappearing out of view. When I sat down, I could only marvel at the beauty of the place. A bit later I saw another bird fly in and disappear in the same direction where the other bird had walked to. Rod then walked back to Anja to tell her what we were looking at, which convinced her to come over and look. A bit later Anja got to see one of the birds as well. We waited for a while, but it seemed that things had slowed down after the buzz of activity that Rod had witnessed. Very excited we left this magical spot. We decided to scale the top of the waterfall and then descend the other way, because the birds kept flying in and out of the same area on the other side. As Rod expected we found a large overhanging rock face on the other side of the waterfall. When we arrived at the base of the rock face, a picathartes flew from the rock face and landed on the rocks right in front of Rod and then disappeared into the forest. Amazing. We had a look at the nests; there were seven nests and several were clearly active: one nest had two eggs and Rod found two chicks in another one. Another three nests seemed active as well.

At the other end of the rock overhang (on the waterfall side) there was a dark corner with large rocks, which provided a perfect spot to hide and wait. On the way down to this spot Anja spotted in a flash something that looked like a large rat. But just when we were about to install ourselves in the dark corner of the overhang, I turned around and saw a brush-tailed porcupine walking towards me. The animal was only about 2.5 meters away from me, but when we made eye contact, the porcupine took a 90-degree turn and amazingly raced in between Vincent and Anja. Luckily, Vincent could not see the porcupine approaching from where he was standing because he immediately grabbed the

machete when he heard our excited talking (to me it seemed like he was going to chop the porcupine to pieces when he saw it). Luckily the porcupine quickly disappeared between the rocks into the forest. Our adrenaline levels had not really gone down yet from this spectacle when suddenly two picathartes appeared from the forest. One flew up to the overhang and sat on the nest. The other bird stood guard for minutes on a rock allowing superb and unforgettable views. Incredibly, we had more than enough time to take pictures and get some video footage.



*Red-headed Picathartes and the rock overhang where the birds breed.*

Elated we went back to the lodge around 1 pm, just in time for lunch. During the interesting lunch we met Louis Sarno, who has been living with Bayaka pygmies since the late 1980s. Initially he only visited them to learn more about their music, but in the end he liked it so much that he decided to live in a Bayaka community.

For the afternoon activities the group split up again: several went for a visit to a Bayaka village, others went on a sunset boat trip and Anja and I stayed at the lodge to walk the trails around the lodge. First we walked a trail (which I will call Riverside trail) that runs along a small river with swampy areas deeper into the forest away from the Sangha River. There is another trail that runs more or less parallel to the Sangha River, which I will refer to as the Sangha trail. There also is a very short trail that leads to a clearing and there is the access road to the lodge, which had good birding (particularly in the morning) and some mammals (mostly squirrels). The access road is probably great for spotlighting, but my efforts to go spotlighting there were all thwarted by rain or thunderstorms.

On the Riverside trail initially very little was seen and heard: I played rufous-sided broadbill and bare-cheeked trogon regularly but got no response at all. On our way back we ran into a pretty good bird flock that included blue-billed and red-crowned malimbe, red-eyed puffback, golden greenbul (pink bill clearly seen), speckled tinkerbird, a female Gabon woodpecker and white-thighed hornbill. Then we walked the Sangha trail, which was very quiet. In the late afternoon we walked along the access road, but this was very quiet too, but we did see African pied hornbill feeding on some fruits. On our walk back, very close the lodge, I suddenly see a largish raptor perched on the top of a dead tree. I can't believe my eyes, it is a Congo serpent eagle. Rod had told me that they had been around regularly recently, but still....this bird was only some 30 meters away giving clear unrestricted views. Unfortunately, he did not take kindly to me slowly lifting the camera. The bird only flew a short distance but out of view. I played the tape but the bird did not respond at all. This sighting was a fitting end to a superb day, which we celebrated with several G&T's around sunset.

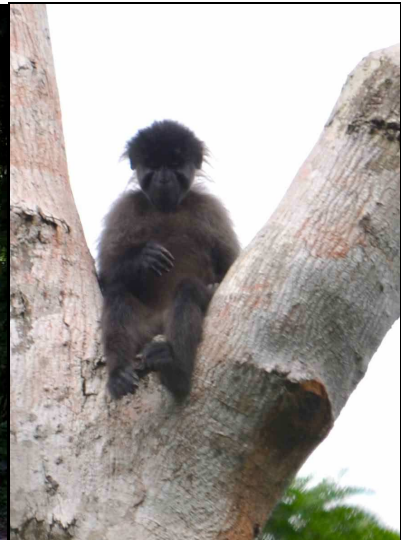
Just when I asked at dinner that night who might be interested in a night walk, the first rain drops started falling and unsurprisingly nobody was interested. For one hour or so, there was steady rain, but around 9 pm it seemed dry enough to go out. The weather still didn't look very stable and Rod decided to give the night walk a miss. The wind was pretty strong around the lodge, but inside the



forest it was initially fairly calm. I had walked about ten meters into the forest when a nightjar flew up from a concealed place along the edge of the trail. The bird caught me by surprise and flew in a rather odd fashion with very slow hovering, almost slow-motion-like wing beats. For a second I wondered whether it might be an owl that had caught something on the ground, but the bird landed on a bare branch almost at eye level and it was clearly a nightjar, but unfortunately I only had a sideways rear view through the bins. When the bird seemed to turn to look my way, it flew off directly, and again it showed a very slow hovering flight. It seemed like it was looking for a safe hiding place. Quite quickly it went down to the ground (or very low just above the ground) in an area where the vegetation was quite low. I tried to make my way to the spot, but even one meter in I was getting stuck in endless spiny vines, so I gave up. I spotlighted the place where I thought the bird had landed but could not see any eye-shine. The very dense secondary undergrowth proved impenetrable from all sides. Frustrating. I walked on and a bit further on I heard a familiar shrill screech. This sounded like the galago that Rod had pointed out yesterday evening. I stopped and rather quickly I found strong eye-shine in a tree, at about 20 meters from the ground. I could see little detail on the face/head because of the strong eye-shine, but the rather big ears were evident and when the animal started moving I could see a long tail. It stopped for a second to look my way and then raced down rather quickly and agile (with a few very short stops) through an area of dense foliage. I could follow the eye-shine that kept appearing and disappearing in the foliage for a while but eventually I lost it. I am sure that what I saw a galago, but the views were not good enough to tell whether it was Demidoff's or Thomas's. I walked deeper into the forest but the weather was now deteriorating rapidly. The wind was getting stronger and stronger and it had started to rain lightly again. The forest eventually became completely quiet and the risk of branches breaking off made me turn around.



*Sangha Lodge Garden*



*Grey-cheeked Mangabey*

### **Day 15, September 18: Dzanga Sangha national park – Dzanga bai**

With some anticipation Dave, Marjorie, Elena, Mike, Angela and me went back to Dzanga bai. Surely we would see more than “just” frolicking and fighting elephants today. When we arrived, the park staff surrounded our young local guide, and after some 10-15 minutes of fruitless discussions, the predictable was asked. The rangers wanted a “protection fee”, because the alleged very dangerous elephant was still around. 500 CFA p.p. would seem more than enough, but when it was clear that we were in a cul-de-sac with unpleased looking park officials and an uncomfortable looking local guide, I said 1000 CFA p.p. and nothing more because I was fed up with standing around in the parking lot. After wasting a valuable 20-30 minutes with this nonsense we finally set off (Rod told us later that this was outrageous, these guys are being paid very good salaries by C.A.R. standards. Try to refuse to pay or at least bargain harder next time). When we arrived at the bai, there were only a



few elephants around. After a while some female situngas appeared. Then hour after hour followed of watching elephants doing not so interesting things. During the first visit a few days back there was at least constant action, fighting, playing, stampeding herds, etc. The most exciting thing that happened all day today was a male sitatunga walking across bai. He was particularly interested in one of the females but in the end she turned him down. Birding was a bit more exciting than the first time. There was quite a frenzy of sunbirds around the mirador: western olive, Johanna's, superb and little green sunbird were all seen well. At the back of the mirador I had excellent views of rufous-crowned eremomela. Forbes's plover and Hartlaub's duck were present in good numbers again. On the way out we had the best view yet of plumed guineafowl on the road.



Judging from all the trip reports I could find on Dzanga Bai we had two rather poor days at the bai. Also from talking to the guides it seems that with two visits to Dzanga Bai at least forest buffaloes should normally be seen. Red river hogs seem to be seen in about one out of four visits. Giant forest hog and bongo are seen infrequently, apparently about 5-10% (depending on who you ask) of the visits produces one of those two species. Otters are only seen sporadically and cats are almost never seen, but leopards have been seen on the access road. In contrast to Mbeli Bai I didn't see any monkeys around Dzanga Bai.

Tim and Anja had a more exciting day and went on a boat ride with Rod to visit a waterfall some 20 minutes upriver. When they landed, they ran into an active poacher camp with several freshly poached blue duikers. Most of the poachers had fled into the forest but one guy was still in the camp.

They made the short hike to the waterfall and then explored the area around the waterfall, where they ended up in a swamp forest area. Rod told me that they recorded Sjoestedt's greenbul that morning. After spending some time here, they returned to the picathartes spot we discovered yesterday and now also Tim got splendid views of the bird. In the afternoon Tim and Anja made an

afternoon boat ride and saw Cassin's hawk eagle and blue-throated roller among others. I was eager to do a last night walk but a thunderstorm that started around dinner spoiled that plan.



### **Day 16, September 19: Bayanga to Yokadouma**

Unfortunately, this was our last morning in the Dzanga Sangha area. I did a last attempt to actually see Guinea turaco, but again I only heard them. After breakfast we hang out a bit in front of the restaurant while the pirogue was being loaded. Rod found a raptor on a bare tree on the other side of the river. Congo serpent eagle!! The bird just kept sitting there so in the end I dug up my scope and had wonderful views. Scanning the canopy across the river I also saw African green pigeon and African grey parrot. When I had to retreat for a sanitary stop I heard Rod shout bat hawk. Luckily the bird flew downriver, so our toilet with superb views over the Sangha River ensured that I had to miss nothing of the bat hawk flapping downriver. Best toilet tick so far. Around 8 am the inevitable moment to leave the lovely Sangha lodge had come. We said goodbye to Rod and his staff and boarded the pirogue for the last time. The pirogue ride was quieter than I hoped. Only one putty nosed monkey was seen and a variety of common birds including the ever-present, but beautiful white-throated blue swallows and several Cassin's flycatchers.

We had to make a short stop in Lidjombo for immigration formalities, but sooner than I hoped the boat ride was over and we got off board again in Libongo in Cameroon. There were still some unfinished immigration issues to be dealt with, so we stopped for a lunch break in the town. The drive back to Yokadouma initially seemed to go rather smooth and painless, but in the afternoon we had to wait for a while at a bridge that was being repaired. En route we saw wrecks of logging trucks that had been involved in some terrible road accidents over the last two weeks, because those hadn't been there two weeks earlier. Some accidents almost inevitably must have been lethal. Just after dark our car suddenly gave up. Eventually it turned out that petrol had been stolen from the car in Libongo and the car had just run out of gas. Jean-Pierre and the driver remained behind to get the car going again, and Anja and I joined Elena and Dave in the second car. Around 8-8.30 pm we were back at hotel l'Elephant in Yokadouma. After visiting a place like Sangha lodge, this could only disappoint. All the things that didn't work two weeks ago still didn't work, but the few things that had been working were at least still working.

After dropping our bags in the room we had dinner. The dinner was not really warm anymore and my stomach was protesting a little bit when I was eating so I stopped eating at some point. Jean-Pierre and the driver arrived some 1.5 hours after us in Yokadouma, but we had all gone to bed by then.

### **Day 17, September 20: Yokadouma to Bertoua**

When I got up I felt rather numb and very tired, which I thought was just the usual end-of-trip tiredness. In the morning we had some spare time so we spread out over Yokadouma. Anja and I

initially walked away from the city centre to the outskirts of town, where we ended up at a local meat market. Most meat seemed to come from “regular” domesticated animals, but there were definitely some duikers on display as well. People selling meat weren’t unfriendly, but from the stares it was clear that we were out of place, so we turned around quickly. After wandering through the outskirts of town for a while, we had a quick look at the town centre, which is practically free of sights and charm, before walking back to the hotel. Around 9 we all returned to the hotel and packed up and left.

Our driver seemed to have a complete off-day today. First he almost hit two people on a motorcycle on a road that was wide enough for smarter solutions. Bizarre. The near-accident with the motorcycle happened in front of a police roadblock, so some discussion and disciplinary talk followed, but in the end all was fine. After having to drive in the slipstream of a logging truck for a while, he seemed a bit frustrated and overtook the truck uphill and indeed literally two seconds after overtaking the truck, a large logging truck came thundering down on the other side of the road. No way a frontal collision could have been avoided there. Our driver then got trapped in the dust cloud of another logging truck, and when he finally managed to overtake the truck in an odd manoeuvre, he yet again managed to do this right in front of a police checkpoint, talking didn’t help anymore and palms had to be greased. We stopped for lunch in Batouri before we continued on the last stretch to Bertoua. Some 45 minutes before reaching Bertoua we had a roadside stop. This was pretty entertaining with tawny-flanked prinia, red black-winged bishop and yellow-mantled widowbird, the last two in full breeding plumage. The last 45 minutes to Bertoua my bowels started to feel decidedly volcanic, which by now I was sure resulted from last night’s dinner at hotel l’Elephant. In the afternoon we arrived at hotel Mansa with nice gardens and a small lake. African thrush and woodland kingfisher were seen at the swimming pool. When we finally got the keys to our rooms, I subjected the toilet to a blitzkrieg.

#### **Day 18, September 21: Bertoua to Yaoundé**

With equal amounts of time at night spent in bed and in the bathroom, I woke up rather green. It took me a while to actually get up and dressed. The others had already left for breakfast, where Anja found pieces of glass in the strawberry jam. The jam was removed from the table, but not replaced. The Mansa hotel is partly government-owned and this may be accidental, but this was the only place of the entire trip where some of the restaurant staff were very arrogant and at best moderately competent. Eventually I managed to drag myself to the breakfast table and take a light breakfast of tea with sugar. This helped and I started to feel much better. I even managed to do some quick birding before we checked out, but only common birds were around. Tim luckily had given me some ciprofloxacin and I quickly felt much better after taking the first dose of the tablets.

The drive back to Yaoundé was uneventful, which was a good thing in my condition. A stop at a decent patch of degraded forest produced two blue cuckoo-shrikes and African pied hornbill. The wildlife on this route was having a hard time though, we saw a white-thighed hornbill, duiker and python on display as bush meat. Jean-Pierre managed to buy a Nile monitor (6000 CFA) that was still alive from a poacher and then released the animal in a relatively safe-looking patch of forest. Around 1.30 pm we were back in hotel Merina, where we spent the afternoon relaxing. Jean-Pierre had invited us for a farewell dinner in a restaurant in Bastos. After a very nice evening and good food we headed back to the hotel and went straight to bed. Around midnight our neighbours turned on the incredibly loud air-conditioning, so we asked for a new room, where the noise turned out to be bearable with ear plugs in.

#### **Day 19, September 22: Yaoundé – Mfou national park**

Today we visited the so-called Mfou (or Mefou) national park, which is basically a primate rescue centre with a chunk of secondary rainforest around it. The primates live in large enclosures and are

well cared for. Some of the primates are even being prepared for rerelease in the wild. All in all, an interesting and commendable place to visit.

The traffic out of Yaoundé was quite terrible that day, so it took us almost two hours to reach Mfou national park. Four French tourists arrived together with us and without any explanation we were all lumped together on an obligatory guided tour. We first went to the chimps. Most of these animals were severely traumatized: some were poaching victims (often orphans), some former pets and others had lived in very small cages in “zoos” or “tourist centres”. Every now and then the bolder chimps threw sticks, faeces and stones at us, but this was not completely undeserved since the monkeys on the other side fence were sometimes asking for it. After another lengthy stop at the olive baboons, things were on the verge of getting really interesting, because we reached the enclosures of red-capped mangabeys and the incredible mandrills. For some reason, our guide deemed this not to be interesting for us, so he raced on. Tim, Anja and I stayed a bit longer with the mandrills and mangabeys. The mandrill males have to be seen to be believed.

Next there was the “jungle hike”; we entered the decent looking secondary rainforest and when I heard that we were going to be told for the fourth time on this trip how to get water from the forest and how to weave a portable mansion from local materials, I decided to start guiding myself. This helped a bit. A squirrel was seen, which looked like green bush squirrel, but I didn’t get clear enough views. Birds were calling all around but proved to be mostly common species. After having “lost” the group in the forest I caught up with them when we arrived at a large enclosure that held some real cool monkeys such as De Brazza monkey and Mona monkey, but the showstopper was the tiny northern talapoin. They are even smaller than you think they are, barely larger than the larger squirrels in the region. The guide awarded this brilliant enclosure with 3 seconds of quality viewing, so our ways had to part again and Anja and I spent some time enjoying the talapoin and the other monkeys on our own. When we continued, we found the guide and the others at the gorilla enclosure. Much more interesting was the action in the canopy of the gorilla enclosure: I had excellent views of a family group of forest woodhoopoes and from a large hole in a dead tree appeared a red-legged sun squirrel giving alarm calls.

The tour was over after the visit to the gorilla enclosure, and I assumed that now we would be able to walk around a bit ourselves and enjoy the wild birds and mammals in the reserve (there are still wild monkeys in the forest). So I walked back in the direction of the forest, while the others just seemed to take a little break. While I was sorting out some sunbirds, I saw one of the drivers waving and calling. I walked back to the entrance/parking and to my despair I see everybody (apart from Anja) nicely seated in the vehicles. Sigh. It was clear that the two of us couldn’t stay behind with one car and driver, because there wouldn’t be enough space in the other car (the third car wasn’t available that day). So off we went, back to Yaoundé. While Mfou only experienced a light drizzle, Yaoundé city centre was experiencing very heavy localized rain. In no time streets were flooded and around 3 pm we were back at our hotel to bore ourselves to death. Not all was lost because after some two hours the rain stopped and Anja and I went to a massive patisserie ten minutes from the hotel to console ourselves with eclairs and almond croissants.

### **Day 20, September 23: Yaoundé – Night flight to Europe**

In the morning most of the group went to the crafts market but I stayed in the hotel to get my trip list updated with yesterday’s sightings. The group returned much earlier than I expected. So Anja and I went to Mvog-Betsi zoo. When we arrived it rained very heavily, but one of the young staff guys was eager to show us around. The animals in the zoo seem to be well kept and most animals have decently sized enclosures. Most interesting is the variety of primates they have: red-capped mangabey, Patas monkey, Tantalus monkey, both mangabeys, etc., but most spectacular are the drills and mandrills. Other animals in the zoo include brush-tailed porcupine, African palm civet, dwarf crocodile, and the awesome Gabon pit-viper. They also have lion, serval and spotted hyena. Bird watching in the zoo was actually not bad. Mostly common species were seen but I was



flabbergasted when I saw a raptor land with a red-eyed dove that it had just caught. The raptor turned out to be an immature Ayres's hawk eagle!

The driver picked us up again and soon it started raining again. We stopped for a moment at the hotel to ask if anyone was interested in outdoor lunch, but Mike, Angela and Marjorie had already ordered and the rest of the gang was absent, so the two of us went to the place in Bastos where we went with Jean-Pierre the other night. After an excellent lunch we were waiting outside for the car to arrive and saw at least hundred straw-coloured fruit bats fly above the restaurant. The restaurant's doorman told us that they roost in a nearby factory, but that they often get disturbed/chased away by locals. We went back to the hotel to pack and freshen up and around 7 pm we were driven to the airport. The check-in was a bit odd, but quite efficient. Most of us were on the same flight with Air France, but we had to say goodbye to Tim and Elena who were on different flights.

### **Day 21, September 24: Arrival Paris Charles de Gaulle – train home**

After an uneventful flight we were back at Charles de Gaulle, the airport analogue of a failed state. I will only highlight the new customs procedure, where the passengers of all planes are all sluiced to an area what one would normally call a large cattle pen if the roof had been missing. A quick count showed that at least 1000 people were waiting in the roofed cattle pen (and that was just the part that we could see). To get out of the cattle pen we had to get past one of the eight!! immigration officials on duty. Of those eight one gave up about halfway, one was for "difficult" cases, and the EU citizens and the rest of the world each got three officials. The only good thing about this ill-conceived set-up was that the luggage had arrived ages ago by the time we managed to escape the pen. Funny enough the airport staff was handing out a little questionnaire to evaluate the new procedure; they looked unhappy too. You would now think that from Charles de Gaulle airport you can get a decent train connection to Gare du Nord, where we needed to catch our TGV train to Aachen. Not so in the provincial town Paris. You will travel by metro. Once you get into the metro, you will meet locals that seem both depressed with their work and you, that is, travellers who have no choice but occupying the seats with their luggage since you can't even store a daypack in the luggage racks. Once you reach Gare du Nord, the metro is filled Japanese style with people and luggage occupying all possible vertical and horizontal space. To unload all the travellers and commuters from the metro, two staircases are deemed more than enough to provide an efficient exit for hundreds of people and their luggage. Then Gare du Nord: our estimated time of departure was 10.08. Sometime between 10.06 and 10.07, the platform number suddenly appeared on the announcement board. And guess what, from just every corner of the train station the platform was literally stormed by people with tons of luggage. Hardened by the laws of the African jungle we battled our way through the melee to find our seats, but the best was yet to come.

In Liège (Belgium) the now half-empty train stopped and eventually it was announced that the train would not continue, but another train was waiting for us on the opposite platform. Personally I was very happy with this solution, because it solved the problem of the non-moving train. So everybody got on the other train and I expected to see nothing but contented people in the train, but I had seriously underestimated the German pensioners and their perception of major issues in the world. Yes, in theory, you have to sit in your reserved seat in a TGV train, but hey, the train broke down, the train was half empty, so when people have to switch train out of the blue, they just grab a seat, which is also efficient and quick. Whatever people tell you about German pensioners, they don't care about efficiency and being practical, they care about rules and order. Throughout the train there was yelling, anger, distressed people, people being commandeered out of their seats, and always German pensioners were involved. In one of the train units one of the pensioners was going completely berserk against a young guy just because he was sitting in his seat (there were at least 10 seats free around the guy), and right in front of us two German pensioner couples disciplined each other into the right seats. Welcome back.

## Trip lists, Guidebooks and Equipment

This time I have only made lists for birds and mammals. Butterflies were plentiful with many very beautiful species, but I had no identification guide for them. Reptiles were scarcer than expected. I did not see a single snake but the other half of our group was lucky enough to see a green mamba at the mirador in Mbeli Bai. Every now and then small to medium-sized lizards and skinks were seen. Monitor lizard (*Varanus niloticus*) was seen a few times. I was disappointed to miss both dwarf crocodile and slender-snouted crocodile, which are sometimes seen on the Sangha River or in Mbeli Bai. The arachnoid highlight was the Amblypygid seen in Mondika (common name: whip spider or tail-less whip scorpion).

For bird identification, I only took *Birds of Western Africa* (N. Borrow and R. Demey). The drawings are mostly good to excellent, but the descriptions are far too short for many species. While preparing for the trip I also used *Birds of Africa (south of the Sahara)* by I. Sinclair and P. Ryan a lot. The text is very concise too, but in about the same amount of text space, they manage to include a lot more valuable hints on habitat and tricky identification issues. As taking both would be a bit too heavy, I wrote a lot of the info of Sinclair and Ryan's book into the other one. The plates in Sinclair and Ryan are often not that great though.

Sounds recordings of the birds were compiled from the 15-CD set *African Bird Sounds* by Claude Chappuis and a few recordings on Xenocanto. Unfortunately, I could not find many recordings for West-African specialties on Xenocanto.

*Field Guide to African Mammals* by J. Kingdon is a great all-round guide with an amazing amount of information in a very pleasantly sized guide, but for example the primates could have benefited from including more plates showing regional or colour varieties. I don't always like the artwork with animals shown in rather stupid poses (cheetah, serval, several primates), but most of the drawings are very good. Annoying is that some plates have a legend and others don't, for no apparent reason. For some species you have to piece together the relevant information on one species scattered over several pages. Nevertheless, I don't know of an African mammal field guide that comes close to this one.

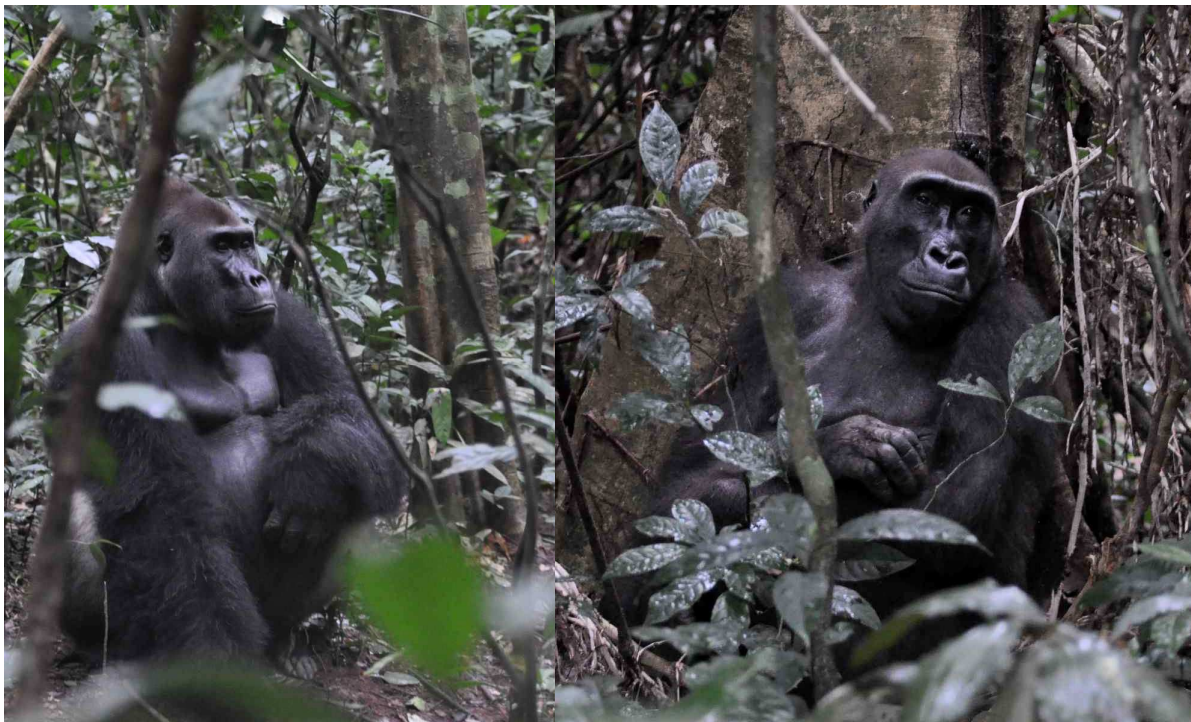
For general travel information, we read the Bradt guides on Cameroon and both Congo's and the Lonely Planet guide on West-Africa at home. We didn't take any of them on the trip (apart from a copy of Yaoundé city centre) simply because there is not that much useful information in the guides on the remoter areas in this region. Bradt's Cameroon guide still contains quite a few mistakes and very outdated information in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. The author of the Congo guide (first edition) claims in the Republic of Congo chapter that Nouabalé-Ndoki national park is quickly becoming a very popular place for wildlife tourism, but I wondered why there is so little information on the park then, e.g., which accommodation there is, what activities can be done, which tour operators run tours there, etc. The information on Odzala national park is just pitiful.

Because I wasn't quite sure what to expect, I travelled fairly lightly. Apart from binoculars and DSLR with 80-400 mm lens and flash, we took a pocket camera (Canon S90), a pocket scope (Nikon ED50) and light tripod, our torches, and headlights for use around the camps. I didn't take a large spotlight (because I assumed that night walks would mostly take place in the forest). For proper photography a good tripod would be very handy though: even at 800 ISO there is often so little light that you will be shooting with shutter times between 1/10 and 1/60. This worked very well and I would probably take the same things again. Since we had two transfers on the Sangha River partly in the dark, a proper spotlight would have been great there, but even with my torch (Tiablo A9) spotlighting from the boat was doable, if the boat was close enough to the riverbank.

## Mammal List

Chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes* – one adult chimp was clearly seen on the pirogue trip from Bomassa to Sangha Lodge on Sept. 14, but after checking the pictures that I made that day at home, it was clear that there were at least 2 and more likely 3 chimps present including a young infant. The chimps were very shy and the fact that there were putty nosed monkeys moving around as well made it difficult to assess how many there were.

Western Lowland Gorilla *Gorilla gorilla gorilla* – a total of about 30-35 different individuals was seen, the family of silverback Kingo was seen at Mondika, about 15-20 different individuals were seen at Mbeli bai, and at Bai Hoku we followed the family of silverback Makoumba. Near the Mbeli swamp boardwalk and on the walk from Mondika camp to the parking gorillas were heard not far from the trail.



*Makoumba (silverback Bai Hoku)*

*Adult Female at Mondika*

Western Guereza Colobus *Colobus guereza occidentalis* – three at Mbeli Bai on Sept. 12, eight at Mbeli Bai on Sept. 13, one at Bomassa on Sept. 14.

De Brazza's Monkey *Cercopithecus neglectus* – one at Mbeli bai on Sept. 13, three at Bomassa on Sept. 14, 2-3 every night on the forest edge at Sangha lodge

[Agile Mangabey *Cercocebus agilis* – unfortunately, we missed this species because the mangabey tracking was cancelled at Bai Hoku]

Grey-cheeked Mangabey *Lophocebus albigena* – (at least) one at Mondika camp at dawn on Sept. 11, two groups of at least 7-8 animals were seen on the walk back from Mondika camp to the parking lot. A group of about 5 was seen on Sept. 14 on the pirogue ride from Bomassa to Sangha Lodge. One group of about 10 animals en route to Bai Hoku and a group of at least 15 animals on the Bai Hoku walk. Note: locally they often refer to this species as “black mangabey”, but this species should not be confused with *Lophocebus aterrimus* in DRC.

Crowned Guenon *Cercopithecus pogonias* – unfortunately only two of these beautiful monkeys were seen at Bai Hoku on Sept. 16. They are often seen around Sangha lodge but I did not see them there.

Putty-nosed Monkey *Cercopithecus nictitans* – Two single animals on Sept. 11 at Mbeli camp, a group



of at least five animals was seen on Sept. 13 at Mbeli Bai. About 2-3 were seen on the pirogue ride on Sept. 14 to Sangha Lodge. One on the pirogue ride from Sangha Lodge to Libongo on Sept. 19. Moustached Monkey *Cercopithecus cephus* – a group of about 15 animals at Bomassa on Sept. 8, a group of at least 7-8 animals on one of the trails in Mondika on Sept. 10, at least 10 on Sept. 14 at Bomassa. Locally they often refer to this species as “red-tailed monkey”.



*De Brazza Monkey*

*Moustached Monkey*

Bosman's Potto *Perodicticus potto* – three! different individuals on the night walk on Sept. 16. [Thomas's Dwarf Galago *Galagoides thomasi* – one heard on the night walk on Sept. 16, on Sept. 17 I heard one calling again and soon found eye-shine in the area from where the call came from. I tried to focus my bins and keep the torch in the right place, but unfortunately the animal started moving quickly and went to a tree with very dense foliage. I could see the eye-shine every now and then, but could not get a clear view of the animal, but it was probably this species and not Demidoff's Galago (from what I could see and the information in Kingdon)].

Black Hawk Bat *Saccolaimus peli* – one at dusk over the Sangha river on Sept. 17

Straw-coloured Fruit Bat *Eidolon helvum* – at least 100 in Bastos in Yaoundé on Sept. 23

Noack's Roundleaf Bat *Hipposideros ruber* – the bats seen near the Picathartes breeding site were of the *Hipposideros* genus according to Rod and the bats in the cave on the edge of Bai Hokou look very similar and may be the same species. The IUCN website states: “Mostly a lowland tropical moist forest species but can also found in relic and riverine forests in dry savannah. Roost in caves, rocky crevices and abandoned mineshafts. Animals have also been found under a bridge, in a hollow kapok tree and in derelict buildings.” This description would by far fit best. Some of the other options are: a) Benito Roundleaf Bat *Hipposideros beatus*; IUCN: “It can be characterised as a true lowland rainforest species. It roosts singly, in pairs or in very small groups in the cavities of fallen logs, in holes of living trees close to the ground and in road culverts. It exhibits a definite preference for waterways, rivers and swamps. It does not occur in cleared areas outside forest.” Roost size and roost sites do not really fit. b) Sundevall's Roundleaf Bat *H. caffer*; IUCN “This species occurs in savannah, bushveld and coastal forest, and is usually associated with rivers and other water resources, provided there are caves or buildings where it can roost during the day. Colony size varies from small to medium-sized groups of tens or hundreds of individuals, exceptionally up to 500 000.” Range and habitat don't fit. c) Sooty Roundleaf Bat *H. fuliginosus* The range and group roost size would fit, but no mention of cave roosts. IUCN says: “There is little information on its overall abundance. It is usually found in small groups, but sometimes in congregations of up two hundred bats. This species is associated with primary tropical lowland moist forest. It does not appear to be

present in degraded forest. Animals have been found roosting in hollow trees.” Added note: Jon Hall later confirmed that the bats in this cave are indeed Noack's Roundleaf Bats, see his Dzanga report here: <http://www.mammalwatching.com/Afrotropical/afrotropcentralafricanrepublic.html>



Left: Noack's Roundleaf Bat at Bai Hoku and right: bat at the Picathartes site, possibly the same species

[Dwarf Squirrel *Myosciurus pumilio* – early morning on Sept. 15 I saw on the Sangha Lodge entrance road a very tiny squirrel-like animal racing through the undergrowth. The animal was very shy and fled immediately when it saw me. It was about 1 meter above the ground on the trunk of a large tree. It first moved to the back side of the trunk, but then seemed to disappear in a dense, tangled area of low bushes. I only saw the main body and the bushy tail well for about 2 seconds.]

Red-cheeked Rope Squirrel *Funisciurus leucogenys* – one at Mbeli Bai from the mirador, two seen very well at Mbeli Bai near the toilet area. At Mbeli bai and Mbeli camp a lot more squirrels were seen but moved away too quickly to be identified, but most of them were probably this species (based on the size and overall colour pattern)

Lady Burton's Rope Squirrel *Funisciurus isabella* – one seen well next to our toilet at Mbeli Camp. I expected that the squirrel would be the more common Red-cheeked Rope Squirrel (and Mbeli lies on the outer edge of the distribution range of this species), but the black and white stripes on the back and the orangey flashes on the tail were clearly seen at close range. Unfortunately, I did not have a camera with me.

Red-legged Sun Squirrel *Heliosciurus rufobrachium* – a probable one on Sept. 17, and two at Mfou, of which one was seen well, on Sept. 22.

Green Bush Squirrel *Paraxerus poensis* – one (and one probable) at Mondika on Sept. 8, one at Mbeli Camp on Sept. 11, one on the Mbeli walk on Sept. 13, and two probable ones at Mfou on Sept. 22.

Giant Forest Squirrel *Protoxerus stangeri* – one seen well at Bomassa, one at Mbeli camp, one on the entrance road at Sangha Lodge on Sept. 15 and 18

Beecroft's Scaly-tailed Squirrel *Anomalurus beecrofti* – one seen fairly well on a night walk on Sept. 16

Brush-tailed Porcupine *Atherurus africanus* – we surprised one staying at a rocky overhang where we found the Picathartes breeding. The animal walked past me only 2-3 meters away.

[Western Tree Hyrax *Dendrohyrax dorsalis* – heard several times at Mbeli and every night at Sangha Lodge]

African Forest Elephant *Loxodonta (africana) cyclotis* – between 3 and 12 different individuals on various days at Mbeli Bai, between 10 and 45 at Dzanga Bai on Sept. 15 and 18, four at Bai Hoku on Sept. 16, one near the Dzanga Bai parking lot on Sept. 15.

Red River Hog *Potamochoerus porcus* – a group was seen rushing through the undergrowth on Sept. 11, but I did not get good views. A small group was running along the forest edge in Bai Hoku, of which I saw one animal quite well when it crossed an open area.

Forest Buffalo *Syncerus caffer nanus* – only one seen at Mbeli Bai on Sept. 11.

Sitatunga *Tragelaphus spekei* – three males and one female on Sept. 12 at Mbeli Bai, one male and one female on Sept. 13 at Mbeli Bai, about 5-6 females at Dzanga Bai on Sept. 15, one male and about 7-8 females at Dzanga Bai on Sept. 18.

Blue Duiker *Cephalophus monticola* – one on the walk to Mbeli Bai on Sept. 11, one at dusk in the shower/toilet area in Mbeli camp on Sept. 13.

Peters' Duiker *Cephalophus callipygus* – one flushed near Mondika camp on Sept. 8, one at Mondika Camp on Sept. 9.





## Bird List

- Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* – several seen on each pirogue ride on the Sangha river (Sept. 7, 14 and 19)
- Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* – two in Dzanga Bai, one in Yaoundé on Sept. 22
- Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* – two in a large wetland en route to Yokadouma, Sept. 6.
- Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* – 2-4 in Dzanga Bai
- [Spot-breasted Ibis *Bostrychia rara* – not seen by me, but half of the group saw four in flight on a sundowner boat trip]
- Hadada Ibis *Bostrychia hagedash* – between 2 and 4 birds in Dzanga Bai, two at Bai Hoku, heard around Sangha Lodge.
- Hartlaub's Duck *Pteronetta hartlaubii* – one on the Sangha river on Sept. 7, one on the pirogue ride from Ndoki Camp to Mbeli Camp, between 2 and 8 birds present in Dzanga Bai.
- African Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer* – 1-2 almost constantly present at Mbeli Bai, heard but not seen at Dzanga Bai.
- Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis* – up to 4 on the pirogue trips on the Sangha river (Sept. 7, 14 and 19), one at Mbeli Bai on Sept. 12.
- African Harrier-Hawk *Polyboroides typus* – the most common raptor in the region. Seen in bays, secondary forest, villages, etc.
- Black/Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus migrans/aegyptius* – one at Bertoua from the car.
- Bat Hawk *Macheiramphus alcinus* – one seen flying over the Sangha river at Sangha Lodge on the morning of Sept. 19.
- Congo Serpent Eagle *Dryotriorchis spectabilis* – one perched on the entrance road to Sangha Lodge on Sept. 17, one seen from Sangha Lodge on the other side of the river on Sept. 19.
- Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus* – one at Libongo on Sept. 7.
- Crowned Eagle *Stephanoaetus coronatus* – one at Mbeli Bai
- [Cassin's Hawk-Eagle *Aquila africana* – only seen by Anja, Tim and Rod on Sept. 18]
- Ayres's Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus ayresii* – a juvenile was seen and photographed in Mvog-Betsi in Yaoundé on Sept. 23. The bird had just caught a red-eyed dove.
- Common Kestrel - one or sometimes two hunting around Merina Hotel in Yaoundé on all days there, always seen in the afternoon.
- Plumed Guineafowl *Guttera plumifera* – three, two and again two on the road inside Dzanga-Ndoki national park on Sept. 15, 16 and 18, respectively.
- Forest Francolin *Francolinus lathamii* – a couple seen well on the walk between Mbeli Camp and Mbeli Bai
- [White-spotted Flufftail *Sarothrura pulchra* – heard only at Mbeli and Dzanga Bai]
- [Nkulengu Rail *Himantornis haematopus* – heard only at Mbeli]
- Black Crake *Amaurornis flavirostra* – one at Mbeli bai on Sept. 13
- Lesser Moorhen *Gallinula angulata* – one at a small wetland in Bertoua
- African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus* – common at Mbeli bai, also seen at Dzanga bai and wetland in Bertoua
- African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis* - one on the Sangha river on the pirogue trip from Bomassa to Sangha Lodge on Sept. 14
- Forbes's Plover *Charadrius forbesi* – a few (1-3) always present at Dzanga bai
- Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* – one in Mbeli bai on Sept. 12, a few times seen flying over the Sangha river
- Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* – a few on the Sangha River
- African Green Pigeon *Treron calvus* - at least five at Bomassa on Sept. 8, one on Sept. 19 at Sangha Lodge
- Tambourine Dove *Turtur tympanistria* – one near Sangha lodge on Sept. 19
- Afep Pigeon *Columba unicincta* – one in flight on Sept. 7 on the pirogue ride to Bomassa
- Blue-headed Wood Dove *Turtur brehmeri* – three different ones seen feeding on the entrance road

at Sangha lodge on Sept. 15. One on the same road on Sept. 16. Heard daily.

Blue-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur afer* – seen twice en route from Yaoundé to Yokadouma. Heard often.

Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata* – one alive and one killed by an Ayres hawk-eagle in Mvog-Betsi zoo in Yaoundé

Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus* – usually seen in small groups (2-6), seen at Mondika, Mbeli, Sangha Lodge, Dzanga Bai, and on the Sangha river.

Great Blue Turaco *Corythaeola cristata* – one at Mbeli bai on Sept. 12, groups of eight and four birds were seen in Mbeli Camp on Sept. 13, a group of six birds at Mbeli Camp on Sept. 14, heard almost daily.

[Guinea Turaco *Tauraco persa* – heard regularly but not seen]

[African Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx cupreus* – heard only]

Dideric Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius* – one on the trail to Mbeli Bai on Sept. 13

Yellow-throated Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx flavigularis* – one on the trail to Mbeli Bai on Sept. 13.

[Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo *Cercococcyx mechowi* – heard only]

[Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo *Cercococcyx olivinus* – heard only]

[Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius* – heard only]

Black Cuckoo *Cuculus clamosus* – one scoped on the trail to Mbeli Bai on Sept. 13

Green Malkoha / Yellowbill *Ceuthmochares aereus* – two single birds around Mondika camp, at least four on Sept. 13 on the trail to Mbeli bai.

[Gabon Coucal *Centropus anelli* – heard only]

Pel's Fishing Owl *Scotopelia peli* – one spotlighted at night on the pirogue ride from Libongo to Bomassa on Sept. 7. Excellent views.

[African Wood Owl *Strix woodfordii* – heard only]

[Bates's Nightjar *Caprimulgus batesi* - the most likely nightjars in the Dzanga Sangha region are Bates's and brown nightjar. After consulting *Nightjars of the World: A Photographic Guide* by Nigel Cleere and the African field guides I think it was a female Bates's nightjar. The bird had no white markings on the wings: the "fingers" of the wings looked fairly uniform brown, but the "arm" appeared very mottled with a mixture of buff, cream, rufous, and light and dark brown spots/streaks. The back and tail seemed lighter, i.e. more rufous, less brown than the wings. The tail showed darker blackish streaks/broken banding, but in the short time frame I could not see any buff or white tail tips. The pictures in Cleere and dwawings in the field guides for brown nightjar show a very dark and small nightjar, which don't match at all with the bird that I saw. The pictures of Bates's nightjar in Cleere and the drawing in Borrow/Demey are pretty similar to the bird I saw. The only thing that confused me at the time and does not match for Bates's nightjar was that I thought it was small to medium-sized nightjar, but that may have been a size misjudgement.]

Black/Chapin's Spinetail *Telacanthura melanopygia* – small numbers at Mbeli Bai

Sabine's Spinetail *Rhaphidura sabini* – a few at Mbeli Bai, several en route en route between Libongo and Yokadouma.

Cassin's Spinetail *Neafrapus cassini* – a few at mondika Camp, one at Mbeli Bai, several near Bayanga village and en route between Libongo and Yokadouma.

Common Swift *Apus apus* - a group of about 30-40 above Mbeli bai on Sept. 11

Little Swift *Apus affinis* – common in Yaoundé, Yokadouma, and Bertoua.

African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus* – a few on a pee stop on the way to Yokadouma on Sept. 6, several on Sept. 7, at least 10 at Lidjombo on Sept. 19, at least 5 en route on Sept. 21. At least 10 at Mfou on Sept. 22

Speckled Mousebird *Colius striatus* – a few in the garden of the hotel in Yokadouma, common Yaoundé, many en route between Yokadouma- Yaoundé

[Narina Trogon *Apaloderma narina* – heard only once]

[Bare-cheeked Trogon *Apaloderma aequatoriale* – heard only once on the walk to Mbeli walk]

African Pygmy Kingfisher *Ispidina picta* – one on the way to Bai Hoku

Shining-blue Kingfisher *Alcedo quadribrachys* – one on Sept. 8, one at Sangha Lodge on Sept. 19

[Malachite Kingfisher *Alcedo cristata* – one seen at Mbeli Bai was probably this species. Red bill and orange cheeks clearly seen, but I could not see whether the bird had a white belly, so white-bellied kingfisher cannot be ruled out with certainty.]

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* – one on the Sangha river on Sept. 6

[Chocolate-backed Kingfisher *Halcyon badia* – heard only]

Woodland Kingfisher *Halcyon senegalensis* – one in Yaoundé on Sept. 5, two on Sept. 20 in Bertoua

Blue-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon malimbica* – one near Ndoki Camp jetty seen from the boat

Giant Kingfisher *Megaceryle maximus* – one on the Sangha river on Sept. 19

Black Bee-eater *Merops gularis* – two at Bomassa on Sept. 7 and 14, about 2-3 around Mondika camp, two on the Dzanga bai walk and one from the mirador on Sept. 15,

[Blue-throated Roller *Eurystomus gularis* – not seen by me, seen by half of the group on a sunset boat trip]

Forest Wood Hoopoe *Phoeniculus castaneiceps* – a group of 3-4 birds was seen very well at Mfou

Black Dwarf Hornbill *Tockus hartlaubi* – two seen through the scope and photographed on the trail to Mbeli bai on Sept. 13

African Pied Hornbill *Tockus fasciatus* – three flying over the Sangha river on Sept. 7 en route to Bomassa, three on Sept. 11 at Mbeli camp, at least three on Sept. 12 at Mbeli Bai. Two on Sept. 17 near Sangha Lodge. Three on Sept. 19 on the way to Yokadouma, three groups of 3, 4 and 2 birds, respectively, en route to Yaoundé, and at least 5 at Mfou national park.

Piping Hornbill *Ceratogymna fistulator* – six flying over the Sangha river on Sept. 7 en route to Bomassa, about 4-5 at Bomassa on September 8. Three near Bayanga village on Sept. 15.

White-thighed Hornbill *Ceratogymna albotibialis* – four flying over and two perched along the Sangha river on Sept. 7 en route to Bomassa, about 6 at Bomassa on September 8. Two on the trail to Mbeli Bai on Sept. 13, one on Sept. 14, four on Sept. 17 along the Riverside trail, one on Sept. 18, four en route to Yokadouma on Sept. 19.

Black-casqued Wattled Hornbill *Ceratogymna atrata* – a largish group (about 10) flying over the Sangha river on Sept. 7 en route to Bomassa, a male at Bomassa on Sept. 8 and 14, another bird in flight on Sept. 14 on the Sangha river, one on the Sangha river en route to Libongo on Spetember 19 plus two en route to Yokadouma on the same day.

White-crested Hornbill *Tockus albocristatus* – two en route to Dzanga Bai on Sept. 15

Speckled Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus scolopaceus* – one seen on the Riverside trail at Sangha Lodge, heard daily.

[Red-rumped Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus atroflavus* – heard only]

[Yellow-throated Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus subsulphureus* – heard only]

[Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus bilineatus* – heard only]

[Hairy-breasted Barbet *Tricholaema hirsuta* – heard only]

[Grey-throated Barbet *Gymnobucco bonapartei* – heard only ]

[Yellow-billed Barbet *Trachyphonus purpuratus* – heard only]

Least Honeyguide *Indicator exilis* – one at Bai Hoku on Sept. 16

Gabon Woodpecker *Dendropicos gabonensis* – a female on Sept. 16 along the Riverside trail at Sangha lodge.

Green-backed Woodpecker *Campethera cailliautii* – one at Bomassa on Sept. 14

[Rufous-sided Broadbill *Smithornis rufolateralis* – heard only once on the Mbeli Bai trail]

White-bibbed/throated Blue Swallow *Hirundo nigrita* – seen on all pirogue rides on the Sangha river varying from 2 to 30+ birds

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica* – two on the Sangha river on Sept. 8, one at Mbeli on Sept. 11, one on the Sangha river on Sept. 17, at least 3 en route to Yaoundé on Sept. 20.

Red-breasted Swallow *Cecropis semirufa* – two near Mfou national park on Sept. 22

Lesser Striped Swallow *Cecropis abyssinica* – two in Yokadouma on Sept. 7

Square-tailed Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne nitens* – common, seen on most days

African Pied Wagtail *Motacilla aguimp* – 1-2 seen almost every day at Sangha lodge

Blue Cuckooshrike *Coracina azurea* – two en route between Bertoua and Yaoundé on Sept. 21



Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus* – common in Yokadouma, Libongo and the Yaoundé area  
Swamp Palm Bulbul *Thescelocichla leucopleura* – four at Bomassa  
Little Grey Greenbul *Andropadus gracilis* – common, seen on most days at all sites in Congo and CAR  
Ansorge's Greenbul *Andropadus ansorgei* – one at Mondika Camp on Sept. 8  
Little Greenbul *Andropadus virens* – common, seen on most days at all sites in Congo and CAR  
[Sjostedt's Greenbul *Baeopogon clamans* – not recorded by me, heard by Rod on a trip with Tim and Anja on Sept. 18]  
Red-tailed Greenbul *Criniger calurus* – at least 5 near Mbeli Camp on Sept. 14  
White-bearded Greenbul *Criniger ndussumensis* – at least two near Mondika Camp on Sept. 8, about 5-6 at Bai Hoku on Sept. 16, at least 3 on Sept. 17 on the entrance road to Sangha lodge  
Yellow-eyed Lesser Bristlebill *Bleda (notatus) ugandae* – (at least) two on the trail towards the swamp boardwalk; according to several guidebooks only Lesser bristlebill/*Bleda notatus* occurs here, but the birds at Mbeli Bai clearly have a yellow eye.  
Red-tailed Bristlebill *Bleda syndactylus* – two on the trail towards the swamp boardwalk at Mbeli on Sept. 13.  
Icterine Greenbul *Phyllastrephus icterinus* – one at Mondika Camp on Sept. 10  
White-throated Greenbul *Phyllastrephus albigularis* – (at least) two at Mondika Camp on Sept. 9.  
Spotted Greenbul *Ixonotus guttatus* – at least two seen on the entrance road to Sangha lodge on Sept. 15.  
[Western Nicator *Nicator chloris* – heard regularly]  
[Yellow-throated Nicator *Nicator vireo* – heard regularly]  
African Thrush *Turdus pelios* – at least five in the garden of hotel Mansa in Bertoua, several in Mvog-Betsi zoo in Yaoundé.  
[Lowland Akalat *Sheppardia cyornithopsis* – heard quite regularly]  
[Fire-crested Alethe *Alethe diademata* – heard quite regularly]  
Fraser's Rufous Flycatcher Thrush *Neocossyphus fraseri* – one seen at Mondika Camp on Sept. 9  
Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat *Cossypha niveicapilla* – two in Mvog-betsi zoo on Sept. 23  
Green Hylia *Hylia prasina* – heard regularly, often seen feeding in the canopy, but never great views.  
Rufous-crowned Eremomela *Eremomela badiceps* – two seen well from the mirador at Dzanga Bai  
Green Crombec *Sylvietta virens* – one on Sept. 14 at Bomassa, one on Sept. 18 at Sangha lodge and a probable one at Mfou national park on Sept. (profile was clearly a crombec, but light was very poor so bird looked all grey-ish black)  
Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brachyura* – one on Sept. 14 at Bomassa  
[Yellow-browed Camaroptera *C. superciliaris* – heard only at Sangha Lodge, Dzanga Bai and Mbeli]  
Yellow Longbill *Macrosphenus flavicans* – three at Mondika Camp on Sept. 8, four at Mondika on Sept. 10  
[Grey Longbill *Macrosphenus concolor* – heard but never seen well]  
Tawny-flanked Prinia *Prinia subflava* – at least one in a grassy/scrubby area about one hour south of Batouri on Sept. 20.  
Banded Prinia *Prinia bairdii* – two from the boardwalk at Mondika Camp, and a family of four at the Mirador in Dzanga Bai  
Black-capped Apalis *Apalis nigriceps* – two in the canopy at Mondika Camp  
Gosling's Apalis *Apalis goslingi* – one seen at Sangha Lodge  
Chattering Cisticola *Cisticola anonymus* – common at Mbeli Bai, also in Libongo near the Sangha river on Sept. 19  
Cassin's Flycatcher *Muscicapa cassini* - common along the Sangha river, two on the Ndoki river both on Sept. 11 and 14, one on the Mbeli river on Sept. 14  
Yellow-footed Flycatcher *Muscicapa sethsmithi* – two seen very well at Mondika Camp on Sept. 10  
[Olivaceous Flycatcher *Muscicapa olivascens* – a possible one on the entrance road at Sangha lodge. The drab-looking bird clearly behaved like a flycatcher, but was only seen from afar and from behind.]  
Sooty Flycatcher *Muscicapa infuscata* – seen twice in the canopy at Mbeli Camp (Sept. 11 and 13)

Grey-throated Tit-Flycatcher *Myioparus griseigularis* – one at Mbeli Camp on Sept. 12 and 13

White-browed Forest Flycatcher *Fraseria cinerascens* – one seen very well at close range from the swamp boardwalk in Mondika on Sept. 8

Fraser's Forest Flycatcher *Fraseria ocreata* - one on the entrance road to Sangha lodge in the morning on Sept. 17

Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone rufiventer* – heard often and seen quite often, 1-2 seen daily in and around Mondika Camp, one daily on the walk to Mbeli Bai, one on the entrance road to Sangha Lodge on Sept. 15 and two on the same road on Sept. 17. Heard almost daily.

African Blue Flycatcher *Elminia longicauda* – one in Yokadouma on Sept. 20, one at Mfou on Sept. 22, one in Mvog-Betsi zoo on Sept. 23, one at Restaurant La Salsa in Yaoundé on Sept. 23.

Dusky Crested Flycatcher *Elminia nigromitrata* – one seen very well at Mbeli Bai near the toilet area on Sept. 12

West-African Batis *Batis occulta* – one male perched midstorey in Mondika camp on Sept. 9. Recently, Gabon/Verreaux's Batis *Batis minima* has been recorded in the adjoining Dzanga-Ndoki national park, but I think that the one I saw was *B. occulta*.

Chestnut Wattle-eye *Platysteira castanea* – a female on Sept. 10 at Mondika, at least 4 of both sexes whizzing around me on the Mbeli Bai trail on Sept. 13; the birds were seen at close range and I could even see the purple eye wattle on the males. A female at Sangha lodge on Sept. 16.

Blackcap Illadopsis *Illadopsis cleaveri* – one sleeping along the trail on the night walk on Sept. 16

Red-headed Picathartes *Picathartes oreas* – two birds were seen together, one on the nest, one on guard at a new breeding site near Sangha Lodge on Sept. 17 (more birds were around).

Western Olive Sunbird *Cyanomitra obscura* – one male on Sept. 12 and one pair on Sept. 13 at Mbeli Bai, one on Sept. 18 and a pair on Sept. 19 at Sangha Lodge.

Collared Sunbird *Hedydipna collaris* – seen on Sept. 6, 19, and 20 en route, also at Sangha lodge on Sept. 19 and many at Mfou on Sept. 22.

Little Green Sunbird *Anthreptes seimundi* – one building a nest next to the mirador at Dzanga Bai. Yellow eye-ring clearly seen at close range.

Scarlet-chested Sunbird *Chalcomitra senegalensis* – a male seen well at Bomassa on Sept. 8

Olive-bellied Sunbird *Cinnyris chloropygius* – seen quite regularly a Mbeli, Mondika and the Dzanga Sangha area.

Superb Sunbird *Cinnyris superbus* – a male at Dzanga Bai on Sept. 18

Johanna's Sunbird *Cinnyris johannae* – a male at Danga Bai on Sept. 18

[Fiery-breasted Bushshrike *Malaconotus cruentus* – heard on Sept. 12 and 17]

Black-shouldered/Redeyed Puffback *Dryoscopus senegalensis* – one from the mirador at Dzanga Bai on Sept. 15 and one on the Riverside trail at Sangha Lodge.

Western Black-headed Oriole *Oriolus brachyrhynchus* – one seen at Mondika Camp on Sept. 9 and one on the Sangha Lodge entrance road on Sept. 17. Heard daily.

Velvet-mantled Drongo *Dicrurus modestus* – two on Sept. 8 at the parking lot for Mondika

Shining Drongo *Dicrurus atripennis* – one at Bai Hoku parking lot on Sept. 16

Pied Crow *Corvus albus* – common in cultivated and urban areas

Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus* – common in cultivated and urban areas

Orange Weaver *Ploceus aurantius* – quite common in cultivated and urban areas

Village Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus* – very common in cultivated and urban areas

Vieillot's Black Weaver *Ploceus nigerrimus* – seen several times en route and at hotel Mansa in Bertoua.

Blue-billed Malimbe *Malimbus nitens* – one male on Sept. 13 at Mbeli Camp, about 5 (males and females) at Mbeli Camp on Sept. 14, one pair on the Riverside trail at Sangha Lodge on Sept. 17

Crested Malimbe *Malimbus malimbicus* – one male at Bai Hoku on Sept. 16

Red-headed Malimbe *Malimbus rubricollis* – a small group feeding high in the canopy on Sept. 8 at Bomassa.

Cassin's Malimbe *Malimbus cassini* – at least 3 pairs feeding and building nests at Bomassa on Sept. 14.

Red-crowned Malimbe *Malimbus coronatus* – at least 5-6 at Mbeli Camp (males and females) on Sept. 12, one male on the Riverside trail at Sangha Lodge on Sept. 17.

Black-winged Red Bishop *Euplectes hordeaceus* – one in breeding plumage about 30 minutes south of Batouri on Sept. 19.

Yellow-mantled Widowbird *Euplectes macroura* – about 4-5 in breeding plumage in a grassy area one hour south of Batouri on Sept. 19.

African Firefinch *Lagonosticta rubricata* – a small group near Libongo on Sept. 7

Pale-fronted Nigrita *Nigrita luteifrons* – two birds at Bomassa on Sept. 14

Chestnut-breasted Nigrita *Nigrita bicolor* - two at Mbeli in the forest on the entrance trail towards the swamp board walk on Sept. 13.

Western Bluebill *Spermophaga haematina* – a female was seen very well close to the start of swamp boardwalk at Mbeli on Sept. 14. Grant's bluebill *S. poiliogenys* occurs here as well but the bird that I saw only had a broader red tip at the end of the beak (not broad red “lipstick” across the beak length) and the red flanks were clearly seen.

Black-bellied Seedcracker *Pyrenestes ostrinus* – a male was seen well from the mirador at Mbeli Bai on Sept. 13

Black-headed Waxbill *Estrilda atricapilla* – two on Sept. 20 in Yokadouma

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* – common in Yokadouma

Bronze Mannikin *Spermestes cucullatus* – common in villages en route, also seen in Bertoua and Yokadouma

Black-and-white Mannikin *Spermestes bicolor* – about 10 in Bertoua

Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura* – one on the outskirts of Yaoundé on Sept. 4. Several en route between Yaoundé and Yokadouma

Yellow-fronted Canary *Serinus mozambicus* – one in Bertoua

Cabanis's Bunting *Emberiza cabanisi* – one en route between Yaoundé and Yokadouma on Sept. 6.



*Cassin's Malimbe*

*Blue-billed Malimbe*