

## Sierra Leone - Tiwai Island: 30/10-3/11 2016

Having wanted to visit Tiwai Island ever since watching a BBC documentary many years ago, I finally made last week. It did not disappoint. Plenty of wildlife and having the island to myself with some wonderful local people was a real treat. I can recommend it hands down.

To get to Tiwai you need a car and I arranged an inexpensive 4\*4 with VSL Travel and my contact person was Geoffrey Awoonor-Renner - [info@vsltravel.com](mailto:info@vsltravel.com). He also made a reservation for Tiwai Island. I tried to make a booking through the Tiwai Island organization, but they only answered sporadically to my emails ([info@tiwaiisland.org](mailto:info@tiwaiisland.org)). Everything worked out very well with VSL and they gave me a new 4\*4 with an excellent driver, Buck. The trip from Freetown takes about 6 hours with the last 2 hours on a very rough dirt road. In the rainy season this road would be very difficult to master I can imagine.

### *The camp*

The community camp on Tiwai is quite comfortable with big tents, good mattresses (maybe a bit on the soft side), european toilets, nice showers and excellent food. They do not sell any water or anything else on the island so you need bring everything with you. However, they can go to the nearest town and get some liquid supplies (water and stronger stuff) if needed for a very nominal sum. It is in general a very inexpensive place to visit.





### *The season*

End of October is at the end of the rainy season and it still rained a bit, but only in the evenings and/or nights, which meant I did not do much spotlighting, but the days were very nice (bar the humidity). The river Moa, which surround the island, is quite turbulent at this time of the year making it a bit difficult going out in a canoe looking for wildlife along the coast. The camp manager recommended February to April as the monkeys get babies at that time and my fine guide Bobor, recommended April, as there are plenty of Monkeys around at that time and the water level is low making wildlife spotting easier.

### *The wildlife*

I did expect monkeys but no way near in that numbers. They are however not habituated, so they mostly escape once they see you, so filming and photographing was a challenge, bar the Sooty Mangabeys, which came into the camp to feed. The trails are only in the center of the island so expect a lot of bush walking if you want to track to the Chimps, for example.

#### Day 1:

I came late in the afternoon and made my only real spotlighting tour the very same evening for a couple of hours, in which I saw nothing more than a pair of moving eyes high up in a tree, too far away to tell what it was.

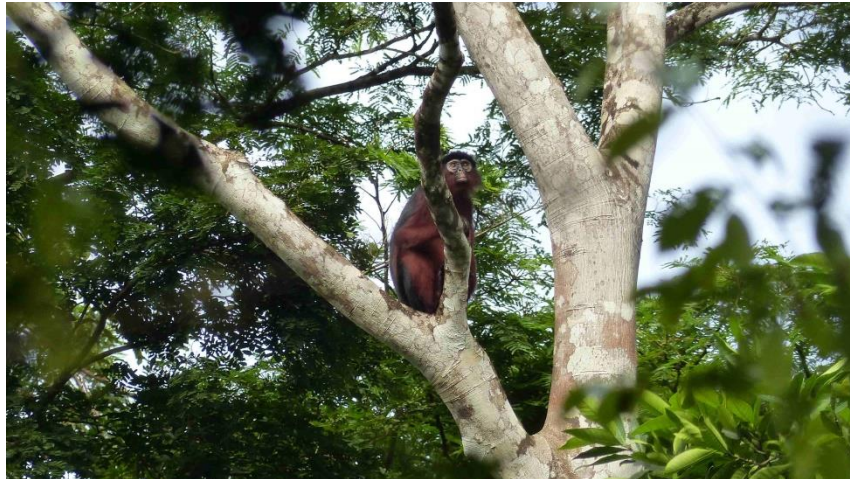
#### Day 2:

If it did not rain in the night, a family of **Sooty Managbeys** usually came to feed in the fruiting tree just beside my tent daily at 7. They were punctual the first morning. At the other days they came also but later when it had warmed up due to the nightly rains.

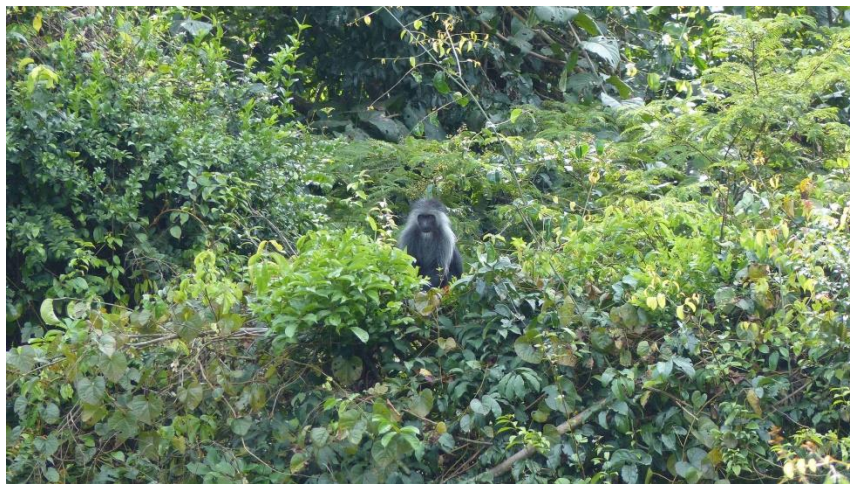


Sooty Mangabey

The 1<sup>st</sup> morning was absolutely brilliant. I had just entered the forest when I saw my first family of **Diana Monkeys**. They are one of the most common species of monkeys on the island and I would see several groups almost every day. Shortly thereafter I saw my only **Putty-Nosed Monkeys** of the trip. **Western Pied Colobus** and **Western Red Colobus** are in abundance and were also easily seen on most walks.



Western Red Colobus



Western Pied Colobus

Squirrels are not uncommon and a **Green Bush Squirrel** was my first identifiable one. The second one was a **Gambian Sun Squirrel** and a 3<sup>rd</sup> one, which came into the camp on most days feeding under the fruiting tree, was a **Striped Ground Squirrel**.



Striped Ground Squirrel

The afternoon tour produced a family of Western Red Colobus only. The afternoon walks were in general slow, which seems to be a general rule in most rainforests.

Day 3:

It rained heavily in the night so no Sooty's at 7, and the forest was rather quiet until it got warmer, and the first hour only produced 1 **Campbell's Monkey**. When the sun finally looked through the heavy clouds the activity level in the forest picked up and soon I got the sights on some more families of Diana Monkeys and Western Red Colobus.

The troop of Sooty Managbeys came to feed at the camp around noon.

The afternoon walk produced one family of Campbell's Monkeys and two families of Western Red Colobus.

Day 4:

It rained heavily in the night again, so again no Sooty's at 7, and the forest was again quite silent to start with. But as yesterday, with the sun, life in the forest returned and produced several groups of Western Red Colobus, one family of Campbell's Monkeys, a few families of Western Pied Colobus and a big group of Sooty Managbeys. The new squirrel for the day was a **Red-legged Sun Squirrel**.

The afternoon tour produced some more Western Red Colobus, Western Pied Colobus and Diana Monkeys. The undergrowth is quite thick and at places not easy to see through, but the afternoon produced my first species of Mongoose, a **Slender Mongoose** and my first (and only) species of Duiker of the trip, a **Brooke's Duiker**. The mongoose I had already seen on my drive from Freetown running in front of the car.

Day 5:

The Olive Colobus are best seen from the river here so I decided to go by boat. I had already agreed to do it yesterday night despite the fast flowing river (Bobor really wanted to go). According to my guide Bobor, Pygmy Hippos are easiest to see from the river at night and Galagos and Pottos should be readily seen also. Luckily I was saved by heavy rains and went we went to get the boat it was gone. I could not have been luckier.

It was a brilliant morning with several groups of Western Pied Colobus, Diana Monkeys and Campbell's Monkeys and one group of Western Red Colobus and one of Sooty Mangabeys. The undergrowth produced my first ever **Red River Hog**, my first ever **Long-nosed Cusimanse**, my first ever **Slender-tailed Squirrel** and another Brooke's Duiker. Bobor also saw one small mouse on the forest floor.



Red River Hog

I had one day to spare in Freetown at the end of the trip and went to Tacugama Chimpanzee Sanctuary, which is about 30 minutes from the city center. Tacugama was established in 1995 to rehabilitate confiscated, orphaned and abandoned chimpanzees with the aim to release back them into their natural habitat. You won't see any other mammals in the area and no wild chimps although they are around, but it was still interesting to see and good to support. And it is here BBC and the other networks come to film chimps using tools to crack nuts.

A lovely, if short, mammal watching trip was over. I'll be back.

All the best

Torbjörn Lundqvist

## Mammal list

Species	Latin
Diana Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus diana</i>
Red River Hog	<i>Potamochoerus porcus</i>
Western Pied Colobus	<i>Colobus polykomos</i>
Western Red Colobus	<i>Piliocolobus badius badius</i>
Campbell's Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus campbelli</i>
Sooty Mangabey	<i>Cercocebus atys</i>
Martin's Putty-nosed Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus nictitans martini</i>
Long-nosed Cusimanse	<i>Crossarchus obscurus</i>
Slender Mongoose	<i>Herpestes sanguinea</i>
Brooke's Duiker	<i>Cephalophus ogilbyi brookei</i>
Green Bush Squirrel	<i>Paraxerus poensis</i>
Gambian Sun Squirrel	<i>Heliosciurus gambianus</i>
Red-legged Sun Squirrel	<i>Heliosciurus rufobrachium</i>
Striped Ground Squirrel	<i>Euxerus erythropus</i>
Slender-tailed Squirrel	<i>Protoxerus aubinnii</i>