

ZAKOUMA N.P. (T)CHAD

7-14TH FEBRUARY 2018.



WEST/CENTRAL AFRICAN LION. *Panthera leo leo*

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In February 2018 I was fortunate to spend a week in Zakouma N.P., Chad staying at African Parks Camp Nomade. A full and detailed trip report can be found on safari-talk.net Travel talk /Trip Report/Africa /Chad - Central African Republic. The purpose of this short report is to highlight the significant number of mammal species / subspecies that can be observed in this truly wonderful ecosystem that has been completely transformed since African Parks took over the management of the park in 2010.



KORDOFAN GIRAFFE *Giraffa camelopardalis antiquorum*

If you are a seasoned traveller to Eastern and Southern Africa you will see many familiar species in Zakouma N.P., but on closer inspection they often appear slightly different and are usually a different subspecies to those you are probably familiar with, the Kordofan Giraffe (above) would be a very good example. You will also possibly observe some species you have probably not observed before The Red-Fronted Gazelle or the Tiang, would possibly be good examples of this.

Taxonomy can be a very controversial issue so for the purpose purely of my own record keeping I have chosen to adopt recent classifications from the following sources:

Cats - Revised Taxonomy of the Feidae. IUCN Specialist Cat Group. CATnews. Special Issue 11. Winter 2017.

Ungulates - Groves C. & Grubb P. 2011. Ungulate Taxonomy. John Hopkins University Press.

Castello J. R. 2016. Bovids of the World. Princeton University Press.

*The only species/subspecies I have some difficulty with is the Defassa Waterbuck, the individuals found in Zakouma appear very different to those found elsewhere, larger and darker on the flanks. My travel companions were also of the same opinion, hence I have gone with the classification given in Frost. W.

2015. The Antelopes of Africa. Jacana Publishers. (Sing-sing Defassa Waterbuck, *Kobus defassa unctuosus*). Castello classifies the Waterbuck found in Zakouma as *Kobus defassa*.

A visit to Zakouma is very much more than just a series of game drives, we visited park H.Q. and enjoyed open access to African Park staff, took part in an aerial elephant survey over the park, spent an evening fly camping on the banks of the crocodile infested Bahr Salamat and visited a village market at Kash Kasha. I am reasonably well travelled in Southern Africa, but would have to say that the Zakouma is my best overall wildlife experience to date and I certainly would hope to return again in the future, particularly now that since my visit nine Black Rhinoceros have been reintroduced into the park the more to be added in 2019 if all goes well. African Parks have done a remarkable job in turning the park around in a relatively short period of time, the park simply teems with wildlife, the birdlife is exceptional also. The extended night drives must be amongst the most productive in Africa, on one night drive we observed 14 Genet, 4 Civet, 5 African Wildcats, 2 Crested Porcupine, a male Leopard, a Serval, a Hyena, 3 White-Tailed Mongoose, several Scrub Hares, 2 Honey Badgers (Mum and baby) and numerous resting bovinds.



RED-FRONTED GAZELLE. *Eudorcas rufifrons*

The positive impact African Parks and their policies have had on the local and wider communities is impressive, improved schooling and health care being just two examples.

SPECIES LIST

COMMON HIPPOPOTAMUS

Hippopotamus amphibious (Seen in the Chari River, N'Djamena, in front of the Hilton Hotel prior to leaving for Zakouma N.P.). Not commonly seen, none in the park.

AFRICAN SAVANNA ELEPHANT

Loxodonta africana cyclones (Seen from the air every

flight, the herd would usually be located during a week stay in the park. They are usually seen as one large herd although some splitting is starting to take place. Very nervous for obvious reasons. Flagship species for the park, reduced from 4,000 to 400 by poaching prior to AP's involvement, numbers now on the increase, many babies seen during this trip, should now be around 550).

CENTRAL AFRICAN LION

Panthera leo leo (ex. *senegalensis*) 8 seen during the trip

including the pregnant lioness on the front cover with a recent Giraffe kill. The Lions of Zakouma appear slightly different to those found further south, smaller, head shape different and males have less well developed manes. They also appear to form smaller prides and during my visit were seen either in pairs or individually. A visitor to the park two weeks after this visit reported seeing 40+ individuals, including cubs which I did not see. I was rather disappointed not to have seen more lions during the visit. Two sub-adult males were responsible for the Giraffe kill.

WEST & CENTRAL SAVANNA BUFFALO

Syncerus branchyceros (ex. *equinoctialis*) Very common in the

park, often seen in mega herds. Very different to the Cape Buffalo, smaller, different horn configuration and a huge variance in colour from black to red, ears are heavily fringed. They also appear slightly calmer than their southern cousins!



WEST & CENTRAL SAVANNA BUFFALO. *Syncerus branchyceros*, Note the variation in colour.

AFRICAN LEOPARD

Panthera pardus pardus, only one seen during a night drive,

however it was a good sighting the Leopard walked right in front of the safari vehicle and we watched him for about 5 minutes, he was a prime specimen about five years old. Leopards are not commonly seen in Zakouma although there is plenty of ideal Leopard habitat and I feel sure there must be a healthy population in the park.

SERVAL

Leptailurus serval serval (ex. *phillipsi*), one seen on a night drive from a distance. A second group of guests staying at Camp Nomade saw three in one evening. They are relatively common in Zakouma.

AFRICAN WILDCAT

Felis lyric lybica, eight seen during the week, including two very young kittens. All were relatively typical for the species however one seen from a distance was very pale with no markings, physically very lithe and larger than usual. It would be easy to suggest Caracal (which are recorded in the park but very rarely seen) but there was no extended hair on the top of the ears. If anyone has any comments or ideas I would be delighted to send you a very poor image for your perusal. African Wildcats are common in the park and you would be very unlucky not to see one during a weeks stay whilst on a night drive.

SPOTTED HYENA

Crocuta crocuta, four seen during our visit, two at the Giraffe kill and two singles later in the week. Not as common as in some parts of Southern Africa. I am aware of visitors to the park who did not see any during a weeks stay.

A single Striped Hyena may have been observed on a night drive from a considerable distance, accurate identification cannot be confirmed, hence was not included in the species count for this trip. Striped Hyena are known to occur in the Zakouma wider ecosystem.

DEFASSA WATERBUCK (SING-SING)*

Kobus defassa unctuosus, see my note above. Very common in the park particularly around riverine and pan habitats.



TYPICAL MALE ZAKOUMA DEFASSA WATERBUCK. *Kobus defassa unctuosus*?

KORDOFAN GIRAFFE

Giraffa camelopardis antiquorum, relatively common usually seen daily in herds and small groups. There is probably not many more than 2,000 of this subspecies

remaining in the wild and about half of these are found in Zakouma. Found in most habitats, with access to water.

WESTERN ROAN ANTELOPE *Hippotragus equinus koba*, we saw them daily in relatively small numbers, other visitors report quite large herds.

TIANG *Damaaliscus tiang*, common seen daily in large herds and small groups in a variety of habitats, generally pans and savanna.

LELWEL'S HARTEBEEST *Alcelaphus lelwel*, as above. Often seen together.

COMMON WARTHOG *Phacochoerus africanus*, generally common throughout the park, often seen with young.

LODER'S KOB *Kobus loderi* (previously considered a ssp of Buffon's Kob, *K. kob*), seen in large numbers as we travelled south in the park towards Bahr Salamat, became the most common bovid the further south we drove, Reedbuck are the more common species in the north. A controversially described species. We saw only one individual near camp with only one horn, isolated from the rest of the Kob herds by a considerable distance.

RED-FRONTED GAZELLE *Eudorcas rufifrons*, seen daily in small numbers. Very nervous and usually seen in pairs appears to prefer savanna with lots of shrubs. Not dissimilar to Thomson's Gazelle similar size but body stripe thinner and lighter. Not common.

NIGERIAN BOHOR REEDBUCK *Redunca nigeriensis*, seen in large numbers daily, certainly in the N.E area of the park around Camp Nomade, which for this visit was situated overlooking Rigueik Pan, the camp is sited at a different location each year.

SUDAN ORIBI *Ourebia montana*, observed two, two miles outside the park on the road to Kash Kasha village at midday.

CENTRAL BUSHBUCK *Tragelaphus phaleratus*, seen in small numbers possibly every other day in a variety of habitats, riverine locations appeared popular. Not common.

WEST AFRICAN BUSH DUIKER *Sylvicapra grimmia pallidior*, six seen usually on night drives in long grass, one sighting during the day. Red-flanked Duiker also listed for the park but not seen on this visit.

HONEY BADGER (RATEL) *Mellivora capensis concisa*, sometimes referred to as the Lake Chad Ratel, this particular ssp is found throughout the Sahel belt. Common on night drives, saw six including a mother with a youngster. This was the first time I had seen a Honey Badger, they were smaller than I expected but certainly oozed confidence. I was very happy to finally see one. A guest staying at the camp took a great image of one during daylight hours.

SIDE-STRIPED JACKAL *Canis adustus*, three seen all at night, two close to the Giraffe kill. Not common.

CENTRAL AFRICAN LARGE SPOTTED GENET *Genetta maculata*, very common, all seen at night. Not unusual to see at least 5 or 6 on a night drive. Small Spotted Genet also occurs in the park but was not seen, however I have seen this species many times in Tanzania, it is identified by the white tip to the tail and as the name suggests smaller body blotches.

AFRICAN CIVET *Civettictis civetta*, eight seen all at night, very common but not as common as the Genet.

MARSH MONGOOSE *Atilax paludinosus*, one seen at dusk in wet area of Riguelk Pan. THIS SPECIES IS NOT ON THE AFRICAN PARKS ZAKOUMA SPECIES LIST. This sighting has been drawn to AP's attention, another sighting was recorded two weeks after this one.

BANDED MONGOOSE *Mungos mungo*, relatively common throughout the park.

EGYPTIAN MONGOOSE

(separately) scurrying across in front of our vehicle.

Herpestes ichneumon, two seen both during the day,

SLENDER MONGOOSE

Galerella sanguinea, one seen as for species above.

WHITE-TAILED MONGOOSE

black individual. (Melanistic phase). Common on night drives.

Ichneumia albicauda, seven seen, including one totally

SENEGAL GALAGO

drive. Whether or not they were all of the same species could be questionable, however only this species is listed for the park, possibly needs to be studied in more detail.

Galago senegalensis, at least one seen on every night

OLIVE BABOON

large troops found in and around all different types of habitat. It has been suggested by some that the fact that the Lion population appears to remain static despite an abundance of prey items may be as a result of cubs being preyed upon by mature Baboons. If that is the case what other species are they impacting on. I have never seen so many in any park I have visited. Everyone in my group was of the same opinion. They were very bold in their behaviour.

Papio anubis, extremely common throughout the park,

TANTALUS MONKEY

park this was the least seen species. Small troops were occasionally seen in trees but were very nervous and immediately moved on. I saw three small troops briefly in treetops.

Chlorocebus tantalus, of the three primates found in the

PATAS MONKEY

daily in troops and small groups, favoured habitat savanna in keeping with their terrestrial lifestyle. This was a new species to me and I found them a very attractive primate, once again quite nervous.

Erythrocebus patas, relatively common in the park seen



COMPARATIVE IMAGE OF TIANG *Damascus tiang* (LEFT) & LELWEL'S HARTEBEEST *Alcelaphus lelwel*. (NOTE HORN DIFFERENCE AND DARK BODY BLOTCHES ON THE TIANG).

CRESTED PORCUPINE
nights.

Hystrix cristata, four observed, two pairs on different

SCRUB HARE
everyday usually at dawn and dusk.

Lepus saxatilis (crawshayi?), significant numbers seen

STRIPED GROUND SQUIRREL

Xerus erythropus, seen most days during daylight hours.

MULTIMAMMATE RAT

Mastomys sp., numerous small rodents seen on a daily basis most unidentified, reasonably sure this species was observed it is the only small mammal on AP's park species list.

Unidentified Bats were seen regularly at night around camp and on the night drives.

SPECIES NOT SEEN

AFRICAN WILD DOG, occasionally seen outside the park and is recorded from inside the park. This is a very rarely sighted species.

CHEETAH, one was sighted close to Camp Nomade feeding on a Gazelle the week before we arrived. Only two or three sightings are recorded per visitor season. I am aware of a visitor who has been twice to Zakouma and seen Cheetah on both visits. This was a target species, but one I knew I was most unlikely to observe. The subspecies found in this region is likely to be the Northeast African Cheetah, *Acinonyx jubatus soemmeringii* which is very rare and endangered.

PALE FOX, another target species which was not achieved and it was certainly not for the lack of trying. Most visitors staying a week would expect to observe at least one, the area around Tinga Camp is apparently a good area to find them particularly late on in a night drive.

STRIPED HYENA, see earlier note.

WESTERN GREATER KUDU, small numbers in the park, during a week you would expect to have a sighting.

AFRICAN GOLDEN WOLF (ex. Jackal), RED-FLANKED DUIKER, SMALL SPOTTED GENET, CARACAL, (last 3 mentioned in the text), GROUND PANGOLIN, AARDVARK, ROCK HYRAX, AFRICAN HEDGEHOG AND AS YET NUMEROUS UNRECORDED SMALL MAMMALS.

The not seen list certainly gives me a good excuse to return in the future and particularly as **BLACK RHINOCEROS** can now be added to the list.

I am not a specialist birder but during the trip **137** species/ssp of birds were recorded by my group without really trying. The highlight for the bird enthusiasts was the sighting of two **Black-breasted Barbets** which were located in a fig tree whilst driving to the southern areas of the park.

Reptiles are well represented in the park, amongst our sightings were a pair of mating African Rock Python, one of the two was huge 5+ metres in length and very thick bodied. Several large **Black-necked Spitting Cobra**, several very large Nile Monitor Lizards and numerous other smaller lizards of several species. Significant numbers of crocodiles were observed in and around the Bahr Salamat I initially recorded them as Nile Crocodile (West African form), but subsequent research has indicated that they were indeed West African Crocodile, *Crocodylus suchus* (IUCN Crocodile specialist Group). Numerous

specimens were in the region of 4+ metres in length and they appeared to be less aggressive than the Nile Crocodile.

37 species/ subspecies of mammals recorded during the visit.

Zakouma N.P. is a wonderful safari destination, with lots of very varied and different wildlife, it has in recent years become quite rightly a must visit destination at the top of many people's wish list. I would hope to return at some stage in the future to secure sightings of some of the mammals not seen on this visit. I hope this list will act as a catalyst to encourage more wildlife enthusiasts to visit Zakouma N.P.



AFRICAN ROCK PYTHONS MATING. Large specimen horizontal in the image, the smaller one is lying vertically across the other in the centre of the image.



TYPICAL LARGE SPECIMEN OF A WEST AFRICAN CROCODILE, *Crocodiles suchus*.

