

Ghana. 22/01 – 31/01 2023

This is a short story about my visit to Ghana in January 2023 with 22 mammals in 10 days.

Trip arrangement

After reading many trip reports I decided to arrange the trip through Robert Ntakor, a famous local bird- and mammal watching, guide as well a conservationist. This forum has been raving about his skills and can only concur. You can contact him on ntakorrobert@gmail.com or befriend him on Facebook. He brought his son Gideon, to teach him the trade. His brother is working for another company so nature seems to be firm in their DNA.

I stayed in reasonable comfortable hotels and the food was fine, especially in the beginning and end of the trip closer to Accra and the beer was cold everywhere. In one hotel they did not have any but asked how many I wanted and went shopping.

I flew with Brussel Airline and the trip got a less than happy start. Sitting with my breakfast red wine at the airport the flight got cancelled and delayed for 24 hours. So instead of chasing wildlife I went into Brussel chasing beer instead. I am happy to inform you all that I was very successful in locating many new species.

As cumbersome the visa Ghana application process were, as easy was it to go through all the gates at the airport.

After changing some money just when arriving (Robert recommended not to change at the airport and USD gave me the best FX-rate), mainly for beer, we went to a hotel close to my first stop, Shai Hills.

Shai Hills

4.45 am the alarm clock went off for breakfast at 5 and departure at 5:30. This was the general rhythm for the whole trip. It was great to wake up in the tropics with warm weather after a long winter.

I was kind of lucky with the weather as Ghana usually get the dry desert winds, the Harmattan, from December to March, lowering the humidity and causing hotter days, cooler nights and hazier sky with dust blowing from the Sahara desert. This year the Harmattan had at least not yet reached the southern part of Ghana. This however may have been responsible for me almost missing out on one of my target species, the Buffon's Kob, which is usually quite easy to find on the dry grasslands. Not this time.

Shai Hills is dominated by a chain of inselbergs amongst dry thickets and sparsely wooded grassland. We walked on a wide gravel road with the inselbergs on one side and, at first, thick bush and later dry savannah, on the other, between 6 and 11. Nice cool in the beginning and very hot at the end. I was the only tourist around, which was usually the case bar Kakum NP.

My first target species was the Green Monkey, a species I missed on Tiwai Island in Sierra Leone a few years back. The first mammal I found was a group of Olive Baboon on the top of the inselberg, just waking up.



I would later see a few closer.



A lonely Lesser Spot-nosed Monkey sat on branch quite far away from me, a species not easily found here. On a rock a small Common Slender Mongoose sat for a few seconds and a few meters from him, inside the thick bush, a lone Maxwell's Duiker swiftly disappeared when I approached.

Usually the savannah is very dry and the grass short this time of the year, so herds of Buffon's Kob are readily seen. Not so now. The grass was very tall due to unseasonal rains so if the beasts did not stand up they are well hidden. We walked for quite a bit with no luck. It was only when we passed close to a lone tree we scared a lone male Buffon's Kob, which ran away.

On the way back to the car we were hoping for some Green Monkeys, and Robert said that they usually are close to where we saw the other mammals earlier. And right he was, as he would be for many of the things we saw. A group of Green Monkeys were feeding inside the thicket, not so easy to see them when sitting in the trees and difficult to get any good shots as they kept hidden. They crossed the road from time to time swiftly.



From Shai Hills to Kakum NP we had around 3,5hours on very good roads not being too busy.

Kakum NP

Kakum National Park is maybe Ghana's most visited attraction with the world famous canopy walkway with its 7 suspension bridges forming a 333-meter long canopy walkway.





The views are spectacular and probably offer the best chance of seeing several species of monkeys, which are not easily seen from the ground as they escape fast when they hear you approaching. Heard 2 gunshots not far away from where I stood in the middle of the day, so the poachers did not seem particularly scared to be caught. I stayed for 3 days driving at 5.30 and arriving at the headquarters around 6, well before the official opening times. Every morning began at the walkaway. It was beautiful and peaceful to enjoy the mist slowly rising and evaporate over the tree tops. I had it to myself at least for the first 1-2 hours.

Much of the time we waited on platform 3 and 6, which was supposed to offer the best chances of spotting monkeys. The species at the top of my list, beside Pangolin was Lowe's Monkey, Olive Colobus, and Lesser Spotted-nosed Monkey. They are frequently seen foraging early mornings, quite often together in larger groups. Not on my first morning however. It was very slow and I did not see any mammals at all despite being in the park from 6-11:30. On the ground we walked very slowly with Robert checking each dark thicket in the trees as this is where you usually see the diurnal and arboreal Long-tailed Pangolin, my target species no. 1. No such luck and I would dip them here. But Kakum is still offers one of the best spots to find them according to Robert.

I was back in Kakum NP at around 15:30 to have a bit more time on the canopy walkway and later the first of 2 night-walks, the only one I did during my stay. Close to monkey bedtime a group of Lowe's Monkey moved in the canopy seeking their sleeping place for the night. A group of Green Colobus travelled with them, but they were still far away and I did not get a good look. Sitting waiting for darkness on one of the platforms, a Forest Giant Squirrel went down a tree and later a Pel's Anomalure climbed up the very same tree, maybe only 30m from us. This was as close as any larger mammal would come during my stay.



Just when we made ourselves ready for the night-walk just after darkness had settled, Robert spotted a Western Potto climbing down a tree and in the other direction a Demidoff's Galago called. Both quite far away. Demidoff's Galago seems to be easy to spot and I encountered them several times. In one tree 3 of them were chasing each other. Later Robert spotted 2 Northern Giant Pouched Rats, which I missed. But one would cross the path down at the head quarter running under one of the huts by the parking lot, so I bagged that one. The silliest decision of

the night I took was not to photograph the 2nd Western African Potto of the night. He was not too far away but we were heading back and my camera was in my backpack already and I felt sure I would see it next night. As soon as I walked away I knew this was the decision I would regret. And I did. I would not see any again.

The 2nd day was pretty much a copy of the first day but with more mammals. Today a few groups of Lowe's Monkey, Olive Colobus, and Lesser Spot-nosed Monkey were around the canopy walkway.



Still too far to get any decent shots even with my 700mm lens (500mm + 1.4* extender). In our quest looking for the Pangolin Robert spotted a furry ass inside a dark thicket high up, which turned out to be a Western Tree Hyrax. The squirrels were more active today too which produced 2 Green Bush Squirrels and another Forest Giant Squirrel.

The two hours night walk generated a very cute Thick-tailed African Dormouse,



an unidentified bat



and a small unidentified mouse climbing a tree, several Demidoffs's Galago, and a moving Western Tree Hyrax at eye level. What the Hyrax he lacks in size he for sure makes up in lung power with maybe the eeriest of all calls I ever heard in the night in any rainforest. Like someone being in a lot of pain.

On day three we had a short morning walk between 6 and 9 with no much new to report before leaving the park for my next target the very same afternoon a, wait-for-it, ...bird.

New Edubiase

This was to be my honorary mammal of the trip, the beautiful and bizarre White-necked Picahartes or White-necked Rockfowl. There are a few known sites in Ghana where you can see them by their nesting site, but no one easier then here, with only a 20 min drive from New Edubiase and then an easy 20min walk on a good path through some secondary forest. On the walk there a very fast moving Spitting Cobra crossed our path, my first live Cobra ever.

Most other places involve a 3-4 hour walk each way, the return trip being in complete darkness. And I think you really want to see them by their nesting site, as they are quite relaxed at this time of the day and not particularly scared of people. I was there between 5 and 6 pm. They move funnily through the forest primarily through a series of hops and bounds on the ground and short flights and made a few laps around the nest they build hanging under a big rock.



As in many other places, this site is also under threat from development. This concession has been sold to a company who want to build a road exactly through where the nesting site is. Robert and others are fighting this at the moment. If they lose it may be a bitter pill for the wildlife tourism in general and birding tourism in particular. 2 birds are responsible for around 90% of the birding trips in Ghana Robert said, the Picahartes and a rare Plover in Mole NP.

Boabeng Fiema Monkey Sanctuary

My prime goal in Boabeng Fiema monkey sanctuary was to find 2 species of monkeys, Lowe's Monkey and White-thighed Colobus and to get some good photos so I planned to stay for 2 days. If you only want to see them I guess 30 minutes or so suffice. 1 minute (or less) to find the Lowe's Monkey and the rest to find the White-thighed Colobus. They are there in good numbers, especially Lowe's Monkey. I was told to hold my distance from the Colobus as they otherwise might be aggressive. Due to my flight cancellation I decided to skip 1 day here not to miss the other interesting beasts, which turned out to be a good call. For photo/filming of mammals this was by far the best place.





The Lowe's Monkeys were waiting for me at the reception already and plenty more came in the forest when the compulsory village guide called loudly. It was snack time. The White-thighed Colobus were not very shy either and came within a few meters. The Lowe's Monkeys literally jumped on me. It is easy to walk the paths and sandals suffice and it was here I met the only tourist outside Kakum NP.

Bobiri Forest and Butterfly Sanctuary

In Bobiri Forest and Butterfly Sanctuary I had one morning tour scheduled and the Long-tailed Pangolin was what we were here for being a prime spot. I was supposed to stay in the park for one night, but it was unfortunately fully booked when I made my booking with Robert. The consolation was that I stayed in the only hotel of my trip where I had to show my passport, which meant great food, nice pool and very cold beer. The drawback was that I dropped my tablet which landed on the edge on my pinky toe. NOT NICE. Had I stayed in the forest I am sure that would not had happened. Luckily I could walk in my sandals in this and the next place.

Anyway, walking is very easy in Bobiri. We followed again a wide dirt road and well-marked paths inside the forest. The pace was slow looking in every nook and cranny. We did not see much the first couple of hours. From time to time we heard steps and rustling leaves but saw nothing. Walking the narrow paths inside the forest we found the first of two Fire-footed Rope Squirrels, another lifer for me, close to the ground, which is where you usually find them. Around 11, Robert shouted the word I wanted to hear, Pangolin. An individual was moving on a branch into a thicket. Unfortunately no time for making to get a good shot, but still wonderful seeing this iconic beast. It is remarkable how well camouflaged they are given their size once inside the bush.



If you like butterflies and reptiles this is a great place to stay too.

Atiwa Range Forest

Atiwa Range Forest Reserve was the last stop for a last morning walk between 6 and 1 pm in a very disturbed patch of forest. It is only a few hours from Accra so perfect for my flight later the same evening. Again we walked up on a wide dirt road which we followed slowly until the top of a ridge. I did not expect much due to its closeness to Accra and though it was more of an activity to pass time. I was wrong. I bagged quite a few new species for the trip.

It was very slow the first couple of hours, but a lot of birds, and when it got warmer, butterflies and reptiles appeared in very good numbers, but still no mammals. Like in many other places in Ghana, the hunting pressure is big, which the spent shotgun shells beside the road was proof of here. There are some monkeys around but they are very rarely seen.

Around 9 leaves rustled and something was clearly moving, a marsh Mongoose, which I saw for the better part of 1 second. Robert got a better view and confirmed the species. At around 9:30 the highlight of the day walked along a liana into a dark thicket up in the low canopy, another Long-tailed Pangolin. He was moving quite fast and I was not really ready with my camera, but at least got a photo for my records.



Up at the ridge the squirrels reigned, with 2 species in the same tree walking on the same liana, a Gambian Sun Squirrel and a Red-legged Sun Squirrel, both lifers and shortly thereafter, another Fire-footed Rope Squirrel moving fast on a tree trunk close to the ground, my last mammal of the trip.

A lovely, if short, mammal watching trip was over.

Tobi

| Common Name | Latin Name | Kakum NP | Shai Hills | Boabeng Fiema Monkey Sanctuary | Atiwa Range Forest | Bobiri Forest and Butterfly Sanctuary |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|----------|------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| Thick-tailed African Dormouse | <i>Graphiurus crassicaudatus</i> | 1 | | | | |
| Lesser Spot-nosed Monkey | <i>Cercopithecus petaurista</i> | 15 | 1 | | | |
| Lowe's Monkey | <i>Cercopithecus lowei</i> | 5 | | 30 | | |
| Olive Colobus | <i>Procolobus verus</i> | 5 | | | | |
| Green Monkey | <i>Chlorocebus sabaeus</i> | | 10 | | | |
| West African Potto | <i>Perodicticus potto</i> | 2 | | | | |
| Western Tree Hyrax | <i>Dendrohyrax dorsalis</i> | 2 | | | | |
| Demidoff's Galagos | <i>Galagoides demidoff</i> | 5 | | | | |
| Olive Baboon | <i>Papio anubis</i> | | 10 | | | |
| Red-legged Sun Squirrel | <i>Heliosciurus rufobrachium</i> | | | | 1 | |
| Forest Giant Squirrel | <i>Protoxerus stangeri</i> | 2 | | | | |
| Green Bush Squirrel | <i>Paraxerus poensis</i> | 2 | | | | |
| Fire-footed Rope Squirrel | <i>Funisciurus pyrropus</i> | | | | 1 | 2 |
| Black-bellied Pangolin | <i>Phataginus tetradactyla</i> | | | | 1 | 1 |
| Pel's Anomalure | <i>Anomalurus pelii</i> | 1 | | | | |
| Maxwell's Duiker | <i>Philantomba maxwellii</i> | | 1 | | | |
| Common Slender Mongoose | <i>Herpestes sanguinea</i> | | 1 | | | |
| White-thighed Colobus | <i>Colobus vellerosus</i> | | | 15 | | |
| Buffon's Kob | <i>Kobus kob</i> | | 1 | | | |
| Northern Giant Pouched Rat | <i>Cricetomys gambianus</i> | 1 | | | | |
| Gambian Sun Squirrel | <i>Heliosciurus gambianus</i> | | | | 2 | |
| Marsh Mongoose | <i>Atilax paludinosus</i> | | | | 1 | |