



Bobiri

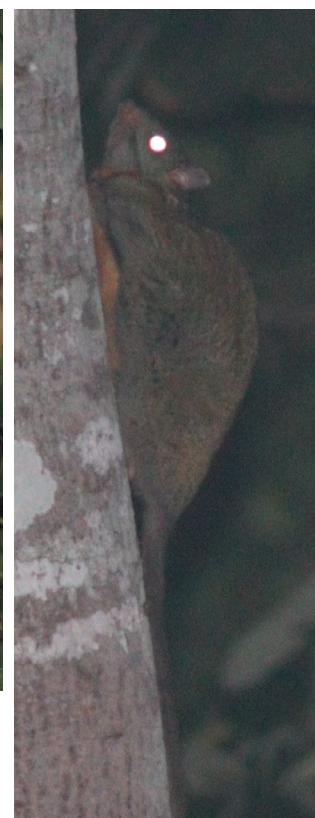
“Independent” Ghana 10. – 31.12. 2023

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We traveled Ghana on public transport for three weeks without any prior arrangements (besides visa and the obligatory reading of reports in the airplane) and managed to observe roughly **37 mammal species** (3 of them not really identified, but clearly different) with **26 lifers**. This approach is completely feasible and we did not encounter any significant trouble, but it's sometimes tiresome, as the “public transport” is a mix of long distance buses that have cryptic schedules and unknown transit times, so you hardly get to use them, overfilled “tro-tro” minivans that go when full and then maybe stop halfway when they get too empty, taxis, tuk-tuks and even motorcycles and is generally very slow and unpredictable; also the places that you have to pass through (downtown transit hubs) are really, really unpleasant. The main redeeming quality of traveling in Ghana is that a lot of people genuinely want to be helpful and we always found a solution to everything by just talking to them.

While deciding on the approach for Ghana, it looked like the only 4x4 car rentals available (a sedan won't really cut it as far as I have seen the tracks in question) were with a driver – being stuck with one stranger for three weeks looks to me even much worse than taking the local guides who at least change from day to day – only later I found a 2012 birding report where people rented a 4x4 without a driver – it was still more expensive per day than our entire expenses, but in the unlikely event I ever had to go to Ghana again this would be the way.

Not having our own car meant that we didn't easily get to obscure places (especially not at night) and thus it somewhat forced us into parks and reserves where guides are compulsory to enter. I never liked the idea of taking guides and have done it only very sparingly so far, but I decided to give it a go in Ghana considering the circumstances – yep, turns out I don't like it in practice either and I will continue primarily choosing destinations where we can be on our own. The guides, while sometimes actually nice people, were generally useless for finding the animals and sometimes actively detrimental to the effort. I do somewhat understand that they



Anomalures: Lord Derby's (left, Bobiri), Pel's (middle, Bobiri), Beecroft's (right, Amedzofe)

don't want people walking around Mole alone and stumbling into elephants, but the idea of guides being compulsory in Kakum or Shai is just absurd. Overall, we saw only 23 species really independently – the remaining 14 come from those areas where we had to have a guide (but they were still overwhelmingly found by us). That having said, I would find the tour of Ghana made of just Bobiri, Amedzofe and the lookout in Mole (all places with no need for a guide) a pleasant outing – and with more time dedicated to each place, the “independent” list could grow.

Our expenses on the ground were almost exactly \$50 per day per person, to which however one has to add not only the airfare but also the 550 bucks in visa, permethrin, DEET and Malarone spent before the journey. (Anyone crossing a Ghana border also needs to show a Yellow Fever vaccine certificate, but that we already had.) Finding accommodations was easy, finding anything to eat or drink was not – we were mostly dependent on hotel meals, or just hungry; the only good non-hotel eateries we found were in Kakum visitor center and Crest in Tamale. There is apparently nothing remotely resembling a supermarket in Ghana and the small shops don't sell anything useful – when we went for overnights in the jungle, we just packed a little of questionable biscuits and hoped for the next day's lunch; the only other “supplies“ I ever invented were bananas and a sweet-ish parody on bread. The most surprising thing to me was how difficult it was to get something to drink, even in relatively posh hotels (in the local perspective) – 1.5L bottles of water are a valuable rarity and we often had to do with 0.75 or even 0.5 ones, which is not logistically easy, consider that I need like 8 of the latter per day. In the heat, a cold soft drink was a dream, but often they sell just 0.3L bottles and that's it.

I was actually surprised by how many species we saw at the end of the day. The forests were alive with animals, but the species were quite repetitive at first. The number really jumped up when we reached the savannas of Mole and a few extra species were then added by crossing the Volta. Overall a lot of the species were just “west African variants” of things we already knew, with the major exception of the Anomalures. It happened to us several times that we found an utterly confusing animal and only after some time realized that it was an Anomalure again – they are huge and, despite being rodents, they don't really look like ones until you see the teeth. The only other thing that made me drop my jaw were Giant Pouched Rats, I think they should be advertised more! We did not see any Pangolins – Daan Drukker says in his report that sometimes guides plant them to be “found” for the tourists and our utter lack of sightings despite significant efforts makes me wonder how many of the successful observers from other reports were tricked this way ...

Species summary:

Kakum – canopy area: Small Sun Squirrel, Forest Giant Squirrel, Lord Derby’s Anomalure, Dwarf Galago sp., Forest Giant Pouched Rat, Lesser Spot-nosed Monkey, Lowe’s Monkey (heard only), Western Tree Hyrax (heard only), two different unidentified smaller rodents, unidentified bats.

Kakum – Entwikwaa: Dwarf Galago sp., Western Tree Hyrax (heard only), West African Potto, African Dormouse sp.

Bobiri: Lord Derby’s Anomalure, Pel’s Anomalure, Western Tree Hyrax, Demidoff’s Dwarf Galago., probably Hipposideros sp., African Dormouse sp.

Mole – Motel and around: Elephant, Kob, Northern Bushbuck, (Defassa) Waterbuck, Common Warthog, Olive Baboon, Green Monkey, Striped Ground Squirrel, White-tailed Mongoose (likely)

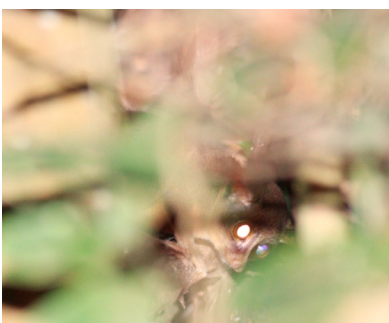
Mole – only on tours: Patas Monkey, Yellow-winged Bat, Pardine Genet, Northern Lesser Galago, Red-flanked Duiker

Amedzofe: Benin Tree Hyrax, Beecroft’s Anomalure, Thomas’s Dwarf Galago, Giant Pouched Rat sp., Straw-colored Fruit Bat, Epauletted Bat (Epomops sp.), Red-legged Sun Squirrel, Mona Monkey (in Tafi Atome)

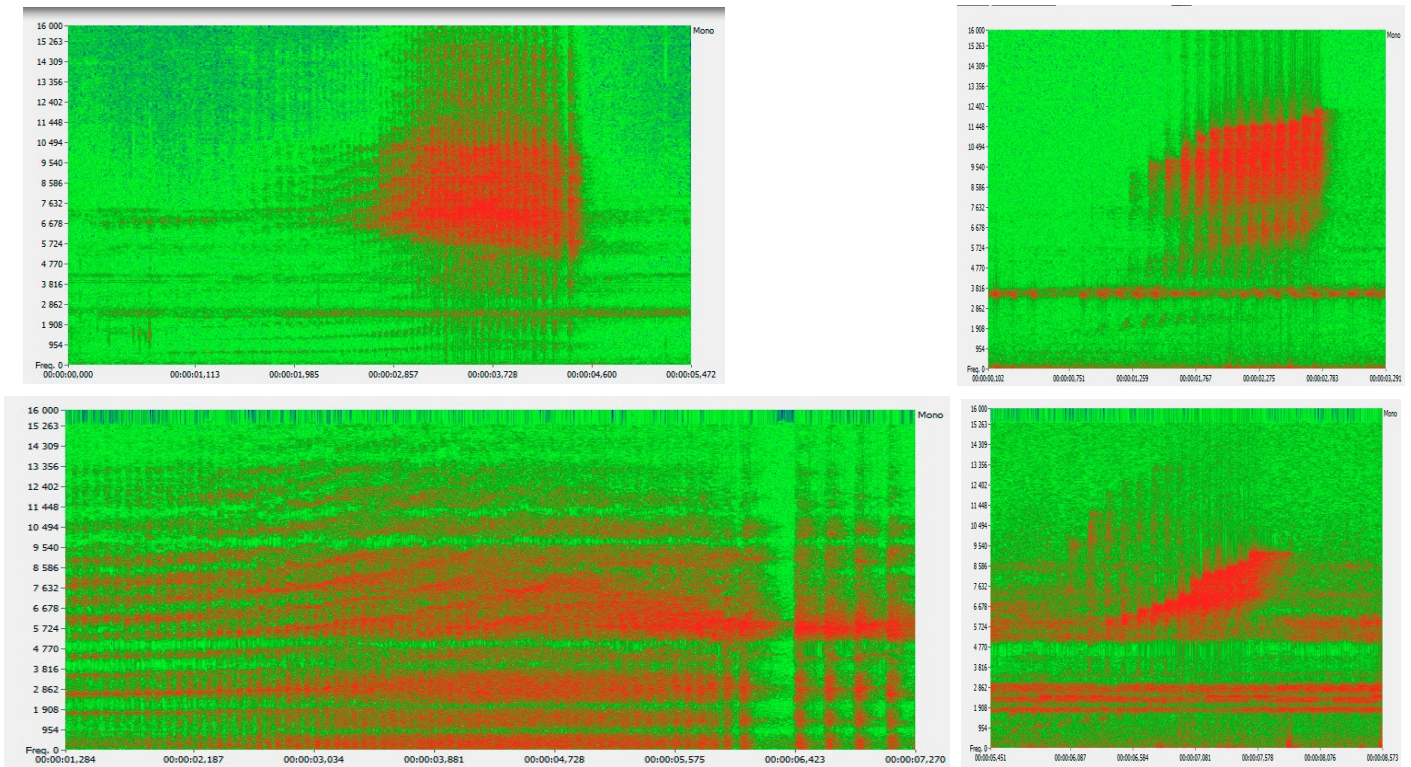
Shai Hills: Olive Baboon, Tantalus Monkey, Lesser Spot-nosed Monkey, Kob, Egyptian Tomb Bat

Additionally, we saw Red-legged Sun Squirrels at Hans’s Cottage Motel and Kokodo Guesthouse in Cape Coast, Small Sun Squirrel near Hans’s and Striped Ground Squirrel near Ezile Bay in Akwidaa.

https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?d1=2023-12-10&d2=2023-12-31&taxon_id=40151&user_id=opisska



Dwarf Galagos - bottom left three from Bobiri (Demidoff’s?), top right three from Amedzofe where only Thomas’s should occur



Dwarf Galago recordings. Top row is ours, bottom from <https://www.wildsolutions.nl>. Top left from Bobiri, bottom left Demidoff's, top right from Amedzofe, bottom right Thomas's. All stretched to same time scale. While there are differences, they seem to be mostly due to higher sensitivity of our recordings for higher frequencies.

In **Kakum**, we first took an overnight tour to the treehouse with several hours of night walking in the **canopy walkway** area. The guide insisted on hacking through small overgrown tracks that were not great for finding mammals – but still produced some, including a frustrating IR-only view of what was probably a Duiker. The only Anomalure was however found when returning to the treehouse on a bigger path and that's where we also saw most of the shockingly huge rats (these are difficult to ID, but the ones deep in the forest were likely Forest Giant Pouched Rats). The treehouse was hot with beds too short for a normal person and not in itself very useful. We spent the next morning on the canopy walkway – no monkeys showed up, but Lowe's Monkeys were heard (and we got a reasonable recording). We wanted to stay more in the park, but the guesthouse was closed for renovations and camping would apparently require overnight presence of a guide – it was not really clear how this would work (and whether we wouldn't have to constantly carry all our stuff from one place to another, as the campsite was deserted and we wouldn't want to leave things there while away), so we stayed in the somewhat boring Rainforest Lodge outside the park – Hans's Cottage Botel is nicer and has at least the squirrels, but we have seen it the night before and it's much further away.



Kakum: two unidentified rodents, Forest Giant Poached Rat from deep in the forest and another Giant Poached Rat individual from the visitor center (bottom right)



Squirrels: top: Striped Ground (Akwidaa), Forest Giant (Kakum), Red-legged Sun (Amedzofe), bottom: unusually colored Red-legged Sun (Hans's), Small Sun (Hans's)

For another night out, we traveled with tro-tro and motorcycles to **Entwikwaa** ranger station, where our guide arranged overnight camping in the forest for us. We were given an unnecessary entourage of three rangers, camped just a few kilometers into the forest and did a night and morning walk. During the latter, our guide got completely lost and we had to save him using the miracle of GPS. At this point, I really regretted not having studied Dwarf Galago voices beforehand – I always thought there would be time, but there was very little internet connection (we could only get Vodafone at the airport). After listening to the voices later, it seems to us that the Dwarf Galagos here were more likely Thomas's, as opposed to Demidoff's around the canopy walkway, but we are not really sure. There were also some weird "galagos" (as called out by the rangers) with much less reflective eyes – these turned out to be some species of African Dormice. The main product of this expedition was the Potto; all of the more agile animals were probably kilometers away due to the constant chatter of the rangers.

We went back to the **canopy walkway** for another early morning and got at least the Spot-nosed Monkeys. Lowe's were again calling not far, but again not seen – the guide said that most monkeys have recently moved to other feeding areas. Besides the guide-only area, there is a trail just behind the toilets that leads to a somewhat derelict campsite and an older treehouse – nobody ever bothered us there, so we hung around a lot and saw some monkeys from the treehouse, but very distant and fast, impossible to identify. In Kakum I had the feeling that the overall experience can be quite variable depending on who you talk to – there did not seem to be any obvious hierarchy in the visitor center, but our driver from Hans's was a guide himself and after we told him that we were into mammals, he arranged for us to sit down with a specific park official – I am not sure that the Entwikwaa idea is regularly presented to walk-ins.



Western Tree Hyrax (left, Bobiri), Benin Tree Hyrax (right, Amedzofe)



Monkeys: top: Lesser Spot-nosed (Kakum), Patas (Mole), Green (Mole), bottom: Mona (Tofi Atome), Olive Baboon (Mole), Tantalus (Shai Hills)

The visits to Akwidaa (for unsuccessful snorkeling) and Bonkro (for successful Rockfowl watching) were not exciting on the mammal front. On the other hand, Bobiri was. **Bobiri Butterfly Sanctuary** is definitely the best rainforest site we have been to – a lonely guesthouse inside the forest with complete freedom to explore the area, day and night, no hassle. We mostly followed the main track used for logging – in places it was muddy and required some effort to pass, but it offered the best views of the canopy. The first night, we finally got photos of Western Tree Hyrax – their calls were ubiquitous both here and in Kakum, but seeing one was surprisingly hard – huge as they might be, they are pretty good at hiding in the leaves, IR was essential. The second night we went further east and found Lord Derby's Anonalures and then further west and found one Pel's. With Dwarf Galagos and Dormice in every other bush, the nights were alive and exciting, even though the number of species wasn't that huge. Unlike Kakum, here we got some pictures of Dwarf Galagos, but we are still not sure of the ID – acoustic recordings suggest that they were Demidoff's. We spent two nights and seriously considered staying for longer, but there was no cell reception at all and I really needed it for some personal issues, so we left, but this was the one place in Ghana I would gladly come back for more. We tried daytime walks through the smaller trails, hoping for pangolins, but without success.



Western Potto (left, Kakum), Pardine Genet (right, Mole)



Hard-to-ID genets from Mole

It took us almost 48 hours to get from Bobiri to **Mole**. We checked into the Mole Motel and then just enjoyed the view from the clifftop, racking many species just from there, without having to take a tour of the park – Kob, Northern Bushbuck, Striped Ground Squirrel, Olive Baboon and Warthog right around the Motel and (Defassa) Waterbuck, Green Monkey and (later) Elephants in the landscape below (note that their taxonomy is a war zone and they can't really be counted as any species). We thought we could walk around the village surrounding the Motel in the night a bit, but were eventually prohibited from doing so, because it's apparently so deadly dangerous – not before we saw a very likely White-tailed Mongoose though. A night car safari produced (not thanks to the guide) two genets, which I am not sure how to ID in the absence of tails on pictures, and a Northern Lesser Galago, a morning car safari repeated most of what was visible from the viewpoint (without Waterbucks) and added Patas Monkey. Another night out in a tree hide seemed promising, but the half-night watch of the saltlick and creek from the hide brought only more genets (one Pardine with a good view) and galagos, likely because of the guide's insistence on keeping a fire (the smoke from which also made any observations needlessly difficult). At least there were the stunning Yellow-winged Bats roosting nearby and a brief view of Red-flanked Duiker on the morning hike back. There was also supposedly Porcupine scat and the driving track had a long section of Hyena footprints. We wanted to stay longer, but the Motel was fully booked – the rangers offered camping, but again, the logistics of leaving stuff was unclear and the prospect of being in a non-AC space over the noon unattractive, so we left – on the way out, we saw a roadkill of a Hedgehog.

I dreaded the long and inefficient way back through Kumasi and Accra, but after some asking around in Tamale, I found that there are sometimes shared taxis directly to Hohoe in Eastern Volta using the northeastern road instead. It did not look promising in the evening, but a car filled up in the morning and by the next sunset, we were checking into the Abraerica hotel in **Amedzofe**, the highest human settlement in West Africa. This time we came ready and already at dinner recognized the completely different call of Benin Tree Hyrax. We have spent three nights there – the village is really friendly (after you pay all the entrance fees to their “attrac-



Bats: Hipposideros sp. (Bobiri), Yellow-winged Bat (Mole), Epaulettes Bat sp. (Amedzofe), Straw-colored Fruit Bat (Amedzofe), Egyptian Tomb Bat (Shai Hills)



African Dormice: left and top from Amedzofe, bottom right two photos of one individual in Kakum

tions“, of course) – unlike other places in Ghana, the people were really unintrusive and we felt safe and easy walking around at night even close to houses; the lower temperature was also nice. Using the “nature trail” as a starting point, we found trails into the extensive plantation/forest mosaic on the plateau – there we met a hunter at night, but he promised to be careful and not shoot us; we also got photos of Benin Tree Hyrax and saw several Beecroft’s Anomalures including finally one in flight – seems that they really hate white light and will just freeze under it, but red light is fine for activity. In the plantations there were also Giant Pouched Rats (difficult to ID to species) and finally some African Dormice that were willing to pose for photos. Dwarf Galagos were common and according to range maps, they should all be Thomas’s – their calls were also much higher pitched than in Bobiri (so high that I often could not hear them). An Epauletted Bat (genus *Epomops*, not the much more common fruit bat) hung from trees in the plantations at night, and several Straw-colored Fruit Bats next to the road to the hotel. We paid a taxi to bring us to **Tafi Atome**, where we quickly saw the Mona Monkeys, but it felt a bit like a zoo.

For the last night, we stayed in the guesthouse in **Shai Hills**. We arranged for a morning walk, but the guide did not show up; 40 minutes later, we got slapped onto another group, but could wander around relatively unbothered and saw the Tantalus Monkeys as well as Spot-nosed again. When it got hotter we hired a safari car for the bat cave, where the Egyptian Tomb Bat colony did not disappoint, and also saw a few Kobs from the car.

Mole: Northern Bushbuck, Kob, Waterbuck, Common Warthog





Giant Pouched Rat from Amedzofe, probably not identifiable to species

While real birders may get 300–400 species from Ghana, our mammal-focused program clearly interfered with birding (chiefly due to our need to sleep at least at some times) and we only got around 180 species. Other than that we saw 15 herps – most interestingly a *Cophoscincopus* water skink (which we first thought to be a newt only to realize there are no newts in Africa) – and a lot of invertebrates: not only was Bobiri really faithful to its designation and had a lot of butterflies, but there was something small of interest everywhere; in Akwidaa we even saw a *Clibanarius* hermit crab that could be an undescribed species.



Thanks to everyone who helped us prepare by responding to my thread on mammal-watching.com and to ID mammals on iNat and FB, in particular to Daan Drukker – who also made a very useful report from which we learned a lot in planning.

Elephant (Mole) – Savannah, Forest, hybrid or a separate species? Your pick!