

After reading several mouthwatering reports posted on the internet, whether for mammals or for birds, I've always wanted to visit Ghana since many years. Now it is done 😊 In order to organize such a trip, I contacted Ashanti African Tours a couple of times but for some reason they never answered to my emails. Strange... However, I also contacted in parallel Robert Ntakor (ntakorrobert@gmail.com) who was used by several other mammal watchers in the past and luckily, he was available on our dates in February-March 2024 so we booked the trip with him. After discussing about our expectations and target species, he proposed us a classic itinerary that brought us to Shai Hills NP, Kakum NP, the well-known picathartes site in the Bonkro forest, the Boabeng Fiema monkey sanctuary, Mole NP, Bobiri forest reserve and the Atewa range. The price Robert was asking for my wife and I for such a 2-week long itinerary was very decent. As already written in many reports, Robert is a great guide: a very nice person to travel with, very knowledgeable about both birds and mammals and very good at finding the target species we gave him while preparation the trip. His skills are quite amazing and for sure belongs to the best guides we've ever had in all our nature trips. Robert is good but not so much his car: the air conditioning was not working, which is a problem for such a country, and we had several other car breakdowns during the trip (brakes, engine smokes...). Nothing too serious each time and I would say it is part of the African adventure 😊, but I think Robert will have to make some serious repair on his car.

We've been many times to Africa but it was only the second Western African country we visited after Senegal end of 2023 so I don't have many points of comparison. Globally speaking, the people we met in Ghana were always very welcoming and friendly. The accommodations Robert booked were comfortable and clean but with lack of maintenance as there was always something not working: air conditioning here, water in the shower there, toilet flush elsewhere etc... The food was ok but on the average side I would say. The roads were tared for the most part in the areas we visited but often with many potholes so in general, I found the road network to be in poorer shape compared to Senegal. We also had several electric outages during our stay, which apparently was a recurring problem according to Robert, but never too serious anyway to negatively impact our trip.

Funny enough, it seemed the whole mammalwatching community was recently visiting Ghana 😊: Jan Ebr was there end of 2023 and I want here to thank him for the advice he gave me when I contacted him a few weeks before our trip when he posted his report. Then, I learnt just a few days before our departure that Martin Royle was also in Ghana and we could meet him in Kakum NP, which was very nice to see him in person several years after our memorable trip in China prior COVID. Finally, we also met several times Carlos Bocos during the trip as we followed more or less the same itinerary from Kakum, Mole, Bobiri to Atewa range. It was nice to exchange on our mammals and bird sightings.

Now regarding the wildlife part of this trip to Ghana, I would say I have mixed feelings about the experience we had because there were positives and negatives during this trip.

On the negative side, the weather conditions were insane during the first half of the trip. Indeed, it was hot and very humid, as expected, but I visited other countries with high humidity levels (Sri Lanka, Uganda, Borneo and Raja Ampat) and nothing was as bad as what we got in Ghana because there was no wind at all in the forests, not a single breeze to cool off a bit, and the mornings were not cooler than the rest of the day, so this was quite tough for me to handle. For the end of the trip, we had a big storm at Bobiri, which cooled down the temperature and also brought some refreshing breeze that was more enjoyable for our walks in the Bobiri and Atewa forests. The temperatures up North in Mole NP were higher but since the weather conditions were significantly drier, I could support this much better. Then, I found the animals, both mammals and birds by the way, to be always very skittish and difficult to take picture of. We could feel that the hunting pressure was high in the country and thus could explain why most of the wildlife was difficult to observe, even in national parks. Indeed, we heard gun shots while in Kakum NP and during our night walks in Atewa, we came across with no less than 4 hunters with their riffle in hands. Finally, and probably the most disappointing point, I found the night walks and spotlighting sessions in the Ghanaian forests to be very boring. Indeed, except for Mole NP that I will cover into more details later on, we saw very little (not to say nothing) in those forests. Compared to what I read in past trip reports, I guess we were unlucky, maybe because of the weather conditions, but we tried hard with Robert during hours and hours on multiple nights and frankly, except for the many tree hyraxes and Demidoff's galagos we heard a lot, we only observed a couple of mammals at night: 2 Pel's anomalures and 1 Demidoff's galago in Kakum NP, 1 bat in Bobiri forest and...that's all ! We saw literally nothing in Atewa, Bonkro forest and on some nights in Kakum. I understand this can happen with wildlife but it is frustrating.

On the other hand, there were positives. First, they have Savannah Dry in Ghana and we are so much fond of this cider from South Africa that it was great to drink it wherever we could 😊. Secondly, Ghana is truly a paradise for bee-eaters, not a mammal I know, but this is a bird family I especially like to observe. There are not so many countries where you can see and take photos in very good conditions of no less than 10 different bee-eater species, some of which easily seen only in this country. Finally, and most importantly, Ghana host a good diversity of mammals, including many different monkey and ungulate species that are typical of the

Western African fauna, and of course they have arboreal pangolins of which we were spoiled to have great sightings, but I will come to this with more details later on...

Now some details on all the places we visited during this trip.

Shai Hills NP

We arrived on the first day at the Accra airport late evening, later than initially planned because three days before our departure our international flight to Accra was cancelled by Brussels Airlines, damned! They were proposing to rebook us to another flight but... 3 days later! No comment. Second time we were flying with this company and second time we had a cancellation issue with them so I think it will be the last time... We had to rebook in urgency with KLM but of course at a much higher cost. Anyway, the KLM flight to Accra was smooth and upon arrival, we got through the health check for the yellow fever vaccine (don't forget it) and immigration control very quickly (it was much easier to get our Visa stamped than getting it from the Ghanaian embassy in Paris 😊). Robert greeted us at the airport exit and drove us directly to our hotel for the evening. We stayed at the *Malbert Inn Guest House*, a fairly nice and comfortable hotel conveniently located near Shai Hills that we visited on the following day. We left the hotel very early in the morning, which was the norm for the whole trip, in order to visit the park when I was not too hot.

I liked this small park that I found quite scenic with green savanna landscape and nice rocky hills. We mostly visited the park by car since we focused on mammals. During the few hours we spent there, we could observe numerous **Buffon's cobs**, several **Tantalus monkeys** that often stayed hidden in trees and **Olive baboons**, including a large group wandering around the entrance gate. We also visited the usual place inside a cave where a colony of **Egyptian tomb bats** roost.

After a few hours and considering the mammals we already observed, Robert mentioned we would have little chance to see other species and thus suggested to leave earlier than initially planned for Kakum NP. We went back to the Guest House to pick-up our luggage and then drove through Accra towards our next stop near Cape Coast on time for a late lunch before a first visit to the Kakum canopy walkway in the late afternoon & evening.

Kakum NP

We stayed 4 days / 4 nights to thoroughly visit the park and give us more chance for pangolin sightings as suggested by Robert. We stayed at the well-known *Hans Cottage Botel*. This is a good hotel but with outdated rooms to be honest. Their restaurant area near the pond is very nice and they serve good food. They also have a large swimming pool very enjoyable during the hot hours of the day. Their pond is a nice place to walk around for some bird watching and crocodile observation while we come back to the hotel between the morning and evening/night visits in Kakum NP. The drive from the hotel to the park entrance is about 30min long on a fairly good, paved road.

Kakum is famous for its canopy walkway and this is indeed a great experience to observe the rainforest from above and to look for mammals and birds from the platforms. According to Robert, we had exclusive access to the platforms early mornings and late afternoons outside of the official opening hours but given the number of people we met during those hours, and they were not all birdwatchers, I think this was not so exclusive 😊 I was also surprised by how quiet the wildlife was during our visits to the canopy walkway during these 4 days. In addition to the walkway, we walked along the numerous trails existing within the park that Robert knew very well. We even walked several times deep inside the thick forest vegetation in search for pangolins. It was always humid, steep on some occasions, but fun sometimes, and we never felt lost since Robert knew exactly where to go. Here also, we saw very little during the numerous hours we spent on the trails during the day and at night. One day, we visited a couple of places outside the park to look for some specific birds. Globally speaking, I found Kakum NP very nice to visit but surprisingly poor in wildlife. Indeed, from the platforms during the day, we saw only a few squirrels that included two **red-legged sun squirrels**, one **small sun squirrel** and one **forest giant squirrel**, one **olive colobus** but quite well, and a few **lesser spot-nosed monkeys** but always far away and furtively. At night, we saw one **Pel's anomalure** on the known tree where it uses to roost next to platform #1 and another one from the trails. We saw nothing else from the trails except for one **Demidoff's galago** at night. On the other hand, we heard tenths of **Western tree hirates** but without seeing one, not even eye shines. Finally, we saw one morning near the entrance gate and buildings a few skittish **Lowe's mona monkeys**. We missed a lot in Kakum: we did not see any duiker, any mongoose nor cusimanse and very few squirrels actually. Even more disappointing and to Robert's surprise, we did not see a single potto! We saw few mammals in Kakum NP but there is a but, and what a but! Indeed, we had two marvelous sightings of **long-tailed pangolins**!! One morning while actively searching from a platform for a lesser spot-nosed monkey that was hiding in a tree, Robert shouted all of sudden that one pangolin was moving in another tree further away. It was quite a distant observation, but we could see the animal very clearly and for a few minutes. What

a wonderful beast and what a long tail indeed! The second observation was even better and funny enough, only a few meters from the main trail going up to the canopy walkway and in a large tree next to a resting area. We saw it extremely well for a few minutes before it climbed very high in the tree and eventually disappeared inside the thick foliage to sleep. I was amazed to see so easily such an iconic mammal after all the time we walked along the trails or deep inside the forest to search for it: a very good example of being at the right moment at the right place 😊 Bottom line, Kakum NP definitely remain a reliable place where to see pangolins if you are patient (and also lucky I would say) enough.

Bonkro Forest

After Kakum, we drove North towards the small city of New Edubiase where we slept at the *Unicorn*, a brand new guesthouse with very comfortable rooms. They don't have a restaurant, but food could be ordered for dinner. They have Savanna dry at the bar and they serve a nice breakfast. We went there for the usual stop at the *Picathartes* site located deep in a secondary forest nearby. After seeing nicely and very easily these amazing birds, we had a night walk to look for mammals, but we saw nothing... This place is where tree pangolins are quite often seen and as a matter of fact, Martin Royle saw one there a few days before we came. Thinking now about it, I regret that we did not ask Robert to spend more time in the forest for a longer night walk back and forth along the trail or even come back early morning before sunrise. Well, that's how it is...

Boabeng Fiema

We kept on driving north to Techiman where we slept at the *Encom hotel*. The room and restaurant were ok but definitely not the best accommodation we had during the trip. From there, it was a one-hour drive to the Boabeng Fiema monkey sanctuary, a small forest with a good network of tracks that I found fairly well maintained by the local community. We had to take a local guide from the village, definitely not necessary, but compulsory anyway and this makes jobs for the locals. The visit is rather short since the forest is small and the monkeys very habituated to humans and easy to see. The **Lowe's mona monkeys** were super tame, approaching us very close and even some of them climbing on us for food. The very beautiful **Geoffroy's colobus** were shier and remained in the trees, but they were in good numbers and fairly easy to observe however. This sanctuary is a nice place to visit to observe these two species of monkeys very well, but it is obviously not a very wild experience.

Mole NP

The drive further North up to Mole National Park was quite long but the tired road was mostly in good shape. On the other hand, the road was busy with hundreds of slow-moving trucks since it is the principle commercial axis to Burkina Faso. Along the way, the vegetation changed from green forests to a drier savannah landscape. The weather became sunnier with higher temperatures but at the same time the humidity level decreased so the conditions were actually more decent for me. We visited Mole NP during 4 full days and nights where we stayed at the *Mole Motel*, very well located on top of a small ridge with a super view to the park and pools where elephants and plenty of other animals were roaming. The rooms were nice and luckily equipped with AC, which was great given the very hot temperatures there. They also had a nice swimming pool, very convenient while waiting at the motel during the hottest hours of the day. The restaurant was serving fairly good food and the personnel was very friendly. Overall, a very nice place indeed to stay when visiting Mole NP. Due to its location, several mammals and birds could be seen within the hotel premises. While enjoying the viewing platform and resting area near the pool, we could observe many **elephants**, several **bushbucks** and **Buffon's cobs**, **green monkeys**, **olive baboons**, **common warthogs**, one **patas monkey**, one **giant pouched rat** and a couple of **striped ground squirrels**. We visited the park with Robert's car, and he choosed a local ranger/guide: Paul, who was a great guy and always ready to spend many hours during the game drives we did on early mornings, late afternoons and at nights. Paul even proposed one day to leave very early in the morning before sunrise to go deeper inside the park to look for uncommon mammals. What I found interesting in Mole is that you can visit the park through typical game drives with cars, but you can also stop wherever you want to continue the visit on foot with the armed ranger/guide. I usually don't like safari on foot because the animals run away very quickly when they see human being walking in the savannah and you see little at the end. There is no exception with Mole NP, except for the elephants who seems to be quite habituated to humans and thus, you can approach them very closely and sometimes too closely to my comfort. Quite impressive! Robert's car had a low underbody so we could not drive through all the tracks, and it was also not ideal for wildlife photography, but the main advantage is we were on our own and thus, could do whatever we wanted and for how long we wanted. The vegetation in Mole NP is fairly dense for a savannah and the animals are very skittish for most part, which made the mammal observations not always easy and photo taking always challenging. Anyway, this parc is quite rich in wildlife for Western Africa standards and during

our 4-day visit, we could observe many different mammal species, not even mentioning birds. The most common mammals we could see were **warthogs, elephants, bushbuck, waterbuck** and **Buffon's cob**. To my surprise, monkeys were not so easy to spot although we could observe **green monkeys, olive baboons** but only a couple of **patas monkeys**. On the not so common species, we had some nice observations of **yellow-winged bats, roan antelopes, common duikers, red-flanked duikers** and **Western hartebeests**, the latter we saw in higher numbers than what I was expecting after reading some past reports. On the tough mammal species, we observed once a group of **Gambian mongooses**, two **slender mongooses** very furtively, and a group of **Western buffalos** that Paul and Robert were eager to find and show us. We drove many kilometers before seeing them. Unlike our night walk experience in the forests, the night drives in Mole NP were much more interesting and active, and although we did not see so many different species, we saw every night plenty of **Senegal galagos**, some of them doing impressive jumps between branches, and plenty of genets that were all **large-spotted genets** according to Robert. We also observed a few **African savannah hares**, some cool night birds, **stripped hyenas** twice, including two young ones that we could approach on foot surprisingly close, one (maybe too) **white-tailed mongoose** and a huge but confused **Western buffalo** bull in our car headlights. Overall, I found Mole NP to be a fairly well protected (although there is no doubt poaching still exists there) and maintained park; it is quite rich in wildlife and several typical Western African mammals can be observed there without too much effort. I did not regret having spent several days to visit this park.

Bobiri forest

We left Mole NP very early morning for the very long drive, about 10h, to reach the Bobiri forest reserve located next to the large city of Kumasi. Robert booked us at the guesthouse inside the forest, which was a great idea. The *Bobiri guesthouse* is basic, but I found it actually much better than what is written in many evaluations. Ok, there is no AC and no electricity all the time but there are showers, clean rooms with comfortable beds and they serve excellent food. In addition, the team who is running the guesthouse is nice and helpful. We arrived late afternoon and we did a small walk along the main trail during the remaining day time. We flushed a **slender mongoose** and observed a few birds but that's all. After dinner, we were planning for a long spotlighting session, but it was cut short as a big storm reached Bobiri and we could come back to the guesthouse just on time before it poured rain for most of the night. We decided with Robert to try again at 4am the following morning. We walked for a few hours along the main trail, but except for a large bat what we identified as a **hammer-headed bat**, we didn't see any other mammal. We walked again in the morning after breakfast but still no mammal. On the other hand, the number and diversity of butterfly species in Bobiri was quite amazing.

Atewa range

Our last stop during this trip in Ghana was the Atewa Range that we wanted to include to see some specific bee-eaters leaving there and indeed, we were treated with some great observations. Robert also mentioned that he regularly saw pangolins there, so we definitely had to add this place to our itinerary. We stayed at the *Royal Bleumich hotel* in New Tafo, which is located about 40 min drive from the Atewa range. This hotel was only royal by its name as it was not very well maintained and the personnel not very welcoming. However, the rooms were comfortable, and their restaurant was preparing good food. We visited in Atewa two places mostly. First, we walked along a few trails at the bottom of the mountains in some degraded forest for bird watching. The area consisted of cocoa plantations, a few pools that attracted a nice range of bird species and large carries due to a large bauxite mine project financed by China that Robert said was recently stopped thanks to the action of locals and foreign organizations willing to defend the Atewa mountain biotope. Let's see how long this will last... The second place we visited was the main trail climbing up to the mountain: it is about 8km long and unlike what is written in some report, I did not find it so steep or difficult to climb if you take some time. We climbed the trail 3 times: once during the day for birdwatching mainly and twice at night. Here also and like in the other forests visited, long hours of spotlighting there did not result in any mammal observed. OK, to be fair, we heard tenths of Western tree hyraxes and we saw once something moving in a tree that Robert said was a fire-footed rope squirrel, but I could not personally identify it as I did not see any distinctive shape. The only mammals we could observe while in Atewa were the thousands of **straw-coloured fruit bats** that were flying over New Tafo and our hotel late afternoons. Quite an impressive show!

To conclude on this trip to Ghana, we could eventually observe 37 different mammal species, which is not too bad given the fact that we did not specifically look for bats and did not observe that many squirrel species. The largest diversity of mammals was actually seen in Mole NP that was definitely richer in wildlife, both nights and days, compared to the forest areas. In the forest however, we were lucky to see very well one of the three pangolins species living in Ghana: the beautiful long-tailed pangolin, as well as several wonderful bee-eaters (the rosy, black and blue mustached species for instance), which made this trip successful. Because we had to

make some choices given the time we had and we did not want to rush from one place to another, we skipped the Ankasa forest, which seems nowadays to be the best place for pottos and a variety of bat species. A good excuse maybe to come back to this country but Ivory Coast and Tai NP seems to be an even more interesting place to visit for the species we missed in Ghana combined with some other extraordinary Western African mammals.

Below is the list of all the mammals we could observe during our 15 days spent in Ghana:

Mammals with photos or well seen (lifers in green)				
Species	Espèces	Latin Name	Where seen	Pic
African forest elephant	Éléphant de forêt	<i>Loxodonta cyclotis</i>	Several observed in Mole NP	X
Demidoff's galago	Galago de Demidoff	<i>Galagoides demidovii</i>	One observed well in Kakum NP but many heard at night in various forests	
Senegal galago	Galago du Sénégal	<i>Galago senegalensis</i>	Plenty observed at night in Mole NP	
Olive baboon	Babouin olive	<i>Papio anubis</i>	Several observed in Mole NP and Shai Hills	X
Tantulus monkey	Vervet tantale	<i>Chlorocebus tantalus</i>	A few observed in Shai Hills	X
Green monkey	Callitriche	<i>Chlorocebus sabaeus</i>	Several observed in Mole NP	X
Olive colobus	Colobe vert	<i>Procolobus verus</i>	Only one individual observed, but well, in Kakum NP	X
Lesser spot-nosed monkey	Hocheur blanc-nez	<i>Cercopithecus petaurista</i>	A few observed in Kakum NP but always in far distance or in poor conditions	
Lowe's mona monkey	Cercopithèque de Lowe	<i>Cercopithecus lowei</i>	3 observed in Kakum NP and plenty in the Boabeng Fiema sanctuary	X
Geoffroy's colobus	Colobe de Geoffroy	<i>Colobus vellerosus</i>	Serval observed in Boabeng Fiema sanctuary	X
Patas monkey	Patas	<i>Erythrocebus patas</i>	Only a few observed in Mole NP	X
Pel's flying squirrel	Anomalure de Pel	<i>Anomalurus pelii</i>	2 individuals seen at night in Kakum NP	X
Red-legged sun squirrel	Héliosciure à pattes rousses	<i>Heliosciurus rufobrachium</i>	Only 2 or 3 individuals observed in Kakum NP	X
Small sun squirrel	Héliosciure tacheté	<i>Heliosciurus punctatus</i>	Only 1 observed in Kakum NP	X
Gambian sun squirrel	Héliosciure de Gambie	<i>Heliosciurus gambianus</i>	Only 1 observed in Kakum NP	X
Striped ground squirrel	Écureuil fouisseur	<i>Xerus erythropus</i>	A few observed in Mole NP	X
African giant pouched rat	Cricétome des savanes	<i>Cricetomys gambianus</i>	1 individual seen at the Mole Lodge	X
African savanna hare	Lievre des savanes	<i>Lepus microtis</i>	A few observed at night in Mole NP	X
Egyptian tomb bat	Chauve-souris égyptienne	<i>Taphozous perforatus</i>	One colony observed in a cave in Shai Hills	X
Yellow-winged bat	Mégaderme aux ailes orangées	<i>Lavia frons</i>	A couple observed in Mole NP	X
Hammer-headed bat	Hypsignathe monstrueux	<i>Hypsignathus monstrosus</i>	One observed in flight in Bobiri forest reserve	
Straw-coloured fruit bat	Roussette des palmiers	<i>Eidolon helvum</i>	Thousands observed flying late afternoon over the Atewa range	X
Long-tailed pangolin	Pangolin à longue queue	<i>Manis tetradactyla</i>	2 magnificent observations in Kakum NP !!	X
Large-spotted genet	Genette panthère	<i>Genetta maculata</i>	Plenty observed at night in Mole NP	X
Slender mongoose	Mangouste rouge	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>	A couple observed in Mole NP and another one in the Bobiri forest reserve	
Gambian mongoose	Mangouste de Gambie	<i>Mungos gambianus</i>	A group observed in Mole NP	X
White tailed mongoose	Mangouste à queue blanche	<i>Ichneumia albicauda</i>	One observed at night in Mole NP	X
Spotted hyena	Hyène tachetée	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>	2 juveniles and 1 adult observed separately at night in Mole NP	X
Common warthog	Phacochère commun	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>	Common in Mole NP	X
Western hartebeest	Bubale occidental	<i>Alcelaphus buselaphus major</i>	Quite common with several nice observations in Mole NP	X
Western buffalo	Buffle des savanes	<i>Syncerus caffer brachyceros</i>	One confused lone male observed at night in our car headlights and a very shy group observed near a pond in Mole NP	X
Buffon's kob	Cobe de Buffon	<i>Kobus kob</i>	Common in Shai hills and Mole NP	X
Waterbuck	Cobe défassa	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>	Several observed in Mole NP	X
Bushbuck	Guib harnaché	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>	Common in Mole NP with several tame ones at the Mole Lodge	X

Red-flanked duiker	Céphalophe à flancs roux	Cephalophus rufilatus	2 observed during the day and another one at night in Mole NP	X
Common duiker	Céphalophe de Grimm	Sylvicapra grimmia	A few observed night and day in Mole NP	X
Roan antelope	Antilope rouanne	Hippotragus equinus	Two separate groups observed in Mole NP	X
Total Species Recorded = 37				
Below some other species that I don't count given the observation circumstances				
Maxwell's duiker		Philantomba maxwellii	Sadly, only a few seen dead on the side of the roads sold as bushmeat	
Western tree hyrax		Dendrohyrax dorsalis	Plenty but only heard during our spotlight sessions in the forests	
Fire-footed rope squirrel		Funisciurus pyrropus	A glimpse observation in Atewa. It was this species according to Robert but I personally could not tell due to the poor conditions	
African civet		Civettictis civetta	One distant black body observed at night in Mole NP. Robert told us it could be a civet but I'm really not sure (could have been a white-tailed mongoose...)	

I'm adding to this report pictures of some of the species we observed during that trip, especially those new to me.



African forest elephant



Olive colobus



Lowe's mona monkey



Geoffroy's colobus



Pel's flying squirrel



Gambian sun squirrel



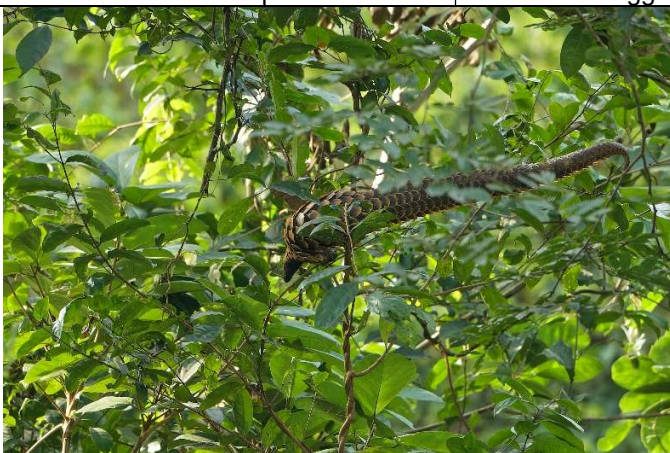
Small sun squirrel



Red-legged sun squirrel



Long-tailed pangolin 1



Long-tailed pangolin 1



Long-tailed pangolin 2



African giant pouched rat



Straw-coloured fruit bat



Egyptian tomb bat



Yellow-winged bat



Red-flanked duiker



Large-spotted genet



Spotted hyena



Gambian mongoose



White tailed mongoose



Buffon's cob



Western buffalo



Common duiker



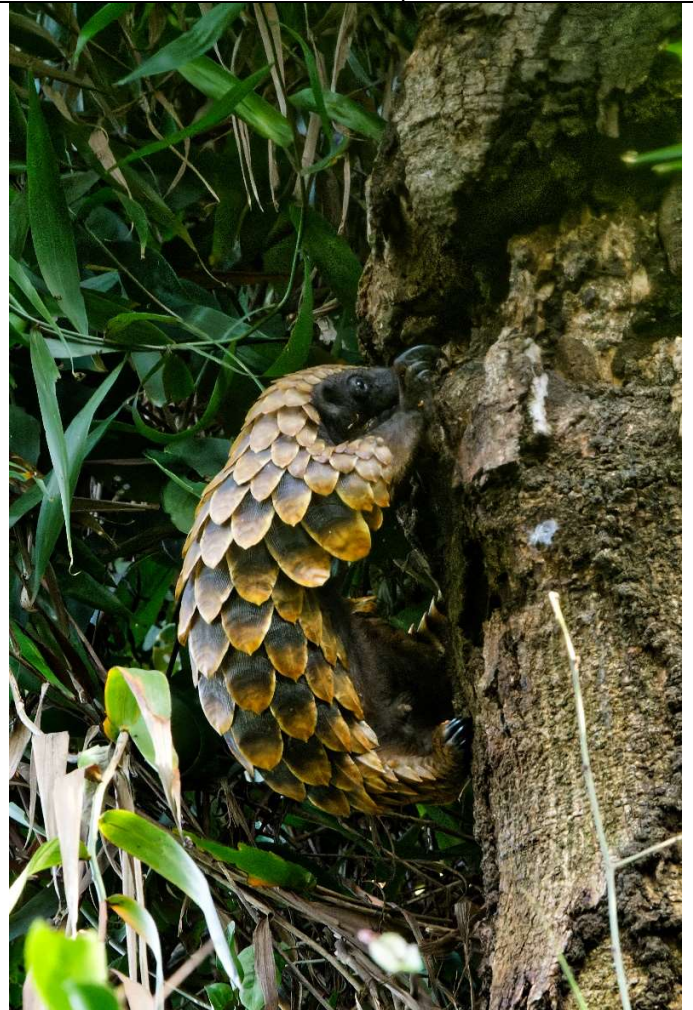
Bushbuck



Western hartebeest



Roan antelope



More long-tailed pangolin