



Pictus Safaris Trip Report – Zakouma NP, Chad – March 2024

Abstract

The 2023-2024 season is beginning to come to a close in Zakouma, and our March 2024 visit to the park was, again, hugely enjoyable and successful. There was some concern that there might be no way to exceed the quality of mammal-watching experienced in 2023, especially as there was a fair amount of water in parts of the park and daytime temperatures were much, much higher than in previous seasons. However, the mammal-watching was consistently superb.

Extreme heat was a recurring theme throughout our eight nights in the park – every day saw temperatures reach well in excess of 45°C (113°F), and it was usually searingly hot for the vast majority of the day. Early morning and late evening drives were productive, and these focussed exclusively on areas with substantial remaining water, including the famous areas of Rigueik and Dikere, as well as Machtour, Antiga and Sourone. The reward was some incredible birding – whilst we didn't keep a bird list as our clients were exclusively interested in mammals, the densities of waterfowl and vast murmurations of red-billed quelea remained a real highlight.

Much of the most productive game-viewing, as usual, came at night. Drives left after dinner at around 9pm, and were usually out until 2.30am or so. Zakouma is a full-on destination in this respect, and it always recommended to miss a few morning or evening drives to ensure everyone is well rested. The standard of accommodation at Tinga Camp remains basic, but the food, levels of service and guiding all continues to improve.

The ongoing political situation in Chad remains uncertain, with elections scheduled for May 6th. Pictus Safaris continue to tentatively plan for the 2024-2025 season which, if anything like the season just gone, will only further cement Zakouma's status as amongst the finest savanna game-viewing destinations in Africa.

At a Glance

Dates	March 22 nd – March 31 st , 2024
Number of Clients	5
Countries Visited	Chad
Key Target(s)	Serval, Honey Badger, Caracal, Aardvark
Total Mammal Species Recorded	45
Total Bird Species Recorded	N/A (No bird list kept for this tour)



Itinerary

Day	Destination	Accommodation
March 22 nd , 2024	N'Djamena, Chad	Radisson Blu N'Djamena
March 23 rd – March 30 th , 2024	Zakouma NP, Chad	Tinga Camp
March 31 st , 2024	N'Djamena, Chad/Tour End	N/A

Highlights

Zakouma NP, Chad

- Superb cat viewing, with 28 serval and five wild cat recorded
- Two leopard sightings, as well as a rare sighting of cheetah
- Superb views of lion, including dramatic clashes with huge herds of buffalo, and many cubs
- Incredible densities of waterfowl around Rigueik and Sourone
- Vast murmurations of red-billed quelea in the south of the park
- 10 honey badger recorded, as well as pale fox, countless civet and genet
- Other highlights included crested porcupine, Patas monkey and Egyptian mongoose
- Memorable encounter with Africa's largest herd of elephant
- Massive gatherings of buffalo, Kordofan giraffe and tiang

Report

In short, the game-viewing in Zakouma remains sensational. On approach into Zakouma Airstrip, we caught our first glimpse of **bush elephant**, and on the taxi to aircraft parking we spotted our first **olive baboon** and **banded mongoose**. The short drive to camp, despite the already-scorching temperatures, allowed for good views of **Kordofan giraffe**, **Defassa waterbuck**, **Buffon's kob** and a handsome herd of **roan antelope**.

Our first afternoon drive took us to Rigueik, a particularly productive area we can only access when Camp Nomade guests are absent – throughout the week, there were repeated disagreements between a film crew and a rather unpleasant group at Nomade, but our access remained largely unfettered, with our group visiting Rigueik around half a dozen times throughout the tour. Today's drive took in the incredible densities of waterfowl at the remaining two pools at Rigueik, as well as great numbers of grazers including **Bohor reedbuck**, **Lelwel hartebeest**, **tiang**, Kordofan giraffe and much more. The highlight of this drive was undoubtedly a huge herd of **buffalo** chasing down three (yes, three!) mating pairs of **lion**, with some remarkable clashes between the cats and their pursuers.



By night, Zakouma truly comes into its own, and our lengthy drive tonight set the tone for the remainder of our stay. Even on the relatively short drive back to camp for dinner, we recorded our first **serval, wild cat, honey badger, Senegal galago, common genet** and **rusty-spotted genet**. Our drive through the productive areas of Machtour and Antiga produced lion, **spotted hyena**, plenty more serval, **African civet**, common genet, rusty-spotted genet, **common duiker** and countless grazers.

Most days fell into a similar pattern, with the exception of a full-day excursion to view the huge herd of bush elephant (that was hanging out much further north than usual), a morning visit to a local market, and evening visits to Sourone to view dramatic flocks of red-billed quelea. Generally speaking, drives were enjoyed around Rigueik wherever possible and, when Rigueik was closed, drives focussed on the few areas holding water around Machtour and Antiga. Rigueik consistently produced excellent lion sightings, as well as herds of buffalo, tiang, Lelwel hartebeest and countless Bohor reedbuck. The grassy areas to the south-west of Rigueik were productive also, offering sightings of lone bull bush elephants, plenty of ostrich (with young), many Nile monitors, Egyptian mongoose, common slender mongoose, kob, **common warthog, striped ground squirrel**, and **Patas monkey**. By night, Rigueik produced one of our **leopard** sightings, as well as lots of serval, honey badger, wild cat, **side-striped jackal** and lion.

Machtour and Antiga were occasionally slow, but always came good in the end. By day, these areas produced the usual cast of giraffe, hartebeest, kob and waterbuck – predators were largely absent, with the exception of a small resident pride of lion with some very young cubs. By night, it sometimes took multiple visits, but we left with sightings of leopard, **pale fox, red-fronted gazelle**, serval, wild cat, spotted hyena, **crested porcupine, white-tailed mongoose**, common duiker and **African savanna hare**.

On the occasions that we visited Sourone, the quelea were the target, and they delighted with spectacular formations as they came into roost each evening. This charming area also produced lion, crested porcupine, wild cat, serval and large herds of buffalo – on the long drive back to Tinga one night, we also happened across two male **cheetah**, a spectacular sighting in this part of the world.

Tinga Camp itself was a great spot for wildlife-watching. **Tantalus monkeys** and **olive baboons** were always around, and the riverbed below camp was frequently visited by lion, bush elephant, buffalo and **bushbuck** during our stay. The trails around camp often held rodents and other small mammals in the very early morning, and we spotted **grass rat, Congo gerbil** and **savanna shrew** when heading out on some mornings. Bats seen in camp and in the field were **midas mops bats, yellow-winged bats, large-eared slit-faced bats, Egyptian slit-faced bats** and **Egyptian free-tailed bats**.

As usual, the Chari River in front of the Radisson Blu in N'Djamena has a resident pod of **common hippopotamus**.



Mammal List – 45 species

Species	Scientific Name	Location(s)*
Carnivora – 16 species		
Cheetah	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>	ZNP
African Civet	<i>Civettictis civetta</i>	ZNP
Spotted Hyaena	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>	ZNP
African Wildcat	<i>Felis lybica</i>	ZNP
Common Genet	<i>Genetta genetta</i>	ZNP
Rusty-Spotted Genet	<i>Genetta maculata</i>	ZNP
Egyptian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>	ZNP
Common Slender Mongoose	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>	ZNP
White-Tailed Mongoose	<i>Ichneumia albicauda</i>	ZNP
Serval	<i>Leptailurus serval</i>	ZNP
Side-Striped Jackal	<i>Lupelella adusta</i>	ZNP
Honey Badger	<i>Mellivora capensis</i>	ZNP
Banded Mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>	ZNP
Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>	ZNP
Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	ZNP
Pale Fox	<i>Vulpes pallida</i>	ZNP
Cetartiodactyla – 13 species		
(Lelwel) Hartebeest	<i>Alcelaphus buselaphus</i>	ZNP
Tiang	<i>Damiscus lunatus</i>	ZNP
Red-Fronted Gazelle	<i>Eudorcas rufifrons</i>	ZNP
Northern Giraffe	<i>Giraffe camelopardalis</i>	ZNP
Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	NDJ
Roan Antelope	<i>Hippotragus equinus</i>	ZNP
(Defassa) Waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>	ZNP
(Buffon's) Kob	<i>Kobus kob</i>	ZNP
Common Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>	ZNP
Bohor Reedbuck	<i>Redunca redunca</i>	ZNP
Common Duiker	<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>	ZNP
African Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	ZNP
Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>	ZNP
Chiroptera – 5 species		
Yellow-Winged Bat	<i>Lavia frons</i>	ZNP
Midas Mops Bat	<i>Mops midas</i>	ZNP
Large-Eared Slit-Faced Bat	<i>Nycteris macrotis</i>	ZNP
Egyptian Slit-Faced Bat	<i>Nycteris thebaica</i>	ZNP
Egyptian Free-Tailed Bat	<i>Tadarida aegyptiaca</i>	ZNP
Eulipotyphla – 1 species		
Savanna Shrew	<i>Crocidura fulvastra</i>	ZNP
Lagomorpha – 1 species		
African Savanna Hare	<i>Lepus victoriae</i>	ZNP
Primates – 4 species		
Tantalus Monkey	<i>Chlorocebus tantalus</i>	ZNP
Patas Monkey	<i>Erythrocebus patas</i>	ZNP
Northern Lesser Galago	<i>Galago senegalensis</i>	ZNP



Olive Baboon	<i>Papio anubis</i>	ZNP
<i>Proboscidea – 1 species</i>		
African Savanna Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>	ZNP
<i>Rodentia – 4 species</i>		
African Grass Rat	<i>Arvicanthis niloticus</i>	ZNP
Striped Ground Squirrel	<i>Euxerus erythropus</i>	ZNP
Crested Porcupine	<i>Hystrix cristata</i>	ZNP
Congo Gerbil	<i>Taterillus congicus</i>	ZNP

*NDJ – N'Djamena, ZNP – Zakouma NP

Misses

This season in Zakouma proved challenging for **striped hyena**, **caracal** and **aardvark** – none of these species were seen by any group during our visit. With concerted effort, we would likely have seen aardvark around Goz Djarat, but we instead stayed in the park focussing on leopard and cheetah. Caracal sightings have been exceptionally rare in the last few seasons (with our sighting last year the only one reported, apparently) but they continue to be commonly seen further west in Siniaka-Minia. Striped hyena seem to be seen less commonly nowadays, but are undoubtedly still around.

As the main herd of elephant was further north than usual, we had no reason to venture further south along the Salamat. As a result, we did not encounter **oribi**, **greater kudu** or **red-flanked duiker** during the tour – but we would expect to easily record oribi and kudu if targeted.

No effort was made to locate the small population of **black rhino**, although fresh dung was seen on one occasion.

Contact Details

Pictus Safaris can be contacted by email at contact@pictus-safaris.com or via our website at www.pictus-safaris.com. We are a tour operator specialising in small-group and private departures across Africa, and will be offering a small-group departure to Chad's wonderful Zakouma National Park in March 2025.