

Central African Republic trip report, March 2025.

Tropical rivers in real life rarely look like my imagined fantasy version. The Sangha River is an exception. Uncoiling lazily through tropical rainforest, with no visible plastic pollution and only hand-powered watercraft in evidence, it could still serve as the setting for a Rudyard Kipling story. As an anachronism it is not perfect – the hordes of crocodiles on exposed riverbanks are long gone – but it is still a twenty-first century wonder. And on the riverbank sits Doli Lodge, a small WWF-run hotel with four bungalows, each containing two units, and a restaurant perched precariously above the river. Perhaps too precariously. One of the supports fell into the river during our stay, to be replaced by a jury-rigged support that appears unlikely to survive the next heavy rain. Moustached Monkeys scamper in the large trees on the property by day, while a nocturnal cohort of animals takes over after dusk.

Paul Carter and I spent two weeks at Doli Lodge in March 2025. Getting there was straightforward. Arriving on the Ethiopian Airlines flight from Addis Ababa, we were ushered into a tiny terminal at the Bangui airport, where our Yellow Fever vaccination cards were checked (although I didn't see any mechanism to ensure that one went through this particular line). We then completed a brief form for immigration, showed it to an official for stamping, were photographed and fingerprinted, moved over to the immigration window where our passports were stamped, and then walked through a door to pick up our luggage. There was a currency exchange kiosk just beyond this, but little else. As we were transferring to a domestic charter flight, arranged by WWF, we immediately re-entered the terminal building on the left, where the same police form was completed again, our passports were re-checked, our bags were passed through a scanner, and we ended up in a small waiting room filled with UN peacekeeping forces from Pakistan. The planes on the tarmac were an interesting mix from *Médecins sans Frontières* and various other international agencies. The Ethiopian Airlines plane was the only regular civilian plane I could see. An airport official asked for 2000 CFA each as we boarded our charter. I was so happy to be getting on the charter I didn't ask for a receipt, my usual gambit, if purely for the entertainment value of hearing why one can't be issued. The pilot was a young South African and the flight with Via Air was a treat – a low flight over broad expanses of forest with eventual views of bays as we neared Bayanga. Bayanga airport consisted of a dirt airstrip and a shed, but a sizable crowd was awaiting the flight, clearly one of the day's highlights. Paul and I were greeted by Lambert and chucked our bags in the bed of a pick-up truck for the five-minute drive to Doli Lodge, located just north of town.

Doli Lodge was lovely. Wooden bungalows with verandahs are set back from the river and surrounded by mature trees, giving a feeling of tranquility. Paul and I went for a walk around the grounds and found several small groups of Moustached Monkeys and an African Giant Squirrel. Dinner consisted of a salad, delicious freshwater fish with vegetables in sauce and pineapple for dessert. A walk after dark revealed a small galago along the trail to Bayanga village, while the entrance road produced a Southern Needle-clawed Galago, at least three Milne-Edwards Pottos and a Shining Thicket Rat on a branch a few feet off the ground. I returned to the lodge about 9:00 pm while Paul continued walking and saw an anomalure and a Hammer Bat.

Because we stayed at the same location for two weeks, I think a day-by-day account of the trip would be a bit tedious, so I've decided to group our sightings. If anyone is interested in more details I'm happy to respond to e-mail inquiries.

Species seen close to Doli Lodge include the following:

1. African Forest Elephant – seen on the entrance road to the lodge early in the morning and along the trails between Doli Lodge and Mossapoula in the evening. Signs of elephant were abundant.
2. Black-and-white Colobus – seen a couple of times along the trails. Quite shy, perhaps due to hunting.
3. De Brazza's Monkey – seen once (early morning) in a tall tree by the swampy area on the north edge of Doli Lodge.
4. Moustached Monkey – by far the most common species around Doli Lodge.
5. Putty-nosed Monkey – seen once close to the lodge. More common in Dzanga Park itself.
6. Southern Needle-clawed Galago – very common along the entrance road to the lodge.
7. Demidoff's Galago – most of the small galagos seen close to Doli Lodge appeared to be this species.
8. Thomas's Galago – present near Doli Lodge but less common than above species.
9. Milne-Edwards Potto – abundant along the entrance road to the lodge.
10. Beecroft's Anomalure – common along the trails north of Doli Lodge.
11. Lord Derby's Anomalure – seen a number of times along the trails north of Doli Lodge.
12. Red-legged Sun Squirrel – one seen on trail north of Doli Lodge.
13. African Giant Squirrel – seen on trails close to Doli Lodge.
14. Western Palm Squirrel – seen at least once high in the trees along the trails north of Doli Lodge.
15. Thomas's Rope Squirrel – seen high in the trees behind the bungalows.
16. Lady Burton's Rope Squirrel – one seen at the base of a tree near a swampy area along the trail north of Doli Lodge.
17. Green Bush Squirrel – one seen in lianas along the trail north of Doli Lodge.
18. Emin's Giant Pouched Rat – seen a couple of times at night, both close to Doli Lodge and along the trails north of Doli Lodge.
19. Jackson's Soft-furred Mouse? – seen several times, photos included. I'm interested in other's thoughts.
20. Shining Thicket Rat – seen several times on night walks.
21. Hylomyscus - several seen that were likely this genus. Unable to identify to species level, as several occur here.
22. Hammer-headed Fruit Bat – common along the trails north of the lodge.
23. Franquet's Epauletted Fruit Bat – seen several times
24. Golden Fruit Bat – seen once along the trails north of the lodge.
25. Benito Roundleaf Bat – seen in a hollow log close to the Picathartes nesting site, across the river and upstream from Doli Lodge.
26. Cyclops Roundleaf Bat – one roosting in hollow tree beside the Doli Lodge entrance road.
27. Tree (African Palm) Civet – seen a couple of times in the trees at the edge of the lodge.
28. Long-nosed Mongoose – seen crossing the road between Doli Lodge and Sangha Lodge.

Of note, many of the squirrels around the lodge were glimpsed so briefly we couldn't identify them. I initially thought that we had seen a Lesser Anomalure along the trails north of the lodge but, after

consultation with Daan Drucker, it may have just been a different colour variant of Beecroft's Anomalure.

Dzanga Bai was a highlight of the trip. Paul and I did two overnight sessions at the hide there. The routine in each case was the same. We departed from the lodge about 1:30 pm, reaching the start of the trail about 2:00 pm. From there, it was a forty-minute walk or so to the hide, accompanied by a guide and tracker. A packed supper was provided. The hide is situated on stilts overlooking the bai, and tents are erected on the hide floor. The sleeping pads provided are very thin, so people might want to take their own. Departure time the next morning is generally about 8:00 am.

Species seen at Dzanga Bai, or on the walk to the bai, included the following:

1. African Forest Elephant – present 24/7 at the bai in varying numbers. One of the benefits of staying at the hide is that you can watch the interactions between elephants at leisure.
2. African Forest Buffalo – a group was present throughout our first stay at the hide but not our second.
3. Bongo – one of my most-hoped for species. A group of 34 was present our first afternoon at the bai. They departed back into the forest about 4:30 pm, which was usual according to researchers present. Two Bongo reappeared the next morning. On our second visit, the Bongo again left the bai in the late afternoon with a couple returning in the morning.
4. Giant Forest Hog – initially two were present on the periphery of the bai. Later, a group of six appeared. On our second visit, a group of eight was present.
5. Red River Hog – a group was likely seen at some distance after dark our first night at the hide. On our second visit, a group of 16 appeared at the far side of the bai just after 6:00 pm.
6. Servaline Genet – one seen on our first night at the hide. Flash photography is prohibited at the hide. A photo taken with red light appears, below.
7. Marsh Mongoose – a pair seen about 9:15 pm during our first night at the hide.
8. Red-cheeked Rope Squirrel – one individual seen several times near the base of the hide platform. Present during both visits to the hide.
9. Crowned Monkey – seen during the hike to the hide.
10. Black-and-white Colobus Monkey – a group high in the trees at the start of the hike to the platform on our second visit.
11. Putty-nosed Monkey – seen both times we hiked to the hide.
12. Moustached Monkey – seen the second time we hiked to the hide.

We did two bai walks, the first to see a troop of habituated Agile Mangabeys, the second to visit several of the smaller bais. Both times we left the lodge about 7:30 am and drove for about 45 minutes to reach the starting point of the hike at Bai Hokou.

1. Agile Mangabey – we spent about an hour with a large habituated group.
2. Gray-cheeked Mangabey – a troop seen high in the trees while hiking, and also seen during our drive to Bai Hoku.
3. Moustached Monkey – troops seen both on the drive in and while hiking.
4. Putty-nosed Monkey – seen on the drive in on our second visit.
5. Black-and-white Colobus Monkey – seen late in the afternoon of our second bai walk.
6. Peter's Duiker – two individuals foraging with the troop of Agile Mangabeys. A further individual seen on our second bai walk near Big Bai.

7. Sitatunga – seen at several of the bays during our second bay walk.
8. African Forest Elephant – several individuals seen at different bays.
9. Bongo – seen once along the road, then a second one seen at one of the smaller bays.
10. African Forest Buffalo – a group of nine seen at Big Bay.
11. Noack's Roundleaf Bat – colony in the cave behind the waterfall at the start of the bay hike.
12. Cyclops Roundleaf Bat – single individual present in the cave behind the waterfall at the start of the bay hike.

List of mammal species seen:

1. African Forest Elephant – *Loxodonta cyclotis*
2. Black-and-white (Guereza) Colobus – *Colobus guereza*
3. Grey-cheeked Mangabey – *Lophocebus albigena*
4. Agile Mangabey – *Cercocebus agilis*
5. De Brazza's Monkey – *Cercopithecus neglectus*
6. Crowned Monkey – *Cercopithecus pogonias*
7. Putty-nosed Monkey – *Cercopithecus nictitans*
8. Moustached Monkey – *Cercopithecus cephus*
9. Milne-Edwards's (Central African) Potto – *Perodicticus edwardsi*
10. Demidoff's Galago – *Galagoides demidovii*
11. Thomas's Galago – *Galagoides thomasi*
12. Southern/Elegant Needle-clawed Galago – *Euoticus elegantulus*
13. African Giant Squirrel – *Protoxerus stangeri*
14. Western Palm Squirrel – *Epixerus ebii*
15. Red-cheeked Rope Squirrel – *Funisciurus leucogenys*
16. Lady Burton's Rope Squirrel – *Funisciurus isabella*
17. Thomas's Rope Squirrel – *Funisciurus anerythrus*
18. Red-legged Sun Squirrel – *Heliosciurus rufobrachium*
19. Green Bush Squirrel – *Paraxerus poensis*
20. Lord Derby's Anomalure – *Anomalurus derbianus*
21. Beecroft's Anomalure – *Anomalurus beecrofti*
22. Emin's Giant Pouched Rat – *Cricetomys emini*
23. ? Jackson's Soft-furred Mouse – *Praomys jacksoni*
24. Shining Thicket Rat – *Thamnomys poensis*
25. *Hylomyscus sp.*
26. Hammer-headed Fruit Bat – *Hypsignathus monstrosus*
27. Golden Fruit Bat – *Casinycteris argynnis*
28. Franquet's Epauletted Fruit Bat – *Epomops franqueti*
29. Noack's Roundleaf Bat – *Hipposideros ruber*
30. Benito Roundleaf Bat – *Hipposideros beatus*
31. Cyclops Roundleaf Bat – *Doryrhina cyclops*
32. Tree Civet - *Nandinia binotata*
33. Servaline Genet – *Genetta servalina*
34. Long-nosed Mongoose – *Xenogale naso*
35. Marsh Mongoose – *Atilax paludinosus*

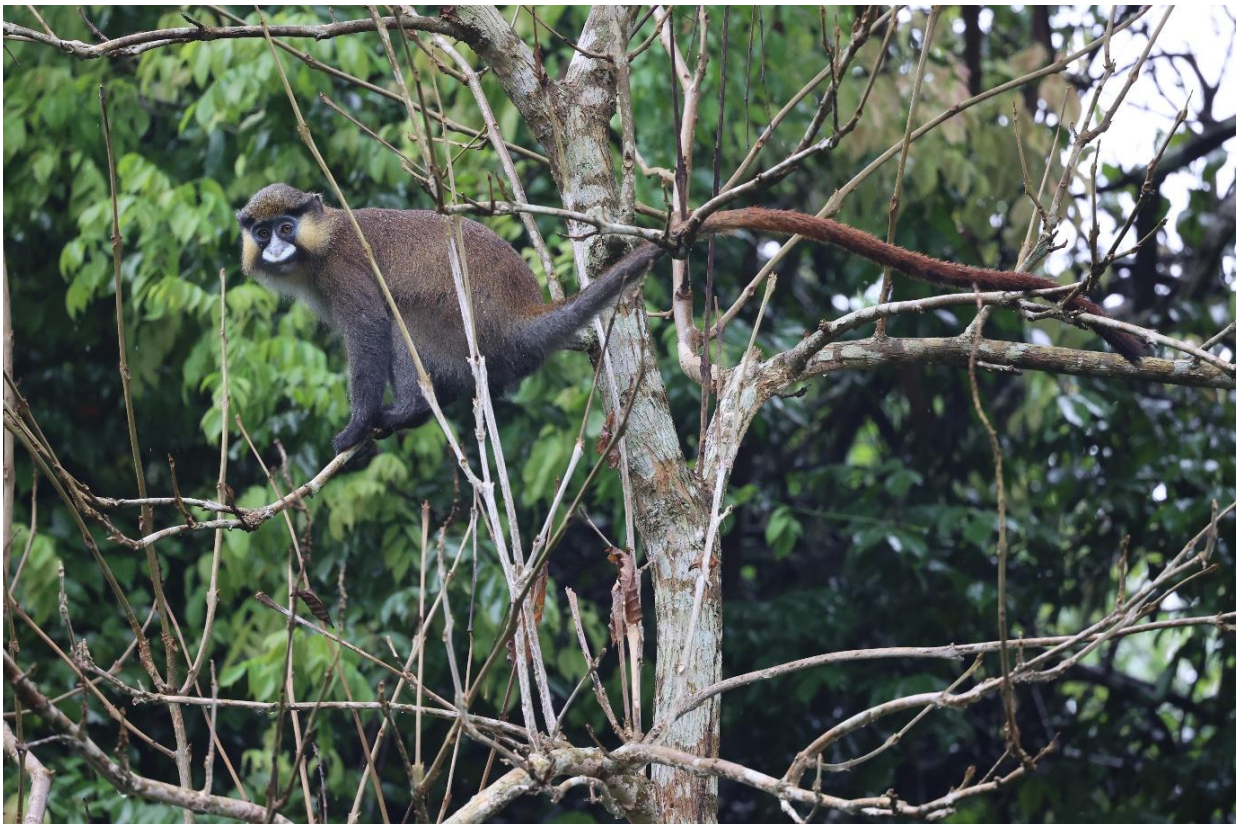
- 36. Red River Hog – *Potamochoerus porcus*
- 37. Giant Forest Hog – *Hylochoerus meinertzhageni*
- 38. African Buffalo – *Syncerus caffer*
- 39. Bongo – *Tragelaphus eurycerus*
- 40. Sitatunga – *Tragelaphus spekii*
- 41. Peters's Duiker – *Cephalophus callipygus*







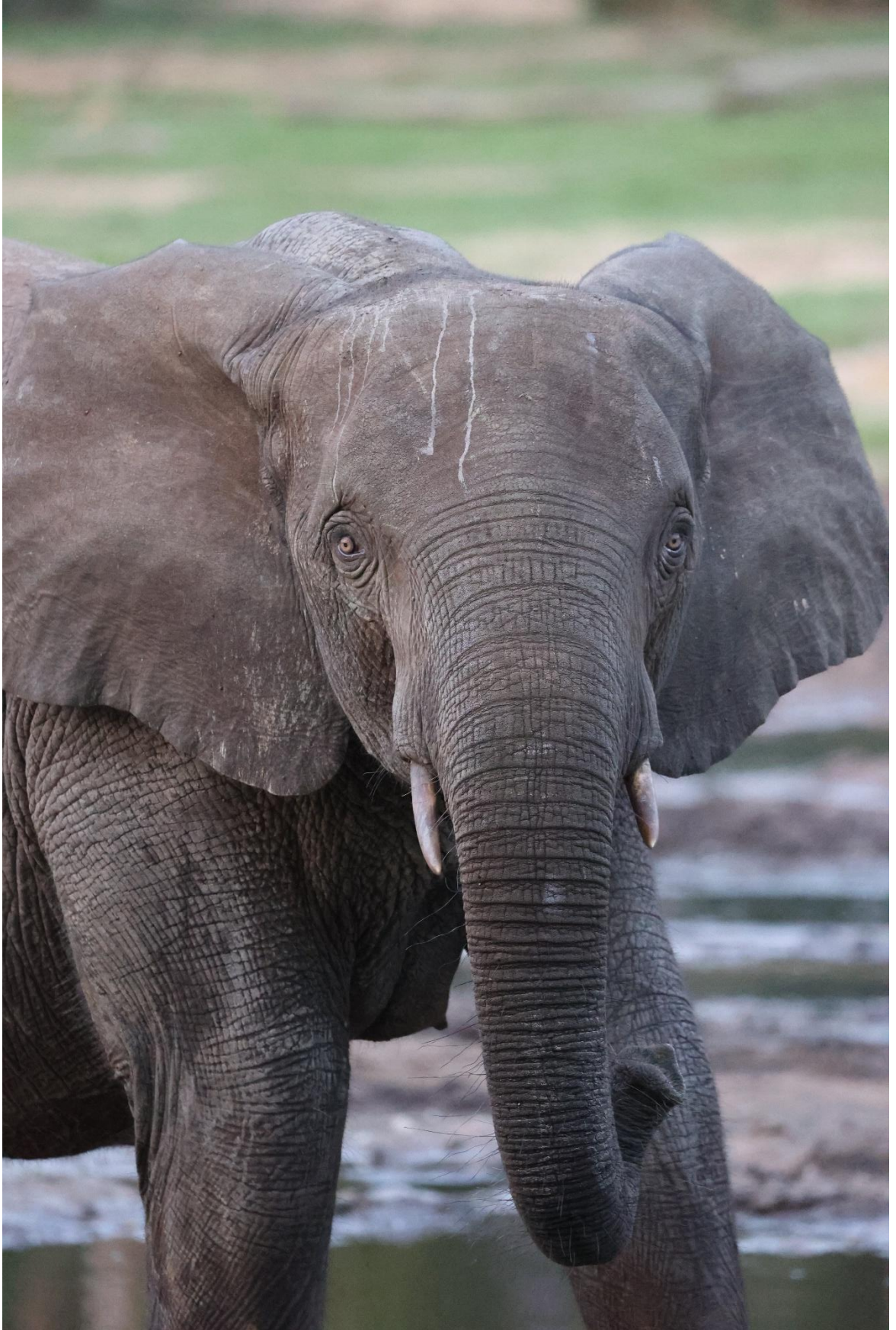




















A big thanks to Paul Carter for joining me on this trip, to Tony, our driver, Leon, our guide, and Kaunda, our tracker. Central African Republic is rarely in the news with any positive stories, but Bayanga and the surrounding area continue to be quite safe. I did contract malaria at the end of our stay, so would suggest taking prophylaxis whatever time of year you visit. Please feel free to contact me at ibtson@yahoo.com if you have any questions or comments.

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