

## Trip Report: Chad

February-March 2022

From the last week of February to the first week of March 2022, I accompanied 6 other visitors to Chad on a trip organized by [Chalo Africa](#), with whom I often work closely. The rest of the group were not hardcore mammal-watchers, although one of them shared an interest in some of the more obscure mammals with me. We did manage to see a fair number of interesting species, though, so while this wasn't a mammal-watching trip, I thought it worth writing a short note with our species list for those who may be interested. If you'd like to see more landscapes and insights on the areas we visited, [please see our other trip report here](#). Species seen for the first time are in bold-type with the ASM-accepted binomial name italicised in parentheses.

Our first night upon arrival in N'djamena was spent at the Radisson Blu, which sits on the banks of the Chari River, looking south. The following morning, I went out to do some casual birdwatching along the river and saw our first wild mammal of the trip – **Common Hippopotamus** – emerging from the river and grazing in amongst a herd of cows on the opposite bank. I didn't have my camera with me, or the presence of mind to attempt a cellphone photo. We then flew out of NDJ via Zakouma National Park (to drop off some other travellers) on our way to Ennedi Cultural and Natural Reserve in the northeastern part of the country. Obviously we saw plenty of wildlife from the plane as we flew into and out of Zakouma, but we didn't see anything on this flight that we wouldn't then see later when we actually visited Zakouma, so I'll keep you in suspense until that part of the report.



Common Hippopotamus. *Photo Credit: Joel Gunter*

By the time we landed in Ennedi, it was close to sunset, and we had a 2 hour drive to our campsite. While the drivers were pushing hard to get to the campsite before it got too late, I did manage to identify a *Gerbillus* sp. **Gerbil** that ran across the road. We also saw a number of Jerboas, which on another drive on a different day, I was able to positively identify as **Lesser Egyptian Jerboas** (*Jaculus jaculus*). Finally, I was able to identify two **Pale Foxes** (*Vulpes pallida*) based on their ghost-like appearance and black-tipped tails.



Lesser Egyptian Jerboa (*Jaculus jaculus*)

We spent 4 nights total in Ennedi, and explored much of the southern region of the reserve, focusing primarily on rock formations, rock art, culture, etc. I continued birding and looking for mammals and mammal tracks. While I won't bore you with my bird lists, one notable bird is the Barbary or Red-necked Ostrich, which was once thought extinct in the area. A couple of years ago, they were rediscovered in the park, and African Parks (who manage it) have introduced several more from Zakouma in the south to help bolster the population. We managed to see 4 of these individuals, which was pretty special. I reckon Ostriches and Crocodiles are "honorary mammals".

We also had a couple of sightings of **Patas Monkey** (*Erythrocebus patas*), and I found their fresh tracks at almost every place we stopped and walked around. While they're obviously VERY shy, their population seems to be doing well. On two occasions, we had distant views of **Dorcas Gazelle** (*Gazella dorcas*), and at one location, I had a good view of a **Rock Hyrax** (*Procavia capensis*). The commonness of their presence was confirmed by good sightings of Verreauxs' Eagles, whose diet consists primarily of hyrax, as well as multiple rock faces with classic hyrax whitewash.



Patas Monkey (*Erythrocebus patas*)





Dorcas Gazelle (*Gazella dorcas*)



Rocky Hyrax (*Procavia capensis*)

Other tracks I was able to positively identify include Honey Badger/Ratel (*Mellivora capensis*), African Golden Wolf (*Canis lupaster*), and Striped Hyena (*Hyaena hyaena*). Also of interest were tracks and quills of North Africa/Crested Porcupine (*Hystrix cristata*), which neither Mammals of Africa (Kingdon et. al, 2013) nor Stuarts Field Guide to African Mammals show for this area.

We did one more night game drive before departing, and found more Jerboas, Gerbils, another Pale Fox, and **Cape Hare** (*Lepus capensis*).

From here we moved on for one night at the Sahara Conservation Fund (SCF) HQ in Ouadi Rime-Ouadi Achim Faunal Reserve (OROA for short), south of Ennedi. This area sits on the gradient between true Sahara and Sahel grasslands. The substrate is generally thick sand, but covered in annual and weak perennial grasses. Whereas Dorcas Gazelle had been a rarity and something to get excited about in Ennedi, it proved almost as common in OROA as Thomson's Gazelle in the Mara-Serengeti. What we'd come here to see primarily were three extremely rare, near-extinct antelope that the SCF is reintroducing to this area. Just before getting to the SCF HQ, we were rewarded with our first sighting of **Scimitar-horned Oryx** (*Oryx dammah*). Almost extinct in the wild until 2016, the population in OROA is now up to almost 500 individuals through a combination of a series of captive-bred releases and very successful post-release wild breeding. They will continue to release more from various collections/zoos until the total captive-release number reaches 500 (so the total population will be much higher with all the successful wild breeding going on). You can [read more about their work here](#).



Scimitar-horned Oryx (*Oryx dammah*)

Once we settled into camp, we went out again for a short drive, where we found a couple more groups of Oryx and had 2 great sightings of **African Golden Wolf** (my camera battery was dead and I wouldn't have a chance to charge it until that evening). After dinner, 3 of us went out again with the head of SCF in Chad for a night drive. We had a great sighting of Pale Fox, very close to the vehicle, clear views of what I suspect to be the same *Gerbillus* sp. Gerbil from Ennedi, Cape Hare, **African Wild Cat** (*Felis lybica*) – successfully hunting the Gerbils, and 2 distant, totally wild (not captive releases) **Dama Gazelles** (*Nanger dama*). This was another one of the 3 we'd specifically come to see, but we didn't actually think we had much of a chance of seeing totally wild ones. This area used to be a stronghold for them, and they ranged across most of the southern edge of the Sahara, but



their numbers have plummeted, and there are very few places you can see original population wild ones. I think there may be an estimated 100 wild Dama Gazelles left in the wild across their range. SCF is working to change that with a reintroduction programme in OROA, and a couple of other places. We did get to see some of the captive-bred Damas set for breeding and subsequent release in their large enclosures, but seeing 2 wild individuals was just massive.

The following morning, we set out early and covered a lot of ground before we finally managed to find our third target, **Addax** (*Addax nasomaculatus*). All the adult Addax in OROA are captive-bred releases, but they're breeding very well and the herds are growing very quickly with new, wild births. SCF will continue to introduce more Addax from various collections and zoos around the world in order to ensure sufficient genetic diversity for population health. At the moment, there are just under 100, if I remember right. At one point, I saw a small, elongated mammal running across the ground and then disappear into a burrow. I couldn't get the driver to stop quickly enough to get my binoculars onto it before it disappeared, but I'm 90% sure it was a West African/Striped Ground Squirrel (*Xerus erythropus*). Couldn't count it on the list without being sure, though. We continued to see several herds of Oryx and Dorcas Gazelle throughout the morning.



Addax (*Addax nasomaculatus*)

Although we didn't see any additional mammals, we did find several fresh digs from Aardvark, which the rangers and SCF guys confirmed as common, along with signs of honey badger. They also confirmed Zorilla and Caracal are common, but Serval is uncommon. I could have happily stayed in OROA at least one more night and done another night drive. One of my biggest disappointments was that when I was packing in Nairobi, I left my powerful red-filtered spotlight (which connects to the car's cigarette lighter – thank you Venkat!) at home due to luggage weight restrictions on the

small internal flights. In reality, I think I could have gotten away with it, as they really weren't too strict with the baggage weight since we had a whole Cessna Caravan to ourselves. So the lighting on our night drives (both in ennedi and here) consisted of one little LED flashlight on either side of the vehicle, with a pretty weak beam.

One hurdle SCF faces is the encroachment of livestock in the reserve. Cattle, goats, sheep, and camels are common, though from my East African perspective, not in numbers large enough to be an issue. Once the Chadian government gave SCF the remit to run the reserve, they were clear that any settlements that had historically been within the boundaries of the reserve (all 78,000 KM<sup>2</sup>) would be allowed to stay, but no new settlements would be allowed to develop. Water is obviously a major issue, and almost all the animals get their water from the *Citrillus colocynthis* gourd/melon that grows across the landscape. Overutilisation of this resource by livestock is a potential issue for the wildlife, as well as fire, which wipes out the *Citrillus*.

We departed OROA by air that afternoon, heading south to Zakouma National Park. Zakouma sits squarely in the Sudan-Guinea Savanna belt south of the true Sahel. While it's not known for having as much diversity as some of the East African savannas, the sheer abundance of all life there is truly spectacular.

Arriving by air we already began to see a fair number of larger, more conspicuous species, including **Sudanic Buffalo** (*Syncerus caffer brachyceros*), **Kordofan Giraffe** (*Giraffa Camelopardalis antiquorum*), **Defassa Waterbuck** (*Kobus ellipsiprymnus defassa*), **Savannah Elephant** (*Loxodonta africana*), **Common Warthog** (*Phacochoerus africanus*), and **Lelwel Hartebeest** (*Alcelaphus buselaphus lelwel*). Once on the ground, we got closer looks at most of these, as well as **Olive Baboon** (*Papio anubis*) and **Tantalus Monkey** (*Chlorocebus tantalus* (I assume ssp. *budgetti*)) as we arrived at Tinga Camp, where we'd be staying for the next 6 nights.







Sudanic or Central African Savannah Buffalo (*Syncerus caffer brachyceros*)



Lelwel Hartbeest (*Alcelaphus busephalus lelveli*)



Kordofan Giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis antiquorum*)

Rather than a blow-by-blow account of all the mammals we saw, I'll instead focus on some highlights below:

- The elephant population in the Greater Zakouma Ecosystem (GZE), which includes the nearby Siniaka Minia Reserve, is estimated to have been close to 300,000 back in the 1960s. Then through war, the rise in ivory poaching, etc. it dropped to around 4,500 individuals by the early 2000's. By 2011, it had dropped a further 90% to only 450. This is when African Parks was invited by the Chadian government (around 2012) to get poaching under control and take over management of the park. Within a couple of years, AP brought poaching levels down to near zero, and they haven't had an incident in 4 years now. Despite this, it took years for the elephants to calm down enough to start breeding again. Now there's a large, mixed herd (adult bulls, females, calves, etc.) that move around nervously. In addition, there's a handful of bulls who hang around near park HQ and are much more relaxed around vehicles. The total number is now close to 600, up from 450, so while it doesn't sound like much, it's a start, and a cause for hope.

Finding this herd and getting a good view is notoriously difficult. On my last trip, in 2020, we had some very good views down the Salamat River in the far southern end of the park, but they elephants were still a good 150m away, if not more. If we'd gotten any closer, on foot or in the vehicle, they would have bolted and disappeared. This year, we missed them crossing the Salamat by about a kilometre as we sat in the shade of a tree along the bank waiting for them. The next day, happily, we did find them, and managed to stop far enough away that the vehicle wouldn't spook them too much, and then approach on foot. I didn't get any good photos when we were on foot, as I didn't carry my camera. Perhaps the guests can share what they have.

You can see elephants in hundreds of locations across Sub-Saharan Africa, but there's something special about this herd, and I feel it each time. Watching them quietly from a



hidden spot in the shade as they go about their business is somehow more rewarding and more emotional than any other elephants I've viewed. This will always be a highlight of Zakouma for me.



Savannah/Bush Elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) in the far southern sector of the park. They moved off into the bush after seeing our vehicle, so we drove on, found a spot down-wind, and went the rest of the way on foot. Eventually came to a nice clearing, ahead of the herd, and were able to watch them from a distance as they crossed, oblivious of our presence.

- The **Northern Lions** (*Panthera leo leo*) in Zakouma are about as relaxed around vehicles as any lion in the Mara-Serengeti, allowing you to get close without disrupting their behaviour. Combine this with the unique Zakouma light, the water in the pans, and the never-ending supply of cubs. The predator research team reckons there are around 150 individuals in the park at the moment. What's interesting to me is that from April to September, at least half the park is almost completely under water. So the lions all abandon their territories and move west to higher ground where they set up new, temporary territories, or just tolerate each other without defined territories (I never got a straight answer on this). Interesting dynamic and behaviour not seen too many other places.



One of only a handful of adult males we found. Plenty of females with cubs.

- Night drives in Zakouma tend to be excellent. **African Civet** (*Civettictus civetta*) seems to be more common/numerous here, by far, than anywhere else I've been. Zakouma SHOULD have both Common Genet (*Genetta genetta*) and **Large-spotted Genet** (*Genetta maculata*), but we never did see a Common Genet (or at least, if we did, we couldn't be 100% sure as we didn't have a good view of the tail). Genets are everywhere on night drives. We also had several good nocturnal sightings of **Serval** (*Leptailurus serval*), but none during the day. Other nocturnal highlights included **Side-striped Jackal** (*Lupulella adustus*), **Senegal Galago** (*Galago senegalensis*), **White-tailed Mongoose** (*Ichneumia albicauda*), **African Savannah Hare** (*Lepus victoriae*), African Wildcat, and Pale Fox.
- I enjoy all the Bovids of Zakouma, especially the abundance of many of the species which are rare, range-restricted, or absent in East Africa. **Western Greater Kudu** (*Tragelaphus strepsiceros cottoni*) are relatively common, but not always easy to find in the thick bush. We had one good sighting with a male following a female with calf and a subadult male watching curiously. The **Central Bushbuck** (*Tragelaphus scriptus phaleratus*) are just so beautifully marked and I thoroughly enjoyed each one we saw (many along the Salamat River). We had one, brief sighting of **Common/Grimm's/Bush Duiker** (*Sylvicapra grimmia*), and a number of good sightings of **Oribi** (*Ourebia ourebi*), **Red-fronted Gazelle** (*Eudorcas rufifrons*), and **Western Roan Antelope** (*Hippotragus equinus koba*). In certain areas, some species are more numerous than I can quite get my head around. Rigueik Pan has more **Bohor Reedbuck** (*Redunca redunca*) than I could ever possibly hope to see in a lifetime in East Africa, and they just sit out in the open on barren ground, unperturbed by a passing vehicle. I would assume they're *Redunca redunca nigeriensis*? It's also FULL of more Defassa Waterbuck I could hope to see in a year elsewhere. At certain times, the open grassland beyond the pan is chock full of **Tiang** (*Damaliscus lunatus tiang*) – in their thousands, tens of thousands at a stretch maybe. Other areas of the park have herds of Lelwel Hartebeest around every 10<sup>th</sup> bush. **Buffon's/Western Kob** (*Kobus kob kob*) is locally common/numerous in several areas of the park.





Western Roan Antelope (*Hippotragus equinus koba*)



A massive herd of Tiang (*Damaliscus lunatus tiang*) on the plain next to Rigueik Pan



Oribi (*Ourebia oueribi*) near the banks of the Salamat River

### What we missed

Notable misses from Ennedi include: Fennec Fox (*Vulpes zerda*), Ruppell's Fox (*Vulpes rueppellii*), Aoudad/Barbary Sheep (*Ammotragus lervia*), Sand Cat (*Felis margarita*), & Desert Hedgehog (*Paraechinus aethiopicus*) – though the presence of the last species is questionable. There's one very good record for Sand Cat on iNaturalist from a reliable observer with good photos:

<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/35052030>

In OROA, I would have liked to see Honey Badger, Aardvark, and Zorilla, which are apparently common. I showed a few people images of Libyan Striped Weasel (*Poecilictis libyca*), but no one could confirm if they occur. I suspect that maybe every low-slung, black & white striped carnivore is quickly identified as a Zorilla without much thought. The maps in MoA show them in Ennedi as well. This would be a huge lifer for me. Caracal (*Caracal caracal*) should be common here as well, but we dipped on those.

In Zakouma we dipped on Striped Hyena, Spotted Hyena (we heard them, but never actually saw them), Leopard, Cheetah (one other vehicle had 2 sightings, but we never found them), African Wild Dog (they're spotted every couple of years, so not surprised), Honey Badger (the same other vehicle had multiple sightings), Marsh Mongoose, Egyptian Mongoose, Black Rhino (there are 2 in the park), Temminck's Ground Pangolin, African Clawless Otter, Gambian Sun Squirrel, Dormouse, and White-bellied Hedgehog. All of those would have been nice, but not many of them would have been lifers for me. The biggest disappointment for me, personally, was not finding Red-flanked Duiker (*Cephalophus rufilatus*), which are known from the park and have been photographed on a few occasions.

I wasn't spending much time on bats or rodents in any location, so you'll notice they don't feature prominently on the list below.



The list:

1. Rock Hyrax: Ennedi
2. Bush Elephant: Zakouma
3. Olive Baboon: Zakouma
4. Patas Monkey: Ennedi & Zakouma
5. Tantalus Monkey: Zak
6. Senegal Galago: Zak
7. Striped Ground Squirrel: Zak
8. Lesser Egyptian Jerboa: Enn & OROA
9. Gerbillus sp.: Enn & Oroa
10. Cape Hare: Enn & Oroa
11. Savannah Hare: Zak
12. Epauletted Fruit Bat *Epomophorus* (I assume *Epomophorus gambianus*): Zak
13. Slit-faced Bat: Zak
14. African Golden Wolf: Oroa
15. Side-stiped Jackal: Zak
16. Pale Fox: Enn, Oroa, & Zak
17. Lion: Zak
18. Serval: Zak
19. African Wildcat: Oroa & Zak
20. African Civet: Zak
21. Large-spotted Genet: Zak
22. Slender Mongoose: Zak
23. White-tailed Mongoose: Zak
24. Banded Mongoose: Zak
25. Common Hippopotamous: N'djamena
26. Common Warthog: Zak
27. Kordofan Giraffe: Zak
28. Sudanic Buffalo: Zak
29. Greater Kudu: Zak
30. Bushbuck: Zak
31. Bush Duiker: Zak
32. Oribi: Zak
33. Dorcas Gazelle: Enn & Oroa
34. Red-fronted Gazelle: Zak
35. Dama Gazelle: Oroa
36. Bohor Reedbuck: Zak
37. Western Kob: Zak
38. Defassa Waterbuck: Zak
39. Tiang: Zak
40. Lelwel Hartebeest: Zak
41. Roan Antelope: Zak
42. Scimitar-horned Oryx: Oroa
43. Addax: Oroa