

Republic of Congo to Dzanga Sangha Reserve (Central African Republic) trip report
13 Sep – 18 Sep 2019

Mathias D'haen



Logistics

I travelled to Bayanga by a route that seems logic, yet which I have not seen described in any other trip report so far. Travelling from Ouessou/Bomassa allows combining Dzanga-Ndoki NP with Odzala NP or Nouabale Ndoki NP.

We (my partner and myself) travelled from Ouessou to Bayanga in a rented dugout canoe with a 15hp Yamaha motor which took us two days (7 hours including the administration posts per day), spending the night at the WCS headquarters in Bomassa. The way back was significantly shorter (4 hours per day) due to driving with the flow of the river and less hassle at the posts. Renting the boat, plus accommodation of the boat-driver and fuel costed us 420 000 CFA but can be done for significantly less as described below.

Because our boat-driver was a mess I got into the finest little details of what it takes to do the trip and writing them out here. A 15hp motor will use 125 liters of fuel from Ouessou – Bayanga and 100 liter from Bayanga – Ouessou. Price of fuel in Ouessou at time of writing is 600 CFA but due to fuel shortage in the country we had to buy our fuel “on the street” at 125 liters for 1200 CFA and 100 liters for 1000 CFA. Rent of the motor plus dugout canoe was 130 000 CFA. The rest of the money went to the boat-driver. It’s better to make a deal with a boat-driver who actually owns a boat, who takes his ID card with him when crossing the border, and who doesn’t lose the “manifest” (document with your travel details that you will be given by the police at departure in Ouessou) all saving you a lot of hassle and money. Also make sure that your boat-driver has already been to CAR and doesn’t drop you off at a Cameroonian military post like ours did. Maybe just make sure your boat-driver isn’t named Lucien... It’s probably also better to go with an aluminum boat and a 25 or 40hp motor, with the latter taking you to your destination twice as fast (50 000 per day and negotiable for aluminum boat and 40hp in Ouessou).

Alternatively you can also take the ferry at Ouessou and drive up to Bomassa (2-3 hours) but transport on that road is rather rare I hear and might get expensive if it has to be done by taxi. A friend paid 170 000 CFA for a dugout canoe, 15hp and accommodation for boat-driver from Bomassa – Bayanga – Bomassa.

You can also ask Rod Cassidy from the Sangha lodge, WWF or WCS if they have any boats going up the river.

What follows is a list of posts that you will encounter on the way up the river. To save time, bring hard copies of your passport as well as 1000 and 2000 notes.

Conversion rate at time of writing is: 1 USD = 599 CFA

Section Ouesso – Bomassa:

Ouesso

- Migrations 2000 CFA per person
- Police 2000 CFA per person (+5000 CFA for manifest but should be paid for by boat-driver)

Kabo

- Military post nothing paid
- Migrations 5000 CFA per person. This is where you will get your exit stamp, so even if you leave from Bomassa make sure to pass by this post first or you will not leave the country.
- Police 2000 CFA per person. Negotiate and try to give him 1000 instead.

Bomassa

- Military post. Nothing paid (only for the manifest our boat-driver lost)

Section Bomassa-Bayanga:

Bomassa

- Military post. 1000 CFA in total paid.

Anti-poaching post

- Nothing paid.

Boumandjokou

- 3 posts (two of which under 1 roof and managed by 1 guy, what a joke). 2000 CFA per person per post.

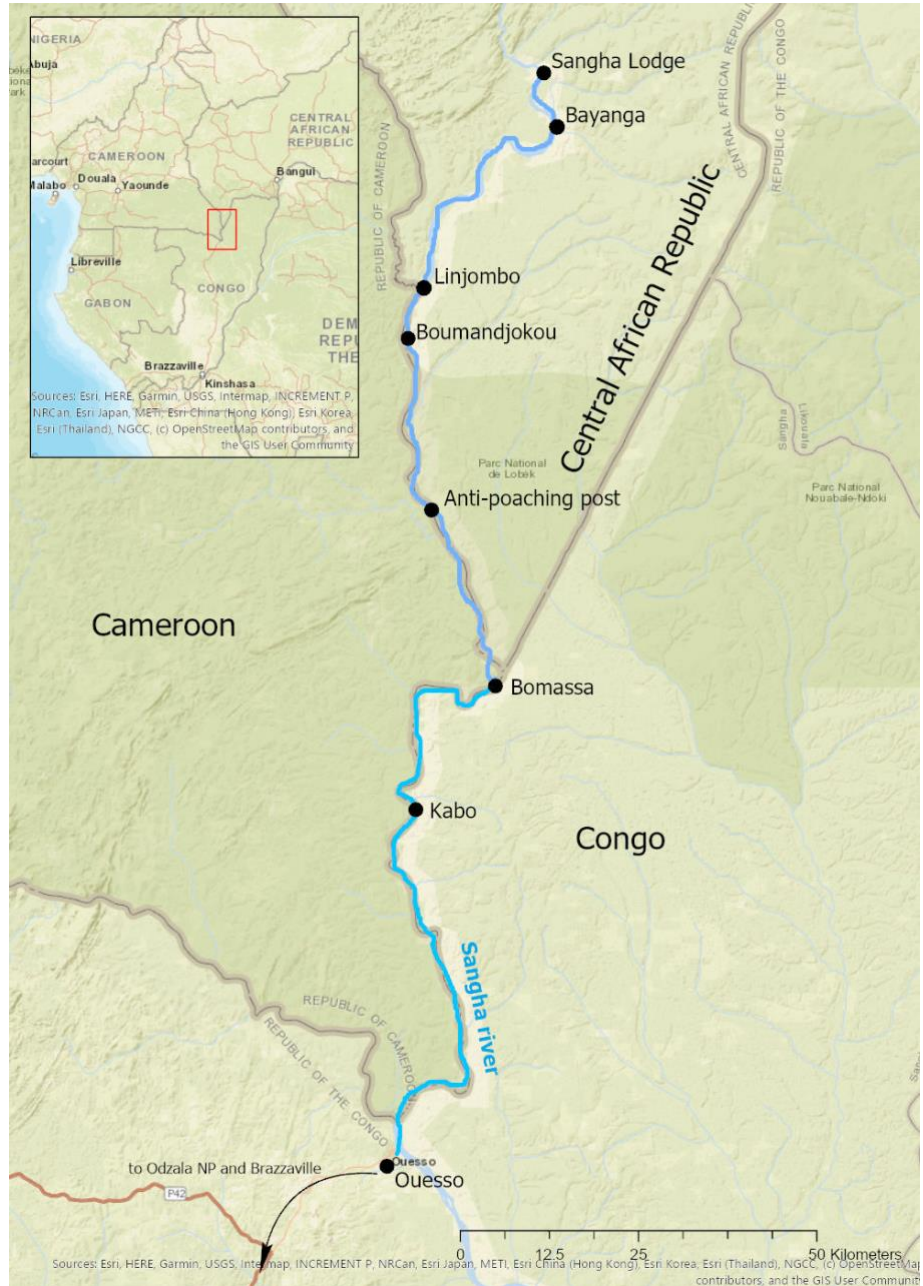
Linjombo

- Migrations CAR, 32 000 CFA per person (30 000 visa cost, 2000 for the officer).

Bayanga

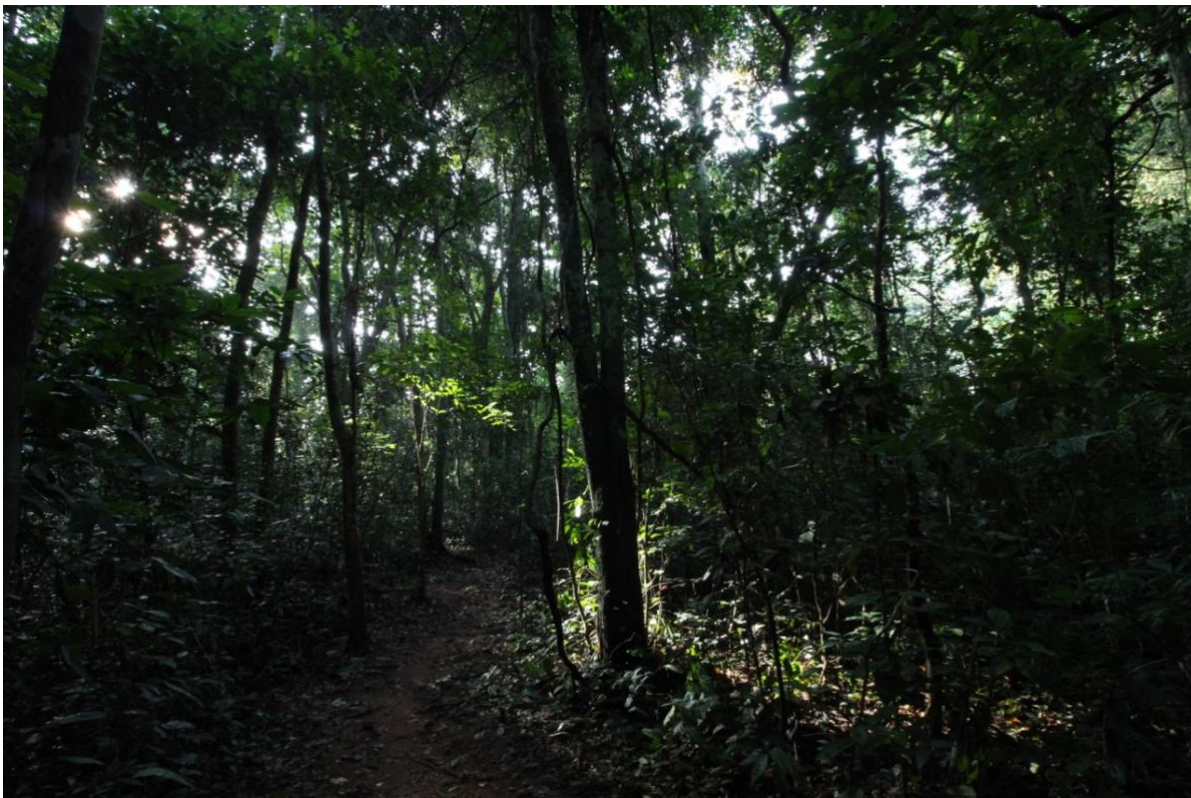
- Police, 2000 CFA per person, make sure to keep the receipt of your visa, it will be checked.

On the way back we only paid the police in Bayanga another 2000 CFA per person and nowhere else.



Accommodation

We stayed two nights at the Sangha lodge and, although we didn't get to meet Rod due to travels, we were warmly received by Alon and the rest of the team in what is one of the most idyllic places I've seen. There is plenty of wildlife around the lodge and the information I got from Alon on where to find what was priceless. I also stayed one night in the Doli Lodge, which has clean and nice rooms but due to its proximity to the village not ideal for bird or mammal watching. The WCS accommodation in Bomassa is pretty nice and it was good to chat to the management team, they are based right next to the river, a few hundred meters upstream from Bomassa.



Wildlife

This was not at all a birding or mammal watching trip but more of a (rather expensive) explorative trip. We visited the Black bellied pangolin that is being followed around the clock by 3 Ba'Aka trackers at the Sangha Lodge. The pangolin spends his first hours of the day warming up in the top of the trees and comes down to feed around 10-11 AM.

Even though we were still early in the wet season we were lucky to find a grey-necked picatarthes at the picatarthes site Rod found. The bird was sitting on a single egg. According to Rod the best period is October. A full day was spent at the Dzanga Bai. It is approx. 2 hours driving following another 20-30 min walk so anticipate on leaving early. We saw high numbers of elephants (fluctuating between 50 – 112) throughout the day. We also saw sitatunga (2 ex.), giant forest hog (3 ex.), forest buffalo (+- 20 ex.) and 1 ad. male bongo.

Mammal species

[List of mammal species recorded.](#)

Of which the following are worth mentioning:

Forest elephant

Seen in the Dzanga Bai only.
Numbers fluctuated between 50 – 112 individuals with most activity towards the afternoon.

Lowland bongo

Dzanga Bai. We were lucky to see a bongo as they are rather rarely observed in wet season. Dry season is reportedly much better.

Giant forest hog

3 individuals seen in the Dzanga Bai.

Forest buffalo

+20 – 30 individuals present in the Dzanga Bai. Resident group.

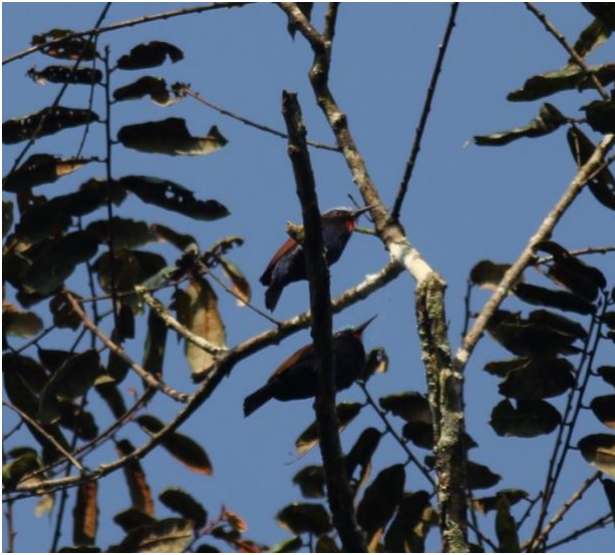
Sitatunga

We struggled finding these. It is reportedly one of the most common species in the Dzanga bai with reports stating that they are always present, we however only saw 1 female with her calf very briefly.

Black-bellied pangolin

Habituated individual that is being tracked day-round by ba'ka.





Blue-headed bee-eater (left) and Black bee-eater (right)

Bird species

[List of all bird species recorded.](#)

Of which the following are worth mentioning:

Hartlaub's duck

Common in the Dzanga bai, more were present in the morning

Bat-hawk

Seen from our boat between Bomassa - Bayanga

Grey-necked Picatarthes

Picatarthes site found by Rod

Chocolate-backed kingfisher

Seen from the deck of our room at Sangha Lodge

Blue-headed wood-dove

Black bee-eater

Seen from our boat close to Bayanga

Blue-headed bee-eater

On the trails around the Sangha Lodge

Cassin's spinetail

Sabine's spinetail

Ruddy Turnstone

Rather rare so far upriver

White-throated blue swallow

White-browed forest flycatcher



Giant forest hogs with forest elephants on the background

Contact me on mathias@dhaen.be if there would be any further questions.