


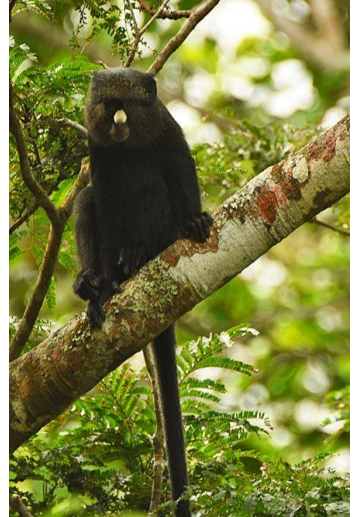
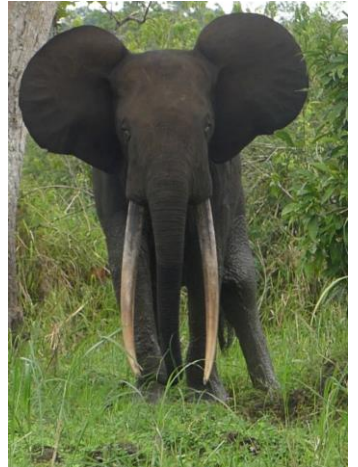


# Gabon Wildlife Adventure

**Destination:** Lope & Laongo, Gabon **Duration:** 10 Days **Dates:** 1<sup>st</sup> Jul – 9<sup>th</sup> Aug 2019

-  Spending time with a troop 700 plus Mandrills with the males in full breeding colours
-  Navigating around Forest Elephants and Mandrills when on foot in the forest
-  Having incredible, long and close views of hundreds of African River Martins
-  Cruising the Akaka River and having close and numerous Elephant sightings
-  Spotlighting two different species of Anamoleure (Beecroft's and Lord Derby's)
-  Seeing 118 species of birds including Rosy & Black-headed Bee-eaters
-  Finding Golden Angwatibo, Servaline Genet, Gabon Squirrel Galago after dark
-  Finding 49 species of mammals including White-bellied Duiker & African Palm Civet
-  Observing a total of 13 species of primate and stunning views of Lowland Gorillas
-  Seeing three species of Crocodile including close Slender-nosed Crocodiles



## Tour Leader / Guides

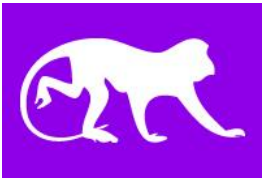
Martin Royle (Royle Safaris Tour Leader)  
 Vianet (Libreville, Akanda & Lope Guide)  
 Anouck (Libreville Transfers)  
 David Lehmann (Mandrill Researcher)  
 Gildas (Local Pygmy Guide in Lope)  
 Ongrille (Laongo / Akaka River Guide)

## Participants

April Brunelle  
 Rosemarie Gerspacher  
 William 'Monty' Ross  
 Chris Scharf  
 Stewart Summers  
 Peter Wheeler

## Overview

<b>Day 1:</b>	Libreville / Akanda NP
<b>Day 2:</b>	Libreville
<b>Days 3-5:</b>	Lope NP
<b>Day 4:</b>	Mikongo
<b>Day 6:</b>	Lambarene
<b>Day 6-9:</b>	Loango NP / Akaka River
<b>Day 10:</b>	Libreville



# Day by Day Breakdown

## Overview

Gabon is a jewel of a country when it comes to intact, pristine forest in Africa. A country that has long been rich in oil and has seen no need to exploit its forests, a country that has endless forests, large savannas and huge rivers that crisscross the evergreen landscape. It is also a country with a chequered past when it comes to tourism. For a long time the country was open to tourism (mostly birding), but in the early 2000's the government cut back on tourism and the country fell away from the tourist circuit and into obscurity. But around 2015 the country started to open itself up again to tourism and particularly wildlife tourism.

The most remarkable facet of Gabon being off the wildlife tourism radar for so long is that it is a country that offers sightings (and many reliable) of some of the most incredible, elusive, enigmatic and endangered mammals in the world. From the strikingly coloured mandrills, to large populations of African forest elephants, the beautiful red river hogs and handsome western lowland gorillas to the impossibly large giant pangolin and West African manatee. Gabon delivers on a level that few countries can. Of course seeing all of those species on one trip would be exceptional and we were not that lucky. However some of those and many more are near guarantees in Gabon. Thanks largely to the concerted effort of the government to keep their parks and forests as natural and pristine as possible and the great work of people like David Lehmann who is researching the mandrills and also establishing eco-tourism activities for red river hogs and giant pangolins. In the next few years it will most likely that seeing a giant pangolin is as reliable as the habituated gorillas of Uganda or Rwanda.

So this tour focused on two of the country's best national parks, Lope & Loango. We also made a quick visit to Akanda National Park in search of northern talapoin and manatees. Our main focus was two primates, the mandrills and western lowland gorillas. But we hoped for a wealth of over wildlife and we were not disappointed.

Gabon has so much to offer and is a veritable treasure trove of exotic and incredible mammal species that Royle Safaris will be running this trip annually for some time to come. We will most likely change the itinerary to also include the third great national park in the country; Ivindo and here have a chance for bongo as well as other species.

For anyone wishing to know more about future trips to Gabon please contact us at [info@royle-safaris.co.uk](mailto:info@royle-safaris.co.uk).



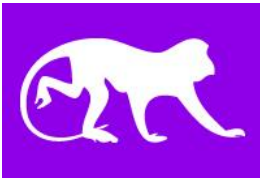
## Day 1 **Libreville & Akanda NP**

## *Arrival & Wildlife Watching*

Many of the group had arrived in advance of the trip starting, so as Martin left the hotel in Libreville he was already in the company of Chris and Peter and we travelled to the nearby hotel that the rest of the group would be at and met April and Stewart; who had also arrived early. Martin had received an email this morning saying that Rosemarie had missed her connection in Paris due to a storm in Canada grounding her plane, she would be arriving 30 hours later than planned and would miss the train to Lope the next day. So arrangements were made and everything sorted for her to meet us on day 4 in Lope.

In the mid morning Monty arrived and the group was complete (minus Rosemarie of course), and we left for Akanda National Park straight away. The park is a mangrove coastal wetland and is very productive for birds as well as being home to West African manatees. But the park is so big and there are many small channels ideal for manatees that actually finding one here was like looking for a needle that spends very little time being visible in a vast haystack.

Our main objective here was a small island that is home to a ranger station and on the island is a small population (just 9 of them) of northern talapoin. As we took the boat from the park entrance to the island we saw many birds, including large numbers of rosy bee-eaters, some fantastic views of palm nut vultures, nesting hammerkop pairs, a large colony of pink-backed pelicans and many village weavers and Viellot's black weavers. We then arrived at the island and it is small, maybe 100m-50m, but despite its size finding these 9 little monkeys was not going to be easy.



We spent around 1 hour searching, we had seen a couple moving very quickly through the trees but it was later when we had prolonged views and followed the small troop through the trees around to the far end of the island. Inside one of the half derelict buildings were a small group of roosting Egyptian rousettes as well. So not a bad start to the trip at all.

We then left the island, took the boat back to the park entrance and drove back to the hotel for dinner and a cold beer.

---

## Day 2 Libreville – Lope NP

## Sightseeing & Travelling

This morning the group went for a little sightseeing around the capital, it is not a great capital in terms of sights but there were some nice birds recorded including African thrush, green-headed sunbird, woodland kingfishers, common bulbul and African palm swifts. We had lunch at the hotel and waited until the mid afternoon before heading to the train station to catch the sleeper train to Lope. The train was 1.5 hours late but we made back some of that time and eventually arrived at Lope at around 2am.

We were transferred to the hotel and after checking in got some well deserved rest. But not before seeing Peter's dwarf epauletted bats (most of which came shooting out of the eaves of April's room when she approached) and also a lone forest buffalo grazing just outside the hotel grounds and a small number of little free-tailed bats feeding energetically around the rooms.

Tomorrow we would split into 2 groups as the capacity for the mandrill tracking is 4 people, so we would have different starting times. April and Monty would be up early and head into the park with Vianet whilst the rest would wait until 9am and have David take us to see the mandrills.



## Day 3 Lope NP

## Wildlife Watching

This morning April, Monty and Vianet went with a local Pygmy ranger into Lope on a game drive, it was very quiet at first with just some forest buffalo around and in mud wallows relaxing, but it did get better. They went on a little walk into a stand of forest in the forest-savanna mosaic and flushed out a yellow-backed duiker very close. They also found a succession of primates in the forest and had good views of all 4 species, although the moustached monkeys were very quick and evaded any quality photography attempts. But they could not complain about the black colobus sighting (a pair very close and relaxed in a tree above them), a large group of grey-cheeked mangabeys and some putty-nosed monkeys.

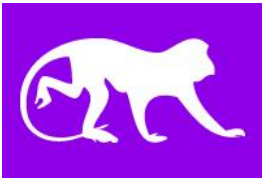
As well as these primates they saw a kewel (or harnessed bushbuck) and some nice birds such as African finfoot, black-casqued hornbills, stunning and huge great blue turacos, piping hornbills and scaly francolin. They headed back to the lodge and had some more birding there including seeing a wonderful African giant kingfisher and had lunch as they waited for the rest of the group to arrive back.

The rest of the group rose a little later and as they were having breakfast had some nice views of various birds around the hotel grounds and river nearby. Notable birds including African grey parrots, red-fronted parrots, African palm swifts, common green-pigeon, palm nut vultures, splendid starlings, African pied hornbills and gymnogenes.

David arrived with his trainee Martin at 9am and we promptly left to find the mandrills.

We first drove to a hill which is in the heart of the mandrill troop's range, David and Martin then used the VHF radio tracking equipment to find one of the 30 collared males which at this time of the year join the huge troop (around 700 individuals) for breeding. We found their location quickly and they didn't seem to be too far away, whilst we were scanning we had views of African grey parrots and black-casqued hornbills flying over the forest. After finding the radio signal we drove a little further and closer to the patch of forest they were in. We then confirmed their presence with more telemetry and headed into the forest. The walk to find them was very quick, maybe 10-15 minutes, along that way we found signs of western lowland gorilla feeding as well as old African forest elephant dung. But quickly we started to hear the calls of the mandrills, the low booming calls of the males and the high pitched screaming calls of the females.

When we started to see the group they were around 25-30m away from us in the thicker foliage, this troop is not habituated and it is amazing (and testimony to David's patient approach) that we can follow this troop at all. It was mostly females, sub-adult males and young mandrills that we found moving through the vegetation or sitting and



foraging in the leaf litter. Some of them would find a small window in the leaves and peer at us curiously. Mostly the youngsters. We would follow and then stop and wait, being silent and patient and allowing them to come to terms with us. This approach allowed us to spend the record amount of time with this troop according to David. In total we spent 1.5 hours with them and were rewarded at the end with some really nice views of several youngsters playing and grooming and curiously staring at us at around 20m and unobstructed by vegetation. But before then we tried to see one of the big adult males. They are hard to see, David's theory being that as it takes males around 10 years to develop their muscle mass and become sexually reproductive (which is a huge energy drain) they are very cautious and wary of getting into conflict. This coupled with the fact that during this time of year the males are very much in mating mode and not that interested in anything else that is going on around them and the fact that for most of the year they live on their own and so have to be a little more vigilant and cautious to predators; we struggled to get very close to a male and the pictures of the males were poor. They always stayed just too far away for pictures, but we saw him and we saw his amazingly coloured face. During the breeding season the colours are bright and vivid. The red and blue on the face and the purple and yellow and blue on the rump were incredible and flashes of colour in the green forest.

The 1.5 hours in the presence of this incredible primate will probably be the single highlight of the entire trip, so much so that everyone on this morning's group was enquiring to David about how to fit another one into the schedule and Stewart would be going on tomorrow morning's activity.

After leaving the mandrills, we were transferred back to the hotel and met up with Monty, April and Vianet. We had lunch and then at 4pm we headed back out into the park.

We found a couple of groups of forest buffalo around, one in a mud wallow and another walking through the long grass and also two pairs of African forest elephants, both mother and calf. The first pair stayed quite deep in the forest, they move out into the savanna in the late evening and night. The second was more in the open and stayed around a little longer.

As the night drew on we scanned with thermals and spotlights, but it was very quiet. We saw a pair of blue duiker just inside the forest and various species of bats including large-eared slit-faced bats and then returned to the hotel, where we walked around the forest near the river and found two or three trees in fruit and full of bats, including nice views of Franquet's singing fruit bat and Peter's dwarf epauletted bats.

---

## Day 4 **Lope National Park**

## *Wildlife Watching*

This morning was the reverse of yesterday, with Martin, Chris and Peter (Stewart went on a second mandrill tracking this morning) going with Vianet and Gildas on a safari around Lope and April, Monty, Rosemarie and Stewart going with David to see the mandrills.

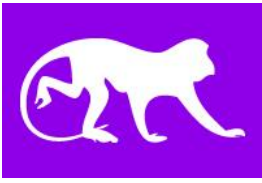
The mandrill group had a very similar time as the group the day before in terms of the numbers of mandrills, quality of sightings and the density of the forest, but they were troubled by elephants and buffalo. They had 4 elephants around them at one point, including at least one that was only 50m away from them. They never saw any of the elephants but had to take evasive action and move a long way around in order to get clear of them and be safe. A similar situation occurred with buffalo also, but David is very mindful of these things and keeps people safe without taking any risks. The reason for taking elephants 100% seriously was more evident later on today.

The game drive was very productive, we quickly saw two grey-cheeked mangabeys which were also part of a very large mixed troop of putty-nosed monkeys. We had great views of both of these species, in fact there was also a second group of putty-nosed monkeys on the other side of the vehicle at one point too. We were able to see them moving through the trees, jumping from tree to tree and also a female carrying a young baby. As we were watching these monkeys we noticed that there were 3 African forest elephants directly beneath the trees (often you can find elephants feeding on the fallen fruits from a large troop of monkeys) and they were only around 20m away, but in dense vegetation and not very visible. It was two females and a young calf.

Carrying on we walked into the forest where we had seen a mixed group of grey-cheeked mangabeys and putty-nosed monkeys, but as we were walking Gildas heard black colobus too and found a small group for us to see. We watched the strange looking monkeys in some open trees and had a mother cradling a baby. We also heard a very large troop of black colobus coming from another patch of forest as we moved around this area of forest looking to see if there were any more primates in this large mixed troop.

As we walked we heard red river hogs and saw many signs of their foraging and rooting around in the undergrowth, but we didn't see them. We also heard a long male mandrill nearby but couldn't find it and then heard crowned guenons nearby. We staked out the area the noise was coming from and saw a couple quickly climbing through the trees, flashing their more brightly coloured bodies (compared to the other primates here). We followed them a little way and saw them again as they moved into the distance trees, so we headed back to the vehicle.

We stopped at a savanna area with a view down into a small swamp and had 6 elephants out in the open, we walked to them and stopped around 50m away and had some very nice views from a safe distance as there was a rise and swamp between us and them. They were feeding relaxed on the grass in the swampy area and were not bothered by our presence at all.



Driving through the denser forest on our way back to the hotel we had a brief African goshawk and then two nice Peter's duiker on the road around 70m away from us. There were more grey-cheeked mangabeys as well, first they were sat posing and then moving through the trees. They were in a mixed group with moustached monkeys as well. The final sighting of the day was a very nice double-toothed barbet close to the road and feeding on a large wasp of some sort.

We then met up with everyone back at the hotel and had some lunch. The plan was to leave for Mikongo now and overnight there and look around the forest for wildlife and possibly giant pangolins. We had two possible options for giant pangolins on this trip, the first was to see if the radio collared one of David's study was ready for tourism, unfortunately it is not. The animal is still be tracked and monitored after only recently being collared. It is also in a part of the forest that would require at least a 3 day extension to the trip as it is in a near inaccessible part of the forest and would require a day to get there and day to get back. So he is not opening it to tourism for a couple of months at least. The second option was to visit Mikongo, after this site became known as a possible location we added a night here, but we couldn't add anymore as our itinerary was already fixed.

So we all headed out, the trip was meant to start at 4pm, which was late (as is par of the course in Gabon), we were all in one vehicle which was a squeeze and as we stopped at a local shop to buy some water and other provisions for the night we made a phone call to get a second vehicle, so we would be more comfortable. During this phone call with the park management (to organise a second car and second driver etc) we were told by the manager of the park of an accident in the park last week. A French tourist was in Mikongo and was attacked by an elephant, gored with the tusks three times and injured. She was in hospital now. Vianet was sent pictures and refused to show anyone as they were not pretty. As a result the park have decided to ban all night walking in the forest and also nearly all night drives. The notice of this had been made by park management a couple of days ago and had not filtered its way down to everyone in the park, not surprising as everything in Gabon seems to take an age to get done. However as we already have permission and plans to go to Mikongo and do night activities we were allowed special entry tonight into the main area of the park in our vehicle for as long as we wanted.

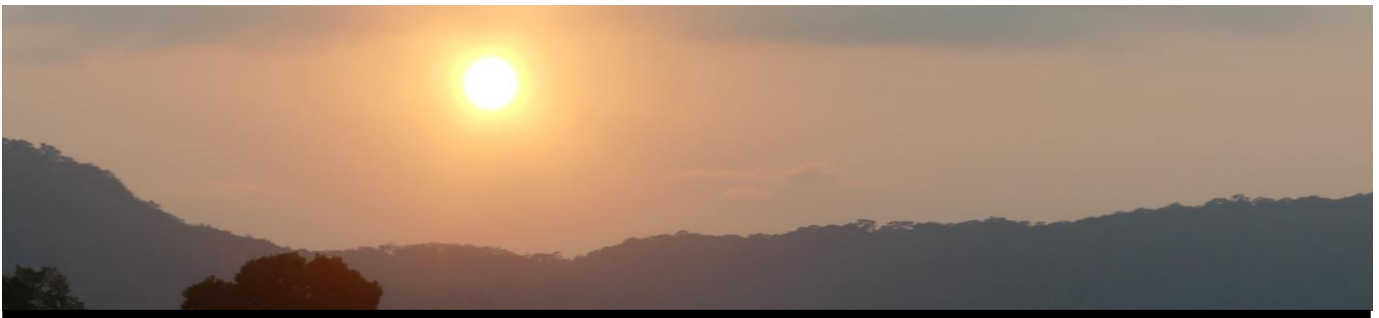
It was an unfortunate compromise but with so many elephants around and walking at night it is most probably the right call. We certainly don't want to get injured by an elephant and we definitely do not want to be the reason the whole park gets closed to tourists just when it is coming back into the minds of wildlife tourism.

So we turned back and instead entered the park after dinner on a longer night drive.

As we waited to get our night drive underway we had some Peter's dwarf epauletted bats flying in the reception, from their roosts to the fruiting trees and back.

As we started the drive we had water thickknees and forest buffalo very early on. We then spotted our first a many African palm civets, these cute animals are superficially very similar to the Asian palm civets but are only distantly related and in fact are part of their own family. We ended up finding 5 tonight and had very nice views of the last one which was just around 10m away and nearly eye level. At another tree we had a Beecroft's anomalure which was quickly moving through a palm tree and then in the tree next to the anomalure we found a Thomas's galago moving energetically in the foliage. We were patience and rewarded with some nice views of this tiny primate and then before we left the anomalure came back out and we had more views. We had more African palm civet sightings and very nice and close freckled nightjars on the road before we found a dwarf crocodile in a stream running through the forest, it was on the bank of the stream at first and then crawled into the water and swam away around a bend and out of sight. We had a very likely Lorraine dormouse, spotted in the thermal first and then seen briefly around 5m from the road. The last different species for tonight was very good and close views of a Peter's duiker just next to the road in a small clearing in the forest and allowing good views for a couple of minutes. Nearby here Peter also had a sighting of a golden angwatibo but we couldn't locate it as a group.

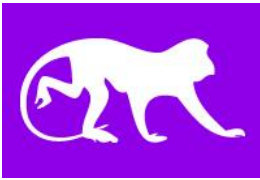
Back at the hotel there was a large herd of buffalo moving through the cropped lawn, there were many young ones in this herd too which was nice to see.



## Day 5      **Lope National Park**

## *Wildlife Watching*

This morning (after the failed Mikongo visit) we all had a morning drive into Lope to look for wildlife, we quickly came across a herd of buffalo moving through the vegetation as they were grazing slowly to a nearby wallow, we would come back to them later as they were moving into an open area and the photography would be better. So we carried



on and found a large troop of putty-nosed monkeys moving noisily through the forest, nearby here we also found fresh (from that morning) tracks of an African golden cat on the road, which was very exciting.

Further on we found another troop of putty-nosed monkeys, this one larger than the other and they were giving us a great show with massive jumps from one tree to another as they all moved through the canopy. We also had a Cassian's hawk eagle soaring overhead and then flying over the savanna and away from us and also a very nice Senegal plover in the open and very close to the vehicle.

We then went back to the buffalo and had a very close (the best so far sighting) of them in the open. They crossed the road close by and we saw several of the young calves. The differences between this forest species and the cape species is very stark when you have them this close, not just the colouration and size, but the horns, shape of the head and general body shape is all very different.

We then went back to the hotel early so that the group heading on a third mandrill tracking could have some lunch first. After lunch at 1pm David arrived and collected Monty, Chris, April and Peter and took them into the forest for one last shot as mandrills. They had a good time, the mandrills were out in force once again, they had very similar views to what we had on the previous tracking days, except that Peter this time had a good view and photo of an adult male's face and they were slightly on the edge of the forest and so in the open a little more which made pictures easier. The reason for them coming to the forest edge today was the higher presence of elephants. There were many in the forest and once again David took evasive measures and walked the group the long way around to avoid problems. The mandrills too were stressed by the elephant presence.

The group saw several elephants in the forest, drinking from a small pool and also hearing one elephant making a stand, thrashing vegetation around and intimidating the mandrills. A scary and intimidating sound to any animal in the forest. On leaving the forest they also had a great view of a large bull elephant in the savanna, the first bull elephant we had seen so far on the trip. And very excitingly when they retraced their steps to head back to the vehicle and out of the forest they came across fresh gorilla tracks over their own tracks, so a gorilla group had also followed them in the forest this morning.

Rosemarie, Stewart and Vianet went out on a game drive this afternoon and had views of more putty-nosed monkeys, moustached monkeys, grey-cheeked mangabeys, buffalo, great blue turaco and two pairs of elephants (both mother and calves). We then all met back at the lodge and had a few beers with David before dinner. After dinner we headed out for a walk around the forest near the river again.

There were lots of bats once again feeding on the fruit and a giant roundleaf bat perched on a tree trunk echolocating, we had great views of this very large insectivorous bat. The only other sighting tonight was a wonderful servaline genet that Stewart and Martin found in the thermal as it moved along the ground and then climbed up into a tree and we had great views of it looking down at us.

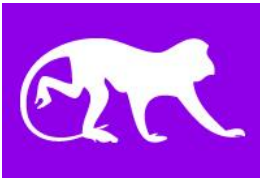
We then all packed up and headed to the train station, the train was originally due to arrive at midnight but we heard it was early and would be there at 11:30 so we went at 10:30 to be safe. When we got there the policeman said that we should have been here before 10pm so they can check our baggage in. We were not able to do that now and we would either have to leave our baggage here or wait 24 hours for the next train. Clearly neither of those options was going to happen and after lengthy discussions the baggage team and a secondary policeman arrived and we were told that we can have our luggage on board the train but we would not be able to get our luggage back when arriving in Ndjole station until after 8am when the station officially opens and the baggage will be retrospectively checked in. Once again this was not going to happen as the train was due to get to Ndjole around 4am and we were not going to spend another 4 hours in the station in the dark waiting when we should be on the road driving to our accommodation. So we made the call to completely ignore the orders of the police and just take our baggage on the train in the carriage we would be sat in. Everyone else at the station was on our side here it was the two policemen who seems to be a little bit like jobsworths. Anyway, the day ended with the train being inevitably late and us at the platform nearly arguing with law enforcement.

---

## Day 6      **Lope – Ndjole - Lamberene**

## *Travelling & Rest*

So the train arrived at 1:15am and we all eagerly got on board, despite our carriage being some 1km away from the platform and us having to lug our baggage over the tracks to get there. But we got there and all boarded and promptly sat down in the nice comfy chairs. The train was quick and we arrived at Ndjole earlier than expected (at around 3am), so we faced another problem. Once we had loaded up the mini bus with the luggage and all got in, the driver informed us that he couldn't drive anywhere as there was a recent law that prohibited the use of these kind of vehicles on this stretch of road after dark. Because of too many accidents, which was fair enough, but it was never passed on to us and so now we were very tired and facing the prospect of having the next 3-4 hours in the station carpark. So we asked the driver to go anyway, we did, we drove around 1km down the road to a road block, there the policewoman was clearly angry at us. She checked the drivers paperwork and found out that one of his documents was out of date. He called his boss in Libreville and he had the new paperwork at home, so our vehicle and driver was grounded until this paperwork could be produced. In the meantime we called for 3 smaller cars to come and take us and our baggage to the hotel and us as a group curled up in the bus and slept for 2-3 hours.



At sunrise we were ready to go, the other vehicles had arrived and we were loading the luggage into them when we found out that the police were being quite nice and recognising our unusual situation and that we were a group of tourists who were tired said that if the boss of the car rental company could take a picture of the document and WhatsApp it across that would be sufficient. However the boss doesn't have WhatsApp and no one in his home does, so he had to wait until his neighbour woke up and asked him to do it. So finally we had permission from the police to move in the original minibus. The other three cars were sent on their way after we had once again lugged our baggage to the bus. So after what seemed like an age we were on the road and what a road it was. Driving through huge tracts of pristine forest until we arrived at the town of Lamberene and the iconic Albert Schwiester Hospital. We would be staying here and it was nice to get some hot food and drinks and a comfy bed after the long journey.

The rest of the day was spent rested and walking down to the Oogoue River and watching the birds, African skimmers being a particular delight. We also found a Lady Burton's rope squirrel scurrying around in a mango tree near our accommodation.

We were all very pleased that tomorrow we would be heading to the forest again and the next few days would be more wildlife and in particular western lowland gorillas.



## **Day 7 Loango National Park**

## ***Travelling & Wildlife Watching***

This morning we left the hospital after breakfast and travelled the short distance to the river and boarded our boat to be captained by Ongrielle, we said goodbye to Anouck and Vianet and started our long boat journey. We first went to a bridge spanning the Oogoue River and underneath the bridge was an enormous colony of Egyptian rousettes, there must have been 100,000 of them crammed together underneath. It was a sight to behold, and then we turned and sped off down the river. We had a lot of distance to cover today and the vast majority of the journey was very fast along the river. The river was lined with rainforest and sometimes savanna, but very few houses and villages and we saw some wildlife along the way including African fish eagles, many palm nut vultures, various swallows and martins and even a couple of West African crocodiles basking on the shore and then brief views of two white-bellied duikers as they ran from a small clearing on the shore into the forest. In some papyrus Chris spotted a southern reedbuck as well, but most of the wildlife today was birdlife. African giant kingfishers, African skimmers and a swimming African finfoot being highlights before a small slender-nosed crocodile half up a tree over the river (this species is a good climber and known for basking high on branches).

We then came to a large lagoon which we had to cross, this was not too pleasant, we had not made fantastic time and the wind had picked up and we all got pretty soaked as we crossed the lagoon to make it to Omboue for lunch. By the time we reached there many of us decided to change clothes as we had our lunch in a café.

We then loaded our vehicles up and made the final section of the journey by car, it was around 2-3 hours drive through savanna-forest mosaic (interspersed with an oil field and refinery) and a couple of villages. We passed the boundary of Loango National Park, which was marked by the river and also an electrified fence to keep the elephants out of the farmland. It was interesting (but not surprising) that the elephants that are encountered on the national park side of the river (where no people live) are quite relaxed and the ones who live on this side of the river and come into contact with farmers and very aggressive and are not to be messed around with.

When we arrived at the lodge we met the manager Mathieu and his chief guide (Dimitry) who would be guiding us for the next couple of days and checked in. We then made a plan to go out for a spotlighting walk after dark in the savanna-forest nearby the lodge.

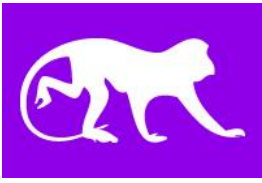
This spotlighting turned out to be very productive with an African wood owl very close and seen very well as well as Gabon squirrel galago and a couple of African palm civets seen well. Not bad for a 2km stretch and a quick walk.

---

## **Day 8 Loango NP / Akaka River**

## ***Gorilla Tracking / Wildlife Watching***

This morning we left the lodge with Dimitri as a large flock of African grey parrots fed on the palms and green bush squirrels scurried around. We would split into two groups once again today, as only 4 people can do the gorilla tracking at a time. So we would all head to the gorilla tracking head-quarters and have the briefing together. Along



the way and crossing the lagoon we had great views of moustached monkeys and red-capped mangabeys on the shore and a small group of common hippos. When we got to the gorillas we all had the briefing so that the second group could go straight in tomorrow, then after the briefing one of the researchers Luran and a local Pygmy guide Emile took Rosmarie, April, Monty and Stewart into the forest to track down the habituated troop of lowland gorillas here.

The gorillas were around 1.5 hours walk through the forest and just on the edge of a swamp when they arrived, they followed them into the swamp and had some great views of them feeding, grooming and resting. They saw all 10 gorillas in this group, including the silverback. They were around 10-20m away from them all the time and with a lot of youngsters in the group they were very entertaining.

Martin, Chris and Peter carried on with Dimitri in the boat and entered the Akaka river after leaving the gorillas. The Akaka River is one of the most productive and diverse part of Gabon and the wealth of life we found on the river was staggering. There were many palm-nut vultures and rosy bee-eaters perched on the riverside trees and flying overhead and many of the half submerged trees and branches had small slender-nosed crocodiles on them basking. They are quite good climbers and some of them we found were around 1.5-2m off the water and balanced on quite thin branches. Many of them shot off the branches and away into the water as we approached, but eventually with some patience we had some close and great sightings of this usually rare and hard to see species. There were some brief views of moustached monkeys running away through the vegetation and then very nice views of a shining blue kingfisher and many African giant kingfishers. Dimitri then found us a small (around 2m) long African rock python, it was curled up on an overhanging tree and we were able to get very nice close views as the boat just rocked right up to it.

As we cruised through the forested part of the river we spotted African fish eagles and one was being mobbed aggressively by a palm nut vulture. Amazingly African finfoots were very common and relaxed around us here, this usually elusive and skittish bird was nearly tame and we saw many of them as we cruised slowly along.

As the river banks opened up from forests to more savanna and papyrus beds we had one of the highlights of the trip, a large flock of several hundred African river martins came along and spent the next 10 minutes or so flocking around our boat, synchronising their dives down to the water to drink and bath and then back up again and around to repeat the manoeuvre. It was an incredible spectacle to see whatever the species, but with this being one of the most sought after African bird species and one that we still do not know much about it was just incredible.

After the African river martins we started to see more African forest elephants in the savannas and on the river banks, we had some very good sightings of young males and a couple of older mature bulls in full mutsch and one with enormous tusks. They seem naturally more aggressive than the savanna elephants and even as we just stopped the boat (nowhere near them) they would start their dominance display, including trumpeting, ear flapping, head shaking and even throwing vegetation at us with their tusks and trunks. We then made it to the camp for lunch, the only other sighting of note being a large Nile monitor basking on an overhanging tree.

Chris, Peter and Martin had lunch at the camp as we waited for the others to return, but they were running late, so we went back out on the river, trying further up and heading deeper into the savanna / forest mosaic here. The bird life was once again incredible, with many shining blue and pied kingfishers, purple herons, African darters, village weavers and there were more and more elephants coming out of the forest as the temperatures cooled as the afternoon wore into evening.

We watched many small groups of elephants emerge and start to feed on the lush grasses, many females and youngster of various ages. There were two adult females feeding alongside a troop of red-capped mangabeys in the open.

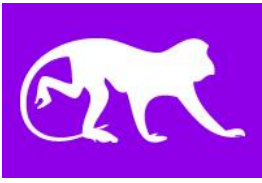
We continued and had an amazing African finfoot sighting, it was foraging along the shoreline and seems completely unaware of our presence. We had hoped to see sitatunga, but it was quiet, we only saw one male sitatunga briefly before it ran off into the papyrus and out of sight. We then found a larger crocodile than we had seen before, around 2m long and had some views before it disappeared into the water. We then turned around and met up with the others back at Akaka camp.

On their way back from the gorillas they had seen many elephants and had similar dominance displays to what we had seen; they also had an elephant swimming across the river in front of their boat and using its trunk as a snorkel; they had also seen red-capped mangabeys and putty-nosed monkeys, many kingfishers, crocodiles and other birds.

After dinner we had a night boat cruise around the rivers and spotlighting a few nice species, we had many crocodiles as well as a nice link rat on the river bank and a feeding Franquet's singing fruit bat perched and feeding in view. There was a female and calve sitatunga feeding in the papyrus followed by a Demidoff's dwarf galago and a lovely Lord Derby's anomalure in the same tree. The other animals we had views of tonight were some bats feeding along the rivers and black crowned night-herons.







---

## Day 9 Loango NP / Akaka River

## Wildlife Watching

This morning the group woke up on the Akaka River and then split into two groups again; Chris, Peter and Martin went to the gorillas and Stewart, Monty, April and Rosemarie stayed on the Akaka river with Dimitri. On the way to the gorillas there were many elephants around, a troop of moustached monkeys moving quickly around the palms near the water; as well as an abundance of riverside birds as normal.

After meeting Lauren and Emile again the trek to where the gorillas were began, it was around 2 hour long and the gorillas were found in the forest. Along the way we heard red-capped mangabeys as well as finding very fresh elephant dung, luckily the elephant was moving in the other direction to where we were heading.

When we arrived at the gorillas they were very relaxed. The silverback was sleeping and the adult females all resting and feeding slowly. The youngsters were more active, and more inquisitive about us. Two of the younger gorillas were play fighting very energetically. Then they started to move from the forest and then down towards the nearby swamp. We followed, it was interesting (and at odds to other gorilla groups Martin had seen) in that the silverback was the last to move throughout the interaction. He slowly got up and followed the group as they walked down the 100m towards the swamp. They stopped on the edge and fed on a fruiting *vivex* tree, which included the silverback skilfully and powerfully climbing up to get quite high to get the ripest fruits. He was joined by 2 youngsters and an adult female whilst another female and a blackback male fed on termites on a decaying tree stump. Some of the group left the forest completely and entered the swamp, it was very sunny but the vegetation was high and the visibility of the gorillas less in the swamp, so we stayed with the members of the group that stayed on the forest edge.

We watched them for a while as they moved through the trees feeding, they started to move off again and all enter the swamp, again it was the silverback who was last to move along. The whole group then moved off into the swamp and we followed parallel in the forest in the hope they would come out and back into the forest. We were rewarded as they entered the forest again and in a very clear part of the forest. We could see them as they crossed our path and walked deep into the forest, it was the end of our hour with the gorillas and we were allowed to stop and wait for the silverback to pass us.

He put on a great show, he was at the back of the group once again and stood proud and rigid in front of us, a clear dominance display, avoiding eye contact and doing his best to intimidate us. He then launched himself, beating his chest as he ran towards us and then away, getting around 3m away from Martin (who was at the end of our group), he then stopped, rigid again, waiting for a reaction. We stayed stock still and he walked off to join the rest of the group. Wow!

We then left ourselves and headed back to the head-quarters, had lunch and got back on the boat to meet the rest of the group along the Akaka River.

Once everyone had met we all headed back towards the lagoon and the lodge. Once again around Akaka we had seen many elephants, a small group of sitatunga including a male, female and calve. The other group had also had views of an Ayer's hawk eagle and long-tailed hawk as well as many slender-nosed crocodiles. Martin, Chris and Peter found a very large African rock python on the shore, but it had moved away and into cover by the time the other boat had arrived.

We made it back in the evening and had dinner and the rest of the night to rest and relax and have a drink to celebrate our last night in Gabon and a largely very successful trip.

---

## Day 10 Loango NP – Port Gentil – Libreville Wildlife Watching & Travelling

This morning we rose early and crossed the lagoon with Dimitri to have a morning jeep safari around the savanna. One mammal we had struggled with because the weather hadn't been great for them was the red river hog. So we decided to have one last chance for this stunning little pig. We had a couple of hours and searched the savanna forest mosaic here, we didn't see any hogs, but found a large herd of forest buffalo and some birds including oxpeckers, red-eyed doves, long-legged pipits, palm nut vultures, common house martins and hadeda ibis.

We then returned to the lodge for breakfast and then departed, the drive to Port Gentil took around 3.5 hours, we had lunch in the town and then caught our flight to Libreville.

In Libreville we split, as Martin, Chris and Peter were flying back tonight and went straight to the international terminal to check in and Monty, Rosemarie, Stewart and April were transferred by Akoun back to the hotel in the city as they were departing tomorrow.

# Species List

Gabon Wildlife Adventure

Jun/Jul 2019

## Mammals (\* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Beecroft's anomalure	<i>Anomalurus beecrofti</i>
2	Lord Derby's anomalure	<i>Anomalurus derbianus</i>
3	Golden angwatibo	<i>Arctocebus aureus</i>
4	Marsh mongoose	<i>Atilax paludinosus</i>
5	Peter's duiker	<i>Cephalophus callipygus</i>
6	White-bellied duiker	<i>Cephalophus leucogaster</i>
7	Blue duiker	<i>Cephalophus monticola</i>
8	Yellow-backed duiker	<i>Cephalophus silvicultor</i>
9	Red-capped mangabey	<i>Cercocebus torquatus</i>
10	Moustached monkey	<i>Cercopithecus cephus</i>
11	Putty-nosed monkey	<i>Cercopithecus nictitans</i>
12	Crowned geunon	<i>Cercopithecus pogonias</i>
13	Black colobus	<i>Colobus satanas</i>
14	Link rat	<i>Deomys ferugineus</i>
15	Whalberg's epauletted bat	<i>Epomophorus wahlbergi</i>
16	Franquet's singing fruit bat	<i>Epomops franqueti</i>
17	Lady Burton's rope squirrel	<i>Funisciurus isabella</i>
18	Demidoff's dwarf galago	<i>Galagoides demidoff</i>
19	Thomas's dwarf galago	<i>Galagoides thomasi</i>
20	Servaline genet	<i>Genetta servalina</i>
21	Western gorilla	<i>Gorilla gorilla</i>
22	Woodland dormouse	<i>Graphiurus murinus</i>
23	Common hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>
24	Benito horseshoe bat	<i>Hipposideros beatus</i>
25	Cyclops roundleaf bat	<i>Hipposideros cyclops</i>
26	Grey-cheeked mangabey	<i>Lophocebus albigena</i>
27	African forest elephant	<i>Loxodonta cyclotis</i>
28	Mandrill	<i>Mandrillus sphinx</i>
29	Peter's dwarf epauletted bat	<i>Micropteropus pusillus</i>

Jun	July								
30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
			1						
							1		
			1						
						*			
			3						
						2			
		2							
		1							
							11	*	
		~25	5	~35			18	~15	
		2	~42	~88			~10		
			6						
			~10						
							1		
		~35	~25	~30					
		2		2			1		
					1				
							1		
			1						
				1					
		*		*			10	10	
			1						
						*	5		
						2			
		5		1					
		~10	21	~40					
		4	11	15		*	40	14	*
		~50	~50	~50					
	4		~15	~10					

30	Greater long-fingered bat	<i>Miniopterus inflatus</i>
31	Northern talapoin	<i>Miopithecus ogoouensis</i>
32	Rufous mouse-eared bat	<i>Myotis bocagei</i>
33	African palm civet	<i>Nandinia binotata</i>
34	Tiny serotine	<i>Neoromicia guineensis</i>
35	Large-eared slit-faced bat	<i>Nycteris grandis</i>
36	Intermediate slit-faced bat	<i>Nycteris intermedia</i>
37	Chimpanzee	<i>Pan troglodytes</i>
38	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
39	Green squirrel	<i>Paraxerus poensis</i>
40	Red-river hog	<i>Potamochoerus porcus</i>
41	African golden cat	<i>Profelis aurata</i>
42	Southern reedbuck	<i>Redunca arundinum</i>
43	Lander's horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus landeri</i>
44	Egyptian rousette	<i>Rousettus aegyptiacus</i>
45	Gabon squirrel galago	<i>Sciurocheirus gabonensis</i>
46	Forest buffalo	<i>Synercos nanus</i>
47	Little free-tailed bat	<i>Tadarida nanula</i>
48	Kewel	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>
49	Sitatunga	<i>Tragelaphus spekei</i>

		1	1						
3									
							3		
			5			2			
				1					
		2							
							2		
		*	*						
		*						*	
		1					1		
			*						*
				*					
						1			
				2					
11						1,000's			
						2			
	2	31	44	~92					2
	~10	3	1						
		1							
							4	4	

\*Some bats identified 100% at roosts or with good views. Others identified with spectrograms in combination with sightings (no spectrograms without visual confirmation are recorded), behaviour and habitat – so not 100% but best educated guesses. For more information please email me.

## Birds (\* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	African jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>
2	Malachite kingfisher	<i>Alcedo cristata</i>
3	White-bellied kingfisher	<i>Alcedo leucogaster</i>
4	Shining blue kingfisher	<i>Alcedo quadibrachys</i>
5	Zebra waxbill	<i>Amandava subflava</i>
6	Black crane	<i>Amaurornis flavirostra</i>
7	Cameroon sombre greenbul	<i>Andropadus curvirostris</i>
8	Little greenbul	<i>Andropadus virens</i>
9	African darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>

Jun	July								
30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
						1	~187	~112	
							3	1	
							1		
							7		
					4				
						1			
								6	
1		~10					~10		
						15	55	56	6

10	Long-legged pipit	<i>Anthus pallidiventris</i>
11	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
12	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinereus</i>
13	Goliath heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>
14	Purple heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
15	Common squacco heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>
16	Haded ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>
17	Cattle egret	<i>Bubalcus ibis</i>
18	Yellow-billed oxpecker	<i>Buphagus africanus</i>
19	Water thickknee	<i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>
20	Striated heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
21	White-thighed hornbill	<i>Bycanistes albotibialis</i>
22	Piping hornbill	<i>Bycanistes fistulator</i>
23	Black-and-white casqued hornbill	<i>Bycanistes subcylindricus</i>
24	Buff-spotted woodpecker	<i>Campethera nivosa</i>
25	Freckled nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus tristigma</i>
26	Blue-headed coucal	<i>Centropus monachus</i>
27	Senegal coucal	<i>Centropus senegalensis</i>
28	Black-casqued hornbill	<i>Ceratogymna atrata</i>
29	Pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
30	African dwarf kingfisher	<i>Ceyx lecontei</i>
31	African pgymy kingfisher	<i>Ceyx pictus</i>
32	Common ringed plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>
33	Woolly-necked stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
34	Splendid sunbird	<i>Cinnyris coccinigaster</i>
35	Copper sunbird	<i>Cinnyris cupreus</i>
36	Feral pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
37	Pied crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>
38	Great blue turaco	<i>Corythaeola cristata</i>
39	Green-headed sunbird	<i>Cyanomitra verticalis</i>
40	African palm swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>
41	Common house martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
42	White-faced whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>
43	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
44	Intermediate egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
45	Common waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>
46	Yellow-crowned bishop	<i>Euplectes afer</i>
47	Lesser kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>

		~48	~35	~20					~27
					4	5	~62	12	6
2						1			2
						2	1		
						4	7	1	
							2	1	
		3					51	22	8
	2				~10	2			4
									7
		2							4
						5		1	
		2						2	
		6					1		
3									
1									
		7	2						
							3		
								1	
		2	4				6	7	
						3	40	~30	~10
								1	
1									
						6			3
							4	2	
2									
		1	2						
					3				~50
	2	1			2	~50			
		2		1			1		
	1								
	~10	~50	~30			~10		2	
						~13	3	11	~10
							32	6	
						8	1		
						4	4	4	~10
			~30						
			1						
					1				

48	Peregrine falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
49	Scaly francolin	<i>Francolinus squamatus</i>
50	Grey pranticole	<i>Glareola cinerea</i>
51	White-backed night heron	<i>Gorsachius leuconotos</i>
52	Palm nut vulture	<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i>
53	Woodland kingfisher	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>
54	African fish eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>
55	Ayre's hawk eagle	<i>Hieraaetus ayresii</i>
56	Lesser striped swallow	<i>Hirundo abyssinica</i>
57	Rufous-chested swallow	<i>Hirundo semirufa</i>
58	Splendid glossy starling	<i>Lamprotornis splendidus</i>
59	Marabou stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i>
60	Long-crested eagle	<i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>
61	Double-toothed barbet	<i>Lybius bidentatus</i>
62	Bat hawk	<i>Macheiramphus alcinus</i>
63	African giant kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle maxima</i>
64	White-throated bee-eater	<i>Merops albicollis</i>
65	Black-headed bee-eater	<i>Merops breweri</i>
66	Rosy bee-eater	<i>Merops malimbicus</i>
67	Blue-headed bee-eater	<i>Merops muelleri</i>
68	Blue-breasted bee-eater	<i>Merops variegatus</i>
69	Gabar goshawk	<i>Micronisus gabar</i>
70	African pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>
71	Yellow-billed stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>
72	Lead-coloured flycatcher	<i>Myioparus plumbeus</i>
73	Whimbrel	<i>Numenius phaeopus</i>
74	Black-crowned night heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
75	Black-chinned quailfinch	<i>Ortygospiza gabonensis</i>
76	Pink-backed pelican	<i>Pelecanus rufescens</i>
77	African cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i>
78	White-throated greenbul	<i>Phyllastrephus albigularis</i>
79	Orange weaver	<i>Ploceus aurantius</i>
80	Village weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>
81	Brown-capped weaver	<i>Ploceus insignis</i>
82	Velliot's black weaver	<i>Ploceus nigerrimus</i>
83	Black-necked weaver	<i>Ploceus nigricollis</i>
84	African finfoot	<i>Podica senegalensis</i>
85	Red-fronted parrot	<i>Poicephalus gulielmi</i>

						1			
		2							
~40		~50				~42			
						2			
9		7				~82	26	37	2
		3							2
						3	4	4	
								1	
		~10	12	12		7			~15
						~220			
		2							
						2			
									1
			1						
				1					
		1				7	22	8	
		3	2						
						1			2
~35						3	33	~30	
		5							
		6	1	2			3	4	22
			1						
							2	1	
							4		
							2	3	
2									
							2		
		~45	~140	~40		~20			
34						4	7	6	~70
						~51			
			1						
		~10							
~113		~50	~30		~101		~306	~150	
				~20					
5					~10				
		4							
		1				2	6	4	
		~15		5					

86	Gymnogene	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>
87	Black saw-wing	<i>Psalidoprocne pristoptera</i>
88	African river martin	<i>Pseudochelidon eurystomina</i>
89	African grey parrot	<i>Psittacus erithacus</i>
90	Hartlaub's duck	<i>Pteronetta hartlaubii</i>
91	Common bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
92	Sabine's spinetail	<i>Rhaphidura sabini</i>
93	African skimmer	<i>Rynchops flavirostris</i>
94	Hammerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
95	Black-faced canary	<i>Serinus capistratus</i>
96	Cassin's hawk eagle	<i>Spizaetus africanus</i>
97	Little tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>
98	Damara tern	<i>Sterna balaenarum</i>
99	Roseate tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>
100	Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
101	Royal tern	<i>Sterna maxima</i>
102	Red-eyed dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>
103	African wood owl	<i>Strix woodfordii</i>
104	Yellow-billed turaco	<i>Tauraco macrorhynchus</i>
105	African paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>
106	Swamp palm bulbul	<i>Thescelocichla leucopleura</i>
107	Red-billed dwarf hornbill	<i>Tockus camurus</i>
108	African pied hornbill	<i>Tockus fasciatus</i>
109	African green pigeon	<i>Treron calvus</i>
110	White-crested hornbill	<i>Tropicranus albocristatus</i>
111	African thrush	<i>Turdus pelios</i>
112	Little buttonquail	<i>Turnix sylvaticus</i>
113	Blue-spotted wood dove	<i>Turtur afer</i>
114	Blue-headed wood pigeon	<i>Turtur brehmeri</i>
115	Tambourine dove	<i>Turtur tympanistria</i>
116	Long-tailed hawk	<i>Urotriorchis macrourus</i>
117	Senegal plover	<i>Vanellus lugubris</i>
118	Pin-tailed whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>

		3			1	3			
					3		11	7	~10
							~500		
		~35			12	21	~25	21	~10
					2		8		
4	~10	~30	21	9	~130	~40	~30	3	14
							2		
					2	~64			
3						1	9	4	
			1						
				1					
						2			
3									
						13			
						~10			
						~20			
						1	1	~30	36
						1			
							1		
				1					
	2	3							
		1							
		10			3	8	2		
			1		1	1		2	
		2							
	1					1			
				1					
			1	2		1			
						2			
2		1	1						
								1	
				1					1
			1						

## Reptiles (\* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Red-headed agama	<i>Agama agama</i>
2	West African crocodile	<i>Crocodylus suchus</i>
3	Gabon plated lizard	<i>Gerrhosaurus nigrolineatus</i>
4	Banded half-toed gecko	<i>Hemidactylus fasciatus</i>
5	African half-toed house gecko	<i>Hemidactylus mabouia</i>
6	Slender-nosed crocodile	<i>Mecistops cataphractus</i>
7	Dwarf crocodile	<i>Osteolaemus tetraspis</i>
8	West African grass lizard	<i>Poromera fordii</i>
9	Seba's python	<i>Python sebae</i>
10	Ornate monitor	<i>Varanus ornatus</i>

Jun	July								
30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	2	~15	16	~55	~50				
						2			
		8							
			1						
		3	1						
						2	22	9	
			1						
		1							
							1	2	
							2		

### **Amphibians** (\* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Common banana frog	<i>Afrivalus dorsalis</i>
2	Cameroon toad	<i>Bufo camerunensis</i>
3	African savanna toad	<i>Bufo regularis</i>
4	Variable puddle frog	<i>Phrynobatrachus auritus</i>

Jun	July								
30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		~15							
							1		
			3				1		
								1	

### **Fishes** (\* = heard or signs only)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Gabon killifish	<i>Aphyosemion gabunense</i>
2	Banded jewelfish	<i>Hemichromis fasciatus</i>

Jun	July								
30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
		~10							
							~10		~30