









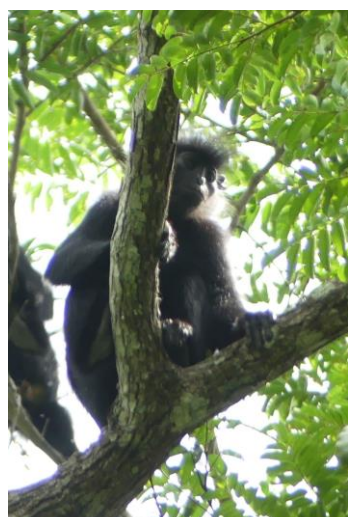
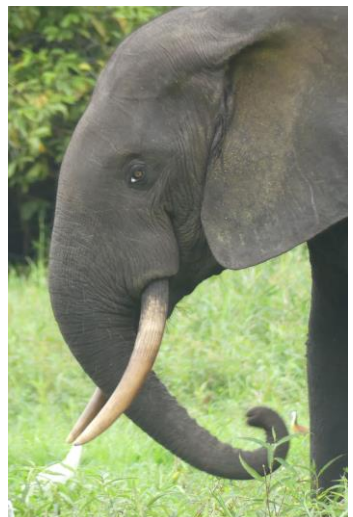
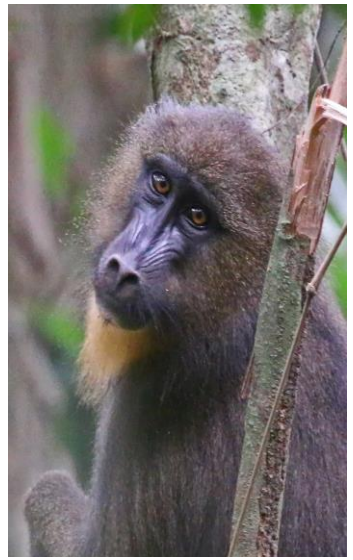


## Gabon Wildlife Adventure

**Destination:** Ivindo (optional pre-tour extension); Lope & Loango, Gabon  
**Duration:** 10 Days (14 Days including extension) **Dates:** 9<sup>th</sup> (13<sup>th</sup>) Jul – 22<sup>nd</sup> Jul 2022

-  Watching and following a group of several hundred **Mandrills** including large males
-  Camping out over the Loangué Bai & seeing **African Forest Elephants & Gorillas**
-  Amazing prolonged and close views of a Vermiculated Fish Owl in Loango
-  Finding and watching a small group of unhabituated **Chimpanzees** in the forest
-  Seeing rare mammals such as **Black-footed Mongoose & Yellow-backed Duiker**
-  106 bird species including Rosy Bee-eaters & Black-casqued Wattled Hornbills
-  Nice nocturnal mammals including a very close **African Palm Civet**
-  43 mammals including **African Pygmy Mouse, Chimpanzee & African Palm Civet**
-  9 Species of primates seen including a stunning experience with the **Gorillas**
-  Seeing several range restricted Central African Slender-snouted Crocodiles



### Tour Leader / Guides

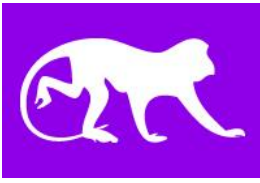
Martin Royle (Royle Safaris Tour Leader)  
 Jorge (Ivindo Guide)  
 Vianet (Libreville, Akanda & Lope Guide)  
 Anouck & Boris (Libreville Transfers)  
 David Lehmann (Mandrill Researcher)  
 Gildas (Local Pygmy Guide in Lope)  
 Salam (Lope Driver)  
 Shergo & Romey (Loango / Akaka River Guides)

### Participants

Scott Hyman  
 Andrew Kyles (plus Ivindo extension)  
 Charles Priest (plus Ivindo extension)  
 Paula Priest (plus Ivindo extension)  
 Janet Rhoton (plus Ivindo extension)  
 Bonnie Shirley (plus Ivindo extension)

### Overview

<b>Day 1:</b>	Libreville
<b>Day 2:</b>	Akanda NP
<b>Days 2-5:</b>	Ivindo NP
<b>Days 6-9:</b>	Lope NP
<b>Day 10:</b>	Lambarene
<b>Days 11-13:</b>	Loango NP / Akaka River
<b>Day 14:</b>	Libreville
<b>Day 15:</b>	Home



# Day by Day Breakdown

## Overview

Gabon is a jewel of a country when it comes to intact, pristine forest in Africa (over 80% of Gabon is forested) and with a lack of tourism industry the country is wild and you can end up having thousands of square kilometres of pristine forest and abundant wildlife to yourself. There is probably nowhere else in Africa quite like this amazing country.

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. That was then put to a swift end (like all tourism around the world) with the covid-19 pandemic, but after 2 years of being closed and 3 years from our first trip to Gabon, Royle Safaris was back and this being the second of three group tours running this summer.

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. There is more time and work need for this but it is getting better and now for the first time there is a real plan in place to take tourists to see this amazing species, but of course the pangolin has to cooperate as walking in the forest at night around elephants is too dangerous if the pangolin is too far away.

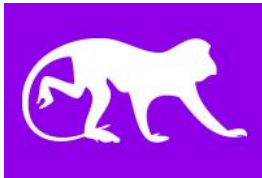
So this tour was broken up into the main trip (which we ran back in 2019) and focused on two of the country's best national parks, Lope & Loango. We also made a quick visit to Akanda National Park in search of northern talapoin and manatees. Our main focus was two primates, the mandrills and western lowland gorillas. But we hoped for a wealth of over wildlife and we were not disappointed. And then there was an optional pre-tour extension which nearly everyone took up to visit the very wild and rugged Ivindo National Park and experience the abundant wildlife (mostly the same species which we would see in other parks) but from large raised platforms overlooking openings called Bais which give an incredible and peaceful view into the lives of these usually secretive forest species. From Ivindo the group would meet up with the others and our Royle Safaris tour leader Martin in Lope and everyone would continue on from day 2 of the main trip and day 6 of the Ivindo clients together.

Gabon has so much to offer and is a veritable treasure trove of exotic and incredible mammal species that Royle Safaris will be running at least 2 trips annually for some time to come. We also have a new itinerary underdevelopment which would be a dedicated giant pangolin tracking trip, it would most likely consist of 7-10 days dedicated hiking in the forest looking for this amazing species. Only very fit and adventurous people would be able to do this as hiking 25-30km in a day in extreme heat and humidity through dense forest, surrounded by elephants would be needed. However this is an opportunity that is available. Otherwise we offer the giant pangolin tracking activity as described in the body of the trip report below, as standard on our group tours.

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) we have already filled 6 of the 8 places on our first 2023 group tour.







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## Days 1-5 **Ivindo Extension Synopsis**

## *Wildlife Watching*

The pre-tour Ivindo extension was guided by Jorge and we don't have a detailed day by day breakdown however below is a synopsis of the itinerary and also we have a list of the key species seen during these days.

Everyone took the recommended advice of arriving the day before the official start of the trip (Day 0) as to be here in time to visit Akanda National Park the following day, the park is best visited in the afternoon (ideally) as the monkeys are most easily seen when they are returning to their roosting trees, however due to an inexplicable change in the train schedule (completely without warning and unprecedented) the train we were due to get on the evening of day 2 has been cancelled (they no longer run trains on that day of the week) so we had to book a train for the evening of day 1 and as a result the only time we could do the Akanda visit to see the northern talapoins was the morning of day 1, and the only time we could do this was to be there for sunrise to see them moving from their roosts as they start their day foraging. Which meant a 3:20am start. Not ideal, but the only choice we had. So everyone arrived (nearly everyone – we did have two people have to cancel last minute due to personal reasons) and nearly everyone's luggage arrived. With the world of travel in chaos currently it was a minor miracle that everyone arrived on time and only 2 people's bags didn't arrive. Paula's bag came the next day and we were able to send it along with her to Ivindo but Charles' bag didn't show up until day 5 and so Martin brought that with him from Libreville to Lope. Air France do nothing in these cases, we had to send someone to the airport everyday to ask and go in and search for the bag among the various other left luggages. A ridiculous system but something that Guillermo and Boris were able to sort out and eventually everyone was reunited with their luggage.

So the early morning visit to Akanda was successful in terms of seeing the **northern talapoins**, this is a range restricted species which likes the mangrove forest and their habitat is decreasing all of the time. The little island we visit is the home of a ranger station and the only really reliable place to see this species.

Of course cruising through the waterways to the island there were many of the common bird species which are expected around here, including some nice ones such as rock pranticoles, palm nut vultures, hammerkops, an large colony of pink-backed pelicans and many village weavers and Viellot's black weavers, whimbrel, blue-breasted bee-eater and blue-throated brown sunbird.

From here the group took the overnight train to Ivindo and then arrival travelled via car and walking to Dilo Camp for breakfast and then onwards again to Rock Camp and on again (a long day is needed today as Ivindo is very pristine and the infrastructure nearly non-existent, the benefit from this means that visiting is a genuine wilderness experience (something unusual in modern Africa). The final destination being Langoue Bai and the home for the next couple of nights.

Staying on the raised platforms is a great experience and can provide amazing views into some of the rare forest dwellers as they come out of the forest to feed and take minerals from the clay soils here. However these couple of days were quite quiet, apart from a lot of wonderful **red river hogs** they only saw few **African forest elephants**, **forest buffalo**, **sitatunga** and one individual **western gorilla** which is very unusual, there is usually at least two different **gorilla** families using the bai daily and large numbers of elephants. Other species were seen on the walk to and from the platform and these including **putty-nosed monkey**, **blue duiker**, **Peter's duiker** and more **gorillas** but these animals were not by everyone. Other interesting sightings including Hartlaub's duck, little swift, palm nut vulture, piping hornbill and African grey parrots.

One of the most amazing things about Ivindo (and large parts of Gabon in general) is just how wild and pristine they are, on the roads from the train station and to and from Booue and Ivindo and Lope it is not uncommon to see forest wildlife. In fact this group had a female **gorilla** cross the road on the way there and on the way back a silverback crossing and standing in the middle of the road as a female carrying a baby crossed behind him. A few days later a group of elephants crossed the road in front of another group of people traveling there. Where else in the world do gorillas just cross the main road.

On leaving Ivindo the walked back to the park headquarters and due to the ever changing and frustrating train schedules (and an unexpected improvement in the road) they took a vehicle to get from Ivindo to Lope, and met up with Martin, Vianet and Scott in Lope Hotel on the night of day 2 below.

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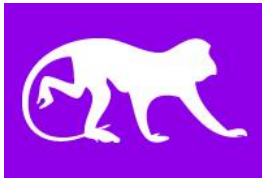
## Day 1 **Libreville & Akanda NP**

## *Arrival, Wildlife Watching & Travelling*

Scott and Martin had arrived yesterday evening and met Guillermo and settled into the hotel, the next morning at the crack of dawn Scott and Guillermo left the hotel to head to Akanda National Park. This trip was in affect the same as the one described in the above Ivindo extension; and once again the main objective here was a small island that is home to a ranger station and on the island is a small population (just around 9 of them) of northern talapoins. Scott was successful in seeing them but didn't get any photographs unfortunately.

They both returned to the hotel, met Martin who was working and solving some issues that had sprung up on the other ongoing trip to Gabon and had lunch.

We then headed to the train station in the late afternoon to catch the overnight train, for one of the many strange reasons that seem to occur in Gabon and nowhere else we were not allowed to travel onto the train with our baggage and the bag of Charles (that had arrived now), so his bag had to be checked in. Always a risk as the train



stops for different periods of time at each station and you are relying on the person in charge of that luggage coach being (1) awake and (2) competent in making sure that all of the correct luggage comes off at the right station. Anyway, we got on and got some rest, the train was due to set off at 8pm and it was 9:15pm before we left Libreville and we then travelled a whole 42km and visited 2 stations in the first 4 hours of travelling. At times like this it is best to not do the maths and work out how long it would take to get all of the 290km to Lope at an average speed of 10km/h. Luckily the train did pick up speed and we got some rest (although not ideal) and as the sun rose we were within 3 stations and around 60km from Lope. Scott even spotted an **elephant** from the window of the train as we approached Bissouma station.

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## Day 2      **Lope National Park**

## *Rest & Wildlife Watching*

We arrived at Lope station at around 8am and went to get Charles' bag and were immediately confronted with a look of incredulity. Handing the luggage ticket and describing the bag was apparently not enough as at one point the staff told us that they can't find it and it is a mess in the carriage and they cannot keep the train here longer than needed. Martin was a few seconds away from lying in front of the train until the bag was found, when a nice boy in the carriage who was hurriedly flipping over bags found it and brought it to us. Unbelievable, as they were going to leave and it was somehow our problem and fault and not theirs that this was the case! But it was resolved and Scott and Martin just wanted to get to the hotel and to bed.

We woke for lunch and; after looking for some bats in the abandoned buildings at the back of the hotel and the garages (where we found a large number of **Peter's epauletted fruit bats** and much fewer of their larger cousins; **Whalberg's epauletted fruit bats**; we left for our first game drive into Lope, seeing a handful of **forest buffalo** grazing on the hotel's lawn when leaving.

Lope National Park is not just the home of the most well known and frequently seen mandrills in the world, but this mosaic of savanna and forests is home to a large diversity of primates and many other mammals and birds. Over the next few days we would make the most of exploring the park looking for as many as we could find. The sighting was one of the most common large birds here, a very nice palm nut vulture but we also quickly found 28 of the **forest buffalos** which belong to a large group that lives near the village and usually frequents a mud wallow near the park entrance. We walked down to the mud wallow, safe on a raised embankment and watched them in the wallow and then getting up, watching us and moving off eventually. It was nice to see the 'big boss' male and several young **buffalo** in the group. Carrying on we found more **buffalo** in a different wallow and walked down to these as well before we found a pair of **African forest elephants**. They were also safely on the other side of a steep gully and so we could get out and see them relatively close on foot. To be able to do this as there are no predators to be overly worried about here is an example of what makes Lope a gem of a national park.

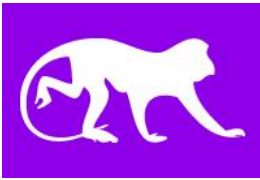
We then encountered our first primate of Lope as we had a solitary (unusual) **moustached monkey** which was very close to the road, but didn't hang around for a long time, moving and feeding as it disappeared into this vegetation. But it was only a little later that we found a small group of **moustached monkeys** jumping and feeding through the trees, this group was mixed with a smaller group of **putty-nosed monkeys**.

We then had one of the strangest sightings you can have in Lope which was a tiny **blue duiker** in the middle of the savanna, crossing the road and running down the road in front of us for a short while before heading towards another patch of forest. Obviously animals like these which like the forests and live in these mosaic habitats have to cross from one patch of forest to another but seeing one is very unusual.

Driving on further we had very nice views of a stunning blue-throated bee-eater and then entered a large tract of forest. Scanning either side of the road with the thermal Martin found what we think was a **white-legged duiker** but we only had brief views in the very thick vegetation before it left. We then heard a troop of **mandrills** nearby, so we waited in the road and the noise of the several hundred strong troop got louder and louder. We started to hear and see trees moving but failed in the dying light to see anymore than 5-6 babies over the road silhouetted before we realised they were settling here for the night. We entered the forest a little way and found where they were going to roost, there was also a lot of ripe fruit around and so we would leave tomorrow earlier than usual (earlier than the hotel likes us to leave as we found out the next day – they really don't like doing anything out of the ordinary) and come straight here to see if we could see these **mandrills**. It seems to be a point of pride in the guides here to see if they show people **mandrills** without the help of David and his radio collared ones. We didn't mind as we may get extra time with this amazing animal. Just as we were leaving the **mandrill** roosting area we found a pair of **blue duikers** close by and then another larger duiker which we really couldn't see very well frustratingly.

Back at the hotel we arrived back just around 5 minutes before the Ivindo crew arrived with Jorge. We all met each other and settled down for dinner after being shown the rooms. During dinner we had some; of what the sonogram and the brief views we could get suggested a **cyclops horseshoe bats** and **lesser free-tailed bats** flying around the restaurant hunting insects.

After dinner most of the group decided to head around the hotel with Martin and Vianet to look for any nocturnal wildlife, we didn't see anything other than the usual Senegal lapwings and water thick-knees which loudly patrol the lawns everywhere here.



## Day 3      **Lope NP**

## **Wildlife Watching**

We had already allocated the first mandrill tracking group last night, Charles and Paula had decided to rest and do a jeep safari instead. So at 6am (an unusual start time for the hotel) Martin, Vianet, Paula and Charles left in the vehicle to head to the mandrill roost site from last night and see if we would get lucky. The others would get up a little later and meet David for the mandrill tracking.

In the vehicle we were barely in the park when we had a great view of a **yellow-backed duiker** it was in the savanna and near the road when we first spooked it driving past and then watched as it bounded away into the nearest forest. We didn't stop for anything else and made our way to the large forest, we arrived and stopped in the road to listen and try and hear the mandrills. We also watched as a large troop of **putty-nosed monkeys** crossed the road above us, jumping from tree to tree effortlessly and entertainingly. Along with these **monkeys** we saw a dwarf black hornbill also cross the road before we got out of the vehicle and entered the forest to find the mandrills we could now hear.

On entering the forest we followed the sounds of the **mandrills**, they always stayed just a little ahead of us, this is not one of David's habituated troops and they would hear or see us and move on, we were pretty much chasing them through the forest. It was amazing to hear them crashing through the forest ahead of them but we only saw three individuals well, and only fleetingly. However near the start of the hike into the forest we had very nice close views of a **White-legged Duiker** followed by some **grey-cheeked mangabeys** and **moustached monkeys** together near the **mandrills**. We followed for a while but eventually it became very quiet and we were also unsure if there was an elephant around, there were some sounds the sounded like there could be an elephant in the forest around us but we couldn't confirm and we didn't think it a great idea to spend longer in the forest without knowing.

So we left and started driving back, we did see a very nice blue-throated bee-eater and also a snow-crowned bush-robin on the side of the road before meeting up with the mandrill tracking group at the hotel.

This was the first opportunity to maybe track a giant pangolin this afternoon, David has a couple collared and if they are close enough to the road or an accessible site we could go and hike to their burrow in the afternoon and wait for one to wake up and leave and watch it for a while. But for the last two weeks or so both collared pangolins had been over 10km away from the nearest vehicle point and a 20km plus hike (half of which would be in the dark) through a dense forest around elephants is not just too hard physically but insanely dangerous that we could do it unless they moved closer over the next couple of days. They didn't unfortunately, but most half of the groups decided to do a second mandrill tracking instead and this worked out well.

So after everyone returned to the hotel we found out that the group that had tracked the **mandrills** had had a good viewing, including seeing a male (albeit briefly) and many females, adolescents and babies, they were feeding, foraging and grooming and playing a lot as they watched them. Then disaster for one of the **mandrills** hit as an adult female fell from the trees and landed on a branch, breaking her back and she lay there slowly dying. There was nothing that could be done, this is nature and it can be brutal. But it was not nice to see. Also interestingly the following day they found fresh leopard scat (from the day before) and tracks in the same area, and it was likely that there was a leopard hunting the troop whilst they were watching them. A troop of several hundred strong is dispersed enough to have some part of the troop terrorised by a leopard and it be unknown to people observing another part of the group. But David did see many of the **mandrills** take to the trees and move over their heads in a rushed pattern. Which may have been in response to the leopard.

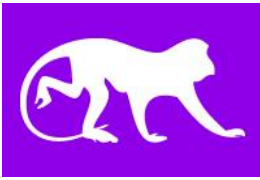
Back at the hotel some of the group went with Martin to have a look at the roosting **Peter's dwarf & Whalberg's epauletted fruit bats** before going back out on a jeep safari as a whole group.

We quickly found a nice **elephant** around a herd of **buffalo**, it would sporadically charge at and flap its ears in the direction of the **buffalo** through the long grass, which was cool to watch. Driving close to the **elephant** and **buffalo** we spooked a **kewel** (bushbuck) and watched as it bounded away through the grass to the nearest forest cover.

Further along we found more **elephants** and walked to them for closer looks, this was a reasonably sized group with many adult females, an adolescent male and a couple of youngsters. We approached to the safest close distance and watched them for a good while. Carrying on we had a troop **putty-nosed monkeys** in a tree moving around but they were quite distance and seeing the white nose was difficult. We then found a mother **elephant** and her young calf, it mustn't have been more than 2-3 months old and its mother would nudge it along as they left a small muddy waterhole to walk towards the forest.

Continuing on it was pretty quiet with just more elephants around and when we got back to the hotel we had dinner and did a little walk around the perimeter of the hotel again, but it was very quiet and other than some feeding **epauletted fruit bats** we didn't see anything and all went to bed.





## Day 4      **Lope NP**

## **Wildlife Watching**

This morning Scott, Vianet and Janet went to try and find a troop of black colobus, whilst Bonnie, Paula, Charles and Andrew waited for David to meet them and go on a mandrill tracking. It would be Bonnie and Andrews' second one each as there were some extra places available and as the pangolin tracking wasn't happening (they were still too far away to hike to and from) it was an option proposed by David and Martin.

When getting out into the park and near where the **mandrills** spent the night David would get out and use his VHF radio tracking equipment to find one of the few radio-collared males which at this time of the year join the huge troop (around 700 individuals) for breeding. After pinpointing the location they entered the forest and started to follow them. They were traveling more today and so it was a little harder to keep up but they left the forest and crossed the savanna, with David directing everyone around to be in location to head them off and get better views, which worked a treat. They even crossed a small river, which was great to see. All in all another very nice and successful morning with this incredible primate.

The black colobus group didn't have the same luck. They were found in the small patch of forest where 2-3 group are known from but as they walked towards them Gildas heard elephants. There was at least one female and a young one around, they never saw them but could hear them and so they waited and waited to see if they moved off, but they didn't. The group even left the forest to see if they could walk around the patch of forest the elephants were in via the savanna and get to the black colobus that way. But it appeared that the elephants were right underneath where the black colobus were and they didn't feel like moving this morning.

Other animals seen on the way to this patch of forest and back were **grey-cheeked mangabeys**, **putty-nosed monkeys**, **moustached monkeys** as well as many birds; the highlights being piping hornbill, black-and-white casqued hornbill, African pied hornbill, Narina trogon and many African grey parrots.

We all met back up at the hotel for lunch before the afternoon game drive. There were lots of **buffalo** in the usual wallows and some nice foraging and feeding **putty-nosed monkeys** as well as another **kwana** running away from us underneath a large flock of noisy African grey parrots flying between patches of forest.

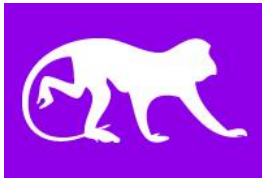
We then stopped and had nice prolonged views of a mixed troop of **grey-cheeked mangabeys** and **moustached monkeys** moving through trees on the edge of a large patch of forest. Whilst watching this a black bee-eater called and made itself visible for the briefest of views. The rest of the drive was quiet again, other than **elephants** and more **buffalo** and then as it started to get dark, large bats started to come out and fly low over the savanna and we tentatively ID'd them as **large-eared slit-faced bats** however slit-faced bats are notoriously difficult and confirmed ID's are only possible in hand.

When we returned to Lope Hotel we did a short walk around the forest just opposite the restaurant before dinner and nearly straight away found a very nice **African palm civet** just waking up from its day sleeping position in the heart of a palm tree. We had great close views of this amazing and beautiful animal as it got up, moved through the palm, jumped very acrobatically to a nearby tree and using its very long tail balanced its way up and out of sight eventually. At the same time a couple of **cylops horseshoe bats** came and landed on the trunks of the trees here and allowed for nice views. There were many sleeping birds around here including a malachite kingfisher in the exact same part of the exact same branch as it was roosting two nights ago. The only other mammal of note today was a **Gambian pouched rat** that Martin, Andrew and Janet had all seen individually around the small kitchen.

## Day 5      **Lope National Park**

## **Wildlife Watching & Travelling**

This morning Scott did another mandrill tracking with David and they had a memorable time (in more than ways than one), firstly the walk to the **mandrills** was quick (maybe 5 minutes) which was a change and they were watching them well, they were feeding and so pretty relaxed and they had good views and there was a very impressive and colourful male nearby, however just as the male was about to come into the open where Scott could get the photos he wanted a group of 5 **elephants** made themselves known and they were not far away. They were three adult females and 2 babies and they were not happy. They charged, trumpeting and crashing through the forest towards them. They all ran out and ran right out of the forest into the savanna, this is usually the end of the chase for most **elephant** charges in Lope, but the elephants (all of them!) carried on chasing them well into the savanna. Eventually they stopped and trumpeted and flapped their ears looking angrily at the group. The plus side was that after the adrenaline died down a little Scott got some nice pictures of the **elephants** in the savanna and in full dominance / intimidation mode.



After that they left and came back to the hotel, a little shaken but with a hell of a story to tell the rest of the group once they got back from their jeep safari looking for black colobus.

Charles took this morning off, so the rest of the group went with Martin, Vianet and Gildas to the forest to look for the black colobus. On the way we had some nice birds including orange-cheeked waxbills, pin-tailed widowbirds and of course the obligatory **buffalos** and then entering the forest we had a brief **moustached monkey** and Martin and Vianet saw a **green bush squirrel** foraging in the trees above the path. It took a good while to find any **black colobus**, when we found them at first there was a solitary male **mandrill** there too, we only saw him poorly however and then watched some **moustached monkeys** in a large tree and there was one **black colobus** there but it was fleeting and not great, so we went to look for some more in another group.

Whilst walking the forest canopy was alive with the sound of hornbills, mostly the large and impressive looking black-and-white casqued hornbill.

It wasn't too much longer before we found another group of **black colobus** this time they showed very well. There were several adults including a nice big male and a female carrying a young baby. The group also had some playing youngsters and we watched them for about 30-40 minutes. They were playing, feeding, grooming and just crashing around the trees above us and putting on a great show. At one point Vianet sat down on a fallen tree and heard some snoring....so he got Martin's torch and we looked inside and there was a fluffy white tail of a **black-footed mongoose** resting inside the hollow log. We looked inside another entrance hole and saw its face, but just as we were formulating a plan to have people with cameras ready at each exit, Gildas (due to a breakdown in communication) shone the torch again and the **mongoose** woke up and darted like a ball being fired out of a canon and away into the forest. But incredible, the first time everyone there (except) Gildas has seen this species and a great highlight on an already good morning.

We all met back at the hotel and exchanged stories and had lunch, we then all went out in the afternoon for our final game drive into Lope. The normal species were seen such as many **African forest elephants**, **buffalo**, **moustached monkeys**, **putty-nosed monkeys** and even a small number of **kevel**. But Vianet, Charles and Scott had a brief view of a male **chimpanzee** in the savanna moving quickly through the grass, it was only the head looking, Charles and Vianet saw the face looking back at them before it disappeared into the long grass.

We then all back to the hotel and packed up, had lunch, paid the bill and waited until 11pm before leaving the train station to catch the overnight train to N'djole. The train is due at midnight, but it didn't come until around 4:30am, we were all tired and slept in the station a little and then a little more on the train.

The only plus side was there were some nice bats flying around the station at night, with a straw-coloured fruit bat seen well crossing the railway line and some banana pipistrelles feeding around the lights.

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## Day 6 Lamberene

## Travelling & Resting

When we finally arrived in N'djole we met our drivers and drove to Lamberene. Along the way Vianet left us as he had to go back to Libreville to present at a conference.

We carried on and arrived in Lamberene for a late breakfast and the rest of the day spent resting and walking around the grounds of the famous and 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.



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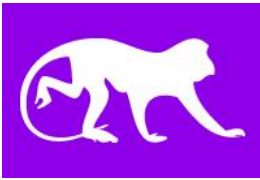
## Day 7 Loango National Park

## Travelling & Wildlife Watching

This morning we left the hospital for the town of Booue on the N'Komi Lagoon just north of Loango National Park, this would be a long day of travelling. As we boarded the boat we saw many birds around including African cormorants, goliath herons, large egrets and white-crowned lapwings.

Our first stop this morning was to look under the bridge connecting the old town of Lamberene on the island and the new town, underneath the bridge is a colony of **Egyptian rousettes** that is many thousands strong. The sound and smell and pitter patter of urine and faeces coming down into the river. But it is a hell of a sight and after seeing these bats we left and headed out and along the Ogooue River for the next few hours.

There were some nice birds along the way including rosy bee-eaters and typical riverside birds and when it came to a brief toilet stop we chose the village of Aschouka which is a relatively large village and they were very accommodating to us, in exchange for us using their bathroom we were introduced to some of the villagers and had a brief tour and then were shown (and some of us joined in) with a traditional festival dance, the N'Djembe which is



an annual festival celebrating the coming of age for women in the village. The festival is two weeks long and we had arrived on the very first morning. It was a fantastic impromptu cultural tour on our transfer day.

Carrying on we had more amazing birds including some grey pratincoles coming close and flying around the boat, we also had a brief stop at a sandbank with a lot of African skimmers, great-white pelicans, little terns, Royal terns and common terns. Nearby here we also found a small pod of **common hippos**. The rest of the journey was not too eventful with us arriving in Booue at 4pm. Straight away we got in our vehicles to transfer the further 1.5 hours to the border of Loango National Park at the mouth of the Iguela lagoon. We then signed in and took the boat for the final part of this long transfer day and reached the new Ndola Camp and had a late lunch before going to the rooms to dump bags and then we straight away had a short jeep safari around the savanna near Ndola Camp.

The first sighting we had was a pair of beautiful great blue turacos flying over the savanna and perching, we then found a few **forest buffalo** in small herds, we had nice views and as the grass is much shorter here than in Lope our views of the **buffalo** where in general better. Watching the group with their dominant bull, several females and youngsters with many yellow-billed oxpeckers all over them. That was about it, it was a short drive and the savanna is not always the most productive ecosystem here. So we had dinner and some rest on our return, also enjoying a nice drink in the bar and then after dinner some of us went out to look for wildlife around the savanna and a little in the forest. It didn't find lots of wildlife but we did have great views of the tiniest mouse, jumping through the bare sand and then down into a burrow, it was very close and we had the torch on it well and the size and colouration are perfect for **African pygmy mouse** very cool to see one of the world's smallest mammals. We then had a freckled nightjar flying and actually nearly crashing into Martin and Bonnie. Then our guide spotted eyes in the forest and we had a **servaline genet**, it was not a great sighting, everyone saw some part of it, but by the time we got to the forest and to the specific tree it was in it had already climbed quite high and was largely obstructed by the leaves. Leaving this **genet** it wasn't long before we found another **servaline genet**, but this one was only seen in the spotlight by the guide and the thermal by Martin but it was running away and we didn't get very good views at all.

Not a bad start to Loango, but of course tomorrow we would split with some people visiting the gorillas and the others carrying on to the amazing wildlife hotspot of the Akaka River.

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

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

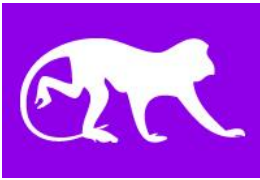
This morning at 7am everyone left the Ndola camp for Akaka Camp in the boat, first we crossed the Iguela lagoon and there is not a great lot to see as we cross this area. But we did have a very fleeting (it's always fleeting) glimpse of an **African manatee**, they come to the surface and we see the nose and then when they submerge in reaction to the boat they show a little of their back and then leave a very tell tale circular 'footprint' in the surface of the water.

There were some nice birds as we crossed the lagoon, including African skimmers, palm-nut vultures, pink-backed pelicans, intermediate egrets and also great-blue turacos. We then arrived at the gorilla station and Bonnie and Charles went (a few other people were feeling a little under the weather and decided not to risk going to the gorillas today. But Charles and Bonnie has a great time, it was a relatively short walk to find them (around 30 minutes) and they nearly had to go through a swamp (a waist deep swamp) but they saved from having to do that by the **gorillas** moving towards them and so they waited and the **gorillas** came to them. They saw all 9 of the family, including the silverback and youngsters. They were climbing in the trees, feeding and relaxing, one of the mothers even placed down logs over a swampy area for her baby to cross, which was just fantastic behaviour to see. It was a great experience. Bonnie and Charles came back with beaming smiles and lots of stories. As well as the **gorillas** they also saw a solitary **red river hog** and even an adult male **elephant** which was pretty close but the forest was quite open and when the rangers started banging their machete's on the tree trunks the **elephant** moved away.

Back on the boat we travelled onwards a little way further across the lagoon and into Akaka River and its tributaries. The bird life is prolific here, including many species of water birds. A highlight early on was a pair of African pygmy goose which were flying ahead of us nearly the whole way. Some of the most numerous bird species seen were several egrets (large, intermediate and some little and a very small number to cattle), many rosy bee-eaters and an African darter perched on nearly every overhanging branch.

We then had a nice bull **elephant** on the bank and being very aggressive towards us, we were completely safe in the water and the **elephant** was just throwing its weight around. Coming towards us and flaring its ears and mock charging. It's always great to see this when you are safe. We also had some nice views of several African fish eagles perched and showing very well. Further along we came across a group of 3 **common hippos** in the water, they were coming up regularly and snorting loudly and watching us, trying to intimidate us, then they relaxed in our presence and they started to remain at the surface, but when we started the engine to leave one of the **hippos** which we hadn't known was there came out and gave us a couple of little charges as we drove off. The rest of the way we had some other nice sightings including African finfoot swimming across the river in front of us and excellent views of a pair of giant kingfishers and then a basking Central African slender snouted crocodile on the river bank.





We arrived at 11:30am and had lunch and exchanged stories from the tow groups as we met at lunch. At lunch we had a nice **elephant** feeding on the other side of the river. Then after lunch we went out for an afternoon boat cruise. There were a few **elephants** feeding on the river banks, they were very relaxed and we saw them very well and close including females and young calves as well as adult males at different points. We also found good kingfishers along the way, including good views of African pygmy kingfishers and then a very nice huge goliath heron.

Our next mammal was a large group of **red-capped mangabeys** in the trees, we could see the movement and some glimpses of the monkeys as they moved around, but it was only the calls which identified the species as the **mangabeys**. We stayed for a while but couldn't see them well at all. Further along we found a female and baby **sitatunga**, they were distant, but clearly visible.

The final sighting of the day was an unbelievable sighting of a vermiculated fish owl which we first saw flying into some bushes on the side of the river and then we found it and watched it looking at us at eye level for a good few minutes. It was a great sighting and a fantastic highlight for the afternoon. We then came back to the camp for dinner and then after dinner we had a night boat safari and it wasn't very productive but watching the **elephants** close through the thermal scope is always very interesting.



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## Day 9      **Loango NP / Akaka River**

## *Wildlife Watching*

In the middle of the night Martin was woke up by a lot of noise coming from around outside, the sound of shuffling and breaking branches and dry leaves underfoot was everywhere. So he got up and went outside to have a look (assuming it would be red river hogs), but went out of his tent and shone his torch right in the face of an **elephant** looking back at him from 10m away. So he quickly went back in the tent, forgot about the pee he needed (as the guide tent only has an external outhouse around 10m away from the tent – and in between was an **elephant**) and went back to bed (eventually).

By the sound of things there were at least 4 **elephants** feeding around the camp for hours and in the morning Martin was convinced others would have heard something, but no one else had noticed anything.

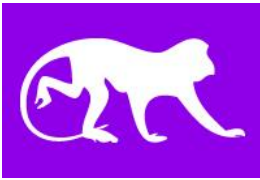
Anyway, this morning the group was split into two once again with Paula and Janet going to do the gorilla tracking this morning and Martin, Scott, Andrew and Charles went out for a hike behind Akaka camp. Bonnie was resting this morning and stayed at the camp.

Unfortunately the gorilla research station experienced its very first positive covid tests with Paula and Janet, so they were unable to do the gorillas. On their return they had to isolate in their tents. What a shame.

The walk behind Akaka and deep into the forest was quite uneventful at first, there were a couple of **red-legged sun squirrels** foraging around the trees just behind camp and we then heard a troop of **red-capped mangabeys** but we only got very poor and brief views. The first half of the walk was quiet, with us being shown some impressive trees, including an enormous zooka tree which is around 150 years old (a very old tree for a tropical rainforest) and also a very big fruit producing tree for elephants, gorillas, chimps and monkeys as well as hornbills, parrots and a range of bird life.

The all of a sudden we heard the cacophony of sound as a troop of **chimps** erupted a short distance away from us, we decided to try and find them. However finding fully wild, non-habituated chimps in the forest is always difficult and we didn't hold much hope of seeing them. But we ploughed through the forest making a bee-line for noise. The **chimps** would be quiet and then erupt with noise and then be quiet again. We walked at a good pace (fully expecting to just be chasing the **chimps** further and further in the forest as they were expected to be staying ahead of us as they could see and hear us moving towards them). But then all of a sudden it went quiet and we started to scan the trees and we found a large male **chimp** resting and feeding in a large tree, we then spotted another and over the course of the next 30-40 minutes we had 5-6 **chimps** moving around the treetops. At some point they noticed us and started to make noise and run through the trees very angrily, banging on branches and shaking loose dead branches to rain down on us. They were putting on a show of dominance to get us to go away. It was an impressive show, especially when they started to come down fast and then run along the ground. What an incredible experience and a real highlight. Not an everyday occurrence for anyone to see unhabituated **chimps**!

So after leaving the **chimps** we carried on walking and heard a lot of noise in the forest nearby us. We were unsure what was making it and so our guide went to have a look and confirmed it was **elephants** we were unsure whether we would have to run or stand our ground. They hadn't noticed we were there and we were positioned perfectly



along the path to watch as 5 **elephants** come out from the dense forest and walked along the path away from us only 30m away from us. Wow! The best way to see **elephants** on foot, in the forest but completely safe as they were completely oblivious to our presence.

Carrying on again we had nice views of black-casqued wattled hornbills before visiting an elephant clay lick. Then back at the camp we found the same troop of **red-capped mangabeys**, but again not great views of this primate. Along with the **mangabeys** we found another couple of **red-legged sun squirrels** very likely all same animals as we saw at the start of the hike.

After lunch we went for another river safari, we had many great views of flying and perched rosy bee-eaters as well as a very cooperative giant kingfisher. There were some **elephants** feeding along the river banks also before we found a long **red-capped mangabey** in a tree (probably the tree it would sleep the night in) but a nice exposed tree and gave us very nice views. Around the same area we found a small flock of great blue turacos. On our way back we saw many **elephants** which had started to come out of the forest to feed in the grasslands and we had a very photogenic view of a large bull **elephant** in a lake bordered by nice forest, it was a perfect postcard picture to sum of Loango and a nice way to end our afternoon safari.

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

This morning after breakfast we left the camp and headed back towards the park headquarters to meet our transport to the town of Port Gentil. Along the river on the way back we had some last wildlife sightings, including osprey, goliath heron and many common riverside birds too. We had a very nice basking ornate water monitor lizard in a tree on the river bank as well as several small to medium sized Central African slender snouted crocodiles. More birds followed including nice and close views of malachite kingfishers.

We then arrived at the park headquarters and collected our luggage (re packed for the flight) and loaded up into the three vehicles and headed north to Port Gentil. Our plane was only a little delayed and we made it back to Libreville to meet Guillermo and have a drink, some dinner and recap over a great and eventful trip.

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## Day 11     **Home**

## *Departure*

This morning some people had arranged to visit some local markets for souvenirs and some people rested, but whatever the plan the day was a rest day as we waited for the Air France flight in the evening. All that was except for Andrew who left in the morning to catch his flight back home.

Everyone eventually made it to the airport and caught their flights back home without issue.

# Species List

Gabon Wildlife Adventure

Jul 2022

## Mammals (\* = heard or signs only / ‡ = seen in Ivindo pre-tour extension)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Black-footed mongoose	<i>Bdeogale nigripes</i>
2	Peter's duiker	<i>Cephalophus callipygus</i>
3	White-legged duiker	<i>Cephalophus crusalbum</i>
4	Blue duiker	<i>Cephalophus monticola</i>
5	Yellow-backed duiker	<i>Cephalophus silvicultor</i>
6	Red-capped mangabey	<i>Cercocebus torquatus</i>
7	Moustached monkey	<i>Cercopithecus cephus</i>
8	Putty-nosed monkey	<i>Cercopithecus nictitans</i>
9	Black colobus	<i>Colobus satanas</i>
10	Gambian pouched rat	<i>Cricetomys gambianus</i>
11	Straw-coloured fruit bat	<i>Eidolon helvum</i>
12	Whalberg's epauletted bat	<i>Epomophorus wahlbergi</i>
13	Franquet's singing fruit bat	<i>Epomops franqueti</i>
14	Servaline genet	<i>Genetta servalina</i>
15	Western gorilla	<i>Gorilla gorilla</i>
16	Red-legged sun squirrel	<i>Heliosciurus rufobrachium</i>
17	Common hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>
18	Benito horseshoe bat	<i>Hipposideros beatus</i>
19	Cyclops roundleaf bat	<i>Hipposideros cyclops</i>
20	Giant roundleaf bat	<i>Hipposideros gigas</i>
21	Hammer-headed bat	<i>Hypsignathus monstrosus</i>
22	Grey-cheeked mangabey	<i>Lophocebus albigena</i>
23	African forest elephant	<i>Loxodonta cyclotis</i>
24	Mandrill	<i>Mandrillus sphinx</i>
25	Peter's dwarf epauletted bat	<i>Micropteropus pusillus</i>
26	Northern talapoin	<i>Miopithecus ogoouensis</i>
27	African pygmy mouse	<i>Mus minutoides</i>
28	Peter's mouse	<i>Mus setulosus</i>
29	African palm civet	<i>Nandinia binotata</i>

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30	Dark -brown serotine	<i>Neoromica brunneus</i>
31	Banana pipistrelle	<i>Neoromica nanus</i>
32	Large-eared slit-faced bat§	<i>Nycteris grandis</i>
33	Common chimpanzee	<i>Pan troglodytes</i>
34	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
35	Green squirrel	<i>Paraxerus poensis</i>
36	Red river hog	<i>Potamochoerus porcus</i>
37	Forest giant squirrel	<i>Protoxerus strangeri</i>
38	Egyptian rousette	<i>Rousettus aegyptiacus</i>
39	Forest buffalo	<i>Synercos nanus</i>
40	Little free-tailed bat	<i>Tadarida nanula</i>
41	Kewel	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>
42	Sitatunga	<i>Tragelaphus spekei</i>
43	African manatee	<i>Trichechus senegalensis</i>

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\*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.

§Slit-faced bats ID to species level are best in the hand, our slit-faced bat ID is tentative at best, based on habitat and behaviour.

## Birds (\* = heard or signs only / ‡ = seen in Ivindo pre-tour extension)

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Chestnut-flanked sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter castanilius</i>
2	Black sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter melanoleucus</i>
3	African jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>
4	Malachite kingfisher	<i>Alcedo cristata</i>
5	Shining blue kingfisher	<i>Alcedo quadribrachys</i>
6	African darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>
7	Long-legged pipit	<i>Anthus pallidiventris</i>
8	Narina's trogon	<i>Apaloderma narina</i>
9	European swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
10	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
11	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinereus</i>
12	Goliath heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>
13	Purple heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
14	Haded ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>

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53	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
54	Black dwarf hornbill	<i>Horizocerus harlaubi</i>
55	African giant kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle maxima</i>
56	White-throated bee-eater	<i>Merops albicollis</i>
57	Black bee-eater	<i>Merops gularis</i>
58	Rosy bee-eater	<i>Merops malimbicus</i>
59	Blue-breasted bee-eater	<i>Merops variegatus</i>
60	African pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>
61	Cassin's flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa cassini</i>
62	Yellow-billed stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>
63	Sooty chat	<i>Mymecocichla nigra</i>
64	Rufous flycatcher-thrush	<i>Neocossyphus fraseri</i>
65	African pygmy goose	<i>Nettapus auritus</i>
66	Black-chinned quailfinch	<i>Ortygospiza gabonensis</i>
67	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
68	Northern grey-headed sparrow	<i>Passer griseus</i>
69	Pink-backed pelican	<i>Pelecanus rufescens</i>
70	African cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i>
71	Northern brown-throated weaver	<i>Ploceus castanops</i>
72	Village weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>
73	Brown-capped weaver	<i>Ploceus insignis</i>
74	Lesser masked weaver	<i>Ploceus intermedius</i>
75	Black-necked weaver	<i>Ploceus nigricollis</i>
76	Grey plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>
77	African finfoot	<i>Podica senegalensis</i>
78	Gymnogene	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>
79	Square-tailed saw-wing	<i>Psolidoprocne nitens</i>
80	Black saw-wing	<i>Psolidoprocne pristoptera</i>
81	African river martin	<i>Pseudochelidon eurystomina</i>
82	African grey parrot	<i>Psittacus erithacus</i>
83	Hartlaub's duck	<i>Pteronetta hartlaubii</i>
84	Common bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
85	Sabine's spinetail	<i>Rhaphidura sabini</i>
86	Common sand martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
87	African skimmer	<i>Rynchops flavirostris</i>
88	Hammerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
89	Vermiculated fishing owl	<i>Scotopelia bouvieri</i>
90	Bronze mannikin	<i>Spermestes cucullata</i>

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91	Crowned eagle	<i>Stephanoaetus coronatus</i>
92	Little tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>
93	Damara tern	<i>Sterna balaenarum</i>
94	Roseate tern	<i>Sterna dougallii</i>
95	Common tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
96	Royal tern	<i>Sterna maxima</i>
97	Red-eyed dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>
98	African pied hornbill	<i>Tockus fasciatus</i>
99	African green pigeon	<i>Treron calvus</i>
100	White-crested hornbill	<i>Tropicranus albocristatus</i>
101	African thrush	<i>Turdus pelios</i>
102	Blue-spotted wood dove	<i>Turtur afer</i>
103	Tambourine dove	<i>Turtur tympanistria</i>
104	White-headed lapwing	<i>Vanellus albiceps</i>
105	Senegal plover	<i>Vanellus lugubris</i>
106	Pin-tailed whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>

										1
‡	~10						~62			
‡	~10									
‡	4									
	~5						1			
							3			
‡		3	~28	~30	6					2
		4	7	4				1	4	3
	~10				~20		~26	~62	3	5
		2	1	1			1			
	2									
			4							
							6			
		2	4	2	2		4			
				1	4					

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

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Red-headed agama	<i>Agama agama</i>
2	African half-toed house gecko	<i>Hemidactylus mabouia</i>
3	Uganda house snake	<i>Lamprophis fuliginosus</i>
4	Slender-nosed crocodile	<i>Mecistops cataphractus</i>
5	West African grass lizard	<i>Poromera fordii</i>
6	Speckled-lipped skink	<i>Trachylepis maculilabris</i>
7	Ornate monitor	<i>Varanus ornatus</i>

July										
Ivindo	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
		~40	~40	~30	6					~30
								1		
									1	
								5		5
			1							
									1	
										2

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

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	African savanna toad	<i>Bufo regularis</i>

July										
Ivindo	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
			1							

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

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Atlantic Mudskipper	<i>Periophthalmus barbarus</i>

July										
Ivindo	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
										~10

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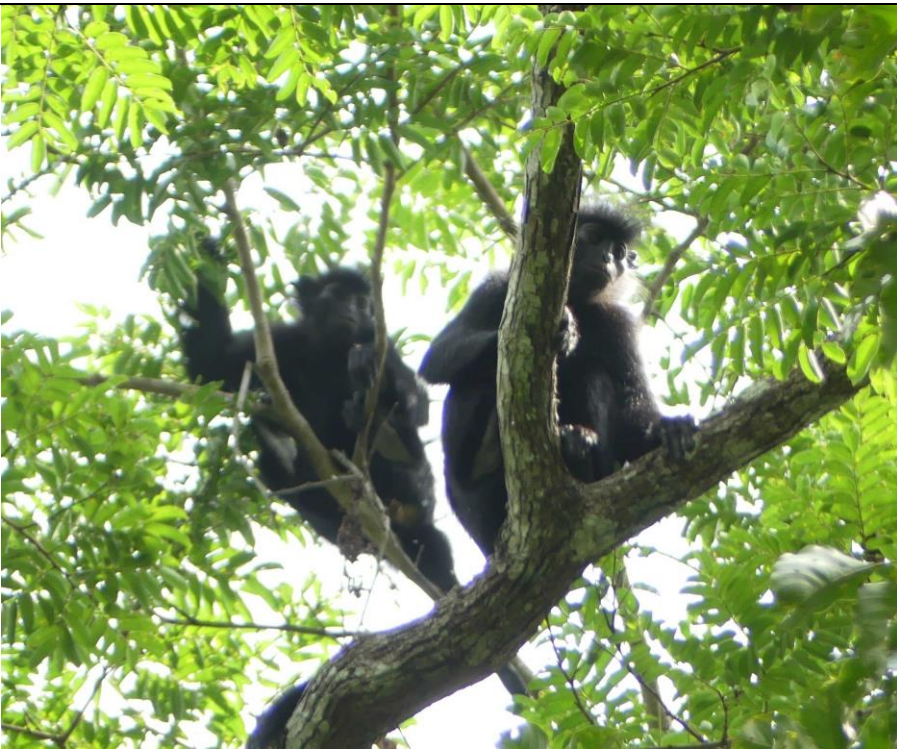


Forest Buffalo



African Palm Civet





Black Colobus



Common Hippopotamus



Giant Kingfisher



Mandrill





African Forest Elephant



Vermiculated Fish Owl



Rosy Bee-eaters



Red-capped Mangabey





Moustached Monkey



Red-capped Mangabey