



"Gabon is a hugely important country for conservation. With a small human population and vast areas of forest, it protects some of the largest remaining areas of intact Congolese forest in Central Africa. These forests harbour the largest population of Forest elephants in Africa, as well as important numbers of many other mega mammal species including Western lowland gorilla, Chimpanzee, Bongo and Mandrills.

Tourism in Gabon is in its infancy; most of the National Park network was only created in the past 15 years, and travel in the hinterland of the country has a 'pioneer' feel to it. As a result, any visitors are likely to have the Parks all to themselves.

This was one of three Royle Safaris trips to Gabon in July and August of 2022. This trip incorporated three different segments (Ivindo, Lope and Loango), although the Ivindo section was an add-on.

In the end a run-in with COVID-19 ensured that only two people completed all three segments and three people were only able to visit one location. Despite this we still managed to create a combined species list of 30 species, with a further 3 either heard or recorded through tracks. Thanks to the birding skills of Marcel Holyoak, we also recorded a trip list of over 130 bird species, one of which, the Sandy Scops owl, has only been seen by a handful of birders ever. Certainly a country to revisit!"

-Dr. Charles Foley (tour leader for this group)

As mention above the first of our three post pandemic wildlife tours to Gabon was led by the esteemed mammalwatcher, co-founder of the mammalwacthing podcast and distinguished field biologist Dr. Charles Foley. Also as mentioned above this tour was impacted by covid-19. An outbreak among the group curtailed the trip somewhat for some people. But subsequent trips didn't have as many issues and in fact the rules and regulations regarding testing, isolation etc have changed already and for our 2023 group tours we don't imagine there will be any mention of never mind impact from covid-19. Below is a summary of the trip and a species list.

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 the wildlife viewing was just as spectacular as ever.

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 other 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 Charles 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 15-18 days, which will be dedicated hiking in the forest looking for this amazing species as the purpose would be capture and collaring of the pangolins for the ongoing research into this 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 we have already filled 6 of the 8 places on our first 2023 group tour, but have second and third group tour dates already secured.

All of the pictures below are from Marcel Holyoak, James Shiffer and John van Niel with their permissions.

Species List

Gabon Wildlife Adventure & Ivindo Extension - July 2022

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Beecroft's Flying Squirrel	<i>Anomalurus beecrofti</i>
2	African Golden Cat	<i>Caracal aurata</i>
3	Red-capped mangabey	<i>Cercocebus torquatus</i>
4	Moustached Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus cephus</i>
5	Putty-nosed Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus nictitans</i>
6	Crowned Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus pogonias</i>
7	Black Colobus	<i>Colobus satanas</i>
8	Cyclops Roundleaf Bat	<i>Doryrhina cyclops</i>
9	African Straw-coloured Fruit-bat	<i>Eidolon helvum</i>
10	Western Palm Squirrel	<i>Epixerus ebii</i>
11	Peter's Dwarf Epauletted Fruit Bat	<i>Epomophorus pusillus</i>
12	Wahlberg's Epauletted Fruit Bat	<i>Epomophorus wahlbergi</i>
13	Franquet's fruit bat	<i>Epomops franqueti</i>
14	Servaline genet	<i>Genetta servalina</i>
15	Western lowland gorilla	<i>Gorilla gorilla</i>
16	Silent Dormouse	<i>Graphiurus surdus</i>

Key: Akanda National Park (AKD) Lope National Park (LOP) / Ivindo National Park (IVD) / Bifoun (BIF) / Loango National Park (LOA) / Lamberene River (LAM)					
AKD	LOP	IVD	BIF	LOA	LAM
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17	Red-legged Sun Squirrel	<i>Heliosciurus rufobrachium</i>
18	Slender Mongoose	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>
19	Common Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>
20	Spotted-necked Otter	<i>Hydriactis maculicollis</i>
21	Grey-cheeked Mangabey	<i>Lophocebus albigena</i>
22	African Forest Elephant	<i>Loxodonta cyclotis</i>
23	Mandrill	<i>Mandrillus sphinx</i>
24	Northern Talapoin Monkey	<i>Miopithecus ogouensis</i>
25	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
26	Green Bush Squirrel	<i>Paraxerus poensis</i>
27	Blue Duiker	<i>Philantomba monticola</i>
28	Red river hog	<i>Potamochoerus porcus</i>
29	Egyptian Fruit	<i>Rousettus aegyptiacus</i>
30	Gabon Bushbaby	<i>Sciurocheirus gabonensis</i>
31	African Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer nanus</i>
32	Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>
33	Sitatunga	<i>Tragelaphus spekii</i>

Note: 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 as a sighting), behaviour and habitat – so not 100% but best educated guesses. For more information please email me.

‡ - Animals where signs were seen but not the animal

* Please note that the mammal list is not complete as the tour leader and mammal expert for the trip (Charles Foley) isolated in Lamberene due to covid and didn't complete the trip.

Birds

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
2	African Jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>
3	Black Guineaafowl	<i>Agelastes niger</i>
4	Reichenbach's Sunbird	<i>Anabathmis reichenbachii</i>
5	African Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>
6	Long-legged Pipit	<i>Anthus pallidiventris</i>
7	Yellow-breasted Apalis	<i>Apalis flavida</i>
8	Buff-throated Apalis	<i>Apalis rufogularis</i>
9	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>

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Key: Akanda National Park (AKD) Lope National Park (LOP) / Ivindo National Park (IVD) / Bifoun (BIF) / Loango National Park (LOA) / Lamberene River (LAM)

AKD	LOP	IVD	BIF	LOA	LAM
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10	Cassin's Hawk-Eagle	<i>Aquila africana</i>
11	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
12	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
13	Goliath Heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>
14	Intermediate Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>
15	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
16	Honeyguide Greenbul	<i>Baeopogon indicator</i>
17	Yellow-lored Bristlebill	<i>Bleda notatus</i>
18	Hadada Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>
19	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
20	Yellow-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus africanus</i>
21	Water Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>
22	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
23	Piping Hornbill	<i>Bycanistes fistulator</i>
24	Grey-backed Camaroptera	<i>Camaroptera brevicaudata</i>
25	Bates's Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus batesi</i>
26	Square-tailed Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus fossii</i>
27	Swamp Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus natalensis</i>
28	Fan-tailed Grassbird	<i>Catriscus brevirostris</i>
29	Lesser Striped Swallow	<i>Cecropis abyssinica</i>
30	Red-breasted Swallow	<i>Cecropis semirufa</i>
31	Blue-headed Coucal	<i>Centropus monachus</i>
32	Senegal Coucal	<i>Centropus senegalensis</i>
33	Black-casqued Hornbill	<i>Ceratogymna atrata</i>
34	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
35	Carmelite Sunbird	<i>Chalcomitra fuliginosa</i>
36	Diederik Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>
37	Klaas's Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx klaas</i>
38	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
39	Olive-bellied Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris chloropygius</i>
40	Copper Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris cupreus</i>
41	Tiny Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris minullus</i>
42	Superb Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris superbus</i>
43	Chattering Cisticola	<i>Cisticola anonymus</i>
44	Short-winged Cisticola	<i>Cisticola brachypterus</i>
45	Whistling Cisticola	<i>Cisticola lateralis</i>

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46	Winding Cisticola	<i>Cisticola marginatus</i>
47	Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>
48	Great Blue Turaco	<i>Corythaeola cristata</i>
49	Red-chested Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus solitarius</i>
50	Green-headed Sunbird	<i>Cyanomitra verticalis</i>
51	African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>
52	Fork-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>
53	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
54	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>
55	Orange-cheeked Waxbill	<i>Estrilda melpoda</i>
56	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>
57	Grey Pratincole	<i>Glareola cinerea</i>
58	Rock Pratincole	<i>Glareola nuchalis</i>
59	Palm-nut Vulture	<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i>
60	White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>
61	Blue-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon malimbica</i>
62	Woodland Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>
63	African Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>
64	Angolan Swallow	<i>Hirundo angolensis</i>
65	Red-chested Swallow	<i>Hirundo lucida</i>
66	White-bibbed Swallow	<i>Hirundo nigrita</i>
67	Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>
68	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
69	Brown Illadopsis	<i>Illadopsis fulvescens</i>
70	African Pygmy Kingfisher	<i>Ispidina picta</i>
71	Lizard Buzzard	<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>
72	Splendid Starling	<i>Lamprotornis splendidus</i>
73	Long-crested Eagle	<i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>
74	African Pied Hornbill	<i>Lophoceros fasciatus</i>
75	Yellow-throated Longclaw	<i>Macronyx croceus</i>
76	Yellow Longbill	<i>Macrosphenus flavicans</i>
77	Giant Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle maxima</i>
78	White-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops albicollis</i>
79	Rosy Bee-eater	<i>Merops malimbicus</i>
80	Blue-breasted Bee-eater	<i>Merops variegatus</i>
81	Reed Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo africanus</i>

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82	African Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla aquimp</i>
83	Olivaceous Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa olivascens</i>
84	Grey-headed Nigrita	<i>Nigrita canicapillus</i>
85	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>
86	Sandy Scops Owl	<i>Otus icterorhynchus</i>
87	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
88	Brown-eared Woodpecker	<i>Pardipicus caroli</i>
89	Northern Grey-headed Sparrow	<i>Passer griseus</i>
90	Pink-backed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus rufescens</i>
91	Latham's Francolin	<i>Peliperdix lathamii</i>
92	Forest Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon fuliginosa</i>
93	Brown-throated Wattle-eye	<i>Platysteira cyanea</i>
94	Village Weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>
95	Vieillot's Black Weaver	<i>Ploceus nigerrimus</i>
96	Black-necked Weaver	<i>Ploceus nigricollis</i>
97	Spectacled Weaver	<i>Ploceus ocularis</i>
98	Preuss's Weaver	<i>Ploceus preussi</i>
99	African finfoot	<i>Podica senegalensis</i>
100	Speckled Tinkerbird	<i>Pogoniulus scolopaceus</i>
101	African Harrier-Hawk	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>
102	Tawny-flanked Prinia	<i>Prinia subflava</i>
103	Square-tailed Saw-wing	<i>Psaldiprocne nitens</i>
104	Black Saw-wing	<i>Psaldiprocne pristoptera</i>
105	Grey-rumped Swallow	<i>Pseudhirundo griseopyga</i>
106	Grey Parrot	<i>Psittacus erithacus</i>
107	Hartlaub's Duck	<i>Pteronetta hartlaubii</i>
108	Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
109	Black-bellied Seedcracker	<i>Pyrenestes ostrinus</i>
110	African Skimmer	<i>Rynchops flavirostris</i>
111	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
112	Black-and-white Mannikin	<i>Spermestes bicolor</i>
113	Bronze Mannikin	<i>Spermestes cucullata</i>
114	Magpie Mannikin	<i>Spermestes fringilloides</i>
115	Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
116	Little Tern	<i>Sternula albifrons</i>
117	Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>

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118	African Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>
119	West African Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus albididorsalis</i>
120	Swamp Palm Bulbul	<i>Thescelocichla leucopleura</i>
121	Yellow-billed Barbet	<i>Trachyphonus purpuratus</i>
122	African Green Pigeon	<i>Treron calvus</i>
123	African Thrush	<i>Turdus pelios</i>
124	Black-rumped Buttonquail	<i>Turnix nanus</i>
125	Blue-spotted Wood Dove	<i>Turtur afer</i>
126	Blue-headed Wood Dove	<i>Turtur brehmeri</i>
127	Emerald-spotted Wood Dove	<i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>
128	Long-tailed Hawk	<i>Urotriorchis macrourus</i>
129	White-crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus albiceps</i>
130	Senegal Lapwing	<i>Vanellus lugubris</i>
131	African Wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus senegallus</i>
132	Pin-tailed Whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>

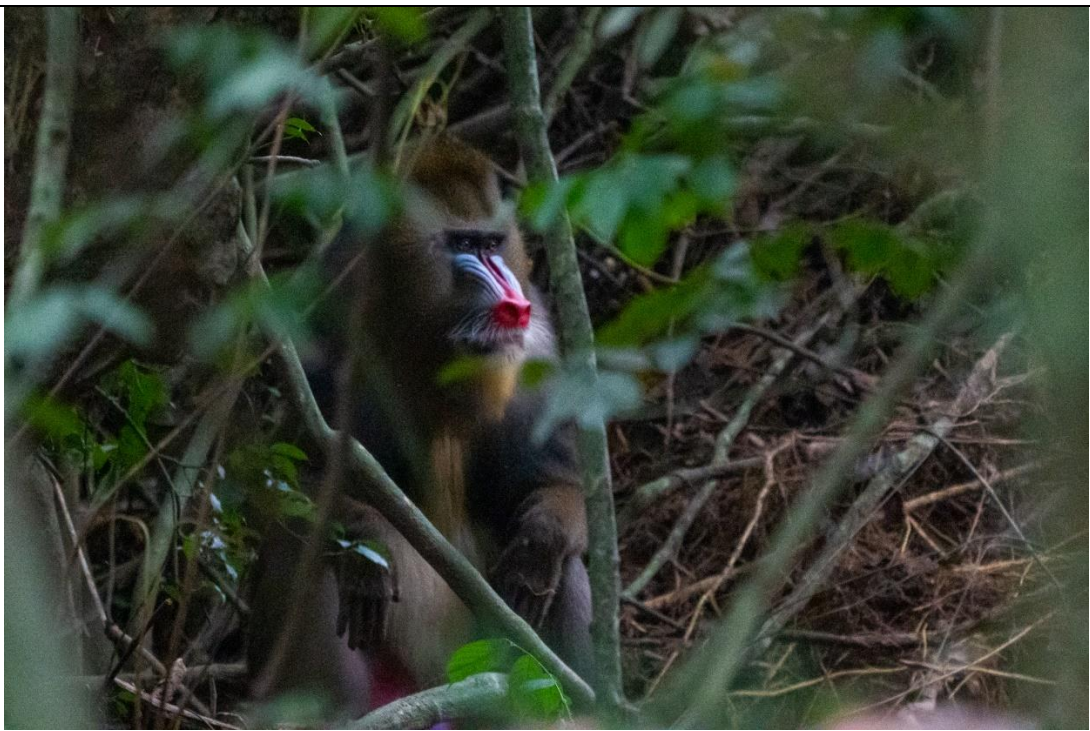
* Please note that the bird list is not complete as the Marcel Holyoak who was compiling the list isolated in Lamberene due to covid and didn't complete the trip.

Reptiles

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Central African Slender-snouted Crocodile	<i>Mecistops cataphractus</i>

* Please note that reptiles and amphibians are under represented on this trip as little special attention was paid to these animals.

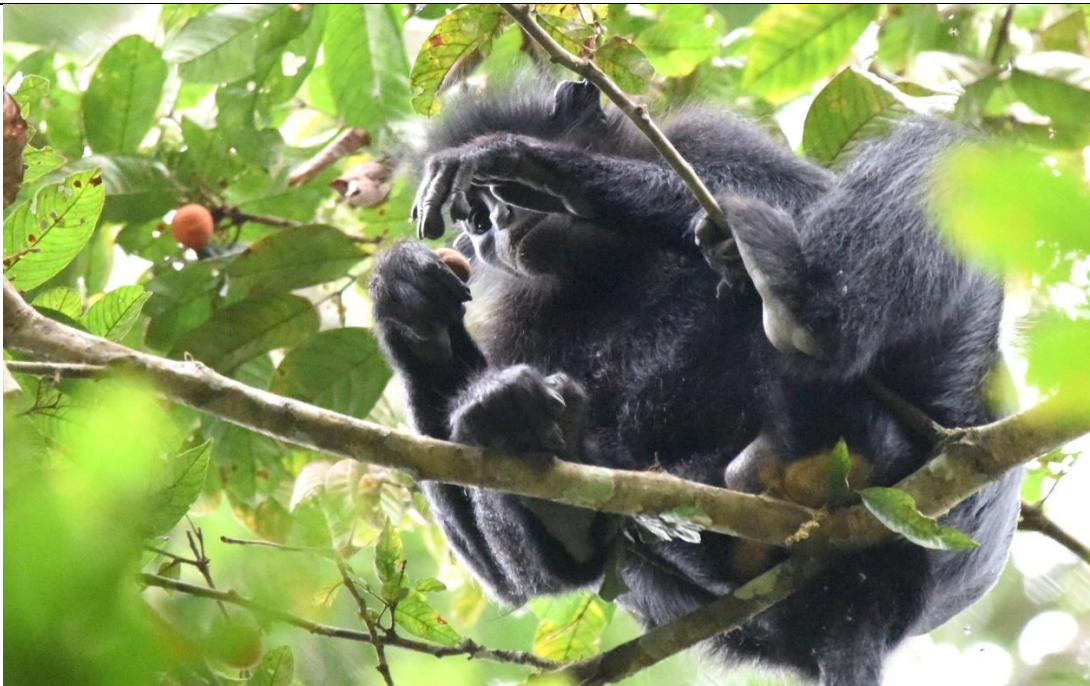
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Mandrill



Egyptian Rousettes



African Forest Elephants

Black Colobus



Red River Hog



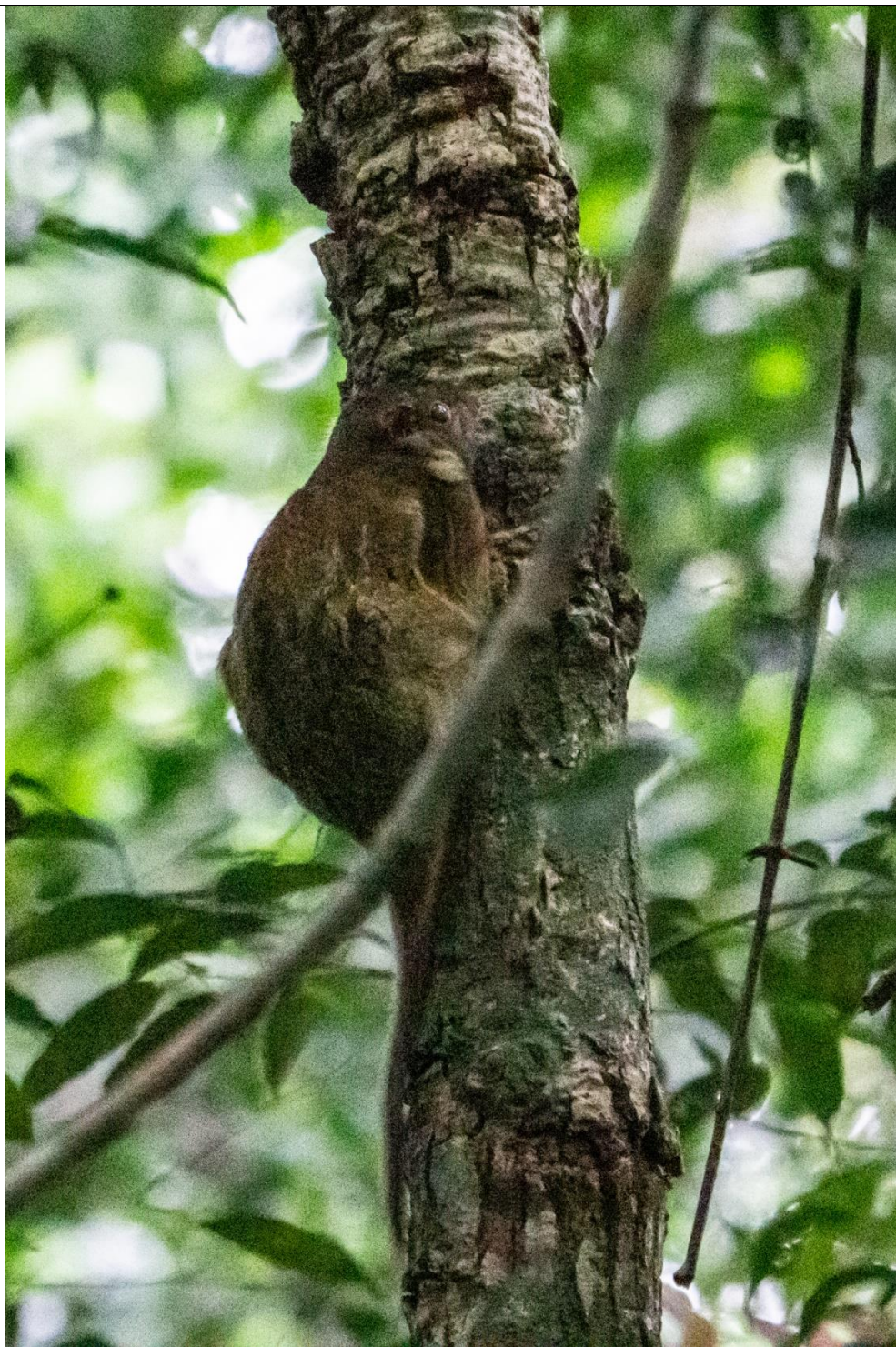
Forest Buffalo



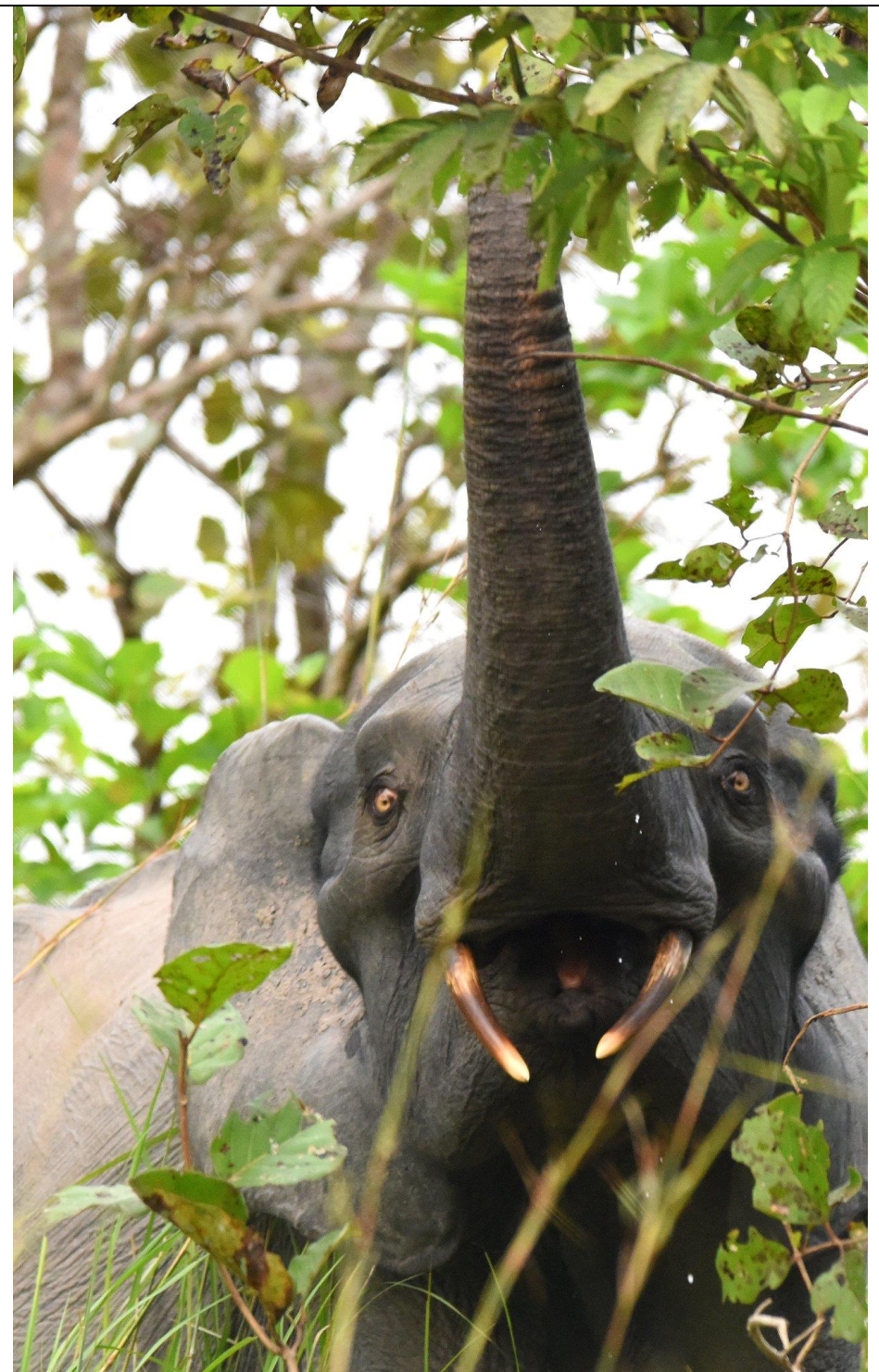
Sitatunga



Cyclops Roundleaf Bat



Beecroft's Anomalure



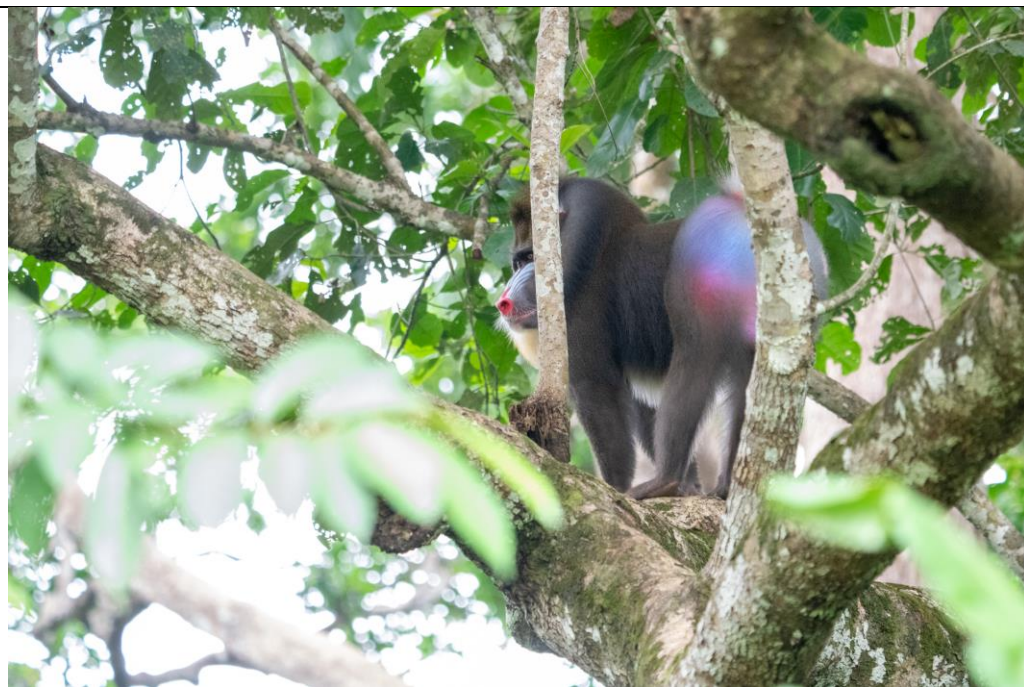
African Forest Elephant



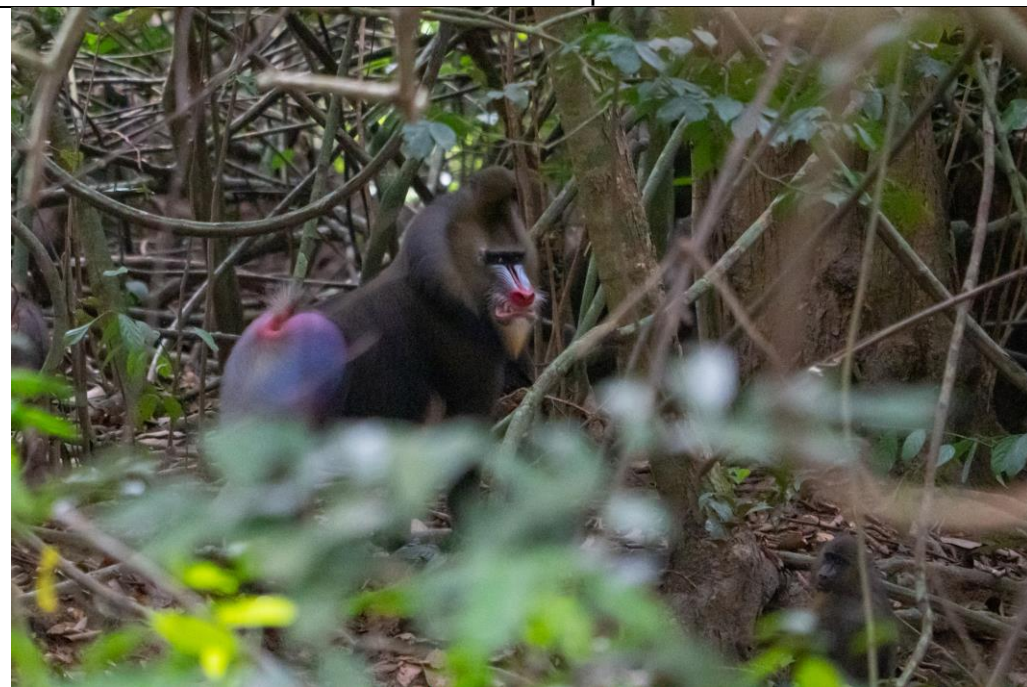
Moustached Monkey



Northern Talapoin



Mandrill



Mandrill



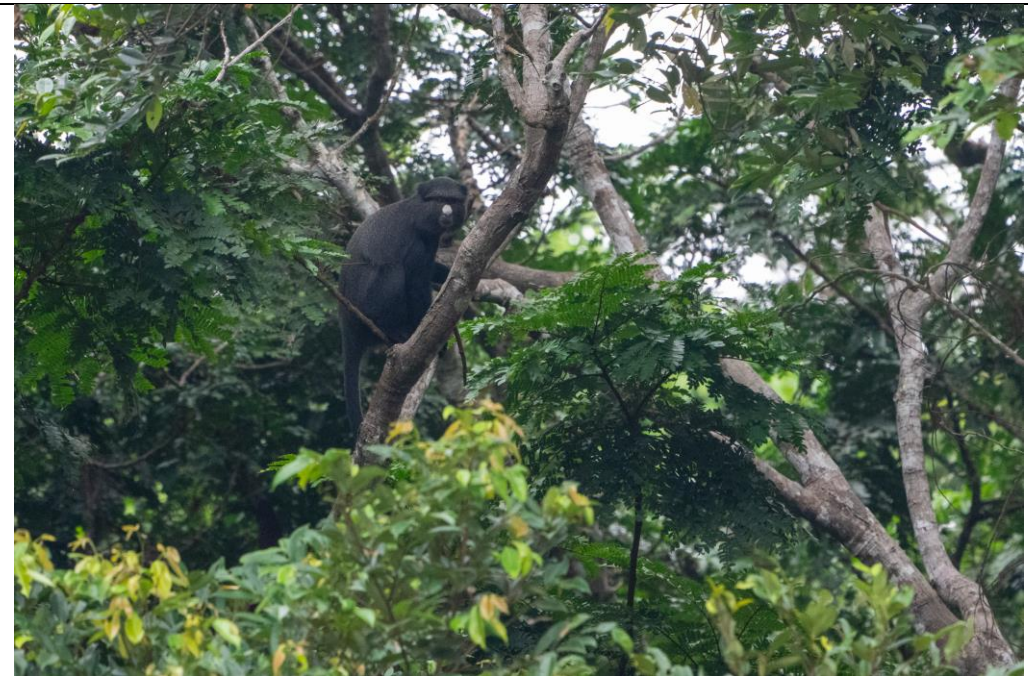
Whalberg's Epauletted Fruit Bat



Red-legged Sun Squirrel



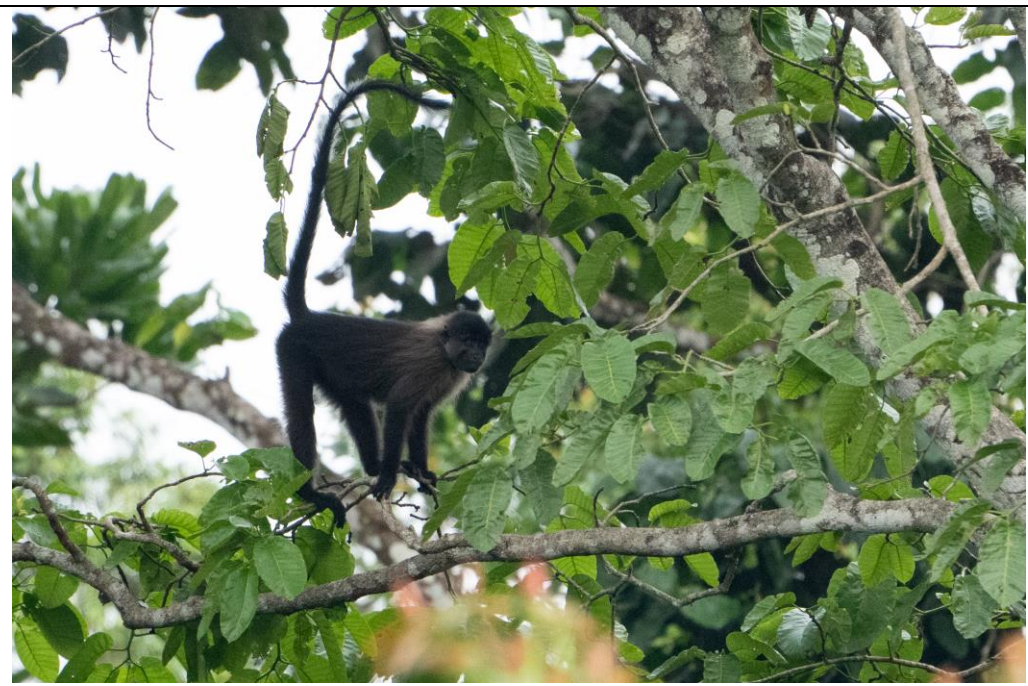
Western Lowland Gorilla



Putty-nosed Monkey



Peter's Dwarf Epauletted Fruit Bat



Grey-cheeked Mangabey



Common Hippopotamus



Sandy Scops Owl