

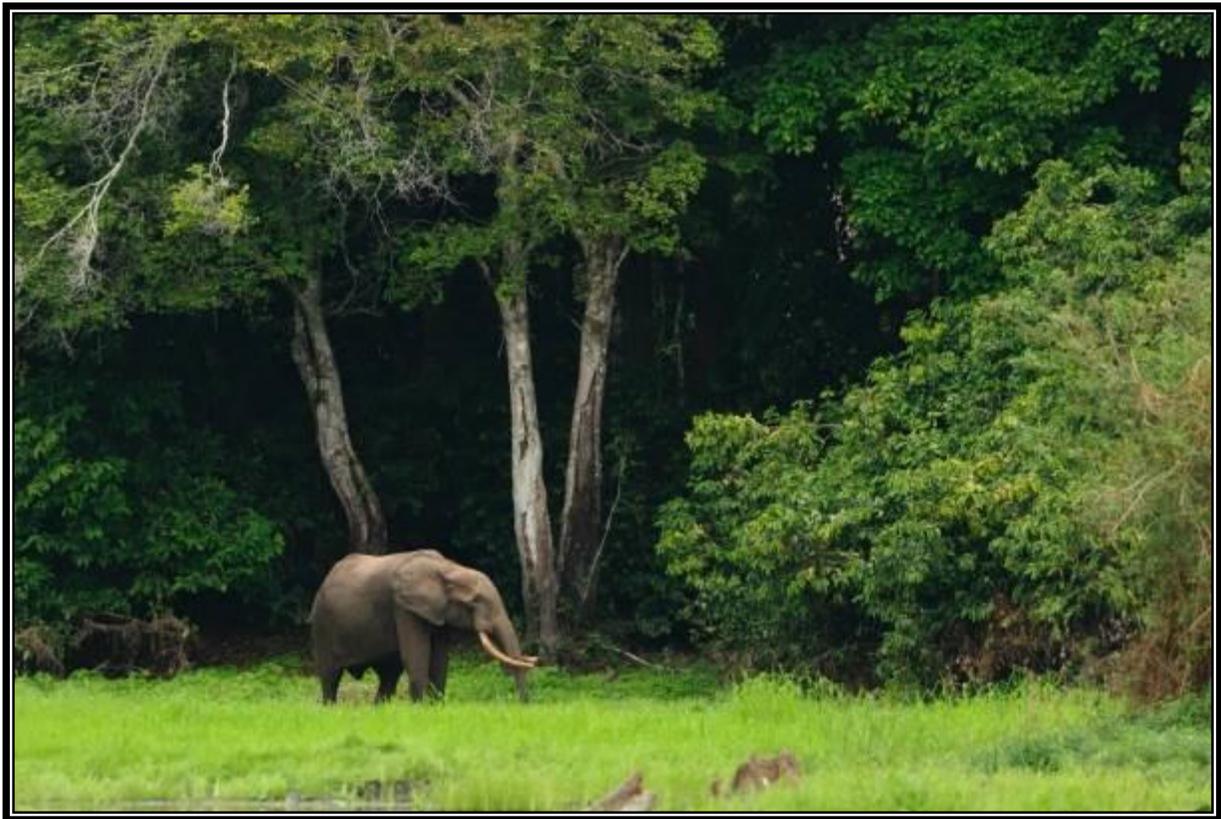


ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Gabon **Rainforest, Birds & Mammals** **Trip Report**

11th to 24th July 2015



Forest Elephant by Markus Lilje

Trip Report compiled by Tour Leader: Markus Lilje

Tour Summary

Gabon is often considered to hold one of the last remaining large wildernesses, which at the same time are still in good shape while being fairly accessible. The relatively small population means there are huge tracts of virgin lowland rainforest left, which are drained by wide rivers that form extensive lagoons and estuaries along the coastline. Despite the challenges of travelling in a country like this, the chance of experiencing some of central Africa's habitats was the drawcard that attracted us all to Libreville, looking forward to a unique tour!

Our first destination in Gabon was the fascinating Lope National Park. Leaving Libreville we made the long but scenic drive to the park, with a few stops along the way producing some interesting encounters and great birds. We found many large beetles at a fuel stop, and later we had good scope views of a flock of Rock Pratincole and White-crowned Lapwing while we enjoyed our lunch on the banks of the Ogooue River. Further comfort stops yielded Banded Prinia, both Cassin's and Sabine's Spinetails, Square-tailed Saw-wing, Black-bellied Seedcracker, Gabon Woodpecker, Spotted Greenbul, White-throated Bee-eater, Green Crombec, Speckled Tinkerbird, Grey-throated Barbet and Great Blue Turaco, and we even had a Yellow-backed Duiker crossing the road as we approached our lodge!



Cassin's Spinetail
by Markus Lilje



Putty-nosed Monkey by
Markus Lilje

Lope National Park has a wonderful array of gallery forest, rolling grasslands and the great Ogooue River right at our lodge, all of which we explored over the next two days. Our lodge was well-positioned to let us take advantage of its proximity to the park, while we were also able to enjoy the wonderful river views from the lodge gardens. The very distinctive grassland habitat here was formed around the last Ice age and has gradually been encroached on by the forest patches. We spent most of our time here driving through the different habitats in search of anything interesting, although we also did some walking, which allowed us to get closer to the forest, permitting close inspection of the plants and better chances of seeing some birds that would be hard to find from the vehicles. We were thrilled to get our first views of Forest Elephant and Forest Buffalo here, with the former especially allowing for some great

views as they walked slowly through the open grasslands and fed on the edges of small wetlands. Another species that was attracted to wetland edges was the Red River Hog, one of our most wanted species – we enjoyed great views of this comical animal as it moved around in the tall grass and later crossed the road in front of us. We also managed to find a number of different primates, including great views of Putty-nosed Monkey and more distant or brief looks at Moustached Monkey and Black Colobus. Some of the more interesting bird species seen during our time here included Cassin's Malimbe, African Green Pigeon, Copper and Superb Sunbirds, Chestnut Wattle-eye, Water Thick-knee, Bates's Nightjar, Blue-breasted and Black Bee-eaters, Black-casqued, African Pied and Piping



Red River Hog by Markus Lilje



Hornbills, Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, Splendid Starling, Double-toothed Barbet, Scaly Francolin, Blue-headed Coucal, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Yellow-lored Bristlebill, Orange-cheeked Waxbill, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Black-necked Weaver and Long-legged Pipit. Our long drive back to Libreville was not very eventful, although we did find the elusive Golden Greenbul, Guinea Turaco and Olive-bellied Sunbird on the way.



Black-headed Bee-eater
by Markus Lilje

Our second and final destination for this tour in Gabon was the Loango National Park area; getting there however was a bit of an adventure. After a short flight over the coast we landed in Port Gentil, the Oil capital of the country. After a little delay we headed toward the jetty where our 2 boats were waiting for us. We started speeding across the huge mouth of the Ogooue River and then had a number of issues with one of the boat's engines. After around 6 hours on the water, heading through beautiful forests, we finally arrived in Omboue, where 4x4 vehicles took us the rest of the way to the Loango Lodge itself. During this rather long and exhausting trip we managed to find a number of interesting birds that included our first Rosy Bee-eaters, White-bibbed Swallow, Giant

Kingfisher, Woolly-necked Stork, Pink-backed Pelican, Common Waxbill, astounding numbers of Palmnut Vulture and even the highly-sought Black-headed Bee-eater – one of Gabon's top birds! We then had 6 full days to explore the area around the Loango Lodge, which was our base during our time here. And explore we did – taking boat trips, driving and walking through the Loango National Park and other nearby attractions.



Blue-breasted Kingfisher by Markus Lilje

We began enjoying the great diversity of habitats during a boat trip to Point St Catherine at the mouth of the lagoon that our lodge overlooked. This trip gave us brief views of Hippo, while along the



African Skimmer by Markus Lilje

mangrove shoreline we found a few kingfishers as well as African Fish Eagle. On sandbars near the estuary's mouth there was a wealth of birdlife, with a large mixed flock of terns that included many Common and Black and smaller numbers of the large Royal Terns. On the edge of this flock we had wonderful views of the elegant African Skimmer, which all took off as a raptor flew overhead, also scaring up a Whimbrel and Common

Redshank in the process. We spent some time on the sand looking at the huge number of crabs that called this area their home as well as many shells that had been washed up along the shore. On the trip back to the lodge we enjoyed watching a few Hamerkops along the shore as well as a large flock of Grey Parrot feeding in a nearby fruiting tree! Another boat trip that afternoon gave us very close views of Blue-breasted Kingfisher, while we also spent much time walking on land, looking at a variety of tracks and flowers in this generally dry area during this particular season.



The Tassi area in Loango National Park was the main priority of our full day we had here. After a quick crossing of the waterbody in front of the lodge we all got onto our vehicles, hoping to find some interesting sightings in this mosaic of forest and grassland. We had alternate periods of driving and walking during the day to search the different aspects of the environment. During the day we managed a number of good sightings of the very woolly-looking Forest Buffalo, often with Yellow-billed Oxpeckers in attendance, mostly in small herds that looked at us as we drove through the grasslands, although some seemed more worried and ran off into the forest. We enjoyed lunch at the Tassi Bushcamp and a bit of time on the shoreline nearby before heading back north. Here we were very happy to twice bump into sounders of Red River Hog, which we were able



Forbes's Plover by Markus Lilje

to approach on foot for good views and photos as they moved off into the safety of the forest. Birding delivered a few highlights too, with about 8 Forbes's Plover being the undoubted highlight near a small drying pan that also held Senegal Lapwing and even Quailfinch. Near the camp we had an out-of-range Lilac-breasted Roller and skulking Common Buttonquail, while there were White-fronted Plover on the beach and the beautiful African Pygmy Goose was seen well at a small waterbody. This part of the park gets very dry during this season, with most species taking part in a regular migration, which sees them leave this area to take advantage of the much moister area to the south, where a great density of these animals then occurs for a few months a year. We were really looking forward to exploring this area during the next few days.



Driving in Loango NP by Markus Lilje

So it was off to the Akaka Bushcamp – a direct 4-hour boat ride to the south and into the area that promised much, with many animals heading here for food and water in the dry season. We had 2 nights in the bushcamp itself, set overlooking a junction of 2 rivers within beautiful forest and flooded grassland surroundings. We took our time on the trip to the camp, enjoying all that the area had to offer, finding localised Slender-snouted Crocodile on partially submerged tree trunks, African Finfoot, Shining-blue, Malachite, Giant and Pied Kingfishers, White-bibbed Swallow, Black Bee-eater, Cassin's Flycatcher and many African Darters as we cruised through the river channel. As the banks gradually opened up further south we started to see more large Forest Elephants,



Slender-snouted Crocodile by Markus Lilje



White-bibbed Swallow by Markus Lilje

some of which gave us wonderful views as they feasted on the lush grass and reeds. Over the duration of our stay in this area we enjoyed the river and the forest on its banks from the boat as well as on foot, when we quietly headed inside to see it in a different way – ever on the lookout for Elephant and Buffalo. On these walks we were fortunate to again obtain great views of Red River Hog, Crowned Monkey and Red-capped Mangabey, while good birds



included White-crested and Red-billed Dwarf Hornbills and Blue-headed Wood Dove. From the boat we continued enjoying sightings of Forest Elephants as well as large numbers of fish-eating birds such as kingfishers, storks, pelicans and herons. We relished the feeling of being in this very remote camp, distant from any other tourists and cities. Even a number of problems we encountered were sorted out as quickly as we could, so we were able to continue enjoying the area's wildlife. A nocturnal boat trip was a little quiet, although we got very close to finding a calling Vermiculated Fishing Owl that remained hidden overhead. The trip back to the main lodge was no less eventful, with highlights including a close male Sitatunga that showed really well and then African River Martin and Rosy Bee-eater drinking and dipping in the river just a few metres from us, giving us a great encounter with these 2 very special birds!



African River Martin
by Markus Lilje

On our last day in this area we again headed out from the lodge with the vehicles and onto a boat and onwards to the Evengue Island. Here our first plan for the day was to visit the very recently reopened



Pel's Fishing Owl
by Markus Lilje

Gorilla Project on the island, where we got to see a very impressive male Lowland Gorilla, although the rest of the trip was quite disappointing and disorganised. After a delicious lunch at another satellite camp of Loango Lodge we headed further with the boat. The Ipie Channel is well-known for its fantastic array of species that occur along the water's edge as well as in the spectacular forest that lines the banks of the river. African Finfoot is a tough bird to find in most of its range; the numbers here and in the Akaka area were quite astonishing however and we enjoyed good views of this shy species. Two of the biggest targets here were both found as we slowly wound our way up and down the channel, the first of which was a wonderful Pel's Fishing Owl looking down at us from its perch. We then enjoyed 3 separate White-crested Tiger Herons, 2 of which were clearly moving into the open as it got later in the afternoon – again a highly-sought species that is considered very hard to find in

its primary forest habitat in difficult-to-access areas of central Africa. A few other good birds we found in the area included Blue-throated Roller, Blue Cuckooshrike and Shining-blue, Giant and the scarce White-bellied Kingfishers. After this very successful trip into a really beautiful channel we headed back to the main lodge, where we spent our final night.



Rosy Bee-eater by Markus Lilje

At this point all that was left was for us to head back to Port Gentil on the 5-hour boat trip, leaving behind the wetlands, mangroves, grasslands and forests of Loango. The trip back went off without any problems as we cruised the meandering rivers and got a bit wet during the final crossing towards the airport. After a short flight back to Libreville we were able to enjoy a good night's sleep in our comfortable hotel. On the final day we had just a little time in the markets, looking at some local handicrafts to take home as a reminder of the fascinating time we were able to spend together in this seldom-visited country.



It was really great sharing the Gabon adventure with all of you! I hope you will fondly remember the highlights and challenges with a smile – as you all did during the tour! Many thanks everyone!

Annotated List of Bird Species recorded in Gabon

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows International Ornithological Congress *Birds of the World: A Checklist* (2006) version 4.2 Princeton University Press, with current updates and notes on Clements list.

Ducks, Geese & Swans Anatidae

White-faced Whistling Duck

Dendrocygna viduata

Up to 15 were seen during our travels to and around Akaka Bushcamp in Loango NP.

Hartlaub's Duck

Pteronetta hartlaubii

2 birds were seen flying over the river at Lope NP, before we had better views near Akaka and along the Ipievie Channel near Loango NP.

African Pygmy Goose

Nettapus auritus

We were very fortunate to see 2 male birds in a quiet backwater in Loango NP.

Pheasants & Allies Phasianidae

Scaly Francolin

Pternistis squamatus

Seen on two consecutive days in the Lope NP area, on both occasions at the roadside.

Storks Ciconidae

Yellow-billed Stork

Mycteria ibis

We had some very good sightings of this species, particularly in the Akaka area in southern Loango NP.

Woolly-necked Stork

Ciconia episcopus

We had good views of quite a few of these distinctive birds on most days in the Loango NP.

Ibises, Spoonbills Threskiornithidae

Hadada Ibis

Bostrychia hagedash

A very commonly encountered bird, in Lope NP and especially later around different parts of Loango NP.

Hérons, Bitterns Ardeidae

White-crested Tiger Heron

Tigriornis leucolopha

This spectacular and highly elusive bird was seen superbly well on a boat trip along the Ipievie Channel, especially in the later afternoon when they came to the edges to fish.

Little Bittern

Ixobrychus minutus

This is often a secretive bird of reedbeds, where we had good views of 2 individuals during our boat trip down to the Akaka Bushcamp.

White-backed Night Heron

Gorsachius leuconotus

A single bird was seen during a morning boat trip in the Akaka area, where it flew along the banks of the Echira River, where it then slunk away.

Striated Heron

Butorides striata

This small and very widespread species was seen on 4 days of the tour, including most views in the Akaka area and along the Ipievie Channel.

Squacco Heron

Ardeola ralloides

Around 6 of these small heron were recorded around Akaka wetlands, where they usually occur along the water's edge.

Western Cattle Egret

Bubulcus ibis



A very widespread species; mainly seen along the roadside and near towns during drives to and from Lope NP.

Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath*

The largest heron species in the world; seen on 2 days along the river in Lope NP and finally at a wetland in the Akaka area of Loango NP.

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Fairly commonly encountered along the watercourses around the Akaka Bushcamp – superficially resembles a smaller version of the Goliath Heron.

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Seen on 4 days – quite a common waterside species, especially around Akaka Bushcamp.

Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia*

Slightly smaller than the previous species – typically in flooded grassland habitat, like along the river near the Akaka Bushcamp.

Hamerkop Scopidae

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*

This unique and always popular species was seen in small numbers in both Lope and Loango NPs, where largest numbers were again in the Akaka area.

Pelicans Pelecanidae

Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens*

Seen daily in Loango NP, where they were mainly encountered flying overhead and also seen joining a feeding frenzy near Akaka bushcamp.

Anhingas, Darters Anhingidae

African Darter *Anhinga rufa*

The narrower channels in the Akaka Bushcamp area held huge numbers of this distinctive species; smaller numbers were seen at other scattered parts of Loango NP.

Kites, Hawks & Eagles Accipitridae

African Harrier Hawk (Gymnogene) *Polyboroides typus*

A pleasantly common species in Gabon, this distinctive raptor was recorded regularly, particularly during the first half of the trip.

Palm-nut Vulture *Gypohierax angolensis*

The commonest raptor in Gabon with daily sightings, including very large numbers around in Loango NP.

African Cuckoo-Hawk *Aviceda cuculoides*

Seen fairly briefly in flight on our final morning in the Akaka area.

Ayres's Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus ayresii*

We watched a distant pair circle over a ridge near the Ogooue River during our drive to Lope NP.

African Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer*

We had a good number of sightings of this very distinctive and iconic African raptor along watercourses in Loango NP.

Finfoots Heliornithidae

African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis*

This is a very sought-after species that is maybe easier to find in Gabon than anywhere else. We enjoyed great views of this often secretive species on 5 days, with most views around Akaka and the Ipie Channel, where we had a total of almost 40 birds!

Rails, Crakes & Coots Rallidae

Black Crake *Amaurornis flavirostra*



Single birds were seen well on 2 consecutive days along the edge of the river near Akaka Bushcamp.

Buttonquail Turnicidae

Common Buttonquail

Turnix sylvaticus

In short grassland near the Tassi area of Loango NP we had a single bird in flight and on the ground for some participants.

Stone-curlews, Thick-knees Burhinidae

Water Thick-knee

Burhinus vermiculatus

A single bird was flushed and then scoped from the banks of the river in Lope NP.

Plovers Charadriidae

White-crowned Lapwing (Plover)

Vanellus albiceps

Our first sighting was of one at the Ogooue River en route to Lope NP, where we then enjoyed further sightings later along the river near the Lope Hotel.

Senegal Lapwing

Vanellus lugubris

2 birds were seen in shortish grasslands in the Loango NP, where they seem to be fairly scarce.

Kittlitz's Plover

Charadrius pecuarius

At least 2 birds were recorded near an ephemeral pan in Loango NP.

Forbes's Plover

Charadrius forbesi

A generally scarce and sought-after species that we found at a fast-drying ephemeral pan in Loango NP – we had a total of 10 birds here.

Jacanas Jacanidae

African Jacana

Actophilornis africanus

A widespread and characteristic wader, conspicuous in wetlands. We recorded very good numbers in the southern parts of Loango NP.

Sandpipers, Snipes Scolopacidae

Whimbrel

Numenius phaeopus

3 were seen at the estuary near Iguela, Loango NP.

Common Redshank

Tringa totanus

A single bird was seen at the estuary near Iguela, Loango NP.

Common Greenshank

Tringa nebularia

2 birds were seen on consecutive days near Iguela in Loango NP.

Common Sandpiper

Actitis hypoleucos

A single bird was seen at the estuary near Iguela, another a few days later near Akaka, both in Loango NP.

Coursers, Pratincoles Glareolidae

Rock Pratincole

Glareola nuchalis

A total of around 25 birds were seen on a sandbar along the Ogooue River, when we had lunch here during our drive to Lope NP.

Gulls, Terns & Skimmers Laridae

African Skimmer

Rynchops flavirostris

Another sought-after species that we found near the mouth of the estuary near Iguela, Loango NP, where there were about 30 birds.

Royal Tern

Sterna maxima

Several were seen near our Loango Lodge within a large mixed flock of terns. This is a much larger tern than the other species that were around.



Damara Tern*Sterna balaenarum*

2 birds were seen in flight at the mouth of the estuary.

Common Tern*Sterna hirundo*

A fair number of these were seen well in a mixed flock within the estuary near Iguela, Loango NP.

Black Tern*Chlidonias niger*

Many of these birds were seen in flight around the estuary in Loango NP.

Pigeons, Doves Columbidae**Rock Dove***Columba livia*

Seen in Libreville.

Red-eyed Dove*Streptopelia semitorquata*

A fairly common widespread species, especially notable in more wooded areas and around towns

Blue-spotted Wood Dove*Turtur afer*

Fairly common on the edges of forest, mainly in and near Lope NP.

Blue-headed Wood Dove*Turtur brehmeri*

An interior primary forest species restricted to West Africa. Several were seen in Loango NP, including some amazing views of a perched bird near the Akaka Bushcamp.

African Green Pigeon*Treron calvus*

Common and seen in good numbers throughout our time in Gabon.

Turacos Musophagidae**Great Blue Turaco***Corythaeola cristata*

Arguably one of Africa's most spectacular birds, this huge frugivore was seen well on several occasions in Lope NP and again in Loango NP.

Guinea Turaco*Tauraco persa*

2 birds were seen briefly along the roadside during our return journey to Libreville.

Yellow-billed Turaco*Tauraco macrorhynchus*

On the final morning in the Akaka area in Loango NP we had good if somewhat brief views of this exceptional bird in the canopy and as it flashed its crimson wings above our heads in flight.

Cuckoos Cuculidae**Senegal Coucal***Centropus senegalensis*

2 birds were seen on consecutive days in the open grassland in Lope NP.

Blue-headed Coucal*Centropus monachus*

We enjoyed some good sightings of these large coucals along the riverside in the Akaka area, Loango NP.

Blue Malkoha*Ceuthmochares aereus*

This peculiar, distinctive species was seen well along the road during the drive to Lope NP and then later during our boat trip down towards the Akaka Bushcamp.

Owls Strigidae**Pel's Fishing Owl***Scotopelia peli*

Two of these very impressive owls were seen during a boat trip along the Ipievie Channel, where one bird in particular was fairly relaxed and allowed us to get some great views!

Vermiculated Fishing Owl*Scotopelia bouvieri*

This very elusive owl was heard on 2 days around the Akaka Bushcamp. During a night boat trip we got incredibly close to it but never managed to get any views unfortunately!

Nightjars Caprimulgidae**Bates's Nightjar***Caprimulgus batesi*

One was seen during a night drive in Lope National Park.

Square-tailed Nightjar*Caprimulgus fossii*

We enjoyed views of several in Lope NP and a single bird during our drive in to Loango Lodge.

Swifts Apodidae

Sabine's Spinetail

Rhaphidura sabini

In Lope NP we enjoyed a good sighting of a small flock of these bird; later we had 2 further sightings in Loango NP.

Cassin's Spinetail

Neafrapus cassini

We had great views of around 6 of these in a mixed flock of aerial feeders during our drive to Lope NP, later numerous other sightings were enjoyed here and in Loango NP.

African Palm Swift

Cypsiurus parvus

Plentiful around Lope NP, especially near palms around our lodge.

Little Swift

Apus affinis

A single bird was seen in flight on the first day we were underway towards Lope NP.

Rollers Coraciidae

Blue-throated Roller

Eurystomus gularis

2 were seen well during our boat trip as we headed down the Ipievie Channel.

Lilac-breasted Roller

Coracias caudatus

One was very relaxed and easy to get close to in the Tassi area in Loango NP, although they are usually not around in this part of the country.

Kingfishers Alcedinidae

Grey-headed Kingfisher

Halcyon leucocephala

We had superb views of a few in Lope NP; a beautiful species!

Blue-breasted Kingfisher

Halcyon malimbica

Another spectacular species that was seen in different parts of Loango NP on 2 days, where they light on its plumage made it look even more spectacular in the brown mangroves.

Woodland Kingfisher

Halcyon senegalensis

Seen well on 2 days near Akaka Bushcamp in southern Loango NP.

White-bellied Kingfisher

Alcedo leucogaster

A very scarce and shy species that can be very hard to find – we finally recorded one along the Ipievie Channel which allowed for unusually lengthy views.

Malachite Kingfisher

Alcedo cristata

We recorded numerous of these waterside jewels in Loango NP.

Shining-blue Kingfisher

Alcedo quadribrachys

Another kingfisher that is highly-sought in much of its range, yet seems very common in Gabon, where we managed sightings of up to 20 birds a day in Loango NP.

Giant Kingfisher

Megaceryle maxima

The Goliath of the kingfisher world. Up to 25 seen daily in Loango NP, including some very impressive sightings along the river banks.

Pied Kingfisher

Ceryle rudis

The world's commonest kingfisher was seen in huge numbers along the watercourses in the Akaka area.

Bee-eaters Meropidae

Black-headed Bee-eater

Merops breweri

The toughest of the African bee-eaters! We were treated to great views of a pair near Omboue and later in Loango NP itself.

Black Bee-eater

Merops gularis

Another beautiful bee-eater that was seen on one occasion in Lope NP and once in Loango NP.

Blue-breasted Bee-eater

Merops variegates

This beauty was seen commonly in Lope and Loango NPs.



White-throated Bee-eater*Merops albicollis*

3 birds were seen on the day we drove to Lope NP, where we had scope views near the Ogooue River bridge.

Rosy Bee-eater*Merops malimbicus*

Yet another great species from this colourful family. We enjoyed views of these birds in flight and perched up high over the edges of rivers, although the highlight was when we could watch them plunging in the river very close to us near Akaka Bushcamp.

Hornbills Bucerotidae**African Pied Hornbill***Tockus fasciatus*

Common throughout forested areas in Gabon

Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill*Tockus camurus*

A shy species of the sub-canopy in tall forest; we had good views fairly briefly during a walk in the forest near the Akaka Bushcamp.

Piping Hornbill*Ceratogymna fistulator*

One of the common 2 hornbills in Gabon; we had daily sightings in forested habitat in both parks.

White-thighed Hornbill*Ceratogymna albotibialis*

We just recorded a single bird in the forest at the Mikongo part of the Lope National Park.

Black-casqued Wattled Hornbill*Ceratogymna atrata*

First views were again at Mikongo, but we enjoyed numerous views later as we left Lope and inside Loango NP, where we had a number of good light views.

White-crested Hornbill*Horizocerus albocristatus*

After one participant had brief views near Lope NP, we all managed to get amazing views of this interior forest skulker in a mixed flock in Loango NP during our walk along the Echira River.

African Barbets Lybiidae**Grey-throated Barbet***Gymnobucco bonapartei*

Our first sighting was of a dozen birds during our drive to Lope, when they were perched on dead branches near the road and could be scoped well.

Naked-faced Barbet*Gymnobucco calvus*

A small group of maybe 8 birds was seen briefly perched in the open in Lope NP.

Speckled Tinkerbird*Pogoniulus scolopaceus*

A scruffy little bird that was seen at the same site as the Grey-throated Barbet, where it showed well.

Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird*Pogoniulus bilineatus*

A distant bird was scoped from our breakfast verandah at Lope Lodge.

Yellow-spotted Barbet*Buccanodon duchaillui*

Unfortunately this bird was heard only in southern Loango NP during a walk.

Double-toothed Barbet*Lybius bidentatus*

A stunning and very distinctive barbet that was seen well in the top of some trees in Lope NP.

Honeyguides Indicatoridae**Willcocks's Honeyguide***Prodotiscus insignis*

A single bird showed well during our drive to Lope NP at the same site as a number of other species near the Ogooue River. In flight it flashed its obvious white outer tail too.

Woodpeckers & Allies Picidae**Gabon Woodpecker***Dendropicops gabonensis*

Another bird that was seen at a roadside stop as we approached Lope NP – a small and well-marked species.

Parrots Psittacidae**Grey Parrot***Psittacus erithacus*

So much better to see them in the wild than as the usual cage bird! We were pleasantly surprised by the very good numbers that were around, with sightings on every day of the tour and biggest numbers of vocal groups around Loango Lodge.

Wattle-eyes, Batises Platysteiridae

Chestnut Wattle-eye

Platysteira castanea

2 birds were seen well but briefly in the forest of the Mikongo section of Lope NP.

Cuckooshrikes Campephagidae

Blue Cuckooshrike

Coracina azurea

Some participants had good views of this species as it showed along the Ipiev Channel during our boat trip here.

Drongos Dicruridae

Fork-tailed Drongo

Dicrurus adsimilis

Less common here than in most other parts of sub-Saharan Africa, we had sightings on 2 days in the Lope area.

Velvet-mantled Drongo

Dicrurus coracinus

This recently split forest equivalent of the Fork-tailed Drongo was found in Lope NP.

Monarchs Monarchidae

African Paradise Flycatcher

Terpsiphone viridis

We enjoyed good views of several in Lope NP, where they were especially common around the hotel garden.

Crows, Jays Corvidae

Pied Crow

Corvus albus

A common and familiar crow, recorded mainly around Libreville and other settlements.

Nicators Nicatoridae

Western Nicator

Nicator chloris

Heard only near our lunch stop on the drive back to Libreville from Lope NP.

Bulbuls Pycnonotidae

Common Bulbul

Pycnonotus barbatus

A ubiquitous species and recorded on many days of the trip.

Little Greenbul

Eurillas virens

This, the commonest forest edge greenbul was heard and seen at our roadside stop on the way to Lope NP.

Yellow-whiskered Greenbul

Eurillas latirostris

We had good views of one along the Mikongo road.

Golden Greenbul

Calyptocichla serina

Two were seen well as they moved through the canopy near the road near our lunch stop on our drive between Lope NP and Libreville.

Spotted Greenbul

Ixonotus guttatus

Seen well on 2 occasions: on the drive to Lope NP and then from a boat in the Akaka area – always in large active flocks.

Yellow-throated Leaflove

Atimastillas flavicollis

Seen on 3 days around the Lope Lodge gardens.

Swamp Palm Bulbul

Thescelocichla leucopleura

Usually a tricky species – seen well at the roadside near Lope NP and again in the gardens of Loango Lodge.

Icterine Greenbul

Phyllastrephus icterinus



2 birds were seen briefly in a mixed flock along the Mikongo track.

Yellow-lored Bristlebill *Bleda notatus*

2 birds were seen briefly but well during our walk along the Mikongo track in Lope NP, where they joined a mixed flock.

Swallows, Martins Hirundinidae

African River Martin *Pseudochelidon eurystomina*

Possibly one of the birding trip highlights! We found 8 of these still fairly unknown birds drinking in the river as we were leaving Akaka Bushcamp.

Square-tailed Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne nitens*

We had good daily sightings of this species around Lope NP.

Black Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne pristoptera*

A single bird was seen flying over the Mikongo forest.

Grey-rumped Swallow *Pseudohirundo griseopyga*

This species was pleasantly common over the extensive short grasslands within Lope NP.

Banded Martin *Riparia cincta*

We found small numbers on 2 days over the taller grass of Loango NP.

Angola Swallow *Hirundo angolensis*

A single bird was seen in the Lope area.

White-bibbed Swallow *Hirundo nigrita*

Small numbers seen at scattered sites throughout the trip with peak numbers of at least twelve seen on the boat trip to Loango NP. This species is always a favourite and is usually seen in beautiful river habitat.

Lesser Striped Swallow *Cecropis abyssinica*

A widespread African swallow that is fairly common in Gabon, where we found it around Lope NP.

Crombecs, African Warblers Macrosphenidae

Green Crombec *Sylvietta virens*

The commonest and most widespread forest crombecs and the only one we found on this tour – we had great views of a close individual along the roadside as we headed toward Lope NP on the first day.

Yellow Flycatchers Erythroceridae

Chestnut-capped Flycatcher *Erythrocerus mccallii*

Around 3 birds were seen well in a mixed flock in the Mikongo area of Lope NP.

Cisticolas & Allies Cisticolidae

Chattering Cisticola *Cisticola anonymus*

Seen in grassland in Lope NP.

Winding Cisticola *Cisticola galactotes*

Heard frequently in riverside vegetation near Akaka, where it was also seen; Loango NP.

Zitting Cisticola *Cisticola juncidis*

Seen and heard over grassland habitat in Loango NP.

Banded Prinia *Prinia bairdii*

This snappy looking bird showed very well during a roadside stop in tall forest after lunch on the long drive to Lope, where they responded well to their own calls.

Yellow-browed Camaroptera *Camaroptera superciliaris*

A single bird was seen briefly by some participants in thick roadside scrub at our productive roadside stop as we approached Lope NP.

Starlings Sturnidae

Splendid Starling *Lamprotornis splendidus*

This spectacular, large starling was seen on 2 days from the veranda of our Lope Hotel.



Oxpeckers Buphagidae**Yellow-billed Oxpecker***Buphagus africanus*

A number of these birds were seen on at least 3 days, where they were most commonly attending Forest Buffalo in both Lope and Loanga NPs.

Thrushes Turdidae**Fraser's Rufous Thrush***Stizorhina fraseri*

We enjoyed a single sighting during a walk we did in forest near Akaka, Loango NP.

African Thrush*Turdus pelios*

This is a fairly common bird in Gabon; we had many around the garden in Lope NP, where they were constantly running around on the manicured grass.

Chats, Old World Flycatchers Muscicapidae**Cassin's Flycatcher***Muscicapa cassini*

A sprightly bird restricted to the vicinity of water, often hawking insects directly above it. We had great sightings in Loango NP and along the Ipiev Channel, where we also found a nest directly over the water.

African Stonechat*Saxicola torquata*

This widespread species was seen on 2 days in the vicinity of the Loango Lodge.

Sunbirds Nectariniidae**Little Green Sunbird***Anthreptes seimundi*

Around 6 were seen in forest in Lope NP.

Collared Sunbird*Hedydipna (Anthreptes) collaris*

This is a very widespread species on the continent. Seen in the garden in Lope NP and at Loango Lodge.

Reichenbach's Sunbird*Anabathmis reichenbachii*

A single birds was seen very well at the Gorilla project on Evengue Island.

Green-headed Sunbird*Cyanomitra (Nectarinia) verticalis*

We had a few scattered sightings over a few days in both Lope and Loango areas.

Blue-throated Brown Sunbird*Cyanomitra (Nectarinia) cyanolaema*

This forest sunbird was seen once in the Mikongo section of Lope NP.

Carmelite Sunbird*Chalcomitra fuliginosa*

This rather striking sunbird, restricted to coastal areas, was seen on a number of days around Loango Lodge.

Olive-bellied Sunbird*Cinnyris chloropygius*

This is a typical forest edge species, which was seen during both travel days, driving to and from Lope NP.

Superb Sunbird*Cinnyris superbus*

A stunning species that was seen on 2 days in Lope NP.

Copper Sunbird*Cinnyris cuprea*

A very common bird around the gardens of our Lope NP lodge.

Old World Sparrows Passeridae**Northern Grey-headed Sparrow***Passer griseus*

Fairly common in Libreville.

Weavers, Widowbirds Ploceidae**Black-necked Weaver***Ploceus nigricollis*

This snappy-looking weaver of forest edge was seen in Lope NP.

Village Weaver*Ploceus cucullatus*

This is one of Gabon's most conspicuous birds, with large colonies found in many towns.



Vieillot's Black Weaver*Ploceus nigerrimus*

Flocks of this beautiful species were noted mainly during our drive back to Libreville from Lope NP.

Cassin's Malimbe*Malimbus cassini*

2 birds that showed well at their nests in Lope NP unfortunately did not stay for long and were not seen by everyone.

Yellow-mantled Widowbird*Euplectes macroura*

A few birds in non-breeding plumage were seen showing patches of yellow in tall grasslands in Lope NP.

Waxbills & Allies Estrildidae**Pale-fronted Nigrita***Nigrita luteifrons*

A single bird was seen in forest along the roadside during our drive to Lope NP.

Grey-headed Nigrita*Nigrita canicapilla*

We had good views on the drive to Lope and in Loango forests.

Black-bellied Seedcracker*Pyrenestes ostrinus*

A stunning small seedeater that was seen in seeding grasses on the roadside near the Ogooue River.

Orange-cheeked Waxbill*Estrilda melpoda*

Fairly good numbers were seen daily in the Lope NP.

Common Waxbill*Estrilda astrild*

Africa's most widespread waxbill was observed in Loango NP on a few days.

Quailfinch*Ortygospiza gabonensis*

One bird was seen very well on mud on the edge of a pan in Loango NP; usually very hard to see on the ground!

Bronze Mannikin*Spermestes cucullatus*

We found this to be a ubiquitous species in scrub throughout parts of Lope NP.

Black-and-white Mannikin*Spermestes bicolor*

A flock of 4 birds was seen well at a roadside stop on the first full day of the tour as we drove to Lope NP.

Indigobirds, Whydahs Viduidae**Pin-tailed Whydah***Vidua macroura*

This familiar bird, which parasitizes small seedeaters, was seen in Lope NP, where some birds were beginning to grow their long tail, but still had non-breeding plumage.

Wagtails, Pipits Motacillidae**African Pied Wagtail***Motacilla aguimp*

A common and familiar African bird, we saw small numbers along the Ogooue River and in the area around Akaka.

Yellow-throated Longclaw*Macronyx croceus*

We found several in Lope NP and then later in the Loango grasslands too.

Plain-backed Pipit*Anthus leucophrys*

A few seen in Loango's short grasslands.

Long-legged Pipit*Anthus pallidiventris*

Our first sightings were around grasslands at the Lope Hotel with further sightings Loango NP.

Annotated List of Mammal Species recorded in Gabon

Taxonomy and nomenclature follows that of 'The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals' by Jonathan Kingdon, Academic Press, 1997.

Cheek-Pouch Monkeys Cercopithecidae**Red-capped Mangabey***Cercocebus torquatus*

Seen on 3 occasions in Loango NP, including during a walk near our Akaka accommodations.



Grey-cheeked Mangabey*Cercocebus albigena*

Fairly good numbers were seen in a few groups on the first full day in Lope NP.

Greater Putty-nosed Monkey*Cercopithecus nictitans*

One of the most common primates during the tour as we had a few sightings in Lope and Loango NPs, including some very close views of interesting behaviour.

Moustached Monkey*Cercopithecus cephus*

After seeing a few in Lope, we enjoyed much better views in Loango NP on a few occasions.

Crowned Monkey*Cercopithecus pogonias*

This is a fairly scarce and shy species that we were very fortunate to see in a mixed troop during a walk in the Akaka area; Loango NP.

Blue Monkey*Cercopithecus mitis*

Heard only in Lope NP.

Black Colobus*Colobus satanas*

A single animal was seen resting high in the forest at the end of our second drive in Lope NP, where it unfortunately quickly retreated.

Hippopotamuses Hippopotamidae**Hippopotamus***Hippopotamus amphibius*

We just had views of a single animal near our lodge in Loango NP.

Pigs Suidae**Red River Hog***Potamochoerus porcus*

Undoubtedly one of the tour highlights! We enjoyed outrageous sightings on at least 6 different occasions and in both national parks we visited! Views included close encounters on foot on 3 occasions and watching large groups crossing the road on 2 occasions.

Bovids & Horned Ungulates Bovidae**African (Forest) Buffalo***Syncerus caffer*

This species is usually still considered the same as the larger savannah-living animals. These very hairy and often reddish animals were seen well in both Lope and Loango NPs. Highest numbers were recorded on the full day we drove around Loango NP, where we had over 60 individuals.

Bushbuck*Tragelaphus scriptus*

We enjoyed good views of around 6 animals in Lope NP.

Blue Duiker*Cephalophus monticola*

One was seen at close range but briefly in Lope NP, another pair during a walk in Loango NP.

Yellow-backed Duiker*Cephalophus silvicultor*

A very scarce and unusual duiker that was a big surprise before we got to Lope, when it crossed the road in front of us – a great sighting!

Sitatunga*Tragelaphus spekii*

Another scarce antelope that can never be guaranteed anywhere! During our boat trip, returning to the main lodge from Akaka, we had a wonderful male at close range in the reeds along the river.

Elephants Elephantidae**Forest Elephant***Loxodonta cyclotis*

After some good views in Lope NP, we were utterly spoilt by many great views in beautiful surroundings in Loango NP, where we recorded well over 60 animals over 3 days in the Akaka area, where they hang out at this time of the year.

Reptile Species recorded in Gabon

Slender-snouted Crocodile

Crocodylus cataphractus

We had great views of as many as 10 daily, in Loango NP.

Ornate Monitor

Varanus ornatus

We found just one of these well marked reptiles during a boat trip near Akaka in Loango NP.

African Rock Python

Python sebae

A young one of these was seen very well, curled up in trees that were overhanging the river banks in the Loango NP, where we got very close to it.

Rockjumper Birding Ltd
C/o Summit Trust Mauritius Limited
Labourdonnais Village
Mapou
Mauritius
Tel (USA & Canada) toll free: 1-888-990-5552
Email: info@rockjumperbirding.com
Alternative email: rockjumperbirding@yahoo.com
Website: www.rockjumperbirding.com

