

GABON TOUR REPORT 2024

22 September - 11 October 2024

by Mark Van Beirs

The undisputed highlight of our Gabon tour was the unique African River Martin. On previous tours we usually saw this species on migration, sometimes in flocks, but never at the colony like we managed now. Spending an unforgettable hour with these truly unusual-looking birds displaying, interacting, digging and formation flying was an unbelievable experience. We also had a magnificent encounter with several Vermiculated Fishing Owls and at another river we found three exquisite Pel's Fishing Owls. Gorgeous Rosy Bee-eaters were decidedly common at the Loango National Park and entertained us on a regular basis. We also noted goodies like Hartlaub's Duck, African Pygmy Goose, Plumed Guineafowl, Finsch's Francolin, Brown and Bates's Nightjars, Bates's Swift, Great Blue, Yellow-billed and Guinea Turacos, Black-bellied and White-bellied Bustards, Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo, Afep Pigeon, Blue-headed Wood Dove, African Finfoot, Forbes's Plover, Rock and Grey Pratincoles, African Skimmer, West African Crested Tern, Olive Ibis, White-crested Tiger Heron, Bat Hawk, Ayres's and Cassin's Hawk-Eagles, Red-thighed Sparrowhawk, Marsh Owl, Red-billed Dwarf, Eastern Long-tailed and Black-casqued Hornbills, Blue-throated Roller, Chocolate-backed, Blue-breasted and Shining-blue Kingfishers, Black-headed and Black Bee-eaters, Red-throated Wryneck, Grey Parrot, Gabon Batis, Bates's Paradise Flycatcher, Plains Lark, Black-collared Bulbul, White-bibbed and Forest Swallows, Dambo and 'Teke' Cisticolas, Congo Moor Chat, Violet-tailed, Reichenbach's, Carmelite, Superb and Johanna's Sunbirds, Black-chinned, Loango and Preuss's Weavers, Red-crowned Malimbe, Black-bellied Seedcracker, Short-tailed Pipit and Cabanis's Bunting. Mammals were not very obvious, but we did observe marvels like African Forest Elephant, Red River Hog, Sitatunga, Red-capped Mangabey, Moustached and Putty-nosed Monkeys and Chimpanzee (for the lucky ones). Birding in the Gabonese rainforests is quite hard work as the birds are usually shy, not very responsive and thin on the ground. It is usually really hot and very humid and for half of the tour the accommodation was quite basic. Many of the roads are ungraded dirt tracks, which can make travelling rather challenging. But most of the participants put these discomforts aside and admired the amazing variety of rare and much wanted species.

The tour started with an internal flight from the capital Libreville to the town of Franceville, situated in the southeast corner of the country. This area is quite unique, as the hills are partly covered in a kind of miombo woodland, interspersed with patches of evergreen forest in the valleys. Large areas of shortgrass plains provide a different habitat still. On our drive east from Franceville we made several stops. A flat tyre in a patch of nice-looking forest gave us a couple of much wanted Black-headed Bee-eaters, which allowed excellent scope views. We picked up a number of more widespread species like African Harrier-Hawk, Speckled Mousebird, Congo Pied Hornbill, Black and Blue-breasted Bee-eaters, Grey-throated Barbet, Swamp Palm Bulbul, Sooty Flycatcher and Collared, Green-headed and Olive-bellied Sunbirds. In more open habitat we found several smart, localized Congo Moor Chats, which showed really well. Red-necked Buzzard, White-

fronted Bee-eater, displaying Flappet Larks, Square-tailed Saw-wing, Tinkling Cisticola, Sooty Chat and a Side-striped Jackal were also noted. At dusk we rolled into the small town of Lekoni, where we were lodged in two small hotels. The menu at the restaurant was really interesting as it offered python, duiker, guineafowl, civet and porcupine, next to juicy palm maggots.

Just after dawn we were already exploring an area of scrubby miombo woodland where things seemed incredibly quiet. The only birds of note were a Little Green Sunbird, a beautifully marked young African Cuckoo and a Woodland Kingfisher. Next, we walked about in a stretch of short grassland surrounded by small trees, where there was a bit more activity. Dambo and the still undescribed 'Teke' Cisticolas were the highlights and it took quite a bit of effort before we all got satisfactory looks. We also added African Green Pigeon, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Little Bee-eater, Cardinal Woodpecker, Northern Fiscal, Plains Lark (the recently split Malbrant's form of Rufous-naped Lark), the smart Black-collared Bulbul, Dark-capped Bulbul, Salvadori's (now lumped into Yellow-bellied) and Green-capped Eremomelas, Violet-backed Starling, Amethyst and Copper Sunbirds, Yellow-throated Longclaw, a much too brief Short-tailed Pipit, Black-throated Canary and Cabanis's Bunting to the list. A patch of forest at a hilltop gave us Red-necked Buzzard, Cassin's Hawk-Eagle, Broad-billed Roller, Petit's Cuckooshrike, Fork-tailed and Sharpe's Drongos, Grey-headed Nigrita and Long-legged Pipit. In the afternoon we birded a nice stretch of miombo-like woodland where the best bird was a female Black-chinned Weaver that posed ever so well for us. Several Swamp Nightjars were flushed and a cracking Red-throated Wryneck was scoped. Overhead we saw flocks of European Swifts and European Bee-eaters. We also picked up Senegal Lapwing, Western Barn Owl (for some), Striped Kingfisher, Double-toothed Barbet and Yellow-throated Leaflove.

Another morning in a mosaic of grassland, miombo scrub and evergreen forest produced goodies like Red-necked Spurfowl, Long-tailed Nightjar, Horus Swift, Diederik and Klaas's Cuckoos, Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo, Lizard Buzzard, Yellow-billed Kite, African Hoopoe, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Little Green and Gabon Woodpeckers, Black Saw-wing, Banded Martin, Black-necked Weaver, Orange-cheeked and Common Waxbills and Yellow-throated Longclaw. A sandy cliff face held a lovely colony of White-fronted Bee-eaters and Red-throated Cliff Swallows. In the afternoon we first checked the surroundings of our accommodation, as a Fiery-breasted Bushshrike was heard singing there. We tried, but, sadly, the bird didn't want to come in. Afterwards we drove towards the famous Canyon de Lekoni, where we explored the grasslands and nearby forest patches. A lucky soul saw a Finsch's Francolin and we all heard its distinctive calls. Black Scimitarbill showed well, and both Spotted and Pale Flycatchers performed. At dusk we heard a Marsh Owl and a Fiery-necked Nightjar.

Another morning slogging across the short grasslands near the Lekoni Canyon gave us some excellent birds. We finally caught up with the elusive Finsch's Francolin as we flushed four birds almost underfoot. A single Black-bellied Bustard and three White-bellied Bustards could be admired in flight and two lovely Marsh Owls were flushed allowing good looks. Several Plains Larks gave nice views and a couple of tiny Short-tailed Pipits obliged. We also further explored the nearby patches of evergreen forest where we kept struggling to get views of the Fiery-breasted Bushshrike. We heard several again, but only managed a glimpse. An African Broadbill was scoped as it displayed in the dense undergrowth. After an excellent lunch we packed our bags and drove to the town of Franceville. A short stop gave us an African Emerald Cuckoo.

The following day our three vehicles took us along an atrocious track through a good chunk of Gabon to the famous Ipassa Reserve, which is situated in the centre of the country. Most of the

road was forest-lined dirt road, so our average speed was rather low. We were amazed about the enormous expanses of forest that still exist in Gabon.

During our five full days at the Ipassa reserve, which is a part of the Ivindo National Park, we were based at the well positioned Research Station. For a birdwatcher it forms an ideal base, but sadly through lack of maintenance, the accommodation has become rather dilapidated and the lack of electricity and running water didn't help the situation. Most days we explored a wide track through the forest and often ventured for short distances on narrow trails that had been made by scientists for survey purposes. As Forest Elephants are still quite common here, we were warned to be very careful and watchful. We also birded along the wide entrance track that leads through secondary forest and along the nearby scenic river. One of the highlights of our visit was a fantastic observation of a pair of foraging Plumed Guineafowl. A mega experience!! One evening we waited at dusk for a rare Brown Nightjar to appear and we were spoiled as it posed so very well for us at close range. Afep Pigeons were regularly encountered and at the river a flock of Rock Pratincoles performed well. One morning we were lucky enough to observe three Olive Ibises as they flew over the clearing, not before or at dusk as is so often the case with these rare ibises, but in broad daylight. The same happened with a leisurely Bat Hawk that showed ever so well. One evening your leader was lucky enough to catch a Fraser's Eagle Owl in his torch beam. Subsequent tries didn't produce a sniff, sadly. Hornbills were particularly well represented with Congo Pied, Piping, White-thighed and Black-casqued commonly encountered. We obtained excellent views of Red-billed Dwarf and Eastern Long-tailed (the old White-crested). Good looks were had of Chocolate-backed, Blue-breasted and Pygmy Kingfishers and of the very smart Black Bee-eater. A good selection of Tinkerbirds was found as Red-rumped, Yellow-throated and Speckled were all scoped. Woodpeckers were not easily located, but we did encounter Buff-spotted, Brown-eared, Yellow-crested and Gabon. Grey Parrots were marvellously common and often showed very well in the fruiting trees in the clearing. So very heartwarming. A good selection of greenbuls was seen, which included Slender-billed, Golden, Spotted, Simple, Honeyguide, Eastern Bearded, White Bearded, Little, Yellow-whiskered, Plain, Little Grey, Ansorge's, Xavier's and Icterine next to Yellow-throated Leaflove and Swamp Palm Bulbul. The sunbird family was represented by Little Green, Grey-chinned, Collared, Blue-throated Brown, Olive, Olive-bellied, Johanna's and Superb. A rare Red-crowned Malimbe was scoped and a pair of Black-bellied Seedcrackers gave excellent views. Other new birds included Black and Sabine's Spinetails, Great Blue and Guinea Turacos, Blue Malkoha, Black and Red-chested Cuckoos, Palm-nut Vulture, European Honey Buzzard, Grey-throated and Yellow-spotted Barbets, Red-fronted Parrot, Gabon Batis, Chestnut Wattle-eye, Red-eyed Puffback, Western Oriole, Velvet-mantled and Shining Drogos, Bates's Paradise Flycatcher, Western Nicator, Square-tailed Saw-wing, Forest Swallow, Green and Lemon-bellied Crombecs, Green Hylia, Buff-throated Apalis, Yellow-browed and Olive-green Camaropteras, Chattering Cisticola, Rufous-crowned Eremomela, Purple-headed and Splendid Starlings, Fraser's Rufous Thrush, Fraser's Forest Flycatcher, Ashy Flycatcher, Black-necked and Preuss's Weavers, Red-headed Malimbe, Chestnut-breasted and Grey-headed Nigritas and Black-headed Waxbill. Every night we heard the loud, weird calls of African Palm Civet, but the only mammals that we saw were Moustached Monkey and Green Bush and Forest Giant Squirrels.

It took most of the day to reach the famous La Lopé Reserve. Half of the route was on tarred road and went smoothly, but the stretches on dirt road were quite rough. A few stops on the way gave us species like Little Grebe and beautiful White-bibbed and Angola Swallows. For the last part of the journey, we followed the wide, very scenic Ogooué River where we picked up wildlife like Northern Bushbuck, Putty-nosed Monkey and Black Colobus. One of the vehicles was lucky enough

to find a family of Chimpanzees crossing a stretch of savanna. In late afternoon we finally arrived at the beautifully situated La Lopé Hotel overlooking the Ogooué river. The airco and the hot showers were very much appreciated.

We woke up to heavy showers, which boded badly for where we wanted to get to today. Upon arrival at the gate of the La Lopé National Park there was a bit of discussion, as the park normally doesn't allow visitors in when it rains. We managed to convince the lady in charge to let us in, and we soon found out why that rule was in place. The main track was an extremely slippery affair and we only managed to drive a few kilometres till it really became too dangerous. So, we walked, in the rain, along the edge of a nice patch of forest and into the short grasslands and only found Yellow-billed Oxpecker, a mother and youngster Red River Hog and a herd of Cape Buffalo. We returned to base where the river produced beautiful White-crowned Lapwings, African Skimmers and a Giant Kingfisher. In the afternoon we birded along the main track leading west and obtained great looks at Bates's Swift, African Woolly-necked Stork, Hadada Ibis and an impressive squadron of Black-casqued Hornbills. A fantastic African Forest Elephant was quietly feeding close to the track, just inside the forest. At dusk we tried for the localized Bates's Nightjar, but we only got a brief response. Richard experimented by taping a Red-chested Flufftail and amazingly enough got an immediate response, while another six Forest Elephants walked not too far away through the grasslands. On the return drive we found a flowering tree containing several species of bats of which we only managed to identify Franquet's Epauletted Fruit Bat.

On our second day at the La Lopé National Park we finally managed to reach the famous swamp where the little known Dja River Scrub Warbler lives. We explored the swamp for several hours but only heard one song strophe of our target and that was it... extremely disappointing. A female Red-chested Flufftail was flushed and we picked up a few new birds for the list like Cassin's Spinetail, Fan-tailed Grassbird and Yellow-mantled Widowbird. A sounder of c40 Red River Hogs was truly impressive and we regularly encountered small herds of Cape Buffalos. A lovely female Northern Bushbuck was much appreciated. After a midday break, we returned to the park where we found things to be extremely quiet. A Rufous-sided Broadbill was heard and at dusk a terrific male Bates's Nightjar was enticed to show itself well. The unlucky person who had to stay at the hotel for health reasons was very lucky as he did find an African River Martin flying overhead.

The following day was an uneventful travelling day to Libreville. We first tackled 100 kilometres of bad dirt track, which was followed by a metalled stretch full of potholes. A quick stop for lunch gave us nice looks at a sandbank in the river, which held eight very nice Grey Pratincoles, next to Rock Pratincoles and African Skimmers. We also caught up with Red-chested Swallow and Orange Weaver here. The final portion of road was quite smooth but gave us a major traffic jam. In the early evening, we arrived at our base in the capital.

Next morning, a short flight took us to the seaside town of Port Gentil where we boarded three vehicles that took us along a coastal road south to the small town of Omboué. Interesting stops along the way gave us White-faced Whistling Duck, Water Thick-knee, White-fronted Plover, African Jacana, West African Crested Tern, lots of African Woolly-necked Storks, Western Reef Heron, Great Egret, Purple Heron and Pied Kingfisher. We arrived at our base in Omboué just in time for lunch. The surroundings of the hotel added Common Tern and Slender-billed Weaver to the tally. In early afternoon we took a lovely boat trip on the nearby lagoon and on the beautiful forest-lined Mvipe River. There were good numbers of gorgeous Rosy Bee-eaters about and we also found several much-wanted African River Martins. Wow, a good start. Two White-crested Tiger Herons were found, but both disappeared all too quickly in the forest. We also noted Hartlaub's Duck, African

Finfoot, Caspian Tern and African Fish Eagle. We started to return while it was getting dark and managed to spotlight three different Pel's Fishing Owls at close range. Terrific stuff. Fantastic birds!!

In the early morning, we had a look around the hotel where we picked up Pink-backed Pelican and Reichenbach's and Carmelite Sunbirds. Later we drove south into the famous Loango National Park. A stop on the journey gave us fabulous looks at a Rosy Bee-eater colony in full swing. These truly exquisite birds showed very well. We would continue to see small numbers through the day. We also observed a couple of African River Martins in their very fast flight here. We had lunch at the Ndola camp where we found lots of Common Terns and an Osprey. A delightful boat trip took us across a lagoon and along a forested river to the small, but well positioned Akaka camp. Yellow-billed Stork, Purple and Goliath Herons and Malachite and Shining-blue Kingfishers were found along the way. An African Forest Elephant was foraging along the river's edge and we had an incredible time observing this gentle giant just a few metres away. Really awesome. Two female Sitatungas showed well, as did several Red-capped Mangabeys. We checked in at the cozy Akaka Camp and in late afternoon took a boat trip on the nearby river. Several gorgeous Violet-tailed Sunbirds performed very well. Dusk found us at a strategic position on the river and it didn't take very long till we obtained fantastic looks at an adult and a youngster Vermiculated Fishing Owl. We observed these fabulous creatures for as long as we wanted and later found another adult with a youngster further downstream. More excellent views were had. A very happy group returned to base that evening.

Our morning in the Akaka Camp area consisted of boat trips and a forest walk. Great birds included Hartlaub's Duck (incredible close-up views), African Pygmy Goose, Knob-billed Duck, Blue-headed Coucal, Blue-headed Wood Dove, Squacco Heron, African Open-billed Stork, a cracking Cassin's Hawk-Eagle and Shining-blue Kingfisher. We enjoyed an early lunch and then transferred by boat to the nice Ndola Camp. In the afternoon we boarded our safari vehicle and explored the distinctive coastal savanna where we were able to admire the highlight of the tour: an active colony of c550 African River Martins. These hirundines nest in sandy flat ground and just dig a hole in the soil. Using the vehicle as a hide we managed to get fairly close without causing any disturbance. We spent more than an hour with these magnificent birds and observed their unique display, the elaborate digging, the distinctive begging, etc. Now and then the flock would flush and swirl like a murmuration of starlings and settle back within minutes. A truly amazing and heart-warming spectacle. On the return drive we noted a couple of Forbes's Plovers and at dusk several Square-tailed Nightjars appeared. While enjoying our tasty dinner a party of six African Forest Elephants were feeding less than 50 metres away... great stuff.

One of the last remaining important birds of the tour was the very localized Loango Weaver, so this morning we took the boat out to a small island in the lagoon, where this unobtrusive speciality was known to live. It didn't take long after arriving to find this modestly-clad species as it was feeding on the fruit of an African Oil Palm. A single male and two females of this near endemic showed quite well eventually. We then explored the lagoon a bit further and found a cracking Shining-blue Kingfisher. Around the lodge smart Yellow-billed Turacos, 100+ Grey Parrots and several White-throated Greenbuls performed. Another boat trip, after lunch, coincided with the falling tide and gave us 259 African Skimmers, six West African Crested Terns, Ruff, Whimbrel, Bar-tailed Godwit, Common Greenshank and Sanderling. In late afternoon we revisited the nearby savanna and had a marvellous time observing the antics at a Rosy Bee-eater colony. c60 of these very attractive birds were displaying or digging holes in the flat sandy soil. Now and then all the birds together would fly and do a bout of formation flying. Wonderful entertainment. A Black-

headed Bee-eater sat quietly in the canopy of a savanna tree, a gorgeous Forbes's Plover allowed perfect looks and a male Northern Bushbuck obliged. At dusk Square-tailed Nightjars appeared and gave excellent looks.

The final day of the tour was a travel day, as we made our way by boat and car to the town of Port Gentil, from where a short flight took us to Libreville where the tour officially ended.

BIRDS OF THE TOUR

1st African River Martin

2nd Rosy Bee-eater

3rd Vermiculated Fishing Owl

4th Pel's Fishing Owl

5th Black Bee-eater & Plumed Guineafowl

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g., it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species). The species names and taxonomy used in the bird list follows Gill, F., Donsker, D., & Rasmussen, P.(Eds). **2024. IOC World Bird List (v14.1)**. Where the subspecies seen is/are known, these are often given in parentheses at the end of the species comment.

BIRDS

White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata*

Knob-billed Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos*

Hartlaub's Duck ◊ *Pteronetta hartlaubii* Amazing close-up views at Loango.

African Pygmy Goose *Nettapus auritus* A pair showed beautifully at Loango.

Black Guineafowl ◊ *Agelastes niger* Non-leader.

Plumed Guineafowl ◊ *Guttera plumifera* A pair allowed great looks at Ipassa.

Coqui Francolin *Campocolinus coqui* Heard only.

Finsch's Francolin ◊ *Scleroptila finschi* Fair looks at several near Lekoni.

Scaly Spurfowl *Pternistis squamatus*

Red-necked Spurfowl *Pternistis afer*

Brown Nightjar ◊ *Veles binotatus* Eye-ball to eye-ball views at Ipassa!

Fiery-necked Nightjar *Caprimulgus pectoralis* Heard only.

Swamp Nightjar (Natal N, African White-tailed N) *Caprimulgus natalensis*

Bates's Nightjar ◊ *Caprimulgus batesi* This speciality showed very well at La Lopé.

Long-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus climacurus*

Square-tailed Nightjar (Gabon N) *Caprimulgus fossii*

Mottled Spinetail *Telacanthura ussheri*

Black Spinetail ◊ *Telacanthura melanopygia*

Sabine's Spinetail *Rhaphidura sabini*

Cassin's Spinetail *Neafrapus cassini*

Böhm's Spinetail (Bat-tailed S) *Neafrapus boehmi* Several were noted at Ipassa. Very localized in Gabon.

African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*

Common Swift (European S) *Apus apus*

Little Swift *Apus affinis*

Horus Swift *Apus horus* Several performed well near Lekoni.

Bates's Swift ◊ *Apus batesi*

Great Blue Turaco *Corythaeola cristata* Regular and vocal at Ipassa.

Yellow-billed Turaco *Tauraco macrorhynchus* A few were noted at Loango.

Guinea Turaco (Green T) *Tauraco persa* Regular at Ipassa.

White-bellied Bustard ◊ (Barrow's B) *Eupodotis senegalensis* Several showed in flight near Lekoni.

Black-bellied Bustard *Lissotis melanogaster* A single was found near Lekoni.

Gabon Coucal ◊ *Centropus anselli* Often heard at different locations, but only seen once.

Senegal Coucal *Centropus senegalensis*

Blue-headed Coucal *Centropus monachus*

Blue Malkoha *Ceuthmochares aereus*

Levaillant's Cuckoo (African Striped C) *Clamator levaillantii* Non-leader.

Diederik Cuckoo (Didric C) *Chrysococcyx caprius*

Klaas's Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx klaas*

African Emerald Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx cupreus*

Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo *Cercococcyx olivinus* Regularly heard and also seen at different locations.

Black Cuckoo *Cuculus clamosus*

Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius*

African Cuckoo *Cuculus gularis* Scope views of a smart young bird near Lekoni.

Rock Dove (introduced) (Feral Pigeon) *Columba [livia] domestica*

Afep Pigeon *Columba unicincta* Scope views of perched birds at Ipassa.

Lemon Dove (Cinnamon D) *Columba larvata*

Red-eyed Dove *Streptopelia semitorquata*

Emerald-spotted Wood Dove *Turtur chalcospilos*

Blue-spotted Wood Dove (Red-billed W D) *Turtur afer*

Tambourine Dove *Turtur tympanistria*

Blue-headed Wood Dove *Turtur brehmeri*

African Green Pigeon *Treron calvus*

African Finfoot *Podica senegalensis* Several excellent sightings at Loango.

White-spotted Flufftail *Sarothrura pulchra*

Red-chested Flufftail *Sarothrura rufa* Heard and flushed at La Lopé.

Nkulengu Rail ♠ *Himantornis haematopus* Heard at night at Ipassa.

Little Grebe (Dabchick) *Tachybaptus ruficollis*

Black-rumped Buttonquail ♠ *Turnix nanus* Non-leader.

Water Thick-knee (W Dikkop) *Burhinus vermiculatus*

Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*

Forbes's Plover ♠ *Charadrius forbesi* Perfect looks on the grasslands at Loango.

White-crowned Lapwing (W-headed Plover) *Vanellus albiceps* Great encounters at the La Lopé Hotel.

Senegal Lapwing (Lesser Black-winged Plover) *Vanellus lugubris*

Kittlitz's Plover *Anarhynchus pecuarius*

White-fronted Plover (W-f Sand P) *Anarhynchus marginatus*

African Jacana *Actophilornis africanus*

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

Ruff *Calidris pugnax*

Sanderling *Calidris alba*

Little Stint *Calidris minuta*

Rock Pratincole (White-collared P) *Glareola nuchalis*

Grey Pratincole ♦ *Glareola cinerea* Scope views of several on a sandbank of the Ogooué River.

African Skimmer *Rynchops flavirostris*

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* Non-leader.

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*

West African Crested Tern ♦ *Thalasseus albididorsalis* Regular encounters along the coast.

African Openbill *Anastomus lamelligerus*

Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis*

African Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia microscelis*

African Darter *Anhinga rufa*

Reed Cormorant (Long-tailed C) *Microcarbo africanus*

Olive Ibis ♦ *Bostrychia olivacea* Nice looks at three in flight in broad daylight at the Ipassa clearing!!

Spot-breasted Ibis ♦ *Bostrychia rara* (HNL)

Hadada Ibis *Bostrychia hagedash*

White-crested Tiger Heron ♦ *Tigriornis leucolopha* Two showed all too briefly at Loango.

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Western Reef Heron (W R Egret) *Egretta gularis*

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*

Great Egret (G White E) *Ardea alba*

Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

Goliath Heron *Ardea goliath*

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*

Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens*

Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*

African Harrier-Hawk (A Gymnogone) *Polyboroides typus*

Palm-nut Vulture (Vulturine Fish Eagle) *Gypohierax angolensis* Very common.

European Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*

Congo Serpent Eagle ◊ *Dryotriorchis spectabilis* Non-leader.

Bat Hawk *Macheiramphus alcinus* One showed well at Ipassa.

Crowned Eagle (C Hawk E) *Stephanoaetus coronatus* Heard only.

Ayres's Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus ayresii*

Cassin's Hawk-Eagle *Aquila africana* Good looks on three occasions of this impressive bird of prey.

Lizard Buzzard *Kaupifalco monogrammicus*

Dark Chanting Goshawk *Melierax metabates*

Red-thighed Sparrowhawk ◊ (Western Little S) *Accipiter erythropus* Scope views of a perched bird at Loango.

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius*

African Fish Eagle *Ichthyophaga vocifer*

Red-necked Buzzard (R-tailed B) *Buteo auguralis*

Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

Marsh Owl *Asio capensis* Two were flushed in the Lekoni grasslands.

Fraser's Eagle-Owl ◊ *Ketupa poensis* Leader only.

Pel's Fishing Owl *Scotopelia peli* Fantastic close-up views of three at Loango.

Vermiculated Fishing Owl ♦ *Scotopelia bouvieri* Two adults and two youngsters showed amazingly at Loango.

Speckled Mousebird *Colius striatus*

African Hoopoe *Upupa africana*

Black Scimitarbill (B Wood-hoopoe) *Rhinopomastus aterrimus*

Congo Pied Hornbill *Lophoceros fasciatus*

Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill *Lophoceros camurus*

Piping Hornbill (Eastern P H) *Bycanistes [fistulator] sharpii*

White-thighed Hornbill ♦ *Bycanistes albotibialis*

Black-casqued Hornbill *Ceratogymna atrata* Pleasingly common at Ipassa, La Lopé and Loango.

Eastern Long-tailed Hornbill ♦ *Horizocerus cassini* Excellent looks at Ipassa.

Blue-throated Roller *Eurystomus gularis*

Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus*

Chocolate-backed Kingfisher *Halcyon badia*

Brown-hooded Kingfisher *Halcyon albiventris*

Striped Kingfisher *Halcyon chelicuti*

Blue-breasted Kingfisher *Halcyon malimbica*

Woodland Kingfisher *Halcyon senegalensis*

African Pygmy Kingfisher *Ispidina picta*

Malachite Kingfisher *Corythornis cristatus*

Shining-blue Kingfisher *Alcedo quadribrachys* Several behaved beautifully at Loango.

Giant Kingfisher *Megaceryle maxima*

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*

Black-headed Bee-eater ♦ *Merops breweri* Excellent looks at this speciality near Lekoni and at Loango.

Blue-headed Bee-eater *Merops muelleri* Non-leader.

Black Bee-eater *Merops gularis* Several perfect encounters. A real beauty.

Little Bee-eater *Merops pusillus*

Blue-breasted Bee-eater (White-cheeked B-e) *Merops variegatus*

White-fronted Bee-eater *Merops bullockoides*

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*

Rosy Bee-eater ♦ *Merops malimbicus* One of the stars of the tour. Common at Loango.

Yellow-billed Barbet ♦ (Eastern Y-b B) *Trachyphonus [purpuratus] purpuratus* Heard only.

Grey-throated Barbet *Gymnobucco bonapartei*

Speckled Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus scolopaceus*

Red-rumped Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus atroflavus*

Yellow-throated Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus subsulphureus*

Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird *Pogoniulus bilineatus*

Yellow-spotted Barbet *Buccanodon duchaillui*

Hairy-breasted Barbet *Tricholaema hirsuta* Heard only.

Double-toothed Barbet *Pogonornis bidentatus*

Willcocks's Honeyguide *Indicator willcocksii*

Lyre-tailed Honeyguide ♦ *Melichneutes robustus* Sadly, only heard.

Red-throated Wryneck *Jynx ruficollis* Scope views of this cutie near Lekoni.

Buff-spotted Woodpecker *Pardipicus nivosus*

Brown-eared Woodpecker *Pardipicus caroli*

Little Green Woodpecker *Campethera maculosa*

Yellow-crested Woodpecker *Chloropicus xantholophus*

Cardinal Woodpecker *Dendropicos fuscescens*

Gabon Woodpecker *Dendropicos gabonensis*

Grey Parrot *Psittacus erithacus* Heartwarming to see good numbers at the forest reserves. Sometimes 100+.

Red-fronted Parrot *Poicephalus gulielmi*

Rufous-sided Broadbill *Smithornis rufolateralis* Heard only.

African Broadbill *Smithornis capensis*

Chinspot Batis *Batis molitor*

Gabon Batis *Batis minima* Scope views of this speciality at Ipassa.

Chestnut Wattle-eye *Platysteira castanea*

White-spotted Wattle-eye ♦ *Platysteira tonsa* Heard only.

Brown-throated Wattle-eye (Common W-e) *Platysteira cyanea*

Fiery-breasted Bushshrike ♦ *Malaconotus cruentus* Glimpses only near Lekoni. Frustrating.

Black-crowned Tchagra (B-headed T) *Tchagra senegalus*

Red-eyed Puffback (Black-shouldered P) *Dryoscopus senegalensis*

Lowland Sooty Boubou ♦ *Laniarius leucorhynchus* Heard only.

Lühder's Bushshrike *Laniarius luehderi*

Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher (Vanga F) *Bias musicus*

Petit's Cuckooshrike ♦ *Campephaga petiti*

Western Oriole (W Black-headed O) *Oriolus brachyrhynchus*

Black-winged Oriole *Oriolus nigripennis*

Velvet-mantled Drongo *Dicrurus modestus*

Fork-tailed Drongo (Common D) *Dicrurus adsimilis*

Shining Drongo *Dicrurus atripennis*

Sharpe's Drongo *Dicrurus sharpei*

Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher *Trochocercus nitens* Heard only.

Bates's Paradise Flycatcher ♦ *Terpsiphone batesi* Regular at Ipassa.

African Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone viridis*

Northern Fiscal *Lanius humeralis*

Pied Crow *Corvus albus*

White-winged Black Tit *Melaniparus leucomelas* Non-leader.

Forest Penduline Tit ♦ (Yellow-fronted P T) *Anthoscopus flavifrons* Non-leader.

Western Nicator *Nicator chloris*

Plains Lark ♦ *Corypha kabalii* A few near Lekoni. A recent split in the Rufous-naped Lark complex.

Flappet Lark *Mirafra rufocinnamomea*

Slender-billed Greenbul *Stelgidillas gracilirostris*

Golden Greenbul *Calyptocichla serinus*

Black-collared Bulbul ◊ *Neolestes torquatus* Excellent looks near Lekoni. A really smart-looking bulbul.

Red-tailed Bristlebill *Bleda syndactylus* Heard only.

Yellow-throated Leaflove *Atimastillas flavicollis*

Spotted Greenbul *Ixonotus guttatus* Common and showy.

Swamp Palm Bulbul *Thescelocichla leucopleura*

Simple Greenbul (S Leaflove) *Chlorocichla simplex*

Honeyguide Greenbul *Baeopogon indicator*

Eastern Bearded Greenbul ◊ *Criniger chloronotus*

Red-tailed Greenbul *Criniger calurus*

White-bearded Greenbul ◊ *Criniger ndussumensis*

Little Greenbul *Eurillas virens*

Yellow-whiskered Greenbul *Eurillas latirostris*

Plain Greenbul (Cameroon Sombre G) *Eurillas curvirostris*

Little Grey Greenbul *Eurillas gracilis*

Ansorge's Greenbul *Eurillas ansorgei*

White-throated Greenbul ◊ *Phyllastrephus albigularis*

Xavier's Greenbul ◊ *Phyllastrephus xavieri*

Icterine Greenbul *Phyllastrephus icterinus*

Common Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus*

Dark-capped Bulbul *Pycnonotus tricolor*

African River Martin ◊ *Pseudochelidon eurystomina* The BIRD of the tour. Magical encounters at Loango.

Square-tailed Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne nitens*

Black Saw-wing ◊ (Petit's S) *Psalidoprocne [pristoptera] petiti*

Grey-rumped Swallow *Pseudhirundo griseopyga*

Banded Martin *Neophedina cincta*

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Red-chested Swallow *Hirundo lucida*

Angola Swallow *Hirundo angolensis*

White-bibbed Swallow (White-throated Blue S) *Hirundo nigrita* Regular over water.

Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii*

Forest Swallow ◊ *Atronanus fuliginosus*

Lesser Striped Swallow *Cecropis abyssinica*

Red-throated Cliff Swallow ◊ *Petrochelidon rufigula*

Yellow Longbill *Macrosphenus flavicans* Heard only.

Grey Longbill (Olive L) *Macrosphenus concolor* Heard only.

Red-capped Crombec ◊ *Sylvietta ruficapilla* Heard only.

Green Crombec *Sylvietta virens*

Lemon-bellied Crombec *Sylvietta denti*

Chestnut-capped Flycatcher *Erythrocerus mccallii*

Green Hylia *Hylia prasine* Several nice encounters.

Fan-tailed Grassbird (Broad-t Warbler) *Catriscus brevirostris*

Dja River Scrub Warbler ◊ (Dja R W) *Bradypterus grandis* We sure tried, but it didn't want to show itself.

Whistling Cisticola *Cisticola lateralis*

Chattering Cisticola ◊ *Cisticola anonymus* Regular at Ipassa.

Tinkling Cisticola (Grey C) *Cisticola rufilatus*

Winding Cisticola *Cisticola marginatus*

Croaking Cisticola *Cisticola natalensis*

Zitting Cisticola (Fan-tailed C) *Cisticola juncidis*

Dambo Cisticola ◊ *Cisticola dambo* Good looks at this speciality near Lekoni.

Pectoral-patch Cisticola *Cisticola brunnescens*

Teke Cisticola ◊ *Cisticola sp. nov.* Nice views, eventually, near Lekoni.

White-chinned Prinia *Schistolais leucopogon*

Buff-throated Apalis *Apalis rufogularis*

Grey-backed Camaroptera *Camaroptera brevicaudata*

Yellow-browed Camaroptera *Camaroptera superciliaris* Really good looks at Ipassa.

Olive-green Camaroptera *Camaroptera chloronota* This good songster showed well at Ipassa.

Yellow-bellied Eremomela *Eremomela icteropygialis* Salvadori's Eremomela is now part of this species.

Green-capped Eremomela *Eremomela scotops*

Rufous-crowned Eremomela *Eremomela badiceps*

Forest White-eye ♦ *Zosterops stenocricotus*

Brown Illadopsis *Illadopsis fulvescens*

Blackcap Illadopsis *Illadopsis cleaveri* Non-leader.

Purple-headed Starling (P-h Glossy S) *Hyalopsar purpureiceps*

Splendid Starling (S Glossy S) *Lamprotornis splendidus*

Violet-backed Starling (Amethyst S) *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*

Yellow-billed Oxpecker *Buphagus africanus* Regular on the Cape Buffalos at La Lopé and Loango.

Fraser's Rufous Thrush *Stizorhina fraseri*

African Thrush *Turdus pelios*

Fire-crested Alethe *Alethe castanea* Non-leader.

Pale Flycatcher *Agricola pallidus*

White-browed Forest Flycatcher *Fraseria cinerascens* Non-leader.

Fraser's Forest Flycatcher *Fraseria ocreata* Common and attractive.

Ashy Flycatcher (Blue-grey F) *Fraseria caerulescens*

Sooty Flycatcher *Bradornis fuliginosus*

Yellow-footed Flycatcher ♦ *Muscicapa sethsmithi* This cutie showed well in the forest at Ipassa.

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*

Cassin's Flycatcher *Muscicapa cassini*

Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat *Cossypha cyanocampter* Heard only.

African Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*

Congo Moor Chat ♦ *Myrmecocichla tholloni* Regular and attractively patterned near Lekoni. A speciality!

Sooty Chat *Myrmecocichla nigra*

Violet-tailed Sunbird ◊ *Anthreptes aurantius* Regular and very attractive along the rivers at Loango.

Little Green Sunbird *Anthreptes seimundi*

Grey-chinned Sunbird (Green S) *Anthreptes tephrolaemus*

Collared Sunbird *Hedydipna collaris*

Reichenbach's Sunbird ◊ *Anabathmis reichenbachii* Regular at Loango.

Green-headed Sunbird *Cyanomitra verticalis*

Blue-throated Brown Sunbird *Cyanomitra cyanolaema*

Olive Sunbird *Cyanomitra olivacea*

Carmelite Sunbird ◊ *Chalcomitra fuliginosa*

Green-throated Sunbird *Chalcomitra rubescens*

Amethyst Sunbird (Black S) *Chalcomitra amethystina*

Olive-bellied Sunbird *Cinnyris chloropygius*

Tiny Sunbird *Cinnyris minullus* Non-leader.

Johanna's Sunbird *Cinnyris johannae*

Superb Sunbird *Cinnyris superbus*

Copper Sunbird *Cinnyris cupreus*

Yellow-throated Bush Sparrow *Gymnoris superciliaris* Non-leader.

Northern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer griseus*

House Sparrow (introduced) *Passer domesticus* Regular. It recently spread all over the country.

Black-chinned Weaver ◊ *Ploceus nigrirentus* Scope views of this goodie near Lekoni.

Slender-billed Weaver *Ploceus pelzelni*

Loango Weaver ◊ *Ploceus subpersonatus* This very localized species showed well at Loango.

Black-necked Weaver *Ploceus nigricollis*

Orange Weaver *Ploceus aurantius*

Village Weaver *Ploceus cucullatus*

Vieillot's Black Weaver *Ploceus nigerrimus*

Preuss's Weaver *Ploceus preussi*

Red-crowned Malimbe ◊ *Malimbus coronatus* Scope views of this beauty at Ipassa.

Blue-billed Malimbe *Malimbus nitens* Non-leader.

Red-headed Malimbe *Malimbus rubricollis*

Yellow-mantled Widowbird *Euplectes macroura*

Marsh Widowbird *Euplectes hartlaubi*

Bronze Mannikin *Spermestes cucullata*

Black-and-white Mannikin *Spermestes bicolor*

White-breasted Nigrita (W-b Negrofinch) *Nigrita fusconotus*

Chestnut-breasted Nigrita (C-b Negrofinch) *Nigrita bicolor*

Grey-headed Nigrita (G-crowned Negrofinch) *Nigrita canicapillus*

Black-headed Waxbill ◊ *Estrilda atricapilla*

Orange-cheeked Waxbill *Estrilda melpada*

Fawn-breasted Waxbill *Estrilda paludicola*

Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild*

Quailfinch ◊ (Black-chinned Q) *Ortygospiza [atricollis] gabonensis*

Western Bluebill *Spermophaga haematina* Non-leader.

Black-bellied Seedcracker ◊ *Pyrenestes ostrinus* Cracking looks at a pair at Ipassa.

Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura*

African Pied Wagtail *Motacilla aguimp*

Yellow-throated Longclaw *Macronyx croceus*

Wood Pipit (Woodland P) *Anthus nyassae* Non-leader.

Plain-backed Pipit *Anthus leucophrys*

Long-legged Pipit ◊ *Anthus pallidiventris* Regular along the whole itinerary.

Short-tailed Pipit ◊ *Anthus brachyurus* A few showed quite well near Lekoni. A tiny pipit.

Black-faced Canary ◊ *Crithagra capistrata*

Black-throated Canary (B-t Seedeater) *Crithagra atrogularis*

Yellow-fronted Canary *Crithagra mozambica*

Cabanis's Bunting *Emberiza cabanisi*

MAMMALS

African Forest Elephant *Loxodonta cyclotis* Fantastic encounters at Loango. Truly impressive.

African Palm Civet *Nandinia binotata* Often heard at night at Ipassa. A bizarre owl-like call.

African Civet *Civettictis civetta*

Angolan Slender Mongoose *Herpestes flavescens* Non-leader.

Side-striped Jackal *Lupulella adustus*

Red River Hog *Potamochoerus porcus* Good looks at La Lopé. A smart-looking mammal.

Cape Buffalo (Forest B) *Syncerus [caffer] nanus* Common at La Lopé and at Loango.

Northern Bushbuck *Tragelaphus scriptus*

Sitatunga *Tragelaphus spekii* Nice looks at Loango.

Franquet's Epauletted Fruit Bat *Epomops franqueti*

Red-capped Mangabey (Collared M) *Cercocebus torquatus* Very nice views at Loango. Not shy.

Moustached Monkey *Cercopithecus cephus* Regular at La Lopé and Loango.

Putty-nosed Monkey (Greater White-nosed M) *Cercopithecus nictitans*

Black Colobus *Colobus satanas*

Grey-cheeked Mangabey *Lophocebus albigena* Heard only.

Chimpanzee *Pan troglodytes* Non-leader.

Green Bush Squirrel *Paraxerus poensis*

Forest Giant Squirrel *Protoxerus stangeri*

REPTILES

Central African Slender-snouted Crocodile *Mecistops leptorhynchus* Several nice encounters along the rivers at Loango.