ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Gabon

Rainforest Birds & Mammals

7th September to 21st September 2022 (15 days)

Loango Extension

21st September to 25th September 2022 (5 days)



Vermiculated Fishing Owl by David Hoddinott

The West African nation of Gabon made headlines in 2002 when its national parks rose from zero to thirteen, as more than 10,000 square miles of pristine rainforest was protected to conserve the incredible faunal wealth of this, the largest intact forest block on the entire African continent. The birding is exceptional and some of the near-mythical African megas that we will be targeting include White-crested Tiger Heron, Pel's and Vermiculated Fishing Owls, African River Martin, Congo Serpent Eagle, Long-tailed Hawk, Lyre-tailed Honeyguide, Black and Plumed Guineafowls, Finsch's Francolin, Hartlaub's Duck, Fraser's and Akun Eagle-Owls, Bates's and Brown Nightjars, Yellow-throated and Thick-billed Cuckoos, Black-headed and Rosy Bee-eaters, Fiery-breasted Bushshrike, Bare-cheeked Trogon, Gosling's Apalis, Rufous-bellied Helmetshrike, Rachel's and Red-bellied Malimbes, Ja River Scrub Warbler, Woodhouse's Antpecker, Yellow-bellied and White-spotted

Wattle-eyes, Black-chinned and Loango Weavers, Congo Moor Chat and Black-collared Bulbul. Due to its small population and vast rainforest resources, Gabon is also unique in harbouring significant numbers of African rainforest mammals that have either disappeared or are very difficult to see elsewhere such as Forest Elephant and Forest Buffalo, sounders of Red River Hogs and a plethora of monkeys. Chances even exist for Lowland Gorilla, Chimpanzee and Mandrill!

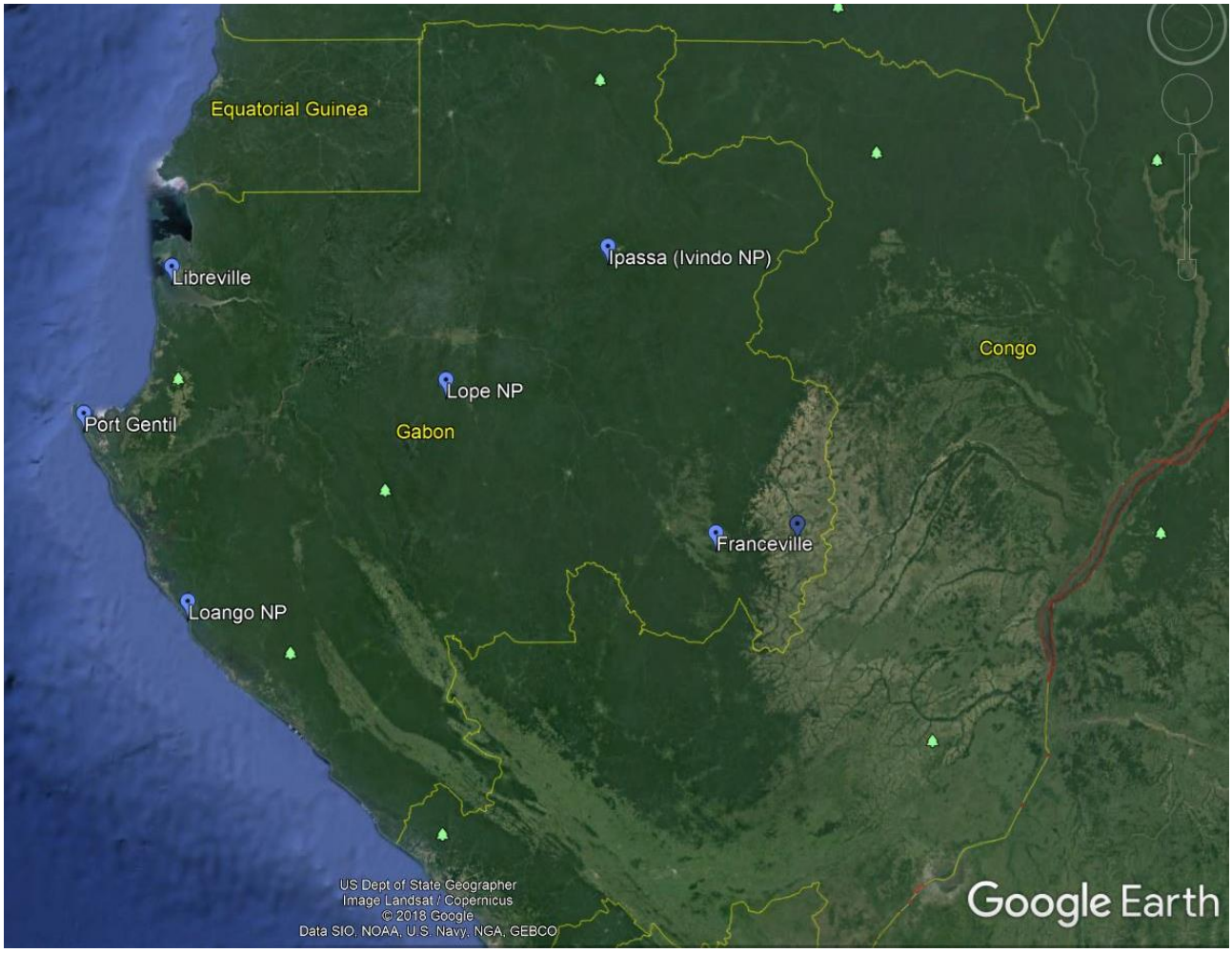
THE MAIN TOUR ITINERARY

Day 1	**Arrival in Libreville**
Day 2	**Libreville fly to Franceville and drive to Léconi**
Days 3 to 5	**Léconi**
Day 6	**Léconi to Franceville, transfer via night train to Lope National Park**
Day 7 & 8	**Lope National Park**
Day 9	**Lope NP and train ride to Boue**
Day 10	**Drive from Boue to Ipassa (Ivindo National Park)**
Days 11 to 13	**Ipassa area (northern Ivindo National Park)**
Day 14	**Ipassa and drive to Libreville**
Day 15	**Libreville and depart, or flight to Port Gentil for Loango Extension**

LOANGO EXTENSION

Day 1	**Libreville to Port Gentil & transfer to Loango National Park**
Day 2	**Loango NP - Mphive Channel boat ride & game drive (north)**
Day 3	**Loango NP - Loango River Mouth and boat ride to Akaka (south)**
Day 4	**Loango NP - Akaka area and boat ride back to Loango Lodge**
Day 5	**Loango NP to Port Gentil, flight to Libreville and final departures**

TOUR ROUTE MAP…



Rainforest Birds & Mammals



Black Guineafowl by David Hoddinott

Day 1: Arrival in Libreville. Our main Gabon tour begins today with our arrival in Libreville, the bustling capital city of Gabon. A short transfer from the airport will take us to our comfortable hotel where the group will meet at dinner.

Day 2: Libreville fly to Franceville and drive to Léconi. This morning we will take a short flight from Libreville to Franceville, one of the country's larger cities that is situated in the south-east of Gabon, close to the Congolese border. After arriving in Franceville, we will begin the two-and-a-half-hour drive to Léconi.

Our one scheduled birding stop for the afternoon will be at an extremely productive forest patch near Bongoville that continues to produce an amazing range of central African lowland forest specialties as well as range extensions for several very exciting species. Rare and elusive species that we may be fortunate to find here include the exceedingly scarce Chestnut-flanked Sparrowhawk, the uncommon Yellow-throated Cuckoo, bizarre Lyre-tailed Honeyguide, Black-headed Bee-eater, the near-mythical Eastern Wattled Cuckooshrike, Gabon Batis, Congo Serpent Eagle, Long-tailed Hawk, Bare-cheeked Trogon, Yellow-throated Nicator, the rare and range-restricted Sjöstedt's Greenbul and the beautiful but very shy Fiery-breasted Bushshrike. Slightly more widespread and regular species that we will also be on the look-out for include Western and Black-winged Orioles, Elliot's, Green-



Bare-cheeked Trogon by David Hoddinott

backed, Yellow-crested and Gabon Woodpeckers, Plain and Honeyguide Greenbuls, Blue-throated Roller, Black Bee-eater, African Pied, Piping and Red-billed Dwarf Hornbills, Willcock's Honeyguide, Purple-headed Starling, Sooty Flycatcher, Grey-chinned, Little Green, Blue-throated Brown, Green-throated and Superb Sunbirds, Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher, Red-necked Buzzard, Western Bronze-naped and Afep Pigeons, Pale-fronted, White-breasted and Grey-headed Nigritas, Cassin's Malimbe, Red-eyed Puffback, Lowland Sooty Boubou, Purple-throated and Blue Cuckooshrikes, Western Nicator, the noisy, tit-like Fraser's Forest Flycatcher and an incredible suite of forest barbets that include Grey-throated, Bristle-nosed, Naked-faced, Yellow-billed, Yellow-spotted and Hairy-breasted, as well as Speckled, Red-rumped and Yellow-throated Tinkerbirds.



Finsch's Francolin by David Hoddinott

Nestled in the south-eastern corner of Gabon and bordered on the east by the Congo lies the Bateké Plateau, an area of moist rolling upland grasslands dotted with patches of broadleaved woodland and evergreen forest. As we ascend the plateau after passing through Bongoville (the birthplace of Gabon's previous President Omar Bongo) we may begin finding our first Sooty and Congo Moor Chats, as well as White-fronted Bee-eater. In the early evening we will arrive at our basic, local hotel, our base for the next four nights.

Days 3 to 5: Léconi area. Our time in the Leconi area will be spent exploring the grassland, forest and woodland patches around Léconi using 4x4 vehicles. Target grassland species include the localized and elusive Finsch's Francolin, Black-rumped Buttonquail, White-bellied Bustard (the unusual race occurring here displays characteristics of both the southern and northern forms), Little Bee-eater, Flappet and Rufous-naped Larks (the distinctive local race is often split as Malbrandt's Lark), the rarely seen Short-tailed Pipit, a plethora of Cisticolas including Croaking, Zitting and Pectoral-patch, the desirable Congo Moor Chat, Sooty Chat, Fawn-breasted and Orange-cheeked Waxbills, Black-winged Red Bishop, Yellow-mantled Widowbird and Black-throated Canary. Hirundines are represented in good numbers and notable species include the huge Red-breasted Swallow, Banded Martin and two species of cliff-swallows; Red-throated and South African.



Congo Moor Chat by David Hoddinott

The extensive tracts of gallery forest that punctuate the grassland and broad-leaved woodland mosaic host several noteworthy species such as Guinea Turaco, African Broadbill, Purple-throated Cuckooshrike, Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo, Western Bronze-naped Pigeon, Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat, Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher, Red-eyed Puffback, Angolan Batis, Black-backed and Double-toothed

Barbets, Black-necked Weaver, White-chinned Prinia and three species of lovely Bushshrikes; Lühder's, Bocage's and Gorgeous (or Perrin's).



Red River Hogs by Adam Riley

The woodland bird communities are extremely varied and consist of a number of species more typical of southern African savanna such as African Hobby, Red-necked Spurfowl, African Cuckoo, Senegal Coucal, Striped and Brown-hooded Kingfishers, White-fronted Bee-eater, Black Scimitarbill, Red-throated Wryneck, Wood Pipit, the attractive Black-collared Bulbul, Green-capped and Salvadori's Eremomelas, Red-capped Crombec, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, White-browed Scrub Robin, Black-headed and Chinspot Batises, White-winged Black Tit, Grey Penduline Tit, Western Violet-backed and Amethyst Sunbirds, African Golden Oriole, Tinkling, Whistling and Short-winged Cisticolas, the scarce Souza's Shrike, Northern Puffback, the very localized and beautiful Black-chinned Weaver, Grey Waxbill and Cabanis's Bunting.

If time permits, we will take the fairly rough road to the rugged and picturesque Léconi Canyons where we have a back-up chance of the grassland species already mentioned. Early evening excursions into the grassland and woodland might produce Fiery-necked, Long-tailed, Swamp and the spectacular Pennant-winged Nightjars and if we are very fortunate perhaps a Marsh Owl.

We will also pay at least one more visit to the forest patch that we stopped at on our first afternoon near Bongoville and here we are certain to add several more fantastic species to our ever-growing list.

Day 6: Léconi to Franceville and night train to Lope National Park. We will depart early this morning for the drive back to Franceville, stopping en route for some final morning's birding in the forests around Bongoville in search of any species we may not have previously seen. Upon arrival in Franceville we'll have dinner at a restaurant in town before departing on the overnight train to Lope National Park. Upon arrival at Lope in the early morning, we will be met by our hosts and will then take the short drive to our famous local hotel, which is set on a wide plain along the rushing Ogooué River, just outside the national park.



Bates's Nightjar by David Hoddinott

Days 7 & 8: Lope National Park. A fabulous three full days will be spent exploring the northern sections of this 5,360 square km (2,069 square ml) park in a large, open, safari style 4x4 truck. The main habitats in Lope are small to large forest blocks surrounded by grasslands, spread out over gently rolling countryside. The immensity of pristine habitat here gladdens the heart!

Our comfortable, air-conditioned bungalows for the next few nights are nestled in the hotel's manicured gardens, flanked by a large grassy plain where Forest Buffalo graze at night and Chimpanzees are sometimes seen crossing between forest patches. The lodge property backs onto the river and is surrounded by small forest glades. Wallowing in the crystal-clear swimming pool that overlooks the Ogooué is a great way to round off our days here – but be warned to keep your binoculars at hand as good birds are always in close proximity. (On previous tours we've seen Black-casqued Hornbills and hunting Bat Hawk right over the swimming pool!)



Forest (African) Buffalo by Markus Lilje

In the morning we are sure to be met by Long-legged Pipits and African Thrushes, which are resident on the hotel lawns. In addition, the flowering plants attract an incredible array of sunbirds and we can expect to find Collared, Green-headed, Green-throated, Olive-bellied and Copper, all providing excellent photographic opportunities and we will also search any large, flowering trees adjacent to the river for the rare Violet-tailed Sunbird. Weavers are prolific and noisy, and species here include Vieillot's Black, Orange, Black-necked and Village. The river and its margins attract birds of a different nature: families of White-crowned Lapwings, African Skimmers and Rock Pratincoles roost on the large rocks, and in the evening they forage over the lodge's airspace. Raptors pass overhead in good numbers and we may see Palmnut Vulture, African Fish Eagle, Red-chested Goshawk and African Harrier-Hawk from the lodge grounds. Other fly-overs include noisy flocks of red-tailed Grey Parrot (wonderful to see outside of their usual caged environment) and the uncommon Red-fronted Parrot. The oddly shaped Mottled Spinetail can be seen winging overhead in small numbers, often accompanied by Sabine's Spinetail and Bates's Swift. The rare Black-faced Canary is sometimes seen in the bushes around the cabins or in the tall, seeding grassland at the edge of the grounds. These grassy plains are also home to the nomadic Senegal Lapwing, spectacular Blue-breasted Bee-eater and Yellow-throated Longclaw, while we may also encounter the nomadic Compact Weaver and Quailfinch (represented here by the black-chinned race that has been split in the past). The surrounding riparian woodland attracts Blue-spotted Wood and Tambourine Doves, African Green Pigeon, the skulking Blue Malkoha, African Pygmy, Grey-headed and Woodland Kingfishers, African Pied Hornbill, Speckled and Yellow-throated Tinkerbirds, Grey Tit-Flycatcher, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Bronze, Black-and-white Mannikins, and rarely, the scarce and erratic Magpie Mannikin.



Rosy Bee-eater by Markus Lilje

Aside from all the fabulous birds we will be searching for, this is prime rainforest mammal country and we can expect to find our first Forest Elephants. These are slighter, darker beasts than their savanna

counterparts, sporting thinner, straighter tusks, smaller ears and three (rather than four) toes. Recent genetic studies have revealed that the Forest Elephant is a distinct species, as differentiated from Indian (or Asiatic) Elephant and African (Bush) Elephant.



Congo Serpent Eagle by David Hoddinott

The small, reddish and woolly Forest Buffalo, however, is still considered the same species as the larger, darker Cape or African Buffalo, despite their considerable differences in appearance! They can be found wallowing in swampy areas or crossing the grasslands between forest patches; and, when observing them, their shaggy coats and tasselled ears provide a comical contrast to their otherwise dour expressions. Even more exotic are the sounders of preposterous Red River Hogs: these white-faced pigs sport a conspicuous black facemask, while their rusty bodies are offset by a white erectile mane running along their spine and long, white ear-tassels. Family groups of a dozen or so are most likely to be observed in the late afternoon when they emerge from the forests to root around in adjoining grasslands.

These are certainly all wonderful animals, but it is the primates that are the key mammalian attraction here; indeed, it is a truly amazing experience to explore these primordial forests where wild Western Lowland Gorillas and Chimpanzees still roam freely! These are, however, very difficult to observe despite their considerable numbers (3,000-5,000 gorillas are resident in the park). Other primates occurring in Lope that we may observe include the excessively long-tailed Black Colobus, blue-faced Moustached Monkeys, the aptly named Putty-nosed Monkey, and the scruffy Grey-cheeked Mangabey and if we are extremely fortunate we may even encounter a troop of the shy Mandrill.

While the area's forests are not as ancient or expansive as elsewhere in Gabon due to the effects of recent ice ages, numerous mouth-watering avian species nonetheless occur. We will search the various forest blocks for Cassin's Hawk-Eagle, Long-tailed Hawk, Red-chested Owlet, Narina Trogon, Chocolate-backed and Blue-breasted Kingfishers, Blue-throated Roller, Piping, White-crested and Red-billed Dwarf Hornbills, the massive Black-casqued Hornbill, Naked-faced and Yellow-billed Barbets, Spotted and Willcock's Honeyguides, Green-backed, Brown-eared and Buff-spotted Woodpeckers, Blue Malkoha, the magnificent Rufous-bellied Helmetshrike, Sooty, Olivaceous and Yellow-footed Flycatchers, Grey-throated Tit-Flycatcher, Chestnut Wattle-eye, the miniscule Tit-Hylia, parties of Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, Buff-throated Apalis, Chestnut-winged Starling, extremely scarce but gorgeous Red-bellied Malimbe, Yellow-mantled and Dark-backed Weavers, Red-tailed Greenbul, Fraser's, Little Green, Blue-throated Brown, Olive, Superb and Johanna's Sunbirds and the rare Forest White-eye, which



Grey Pratincole by Glen Valentine

was recently split from the more widespread and abundant African Yellow White-eye. If we are extremely fortunate we may hear or see the rare, elusive and bizarre Lyre-tailed Honeyguide performing its unique aerial display flight over the forest patches.

The sterility of the grasslands is in stark contrast to the richness of the forests, but Chattering and Short-winged Cisticolas and Blue-headed Coucal can be found here as well as in the adjoining scrub. In the dense, rank, grassy depressions we will seek out the extremely range-restricted and elusive Ja River Scrub Warbler and the brilliant Black-bellied Seedcracker.



Rufous-sided Broadbill by David Hoddinott

We will also stay out until after dusk on at least one occasion to try our luck at the scarce Bates's Nightjar. We might also encounter African Wood Owl, Swamp and Freckled Nightjars and Western Barn Owl, as well as the miniscule Demidoff's Dwarf Galago on these excursions

Day 9: Lope National Park and train ride to Boue. Our train ride from Lope to Boue is likely to be in the late evening so we should have a third full day to enjoy the exceptional Lope National Park before taking a short train ride to the large town of Boue, a short distance to our east. We can expect to arrive in Boue in the late evening or early tomorrow morning and upon arrival we will check into a nearby hotel for a few hours of sleep before breakfast and the long drive to Ipassa Reserve.

Day 10: Drive from Boue to Ipassa (Ivindo National Park). Today's drive takes us through mostly continuous secondary lowland forest, much of which is still in excellent condition and we will make a few stops along the drive where we can expect to encounter a few interesting species that could include Great Blue and Yellow-billed Turacos, Yellow-browed and Olive-green Camaropteras, Banded Prinia, Green Crombec, Piping and African Pied Hornbills and if we are lucky perhaps even a Long-tailed Hawk or Congo Serpent Eagle, both of which have been seen from the roadside along this drive on previous tours. We can expect to arrive at Makokou, a large town near the entrance to Ipassa Reserve in the early afternoon and we will have the late afternoon and early evening to bird the grounds and entrance road of the reserve.



Western Bluebill by Jonathan Rossouw

Days 11 to 13: Ipassa area (northern Ivindo National Park). We have three full days to explore this fabulous area. Birding in the area is superb with many of Gabon's most highly acclaimed and sought-after species on offer.

Most of our time will be spent along a track through the forest that only goes in for about a mile but offers almost all of the area's specialties. Coveys of Black and Plumed Guineafowls occur here and we certainly have a reasonable chance of seeing these rare and almost-mythical forest Guineafowls. The forest



White-bibbed Swallow by Markus Lilje

can be fairly quiet at times until one locates a mixed species flock (bird party) and that's when the excitement reaches epic proportions! Yellow-bellied, White-spotted and Chestnut Wattle-eyes, the miniscule and scarce Woodhouse's Antpecker, vociferous but unobtrusive Yellow and Grey Longbills, Bates's Paradise Flycatcher (normally a rare species but is pleasantly common here!), stunning Rachel's, Cassin's, Blue-billed and Crested Malimbes, Maxwell's Black and Yellow-mantled Weavers, Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, Fraser's Sunbird, Buff-spotted, Gabon and Brown-eared Woodpeckers, Yellow-footed Flycatcher, Green and Lemon-bellied Crombecs, Green Hylia, Shining and Velvet-mantled Drongos, Gabon and Fernando Po Batises, Western Nicator and Rufous-crowned Eremomela are all possible. Ipassa also supports an incredible array of Greenbuls that includes Little, Little Grey, Ansorge's, Slender-billed, Yellow-whiskered, Golden, Honeyguide, Spotted, Icterine, Xavier's, Red-tailed, Eastern Bearded and White-bearded.

If we encounter an ant swarm we may be fortunate to find Red-tailed and White-tailed Ant Thrushes, as well as Fraser's Rufous Thrush, Fire-crested and Brown-chested Alethes and Red-tailed and Yellow-lored Bristlebills. Other forest interior species that we will be looking out for along the main track and indistinct side trails include Chocolate-backed and African Dwarf Kingfishers, Blue-headed Wood Dove, Rufous-sided Broadbill, Forest Robin, Afep Pigeon and White-spotted Flufftail.

Great Blue Turacos are especially vocal and obtrusive around the camp grounds, along with Grey Parrots, Swamp Palm Bulbuls, Piping and African Pied Hornbills and the occasional White-thighed Hornbill. This is also where we might find African Pygmy Kingfisher, Yellow-browed and Olive-green Camaropteras, Banded Prinia, Red-eyed Puffback, White-breasted, Pale-fronted and Grey-headed Nigritas, the attractive but shy and unobtrusive Western Bluebill and Black-headed Waxbill, Simple Greenbul and Scaly Francolin. In this dense, forest-edge understory habitat we may be lucky and obtain a view of the rare, secretive and extremely elusive Gabon Coucal, as well as Lowland Sooty Boubou, Black-faced Rufous Warbler, Brown Illadopsis and Falkenstein's (Yellow-necked) Greenbul. Flocks of Sabine's and Cassin's Spinetails and Square-tailed and Black Saw-wings swoop low over the clearings and if we are very lucky we may find the rare and patchily-distributed Forest Swallow.



Hartlaub's Duck by Glen Valentine

On one of our days we will leave Makokou very early and embark on a drive out to the north-east of town towards the small village of Belinga. We will spend the entire day birding the remaining forest patches in this area that may yield a number of the species already mentioned above, along with chances for Blue Cuckooshrike, Rufous-bellied

Helmetshrike and Violet-backed Hyliota. This is also the only area on the trip where we have a realistic chance of seeing some of Gabon's rarest forest species such as Forest Penduline Tit, Eastern Wattled Cuckooshrike, Yellow-capped and Preuss's Weavers, Red-crowned Malimbe and Black-collared Lovebird.



Gorgeous (Perrin's) Bushshrike by Markus Lilje

We may undertake a short boat ride along the Ivindo River one afternoon where we will target the extremely localized Gosling's Apalis and White-browed Forest Flycatcher, and where we may also find the rare Violet-tailed Sunbird, unique African Finfoot, White-bibbed Swallow, Hartlaub's Duck, Cassin's Flycatcher, African Skimmer and large numbers of Rock Pratincoles. Please note that this activity has not always been possible on previous tours.

In the evenings we will do some night birding that could yield some very special nocturnal species such as Fraser's and Akun Eagle-Owls, Sjöstedt's Barred Owlet and Brown and Bates's Nightjars. Nocturnal mammals are also reasonably well represented here and we may encounter Thomas's and Demidoff's Dwarf Galagos, Gabon Squirrel Galago, Servaline Genet and African Palm Civet during our night time forays.

Day 14: Ipassa and drive to Libreville. After a wonderful couple of days at the fabulous birding locality of Ipassa we will begin our journey back to Libreville. This will be a very long, fifteen-hour drive, which means we will depart early and arrive at our hotel in Libreville in the evening with only a few stops along the way. One such scheduled stop that we are certain to make will be in the town of Ndjole that lies along the banks of the wide Ogooue River. Here we will have our picnic lunch and hopefully enjoy good scope views of Grey Pratincole. This is the only site along the route for this sought-after and range-restricted species and we may also see more African Skimmers here along with several species of swallow.



African Skimmer by Glen Valentine

Day 15: Libreville and depart, or flight to Port Gentil for Loango Extension. This morning will see the conclusion of our Gabon tour for those not continuing on with the Loango Extension. For those heading off to Loango we will board a flight to Port Gentil and continue our adventure from there. More details on this exciting extension below.

Loango Extension



White-crested Tiger Heron by David Hoddinott

Our post-tour extension of the fabulous Loango National Park, often referred to as "Africa's Last Eden" takes in the extensive wetlands, grasslands and coastal forest that dominate this wonderful reserve in coastal Gabon. Some of the mouth-watering species that we hope to encounter include the impressive White-crested Tiger Heron, Pel's and Vermiculated Fishing Owls, Bates's Nightjar, African Finfoot, Hartlaub's Duck, White-bellied Kingfisher, Forbes's Plover, the once-mythical African River Martin, Loango Weaver, Violet-tailed Sunbird and Damara Tern among many others! Mammals are also a major feature of Loango and we should see Forest Elephant, African (Forest Buffalo), Red River Hogs and Sitatunga, while chances exist for Lowland Gorilla, Chimpanzee and Crowned Monkey.

Day 1: Libreville to Port Gentil & transfer to Loango National Park. Getting to the great Loango National Park is an adventure in itself, with an internal flight over vast forests and lagoons into the oil-rich coastal town of Port Gentil, followed by a long boat ride across estuaries, lakes and forest-lined channels and ending up with a late afternoon drive through coastal forest and grasslands in an open-air safari truck across northern Loango National Park! An epic journey but well worth the trip! The park is situated along Gabon's south-central coastline, south of Libreville, and protects expansive forests, grasslands and wetlands. Mike Fay, the famed American ecologist known for his epic 455-day trek across 2,000 km of the Congo Basin, coined Loango "Africa's Last Eden". In the northern sector of the park, an enterprising company has built a top-class eco-lodge and more rustic safari camp amongst Loango's most beautiful and rewarding birding and wildlife areas and we will be utilizing these very comfortable and perfectly situated accommodations as our bases during our time in the reserve.

Our first port of call will be Loango Lodge, situated in the northern sector of Loango National Park. After a thirty minute flight from Libreville we will reach Port Gentil and from there we transfer to



Pel's Fishing Owl by Glen Valentine

awaiting motor boats to embark on a five-hour boat trip across the great Fernan Vaz Lagoon, past the town of Omboue after which we will finally reach the famous and bird-rich Mphive Channel that we will explore late this afternoon. The birding here is phenomenal and we will have our first chance at some of Loango's prized birds such as White-crested Tiger Heron, African Finfoot, White-bellied and Shining-blue Kingfishers and Hartlaub's Duck. Thereafter we will board an open-air safari vehicle and drive for an hour through the northern section of Loango National Park to the charming and luxurious Loango Lodge, situated along the banks of the Loango River, a magical site indeed!

Day 2: Loango NP - Mphive Channel boat ride & game drive (north). We will depart very early this morning with a packed lunch, headed for the Mphive Channel. This forested, slow-flowing watercourse is one of the highlights of our Gabon tour. We can expect to encounter astounding numbers of usually rare and elusive African lowland forest and riverine species such as Hartlaub's Duck, African Finfoot, Shining–blue Kingfisher, White-bibbed Swallow and Cassin's Flycatcher and can also expect to find several White-crested Tiger Herons, White-bellied Kingfishers, Pel's Fishing Owls and White-browed Forest Flycatchers during our morning boat ride! Other species occurring here include the vocal but scarce Congo Serpent Eagle, Long-tailed Hawk, Thick-billed Cuckoo and Violet-tailed Sunbird among many other exciting possibilities. We also hope to find the localized Slender-snouted Crocodile and families of diminutive Spot-necked Otter.

We will return to ou r fabulous lodge in the early afternoon and have the opportunity to enjoy a leisurely game drive in the savanna section of the park during the late afternoon. Here we will keep a lookout for Forbes's Plover, Quailfinch, Black-headed Bee-eater, Swamp Boubou and Red-tailed Leaflove as well as Forest Buffalo, Forest Elephant, Red River Hog and Sitatunga. We will return to our lodge in the early evening.

Day 3: Loango NP - Loango River Mouth and boat ride to Akaka (south). This morning we embark on the short boat trip to the nearby Loango River Estuary. Here we will scan for Western Reef Heron, White-fronted Plover and an assortment of other waders that occupy the sandbars, as well as the rare Damara Tern and Black, Common, Greater Crested and Caspian Terns. There should also be large numbers of African Skimmers



African Finfoot (female) and chick by Glen Valentine



African River Martin by Markus Lilje

roosting on the sand banks and skimming leisurely over the lagoon. Forest Buffalo sometimes forage on the beach itself and we may be very lucky and observe the famous surfing Hippos for which this area is known. We will also search the riparian forest and mangroves here for Mangrove Sunbird, while Carmelite and Reichenbach's Sunbirds are likely to be seen in fairly large numbers around flowering trees. We may also find the rare and elusive Violet-tailed Sunbird here as well as more Shining-blue Kingfishers.

In the mid-morning we will begin our boat journey to the remote camp of Akaka, situated 66km further south in the heart of Loango National Park. This small and comfortable camp is set in some of the richest forest in the park and the boat ride to the camp takes us through much pristine habitat. Photographic opportunities are excellent!

Our first stop will be at a small island that is one of the few known breeding sites of the extremely localized Loango Weaver that nests here annually in small numbers along with its more widespread and abundant cousins: Slender-billed, Black-necked, Village and Vieillot's Black Weavers. Thereafter our trip will take us through vast open-water lagoons, papyrus swamps, floodplains and various forest types. Birds we are likely to encounter include Hartlaub's Duck, African Finfoot, White-bibbed Swallow, Cassin's Flycatcher, Pink-backed Pelican, Goliath Heron, Intermediate Egret, Little Bittern, Hamerkop, Yellow-billed and Woolly-necked Storks, African Fish Eagle, African Spoonbill, Giant, Malachite and Pied Kingfishers, African Jacana, White-faced Whistling Duck, African Darter, Winding Cisticola, Blue-headed Coucal and Rosy Bee-eater, and if we are fortunate, the elusive and nomadic Allen's Gallinule. This boat trip to Akaka will also be our best chance of the trip to see African River Martin that arrives from the Congo in August and nests in the area in large numbers from the end of September! In addition, this boat trip will offer us excellent mammal-watching opportunities, with good chances of close encounters with Forest Elephant, as well as Red River Hog, Forest Buffalo and a range of monkeys, including the attractive Red-capped and Grey-cheeked Mangabey and Moustached and Crowned Monkeys. Chances even exist for sightings of Chimpanzee, Hippopotamus and Sitatunga, and if we are extremely lucky, Leopard and Lowland Gorilla. This evening we will search the surrounding forest for the beautiful, elusive and much-desired Vermiculated Fishing Owl, as well as Bates's Nightjar.



Forbes's Plover by David Hoddinott

Day 4: Loango NP - Akaka area and boat ride back to Loango Lodge. We have a full morning to explore the wonderful area around Akaka. Puttering slowly and quietly along the network of channels in the area, we'll watch



Black-headed Bee-eater
by David Hoddinott

and listen out for African River Martin, Violet-tailed Sunbird, Congo Serpent Eagle, Long-tailed Hawk and White-browed Forest Flycatcher, while savouring the numerous Rosy Bee-eaters, Cassin's and Sabine's Spinetails and Black-casqued and Piping Hornbills. We shall also head into one of the forest patches along forest trails where we may encounter Red-chested Goshawk, Blue-headed Wood Dove, Fire-crested Alethe, Chestnut Wattle-eye, Red-tailed and White-tailed Ant Thrushes, Fraser's Rufous Thrush, Blue-billed Malimbe, White-crested Hornbill and Brown-eared Woodpecker, and if we are very fortunate perhaps the rare Plumed Guineafowl, the elusive and shy Bare-cheeked Trogon, Woodhouse's Antpecker or Gabon Coucal. After lunch at Akaka Camp we'll begin the return trip to Loango Lodge, keeping a lookout for any species that we may not have encountered yet or of which we require better views. We can expect to arrive back at the lodge in the late afternoon and enjoy a final dinner at this fantastic venue.

Day 5: Loango, drive to Port Gentil, flight to Libreville and departures. This morning after breakfast, we begin the five-hour drive back to Port Gentil that takes us through coastal grasslands, wetlands and forest patches. Upon arrival in Port Gentil we'll board our domestic flight to Libreville and transfer through to our nearby hotel for a farewell dinner before connecting with our international flights home.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

This includes:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to breakfast on day 15 for those on the main tour, and from lunch on day 1 to dinner on day 5 for those on the Loango Extension;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- Ground transportation;
- Reserve entrance fees;
- All guiding services (including local guides and tour leaders); and
- Gratuities for local guides and other staff.

The tour fee does not include:

- **ANY** airfares;
- Visa fees;
- Any drinks;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to

ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:
a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we now quote our tours in 4 currencies (see website for all 4 currencies). The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed (see website) will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 3 months before the tour.) Approximate domestic flight and single supplement rates have been converted to US$ but are also subject to exchange rate movements.
b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.
c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to major foreign exchange fluctuations and unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.
d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and/or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, porters, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader. If, therefore, you feel that he has given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip him.

Special Notes

- The pace of the tour is generally moderate.
- Gabon is still relatively untouched by tourism and the people are friendly and courteous. It is seen as being **inappropriate** to hand out sweets or other things to interested bystanders or anyone we may encounter along our tour. Your sensitivity in this regard would be much appreciated.
- We will be birding in some remote areas well away from modern medical facilities. If you have any pre-existing medical conditions, please inform the Rockjumper office in advance.
- Many of the hotels are of reasonable standard during the tour, although in some areas where we will be staying the only available accommodations are basic guesthouses or a tented camp with shared facilities and no hot water. However, the quality of the birding at these sites more than makes up for the minor temporary inconveniences!
- There are two long drives on this tour to access Ivindo National Park. The first will involve a short train ride of roughly an hour and then around 8 hours by vehicle from Boue to Ivindo National Park. On our return to Libreville we will go back to Boue and then take a night train through to Libreville.

ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DETAILS:
This tour **does not** include **ANY** airfares. Day 1 of the main **Gabon** tour is allocated as an arrival day and you are free to arrive at any time on this day, preferably before **17:00** so that we can all sit down for a welcome dinner. The tour will conclude in the morning on day 15 at the Leon M'ba International Airport.

For those on the **Loango Extension**, our flight will depart from the Leon M'ba International Airport, Libreville, at around midday on day 1 of the extension. Kindly arrive in advance of this time on this day, or arrive the day before. The extension will end at Leon M'ba International Airport in the late afternoon on day 5 of the extension.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Leon M'ba International Airport (IATA: LBV) in Libreville is the starting point for the main tour **and** the Loango Extension. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**