



## GABON BIRDING ADVENTURE

3-16 February 2020



**White-crested Tiger Heron** is one of the species we hope to see on this trip.

Gabon is a relatively undiscovered gem for birdwatchers. This French-speaking country is located in Equatorial West Africa and complements our “bulge of Africa” tours much further to the north (Ghana being the usual destination we run in that part of the world). While Gabon has no endemic birds, there are some tantalizing species such as **African River Martin**, **White-crested Tiger-Heron**, and various others that are arguably more easily found here than anywhere else. We also time our trip early in the year to maximize the chance of **Grey-necked Rockfowl** (*Picathartes*), one of two species forming a West African endemic family! (For near-guaranteed views of a rockfowl, it is best to join our Ghana tour, though.) Almost 70% of Gabon is still covered by pristine, primeval lowland rainforest, which is part of the appeal. With a population of just 1.5 million people, Gabon’s forests remain relatively untouched. The country also has a wide range of other habitats, not only tropical rainforest, but also coastal lagoons, large rivers, grassland, and pristine beaches, all of which are home to a wide variety of spectacular birds. Apart from birds, Gabon also boasts spectacular animals such as African Forest Elephant, African Elephant, three species of crocodile, several marine turtles, Chimpanzee, Western Gorilla, and other amazing primates.

This tour can be combined with our following **Birding Tour São Tomé and Príncipe: 10-day Birding Adventure 2020** (18 – 27 February 2020) and following that with our **Birding Tour Ghana: Upper guinea Forest and Pre-Sahel 2020** (1 – 22 March 2020).

### Itinerary (14 days/13 nights)

#### Day 1. Arrival in Libreville

On arrival into Libreville International Airport you will meet the tour leader and then be transferred to the hotel for your overnight stay.

#### Day 2. Libreville

We spend the day birding around the Gabonese capital and embark on an unforgettable two weeks of birding in Gabon.

Among the many birds we will watch out for in Libreville are **Carmelite** and **Reichenbach’s Sunbirds**, **Woodland Kingfisher**, **Grey-backed Camaroptera**, **Red-headed Lovebird**, **Blue-breasted Bee-eater**, **Chattering Cisticola** **Orange-cheeked Waxbills**, **Klaas’s Cuckoo**, **Blue-headed Coucal**, **Splendid Starling**, and **Black-and-white Mannikin**.

#### Day 3. Libreville to Omboué

Today we set off early, traveling south via a flight to Port Gentil to Omboué, where we will stay for two nights. Once we arrive at our hotel on the shores of the Nkomi Lagoon we will explore the hotel’s gardens, where we may see **Slender-billed Weaver**, **Blue-headed Coucal**, and **Green-backed Woodpecker**. Then, time permitting, we can take a boat trip out to Fernan Vaz Lagoon, where we may see **Cassin’s Flycatcher** and perhaps **White-crested Tiger Heron**.

Among the many birds we will watch out for at Omboué are **Palm-nut Vulture**, **Ethiopian Swallow**, **African Skimmer**, **Little Tern**, **Grey Pratincole**, **Water Thick-knee**, **Rock Pratincole**, **Pied Kingfisher**, **African Pied Wagtail**, **Great Egret**, **Woolly-necked Stork**, **White-fronted Plover**, **Little Tern**, **Giant Kingfisher**, **Yellow-breasted Apalis**, **Rufous-vented Paradise Flycatcher**, and **Swamp Boubou**.

#### Day 4. Loango National Park

From Omboué we will spend the day birding in Loango National Park, including a boat safari. This park is not only abundant with birds but also famous for the wildlife that lives there, including African Forest Elephant, Forest Buffalo (the smallest subspecies of African Buffalo), Red River Hog, Slender-snouted Crocodile, and even Leopard. We may perhaps see the elephants stroll along the beaches of the park and playing in the surf, alongside **Forbes's Plover** and **Western Reef Heron**.

Among the many birds we will watch out for in Loango National Park are **Royal Tern, Black-casqued Hornbill, White-crowned Lapwing, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat, Senegal Coucal, Long-legged Pipit, Woodland Kingfisher, Damara Tern, Yellow-throated Tinkerbird, Red-chested Cuckoo, African Crake, Grey-rumped Swallow, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, and Yellow-billed Turaco**.

#### Day 5. Omboué to Lambaréné

We will leave the hotel early this morning for an unforgettable journey by boat from Omboué to Lambaréné. We will depart, luggage and all, down the Ogooué River in a south-easterly direction to Lake Onangué. Birds and scenery along the way will be breathtaking!

#### Days 6 – 7. Lambaréné to Tsam Tsam

We will rise early for a short boat transfer to Tsam Tsam, where we will be spending two nights in the heart of the Gabonese tropical rainforest. Tsam Tsam is an ecotourism site run by the non-profit organization OELO (Organisation Ecotouristique du Lac Oguemoué). We will journey up the Ogooué River, rich in avifauna, towards Tsam Tsam, where we will stay in cabins on stilts in the rainforest overlooking the Ogooué River. Flocks of **Grey Parrots** and **Piping Hornbills** will be a common sight.

Once settled into the camp we may take a boat ride to some nearby quiet ponds – these ponds are host to small flocks of the brilliant **Hartlaub's Duck**, with **Black** and **Cassin's Spinetails** circling in the skies above. In the evening, weather permitting, we will take a night boat trip looking for **Vermiculated Fishing Owl, Pel's Fishing Owl, and White-backed Night Heron** among other nocturnal species.

In the early morning mist on the second day here we will walk in the forest patches on site before breakfast to see what is active. We may even hear or see Western Gorillas. Then post-breakfast we will spend a full day exploring the forests and visiting the patches of grass clearings to see what species may be there. Depending on what we see, it may also be possible, later in the afternoon, to visit nearby Tsam Tsam village. Tsam Tsam will be an unforgettable rainforest experience.

Among the many birds we will watch out for around Tsam Tsam are **Shining-blue Kingfisher, Bates's Nightjar, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher, Red-rumped Tinkerbird, Pectoral-patch Cisticola, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Long-legged Pipit, Quailfinch, Violet-tailed Sunbird, Cassin's Malimbe, White-browed Forest Flycatcher, Fire-crested Alethe, Grey-backed Camaroptera, and Velvet-mantled Drongo**,

#### Day 8. Tsam Tsam to Lambaréné

After breakfast, we will board the boat to Lambaréné and enjoy more fantastic birding as we travel further upriver. On reaching Lambaréné we will stay at a guesthouse near the Albert

Schweitzer Hospital. The Albert Schweitzer Hospital was established in 1913 by Albert Schweitzer. Its Medical Research Unit is one of the leading scientific institutions in Africa and a highly regarded training site for African physicians. There is also good birding to be had there in the grounds, with **Grey-headed Nigrita** and **Black-winged Oriole**.

Among the many birds we will watch out for around Lambaréné are **Yellow-throated Tinkerbird**, **Yellow-mantled Weaver**, **Fraser's Rufous Thrush**, **Golden Greenbul**, **Tambourine Dove**, **Lesser Striped Swallow**, **Lizard Buzzard**, **Square-tailed Saw-wing**, **African River Martin**, **Shining Drongo**, **Goliath Heron**, and **African Harrier-Hawk**.

### Days 9 - 10. Lopé National Park

Today we head overland to Lopé National Park, which is one of the biggest national parks in Gabon and a mix of rivers, bush savanna, open plains, and forest. Arriving in the afternoon, we will have time to explore around our accommodation and do a short excursion onto the plains. Not only is Lopé home to many bird species but also to a population of Forest Buffalo and African Forest Elephant, and in the forest there is a wide variety of primates, including Putty-nosed, Crowned, and Moustached Monkeys, Grey-cheeked Mangabey, and Black Colobus – we might with much luck even see Mandrill. Some of the avian specialties include the rare and localized **Ja River Scrub Warbler** and perhaps a **Bat Hawk** hunting the forest edges.

Given the size of the reserve we will only be able to cover a fraction of it. In the grasslands we may be lucky to see **Senegal Lapwing**, **Bronze Mannikin**, and **Red-billed Quelea**. Where the grasslands give way to scrub, **Blue-breasted Bee-eater** and **Cinnamon-breasted Bunting** may also be found. At the forest edges we may see **Long-tailed Hawk**, **Red-chested Owlet**, and the superb **White-crested Hornbill**.

Among the many birds we will watch out for around Lopé National Park are **Lyre-tailed Honeyguide**, **Viellot's Black Weaver**, **Chattering Cisticola**, **Speckled Tinkerbird**, **Splendid Starling**, **Lemon-bellied Crombec**, **Fraser's Forest Flycatcher**, **Grey Tit-Flycatcher**, **African Shrike-flycatcher**, **Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher**, **African Paradise Flycatcher**, **Brown-throated Wattle-eye**, **Superb Sunbird**, **Red-eyed Puffback**, **Fiery-breasted Bushshrike**, **Western Black-headed Batis**, **Croaking Cisticola**, **Yellow-lored Bristlebill**, and **Dark-backed Weaver**.

### Days 11 – 12. Ivindo National Park

From Lopé we travel further eastwards towards the town of Makokou on the edge of Ivindo National Park. En route we pass pristine forest and will look out for more species – we may see **Western Bluebill** and **Black-bellied Seedcracker**. Along the banks of the Ivindo River we may see the strange **African River Martin**. Our destination is the Ipassa Makokou Biosphere Reserve in the northern part of Ivindo National Park. This is equatorial rainforest, approximately 10,000 hectares in size and situated in a rich area for forest birds. There are many paths cutting through the forest to explore. Here we may hear and even see **Yellow-throated Cuckoo**, **Bare-cheeked Trogon**, **African Piculet**, and the beautiful **Rachel's Malimbe**. It is more likely that we will hear many of the birds, given the density of the rainforest, but we will have a chance to see them as well, as they often gather to feed on the exposed rainforest tracks bisecting the forest. Around the Ipassa Research Station we are likely to see the impressive **Great Blue Turaco** and **Red-fronted Parrot**. The elusive **Congo Serpent Eagle** may also make an appearance.

Among the many birds we will watch out for around Ivindo and Ipassa are **Red-tailed Bristlebill, Eastern Bearded Greenbul, Gabon Woodpecker, Gosling's Apalis, Mackinnon's Shrike, Maxwell's Black Weaver, Afep Pigeon, Hairy-breasted Barbet, White-thighed Hornbill, Mottled Spinetail, Rufous-sided Broadbill, Black Dwarf Hornbill, Rufous-crowned Eremomela, Swamp Palm Bulbul, Sjöstedt's Greenbul, Brown Illadopsis, Red-tailed Ant Thrush, Forest Robin, Grey Parrot, Dusky Tit, Purple-throated Cuckooshrike, Grey Longbill, Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, African Emerald Cuckoo, Yellow-throated Nicator, Scaly Francolin, Blue-throated Roller, Cassin's Hawk-Eagle, Chestnut-breasted Nigrita, Sabine's Spinetail, African Dwarf Kingfisher, Brown-chested Alethe, Violet-backed Hyliota, Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher, and Blue-headed Wood Dove.**

### Day 13. Makokou to Lambaréné

Today we head back toward Libreville, but to break up the long journey we will spend the night in Lambaréné. Here we will enjoy more birding, both en route and around the Albert Schweitzer Hospital gardens and in local areas.

### Day 14. Lambaréné to Libreville

It's an early start today to undertake a long drive to Libreville, with birding en route. Among the many birds we will watch out for between Lambaréné and Libreville are **Black-bellied Seedcracker, Woodland Kingfisher, Common Bulbul, Bronze Mannikin, African Pied Hornbill, Grey Parrot, and Tambourine Dove.**

Once in Libreville you will either opt to stay an extra night or take a late evening flight. End of services.

*Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides, and other factors. Please also note that for this particular tour we are planning to make some major changes to the itinerary without affecting the bird and mammal species we expect to see. Gabon is notoriously expensive, and from time to time we have to make quite major changes (but, again, without adversely affecting the birding targets) to keep the prices in check to some extent. We try our best to target the most strategic bird species (i.e. widespread West African specials as well as more localized Equatorial West African birds such as **Grey-necked Rockfowl** and **African River Martin**), while keeping the price as reasonable as possible, given the fact that Gabon always is pricey. We also try our best for important mammals such as Western Gorilla, but if you want near-guarantee sightings of gorillas, we suggest joining our annual Uganda tour (for Mountain Gorillas).*

<b>Duration:</b>	14 days
<b>Limit:</b>	8, but we can also sometimes run this trip at the advertised price with a slightly smaller group - we will let you know if there is a surcharge if the trip does not fill completely.
<b>Date:</b>	3 - 16 February 2020
<b>Start:</b>	Libreville

**End:** Libreville  
**Price:** €7769 per person sharing  
**Single Supplement:** €650

**Price includes:**

Meals  
Accommodation  
Guiding fees  
All transport while on tour including airport transfers  
Bottled water throughout the tour

**Price excludes:**

Flights  
Airport taxes  
Visa fees  
Items of a personal nature, e.g. laundry, gifts  
Drinks other than bottled water  
Personal insurance  
Gratuities

**Approximate costs of items not included:**

Gabon visa €150

**Accommodation:** The hotels and lodges are mostly of good or medium standard. At Ipassa we may stay at the research station with shared facilities.

**Transport:** Transport will be by minivan, 4x4, and boat (where applicable).

**Difficulty:** The walking effort is mostly easy. You must also bear in mind the humidity, so taking adequate water is essential.

**Climate:** Mostly hot and humid, particularly in forest areas, with dry and sunny weather and some overcast and rainy spells