



COMPLETE GABON – RARE BIRDS AND APES

28 AUGUST–15 SEPTEMBER 2027



Gabon is home to many rather rare and poorly-known birds – one of the most wanted of them is Black-headed Bee-eater.

Overview

Gabon is a relatively undiscovered gem and hosts a great many difficult African bird species. This French-speaking country is located in Equatorial West Africa and complements our “bulge of Africa” tours much further to the north-west (Ghana being the usual destination we run in that part of the world, along with Senegal). While Gabon has no endemic birds, there are several tantalizing species such as **African River Martin**, **Grey-necked Rockfowl**, **Black-headed Bee-eater**, **Vermiculated Fishing Owl**, and various other Congo-basin species that are arguably more easily found here than anywhere else.

Almost 70 percent of Gabon is still covered by pristine, primeval lowland rainforest, which is part of the appeal, and, with a country population of under 2 million people, these forests remain relatively untouched. The country also has a wide range of other habitats, not only tropical rainforest but also coastal lagoons, pristine beaches, large rivers and associated riverine vegetation, montane-type grasslands, and broken miombo woodland, all of which are home to a wide variety of fabulous birds. Gabon also boasts spectacular animals, and these still relatively untouched wildernesses (such as within the amazing Loango National Park, and the vast Lopé National Park) are home to the likes of **African Forest Elephant**, the striking **Red River Hog**, three species of crocodile, **Western Gorilla** and the iconic **Mandrill**, amongst others.



*We include two specific ape-trekking permits in the tour cost, for Mandrill and **Western Gorilla** (pictured) – which add an exciting dimension to the tour (photo Sue Bryan).*

Our comprehensive Gabon tour visits all of the key birding sites and targets a great deal of the country’s many specials. Beginning in the coastal capital city of Libreville, our first “leg” travels around the interior of the country, beginning with a flight to Franceville. From here, we explore

the wild open expanses of the Lekoni region and the Bateke Plateau for scarce species like **Congo Moor Chat**, **Black-chinned Weaver**, **Black-collared Bulbul** and the mega **Black-headed Bee-eater**. We then transfer to the extremely wild and largely untouched forests of the greater Makokou area, where we have four nights to give us a shot at the many scarce equatorial African forest species, including the highly-desired **Grey-necked Rockfowl** – which we have a special day set aside to search for them. We then move onto Lopé National Park, where we finish our inland leg of the tour hoping for birds like **Congo Serpent Eagle** and the localized **Dja River Scrub Warbler**. Whilst at Lopé, we will also have a dedicated **Mandrill** trekking activity, where we should see these rare animals.

We then transit back to Libreville, and take a short domestic flight to the coastal wetlands, rivers, and surrounding forests of the greater Loango National Park. This vast wilderness is truly incredible and is sure to be a major highlight. Here, multiple boat trips and exquisite wilderness lodges, will be enjoyed alongside herds of animals and vast numbers of birds. This is a superb way to end our tour, as we seek out the country's more well-known specials, such as **African River Martin** and **Rosy Bee-eater**, along with others such as the rare **Vermiculated Fishing Owl**, closely related **Pel's Fishing Owl** and **White-crested Tiger Heron**. It is in Loango, where we will have our dedicated **Western Gorilla** trekking activity.



***Black-collared Bulbul** is a range restricted species that favors mesic grassy savannas on the edges of forests – and is one of our primary targets in the early days of the tour in the Lekoni region.*

Detailed Itinerary (19 days/18 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Libreville

Today is your arrival day, and you are welcome to arrive at your leisure (there are no formal plans for birding today). Following your arrival into the Gabonese capital of Libreville you will be transferred to your hotel, where the tour will begin with a group dinner.

Overnight: Libreville hotel (or similar)

Day 2. Flight to Franceville, and transfer to Bongoville

We will take a morning flight to Franceville (depending on flight schedules), from where we will have a short drive to Bongoville. We will be based here for three nights, using this as a base for our explorations of the Lekoni area. We will likely have the afternoon available to us to begin our birding and can get a head-start on some of the species listed under Days 3 – 4 below.

Overnight: Bongoville hotel (or similar)



*The splendid **Black Bee-eater** occurs throughout the country.*

Days 3–4. Birding Lekoni and surroundings

The area around Lekoni is rather unique in equatorial Africa – comprising of, most notably, the higher-lying grasslands of the Batéké Plateau, a habitat zone that seems very much out of place here. Naturally, this somewhat isolated habitat hosts many unique bird species, not found elsewhere in Gabon and more characteristic of further south in Africa – such as parts of Angola

and Zambia. In addition to these montane-type grasslands there are also small tracts of somewhat-stunted miombo woodland along with patches of montane forest, creating a fantastic birding environment! Arguably the most prized bird of the grassland zone is the sought-after **Congo Moor Chat**, which is relatively common and normally fairly conspicuous. However, not to be outdone are other sought-after species such as **Finsch's Francolin**, **Black-rumped Buttonquail**, **Plains Lark**, the ever-prized **Black-collared Bulbul**, scarce **Black-chinned Weaver**, **Fawn-breasted Waxbill**, and **Short-tailed Pipit**.



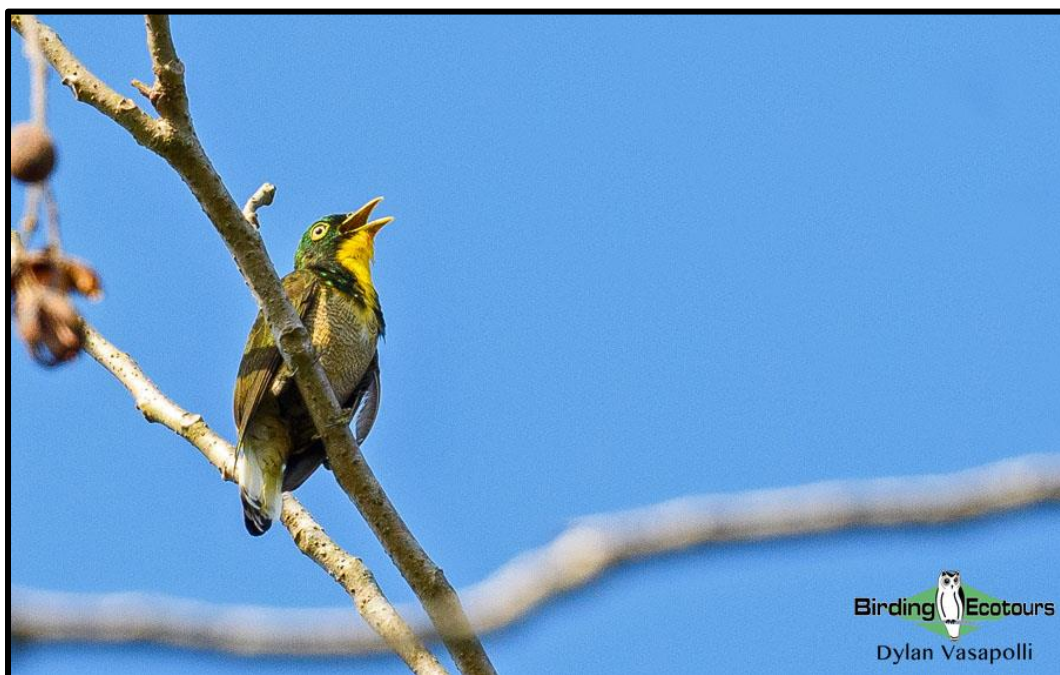
Congo Moor Chat is one of our main targets in the grasslands around Lekoni.

Where the grasslands give way to often-stunted miombo-type woodlands we will focus on other species more characteristic of this unique woodland belt running through south-central Africa, such as **Black-backed Barbet**, **Black Scimitarbill**, **Red-capped Crombec**, **Yellow-bellied Hyliota**, **Tinkling Cisticola**, **Green-capped** and **Salvadori's Eremomelas**, **White-winged Black Tit**, **Western Violet-backed Sunbird**, **Wood Pipit** and **Cabanis's Bunting**, amongst others. Small patches of thickets can be found in the woodland areas and host a surprisingly different suite of species – no matter how small they are. We will try for the likes of **Bocage's** and **Lühder's Bushshrikes**, **Angolan Batis**, **Sharpe's Drongo** and even **African Broadbill**.

Much closer to our home base, the Bongoville forest is excellent, and gives us our first opportunity at accessing some lowland forest, with a host of representative birds possible. The birding in these lowland forests is notoriously difficult, with the birds often shy and requiring lots of work and effort to be seen – something that we will have to get used to during our forest birding in Gabon. Easily the main target of this forest is the highly sought-after **Black-headed Bee-eater** (see cover image), which usually occurs around the forest edges. We should also be able to find our first **Black Bee-eater** here as well (another stunning member of this family), along with other forest

specials like **Yellow-throated Cuckoo**, the notoriously difficult-to-see **Lyre-tailed Honeyguide**, **Rufous-bellied Helmetshrike**, **Spotted Greenbul**, **Purple-headed Starling**, **Cassin's Malimbe** and **Tiny Sunbird**, amongst many others. Barbets and tinkerbirds abound, and we should be able to find the likes of **Yellow-spotted** and **Hairy-breasted Barbets** and **Red-rumped Tinkerbird**, and the calls of **Yellow-billed Turacos** are usually not far away.

Overnight: Bongoville hotel (or similar)



*The diminutive **Yellow-throated Cuckoo** is a sought-after lowland forest bird.*

Day 5. Transfer to Makokou

Following the Lekoni area, our next major birding destination is the impressive forests of the greater Makokou area (which includes the vast Ipassa Strict Nature Reserve/Ivindo National Park, and surrounds). This is a very long drive, on a bad road for the most part, and will likely take us the bulk of the day. Although we will spend virtually the whole drive passing through excellent forested areas, which is sure to whet our appetite, we will not have much time available for birding. Importantly, we do have backup sites for the mega **Black-headed Bee-eater** along the way and can also have our first attempt at other scarce species like **Gosling's Apalis**. We anticipate rolling into Makokou in the late afternoon.

Overnight: Makokou hotel (or similar)

Days 6–8. The Ipassa forests and Grey-necked Rockfowl

We have three full days of birding, in which to explore and try to find many of the exciting species that exist here. Most of our time will be spent in and around the Ipassa-Makokou Strict Nature

Reserve, where we will explore the forest edges around the old research station and undertake hikes into the heart of the forest. Although we will be virtually entirely on foot, forest birding can be difficult, and this area is certainly no exception, however, with patience, and a bit of luck, we should enjoy a number of the area's many specials.

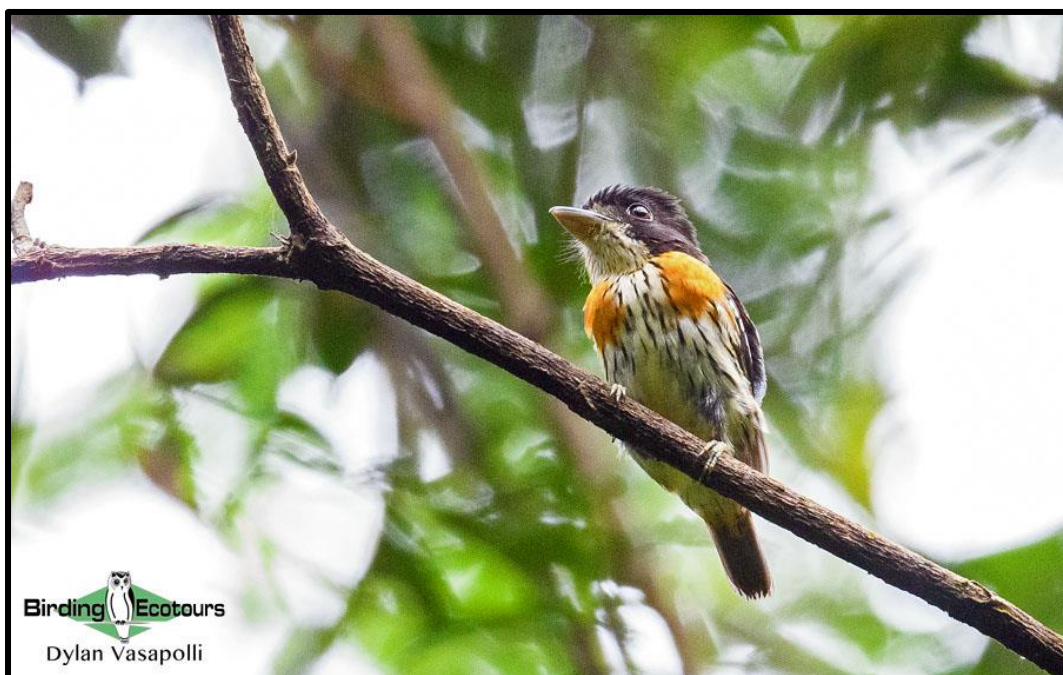


*An abundance of hornbills frequents the mature and relatively undisturbed forests of the greater Makokou region – here two giant **Black-casqued Hornbills** fly over the canopy.*

The canopy and upper levels of the forest play host to some of the larger and arguably more vocal species, and we will search for the massive **Great Blue Turaco** along with its more ‘normal-sized’ cousins, **Yellow-billed** and **Guinea Turacos**. A plethora of hornbills occurs here, including sought-after **White-thighed**, **Black-casqued**, **Red-billed Dwarf**, **Black Dwarf** and **Eastern Long-tailed Hornbills**, while **Piping** and **Congo Pied Hornbills** are usually more common. **Chocolate-backed Kingfishers** call from the upper reaches of the massive trees, yet remain as difficult to see as ever. Barbets are also well represented, and the area should produce **Eastern Yellow-billed Barbet** on top of the others mentioned already. The deep calls of **Afep** and **Western Bronze-naped Pigeons** ring out throughout the forest, though it normally takes some effort to track these birds down. A number of cuckoos are also present, and our main targets will feature the sought-after **Yellow-throated Cuckoo**, along with **Dusky Long-tailed** and **Olive Long-tailed Cuckoos**, while more widespread species include **African Emerald**, **Black** and **Red-chested Cuckoos**. Not to be forgotten, a number of woodpecker species also occur here, and species such as **Yellow-crested**, **Brown-eared**, **Buff-spotted**, **Gabon** and **Green-backed Woodpeckers** all feature. Many passerines also frequent the higher reaches, and we’ll be keeping an eye out for **Red-eyed Puffback**, **Western Oriole**, **Purple-throated Cuckooshrike**, **Green Hylia**, tiny **Rufous-crowned Eremomela**, **Fraser’s Rufous Thrush**, **Dusky Tit**, **Fraser’s** and **Little Green**

Sunbirds, and all of the world's nigrilas- **Grey-headed, Pale-fronted, Chestnut-breasted and White-breasted Nigrilas**.

Species that prefer the mid-strata and vine tangles hanging the canopy include the sought-after **Bare-cheeked Trogon** and secretive **Rufous-sided Broadbill**, alongside **African Dwarf and Blue-breasted Kingfishers, Blue Malkoha, Fraser's Forest, Yellow-footed and Chestnut-capped Flycatchers, Bates's Paradise Flycatcher, Gabon Batis, Yellow-bellied and White-spotted Wattle-eyes, Western and Yellow-throated Nicators, Yellow-browed Camaroptera, Grey Longbill, the sought-after Gosling's Apalis, Maxwell's Black Weaver, and Crested, Blue-billed, Red-bellied and Cassin's Malimbos**.



Rufous-sided Broadbill is a shy denizen of the forests that we'll hope to find displaying.

Tangles, thickets, and bushy growth in the lower strata play host to many shy species, and we'll have our work cut-out for ourselves as we try to find the likes of **Blue-headed Wood Dove** and the beautiful **Yellow-breasted Forest Robin**, as well as **Brown-chested and Fire-crested Alethes, Brown and Pale-breasted Illadopsis, Olive-green Camaroptera, Banded Prinia and White-tailed Ant Thrush**.

We will also be able to hone our bulbul skills immensely here, with a vast number of different species occurring within the forest, including sought species such as **Sjöstedt's, Golden** and both **Eastern Bearded and White-bearded Greenbuls**. While an array of other species including **Anson's, Yellow-whiskered, Falkenstein's, Honeyguide, Spotted, Little Grey, Icterine, Xavier's and Red-tailed Greenbuls**, along with the noisy **Swamp Palm Bulbul** and shy **Yellow-colored and Red-tailed Bristlebills** possible as well.

Keeping an eye out for raptors flying overhead can produce species such as **Cassin's Hawk-Eagle, Congo Serpent Eagle, Long-tailed Hawk, Red-thighed Sparrowhawk and Red-chested**

Goshawk. Where such openings in the canopy are present, we will also scan the skies for aerial feeders, and hope to find **Mottled, Cassin's and Sabine's Spinetails** and the scarce **Forest Swallow**, along with **Square-tailed Saw-wing**. Flowering trees in these zones, as well as in the forest proper, play host to large numbers of sunbirds, featuring **Tiny, Carmelite, Grey-chinned, Collared, Blue-throated Brown, Olive-bellied and Superb Sunbirds**.

The grassy verges to the roads and tracks in the area may host a variety of colorful seedeaters, amongst them is the possibility of **Black-bellied Seedcracker** and **Western Bluebill**, while the likes of **Black-headed and Orange-cheeked Waxbills** and **Black-and-white Mannikin** are usually more commonly seen. While here, we can also try our luck for some of the prized (though decidedly uncommon) nocturnal birds, which might include the localized **Sjöstedt's Barred Owlet, Fraser's Eagle-Owl**, as well as both **Bates's and Brown Nightjars**.

We will need to be very fortunate, however, to come across the poorly known **Spot-breasted Ibis**, both **Black and Plumed Guineafowls**, rare **Black-collared Lovebird**, sought-after **African Piculet**, along with the likes of scarce **Fernando Po Batis, Black-necked Wattle-eye, Yellow-capped Weaver**, and both **Rachel's and Red-crowned Malimbés** – but all are possible.

*Importantly, on one of our days, we will undertake a day-long trip (with a difficult hike) to try and find one of the Africa's most sought-after birds – **Grey-necked Rockfowl**. This localized species has become almost impossible to find in recent years, due to turmoil in Cameroon (its only other accessible locality), and is thus an opening on many a world-birders list.

Overnight: Makokou hotel (or similar)



Gosling's Apalis is a scarce Central African species that is not easily seen anywhere.

Day 9. Transfer to Lopé

After our three full days birding in the lowland forests of Ipassa (and surrounds), we will journey to the vast Lopé National Park, (ultimately en-route back to Libreville). This will again be a full travel day, with a long road to negotiate, and portions of the road again being extremely bad and slow-going. We anticipate arriving at our lodge on the outskirts of the park in the late afternoon and can take a walk around the lodge surrounds, should time be available.

Overnight: La Lopé Lodge (or similar)

Days 10–11. Birding and Mandrills in Lopé National Park

This is one of the biggest national parks in Gabon, offering a mix of rivers, bush savanna, open plains, and forest. Given the size of the reserve, we will only be able to cover a fraction of it, however, we will access some of the most exciting areas in the reserve.

We will have two full days to explore, though this translates into one full day of birding (due to one day being taken up with Mandrill trekking). In the open areas we will try for species such as **Senegal Lapwing**, **Blue-breasted Bee-eater**, **Compact Weaver**, and **Red-headed Quelea**, while a distant swamp is home to arguably our biggest target – the localized **Dja River Scrub Warbler**. In the various small forest patches (and along their edges) we will seek out **Long-tailed Hawk**, **Red-chested Owlet**, **Lyre-tailed Honeyguide**, **Fiery-breasted Bushshrike** and the superb **Eastern Long-tailed Hornbill**, along with a great many others. We will also be sure to keep an eye to the sky for the sought-after **Bates's Swift** flying overhead. The massive river flowing past our lodge usually has a few waterbirds such as **White-crowned Lapwing**, **African Skimmer**, and **Rock Pratincole**. After dark, we can try for both **Bates's** and **Swamp Nightjars** in the surrounds.

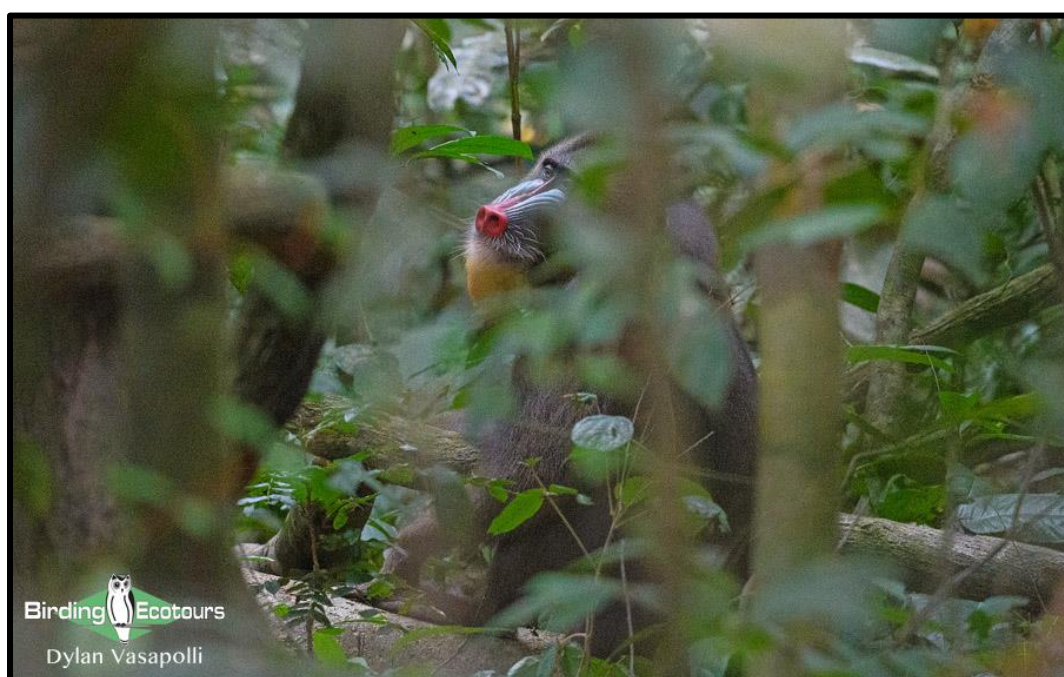


Eastern Long-tailed Hornbills, with their amazingly long tails, are a shy forest denizen.

Lopé is sure to be a good change of birding, with its mix of habitats, and we will likely have seen the bulk of the more common and widely spread species – but this is a good backup chance for us to look for any species we may yet have missed up until this point. Not only is Lopé home to many bird species but also to populations of **African Forest Elephant** and **Cape (Forest) Buffalo**, along with a wide variety of primates, including **Putty-nosed**, **Crowned**, and **Moustached Monkeys**, **Grey-cheeked Mangabey**, **Black Colobus** – and most importantly, the rare and stunning **Mandrill**.

*We have a special activity set aside, where we undertake to track and see **Mandrill** within the area. This activity is included in the tour cost and will take up one of the days (but please see more information on this under the “General Tour Information”).

Overnight: La Lopé Lodge (or similar)



*A fine male **Mandrill** watches over the enormous troop of mostly females wandering about. This photo was taken on our 2024 tour and gives an exciting in-situ image of the experience.*

Day 12. Transfer to Libreville

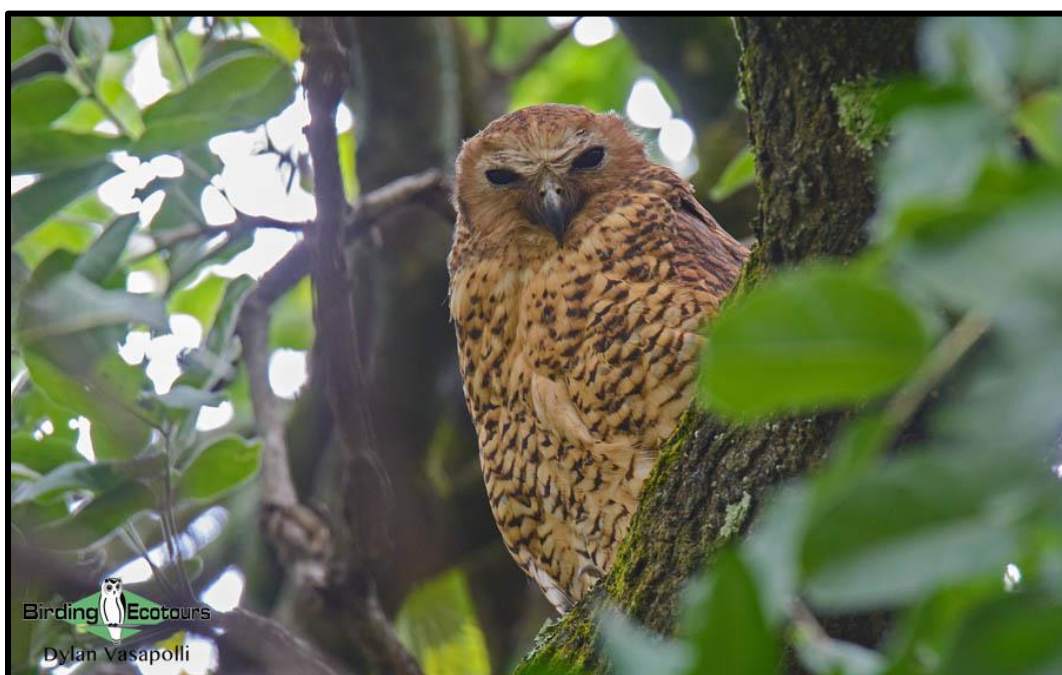
After what is sure to be an exciting and adventurous first leg of the trip, traversing the interior of Gabon, we make the long trip back to the capital, Libreville, so we can prepare for the exciting conclusion of this trip in the spectacular Loango National Park. This is another very long journey (with bad roads for part of the way) that will take the whole day, and see us getting into Libreville in the early evening. Our lunch-stop at Ndjole usually presents us with a good chance of finding the scarce **Grey Pratincole** on the distant sandbars that are visible from the town.

Overnight: Libreville hotel (or similar)

Day 13. Flight to Port-Gentil, and transfer to Omboue

Saving the best for last, we transfer south (via a flight to Port-Gentil) to the magical Loango National Park – though today, we will not get into the park itself, and will stay in the quaint village of Omboue. Located a few hours drive south of Port-Gentil, it is necessary to spend a night here, as it gives us access to the important Mpivié River, which is the best site in the country to find the highly prized **White-crested Tiger Heron** and the sought-after **Pel's Fishing Owl**. We will have a late afternoon/evening boat cruise along the river (which is reached via boat crossing a vast lagoon), which gives us our best chance at the owl, especially. We are also likely to see several other great birds, including the local **African Finfoots** (which are usually dark in coloration, compared to elsewhere), **Shining-blue Kingfisher** and **Hartlaub's Duck**.

Overnight: Omboue hotel (or similar)



Pel's Fishing Owl is one of two fishing owls we'll be trying very hard for in Gabon.

Days 14–17. Rare birds and wildlife of the Loango National Park

After a final morning boat cruise on the Mpivié River on Day 14, we will transfer the short distance to Loango National Park itself, where we will have four nights in this incredible wilderness area.

This is one of Africa's greatest remaining Eden's (as quoted by Time Magazine), oozing raw Mother Nature. We will spend our time likely between two lodges located within the park, giving us the best opportunities to access the excellent coastal savannas, thick riparian swamp forests and vibrant lagoons that make up this wilderness. The very remote (and more rustic) Akaka Camp (reached by a long, several-hour-long boat ride, deep into the park) is idyllically situated on the Akaka River, where it overlooks a floodplain and is otherwise surrounded by prime lowland forest. We have several key birding targets here, with arguably the most important going to the highly

localized **African River Martin**. These rare birds should have begun arriving during our time here, and while they will not be at their colonies breeding yet, are usually present in groups on the river, often associating with the vast flocks of **Rosy Bee-eaters** which are around. The rarely seen **Vermiculated Fishing Owl** is another of our major targets here, and some time in the evenings will be dedicated to seeing this incredible bird. We will undertake day boat cruises whilst here, and will be on the lookout for other targets like **Violet-tailed**, **Reichenbach's** and **Mangrove Sunbirds**, **White-backed Night Heron**, several kingfishers and a range of other waterbirds.



*The other fishing owl is the decidedly rarer **Vermiculated Fishing Owl**.*

The lowland forests in this part of the park are also home to some exciting birds and give us a chance at seeing rare birds like **Black** and **Plumed Guinea-fowls**, **Bare-cheeked Trogon**, **Eastern Long-tailed Hornbill** and even **Sjöstedt's Barred Owlet**, if we are lucky (though we'll need to be wary of elephants while walking). Spending some time sitting on the camp deck, overlooking the area, is a great way to see many birds with great species like the enormous **Black-casqued Hornbills** regularly flying by, along with several raptors and so many others – even **African River Martins** at times!

Aside from the many birds we'll be seeing, the park is arguably more famous for its other wildlife and general wilderness. Herds of **African Forest Elephant** roam freely and widely, as do numbers of **Cape (Forest) Buffalo**. We will keep a special eye out for the spectacular **Red River Hog**, though these are perhaps better seen in the more open savanna regions of the park, and on the waterways, **Central African Slender-snouted Crocodile** is usually evident.

*One of the main attractions on the mammalian front for us is the opportunity to track **Western Gorillas** – and this special activity gives us deeper insight into their lives, as we venture after a habituated group studied by researchers. The group size limit to see the gorillas is small, and we

will likely need to be split up over two days with the folks who are not doing the trekking that day, going out birding, and vice versa. (see more information under the “Gabon General Information”).



African River Martins perched with glorious Rosy Bee-eaters – these two species often mix together at this time of year, just prior to the river martins breeding.

We will then transit to the very comfortable Ndola Camp, closer to the savanna portions of the park and at the head of the Iguela Lagoon. Just as with Akaka, the birding from the lodge deck is superb, and the immediate surrounds often has a wide array of birds including several sought-after sunbirds and shy **Leaf-loves**, amongst others. Our time here will likely consist of a mix of boat rides and safari drives (on open-top safari style jeeps), taking us through the mosaic of beautiful coastal grasslands and small lowland forest patches.

The birdlife here is quite different, and we'll be on the lookout for the likes of **Forbes's Plover**, **Senegal Lapwing**, **Pectoral-patch Cisticola**, **Quailfinch** and **Blue-breasted Bee-eater** in the more open areas. **Rosy Bee-eaters** importantly nest in these areas, and there is usually an active colony present, which offers us excellent insight into these stunning birds. **African River Martins** also breed in these areas, but later in the season and it is not expected for us to find them at their breeding colonies (but they should be present elsewhere in the park, as mentioned above). The mega **Black-headed Bee-eater** can also be found in the area, should we still be missing this bird, as can the scarce **Congo Serpent Eagle**. A remote island in the rough vicinity holds a small number of breeding **Loango Weavers**, which we'll be on the lookout for, while the coastline here will give us another new swathe of waterbirds – with the tern roost regularly containing **African Skimmer** and **Damara Tern**.

Overnight: Loango National Park (Loango Camps – Akaka & Ndola or similar)



African Forest Elephant is one of several important mammal targets we'll be searching for – fortunately they are common in Loango. We will also be looking for others including the stunning Red River Hog.

Day 18. Final birding in Loango National Park, and transfer back to Libreville

This is the penultimate day of the tour. We have a final morning to spend within the stunning Loango National Park, searching for any missing specie, or enjoying our final moments with some of the iconic park species, like **Rosy Bee-eater**. Around midday, we will likely need to bid farewell to the park, and start our journey back to Port-Gentil, from where we will take an evening flight back to the capital, Libreville. Upon arriving at our comfortable hotel, we will settle in for one final group dinner, reminiscing about all the excellent bird and wildlife encounters we have experienced over the course of what is sure to be an incredible tour.

Overnight: Libreville hotel (or similar)

Day 19. Departure from Libreville

This is your departure day, and you are welcome to leave at your leisure. Please note that there are no formal birding plans for the day, and the tour will officially conclude after breakfast.

Overnight: Not included

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. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling or other factors.

Gabon is notoriously expensive, and we realize our itinerary is more expensive than most. It is important to mention that our tour price includes all three domestic flights, both Mandrill and Western Gorilla trekking permits, and four nights within the pricey Loango National Park – all of which increase the cost, and differentiates our tour to most other birding tour offerings



Loango National Park is an indescribable wilderness area, and we allocate four nights within the park to take it all in.

Tour Details

Duration:	19 days
Group size:	6
Dates:	28 August–15 September 2027
Start:	Libreville
End:	Libreville
Price:	€ TBA per person sharing based on 6 participants (2027)
Single supplement:	€ TBA (2027)

Price includes:

All accommodation
Airport transfers, on day of arrival/departure only
All meals from dinner on Day 1 to breakfast on Day 19
Bottled water
International tour leader and local guide(s) where applicable
Park entrance fees
All ground transport costs
*Domestic flights cost (Libreville – Franceville ; Libreville – Port-Gentil ; Port-Gentil – Libreville)
*Mandrill tracking permit (Lopé NP)
*Western Gorilla tracking permit (Loango NP)
*All standard drinks within Loango National Park

Price excludes:

International flights to/from Libreville
Travel insurance
Entry visas
Soft and alcoholic drinks (except water)
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))
Gifts and other items of a personal nature