



ECOFAC
Muriel VIVES
BP 15115
Libreville - GABON
Tel: (241) 73 23 43/44
Fax: (241) 73 23 45
Email: ecofac.coord@internetgabon.com
www.ecofac.org

GABON



Lopé fauna reserve

Situated on the equator in the centre of the vast central African forest block, the Lopé Reserve in Gabon is located 350 km to the east of Libreville, a 7 hour ride by vehicle or 4 hours by express train.

It is a living witness of what central Africa used to be like 18 000 years ago. At this time, the climate of the earth became colder and drier. Tropical rain forests that need warm temperatures and high humidity retreated and were replaced by savannas. Patches of forest remained in wetter places and formed forest refuges. When the global climate warmed up again the forest started re-colonising the savanna from these forest islands. It is this phenomenon that explains the savannah/forest mosaic in the north of the Lopé Reserve with Marantaceae forest characteristic of young forests.

The Lopé Reserve has a relatively dry climate compared to most other equatorial rain forests because of its position in the rain shadow of the Chaillu mountain range. The southern area is covered by primary forest. Its fauna is typical for central Africa forests : primates, antilopes, buffalos, elephants. The Lopé Reserve has several emblematic primate species, in particular gorillas, chimpanzees, mandrills and the endemic sun-tailed monkey (*Cercopithecus solatus*), only discovered in 1984 !.

In Lopé some of the oldest traces of human artefacts in central Africa can be found : the Stone Age lasted from 400 000 years ago until 4000 to 5000 years ago.

☛ Highlights :

- Opportunity to watch primates : gorillas, mandrills, chimpanzees, small monkeys as well as other large forest species : forest elephants , sitatungas, forest buffalo, red river hog...).
- Lopé is a unique place to observe the vast tropical rain forest.
- Observation on foot or by boat.
- **Gorilla tracking**
- Birdwatching : the **picathartes (or bare headed rock fowl)**, one of the most difficult birds to observe, is resident in the Mikongo zone. A “megatwich” for all birdwachers !
- You will help to protect the Lopé Reserve and combat poaching.
- Accommodation in a comfortable lodge in the Reserve and/or in a tented camp.
- Programms can be arranged according to time available.

☛ Suggested programmes

For the lowland gorilla visits we recommend that during the first year you programme two days of tracking in order to give your clients a better chance of obtaining good observations.

- **2 days : Mikongo Gorillas**

- Day 1 : Transfer from the railway station at Lopé, or from the hotel, to Mikongo Lodge. Lunch at the lodge. Briefing. Dinner and night at Mikongo in double rooms.
- Day 2 : 5.45 : breakfast. 6.30 : 1 tracker + 1 guide for a maximum of 3 people to go gorilla tracking. Picnic on the way. Back in the afternoon and transfer back to Lopé hotel or railway station.

- **3 days : Mikongo Gorillas**

- Day 1 : Arrival in the evening at Mikongo. Transfer from the Lopé railway station or the hotel. Dinner and night at Mikongo in double rooms.
- Day 2 : 5.45 : breakfast. 6.30 : 1 tracker for a maximum of 3 people to go gorilla tracking. Picnic on the way. Back in the afternoon. Dinner and night at Mikongo in double rooms.
- Day 3 : 5.45 : breakfast. 6.30 : 1 tracker for a maximum of 3 people to go gorilla tracking. Picnic on the way. Back in the afternoon. Return by vehicle to the Lopé railway station or the Lopé hotel.

A typical day gorilla tracking: a 5 to 7 hour walk in the forest with the local tracker who is following gorilla trail. An early start is important as is the need to make as little noise as possible in order to hear the various forest noises and detect groups of monkeys and other animals. The walk is easy with frequent stops to listen. If elephant or buffalo are encountered it is vital to follow the guide's instructions.

- **2 days : by dugout canoe on the Offoué river**

- Day 1 : Departure by ECOFAC vehicle from the Lopé railway station, or the hotel, to Mikongo Lodge. Picnic before setting off up river in the dugout canoe. Night under canvas on the river bank - full board.
- Day 2 : descent of the Offoué river. Picnic on the way. Back in the afternoon to the Lopé railway station or the hotel.

A typical day on the river by dugout canoe: the boat has an outboard engine but paddles are used whenever possible when going down stream in order to ensure the best viewing conditions for wildlife along the river banks.

- **4 days : Mikongo and Offoué river**

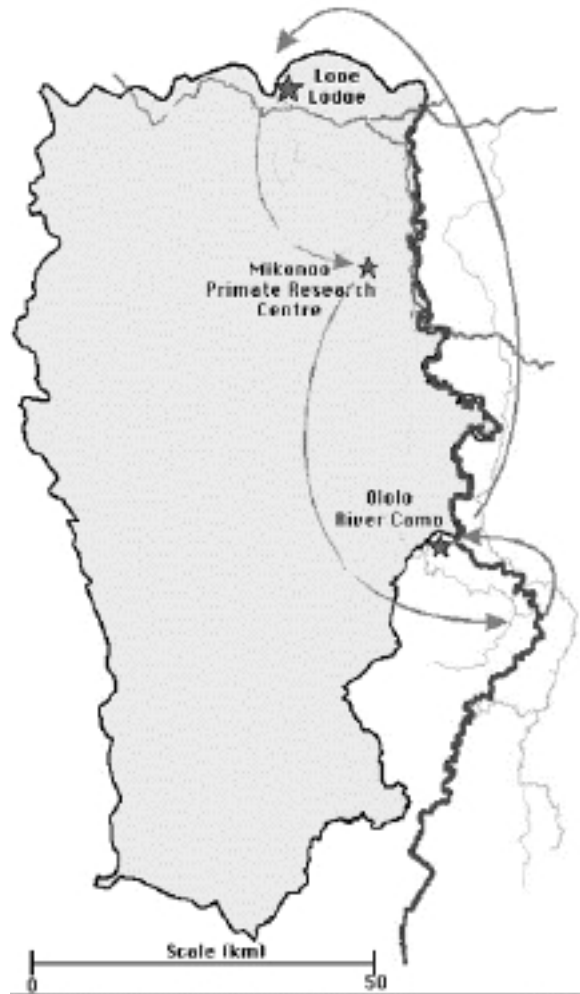
- Day 1 : Transfer by ECOFAC vehicle from the Lopé railway station, or the hotel, to Mikongo. Dinner and night at Mikongo in double rooms.
 - Day 2 : 5.45 : breakfast. 6.30 : 1 tracker for a maximum of 3 people tracking gorillas. Picnic on the way. Back in the afternoon. Dinner and night at Mikongo in double rooms.
- Note : For groups of up to a maximum of 12 persons, the programme can be alternated between 2 groups of 6 on the river and 2 groups of 3 gorilla tracking.
- Day 3 : 5.45 : breakfast. 6.30 : 1 tracker for a maximum of 3 people tracking gorillas. Picnic on the way and return to Mikongo by 13.00. Transfer to the Offoué river. Boat along the river. Night under canvas on the river bank - full board.
 - Day 4 : continue on the Offoué river. Picnic on the way. Back in the afternoon to the Lopé railway station or the hotel.

- **2 days : birdwatching**

- Day 1 : Transfer by ECOFAC vehicle from the Lopé railway station, or the hotel, to Mikongo. Dinner and night at Mikongo in double rooms.

- Day 2 : 5.45 : breakfast. 6 .30 : 1 tracker for a maximum of 3 people birdwatching. Picnic on the way and return to Mikongo by 15.00. Back in the afternoon to the Lopé railway station or the hotel.

The programm may have to be changed at short notice for security, weather or other reasons. The ECOFAC staff and the local guides will always do their utmost to find the best option, even ir it means changing the routing. When discovering other cultures and mentalities a sense of tolerance and mutual respect is important.



➤ **Conditions :**

- **Logistics :**

- Guiding : 1 tracker and 1 guide for maximum 6 people for wildlife viewing.
- Transportation : by train from Libreville, by 4x4 vehicle in the park, by motorised dugout canoe along the Offoué river, and on foot for wildlife viewing.

- **Accommodation / catering :**

- La Lopé Hotel : 15 air conditioned and comfortable bungalows. A restaurant serves European food.
- Lodge Mikongo : Forest lodge of 6 wooden bungalows. Air conditioning is not necessary on the forest where temperatures are much cooler. European food is served.
- Camp along the Offoué river : nights under canvas
- Meals : breakfast and dinner at the hotel or in the camp, picnic lunch.

- **Security and level of fitness required:**

- Gorilla tracking is not especially arduous but client should nevertheless be in good physical shape and enjoy walking. Conditions are sometimes very humid which some people may find difficult to support.
- Offoué river trips are for a maximum of 6 people at a time.
- All participants must know how to swim.
- Children under the age of 16 are not accepted for gorilla tracking.
- **Warning : to protect the gorillas from the possibility of catching human diseases, clients suffering from an infectious illness will not be permitted to visit the gorillas. No refunds will be given.**
- Visiting a wildlife reserve can be dangerous if simple rules of common sense and security are not observed. Follow the instructions of the guides at all times when hiking in the forest.
- It is strongly recommended to take an insurance for medical evacuation.

- **Seasons :**

- January, February : short dry season, good for tourism : few rain showers, comfortable temperatures. Low water on rivers for boat trips.
- March, April : short rainy season. Many rain showers, very hot. Good light for photography.
- June, July, August: long dry season. Little rain, very comfortable temperatures (22/25 °C) but not much sun, clouded skies and less good light for photography. Low water in the rivers slowing down speed of dugout canoes. Difficult time for gorilla tracking as gorillas move about much more in search of food, and there are fewer tracks visible on the dry ground.
- September, October, December : long rainy season. Very wet, high water level in rivers, and very hot. Plenty of fruits in the forest which makes animal observations easier.

➤ Practical Information :

- **Health**

- Vaccination against yellow fever is compulsory
- anti-malarial treatment is essential.
- Check polio, tetanus and B.C.G.
- Meningitis (A+C), Hepatitis (A+B) and Typhoid are recommended.

- **Formalities, language and currency**

- Valid passport (at least 6 months) and visa (350FF as of 31/03/01).
- The official language is French. Most common local language spoken is « fang »
- Local currency is the CFA franc : 100 F CFA = 1 FF. Credit cards are little used. It is recommended that visitors bring French francs which are readily accepted in hotels and restaurants.

- **Flights and local time**

- Same time as in France in winter; 1 hour ahead in summer.
- From Europe Gabon's capital Libreville is served by : Air Gabon, Air France, Swissair, Royal Air Maroc.

➤ To know more about wildlife viewing:

The animals in the Central African rain forest are much more frugivorous (fruit-eating) than those of the East African plains which are mainly browsers or grazers.

Knowledge of the plants and their fruiting periods is important because animal movements are determined by fruit production. From October to December fruit is abundant in the forest. The dry season which lasts from July to September is a time of fruit scarcity and animals move a lot more in search of food. Some species like elephants and gorillas come out on to the edge of the savannah to eat wild guavas.

- **Gorillas** : two families are currently being habituated to human presence. However for the moment encounters with gorillas are somewhat irregular, although becoming more and more frequent.
- **Mandrills** : large groups of several hundred individuals (as many as 600 have been recorded - the biggest groups anywhere in the world!) can be found in the reserve. They are currently being studied, as little is known about these primates. Observing these groups is a spectacular event though relatively rare.
- **Small monkeys** : 5 diurnal species can be commonly observed in Lope : *Colobus satanas*, *Cercocebus albigena*, *Cercopithecus cephus*, *C. nictitans* and *C. pogonias*. They are frequently seen on walks in the forest.
- **Elephants** : forest elephants can be observed in the savannahs, in swampy areas or near fruiting trees.