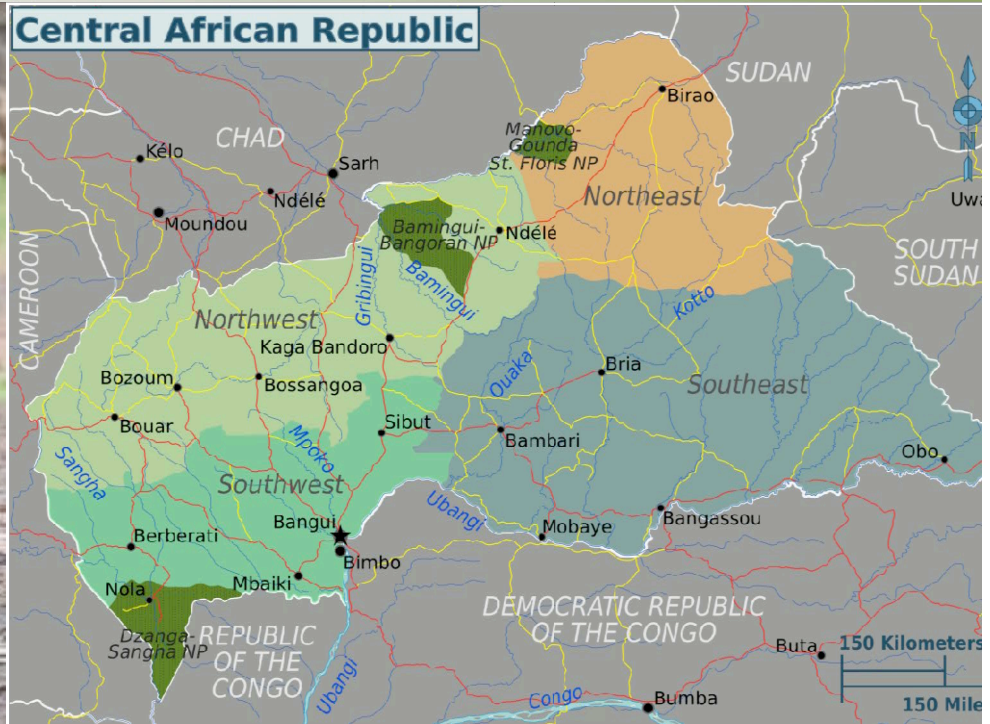


RAINFOREST EXPEDITIONS CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Images by Tony Camacho - More photos by Tony: Science Photo Library
Website

LOWLAND GORILLAS, FOREST ELEPHANT AND PEOPLE OF THE FOREST
DZANGHA – SANGHA NATIONAL PARK
Eight Day Guided Expeditions



Situated in the Northern part of the Congo basin, the **DzangaSangha Protected Areas** are internationally known for their beautiful rainforests, host to a remarkable diversity of wildlife, comprising western lowland gorillas, forest elephants, bongo antelopes, forest buffalos (pictured right) and a multitude of bird species. Furthermore, a rich local culture, comprising the Sangha fishermen as well as hunting and gathering BaAka, are present in the area. Apart from conservation and local development efforts, DzangaSangha operates as an eco-tourism and research centre.

Sharing borders with Cameroon and Congo, the DzangaSangha Protected Areas are part of the TrinationalSangha (TNS) complex, currently in the process to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

01 – 08 MARCH 2013

12 – 19 JULY 2013

22 – 29 NOVEMBER 2013

Note – road access is limited, hard, and long (12 – 18 hours from Bangui / 2 -3 days from Cameroon).



We can arrange this for private groups, if required, but this is NOT recommended.

ITINERARY

DAY 01: Friday

Charterflight in from BANGUI to BAYANGA. Flight times and aircraft used to be advised, as well as cost. Arrival and transfer to the Sangha Lodge in time for lunch.

Situated on the banks of the Sangha River in the Dzanga-Sangha special reserve, Sangha lodge is the ideal tranquil spot from which to set off on activities within the Dzanga-Sangha National Park, and the perfect most relaxing spot to return to after a long day in the field. The lodge consists of 6 well appointed bungalows, each with their own ensuite bathroom, with hot and cold running water and flush toilets and 2 with a shared shower and toilet, giving a total of 8 bungalows.



There is a well stocked bar with cold beer and drinks, ice is made with Bottled water and is safe to add to your drinks. A small kitchen produces simple yet tasty Western and African foods

You will spend eight days / seven nights at Sangha Lodge on a full board basis i.e. all meals included.

Evening: a sundowner cruise up river from the lodge will take you into the area of the hill where the river narrows considerably. Once there, the motor will be turned off and we drift down slowly while drinking gin and tonics or beer as we watch the sunset over the forest and discuss the next week's program with your guide, Rod Cassidy.

DAY 02: Saturday

To the Elephants at Dzanga Bai which is a full day excursion with a picnic lunch included. Approximately 90 minutes by vehicle and an hour walk to the viewing platform.

To be able to observe the timid forest elephant in the wild is an experience usually reserved to a limited circle of researchers. Dzanga Bai has always been known for its remarkable density of local wildlife, and visitors have thus the chance to observe wildlife in a region covered by dense forest where this is hardly possible. It is a forest clearing extending 500 by 250 meters, which can be reached after a walk through primary forest on a path created by elephants.





The Dzanga Saline offers tourists the possibility to observe between 40 to 100 elephants daily from an elevated platform located at its edge. The elevated density of wildlife can be explained by the presence of soil that is rich in minerals and clay. Animals find these minerals in the water stagnating on the surface as well as via digging into the ground. Respective nutrients are essential for the reproduction of elephants. Besides elephants many other animal species that are characteristic for the Reserve may be observed: Sitatunga, forest buffalo, Bongo Antelope, Red Forest Hog, and a great variety of bird species.

Return to the lodge for dinner and overnight.

DAY 03: Sunday

After breakfast – experience a net hunt with the Ba’aka. Return to the lodge after lunch.

Accompany the BaAka pygmies hunting and help with the carving up of the game, let the BaAka women show you the medicinal and other plants of use, taste a typical dish of liana leaves with a sauce made from forest nuts, watch how they construct in the forest, in no time at all, a protective hut against the rain. Getting to know this secret culture is an experience few have known.

Net hunting mobilizes large groups of BaAka pygmy men and women, who leave together for the forest. Normally each family brings with them their long nets made from strips of liana bark (locally known as “kusa”). Women transport their things in traditional baskets made from fibres of the Raphia palm or from “ikwa”. Young children are carried on the body and are tied to the waist with a piece of cloth. The men carry the nets and spears.

Depending on the actual season, the net hunt can take place daily in the vicinity of the villages, but can also sometimes be far away from the villages, from temporary forest camps.



In the afternoon, we visit a Ba’aka family and experience their music and culture.

The essence of the BaAka culture that has been preserved over the millennia, is mainly expressed in music and dance, serving to maintain their bonds with their gods, spirits and ancestors. Language could not fulfill this task very well as it was exposed to many changes: instead of developing their own language the BaAka often used the same language as their neighbours who were of Bantu origin. This facilitated their link to the outside world and to other groups of the population, but also caused many modifications in language whenever the neighbours changed.

Music and dance, however, have always been an expression of genuine BaAka feelings and imagination.

Each singer and percussionist chooses his or her own rhythm resulting in a wonderful array of

harmony. This universe of movement, rhythm and sound is very difficult to describe, you have to experience it for real.

After Dinner at the lodge, we walk with spotlights and guides into the forest behind the Lodge.

A deep, untouched rainforest, where elephants and wild gorillas are often heard and sometimes seen, this experience is unique and not to be missed. Some of the more unusual nocturnal species like Galago, Potto, Genet, Civet, Golden Cat, Hammer-Bat and a number of owls can be seen.

DAY 04: Monday

Gorillas – this is a full day excursion with a picnic lunch included.

There are now two places to view gorillas, and they only take 3 persons at a time – e.g. 6 per location per day so one group will be about an hour “behind” the other group of three OR three persons visit the mangabeys, starting in early morning, then trek gorillas, whilst the others trek gorillas then mangabeys.

It is an approximately 90 minute drive to the trekking base.

GORILLA TREKKING

Several international researchers as well as other team members are living permanently in the camp of BaiHokou who are responsible for locating and following the gorillas each day.

Early in the morning, at sunrise, a team leaves the camp with information on the location where the gorillas slept the previous night.

As soon as the nest site is found, the team then follows the traces the gorillas have left while moving and feeding. This task could not be achieved without the help of pygmy trackers whose senses are perfectly in tune with the forest.

The tracking experience alone searching for the gorillas by following their almost imperceptible signs on the forest floor, leaves you with an unforgettable memory. To do this, one takes elephant paths and narrow trails, sometimes crossing copses. The pursuit can be strenuous as gorillas can sometimes cover significant distances before finding a fruit tree of choice.

Sometimes one or two hours pass before establishing contact with the gorillas. At noon the tracking team is replaced. Its position is communicated to the camp by radio so the relief team can leave in the right direction.

Encountering the gorillas cannot be guaranteed, but nearly 90% of the tourists taking part in this activity have seen gorillas in close proximity.

All participants have to take responsibility for any risk themselves. The Park administration has fixed a minimum age of 16. Visitors are informed of the rules of conduct at the camp. No one with diarrhea, a cold or other transmittable diseases will be allowed to participate, this is so as not to endanger the gorillas' health. The role of the dominant male gorilla, the silverback, is to defend his family, preventing the group from overly dispersing and other males from leaving with resident females. This role partly explains the mock charges against the pursuing humans. If this occurs, one must wait in a knelt position with the head declined. Charges can be up to only a few meters away. Most of the time, researchers and tourists are within 15 or 20 meters of the animals.

AGILE MANGABEY TREK

In 2004, the PHP diversified its activities and began habituating a large group of agile mangabeys (Cercocebus agilis) which have since been followed daily. Agile mangabeys are medium sized



monkeys (males 7-12kg, females 5-7kg) which very much live up to their generic name by their vibrant nature. They are mostly ground-dwelling, and feed on a diverse array of fruits, seeds, stems, mushrooms, eggs, insects, crustaceans, and even certain mammals. The group can be observed at leisure at distances of under 10m whilst their active hands rummage through leaf litter in search of insects, investigating and extracting all that is possibly edible from holes in trees, digging up mushrooms, storing seeds in their cheek pouches, and grooming their companions.

Agile mangabeys also have a vast vocal repertoire, with the males possessing a vocal sac to amplify their distinctive 'whoops' across the forest - allowing them to communicate to the rest of their group and other groups.

The group followed at BaiHokou is of an exceptional size, numbering more than 200 individuals, ranging in an area covering many km², and focused around the bai system. The habituation process allows this otherwise secretive and relatively unknown species to be easily observed in the dense vegetation.

From the first months, the PHP were able to make exceptional observations such as opportunistic hunting of young antelopes (duikers) by the males, and a mid-year birthing season. However, with the potential to form such large groups, the social organization of agile mangabeys is evidently complex, and much is still to be learnt.

Return to the Lodge for dinner and overnight.

DAY 05: Tuesday

Morning boat ride and birding from the lodge in search of Picathartes etc. Return for lunch.

Rod Cassidy and Barry Watkins recently discovered a hitherto unknown population of this extremely rare species, the Red-necked Picathartes, breeding in a small colony of 3 birds less than 5 Kms from the lodge. Further exploration, a week later by Rod Cassidy turned up another 3 nests over a 500 meter stretch of cliff face. Even if not a birder, this hike up the river will

show you some huge forest trees, primates, waterfalls and other bird species, and an amazing view over the rainforest canopy. Agility and fitness are required.

In the afternoon you will be driven to a river crossing (approximately 15 minutes by road) and board pirogues with Ba'aka guides for a 4 -5 hour trip down the Yobe River to the main river, travelling through some beautiful primary rainforest – viewing birds / primates etc. This river has been recently opened up as a community project by the Ba'aka and Sangha Lodge, and now allows access to areas once unknown to foreigners.

DAY 06: Wednesday

Option of second gorilla trek, those not doing a trek should do the Saline walk at BaiHokou, from saline to saline, with a picnic lunch.....this is an interesting day. If one decides on a second trek, the Saline Walk can still be undertaken this day.

SALINE WALK

Following elephant paths through the forest from the camp, you are led to the wildlife's' favoured spots. Often these are clearings and salines, crossed by streams, and kept open by the elephants. With a bit of luck you will not only see forest elephants and buffalos, but also sitatunga, bongos, monkeys and traces of other animals. The sounds, smells and the luminous green of the vegetation create a very unique atmosphere.

Starting point of this activity is the research camp BaiHokou, which is also focal point for "gorilla tracking" and the "tracking of agile mangabeys". Return to Lodge in afternoon, where we spend a few hours with the resident Ba'aka families, learning about their collection and usage of forest plants and herbs.

InBaAka pygmy culture medicinal plant know-how is kept primarily by the women. Men generally have a basic knowledge covering their own needs, but it is the older women that most neighbours consult.

It is extremely interesting to accompany women in the forest and to observe the exceptionally skilful movements of their hands and their handling of machetes, which is their preferred tool for even the finest of work. Leaves are pressed to extract sap while at the same time rolling other leaves into a funnel to apply the medicine to eyes and ears.

Here visitors can experience traditions that have been in existence for millennia and witness the transmission of this knowledge from the mothers to the infants carried on their backs. These people, who have no ways or means to go to a supermarket to buy string, cough syrup or the honey they so relish, are perfectly in tune with the natural environment they live in.



This activity is carried out in the presence of a guide who can serve as an interpreter. In general the atmosphere is relaxed, allowing you to pose as many questions as you like.

DAY 07: Thursday

A further visit to DzanghaBai, for elephants etc for a full day excursion with picnic lunch provided.

Return to the lodge in the evening for dinner and overnight.

DAY 08: Friday

Transfer to BAYANGA AIRSTRIP for your chartered flight to BANGUI. Plane costs / timings are to be advised. Please note that the CAR airport departure tax of CFA 10,000.00 is excluded & will have to be paid direct in cash upon departure.