

Comprehensive Gabon

Tour Leaflet
2025



African River Martin © Michael Mills

17 September – 6 October 2025

Comprehensive Gabon 2025



CONGO BASIN FORESTS

- Superb lowland forest birding at Ipassa, Loango and Lope
- Excellent grassland and woodland birding at Lékoni
- Black-headed Bee-eater, Rosy Bee-eater and breeding African River Martin

Black-headed Bee-eater © Paul Noakes



TOUR LEADER: MICHAEL MILLS



Michael's incredible focus, dedication and ability to locate and show Africa's toughest birds is probably unequalled on the continent. He has led dozens of tours across Africa and his experience in locating birds on just the softest of calls or briefest of views impresses those who travel with him.

2025 DATES

17 Sep – 6 Oct

2025 PRICES

| | |
|--------------------|--------|
| Tour Price | € 8940 |
| Internal Flights | € 480 |
| *Single supplement | € 975 |

**Unless sharing a bed, all participants will need to pay the single supplement, and in some places such as Loango and Ipassa, all rooms are shared.*

BOOK ONLINE

Visit www.birdingafrica.com
Deposit (\$150) by credit card
Email info@birdingafrica.com



White-crested Tiger Heron © Paul Noakes

Our Comprehensive Gabon Tour offers an extensive itinerary covering all the best birding sites in Gabon.

We spend a significant amount of time focussed on the rich Congo Basin forests at Ivindo NP, accessed from Makokou. Here we hope to see a diverse range of species that could include Black Guinea fowl, Plumed Guinea fowl, Vermiculated Fishing Owl, Akun Eagle-Owl, Fraser's Eagle-Owl, Sjöstedt's Barred Owlet, Bare-cheeked Trogon, Gosling's Apalis, Brown Nightjar, Spot-breasted Ibis and, with exceptional luck, Grey Ground Thrush.

Time is also spent in the grassland-woodland-forest mosaics of the far south-east. Here, forests hold Lyre-tailed Honeyguide, Fiery-breasted Bushshrike and Black-headed Bee-eater, grasslands are home to Congo Moor Chat, Black-chinned Weaver, Short-tailed Pipit, Dambo Cisticola, Black-collared Bulbul and the yet-to-be-described 'Teke Cisticola', and woodlands could turn up Eastern Black-backed Barbet and a variety of miombo species.

We also visit the rich savanna-forest mosaics, inland at Lope and along the coast at Loango. In the Lope area we will search for scarce lowland forest birds such as Bates's Nightjar, Fiery-breasted Bushshrike, Rufous-bellied Helmetshrike and Dja River Warbler. At Loango we will visit an active African River Martin colony, and other species we look for include Rosy Bee-eater, Black-headed Bee-eater, Violet-tailed Sunbird, Vermiculated Fishing Owl, Damara Tern and White-crested Tiger Heron.

TOUR FOCUS

Gabon offers an impressive list of specials for world listers; this tour caters to these hardcore birders. If you wish to spend time also admiring other wildlife while avoiding the hardest parts of Gabon, please consider our Gabon Highlights Tours.

For an idea of species to be seen, consult our previous reports or request our tour checklist.

The tour runs at the start of the rainy season; we expect to encounter some rain.



Plumed Guineafowl © Paul Noakes

ACCOMMODATION AND MEALS

Accommodation and meals vary in standard, but wherever possible we use international-standard hotels and lodges. Expect only cold water showers outside the main towns, with water often provided in a bucket. At Ipassa bathrooms are shared with other members of the group. All lodgings have electricity, although power failures can occur.

Meals are generally Western-style. Please advise if you are vegetarian; options are generally limited. Chicken and fish are the most widely available meats.

Water is not safe to drink, so we supply complimentary bottled water.

GROUP SIZE

Maximum 9 participants.

WALKING

This tour requires a moderate degree of fitness. Most walks will be done at a gentle pace on flat terrain, although there will be a couple of longer outings. Trails can be a bit muddy at times.

INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS

Please plan to fly into Libreville by the evening of 17 September 2025. Departure after the tour from Libreville is possible from 10 pm on 6 October 2025, although we recommend that you stay overnight in Libreville in case there are delays to our last internal flight.

Please email our office the details of your proposed flight for approval, before purchasing your ticket.

INTRODUCTION

Gabon, lying on the equator in western Central Africa, is largely blanketed in lowland Congo Basin Forest. Unlike most of the rest of Central Africa, extensive tracts of forest remain even outside protected areas, and good birds can be seen even during stops on some of the longer drives.

Some of the best lowland forest birding is to be had in the Ivindo Basin, which we will access from Ipassa near Makokou. An impressive diversity of rarely-seen forest birds can be found here, and will be the main focus of our trip with three full days here. Highlights could include Black Guinea fowl, Plumed Guineafowl, Rachel's Malimbe, Akun Eagle-Owl, Sjöstedt's Barred Owllet, Grey Ground Thrush, Vermiculated Fishing Owl, Spot-breasted Ibis, Congo Serpent Eagle, Gabon Batis, Bare-cheeked Trogon and African Piculet, to name just a few.

An extra dimension is added to the Eastern Gabon Tour by visiting the grasslands and miombo woodlands of the Bateke Plateau at Lékoni. A good list of open-country birds can

be seen here, including Finsch's Francolin, Black-collared Bulbul, Black-chinned Weaver and the undescribed Teke Cisticola.

For the Highlights Tour we visit the coastal savannas at Loango where large number of African River Martin congregate from late September to breed in busy colonies, burrowing into the white coastal sands. Watching their displays is one of the greatest birding spectacles on the Africa continent, and our entire trip is timed so that we can witness this spectacle. Other birds we hope to see here include Loango Weaver, White-backed Night Heron, White-crested Tiger Heron, Violet-tailed Sunbird, Black-headed Bee-eater and African Finfoot.

Finally, we visit Lope National Park, which protects a rich area of savanna-forest mosaic. Forest mammals, including several species of primate, are a strong attraction here and on the birding front we hope to find Bates's Nightjar, Dja River Warbler, Fiery-breasted Bushshrike and Rufous-bellied Helmetshrike.

African River Martin © Paul Noakes



ITINERARY AND MAP

- Day 1 Arrive Libreville. Overnight Libreville.
- Day 2 Fly to Franceville. Overnight Franceville.
- Day 3 Drive to Lékoni. Overnight Lékoni.
- Day 4 Full day at Lékoni. Overnight Lékoni.
- Day 5 Full day at Lékoni. Evening return to Franceville. Overnight Franceville.
- Day 6 Morning near Bongoville. Night train to Booué. Overnight on train.
- Day 7 Drive Booué to Makokou. Overnight Makokou.
- Day 8 Day trip to Belinga Road. Overnight Makokou.
- Day 9 Full day at Ipassa. Overnight Ipassa.
- Day 10 Full day at Ipassa. Overnight Ipassa.
- Day 11 Full day at Ipassa. Overnight Ipassa.
- Day 12 Ipassa to Booué. Night train to Lope. Overnight Lope.
- Day 13 Full day at Lope. Overnight Lope.
- Day 14 Full day at Lope. Overnight Lope.
- Day 15 Full day at Lope. Night train to Libreville. Overnight on train.
- Day 16 Fly Libreville to Port Gentil. Drive to Omboué. Overnight Omboué.
- Day 17 Full day in the Omboué area. Overnight Omboué.
- Day 18 Omboué to Loango NP. Overnight Loango NP.
- Day 19 Full day Loango NP. Overnight Loango NP.
- Day 20 Drive to Port Gentil. Fly to Libreville. Tour ends.

Dambo Cisticola © Paul Noakes



DAY-BY-DAY ITINERARY

Please note that changes to the Gabonese train schedule may require adjustments to this itinerary.

Day 1: Arrive Libreville

Welcome to Gabon! Once you have dealt with arrival formalities and collected your luggage, proceed to the arrivals hall, watching out for a board showing your name, the name of our hotel or 'Birding Africa'. From the airport you'll be transferred to your nearby hotel. Overnight in Libreville.

Day 2: Fly to Franceville

This morning we fly to Franceville in the far south-east of the country, before checking into our comfortable hotel in town. After lunch we'll make an afternoon excursion to some forests near Franceville. Overnight in Franceville.

Days 3–5: Lékoni

An early start will see us driving the relatively short distance from Franceville to Lékoni. We'll pass the forests around Bongoville (to be birded later) to spend most of the day in the Lékoni area. We'll then have two additional days at Lékoni, before driving back to Franceville in the evening, where we overnight, on Day 5.

The Lékoni area is famous for spectacular grassland birding, with patches of miombo and forest adding to the mix. The best birds in the grasslands are Finsch's Francolin (very hard to see), Black-collared Bulbul, the undescribed 'Teke Cisticola', Congo Moor Chat, Black-chinned Weaver and Short-tailed Pipit, all of which we'll make a concerted effort to see. Other grassland birds may include White-bellied Bustard, Black-bellied Bustard, Black-rumped Buttonquail,



Rufous-bellied Helmetshrike © Paul Noakes

Temminck's Courser, Horus Swift, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Rufous-naped Lark (the subspecies here called Malbrant's Lark), Flappet Lark, Banded Martin, Dambo Cisticola (rare), Sooty Chat, Yellow-mantled Widowbird, Fawn-breasted Waxbill, Locust Finch (rare) and Long-legged Pipit.

Patches of miombo woodland are scattered around, and add a good variety of extra species, such as Red-throated Wryneck, Western Black-headed Batis, Souza's Shrike (rare), White-winged Black Tit, Grey Penduline Tit, Red-capped Crombec, Neddicky, Salvadori's Eremomela, Green-capped Eremomela, Western Violet-backed Sunbird, Wood Pipit and Cabanis's Bunting.

Finally, smallish patches of dense, dry forest hold a variety of forest birds, of which Angola Batis, Gorgeous Bushshrike (sometimes splits

as Perrin's Bushshrike) and Black-backed Barbet are the most interesting, although we may also see Western Bronze-naped Pigeon, Double-toothed Barbet, Bocage's Bushshrike, Black-shouldered Puffback, Lühder's Bushshrike, Square-tailed Drongo and Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat.

Day 6: Bongoville; train to Booué

We spend the entire morning birding the forests in the Bongoville area, where highlights may include Black-headed Bee-eater, Lyre-tailed Honeyguide, Fiery-breasted Bushshrike, Pale-fronted Nigrita and Naked-faced Barbet. We then return to Franceville for a late lunch, before boarding the overnight train to Booué. We expect to arrive at Booué at around midnight, and will transfer immediately to our hotel, only 2-minutes' drive away.



Congo Moor Chat © Michael Mills



Black Guinea fowl © Tasso Leventis

Day 7: Booué to Makokou

Today we drive to Makokou, making various roadside stops along the way.

Day 8-11: Ipassa and the Belinga Road

The Ivindo Basin around Makokou holds some of the best lowland forest birding on the continent. Our time will be divided between the Belinga Road (one hour to the east) and Ipassa Research Station inside Ivindo National Park, and we'll take at least one boat trip up a forested river. Some nights we'll be based in Makokou, and on others we'll stay at Ipassa Research Station.

The primary forest at Ipassa will be our main focus, with a long list of spectacular birds on offer, many requiring patience to see. Mouthwatering possibilities include Black Guinea fowl, Plumed Guinea fowl, Latham's Forest Francolin, Olive Ibis, Spot-breasted Ibis, Blue-headed Wood Dove, Sjöstedt's Barred Owlet, Fraser's Eagle-Owl, Akun Eagle-Owl, Bare-cheeked Trogon, Lyre-tailed Honeyguide (very hard to see), African Piculet, Rufous-sided Broadbill, Gabon Batis, White-spotted Wattle-eye, Bates's Paradise Flycatcher, Tit Hylia, Yellow-footed Flycatcher and Rachel's Malimbe. We have even seen Grey Ground Thrush here on a previous trip.

A supporting cast is provided by African Dwarf Kingfisher, Thick-billed Honeyguide, Buff-spotted Woodpecker, Brown-eared Woodpecker, Gabon Woodpecker, Bioko Batis, Chestnut Wattle-eye, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher, Sjöstedt's Honeyguide Greenbul, Yellow Longbill, Grey Longbill, Brown Illadopsis, Red-tailed Ant Thrush, Rufous Flycatcher-Thrush, Grey-throated Tit-Flycatcher, Brown-chested Alethe, Johanna's Sunbird, Bates's Sunbird and Blue-billed Malimbe.

Forest along the Belinga Road could produce many of the aforementioned species, plus chances of seeing Black Dwarf Hornbill,

Preuss's Weaver, Long-tailed Hawk, Red-bellied Malimbe, Red-crowned Malimbe, Gosling's Apalis and White-throated Blue Swallow.

After dark we'll take a boat trip in search of Spot-breasted Ibis, Brown Nightjar, Bates's Nightjar and Vermiculated Fishing-Owl.

Day 12: To Lope

After some final birding at Ipassa we'll drive back to Booué and then take the train to Lope, where we expect to arrive around midnight. We'll immediately transfer to our comfortable lodge, 5 minutes away by car. Overnight on the edge of Lope.

Sjöstedt's Barred Owlet © Paul Noakes



Day 13–15: Lope

The savanna-forest mosaic of Lope National Park offer some excellent mammal watching, plus the opportunity to see several rare birds. We have the better part of three days to bird its varied habitats. Lope is the best place to see the localised Dja River Warbler, which we'll search for in small forest swamps. Other forest birds we hope to find include Bates's Nightjar, Bates's Swift, Black-casqued Hornbill, Lyre-tailed Honeyguide, Rufous-bellied Helmetshrike, Fiery-breasted Bushshrike, Black-shouldered Puffback, Western Black-headed Oriole, Buff-throated Apalis, Blackcap Illadopsis, Forest White-

eye, Black-bellied Seedcracker and Western Bluebill.

The grasslands can be productive too, with Forbes's Plover, Senegal Lapwing, Swamp Nightjar, Pectoral-patch Cisticola, Compact Weaver and Black-chinned Quailfinch. Gallery forest and river front hold Water Thick-knee, White-crowned Lapwing, Red-chested Swallow and White-browed Forest Flycatcher. Orange Weaver breeds in our hotel gardens and Black-faced Canary is sometimes seen there too. Night on the edge of Lope Reserve, but on the final night we board the train to Libreville.



Violet-tailed Sunbird © Paul Noakes

Day 16: Libreville to Omboué

We arrive in Libreville early this morning, before taking a flight to Port Gentil and driving to Omboué. Overnight at Omboué.

Days 17–20: Loango and Omboué

We have three full days to explore the rich coastal grasslands and forests of Loango National Park and surrounds. Nights will be split between Loango National Park and Omboué town.

One of Africa's greatest ornithological spectacles occurs here every year between late September and February, when tens of thousands of African River Martins and Rosy Bee-eaters migrate to the coast and set up their breeding colonies in the coastal sands. During our visit they will just be starting to breed, and we should see some spectacular displays. Lots of other birds are

on offer too, and we have good chances for Plumed Guineafowl, African Finfoot, White-backed Night Heron, White-crested Tiger Heron, Hartlaub's Duck, Pel's Fishing Owl, Vermiculated Fishing Owl, Swamp Boubou, African Royal Tern, Damara Tern, Black-headed Bee-eater, White-thighed Hornbill, Spotted Honeyguide, Loango Weaver, Red-tailed Leaflove, Grey-rumped Swallow, White-throated Blue Swallow, Rufous-bellied Helmetshrike, Mangrove Sunbird, Reichenbach's Sunbird, Carmelite Sunbird, Western Bluebill, Black-bellied Seedcracker and Black-chinned Quailfinch. A variety of mammals can be seen too, including Forest Elephant, Forest Buffalo, Western Sitatunga, Western Gorilla, Red River Hog, Red-capped Mangabey, West African Manatee and Water Chevrotain!

On the final day we will return to Port Gentil for our flight back to Libreville. The tour ends on arrival in Libreville.

Fraser's Eagle-Owl © Paul Noakes



INCLUDED IN TOUR PRICE

- Services of Birding Africa tour leader and local guides
- Entry fees and activities as per itinerary
- Ground transport and airport transfers
- Internal flights are billed separately
- Accommodation and all meals starting with dinner on the first night and ending with lunch on the last day
- Bottled water in the vehicle and one soft drink per meal
- General tips

BOOKLET AND CHECKLIST

Birding Africa provides:

1. Tour Details leaflet with detailed itinerary (this document).
2. Tour Information Pack, emailed to you.
3. Tour Booklet with checklists, provided in hard copy at the start of the tour.

QUESTIONS?

Please email the office, info@birdingafrica.com, to reserve a place or ask questions (you can also cc michael@birdingafrica.com and callan@birdingafrica.com who are both involved in the planning of this tour.

HOW TO BOOK

1. Complete our easy online booking form.
2. Secure your booking deposit by credit card on our 3D secure online payment site (\$150)
3. Settle the balance by bank transfer 150 days before the tour. We will email you a reminder and the banking details.

