



GABON, SÃO TOMÉ AND PRÍNCIPE

September - October 2006

An African Bird Club Conservation Fund Tour

Tour participants

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This comprehensive 25-day tour combines the endemic rich islands of Sao Tome e Principe with excellent forest and savannah birding of Gabon. We visited both of Gulf of Guinea Islands, Lope National Park, the Bateke Plateau at Lekoni, Ivindo River basin at Makokou and Gamba Area Complex for breeding Black-headed and Rosy Bee-eaters and African River Martin. Although diversity was good (about 420 species), it was the quality of birds that was more impressive.

Besides all participants seeing almost all the island endemics, including Dwarf Olive Ibis, Sao Tome Scops Owl, Giant Weaver, Giant Sunbird and Sao Tome Short-tail, other highlights included: Dja River Warbler, Rosy, Black-headed, Blue-headed and Black Bee-eaters, White-crested, Black-casqued and Black Dwarf Hornbills, Congo Serpent Eagle, Finsch's and Latham's Forest Francolin, Black and Plumed Guineafowl, Forbes's Plover, African Skimmer, Rock and Grey Pratincole, Gabon Coucal, Bates's, Brown, Swamp and Long-tailed Nightjars, Black Spinetail, Bare-cheeked Trogon, Chocolate-backed, African Dwarf and White-bellied Kingfisher, African Piculet, Rufous-sided Broadbill, Red-throated Cliff Swallow, African River Martin, Blue Cuckooshrike, Black-collared Neolestes or Bulbul, Congo Moor Chat, Dambo Cisticola, Gosling's Apalis, Salvadori's Eremomela, Violet-backed Hyltiota, West African and Verreaux's Batis, Violet-tailed and Johanna's Sunbird, Souza's Shrike, Fiery-breasted Bush-Shrike, Gabon Helmetshrike, Black-chinned and Loango Weaver, Black-chinned Quailfinch and Black-bellied Seedcracker. Mammal highlights included African Forest Elephant, African Forest Buffalo and five primate species: Grey-cheeked and Red-capped Mangabey and Crowned, Putty-nosed and Moustached Monkeys.

DAY 1: FLY TO SAO TOME (Bird of the day = Sao Tome Prinia)

Since everyone arrived in good time for our flight to Sao Tome, we gathered at the Tropicana for a relaxed lunch, before heading to Libreville's airport for our late afternoon flight. We landed shortly before sunset, our journey to the centre of town producing our first endemic, Sao Tome Prinia, perched on the roadside telephone lines.

DAY 2: SAO TOME HIGHLANDS AND NORTHERN SAVANNAS (Sao Tome Speirops)

A 05h30 sunrise departure saw us winding our way up into the central Sao Tomean highlands. We couldn't resist a roadside stop for our first Gulf of Guinea Thrush, also notching up Newton's Sunbird. Soon we were at Bom Successo, trailhead to Lagoa Amelia. Over breakfast we admired our first Sao Tome Speirops and Principe Seedeater, and a pair of dagger-billed Forest Chestnut-winged Starlings put in a brief appearance. However, we were shortly marching up the muddy trail towards Pico de Sao Tome, the islands highest peak. Sao Tome Spinetail flitted overhead, Sao Tome Prinia buzzed pass in display, a male African Masked Weaver (endemic subspecies) worked hard at its nest, and Sao Tome Weaver and Paradise Flycatcher were spotted in a patch of secondary forest. Our attention was focussed on white-eyes, and carefully scanning numerous flocks of Speirops

eventually turned up a 20-strong flock of Principe White-eye (even rarer on Principe!). At the forest border we paused for our first views of the local race of Lemon Dove, and a striking Sao Tome Oriole or Papa Figo. Once in the forest proper it started to drizzle, as we continued to our vantage point over the dry crater lake. We waited for the rain to stop, which eventually did. During a sunny spell bird activity picked up, with a large fruiting tree drawing several Sao Tome Green Pigeon, while Sao Tome Olive Pigeon called from the nearby forest. But the sun soon disappeared as more serious rain set in and we decided to head for the drier lowlands.

Two hours later we found ourselves in glorious sunshine, watching Sao Tome Kingfisher perched on a rock in the middle of a crystal-clear Sao Tomean stream. A male Sao Tome Bronze-naped Pigeon called from a nearby treetop, while our first male Sao Tome Paradise Flycatcher flitted back and forth across the road. Along the coast we watch dark and pale morph Western Reef Egrets skilfully plucking fish from ocean surface while still on the wing. To round off a fine day we spotted several male Giant Weaver, chasing each other about a patch of secondary forest.

DAY 3: TO PRINCIPE (Dohrn's Thrush Babbler)

The small, forgotten island of Principe lies a mere 45 minute airplane hop to the northeast of its larger cousin. By 9am we were booked into our little hotel and watching Principe Kingfisher and Grey Parrot from our balcony. A walk to the outskirts of town quickly turned up several buzzing Principe Golden Weaver and the unusual and vociferous Dohrn's Thrush Babbler. On the outskirts of town a surprise European Sand Martin flew up and down a nearby stream – a first for the country! Another patch of forest produced excellent views of Principe Speirops and, eventually Principe Glossy Starling. After lunch and a siesta we headed out of town in another direction to track down the two remaining endemics. They were determined not to make our lives too easy, but a flowering tree eventually proved irresistible to a Principe Sunbird, followed by the Ron and Dollyann combo spotting and scoping Principe Drongo for all.

DAY 4: PRINCIPE (Black Noddy)

With a full day to explore Principe, we decided on a mini pelagic expedition. The calm waters of Santo Antonia bay soon produced several Brown Booby cruising past, but conditions got rough as we entered the open ocean and headed into the wind. So we turned, an with the wind behind our back headed out to some rocky islets just offshore, where several more Brown Booby were perched and a pair of White-tailed Tropicbirds sailed overhead. After a short leg-stretch on a picture-perfect tropical island beach – people were beginning to think we were on holiday! – we headed out to some more rocky islets, where hundreds of Black Noddy and Brown Noddy were perched. By lunchtime we were back in town, and following our last Principean siesta was a journey into the highlands. Here Principe Sunbird was remarkably common, and we managed to find several Blue-breasted Kingfishers and another Principe Drongo, before winding back down to the coast.

DAY 5: TO SOUTHERN SAO TOME (Dwarf Olive Ibis)

An early morning return flight to Sao Tome soon saw us dodging potholes as we headed south along Sao Tome's eastern coast. After 2 hours we reached our destination, and old oil palm plantation. We had lunch and while I was repacking our luggage, Sakkie spotted a Giant Sunbird for the rest of the group. A good start! Initially we walked through oil palm plantations, but soon reached pristine forest. En route we flushed an ibis, but most of the group missed it. But everyone saw the angry, rufous phase Sao Tome Scops Owl calling from the forest mid-storey. In the late afternoon the rain set in, so we quickly set up camp. Just before sunset some ibises called nearby. We stalked in their direction, the whooshing sound of wings suggesting we had flushed our quarry. But careful scanning revealed a Dwarf Olive Ibis perched on a bare limb of a large emergent tree, where it sat for prolonged views. As it got dark we trudged back to camp, damp but in good spirits, for a tasty pasta salad and an early night.

DAY 6: SOUTHERN SAO TOME TO LIBREVILLE (Sao Tome Short-tail)

Heavy rain through the night made everyone eager to get out of their tents and on the move. From our campsite we continued up a steep ridge, spotting the unusual Sao Tome Short-tail walking hesitantly along a branch. The slippery terrain made going slow, and after a while we decided to cut our losses and head back to Sao Tome, where our flight back to Libreville was waiting. Everyone was more than happy with what they had seen.

DAY 7: LIBREVILLE (Black Spinetail)

We used the morning to dry out and recover from the rigours of southern Sao Tome. In the

afternoon we decided to do some exploring to the north of Libreville. After about 20km we stopped in some secondary forest. Bird activity was high, and we quickly notched up 20+ species, including Forest Chestnut-Winged Starling, Purple-headed Starling, Speckled Tinkerbird and Green-throated Sunbird. Overhead, small groups of Rosy Bee-eater were moving southwards, perhaps to their coastal breeding grounds, but the show was stolen by a pair of Black Spinetail, circling low over the forest and returning for three separate showings.

DAY 8: TO LOPE (Grey Pratincole)

With the rest of the group arriving early in the morning and feeling sprightly enough to start the tour immediately, we decided to push the tour forward by two days to allow us extra time in the fabulous Ivindo Basin. After breakfast and some final arrangements we started our journey to Lope. The first roadside stop produced Simple Leaflove, but we pushed on to our lunch stop at N'Djole. Here, overlooking the Ogooue River, we were treated to both Rock Pratincole and a pair of striking Grey Pratincole, White-headed Lapwing, Cassin's Flycatcher and Black-bellied Seedcracker. After a good break we continued on our way, with one stop before Lope producing Cassin's Spinetail and a trio of Greenbuls, Little Grey, Slender-billed and Golden.

DAY 9-10: LOPE (Chocolate-backed Kingfisher and Dja River Warbler)

Lope National Park and surrounds is rich in bird diversity, and hosts several special species, most notable Dja River Warbler. We had two full days to explore the forests and savannas of the area. The surrounds of the hotel proved an excellent introduction on our first morning, with open areas hosting Long-legged Pipit, Forbes's Plover, Pectoral-patch Cisticola and Short-winged Cisticola, Black-chinned Quailfinch and Blue-breasted Bee-eater. Nearby gallery forest was host to Square-tailed Sawwing, Purple-throated Cuckooshrike, Common Wattle-eye and Velvet-mantled Drongo. However, the undoubted highlights were a striking male Violet-tailed Sunbird feeding at some blood-red flowers, and a confiding Black Dwarf Hornbill. Black-faced Canary and Orange Weaver were welcome additions to our garden list.

The second morning was spent in Lope National Park. En route to Dja River Warbler marsh we paused to admire Compact Weaver, Yellow-mantled Widow, Whistling Cisticola, flocks of squawking Grey Parrot, Grey-headed Kingfisher, and African Pied, Piping and Black-casqued Hornbills. After a drive and short walk we found ourselves on the edge of a small swamp, the churring calls of Dja River Warbler drawing us closer. A short bout of playback attracted a pair of warblers which approached within 30 metres, flopping from sedge-top to clump to sedge-top, calling all the while. Until Patrice Christy discovered these birds here in the 1990s, they were virtually impossible to see anywhere. On the way back we paused at a forest patch to successfully call in Blue-headed Wood Dove and Lesser Bristlebill. Here too we found Chestnut-capped Flycatcher.

The rest of our time was spent exploring roadside forests in the area. Noteworthy species seen include Scaly Francolin, Great Blue Turaco, a male Swamp Nightjar at arms-length, Green Turaco, Naked-faced Barbet; Yellow-throated Tinkerbird and Speckled Tinkerbird, Hairy-breasted Barbet, Yellow-crested Woodpecker, White-chinned Prinia, Fraser's Forest Flycatcher, Sooty Flycatcher, Black-and-white Shrike Flycatcher, Fiery-breasted Bush-Shrike, Black-shouldered Puffback, Sooty Boubou, Luehder's Bush-shrike, Gabon Helmet-shrike, Western Black-headed Oriole, Shining Drongo and spectacular views of the much-desired Chocolate-backed Kingfisher.

DAY 11: TO LECONI (Congo Moor Chat)

With Lekoni some distance away, and the road conditions uncertain, we decided on another early start. Most of the day was spent travelling. Morning stops produced European Honey Buzzard, Black Bee-eater and flocks of Red-throated Cliff Swallow milling about a bridge. Lunch was enjoyed alongside a stream where Magpie Mannikin was a surprise find. Near to Lekoni a slightly longer stop gave us a taste of what the next two days had in stall, with Congo Moor Chat, Tinkling Cisticola, Flappet Lark and Cabanis's Bunting seen.

DAY 12-13: LECONI (Black-chinned Weaver and Finsch's Francolin)

The woodlands and grassland surrounding Lekoni, near the Congo border in the far south-east of the country, are the northern limit for many species, and the only site for several species in Gabon. Our first day was focussed around finding the threatened and highly localised Black-chinned Weaver. Our morning efforts did not produce our main quarry, but were by no means unrewarded. More wooded/forested areas produced Green-backed Woodpecker, Johanna's Sunbird, Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo, Yellow-browed Camaroptera, Petit's Cuckooshrike, Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat, the desirable Black-collared Bulbul or Neolestes, Black Woodhoopoe, Yellow-bellied Hyliota, Salvadori's Eremomela and Green-capped Eremomela, Square-tailed Drongo, Violet-backed Starling and fleeting

views of the diminutive Angola Batis. More open areas were the favoured haunt of White-bellied Bustard, Malbrandt's Rufous-naped Lark, Croaking Cisticola and the yet-to-be-described 'Teke Cisticola', White-winged Black Tit, Short-tailed Pipit and Banded Martin. A striking male Long-tailed Nightjar was found dust bathing along one of the tracks. In the late afternoon we visited an area of open woodland, where a Black-backed Barbet was spotted distantly. We tried to get closer, and here bumped into our main target bird, a trio of Black-chinned Weavers which alternated between sunning on treetops and chasing each other from tree to tree. A fine ending to our first day.

Day two was focussed more on woodlands, but was also used to fill in missing gaps on our list. Perrin's Bush-Shrike was first up, although was true to its reputation of being a skulker and made us work hard for brief views. In the woodlands we were rewarded with Red-throated Wryneck, Neddicky, Rattling Cisticola, and two rarities, Red-capped Crombec and Souza's Shrike. The highlight of the morning, however, was a pair of Finsch's Francolin, which although not seen on the ground was flushed twice for excellent flight views. The afternoon was devoted to the grasslands where Temminck's Courser, flocks of Fawn-breasted Waxbill and a lone Marsh Owl were seen. The highlight was a male Dambo Cisticola, not known from anywhere else in western Africa, first sitting and then in display.

DAY 14: TO MAKOKOU (Gabon Coucal)

"Road no good" I had been told. But a couple of phone calls suggested that we shouldn't have a problem getting from Franceville to Makokou. The thought of taking two days to get to Makokou instead of one was not something I was warming to. Another sunrise start saw us on our way to Franceville, slowing down for a female Black-bellied Bustard on the verge of the road. From here we turned for Okandja, stopping for a roadside Marsh Tchagra spotted by Sakkie. The drive was long and slow, with the road badly eroded in places, but we made good time and arrived in Makokou just before sunset, a roadside Gabon Coucal the highlight of the ride.

DAY 15-19: IVINDO BASIN BIRDING (Goslings Apalis, Yellow-throated Cuckoo, Blue-headed Bee-eater, Black Guineafowl and Forest Francolin)

Perhaps the most diverse lowland forest site in Africa, the Ivindo Basin forests in the surround of Makokou are renowned for their great birding. The two extra days we managed to make up would be very well spent here. With a full five days to explore the area, we had ample time to visit Ipassa station on two days, explore forest on various roads in the surrounds and spend several hours exploring rivers by boat.

Certainly one of the most localised species of the region is Goslings Apalis. This was our target for the first morning. Sunrise found us at a nearby river, with several pairs of apalis calling in the distance, all too far away to see. We waited patiently, entertaining ourselves with White-throated Blue Swallow, a nesting Gabon Woodpecker, a male Elliot's Woodpecker, a pair of Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrikes, and striking Banded Prinia. Eventually an apalis had moved closer, and a short bout of playback drew the bird right in, where it perched at eye level, allowing prolonged views. With this we decided to move on to a nearby area with secondary scrub. Here we notched up Yellow-necked Greenbul, Gabon Woodpecker, Bristle-nosed Barbet, Black-capped Apalis and Buff-throated Apalis, a party of excited Rufous-crowned Eremomela, a male Superb Sunbird, every bit worthy of its name, and Western Bluebill. By this time it was getting rather hot, so we returned to our hotel for lunch, and then headed to the outskirts of Ipassa, for a taste of what the next day would have in stall. First up was Red-rumped Tinkerbird, followed by a trio of Black-bellied Seedcrackers feeding on the verge of the track, a pair of excited Masked Apalis and a male Yellow-mantled Weaver. In the late evening we found a Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat, which called back incessantly but proved very difficult to see.

Two boat trips during our stay provided sightings of a number of species not seen on land. These included the only Hartlaub's Duck, Leafloves and Bates's Swifts of the trip and our first African Finfoot and White-browed Forest Flycatcher. Perhaps the best birds were recorded were a pair of noisy Spot-breasted Ibis flying circles above our boat at sunset and two rarely seen nightjars, Bates's Nightjar and Brown Nightjar, the latter perhaps the rarest bird seen on the trip.

Two mornings were spent investigating patches of forest towards the Congo border. En route we found Narrow-tailed Starling and as we alighted from the car at our first stop, calls of a Blue Cuckooshrike alerted me to a pair sitting in the crown of an emergent tree, followed by scope views for all. A little further down the road a pair of White-thighed Hornbill whooshed overhead (the first of 7 hornbills species on that walk!), a pair of Violet-backed Hyllota was scoped in the canopy and Forest White-eye responding to the call of "Tit-Hylia" presented on Chappuis's West African bird calls. Next was a pair of Sabine's Puffbacks, a male West African Batis eventually pausing on a palm frond for long enough for everyone to see, two separate sightings of Blue-headed Bee-eater, White-crested Hornbill, a pair of Black Dwarf Hornbill inspecting a potential nest cavity, and a very confiding Forest Robin. A second area produced several Eastern Bearded Greenbul, Yellow-bellied Wattle-eye, which proved almost impossible to see, a surprise Uganda Woodland Warbler singing

from the forest canopy, a striking male Crested Malimbe stripping strands from a palm frond spotted by Bob, a Rufous Flycatcher Thrush and, for those who happened to be in the right place at the right time, views of a perched Forest Francolin. The quality of forest birding was remarkable, yet was still outshone by Ipassa.

The first couple of hours at Ipassa were overwhelming, as we racked up a long and impressive list. Species included Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill, a stunning male Bare-cheeked Trogon, Brown Illadopsis, a pair of African Piculets sitting still for 5 minutes (must be a record!), several Rufous-sided Broadbills, Brown-eared Woodpecker, Little, Sjostedt's Honeyguide, Icterine, Xaviers and White-bearded Greenbuls, Yellow-throated Nicator, Grey Longbill and Yellow-footed Flycatcher, among many others. The warmer part of the day was spent in more open areas, where Western Nicator, a bouncing male Yellow-throated Cuckoo, Verreaux's Batis, Chestnut-flanked Sparrowhawk, which flushed out of the undergrowth and flew across the road with its prey clenched in its talons, Mackinnon's Fiscal, Cassin's Malimbe, Forest Penduline Tit (seen by some), Chestnut-breasted Negrofinch and Bates's Paradise Flycatcher, were all seen. A sunset visit back in the forest produced Bates's Sunbird, which didn't stay for long, fly-over views of Afep Pigeon, a pair of Pale-fronted Negrofinches, and a group of Tit-Hylia found by Ron. Our second day was kicked off by a pair of Yellow-billed Turaco, the diminutive African Dwarf Kingfisher scoped by Ron, Yellow Longbill, a Lemon-bellied Crombec which descended below the canopy!, Grey-throated Tit-Flycatchers feeding a juvenile Yellow-throated Cuckoo (the first known host species), Ansorge's Greenbul and several Fraser's Sunbird. Calling Black Guineaowl got everyone excited, but despite much effort only some of the group obtained poorish views. We would have to try again later. A White-spotted Wattle-eye called from the canopy but refused to come any closer, and ended in a discussion on ticking birds on call, at least as an identification aid when small white spots were not noted. Back at the forest edge an African Crowned Eagle displayed over the forest. Our afternoon return visit had one aim: to see a Black Guineaowl. We slowly edged down the forest path to where the birds had been calling in the morning. A bird called further down the track, so we moved in, waiting patiently. Hopefully. Eventually my hopes were beginning to fade, so I walk forward 20m and played the call one last time. I was just beginning to think about giving up when I heard some rustling a couple of metres to my right. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a Black Guineaowl popped out of the forest undergrowth and onto the track, not 4m from me. I froze, not knowing what to do. The bird eyed me suspiciously, but continued unperturbed. I turned back to see a group of birders staring down the track. Had they seen it? None were using their binoculars! How could they not have? After about a minute of surveying the scene the bird decided it had seen what it needed to and disappeared back into the forest. As I walked back to the group I couldn't wipe the grin off my face. Everyone was aghast – they certainly had seen it, but everyone forgot to use their binoculars. But it wasn't over. I whistled some poor imitation in response to its call, and again it emerged, this time less than 10m of the whole group, where it eyed us all with suspicion, started to forage, and again, after about a minute, decided enough was enough and back into the forest! Incredible, and certainly a memory, that will stick with most of us, for a long time.

DAY 20: TO LIBREVILLE (Congo Serpent Eagle)

The final part of our main tour was a drive back to Libreville. A Gabon Coucal was spotted crouched in the road. We stopped to investigate, but it had disappeared into the undergrowth. Some nearby rustling caused me to investigate, turning out to be a White-backed Night Heron. At a stream crossing Sakkie spotted a White-bellied Kingfisher, which regrettably flew off before the rest of us could see it. Not long after Dollyann yelled from the back: "Stop, stop! Plumed Guineaowl". Slamming on breaks we soon realised that although hanging around on the roadside and allowing good views for all, the bird was certainly not tickable and would shortly be sold for next to nothing as someone's dinner. It was bushmeat. However, the undoubted highlight was a Congo Serpent Eagle, again spotted by Sakkie who was determined to make the most of his last day.

DAY 21-25: GAMBA COASTAL COMPLEX (Rosy Bee-eater, Black-headed Bee-eater, African River Martin and Plumed Guineaowl)

Saying our goodbyes to Sakkie, who was soon heading home, we boarded our plane to the Gamba Area complex where we had three full days of birding ahead of us. We were met at the airport and transferred to our comfortable accommodation on the banks of a large inland lagoon, all the way accompanied by Rosy Bee-eater, when it wasn't raining. Our journey there turned out to be rather wet, but it soon cleared up and we were watching Loanga Weaver and Rufous-tailed Palm Thrush from our veranda. A late afternoon trip to the lagoon mouth produced Pink-backed Pelican, a small flock of African Skimmer and a colony of Slender-billed Weavers. The next day was spent scouring the savannah edge for one of our four main targets, Black-headed Bee-eater. Overhead we enjoyed spectacular views of Cassin's Spinetail, together with Grey-rumped Swallow. Yellow-breasted Apalis frequented the thickets and a Lesser Grey Shrike was a surprise. But the heat soon got too much, so we turned, this time in luck with Black-headed Bee-eater, albeit with relatively brief sightings. An afternoon boat trip produced White-browed Forest Flycatcher, Giant Kingfisher and Brown Sunbird.

The next day we explored the savannas more widely by car. Rosy Bee-eaters were everyone, but

there was no sight of them breeding. About 10km from camp, we came across a colony of African River Martins, the inhabitants energetically collecting nesting material, excavating their burrow and calling. We engrossed ourselves in watching their activities, admiring their striking plumage. After about 30 minutes they decided it was time to head off and forage, and the group disappeared off into the surrounding savannas. We continued, spotting a distant swarm of birds hovering low over the savanna. A Rosy Bee-eater colony, probably 2-3 thousand strong! We approached on foot to within 50m, watching at close quarters as they displayed to one another with insects in their beaks and busily flung sand about as they added finishing touches to their nest burrows. A spectacle extraordinaire, and voted the birding experience of the trip. Once all had taken the photos they wanted and felt they knew the ins and outs of Rosy Bee-eater behaviour, we headed to some nearby forests to escape the heat of the sun, where we managed to track down Forest Robin, before returning for lunch and a siesta. The afternoon saw us back in the savannas, this time successfully finding two Black-headed Bee-eater nests, their owners this time staying long enough for our full admiration. Back near the accommodation we spotted a female Square-tailed Nightjar with her fluffball of a youngster.

Our last day was spent back in the forest under-storey, our boat trip en route producing excellent views of African Finfoot. Noteworthy sightings of our morning walk included Blue-throated Roller, showing off its diagnostic throat, a pair of White-crested Hornbill perched in the open, Red-tailed and White-tailed Ant Thrush foraging in the track alongside one another and allowing excellent comparison, and a striking Blue-billed Malimbe. However, the undisputed champion was a pair of Plumed Guineafowl, spotted by Dollaynn as they foraged in the track some 50m ahead of us, giving us time to admire their finely spotted plumage and funky hair dos. The afternoon was spent back on the boat, at last obtaining good views of Shining-blue Kingfisher, and seeing Goliath Heron, Royal, Common, Arctic and Black Tern and, after dark, White-backed Night Heron.

The following day we returned to Libreville, although not without some concern over whether our flight was cancelled or not. After much persistence and persuasion it was eventually reinstated, and we were all relieved to touch down on Libreville's runway.