

**WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION
SOCIETY**

FINAL REPORT

TOURISM PROSPECTION

Ivindo National Park & Lope National Park

Republic of Gabon, Central Africa

October 2006 – June 2007

Julian Easton & Jean-Pierre Tezi

Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)

Tourism prospection

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Summary

Over an eight month period from October 2006 until June 2007, steps were made to further develop ecotourism in Lopé and Ivindo National Parks in Gabon. Nine missions were carried out under the WCS tourism prospection project to explore, and identify new tourist routes in the national parks, and to highlight the potential of these areas to potential tourist investors. Nine mission reports were completed alongside a 20 minute film and a stock of photographic images.

Introduction

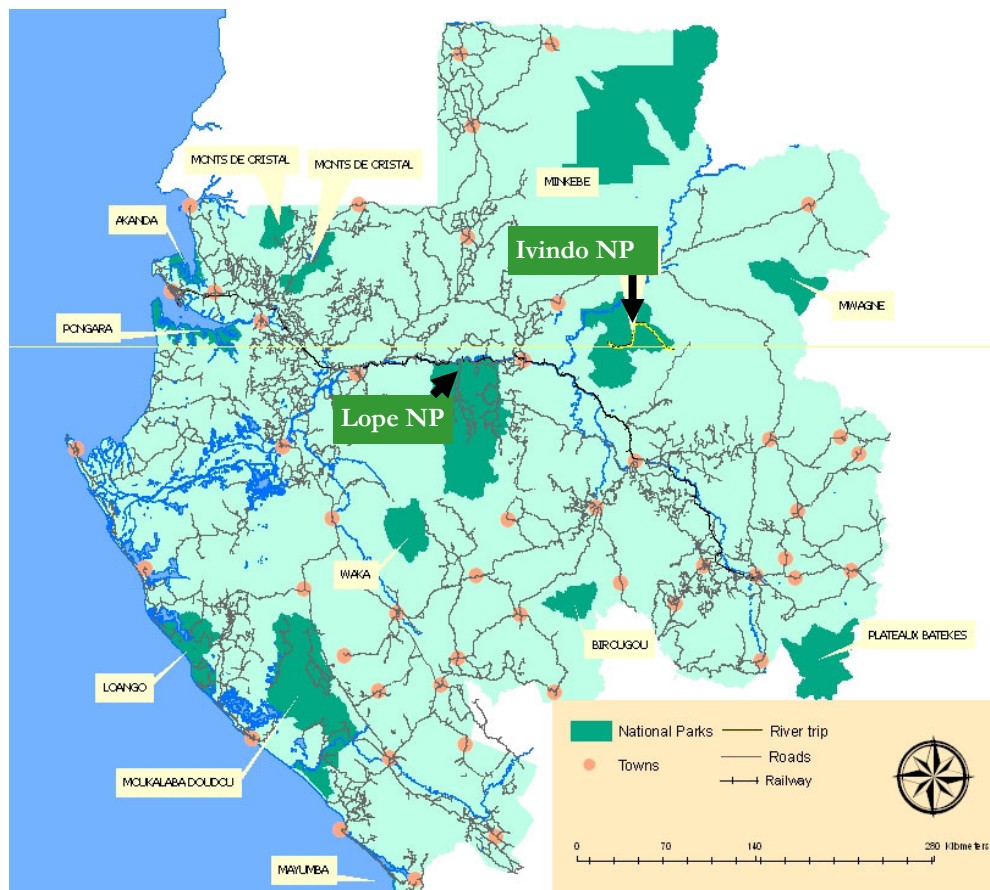
Tropical forests cover only 6% of the land surface of the earth, but they harbour over half of the plant and animal life that inhabits the planet. Over the past 50 years, one third of the world's forests have been destroyed, and with this an unknown quantity of biodiversity has also been lost.

The Republic of Gabon in Central Africa has escaped much of this destruction. A low human population density outside the main towns (0.3 persons/km²) and the lack of access into the forest due to basic transport infrastructures have allowed the forests to remain relatively intact. Today 80% of the country is covered by forest and this alongside wild coastlines, un-chartered rivers and un-discovered water-falls means that the country still contains some of the most

pristine natural areas left in the world.

In some parts away from roads and towns, vast inaccessible areas of forest are home to secretive animals that have lived for thousands of years, with little threat from man.

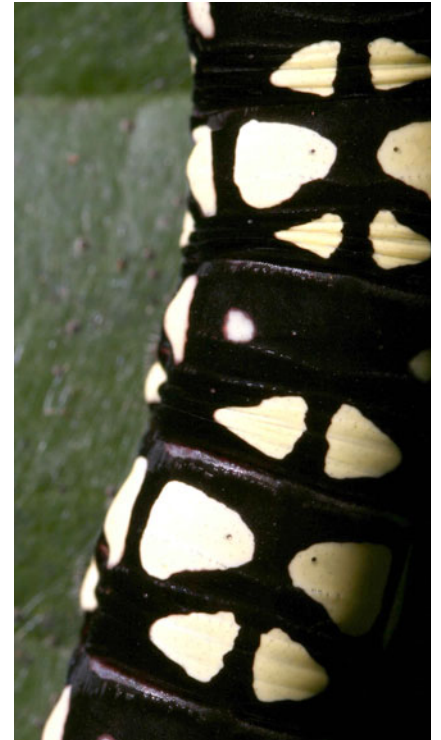
One of these areas has recently been gazetted as Ivindo National Park. This protected area lies between the towns of Makoukou in the north, Booue to the west and Franceville to the



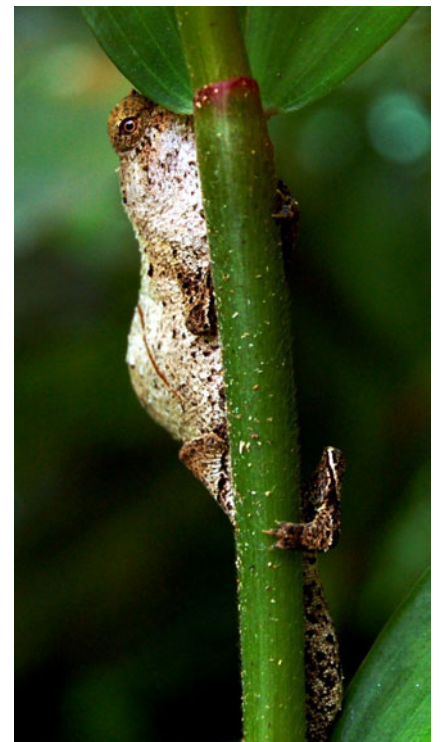
east. The park is named after the river which flows through the north-west corner. The pristine forests of Ivindo National Park in the heart of Gabon are home to the lowland gorilla, the chimpanzee, forest elephant, leopard and red river hog. Alongside these and other large mammals, it provides refuge to hundreds of birds and many smaller vertebrate species, unknown numbers of invertebrates and micro-organisms, all of which wait to be catalogued.

The second area studied in this project was Lopé National Park, named after a small river that flows into the great Ogooué river. Mostly rainforest, the northeast corner of the park contains the last remnants of grass savannas created in Central Africa during the last Ice Age 15,000 years ago. These savannas are now a rare 'island' habitat in the rainforests and thus the Park preserves a unique record of biological evolution during that time.

Through the development of low-impact eco-tourism circuits for visitors, these protected areas can be better protected and the natural heritage can be used to derive an economic value from this forest and help guarantee its long-term survival from degradation, and eventual destruction. Ecotourism is reported to be the fastest growing sector of the global tourism industry with most tourism growth today occurring in and around the world's last remaining natural areas. National Parks and Nature Reserves have become increasingly popular, and at the fore-front are developing countries rich in biodiversity.



Gabon has the opportunity to develop a competitive and lucrative ecotourism sector within its economy. If developed and marketed appropriately, a growing number of visitors would be attracted to the country and conservation through the sustainable use of equatorial forests could become profitable.

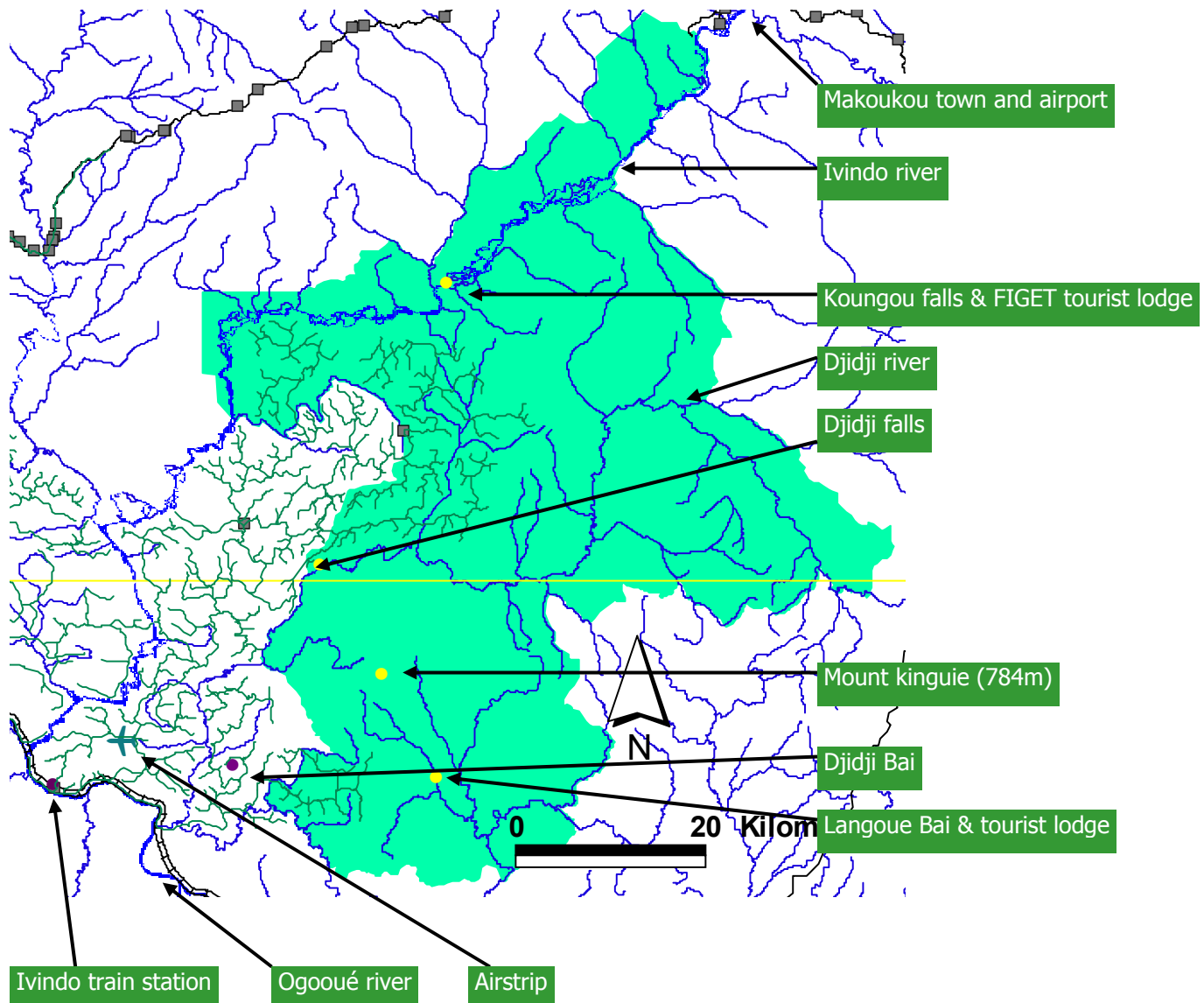


Ivindo National Park

Quick facts

Access	<i>Makoukou airport, Ivindo airstrip, Ivindo train station, forestry roads</i>
Area	<i>3000 km²</i>
Rainfall	<i>1750 mm/yr</i>
Biodiversity	<i>131 mammals - 17 species of primate, 16 ungulates, 13 carnivores 397 birds</i>
Habitat	<i>Rich in butterflies with many rare species and several new species recently discovered Forest clearings (bais), Ivindo and Djidji rivers, Koungou and Mingouli waterfalls, Cliffs of Mt. Kinguie</i>
Other	<i>Archaeological sites (neolithic, iron-age and old Kota villages)</i>

Map illustrating Ivindo National Park, showing major rivers, forestry roads, villages and sites of interest to tourists



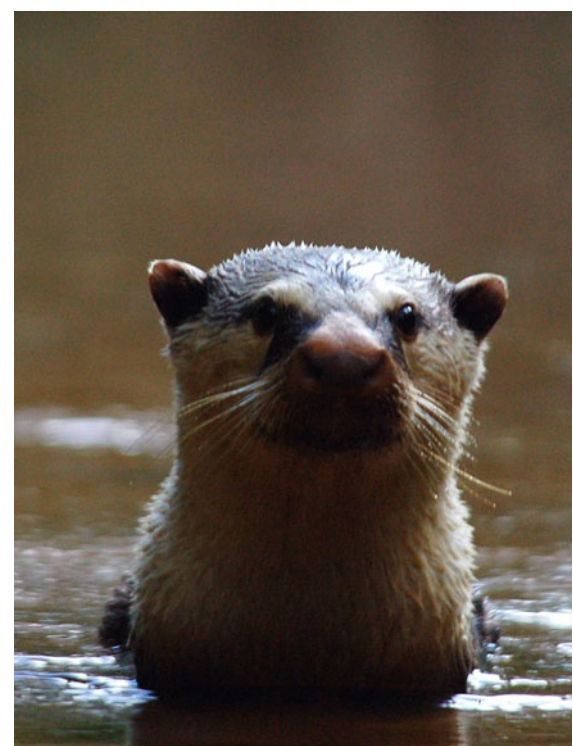
Ivindo National Park has huge potential for attracting eco-tourists, but currently offers only a small choice of activities. This limits the length of stay that visitors spend in the park and also restricts the income that the park can generate from tourism. Langoue Bai camp in the south of the park is currently the strongest draw for tourists, providing visitors with the exceptional opportunity to visit a natural forest clearing to view Forest elephants, Lowland gorillas, Sitatunga and Forest buffalo in their natural habitat. Presently, the only other option is the FIGET tourist camp situated to the North of the park, where tourists can stay at the Kongou falls lodge, visiting the spectacular Kongou Falls, and enjoying walking excursions in the forest. If the Djidji river trip becomes operational, these two sites could be linked by walking trails, to be opened up between FIGET and the Djidji. This would allow either a one or two week trip to be feasible.

Djidji River - Ivindo National Park

Snaking along the equator the Djidji river (also called the Dilo by Europeans), slowly meanders from outside the eastern borders of Ivindo National Park through the centre of the park. Here it turns south, flowing out of the southwest corner of the park and into the mighty Ogooué river which drains two thirds of Gabon. The river's watershed covers half of the national park and the eastern boundary includes the impressive Djidji Waterfalls, which stand 70m high and 250m wide. It is this natural barrier that has helped protect the area from the impacts of recent man, as hunters have been blocked from travelling upstream in canoe. The area is simply in the middle of nowhere, no roads, villages or human signs have impacted on the area. This area has allowed forest animals that are normally highly nervous and skittish of man, to lose some of this innate fear, and therefore can be more easily observed than elsewhere in the country. This sanctuary of calm has also allowed wildlife populations to remain high.

Regular ten-day trips to explore this river for tourism potential have been carried out a total of four times. The trips involved heading up-stream for 4 days and back down for 6 days. The upstream leg was carried out using an outboard motor and the downstream return by both paddle and outboard.

Paddling downstream from the eastern park boundary the river begins as a narrow meandering stream, buried beneath overhanging vegetation such as the stilt-rooted *Rikio* trees. Using machetes and a chainsaw, we initially opened up a course along the river, and slowly drifted downstream pushing and hauling the canoe through undergrowth and over fallen trees. One early evening we were surprised to find a venomous water cobra lying in the bottom of the boat. How far upstream had he been knocked into the boat we couldn't know, an uninvited passenger for the rest of the afternoon, as we jumped and scrambled unknowing around him.



Other encounters along the river may include sightings of the shy slender-snouted crocodile. This is a specialist fish eating crocodile, having a long thin snout armed with needle-teeth for holding onto its prey. It has a smaller cousin the dwarf crocodile who is a nocturnal generalist and also seen along the river banks and smaller river streams. Both species of crocodile can be found basking in the sun either on tree stumps, sandy banks or the shallow swamps. On one occasion we almost drifted over one whilst it basked in the warm waters. Sensing our canoe bearing down onto him he tried to sneak away unnoticed, but failing this, he launched himself up out of the water gave a clack of his jaws, a snap of the head and powered out into the deeper waters.



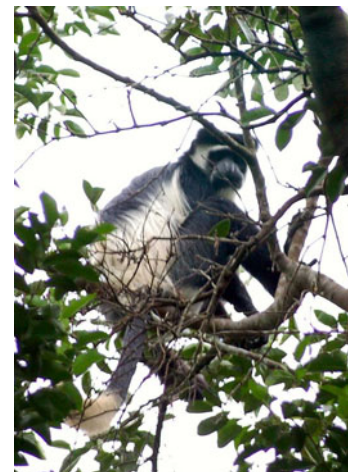
In stretches, the dark canopy over the upper regions of the river can give way into wide low-lying flooded forest. In some places these can form bright lakes, and here it is not uncommon to float around a bend into a family of forest buffalo, sitatunga or forest elephants. The large solitary bulls have enormous downward pointing tusks, probably some of the biggest tusks left in the world. Unsure and inquisitive, these old males may lift their trunks smelling the air and rock left to right, trying to identify our foreign smell in their green kingdom. On one occasion whilst patiently waiting in a small tree overlooking one of these clearings in the river, where elephants had been noted to frequent to drink the mineral-rich mud, I was disturbed by a soft crunching behind me. Turning around, the flash of white of a tusk in the dark forest showed that two young male elephants were walking straight towards me. At less than 10 metres, they picked up my smell and up shot their trunks with their eyes wide in surprise, moving with unnerving agility through the dense undergrowth. They eventually turned and returned into the greenness of the forest, but not before circling the tree and having a good investigation of what I was.



A lucky and rewarding sight is to catch a glimpse of the rare Congo swamp otter. This large and powerful otter is the least known of the three African otter species, and it is a specialist predator. Its sleek coat glides through the water, a glistening head popping out at intervals to reveal a striking black and white mask and a white underbody and neck. Two black streaks run like masquara down their cheeks from below bulging myopic eyes. Often seen in family gaggles, they hug the banks touching and kneading the muddy bottom and in-between roots with their sensitive fingers, hunting for crabs, shrimps and other aquatic creatures.



Birdlife along the river is raucous, colourful and varied. It includes flycatchers, kingfishers, herons, turacos, hornbills and raptors. We passed ridiculously enormous hamerkop nests, and had the chance to see two ibis species the common hadada and the rare and colourful spot-breasted ibis. Also there are good chances to see the enormous Pel's fishing owl, and the enormous Goliath heron as they often swoop out from their fishing spot, to fly lazily along the river in-front of the canoe. The noise of water being rapidly paddled will be the orange feet of an African finfoot as they rush across the canoe bow into the nearest tangle of roots, whereas the cryptic White-crested tiger heron will take refuge by freezing once it has been disturbed, being near impossible to observe in the undergrowth.



Overhead, the swoosh of leaves is the first sign that primates are ahead, and as the walls of jungle rise up, monkeys can be observed flinging themselves from one bank to the other, in order to feed on fruiting trees. De Brazza monkeys may be low down in the trees and descend to the ground as we pass, bounding along the river banks like lumbering cats. The secretive northern talapoin, the raucous mangabey and the riotous colour of the moustached and crowned monkeys are all often seen from the canoe, as we drift under them as they feed on the riverbank trees. Our largest family relative, the gorillas and our closest cousins the chimpanzees also inhabit these forests and can be seen, but their naturally low populations mean they make a very lucky but rewarding encounter.



Continuing downstream, the sound of deep grunts will advertise the presence of red river hogs. These the most colourful of pigs, have great tufted ears, and white whiskers like old men, and they root about looking for grubs, insects, fruits and any other juicy morsels to suck-up with their powerful jaws. It is possible to leave the canoe and track them on foot, approaching to much closer distances than populations elsewhere would allow.

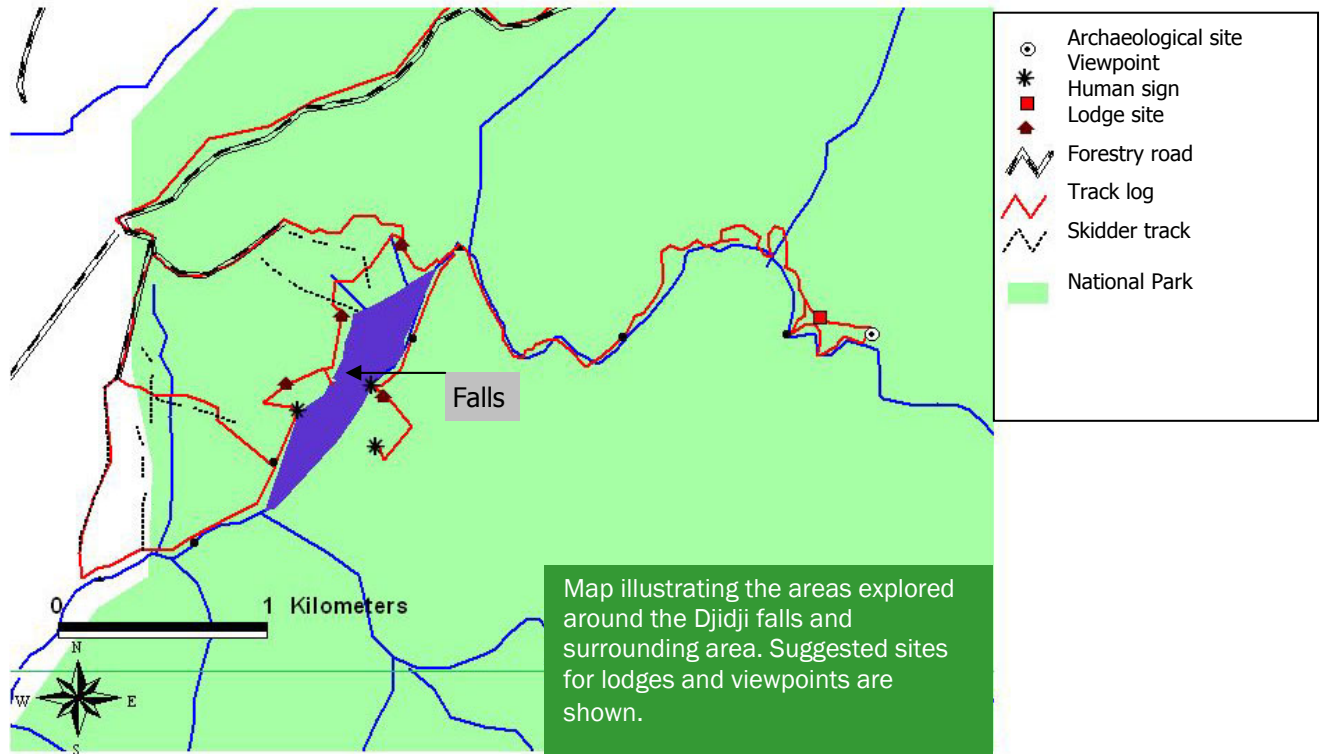
In brief, the Djidji River is an undiscovered, wild river which also has wonderful wildlife viewing potential of secretive and difficult to see forest animals. However difficulties include the poor access and no infrastructures and accommodation. There are also small inconveniences such as the number of biting insects, especially tsetse and filarial flies, the mid-day heat and also the heavy rain. Below some ideas are laid out of possible future developments and how some of the difficulties can be overcome.



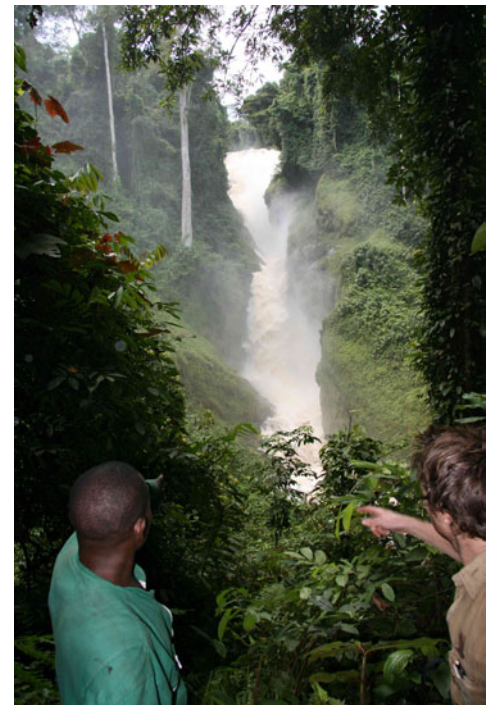
Djidji Falls

The Djidji waterfalls are split into 3 main sections, the northern channel which is a two-step plunge waterfall, the central section of 3 falls and a wide southern section, all of which are wide cascade waterfalls which maintain contact with the underlying bedrock.

500m up-stream and 1km down-stream of the falls, the river becomes fast-flowing rapids rushing through thick stands of screw pine, and is too dangerous for boat access. With another set of rapids at 2km and another at 3.4km upstream of the falls, only a 1.5km section of calm water is available for tourist boat trips.



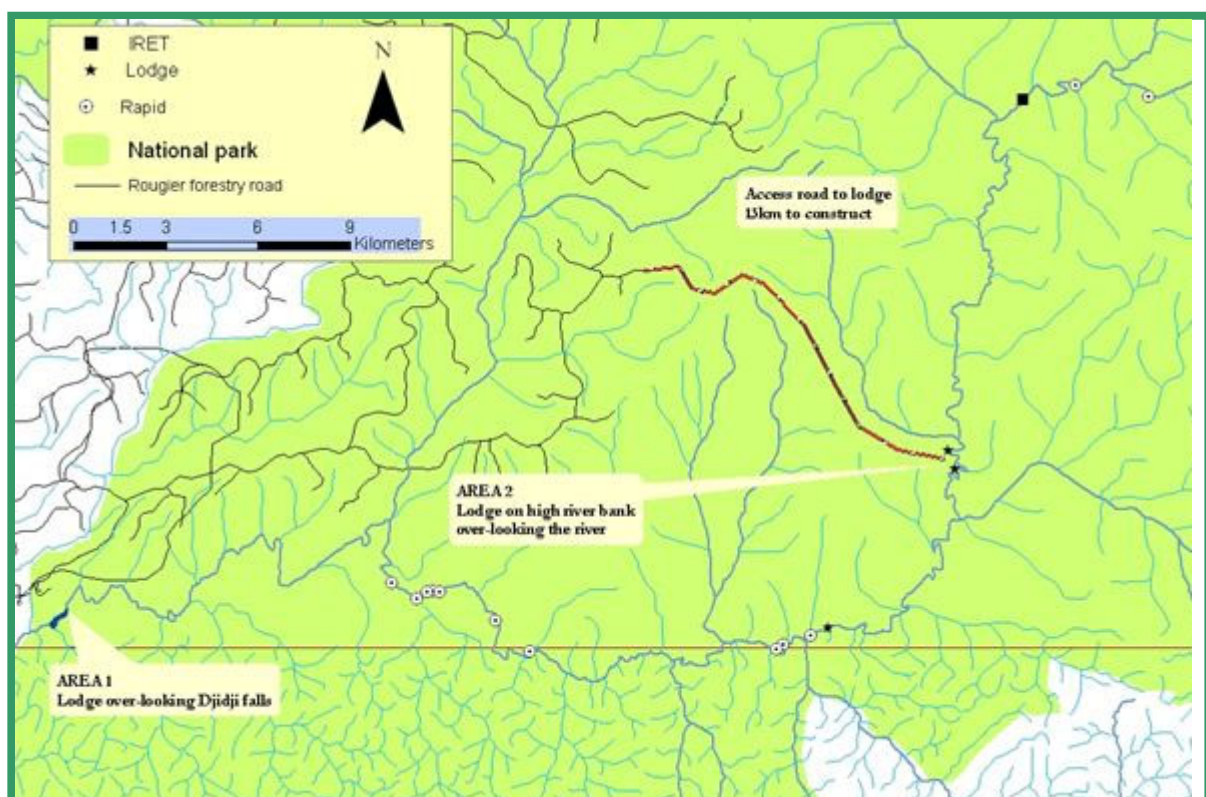
Four potential sites for a lodge are suggested above. It is thought that an over-night camp is all that is required here, with a more substantial camp being built higher up the Djidji river, where boat trips and better river-based wildlife viewing is possible.



Eco-tourism development of the Djidji river

The lodge & Access

Travelling up and down a river under the hot sun whilst being bitten by tsetse flies will not appeal to many high-end international clients, even if they initially say that they wish for a basic and natural experience. The results of previous missions show that there are little increased benefits in animal encounters by travelling further upstream compared to lower down the Djidji river and putting up and taking down a tent every night is impractical. There is one area upstream above a set of rapids, where elephants are more likely to be encountered. However given time and logistical constraints and also the fact that tourists will be visiting Langoue Bai where elephants are almost certain, it is not thought necessary for tourists to travel to this site. It is therefore suggested that in order to maximize the enjoyment of a stay on the Djidji, a comfortable lodge should be built with river and forest based activities organized out of this lodge along the river up and downstream.



This lodge could be situated anywhere along the upper Djidji (“upper” signifies up-stream of the Djidji waterfalls), but due to rapids and access points, two areas are suggested (see the above map). The development of a new tourist destination on the Djidji river is largely dependent on the availability of an easy access point as international visitors do not have sufficient time to spend long periods travelling in order to get to their destinations. The location of Area 1 would allow spectacular views over the Djidji waterfalls and the existing forestry road-network is ideal for access. With the Djidji falls at its doorstep, it would also be ideal to invest in a micro-hydroelectric turbine to provide the site with clean electricity 24 hours a day.

Area 2 is a site chosen as it is situated along a section of river which is both deep and wide and without rapids. This would allow the use of a large, flat bottomed electric or solar-powered boat to cruise along the calm waters of the middle section of the river. The site is illustrated below, and is situated on a high bank overlooking the river and a small floodplain, in which sitatunga have been observed. In either site, the lodge should include tented safari-style tents with private bathrooms with showers, and communal areas for relaxation, and meals. The lodge should offer

information on the ecology of the forest, with reading materials, digital information and experiment with new technologies including video cameras and roving monitors. These would allow visitors to get close to birds and secretive animals as they nest, breed and feed. Feeding stations could be developed for nectar-feeding sun-birds, bats and maybe sap-feeding galagos to allow visitors to see the feeding tactics of difficult to see forest animals. Displays such as aquariums, ant-farms etc. would provide good interpretative materials of the smaller and often un-seen animals. Scientific researchers should also be encouraged and add to the ecotourism product.



Kingfisher camp – Giant kingfishers often make nests in the steep banks of clay, such as in-front of this site.



The view from the Kingfisher satellite camp, overlooking a wide bend in the Djidji river

Night excursion

Night excursions were carried out by paddling downstream just after night fall, for 1 hour. Crocodiles were seen, and found to be easier to approach, whilst frogs, bats and sleeping water-birds were also observed. Species of note included two encounters with the rare Water chevrotain, a primitive ruminant with a social system similar to a solitary carnivore. They live at very low densities and suffer intensive hunting, becoming rare in many parts of their range. However, the water chevrotain does not seem to be uncommon along the Djidji river. Another highlight was an observation of an Elegant needle-clawed galago. This nocturnal primate lives on a diet of gums, supplemented with insects. The name lends itself to specializations of its sharp nails, which are used to cling to the side of wide tree trunks, which are too wide to embrace.

Parrot excursion

Stands of palms *Raphia spp.* along the banks of the Djidji are used as dormitories by African grey parrots at night. We observed the parrots arrive between 18:30 and 19:00 in the evening either singly, in pairs or small groups, until approximately 20 birds were in a tree. In front of a setting sun and the rise of the moon, the visual observations were not wonderful, but the vocalizations and bird sounds were. In the morning they left between 05:50 and 06:15. Given the late arrival and early departure, good viewing and photographic opportunities were difficult. If a spotlight was shone onto the roosting birds, they would become nervous and leave, alarm calling. By using flash photography with sensitive and very long exposure times, some photographs were possible and also using the super-night vision on the digital camera, some birds could be seen. The variation and volume of calls, whistles and clicks is impressive in itself and it is suggested that a rewarding and feasible parrot excursion could be run in which tourists left a nearby proposed lodge site and travelled to the parrot dormitory in order to arrive at dusk. With drinks provided, and a sun-downer whilst listening to the in-coming birds, a short film could be shown of the parrots roosting or if night-vision cameras were available, then this could be filmed and shown in real time on the screen.

Fishing excursion

With over 100 species of fish so far catalogued from the near-by Ivindo river at Makoukou, the higher reaches of the Ivindo basin have been described as a centre of speciation for the fish families of Mormyridae, Cyprinidae and Siluridae. The Djidji river has yet to be explored by ichthyologists, but it is thought that above the natural barrier of the waterfalls, there will be an interesting system of fish, probably with a few endemic species. The Mormyridae family is particularly interesting for tourism, as the family contains nocturnal electric-fish. Some species have even evolved extended lower lips and have been called “elephant-nosed fish”. This particular species is a relatively popular aquarium fish, and a small aquarium setup at the lodge would be an interesting educational and interpretive centre for these little-known fish species, alongside other aquatic insect and amphibian species found along the river courses.

We tried fishing and discovered that the fish quickly took bait and it was relatively easy to catch enough for dinner. The species caught included seven *Schilbe spp* locally called “yarras”, two *Anaspidoqlanis spp.* (catfish), and one Barbell *Batesii sp.* (locally called “Capitaine d’eau douce”) in the family of Eurasian carps. It is understood that specific fishing zones are permitted in the National parks of Gabon, but if fishing is to be developed it must follow NP management, with monitoring of trends to identify any associated impacts.

The Yarra and catfish are both good fish to eat, and were prepared with locally picked mushrooms *Cantharellus spp.* and made into a fish stew. An excursion similar to this would be very popular with visitors, having the opportunity to collect and use natural wild products for their dinner. This was a first impression and it is thought that fly-fishing would also be interesting to develop on the river as this does not require the need to use bait, and maybe used to catch the predatory “Brochet” (*Hepsetus odeo*) and this maybe a reasonable sport fish.



Alongside fishing, the act of sitting quietly and waiting also lends itself well to wildlife and bird watching and the afternoons were interesting for both the fishing activity but also the chance of seeing wildlife.

Otter excursion & after-dinner talk

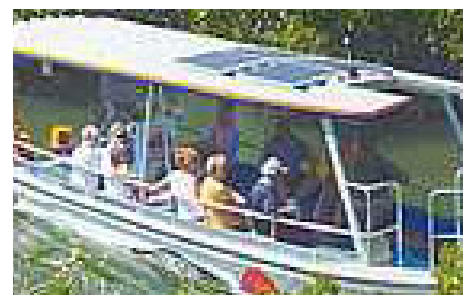
The rare Congo swamp otter seems to be locally common along the Djidji river. In order to give tourists an interesting and high chance of observing this animal, it is suggested that alongside the tourist lodge, a PhD student and assistant is encouraged to use the lodge as a base in order to place radio-collars on a local family of otters. This would add to the poor knowledge base on this animal and would lead to the collared individuals becoming habituated to researchers, allowing tourists to also benefit in the long term. This otter is the least known of the three extant African species and no detailed ecological study on this species is believed to have been published. On the IUCN red list the species is listed as data deficient. Organized tours would allow tourists to join the research team, to track, locate and observe the otters, and an

evening presentation by the research assistant could be given after dinner on the research and conservation of this species.

A solar-powered boat

being practically silent and generating no emissions, the boat would fit nicely into the eco-friendly attitude that the lodge should follow. Specifics of the boat should include the need to have an enclosed area to protect from tsetse flies, it could be equipped with audio-visual guides to give visitors greater knowledge of the environment, forest ecology and the work carried out by the National park authority and Conservation NGOs. A large screen could also be used to show short films of hard-to-see animals and footage shot along the Djidji previously, to compliment real-life wildlife viewing during the cruises.

A solar- powered 12-passenger electric boat that can also be charged overnight if necessary would be a suitable wildlife viewing craft. With a low draft



Examples of electric boats currently being used for wildlife tourism

Marketing

tourists in Langoue to drive up to the lodge to lengthen their stay in Ivindo NP. Access should also be opened up to the Ivindo river to the north along existing forestry roads, so tourists can fly into Makoukou, visit Koungou falls at the present FIGET camp and then travel by boat / foot / road to the Djidji lodge and then finally going onto Langoue Bai. This itinerary would allow visitors to spend a week to 10 days simply in Ivindo NP. Weekend trips should be marketed with clients flying in / out of Ivindo airstrip. In all these options, the tour should be sold as a package with defined activities listed giving guests the opportunity to do as much or as little as they would like.

The Eco-lodge would offer a calm relaxing base from which nature-based activities could be organized. Visits could be arranged to allow

Examples of activities

Early morning river cruise up-stream

forest river, with chances to observe crocodile, monitor lizard, otter, red river-hog and primates.

Boat excursion in the silent electric boat upstream. Experience the dawn along a pristine

Late afternoon river cruise down-stream

silently drifting downstream along a pristine forest river, with chances to observe crocodile, monitor lizard, otter, red river-hog and primates.

Boat excursion in the silent electric boat downstream. Experience the evening light whilst

Afternoon fishing excursion

you try your hand at fishing for either your dinner or to release. Species caught include Catfish, Yarra and Fresh water capitaine.

Sit back and enjoy a relaxing afternoon on the river, whilst accompanying a local fisherman as

Night-time crocodile safari

by expert guides, by using spot-lights you have the chance to observe the nocturnal dwarf and diurnal slender-snouted crocodiles, frogs, owls, galagos, fishing spiders and the rare water chevrotain or "fanged deer". Previous video recordings and night-time cameras will reveal the hard-to see animals that you may not get the opportunity to view first-hand.

Discover the forest at night accompanied



Walking trails

into the forest along designated walking trails linking a series of spotting hides. Accompanied by a professional guide, you will learn about the ecology of the rainforest and the intricate web of interactions within this complex ecosystem. Along the trails make use of the designated listening posts to hear what birds and animals are calling and discover how sound is often more important than sight in the forest habitat.

Strap on your hiking boots and head out

African grey parrot sun-downer

art electric boat to a natural African grey parrot roost in Raphia trees. Experience the awesome sounds as returning parrots roost in the Raphia stands whilst interpretative material and permanent night-vision cameras reveal their hidden night-time antics on the boat's projector. This trip is particularly recommended during the full moon, when the parrots are more clearly visible.

Take a cruise on our state-of-the-



Congo swamp otter excursion

they radio track and study this rare forest animal.

Accompany our research team as

Specialized bird-watching excursion

a specialized bird guide, this excursion will suit bird watchers and interested others, walking slowly through the forest, listening for the birds, calling some in using playbacks and visiting some permanent viewing hides which overlook nesting sites of kingfishers, ibis and heron.

Accompanied with

Canoeing trips

opportunity to drift silently down the river, with chances to come upon monkeys, red-river hogs and various bird species to spot these difficult to observe forest species

Paddle gently downstream in an open canoe. Accompanied with a guide, you will have the

Picnic lunch and swim

from the beach.

Take an excursion on the electric boat to a picnic site above a natural sandy beach. A mosquito-netted platform allows a bug-free lunch to be taken. Follow this by an afternoon dip in the river

Camping

Pack your supplies and head upstream to camp for the night on the banks of the Djidji. Accompanied by an experienced guide, you will catch your dinner and cook on a log fire, enjoying a traditional fish stew. This is one for the more adventurous visitor.

Canoe the Djidji from source to falls

(Special arrangement only)

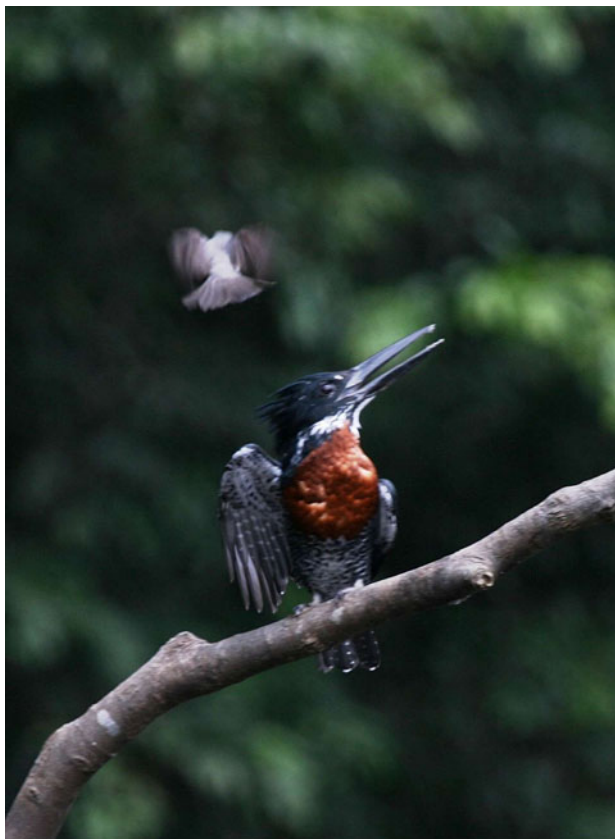
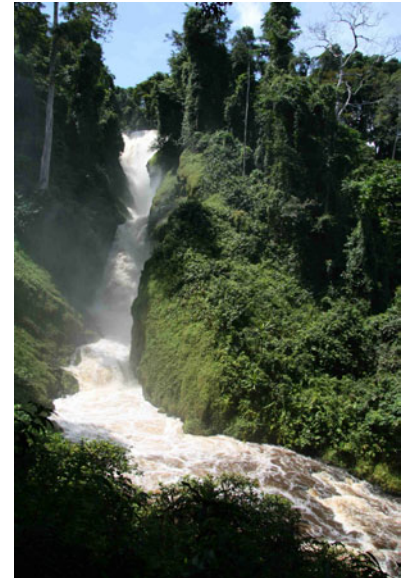
Fly into the Ivindo airstrip and get the train to Millole. From here drive to Winnerpac from where and you will begin your descent of the Djidji. This trip will take 5 days with 3 full days of paddling. You should expect to carry your boats over fallen logs and drag it down shallow rapids. Camping will be in designated sites, and washing will be in the river. Upstream you will have a good chance to see elephants, otters and monkeys as they jump across the narrow river in the canopy.

Waterfall excursion

Spend a morning with a guide following designated trails around the waterfalls, discover begonias, ferns and orchids and keep an eye open for frogs and toads.

Archaeological tour

The banks of the Djidji river may no longer be inhabited, but there used to be pockets of people as they moved through the forest. Join a trained guide and visit an archaeological site to discover artefacts, stone tools and excavations which show past occupations and human presence.



Mount Kinguié - Ivindo National Park

At the present time Langoue Bai in the south of Ivindo NP offers eco-tourists the opportunity to visit a natural forest clearing accompanied by researchers to view rare forest animals. The development of walking trails around Langoue Bai camp would allow visitors to lengthen the duration of their stay, and walk in the forest along designated trails. One possibility is the establishment of a path to the north of the camp allowing visits to Mount Kinguié. This should lengthen the stay of visitors and the construction of a satellite camp on the summit of Mount Kinguié would permit overnight stays and visitors could enjoy the spectacular views over the forest canopy.

Mount Kinguié is situated 14 km north of Langoue Bai at an altitude of 749m. The walk takes approximately 4 to 5 hours from Langoue camp and requires a good level of fitness. The western side and north-west corner are steep north-facing cliffs and the southern side is a more gentle descent. The relief takes the form of a large flat plateau which is composed of sandstone created from the Francevillean sedimentary basin, and dating to over 2 bya during the Proterozoic geological period.

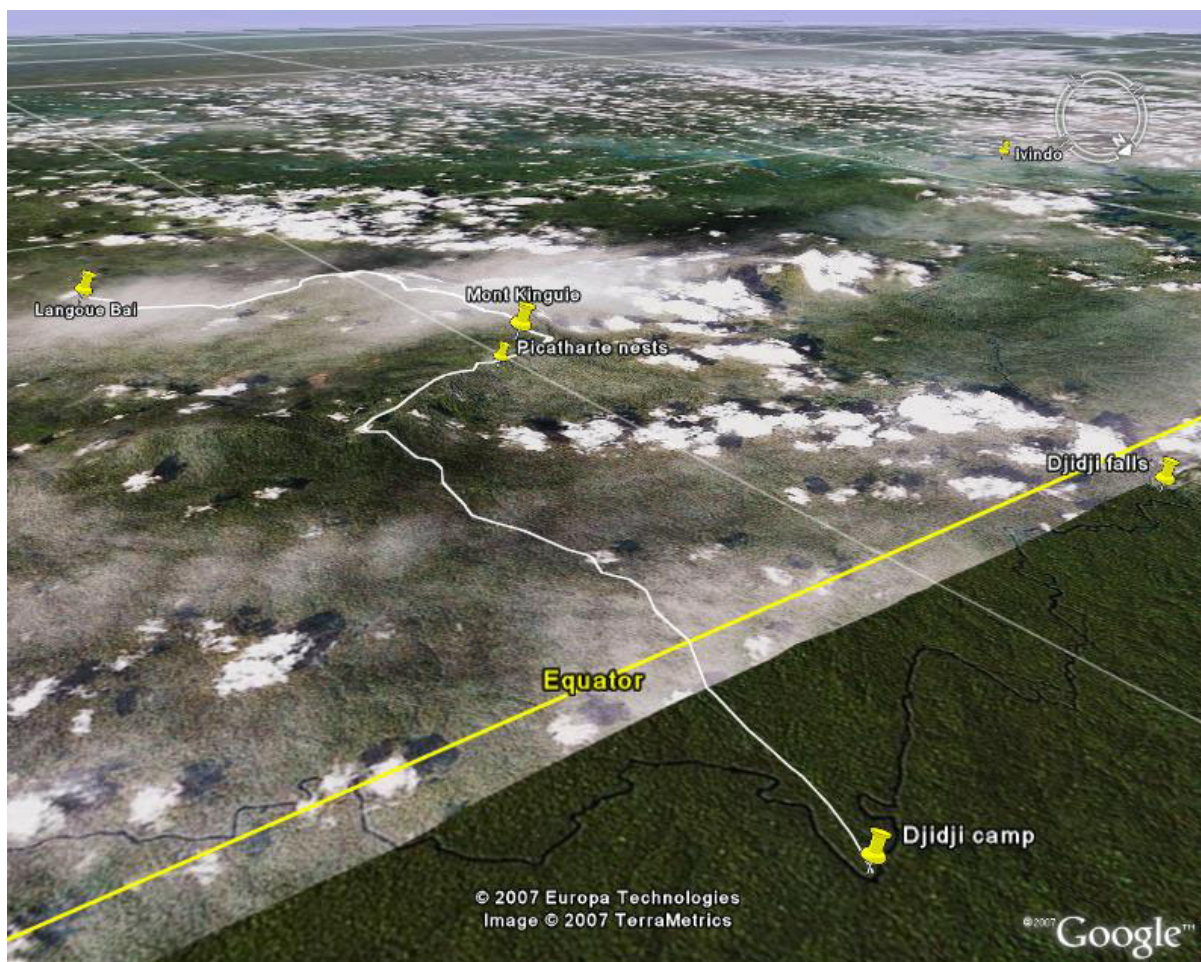


Illustration of route taken when we explored Mount Kinguié and carried onto the Djidji river

Possible attractions

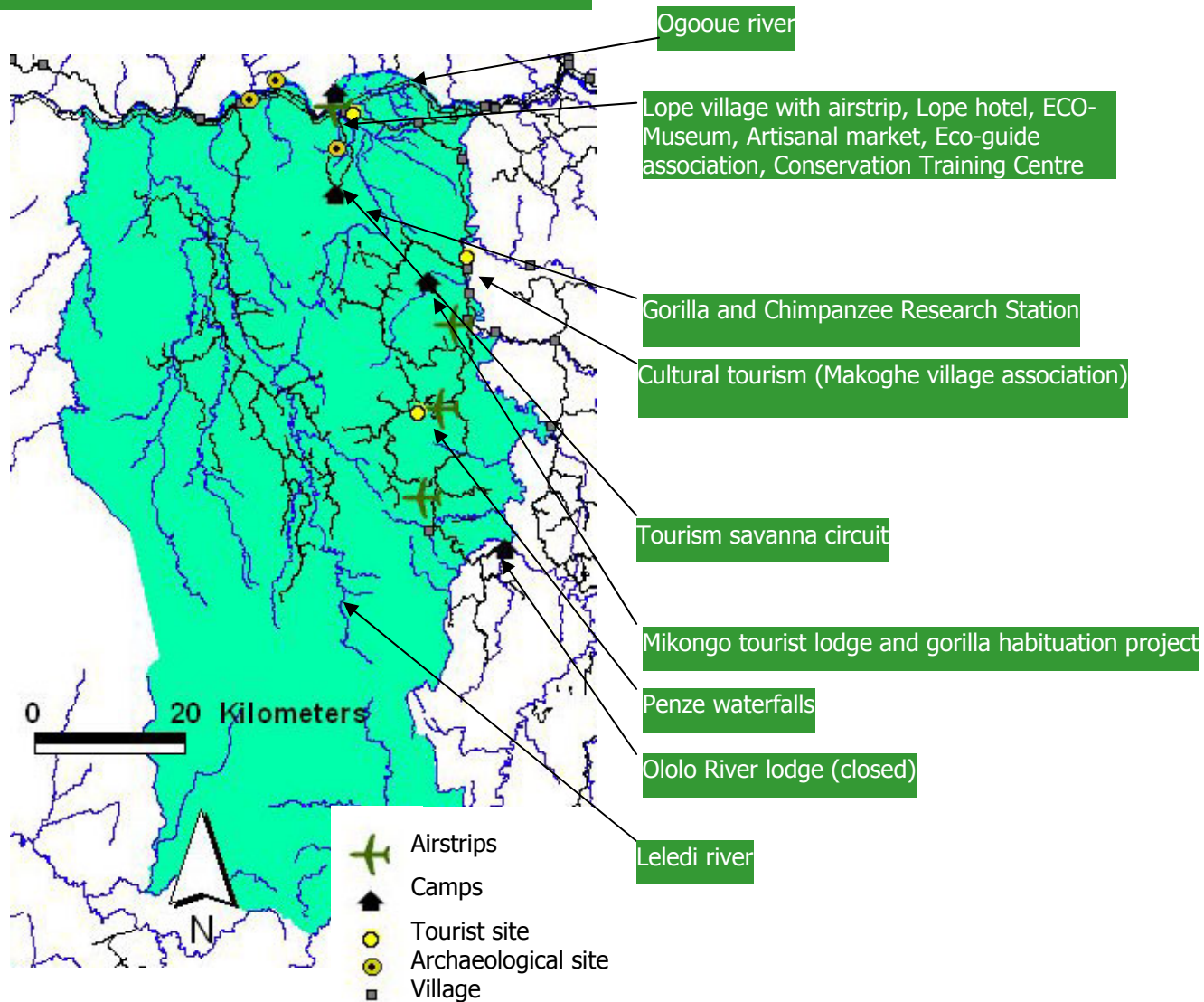
Grey-necked picathartes nests and ancient human archeological sites are possible attractions of the region
Grey necked picathartes - 13 nests were counted along the foot of the cliffs
Expeditions to ancient human archeological signs, and to explore the cliff faces
Views over the forest from the summit
Satellite camp on the summit of mount kinguié with views over the forest canopy
Archaeological expedition to explore the foot of the cliffs and the gateway

Lopé National Park

Quick facts

Area:	4970 km ²
Altitude:	97 – 956m
Access:	Railway, Lopé airstrip, Road
Precipitation:	1500mm / yr (Sept – Jan, Dec – Mar)
Habitat types:	Savanna 6%, Mature forest 28%, Regenerating forest 65.5%, Water courses 0.5%
Fauna:	412 Bird species, 63 mammal species,
Infrastructures:	Lopé Hotel, Mikongo forest camp, Ololo forest camp (closed), Eco-guide association, Savana drives, WCS Mandrill tourism, Lopé Case de passage, Eco-museum, tourist boutique, Cultural tourism

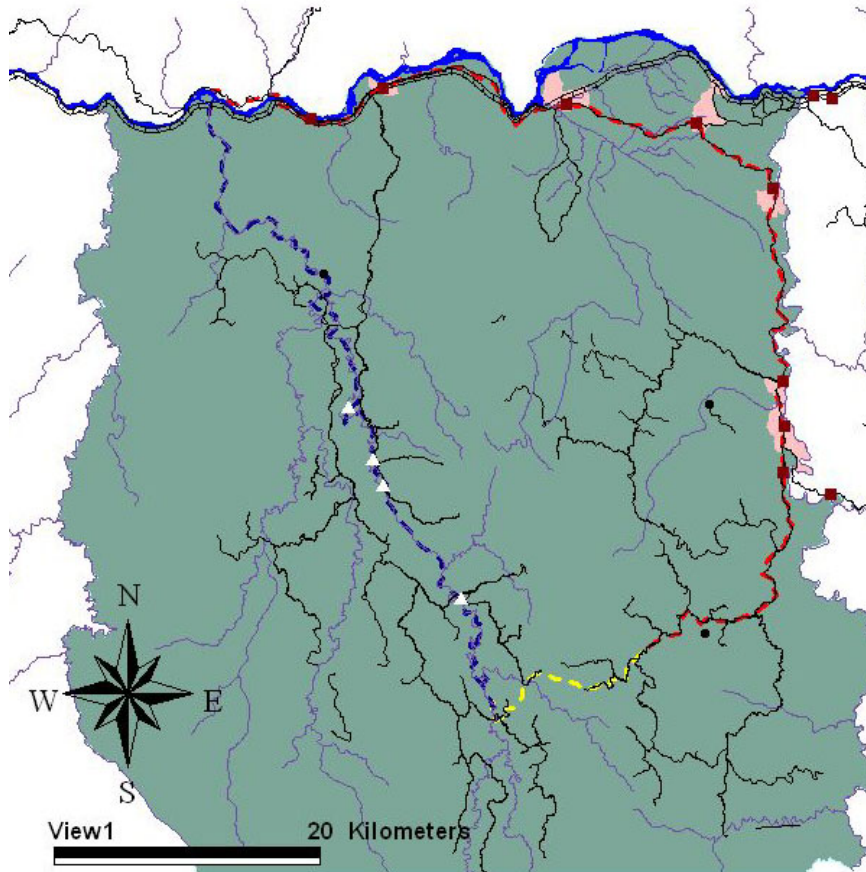
Map illustrating Lopé National Park, showing major rivers, railway, roads and villages.



The Leledi River - Lopé National Park

The Leledi river flows north through the centre of Lopé national park, into the Ogooue river. It is a fast flowing, shallow river, with numerous small rapids. The river meanders through mature forest, logged forest and marantacea forest and finally arriving at the open savannas in the north of the park.

In November 2006 a five day expedition from Lopé down the Leledi river, and back to Lopé was carried out using 3 boats carried in using a team of 15 porters. The circuit is illustrated below. The porters took four days to cover the 20km walk to reach the Leledi and the descent of approx.



60km took 2 ½ days to complete. The walk into the head of the river is challenging, due to steep terrain (maximum of 784m). However there are excellent views across the forest canopy, and you pass the Penze waterfalls and archaeological site, which are well worth visiting.

The Leledi river is generally shallow and fast-flowing with many small rapids. The team capsized a total of four times and unfortunately on one occasion, the boat and all equipment tied onto the boat did not re-surface and was lost.

The Leledi offers the chance to paddle down a river through a wild area, with the chance to encounter all the large mammals that are found in the park, including forest elephant, lowland gorilla, chimpanzee, forest buffalo and seven other diurnal primate species. There are also several salines along the banks where species such forest elephants, black colobus and gorilla feed on the clay minerals that they produce. On the one descent that we carried out, black colobus were seen feeding at one such site. Similar sites are also found on the Offoue river, and gorillas have often been sighted feeding at these areas. A family of four elephants was also seen at another one of the salines.

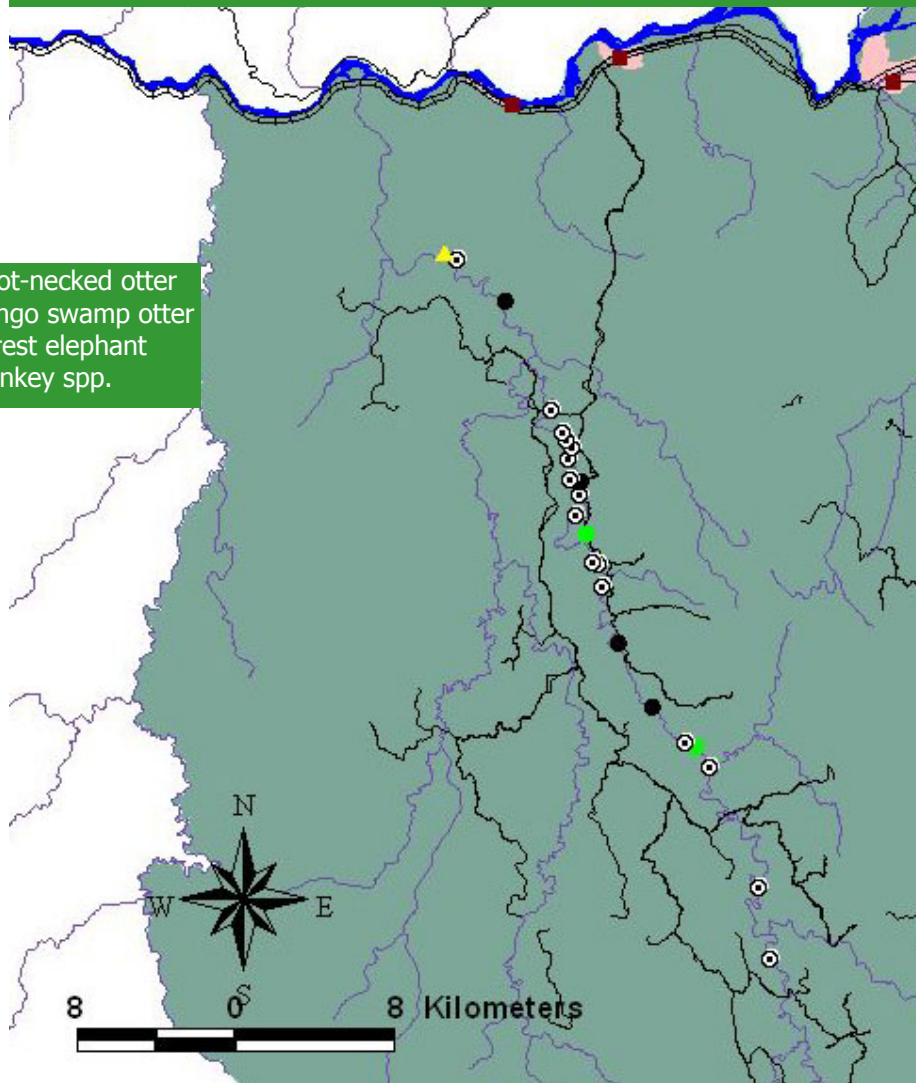
No. of encounters for animals

Monkey spp.	16
Dwarf crocodile	8
Monitor lizard	5
Forest elephant	3(*6)
Black colobus	2
Congo swamp otter	2
Forest buffalo	2
Water chevrotain	1
Yellow-back duiker	1
Spot-necked otter	1

*No. of individuals

Map illustrating the approximate positions of observations during the Leledi descent

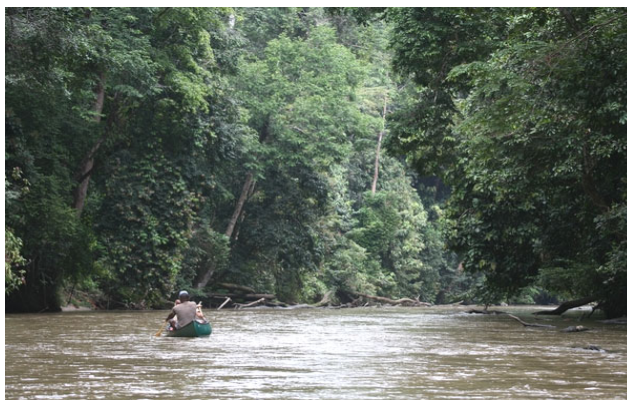
Spot-necked otter
Congo swamp otter
Forest elephant
Monkey spp.



Eco-tourism

development along the Leledi River

The Leledi river provides an exciting chance to paddle down through remote rainforest with the chance to see large mammals. The canoeing trip could either be carried out on a camping basis, in which case the trip would be organised from Lope hotel and a three day trip is organised in basic satellite camps. Alternatively a lodge is built on the river in the park and the canoeing trips could be one of several activities offered from the



lodge. Access to the area would be by way of

either:

1. Using the disused forestry roads from the north. There would be approximately 70km of existing forestry roads to re-open, and this would allow access to the middle sections of the Leledi, and then guided boats could be used to transport tourists downstream.
2. Using the existing airstrips and forestry roads to the east (11km) and then 6km track would need to be built through the forest, suitable for either a 4x4 car or an all terrain vehicle.

Next steps

Lope NP

Prospect the SOFORGA and the NSG roads for access by car or quad bike to transport canoes.
Prospect the Leledi area for a suitable lodge site.
Prospect the forestry roads in the south of the park.
Carry out further descents of the Leledi river in different seasons to map out the rapids and monitor wildlife viewing.
Explore the Penze falls and surrounding area for further archaeological sites.

Ivindo NP

Explore the cliffs along the eastern and western sides of Mount Kinguie.
Open up a circular path from Langoue camp to Mount Kinguie.
Exploration of potential new bays in the area to the south east of Mount Kinguie.
Monitor the picathartes nest sites at mount Kinguie to ensure that they are active.
Undertake further archeological searches of the cliffs at Mount Kinguie in order to identify old village sites.
Map out elephant paths around Langoue bai, and set up walking trails.
Access routes to the Djidji river, prospect the best areas for reaching the suggested lodge sites.
Research into Tsetse fly traps.
Koungou falls and FIGET – Prospect routes to this site from the Djidji river via Makoukou.
Prospection of Djidji river below the falls to verify access possibilities via the river from the south.

