

In April 1999 I had the opportunity to take part in an inspection visit of tourist sites in the West African nation of Ghana. The natural ecosystems of Ghana are important for biodiversity and are little known. Although I had previously traveled to East & Southern Africa as a wildlife researcher, tourist or tour leader this was my first experience in this area of the continent. West Africa & Ghana in particular is not often thought of as a destination for nature tours. Ghana has always attracted attention for its rich and varied cultures, history, artwork and native crafts. Ghana's natural attractions have had to deal with a large human population density and for the region a significant level of development. That does not mean that the country is devoid of natural areas & wildlife. Ghana has a protected area system of 15 national parks, game reserves and wildlife sanctuaries that cover all of the major natural vegetation zones found within its borders. This reserve system has managed to preserve some of West Africa's largest populations of forest & savanna elephants as well as most of the large to medium sized mammals and primate species that were found in the country 100 years ago. This report will give my impressions of the ecotourism sites that I visited on this tour.

April 08, 1999 – Labadi Beach Hotel

Arguably the best hotel in Ghana the Labadi has protected & restored with the cooperation of the Ghana Wildlife Society a section of mangrove swamp located within the hotel grounds. Among the interesting species of wildlife I found here were the birds - Senegal Coucal, crowned Tchagra and mud skipper an air breathing fish.

April 09 & 10 – Cape Coast

Overall wildlife was scarce. However I saw more vultures here than elsewhere in the country with hooded vultures the most common along with the occasional Nubian vulture. Most were found by local butcheries – places where livestock are slaughtered. An exception is the Hans Botel a hotel located near Kakum. Hans's surrounds a small lake with an active number of small Nile crocodiles that feed off of visitor food scrapes and the hotel grounds active weaver bird colony.

April 09 & 10 – Kakum National Park

Kakum National Park protects the watershed of 3 large streams which supply water to the city of Cape Coast and the surrounding vicinity. Along with watershed protection Kakum preserves the last largest undeveloped tract of habitat in this region of Ghana. The forest has been selectively logged and heavily hunted however it holds much of its original fauna including a small herd (150 or more) of forest elephants. I saw two sections of the park. The justifiably famous Forest Canopy Walk area is actually more of a tourist attraction / environmental education center than a good wildlife viewing area. However interesting animals do turn up especially if you stay nearby overnight and get on the walkway shortly after dawn. That I didn't do but I still saw 2 interesting birds – black & white casqued hornbill & red – vented malimbe. My best wildlife experience at Kakum was at the Membasama Village entrance. I camped there overnight. On my ranger escorted night walk I saw potto & Allen's galago and heard West African tree hyrax. Also heard a few gun shots which showed me that "bush meat hunting" is still a major problem here. A forest walk, again with armed rangers, here at dawn turned up a mixed group of lesser white-nosed & Campbell's guenon monkeys. I heard these and was able

to differentiate two very different monkey vocalizations and I also saw motion in the canopy. Feeding on the forest floor underneath the group were two Maxwell's duikers & a green forest squirrel. My ranger escorts later flushed what they told me was a yellow-backed duiker. This animal crashed and bleated through the forest like a small cow. Having previously myself flushed small and medium sized duikers on the West African Island of Bioko, I have no doubt that the id. was correct. The yellow-backed duiker in turn flushed out a young bay duiker which I got a good look at. Numerous birds were seen but the highlight was the crested Guinea-fowl.

April 10 & 11 – Kumasi Area

Although a cultural treasure this region of Ghana has little natural habitat remaining. Outside of the Owambi Sanctuary little wildlife remains. Interesting birds I saw here were blue-bellied roller & allied hornbill. The Owambi Sanctuary, although small has great potential as a regional environmental reserve and education center. With some investment of money & staff it could easily be Kumasi's - Kakum. Owambi protects a reservoir which provides the city of Kumasi with most of its water. In a short visit here I saw a small troop of Campbell's guenons, pygmy goose, allied hornbill & lily-trotter.

April 11 – 13 – Mole National Park

A 6 hours drive north of Kumasi is Mole is the first and largest of Ghana's National Parks. Mole has nearly all of the large savanna mammals that are found in Ghana. Populations of, particularly of large predators are low but there is a herd of nearly 900 savanna elephants as well as viable populations of West African buffalos and 8 species of antelopes. Driving North of Kumasi any signs of wildlife were scarce. Birds of prey & vultures were notably not visible, unlike similar habitat that I had previously traveled in East & Southern Africa. That was until we crossed the Park boundary. In spite of Mole's size (4,921.00 sq. kms.) only a small section of the park is accessible to tourists. Within the whole Park there is only a short road circuit that can easily be driven in 2 hours. All tourists in Mole must be accompanied by a park ranger; however this allows visitors the option of stopping their vehicles and taking walks whenever they wish. Game walks can also be arranged for visitors who arrive without or even with vehicles. This aspect gives Mole a unique attraction that is difficult to find in other national parks on the continent. At Mole escorted wildlife walks are the rule, not the exception. Within my two day stay here I saw the following – patas monkeys (a real pleasure since these species had eluded me in Kenya), olive baboon, green monkey (some consider this the same species as the vervet, I don't), bushbuck (a very strikingly marked animal compared to East & Southern African bushbucks), Buffon's kob, Defassa waterbuck, warthog, West African savanna elephant (that being said this population has ears & tusk similar to forest elephants), yellow-winged bat & epulatted fruit bats. The bird life is diverse and interesting. Notable species for me were the Barbary shrike, African hobby, double spurred francolin, red-throated bee eater, white-necked stork, white-backed vulture & spotted eagle owl. We also saw a few good sized Nile crocodile. With a more effort on with infrastructure and anti poaching patrols Mole could be the most easily accessed and popular park in West Africa for birding and mammal viewing.

April 13 – Boabeng – Fiema Monkey Sanctuary

One of the best primate sanctuaries anywhere. Originally established by two local villages - Boabeng – Fiema. For traditional reasons both Campbell's guenons & Geoffrey's West African black & white colobus are protected. Not only do you get good looks at both species but you will also probably get the best wild primate photographs you've ever gotten in your life. The Sanctuary is one of best "case studies" I've seen that demonstrate that cultural beliefs or/and local traditions can be incorporated into a viable conservation plan to protect endangered species and habitats. Along with watershed protection this I think is the "key" that can allow West Africa to continue to protect natural habitats and wildlife well into this century.