

A number of months ago I had a work trip to Zanzibar and I thought I'd take advantage of my time there to try to see Ader's duiker. Ader's looks similar to the Red duiker, but has attractive white markings across its rump, side and legs. The species is listed as critically endangered and is one of the rarest mammals in Africa, with a population of less than 800 individuals. There are only three known sites where it occurs: in the Arabuko-Sokoke forest south of Malindi in Kenya, where it is now extremely rare, the Ndori forest in Kenya, close to the Somali border, where access is difficult because of the security situation, and a few places on Zanzibar.

Before my trip I made some enquiries about where I might be able to see the species and received mixed information. Two colleagues who had spent several years doing their PhD studies in forests on Zanzibar where the duiker was supposed to occur had never seen one and suggested my chances were very slim. However the Director of Jozani National Park said that there was a forest in the south of the island near Mtende village where Ader's were not hunted and where the chances of seeing one were quite good. 'How good' I asked. 'Oh, one day should be enough to see one' was the response. I was accustomed to people giving me wildly optimistic chances of seeing rare wild animals, so I didn't raise my hopes too high, but this place was obviously my best bet and the Warden offered to organise a trip for me, so I decided to go for it.

The Warden had given me the phone number of the village chairman who informed me that we should get there by about 3pm as the duiker moved through the area in the late afternoon. After the meeting two colleagues and I hired a vehicle and drove from the capital to Mtende village from Stone Town, which took about 1 hour and 20 minutes. We found the village easily and the chairman and a guide were there waiting for us. During our introductions he told me that we should have arrived at noon as that's when the duiker were most active. Things were not looking good. We then drove for about 5 minutes, parked the car by the side of the road and headed off into the coral rag, which is essentially a dense thicket filled with thorn trees. After a 10 minute walk we reached a small area where the trees were slightly more open and they told us that we'd sit here to wait for the duikers to pass by. As proof that Ader's used the area they showed us some marks on a tree that had obviously been made by a medium size animal scraping its horns on the bark – and with that we sat down to wait in silence. After an hour the chairman's phone had rung three times, we'd seen no signs of any animals, and I could feel my colleagues eyes boring into the back of my head wondering when I was going to give up this ridiculous quest and head to the beach for a swim and a cocktail. Then after 70 minutes we heard something moving our way through the dense undergrowth and the guide put his thumb up and pointed. A few minutes later we saw a large male Ader's moving slowly through the bushes, about 25 meters from us. It was difficult to get a good view through the vegetation, but I could clearly see its face and its rump which had a (surprisingly small) white band across it. The animal obviously detected something as it stopped and smelled the air loudly for about 5 minutes, before turning around and melting into the bush. We were ecstatic but the guide told us that we should wait as another one would be passing by within about 10 minutes. Unbelievably after almost exactly 10 minutes we heard another noise, this time coming from a different direction and we saw another Ader's, this time a much smaller female, walking through the bushes.

Again the view was poor and the animal moved away after a couple of minutes. At this point we got up and left, shaking our heads that we'd seen not just one, but two of the rarest and hardest to find animals in Africa. The guides told us that if we came the next morning they would show us the Rufous and black elephant shrew which was apparently very common in the area, as well as suni, Blue duiker and Zanzibar colobus, but unfortunately I got food poisoning that night from the beach lodge where we were staying and was not able to return.

The village has obviously protected its forest well and they are very keen to get more people to come and see the wildlife there. This experience is certainly not for everyone – only real enthusiasts would be willing to sit in a thicket for a few hours hoping to catch a glimpse of a small ungulate, though for mammal twitchers this is really the only realistic location for seeing Ader's at the moment (a few individuals have been introduced onto Mnemba island, but you'll have to pay the \$1000 a night bed fee to see them and these animals are essentially captive). We paid our guides about \$25 for their time, and considered it money very well spent, particularly as it provides huge encouragement to the village to continue with its conservation policies.

If anyone is interested in visiting the area I can put you in touch with someone who can organise a guide in the village. I should mention that the village guides only spoke Swahili so if you wanted to visit you'd be advised to take a driver who spoke English. I would probably set aside two days to see the Ader's, as I doubt whether everyone would be as lucky with the sightings as we were.