

MAMMALS in ETHIOPIA (October 2014)

For research purposes I stayed the last couple of months in SW Ethiopia, Jimma zone. After a few months, we decided to go on a small tour to see some natural parks in the country and combine research and tourism on the way. Our focus was not on mammals especially, but because I used the mammal-watching website of Jon to prepare the trip, and because reports never include the Western part of Ethiopia, I decided to make a small mammal report of our tour. We toured with Action tours, www.actiontoursethiopia.com, a very reliable tour company who did everything as promised in their e-mail communications. We took this company because of their experience in Western Ethiopia (especially Chebera-Churchura NP) and because it was one of the few companies offering reasonable prices. In total we traveled 10 days. First two days were spent in Gera forest, Western Ethiopia. This is a (semi-) natural forest with wild coffee, and although human pressure is strongly increasing here, there is still plenty of wildlife around. Then one day was spent in and around the city of Jimma. Next two days were spent in Chebera-Churchura NP. We chose this park because there is 1) almost no information to be found on the internet about this park, what made us kind of curious and 2) It is close to Jimma town and Jimma is the gate way to the northern part of the park. Then two days were spent in Awash NP, the only place where we were allowed/able to do night drives (One in the Northern sector, one in the Southern sector). Last two days were spent in the beautiful Ali Deghe reserve. In Gera forest and Jimma we did not have a car, in Chebera-Churchura NP there are no drivable roads for now, and in Ali Deghe reserve there was a big fight between two tribes to claim grazing land inside the park only three weeks before our arrival and there was no way we were allowed to drive inside the park at night. However, we spotlighted on foot almost every evening (one night in Gera, one in Jimma, one in Chebera-Churchura NP and two around Bilen lodge, close to Ali Deghe reserve). We lacked the knowledge and information for rodents and bats, so decided to focus on the bigger mammals.

For more information concerning travelling in West Ethiopia, and what to see and do, please check: <http://binco.eu/en/publicaties/reisgids-in-en-rond-jimma-zuid-west-ethiopie/>

Chebera-Churchura NP had too much vegetation, which made it very hard to walk inside the national park. Dense vegetation, in the savannah part, the woodland and the riverine forest made it hard to see birds, let alone more elusive wildlife. Nevertheless, it is a blessing in terms of human disturbance. This might very well be the last place in Ethiopia where you can reliably see elephants and buffalo's. Furthermore, a whole bunch of carnivores are present, most notably lion and spotted hyena, but hard to see due to the dense vegetation.

Awash NP had too few vegetation, especially grasses were hard to find. This park is still getting worse (compared with the same period four years ago). Herbivores are now almost entirely limited to goats, cows and camels. On the upside: it is probably the lack of vegetation that allowed great sightings of some cats and aardwolf at night.

Ali Deghe reserve is a blessing in terms of wildlife. It is the only park in the country where you can easily see a whole bunch of different herbivores, although some are rather skittish. The grass surely was overgrazed here (but at least there still was grass) and it seems that cattle pressure is increasing here as well. It would have made the perfect place for spotlighting, but there was no way we would get inside the park at night. We were allowed to camp at Bilen lodge instead, which has resident dikdiks and warthogs, and a male lion is often heard at night.

Mammal list:

- 1) Aardwolf – 1 spotlight sighting in Awash NP (Southern Sector), 1 daylight sighting in Ali Deghe reserve
- 2) Spotted hyena - 1 spotlight sighting around Bilen lodge (around Ali Deghe reserve), 1 daylight sighting Ali Deghe reserve. Different spotlight sightings during night walk around Kito River, just outside of Jimma town.
- 3) Leopard - 1 spotlight sighting in Awash NP (Southern Sector)
- 4) African wild cat - 1 spotlight sighting in Awash NP (Northern Sector), 1 daylight sighting Ali Deghe reserve
- 5) Common genet - 1 spotlight sighting in Awash NP (Northern Sector), 2 spotlight sighting during night walks around Bilen lodge
- 6) Blotched genet - 1 spotlight sighting during night walk in Gera forest
- 7) African civet - 2 spotlight sightings in Awash NP (Northern Sector), 1 spotlight sighting during night walk around Bilen lodge, 1 spotlight sighting during night walk around Kito river, just outside Jimma town
- 8) Bat-eared fox – 1 daylight sighting in Awash NP (Southern Sector)
- 9) Common jackal – Many daylight sightings of this species at Ali Deghe reserve
- 10) Black backed jackal – One daylight sighting of this species at Ali Deghe reserve
- 11) White-tailed mongoose - 1 spotlight sighting around Bilen lodge. Plenty of spotlight sightings around Kito river, just outside of Jimma town during night walk.
- 12) Marsh mongoose - 1 spotlight sighting (2 indiv.) during night walk in Chebera-Churchura national park
- 13) Slender-tailed mongoose - 1 daylight sighting in Chebera-Churchura national park
- 14) Waterbuck - 1 daylight sighting in Chebera-Churchura national park, 1 spotlight sighting in Awash NP (Northern Sector)
- 15) African Buffalo - 2 spotlight sightings during night walk in Chebera-Churchura national park
- 16) Beisa Oryx – few (<30) seen in Awash (Southern sector), plenty in Ali deghe reserve
- 17) Soemmering’s gazelle – only two seen in Awash (Southern sector), plenty in Ali Deghe reserve
- 18) Northern Gerenuk – Plenty seen (though skittish) in Ali Deghe reserve, two seen early morning around Bilen lodge
- 19) Salt’s dikdik – Plenty in Awash and around Bilen lodge, few seen in Ali Deghe reserve
- 20) Grevy’s zebra – Small groups (max 6) scattered scarcely across Ali Deghe reserve, skittish
- 21) Lesser kudu – One male while spotlighting in Awash (northern sector)
- 22) Bohor reedbuck – Several seen at the “Hyena belt” just outside of Jimma town, mainly residing at the airport there
- 23) Bushbuck – One female seen at Gera forest while spotlighting during night walk
- 24) Common duiker - One seen at Gera forest while spotlighting during night walk
- 25) Hamydras baboon - Plenty in Awash (Northern sector), some groups along roadside between Awash and Ali Deghe
- 26) Olive baboon – Plenty in Awash (Southern sector), Gera forest, and in Chebera-Churchura.
- 27) Black-and-white colobus monkey – Plenty around Jimma, most in Gera forest. Several groups in Chebera-Churchura NP.
- 28) Vervet monkey – Seen around Jimma, in Chebera-Churchura NP, Awash NP and around Bilen lodge

- 29) Blue monkey – Seen in small groups during day walk inside Gera forest
- 30) Senegal galago – Several sightings (never good) at Gera forest while spotlighting during night walk
- 31) Hippopotamus – Seen three individuals at the Kito river, and 8 at Lake Boye, both locations just outside Jimma town
- 32) Giant forest hog – A small group (3) was seen during daytime inside Gera forest
- 33) Bushpig – 2 bushpigs ran away through dense bush at Chebera-Churchura NP (seen badly).
- 34) Warthog – Several sightings in Awash NP (Northern and Southern sector), several sightings around Bilen Lodge and in Ali Deghe NP
- 35) Striped ground squirrel – One seen at Chebera-Churchura NP
- 36) Unstriped ground squirrel – One seen at Ali Deghe reserve, one near Bilen lodge
- 37) Gambian sun squirrel – One seen at Chebera-Churchura NP
- 38) Gerbil sp. – One seen during spotlighting in Awash NP (Northern Sector)
- 39) Scrub hare – Several were seen at Gera forest while spotlighting during night walk
- 40) Cape hare – Several seen during night drives in Awash and night walk around Bilen lodge
- 41) Yellow-spotted tree hyrax – One seen on the road side close to Chebera-Churchura national park
- 42) Rock hyrax – One seen on the road side driving from Jimma to Addis

We heard a lion on two consecutive nights at Bilen lodge, near Ali Deghe reserve and the driver heard one lion calling at night at the Filwoha hot springs in Awash national park. Elephant tracks, dung and trails were omnipresent (but not fresh) in Chebera-Churchura NP, there is a high chance of seeing large herds during dry season, I was told... One unidentified fox during night game drive in Awash NP (Southern Sector) might have been Rüppels fox (seemed to small and not enough black for Bat-eared fox) but seen too briefly. One jackal sp. seen at “Hyena belt” just outside Jimma town while spotlighting during night walk.

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Greetings,
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