



At Royle Safaris we have become somewhat specialists in trips which look for some of the world's rarest and most elusive mammals. After 12 years and over 250 tours we have successfully established small scale sustainable ecotourism projects centred around some of these species; including Siberian Tiger, Amur Leopard, Javan Rhino, Himalayan Red Panda and Giant Panda as well as being key in the ongoing ecotourism of Snow Leopards, Jaguars, Wolverines, Mandrills and many other endangered species.

So it is not surprising that our attention would some day turn towards the Pygmy Hippo. The only large mammal in Africa (other than the Okapi) which has consistently remained elusive and very difficult to see and even more difficult to produce repeated successful trips to see it. For a number of years we were looking at Sierra Leone and very nearly chose Gola National Park but then we heard of a sighting and photographs taken of a wild Pygmy Hippo in the daytime from Tai National Park in Cote D'Ivoire. We decided to strike whilst the iron was hot, however this happened in 2020 and we all know what happened then. So fast forward 2 years (or close enough) and we finally made it to Tai National Park, close to the border of Cote D'Ivoire and Liberia.

Our team would be Martin Royle of Royle Safaris, Chris Scharf (our very intrepid client from various other trip reports of ours), Tom Clode of Pictus Safaris and three guides from the park itself, Clermont, Everest and Stefan. Prior to our trip another small group had been in the area to look for hippos and other species, they had longer than we had and they were not as focused solely on the hippo as we would be. But their list of mammals was mighty impressive, despite not seeing a hippo they had set us up for a good trip with sightings of various duiker species including two views of the iconic Jentkin's Duiker, all of the 12 primate species and other high target species such as Johnston's Genet and Liberian Mongoose. We knew our total wouldn't be as impressive as we would spend less time in the forest during daylight hours and become a little more nocturnal and also spend more time on the river as we would focus on the most likely locations for Pygmy Hippos.

However even including these limitations we produced a mammal list similar to the first trip and we are very happy with our sightings, despite not seeing a hippo. As with many of the first times Royle Safaris runs an expedition style trip for such an elusive species we are not perturbed by failure. In fact failure is always an option on these scouting trips, what we look for is how we can improve in the future. We look for patterns with the animals (times of the day they are most active, routes they take when moving through areas, river crossing sites etc), key habitat traits (mineral licks, mud wallows, preferred feeding areas, day refuges etc) and areas which can be used for stake outs and or repeatable excursions. And it was these aspects of the trip which we were very happy with; we found good feeding locations for the hippos, various places which they use as day refuges, lots of activity around the river as well as dung marking locations and a mud wallow. We also started to see how we could best utilise time and the best approach to not just maximise sighting opportunities but also to try and get good views and ultimately photos. We have two or three approaches to increase our chances of Pygmy Hippos on future trips, we will begin to employ over the coming months to further finetune our future trips.

The main issue we would find is finding a happy medium between people wanting to see a Pygmy Hippo and people wanting to see the range of other wildlife including the world famous Tai Forest Chimpanzees, these chimps are world renowned for their nut cracking and whilst we didn't dedicate any time to see them on this trip, they are easily observed. The two approaches for a trip to Tai (1) Dedicated Pygmy Hippo Expedition and (2) Tai Wildlife Adventure seem to fall into two distinct itineraries. Of course doing either leaves the client with a great chance of seeing anything that lives in the park, but certainly the time spend in the key areas and at the key times for some species will be lesser depending on the itinerary.

So below is a list of our sightings, as mentioned this trip was 100% focused on Pygmy Hippo and the mammal list for a more general trip could be increased somewhat, the birds are also good and we only recorded incidental sightings and as much of our time looking for hippos was at night the bird list is lacking. Reptiles and amphibians can also be very good here and once again we only recorded a few as we were not looking for these. All in all anyone wanting to visit Tai for either general wildlife or just the Pygmy Hippo will thoroughly enjoy the trip and stand a very good chance seeing some of the world's most endangered and rarely seen mammals in the whole of Africa.

This trip started in Abidjan and moved to Tai via San Pedro and the same route back, due to the current covid protocols for departure we had to have a PCR test done in Abidjan prior to departure so we had more time in the city than planned and we visited Banco National Park, which is a small area of primary rainforest inside the city, home to Chimpanzees and other species (however they are hard to see).

We will be planning to return to Tai annually and if anyone is interested in either option (general mammalwatching or dedicated Pygmy Hippo) please contact us at [info@royle-safaris.co.uk](mailto:info@royle-safaris.co.uk) and we will happily provide information and answer any questions.

# Species List

## Pygmy Hippo Expedition (initial scouting trip) Feb/Mar 2022

### Mammals

‡ indicates where we have seen sign or heard the animal and not visually observed the animal

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Lord Derby's Anomalure	<i>Anomalurus derbianus</i>
2	African Brush-tailed Porcupine	<i>Atherurus africanus</i>
3	Marsh Mongoose	<i>Atilax paludinosus</i>
4	Bay Duiker	<i>Cephalophus dorsalis</i>
5	Maxwell's Duiker	<i>Cephalophus maxwellii</i>
6	Black Duiker	<i>Cephalophus niger</i>
7	Ogilby's Duiker	<i>Cephalophus ogilbyi</i>
8	Zebra Duiker	<i>Cephalophus zebra</i>
9	White-naped Mangabey	<i>Cercocebus lunulatus</i>
10	Campbell's Mona Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus campbelli</i>
11	Diana Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus diana</i>
12	Lowe's Mona Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus lowei</i>
13	Putty-nosed Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus nictitans</i>
14	Lesser Spot-nosed Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus petaurista</i>
15	Little Free-tailed Bat	<i>Chaerephon pumila</i>
16	Green Monkey	<i>Chlorocebus sabaeus</i>
17	Pygmy Hippo	<i>Choeropsis liberiensis</i>
18	King Colobus	<i>Colobus polykomos</i>
19	Emin's Pouched Rat	<i>Cricetomys emini</i>
20	Common Cusimanse	<i>Crossarchus obscurus</i>
21	Straw-coloured Fruit Bat	<i>Eidolon helvum</i>
22	Western Palm Squirrel	<i>Epixerus ebii</i>

Key: Abidjan (ABD) / San Pedro (SPD) Palm Oil & Forest between San Pedro & Tai (POF) / Tai National Park (TAI) / Banco National Park (BAN)				
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23	Buettikofer Epauletted Bat	<i>Epomops buettikoferi</i>
24	Fire-footed Rope Squirrel	<i>Funisciurus pyrropus</i>
25	Demidoff's Dwarf Galago	<i>Galagoides demidovii</i>
26	Thomas's Galago	<i>Galagoides thomasi</i>
27	Johnston's Genet	<i>Genetta johnstoni</i>
28	Cyclops Roundleaf Bat	<i>Hipposideros cyclops</i>
29	Water Chevrotain	<i>Hyemoschus aquaticus</i>
30	Flat-nosed Wood Mouse	<i>Hylomyscus simus</i>
31	Hammer-headed Bat	<i>Hypsignathus monstrosus</i>
32	Liberian Mongoose	<i>Liberiictis kuhni</i>
33	African Forest Elephant	<i>Loxodonta cyclotis</i>
34	Edward's Swamp Rat	<i>Malacomys edwardsi</i>
35	Dark-brown Serotine	<i>Neoromicia brunneus</i>
36	Banana Pipistrelle	<i>Neoromicia nanus</i>
37	Chimpanzee	<i>Pan troglodytes</i>
38	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
39	Green Bush Squirrel	<i>Paraxerus poensis</i>
40	West African Potto	<i>Perodicticus potto</i>
41	Western Red Colobus	<i>Piliocolobus badius</i>
42	Red River Hog	<i>Potamochoerus porcus</i>
43	Slender-tailed Squirrel	<i>Potamochoerus porcus</i>
44	Forest Soft-furred Mouse	<i>Praomys rostratus</i>
45	Olive Colobus	<i>Procolobus verus</i>
46	Forest Giant Squirrel	<i>Protoxerus stangeri</i>
47	Halcyon Horseshoe Bat	<i>Rhinolophus alcyone</i>
48	Nut-coloured Yellow Bat	<i>Scotophilus nux</i>
49	Forest Buffalo	<i>Syncerus nanus</i>

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**Note:** Some bats identified 100% at roosts or with good views. Others identified with spectrograms in combination with sightings (no spectrograms without visual confirmation are recorded as a sighting), behaviour and habitat – so not 100% but best educated guesses. For more information please email me.

## Birds

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
2	African Jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>

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3	White-crested Guineafowl	<i>Agelastes meleagrides</i>
4	Shining-blue Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo quadribrachys</i>
5	Cassin's Hawkeagle	<i>Aquila africana</i>
6	Intermediate Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>
7	Hadeda Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>
8	Olive Ibis	<i>Bostrychia olivacea</i>
9	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
10	Grasshopper Buzzard	<i>Butastur rufipennis</i>
11	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>
12	Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis daurica</i>
13	Rufous-chested Swallow	<i>Cecropis semirufa</i>
14	Senegal Coucal	<i>Centropus senegalensis</i>
15	Black-casqued Hornbill	<i>Ceratogymna atrata</i>
16	Yellow-casqued Hornbill	<i>Ceratogymna elata</i>
17	Simple Greenbul	<i>Chlorocichla simplex</i>
18	Melancholy Woodpecker	<i>Chloropicus lugubris</i>
19	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
20	Lemon Dove	<i>Columba larvata</i>
21	Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
22	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>
23	Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>
24	Great-blue Turaco	<i>Corythaeola cristata</i>
25	Malachite Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis cristatus</i>
26	African Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus gularis</i>
27	Red-chested Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus solitarius</i>
28	White-faced Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>
29	Congo Serpent Eagle	<i>Dryotriorchis spectabilis</i>
30	Black Heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>
31	Western Reef Egret	<i>Egretta gularis</i>
32	African Silverbill	<i>Euodice cantans</i>
33	Blue-throated Roller	<i>Eurystomus gularis</i>
34	White-backed Night Heron	<i>Gorsachius leuconotus</i>
35	Palm Nut Vulture	<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i>
36	Grey-headed Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon leucocephala</i>
37	Blue-breasted Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon malimbica</i>
38	Woodland Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>
39	African Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>
40	Nkulengu Rail	<i>Himantornis haematopus</i>
41	White-throated Blue Swallow	<i>Hirundo nigrita</i>

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42	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
43	White-crested Hornbill	<i>Horizocerus albocristatus</i>
44	African Dwarf Kingfisher	<i>Ispidina lecontei</i>
45	African Pygmy Kingfisher	<i>Ispidina picta</i>
46	Dwarf Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sturmii</i>
47	African Pied Hornbill	<i>Lophoceros fasciatus</i>
48	Bat Hawk	<i>Macheiramphus alcinus</i>
49	Giant Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle maximus</i>
50	White-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops albicollis</i>
51	Black Bee-eater	<i>Merops gularis</i>
52	Long-tailed Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo africanus</i>
53	Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>
54	Cassin's Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa cassini</i>
55	Little Grey Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa epulata</i>
56	Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>
57	Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>
58	Lesser Moorhen	<i>Paragallinula angulata</i>
59	Northern Grey-headed Sparrow	<i>Passer griseus</i>
60	Latham's Francolin	<i>Peliperdix lathamii</i>
61	African Finfoot	<i>Podica senegalensis</i>
62	Gymnogene	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>
63	Square-tailed Saw-wing	<i>Psalidoprocne nitens</i>
64	Timneh Parrot	<i>Psittacus timneh</i>
65	Hartlaub's Duck	<i>Pteronetta hartlaubii</i>
66	Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
67	Rufous-fishing Owl	<i>Scotopelia ussheri</i>
68	Cameroon Sombre Greenbul	<i>Stelgidillas gracilirostris</i>
69	Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>
70	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
71	Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone rufiventer</i>
72	West African Crested Tern	<i>Thalasseus albididorsalis</i>
73	White-crested Tiger Heron	<i>Tigriornis leucolophus</i>
74	Black-billed Wood-dove	<i>Turtur abyssinicus</i>
75	Blue-spotted Wood-dove	<i>Turtur afer</i>
76	Long-tailed Hawk	<i>Urotriorchis macrourus</i>
77	Sabine's Gull	<i>Xema sabini</i>

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## Reptiles

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Peter's Rock Agama	<i>Agama picticauda</i>
2	Senegal Agama	<i>Agama sankaranica</i>
3	Smith's African Water Snake	<i>Grayia smithii</i>
4	Brook's House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus brookii</i>
5	West African Slender-snouted Crocodile	<i>Mecistops cataphractus</i>
6	Varigated Green Snake	<i>Philothamnus semivariegatus</i>
7	Large-eyed Green Tree Snake	<i>Rhamnophis aethiopissa</i>
8	Speckled-lipped Skink	<i>Trachylepis maculilabris</i>
9	African Five-lined Skink	<i>Trachylepis quinquetaeniata</i>
10	Nile Monitor	<i>Varanus niloticus</i>

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## Amphibians

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1		<i>Arthroleptis variabilis</i>
2	Allen's Slipperly Frog	<i>Conraua alleni</i>
3		<i>Ptychadena stenocephala</i>
4	Tai Toad	<i>Sclerophrys taiensis</i>

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## Fishes

	Common Name	Binominal Name
1	Long-finned Tetra	<i>Brycinus longipinnis</i>
2	True Big-scale Tetra	<i>Brycinus macrolepidotus</i>
3	African Sharptoothed Catfish	<i>Clarias gariepinus</i>
4	Redbelly Tilapia	<i>Coptodon zillii</i>
5	Grass Eater	<i>Distichodontus rostratus</i>

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6		<i>Heterobranchus isopterus</i>
7	African Arowana	<i>Heterotis niloticus</i>
8		<i>Labeo parvus</i>

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