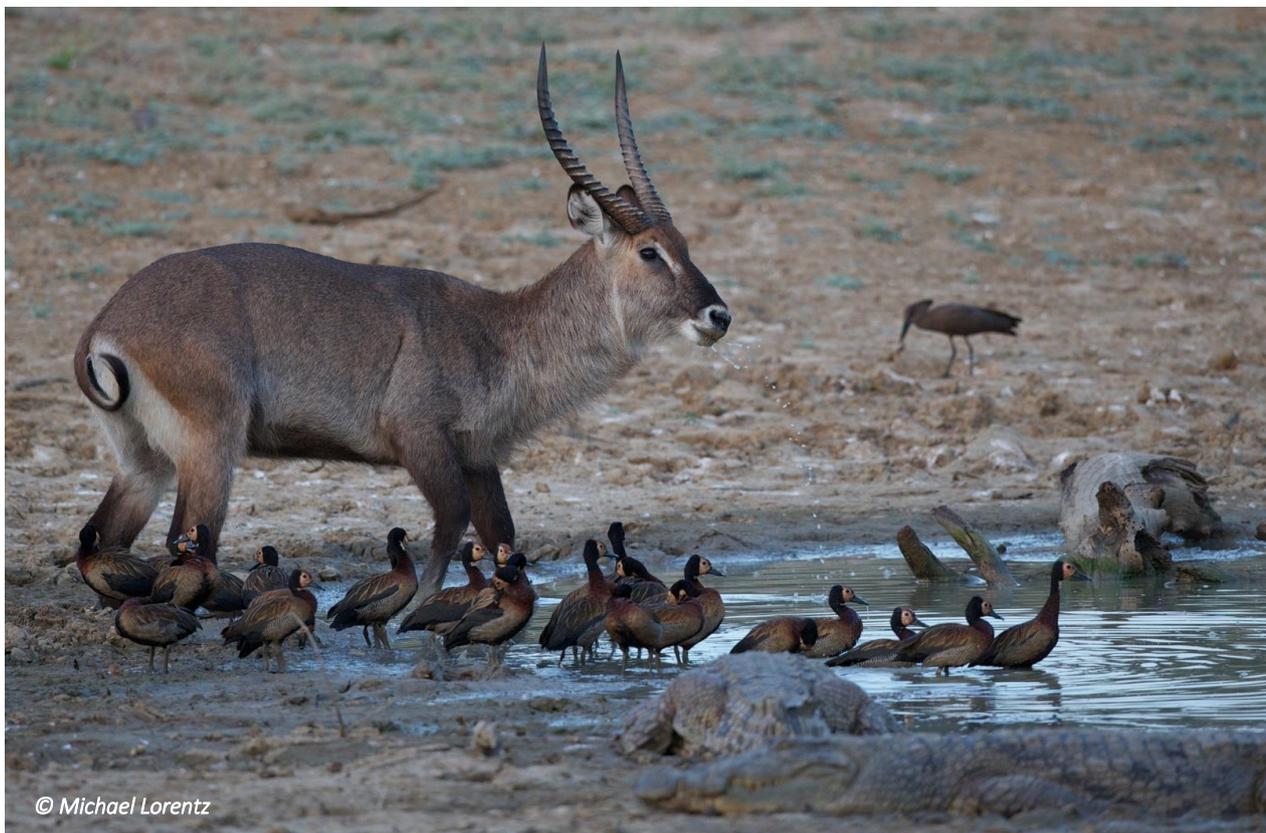




## BIRD WATCHING IN ZAKOUMA NATIONAL PARK, CHAD

**Zakouma National Park** is situated in south-eastern Chad and covers an area of just over 3,000km<sup>2</sup>. Zakouma was declared a national park in 1963 by Presidential Decree, offering it the highest form of protection available under the laws of Chad. The park is in the centre of a functional ecosystem and although the African savannah elephant is the flagship species, the park is an important refuge for numerous other species, many of which are threatened elsewhere within the Sudano-Sahelian eco-region of northern Africa.

The ebb and flow of life in the park is dictated by the extremely contrasted wet and dry seasons. Between June and October, heavy rains and incoming flood waters from the Sudan inundate large parts of the park, replenishing the water courses in preparation for the upcoming dry months. The birdlife and wildlife congregate in ever larger flocks and herds around the receding waterbodies and floodplains, offering some of the most impressive game viewing in Africa, especially at the height of the dry season. The park falls within the enormous '*Inundation Plains of the Bahr Aouk and Salamat*' RAMSAR site, one of the largest in the world and an important stop-over for migrating birds and breeding ground for birds and fish alike.



© Michael Lorentz



Bird watching in **Zakouma National Park** is an extremely rewarding experience. Not only in the number of species (currently 398) but also in the sheer abundance of birds. Seeing literally thousands of birds at a pan in the dry season is the norm and quite a spectacle. White Pelican; Yellow-billed, Marabou and Saddle-billed Stork; African Spoonbill; Combed, White-faced and Fulvous Duck; Spurwing and Egyptian Goose; Black-crowned Crane; Great White and Cattle Egret; Grey, Purple and Black-headed Heron; Glossy and Sacred Ibis; Collared Pratincole and several wader species abound – all watched over by the oft present African Fish Eagles and ubiquitous Yellow-billed Kites. Raptors are well represented with 52 species having been recorded in the park (eight are owls). Insect eruptions after the rains have started are particularly rewarding with scores of raptors seen hawking the termites.

**Zakouma** has many of the Sahelian ‘specials’ such as Beaudouin’s and Short-toed Snake Eagle, Sahel Paradise Whydah, Green-backed Eremomela, Long-tailed Starling, Black-rumped Waxbill, Black Scrub-Robin, Scissor-tailed Kite, African Collared Dove, Little Grey Woodpecker, Western Bonelli’s Warbler, Clapperton’s Spurfowl, Plain Nightjar, Rufous-rumped Lark and Rose-ringed Parakeet. The sought after Black-breasted Barbet (pictured on right) with its limited range, can be seen in the park; with some effort a sighting can almost be guaranteed. Bruce’s Green Pigeon, Veillot’s and White-headed Barbets are often seen in the same fruiting fig trees as the barbets.



The common birds seen in and around Tinga Camp during the dry season when this tourism facility is open (mid-November to end-May) are Long-tailed and Greater Blue-eared Starling; Beautiful, Pygmy and Variable Sunbird; Buff-bellied and Eastern Olivaceous Warbler; Red-throated Bee-eater (pictured on left); Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin; Black-headed Gonolek; Western Grey Plantain-eater; Black-billed Wood-dove;

Speckled Pigeon; Black-rumped Waxbill; African Silverbill; Lesser Whitethroat; Red-billed Firefinch; Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu; Village Indigobird; Paradise Flycatcher (also the white morph); Green-backed Eremomela; White-rumped Seed-eater; Grey Woodpecker; Orange-breasted Bush Shrike; Namaqua Dove; Brown Parrot and Senegal Coucal. Fish Eagles can be heard calling regularly during the day and the Scops and Pearl-spotted Owlets at night. Egyptian, African Wattled and Little Ringed Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Yellow and White Wagtail, Hamerkop, Green-backed and Black-crowned Night Heron and Senegal Thick-knee can be seen when the Tinga river has still got water, together with a variety of waders and herons.

A game drive will almost certainly produce sightings of Red-necked Ostrich (pictured on right); Abyssinian Roller; African Grey and Northern Red-billed Hornbill; Abyssinian Ground Hornbill; Woodchat, Isabelline and Masked Shrike; Grey-backed Fiscal Shrike; Blue-naped Mousebird; Stone Partridge; Four-banded Sandgrouse; Black-headed Lapwing; Beaudouin's and Short-toed Snake Eagle; Swallow-tailed Kite; Eurasian Hoopoe; Egyptian, Hooded, Lappet-faced and White-headed Vulture; Rüppell's Griffon; Clapperton's Spurfowl; Helmeted Guineafowl (without a helmet!); Black-bellied, Denham's and Arabian Bustard; African Collared and Venacious Dove; Rose-ringed Parakeet; Black Scimitarbill; Veillot's and White-headed Barbet; Blue-cheeked, Northern Carmine, Little and Little Green Bee-eater; Yellow-billed Oxpecker; Fine-spotted Woodpecker; Heuglin's and Northern Wheatear; Chestnut-backed Finchlark; Black Scrub-Robin; Speckle-fronted Weaver and Brown Babbler. Enormous flocks of Red-billed Quelea's weave their way between the trees to and from water and their roost, with spectacular sightings of raptors targeting the swirling masses at the water. On the pans at the height of the dry season are literally thousands of waterbirds, including the Black-crowned Crane. Sightings of Greyish Eagle-owl, Barn owl, Long-tailed, Plain and Standard-winged Nightjar as well as Spotted Thick-knee are likely on a night drive.



Please visit the links below for more information on the **Zakouma**, and the work being done here to protect the ecosystem and one of the most important Central African savannah elephant populations. In the hot months of March, April and May the fauna is very concentrated around remaining water. December, January and February are milder, with the species less concentrated, but still offering an amazing experience. For reservations or specific questions please contact us on [zakoumatourism@african-parks.org](mailto:zakoumatourism@african-parks.org).

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Am Kreko © Jean Labuschagne



Reguiek wetland © Zanne Labuschagne

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