



RIO
MUNDI

KEMBOMA

GULF

LIBREVILLE

OGOUE

LAMBARENE

OGOUE

PORT-GENTE

GABON

OF

NGUELA

NGOUE

SETTE-CAMA

BOUALLI

GUINEA

NYANGA



GABON

LAND OF

Mystery

Imagine, if you can, “pink” elephants living side by side
with fanged aquatic antelopes that climb trees.
Fantasy? No. True inhabitants of Gabon’s strange forests

BY FRANK E. DELANO

Photographs by Françoise Birkgi





Gabon, West Africa, lies between Cameroon and the Congo, a country of strange tribal customs, witch doctors, dense jungle and sunlit savannas—and an unspoiled territory for hunting. It is a low country, bisected by numerous rivers and swamps; it is hot, humid and exciting. There are few roads, and, except for some air service, almost all transportation is by water.

Among the interesting game that roam undisturbed through the dense jungle and across the wide savannas are gorillas, situtunga, yellow-backed duiker, elephants of 30 to 90 pounds ivory, and a small, but very aggressive, West African or dwarf buffalo. On a six-hour trek through the forest, I saw fresh tracks of yellow-backed duiker, gorilla, buffalo, situtunga, leopard, elephant, bush pig and the great lizard.

Maurice Patry, famous white hunter of the area, has his base camp at Setté-Cama, 250 miles south of the town of Port Gentil. I arranged to fly from New York to Paris via TWA, and then by UAT the next day to Dou-

The dreamlike photo above shows the author moments after the echoes of his shot died away. At right is one of the strangest quarries imaginable—a "pink" elephant.

ala in the Cameroon. From here I transferred to a DC-6 and flew to Libreville, the capital of Gabon. It takes about an hour to fly from Libreville to Port Gentil. From Port Gentil, it is necessary to charter a small plane to fly south to Setté-Cama. Since the hunting season is year round, except for October and November, I arranged to make my trip in January, shortly before Patry had plans to take a client to India.

In Gabon, unlike most other African countries, you pay only for what you've actually shot. An elephant head tax, for example, is \$40 in Gabon. In Kenya, the cost is \$210 for the first elephant, \$280 for the second, with no third license issued. The limit in Gabon is three elephants. A basic big-game permit in Gabon is \$60, compared to \$140 in Kenya. No license for sea or river fishing is required in Gabon. My big-game hunting license, valid for three months, entitled me to kill three elephants, six buffaloes, four situtunga, two bongo, three yellow-backed duiker, one panther, over and above the unprotected animals.

A special license is needed for gorilla.

Maurice Patry is well organized, has good equipment, and his natives are trained as fine trackers. He has an assistant who maintains his Jeeps and other vehicles in excellent repair. His cook provides top-notch meals, including freshly caught fish from a nearby lagoon or the sea, and accommodations are extremely comfortable. At the base camp, Patry has room for two hunters. He has four temporary camps around his 1000-square-mile hunting preserve, one at Badinga from which I hunted my gorilla, another at Iguéla, and so on.

I found that I did not take the right clothing for the time of year I went to Gabon, relying on the gear I had used in East Africa. It was very hot in Gabon, and I soon stripped to shorts and no shirt. Raingear is extremely important in this humid area, as the rainfall this year measured about 25 feet. (In New York City, it's 42 inches.) Several pairs of khaki trousers, khaki shorts, raingear and three pairs of ankle-high canvas tennis shoes

are the basis for an adequate wardrobe.

Across the lagoon and in the ocean ten minutes from Setté-Cama, there is record-class tarpon fishing. Barracuda, red snapper, horse mackerel, capitaine, swordfish, different kinds of sharks and many other varieties are a dime a dozen. Often on our return from gorilla hunting, I would fish from the outboard as we returned through the lagoon toward camp, catching that night's dinner.

One of the most unusual trophies to be found in Gabon is a "pink" elephant. The fact that most of Gabon's elephants have pink tusks is still a mystery, but there are some pretty good and plausible reasons for the phenomenon.

In the dense, swampy rain forests, I have seen water the color of red wine flowing in the streams and marshes. Dead leaves from mahogany and other red-colored trees decay, exuding a red dye that colors the water. An elephant drinks the water, and the coloring finds its way to the elephant's tusks, which, of course, are his incisor teeth. Other sources,



After close examination of his "pink" pachyderm, the author found that its tusks had a true reddish cast—a real pink. One solution to the oddity, which is common in Gabon, is that the fantastic decay rate of mahogany leaves dyes the water red, which in turn affects the color of the tusks.

including the food in this area, may also contribute to the peculiar pink tinge of the ivory.

The ivory, prized by jewelers the world over, doesn't have a single surface crack like East African and other ivory. It is "hard," as compared to the "soft" East African ivory. The elephants are not all small tuskers, but can carry ivory up to 90 pounds. However, about 25 percent of all the elephants in Gabon seem to have single tusks.

Another extremely rare trophy to be found in Gabon is the unusual and fascinating antelope called the chevrotain aquatique. I first learned about the animal over a lunch in Paris with Francois Edmond-Blanc, one of the world's greatest living hunters (SPORTS AFIELD, April 1963). This animal can barely run on land, spends 90 percent of its life in the water, has fangs instead of horns and sometimes eats meat! I had some difficulty in securing permission from the Gabonese government to shoot a chevrotain, but finally heard over our radio at the base camp that it had been granted. I was fortunate enough to shoot one after several days of hunting. It is now at the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

The animal weighs about 30 pounds, has short hair and a rather elongated jaw, and its front legs are quite a bit shorter than the rear legs. The male has two fangs or tusks instead of horns and a beautifully colored, gray-brown coat with a white, horizontal stripe and white markings under its throat.

The chevrotain aquatique is prehistoric and, like the rhino, hasn't changed in a million years. It lives only in the remote rain forests and swamps of Gabon, the Congo, Albert Lake and the Ituri forest. It swims like an otter and rarely emerges from the water, and then only to feed on special fruits, leaves and small rodents. If on land when spooked, it dives for the water; then it behaves like the situtunga, largest of the aquatic antelope. All a hunter can see above the water's surface is its nose.

Although these antelope are described as "rare" (Patry hadn't seen one in 16 years), it is my conviction that there are numbers of them in existence. "Rare" applies most appropriately to the difficulty in finding one. I was fortunate in seeing five or six because of their habit of emerging only to feed.

The chevrotain is a fair climber, frequently taking refuge in the lower branches of trees when attacked. Some say that when it is pursued by hounds, it will jump, to hang itself upon a branch by its hooked canine tusks until the danger is over. Its enemies are numerous—snakes, lizards and flesh-eating mammals.

Chevrotains aquatiques always live close to water, on islands in lagoons or along the banks of rivers in the equatorial rain-forest country. I hunted them in stupefying heat on islands, with five native trackers acting as beaters. I would patrol up and down the shore of one end of an island in a dugout

canoe. Then Laurent, the head tracker, and his men would start walking through the forest at the other side of an island, beating two sticks together and shouting as they progressed. When I heard them approach, say a half mile away, I would maneuver my canoe to the mangrove edge, get out and walk closer to shore. I stood in water perhaps two feet deep, so that if a chevrotain jumped in from the land, I could at least hear it. I heard several hit the water the first day, but couldn't see one. On the second drive across another island that same day, I saw two chevrotains leap into the water about 20 feet from me. As I walked toward the spot, two large crocs slithered off the bank—I got out of there fast.

The second day's hunt was complicated by heavy thunderstorms, but we repeated the same technique. This time I wore my .357 Ruger Blackhawk and carried the .44 carbine. Good croc insurance! At about three o'clock, after six hours patrolling in the canoe, I heard Laurent and his boys off to my right. Taking a stand in the dark mangrove swamp, I glued my eyes on the bank. Suddenly two or possibly three chevrotains jumped into the water. One came swimming rapidly in my direction! At about ten feet away, he must have seen me, because he submerged completely. When he came up, he was 15 feet behind me—and swimming very fast. I shot him with the .44. At the sound of the shot, two more leapt into the water almost at my feet, and I grabbed one by its left rear leg. Fortunately, one of

Laurent's boys, seeing my predicament from the shore, ran up, and together we captured the live male chevrotain. After retrieving the male that I had shot, we climbed into the canoe with the two chevrotains. I wanted to get the canoe out of the dark shore area into the sun, so I could photograph. To my knowledge, the movies I took are the only ones in the world of a live African chevrotain aquatic in its natural habitat.

The second canoe soon appeared, and I was able to organize some very special photography. The live specimen was very determined to make its escape, but we held his legs together, being careful to avoid a bite from his sharp fangs. I photographed his entire body, with close-ups of the amazing tusks. Since I had permission to take only one chevrotain, I reluctantly let the live one go, knowing full well that any zoo in the world would treasure such a rare animal.

Hippos are protected, and so hunting of them is forbidden. However, special permits can be obtained to shoot the chimpanzee and the gorilla. I can testify that hunting the latter is tough, nerve-wracking and difficult, as the hunter is forced to track the densest parts of the rain forest, wade leech-infested swamps and endure many hardships.

Hunting in Gabon is excitingly different from East Africa—the game, the land, the climate and the people were all new to me. It's less expensive than most other African safaris, and the rewards are great.



The author took what will probably turn out to be the only motion pictures of a live chevreton aquaticus. After killing a specimen, he was able to capture one alive and photograph it in detail. As he had a permit to take only one of the animals, the living one was released.



One of the most unusual aspects of this small, water-dwelling antelope is that in place of the usual spiked antlers of its race, this little fellow sports a pair of sharply curved, serviceable fangs.