

Location



Introduction

Gabon is located on the west coast of central Africa, bordered by Equatorial Guinea in the northwest, Cameroon in the north, the Republic of the Congo in the east and south, and by the Atlantic Ocean on the west. The 885 km coast of the Gabonese coastline is composed of sandy beaches and estuarine systems, comprising habitats such as coastal lagoons, including Lagune Igužla and Lagune Ndogo (which has 350 islands), littoral thickets and mangrove ecosystems. Three coastal national parks (Loango, Mayumba and Moukalaba-Doudou) protect some of this habitat.

Gabon is divided into 9 provinces, 3 of which are on the coast: Estuaire, Ogooué-Maritime and Nyanga. It has an equatorial climate, with high mean annual temperatures and the rainy season running from October to May. 89.3% of the land area is covered by tropical rainforest.

A dispute is ongoing between Gabon and Equatorial Guinea over Mbane Island and lesser islands in Corisco Bay.

Regional Seas and Biogeography

West and Central Africa Regional Sea
Guinea current LME

Habitats

The northern coastline is deeply indented with bays, estuaries and deltas as far south as the mouth of the Ogooué River. Further south, the coast becomes steeper, with coastal areas bordered by lagoons and mangrove swamps.

→ Habitat 1

Mangroves are found extensively throughout the coastline of Gabon, including around the mouth of the Muni river in Corisco Bay, which borders with Equatorial Guinea. In the Ogooué river delta, mangroves extend 35km inland. In the Loango National Park and the area to the south (Complexe d'aires Protégées de Gamba), there are extensive seasonally waterlogged savannas and herbaceous swamps.

→ Habitat 2

Seagrasses are found in Corisco Bay, providing important habitat for wading birds and as a foraging ground for turtles.

→ Habitat 3

Estuaries in Gabon provide important wintering grounds for wading birds.

Biodiversity Hotspots

→ Ramsar sites

Wonga-Wongué is a coastal region with many coastal rivers, swamps, marshes and cliffs. The Site supports elephants and hippos, as well as important numbers of waterbirds, particularly pelicans.

→ National Parks and ecological reserves

Akanda National Park (also a RAMSAR site and IBA), in the north of the country, is characterised by relatively undisturbed mangroves and swampy forests. Vast areas of mudflats are exposed at low tide. It provides a nesting zone for migratory birds, including many thousands of waders. It is an important feeding area for leatherback (VU) and olive ridley (VU) turtles.

Pongara National Park (also a RAMSAR site) lies on the southern shores of the Gabon estuary and has a wide

range of mangrove, riverine swamps and littoral/flooded forests. It is an important site for the leatherback turtle (VU) which breeds there and for hawksbill turtle (CR), green turtle (EN), and olive ridley turtle (VU), as well as elephants, an important population of migratory birds and several thousands of overwintering waders along the sand and mud flats. Cetaceans are common in the coastal waters, crocodiles and hippopotamuses have been observed between the lagoons and the sea.

Loango National Park (which includes the Petit Loango and Sette Cama RAMSAR sites) is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Large mammals such as buffalo, elephants, hippos can be found on the beach and sometimes in the Atlantic ocean. Cetaceans are regularly seen off the coast, crocodiles and manatees inhabit the lagoons and the surrounding mangroves are home to a rich avifauna. This is a very important site for nesting turtles, and cetaceans are regularly seen off the coast. Petit Loango also supports nesting terns. Loango NP is part of the Gamba complex of protected areas.

Mayumba National Park is a thin band of sand and dunes in the far south of the country, bordering Congo. It provides very important leatherback turtle nesting habitat. The Park extends 15km offshore, to protect habitat of dolphins and humpback whales.

→ IBAs

Ogooué delta and Mandij Island IBA is situated close to Cape Lopez, the westernmost part of Gabon. Cape Lopez is a finger of land protruding into the Atlantic Ocean, providing important habitat for migrating birds and some breeding tern species.

→ IMMAs

No IMMAs have yet been identified in Gabon.

At risk Wildlife

In this section, some individual wildlife species are mentioned followed by a letter in parentheses. These are species included in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species within the top three categories of risk - Vulnerable to extinction (VU), Endangered (EN) or Critically Endangered (CR). A more complete list of IUCN listed species is found in Appendix 1.

→ At risk birds

Gabonese waters are of great importance for migrating sea and coastal birds. Many tens of thousands are passing by coming from or going back to their breeding and/or wintering grounds. Large numbers of wading birds overwinter in Gabon, including plovers, oystercatchers, stints, snipes, pratincoles, spoonbills, herons and egrets. Lesser flamingos (*Phoenicopterus minor*) are occasional visitors. Seabirds including grebes, storm-petrels and shearwaters have been observed in Gabonese waters, as well as Cape gannets who are occasional visitors (*Morus capensis* – EN). Caspian and common terns breed in Gabon, as do loango weaver birds (*Ploceus subpersonatus*) which are found in swamp areas.

→ At risk reptiles

Turtle nesting occurs throughout the coastline of Gabon, during September to March. The most important beaches in Gabon are found in Mayumba and Pongara National Park, but has also been confirmed on the beaches near Gamba, Loango National Park and on the beaches around the Ogooué Delta. Four species of sea turtle nest in Gabon: leatherback (VU) (largest nesting population in the world), Olive ridley (VU), hawksbill (CR) and green (EN). Hawksbill turtles have also been observed in the coastal lagoons.

In the lagoons, crocodiles including Nile, West African slender-snouted (CR) and African dwarf (VU) crocodiles.

→ At risk mammals

→ At risk mammals

Several cetacean species migrate to Gabonese waters during July to September, while others are resident. Atlantic Humpback dolphins (CR) have been documented all along the coastline and also in coastal mangrove systems. An important area for this species is in the Mayumba/Conkouati transboundary protected area (between Gabon and Congo). Humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), migrate to Gabonese waters between the months of June and November. Other cetaceans known in Gabon include a number of dolphin species, orca, beaked, sperm and bryde's whale. African manatees (VU) are found throughout the coastal region and all lagoons of Gabon, particularly common in N'gowe and N'dogo lagoons. They are likely to migrate to Equatorial Guinea (via the Muni estuary) and to Congo (between Mayumba and Conkouati-Douli National Parks).

Past experience with oil spill and potential risks

Gabon has been producing oil from onshore and offshore facilities since the 1960s. Oil production takes place in some sensitive and remote inland areas, including in the Ndougou lagoon. No major oil spills have occurred in Gabonese waters, but two moderate spills took place in Mayumba National Park in 2004. In recent years, there have been reports of ongoing small oil leaks in inland areas. There is no reference of any response to oiled wildlife from any of these incidents.

International and Regional Treaties and Agreements

→ Oil spill and HNS Response

- d CLC Convention 69
- CLC Protocol 76
- CLC Protocol 92
- FUND Protocol 76
- FUND Protocol 92
- FUND Protocol 2003
- LLMC Convention 76
- LLMC Protocol 96
- OPRC Convention 90
- HNS Convention 96
- HNS PROT 2010
- OPRC_HNS 2000
- BUNKERS CONVENTION 01

→ Marine Biodiversity Protection

- Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds (AEWA)
- Abidjan Convention for Cooperation in the Protection, Management and Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Atlantic Coast of the West and Central Africa Region
- GI-WACAF (The Global Initiative for West, Central and Southern Africa)

Oil Spill Response and HNS Spill Response

→ National Contingency Plan?

The National Oil Spill Contingency Plan (Plan d'Urgence National du Gabon or PUNG) was adopted in 2006 and last revised in 2008. Some oil companies operating in Gabon have their own oil spill response capability and equipment.

→ Role of Competent National Authorities

Historically, the authority in charge of oil spill response at sea is the Ministère de la Défense Nationale (navy). Oil spill response onshore falls under the responsibility of the Direction Générale l'Environnement et la Protection de la Nature (DGEPN). These responsibilities may have altered following a change of government in early 2024. It is likely that oiled wildlife response would fall under the DGEPN, and that the following organisations would be involved: the Direction Générale de la Faune et des Aires Protégées, l'Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux (ANPN) et le Conseil National de la Mer. These responsibilities may have altered following a change of government in early 2024. The Ministère des Eaux, des Forêts, de la Mer, de l'Environnement, chargé du Plan Climat, et du Plan d'Affectation des Terres may also be involved.

Oiled Wildlife Preparedness and Response

→ Formal guidelines?

It is likely that oiled wildlife response would fall under the DGEPN, and that the following organisations would be involved: the Direction Générale de la Faune et des Aires Protégées, l'Agence Nationale des Parcs Nationaux (ANPN) et le Conseil National de la Mer. These responsibilities may have altered following a change of government in early 2024. The Ministère des Eaux, des Forêts, de la Mer, de l'Environnement, chargé du Plan Climat, et du Plan d'Affectation des Terres may also be involved.

→ Response objectives and strategy

No reference.

→ Euthanasia or rehabilitation?

No reference, however it is likely that wildlife rehabilitation would be allowed.

→ Impact assessment

WWF Gabon and Ibonga carry out sea turtle monitoring, especially around the Gamba/Sette Cama area and southern Loango National Park, they are also involved in cetacean monitoring.

WCS Gabon also carry out monitoring of sea turtle nesting sites, especially in Loango and Mayumba National Parks and monitoring of cetacean populations.

Aventure Sans Frontières have knowledge of sea turtle nesting sites for certain stretches of coast, especially around Pongara National Park.

→ Notification and early response

No reference.

→ Wildlife responders

In the event of a wildlife incident, WWF Gabon, WCS Gabon, ASF and the NGO Aquatic Species are likely to get involved and some of those organisations could provide volunteer workforce to assist in a response.

The Gabon Seaturtle partnership is a network of organisations which conduct sea turtle monitoring and conservation activities, so are a focal point for turtle knowledge in Gabon. Members include WCS (who provide the secretariat), WWF Gabon, Ibonga and ASF.

Eco-guards who work in Gabon's national Parks (under the ANPN), oversee protection of habitats and wildlife in the parks, collect environmental data and train and educate local communities on nature protection. They would likely play a key supporting role during an oiled wildlife incident in Gabon.

→ Cooperation between stakeholders

See Gabon Sea Turtle Partnership above.

→ Permanent facilities

There are no known rehabilitation facilities in Gabon for marine wildlife.

→ Current processes

There are no processes in place at this time.

Documentation and references**General references**

Action plan for the conservation of the West African Manatee. https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/document/Afr_Cet_Man_Manatees_AP_e_0.pdf

Atlantic Humpback dolphins. <https://www.sousateuszii.org/countries/gabon/>

GI-WACAF country profile for Gabon. 2019. <https://www.giwacaf.net/en/countries/gabon>

Gabon Sea Turtle partnership. http://www.seaturtle.org/groups/gabon/fr_accueil.html

Loango National Park. <https://whc.unesco.org/fr/listesindicatives/6593/>

Le Complexe d'Aires Protégées de Gamba: une illustration de la biodiversité du Gabon. https://www.pauwelsolivier.com/docs/Gamba_Illustration_Fr.pdf

Le Parc National de Pongara. <http://parcsgabon.com/index.php/le-parc-national-de-pongara/>

Les Parcs Nationaux de Gabon. <http://parcsgabon.com/index.php/les-13-parcs-nationaux-la-porte-dentree-de-lafrrique-tropicale/>

Mangrove ecosystems of Gabon. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382177>

Plan d'Urgence National du Gabon (PUNG) Contre les déversements d'hydrocarbures et d'autres substances nuisibles. GI-WACAF Country Profile for Gabon. <https://www.giwacaf.net/en/countries/gabon/noscp>
RAMSAR sites information service. <https://rsis.ramsar.org>

Sea turtles of Africa. SWOT report vol.12, 2017. <https://www.seaturtlestatus.org/articles/2017/the-sea-turtles-of-africa?rq=gabon>

Satellite tracking of green turtles in Corisco Bay. http://www.seaturtle.org/tracking/index.shtml?tag_id=68396a&full=1&lang=

WCS Gabon. <https://gabon.wcs.org/en-us>

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Appendix 1

→ At risk birds

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

Cape Gannet / *Morus capensis* / EN / Non-breeding visitor /
Siberian sand plover / *Anarhynchus mongolus* / EN / Migratory (overwintering) /
Loango weaver bird / *Ploceus subpersonatus* / VU / Resident (breeding) /
African manatee / *Trichechus senegalensis* / VU / Resident/migratory /
Atlantic Humpback dolphins / *Sousa Teuszii* / CR / Resident/migratory /
Hippopotamus / *Hippopotamus amphibious* / VU / Resident /

→ At risk reptiles

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)

→ At risk mammals

Common name / Latin name / IUCN Red List Category (CR,EN,VU) / Resident-Migratory (season) / Breeding-Nesting-Pupping (season)