

# SETTE CAMA, LOANGO NATIONAL PARK | SEASONALITY

Located on the equator, Gabon has two dry seasons and two wet seasons annually.

The season during which you visit Sette Cama will offer different opportunities and highlights in terms of weather conditions, potential sightings, mammal and birdlife behaviour, together with possible activities during your stay.

This guide outlines the most notable patterns and considerations to bear in mind when planning your stay.

## SEASONALITY CALENDAR

Mid-January to April	Wet Season
May to September	Dry Season
October to early / mid-December	Wet Season
December to mid-January	Short Dry Season



## SEASONAL IMPACTS ON WEATHER & WILDLIFE AT SETTE CAMA

### JANUARY | SHORT DRY SEASON. MID-MONTH TRANSITION TO WET SEASON

This time of year coincides with the largest number of surfing hippos being sighted in the coastal zone of Loango National Park as they feed on coastal grasslands.

Olive ridley sea turtle hatchlings peak in January and the first leatherback hatchlings start to appear. Large numbers of forest buffaloes and forest elephants are sighted on the coastline, as well as along the estuary (with common sightings of elephants swimming / snorkelling in this area).

At this time of year, salt marsh areas are inundated with water, creating access for kayaking in these landscapes – usually with a bird watching focus.

### MID-JANUARY TO APRIL | WET SEASON

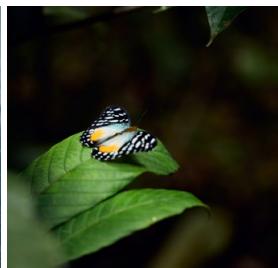
The start of the wet season usually brings with it the clearest skies following cloud build up and rainfall. This is also the time of year when Sette Cama experiences its highest temperatures in the day, up to 32°C / 90°F.

At this time of year, there is much more fresh growth along the coastline, which attracts a number of grazers and browsers, resulting in large concentrations of forest buffalo and forest elephant along the coastline.

The heavier downpours at this time of year turn the Ndogo Lagoon estuary tea-coloured from tannins and nutrients, and it's not uncommon to see forest elephants snorkelling across the Ndogo Lagoon's estuary.

From February through April, the peak hatching period for leatherback turtles occurs.

Around March and April towards the end of the wet season provide fantastic opportunities for landscape photography with dramatic cloud build-ups and spectacular sunsets.



SHORT DRY

WET

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## MAY | TRANSITION FROM WET TO DRY SEASON

The start of the dry season in May is usually a period of transition where wildlife begin to shift their habitats and range in response to changing seasons and available resources.

Seasonal elements from either the wet or dry season may impact wildlife viewing and activities in this month.

## JUNE TO SEPTEMBER | DRY SEASON

The swampy areas in Loango National Park's interior, including Akaka and the Rembo-bongo lakes begin to attract large numbers of forest elephants and forest buffalos. Densities of these animals in Loango's inland swamps usually peaks from July to September. At this time of year, forest elephants and forest buffaloes are still found along Loango's coastline, just in smaller numbers as compared to the wet season.

From July, humpback whales arrive in Loango and are often sighted off-shore (usually at quite a distance away) and are best observed through binoculars, especially from the raised vantage point of Point Milongo.

The coastline north of Point Milongo may offer sightings of red river hogs hunting ghost crabs on the beach in the early morning (around dawn) at this time of year.

From mid-July until the end of the dry season, forest sitatunga are most frequently sighted, especially on the coastal strip between the Atlantic Ocean and Ndogo Lagoon's estuary.

From mid-August through to late September as the milkwood trees begin fruiting, African grey parrots are often seen in large flocks of 200 + individuals taking advantage of ripe fruit. During this same time period, sightings of black headed bee eaters are easiest, as these birds begin nesting in sandy clearings within the rainforest (until October).

The swampy areas that run behind Loango's coastline and Ndogo Lagoon's shorelines become a highlight. With vegetation here containing some of the last available moisture ahead of the rains, these swampy areas become increasingly productive. Some of the trees in this area of Loango are the first to begin fruiting, increasing the potential for great ape sightings as chimpanzees and western lowland gorillas move into these areas to forage.

In late September, the dry season is reaching its most intense, and the last available water within the rainforest draws high concentrations of wildlife. As the dry season is ending and the rainy season begins, migrant birds such as rosy bee-eaters and African river martins start to arrive ahead of their nesting season.

In September, olive ridley sea turtles will also begin their nesting season along Sette Cama's shoreline, continuing throughout the month and into October.



WET

DRY

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## OCTOBER TO EARLY NOVEMBER | TRANSITION FROM DRY TO WET SEASON. BEGINNING OF WET SEASON.

October is a dramatic transition month in Loango National Park, bringing in thunderstorms, dramatic sunsets and big rains. This is a remarkable time to be in Loango with an intense atmosphere of rejuvenation following the dry season. Big skies and cloud build-up create intense light across Loango, offering exceptional landscape photography.

Most bird species are coming into their breeding season in this period, and are more active, vocal, and easier to locate. For mammals, this seasonal shift prompts a migratory one, as forest buffaloes and forest elephants who have spent dry season in the internal swamps (ie. Akaka) begin to move in numbers back towards the Loango coastline.

After the first rains, heavy downpours begin to compact sandy, open areas, forming ideal nesting areas for rosy bee eaters and African river martins who start scouting for nesting opportunities. Both species of birds will begin to excavate once sand is properly compacted and suitable, forming colonies that nest in ground burrows. African river martins are most easily sighted early on in their nesting phase, while rosy bee eaters continue to be observable once hatchlings emerge and begin feeding (approx. November) as adults bring insects back to the nest.

Tracks from olive ridley sea turtles may be found along the coastline, with signs of fresh nesting activity throughout October.

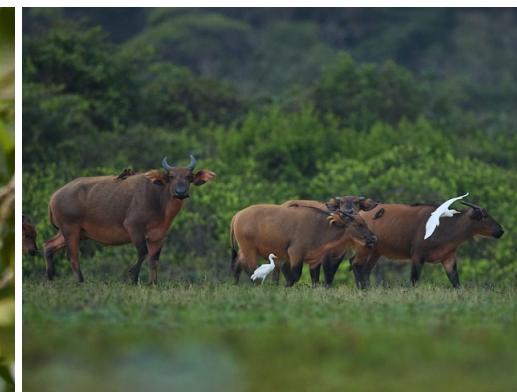


## NOVEMBER | WET SEASON

Leatherback turtles begin to nest during the month of November, continuing through to January.

## DECEMBER | Wet season transitioning to short dry season

The short dry season usually begins in December, bringing clearer skies, and great conditions for photography, accompanied by a vibrance of colour from the foliage growth during the preceding wet season. Larger concentrations of forest elephants and forest buffaloes continue to be seen along the coastline and continue to be found in these areas until the dry season begins again in April. The first olive ridley turtle hatchlings start to emerge.



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## WILDLIFE SPECIFIC SEASONAL CONSIDERATIONS

### MAMMALS

**Commonly sighted great apes:** central chimpanzee (unhabituated), western lowland gorillas (unhabituated).



**Other commonly sighted primates:** red-capped mangabeys, grey-cheeked mangabeys, putty nosed monkeys, moustached guenons and crowned monkeys.



**Commonly sighted forest & coastline mammals:** red river hogs, forest buffaloes, forest elephants, Ogilby's duiker, blue duiker, yellow-backed duiker, bay duiker, forest sitatunga.



**Nocturnal mammals (listed from easy to challenging to find):** A number of species of fruit bats and galagos (bush babies), water chevrotain (mouse deer), servaline genet, marsh mongoose, brush-tailed porcupine, African palm civet, Beecroft's anomalure (a species of African flying squirrel), golden angwati, Milne-Edwards' potto and others.



**Rarely sighted, yet notable resident mammals:** leopard, giant pangolin, west African manatee, golden cat.

### MAMMALS WITH SEASONAL FLUCTUATIONS IN POPULATION DENSITIES

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Forest Elephant	***	***	***	**	*	**	**	**	**	**	***	***
Forest Buffalo	***	***	***	**	*	**	**	**	**	**	***	***
Forest Sitatunga	*	*	*	*	*	*	**	***	***	*	*	*
Surfing Hippos	***	***	***	***	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	**

**A note on great apes:** Central chimpanzees and western lowland gorillas are both very common in the Sette Cama area. Both species are un-habituated and family groups/clans range over large areas. While there is a chance of encountering great apes every time we are out on activities, we are still learning about their daily and seasonal habits. We are currently collaborating on an ecological monitoring project with great ape researchers to improve scientific understanding of these individuals. Over time, as great apes in the area become more familiar with humans entering the rainforest, we expect to be able to consistently locate and encounter groups while maintaining a respectful distance.

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## MARINE LIFE & REPTILES

**Commonly sighted reptiles:** Nile crocodile, dwarf crocodile, ornate monitor.

**Less-commonly sighted reptiles:** Slender snouted crocodile.

**Commonly sighted marine life:** Leatherback turtles (seasonal), olive Ridley turtles (seasonal), green turtles (seasonal – rarely sighted), hawksbill turtles (seasonal – rarely sighted) hippopotamus, humpback whales (seasonal)

**Common, rarely-sighted residents:** West African manatees, female sea turtles ashore during nesting.

## MARINE LIFE WITH SEASONAL INCREASES IN SIGHTINGS

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Humpback Whales						**	***	***	**			
Leatherback Turtles	*** 🏃	*** 🐣	*** 🐣	*** 🐣	**	**	**	**	**	**	*** 🏃	*** 🏃
Olive Ridley Turtles	*** 🐣	**	**	*	*	*	*	*	*** 🏃	*** 🏃	*** 🏃	*** 🐣
Green Turtles	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Hawksbill Turtles	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

Key: 🏃 = Nesting | 🐚 = Hatchlings

**A note on sea turtles:** Sea turtles are found in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Loango and Sette Cama year-round. Leatherback and olive ridley occur most commonly, with green and hawksbill turtles rarely sighted. Leatherback turtle nesting season occurs from November through to January, with hatchlings appearing 45 – 70 days later. Olive ridley turtles nest from September to October, with hatchlings appearing from December and peaking in January. Juvenile sea turtles may be visible in the shallows along the coastline of Sette Cama year-round, especially just north of Point Milongo where they feed on algae-covered rocks in the shallows.



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## BIRDLIFE

Birdlife is abundant in the Sette Cama area of Loango National Park year-round, with over 395 species recorded. The birding focus will shift throughout the year, pending what species visitors desire seeing.

The below seasonal table only outlines key species that have the most dramatic fluctuations in sightings based on whether they are migrant, or a limited seasonal window for distinctive behaviour (ie. nesting) which may result in improved sightings during certain periods of the year.

In general, September and October can be considered some of the most spectacular months for birding at Sette Cama, as many species are in breeding season and therefore more vocal, more visible and therefore easier to view.

**Commonly sighted birds:** goliath heron, palm nut vultures, pink-backed pelican, African finfoot, Hartlaub's duck, African grey parrot, great blue turaco, many species of kingfisher (ie. pygmy, shining-blue and blue-breasted), sunbirds (ie. carmelite and Reichenbach's) weavers (ie. Viellot's, black-necked) and hornbills (ie. white-crested, black-casqued, red-billed dwarf) white-throated blue swallow, western nicator, snowy-crowned robin chat, rufous-tailed palm thrush, white morph African paradise fly catcher.

**Some local specials:** white-crested tiger heron, Latham's forest francolin, black guineafowl, Forbes' plover, Damara tern, vermiculated fishing owl, Pel's fishing owl, black-headed bee eater, rosy bee-eater, African river martin, mangrove (mouse-brown) sunbird, common waxbill (spp. Rubriventris), Loango weaver.

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Rosy bee eaters	***	**						*	*	**	***	***
African river martins	*							*	***	***	**	**
Black-headed bee eaters	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	***	***	***	*	*
African grey parrots	*	*	*	*	*	*	**	***	***	**	*	*

