

# Minziro Forest reveals new galago and bat records for Tanzania

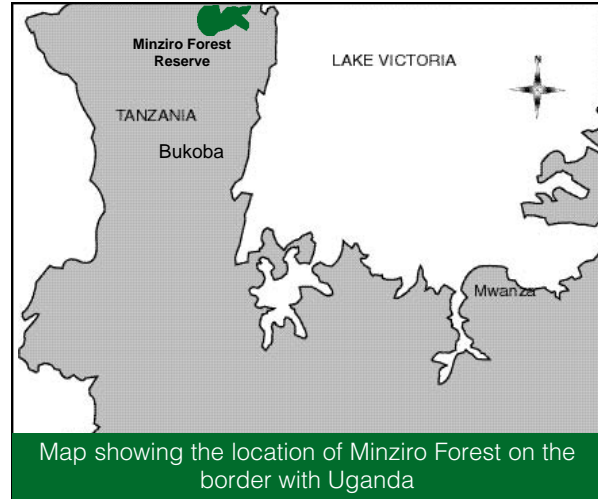
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Until recently Minziro forest was one of the most remote and unexplored forests in Tanzania. The forest is essentially an outlier of the vast Congo-Guinea forests that stretch across to central and west Africa and is the largest (28,841ha) forest block remaining in NW Tanzania. The forest is unusual biologically as it contains a mixture of Congo-Guinea biome animal and plant species. This article reports on a bushbaby survey recently conducted by research affiliates of the Tanzania Forest Conservation Group in collaboration with the GEF/UNDP Cross Borders Biodiversity project. This was the first nocturnal primate survey in Minziro which gave us an opportunity to find out whether Tanzania has some of the galago species normally associated with the Central and West African forests. While surveying the galagos we also made notes on other mammals.

Ten galago species had previously been recorded in Tanzania. In general these species are associated with the forests and woodlands of Southern and Eastern Africa. Minziro, with its assemblage of Congolean plants and animals, promised to contain some interesting discoveries.

Minziro forest is located in Kagera Region, NW Tanzania north of the Kagera River and close to the Uganda border. Minziro Forest extends over the border into Uganda where it is called the Sango Bay Forest. The forest is seasonally flooded particularly in the wetter eastern side. In the middle of the forest there is

an area of higher ground where the village of Minziro is situated. In the dry season herds of Ankole cattle graze in the adjacent grasslands. These pastures are burned annually to promote new growth.



## The Galagos of Minziro

Three species of galagos were observed or heard in Minziro Forest Reserve; the Large-eared greater galago *Otolemur monteiri argentatus*, Demidoff's galago *Galagoides demidoff*, and Thomas's galago *Galagoides thomasi*.

The presence of Thomas's galago *G. thomasi* in Minziro is a new galago record for Tanzania. The Demidoff's galago record is also of interest as there are few documented records. These galagos at 50-80grams are amongst the smallest primates in the world.

We identified the greater galago form as the northern silver galago *Otolemur monteiri argentatus*. The majority of the *Otolemur* seen were black in colour due to melanism and the rest were silver grey in colour. The high proportion of melanistic animals is unusual but is consistent with populations of greater galagos around the southern margins of Lake Victoria. The calls of these Large-eared greater galagos were very similar to the southern greater galago *Otolemur crassicaudatus* which occurs from southern Tanzania to South Africa.



A dark phase/melanistic form of the northern silver galago *Otolemur monteiri argentatus*. Photo by Nadine Svoboda



A light or normal phase form of the northern silver galago. Photo by Nadine Svoboda

Our limited data shows that the galagos were not evenly distributed throughout the forest reserve. The Large eared greater galago occurred mainly on the forest edge and in riverine forests where yellow barked acacia trees predominate. This is because one of their main food sources is acacia tree gum. Demidoff's galagos were only seen in the forest surrounding our campsite in areas around tree falls or pitsaw sites. The paucity of sightings of this species possibly indicates low animal densities. In other areas of west and central Africa, Demidoff's galago are very commonly seen and occur at high densities e.g. over 100/km<sup>2</sup> in Gabon. Thomas's galagos were seen more often than Demidoff's galagos and were observed in forest edge

vegetation and in the forest canopy. It may be that since they were often at the forest edge they were more visible than Demidoff's galago which occupied the thicker interior of the forest.



Demidoff's dwarf galago. Photo by Liz Pimley. and Thomas's dwarf galago. Photo by Lesley Ambrose.

Five species of diurnal primate were observed: Sykes or blue monkeys (*Cercopithecus mitis*), Grey-cheeked Mangabey (*Lophocebus albigena*), Red tailed guenons (*Cercopithecus ascanis*), Black and white colobus (*Colobus angolensis adolfi friederici*) and Olive baboons (*Papio anubis*).

Other mammals observed include the Hammerhead fruit bat *Hypsignathus monstrosus* whose presence in Tanzania is poorly documented.

## Conservation

From our brief visit we observed that there were two main conservation issues surrounding Minziro forest reserve. There was a great deal of cutting of Podocarpus trees of which many appeared to be very small in size (< 35cm dbh) indicating that this species might be nearing commercial extinction in the area. The seasonal grazing of Ankole cattle in the grasslands surrounding the forest initially seems to be a sustainable activity but the levels of burning that occur to generate pasture, may be reducing the forest area. Fire damage seen on the forest edge kills many of the shrub and small trees and over time this may force a retreat of the forest boundary.

## Concluding remarks

Previous to this survey it was known that Tanzania had 10 galago species. With the addition of Thomas's galago there are at least 11 species of galagos in Tanzania, which is more than any other country. Minziro forest also contains Tanzania's only significant population of the black and white colobus subspecies *C. a. adolfi friederici*, the grey-checked mangabey *Lophocebus albigena* and the hammerhead fruit bat *Hypsignathus monstrosus*. As is reflected in other taxonomic groups, the Demidoff's and Thomas's galagos are typical Congolese species of which Minziro forests is the last sizeable remnant in Tanzania. Minziro forest is therefore of high biodiversity value for primates and other mammals, both nationally and globally. The issues of pit sawing and fire damage are serious management issues affecting Minziro Forest Reserve.