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Wildlife and Fauna of Guinea

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Introduction

Guinea, known as the "Water Tower of West Africa," stands as a unique tapestry of life woven across its varied landscapes. Situated on the Atlantic coast, this nation boasts a remarkable diversity of ecosystems, making it one of Africa’s most important biodiversity hotspots. From the lush, rain-soaked forests in the southeast to expansive savannas, mountainous highlands, and intricate networks of rivers and wetlands, Guinea’s geography fosters rich plant and animal communities found nowhere else in the world.

This wealth of natural wonders is complemented by Guinea’s vibrant fauna. The country is a sanctuary for nearly a quarter of all mammal species found in continental Africa, and it is recognized as one of the world’s prime regions for primate biodiversity and endemism. Not only do the country’s forests and rivers provide refuge for great apes—including the largest residual population of western chimpanzees—but they also harbor elusive creatures such as the pygmy hippopotamus, rare duikers, forest elephants, and a dazzling variety of birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. Along its coast, irreplaceable mangrove forests and marine ecosystems nurture countless aquatic species and support livelihoods for coastal communities.

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Yet, beneath this abundance lies a stark and urgent reality. Human population growth, agricultural expansion, deforestation, unsustainable logging, and booming mining industries are imposing enormous pressures on Guinea’s natural habitats. Hunters and poachers, often driven by necessity, threaten vulnerable species, while recurring bushfires, overfishing, and the impacts of climate change add layers of complexity to already grave conservation challenges. The very landscapes that support Guinea’s iconic species are being transformed, fragmented, and lost at an accelerating pace.

Conservation efforts are underway, shaped by national initiatives, regional cooperation, and the dedication of scientists, conservationists, and community members. Guinea’s network of protected areas—ranging from national parks to classified forests—offers vital refuge for remaining wildlife. Strengthening these protections, building the capacity of conservation officers, and promoting sustainable livelihoods for local populations are essential steps. At the same time, effective conservation in Guinea requires integrating biodiversity concerns into strategies for agriculture, mining, and broader socioeconomic development.

This book, *Wildlife and Fauna of Guinea: A Guide to the Wildlife and Fauna of Guinea*, aims to be a comprehensive resource for understanding Guinea’s natural riches, the threats they face, and the opportunities for coexistence and sustainable conservation. Each chapter explores a different facet of the country’s ecological mosaic, from the

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specifics of habitat types to the stories of its rarest animals, shedding light on both scientific insights and the everyday realities of conservation.

By sharing the wonders and challenges of Guinea's wildlife, this guide hopes to inspire appreciation and action—by scholars, professionals, travelers, and citizens alike—in preserving this irreplaceable heritage for future generations.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Lay of the Land and the Rhythm of the Rains

Guinea, a country shaped like a gentle crescent on the shoulder of West Africa, presents a remarkable study in geographical diversity. Bordered by six neighbors – Guinea-Bissau and Senegal to the north, Mali to the northeast, Côte d'Ivoire to the east, and Liberia and Sierra Leone to the south – it acts as a geographical linchpin in the region. This positioning, coupled with its varied terrain, is the primary architect of the nation's rich tapestry of life.

Covering an area of approximately 245,857 square kilometers, Guinea is roughly comparable in size to the United Kingdom or slightly smaller than the state of Oregon in the United States. Along its western edge, it boasts a coastline stretching about 320 kilometers along the North Atlantic Ocean, a vital interface between land and sea that shapes both climate and habitat.

The country's landscape is broadly divided into four distinct natural regions, each contributing uniquely to the overall biodiversity. These divisions, moving from west to east, are Maritime Guinea, Middle Guinea (the Fouta Djallon highlands), Upper Guinea, and Forest Guinea (the southeastern rainforest region). While we will delve into the specific ecosystems of these regions later, it is their underlying geography that sets the stage.

Maritime Guinea, also known as Lower Guinea, is a coastal plain that runs parallel to the Atlantic. This region is generally flat and can be quite wet, featuring numerous tidal estuaries and inlets formed by drowned river valleys. Offshore islands dot the horizon, remnants of ancient hills now separated from the mainland by rising sea levels over geological time.

Moving inland, the terrain begins to rise, leading into the mountainous heart of the country: Middle Guinea, dominated by the Fouta Djallon highlands. This vast, rugged plateau, composed of ancient rocks like granite and gneiss, covers a significant portion of the country. Its dramatic escarpments and elevated areas are the source of some of West Africa's most important rivers.

East of the Fouta Djallon lies Upper Guinea, characterized by a drier, more open landscape. Here, the mountains give way to a rolling plain, part of the broader Sudano-Guinean savanna belt that stretches across West Africa. The elevation is lower than the highlands, and the vegetation transitions from dense forest or montane growth to grasslands dotted with trees.

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Finally, in the southeastern corner of the country is Forest Guinea, a region known for its tropical forests and significant elevation. This area is part of the Guinean forests of West Africa, a critically important biodiversity hotspot. It is also home to Guinea's highest point, Mont Nimba, which reaches an elevation of 1,752 meters (5,748 feet) near the borders with Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.

Guinea’s climate is predominantly tropical, a key factor influencing the distribution and types of wildlife found throughout the country. The year is generally divided into two main seasons: a wet season and a dry season. This distinct seasonality, driven by the movement of the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ), dictates rainfall patterns and profoundly impacts the availability of water and resources for ecosystems.

The wet season typically arrives around April or May and lasts until October or November. During this time, moist southwesterly winds blow in from the Atlantic, bringing heavy rainfall across much of the country. The peak of the rainy season usually occurs in July and August, with some areas experiencing torrential downpours.

Rainfall amounts vary significantly depending on the region. The coastal areas, particularly around the capital city of Conakry, receive the highest annual precipitation, often exceeding 3,800 millimeters (150 inches), sometimes even reaching over 4,000 or 5,000 millimeters. This creates a consistently humid environment that supports lush coastal vegetation and wetlands.

As you move inland, the total rainfall generally decreases, although the highlands and the southeastern forest region still receive substantial amounts. The Fouta Djallon highlands might see between 1,500 and 2,300 millimeters (60 to 90 inches) of rain annually. The southeastern forest region also experiences heavy rainfall, contributing to its dense forest cover.

Upper Guinea, being further from the coast and part of the savanna belt, receives less rainfall, with annual averages dropping to around 1,500 millimeters (60 inches) in the south and even lower, sometimes below 1,200 millimeters, towards the border with Mali in the drier northeast. This gradient in precipitation is a primary factor shaping the transition from forests in the south to more open grasslands in the north.

Following the wet season, the dry season takes hold, generally from November or December through March or April. During these months, the ITCZ shifts southward, and a dry, dusty wind known as the Harmattan blows from the northeast, originating from the Sahara Desert.

The Harmattan brings with it lower humidity and can carry fine dust particles, reducing visibility and coating the landscape in a fine layer of ochre-colored powder. While its effects are felt throughout the country, the Harmattan is particularly pronounced in

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the northern regions of Upper Guinea, leading to hot, dry days and noticeably cooler nights.

Temperatures in Guinea are generally high and remain relatively constant throughout the year, reflecting its tropical location. Average annual temperatures across the country hover around 26-27°C (about 77-81°F). However, there are regional variations influenced by elevation and proximity to the coast.

Coastal areas like Conakry experience consistently high temperatures and humidity. Average highs in Conakry are around 29-32°C (84-90°F), with lows rarely dropping below 21-23°C (70-74°F). The humidity, however, can make it feel much warmer.

Inland, especially in Upper Guinea during the dry season, daytime temperatures can soar, sometimes exceeding 38°C (100°F) and occasionally even reaching peaks of 40-42°C (104-108°F). The nights in these areas, particularly when the Harmattan is blowing, can be significantly cooler, leading to a larger diurnal temperature range compared to the coast.

The higher elevations of the Fouta Djallon and the mountains in Forest Guinea generally experience milder temperatures than the lowlands. While still tropical, the altitude provides some respite from the heat, although daily temperature variations can still be noticeable.

This interplay of varied topography, a predominantly tropical climate, and distinct wet and dry seasons creates the mosaic of habitats that supports Guinea's remarkable biodiversity. From the inundated coastal plains to the cooler mountain peaks and the drier interior savannas, each region offers unique conditions for life to flourish, or, as we will explore, to struggle against mounting pressures. The rivers, born in the "Water Tower" highlands, thread through these landscapes, connecting ecosystems and serving as vital arteries for both wildlife and human populations.

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