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New Northwestern Range Limit of the Northern Talapoin, Mbam et Djerem National Park, Cameroon

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Abstract: Recent surveys carried out in the Mbam Djerem National Park, Cameroon, have recorded the presence of talapoin monkeys (*Miopithecus ogouensis*). This area, at about 6°N, is in the transition zone between the Central African forest block and the Guinea-Congolia/Sudania savannas. These observations, plus those from similar habitat in the Central African Republic to the east, suggest that the distribution of the northern talapoin may be much more extensive than previously thought. Its small size and choice of habitat may have precluded it from being noticed by wildlife surveys in the past, as these monkeys tend to occur in swampy areas with thick vegetation. Future survey teams are encouraged to be on the lookout for talapoins both north and south of the Equator in savanna gallery forests.

Résumé: Les recensements récents dans le parc National de Mbam et Djerem au Cameroun montraient la présence des talapoins (*Miopithecus ogouensis*). Le milieu de cette région, qui se situe vers 6°N, est la zone de transition entre le bloc de forêt d'Afrique Centrale et les savanes Guinée-Congolia/Soudanienne. Ces observations, plus ceux des habitats similaires dans le République Centrafricaine, située à l'est, suggèrent que la distribution du talapoin du nord est peut-être plus étendu qu'on a cru auparavant. Il est possible que sa petite taille et sa choix du milieu l'ont cachée de l'attention des recensements dans le passé; ces singes préfèrent les zones marécageuses avec une végétation très touffue. Nous encourageons les équipes de sondage futur de chercher activement pour cette espèce, aussi bien au nord qu'au sud de l'équateur dans les forêts galeries dans les savanes.

Key Words: *Miopithecus*, talapoin monkeys, biogeography, distribution, Cameroon

Introduction

Two species of talapoin monkey are currently recognized: the northern talapoin, *Miopithecus ogouensis*, north of the Congo River; and the southern talapoin, *M. talapoin*, to the south of the Congo River (Oates 1996; Kingdon 1997). They are a very small, inconspicuous, strictly riparian species. Their preferred habitat is inundated forest, but they also occur in dense riparian vegetation throughout woodland and areas dominated by agriculture (Gautier-Hion 1973; Kingdon 1997). The distribution of the northern talapoin is centered on the riparian forests of Gabon (Fig. 1) but they also occur in Cameroon, Equatorial Guinea, Republic of Congo, and Cabinda, an exclave of Angola. The known east-west limits of the major block of its distribution are from about 8°36' (the Atlantic Ocean coast) to 16°E, and its north-south distribution from about 4°10' N (in Cameroon) to 5°40' S (in Cabinda) (IEA 1998; Kingdon 1997; Lernould 1988) (Fig. 1). Records from Blancou (1958) and Tello (A. Gautier pers. comm.) also

suggest that they occur almost to 8°N along riparian forests in the savannas, along the Ouaka River in the Central African Republic. This is 600 km east and 400 km north of the edge of the main distribution block (Fig. 1). Stephen Gartlan (in Wolfheim 1983) suggested that they occurred north of the Sanaga River, but this has yet to be confirmed.

Observations

A new national park, Mbam et Djerem, was created in 2000 in central Cameroon. This park, of about 5,000 km², lies on the Guinea-Congolia/Sudania regional transition zone (White 1983) between the main forest block and the Guinean savannas to the north. Its southern and northern limits are about 5°30'N to 6°12'N, respectively (Fig. 1). The Djerem River, in fact the upper reaches of the Sanaga, runs north-south through this park, and is lined by a broad band of riparian forest. The southeastern part of the park is lowland, tropical, semideciduous forest; the northwestern part is wooded and

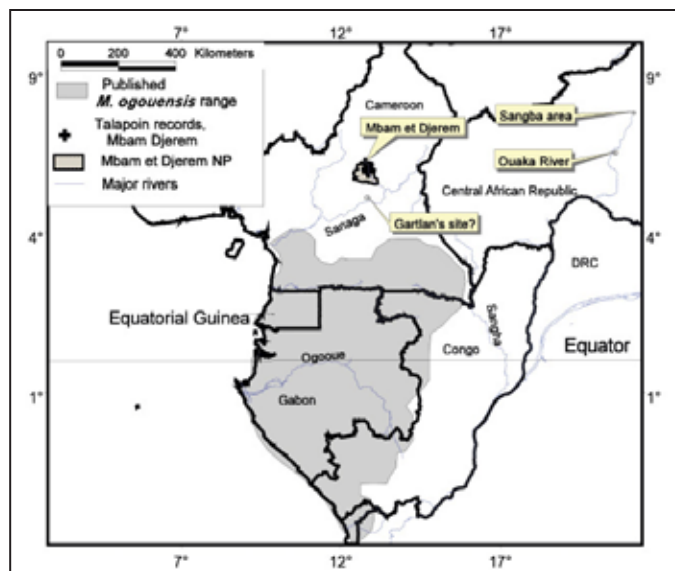


Figure 1. Range of *Miopithecus ogouensis*, after Kingdon (1997) and IEA (1998), the two areas in Central African Republic cited by Tello (A. Gautier pers. comm.), Blancou (1958), and S. Gartlan (in Wolfheim 1983), and the recent records from Mbam et Djerem National Park, Cameroon.

bush savannah with gallery forests lining the watercourses. The transition between the forest and the savannah has a relatively high biodiversity because of the interlacing of the two main habitats. The forest has been slowly creeping north since the 1950s (evidenced by the old maps of the region and present conditions, which show the contrast between savannah in the past and young colonizing woodland today).

A series of wildlife and vegetation surveys were carried out in the park between 2000–2005 (detailed in Maisels 2005). At the end of 2005, a comprehensive program was set up to cover the entire protected area with a series of survey lines, crossing all habitats throughout the park. This was to be the baseline for monitoring ecological parameters and human impacts in the park.

Talapoin monkeys were recorded along the Djerem River at about 6°N during one of the pilot surveys in 2003, and again, twice, during a comprehensive survey in 2005–2006. They were seen in gallery forests of the Djerem and a tributary in the northern third of the park. We also asked local hunters about the monkey species present in the area, and all described a very tiny monkey that lives in large groups next to water; the local name in Gbaya is *dikiti* and in Vouté it is *djane*.

Discussion

The observations detailed here confirm the most north-westerly limit of the distribution of northern talapoin recorded to date. The records are 200 km north of the distribution cited in Kingdon (1997) and IEA (1998), and 100 km north of the area suggested as a possible locality by S. Gartlan in Wolfheim (1983). It has probably been overlooked during wildlife surveys due to its small size (0.8–1.9 kg; Kingdon 1997), its preference for swampy or inundated areas that are difficult to

reach, and its habit of keeping to the thickest, most lianescent vegetation. Although talapoin call when disturbed (Gautier-Hion 1988), the vocalizations are bird-like (refer to Gautier-Hion *et al.* 1999 for recordings) and possibly difficult to identify by survey teams unfamiliar with the species.

We recommend that the wildlife survey staff in Cameroon and Central African Republic working in areas up to 8°N and about 21°E bear in mind that this species could be present in suitable habitats, and look for it during fieldwork and question local hunters about it. Faunal survey teams working in the possible area of occurrence of the southern species, *M. talapoin*, should also be aware of its possible presence in gallery forest mosaic habitats. All records should be georeferenced in order to improve our understanding of these species' use of habitat and their geographical distribution.

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