**TRIP REPORT UGANDA**

27 July – 11 August 2018

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**Why go?**

While looking for our next destination, Uganda was not really on our radar. As we were restricted to the months August and July, Uganda popped up, as it is one of the better periods to visit the country. After reading some trip reports, we were sold. Uganda offers some great central-Africa birding, including some really appealing species like Shoebill, Grauer’s Broadbill and Green-breasted Pitta. In addition, you can do some safari as well, and best of all, you get the chance to see Gorilla’s and Chimpanzees. It is also an ‘easy’ country to visit since eco-tourism is well developed, the country is in general quite safe and most people speak English.

**Logistics and hotels**

Since we prefer to organise our trips by ourselves, we at first opted to only rent a car including a driver. We contacted several tour agencies, just like Marques et al. did. By getting a driver from a tour company it would be easier to get to the right places and to make the right arrangements. Avian Watch Uganda from Alfred Twinomujuni offered us the best deal; $120 for a car and driver per day.

Hotels are pretty easy to find in several trip reports and on internet. The prices vary, but prices around 15-20 euro seem to be normal.

In addition to these costs, entrance fees for the national parks accounted for most of the other expenses. Prices can be found here [http://ugandawildlife.org/about-us/visitor-tariff](http://ugandawildlife.org/about-us/visitor-tariff) and usually you pay $70 per day (entrance and birding fee).

Adding up the aforementioned costs, we concluded that the all-in offer of Alfred of $2640 per person for 16 days would be cheaper than organizing things on our own. The all-in option included the car and driver, accommodation, food, water and entrance fees. It also included the Gorilla permits ($600). We decided to choose for the all-in option. Fees for the GB Pitta and Chimpanzees were excluded.

Looking back at this decision we were glad we made this choice. Without doubt, having a driver is recommended to everyone in Uganda. It is possible to drive on your own, but some roads are in a bad state, which makes driving difficult and tiring. Furthermore, any possible difficulties with the car are solved by the driver. We once had an issue with one of the brakes, which was solved when we were out birding. Also, having the hotels, food and park entrances pre-arranged saved us a lot of hassle. Considering the food, it is proper and safe food was guaranteed (as none of us got sick!). Furthermore, arrangements with the hotel e.g. for dinner times or packed lunch were easily made. At the national parks, especially the arrangements/negotiations with the local guides were useful. Having these things pre-arranged did however not mean it was completely free of hassle, it took our driver Bridget and trainee-guide Allen some effort in a few cases to get things sorted out for us. Which brings me to the down side of having things pre-arranged. It makes the trip less flexible and especially makes you dependant of your tour company. It must be said that our driver and trainee-guide did their very best in fulfilling our wishes and they must have had a tough 2 weeks. Due to their efforts we were still quite flexible. Furthermore, the itinerary was adjusted to our needs and Alfred
gave some advice on it as well (both before arrival as during our stay in Uganda). Considering the dependency, only the hotels were not 100% to our joy. We had agreed upon a concept list of hotels, but never received the definite list. Especially the last 3 hotels were not very well located considering bird watching and the places of our interest. In Lake Mburo we stayed in the park, while the best birding is outside the park. In Mabira Forest we stayed in an eco-resort which was a 45 min. drive to the best trails. And our final hotel in Kampala was near the city centre, while somewhere more outside the city would have been better to avoid the traffic. On the other hand, if we had arranged it by ourselves, it most probably would have resulted in similar kind of problems.

Guides
It was our first proper birding trip in Africa, so the whole thing with a driver and guides was new to us. We are mainly used to bird on our own, also abroad. We chose not to hire a private guide for the trip but in the end Allen, a trainee-guide from Avian Watch Uganda, joined us during the full trip. This was proposed earlier by Alfred and didn’t cost us any extra money as he was still learning the profession of being a birding guide. His knowledge was somewhat limited, but especially in making local arrangements he was useful. With the local guides we had mixed experiences. In Mabira, Mgahinga and Semuliki we got very skilled local guides. In Kibale we joined Alfred for a day, he was there to guide another private tour. In QENP and Lake Mburo we birded on our own. Bwindi however was a different kind of story. As Gorilla tracking is the main activity there, the UWA-guides have generally limited knowledge of birds. However, there are some good private guides available, but this was not included in our tour. In Buhoma, Allen suggested to go on our own, since he is from the area and it would give us some more flexibility compared to taking an UWA-guide. In hindsight, we would have liked to have a private local guide. Allen knew most of the places where to find the target birds, but he knew only some of their calls. Especially in this dense forest vocalization is key to find some of these birds. In Ruhija we chose to hire a private local guide, which is a must in finding the Green Broadbills.

Itinerary
Since we had limited time, we chose to focus on the Albertine Rift endemics. As a consequence we had to skip the Murchinsons Falls, which was the biggest downside of our itinerary. We included Mgahinga in order to increase chances of seeing Ruwenzori Turaco and Ruwenzori Double-collared Sunbird. Semuliki was included as none of us had been to Western Africa, so most of the birds here would be new to us. Furthermore, its remoteness and wildness were appealing too. We also included Mabira Forest Reserve, as it hosts some birds which are difficult to see elsewhere, besides Murchinsons Falls. In hindsight, one could doubt whether to include Mabira or not. Its forest is not very beautiful and the number of target birds is limited. On the other hand, it might be just one of these sites which really needs some eco-tourism, as the forest is clearly under pressure. The time we spent in Bwindi was enough to find most target birds, although one more day in Buhoma would have been nice.

Our itinerary:
- Kibale
- Semuliki
- Queen Elizabeth National Park
- Bwindi Buhoma
- Bwindi Ruhija
- Bwindi Rushaga
- Mgahinga
Lake Mburo
- Mabira Forest Reserve
- Mabamba Swamp

Safety
We never felt unsafe during the trip. Driving must have been the most dangerous activity during our trip but we have experienced far worse in other countries (e.g. Vietnam and Peru). In the bigger cities, like Kampala, you should keep an extra eye on your belongings. During ‘bird activities’ in the National Parks you often are obligated to go with/take an armed guard with you. It is said that they protect you against the wildlife but rebels in the border areas can also be a reason for this measure.

Gorillas
Gorilla tracking is the main tourist attraction of the country and is primarily done in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. In Mgahinga National Park there are habituated Gorilla’s as well, but in much lower numbers and thus less reliable to encounter. Gorillas can also be found in Rwanda although prices for Gorilla tracking apparently are twice as high there. In Bwindi, there are several sites from where one can do Gorilla tracking: Buhoma, Ruhija, Rushaga and Nkuringo. At each site several groups can be visited. Chances of seeing them are near to 100%, as trackers go out early in the morning to locate them, as well as in the afternoon, to locate their sleeping site. Moreover, if a certain group can’t be found they sometimes allow people to visit an already visited group. Getting to the Gorilla can be quite a physical exercise and should not be underestimated. At the briefing, the rangers will tell about the ‘African helicopter’ (someone who can carry you back on his own back), costing a few hundred dollars. We thought this was a joke, but Allen and Bridget told us that even on our day of Gorilla tracking two people used this option of transport on the way back. Making a reservation and getting a permit in advance is necessary, especially in the high season. As we got our permits quite late, they were only available in Rushaga. They cost $600 per person, which is a lot. One can doubt whether it is necessary to ask such a high price and if all the money gets to the right persons, but it surely does guarantee the protection of the Gorillas and their unique environment.

Trip reports and books
We used ‘The Birds of East Africa’ by Stevenson as our main source of information. In addition, we looked up several trip reports on cloudbirders.com and searched through observations on observation.org and ebird.org. All our observations can be found on observation.

Some of the more useful trip reports included:
- Sargeant, 2003
- Hendriks, 2016
- Lebrun, 2017
- Marques, 2007
- D'haen, 2017
- Van der Loock, 2015

Weather and season
In Uganda, there are two dry periods, from June to August and from December to February. We only occasionally experienced a shower when birding. Temperatures varied between 25-35 degrees Celsius and only higher up in Bwindi and Mgahinga the mornings were colder (10-15 degrees Celsius). Birds usually breed earlier in the year, which means birds are less vocal in July-August, although this differs between species. It is a good period to search for Green-breasted Pitta, while the young of the African Green Broadbills had just fledged.
Day to day itinerary

27-07 Entebbe – Kibale

Our driver (Bridget) and guide (Allen) are a bit late due to heavy traffic, but after some waiting we are quickly on our way to the first destination: Kibale. Driving to Kibale takes us the whole day, so we are limited to spotting birds from the car or during one of the few stops. Interesting birds include Double-toothed Barbet (close to the airport), fly-by Meyer’s Parrots, Pink-backed Pelicans, Sooty Chat, Black-and-white-casqued Hornbills and Crowned Hornbills. Furthermore we see our first Olive Baboons, Guereza Colobus and Central African Red Colobus. Highlight of the day for sure were two African Forest Elephants feeding on the edge of the forest in Kibale as we drove by, providing excellent views!

Hotel: Kibale Homestay, recommended

28-07 Kibale

Our first day birding and immediately D-day: Green-breasted Pitta is our target bird of today. Several groups are searching for the Pitta today and well before sunrise we arrive at the spot. It doesn’t take long before we hear the first birds. Their wing-fluttering is surprisingly loud. However, seeing a bird is something different. Eventually, another group spots a bird high up in a tree allowing us to get some good views. For about 20 min. we observe the bird, displaying every now and then. Wow..

We leave the spot, to give the birds some rest and privacy, and slowly walk back to the HQ. In the background we hear Eastern Chimpanzees screaming and screeching in the forest. Because we only paid for the Pitta and not for the Chimpanzees we are not allowed to move in the direction of the sounds. Despite several attempts, there is no way to go after them when you haven’t paid the fee... Alfred is guiding us in the forest, which helps us to pick up Red-tailed Bristlebill, Little Greenbul and White-throated Greenbul, Scaly-breasted Illadopsis, Pale-breasted Illadopsis, Blue-throated Roller, Grey-throated Tit-Flycatcher, Fire-crested Alethe (HO), Afep Pigeon (HO), Black and Red-chested Cuckoo, Speckled Tinkerbird, Dusky Tit, Purple-headed Starling, Red-capped Robin-chat (HO), Blue-shouldered Robin-chat and Vieillot’s Black Weaver. Before having lunch we check the main road through the forest near the HQ, seeing Crowned and Cassin’s Hawk-Eagle. When walking back to the car suddenly an African Forest Elephant crosses the road as if it was nothing! Very impressive and a good reality check for all of us!

After lunch Allen offers us to join a local guide, to check the agricultural feeds near the hotel. We agree, paying a small fee, but are not very satisfied in the end, seeing only common birds. Apparently various people offer walking/birding tours in the vicinity of Bigodi Swamp. Birds seen include Baglafecht Weaver, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Lüdhers’s Bushshrike (HO), Bocage’s Bushshrike, Toro Olive Greenbul and Joyful Greenbul.

In the late afternoon we are birding along the main road through the forest, and start birding a few km’s past the HQ. We see Sooty and Cassin’s Flycathers, but we arrive quite late at the real sweet spot (around GPS 0.485, 30.354). The road offers here a good vantage point to scan for Afep Pigeons, which we unfortunately do not see. However, many other good birds are around. We see White-headed Wood Hoopoes, Petit’s Cuckooshrike, Willcocks’s Honeyguide, Red-headed Malimbe, Sabine’s Spinetail and Scarce Swift. Furthermore, after several HO observations of Eastern...
Chimpanzees today, we strike gold at the end of the afternoon. After the umpteenth HO we manage to get a glimpse of two Eastern Chimpanzees in the forest edge, what a day!!

Hotel: Kibale Homestay, recommended.

Guides:
- Local guide from HQ, no birding skills, but sufficient knowledge of how/where to find the Pitta
- Alfred walking back to the HQ
- Local guide from Kibale Homestay (?), not recommended

29-07 Kibale – Semuliki

Today we will travel to Semuliki, but not after we have done some birding in Kibale. We try the same spot along the road as yesterday, hoping to get views of Afe Pigeon. Birding was nice again, seeing Elliot’s and Brown-eared Woodpecker, but none of our target birds. We take a detour to the northern section of Kibale, hoping to find Lowland Masked Apalis. Alfred told us about a good spot, at GPS 0.646, 30.384. During our search we find Grey-capped Warbler, but no Apalis. We are quite disappointed, but fortunately Allen pushes on. In the next village he talks to some local guides and eventually he manages to find one willing to take us to a good spot for a small fee. It’s already around 1 pm, but we decide to give it a last try. We walk through the tea-fields to some kind of wet valley. We arrive at the spot (GPS 0.637, 30.380) and start taping the bird. It takes a while, but then suddenly a bird turns up and we all have good views of the Lowland Masked Apalis! While we return to the car a nice Mottled Spinetail flies over the tea-fields. We have lunch (finally!) in Fort Portal, with Ross’ Turaco next to the restaurant, and then continue to Semuliki. The road is in good condition and we arrive at 6 pm, with just enough time left to do some roadside birding till it gets dark. Semuliki is famous for its Hornbills and in the evening we already have nice views of birds flying to their roosting trees. We see Piping, Crowned and Black-and-white-casqued Hornbills. After diner we have nice views of the resident African Wood Owl and a larger fruit bat spec hanging upside down near the Bandas.

Hotel: Park Bandas – basic, but probably the only choice around.

Guide: at GPS 0.643782, 30.377040 there is a local office, which offers ‘bird walks’. Here we picked-up our local guide for the Apalis. This is probably the best place to ask around for a guide.

30-07 Semuliki

Our guide today is Justice, the best bird guide around (and probably also one of the few ones). We are excited, Semuliki is a large and quite remote reserve and one of the easternmost parts of the Congo basin. Much is still unknown and some birds visit the area as a seasonal migrant, e.g. Capuchin Babblers. It is a very exciting birding spot as one can see some good birds found nowhere else in the country, with even a possibility to find new species for Uganda. Before we start, Justice insists on renting rubber boots as according to him, these would be necessary in the forest. In hindsight, rubber boots were not necessary at all.

We start with some roadside birding, around GPS 0.833, 30.167, again to try to see some Hornbills. We manage to find more Hornbill species, the Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill, Black-casqued and White-crested Hornbills (a real gem). In the forest next to the road we hear Forest Robin and White-tailed
Ant-Thrush singing. We also pay a visit to the Male Hot Springs, a truly magical place with steam rising from the soil, a rising sun against a backdrop of rainforest, while large groups of African Green Pigeons are flying around. It is at this magical place where we also see the rare De Brazza’s Monkey, acting very shy while moving through the palm trees.

We continue and make a quick stop for a Verreaux’s Eagle-Owl. At GPS 0.806, 30.141 we stop again to check the fields and rather quickly we find Orange-cheeked Waxbill. Around GPS 0.797891, 30.098521 we finally really enter the forest and start hiking north. At one of the pools we see a duck, but unfortunately it is not the hoped for Hartlaub’s Duck but an African Black Duck. Birding is good though with Red-headed Bluebill, Red-headed Malimbe, Least Honeyguide, Yellow-throated Cuckoo (HO), Lemon-bellied Crombec, Dusky Crested Flycatcher, Black-bellied Seedcracker, Rufous-sided Broadbill, Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, Verreaux Eagle and Chestnut-breasted Nigrita. At the Nigrita we have lunch, while a Red-rumped Tinkerbird starts calling, but we fail to get views of the bird. After lunch we continue and see Narina Trogon, Blue-breasted Kingfisher and Jameson’s Wattle-eye. We end at a site with several ponds. This is a good spot for White-bellied Kingfisher, and indeed a bird is heard. We try to find the bird, but only our guide sees it as he flushes the bird. While searching for the kingfisher, a duck flies by and briefly lands in an overhanging tree over one of the pools, a Hartlaub’s Duck! As soon as we see the duck, the duck sees us as well, takes off and disappears as soon as it appeared in the first place. As we walk back to the car, some serious rain- and thunderclouds develop and we hurry back, walking the last kilometre in heavy rain and consequently see few birds.

Hotel: Park Bandas
Guide: Justice from Semuliki NP, recommended.

31-07 Semuliki – QENP

Today we start the day with a calling Yellow-throated Cuckoo at our accommodation. Before heading to QENP we do some roadside birding, but fail to find anything new or exciting. African Giant Squirrels were nice, as well as the Uganda Mangabeys and an Elephant-Shrew spec. Around 10 am we hit the road again, but around GPS 0.910, 30.193 we make a very interesting stop. Initially to watch a White-headed Barbet, but the stop takes longer and longer as we keep on seeing interesting birds on the adjacent plains. Birds seen here include African Marsh Harrier, African Openbill, a nice group of Piacpiac, Grey Kestrel, Moustached Grass-Warbler, Crested Malimbe, Yellow-billed Stork, Little Bittern, Blue-breasted and Grey-headed Kingfisher. In Fort Portal we have lunch again, with again the same Ross’ Turaco and also more than 1000 Yellow-billed Kites on migration. Around 5pm we arrive in QENP and start seeing our first game and birds, such as White-headed Vulture, Brown and Black-chested Snake Eagle, Brown-crowned Tchagra and White-browed Robin-Chat. Highlight of the day are two female African Lions resting in a tree near the main road. At the Pumba Safari Cottages we enjoy a nice sunset over the vast savanna.

Hotel: Pumba Safari Cottages – recommended, although there seem to be plenty of good lodges around.
Guide: -
A full day in the park and the first real safari for some members of the group. After a quick stop at the bridge, with Papyrus Gonolek, we start at the Kasenyi tracks. Quite some grassland has been burned, apparently to create some fresh green grass for the animals. There’s no fresh grass yet and as a consequence, we find only low numbers of animals in this area. However, within less than 30 minutes in the NP, we do find a African Leopard! The cat lays out in the open on a blackened piece of grassland, awesome! A great start of the day. Birding is good, and we are especially happy with Brown-chested Lapwing and Temminck’s Coursier. Other birds we see include Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike, Common Buttonquail, Red-capped and Flappet Lark, Trilling Cisticola and White-Backed Vulture. After lunch we take a tourist boat for a trip up and down the Kazinga Channel. It is a nice tour with good views of mammals coming to the river for bathing and drinking. Elephants, Hippo’s, Buffalo’s and Waterbucks are numerous. Birds are not the main attraction but we do see Black Crake, Water Thick-knee’s, lots of Pied Kingfishers, Madagascar Bee-eaters and our only Red-throated Bee-eater of the trip. A persistent downpour makes us return a little early. For the rest of the afternoon we drive on the North Kazinga Plains/Crater Drive. Again, the animals we see are in low numbers but the number of species is good. We all enjoy sightings of the African Bush Elephants, Olive Baboons, Hippo’s, Nile Crocodiles, Nile Monitor, Bushbuck, Waterbuck, Buffalo’s, Uganda Kob, Banded Mongoose, Common Warthogs and its imposing brother the Giant Forest Hog. Lappet-faced Vultures fly around and we find a Black-bellied Bustard, White-headed Barbet, Black-lored Babbler and Levailant’s Cuckoo.

Hotel: Pumba Safari Cottages.

Guide: -

Since we drive west towards Bwindi, we pass through the Ishasha sector of the park and we basically have a 4 hour game drive. Some parts here are clearly better for animals, and we do see some nice Elephant herds. As we are driving quite fast, birding is not very easy. On the other hand, we still have some target birds here to find, so we keep on searching and stop every now and then. We manage to pick up a nice set of Cisticola’s, including Croaking, Stout, Carruther’s and Wing-snapping. Other birds en route include Green Wood-Hoopoe, African Crake, African Spoonbill, Marsh Tchagra and 3 gorgeous Black Bee-eaters. Regarding the mammals, this is the region where we see Topi’s, apparently they are absent in QENP itself. At 4pm we arrive at the Buhoma Community Rest Camp, meaning we still have some time to go birding here on the entrance road. It is exciting to finally be here at the Bwindi NP, but some rain makes it difficult to do some proper birding. Best birds we encounter are Grey-winged Robin-chat, Pink-footed Puffback and Many-coloured Bushshrike.

Hotel: Buhoma Community Rest Camp – recommended, especially because of the warm stove in our beds :)

Guide: -

While going through the target list of today last evening, we realized today would be a though day. And so it was. Since Buhoma is a dense forest (it got the name ‘impenetrable forest’ for a reason) and
quite some ground-dwelling birds are on the target list, you need patience and knowledge of the calls to find these birds. Unfortunately, we kind of lacked both a bit, so birding was frustrating from time to time. On the other hand, birding here is also amazing, with so many birds and among them a lot of range-restricted or rare birds. We start the day with high hopes and quickly find birds like Red-capped Robin-chat, Yellow-eyed Black Flycatcher, Equatorial Akalat, Black Bee-eater, Kakamega Greenbull, Black-faced Rufous Warbler, Rwenzori Batis, Purple-breasted Sunbird, Yellow-whiskered Greenbul and Oriole Finch. So far, so good. Red-throated Alethe and White-bellied Robin-chat are heard only. However, tension rises as we get closer to the spot for Neumann’s Warbler, which is only known from this place. After hearing our first Neumann’s Warbler calling in the distant, we come across an interesting flock and pick-out a very sweet Jameson’s Antpecker. We continue the search for the Neumann’s Warbler, and we hear the bird a few times more. It responds to tape, but doesn’t get closer. Eventually, only Allen manages to see a bird, quickly flying past a track. We join him, but the bird is gone. We have lunch around 2pm and decide to stop looking for the Neumann’s and continue to search for other target birds. We are on a tight schedule and time is running out but we do have some remaining target birds... At a stake-out for Willard’s Sooty Boubou (-1.0174,29.62) we try to tape-lure a bird, and only after more than 10 minutes suddenly a bird turns up and gives us great views. We can still hear the bird calling when walking back. On our way back we hear a Bar-tailed Trogon and African Broadbill, and see Brown-capped Weaver. Back at the entrance we find 2 nice White-tailed Ant-Thrushes. In the forest we encounter African Giant Squirrels, Smith’s Bush Squirrel, Blue Monkeys and a Rwenzori Red Duiker. Despite our good score, we end the day with some mixed feelings as we have some target birds remaining or only heard them. There is no second chance for us in this area because tomorrow we have to continue to Ruhija.

Hotel: Buhoma Community Rest Camp – recommended.

Guide: Guides in Bwindi are something different. As most tourists come here for the Gorilla’s, park rangers usually lack birdwatching skills. The only skilled guides available are private guides. As our trainee guide is from this area, we agreed to have him as our only guide for this day. This was ok, but his knowledge concerning bird calls was limited, which is a great handicap in this place. In hindsight, we would have liked to spend some more money on hiring a truly skilled guide.

04-08 Bwindi Buhoma – Ruhija

We start today with some birding along the entrance road, but we fail to find any new birds to add to our trip list. We continue towards ‘the Neck’, about half way between Buhoma and Ruhija. At the Neck, we stop and walk regularly. Afep Pigeon is being heard only again, but we see Red-tailed Ant-Thrush, Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo, Chestnut-throated Apalis, Black-faced Prinia, and Black Bee-eater. At the bridge we have lunch and enjoy Cassin’s Flycatchers down the river. A quick stop-by delivers us Golden-breasted Bunting and while searching for Dusky Twinspot (not found) we find a Rwenzori Hill-Babbler. At Ruhija we check in at the Ruhija Community Rest Camp and quickly continue towards the site for Grauer’s Warbler (GPS -1.047, 29.780). And indeed, it does not take long before we hear a bird calling. Eventually, with a lot of patience we manage to see one. It’s a small track, but it is a nice spot to see some of the target birds. We find White-browed Crombec, Rwenzori Batis, Mountain Masked Apalis, Stripe-breasted Tit and Kandt’s Waxbill. At night we make a small game drive in search for the Montane Nightjar (ssp. Ruwenzorii). No Nightjar was found due to windy conditions but several Lesser Galago’s spec. and an Cat spec. (maybe a Serval) make the day to a very happy ending!
Hotel: Ruhija Community Rest Camp – food is somewhat basic but accommodation and location is good, recommended.

Guide:

05-08 Bwindi Ruhija – Rushaga

A quite similar day as the day before yesterday, we have a long target list today! After a bit of a hassle (see below at ‘guide’) we start our walk into the forest, accompanied by a private guide. The forest is more open here, quite a difference with Buhoma. We pick up target birds quickly thanks to our guide Gordon. We see a nice Mountain Sooty Boubou, Rwenzori Hill Babbler, Blue-headed Sunbird, White-headed Wood-Hoopoe, Yellow-streaked Greenbul, Black-faced Prinia, Yellow-eyed Black Flycatcher and hear Strange Weaver (later on we see one) and Red-throated Alethe. Dusky Crimsonwings are heard close by, but do not show. A bit further on we hear again Dusky Crimsonwings and now we have brief views as they cross the track. Archer’s Ground-Robin is heard and eventually seen, just like Rwenzori Apalis, Mountain Illadopsis and Mountain Yellow Warbler. We continue with nice birds like Bar-tailed Trogon and White-starred Robin. Not a bad start, but we are here mainly for one bird, the Grauer’s Broadbill. Again a species only found here. The chicks had recently fledged, decreasing our chances of seeing one severely. Moreover, a friend of us had visited this site a few days ago and searched in vain for these birds for two full days… We join another group of birders (Birdquest) and our guides make a plan to search for the birds. The guides split up, to look for the birds in the adjacent hills, while the rest waits at the site of the abandoned nest, in case the birds return to the vicinity of their nest. After about an hour of searching one of the guides hears a bird calling. The guides communicate by shouting to one another and one of the guides rushes down to get the group. What follows is a long and exhausting climb through the forest, a real track is absent. When we arrive at the spot, we hear a bird calling. The next 30-45 min. we can hear a bird calling from a tree top, but it does not show itself. While we are afraid of losing the bird, more birds turn up (probably the parents returning to their chick) and we finally get to see the birds. After some chaos and panic among the birders, everyone gets to see the birds and many hugs and high-fives follow. Imagine 20 birders going crazy somewhere on a hilltop in a huge rainforest, deep down in Central Africa… The birds (at least 3) gave exceptional views and we eventually leave the birds as not all targets are in the bag yet. On our way down we pick up White-bellied Crested Flycatcher. At the swamp we have a late lunch and in the meantime we try for Grauer’s Swamp Warbler. It is already past 2 pm and it takes some effort, but we eventually hear a bird calling and shortly see it flying. On the way back we don’t see anything exciting, except from some very fresh Gorilla tracks. But, the fun isn’t over yet. We continue by car to Rushaga and scan the road for another target. And yes, a Handsome Francolin is foraging next to the road, not taking notice of passing cars or excited tourists. We make one more stop, taking a side road to GPS -1.065, 29.799. Allen has noticed our disappointment of missing some target species, so he has collected some local knowledge. We primarily look for Purple-breasted Sunbird, a bird missed by most of us in Buhoma. There is a flowering tree with sunbirds, and indeed, we all manage to see a nice Purple-breasted Sunbird. As the sun sets, we explore the area a bit more and Allen finds some Dusky Twinspots. There are some starlings as well; Sharpe’s Starlings and Stuhlmann’s Starling, a target species we were still missing! We set off again in a very good mood, a good thing, as the next 3-4 hrs are spent on some of the worst roads we encounter this trip.

Hotel: Wagtail Eco-Safari Camp - not recommended, diner and sleeping were ok, but their timing and packed lunch was the worst we have had.
Guide: Last evening Allen tried to arrange a friend of him to guide us today. Unfortunately, this morning Allen told us that he did not succeed at doing so as his friend was guiding another group. We learned from birding in Buhoma and urged Allen to try to arrange something. Eventually, when we told we were prepared to pay a small fee (around $10 per person) things were sorted quickly. Our guide, who was already in the field with another group (Birdquest) walked back to join us. Amos is probably the best (or best known) guide around, but our local guide Gordon was also very skilled and worked together with Amos. Gordon had great knowledge of the bird calls in this area and proved of significant use in helping us finding our target birds.

06-08 Rushaga – Mgahinga

Today is the day we all have been looking forward to: Gorilla tracking. There are six family groups of Gorilla’s that can be visited from Rushaga. After a general instruction the group of over 50 international tourists are divided into six groups of about 6-8 people. We can stay together as a group. Instead of going into the forest, like the other groups, we take the car to a nearby village. We ascent a big hill, walking through agricultural fields. On that hill we have to wait because trackers are still trying to locate our group. After about an hour we get the message that the group has been found, and we start to descend the hill on the other side. Although we are walking through cultural fields, it is difficult terrain with some very steep slopes. Alwin even slips away, sliding down the slope a few meters. Eventually we reach the Gorilla’s, which are on the very edge of the park, marked by a stream. Seeing a Gorilla is a truly unique experience! With their human-like hands, faces, eyes and expressions you really feel as being their guest. We spent a full hour with the group and especially a curious and playful young Gorilla at close range is a feast to witness. At some point the silverback makes a charge towards us, apparently because we are in his way as he wants to get to some tasty plants... A pretty exciting moment for all of us, as one can imagine. After an hour we leave the group behind and work our way up the hill again. As we spent little time in the park, no birds of interest were seen today.

Hotel: Danita House, Kisoro. A real surprise. At first we were not happy staying at quite a distance from Mgahinga, but staying at Danita House was a real pleasure. Best food we have had and very friendly people. Recommended.


07-08 Mgahinga – Kabale

The road towards the visitor centre of Mgahinga NP is one of the worst roads we will encounter this trip, our van just makes it to the parking lot. A 4x4 would have been nice to have here. Before we reach the visitor centre we already pick up one of our targets here, Cinnamon Bracken Warbler. We meet our guide Laurian and start walking towards the gorge. We are surprised to see how different the landscape is here compared to other areas we have visited. Lots of bamboo, no big trees and quite some open grassy areas. It takes not long before we see another target, Rwenzori Double-collared Sunbird. There is quite some activity and we see other birds like Doherty’s Bushshrike, Chubb’s Cisticola, Blue-headed Sunbird, Rwenzori Batis, White-starred Robin, Kandt’s Waxbill, Variable Sunbird, Regal Sunbird, Mountain Yellow Warbler, Western Green Tinkerbird and Archer’s Ground Robin. It takes a bit longer to find the other star bird of Mgahinga, but eventually we all see a nice Rwenzori Turaco and later on we will see more birds. We continue towards ‘the gorge’ and in
the meantime we encounter more nice birds such as White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Abyssinian Thrush, Rwenzori Apalis and Rwenzori Hill-Babbler. We also see the park's specialty, the Golden Monkey. With all targets in the bag, we are exciting to find out what's more to see on these volcano slopes. We are especially excited about 'the gorge' (GPS -1.378, 29.603), a site where Shelley’s Crimsonwing can be found. The gorge is our destination today, one can continue higher up, to heath-like vegetation, which must be very interesting as well. While having lunch in the gorge we look out for crimsonwings. Along the stream is the best place to look for crimsonwings as they can come out of the thick vegetation here occasionally to drink. At some point we hear the soft calls of crimsonwings and after some patience we see a nice family of Dusky Crimsonwings. No other crimsonwings were found today. Stripe-breasted Tits are present in the gorge and some naughty but insanely clever White-necked Ravens plundered our bags for food and left them meters away from where we had left them in the first place. When descending again, we take a more westerly route through thick bamboo forests. According to our guide this is a good site to look for Abyssinian Ground Thrush. The forest is monotonous and extremely quiet. We only see a few birds such as Strange Weaver and Stripe-breasted Tit. We try to tape-lure the bird, but it seems useless and after some time hope fades away. But then, after 2 hrs walking we hear a bird singing! It is in the distant, and we cannot get closer, but at least we found a singing bird. After another 30 mins we find a much closer bird and manage to locate it. We flush the bird, but we all have good views of the bird as it flies past us. Wow! Before leaving the park we admire a beautiful Johnston’s Chameleon at the information centre. Our first chameleon ever for all of us. On our way to Kabale we make a quick stop at Lake Bunyonyi (GPS -1.213, 29.830) to see if we can pick up some Papyrus species. It’s not very spectacular, but we find Purple Herons, African Yellow Wabler, Grey-crowned Cranes and a nice Spotted-necked Otter.

Hotel: White Horse Inn. What to say, an ok hotel and probably safe as well. But really big and clearly popular among business men and the well-off. Quite luxurious but recommended.

Guide: Laurian from Mgahinga NP, recommended

08-08 Kabale – Lake Mburo

It is quite a drive from Kabale to Lake Mburo, so we take a break somewhere at a large patch of Papyrus (GPS -0.752, 30.334). Here we find Papyrus Gonolek and Holub’s Golden Weaver while 3 Woolly-necked Storks are flying over. It is already past noon when we reach Lake Mburo, but we still enjoy birding along the road while entering the park. We see our first Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, as well as Red-billed Quela, African Dwarf Kingfisher, Rufous-bellied Heron, Water Thick-knee, Common Scimitarbill, Lilac-breasted Roller and White-winged Black Tit. We do not have packed lunch today, so we have lunch at the park’s restaurant at the lakeside. It’s the only restaurant in the park and their service is very slow, we spent more than 2 hours in the restaurant, wasting valuable time, as we only have one afternoon and one morning in the park. Moreover, we are sleeping in the Park’s banda’s, which is not very tactical as the best birding is done just outside the park. We decide to go back to the entrance road again to look for Red-headed Barbet. We find Crested Barbet, Red-headed Lovebird and Brown-necked Parrot. We visit the stunning Kwakobo Rock Lodge, a friend of us (Arjan Dwarshuis) has seen Red-faced Barbets in a fruiting tree in front of the lodge. We do find the tree filled with Baboons and doves, but no Barbets. At some point we probably do hear the Red-faced Barbets, but not convincing enough for a tick. However, missing this birds is compensated at dawn, when Freckled and a stunning male Pennant-winged Nightjar start flying around. A spectacular sight! We have dinner at the lodge, willing to pay a bit extra, instead of having dinner at the park’s
restaurant again at the lakeside. Driving through the park at night is actually not allowed, but thanks to Bridget’s smile we have a nice night drive while driving back to our cabins. Mammals seen during day and night include Common Dwarf Mongoose, Impala, Giraffe, Zebra, Eland, Bushbuck, Bunyoro Rabbit, a Duiker spec., Galago spec., Buffalo, Topi, Hippo’s and some extra species of monkeys and deer.

Hotel: Rwonyo Rest Camp. Very basic banda’s in the NP, no shower or toilets present.

Guide: -

09-08 Lake Mbuuro – Mabira

We wake up at first light, just in time to hear and see some Black-shouldered Nightjars flying round the Banda’s. We start the day with a boat ride on the lake. We are actually just around the first corner when we see our first African Finfoot. After that, we continue to the Papyrus reed beds. Here we search for White-winged Warbler, and after hearing several birds we finally manage to see a bird. Other birds around the Papyrus are Greater Swamp Warbler, Swamp Flycatcher, Northern Brown-throated Weaver, Holub’s Golden Weaver and Papyrus Gonolek. On another part of the lake we visit the roost of White-backed Night Herons and see a juvenile bird. Also here is another pair of Finfoots, who show pretty well. Tens of Hippos and three small Nile Crocodiles are a nice bycatch. After breakfast at the park’s restaurant we can only have a short game drive through the park as we have to get to Mabira. The only Lion of the park and the rare Hyena’s are not encountered but the Giraffe’s, Zebra’s and a big African Rock Python were pretty nice as well. During this game drive we manage to find a Long-tailed Cisticola, Verreaux’s Eagle-Owl, Striped Kingfisher, Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike, Spot-flanked Barbet, White-winged Tit and Rüppell’s and Lappet-faced Vulture. But that’s it, we leave without a Red-faced Barbet on our list. The rest of the day we spend driving towards Mabira, arriving at Griffin Falls Camp after dawn.

Hotel: Griffin Falls Camp – very basic with no electricity, due to its location not recommended. It is probably better to look for accommodation in Jinja.

Guide: -

10-08 Mabira – Kampala

We have to make a choice, as we stay at Griffin Falls Camp we can either walk at the trails around the camp, or go to Mabira Forest trails, at the information centre. We choose for the latter, although wasting some valuable time in the morning. Around the Griffin Falls Camp three of us see a Green Twinspot but lose the bird before the others can catch up. We stop every now and then and at GPS 0.429, 32.984 we find a Brown-chested Alethe, African Pied Hornbill, Grey Parrot. Some of hear Nahan’s Partridge but this cannot be confirmed by all of us. At the information centre guide Herman joins us and we walk one of the trails. Birding here is not bad, although you can hear cars and trucks passing in the distant. We find Forest Wood-Hoopoe, as well as Least Honeyguide, Yellow-spotted Barbet, Great Sparrowhawk, Forest Robin, Green Hylia and Weyn’s Weaver. An Elephant-shrew spec. forages silently on the forest floor. In the afternoon we try two tracks (dirt roads) more to the east, which start from the main road. At GPS 0.414, 33.060 our guide manages to tape-lure a White-spotted Flufftail to the other side of the road, giving us brief but good views of the bird. Other birds here include Red-headed Bluebill and White-throated Bee-eater. We take another side road, were
we finally find one of the target birds, Lowland Sooty Boobou (GPS 0.417, 33.040). We also encounter our only Superb Sunbird of the trip. We decide to give a last try to find Tit Hylia at GPS 0.413, 33.048, but to no avail. According to our guide the tracks here are especially good in the early morning, as groups of birds moving through the forest can be seen here as they cross the road. A pity we have only one morning left in Uganda. After saying good-bye to our guide we continue to Kampala for the night.

Hotel: Nob View Hotel, in the centre of Kampala. Decent and large hotel, location can be better.

Guide: Herman from Mabira NP - recommended

11-08 Kampala – Mabamba – The Netherlands

Our final day in Uganda, and there is still one big bird on the wish list, the Shoebill! We leave Kampala early, but not as early enough to beat all the traffic jams. At the boat ramp of the Mabamba Swamp Bridget has a long discussion with the parking guard, apparently they introduced an extra fee recently. Around 9 am we can finally depart in two motorised boats. While cruising on one of the bigger canals we start to see a big bird on the left side of the canal, that must be a Shoebill! As we are getting closer, our guide notices a Blue Swallow, which is also on the target list. This bird is more difficult to get into view, so we first focus on the Blue Swallow. The bird is flying around in a group of Barn Swallows and after everyone has seen the bird, we can finally turn towards the Shoebill. Whoaah, what a bird..! So big, and so prehistoric. At a distance of 20 meters we can observe the bird, which does not seem to bother much. After a while we leave this bird and find another one a bit further on. Again, we have incredible views. After the Shoebill-show we look around for other marsh birds. Blue-breasted Bee-eaters are common and an African Marsh harrier is flying around. Other birds we encounter are Winding Cisticola, Yellow-billed Duck, Blue-headed Coucal, Long-toed Lapwing, Fan-tailed Widowbird and Broad-billed Roller.

We leave Mabamba and have lunch in a lake-side restaurant near the airport. And then it is time to say good-bye to our guide Allen and driver Bridget. We had a great time together but the fun had come to an end. After 16 days of birding it’s a wrap, good-bye Uganda! Wembaleh mngongh!
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Specie</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Status</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Albertine endemic</td>
<td>Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk</td>
<td>VU Vulnerable</td>
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<tr>
<td>ME</td>
<td>Near-endemic</td>
<td>Leptoptilos crumenifer</td>
<td>NT Near threatened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esp</td>
<td>Endemic subspecies</td>
<td>Charadrius tricollaris tricollaris</td>
<td>EN Endangered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nesp</td>
<td>Near-endemic subspecies</td>
<td>Chlidonias leucopterus</td>
<td>CR Critically endangered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HO</td>
<td>Heard only</td>
<td>Polyboroides typus typus</td>
<td>Endemic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**List of observed birds**

**Legend**

- **AE**: Albertine endemic
- **ME**: Near-endemic
- **Esp**: Endemic subspecies
- **Nesp**: Near-endemic subspecies
- **HO**: Heard only

**Status**

- **VU**: Vulnerable
- **NT**: Near threatened
- **EN**: Endangered
- **CR**: Critically endangered
- **NEssp**: Near-endemic subspecies
- **HO**: Heard only
- **93.**

1. **Albertine endemic** Rufous-breasted Sparrowhawk
2. **Near-endemic** Leptoptilos crumenifer
3. **Endemic subspecies** Charadrius tricollaris tricollaris
4. **Near-endemic subspecies** Chlidonias leucopterus
5. **Heard only** Polyboroides typus typus

**Notes**

- **Lake Chelbe to Lake Kivu**: Lake Chelbe to Lake Kivu, in Uganda.
416. Southern Red Bishop
Euplectes orix

417. Fan-tailed Widowbird
Euplectes axillaris phoeniceus

418. Marsh Widowbird
Euplectes hartlaubi humeralis

419. Jameson's Antpecker
Parmoptila jamesoni

420. White-breasted Nigrita
Nigrita fusconotus fusconotus

421. Chestnut-breasted Nigrita
Nigrita bicolor saturatior

422. Pale-fronted Nigrita
Nigrita luteifrons luteifrons

423. Grey-headed Nigrita
Nigrita canicapillus schistaceus

424. Green Twinspot
Mandingoa nitidula schlegeli

425. Dusky Crimsonwing
Cryptospiza jacksoni

426. Black-bellied Seedcracker
Pyrenestes ostrinus

427. Red-headed Bluebill
Spermophaga ruficapilla ruficapilla

428. Dusky Twinspot
Euschistospiza cinereovinacea graueri

429. Red-billed Firefinch
Lagonosticta senegala ruberrima

430. African Firefinch
Lagonosticta rubricata haematocephala

431. Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu
Uraeginthus bengalus bengalus

432. Yellow-bellied Waxbill
Coccopygia quartinia kilimensis

433. Orange-cheeked Waxbill
Estrilda melpoda

434. Common Waxbill
Estrilda astrild adesma

435. Black-crowned Waxbill
Estrilda nonnula nonnula

436. Kandt's Waxbill
Estrilda kandti kandti

437. Black-faced Waxbill
Estrilda erythronotos delamerei

438. Bronze Mannikin
Lonchura cucullata cucullata

439. Black-and-white Mannikin
Lonchura bicolor poensis

440. Pin-tailed Whydah
Vidua macroura

441. Cape Wagtail
Motacilla capensis wellsi

442. Mountain Wagtail
Motacilla clara torrentium

443. African Pied Wagtail
Motacilla aguimp vidua

444. Yellow-throated Longclaw
Macronyx croceus croceus

445. African Pipit
Anthus cinnamomeus lichenya

446. Plain-backed Pipit
Anthus leucophrys zenkeri

447. Oriole Finch
Linurgus olivaceus prigoginei

448. Western Citril
Crithagra frontalis

449. Yellow-fronted Canary
Crithagra mozambica barbata

450. Golden-breasted Bunting
Emberiza flaviventris kalaharica

List of observed mammals

1. Red-legged Sun Squirel
Paraxerus alexandri

2. Forest Giant Squirrel
Protoxerus stangeri

3. Smith's Bush Squirrel
Paraxerus cepapi

4. Boehm's Bush Squirrel
Paraxerus boehmi

5. Carruther's Mountain Squirrel
Funisciurus carruthersi

6. Striped Ground Squirrel
Xerus erythropus

7. Eastern Chimpanzee
Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii

8. Olive Baboon
Papio anubis

9. Blue Monkey
Cercopithecus mitis

10. De Brazza's Monkey
Cercopithecus neglectus

11. Tantalus Monkey
Chlorocebus tantalus

12. L'Hoest's Monkey
Allochrocebus lhoesti

13. Golden Monkey
Cercopithecus mitis kandti

14. Giraffe
Giraffa camelopardalis

15. Forest Elephant
Loxodonta cyclotis

Loxodonta africana

17. Common Warthog
Phacochoerus africanus

18. Giant Forest Hog
Hylochoerus meinertzhageni

19. Common Slender Mongoose
Herpestes sanguineus

20. Banded Mongoose
Mungos mungo

21. Common Dwarf Mongoose
Helogale parvula

22. Bunyoro Rabbit
Poelagus marjorita

23. Black-fronted Duiker
Cephalophus nigrifrons nigrifrons & C. n. rubidus

24. Spot-necked Otter
Hydrictis maculicollis

List of observed reptiles

1. Nile Crocodile
Crocodylus niloticus

2. Nile Monitor
Varanus niloticus

3. Black Lechwe
Kobus elliprurus

4. Cape Buffalo
Syncerus caffer caffer

5. Waterbuck
Kobus elliticaprymnus

6. Bushbuck
Tragelaphus scriptus

7. Common Eland
Tragelaphus oryx

8. Plains Zebra
Equus quagga

9. Common Warthog
Phacochoerus africanus

10. Giant Forest Hog
Hylochoerus meinertzhageni

11. Common Tarentul
Chilodactylus rufus

12. Black-faced Duiker
Cephalophus nigrifrons nigrifrons & C. n. rubidus

13. Yellow-bellied Waxbill
Coccopygia quartinia kilimensis

14. Orange-cheeked Waxbill
Estrilda melpoda

15. Common Waxbill
Estrilda astrild adesma

16. Black-crowned Waxbill
Estrilda nonnula nonnula

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