

Uganda Bird Trip, February 2019

Travel: I flew United Airlines and Brussels Airlines from Austin, TX to Entebbe, Uganda. Brussels Airlines flights to and from Africa depart/arrive in Terminal T at the Brussels Airport which requires a shuttle from the other international terminal. Brussels Airlines makes a big deal about carry-on luggage weights on their website, but it did not weigh mine either way.

Entering Uganda: I received an e-Visa for 50.00 USD prior to arrival and possessed proof of Yellow Fever vaccination so everything went smoothly.

Lodging in Entebbe: I stayed at the Protea Hotel Entebbe which has a free shuttle from the airport. My room was comfortable, room service efficient, the buffet breakfast delicious, and the grounds, although manicured, did yield 25 species of birds over the course of two hours. Personal highlights were Spur-winged Lapwing, African Thrush, and Angola Swallow.

Bird Book: Stevenson, Terry and John Fanshawe. *Birds of East Africa Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi*. Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2002.

Weather: Generally the weather was fine. I wore a fleece several mornings in Biwindi, but quickly shed it as the day progressed. The weather in the West and North was quite hot and dry. Rain only impacted our plans briefly one afternoon while birding the Royal Mile.

Food: Generally, breakfast was delicious fresh fruit, made-to-order eggs, toast, and sometimes bacon/sausage. We usually had a packed lunch which almost always consisted of a sandwich, hard-boiled eggs, fresh fruit, and a juice box. Dinner was usually a choice between chicken, beef, or fish with a vegetable and starch. I found the food well-prepared, generally mild, and never suffered any kind of stomach upset.

Communication: Every place I stayed had WiFi, some faster than others, and most only available in the common areas. A SIM card for the phone was very hard to obtain requiring passport photos, etc., so I skipped that process.

Bird Guide: Paul Tamwenya, African Birding Journeys, <http://www.birdinginuganda.com/>. My excellent experience began with quick and detailed responses to my e-mail inquiry. Within a short period of time, we were able to agree on a dates, goals, and price for a private, 21 day, birding trip throughout Uganda. Once in Uganda, Paul Tamwenya, the Director of African Birding Journeys, was an outstanding birder, excellent companion, and delivered exactly what we had agreed upon. We were in the field from dawn to dusk and sometimes beyond, observing 536 species of birds including 318 life birds, 10 species of primates, elephants, tree-climbing lions, hippos, giraffe, zebras, and many additional beautiful animals. Personal birding highlights included Shoebill, Grauer's Broadbill, Red-chested Flufftail, Yellow-throated Nicator, Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, Black Bee-eater, and Forest Woodhoopoe. Overall, I had a very enjoyable experience due to Paul's comprehensive knowledge of Uganda's birds and animals, his outstanding spotting and listening skills, and his patient approach to making sure I was on the bird or animal and was getting great views. In addition, Paul's spot-on selection of clean and comfortable accommodations conveniently located near key birding sites, his use of local guides to support his efforts and promote conservation, his friendly and enthusiastic demeanor, and his excellent driving skills made the entire experience pleasant and stress-free. Without reservation, I would recommend African Birding Journeys and its Director, Paul Tamwenya, for a Uganda birding safari.

Thursday, February 7th, Day 1: Birded Entebbe Botanical Gardens

The gardens provided an accessible introduction to birding in East Africa. As the gardens are located along Lake Victoria, they provide both woodland and water habitat. The paths/dirt roads are well maintained. Over the course of several hours, we saw Lizard Buzzard, Orange Weaver, Great Blue Turaco, Palm-nut Vulture, Eastern Grey Plantain-eater, Crowned Hornbill, Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill, Black-headed Paradise-flycatcher, Lizard Buzzard, 5 species of sunbirds, and Snowy-crowned Robin-Chat among many others. I also enjoyed seeing Black-and-white colobus. On the drive back to the hotel, we observed two roosting Bat Hawks on a side road which was quite an unexpected treat.

Friday, February 8th, Day 2: Birded Mabamba Wetlands and on to Lake Mbuoro National Park

At the Mabamba Wetlands, we took a several hour-long boat trip through channels in the large wetlands resulting in an excellent view of Swamp Flycatcher, Shoebill, 3 Lesser Jacanas, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Long-toed Lapwing, and calling Lesser Swamp Warbler. The boat launch site also afforded nice views of Vieillot's Weaver, Spotted Flycatcher, and Double-toothed Barbet. After lunch at the equator, we spent the rest of the afternoon driving to lodging near Lake Mbuoro National Park. The dirt road through scrubby habitat with a little water here and there to Rwakobo Rock Lodge was rich in birdlife providing our first trip views of Cardinal Woodpecker, Plain-backed Pipit, Green-winged Pytilia, and Red-cheeked Cordonbleau.

Saturday, February 9th, Day 3: Birding Lake Mbuoro National Park and Lake Mbuoro Boat Trip

I really enjoyed birding this park consisting of woodland and savannah habitats. On this day, it was very sparsely visited. We birded the roads throughout the park until the 2:00 pm boat trip and then birded back to the lodge that evening. Morning sightings included Blue-naped Mousebird, Black-headed Gonolek, Bare-faced Go-away-bird, Red-necked Francolin, Red-headed Weaver, an unexpected Short-toed Cuckoo, stunning African Pygmy Kingfisher, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, African Harrier-Hawk, 2 Meyer's Parrots, Tabora Cisticola, Madagascar Bee-eater, and Spot-flanked Barbet. Mammals were also well represented with Giraffe, Cape Buffalo, Zebra, Impala, Baboons, and Waterbuck all easily observed. The boat trip allowed for excellent views of three African Finfoot and Black Crake as well Nile Crocodile and Hippopotamus. Returning to the lodge, we saw the first Goliath Heron, Holub's Golden Weaver, Brown-backed Scrub-robin, and Grey Kestrel of the trip. At the lodge, a sighted, calling Black-shouldered Nightjar was a wonderful way to end the day.

Sunday, February 10th, Day 4: Birding around lodge and then birding to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park-Ruhizha area

The day started off with a bang as we sighted a calling Freckled Nightjar, Tropical Boubou, Purple-banded Sunbird, Black Cuckooshrike, and a Grey-capped Warbler at or near the lodge. A stop near a grassy stretch on the dirt road back to main paved road provided a wonderful list of new trip birds including Village Indigobird, Waller's Starling, Pale Flycatcher, and perched Red-headed Lovebird. The drive was fairly long to our next site, but how can one complain when stops along the way yielded White-backed Duck, Grey-crowned Cranes, Augur Buzzard, Stout Cisticola, and Papyrus Gonolek. Once on the winding and climbing road to the Impenetrable Forest, birding really picked up with roadside sightings of Dusky Turtle Dove and Yellow Bishop. A longer stop, provided an amazingly long view of Grauer's Warbler, a flash of a Blue-headed Sunbird, Chubb's Cisticola, and our first Brown-capped Weaver. Cinnamon Bee-eaters flew across the road all the way to our lodging, a gorgeous way to end the day.



Monday, February 11th, Day 5: Birding Mubwindi Swamp and birding along the road until dusk

If only all Mondays could be this great. The day began with the strenuous hike down through woodlands to the Mubwindi Swamp followed by roadside birding in the afternoon and evening. The Mubwindi Swamp lived up to its reputation. The 6-7 hour round trip hike began with multiple views of Purple-breasted Sunbird visiting a flowering tree followed by great looks of Yellow-eyed Black Flycatcher, Petit's Cuckooshrike, Dusky Tit, Blue-headed Sunbird, Strange Weaver, and Sooty Mountain Boubou all while we kept an eye out for the Grauer's Broadbill. Shortly thereafter, the local guide pointed out a spectacular, feeding Grauer's Broadbill at which point, Paul joked, "hike complete". But the hits kept right on coming with good views of Red-headed Malimbe, Rwenzori Batis, Pink-footed Puffback, Dwarf Honeyguide, and Grey-chested Illadopsis. After a quick lunch, we hiked deeper into the swamp allowing for excellent views of Barred Warbler and Grauer's Scrub-warbler followed by a simply outstanding 5 plus second view of a Red-chested Flufftail. After an afternoon rest, the outstanding birding continued with Striped-breasted Tit, Regal Sunbird, Western Green Tinkerbird, White-headed Woodhoopoe, 2 Dusky Crimsonwings, Rwenzori Hill Babbler, Black-faced Apalis, and 2 White-starred Robin all showing well along the main road. Great views of L'Hoest's Monkey and Blue Monkey were also obtained. The evening ended with a calling and sighted Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo and a calling and then sighted Rwenzori Nightjar on the road.

Tuesday, February 12th, Day 6: Birding to Buhoma via "The Neck"

I started the day with a fly-by White-necked Raven, a great look at a beautiful White-tailed Blue-Flycatcher, and roosting Rock Martins while standing in the lodge parking lot. We then birded the Bwindi Road for a few hours before beginning the long and bumpy drive to Buhoma via "The Neck". Before heading to "The Neck", we succeeded in seeing the skulking Mountain Illadopsis, a perched and singing Mountain Yellow Warbler, and a Chestnut-throated Apalis after only hearing it at several other sites. After hearing, but not seeing, Doherty's Bushshrike and Cinnamon Bracken-warbler, Paul began the drive to Buhoma. The first part of the drive was through a lot of farmland where we did pick up McKinnon's Shrike and nesting Cape Wagtail, but the real fun began in "The Neck". Our lunch spot near a beautiful stream in this forested area provided outstanding looks at Black-faced Rufous Warbler, Black-Bee-eater, Cassin's Flycatchers feeding young on the rocks in the stream, Red-faced Woodland Warbler, Little Green Sunbird, and a stunning fly-by Shining-blue Kingfisher. Further into "The Neck", another roadside stop provided nice views of Red-tailed Greenbul, Green Hylia, Ludher's Bush-shrike, and Black-billed Weaver. We rolled into Buhoma in late afternoon and relaxed at Ride for a Woman, a non-profit which provided excellent service, accommodation, and meals for two nights. It was fun to see a Toro-Olive Greenbul while sipping the welcome drink at Ride for a Woman.

Wednesday, February 13th, Day 7: A twelve hour hike in Buhoma

The day began with nice views of African Goshawk, Many-colored Bush-shrike, Little Greenbul, and Uganda Red-tailed monkeys. Although birds were not numerous throughout this hike, we did have excellent views of many sought after species including Equatorial Akalet, Red-tailed Bristlebill, Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo, after an epic game of hide-and-seek, White-bellied Robin-Chat, Red-throated Alethe, Yellow-spotted Barbet, Golden-crowned Woodpecker, Mountain Wagtail, Honeyguide Greenbul, White-tailed Ant-Thrush, high up Grey Apalis, Grey-throated Tit-Flycatcher, and White-breasted Negrofinch, and Chestnut Wattle-Eye as a consolation prize when we couldn't track down a calling, but ultimately elusive, Neumann's Warbler. As we left the forest, we finished with a nice view of the stunning Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat. The day ended with a happy, but very tired, hiker.

Thursday, February 14th, Day 8: Birding while driving to Queen Elizabeth National Park

A last gasp attempt to see a Chapin's Flycatcher failed, but we did get nice, early morning looks at Green-throated Sunbird, Bronze Sunbird, and Black-and-White-Shrike-flycatcher at the park entrance. A stop at a residence just outside Buhoma provided a good look at two roosting African Wood Owls and shortly thereafter a field yielded Fawn-breasted Waxbills. As we got closer to Queen Elizabeth National Park, we sighted three tree-climbing lions and our first elephants. What a treat! Another highlight of the day was finally catching up with a White-headed Barbet.

Friday, February 15th, Day 9: Full day birding in Queen Elizabeth National Park including Kazinga Channel Boat Trip

After breakfast, we drove to Queen Elizabeth National Park - the second biggest protected area in Uganda – where we spent most of the morning and early afternoon birding and mammal watching in the savannah. A lion, plentiful Uganda Kob, Cape Buffalo, and elephants were great to see. Birding was also good beginning with Pallid Harrier and Semi-collared Flycatcher at the park entrance followed by four species of larks, including White-tailed Lark, numerous Caspian Plovers, Black-bellied Bustard, Senegal Lapwing, Long-billed Pipit, Isabelline Wheatear, and Black-chinned Quail-Finch. The boat trip began with numerous roosting African Skimmers followed by multiple species of over-wintering shorebirds, Red-throated Bee-eater, Hamerkopf, Yellow-billed Stork, African Spoonbill and Saddle-billed Stork. Elephants, Cape Buffalo, and Hippos were also plentiful. Our afternoon drive was fairly quiet, but we did see our first Black-ored Babblers, Black-headed Batis, and Compact Weavers.



Saturday, February 16th, Day 10: Bird watching around Queen Elizabeth NP before driving to Kibale Forest National Park

The day started with some additional birding in Queen Elizabeth National Park which yielded a nice view of a calling Red-chested Cuckoo, scope views of African Mustached Warbler, our only Spotted Hyena of the trip, multiple White-browed Coucals, and a Red-backed Shrike. Once we arrived in Kibale Forest in late afternoon, the birding picked up again as we saw the stunning African Emerald Cuckoo, Black Bee-eater, Blue-throated Roller, Hairy-breasted Barbet, African Shrike-flycatcher, Green Sunbird in the scope, and Blue-throated Brown Sunbird in quick succession.

Sunday, February 17th, Day 11: Early morning birding followed by afternoon chimpanzee tracking in Kibale Forest National Park

We began the morning jogging through the Kibale Forest to the Green-breasted Pitta display site so we would be there before sunrise. Our effort paid off, as we observed the bird displaying for about five minutes before it flew off. This great start was followed by watching a Chimpanzee troop work their way through the forest on the ground and in the trees to a fruiting fig tree and a good sighting of a Red-tailed Ant-Thrush. What a wonderful morning. We spent the rest of day birding up and down the road through the Kibale Forest and our efforts were rewarded with great views of Afep Pigeon, Tiny Sunbird, Grey Tit-flycatcher, and feeding Grey-cheeked mangabey. There was not a lot of variety today, but the Pitta and the Chimpanzees sure made up for the lack of numbers.

Monday, February 18th, Day 12: Bird Bigodi Swamp and then transfer to Semliki Forest National Park

After breakfast, we took a four hour guided hike through the Bigodi Swamp. Highlights included Brown Illadopsis, a cooperative White-spotted Flufftail, eye-level views of Yellow-spotted Nicator, Yellow-billed Barbet, Grey-headed Negrofinch, Black-crowned Waxbill, a gorgeous, perched Shining Blue Kingfisher, and our only views on the trip of Central African red colobus. Late that afternoon after a fairly long drive through western Uganda, we arrived in Semliki Forest National Park in time to see another African Wood Owl and one stunning White-crested Hornbill flying from its feeding site to its roosting site. We stayed in basic accommodations (Semliki Bandas) in the forest so that we could get an early start the next day.

Tuesday, February 19th, Day 13: Birding in Semliki Forest National Park

An early morning start paid off as we began the day by observing Piping Hornbill, African Pied Hornbill and Western Bronze-naped Pigeon from the roadside. After that good start, we took a 7 hour hike through the lovely Semliki Forest and enjoyed seeing some special species both in the understory and high above in some towering trees. Species observed included calling Buff-spotted Woodpecker, African Dwarf Kingfisher, the velvety Chestnut-breasted Negrofinch, a pair of Grey-headed Sunbirds, Red-billed Dwarf Hornbill, calling Yellow-throated Nicator, Jameson's Wattle-eye, Crested Malimbe, Chestnut-capped Warblers, Yellow-throated Cuckoo, perched White-bellied Kingfisher, Chocolate-backed Kingfisher at eye-level, calling and frenetic Leaf Love, and a calling and then sighted Zenker's Honeyguide. A short stop after the hike, yielded great looks at an adult and juvenile Verraux's Eagle Owl, before we proceed to the comfortable Ataco Country Resort in Fort Portal.

Wednesday, February 20th, Day 14: Birding to Murchison Falls National Park - Masindi

This was basically a driving day as we proceeded from Fort Portal to Murchison Falls National Park. A roadside stop in a forest produced great looks at a Yellow-mantled Weaver and a Masked Apalis, while a stop by a small Papyrus marsh resulted in excellent looks at a calling White-winged Warbler.

Thursday, February 21st, Day 15: Birding to Budongo Forest – Royal Mile and a field by the Polish Catholic Church

The Royal Mile was as good as advertised. Birding began with a squabbling pair of Forest Robins, followed by a long battle with a high in the canopy Ituri Batis. Birding got a little easier after that with a perched Grey Parrot, Grey Longbill, another beautiful Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, Narina Trogon, a Blue-breasted Kingfisher, Rufous-crowned Eremomela and a male White-thighed Hornbill feeding its sealed in mate. The Hornbill behavior was especially nice to observe as I have always wanted to see this behavior in the wild, having seen it many times in nature documentaries. Following an afternoon rain shower, we returned to the far end of the Royal Mile and sighted 5 Green-backed Twinspots, a much lower Rufous-crowned Eremomela, Spotted Greenbul, Lemon-bellied Crombec, and on the way out, Crested Guineafowl and bonus views of a Chimpanzee troop. A stop in fields by a Polish Catholic Church provided wonderful views of Brown Twinspot, Cabanis's Bunting, and Black-bellied Firefinch. Upon our return to the New Court Hotel, I purchased the only postcards I ever saw in Uganda and asked in the restaurant if anyone ever ordered the pizza on the menu. Nope was the quick answer, so steak and fries seemed like a better option.

Friday, February 22nd, Day 16: Birding to Northern Murchison Falls

After viewing an eye-level African Blue Flycatcher in the parking lot of our Masindi Hotel, we drove to Busingiro where we had an easy view of an Ituri Batis, isn't it always the case, as well as great views of displaying Scaly-breasted Illadopsis, and eye-level Yellow-browed Camaroptera. We then proceeded to an escarpment which is now in the middle of a massive Chinese road construction project. Things didn't look good, but the birds persisted with a short hike producing great views of Black-faced Waxbill, Lesser Blue-eared Glossy Starling, Silverbird, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, and Foxy Cisticola. Another stop produced Buff-bellied Warbler, Beautiful Sunbird, and Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-weaver. When we reached Paul's creekside stakeout for the Red-winged Grey Warbler, the entire bank had been destroyed by a bridge project and parking lot. Luckily, the birds had moved to the other side of the creek! After seeing some Abdim's Storks along the way, we arrived at our lodge for the next two nights where we saw two Shoebills far away on the banks of the Nile and heard, but didn't see, Senegal Thick-Knees.

Saturday, February 23rd, Day 17: Birding Northern Murchison Falls National Park and Boat Trip

After taking the ferry across the Nile, we birded in the savannah until the 2:00 pm boat trip to Murchison Falls. It was fun to see elephants and giraffes again as well as new mammals including the slim Patas monkey, a Side-striped Jackal, the odd-looking Jackson's Hartebeest, and the small Orbi. Birding was also steady as we observed some new savannah species including Speckled-fronted Weaver, Temmick's Courser, Woodchat Shrike, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, the stunning Montagu's Harrier, the gorgeous Abyssinian Roller, Dark Chanting-Goshawk, , Red-necked Falcon, Vinaceous Dove, Black-billed Dove, and a pair of Abyssinian Ground-hornbills. The boat trip didn't disappoint with the requisite elephants, crocodiles, and hippos as well Rock Pratincole on the rocks near the dock closer to the falls, Red-throated Bee-eater, African Darter, Purple Swamphen, and Giant Kingfisher. Highlights of later that evening included multiple Grasshopper Buzzards, an unforgettable male Pygmy Sunbird, White-crested Helmet-shrike, and both Pennant-winged and Standard-winged Nightjars at dusk. It was a real treat to see the Standard-winged Nightjar fluttering in the headlights.



Sunday, February 24th, Day 18: Birding to Kaniyo Pabidi in search of the Puvel's Illadopsis

The morning started with a bang as in short order we spotted Black Scimitarbill, Eurasian Hoopoe, Red-faced Crombec, White-crested Turaco, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, and Bar-breasted Firefinch. As we continued to bird along the road to Murchison Falls additional beauties were sighted including Northern Carmine Bee-eater, Red-shouldered Cuckooshrike, and a small flock of Yellow-billed Shrikes until we reached a very long Chinese road construction project which put an end to what had been a very productive morning. Later at the Bundongo Ecolodge, I had great looks at Rufous Flycatcher-Thrush right beside my cabin, and African Forest-Flycatcher and Chestnut Wattle-eye by the fire pit.

Monday, February 25th, Day 19: Birding as we transfer to Jinja via Mabira Forest

After breakfast, we were able to track down the localized Puvel's Illadopsis before driving to Jinja via a late afternoon stop in the Mabira Forest. Along the way, we spotted a flock of Brown Babblers and in the forest, we sighted a preening Forest Woodhoopoe.

Tuesday, February 26th, Day 20: Morning birding in Mabira Forest

Leaving Jinja heading to Entebbe for my flight home, left a little time to bird two dirt roads into the Mabira Forest. Although the roads were travelled by numerous motorcycles, we were still able to observe a few good species including Fire-crested Alethe, Buff-throated Apalis, Green-tailed Bristlebill, Black-crowned Waxbill, Short-toed Eagle, Velvet-mantled Drongo, and Black Cuckoo before making our way through the unbelievable Kampala traffic enroute to Entebbe.

Summary: All in all, this was an outstanding bird trip due to the quality and quantity of birds observed as well as the excellent guiding skills of Paul Tamwenya. The numerous primate and mammals species were an added bonus. The only thing I might have changed about this trip is that I probably would have stayed another day in the Semliki Forest given the diversity of localized bird species. If you are thinking of birding East Africa, based on my experience, I would highly recommend a birding tour with Paul Tamwenya with African Birding Journeys.

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