

UGANDA

Weekend birding 6-8 September 2019

Entebbe, Mabamba Swamp, Lake Mburo National Park & Mpanga Forest Reserve







Synopsis:

I spent a weekend in Uganda to connect with the sole member of *Balaenicipitidae* family, the Shoebill (*Balaenicipes rex*), sometimes called the ‘Whale-headed Stork’. The trip began at Entebbe (the country’s only international airport) on Friday afternoon, 6 September and ended at Entebbe on Monday morning, 9 September. Before my arrival, I had contacted a local bird guide, Deogratius Muhumuza, whom I discovered through the *birdingpal* portal. Together, we put together an itinerary that included a number of diverse birding areas that are reasonably handy to Entebbe and can be visited in a weekend.

The highlight of the trip was of course, Shoebill, and we had a lucky encounter with a pair at Mabamba Swamp – and I have included a series of photos of the courtship ritual. Other less common birds seen in the extensive wetland here were Montane Blue Swallow, Lesser Jacana, Rufous-bellied Heron and Carruther’s Cisticola. More regular were African Marsh Harrier, African Swamphen, Yellow-billed Duck and Northern Brown-throated Weaver. At the boat launch site, we encountered a small colony of Weyns’s Weaver, in addition to Red-chested Sunbird and a delightful African Blue-flycatcher.

From Mabamba, we drove to Lake Mburo National Park for a Saturday night stay at Eagle’s Nest Lodge. Here, in drier savanna country, our main target was the intra-African migrant, Brown-chested Lapwing – September being one of the most reliable months to see the bird. Having missed Papyrus Gonolek at Mabamba, we also managed to enjoy views of this shy east African endemic in swamp land inhabited by

hippopotami. Other highlights here were Crested Francolin, Red-necked Spurfowl, Crested Eagle, Brown-backed Scrub-Robin and Grey-capped Warbler.

On Sunday, we drove back towards Entebbe (two Scarce Swifts seen before a storm) and spent the afternoon at Mpanga Forest Reserve. The forest was relatively quiet, but we did pick up Little and Red-tailed Greenbuls and two lifers: Rufous Flycatcher-Thrush and Toro Olive Greenbul. Outside the forest, we also connected with two more lifers in the guise of Purple-headed Starling and (Hartlaub's) Marsh Widowbird.

On the Friday evening before, and on the Monday morning before my flight out, I walked over to the Entebbe Botanical Garden (staying close-by at Imperial Botanical Beach Hotel) and birded the lovely grounds originally laid out by the British colonialists on the shore of Lake Victoria. Here I picked up Golden-backed Weaver as a lifer and saw African Goshawk, Double-toothed Barbet, Great Blue and Ross's Turaco, Eastern Grey Plantain-eater and Saddle-billed and Marabou Stork and African Openbill. The gardens were anything but peaceful with the strident cacophony of dozens of courting Black-and-White-Casqued Hornbills.

To sum up, a very productive weekend with 150 species of which 16 were life birds. Uganda, famously dubbed 'the Pearl of Africa' hosts 1065 confirmed species (August 2019) – among the richest avifauna in Africa (and some of the continent's most desirable endemic species). In addition, the visiting birder will encounter good infrastructure, easy logistics, comfortable accommodations, and friendly people.

For guiding, I highly recommend Deogratus (Deo) Muhumuza as a knowledgeable and amiable companion for any birding excursion. Deo's contact is: ugandapal@gmail.com. I hope to follow-up with another tour, this time for the Albertine Rift endemics at Bwindi in the not-too-distant future.

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15 September 2019

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Three very different ecosystems in three days: navigating the extensive swamp at Mabamba...



Savanna parkscape green after recent rains and my Ugandan ranger at Lake Mburo NP



Hunting for the Papyrus Gonolek at the Lake Mburo swamps; national park entrance gate



Birding inside the remnant forest at the Mpanga Forestry Reserve



View of Lake Victoria from Entebbe Botanical Gardens

Systematic List

(life birds in bold)

Mabamba Swamp

Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*

Long-tailed Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax africanus*

Common Squacco Heron, *Ardeola ralloides*



Rufous-bellied Heron, *Ardeola rufiventris* – just one of this ‘difficult’ species flushed from reed cover



Intermediate Egret, *Mesophoyx intermedia*

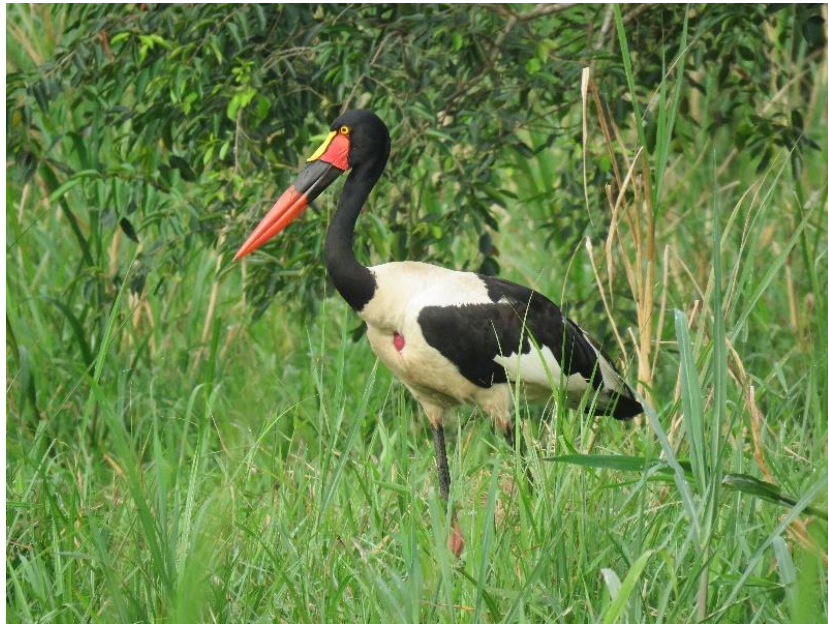
Great Egret, *Casmerodius albus*

Purple Heron, *Ardea purpurea*

Black-headed Heron, *Ardea melanocephala*

Hamerkop, *Scopus umbretta*

Saddle-billed Stork, *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*



Shoebill, *Balaeniceps rex*



Yellow-billed Duck, *Anas undulata*

Black-shouldered Kite, *Elanus caeruleus*

Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus*

African Marsh Harrier, *Circus ranivorus*



Black Crake, *Amaurornis flavirostris*

African (Purple) Swamphen, *Porphyrio madagascarensis*

Common Moorhen, *Gallinula chloropus*

African Jacana, *Actophilornis africanus*

Lesser Jacana, *Microparra capensis* – surprisingly common ; at least five individuals seen



Grey Crowned Crane, *Balearica regulorum* – the national bird of Uganda (also on the flag)



Long-toed Lapwing, *Vanellus crassirostris*



Common Sandpiper, *Actitis hypoleucos*

Marsh Sandpiper, *Tringa stagnatillis*

Blue-headed Coucal, *Centropus monachus*

Pied Kingfisher, *Ceryle rudis*

Malachite Kingfisher, *Alcedo cristata*

African Pygmy Kingfisher, *Ispidina picta*

Blue-breasted Bee-eater, *Merops variegatus*

Banded Martin, *Riparia cincta*

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*

Angola Swallow, *Hirundo angolensis*

Montane Blue Swallow, *Hirundo atrocaerulea* – we were delighted to see one bird flying low over the water

African Pied Wagtail, *Motacilla aguimp*

Yellow-throated Longclaw, *Macronyx croceus*

African Blue-flycatcher, *Elminia longicauda*



Carruthers's Cisticola, *Cisticola carruthersi* – this bird was brought in by playback

Swamp Flycatcher, *Muscicapa aquatica*



Red-chested Sunbird, *Cinnyris erythrocerca*

Northern Brown-throated Weaver, *Ploceus castanops*



Weyns's Weaver, *Ploceus weynsi*



Fan-tailed Widowbird, *Euplectes axillaris*

Lake Mburo National Park

Hadada Ibis, *Bostrychia hagedash*

Egyptian Goose, *Alopochen aegyptiacus*

White-faced Whistling-Duck, *Dendrocygna viduata*

Spur-winged Goose, *Plectropterus gambensis*



Yellow-billed Kite, *Milvus migrans parasiticus*

Palm-nut Vulture, *Gypothierax angolensis* (juvenile illustrated)



Common Kestrel, *Falco tinnunculus*

Long-crested Eagle, *Lophaetus occipitalis*



Bateleur, *Terathopius ecaudatus*

Grey Kestrel, *Falco ardosiaceus*

Helmeted Guineafowl, *Numida Meleagris*

Crested Francolin, *Francolinus sephaena*



Red-necked Spurfowl, *Francolinus afer*



Black-bellied Bustard, *Eupodotis melanogaster*



Water Thick-knee, *Burhinus vermiculatus*

African Wattled Lapwing, *Vanellus senegallus*



Spur-winged Lapwing, *Vanellus spinosus*

Senegal Lapwing, *Vanellus lugubris*

Brown-chested Lapwing, *Vanellus superciliosus* – not easy! We spent many hours searching recently burned areas for this species – often interspersed with the quite similar Senegal Lapwing



African Green Pigeon, *Treron calva*

Speckled Pigeon, *Columba guinea*

Blue-spotted Wood-Dove, *Turtur afer*

Red-eyed Dove, *Streptopelia semitorquata*

Ring-necked Dove, *Streptopelia capicola*

Laughing Dove, *Streptopelia senegalensis*

Bare-faced Go-away-bird, *Corythaixoides personata*



Swamp Nightjar, *Caprimulgus natalensis* – Heard at night

Little Swift, *Apus affinis*

Scarce Swift, *Schoutedenapus myoptilus* – two seen on road back to Entebbe; just before rain

African Palm Swift, *Cypsiurus parvus*

Speckled Mousebird, *Colius striatus*

Blue-naped Mousebird, *Urocolius macrourus*

Striped Kingfisher, *Halcyon chelicuti*



Woodland Kingfisher, *Halcyon senegalensis*

Little Bee-eater, *Merops pusillus*

White-throated Bee-eater, *Merops albicollis*

Lilac-breasted Roller, *Coracias caudata*

Green Wood-hoopoe, *Phoeniculus purpureus*

African Grey Hornbill, *Tockus nasutus*

Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, *Pogoniulus bilineatus*

Nubian Woodpecker, *Campethera nubica*

Cardinal Woodpecker, *Dendropicos fuscescens*

Grey Woodpecker, *Dendropicos goertae*



Cape Wagtail, *Motacilla capensis*

Common Bulbul, *Pycnonotus barbatus*

Yellow-throated Greenbul, *Chlorocichla flavicollis*

African Thrush, *Turdus pelios*

Winding Cisticola, *Cisticola galactotes* – the most common *cisticola* encountered; in most habitats



Tabora (Long-tailed) Cisticola, *Cisticola angusticaudus*

Tawny-flanked Prinia, *Prinia subflava*

Grey-capped Warbler, *Eminia lepida*

Brown-backed Scrub Robin, *Cercotrichas hartlaubi*



Grey-backed Camaroptera, *Camaroptera brachyura*

Black-lored Babbler, *Turdoides sharpei*



White-winged (Black) Tit, *Melaniparus leucomelas*



Yellow White-eye, *Zosterops senegalensis*

Bronze Sunbird, *Nectarinia killimensis*

Copper Sunbird, *Cinnyris cuprea*

Marico Sunbird, *Cinnyris mariquensis*

Collared Sunbird, *Hedydipna collaris*

Common Fiscal, *Lanius collaris*

Grey-backed Fiscal, *Lanius excubitoroides*

Papyrus Gonolek, *Laniarius mufumbiri* – finally seen well in response to (minimal use) of playback

Pied Crow, *Corvus albus*

Yellow-billed Oxpecker, *Buphagus africanus*

Rüppell's Long-tailed Starling, *Lamprotornis purpuropterus*

Northern Grey-headed Sparrow, *Passer griseus*

Vieillot's Black Weaver, *Ploceus nigerrimus*

Yellow-fronted Canary, *Serinus mozambicus*

Mpanga Forest Reserve

Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill, *Bycanistes subcylindricus*



Little Greenbul, *Andropadus virens*

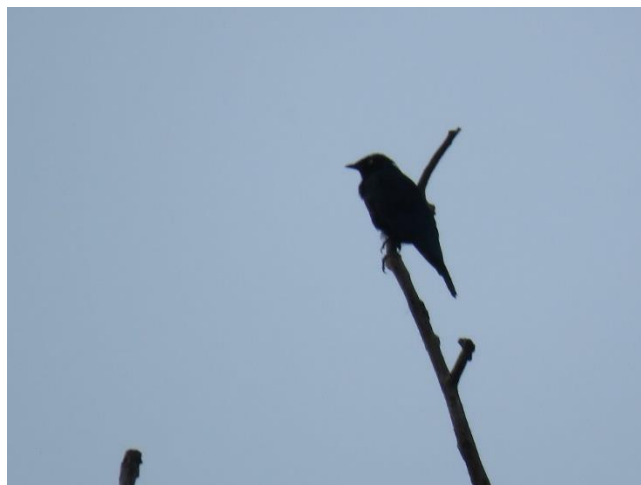
Toro Olive Greenbul, *Phyllastrephus hypochloris* – a real skulker, vocal in low cover

Red-tailed Greenbul, *Criniger calurus*

Rufous Flycatcher-Thrush, *Stizorhina fraseri* – one bird, sitting quietly in the mid-level of the forest

Fork-tailed Drongo, *Dicrurus adsimillus*

Purple-headed Starling, *Hylopsar purpureiceps*



Entebbe Botanical Garden

African Goshawk, *Accipiter tachiro*



African Fish Eagle, *Haliaeetus vocifer*



African Openbill, *Anastomus lamelligerus*



Marabou Stork, *Leptoptilos crumeniferus* – many nesting





(African) Grey Parrot, *Psittacus erithacus*



Great Blue Turaco, *Corythaeola cristata*



Ross's Turaco, *Musophaga rossae*



Eastern Grey Plantain-eater, *Crinifer zonurus*



Crowned Hornbill, *Tockus alboterminatus*



Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill, *Bycanistes subcylindricus*



Double-toothed Barbet, *Lybius bidentatus*

African Shrike-Flycatcher, *Megabias flammulatus*

Brown-throated Wattle-eye, *Platysteira cyanea*

Red-bellied Paradise-flycatcher, *Terpsiphone rufiventer*



African Paradise-flycatcher, *Terpsiphone viridis*

Scarlet-chested Sunbird, *Chalcomitra senegalensis*

Black-headed Weaver, *Ploceus cucullatus*

Slender-billed Weaver, *Ploceus pelzeini*

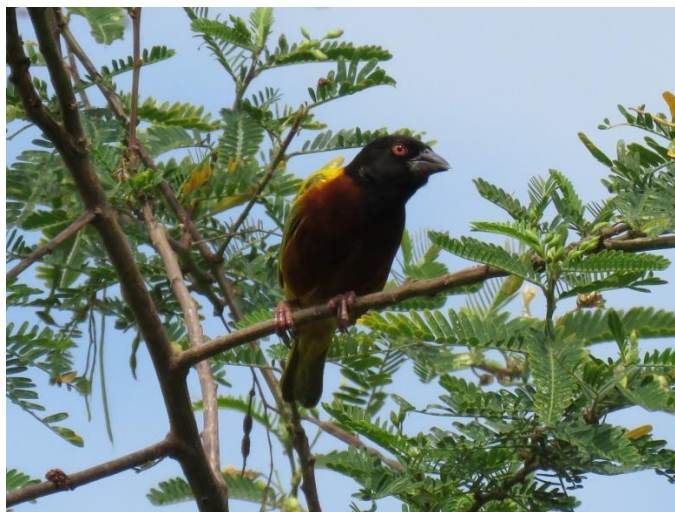
Grey-headed Negrofinch, *Nigrita canicapilla*

Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, *Uraeginthus bengalus*

Bronze Mannikin, *Lonchura cucullata*

Village Indigobird, *Vidua chalybeata*

Golden-backed Weaver, *Ploceus jacksoni*



Road outside Entebbe

(Hartlaub's) Marsh Widowbird, *Euplectes hartlaubi* – the last bird of the day, a lifer and uncommon



And finally, a farewell from Gonzo:



END REPORT