



Nyungwe National Park

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Contact

Mathias D'haen
mathias@dhaen.be

Introduction

As a student I am currently doing research in Garamba National Park (DRC), I decided to spend my holiday in Nyungwe National Park (Rwanda) and Lake Bunyonyi (Uganda) with the objective of watching birds in these enigmatic places. Please note that it was not a hard-core birdwatching trip, in that sense that the sole target was to see as much species as possible. I did not hire birdwatching guides, nor did I had the chance of preparing myself well enough by studying all local birds or to familiarise myself with the ecology of the local endemics. Moreover did I travel around by public transport, which is very convenient, but of course not the most time-efficient.

More than describing all birds, or exact locations where I've been, I will describe the practical set-up of this trip on how I got around, the prices, and others. This to facilitate others in travelling on a similar way, as I didn't always found information on how to travel by public transport in Rwanda and Uganda.

For all my observations their exact locations I would like to direct the reader to my observado.org account: <http://tinyurl.com/jt5z2we>

Please go to www.observado.org, filter on 'Mathias D'haen' and on 'Rwanda' if the link would not direct you.

Please note that this report is only about the part of my trip in Rwanda, look for 'Lake Bunyonyi' to see the Ugandan part of my trip.

Currency

Local currency is Rwandan Franc and a currency rate of 1USD = 820 FRw was used.

Public transport

Rwanda has a very well maintained road system with an extensive bus network (private bus companies). Travelling around by bus is something I can recommend everyone with an adventurous spirit, not wanting to pay too much and willing to socialize with locals. Prices given to tourists are the same as to local people; moreover there is no need to bargain since every price I was given seemed very honest.

I took a bus in Kigali on 12/01/17 at 8 o'clock (busses go every hour, except around midday, then less regular) in Nyabugogo bus station (ask your taxi or motordriver for the bus station, everyone knows it). I took Omega Bus, but Alpha Bus and Impala Bus (the latter driving less regular) are doing the route as well.

There is no need to book your ticket well in advance, I always bought it just half an hour, or less, in advance. After 3-4 hours you will arrive in Nyungwe National Park. I arrived at 13 o'clock (which is 5 hours, since it lies just West of the park).

Just ask the driver to stop at Gisakura guesthouse and he will drop you off in front of the door, since it lies exactly on the route.

Travelling from Gisakura guesthouse to Uwinka is a bit tricky since you can try to stop one of the busses (Omega, Alpha or Impala) but they are mostly full, and they are not going to be enthusiastic to take you only for this short distance. You can take a motorbike-taxi, or hitchhike like I did, and which was very convenient.

The ride should take you about 30-45minutes.

If you travel back from Uwinka (or Gisakura Guesthouse) to Kigali, make sure that you let the staff call one of the companies to make a reservation. I asked them a day in advance, they told me it was not necessary to make a reservation, but when I tried to take a bus no bus stopped as they were all full. After waiting more than 1.5 hours I asked the staff again, they made a phone call and I was on the next bus that passed by...

The bus from Kigali to Nyungwe (and other way around) is less than 10\$.

Accommodation

I spend 5 days in Nyungwe National Park, which was enough but definitely not too much if you are to find the birds yourself and you are not keen to hire a guide.

Gisakura Guest house (GPS: -2.440300, 29.092352) ; I stayed two nights in Gisakura guest house (30\$ pers/night including breakfast, but is (relatively) cheaper for two persons, since they don't have one person rooms. Sleeping in a tent is normally possible as well, but you should bring your own tent, and verify it with the staff first. Lunch and dinner was 6000 FRw and was good).

Uwinka camp site (GPS: -2.478403, 29.200555); I stayed two nights here and paid 30\$ per night to sleep in my own tent (you can rent a tent if you don't have one but you will be charged for it 35 000FRw per night). Breakfast is not included. Lunch and dinner are 3000 FRw and are good.

Visited places

Gisakura surrounding: I walked between the three plantations (which are generally bird-less) around Gisakura guest house and birded the forest edge, which was very productive (GPS: -2.451760, 29.096877). Also the garden in Gisakura guesthouse is very good for birdwatching.

Karamba Trail: I accidentally stumbled upon the Karamba trail (by following the main road that goes through the park) and walked the entire trail. The trail is said to be one of the better in the park for birdwatching. It's a very easy trail of only 4 km (beginning of trail: -2.4790, 29.1117, end: -2.4751, 29.1085).

One of the better birdwatching places around Uwinka is probably the road between the main road and a little village, just a few hundred meters East of Uwinka camp site (start road: -2.451760, 29.096877). It is a road accessible to everyone (no need to pay a guide).

I walked several other trails (completely or partially) around Uwinka camp site (also canopy walk, which is not good for birdwatching as I thought at first).

To my opinion, no trail is by far better than another. It is just key to find a bird flock (which you can find everywhere).

Birdwatching

I think it's useless to say that Nyungwe is an extremely good place for birdwatching. Being located in the Albertine Rift, it contains many of its endemics. That does not mean that birdwatching is easy, especially in this period of the year. January/February is called the short-dry period and is not a breeding period for most birds. This means that most birds are gathered in flocks and walking around in the forest is 90% of the time bird-less, until you stumble upon a flock of 20-30 bird species and get about 5 seconds per bird to identify it. Birds were mostly very skulky and observations were often flushing birds between the canopies. I am convinced that getting a bird guide will be a huge help on finding as much species as possible (even though I talk with one woman who paid 70 USD, but saw only 21 species).

Observed species list

- 1 Pink-backed Pelican - *Pelecanus rufescens*
- 2 White-bellied Wood Rail - *Aramides albiventris*
- 3 Great Blue Turaco - *Corythaeola cristata*
- 4 Black-billed Turaco - *Tauraco schuettii*
- 5 Ruwenzori Turaco - *Ruwenzorornis johnstoni*
- 6 Senegal Coucal - *Centropus senegalensis*
- 7 Klaas's Cuckoo - *Chrysococcyx klaas*
- 8 African Black Swift - *Apus barbatus*

- 9 Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater - *Merops oreobates*
- 10 White-headed Wood Hoopoe - *Phoeniculus bollei*
- 11 Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird - *Pogoniulus bilineatus*
- 12 Tullberg's Woodpecker - *Campethera tullbergi*
- 13 Ruwenzori Batis - *Batis diops*
- 14 Chinspot Batis - *Batis molitor*
- 15 Northern Puffback - *Dryoscopus gambensis*
- 16 Mountain Sooty Boubou - *Laniarius poensis*
- 17 Doherty's Bushshrike - *Telophorus dohertyi*
- 18 Grey Cuckooshrike - *Coracina caesia*
- 19 Grauer's Warbler - *Graueria vittata*
- 20 Mountain Oriole - *Oriolus percivali*
- 21 Pied Crow - *Corvus albus*
- 22 White-necked Raven - *Corvus albicollis*
- 23 White-tailed Blue Flycatcher - *Elminia albicauda*
- 24 Stripe-breasted Tit - *Melaniparus fasciiventer*
- 25 Black-headed Bulbul - *Pycnonotus atriceps*
- 26 Yellow-Whiskered Greenbul - *Eurillas latirostris*
- 27 Yellow-streaked Greenbul - *Phyllastrephus flavostriatus*
- 28 Olive-breasted Greenbul - *Arizelocichla kikuyuensis*
- 29 Black Saw-wing - *Psalidoprocne pristoptera*
- 30 Angolan Swallow - *Hirundo angolensis*
- 31 Red-breasted Swallow - *Cecropis semirufa*
- 32 Chubb's Cisticola - *Cisticola chubbi*
- 33 Banded Prinia - *Prinia bairdii*
- 34 Mountain Masked Apalis - *Apalis personata*

- 35 Black-throated Apalis - *Apalis jacksoni*
- 36 Chestnut-throated Apalis - *Apalis porphyrolaema*
- 37 Brown-headed Apalis - *Apalis alticola*
- 38 Grey-backed Camaroptera - *Camaroptera brevicaudata*
- 39 Ruwenzori Apalis - *Oreolais ruwenzorii*
- 40 African Yellow White-eye - *Zosterops senegalensis*
- 41 Waller's Starling - *Onychognathus walleri*
- 42 Mountain Thrush - *Turdus plebejus*
- 43 Red-throated Alethe - *Pseudaethe poliophrys*
- 44 White-starred Robin - *Pogonocichla stellata*
- 45 African Stonechat - *Saxicola torquatus*
- 46 White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher ssp toruensis - *Melaenornis fischeri toruensis*
- 47 Yellow-eyed Black Flycatcher - *Melaenornis ardesiacus*
- 48 African Dusky Flycatcher - *Muscicapa adusta*
- 49 Purple-breasted Sunbird - *Nectarinia purpureiventris*
- 50 Bronzy Sunbird - *Nectarinia kilimensis*
- 51 Collared Sunbird - *Hedydipna collaris*
- 52 Green-headed Sunbird - *Cyanomitra verticalis*
- 53 Northern Double-collared Sunbird - *Cinnyris reichenowi*
- 54 Regal Sunbird - *Cinnyris regius*
- 55 Northern Grey-headed Sparrow - *Passer griseus*
- 56 Thick-billed Weaver - *Amblyospiza albifrons*
- 57 Baglafaecht Weaver - *Ploceus baglafaecht*
- 58 Strange Weaver - *Ploceus alienus*
- 59 Dark-backed Weaver - *Ploceus bicolor*
- 60 Dusky Crimsonwing - *Cryptospiza jacksoni*

61 Black-crowned Waxbill - *Estrilda nonnula*

62 Grey-headed Nigrita - *Nigrita canicapillus*

63 African Pied Wagtail - *Motacilla aguimp*

64 Western Citril - *Crithagra frontalis*

65 Streaky Seedeater - *Crithagra striolata*

66 Thick-billed Seedeater - *Crithagra burtoni*

67 Black-eared Warbler - *Basileuterus melanotis*

