

# Uganda: June 22<sup>nd</sup> – August 15<sup>th</sup> 2007

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## **Introduction**

Initially I came to think about a birding trip to Uganda, when a friend recommended me a tropical biology course in Uganda. I participated in this four weeks course organized by the Tropical Biology Association TBA<sup>(1)</sup>, at the Makerere University Biological Field Station<sup>(2)</sup> (MUBFS) Kanyawara, Kibale Forest NP, including five days in Queen Elisabeth II NP. After that course Claudio Koller, Diana Briel and Fabian Ducry joined me and we went on a three week birding tour throughout the western part of the country. We all know each other from our youth birdwatching and conservation group Natrrix<sup>(3)</sup> in Zurich, Switzerland and travelled together before. Claudio is a specialist for the Indian Subcontinent, where he has seen over 840 species. As it was the first African birding for all of us, our tour was very successful even if we missed some target birds. We were all very impressed by the huge avian diversity and abundance of endemic species in Uganda!

## **Planning**

Being students, we were looking for a good balance between low-budget and loads-of-birds in a three-week tour. We asked six local safari companies, including the three famous birding safari companies Avian Watch Uganda<sup>(5)</sup> by Alfred Twinomujuni<sup>(13)</sup>, Access Uganda Tours<sup>(6)</sup> by Hassan Mutebi and Bird Uganda Safaris Ltd.<sup>(4)</sup> by Herbert Byaruhanga, for their best offer for car and driver as well as for local bird guides in a few areas. Bird Uganda Safaris Ltd. offered 180 USD daily for car, driver and fuel, Avian Watch Uganda 120 USD daily for car and driver and Great Lake Safaris<sup>(7)</sup> 110 USD for car and driver. We took the offer of Avian Watch Uganda because Alfred Twinomujuni gave us the second cheapest offer and he told us to organise an experienced birding tour driver knowing the good spots. Herbert Byaruhanga from Bird Uganda Safaris Ltd. offered us a good birdwatch tour driver too, but we guessed that paying the fuel by ourselves would be the cheaper option with Alfred's offer.

We designed our itinerary by ourselves based on several very good trip reports<sup>(18-20)</sup> and according to "Where to watch birds in Uganda"<sup>(9)</sup>. The result was good, all felt that we missed about the same time anywhere... We selected our accommodation for ourselves by checking the Bradt-Guide<sup>(8)</sup> and Avian Watch Uganda booked our accommodation as a free service in advance.

## **Accommodation**

We stayed either in budget accommodations<sup>(8)</sup> or we camped with our own tents on UWA campsites. All the accommodations contained with more or less intact mosquito nets and we didn't have problems with any animals in our beds. When camping, be sure that your tent consists of an outer and an inner layer and that you have a warm sleeping bag as it can get cold in Ruhiza, Biwindi. Electricity was rarely available, petrol lamps were always provided, a shower or washing room and water was provided in all areas and we filtered it for drinking. For contact details to the following places, see the Bradt Guide<sup>(8)</sup>.

Mabira Forest – Mabira Forest Tourist Project: Mediocre. Double rooms without electricity for 10'000 USH pp/night. Washing room and pit latrine outside. Dinner and breakfast was ok and at normal tourist price of about 5'000-6'000 USH.

Murchison Falls NP – Red Chili Rest Camp: Mediocre. They are always overbooked and we had to camp for 5'000 USH pp/night – unexpectedly, but indeed nice for our budget. The meals are at a normal price of about 6'000 USH, packed lunch has to be ordered before 20:30 in the evening!

Fort Portal – Continental Hotel: Good. Clean double rooms for 25'000 USH with electricity, TV, cold or boiling shower (nothing in between...) and a flushed toilet. We had our rather expensive but excellent meals at the Ruwenzori Travelers Inn.

Semuliki Forest NP – National Park Bandas and Campsite: Mediocre. Double rooms without electricity, with shared pit latrine and cold shower for 10'000 USH pp/night. We arranged a local cook who prepared some standard meals, packed lunch and had some time problems (he was always delayed) – there is no permanent restaurant.

Kibale Forest NP – MUBFS research station: Good. 4-bed or double rooms with electricity, shared flushed toilets / pit latrines and warm showers for 15'000 USH pp/night. The staff there provides some traditional meals on request. I am not sure, if tourists are welcome in general, but requests can address to the contact on the MUBFS homepage<sup>(2)</sup>.

Queen Elisabeth II NP – Mweya Peninsula Campsite: Mediocre. Camping for 5'000 USH pp/night, too few shared showers and toilets for the many tourists! We always had our meals at the Tembo Canteen, where we got very good meals at the normal tourist rate. The advantage of the campsite is the possibility to walk on the campsite to find some Nightjars as well as to walk back from the Tembo Canteen to the campsite. Be aware of Hippos, Lions and Hyenas walking around on and around the campground and don't enter the surrounding bushy areas – for your own health. Always carry a good torch when you walk around outside of the canteen or the tent as well as stay in a group. Keep distance from Hippos and try not to disturb them as they could run away or kill you otherwise...

Buhoma, Biwindi Impenetrable NP – Biwindi-View Bandas & Gorilla Nest Campsite: Very good. As the Buhoma Community Rest Camp was fully booked, we got a 4-bed room for 15'000 USH pp/night without electricity and shared flushed toilets and warm showers. The meals were very excellent at a normal tourist rate!

Ruhiza, Biwindi Impenetrable NP – Institute of Tropical Forest Conservation (ITFC): Mediocre. The place was overbooked, we camped for 6 USD pp/night and they provided us with some canvas covers to save our tents from the frequent rainfalls at Biwindi – well, it didn't rain for 3 days finally. Shared pit latrines and a washing room, we ordered warm water. We had to bring our food by ourselves and a good local cook prepared our meals.

Lake Mburo NP – Rwonyo Rest Camp: Mediocre. Double rooms without electricity and with shared cold showers and pit latrines for 25'000 USH. We took our meals at the Restaurant at the lake, where they were always a little delayed.

Entebbe – Entebbe Tourist Hostel and Campsite: Good. 4-bed room with electricity, warm shower, flushed toilet. Meals we took at the nice Four Turkeys bar.

## **Equipment**

Our “bible” was the “Birds of East Africa” from Stevenson and Fanshawe<sup>(10)</sup> and the literature and trip reports in the reference joined our trip. All had binoculars and we had one scope. Depending on which forest trails and for how long you walk, the scope is of less use in my opinion, in open country it was more useful. Indispensable was an iPod containing most African species on the “African Bird Sounds” collection from Chappuis (15 CDs), “The Bird Songs of The Gambia and Senegal” (3 CDs) and “The Bird Songs of Kenya & Tanzania” (1 CD) together with a small speaker (not to forget: spare batteries, spare wire...). Recording-playback equipment would have been a better option to attract unknown bird songs. To look for Nightjars, we used strong head torches and a portable spotlight. Where electrical power was missing, we used a transformer for the car’s firelighter bus to produce 220V electricity.

Rain was very hard in Semuliki and Kibale our raingear showed not to be made for tropical rainfalls... Gumboots were necessary for Semuliki, good trekking shoes are indispensable everywhere. I took Lariam as Malaria prophylaxis without problems, Fabian took Malarone, Diana and Claudio took Artemisia pills – though difficult to get and are not officially prescribed – which are actually the current successful therapy drugs in East Africa. Any further health and equipment recommendations are found in the Bradt Guide<sup>(8)</sup>.

## **Annoyances**

Uganda is great place and definitely earned the name “Pearl of Africa” and Ugandans are very friendly. We encountered just very few difficult or annoying situations.

At the tourist site at Kanyawara, Kibale Forest NP, when we hired Benson Bamatura<sup>(14)</sup> as bird guide and went there to try for the Green-breasted Pitta, we were refused to enter the forest as the UWA station run out of rangers to accompany, because the birding ranger Harriet was ill and half of the rangers participated a training that day. Despite the fact that we had a local bird guide who trained the rangers in birding skills and who knows the trails, they prohibited us to go to the forest and advised us to do birding along the street. Any discussion with the executive UWA officer was useless and as soon that I explained my frustration about this, he started to insult Benson not to know the trails and the birds (!), stating that only their rangers would know them. As soon as I told them my disappointment about the rangers in Semuliki whose knowledge was not sufficient for birdwatchers, they got very upset. We promised them to complain at the headquarters about their unprofessional behaviour and our chance for the Pitta died. Please book in advance the bird ranger Harriet by phone to prevent any similar happening that we encountered there!

The UWA organisation at Buhoma, Biwindi, was annoying too: The army guy which has to come with you as a protection since the 1997 massacre by DRC rebels were every day delayed for almost two hours, what took us precious time in the forest. Our bird guide Robert Byarugaba told us, that the problem is the new, incompetent and inexperienced executive officer at the Buhoma UWA station who caused a chaos

organisation at Buhoma. Hopefully the organisation improves, otherwise be prepared to delay.

Many people report long waiting times for food in a restaurant, which wasn't the case on our trip except for one time in Fort Portal.

### ***Local guides***

We were guided by local bird guides at a few locations, which I like to describe below. Contact details are found in the reference section.

#### **Robert Byarugaba<sup>(12)</sup>, Biwindi Impenetrable Forest NP**

Robert was our guide for our time in Biwindi, he is a friendly guy who speaks English fluently and leads tours throughout Uganda for seven years. He is Alfred Twinomujuni's<sup>(13)</sup> nephew, which trained him based in Biwindi. He is an excellent bird guide for Biwindi where he knew all the birds by call and imitated their vocalisation efficiently. When he's not on tour with a group, he travels around the country to repeat all the birds and to actualise birding spots for his future tours. Compared to Alfred, Robert charges 50 USD in stead of 80 USD daily, but he doesn't carry any playback equipment as Alfred does, who is told to be the best birder in Uganda.

#### **Ibrahim Senfuma<sup>(15)</sup>, Mabira Forest Reserve**

Ibrahim is the resident bird guide in Mabira Forest Reserve, he is a very nice guy, speaks a good English, knows all the Mabira bird calls and all the specific spots to see the Mabira specialities as Nahan's Francolin. He is recommended in every trip report we found and is definitely the best for that area. He also leads tours throughout whole Uganda and quoted us 70'000 USH for a full day birding.

#### **Benson Bamatura<sup>(14)</sup>, Kibale Forest NP**

Benson is a friendly guy, speaks English fluently and is an excellent bird guide for Kibale Forest, where he knew all the bird calls perfectly including the surrounding cultivation species. He is an expert for Semuliki as well, as he trained all the UWA rangers in both Semuliki and Kibale in birds and he recorded many bird songs in Semuliki. Benson will soon expand his work to lead tours in whole Uganda. After our bad experience with the UWA at Kibale, we felt that he probably doesn't have a good network among the UWA compared to other bird guides, which seems to be very bad facing his excellent knowledge of the local avifauna. He normally quotes 50 USD daily as most of the other bird guides.

#### **Ismail, Mabamba Swamp**

Ismail was our guide in Mabamba Swamp, where he knows the swamp birds, some specific spots for Shoebill and Lesser Jacana, and most calls very well. His English is a little poor, but communication is no problem and he seems to be a very good guide for Mabamba. Please ask Alfred<sup>(13)</sup> for Ismail's contact details.

#### **Alex Gabiito<sup>(16)</sup>, Biwindi Impenetrable Forest NP**

Another trainee of Alfred is Alex, a very sympathetic young guy, who came with us for two days. He is still learning and probably in a couple of years, he will be a good guide for birders in Biwindi.

## **Steven, Ruhiza, Biwindi Impenetrable Forest NP**

Steven is the executive UWA ranger at Ruhiza, Biwindi Impenetrable NP, where he seems to have spent at least years. He is a very sympathetic older man who enjoys birdwatching, knows all the local birds perfectly and who is familiar with the actual good spots for specialities. If he is free, take him as accompanying ranger to the Mbuwindi trail as he probably hears the African Green Broadbill before your bird guide does it, as it was the case with another bird group when we were there.

## **Jessica, Semuliki Forest NP**

Jessica was our UWA ranger-guide in Semuliki Forest NP. She is a sympathetic woman who told us a lot about the situation in the area which is prone to invading DRC rebels and she knows the most important birds calls, for example the Hornbills, Grey Ground-thrush, Yellow-throated Nicator, Rufous-sided Broadbill and a few more. Apart from these birds she did some identification mistakes and we would recommend not to rely too much on the local ranger-guides and to book Benson Bamatura<sup>(14)</sup> instead as he trained them and has definitely an excellent local knowledge.

## **Sula<sup>(17)</sup>, our driver**

Sula is not only an excellent driver, he is just famous throughout whole Uganda! He is a friend of everybody everywhere which is a big advantage to organise things. For example he organised the best rangers available at the different places, he helped to solve problems with his diplomatic skills and knew very well how to handle all the different people successfully. He is 26 years old, lives in Kampala and works as a freelance safari guide after he finished his military career. Sula's abilities to find mammals and perched birds from the car were invaluable and got us lions and many specific places for difficult birds.

## ***Itinerary***

Our experiences, highlights, lowlights and important changes to the site information in Sacchi & Rossouw (1997)<sup>(9)</sup> are provided below.

## **Kibale Forest NP: 23rd June to 4th July, 8th–22nd July, 2nd–4th August**

I spent the first month at the Makerere University Biological Field Station (MUBFS) where I guided my friends for a day during our birding trip. You need a ranger as a tourist at this site. A huge, well maintained trail system allows exploring each habitat of the forest and many forest interior species as Alethes, Ant-thrushes and Duikers are easily seen. The papyrus swamp in the north is a nice place to tape White-winged Warbler and Papyrus Gonolek. Primates around the station are habituated and therefore easy to watch and photograph on close range. I met Chimpanzees six times in three weeks, but if you meet a chimp group with researchers, you have to disappear immediately – otherwise you got killed by the researchers as they don't like other people to disturb their studies...

Kanyawara is still the best place for the Green-breasted Pitta. You need two things to get the Pitta: Good luck and Harriet. The UWA ranger Harriet is told to be excellent in birds and she to know the places for the Pitta. Arrange a morning walk with her in advance at the Kanyawara tourist centre that you certainly get her as ranger.

Bigodi Swamp at the eastern border of Kibale Forest NP has lost its birding value: In “Where to watch Birds in Uganda”<sup>(9)</sup> and many trip reports, it is stated as a must for birders to visit this swamp, but recently I heard from a bunch of groups independently that it is not worth to spend a single hour there! Local farmers should be everywhere in the reserve together with goats frightening away all special birds including the Papyrus species. For a better reserve close by at the western border, contact Benson Bamatura<sup>(14)</sup> for information as I don’t remember the name.

Highlights: My introduction to forest bird species during the first month as well as many tame primates during night (Galagos, Pottos) and day (7 species). During a long walk to the research station Ngogo: Cassin’s Hawk-eagle and White-collared Oliveback. African Wood-owl and Red-headed Bluebills in my hands, Black Bee-eater, Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo, Black Cuckoo, African Broadbill, Yellow-billed Barbet, Masked Apalis, Cassin’s Grey Flycatcher, Jameson’s Wattle-eye, Pale-breasted Illadopsis, Green-backed Twinspot.

Lowlights: The Pitta-Dip (see Annoyances).

### **Mabamba Swamp: 23rd July**

We tried all different channels in this swamp at Lake Victoria for the Shoebill and were not successful. Nevertheless, the chance to see it here is very high! Try both Mabamba Swamp and Murchison Falls NP to increase your chances for it, as it isn’t guaranteed at both places. Ask your local guide for the Lesser Jacana spot, which we were shown by Ismail.

Highlights: Lesser Jacana, Carruther’s Cisticola, Superb Sunbird, Grey-rumped Swallow, Banded Martin.

Lowlights: Shoebill dip.

### **Mabira Forest Reserve: 23rd–25th July**

We walked a full day on two paths going from the main road straight to the north. Even if many local people were walking on these paths, we had an excellent forest excursion and did hardly miss any target species. Ibrahim Senfuma showed us two spots for the Nahan’s Francolin where it didn’t respond on our tape in the afternoon, but came out very quickly in the following morning. We went a couple of meters into the forest to see them, but afterwards they crossed the street, so you probably could stay on the street to tape them. Due to the people’s frequency, it seems unlikely to encounter White-bellied / Shining-blue Kingfishers at the ponds along the paths; they apparently have disappeared during the last years.

Highlights: Nahan’s Francolin, Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrike, Forest Wood-hoopoe, Magpie Mannikin, Black-bellied Seedcracker nest, Weyns’s Weaver, Little Grey Greenbul, Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher, White-shouldered Tit, Little Green Sunbird, Sooty Boubou.

Lowlights: Tit-Hylia dip. We couldn’t identify the calling Owls during the night, they didn’t fit our recordings.

### **Murchison Falls NP: 25th–28th July**

We went one day to the Northern Circuits (Buligi Track, delta, Queen’s Track, airstrip, N of Paraa), the next day we went on the boat ride to the falls and spent the evening

there with a night drive back to Red Chilli. We stopped at the Sambiya River on the way back to Masindi. The weather is crucial for birdwatching: We were lucky to get a cloudy and partially rainy day on the N-circuits: Bird activity was very high therefore, normally after 9:00 it gets hot and the activity drops quickly to zero. Organise a ranger which knows the exact place for the Shoebill and, with a ranger you can also go a few steps out of the car. Take packed lunch with you to the N-circuits, depending on the weather; it is not worth to return for lunch as there is no ferry from 12:00 to 14:00. To stay at the bat caves at dusk is great, the “clouds” of bats leaving the caves are just spectacular and attract Bat Hawks. The drive back to Red Chilli in the darkness is very productive for huge numbers of Nightjars in different habitats depending on the time of the year. Be aware that night drives are prohibited generally. The boat trip to the falls was useless, the Rock Pratincoles you can also see from the falls’s top, were disturbed by tourists when the boat landed at their rock.

Highlights: Millions of bats at dusk and the following night drive! Giraffes, Oribis, 3 Shoebills, Rock Pratincole, Vinaceous Dove, White-crested Turaco, Pennant-winged / Long-tailed Nightjar, Swallow-tailed / Red-throated / Northern Carmine Bee-eater, Abyssinian Ground-hornbill, Brown-backed Woodpecker, Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike, Cliff Chat, Spotted Morning-Thrush, Red-winged Grey Warbler, Whistling Cisticola, Silverbird, Beautiful Sunbird, Yellow-billed Shrike, Lesser Blue-eared / Bronze-tailed Starling, Rufous Sparrow, Speckle-fronted Weaver, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver, Vitelline Masked Weaver, Little Weaver, White-rumped Seed-eater.

Lowlights: Boat trip to the falls. The raptor at dusk at the bat caves was a Wahlberg’s Eagle... Denham’s Bustard, Pel’s Fishing Owl, Violet-backed Sunbird didn’t show up.

### **Fort Portal surroundings: 29<sup>th</sup> July**

We spent a morning in the cultivation around Fort Portal before driving to Semuliki to catch up a number of common species not encountered in the National Parks.

Highlights: Juvenile Village Indigobird fed by a Red-billed Firefinch.

### **Semuliki Forest NP: 29th July to 2nd August**

For the lot of time we spent in this park, the success was low... Nkulengu Rail seems to be easy if you are at 5:30 at the ranger’s quarters: There you can hear it calling from a tree and if you approach and you wait there, it may come down to the ground as soon as the sun rises (due to Jessica). We disturbed it a little bit with our torches and therefore we didn’t see it even if we were under the tree where it was calling. Birding at Semuliki seemed to us much more difficult than in any other forest. The forest walk from the camp ground to the hot springs produced only a handful birds which was probably due to bad luck. We planned to explore the Kirimia trail for two days, initially we wanted to camp at one of the oxbow lakes. Due to the clashes from March / April 2007, the camping grounds were not maintained and there was no possibility therefore to camp and they didn’t allow us to do that. Instead we went two days on the trail, on the first day, it started to rain heavily after lunch and consequently on the second day, we couldn’t pass the first river crossing as the whole area was inundated – by the way: Don’t forget your gumboots anyway! Frustrated, we got the best out of the first stretch and we at least got some of the specialities. Another problem is that of a good ranger as Jessica was very helpful in finding some specialities, but had a limited knowledge and was sometimes

misleading. Take Benson Bamatura<sup>(14)</sup> as a bird guide with you, if you want to be sure not to miss any present species.

Highlights: Red-thighed Sparrowhawk, Nkulengu Rail, Buff-spotted Flufftail, Three-banded Plover, Freckled Nightjar, Hairy-crested / Red-billed Dwarf / Black-casqued Wattled / Piping Hornbill, Rufous-sided Broadbill, Yellow-throated Nicator, Xavier's / Icterine Greenbul, Forest Robin, Grey Ground-thrush, Red-tailed Ant-thrush, Black-capped Apalis, Capuchin Babbler, Crested Malimbe, Orange-cheeked Waxbill.

Lowlights: Dip of Gabon Woodpecker, White-crested Tiger Heron, Blue-billed Malimbe and African Piculet seen a day or some hours before by Mike Harvey. No luck with many Semuliki specialities as well as with the weather conditions. Grey-throated Rail most probably seen but not in the binoculars, therefore not completely sure observation... A juvenile Bluebill was probably a Grant's Bluebill.

### **Queen Elisabeth II NP: 4th–8th July, 4th–6th August**

On my first stay, we did game drives and walks in different habitats (for field exercises as bird density investigation by transect counts) and stayed at Mweya. For any walks in the park you need a ranger to come with you and I think they don't like to walk around too much as it is dangerous indeed (Buffalo, Elephant, Lions, Leopards, Hippos). We did a short night walk on the airstrip and got some Square-tailed and on our second stay a Pennant-winged Nightjar – but it is not recommended as it is dangerous (Hippos, Lions) and prohibited. More suitable for "night walks" is the camping ground, where you are probably allowed to walk around and where many Square-tailed Nightjars were found – but even here keep distance to Hippos and watch out for Lions! The game drives in the North were productive especially if you see many different habitats. Especially the woodlands in the crater area N of Katwe are interesting. We drove down to Biwindi quickly and therefore missed many good areas in the South of the park. Watch out at Ishasha for the tree-climbing Lions and for White-headed Barbets.

Highlights: Lions, African Skimmer, White-headed Barbet, Square-tailed Nightjars in my hands, Broad-tailed Warbler, African Moustached Warbler, Pale Flycatcher.

Lowlights: Two heavy rain showers in the evenings / one afternoon. Night walks are prohibited. Claudio missed the Grey-headed Gulls.

### **Biwindi Impenetrable Forest NP: 6th–12th August**

We spent enough time in Biwindi, that we had one day for a general forest walk and one day for a specialised second search in both areas, Buhoma and Ruhiza. At Buhoma it was surprisingly calm at the time we were there. If you are earlier within a year, you probably have more activity. At Buhoma it is worth to spend more time than at Ruhiza as more good species are possible. The birds at Ruhiza are fewer and more quickly encountered, for example we did the Mbuwindi Swamp walk twice and we got an almost identical bird list. We missed the African Green Broadbill, for which you have to go at the time they are breeding and the rangers can show you the bird on its nest. To improve your chances, you have first to take Stephen – the UWA ranger in duty at Ruhiza who knows and likes the birds very much and who will hear the Broadbill's call first – with you and second you need a recording to attract the bird. For the Purple-banded Sunbird, you need the right flowers being full of nectar (Symphonia?) to encounter it on the Mbuwindi trail. Stephen announced that in the



close future (end 2007 approximately), the UWA will open a new trail with better chances for Shelley's Crimsonwing and Ruwenzori Turaco, which I am very curious about!

Highlights: The weather was great, almost no rain at all! The highlight bird list is long: Ovambo Sparrowhawk, African Cuckoo-Hawk, Mountain Buzzard, Handsome Francolin, Red-chested Flufftail, Dusky Turtle Dove, Red-chested Owlet, Ruwenzori Nightjar, Western Green Tinkerbird, Tullberg's Woodpecker, Mountain Wagtail, Grey Cuckoo-shrike, Mountain / Shelley's / Ansorge's / Yellow-streaked / Cabanis's Greenbul, White-starred Robin, Red-throated Alethe, Archer's Robin-Chat, White-bellied Robin-Chat, Olive Thrush, Mountain Yellow / Cinnamon Bracken / Evergreen Forest / Grauer's Rush Warbler, Red-faced Woodland / Short-tailed Warbler, White-browed Crombec, Grauer's Warbler, Singing Cisticola, Collared / Mountain Masked Apalis, Yellow-eyed Black Flycatcher, Chapin's Flycatcher, Ruwenzori Batis, White-bellied / White-tailed Crested Flycatcher, Mountain / Grey-chested Illadopsis, Ruwenzori Hill-Babbler, Stripe-breasted Tit, Blue-headed Sunbird, Regal Sunbird, Mountain Black Boubou, Many-coloured / Doherty's Bush-shrike, Montane Oriole, Sharpe's Starling, White-naped Raven, Woodhouse's Antpecker, Dusky Crimsonwing, African Firefinch, Black-headed Waxbill, Thick-billed / Streaky Seedeater, Cinnamon-breasted Rock Bunting.

Lowlights: The army rangers being delayed for 2h every day at Buhoma. We missed Brown-necked Parrots which flew over when we were inside the guesthouse, the African Green Broadbill which was seen a day before we were there and a pair of Oriole Finches flew over our heads we missed. No luck with Shelley's Crimsonwing, Ruwenzori Turaco and Purple-banded Sunbird.

### **Lake Mburo NP: 12th–14th August**

The boat trip was very successful with two White-backed Night-Herons and six African Finfoots, the guy knows the locations of the birds very well as he does three or more tours a day. The guided walk in the morning with a very skilled ranger was very interesting, as we found many birds quicker than from the roof of our car. The game drives were disappointing as we hardly found any birds apart from Rüppell's Long-tailed Starlings. We think the season was probably not optimal as it was terribly calm, probably it is better in June?

Highlights: Zebras and Impalas. African Finfoot, White-backed Night-Heron, Rufous-bellied Heron, Bat Hawk, Red-headed Lovebird, Little Rush Warbler, Green-backed Eremomela, Long-tailed Cisticola, Yellow-breasted Apalis, White-winged Tit, Brubru, Greater Blue-eared Starling

Lowlights: We missed the Brown-chested Plovers being on the same burnt fields for weeks until the day we went there... Red-faced Barbets were missing too, I doubt that they are easy in general.

### **Entebbe, Botanical Garden: 15th August**

We were looking for a few missing species after our trip, but missed them. But we recognised, that the Botanical Garden would have been a very nice introduction to a Uganda birding trip indeed, as a number of forest, wetland and cultivation species are present.

Highlights: Shikra, African Hobby adding for Fabian and me resp.

Lowlights: No Orange Weavers, Orange-tufted Sunbirds or Giant Kingfishers around.

## **Species List**

A complete species and counts list for birds and mammals is found in the Excel-File Uganda\_VI-VIII\_07\_DM.xls.

## **Recommendations for a next tour**

As we did a self-guided tour, the advantages were mainly financial. Our trip was quite successful after I learnt many bird calls from my Kibale stay to identify many birds as and interesting songs and calls. We were sometimes restricted in time to search for interesting birds and a good bird guide would be able to identify interesting birds much faster. If you don't know some local bird vocalisations, you are probably lost in the forest without a guide. In the savannah and cultivation, birds are easier to see, but difficult birds as *Cisticolas* can give some problems, we probably missed some *Cisticola* species too. The main disadvantage of a self-guided tour is the lack of specific habitat knowledge: Many bird guides know good cultivation spots for example, where a lot of birds can be spotted within a short time for example. Our combination of self-guided and local guides in Biwindi and Mabira was good – but in Semuliki, where a ranger was supposed to be our guide, we wished we had hired a better one...

The timing and direction of our tour is also a point to think about: Many people go “clockwise” and we went “counter clockwise” to western Uganda. For my friends, this was the better option. If it is your first birding in Africa and you go to Biwindi as the second National Park, you're overstrained. Even if we always switched between forests and savannahs, we had a good introduction with Mabira Forest and the Kampala area to go to the bigger parks afterwards. The time of our birding tour from end-July to Mid-August was too late in my view – at least for the African Green Broadbill. Most birding tours go between mid-June and mid-July when the Broadbill is breeding and probably more activity takes place in the savannahs. A visit in winter would also be interesting, if you want to get some passage migrants and winter guests from the palearctic as well as birds as the Standard-winged Nightjar and Lizard Buzzard.

It would be wise to take “Birds of Africa” from Sinclair & Ryan<sup>(11)</sup> on the next trip, especially if you go to Semuliki where west African birds can occur, which are not described in Stevenson & Fanshawe<sup>(10)</sup> as it was the case of the White-crested Tiger Heron and recently the Golden-naped Weaver (Bull ABC Vol 14 No 2, 2007).

## **Abbreviations**

NP = National Park, UWA = Uganda Wildlife Authority, QENP = Queen Elisabeth II National Park, MUBFS = Makerere University Biological Field Station at Kanyawara, Kibale Forest NP, ad = adult, imm = immature, juv = juvenile, M = Male, F = Female.

## **References**

### **Homepages**

<sup>(1)</sup> [www.tropical-biology.org](http://www.tropical-biology.org)

- (2) [www.usu.edu/mubfs/frames.html](http://www.usu.edu/mubfs/frames.html)
- (3) [www.natrix-jugendgruppe.ch](http://www.natrix-jugendgruppe.ch)

### **Safari Companies**

- (4) Bird Uganda Safaris Ltd., <http://birduganda.com>, contact: [director@birduganda.com](mailto:director@birduganda.com)
- (5) Avian Watch Uganda, [www.avianwatchuganda.co.ug](http://www.avianwatchuganda.co.ug), contact: [alfred@avianwatchuganda.co.ug](mailto:alfred@avianwatchuganda.co.ug)
- (6) Access Uganda Tours, [www.accessugandatours.com](http://www.accessugandatours.com), contact: [tours@accessugandatours.com](mailto:tours@accessugandatours.com)
- (7) Great Lake Safaris Ltd., [www.safari-uganda.com](http://www.safari-uganda.com), contact: [info@safaris-uganda.com](mailto:info@safaris-uganda.com)

### **Recommended Literature:**

- (8) Briggs, P. (2007): Uganda. Bradt Travel Guides Ltd., UK.
- (9) Rossouw, J. & Sacchi, M. (1998): Where to Watch Birds in Uganda. Uganda Tourist Board, Kampala.
- (10) Stevenson, T. & Fanshawe, J. (2002): Birds of East Africa. Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi. Christopher Helm, London.
- (11) Sinclair, I. & Ryan, P. (2003): Birds of Africa. South of the Sahara. Struik Publishers, Cape Town.

### **Bird guides**

- (12) Robert Byarugaba, P.O. Box 992, Kabaale, Uganda, +256782029054, +2562772901628
- (13) Alfred Twinomujuni, c/o Avian Watch Uganda, P.O. Box, Kampala, Uganda, +256782884037, +256772869744, [alfred@avianwatchuganda.co.ug](mailto:alfred@avianwatchuganda.co.ug), [birdwatchuganda@yahoo.com](mailto:birdwatchuganda@yahoo.com), [www.avianwatchuganda.co.ug](http://www.avianwatchuganda.co.ug)
- (14) Benson Bamatura, c/o Makerere University Biological Field Station, Kibale National Park, P.O. Box 409, Fort-Portal, Uganda, +256782451331, [birdwithbenson@yahoo.com](mailto:birdwithbenson@yahoo.com)
- (15) Ibrahim Senfuma, P.O. Box 142, Lugazi, [mrvibra@yahoo.com](mailto:mrvibra@yahoo.com)
- (16) Alex Gabiito, [agabiito@yahoo.com](mailto:agabiito@yahoo.com)
- (17) Sula, +256772324250

### **Recommended Trip Reports**

- (18) [www.birdtours.co.uk/tripreports/uganda/uganda10/uganda-2005.htm](http://www.birdtours.co.uk/tripreports/uganda/uganda10/uganda-2005.htm)
- (19) [www.birdtours.co.uk/tripreports/uganda/uganda2/ugan2002.htm](http://www.birdtours.co.uk/tripreports/uganda/uganda2/ugan2002.htm)
- (20) [www.birdtours.co.uk/tripreports/uganda/uganda8/uganda-2005.htm](http://www.birdtours.co.uk/tripreports/uganda/uganda8/uganda-2005.htm)

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