

# Uganda – Mammals & Mountains

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd September – 6th October 2023

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Shoebill



Nile Crocodile



Hippopotamus



Mountain Gorilla

Tour report kindly compiled by client Jack Blincowe

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Tour participants: Jude Ainomugisha (leader) with six Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

**Saturday 23rd September**

We travelled from London to Entebbe.

## Day 2

**Sunday 24th September**

After transferring from Nairobi to Entebbe, we were greeted by our guide and supporting staff at the airport. The rain seemed near torrential when we headed for the jeep. Whilst this initially dampened our spirits, our guide informed us that heavy rain on arrival was actually seen as a blessing and a sign of good fortune ahead- a prediction that was soon proven to be true!

After a brief chat about our specific interests, targets and general excitement we soon made our way to our hotel, The Two Friends, situated right on the shore of Lake Victoria. That morning we were encouraged to explore the hotel grounds ourselves, which were teeming with life!

We had close views of many species including African Harrier-hawk, Little Sparrowhawk, Vervet Monkeys and the handsome and abundant Hamerkop. As the closest relative of everyone's target bird, the magnificent and scarce Shoebill, we mused that this was a good omen and hopefully the shape of things to come.

However, the stars of the morning cast were undoubtedly the lovely Pied Kingfishers who put on a show worthy of their monochromatic majesty. They were clearly used to humans, and happily hunted and ate young Talapia whilst we watched! One even joined us on the balcony of the hotel restaurant whilst we had our lunch!

After we had refuelled, we started making our way to the much anticipated Entebbe Botanical Gardens. We took a brief detour on the way to visit a sleeping White-faced Scops Owl that gave us spectacular views whilst it sat motionless within its favoured tree, eying us from one half closed eye from time to time.

After this welcome diversion, we began our trek through the botanical gardens themselves. The birdlife here was even more impressive. Palm-nut Vultures whirled overhead, Great Blue Turacos made their way through the canopy above us, and a wealth of sunbirds and weavers surprised us at every turn.

It was here we saw the first unusual primates of the trip, the black-and-white Guereza Colobus Monkeys! They afforded us great views whilst they munched on figs and jumped about the canopy. Shortly after this we encountered a shy Red-tailed Monkey. Whilst it wasn't as bold as its Colobus cousins, we still had incredible views as it cautiously clambered through the trees.

As we continued our walk, Black-and-white Casqued Hornbills, African Paradise Flycatchers and Northern Black Flycatchers joined the cast, then finally a diminutive African Pygmy Kingfisher served as our grand finale in the sunset. We then headed back to the hotel to catch up on some much needed sleep and prepare ourselves for tomorrow, our most highly anticipated day.

Day 2 highlights clockwise from top left: Pied Kingfisher, Great Blue Turaco, White-faced Scops Owl and Red-tailed Monkey



## Day 3

## Monday 25th September

This was the day we began our trip to the Mbamba swamp, kingdom of the Shoebill and home to many other fascinating creatures.

The Shoebills are most active at dawn as they hunt for their breakfast, so we set off as early as possible, ready and in the van by 06:30. On the way we made brief stops to observe Grey-crowned Crane (national birds of Uganda), Great Blue Turaco and African Green Pigeon.

We soon made it to Mbamba Swamp and were greeted by our friendly canoe pilots. Village Weavers, Broad-billed Rollers and more Hammerkop wheeled overhead as we boarded our craft.

After eagerly boarding the boats, we made our way through the channels of the Papyrus swamp, our pilots expertly navigating us as we passed African Jacana, Malachite Kingfishers, Reed Cormorants and Yellow-billed Ducks.

Within 15 minutes we had found our quarry. A huge Shoebill stood out in the open, posing statuesque by the waterside as she waited for her morning meal to make an appearance. Seemingly unbothered by her audience, she

gave us amazingly close views as she went about her morning business; preening, stretching and stalking her prey as we watched less than 10 metres away!

After about 15 minutes we left her in peace, allowing the next group to have a view. We were all surprised with the ease of which we found the Shoebill, and the intimacy of the views we had. This was a truly exceptional birding experience and it's important to remember that almost half of all birders who try here for the shoebill have no sightings at all, let alone ones this close or un-obscured. This was truly a privileged encounter and not to be taken for granted.

As we made ready to leave, we were greeted by a courting pair of Red-headed Lovebirds that preened and snuggled each other in the treetops. Soon afterward we began making our way to Lake Mburo National Park.

We stopped a few times on the long journey to view more Grey-crowned Cranes, herons and the adorable White-faced Whistling Duck among others.

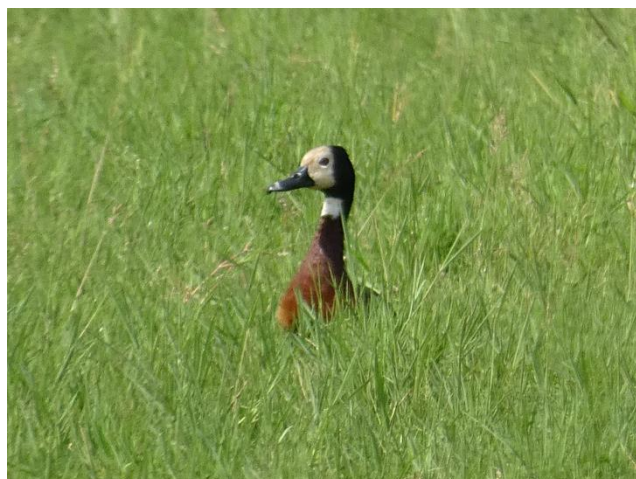
The most exciting bird we saw on this stretch of the journey was a Great Sparrowhawk- or at least we thought it was! Upon closer inspection it was revealed that this was actually a Thick-billed Cuckoo mimicking the huge Sparrowhawk with surprising accuracy. Cuckoos are master mimics the world over, and if one can fool several enthusiastic birders and a seasoned guide then that surely is a testament to their prowess!

After this we arrived at the national park's borders and explored the grounds on the way in. Burchell's Zebra and Common Warthog marked a change in the biome as we transitioned from wetland to scrub.

We arrived at Lake Mburo Safari Lodge and set up our bags for the evening. Whilst sorting ourselves out, we watched the Yellow-winged Bats hunt in the night-time treetops! Once in bed after supper, we were serenaded to sleep by nightjars as we awaited another incredible experience tomorrow.



Day 2 highlights, clockwise from top left: Shoebill, Malachite Kingfisher, White-faced Whistling Duck and Thick-billed Cuckoo



## Day 4

**Tuesday 26th September**

First thing in the morning I was treated to a very special viewing by one of the local lodge staff; the Slender-tailed Nightjar that sang us to sleep! Apparently he took up residence right beside my cabin, making us neighbours. As a nightjar enthusiast myself, I was nothing short of delighted!

Our morning excursion through the dry bush yielded some exciting results! Bush Buck, Waterbuck, Burchell's Zebra, a huge herd of Cape Buffalo and a very shy Hippo made for interesting mammal watching. Woodland Kingfishers, Green Wood-hoopoe and multiple waders made up just some of the bushland birds we encountered. We were all particularly enamoured with the handsome, yet sinister, Yellow-billed Oxpeckers that rode atop the many Cape Buffalo in the area. We had excellent views of them preening the buffaloes for ticks, as well as going about their unscrupulous business of pecking at the Buffalo's tick wounds to drink their blood!

Perhaps the most unexpected thing we encountered was a herd of rare Nubian Giraffes, recently introduced into the area. We observed several adults and even a young calf making their way through the acacia trees, happily munching them as they passed.

Before returning to the lodge for launch, we had a special treat waiting for us by the roadside: a Verreaux's Eagle Owl! We peeped under the dense foliage for a sighting of the massive bird, but it was difficult to appreciate fully from that angle. Still, there's no poor sighting of an owl, let alone this species!

After lunch, we set out in our jeep once more to the lake shore in the hope of finding an African Finfoot, one of Africa's most sought after and difficult to see birds. A family of Warthogs were waiting for us at the shore of Lake Mburo, but unfortunately they weren't the only thing. A massive stormfront hit as soon as we arrived, with torrential rain hammering the jeep and thunder lighting up the skies. Many of us feared that the rain would quite literally put a damper on our boat trip, or perhaps even cancel it. Other guests and guides left after 20 minutes of the deluge, but our group and our guide stood firm. Within another 10 minutes the rain began to clear a little and we boarded our boat.

The unusual weather conditions worked in our favour. The African Finfoot came out of cover to make the most of the clearing skies and we saw no less than nine "Finfeet" before we headed back to shore - a new record for the tour! A mother preening with her chick was a particular highlight, as was another female perching on a log to display her quite clearly finned-feet. Whilst these bizarrely abundant birds were the highlight, Hippopotamus, Nile Crocodile, White-backed Night Heron and scores African Fish-Eagle were also enjoyed.

On the way there we observed one of the Crocodiles feasting upon a Hippo carcass. He was being driven off by a large bull by the time we returned in an interesting display of interspecies aggression.

As we made our way home, we stopped once more to enjoy the Verreaux's Eagle Owl, affording us even more spectacular views than before.

We returned to our lodgings for a final time before our long journey tomorrow- but that wasn't the end of the day. The heavy rain brought forth a deluge of winged termites! Both kings and massive queens could be seen, and African Green Toads made short work of both. An interesting end to an interesting day.



Day 4 highlights clockwise from top left: Slender-tailed Nightjar, African Finfoot, Nile Crocodile and Verraux's Eagle Owl



## Day 5

Wednesday 27th September

The Slender-tailed Nightjar saw us off that morning, as did a walking bean husk (that on closer inspection turned out to be a highly camouflaged beetle). The toads had made the most of the rain, leaving behind toad-spawn in the deep puddles that were already filled with “toadpoles” to our delight!

We bid farewell to Lake Mburo and began our long, difficult trek to Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. We stopped along the way to view various species at the roadside, such as Augur and Lizard Buzzard, Brown Serpent Eagle and Long-crested Eagle. A Grey-crowned Crane with a pair of scruffy looking chicks proved to be the highlight of the journey. We stopped for a nice meal in our guide's hometown to break up the journey a little, before ascending to the lofty peaks of Uganda's mountain forests.

We had our dinner at the Mahogany Springs Lodge, our home for the next few days, and prepared ourselves for the most exciting part of our trip.

Clockwise from left to right: Unknown bean beetle, Lizard Buzzard, Grey Kestrel and Grey-crowned Crane.



## Day 6

## Thursday 28th September

We began the day with much excitement. After a hearty breakfast and a full briefing, we got in the Jeep and set off for the Bwindi impenetrable Forest.

We were greeted at The Visitor Centre by local rangers and members of the Bwindi community, welcoming the tourists with local dances and songs and encouraging the bravest of us to join them in the dance!

Shortly after this, we were once again given a briefing by the park rangers and introduced to the Gorilla family we were tracking. We were going to be tracking the Binyido family, named for the massive, scarred silverback that headed the family. We were then informed of the risks and proper gorilla etiquette before we set out. Many of us elected to hire porters for this experience, not only for our own ease but to support the local community and the conservation work they contribute to.

After disembarking from the Jeep, we began a descent into the impenetrable Forest. At this time, I must inform you that we did not find any Gorillas - rather, they found us! The massive silverback and his troop nearly walked right into us along the path! This all seemed to happen in less than 10 minutes since we started the walk too, just beating the Shoebill for expediency!



Under our local guide's direction, we moved ourselves to the sides of the path as the Gorillas approached and allowed them to pass through with little fuss. Over the next hour we then watched the gorillas go about their Monkey Business. A very young baby seemed keen to show us the hierarchy of Bwindi, playfully challenging us with dominance displays, wielding branches and sticks as weapons or teething implements as he saw fit. Otherwise, the troop largely ignored us, focussing on eating their leafy lunch. There were a couple of warning grunts uttered, which we and our guides respected, but otherwise these habituated Gorillas seemed very relaxed in our presence. The massive, scarred silverback proved to be particularly photogenic, patiently posing for the photographers whilst he and his family feasted on the leaves of the understory. The hour almost flew by, and nobody was ready to leave these magnificent animals. However, we all understood that disturbance of these sensitive creatures must be kept to a minimum. As with all conservation focussed adventures, the best interests of the animals always come first.

After bidding a reluctant farewell to our magnificent forest dwelling cousins, we left the forest and made our way back to the road. We Had a little 'graduation ceremony' where we were awarded a Gorilla Tracking Certificate and praised for treating the mighty animals with the respect they deserved.

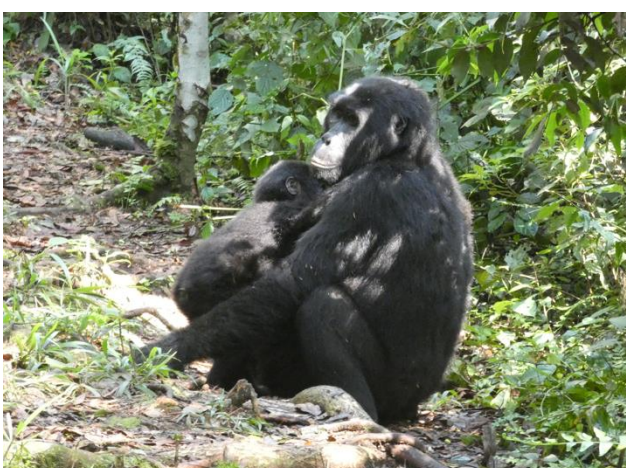
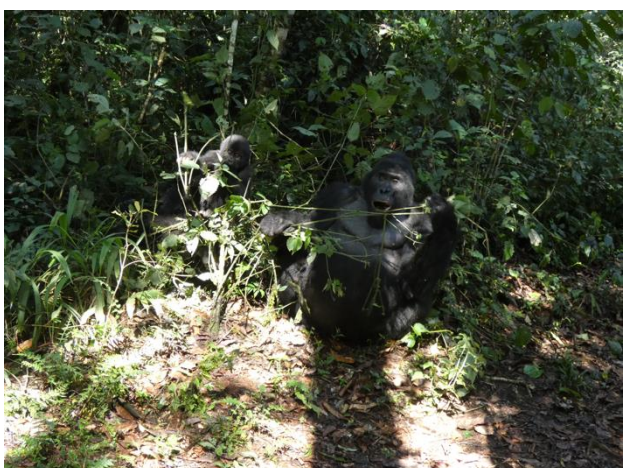
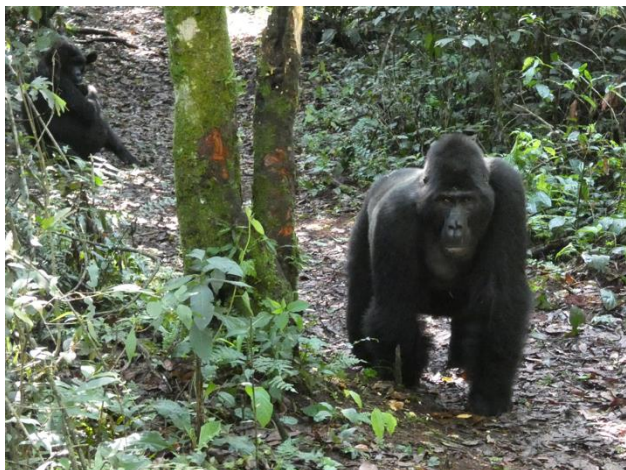
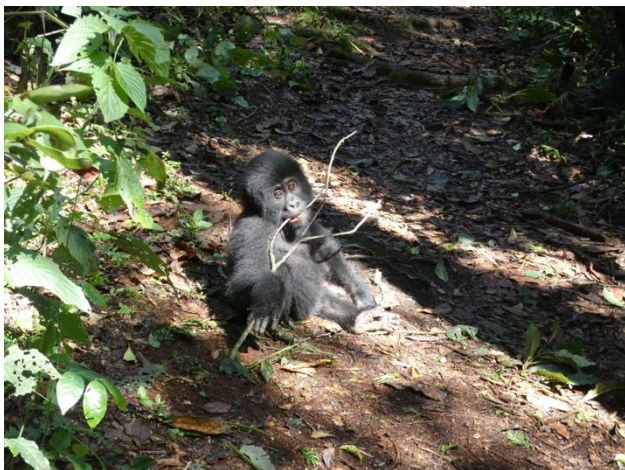
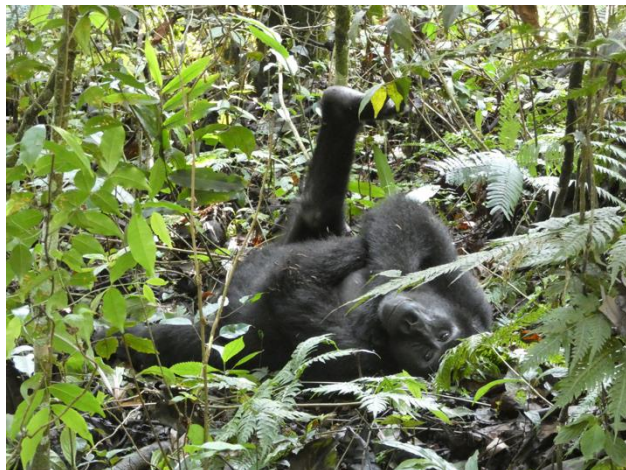
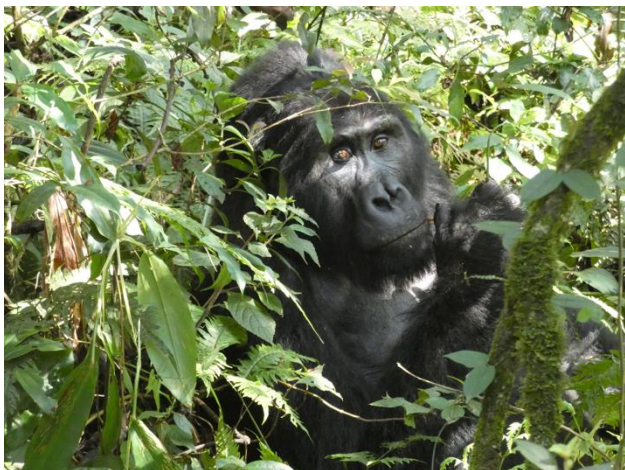
We then tipped our guides, paid our porters and made our way back to our lodgings- and all before lunchtime!

Seeing that we accomplished our goal so early and so completely, we spent the rest of the day relaxing. Most of us did some light bird watching from the lobby balcony whilst we unwound and processed the excitement from the morning.

During this time, we discovered one of the most sought after birds of the trip, the Lady Ross's Turaco. A pair of them performed very well, flitting from tree to tree, capering just a few feet from us whilst we watched them gorge on fruit and chase away rival birds from their prize. Double-toothed Barbets and various greenbulbs flitted about the gardens as well as a wealth of interesting insect and herptile life. Hives of bees the size of pin-heads, tiny green tree-frogs and multiple lizard species all added to the biodiversity of our day.

We soon had a celebratory dinner and recorded the day's findings before returning to our beds and reflecting on the incredible privilege we had just experienced. A lovely poem about the Mountain Gorillas was laid out for us on our pillows when we returned, adding further to our wonderful experience.

Clockwise from top left: Binyido the Silverback Mountain Gorilla enjoying his lunch, a young male Blackback Gorilla (Binyido's second-in-command), Binyido warily approaching the tourists on his path, a female Gorilla nursing her baby, dinner with dad, and finally the baby Gorilla showing us who's boss in Bwindi.





## Day 7

## Friday 29th September

We began our morning with an intense canopy birding session just outside the Bwindi visitor centre, directed by a local Bwindi guide and aided by our regular. We saw dozens of species, most of which we had never seen before. Brown-headed Weavers crept through the trees like woodpeckers, a pair of Bocage's Bush-shrikes stalked prey through the leaves and Mountain Orioles posed dramatically against the sky for us!

We also encountered an injured snake. Many of us feared the reptile was beyond saving, but as a guide went to move him from the path, he seemed to make a miraculous recovery! He was returned to the undergrowth and discouraged from returning to the path, hopefully to make a quiet recovery.

As we ventured further along the path, we encountered huge numbers of butterflies. African Map, Blue Mother-of-pearl and Swallowtails were among the bountiful plethora of insects we encountered. More Safari Ants made paths across our own, exotic treehoppers pretended to be bird droppings and exotic moths also lurked in the leaves as we travelled beneath the roadside canopy.

The highlight of the walk was finding a Grey-throated Barbet nest. A dull name for such a spectacular bird, the guides mused that 'Rhinoceros Barbet' would be a more fitting name for the grey and seemingly horned species. A truly bizarre rainforest find and exactly the sort of wonderful, previously unknown species I hoped to experience in The Impenetrable Forest.

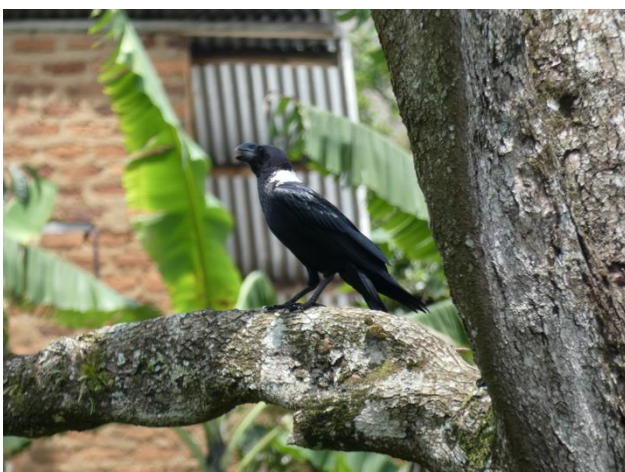
After this highlight we returned to the jeep, our necks suitably sore and our birding checklists suitably full. As we drove back, we encountered a pair of magnificent White-necked Ravens! Our guide was astonished at this as they're rarely seen in the area, pulling over to allow us spectacular, if brief views of this huge and shy corvid. We also stopped to photograph a colourful Blue-headed Agama lizard before returning to our lodge for lunch and a quieter afternoon.

A few of us who weren't 'birded out' from this morning explored the lodge gardens with our guide. Truly excellent views of Ross's Turaco and Double-toothed Barbet were given with the guide's direction, as well as a lovely encounter with our first Wahlberg's Eagle, perched upon the canopy like a miniature chocolate harpy.

We then ventured out beyond the walls of Mahogany Springs on a walking birding expedition with the local guide, enjoying close views of sunbirds, citrils and manakins whilst having a spectacular view of Bwindi in the background. The highlight of this walk was surprisingly intimate views of a female Mackinnon's Shrike! A true rainforest specialist that posed for us very nicely on the powerlines above the road. Shortly after this, the rain hit, and we had to beat a hasty retreat for the night.



Clockwise from top left: Mountain Oriole, Gray-throated ‘Rhinceros’ Barbet with prey for hungry chicks, White-necked Raven and Lady Ross’s Turaco.



## Day 8

## Saturday 30th September

Making our way down from Bwindi was no easy feat, but we were soon under way after breakfast. As we drove downhill, a pair of beautiful Mackinnon’s Shrikes posed nicely for us, the male showing off his unusual ochre flank patterns whilst he hunted from the telephone wires with his mate.

After a few hours and a few more roadside birds later, we finally made it to our grand destination: Queen Victoria Park! This park is most famous for its tree climbing Lions, but before we could pursue them, another interesting savannah animal caught our attention. We pulled the jeep over to observe a pair of massive dung beetles digging through fresh elephant dung! The larger of the two was clearly a pachyderm poo specialist, the massive beetle being easily the size of a tennis ball. We observed their messy antics for a good ten minutes before continuing our search for more mammals, much to the amusement of our guide.

As we searched for the Lions, we encountered many bird species including Red-billed Quelea, Collared Widowbirds and the spectacular brood parasite; the Pin-tailed Whydah. We also had spectacular views of the previously distant, and much sought after Palm-nut Vulture, perched just a few feet from us with its hooded contemporaries!

Eventually we managed to spot a paw dangling in the distance. Then a tail, then a body, and then two whole lionesses relaxing on a shady underslung branch. Though distant and still, it was quite wonderful to see these famous Lions doing what they were famous for.

However, this was not the spectacle we'd remember most from this day! As we continued, we encountered some Sand Martins. Perhaps 'some' is an understatement, as we encountered tens of thousands of Sand Martins! The murmurations darkened the sky as they flew over, and I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say this could easily have been half of the UK population in this one park. Our guide was just as astounded by the spectacle as we were, saying it was a first for him too! This spectacle wasn't the only familiar face we'd see, we'd also encounter Barn Swallows and even an Osprey, feeding on a catfish in the evening sun.

Following the Osprey's lead, we soon made our way to our hotel for the night for our own dinner, but not before enjoying a very close encounter with a roadside Waterbuck.

Clockwise from top left: Male Mackinnon's Shrike, Giant Dung Beetle (*Haliocopris bucephalus*), Palm-nut Vulture and the famous Tree Lions of Victoria.





## Day 9

## Sunday 1st October

At breakfast we were greeted by a large family of banded “mongeese!” Bold and unafraid of humans, they made themselves thoroughly at home on the hotel grounds. Adorable Swamp Flycatchers also made themselves at home throughout the hotel, snatching insects from the air wherever they perched, be it outside our rooms or even in the lobby!

We set off early into the bush once again. We hoped to encounter our tree Lions once more, but they were already off hunting, concealed deep within the savanna grass.

What we did manage to do was have excellent views of their prey though, the Ugandan Kob! We found several males on a lek site, attempting to woo a single female. It was quite clear she wasn't as impressed with the handsome males as we were.

After observing the Kob's courtship misadventures, we set our sights on Temminck's Courser. These rare birds only live on rough terrain off the beaten track and finding them was quite a challenge. But we eventually succeeded and saw at least four of the swift and elegant birds coursing through the sparse vegetation. After this hard-won victory, we headed back to the hotel for lunch.

After lunch we boarded the hotel's tour boat. This tour went up the coast of the Kazinga Channel, giving us all excellent views of the wildlife at the water's edge. Cape Buffalo, African Bush Elephants, Hippopotamus and Warthogs were in abundance and offered excellent viewing opportunities.

The two species we were most keen to see though were the Giant Forest Hog and the Goliath Heron. Both giants represented the largest of their kind and we were lucky enough to see both! The forest hog appeared only briefly, the species is shy and avoids contact with humans; large freshwater sources provide the best chances of seeing these elusive creatures.

The Goliath Herons on the other hand boldly strutted up and down the shore, flaunting their magnificent purple and bronze plumage as they towered above the other wading birds. Perhaps the most unusual of these was a lone African Spoonbill, found well outside of its normal range. He was apparently a regular here, a single vagrant specimen that has persisted in the channel for years.

Our most impressive encounter from the boat however was with the Nile Monitor Lizards! These huge, emerald green reptiles put on quite a performance, basking, mating and even raiding a Village Weaver nest! The boat reached the end of the channel before making a swift return home as we raced past hungry Barn Swallows, Pied Kingfishers and regal looking African Fish Eagles.

Once back at the hotel we had our dinner and wound down for the night.



Clockwise from top left: Ugandan Kob lek, Goliath Heron, Giant Forest Hog and Nile Monitor Lizard.



## Day 10

## Monday 2nd October

We left early in the morning hoping to catch our target bird in the park. This was the huge and magnificent Martial Eagle, the eagle with the largest wingspan in all of Africa. On the way we encountered more snake eagles, Grey Kestrels, doves and a Crowned Hornbill.

Once deep into the heart of Victoria Park, it wasn't long before we spotted our Martial Eagle soaring high above in the morning thermals! It gave us stupendous views of its enormous wingspan, which could be easily compared against the seemingly minute Bateleur attempting to mob it. After a brief but magnificent display the Martial Eagle left us and we continued our safari, already victorious.

The Temminck's Coursers were much easier to find this morning, racing and even displaying right beside the jeep, puffing out and thrusting their fluffy chests as they dashed from space to space.

Soon after this we came across our highlight of the day. We stopped the jeep to observe a young Bateleur Eagle behaving in a strange way, waddling along on the ground and spreading his wings as if he were trying to mantle something. After a moment of trying to decipher this strange behaviour, we realised it was trying to mantle a 7ft

African Rock Python! We ascended the hill slightly and got a nice view of the massive snake before it hastily slithered beneath the brush. An amazing and, according to our guide, an exceedingly rare reptile experience!

We returned back to the hotel shortly after this, stopping on the way to observe an unusual weather phenomenon. It took us a few minutes to realise we were observing a small tornado forming over the channel! It wasn't any kind of threat to us at that size but was absolutely fascinating to observe!

We made it through the exciting-but-not-scary gusts of wind back to our hotel for lunch and a relaxing afternoon overlooking the Kazinga Channel. Warthogs, Elephants, Hippo, Pied Crows and even Crocodiles could all be observed from our rooms.

Later that evening we set out just before dinner to try and find more nightjars. Sadly, no birds responded to our calls, but we had spectacular eye-to-eye views of Marabou Storks and Yellow-winged Bats in the sunset as compensation.

Clockwise from top left: juvenile Martial Eagle, Temminck's Courser, Marabou Stork and African Rock Python.





## Day 11

Tuesday 3rd October

This was another long day of travelling from the Bush and scrubland deep into the rainforest and marsh.

As we drove to our destination, Kibale Forest, we encountered a bird that was sorely missed from our savannah drive, a Black-bellied Bustard! The large and elegant bird kept pace with our jeep as we observed him from the window, unsure what to make of us once he made his way into the adjacent fields, we stopped by a Papyrus swamp.

Whilst initially confused by the nature of our papyrus pit-stop, once our guide began making a bird call, our purpose there became clear. From the dense Papyrus stems emerged the beautiful Papyrus Gonolek! We'd previously encountered Black-necked Gonoleks, but the golden crown of the scarlet and black Papyrus easily put them to shame! After they briefly emerged to investigate an intruder, the gonoleks soon disappeared back into the Papyrus as quickly as they appeared. We made a couple more pit stops to see various roadside birds, none more impressive than the Piapiac, a bizarre long tailed corvid I'd never heard of until we stumbled across it riding atop a cow in a field!

After a long trip we finally arrived within the rainforest. We stopped bright to observe some Ugandan Red Colobus Monkeys feeding on some eucalyptus bark (apparently a mild narcotic), with a tiny, energetic baby front and centre! We were sure we'd all have better views of the rare and beautiful primates soon though, so we left them to it. Five minutes later we arrived at Turaco Treetops Lodge. We were scheduled to have a guided bird walk late in the afternoon but were encouraged to explore the grounds ourselves. I decided an entomology adventure would be the best use of my time and began a trip through the jungle paths. I encountered many strange and wonderful insects, including a giant Assassin-bug and ornate longhorn beetle, but the Stalk-eyed Flies were the highlights of the day for me!

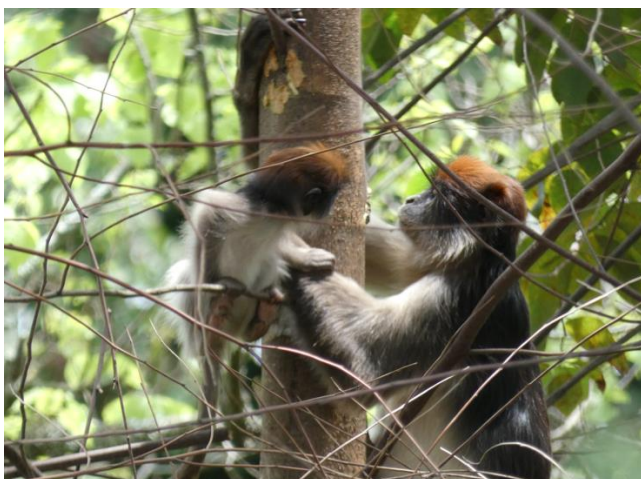
I had also had my final views of Ross's Turaco during this time as well. They curiously gazed down at me from the canopy, perhaps with mild concern as I gasped with delight at every new insect.

After our solo adventure last, we all met up again to begin our jungle birding. This was no simple task as the birdlife flitted through the dense branches. Sunbirds, bee-eaters and flycatchers twirled in the canopy. However, a particularly good view of a Grey-backed Camaroptera 'Camera-operator' stole the spotlight.

We returned to the bar after this and listened to the evening cacophony before retiring for the day.



Clockwise from top Left: Papyrus Gonolek, Piapiac, Stalk-eyed Fly and Ugandan Red Colobus Monkeys.



## Day 12

## Wednesday 4th October

We set off after breakfast in the hopes of seeing our final ape and big target animal, the Chimpanzee. We made it to Kibale Forest information centre where we handed in our documents and listened to a briefing before briskly setting off with our guide and armed guard. Both seemed competent and kind, reassuring us that they'd never had to fire their rifle in our defence yet, putting us more at ease. Still, the rifle served as a stark reminder that these were wild and powerful animals that should be treated with caution and respect at all times.

After a short drive, we disembarked within the Chimpanzee troupe's territory and began exploring. It wasn't long before we could hear the Chimpanzees' familiar cries echoing through the trees. We found a small group of raucous, immature males, females and infants high in the canopy of a fig tree, apparently a favourite haunt. Occasionally they would look down at us, but they were largely preoccupied with eating as many figs as they could—or fighting over the issue. The guide informed us that the alpha male of the troupe had recently been killed in a challenge for dominance, so the young males were still figuring out which rung they sat on in the new social ladder.

As the Chimps showed little interest in coming down from the treetops, we set off into the jungle to find the rest of the wandering troupe. We paused to observe a beautiful, green Cicada on the way. After tracking their cries, we soon found them. The large, adult males were here, as well as immatures. The younger Chimpanzees seemed

interested in us, eyeing us with innocent curiosity. The older adults seemed bored with us from the beginning and stared passed us with indifference. Humanity does tend to lose its novelty after being habituated to them every other day for over a decade. Besides, bigger things than nosy humans were underway! In the wake of the alphas Chimpanzees death, new power plays were unfolding, new alliances were being forged and new faces were vying for the empty throne.

The older Chimps seemed happy to laze around and watch from the sidelines, whereas the younger chimps seemed agitated and keen to demonstrate dominance displays to secure a foothold for themselves in their new future. We had intimately close views of all of this unfolding as we trekked within their midst, an audience to a primal drama that was all too familiar.

Without warning, one of the larger males barked a cry, and the whole troupe moved out. Tired of these human interlopers, the Chimpanzees rushed and vanished into the trees, not looking back at their awed cousins as they went.

We returned soon after this, leisurely enjoying the jungle flora and fauna as we went. Perhaps I took it a little too leisurely on my end, enjoying the butterflies, cicadas and mushrooms until the armed guard escorted me from the forest!

We tipped our guides, received our Chimpanzees tracking certificates to go with our Gorilla ones, and headed back to Touraco Treetops for lunch.

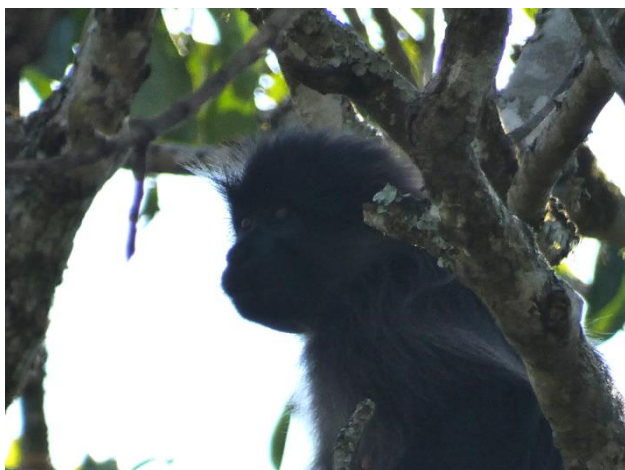
For our afternoon excursion, we set off for a guided walk through the Kibale swamp with a local guide. On the way, we stopped to observe some Grosbeak Weavers by the road. Though distant, it was clear these animals were bulkier and more formidable than their contemporaries.

The insects were plentiful and bizarre on our guided walk through the forest and papyrus swamp. Various dragonflies, lichen mimicking shieldbugs, Giant Whirligig Beetles and of course the ever vicious Safari Ants were a delight to observe. The bizarre and brilliant treehoppers captured my attention the most though, one in particular showing amazing, thorny body modifications to aid in camouflaging his silhouette.

Speckled Tinkerbird, flycatchers, starlings and even a Shining-blue Kingfisher all played a part in the birdwatching as we progressed through the swamp. Mammals, however, once again earned the top spot on our star animal list.

We had exquisite views of Uganda's endemic monkeys, the Ugandan Red Colobus and Grey-cheeked Mangabey. The Colobus Monkeys looked down upon us with mild curiosity, whilst the Mangabeys seemed ready to engage us in a gang war! We learned that this ganging-up strategy is what saves them from being on the Chimpanzees menu, whereas the less militant Columbus are easy pickings by comparison. We returned to our lodge soon afterwards, muddled but unbroken, thrilled with what we had seen thus far.

Clockwise from top left: Chimpanzee, Cicada, Treehopper and Grey-cheeked Mangabey Monkey.



## Day 13

## Thursday 5th October

We awoke on the morning of our last full day with a mixture of triumph and melancholy. We'd seen all of our target species and had a magnificent time with each of them, but our trip was about to come to an end.

Whilst we had our breakfasts, the insect life once again proved itself to be abundant and impressive, with several moths dotting the walls of the open-air bar. The pool also contained a final insect surprise; a bedraggled Sausagefly! Sausageflies are the massive, winged males of the Safari Ants we'd frequently encountered throughout our travels, though you wouldn't think it to look at him! In fact, it took entomologists several years to classify the bizarre insect as he looked so different from his brethren.

After loading up the jeep and returning the Sausagefly to the undergrowth, we set off to see our final target bird, the Giant Kingfisher! We stopped at another hotel on the way to find the titanic kingfisher waiting for us to leave the car! Whilst initially flighty, we did eventually have wonderful views of a male and female calling to one another over the crater-lake.

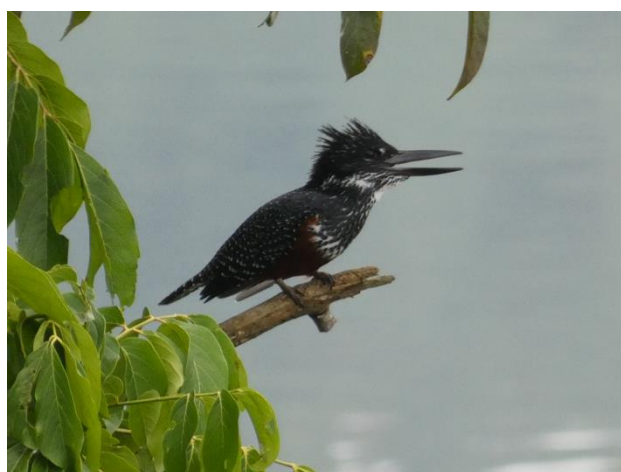
Pressing onwards towards Entebbe, we paused for lunch at another hotel. Whilst we had our lunch, we watched a pair of Kestrels do the same from below! Our fish and chips were somewhat more appetising than their stolen chick, however.



Once we'd finished our dinner-date with the Kestrels, we continued until Entebbe for dinner, an early night and an even earlier start. Great Blue Turacos, African Openbills, Colobus Monkeys and scores of Pied Kingfishers seemed to appear to bid us farewell along the way.

As a final treat, we stopped off at a nearby hotel to see our last bonus birds, two African Wood Owls! We saw the mated pair resting in the trees, gazing down at us with their big, black nocturnal eyes. We then headed back to the Two Friends Hotel, where we began our adventure. It only seemed fitting that it should end here too. A lone Hammerkop watched us from the hotel rooftop in the sunset as we prepared for bed and a very early departure. Its silhouette reminded us of the most impressive bird of the trip, and perhaps of our lives.

Clockwise from top left: Sausagefly (male Safari Ant), Giant Kingfisher, African Wood Owl and Common Kestrels.



## Day 14

Friday 6th October

Returned from Entebbe to London.



Hammerkop in the sunset, the very last bird I photographed in Uganda and apparently a harbinger of good times yet to come.

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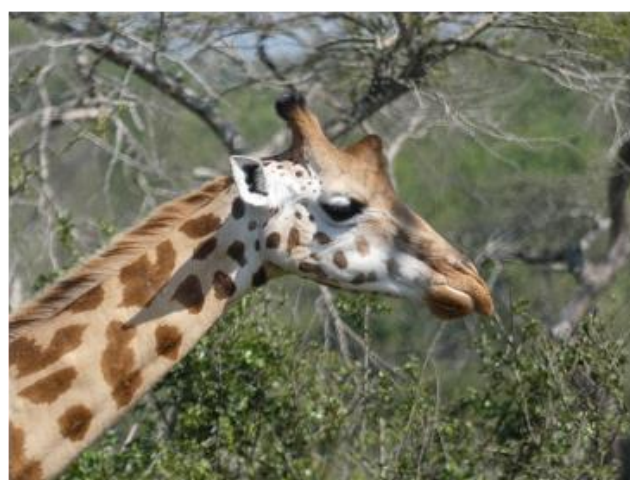


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Chimpanzee and Blue Mother of Pearl Butterfly



African Bush Elephant and Nubian Giraffe



African Blue Flycatcher