

# Uganda's Mammals and Mountains

Naturetrek Tour Report

20th September – 3rd October 2025



Shoebill by Peter Smith



Chimpanzees by Mike Amin



Chimpanzee by Sarah Greg



Great Blue Turaco by Mike Amin

Tour report kindly written by client Sarah Greg



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

Tour participants: Gerald Tumwekwase (leader) with six Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

**Saturday 20th September**

### Arrival

Unusually for a wildlife trip to Uganda, ours began in Kenya. A cyber-attack at Heathrow led us to miss our connecting flight from Nairobi to Entebbe and stranded us in Nairobi for the day. Thanks to the efforts of some Air Kenya ground crew, a group Kenyan visa was obtained within a reasonable time, and once we'd agreed to stay together we were all taken to the same hotel.

## Day 2

**Sunday 21st September**

### Nairobi

None of us wished to waste an afternoon in Kenya, so a suggestion from one of the group that we visit Nairobi National Park was quickly agreed to. The hotel, at short notice, secured us an excellent guide and safari vehicle, and we enjoyed a splendid afternoon, seeing many animals that we wouldn't see in Uganda, all set against a background of the Nairobi skyline. Special mention must be made of the numbers of White Rhino we saw (about twenty), the most any of us had seen in one place. Among them was a particularly cute mother and calf which performed very well for the cameras, and made us and a few others late to leave the park. In addition, there were many, many Ostriches: we lost count.

## Day 3

**Monday 22nd September**

### Entebbe, Mbamba Swamps and drive to Lake Mburo National Park

We finally arrived in Entebbe twenty-four hours late, after very little sleep, and met up with our guide, Gerald. After a very quick turnaround at 2 Friends Guesthouse, we were off in pursuit of the Shoebill. Waiting for the ferry to take us across Lake Victoria to the swamps was an education in itself, and we made the most of the wait with a bit of kingfisher and people watching.

The Mbamba Swamps were quite beautiful and peaceful, with lots of glorious flowering water lilies and many, many bird species. And yes, we met a Shoebill and had great views. It appeared very amenable to us getting reasonably close. These birds can stay stationary for hours, so we were doubly lucky in seeing this one move and eventually fly off.

This was the start of our first day's viewing of Ugandan wildlife, and it didn't disappoint. The standout viewings were, in addition to the Shoebill above, a field full of Grey Crowned Cranes: hundreds of them. They were 'dancing', flying, foraging and generally making a great deal of noise, something that will live long in the memory. The icing on the cake was three more Shoebills standing in ponds to one side of the cranes. They were a long way away, but clearly visible through binoculars.

Other birds seen included Pied and Malachite Kingfishers, various egrets, Black-headed Heron, African Fish Eagle, cormorants, White-faced Whistling Duck, Black Crake, African Swampfen, Long-toed Lapwing, Lilac-breasted Roller, Sacred and Hadada Ibises, Yellow-billed Kite, various weavers and bee-eaters, Marsh Harrier, Winding Cisticola, pelicans, Crested Francolin, Common Bulbul, Snowy-capped Robin-Chat, Spur-winged Goose and Bare-faced Go-away-bird. Mammals included Banded and Dwarf Mongooses, Warthog, Waterbuck, Plains Zebra, Impala and Vervet Monkey.

On arrival at Rwakobo Rock, Lake Mburo, a brief bird walk turned up three different nightjars, all within a few metres of each other, which was quite special. Rwakobo Rock Lodge has a great location: as its name suggests, it sits atop a rock outcrop, with lovely views of the surrounding countryside.

## Day 4

**Tuesday 23rd September**

### Lake Mburo

Driving out from the lodge in the morning gave us thirteen or so bird species within a hundred metres, and a Hamerkop nest, which was an impressive piece of engineering built within the fork of a tree. The morning was spent in the savannah area of the park, which yielded many bird species as well as numerous mammals. We saw several types of weavers and bee-eaters, woodpeckers included Bearded and Nubian, Striped and Woodland Kingfishers, bulbuls, Lappet-faced, White-backed and Hooded Vultures, African Harrier-Hawk, Bateleur, Brown Snake Eagle, Superb Sunbird, Fork-tailed Drongo, African Grey Hornbill, African Thrush, Meyer's Parrot, Superb Starling, Red-necked Spurfowl and Pin-tailed Whydah. Mammals comprised Olive Baboon, Buffalo, Plains Zebra, Warthog, Hippo, Rothchild's Giraffe, Topi, Waterbuck and Impala.

The afternoon was spent on Lake Mburo. The number of Hippos was impressive, and none of us are going to forget what the guide told us about the importance of Hippo poo to the ecosystem! A special moment was being shown a pair of White-backed Night Herons, a species sadly becoming endangered at the lake due to predation by Vervet Monkeys.

On our return to dry land, we noted that a group of Ugandan students had arrived by coach for a boat ride. They had left the vehicle with its windows open, something which was rapidly spotted by the resident Vervet Monkeys, who were quick to take advantage and investigate! Watching them make their getaways, after being chased out by the coach driver who firmly told them off, shaking his finger at them, was very amusing. On the lake, we had lovely views of Pied and Malachite Kingfishers, plus Rüppell's Griffon Vulture, cormorants, African Fish Eagles, Little Heron, Broad-billed Roller, Ross's Turaco, Palm Nut Vulture, Hamerkop, a juvenile Bateleur and sandpipers moving delicately from Hippo to Hippo.

## Day 5

**Wednesday 24th September**

### Journey to Bwindi and Lodge

A longish drive through the Ugandan countryside gave us more opportunities for bird spotting. We saw Long-crested Eagle, Grey Crowned Cranes, Village Indigobird, Grey Heron, Augur Buzzard and Guereza (Colobus) Monkeys.

We arrived at Mahogany Springs Lodge in time for a late lunch, and enjoyed an afternoon of mainly bird viewing, and trying to get the perfect picture of an uncooperative squirrel from the lodge veranda.

## Day 6

**Thursday 25th September**

### Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

After a briefing at the Park HQ and much paperwork for Gerald, we set off. Our group was selected for a longer drive and a shorter trek, not that we knew that at the time. Having picked up our guides, guards and porters, we walked, and before too long came across our nominated group of Mountain Gorillas. Having donned our face masks, we were allowed closer, much closer than I had imagined possible. It was a wonderful and quite emotional encounter. For the most part, the Gorillas ignored us and carried on with their routine grooming and sampling of vegetation. However, they did look at us (or our cameras), and at one point the silverback decided to make it clear who was boss. After the hour was up, we set off to a lunch spot where, halfway through our sandwiches, we were somewhat surprised by the reappearance of the same Gorilla group, moving through the forest behind us. The afternoon was spent enjoying the lodge and checking through the morning's photos.

## Day 7

**Friday 26th September**

### Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

This morning we returned to the Park HQ, where we were greeted by a troop of L'Hoest's Monkeys and picked up our guide for a walk in the forest, using a well-trodden trail. Many birds were seen, including Double-collared and Collared Sunbirds, African Blue, African Dusky and African Paradise Flycatchers, Black-necked, Brown-capped and Black-billed Weavers, Black-faced Rufous and Red-faced Woodland Warblers, Double-toothed and Hairy-breasted Barbets, Red-tailed and Common Bulbuls, Elliot's Woodpecker and African Crowned Eagle.

As well as L'Hoest's Monkeys, we saw black and white Guerezas and Red-tailed Monkeys. We had a fleeting glimpse of a Black-fronted Duiker and saw an active Red-legged Sun Squirrel, as well as many beautiful butterflies.

Most of the group spent the afternoon in the lodge, viewing birds from the veranda. I chose to go on an excursion with a couple of local girls from the community, and visited Bwindi Plus Orphanage School. I was shown how coffee is grown and traditionally processed, and how both banana gin and banana beer are made. The gin was very good, but unfortunately no tasting of the beer was allowed, due to concerns over water safety! The walk also provided an opportunity to meet some of the original inhabitants of the Impenetrable Forest, the Bantu. I got a close look at how bananas and vegetables are grown in the area, and visited a local charity supporting women (Ride4AWoman). It was a very enjoyable and informative afternoon, and the local girls were fun to be with.

## Day 8

**Saturday 27th September**

### Drive to Kibale

We had a scenic drive passing through areas of charcoal making, coffee, tea and pineapple plantations, and saw the wonderful locally-grown produce available from street and town markets. The journey also provided some

good bird viewing: Black-headed Heron, Marabou Stork, and wonderful views of a Spectacled Weaver on its nest. We arrived at our lodge during an impressive thunderstorm and torrential rain, which went on for some hours.

## Day 9

**Sunday 28th September**

### Kibale National Park

Fortunately, Sunday morning dawned clear and bright as we set off for the Park HQ and to pick up our guide. Like us, Chimpanzees do not like getting their feet wet, and after the previous day's thunderstorm, we were told that it was likely they would spend longer up in the trees that morning. So, our guide initially took us on a very informative forest walk, where we were shown various medicinal trees (some used in the production of Covidex), and others whose fruit and berries are enjoyed by Chimpanzees and Forest Elephants. No Chimpanzees yet, but we did see Grey-cheeked Mangabey, and Red-tailed and Ashy Red (Ugandan) Colobus Monkeys.

We arrived at the Kanyantale Chimpanzee group just as they were beginning to descend from the trees: great timing by our guide. We then had a full hour of photo opportunities before moving back to the Park HQ for the obligatory certificate ceremony.

After lunch, we set off for a walk in the community-run Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary, mainly in pursuit of good views of turacos. We were successful with good views of both Ross's and Great Turacos, Woodland Kingfisher, and more Ashy Red Colobuses, Red-tailed Monkeys and Grey-cheeked Mangabeys.

## Day 10

**Monday 29th September**

### Drive to Murchison Falls

We had another very scenic drive up into low cloud, past mile upon mile of tea estates. Yet again, there was much to be seen from our vehicle along the roadside, including many Olive Baboon groups enjoying the dry and warm tarmac first thing in the morning, and Red-tailed Monkeys crossing from one side of the road to the other for breakfast. As for birds, we saw Dusky Tit, waxbills, hornbills, Lizard Buzzard, Ross's Turaco and others.

We were greeted at the entrance to the Park by Guerezas and many Olive Baboons. The Falls themselves were spectacular and took our breath away. They were quite incredible, and by some measures the most powerful waterfall on the planet. The falls were very difficult to view close up without getting soaked. Most of us did! After arriving at our lodge, we noticed a pair of Palm Nut Vultures were nesting in a tree overlooking the swimming pool.

## Day 11

**Tuesday 30th September**

### Murchison Falls NP

We set off early for a game drive, sharing a view of the sunrise over grassland alongside some Jackson's Hartebeests. We went on to have good views of Rothschild's Giraffe, Cape Buffalo, Kob, Hippo, Waterbuck, Elephant, Warthog and of course the very cute Oribi.

Bird sightings were excellent, and included many weavers (Little, Village, Grey and Speckle-fronted), Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu; Griffon and Palm Nut Vultures, Bateleur, Martial and Long-crested Eagles, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Grey-backed Fiscal, Northern Red Bishop, and Abyssinian Ground and African Grey Hornbills.

The afternoon was spent on the River Nile, where we had our best Elephant sightings of the trip. They shared top afternoon billing with close views of Red-throated Bee-eaters nesting in holes in the cliffs. Other birds and animals seen included cormorants, African Fish Eagle, White-faced Whistling Duck, Yellow-billed Stork, Pied and Malachite Kingfishers, African Skimmer and Goliath Heron. We also saw Waterbuck, Warthog and the eyes of the occasional Nile Crocodile, as they surfaced to take a look at us.

## Day 12

Wednesday 1st October

### Murchison Falls NP

We had another early morning start, and our specific goal was a big cat or two! The weather was overcast and the grass was unusually high in this part of the park this year, so our luck would need to be in.

Gerald followed various leads from other guides, and finally we came to a Leopard resting in a tree. While we were enjoying the Leopard, there was much excitement in other nearby safari vehicles, directed towards us. Underneath our vehicle was a magnificent Gaboon Viper; it soon moved way at a steady pace. Eventually the Leopard did the same: it jumped down from the tree into the long grass and disappeared.

In addition to birds and mammals already mentioned, we had lovely views of Patas Monkey, Black-bellied Bustard, Heuglin's Spurfowl and Dark Chanting Goshawk.

The afternoon was spent around the lodge, enjoying the pool and scanning for more wildlife from our balconies. An early dinner was followed by a night game drive, during which we saw a young Puff Adder, Scrub Hare, many nightjars in the road, Egyptian Mongoose, Spotted Hyena, a genet and Verreaux's Eagle-Owl.

## Day 13

Thursday 2nd October

### Return to Entebbe and Botanical Gardens

Our drive back to Entebbe was not without excitement: the Olive Baboons in the park seem to like playing 'dare' with passing vehicles, and are reluctant to leave the centre of the road until the last possible second. Fortunately, Ugandan drivers are well used to this game. Before leaving the park, we came across a female Elephant enjoying a breakfast from the roadside. She did not want us to pass, and performed a mock charge. Fortunately, there was another safari vehicle close by, and we paired up to pass the Elephant in formation. She moved off into the bush with one last wave of her trunk.

On arrival at Friends2GuestHouse, a late lunch was enjoyed by Lake Victoria, which was followed by an afternoon walk around the Botanical Gardens. The gardens produced many interesting trees, as well as birds and animals: pelicans, Ross's Turaco, Broad-billed Roller, African Harrier-Hawk, Bat Hawk, African Grey Parrot, Tambourine Dove, weavers, a Woodland Kingfisher going in and out of a nest hole, Eastern Plantain-eaters and Guerezas.

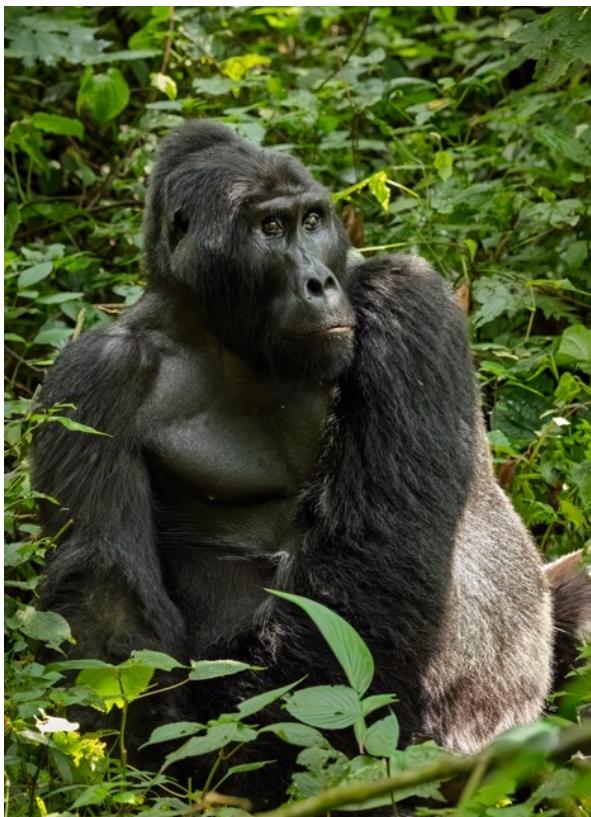
All too soon, it was time to return to the guest house, finish our packing, and head off at various intervals to the airport for our different return trips, with many happy memories stowed away.

## Day 14

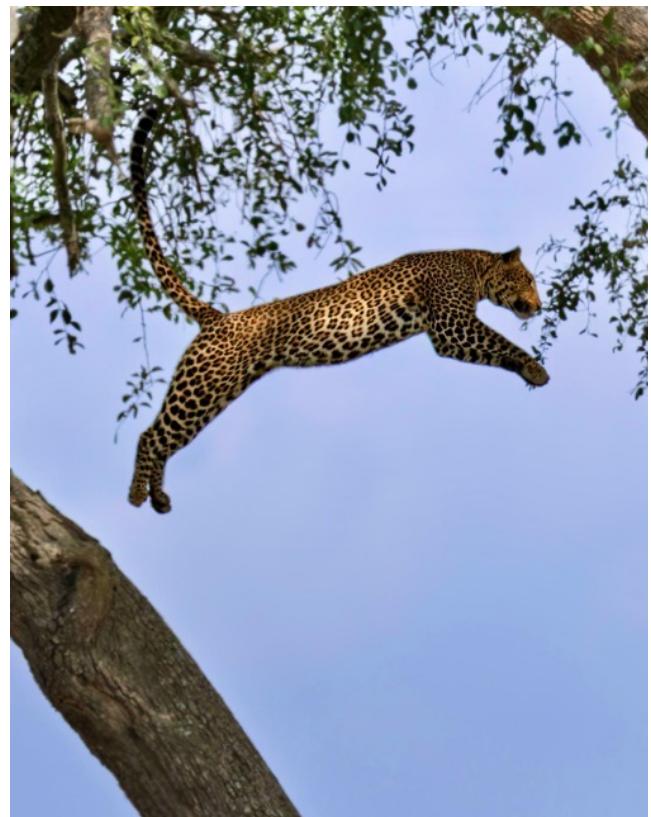
Friday 3rd October

Return home

Our flight from Entebbe, via Nairobi, landed in London in the morning, where we said our final goodbyes.



Gorilla by Mike Amin



Leopard by Mike Amin



Shoebill by Mike Amin



Gorilla chilling by Sarah Greg

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