



## TRIP REPORT

### UGANDA BIRDING & WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY TOUR

15-29 AUGUST 2022

by Steve Braine

Please visit our website to view the image gallery for this trip: <https://thenaturalistcollection.com/more/trip-reports/trip-report-uganda-2022/>

**Participants:** Charles, Colleen, Arno, Christine, Adri and tour leader Steve Braine

We all landed at Entebbe Airport long before sunrise on the morning of the 15 of August and were transferred to the Airport Guesthouse. A few birds and animals are mentioned and a series of pictures to remember the trip by.

The following day to day account of our travels and some of the birds and mammals seen while in Uganda is given below:

#### **Day 1:**

After catching up on a few hours of sleep at the Airport Guesthouse we all met for breakfast. The rest of the morning we had a relaxed time birding in the guesthouse gardens. Several species were new to the group and the first bird photographed by all was the Eastern Plantain Eater. Many more were to be seen throughout the tour. A passing Bat Hawk was also seen being mobbed by Pied Crows. Several other raptor species were observed flying overhead, Red-chested Sunbird (which also had a nest in the garden) and African Thrush were photographed.

In the early afternoon Crammy came to meet us all, and also introduced us to Mathew who would be accompanying us on the trip. He then took us to the bank to exchange and draw some Ugandan Shillings and from there headed to the botanical gardens. Although rain seemed imminent, several good birds were seen. The botanical gardens gave good views of Mantled Guereza and Red-tailed Monkey. The birds photographed included Black-and-White Casqued Hornbills, Great Blue Turacos, Green Crombec, Pygmy Kingfisher, Woodland Kingfisher and a few other species. A nice introduction to Uganda birding!

#### **Day 2:**

After an early breakfast we drove along a rather bumpy road to get to Mabamba Swamps where we embarked on a canoe ride in search of the enigmatic Shoebill. Besides getting incredible views and photographs of the Shoebill we also saw Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Chubb's Cisticola, African Marsh Harrier, Yellow-billed Duck and raptors including Osprey, African Fish Eagle and many Yellow-billed Kites. The first Northern Brown-throated Weavers were seen building their nests and several Malachite Kingfishers were photographed from the boat. The Shoebill chick was

photographed and a nearby nesting Long-toed Lapwing had to take second place during the shoot! A single Purple Swamphen was briefly seen and African Jacanas abounded.

Several other species were seen along the drive back including Long-crested, Western Banded and Wahlberg's Eagle. Many Village Weavers were observed and a few other species such as White-throated Bee-eaters, however today the Shoebill stole the show! We returned to Entebbe for lunch and headed back to the botanical gardens in the afternoon. Although the weather was beaoning, we once again managed a few good birds: Spur-winged Lapwing, Black-headed Weavers and Woodland Kingfishers being some of those seen.

### **Day 3:**

Another early departure from Entebbe to try and avoid the Kampala traffic (which may be impossible?) to Murchison Falls. We managed to get out of the hustle and bustle of the city outskirts and stopped for lunch at Kabalenga where we managed to call up a White-crested Turaco, unfortunately it remained shy and elusive and would not pose for photos. A beautiful white male morph of the African Paradise Flycatcher was also seen here the first for most of the group. After lunch we moved on to our next stop on the edge of the Murchison Falls National Park overlooking the Nile.

### **Day 4:**

The morning drive into the park provided us with great wildlife and bird sightings including a lioness, the large and impressive Abyssinian Ground Hornbills, Northern Carmine Bee-eaters, Denham's Bustard, a perched Martial Eagle and Bateleur. After we enjoyed our packed lunches, we then drove to the top of the Murchison Falls. Besides the turbulent and impressive waters, we managed to get good views of Rock Pratincoles above the falls and stunning views of Dark Chanting Goshawk.

On our return drive from the falls, we had another excellent Dark Chanting Goshawk sighting with a huge storm brewing above. Along the way we saw several Uganda Kob, Defassa Waterbuck, Olive Baboons, Tantalus and Patas Monkeys, African Elephant, Buffalo's, Oribi and a single Spotted Hyena.

As we neared the lodge, we found a few Elephant bulls with Piapiacs all over them. We arrived back at the lodge a little before sunset and a few of the birds seen in the gardens were Black-capped Gonolek, Spotted Palm Thrush, Rüppell's Starlings, Grey-backed Fiscals and Meyer's Parrots.

### **Day 5:**

After breakfast we spent an incredible time in the gardens where photographic opportunities were plentiful before driving through the park once again. After encountering numerous Uganda Kob, Oribi and African Buffalo we had more views of Abyssinian Ground Hornbills with many more later that day. Black-headed, Spurwing and African Wattled Lapwings showed well, common species such as Slender-billed and Little Weavers, Northern Grey-headed Sparrows and the lovely Speckle-fronted Weaver (a close relative of the Scaly-feathered Finch (Weaver) from the South). We also saw Little and Northern Carmine Bee-eaters, Grey-hooded Kingfisher and at Delta Point we found Black-headed, Spurwing and African Wattled Lapwings.

### **Day 6:**

We enjoyed another productive morning photographing birds in the gardens before heading back into the park.

We had our lunch at Hippo Pools at the jetty before departing on a two-hour boat cruise, which was great! After the boat trip we returned to the lodge and en-route had many Buffalo's, Uganda Kob, Defassa Waterbuck, Oribi and African Elephants. All in all a great day was had with very good sightings and photographic opportunities.

#### **Day 7:**

We left early on a long drive via Masindi to Fort Portal and then on to Kibale Forest Lodge for the night. We also passed through Hoima where we had an experience of a local wedding ceremony. We eventually arrived at our destination after what felt like a million speed bumps! During dinner Crammy had arranged a cake and sing song for Christine's birthday! After doing our daily checklists and dinner we retired to bed for the early morning Pitta trek the following morning.

#### **Day 8:**

An early morning start for the elusive Green-breasted Pitta had us in the forest at daybreak and it was not long before the excellent guides, Justice, Mathew and Crammy, located the bird. However, with its skulking habits it proved difficult to locate in the dense undergrowth. We were then told to gather on the track and the bird was 'herded' to metres in front of us. Everyone had excellent views and obtained good photographs of this extraordinary rare bird! Elated we all slowly moved back through the forest to where Alex was waiting for us. We decided to walk to the main road and en-route had a few good views of other species including White-throated Prinia and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, before getting back to our accommodations for lunch. Adri went out again in the afternoon to do the Chimp trekking with Justice. She had a phenomenal time with the Chimps and her pictures tell a thousand words.

#### **Day 9:**

After packing up we left Kibale Forest Lodge for the nearby Community Wetland Walk at Bigodi. Several different apes were seen and Ross's Turacos, Great Blue Turacos and several other birds showed well along the route. We then left Kibale and travelled through Fort Portal and through Kasese arriving at Buffalo Safari Lodge where we were greeted by several elephants along the track.

#### **Day 10:**

From the lodge we did an early morning drive into the park and returned later for lunch. In the afternoon we travelled to the Mwe Peninsula and did a two-hour boat trip along the Kazinga Channel. Many Elephants, Buffalo, Defassa Waterbuck as well as Bushbuck were observed and huge numbers of various waterbirds including two rare Heuglin's Gulls (Crammy also spotted a Lesser Crested Tern and although we turned back we were unfortunately unable to relocate it)

#### **Day 11:**

We left Buffalo Safari Lodge and did a quick search for Papyrus Gonolek and although the bird was heard it did not show itself. We then headed off through the park via the Ishasha sector towards Buhoma. Along the route wildlife and birds seen included Uganda Kob, African Buffalo, African Elephant and Nile Bushbuck; Black-rumped Waxbill, Western Banded and Brown Snake Eagles. We arrived at Buhoma, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park, late afternoon.

We did a bit of birding around the camp and after dinner the checklists and then went to bed early for the early morning Gorilla trek. Excitement was running high!!

**Day 12:**

Today was the BIG day where we tracked for approximately four to five hours to find the Gorillas. The Gorillas, when finally found, gave an incredible show and the hour with them sped by at breakneck speed! However, all had a really good experience with these marvellous beasts and many photographs were taken. Arno who had stayed behind did a small trek with the guides to photograph birds and was also extremely lucky to see a few Gorillas along the trail.

The afternoon was spent bird watching and photographing around the gardens and from the deck.

**Day 13:**

We left after breakfast along the Buhoma main trail to do some birding. During lunch a storm was brewing and we no sooner finished our lunch and the heavens opened up. We then proceeded back to the Buhoma Community Camp where we enjoyed hot coffee and some late birding from the decks of our rooms and the main lodge area.

**Day 14:**

An early morning start was necessary for a long drive via the Rwakobo road to Lake Mburo. We stopped briefly for lunch and did a little birding en-route. Brown-chested Lapwing and bee-eaters were photographed along the way as were a few other species including a Mckinnon's Fiscal and Rwenzori Striped Chameleons. We arrived at the park fairly late and saw our first Bare-faced Go-away birds and with a storm brewing we managed to locate a few Brown-chested Lapwings.

**Day 15:**

After breakfast and another birthday cake with sing song arranged by Crammy, we travelled through the park to board the boat trip on Lake Mburo. The cruise was great delivering us with several species of game and birds as well as excellent views of African Finfoot, which stole the show for the morning! Several African Fish Eagles were calling overhead sealing off an incredible trip with great people. After the boat trip we stopped briefly to try and photograph Brown-chested Lapwings. After the stop we headed off towards Entebbe only stopping briefly for a coffee and a photo session at the Equator. We arrived late at Entebbe and booked into Travellers Inn where we completed the checklists before parting our ways. An incredible trip through Uganda with exceptional bird guides Crammy, Mathew and driver Alex had come to an end. Thanks to all for making the trip a roaring success!

A total of 37 mammals, 6 reptiles and 364 bird species were recorded, many more were heard by the guides but not physically seen. Another epic Uganda tour with Crammy and Batis Birding Safaris Namibia. We hope to have many more!