



## UGANDA - TRIP REPORT July 3-26, 2006

By Adrian Binns

### Day 1 / July 3 – Entebbe Botanical Gardens; Mabamba Swamp; Red Chilli Hideaway

After being fleeced at the Entebbe airport money exchange counter (who ever heard of a lower rate for a smaller denomination bill, or for one that was slightly older?), Herbert lead us to our van and we were on our way to breakfast at the Windsor Lake Victoria Hotel. It was just beginning to get light when we arrived but the allure of birds was too great and breakfast had to wait as we looked at African Thrush, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Pied Crow, Hadada Ibis, Ruppell's Long-tailed Starling, a Kammerkop on the water fountain, Yellow White-eye, Northern Masked Weaver and Common Bulbul before we decided it was best to eat while it was still darkish! Following some excellent fruit, cereals and a good old cooked fare next up were Red-eyed Doves, Red-chested Sunbird, Broad-billed Roller, Little Swifts, Lizard Buzzard, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and the first of what would be very common Black Kites. From here it was less than a 10 minute drive before we were at the Botanical Gardens where the target bird was the Orange Weaver. No problem at all as we soon found several feeding amongst Slender-billed Weavers. There were no shortage of Black Kites that were after scraps left over from weekend picnickers; White-throated Bee-eaters; Great Blue Turaco's; huge Black-and-white casqued Hornbills and noisy Eastern Plantain-eaters gave us lots to keep us occupied, and we had our first chance to sort through the sunbirds picking up Scarlet-chested and Bronzed. We caught the briefest glimpse of a White-browed Coucal before it disappeared into dense shrubbery; had a slightly longer look at an African Pied Hornbill and had great views of Klass's and Diederick's Cuckoo, the former parasitizes sunbirds while the later choice hosts are weavers. Two birds that were calling continuously were Winding Cisticola and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird which we soon located. On our way out we paused for a Woodland Kingfisher and Mosque Swallows and came across the common herons and egrets along with the ubiquitous Marabou Stork.

After three quarters of an hour at the gardens we headed west to the Mabamba Swamp stopping frequently along the slow uneven dirt road as everything was new, Angola Swallow, Grey-headed Sparrow, Speckled Mousebird, Shikra, African Harrier Hawk, Striped Kingfishers on the wires and a Red-faced Lovebird that shot across the road. We got out to look for it and came across a second one along with Bronzed Mannikin, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird and a little further on Sooty Chat, Plain-backed Pipit, Lesser Striped Swallow, African Palm Swifts and Grey-rumped Swallows.

By mid morning we were at the swamp with an endless sea of papyrus reeds stretched out before us and the narrowest of channels for the boats to negotiate their way out towards Lake Victoria. Next to the boat launch we saw Fan-tailed Widowbirds, Red-billed Firefinch, Vielliot's Black Weavers and an Orange Weaver putting the finishing touches to its nest. Blue Swallows, unfortunately without their long tails feathers were also seen. We split up into 2 boats and headed into the open waters first paddling along the channels where we had Yellow-backed Weavers, Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Blue-breasted Bee-eaters, Yellow-throated Longclaws and a couple of small groups of Weyn's Weavers fly by. We would come across the brilliant blue and orange Malachite Kingfishers on a number of occasions; a couple of Swamp Flycatchers; and soon had the first of many Squacco Heron's and three Long-toed Plovers. Once out into the wider and more open water African Jacana's were numerous amongst the lettuce, hyacinth and water lilies and Yellow-billed Ducks stayed as close as they could to the vegetation for protection, but from what I am not too sure; a Cape Wagtail; a Black Crake was briefly seen and heard a couple of time, and 4 White-faced Whistling Ducks were found on a bare spit. We came in search of the big one, the 4 foot gray Shoebill with its massive fat bill. Bill spotted him on the far side of the water against the papyrus and we made a bee-line for it, getting extraordinary looks before it took off. We also got to see a Spot-necked Otter breach a few times on the way in.

We took our picnic lunch in the shade a very large tree, close to a great many butterflies favoring the vervain, several Red-tailed Monkeys and Great Blue Turacos bouncing about tree canopy. A Plain-backed Pipit joined us briefly before being frightened by a couple of the local kids that were watching us eat from the safety of a termite hill, obviously eagerly awaiting to be summoned for any hand outs. Little did they know that they were in luck and very much appreciated our generosity.

A quick stop down the road at a papyrus swamp failed to produce a Papyrus Gonolek but we did hear White-winged Warbler and saw Red-chested and Bronzed Sunbird. On the drive we encountered a pair of beautiful Grey Crowned Cranes, a Black-headed Heron and Olive-bellied Sunbird.

By 4pm we had negotiated the outskirts of Kampala and arrived at the Red Chilli Hideaway, a small compound, mainly for those traveling by overland buses, with a few cottages and of course a good number of tents for those travelers. While wondering the small grounds we got great looks at Eastern Plantain-eater, Ross' Turaco, the rare Grey Parrot, Scarlet-breasted Sunbird and Vervet Monkeys and on two occasions had an African Hobby calling as it shot through the neighborhood. Hooded Vulture and immature Palm-nut Vultures were followed by noisy Hadada Ibis to roost.

Just as we were beginning to do our checklist the rolling power cuts that are so common in Uganda got us and for the next 12 hours we would be without electricity. However there was still enough daylight for the checklist and later candles were provided along with paraffin lamps. We went through the bustle of evening traffic to dinner at an Indian restaurant named the Khyber Pass for a pleasant meal.

## **Day 2 / July 4 – Mabira Forest; Jinja -The source of the Nile**

We were on the road by 7am heading west towards Jinja with Long Crested Eagle and Lizard Buzzard seen along the way to breakfast which we had at the Colline Hotel in Mukono. At 9am we had reached the Mabira Forest where we picked up our local guide Ibrahim at the headquarters. As one would expect this was typical forest birding with most of the species seen at mid level all the way to the canopy, "way up there". We began around the headquarters with a Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird calling as we picked up the diminutive tailless Green Crombec; an African Blue-flycatcher; African Thrush and a Little Greenbul bringing nesting material to a nest deep in a tangle.

Our next stop was a mile or so up the main road where we walked the forest trail road, which turned out to be rather busy with a truck going back and forth and numerous motorbikes and bicycles, the most common means of transportation. With a thickening and occasionally threatening cloud cover we encountered many birds. Right off the bat, Rufous Flycatcher Thrush, African Sooty Flycatcher, Olive Sunbird and Green Sunbird, Slender-billed Greenbul, a calling Speckled Tinkerbird which was eventually seen, a male Black Cuckoo-shrike along with a pair of Purple Cuckoo-shrikes; Buff-throated Apalis which we encountered a number of times; a Brown Illadopsis which was one of the few ones we saw close at eye level; Western Black headed Oriole; Yellowbill; Lead-colored Flycatcher; Yellow Longbill; Western Nicator; Grey-headed Negrofinch; a female African Shrike-flycatcher which wags its tail sideways; Tambourine Dove; Little Grey Greenbul; Olive-green Camaroptera though the calling Yellow-browed was only seen as it shot across the road. It took a while but was well worth the looks as we called in a Jameson's Wattle-eye and got to see a male Chestnut Wattle-eye, one of the few birds that is named for the female.

Following a short period of rain we continued on with a Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo that shot across the road and perched for a short while, and several species ranging in size from the diminutive Green-throated Sunbird to the huge Black-and-white Casqued Hornbills, these included Velvet-mantled Drongos; Green Hylia, White-breasted Negrofinch; Purple-backed Starlings and numerous heard only birds such as Red-tailed Bristlebill, Lesser Honeyguide, Scaly-breasted Illadopsis, and Black-billed Turaco.

We had lunch in Jinja, a town which prides itself as being the source of the Nile, or is that the source of Nile beer? Or both? African Openbills, Long-tailed and Great Cormorants along with Little Egrets were quite common. A Speckled Pigeon on the roof tops of our lunch stop was a new trip species and then driving down the hill to the source we had close encounters with Ruppell's Long-tailed Starlings, Woodland Kingfisher, Piapiacs, Northern Puffbacks, Pink-backed Pelicans, Scared Ibis, Cape Wagtails and a incredible number of Pied Kingfishers, dozens and dozens, many of whom were investigating their nest holes on a bank. The return

up the hill was just as successful with dozens of White-throated Bee-eaters, Klass's Cuckoo, Common Wattle-eye, Black-headed Gonolek, Red-chested Sunbird, Winding Cisticola and Bronzed Mannikins.

Dinner was at the Pavement 'sizzles and flames' where the brits had an excellent Indian cuisine and the yanks some mediocre Chinese fare.

### **Day 3 / July 5 – Kampala to Murchinson Falls NP**

Today we had a long drive ahead of us as we were heading north north east towards Murchinson's Falls NP. It took several hours before we reached the acacia savannah, with en-route sightings of Double-toothed Barbets, Purple Herons, Lizard Buzzard, Crowned and Pied Hornbills, Brown Parrots, Collared Sunbirds and Long-crested Eagles with their obvious white wing patches in flight, reminiscent of Caracaras back in the America's. Our first crack at tall grass savannah species was very successful with Vinaceous Doves, Broad-billed Rollers, several weavers including Black-headed, Grosbeak and Compact, Yellow-mantled and Fan-tailed Widowbirds, Marico Sunbird, White-headed Sawwings, Winding Cisticolas, circling Pink-backed Pelicans, African Harrier Hawk, Blue-spotted Wood-doves more often heard than seen and White-browed Coucal, which would turn out to be the dominant coucal of the trip. A White-crested Turaco caught our eye besides the road, but trying to locate it after stopping was another story. Pushing on, African Green Pigeons, both mousebirds, Blue-naped and Speckled, Northern Black Flycatcher, Grey Hornbill and a few more Brown Parrots were spotted. We could hear White-crested Turacos at our roadside lunch stop, but again they failed to show themselves while a Bateleur, Greater Blue-eared Starlings and Western banded Snake Eagle did. The road to Masindi was under construction so we had a great many criss-crossings from one side of the road to the other to negotiate for some 40 kms, all on dirt roads of various dusty conditions. Seeing a large Yellow-winged Bat flying in the midday hours was different and we were able to track it down on its perch. White-headed Barbet, Black Flycatchers, African Harrier Hawk and a Singing Cisticola were on this road, but the sighting of Grey-headed Bush-shrike was more elusive.

Following a brief stop in Masindi, we reached the entrance to Murchinson Falls NP at 3:45 where a tree held about half a dozen African Blue-flycatchers, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird and Red-faced Cisticola. Following a brief rain shower we first had to drive through the Budongo Forest, with windows rolled down due to Tsetse flies. Black-billed Wood-doves were common besides the road along with a few Yellow-fronted Canaries, White-shouldered Tits, Cardinal Woodpecker, Yellow-mantled Widowbird, White-rumped Swifts, Rufous-chested Swallows, Helmeted Guineafowls, and we got our first looks at mammals including Warthogs, troops of Olive Baboons and a Side-striped Ground Squirrel. In the more open areas a Bateleur was overhead, Broad-billed Roller, Black-crowned Tchagra, Baglefecht Weaver, Northern Red Bishop, Red-winged Pytilla, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Scimitarbill, African Paradise Flycatcher, Chin-spotted Batis, more White-shouldered Tits, Common Fiscal and a Rattling Cisticola. As the overcast day was drawing to a close we came across a Gray Kestrel looking for food on the ground, a Senegal Coucal, Black-winged Bishop, White-headed Sawwings, an Egyptian Mongoose crossing the road and several Nile Crocodiles at a shrinking pond which also had 3 Black Crakes, Intermediate Egret and Hadada Ibis. Along the final stretch of road into the Red Chilli Camp we came across African Moustached Warbler, Red-necked Spurfowls and Crested Francolins, Grey-backed Fiscals, Red-checked Cordonbleus, Sooty Chats, Marabous, Angola Swallows, Lesser-striped Swallow, Grey-headed Kingfishers and heard the gorgeous song of the Spotted Morning Thrush sitting in a bush with an active Silverbird getting in some last minute insect hunting before turning in for the night.

### **Day 4 / July 6 – Murchison Falls NP; Boat ride to Murchison Falls**

This morning's dawn chorus consisted of Spotted Morning Thrush, Red-cheeked Cordonbleus and Crested Francolins as we gobbled down an early breakfast in order to catch the 7am ferry across the river. It was a very brief drive to the dock where we watched swarms of Red-billed Quelea's leaving their roosts in the reed beds in flocks ranging in size from hundreds to thousands - quite impressive really, while Yellow-backed Weavers were feeding amongst the trees. The 10 minute ferry ride gave us our first looks at Hippos and on the other side we were greeted by a large troop of Olive Baboons, several Wire-tailed Swallows and the stunning Pin-tailed Whydah.

After dropping off our bags at the Paraa Lodge just minutes away, it was off on a game drive through the western section of the park. We immediately picked up birds; Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Pin-tailed Whydahs, a

perched Hooded Vulture, stunning Red-throated Bee-eaters, Violet-backed Starlings, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Rattling Cisticola and Spot-breasted Barbet all within 200 meters of the lodge. A beautiful though not so common Bushbuck was besides the road and we came across an immature Eastern Chanting Goshawk sitting on a dirt mound. The ever present sound of the African savannah was provided by Ring-necked Doves and we also heard a Croaking Cisticola. Black-crowned Tchagra's, African Paradise Flycatcher, Grey-headed Kingfisher, African Moustached Warbler, Grey-backed Fiscals and Black-headed Gonoleks were all seen in the dry bushy scrub that gave way to Whistling-thorn Acacia and grasslands. Northern Red Bishops and Yellow-mantled Widowbirds along with Oribi's a small antelope, Jackson's Hartebeest and Buffalo were added. Flappet Larks were common in the shorter grass as we came across a few Piapiacs and the gaudy colored Northern Carmine Bee-eater. On the ground the first of many Abyssinian Ground Hornbills were seen, sometimes in groups of over a dozen, our only Hueglin's Francolins of the trip along with Crested Francolin's; Vitteline's Masked Weavers, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Palm-nut Vulture, Swallow-tailed Bee-eaters, Black-winged Bishops, African Mourning Doves, Wattled Lapwings by the dozens and both White-browed and Rufous-crowned Sparrow-Weavers nest building.

One of the most impressive sights we saw was coming around a corner to find Giraffes scattered throughout the landscape in front of us. Over 40 were counted including many young ones as well as a couple of darker ones, these being the oldest. Another astonishing mammalian encounter was with a beautiful male Patas Monkey, with a drooping grimace, that tried to elude us by unsuccessfully trying to hide behind acacias. The birds continued as we neared the Lake Albert shoreline with a Martial Eagle being harassed by a Spur-winged Plover, Bateleurs, Northern Puffback, Grey-crowned Cranes and views of Grey-headed Gulls, White-winged Black Terns, Great and Intermediate Egret and Pink-backed Pelicans. The large marshy area adjacent to the lake held an astonishing 3 Shoebills much to Herbert's surprise and delight. Seeing that many in one field of view prompted a call into the rare birds committee! 3 Elephants were also taking advantage of the cool water by feeding and relaxing. Amongst the Water Hyacinth we saw Long-toed Plovers, Glossy Ibis, Grey and Squacco Herons, Cattle Egrets, African Jacanas, Egyptian Geese and our only Osprey before heading to lunch.

The afternoon was spent relaxing aboard the 40 passenger boat that we took from the ferry landing up the river to Murchinson Falls. Somehow during the 3 hour journey we managed to only get a few rain drops while the eastern side of the river certainly got its fair share of rain storms. Nile Crocodiles, Water Buffalos and Hippo were numerous, most of whom were basking on the bank or wallowing in the shallow waters edge. We worked our way along the northern edge with great views of Pied Kingfishers, African Fish Eagles, Grey Hornbills, Egyptian Geese, Water and Senegal Thick-knees, Comb (or Knob-billed) Ducks, Goliath Heron, Striated Heron, Hadada Ibis, Grey and Purple Heron, African Darters, Yellow-billed Storks, Red-throated Bee-eaters, Saddle-billed Storks, Dark Chanting Goshawk flying over, Sacred Ibis and much to everyone's surprise a pair of White-crowned Lapwings. On the return journey we made a special effort to get closer to document this extremely rare Uganda sighting and found that they had 2 (likely 2 day old) chicks with them - a first for Uganda? As we neared the islands near the neck of the river and our turn around point, swallows were numerous with Angola, Barn and Wire-tailed along with White-rump Swift seen but the skillful navigating of the skipper allowed us to get within feet of several Rock Pranticoles resting on the boulders as the sky darkened around us with streaks of lightening.

Maybe it was due to the earlier storms, but this evenings night drive failed to produce either owls or nightjars though it was not a complete bust we did get to see a couple of Scrub Hares and Ugandan Grass Hares!

## **Day 5 / July 7 – Murchison Falls NP**

We began by heading along some of the same track we did yesterday before bearing off and into a distinctive landscape dominated by *Borasis* palms. The first couple of birds we heard, these being the much sought after White-crested Turaco and the common (at least for here) Crested Francolin, thereafter it was a steady stream of species with Violet-backed Starlings, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Black-headed Weaver, Grey Hornbills, Red-throated Bee-eaters, Speckled Mousebirds, Rufous-crowned Sparrow-Weavers, 3 Black-headed Gonoleks, Grey-headed and Pygmy Kingfisher, White-browed Scrub Robin, Dark and Eastern Chanting Goshawk, Black-crowned Tchagras, Spot-flanked Barbet, Foxy Cisticola, Speckled-fronted Weaver, Black-winged and Northern Red Bishops, Rufous Sparrows that have an infinity for whistling-thorn acacias, Cardinal Woodpecker, Diederik's Cuckoo, Bar-breasted Firefinch, Northern Black and Pale Flycatcher. We came across our first

Spotted Hyena though the look was poor as it was going away from us through the tall grass. A couple of Scimitar-bills were followed by small groups of Red-billed Queleas, a White-headed Barbet, another funny named cisticola, this time a Siffling; 13 Abyssinian Ground Hornbills, Senegal Coucal, Brown Snake-Eagle and Black-and-white Cuckoo before getting out the van to wonder the palms in search of an interesting small raptor. Actually this particular spot was very good for raptors with Little Sparrowhawk, Red-necked Falcon, Wahlberg's Eagle, Ruppell's Griffon Vulture, Bateleur, and a likely Tawny Eagle.

Following lunch we caught the 2pm ferry, though it was a little late, and our goal was to reach the Top of the Falls some 35 kms away. Along the way we made a walking stop around a village for White-rumped Seed-eaters with Yellow-backed Weaver and Cardinal Woodpeckers seen in the surrounding trees. Further along more success with woodpeckers as 3 Nubians were located along with a Brubru, more Black-headed Gonoleks, Chin-spot Batis, Rattling Cisticola and Northern Black Flycatcher. At a small pond with stalking Saddle-billed Storks and basking crocs Erica found a brilliantly camouflaged Flower-eyed Mantis. Continuing on we stopped for a perched Brown Snake-Eagle and African Goshawk and came across our second Black-and-white Cuckoo, but the skies were definitely threatening all around us as we neared our destination. By the time we reached the Top of the Falls our luck had run out and the skies opened up, just as we were getting our first views of the falls, cutting short our visit and rendering our birding useless for the remainder of the afternoon.

### **Day 6 / July 8 – Transfer to Masindi via Bugundu Game Reserve, Escarpment, Budongo Forest Reserve**

Another overcast day! A dead battery on the ferry meant we could have slept in an extra hour but instead we watched the world go around along with a large troop of Olive Baboons, at the ferry car park in the drizzle.

As we left Murchison Falls NP we encountered Crested Francolins and a Dark Chanting Goshawk and once out of the park we were into dry scrub with mostly very short grass for a considerable distance (all morning) coming across Village Indigos, Wattled Starlings, Vinaceous Doves, Vitelline Masked Weavers, Beautiful Sunbird, many Fork-tailed Drongos, Black-headed Gonoleks and Black-crowned Tchagras, Piapiacs, White-browed Coucals, Striped Kingfisher and a good look at a Red-necked Falcon. A stop to stretch the old legs and beat the bushes produced Red-billed Queleas, Black-billed Barbet, Northern Red Bishops, Green-winged Pytilla, a pair of Cardinal Woodpeckers, Spotted Morning Thrush, White-browed Robin-Chat, Crested Francolin and White-browed Sparrow-Weaver. Continuing on we had a Lizard Buzzard, Brown-crowned Tchagra and a Red-faced Cisticola before reaching the Bugundu Game Reserve, which just happened to lack any mammals other than a few herds of Angolan Longhorn Cattle. Here the short grass was replaced by tall grass with the escarpment narrowing to a point near Lake Albert, but before having to climb up the escarpment we had Yellow-backed Weaver and a female Golden-backed Weaver nest building, a singing African Moustached Warbler and Long-crested Eagle.

By 12:30 we had settled into our picnic lunch on the Escarpment overlooking the Game Reserve below and Lake Albert in the distance. Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird and numerous White-shouldered Tits were in the trees around us flittering about while a pair of Dark Chanting Goshawks circled over the valley. We were fortunate enough to get great looks at a pair of very rare Cliff Chats. 3 young Crimson-rumped Waxbills were begging for food, a Black-billed Barbet shot into her nest hole cavity and we also had a Northern Puffback, Greater Blue-eared Starling, Grey Hornbill, Striped Kingfisher and both Rattling and Croaking Cisticola.

Before reaching Budongo Forest we made a quick stop in what Herbert liked to call 'the gardens' which were more like manicured weed patches, produced Red-faced and Whistling Cisticola, Black Bishop, Cardinal Quelea and a perched Wahlberg's Eagle.

Once in the Budongo Forest Reserve we walked a stretch of the forest soon picking up a wide assortment of species including Cassin's Hawk-eagle, African Crowned Eagle, Yellow-crested Woodpecker, Yellow-whiskered Greenbul, Red-tailed Bistlebill, Rufous-crowned Eremomela, Superb Sunbird, Olive-green Cameroptera, Ituru Batis and heard Yellow-throated Tinkerbird, Forest Robin, White-spotted Flufftail, Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo, Nathan's Francolin and several Ugandan Woodland Warblers. Though this forest has possibly Uganda's largest concentration of Chimpanzees, the only primates we encountered were Red-tailed Monkeys and Grey-cheeked Mangabeys.

By late afternoon we were working a section of striped forest now under intensive agriculture, walking the road and having inquisitive children come running out the fields to check us out. Here we had a good showing of White-thighed Hornbills, African Pied Hornbill, a Black-shouldered Kite and Long-crested Eagle along with Broad-billed Roller, Vieillot's Black Weaver and Narrow-tailed Starlings. Continuing on before reaching Masindi in a very heavy rain storm, we picked up a couple more Black-shouldered Kites, Senegal Coucal, Lizard Buzzard, a flock of thirty-some Grosbeak Weavers, Purple-headed and Splendid Glossy Starlings

### **Day 7 / July 9 – Budongo Forest; Royal Mile; Busingiro Section**

Once again poor weather greeted us with a steady drizzle accompanying us for our morning on the Royal Mile, a gorgeous stretch of primary forest in Budongo Forest Reserve. From deep in the forest we could hear the guttural growling of colobus monkeys as they acknowledged each other. Blue and Red-tailed Monkeys were the only primates we saw this morning but the birds were numerous. Being densely vegetated on either side of the wide road there were plenty of heard only birds including such sulkers as Fire-crested Alethe, Forest Robin, Blue-throated Robin-Chat, Scaly-breasted and Brown Illadopsis along with Hueglin's Francolins and a Spot-breasted Flufftail. In areas of open canopy Black Sawwings, Angola Swallow and Sabine's Spinetails flew around and White-thighed Hornbills could be seen perched towards the upper limited of the limbs. It took a great deal of searching but we were rewarded with three kingfishers – Chocolate-backed, high up of course, along with African Dwarf and Blue-breasted far more obliging, and at one stage we had all three calling at the same time! The three-noted calls of Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo were heard all along this stretch with an occasional sighting. There was nice assortment of other species including Green Hylia, Blue-throated Brown Sunbird, Yellow-billed Barbet, Western Black-headed Orioles, Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, Chestnut Wattle-eye, Chestnut-crowned Eremomela, Yellow-browed Camaroptera, a pair of African Shrike-flycatchers, Grey-headed Negrofinch, two malimbe species, Red-headed and Crested, a party of 6 Dusky Tits, and a couple of Nathan's Francolin that came out along the edge of the woods to feed. It was greenbul heaven with Little, Toro-olive, White-throated and Red-tailed seen, but could we identify them all? We ended with a Blue-throated Roller doing its marvelous display flight.

By noon the skies brightened up and butterflies took to the wing. By the end of the day we had seen African Joker; Blue, African and Beautiful Monarchs; Golden and Brown Pansies; Friar's, *acraeas* and the stunning Guinea Fowl.

Following lunch we worked a section of sugar cane and agricultural fields, adjacent to the forest finding Pygmy and Woodland Kingfisher; Red-collared Widowbirds, African Moustached Warbler, Compact Weaver, Village Indigo, Red-faced and Whistling Cisticola, Bronze Mannikins, Red-faced Lovebirds, Copper Sunbirds, Marsh Tchagra, Brimstone Canary and an African Crowned Eagle. A Cabanis Bunting was also heard.

By mid afternoon we were in the Busingiro section of Bugondo. We got in over an hour walking along the road through the forest before it began to drizzle once more. Greenbuls once again took center stage with Yellow-whiskered, Little, Toro-olive, Slender-billed and a dozen Spotted seen along the way. Spot-flanked Barbet, Yellow-White-eyes, Ituri Batis, Vieillot's Black Weaver and Black-necked Weaver, Common and Black-crowned Waxbills and the splendid Cardinal Quelea rounded out this session with a very obliging Senegal Coucal.

One last stop along the grasslands before the skies opened up produced Pin-tailed Whydahs, Red-collared Widowbirds, Common Fiscal, Red-billed Firefinch, more Compact and Black-necked Weavers and another African Moustached Warbler, Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike, Striped Kingfisher, and five raptor species, an immature African Crowned Eagle, Long-crested Eagle, Wahlberg's Eagle, Black-shouldered Kite and 2 Red-necked Falcon's.

After dinner, Colin and I stayed up, along with most of the town, to watch the World Cup final, which was stretched to the limited with Italy beating France 5-3 in a penalty shootout, following a 1-1 tie at the conclusion of extra time.

### **Day 8 / July 10 – Transfer to Kibale NP**

African Dusky Flycatcher, Spotted Morning Thrush and Red-eyed Dove greeted us this morning following a few hours of overnight heavy showers. After loading up we headed south west on a long drive for some 200kms

on rough dirt roads through many villages certainly getting a great feel for the landscape and all the colorful people in particular the school kids with a different color uniform for each school – purple, blue, turquoise, pink....the list went grew longer as the drive did; Bicycles with bunches of bananas and others carrying as many as three bags of charcoal on the back; men walking carrying machetes' and others using them to cut the roadside verges. A stop at a Papyrus swamp bed for White-winged Warbler and Papyrus Gonoleks was successful with four of the later seen exceedingly well. Lunch was taken besides another Papyrus swamp with numerous puddling butterflies and Carruther's and Winding Cisticola, Yellow-backed Weaver and Swamp Flycatcher.

Continuing on our way we passed churches of various denominations; brick kilns, and people at water wells filling yellow cans. The landscape continued to be very lush and green and dotted with a yellow profusion of flowers on *Cassia spectabilis* trees, though it was evident that much of the forest had been striped and replaced with agricultural plots, sugar cane, banana and tea plantations in particular as we got nearer to Fort Portal. En route we caught up with Hartlaub's Golden Weaver, 5 beautiful Ross's Turaco's and Slender-billed Greenbuls.

By mid afternoon we had reached the Sebitoli section of Kibale Forest where we proceeded to bird about 300 meters along the main road. Though there seemed to be a continuous stream of traffic the birding was excellent with Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Black-necked Weaver, Red-head Bluebill, Yellow White-eye, Narrow-tailed Starling, Struhlmann's Starling, Purple-headed Starling, Western Nicator, both sexes of Pink-footed Puffbacks, Grey-throated Barbet, Chubb's Cisticola, African Emerald Cuckoo, Yellow Whiskered Bulbul, Green Hylia, Collared Sunbird, Olive-bellied Sunbird, Little Green Sunbird, several Tiny Sunbird's, Grey-crowned and White-breasted Negrofinch's, Lesser Striped Swallow, Grey Apalis, Black-throated Apalis, Grosbeak Weavers, Sooty Flycatchers, White-throated Prinia's, Yellow-spotted Barbet, Hairy-breasted Barbet (isn't that a wonderful name?), African Shrike Flycatcher, Honeyguide Greenbul, Cameroon Sombre Greenbul, and a male Ludgen's Bush-shrike all seen well. The star of this patch was undoubtedly the male Woodhouse Antpecker that showed well for most of the group before vanishing into the under growth. A close second was the Olive Long-tailed Cuckoo that responded to Herbert's calls and came in for a great and prolonged view. The Blue-throated Roller calling and displaying with downward wings on the glide made it a wonderful trifecta.

Red-headed Malimbe was only briefly seen by one or two of us while Black-faced Rufous Warbler and Black-billed Turaco were only heard. Driving back we had half a dozen White-naped Pigeons, Crowned Hornbill's, Great Blue Turaco, Ayer's Hawk-eagle and of all things in this habitat an African Marsh Harrier. Amongst the mammals, Red Colobus Monkey, Giant Squirrel and Red-footed Squirrel were added. One final stop at a bridge, lead to African Black Ducks being quickly flushed and a cooperative pair of Cassin's Grey Flycatchers.

We were all anticipating our visit to Fort Portal. It is described on my map as a "Nice Town" and in the guide book as "probably the finest of Uganda's towns". Well beauty must have been in the eye of the beholder, as none of us could see what they were talking about...it was no better or worse than any town we had come across to date.

## **Day 9 / July 11 – Kibale NP**

We reached the Kibale Forest following a prolonged search for bottled water in Fort Portal and a stop along the road for our primary target the Black Bee-eater. After calling in a Narina Trogon and seeing 4 or 5 Grey Parrots along with Grey Apalis, Dusky Flycatcher, Green Crombec, Honeyguide Greenbuls, Hairy-chested and Yellow-throated Barbet and Yellow-throated Tinkerbird we located 4 Black Bee-eaters at the top of a dead snag. A little further along the road we came across Green, Purple-banded, Scarlet-chested and Collared Sunbirds as well as White-thighed Hornbills, African Green Pigeon and Speckled Tinkerbird. Scanning across a wooded valley we soon found a Wahlberg's Eagle and several Afep Pigeons perched on snags as well as Grosbeak Weavers and Violet-backed Starlings. Another stop was at a bridge that crossed a good flowing stream with a pair of cooperative Cassin's Grey Flycatchers and Mountain Wagtail in the stream. The surrounding vegetation had Grey-headed Negrofinch, Grey Parrot, another Ayer's Hawk-eagle, Slender-billed Greenbul and 2 Mottled Spinetails. Deep in the undergrowth along the far bank a White-spotted Flufftail was spotted. Once it ventured across an opening we all got the looks we wanted.

By late morning we had arrived at the campground compound and spent a little while sorting out the bandas (basic accommodation) and tree houses. Colin and I had a long walk into the forest, close to 800 meters to reach our tree house set 30 feet off the ground and overlooking the dry marsh. Though the setting was nice, the monkeys had made mince-meat of the toilet paper which was scattered all around the tree house, and the facilities were next to non-existent. The butterflies along this particular section were superb with Blue Mother of Pearl, various *Charaxes*'s, Guinea Fowl and diminutive orange and black Forest Zulus. Around the campground we came across Crowned Hornbills, Little Greenbuls and African Pied Wagtail. With some re-arranging we eventually settled into a banda. In the campground, Moses and his mobile catering unit, set up an elaborate kitchen and produced some excellent food.

Kibale is home to an amazing 13 primate species and prides itself as being the "Home of the Chimpanzees". We spent 3 hours this afternoon with our Kibale chimp tracker Johnson walking at a very slow pace in search of these wonderful primates. It was not long before we would come across Olive Baboons, Vervet, Red-tailed, Gray-cheeked Mangabeys, Black & White Colobus and Red Colobus Monkeys. While the birding was slow we did see 2 Yellow-spotted Barbets, Crested Guineafowls and a couple of Rufous-bellied Flycatchers while hearing Red-chested Cuckoo, Tambourine Dove, Afep Pigeon and Narina Trogon.

It was not long before we found evidence of chimps with frequent 'turd alerts' along the paths as well as hearing them vocalizing amongst each other as they moved through the forest. There are some 1400 chimps in Kibale split amongst many troops which average about 100 in a size. Each troop covers about 5 square kilometers and there are 3 troops that are habituated to humans – 2 for researchers and this troop which caters to the growing tourist industry. We soon came across a small group feeding in the canopy consisting of 2 parents and various aged offspring including a baby which huge ears. When feeding chimps split up into small groups and are silent so as to not alert other members of the troop to their food source, in this case a fruiting tree. We also saw evidence of a Red Colobus Monkey they had killed the day before. The group is now killing these monkeys (for protein) on a regular basis and recently Johnson had known about 4 kills in a morning which is raising concern for the future of these smaller primates.

Following an excellent dinner that Moses had prepared the male party headed out for a night drive along the main road. We began with an African Palm Civet near the headquarters and the outing produced a Severline Genet as well as 4 calling African Wood Owls with one being seen very well.

## **Day 10 / July 12 – Kibale NP**

We spent today walking the forest trails covering about 6 miles in all and breaking it up with another of Moses' wonderful meals at the campground. Silva a local butterfly enthusiast joined us along with his net, but this was never unraveled, as he liked the idea of us photographing them so that he could then identify them. Many were seen including a wonderful selection puddling at a muddy crossing and a great many were left unidentified. Amongst those we were able to identify Bush Browns, Neave's Judy, *Bicyclus mandanes* and *mollitia*, *Catuna*, several Swallowtails including Emperor, Lormier's and Zoroaster's, Green-veined Charaxes, Demon Charaxes, Dark-blue Pansy, False Fritillary, and the brilliant Hobart's Red Glider.

The birding was hard with species few and far between. The trails were excellent and we covered a considerable amount of ground up and down hills as well as along flatter ground. Though the understory was thick in most places it at least afforded us a chance to look for pittas that blend in so well with the leaf litter and ground vegetation. The morning began overcast and it was not until 10:30 that the sun appeared to cast rays of light on the forest floor. Little Greenbuls and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbirds were common and many species were heard included Brown Illadopsis, Yellow-throated Tinkerbird, Yellow-billed Barbet, Yellow-breasted Barbet, Western Nicator, Emerald Cuckoo, Red-chested Cuckoo, Black-billed Turaco, Forest Robin, Blue-breasted Kingfisher, Western Black-headed Oriole, Chestnut Wattle-eye and Red-tailed Bristlebill. We did manage to coax out a Scaly-breasted Illadopsis and got looks at Green-throated Sunbird, Blue-throated Sunbird and Red-capped Robin Chat; a dueting pair of Grey-throated Flycatchers; a Narina Trogon, Velvet-mantled Drongos, White-tailed Ant-thrush, Red-chested Cuckoo, Uganda Woodland Warbler, Green Hylia and Vieillot's Black Weaver.

During our walk we would occasionally hear chimps on the move, and did track down one noisy troop which gave us a wonderful experience with 2 on the trail 20 meters in front of us and about 9 others crossing the trail.

Once we had lost sight of them, we turned back only to find ourselves walking parallel with two of them about 20 meters away, and if it was only for some 30 seconds or so, walking along side our closest “relatives” was a magical experience.

During our lunch break Bill pulled out a Levalliant’s Cuckoo, which by all accounts was a tremendous find especially as it should not have been here at this time of year. The highlight of the afternoon trek into the forest was undoubtedly a Red-chested Owlet being mobbed by male and female Chestnut Wattle-eyes but we did come across other goodies such as White-thighed and Black & White Casqued Hornbills, Olive-bellied, Olive and Collared Sunbird, Tambourine Dove, Gray-crowned Negrofinch, a pair of Western Black-headed Oriole, Dusky Tits, Buff-throated Apalis, Velvet-mantled Drongos’, Speckled Tinkerbird, Hairy-chested and Gray-throated Barbets, Afep Pigeon and looking up through a canopy opening Mottled and Sabine’s Spinetails. Amongst the heard birds the ubiquitous Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird and 3 noted call of the Red-chested Cuckoo, Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo, Yellowbill, White-tailed Ant-thrush and Yellow-spotted Barbet.

Moses had prepared another wonderful dinner which we ate out in the open campground area. Just as we were waiting for desert we could hear the distant voices of singing gradually getting closer and soon could make out that they were singing Happy Birthday. Turning around we could see a line of young locals walking up the road towards us. As they reached the patio Moses joined the front of the queue with a cake. By now Naomi had realized that this was her birthday and no one else in the campground! 15 locals made up the ensemble known as the Jungle Rabbits and for an hour they entertained us with songs and dances of various tales of love and woe. They were excellent as was the cake that Moses somehow cooked on the barbeque.

### **Day 11 / July 13 – Kibale NP; Bigodi Wetland**

For the first time we had a sunny start to the morning and expectations on the trail were high, with pittas being the sought after target. For 3 ½ hours we hiked some 4 miles in vain with Harriet our local guide doing a lot of the ‘dog work’ off the trail. Was it too dry in here for them? Had they moved on? Or are they just that elusive? Little was seen with the exception of Chestnut Wattle-eye, Black-necked Weaver, Brown Illadopsis, Green Hylia and a Green-throated Sunbird poking its head out of its long penduline nest that looked just like a mixture of leaves and cobwebs, but many were heard including 4 White-throated Greenbuls, Blue-breasted Kingfisher, Red-tailed Ant-thrush, Western Black-headed Oriole, Red-chested Cuckoo, Tambourine Dove, Black & White Casqued Hornbill, Honeyguide Greenbul, Narina Trogon, Yellow-spotted and Yellow-billed Barbet, Red-tailed Bristlebill and Western Nicator.

By contrast from this mornings walk the afternoon’s walk at Bigodi Wetland, about 5km from the Campground, was full of birds. We did a 3km loop along a riparian edge and through agricultural and scrub slopes. Juvenile and adult Diederik’s Cuckoo’s, Speckled Tinkerbird, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher, Bronzed Mannikins, White-chinned Prinias, Scarlet Sunbird, Green-headed Sunbird and a Green-throated Sunbird peering out her nest hole, Tambourine Dove, Grey-crowned Negrofinch, African Blue Flycatcher, Violet-backed Starlings, Black-necked Weavers, White-headed Sawwings, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Speckled Mousebird, Red-billed Firefinch, Grey Parrots, Brown Snake Eagle circling above us, Yellow-fronted Canary and a displaying Brimstone Canary, African Yellow White-eyes, Red-faced Cisticola; a Grosbeak Weaver building its extraordinary elaborate and delicate nest with such a huge bill; a group of 8 White-throated Bee-eaters; a single Little Swift and Common (Brown-throated) Wattle-eye was all seen. Red-headed Bluebill once again was only seen by Herbert and Toro-olive Greenbul was heard. Two small very similar looking squirrels were seen these being Boehm’s and Alexander Dwarf and once we reached the Papyrus Swamp we found that the boardwalk, usually surrounded by water, was bone dry. The only birds we came across here were White-breasted Negrofinch and a Papyrus Gonolek which was heard calling once.

Black-crowned Waxbills, Black and White Shrike Flycatcher, a confiding Dusky-blue Flycatcher, the stunning Yellow-billed Barbet and some 30 plus Alpine Swifts that had come down from the Rwenzori Mountain to feed were all new for the trip. The most extraordinary experience may have been when we called in two Snow-capped Robin Chats, which we were looking at below us in an open muddy area, and having a Forest Cobra about 5 feet in length come towards us and when it realized that we were there, it climbed up dense branches at one stage stopping eye to eye 5 feet from Erica before continuing on its way gracefully back into the woods.

Returning to Fort Portal we encountered several Cinnamon-breasted Bee-eaters besides the road and for the first time on the trip saw the sun go down behind the Rwenzori's, known locally as the "Mountains of the Moon".

### **Day 12 / July 14 – Transfer to Semulike NP**

Today we transferred from Fort Portal to Semulike National Park having to go up and over the Rwenzori Mountains and down the other side into the Congo Basin, where at one point we could see the Semuliki River a short distance away with the Congo on the other side. It was a dirt road, mainly in poor condition for the whole 3 hour plus with stops / 70 km drive.

While loading up our bags Mosque Swallows lined the telegraph wires along with a few Bagefecht Weavers and a Grey-headed Kingfisher. A couple of Bronzed Sunbirds also we seen perched on the compound fence. As soon as we filled up with diesel, got a tire leak mended, bottled water, phone card and paper we were off! We continued on until we began the ascent up the Rwenzori's stopping for Rock Martins, African Stonechat, and Variable Sunbird and passing by Northern Black Flycatchers, Zitting Cisticola and a Pygmy Kingfisher. A second stop produced a Cardinal Woodpecker, a calling Whistling Cisticola from the top of a tree, Black-billed Barbet, African Moustached Warbler and Green-headed Sunbirds. Our next stop found a tree alive with White-shouldered Tits; Purple banded Sunbird, Black Bishop, Black-headed Weaver and a couple of Grey-backed Cameroptera's. By 10am we were dropping down towards the Congo basin again making several stops which produced Lesser-striped Swallow, White-rumped Swallow, Brown-crowned Tchagra and Western Citril the western race of African, as well as the first of what would be many Red-billed Dwarf Hornbills that we would hear for the remainder of the day but not see! Colin caught up with the Grey-backed Cameroptera, we had a Red-faced Cisticola and we were able to call in an amazing total of 8 Leafloves!

We took our picnic lunch in the park headquarters car park with a stunning Blue-headed Agama basking at the base of a tree, Palm Nut Vultures circled overhead and Olive Baboons were calling a short distance away. Monkeys remained numerous during our afternoon walks with sightings of Grey-cheeked Mangabey, Black and White Colobus and Red-tailed Monkeys.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent walking two trails, each for a couple of hours, and about 10 km apart from one another. Again, as with our walks along the forest trails at Kibale, we found the birding to be tough-going with few species seen in the understory and a great many in the upper reaches of the canopy. Was this the time of day? Was it the wrong season? Could we blame El Nino? It is hard to believe considering that so many species inhabit these forests, but where are they? Anyway we did manage on the first walk through the shaded though humid forest from the Sembaya gate to the Hot Springs to get our best looks at a Green Crombec and 3 Icterine Greenbuls along with Little Greenbuls, Rufous Flycatcher Thrush and Olive Sunbird. The springs yielded a pair of Spur-winged Plovers and Common Sandpipers while back in the forest ants on the march meant that a Fire-crested Alethe and Red-tailed Antthrush were about. A woodpecker that we could not quite get to grips with turned out to be Tullberg's. Looking high in the canopy we worked out the differences between pieces of Great Blue Turaco and Piping Hornbills tails!

On the way to Kasitu, our next stop, we stopped for Little Bee-eaters, a Grosbeak Weaver, African Pied Hornbills and passed a village where a pygmy tribe live, though they looked taller than any of us expected. At Kasitu we were warmly greeted by a throng of children before heading into the forest. A Western Bronzed-naped Pigeon was heard calling as was a Black-casqued Hornbill but neither showed. We did have a little better luck, after nearly giving up, with a Red-rumped Tinkerbird. Along the trail we could see birds moving across but by the time we caught up to them we could only locate Xavier's Greenbuls, Western Nicator and a Rufous Flycatcher Thrush. Surely there were other species? We did a good look at a female African Shrike Flycatcher wagging her tail from side to side.

From here it was a half hour drive to our hotel in Bundibugyo with one stop for a Superb Glossy Starling.

### **Day 13 / July 15 – Semuliki NP: Kasitu Trail; Transfer to Fort Portal**

Following a noisy evening and night the skies opened up as we were awakening. We headed back to the Kasitu Trail where the rain managed to avoid this part of the forest basin. For the remainder of the morning

and early part of the afternoon we covered some 5 miles of the trails through the forest with a couple of breaks in open areas on our way to the ox-bow and back. We were joined by an apprentice guide and wildlife guard armed with some Russian assault weapon and a Japanese digi-scooper. Red-billed Dwarf Hornbills were soon located giving us good views while a couple of Black Dwarf Hornbills flew over and a White-crested Hornbill was slightly more cooperative giving us a view of its large size as it slowly crossed the canopy. Along with Piping Hornbill and African Pied we had a 5 hornbill morning! We came across our first Grey-headed Sunbird and by the end of the walk we had great looks at half a dozen of them. We were stumped on a bird in the shadows of vines dangling a large light color leaf from its bill likely to be used as nesting material. Once it came out and moved about it was identified as a Chestnut-breasted Negrofinch. Though the sighting was brief, our Japanese digi-scoping companion spotted an African Piculet, the smallest of the lot at 3" on a snag, but trying to relocate it after it flew was a whole other story. Western Bronzed-naped Pigeons could be seen flying over the canopy and at one stage a group of 7 headed away from us. A Brown-chested Alethe was pretty elusive in the underbrush and three new species were briefly heard, a Yellow-throated Nicator, Brown-eared Woodpecker and White-bellied Kingfisher.

Several Tiny Sunbirds were seen well and the trail produced Honeyguide Greenbul, Red-tailed Greenbuls, Icterine Greenbuls, Xavier's Greenbul, Rufous Flycatcher Thrush, Speckled Tinkerbird, many Grosbeak Weavers and Violet-backed Starlings, African palm Swifts, Green Sunbirds, Green Hylia, Hairy-breasted Barbet, Western Nicator, Chestnut Wattled-eye, Long crested Eagle, African Harrier Hawk, Dwarf Kingfisher, African Green Pigeons, Palm Nut Vulture and Great Blue Turaco along with a continuous chorus of Little Greenbuls.

Heard only species included Brown Illadopsis, Red-rumped Tinkerbird, Olive-green Cameroptera, Forest Robin and Blue-throated Sunbird. In all the first several hours were very productive while by late morning the forest became quieter and remainder of the walk was slower.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent working our way back to Fort Portal through the lovely Rwenzori's. Raptors were evident with Long-crested Eagle, African Harrier-hawk, Brown Snake Eagle and Cassin's Snake Eagle seen very well along with three dozen or so Black Kites and a Bateleur. Amongst the passerines, Speckled Mousebird, a pair of Northern Black Flycatchers, Whistling and Red-faced Cisticola, Red-collared Widowbirds and a Pygmy Kingfisher.

#### **Day 14 / July 16 – Kihingami Wetland; Queen Elizabeth NP**

Engine trouble was the reason that we got for Herbert's late arrival this arrival. One benefit was that we got to study the sunbirds on the bottlebrush tree in the gardens which included Variable, Olive-bellied, Bronzed, Scarlet-breasted and Regal while a Lizard Buzzard roamed the grounds in search of breakfast.

Though the mornings birding got started a few hours late we explored the tea plantations and second growth forest at the Kihingami Wetland through to lunch time. We got our closest looks at a Grey-throated Barbet and were able to call in 2 Grey-winged Robin Chats for brief looks as well as Cabanis's and Joyfull Bulbuls. Speckled-breasted Woodpecker and Brown-eared Woodpecker put in appearances, though the later was ever so brief, and we had better luck with two other new species amongst the *Macalanga* trees (the ones with the giant leaves), Black-faced Rufous Weaver and Masked Apalis especially as there were a pair of the first one and 4 of the second. A stately African Flame tree produced a number of sunbirds including Green-throated, Blue-throated, Olive-bellied, Green-headed as well as a Superb. Other birds seen here included Great Blue Turaco, Black-crowned Waxbills, Crown Hornbills, Buff-throated Apalis, Angola and Lesser Striped Swallow, White-throated Prinia, Green Crombec, Green-backed Cameroptera, Least Honeyguide, Honeyguide Greenbul, Slender-billed, Toro-olive and the ubiquitous Little Greenbul.

Following a 1 ¾ hr journey over what seemed like roads under repair for a great deal of the distance, we finally reached Queen Elizabeth National Park and the Equator. The densely treed savanna immediately began to produce new species with three vultures species together, Ruppell's Griffon, White-backed and White-headed. A Golden-breasted Bunting was found in an acacia tree while along the road we would come across Helmeted Guineafowl, Ruppell's Long-tailed Starlings, Flappet Larks, Northern Black Flycatcher's, Black-crowned Tchagra, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Plain-backed Pipit, White-browed Coucal, and numerous Laughing Doves, Red-necked Spurfowl along with both mousebird species. A Brown-chested Plover was a great find and we soon

added Senegal and Crowned. Stout's Cisticola popped up a few times on the tall grass stems as did a Southern Red Bishop and Holub's Golden Weaver and a whole family of Black-lored Babblers. Sooty Chats, Yellow-fronted Canary's, Red-billed Quelea's, Red-billed and African Firefinch were along the road and we watched a Black-bellied Bustard cross the road and vanish into the grass before it took to the wing.

We reached our spectacular Lodge, set on an escarpment overlooking the Kazinga Channel, just as the sun was setting and we were certainly looking forward to checking it out completely during daylight hours. During and after dinner a troop of local dancers and bongo players from Herbert's town, about an hour away across the river, entertained a gathering crowd with a flavor of Ugandan rhythms, though the evening's entertainment was interrupted when a Hippo ambled onto the short grass dance surface.

### **Day 15 / July 17 – Queen Elizabeth NP**

It was breakfast with Red-chested Sunbirds feeding on the flowers besides the outdoor dining room and Slender-billed Weavers helping themselves to anything that was left on anyone's plate as soon as they got up from the table. Around our rooms many White-browed Robin Chats and Northern Brown Weavers were kept busy with their almost fully fledged broods.

This morning's game drive was very successful with Verreaux Eagle Owl, Arrow-marked Babbler, Madagascar Bee-eater and Grey Capped Warbler all being new. The Golden-breasted Buntings that were distant the day before were today feeding in the open and we came across a Ruppell's Long-tailed Starling with a Smooth-billed Ani type bill – really quite extraordinary, for such a thin long billed bird. Around the Katwe Explosion Crater Grassland Pipit, Bare-faced Go-away Bird, Black-headed Batis, Tropical Boubou, Grey Woodpecker and a family group of Trilling Cisticolas were all new while the most colorful bird was probably the male Green-winged Pytilia. A final stop at the Nymunuka Lake, which means smelly (as in smelly salt) a Lappet-faced Vulture was soaring, which wrapped up all the vulture species for us.

It was back to the lodge for lunch in anticipation of the afternoon's boat ride up the Kazinga channel which separates Lake Edward to the west from Lake George to the east by some 30 kms. The 2 hour boat ride did not disappoint with many mammals along the banks and in the water, including herds of elephants, wallowing buffalos, water buck, hippos and a Giant Forest Hog. A young lion was spotted resting in the lower branches of a Giant Euphorbia tree but the views with really rather poor with the branches and dense shade obscuring most of the beast. Egyptian Goose, Three-banded, Kittlitz and White-fronted Plover, African Spoonbill and a large gathering of Plain Martins added to the species list while two sand spits were gathering areas for numerous Great Cormorants all faced in one direction looking just like a congregation listening intensely to a stately Saddle-billed Stork facing them. Gull-billed and White-winged Terns including one still in full breeding plumage along with Grey-headed Gulls made up another section along with hundreds of Pink-backed Pelicans and on the way back in a Dusky Turtle Dove flew across the channel.

During the late afternoon and early evening hours we headed out to the eastern section of the park with its short grass and herds of Ugandan Kob spread out for as far as the eye could see. With such an abundance of prey we hoped for lions but never did come across any. Birds on the other hand were few and far between but we did come across Grey-crowned Cranes, Rufous-naped Lark, Senegal Thick-knees and Brown Babblers. At the Keseyi Lake, where the locals were farming salt, there was still a little water left which attracted Marabou, Pink-backed Pelicans and 8 Lesser Flamingoes. Just as the sun was setting a Verreaux Eagle Owl could be seen on top of a Euphorbia and there was great excitement as a 7 foot Rock Python crossed the road in front of us. Getting out of the van we had a close encounter with it, well actually Bill did, scaring the hell out of him as it reared its head and returned to the thicket it had just come from. As dusk fell it seemed as though the activity picked up with Black-bellied Bustard and Harlequin Quail seen in flight and exceptional looks at 3 African Crakes and a miniscule Common Buttonquail 6 feet from the vehicle. Many Square-tailed Nightjars were also seen hawking along this particular section of tracks. One final bit of excitement occurred when we came across a Leopard that was about to cross the main road, but unfortunately my torch decided not to work just at this moment and the full experience of this elusive mammal was not fully realized.

### **Day 16 / July 18 – Queen Elizabeth NP; Jacana Safari Lodge; Transfer to Kabale**

We spent the better part of an hour this morning traveling the tracks that lead to the Kazinga channel bridge getting our best looks at a Spotted Hyena and a having a small falcon fly by us that was Red-footed, a very good record. On the other side of the channel we headed south to Jacana Safari Lodge that lies on the banks of Lake Nyamusingire. Two hard to find birds can be seen from here and we got exceptional views of the Shining Blue Kingfisher when one flew back into the tree by the swimming pool and the other being the African Finfoot which Colin located on the far shore with the female preening on a log and the male soon joining her. New for the trip were Little Grebes with a group of about 15 far out on the lake.

We spent the remainder of the morning walking through a section of the Maramagambo Forest which was slightly different from our previous forest walks in that it the understory was very open. We began with Marico Sunbirds, Tambourine Doves, Black-headed Weavers and African Thrushes around the parking area and soon after had a pair of Brown-eared Woodpeckers. Inside the forest few species were yielded with the exception of a Grey-throated Flycatcher calling, a few Vieillot's Black Weavers and a good view at a Brown-chested Alethe with its distinctive behavior of flashing its wings on a couple of occasions. Once we reached the bat cave the noise intensified with an estimated million Egyptian Fruit Bat inhabitants. As one can imagine space was tight and there was a considerable amount of jockeying about and bats flying around trying to get situated. Below a 15 foot Central African Rock Python was slithering around in search of a meal. With the opening of the wide cave mouth allowing enough light we could see very well and many bats were within feet of us. On the way back Red-capped Robin Chat and Fire-crested Alethe showed very well and we had great views down an embankment towards a pool of water of a 4 foot Monitor Lizard with Black & White Colobus Monkeys and a Long-crested Eagle well out of reach above it.

Following lunch the remainder of the afternoon was spent heading south to Kabale with a pause to view Herbert's home village near the crater lake shaped like the outline of Africa. Once beyond the Maramagambo Forest the landscape changed drastically with tea and banana plantation dominating and the further south we went, especially as we began to climb in elevation the landscape was severally denuded of vegetation no doubt courtesy of livestock.

The grounds of our hotel in Kabale had Bronzed Sunbirds, Slaty White-eyed Flycatchers and Streaky Seedeaters.

### **Day 17 / July 19 – Kabale to Bwindi Impenetrable Forest**

As we exited our rooms we were heralded by a Grey Crowned Crane that had roosted on top on a pine tree, this being the only crane species to roost off of the ground. We later found a pair dancing just outside the hotel grounds. Following breakfast we worked our way up in elevation towards Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. The landscape of steep sided hills with every inch striped of forest and now under agricultural plots continued all the way to the forest where the trees created a clear demarcation between forest and farm. A stop along the farms and villages produced Western Citril, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Streaky Seedeaters and Thick-billed Seedeaters, flocks of Yellow-bellied Waxbills with both Black-crowned and Black-headed Waxbills, Black & White Mannikins, Bronzed Sunbird, African Stonechat, White-browed Robin Chat, Common Fiscal and the first of a number of Chubb's Cisticolas. Just before entering the forest we had Brown-backed Bush Robin, Variable Sunbird, Rock Martin and a far better look at a Dusky Turtle Dove than we had on the boat ride.

Once inside the forest we certainly understood why it is named Impenetrable. We worked the dirt road where for 3 ½ hours we finally found the forest birding that we had expected from the beginning of the trip. Not only were a great many birds new we had exceptional looks at them. We began with an Ayer's Hawk Eagle and two Crowned Eagles circling over the valley in front of us, which agitated the Black and White Colobus Monkeys and soon followed with Brown-capped Weaver, Mackinnison's Fiscal, Cardinal Woodpeckers, Chubb's Cisticola and a pair of White-headed Wood-Hoopoes. Montane Oriole was heard at the next stop and several Grey Cuckoo-Shrikes showed themselves. A Chin-spot Batis was amongst vine tangles and Black Sawwings became more and more numerous as the day went on. Mountain Greenbuls, Chestnut Apalis's, a pair of Northern Puffbacks and Red-faced Woodland Warblers came close to the side of the road while a Red-throated Alethe could be heard in the undergrowth but never showed. The first of the Albertine Rift Endemics showed itself, this being the Rwenzori Batis and this was soon followed by Regal Sunbird and a very confiding Dusky Crimsonwing that came of feed on the side of the road. African Hill-Babbler, Yellow-streaked and Yellow-whiskered Bulbul, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird soon followed along with a Cinnamon Bracken Warbler that

eventually was seen by some in the group, but the bird of the day or possibly the trip surely must be the very colorful Doherty's Bush Shrike which we finally located by voice deep inside a tree. Herbert was extremely excited that Handsome Francolin was spotted on the road as that seemed to be our only chance. In fact there were 4 birds that we were able to follow as they continued down the road for a good distance. Black-billed Turaco was once again heard and in the afternoon only one of us got to see it in flight. A Grey-throated Barbet put in an appearance and we had a couple of Mountain Yellow Warblers. A small troop of L'Hoest's Monkeys were new mammals for the trip along with a couple of Caurruther's Squirrels.

By 2 pm we had reached our Guest House where we met up with Moses who had lunch waiting for us. We got settled into our basic digs, and ate besides a warm fire while the clouds rolled up the valley along with a steady drizzle. By 3:30 the rain had abated and we were back on the road in the opposite direction this time.

The afternoon's leisurely jaunt along a busy pedestrian (villagers moving up and down the mountain) path produced Northern Double-collared Sunbird, Willcock's Honeyguide, Grauer's Warbler, Collared Apalis, Olive Pigeons, Mountain Masked Apalis and White-tailed Blue Flycatcher all being new with a supporting cast of Regal Sunbirds, Yellow-billed Turaco, Ludher's Bush-shrike, more Red-faced Woodland Warblers, Brown-crowned Tchagras, African White-eyes, Gray-backed Camaroptera, Black and White Casqued Hornbills, Dusky Flycatcher and Cinnamon-chested Bee-eaters.

The evening was spent warming up besides the fire and reading by candlelight as there was no electric at the Guest House.

### **Day 18 / July 20 – Bwindi Impenetrable Forest - Mubwindi Swamp**

From our base camp at 2350 meters we walked the strenuous 2 ½ miles up and hills and finally down the long steep trail to the level area around the Mudwindi swamp 350 meters below. It took us 3 hours. A number of the species that we located on the way down we had seen yesterday, though for long stretches there seemed to be no activity whatsoever. We did however come across one mixed flock party that consisted of a pair of Bar-tailed Trogons, which were whistled in, Grey Cuckoo-shrike, Montane Orioles, a female Pink-footed Puffback, an Olive Woodpecker as well as several White-headed Wood-hoopoes. After it seemed as if we would never reach the bottom, we did, and we were soon escorted by armed wardens down a narrow trail through the bush to view an active African Green Broadbill nest. It was located under large leaves about 35 feet off the ground, with one of the parents peering out the entrance hole. Within 10 minutes the other parent flew in and we had wonderful views of them perched near the nest and feeding the two youngsters. Throughout this immense forest the group that is monitoring this extremely rare species only knows of two nests!. From here it was more bush-whacking down to the swamp with White-starred Robin heard and Waller Starlings flitting about the canopy and a very cooperative Archer's Robin-Chat. At the swamp we had success with several Grauer's Rush Warblers, Yellow-crowned Canary, a perched Augur Buzzard our first of the trip which showed well in flight as it circled the swamp and a heard only Red-chested Flufftail.

By 1pm we had meet up on the trail with our chef's assistant who had bought our hot lunch down from base camp on his head! Spaghetti bolognaise deep in the forest did the trick, giving us the energy and courage to tackle the gruesome climb. A Cinnamon Bracken Warbler and several Yellow-eyed Black Flycatchers were soon located near the start of our ascent, giving us a total of 13 Albertine Rift Endemics to date. Erica on the way up encountered a Black-fronted Duiker as well as a White-browed Crombec. By 4pm we had all made the trek back and enjoyed a relaxing tea break by the fire waiting for the cloud cover that had rolled in during the afternoon to clear. This enabled us to catch up on some swifts which consisted of many Scarce Swifts, 1 Mottled Spinetail and a single African Black Swift.

### **Day 19 / July 21 – Bwindi Impenetrable NP, the Neck to Buhoma**

A pre dawn walk along the road produced a couple of noisy pairs of Spectacled Galagos (bush-babies) and a Rwenzori Nightjar was active around the guest house.

After packing our bags, loading up the vehicles and saying a last goodbye to our excellent chef Moses, we headed through the National Park and down the valley towards Buhoma about 1000 meters lower in elevation. We stopped a number of times along the way picking up Blue-headed Sunbird and Rwenzori Double-collared

Sunbird along with our best looks at a Tullberg's Woodpecker. Carruther's and Boehm's Squirrels were seen again and we watched an extraordinary encounter between a Boehm's and Ituri Forest Chameleon in which the squirrel looked as if he would take the chameleon but eventually decided to move on. In an area of tall grasses and agricultural plots on a slope we caught a few glimpses of a Dusky Twinspot in flight along with three species of waxbill, Dusky Turtle Dove and a Grassland Pipit. During the course of the day we came across 3 Augur Buzzards, two of which were dark morphs.

By late morning we had reached The Neck a narrow section of forest that had farming on either side of it. For three hours we worked our way along a couple of very productive areas. In the first one we saw Hairy-breasted Barbets, Grey-headed Negrofinch, African Paradise Flycatchers, Black-faced Rufous Warblers, Red-throated Alethe, Narrow-tailed Starling, Green-breasted Sunbird and Cassin's Flycatcher, Shelley's and Red-tailed Greenbills along the fast flowing river. Following lunch at the bridge, the next stop was outstanding. We hardly moved 50 yards at all with Western Bronzed-naped Pigeon, Montane Oriole, African Dusky Flycatcher, Struhlmann's Starling, Little Greenbul, Green Sunbird, African Paradise Flycatcher, Black & White Crested Shrike-Flycatcher, White-chinned Prinia's, Red-chested Cuckoo, Green Crombec, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Dusky Blue Flycatcher, Yellow-spotted Barbet, Variable Sunbird, Red-headed Malimbe, a female Petit's Cuckoo-Shrike, White-breasted Negrofinch all seen very well. Elliot's Woodpecker played hide and seek for us and a Blue-shouldered Robin Chat called for what seemed liked ages without showing itself, but possibly the bird of the trip, the Black Bee-eater, showed its true color in its entire splendor after chasing it for 19 days!

From the forest it was down the hill through the agricultural plots to some open gardens for several stops primarily looking for Red-necked Wryneck which we could not find. We did come across a White-tailed Ant-Thrush crossing the road, Tambourine Doves, Tropical Boubou with its, what else but, tropical call, Common Fiscals, Black-headed Heron, Bronzed and Superb Sunbird as well as good looks at Yellow-throated Greenbul. One final scan of the valley below us produced an African Hobby, sitting in what should have been the Bat Hawk tree, Grey-crowned Cranes, Woolly-necked Storks, Palm Nut Vulture, Bronzed Mannikins, Baglefecht Weavers and a Woodland Kingfisher. By late afternoon we reach the small stretched out village of Buhoma, better known as Gorilla Central. Once assigned our gorilla group, R in this case, we settle into the liberally used word "Luxury" Tented Camp for what would be the first of 3 nights.

## **Day 20 / July 22 – Bwindi Impenetrable NP - Buhoma – Gorilla Trek**

This was the day we had been anticipating – the trek through the Impenetrable Forest for Gorilla's and we were not disappointed at all. Following breakfast we walked the several hundreds meters to the staging area where there were about 25 of us in all, all being split up into 3 groups of 8. We took advantage of a little birding while waiting for the endless paperwork and formalities to run their course, seeing 2 Ross' Turacos, Red-chested Cuckoo, Magpie Mannikin, Black-throated Apalis, and a glimpse of Bocage's Bush-shrike.

Assigned Group R, short for Rushegura the name of the gorilla troop, we each had a porter to carry our belongings which for some was next to nothing. This turned out to be a very wise move. At 8:45 we were on our way with an armed escort in front and in back, a guide, a bushwacker, and our 8 porters! Walking down the main the track we turned uphill, where we paused for a final briefing, before heading into the Impenetrable. On their last census in 2002 there were 326 gorillas in the 331 sq km park with an estimated increase to nearly 400 at present. 13 gorillas make up this particular troop we were tracking and it was soon very evident that we would be creating our own trail. With machetes the two leader men cut a swathe through the forest while we negotiated the slippery vegetated slope one step at a time holding on to our walking sticks in one hand and any vine or small trunk that we could get our hand on. It was steep both on the incline and vertically and we had to negotiate our way up and down several treuous sections with the help of our porters. We came across a clearing where the gorillas had moved down the mountain (having set up their overnight camp a good distance away) in the early morning hours and this helped in leading us towards them. Though we probably did not have to walk any more that 200 meters it took all of half an hour to get there. Of the three groups, we drew the lucky straw, in that we had the closest troop. Our allotted one hour with them went by just like that. We watched them eating, playing, climbing vines and falling back to the ground. 3 youngsters ranging in age from 1 ½ years to 3 ½ years kept us amused while a mother (one of 5 the silverback has) kept an eye on them from 8 feet off the ground. Once they had had enough of an area they moved a short distance away and we followed. At one point one the youngster got curious and came up to me and gently grasped my ankle before retreating. Was she asking me to come and play? 5 minutes later she approached me again and did the same thing. It was a

magical experience. I realized that even at her young age she had tremendous strength. The silverback, Mwirima, was a brute of a primate, muscular and strong and he was always happy eating, moving from one spot to another. In our final 15 minutes we had to observe him he always seemed to be hidden from camera view, but with minutes to go he showed himself which capped this extraordinary experience. Our time went by all too quickly.

The afternoon was spent taking the self-guided walk along the stream trail with local guide Robert. We watched Bronzed Sunbirds coming to their nest to feed their young, caught up with the Bocage's Bush-shrike, Magpie Mannikin, got good views of both Petit's Cuckoo-Shrike as well as Black-billed Weaver but the Many-colored Bush-Shrike dipped into the tangles and would not respond to the tape. Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, Sooty Chat; Toro-olive, Red-tailed, and Little Greenbul; White-browed and Green Crombec; Buff-throated Apalis, White-throated Prinia, Brown-capped Weaver, Dwarf Kingfisher, Grey-backed Camaroptera, African Paradise Flycatchers, Dusky-blue Flycatchers, White-eyed Slaty Flycatchers, Olive-bellied and Green Sunbird, White-breasted and Gray-crowned Negrofinch, Yellow White-eyes and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird rounded out the session before thunder and storms moved in mid afternoon.

### **Day 21 / July 23 – Bwindi Impenetrable NP - Buhoma – Main track**

For the past 10 days they had not seen the sun and it looks as though the rainy season has begun about 3 weeks early. Overnight night we had a drenching rain for an hour or more and again during the morning hours we caught another hours worth before it stopped, only to resume late afternoon.

Robert joined us again and we spent 9 hours walking about 4 miles along the main forest track, hearing our group of gorillas very close to the track. A juvenile African Goshawk was calling non stop, undoubtedly begging for food; Little Grey Greenbuls, White-bellied Robin Chat, Grey-capped Warbler and Black Cuckoo were new species for us while we enjoyed steady birds throughout the morning including Grey-back Camaroptera, Yellow-throated Greenbul, Lugden's Bush-Shrike, 5 Cinnamon-chested Bee-eaters sitting in a row, Green-headed and Green Sunbird, White-chinned Prinias and White-browed Crombec. We would come across several feeding flocks as well, one including Black-necked Weaver, Cameroon-sombre, Red-tailed, Toro-olive, Cabanis, and Shelley's Greenbuls along with White-breasted and Grey-crowned Negrofinchs. Black Bee-eaters perched atop the canopy bare branches were as exquisite as ever and a couple of Grey Parrots flew over. Blue-headed and Olive Sunbird, Olive-green Camaroptera and several Black-faced Rufous Warblers were seen very well and we all eventually got to see the Mountain Illadopsis that was sulking in the undergrowth. Throughout the day we would hear Red-throated Alethes, one of which Colin got to see well on the track, and a couple of other species never showed in spite of being heard, Equatorial Akalata and Short-tailed Warbler, the later somehow eluded us after an hours wait.

After about an hours rain delay the birds continued at a feverish pace, with another greenbul species, this time Ansorge's, the stunning Banded Prinias and very spiffy Many-colored Bush-shrike, which made up for yesterdays vanishing act. Great Blue Turaco, Spot-breasted and Hairy-chested Barbets along with the ubiquitous calling Yellow-rumped Tinkerbirds, 3 Sooty Flycatchers, Dusky Tits, Waller's and Narrow-tailed Starlings, Red-headed Malimbos were all seen near the canopy while a little lower down we came across Pink-footed Puffback, Buff-throated Apalis, Elliot's Woodpecker, Buff-spotted Woodpecker, Bar-tailed Trogon, African Broadbill, African Shrike-Flycatcher, Petit's Cuckoo-shrike, Black Cuckoo-shrike, Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike and Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrike and at eye-level or below a White-bellied Crested Flycatcher, Red-tailed Bristlebill and the fleetest of glimpses at a pair of Woodhouse's Antpeckers.

### **Day 22 / July 24 – Buhoma to Mbarara**

Overnight heavy rain meant that we had to alter our route as the mountain dirt roads were not conducive to our vehicle, therefore depriving us of a final crack at upper elevation species. Our change of plan meant that we would head to Mbarara for the night giving us a shorter drive on our final day to Lake Mburo National Park.

On and off rain and drizzle dogged us throughout the day, but we did manage to get a little birding in stopping at a bridge with an abundance of swifts overhead consisting mainly of White-rumped with a few Little's and Mottled along with Wire-tailed Swallows. An African Harrier-hawk and her offspring were also about as was White-browed Coucal, Yellow-streaked Greenbuls, Holub's Golden Weaver, Black-lored Babbler, Yellow-

throated Longclaw, Cape Wagtails, Tropical Boubou, Grey-crowned Cranes, Splendid Glossy Starlings, Common Fiscal and Olive-bellied Sunbird. A stop along some fields produced a pair of Red-faced Lovebirds, a couple of Yellow Bishops, Brown-backed Scrub Robin and African Green Pigeons. Dark morph Augur Buzzards were seen perched and in flight including one with rather large prey. Another stop produced Ludgen's Bushshrike, African Paradise Flycatchers, Dusky-blue Flycatcher, White-browed Scrub Robins, Chubb's Cisticola and many Speckled Mousebirds.

We reached Mbarara at 2:30pm, checked into our hotel and headed northwards towards Lake Mburo, but we never got there, stopping numerous times at wetlands where we picked up the stunning female Greater Painted-Snipe, Saddle-billed Storks, Yellow-billed Storks, a flyby Rufous-bellied Heron being followed by a Striated Heron, Grassland Pipit, Pied, Woodland and Malachite Kingfisher, Three-banded Plover, Ringed Plover, Little Stint, Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpiper, Comb Duck, Yellow-billed Duck, Wattled Lapwing and Spur-wing Plover, Water Thick-knee, Broad-billed and Lilac-breasted Roller as well as African Fish Eagles. They weren't the only raptors seen along the road, which included Brown Snake-eagle, 3 Black-chested Snake-eagles, Wahlberg's Eagle, Black Kites and Long-crested Eagle.

### **Day 23 / July 25 – Lake Mburo National Park**

No rain – which was a pleasant surprise. On the road into Lake Mburo National Park we came across 2 Brown Parrots, Crested Francolins, several Bare-faced Go-away Birds, White-browed Coucal, Tropical Boubou, Striped Kingfishers, many Ruppell's Long-tailed Starlings, Black-chested Snake-eagle and a very odd plumaged snake-eagle that will likely remain unidentified.

Once in the park, the acacia – giant euphorbia – scrub dominated the savannah, and mammals were a common sight, in particular Warthogs including many with young ones, Olive Baboons, Vervet Monkeys, Bushbuck, Waterbuck, Bush Duiker, Impalas, a few Buffalo, one Topi, a Scrub Hare and dozens of Common Zebra. The avian highlight included 5 Red-faced Barbets and 3 Long-tailed Cisticolas, both of these Lake Mburo specialties and barely making it across the border into Uganda; Emerald-spotted Wood-dove; Ashy Flycatcher; Red-faced Crombec; Buff-bellied Warblers; Yellow-breasted Apalis, this being the subspecies with the black breast spot; Wahlberg's Honeyguide; 7 Brown-chested Lapwings located in the short grass, and a heard only Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike.