

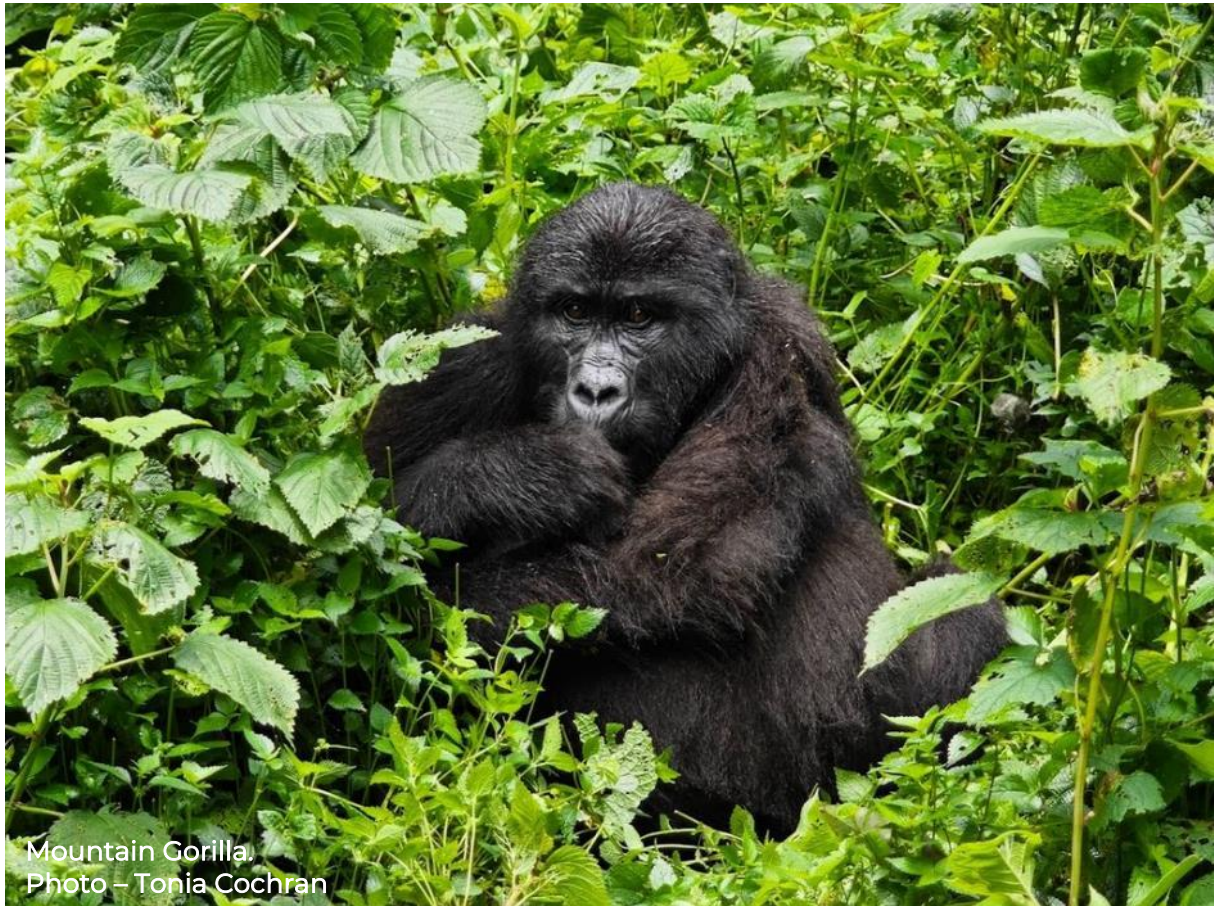


UGANDA

East Africa tour

12 – 27 November 2023

Prepared by Tonia Cochran, Inala Nature Tours on 2 January 2024.



Mountain Gorilla
Photo – Tonia Cochran

Day 1: Sunday 12 November 2023. We were met on our arrival by our local guide and our driver who would be with us for the whole tour. We were transferred to our hotel. After settling into our rooms and exploring the garden for the first birds of the trip (Eastern Plantain-eater, African Openbill, Northern Brown-throated Weaver, White-browed Robin-chat, Green-headed and Scarlet-chested Sunbird), we met for a welcome dinner before heading to bed early in anticipation of our exciting tour ahead.

Day 2: Monday 13 November 2023. After an early breakfast, we headed to Lake Victoria, where we boarded a boat to transfer to our smaller community-owned wooden boats in which we would explore the labyrinth of channels and lagoons along the fringes of the lake for the next two hours. This area is classified as an *Important Bird Area* (IBA) and home to several pairs of Shoebills, Uganda's most famous avian resident. This charismatic monotypic species is certainly amongst the

most sought-after birds in Africa and was our main target for today. A Shoebill had already been sighted by local community members when we arrived, so we wasted no time travelling to the location, at first with the aid of small outboard motors and then manual navigation using poles, as the channels became smaller, and the vegetation became thicker. We were soon rewarded with spectacular views of a Shoebill who seemed more intent on watching the water for fish than noticing us. We had second close views after it flew a short distance to change its fishing location before we left it in peace and moved off to see some other waterbirds (Yellow-billed Duck, Common Moorhen, Red-knobbed Coot, African Swampphen, African Jacana, Black Crake, Reed and White-breasted Cormorant, Squacco, Grey, Black-headed and Purple Herons, and Great Intermediate and Little Egret amongst others). We also had great views of Malachite and Pied Kingfishers and Blue-headed Coucal on and amongst the overhanging reeds, while Long-toed Lapwing and African Pied Wagtail poked around the shore and African Marsh Harrier coursed over the vegetation. We were also extremely lucky to see a pair of courting Spotted-necked Otters, with the male following the female in the water along the shoreline. We then returned to the larger boat for a transfer back to Entebbe and headed to our safari lodge nestled in the heart of a rhino sanctuary. En route we saw our first Marabou Storks with a single Grey Crowned Crane unexpectedly accompanying them in a channel near town, as well as African Openbill and Abdim's Stork, Hamerkop and Yellow-billed Kite which were to be common birds throughout the trip. After welcome drinks and a nice dinner, we were escorted to our rooms by the staff.

Day 3: Tuesday 14 November 2023. National Park. The rhino sanctuary is home to a population of 32 Southern White Rhinoceros and the only place in Uganda where they are now found in the wild. We headed to the headquarters for a briefing by our ranger and donned gumboots (wellingtons) as it had rained recently, and the tracks were wet. We headed out on foot to an area where the rangers had spotted some rhinos and soon found ourselves amongst a group of six individuals, which we watched and tracked at a discreet distance (which meant avoiding getting in their way) for around one hour. Overall, they were peacefully grazing and trying to avoid one of the males who was making a nuisance of himself with a female who had a half-grown calf and marking 'his' territory by squirting sprays of urine at frequent intervals. Around their feet and perched on their backs were several Piapiac, a range-restricted corvid from the tropical equatorial region of central Africa, who were busily collecting flies and other insects disturbed by the huge herbivores. What a privilege to be able to walk with these amazing animals and contribute to their conservation. The commitment of the rangers to protect them from poachers is admirable. The sanctuary is also home to 340 bird species, and we saw our first Spectacled and Blue-naped Mousebirds, African Grey and Black and White Casqued Hornbills, Broad-billed Roller, Greater Blue-eared Starling, Double-toothed and White-headed Barbets, White-browed Coucal and African Green Pigeon here. We also saw our first Pin-tailed Whydah male in breeding plumage with its impossibly long tail and the gorgeous Northern Red Bishop for the first time today. After a substantial lunch at a local roadside café, we then travelled to Murchison Falls National Park. We birded on the way, picking up a variety of raptors including Black-winged Kite, Martial and Wahlberg's Eagles, Grey Kestrel, Shikra and Common Buzzard, and also Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, mostly on the electricity poles and lines or gliding overhead. We stopped at the top of Murchison Falls to view the thunderous quantities of water that were cascading down after higher than average rainfall; some of the group ventured to the viewing platform, coming back soaking wet from the spray. A few Rock Pratincoles clung precariously to the small

amount of exposed rock left amongst the vastness of the water. We then proceeded to our safari lodge in the park via a highly successful late afternoon-early evening game drive en route, seeing our first African Bush Elephant, troops of Olive Baboon, Common Warthog, Vervet and Red-tailed Monkeys, Mantled Guereza (Black and White Colobus), Rothchild's Giraffe, Lelwel Hartebeest, Common Eland, Oribi, African Buffalo and Nile Bushbuck and even a Leopard prowling by the side of the road! We arrived at our lodge in time for a huge buffet dinner and a comfortable overnight stay.

Day 4: Wednesday 15 November 2023. After an early breakfast, we took a morning game drive within the National Park, searching through the lush green grass and finding more of most of the mammals we encountered last night (except Leopard) but adding Patas Monkey and Yellow-winged Bat, Bird sightings this morning included Heuglin's Spurfowl, Senegal Coucal, Levaillant's Cuckoo, Black-headed Lapwing, Tambourine Dove, White-headed, Palm-nut, Ruppell's and Lappet-faced Vulture, Bateleur, Dark and Eastern Chanting Goshawk, Tawny Eagle, Lesser Grey, Red-backed Shrike, Grey-backed Fiscal, Red-throated bee-eater and Yellow-throated Longclaw. Yellow-billed Oxpeckers hitched rides on the African Buffalo and several overwintering species (European Roller, Whinchat and Northern Wheatear) were also present. We also saw several Abyssinian Ground Hornbill—firstly a few males together and then some that had paired up. A rare Savannah Monitor was seen crossing the road. One of the Rothchild's Giraffes we were looking at had a snare around its front ankle, preventing it from walking properly. Our local guide called the rangers who were soon on the scene to investigate (we later found that the animal had been anaesthetised by the park vets and the snare successfully removed). After lunch, we took a boat cruise on the Nile. Here we added Nile Crocodile and Water Monitor as well as several new species of birds for the trip, including Goliath Heron, White-faced Whistling Duck, Wood Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Yellow-billed and Saddle-billed Stork, Giant Kingfisher, African Sacred Ibis, Senegal Thick-knee, Black-crowned Night Heron and Striated Heron, Rattling Winding and Long-tailed Cisticola, Osprey and Western Yellow Wagtail. The steep banks along one section of the river was dotted with the nesting holes of Red-throated Bee-eaters, with hundreds of birds in attendance, flying in and out and clinging to the side of the holes. We went as far as we dared in our boat to the base of Isaac Falls which was also a raging torrent from all the water coming down the river, stopping at and sheltering behind a small island where cormorants and African Darter were nesting and roosting. We returned to our lodge late afternoon and walked around the grounds, picking up Silverbird, Swamp Flycatcher, Spotted Palm Thrush, Sooty Chat and Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, before settling in for another buffet dinner and well-earned rest after a long day.

Day 5: Thursday 16 November 2023. Today was mostly a travel day with our destination today being Masindi. We started the day at the old Parra ferry crossing (the ferry has now been replaced with a bridge over the Murchison River) where we spent some time watching a pair of Pin-tailed Whydahs courting on the grass. We then stopped at an escarpment where we picked up Foxy Cisticola and Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and then passed through a section of Budongo Forest Reserve called the 'Royal Mile' where we saw Chestnut Wattle-eye, Black-crowned Tchagra, Slender-billed and Plain Greenbul, Northern and Red-faced Crombec and Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, Grey Apalis, Green-winged Pytilia, Dusky Babbler, Grey-backed Camaroptera and Rufous-crowned Eremomela. We also heard White-spotted Flufftail but could not see it in the dense undergrowth. Blue Monkeys and Mantled Guereza passed through while we were birding, and a Boehm's Bush

Squirrel scuttled up the trunk of a large tree nearby. We attracted the attention of some local kids who were very keen to have their pictures taken (they had all the moves!) and try our binoculars. They even ran after the bus when we left.

Black-billed wood Dove and Western Banded Snake Eagle, Striped Kingfisher, African Woolly-neck Stork, Crowned and White-thighed Hornbill, Swallow-tailed and White-throated Bee-eater, Black-billed Barbet, Moustached Grass Warbler, Diedrik and Klass's Cuckoos, Northern Black Flycatcher, Western Violet-backed and Beautiful Sunbird, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-weaver, Thick-billed Weaver, Red-billed Firefinch, Yellow-fronted Canary, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and Cardinal Woodpecker were also seen today. Two particular highlights were watching a Lizard Buzzard eating a mouse and seeing a pair of White-thighed Hornbills preening each other in a tree. We arrived at the Masindi Hotel late afternoon. Built in 1923, it has hosted several famous visitors including the famous writer Ernest Hemmingway who stayed there whilst recovering from two plane crashes (at nearby Murchison Falls and Butiaba airstrip), and actors Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn who used it as a base during the filming of 'African Queen'.

Day 6: Friday 17 November 2023. Today we headed towards Kibale Forest National Park. Our first stop was some open fields near Masindi where we saw several Grey Crowned Crane, Marabou Stork and Hadada Ibis and various egrets and herons. We then stopped at Nguse River Camp for a comfort stop which turned into a great birding session, with great views of Bronze Mannikin and Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Green-headed, Red-chested and Bronzy Sunbirds and we watched hundreds of male Village Weavers noisily building nests and performing elaborate displays whilst the females critically examined their handiwork. After a picnic lunch at a roadside café we headed to Fort Portal Wetlands where we had great views of a pair of a male White-collared Oliveback displaying to a female (which involved a lot of bobbing and dancing). Highland Rush Warbler, Yellow-fronted Canary, a group of Speckled Mousebirds hanging upside down in a tight group, and several species of weaver species, including Baglafaecht, Holub's Golden, Northern Brown-throated, Vieillot's Black and Black-headed Weaver were also seen here. Yellow-mantled Widowbird was a highlight and we also saw Angola Swallows for the first time today. We then drove to the Chimpanzee Centre to collect our Chimp passes for tomorrow morning, before arriving at our beautiful lodge nearby late afternoon. After checking in we spent a bit of time exploring the grounds of the lodge, picking up Great Blue and White-crested Turaco and Eastern Plantain-eater, before a splendid dinner in the dining area and settling into our cabins.

Day 7: Saturday 18 November 2023. After a very early breakfast, we travelled the short distance to Kibale National Park where we met our Pitta guide and Chimp guide. We walked silently into the forest along semi-formed tracks in search of the elusive Green-breasted Pitta. This species roosts in trees overnight and we were told that we had to be there by dawn (around 6.30am) to have any chance of seeing it before it disappeared into the depths of the forest floor. We heard a male calling, but it flew behind us and disappeared before anybody in the group saw it. Our second attempt was much more successful, and we had the rare privilege of watching a male 'wing-drum' displaying on a high branch for around 15 minutes, which involves jumping vertically at regular intervals and flicking his wings, emitting a low 'brrrrrt' sound. What an amazing experience! We eventually tore ourselves away to let him get on with it and returned to the centre for our chimpanzee briefing, saying goodbye to our pitta guide. We then headed back out into the forest, and quickly came upon a rather large group of Chimpanzees. Our first encounter was a male Chimp lying asleep on his side with his hands tucked

under his head. He lazily opened his eyes to watch us as we skirted around him. Shortly after we came across more males sitting with their backs against the trunks of the huge trees in the forest. We were told that three males were vying for dominance in the group after having killed the dominant male a few months before. We were quietly watching one of the contenders sitting half asleep on the ground when one of the females started screaming. Becoming instantly alert, the male rose and started to move quickly towards the sound, swinging branches in his haste to get to the action. We all stayed very still while he negotiated around us. Another male seemed to have a slight advantage in the dominance stakes, and we watched him briefly mate with a female who was in season. After viewing a few more Chimps, we birded on the tracks on the way back, getting good views of Blue Malkoha, Brown-eared and Golden-crowned Woodpecker, Western Black-headed Oriole, Purple-headed and Splendid Starlings and Fraser's Rufous Thrush and another prize – Narina Trogon. We also heard an African Emerald Cuckoo, Yellow-billed Barbet, Green Hylia and three species of Tinkerbird (Speckled, Yellow-throated and Yellow-rumped). Other primates we viewed this morning included Olive Baboon, Red-tailed Monkey and Mantled Guereza. We then headed back to the Centre to collect our Chimpanzee certificates before returning to the lodge for a delicious hot lunch. We spent the afternoon birding and relaxing on the grounds, picking up Speckled Mousebird, Black-and-White-Casqued Hornbill, Black-throated Wattle-eye, African Blue Flycatcher, Green White-eye, Scarlet-chested, Bronzy and Olive-bellied Sunbirds, Thick-billed Weaver, Red-billed Firefinch, Yellow-fronted and Brimstone Canary and the gorgeous Black-crowned Waxbill. A brightly coloured Uganda Blue-headed Tree Agama sunbaked on the beautifully manicured hedge, while several African Striped Skinks and young agamas basked on the paths in the sun. We returned to the restaurant for a delicious dinner.

Day 8: Sunday 19 November 2023. This morning we birded around the lodge grounds, seeing Double-toothed Barbet and more views of the gorgeous male African Blue flycatcher, before heading back to the Fort Portal Wetlands for another chance of seeing some different weaver species which we missed on our visit a couple of days prior. We also watched a beautiful male Blue-headed Agama displaying on a nearby rock wall. We then travelled to Queen Elizabeth National Park which is named after the Queen of England who visited it in 1954 and is the second largest national park in Uganda. We arrived at the Queen's Pavilion in the park, where we ate our substantial picnic lunches accompanied by some delicious cappuccinos that were made in the local café, using a coffee press to whisk the milk. We then purchased some crafts and local produce in the giftshop, before heading to our luxurious safari lodge located on a peninsula overlooking the Kazinga Channel within the National Park. After welcome drinks and checking into our rooms, we regrouped for pre-dinner drinks and dinner in the restaurant. Birds we saw today included Senegal Lapwing, African Sacred Ibis, Pink-backed Pelican, White-backed Vulture, Black-chested, Western-banded and Brown Snake Eagle, Long-crested Eagle and Bataleur, a pair of African Fish Eagles, Augur Buzzard, Woodland, Giant and Pied Kingfisher, Little Bee-eater, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Flappet Lark, Lesser Stripe, Angola and Barn Swallows, Red Faced, Short-winged and Chubb's Cisticola, Swamp Flycatcher, White-browed Robin-chat Whinchat, Lesser Masked Weaver and our first views of Southern Red Bishop (replacing the Northern Red Bishop we had previously been seeing).

Day 9: Monday 20 November 2023. While eating breakfast early this morning, we suddenly noticed a group of around 15 Banded Mongoose swarming into the restaurant through an open patio door to divide into several well-organised smaller

groups to scout the floor underneath the tables for food scraps before nonchalantly heading back out the way they came. This appeared to be a daily ritual, judging by their practiced performance and no reaction whatsoever from the waiting staff. We then headed out on a morning game drive along the Channel and Kasenyi tracks of the park. Queen Elizabeth National Park boasts the highest biodiversity of any game reserve in the world and the habitat is comprised of a mix of open savannah, rainforest, dense papyrus swamps, crater lakes and the vast Lake Edward. The National Park is home to almost 100 mammal species and over 600 bird species. Birds we saw this morning included our first Red-necked Spurfowl, White-browed Coucal, a pair of Diederik Cuckoos, African Green Pigeon and Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Rufous-naped, White-tailed land Flappet Lark, African Pipit, Arrow-marked Babbler, Spur-winged, African Wattled and Senegal Lapwing, Crimson-rumped Waxbill and Quailfinch. Many mammals were also seen, including Defassa Waterbuck, African Buffalos sitting in muddy wallows, Uganda Kob and we also saw another Yellow-winged Bat flitting amongst the bushes as we passed by. We returned for a hot lunch at the lodge, before heading out again for an afternoon cruise on the Kazinga Channel. Black Crake, Lesser Flamingo, Water Thick-knee, Black-winged Stilt, Common Ringed, Little Ringed and Kittlitz's Plovers, African Jacana, Little Stint, Common, Marsh and Wood Sandpipers, Common Greenshank, Gull-billed, Whiskered and White-winged Terns, Yellow-billed Stork, African Spoonbill, Squacco Heron and a juvenile Little Bittern were seen on the banks of the channel in addition to flocks of Great White Pelicans, White-breasted Cormorants and Grey-hooded Gulls. We also saw over 300 Pied Kingfishers along the channel banks, including a rare leucistic (almost white) individual. Malachite Kingfisher, Grey Headed and Woodland Kingfisher were also seen today. Red-throated and Blue-cheeked Bee-eater were also seen in the bushes near the water's edge. Many mammals were also seen on the banks including African Bush Elephants, Common Warthog, many Hippopotamus (also in the water) and many more African Buffalo. Several Nile Crocodile and a Nile Monitor were also basking on the banks. Shortly before we finished the cruise, we came across an African Harrier Hawk raiding a Village Weaver nest and eating the chicks one by one- a gruesome sight to finish the day although a real feast for the raptor. We returned to the lodge late afternoon for a short rest before dinner. Chinspot Batis, Black-headed Gonolek, Brown Tchagra, Swamp Flycatcher and Red-chested Sunbird were seen around the grounds and distant views of Giant Forest Hogs on the far channel bank were seen from the lodge veranda.

Day 10. Tuesday 21 November 2023. This morning at breakfast we were hoping for a repeat of the Banded Mongoose invasion of yesterday, only to find the patio door was closed. This didn't stop the troop exploring within the lodge, as we met a wave of them pouring out the doors of the reception lounge as we entered. Several groups were also pottering around the grassy lawns outside. After breakfast, we took another game drive, spotting more elephants, Tantalus Monkeys, Common Warthog, Hippos, Buffalos, Defassa Waterbuck and Uganda Kob. Alas no sign of leopard or the climbing lions. Red-necked Spurfowl, White-browed Coucal, Levillant's Cuckoo, Marabou, Yellow-billed, Abdim's and Woolly-necked Stork, Pink-backed Pelican and Palm Nut Vulture were some of the birds we saw this morning. We had a picnic lunch at the Ishasha gate and then headed to the town of Kihiki where we refuelled and collected our local Bwindi bird guide. Pallid Harrier, White-throated Bee-eater, Fan-tailed, White-winged and Red-collared Widowbird, Black Bishop and Crowned Hornbill were some of the bird highlights seen today. We arrived at our lodge at Bwindi in time to relax before a giant 4 course dinner was served in the lodge restaurant.

Day 11: Wednesday 22 November 2023. Today was Mountain Gorilla trekking day Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and home to approximately half of the world's population of the endangered Mountain Gorilla. Once part of a much larger forest that included the Virunga Volcanoes in neighbouring Rwanda, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is now an ecological island within a sea of human cultivation and therefore of vital conservation importance. We left early this morning, arriving at the National Park visitors centre at Buhoma at around 7:15am to ensure we caught the welcome dance performed by women from Ride 4 A Woman, a charitable organisation set up to support women from the local community. This is always one of the highlights of the day and didn't disappoint. We then had a briefing on Mountain Gorilla etiquette before being split into groups of eight, each headed by a local ranger. We boarded our bus with our assigned ranger and guard and travelled for around 45 minutes nearest point where the gorilla group that had been assigned to us had been located by trackers that morning. We all met our porters who were members of that local community and set off on foot down the main street and then along tracks in the fields to the forest edge. Here we left our porters and armed only with our cameras and face masks (to protect the gorillas from any human-borne diseases) we walked into the forest accompanied by our ranger guide and guards towards the trackers who were directing us to the gorilla group.

We arrived in misty drizzle and found the gorilla group in the tree canopy. The rain soon cleared, and the group started descending to the ground in search of food. One of the first to descend was an adult female with a very young 1-2 month old baby that she was still nursing against her front. She trustingly allowed us to watch her while she foraged while holding her baby. The rest of the group followed shortly afterwards, and we had excellent views of around a dozen members of the group for the hour-long period that had been allocated to us. Such a rare privilege to watch these gentle giants going about their daily routine, especially as only one group of people per day is allowed to view each gorilla group. We then said goodbye to the trackers who would stay with the gorillas and rejoined our porters to return along the forest trails, passing Makara the huge silverback on the way. On the way back to the bus, some of the group were lucky another to see a Montane Side-striped Chameleon ambling slowly across the track with the characteristic jerky back and forth movement peculiar to this fascinating group of Old World lizards. On our return to the visitors centre, we were each issued with a gorilla certificate and provided with a chance to purchase a pictorial laminated sheet of the group that we had been tracking, with all proceeds going towards the conservation of this species and the protection of the forests in which they live. We then returned to the lodge for another huge meal, electing to rest and explore the lodge grounds for the rest of the afternoon. At 16:30 several members of the Bwindi Retired Rangers Association visited us, and we spent around 90 minutes listening to their fascinating stories dating back to their involvement in habituating the first gorillas since the formation of the national park in 1991. It was a great day, finished off by another 4-course dinner of more manageable proportions after instructing the chef to 'downsize' the meals the night before.

Day 12: Thursday 23 November 2023. This morning we left early to birdwatch along the waterfall trail inside Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, accompanied by our local guide. Species that we saw this morning included Speckled and Yellow-throated Tinkerbird, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, a beautiful rufous morph African Paradise Flycatcher, Mackinnon's Shrike, Slender-billed, Red-tailed, Yellow-

whiskered and Plain Greenbul, Black-throated, Buff-throated and Grey Apalis, White-chinned Prinia, Grey-winged Robin-chat, several species of sunbirds (Green, Blue-throated, Olive, Bronzy and Northern Double-collared and Red-chested Sunbird), White-breasted Nigrita, with the highlights being a female Bar-tailed Trogon who sat obligingly on a branch and a Green Twinspot foraging low in the vegetation along the side of the path. We also had good views of L'Hoest's Monkey, Curruther's Mountain Squirrel, and Rwenzori Sun Squirrel. We returned to the lodge for lunch before visiting the Conservation Through Public Health to listen to a presentation on the great work that they are doing with the local community to help protect mountain gorillas. We saw Dusky Blue Flycatcher and Black-necked Weaver in their yard. We then visited the Ride 4 A Woman headquarters where we watched the women from the local community sewing clothing and other articles with their 'Singer' treadle sewing machines, weaving baskets and mats and hand-sewing intricate items such as trivets. Each item was beautifully crafted and labelled with the maker's name, so as we purchased items, we had our photographs taken with the makers of the products. One of our group had her heart set on a beautiful boldly patterned basket that was still being made and we waited until the maker expertly finished it off and handed it over – such amazing personalised service! We then returned to our lodge to admire our purchases and the Rainbow Skinks sunning themselves on the path and the restaurant veranda before another dinner in the restaurant.

Day 13. Friday 24 November 2023. This morning we birded from the veranda of the lodge, picking up Green-headed Sunbird and Yellow-whiskered, Little and Little Grey Greenbul, before we reluctantly departed Buhoma and left Bwindi behind. Today was mostly a travel day as we headed towards Lake Mburo National Park. We stopped about midway for a picnic lunch which we brought from the lodge while our driver replaced one of the bus tyres that had burst shortly beforehand. We birded from the bus on the way into the National Park, seeing some new species like Black, Red-chested and African Cuckoo, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Crested Barbet and Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher, Brown Babbler, African Thrush, Marico Sunbird and Bare-faced Go-away-bird. Mammals we saw included groups of Vervet Monkeys, Olive Baboons, Maneless Zebra, Common Warthogs, African Buffalo, Nile Bushbuck, Defassa Waterbuck and Impala (Lake Mburo is one of only a few places in Uganda where Impala are still found). We arrived at our unfenced tented camp late afternoon. After dinner we were escorted to our safari tents by the camp staff via a side track, where we saw a Swamp Nightjar roosting on the ground. Some of the group heard Spotted Hyaena calling during the night.

Day 14. Saturday 25 November 2023. This morning after breakfast we headed off for an early morning game drive followed by a cruise on Lake Mburo. Birds we saw on this morning's cruise included White-faced Whistling Duck, Knob-billed and Yellow-billed Duck, Water Thick-knee, Common, Green and Wood Sandpiper, Striated Heron, several pairs of African Fish Eagles (many near their nests), African Pygmy, Malachite and Pied Kingfishers, Purple-backed Sunbird, Slender-billed Weaver, Grey-capped Warbler and gorgeous Common Waxbills. The highlight of the cruise was our target species, the African Finfoot. We saw several individuals which were mostly skulking under the low growing trees on the banks of the lake, but shortly before we returned, we saw a male Finfoot intently following a female quite some distance from shore and had beautiful views of this secretive and elusive species while they were otherwise occupied. Another highlight was the rare and elusive White-backed Night Heron that peered at us through the thick lakeside vegetation with its large, bespectacled eyes. Several groups of mostly submerged

Hippopotamus and African Buffalo glared balefully at us as we passed, and Nile Crocodiles basked in the sun on the banks or slid silently into the water at our approach.

We watched a large Warthog family foraging on the grass near the boat ramp, while dung beetles worked furiously to process the herbivore dung into balls which they pushed and pulled along in groups of two and three (some doing a better job than others). We then boarded our bus and headed back to camp for a hot lunch, followed by a short rest and a shower (hot water being delivered to our tents by the camp staff). We headed out for a late afternoon game drive at 16:30. Highlights included Crested Francolin, more Bare-faced Go-away-Bird, Green Wood Hoopoe, Meyer's Parrots, Collared Sunbird, White-winged Black Tit, White-headed Saw-wing, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Levaillant's Cuckoo, Striped and Woodland Kingfisher, Yellow-fronted Canary, African Cuckoo, African Grey Hornbill, Broad-billed Roller, Tabora (Long-tailed Cisticola), Red-faced Crombec and the striking Spot-flanked and Crested Barbet, Yellow-breasted Apalis and Golden-breasted Bunting. Beaudouin's Snake-eagle, Long-crested and Wahlberg's Eagle and a group of Black-lored Babblers were also seen, and we watched Red-rumped Swallows collecting mud for their nests. We also saw a small group of Common Dwarf Mongoose crossing the road in front of us and more Rothchild's Giraffe and Impala, but new sightings included a pair of Topi with a young calf and a Common Eland.

Day 15: Sunday 26 November 2023. After an early breakfast, we headed out of the park via a different track. After negotiating our way out of the park and a restroom break at the park gate (where we watched Village Weavers nest building and admired a distinctive, elegantly built long-necked Red-headed Weaver nest), we then headed to the township of Kayabwe, which is located on the equator for lunch. Some people ate their picnic lunches while others tried some local cuisine at a café. After lunch we took pictures at the equator and viewed a demonstration of the Coriolis effect (fact or sleight of hand?), before heading back to the bus and travelling back to our comfortable hotel in Entebbe where we started our journey. We relaxed around the grounds birding and watched the Kenyan Rock (Red-headed) Agama on basking on the walls with drinks in hand until dinner. Tropical Boubou, Diedrick's Cuckoo, African Green Pigeon Crowned Lapwing, White Stork, Meyer's and Grey Parrots, Greater Blue-eared Starling, Whinchat, Sooty Chat and Southern Red Bishop were the bird highlights today.

Day 16: Monday 27 November 2023.

This morning we all headed off to the Entebbe Botanical Gardens for a last morning together before we went our separate ways. During our walk around the garden, we had great views of Great Blue Turaco, African Openbill and Marabous Storks, Woodland and African Pygmy Kingfisher, White-throated Bee-eater delivering food to a nest, Splendid and Ruppell's Starling and Snowy-crowned Robin-chat, Collared, Purple-banded and Copper Sunbird; a group of Mantled Guereza were asleep in the branches of a giant tree in the middle of the gardens.

The gardens have water frontages over Lake Victoria and Spur-winged Lapwing and Black-winged Stilt, Wood Sandpiper, Little Egret, Black-headed Heron, Reed Cormorant, Western Yellow Wagtail and Pied Kingfisher were seen around the shoreline. One of the main targets this morning was Orange Weaver, and after quite a bit of searching and picking our way along the muddy tracks, we managed to see one in a tree along the shore; we also picked up a Slender-billed and Golden-

backed Weaver there. We then returned to our hotel to pack our bags and leave for Entebbe airport, stopping en route to have a cup of coffee at the Gorilla Café. This is an initiative of the Community Through Public health program which buys coffee beans from the local community at Bwindi who are required to be 'gorilla friendly' when growing it. Then out to the airport where we sadly said farewell to our local friends and boarded our flight to Nairobi for our Kenyan adventure.

This was an amazing trip with a great group of people. We saw a whopping total of **324 bird species and heard another 15 species**. Thirty-four species of mammals and 12 species of reptiles (and 2 amphibian species) were also seen on this tour. We met some amazing local community members and saw some spectacular scenery.

