

# Uganda: Fabulous Birds & Mammals with Naturalist Journeys



**September 5 – 13, 2022**

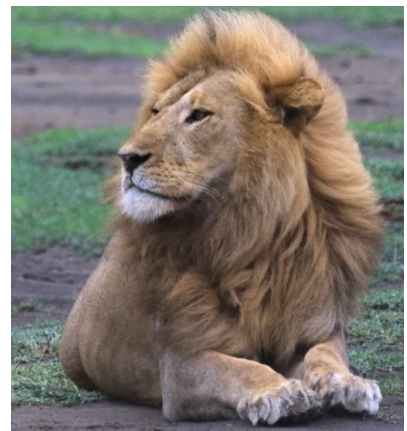
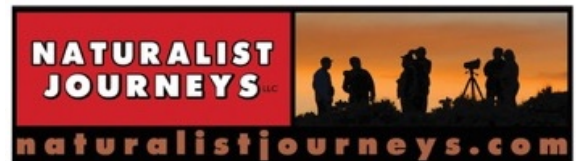
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## Tour Summary

9-Day / 8-Night Uganda Safari

\$4290, from Entebbe

Airport is Entebbe International (EBB)

Join Naturalist Journeys on this exciting Uganda adventure. Uganda is fast gaining fame as a wonderful place to explore Africa, hosting a rich geography of wetlands, savannas, and montane rainforests associated with the Albertine Rift, a high plateau where Africa's great rivers are born and 20+ endemic bird species can be found. From the shores of Lake Victoria to lush forests skirting the beautiful Virunga Volcanos, Uganda hosts both a rich bird and mammal fauna. It is a fascinating blend that we explore through a classic African safari with game drives. We also spend time exploring some of the best forests remaining on the continent; Uganda's wild forest reserves are home to myriad beautiful birds, rare Mountain Gorilla, Chimpanzee, and other primates. The Gorilla trek on this trip is optional, but highly recommended!

## Itinerary

## Tour Highlights

- ✓ Explore the labyrinth of lagoons of Mabamba Swamp by canoe in search of Uganda's iconic Shoebill
- ✓ Enjoy a game drive in Lake Mburo NP for views of Zebra, Impala, Eland, Topi, African Buffalo, and more
- ✓ See some of Africa's most beautiful birds: turacos, barbets, bushshrikes, bee-eaters, and broadbills
- ✓ Enter Bwindi's Impenetrable Forest NP, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, home to approximately half the world's endangered population of Mountain Gorilla
- ✓ Discover Bwindi's productive montane forest birding along the mountain spine of Africa—lush forests support 23 of Uganda's 24 Albertine Rift endemic birds
- ✓ Visit Queen Elizabeth National Park on the Equator in search of Elephant, Spotted Hyena, Leopard, Lion, Ugandan Kob, Side-striped Jackal, Baboon, and other mammals, as well as abundant birds
- ✓ Take an exciting boat cruise on the Kazinga channel for excellent sightings and photo opportunities of wading birds and abundant Hippopotamus

### Mon., Sept. 5 Arrivals in Entebbe on the Shore of Lake Victoria

Several major airlines provide service to Entebbe, including United, Delta, Emirates, Ethiopian, KLM, and others. Typical stops en route include your gateway through Brussels, Amsterdam, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Doha, or Kigali. Note, you need to leave the day prior to arrival, departing the USA on September 4. If you wish to combine with another part of Africa, then Kenya or Ethiopia work well and in both we have partner companies that can provide guided custom excursions.

Today is planned as just a day of rest; for those arriving in time we gather for a welcome dinner at our hotel. For those that arrive early in the day, you can rest and enjoy birding on the grounds, or we may organize an optional excursion to the local botanic gardens as a group with a guide. The hotel is close to the airport, and provides dependable and convenient shuttle service.

*Accommodations at the Boma Hotel or similar, Entebbe (D)*

### Tues., Sept. 6 Mabamba Wetlands | Lake Mburo National Park

After an early breakfast, we proceed to the Mabamba Swamp, a Wetland of International Importance, in search of water birds including Uganda's iconic Shoebill. In this narrow bay, lined by papyrus, other specialty birds include Hamerkop, Lesser Jacana, Blue Swallow, Papyrus Gonolek, White-winged Warbler, Blue-breasted and Madagascar Bee-eaters, Gray-rumped Swallow, Greater Swamp-Warbler, Slender-billed Weaver, African Pygmy-



Kingfisher, and Plain-backed Pipit. Waterbirds include African Pygmy-Goose, Spur-winged Goose, Long-toed Lapwing, Gray-hooded Gull, and three species of terns: Gull-billed, White-winged Black, and Whiskered. We may be lucky and find the giant of all herons, the Goliath. Raptors include the interesting Lizard Buzzard, and perhaps the Palm-nut Vulture. Mammal fans want to be on the lookout for Spot-necked Otter, occasionally seen in the water here.

Mabamba Swamp is a labyrinth of channels and lagoons. Even getting there holds exciting birding! The road to Mabamba winds its way through areas of secondary forest and agricultural land, attracting Red-headed Lovebird, African Crowned-Hornbill, and a range of sunbirds including the Green-headed, Green, Red-chested, Collared, Marico, and Scarlet-chested. The road ultimately ends at a papyrus reed-bed adjoining Lake Victoria, whereby canoe we explore a maze of channels and mudflats for a reliable resident, the majestic Shoebill.

Then, in the afternoon we drive to Lake Mburo National Park. While small, this park has outstanding biodiversity, with numerous species of birds and an excellent array of large mammals including Burchell's Zebra, Impala, Elands, Topi, and Buffalo. Oribi can be found here, as well as Olive Baboon, and Waterbuck and Reedbuck that relish the lush habitat. Where grazing mammals occur, we find Yellow-billed Oxpecker as well.

The park contains an extensive area of wetland including lakes and marshes. Ancient Precambrian rock tells a fascinating geologic story. The bird population is rich, including Green-backed Woodpecker, African Finfoot, Brown-chested Plover, Southern Ground Hornbill, Spot-flanked, Red-faced and Black-collared Barbets, White-winged Warbler, Carruthers Cisticola, Papyrus Gonolek, Yellow-billed Oxpecker, and Northern Brown-throated Weaver. Gray-crowned Crane are often the photographers' favorite.

After a full and rewarding day, we enjoy dinner and our comfortable lodgings. And keep on the lookout for nightjars!

*Accommodations at the Mantana Tented Camp or similar, Lake Mburo (B,L,D)*

## **Wed., Sept. 7**

### **Mburo National Park: Full Day Birding, Game Drive & Boat Cruise**

We have the full day to explore the park today. With our expert guides, we look for birds and mammals. Search the skies for Tawny Eagle, Ruppel's Griffon Vulture, Grey Kestrel, and the differently patterned male and female Bateleur. Feeding in trees we look for Ruppel's Starling, Brown Parrot, Grey Hornbill, White-browed Coucal, Northern Brubru, and Black-headed Oriole; in and around their roots we may find Water Thick-knee seeking shade or Coqui Francolin busily feeding. Favorites for the day often include Shining Blue, Woodland, and Giant Kingfishers, Broad-billed Roller, and Little Bee-eater. With keen eyes we may spot a roosting Verreaux's Eagle Owl, a Greater Honeyguide, and associated with water, White-backed Night-Heron, Papyrus Gonolek, Lesser Masked Weaver, and Carruther's Cisticola.

In more open savanna, dotted with acacias, we look for Senegal Lapwing and birds of the grasslands and scrub, including White-backed Scrub Robin, Plain-backed Pipit, Sooty Chat, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Red-faced Crombec, Chinspot Batis, Grassland Pipit, and Golden-breasted Bunting. Learn to sort out starlings today: Rupell's Long-tailed, Greater Blue-eared, and Bronze-tailed.

We return to our upmarket tented camp for an enjoyable evening. Chefs take pride in our meals, and include fresh local foods on the menu. Enjoy drinks from the bar, and as night falls, sounds of the African night.

*Accommodations at the Mantana Tented Camp or similar, Lake Mburo (B,L,D)*

## **Thurs., Sept. 8 Drive to Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park**

Today we start early after breakfast, with an exciting destination in mind—the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. This is mainly a travel day, our drive time is 6 – 7 hours or more, depending on the stops we make for scenery and birding (and lunch) along the way.

Bwindi National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is home to approximately half of the world's endangered population of Mountain Gorillas. This vast reserve offers arguably the most productive montane forest birding in Africa and supports 23 of Uganda's 24 Albertine Rift endemic bird species.

Once part of a much larger forest that included the Virunga Volcanoes in neighboring Rwanda, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park is now an ecological island within a sea of human cultivation and therefore is of big conservation importance. We have several days here to enjoy the world-famous Mountain Gorillas (permit required, additional cost) and some spectacular birding.

Our lodge opened in 2014, with a mission to provide lodging for the park while supporting the local community. It is a small lodge, with wonderful hospitality.

*Accommodations at Buhoma Community Haven Lodge or similar, Bwindi (B,L,D)*

## **Fri., Sept. 9 Gorilla Tracking in the Forest**

For those that select the Gorilla tracking option, after an early breakfast, we report to the park headquarters for a briefing prior to the Gorilla tracking excursion. This activity may take anywhere from one hour to a full day, so a reasonable degree of fitness is required. The hike starts about 8:30 – 9:00 AM and we are back anytime of the day. It may be just an hour or several hours. It is a wonderful experience to stare into the eyes of these gentle giants; watch them in awe as they play and go about their daily activities. It is indeed a “once in a lifetime” experience. Each encounter is different and has its own rewards; we are likely to enjoy close view of adults feeding, grooming, and resting as the youngsters frolic and swing from vines in a delightfully playful display. Only a limited number of people are allowed in to see the family groups each day (we have two days and may split up between them), so the earlier you sign on the better. We forward your permit payment on with registration. The forest habitat is fascinating, with lush greenery and of course, a host of birds.

We hope that our whole groups opts for the gorilla trek; our visit supports their conservation and rangers work hard to pace the hike for you to have success in finding them. If you are not able to do the hike, or perhaps have seen them at another location, birding is plentiful and an alternate activity on this day. Also possible are short nature walks or a cultural visit.

*Accommodations at Buhoma Community Haven Lodge or similar, Bwindi (B,L,D)*

## **Sat., Sept. 10 Birding Bwindi**

Forest birding at Bwindi ranks as the best birdwatching in Uganda and Africa as well, having been voted the number one hot spot in Africa. It is home to over 23 highly-localized Albertine Rift endemics. Our birding today takes place at different elevations, much of it in mid-montane forest.

The list of special birds is long! Sunbirds appear like our hummingbirds, but are songbirds that sing. We look for Blue-headed Sunbird, Northern Double-collared Sunbird, and Grey-headed Sunbird, Green-throated Sunbird, and Blue-throated Brown Sunbird. Stunning and colorful are the Black-billed Turaco, Bar-tailed Trogon, Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, Lagden's Bush-shrike, Doherty's Bush-shrike, Montane Oriole, African Golden Oriole, and the smaller Oriole Finch. Flycatchers and other small birds of the forest include Black-faced Rufous

Warbler, Grauer's Warbler, Banded Prinia, three species of Apalis: Black-throated and Mountain Masked, Red-throated Alethe, Yellow-eyed Black-Flycatcher, Ashy Flycatcher, Dusky-blue Flycatcher, Chapin's Flycatcher, Chin-spot Batis, Rwenzori Batis, Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher, White-bellied Crested-flycatcher, Mountain Illadopsis, and Dusky Tit.

Noisy are the African Hill-Babbler, Sooty Boubou, Pink-footed Puffback, and White-naped Raven. Starlings, various finches, sparrows, and weavers abound, including Stuhlmann's Starling, Narrow-tailed Starling, Waller's Starling, Strange Weaver, Brown-capped Weaver, Black-billed Weaver, Dusky Crimsonwing, Yellow-bellied Waxbill, Magpie Mannikin, Yellow-crowned Canary, Thick-billed Seedeater, Streaky Seedeater, and Shelly's Crimsonwing. Overhead, we look for two striking raptors, Mountain Buzzard, and Ayre's Hawk-eagle.

Sought after as we work a mix of elevations are African Wood-Owl, Scarce Swift, Black Bee-eater, Red-chested Owlet, Tullberg's and Elliot's Woodpeckers, African Broadbill, Petit's Cuckoo-shrike, Grey Cuckoo-shrike, Archer's Ground Robin, Toro Olive-Greenbul, Ansorge's Greenbul, Equatorial Akalat, White-bellied Robin-chat, Olive Thrush, White-tailed Ant-Thrush, Short-tailed Warbler, and Red-faced Woodland-Warbler.

We could continue, but you can see from those species mentioned here that the area is rich! Extremely rare and likely tough to find, requiring more extensive hiking than we do, is the endemic African Green Broadbill.

We return to the hospitality of our lodge, to dine and enjoy the evening.

*Buhoma Community Haven Lodge or similar, Bwindi (B,L,D)*

## **Sun., Sept. 11 Birding to Queen Elizabeth National Park**

Today we start early because it's a travel day, with a 5 – 6-hour drive to Queen Elizabeth National Park. We pass through the Ishasha sector of Queen Elizabeth National Park (known for its tree climbing lions), watching for mammals and birding along the way. We hope to find African Long Crested Eagle, Augur Buzzard, Mackinnon's Fiscal, Black-headed Waxbill, Black-and-white Mannikin, Senegal Coucal, Red-chested Cuckoo, Grey-capped Warbler, and other species.

The park is named after the Queen of England, who visited in 1954. It is the second largest national park in Uganda. In terms of diversity, this park ranks among the best birding destinations in Uganda with over 610 species recorded, and a one-day record of 296 species. Mammals include African Elephant, Spotted Hyena, Leopard, Lion, Ugandan Kobs, Side-striped Jackal, Baboon, Chimpanzee, Bush and Water Bucks, Warthog, and Giant Forest Hog to mention but a few. Specialty birds of this park include Harlequin Quail, Blue Quail, Small (Common) Buttonquail, African Crake, White-winged Warbler, Martial Eagle, African Skimmer, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Papyrus Gonolek, Amur Falcon, Ovampo Sparrowhawk, Lowland Akalat, Greater and Lesser Flamingo, Shoebill, Black Bee-eater, Caruthers's Cisticola, Terek Sandpiper, Secretary Bird, and Temminck's Courser.

Our lodge is at the gateway of the park, with fine views and good birding on the grounds. The main house has large windows in the dining area and a viewing deck, great for sundowners and dining.

*Accommodations at Enganzi Game Lodge or similar, Queen Elizabeth National Park (B,L,D)*

## **Mon., Sept. 12 Game Drive in the Park | Boat Cruise on the Kazinga Channel**

After breakfast we set out for a nearly full day game drive and birdwatching drive in the park. We save the active hours of late-afternoon for our exciting boat cruise on the Kazinga channel. The launch is one of the most exciting water activities in Uganda. The channel is a narrow neck of water that connects Lakes George and Edward, with excellent photo opportunities for waterside birds and abundant Hippopotamus. Amongst the birds

we are likely to encounter African Skimmer, Striated Heron, African Spoonbill, Water Thick-knee, Three-banded Plover, Marsh, Green, Wood, and Common Sandpiper, Gray-headed Gull, Plain Martin, Lesser Swamp-Warbler, and following the mammals, Yellow-billed Oxpecker.

*Accommodations at Enganzi Game Lodge or similar, Queen Elizabeth National Park (B,L,D)*

## **Tues., Sept. 13 Return to Entebbe | Departures**

After breakfast, we make our return to Entebbe. Please plan your departure flights in the evening. (B,L)

## **Cost of the Journey**

### **Plan Ahead!**

Protect yourself with Allianz Travel Insurance. Their website will show a grid of tour cost and your age category for you to make selections. As of January 2017, Naturalist Journeys pays 100% of your flight carbon offset.

### **Travel Information**

Please plan to arrive at your convenience at Entebbe International (EBB) on September 5. Please note that flights will originate from the United States on September 4. Please plan evening departures on September 13.

### **Cost of the Journey**

Cost of the Journey is **\$4290 DBL / \$4790 SGL**, based on double occupancy, per person. The tour price includes airport transfers, 8 nights' accommodations, all meals from dinner Day 1 through lunch Day 9, professional guide services, park and preserve entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses.

Cost of the journey does not include airfare from your home to and from Entebbe, Uganda or items of a personal nature, such as drinks from the bar, telephone, and local guide gratuities (at your discretion, we will give some guidelines). Since the Gorilla hike requires more stamina, we make that optional, and the permit needs to be paid in addition to the tour cost, at present \$700 (subject to change). Please pay this permit fee at registration to ensure you get a spot. Funds go to support Gorilla conservation.

### **Photo Credits**

Mountain Gorilla, Herbert Byaruhanga (HB); Shoebill, HB; Hippo, Peg Abbott (PA); Elephants, PA; Madagascar Bee-eater, PA; Spotted Hyena, PA; Lion, PA.

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