

Grand Uganda: Fabulous Birds & Mammals with Naturalist Journeys



July 13 – 29, 2023
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Tour Summary

17-Day / 16-Night Uganda Safari
\$8,290 DBL/\$9,140 SGL, 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 and Chimpanzee treks on this trip are optional, but highly recommended!

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
- ✓ Find out why Kibale Forest National Park is the best safari destination for Chimpanzee tracking in East Africa, a place where up to 13 species of primates can be seen (and the bird list is 325 species!)
- ✓ Discover Murchison Falls, a stunning end to our tour!

Itinerary

Thurs., July 13 Arrive 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, July 12 departing the USA. 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. The hotel is close to the airport, and provides dependable and convenient shuttle service.

For those who come in early, you have the option to join a guided botanic garden tour today.

Accommodations at the lovely Protea Hotel on the shores of Lake Victoria, Entebbe (D)

Fri., July 14 Mabamba Wetlands | Botanic Gardens

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.

This afternoon we explore the local botanic gardens with our guide. Trails are well-manicured and easy for walking and birding.

Accommodations at the lovely Protea Hotel on the shores of Lake Victoria, Entebbe (D)

Sat., July 15 Lake Mbuo National Park

If we dipped on the Shoebill yesterday, we head back to Mabamba Wetlands this morning before we drive to Lake Mbuo. If we were successful, we depart directly for Lake Mbuo 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, Lake Mburo (B,L,D)

Sun. July 16

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

We leave Entebbe on 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, 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 in the menu. Enjoy drinks from the bar, and as night falls, sounds of the African night.

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

Mon., July 17 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 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, Bwindi (B,L,D)

Tues., July 18 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, Bwindi (B,L,D)

Wed., July 19 Birding Bwindi

Forest birding at Bwindi ranks 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, Bwindi (B,L,D)

Thurs., July 20 Birding to Queen Elizabeth National Park

Today we shall start early because it is 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, Queen Elizabeth National Park (B,L,D)

Fri., July 21 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, Queen Elizabeth National Park (B,L,D)

Sat., July 22 Birding to Kibale National Park

After breakfast, we drive to Kibale National Park, crossing the Equator with views of the mountains as part of our day. Kibale is the best safari destination for Chimpanzee tracking in East Africa. It contains one of the loveliest and most varied tracts of all tropical forests in Uganda. It hosts 13 species of primates, including the Chimpanzee. The population we see today is among the estimated 1450 chimpanzees, Uganda's largest population of this endangered primate. It is also home to the rare L'hoest's Monkey and East Africa's largest population of the threatened Red Colobus Monkey. Other primates that you may see include the Black-and-white Colobus, Blue Monkey, Grey-cheeked Mangabey, Red-tailed Monkey, Olive Baboon, Bush Baby, and Potto.

Kibale's lush forest cover predominates in the northern and central parts of the park. Kibale's highest point is at the park's northern tip, reaching just over 5000 feet above sea level. The park boasts 325 bird species, including six that are endemic to the Albertine Rift region. They include the Black-capped Apalis, Blue-headed Sunbird, Collared Apalis, Dusky Crimson Wing, Purple-breasted Sunbird, and Red-faced Woodland-Warbler. If we are lucky, we may also see the stunning African and Green-breasted Pitta, Black Bee-eater, Yellow-spotted Nicator,

Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, Little Greenbul, Black-eared Ground-thrush, Brown-chested Alethe, Blue-breasted Kingfisher, Abyssinian Ground-thrush, and perhaps the regal Crowned Eagle.

Our lodgings again have fine views of surrounding tea plantations in this fertile mountain setting. There are gardens and our rooms are in a colonial house where we can enjoy the bar and dining.

Accommodations at Home Bliss Hotel, Fort Portal, gateway to Kibale National Park (B,L,D)

Sun., July 23 Kibale | Chimpanzee Tracking in the Forest

After an early breakfast we drive to Kibale National Park visitor center for a briefing and chimp tracking. The activity may last a few hours to several hours. It is an extraordinary experience, and we provide permits for all since hiking here is gentler than at Bwindi. Enjoy the antics of these fascinating chimps!

We also look for birds in the area, finding different species. Birding in the afternoon along the main road may be productive. Depending on the weather conditions, birding Bigodi Wetland is also productive for riverine forest birds. Kibale National Park is a good site for a number of birds that are hard to find elsewhere, including Speckle-breasted Woodpecker, Cabanis's Greenbul, and Joyful Greenbul, as well as White-spotted Flufftail, Dusky and Olive Long-tailed Cuckoos, Lesser Honeyguide, Blue-shouldered Robin-chat, White-chinned Prinia, Grey Apalis, Olive-green Camaroptera, and White-collared Oliveback.

We have a final evening at the guest house, with time to review highlights from our journey so far.

Accommodations at Home Bliss Hotel, Fort Portal, gateway to Kibale National Park (B,L,D)

Mon., July 24 On to the Royal Mile!

Today after some early birding followed by breakfast and packing up at our hotel in Kibale, we head on to the east, arriving late in the day to Masindi town. We break up the drive with birding stops and enjoy the scenery as we travel alongside Lake Albert.

Our hotel at Masindi is colonial style and while located in the city has nice plantings and a central courtyard/garden area with bar and dining. We have an early start the next day so we plan to relax a bit and settle in, tally up our species list and head to bed!

Accommodations at the Masindi Hotel (B,L,D)

Tues., July 25 Birding the Royal Mile of Budongo Forest

We rise early to be in the lush forests of Budongo at dawn, when birds are singing. The area we visit today has tall trees and is known as the Royal Mile. Who can resist the chance to find a Chocolate-backed Kingfisher? This forest area is home to over 360 species of birds and brings a notable number of species from Central and Western Africa into the mix. We take a packed lunch to have as much of the day here as possible. By visiting a mix of habitats, we may find Blue-breasted and Dwarf Kingfisher, White-spotted Flufftail, Puvell's Illadopsis (unique here) Yellow-crested Woodpecker, a new variety of sunbirds and greenbuls, and overhead, possibly Crowned Eagle or Cassin's Hawk-Eagle.

At day's end we return to our hotel in Masindi and enjoy dinner in the garden area.

Accommodations at the Masindi Hotel (B,L,D)

Wed., July 26 Murchison Falls National Park

We leave Budonga today and head on to Murchison Falls National Park. The two protected areas are quite

different from one another yet in close proximity. From Masindi to the South Gate will be an hour's or so. South of the river the park is quite forested, once across savanna opens up extensively, perhaps the most classic landscape of our tour if comparing to better known areas of Kenya and Tanzania.

Murchison Falls are on the White Nile River and are impressive for here as the Nile narrows, it pushes water through a narrow cleft. The drop is almost 150 feet, majestic and mesmerizing. The rocks below the falls are great habitat for Rock Pratincole which we look for on our boat trip along with colorful bee-eaters and more.

This is Uganda's largest national park, impressive for both birds (over 450 species) and mammals (76 species). Many famous visitors, including Winston Churchill and Ernest Hemingway explored here. Many first knew of it from movie scenes in the film the African Queen, filmed here and starring Humphrey Bogart. Part of the park is on the shores of Lake Albert at the northern end of the Albertine Rift Valley. This is ecologically the most intact park in Uganda, with predators including Leopard and Lion.

Our lodgings here feature well-appointed rooms with private verandas. The dining area has a river view and an outside wood-fired pizza oven, quite a treat!

Accommodations at Pakuba Safari Lodge (B,L,D)

Thurs., July 27 & Fri., July 28

Two Full Days to Explore Murchison Falls National Park

After early breakfasts each day, we have morning game drives. In the lush Borassus Palm savanna, we may be able to encounter Elephant, African Buffalo, Giraffe, and a variety of antelopes. With luck, we may also see Lion and Leopard is also possible. Birds of the grassland include the Secretary Bird, Abyssinian Roller, Black-bellied Bustard, and Abyssinian Ground Hornbill.

Each day we either enjoy a packed lunch or return to our hotel for a patio lunch, and then venture off on an afternoon boat trip. One is to the Lake Albert Delta. Here, we have another chance of sighting the rare Shoebill, particularly important if we miss them the first day at Mabamba. The variety of water birds here is dazzling, including species like Pied Kingfisher, Red-throated Bee-eater, Goliath Heron, Saddle-billed Stork, Sacred Ibis, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Senegal Thick-knee, Black-headed Lapwing, Long-toed Lapwing, Little Bittern, and one familiar from back home, the Osprey. There are also good numbers of Nile Crocodile.

We also look for Red-necked Falcon, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Vinaceous Dove, and Grosbeak Weaver. Other specialties include Buff-bellied Warbler, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Bar-breasted Firefinch, Red-winged Grey Warbler, Spotted Morning-Thrush, Maribou Stork, Red-throated Bee-eater, Silverbird, Beautiful Sunbird, Black-headed Gonolek, Speckle-fronted Weaver, Golden-backed Weaver, White-rumped Seedeater, White-crested Turaco, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-weaver, Carmine Bee-eater, White-rumped Canary, and more. Two impressive species are possible here: Pel's Fishing Owl and Pennant-winged Nightjar.

Our lodge offers an option for a night drive, with a chance to see Serval Cat, Hyena, Leopard, and more. This is organized by a concession at an additional cost.

Accommodations at Pakuba Safari Lodge (B,L,D)

Sat., July 29 Drive to Entebbe for Evening Departures

We organize flights out today, with a return to our hotel for a chance to repack and regroup in a hospitality

room for the group if you wish. As flights vary in time you can wait here in the garden or while enjoying a nice meal. If you need to overnight we can make arrangements for you.

If for any reason weather precludes our flight, it is five-to-six hour drive back to Entebbe, through traffic as we route through Kampala, but as most flights depart in the evening hours, we have time for a final morning of birding and a chance to freshen up and pack for our flights. (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 July 13. Please note that flights will typically originate from the United States on July 12 or earlier to reach there by this date. Please plan on evening departures not earlier than 8:00 PM onward on July 29.

Cost of the Journey

Cost of the Journey is **\$8290 DBL/\$9,140 SGL**, based on double occupancy, per person. The tour price includes airport transfers, 16 nights' accommodations, all meals from dinner Day One through lunch Day 17, professional guide services, park and preserve entrance fees, and miscellaneous program expenses. The Chimpanzee permits are included and arranged for the group.

Cost of the journey does not include airfare from your home to 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; Leopard, PA.

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