

Birds and Wildlife Uganda 2019



Stephen Ingraham: The Point and Shoot Nature
Photographer. Epic Uganda Vacations.



Our journey was arranged by the good folks at Epic Uganda Vacations. Here our guide, Moses, and I stand on the equator.

Uganda has long been known as the “pearl of Africa”...a name given to the country by Winston Churchill after a visit in 1909. Having spent an all-to-brief 13 days there in 2019, I can understand why. Uganda is unique among East African countries for many reasons. First of all it is the most “western” country in East Africa, and so is home to some habitats that are more common in the west. This gives it a range of habitats unequaled in Africa. Then to it is much more “lush” than most East and South African countries, with tall grass savannas and closed canopy rain, and even cloud, forests. From the marshes of Lake Victoria, to rich Nile Valley of the North, from the dry savannas of the Kaibo Valley in the north east, to the all but vertical rainforest of the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in the south west, you can experience the full range of what Africa has to offer. While it might not be the best country for viewing the big five...though you will see all five in Uganda...you will see more birds, and more species of birds, in a few days in Uganda than in any other country on the continent. It is indeed a pearl of great price among African nations.



We arrived in Entebbe late in the evening and did not get to our guest house until close to mid-night, but we were up the next morning and headed out to Lake Victoria and the Mabamba Wetlands in search of the iconic bird of Uganda: the Shoebill. Our guide for the morning perched high for a better view over the marsh grasses.



It was beginning to rain by the time we found our first Shoebill. At first I thought I was seeing a bird perched on a rock, until I realized that the whole thing, apparent rock and all, was the bird. Shoebirds are huge! In the same area we found this African Jacana.





Kingfishers are among my favorite birds. We found this Pied Kingfisher and the Malachite Kingfisher in the same small stretch of channel. The Grey Crowned Cranes, the national bird of Uganda, were just a bit further along.

After returning to Entebbe for lunch and a rest, we spent the late afternoon at the Entebbe Botanical Gardens, where we encountered many birds, including our first Bee-eaters of the trip, these White-faced Bee-eaters, as well as the Pygmy Kingfisher and the Black and White Casqued Hornbill. We were to see many Black and White Colobus monkeys but this was our first.



The next morning early as we gathered for breakfast we were treated to this African Harrier Hawk and a pair of Black-headed Gonoleks (in the shrike family) right above the breakfast area.





Uganda's Rhino population was decimated by poaching during the troubled years, but efforts are being made to reestablish the White (or wide lipped) Rhino, with a successful breeding program at the Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary. We joined an armed ranger for a trek out to see the Rhinos up close...a rare privilege anywhere in Africa.



The White Rhinoceros are just at the edge of that thicket as we watch.





As we traveled on from Ziwa toward Murchison Falls National Park, when we stopped to do our paperwork at the entrance to the park, we encountered our first troop of Yellow Baboons.





Murchinson Falls National Park is a highlight of any Ugandan safari. The park is bisected by the Nile River. The northern half of the park is some of the most lush savannah in Africa...covering rolling hills that rise from the river. This is the dawn view out over the Nile from our lodge on our first morning in Murchison.



The Uganda Kob is the most common antelope in Uganda. Murchinson Falls is home to large herds of them.



Jackson's Hartebeest, found in Uganda, is considered a hybrid between the Cokes and Lelwei subspecies. It is considerably bigger than the Kobs it often feeds with.





Elephants were also impacted heavily by the troubled times, but population is recovering in Murchinson Falls and other Ugandan parks. It is estimated that Murchinson is home to about 1400 elephants in 2019. We saw a number of youngsters, which is always a good sign.

The Giraffes of Uganda are Rothschild's...a subspecies of the Masai Giraffe common to East Africa. Murchinson Falls National Park has about 1500 Giraffes. There are also Giraffes in Kidapo Valley National Park, and a few have been reintroduced to Lake Mburo National Park, from the herds at Merchison.





The Patas Monkey is a savannah monkey that is at home in the tall grasses of Murchinson Falls NP.



We saw about 9 species of Kingfishers in Uganda in 2019, This is the Grey-headed. We also saw this species at the Entebbe Botanical Gardens, but not this close :)



A handsome Uganda Kob and one of my most wanted Ugandan birds...the Northern Carmine Bee-eater.



A Dark-chanting Goshawk. Note the orange on the bill.



Northern Red Bishop, a stunning bird of the savannah and thickets.

Overleaf:

Another Northern Carmine Bee-eater.







Savannah rising from the Nile Valley, and Hippopotamuses in the Nile itself, near the delta of the Albert Nile.



Another Shoebill,
this time at the delta
where the Albert
Nile joins the
Victoria Nile...other
than the Mabamba
Wetlands, one of
the best places in
Uganda to see the
elusive Shoebill.





We had a relatively close encounter with a small group of elephants above the Nile.



Magnificent animal! The stuff of dreams for anyone who has ever dreamed of Africa.



A cruise to the base of Murchinson Falls on the Nile is a highlight of any trip to Uganda. Lots of hippos!





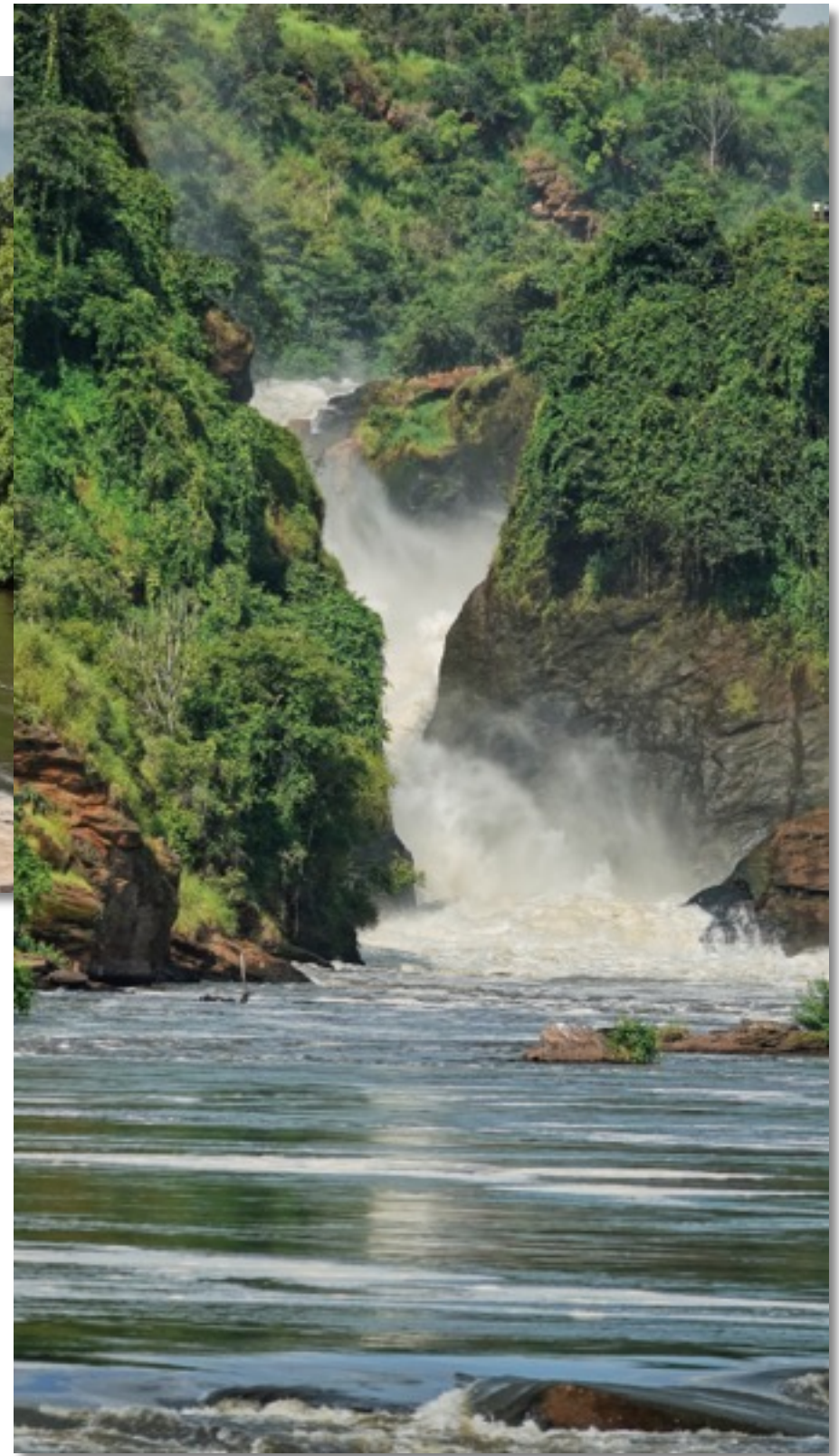
Red-throated Bee-eater, the “rainbow” bird of East Africa. There is a large nesting population in the clay banks along the Nile.



Saddle-billed Stork and Rock Pratincole, the Pratincole where you would expect, as the Nile grew rapid below the falls, but the stork was also close to the rapids.



At Murchinson Falls the full flow of the Nile is funneled into a narrow canyon and then leaps 130 feet down the face of a cliff. You can hear it from miles away. The falls is currently threatened by oil exploration and is in need of our support.





A Rock Monitor Lizard crossing the road, a Cape Buffalo with a Piapiac in attendance and a adult Bateleu (a member of the hawk-eagle family).
Overleaf: a female Abyssinian Ground Hornbill.





Giraffe's as it gets on toward sunset.



Grey-backed Fiscal, a
shrike. Yellow-billed
Oxpecker on a Giraffe.



White-browed Coucal and
Crested Francolin





At the top of Murchinson Falls on Nile River. An unbelievable rush of water. And this is only what remains of the volume after dams upstream reduced it. We drove to the viewpoint on our way out of Murchinson Falls National Park.





We spent the night in Homia on our way from Murchinson Falls to Fort Portal and Kibale National Park. The grounds of the hotel were good birding, Crowned Hornbill, Green Pigeon, Eastern Grey Plantain-eater.



On our way out of Homia, we stopped for the Malibu Storks feeding on the soccer pitch in the middle of town, and for the Pin-tailed Whyda along the road.





Overleaf: Bronze Sunbird, one of the few long-tailed Sunbirds in Uganda. On this page, Chubb's Cisticola, African Dusky Flycatcher, and Black-crowned Waxbill. All taken at the Amabere Ga'nyinamwiru caves near Fort Portal.



White-tailed Blue Flycatcher, Variable Sunbird. Also at the caves.





On our way to Kibale National Park and our Chimpanzee trek, we were waylaid by an aggressive troop of Baboons. We made the mistake of slowing down for a photo and two youngsters immediately jumped up on the front of the van against the windshield. As they went up and over the back, they tore the rear bumper mirror off the van.



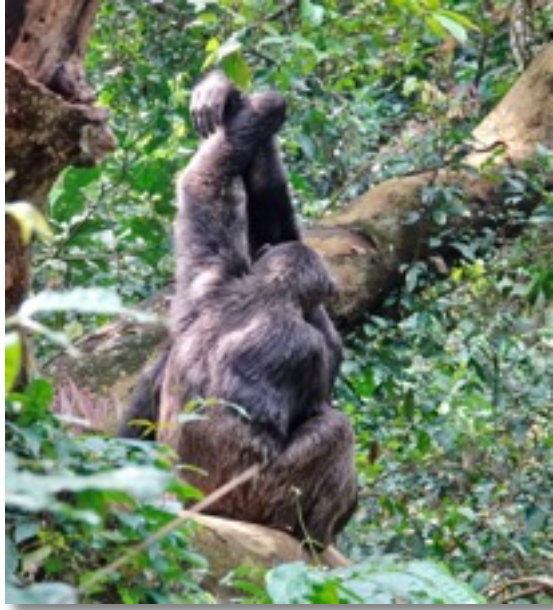
Kibale National Park is the primer Chimpanzee Trekking venue in Uganda. You need reservations well in advance, but the rangers have close to an 100% success rate in providing a quality encounter with our closest cousins in the wild.



Compared to trekking for Gorillas, the Chimps are easy.









Next door to Kibale National Park, just few miles up the road from the Visitor Center where you trek for Chimps, is the famous (among birders) Bigodi Swamp Walk. The Swamp Walk is a project of the Kibale Association for Rural and Environmental Development. Well trained ranger/birders guide you through second growth rainforest and open fields and wetlands in search of some of the best birds in Uganda. It is generally agreed that while the number of birds seen can be low, Bigodi provides some of the best looks at rare birds in Uganda. This is the Great Blue Turaco.

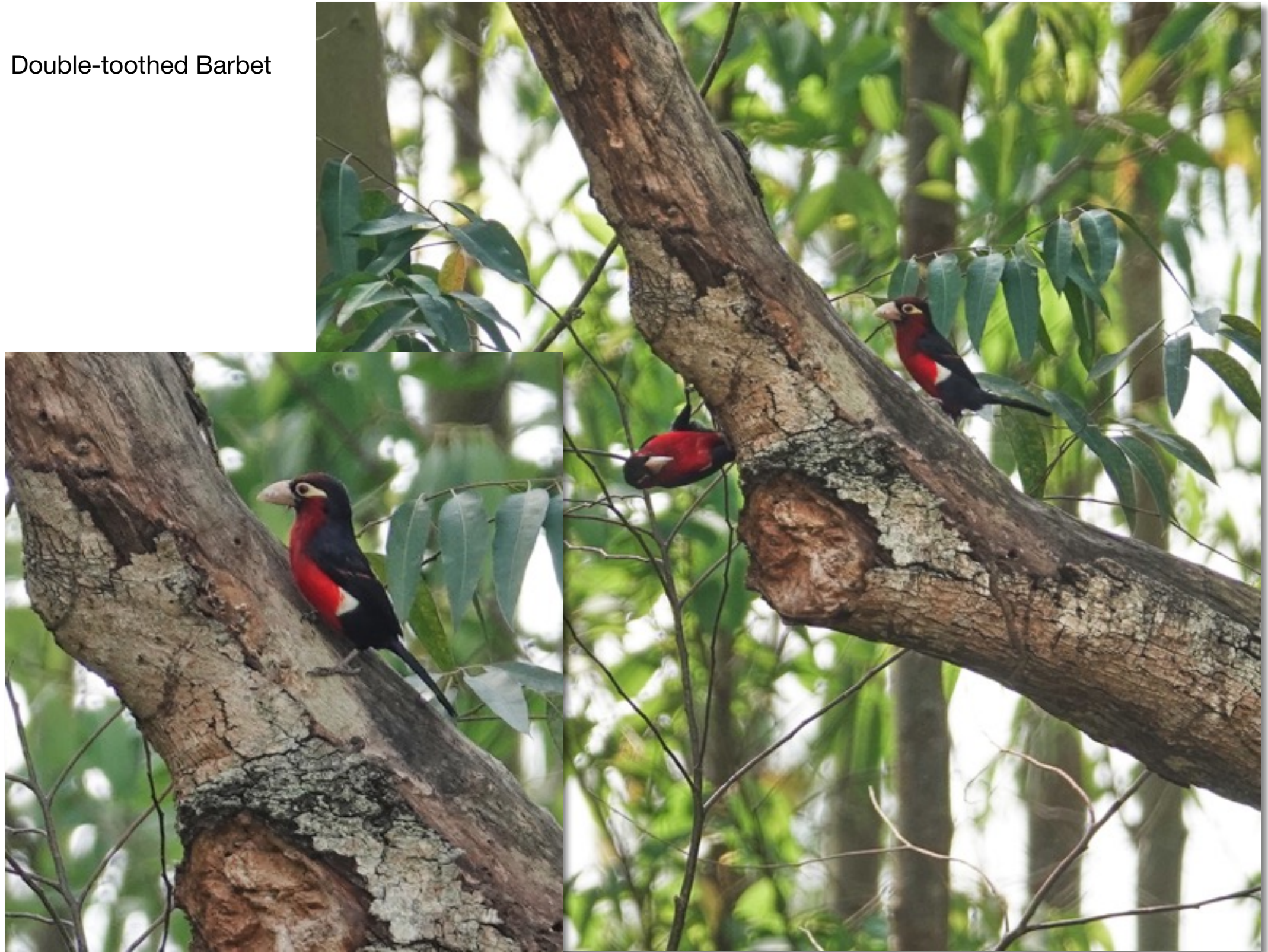


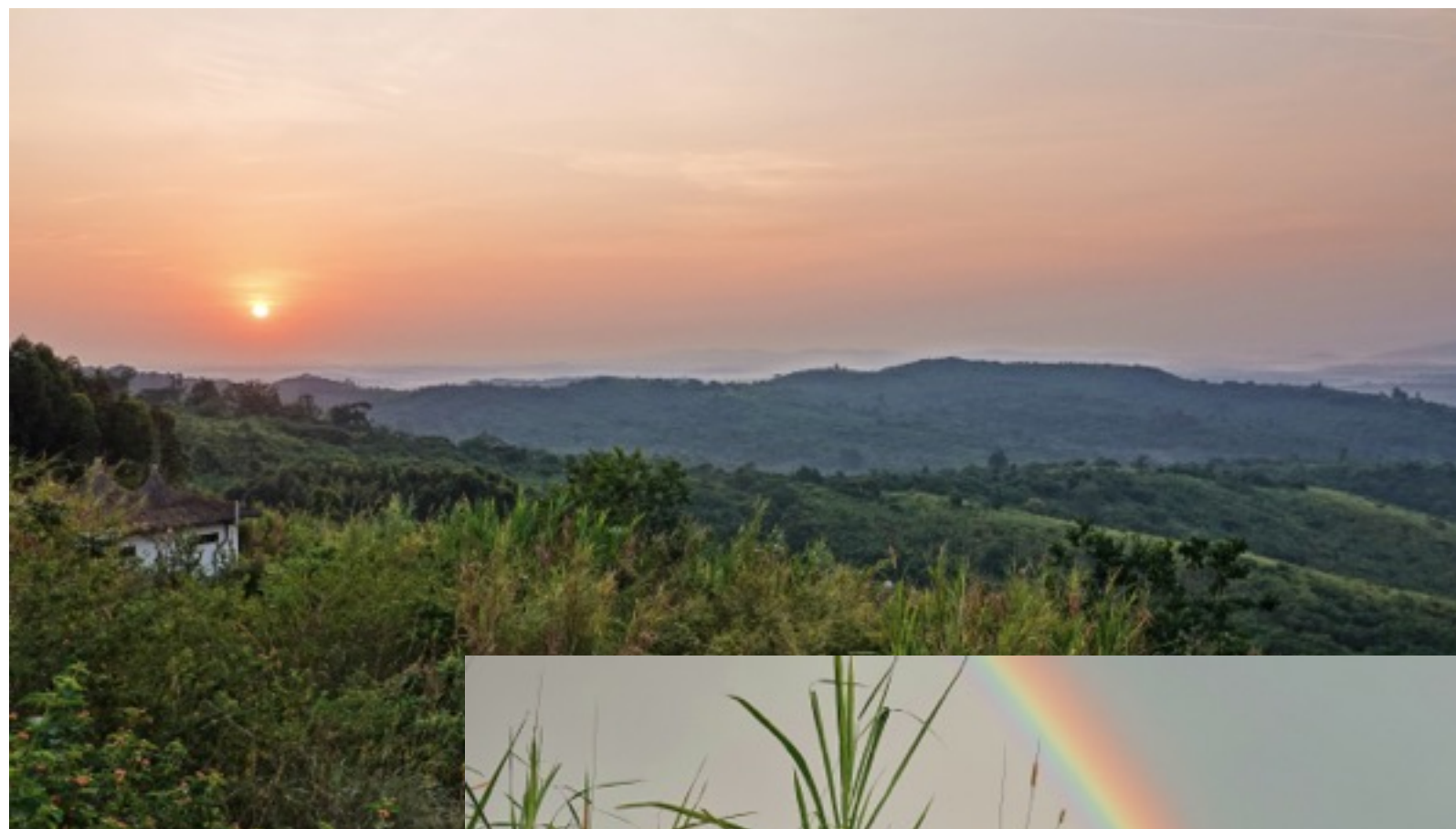
Olive-bellied and Copper Sunbirds.



Vieillot's Black,
Masked,
Black-headed,
Yellow-backed,
Weavers

Double-toothed Barbet





Sunrise and rainbows
over Kibale from our
lodge.





We stopped on the way out of the Fort Portal and Kibale area to see one of the many crater lakes in the area, and while we were stopped, found this pair of Cinnamon-chested Bee-eaters.





Two views from the Queen Elizabeth Pavilion in Queen Elizabeth National Park...landscape looking out toward Lake George, and a Baboon by the parking lot.





We stopped for lunch at Irungu Forest Lodge, and had a hour or more to bird the grounds.

White-browed Robin-chat, Yellow White-eye, Female Marico Sunbird



Brown-throated Wattle-eye,
female and immature, Northern
Crombec, two different acrobatic
poses.



A highlight of any visit to Queen Elizabeth NP is the boat cruise on the Kazinga Channel, connections Lakes George and Edward. Elephants and Cape Buffalo enjoying the waters by the boat dock.





Yellow-billed Stork along
the Kazinga Channel.



Grey-headed and Malachite Kingfishers, both along the banks of the Kazinga Channe.





There are hippopotamus in any good sized body of water in Uganda, river or lake. The small boats used on the Kazinga Channel allow for close view.





Nile Monitor Lizard,
African Fish Eagle,
Water Thick-knee.





Nile Crocodiles can grow up to 20 feet long. This one was probably about 15 feet.





Though you see many of these “hippo roaring” shots, in my experience it is more often a hippo yawning.

Cape Buffalo with Yellow-billed Oxpeckers. The Oxpeckers are actually members of the same family as starlings.





The Hamerkop, a heron, though a strange looking heron.



Red-necked Spurfowl and Double-toothed Barbet. Among the first birds to greet us as we entered the wildlife drive in the Northern Sector of Queen Elizabeth National Park.





Crowned
Lapwing



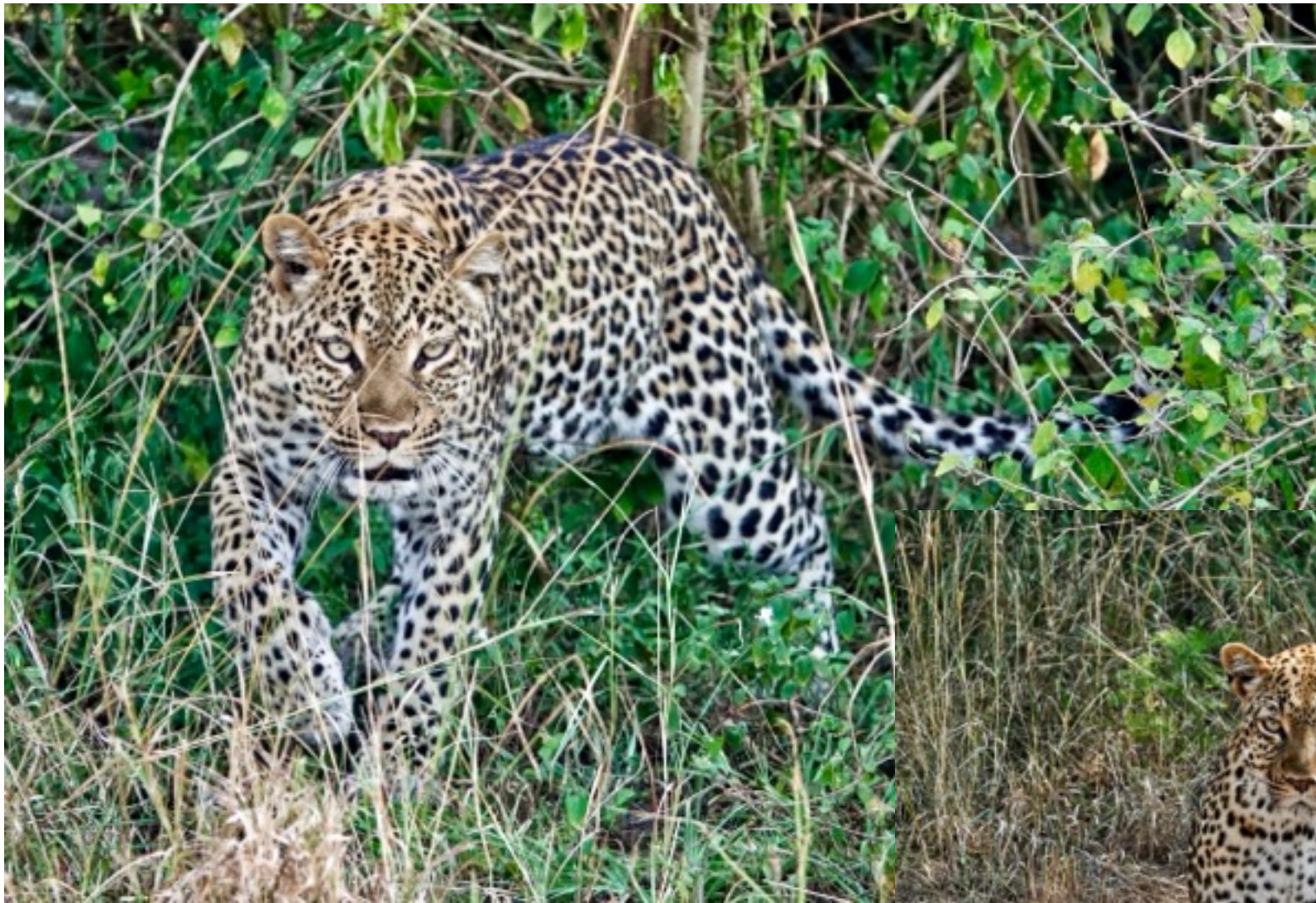
The dry savannah of the northern sector of QEP. The Kesenyi Plains. If you look closely you will see two lions laying near the thicket of brush in the mid-ground.





We were privileged to join Dr. Ludwig Siefert of the Uganda Carnivores Project and his radio trackers to look for radio collared Lions and Leopards in Queen Elizabeth National Park. The experience is limited to 4 vehicles a day, and you have nearly a 100% chance of encountering both species of big cats.





Female Leopard recovering from a eye-wound. She had a cub somewhere behind her in that thicket.









Our lodge for the night was perched up on the rim of the great rift, with the park stretching away across the valley below.



The somewhat isolated Ishasha Sector of Queen Elizabeth National Park near the southern border is home herds of Uganda Kob (fawn here) as well as Topi, a large dark antelope of more heavily thicketed savannah, as well as the Yellow-throated Longclaw.





Topi always look “sturdy” to me as opposed to graceful, but they are thought to be one of the fastest of East Africa’s antelope species.



We had distant views of the Grey Kestrel and the African Open-billed Stork.





Ishasha Sector is best known for its “tree-climbing” lions. Climbing trees is not a common behavior among lions. There are only a few locations, widely scattered across East Africa, where they have, for totally unknown reasons, developed the habit. The day we visited, the only lions we could find were on the ground, though we visited every tree ever known to have a lion in it. :)



In the dawn
light this
Variable
Sunbird
outshone the
sun! Near our
lodge in the
south west
corner of the
Ishasha
Sector.





On the way from the Ishasha Sector of QENP to Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, you climb up through tea plantations. This area was once all rainforest, but agriculturalists move in over 500 years ago.

Today, the oldest rainforest on the planet remains only in the national parks designated to protect it.



Lake Bunyonyi, with its name islands, is considered one of the most beautiful lakes in Uganda. We stopped briefly on our way from Ishasha Sector to Bwindi.



My accommodation for the night in Bwindi.



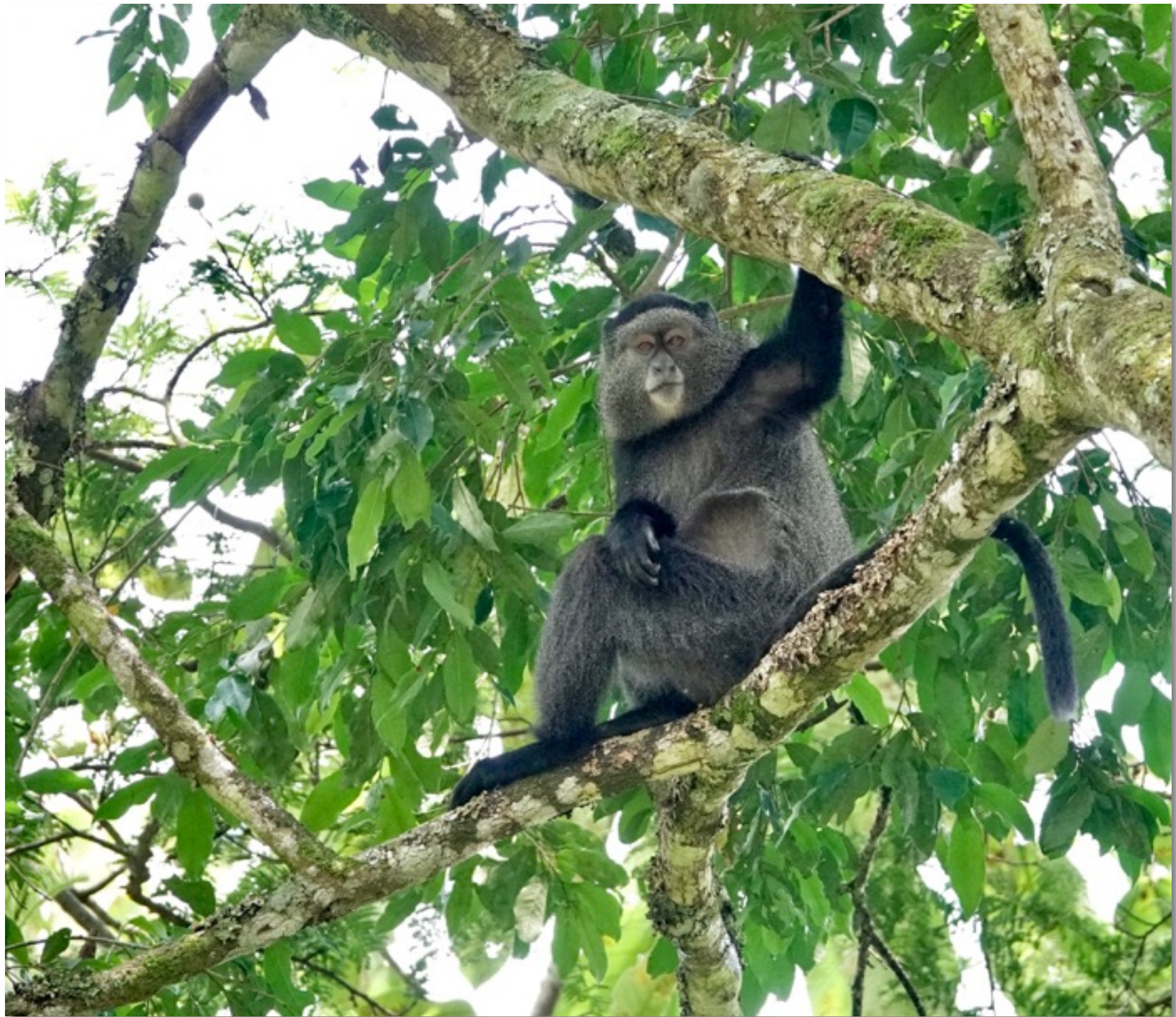
Two birds from along the shores of Lake Bunyonyi. Pied Wagtail, and Sacred Ibis.





Bwindi Impenetrable Forest is best known as one of the last homes of the Mountain Gorilla, but it is also home to many other varieties of primates. We spotted a mixed group of monkeys along the road to the park. These are Red-tailed White-nosed Monkeys.







Here and overleaf: Blue Monkey.

Below: L/Hoest's Mountain
Monkey, right beside the road.





Birding around the grounds of the lodge and on the road connection lodges was excellent in Bwindi. Northern Double-collared Sunbird and White-browed Robin-chat.



Pied-Crow and African
Dusky Flycatcher



African Paradise
Flycatcher



Cinnamon-breasted Bee-eater





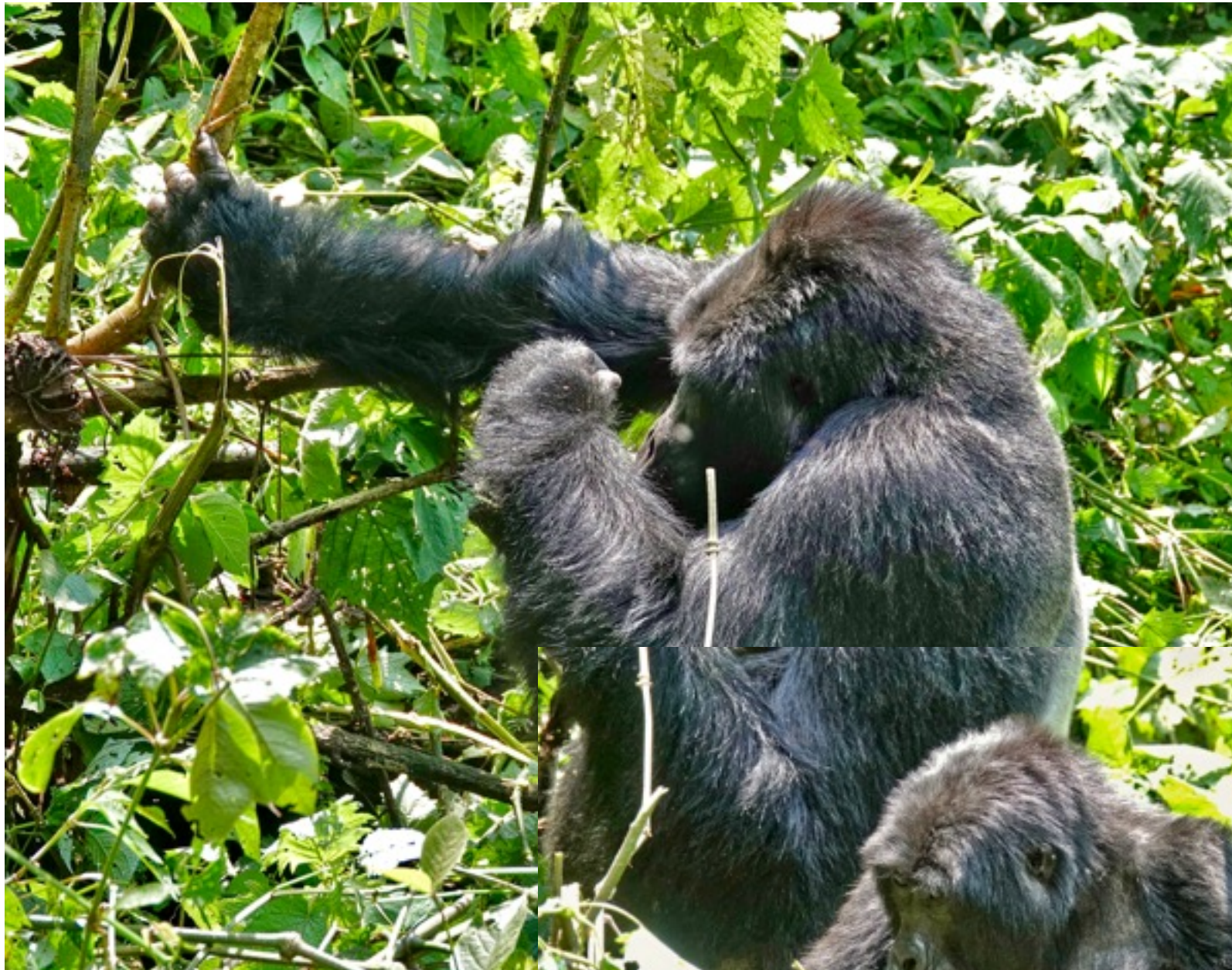
Mountain Gorilla Trekking is the most popular wildlife activity in Uganda, and Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park is the place to do it. 3 different trailheads offer a chance to visit habituated Mountain Gorilla families. The mountains are steep and the vegetation is heavy. You go out with Rangers who spend every day with the Gorillas, as well as armed Ranges, and you can hire a porter to help on the steepest parts.



While you are trekking in, the early trackers are starting where the gorilla bedded for the night and relocations them. By the time you get to the area, the family has



hopefully been found and the early trackers will have opened a rough path to their current location. The last part of your trek will certainly be bushwacking on steep heavily vegetated slopes.



Spending an hour with these magnificent creatures, so like us in so many ways, is, for some, a life-changing experience...and certainly enriching for anyone.

The family we visited was a large Silverback Male, his mate, and 4 youngsters, including one just a few months old.



















Lake Bunyonyi, the lake of many small birds, is filled with islands. Roads touch its shore only in a few places, and transportation is by boat...this is the village school “bus” picking up children at an isolated homestead.





I wanted this to be a Goliath Heron, but it is actually an immature Purple Heron.





The view from my cabin must be outside the border of Lake Mburu National Park. It was the season for young at Lake Mburu. Here we have a baby Warthog, and a zebra foal. Lake Mburu is one of the few places in Uganda where you can find Zebras.





Lake Mburo is also one of the only places in Uganda that you will find the largest of the East African antelope...the Eland.





Another Topi, Zebra foal, and the classic African Antelope, the Impala. Surprisingly, in Uganda, Impala are only found in Lake Mburo National Park.





Long-crested
Eagle.

A handsome
Defassa
Waterbuck.



Striped and Woodland Kingfishers.





African Hoopoe and
Broad-billed Roller.





Late in the day, getting on toward full dark, we happened on this Leopard as it happened on the Bushbuck standing on its termite mound. They studied each other for fifteen minutes before the Leopard decided the Waterbuck was not



worth the time and energy to chase down.



Picking up a few last species of birds on our final day, as we did a walking safari. Wattled Lapwing, and Green Wood Hoopoe.



Bare-faced Go-away Bird,
Black-bellied Bustard



