

Fred and Elizabeth return to Uganda. 17<sup>th</sup> March- 7<sup>th</sup> April 2015.

'We' had developed a Tour formula for minimal haste and more leisure time at fewer venues. We called it "Whiteknuckles Lite" and it worked well on my solo trip to Uganda in March 2014 when it was refined into "Whiteknuckles UltraLite". At the end of that visit I had promised to return with Elizabeth to **Broadbill Forest Camp** which had been developed by my good friend Emmy Gongo. Emmy readily agreed to act as guide for us on our full trip and to do the bulk of the driving. Having known him for several years I really cannot imagine touring Uganda without him. His local knowledge and skills are superb and he is a very capable and safe driver.

After a couple of emails to my friends at Churchill Safaris our choice for the rest of our lodgings was fixed. SNBrussels came up with decent flight times and prices from Manchester via Brussels and I sprung the trip into a few weeks or so to revisit some favourite places and to explore new ones.

I am not going to bore anyone with a bird by bird, day by day account of the whole trip. Lodges will be mentioned with an URL. Instead I will simply post my itinerary and personal views on what we saw and did.



Our arrival at EBB from home was straightforward, our visas obtained and our luggage collected. We had arranged for the free pick up by Airport Guest House <http://www.naturelodges.biz/airport-guesthouse> where we had booked a room for two nights. This is a convenient and pleasant place in which to unwind and recover from the flights while ticking off our first birds of the trip. We spent a lazy next day just relaxing and enjoying the many birds that visit the gardens including the **Red-chested Sunbird** and **Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher**.

We first made a personal re-visit to Hoima's Cultural Lodge to see it open and running.



<http://hoimaculturalsafarilodge.com/index.html>

This is a development by our friend's Ether and Henry Kyambadde of Churchill Safaris. We had a very enjoyable evening and overnight having been driven there and back by Joseph of Churchill Safaris. This is a very pleasant place on the outskirts of Hoima with good food and wine. The management also arranged for some interesting post prandial entertainment by a

local dance group.

We then returned to Kampala to exchange vehicles for the drive to Lake Mburo National Park for a three night stay at Arcadia Cottages. <http://www.arcadialodges.com/lake-mburo.html> Arcadia are conveniently based inside the National Park and the grounds hop with both birds and beasts making it ideal for WhiteknucklesLite. We got off to a great start as we met a huge male Leopard starting on his fresh killed Zebra just by the Zebra track on the way in. He obliged with several poses as he dined and was quite relaxed in our presence. We checked on him from time to time over the three days it

took him to finish off his prey.



We had bad rain next day so the planned walk was scrubbed and as the car was giving problems it was no great loss. We did a boat ride on the Lake in the afternoon and caught up with the local Finfoots



and had an interesting quite physical encounter with some Hippo. The grounds of this lodge are quite open and frequented by Warthog,



Bushbuck, Impala etc., as well as Hippo at night. Many birds were noted including numerous Yellow Wagtails, Chinspot Batis and the lovely Klaas's Cuckoo.



Next day we caught up with some serious birding for our growing list as well as saying our daily "Good Morning" to the



Leopard and climbing to the top of the viewpoint. This Park contains most of the wildlife seen further south in Tanzania such as numerous Zebra, less one of course, Eland, Buffalo, Topi, DeFassa Waterbuck, Reedbuck and Bushbuck as

well as some large Leopards. Lions are seen from time to time.

Following our stay in Lake Mburo we moved on to Emmy's Broadbill Forest Camp [www.broadbillforestcamp.com](http://www.broadbillforestcamp.com) high in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest for five nights. Lots of elephant sign, chimps and monkeys in the valley as well as good sightings of two of the beautiful endemics of the area, Ruwenzori Red Duiker and Handsome Francolin.



On the drive in we noticed some distressed young BeeEaters that appeared to have problems getting airborne and wondered if they had exited the nest too soon. Good Samaritan that I am, I picked one up and went to place it back in the nest only to find the hole full of Safari Ants. This discovery coincided with me realising my hands and legs were being attacked by the same ants that had

actually been on the young birds, hence their problems. Sadly I could do little for them and had to let nature take its course. (I did exact some revenge on the Ants that were now painfully attacking me and no doubt this is was against Park Rules but what the heck? I plead self-defence.) Oooh. That's a lot of photos but the trip was so good it is hard to know what to leave out. I'd better get on and write.

At Broadbill, Emmy has continued his plan to plant many bird and mammal friendly shrubs and flowers which are rapidly becoming established.



These proved very popular with Butterflies too.

Our four days were spent birding from the Balcony as well as exploring the local area and tracks which passed all too soon. Highlights of the endemics seen from the balcony were Red-faced Woodland Warbler, Stripe-breasted Tit and Regal Sunbird. We also had striking views of Cassin's Hawk-Eagle, Northern Puffback and the beautiful endemic Black-billed Turaco. Many Ruwenzori 3 horned Chameleon can be seen in the garden and on Elizabeth's hand.



Saying our farewells to the staff and wildlife of Broadbill after a splendid five nights we now headed for the western tip of Lake Bunyoni and the small and simple Heritage Camp at Muko. <https://heritagelodgesuganda.com/> On our way we did a side trip to Ruvuma Swamp which was very rewarding. This swamp is formed as the outlet from Lake Bunyoni meanders its way north and then west to skirt Bwindi before entering Lake Mutande. Here we added several species including White-winged Warbler, Fan-tailed Widowbird, Cape

Wagtail and Papyrus Canary as well as a very mysterious Weaver that fits no known description in any Bird book we have. We then made the short drive back to the Kabale road and on to Muko Camp where we settled in to our 'usual' roomy cabin for three nights and a welcome sighting of the Spot-necked Otters that frequent this area of the lake as well as the regular colonies of Egrets, Herons and Cormorants.

Having settled into our cabin we lost no time in birding around the grounds and adjacent lakeside before taking dinner where the highlight was an excellent Crayfish Masala. Next day we set off up the main road to Kanaba Gap and what to me is one of the finest views in East Africa.

First seen by me in 2003 and never bettered. The whole of the Virunga volcanos laid out in front of you from Mahavura, Mgahinga, the jagged "teeth" of Sabinyo to Visoke and right across to the currently erupting twins of Nyiragongo and nearby Nyamuragira in the DRC.



Pick a clear day, we did, and you can nearly see forever. After that visit we dropped down to the



Echuyo Forest Reserve which, despite being bisected by the new tar road, is safe to bird and can yield many specials as it did for us. Emmy is quite skilled at calling birds out for examination and photography and we were soon seeing Regal Sunbirds, the aptly named Strange Weaver, White-starred Robin, Mountain Masked Apalis and Long-tailed Barred Cuckoo to name but a few. We gradually worked our way downhill, with Emmy bringing the car in stages, and adding other birds as we went. As you leave the forest proper there is a small stream and swamp which also repaid investigation.



Next day we birded the rough road alongside the lake where we encountered more Otters as well as many birds in and around the local Shambas. The views of this lake are very good and where you can access the swampy shores you can find lots of different birds that make it their home. Notable finds were Veillot's Black Weaver, Yellow Bishop, Blue-headed Coucal and Little Rush Warbler.

We also encountered what must be one of the largest Domestic Pigs I have ever seen. Vegetarians look away now. Back at Muko we encountered the only Purple Heron of the trip and saw many Marsh Harriers hunting the reeds as we explored a little used track from the village where a large flock of Grey Crowned Cranes were feeding.

Next morning, April 1<sup>st</sup>, appropriately, we left Muko for Kabale to refuel for the trip up to Katanguru for our looked forward to visit to Mweya Lodge in Queen Elizabeth National Park. <http://www.mweyalodge.com/> This is always one of our favourites being so centrally located on the Peninsular.

However we had yet to get there and had a choice of routes. To avoid retracing our route through Bwindi we opted for the more 'direct' route via lovely tar to Ntungamo and then north, still on tar for some way, where we faced 50km or so of dirt road through Kitagata before joining the 'main road' again at Ishaka. Well that was the plan. It worked well enough until we left the tar for the last 50km through Kitagata. This is now under reconstruction and beset with temporary diversions due to "land problems" or so the signs said. And to add to the interest this road is very busy with huge Rwandan trucks carrying Cement from Hima to Rwanda. So it was more or less inevitable we encountered a large 'blockage' where two trucks had firmly stuck together. One had lost traction on the wet dirt surface, did I mention it was raining? And his countryman just tried to push past with the inevitable result. So we sat and watched the fun as first one then two huge



Earthmovers were eventually called in to do some serious pushing. As the gap widened a number of other vehicles were itching to push past us to get through but Emmy seized his moment, engaged 4WD and shot through the gap as soon as it was wide enough. We never looked back. And so, after

getting embroiled in UWA's new book keeping centre, we entered QENP and arrived at Mweya Lodge and after being greeted as old friends we were shown to our new Special Tent overlooking the channel. We had splurged on this as it looked lovely and we knew from previous visits that sometimes lions



came to hunt the Warthogs that lived under the platform. We settled in and prepared for dinner which was very enjoyable.

As we passed reception on the way back to our tent we were advised that "perhaps we should wait for a lift?" April 1<sup>st</sup>? Normally we just

walk back with our torch but like good guests we got in the land cruiser and were taken home. Well almost home. We stopped just before the tent as four lovely lions were sitting to attention at the top of our steps down to the tent. Oh why did I not take my camera to dinner?? What to do now? We could see the lions and the lions could see us. We dismounted the truck on the 'blind' side and repeating under our breath "do NOT run" we slipped quietly over the rail fence at the rear of the tent and safely made the front door with my key in my hand. Elizabeth and I can still be quite nimble at times. What with stuck trucks and wandering lions I think we had had quite enough for one day. We retired and slept soundly.

Our stay at Mweya was for three nights so this gave us two full days and after the initial excitement



with the lions we had high hopes which were fulfilled. First we set off for the Explosion Craters and on the way we found two lovely Verreaux's Eagle Owls in a tree next to the road. One was shy but the other, the female, obliged with some nice poses. The Explosion craters are not my favourite part of the park but it is normally good for ground birds such as crakes and quails etc. However after the rain of the last few days it was the scenery that got my camera clicking. Clear skies and views right across to DRC in the west and the Ruwenzoris in the north all as a backcloth to the most beautiful green landscapes of lush grass

dotted with Acacia. We met a small party of Elephant coming our way on the narrow grass track and stopped to let them approach which they obligingly did. We thought they may make us back up but as they reached us they just walked around us with what I swear was a wink from the Matriarch who had crossed tusks that met in front of her trunk. Her small family just ignored us. Further on the drive took us through more beautiful green scenery although some interaction with a herd of curious Buffalo provided some excitement. Exiting



back to the main track we noted many Lesser Flamingo in one of the crater lakes. As we headed back we met the small unit of Ellies led by "Mama Crosstusks" that we had met earlier some kms away so they had moved a good distance.



They crossed just in front of us but we just got a hard stare and no wink this time.



The afternoon was spent on the Kazinga cruise. We always take the UWA boat as the slower pace and greater stability makes for a better camera platform. Of course we met several elephants, buffalo and hippo taking the water but the main draw was the birds. The tick list grew rapidly with such newcomers as Pink-backed Pelican, Goliath Heron and both Gull-billed and White-winged Terns. A highlight for me was Red-throated BeeEater which I have never seen here before.



Despite taking my camera to dinner there were no lions tonight.

Next day we headed out early for Kasenyi with a Bush Breakfast. By one of life's coincidences we met a group of Elephant that had entertained us in 2013 in almost the exact same position as last time. This time the Matriarch was firmly in charge and took no nonsense from either us or her young charges

although one very junior calf could not resist an amusing mock charge with ears a flapping. Entering Kasenyi via the new "Gate" we encountered about fifty Ellies crossing the track so we stopped to let them pass. Tracks were a bit sticky following rain but Emmy mastered them all very well. We met a pride of



Lion finishing last night's meal of Kob but not being particularly 'active' we left them to it. We had our Bush Breakfast at a small picnic site overlooking a salt lake before covering yet more tracks, seeing even more elephant, waterbuck and buffalo and of course several new birds including both Crowned and Senegal Lapwings, Rufous-naped Larks and Red Bishops. We also watched a large Egyptian Mongoose for quite some time as it hunted in the grass.



Later in the day we ventured up to a remote part of the Park where we found three species of Quail, Common, Button and Harlequin. This took some time so



we arrived back at the Lodge after "closing time!" You can do such things when with Emmy. Still no lions at dinner. We now left QENP for Mabira Forest to the east of Kampala so we had a six hour drive via Kasese and Fort Portal. It was 4<sup>th</sup> April and Easter Saturday so traffic was very busy in Kampala when we arrived at 15.00. Indeed it was gridlocked so we 'detoured' off the main road into some very rough side roads and eventually exited Kampala two hours later. Turning off the main road to Jinja after 50 km we arrived at our final lodge for two nights. Rainforest Lodge is situated as you would expect in the Mabira Rainforest. <http://geolodgesafrica.com/index.php/our-lodges/the-rainforest-lodge> This is built in the same style as other Geo Lodges such as Jacana with timber construction and screens. There is a balcony but the trees are so close it is hard to see much birdlife clearly although they were

very vocal. However we did manage to add Chestnut Wattle-eye and Yellow Longbill to our list from the balcony along with Giant and Red-legged Sun Squirrels. We did some walks in the area which yielded good views of Grey-cheeked Mangabey and B&W Colobus Monkeys as well as several forest birds such as Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrike, **Forest Robin**, Speckled Tinkerbird, **Yellow-throated Tinkerbird**





and **Yellow-spotted Barbet**. Whilst I don't care too much for Forest birding it can be rewarding at times so I was well pleased with our visit. Whether the balcony at Rainforest Lodge came up to expectations is another question.

So it was now back to Entebbe for our flight home but Kampala was not done with us yet. It was Easter Monday and the tailback towards "the coast" at Entebbe was horrendous. 4km took us nearly two hours of stop/go, during which we were rear-ended quite hard by a Toyota Corolla. The robust Landcruiser sustained no damage but the poor man in the Corolla had his front end modified and lost his headlights. He

apologised for hitting us and we left him to it.

A final stop at the friendly Airport Guesthouse for a last Nile Special and a meal of Fishstew with Rice and it was soon time to get on the plane. It was on time and so we made both our connections in Brussels and Manchester to arrive home in time for a welcome glass of red wine and a Pizza.

Total checklist for the trip was 322 which was not bad at all.

Photos are on here. <https://whiteknucklesgallery.shutterfly.com/pictures/637>

More photos here:-



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