

Primarily Primates

A solo Whiteknuckles Production.

Skip the boring bits about London City, Congested Tubes, (Transport, not my body), Security at LHR or the 8 hour flight and your hero debouches at Entebbe, and gets to see the inside of the Terminal for the first time. Ticked Indigo bird and Red Bishop whilst taxiing in. Get Three Month Visa from nice man (\$30) and find luggage last seen at Paddington Station.(I had used the Heathrow Express check in.)

Met by Fred Bagonza, the unlucky individual who was to be my driver/guide/companion for the next three weeks. He showed me the Air France 707 which was the subject of 'Raid on Entebbe' still rotting away or maybe in service it is sometimes difficult to tell.

After a courtesy call to Ether in Kampala for packed lunch and coffee we set off west. We missed our first port of call, Mpanga Forest, and arrive at the Equator for lunch.

Fred seems to think this is of interest to me as well as a good spot for aforesaid lunch. He is disillusioned! I find we missed Mpanga as it was too early for lunch. No mention of birding. This is not looking good. However he takes me to one of his favourite bits and there are Long Claws, Larks, Ospreys etc., as well as



Turaco. He is forgiven. After a fly infested trek we head on west to **Lake Mburo N P.** and check in to our lodge. Very homely, Tented like Rufiji or KTL. See lots of Serengetti type critturs. Next morning thinking it will be light, as always in Africa at 6. I get up. It is pitch black and I bump into something which resembles a Buffalo. **NB** Uganda is further west but keeps East African time. Should have noticed it was light at seven last night. Fred unwell and goes to clinic. What do I do to these chaps? I walk and see Eland, Zebra Impala etc., plus lots of birds. Guide Joshua says no Predators just as I point out Hyena following our scent. In the p m we go on lake and two ladies learn why you wind up your windows when leaving your vehicle. We had not cast off before the



Vervets were in and wrecking it! Interesting cruise with more ticks including 5 Finfoot. Charged by Buffalo who was bathing. On way home, we see nice Leopard and cub stalking Impala. Mum keeps in cover but junior poses for me. The Impala gets away so we watch the two cats play until Mum decides it



is time to look for supper. Quite a good end to my second day in Uganda with bird count 117 and Mammals galore. Fred is back from clinic 'cured' so all is well. Much activity around camp in night so stay in my tent An early walk in the morning mist proves exciting with further close encounters of the antelope kind and many birds. We leave the Park after breakfast and drive west on goodish roads to Kabale and through excellent mountain scenery to our new home at the foot of the Virungas. The lodge is in a beautiful setting on a lake but when you have said that you have said it all. The quality was not up to Whiteknuckles standards. Pity that. Fred takes my Passport and disappears. On return I find he has arranged an early morning exit visa to **Rwanda.**

Early Morning it is and we hit the border at around 07.00 to find it is only 06.00 in Rwanda hence the 'visit' last night. Still following this? Good. To Ruhengere with armed escort. No pictures. We get permit without fuss to visit Sabyoni Group. Into forest and up into the Virungas or **Parc des Volcans.** Very fertile and very scenic. No problems in the trek despite altitude.

After about 90 minutes we hit dense bush and the trail gets a bit stickier but nothing we cannot handle. We are told to leave our belongings with the scouts as we are close and only cameras are permitted from now on. No eating drinking, smoking or else. I had only my light camera and 80mm

lens as I knew it would be poor light and dark subjects. I was right.

We find the Sabyino Group and my first Gorillas. The reaction was simply "Wow!" We are not supposed to come closer than 5 metres but the



of this
aside.
Then we
others
closely for
there! This
relative
youngsters
Adults



Gorillas do not know
rule. I get brushed

are joined by two
who inspect me
signs of close
relationship. No luck
is all taking place in
open ground of
Undergrowth with
acting up and the
looking benignly on.

The males keep a discreet distance not from fear but total lack of



interest. Second in command "Ryango" simply ignores us even when I nearly fall over him. The Head Honcho "Guhonda" tries to keep the kids in order but fails dismally. Our tracker has a superb relationship with the whole group and everyone is quite relaxed despite the close proximity of some awesome beasts. All too soon our strict one hour audience is over and we have to leave them to get on with their lives. Back down the trail we met "Ryango" once more and I take the opportunity of

posing with him. Not good!

We get our Certificate at Parc HQ and an armed escort back to the border where it costs me another \$30 to get back into Uganda. Back at base we learn of a foul up with permits for the morrow but as it is tipping down I am not that dismayed. We go on a boat trip on the lake in the PM and see two lots of African Otters, Ross's Turaco and get a few more ticks. Next we are off to **Bwindi** to penetrate the Impenetrable Forest. The area is good for birds too! Our digs are splendid. Two large beds, open air ablutions and a proper bath. The location is first rate in grounds full of birds. Next morning we set off up the mountain in a Thunderstorm and this is HARD! We are looking for the HB group and I think of many acronyms for HB & BH! After two hours of this we hit open ground,



relatively speaking and are told "Get your cameras ready!" A family of 11. None of heard of the 5 is in whilst the to get a close white ape with mum drags him he persists as he climbed up here probably right! horrendous



whom seem to have metre rule either. Dad contemplative mood youngest is determined look at this strange specs and red face! His back once or twice but is convinced we have just to see him. He is All thoughts of the climb up are forgotten

as the sun comes out and we are in the midst of a family group just

feeding and sunning themselves. Could fill this page with the pictures but will resist the temptation!

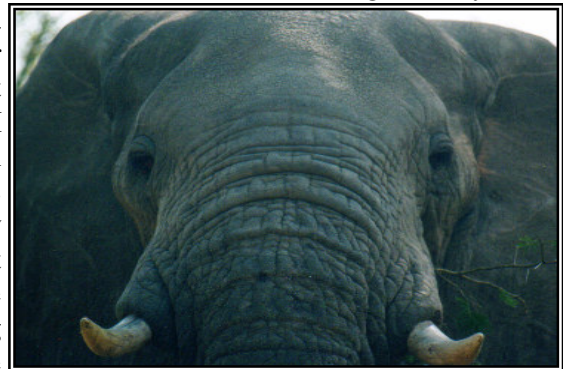
Again our hour with the gentle giants is over all too quickly and the trail is only marginally easier going downhill. My legs make it on autopilot back to the lodge for a welcome beer where we find the other trekkers have not been so lucky. The bath is run and aching limbs are eased before an excellent dinner where I absent mindedly eat what I think is a cherry tomato only to discover, too late, that it is a hot pepper! Did I mention that the tariff includes Alcohol? The next day is spent on a

long walk in the forest getting a cricked neck looking at birds 100 metres up in the Canopy or hidden in the Undergrowth. Grown men do this I am told. I see Giant Squirrel, Bohm's Sun Squirrel and Red footed Sun Squirrel and a red snake with a white head. Quite a lot of new ticks to the growing list including several rarities from the Congo, which is less than a kilometre to the west. Next day we are diverted from Ishasa for 'Security reasons'? However we make **QE Park** and stay south of the channel where we are entertained by a colony of Bats. At Jacana Lodge the Shining Blue and Blue Breasted Kingfishers are round the swimming pool and the resident Finfoot cruises



by during breakfast. On to Mweya Lodge where we have our first 'Elephant Moment', see Giant Forest Hog and our first Kob. A cruise on the Kazinga channel gets many water birds onto the list, A nice Hippo with Calf and another Leopard! There are resident Warthogs in the Garden and a tribe of habituated Banded Mongoose who are quite fun. We find no Lions and game is not quite the quantity of other Parks. We head for **Kibale** forest and the **Bigodi Wetlands** staying with Aubrey at Ndali which is like a home from home on the edge of a crater lake. Great for birds so more ticks. Many monkeys to add to the Primate list. Red & Black and White Colobus, Red tailed, Sykes and Golden Monkey. We give a White Spotted Flufftail a complex by calling it up and then leaving it behind. We can still hear it calling when we are back in the car! From Ndali we head into the unknown

for **Katonga** Reserve. Little visited. We shun the campsite for a small lodge which is basic but adequate but possibly not for all tastes. Naturetrek would be envious! Anyway the bed was comfortable and bug free, the cuisine 'African' and Grace's kids charming! The reserve was very interesting although the canoe trail missable. The walking was excellent with more ticks of fur and feather. Deserves a longer visit but Ether had had to be bullied into letting me go for even a day. Then to **Semliki** via Fort Portal in the Rwenzoris. Great scenery and the approach into this hidden valley quite dramatic. There are habituated chimps here but I did not bother. Night drives yielded the usual White Tailed Mongoose and Genets but nothing exceptional. Walking safaris were very good with much ground game coming back after being poached to near extinction. Four poster beds and much birdlife by sitting in the bar.(Congo Serpent Eagle!) A trip on Lake Albert got many more birds including Red Chested Beater, Pygmy goose etc., but no Shoebill. A good day out nevertheless. From here to **Murchison Falls** was a



days drive for my last three nights. This yielded our first lion stalking a Kob and the best Elephant moment of the trip. Needed a wide angle lens with this one. I have NOT cropped it! A nice fellow if a touch bellicose! Lots of Oribi and Jackson's Hartebeest, plus Rothchild's Giraffe and some big Buffalo. Probably more game here than elsewhere in Uganda but still not up to other parts of Africa. The trip to the Falls gave good views of more of the resident birds including Rock Pratincoles. The trip back to Kampala got me

the final Kingfisher, Chocolate Backed, and together with Cassin's Hawk Eagle brought the total to 404, with which I was content. I missed out on the Botanical Gardens in Entebbe but there were plenty of birds next morning in the Hotel grounds and on the Lake Shore. The return flight was over the Congo, Chad and Libya. My the Sahara is BIG! Early into LHR and Express to Paddington as time was tight for my I O M flight from City. Taxi from Paddington took 45 mins so made it.

Phoned home and flight arrived Ronaldsway just after 8.

