

Fred's 4th trip to Uganda

10th February – 10 March 2006

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Preliminary information etc.,

This was to be my fourth visit to Uganda having been solo in 2003, back with my wife in 2004, followed by a joint trip with birding fanatic Bill North in 2005 where time only permitted us to see half the country. So when he suggested that we return to 'do the bits he missed' I could but agree! Uganda is such a lovely green and fertile country that the decision to visit is not a hard one! Bill had to fly back on 20th February but as there were other items on my personal wish list I decided to stay on and do some of these before returning on 10th March.

I was already an avid reader of Bradt guides and had both the current issue and Phillip Briggs updates which he sends out regularly via Email. As on my previous visits I used the direct London-Entebbe flight of BA. There are cheaper flights but I find the extra journey time a bit wearing. Even having to connect with a flight to/from my home on the Isle of Man the direct flight means I can do the trip home in a day. I book all flights on the Internet direct with BA and the main Ground arrangements are made with Churchill Safaris and Travel in Kampala. They do a reasonable job. This time we splashed out on Professional Bird guides using Johnny Kamugisha as driver guide for the joint bit and for my solo part I had Emmy Gongo. Both these men are bird experts and founder members of the Ugandan Bird Guides Association. We were provided with a Toyota Prado which was quite comfortable but with Auto transmission and Turbo engine it was not really suitable. I found the Transmission and Turbo tended to cancel each other out as changing down for hills brought in the Turbo leading to you easing up on the throttle and the car then changed back up leaving you worse off than before. Similarly when stuck in mud (Emmy's speciality) you need to "rock" out in High gear to avoid wheel spin which the auto/turbo combination made nigh on impossible. Having said that it did not breakdown or rattle too much. However I would strongly recommend disconnecting the stupid "Beeper" that sounds when you select reverse gear. Heaven knows how many mammals and birds this scared off when backing up for a closer look. The Elephants in particular seemed mightily displeased with the noise and needlessly upsetting Elephants can be a Health Hazard. (Personally, I wish they had trashed the damned car! A stubborn Buffalo had a good try!)

Most places we slept had either Mosquito nets or screened windows but I have to say that I saw little evidence of any Mosquitoes during my four week trip. Our route was Entebbe-Masindi-Murchison-Bundibugyo-Semliki Wildlife Reserve, with Bill then returning to Entebbe having dropped me off at the Sebitoli Gate to Kibale Forest. My solo routing is included in the daily record below. By and large everything worked out reasonably well and more or less to plan, except when it did not!

The Rate of exchange was \$1/UgShillings 1800, more or less. Most places were happy with shillings although some up market places preferred dollars. Changing money was not a problem. The cost of Meals, Beer etc., was not expensive whatever the quality of accommodation with one exception where Semuliki Lodge seemed to exploit their monopoly by charging around 4,000 for a beer compared to 1,600 elsewhere. To coincide with Kenya etc., Uganda is three hours ahead of UK although actually on the two hour meridian. This means that it got light at around seven and dark again twelve hours later. As usual the Temperature difference between a European winter and Equatorial Africa needs to be taken into account. 30C in Entebbe and 2C in London so pack a Fleece and Woolly layer.

Kit carried. I do not carry a telescope and rely on my Minox 10x42 Binoculars which serve me well enough. I also had my Fuji S5000 Camera with a good 10x Optical zoom and 1.5 converter and what I felt was an adequate supply of re-chargeable batteries together with the requisite Charger. I have managed previous trips without problems but a "Power spike" in Bundibugyo fused the charger so I had to resort to buying standard types as the charger also took a set of batteries with it.

My library consisted of "The Bradt Guide" and "Birds of Africa, south of the Sahara" by Sinclair and Ryan. Bill and both our guides carried Stephenson and Fanshawe's "Birds of East Africa" so we were well covered with learned guidance. Ha!

Now to the trip itself:-

February 9th. Home to London Heathrow airport. I took the afternoon flight to London Gatwick and transferred by National Express bus to LHR. The Entebbe flight boarded and left more or less on time at 19.50 for the eight hour journey. A couple of drinks and dinner still left some time to get some fitful sleep for the long day tomorrow.

February 10th. A big gain in using BA's flight is that it arrives at 07.30, giving you a whole day to get moving. (I always resist the entreaties "to spend the first night in Kampala to rest, be briefed, meet the guides etc., etc.") I am sure Kampala is a very nice place but it is not for me! So through Immigration without a fuss (they have improved the system and it is now quite quick. Pay your US\$30, get a stamp in your passport and go find your luggage.) Johnnie K met us outside and we were on the road by about 8.15 and heading for Masindi. Through the Capital's usual traffic chaos and onto a good tarmac road north. We had ticked the usual Urban Marabouts and Hadada etc., Being more inclined to Pachyderms than Pipits I had arranged a stop at Ziwa Rhino Trust for lunch. This is about three hours up the road about 20km before the Masindi turn off. www.rhinofund.org for details. This is set in pristine bush and we rapidly started picking up birds for our list. White-headed Barbets, Gonaleks, Shrikes etc. Having signed in we picked up a guide to go and see the Rhino thinking we would drive around a bit take some photos and depart. We were surprised/delighted to be asked to get out of the car and proceed on foot once we had located them. After a walk of around 500 metres or so we could see four large grey shapes under an Acacia. Was this it? "Oh no you can come with me and go as close as you dare" or 20 metres whichever is the longest. So we arrived to greet four large White Rhinoceros. Very impressive and more so on their own turf. One got up and gave us a long hard stare but his pals just slumbered on. We also watched a very nice Harrier and other Savannah birds. Very nice. Then back to the car and on to Masindi where we were booked into the Masindi Hotel. Very pleasant airy rooms with Fridge, which we filled with our drinking water bottles, and Air con. Meals and beer prices were extremely reasonable. Bronze tailed Starlings in the Garden too!



February 11th. Early breakfast for a dawn start to visit the Royal Mile in Budongo Forest reserve ticking a few Waxbills, Snake Eagles etc., on the way. The Royal Mile is justly famous with birders and did not disappoint us. We quickly had good views of Dwarf, Pygmy and Chocolate-backed Kingfishers while both Cassin's and Sabine's Spinetails hawked overhead. We were also treated to good views of Chimpanzees as they crossed the trail just ahead of us to access a fruiting tree that had both B&W and White-thighed Hornbills already in residence. We also picked up Chestnut-capped Flycatcher, Ituri Batis and Fraser's Nightingale-Thrush. One of the highlights among so many was excellent views of a very obliging Narina Trogon who sat close and long enough for some decent pictures. We just missed seeing a Crowned Eagle perched as it flew off on our approach. Then it was back to base in the heat of the day as everything went quiet. Nobody came up with anywhere special to go in the cool of the last few hours of daylight so we headed east towards Masindi Port. After a few kilometers there is a prominent hill with Radio Masts atop it. We turned off through open grassland spotting the odd bird as we went and then at a fork we went left and commenced up the rough track that led to the summit. Very soon we had Raptors soaring the up currents and we christened the place "Raptor ridge". Common, Honey and even Red-necked Buzzards were sprinkled with Wahlberg's Eagles and a few Tawny too! During a stop to watch Abyssinian Rollers two White-crested Turaco looped across the road giving clear and unmistakable views. A great place to go if you have a few hours in Masindi. Our count had reached 124 by dark.

February 12th. Again an early start for more Budongo, this time the main track around Busingiro which after yesterday was a trifle slow. The traffic was also a bit of a problem. We did get nice views/photos of Brown Twin-spots at the camp site and the bushes around are well worth searching thoroughly. Cassin's Hawk Eagle overhead plus a possible first Crowned Eagle. We were headed for Murchison Falls via the coast but drew a blank at the crest of the Rift as the building that hosted the Cliff Chats is no longer there. Nevertheless there were lots of Banded Martins and other Hirondenes around by way of compensation. The drive to our overnight rest at Nile Safari Lodge was not boring by any means. Nile Safari Lodge overlooks the Nile and is part of the Inns of Uganda Group. Our main reason for visiting is that being just outside the park proper you can bird around the place on foot. They also have their own small launch for hire which will take you down to the Delta. Not a cheap place but in a superb location. We had our first Swallow-tailed BeeEaters whilst enjoying a cold beer. The evening walk also produced its fair quota including Black Scimitar bill. By dark our list had grown to 158 but by lunchtime tomorrow it would hit 226.



to our growing list.

February 13th. We had booked the Launch for 'first light' and whilst sitting at the stage we were buzzed by Standard-Winged Nightjars so no complaints there. I had seen Pennant Winged before but never these strange things. A Malachite Kingfisher was also disputing our use of the launch. Under way and downstream and seeing various Herons, from Goliath to Squacco, Darters and our first Fish Eagles. Then a Shoebill flew over head, circled round and pitched in a nice clear area where we could get some nice photographs. If he had gone into the Papyrus we would have lost him. We also had good views of Darters, Saddle billed and Open billed Stork etc., plus our only Common Moorhen of the trip. Then back to the Lodge for Brunch. In the afternoon we went by car to the top of the Falls which is a longish drive but not without interest. Several of the regular pools had dried out but a scan with the binoculars was always worthwhile. At the top of the Falls the most amazing sight was thousands, and I do mean thousands, of Abdim's Storks coming down on both sides of the river and onto the rocky Islets in midstream. What they were doing I have no idea. The Falls are of course very impressive with all that water being squeezed into such a small gap. A nice Game drive back produced the usual Buffalo and Jackson's Hartbeeste, Bohor Reed Buck, DeFassa's Waterbuck, Kob etc. Another pleasant evening walk only added

February 14th. We were up and heading for the Paraa Ferry to cross to the North Bank for the Launch to Murchison Falls. We were booked into Paraa Lodge for two nights. This is another class place in a prominent location. All rooms look out over the grounds to the Nile and Elephant regularly wander by at night. We took the Launch and headed upstream past the Island where Hemingway crashed his plane. This Island was covered in yet more Abdim's storks but left room for Fulvous Whistling Duck, Spur winged Goose and other swamp birds. The BeeEater cliffs were empty but we had seen Red-throated already down the river. This part of the Nile is infested with huge crocodiles. We saw plenty of Elephant, Hippo etc., and our first Giraffe, Murchison being the only place where they occur. Two Skimmers were added to the list although I knew we should see plenty in Queen Elizabeth NP later. Much amusement as a Goliath Heron defended its catch against a marauding Fish Eagle. The Eagle ended up in the River. At the foot of the Falls the resident Rock Pratincoles posed for their daily photocall but there was no sign of the Pel's Fishing Owl that frequents this pool. After a nice lunch and settling into our new rooms we set out for Delta point via the North west corner of the park which was very productive. Woodchat Shrike, Piaciac pecking Buffalo, Heuglin's Francolin, Great-spotted Cuckoo and a roosting party of Steppe Eagles bringing our list to 259 by dark.

February 15th. Next morning we were out again bright and early and had some good "Elephant moments" as well as good birds. The highlight has to be the very co-operative Secretary bird but if cooperation was to count then the Blue-cheeked and Northern Carmine BeeEaters together in the same tree comes a close 2nd as the resultant photo gave 2 for the price of 1. We also had strange views of a Marsh Harrier walking down the track pretending to be a Francolin and our first and only Namaqua dove of the trip. We rounded off the day with Speckled-Fronted Weavers and Silverbirds.

February 16th. This was a day taken up with travelling as our itinerary was to get from Paraa to Bundibugyo. No mean feat but it was considered better to lose a whole day travelling rather than shorten a stay by breaking the journey. We still managed a few birds at comfort stops etc., before arriving in Bundibugyo at 16.00 or so. We checked into the basic but comfortable "Hotel Vanilla" and arranged guides for tomorrow in the Semliki National Park. This place has long been on my list of places to visit. I was not to be disappointed.

February 17th. We drove the 15km to pick up Samson our guide and then to walk the Kirumia trail. We had hardly got onto the trail when we identified a Yellow-throated Cuckoo calling and managed to catch a close look at a female. This trail heads into the Mature Forest along a well defined and easy track and whilst forest birding is not my thing we did successfully identify both Gray's, Red-headed and Crested Malimbe quite quickly. We also scored well with the Hornbills with good views of both Black Dwarf and Red-billed Dwarf varieties for which this forest is justly famous. In fact the only one we missed out on was the Black Wattled. We could hear them nearby but failed to get even a glimpse of them. One amusing interlude was when Johnnie K "identified" a Congo Serpent Eagle calling and set about whistling it in closer. The bird duly responded and came very close to us. So close we could easily photograph a Rufous-sided Broadbill. If you ever read this Johnnie no need to blush it was still a good bird to see. As the day grew hot it was back in the car for the two hour drive to Semuliki Lodge in the Wildlife Reserve. This took us back over the first ridge of the Ruwenzoris with excellent views down over the Ituri forest into the Congo. We arrived for a late lunch at this comfortable but pricey place. We quickly added several "garden" birds such as Black-billed Barbet, Red-shouldered Cuckoo shrike and Red-headed Weaver. The afternoon highlights were both Black-headed and Senegal Lapwings with a night drive producing both Plain and Slender-tailed Nightjars. Doubts re the former were dispelled by us picking it up while it sat under the spotlight. On a Mammal note it was pleasing to see Lions once more coming into the reserve and obviously recovering from the brink of local extinction. Lots of Elephant around too.

February 18th. We took the Lodge's boat out onto Lake Albert in the morning. We have still to find a Shoebill here but the trip is rewarding nevertheless by the numbers of Waders and Weavers on the shore and in the reed beds. Dabchicks were found almost out of sight of land. It is a big lake! We also added Purple Swamphen to the list which now stood at 317. Then back ashore, picking our way passed a pair of Water Dikkop, and back to the Reserve proper. Lots of Elephant sign and we understand they are coming right down to the Lake to drink as the rains are overdue. We did a short afternoon trip, it really was very hot down there, to Semliki Flats and its huge populations of Ugandan Kob and Bohor Reedbuck. Very quiet for birds but a final look at the Airstrip got us our first Pallid Harriers along with lots of Montague's. They seem to roost up there as most were on the ground. As it was relatively quiet we bravely/foolishly tried to identify the many Cisticola that were teasing us. We think we split out Trilling, Winding, Croaking, Zittling, & Siffling but who really knows? But it was a good end to a full day. A last bottle of wine with Bill to mark the end of his trip. His final score worked out at a probable 323 +/- 2?

February 19th. Today we went back up the excellent scenic road to Fort Portal but not before we had added Red-faced Cisticola to Bill's list. A brief stop at Kabarole Tours office in Fort Portal to check my personal arrangements for the next phase of my trip and then to Kibale National Park at the Sebitoli Gate. Our arrival was marked by nice views of Cinnamon Breasted BeeEaters and Red-headed Bluebills. I checked in to my Banda and Johnnie and Bill then carried on to Entebbe leaving me alone in the forest. Sebitoli Gate is well worth a visit as an alternative to the more famous Kanyanchu. It is developing nicely, set in a cool clearing the Bandas are comfortable and the staff very friendly. They cooked me an excellent dinner and had cool beer for sale. Not much wrong with that. Birding the approach road was as productive as anywhere with lots of Great Blue and Ross's Turacos, Nicators etc., as well as a yet to be identified small Wood-pecker.

February 20th. William from Kabarole came on schedule to pick me and transfer me to Kanyanchu Tree House which had been booked since October. On arrival it was closed for renovations and being the specific reason for my visit I accepted apologies but declined the offer of a 'normal' Banda. William then moved me on to Lake Nkaruba where I was booked in for the next day anyway. This gave me a two night stop in a very attractive place that I had only visited one afternoon last year. Even without an expert holding my hand I was still able to identify Rufous-Bellied Paradise Flycatcher, Crimson-rumped and Yellow-bellied Waxbills etc., Lake Nkaruba is another commendable local initiative and deservedly becoming popular due to its beautiful setting in the Crater lakes area. There is a good canteen and, yes, even beer. There are several walking trails most of which I sampled. The birding is excellent in a new habitat. Try the walk to "The top of the world".

February 21st. Today I was to get the only Semi-collared Flycatcher and good pictures of White-headed Sawwings. Other birds were my first Yellow-billed Ducks of the trip, African Blue Flycatcher, Red-chested Cuckoo among others. There seems to be a resident family of Banded Mongoose who are fairly approachable and the trees are home to both Black & White and the rarer Red Colobus. Plenty of Squirrels too. My home tonight was the aptly named "Lakeside Cottage" which is quite secluded down by the lake (where else). Take a torch to dinner. I took a leisurely approach to life today knowing what was in store for tomorrow. A huge electric storm in the night made me almost hope the trip would be cancelled.

February 22nd. William picked me from Lake Nkaruba on time and drove via Fort Portal to the Trail head for my Trans-Ruwenzori Trek. In company with Moses and David, very biblical, we commenced a walk/trek that I had long wanted to do. Birders can skip this bit, I was too busy to



see much other than three very obliging Ross's Turaco. We never saw Ruwenzori Turaco but by the time I reached the summit I would not have noticed if one had sat on my head. The going was easy enough at first up a track and then into footpaths linking various Shamba that line the fertile slopes. The trail got very steep in parts and the thinning air did not help. Too many beers and too little walking the previous two weeks I am afraid. There is a rest place at 2,060metres which I had been told was the top. Wrong! This was just the start of the National Park. David, the Park Ranger returned at this point and left Moses & I to continue alone. The going was very steep once into the forest although it was encouraging to see we were getting higher than most of the trees. Eventually the Pass (at 2,500 m) was gained as it started to rain. At least it was warm rain. Down through the Bamboo zone was relatively easy strolling until we could see Bundibugyo, the Semuliki River and the far blue Congo hills below. Then came the hard part. The descent was very steep and eroded and you need to be very sure-footed. As Bundibugyo was much lower in altitude than our start point the descent was also much longer. It seemed to go on forever. Eventually all good (and bad) things come to an end and we reached a walkable road at around 1,400 metres leaving a fairly level last three miles into town and a good shower. OK, so I hitched a ride on a Motor-cycle for this bit. It was fun and the best 1,000 shillings of the trip!

William had transported the luggage, my room was ready but the promised longed for shower was not working! So I changed my room and even got a sit down toilet rather than a Squat John. Almost bliss but this was the Hotel Vanilla. Dinner was served just as the power went off and we continued by candlelight. If Mosquitoes penetrated the net while I slept I did not hear them! The Check list got scant attention today.

February 23rd. Today it was back on the Kirumia River Trail for a longer walk to try for more birds. We were not disappointed although, again, the Black-Wattled Hornbill did not put in an appearance. We saw Crested Guinea Fowl, Red-necked Falcon, Scarce Swift and Olive Pigeon to name but a few. We did not get as far as the 2nd Oxbow lake as the heat was building up and birds were getting scarce. I think camping out here would be a good idea for the next trip. Today was Election day in Uganda so to mark the occasion the Power was off for most of the day and by mid afternoon rain started in earnest leaving the rest of the day as a wash out. To their credit Hotel Vanilla had washed, but not dried, my filthy walking trousers and shirt from yesterday. Again our evening meal was taken by Candle-light. Thank heavens the Fridge was not electric as the beer was nice and cold.

February 24th. Today we went to the Sempaya Hot Springs over an interesting set of board walks to the view point. Lots of waders etc., in the marshes including Little Stint, Ruff, Dunlin and Curlew Sandpiper. Then after a visit to Sempaya HQ to sign out we headed once more over the interesting road back to Fort Portal. I was dropped at N'Dali Lodge where I was to spend the next two nights in luxury to re-charge after the trek. That is my excuse! The trip from 20th to 24th was booked through Kabarole Tours of Fort Portal, by Email from home, and I cannot praise their service highly enough. Everything went without a hitch and their honesty is above question. I had been at N'Dali Lodge at some time during each of my earlier three trips to Uganda and they never let me down. A warm welcome from George and a cold beer was pressed in my hand as a late light lunch was served on the Patio overlooking the lake. The grounds, which you can freely explore, are positively jumping with birds. The Lodge is also a good centre for walking the Crater Lakes Region as well as for the usual Chimp tracking at Kanyanchu.

February 25th. A full day at N'Dali where I spent the morning walking the local area and picking up a few new birds but not that many. I did however get closer looks at some that previously had been seen more briefly such as Sooty Chat and Veillot's Black Weaver which has a colony just by N'Dali's Patio. Late afternoon I was joined by Emmy Gongo another well known Bird Guide who was to be my driver for the rest of my trip. I had known Emmy for a couple of years and looked forward to his company. Keen to start "work" he dragged me out for a walk even though his 'contract'

did not really start until tomorrow. We walked the Sugar Cane fields below N'Dali and added a few more to our growing list which stood at 376 by nightfall.

February 26th. We left N'Dali for the drive to Queen Elizabeth National Park about 3 hours south. We went first to Chambura Fig Tree Camp for lunch to see what was about. We were refused permission to follow the track along the Gorge Rim (in case we saw Chimps without paying!) but still managed to add our first Red-faced Lovebird to the list among others. After lunch we headed for Jacana Lodge in the Maramagambo Forest sector. On the way we ticked Marsh Tchagra and Fan-tailed Widow Bird before our appointment to the regular Shining-Blue Kingfisher that is often by the Swimming Pool at Jacana Lodge. He did not let us down. The 'resident' Finfoot did not show however. The afternoon walk back to the Entrance Gate had brought us our first Black BeeEaters, a White-browed Crombec and a couple of Sun-birds when Emmy called "African Black Paradise Flycatcher!" Eh! He showed me an all black Paradise type of Flycatcher much like a Rufous-Bellied but all black and no defined crest. "No such bird, Emmy!" but he was adamant. Nothing in Stevenson and Fanshawe, so what were we looking at? It disappeared into the bushes of course but left a clear mental picture. Emmy was positive and confirmed that Alfred T. had also seen this bird. Back at the Lodge I looked in Sinclair's "Birds of Africa" and showed Emmy the drawing of Bedford's Paradise. He said this was what he meant by African Black and I had to say that what we had seen matched the illustration to a "T". Not including this one, my list was now 376. We were heading for my best ever total of 406 although this was not my prime object. My enjoyment is in seeing birds and mammals in whatever numbers present themselves. I like Quality not Quantity but use numbers as an indicator of how busy we had been.

February 27th. Next morning we went out again at sun rise and managed to get some clear pictures of Black-BeeEaters in the early sun. Then again this Black Flycatcher showed up, or its cousin. This time I got some pictures but a black bird in bush in the early light is a bit contrasty so they are not the best. However they do show the bird to be as described yesterday. What more can I add? Emmy says pairs have been seen on a fairly regular basis and I have no reason to doubt that a bird from about 50/60 kms away in Congo could not also be in the very similar habitat of Maramagambo. This is for experts to sort out. We left Jacana and headed for Mweya Peninsular on the Kazinga channel. I was booked into Mweya Lodge for three nights. This is an excellent Lodge with 360 degree views over Lake Edward and the Kazinga Channel. On the way we tried for Papyrus Gonalek at Katunguru Bridge without success. We did get our first Mosque Swallows and some clear views of Bushbuck etc., Elephant in large numbers were drinking from the opposite Bank. As the day cooled I met up with a Guard Kuli for a planned walk down to the observatory at the tip of the Peninsular. You have to take a Guard as Lion and Elephant are readily encountered here. As we crossed the airstrip it was easy to pick up Kittlitz's Plovers and Rufous capped Larks etc., Then six Pratincoles zoomed over, circled and landed just in front of us. I use the word landed but the juveniles 'pecked' the ground on landing. We got some close views and identified them as Collared. The walk was most enjoyable and of course we could see lots of Pelicans etc., across the Channel. It was growing dusk as we returned and it was fun to put up Hares and then run into a party of curious Buffalo as well as the ubiquitous Waterbuck and Kob. The Buffalo did not know what to make of us being on their patch but simply huffed and puffed a bit before making way for us. I have never seen so many Warthogs. No wonder Lion haunt the area.

February 28th. We did a drive out this morning to the Kasenyi flats area. Had our first really close encounter with Elephants during heavy rain and as it dried out started to pick up Grassland specialities such as Temminck's Courser and Crowned Lapwing. A possible Corncrake was seen but not positively identified for it to count. We also found a pair of Verreaux's Eagle Owls on a Euphorbia. On the return track we found Three Lions sitting under a Thorn bush whilst Kob and Warthog happily grazed quite close. The Lions were making no effort to hide so we guessed they were well fed and just checking out the menu. We also noted a mature Female Bushbuck wearing a radio collar. At lunch our list had broken the 400 mark. We did a short early afternoon drive which earned us European BeeEater and our first African Hobby perched in a Cactus. On our way back we had the pleasure of a 3 metre Python crossing the road. We were booked on the afternoon Launch trip down the channel which is not to be missed. Lots of Skimmers, Waders etc., including Heuglin's (yellow legged), Black-headed and Grey-headed Gulls, Great White and Pink-backed Pelicans, Gull billed Terns etc. The special was Ruddy Turnstone which is more normally seen on the coast. Elephant, Hippo and Buffalo were all in or at the water edge giving unrestricted views. We did a short drive towards Katwe before nightfall but apart from some interesting Elephant moments we had seen nothing much until we turned up the Crater Explosion track where we found both Common and Button-Quail. We re-entered at the main gate a little after the permitted time but having Emmy along undoubtedly helped. We watched a further Verreaux's Eagle Owl and whilst there was talk of Cactus Climbing Lions we did not find them.



March 1st. We took another morning drive to Kasenyi Flats which produced a long sighting of Giant Forest Hog as well as another mystery bird. After much head scratching it could only be a Tawny Pipit. We also saw some White-backed Vultures picking over some bones and quite clearly there was a Ruppell's Griffon with them. Altogether heavier and much lighter in colouring. We saw a car stopped and gazing miles away at one or two Elephant coming into view. The other car did not linger, wanting breakfast? but we hung on and the herd grew to over twenty including several quite small ones. They were purposefully heading our way so we waited whilst they fed a while and then came on. We guessed where they would cross and backed away slightly to give them room. (If you let the Elephants make the decision to approach they will often permit close encounters.) After a bit of scenting us they continued to the road about two car lengths in front and crossed quite relaxed but with a wary eye on us. The Adults split with



some crossing first, then the infants and then the rest of the Adults. One of the latter gave us a bit of Ear Waving and snorting but made no real effort to threaten us. I was well content at this best close encounter of the trip.



Returning down the track we had good views of an African Crake to boost numbers to 417. We skipped lunch, Emmy does not waste time on such

things, and went out for a drive but not much around. We did have a good photocall with a family of Giant Forest Hogs, Boar in lead, two hoglets and Sow in rear. As it cooled I went out with Kuli for a further walk on the Airstrip etc., Many Buffalo and Warthogs and our first Fire-Crowned Bishop. The star was a very co-operative Pearl Spotted Owllet, quite rare in West Uganda, who was very patient with us and allowed close approach for some excellent photographs. It even waited while I experimented with differing ISO and Pixel ratings. The night was punctuated with much thunder and heavy rain.

March 2nd. We moved on today for Ishasa sector via a last try at Katunguru for Papyrus Gonalek. They were calling but refused to come out. The Ishasa track has been improved but the rain had left softer parts a bit tricky. A large herd of elephants had obviously taken advantage of the rain and indulged in a mud bath as their tracks were all over the place. Quite a few of the known ponds have dried out and the highlight of the afternoon was a Crowned Eagle being set on by two Bataleurs. We watched this for quite a while as the whole ensemble drifted off down wind. Not sure what a Crowned Eagle was doing over Acacia scrub but perhaps this was the reason for the dispute with the Bataleurs. My accommodation in Ishasa was in UWA Banda set about 300 metres away from Canteen and Office. Take a torch to dinner. And perhaps an escort back would be prudent! Meals can be self-cooked or as I did, taken in the little Canteen run by Moses. He has a Paraffin fridge too. Very reasonable! I did a short walk down the river bank but saw little of interest other than two Vine Snakes and the Democratic Republic of Congo some metres away on the opposite Bank.

March 3rd. Sitting outside my Banda watching the dawn my reverie was broken by a loud Elephant rumble very close. A Matriarch and two offspring appeared round my Banda and as I kept still they ignored me and simply walked on passed. Perhaps an escort last night might have been a sound idea! This morning we headed up towards Lake Edward about 20km away. The going was pleasant and we had many sightings of a friendly Pallid Harrier. We also got close views of a flock of Wattled Starling in breeding plumage. The rains are coming and the birds are all changing. We had seen this with the Pin-tailed Whydahs and various Bishops which was making identification somewhat easier. Lake Edward flats are a massive expanse of firm marsh dotted with pools and reed beds. Plenty of Snipe, Lapwings and BeeEaters plus of course the Buffalo and Kob. This is a good area for Lions but we did not see any. A drive to the south failed to produce any of the Tree climbing Lions for which this sector is gaining a reputation. There are plenty of tracks to follow so do take a guide it is easy to get lost but the riverine forest is a good locator. I repeated the river bank walk again in the evening and saw the Cassin's Grey Flycatcher which is the local speciality.

March 4th. Now we moved on for the Ruhiza area of Bwindi. As we left camp we saw a nice Serval hunting in the grassy plain and on our way to the



main road we found six Lion up a Fig Tree. Of course we stopped to take pictures. Then we moved on and found another youngish cub all alone up another tree. His Mother would no doubt be in the grass somewhere close. This was visible from the main Ishasa road. Then into the 'town' of Kihiki to buy supplies as we are self catering for the next two days. During a lunch stop at Buhoma I took a walk into Bwindi NP and had good views of a female Vanga flycatcher feeding her fledged chick. Then on to the road over "the neck" to Ruhiza/Ruhija. This is very scenic and much improved from the state described in most Guide books. This is now THE way to Kabale. We stopped at the river crossing and again saw Cassin's Flycatcher. Further on at a spot Emmy obviously knew well we called up a pair of Red-throated Wryneck. We also obtained excellent views of both Luder's and Doherty's Bushshrikes and Yellow-billed Barbet. Our accommodation was very pleasant in a bungalow with two bedrooms and a lounge. Lighting by Solar Battery. Situated on a rise overlooking the Bwindi Canopy it was quite idyllic and well recommended. We got our first Stripe Breasted Tit on the driveway. A Rift Endemic on your doorstep has to be a plus. Our cook (did you seriously think I was cooking too?) Felix did wonders on the Charcoal fire. He was hired in from Buhoma and is well versed in culinary skills. A friendly young man who deserves to succeed. Highly recommended if you are passing this way. Bird list a creditable 448 with more to come tomorrow when we head for Mubwindi swamp 300 metres below. Nice and cool at this altitude, 2,300 metres and no sign of Mosquitoes.

March 5th. After Eggs, coffee and toast from Felix we drove to the trail head for the descent to Mubwindi. You walk UP at first for about 100 metres and then commence the descent along a well used trail. Much sign of Elephant and we even heard Mountain Gorilla creating a noise not too far distant. We quickly saw Yellow-whiskered and Mountain Bulbuls to start the list. We also started with more of the Albertine Rift Endemics including Ruwenzori Batis and Red-faced Woodland Warbler. I will list the A.R.E's seen at the end of today's note. Where we cross the small feeder river a pair of African Green Broadbills were building a nest and were in good clear view. Finding a small green bird in green leaves in the Camera Viewfinder was not so easy. After watching for a while we headed on down to the Swamp itself and were rewarded with equally good views of several Grauer's Rush Warbler. Then it was time to start the climb out before it got too busy. There was a large party with telescopes etc., not far behind. On the climb out we managed to call in a Bar-tailed Trogon to complement the Narinas seen earlier. We did a walk in the afternoon when we saw more Doherty's



and Luder's Bushshrikes plus a Grey-headed one too. We managed to wait patiently until Dusky Crimson-wings came out onto our track to feed. The photo's are not good but they are visible. The highlight for me was a pair of Great Sparrowhawks that flew level with us very close in such good evening light that it made identification almost too easy. Workaholic Emmy even dragged me out after dinner to try for Nightjars and Owl's but sadly we drew a blank. ARE's seen. African Green Broadbill, Archer's Robin-Chat, Red-throated Alethe, Yellow-eyed Black Flycatcher, Red-faced Woodland Ruwenzori Batis, Blue-headed Sunbird, Regal Sunbird, Strange Weaver, Dusky Crimsonwing. (14 in 24 hours.)

March 6th. Today we moved on along the road to Kabale which is in really good condition. We stopped frequently for birds and had excellent views of the elusive Cinnamon Bracken Warbler singing its head off. As we were getting back into the car a Handsome Francolin wandered happily across the road in

front of us. ARE No.15. No sooner had we got going than a Ruwenzori Red Duiker decided to graze by the roadside allowing more photos. Not a bird I know but an Endemic Mammal. Good enough for me. On down the road and just at the gate a Great Blue Turaco posed in a tree quite in the open. No obscuring foliage at all. We saw our first Auger Buzzards and a huge unidentified Eagle. We stopped in Kabale and bought more batteries. At the 128 km for Mbarara sign a White-necked Raven was picking through the roadside rubbish. On the other side of Mbarara we stopped at a large pond on the left of the road and collected Three Banded Plover, Bare-faced Go-away Bird and Lilac Breasted Roller. Then in at the Sanga Gate of Lake Mburo NP where I declined to add Ostrich as it was obviously captive. I quite like this park as being very reminiscent of the Serengeti of which it is a northern extension. Zebra, Impala and Eland are quite easy to see here. There are also several "southern" birds worth seeing. Unfortunately local Cattle herders are encroaching on the Park quite badly in parts. Our base was the Mantana Tented Camp set on the hillside but discretely hidden from view by vegetation. Animals roam at will during the night so leaving the Tent is not a good idea. Bird list is now 496.

March 7th. We set off for Park HQ at Rwonyo to arrange for a boat on the Lake. This was provided and being quiet we were the sole occupants. We dipped on Papyrus specialities, again, but had excellent views of two Finfoot. The second one was quite unafraid and gave our first views of one on land, finned feet and all. Holub's Golden Weaver, Lesser Swamp Warbler and the secretive Grey-capped Warbler were brought to book. While Emmy was fixing the car, one of the latter cheerfully perched just in front of me for an excellent photograph. At Rwonyo Camp I also got excellent photographs of an obliging Sulphur-breasted Bush shrike. A hot midday drive yielded nothing of real interest other than friendly Bushbuck. My favourite Antelope. The birdlist has broken the 500 barrier. A big storm was brewing in the afternoon but we did a short drive, added Spot-flanked Barbet to the list and had a dispute with some Buffalo over right of way. They won!



March 8th. We left the Park by Nshara Gate which was home to some interesting Bats. We also picked up Arrow-marked Babblers and Coqui Francolin. After the main road we went about 20km., to the 50km from Masaka marker, where there is a small settlement and a Swamp to the right (south) of the road. This Kaku Swamp and Shoebill and Sitatunga can be seen here. But not today. However it was good for Hottentot Teal and Rufous Bellied Heron as well as giving Emmy a 'Lifer' in the form of a male Garganey Teal. Then on through the chaos of Kampala for our next night stop at the New IOU Lodge in Mabira Forest Reserve. It was so new that it was not finished and had no roof. So after making plans for tomorrow we headed for Jinja and the Kingfisher Safari Lodge where we managed to get the car stuck and book a Rondavel for the night. A nice view over the Nile but recent rain made it very muddy. Food was fine but the clientele left much to be desired. Not a place I will hurry back to.

March 9th. A quick checkout, skipping breakfast as the service was slow, and back to Mabira. We walked a long muddy trail to the river, adding Purple Throated Cuckoo Shrike, Nahan's Francolin, Ugandan Wood-Warbler and White-throated Greenbul to the list. We also called up a White-Spotted Flufftail and induced it to cross the path in view of us. Nice one. After eating our packed lunch we headed back to Kampala and Entebbe. Emmy was easily convinced to try Kajansi Fish Farm but apart from a few Egrets, a solitary Yellow-billed Stork and a Lizard Buzzard there was nothing of note. There were workers in each of the ponds so this may account for the lack of birds. I then checked into the Windsor Lake Victoria for my last night in Uganda for a while. Very comfortable and again I had made the arrangement direct by Email from home. Emmy was indefatigable and insisted that we now went into the Imperial Botanical Gardens for some last minute birding. We saw the resident Golden Backed and Orange Weavers along with others. Lots of Waders out at "sea" but we could not be sure of them. So back to the Hotel and farewell and thanks to Emmy. He was excellent company and anyone using him will not be disappointed.



March 10th. Next morning an early Breakfast and on to the Hotel shuttle bus for the BA flight home. We left on time at 10.05 and arrived a little early in London at 16.00 to almost sub zero temperatures. I had remembered to keep a Fleece at the top of my Luggage. All that remained of my journey was to simply re-trace my steps back to Gatwick for the 19.25 flight to Isle of Man and home.

Having fed in my tick list to the computer the final count is 526 of which 108 are completely new to me from Uganda. I am well content with that as some obvious birds such as Spoonbills were not seen. I was particularly pleased and impressed with Emmy's persistence and help in identifying some of the smaller and more easily overlooked birds.

Fred Hodgson