

Writing reports is a balance of text and a few photos without duplicating any Gallery. What to do? Well maybe getting the nitty gritty out of the way first will pave the way for some further detailed accounts of the what and where later on?

I have a habit of finishing a trip with a list of things I did not do but which then form the basis of the next visit. So it was this time. Several Lodges and camps had got my interest and some activities too. Other Lodges are regular haunts and no trip would be complete without a stay there. So it all came together nicely. This trip, in addition to Elizabeth, I had the pleasure of two friends neither of whom had been to Uganda before. So I kept mainly to a well-trodden path that I knew well.

Ground arrangements for my choice of Lodges were ably handled by the team at Churchill. I was sticking my neck out (nothing new there) by firmly picking the Lodges and camps we required so knew any blame would fall on my shoulders if they did not prove satisfactory. Of 14 destinations only 2 did not measure up.



The Land Cruiser was owned and driven by my very own Albertine Rift Specialist Emmy Gongo and all I had to do was feed the beast with Diesel at UgSh3500 a litre. It was pleasing to see some well-treaded Tyres fitted and over the whole 30 days we never got so much as a puncture. We did shake a U bolt loose but fixed this in Kihhi in an hour or so.

Our chosen route was roughly a circle starting from Entebbe and heading to Mabamba, Lake Mburo, Nkuringo, Buhoma, Bwindi and to QENP via Ishasha before rounding the Ruwenzoris to Bundibugyo and Semuliki NP. Then back to

Kanyanchu (Kibale NP) before striking north for Murchison Falls via Masindi and then back to Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary to meet some pachyderm friends of a few years and then down to Kampala Entebbe and the long flight home. That was the plan.

Here follows the execution in edited highlight format. I really will try and spare your sensitivities and not recount every one of our feathered friends. Neither will I recount each and every incident. Travel Logistics were easy enough. Four tickets with Turkish Airlines from England was the easy bit. Landing first in Kigali at 3.00 in the morning was a bit of a drag but the time change from Rwanda to Uganda moved the night along nicely and having had 22 hours layover in Istanbul to see this lovely city we were still relatively fresh at Entebbe at 4.35 or thereabouts. Through Immigration was a doddle, I knew which desk to hit before the rush arrived from higher seat numbers than ours. A very nice man stamped in our Visas, the luggage was on the Carousel and our driver, from Airport Guest House, was there to take us 'home'. Crept into our beds at around 5. a.m. and our trip was up and running.



A late rise for Breakfast and to find our feet and a few birds in the guest house grounds including Double-toothed Barbets We needed Forex for the necessary pile of shillings and something called a Sim card for my David's phone so he could ring home.



We emerged from Entebbe town as Millionaires. We then had a Beer or two whilst we met the owner of one of the Lodges we were booked in at.

A side trip to the Botanical Gardens in the late afternoon filled the rest of the daylight on day 1 and Airport Guest House had a BBQ for dinner. And a pair of Barn Owls in the Mango Tree under which to eat our meal.



We drove the scenic route to Mabamba for our Lake Excursion by Makoro to seek our first target bird, the enigmatic Shoebill Stork. We had two Makoros waiting our arrival and we were soon paddling out through the Reed and Papyrus in search of *Balaeniceps rex*. We soon made contact much to



the dismay and annoyance of a Yankee twitcher who felt he had proprietorial rights. When he accused us of being Australians he came very close to being tapped on the head with a paddle and dropped in the lake.



After some excellent pictures of a co-operative Shoebill we headed to the main road and west to the Equator stop for lunch, and a Beer. During a brief call at another swamp 'we' put the Cruiser's rear wheel in a hole which took some extricating. On to Lake Mburo NP by late afternoon, well dusk really, and we checked into Arcadia Cottages for three nights. A lovely place with good food and comfortable Cottages. Lots of wildlife in the grounds which are close to the lake and so handy for excursions. We had arranged



with a UWA Ranger and known birder, Moses, to take us on the lake to seek the African Finfoot. We found five and several other birds too. However the highlight was a lovely female Leopard we



spotted (oops) on the shore. We quietly took the boat in close to her and she was so relaxed she watched us arrive and then lay down to study us as closely as we were studying her. I now have some of the nicest Leopard photos I have ever taken. A real lady. The arrival of another boat made her leave but I am told she came back to pose for them too.

Lake Mburo NP is really nice and I always take my time there. Rain stopped play next morning so a planned long walk had to be cancelled. But later on we managed a brief Nature walk in sunshine and met a few buffalo and a not too friendly Hippo.

After a final breakfast we set off west for Kabale over an intermittent road before turning off to Nkuringo Camp and our





home for the next two nights. Rain prevented the superb views of the Virungas from camp but the



beds were pre-warmed with bottles and an early night called for. Next day we arranged to do some local birding and I got to meet a fine Rhinoceros Chameleon. We also arranged to meet guides for our planned walk to Buhoma through the Bwindi forest. I had long wanted to make this walk and tomorrow was the day it would happen or not. You can actually see Buhoma, some 13km distant as the Eagle flies, from Nkuringo but walking it was a different matter as we were about to find out.

So boots on and we left Nkuringo Gorilla Camp down to the Park Gate to pick up our UWA Rangers. Pay the Fees,

\$35 Park entrance and \$15 for the walk. We are heading for Buhoma on foot down a slope for a vertical descent of 400 metres or so. A comfortable pace was maintained, hey we are not stupid this IS downhill. We reach the river valley and set off to follow the stream north and soon found an error in "The Plan". **N.B. Fred's plan.** The other two souls are just innocents abroad. This is not the river that goes through to Buhoma. We cross a log bridge that is literally a log over the river. It does wonders for your balance and deportment. Then up a steep slope and muddy path for about 100 metres although it felt much higher. Then what goes up comes down and we find another river, and no, this is not the right stream either! Bugger! So we take a break and have a breather. We meet another couple heading to Nkuringo and swap Guards so ours go back and we take 'theirs' with us. We press on down a very muddy trail and worry about the couple who have to climb out the way we came in. And then we worry about the fix we are in as we can't go back, Emmy, Elizabeth and the car have left to drive 150km to Buhoma, so we have to go on come what may. So another climb and another descent on an even worse bit of track. Then Hallelujah, we do another climb and hit the regular track that comes out at Buhoma that I know well enough. Our spirits lift in tune with the rise in this track. Rise? It is meant to go down!! We have another break in a little Gazebo type hut and finish our rations as it starts to rain again. Then we head on as the thunder rattles around and the rain starts to be heavy. We are told it is now downhill from here just as the heaven's really let go. I hate waterproof gear so just soak it up taking care to put cameras in plastic bags. Wide brimmed "Sun Hat" keeps my eyes dry but nothing keeps the rest of us dry. Ah well, skin has served me well for many years and the rain is as good as a shower and I can launder my trousers and shirt as I walk. Simple enough. Pretty soon I see the turn off to the Waterfall walk I know so well and know we have about 4km left to go. But thoughts of a cool beer have evaporated, we are wet enough already.

So we make the gate without seeing many mammals or birds and few photographs as of course they have more sense than us and don't go out in either Midday Sun or midday downpours. Our car is there waiting for us and takes us to our tents which have H&C water AND a proper Bath. Bliss! Elizabeth decides not to file for divorce but to have me put away instead. Can't really blame her. My idea! The buck stops with me! Chris and David give me the benefit of the doubt and put it down to my age.



Bath over and we sit down to a great meal of steak cooked to perfection by our chef. A Bottle of wine miraculously appears too. True friends never desert one. We did not take much rocking to sleep this night. Aching limbs and a Hot Water Bottle see to that. Tomorrow was scheduled as a rest day so Breakfast can be delayed. Lots of good birds to see and photograph. Some Gorillas too. Not sure if it was a

habituated group but they don't seem bothered. Of course, not having paid our \$500 we look the other way. We do some birding



including giving a Flufftail deep neurosis as we try to call her out of her swamp. We never did get a glimpse.

After our two nights in Buhoma (exact location a state secret) we head up to Ruhija birding as we go. The road is very wet and slow going. We tick the usual Cassin's Grey Flycatcher at the bridge where he lives and get great views of Malimbe and Black BeeEaters. Our base is now Trekker's Tavern where Julius rules supreme in the Kitchen. We get our usual Bungalow in the trees and whilst everything works there are issues with water supply and Electric. Batteries are low and the rain and tree cover has not helped to charge them up. Still



one of our favourite places but in need of some management. Our time here is spent cruising the road for birds. We see no reason to go down to Mubwindi Swamp due to the rain and the advice that the African Green Broadbill is not at home. Our list is growing fast.

We see lots of Blue and Red-tailed Monkeys and a lovely encounter with the rare Rwenzori Red Duiker. Then it is down to a new place that got my attention. "Cuckooland". Accessed from a turn off and we park the car and descend the steep slope, maybe 100 metres, 350 feet, down to the Bwindi NP border. Our tent overlooks the forest and we can hear Chimps hooting across the valley.



Run and managed by the owner we enjoy this place a lot. Another chance to just wander locally and relax with many new bird sightings. Strangely we saw no Cuckoos other than Detric's although Black was complaining "I'm so sick!" and Emerald was shouting "Hello Georgie" most of our stay. Some nice Sunbirds put on a display and Grey-headed Negrosfinches put in a regular appearance. Enough birds. Cuisine was good and owner Phillip joined us at meal times.



Then it was back up that hill and time to leave Bwindi for QENP. Minor car repairs in Kihikihi in thunderstorm and then just before we arrived at the turn for Ntungwe camp we found Lions on the road drinking from the rainwater pools. Blood showed they had recently killed and fed. We sat and watched and one by one the two females, one adolescent male and four cubs climbed a Fig tree before our very eyes. I thought of the many folks who



seek out the Tree climbers of Ishasha and here we were enjoying a real treat. How many can YOU count? On arrival at Ntungwe we were most surprised to learn that only one chalet was available and somebody had messed up. Some assertive negotiations got some folks evicted and we claimed squatter's rights when they returned. This Lodge could be a gem but I fear poor hand to mouth management reflected badly. The cuisine was unimaginative to say the least and it seemed the poor chef was resorting to left overs and packet soup. We did a couple of Game drives into QENP but our attempts to gain Lake Edward Flats was thwarted by soft going. It is never firm up there but this was real goo. To our surprise we met a young man out





of his car drinking a beer on a slope over the valley where we had seen Lions earlier. At 11 am. His reason was he was having a bad day. Our guide ordered him back to the car pronto. A late evening drive yielded some nice birds and lots of buffalo and elephant.



Time to move on. The drive to Katanguru and QE Bush Lodge was quite eventful with three more rare species. Blue-breasted and Pygmy Kingfishers and Blue-throated Roller. We checked in to QE Bush Lodge and were shown our rooms. As the light faded what we thought were Hippo turned out to be Giant Forest Hogs. A nice beginning for QENP. We liked our stay at Bush Lodge. We did wonder if the mess restaurant would come under pressure at fully booked times but they coped. Lots to see in the grounds. Chris went Chimp tracking at Chambura while the rest of us had breakfast at a more civilised hour. Whilst sitting on my stoop I spotted a small Chameleon and got it down from the tree by devious means. It was a young Flap-necked C. and it posed nicely for some photos. It was still around when the Chimp tracker returned from a successful encounter so the Chameleon was

produced for him too. In the afternoon we returned to Chambura Camp so the others could enjoy it and the birds. Then we went to Jacana Lodge to check out the lakes and forest area. We found Blue-breasted Kingfishers but no Shining Blues. Lots of Monkey activity and we were not short of birds. Saw an Otter at Jacana too. On the return drive we met some friendly Ellies on the main road who obliged for more Ellie pictures. Next morning two of us rose early and set off for the Papyrus beds at Katenguru where we hope to lure out the colourful Papyrus Gonalek and White-winged Warblers that lurk in there. We were successful on both counts. On the return we met two more Giant Forest Hogs on the track. We then decamped to Mweya Lodge, our favourite, for a three night stay. Of course we did the UWA Launch trip on the channel as always and saw lots of African Skimmers plus many other waterbirds. Elephants



and Hippo too. Our planned walk to the point was rained off as a humungous storm broke just prior to our scheduled start. We did venture down the airstrip later to see if Andrew's Lions were at home (see report "Andrew and the Mweya Lions") but only found fifty Buffalo and Waterbuck. I did get my toes nibbled by a passing Mongoose though.



One morning we sent down to Kasenyi Plains but it was quiet. A group of cars indicated action but it was a "Somebody thinks they saw a Leopard over there" type of sighting so we did not linger. We went to the local Katwe Lake and found many Flamingo of both species at home. One enterprising soul came on a Motor cycle and suggested we hired a guide but we declined. We probably knew the area better than him. We found lots of Quail and Crake's up on the higher ground back in the NP and

a rare sighting of Red-billed Quailfinch too. However the highlight of this part of the trip has to be given to an encounter with a family of Elephant. We spotted them just ahead on the track and positioned the car just right (for us.) The Matriarch and her escorts took no real heed but the sub adults took it upon themselves to "ask us to move along"! We stayed where we were. Several amusing mock charges later and they were really winding themselves up. I got some lovely video as they came right up to the car with ears flapping. Now and again as a change of routine they turned their backs at the last minute and ran backwards at us



as if this made them even fiercer. So funny. Eventually Matriarch and entourage came behind them and prodded them with tusks to “get on with the job” of moving this cheeky car. No luck there either. So big mama decided to show how it was done and after a couple of quite hairy mock charges we felt she had made her point and reversed a bit. Then the darn kids chased after us blowing raspberries. The cheek of it. **Health warning.** Do NOT take liberties with Ellies unless you 1. have a competent guide and 2. are sufficiently experienced to know what you are doing. Accidents can happen. Next morning on our way out we met a smaller herd and the Matriarch immediately charged us with little warning. Maybe she had heard of us?

Leaving QENP by the explosion craters we made our way via Fort Portal, despite the Diesel shortage over the Ruwenzoris to Bundibugyo. Two surprises. There is a grand smooth new tar road, which has destroyed what for me was one of the most scenic drives in Uganda, all the way to Sempaya, which was nice. And the standards of our Hotel fell well short of what we had enjoyed there before. The food was fine but no water (at all) is not conducive to a pleasant stay. We had arranged a Nature walk in the NP and at Sempaya Springs next morning. Knowing the road was good we checked out of our Hotel that morning for good. We would make Fort Portal or Kanyanchu. Now a word about UWA's daft fee policy. Be aware that they propose a “Birding Fee” of US\$100, per person, to look at birds. This is plain stupid and off putting. Why charge \$35 to enter a NP and for that we can look at Mammals but NOT birds? However the



Nature walks are just \$15 and so we nature walked. Coupled with that stupidity was the noise of timber extraction by locals over which UWA seemed to have no concerns. But the bloody birds did and made themselves scarce. So we moved on to Sempaya and enjoyed a cold Beer and a walk to the Hot Springs, where we also saw some birds, Oops! Then back through Fort Portal on that lovely road and on to Kanyanchu and Kibale Forest Camp. Now for 4 nights not 3. A nice place with pleasant grounds bordering Bigodi

Swamp. We entered the forest next morning and found our target birds, Iliadopsis, Brown and Scaly as well as Green-breasted Pitta. We called in another birding group to this much sought after bird but they failed to find it. We also had a nice meeting with a Blue Duiker that allowed a close approach. We also found the Pitta again. Next day we walked the Bigodi Swamp and got some more birds for the growing list as well as seeing Grey-cheeked Mangabey Monkeys. A first for us.

All in all a fruitful stay at Kibale and we are now placed to tackle that road up to Hoima and the north. Which we did without too much delay. We cut through the Tea Plantations to the Tar road to Kyenjojo and then headed north on dirt. The road was not as bad as feared and reasonable progress was made to Hoima after which the road improved and we got to Masindi and on into Murchison Falls National Park without delay. Our first base was to be the Eco Lodge at Kanyo Pabidi for two nights. We loved our stay in the Eco Cabins at Kanyo Pabidi.

We made good use of the remaining daylight with a walk along the road. and saw the biggest spider ever. It was on its web strung over the width of the road which must had stretched 20 feet or more. And sitting in the middle some 30 feet up was the owner. I needed a zoom lens to get a picture and guess the size at about one foot across. And early next morning the forest was kind to us. We paid a more modest fee and hired the lovely Evelyn to escort us through the forest where her bird knowledge was very impressive. Emmy and her made a good team. We added more birds such as Chocolate-





backed Kingfisher, the elusive Puvell's Iliadopsis and others to the list. It was whilst we were tempting a family of Nahan's Francolin to overcome their shyness that we got another 'freebie'. A female Chimp with infant wandered by us and probably wondered what we were doing making strange bird noises.



We made a decision to visit the top of Murchison Falls in the late afternoon. A longer drive than we had estimated, around 35km to the turn off but the Falls were lovely in the afternoon light. We had the place more or less to ourselves apart from two couples with a small child. I don't quite know how wandering around with a bottle of Nile Special in one's hand added anything to the experience of the falls. It certainly did not enhance the level of childcare in this dangerous place. We delayed our departure until last light to see

the Bats emerge and the attendant Bathawks take their meal. On the return drive we also added three species of Nightjar to our growing species list. Black-shouldered, White-tailed and the splendid Standard-winged. Nobody could see this bird in full plumage and not be impressed. We did another impromptu walk next morning before packing and heading for the Paraa Ferry. On the way we chanced upon a nice Bushbuck in one of the river valleys and an indolent B&W Colobus draped along a branch with all four legs hanging down just like a Leopard. A short wait for the Ferry had us adding more birds to the list and after checking in at Paraa Lodge we took lunch in the garden while the heat of the day subsided. Then we went out on a drive and spent some time with our first Patas Monkeys, Hartebeeste and Oribi of the trip. We also picked up several discarded Water Bottles that had obviously been thrown out by Oil workers. They even had MSL logos on the bottles. Disgusting! Taking advantage of Paraa Lodge's position on the north back next morning we set off for the Delta by a somewhat circuitous route. As well as new birds we had a great meeting with more Elephant. One of the "Aunties" took great exception to our presence and had a right old time trumpeting and mock charging us. She never pressed home though and we all had a good laugh at her expense as well some interesting photographs. My regret was not to video this time, I forgot, as the sound effects of her and big sister belly rumbling and snorting at us were something to wonder at. When we moved on she actually came after us up the track for some distance. Funny girl! Later we met the Old bull that had so upset RooAbroad when trying to mend a puncture. He was quite calm with us and sent on his best wishes. Nothing much at the Delta when we got there so we returned in order to have lunch in time for the 14.00 UWA Launch to the falls. This interesting trip, a must for everyone, was enhanced by a Wedding party with all the ladies and gents decked out in fine hats and a not inconsiderable supply of Nile in the Cool box.. A short evening game drive yielded more wildlife including over 500 head of Buffalo. Next day we set off on foot for some local birding and covered a lot of ground along a dry river bed, and not so dry swamp, before finally



emerging back at the Lodge for a late lunch. In the afternoon we went off to a little used track to seek Egyptian Plover but they were not at home. But we did meet some more Elephant by the stream. Being on foot we really enjoyed this encounter too. Then it was pack up and head for a night at Ziwa Rhino sanctuary. We booked a walk at 14.00 as the best time to go as the Rhinos shake off their sleepy day and set off to feed and wallow. We met up with Bella and her two daughters, first born Augustus and year old Donna who was already quite large at nearly half her mums size. She was also very



curious about our presence and made several close approaches. I would have loved to have scratched her behind the ears as I do my Ellie Orphans but sense prevailed. Later we did a short unaccompanied walk around the 'estate' but saw nothing more dangerous than Vervet Monkeys. Meals at

Ziwa are in the new restaurant and enlivened by the presence of several habituated Antelope such as Reedbuck and Bushbuck quietly cropping the grass. After turning in late we heard the distinct munching of a large mammal and having looked out under the moon we saw a large Rhino Bull just by our car. Next morning we packed and said our farewells before departing on the last leg of this trip. We arrived in Kampala without a delay other than to give a stranded car from Gorilla Tours a bump start. After lunch we met with Churchill Staff for a debriefing and long talk before they kindly took us to the airport for our return flight. Everything worked out as planned, despite snow in England disrupting some flights and we returned home to start the chores of laundry and sifting through our records.

We had a great time, this was my seventh personal visit which has been handled by Churchill each time without major dramas. Minor problems have been dealt with promptly and fairly which is the mark of a great Agent. Even the best Operators can get things wrong sometimes. It is how they are corrected that makes a good Agent into a great one.

We did cover more ground than we would normally, I am very much a settle down for a few nights type of tourist but we wanted to show our companions who had not been to the Pearl as much of this wonderful country as we could. I think they enjoyed it. Our final score was 476 bird species including several new ones for me. Would we have changed things? Probably but I have no idea what.

Photos are on WKS Gallery for those interested and I may as well fill this page with a few as waste it.. Now to get back into routine and start planning another.

