

Ugandan End of Year Holiday tour. The full team.

December 3rdth – Dec31st 2018

Preliminary information etc.

It was time we all went back to The Pearl of Africa so Fred put together a group version of his now infamous “Whiteknuckles Lite” with the focus on less travelling and more wildlife. There was a side trip to Semliki on the promise of decent accommodations.

Uganda is three hours ahead of GMT. The usual African twelve hours of daylight and twelve of night time is slightly distorted by being so far west so sunrise and sunset run about an hour later than the norm. There is not much seasonal change but rain is heaviest in April. The mountainous west can be wet at any time but it does not last. Our visit was fixed by the calendar so we just took it as it came. We had no rain at all until the last two days.

Entry requirements: - Visas are readily available at all points of entry. Entebbe is much quicker than it used to be.

Local currency is the Shilling (UgSh) Import/Export not allowed but £ & US\$ readily exchangeable.

Getting there, back and around. Lots of carriers fly into the main airport of Entebbe. We have used BA, KLM, Kenya and Turkish and this time SNBrussels got the job on price. As usual we got our own tickets and asked Ether and the girls at Churchill to book the Lodges of our choice. They did a fair job as always. We had arranged for our good friend **Emmy Gongo** to drive his car and guide us as he is a proficient Birder and we always get on well.

Accommodations. We handpicked some these from previous visits and chose others on recommendations. All but one were most enjoyable and described in the following text.

Books? Uganda is East Africa so my library consisted of the invaluable Bradt Guide plus “Birds of Africa, south of the Sahara” by Sinclair and Ryan as I knew Emmy would have Stevenson & Fanshawe. I dispensed with maps as we knew where we were going

Now to the trip itself: -

After the usual convoluted flight from our homes the late evening of 4th December saw us arriving in Entebbe for an overnight stay in Papyrus Guest House run by Lydia who also runs Nkuringo where we will be staying later. <https://www.papyrusguesthouse.com/home> Dawn of the 5th



December had us wakening to a distant view of Lake Victoria and a little bit of birding (the picture is of a male **Vanga Flycatcher**) before and after an excellent breakfast. Emmy was due to arrive around 09.00 and so he did. After loading up the car we bid a temporary good bye to Papyrus and headed off to our first main base in Kibale Forest.



Of course Emmy being Emmy he could not resist stops on the new, but not yet open, Kampala Expressway for a few more birds including this **Broadbilled Roller**. We then cleared Kampala and made good time to our new Lodge recommended by Emmy, Chimpanzee Guest House. This was a nice place in its own cultivated grounds in which there were several excellent Banda style rooms with good views over the area. <http://chimpanzeeforestguesthouse.com/> We happily settled in here for three nights during which we would make drives to the forest and elsewhere seeking the wildlife that lives there.



A few photos are warranted I think. First is a misty morning over Kibale Forest looking towards Kanyanchu and below is one of the many **Red-tailed Monkeys** that live there. Next are two very different



Barbets. Left is a **Double-toothed Barbet** that was nesting in the grounds of Chimpanzee Guest House and the other is a **Yellow-billed Barbet** that we saw when walking in the Bigodi Swamp. Bottom left are the very common **Little BeeEaters** and a **Long-crested Eagle**.



During our two days-three nights at Chimpanzee Guest House we did several drives to the Forest HQ as well as an organised walk through the Bigodi Wetlands all of which was very interesting even though we had done them before. We saw lots of other fine birds such as Narina Trogon, Dusky Flycatcher, Cape Wagtail and Black BeeEater. The

latter being more usual in Bwindi and the west but there was no mistake

After an excellent stay here, with the only mishap being the discovery that my Nikon does not bounce well off concrete, we drove off via Fort Portal, where we had morning coffee and a Mango Madness whilst Emmy did some shopping for supplies as the next place would cook our food.

Then it was over the foothills of the Mountains of the Moon (Rwenzoris) to the UWA Bandas at Sempaya where we had arranged to stay two nights in order to bird the Semliki Forest Reserve. The birding went well with several Forest Hornbill targeted and seen well such as Piping, White-thighed, White-crested and Black Casqued Wattled. Flocks of Green, Olive and Western Bronze-naped Pigeons were also seen. A highlight was also my first ever

sightings of the Brazza Monkey when we found some feeding as we



visited the Hot Springs. Indeed the only disappointment was the Bandas which were set in Forest and gloomy inside

and out. The food which we had brought was OK.

We now returned towards Fort Portal and birded slowly along the road of what I used to think was one of the nicest roads in Uganda as it snaked its way around the foothills. However the new road has bypassed much of it. Roadside birds encountered



included splendid African Goshawk, Ross's Turaco and a very playful and posing **Grey-headed Kingfisher** as well as its diminutive and beautiful relative the **African Pygmy Kingfisher**.



We continued our drive to Fort Portal and onto Kasese where we had morning coffee in the courtyard of a nice clean hotel while Emmy attended to some administrative business in town as well as fuelling up the car. Our next stop is always a 'must' for when we are in Uganda, Mweya Lodge set on the eponymous peninsula in Queen Elizabeth National Park, over-looking the Kazinga Channel. We had booked the two bungalows with this view.



These were the bungalows where we had the incident with the lions on our last visit in 2015. (see report "Fred and Elizabeth return") but sadly the lions did not oblige this visit but we will keep coming back. We were booked here for three nights and used the time to visit most of the usual favourite places in this splendid park as well as indulge on the usual Channel Cruise. One bird of note

seen on the cruise was a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** which when I got home I saw had a ring. Checking up I was advised this was a Baltic Sub species that had been ringed in Finland in July 2016. Another visitor from Europe that posed for me was this **Eurasian Marsh Harrier**. Queen Elizabeth NP is



also famous for being one of the few places where **Giant Forest Hogs** are often seen in daylight and we were not disappointed. Ellies



play their part too. Some in QENP are very friendly.



One of our trips was to the nearby Maramagambo Forest where we can often find some nice birds such as Black BeeEater, a melanistic race of Paradise Flycatchers and Blue-breasted Kingfishers with African Finfoot on the lake by the Jacana Lodge. But the star of this visit was to be the long sought **Shining Blue Kingfisher**. And we did not find one but a pair but it was too hard to get them



in the same frame. Indeed it was hard enough to get even one in clear view in the dense thicket around the small stream where they were. We have tried for this bird every time we have come this way and at long last our patience has been rewarded. <https://mweyalodge.com/>

We had an excellent three days at Mweya as we always do and reluctantly had to tear ourselves away but we had a long drive to the next location down in Buhoma which is the mecca for Gorilla trekkers in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. Our way was of course through the Ishasha sector of QENP which has a reputation for being very muddy after rain so we did not delay for many sightings. However we did stop for a lion pride that was attempting to cross the road to join up into one unit again as they had been

disturbed by some nearby road workers. As we watched first the female and then the male came to the small cliff at the roadside to check us out and make sure there was no traffic before crossing. They made a nice pair and I don't mind photo'ing lions actually doing something so here they are.



It is very nice when you can get eye level pictures instead of the more usual looking down shots. And I had to climb up on the roof of the car to get these.

We then progressed along the worsening road where several lorries had got stuck in the mud. At one point

we had to leave the road altogether and divert into a village to get around the obstruction.

But we eventually arrived in Buhoma and having checked through the 'gate' we get to one of the few Lodges actually inside Bwindi. We had splurged on the normally expensive Gorilla Forest Camp <https://www.sanctuaryretreats.com/uganda-camps-gorilla-forest> having been made an offer it was hard to refuse. Elizabeth and I had stayed there on several occasions and it is very nice with large roomy tents set in lovely wooded grounds. From my tent I watched too many birds to list so



will just show the **Common Wattle-eye** that had its nest nearby and the **Sykes' Monkey** coming to the figs. More exciting still was the **Forest Cobra** that chased and caught a rodent right by



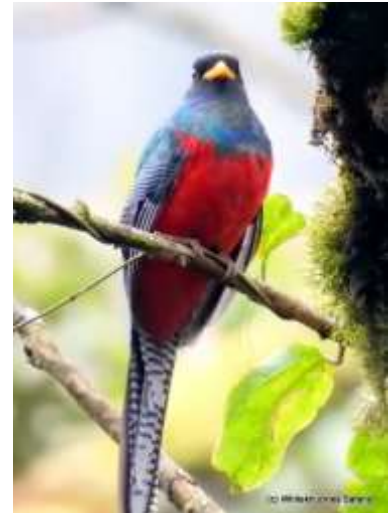
my feet as I came back from lunch. I thought it was me it was after at first! Phew!

We had four nights in Gorilla walks.

Forest Camp during which we did several

(c) Whiteknuckles Safaris

Even just walking the main trails yielded many birds and butterflies and of course no walk with local boy Emmy could take place without meeting members of his family and friends.



Above. Grey-winged Robin Chat. (lifer)

Right. Bar-tailed Trogon

Charaxes Fulvescens. Forest Pearl.

After our filled days in Buhoma we moved on up to Ruhija and Emmy's own Broadbill Forest Camp <http://broadbillforestcamp.com/index.htm> which he has built on an old Shamba (Garden) right on the border of Bwindi Forest. He founded a Conservancy with the local people to protect the environment and where possible encourage a friction free relationship between the human farmers and the wildlife around. A noble concept.

Broadbill has developed over the years since David and Chris saw the open plot in 2012 and there are now 12 bed spaces set in light woodland. The grounds have been replanted with native vegetation in place of non-native species to encourage wildlife and the policy works well.

I have sat at 'my' tent and seen many species including several Albertine Rift Endemics at quite close quarters. Forest Elephants come by for fresh food from time to time. Over the years I have



posted many photos of Broadbill so I will simply put up these two as examples. Birding is of course superb and we went on several very productive walks around the

forest trails seeing such birds as Black-billed Turaco, Regal Sunbird and Cinnamon Bracken Warbler as well as **Black BeeEater, African Hobby** and Cassin's Grey Flycatcher. The grounds are also home to the **Ruwenzori Rhinoceros Chameleon** and **Northern Double-collared Sunbird.**



Monkeys and Chimps live close by and are often encountered both in the grounds and when on walks in the area. **Black & White Colobus** and the charming **L'hoest's Monkey** are a given on any walk.



We left Broadbill very content with our stay and pleased to see the continuous improvements that Emmy and his wife Jovlett are making to their venture.

Our next location was at the other end of Bwindi some twenty miles as the Eagle flies but a four hour drive by car. We broke the journey with an excellent birding drive along the shores of Lake Bunyoni at Muko where several special

wetland species were observed but to list them here would be very boring. There is a checklist posted here. We now arrived at Nkuringo Lodge which is linked with Lydia's Papyrus Guest House in Entebbe. This has also been improved since my last visit and I especially wanted to try the new family units Lydia had shown me on my solo visit five years ago. They were really lovely in design and execution and superbly comfortable sadly whilst I have pictures of the interiors I have none of the outside as the ground was so steep it was impossible to get back far enough. We had three very enjoyable nights up here before it was time to drop down to **Lake Mulehe Lodge**. This is owned by Ether of Churchill Safaris and is where we planned to spend Christmas without a car in order that I could let Emmy go home to be with his family over the festivities. We also needed a rest from all



the birding and welcomed the break although of course we were not totally lazy and did go on walks up and down the area. One bird that kept us on our toes was a Red-

chested Cuckoo that kept flying into a nearby tree but try as we might we could never find where it had perched after seeing it fly in. We saw it so it's on the checklist but I never got a photo. We had



a lovely Christmas and the staff looked after us really well. This was the view at Dawn on Christmas morning. We just missed Santa Claus as he nipped behind Muhavura.

After three pleasant days Emmy re-joined us on 27th December for our drive to Lake Mburo so after

farewells to the staff we set off down the road to Kisoro and then turned up the main road bound for Kabale via the Kabamba Pass which is one of my favourite places and where we invariably stop to take in the view to the Virunga mountains. Muhuvura ("The signpost") with a lenticular cloud then



Mgahinga, Sabinyo, Visoke and Karasimbe with Nyiragongo still erupting on the far horizon.

After a stop in Kabale we made good progress and arrived at the Park Gate for Lake Mburu NP and paid our fees etc., before proceeding on a game drive to Park HQ where we met Sgt. Moses and arranged for him to take us out on the lake during our stay. I have known Moses for some years and he is one of the few UWA Rangers who really likes to go birding. We then proceeded to our lodge Acadia Cottages where we have stayed before. The cottages are quaint as they are cement but shaped like timber logs. Inside is very nice with plenty of room and a 'hall' for drying wet things. I like it for the wildlife that freely uses the lodge grounds due to the location inside the Park.



I won't show all that came into the grounds but here is a **Waterbuck** and calf at the cottage next door. Wildlife was not confined to the outdoors either as the picture, below left, of a **Woodland Dormouse** shows. Sadly our boat trip had to be cancelled



due to heavy rain but we still managed to head out later for a game drive and saw much wildlife. I shall end the wildlife with a photo of Uganda's National bird the **Grey Crowned Crane**.



And so our trip to The Pearl of Africa drew to an end and we left

Lake Mburu for the drive to Kampala with the almost obligatory stop at the Equator for a snack before proceeding to Churchill House to thank Ether (Mama K.) and her team for putting the trip together so well for us once again. It was nice to see Ether's daughter "Heaven's Angel" so grown up too as we had not seen her for maybe five years or more. A team photo was called for.

L-R. Ether's niece, Elizabeth, Mama K (Ether), Heavens Angel with "Taata Churchill", David and Chris with Emmy kneeling. 21 days in the bush and we scrub up well!



That's almost it. One more night in Papyrus and some birding in the



Botanical Gardens so that David could see an African Grey Parrot in the wild and we were done and on the plane home.