

Trip Report by Peter Roberts - Australia

Uganda has been described as the 'Pearl of East Africa' and was regarded as the most beautiful and potentially the richest country in East Africa. From the source of the White Nile on the huge papyrus-fringed Lake Victoria to the snow-capped Rwenzori Ranges,, the luxuriant montane forests of the Virunga volcanoes, harbouring some of the last remaining Mountain Gorillas, to the extensive savannas around the awe-inspiring Murchison Falls, Uganda is an equatorial country of substantial contrasts and variety. No other area in Africa can match its amazing diversity of habitats and this richness is reflected in its incredible bird list of over 1000 species. Amongst these are many highly sought after birds, such as the unique Shoebill and numerous spectacular endemics of the Albertine Rift Valley, that are currently impossible to find anywhere else. This huge bird list is all the more remarkable given the small size of the country (approximately equal to Great Britain or the state of Oregon), making it probably the richest African birding destination. Uganda straddles the equator and borders the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan and Tanzania.

Tour organiser: Peter Roberts

Local Leader and Agent: Herbert Byaruhanga, Managing Director of Bird Uganda Safaris.

Driver / Bird Guide: Paul

Tour Participants: David & Judy Brenner, Yvonne Brown, Lionel & Mary Cartlidge, Rita Freeman, Ellen Gizzarelli, Vesna Mihailovic, Ruth Robinson.

Day 1, July 1st: Travel day for some setting out from U.S.A. Some left the USA, today, heading towards Europe.

Day 2, July 2nd: Departure from UK/Europe towards Uganda. David, Judy and Ellen arrived early today into Entebbe and were transferred to the accommodation. The rest of us were "on the road" or "in the air" courtesy of Emirates Airlines going towards Entebbe via Dubai.

Day 3, July 3rd: Arrive at Entebbe, Uganda. We arrived at Entebbe International Airport by about 3pm and were met by Herbert and Paul from Bird Uganda Safaris. Herbert had only arrived back from Utah, USA yesterday after a promotional trip. We were late out of customs and immigration, so drove directly to the accommodation, with a few good birds being pointed out as we went. It was a cloudy, cool, late afternoon at the start of the dry season. We checked in, met up with the "earlybirds", gave meal requests for supper and wandered about the local area - a mix of developing "middle-class" suburbs and open areas. A number of common species were found, some of them of interest to me as being much scarcer and specially sought birds on my regular Tanzania trips, but common garden birds here: **Eastern Grey Plantain-eater, African Hobby, Red-chested Sunbird and Broad-billed Roller** for example. A lovely **Double-toothed Barbet** was found in the hotel garden. We ate at 7.30pm and were in bed by 9pm, ready to catch up on lost sleep and prepare for an early start tomorrow.

Day 4, July 4th: Birding Mabamba and on to Masindi. The staff at Lindsay Cottages was very accommodating, providing a full cooked, early breakfast, at 5.45am. Herbert and Paul came by at 6.30am for the start of our Safari. We loaded up and set out to Mabamba Wetlands on the shore of Lake Victoria. There were numerous, brief roadside birding stops for exotics such as stunning Great **Blue Turaco** and **Woodland Kingfisher** Once at Mabamba we met up with local bird guide Ishmael and transferred to 3 locally-built boats and were paddled out into the extensive papyrus swamp with its labyrinth of channels and lagoons, classified as an IBA (Important Bird Area) and home to several pairs of Shoebills, which was our main target of the day (or trip?). It was a cool and overcast morning and birds were very active. As we boarded the boats Ishmail found us a very scarce Weyn's Weaver - a greater rarity than the Shoebill in fact! Also here were **Yellow-backed (Black-headed), Viellot's** and **Northern Brown-throated Weavers**. Out in the papyrus channels various common wetland species kept us entertained as we anticipated the "big one". This included our first **Cisticola** of the trip - Winding, plus **Long-toed Plover** and **African Marsh Harrier**. Not long into the quiet journey Ishmail stopped and scanned and said there was a Shoebill up ahead. We paddled closer and took first looks, then went silently closer and had some marvellous views of this most famous and bizarre avian wonder. Like nothing else on earth, **Shoebill** is the only representative in its family. We were all awe-struck as it happily stood there, then preened, scratched itself, showed off its huge, grinning, wooden-looking clog-like bill and then eventually took to the air on huge broad wings. At this point we could have all gone home contented - but we paddled back and soldiered on! We were now headed north into the interior to Masindi, with a picnic lunch en route. Apart from various brief stops for roadside goodies such as photogenic Great **Blue Turacos** and **Black & White-Casqued Hornbills**, plus longer breaks at further papyrus swamp for Papyrus Gonolek (successful with that too), we kept going, back into the throng of the sprawling, lively suburbs of Kampala. The picnic stop was at the Makerere University Hostel grounds - a pleasant place with loos and picnic chairs. The afternoon was spent driving up a smooth, paved road northwards into increasingly sunny weather, before turning onto dirt road at Hoima and arriving at Masindi to a quite pleasant, simple, old colonial-style hotel by 6pm.

Day 5, July 5th: Budongo & Kanio Pabidi to Murchison Falls National Park. We left for Budongo by 7am and only went a short way north before taking a good long birding break in open, cultivated, scrubby areas full of birds. Red-headed Quelas were abundant and accompanied by various other open country agricultural/grassland birds such as Bronze Mannikins, Red-collared and Yellow-shouldered Widows, Black Bishop and numerous weavers including Compact. A few interesting raptors popped up here too: Lizard Buzzard, Steppe and Long-crested Eagles. We then drove on the short distance to the Budongo Forest Reserve, where we took a pleasant, long guided walk for three hours around Kanio Pabidi until gone 1pm and a picnic lunch on the veranda of the brand new Visitor Centre. Forest birding is always notoriously difficult, potentially frustrating and an activity where it is easy to lose focus! This morning was no exception as we walked through miles of lovely forest knowing all the great species that occurred here, but of course, only connecting with a selection after much hard work, perseverance and patience. We did find a good mix of widespread species and more local specialities. As we pulled up at the entrance to Budongo we had the very local White-crested Turaco fly over and gained stunning views of Grey-headed Oliveback - a species that Herbert only reckons to find every other year of guiding. At the top of the "want-list" was the ridiculously scarce and localised **Puvel's Illadopsis**, which gave good

views to some, reasonable views to others and virtually none to the unlucky 1-2 as it skulked its way across the forest floor in answer to playback. Other good stuff, giving itself up to the majority included **Yellow Longbill, Little, Plain and White-throated Greenbuls, Blue-breasted, Kingfisher (only hearing the much-wanted, canopy-dwelling Chocolate-backed) Western Black-headed Oriole, Yellow-Rumped and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbirds, Green Hylia, lovely-looking Red-tailed Ant-Thrush** and (not quite living up to its name) **Fire-crested Alethe** (both seen really well). At the picnic we came across a nice group of birds agitated by an unknown menace, which attracted a good variety of scolding birds into a nearby tree. Here was a great chance to see **Green Crombec, Toro Olive Greenbul, Western Olive and Olive-bellied Sunbird** before we drove off towards the ferry across the Nile to reach our lodge just over the other side in Murchison Falls National Park. We drove directly through good open woodland savannah, seeing occasional good birds and the first few game animals including **Uganda Kob** - a "first" for all of us except Ruth who'd lived here for years. Our intention of catching the 4pm ferry were dashed when first one of the vehicles got fuel problems; quickly sorted out but followed rapidly by a puncture on the other. However, Herbert pulled a few strings and got us across at 5pm and we checked in to the quite upmarket Paraa Lodge by 5.30pm.

We were out again by 6.30pm to do a brief dusk/night drive, which proved very worthwhile. **Red-throated Bee-eaters** were gorgeous in the lovely stormy pink-clouded sunset after a hot dry day. As dusk fell we had great looks at the truly weird Pennant-winged Nightjar in full regalia followed quickly by a more down-to-earth Square-tailed or two. On the way back a Verreaux's **Eagle-Owl** popped up along with some Uganda **Grass-Hares**. A good buffet meal soon after was followed by the usual "early to bed".

Day 6, July 6th: Murchison Falls National Park. We were off in our vehicles for a game drive in Murchison Falls National Park by 7am this morning. As with all these African Parks, there was far more to see than physically possible in the time we had. But we made a good inroad into the list of likely birds and saw some good game animals too. In terms of rarity I suppose the Red-winged Grey Warbler must be "up there", but other, better-looking birds included many typical of more open, East African savannah habitats: **White-headed Vulture, Black-shouldered Kite, Wahlberg's Eagle, Grey Kestrel, Red-necked Falcon, Grey Crowned-Cranes, Black-bellied Bustard, Flappet Lark, Pied Cuckoo and Nubian Woodpecker** - and of course those stunning **Cisticolas**: Rattling, Winding, Zitting and Croaking! More special to the area, and therefore to us who were new to Uganda, were species such as stunning **Swallow-tailed and Northern Carmine Bee-eaters**; crazy-looking **Abyssinian Ground Hornbills, Black-billed Barbet, Sooty Chat, Black-headed Gonolek, Piapiac and Black-winged Bishop**, It was a fine, sunny day and the large vistas of open plains dotted with bush were classic Africa, complete with good herds of **Uganda Kob and Oribi**, plus smaller numbers of Jackson's Hartebeest and fine groups of Buffalo and Giraffe. A single bull Elephant kept us waiting to pass on the way to the confluence of the Victoria and Albert Niles.

We returned to the lovely Paraa Lodge for lunch, then quickly loaded up and caught the 2pm ferry back across the Nile to the south side to begin the journey back to Masindi. First we checked out the nearby scrub, known to Herbert as good for a couple of very local species: Bar-bellied Firefinch and White-rumped Seedeater. We found both quickly and saw them well. Then off to the famous Murchison Falls - well worth the diversion and spectacular as the vast volume of Nile water funnels into a constricted rocky gully, complete with lovely little Rock Pratincoles giving great views. We had to race back to

Masindi after this, stopping only for occasional quick birding stops that pulled in a few other goodies - **White-crested Turaco** again, **African Harrier-Hawk**, **Vinaceous Dove**, **Little Weaver** and **Brown Babbler**. Back at the Masindi Hotel by 6.50pm, we had supper at 7.30pm and were to our beds early for a visit to the famous "Royal Mile" in Budongo tomorrow.

Day 7: July 7th: Budongo - Birding the Royal Mile. Off at 7am to go a fairly short distance to a different part of the Budongo Forest Reserve at the famous Royal Mile, picking up local guide Vincent along the way. It was an easy, very slow and gentle stroll along this well-birded wide track through glorious forest for much of the day until mid-afternoon. Time flew by, as did many birds. Some periods were typically, worryingly slow, followed by flurries of activity. Some birds high on the want-list never showed, others only briefly or "heard only", yet others doing exactly what you pray for and showing to everyone really well. In this way, the hours passed as we sampled this area deserving many days of serious birding. Highlights included nice gaudy, big birds such as White-thighed Hornbill and range-restricted birds such as Chestnut-capped Warbler. We had terrific luck with kingfishers; Vincent found us the very elusive, high canopy-dwelling but stunning Chocolate-backed Kingfisher almost at the same time as we found the equally gaudy Blue-breasted and a diminutive gem: African Dwarf. All were ogled and "ooh-aahed" over during long scope studies. **Red-headed and Crested Malimbres** and **Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher**, despite being bright black and red, led us a chase before most got reasonable views. Numerous little green and brown birds loitered in the high canopy giving us "warbler neck", or deep in the undergrowth giving us cramp in bent knees - but over the day were well worthwhile. Little, **White-throated and Spotted Greenbuls** did their best to muster some interest, but largely failed! Other species such as **Forest Robin**, **Scaly-breasted Illadopsis**, and **White-spotted Flufftail** were all heard often, but not a hope of seeing them, despite good effort for at least the Robin. Others including Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat showed only reluctantly to 1-2 for fleeting views in thick cover. Barbets were more obliging with great looks at Spectacled and Yellow-throated Tinkerbirds and Yellow-billed Barbets. By mid-afternoon we drove on to a different section of Budongo at Busingiro. On the way we stopped for a brief bird-walk at some open agricultural fields where we might have found Cabani's Bunting. We didn't, but did find other good species including African Yellow Warbler and Whistling Cisticola. At the new forest location, for some reason unknown to mere mortals, was the subtly different, preferred forest (and the only site in Uganda) for Ituri Batis. We set off down another lovely, wide forest road and within a few minutes had this world-class rarity in our scope. **Forest and Grey-headed Flycatchers**, **African Shrike-Flycatcher**, **Little Green Sunbird** and various other species kept up the flagging energy levels before departing this wonderfully rich forest by 5pm. Last call was a small patch of papyrus known to Herbert to be good for calling out Carruther's Cisticola and White-winged Scrub-Warbler. Along the way we had super and unexpected views of a pair of White-crested Turacos out in open bare trees - very untypical, but very welcome. At the swamp we had little luck at first with either species, but did find other bonus birds: **Black Cuckoo** and **Yellow-throated Greenbul** called in and seen closely. Eventually the warbler showed briefly for 1-2 and we called it a long and successful day and returned to the hotel by 6.35pm.

Day 8: July 8th: To Kibale National Park. After breakfast we drove south towards the Kibale area via Hoima and Fort Portal. To start with it was a long way on dirt roads with stops for leg-stretches and

birding. We picnicked along the roadside and dished out surplus fruit to the inquisitive local kids. A few interesting birds popped up - **Brown Snake Eagle, Greater Honeyguide, Brown Babbler, Yellow-spotted Nicator, White-chinned Prinia, Heuglin's Francolin**, and extraordinarily good looks at **Great Blue Turaco**. As we neared Kibale Forest National Park we gained elevation and were in slightly hillier country with extensive tea plantations. Stopping once in the Park and on a short walk after check-in, we picked up a few more birds of interest on what was primarily a travel day. **Toro Olive and Honeyguide Greenbul, Black Bee-eater, Lemon Dove, Purple-headed Glossy Starling, Black-and-White Mannikin, Green Crombec, Olive and Little Green Sunbirds** all portend for more and better tomorrow. We also began seeing plenty of what the place is famed for - primates. We had great views of **Grey-cheeked Mangabeys, Vervets, Red-tailed Monkeys, Black-and-White Colobus and the rarer Red Colobus Monkeys**. We also fixed plans for some of us to track **Chimpanzees** tomorrow.

Kibale is an extensive National Park, c.760 sq.km, at an altitude of c.4,000', protecting a large block of rainforest. Apart from the good birding it harbours the greatest variety and concentration of primates found anywhere in East Africa: we'd seen 6 species in the brief time here this afternoon. The Primate Lodge is a new accommodation that is trying hard to please, with very helpful staff. The setting is its key attraction - right in the heart of the forest and adjacent to the Park HQ from where the Chimp tracking begins. (A slightly more upmarket lodge exists, but is an hour's drive away).

Day 9: July 9th: Birding Kibale National Park. After breakfast at 6.45am we were due to split into two groups - one for birding, the other for chimp-tracking. On local advice from Park Rangers, Herbert thought it better to swap the Chimp-tracking to the afternoon, so we all went off into the interior of the forest as a birding group instead. Getting inside the forest is the best/only chance to see floor-dwelling denizens such as **Pittas and Illadopsis**, for which we tried hard. **Brown Illadopsis** called tantalisingly closely but showed only to 1-2 people. Birding was generally very slow and hard work, but the walking was quite easy so we persevered. As we got further in, a Rufous Flycatcher-Thrush was one of the few "obliging" birds, popping up to show quite well. Further in still and the excited hoots and whoops from Chimpanzees got louder and louder. We were delighted when we stumbled across a large group, some on the ground, then up in the trees, avidly feeding on fresh figs. This was a huge bonus, as they gave us excellent views of posed groups, playful young, mothers and babes, large, old males -all close and some full-frame in the scope. I could have stayed all morning to watch their antics, but the local ranger needed us to move on after a good time with them as there were other dedicated Chimp-trackers coming and this sighting for us birders was pure serendipity! Our best bird of the morning was a very well posed Red-chested Owlet scoped in the canopy for ages. Thereafter it was back to the long periods with not much happening and the "blink and you miss it" occasions, such as the fleeting views for some of White-spotted Flufftail. Back at the HQ by 11.30am, we bought souvenir Chimp postcards and local handicrafts, had lunch at 12.30pm, and relaxed in the heat of the day. Judy and Yvonne opted to go on the official Chimp-tracking at 2pm to see more of those fascinating primates. The rest of us reverted to birding mode and went out at 3pm for a more relaxed afternoon of roadside birding in the Kibale Forest. The Chimpanzee tracking was a fairly tough hike off-path, but a great success, finding a group within 20 minutes then following it closely for hours. Plenty of close encounters and observation of all sorts of monkey business made it a memorable afternoon. The birders continued to slowly whittle away the long list of special birds with sightings of Crowned and Cassin's Hawk-Eagles, Afep Pigeons, Cassin's

Flycatcher, Stuhlman's Starling and more.

Day 10: July 10th: Birding the Bigodi Swamp area and then to Queen Elizabeth National Park. After breakfast we were packed and away to Fort Portal and then to a nearby swamp/forest area with easier access than Bigodi to spend much of the morning walking trails at first through mixed open habitats from tea plantations and farmland to swamp, then into thicker, wet forest. Again, a new selection of special birds was seen - some very well by all, others less so. Red-headed Bluebill was one of the less cooperative birds, popping up twice but fleetingly for 1-2 people. Grey-winged Robin-Chat was a well-seen and a particularly good find. Jameson's Wattle-eye Joyful and Yellow-whiskered Greenbul put on good performances. This swamp/reserve was another locally-run project with young people learning birds and guiding to try and boost and vary the local income with new enterprises - they deserve to succeed and I wish them good luck. We had a quick buffet lunch back in Fort Portal where "Happy Birthday" was sung to me. Then a 5-minute stop to buy myself a splendid "new" watch for the modest price of about £3 /\$6 (my old one having collapsed on me), before heading off speedily on paved road towards Queen Elizabeth National Park. We made a few leg-stretch stops on the way as we drove into increasingly open bush country. One stop in particular was a must - the crossing of the Equator, complete with obligatory photos. We reached the lovely Mweya Safari Lodge by 5pm, checked in. then relaxed with a bird walk around the grounds, adding quite a few new, typical East African savannah birds. **Slender-billed Weavers** were abundant and other "regulars" appeared to be **Red-chested Sunbirds, Black-headed (Yellow-backed) Weavers and Angola Swallows**. It is a very panoramic view from the lodge with water all around below the high peninsula. We could look down on to distant waterbirds and also found far-off Elephants and a Palm-nut Vulture. A very good buffet supper in "salubrious" surroundings included a surprise Birthday for me with champagne, cake and Happy Birthday sung again!

Day 11: July 11th: Birding and Game-drives in Queen Elizabeth National Park. We were away after a good breakfast at 7.30am, to take a drive through the Park to see what we could see - no particular targets, just a general look-see. We meandered through the open scrubby savannah dominated by large Candelabra (Euphorbia) trees, finding a modest range of interesting birds. **Red-necked Francolins** were common and we were pleased to call up **Black Coucal and Broad-tailed Warbler** from damp grassland. **Fawn-breasted Waxbills** in little groups appeared periodically along with occasional **Northern Black Flycatchers** and **Arrow-marked Babbler**. However, on our return, as we'd just got out at a Ranger Post to stretch legs and use bathrooms, Paul had a call from a colleague up the way to say there was a **Leopard** in view. It was the quickest "all aboard" of the trip and within a few minutes up the road we were watching a stunning male Leopard slowly walking through the bush, scent-marking as he went. It was all over too soon as he disappeared into thick cover - but certainly an enormous highlight and unexpected treat.

A pleasant, long break at lunchtime gave us a chance to cool off (not that it is really that hot). Out again at 3pm down to the very nearby jetty on the Kazinga Channel to board a good-sized launch for a two-hour boat trip down the Channel to Lake George. It was a very pleasant and easy two hours birding, seeing mostly quite widespread and common species, but very close and giving good photo

opportunities. Mammals were a prominent feature with masses of arms-length loafing, bathing and wallowing African Buffalo and Hippopotami. In amongst great studies of these were excellent views of classic African waterbirds: **African Spoonbill, Yellow-billed & Saddle-billed Storks, Collared Pratincole, Water Thick-knee, Kittlitz's, Spur-winged & African Wattled Plovers, African Fish-Eagle, Malachite Kingfisher, Great and Long-tailed Cormorants, Goliath Heron, Great, Little and Cattle Egrets, Pink-backed and Great White Pelicans.**

An hour's break followed the boat trip, then we were out in the vehicles again at 6pm to do a late afternoon/night drive until about 8pm. This was very successful in that we found several good new birds on the way out - **Golden-breasted Bunting and African Crake** showing well in particular. At dusk we had further ethereal looks at Pennant-winged and Square-tailed Nightjars. As we drove back towards Mweya Lodge a large animal was spotlighted on the road - incredibly our 2nd **Leopard** of the day. This gorgeous animal stopped and looked at us, giving us fine views before disappearing into the bush. My attempts at spotlighting nocturnal animals was less than "accomplished". Calling a halt as I'd seen eye-shine in a bush, we reversed expecting an exciting owl or bush-baby, only to find the eyes were those of an elephant, and the "bush" the **elephant** itself!

Day 12: July 12th: To Kisoro: It was another unavoidable, predominantly travel day today, going from Queen Elizabeth National Park all the way to the far SW corner of the country, bordering Congo and Rwanda at Kisoro. Some of the road was paved and smooth, some paved and potholed, some unpaved but smooth-ish, some steep bumpy and dusty as we traversed over steep hills where new roads were in the making. (Perhaps on my next visit there will be a swish new smooth tarmac road reducing the 7-hour journey time of today?). Looking at things philosophically, we saw lots of interesting rural Uganda, viewed the village where Herbert grew up, and had time to "watch the world go by". We had our picnic lunch at the White Horse Hotel in Kabale where Black Kites waited to plunder our chicken legs and McKinnon's Fiscal Shrikes were first noted. By mid afternoon we were crossing over some intensively terraced agricultural hills where a good chunk of natural forest is safeguarded. The Echuya Forest was a very welcome hour's birding stop producing quite quickly a sudden new flurry of good birds. Forest birds found here included **White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Collared (Rwenzori) Apalis, Rwenzori Batis, Dusky Crimson-wing, Strange Weaver, Olive Woodpecker, Red-faced Woodland Warbler, Sharpe's Starling and Olive Thrush.** By about 6pm we were in the small town of Kisoro, and checked in to the Traveller's Rest Hotel, dubbed the unofficial gorilla-tracking centre, where various famous primatologists have stayed in the past.

Day 13: July 13th: Birding Mgahinga National Park /Gorilla-tracking at Nkuringo. After a 5.30am breakfast the Gorilla-trackers (Ellen, Judy, Vesna, Yvonne and myself) were off with Paul to drive for a bit over an hour along dark. bumpy. dirt roads to Nkuringo from where we were due to set out. The five of us were joined by two young Israeli girls and after a briefing, hiring of porters and acquisition of walking sticks, we set off on the long descent. This was quite steep in places, but on tracks down through agricultural plots towards forest in the valley, some 2000' below. Beyond the valley was a steep rise on the other side, covered in forest and we all had secret fears that the gorillas might be that far away. However, luck was very much on our side, and after close to 2 hours very gentle descent (some do it in

an hour!) and before we'd even reached the forest on the valley floor, the **gorillas** were located in the "buffer" zone between the agriculture and the forest proper. This was open scrubby land with lots of ground vegetation, creepers and vines that appeal to the gorilla's taste buds. And there they were! We spent our full allowed hour mesmerised by 8-9 individuals from shy **Silverback**, through black-backed males, females to small young. At times absurdly close as they just got on with their gentle, quiet, slow life of sitting about eating, resting, playing and generally ignoring our presence. Absolutely magical! Then the return ascent - not so magical for some! But we all made it back to the top, some more easily and decorously than others, We'd all succeeded, seen our Mountain **Gorillas** and could feel justly pleased with ourselves. (Of course a good few common birds were recorded on the way up and on the way back to Kisoro with Paul). We arrived at the hotel by 4pm and found the birding group already home and having a relaxing time. They reported that after a 7am departure to Mgahinga National Park, the birding was a bit slow. The walking trails were quite steep through a variety of montane habitats including bamboo. It was also cold and windy up there, setting out at c.7000' and climbing higher. **Rwenzori Turaco and Ruwenzori Double-collared Sunbird** were the major finds, giving great views apparently - birds we'll not find elsewhere. Other special birds were glimpsed or heard only, though the flowers were good. Back at the hotel there was a short session of locals doing some drumming and dancing before supper.

Day 14: July 14th: Kisoro to Ruhija. We packed up, paid up and set off by 7.45pm this morning. It was yet another fine, dry, sunny day, but with a pleasant temperature tempered by the altitude. We drove a total of just 60-70 kilometres to Ruhija, but the unmade rough roads made it a long, bumpy and dusty journey, broken by short birding stops. We gained in elevation steadily from the lower forests at about 5-6,000' up to well over 7,000'. The journey took us again through terraced intensively used steep hillsides (this is one of the most densely populated areas of Uganda because of the rich volcanic soils, abundant water and good climate. Eventually we entered the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park - a sharply demarcated line between forest and fields. At Ruhija we settled in to our basic overnight camp - some in tents others in bunkhouse rooms. Birds along the way were not abundant, but several top quality localised and endemic species brightened things up. A first stop at a roadside papyrus swamp produced dozens of **fly-by Rameron (Olive) Pigeons** as we eventually called out views of **skulking Grauer's Scrub-Warbler**. Other goodies included excellent looks at **Grey Cuckoo-Shrike, Western (Green) Tinkerbird, Black-faced (Mountain Masked) Apalis, Montane Oriole, Grey-throated Barbet, Yellow-bellied & Black-headed Waxbills, quirky Grauer's Warbler, Blue-headed, Tiny and Regal Sunbirds** and more. Other species of course were either hoped-for and not noted or heard but not seen - the Bushshrikes particularly so! By late afternoon the clouds made light poor for birding, and the wind and altitude made it distinctly cooler. We returned to our bunkhouse to an open fire and settled in for the night. We were treated to a surprisingly tasty and well-delivered supper by Moses the field chef before retiring to our tents by 9.30pm.

Day 15: July 15th: Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park from Ruhija to Buhoma. It was a windy night and dawn, making the birding potentially more tricky. However, we drove a short distance at 7am to the bamboo area of the forest and made an attempt to pull in more of the seemingly inexhaustible supply of the local specialities. The only one to be called in, skulk and show up in the centre of shadowy

bushes was the Mountain Illadopsis. This National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and home to approximately half of the world population of c.650 **Mountain Gorillas**. It also is supposedly the most productive montane forest birding in Africa, with 23 of Uganda's 24 Albertine Rift endemic bird species. This morning they were playing very hard to get!

We returned for a good cooked breakfast. Yvonne was the only one brave enough to test the mobile hot shower (very good apparently), then we were packed and wending our way along the tortuous roads slowly descending, birding as we went, towards Buhoma. This took us until mid afternoon, with a picnic lunch provided by Moses en route. Again, birding was typically patchy, but several further new birds popped up, some of them quite special. It was a good morning for **Greenbuls** (if you like that sort of thing) with **Slender-billed, Yellow-whiskered, Eastern Mountain, Honeyguide, Yellow-throated Grey, Honeyguide, Shelley's** and the recently discovered in Uganda **Ansorge's** all showing well. We checked in to the very pleasant Gorilla Resort on the edge of Bwindi, (with gorillas occasionally wandering into the grounds apparently!) by late afternoon. After a break we were out on foot for a final birding session in nearby trails by 3.45pm. We wandered through the town of Buhoma -very much tinier than I'd anticipated, and seemingly only there because of Gorillas - then into the National Park Entrance area. Here we called in Luhder's Bush-shrike, breaking the curse of "no bush-shrikes so far". A few greenbuls were noted and a generally relaxed stroll ensued until just after 5pm. A flowering tree harbouring lots of good sunbirds was our final pause, where the "usuals" were augmented by Green-headed and a first Green-throated. Back at the lodge we enjoyed the free drinks, the veranda and time to wind down, with lovely looks at Bronze Sunbirds for those unable to stop birding. Supper was very pleasant and we retired to our large, comfy tents complete with hot water bottles in the beds.

Day 16: July 16th: Birding Bwindi. Breakfast at 7am, then away walking back to start the one main trail that runs right through this section of Bwindi Impenetrable Forest from Buhoma to Nkuringo. We met up with local bird guide Robert Byarugaba and took a couple of mandatory guards with rifles (to protect us from Elephants?) then set out for the day. Basically we wandered gently along the quite wide track, free of all road traffic all day, taking picnics with us. Some of the group opted for an early finish, returning to the lodge by mid-afternoon, the others stayed on walking and returned by 5.30pm. Birding started off slowly with just a few good birds at well-spaced intervals. The afternoon picked up somewhat, with little flurries of activity when several good species turned up at once. By the end we were all very satisfied that we'd seen a goodly selection of birds in this difficult place. In this "stop-start" fashion we pulled in the highly skulking **Black-faced Rufous Warbler** after several attempts. Other **skulkers** and forest floor dwellers that we found with perseverance were **Equatorial Akalat**, several good looks at **White-tailed Ant-thrush on the track, Mountain Illadopsis, White-bellied Robin-Chat (the only place it occurs in Uganda) and Red-tailed Bristlebill**. We tried hard for the forest-floor **Red-throated Alethe**, but had no luck. Up in the neck-breaking canopy we spied Collared, Ruwenzori, Buff-throated and Grey Apalises, Willcock's Honeyguide, Black Bee-eaters in lovely sunlight, Elliot's and Tullberg's Woodpeckers. Species active and showing in the mid canopy down to a more manageable eye-level included numerous Greenbuls: Ansorge's, Cameroon Sombre, Cabani's, Little, Yellow-streaked and Red-tailed. The very localised Yellow-eyed Flycatcher posed beautifully for us, as did Dusky Blue, and White-bellied Crested-Flycatcher and the dapper little Banded Prinia. Short-tailed Warbler and

Brown-capped Weaver was seen well by some of us, On the late return we scoped the weird Grey-headed Sunbird, looking more like a large warbler or small greenbul than anything else - a good job Robert and Herbert were there to tell us what it was! Flashier finds were a couple of good looks at Bar-tailed Trogon and close to Bocage's Bush-shrike in the morning. We were all fairly tired, but very satisfied by the return to our lodge. After Ruth's fall at the Ruhija camp on dark wobbly stone paths, we suffered another casualty tonight with Mary coming a cropper as she left the bar area to descend the long uneven steps to the tents.

Day 17: July 17th: To Lake Mburo National Park. After breakfast at the usual 7am, we set off towards Lake Mburo, We were 3 hours on un-paved roads to Rukungiri then sped up once on the smooth paved roads via Ntungamo and Mbarara, reaching Lake Mburo National Park by 2.30pm - another surprisingly long drive for a comparatively short distance in UK/USA terms.

The National Park is a different habitat of lakes (not visited) and Acacia savannah with a correspondingly distinct fauna to other reserves. We quickly found numerous new game animals such as Zebra, Topi and Impala. There were plenty of more typical East African savannah birds to keep us busy and give a last minute boost to the list -already at 400 species. **Crested Francolin, Spot-flanked Barbet, Bare-faced Go-away-bird, Black-headed Gonolek, Green Woodhoopoe, Scimitarbill, Brubru, White-winged Black Tit, Green-backed Woodpecker** and so on. One of the more "wanted" specie here on this all too short visit was **Red-faced Barbet**. This is a species with a very restricted range (known only from remote north-eastern Tanzania, Rwanda and here), so we were particularly pleased to find several during our game-drive. We finally went to the Mihingo Lodge by about 6pm. This was a beautifully situated place atop rock kopjes with views across the savannah woodland below. It was also the most swish and best-appointed lodge we'd stayed in, though the lovely, spacious tents were all spread out across a wide area requiring walking along very uneven tracks (but this lodge claimed no casualties!). At dusk prior to a good evening meal, we were treated to some fly-bys of Freckled Nightjar, calling in response to my playback.

Day 18: July 18th: Return to Entebbe for Departure. After breakfast we made a start on our return to Entebbe. We'd hoped there might be time for birding en- route, but Herbert knew better and wisely set out fairly quickly to ensure we arrived in plenty of time for check-in. In the end, with 1-2 brief stops for birding and leg-stretching on the way, we turned up at the airport only just on time after slow traffic on the outskirts of Kampala and having to eat our picnic on the road. Hoped-for birding at Entebbe Botanic Gardens was out of the question and we picked up just a very few birds of interest on the journey. **Crested Francolin, Lilac-breasted Roller, Woodland Kingfisher**, and other "usuals" were notched up along with new species - **African Cuckoo** and nesting **Woolly-necked Stork** bringing the final tally to 434 species recorded. At the airport fond farewells were said to Paul and Herbert who had been such excellent birding guides and great company too. We also said goodbye to David and Judy who were catching their KLM flight later today.

Day 19: July 19th: Arrival into Europe and on to USA for some. We were all home by some time today, those continuing on to USA having a very long journey through the time zones.

Conclusions: I think the tour was largely very successful. Uganda is a very different mix of activities and potential priorities to Kenya or Tanzania. While Kenya and Tanzania have more spectacular big game and possibly a better range of open savannah birding, Uganda's big attractions are **Shoebill**, West African forest birds and the possibility of seeing Chimpanzees and Gorillas - quite an eclectic mix! We managed to successfully combine all of these. Forest birding is always difficult anywhere in the world and requires, luck and perseverance. There are always going to be some species seen well and others not at all in any single visit, so it is just about impossible to "mop up" all wanted species. This can be frustrating if you don't take a more philosophical approach and count on the positive side all the special, localised and endemic birds that you did see. Comparing our "end result" of species seen, I think we did pretty well given the time spent in each area. Although a much smaller country, the highlights are spread further, so there is a need for greater travelling over generally poorer roads. Tourism has taken a knock at times through Uganda's recent turbulent past, so lodge infrastructure isn't quite on the same level as Kenya and Tanzania - but none were that bad, and some lodges very comparable and up there in the 4-5* category. Most impressive were the local leaders. Both Paul and Herbert had very good knowledge of their birds, calls, where to find them - and phenomenal eyesight and ability to get us onto difficult skulking birds. Herbert had done a great job in arranging the whole tour - all details went very smoothly. Best of all, both were good company and easy to be with. Thanks to all participants for making the tour possible - I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did.

And finally: here is a random miscellany (or is that tautological?) of facts discovered about people commemorated in bird's names. Having a bird (or other organism) named after you happened mostly in the great period of explorations between the 17th and 19th centuries - particularly the 1800s in Africa. It happened either because you went out and found it yourself, or you gave the name to your financial sponsor, mentor, wife, friend (probably in that order). Most people involved were wealthy, educated and involved in some way in the great expansions of Empire from European countries. Here are brief details of some we came across - not one of them an Austrian philanthropist!

Ansorge (1850-1913) was an English explorer and collector active in Africa. He also collected new species of fish. It was Hartert who named the Greenbul in Ansorge's honour.

Archer (1882-1964) was Sir Geoffrey, Governor of British Somaliland then Sudan, writing bird books for both. Sharpe described the Robin-chat in his honour from a specimen collected by Jackson in Uganda. Other birds (Francolin and Lark) were named in his honour after he had collected them himself.

Cabanis (1816-1906) was the most influential European ornithologist of his day. He never visited Africa, but collectors sent him skins to the Berlin Museum.

Cassin (1813-1869) was a Quaker businessman and unpaid Curator of Ornithology at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia. He is considered as one of the main figures of American ornithology and described 198 species of birds - many from his own expeditions. Whether he named the **Hawk-Eagle, Honeyguide, Flycatcher and Spinetail** after himself, or somebody named it in his honour is

unclear.

Chubb (1884-1972) was Curator of the Museum in Durban, S. Africa. His father was a Curator at the British Museum who was killed in a car accident, and it is possible that the Cisticola and Twinspot bearing the common name "Chubb" may be in his honour - though both have the scientific name "chubbi" which does relate to "junior".

Doherty (1857-1901) was a highly regarded and widely travelled American collector. Firstly collecting lepidoptera he began collecting birds after meeting Rothschild in Tring, UK. He died of dysentery in Nairobi while collecting molluscs.

Elliot (1835-1915) was Curator of Zoology at the Field Museum of Chicago and a founder of the A.O.U. Being interested in ornithology and independently wealthy he was able to fund lavish bird books illustrated by the best artists of the time.

Grauer (1870-1927) was a zoologist who collected intensively during an expedition to the Belgian Congo in 1909. He is also mentioned in the scientific nomenclature for gorilla subspecies.

Heuglin (1824-76) was a German explorer of Central Africa who was strongly opposed to evolutionary theory.

Holub ((1847-1902) was a Czech naturalist trained as a physician. He travelled to Africa extensively collecting over 30,000 specimens. On his second tour to Africa most of the expedition died of malaria and all equipment was lost. He returned impecunious, had to sell off much of his collection and died of malaria himself later.

Jameson (1856-1888) was an Irish hunter/explorer/naturalist collecting in Borneo, Africa, Spain and the Rockies. He died of haemorrhagic fever in the Congo while exploring with Stanley and Emin Pasha. He apparently witnessed a cannibal banquet in the Upper Congo and was accused by Stanley of instigating it!

Kandt (1867-1918) was a German physician who lived in Rwanda. He was sent by the Kaiser on an expedition to find the source of the Nile in 1898.

Kittlitz (1799-1874) was a Polish-born German artist, naval officer, explorer and ornithologist. He was the first person to collect the Murrelet named after him, but details of his connection with the Sandplover are unclear.

Levaillant (1753-1824) was a French traveller, explorer, collector and naturalist born in Dutch Guiana (Suriname). He was one of the first ornithologists to collect in S. Africa where he worked from 1781. It is odd that despite being "first there" with plenty of new species to describe and collect, it is rumoured that he "invented" species - even by creating new birds by putting together pieces from specimens of

other species! Narina Trogon was named by him for a beautiful Hottentot girl who was probably his mistress and Klaas Cuckoo named by him after his Hottentot manservant!

Luhder (1847-1873) was a German naturalist collecting in Cameroon.

Mackinnon (1864-1937) had a degree in medicine from Aberdeen University and was a medical officer in Uganda, then Director of Transport there. The Shrike was named for him by Sharpe from a specimen collected by Jackson.

Meyer (1767-1836) was a German physician with an interest in ornithology. He never went to Africa, so it is not clear how/why the parrot was named after him. (Not to be confused with A B Meyer who travelled extensively in S E Asia). **Neumann (1867-1946)** was a German ornithologist collecting in Africa, ranging widely from West, to East, Arabia, and maybe to S. Africa.

Petit (1856-1943) was a French naturalist collecting in Angola between 1876-1884.

Puvel - I've not got much detail on this obscure collector, other than that he was French and immigrated to Guinea-Bissau: dates unknown.

Reichenow (1847-1941) was the German son-in-law of Cabanis. He dominated German ornithology for years. He made only one expedition to Africa, but published a 3-volume work on the birds of Africa. He named a number of species after their collectors.

Rueppell (1794-1884) was a German collector who made two long expeditions to east and north Africa. Kittlitz accompanied him on his 2nd adventure.

Sharpe (1847-1909) was Richard Bowdler Sharpe, British zoologist and Keeper of Vertebrates at the British Museum. He founded the B.O.U. He didn't travel to Africa himself.

Shelley (1840-1910) was a nephew of the famous poet. Firstly a geologist, then an ornithologist he had a career in the army, then with the government of S. Africa who sent him on geological surveys that enabled him to collect and study birds. He also worked in Australia and Burma.

Stuhlmann (1863-1928) was a German Professor and zoologist collecting in East Africa. He also collected anthropological artefacts.

Tullberg (1842-1920) was a Swedish zoologist who was more an academic than explorer, with no reference to foreign travels outside Sweden.

Verreaux (1807-1873) was one of three French collector/naturalist brothers. The whole family traded in large numbers of specimens and were heavily involved in taxidermy - to the point of stuffing a deceased.