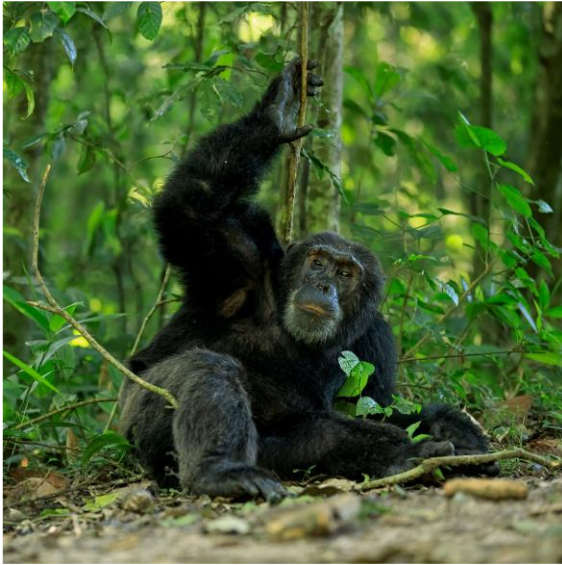


Tour Report

Africa - Uganda Wildlife Photo Safari

11 - 23 October 2023

Chimpanzee



Leopard



African elephant



Mountain gorilla



Compiled by Bret Charman

Day 1: London Heathrow to Dubai**Wednesday 11 October 2023**

Due to some late cancellations, we had only a small group heading out to Uganda for our dedicated photo safari, and the group flight departed London Heathrow on time on the evening of our departure day. We enjoyed a smooth flight to Dubai, where we connected with our onward flight to Entebbe, Uganda.

Day 2: Dubai to Entebbe**Thursday 12 October 2023**

After a couple of hours in transit at Dubai airport, we were soon on our way once more. With a very quiet flight and plenty of spare seats, we enjoyed a smooth ride to Entebbe. As we entered the terminal we were met by a representative, who tried his best to whisk us through immigration. After a short delay, we picked up our bags and were handed over to our guide for the next couple of weeks: Robert.

Robert drove us the short distance to our overnight hotel in Entebbe – the Protea - which was only a short distance from the airport. We were soon checked in and met the final member of the group before making a plan for the following morning. As it was by now mid-afternoon, we agreed to meet for an early dinner so we would be well-rested for the busy days ahead. All of us enjoyed a very good meal before retiring to our rooms and catching up with some much-needed sleep.

Day 3: Entebbe to Kibale, via Mabamba Swamp**Friday 13 October 2023**

With an early breakfast arranged, we met in the hotel restaurant and were presented with a feast. After this chance to stock up and enjoy a tea or coffee, we met Robert and drove a short distance to a jetty, where we boarded a boat. This morning we were heading to Mabamba Swamp, famed for its population of shoebills. The opportunity to see this elusive, bizarre bird is a bonus on this trip and as we had the morning free, we went out to see if we would be lucky. We spent the morning making our way slowly through this incredible habitat and enjoyed views of a remarkable number of birds. Unfortunately, we struck a blank with the shoebill, but some highlights included malachite and pied kingfishers galore, marsh harrier, yellow-billed duck, African jacana and even black crane.

After a very peaceful morning in the swamp, we headed back to Entebbe to pick up some lunch before setting out on the long drive west towards Kibale Forest National Park. Driving through the Ugandan landscape is truly amazing; the country is blessed with fertile soil and a very productive climate, and is often referred to as 'the Pearl of Africa'. It seems as if every inch of the landscape is cultivated, either for growing food or firewood. However as we continued west and neared our destination, native forest started to appear: Kibale Forest National Park. As we started to wind our way through the forest, olive baboons flanked the roadside, feasting on the lush grass verges. We arrived in late afternoon and after a briefing were whisked to our rooms where we had a chance to freshen up before dinner. Meeting back at the bar, we wandered over to our table where we enjoyed a fabulous meal in the most magical setting. The forest comes alive at night as insects and frogs start to call and, as we retreated to our rooms, we said goodnight and readied ourselves for our first day of trekking with chimps.

Day 4: Kibale Forest National Park**Saturday 14 October 2023**

The group reconvened for breakfast at 07:00, enjoying a lie-in of sorts, and we were treated to a hearty meal – the perfect way to start the day. As we sat in the open dining area, a troop of baboons wandered by, our first primates of the day. With our stomachs full, it was time to wander down to the registration area and check in for our upcoming encounter. As we stood outside the building a group of grey-cheeked mangabeys was busy feeding in the canopy above, watching over us. We were briefed about what we could expect and how to behave around the chimpanzees. One of the most important things was to wear a face mask – to protect the chimps from any illnesses that we might be harbouring. This is something that everyone visiting both chimpanzees and gorillas must do, for their long-term protection and welfare.

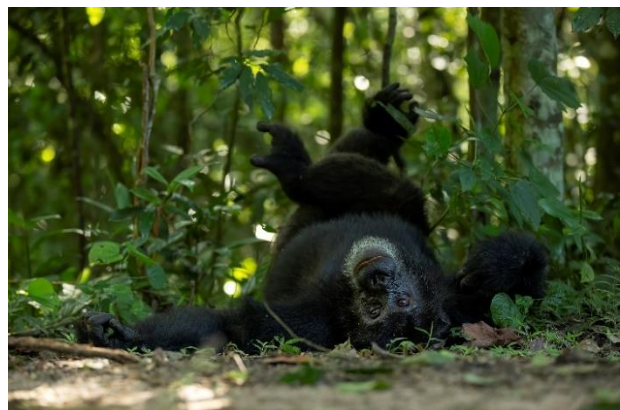
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We then had to drive a short distance to where we would start to track the chimps. As we made our way up a bumpy track, there in front of us sat a large chimpanzee. It seemed as if our trek wouldn't be so long after all! Climbing off our vehicle, we extricated our cameras from our bags and started to photograph the chimps, which were all around us. Several of them headed up into the trees and kept moving away from us. It was then that a senior male in the group settled down for a rest on the edge of the track. We spent the next twenty minutes or so enjoying some incredible photography moments with this handsome individual.



After spending a little while sitting up and watching his pale-skinned ape cousins, he decided it was all too much and that it was time for a proper rest. He turned over onto his back and just seemed completely unphased by the world around him.



We decided to move on and leave the posing chimp in peace. So we headed down the hill, deeper into the magnificent forest that lay all around. As we made our way down the hill, the sounds of chimpanzees rang through the trees until we reached a huge fruiting tree. Here the family was high above us, feasting on the fruit, before throwing the remnants down us as we watched from below. We then followed a small group of chimps as they headed further away from where we had left the vehicle, and enjoyed a really intimate period as they rested and groomed one another in the shade of some low trees.

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With a fabulous morning behind us, enjoying numerous unbelievable encounters with our closest cousins, it was time to head back through the forest and up the slope to the track where we had left the vehicle. It wasn't long before Robert came to pick us up and we were on our way back to the lodge. On arrival back at the lodge we had a chance to freshen up and meet for a really delicious lunch.



In the afternoon we headed out to a nearby community for a walk around an area set aside for wildlife. The swamp forest of Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary is home to eight species of primate, and these were the primary focus of a walk with a local guide around this tangle of trees and water.

As we started walking almost immediately we came across our first red colobus monkeys of the trip. They were resting in the trees on the edge of the swamp, but were particularly challenging to photograph. We continued and as we walked along field margins, saw flocks of bronze manakins and village weavers searching for food. As we started along a small road that formed the boundary of the protected area, we saw a lone red-tailed monkey which was soon joined by a single L'Hoest's monkey, then a grey-cheeked mangabey. The L'Hoest's monkey was particularly obliging and posed beautifully for us on the lower branches of the trees.

Other highlights included a pair of great blue turacos perched atop a tree - we were able to see their magnificent colours against the pale overcast sky. As we neared the end of the walk, we had further views of grey-cheeked mangabeys, red colobus monkeys and a posing vervet monkey. It was a lovely way to spend the second half of the day, and although we had limited photography opportunities, we were treated to excellent views of six different species of primate.

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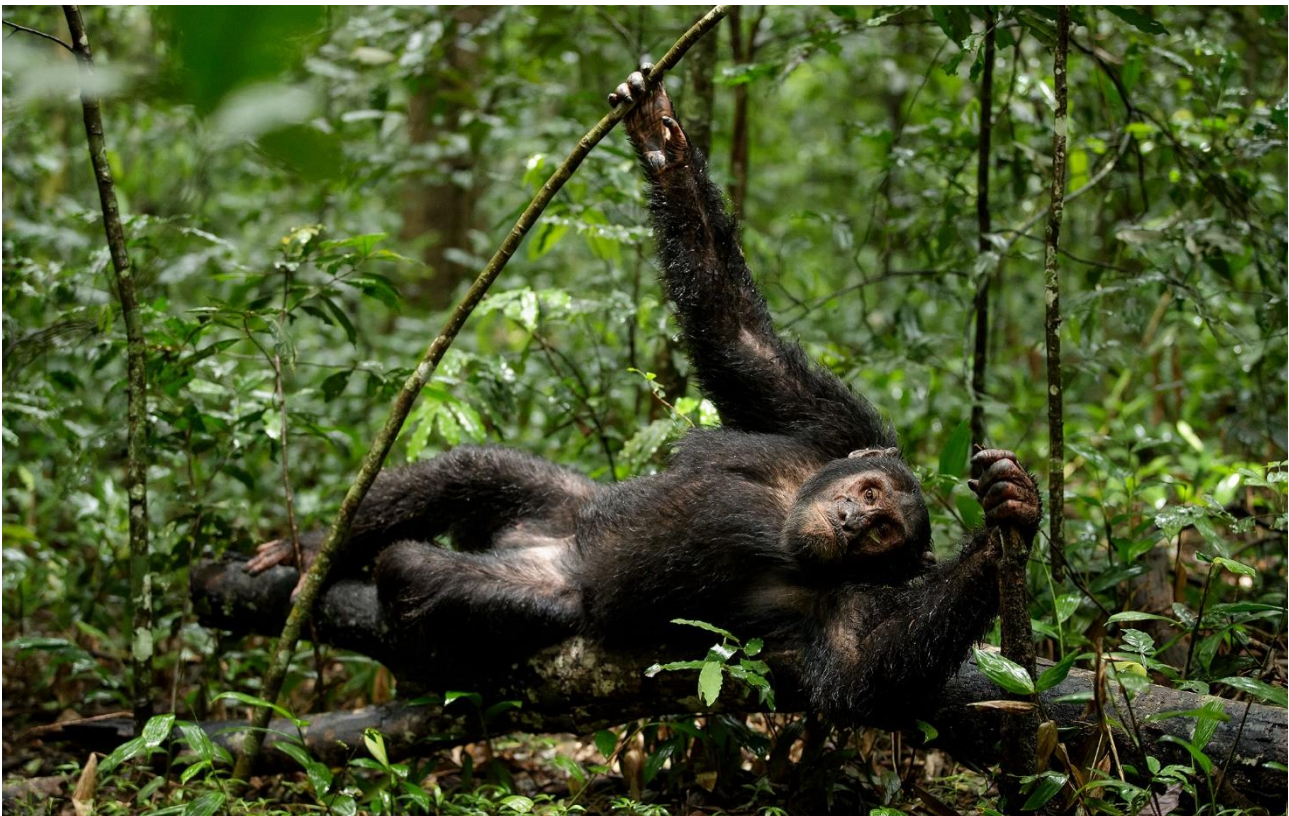
After a short drive back to the lodge, we went to our rooms to get changed, freshen up and catch up again for dinner. Once again, the staff served an excellent meal and we enjoyed a wonderful end to what had been an exceptional day.

Day 5: Kibale Forest National Park

Sunday 15 October 2023

Today we were scheduled for our second chimp tracking experience. Hoping to add to our portfolio from the day before, we were due to head out in search of the same community of animals, however we woke to a wet and rainy morning. The heavens had opened on Kibale and as we met for breakfast the rain was showing no sign of easing.

Robert, our fabulous guide, came to find us and asked whether we would prefer to delay the start of our trek and head out when the rain had stopped. "Of course." we said, "That would be ideal." So we waited to see if the clouds would part - , metaphorically speaking. We didn't actually want the sun to come out, as that would create a nightmare for photographing the dark-coloured chimps under the forest canopy. While we waited, we edited our images from the day before and enjoyed tea and coffee in the lodge's comfortable seating area. Finally, with the morning nearly over, the rain stopped so we headed out in search of the chimps. A massive bonus was that we were all on our own with our local guide. On our way to the start point, more olive baboons lined the grassy verges of the road. We started our trek in a similar place to the day before, but this time headed into the forest in the opposite direction. We descended the hill, working our way along narrow forest trails, heading towards where the chimpanzees were last seen. As we reached the valley floor, we heard the chimps calls for the first time, so we started to climb again and it was here that we found the first of the chimps.



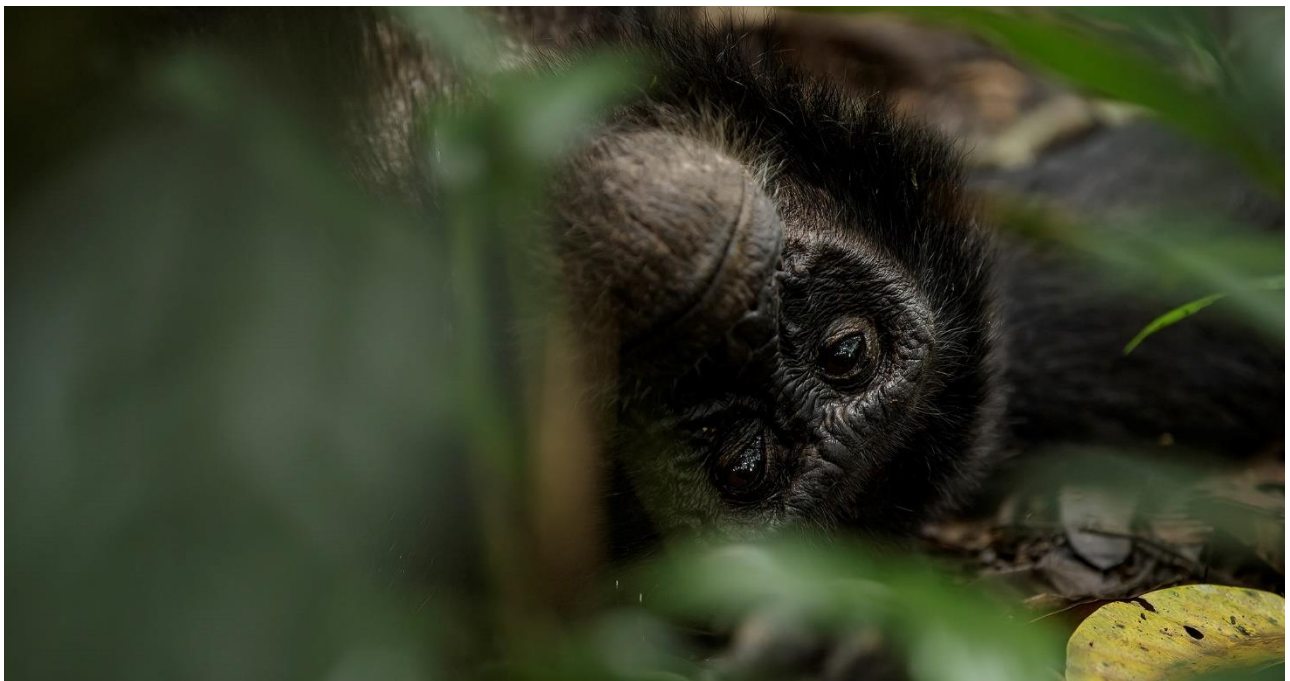
The first ones we came across were on a wider forest trail and one individual decided to rest on a downed tree and just sat there relaxing in the most wonderful setting. We spent a bit of time photographing them, before they moved on (as chimps do) - so we moved on with them. Trekking up and down on slippery trails we tried to keep up with the group and finally found them up in the trees. This wasn't great for photography, but to our delight a youngster decided to climb down some vines to get a better look at us. The light was tricky, but there were some great moments to capture as it sat and watched us.

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We moved on a little further, back down to where we had just come from, and found some more chimps resting beside a trail. What's so wonderful about tracking habituated chimps is that for the most part they



completely ignore you and simply go about their business. So we settled in with this pair of large male chimpanzees, which were more than happy to sit and relax in front of us, posing for a plethora of imagery.

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From intimate portraits to environmental shots, we were able to build on our already impressive portfolio of imagery. We were treated to prolonged views and our local guides did their utmost to give us the best opportunities possible. We were joined briefly by another couple who were also chimp tracking, before it was time to leave the chimpanzees for the final time.

Our walk back took us a different route and we bumped into more and more chimps along the way. In fact, a couple of chimps decided to sit on a small footbridge over some swampy ground, so we had to traverse the muddy ground to the other side. We ended up walking directly back to the registration area as it was closer than the spot where Robert had dropped us off in the forest. What an incredible privilege to have such amazing encounters with the chimpanzees of Kibale Forest National Park over the past two days! On our return to the lodge we enjoyed another exceptional lunch and had an opportunity to spend a relaxing afternoon in the lodge's grounds.

Some of the group decided to spend the afternoon relaxing, while also enjoying the magnificent wildlife around the lodge. To our amazement the same chimps we had left earlier in the day decided to make an appearance on the lodge's nature trail (which runs around the perimeter of the grounds). We also had several blue-headed agamas which we enjoyed photographing. What a fabulous few days in the magical surrounds of Kibale, enjoying chimpanzees and other primates! Furthermore, the team at the lodge made our stay an absolute delight – they could not have done more for us.

We settled in for a final dinner and made the most of the excellent hospitality before retreating to our rooms for a final night's rest in this memorable part of Uganda.

Day 6: Kibale to Queen Elizabeth National Park

Monday 16 October 2023

This morning we had a long journey ahead of us as we headed down to Queen Elizabeth National Park. After enjoying breakfast at the lodge, we packed our bags and ourselves into the vehicle and set off out of Kibale. We immediately came across a troop of olive baboons, which were feeding along the roadside as usual. There was also a group of red colobus monkeys sat high in a tree above the road.

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On our way to the Ishasha sector of Queen Elizabeth National Park, we planned to stop off at Nkuruba Crater Lake, which is home to several species of monkey and often allows excellent photography opportunities. As our vehicle climbed up the slippery roads on the way to the crater, we slipped off into a shallow ditch. With the ground so slippery, we were unable to extricate ourselves, but thanks to a group of local men we were soon on the move again and made it to our stop only around 45 minutes later than planned.

We started to walk around the crater lake with our local guide, but unfortunately the weather was still not really on our side – it was raining, and if there's one thing that monkeys don't like, it's rain. Despite that we continued our walk, only getting views of black-and-white colobus monkeys, while the birdlife included hamerkop, great blue turaco and a lone green white-eye. We did capture some images of the colobus monkeys, but with the rain falling we retreated to the vehicle and continued with our journey further west.

It was a stunning drive down the Great Rift Valley, with the mighty Rwenzori Mountains on one side and a great expanse of wilderness on the other side, comprising Kibale Forest and Queen Elizabeth National Parks. As we drove along the boundary of the parks, we started seeing our first Ugandan kob (a species of antelope endemic to the region), several herds of buffalo and a number of warthogs. We stopped for lunch and enjoyed the view over this expansive area of protected habitat. Continuing onward, we came across our first



elephants just after we crossed the Equator, and were soon crossing the Kazinga Channel. It wasn't long before we turned off the main road and started down the dirt track towards Ishasha. Along the way we came across many troops of baboon, some characterful crested guineafowl and a large herd of buffalo with cattle egrets on their backs.

As we got closer to Ishasha, the weather had started to turn, this time for the better. The sun had started to burn through the cloud and by the time we arrived at the gate to the Ishasha sector, the light had markedly improved. So as a group we decided to enjoy a game drive before checking in to the lodge. As we drove into the area we were greeted by large numbers of topi and Ugandan kob, many of both species with their young. In fact, there were some really young topi about and we were delighted to enjoy some excellent views of this handsome species of antelope and their offspring.

We continued on as we had heard that a leopard with cubs was not too far away. Traversing the grassy plains, we were blown away by the thousands of barn swallows which had just arrived from Europe, alongside a plethora of other bird species such as grey-backed fiscal, a recently arrived juvenile common cuckoo, Senegal lapwing and

white-browed coucal. We arrived at the site where the leopard had been seen just as a couple of vehicles were leaving, having only spent a couple of minutes looking there. Robert took us in closer and, almost immediately, a leopard came out of the bushes only 20 metres away. It was a fabulous way to start our visit to Ishasha, but it was only then that Robert noticed the young cub feeding on something in the thicket.

All of us hoped the cub might come out, but instead we had to settle for the female appearing again right in front of us. She walked right past us and settled down in the long grass. It wasn't long before she was obviously unsettled by the flies and got back on her feet. This time she headed straight towards a nearby

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tree. Our vehicle was in the perfect position as she climbed the tree and paused on the side of the trunk, looking right at us, before climbing onto a higher branch and posing once again. What a wonderful afternoon! With this action-packed day behind us, it was time to head to Ishasha Wilderness Camp. Greeted by the manager and the team, we were soon checked in, shown to our rooms and duly met back for the first of many excellent meals.



Day 7: Queen Elizabeth National Park – Ishasha Sector

Tuesday 17 October 2023

This morning we met up in the dining area at 06:00 as we were heading out early for a dawn game drive. Our primary goal in the Ishasha sector was to photograph the area's famous tree-climbing lions- anything else would be a bonus. As we left camp, a herd of waterbuck was resting in the long grass, while the noise of frogs was deafening. Continuing across the flats, we reached the base of the escarpment and made our way up to the top where we saw our first spotted hyenas of the trip. The Ugandan kob were very busy, trying to keep their distance from these apex predators, before settling down once.

With plenty of birdlife around and large herds of buffalo, topi and kob, there was plenty to see, but the leopard was missing in action. There was a topi carcass though, which the leopard had seemingly killed overnight. Without a cat to chase them away, quite a number of vultures had started to gather on the meal. Lappet-faced, hooded, white-backed and palm nut vulture were all present as the larger lappet-faced vulture dominated the food. With no luck on the cat front, we headed back to camp for breakfast and found the waterbuck in nearly the exact same position as before. Back in camp, the group was treated to an excellent breakfast with views over the Ntungwe River.

The lions can usually be found in the old fig trees of Ishasha during the heat of the day, so with that in mind we headed out again at 10:00 for a game drive with the intention of finding our felid quarry. Most of the mature fig trees are found in the southern area of the Ishasha sector, so we headed down that we to see what we could find. We drove alongside an area of swamp and it was here we had our first clear views of elephants before continuing onwards in search of the lions. Despite our best efforts, we were unable to find the lions so we stopped at the Ishasha River and watched hippos for a while. On our way back to camp, we

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stopped by the leopard spot once again, just to see if she had decided to show herself. There was no leopard in sight and the kill had been picked clean by the vultures. It wasn't long before we were back in the comfort of camp, enjoying our first lunch in this truly beautiful part of the world.

After a little time to relax and freshen up in our rooms, we met up for an afternoon game drive. Once again thousands of barn swallows were feeding en masse as we departed camp. We headed south once again and came across a large herd of elephants. Robert suggested that they would most likely walk across the large area of open plain on their way to the swamp, so we decided to head around and try to get in front of them. Our plan was to photograph them as a herd coming across the plains in the warm evening light. However, as is so often the way, even the best plans don't always come to fruition.



Despite things not working out exactly as we had hoped, it was still a wonderful sight to see so many large elephants in the open grasslands. We spent around an hour with them before the light started to fade. With light levels dropping, we started to make our way back to camp. As the sun dropped below the horizon we came across a very handsome hyena sat not too far from the road, and - despite using very slow shutter speeds - we were able to capture some lovely shots. It wasn't long before we were back at the lodge enjoying yet another fantastic meal prepared by the team.

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Day 8: Queen Elizabeth National Park – Ishasha Sector

Wednesday 18 October 2023

We had another full day in Ishasha to try and find the lions, while whatever else we might come across would, of course, be a bonus. With another early start and hot drinks to kick start our systems, we headed out once more. The kob were all busy on the rutting grounds, as well as a few topi. We came across a hyena which appeared to be feasting on the remnants of a young topi, but it certainly didn't want to pose for photography. So we moved on to see what else we could find.

In the area where we had seen the leopard on our first afternoon, there was yet another carcass. It seemed as if she had made yet another kill overnight, and once again the vultures were more than happy. This time we had our first white-headed vulture of the trip, alongside hooded and white-backed vultures. Other than that, it was a quiet morning so we headed back for breakfast.

At 10:00 we decided to try again for the lions, but it seemed that Lady Luck was conspiring against us as we couldn't find them. No matter how hard we tried nor how many fig trees we checked, the lions had vanished. So we drove along the main road, back to the main entrance to the Ishasha sector. As we neared camp, down on the floodplain below the escarpment, a family of giant river hogs were feeding in the cloudy gloom. We returned to camp for lunch and once again enjoyed another excellent meal.

Heading out for our final evening drive, we hoped our luck might change, but it started out on the quiet side once again. We worked our way along the escarpment and found that the team from camp had set up sundowners in the most magical spot overlooking the Great Rift Valley. Endless views across Queen Elizabeth National Park are something to behold, and after enjoying some snacks and refreshing drinks, we headed on to where a leopard had been seen. As we arrived in the area, Robert had spotted the cat high in a tree a couple of hundred metres away – not quite the leopard sighting we had hoped for, but lovely to see nonetheless.

Day 9: Queen Elizabeth National Park to Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

Thursday 19 October 2023

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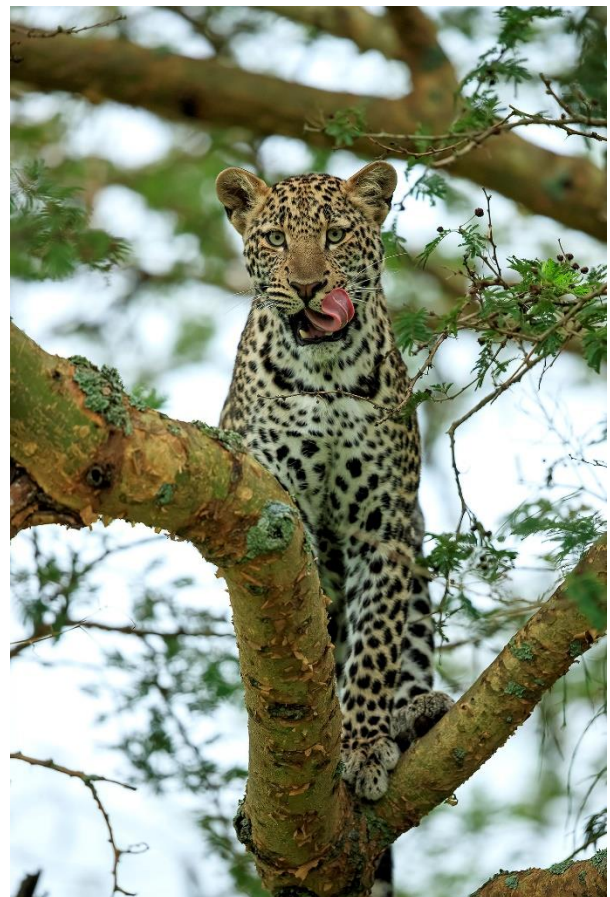
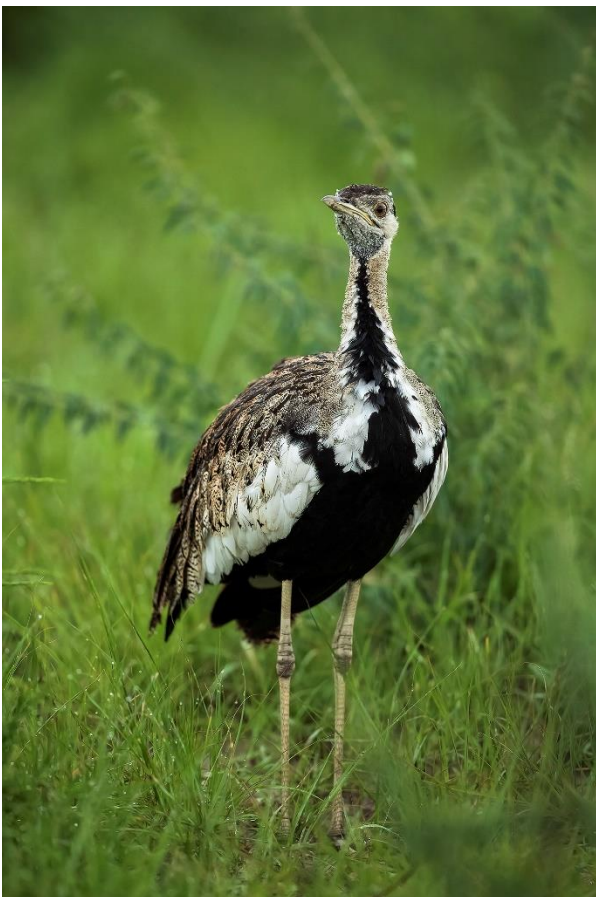
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This morning we had a final chance to explore the beautiful wilderness around Ishasha, hoping to enjoy a final rewarding wildlife encounter and hopefully some excellent photograph opportunities. As per usual, we awoke before dawn, meeting up for tea and coffee at 06:00. With heavy, overcast conditions, we delayed our drive until 06:25, waiting for the light to increase significantly to see what we could find. Just as we left the camp gate, the herd of waterbuck were in their usual spot, determined not to move too far.

Continuing up the escarpment we found a large herd of buffalo. There was plenty of birdlife around too including species such as helmeted guineafowl, speckled mousebird, saddle-billed stork, pin-tailed whydah and martial eagle. On the mammal front, the usual suspects such as topi, Ugandan kob and warthog were plentiful. We also had a fabulous black-bellied bustard pose perfectly only a few metres from the vehicle. Heading round the area on a long loop, everything was pretty quiet, except for a large herd of forest buffalo which included a gorgeous calf.

Unfortunately, the rest of the drive as we headed south was on the quiet side - except for a plethora of bird species. Grey-crowned cranes, woodland kingfisher, African fish eagle, little bee-eater and striped kingfisher all made an appearance, but weren't in prime photographic positions. So we headed back to camp for breakfast and to pack our bags.

As we hit the escarpment we turned onto the track that runs parallel to the main road and came across a vehicle that had stopped close to a large tree. There, in the tangle of branches, was a young male leopard.



Robert moved our vehicle into the best position he could as we tried to get some shots. The light was terrible, but the leopard was absolutely stunning, so we persevered. The heavy cloud cover threatened rain, and within minutes of arriving, the heavens opened. Luckily for us, this meant the leopard became increasingly unsettled and might well have given us a chance to get him coming out in the open. Within a few seconds the leopard stood up, luckily for us in a small clear patch, before he moved along the branch and descended down the tree. Once he was on the ground, we were unfortunately unable to see where he went, although it was unlikely he wouldn't move far until the rain stopped. We shut the roof and windows and started to

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move down the road a little further, before turning around and slowly making our way back to where we had left the leopard.

As we approached the tree where we had left our spotted quarry, the rain started to ease a little and Robert suddenly spotted him in the tall grass just off the roadside. He was busy grooming himself, trying to clear his coat of the raindrops which had likely provided quite a drenching. As he sat there, cleaning himself, a herd of Uganda kob were slowly grazing their way across the open grassland. Suddenly, the leopard dropped down in the grass and started to stalk the incoming prey.



We all held our breath as the leopard crawled further into the long grass, slowly inching closer to the herd of kob, which were seemingly unaware of his presence. For the next hour, we watched as the kob grazed their way ever closer to where we could occasionally see the leopard. All our cameras were at the ready for the moment the leopard might try its luck. The herd started to move perpendicular to the leopard until a group of three youngsters seemed to sense the threat. At first, they definitely weren't able to see the leopard, but they made some half-hearted alarm calls in the general direction of the big cat.

The three young kob edged ever closer to where the leopard was sat. Their alarm calls intensified in regularity, but also in tone. It seemed as if the antelope had now spotted the leopard and he knew the game was up. We were relieved there had not been a kill, but also a little dejected for the young leopard. He had done so well, but unfortunately was unlucky on this occasion. It seemed sure that he would flourish though if he persevered in the same manner, and it would not be long before he had his next meal. With a heavy heart, we decided to make our way slowly back to camp. At the floodplain beneath the escarpment, a large male elephant was feasting on the abundant grass. With lunchtime near, it wasn't long before we were back at the camp enjoying the fine dining on offer for the final time.

And so our time in Ishasha was over. After lunch we were on the road heading south toward Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park. Our final stop in Uganda was what we were hoping would be the highlight of the trip. For a little while we enjoyed the comfort of tarmac once again, before turning off and starting to climb through verdant cultivated hills. Typically, the sun started to shine almost as soon as we left Ishasha

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and the weather was delightful as we made our way up the bumpy road to our next lodge. Buhoma Lodge is nestled within the forested hills of Bwindi and is arguably one of the most charming lodges in Africa. We arrived in the afternoon and enjoyed a warm welcome from the team, were shown to our rooms and had a chance to freshen up, relax and get our things ready for the following day.

We reconvened for dinner at 7 pm and enjoyed what was another excellent meal.

Day 10: Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

Friday 20 October 2023

This morning we had to be up early as we were driving a couple of hours to the start point for our gorilla trek. When you pay for your gorilla permits, you are randomly allocated a start point which is deemed to be accessible from your accommodation. This means that it may be necessary to drive for as much as a couple of hours from Buhoma around to Ruhija. We drove through the undulating terrain, making our way through endless fields, before crossing a small section of the park (an area that sticks out to the north) before finally arriving at the check-in area for our first day with the gorillas.

After a dance by a local tribal group we were given an in-depth briefing about the dos and don'ts of gorilla trekking, and how to behave around these gentle giants. We also had to wear face masks whenever we were in the vicinity of gorillas to ensure that we didn't transmit any pathogens. With only two isolated populations of mountain gorillas remaining, the main threat to their long-term future is disease introduced by humans.

After being allocated the Kyagurro group of gorillas and the team of porters who would accompany us we started by climbing the hill directly behind the registration centre. We were at over 2,123 metres altitude and although we all felt that our breathing wasn't as effective as usual, we worked our way up through the forest at a steady pace. We were told that it today's trek wouldn't be the longest, as the gorillas were thought



to be relatively close by. What we didn't realise was how steep the terrain would be. After maybe half a mile of climbing, we reached a steep-sided ridge, with the forest falling away dramatically on either side. Our guide called out into the forest with a loud whoop and the trackers responded from far below in the tangle of trees.

At that point we turned off of the main track and started to zig-zag our way down the steep escarpment. There was a fair bit of slipping and sliding as we descended quickly in this unforgiving terrain. There was no need to worry, though, as the porters carried our bags and ensured we made our way down safely until the forest started to open up. The guide let out another call, and the reply confirmed we were now getting close. The habitat had changed from traditional rainforest to thick scrub and vines and we started to traverse the hillside to make our final descent. This final leg was the toughest as there was nothing to hold on to, but the reward was worth it. On the valley floor we crossed a small stream and climbed a little to find our trackers. At this very moment it started to rain. Unfortunately, it kept raining for the entire time we spent with the gorillas. You are supposed to spend one hour with them, but because they were hiding and almost impossible to see, let alone photograph, we were given an

extended stay in the soaking forest.

Our first gorilla was a mother with a toddler. She was doing everything she could to shelter her youngster from the rain, so it was incredibly challenging to get photos. Every now and then, though, she would turn and

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the toddler would lean around her to look at us. There is something truly remarkable about close encounters with these great apes. They trust you implicitly and it always makes me feel emotional, as I am sure it does for others too. With limited photo opportunities as the gorillas moved deeper and deeper into the thick cover, we decided to move down the slope and see if we could find a different gorilla in a better position for photography.

Unfortunately, the rain had other ideas and it started to really pour. The rainforest was living up to its name today. For around 40 minutes we didn't take a single picture but just did our best to stay dry. We were doing the same as the gorillas...

Finally the rain started to ease and the family started to emerge and we had a mother with a young baby only a couple of metres away from us. Just as we thought we were going to be rewarded for our patience, the silverback took offence to our proximity and drove her further away.



This meant we had a short period when we could photograph the silverback as he was sat amidst the rich green forest vegetation. With time running out, we felt we should see if we could find the mother with the youngster one last time. As we climbed the slope, slipping and sliding to get back to her, the heavens opened up again. On the other side of the stream, for a brief moment a female sat feeding out in the relative open, providing a magical scene – a gorilla in a sea of green.



Just as we arrived at the spot where the female had been, she retreated into the thick cover of a vine-clad tree and settled down to feed on the leaves. There she stayed until our time was up and we had to make our way back to the registration point. It was, unsurprisingly, a steep climb back up to the ridge. We went a slightly different way, but practically headed straight up. Once again our porters were on hand to provide all the support we needed and we made swift progress back up to the ridge. We continued at a decent pace to the top of the hill and then started the short descent to the registration point. On our arrival back at the vehicle, Robert was waiting for us and we changed from our wet clothes to the dry ones we had left in the Landcruiser. It was then time to tuck in to our packed lunches, before we started the two hour drive back to Buhoma.

The rain was relentless and for much of the rest of the day there was one torrential downpour after another. As a result we spent a relaxing afternoon in the comfort of the lodge's lounge area, close to the open fire. We sat down for dinner at 7 pm and were treated to one gastronomic delight after another. With another gorilla trek the following morning, we headed to bed early and enjoyed a very well-deserved sleep.

Day 11: Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

Saturday 21 October 2023

This morning we enjoyed a relative lie-in, as we knew our briefing and registration would be at the Buhoma start point (only a couple of hundred metres down the road). As usual we were served a fabulous breakfast, which energised us for the day ahead.. After the slight washout of the day before, Robert had seemingly pulled some strings and we had been assigned a short trek today with a large family of gorillas - the Habinyanja family – that I had met before. After the typical welcome (with a group of local women dancing) followed by then our briefing, it was time to climb aboard the Landcruiser and drive around half an hour to the start point of the trek.

On arrival at the start of the trek we were assigned our porters and given another short briefing by our guide. The previous day the gorillas had been feeding only a few metres from the road, so we started to walk up the hill to where they had last been seen. As it happened, our trek was a lot shorter than we had imagined – after around 100 metres we came across the dominant silverback and many other members of the family.

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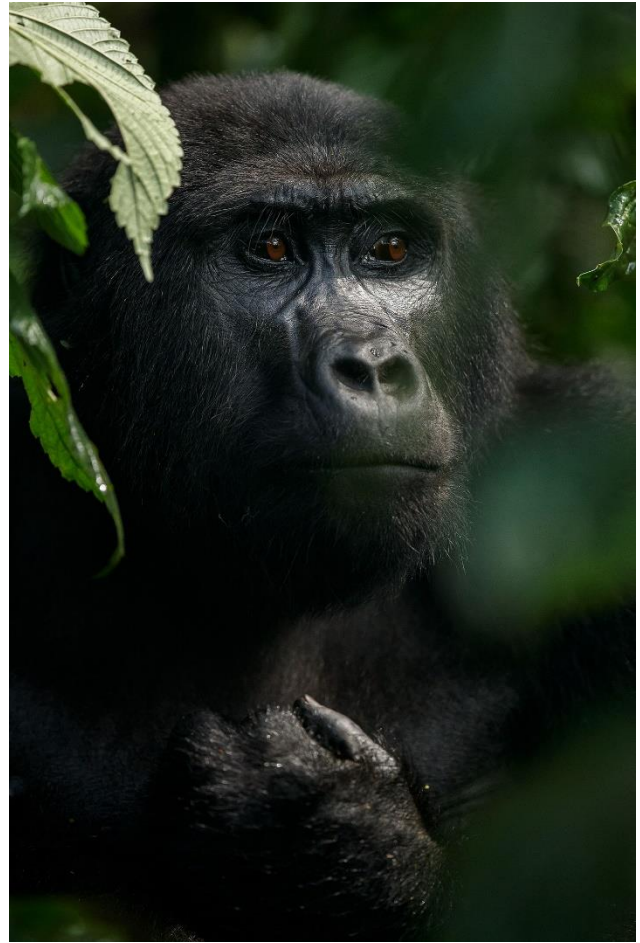
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We spent the next hour and a bit revelling in the most amazing encounters family as they went about their business in this beautiful part of the forest. Unfortunately, after yesterday's incredibly wet weather, our camera gear was fogging up and initially we struggled to capture the images we wanted, however as time went on the fogging cleared a little and we were rewarded with stunning opportunities to capture intimate portraits.

This was arguably one of the most rewarding gorilla treks I have been privileged to undertake. With so many gorillas all around, posing perfectly in well-lit and open forest, we spent prolonged periods with different individuals trying to capture their personalities and really do these magnificent mammals justice. To get so close to such a large mammal in complete peace and quiet is like no other wildlife experience on Earth. The group had been treated to one of the world's most magical moments and we really couldn't have asked for more.

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And so, reluctantly, it was soon time to leave the family of gorillas to their day of foraging. We wandered the short distance back to the vehicle for the drive back to Buhoma. With Robert at the wheel, the journey was smooth and some of us ate our lunch as we drove. We arrived back in Buhoma at lunch time and had the afternoon to relax in the comfort of the lodge and see if any wildlife would show itself.

What a fabulous day, if only we could have spent more time with the gorillas! Unfortunately, unlike the previous two afternoons, the L'Hoest's monkeys decided not to make an appearance around the lodge this afternoon. Some of us went for a wander but the riverside walk was a little on the swampy side, so we stuck to the main road where we enjoyed a few birds. However it is the peace and tranquillity of this magnificent forest that makes Buhoma such a wonderful place to stay.

As the sun dropped behind the hills, we met back in the lounge area for a drink, before sitting down for our final meal together in Uganda.

Day 12: Bwindi Impenetrable Forest to Entebbe & on to Dubai

Sunday 22 October 2023

With a long journey ahead of us, we were able to enjoy a leisurely start before meeting for another hearty breakfast. With our bags packed and our kit finally dry, we said goodbye to the wonderful team at Buhoma and climbed aboard the Landcruiser one final time. We had a couple of hours drive to the nearest airstrip, descending down from the hills of Bwindi to the Great Rift Valley below. The sun was shining down on us as we passed through endless fields of green with villagers dressed in their Sunday best. We arrived at the airstrip with plenty of time to spare and boarded the Cessna Caravan for the one-hour flight back to Entebbe.

Here we had to say goodbye to Robert and thank him for his excellent service throughout. He really couldn't have done more for us. The flight to Entebbe was incredibly smooth and it wasn't long before we were making our way through Entebbe Airport.

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One of the group was staying on for an extra day, trying their luck with shoebill once more, while the rest of us caught our flight to Dubai with Emirates.

Day 13: Arrive UK

Monday 23 October 2023

After connecting in Dubai, this morning we arrived back at Heathrow slightly ahead of schedule and said our goodbyes. What a fabulous trip we had had! Except for a little more rain than anticipated, the encounters with our closest cousins were exceptional and the photographic rewards equally impressive.

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|----|----------------------------|---|--|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14 | Hadada ibis | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 15 | White-faced whistling duck | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| 16 | Yellow-billed duck | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| 17 | African fish eagle | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 18 | Palm-nut vulture | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 19 | Opsrey | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 20 | Hooded vulture | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 21 | White-headed vulture | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| 22 | White-backed vulture | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 23 | Lappet-faced vulture | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 24 | African marsh harrier | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| 25 | Lizard buzzard | | | | | | | | | |
| 26 | Tawny eagle | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| 27 | Long-crested eagle | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 28 | Martial eagle | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 29 | Helmeted guineafowl | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 30 | Crested guineafowl | | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| 31 | Red-necked spurfowl | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |

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|----|-------------------------|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| 32 | Black crane | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| 33 | Purple swamphen | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| 34 | African jacana | ✓ | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 35 | Grey-crowned crane | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| 36 | Black-bellied bustard | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 37 | Collared pratincole | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| 38 | Long-toed lapwing | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| 39 | Spur-winged lapwing | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 40 | African wattled lapwing | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 41 | Senegal lapwing | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| 42 | Common sandpiper | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 43 | Green sandpiper | | | | | | | ✓ | | |
| 44 | Ring-necked dove | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 45 | Great blue turaco | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| 46 | Levaillant's cuckoo | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| 47 | Common cuckoo | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 48 | White-browed coucal | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 49 | Speckled mousebird | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 50 | Pied kingfisher | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| 51 | Striped kingfisher | | | | | | | ✓ | | |
| 52 | Grey-headed kingfisher | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 53 | Woodland kingfisher | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| 54 | Malachite kingfisher | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| 55 | Little bee-eater | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 56 | White-throated bee-eater | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 57 | African grey hornbill | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| 58 | Black-and-white-casqued hornbill | | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 59 | Rufous-naped lark | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 60 | Plain martin | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 61 | Common house martin | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 62 | Mosque swallow | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| 63 | Barn swallow | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 64 | African pied wagtail | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 65 | Yellow-throated longclaw | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 66 | Common bulbul | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 67 | Sooty chat | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |

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|----|--------------------------------|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| 68 | Zitting cisticocla | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| 69 | African blue flycatcher | | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| 70 | Yellow white-eye | | | | ✓ | | | | | |
| 71 | Olive-bellied sunbird | | | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 72 | Grey-backed fiscal | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 73 | Black-headed gonolek | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 74 | Fork-tailed drongo | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 75 | Ruppell's long-tailed starling | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 76 | Black-headed weaver | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| 77 | Village weaver | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| 78 | Red-billed quelea | | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| 79 | Red-collared widowbird | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 80 | Black bishop | | | | | | | | | |
| 81 | Southern red bishop | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 82 | Pin-tailed whydah | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 83 | Common waxbill | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| 84 | Bronze mannikin | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| 85 | Black-and-white mannikin | | ✓ | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MAMMALS | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | African bush elephant | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 2 | African forest elephant | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | Olive baboon | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 4 | Vervet monkey | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| 5 | Red-tailed monkey | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | |
| 6 | L'Hoest's monkey | | ✓ | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 7 | Blue monkey | | | | | | | | ✓ | |
| 8 | Uganda mangabey | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| 9 | Black-and-white colobus | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | |
| 10 | Ugandan red colobus | | ✓ | | ✓ | | | | | |
| 11 | Mountain gorilla | | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 12 | Common chimpanzee | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| 13 | Lion | | | | | | | | | |
| 14 | Leopard | | | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 15 | Common genet | | | | | ✓ | | | | |
| 16 | Banded mongoose | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| 17 | Spotted hyena | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|------------------|--|--|--|---|---|---|---|--|--|
| 18 | Common warthog | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 19 | Giant forest hog | | | | | | ✓ | | | |
| 20 | Topi | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 21 | Cape buffalo | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 22 | Forest buffalo | | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| 23 | Waterbuck | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 24 | Kob | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 25 | Hippopotamus | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |