

## Tour Report Uganda Wildlife Photo Safari 15 - 26 October 2024

Chimpanzee



Shoebill



Lion



Mountain gorilla



Compiled by Bret Charman

**Day 1:**

London Heathrow to Doha, Qatar

**Tuesday 15 October 2024**

With an overnight from London Heathrow, some of the group left the UK, while others were waiting for us in Uganda. The flight left on time and we arrived in Qatar the following morning as per our schedule.

**Day 2:**

Doha to Entebbe, Uganda

**Wednesday 16 October 2024**

Our flight to Entebbe left Doha on time and we enjoyed a smooth flight. Arriving on time, in the middle of the afternoon, it wasn't long before I met the group in baggage reclaim. With the assistance of a superb facilitator, everybody was quickly through and we were soon out meeting our fantastic driver/guide for the trip, Robert. Having had Robert as my guide before, I knew we were in for a superb 11 days.

We were whisked from the airport to the nearby Protea Hotel, where we would spend the first night. It was here a little later that I met the other members of the group who had arrived a day early. All of us ate together and I filled them in on what we might expect over the coming days in the 'Pearl of Africa'. It was a great first meal and a great way to introduce ourselves to one another.

With a long day ahead of us, we headed to bed nice and early.

**Day 3:**

Mabamba Swamps, Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary &amp; Murchison Falls

**Thursday 17 October 2024**

Today was to be action-packed with plenty on the itinerary to keep us entertained, as well as a long day on the road. Our first port of call was the papyrus swamps along the shores of Lake Victoria, Mabamba. These



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floating masses of vegetation are home to an incredible diversity of bird species, but there was one particular bird that was to be the focus of our time here. Mabamba Swamp is famed for its obliging population of the usually secretive shoebill. This unique species is not easy to see and sought-after by wildlife lovers from across the globe.



Taking a wooden boat from the northern shores of Entebbe, we crossed the open water before arriving at the swamp and transferring to two smaller wooden boats. Just from this crossing, we were treated to views of countless pied kingfishers, an African fish eagle, yellow-billed kite, glossy ibis and long-tailed cormorants (among many more). Entering the channels within the papyrus, many more species presented themselves including purple heron, malachite kingfisher, black crane, yellow-billed duck and African marsh harrier. However, we all kept our fingers crossed that we would be rewarded with views of a shoebill. Our guide did not disappoint.

We were treated to exceptional views of a bird as it sat on the floating mass less than 20 metres from our boats. It put on quite a show for us and after a fair amount of time, it moved to higher ground, constantly providing a plethora of photographic opportunities. What an incredible treat. Despite some slightly tricky lighting, we were rewarded with some excellent photographic opportunities. It was so lucky to have a particularly obliging bird. In fact, despite being common here, they can still be surprisingly elusive and sightings are far from guaranteed.

Unfortunately, we had to call time and make our way back toward the larger boat for our transfer back to Entebbe. Robert was there waiting for us. He whisked us across town to the mall where we were able to buy a few essentials and source a delicious lunch as we started our long drive north toward Murchison Falls National Park.

Skirting around the western flanks of Kampala, we got caught in a little bit of traffic but were soon making good progress on the main road north. Robert had arranged a little surprise for the group – we were to make a stop at Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary. This was not in our itinerary, but our time there was exceptional. Heading out on foot, we found a group of six different white rhinos and had the most remarkable close encounters.

In fact, despite our guide's best efforts in the swampy habitat, the rhinos often came closer than anticipated and we had to make hasty retreats. This was all part of the adventure though and the group were rewarded with incredible memories and some wonderful images. What a bonus!

Once again, it was time to head back on the road. We still had a fair bit of ground to cover to reach our destination, Murchison Falls National Park. After a few hours, including a drive through the dark, forested interior of the park we arrived at our charming tented lodge – Twigga Safari Lodge. Perched on a hill above the Victoria Nile, the lodge provides a beautiful spot to base yourself for safaris within Murchison Falls National Park.

After an incredibly long day, we enjoyed an excellent first meal in the lodge's dining area. Dinner was interrupted by close-up views of a hippo in the dining room before we retreated to our safari tents for a very well-earned rest.

**Day 4:**  
Murchison Falls National Park

**Friday 18 October 2024**

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After a long journey, we had a relatively relaxed start to the day with breakfast at 6.30 am. Leaving the lodge at 7.20 am, we were soon across the river and starting to explore the open savannah habitats of the park's peninsula between the Victoria and White Niles. The first notable highlight was a herd of buffalo enjoying the muddy delights of a drying waterhole right by the road. They were all caked in the thick glutinous mud, looking very happy with themselves. The next mammalian highlight was a small group of hartebeest, alongside a Rothschild giraffe and one of my favourite antelopes – the oribi.

We were treated to views of countless birds, including, the Abyssinian ground hornbill, martial eagle, northern red bishop, and bateleur eagle, while other mammals included the ubiquitous Uganda kob, hippo and patas monkey and warthog also presented themselves. Having enjoyed the savannah grasslands and open acacia forest, we worked our way down to the shores of Lake Albert, where an incredible diversity of birdlife was present. White-faced whistling ducks, spur-winged and Egyptian geese, grey heron, great egret and so many more species provided plenty of entertainment. With the sun now high in the sky and the temperature steadily rising, we started to make our way back toward the lodge.

Driving along the ridgeline that dominates the centre of the savannah, we came across an Abyssinian ground hornbill posing perfectly on a termite mound right by the roadside. It was sat perfectly still as the group enjoyed excellent views and quickly captured an impressive portfolio of images. These birds are a sizeable species and with their brightly coloured skin, both red and blue for the males, they make for spectacular photographic subjects. With time getting away from us, we left the hornbills in peace and made our way back to the lodge for lunch.

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Having enjoyed a fabulous first morning in Murchison, the afternoon was scheduled to head out on the Victoria Nile for a private cruise in search of wildlife and to see the falls for which the park is named. We knew that this trip would be a bird photography wonderland and so we had high hopes for the voyage. It certainly did not disappoint. Working our way upstream, we were treated to fantastic views of hippos as they sat along the shallow edges of the river.



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Carrying on further upstream, we were treated to fantastic views of a red-throated bee-eater and a malachite kingfisher. Both species posed nicely as the camera shutters fired off in tandem. Our skipper carefully manoeuvred the boat to enable us to get the best images possible. Being on the water provided us with a completely different experience from the vehicle-based safaris.



As well as the more colourful birds, we were treated to exceptional views of the African darter, goliath heron, yellow-billed kite, giant kingfisher and wire-tailed swallow. High in the trees above the river, a troop of black-and-white colobus monkeys fed on fruits in the canopy, while an elephant also made an appearance briefly on the edge of the thick riverside forest. Furthermore, we had a great view as a huge Nile crocodile slid into the water right in front of our boat, cruising by before disappearing into the churning waters in the river's centre. Finally, we made it into the turbulent waters just downstream of Murchison Falls. Thought to be the most powerful waterfall on Earth, the roar and ferocity certainly left a lasting impression.



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With the sun slowly setting behind us, it was time to turn around and follow the current back downriver to where Robert was waiting for us. What a fabulous day in the varied habitats of Murchison Falls National Park. Arriving back at the lodge, we had time to freshen up before reconvening in the dining room for another excellent meal.

**Day 5:**

**Saturday 19 October 2024**

Murchison Falls National Park

This morning promised to offer us another different experience. We would be heading along the Victoria Nile once again, on yet another private cruise, searching for a wealth of wildlife along the river's banks once again. As well as the birds we were now very familiar with, including red-throated bee-eater, pied and malachite kingfishers, we were blessed with excellent views of osprey, woodland kingfisher, black-headed gonolek, striated heron and brown-throated weaver.

An elephant decided to show itself on the river banks, our best view of an elephant so far, and the group enjoyed photographing this gentle giant. Slightly further downstream we stumbled across a nesting colony of pied kingfisher and spent a bit of time photographing as they perched, and came to-and-fro. There were so many bird species, that it was hard to keep up, but a selection of other avian delights included bare-faced turaco, lanner falcon, grosbeak weaver and grey-crowned cranes. By this point, we had made our way down to the papyrus-lined delta, where the Victoria Nile flows into Lake Albert. It is in this area where there is a chance to see shoebill. However, it seemed like our luck might have turned and we would be unsuccessful. We came across a local fisherman who told us that he'd seen a shoebill earlier in the day, but unfortunately, it had been scared off. Just as we were about to head to shore, we spotted a shoebill shape on the furthest patch of papyrus. Sure enough, it was a shoebill. This bird was sat out in the open, standing proudly in the warm morning sunlight. What a sighting!



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The group were able to capture images as the bird stood proudly and our skipper managed to park the boat on the edge of the floating vegetation. It was time for us to head to shore and enjoy a game drive back to the lodge through the main safari area of the park. It was then that the shoebill took flight and provided us with one final photographic opportunity.



Approaching the shore, Robert was there waiting for us and it wasn't long before we were driving along the lake shore, working our way to the rest stop where we were able to use the facilities before continuing with our safari.

Shortly after we realized that a pride of lions had made a kill close to the road. With two of our group having never been to Africa, we decided we needed to take a closer look. At the location, we found four lions feeding on a warthog kill (although it took us a while to work out what the prey species had been). There was a lioness with two growing cubs and a sub-adult male. The female moved off into the nearby shade of a thicket, soon followed by one of the cubs. The other two stayed put, determined to make the most of the prize which they now had for themselves. Robert was sure that there were more lions around, and sure enough, he spotted another lioness a few hundred yards away, working her way through the acacia scrub on a low rise.

With the sun beating down on us and time once again racing away, we started to make our way back towards the lodge. We found a large herd of buffalo which had a lone forest buffalo within its ranks, including her hybrid calf while we also got to see a couple of yellow-winged bats roosting in a tree and a beautiful swallow-tailed bee-eater. Other notable sightings included a lovely family group of elephants down by the water and two lions sitting in a distant sausage tree. Unfortunately, the track to the tree was closed, so we had to make do with views through binoculars.

We arrived back at the lodge as the day's sun was at its fiercest and we were served another excellent meal and cold drinks, another busy afternoon ahead of us. It was a quieter drive through the stunning scenery of Murchison Falls, but we were treated to views of huge herds of Ugandan kob, oribi galore, giraffes all over and plenty of buffalo too. It was an absolutely beautiful evening immersing ourselves into the heart of this

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beautiful landscape.



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We were though given a special treat. Robert had managed to negotiate with a ranger and we were allowed to pop down to where the lions were resting in the sausage tree. We only had a few minutes with the light fading, but it was lovely to get views of the lioness sleeping on the high branch. Just magical!

We returned to Twigga for our final dinner, enjoying another excellent meal, before once again retreating to our rooms.

**Day 6:**

**Sunday 20 October 2024**

Murchison Falls National Park to Kibale Forest National Park

This was to be our last morning enjoying the wild wonders of Murchison Falls before we headed south-west to our next destination, Kibale Forest. With packed lunches provided, we headed off into the park for our final game drive.

It was another beautiful day and we were treated to views of many species which were now familiar to the group. It was arguably a large male elephant that was the highlight of the morning though, as he busily fed on the edge of a patch of acacia scrub. It wasn't the best for photography necessarily, but he was the first large bull we had seen on the trip.



The birdlife was particularly impressive with a number of new species including black-crowned tchagra, northern carmine bee-eater, Denham's bustard and brown snake eagle. With lots of ground to cover, we had to say our goodbyes to this beautiful part of Uganda. Working our way along the southern shore of Lake Albert. We enjoyed our packed lunches on the road, watching the changing landscapes as they passed us by.

Robert did an excellent job of driving us across the verdant landscapes of this beautiful country. Our species list wasn't too bad for the drive with the notable highlight being a group of black-and-white casqued hornbill perched on a tree by the roadside.

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We arrived at Primate Lodge, nestled in the thick rainforest of Kibale, in the late afternoon and had time to freshen up before reconvening for a fabulous dinner and making a plan for the following day.

**Day 7:**

**Monday 21 October 2024**

**Bigodi Wetland & Kibale Forest National Park – Chimpanzee Tracking**

Robert had found out that there were meant to be a lot of people tracking chimpanzees that morning. Managing to work some magic, we were able to move our walk to the afternoon and instead headed towards the Bigodi Wetlands for a walk searching for primates and many sought-after birds. Before we left the lodge though, a black-and-white casqued hornbill put on a show right outside the dining area. Seemingly searching for the agamas which are found in the gardens, it came right down to the ground and posed for some photographs.



We drove the short distance to the wetlands and met our local guide. Having had a little introduction, we were each given a pair of rubber boots as some sections of the walk were underwater after the recent heavy rain. In the grounds around the centre, we had a brief view of a red-tailed monkey and grey-cheeked mangabey with a group of the spectacular great blue turaco in some trees just a short walk away. These colourful birds were an absolute delight, and despite being a challenge to photograph, they are particularly vibrant. Other highlights in the first few minutes of the walk included both red and black-and-white colobus, as well as a troop of olive baboons. The walk had already rewarded us with excellent views of several new species of monkey and a couple of new bird species (pin-tailed whydah, lesser striped swallow and snowy-crowned robin chat).

Working our way along the edge of the swamp, the primates managed to elude us for most of the walk, but instead, we were treated to many fantastic birds including long-crested eagle, shining-blue kingfisher and Ross' turaco. It was after these avian highlights, that we had to start to make our way back across the swamp on a submerged boardwalk. It was, to say the least, a little challenging. Our progress was slow but steady and we successfully reached the other side. On this side of the swamp, the group were treated to their first good view of vervet monkeys and we captured some stunning images of a black-and-white colobus which posed nicely in a tree for all of us.

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Having spent a wonderful morning exploring the wetlands, it was time to head the short distance back to Primate Lodge where we enjoyed another exceptional meal. It is always worth saying that this lodge is an absolute delight. The staff, the setting and the fabulous rooms really are a highlight for any stay in Kibale.

It wasn't long before we were heading down to the chimpanzee tracking registration area and having our briefing. With the do's and don'ts made clear, we made the short drive to where we would start our walk into the thick, ancient forests of Kibale. What can I say about the next couple of hours? Quite simply, it was exceptional. There was only our group and one other out in the forest. Making our way along the forest trails, we worked our way closer to where the chimps were last seen.

The moment you come across your first chimpanzee is always memorable. For us, it was a youngster sitting on the ground while others were high in the trees above. The younger chimps are often more timid, and so it proved as it kept moving away from us, before settling down for a brief period. It was in these brief moments that the group were able to capture some beautiful imagery.

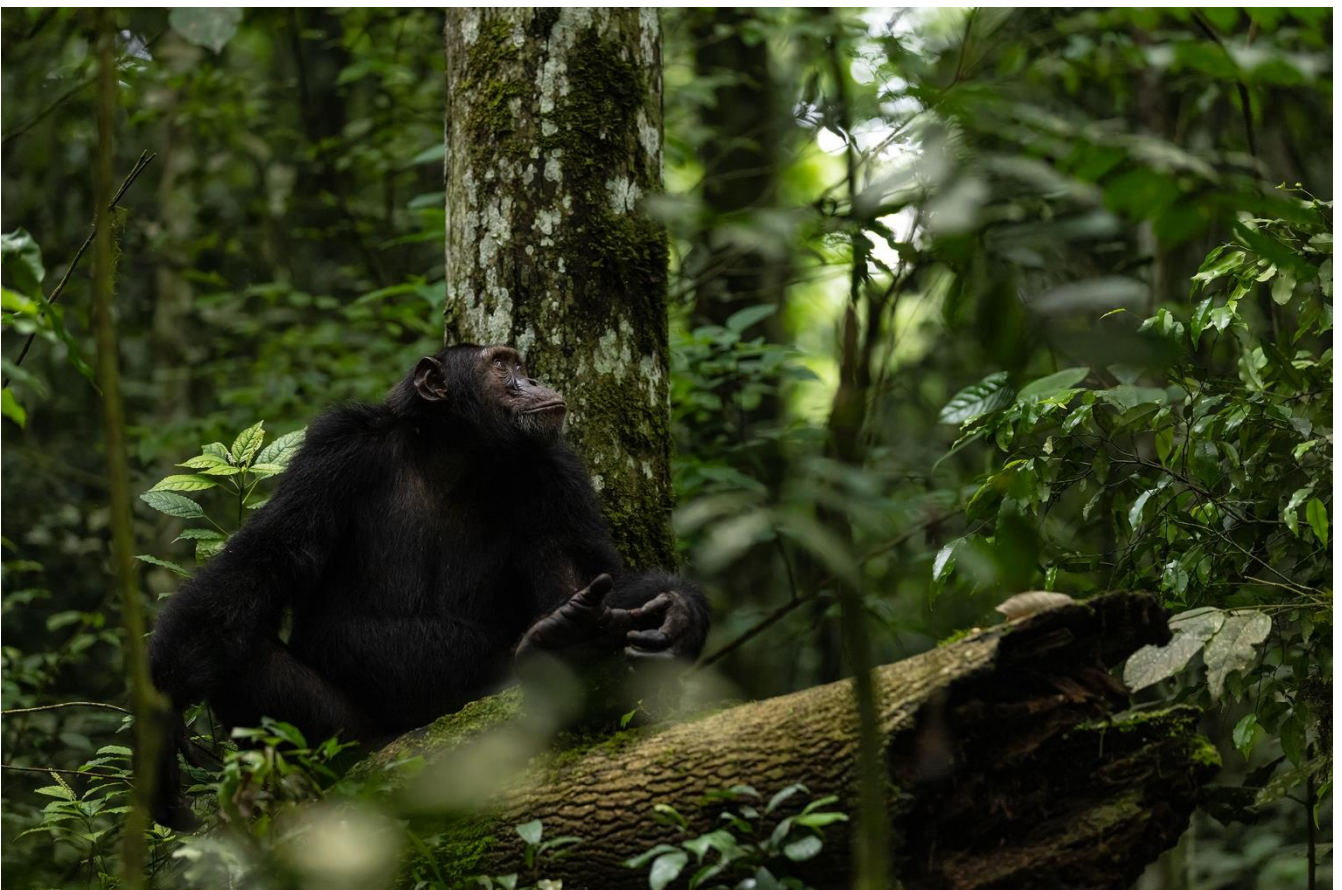


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The best thing about spending time with the chimps is that they provide countless opportunities to capture stunning imagery. You're only supposed to be with them for an hour, but because much of the time is spent



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moving through the forest, the tracking can end up lasting for a few hours. Keeping up with the chimps is all part of the fun and my group did brilliantly at trying to get into the best positions for photography.

The younger chimp rested for a brief time and allowed us to capture some really beautiful portraits. Resting on its side, trying to keep out of the mud, it closed its eyes and looked completely relaxed in this imposing forest habitat. Using the surrounding vegetation to capture breathtaking imagery is part of the process of photographing primates in the rainforest. You can add real depth to the images so everyone is always on the lookout for gaps in the lower branches or angles where you can use the foliage to your advantage. We couldn't have asked for a better start, but more was still to come.

After the first group of chimps moved away from us, our guide noticed a group of females with small young, but unfortunately, they didn't want to stick around. Instead, we ended up beside a male chimp in his prime. He was called 'Surprise' and as we sat there another young chimp made its approach to our group. The guide warned us that he was stubborn, which translated to a mock charge at one of the group and a hand slap on the floor right in front of him. What excitement!



All of the group did brilliantly and came away with some incredible images. The low light levels in the forest are always tricky, but when it all comes together, it is particularly rewarding. Surprise was definitely the star of the show and he kept changing pose, providing endless photographic opportunities. We really couldn't have asked for more.

Before we knew it, our time was up. Making our way back up the hill to where our vehicle was waiting for us, the rain started to fall. We reached the vehicle just as the heavens well and truly opened. The thunder and lightning followed moments later. The timing couldn't have been better. Within ten minutes, we were safely back at the lodge. The wonderful staff took our boots from us, for cleaning, and we dashed to our rooms for showers and a change of clothes.

We agreed to meet back up at either 7 pm for dinner or earlier if anyone fancied a celebratory drink. What an excellent day!

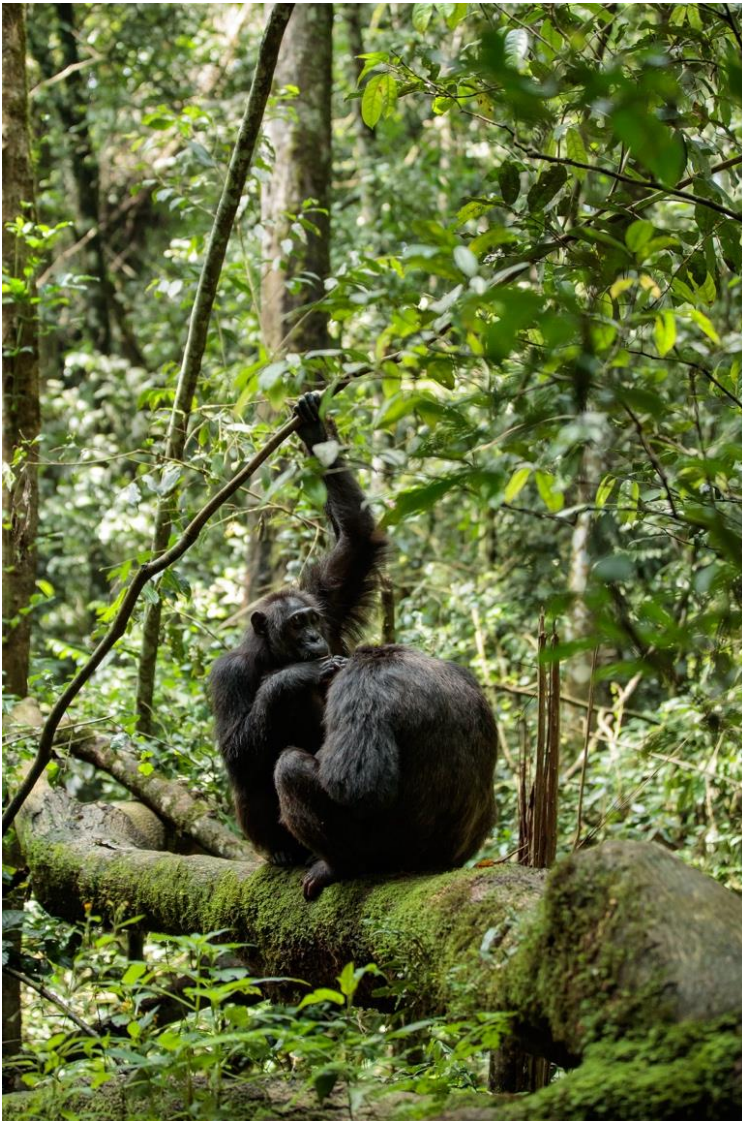
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**Day 8:****Tuesday 22 October 2024****Kibale Forest National Park – Chimpanzee Tracking**

Today was another day focused on the chimpanzees. It was due to be busy once again with visitors, but unfortunately, we were unable to change to the afternoon tracking experience. However, this was not necessarily a bad thing as it meant our group were able to enjoy the chimps as they went through different parts of their daily routine.

Typically, in the mornings the chimps spend a lot more time either high in the trees or moving at speed on the ground. They are looking for food and can quickly cover distance until they find a spot that meets their requirements. Like yesterday, we had to drive a short distance (to the same patch of forest) and start to track the chimps from the road. When we found the chimps, they were high in the trees making plenty of noise and busy feeding on an array of different fruits.



With the chimps out of reach, we just stood there, marvelling at their sounds as they rang out through the trees. We probably stood there for close to an hour, before finally descending towards the forest floor. After moving around the forest, we found a pair of chimps resting on a downed tree. The light was pretty harsh (the clouds hadn't yet formed) and it was tricky to capture images to the same standard as the day before, but we were privileged to see the pair groom and relax.

After watching the duo on the downed tree, we moved off, as some of the other tracking groups descended on the same location. Our guide wanted us to get away from the crowd, allowing us a more intimate experience. We came across a couple of chimps moving swiftly on the ground, before one picked up speed, kicking a buttress root which reverberated through the trees.

In the surrounding trees, you could still hear chimpanzees as they crashed from tree to tree searching for fruits. In the distance the shrieking cries and whoops from other families within this large community of our closest cousins. Our final encounter was with three different individuals, enjoying the warm morning sun on another downed tree.

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It is amazing how chimpanzees, much like us, have an aversion to getting wet and muddy. They always try their best to lift themselves off of the ground and stay dry wherever possible – no means an easy feat in a rainforest. Photography was a real challenge once again, but it was perfect to show how varied the experience can be and what behaviours can be witnessed. This is why we always include two opportunities as it maximises photographic opportunities and allows our groups to really enjoy the remarkable encounters the chimpanzees can afford us.

Time, once again, was up and it was only fair that we left the chimpanzees to socialize and feed in peace. And so, with smiles on faces all around, it was time to walk back up the hill to where Robert was waiting for us. We were driven back to Primate Lodge where we once again had our boots and clothes taken for cleaning. With a chance to freshen up, we were treated to yet another delicious lunch, before having the afternoon to rest and relax in the comfort of the lodge. We were able to have a look through the images and relax with a long drive ahead of us the following day. Keeping with tradition, we arranged for dinner to be at 7 pm – it was another exceptional meal and everyone went to bed feeling very content with the past couple of days.

#### **Day 9:**

**Wednesday 23 October 2024**

Kibale Forest National Park – Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

We awoke early and enjoyed yet another superb breakfast in the charming dining area of the Primate Lodge. The black-and-white casqued hornbill decided to make yet another appearance, landing on the ground in search of its reptilian prey. With our bags packed, we waited in the lounge area, where a number of red colobus monkeys put on a show in the trees above – a lovely way to end our time at this stunning lodge.

This would be the longest drive yet, with a lot of ground to cover and with the inability to drive through Queen Elizabeth National Park (thanks to the FCDO's travel advisories) we had to head south, before

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working our way west towards the forest-clad mountains of Bwindi. For the most part, we knew that the roads would be pretty good so we settled in for the long drive, enjoying the changing landscapes as they passed us by. One of the highlights was crossing the Equator on the road south of Kibale. Of course, we climbed out of the vehicle for the opportunity to straddle the line dividing the Northern and Southern hemispheres of Earth.

We stopped for lunch and a roadside restaurant and were able to select from an incredible array of delicious dishes. This was a great break, knowing we had the whole afternoon on the road. The drive did offer sightings of a variety of different species including a handsome long-crested eagle, grey-crowned cranes, Ruppel's starling, marabou storks following a tractor, palm-nut vulture, white-throated and cinnamon-chested bee-eaters, red-necked falcon and woolly-necked storks.

After a long day, Robert had superbly navigated the country roads, delivering us to the welcome respite of Buhoma Lodge. This charming property is nestled within Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park, with stunning views and beautiful accommodation. The staff gave us a warm welcome and we were soon whisked upstairs and given an introduction before being shown to our rooms. There was a little time before dinner and we were able to freshen up, before reconvening for our first meal in this spectacular location. Everyone was tired from a long day of travel, so we headed off to bed to be well-rested for our first gorilla trek the following morning.

#### **Day 10:**

**Thursday 24 October 2024**

Bwindi Impenetrable Forest – Gorilla trekking

With a day ahead of us that could involve trekking at high altitude, we arranged for breakfast at 6.45 am, allowing us plenty of time for our food to settle before heading out. There had been plenty of rain overnight, which hopefully meant we would stay dry when out in the humid forests of Bwindi. At 7.30 am, Robert drove us just down the road to the reception area, where we had a welcome from a local women's group (including singing and dancing) before we had our briefing from one of the rangers. We were told about what to expect



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and how to behave around the gorillas and the importance of gorilla tourism for the community and the wildlife of Bwindi.

Once the formalities were finalized, we were allocated our trekking groups. For our first trek, we were given the Katwe family. This was the smallest group of gorillas that I had visited with two silverbacks, one blackback, a lone adult female and two juveniles. As the gorillas were over the mountain that towered above us, we hopped back in the Landcruiser and drove for 25 minutes around the mountain, working our way to a point high up on the hills. The views were incredible.

After getting out of the vehicles, we met our porters and started to walk along a ridge, working our way closer to the edge of the thick forests of Bwindi. It was hot and humid as we climbed our way higher into the hills, passing through eucalypt and tea plantations. There were fresh signs of the elephants that call the forest home, but they had seemingly retreated into the safety of the trees. Stopping regularly for water, we had only walked around 45 minutes when we realised we were getting close to the gorillas.

The group were told to leave their bags with the porters and there in front of us was our first gorilla. It was the blackback. Within a few moments of us trying to get into position, the gorilla charged before stopping right in front of us. Suddenly, he lifted his hand towards us as if apologising for his overly enthusiastic welcome. One of the researchers told us that the family had seemingly woken up on the wrong side of their nest that morning, and we shouldn't take it personally.

The gorillas had decided to park themselves in a maze of vines and watching them as a group was proving to be tricky. Our guide informed us that they were likely trying to come through to where we were sitting, as one of the silverbacks made his approach along the path toward us. We retreated to a point where we could allow the gorillas to pass and waited for them there. Sure enough, within a minute, the whole family walked right by where we were stood. What luck! Getting so close to these animals is always an incredible treat.

Thankfully, the whole family ended up in an area that was more conducive to photography and despite some humidity issues with cameras, we were able to get some fantastic views. The silverbacks were particularly



obliging at times, sitting only yards away, allowing the group to capture some intimate portraits. The light was a little harsh, as it was an unusually bright and sunny day, but this didn't dampen the enthusiasm from the group – shutters whirred away.

One of the youngsters climbed a tree to the left of us, working its way higher up into the spindly branches, before settling in and starting to feed on the green leaves it had immersed itself within. Meanwhile, a couple of the other individuals had now emerged from the thicker vegetation and provided yet more close views. It is really hard to describe just how incredible an experience it is to sit so close to such a large wild animal. What makes it even more remarkable, is just how gentle and accepting they are. There is no aggression, and they seem to almost look through you rather than at you. You are only allowed to spend one hour with the family, and you have to make the most of every minute. Much of the time, it is worth putting the cameras down and just soaking up everything.

Our group were rewarded for their patience as the second youngster climbed high into vines above the adult female. It posed for us as it fed on the fresh green leaves, providing

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some sweet portraits in its lush green surrounds. Before we knew it, our time was coming to an end and we had to wrap up our photography.

What an incredible way to spend a morning. The rain had kept away and we had all thoroughly enjoyed our first day encounter with Bwindi's most sought-after species. Meeting back up with our team of porters, we were soon walking out of the forest (albeit we had only been 100 yards into it) and started to make our way back down along the ridge to where Robert was waiting for us. We thanked and tipped our porters, before climbing back into the vehicle.

Making our way down back towards Buhoma, we stopped at one of the local community projects, 'Ride 4 Women'. This enterprise was set up to provide income to single mothers and women suffering domestic abuse. This project provides a refuge and a safe working environment to better their lives. What a fantastic project! We even had a little bonus wildlife encounter as a pair of chameleons were on one of the bushes in the courtyard. The group purchased some wonderful products, further helping to support the impressive work done here.

We arrived back at Buhoma Lodge, heading up to the lounge area, where we enjoyed our packed lunches (these were given to us in the morning as we weren't sure whether we would be back in time for lunch) and a round of refreshing cold drinks. The heavens had opened up as we sat eating our lunch, with several of the group arranging massages for the afternoon. This was also the time to select our choices for dinner, which we had arranged for 7 pm. We all met by the bar ahead of dinner, reminiscing about our incredible morning and working through all the photos we had captured. Dinner was exceptional. With full stomachs and tired eyes, we headed back to our rooms to find hot water bottles in our beds. The rains started again while we were in our rooms and thunder reverberated through the hills all around us.

#### **Day 11:**

**Friday 25 October 2024**

Bwindi Impenetrable Forest – Gorilla trekking

Today was to be our last full day in Uganda. How time flies when you are enjoying such an incredible country. Having already had a gorilla briefing, we were able to enjoy a more relaxed start to the day, before heading to the registration area to be assigned our gorilla group for the day.

On this occasion, we were assigned a gorilla group in know very well, the Habinyanja family. This was my fourth time trekking with this wonderful family of gorillas and I knew we were in for a real treat. Bwindi has a 'peninsula' of forest that sticks out into the surrounding farmland to the north and it is in this area that the family are typically found. It means that trekking to find them is often assigned as an 'easy' option. They are often found only a few hundred yards from the surrounding tea plantations or areas of coffee.

To start the walk, we had to drive around 45 minutes to this peninsula of forest, where we alighted the vehicle and met our porters for the day. We were soon on our way, working our way down along the tracks of a tea plantation, before turning into the rows of tea and progressing down a much steeper slope. The porters did brilliantly helping the group descend the steep and slippery slope before we hit the swampy bottom of the valley. It turned out, this is where the gorillas had decided to spend the morning feeding. They had chosen an area which was particularly wet and uneven underfoot. It certainly wasn't the easiest area to traverse, but it was great to see so many gorillas in a relatively small area.

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It started off being a little challenging for photography as the gorillas were sat out in the harsh sunlight, but as the hour progressed it improved. The family were busy feeding on the roots of wild ginger, working their



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way through the swamp and all coming together in an open area right where the group gathered.

The photography continued to prove challenging, but we could not complain about the incredible encounters we were treated to. It really was one of those wildlife encounters where photographs just don't do it justice. What a remarkable hour we enjoyed, but before we knew it, the gorillas had decided our time was up. Almost to the second, they knew the hour had passed and they started to make their way back towards the thicker forest. Knowing that our time was up, we met back up with the porters, packed our camera gear away and headed back up the steep slope, working our way through the low bushes of tea that now surrounded us.

Emerging from the tea, we caught our breath in the shade of the trees, before continuing up the main track to where the Landcruiser was parked. There we found Robert, waiting patiently for us as always. He was the most wonderfully patient guide. Once again, we said thank you to our porters, tipping them generously for their help and time, before starting the drive back toward Buhoma.

This afternoon we had something lined up that would provide one last highlight for the group. There is a wonderful, locally run conservation project at the bottom of Buhoma called the 'Pangolin Rescue Centre Uganda'. This small project works incredibly hard with the local people, rescuing pangolins in need, rehabilitating them and re-releasing them back to the wild. Upon our arrival, we were given a warm welcome and an introduction to the important work they do. We were then asked whether we would like to see the pangolins they currently had, two of them, and see the amazing community work they do to encourage people to protect these persecuted mammals.

We were escorted down from the reception area and shown to where the pangolins are housed in purpose-built enclosures. Feeding pangolins is incredibly challenging as they need a constant supply of food and they only eat live prey, termites or ants which means each day termites are collected and put into their enclosures. This means they can feed undisturbed and have limited contact with people. During the day, when they are strong enough, the pangolins are taken out into the surrounding fields and allowed to feed



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on the ants that they find themselves. One of the pangolins was in its enclosure, while the other was out feeding. The staff member showed us the pangolin that had just been rescued, quickly picking it up so we could see the details of these remarkable mammals. The scales for which they are so heavily trafficked are made of keratin, the same material as our fingernails. However, no use medicinally as thought by many people in Asia.

Some of the projects they support within the community are bee-keeping, growing mushrooms and growing vegetables, all funded in return for working with them in protecting pangolins. Having enjoyed views of the pangolin recently rescued, we worked our way back to the reception area. It was here that we went out into the surrounding fields, along with rangers from UWA (Ugandan Wildlife Authority), to find the pangolin that was out feeding. This pangolin, like the other, was a white-bellied pangolin, which is known for its tree-climbing prowess. We wandered through the fields, past low-growing bushes of tea before ending up in an area shaded by low trees. The whole group couldn't believe their eyes as there, right in front of us was a pangolin.

With one of the centre's team standing nearby, the pangolin was feeding on the ground, tucking into an ants' nest. We really couldn't believe our eyes. What an incredible sight it was to see a mammal with an almost mythical status assigned to it, wandering freely as it searched for food. The group made their approach and started to capture images as it rummaged through the leaf litter. Their sharp claws allow them to expertly dig out a meal, before using their long sticky tongue to extract the ants or termites from their tunnels.

We moved around, trying to get the best angle to capture images of this stunning creature. It certainly felt a little surreal, knowing we were this close to one of the most elusive mammals in Africa. What an absolute treat. The pangolin worked its way passed several members of the group, wandering within only a couple of feet of us, before climbing a little way up some of the trees before settling on an area as it gorged on ants. The pangolin was due to be released within the next 24 hours and we were so incredibly lucky to get such remarkable, prolonged views. After around half an hour, it was time to leave our scaled friend in peace and



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wander back to the centre, where Robert was once again waiting for us. This was truly a once in a lifetime opportunity.

It's not often you get to see wild mountain gorillas and a white-bellied pangolin in one day. Undoubtedly, it was the most wonderful way to end what had been an exceptional trip. It was a short drive back to Buhoma, where once again we tucked into our packed lunches in the comfort of the lounge area. Everybody was overjoyed by the day's wildlife encounters. We really couldn't believe our luck.

Our final meal was arranged for our preferred time of 7 pm, and we reconvened in the lounge area beforehand. The fire was lit as we talked about another memorable day in Uganda. This was to be our last dinner together and the food was, as ever, delicious. Enjoying fabulous conversation, it was soon time to head to our rooms and get some sleep. The next morning we had an early start with a flight to catch.

## **Day 12:**

**Saturday 26 October 2024**

Bwindi Impenetrable Forest to Entebbe; fly to Doha, Qatar

This morning, we had a flight to catch from Kihihi Airstrip at 8.30 am. This meant we needed to leave bright and early to drive the one and a half hours from Buhoma. We were treated to a final delicious breakfast at Buhoma, before climbing aboard the Landcruiser one last time. Robert did a fantastic job of whisking us down from the mountains and dropping us off at the airstrip with plenty of time to spare before our light aircraft flight back to Entebbe.

It was here we had to say goodbye to Robert, as he would be driving back to Entebbe, and board the Cessna Caravan for the hour flight back to civilisation. We enjoyed a very smooth flight, touching down at Entebbe airport, before being driven to the nearby Protea Hotel where the group had day rooms. We had the chance to freshen up, agreeing to meet up for lunch in the hotel restaurant. With the lovely weather, we sat outside and enjoyed a fantastic final meal together in Uganda.

With our evening flight approaching, those members of the group flying out today reconvened in the hotel lobby, we drove the short distance to the airport and were soon checked in and through security. The group were all able to enjoy the comfort and peace and quiet of the lounge, before boarding the flight to Doha. We enjoyed a smooth flight and a simple connection through the airport, again with time in the lounge, before boarding our final flight to London Heathrow.

Arriving in London just ahead of schedule, we flew through passport control and soon had our bags in hand. Finding ourselves in arrivals, we said our goodbyes and wished each other luck for our respective journeys home.

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# Checklist for Uganda Wildlife Photo Safari



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12
	<b>BIRDS</b>													
1	White-faced whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>					✓							
2	Egyptian goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>				✓	✓							
3	Spur-winged goose	<i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>				✓								
4	Yellow-billed duck	<i>Anas undulata</i>			✓									
5	African darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>				✓	✓							
6	Long-tailed cormorant	<i>Microcarbo africanus</i>			✓									
7	Whiskered tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>			✓									
8	Long-toed lapwing	<i>Vanellus crassirostris</i>			✓		✓							
9	Spur-winged lapwing	<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>				✓	✓							
10	Wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus senegallus</i>					✓							
11	African jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>			✓	✓	✓							
12	Common sandpiper	<i>Acitis hypoleucos</i>				✓	✓							
13	Common greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>				✓								
14	Shoebill	<i>Balaeniceps rex</i>			✓		✓							
15	Hammerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>			✓	✓								
16	African woolly-necked stork	<i>Ciconia microscelis</i>									✓			
17	Saddle-billed stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis</i>				✓		✓						
18	Marabou stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumenifer</i>			✓						✓			
19	Grey-crowned crane	<i>Balaerica regulorum</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			
20	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>			✓		✓							
21	Striated heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>			✓		✓							
22	Squacco heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>			✓									
23	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>				✓	✓							
24	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>				✓	✓	✓						

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25	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						
26	Purple heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>			✓	✓	✓							
27	Black-headed heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
28	Goliath heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>				✓								
29	Glossy ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>			✓									
30	Hadeda ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>				✓		✓	✓		✓			
31	African swamphen	<i>Porphyrio madagascariensis</i>			✓									
32	Black crane	<i>Zapornia flavirostra</i>			✓									
33	Helmeted guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓						
34	Mourning collared-dove	<i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>					✓	✓						
35	Red-eyed dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>						✓						
36	Ring-necked dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>					✓							
37	Emerald-spotted wood dove	<i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>				✓	✓							
38	Namaqua dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>				✓	✓							
39	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>					✓							
40	Black-winged kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>					✓							
41	Palm-nut vulture	<i>Gypohierax angolensis</i>			✓						✓			
42	Lappet-faced vulture	<i>Torgos tracheliotos</i>					✓							
43	White-backed vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>				✓	✓							
44	Ruppell's griffon vulture	<i>Gyps rueppelli</i>					✓							
45	Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>				✓	✓	✓						
46	Brown snake eagle	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>						✓						
47	Western banded snake eagle	<i>Circaetus cinerascens</i>				✓	✓							
48	Martial eagle	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>				✓	✓							
49	Long-crested eagle	<i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>							✓		✓			
50	Lizard buzzard	<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>				✓								
51	Dark chanting goshawk	<i>Melierax metabates</i>					✓							
52	African marsh harrier	<i>Circus ranivorus</i>			✓									
53	Yellow-billed kite	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓								✓
54	African fish eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga vocifer</i>			✓	✓	✓							
55	Grey kestrel	<i>Falco ardosiaceus</i>				✓								
56	Red-necked falcon	<i>Falco chicquera</i>									✓			
57	Lanner falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>					✓							
58	Alpine swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>			✓	✓	✓							
59	African palm swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>			✓	✓	✓							

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60	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>				✓	✓	✓							✓	
61	Wire-tailed swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>				✓	✓	✓								
63	House martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>				✓	✓	✓								
64	Lesser striped swallow Mosque swallow	<i>Cecropis semirufa</i>							✓		✓					
65	Great blue turaco	<i>Corythaeola cristata</i>						✓	✓							
66	Ross' turaco	<i>Musophaga rossae</i>							✓							
67	Bare-faced go-away-bird	<i>Crinifer personatus</i>				✓	✓	✓								
68	Senegal coucal	<i>Centropus monachus</i>						✓								
69	White-browed coucal	<i>Centropus superciliosus</i>				✓	✓	✓								
70	Red-chested cuckoo	<i>Cuculus gularis</i>								H	H					
71	African cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>									H					
72	Meyer's parrot	<i>Poicephalus meyeri</i>						✓								
73	Shining-blue kingfisher	<i>Alcedo quadribrachys</i>								✓						
74	Malachite kingfisher	<i>Corythornis cristatus</i>		✓	✓	✓										
75	Grey-headed kingfisher	<i>Halcyon leucocephala</i>		✓	✓											
76	Woodland kingfisher	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>						✓								
77	Giant kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle maxima</i>				✓	✓									
78	Pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>		✓	✓	✓										
79	Red-throated bee-eater	<i>Merops bulocki</i>				✓	✓	✓								
80	Cinnamon-chested bee-eater	<i>Merops oreobates</i>										✓				
81	Swallow-tailed bee-eater	<i>Merops hirundineus</i>						✓								
82	White-throated bee-eater	<i>Merops albicollis</i>										✓				
83	Northern carmine bee-eater	<i>Merops nubicoides</i>						✓	✓							
84	Green woodhoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus bollei</i>							✓							
85	Speckled mousebird	<i>Colius striatus</i>				✓	✓	✓								
86	Abyssinian ground hornbill	<i>Bucorvus abyssinicus</i>				✓	✓	✓								
87	Crowned hornbill	<i>Lophoceros alboterminatus</i>							✓							
88	African grey hornbill	<i>Lophoceros nasutus</i>				✓	✓	✓								
89	Black-and-white casqued hornbill	<i>Bycanistes subcylindricus</i>							✓	✓	✓	✓				
90	Piapiac	<i>Ptilostomus afer</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓									
91	Pied crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓				✓
92	Sooty flycatcher	<i>Bradornis fuliginosus</i>										✓	✓	✓		
93	Snowy-crowned robin-chat	<i>Cossypha niveicapilla</i>								✓						
94	African blue flycatcher	<i>Elminia longicauda</i>											✓	✓		

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95	Northern puffback	<i>Dryoscopus gambensis</i>					✓							
96	Black-crowned tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>						✓						
97	Black-headed gonolek	<i>Laniarius mufumbiri</i>					✓							
98	Red-tailed shrike	<i>Lanius phoenicuroides</i>						✓						
99	Grey-backed fiscal	<i>Lanius excubitoroides</i>			✓	✓	✓							
100	Northern fiscal	<i>Lanius humeralis</i>						✓						
101	Zitting cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>					✓							
102	Bronze sunbird	<i>Nectarinia tacazze</i>										✓	✓	
103	Red-chested sunbird	<i>Cinnyris erythrocerus</i>										✓	✓	
104	African pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>										✓	✓	✓
105	Northern grey-headed sparrow	<i>Passer gongoensis</i>					✓	✓						
106	Northern brown-throated weaver	<i>Ploceus castanops</i>			✓	✓	✓							
107	Red-billed quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>					✓	✓						
108	Northern red bishop	<i>Euplectes franciscanus</i>				✓	✓	✓						
109	Southern red bishop	<i>Euplectes orix</i>									✓			
110	Black bishop	<i>Euplectes gierowii</i>									✓			
111	Bronze mannikin	<i>Vidua macroura</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓						✓
112	Magpie mannikin	<i>Spermestes cucullata</i>									✓			
113	Black-and-white mannikin	<i>Spermestes fringilloides</i>									✓			
114	Common waxbill	<i>Spermestes bicolor</i>									✓			
115	Ruppell's starling	<i>Uraeginthus bengalus</i>					✓							
116	Yellow-billed oxpecker	<i>Lamprotornis purpuroptera</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓						
	<b>MAMMALS</b>	<i>Buphagus africanus</i>					✓	✓						
1	African bush elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>			✓	✓	✓							
2	Vervet monkey	<i>Erythrocebus patas</i>			✓	✓	✓							
3	Red-tailed monkey	<i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i>									✓			
4	L'Hoest's monkey	<i>Cercopithecus ascanius</i>									✓	✓	✓	
5	Uganda mangabey	<i>Cercopithecus lhoesti</i>										✓	✓	
6	Olive baboon	<i>Lophocebus ugandae</i>									✓			
7	Black-and-white colobus	<i>Papio anubis</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
8	Red colobus	<i>Colobus guereza</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
9	Ugandan red colobus	<i>Procolobus tephrosceles</i>								✓				
10	Common chimpanzee	<i>Gorilla gorilla beringei</i>										✓	✓	

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11	Chimpanzee	<i>Pan troglodytes</i>							✓	✓			
12	Yellow-winged bat	<i>Lavia frons</i>						✓					
13	Three-cusped pangolin	<i>Manis tricuspis</i>										✓	
14	Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>			✓	✓							
15	Marsh mongoose	<i>Atilax paludinosus</i>			✓								
16	Plains zebra	<i>Equus quagga</i>			✓								
17	Southern white rhino	<i>Ceratotherium simum simum</i>			✓								
18	Hippopotamus	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓					
19	Rothschild giraffe	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>			✓	✓	✓						
20	Jackson's hartebeest	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis camelopardalis</i>				✓	✓	✓					
21	Oribi	<i>Alcelaphus buselaphus lelwel</i>				✓	✓	✓					
22	African buffalo	<i>Ourebia ourebia</i>				✓	✓	✓					
23	Forest buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>				✓	✓	✓					
24	Defassa waterbuck	<i>Syncerus caffer nanus</i>					✓						
25	Ugandan kob	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>				✓	✓	✓					
26	Bohor reedbuck	<i>Kobus kob</i>				✓	✓	✓					
27	Bushbuck	<i>Redunca redunca</i>						✓					
28	Cape bushbeck	<i>Tragelaphus sylvaticus</i>			✓								
	<b>REPTILES</b>												
1	Nile monitor	<i>Crocodylus niloticus</i>				✓	✓						
2	Red-headed rock agama	<i>Varanus niloticus</i>				✓	✓						
3	Montane side-striped chameleon	<i>Agama agama</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
4	Elliot's chameleon	<i>Trioceros ellioti</i>										✓	

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