



**UGANDA: SHOEBILL, ALBERTINE RIFT ENDEMIC, GREEN-BREASTED PITTA,
CHIMPANZEES, AND GORILLAS IN 19 OR 14 DAYS**
(plus optional 5-day extension to Murchison Falls National Park and Budongo Forest)

1 - 19 August 2020 (14-day tour 1 - 14 August 2020)



Shoebill is one of our targets on this tour

OVERVIEW:

Birding Tour Uganda Itinerary – The 19-day version is detailed here, but the first 14 days can be done as an independent tour.

This tour allows one to find the most important birds and primates that Uganda has to offer. **Shoebill** is almost guaranteed. Over 20 Albertine (Western) Rift endemics are also sought (21 were seen on our 2017 tour), including one of Africa’s most fabulous turacos, **Rwenzori Turaco**, and of course the “must-see” **African Broadbill**. We have not yet missed **Green-breasted Pitta** on any of our trips – Uganda has become the classic country for finding this otherwise very difficult bird. We also look for other range-restricted birds, such as **Red-faced Barbet** that is also found in a remote part of Tanzania excluded from most birding tours to that country. **Ross’s Turaco**, **Great Blue Turaco** (almost twice the size of other turacos), and various other birds are virtually garden birds here in Uganda, “the Pearl of Africa”. Other highlights of our Uganda birding tour are a great many primates such as **Uganda Red Colobus**, **Eastern Black-and-white Colobus**, **Eastern Gorilla**, and **Chimpanzee**, not to mention the spectacular scenery, including such famous places as Lake Victoria (the continent’s largest lake), Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, and last but not least the Virunga volcanoes.

The five-day extension is good for a host of more widespread African birds, **Lion**, with some luck **Leopard**, and fabulous sites such as Murchison Falls, where the Nile is forced through a narrow gap.

PLEASE NOTE: This trip is moderate in terms of fitness required, except for some days that are considered quite strenuous, such as the day of gorilla trekking and the day hike into Mubwindi Swamp and back. Chimpanzee trekking and looking for Green-breasted Pitta can also involve quite a lot of walking. You are welcome to opt out of any activities if you don’t feel you’ll manage them. There are also many days of forest birding; please wear appropriate clothing items (dark/neutral clothing and caps instead of very wide-brimmed hats) and be ready to spend good amounts of time on foot with a decent chance of soaking rain, so protection for camera gear is advised.

ITINERARY AT A GLANCE**Main Tour**

- 01 August – Birding Entebbe and the shore of Lake Victoria
- 02 August – Shoebill! And onwards to Lake Mburo National Park
- 03 August – Full day in Lake Mburo National Park
- 04 August – Lake Mburo National Park to Kisoro
- 05 August – Birding the Virunga volcanoes region: Mgahinga Gorilla National Park

OVERNIGHT

- Lake Victoria View Guest House, Entebbe
- Rwakobo Rock, Lake Mburo National Park
- Rwakobo Rock, Lake Mburo National Park
- Mucha Hotel, Kisoro
- Mucha Hotel, Kisoro

06 August – Kisoro to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Ruhija
 07 August – Birding Ruhija, Mubwindi Swamp Walk
 08 August – Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park: Ruhija to Buhoma
 09 August – Birding Buhoma (or Gorilla trekking)
 10 August – Birding Buhoma (or Gorilla trekking)
 11 August – Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park to Queen Elizabeth NP
 12 August – Queen Elizabeth National Park to Kibale National Park
 13 August – Kibale National Park: Green-breasted Pitta or chimp trekking
 14 August – Kibale National Park: Green-breasted Pitta or chimp trekking, transfer

Trekker's Tavern Cottages, Ruhija
 Trekker's Tavern Cottages, Ruhija
 Buhoma Community Haven Lodge, Buhoma
 Buhoma Community Haven Lodge, Buhoma
 Buhoma Community Haven Lodge, Buhoma
 Mweya Safari Lodge, Queen Elizabeth NP
 Kibale Homestay, Kibale National Park
 Kibale Homestay, Kibale National Park
 Masindi Hotel, Masindi (for participants of the extension)

Murchison Falls National Park and Budongo Forest (Royal Mile) Extension

15 August – Birding Budongo Forest
 16 August – Masindi to Murchison Falls National Park
 17 August – Birding Murchison Falls National Park
 18 August – Murchison Falls National Park, transfer
 19 August – Departure

Masindi Hotel, Masindi
 Kabalega Wilderness Lodge, Murchison Falls NP
 Kabalega Wilderness Lodge, Murchison Falls NP
 Lake Victoria View Guest House, Entebbe

ITINERARY (19 days/18 nights)

Day 1. Arrival at Entebbe International Airport and birding the shore of Lake Victoria

We'll fetch you from Entebbe International Airport and check in at our guest house before starting the birding. The dazzling **Black-headed Gonolek** as well as the striking **Double-toothed Barbet** are both common around Entebbe. **Bat Hawk** and **African Hobby** are sometimes seen around town. **Broad-billed Roller**, **Palm-nut Vulture**, numerous weavers, and perhaps our first **Great Blue Turaco** might be seen as we bird Entebbe Botanical Garden on the edge of Africa's largest lake.

Overnight: Lake Victoria View Guest House, Entebbe

Days 2 - 3. Shoebill! And onwards to Lake Mburo National Park

Bypassing the bustling city of Kampala (adjacent to the more pleasant small town of Entebbe) we head for Mabamba Swamp, one of Africa's most accessible sites for the monstrous Shoebill. The papyrus-swamp-loving **Red-chested Sunbird**, numerous weaver species that build their impressively neat nests in the wetlands, coucals, and many tropical waterbirds such as **Lesser Jacana** abound as we do a dugout canoe trip into the huge swamp. **Swamp Flycatcher** is also common here. After seeing **Shoebill** we then continue to our site for **Orange Weaver**, often seeing **Eastern Plantain-eater**, **Ross's Turaco**, large flocks of noisy **Great Blue Turacos** (the far-carrying calls of which are one of the characteristic sounds of Uganda), **Grey Kestrel**, and a very big, beautiful barbet, **Double-toothed Barbet**.

We eventually arrive at Lake Mburo National Park (where we'll spend two nights), which breaks the journey between Entebbe and the southwestern border region of Uganda, where we will look for over 20 Albertine Rift endemics (this, also known as the Western Rift, is a branch of the Great Rift Valley).

The following morning we take a boat trip on the lake, and this is one of the easiest places to find **African Finfoot**. We sometimes see overwintering **Malagasy Pond Heron** and **Papyrus Gonolek** in addition to an array of kingfishers including the likes of **Malachite Giant, Pied**, and the rare **Shining-blue Kingfisher**. In general this park gives us an excellent opportunity to see a lot of arid-country birds, which can include **Blue-naped Mousebird, Bare-faced Go-away-bird, Golden-breasted Bunting**, and the incredibly localized, rather "thin-on-the-ground" **Red-faced Barbet**, along with a more widespread East African species, **Spot-flanked Barbet**. **Nubian Woodpecker** is often heard before it is seen. Like in most arid-habitat parks in East Africa a large bird list can be accumulated very fast, and the above species are just a few of the many goodies we expect to find. This is the only place where we're likely to see **Plains Zebra** during our Uganda birding tour, and there are a lot of other mammals as well, such as **Hippopotamus, African Buffalo, Defassa Waterbuck, Bohor Reedbuck, Topi, Common Eland**, and many more.

Overnight: Rwakobo Rock, Lake Mburo National Park

Days 4 – 5. Birding the Virunga volcanoes region: Mgahinga Gorilla National Park

The **Mountain Gorillas** here freely roam into neighboring Rwanda and the DRC, but with extreme luck we might stumble across them (usually we have to wait until we get to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, though). One of the main reasons we include this park on our Uganda birding tour is to look for the gorgeous **Rwenzori Turaco**. This park has a lot of bamboo forest, in which we search for **Abyssinian Ground Thrush**. The nearly-extinct **Shelley's Crimsonwing** is always possible – this Vulnerable (IUCN) species seems to be declining, and for once not because of humans. We may get a head start with some other Albertine Rift endemics, but most of these will have to wait for Bwindi.

Overnight: Mucha Hotel, Kisoro

Days 6 – 7. Ruhija, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park

We travel to one of Africa's richest forests for primates and birds, starting in the high-altitude Ruhija part of the national park. We'll start birding the forest-covered hills as soon as we arrive, looking for the beautiful **Black Bee-eater** and also trying to find **Grauer's Swamp Warbler** at a roadside site, so that we can reduce the length of the long walk on Day 6, this warbler occurring right in the lower reaches of Mubwindi Swamp. **Mountain Yellow Warbler** might also be seen, nice to compare with **Papyrus Yellow Warbler**, for which we try another day.

A walk most of the way down to this swamp can't be avoided, though, as **African Broadbill**, one of Africa's most desirable birds, also occurs there. The good-looking, highly-localized **Yellow-eyed Black Flycatcher** also lurks pretty close to the bottom reaches. The walk down to the site for this broadbill (and back) takes a large part of the day, but this is one of the best birding days of the entire tour. Trip participants usually end up getting a constant stream of life-birds throughout the day, mainly Albertine Rift endemics.

Banded Prinia, Mountain Masked Apalis, Rwenzori Apalis, Chestnut-throated Apalis, the strange-looking (and dull for a barbet) **Grey-throated Barbet, Red-faced Woodland Warbler**, and up to four species of quiet, brightly-colored forest finches known as crimsonwings (all of them very difficult, though!) are often encountered. There are too many high-quality species to list here, but we hope to find **Olive-breasted Greenbul** (one of the more attractively colored greenbuls – we’ll see a great many of the duller ones, as Uganda is absolutely full of them, presenting quite an identification challenge). We do need to mention a couple of the other range-restricted species as well, though – the very long-tailed **Blue-headed Sunbird**, the dazzling **Regal Sunbird, Stripe-breasted Tit, Rwenzori Batis**, and also slightly more widespread species like the fabulous **Bar-tailed Trogon** and **Rwenzori Hill Babbler**.

Overnight: Trekker’s Tavern Cottages, Ruhija

Days 8 – 10. Buhoma, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park: birds and gorilla trekking

En route between the higher-altitude Ruhija and the lower-elevation Buhoma sections of the park we stop to bird “The Neck”, which allows us to see quite a number of species we won’t find elsewhere. **Black Bee-eater** and **Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater** are both quite easy to see here. **Chubb’s Cisticola** duets from the thickets. **Black-and-white Shrike-flycatcher** (also known as Vanga Flycatcher) might be seen – this charismatic bird usually moves around (a lot, it’s an extremely lively species) and makes lots of noise as it flies around from one perch to the next. It has a fabulous crest, but the female is chestnut and white, whereas the male is black and white with striking yellow eyes. We might also see **Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Mackinnon’s Shrike, Bronzy Sunbird** and several other sunbirds, **African Grey Woodpecker, Augur Buzzard**, etc.

At Buhoma itself we spend one day trekking for gorillas (this is a strenuous, optional activity; if you decide not to join in you’ll be taken birding instead, or you can relax or look at and photograph birds around the lodge). Deep-forest birds we’ll seek include many more localized endemics that barely get into neighboring countries – **Grauer’s Warbler** (not to be confused with **Grauer’s Swamp Warbler**, which we should have already seen), **Petit’s Cuckooshrike, Lühder’s Bushshrike, Brown-capped Weaver** and other weavers of the forest canopy, **Red-throated Alethe**, and lots of others. We’ll be sure to spend time looking for slightly more widespread birds as well, including the skulking **White-spotted Flufftail, Red-shouldered Cuckooshrike, Olive-bellied Sunbird**, some beautiful forest barbets such as the large **Yellow-billed Barbet**, the dazzlingly bright and shiny, bright green-and-yellow **African Emerald Cuckoo**, and, last but not least, **Black-billed Turaco**.

Overnight: Buhoma Community Haven Lodge, Buhoma

Day 11. Birds and mammals of Queen Elizabeth National Park

We stop over in Queen Elizabeth National Park (often staying on the Mweya peninsula itself, along the Kazinga Channel) en route to Kibale Forest. England’s queen officially opened this national park (well-known for its tree-climbing lions and boasting 100 mammal species and 600 bird species!) in 1954. One of the highlights of our stay here is getting out onto the Kazinga Channel by boat and seeing **Nile Crocodiles, Hippopotamuses**, and a great many waterbirds. Naturally, we also see **Common Warthog, African Buffalo, Uganda Kob**, and a plethora of other mammals. **Forest Hog** usually steals the show, however.

Overnight: Mweya Safari Lodge, Queen Elizabeth National Park

Days 12 – 13. Kibale National Park – the Chimpanzee/Green-breasted Pitta combo!

The drive from Queen Elizabeth to another fantastic national park, Kibale, is amazing: We traverse the foothills of the “Mountains of the Moon” (the Ruwenzori Range) and cross the equator, eventually arriving at the richest forest for primates on the African continent. Our main avian target is **Green-breasted Pitta**, which is best found at dawn, when its display call allows us to narrow down its whereabouts (otherwise, despite the jewel-like colors of this bird, it’s like looking for a needle in a haystack on the forest floor). While we search for this bird the atmospheric, quite scary noises of large troops of **Chimpanzees** resonate through the forest. We should also find some other primates such as **L’Hoest’s Monkey**, **Uganda Red Colobus**, one of the most striking of all African primates, **Guereza** (Eastern Black-and-white Colobus), **Red-tailed Monkey**, **Grey-cheeked Mangabey**, and other monkeys (not to mention the well-built **Olive Baboon**, which wanders around in massive groups, usually on the ground). We also have a lot of good birds to see, which might include **White-headed Wood Hoopoe**, **Narrow-tailed Starling**, **Black-billed Turaco**, and **Chestnut Wattle-eye**.

Overnight: Kibale Homestay, Kibale National Park

Day 14. Half-day drive to Entebbe for extension or departure

It’s best to either take an evening flight home or spend another night in Entebbe if you are not joining the extension, which adds a further five days to this birding tour.

Murchison Falls and Budongo Forest (Royal Mile) extension:

Days 14 – 15. Masindi and Budongo Forest (including the beautiful Royal Mile)

White-crested Turaco is one of the most amazing birds we hope to encounter on the way to Masindi. There are a lot of other great birds too, such as **Foxy Cisticola**, the almost tailless **Northern Crombec**, the beautiful **Spotted Palm Thrush**, good raptors such as **Western Banded Snake Eagle** and quite a number of others, the stunningly unique **Red-winged Grey Warbler**, the extravagant **Marsh Widowbird**, and hopefully **Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver**, to name but a few.

Budongo Forest itself is excellent for many special birds we won’t have seen during the main tour. **Chestnut-capped Flycatcher** is a star bird – along with two other species; there is a trio of small warbler-like flycatchers that are taxonomically enigmatic, and this is one of them (we usually find the other two on our Tanzania and Mozambique birding tours). **Fraser’s Forest Flycatcher** is another prized bird here. But it’s the kingfishers (most of them not associated with water!) that make the Royal Mile famous. **Chocolate-backed Kingfisher** is probably the most popular of them all, but then **Blue-breasted Kingfisher**, **African Dwarf Kingfisher**, and others are also completely dazzling. **Red-tailed Ant Thrush**, **Fire-crested Alethe**, and **Nahan’s Partridge** usually stay close to the forest floor. The pretty **Rufous-crowned Eremomela**, **White-thighed Hornbill**, and a lot of others inhabit the canopy. Some fantastic forest barbets, tinkerbirds, and woodpeckers abound. There are a great many greenbuls, different species inhabiting different levels of

the forest from the undergrowth to the canopy, and these are fun (or, in some people's opinions, not!) to learn to identify. The Royal Mile is a breathtakingly beautiful forest to spend time in and certainly boasts an extremely rich birdlife.

Overnight: Masindi Hotel, Masindi

Days 16 – 17. Murchison Falls National Park

We do boat trips and birding/game drives in this area, where we always add a great many new birds to our list. This is also a brilliant place for big and small mammals that might include **Lion, Leopard, Rothschild's Giraffe, Oribi, Lelwel Hartebeest, Common Warthog**, the scarce **Patas Monkey**, and many others. **Black-headed Lapwing, Silverbird, Speckle-fronted Weaver, Abyssinian Ground Hornbill, Red-throated Bee-eater, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Rock Pratincole, White-headed Barbet, Black-billed Barbet, Meyer's Parrot, and Bateleur** are just a few of the species on our rather large menu.

We should of course mention the fact that the massive volume of the Nile River is forced through a narrow gap here at Murchison Falls – while looking at this site there is a small chance we might also manage to find **Pel's Fishing Owl** or **Bat Hawk**. Where possible we can arrange night drives for some nightjar and owl species in the area; these may include **Long-tailed, Plain, and Pennant-winged Nightjars** and possibly **Greyish Eagle-Owl**.

Overnight: Kabalega Wilderness Lodge (or similar), Murchison Falls National Park

Day 18. Birding on the way back to Entebbe

We'll look for any species we might still be missing as we make our way back to Entebbe.

Overnight: Lake Victoria View Guest House, Entebbe

Day 19. Flights leave Entebbe

Your flight can leave any time today.

Please also note that the itinerary might change due to various factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information, road or weather conditions. The itinerary is therefore only a guide and cannot be guaranteed.

Duration: 19 days (including 5-day optional extension)

Limit: 4 – 8

Date: 1 – 19 August 2020, 14-day tour 1 – 14 August 2020

Start: Entebbe

End: Entebbe

Price: US\$9681 per person sharing for the full 19-day tour (including the extension), based on an amazingly small group size of 4 - 8. The 14-day tour is poorer value for money and costs US\$7465.

Single Supplement: US\$880 for 19 days, US\$636 for 14 days

Optional gorilla permit (subject to availability) US\$600

Optional chimpanzee permit (subject to availability) US\$150

Price includes:

Bed and breakfast in Entebbe

All accommodation while on tour

All meals while on tour

Bottled water

Private transportation in a 4x4 vehicle

Park entrance fees

Guiding fees

Boat rides on the Kazinga Channel in Queen Elizabeth (and the Nile on the extension)

Nature walk fees

Canoe fees at Mabamba Swamp

Price excludes:

International flights

Insurance

Visa

Drinks

Items of a personal nature (such as gifts and laundry)

Gratuities