



**ULTIMATE UGANDA BIRDING TOUR – SHOEBILL,
ALBERTINE RIFT ENDEMIC AND GREAT APES**

01 – 19 AUGUST 2024



Shoebill is one of the most sought-after birds in the world, and is one of our special targets on this tour!

This Uganda birding and mammal extravaganza allows you 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, including one of Africa's most fabulous turacos, **Rwenzori Turaco**, and of course the “must-see” **Grauer's** (African Green) **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**, **Guereza**, **Eastern (Mountain) Gorilla**, and **Chimpanzee**, not to mention the spectacular scenery, including such famous places as Lake Victoria (the continent's largest lake), Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park, and last but not least the Virunga Mountains.

The latter part of this tour is good for a host of more widespread African birds, **Lion**, with some luck **Leopard**, **White Rhinoceros**, and fabulous sites such as Murchison Falls, where the mighty Nile is forced through a narrow gap.



*We have the option to spend some time with **Eastern (Mountain) Gorillas** on this tour.*

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 good chance of soaking rain, so protection for camera gear is advised.

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 the Entebbe Botanical Garden on the edge of Africa's largest lake.

Overnight: The Boma, or similar, Entebbe



The Great Blue Turaco is magnificent!

Days 2 - 3. Shoebill and transfer 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 continue to our site for **Orange Weaver**, often seeing **Eastern Plantain-eater**, **Ross's Turaco**, large flocks of the noisy **Great Blue Turaco** (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 Kingfisher**, **Giant Kingfisher**, **Pied Kingfisher**, 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



*Sometimes we see up to five **African Finfoots** at Lake Mburo.*

Days 4 - 5. Birding the Virunga Mountains region: Mgahinga Gorilla National Park

The **Eastern (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 Forest 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 very rare **Shelley's Crimsonwing** is always possible – this Endangered (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: Travellers Rest, Kisoro



*The beautiful **Regal Sunbird** is an Albertine Rift endemic.*

Days 6 - 7. Ruhija, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park

We travel to one of Africa's richest forests for primates and birds, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park, and start in its high-altitude Ruhija part. 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 **Grauer's (African Green) 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



*The highly prized **Grauer’s (African Green) Broadbill** is another major target.*

Days 8 - 10. Buhoma, Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park: birds and optional 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.

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), **Bar-tailed Trogon**, **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, green-and-yellow **African Emerald Cuckoo**, and, last but not least, **Black-billed Turaco**.

Forest-edge birding can be equally rewarding (and often easier for photography!) with such specials as **Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo**, **Great Blue** and **Ross's Turaco**, **Grey-winged Robin-Chat**, **Black-necked Weaver**, **Red-headed Malimbe**, **Northern Double-collared Sunbird**, **Grey-headed Nigrita** and many others. Over our two full days here we will spend plenty of time birding the forest trails, forest edge and adjacent agricultural areas.

At Buhoma itself, there is the opportunity for one day optionally trekking for **Mountain Gorillas** (this is a strenuous activity; if you decide not to join, you'll be taken birding instead, or you can relax or look at and photograph birds around the lodge).

Overnight: Ride 4 a Woman, Buhoma



Bar-tailed Trogon occurs in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest.

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 on the Kazinga Channel by boat and seeing **Nile Crocodile**, **Hippopotamus**, 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: Bushlodge, Queen Elizabeth National Park



Green-breasted Pitta is another of Africa's most sought-after species we'll be targeting.

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. There is also the opportunity for optionally trekking for **Chimpanzees**. 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 Forest Lodge, Bigodi

Day 14. Travel to Masindi

After some final birding around Kibale we head to Masindi. Time-permitting, we can already start birding famed sites nearby such as the Royal Mile.

Overnight: Masindi Hotel, Masindi – Tel. +256-77260420130

Day 15. Birding at Budongo Forest and the beautiful Royal Mile, transfer to Murchison Falls National Park

Budongo Forest is excellent for many special birds we won't have yet seen during the 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. From here we will transfer to Murchison Falls National Park.

Overnight: Twiga Safari Lodge, near Murchison Falls National Park

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 that 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: Twiga Safari Lodge, near Murchison Falls National Park



The massive Abyssinian Ground Hornbill can be found in Murchison Falls National Park.

Day 18. Birding Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary on the way back to Entebbe

Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary is the only place in Uganda to see **White Rhinoceros** and arguably the best place for the incomparable **White-crested Turaco**. There's a good variety of other birds as well (as usual), including **Bronze-tailed**, **Purple**, **Splendid**, and **Rüppell's Starlings**, **Parasitic Weaver**, **Marsh Widowbird**, **Weynes's Weaver**, **African Hoopoe**, **African Cuckoo-Hawk**, etc. We then transfer back to Entebbe.

Overnight: The Boma, or similar, Entebbe

Day 19. Flights leave Entebbe

Your flight can leave any time today from Entebbe International Airport.

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 19 days
Group Size: 4 – 6
Dates: 01 – 19 August 2024
Start: Entebbe, Uganda
End: Entebbe, Uganda
Prices: \$10,528 per person sharing (2024)
Single Supplements: \$824 (2024)

Price includes:

All accommodation
Meals (from lunch on day 1 until breakfast on day 19)
Unlimited bottled water
Expert tour leader
All entrance & conservation fees
All ground transport, including airport pick-up and drop-off
Boat rides in Queen Elizabeth National Park & Murchison Falls National Park
Canoe fees at Mabamba Swamp (Shoebill)

Price excludes:

International/domestic flights (to/from Entebbe)
Visas
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.
Any pre- or post-tour accommodation, meals, or birding excursions
Soft/alcoholic drinks
Personal travel insurance
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))
Optional Gorilla tracking permit (\$700 currently)
Optional Chimpanzee tracking permit (\$200 currently)