Uganda Wildlife Spectacular Tour Report 2025

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Situated at Africa's greenest heart, Uganda is perhaps the finest country in the world to spend time with our closest living wild relations, Chimpanzees and Mountain Gorillas. Yet doing a trip just to see them really doesn't do Uganda justice.

I recently returned from leading a wonderful wildlife tour in this safe and friendly corner of Africa. There were so many highlights it was difficult to really limit them to a few. From walking safaris with Southern White Rhinos, witnessing a 'rain dance' by wild Chimpanzees, enjoying the antics of a young Mountain Gorilla and photographing endangered Golden Monkeys as they searched for food in foothill forests of an ancient volcano, we really did have some memorable moments. In all we photographed ten species of primates on this trip

The blessings of being in Uganda at the end of the rains meant we could take photos in the dense forests of Uganda in overcast skies. The rains also saw us driving through swarms of butterflies; many wonderful birds were in breeding plumage; the weavers were nesting and we saw the elegant ballets of courtship between Grey Crowned Cranes, Uganda's national bird.

We photographed one of the world's whackiest looking chameleons, the curious Three-horned Chameleon which is endemic to the Albertine Rift that runs through Uganda and finally, we all enjoyed a chance to meet the wonderful Echuya Twa people, one of Uganda's first cultures, whose relationship with the forests spans over 60,000 years.

WALKING WITH WILD RHINOS

The first part of our trip took place in Ziwa, a sanctuary and breeding reserve for endangered Southern White Rhinos. Ziwa is the only place in Uganda where you can see white rhinos. The reserve was established in 2005 with only six white rhinos that were brought in from Kenya. Now, twenty years later, the number of rhinos at Ziwa now exceeds 50.

I initially thought that we would only see rhinos at Ziwa. Those thoughts went straight out the window on the drive to our first walking safari when I spotted a pair of young Abyssinian Ground Hornbills near the road. Unsure if we would see them again on the tour I asked our wonderful driver/guide to stop so we could photograph them and we all climbed quietly out to capture images of these gigantic, mostly ground dwelling birds.

Further into the park we got a little distracted by Ziwa's other wildlife including our first sightings of Zebra, Ugandan Kob, Waterbuck, Bushbuck and the gorgeous Warthog, locally known as Pumba.

After our first briefing for our walking safari we headed into the field for the rest of a cloudy afternoon. We met six rhinos that day, including one eight month old baby girl who was the centre of their universe. When she wasn't playing or trying out different things to eat, we actually saw her suckling milk from her mother which was incredibly special. Our background music for the afternoon was a chorus of Black and White Colobus Monkeys, White-crested Turacos and the odd munching sound of rhinos as they grabbed clumps of grass, using their square-shaped lips, to eat. I don't think any of us truly realised the height of wild rhinos until that afternoon. As their tour leader I stand at 6'2" tall and we were so respectably close to the rhinos that I was almost shoulder-to-shoulder with one of them!

The following morning we returned to Ziwa for our second walking safari. This time our drive to the rhinos allowed us to see our first Blue Duikers of the trip. Sadly they were extremely shy and by the time we had all got our cameras ready, the duikers had darted off into dense bushes.

Our first two rhinos we walked with included one very large male with huge horns. It was a little more difficult to keep up with this pair and they rarely came out into clearings but we did manage to capture some lovely images of one as it emerged through a natural pathway between two lots of bushes.

In between we found a wonderful Black-headed Gonolek who was calling from the top of a huge Candelabra Euphorbia nearby. Photographing this lovely bird with its iconic call in such a beautiful endemic succulent was a lovely side subject while we waited patiently

for the rhinos to come out into the open.

While we were photographing the Gonolek, our guide came to tell us that a large crash of rhinos had been spotted near the park headquarters so we all piled back into our car and drove out to see them.

When we arrived we were astonished to see so many! We walked into a crash of at least 9 individuals of various ages. At one point we felt completely surrounded by rhinos. What an incredible way to end our time in Ziwa.

Our drive north beckoned so we had to force ourselves away and, after saying goodbye to our wonderful guides we packed up for the journey to Kibale.

RAIN DANCES AND CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH WILD CHIMPANZEES

The drive north to Kibale took us initially through huge tracts of agricultural lands which morphed from sugar cane fields in the south to the bustling beauty of tea plantations in the full swing of harvest in the north. We stopped for a late lunch at Fort Portal and from there we drove a short way to our incredible lodge.

Sitting on the edge of the wild, our rooms looked out over the moist, lush tropical rainforests of Kibale National Park. Each of our rooms had views across the forests to the distant Rwenzori mountains, or the famous "Mountains of the Moon". The Mountains of the Moon is not a new term. It's ancient – over 2,000 years old, referring to a legendary mountain range in east Africa, known for being the source of the Nile. The term comes from a Greek merchant, Diogenes, who travelled to East Africa and claimed to have found the source of the Nile – which the natives called the Mountains of the Moon due to their snow-capped peaks.

It wasn't until 1862 that British explorers James Grant and John Speke, also searching for the source of the Nile, ventured into the Rwenzori mountains, and found the summits blanketed in white, fitting Diogenes' description.

Looking out on the distant, mist covered summits of the Rwenzoris, it was hard to imagine that, just beyond them, lay the vast wilderness of the Congo.

The following morning we rose early to go out for our first trek with wild Chimpanzees. After successfully negotiation the 'road block troupe' of Olive Baboons we arrived at the Chimpanzee centre in time to see some wonderful singing and dancing by the local people of the area. We were then briefed and allocated to our tracker who, thankfully, was the most experienced in the reserve. In his capable hands we not only enjoyed some wonderful encounters with these charismatic animals, we also learned so much about food plants, chimpanzee behaviour and the stories of the family group we spent time with that morning. In fact we all got so caught up with the wonderful stories and expansive knowledge of our tracker that we were left with too little time to return to the lodge for lunch!

Instead, we opted to dine at the Kibale Café and, while we waited for our food, we were entertained by three species of primates – Red-tailed Monkey, Black and White Colobus and also Olive Baboons. The rainy season had brought a host of outrageously coloured butterflies to life, some of whom visited the carpark adjacent to the café to drink from pools of water. As we ate lunch, out of the corner of my eye I spotted something blue. For a brief second I thought someone had dropped a lid off a water bottle until I realised it was actually the head of a Blue-headed Tree Agama. Excited, I encouraged my group to stop eating for a minute so we could go and take photos of this wonderful forest lizard, a male with all of his blue and yellow grandeur on display.

Soon it was time for our afternoon trek and we once again met up with our incredible tracker. A family chimpanzees had been found in the forests close to a nearby soccer pitch so we drove off to start our trek under grey skies.

Around 40 minutes later we found one of the most well known and loved families of chimps in Kibale, headed by alpha male Balaija. The first two chimps we saw were two males sitting in a clearing at the edge of a large stand of Elephant Grass. They were so relaxed about us being there and we were the only group of people with them, that they started to hold one hand each, high above the other's heads, so they could groom each other's armpits! It was singularly one of the most extraordinary things we witnessed during the whole tour!

Nearby the remaining family members were playing in the treetops. The dark skies that had threated rain, were finally morphing into wind, thunder and lightning. Sensing the oncoming downpour we saw Balaija climb down to the forest floor and excitedly do a rain dance right in front of us! He got so excited by the coming rains that he swung on lianas almost at our feet and at one point he brushed his

shoulders against my legs. What an incredible thing to see.

Then the rain came! And what a downpour! It forced us all to take shelter at a nearby forest dwelling until it subsided. The shelter gave us all a chance to chat with our trackers who explained to us the magnificence of what we had witnessed that afternoon, how rare it was to see behaviour like that from Chimpanzees and how blessed we were to just be in the right place at the right time to photograph it all.

After around 45 minutes, the rain slowed enough for us to walk back out of the forest to our waiting car. What a mesmerising afternoon that was!

The following morning we drove out to Kibale to start on our final trek with the Chimpanzees. This time, however, on the road, we saw many many wild Olive Baboons. Noticing that a couple of them had young babies we stopped to take photographs and to our amusement we even had a couple of baboons climb onto the car tyres and roof! It was quite something to listen to the footsteps of a large baboon as it walked the roof of the car just above our heads!

Arriving at the centre, we skipped the briefing because we had already done it the day before. So we went straight out onto the trails for our morning chimpanzee trek. Sadly on this day, the sun came out which made photography on the forest floor and in the canopy really frustrating. Despite this we enjoyed some of our encounters and, at one point, a small dark thing went bolting along the forest floor right between us. It was so fast that it was hard to identify but one of the guides said it was a Red-tailed Monkey who wanted to avoid predatory chimps at all costs so he ran off quickly! By the time our photography session was ending, we found a group of male chimps sitting on a dead log to groom but as we took pictures of them we were attacked by a large swam of safari ants so we all beat a hasty retreat out of the area, removed as many ants as we could and then walked out of the forest!

Over lunch that day, we sat looking at stupendous views from our lodge while we ate outside in glorious weather.

PLAYING WITH THE MANGABEYS – FINDING UGANDA'S OTHER WILD PRIMATES

After three thrilling treks with chimpanzees and some tantalising, yet brief, encounters with other primates, I started to wonder if we could possibly go somewhere to meet some of Uganda's lesser known monkeys. That afternoon we went off to a nearby agricultural area and, in one lovely walk at the edge of fields, we managed to see and photograph Vervet Monkey, Red Colobus, Grey-cheeked (or Ugandan) Mangabey and Red-tailed Monkey.

This was a lovely walk with some avian highlights including Great Blue Turaco, Black and White Casqued Hornbill and African Pygmy Kingfisher.

It was a wonderful way to end our time in Kibale, especially since it was our first and last chance to photograph both the Mangabeys and Red Colobus on our tour.

TREE CLIMBING LIONS IN UGANDA'S GREATEST SAVANNA RESERVE

The following day we enjoyed a full day on safari in Queen Elizabeth National Park. Effectively a transit day between Kibale and Bwindi, we first visited the northern section which featured a series of grasslands interrupted by large Candelabra Euphorbias.

It was here that we saw our first African Elephants, Cape Buffalo and a variety of birds including large clusters of Village Weaver nests, Wattled Lapwings and Woolly-necked Stork.

The highlight of the northern section, however, was three leopard sightings! All of them were in the Euphorbias and sadly only one of them was photographable for a brief moment, but it was still amazing to see.

We then drove the transit road between sections of the park towards Ishasha in the south. On this drive we had views of Lake Edward, whose distant shore lay in nearby Democratic Republic of Congo. The rainy season also delivered us huge swarms of butterflies in a myriad of different species that fluttered around us like rainbows. They were so prolific that at one point we slowed so as not to kill too many in our car and we even stopped to photograph large groups of them as they visited the pools on the road in the peak of the sun, to drink.

The recent rains also forced pretty Vlei Ink Flowers into bloom which were an iridescent highlight of our day on safari.

We finally entered Ishasha in the beautiful mid-afternoon light. It all seemed a bit quiet here until we had some news about a pride of lions that had been seen that morning in a tree. We decided to see if we could relocate them and, after a while of driving through the park and seeing very little wildlife, all of a sudden we found them! A wonderful sleeping lioness with her two mature cubs all enjoying their afternoon siesta on the sturdy branches of a large fig! Amazing! We stayed with them as long as time allowed and during the stop we also enjoyed a wonderful encounter with a wandering African elephant who approached us from the grasslands nearby!

The clouds finally broke and all of a sudden the wonderful sunshine gave way to a sudden downpour which forced us to close up the car and the lions to leave the tree.

I think we were all absolutely enthralled! Just when we'd given up hope of seeing the lions, not only did we see them but we got some incredible photos of them too!

This amazing sighting was made even more special by the fact it was the wedding anniversary of two of my guests and these were the first lions they had ever seen in the wild! Incredible!

By the time we reached Bwindi it was dusk and in the last light of day we spotted some beautiful Grey Crowned Cranes flying into their night roost of trees at the edge of the forest. We briefly stopped to photograph them until the light dimmed. It was a magical end to another day of wonderful wildlife photography on this tour!

That night, celebrations were in order at our lodge as we made a toast to wonderful wildlife and long, happy marriages.

MAGICAL MOUNTAIN GORILLAS

The next morning we went off to enjoy our first trek to meet Uganda's magical Mountain Gorillas.

After our mandatory briefing we teamed up with our wonderful guide and trackers, drove a short distance uphill and we began our trek. The walk firstly took us uphill through fields until we reached the forest edge. From there we descended into thick scrub with a path cut by the machetes of our trackers. When that opened out onto forest we saw our first gorilla, a female who descended from the trees and started walking to the rest of her family group. She was joined afterwards by large Silverback "Kabukojo" who actually walked along a trail ahead of us, literally guiding us to his family. Eventually we found them all grazing in the dense bushes under sunny skies.

The heat began to get a bit much so Kabukojo moved to the shade with the rest of his family in tow. We gently and quietly followed them to get photos. At one point I heard a bit of a ruckus and I looked over to see one of my group members had been knocked off his feet by a young male gorilla doing a mock charge to express his dominancy!! Thankfully no one was hurt but for a moment my heart was in my mouth, hoping that my guest was OK!

Sadly our permitted hour with Kabukojo and his family flew by and before any of us were ready to leave we needed to finish with them. It was just wonderful to realise how much gorillas behaved and looked like humans. Really spending time with them is a bit like looking into a mirror of your soul.

That afternoon, enchanted by our first gorilla meeting and also feeling a little tired, we went to our lodge for a celebratory beer with lunch and a rest before dinner.

The following day we did it all again. This time our morning trek took us to another renowned gorilla family in Bwindi Impenetrable Reserve, that of Silverback Malaia whose name in Swahili means 'Wanderer'. Most gorilla families have a Silverback who stays put while the female gorillas visit different families to mate with other males. Malaia broke this rule by wandering around to mate with the females of other families! Malaia was 35 years old when we met him. Male gorillas only live to around 45 years old which made Malaia quite elderly.

Initially we saw him with a female who had an energetic youngster with her. He saw us then proceeded to walk through the forest uphill, taking us on a bit of a wild gorilla chase in pursuit. We had a short but steep, machete-cut hike to a rainforest clearing where we caught up with Malaia and his family. From here we spent a magical hour with them while they rested on the forest floor. We found out that the baby, a young boy named Haraki, was around eight months old and already a bit boisterous for his age. In between being pulled off lianas that he was too young to climb, we all enjoyed watching the female gorilla's play with him while patient Malaia sat nearby watching on. It was a magical trek in beautiful light where we all saw some wonderful gorilla behaviour and captured some amazing photos!

That afternoon I wanted to see if we could find some other monkey species at Bwindi and I'd heard about a trail to a waterfall where we might get better view of Black and White Colobus and hopefully our first real views of L'Hoest's Monkeys. After meeting our guides and guards we started on the trail to the waterfall when it began to rain. The rain kiboshed most of the wildlife sightings but we kept going until one of our guards mentioned that a semi-habituated family of L'Hoest's Monkeys had been spotted near the lodge close to the information centre. We all quickly did an about-turn and raced back to the start of the walk in case we might miss them.

What followed was the rest of the afternoon in overcast skies (the rain stopped!) with a wonderful group of adorable L'Hoest's Monkeys and even some more photographable Black and White Colobus. While we were photographing these amazing monkeys of all ages, I found a large African Land Snail and photographed it in the hands of our guard. It was a glorious end to a superb day in Bwindi!

WILD HONEY HUNT AND FOREST EDUCATION WITH THE ECHUYA TWA PEOPLE

The following day, we packed up our bags and drove south to Mgahinga from Bwindi. The first section of our drive took us through the Ruhija section of Bwindi, with its incredible trees and old growth forests. On our drive through here we found wild Crocosmia flowers growing on the side of the road when we stopped to photograph a wonderful group of Black and White Colobus Monkeys. Finally! We had a good encounter with these spectacular primates and their pied, soft mantles as they jumped through the canopy of gigantic trees.

A short time later we found some more, but this time they were in a tree that featured a huge wasp nest draping from it like a large piece of cloth! Sadly the colobus were not so photogenic here but the wasp nest was fascinating!

Sadly, a short drive later these incredible forests gave way to agricultural lands as we headed into the region of Kabale.

From there it was all fields until we saw the Echuya Forest where we made our next stop of the trip. It was here that we met a wonderful community of Echuya Twa, some of Uganda's most marginalised people whose culture is very endangered. When the national parks of Bwindi and Mgahinga were set up in the early 1990s the Ugandan government stopped allowing the Twa (the original/first pygmy tribal people of Uganda) from hunting and living in the forest. Forcing them onto agricultural land with shared plots many Batwa (plural – batwa, singular – ovatwa) now live in poverty, surviving from minimal tourism and subsistence farming.

When we arrived we were greeted by our wonderful guides who took us on a two hour odyssey through a special trail they had created to teach people about Twa culture. Before we even started on it, we met a lovely young boy who had fashioned a scooter toy out of wood so we stopped to photograph him before we were welcomed by the Twa into the forest with singing and dancing.

From there we were led on a trail to talk about medicinal plants (see notes) and then to a hunting hide and a simulated village where we learned how the Twa made fire, cooked, sheltered and worshipped. We also visited a tree house and a shrine to a deceased person while learning how these structures are used.

A TASTE OF THE WILD

Before we decided to visit I asked about the possibility of learning how the Twa look for wild honey. In my experience, honey hunting is fascinating and luckily we were invited by the Twa people to go on a wild honey search. What followed was an astounding experience where the Twa people found a rounded hole in the soil that formed the entrance to a hive of stingless bees. When they found it was active, they carefully unearthed the honeycomb from the ground and, from small sacs hanging from the honeycomb they squeezed the most glorious tasting fresh honey into our palms to try. It was INCREDIBLE! We all loved it so much we wanted to buy some, but the low yield of this style of honey made it impossible to buy. Instead the Twa kindly gave us some in a small bottle to take with us on the trip – a real privilege!

As we walked towards the end of the forest trail the Twa stopped us to show how they would play swing on forest lianas and at the end, we were farewelled by the same people singing and dancing for us in gratitude.

When we got back to the car, we gifted the community a donation of flour, salt and sugar as a thank you for our visit. It was hard to say goodbye to these wonderful, tiny people, who so generously shared their culture with us on our tour!

UGANDA'S HEART OF FIRE

After we said goodbye to our newfound Twa friends we drove to Lake Mutanda where we travelled a pretty road around the edge of the lake to our stunning lodge! Set on a peninsula on the lake, each of the lodge rooms had wonderful views of the water. It was such a quiet and peaceful place with lots of birdlife, lovely hosts and a wonderful restaurant with an open fire. From the lodge you could look out at the lake with its numerous small and wild islands. At dinner that night we could see the three beautiful volcanoes of Muhabura, Mgahinga and Sabinyo (set of teeth). Muhabura is the only active volcano of the three and apparently when it is blowing you can see it glowing on the horizon at night. While we did not see that on the tour, it was still the best lodge view of our entire trip!

That night, when we went for dinner, we had just finished our entrees when our guide and the staff of the lodge came to alert us to the fact they had found a female Jackson's Chameleon in the nearby village. They brought it down for us so we went and got our cameras to photograph it before the light became so bad that they had to take it back to where they found it. It was lovely of them to think about us though! We were all so keen to see one!

We went back to our dinner and that night we all fell asleep to a lullaby of Wood Owls, crickets and large numbers of African reed frogs. It was an amazing end to yet another wonderful day on tour!

ADORABLE GOLDEN MONKEYS OF THE BAMBOO FORESTS

We woke early that day to have breakfast at first light before driving an hour and a half over very bumpy roads to reach the park gates of Mgahinga. Once we arrived, we were greeted by some lovely singing and dancing from the local Turambe people before we had our briefing for our Golden Monkey trek. After our briefing we grabbed our walking poles, cameras and our sense of adventure and we were the first group out on the trail.

Noticing that our guide was wanting us to stop and talk about plants, I gently nudged him and let him know that we could do all of that on the way down. I wanted to get up to the Golden Monkeys while the light was still good and where we could be with them on our own, before the other groups arrived.

The walk up to them led us over the foothills of volcanoes, through bamboo forests. We did stop to catch our breath a few times and at one of these points we had a beautiful view of Mount Subinyo.

Our trek wasn't necessarily difficult, it was just longer than most of us anticipated. Thankfully we managed to be the first group up there and, for a brief while, we delighted in watching and photographing a group of Golden Monkeys as they scampered around moss-covered trees, searching for spiders and insects to have for breakfast!

With numbers estimated to only be between 2000 and 4000 in the wild, it was wonderful to spend a few quiet moments with these adorable monkeys. Soon though, the sun came out, the monkeys got active and the groups of tourists we had sped to pass on the trail so we could be first up there, arrived. Our moment of quiet was gone. Still, the sun made the monkeys very active so we were amused by watching their youngsters playing while the adults ran in the trees just above our heads. The dappled light started to make for difficult photography and the monkeys became harder to track in the forest. Being up there with them still felt magical however!

On our trek out of the mountains we stopped to learn more about Golden Monkeys including their varied diets of spiders, insects, fruits, flowers and even chameleons! At one point we found a wild, flowering Red Hot Poker flower and our guides informed us that the monkeys and chimpanzees will often break off the flower heads so they can drink water from the stems!

Hearing a Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird we stopped to try and call it in for photographs.

It was a glorious and slower walk down the hill through these beautiful forests.

When we reached the bottom our guide said he had a present for us and lo and behold, a local lady had found us a male Jackson's Chameleon to photograph! We were all overjoyed by this unexpected surprise and in between grabbing bites of our packed lunch we stopped to photograph this quirky little chameleon with its curious combination of three unicorn-like horns on his head. As an endemic to the Albertine Rift, finding and photographing a Jackson's was a totally unexpected highlight of our trip.

The lodge we stayed at was so beautiful that we had an afternoon off to simply enjoy the incredible views, birds and other wildlife.

GREY CROWNED CRANES – THE BALLERINAS OF UGANDA'S FIELDS

The following morning we all met to depart on the long drive back to Entebbe.

We broke the journey up with some stunning stops on the way to photograph Grey Crowned Cranes. Seeing so many of these beautiful creatures in the local fields was a delight. We managed to photograph them from quite close range and also take joy in watching their elegant displays of affection towards each other. It was a bit like watching an avian ballet being around so many of these beautiful birds.

Our long drive also took us through the tiny wildlife reserve of Mburo where we saw distant Cape Buffalo, zebras, waterbucks, impala and bushbucks.

The roadside bird highlights included Marabou Storks, Abysinnian Rollers, Lizard Buzzard, many Long-crested Snake Eagles, Augur Buzzard and Pied Kingfishers.

By the time we reached our lodge at the edge of Lake Mabamba it was late so we checked in and had dinner before an early night and preparing for our Shoebill cruise the following morning.

THE SHOEBILL – AFRICA'S FLYING DINOSAUR

After a very early start we drove down to Mabamba Swamp, arriving for first light to go out and search for the Shoebill, one of the most iconic birds on earth and the largest stork in the world. Thankfully we had very soft light at the start of our boat trip and within the first half an hour, with the help of some local fishermen, we found one! Like so many Shoebills it was a solo bird and we stayed with it for as long as the light allowed. It did attempt to fish once but it was unsuccessful and by the time we started to do thisk, other boats arrived, so we decided to go off and see if we could find another. Although we never got to see another Shoebill at close range, we did see a distant one flying and also some lovely waterbirds including Long-toed Lapwing, Black Crake, Reed Cormorant, Malachite and African Pied Kingfishers, Fan-tailed Widowbird, Swamp Flycatcher, Purple Heron, African Jacanas and African Swamphens. Overall it was a lovely morning out on the water and a wonderful way to end our time in Uganda.

When we came ashore we said our farewells with a vow that we will all meet again sometime, somewhere exotic.

What a great trip with a wonderful group! Thank you so much!