











The Ultimate Primate Tour

Destination: Uganda & Rwanda **Duration:** 17 Days **Dates:** 26th May – 10th June 2016

-  Seeing a total of 16 different species of primates throughout the tour
-  Tracking the Rushagera group of Gorillas in Bwindi and Sabinyo group in Rwanda
-  Spotting a mother Leopard and her cub at very close range in QE National Park
-  Tracking down our closest cousins in the wonderful setting of Kibale Forest
-  Cruising the Kazinga Channel with hundreds of buffalo, hippos and elephants
-  Spending the day with a Lion researcher in QE NP and having great sightings
-  Spotlighting a couple of different species of bushbabies throughout the trip
-  Observing a total of 230 different species of birds including 3 species of turaco
-  Spending 2 hours in the company of Gorillas and seeing incredible behaviours
-  Seeing an Aardvark in Murchison Falls NP along with 56 other species of mammals

Tour Leader / Guides

Martin Royle (Royle Safaris Tour Leader)
 Ronnie (Local Guide & Driver)
 Frederick (Murchison Falls National Park Spotlighting Guide)
 AJ & Aaron (Nile River Boat Cruise Guides)
 Robert, Jacob & Rhonda (Kibale Guides)
 Ben, Jacob and Harriet (Queen Elizabeth National Park Guides)
 James (Queen Elizabeth National Park Lion Researcher)
 David, Davis & Monika (Bwindi Gorilla Tracking Guides & Rangers)
 Daniel, Justice & Abraham (Bwindi Porters)
 Edward & Francis (Volcanoes NP Gorilla Guides)
 John & Tio (Volcanoes NP Porters)
 Ehope (Nyungwe Guide)

Participants

Mr. Brian Cliff
 Mrs. Nancy Cliff

Overview

Day 1: Entebbe

Days 2-3: Murchison NP

Days 4-5: Kibale NP

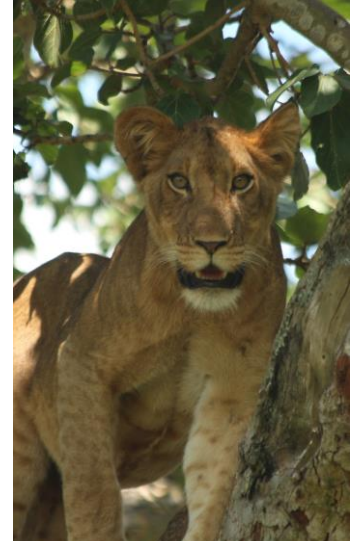
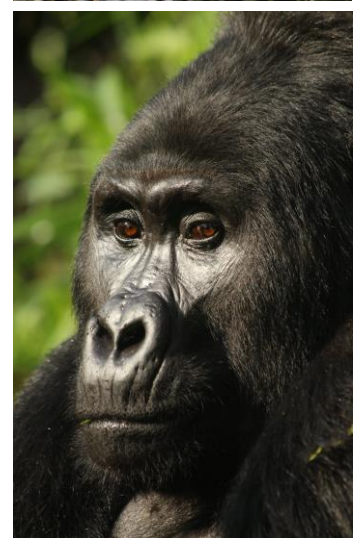
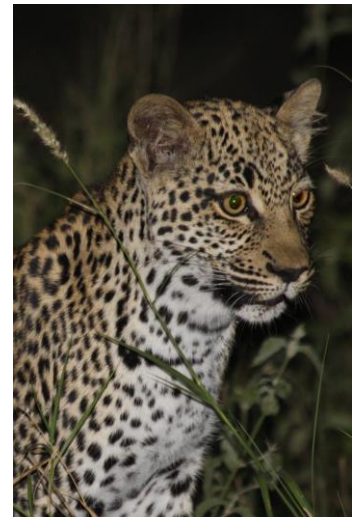
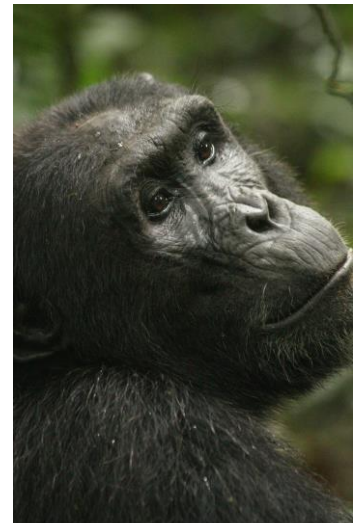
Days 6-7: QENP

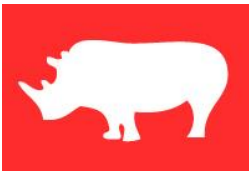
Days 8-9: Bwindi NP

Days 10-11: Volcanos NP

Day 12: Lake Kivu

Days 13-15: Nyungwe NP





Day by Day Breakdown

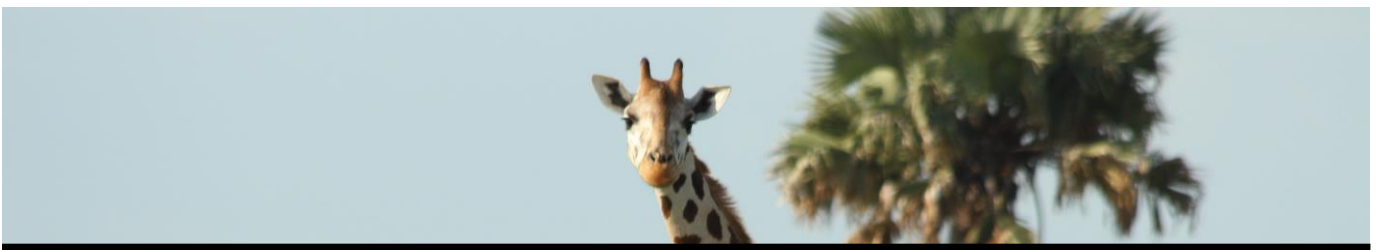
Overview

There are very groups of animals that capture the imagination and tug on our heart strings in the same way that primates do. From tiny, solitary and nocturnal bush-babies to the colourful and endemic lemurs of Madagascar the world of the primate is a varied and special one. But we can go a step further with primates and it maybe represent a step backwards in many ways, towards our very early ancestors and possibly to a time when humans and early hominids faced the same challenges as the present day great apes do in the forests of central Africa. It is a widely known and accepted fact that chimpanzees are our closest living cousins (depending on what book or article you read we share 90 – 99% of our DNA with them). But not many people realise just how human like their societies and personalities really are. It seems the more we find out about chimps and their ‘darker’ side the more we see ourselves as a species reflected in them. From tool use in making sponges, hammers, anvils, straws and even spears to their varied use of sound, facial expressions and body language; as well as from their strong friendship bonds and the forming of coalitions to the horrific acts of kidnapping, rape, murder, torture and cannibalism; chimps share not just the better sides of human nature but many of our more barbaric traits too. But living almost alongside this highly intelligent and complex social animal lives an even larger relative of ours. Albeit an older relative and one with their own strict social system and intricate system of sounds, body language and social rank. This huge primate (the largest of them all) is almost completely vegetarian (excluding the odd ant here and there) and they are often dubbed gentle giants. I am of course talking about the wonderful mountain gorillas. There are only 4 places in the world were this species can be seen and only 2 where sightings are assured and it is currently safe to visit. One of these national parks is the aptly named Bwindi Impenetrable Forest in Uganda and the second the very famous former home of primatologist Dian Fossey, Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda. Around 80% of the mountain gorilla population resides in these two national parks; and it is one family harem of mountain gorillas in Bwindi that will make up the main event for this tour. The habituated groups of gorillas in Bwindi and Volcanoes are all very well known and the group that you will be tracking is the large (27 members) Kahungye group. This is one of the latest groups to be habituated and so some of the younger individuals and especially the blackbacks (adolescent males) are still quite curious so great interactions and behaviours should be your reward for the hard trek through the impossibly steep and crazily thick Bwindi Impenetrable Forest.

Spending time around and observing both chimpanzees and mountain gorillas at close quarters will allow you a very special insight into the key differences between the two species. But we will not content ourselves with these two primate species, we will also search out up to 11 further species of diurnal primates and 3 species of smaller and more elusive nocturnal primates. With some luck a huge total of 16 species of primates can be reached; surely making Uganda and Rwanda the ultimate destination for anyone interested or fascinated by primates.

In addition to the forests and mountains of Kibale, Bwindi and Volcanoes National Parks we will also be spending time in the wonderful savannah ecosystems of Murchison Falls & Queen Elizabeth National Parks where we will hope for the larger and more typical African wildlife including 4 of the Big Five will be waiting for us with some luck (only the heavily poached rhino is missing from this jewel of African parks). We will then end our trip with a stay at the Nyungwe Forest National Park in Rwanda, a large inaccessible forest that is home to many species of primate which we will look for.

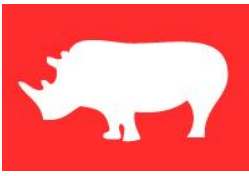
By visiting both Uganda and then Rwanda we will be travelling through a great variety of ecosystems, many endemic and unique to the East African Rift Valley. From lowland tropical rainforest and Afro-montane forest to bamboo forest and open savannah. It is this range of habitats that will hopefully bring us into contact with one of the greatest diversities of primates anywhere in the world.



Day 1 **Entebbe**

Arrival

This morning the plane was a little delayed on arrival but once it touched down and Brian and Nancy were met by Martin and Ronnie and taken the short distance from the airport to the hotel which is on the banks of Lake Victoria. We checked in and Brian and Nancy went for a little walk around the hotel grounds before meeting Martin back for dinner in the hotel restaurant.

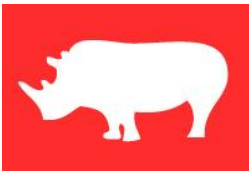


Day 2 **Murchison Falls National Park** *Travelling & Wildlife Watching*

This morning at 7am we left Entebbe and drove through the hustling and bustling city of Kampala. The suburbs of Entebbe and Kampala mixing into one giant metropolis. We then left the city and travelled out into the country, however Uganda being so fertile due to the volcanic soils around here there are so many people and therefore not many places where people do not live. On the way we stopped to pick up some fresh fruit at a farmers market with an incredible array of produce. Ronnie explained about the various different kingdoms that separate the city and the local kings still have some administrative powers in the local authorities. We drove onwards and past various university buildings. As we drove along and over the Kafu River we saw lots of herds of the impressive looking Ankole cattle, the most impressive of which came as we entered the Bunyoro Kingdom which is close to the entrance to Murchison Falls National Park. We then entered the eastern side of the park, which is bisected by the River Nile. Many species are present on both sides of the river but giraffes are a notable absentee on the eastern side of the river. As we drove into the park we found many troops of olive baboons on the sides of the road, also along the roadsides were many butterflies taking advantage of some recent rainfall which had leached some minerals and salts to the surface which is now what the butterflies were after. The first part of the drive was through thick forest and with the baboons along the roadside we had black-and-white casqued hornbills overhead flying from one side of the road to the other. On leaving the forest we rose to the crest of a hill and had great views out over the park and the Nile that runs through the park, we then descended towards the river with yet more olive baboons along the way and a beautiful male Ugandan kob crossing the road too; we then got to the ferry and crossed over the river. We could head a pod of common hippopotamus in the distance but couldn't see them, once we arrived on the eastern side of the river we noticed that the habitat was markedly different with savanna dominating the habitat. There were many birds around the park as well, some of the more recognisable and common species being common bulbuls, white-fronted go-away birds, pied crows, ring-necked doves and piapiacs. It was around 4pm and there was lots of wildlife taking advantage of the lower temperatures of the late afternoon, as we slowly drove through the park towards our lodge on the far side of the park we spotted many common warthogs, many pairs of oribi, herds of African buffalo and some smaller families of African bush elephants. The grasslands were very lush and dotted around the grassland and in between the acacia trees were many large palm trees. Ronnie told us that these palm trees were brought here (introduced) by the elephants from South Sudan. The elephants feed on the fruits and then transport the seeds in their dung. These palms are invading and have been working their way into the park since the elephants have started to live here throughout the year instead of migrating back and forth from South Sudan. Whether the palms will have a long term detrimental effect on the park is unknown at this stage.

Because we are arriving at the end of the rainy season the vegetation was in full bloom and there were many baby animals around and with the calving period comes the breeding season. The females of many species are coming into oestrous now after giving birth and there were many male kobs chasing each other around in dominance battles. Trying to win females to their harem and fend off males who come too close to them. We had great views of a mother and very young giraffe close to the road, this is a newly designated species of giraffe. As of September 2016 the giraffes of Africa were subjected to the most comprehensive genetic study to date and it was found that instead of the traditional view that all giraffes were one species which was split into several subspecies it has now been found that the giraffe is in fact 4 distinct species. All of which have not interbred with other species for hundreds of thousands and sometimes millions of years; so despite looking similar the southern giraffe, Masai giraffe, reticulated giraffe and northern giraffe (which is the species found here) are all distinct species. As the sun began to get lower and lower in the sky several birds started to come back to trees to roost for the night. We had views of African white-backed vultures including one perched next to a beautiful tawny eagle. Continuing our journey past fruiting sausage trees and many red hartebeest and the ubiquitous piapiac birds along the way. Close to the gate where we would leave the park we had an African savanna monitor crossing the road.

We then arrived at the lodge as the sun had just set over the Nile and had our dinner after settling in; then at 7:30pm we headed back to the gate to have a spotlighting night safari with Frederick the park guide. As we started the night safari we found many many antelopes (mostly kob and oribi) and some feeding hippos as well as a pair of elephants, but then our first truly nocturnal animals as a very large crested porcupine crossed the road. We then had great views of two different species of genet as one crossed the road and went into a thicket nearby the road and then another walked in the grass parallel to the road and then into a small stand of acacia trees. The first one being a blotched genet and the second being a servaline genet (the servaline being seen in thicker forest than the blotched); Martin spotted a distant African wild cat crouched down in the long grass as we started looking for the local spotted hyena den site and investigate an abandoned building that is sometimes used by a leopard we came across a couple of kowalski's bushbuck, several white-tailed mongooses, African savanna hares, two swamp nightjar, many spotted thick-knees, as well as a second crested porcupine and a colony of little wrinkle-lipped bats around the building. We then arrived at the den and had fantastic views of the hyenas as they came out of the den and surrounded the vehicle. It was particularly good when some very young pups came out and started to investigate the car, obviously buoyed by the confidence of the adults. But after a few minutes they all lost interest and headed into the darkness, calling to each other as they started their night hunting. We then turned around and started to



head out of the park, along the way we saw one of the most elusive animals in Uganda, and had great views of an aardvark as it came on to the road and slowly walked in front of us for a few meters and then away into the bush. What a fantastic way to end the night safari and first full day on safari. Around the lodge grounds a few bunyoro rabbits were feeding on the lawns as we headed to bed after the long day.



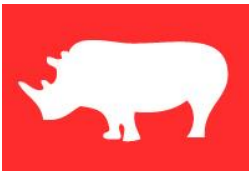
Day 3 **Murchison Falls National Park**

Wildlife Watching

Throughout the night thunder and lightning rung out across the African sky and at 6:30am when we set off towards the park gate lightning was still lighting up the sky in the distance. Before we arrived in the park we had a huge bull elephant crossing the highway and heading out of the park and towards the agricultural lands. We then found a second male elephant near the road, this one wasn't as happy about us in the morning and mock charged us as we passed and carried onto the park gate. Driving into the grasslands we found huge flocks of helmeted guineafowl scattered all around. As it was the breeding season we saw lots of the antelopes being very active with lots of male male competition, including waterbuck and bohor reedbuck chasing each other around and the large harems of kob being watched over by diligent males. We stopped to watch the behaviour of the kob, reedbuck and waterbuck and in the distance we had good views of a family of giraffe, as we were stopped we hear the distant but distinct roaring of lions. We tried to pinpoint where the lions would be but there are no roads accessing the area where the roaring was coming from, so we carried on to see what other wildlife we could find. We then had great views of a breeding pair of red-necked falcons perched on a large shrub, waiting for the day to warm up and their prey to become more active.

Further along we found large numbers of waterbuck as well as a pair of female kewel bushbucks before a family of 12 elephants, including a very young calf, started to walk parallel to the road and allowing great views as they walked and casually picked up pieces of vegetation, dusted them free from soil against their feet and ate them. All whilst the calf struggled to keep up, his little legs running along as the adults slowly plodded along. Near to the Nile the trees grew larger and more abundant and we found a small troop of patas monkeys resting in the acacia trees. Also in the wooded area we had very close views of southern giraffes feeding on the acacia and large numbers of Ruppell's long-tailed starlings in all of the trees. Before we could carry on we had to wait for a large male leopard tortoise which decided to cross the road right in front of us. Heading deeper into the acacia and yellow-fever tree woodland four more elephants feed in the shade and we saw more new life including Egyptian geese and their goslings and a pair of common warthogs suckling from their mother. Further sightings before we had a break and some fresh fruit on the shores of the Nile and in the presence of a huge pod of hippos; included Denham's bustard, African fish eagle and many olive baboons feeding on sausage tree fruits and we then got stuck behind a bull elephant casually walking down the road ahead of us. Eventually the elephant moved off the road and we were able to get to the riverbank for fresh pineapple and a short break. As we stopped and stretched our legs we spotted a pair of Uganda's national birds, the African grey-crowned cranes feeding. We then headed towards Paraa Lodge for lunch and on the way found huge herds of African buffalo near the road and then slowly walking down to the river in a very long caravan, as well as having a family of giraffe cross the road right in front of us, more patas monkeys in the trees next to the road and then some African white-backed vultures and marabou storks feeding on a kob carcass which looked like it was from last night. Close to the lodge a mother elephant stood next to the road with her 3 year old calf, they allowed us to approach very close and we had great views before they turned and walked into the bush and we arrived for lunch.

After lunch we left Paraa Lodge and drove down to the nearby jetty to board the Kibiko launch to take us to Murchison Falls themselves. Along the way pied kingfishers and hippos dotted the riverbanks and we spotted a couple of young crocodiles, nearly perfectly camouflaged in the riverside vegetation. The birdlife was wonderful including great views of a grey heron hunting, a few African fish eagles perched on various trees and ospreys circling the river looking for fish. Large number of elephants were coming down to the river to drink and cool down and we got very close views of a very large 50 year old male feeding on his own in the water. We then headed further down the river to the falls and had great views, the falls are 43m tall and the channel is only 7m wide, meaning that an incredible 300m³ per second flowed through the falls. On the way back to the jetty we found more crocodiles as they were out basking in the sun with their mouth wide open to take advantage of all of the afternoon sun. We then started our long drive out of the park and back to the lodge, we didn't have any new species sighted along the way and as the sun was setting the glowing orange light lit up oribi, black-bellied bustards and red hartebeest in the most fantastic way, making for great photographs. Back at the lodge we were just in time to see



the sun setting over the Nile before dinner. Tomorrow we would start early again and we would have a long journey ahead of us, so a good night's sleep was much needed.



Day 4 Kibale Forest National Park

Travelling & Wildlife Watching

This morning at 6am with the lightning still lighting up the sky in the distance and heavy rainfall having fallen over night we left the fort and started the drive to the park gate, we would have to drive through the park and over the Nile to get to the highway so we would have one last opportunity to see if we could find any wildlife in the park. We would be travelling pretty quickly and so would only stop for sightings of wildlife or behaviour that we had not previously seen as we had a long way to travel today. The sunrise over the savanna was stunning this morning and we didn't see any wildlife other than the common species such as elephants, giraffe, buffalo, kob, oribi, baboons, waterbuck and warthogs. Once we left the park and started to drive south towards Kibale we passed many villages, the maize fields ready for harvest and the large mango trees full of fruit. There were so many birds around the village this morning species including spurwing lapwings, crowned lapwings, mourning doves, black-headed bulbuls, African pied wagtails, cattle egrets, great egrets, red-cheeked cordon-bleus, lesser blue-eared starlings, northern red bishops, Ruppell's long-tailed starlings among others. Also around the villages were troops of olive baboons and in one tree next to the road we had great views of a foraging troop of eastern black-and-white colobus. As we continued our journey views out over Lake Albert and the Albertine Valley with the Congo rainforest sprawling out beyond presented themselves to us. Ronnie is very knowledgeable about the agriculture of the region and he pointed out banana, tobacco, sorghum, peanuts, potato, mustard and many other crops being farmed here. Bananas are very popular around the town of Hoima and the nearly endless plantations of bananas spread out in every direction, from this isolated region of the country nearly all of the bananas eaten in Uganda are produced here. We stopped for lunch in Kagadi village and after a good break, started our journey south again, as we gained in altitude a little we started to see the banana plantations give way to tea plantations. Tea being a very popular cash crop in East Africa and exported all over the world, beyond the plantations and into the far west we had views of the Ruwenzori mountains, these are highest peaks around here and some of the summits are snow covered, however the amount of snow is decreasing more and more each year as the climate increases.

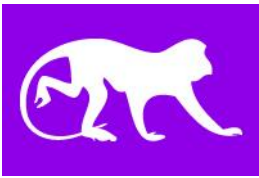
We then arrived at the forest lodge at 3:30pm having made good time after lunch. We settled into the lodge, located in the middle of the park there are many species of primates that can be found all over the lodge grounds and we had a small mixed troop of red-tailed monkeys and eastern black-and-white colobuses feeding on leaves nearby the bar area. Martin went with one of the lodge staff to set up his camera traps, the first one around the bins; as they attract many species of animals to scavenge on leftovers; in the lodge and the second overlooking a salt lick and clearing in the forest that sometimes attracts herds of African forest elephants and forest buffalo among other species. Then after dinner we went out with Robert for a night walk around the nearby forest, but it started to rain and with thunder and lightning following the rain it was unlikely we would see much as many animals are less active during storms. All we saw (before the heavy rain put a stop to the night walk) was a Demidoff's galago that Martin spotted moving quickly through the trees just above the pathway. So we went to bed and prepared for our full day with the chimps tomorrow.



Day 5 Kibale Forest National Park

Chimp Tracking

This morning we left early in the morning with Jacob from the lodge and walked the short distance to the park headquarters where we met Rhonda who would be our chimp tracking guide and then Ronnie drove us down into the forest to where the chimps were seen preparing their night nests last night. It was early enough in the morning that the chances were that the chimps had not woken up or at least had not moved very far and so we stopped and waited to see or hear signs of them from the only driveable track into the forest. As we waited and watched the mist rising through the branches of the large fig trees, Rhonda gave us a briefing about the chimp group here as some red-tailed monkeys and a couple of L'hoest monkeys were seen high in the trees feeding at aninjoria fruits. As the



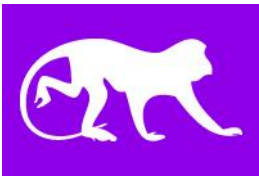
sun began to rise higher and higher the mist began to dissipate and we spotted many olive baboons waking up from their sleep in the trees and then pair of African giant squirrels as they moved along the branches and through the trees feeding. Then we heard the chimps call, they had found their first feeding trees of the day. There are around 1,450 living in the forest and one troop in particular the Kanyawara group (which means Lion's Hill group) is around 150 strong. This troop has been habituated since 1993 and from 2001 onwards people have been able to track the troop (either for an hour in the morning or afternoon or a full day from when they wake until they build their nests for the night).

The large community of chimps in this group spend the night close together in the trees near to where we had waited this morning and were not hearing their calls. Once they are awake they split up into much smaller groups and forage throughout the forest in search of fruiting trees. This reduces competition amongst the individuals and the chimps here spend a far larger percentage of their time on their own or in pairs as do some other communities. The females are much less social and more solitary than the males and as a rule they are more difficult to get close to when tracking them. Despite their food competition there is an interesting behaviour called the food call that males make on finding a large body of fruit. Females hardly ever make this call and tend to keep the food for themselves. It is believed that the males benefit from sharing food as it shows the females that this individual is capable of finding food and would therefore make a good mate. It also solidifies male-male bonds, which are critical to the ambitions of individual chimps as they vie for top spot and the best mating rites. The females rarely make this call as the females are usually unrelated individuals and they are all competing with one another for the best males in the group as well as the most food so that they are in ideal breeding condition, or have enough food during lactation and for their young infants.

The complex socio-ecology of chimpanzees is far too deep for me to attempt to explain it now, but you can be sure that the individuals in the group display close friendships, form coalitions, lie to and cheat each other, females give out sexual favours to males they may want support from in the future and they even form close bonds with individual males and will go behind the back of the alpha male during oestrous to mate with the less dominant male. Their triadic friendships and coalitions are key in males gaining upper hands on others and challenging dominant chimps and they even seem to plan future possible interactions between other individuals and pick and choose sides based on these future social interactions. The knowledge chimps seem to possess of other individual's personalities and social rankings is incredible and some chimps have been known to accept being second or third in command for an interim period whilst knowing that the leader they support will not last long (maybe he is too forceful or not benevolent enough) and when the community makes moves against him the lower ranked chimp is in the perfect place to launch a coup and gain dominance. If this sounds too farfetched for animals and more like a scene from Planet of the Apes I can assure you that long term studies both in the wild and captivity have shown events like this to be more common occurrences than to be purely produced by random chance.

As we followed and watched the chimps today day some of these behaviours were exhibited (with many events being very subtle and hard to decipher over a short period of time) but you would need a whole lifetime to fully appreciate everything. A great book explaining some of the complex intricacies of chimpanzee society and how closely it mirrors our own political systems is the 25 year old 'Chimpanzee Politics' by Frans de Waal – this book is such a hit and draws upon the comparisons between human and chimp societies that it is recommended to first term congressman before taking office in the US. Below is a summary of what we saw as we searched for and then followed the chimps through the forest.

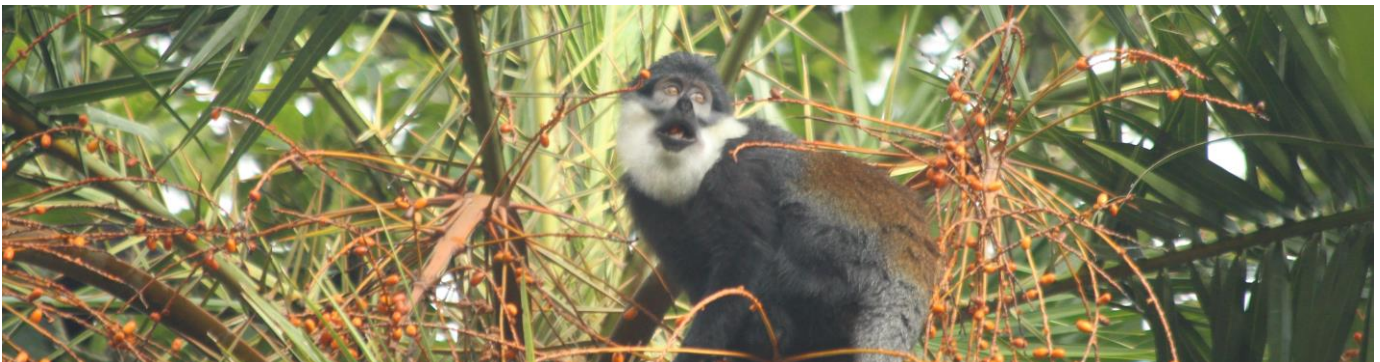
We walked a short distance and found a pair of chimps high up in the trees, they didn't offer the greatest views but we knew that if we waited a period of time we would find more and hopefully see them on the ground and be able to get close to them. These chimps in the trees were feeding close to some blue monkeys as well. After a few minutes two large male chimps came into view and climbed along the trees towards some distant calling. The group was very scattered it seemed as there were more and more pant-hoots and screams from several different directions in the forest. As we watched this pair of chimps they were joined by more chimps in the same tree, this large fig tree was in fruit and the chimps were feeding greedily on them. They were still not very settled and moved from tree to tree, occasionally calling to each other and then going very quiet as they moved to a new tree. After an early morning feeding session they tend to settle down for a rest on the forest floor. We just had to follow them for long enough until they settled down. Then the alpha male of the troop called Wygano (which means 'long-back') came down to the ground and walked on the ground, we followed him until we sat down and had a little nap. It is amazing how quickly chimps can move along the ground and we struggled to keep up. They seemingly glide over the uneven ground on their natural four wheel drive. We followed the chimp and were shown various tree species including the elephant-beer tree, more commonly called marula; which the very nice and popular drink of amarula comes from. Another interesting tree was *Ficus expolmantis* which has very rough leaves, like sandpaper which are not digested but instead worms in the chimps stomach stick to it and are passed when the chimp defecates. We lost Wygano as he moved silently and quickly through the trees and as it went very quiet for a while as the chimps all fed in silence; not wanting to alert other chimps to their food; we had our breakfast in the forest. This time of year the fruit levels are low and so when chimps find a good tree they tend to feed in it silently and after their fill will sound to attract others to the tree. They do not call earlier as to avoid increased competition for low numbers of fruit. After breakfast we quickly found Wygano again and this time he had one of his beta males with him, they were on the ground and moving slower so we could follow more easily. Males often form alliances and coalitions which help them all achieve

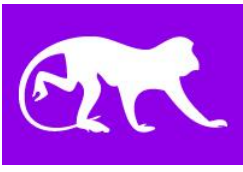


more privileged positions in the community; but the intrigue and interactions within these coalitions and alliances are complex and ever changing. These two males were followed closely by a much younger male, clearly trying to mimic the older males and learn the way of the chimp's world, but also become close to the alpha and so get preferential treatment at feeding sites. This small group was joined by more chimps coming down to the ground, around 8-9 chimps altogether within a 50m² area of forest. The sun was high in the sky now and in patches where the sun penetrated to the forest floor the chimps were sunbathing. The alpha male (for reasons we couldn't fathom) got up and ran to the base of a large fig tree and drummed his feet on one of the buttress roots, making a very loud noise. This is one of the ways the chimps sound out their territories to rival groups as well as advertise their presence to members of their own group as the low pitch drumming noises carry far in the forest. The group settled down again after several drummings and started to doze off at the base of large trees. We were in the middle of a group of sleeping chimps and the views and insight into their lives was incredible as we sat down nearby them and just watched. Another very common chimp behaviour is when a male shows a passing female that he is ready and eager to mate, we saw the alpha do this. He was sat just watching around the and then female climbed down a nearby tree and he flashed his erect penis to entice her over. It didn't really work as she had a young infant who followed her down the tree shortly after. The chimp still had the white patch of fur on his rump, looking like a small rabbits tail, this is a show that the chimp is very young and so not to be treated like an adult, it did something socially incorrect. Sometimes the punishments for chimps acting inappropriately or above their status and rank in the community can be very harsh. This white tail fluff is a way of making sure that young infants are not killed or beaten too badly for small transgressions. More chimps started to come down from the trees, many more females and younger chimps; obviously attracted by the sound of drumming earlier. The increased number of chimps resulted in the older males getting more and more excited, pant-hooting and screaming started and for a couple of minutes it felt like the whole forest had erupted with the loud calls of dozens of chimps. Then silence again, then more pant-hoots and screaming, then silence. This went on for around 10-15 minutes until just the older males were left on the ground resting and the other younger chimps and females had all walked off or climbed up into the trees and away. All expect for the 3 year old male who was doing his best to be as close as possible to the alpha male. It is unusual for a chimp of this age to be on his own and away from his mother for this long, but it may be that he is orphaned and wants to stay around the males for protection and maybe get fast tracked into adulthood.

As we watched the males a female came down with a very young baby and approached the two beta males on the ground. She was very cautious and shy of us being around and decided after a few minutes that she didn't quite trust the humans being this close and climbed back up a tree and waited a short distant up the fig tree. We stayed with the 6 males on the ground as they rested and dozed in and out of slumber, grooming in between bouts of sleep. The small signs of appreciation and acceptance that are shown between the males when grooming is great to see, the beta opening his arms up in an embrace and making soft hoot calls to assure the young male that this is ok and that the grooming is a good way of getting recognised and establishing friendships. After around an hour of the chimps being around here they started to get up again and move around, splitting off into pairs or singles as they went off in search of other feeding trees. We waited a while, as they were moving in silence and with a purpose we would have found it very hard to keep up and so we left them and would wait for them to call and then go off and find them again. The butterflies were out in force as the sun got higher and the temperature hotter. Kibale is known for his great diversity of butterflies and we were treated to many colourful species as we walked through the forest looking for the chimps and waiting for them to call. The afternoon became quieter and a reoccurring leg injury forced Martin to head back, with Brian and Nancy staying and continuing to track the chimps for a couple more hours.

Back at the lodge in the late afternoon we made arrangements for another night safari after dinner, however the weather forecast was for more storms and so we didn't hold too much hope for anything different from yesterday. But after dinner we went out, the wind was very strong and the rain less so but still there. We didn't see any mammals but did find some interesting invertebrates including large grasshoppers, cicadas including one in the middle of shedding its exoskeleton. We also found a cicadas that was being attacked and ripped apart by ants, this was brutal but fascinating to see. We also found a very large and hyper aggressive praying mantis with beautifully coloured wings complete with eye rings to warn off would be predators. But no more bushbabies and we retired to our rooms after around 1 hour as the wind and rain increased in ferocity.





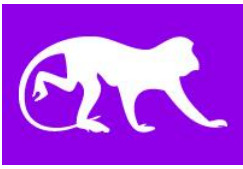
Day 6 **Bigodi Swamp**

Wildlife Watching & Travelling

Today we left Kibale forest and headed a short drive to the small community based project of Bogodi Wetlands, this is run with the local people in charge and with all of the guides being trained from the local community and all the proceeds helping to preserve the swamp and its wildlife as well as providing the Bogodi community with a valuable income. On arriving at the starting point we met Ben who briefed us and who would also be our guide, Guyana and David would also be joining us as trainee guides from the local community. We then walked from the headquarters into the small forested swamp. During the briefing a huge colony of black-headed weavers entertained us with the males busy going back and forth and weaving their intricate nests from blades of grass, all for the approval of the females. Even before entering the swamp proper we saw plenty of birds and flowers, the prettiest flowers being a blue species of morning glory and birding including the large and impressive black-and-white casqued hornbills, hammerkops with their odd shaped heads and smaller species of seed eaters such as manakins and sparrows. Also as soon as we got to the trees that skirt the edge of the swamp we found a small troop of Ugandan mangabeys feeding. They were walking out on the thinnest branches to collect the leaves from the very tips of the tree. These leaves are easier to digest without any of the toxins, tannins and other nasty chemicals that older leaves acquire over time. They were also breaking the bark off the tree trunk to find insect larvae inside, a very good source of protein for these largely vegetarian primates. Also feeding with the Ugandan mangabeys were the smaller and more agile red-tailed monkeys and a couple of the rarer L'hoest monkey. We had great views of a L'hoest monkey feeding on the flowers and small fruits of a palm just over the road from where we were standing. It was great to see these three species all feeding together and sharing the same tree in harmony. We then started our walk around the swamp.

Most of the walk through Bigodi takes you on the fringe of the wetlands, where agriculture meets the wild and from mangabeys and hornbills on one side to cacao, coffee, corn, soya and dozens of other crops on the other side. As we continued the birdlife was prolific with numerous species allowing great views, such as black-and-white casqued hornbills perched in a large tree next to the path and fly bys from the stunning great blue turaco which are common around here. Carrying on we found that the pair of hornbills we could see perched was just one small part of a much larger flock and these were scattered in the trees above a feeding Ugandan red colobus. This monkey was feeding in a very open tree and allowed us great views. It is one of the largest species of monkeys in Uganda, but also one of the favoured prey animals of the chimpanzees when they decide to hunt for much needed meat. As we carried on walking we spotted some further animals including large water spiders in the swamp as we walked on board walks over the still water. We walked past the border of a coffee plantation and were told that coffee accounts for 20% of Uganda's economy and it employs over 5 million people. This number is so high as coffee is quite easy to grow and many people have some coffee plants in their gardens. They then form small cooperatives which club together during the coffee harvest. As few people have enough space to make coffee farming cost effective individually but when combined it all works out. A small watch tower offered great views out over the swamp and surrounding farmland and the many tea plantations that are now beginning to take over from more traditional crops like sorghum. The young tea plants are kept under cover to deter pests and many of the plants here are still young, showing that this is a new endeavour in this part of Uganda.

Along the way around the trail we were told about the various uses of papyrus as well as other crops such as peas and corn which are also grown in the rich volcanic soils. In the background the deep hooting calls of Ugandan mangabeys rung out and the sight of red-tailed monkeys making long and impressive jumps in the trees was great to see. We then had great views of a long-crested eagle which came gliding down and perched in the open near the road before a red-legged sun squirrel crossed the pathway and climbed quickly up a tree and into the forest. We carried on and around to a reforestation project and tree nursery, the local community earn so much money from having the swamp here that they are converting their farmland back into swamp and the reforestation project is crucial to this. Further sightings included more great blue turacos flying low and over the road, a large troop of mangabeys feeding in a tree close to the road, we had nice sightings of the alpha male and a youngster very close to the road. We then met up with the main road through the village of Bigodi and back to Ronnie, where we left the area and drove towards our next stop Queen Elizabeth National Park. Along the way we spotted many olive baboons and tantalus monkeys and had lunch. Ronnie took us to see the incredible views out over the twin crater lakes and Ruwenzori ranges as we drove through many different crop growing areas. Tomatoes, corn, potatoes, bananas, peanuts, mango and many more species are all grown in large numbers here. We made a brief stop in Kasase before crossing the equator and into the savanna of Queen Elizabeth National Park. As we entered the park and drove to our camp we saw some species including waterbuck, Ugandan kob and a magnificent martial eagle. After checking in and unpacking we left for an afternoon safari nearby; we saw many of the more 'typical' species of the park including lots of Ugandan kob, common warthog, waterbuck and many of these species were preparing for the breeding season with many male kob chasing the females around and trying to get them into their harems. This part of the park is heavily overgrown with an invasive species of cactus, the local people brought them here to form bomas to keep wild animals out of their corrals, villages and homes. Now the park is officially protected the cacti are being removed slowly but surely but the authorities seem to be fighting a losing battle. As the sun began to set we found a male and female lion sleeping a little way off in the short grass. They were very relaxed and looked unlikely to get up and move any time soon, the most we saw was the male stand up, move to the female, nuzzle her and then lie back down, but next to her. We stayed around the park until after sunset where



we found a mother leopard and 18 month old cub on the road. They stayed on the road for a few minutes and gave us great views as the mother drank from a small puddle on the side of the road and then sat down and watched us as the cub jumped up and down in a small ditch just next to the road and then they disappeared off into the night. A great sighting and the undisputed highlight of the trip so far. The last sighting of note we had before getting back to the camp were two spotted hyenas running over the road and away to start their night's hunting.



Day 7 **Queen Elizabeth National Park**

Travelling

This morning we left the camp at 6:30am, common hippos and spotted hyena had been very vocal and active throughout the night and close to the camp. We drove to meet James who is a lion researcher and who would be taking us out to see some of his research animals in the park and along the way had great views of a stunning sunrise over Lake George. The lion monitoring project started back in 1994 with an aim of keeping an eye on the spread of diseases among the population. Since then the project has also led to improving the image of the lion to the local people who live alongside them. Their numbers and movements are now accurately monitored and so people can be advised on how best to live alongside this top predator. This has boded well for the lions here even if they are also suffering from the wider trend of declining numbers.

It wasn't long after we met James then he found 3 male lions, 3 brothers, they were found on a very fresh buffalo carcass which had only just been killed. One of the males was feeding on the carcass and then went and marked the ground nearby the carcass, a second lion came up from the grass it had been resting in and nuzzled the other male. We could only see the top of the mane of the third lion as it lay in the long grass and we watched the two males feeding and marking for 10-15 minutes before they all lay down and started to sleep off the many kilos of meat they had eaten. These 3 male lions had come up from the Ishasha area (80km away) in search of a pride to take over. This lions had started to take over the territory of an older male who was recently euthanised. The old male had started to enter villages and had broken down the door to a home (the people all escaped unharmed) but action had to be taken before someone was killed and that would inevitably lead to the local people looking at lions in a very negative way again. By removing one old, problem animal the park authorities hope to keep alive many more of the lions in the park and get the locals interested in conservation. On our way to find more lions we found some Senegal lapwing eggs very close to the car, the parents had been mobbing the vehicle in an attempt to scare us away from the well camouflaged eggs, and we did avoid them. As James pinpointed the direction of the next lions using the VHF antenna we came across 2 hippos in a mud wallow that was barely big enough for one. Clearly they had been out grazing during the night and had decided to spend the day here and keep out of the sun as much as possible as they are some way away from the nearest permanent water. We then found a mating pair of lions just next to a very busy kob lekking site. These were the same male and female lions we had seen sleeping yesterday evening, this time we got much closer and had them mating right in front of the vehicle. After mating a couple of times they went and lay down in the bushes and slept and we carried on to see if we could find any more lions with James. Before we found the next lions we spotted a large Verraux's eagle owl perched in a tree very close to the road but then the antenna started to pick up the sign of a female, this meant that we were likely to see a pride for the first time. We found a pride of 7 female lions and 6 cubs, mostly sleeping in the shade of an acacia tree. The cubs were from two litters, James saying that one litter was 18 months old and the other 16 months old. Even though 2 months doesn't sound like a lot but the size difference between the two was very obvious. As the cubs all come out of hiding and walked over to the adults sleeping in the shade we watched the greeting behaviours, the nuzzling, licking and cheek rubbing all helping to reinforce bonds between the pride members. We watched as they settled down and dozed together, the sun was rising higher and the temperature was also getting hot so we left to have a cold drink and break overlooking a natural salt lake in the park, which had been turned into a salt farm; as the lions were likely to not move very much for the next few hours. On our way back towards the camp we passed the buffalo carcass and the three males had flipped the carcass over moved away, most likely looking for shade somewhere. We searched a little bit around the area and found them all sleeping under a large cactus as the number of vultures circling above grew and grew as they had now found the carcass. Further along we passed another salt lake which was left completely for the animals, the only animals around here was a huge herd of African buffalo.

On leaving this section of the park we drove towards Mywera Lodge on the opposite banks of the Kazinga Channel to our camp. We had lunch here overlooking the channel which links the lakes of George and Edward and is home



to the highest concentration of hippos in the world. After lunch we drove down to the jetty and boarded a small boat which would take us along the channel on a safari cruise, Robert would be our guide and he first explained that the channel is 40km long and 8m deep and full of life. All along the side of the channel were many buffalo, hippos and pied kingfishers. The bird life around the channel was prolific with the highlight at the start being a female and sub-adult African fish eagle. Other bird species we saw in abundance included Egyptian geese, red-throated bee-eaters, hammerkops, white-breasted cormorants and oxpeckers on many of the hippos and buffalo that were cooling off in the water, just leaving their heads and arches of their backs above the water. Around halfway to Lake Edward we spotted a peregrine falcon flying down for a drink but being mobbed by many Mosque swallows, so the falcon had to take off and find somewhere quieter for a drink. We then passed by a pair of mating hippos, the male pushing the female under the water as he tried to mount her. It was quite funny to see how she struggled to get in a comfortable position that wouldn't result in the drowning of the female, it made us wonder how many female hippos do actually drown during mating.

Towards the mouth of the channel where it meets Lake Edward there is a small fishing village, there are many less animals here but more birds including marabou storks, cormorants and hammerkops (and their enormous nests), which all do very well around human settlements. We then turned around and headed back, the drive from the jetty to the camp was quite short and only a couple of troops of baboons were around and seen. Ronnie did get news on his phone of a lion that had been spotted from the main road (which runs north to south through the park) and so we made a short detour and found the lion up a tree. Some of the lions in Queen Elizabeth National Park are famous for their habit of climbing trees. The exact reason is unknown but is most likely because of the combination of lots of annoying tsetse flies and the presence of trees with large, smooth barked and largely horizontal branches in the Ishasha region of the park. This lioness was a good distance into the forest and we could only see her well through binoculars and in the fading light we decided to leave her and go back to the camp for dinner.

Day 8 **Ishasha Section of QENP**

Wildlife Watching & Travelling

Today we decided to try and find the famous tree-climbing lions of Ishasha which lies in the far southern section of Queen Elizabeth National Park and around 72km away. On checking the camera traps that Martin had set up around the camp we found lots of hippos around the camp, which wasn't a great surprise but there was nothing else of note on the camera traps. So we started the drive and spotting the usual suspects in Queen Elizabeth National Park such as Ugandan kob, defassa waterbuck, elephants, olive baboons, tantalus monkeys and waterbuck. We had some good views of elephants feeding in very long spear grass. This is the grass that is squeezed and combined with banana to make the local brew of banana beer. We then reached the Maramagambo Forest and found lots of baboons and tantalus monkeys in the trees and along the sides of the road. They had lots of babies with them including some very young babies, some only a week or so old.

When we finally reached Ishasha we familiarised ourselves with the figgy trees preferred by the lions as their branches are large and are usually horizontal for long sections and its bark is very small and forgiving when lying on it. However it was very quiet as we drove around checking the favourite trees of the lions. Also in Ishasha there is a new antelope, not found on the other side of the Maramagambo Forest, this is the ochre and chestnut coloured topi so we were keeping an eye out for topi as well. Driving around the figgy trees where the lions are usually found we only saw huge numbers of butterflies and the occasional common warthog and kob flushed from the high vegetation. Just when we were about to give up we came to a tree with 2 lionesses and 4 cubs up in the branches resting. The cubs were between 14-16 months old and they watched us as we watched them. Being late morning this is the perfect time to see the lions in the trees, another theory as to why they climb the trees here is that they escape the heat and get a breeze by being off the ground and it is true that the late morning and middle of the day is the best time to see them up in the trees. We spent a little time around here and watched as one of the adults jumped down and ran off into the bush. We couldn't see the reason for this, she didn't go off in chase of any animal and the other lions just stayed in the tree and didn't follow her so her motives for this activity in the middle of the day was a mystery to us. One of the cubs did move around to another part of the tree and stared out in the direction that the adult had moved, but made no attempt to follow. We then left the lions and went to a small camp site on the banks of the 10m wide Ishasha River, the opposite bank being the war-torn and unfortunately too dangerous to visit Democratic Republic of Congo. The only guardians of the border being the 30 or so hippos fighting and yawning in the muddy waters in between. The opposite side is actually one of Africa's largest national parks, the huge 3,000km² Virungas National Park, the park stretches south and borders Bwindi, Mgahinga and Volcanoes National Parks of Uganda and Rwanda. Home to lions, elephants, leopards, buffalo, mountain gorillas, chimpanzees and hundreds of other species this park should be a well visited safari destination instead of ravaged by poachers and the bushmeat trade. After lunch we left the park and began our journey towards Bwindi further south. Along the way we had brilliant views of the Ruwenzori Mountains including the twin peaks marking the highest summits of the chain. On arrival at Bwindi we went straight to our accommodation, checked in and spent the rest of the day resting and relaxing in the lodge and tomorrow we would head into the forest in search of the mountain gorillas.



Day 9 **Bwindi Impenetrable Forest NP**

Gorilla Tracking

This morning at 8am we travelled the short distance from our lodge to the park headquarters, met our gorilla tracking ranger David and had a briefing about the gorilla trek. We met the rest of our group of 8 and were told that we would be tracking the Rushegura group today, they are often found close to the village of Rushegura which is where we were staying and the conditions were perfect, quite cool with a dampness in the air this morning but not hot and sunny which can make hiking in humid conditions very fatiguing.

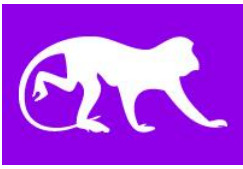
The Rushegura group is sometimes called the R group and they are currently 14 members strong, including a baby which was born just last month. The group was habituated for tourism in 2000 and then started receiving its first groups in 2002. The group was formed when the Habinyanya group split when Mwirima (the dominant silverback) left and took several (7) females with him. Mwirima has since passed away and the current silverback of the group is his son Kabukojo.

Before setting off we hired Daniel, Justice and Abraham to be our porters and were introduced to Davis and Monika who would be our armed escorts. The forest is home to wild elephants, buffalos and leopards and so an armed escort is a good idea. We started our hike along the banks of the Sheud river which is narrow and running fast down the slopes of the hills and towards the lowlands of Queen Elizabeth National Park. This river was once believed to lead to the source of the Nile, which has now been found to most likely be in Nyungwe Forest in Rwanda. We walked for around 40 minutes alongside the river and were shown some of the plants that the gorillas like to feed on. We then came to a clearing, some tea plants and a newly constructed lodge building and the chalets. We had only walked around 2km parallel to the village and the gorillas were here feeding in the shade of the buildings on the herby shrubs that are growing next to the village. As the gorillas are not persecuted at all here anymore and the plants they like to eat are found close to the village and also they sometimes like to eat the crops grown by people, they often spend time around the village. It may seem odd at first that such an iconic and mysterious and wonderful animal is found living alongside people, but they are peaceful and when undisturbed do not mind human presence. It is up to the humans to be gorilla aware, not to disturb them and most crucially not getting too close and possibly spreading diseases like colds and flu which can be fatal to gorillas.

The first gorilla we came to was the silverback, he was feeding away in the thick bushes and he had a young male in a small tree above him also feeding on the vegetation here. At first we could only see black shapes and body parts as the bushes and leaves moved back and forth. We walked around the bushes and into the open and quickly we saw more and more gorillas including the female and her young baby. They were sat in the open feeding and watching us, as we walked out into the small tea plantation we could see more and more of the gorillas. As we watched in silence they all started to come out of the bushes and into the open, mostly to move from one tasty bush to another. What was interesting is the proximity many of the gorillas stayed to the silverback; he is very much the dictator of the group, when he moves the group moves, when he sits and eats the group sits and eats, when he sleeps the group sleeps etc. It was only when he came out of the thicker bushes and walked towards us then we found we had not been surrounded by the group. As we were on the very narrow pathways made between the tea bushes we couldn't move anywhere and neither could the gorillas. This resulted in Martin being just 30cm away from the silverback as he tried to move past him and to the other side of our group. Crouching down and making the comfort grunts the silverback (followed by several younger gorillas) they walked casually past Martin, Brain and Nancy and to the new bushes that had obviously taken his fancy. Once the silverback was settled here he looked over to the other side of the tourists and made a soft call and immediately the female with the young baby came over to join him. Whilst he is very comfortable around people he obviously didn't like people standing between him and his newest child, well I think he is a very smart silverback and it is decision making such as that that makes him such a good leader of his family. All together we were getting just the most incredible views of the gorillas being so close to us and in such beautiful weather. During the hour we had with the Rushegura group we were treated to views of all 14 gorillas which included 3 youngsters and the big silverback himself. We watched as he sat close to us and striped off the bark from woody stems to get to the juicy inner pulp of the plants. This particular plant is high in sodium and the gorillas get most of their salts from eating this species. We then saw them raiding a passionfruit tree and eating many of the beautiful fruits. Luckily some of the permit fee is given back to the local villagers who have their crops raided by gorillas and this discourages retaliation from the locals against the gorillas.

Just towards the end of the hour with the gorillas we had an adult female feeding on the eucalyptus, stripping the bark to get to the tasty gum or sap, she was unceremoniously moved from the tree by a large blackback (a male under the age of 15, so he is nearly as large as the silverback, but hasn't started to go silver on his back) who took over feeding on the gum.

We then had to leave the gorillas and walked around 50m up a small track to the main road running through the village, I wonder how many people have walked along the main road this morning and will continue to as they go looking for souvenirs or just walking around the village and do not realise that they are so close to a family of wild gorillas going about their normal routine. Once we got back to the park headquarters we got our gorilla tracking certificate and said goodbye to our porters and rangers, before heading back to the lodge where we rested and relaxed for the rest of the afternoon. Brain and Nancy walked into the village, before the heavens opened and the rainforest showed us why it is called a rainforest.

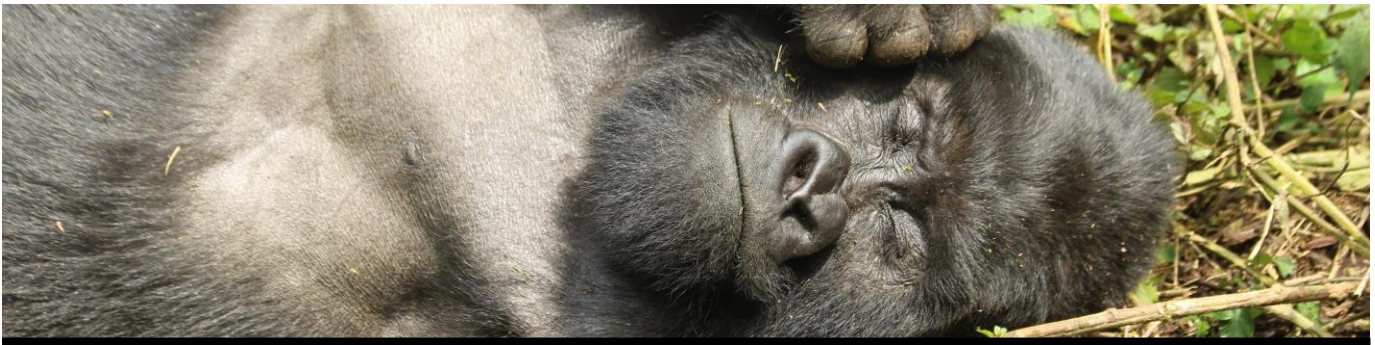


Day 10 **Volcanoes National Park**

Travelling

After breakfast we packed up the vehicle as a troop of L'hoest monkeys were playing around and jumping on our vehicle and then departed towards the town of Kisoro close to the border with Rwanda. We first had to travel through to the other side of Bwindi, along the way we had a Weyn's duiker crossed the road and allowed for some good views at the side of the road before it disappeared into the thick forest; and an augur buzzard soaring overhead before we left the forest and started to travel through villages and plantations again.

On the way we past the view point dubbed the 'Switzerland of Africa' the rolling hills and lake crater lakes, including the wonderfully shaped lake Bunyoro; these views do actually have a look of central Europe but there is something typically African as well. As we continued we got our first views of the Virungas. The first three peaks we saw were Mt. Muhabura, Mt. Sabyinyo and Mt. Gahinga. We stopped a couple of times to take in these views before carrying on to Kisoro. Here is the famous Traveller's Rest Hotel. A hotel that was founded by Walter Baumgartel the place was the closest port of call and link to the western world for the first two primatologists who studied the mountain gorillas; George Schaller and Dian Fossey. This quaint place is a really nice retreat and the gardens were a perfect place for lunch before heading on to the border. Kisoro is also home to a large UN Congolese refugee camp and the Congo artwork is prevalent around the town, especially in the bar of the Traveller's Rest Hotel where it is all original, unique and for sale. The standard of the wood carving from the Congo is incredible and many pieces offer a glimpse into a traditional life of communities that few Europeans will ever get to experience due to the turmoil in the DRC and the fact that many of these communities will be destroyed when the conflict dies down and logging companies enter to take advantage. The border crossing was very straightforward and we continued on towards the imposing silhouettes of Mt. Karisimbi, Mt. Sabyinyo and Mt. Visoke and our lodge lying close to Mt. Sabyinyo. Shortly after arriving we were treated to a traditional local welcoming dance from some children and teenagers. The vigorous and enthusiastic dancing was infectious and if it wasn't for a long day in the vehicle to get here we probably would have joined in. As it was the excitement of a second gorilla trek tomorrow prompted dinner and rest instead.

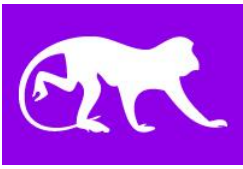


Day 11 **Volcanoes National Park**

Gorilla Tracking

Today would be our second gorilla tracking experience and would prove to be another incredible highlight of a trip full of highlights. The morning was very misty and ideally for us provided the perfect backdrop to the real gorillas of the mist. The mist was so thick that the huge volcano of Sabyinyo which is directly in front of our lodge was barely visible, the mist also brought a chill to the air, but the excitement of going in search of gorillas again kept us warm. We arrived at the headquarters of the park where we would be allocated our group of tourists and also our gorilla family to be tracked today. As we waited for these formalities the Sacola tribe performed some traditional songs and dances for us.

After the guides and rangers had worked everything out we were allocated the Sabyinyo group and Edward and Francis would be our trackers this morning. This group was a real coup as it includes the oldest and largest silverback currently on record, the 44 year old, Guhonda, weighing in at over 220kg. But as well as this massive silverback the family is famous for having the only known bald gorilla. The blackback is missing all of the hair on the top of his head, giving a comical appearance. The whole family is some 18 strong with the youngest being 5.5 months old. After a very good, comprehensive briefing from Edward we got into our vehicle and drove the short distance to the starting point for hiking to this group. We hired Tio, Peter and John as our porters for the journey



and walked for around 40 minutes through the plantations of eucalyptus and pyrethrum towards the volcanoes and their forested slopes. The mist was beginning to be burned off and the park's thick and rich forests were becoming more and more visible. Once we arrived at the border of the park we climbed over the small stone wall; used to keep the wild buffalo and elephants out of the agricultural land and keep the livestock out of the park; we walked for a further 30 minutes. Walking through the thick bamboo zone until we arrived at the very densely vegetated herbaceous part of the forest. They huge hygenia trees and giant thistles, stinging nettles and lobelias started to dominate the area; we had to stop and wait a while as a herd of forest buffalo were nearby and we didn't want to spook them and have them charge through us. Once the buffalo had passed we moved on and came to one of the gorillas, the first gorilla we saw was high up in the trees, with its arms and legs spread out gripping trunks and hanging like a star in the middle. We watched the gorilla climb a little higher and then settle and start to feed on the leaves up there. As we watched more and more black shapes in the tree became visible, including the huge silverback, who was surprisingly high up for his massive bulk. We could only count 9 of the 18 gorillas at first and many of these were not in the greatest positions for viewing, being high up in the trees and feeding away. We did have good views of a female climbing down and then the silverback who also climbed down. Because many of the leaves in the understorey are very dry the gorillas often climb a little way and feed on the softer leaves in the trees, we had obviously arrived on a soft leaf feeding day. As we spent time here and watched and looked into the vegetation more we spotted more and more of the gorillas, including a mother who was breastfeeding a young baby on the ground and allowed us to get fantastic views of this incredibly intimate behaviour. The gorillas were very relaxed and even with the 5.5 month old baby she was very happy for us to be around. The silverback then came down from the tree and moved through our group towards the sun and a clearing in the forest. He was followed by the bald blackback, Big Ben. As the entire group came out into the sunny clearing we had amazing views of them in the sun. Feeding slowly on the vegetation, as well as nursing was going on just a few centimetres from us. The youngsters were climbing clumsily among the bamboo and were great to watch as they play fought, chased each other around, honed their climbing skills and basically began to learn the skills needed to be a gorilla in this habitat. We spent the remainder of our hour with the gorillas here and just as we were leaving the silverback finished being groomed by one of the adult females, lay down in the sun and fell asleep. What a life, the life of a silverback in one of the most well protected national parks in the world must be wonderful; it was also a great way of ending our time with the gorillas, showing that they are so relaxed in our presence that they just fall asleep without a care in the world.

We then headed back out of the park, via the bamboo zone and agricultural fields, we met up with Ronnie again and said goodbye to our porters and rangers. All in all we had seen 7 adult females, the young baby, 3 juveniles, the bald blackback and one of the two silverbacks in the group. Not a bad morning and we were back at the hotel in time for lunch and had the rest of the day to rest and relax. Today Martin had ran out of painkillers for his leg injury so went to see if he could get some more painkillers but it was the weekend and the chances were low that Ronnie and Martin could get the right painkillers.

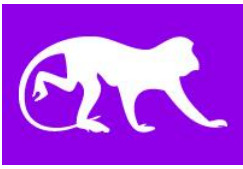
Day 12 **Volcanoes National Park** *Golden Monkey Tracking & Travelling*

This morning Nancy and Brian went with Ronnie to the park headquarters and went into their golden monkey tracking, Martin stayed behind at the lodge today as his leg was hurting too much to hike into the park without painkillers. The bird life was prolific this morning, it was much brighter than it was yesterday and the common bulbuls, African stonechats, laughing doves, white-necked ravens and northern grey-headed sparrows were very abundant we they were taken to the starting point for the golden monkey tracking.

The golden monkey used to belong to the species complex of blue monkeys. However recent genetic evidence has suggested a split and the golden monkey (*Cercopithecus kandti*) is now distinct from the more widespread blue monkey (*Cercopithecus mitis*). This recent reclassification of the golden monkey has been great for the species as they are now afforded special protection as they number fewer than 5,000 globally and are only known from a couple of locations. Most of them located in Volcanoes National Park, they are specialist folivores and love the fresh bamboo shoots. In Volcanoes National Park two of the troops here have been habituated so that you are able to get a lot closer than usual to this usually very skittish monkey.

They are usually found in the thick bamboo zone as this is their primary food and so Nancy and Brian started their hike in a similar location as to where we started our gorilla trek yesterday. The group we would be tracking is called the Kabatwa group and they had been habituated since 2000 and they have been having tourists since 2003. This meant that they are well versed to humans and completely ignore us as we walk amongst them and watch them feed and interact with each other.

In fact they had not even entered the park before the troop of around 40 were spotted climbing and jumping around in the thick bamboo. They then spent some time watching the monkeys in the bamboo before they all left and headed into the open plantations to forage. This is a problem as they are often not regarded in the same high vane as the gorillas by the locals (even though they do now bring in vital revenue for the local communities through tourism) and they can be killed for raiding crops as they were doing today. This group is around 120 strong but it was just a subgroup that we found today feeding in the plantation. There are 4 adult males in this group and the social structure of golden monkeys is similar to baboons; where one overlord uses several related males to help protect sections of the group. The majority of the individuals are females and their offspring of various ages. We



saw all four of the males including the overlord, who was significantly larger than all the others. Like baboons the dominant male secretes a pheromone which suppresses the development of other males second sexual characteristics (such as large size, enormous testes and enlarged canines) and means that there is usually just one fully mature male in a society. Once this male dies or leaves the group for an extended amount of time the pheromone is no longer produced and the other males develop. The first male to develop then starts to produce the pheromone and suppresses the other males development.

After a while the monkeys left the plantation and headed back to the bamboo and disappeared, it was pretty much one hour into the experience and it was almost like the monkeys had told the time and said its time for you guys to head back to your lodge. Once Nancy and Brian arrived back at the lodge we had lunch and packed before heading out to Lake Kivu. The drive was around 3 hours and was very scenic as we approached the huge lake, our hotel was on the shores of the lake, which looked like the sea as the waves came into the beach, we had our dinner outside against the sound of the waves and the chattering of straw-coloured fruit bats as they fed in the fruiting trees in the hotel grounds.

Day 13 Nyungwe Forest National Park

Travelling

This morning we left the hotel and the shores of Lake Kivu, whilst loading the vehicle with our luggage Martin found various colonies of straw-coloured fruit bats noisily and restlessly sheltering from the sun under the fronds of the palm trees lining the car park and entrance way of the hotel. Rwanda is known as the land of a thousand hills and it felt like we had wound our way up and down and around them all as we drove south through the vibrant green hills of the countryside. We occasionally met up with the lake again, we would be following the huge lake south wards and were given some great views out over the lake as we drove towards the forested hills of Nyungwe Forest National Park. The amount and variety of crops being grown was similar to that in Uganda and was once again showing us that the rich volcanic soils here allow nearly anything to grow in abundance. This abundance of produce is the reason why Rwanda and Uganda have the two highest population growth rates in Africa, which is putting huge pressure on the countries few remaining protected areas. Making the money allocated from tourism to the local people so important. A huge amount of the land we drove through (particularly the hills) was covered in eucalyptus plantations. We stopped for lunch on a winding road and had great views out over the hills and Rwandan countryside. As we entered the town of Kibuye and met up with Lake Kivu again we saw large fish farms along the shoreline, they were farming the introduced Nile tilapia.

We arrived at the lodge at around 4pm and checked into the stunning chalets and rested for the rest of the evening.

Day 14 Nyungwe Forest National Park

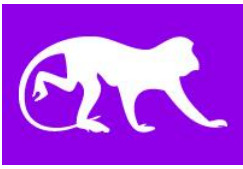
Wildlife Watching

This morning Nancy and Brian went early with Ronnie to the park headquarters to start their chimpanzee tracking, the chimps here are not as used to people as in Kibale and they can be little harder to see. Partly because the terrain is physically more demanding as the forest is hilly but also they tend to stay high in the trees and are spooked more easily. But the overall experience is wonderful. Just like in Kibale the trick to finding the chimps is for the rangers to take you to where the chimps built their night nests yesterday evening and then listen for their calls, if they have already left the sleeping area. So the hike started with walking up a steep hill to where they had slept, almost as soon as they reached that point the chimps started to call on the otherside and back down the hill and up the otherside of the narrow valley. Overall the experience was not as good as in Kibale but Nancy and Brian did get great views of them in the trees and then moving on the ground, when Brian saw 5 individuals moving along the ground, but the dense vegetation and hard terrain to navigate resulted in the chimps getting away more than once. The chimps didn't seem to want to stay in one tree for any extended amount of time, perhaps the forest not being as productive in terms of fruit at this time of year (as Kibale) meaning that the chimps have to do various things that make finding and observing them more difficult; such as moving around from fruiting tree to fruiting tree, spending less time in each location, not calling out as much as they do, as not wanting to give away their food to other chimps and also moving around in smaller groups or as individuals. Hiking around the forest they also saw signs of foraging by the huge yet rarely seen giant forest hog. Ronnie also spotted a western tree hyrax in a tree near the park headquarters as he waited for Nancy and Brian to return, this is one of the hardest animals in Africa to see, even though their piercing calls are commonly heard throughout forests. After seeing around 30 chimps in various interchangeable groups we struggled to find a group that was in one place long enough to observe properly and after a couple of hours, Ronnie took Nancy and Brian back to the lodge for a midday rest.

After lunch Nancy and Brian went for a birding hike around the wetlands of Karamba, here the bird life is prolific with sightings of Ruwenzori batis, pied kingfisher, African pied wagtails, barn swallows, many-coloured bushshrike, yellow-crowned canary, yellow-eyed black flycatcher, yellow-fronted canary, northern puffback among many more species. Back at the lodge in the evening we planned what we would do tomorrow and enjoyed another night in the African wilderness.

Day 15 Nyungwe Forest National Park

Wildlife Watching



information centre and met our hiking guide; Ehope, and started to walk the Igishigishigi trail. This is a shortish trail through the rich forest gradually moving downwards through the forested slopes and to a huge canopy walk way which spans across a valley, giving the most incredible views across the forest. As we walked slowly down the path, winding back and forth down the steep slope we were shown various medicinal plants that the local people (and some of the primates such as chimps) use. Our first primate of the day were a couple of L'hoest monkeys which were crisscrossing the path, heading down the slope in a much more direct way than us following the path. There were many butterflies around this morning, unlike Kibale which has had numerous studies done on the butterflies there, information on Nyungwe is lacking and we are unsure how many species are found here, but judging by today the diversity and abundance of butterflies surely rivals that of Kibale. Continuing down Martin spotted a small troop of mona monkeys in a large fig tree, they were moving through the tree in a small mixed troop with some Angolan colobus. They didn't offer great views however they did show the difference between the two species in terms of size, shape and colour. Many of the primates in these forests will move around in mixed species troops for protection as many eyes helps to detect predators in different places, as some species of primate like feeding in the canopy and so can spot for eagles, others like the understory and so are on the watch of pythons and others still like the ground and so are high alert for leopards.

Moving further along we came to the canopy walk, a 150m long walkway suspended over 50m above the forest floor and some 20m above the trees beneath, giving an unprecedented view of the forest. The expanse of the forest sprawling out beneath us was at its fullest as we stood above the forest taking it all in. The birds around here were very good with sightings of some Ruwenzori endemics such as the Ruwenzori batis and Ruwenzori apalis, as well as other species such as Graver's thrush warbler, red-tailed atethe, purple-breasted sunbird and blue-headed sunbirds to name some of the species seen in the forest canopy and understory on this hike.

After leaving the magnificent canopy walk we started to walk back up the slope and close to the top we found a troop of blue monkeys, they were very close to us, only around 3m in the trees either side of the road and crossing the pathway just above our heads. This species is usually quite tricky to see in Nyungwe and we were very lucky to have such close views of the blue monkeys on our way up.

Back at the lodge we had our lunch and then were driven the short distance to the home range of a large troop of the stunning looking Angolan colobus. This group has around 50 individuals and they are very accommodating with tourists. We watched as the troop fed and played around in the forest at close quarters. We even had great views of a young baby, still pristine white in colour, having not started to develop the black markings on their pelage which happens at around 2-3 months of age. After spending an hour or so with the Angolan colobus we retired back to the lodge for our last evening meal in Africa and our last night here.

Tomorrow we would start our long journey towards the capital city and the airport to catch our return flight home.



Day 16 **Kigali – Home**

Travelling & Departure

This morning we left early as to make the most of the day as we have a long journey to get to Kigali in time to catch our return flights home in the evening. We drove through tea plantations at first, the morning mists moving silently over the well trimmed tea bushes. We then left the plantations and drove up the hills and through the park to get to the other side, the mists here looking eerie and primeval against the dark green forest. We didn't see much wildlife as along the road, just some bird species such as yellow-billed kites, pied crows, speckled mousebirds and a pair of large and stunning Ruwenzori turacos; the only mammal we saw in the park was a solitary L'hoest monkey just sat on the side of the road, as if hitchhiking.

We then left the forest and moved into the eucalyptus tree plantations and the single buildings started to cluster into villages and the towns and we were very much back in the realm of humans. Towards the major town of Butare we travelled through the second Congo refugee camp of the trip before visiting the Butare Ethnographic museum. This nice museum is a great way to gain a great understanding of the cultures of Rwanda and the rest of East Africa as well as seeing what happened during the early colonial years. A great selection of handicrafts showed how the many tribes of Rwanda solved every day problems in ingenious ways using the materials in the forests and savannas. After the guided tour of the museum and learning about the agriculture, housing, clothing, social systems, weaving, hunting, art, war and history of the Rwandan peoples we left Butare and drove directly to the airport in Kigali. Here we left Ronnie and said our goodbyes and headed in our separate ways.

