



# Uganda 2016

29th July - 7th August

by Julian Hough



Worldwide Birding & Wildlife Safaris

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*l to r: Nancy, Irving, Mary, Andy, Alison. Front: Julian Hough, Preston, Steve and Lisa.*

## **Uganda, July 30th-August 7th 2016** (all photos by Julian Hough)

Although the “official” start of the tour began on the evening of the 30th, all the participants arrived a day early to decompress. We all planned to use the extra day to do some casual birding around the hotel grounds and nearby Entebbe Botanical Gardens, themselves a fantastic birding spot.

### **July 30th- Entebbe**

Although left to our own devices, everybody found themselves convening at the Entebbe Botanical Gardens for some *ad hoc* birding. A large expanse of wooded grounds and scrub adjacent to Lake Victoria, it gave everybody a chance to get a handle on some of the local species, most of which were new for everyone – ticks came thick and fast! Splitting into a couple of small parties, we all independently enjoyed the repulsive looking, yet formidable Marabou Storks, Reed (Long-tailed) Cormorant, and a variety of ‘glossy’ starlings.

These caused us a few head scratching moments and thumbing of field guide pages before the precise species began to fall into place, namely Splendid, Ruppell’s and Great Blue-eared. The delightfully strange Hammerkop and ever-present Yellow-billed Kites glided over the area. Pied Kingfishers were too many to count, and we had our first run in with weavers; a varied family, and with lots of different species. It was the same issue with the starlings – once you got your eye in, the species fell into place, but the females continued to pose an identification challenge for the keener observers on the trip. Hooded Vulture and the group’s first dapper African Fish Eagle circled overhead, along with distant Long-crested and Whalberg’s Eagle and many Pink-backed Pelicans.

Walking the grounds produced the huge Black and White-casqued Hornbills, Ross’s and Great Blue Turaco, Diederik, Klass’s and Levaillant’s Cuckoo and the quirky-looking Broad-billed Roller, while the forest-dwelling, and aptly-named Woodland Kingfishers





*"Anybody seen any Marabou Storks around here?"*

sat quietly in the shade. Along the edge of the lake, several of us were lucky enough to see Black Crake, African Pygmy Kingfisher and Madagascar Bee-eater, Golden-backed Weaver as well as brief views of Orange Weaver – a species that seems to be local and a bird we saw nowhere else on the trip.

Back at the Lake Heights Hotel, some took advantage of a dip in the pool to cool off while others birded the grounds and added other species to the list such as Red-billed Firefinch and Eastern Plantain Eater while African Harrier Hawks glided overhead. We all convened for the official welcome dinner. Looking out from the rooftop patio, a cold Nile Special beer in hand, we had a great view of the suburbs of Entebbe while an African Hobby hawked overhead. With a relaxed, bird-filled day already under our belt we were all feeling stoked for the following day's birding at Mabamba Swamp and the search of one of Uganda's most sought-after species – the statuesque and not-so-easy-on-the-eyes Shoebill!

### **31st July – Mabamba Swamp**

Standing four-feet tall, Shoebill is one of the star-birds of any visit to Uganda should you be lucky enough to see it. Situated 50kms south of Entebbe, the large and expansive swamp is home to a small number of Shoebills and is one of the premier places to see this bizarre-looking bird.

We set off early, deciding to take the ferry to shorten our drive. We met our local guides Brian, Robert and Sam (our driver). We all split into two comfortable Toyota Land Rovers and with bags packed, we were off! However, this morning Africa reminded us all that things run on African time - there was no ferry to meet us! Since it was Sunday, it was apparently delayed. The delay allowed us to bird from the ferry, notching up our first African Jacana, Spur-winged Lapwing and African Yellow-billed Stork. Although no Rock Pratincoles could be found perched up on any of the boats, distant flocks of White-winged Black Terns, including adults and grey, non-breeding first-years, paraded steadily past.

Finally we were off the ferry almost as soon as we boarded it. Although the delay had cost us some time, we were still ahead of the game and we soon arrived at the boat launch where three canoes and local guides waited to escort us into the swamp. A bathroom stop was a wakeup call for some of the group that we weren't in Kansas anymore! Off into the swamp, we saw our first dashing Malachite Kingfishers, Squacco Heron, African Marsh Harrier, Scarlet-chested Sunbird and Blue-chested Bee-eaters. Cisticolas – a family of hard-to-see birds that essentially all look mostly the same except sound different – were represented by Winding Cisticola. It seems the best way to identify these was to name them after how they sound!

Slowly we meandered through the swamp until we came to an open area with great views of the vast swamp.





*Mabamba Swamp –home to Shoebill, Lesser Jacana and other goodies!*

We were all shell-shocked to come around a corner and basically come face to face with a Shoebill sitting quietly in the marsh. We drifted slowly to within 20ft of this monstrous duck-eating heron. We were so close I could barely fit it in the camera frame. Several minutes ensued of pixels being burnt as the group enjoyed the first of many amazing bird experiences. The first morning and one of Uganda's enigmatic birds was already under the belt!

After spending time with it, we headed over to look for another Mabamba specialty; Lesser Jacana. In the distance (and I mean distance!) a large, grey bird soaring in the haze was another Shoebill – lending some truth to the fact that these beasts can actually fly! The local guide was great and with some patience all the group was able to get great looks at the diminutive, swamp-dwelling Lesser Jacana. Long-toed Lapwings, Gray-headed Gull, Purple Heron and White-throated Bee Eaters were noted as well as three migrating Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters (the only ones of the trip).

After a packed lunch back at the launch, we headed back, stopping at a couple of spots to add Tambourine Dove, Helmeted Guineafowl, Gray-chinned Prinia, skulking Grey-backed Camaroptera (aka "camera operator"), Collared and Olive-bellied Sunbird and a Gray-crowned Negrofinch (at its nest). We couldn't find the locally scarce Weyn's Weaver here, but added Lesser Masked, Village, Viellot's Black and Black-headed to our burgeoning weaver list!

After a long day we returned to Entebbe and stayed at the rustic and charming Boma Guest House, adding a dashing White-browed Robin-chat visiting the feeder.

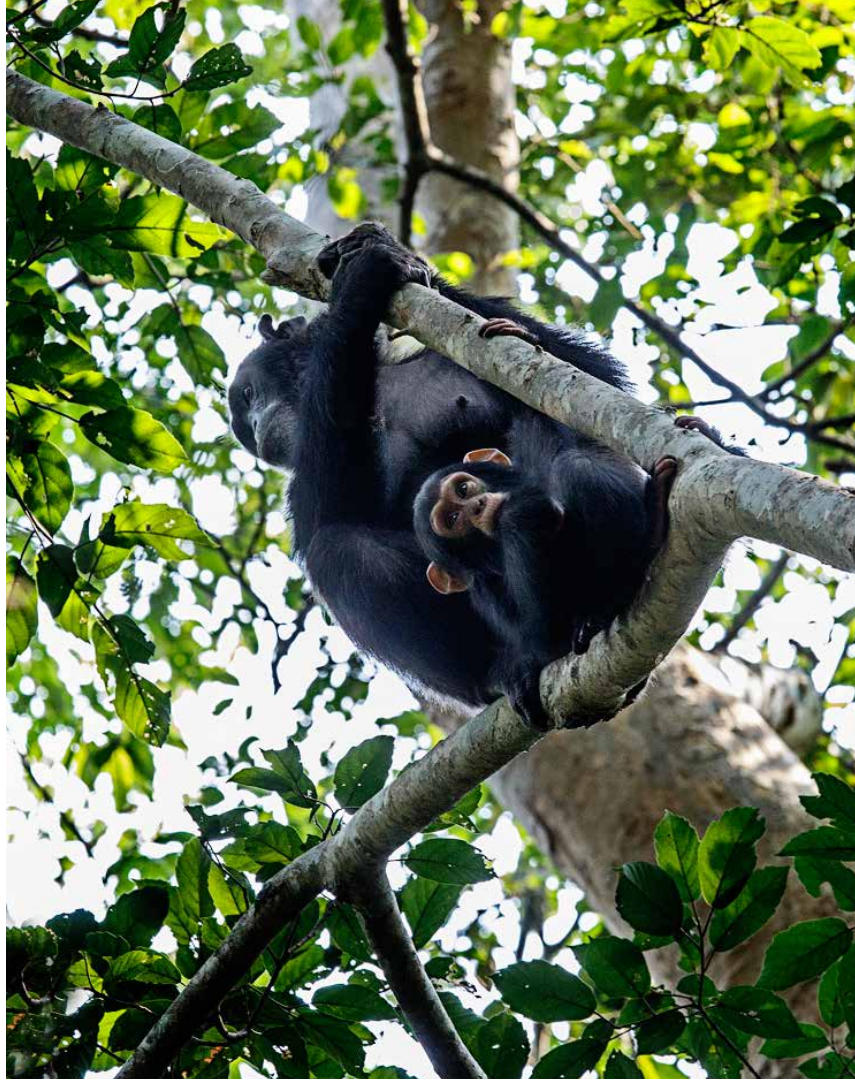


*African Jacana*

## 1st August – Kampala-Kibale

An early morning start was necessitated by the long drive to Kibale. Brian took a short-cut to avoid the congested traffic around Entebbe and we stopped briefly at some areas to pick up our only Pipiac of the trip. Aside from a few bathroom breaks, most of the birding was done from the bus, hip-shotting species as we traversed the dusty roads. Brian's careful driving and incredible local knowledge really helped fill in the details about Ugandan people and their life and culture and really helped round-out the days for our group. We traversed through small villages of Katende, before joining the main road and heading west to our destination of the town of Fort Portal. A lunch stop here took longer than expected due to slow service. Birds to be seen while included African Palm, White-rumped and Little Swifts and our first Red-rumped Swallows.

Finally, as the day was growing short, we were on our way back east to an area of forest near Sebitoli. Birding the road here in the cool afternoon was a welcome break from the long journey. Birds came fast; Grey-throated Barbet, Sooty Flycatcher, Ugandan Wood Warbler, White-browed Crombec and our first greenbuls: Yellow-whiskered, Slender-billed, Honeyguide and Joyful. A brief, untickable view of a Great Sparrowhawk disappearing into the forest was disappointing but other birds such as Yellow-crested Woodpecker, Stuhlmann's Starling and Speckled Barbet were good additions to the list. Robert pointed out a good bird flying into a roadside tree – a Yellow-mantled Weaver. Brief looks ensued before that bird vanished. Monkeys were evident along the road with small parties of Blue, Red Colubus and Red-tailed giving great looks.



Light was fading and we made the last leg of the journey to Kibale Forest and the Primate Lodge which would be our home for the next two nights. The finale to the evening was a fabulous Verreaux's Eagle Owl that glided past in front of the vehicle and showed briefly to our group. Tired and weary all were thoroughly enchanted by the quality of the lodge and again, fabulous food and service- hot towels and juice given to us on arrival being a nice touch.

## 2nd August – Kibale Forest

The plan was simple. Leave at dark and track down through the forest to an area the local guide had staked out for Green-breasted Pitta – one of the main target birds of the trip. Accompanied by an armed guide, our local guide Gerard led us to an area of forest. The pitta displays at 6:30-7:00am and then can be hard to find – unless it is found feeding nearby. Standing quietly in the dark jungle, Gerard heard it display once. We waited, and waited, and searched and searched..then nothing. The distant howl of a chimpanzee group was the most notable sound in the jungle and few birds were evident, most notable being an African Goshawk which gave several brief views and several Red-chested Cuckoos calling high in the canopy but never really showing themselves.

Walking back to the main track, we stumbled on to a small group that had located two Chimpanzees- and great looks were had at two grown chimps – one sleeping and then both becoming a bit more active. At this time of year, the larger groups splinter into small groups so some can be harder to track and find. As we watched, the news spread and within an hour over 40 people gathered to watch and take pictures – not quite the wild jungle experience I had in mind and more akin to the Bronx Zoo.

We retired back to the lodge to rest, adding Speckled Tinkerbird and Grey-capped Camaroptera before embarking on the afternoon Chimpanzee trek (with another try for the pitta in another spot). We walked for some time, seeing few birds and even fewer pittas. The highlight came some time later when the trackers located a small family of Chimpanzees and we were afforded intimate views of these animals for a while. With an option to return to the lodge and rest, several members of the group took some downtime, returning to the lodge. Andy, Steve, Robert and I soldiered on, and as darkness approached, we had spent nearly ten hours searching in vain for the Green-breasted Pitta and had to admit defeat!

Today was a long drive to Bwindi, with a few birding stops thrown in to stop people going insane on the bus! We birded the road out of Kibale, paying homage to the roadside antics of olive baboons. It started to drizzle so we took shelter under some trees and birded the road. It was rather quiet but Robert picked out a Red-headed Malimbe atop a tall tree with brief flybys of Western Orioles.

As we piled back into the vehicles we set off along the wide road. Glancing up, I glimpsed a dark bird silhouetted against the leaden sky. Even in that brief view, I knew it was one of my most-wanted birds on the trip, "BLACK BEE-EATER-STOP THE TRUCK!!!!" We piled out of the trucks and saw nothing more of it for the next few minutes. A usually stunning Violet-backed Starling looked very unimpressive against the skyline while Narrow-tailed Starlings caused false alarms before Steve located the two Black Bee-Eaters perched in nearby trees. Great scope views were had of this scarce bird – it would be the only sighting of the trip!

We carried on through Kasani, finally stopping at the river crossing at Katunguru. White-rumped and Little Swifts hawked overhead with some Lesser-striped Swallows mixed in. Out on the far side of the river, we saw distant African Elephants and our first Hippopotamuses – a loafing group of six. A closer individual surfaced while Gull-billed Terns patrolled the near shore as we tried to get views in the vegetation of Stout Cisticola, African Moustached and Great Swamp Warblers.

After a nice break we continued on further south, adding new raptors such as Peregrine and Common Kestrel at a gas-up stop. At this point, traversing the many small villages, cities and communities, we all marveled at the happy disposition of the people, realizing that the poverty and lives of the Ugandan people, from our privileged perspective, is more difficult. We all were reminded of how fortunate we are to have some of the things we take for granted in normal everyday life, and I don't mean Dunkin' Donuts and Pizza – I mean electricity and running water! Alison kept us alive on Wine Gums during the trip, and at the rate Brian was eating them, I think he realized the Western world still has something useful to offer Uganda!

The landscape became more open and arid and we got our first taste of rolling grassland and Acacia trees. We stopped at the spot that marks the equator and took the obligatory tourist pix. With this change in habitat, new species were added that included Bateleur, Black-lored babbler, White-browed and Black Coucal. We headed south on the edge of Queen Elizabeth National Park, en route to Ishasha. This area is home to the so-named Tree Climbing lions and while we didn't see any, some of the group managed a few more distant elephants. Cape Buffalo were seen out in the grassland, but then we had great looks at three of these beasts wallowing in roadside mud.

A roadside rest stop ensued to eat lunch. With no bathroom, Brian reminded Irving that it would be *Az och un vai!* going "behind a bush" in Africa – it often required a bit of extra forethought and might have unintended consequences! Thankfully, nobody got eaten, lunch was great and we added Go-Away Bird, Cardinal Woodpecker, Pin-tailed Whydah, Northern Black Flycatcher, Blue-chested Bee-eater and our only White-headed Vulture of the trip as it sailed overhead. An attempt at one of the creek crossings for Narina Trogon was unsuccessful, so we pressed on.

By late afternoon we left the heat of the lowlands and started our climb up into the mountains, heading towards Ruhija, which was to be our base for the next three nights.

The weather became overcast, and light was fading as Robert stopped at a bridge to look for a couple of good birds, mainly Cassin's Grey



*Getting to grips with Black Bee-eater at Kibale*



*There's a Cape Buffalo under there~*

Flycatcher. As we stopped our van, perched on low shrubs across from the river was a dull and bedraggled Cassin's Grey Flycatcher. It quickly disappeared and flew back towards the river, unseen by the rest. Chapin's Flycatchers performed well in the tall trees bordering the river. The initial one proved difficult to get on for some of the group. Not to be thwarted, Robert in his typical and trademarked excited demeanor to get everyone on a new bird, sounded as though he was going to bludgeon us all with his scope if we didn't see it. "See my light? To the left... It's right there, right out in the open. There!!..there..there..see it..right above my light!". We all finally managed to get tickable views. We gave Robert a *Xanax* or two to calm him down and bundled him into the van. An African Black Duck was seen briefly on a roadside pool as well as our only Cinnamon breasted Bunting. It had been a long day and we were glad to reach Gorilla Mist Camp, excited about the prospect of Gorilla trekking – undoubtedly one of the highlights of the trip for everybody. The camp was nestled on top of a hill looking down over the misty hills of Bwindi forest. After a welcome beer and some great food, we turned in for the night. A hot-water bottle placed in our beds was a nice surprise in the cool mountain evening!

#### 4th August – Ruhija, Bwindi

Today was the much-anticipated Gorilla day. Due to limitations of disturbance, groups visit one of the four family groups in this part of Ruhija once a day only with a maximum of eight people. Since there were nine in our group, I joined a separate party to enable the rest of the group to trek together to visit one of the closer family groups. Andy kindly filled in the following narrative from his group:

*"Everyone's energy level at breakfast was obviously amped up today. No doubt it was because today we were to go gorilla trekking, a highlight for most of us on the trip. Upon arrival at the park, the eight of us intently listened to the park ranger explain how we would hike down and up to the gorilla family group. Experienced trackers had been out for a few hours already locating the gorillas. The hiking was strenuous to say the least. There was nothing graceful about the way we followed the rangers who cleared a trail for us with machetes. At times it was necessary to slide down the steep mountainside on our butts to keep from somersaulting to the bottom. Drenched in sweat and our chests screaming for air we slowly made our way to the prize. I have to give props to the entire group; with encouragement from each other we all persevered through the grueling trek and reached the gorillas!"*

*Our guides pointed ahead and told us the gorillas were right there in front of us feeding. As they slowly cut back the surrounding growth our beautiful ancestors were revealed. With camera shutters clicking away we all tried to capture the beauty of these majestic animals. We were allowed to spend an hour with the gorillas, following them as they fed and relaxed. The male silverback certainly was an intimidating presence, his massive form hulking in the undergrowth as he kept a close eye on his family, occasionally grunting to them.*

*Having the opportunity to literally come face to face with such majestic creatures is an experience none of us will ever forget. The memories we took away from that mountainside quickly diminished the physical and emotional challenges we endured. I was particularly affected by the gorillas' mannerisms and facial expressions which so closely resembled those of humans. I thought of family and friends and wished I could share this amazing experience with them all. Unforgettable!"*

My experience was similar in the same amazing way!. The hike in was strenuous but definitely added to the experience.

With the option of resting for the afternoon taken by many, a small group of us continued to bird seeing Chestnut throated Apalis, Northern Puffback and Chinspot Batis in the parking lot. Taking one of the tracks that ran alongside the valley, we hit birds quickly, driving the list up with Mountain Buzzard, Black Saw Wing, Scarce Swift, Cabanis's and Yellow-streaked Bulbul. One corner of the road was active and we had good views of skulkers such as Red-throated Alethe, Mountain Illodopsis and Rwenzori Hill Babbler. Apalis's came quick

*Mountains of Ruhija from our cabin at the Gorilla Mist Camp*



*Mountain habitat en route to Ruhija*



**WELCOME FOR THE  
ULTIMATE GORILLA  
EXPERIENCE**

**AT RUHIJA WITH BITUKURA  
AND ORUZOGO GORILLA GROUPS  
PLEASE COME AGAIN**





too with Chestnut-throated, Mountain Masked and Collared all giving themselves up with patience, as did the aptly named Strange Weaver, creeping around the trunks in atypical weaver fashion! Collared and the appropriately named Regal Sunbirds dazzled words out of all three of us that I can't write here! Stunning birds! A brief Black-crowned Tchagra provided frustratingly poor views but not so a nice saffron Montane Oriole that performed at eye level.

Thoroughly satiated with this birdy stretch, we headed back to the lodge for another great dinner and a few celebratory beers.

The following day's itinerary consisted of a long, all day walk down into the valley to Mbwindi Swamp.

People were given the opportunity to either relax, visit the local Pygmy community and leisurely bird with Brian, while others had the option of taking the trek. Most opted for the former, but the die hards, Andy, Steve and myself clearly had plans for the latter – it was the only chance to see Grauer's Broadbill – a tiny, rare bird restricted to this valley in Uganda – a real target bird!

### 5th August – Mbwindi Swamp, Bwindi

Andy, Steve and I set off with Robert, our guide and we picked up Amos, one of the local guides in the area. Due to the potential danger from Elephants, we were accompanied by an armed guide for the duration of the trip. The entrance to the track yielded killer looks at Banded Prinia and got the adrenalin going.

The weather, as usual was cool, and clear and perfect for birding. The slowly undulating path dropped steeply in some areas and we soon came across fresh Gorilla poop from the night before. Cinnamon-breasted Bee-eaters and Mackinnon's Shrike showed well. The Broadbills had fledged and were no longer tied to the nesting area and so finding them now was very problematical. Finding a 4.5" green bird in a vast jungle of 40-60 ft trees seemed a daunting and hopeless prospect.

Their high-pitched, "sii-sii-sii" calls were likely to be the best way of detecting it. Pushing on, excited by the activity, we added the impressive Crowned Eagle, Augur Buzzard, stunning African Emerald and Klass's Cuckoos, Waller's Starlings, Mountain Yellow Warbler and a crackling Bar-tailed Trogon flitting through the trees over the path. A dark area of scrub where we managed brief views of a super-skulky Archer's Robin-chat but had better looks at White-starred Robin. Listening and watching for any Broadbill-like birds, we came across a small party of weird-looking White-headed Wood Hoopoe's feeding overhead.

It was while watching these that I was aware of a call and I remarked, "Why does every bird I am hearing right now sound like a Green Broadbill?"

The answer was quickly made apparent when Robert and Amos remarked it WAS the Broadbill calling right above us. Almost instantly it was spotted flitting around under the canopy of small group of trees allowing amazing, prolonged views of what turned out to be not one, but two broadbills. Amazing luck! The birds allowed for some bad photos, but beggars can't be choosers. We soaked up the birds, energized before finally arriving at a weird ecosystem that was Mbwindi marsh. A huge expanse of reed-filled water – home to the endemic Albertine Rift species known as Grauer's Rush Warbler. This was another target bird. Playing its call did little to instill enthusiasm as no rush warblers of any kind responded. A dapper Black-headed Waxbill was a stunner and new for the list but it was getting hot and quiet and optimism of seeing the warbler was waning.



*There be Gorillas 'n stuff in dem thar woods!*



*A stunning Crowned Eagle circling overhead*



*One of two diminutive megas -African Green Broadbill!*

We headed back up the track, skirting the marsh and as we got to an open area, Robert or Amos spotted a Grauer's Rush Warbler sitting out in the open vegetation and giving amazing views. BOOM! On the list.

We took a welcome break for lunch. Heading back, we added Gray and Black Cuckoo Shrikes, Yellow-eyed Black, White-eyed Slaty and White-bellied Crested Flycatchers and Rufus bellied Paradise Flycatchers, the endemic Blue-headed Sunbird, Brown-capped Weaver and what was probably one of the most stunning looking birds of the trip – Doherty's Bush Shrike – wow!!

We returned finally to the road, tired but blown away by the quality of birding – definitely one of the best day's birding of the trip!



*Mbwindi Swamp - a swamp in the middle of a jungle valley!*

We planned a late dinner in order to look for a couple of difficult to see birds active at dusk. The group regaled us of the visit to the pygmy community (who, as it turns out were not THAT small).

We took both vans and driving down the dusty path at sunset, Brian told us he always sees Handsome Francolin on this road. Well, those statements are just a death knell for good fortune in my opinion. As it happens, ten minutes later a Handsome Francolin, as if on cue, wandered along the road in a manner similar to a patron having been evicted from a bar! One down, one to go.

Next up –Rwenzori Nightjar. We stopped and played the call at a couple of spots but saw and heard nothing. The sun had been completely enveloped by the clouds and the road became illuminated only by the land rovers' beams. Suddenly out of nowhere, a Rwenzori Nightjar exploded from the left banking and added itself to the list. It crossed squarely in front of us, its cryptic brown plumage visible briefly as it passed through the land rover beams. We pulled over but it was not seen again, a bittersweet moment since only Brian and myself managed any kind of look.

Beers and a comfortable bed welcomed us and sleep came quickly that night.



*Black and White Colubus Monkey with baby*



*Top up, not down--now we are really in Safari mode*



*Bateleur – definitely a cool raptor!*

## 6th August – Ruhija, Bwindi to Mburu Lake

Today was a long drive day, heading down from the mountains to the lowlands of Lake Mburu, lying halfway to Entebbe. Handsome Francolin and Golden-breasted Bunting were seen again on the drive down, but we needed to press on.

We learned that the company that had arranged our boat tour later that day had messed up our booking and we had the option of taking an earlier, or later boat tour. We opted for the earlier one, but given the distance we needed to cover, time was not on our side.

We pressed on, adding Lilac-breasted Roller finally and at a rest stop, our first White-necked Raven's sitting quietly in a tree behind the restroom.

We pulled back out onto the road, and a few miles along, out of nowhere, disaster struck. It was not anything I saw coming and I felt a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach. I think Brian was more distraught than myself. We panicked and didn't know quite what to do with this disastrous news. We sat there quietly, not knowing what to say to one another. It suddenly became apparent that Alison had run out of Wine Gums! We (and I mean Brian) had been eating them like they were going out of fashion! But we were adults, and we would survive. Lisa and Steve's consolation Cajun mix, were nice, but they could not fill the void. I consoled Brian and told him he should ask Irving and Alison to mail him some if withdrawal kicked in. I felt sure he would bounce back! He's a trooper!

It was nice to finally reach Lake Mburu, albeit with a bit of anxiety knowing we had a boat to catch – and that was our only chance of two major target birds – White-backed Night heron and African Finfoot. After stopping to tick off some of our first big game such as Zebra, Waterbuck, Impala and Bushbuck, we sped to the dock, noting many more Bateleurs, and Ruppell's Griffon Vultures overhead.



*Looking for 'big' game at Mburu*



*Bushbuck*





There was a big party of school kids waiting for their trip, and as ever, they were incredibly friendly, happy and inquisitive of us “white western folk”. Ushered onto the boat that was waiting for us, we had close views of a group of wallowing Hippos. They watched us intently with what seemed like a high level of suspicion!

On the boat, communication became difficult with everyone shouting out “*What’s that, what’s this?*”

After the fortieth attempt to get Irving on a Black Crane, there was a Eureka moment when he said “I can see it!”. Pressure off, we continued on, scanning the banks, adding Water Thicknee, African Fish Eagle and then, Lisa suddenly yelled, “*Finfoot, there!*”. “*Where’s there?*”, people shouted. “*Right there, under the dark boughs*”. “*But, there’s lots of dark boughs!*”



*Could African Finfoot be any easier?!*

Finally the boat was maneuvered into a good spot, and out swam a Masked Finfoot..in full view allowing for great views! Even Irving saw this without any problem! Three more finfoots were seen, and then a highlight was an almost-too-easy pair of White-backed Night Heron’s on a nest, suspended a few feet from the water! Great looks at Hippos were had, one even “bumping” the boat.

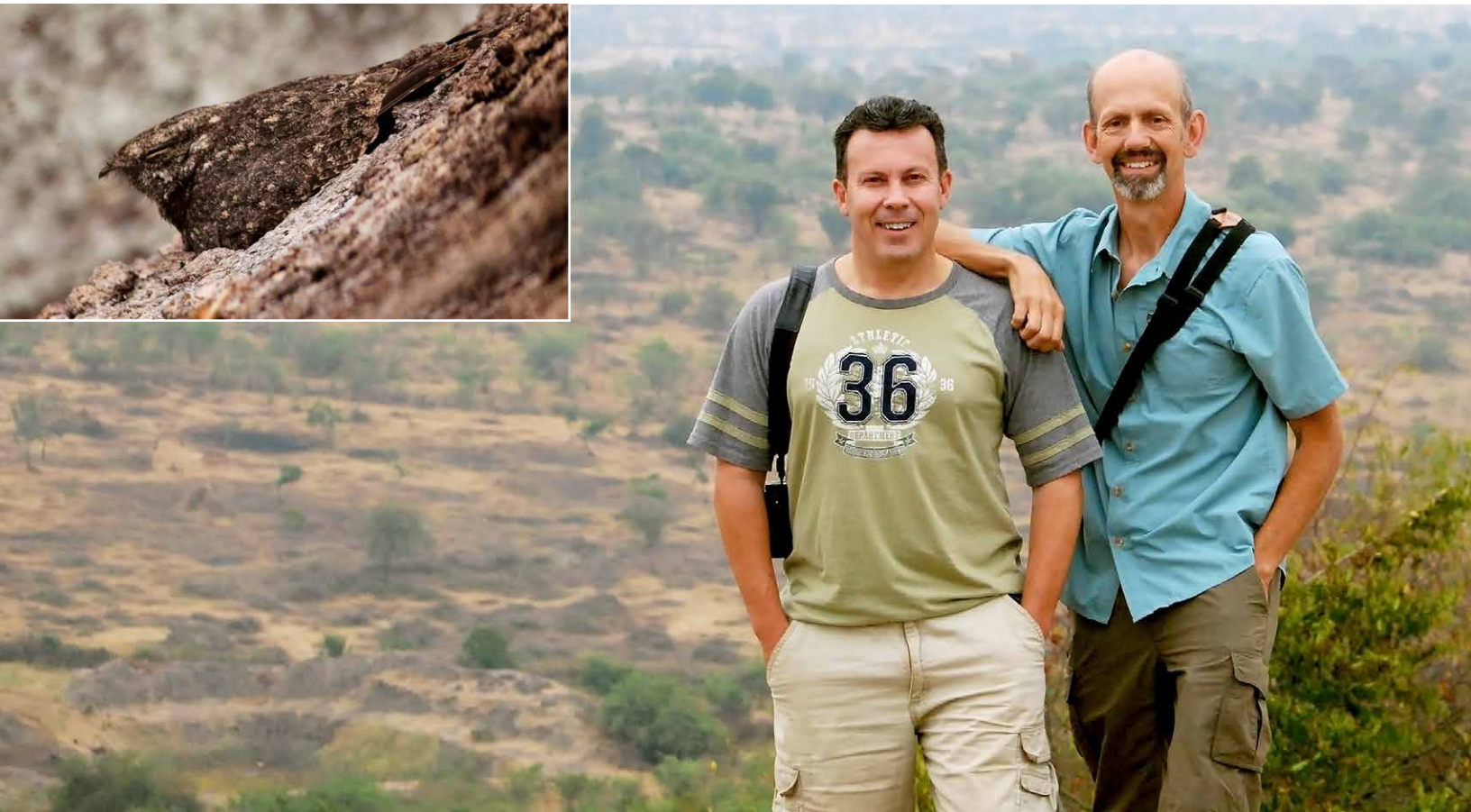
A late evening “game drive” provided great looks at Zebra, Impala and our only Tawny Eagle of the trip. As dusk approached, a huge Verreaux’s Eagle Owl appeared by the roadside, perched atop an acacia tree and allowed great looks for those that had missed the earlier one. As we headed up the road, to our lodgings at Rawkobo Rock, a Freckled Nightjar, flitted through our headlights.

It had been a long day, but it was evident our lodging was spectacular and an enjoyable dinner and wine did well to wipe out the tiredness. Open dining area perched on the edge of a rock plateau overlooking the surrounding landscape. The morning vista would be superb! We retired to our cabin, serenaded (frustratingly) by a calling Freckled Nightjar next to Andy and my cabin.

## **7th August –Mburu Lake**

Up early and kicked off the day with a superb Freckled Nightjar in view in scrub below our cabin! Found by the guides kicking around, it enabled everyone to get great looks...maybe we should have tried looking there in the morning!

*Freckled Nightjar - I like my nightjars like I like my drinks - on the rocks! Andy and I overlooking Mburu from our lodging!*





Today was the final day and a long drive back to Entebbe for our late evening flight back to the USA. Some of the group had an extra day, so we loaded the vans with the “early birds”, so that the other people could bird a bit more leisurely. Birding was great and new species were notched up by our crew in the form of Lesser Honeyguide, Emerald spotted Wood Dove, White-winged Tit, Singing Lark, Tabora Cisticola, White-browed and Brown-backed Scrub Robin and Crested Francolins. The area of the park was drier and there were less animals than the previous night, but the highlight was seeing the statuesque Elands, a secretive impala-type animal. Several Dwarf Mongoose were seen, and while stopped, we had good looks at a Brubru – a small shrike-like species and the only one of the trip.

It was time to leave. After crossing the Equator once more, we paused to buy some *tchotchkes* and Brian to have his Rolex – not the really expensive watch that nobody has in Uganda – but a name given to eggs and ham rolled up in a flour tortilla!

We stopped briefly enroute to Entebbe at a small swamp Brian knew of. Good looks at Rufous-bellied Heron, our second Spur-winged Goose and lots of Gray-crowned Cranes. New birds here included Fan-tailed Widowbird and Yellow Bishop.

I still needed Grey Kestrel – the other van had seen it on our travels, but it still eluded some of us and it was a bird I wanted to see. The outskirts of the Entebbe area was the best place to see it. A couple of last chance stops to check for Papyrus Gonolek proved frustrating, but did yield great looks at Otter. A mile down the road, a kestrel-like silhouette glimpsed by me, prompted typical shouts of “STOP THE TRUCK!!” Jumping out I was able to glimpse a nice battleship-grey bloom to the the bird’s upperparts – Grey Kestrel! Boom! Better late than never. As we took a shortcut to avoid traffic, at a swampy spot, a dark bird crossed the road. In flight it was a gonolek – but in that brief view, I could have sworn it had a pale crown.....

Quickly we were back to Entebbe Airport with time to check-in and eat some lunch. As we pushed our luggage up the ramp, we were waved off by eye-level aerobatics of Little Swifts. We said our goodbyes to Brian and other members of the group, and reflected on what a spectacular and enjoyable trip it had been. With over 320 species of bird and a host of mammals it had been a great group of people and an overwhelming success on all fronts!



Local kids gathering water to take up to their village



*The crew doing what they do best!*



*Birding the lush jungle at Rubija*



*A big thank you to all our participants for making this a great trip and to our guide from Sunrise Birding and local guides. Leaders (l to r): Brian, Julian Hough, Robert and Sam. © Andy B.*