

Uganda 14.2.-6.3.2014

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This report provides details on the mammals seen during a botanical expedition to the forest reserves of southwestern Uganda. Most of our time was spent noisily sampling plants in the forest, which was not conducive to observing mammals. Thus mammal watching was restricted to a few half days specifically dedicated to this (incl. guided chimpanzee and gorilla tracking), early morning or late afternoons around some lodges, and chance observations during field work. Also, we only had two nocturnal activities (a guided night walk in KNP and a guided night drive in LMNP). Likewise, no small mammals or bats were trapped. That we nevertheless saw 49 identifiable mammal species is a testament to the diversity and abundance of mammals in Uganda, although I was shocked by the degree of habitat destruction outside of the reserves.

Our ground arrangements were organized by Tinkerbird Tours (www.tinkerbirdtours.com), whose owner and head guide Emmy Gongo is an amazing birding guide and also very knowledgeable with mammals and great at finding them. Highly recommended!

For taxonomy of ungulates and primates, I follow the Handbook of the Mammals of the World.

Itinerary

13.2.: Early morning arrival in Entebbe airport; rest of day devoted to burocratical meetings in Kampala.

14.2.: Morning drive from Entebbe to Mabamba Swamp, boat ride in the papyrus swamps looking for Shoebill (not seen), then on to Kibale National Park (KNP).

15.-16.2.: Two full days of field work in KNP, with one morning devoted to chimpanzee tracking (150 US \$ p.p.).

17.2.: Morning field work in northern part of KNP along paved road to Fort Portal; then drive on to Fort Portal.

18.2.: Full day along Kirumia track in Semliki National Park (SNP).

19.2.: Morning working samples in Fort Portal, afternoon drive to Queen Elisabeth National Park (QENP).

20.2.: Full day in QENP, the morning spent on game drive in the northern sector of the park, the afternoon with boat tour on Kazinga Channel.

21.2.: Full day in Maramagambo Forest in eastern QENP. Night in very nice Kingfisher Lodge on the rift valley overlooking QENP.

22.2. Most of day driving to Buhoma in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP).

23.-24.2.: Two full days of field work in the Buhoma sector of BINP.

25.2.: Drive to the Ruhiza sector of BINP via “The Neck” with some field work on the way.

26.22.-28.2.: Three days of field work in the Ruhiza sector of BINP, including one morning devoted to gorilla tracking (600 US \$ p.p.).

1.3.: Drive to Kisoro town.

2.-3.3.: Two full days of field work on the slopes of Mt. Sabinyo in Mgahinga National Park (MNP).

4.3.: Drive to Lake Mburo National Park (LMNP); night drive.

5.3.: Early morning game drive in LMNP, then on to Entebbe.

6.3.: One hour in the morning in Entebbe Botanical Garden; then on to airport.

Some notes in the reserves

Kibale National Park (KNP): Tall moist forest at 1200-1500 m. We stayed at Chimpanzee Forest Lodge (recommended, though not located in the forest) about 1 km west of the park. There is also expensive accommodation at Kanyanchu Tourist Center in the park.

Mammals: The best site in Uganda for primates, with 13 species, including a very successful chimpanzee tracking programme. Specialities include Ashy Red Colobus and Uganda Crested Mangabey. Other mammals are much harder to find in the dense forest and would require arranging guided walks on quiet roads or trails. Known from the park are, e.g., Eastern Blue and Johnston’s Duikers, and Lord Derby’s Anomalure (at night). Nearby Bigodi Swamp (communally run guided walks are available) has Lake Victoria Sitatunga, but this rarely seen.

Semliki National Park (SNP): The only lowland congoian forest in Uganda. Considering the amazing list of species found in the park (even Okapi used to occur), I was expecting a tall, lush tropical rainforest along the lines of Amazonia, and was surprised to find a fairly dry and low, if evergreen vegetation. Main access to find animals is along the 14 km long Kirumia trail that runs all the way to Semliki River along the border to the Democratic Republic of Congo, first through secondary forest and then through stands of ironwood-dominated primary forest. We stayed in the upscale and sterile Mountains of the Moon Hotel in Fort Portal and drove one hour on a newly paved road to the park before dawn. There are, however, two basic camp grounds in the park (one along the main road, another at km 6 of the Kirumia trail), and for those willing to rough it, staying at the latter would provide the chance to access the best forest at dawn and dusk as well as (if allowed) to do a night walk and small mammal or bat trapping.

Mammals: About 10 primate species, including Johnston’s Mangabey, De Brazza’s Monkey, Dent’s Monkey, and Semliki Red Colobus. Other interesting mammals include Water Chevrotain, Lake Victoria? Sitatunga (far side of marshes at male hot springs), Dwarf Antelope, White-bellied Duiker, Beechcroft’s Anomalure, and Zenker’s Flying Mouse.

Queen Elisabeth National Park (QENP): One of the premier national parks of Uganda, mainly with savannah and low forests. We stayed in rustic and very nice Bush Camp along Kazinga Channel. This is located on private property and it might be possible to arrange some trapping here.

Mammals: With 95 mammal species, this has the highest list of any Ugandan reserve, but most of the species are either “standard” African fare or hard to find. Specialities are Giant Hog, Uganda Topi (southern Ishasha sector) and the tree-climbing lions (also Ishasha). There is chimpanzee tracking at Chambura Gorge.

Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP): The largest remnant of humid forest in southwest Uganda at 1300-2500 m. We stayed first at fairly basic but very nice Buhoma Community Rest Camp next to the park entrance at Buhoma (1500 m) and then at equally basic but also very nice and friendly Broadbill Forest Camp right next to the park border at Ruhiza (2400 m).

Mammals: Most famous for its population of about 400-500 “mountain” gorillas, this park also has many other primates, as well as some squirrels and duikers. African Golden Cat reportedly is regularly seen late at night at Broadbill Forest Camp and also occasionally on the roads at night.

Mgahinga National Park (MNP): This is the Ugandan sector of the tri-national Virunga park. We stayed at the Tourist Hotel 2008 (not recommended) because the much better Traveller’s Rest Hotel was booked out. Staying in Kisoro meant that to reach the park we had to endure a bone-jarring 1-hour drive each way to the park gate. There is also accommodation next to the park entrance, either in fairly basic and cheap community-run bandas or in a very expensive lodge.

Mammals: Renowned for its “mountain” gorillas, this park also has a good population of Virunga Golden Monkeys. Virunga Buffalo are common and regularly seen. Otherwise, only several squirrel species are likely.

Lake Mburo National Park (LMNP): A tract of typical East African acacia savannah. We stayed at superb the Ryokoko Rock Lodge near the park entrance, located on a granite outcrop with great views and two water holes attracting birds and common mammals (baboons, bushbuck, zebras, etc.).

Mammals: A wide range of ungulates, including the only Ugandan populations of Plains Zebra and Impala, as well as Golden Klipspringer, Eland, Uganda Topi, Sudan Oribi, and Bohor Reedbuck. Organized night drives might yield Greater and Spectacled Galagos, Zorilla, Servaline Genet, Leopard or the single lion (a male) left in the park (due to poisoning by cattle ranchers).

Not visited by us, but certainly worth a visit are Budongo Forest (Chimpanzee; Chequered Elephant Shrew along the “Royal Mile”, a former logging track through great forest) and Murchinson Falls NP (Patas Monkey, Uganda Hare, Jackson’s Hartebeest, Sudan Oribi, Bohor Reedbuck, Rothschild’s Giraffe, etc.).

Notes on mammal watching

Most reserves in Uganda are tightly managed by the Ugandan Wildlife Authority, who closely monitor tourist activities. Thus, activities such as night walks, small mammal or bat trapping might be difficult to impossible to arrange in the parks (but it never hurts to ask). On the other hand, such activities should be possible on the private ground of lodges located next to or inside the parks, such as Broadbill Forest Camp (BINP) or Bush Camp (QENP).

Species list

Demidoff's Dwarf Galago (*Galagoides demidovii*) Two seen high in the canopy during a guided night walk at Kanyanchu Visitor Center in KNP (90 minutes, 40 US \$ p.p.).
Not seen: Also seen on these walks are Thomas's Dwarf and Spectacled Lesser Galagos (both uncommon) as well as East African Potto (rare). In BINP, Northern Lesser Galago is apparently not rare, e.g., around Broadbill Forest Camp.

Greater Galago (*Otolemur crassicaudatus*) Six seen (2 pairs, two singles) on night drive at LMNP.

Johnston's Mangabey (*Lophocebus johnstoni*) One troop along Kirumia track in SNP.
Not seen: Also present in SNP, but not seen by us on our short visit, are De Brazza's Monkey (rare), Dent's Monkey (uncommon) and Semliki Red Colobus (uncommon).

Uganda Crested Mangabey (*L. ugandae*) Two troops seen in KNP, many more heard. Often follows Red-tailed Monkeys.

Olive Baboon (*Papio anubis*) Common, seen in KNP, SNP, QENP, BINP and LMNP.

Tantalus Monkey (*Chlorocebus tantalus*) One troop in QENP. The ranges of the two *Chlorocebus* species overlap in this park, where they coexist side by side in separate troops.

Vervet Monkey (*C. pygerythrus*) Seen in KNP (one troop), QENP (common), LMNP (common) and Entebbe Botanical Garden (one troop).

L'Hoest's Monkey (*Allochrocebus lhoesti*) One or two troops seen daily in KNP and BINP.

Red-tailed Monkey (*Cercopithecus ascanius*) Common in KNP, SNP and Maragamambo Forest in QENP.

Blue Monkey (*C. mitis*) Two troops seen in the lower parts of Maragamambo Forest in QENP along the road linking the northern and southern sectors of the park.

Silver Monkey (*C. doggetti*) One or two troops seen daily in the Ruhiza sector of BINP.

Virungas Golden Monkey (*C. kandtii*) One briefly glimpsed in MNP on the lower slopes of Mt. Sabinyo. There are habituated troops in the park on the slopes of Mt. Mgahinga (for tourism, where there are also habituated gorillas) and along the border track (for research).

Guereza (*Colobus guereza*) Common in KNP (around research station), SNP (along main road) and in Entebbe Botanical Garden.

Ashy Red Colobus (*Piliocolobus tephrosceles*) Seen twice in KNP, once next to the visitor center at Kanyanchu, and then close to river along a track going south from the bridge in the northernmost part of the park along the metalled road to Fort Portal. Both troops were extremely confiding. KNP is the stronghold of this species but it is apparently declining because its boldness makes it the favourite prey of chimpanzees.

Chimpanzee (*Pan troglodytes*) A wonderful hour spent with a habituated group feeding in a fig tree at KNP. Also seen twice along the main road through KNP. Heard at BINP.

Eastern Gorilla (*Gorilla beringei*) The highlight of the trip was an hour spent with a group of 13 members at Ruhiza in BINP.

Egyptian Fruit Bat (*Rousettus aegyptiacus*) One seen on the night walk at KNP.

Yellow-winged Bat (*Lavia frons*) One at LMNP. The only of the many bats seen that I was able to identify.

Scrub Hare (*Lepus saxatilis*) Common on the night drive at LMNP.

Striped Ground Squirrel (*Euxerus erythropus*) One next to the fishing village at Mabamba Swamp on Lake Victoria.

Fire-footed Rope Squirrel (*Funisciurus pyrropus*) One in SNP.

Carruther's Mountain Squirrel (*F. carrutheri*) Two in the Ruhiza area of BINP. One was apparently trying to dig into the breeding burrows of sawwing swallows in a road bank, and was being mobbed by the swallows.

Alexander's Squirrel (*Paraxerus alexandri*) One sunning itself outside of a tree hole in SNP.

Boehm's Squirrel (*P. boehmi*) Several at Buhoma in BINP.

Ruwenzori Sun Squirrel (*Heliosciurus ruwenzori*) One in MNP.

Red-legged Sun Squirrel (*H. rufobrachium*) One in SNP.

Tropical Vlei Rat? (*Otomys tropicalis?*) A large, very dark rodent seen in QENP might have been this species. Numerous other rodents were seen but could not be identified.

Spot-necked Otter (*Lutra maculicollis*) One seen very well in the stream below the bridge on the main road through KNP.

Ichneumon (*Herpestes ichneumon*) One seen crossing a road in agricultural areas near Entebbe.

Slender Mongoose (*H. sanguinea*) One at Ryokoko Rock Lodge at LMNP.

Dwarf Mongoose (*Helogale parvula*) One troop seen several times close to Ryokoko Rock Lodge at LMNP, another troop seen in the park itself.

White-tailed Mongoose (*Ichneumia albicauda*) Three on the night drive in LMNP.

(Spotted Hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*)) Heard distantly in LMNP.

Lion (*Panthera leo*) One pride and a single female seen in QENP.

African Savanna Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) Common in QENP.

Not seen: African Forest Elephant: According to Emmy and park rangers, the elephants inhabiting the forests in SNP, BINP and MNP are smaller, with rounder ears and straighter trunks than the elephants seen in savannas. In SNP, Emmy has seen both forms in separate

groups. Whether these forest-inhabiting elephants are true Forest Elephants appears to be uncertain. We heard them in the Ruhiza sector of BINP and MNP, but the rangers were very careful and lead us away from them.

Plains Zebra (*Equus quagga*) Common in LMNP.

Common Warthog (*Phacochoerus africanus*) Common in QENP and LMNP.

Forest Hog (*Hylochoerus meinertzhageni*) A group of 8 seen along Kazinga Channel from Bush Camp in QENP. Apparently declining in the park due to poaching.

(Bushpig (*Potamochoerus larvatus*)) Presumably this species was heard at night making its way through Broadbill Forest Camp, but I did not manage to see them.

Common Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*) Common in QENP and LMNP.

Cape Buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*) Common in LMNP.

Lake Chad Buffalo (*S. brachyceros*) Common in QENP.

Not seen: The Virunga Buffalo is common in MNP (many tracks and fresh dung), but we did not see it in the dense vegetation. Likewise, the Forest Buffalo occurs in SNP, but is hard to see.

Nile Bushbuck (*Tragelaphus bor*) Two shy singles in QENP and four seen distantly in Mubwindi Swamp in BINP.

Cape Bushbuck (*T. sylvaticus*) Common in LMNP.

Not seen: Other ungulates present at LMNP, but not seen by us on our short visit, are Sudan Oribi (not uncommon), Bohor Reedbuck (uncommon) and Golden Klipspringer (not uncommon, best seen on guided walking tours).

Common Eland (*Taurotragus oryx*) One at LMNP.

Common Impala (*Aepyceros melampus*) Common at LMNP.

Uganda Kob (*Kobus thomasi*) Common at QENP and LMNP.

Defassa Waterbuck (*K. defassa*) Common at QENP and LMNP.

Uganda Topi (*Damaliscus ugandae*) A few in QENP (southern sector), common in LMNP.

Bush (Common) Duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia*) Two singles in LMNP.

Eastern Yellow-backed Duiker (*Cephalophus curticeps*) A single glimpsed moving off a trail in the Ruhiza sector of BINP.

Black-fronted Duiker (*C. nigrifrons*) Four singles seen along roads and tracks in the Ruhiza sector of LMNP. Surprisingly confiding, allowing approach to within 5 m. One was seen together with a group of L'Hoest's Monkeys.