

# Birding Uganda

Peter and Carol Abbott

Carol had decided that the enigmatic Shoebill was her next target bird, so that provided a convenient reason to visit Uganda, known as the 'Pearl of Africa'. This country straddles a number of biomes and offers significant species diversity for its size. 'Bird Uganda Safaris' have taken a number of Australians, including club members, around their region.

Everyone was generous with information so we contacted the company and arranged an itinerary. Before long we were in Entebbe meeting Judith and Davis who would very competently guide and drive us over the next 17 days, and who were great company. We left Uganda with many memories and here are just a few:

African Grey Parrots are a popular cage bird so seeing them in the wild at Entebbe Botanic Gardens on our first day was a good start. Situated on the shores of the world's second largest freshwater lake, Lake Victoria, the gardens were a pleasant place to re-familiarise ourselves with African lowland species. We saw our first of many Great Blue Turacos, and Pied Kingfishers were there in their hundreds.

Uganda provided so many geographic points of interest including crossing the equator, boating the Nile then traversing the western branch of the Great Rift Valley known as the Albertine Rift. This includes the Rwenzori Mountains – the fabled 'Mountains of the Moon'. At one stage, in Queen Elizabeth National Park, we looked over a creek into the Congo, a small (hippo laden) swim away.

There were magnificent rainforests and open savannah and we enjoyed birding from boats on some of the region's enormous lakes.

The early days saw us in motorised canoes traversing the papyrus swamps that fringe Lake Victoria. Shoebills were successfully and spectacularly viewed on both days in the swamps. Healthy hippo populations were present and a number of excellent birds were seen including the brilliantly coloured Papyrus Gonolek and White-spotted Flufftail.

Birding on and around the Nile was very worthwhile. We visited Murchison Falls – Africa's most powerful waterfall which holds a population of Rock Pratincole. Flocks of Uganda's national bird, the Grey-crowned Crane, were present on islands in the delta plus another Shoebill. Nile Crocodiles basked appropriately on the banks of the Nile. Murchison Falls National Park also provided excellent savannah birding with Abyssinian Ground Hornbill a useful sighting.

We were mugged while waiting for a ferry. A hidden Olive Baboon leapt from



Shoebill (Above) and Papyrus Gonolek (below) by Carol Abbott



a tree and made off with our lunch. He is apparently a known criminal. A group of schoolchildren received the same fate at the hands/trotters of the warthog gang.

Good birding was had in the forests of the famed 'Royal Mile' at Budongo with its spectacular Chocolate-backed, Blue-breasted and African Dwarf Kingfishers. There were also other nice birds such as Red-tailed Ant Thrush, Rufous-crowned Eremomela, Chestnut-capped Flycatcher and Golden-crowned (also known as Yellow-crested) Woodpecker

Visiting Kibale Forest and adjoining wetlands needed a pre-dawn start. We were amazed that the hotel had laid on a hot breakfast for us at 4am! The target was the much sought after Green-breasted Pitta which was successfully achieved, followed by an interesting morning tracking Chimpanzees through the forest. Black (Great) Sparrowhawk, the sometimes difficult Shining-blue Kingfisher and plenty of the Cuckoos were also nice sightings in that region.



Grey-crowned Crane by Carol Abbott

