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Opportunities for the Development of Birdwatching Tourism in Uganda



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Opportunities for the Development of Birdwatching Tourism in Uganda

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Executive Summary

Birdwatching tourism (also known as avi-tourism) is one of the most popular and fast-growing niche nature-based tourism activities, with an estimated 3.5 million international avi-tourism trips taken globally in 2017. Uganda's share of the avi-tourism market is currently very small, with an estimated 700 tourists coming to Uganda in 2019 for the specific purpose of birdwatching. By contrast, South Africa was already receiving up to 15,000 international avi-tourists in 2010, yet its birdwatching potential is not appreciably different. Anecdotal reports suggest that avi-tourist numbers in Uganda have not grown significantly for ten years.

Based on an average trip length of 12 days and daily expenditure of USD (\$) 260, avi-tourism is worth approximately \$2 million per annum to the Ugandan economy, pre-COVID. Avi-tourists typically have high levels of ecological knowledge, awareness of conservation issues and are relatively wealthy and willing to spend locally. They tend to stay longer in destinations and visit areas away from traditional tourist hotspots. The further development of avi-tourism in Uganda has the potential to deliver much greater benefits, both in direct financial terms to the national economy, tour operators, guides and local communities, and indirectly by adding value to biodiversity and incentivising the protection of natural areas, especially wetlands and forests.

This report describes the global avi-tourism sector and the potential development of the market in Uganda, and sets out specific investments to strengthen the avi-tourism offering to reach a target of 2,000 avi-tourists per annum by 2026. Recommendations are made for a three-year, USD 1.86 million package of infrastructure investment at 11 priority sites in the Albertine Rift region, alongside marketing and capacity-building measures to strengthen the enabling environment for the sector and boost community engagement.

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Acronyms

ABC	African Bird Club
ARE	Albertine Rift endemic
BBD	Big Birding Day
DIT	Directorate of Industrial Training
DRC	The Democratic Republic of the Congo
IBA	Important Bird Area
KAFRED	Kibale Association for Rural and Environmental Development
MTWA	Ministry of Tourism Wildlife and Antiquities
NDP	National Development Plan
NFA	National Forestry Authority
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NP	National Park
NPA	National Planning Authority
QENP	Queen Elizabeth National Park
RSPB	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
UBGC	Uganda Bird Guides' Club
UCOTA	Uganda Community Tourism Association
USAGA	Uganda Safari Guides Association
UTB	Uganda Tourism Board
UWA	Uganda Wildlife Authority

1. Introduction and objectives

Uganda is officially home to 1,057 species of birds (Carswell, et al., 2005), representing more than 11% of all species globally. The list continues to grow as new species are reported, thanks to a well-trained network of local bird guides, and the true number may now exceed 1,080. A combination of East African savannas, moist West African rainforests and high-altitude environments results in a high level of biodiversity (USAID, 2006). Uganda boasts the highest density of bird species in Africa and has 34 Important Bird Areas (IBAs)¹ (NatureUganda, 2015), many of which are located within the Albertine Rift landscape along its western border. The Albertine Rift is home to more than half of Africa's bird species and at least 40% of its mammal species (USAID, 2006). The forests and wildlife of the Albertine landscape attract more than 80% of all Uganda's leisure tourists for wildlife safaris, birdwatching tours and gorilla and chimpanzee tracking.

Birdwatching tourism (also known as avi-tourism²) has become increasingly prominent in Uganda. There is considerable potential to grow this market segment further and to forge stronger links between birdwatching visitors and local communities near key birding areas. This has the potential to increase community revenues from tourism and provide an incentive for stronger protection of the habitats that host the birds. Through a benefit-sharing mechanism operated by the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), 20% of National Park (NP) gate fees are invested in Park-adjacent communities, who also benefit from tourism-related job opportunities, community-based tourism and the sale of products and services.

¹ IBAs are areas identified by BirdLife International as priority conservation sites for bird life.

² Avi-tourism is niche form of tourism in which the tourist undertakes travel to view birds in their natural habitat.

2. Methodology

This assessment set out to profile the nature of birdwatching tourism in Uganda, including tourist numbers, countries of origin, typical length of stay, average expenditure, places visited, the main local and international tour operators, their marketing channels and the breakdown between independent tourists and members of organised groups.

The analysis was based on a review of selected **literature** on Ugandan birdwatching and global trends in avi-tourism (see bibliography in Appendix I) and **interviews** with sector stakeholders using a questionnaire guide (see Appendix II). These consultations involved local and international birdwatching tour operators, local bird guides, Government of Uganda agencies such as the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB), UWA and the National Forestry Authority (NFA), NGOs such as NatureUganda, the World Wildlife Fund and the Wildlife Conservation Society, as well as the International Union for Conservation of Nature, Makerere University, Uganda Community Tourism Association (UCOTA) and various community-based organisations (see full list in Appendix III). Interviews took place by phone, email and physical visits.

The stakeholder interviews informed the selection of 20 premium birding sites in the Albertine Rift, which were then visited for **field assessments** (see Appendix IV). Discussions were held at each site with local bird guides, ranger guides, tourism wardens, providers of tourism facilities and services, and other relevant stakeholders. Based on the current situation and future potential, 11 of these sites were prioritised and recommendations were formulated for investments to support the further development of avi-tourism.

3. Global birdwatching tourism

3.1 Nature and scale of global birdwatching

Birdwatching tourism, birding or avi-tourism is a sub-category of nature-based tourism.³ Avi-tourism and other forms of niche tourism can help destinations diversify their product offering, minimise the effects of seasonality and reduce pressure on visitor 'hotspots' by distributing tourists to less-visited locations. Birds can be seen almost everywhere and are not restricted to protected parks and reserves. Some of the best sites for seeing birds are in peri-urban areas, where different habitat types converge.

The UK's Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has over 1.1 million members, making it one of the largest wildlife conservation organisations in the world. The Audubon Society in the USA has over 600,000 members and is active through 500 local chapters. At least 18% of all Americans are birdwatchers and birdwatching was "the most steadily growing recreational activity in the United States", growing 287% from 1982 to 2009 (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2013). Similar trends are seen in a number of European countries (Cordell, et al., 2009).

Birdwatching is the UK's number one hobby, and the UK is the largest European source country for international birdwatching tourism, followed by the Netherlands and Germany (Netherlands CBI, 2021)

An increasing number of birdwatchers are traveling to long-haul destinations to spot new birds that cannot be seen in their own country or region (ResponsibleTravel.org, 2021). Three million international trips are taken each year for the main purpose of bird watching (ibid.). Domestic birdwatching trips in the USA alone number more than 25 million per annum (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2013), indicating significant potential for the growth of international avi-tourism.

A number of factors have contributed to the rising global popularity of birdwatching and avi-tourism. These include a drop in the price of birding equipment such as binoculars and telescopes, a growing number of TV documentaries on birds and other wildlife, and the increasingly sophisticated techniques available for filming birds close-up and in flight. There is a growing number of field guides dedicated to birds and birding, as well as an array of coffee table

³ Nature-based tourism is tourism that takes place in natural environments with the specific purpose of viewing and experiencing the natural features of a destination.

bird books. The number of festivals featuring birds and birding as a pastime has also grown significantly. In 2018, there were over 400 festivals or events featuring birdwatching in the US and Canada alone. World Migratory Bird Day is now celebrated in some 70 countries and includes festivals, education programmes, presentations, film screenings and birdwatching trips, run by hundreds of volunteers and organisations. One of the most important drivers for the growth in numbers of birdwatchers has been the rising popularity of wildlife photography. According to a recent survey, there were 13.9 million wildlife photographers in 2001. That number had grown to 25.4 million by 2011 and was expected to reach over 30 million by 2018 (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2013).

Despite the rapid growth in the popularity of birdwatching, the demographics of birdwatchers have changed little over time. Birdwatching is predominantly a pastime for middle-aged and retired people, with disposable income. Table 1 shows the birdwatching participation rates for different income bands in the USA, indicating that people with higher incomes are more likely to participate in birdwatching than those with lower incomes.

Table 1. Income distribution of US population and birders, 2011

Annual income (USD)	Population ('000s)	No. of birders ('000s)	Participation rate
<\$20,000	30,550	4,455	15%
\$20,000 - \$29,999	23,154	3,611	16%
\$30,000 - \$49,999	40,036	7,734	19%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	33,850	8,432	25%
\$75,000 or more	66,177	15,862	24%

Source: (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2013)

Considering also the cost of international travel, the potential target market for international avi-tourists is clearly in the upper income brackets, especially for long-haul destinations like Uganda. So although there are huge numbers of birders in North America and European countries, avi-tourists still make up a relatively small proportion of the total. On the other hand, there is a very large pool of birders who could potentially become avi-tourists in the future.

3.2 Success factors for avi-tourism

There are approximately 10,000 species of birds in the world, distributed regionally as shown in Table 2. It is clear that Africa has high avi-tourism potential, ranking third amongst the global regions for bird species richness and fourth for endemism.

Table 2. Regional distribution of avian species richness and endemism

Region	Richness*	Endemism**
South America	3,281	488
Asia	3,114	748
Africa	2,316	305
Australasia	1,326	570
Middle East	619	11
North America	1,289	138
Central America	1,167	14
Caribbean	785	87
Europe	542	13
Oceania	353	109

* Richness refers to the number of extant (existing) bird species.

** Endemism refers to the number of species found only within this region.

Source: (Steven, et al., 2014)

In addition to high species diversity, richness and endemism, a review of international avitourism destinations reveals the following common success factors:

Favourable natural characteristics:

- Distinct flagship birds or 'drawcard' species (such as the Shoebill in Uganda);
- A variety of ecological biomes⁴ in close proximity;
- Attractive core birding assets such as IBAs, Ramsar sites⁵, birding hotspots and specific routes; and
- The possibility of viewing large numbers of birds quickly (300-400 species on a 2-3 week trip).

Good tourism infrastructure:

- Complementary wildlife and natural attractions (for Uganda this includes gorillas, chimps, Murchison Falls, etc);
- Established range of accommodation in birding areas;
- Supporting infrastructure such as hides, observation towers, canopy walkways, boardwalks and interpretation centres;
- An established local birding community, with trained guides; and
- Relative ease of self-organised travel, including presence of car rental companies.

⁴ A biome is a major ecosystem spread over a wide geographic area and characterized by certain types of flora.

⁵ Ramsar sites are wetlands designated to be international important under the 1971 'Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat'. It is named after the Iranian city of Ramsar, where it was signed.

Market presence:

- Strong market profile with specialised tour operators and itineraries advertised on websites;
- Advertising and editorial content in key tourism and birding publications, and relevant digital and social media platforms; and
- Presence at general tourism and specialized international trade shows (e.g. British Birdwatching Fair, Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival).

4. Birdwatching tourism in Uganda

4.1 Birding potential of Uganda

Uganda is located in an important biological convergence zone, spanning seven of Africa's 18 phytocoria⁶ and, as such, is a country of contrasting landscapes. Of the 2,000-plus bird species found on the African continent, Uganda contains more than half, making it one of the most bird-rich countries in Africa. It is a world class birding destination and features in the itineraries of all major avi-tourism operators, as well as being popular with independent birdwatching visitors.

Along Uganda's western border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a fragmented mosaic of montane forests at 600 to 3,000 m above sea level along the Albertine Rift, which host numerous endemic species⁷ of many taxa, including 28 endemic bird species.⁸ The Albertine contains more vertebrate species than any other region in Africa and more endemic species of vertebrate than any other part of the continental mainland. As such, it is one of the most important regions for conservation in Africa.

4.2 Development of avi-tourism in Uganda

The early 1990s saw an initial influx of avi-tourists to Uganda, mostly independent travellers wanting to see the Shoebill, one of the country's flagship species (see text box).

There are an estimated 150 pairs of Shoebill in Uganda (NatureUganda, 2015). The species is widely but thinly spread, and is found at several wetlands in the Lake Victoria basin, the Albertine Rift lakes and along the River Nile. It can appear in ephemeral wetlands, following good rains, suggesting it can make large movements from where it is resident. Its main stronghold is the central Lake Kyoga region. Shoebills tend to be solitary, pairing up only briefly for mating in remote and far-flung areas, giving Uganda, where Shoebills can be reliably seen in several locations, a comparative advantage in attracting birders in search of this species. It can be seen in 12 of Uganda's 34 IBAs (Byaruhanga, et al., 2001). The Shoebill's stronghold is the Sudd swamp of South Sudan, to which access has been near impossible due to prolonged civil unrest. The only other reliable site for this species outside Uganda is the Bangweulu Swamp in Zambia.

⁶ Phytocoria are bio-geographic regions described in terms of their floristic make-up.

⁷ Endemic species are those found in just one region and nowhere else in the world.

⁸ The Albertine Rift runs through Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC, so these endemics are shared by several countries. The Fox's Weaver is the only endemic bird exclusive to Uganda.

Avi-tourism grew in parallel with Uganda’s overall tourism sector, to a large extent driven by the fact that Uganda was the only safe place to see the mountain gorilla. Access to gorilla habitats provided simultaneous access to the sought-after avian diversity of the central African rainforests where, again, Uganda was the safest and most reliable visitor destination.

In 1997, the Government of Uganda, supported by the European Union, developed and financed a strategy for avi-tourism growth. This was built around the identification of birding hotspots, development of infrastructure to access those areas, roll-out of a guide training programme, publication of a *“Where to Watch Birds in Uganda”* booklet, an aggressive advertising and promotion campaign targeting international trade shows and the financing of journalists from avi-tourism and specialist birding magazines to come to Uganda and write about their experiences. Through sustained financing for this programme over five years, Uganda was ‘on the map’ as a specialist avi-tourism destination.

4.3 Top birding sites and the standard circuit

Uganda has a diversity of birds spread across different areas and birdwatching hotspots. These include ten NPs, 34 IBAs, 12 Wildlife Reserves and 12 Ramsar sites. Many locations outside protected areas also provide great birdwatching opportunities. The most popular locations are in the Albertine Rift, which has five of Uganda’s ten NPs. The Albertine harbours 37 range-restricted bird species that cannot be found elsewhere in the world, making it highly attractive for birdwatching tourists. Seven of the top nine birdwatching sites visited by leading local tour operators are located in the Albertine (Table 3).

Table 3. Most visited birdwatching sites in Uganda, by local avi-tourism operators

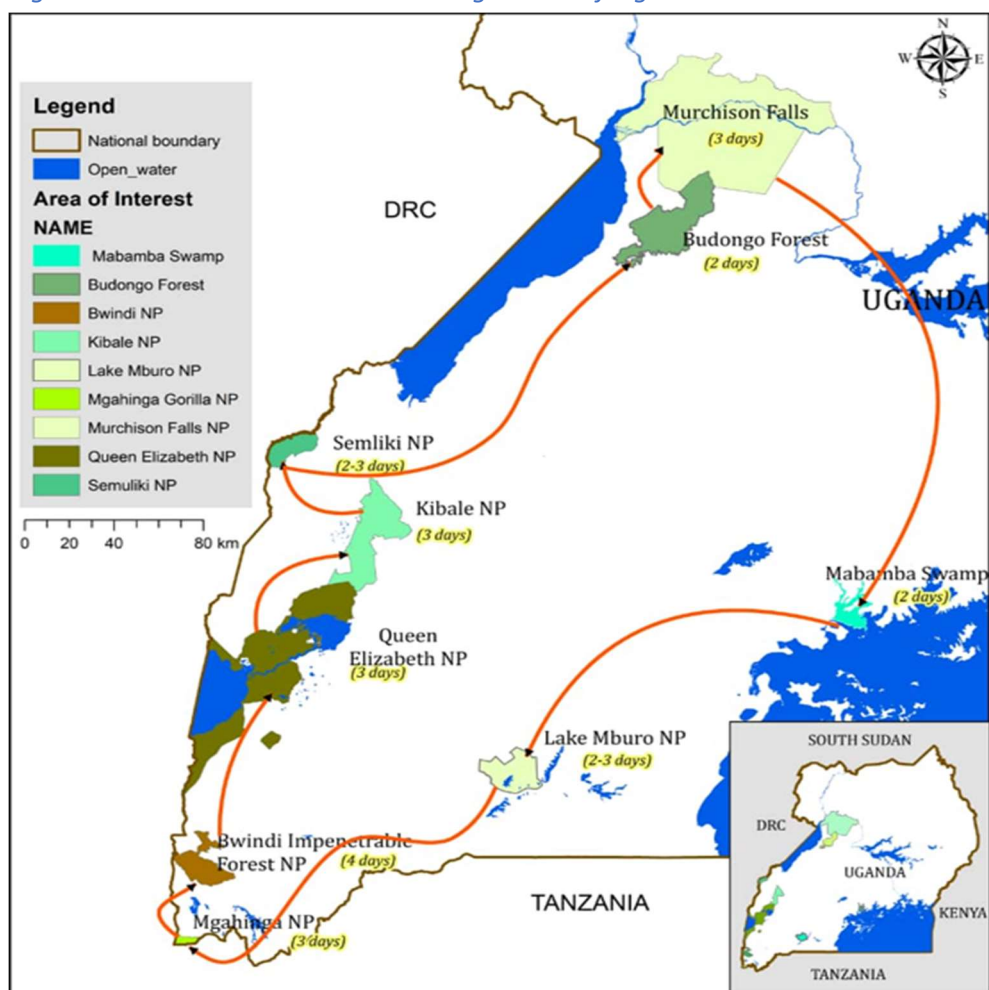
Site name	% of operators including in itineraries	Located in Albertine Rift?
Murchison Falls NP	90%	Yes
Bwindi Impenetrable NP	90%	Yes
Mabamba Wetland	80%	
Kibale Forest NP	80%	Yes
Queen Elizabeth NP	70%	Yes
Semuliki Forest NP	60%	Yes
Lake Mburo NP	60%	
Budongo Forest	50%	Yes
Mgahinga Gorilla NP	40%	Yes
Kidepo Valley NP	40%	
Mabira Forest	30%	

Site name	% of operators including in itineraries	Located in Albertine Rift?
Mt. Elgon NP	20%	
Botanical Gardens	20%	
Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary	10%	
Pian Upe Game Reserve	10%	
Mpanga Forest	10%	
Matheniko Game Reserve	10%	

Source: Interviews with leading Ugandan bird guides and tour operators

Uganda's standard birdwatching circuit takes in a number of sites in the Albertine Rift, and can be made either clockwise or anti-clockwise, starting and finishing at Entebbe (see Figure 1). This typical circuit is described in detail in Appendix IV.

Figure 1. The traditional birdwatching circuit of Uganda



4.4 Estimated volume, length of stay and value of avi-tourists

Official statistics on avi-tourists are not collected, but in a 2019 visitor survey, 1% of leisure tourism respondents indicated that they participated in birdwatching while in Uganda (Ministry of Tourism, Wildlife and Antiquities, 2019). With an estimated 126,000 leisure tourists visiting Uganda that year (World Bank Group, 2020), this would be approximately 1,200 people. But this includes all tourists who participated in birdwatching, not necessarily avi-tourists whose primary purpose of travel was to see birds. Discussions with some of the leading birdwatching tour operators suggest an annual total of around 700 avi-tourists, possibly reduced due to the Covid pandemic. By contrast, South Africa was already receiving 8,000 to 16,000 international avi-tourists per annum by 2010 (South Africa Department of Trade & industry, 2010).

Tour operators and guides estimate that an average birdwatching trip in Uganda lasts about 14 days (ranging widely from 1 day to about 28 days). Table 4 shows the costs of birding trips offered by some of the larger international tour companies. The variation in cost depends mainly on the choice of accommodation, which ranges from \$150 per night for budget accommodation to \$300-400 for mid-range accommodation and \$600-1,000 for luxury options.

Table 4. Costs of birdwatching trips to Uganda via international birdwatching companies

Company	5 days	12 days	14 days	18 days	20 days	22 days
Birdquest		\$6,350				\$10,790
Rockjumper	\$1,895		\$6,245	\$10,397		
Birding Ecotours				\$8,950		
Wings					\$9,400	
Victor Emanuel Nature Tours					\$12,795	
Birding Africa	\$2,480	\$5850				\$11,890
Tropical Birding				\$8,095		
<i>Average:</i>	<i>\$2,188</i>	<i>£6,100</i>	<i>\$6,245</i>	<i>\$9,147</i>	<i>\$11,098</i>	<i>\$11,340</i>

Source: Company websites

Most birdwatching tourists travel to Uganda between June and August, with lower numbers in September, December and January. Interviews with local tour operators suggest that American visitors usually stay for longest, followed by those from the UK and then other nationalities.

4.5 Comparison with regional competitors

The World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report ranks countries according to different elements of their travel and tourism offering. The latest results for seven eastern African countries are shown in Table 5. Uganda ranks highest in price competitiveness

and is third (to Kenya and Tanzania) in natural resources. But it still ranks 122nd globally and scores particularly poorly on safety & security (in which only Kenya comes lower within eastern Africa) and in tourist service infrastructure (beating only Ethiopia and Malawi within the region).

Table 5. Comparison of travel and tourism competitiveness of countries in eastern Africa

Country	Global rank	Safety & security	Tourist service infrastructure	Natural resources	Price competitiveness	Prioritisation of tourism and travel
Mauritius	54	5.8	5.0	2.4	4.6	6.1
Kenya	82	4.6	2.9	4.5	4.9	5.4
Tanzania	95	5.2	2.4	4.7	5.5	4.9
Rwanda	107	5.9	2.3	2.6	5.3	4.1
Uganda	112	4.7	2.3	3.7	5.7	4.3
Ethiopia	122	5.1	1.7	3.0	5.5	3.8
Malawi	125	5.4	2.0	3.1	5.6	3.6

Source: (World Economic Forum, 2019)

Table 6 compares some of the costs and birding potentials of an avi-tourism trip to different East African countries. Uganda is more price-competitive than Tanzania, but less-so than Kenya and Ethiopia, despite having the region's lowest NP entry fees. It has a similar number of bird species to Kenya and Tanzania, but only one endemic.

Table 6. Comparison of national birdwatching attributes in eastern Africa

Aspects of birdwatching	Countries				
	Uganda	Kenya	Rwanda	Tanzania	Ethiopia
Trip cost per day	\$471	\$399		\$525	\$387
No. of IBAs	34	68	7	80	68
NP daily entry fees	\$40	\$52-60	\$50	\$53-82	
Daily birdwatching fees in forest protected areas	\$30		\$50		
No. of bird species	998	1,057	636	1,074	821
No. of endemic bird species	1	11	1	31	17

Sources: Trip costs from (Birding Ecotours, 2021)

IBA information from (BirdLife International, 2021)

NP entry fees from wildlife authority websites.

Nos. of bird species and endemics from (BirdLife International, 2021), which gives a slightly lower total for Uganda than the Bird Atlas of Uganda (Carswell, et al., 2005).

Another study comparing Uganda with Tanzania on tourism competitiveness revealed that Tanzania scored significantly higher in the variety of tourism activities on offer, the quality of accommodation and the ease of accessing the destination. On the other hand, visitors to Uganda

stayed significantly longer on average (Jani & Minde, 2016). Comparative research on competitiveness for birdwatching tourism is scarce, and much of the information provided here comes from discussions with stakeholders and online sources.

4.6 Leading tour operators offering birdwatching packages

International tour operators

The local guides and tour operators who were consulted during the assessment identified the following international birdwatching operators bringing foreign avi-tourists to Uganda:

- **Birdquest** is a British company founded in 1981 and has been running trips to Uganda since 1994. The main tour leader is Nik Borrow, an authority on Africa's birdlife who has co-authored the book *Birds of West Africa* and is an accomplished illustrator. Birdquest has a long association with Livingstone Kalema who runs his own local tour company (see below). They run two trips per year with an average group size of six.
- **Rockjumper** was founded in 1998 and is based in South Africa. It ran seven trips to Uganda in 2019 with group sizes of six (with one leader) or 12 (with two leaders). The founders are Johnathan Russow and Adam Riley, the former one of the authors of *Where to Watch Birds in Uganda*, the latter a contributor. They also use Livingstone Kalema as a local guide.
- **Birding Ecotours** was founded in 2002 by South African Chris Lotz. They run two trips per year to Uganda and their tour leader, Dylan Vaspoli, works with local guide Harriet Kemigisha. Their group size is from four to eight people and their main trip lasts 19 days.
- **Wings** is an American company founded in 1973 which operates a single 20-day trip to Uganda each year led by Brian Finch (based in Kenya), working with Paul Tamwenya, the owner of Birding Journeys Uganda. They take up to eight participants using two leaders.
- **Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT)** run a 20-day birding tour to Uganda with Australian guide and tour leader Dion Hobcroft. Their tour limit is eight people.
- **Birding Africa** was founded in 1997 by South African Callan Cohen. They offer a choice of six, seven and 11-day itineraries with the option of doing them back-to-back, or a separate trip of 15 days. Their guide is Michale Mills, an accomplished South African birder and author of several publications.

- **Tropical Birding** was founded in Cape Town in 2004 and runs tours to many countries, including an annual 18-day trip to Uganda with an extension to Rwanda. It has a limit of eight clients with a single tour leader.
- **Fieldguides Birding Tours** is an American company from Austin, Texas that was founded in 1985. It runs an annual 14-day tour to Uganda with a maximum group size of seven. Their Ugandan guide is Herbert Byaruhanga of Bird Uganda Safaris.

Additional companies mentioned by at least one local guide are: Avian Adventure, Barcelona Birding Point, EA Birding Tours, Malimbe Safaris. Nature Travel Birding, Nature Trek, Staying Birds, Sunbird Tours and Sustainable Birding Company.

Ugandan tour operators

UTB reports that there are 768 registered tour companies in Uganda, of which 320 of which have so far been licensed. The five leading operators offering birdwatching tours are as follows:

- **Bird Uganda Safaris** was established in 2002 by Herbert Byaruhanga and has gained prominence both nationally and internationally. He has been instrumental in training many of the leading bird guides in Uganda and has shaped the local birdwatching tourism sector. Herbert has marketed his trips at several international bird fairs and festivals. His company works with Mass Audubon, VENT Bird Tours, Naturalist Journeys, Avian Journeys and Sandpiper Journeys in the USA, as well as Neblina Forest (Ecuador), Puembo Birding, Sandwich Bird Tours (UK), Inala Nature Tours (UK), Bellbird Tours (Australia), Field Guides Birding Tours and African Geographic.
- **Livingstone Africa Safaris** was founded in 2000 by Livingstone Kalema, one of the first Ugandans to take a keen interest in birdwatching. They also offer nature trekking, wildlife trips and cultural experiences. They are the local agents for Rockjumper, one of the most popular international tour operators. Livingstone is another regular attendee at international bird fairs and festivals.
- **Harrier Tours and Travel** is one of the first birdwatching companies in Uganda owned by a woman. It was established in 2009 by Harriet Kemigisha, building on her experience working with UWA as a ranger guide at Kibale NP. She has achieved many milestones, among which is owning and operating the Kibale Forest Lodge in Bigodi town on the boundary of Kibale NP, and is an inspiration to many women guides in Uganda. Harrier

Tours is the ground handler for Birding Ecotours, another popular international birdwatching company, and has also partnered with the Audubon Society of Portland, Talon Birding Tours, Wild Latitudes, Cheepers Africa, Bustards Birding Tours (USA), Wise Birding, Birdwatching Breaks and the RSPB (UK), as well as working with researchers from Michigan State University and Ohio University.

- **Birding in Paradise** as started in 2004 by Johnnie Kamugisha, another senior Ugandan bird guide. He owns a sister company, Johnnie Uganda Safaris, and his two companies sell tours to Uganda for birdwatching as well as butterfly viewing and general wildlife and cultural tours. Johnnie is a regular attendee at international bird fairs and expos, where he gets most of his clients.
- **Birding Journeys Uganda** is headed by Paul Tamwenya who has been birdwatching for over 20 years and has secured birdwatching tourists through persistence and hard work. He has attended a number of bird fairs and festivals overseas.

4.7 Key promotional channels

One of the commonest marketing tools for Ugandan avi-tourism is public events such as bird fairs, wildlife festivals and travel shows in key source markets. Local operators report that the events listed in Table 7 are particularly important for marketing Uganda as a birding destination.

Table 7. Prominent international birding fairs and festivals

Event	Location	Year started	Approximate no. of attendees
British Birdwatching Fair	Rutland, UK	1989	20,000
American Birding Expo	Philadelphia, USA	2015	1,000s
Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival	Florida, USA	1997	2,000 (2019)
African Bird Fair	South Africa	2013	
America's Biggest Week	Ohio, USA	2009	90,000
Asian Bird Fair	Asian countries	2010	
Colombia Bird Fair	Cali, Colombia	2014	22,000
Cape May Bird Festival	Cape May, USA		
Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival	USA		

Source: online research.

In a bid to market Uganda globally, UTB has appointed Market Destination Representatives in the key source markets of the UK and Ireland, Germany, Switzerland and Austria, as well as in the emerging markets of the Gulf states, Japan and China.⁹

4.8 Specialist publications

Guidebooks

Avi-tourists to Uganda rely mostly on the following regional field guides:

1. *Birds of Africa: South of the Sahara* was first published in 2003 and brought up to date in 2010 (Sinclair & Ryan, 2010) with taxonomical changes that make it the definitive guide.
2. *The Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania* (Zimmerman, et al., 2005) does not cover a considerable number of important Ugandan birds, including the Albertine Rift species. It is also very much behind with recent taxonomical changes, although an abridged and revised edition was published in February 2020 as a field guide.
1. *Birds of East Africa Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi* (Stevenson & Fanshawe, 2020) originally came out in 2002 and was a long-awaited and first full guide to the region. It was (and still is) the best the most commonly-used field guide. A new edition was published in 2020, with fully revised taxonomy and species splits, although it will take some time for older editions to be replaced.
3. The *Collins Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa* (Williams & Arlott, 1980) is now completely outdated and contains many inaccurate illustrations from museum skins.

In addition to these regional guides, there are several more specific guides that target Ugandan birding:

- In 1997, a team of six birdwatchers conducted fieldwork for the publication of the field guide, *Where to Watch Birds in Uganda* (Rossouw & Sacchi, 1998). This award-winning publication was the first of its kind in East Africa. Now some 24 years old, it is long overdue for an update to include new sites, maps and species checklists. This could be produced at relatively low cost and could also include lists of accommodation, guides,

⁹ "UTB's first-ever virtual POATE 2021 notches record attendance amidst optimism for tourism recovery"
<https://www.pmldaily.com/features/tours-travel/2021/05/utbs-first-ever-virtual-poate-2021-notches-record-attendance-amidst-optimism-for-tourism-recovery.html>

tour companies and access instructions, and become an asset to generalist travellers and tourists, as well as birdwatchers.

- In 2001, NatureUganda published *Important Bird Areas in Uganda* (Byaruhanga, et al., 2001). Whilst very informative about the natural history of 30 different birding sites, it provides no details on access, accommodation or local guides.
- In 2014, Tourguide Publications published a photographic guide to the *Birds of Uganda* (Meunier & Mckelvie, 2014), a good casual guide for the generalist tourist.
- The latest publication on Uganda's birds is a periodic digital newsletter called *Birdwatch Uganda* (Mirembe, et al., 2021), intended to provide information and updates on Uganda's birdwatching sector in digital form via four editions per year.

Specialist magazines

- **Bulletin of The African Bird Club:** One of the most influential regular publications on birdwatching in Africa is the Bulletin of The African Bird Club (ABC), a UK-registered charity formed in 1994. The Bulletin has 1,200 subscribers in 60 countries. The Club has a conservation programme that supports small- to medium-sized conservation projects in Africa with grants of up to GBP 5,000, including training courses, research into threatened species and promotion and awareness-raising around conservation issues. ABC's sponsors support these conservation efforts through subscriptions and donations.
- **African Birdlife:** BirdLife South Africa, the national Birdlife International partner organisation, publishes a bi-monthly magazine called *African Birdlife* with well-written articles and professional standard photographs of the continent's birds. It is an important mouthpiece for BirdLife South Africa to create awareness about bird research and conservation, and has carried several detailed articles on Uganda.

5. Experiences from avi-tourism initiatives in Uganda

5.1 Main initiatives from past 20 years

EU tourism project

Support for the development of avi-tourism in Uganda has been piecemeal and sporadic. The EU provided \$0.5 million to the UTB in 1998 for the development of tourism in the country, of which \$165,000 was earmarked for birdwatching investments. There were an estimated 100 international avi-tourists in that year, targeted to rise to 1,000 per annum with the potential to generate \$6 million in revenue. This target has not yet been reached.

African Birding Expo¹⁰

The inaugural African Birding Expo (ABE) was organised in 2016 as a collaboration between UTB and the World Bank under the Competitiveness and Enterprises Development Project, which sought to market Uganda as an avi-tourism destination. The latest ABE took place at Entebbe between 10th and 12th December, 2021. This annual expo brings together birdwatching tourism sector players from Uganda and surrounding countries. International birders, travel writers, bloggers, tour operators and agents are taken on local familiarisation trips in exchange for stories in social media and international birding publications. One of the many positive outcomes is the increased number of birdwatching trips led by the international tour leaders who participated in these familiarisation trips. The expo has kickstarted other events such as the International Conference for Women Birders, scheduled for 6th to 8th December, 2023,¹¹ aimed at empowering and promoting birdwatching among women. The ABE is an effective marketing tool for Uganda, but requires more investment to increase participation and coverage. Furthermore, the expo has largely been organised in Kampala and Entebbe for easy accessibility, and there is need to take it to other areas in the country to involve regional participants and local community members.

Big Birding Day

The Big Birding Day (BBD) is annual event launched in 2009 by NatureUganda, the Birdlife International partner in Uganda, in partnership with other birdwatching and conservation stakeholders such as UWA, UTB and the Uganda Bird Guides' Club (UBGC). The BBD is geared

¹⁰ <https://africanbirdingexpo.com>

¹¹ <http://ic4wb.com>

towards creating awareness of birds and their conservation among the general public. It involves birdwatching all over Uganda to see the number of birds that can be registered in a single day from the different birding areas, for which the most successful teams are rewarded. The BBD attracts many stakeholders within the birdwatching sector and the sponsorship provided to participants to facilitate travel to different areas of birdwatching is attractive to many.

Training of bird guides

The training of bird guides in Uganda has taken place on an *ad hoc* basis since 1998, sponsored at various times by the UTB, UWA, MTWA, UNDP, Private Sector Foundation Uganda and others. There are currently over 120 trained bird guides (as estimated by the UBGC), all of whom claim to have received some form of training in birdwatching and tourist guiding. With the advent of licensing requirements in the tourism sector in 2019,¹² tourist guiding is now a recognised profession under the Directorate of Industrial Training (DIT) and certification has become a pre-requisite for employment as a bird guide. In 2020, the DIT developed Assessment and Training Packages for Tourist Guides at Levels 1, 2 & 3. It has recently (December 2021) certified a number of trainers and assessors, who will now carry out the training of prospective guides.

With tourist guiding becoming a formalised profession, more young guides are coming into the business and starting their own tour companies. New and upcoming operators are securing clients through low-cost offers via their websites, but a minimum level of proficiency and professionalism is required, for which the importance of good training cannot be understated. There are instances where untrained taxi drivers have offered budget travellers low-cost game drives in unsuitable vehicles, which undermines those who have invested in training and damages the Ugandan tourism product.

The first nationwide bird guide training programme in Uganda was funded by the EU (through the UTB) and was facilitated in 2000 by Malcolm Wilson, using a custom-designed manual for “*A Foundation Course in Ornithology*”. Most of Uganda’s current bird guides and tour operators are a product of this programme.

Most of the guide training workshops to have taken place since then have been organised by Herbert Byaruhanga, who was one of the original training participants and also founded the

¹² <https://utb.go.ug/news-and-views/registration-and-licensing-tourism-facilities-and-services-uganda>

UBGC. Herbert has been assisted by other senior guides under the Uganda Safari Guides Association (USAGA) which is the overall guides' association in Uganda, to which UBGC subscribes. Herbert's training is based on the BirdLife South Africa resource manual.

Malcolm Wilson has continued to run bird-ringing workshops in Uganda on a regular basis. These give participants a close look at secretive bird species and go over intricate identification factors. Theoretical sessions are included from the original bird guide training course, updated and improved. The workshops have been run by bird-ringers from the UK, whose costs have been covered by avi-tourists who facilitate the workshops as paying volunteers. UWA, NFA and NatureUganda usually host these workshops and waive access fees in recognition of the service provided and the chance for rangers and guides to attend. This format brings visitors (who sponsor the events) together with local birders and guides, without any cost for the organisations benefiting.

5.2 Lessons learned

Experiences from the last 20 years of avi-tourism in Uganda point to the following requirements for the successful future development of the sector:

- **Involvement of local stakeholders:** The development of international avi-tourism requires the full engagement of local guides, clubs, communities, tour operators and other stakeholders, to create a sense of belonging and ownership.
- **Strong local bird clubs:** Being a bird guide is seen as a high-status profession, but not everyone is capable of being a competent bird guide. Bird clubs are one avenue that make it possible for individuals to experience birdwatching and recognize their ability to be good at it, first becoming passionate about the activity before deciding to move to a professional career.
- **Gender balance in birdwatching and guiding:** There is a need to bridge the gender gap in birdwatching. The Uganda Women Birders' Club was started in 2013 provides a platform for women to learn and gain inspiration from other bird guides. It inspired the creation of Rwanda Women Birders (in 2018) and Kenya Women Birders (in 2019). These initiatives are overcoming social barriers that deter women from venturing into the tourist guiding world.

- **Community benefit to address local needs:** Initiatives that benefit a wider community tend to be more successful than initiatives benefiting individuals. An example is the Bigodi Wetland initiative by the Kibale Association for Rural and Environment Development (KAFRED), which has used tourist revenues to finance a secondary school and hospital for the community around Kibale NP.
- **Low-cost guide training:** Training of tourist guides is expensive and often needs to be sponsored. Training is best channelled through guides' associations, such as USAGA, to maximise sustainability. Training should ideally take place outside the peak tourist seasons of June-September and December-March.
- **Feedback mechanisms:** Feedback from stakeholders is important to gauge the impact of a given initiative on a community.
- **Sustainability and an exit strategy:** A sustainability strategy is needed to allow continuity after funders have exited. Supporting existing ventures tends to be more successful and sustainable than supporting projects that are starting from zero.
- **Post-project monitoring and follow-up:** There is need for continuous monitoring during to evaluate the successes and failures of a given initiative, and for extracting lessons.

5.3 Constraints to the development of birdwatching tourism

Some of the constraints to avi-tourist development in Uganda identified through observations and discussions with stakeholders are as follows:

- **Insufficient online information:** Ugandan birdwatching has a limited online presence scattered across many websites, making it difficult to get reliable information on bird species and sites.
- **Insufficient targeted marketing:** There is limited marketing of Ugandan avi-tourism in key source markets. The marketing that does take place is frequently carried out by inadequately trained personnel from tour firms or government ministries who lack the right knowledge of the product and sufficient technical understanding to speak directly to potential avi-tourists.
- **Negative publicity and travel advisories:** Negative news and sensationalist media reports of famine, viruses, civil disorder, dangerous wildlife and corruption can significantly constrain tourism, including avi-tourism. The Government of Uganda can be

slow to counter instances of negative publicity, by which time considerable damage may have been caused to the sensitive tourism sector.

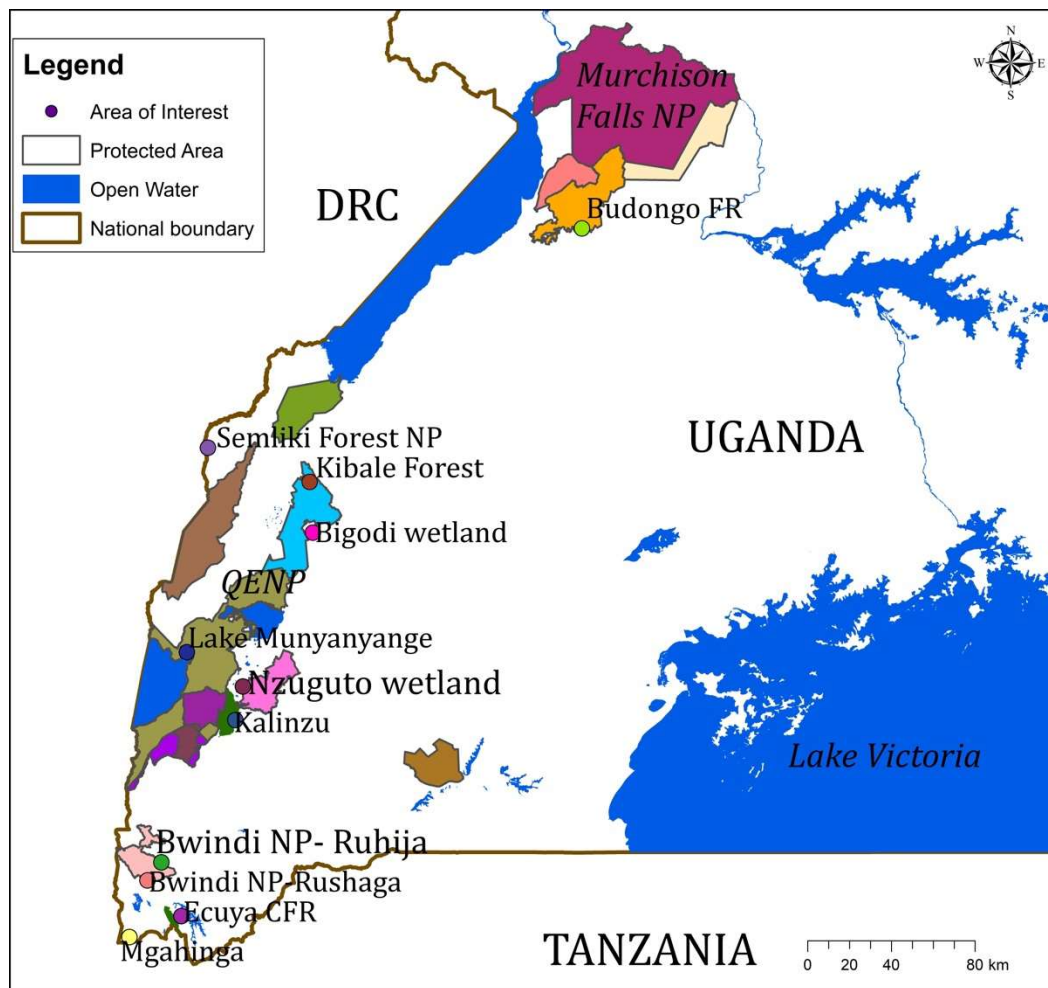
- **High cost:** Uganda is seen as an expensive destination and facilities are perceived as poorer value than their equivalents in competitor countries.
- **Inconsistent quality of tourist accommodation:** Uganda offers a good variety of tourist accommodation in the middle- to upper-end market, but many budget tourists and independent travellers are priced out. They may choose to visit cheaper destinations like South Africa, where rustic bush camp accommodation costs as little as \$20 per person per night and chalets and lodges cost \$150. An absence of international hotel chains is cited as a major reason for a shortage of quality accommodation facilities. As of 2018, Uganda had only a handful of internationally branded hotels, compared to 86 in Kenya and 46 in Tanzania (KinghtFrank, 2018).
- **Ostracisation of LGBT community:** The Government's legal stance against LGBT people is likely to have denied Uganda considerable revenue from members of these communities, who would potentially wish to travel there on a birdwatching (or other) tour.
- **Lack of guide accommodation, with gender segregation.** A number of birdwatching areas (and their lodges) lack accommodation for bird guides. Male and female guides are often forced to share facilities like bathrooms.
- **Insufficient human resource capacity and lack of training.** Consistency and quality in bird guide training remains a huge challenge in Uganda, despite the importance of well-trained guides for the birdwatching experience. No institution offers formal training (though this is soon envisaged under the DIT), so this tends to be provided irregularly and independently, with a lack of standardisation. The few trainings available tend to be expensive and out of many people's reach. Inadequate policy and regulation around standards for tourist guides is a related challenge (National Planning Authority, 2020).
- **Low remuneration and exploitation of guides.** Experienced bird guides are not sufficiently remunerated and can be exploited by tour operators. If avi-tourism is to be developed as a valuable niche market, then better financial incentives and job security are needed for those who work in the sector, reflecting the level of skill they require.

- **Lack of guiding resources.** In Uganda, it is not easy to access specialised birdwatching such as like binoculars, telescopes, directional microphones, books and cameras, and these are expensive for individual guides. There is also no guidebook specific to the birds of Uganda and available publications are relatively dated and do not represent Uganda's full species coverage. The best of those available for bird identification are *Birds of East Africa* (Stevenson & Fanshawe, 2020) and *Birds of Africa: South of Sahara* (Sinclair & Ryan, 2010).
- **Inadequate and poorly maintained birdwatching infrastructure:** Birdwatching structures like trails, boardwalks, bird hides, canopy walkways and canopy towers are generally not well maintained. Several potential birdwatching sites like Kalinzu, Kasyoha-Kitomi and Echuya Central Forest Reserves (CFRs) have no birding trails, so are omitted from the popular avi-tourism routes.

6. Prioritisation of birdwatching sites in the Albertine Rift

20 potential sites for avi-tourism development were visited and consultations took place with senior personnel including tourism wardens, forest sector managers, range managers, supervisors and site-based bird and ranger guides (a list and map of the 20 sites can be found in Appendix IV). Based on these visits and consultations, together with recommendations from local tour operators and bird guides, 11 sites were prioritised for development (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Map showing 11 priority development sites for avi-tourism



The prioritisation was based on the following criteria:

- existing exposure to avi-tourists;
- potential linkages between avi-tourism and local community groups;
- existence of nearby tourist infrastructure, especially accommodation (as birdwatching activities often start at dawn);

- d) potential to yield a variety of species as well as unusual or rare birds (especially 'drawcard' species, such as the green-breasted pitta, Puvel's Illadopsis, Rwenzori Turaco or Shoebill);
- e) land and opportunity to develop site infrastructure;
- f) presence of local guides;
- g) potential links to broader conservation or research activities; and
- h) ease of access to the site by tourists.

The criteria were balanced to deliver an optimised set of recommendations. While investment in lesser-known and seldom visited sites might be considered risky, some have counter-balancing conservation and community co-benefits that justify support.

7. Recommended site investments

The provision of a high-quality birdwatching experience to avi-tourists requires a variety of support infrastructure, such as canopy towers, boardwalks and canopy walkways, examples of which are described in Appendix VI. This section summarises the site-specific infrastructure investments that are proposed for each of the prioritised locations. All 11 sites require additional support for guide training and basic birdwatching equipment such as binoculars and field guides, which is costed in the summary table at the end.

7.1 Mgahinga Gorilla NP

Mgahinga is the most southerly and the smallest of Uganda's NPs, covering just 33.7 km². It is sometimes left off birding itineraries because of the extra time needed to go so far south. But Mgahinga is home to many Albertine Rift endemics (AREs) and has rich montane forest and bamboo habitat. One of the main birding areas is the gorge, which is sometimes inaccessible due to the rugged nature of the land and periodic floods. Accessibility could be improved by installing boardwalks. There are only two ranger guides who support birdwatching at Mgahinga. There is a need and an opportunity to train more guides from the local Batwa community.

Recommended investments:

1. Research and install trails, specifically for birdwatching.
2. Explore new areas of the park to discover and document key species, such as Shelley's Crimsonwing.
3. Install a boardwalk in the gorge to facilitate birdwatching.

7.2 Echuya Forest Reserve

Situated between Mgahinga Gorilla NP and the popular tourist region of Lake Bunyonyi, Echuya complements the region's other attractions. It is also located in one of the most densely populated agricultural regions of Uganda, thus faces a high threat of degradation from surrounding communities, whose support is vital for its long-term conservation. Developing community-based birdwatching could be a vital tool for forest conservation here. NatureUganda has established working relations with the Batwa community around Echuya and provided training in alternative livelihoods like bamboo growing, to reduce pressure on the forest ecosystem. There is a campsite at the entrance to the forest while Kisoro (11 km away) and Kabale (13 km) provide additional accommodation options.

Recommended investments:

1. Explore the forest to design and create more trails specifically for birdwatching.
2. Rehabilitate the campsite at the entrance to the forest
3. Construct a canopy walkway in the forest for tourists to enjoy views of the volcanoes.

7.3 Bwindi Impenetrable Forest NP, Ruhijja Sector

Ruhijja is one of the most popular birding sites in Uganda for accessing high altitude species and AREs. Several middle- to top-end lodges have been built here over the last ten years, as access to more habituated gorilla groups has opened up. The tree species *Symphonia globulifera* attracts a plethora of Sunbird species, five of which are AREs, and as such could provide an opportunity to construct a tower hide to secure (usually impossible) photographs of these birds. Ruhijja has at least six well-trained bird guides to handle the large number of birdwatchers. Some are from the local community and others are UWA ranger guides, who work together and form a united force for the national BBD event.

Recommended investments:

1. Install a raised walkway across one of the steep valleys.
2. Construct a boardwalk through part of Mubwindi swamp.
3. Construct a canopy tower hide adjacent to a *Symphonia globulifera* tree.
4. Develop more trails in the bamboo zone to access endemics specific to this habitat, such as the Kivu Ground Thrush.

7.4 Bwindi Impenetrable Forest NP, Rushaga Sector

Rushaga has eight habituated gorilla groups and attracts the highest number of tourists to Bwindi. With various budget, mid-range and luxury accommodation options just outside the NP, birdwatchers are already on site and catered for. The edges of the forest also offer excellent birding. A birdwatching club has been established and a number of site guides are available to lead birding tours. There is a good opportunity for further birdwatching development.

Recommended investments:

1. Research new areas of the site specifically for birdwatching, and design and build new trails.
2. Train local guides from the communities surrounding the park, including the Batwa.
3. Research possibilities for constructing canopy towers and boardwalks

7.5 Lake Munyanyange

Lake Munyanyange is an enclave of Queen Elizabeth NP (QENP) which has huge potential for wetland birdwatching. A guided nature walk or bird walk around the Katwe and Munyanyange craters costs UGX 35,000 (\$10) via the Katwe Ecotourism Association, which could be assisted to develop the tourist offering further.

Recommended Investments:

1. Create an all-season boardwalk around the lake, or in parts that become seasonally inundated.
2. Construct a hide to access concentrations of roosting birds along the lake shore, based on prior research into location, design and birdwatchers' wishes.
3. Construct an interpretation centre with washrooms.

7.6 Kalinzu Forest Reserve and ecotourism site

Kalinzu is part of the greater Maramagambo-Kalinzu and Kasyoha-Kitomi forest complex that also includes part of QENP. It is usually bypassed on the standard birdwatching circuit, as groups move north from Bwindi to QENP, but there is potential to open it up to more birdwatching visitors. There is an active chimpanzee trekking centre that provides infrastructure to receive visitors. There is also a basic campsite and a number of private lodges nearby, mostly in the Kyambura area at the eastern edge of QENP. Kalinzu is well-located with easy accessibility and close to other birdwatching hotspots such as QENP, Maramagambo Forest and Kasyoha-Kitomi Forest reserve. It could be an ideal feature on the itineraries of tour groups to the area. There are few birding trails here, so birdwatchers use similar trails as those used for chimp tracking. The visitor office is old, but there is reportedly a plan to build new offices and a canopy tower in the forest, which can be possible areas of collaboration.

Recommended investments:

1. Explore the forest to design and develop specific birding trails.
2. Upgrade the visitor centre and camp site.

7.7 Kibale NP

Ecotourism activities at Kibale NP are allowed at the main Kanyanchu visitor centre and in the less-explored Sebitoli sector, a 50 km driving distance via the Fort Portal-Kyenjojo road. While Kanyanchu is the main site for chimp trekking and **Pitta** viewing, there is plenty of good birdwatching in the forest at Sebitoli. But Sebitoli has a limited number of ranger guides and sparse facilities in terms of trails, washrooms and a well-maintained campsite. It is understood

that UWA plans to construct a canopy walk at Sebitoli, which would boost its attractiveness to birdwatchers, and an EIA is being conducted in preparation for this task. Kanyachu has good facilities in terms of accommodation, interpretive information and washrooms, but the same cannot be of Sebitoli. Additional infrastructure at Sebitoli, such as a canopy tower, would enhance the visitor experience and provide better viewing for birders. Further exploration of Kibale NP is needed to discover new birding spots, and the creation of new trails designed specifically for birdwatching would further increase the Park's value as a top birding destination.

Recommended investments:

1. Construct shelters or picnic stops in the park for birdwatchers
2. Explore new areas of the park with the aim of creating new trails specifically for birdwatching.

7.8 Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary

Bigodi is a flagship site for community conservation in Uganda, under the management of KAFRED. Located 6 km south of the Kanyanchu visitor centre at Kibale NP, it is ideally positioned to attract tourists who visit Kibale for chimpanzee tracking. KAFRED constructed the well-known Bigodi Wetland boardwalk in 1994, with support from the US Embassy. The boardwalk attracts tourists, especially birders, by providing an excellent opportunity to see forest-edge and riverine bird species that are difficult to see elsewhere. The boardwalk tour can be four hours long and there is a lack of shelter in the event of rainstorms. There was also a viewing platform built here in the 1990s, but it has since collapsed. The nature walk (inclusive of birdwatching) costs \$23 for foreign tourists, \$20 for foreign residents and \$5 for Ugandans. This community-based initiative attracted 2,500 tourists in 2018/19, according to KAFRED's chairman, the majority of whom were birdwatchers, which makes it a site worth enhancing. KAFRED has seven permanent bird guides from the Bigodi community and has been instrumental in training many others through internship programs and volunteering. The boardwalk project has inspired at least four similar initiatives within the same area.

Recommended investments:

1. Construct stopover shelters and picnic spots along the swamp boardwalk.
2. Install washrooms at the furthest points on the route.
3. Conduct remedial maintenance of the boardwalk, especially in areas submerged after rain.
4. Consider an additional boardwalk to provide a shorter option and reduce tourist pressure.
5. Construct a viewing platform / pavilion.

7.9 Semuliki Forest NP

The forest trails at Semuliki become boggy during the rainy season and there is a need for boardwalks and a bridge to ease movement from the Kirumia trail to the oxbow lakes (5.5 km away). There is also a need for trails to open up other parts of the forest, where different habitats occur, which would make it easier to find key species unique to this location. There is a shortage of guides at Semuliki, with only two who are trained to accompany birdwatchers. There are only UWA ranger guides, calling for training of more guides from the surrounding community (who have expressed interest in this). Equipment is also an issue and the staff will not be able to develop the skills necessary to be proficient guides without binoculars and field guides. Good mid-range accommodation is necessary for this destination to be viable, since the only options are UWA bandas (limited in number), Ntoroko Game Lodge (which was submerged by floods) and the luxury Semuliki Safari Lodge (which is expensive). Conveniently situated accommodation near Sempaya hot springs would attract more birdwatchers.

Recommended investments:

1. Install an elevated walkway from the Kirumia trail to the oxbow lake.
2. Construct a suspended canopy walkway using the larger ironwood trees.
3. Construct a canopy tower with commanding views of the canopy.
4. Create new trails in selected habitats in the forest, specifically designed to find key bird species.
5. Develop a local community-run lodge, close to Sempaya and the trails network.

7.10 Nzuguto wetland

Nzuguto wetland is located in an area of crater lakes in Rubirizi District that already attracts a steady stream of visitors. The wetland is about 70 hectares in size and attracts over 200 species of birds, including the Zebra Waxbill, Shining-blue Kingfisher and White-collared Oliveback, all of which are major ticks for a birdwatching client. The Nzuguto Environmental Conservation Association was formed as a custodian of the wetland and could benefit from further investment and encouragement. The area has two trained bird guides from the neighbouring community. The wetland had a boardwalk used by birdwatchers, but which has collapsed since the advent of Covid and the association has no funds to rebuild it. There is good potential to further develop locally inspired community conservation efforts.

Recommended investments:

1. Install a new boardwalk with bird hides.
2. Install a visitor and interpretation centre.
3. Provide equipment such as binoculars and books.

7.11 Budongo Forest Reserve

Budongo is one of the most popular destinations in Uganda for birdwatching groups, particularly the Royal Mile and Kaniyo Pabidi sites. One of the biggest drawbacks is the lack of accommodation and other facilities. Tourists are obliged to stay in Masindi town, about 30 km (90 minutes) away on a dirt road. The washroom facilities at the site are not up to standard. The location of the NFA cash office at the Nyabyeya Forestry College is another inconvenience that causes delays in birdwatching activities, as time is spent trying to find an NFA clerk.

There is available land near the Royal Mile that could be used to build a lodge. If this were put out to tender and constructed in conjunction with a local contractor, it could create jobs and bring a sense of awareness to the surrounding community on the importance of the forest.

The Royal Mile has one main trail, which can become monotonous, and the pressure of visitors pushes birds into deeper areas of the forest. The trail is used by tourists and their vehicles with drivers often follow behind. There is a need for new trails in the area. The Royal Mile also has only one site guide, who is often overwhelmed by the large group sizes of birdwatchers during the peak season.

Birdwatchers report that it is difficult to see birds in the canopy along the Royal Mile, as they are silhouetted against the sky. It would benefit from an elevated installation to bring birdwatching to canopy level. The NFA is reportedly planning to invest in a canopy walkway at Budongo. This will be challenging because the area is mostly flat and the dominant mahogany trees are very tall. A considerable amount of illegal logging is also taking place, and there is an ongoing chimpanzee research project by the Budongo Conservation Field Research Station and Makerere University, where conflict has occurred between researchers and birdwatching groups who have strayed from the main trail. Kaniyo Pabidi would probably be a better site to install a canopy walkway or tower, as it is one of the few relatively unlogged forest tracts in Uganda and there is no ongoing primate research.

Recommended investments:

1. Develop a new trail system leading off the Royal Mile.
2. Introduce an easier permit and payment system for visitors, ideally online.
3. Construct a community-run lodge adjacent to the forest, close to the Royal Mile.
4. Construct a canopy tower in one of the taller forest stands.
5. Build an interpretation centre with shelter, washrooms and a picnic spot.

7.12 Summary of tourism development by site

Table 8 summarises the investment recommendations for the 11 prioritised sites over a three-year timeframe, with the aim of increasing the total number of avi-tourists to 2,000 per annum.

Table 8. Summary of investment proposals across 11 selected sites

Site	Management	Trail development	Canopy tower/ bird hide	Boardwalk	Washrooms/ welcome centre/ campsite	Rain shelters ¹³ / picnic spots
1. Mgahinga Gorilla NP	UWA	X	X			X
2. Echuya CFR	NFA	X	X	X	X	X
3. Ruhija, Bwindi NP	UWA	X	X			X
4. Rushaga, Bwindi NP	UWA	X	X			X
5. L. Munyanyange	Community	X	X	X	X	
6. Kalinzu CFR	NFA	X	X			X
7. Kibale Forest NP	UWA	X	X			X
8. Bigodi Swamp	Community	X	X	X	X	X
9. Semuliki NP	UWA	X	X	X		X
10. Nzuguto wetland	Community	X	X	X	X	
11. Budongo CFR	NFA		X			X
Estimated cost (USD):		200,000	500,000	200,000	300,000	90,000
<i>Sub-total for site investments</i>		\$1,290,000				
<i>Plus marketing</i>		\$450,000*				
<i>Plus guide training and equipment</i>		\$120,000*				
Grand total:		\$1,860,000				

* See next chapter for marketing, training and equipment details.

¹³ Getting permission to construct rain shelters in NPs has been difficult as they might be deemed incongruous, but they can significantly improve the visitor experience by providing much-needed shelter in the event of heavy rain.

8. Recommended general investments

The site-specific investments recommended above will only be impactful as part of a more comprehensive sector strategy. They should be accompanied by complementary activities that continue to develop avi-tourist markets, build local bird guiding capacity and strengthen the wider birding environment in Uganda.

8.1 Marketing and promotion

There is a need to identify new avi-tourist source markets and actively promote Uganda as a birding destination. This requires a budget of **\$450,000 over 3 years**.

The high priority marketing opportunities are detailed below:

Bird fairs and festivals

International bird fairs and festivals are important platforms for selling birdwatching tours to potential tour companies and individual avi-tourists. Attendance at these events by operators promoting Ugandan tours is still insufficient.

The larger and more prominent events are the annual American Birding Expo, Space Coast Birding and Wildlife Festival (Florida), Colombia Bird Fair, Asian Bird Fair, African Bird Fair and events in Spain¹⁴ and Portugal.¹⁵ Due to Covid-related restrictions, more events are also being held virtually. Uganda itself currently hosts the African Birding Expo, which could be expanded and improved to achieve greater impact.

Delegates have in the past been chosen from the NGOs community and have not always been able to engage with the birdwatching public with the with level of expertise on the birds of Uganda. It is vital that delegates to these events are chosen for their technical knowledge and ability to give talks, seminars and workshops, and be presentable and confident. One option would be to include experienced birding guides and operators.

Websites

There is a need to improve the birding content across the diverse websites of the UWA, UTB, NFA, community groups, private lodges and tour firms. This should be done in collaboration with bird experts and web designers, working together to develop accurate and interesting content

¹⁴ <http://www.donanabirdfair.es/home-2/>

¹⁵ <https://www.birdwatchingsagres.com/en/>

that can be presented from a Ugandan perspective, and without mistakes that give an unprofessional impression. An additional possibility is to develop a dedicated Ugandan birding website, with maps and information on all available species and sites, as well as a directory of accredited tour operators and guides.

Social media channels

It is necessary to have a dedicated birding expert, perhaps at UTB, responsible for posting regular birding content via the social media channels of UTB, MTWA, UWA and NFA. Opening birding-related Instagram and Twitter accounts would further contribute to spreading awareness. Chirp Birding¹⁶ is a social network for the global birding community and would be an excellent platform for sharing Ugandan information. birdguides.com is another excellent platform for birding news and sharing sightings of key species. A knowledgeable Ugandan birding expert should also join Facebook groups such as *We Love Birds*, which has over 0.5 million followers. If such an expert were to interact at this level on a regular basis, it would significantly raise the online profile of Ugandan birding.

Print and online advertising

Advertising online and in paper magazines can directly reach potential avi-tourists and members of the travel trade. Some of the most relevant publications for advertising are:

- a) *Birding Online Magazine* from the American Birding Association.
- b) *The Bird Watchers Digest*, another US publication.
- c) *Bird Watching*, a North American magazine with a large subscription base.
- d) *Birdlife: The Magazine*, published by BirdLife International's partner in South Africa, which covers the African continent and has featured Uganda several times.
- e) *Bird Watching Magazine*, the UK's best-selling monthly wild bird magazine.
- f) *The Bulletin of the African Bird Club*, a twice-yearly publication with conservation news, which has often published articles on Ugandan birds.

Updates to birding publications

There is a need to update and re-publish the book *Where to Watch Birds in Uganda*, adding the latest maps, access information, accommodation guides, tour operator information, bird lists, etc, to assist both independent travellers and tour groups. This would be a useful marketing tool

¹⁶ www.chirpbirding.com

with advertisements and high-quality images of the birds and scenery of Uganda. Field research and a full update could be completed in approximately six months.

Uganda also features in relatively few field guides compared with other countries, and current nomenclature and taxonomic changes are in dire need of updating. A Uganda-specific publication is long overdue and would be a great asset to visiting birdwatchers. An author(s), illustrator(s) and publisher would need to be identified and contracted.

Additionally, an e-Guide to the birds of Uganda would come handy and would provide a more convenient resourced than a bulky handbook.

8.2 Developing local birding and guiding capacity

The following package of support requires an estimated **\$120,000 over 3 years**:

Guide training

As discussed, guide training is an essential component of sustaining an expert and professional pool of qualified guides. Many sites are struggling to cope with too many birdwatchers visiting at once, with the UWA and NFA understaffed. Their own staff could be supplemented by training local community members (in the same way that local Bwindi porters assist with gorilla trekking). The current tourist guide training programme is doing a good job of recruiting guides into the industry, but there is insufficient diversification into specialised forms of training, such as bird guiding. Training content should be harmonised, well-structured and deliver internationally accepted certifications. Birding symposiums and dialogues should be promoted as platforms to share knowledge. There should also be reform in the institutional curriculum (for example at the higher institutions of learning) to accommodate ornithological courses, which give a firm foundation for people interesting in a birdwatching career.

Bird clubs

Whilst there is a large theoretical component to bird guide training, ultimately it is experience that makes a good guide. One of the more successful conduits for building experience has been local bird clubs. These can give their members a sense of pride and purpose, and are often the best way to lead to guiding work. Notable examples include the UGBC, Uganda Women Birders' Club, Sunbird Hill Bird Club and Rushaga Birders' Club, among others.

The club at Sunbird Hill (a private location next to Kibale Forest NP that hosts wildlife enthusiasts and serves as a workshop training centre) successfully applied to the African Bird Club's small

grants programme to replicate their own club in three nearby villages. The funds were used for building materials for three Village Bird Club offices, reference books and facilitation fees for the trainers to initiate the clubs and train mentors to run each club for an initial start-up period. There are already freelance guides in many communities who command respect and are in positions to start clubs and organise such activities.

Birding equipment

Birdwatching equipment is vital for upcoming bird guides and should be made available and affordable for those that would like to purchase. Equipment such as binoculars and books cannot be handed over to community members in an *ad hoc* manner and should be linked to trainings or distributed through local community associations or birdwatching clubs.

Research

Further fieldwork is needed to realise the potential of many of Uganda's lesser-known birding sites, especially some of the forest reserves such as Kagombe and Bugoma. Locating 'drawcard species' would put these locations on the map. A basic inventory of each site should be conducted to establish definitive bird lists, as this has not been done since the EU-funded project of the early 1990s. Research visits would also provide an opportunity to establish the layout of these sites, including trails, access and overall site evaluation, giving potential birdwatchers the necessary information for visiting. This could feed into the proposed update of *Where to Watch Birds in Uganda*. The findings could also be posted on NGO websites and social media outlets.

Volunteer workshops and trips

One of the small initiatives that has attracted birders to Uganda has been a series of bird ringing workshops over the past 25 years at several locations. Tourist guests have enjoyed the unique learning experience. Organisations such as the RSPB, BirdLife International and The Endangered Wildlife Trust should be welcomed to conduct further workshops in Uganda, to diversify the birding product and create a wider and more dynamic learning experience.

Local birding events

There is a need to support public birdwatching events such as the national BBD, to create more awareness on the value of conservation of birds.

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Appendix II Sample questionnaire for local avi-tourism stakeholders

Background information on tour operator and company

1. Name of Interviewee:
2. Name of tour company:
3. When was the company started (year)?.....

Birdwatching client information

4. a) What time of the year do you mostly get your clients? (give reasons if any)
.....
Estimate the average number of birdwatching clients that come to Uganda annually
.....
- b) How many birdwatchers did you have in 2019 (estimate)?
- c) What is the percentage increase/ decrease of birdwatching clients that your company has received in the last 5 years?.....
- d) Of the birdwatchers, how many (%) contacted you through international tour leaders/agents and how many contacted your company directly?
- e) What were the top 5 (descending order) nationalities of the birdwatching tourists that you received in 2019?
- f) What was their average length of stay (no. of days)?
- g) Of the mentioned nationalities, which of them spent more days in the country, at least rank the top 3 from highest to lowest?
5. What birdwatching areas did they visit in Uganda (mention as many as possible)?
.....
6. Mention the main international tour companies sending birdwatching clients to Uganda (at least 5)
.....

Marketing the business

7. a) How do you market your birdwatching trips? (tick as many appropriate answers as possible)
 - website.....
 - online marketing.....
 - word of mouth.....
 - bird fairs, travel shows and festivals.....
 - others, specify.....
- b) If one of the answers above is bird fairs, festivals or travel shows, mention a few travel shows that you attend to market your company

Potential of birdwatching

8. a) What is the percentage increase/ decrease of birdwatching clients has UWA received in the last 5 years (not considering the Covid pandemic)?

.....

b) In the next 5 years, what does your company anticipate? (tick appropriate answers)

- Significant reduction in the number of birdwatchers.....
- Small reduction in the number of clients.....
- About the same number of clients.....
- Small increase in the number of birding clients.....
- Significant increase in the number of clients.....

9. a) Mention top 10 or more sites within the Albertine rift area with good birding

.....

b) Mention sites within the Albertine Rift that need improvement and specify the improvements needed per site to develop/enhance the sites in a sustainable manner e.g. canopy tours, training of guides, board walks, trails, guidebooks, tourism office, bird feeders, etc (mention a site with the development)

.....

Learning from the past

11. Mention any birdwatching developments by e government, donors or NGOs that have been successful and give the reasons

Mention failed ventures and give reasons:

12. Mention any challenges you face as a birdwatching tour operator (access fees to birding areas, insufficient trained guides, time allocation to activities in Protected Areas etc)

.....

13. Suggest ways that the overall birdwatching experience in Uganda can be improved (not just in the Albertine Rift but throughout the country).

.....

Please mention any other issues that we may have forgotten to mention

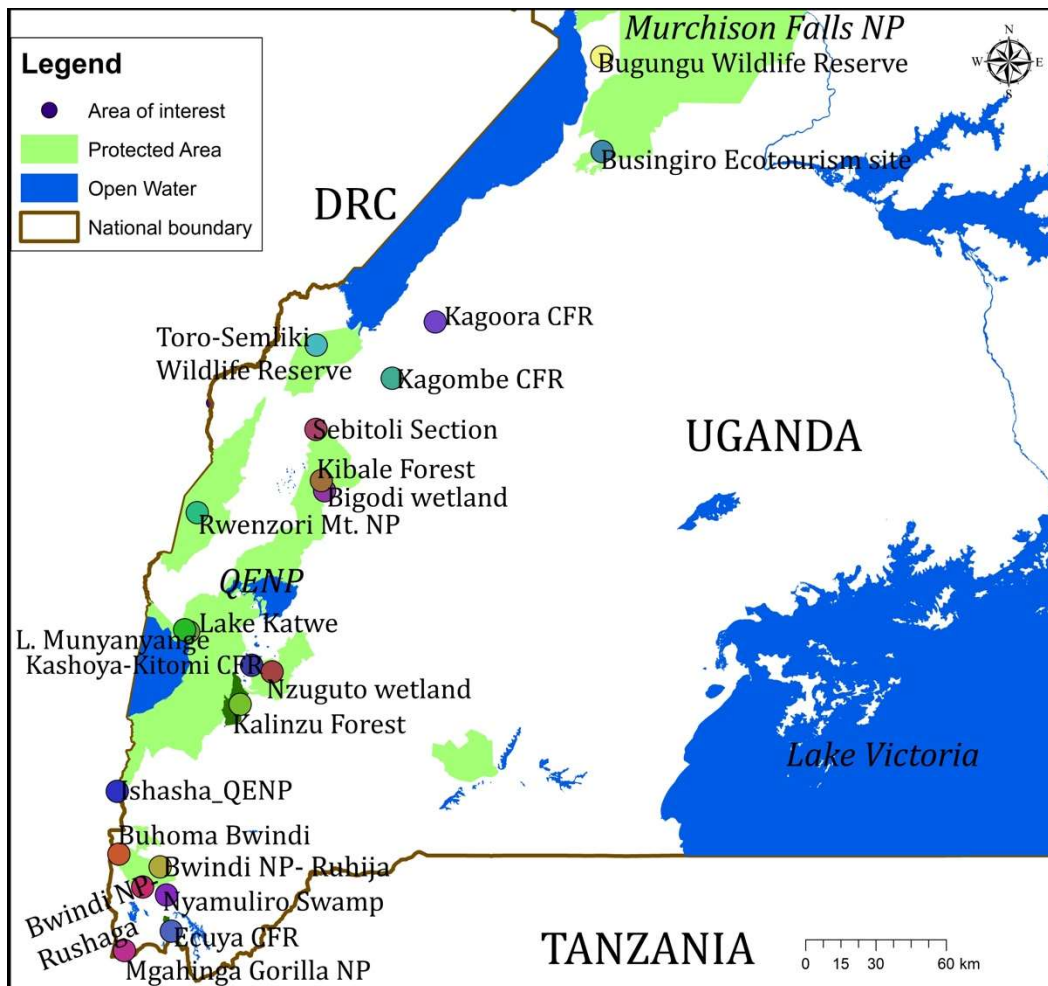
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Appendix III List of people interviewed

Stakeholder	Designation	Organisation
Bird guides		
Davis Rukundo	Chairperson	Uganda Bird Guides Club
Arshley Brian	Secretary	Uganda Bird Guides Club
Abia Atukwatse	Secretary	Uganda Women Birders
Prossy Nanyombi	Vice Chairperson	Uganda Women Birders
Tuhaise Brian	Secretary	Uganda Safari Guides Assoc.
Veronica Nakafeero	Freelance bird guide	
Alfred Twinomujuni	Freelance bird guide	
Emmy Gongo	Freelance bird guide	
Frank Akankwasa	Freelance bird guide	
Saul Ampeire	Freelance bird guide	
Tonny Byarugaba	Freelance bird guide and tour operator	Mamaland Tours
Local birdwatching tour operators		
Herbert Byaruhanga	Director	Bird Uganda Safaris
Paul Tamwenya	Director	Journeys Uganda
Crammy Wanyama	Director	Avian Safaris
Livingstone Kalema	Director	Livingstone Africa Safaris
Harriet Kemigisha	Director	Harrier Tours
Deo Muhumuza	Director	Wide Wild Safaris
Johnnie Kamugisha	Director	Birding in Paradise
NGOs		
Dr. Simon Nampindo	Executive Director	Wildlife Conservation Society
David Duli	Country Director	Worldwide Fund for Nature
Dr. Dianah Nalwanga	Programmes Manager	NatureUganda
Community/private bird Initiatives		
Julia Lloyd	Owner	Sunbird Hill
Tinka John	Founding member	KAFRED, Bigodi Wetland
Ambrose Twinomujuni	Founder	Bigodi Wetland Environmental Association
Government Institutions		
Sophie Baliuka	UTB	
Others		
Felix		UCOTA

Stakeholder	Designation	Organisation
Raymond Ongen	Site Guide	Royal Mile, Budongo CFR
Robert	Site Bird Guide	Kalinzu Forest
Baker	Site Guide	Echuya Forest
National Forestry Authority		
Sylvia Tumusiime	Eco-tourism Officer	
Robert	Forest Supervisor	Royal Mile, Budongo CFR
Barekye Sam	Sector Manager	Bugoma CFR
Timothy Kiboma	Forest Manager	Bugoma CFR
Boaz	Sector Manager	Kagombe CFR
Deo Byabusa	Site Community Guide	Kasyoha-Kitomi CFR
Amos T	Supervisor	Kasyoha-Kitomi CFR
Mudini Albert	Sector Manager	Kasyoha-Kitomi CFR
Uganda Wildlife Authority		
Dorcus Twesigomwe	Business/ Product Dev't Manager	Kampala
John Bosco Okello	Sector Manager	Bugungu Wildlife Reserve
Onen John	Community Conservation Manager	Bugungu Wildlife Reserve
Harriet Nakyesa	Ranger Guide	Sebitoli Sector, Kibale NP
Joseph Wasike	Sector In charge	Sebitoli Sector, Kibale NP
Harriet Mbabazi	Asst. Warden	Semuliki NP
Alex Turyashemererwa	Ranger Guide	Semuliki NP
Patrick Tushabe	Warden	Toro Semuliki Wildlife Reserve
James Okware	Warden	Rwakingi sector, Rwenzori NP
Joseph	Ranger guide	Rwenzori NP
Sande Charles N	Warden Tourism	Ruhijja sector, Bwindi NP
Tindyebwa Ronald	Warden Tourism	Rushaga sector, Bwindi NP
Sunday Frank	Warden Law Enforcement	Mgahinga Gorilla NP
Omas	Ranger Guide	Mgahinga Gorilla NP

Appendix IV Map showing the 20 sites visited



Appendix V Uganda’s standard birdwatching circuit

Starting at Entebbe, a morning trip can be made to the Mabamba swamp to observe the Shoebill (Figure 3). Travelling the standard birdwatching circuit clockwise, the first main site is then Lake Mburo NP. The journey from Entebbe to Mabamba and onwards to Lake Mburo can be made in good time

Figure 3. the Shoebill, one of Uganda’s iconic bird species



via the ferry from Entebbe to Buwaya landing, and from there directly to Mpigi on the main Masaka road. This avoids the significant traffic congestion of the longer route via Kampala.

Lake Mburo NP

Lake Mburo has a combination of Akagera-Serengeti savanna habitat and relic miombo woodland, which only occurs in this particular region of southern Uganda. As a result, there are several species found here that are not found anywhere else in Uganda. These include regional endemics such as Red-faced Barbet and seasonal visitors such as Brown-chested Lapwing, as well as a variety of species at the northern edge of their range. With birdwatching on the increase, several new species for Uganda have been recorded at Lake Mburo.

Mgahinga and Bwindi NPs

From Lake Mburo, the standard circuit proceeds south-west to the Mgahinga Gorilla and Bwindi Impenetrable NPs in the Albertine Rift. Mgahinga NP is the more distant of the two and is often bypassed, given that most of the birds there can be found also in Bwindi. But it is arguably a better place to see Rwenzori Turaco and the endangered Shelley’s Crimsonwing (an ARE, of which very few sightings have been made, and only at Mgahinga in recent times). Mgahinga is also the only place in Uganda to see golden monkey, another ARE. With gorilla viewing also available, Mgahinga is said to be the place “where silver meets gold”.

The most popular sectors of Bwindi NP for birdwatching are near the main centre at Buhoma and in the higher altitude montane forest of Ruhija, with distinctly different sets of species. One of the biggest attractions at Ruhija is the Mubwindi swamp trail, which attracts a pilgrimage of

birdwatchers targeting Grauer's Broadbill and Grauer's Swamp Warbler (both AREs). This is possibly the only place in the world to see these two species in one location (as the other sites are in the DRC and too insecure for organised tours). The Mubwindi swamp is also home to the Broadbill Stork and the tree species *Symphonia globulifera*, which attracts a plethora of Sunbird species, five of which are AREs. The **Purple-breasted Sunbird** is a canopy dweller and hardly ever seen at lower levels in the forest and is therefore a highly desired photographic prize (Figure 4).

Figure 4. The Purple-breasted Sunbird



Three nights at Bwindi give two full days' birdwatching, which is usually sufficient unless a group is interested in observing a particular species in more depth. As more gorilla groups at Bwindi have become accessible for tracking, new lodges have been built to accommodate gorilla-viewing tourists. Both Nkuringo and Rushaga are now

comparable with the popular Buhoma and Ruhija sections, with a range of luxury, mid-price and budget accommodation, and ought to get a fair share of avi-tourists. But most birdwatching tour operators have yet to include Nkuringo and Rushaga on their itineraries, because the habitat and species mix differ little from Buhoma and Ruhija.

Kalinzu Forest Reserve and ecotourism site

Kalinzu is not on the standard birdwatching circuit, but is described here because of its potential for future inclusion. Kalinzu is part of the greater Maramagambo-Kalinzu and Kasyoha-Kitomi forest complex that also includes part of QENP. The forests here are different to the Budongo-Kibale and Bwindi, at a

Figure 5. The underwhelming entrance to Kalinzu forest



different elevation and with different tree species. There is a basic bird list of 378 species which could easily be increased with more exploration.

Echuya Forest Reserve

Situated between Mgahinga Gorilla NP and the popular tourist region of Lake Bunyonyi, Echuya complements the region's other attractions. With 152 bird species, including 18 AREs and the endangered **Grauer's Swamp Warbler**, Echuya is the most important forest in the country for the rarity of its fauna and flora. It is rarely visited by avi-tourists.

Figure 6. Overlooking Echuya forest



Queen Elizabeth NP

From Bwindi, the standard itinerary heads north to QENP, Uganda's second largest NP, covering just under 2,000 km². With a checklist of over 600 bird species, QENP would require several days to explore properly. It is often omitted from birdwatching itineraries, however, because many of the species found here can be seen elsewhere. Even the species that occur in the forested areas of the Park will likely be seen in other forests in the Albertine Rift, and may include AREs, of which there are none in QENP.

It is possible to take a boat cruise along the Kazinga Channel that connects Lake George and Lake Edward, which has roosting spots hosting high concentrations of birds (Figure 7). Herds of elephant and buffalo may also be sighted.

Figure 7. Red-throated Bee-eaters nesting along Kazinga Channel



Figure 8. Lesser Flamingo, Katwe salt pans, QENP



Lake Munyanyange is an enclave of QENP that offers a variety of novel wetland species, including **Lesser Flamingo** (Figure 8) and **Greater Painted Snipe**. Between November and April, when filled with water, the lake hosts a great variety of waterbirds, including many Palearctic migrants such as large flocks of terns, and gulls (including Gull-billed Tern and **Lesser Black-backed**

Gull). There is an established group of guides under the Katwe Ecotourism Association.

Shoebill occur in QENP, but are not easily accessed by vehicle. They can be found on the southern edge of Lake George near the fishing village of Hamukungu, but to reach this spot is considered off-road driving and is therefore forbidden. They may also be found on the Lake Edward flats in the southern Ishasha sector of the Park, but this involves a long drive on tracks that become treacherous in the rainy season. There are some wetlands along the Ishasha road that have had Shoebills in the past, but require site exploration and monitoring to understand the reliability of sightings.

Kibale Forest NP

In addition to being one of the main sites for chimpanzee tracking in Uganda, Kibale NP is home to over 375 species of birds and is well-known for reliable sightings of the **Green-breasted Pitta**, a secretive resident of central Africa's rainforests (Figure 9). Prior to the discovery of this bird at Kibale in 2005, there had only been two recorded sightings in Uganda, both from Budongo Forest. The bird was discovered at Kibale by Harriet

Figure 9. The Green-breasted Pitta, one of Uganda's flagship forest bird species



Kemigisha, a UWA ranger who was working as a chimp trekking guide.¹⁷ After its discovery here, birdwatching visitation rose by 80% and Harriet was in great demand as the ‘pitta lady’, guiding birders from all over the world to see this difficult-to-find species.

Kibale Forest remains an essential stop on all birdwatching tours to Uganda thanks to this species, while Harriet has become a private birdwatching guide and runs Harrier Tours. This example shows what discovering a rare species can mean for tourist numbers and revenue. Kibale is also the site of an interesting reclassification of bird species (see text box).

In 1966 two bird specimens were collected by Glen and Williams in Kibale Forest, which were identified as Black-eared Ground Thrush (*Geokichla camaronensis*). Later in 1978, A. Prigogine, on further examination, concluded that they were in fact a new species, Kibale Ground Thrush (*G. kibalensis*), but later were consigned to a subspecies of Black-eared Ground Thrush (*G. camaronensis kibalensis*). Either way, this begs the question how many more tantalising and exciting discoveries may be waiting to be made in Uganda’s forests.

One of the best places to birdwatch at Kibale is along the main public road that dissects the Park. The road offers good vantage points along its length, but birdwatchers operating here can cause an obstacle to through-traffic and represent lost revenue for UWA. A solution to this problem is required, possibly by introducing a small levy for birdwatching groups.

Bigodi wetland sanctuary

Another well-known attraction at Kibale Forest is the Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary guided walk, managed by the Kibale Association for Rural and Environmental Development (KAFRED), which was founded in 1992 to conserve biodiversity outside protected areas (see text box).

KAFRED was started in 1992 with six members, two of whom were working with the Kibale NP and brought knowledge of biodiversity monitoring and trail surveying. Current membership is over 170 and includes individuals as well as associations, such as the Bigodi Women’s Crafts Group. KAFRED’s boardwalk has inspired similar developments by the Bigodi Community Association and Bigodi Community Experience. KAFRED uses the proceeds from ecotourism to invest in social services (such as a secondary school) and provides employment and training opportunities for local youths.

¹⁷ Her story can be read here: <https://africageographic.com/stories/video-searching-elusive-green-breasted-pitta> -

The four-hour wetland walk in Bigodi partly traverses a boardwalk (see Figure 10), which gives an excellent vantage point for seeing the Papyrus Gonolek and White-winged Warbler, two highly sought-after bird species. The Bigodi walk is also a fairly reliable spot for seeing the White-Collared Oliveback, another vital addition for any birder's list. Whilst not endangered, it is a difficult bird to find and see, which makes it a good drawcard for the Bigodi wetland.

Figure 10. Boardwalk at Bigodi wetland sanctuary



The wetland attracts over 200 species of birds, both forest and forest-edge species, which may be difficult to sight in the NP. For example, the Great Blue Turaco, White-tailed Ant-Thrush and White-spotted Flufftail. The area also has a good selection of primates such as the endangered localised red colobus, **Ugandan red colobus**, black and white colobus, vervet monkey and occasional visits of the common chimpanzee.

Rwenzori Mountains NP

The Rwenzori Mountains NP is mostly visited by climbers and hikers, and is one of the most neglected Parks from a birdwatching point of view. Yet it is conveniently situated just north of QENP, west of Kibale Forest NP and south of Semuliki NP, close to the route taken by most birdwatching tours as they travel to and from these other locations. This large park has 19 ARE bird species, including the only sightings of Grauer's Cuckooshrike, a near-threatened species found only here and in the eastern DRC, and Rockfeller's Sunbird, found only here and (very rarely) in Nyungwe NP in Rwanda. Whilst these two species would be good drawcards if they could be found with reliable frequency, visitors are deterred by the time and effort needed to hike into the forest. Given the opportunity to spend limited time in other forests, Rwenzori can be easily dismissed for its lack of convenient accommodation, trails and access.

Semuliki NP

From Kibale Forest NP it is a two-hour drive to Semuliki NP, which is the lowest point in Uganda and sits at the easternmost extremity of the lowland Congo basin rainforest. This makes it the only place in East Africa to find some 144 West African species at the edge of their range, and

allows birdwatchers to view these species from the relative safety and security of Uganda and to increase their tallies considerably.

Semuliki has an impressive list of 441 species, of which drawcard species are: **Nkulengu Rail, African Piculet, White-throated Blue swallow, Yellow-throated Cuckoo** and a variety of hornbills such as the **Piping, Red-billed Dwarf, White-crested, Black-casqued and Wattled Hornbills.**

A long (15 km) walk provides access to the Semuliki River, the only place in East Africa to see the White-throated Blue Swallow. Another drawcard discovered here in 2007 was a pair of Golden-naped Weavers, an incredibly rare bird previously thought endemic to the Ituri Forest in the DRC. The distance from the start of the Kirumia trail and the first oxbow lake on the Semuliki River is about 5.5 km. The big draw cards to the oxbow lakes are species like the white-throated blue swallow, Grey-throated Rail and **Hartlaub's Duck**, which are very hard to see elsewhere in the Park.

Despite this unique opportunity to see so many species not found anywhere else in East Africa, Semuliki is often left off birding itineraries. Partly this is due to a lack of suitable accommodation. Birdwatchers must either travel over 60 km to the Park each day from Fort Portal, stay at the high-budget Semliki Safari Lodge in the Semuliki Wildlife Reserve or use the UWA bandas



and campsite at Bumaga post, which are very basic and not used by the main tour operators.

Another restricting factor is waterlogging of the Park's trails in the rainy season, which is extremely limiting for birdwatching access. Elevated boardwalks would improve the birdwatching experience greatly. There is also only one bird guide currently employed at the Park centre, which is a significant limitation when birdwatching group visit concurrently.

Murchison Falls NP

From Semuliki NP or Kibale NP, the itinerary continues north to Murchison Falls NP. This used to be a gruelling ten-hour drive on dirt roads, but is now a relatively comfortable four hour journey on a surfaced road via Masindi, significantly increasing the time available for birdwatching.

Murchison Falls NP is connected to Budongo Forest Reserve, and the two protected areas offer two very contrasting habitats. Murchison is primarily a wooded savannah habitat, the only real example in Uganda, apart from Kidepo Valley NP, of the Guinea-Sudanian Savanna grassland biome. This provides a variety of drawcard species not found elsewhere in Uganda, including the Foxy Cisticola, Northern Carmine Bee-eater and Pel's Fishing Owl, as well as a good chance of seeing the Shoebill at the River Nile delta. This is also the only site for the endangered Rothschild's subspecies of northern giraffe, although these have now been introduced to Lake Mburo NP.

Budongo Forest Reserve

Budongo is the largest forest in East Africa and has its affinities with the great Ituri forest in the Congo Basin. It is one of the most popular destinations in Uganda for birdwatching groups, particularly the Royal Mile and Kaniyo Pabidi sites due to their well-maintained trails. Budongo boasts of over 360 bird species and several species that make this site especially worth visiting, including Puvel's Illadopsis, Grey Ground-Thrush, Chocolate-backed Kingfisher, African Dwarf Kingfisher, Uganda Woodland Warbler, Ituri Batis and Chestnut-capped Flycatcher. Puvel's Illadopsis is a species discovered in Uganda relatively recently outside its closest West African range of Cameroon. Species such as this can attract entire birding groups to a site. Exploration to discover similarly rare species would yield highly beneficial results to any locality where they were found. The Grey Ground Thrush is a mythical species recorded only once at Budongo in the 1990s. It is elusive species such as this which give sites like Budongo an atmosphere of excitement of the chance of re-discovery.

Figure 12. The Royal Mile, Budongo CFR



Birdwatchers generally visit three sites at Budongo. The most popular is 'The Royal Mile', a spectacular avenue of large mahogany and ironwood trees (see Figure 12). The other two are Kaniyo Pabidi, which is in Murchison Falls NP, and the less popular Busingiro eco-tourism site.

In birding circles, certain stretches of road or trail attain mythical status. For example, in American birding circles the Panama Pipeline

Road.¹⁸ The Royal Mile at Budongo provides such an experience by providing access to some of the most pristine forest habitat in Uganda. Massive mahoganies, ironwoods and figs create a diverse canopy habitat and the lush understorey supports a multitude of different ecological niches, yet still affords good sightlines to spot birds.

There is a lack of convenient accommodation and most birdwatching tourists stay at Masindi, as accommodation is basic and limited at the tourist visitor centres of Busingiro and Kaniyo Pabidi, although the latter does have good accommodation nearby. Masindi is some 43 km from Busingiro and 40 km from the Royal Mile on slow roads. Having a good tourist lodge near the Royal Mile would result in many tour operators changing their itineraries, and greatly improve the experience of birding in the Royal Mile.

¹⁸ <https://www.10000birds.com/surfing-for-birds-at-pipeline-road.htm>

Appendix VI Examples of birdwatching support infrastructure

The provision of a high-quality birdwatching experience to avi-tourists requires a variety of supporting infrastructure, examples of which are described in this appendix. While many investments have been made over the years in similar types of infrastructure in Uganda, a key challenge has been to ensure that the systems are in place to repair and maintain these facilities.

Hides and blinds

Hides or blinds were initially constructed in wetlands by wildfowl hunters, to provide cover for shooting. As birdwatching became more popular, hides were constructed at wetland reserves in Europe and North America to let birders get closer to concentrations of feeding birds. Hides are typically constructed at vantage points where the

Figure 13. Bird hide at Sunbird Hill next to Kibale NP



sun passes behind or from left to right, offering good light for bird viewing (Figure 13). A birdwatcher might spend 5 to 20 minutes observing birds in the watchable vicinity, or up to an hour or two watching particular behaviour or waiting for a special bird to appear. Photographers in particular use hides to wait for the perfect moment for a shot.

Hides may also be built in strategic places where there are large congregation of birds or where a carcass can be dumped to witness the spectacular feeding frenzy of a large number of vultures. Other hides may be set in reedbeds overlooking a cleared area or pond, with access via a boardwalk in complete concealment. Reedbed hides are particularly good for bitterns, crakes, rails (a particularly difficult group of birds to see), duck species and other waterbirds.

Possibly the first hide in Uganda was that on the Mweya Peninsula in Queen Elizabeth NP in 1998, which was designed by Malcolm Wilson and executed by Operation Raleigh, a UK-based youth volunteer organisation. The hide was built using gum poles and corrugated iron roofing, with an adjacent scrape forming a shallow muddy lagoon. This attracted many shorebirds and ducks, as well as hippo. Birding walks to the hide were offered by the Mweya Safari Lodge, but UWA did not promote this attraction and the structure became overgrown and eventually

collapsed. A similar hide was constructed by a wetland on the north bank of the Nile at Murchison Falls, at a Shoebill feeding and roosting spot. Today it is rarely visited, however, and has also become termite-infested and fallen into disrepair.

Guides working at the main birding sites report a need for shelters where tourists can take a rest and escape from the rain. But the tour operators consider such structures to be undesirable 'clutter' in the forest. As a compromise, hides that were located in carefully thought-out positions could double up as shelters.

Photographic tourism, especially for birds, has been growing rapidly and in many cases has supplanted traditional bird viewing via binoculars. There is an opportunity to build hides specifically for photography at food sources, nesting colonies, ponds or other sites of regular visitation.

Canopy tower

A canopy tower is a structure built in a forest to allow viewing of species that inhabit particular horizontal layers within the forest ecosystem. Forest birding can be taxing on the neck from looking directly up from the ground, and canopy towers can be a good way to allow easier viewing of treetop-dwelling species. They can also attract general tourists for canopy-level forest viewing. There is a good example of such a tower in Zika Forest near Entebbe, constructed in the 1940s by the then Yellow Fever Research Institute for sampling mosquitos at different levels. Today this tower is a dangerous ruin as its wooden platforms have all but rotted away, and the forest is a relic of its former size and health.

For many years, Kibale Forest was the only reliable site to see a true canopy-dwelling species, the White-naped Pigeon. These birds (and others) could be seen from the visitor centre at Kanyachu, sunning themselves in the early morning on dead branches protruding from the canopy. Today, however, it is not possible to see this species as the forest around the visitor centre has grown up to obscure the view. This would be an ideal site to place a canopy tower.

High level walkways

High level walkways offer a unique perspective on the upper strata of forests. They are typically built as either a raised boardwalk or a suspended 'hammock' or rope bridge. Solid platforms at each end or at intermediate points offer the same opportunities as a tower. If well designed on land that slopes away, it may be possible to lead people from an access path onto a walkway and

take them many metres above the ground in a very short time. Access will otherwise be via a ramped walkway or a series of steps.

As birdwatchers require maximum stability for focusing binoculars or a camera, the boardwalk-type design is generally preferable, otherwise birdwatching is not possible on windy days or when other visitors are present. The canopy walkway at Kakum NP in Ghana suffers from this drawback, and has been described as a 'fairground ride' by one tour guide. But a guide familiar with a high-level walkway at Nyungwe NP in Rwanda reports that it is possible to have a good birdwatching experience with the hammock-type walkway, as long as there is no wind or other people walking on the structure. A structure fixed to the ground will offer better stability for birdwatching, but may not offer access to the same variety of species that a walkway could at greater height.

There are three examples of high-level walkways in South Africa, all of the raised boardwalk design. A walkway at Mapungubwe NP takes visitors through a section of riparian forest on the Limpopo River. The path starts from the car park and remains level as the ground drops away toward the river. It offers a great opportunity to view grazing mammals beneath and birds at eye level. A second aerial boardwalk, at Dlinza forest in KwaZulu-Natal, culminates at a spectacular forest viewpoint 25-30 m high. The third is in Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens in Cape Town, which is a boardwalk on a steel frame.

'Vulture restaurants'

Vultures face problems such as the poisoning of carcasses by farmers to control perceived vermin, such as jackal. Vulture restaurants were initiated by conservation groups to provide supplementary food for vultures in areas where they are threatened. They are particularly popular in South Africa, which has 236 documented examples. These 'restaurants' make up for a lack of natural carrion by providing a source of uncontaminated food, especially during the breeding season. By supplying clean carcasses in private nature reserves and other carefully selected sites, vulture restaurants have enabled many populations to remain stable. The provision of uncontaminated food also reduces the threat of anthrax and rabies. These sites provide additional benefits by allowing regular counting and population monitoring, alongside excellent photography opportunities of birds feeding at a carcass, often alongside hyena, lion, jackal and leopard. The creation of such restaurants requires a certain level of capacity and expertise. They also require organised management and regular carcass supply.

In Uganda, UWA organises an annual vulture count in the four savannah NPs of Lake Mburo, Queen Elizabeth, Murchison Falls and Kidepo. The carcass of a cow is placed simultaneously in each NP and attracts most of the vultures in the respective region. This permits an accurate count of all seven of Uganda's vulture species. Many other bird and predatory species are attracted to these events, and the interaction of birds competing for scraps is exactly what photographers look for. If a similar activity was carried out on a more frequent basis, it would make an ideal avi-tourist attraction, given UWA's permission and support in bringing carcasses and constructing hides in strategic spots. Benefits would accrue not only from tourism, but also from the research opportunity and the support for the vulture populations.

Whilst the baiting of large carnivores is counter to some Parks' management policies, there are exceptions such as the 'leopard tree' in Tsavo West NP in Kenya, where a goat leg is hung on a wooden frame each night for tourists to watch leopards feeding. Whilst leopards are not of conservation concern, there is good reason to consider feeding vultures, which travel over vast areas and are often threatened by anthropogenic factors. Vulture numbers have drastically declined throughout Africa over the past 30 years, and continue to do so.

Boardwalks

One of the best examples of a boardwalk in Uganda is at the Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary, which has for many years facilitated access to an otherwise impenetrable swamp. A steady flow of birdwatchers and other tourists has provided a good incentive to maintain the facility. There is also a good network of boardwalks at the Sampaya hot springs in Semuliki NP, which enables visitors to see the springs close-up in muddy terrain. Constructing additional boardwalk 'loops' off existing structures (especially in papyrus areas) would create more places to watch for birds without disturbance. One factor to take into consideration is the regular use of boardwalks by local villagers as they go about their work. Encountering this kind of traffic on a boardwalk can disturb a morning's birdwatching, where peace and quiet are needed.

Walking trails

It takes considerable thought and sensitive planning to place new trails that provide access to a specific habitat or site in ways that do not degrade that habitat or upset the perspective. It is also important to take into account the work required to keep them in a functioning state. Some trails have been blocked to birdwatchers, specifically at Buhoma in Bwindi NP, as there were cases of non-birders booking a birdwatching tour knowing the likelihood of seeing gorillas was

high, and a fraction of the cost of gorilla trekking. Yet for genuine birdwatchers, these trails are often the most convenient for accessing species that occur at different altitudes within a relatively short distance.

Ponds and waterholes

Ponds and waterholes are relatively low-cost features that can be constructed and managed at tourist lodges. Ponds are typically constructed within the garden, restaurant area or reception of a lodge, where it is easy to keep an eye on bird activity. If well located, they can offer tourists a great opportunity to see birds which come to them, without requiring a birdwatching outing. They can be an interesting focal point for photographers and a good way for non-birders to see colourful species close-up. In addition to birds, attractive insects like dragonfly and butterflies can be seen at these ponds. Malcolm Wilson designed and built a 3 x 6 m pond at the eco-tourist site of Sunbird Hill next to Kibale Forest NP (Figure 14). Located some 10 m from a sitting area (or 'birders lounge'), it attracts a regular stream of birds which come to drink and bathe.

Figure 14. Bird bath at Sunbird Hill on the boundary of Kibale NP



Ponds are not common at lodges in Uganda, possibly because of cost, liability or the risk of attracting mosquitoes or large predators. A lack of knowledge of how and where to install ponds may also be a limitation. By putting fish into a pond, the problem of mosquitos is dealt with. Fish will also attract birds such as kingfishers and herons.

Ponds are better suited to lodges in forest environments, while larger waterholes are

better suited to drier savanna environments. Many waterholes in more arid locations are sustained by a solar-powered pump connected to a borehole or well. Many lodges in South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Kenya have waterholes in front of their main game viewing areas. These larger water features attract mammals and group of birds (such as swifts, swallows, ducks and shorebirds) to drink and bathe.

Bird tables have been tried at various lodges and are proven to work well in hot weather, but bird tables (where food is put out) have never been a success as they attract baboons and monkeys, which become dependent and aggressive.