

Uganda, part two.

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Entebbe eastwards, including Mount Elgon on the Kenyan border, arid savannahs on the route to Moroto, plus the lush lowland forests at Mabira. This segment of the trip, totalling almost two weeks, saw me squashed onto occasional buses, sitting atop trucks fully laden and hitching on the back of motorbikes, travel by my favoured means, backpacking all the way. After two days back in the Entebbe area, my route first took me to Sipi Falls, a very scenic area and the gateway to both Mount Elgon and the arid semi-deserts that extend northwards. After several days there, the superb Mabira Forest beckoned and the amazing birding there held attraction for a good few days before I finally returned yet again to Entebbe, spending my last days exploring the general area and slightly wider afield, stumbling by chance upon the stunning Lutembe Bay.

25 December, Christmas Day
In compassion to my long-suffering travel partner, on the last day of their holiday, I reluctantly agreed to forgo a day's birding and spend Christmas hurtling down the Grade 5 rapids on the white waters of the River Nile at Jinja. Jeepers, the thought of paying out to not only miss good birding, but risk life and limb, was almost enough to bring out the Christmas Scrooge in me, but there I was, 7 a.m. Christmas morning, up and waiting for the rafting company to collect us and take us into oblivion! Then the miraculous happened, as an African Thrush hopped past, the Christmas fairies must have been listening to my silent desires - the rafting company forgot to collect us!!! Yippee, they finally remembered us when they were 60 km away and unable to return! Stranded and forlorn, what could we do? Maybe, a little wander down to Entebbe, I suggested, a very laid-back and pleasant place to spend Christmas ...one or two birds there too! An hour later, after negotiating the medlam of the microbus station in Kampala, and we were in Entebbe. Under skies heavy in Marabou Storks and wheeling Black Kites, I should have been taking the day off from birding, but as my eye flicked from side to side, a Double-toothed Barbet appeared on the wires, a Hadada Ibis dropped in to drink at a small pool and I realised a non-birding day just wasn't going to happen! So, in a gesture of compromise, we took a wander around the leafy gardens of suburbia - culture in the form of churches resonating to gospel song and full to the beams with celebrating Ugandans, dressed out in their best clothes, all to the backdrop of some fine birding, headed by hornbills of three species, a fly-over Brown Parrot, one Grey Kestrel and an assortment of sunbirds and weavers. With our stroll, almost by chance, incorporating a rather boggy margin to Lake Victoria, added extras included seven Knob-billed Ducks, a Green-backed Heron, a lot of Paleoarctic waders and a few Gull-billed Terns. Swamp Flycatchers also present. Next, I have to confess, I got sneaky - trying to incorporate a sewage farm into the Christmas Day itinerary, I suggested a small detour towards a nice bakery and then burred something about having a quick look at some pools just a bit further down. The bakery served a nice chicken pie, but arriving at the sewage farm moments later didn't really get the thumbs up! I just don't see how the chomping of lunch to the scenic delights of White-faced Whistling Ducks can fail to impress anyone. And alongside them, paddling near the effluent sludge, loads of Marsh Sandpipers, Black-winged Stilts and other waders, ah delightful. And so ended Christmas Day, bar an African Grey Parrot that flew over as dusk approached.

26 December, Kajjansé and more, one farewell
Between Entebbe and the airport, there lies an extensive area of flatlands, wet grass and dotted papyrus. As the sun broke the horizon and a mist hung over the marsh, I was up to my knees getting drenched by the dew and occasional misplaced foot. These grasslands were productive though - atop stalks, soaking up the first rays of the climbing sun, Blue-headed Coucals appeared everywhere, at least six dotted across the immediate area. Also African Marsh Harriers quartering, a Crowned Crane flying over and two Scaly Francolins darting through a slightly drier area. Add onto that, a Plain Martin flying about, a Variable Sunbird visiting flowers and eight Fawn-breasted Waxbills and it could be concluded the morning had started well. Plenty of Common Waxbills too and a few Brimstone Canaries. Next stop was about 25 km north - a visit to Kajjansé Fish Farm, reportedly an excellent spot with potential for unusual migrants. Arrived to a flurry of activity - White-throated Bee-eaters by the dozen, Pied Kingfishers everywhere and a good assortment of more. Once wandering around, the pools were pleasant, but not mind-blowing - a reasonable mix of migrants waders, plenty of herons, including Yellow-billed Egrets, Squacco Herons and a Purple Heron, plus a selection of smaller birds including a few Malachite Kingfishers, one Greater Honeyguide, a Wattled Starling and good numbers of Fan-tailed Widowbirds. With that, we decided to return to Entebbe to relax the afternoon away in the garden of our accommodation, Hadada Ibis strolling the lawn, African Thrush grubbing about in the hedge and Eastern Grey Plain-Eaters squawking their way overhead. In the evening, one half of the travelling duo departed for the airport, destination cold lands to the far north. The other half still had plenty of time to go, the beginning

of which would be a voyage starting the next morning. 27 December, eastward to Sipi Falls Lying some 330 km north-east of Entebbe, the Sipi Falls area is widely thought of as one of the most beautiful localities in all Uganda and, for the birder, it doubles as an excellent base to explore the slopes of Mount Elgon, home to extensive montane forest and highland specialities. So it was, a little after dawn, I set out on my journey - microbus up to Kampala, a long bus to Mbale and then a bush taxi up the hairpins to arrive at Sipi in mid-afternoon. What a locality, with the tent up, I sat back for a while to take in the view - the impressive waterfall in front, a pair of Fan-tailed Ravens sailing past. A cup of tea or two later and I began my explorations - the idea was to find a suitable route to begin a hike the following day, a path that might take me up the Mount Elgon that towered above. I trudged upwards for a couple of hours, relatively few birds on route, then doubled back into an area of open pasture, meadows that produced the best birds of the afternoon - the only Red-billed Oxpeckers and Yellow-crowned Canaries of the trip and the first African Citrils. Having also established a route for the next day and seen Bronze, Northern Double-collared and Green-headed Sunbirds, I then backtracked and returned to camp. 28 December, Mount Elgon A fantastic day, if somewhat hard on the legs! In eleven hours of trekking, I climbed from Sipi Falls to a second waterfall further up the mountain, then followed a stream up to the beginning of the montane forest. After bashing around in dense forest for a while, I stumbled upon an excellent trail and thereafter hiked ever upwards, ranging from about 2000 to 2500 metres altitude. Having left Sipi Falls at 6.30 a.m., I was on the rim of the upper falls by 8.00 and what a spectacle awaited me - presumably having all roosted nearby, the air was filled with hundreds of swifts and hirundines. And I, perched on the top of a cliff, was eyeball to eyeball with them, the perfect way to watch these aerial masters. Amongst the masses of hirundines, Barn Swallows, Rock Martins and Sand Martins predominated, but Grey-rumped Swallows also appeared in abundance, along with a few Red-rumped Swallows and House Martins. These alone would have been impressive, but alongside them flew the swifts, the big guns of the sky!!! Dozens of Nyanza Swifts, then, out of the blue, Scarce Swifts too, hurtling along the cliff edge before towering high into the sky and one more plunging into the abyss below. Awe-inspiring stuff, then the power-brokers really arrived - hunks in the form of Mottled Swifts, fast and supreme, superb birds. With Little Swifts also fluttering about, there was plenty to captivate for an hour or so, especially with the added attractions of several African Citrils on the cliff edge, Red-winged Starlings below and an African Goshawk in a dead tree nearby. Peeling myself away from the cliff top, my route then took me along stream upwards towards the forest edge. This initial stretch, through meadows and stunted bush growth, offered a few birds typical of open country in this area - an Augur Buzzard, a pair of Fan-tailed Ravens, a Common Fiscal, plus plenty of Chubb's Cisticolas, a Thick-billed Seedeater and a few more African Citrils. The big rewards though were still to await me, all lurking in the montane forests now looming above me. To get into those forests, I had two basic options - a trek of a couple of kilometres to the Forest Centre where I could enter officially and lumber myself with yet another compulsory guide or take one of the numerous small tracks that climb hidden towards the higher slopes. I opted for the latter, an illicit jaunt that led me forever upwards into one of the best birding days of the entire trip. The forests were simply superb, non-stop birding action from start to finish - with each step taking me to a slightly higher altitude, the trail traversed a variety of montane habitats, beginning with dense luxuriant forests in the lower elevations to more stunted growths as the path reached near 2500 metres. All were crawling in birds! My chosen path began just south of the Chebonet River, ascending steeply through high forest, rich in fruiting figs and dangling creepers. Black-and-White Casqued Hornbills, Tambourine Doves, Stuhlmann's and Waller's Starlings all abounded, plus Yellow-whiskered, Slender-billed and Mountain Greenbuls. A stop by a small stream added Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, African Blue Flycatchers and a couple of Dusky Flycatchers, as well as Black Saw-wings overhead and numerous other small birds disappearing into dense cover, many to never be seen again - the ever-lasting frustration of birding the tropical forests! Patches of slightly more open area forest made things easier, and soon the first specialities began to fall - a Purple-throated Cuckoo-Shrike, an unexpected Red-shouldered Cuckoo-shrike too, plus a variety of weavers, including Baglafaecht's, Spectacled and Black-billed. A little further up, the path crossed an open rocky knoll, affording fine views across the canopy and upwards to the montane heaths far above. The next section, a few kilometres that absorbed many hours, was pure birding heaven. Entering a zone of low canopy montane forest, the bird action was constant, with small flocks moving through almost continuously, occasional specials emerging from vegetation and surprises appearing around every corner. With the sparser vegetation also making the birds easier to see, all too soon the bird tally was spiralling upwards - oodles of Yellow White-eyes pulled in many fellow flocking birds - various apalises and batises, a variety of greenbuls and more. Amongst the highlights in this group, two White-eyed Flycatchers, one Shelly's Greenbul, two Chestnut-throated Apalis, two Buff-throated Apalis, four Grey Apalis, 15 Chinspot Batis, 12 Common Wattle-eyes, four Black-throated Wattle-eyes and so the list went on. From one particularly dense tangle, a stunning example of a Luhder's Bush-Shrike emerged, whilst similar areas produced no less than six Black-faced Rufous Warblers and quite a few more Tambourine Doves. With mind going into overload, a Montane Oriole also put in a showing, as did a Grey Cuckoo-Shrike (nicely rounding off the family) and a small flock of Slender-billed Starlings. By now, the day was wearing on and I began to think it was time to start my descent ...but everytime I had such thoughts, another stunning bird appeared to quash the idea! Two Hartlaub's Turacos, a pair of Brown-capped Weavers, a Lemon Dove, none did much for the argument to return down the mountain. Eventually, I set myself a time - I would climb until 4.00 pm., then turn around, come what may. At 3.58 p.m., I hit jackpot! Just as I pondered my day's success, a movement under one of the deepest, darkest bushes caught my attention ...and there, in the gloom, but in full view, was an absolutely amazing bird, surely one of the best birds of the whole trip, a White-starred Robin. Hopping up and down, on the ground and low twigs, it was not an adult, but a star-spangled juvenile, almost certainly the most attractive fledgling of a bird you could imagine. Left me wondering what impact an adult might have, but wait as I did, no adult appeared to feed the youngster, so with this bird in my memory banks, down the mountain I went. Flocks of Black-crowned Waxbills flitted up from an open area, Olive-bellied and Collared Sunbirds zipped across, but I was intent on getting down, a night on the mountain was not high on my priorities! 29 December, Moroto Plains, scorched lands Way back in the early days of December, I had

decided that a big fat 500 would be a good species count for the whole trip and, somewhere along here, I had tallied up my totals and found that I was still a shocking 60 odd species short of my target! Hmm, a bit of calculating reckoned on a possible 45 additional with a bit of luck at Mabira Forest, my next intended destination, plus three or four more in the Entebbe and Mbamba areas. That still left me at least ten short! Now I had already toyed with the idea of a trip up to Moroto, about 200 km or so north, but now those sweltering dusty roads that would take me there seemed ever more appealing. Hot and dry, the thorn savannah that stretches north of Mount Elgon offers a range of species that are more usually encountered in northern Kenya and so, leaving Sipi at 6.30 a.m., I hitched back down to the main road and then northwards on the dirt road to Moroto. My idea was not to get to Moroto itself, but the first good habitat en route. Quite fortunate really, as I managed to hitch only 25 km before my lift turned into a village and that was it, no more cars! So that's where the footwork started - first through an irrigated area which produced a bunch of unexpected species, including several European Marsh Harriers, a male Pallid Harrier, a single Marsh Tchagra and the only Senegal Coucal of the trip. Also lots of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters. Then onward out into acacia scrub, immediately bumping into Yellow-billed Shrikes and a flock of Superb Starlings, the latter really living up to their name! Rattling Cisticolas and Northern Wheatears livened my amble through the scrub, along with several Red-faced Crombecs, a couple of Black-shouldered Kites and the third harrier species of the day, a male Montagu's! Then, in short succession, I flushed first a White-bellied Bustard, then a Black-bellied Bustard, super! A couple of hours of trekking under an increasingly hot sun and a distant target appeared, a stand of high acacia woodland shimmering on the horizon. With my water well run out, I staggered into the shade of the trees and, wow, what an oasis I had stumbled upon - a hive of activity and full of new species for the trip! White-crowned Shrikes, Northern Brownbills, a Sulphur-breasted Bush-Shrike all within minutes, a Silverbird too, plus a noisy Brown Parrot and a surprise Pale Chanting Goshawk. The flurry of birds continued with a Lead-coloured Flycatcher, two Brubru Shrikes, small flocks of both Black-lored and Common Babblers, a migrant Common Redstart and, absolute star of the day, two cracking Abyssinian Scimitar-bills, pure magic. By now though, the early afternoon sun was absolutely scorching and I decided to hike back towards the dirt road. One Nubian Woodpecker, several Little Weavers and a Foxy Cisticola later and I was back at the road. Half an hour later, I was sitting on top of a charcoal-laden truck, bumping back to the cool heights of Sipi Falls. 30 December, skulkers at Sipi Another early morning hike upwards, arriving at the top of the higher altitude waterfall pre-sunrise, hoping for a repeat performance of the swift and hirundine show. Sadly, the concentration of birds was less impressive than had been a couple of days earlier, with far fewer swallows present and varying numbers of swifts - one minute about 20 Nyanza Swifts and a few Little Swifts, next up to 40 Scarce Swifts, then as they shot off down the mountain slopes, in came flocks of Mottled Swifts, all very fine birds, but not hurtling around together as in earlier days. Having sat on the cliff edge for a couple of hours, and watched the comings and goings of the various species, I then followed the stream towards the national park and, in a dense thicket about a kilometre up, I found the best two birds of the day - both usually skulkers, but on this occasion both sitting up and sunning themselves, a Cinnamon Bracken Warbler and a Mountain Yellow Warbler atop adjacent snags! With that, I returned to the camp at Sipi Falls and packed up my tent. I strolled out to the road, hitched a lift on the back of a truck and returned to Mbale, thereafter getting a matatu direct to Mabira Forest, some 150 km or so to the south-west. En route, a spectacular sight of about 25 Broad-billed Rollers hawking at an insect emergence near Jinja, plus a couple of Sacred Ibis elsewhere, several Black-shouldered Kites and two Grey Kestrels. I arrived at Mabira late in the afternoon and what a nice place it was - from a small village nearby, food hawkers were piling onto the road, serving everything from barbecue chicken to corn on the cob and bananas ...every passing car causing a stampede as they dashed to try and sell their offerings. With this being just a short stroll from my intended base, I already was beginning to like the place! News began to filter through from Kenya, carnage following the elections. 31 December, Mabira Forest Three hundred square kilometres of lowland forest, sporting over 300 species of bird. An excellent system of trails through both fantastic primary and secondary habitat. A campsite in the heart of the action and a freedom to wander at will without a guide. Mabira was going to be fun! With the Kampala to Jinja road bisecting the forest, it served as a convenient marker to divide up my labours - day one would be spent in the rich secondary forests to the north of the road, with latter days exploring the depths of the primary forest beyond the road. So, rising pre-dawn to chorus of numerous songsters hidden in the depths of the greenery beyond, I began my jaunt along the trails radiating out from the campsite. In the twilight of dawn, beneath a dense canopy, it was a dark gloomy world on the forest floor, a hum of insects and a rising warmth perpetuated the feel of an exotic microcosm. Scurrying birds fitted across, mere dark shapes that tempted me further into the tangled undergrowth that lay ahead. As a resemblance of light began to creep into the forest, White-spotted Flufftails began to call and mysterious shapes began to materialise into birds ...and soon the first new species of the day were before me - a superb little Forest Robin and, very vocal, but none too easy to see, a flock of Brown Illadopsis, the call of the latter one of the characteristic sounds of Mabira. Moments later, another stunner of the undergrowth emerged, a Fire-crested Alethe. All very good, three of the forest's elusive birds had already been seen and it was barely light! Thereafter followed many excellent hours, slowly wandering the trails, notching up species after species. Under a canopy dominated by big impressive birds such as Great Blue Turacos and hornbills of three species, the occasional glimpses into mid-story produced plenty of good birds - not least amongst them, a bewildering mix of greenbills, from the now familiar Little, Slender-billed and Yellow-whiskered Greenbills through to a couple of White-throated Greenbills and a few Red-tailed Greenbills, plus more exotic members of the family such as Green-tailed Bristlebill and Western Nicator. Alongside them, Speckled Tinkerbirds and Yellow-spotted Barbets proved easy to find, whilst White-headed Saw-wings cruised the canopy top and numerous flocks of forest weaver appeared from time to time, including a super party of Weyn's Weavers and a pair of Yellow-mantled Weavers. Mid-morning, just as I thought it might start to quieten down, I bumped into another of the day's highlights - hopping along a trail in full view, a rather splendid Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat! In the early afternoon, I left the forest for a while and hitched a few kilometres towards Jinja to seek out a pool said to hold Shining Blue Kingfisher. It might well have done so ...if the pool had been there! Under a stinking hot sun, having gone a

few kilometres on a motorbike and a couple more on foot, I found the pool and discovered it was totally dry, cracked mud marking out its former presence! I began the trudge back, then paused when I encountered a very active bird flock - masses of greenbuls and Yellow White-eyes, plus both Grey-headed Negrofinch and White-breasted Negrofinch, a Chestnut Wattle-eye and, two new species for me, a very nice Green Hylia and a Yellow Longbill! Also loads of monkeys - Red-tailed Monkeys bouncing all over the place! Having half boiled myself under the sun, I then retreated back to the campsite for a while, a lazy hour then ensued, two Ashy Flycatchers entertained, plus various sunbirds, including both Collared and Olive Sunbirds. As dusk began to approach, thoughts turned to how I would celebrate the incoming new year! As New Year's Eves go, it was not so bad - I wandered north of the campsite into neighbouring farmed area and sat there to watch the sun go down, an African Hawk Eagle sat and roosted in a tree adjacent, an impressive flock of about 60 White-throated Bee-eaters wheeled about and, just as the sun began to sink for the last time that year, two African Grey Parrots flew over, disappearing into the reds of the setting sun. They would have been my last birds of the year had I not chosen to go and celebrate with barbecued chicken from the roadside food-sellers ...there, great ugly silhouettes revealed the presence of roosting Marabou Storks, truly the last birds of 2007! And then, so I thought, it would be a peaceful night sleeping in my tent. Some hope! With screaming Western Tree Hyrax echoing around the forest and wailing womanfolk in mourning chanting as part of some sort of ritual, I somehow managed to drag myself across the midnight threshold, not with a lot of sleep, and into the New Year! 1 January, Mabira Forest. New Year's Day, 7.00 a.m., first species of the day, African Harrier Hawk, not a bad start. 7.10 a.m., two Mottled Spinetails, even better! Despite the success of the previous day, I was still 21 species short of my target of 500 species for the trip - this day, in the rich primary forest south of the road, would be make or break. The Mottled Spinetails had lifted me one towards that goal, the next was to be a stunning bird, but a real difficult one to see - small and feeding quietly on the forest floor in the depths of thick undergrowth, I kept getting glimpses of bright red and a massive beak. It could only be one of two species, both of which would be new for me. And eventually, as it hopped into a patch of leaf litter unobscured, it was indeed one of them, it was a very fine Black-bellied Seedcracker, not a species I had imagined would be so secretive! The forest itself was an amazing entity, a dense canopy, climbers tangling, periodic massive fig trees and resounding to sounds of insects and birds unseen. As a birding locality though, it was not going to reveal its secrets so easily - as at Bwindi, many of the birds inhabited either the canopy far above or grubbed about on the ground in impenetrable thickets, neither place exactly observer-friendly! Where stream or steep slope intruded, views were frequently much better, both into the canopy and the undergrowth. At the first such place I encountered, a track down a valley side, I arrived just as a flock of birds was passing. With clear views across the canopy and mid-stratum, it was an excellent half hour or so - two Forest Wood Hoopoes led the action, though a Chestnut Wattle-eye and pair of Hairy-breasted Barbets were pretty stunning too. In a flurry of activity, a procession of birds flitted though, some lingering, some not, but including various greenbuls, both Yellow-crested and Brown-eared Woodpeckers, several Buff-throated Apalis, a Speckled Tinkerbird and a few Yellow White-eyes. A little further, past the Arch Tree (a large fig straddling the trail) and through some dense growths that produced a fine Dusky Long-tailed Cuckoo, and I arrived at a stream. With several trees fallen, affording good views of the canopy, plus an impressive mix of low bushes and mid-storey trees, a couple of hours just sat on a log proved to be most fruitful. Flock after flock of birds appeared, either on the canopy edge or, more frequently, in the lower streamside vegetation. Rufous Thrush, Olive Green Camaroptera, Velvet-mantled Drongo, Black Cuckoo-Shrike, all top quality birds and all giving very good views, supported by loads of greenbuls (11 species seen, including a flock of White-throated Greenbuls, plus the only Red-tailed Bristlebills and Toro Olive Greenbuls of the trip and the first Little Grey Greenbuls). From thick bushes, Sooty Boubous dueted and eventually popped, whilst the continuing bird movements through the valley added a Grey-headed Negrofinch, a flock of Purple-headed Starlings, two Red-headed Malimbos and a variety of forest weavers, ranging from Yellow-mantled Weaver through to Black-necked Weaver and Vieillot's Black Weaver. The place was stunning and it was difficult to move on, but eventually I did, slowly working the forests ever eastward, adding yet more Velvet-mantled Drongos and an amazing concentration of Great Blue Turacos, a single group of fruiting figs attracted at least 25 birds, plus a couple of African Grey Parrots and a few Black-and-White Casqued Hornbills. Further east still, I reached another stream, again producing many of the birds already seen, but with the notable additions of a Grey Longbill and the first Grey-headed Sunbird of the trip. Sunbirds were abundant throughout the day and, though they were frequently in the canopy attending flowering trees, a total of ten species seen, the highlights being Olive, Blue-throated Brown and Green-throated Sunbirds, each only seen once or twice elsewhere on the trip. With both Red-chested and Black Cuckoos calling and a Grey-throated Barbet high in the trees, I then began my walk back through the forest. It was now mid-afternoon and I had been in the forest for eight hours, yet still new birds continued to appear - Yellow-throated Tinkerbirds, a Green-backed Woodpecker and another woodpecker that is something of a puzzler. Seen well over a period of ten to fifteen minutes, the bird perfectly matched the description of a female Fine-banded Woodpecker - small olive green back, dark crown flecked white, red rear to crown, lightly barred grey face, finely barred underparts from chest to tail. No other species even closely resembles this, but Fine-banded is supposed to be confined to the mountain forests, not occurring in lowland areas such as Mabira. Could it be a wanderer from the forests around Mount Elgon? Late afternoon, I decided to leave the forest for a quick hike up 'Radio Hill', an elevated location with radio mask that would give good views of the skies above the forest. I had hoped to see Sabine's or Cassin's Spinetails, but was not in luck - the views were good, and a Cassin's Hawk Eagle a major bonus, but otherwise it was hot and relatively birdless, bar rather many White-throated Bee-eaters. En route back, I decided to detour to the roadside foodstalls to get a cup of tea, a decision which resulted in me seeing two Magpie Mannakins in scrub near the village and a pair of Black-and-White Shrike-Flycatchers just nearby. Having quenched my thirst, I returned to the forest for an evening session ...and, after having trudged the trails for hours and hours the previous day and this, I finally bumped into one of Mabira's more elusive specials - quietly walking along, I surprised a Nahan's Francolin, which gave the briefest of views before scuttling off into the undergrowth! The day was coming to an end, my first day of 2008 having been totally fantastic. Later I totaled up my

species counts ...the trip total stood at 499! 2 January, last wanders in the forest. All I had to do was find one last species and my trip list would stand at 500 species! So, off into the forest I went, another dawn start seeing me wander first through the secondary forests before cutting across to the primary forest again. Lots of excellent birds - two more Forest Wood Hoopoes, flocks of both White-throated Greenbuls and Green-tailed Bristlebills, plus yet more Velvet-mantled Drongos, another Hairy-breasted Barbet and additional Yellow-throated Tinkerbirds, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatchers and a few woodpeckers. I even managed to relocate the Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat of two days earlier, along with the Sooty Boubous of the day before, but try as I might, I could not find a bird to carry me to my final target! Great Blue Turacos again gathered in flocks of 20 strong, a couple of Grey Parrots squawked their way across the sky and a stunning Forest Robin hopped right out into the open. And then, eventually, the final domino tumbled - peering into the undergrowth looking for another bird, a bright orange head popped up, a head familiar to me from my South African days, it was a Red-capped Robin-Chat and a suitably charismatic bird to take the title of '500th bird'. Having watched that wonderful little bird for quite a while, I then turned to leave the forest. With Northern Black Flycatchers in the campsite, I packed up my tent, took a last wander over to the tea stalls, then hitch-hiked the 55 km back into the bustling city of Kampala. Hooded Vultures and Marabou Storks circled overhead and, thanks to the growing turmoil in neighbouring Kenya, queues began to build at petrol stations. I spent less than an hour in Kampala, before exiting southward for my return to Entebbe. 3 January, Kajjanshe and about. With Kajjanshe offering the most potential for unexpected bonuses at this late stage of the trip, I decided it was the place to go - perhaps a vagrant wader or two might have dropped in, maybe something amongst the scrub birds. So, at the usual early hour, before the sun began to bite, I travelled the 25 km and began my birding day. Immediate impressions were good, amongst the mix of bee-eaters and hirundines, Angola Swallows had arrived in force - numbering at least 50, every other wire seemed to have a couple of birds sitting, plus yet more feeding over the small pools. Quite a contrast to the situation two weeks earlier, when I had struggled to see more than just an occasional one or two. And, as a colourful backdrop, a dozen or so White-throated Bee-eaters hawked or competed for the wires, accompanied by at least 20 Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, plus a couple of European Bee-eater too. Before looking at the pools, I had a short stroll around adjacent scrubland - this was nice, producing a good selection of common species, including various weavers, warblers and the like, but also a Long-crested Eagle, a couple of singing Black-headed Gonoleks and both Vieillot's Black Weaver and Grosbeak Weaver, the latter being a pair feeding fledged young. On the track, four Brimstone Canaries fed and a small flock of Black-crowned Waxbills flitted up. And then it was time to enter the fish farm itself, the small pools very much the oasis of the valley. Hooded Vultures wheeled and African Fish Eagles cried. Soon the pools were producing their stuff - Openbill Stork, Squacco Herons, a Green-backed Heron, two Yellow-billed Egrets still, plus the more common egrets and both Black-headed and Purple Herons. Waders were very much as before - the Black-tailed Godwit was still present, as were the flocks of Common Snipe and the selection including Curlew Sandpiper and Marsh Sandpiper, but there were no oddities in the assortment. Nor was there a Pygmy Goose, a species I had yet to bump into on this trip and one that I had hoped might be here. Still, two African Jacanas provided some compensation and, over in the bushes, there was still time for one very nice bonus - after seeing a couple of Copper Sunbirds, another species appeared ...a very impressive one at that! For the first time in quite some days, I needed to consult my fieldguide and soon I had him nailed, very much living up to his name, there in front of me was a Superb Sunbird! A little bit more birding and I then returned to Entebbe and spent the rest of the day strolling around the town - first getting kicked off the golf course after going to photograph a Abdim's Stork on the greens, then relaxing on the Victoria lakeshore as a couple of Gull-billed Terns loafed offshore and an African Hobby went powering over, scattering a flock of swifts that had included six White-rumped Swifts amongst the 75 or so Little and Palm Swifts. As evening approached, my penultimate evening, I took one last walk to the fabled sewage farm - en route I found a Peregrine sat on a radio mask (my only one of the trip) and then at the sewage farm itself, all the usual birds - White-faced Whistling Ducks, Yellow-billed Ducks, waders, etc - plus, on the marsh behind, four Spur-winged Geese and, here too, Angola Swallows, perhaps 20 in all. Walking back to the campsite, as the sun dropped below the horizon, a Northern Black Flycatcher sat on wires and two African Grey Parrots flew over. 4 January, Lutembe Bay, a stunning finale! A fantastic last day, with an unexpected nine additional species for the trip and the chance finding of a Shoebill, giving unbeatable views. Having still not bumped into a couple of papyrus specialities, I had contemplated a return to Mbamba, but opted instead for a random exploration of the shoreline of Lake Victoria between Entebbe and Kampala, hoping to find some accessible papyrus swamp. Taking a local taxi from Entebbe to a point 20 km south of Kampala, I jumped out at a spot where I could see what appeared to be distant marshes. Hiking towards these, it soon became apparent that access was not going to be easy - I was up to my waist in wet grass and the way ahead looked impassable. However, from a bird point of view, I was already in the thick of the action - one Three-banded Plover, several stunning Blue-breasted Bee-eaters, the only Black Coucal of the trip, plus Fan-tailed Widowbirds, Red-billed Firefinches, etc. I then stumbled upon a track that cut through a flower farm (that is actively encroaching on the papyrus swamp) and thereafter led to the 'campsite', an excellent locality encompassing a remnant patch of forest and overlooking a large lagoon and swamp. Great Blue and Ross's Turacos abounded in the forest, Diederik Cuckoos and a Green Crombec too, but the view across the lagoon offered even more promise - as well as both Blue-headed and White-browed Coucals in the near swamp, masses of birds could be seen in the far distance. To get to those birds, however, there was no option other than to return and hike several kilometres to a hill I could see that appeared to overlook them. A couple of hours more, via several Crowned Hornbills, two Senegal Lapwings and a pair of Ovambo Sparrowhawks, and I was on that hill. And from there, I spotted a grey blob on the opposite side of the lagoon about a kilometre away! A large grey blob standing alongside the water and a very distinctive-shaped thing at that ...it was a Shoebill! With a boat, I thought, that bird would offer the perfect photo opportunity, so another half an hour trekking and I found a small village and someone with a dugout canoe. Out into the lagoon we went, a kilometre of open water to cross and birds everywhere. Vast flocks of mixed Black-headed and Grey-headed Gulls, with Slender-billed Gulls too, waders galore including Long-toed Lapwings

and a variety of Palearctic migrants, Pink-backed Pelicans and African Jacanas, the only Glossy Ibises of the trip, plus the only Garganeys and plenty more too. More important still, the Shoebill was still there, the grey bulk clearly visible far across the water. Onward we paddled, past islands of Great and Long-tailed Cormorants, beneath African Marsh Harriers and Fish Eagles and close to a Goliath Heron peering from reeds. All was going so well, but then, a hundred metres short of the Shoebill, the canoe sprang a leak!!! With water gushing in, I had visions of me and my camera taking an unscheduled dip, I wondered if there were crocodiles! Worse still, I could see a certain bird in the corner of my eye, so near, yet so far. Plugging the hole with rags and bailing out water with my shoes, thoughts quickly returned to the Shoebill, just standing there and not in the least concerned by our dilemma. 'Paddle' I instructed, I would get the photographs and worry about sinking later! With the incoming water reduced to a trickle, we drifted in to just 20 metres or so from the great bird, a fantastic moment. One month in Uganda and finally, barely eight hours before I was due at the airport, I got my photographs of the main target bird! Plunge fishing, stalking, then finally flopping across to an adjacent bank, he offered great views. Not only was it I mesmerized, so too was the young fellow who had brought me in the canoe ..it was a new bird for him too! As water once again began to lap our feet, it was time to leave the Shoebill. A quick detour across to a couple of the islands full of gulls, then a bit more bailing out and a kilometre of paddling. I was back on dry land, overhead an Osprey soared, and in front of me, a long hot walk back. Arriving in Entebbe, I packed up my tent, relaxed a while, then walked to the airport, a Violet-backed Starling the last treat. 5 January, homeward bound, the long way! You expect aeroplanes to go the right way! Ours didn't! Due to the ongoing conflict in Kenya, blockades had left land-locked Uganda without fuel - it didn't even have enough for planes! So, instead of a nice flight direct to Amsterdam, we instead had to fly in the middle of the night an additional 900 km south to Kilimanjaro in Tanzania to refuel. Result, one missed connection in Amsterdam, one very late arrival in London. Hurling across the UK for a few hours, with barely a moment to note more than the odd Song Thrush and Blackbird, and I was again at an airport. Finally, by now the next day, I was at home in Lithuania, trip over. One month of travelling, 512 species of bird, almost 40 species of mammal and one good suntan, trip deemed successful!