

In pursuit of African Transmorphism

Ever since the discovery of the Shellback Quail in Zambia in 2000 by WBL and LC we have pressed on, despite much scepticism, in our search for the peculiar ability of African Wildlife to appear in various guises. Similar phenomena were noted in Tanzania in both 2000 and 2002 so a reconnaissance was made to see if this could be a transequatorial displacement. The probable epicentre was felt to be where Western African Forest gave way to East African Savannah as this was the crucible where Homo Sapiens had been forged from the humble Chimpanzee. Was this reversible? Uganda and the Western Rift were chosen for two visits in 2003 and 2004. Many strange happenings were observed which are worth further exploration. Reliable and dependable observers actually recorded some of these with a digital camera. Eastern Chanting Goshawks became Grasshopper Buzzards. An African Crake became a Common Quail (much déjà vu here?) and then reverted to Crake before our very eyes. 1000 head of Buffalo simply disappeared. Even trained Park Rangers watched in awe as elephant became buffalo in Semuliki but as this was close to Congo this was bad ju-ju! Indeed a strange and mysterious land where even humble dollar bills went off on frolics of their own. Guides called Johnnie were actually Fred. Itineraries suffered in the same strange manner. What is going on out there? Definitely needs a full expedition and Royal Society funding.



A Brief resume of our experiences.

We used the hitherto reliable services of Whiteknuckles Safaris and the itinerary booked and paid for. The flight out (BA direct to Entebbe) was comfortable and on time. We looked for Johnnie and were met by Fred and David. The latter made his excuses, and left. We and met our first Wildlife. We started among the Buffalo, Eland and Impala best we have had in Africa. Excellent but where the strange phenomena commenced when several Dollar bills went walkabout during dinner. Most odd!

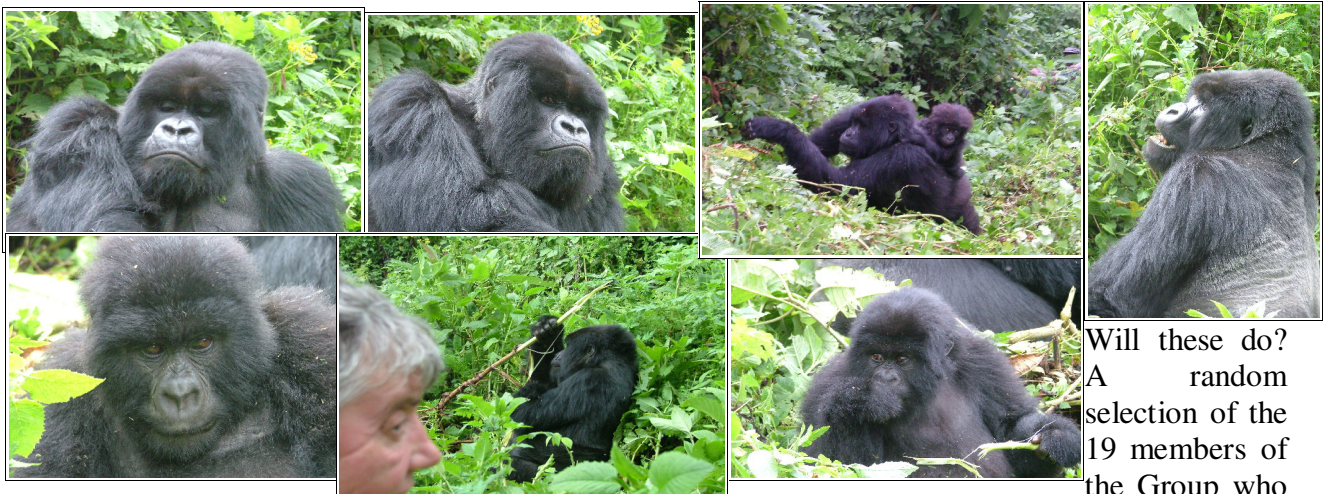


A boat trip produced many aquatic species, Papyrus Gonalek, White Winged Wobblers Finfeet and two Little Bitterns. Many other birds and beasts were encountered at this spot which comes highly recommended. The tick list hit 110 in two days without really trying. We saw it, called it and ticked it. Three eventful days past quite quickly. Then it was back on the road for a dusty drive to Queen Elizabeth NP famous for its Gardening Warthogs and fine cuisine. and Mweya Lodge, This came as a surprise as our Itinerary said we should have been in Rwanda! Evidently "Vanishing Dollar Syndrome" was not confined to us as some blighter had made off with Gorilla Permit money of 8 Germans and ourselves some days before. The Germans went home to threaten Poland and we went to QENP. Which was fair enough. Not yet a match for Tanzania or Zambia in terms of numbers but neither were the visitors too obvious. We indulged in Elephants, Warthogs, Forest Hogs as well as birds galore. Tick list now 179. But you don't want to know that. Via Ishasa to Bwindi, reversing the itinerary, was next where really I had wanted Elizabeth to enjoy the excellent lodge facilities and the Forest Walks to the Congo Border. Monkeys and birds galore. As I was there I had arranged a permit to visit our cousins. It had rained a bit and whilst we were to have driven part way our driver refused. We had a 10km walk to reach our start point for the climb. It was hard and hot! No zig zag paths, just straight up! Happily we survived and to compensate we found the Gorillas quite close after entering the NP. Maybe 1 mile in and on a reasonable trail for , most, of the time. Even the Big Yin was up a tree feeding, all 220 Kgs of him. Whilst the light was a bit gloomy we did have an enchanting hours audience. We returned the same way when again the cars failed to meet us and I got back to the Lodge at around 16.00. Had a bath and lunch in that order. The Chalet girl brought Hot Water bottles and offered a massage. What a



life. Bliss! A pleasant and rewarding stay. Then on to Rwanda for more of the same. Drive to Border fine and hassle free and into the Mountain Gorilla's Nest. A new lodge constructed of bits rummaged from Wickes or B & Q. We had the VIP Bungalow. Clare Short and Donald Rumsfeld have slept here but whether at the same time we were not told. If we were VIP, heaven help Economy class. The assistant manager (Tom) did bring us central heating in a bucket even if dinner never arrived.

We had picked Rwanda for my co-Directors visit as it was 'easier' than Bwindi. Not this time. We hiked up mud slides, through rank vegetation etc., for about two hours and must have been well into the Congo on the slopes of Visoke when "last night's nest" was found. Within 400 metres, (we were in ex Belgian territory) we had our Gorilla's in sight. We had been warned that the Group Male was a bit jumpy and intolerant. He was an absolute Pussy Cat. Elizabeth sat and watched them and they sat and watched her. One infant made to climb on her knee but was shooed off by the guide as close contact is now discouraged. Dad just watched that matters did not get out of hand, controlling events with the odd grunt. O.K.! You want the fotos? Here they are!:-



we met. To get back on schedule we left Rwanda and headed north, with an unscheduled overnight in Kibale compensated for by the nicest bottle of wine I have had in Africa. On to Aubrey Price's N'dali Lodge outside Fort Portal. We looked for monkeys and flufftails but found Chimpanzee's. Very odd indeed! Then on to Semuliki on Lake Albert. Many birds and beasts and my hat learned to swim. We encountered the Ugandan Defence Force on manouvres which was comforting even if they used our car as a rallying point. Definitely no photo of this event.

Finally up to Murchison Falls NP with some excellent Elephant moments, a memorable, for the wrong reasons, boat trip to the Falls. Worth the trip for the Rock Pratincoles and Pels Fishing Owl which Elizabeth spotted ahead of the twitchers! Oh, we nearly forgot, two Shoebills too!

The return to Kampala was uneventful with an excellent African dinner with Ether and so to Entebbe for a relaxed, almost, trip home to Isle of Man in the day.

A trip of mixed reactions and experiences, but not without its compensations.



Elephant Moment



Watching us watching them!