





# BIRDING PARADISE?

Mpanga forest, weaverbirds are guaranteed to give you a noisy reception. Kingfishers perch on papyrus reeds or hover in the air before nose-diving for mudfish. Boatmen can ferry you deeper into the swamp on oar-driven boat to get to the solitary shoebill habitat. It is rated the best spot to see the shoebill in Africa. A boat ride through Mabamba bay wetland is a great way to see the shoebill stork, malachite kingfisher, swamp flycatcher, pied kingfisher, papyrus gonolek, black-headed heron, African open-billed stork, black kite and African marsh harrier, among many others.

Kasenge Forest Resort at Mbalala, a five-minute drive off the Kampala/Jinja highway in Mukono, has a mini water pool with ducks and swans. Hassan Mutebi, a resident birder, says he has logged more than 140 species of birds there.

"I have seen the Egyptian geese, the red-chested cuckoo, the tawny eagle, hamerkop, sandpiper and many other owls," Mutebi says.

Mabira Forest, located 51km along the Jinja-Kampala highway, is populated by forest birds. Besides birds, the location boasts of picnic spots, restaurants and roadside open oven *nyama choma* (roasted meat) and chicken thighs or wings. Lunch and accommodation at Forest Lodge treat nature walkers to a memorable experience.

Budongo forest has the Royal Mile, where birds like the Puvell's illadopsis, shining blue kingfisher, African dwarf kingfisher, Cassin's spinetail, chestnut-capped flycatcher, Ituri batis and Nahan's francolin can be spotted. It is home to more than 350 bird species.

Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, 540km away from Kampala, is another popular place for birding. Although it is more known for its gorilla-trekking safaris, birdwatching comes at a close second due to the abundance of rare species. About 350 bird species can be found in Bwindi and these include black-billed turaco, African green broadbill, Chapin's flycatcher, Fraser's eagle, handsome francolin, black-collared apalis and white-bellied robin chat. It is rated Africa's number one birding spot by the African



A flock of Adim's storks at Murchison Falls National Park in 2013. One can spot a variety of bird species during a game drive or on a boat cruise on the River Nile



The African fish eagle

Bird Club, a conservation charity.

Kibale Forest, located 348km from Kampala city, is stocked with more than 335 different species of birds. Among them are the red-winged francolin, red-chested flufftails, white-napped pigeon, African pita, joyful greenbul, grey-winged pigeon, Abyssinian ground thrush, grey-throated flycatcher masker, Uganda woodland warbler and chestnut-winged starling.

### NATIONAL PARKS

Murchison Falls National Park has more than 300 different species of birds tweeting and flapping their wings along Baker's Trail. Among them are the iconic shoebill, bee-eater, giant kingfisher and shoebill stork.

The trail has break points with seats to sip on wine or water and continue. The

## KIDEPO VALLEY NATIONAL PARK IS THE OSTRICH CAPITAL OF UGANDA.

place is ideal for photos and videos in this social media era.

About 450 bird species have been recorded in Murchison Falls National Park and these can best be seen during a game drive through the park or on a boat ride to the bottom of the falls. Bird species at Murchison Falls National Park include Goliath heron, swamp flycatcher, Abyssinian ground hornbill, red-throated bee-eater, Northern red bishop, African quailfinch and giant kingfisher.

Other national parks where birding is prominent include Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, home to about 180 bird species like the Cape robin, white-starred robin, brown woodland warbler, cinnamon bracken warbler, Rwenzori batis, greater double-collared sunbirds

and Archer's robin chat, among many others.

Kibale Forest National Park has over 375 species due to the dense vegetation. You get birds like the red-chested owlet, purple-breasted sunbird, blue-breasted kingfisher, crowned eagle, little greenbul, black bee-eater, dusky-blue flycatcher, grey-throated flycatcher and white-napped pigeon, among many others.

Queen Elizabeth National Park has over 600 bird species, especially along the Kazinga Channel. The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) tourism warden, Steven Nyadru, says they include the swamp flycatcher, African skimmer, malachite and pied kingfishers, grey-headed kingfisher, black-headed gonolek, Verreaux's eagle-owl, sedge warbler, white-winged terns, grey-



Hornbills can be spotted in Murchison Falls National Park

## BIRDS ALWAYS HAVE GREAT STORIES BEHIND THEM

Judith Mirembe, a bird guide, says the noisy weaverbird uses its architectural skills to attract a mate to itself.

"Good nest constructors are polygamous weavers. The females cannot resist their tweets, colourful feathers and skill at nesting. For a weaverbird to get a spouse, he has to intricately gather grass and stems, and knot the nest on a loose tree branch," Mirembe says.

She explains that the nest location on weak tree stems make it hard for predators like snakes and rats to access laid eggs or chicks.

"Before the female accepts the proposal, she first inspects the architecture of the nest, its location and if it has a room where the hatching is to be done. Once all the requirements are met – the couple are good to go!"

The crested cranes, which are the national birds, also have a unique story of monogamy. Uganda has the species that get one mate in their lifetime. When one dies, the widow or widower remains single.

John Logwe, a Uganda Wildlife Authority ranger and guide at Kidepo Valley National Park, says birds can alert you of any dangerous earthquake.

"Birds do not need a weather forecast to know drought or an earthquake is due. They just flee and humans who are edified, start planning their own safety," he says.

In the Bible, Job 38:36, God asked Job to tell him who tells the ibis when the Nile will flood, or who tells the rooster that rain will fall? In Egypt, whenever the ibis bird appears, people understand that River Nile is about to flood. God always warned people through the ibis bird.

capped warbler, collared pratincole, martial eagle, several falcons and Gabon and slender-tailed nightjars. Birders can log more than 500 different bird species while there.

Lake Mburo National Park is home to about 351 bird species, with such species like the Nubian woodpecker, trilling cisticola, bee-eaters, cheeky bronze-tailed starling, crested francolin, emerald-spotted wood dove, brown parrot, African fish eagle and red-necked spurfowl, among others.

Semuliki National Park has about 441 bird species in its riverine forest. They include the Maxwell's black weaver, blue-billed malimbe, yellow-throated nicator, black dwarf hornbill, Nkulengu rail, piping hornbill, yellow-throated cuckoo, dwarf honeyguide, great blue turaco and purple-breasted sunbird.

Mgahinga National Park, which is popular for mountain gorilla tracking, is punctuated with Rwenzori turaco, Lagden's bush shrike and scarlet-tufted malachite sunbird.

In Kidepo Valley National Park, there are destinations

of migratory birds. John Logwe, a UWA guide, says birds flee the winter in Europe or South Africa to seek refuge in Kidepo, Lutembe beach, Lake Albert and Lake Victoria shores.

"These birds stop to refuel (eat) before continuing to South Africa or Europe. The old ones that cannot continue the journey retire and die here," Logwe says.

Kidepo is the ostrich capital of Uganda. Ostriches are some of the biggest birds in the world, famous for a feather length longer than a human arm and a kick that can kill a lion.

They are known for their dancing costume and fashion before mating. They lay eggs as big as coconuts. These eggs need an hour of boiling to get ready.

Lake Mburo National Park has more than 300 different species of birds living by the shores of 10 lakes. UWA guide Allen Kaba says many tourists catch them on telescopes mating, feeding and rearing their young.

Mburo is actually the only park in Uganda where nature walkers go birding without a ranger or guide.