

My wife and I have been looking to visit Uganda for many years to see chimps and mountain gorillas but it was always postponed for good (or bad) reasons... Having heard that Rwanda recently increased their gorilla permits up to 1500 USD and that Uganda is no longer proposing permit discounts during the low season, we thought it was really time to visit this country before the gorilla permit cost in Uganda also becomes too insane to afford.

We organized a 14-day trip to Uganda with Royle Safaris who used the local travel agency Gorilla Tours. The trip organization was very good and we decided to focus on a South West itinerary to avoid too much driving time and allowing us more time in the parks for guided walks or game drives. The tour consisted in the following: Entebbe – Mabamba swamp (for shoebill – yes we're also interested in birds ☺) – Kibale NP – Semliki NP and Game Reserve – QENP – Ishasha – Bwindi – Lake Mburo – Entebbe.

We knew we went to Uganda during the raison season and we were not disappointed as we had rain everyday: from short showers to heavy thunderstorms with rain pouring for hours at 3 different occasions, once being during our CHEX tracking in Kibale, which spoiled most of the experience. Well, that's life...

Uganda is a lovely country with beautiful landscapes and some pristine parks like the Ishasha section of QENP for example. I also found the hilly region near Bwindi very scenic to drive through. Globally, Uganda has very different landscapes to offer compared to the other Eastern African countries we visited like Kenya or Tanzania, which is good. People are also very friendly and welcoming. We had very nice accommodations throughout the trip but it did not find the food particularly good. Uganda is developing quite well and from past trip reports I could read on MammalWatching, the roads are now fully tarmacked in Kibale forest and to get to Semliki forest. This probably has a consequence to see less wildlife than before. For example, the Kibale Primate Lodge is still a great place in terms of comfort but not deep in the forest anymore. Although there are still some monkeys wandering around the lodge during the day, we did not see any animals at night during long spotlighting. On the other hand, the tarmac road is not preventing animals to cross it and we had great views of forest elephants on the road side on a very early morning start. Wonderful!

As I said earlier, we were a bit disappointed by the CHEX experience in Kibale for chimps mostly due to the weather that prevented us from observing chimps in good conditions. However, our guide booked us later another chimp tracking walk in the gorge section of QENP where we saw very well and close of several male chimps so all in all, chimp observations were globally good. For the mountain gorillas, we were booked in the Buhoma section of the Bwindi impenetrable forest. Buhoma is a nice location and both gorilla groups we visited on 2 consecutive days had the good idea to be close to the starting points of our trek, which considerably limited the time and make the trekking easy. Lucky us ☺! On the other hand, I believe Buhoma is less wild than the Ruhija section and therefore, beside gorillas we did not see much other mammals. However, birds were plentiful. We could see some tree climbing lions in Ishasha and it looks like we had the chance to see many leopards in QENP as we saw 4 different individuals in 3 days, which was the first time ever for our guide. We don't complain ☺

Beside the well-known parks of QENP, Bwindi and Kibale, I found that the less visited Lake Mburo and Semliki forest parks were also very interesting and worth visiting. Lake Mburo has a healthy population of ungulates, not only in numbers but also in diversity, plus has a nice lake for boat tours offering very good birdwatching opportunities. The Semliki forest is great to walk through for unusual/rare primates like Dent's mona or De Brazza monkeys and it also contains lots of forest birds we don't see anywhere else in the country. The Tooro Game Reserve part of Semliki is also interesting with both forest and savanna allowing us to see different biotopes and animals. I did not regret to spent time in those parks.

If day activities were great, I was not impressed by the night walks or drives on the other hand. We indeed saw quite a few animals although we did night spotlighting on 5 occasions. I can't tell if this was due to our guides or us not being well prepared or if just animals were not there...

Finally, if Uganda is definitely a prime destination for primates (we could see 13 different species during our trip – even 15 if I count glimpses of 2 other species as explained in the table below), the national parks we visited in this country don't offer the same concentration / diversity of other wildlife compared to Kenya or Tanzania for example. It is good to be aware of this before visiting Uganda to avoid any disappointment.

Bottom line, we were very happy about this trip to Uganda even if we did not see so many different mammal species with only 39 recorded (see table below), which I don't find particularly good. However, we had 4 main targets before this trip: shoebill, chimps, mountain gorillas and tree climbing lions and we saw all of them very well with great photo opportunities so by itself, this makes this trip successful.

Below is the list of mammals observed during such Uganda trip (lifers in red):

Mammals with photos or well seen				
Species	Espèces	Latin Name	Where seen	Pic
Chimpanzee	Chimpanzé	Pan troglodytes	Several seen in Kibale (mostly females and juveniles) and another great sighting of several males in the gorges sector of QENP	X
Mountain gorilla	Gorille de montagne	Gorilla beringei beringei	2 groups visited in the Buhoma sector of the Bwindi impenetrable forest	X
Central African red colobus	Colobe bai d'Ouganda	Ptilocolobus oustaleti	Only a few seen in Kibale forest and Bigodi swamp	X
Guereza colobus	Colobe guéréza	Colobus guereza	A lot seen almost everywhere	X

Olive baboon	Babouin anubis	Papio anubis	A lot seen almost everywhere	X
Ugandan mangabey	Mangabey à joues grises	Lophocebus albigena	Several seen in Bigodi swamp, Kibale and Semliki	X
Tantulus monkey	Vervet tantale	Chlorocebus tantalus	A few seen in Semliki game reserve	X
Vervet monkey	Vervet bleu	Chlorocebus pygerythrus	Several seen in Lake Mburo NP	X
L'Hoest's monkey	Cercopithèque de l'Hoest	Cercopithecus lhoesti	1 seen in Bigodi swamp and several in Bwindi	X
Dent's mona monkey	Mone de Dent	Cercopithecus denti	4-5 individuals seen in Semliki forest	X
Blue monkey	Cercopithèque à diadème	Cercopithecus mitis	Several seen in Semliki forest and Bwindi	X
Red-tailed monkey	Cercopithèque ascagne	Cercopithecus ascanius	A lot seen in Kibale, Semliki and Bwindi	X
Thomas's galago	Galago de Thomas	Galagoides thomasi	1 seen well during a night walk in Kibale	X
Egyptian roussette	Roussette d'Egypte	Rousettus aegyptiacus	1 roosting under our cottage roof in Kibale	X
Scrub hare	Lièvre des rochers	Lepus saxatilis	Several seen during a night drive in QENP	X
Alexander's dwarf squirrel	Funisciure d'Alexandre	Paraxerus alexandri	Several seen in Semliki forest	X
Ruwenzori sun squirrel	Héliosciure du Ruwenzori	Heliosciurus ruwenzori	1 seen at Bwindi	X
Red-legged sun squirrel	Héliosciure à pattes rouges	Heliosciurus rufobrachium	1 seen in Semliki forest	X
Striped ground squirrel	Ecureuil terrestre du Sénégal	Euxerus erythropus	A few seen at the Entebbe botanical gardens	X
Marsh mongoose	Mangouste des marais	Atilax paludinosus	1 seen during a night drive in Semliki game reserve	X
Dwarf mongoose	Mangouste naine du Sud	Helogale parvula	Plenty observed in lake Mburo NP	X
Banded mongoose	Mangouste rayée	Mungos mungos	A few seen in Ishasha and lake Mburo NP	X
Spotted hyaena	Hyène tachetée	Crocuta crocuta	1 seen running in the distance in QENP	
Rusty-spotted genet	Genette tigrine	Genetta maculata	1 seen during night drive in QENP and another one during night drive in lake Mburo NP	
Leopard	Léopard	Panthera pardus	4 great observations in QENP and Ishasha	X
Lion	Lion	Panthera leo	A group of 6-7 seen poorly in the thick bushes of QENP and 3 seen in a tree in Ishasha	X
African bush elephant	Eléphant d'Afrique	Loxodonta africana	Plenty seen in QENP / Ishasha	X
African forest elephant	Eléphant de forêt	Loxodonta cyclotis	Several seen very well early morning in Kibale and in Semliki game reserve	X
Common hippopotamus	Hippopotame amphibie	Hippopotamus amphibius	A lot seen in QENP and lake Mburo NP	X
Common warthog	Phacochère commun	Phacochoerus africanus	Common everywhere	X
Rothschild's giraffe	Girafe de Rothschild	Giraffa rothschildi	~10 seen in lake Mburo NP	X
Lake Chad buffalo	Buffle de l'Ouest	Syncerus brachyceros	Plenty seen in QENP	X
Common Eland	Eland du Cap	Taurotragus oryx	Several seen but shy in lake Mburo NP	X
African buffalo	Buffle de Cap	Syncerus caffer	Common in lake Mburo NP	X
Bushbuck	Guib harnaché	Tragelaphus scriptus	2 seen during night drive in QENP and common in lake Mburo NP	X
Uganda Kob	Cobe de Buffon	Kobus kob	Very common in Semliki game reserve and QENP	X
Waterbuck	Cobe defassa	Kobus ellipsyprimus	Quite common everywhere	X
Topi	Topi	Damaliscus lunatus	A lot seen in Ishasha + a few in lake Mburo NP	X
Impala	Impala	Aepyceros melampus	A lot seen in lake Mburo NP	X
		Total Species Recorded = 39		

Below are a few other mammals that I don't really count as observed since it was either a glimpse or in conditions such that it was not possible for me to be certain which species it was:

Species	Espèces	Latin Name	Where seen
De Brazza's monkey ?	Cercopithèque de Brazza	Cercopithecus neglectus	A glimpse observation during a walk in the Semliki forest. It was so quick that I could only see a fairly pale grey fur disappearing in the trees but no face to be certain which monkey it was. However, our local guide (Moses) said it was a De Brazza monkey due to the sounds it made.
House mouse ?	Souris grise	Mus musculus	Quickly seen running in the Kibale Primate Lodge dining area. It had a black fur and a long naked tail.
Savanna mongoose ?	Mangouste de Dybowski	Dologale dybowski	We went to the Semliki Safari Lodge where J.Woolgar saw them in 2013. We quickly saw one individual with a cute little face staring at us near the kitchen area but it ran away by the time I had a chance to take a photo for clear identification. It was small in size and had a dark fur. According to our local guide, it was a savanna mongoose. We unfortunately did not see any others during that day...
Demidoff's galago ?	Galago de Demidoff	Galagoides demidoff	Some red eyes seen in trees during our night walk at Kibale. According to our guide there were of Demidoff's galagos but to me, seeing only eyes doesn't count ☺

I'm adding to this report some pictures of the most iconic species we observed during that trip and/or those new to me:



Chimpanzee



Mountain gorilla



Central African red colobus



Guereza colobus



Ugandan mangabey



L'Hoest's monkey



Dent's mona monkey



Blue monkey



Red-tailed monkey



Thomas's galago



Uganda Kob



Scrub hare



Alexander's dwarf squirrel



Ruwenzori sun squirrel



Red-legged sun squirrel



Striped ground squirrel



Banded mongoose



Dwarf mongoose



Leopard



Tree climbing Lion



African bush elephant



African forest elephant



Lake Chad buffalo



African buffalo



Common Eland



Bushbuck