Uganda

Northeast – Kidepo Valley



Karamoja Apalis by David Hoddinott

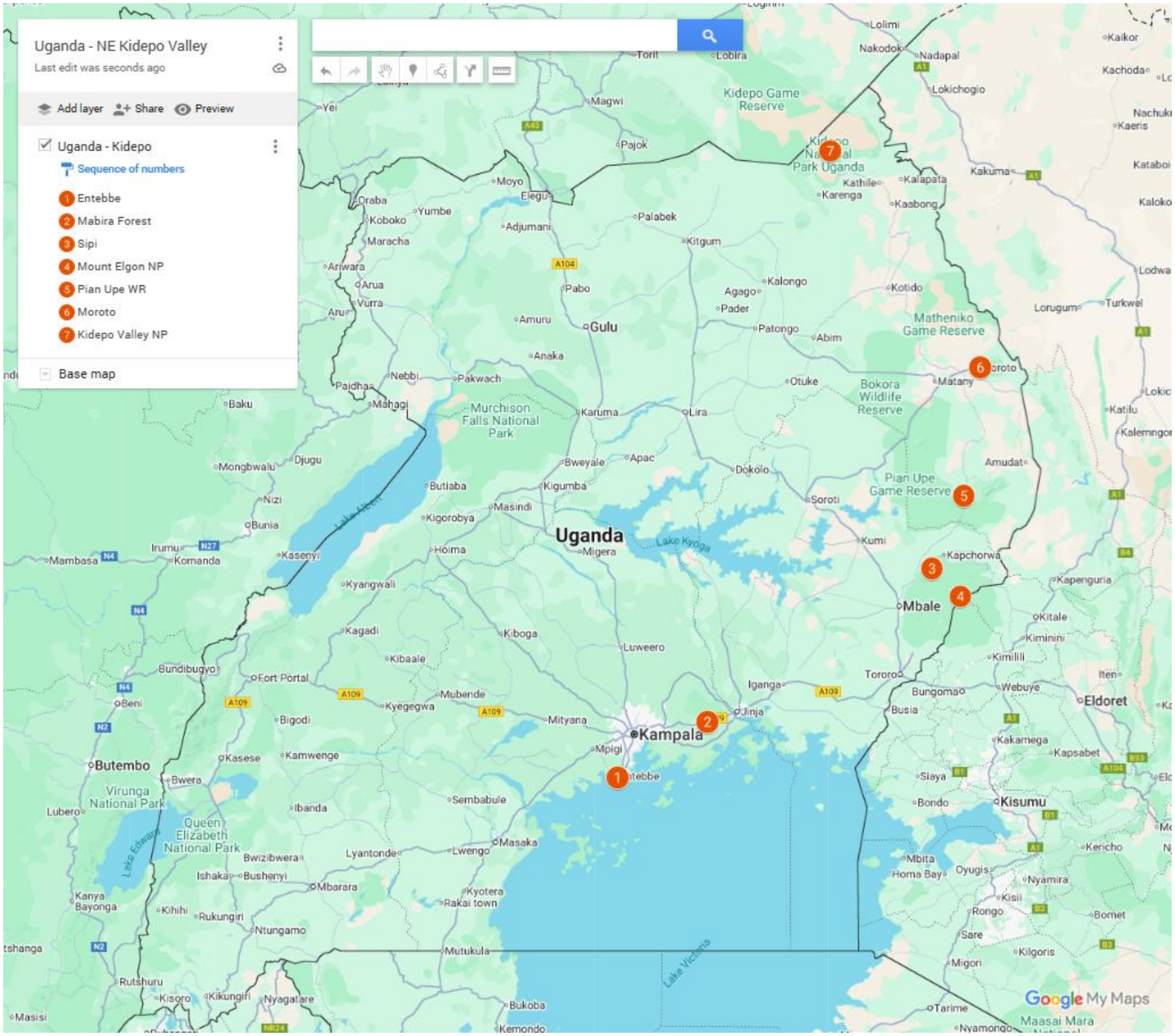
Northeastern Uganda is rarely visited, and in birding terms even less known of. Whilst very different to the more traditional tours focussed on birds, gorillas and chimpanzees, this tour will mostly traverse the drier, arid areas bordering Kenya.

We'll start off as most tours do, cruising the Mabamba Swamp for the enigmatic Shoebill before visiting Mabira forest for a collection of Guinea-Congo Forest biome specialities. Then it is off the beaten track proper, taking in Pian Upe Wildlife Reserve for Karamaja Apalis and the rarely recorded endemic, Fox's Weaver. Then it is the afro-montane forests of Mount Elgon for Jackson's Spurfowl, before our tour culminates in the extensive savannahs of the Kidepo Valley National Park, home to many of Africa's key megafauna species.

This is the less tamed part of Uganda that few birding and wildlife enthusiast have yet visited. It promises to deliver vast numbers of birds and mammals, but also exquisite landscapes and encounters.

Itinerary & Map

Day 1	**Arrival in Entebbe**
Day 2	**Mabamba Swamp to Mabira Forest**
Day 3	**Mabira Forest**
Day 4	**Mabira Forest to Mount Elgon National Park**
Day 5	**Mount Elgon National Park**
Day 6	**Pian Upe Wildlife Reserve**
Day 7	**Pian Upe Wildlife Reserve to Moroto**
Day 8	**Mount Moroto & Kenyan border**
Day 9	**Moroto to Kidepo Valley National Park**
Days 10 to 12	**Kidepo Valley National Park**
Day 13	**Kidepo Valley National Park to Entebbe & final departure**


Uganda - NE Kidepo Valley
Last edit was seconds ago
Add layer
Share
Preview
Uganda - Kidepo
Sequence of numbers
1 Entebbe
2 Mabira Forest
3 Sipi
4 Mount Elgon NP
5 Pian Upe WR
6 Moroto
7 Kidepo Valley NP
Base map
Uganda
Kampala
Mbale
Gulu
Kisumu
Eldoret
Butembo
Murchison Falls National Park
Kidepo Game Reserve
Matheniko Game Reserve
Bokora Wildlife Reserve
Pian Upe Game Reserve
Virunga National Park
Queen Elizabeth National Park
Lake Kyoga
Lake Victoria
Google My Maps

Birding sites in detail



Shoebill by David Hoddinott

Mabamba Swamp. We begin our Ugandan adventure in search of a very special bird. Our prime target for today is the legendary Shoebill and we will set off through small rural villages and homesteads to Mabamba, which is a large wetland connected to Lake Victoria. This extensive papyrus swamp is home to several pairs of Shoebill, Uganda's most famous avian resident and the prime attraction to the nation for most birders. This charismatic species, the only representative of its family, is certainly amongst the most highly prized birds in the world! We will commission a boat from the nearby fishing village and search the maze of channels in an attempt to find this special species. Other water birds abound and we should find several species of herons, egrets and waterfowl, the ever-present African Fish Eagle, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, African Marsh Harrier, African Swamphen, Long-toed Lapwing, African and the tricky Lesser Jacanas, Malachite Kingfisher, and African Pygmy Goose. The papyrus holds the endearing Swamp Flycatcher, Blue-headed Coucal, Greater and White-winged Swamp Warblers, Grey-capped Warbler, the indescribable Papyrus Gonolek, and the nomadic and unpredictable Weyns's Weaver. If we are exceptionally fortunate, we may also see the rare Sitatunga, a shy swamp-dwelling antelope with splayed hooves.

Thereafter, we will bird the surrounding grasslands, papyrus swamps and farm bush. Here we might expect to see the funky-looking Long-crested Eagle perched atop telephone poles, Wahlberg's Eagle, Palm-nut Vulture, hovering Black-winged Kite, African Harrier-Hawk, Lizard Buzzard, the truly impressive Great Blue Turaco, raucous Eastern Plantain-eater, seemingly awkward Black-and-white Casqued Hornbill and floppy-flighted Crowned and African Pied Hornbills, dazzling-blue Woodland Kingfisher, Broad-billed Roller, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Angola and the endangered Blue Swallows, Splendid and Rüppell's Starlings, African Thrush, Northern Black Flycatcher, Sooty Chat, gregarious Grey-backed Fiscal, Scarlet-chested, Superb and Red-chested Sunbirds as well as the comical Pin-tailed Whydah. Should we have missed it in the swamps, we have another chance to find the scare and nomadic Weyns's Weaver.



Great Blue Turaco by Daniel Danckwerts

Mabira Forest. We'll aim to beat the worst of the Kampala traffic and arrive in the town of Jinja with sufficient time to visit the nearby Mabira Forest. This protected forest supports over 300 bird species, some of which are very difficult to see elsewhere in Uganda. One of the first sites that we will visit is a small forest pond where a wonderful selection of very secretive forest birds regularly comes down to drink. Targets here include Red-tailed and the elusive Yellow-lored Bristlebills, Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat, Forest Robin, Dusky Crested Flycatcher, Brown-chested Alethe, Scaly-breasted Illadopsis, and two glowing seedeaters: Black-bellied Seedcracker and Red-headed Bluebill.



Weyns's Weaver by Keith Valentine

Some of the other specials we will search for are Grey Parrot, the highly localised Forest Wood Hoopoe, uncommon Cassin's Hawk-Eagle, Grey-throated Barbet, Buff-spotted, Brown-eared and Yellow-crested Woodpeckers, Grey and Yellow Longbills, Purple-throated Cuckooshrike, Velvet-mantled Drongo, Toro Olive Greenbul (one of nine greenbuls species found here), Western Nicator, the striking Jameson's Wattle-eye, Blue-headed Crested Flycatcher (scarce but possible), Green-throated Sunbird, Red-bellied Paradise Flycatcher, Lowland Sooty Boubou, Yellow-mantled and the nomadic Weyns's Weaver, the rare Tit-Hylia and White-breasted and Grey-headed Nigritas.

We'll spend another morning around Mabira searching for some of the more challenging species including the Forest Wood Hoopoe, Blue-shouldered Robin-chat, Yellow-lored Bristlebill, and Black-bellied Seedcracker.



Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat

Mount Elgon National Park. We head into the park's montane forests, the elevation here is quite high and cold weather should be expected. For similar reasons, there is a better quality of birds here—species that thrive at high elevations. We shall cover some of the well-established trails in search of the Abyssinian Ground Thrush, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Black-collared Apalis, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Abyssinian Crimsonwing, Jackson's Spurfowl, Moustached Tinkerbird, White-starred Robin, Cape Robin-Chat, Little

Rock Thrush, Mountain Yellow Warbler, Cinnamon Bracken Warbler, African Hill Babbler, White-browed Crombec, a few dark-colored Starlings such as Waller's, the eastern sub-species of Red-winged and Stuhlmann's, as well as Amethyst Sunbird and Hartlaub's Turaco among others.



Fox's Weaver by David Hoddinott

We'll search for Nyanza Swift whilst enjoying fantastic views Sipi Falls, the most romantic waterfall in the region.

Pian Upe Wildlife Reserve. We'll spend our time exploring this remote, rarely visited site, scouring the Whistling Thorn savannas for two very special birds: the recently re-discovered Ugandan endemic Fox's Weaver and the highly localised Karamoja Apalis.

The latter is fortunately quite common here and is best located by its distinctive piping call. Fox's Weaver could prove a little more challenging, though we stand an excellent chance at finding this mega. It is the only true-endemic bird species in Uganda but remains extremely elusive and is poorly known.

It was recorded in the vicinity of Lake Bisina, Lake Opeta and Lake Kyogo but the species totally disappeared for several years and was thought to be in dire straits; surveys conducted in 2015 completely failed to find this species after five years in which the species was apparently lost! A small population was then discovered in 2018 and our reconnaissance trip in 2019 was successful – in fact, we found the birds breeding!



Jackson's Spurfowl by Greg de Klerk

Virgin grassland and wooded habitats have created an incredibly welcoming environment for dry country birds and several sought-after mammals such as the handsome Roan. Whilst moving past Red Acacias, Desert Date, and various species of bushwillows we'll come across several cisticola species, spectacular Secretarybird, Foxy Lark, Northern Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Hartlaub's Bustard, Stone Partridge, Yellow-spotted Bush Sparrow and Jackson's Hornbill. More arid areas may turn up the huge, Yellow-billed Shrike, Golden-winged Sunbird, Northern Red Bishop, Trilling Cisticola, Shelley's Sparrow, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Silverbird, Cardinal Quelea, Marsh Tchagra, Striped and Woodland Kingfishers, Flappet Lark and Grey-backed Fiscal. Flocks of Mottled Swifts are also sometimes seen overhead.

Pian Upe to Moroto. This stretch involves driving through villages and communities. By Ugandan standards, it is all dry country, and usually, the best place to find Steel-blue and Long-tailed Paradise Whydahs. We will also be on the lookout for Rufous Chatterer,

d'Arnaud's Barbet, Purple Grenadier, very scare *archeri* subspecies of Orange-winged Francolin and Shinning Sunbird, along with several other birds that call this area home.



Black-breasted Barbet by David Hoddinott

Mount Moroto. The town, located at the base of Mount Moroto, is surrounded by unique thicket habitats that attract several eastern and north-eastern birds of Uganda. We will be based here to explore the Matheniko-Bokora Wildlife Reserve and conduct circuits around the mountain to catch up with some restricted range species. These include Hunter's Sunbird, Purple Grenadier, Shining Sunbird, Red and Yellow Barbet, White-bellied Go-away bird, Northern White-faced Owl, Long-tailed and Standard-winged Nightjars, Abyssinian, and Purple Rollers, as well as Abyssinian Ground, Eastern Yellow, and Jackson's Hornbills.

While scanning the scrub and walking through the dry, thorny acacia country, we will be searching for Red-fronted and Black-breasted Barbets, Brown-backed Woodpecker, Singing Bush Lark, Red-winged Lark, Ethiopian Swallow, African Grey Flycatcher, Foxy and Red-pate Cisticolas, White-bellied Tit, Mouse-colored Penduline Tit, Northern Fiscal, Yellow-billed Shrike, Slate-colored Boubou, Fan-tailed Raven, Superb Starling, Red-billed Oxpecker, Eastern Violet-backed, Shining and Beautiful Sunbirds, Shelley's Rufous and Chestnut Sparrows, White-headed and White-billed Buffalo Weavers, White-browed and Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weavers, Straw-colored Whydah, Grey-capped Social and Speckle-fronted Weavers, Green-winged and Orange-winged Pytilias, Black-bellied and Black-faced Waxbills, Black Bishop and Brown-rumped Bunting.

Kidepo Valley National Park. During our time here, we will spend our time birding the park and have the opportunity for night drives (optional extra). This is the least explored of all Uganda's parks and yet, has already recorded over 480 species, making it the second highest count after Queen Elizabeth National Park in the country.



Gambaga Flycatcher by David Hoddinott

This IBA is located entirely within the Somali–Masai biome, with 28 species from the Somali-Masai and Sudan–Guinea Savanna biomes being endemic to this park. The Narus and Kidepo Valleys are fantastic spots for an exceptional birding experience, and we'll be looking for several key species such as Common Ostrich, Secretarybird, Pygmy Falcon, Fox Kestrel, Stone Partridge, Clapperton's, Heuglin's

and Yellow-necked Spurfowls, Kori, White-bellied, and Hartlaub's Bustards.

Other birds to look for among the many in the several habitats here will include White-winged Widowbird, White-bellied Canary, Reichard's and Reichenow's Seedeaters, Augur Buzzard, Wahlberg's Eagle, Lynes's Cisticola, Green and Wood Sandpipers, Common Reed and Lesser Swamp Warblers, Gambaga Flycatcher, Greyish Eagle-Owl, Pennant-winged and Freckled Nightjars, Yellow-billed Shrike, Black-headed Lapwing, Black-backed Cisticola, White-crested Turaco, Bruce's Green Pigeon, Boran Cisticola, Mocking Cliff Chat, Sooty Chat, Mottled Swift, White-fronted Black Chat, Brown-backed Woodpecker Green-backed Eremomela, Brown-rumped Bunting, White-headed Vulture and Hemprich's Hornbill.



Clapperton's Spurfowl by David Hoddinott

Mammals are numerous and we are sure to come across several megafauna such as African Elephant, African Buffalo, Northern Bushbuck, Northern Giraffe, Cheetah, Hartebeest, Waterbuck and Kob. With luck we may find Lion, whilst night drives occasionally find Leopard, that uniquely hunt Crested Porcupine here!

Tour Grading & Key

Overall Ease		Forest birding is moderate to demanding, some long travel & birding days, moderate trails. Remote, rarely visited parts of Uganda with limited tourist infrastructure.
Birding Ease		Forest birding is moderate to demanding, several low-density species that may require repeated effort. Open savanna & woodland is easier.
Accommodation		Variable. Modern & comfortable lodges & ensuite safari tents at most sites with a few simple lodges.
Walking / Trails		Variable, a few narrow and/or steep trails, mostly tracks.
Vehicles / Roads		4x4 Landcruiser vehicles. Some long drives on sealed & unsealed roads, prone to having potholes & livestock.
Photography		Average to good. Forest photography has typical lighting challenges. Better lighting in savanna areas. No dedicated hides.
Annoyances		Some moderate altitude changes. Large temperature variances & some rain can be expected.

Financial Arrangements and Important Notes

Tour dates, prices, single supplement, approximate flight costs and tour spaces are displayed on our website.

Tour inclusions:

- All meals from dinner on day 1 to lunch on day 13;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings;
- All ground transportation during the tour;
- All reserve & site entrance fees;
- All guiding services
- Tips for local guides, drivers, and services.

Tour exclusions:

- Visa fees;
- ANY flights;
- Any beverages (including mini-bar charges at hotels);
- Optional excursions (ie: night drives);
- Special gratuities;
- Telephone calls, laundry, and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If you feel that they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them at your discretion.

- **Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing. The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates.**
- **Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registrations, a small group supplement will be offered to confirm the tour.**
- **Tour prices are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.**
- **The designated tour leader/s may be changed at short due to unforeseen circumstances.**
- **The itinerary is indicative only. Changes may need to be made to the order in which the tour is conducted, or some of the venues we visit closer to departure. We will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.**

- Although Uganda is an equatorial nation, much of the country is situated on a plateau at roughly 1000 metres above sea level, and therefore, the climate is relatively mild. In some northern areas it can be hot to very hot (more than 30°C).
- At times, we may be walking on narrow and/or steep trails.
- This Uganda tour does require a good level of fitness and participants should be in good general health as much of the birding will be done on foot and may require walking for several hours at a time. Should you have any physical limitations, please notify us in advance of departure.
- There will be a several lengthy drives and many of the days will be long with early starts.
- The vehicles used are comfortable stretched Landcruiser 4X4's with open roof-hatches.

Arrival and Departure Details

The tour begins in Entebbe on day 1, and as this is an arrival day, you are free to arrive at any time. The tour will conclude in the afternoon of day 13 at Entebbe International Airport.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your Tour Confirmation package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

Entebbe International Airport, Entebbe (IATA: EBB) is the main port of entry and departure for international flights for this tour and is well serviced by most of the world's major airlines.

Visa requirements differ by country, nationality of the traveller and duration and purpose of your intended stay. It may be necessary to obtain a visa or an electronic travel authorization in advance of your travel. It is therefore vitally important that you check with your travel agent/consulate/embassy for exact visa requirements.

DO NOT book any flights until the Rockjumper Team have officially confirmed the tour.