Wild Globe Travel Consultancy
Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.
14 Greenfield Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex BN21 1JJ, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1323 731865
Mob: +44 (0)7821 640118
Email: jason.woolgar@btinternet.com
Website: www.wildglobetours.com

RWANDA AND UGANDA

Date - June 2021

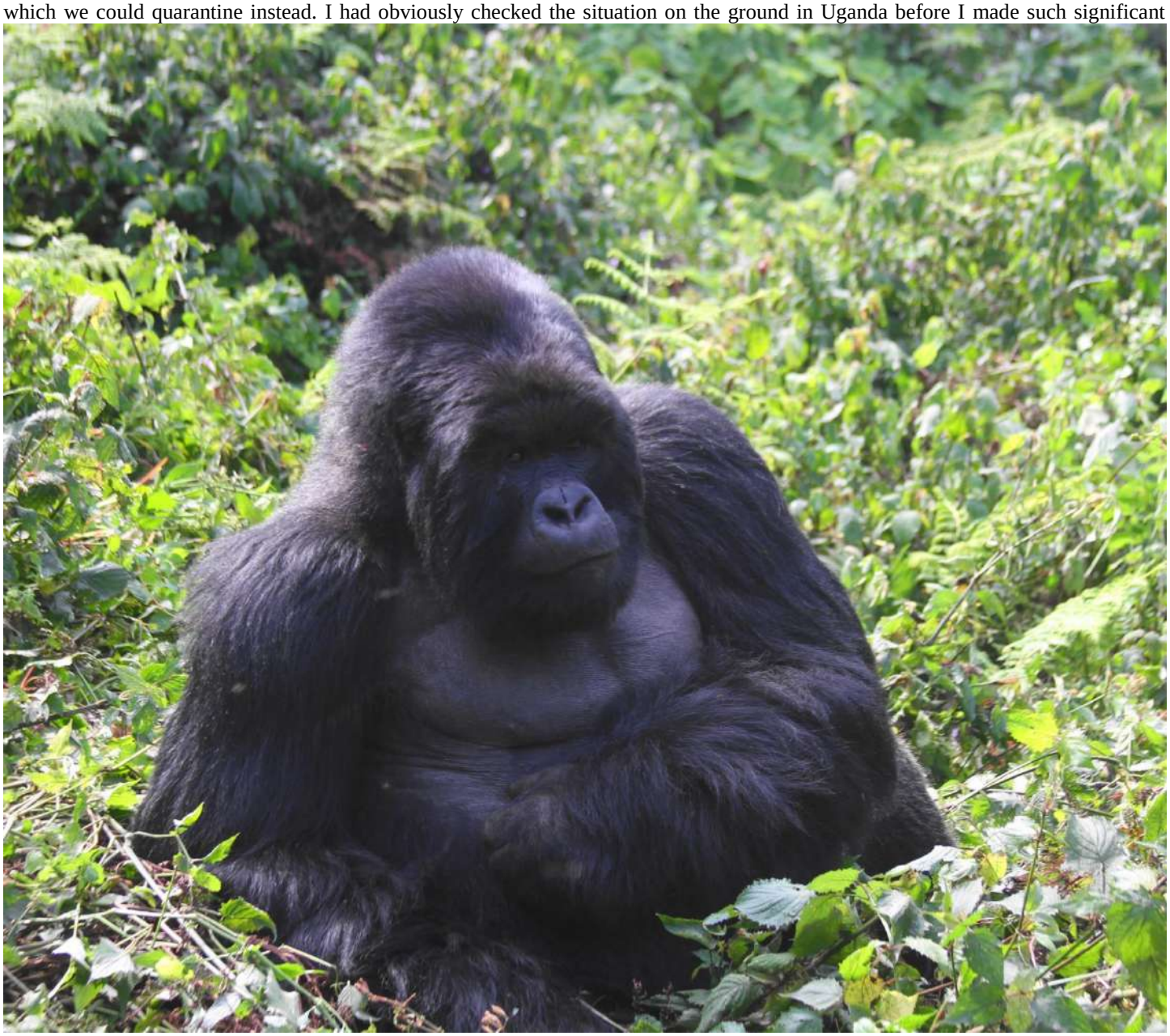
Duration - 30 Days

Destinations
Kigali - Volcanoes National Park - Lake Ruhondo - Lake Burera - Lake Kivu - Nyungwe National Park - Akagera National Park - Lake Ihema - Entebbe - Kampala - Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary - Lugogo Wetlands - Murchison Falls National Park - Kibale National Park - Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary - Queen Elizabeth National Park - Lake Edward - Kazinga Channel - Kyambura Gorge - Maramagambo Forest - Ishasha River - Bwindi Impenetrable National Park - Lake Mutanda - Mgahinga Gorilla National Park - Lake Mburo National Park

Trip Overview

This tour was supposed to be the beginning of a return to wildlife travel following the coronavirus pandemic and had been arranged in October 2020, when the virus appeared to be at least somewhat under control and the vast majority of restrictions had been lifted. It was intended as a fairly short trip to visit the three national parks in Rwanda, as well as the two mountain gorilla parks Bwindi and Mgahinga in Uganda. However, another wave of the virus was spreading and by the New Year, the UK had been plunged back into a national lockdown that was not due to end completely until the 21st of June, five days before I was due to fly to Kigali. During the

interceding period, the UK Government began categorising countries in terms of safe travel or otherwise and any considered a very high risk were placed on the dreaded 'Red List', which basically meant that anyone returning from one had to spend eleven days in quarantine in an airport hotel at great expense. I was delighted that my son James was able to return to assist me on this tour, but his presence meant that we were going to be basically locked together in a tiny hotel room for at least eleven days and instead I extended the Uganda section of the tour by almost two weeks to avoid this quarantine process, as Uganda was not on the red list and we could return directly to the UK from there without having to quarantine. This was a massive gamble of course, as there was always the possibility that Uganda might be added to the red list, which would mean that not only had I extended the original trip by two weeks for no reason, but that we would still have to either quarantine in the UK for the extra eleven days or find another 'safe' country in which we could quarantine instead. I had obviously checked the situation on the ground in Uganda before I made such significant



changes and coronavirus cases were low, which remained the case throughout the ensuing period and at one stage it did look as if my decision would be justified. We both agreed that it made sense at the time and I would certainly always prefer to spend an extra two weeks on safari in Uganda than have to quarantine in one small room with my son, as much as I love him. However, by this stage UK officials were no longer only taking case numbers into account when assessing destinations, they were also trying to avoid certain strains of the virus reaching our shores and two days before we were due to depart, I heard that this worst case scenario had indeed occurred and that Uganda had been placed on the red list. We would now have to quarantine at the end of the tour regardless, either in the UK or another country, and whilst we spent most of the tour exploring a myriad of contrasting options, we would eventually be away from home for 43 days. I appreciate that a great deal of people were in a far worse position across the globe and that I was incredibly fortunate to still be able to travel, but the original tour was due to take place over twelve days and it is always important to highlight the reality of what can and does occur on tour, particularly during these deeply unsettled times. On arrival we had to spend our first night in quarantine in Kigali and would need to take PCR tests before entering each of the national parks in Rwanda, excluding Volcanoes at the beginning of the trip, as we would arrive within the 72 hours that our entry PCR test was valid for. We would also have to take a further test before departure and although this was organised efficiently enough, a last minute complication involving our Uganda visas, prevented me from taking James to the Kigali Genocide Memorial, which commemorates the horrific genocide that took place in Rwanda in 1994 and is a final resting place for around a quarter of a million of its victims. For all the disruption and problems, this was actually my only significant regret of the tour, as I have always felt a deep affinity for Africa and the shocking events of 1994, when up to 800,000 Tutsi citizens were slaughtered by their Hutu compatriots, had a profound effect on me, particularly in terms of the rest of the world standing by and doing absolutely nothing. In fact, the reality is even worse, as the

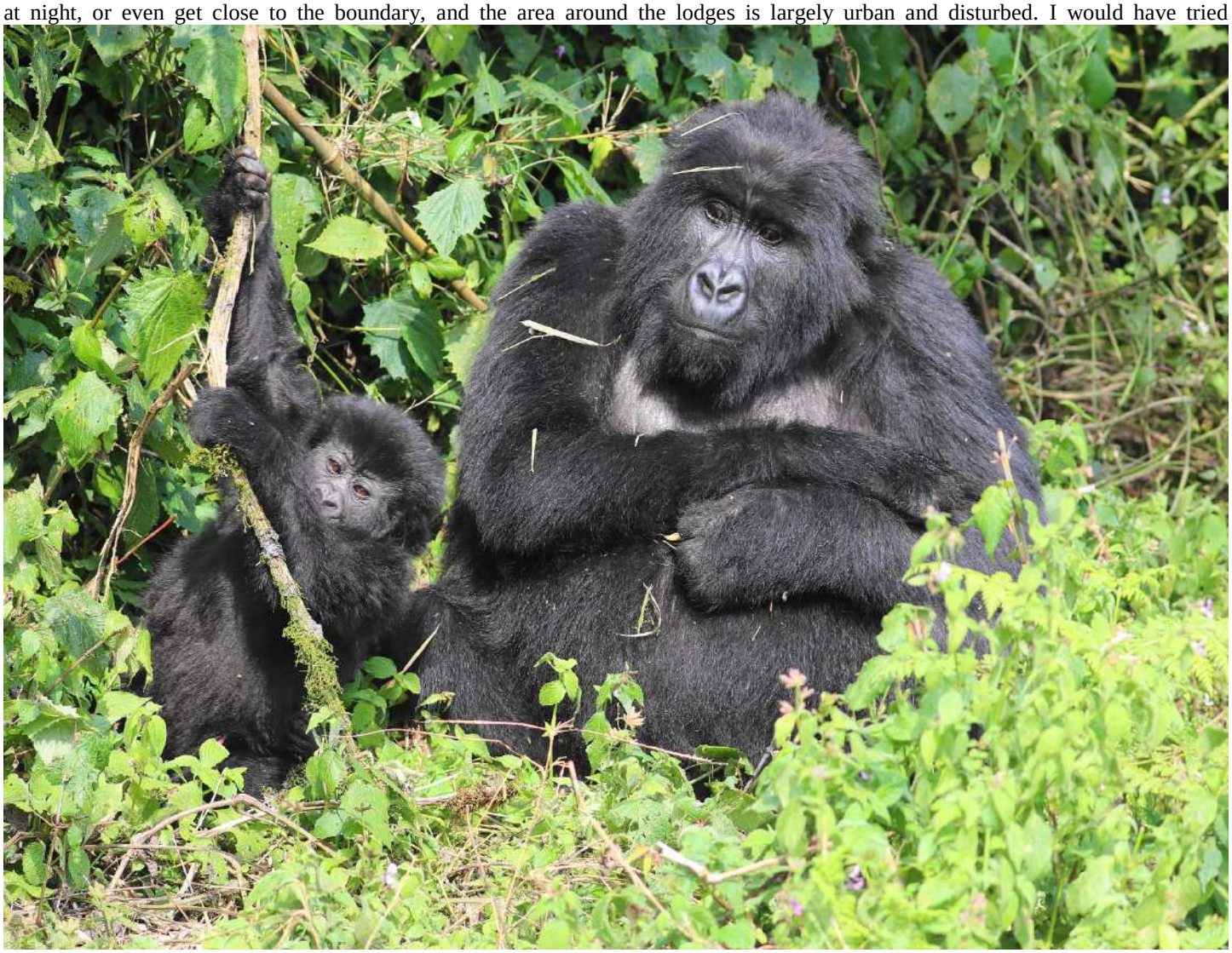
United Nations actually withdrew their so called peacekeeping forces, when it was clear that a massacre was about to commence and that they desperately needed to deploy more troops on the ground. It remains a shameful episode in the repeatedly tarnished history of the United Nations, but make no mistake, the entire international community failed Rwanda during the summer of 1994, largely because there were no mineral rights or strategic interests to protect and consequently no political will to intervene. The killings happened by the tens of thousands, day after day in broad daylight, in full view of the eyes of the world. They were impossible to ignore and yet, ignore them the world did. The violence was as shocking as it was savage and lasted almost exactly 100 days until the Rwandan Patriotic Front, a Tutsi rebel force, took Kigali and seized power in July 1994. Tutsis were slaughtered in their own villages and towns, often by their Hutu friends and neighbours and usually by machete or club, the only weapons widely available. Any moderate Hutus who refused to kill were also murdered and up to half a million Tutsi women are thought to have been raped, often

after their children had been killed in front of them and in many cases by men with AIDS, who had been formed into special rape squads specifically to infect Tutsi women. There was to be no sanctuary and the tens of thousands who took shelter in churches and schools were butchered like cattle, often with the assistance of the priest and local officials. At Murambi in the southwest, the local bishop instructed the Tutsis hiding in his church to move to a nearby school where they would be protected by French troops, but it was a trap and some 45,000 were massacred in the school as the French soldiers withdrew with the Hutu militia closing in. Those who did escape were slaughtered the next day in the church, again in their thousands. One particular story has always stayed with me, that of a Hutu woman with her own baby tied in a traditional sling to her breast. She could have been out for an everyday walk with her family or toiling in the field under a hot African sky. Instead, she was hacking her Tutsi neighbour to death with a machete, as well as the baby that her neighbour also had slung to her chest. Although it hardly seems to matter retrospectively, the final death toll has often been disputed, but it would certainly have exceeded more than a million souls if you take into account the fleeing Hutu killed by the RPF at the end of the conflict, as well as the Hutu refugees who died of disease in Zaire, now the DRC, and other neighbouring countries, In addition and generally forgotten, approximately ten thousand Batwa pygmies were murdered during those original 100 days, around a third of their total population. For those who want to learn more about one of the most significant and shocking events of the 20th century, and the way in which the entire civilised world just stood by and did nothing, I would suggest that you read the utterly compelling ‘We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families’, subtitled ‘Stories From Rwanda’, a brilliant and harrowing account of one of humanity’s darkest hours by the American journalist Philip Gourevitch. As Gourevitch explains...

‘What distinguishes genocide from murder, and even from acts of political murder that claim as many victims, is the intent. The crime is wanting to make a people extinct. The idea is the crime.’

I would also recommend the equally profound ‘The Zanzibar Chest - A Memoir of Love and War’ by the former war correspondent Aidan Hartley. Whilst Hartley explores the horror of the Rwandan genocide, as well as other traumatic conflicts in Ethiopia, Somalia and Burundi, his powerful and exquisitely written book is more about loss, identity and place, especially his own place within Africa, than it is about war itself or even the causes behind it. Finally, and while there are many other worthwhile books on the subject, I never hesitate to recommend the entirely absorbing ‘The Scramble for Africa 1876-1912’ by Thomas Pakenham, which, as I have stated on numerous occasions, should be taught as part of the curriculum of every country involved in the shameful and brutal partition of Africa. As a historical volume it is a superb read, as a discourse on the horrors of colonialism, it is an essential one.

Having quarantined overnight in Kigali, the first good news of the tour was that the coronavirus tests taken when we landed were both negative and we were free to move on to our first destination, Volcanoes National Park, one of three national parks in the country. Actually, strictly speaking there are now four, as the Gishwati Mukura National Park, situated in the northwest of the country near Lake Kivu and incorporating the Gishwati and Mukura forests, has apparently been officially gazetted, although it was not yet open to tourists when I visited. No doubt the global pandemic has delayed its formal launch, but it remains enormously encouraging that these two important forests will now receive formal protection as part of a highly laudable government plan to restore forest across 30% of the country. Having escaped quarantine, the only other formal restriction we now faced was a national 6pm curfew, which was not going to be an issue later at Akagera National Park, as you were allowed to participate in nocturnal activities if you were already within a reserve by 6pm, but certainly would be elsewhere. At Volcanoes the damage was limited, as you are unable to access the park at night, or even get close to the boundary, and the area around the lodges is largely urban and disturbed. I would have tried



spotlighting somewhere of course, as there are still patches of fragmented rainforest that may have been productive, but this was not an option and instead I just walked the tiny grounds of our lodge each evening, albeit without success or much prospect of any. Apart from an introduction to the area by way of a fairly gruelling hike to the crater lake at the summit of Mount Bisoke, which was barely visible in poor weather, our time at Volcanoes would be devoted to just two species, golden monkey and the critically endangered mountain gorilla, a subspecies of the eastern gorilla, which James had never seen. The park itself incorporates five of the eight volcanoes in the Virunga Mountains and is contiguous with the southern section of Virunga National Park in the DRC. The mountain gorillas aside, the park is renowned as the home and research area of the conservationist Dian Fossey, who was murdered here in 1985 and is buried at Karisoke, among the graves of many of her beloved gorillas. One of these is Digit, one of Fossey's favourite gorillas, who was speared to death and had his head and hands hacked off, they are sold as ashtrays, whilst trying to protect his family from poachers. They now rest side by side in the graveyard that Fossey herself established for other murdered gorillas and it is likely that she was killed as a result of her outspoken opposition to the rampant poaching that occurred here, often with the assistance of park officials and rangers. Indeed, it is probable that her death was ordered by a senior government representative in order to safeguard the highly lucrative animal trafficking trade that the Rwandan authorities were no doubt benefiting from and actively supporting. As if she knew how her end was likely to unfold, Fossey once said...

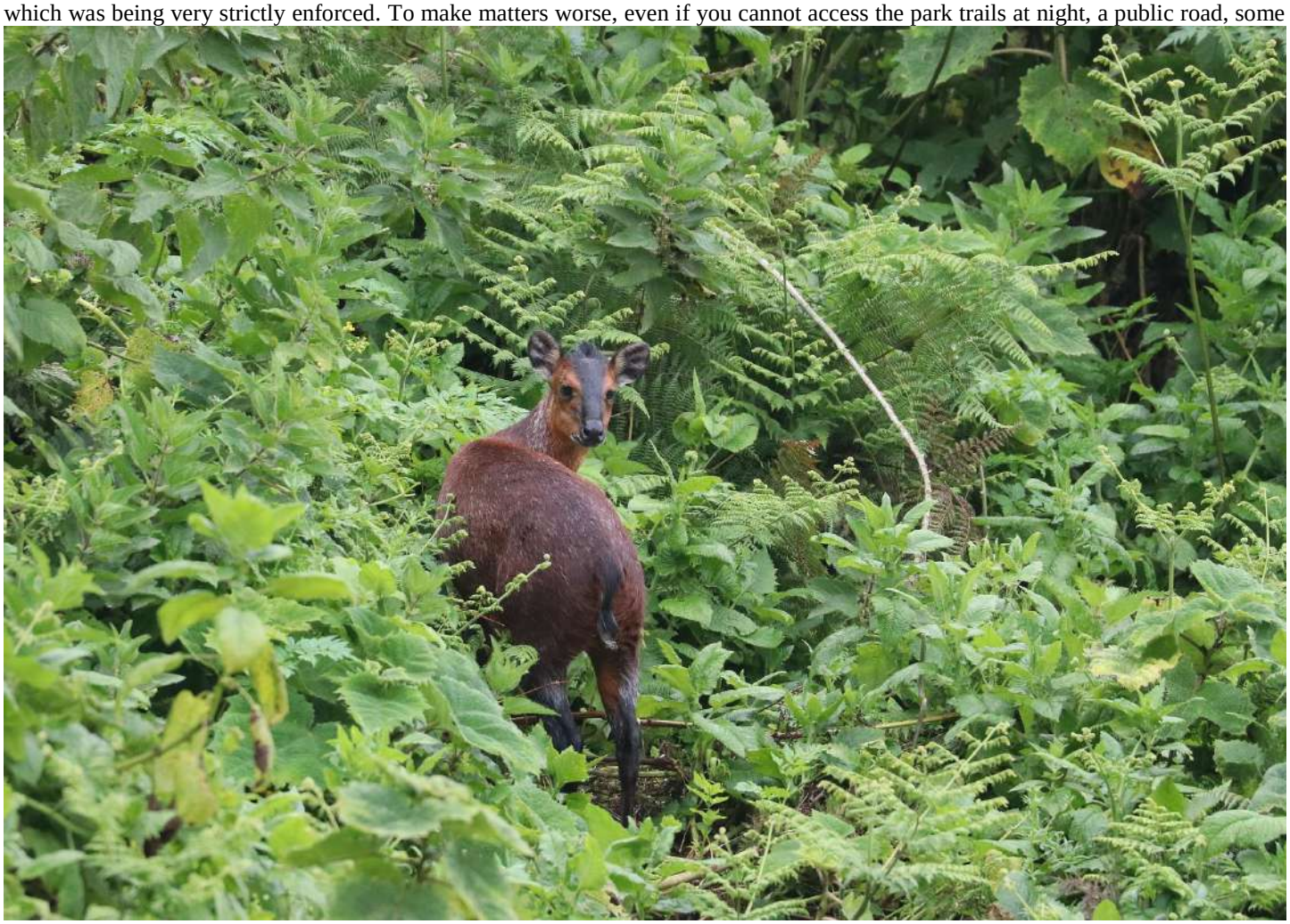
I have no friends. The more you learn about the dignity of the gorilla, the more you want to avoid people.

If you would like to contribute to the continued survival of these magnificent apes in her memory, please visit the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund website at www.gorillafund.org. All donations will help safeguard these gentle creatures and you can also adopt one of the wild gorillas currently being monitored and protected here. Of course, if you ever have the opportunity, the best way to help conserve gorillas is by paying a great deal of money to visit them, as there is a strong argument to suggest that these animals only continue to exist in the wild as a result of the income generated by tourists in order to see them. In general, it is an assessment that I am prepared

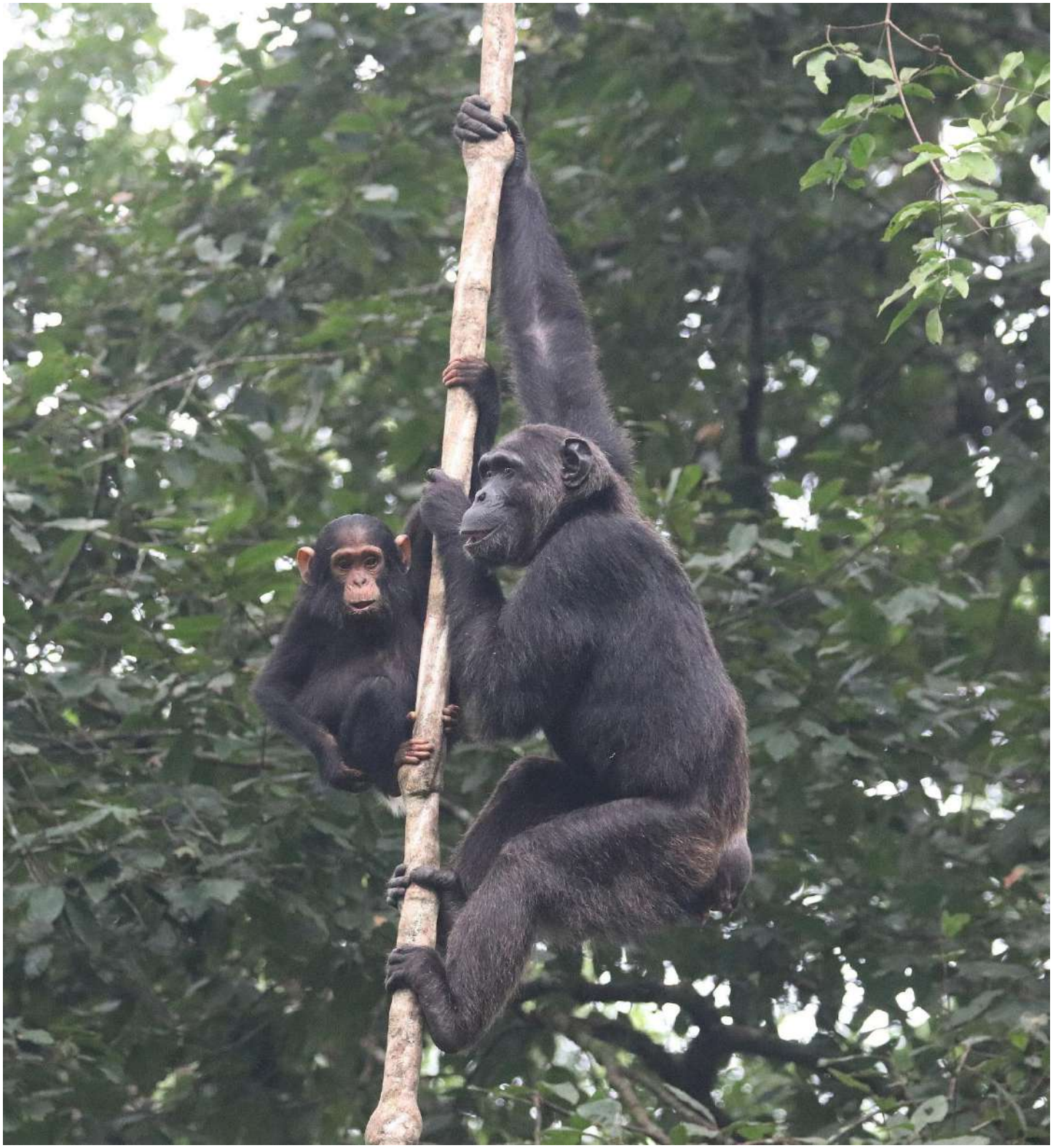
to support and it is certainly unlikely that mountain gorilla numbers would have increased substantially without the benefits derived from sustained tourism. For the first time in decades, the mountain gorilla population is estimated to once again number more than a thousand and whilst this figure remains woefully low, there were thought to be just 250 or so remaining in 1981, when the species was given little hope of recovery and long-term survival. It goes without saying that there is still a huge amount of work to do, but if you remain undecided or unsure, I can honestly say that sitting among a family of these incredibly gentle animals is undoubtedly the most rewarding of all wildlife experiences, at least as far as I am concerned. As I have recounted on numerous occasions, my first gorilla encounter completely changed my life many years ago and it is difficult to explain just how excited I was to now be able to savour

these extraordinarily beautiful animals in the company of my own son, with whom I have shared so many thrilling experiences over the years. He had already seen western gorillas with me at Odzala in the Congo, but never mountain gorillas and I had arranged three encounters with them, all at different destinations, including the amazing opportunity to actually take part in the gorilla habituation process at Bwindi, where I first had the privilege of spending time with these remarkable and peaceful primates. I am happy to relay that our first sighting together did not disappoint, as we spent the precious hour that each permit permits with a characteristically serene family group of sixteen gorillas, all eating and grooming out in the open for the majority of our time. At one point, with our guides telling our small group to remain still, the dominant silverback gently pushed past us to re-join the rest of his family and James and I were both filmed with this immense gorilla just ambling by. There is nothing quite like having the most powerful ape on the planet gently ease you out of his way, but what most tourists realise within a few minutes of meeting these creatures, is just how peaceful they actually are and how easily they can be harmed. I could have wiped out the entire group with a single automatic weapon and that is the terrible reality of the bushmeat trade and the poaching that occurs in this and so many other regions. Guests often also mention the smell, as the gorillas are great apes just like us, but even more so of course given their size, and you can clearly smell their body odour when sitting within a group of them. It is, however, the most natural smell imaginable in this idyllic setting and, having experienced both, is nothing at all like being choked on a packed London underground train during rush hour on the hottest day of the year. Indeed, it is almost impossible to contemplate a mundane outside world during what is a singularly unique moment in the lives of anyone fortunate enough to spend time with animals that could almost be human, but thankfully are not. James and I savoured every last moment together and our magical shared experience certainly confirmed that the stress of just getting here had all been worthwhile. Whilst the opposite can be the case and it can occasionally take several hours to locate your particular gorilla group, our search took less than an hour and the golden monkeys were even easier to find, given that we first saw them beyond the park boundary digging up and eating potatoes in a field. Formally considered a subspecies of the blue monkey, the golden monkey is now classified at full species level by most sources and at Volcanoes a few groups have been habituated for visitors to observe in much the same way as the gorillas, That the event is somewhat less memorable goes without saying, but these are still impressive primates and we spent a highly enjoyable morning watching a habituated group of around 30, as well as a few members of a genuinely wild troop passing by. Our only other activity in the vicinity was a leisurely boat ride on Lake Ruhondo, which was pleasant enough, but not productive beyond a few pied kingfishers and the only other mammals observed on this first leg of the tour were three black-fronted duikers on the Mount Bisoke hike. Unbelievable really when you consider the astounding diversity of the region, but the gorilla and golden monkey treks concentrate entirely on those species and of course the main issue was the lack of any nocturnal activities. This would improve elsewhere, but sadly not at our next destination Nyungwe National Park, where our inability to search at night was likely to prove even more damaging. With extensive

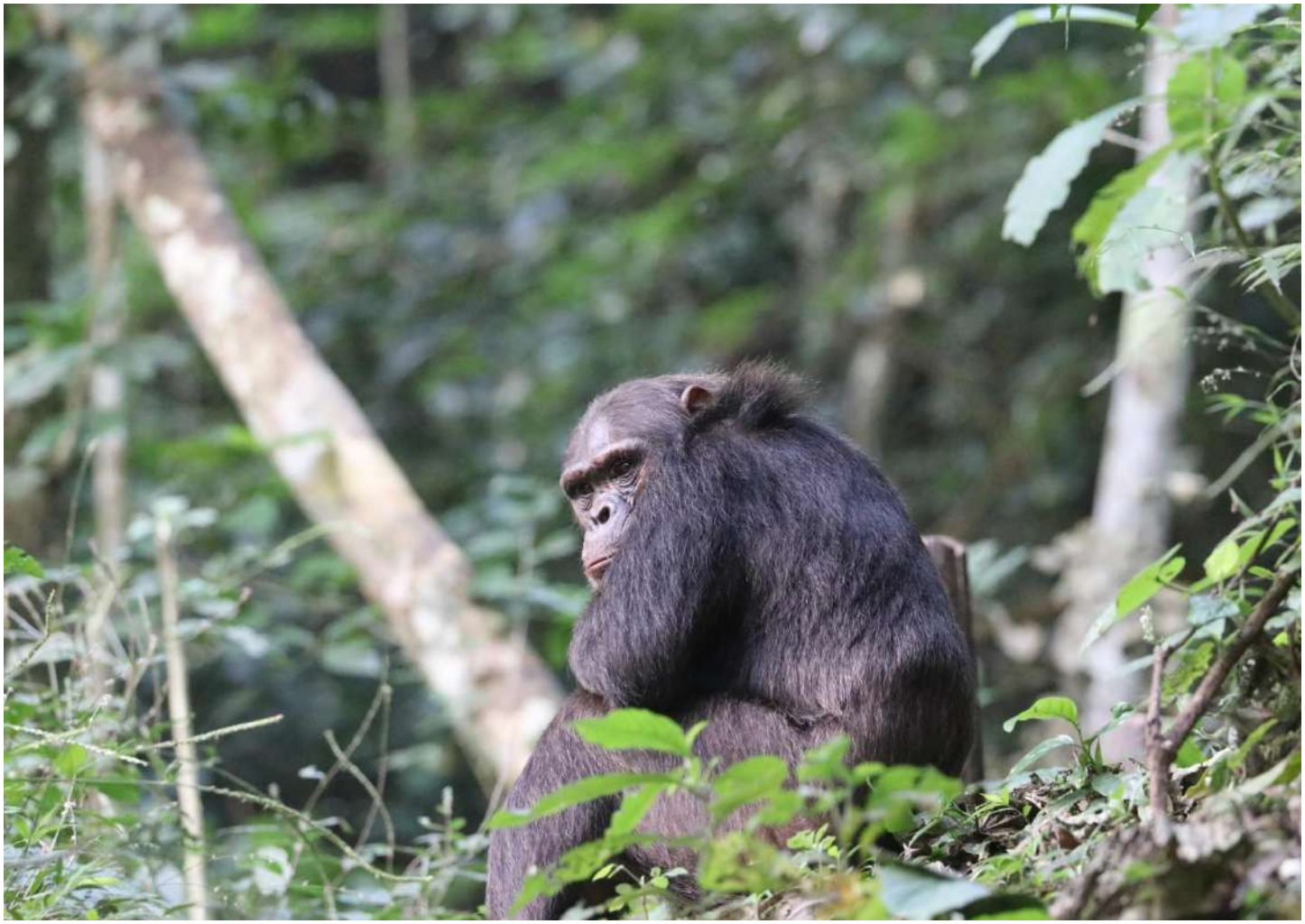
swathes of largely pristine forest to explore, Nyungwe had originally been the destination where I had hoped to at least investigate seriously for an African golden cat, one of the very few felids to have eluded me in the wild, particularly as I was aware that guided night walks were due to commence here and I was likely to have four extended spotlighting sessions to search for this elusive cat and a host of other rare nocturnal species. Indeed, on our second chimpanzee hike, the local guide pointed out golden cat scat from earlier that morning and later told me that he had seen many of these notoriously shy cats over the years, more or less one a month on average. This was as I had expected here, but would not help us at all, as the nocturnal walks had not yet commenced, again delayed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, and even if they had, we could not reach the park at night as a result of the 6pm curfew, which was being very strictly enforced. To make matters worse, even if you cannot access the park trails at night, a public road, some



57 kilometres long, runs directly through the reserve and anyone can drive or walk along this road at night with lights. No permission is required and although in some ways spotlighting along a major road is not ideal, this particular stretch is not that busy after dark and a wide road can often give you the advantage of greater visibility and a larger area to search. Again, none of these factors would assist this time, not given the fact that our accommodation was not allowed to let us enter or leave the lodge grounds after 6pm, which meant that if we did spotlight, it would have to be all night. Given that I am used to spotlighting throughout the night, I was actually fine with this and was initially thrilled that we had found a solution, but my main driver/guide for the Rwanda section of the tour was understandably less keen, as the police were stopping all cars at night and he would have lost his tourist licence, not to mention his safari vehicle. It was clearly too much to ask him to risk, particularly as there was nothing covert about what we would be doing on a major road with two extremely bright lights, and instead we traversed long stretches of the steep road in the early morning and late evening, just on the off chance that we might get unfeasibly lucky. We did enjoy some very limited success, but there is no substitute to being in the park at night and by the time that we left Nyungwe, having spent more than a week within one of Africa's biodiversity hotspots, we had identified a total of twelve mammals, less than I would expect to find in the UK given the same length of time. The park itself is accessed, from Volcanoes at least, by driving south along Lake Kivu, one of Africa's Great Lakes and a border between Rwanda and DRC. Situated within the Albertine Rift, the western section of the East African Rift, Nyungwe is home to thirteen primate species and as much as I would have cherished even a glimpse of the almost intangible owl-faced monkey, my three far more realistic targets were Angolan colobus, grey-cheeked mangabey and dent's monkey, as none of these would be seen at the destinations I had arranged to visit later on in Uganda. At one time grey-cheeked mangabey could be observed at Kibale National Park and although exactly the same monkey still resides there now, it has been assessed as a distinct species and renamed the Uganda mangabey. The colobus would be easy, you could even take guided walks just to see them, but we would need some good fortune with the other two and I asked our guide to look out for them on each of the two chimpanzee treks that I had included here. Observing chimpanzees is always a highlight of any tour and our first attempt took place in an isolated patch of forest away from the main section of the reserve. If I am honest, the forest felt a little too small and fragmented for this to be a truly authentic experience, although it did take us a long time to find the chimps and to walk out afterwards. In between, we followed a group of ten to fifteen for around two hours, as your time does not begin until you are actually with the chimpanzees, as opposed to trailing behind them. The park guides are usually reasonably relaxed about these rules and do their best to ensure that everyone has an enjoyable sighting. On this occasion, we were able to watch individuals sitting and feasting on fruit at eye level and they mainly remained on the ground, at one stage trailing across the forest floor in almost a straight line like soldier ants. Every encounter is different of course and whilst this

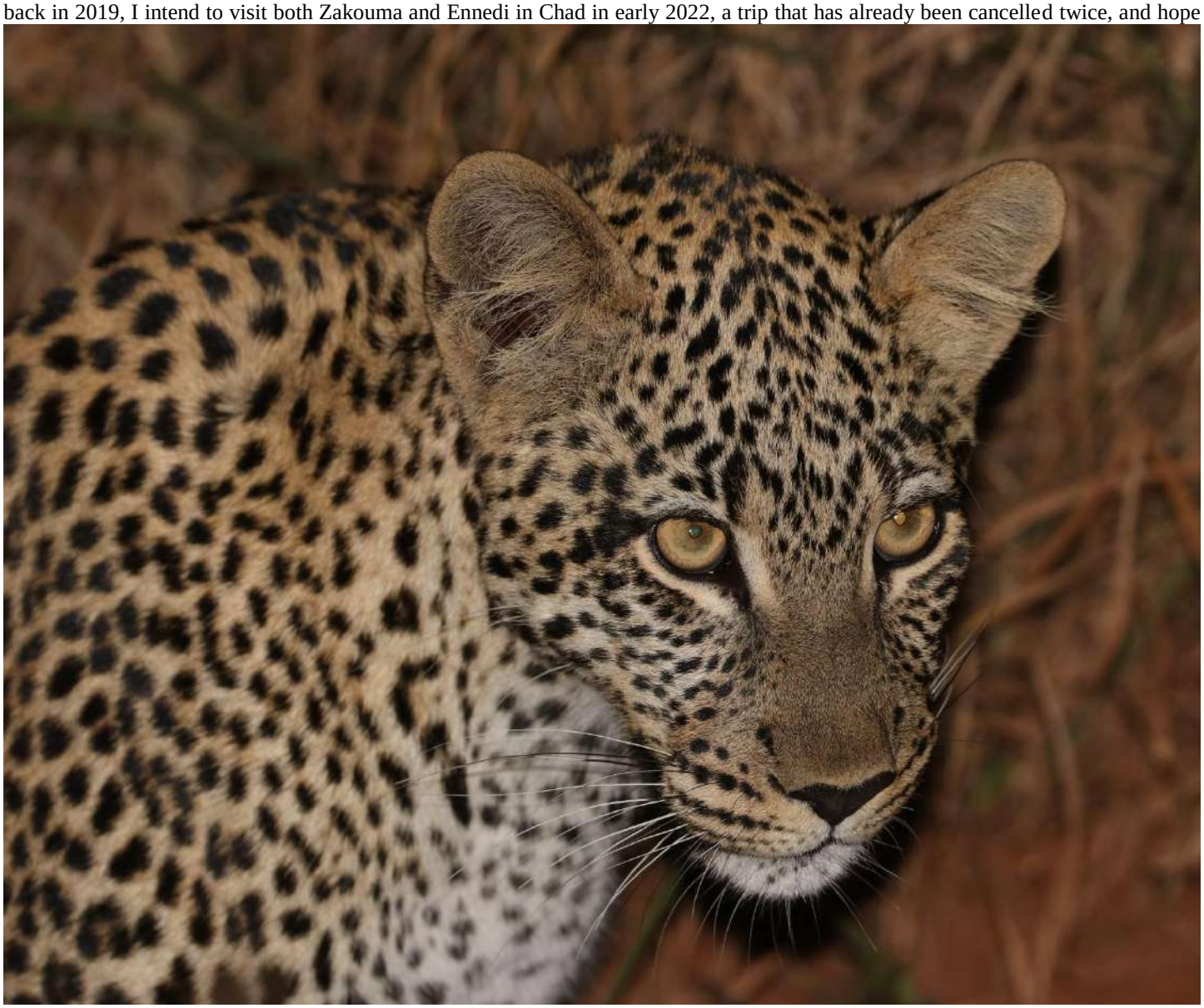


first effort featured lots of chimpanzees on the ground, the second was an entirely contrasting experience, whereby the three chimpanzees that we were able to find, or that I should say the local spotters had very kindly found for us, all remained in the same tree for the duration of our hour with them. This actually made sense, as chimpanzees often spend the early morning foraging on the ground and will move on and then up higher to feed as the day progresses. Chimpanzee tracking is consequently designed to catch them on the ground, before they begin moving with purpose and are lost to the forest, hence the early start. However, this second hike was back in the main Nyungwe forest, which, as anyone who has visited here will tell you, is very steep. For steep, read torturous in places and to even get close to the area where the chimpanzees had been spotted, our group had to negotiate several significant slopes, all of which were wet and muddy following heavy rain. There are no neat and convenient trails of course when you are tracking an animal on foot and whilst James and I are entirely comfortable in these conditions, many tourists are not and sometimes progress can be slow. To be fair, this was a demanding hike for everyone involved and by the time that we finally arrived, there were only three chimpanzees remaining, two males and a female. Fortunately, they made no effort to move on and we were able to rest against the side of the hill and watch them at our leisure for the entire hour, at which point we had the unenviable task of climbing out again. Whilst we saw fewer chimpanzees and at a greater distance, this second encounter was actually more rewarding, no doubt as a result of the effort involved, and as if to further highlight the entirely random nature of wildlife viewing, on our first hike we came across a small group of dent's monkeys and on our second a few grey-cheeked mangabeys, the two potentially tricky species that I had been hoping to see at Nyungwe. We had our skilful local guides to thank for the mangabeys, as they heard them at distance and deliberately diverted us on the way back to ensure that we came across them. As always, local knowledge and expertise is crucial and on a number



of subsequent hikes, including the pretty Isumo waterfall trail, we had decent to excellent views of Angolan colobus, blue monkey, l'hoest's monkey and vervet monkey, as well as a few more black-fronted duikers and several squirrels. In all we saw seven of the thirteen primates that Nyungwe protects, which was not too bad considering that the owl-faced monkey is virtually impossible and we had no opportunity to search for the three nocturnal species. The only easy primate missed was an olive baboon, but I expected we would put that right within a few minutes of arriving at our final destination in Rwanda, Akagera National Park. As is the case with

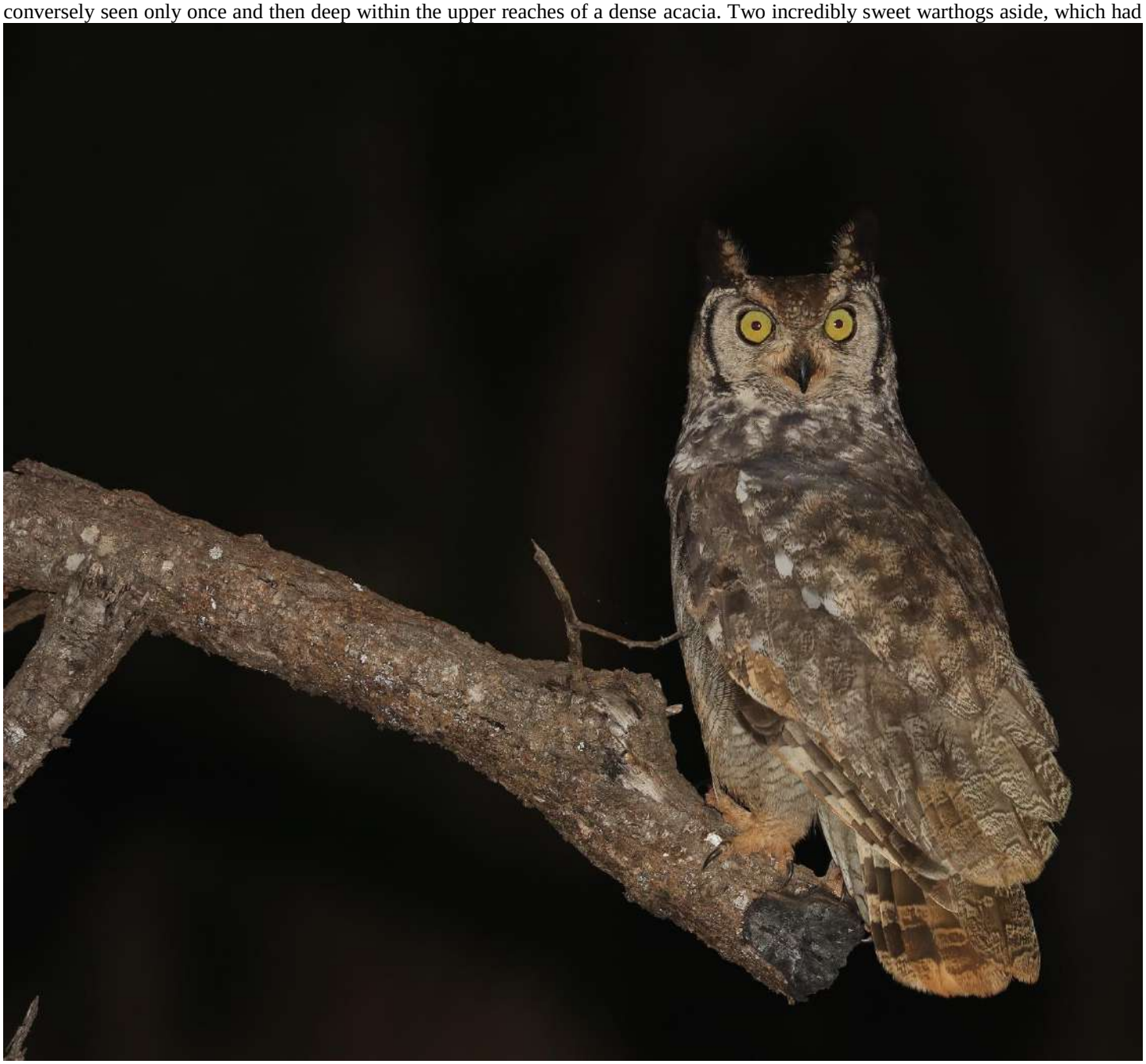
Nyungwe, Akagera is managed by African Parks, a non-profit conservation organisation currently responsible for the rehabilitation and conservation of nineteen national parks and protected areas across eleven countries. Their aim is to increase this number to at least 30 parks by the end of the decade and with more than 1,000 fully trained rangers, they currently safeguard almost fifteen million hectares of land, which equates to about 37 million acres, and thousands of vulnerable animals, including 13,500 elephants and more than 7,500 western gorillas. Although significantly delayed by the coronavirus pandemic since I stayed at Odzala-Kokoua in Congo back in 2019, I intend to visit both Zakouma and Ennedi in Chad in early 2022, a trip that has already been cancelled twice, and hope



to support as many of their reserves as possible going forward. As home to the largest protected wetland in Central Africa and the only surviving savannah in Rwanda, Akagera was always considered to be one of the most important and biodiverse reserves in the region, but for decades it received no protection and was almost lost entirely following the Rwandan Civil War and the horrific genocide already touched upon. Poaching was rife and took place pretty much unopposed, the last Black rhino was killed here in 2007, and the entire lion population was eradicated to make way for cattle, of which there were some 30,000 living on the reserve when African Parks assumed control in 2010. Their progress since has been nothing short of remarkable, as all significant poaching has ceased and major mammal numbers have more or less quadrupled in just over a decade. Both lion and black rhino have been successfully reintroduced and I am thrilled to say that since my visit in early July 2021, 30 white rhinos have also been released here. This is currently a conservation success story of epic proportions and having learned so much about the astonishing recovery taking place, I was desperate for the reality on the ground to match what I was reading and being told from afar. As such, I decided that it would make sense to simply explore as much of the reserve as possible and see which species could be encountered and in what numbers, as opposed to searching specifically for one or more mammals. That was my laudable intention at least, but having not seen a black rhino in the wild for eleven years, a fact that I could barely believe when I checked before we departed, the emphasis changed somewhat and by the end of our four-night stay, we were really only looking for one animal. To be fair, this was partly due to the fact that our visit had been tremendously successful by that stage and we had already encountered more or less every large mammal in the park, as well as a dazzling array of birds and other wildlife. I will not go into a great deal of detail for obvious reasons, but it is already fairly well known that rhinos are easier to see in the southern section of the park, or slightly less difficult would probably be more accurate, and we consequently spent more of our time in this area. You are also not currently able to spotlight from the accommodation in the north, but next time I will try to spend at least a couple of nights in that part of the reserve, as it was a long drive from our tented lodge in the south and is far better for certain species, including elephant and spotted hyena. In fact, we only saw one of each during our entire stay and I always say that you know you have been lucky at a reserve when you only see several species once and this occurred multiple times at Akagera. In devoting so much time to our rhino quest, which our visit had quickly become, we obviously sacrificed a few additional and possibly better views of certain animals, including lions, which were also

encountered just once. However, we knew that we were going to see a lot of elephants and lions in Uganda and that this would be our only chance of a black rhino, not only on this tour, but possibly for several years to come. As is often the case, our night drives produced several of our more memorable encounters and it was a relief just to be able to spotlight again after all the restrictions. Our one lion sighting was at night, of a huge male and four females sprawled out across the road, and also our single elephant, an old bull crossing down towards Lake Ihema. Different leopards were observed on two consecutive evenings, not unusual of course, but on the

first occasion, we noticed, as we moved off, that a serval was sitting on the other side of the road watching the same leopard. I was later informed that this was the first serval recorded in the park for seven months, including by the guides and rangers. James managed to take a short film, which was just as well, as I completely missed the shot and this happened again during our only spotted hyena encounter, with James managing to secure a brief filmed record of a typically calm hyena strolling past our vehicle. I did not fare a great deal better in terms of photographs of any of the smaller nocturnal carnivores, but we did enjoy decent views of large-spotted genet, white-tailed mongoose and marsh mongoose, as well as the only two nocturnal primates that occur in the park, the northern lesser galago, which appears to be fairly common and was observed every evening, and the thick-tailed greater galago, which was conversely seen only once and then deep within the upper reaches of a dense acacia. Two incredibly sweet warthogs aside, which had



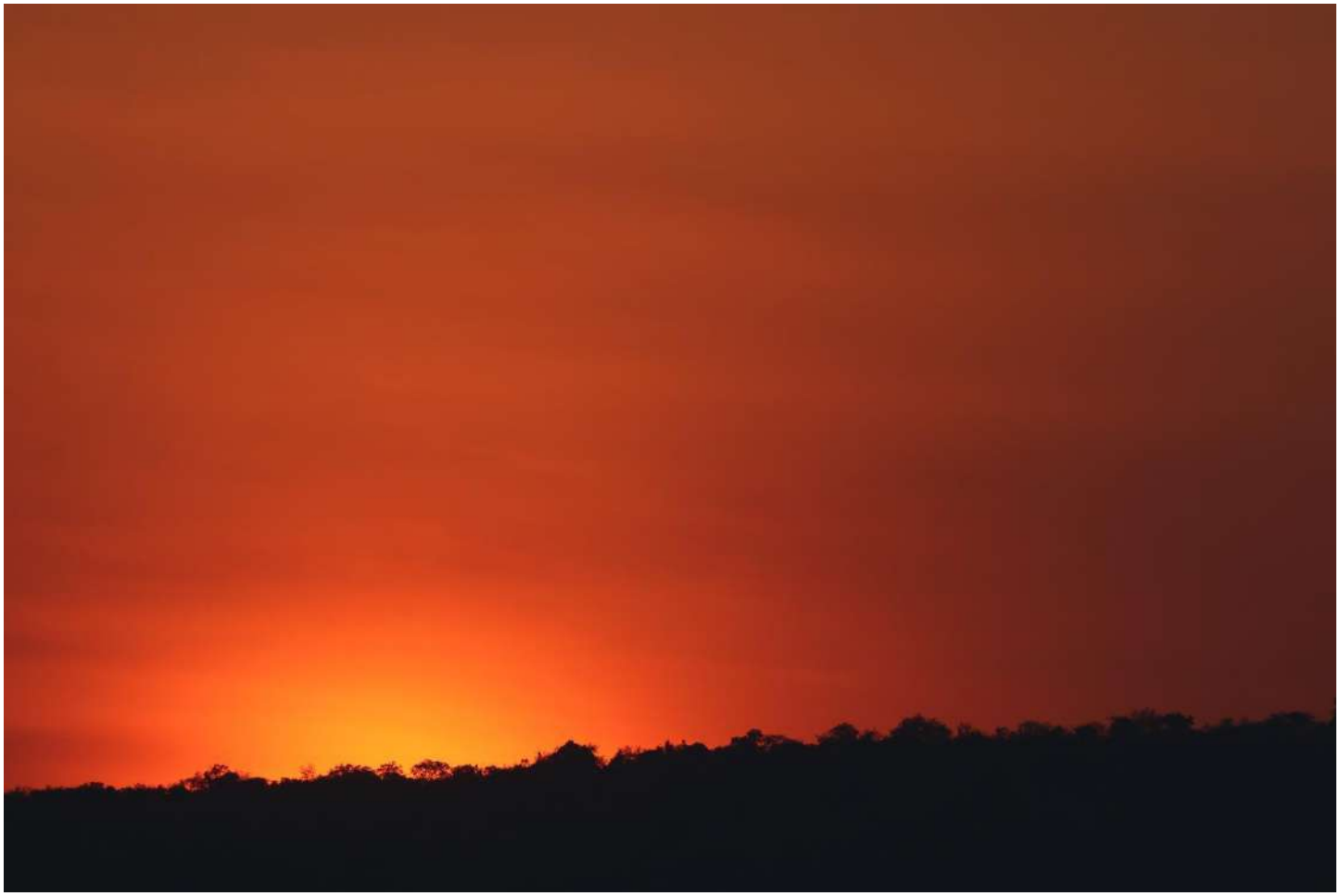
made their home in an old abandoned concrete shed and could be seen sleeping within, perhaps the highlight of our nocturnal activities was a characteristically brief, but unobstructed view of the only sengi, or elephant shrew as I still always think of them, that occurs in the park. Indeed, the four-toed sengi is the only sengi species in the entire country, which, for once with these ridiculously energetic small mammals, made the identification process mercifully straightforward. In a park renowned for its birdlife, I was delighted to find spotted eagle-owl and verreaux's eagle-owl, both of which posed obligingly for me, and almost 500 distinct species have been recorded here, including shoebill, which I was confident of seeing in Uganda and did not subsequently devote any time to. The real beauty of Akagera, and of course the secret to its biodiversity, is its habitat, which is correspondingly diverse and includes multiple lakes and vast adjoining areas of marsh and papyrus swamp. Large expanses of open savannah and secluded acacia woodlands are overlooked by the green rolling hills of the highlands and Lake Ihema, the largest lake in the reserve and the largest entirely in Rwanda, is directly linked to the Kagera River, which runs almost 600 kilometres to Lake Victoria and after which the national park is named. Out of interest, the lodge to the south is situated fairly idyllically on Lake Ihema and you can sit watching the hippos from the outdoor dining platform. There are plans for another lodge in the northern section, which will open an entirely new region of the park to night drives, and may in turn produce some new species, and they also intend to introduce walking safaris, hopefully as early as 2022. Akagera would be a perfect environment for this type of activity and may even result in sporadic sitatunga sightings, as you cannot take safari vehicles into these swamps and these wetland specialists would be far easier to look for on foot. They were consequently the only antelope that we failed to find, out of eleven in all, and the only other significant miss was probably a side-striped jackal, which I had certainly expected to see, but that our guide confirmed are very rarely spotted in the south, by night

or by day. I do not normally go into this level of detail, but I found that I was exploring Akagera almost as a new park and was interested to learn to what extent it had recovered after years of neglect. For the record, these are the mammal species encountered during three full days and two half days, in the order they were seen and including four nocturnal drives. Those in bold, fourteen in total, were observed on only one occasion:

01) Waterbuck
02) Plains Zebra
03) Topi
04) Impala
05) African Buffalo
06) Olive Baboon
07) Warthog
08) Oribi
09) Northern Lesser Galago
10) Giraffe
11) African Savanna Hare
12) **Four-toed Sengi**
13) Bushbuck
14) Leopard
15) **Serval**
16) Large-spotted Genet
17) **White-tailed Mongoose**
18) **Spotted Hyena**
19) **Klipspringer**
20) Hippopotamus
21) Common Dwarf Mongoose
22) Slender Mongoose
23) Vervet Monkey
24) **Eland**
25) **Blue Monkey**
26) **Lion**
27) **African Elephant**
28) Marsh Mongoose
29) **Bohor Reedbuck**
30) **Roan**
31) **Thick-tailed Greater Galago**
32) **Common Duiker**
33) **Black Rhinoceros**

Whilst 33 species is impressive enough within a relatively short period, more animals will be seen and on a more regular basis, as the resident populations continue to recover and more is learned of their behaviour and movements. Currently there is a lack of knowledge in certain fields, understandably given the poor condition in which the park was inherited, and no one is even entirely certain which species still occur. I only took one boat ride on Lake Ihema for example, because I was not able to ascertain whether spotted-necked otter had survived on these waters. Time should inevitably correct these issues and hopefully all of the missing species will eventually find their way back. Unquestionably, wild dogs will need to be reintroduced, as Akagera was once a stronghold for these apex predators, until they were wiped out by human persecution and disease. However, as wild dogs are considered to be the most efficient large carnivores in Africa, it probably makes sense to delay their introduction, at least until their prey species have sufficiently recovered. Meanwhile, and for all our undoubted success, we kept missing the rhinos, by less than a minute on one occasion according to the devoted and dedicated rangers who monitor and protect these fabulous but vulnerable beasts. With time running out, this is the point at which you start to get desperate and begin changing plans and chasing shadows. It is a mistake of

course and rarely works, but it is equally understandable and on our final morning I was not really sure whether to stick or twist, that is to say, to cover as much known rhino territory as quickly as possible or just keep on methodically searching an area that we knew one animal had been visiting regularly. After lengthy discussions with our African Parks guide, who had been tremendously helpful and a great deal of fun during our stay, we decided to stick with the one rhino, which looked to be either a terrible or unfortunate decision, depending on your perspective, when we had still not found one with less than an hour remaining. I must admit that I had almost given up at this point, but I have known entire tours and weeks of misery to change in a single second and our decision suddenly looked inspired when I turned my head to the right and found myself staring directly at a black rhino. I am not sure which one of us was more surprised, but it turned and ran in a single movement and James had not seen it at this point. If it had not stopped running he never would, but it thankfully turned back at what it assumed was a safe distance, a trait of so many mammals that will often get them killed, and we were all able to savour a dramatic, albeit relatively brief, view of this beautiful and iconic African animal, before it slowly ambled behind a tree and then darted off into the bush. At that point it suddenly felt as if this was my first black rhino for more than a decade and I was really humbled by the reaction from our guide, driver and two of the rhino rangers we



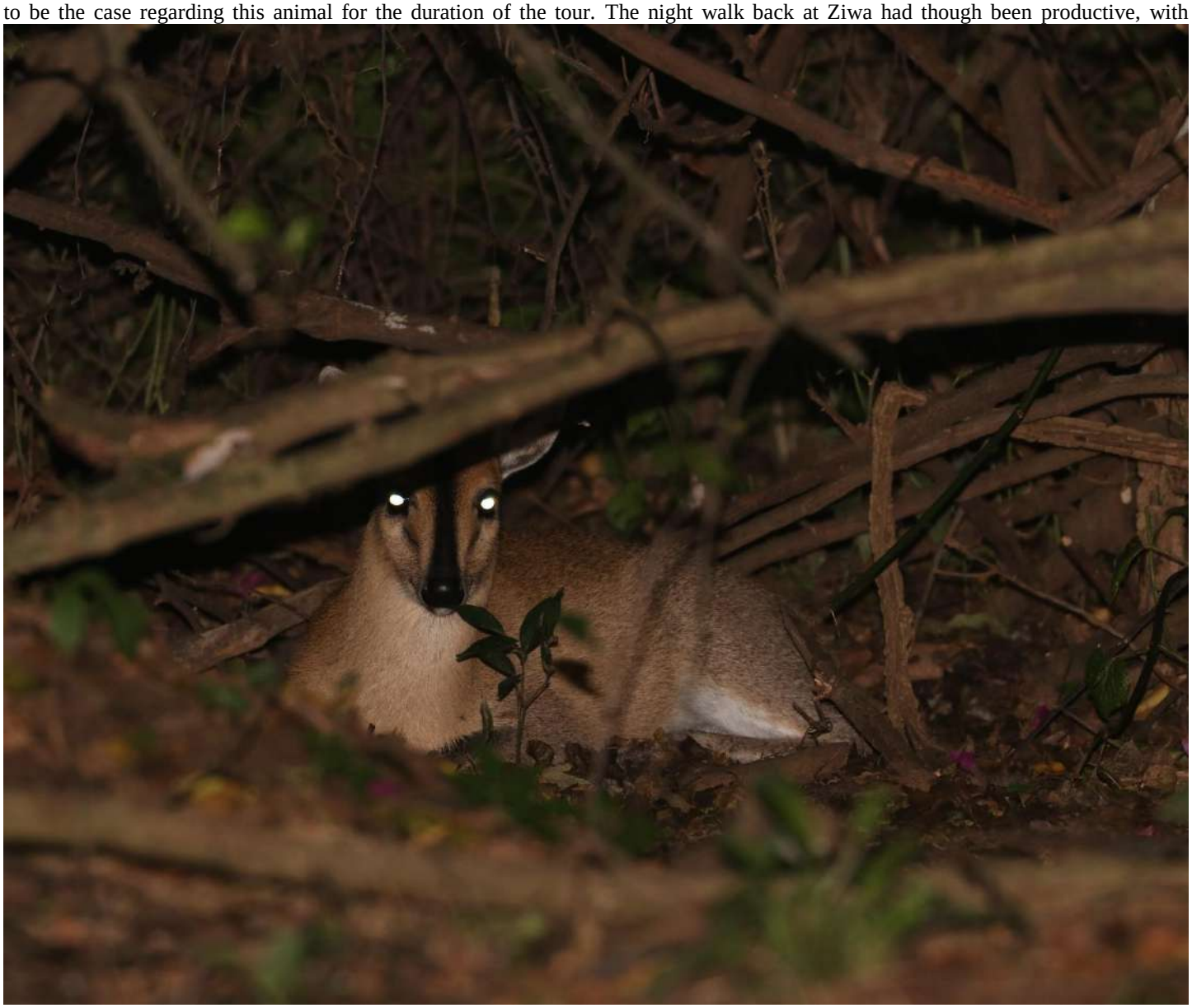
met on the way back, all of whom were as genuinely thrilled as we were. It had been a spectacular and heart-warming way to end our stay, not only at Akagera, but in Rwanda, where everyone had welcomed us and worked tirelessly on our behalf. There is no way that we would have been able to make an at times troubled tour work, without the considerable efforts of so many wonderful people and I cannot wait to return to the Land of a Thousand Hills, particularly when all of the restrictions have been lifted. It will be amazing to explore the forest trails of Nyungwe at night and to search for golden cats and owl-faced monkeys, regardless of whether these elusive ghosts actually appear or not. By then it may even be possible to glimpse a forest elephant disappearing into the shadows, as this smaller species of elephant was hunted to extinction here, but is now due to be reintroduced. I would also automatically include Akagera on any future tour and if it continues to recover at its current rate, which it hopefully will given that 10% of all income generated by the park is shared with the local community, in five years it will rival every savannah environment in neighbouring Uganda and many beyond. Whilst it is impossible to visit this intoxicating country without reflecting upon the great evil that took place less than three decades earlier, today Rwanda is a land of vibrancy and warmth, full of trust and hope, as so much of Africa has had to be over the years. Neighbouring Uganda is no exception of course and following years of conflict and turmoil, this is a sentiment that most Ugandans will understand only too well. My original plan had only been to visit the two mountain gorilla parks Bwindi and Mgahinga, but with the frankly unappealing prospect of having to share one small hotel room with my son for eleven days, I decided that we would instead quarantine across some of the premier wildlife destinations in the country. The first of five reserves added would be Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary, where we would have the rather special opportunity to observe a white rhino in one country, within 24 hours of having seen a black rhino in another. I am sure that this has occurred previously, and I have seen both species in a single day within one reserve, but it cannot be that common, not given the scarcity of the black rhino and how difficult they can be to find. Logistically it could be challenging as well, unless you were perhaps driving across a border to a nearby reserve, and whether we succeeded or not would initially depend on whether we had to take a coronavirus test and quarantine overnight upon arrival in Uganda. Given the length of time we had been in Rwanda, I had calculated that we should not need to by about twelve hours, but I was far from convinced and was as relieved as I was thrilled when the immigration official gave us a huge beaming grin and told us that we were free to leave. In some ways the tour almost started at this point, as case numbers were incredibly low in Uganda and there were relatively few restrictions in comparison to Rwanda. Apparently there was an 8pm curfew, but this did not apply to tourist vehicles and most locals were not allowed to drive to work, which meant that the roads were practically deserted and all our journeys were far shorter than would normally have been the case. People were allowed to shop locally and consequently the markets, always busy meeting places, were transformed into heaving community centres, with blaring music and friends mixing as if the pandemic had never occurred. If I am completely honest, having lived under such severe restrictions in the UK for so long, it was uplifting just to see people together again and to hear them laugh. The cases here have remained stable at least and the death toll in Uganda has consistently averaged around 2% of that in the UK, despite the fact that by the time I returned home in August 2021, just 4,129 Ugandans had been fully vaccinated against the disease, a figure that barely registers as a percentage against a population of more than 47 million. At one stage the country ran out of vaccines and, unsurprisingly for the continent that is always at the very back of the queue when it comes to health and humanitarian issues, Africa in general remains the least vaccinated region on earth. While hundreds of millions had received a third dose by the end of 2021, almost entirely the citizens of the more affluent nations, only around 10% of Africans had been fully vaccinated with two doses, the figure for Uganda was less than 5%, and almost half of all African countries have a full vaccination rate below 2%. It would be hard to imagine such obvious and disgraceful injustice being accepted elsewhere, but it has always been as if Africa is not part of the rest of the world and does not matter. These facts and many

others just as woeful, involving poverty, disease and infant mortality for example, are barely reported on an international basis and when they are, people just seem to shrug their shoulders and dismiss them as soon as they hear where they have occurred. I appreciate that obviously some of the most severe suffering has been caused by a succession of corrupt African leaders and despots, but this has been the case across the globe for millennia and with no knowledge of the way that most of Africa was savagely exploited by a few Western powers, including my own, it is all too easy to dismiss the region as insignificant or beyond help. It is anything but of course and I believe that people would feel differently if they were able to see for themselves how so many Africans have to live and the overwhelming poverty that is still endured here. I try to visit as often as I can, but in truth it is not as often as I would like and I could

barely believe that I had not been in Uganda since 2013 when I began planning this tour. I also visited Ziwa on that occasion, as this is the only reserve in the country where white rhinos occur following their reintroduction from Kenya in 2005. Until they were wiped out by poachers in the early 1980s, both white and black rhinos were once widespread across northern Uganda and whilst the smaller black rhino species is yet to be returned, plans are in place to reintroduce twenty animals within the next year, global conditions permitting inevitably. Meanwhile, their more sociable cousins have been thriving at Ziwa and it is intended that several will be moved to at least two national parks within their former range, where it should be possible to establish sustainable populations, given time and sufficient protection from poachers. As with so much else, their return has been delayed by the global pandemic and whilst it will be magical to once again observe these hugely impressive beasts in a Ugandan national park, they will undoubtedly be harder to find. Ziwa is a relatively small reserve and the rhinos remain easy to see here, although we were not quite able to achieve our aim of two distinct species across two countries within 24 hours. After a slight delay travelling in, we ultimately realised what was more a noteworthy talking point than an actual objective, within about 27 hours. Still a remarkable feat and of course just seeing these magnificent animals was always our only real priority. Most people consider rhinos to be dangerous, but even black rhinos, the more nervous and therefore the more aggressive of the two species, are largely misunderstood and will generally only attack when they feel threatened. In comparison, white rhinos are considerably calmer and will basically follow you around like a dog once they get to know and trust you. I have spent dozens of hours on foot with these gentle giants and James has been standing alongside me since he

was a very young boy, always without any issues. Having already observed several during the day, this was superbly demonstrated later that evening, when a few rhinos emerged from the bush and began grazing within a few metres of where we were eating our own meal. To have rhinos join us for dinner was a rather fabulous experience and we enjoyed the unlikely spectacle until it was time to depart for our night walk. Upon our return, they had all settled down to sleep on the lawn beside our accommodation, purely because they feel safe here and trust the reserve staff not to harm them. As so many tour operators will tell you, there is nothing quite like falling asleep to the evocative sounds of the African bush and I can certainly confirm that you have not really lived, until you have dozed off to the reverberation of several flatulent rhinos all gently breaking wind. Our laughter kept us awake more than anything and

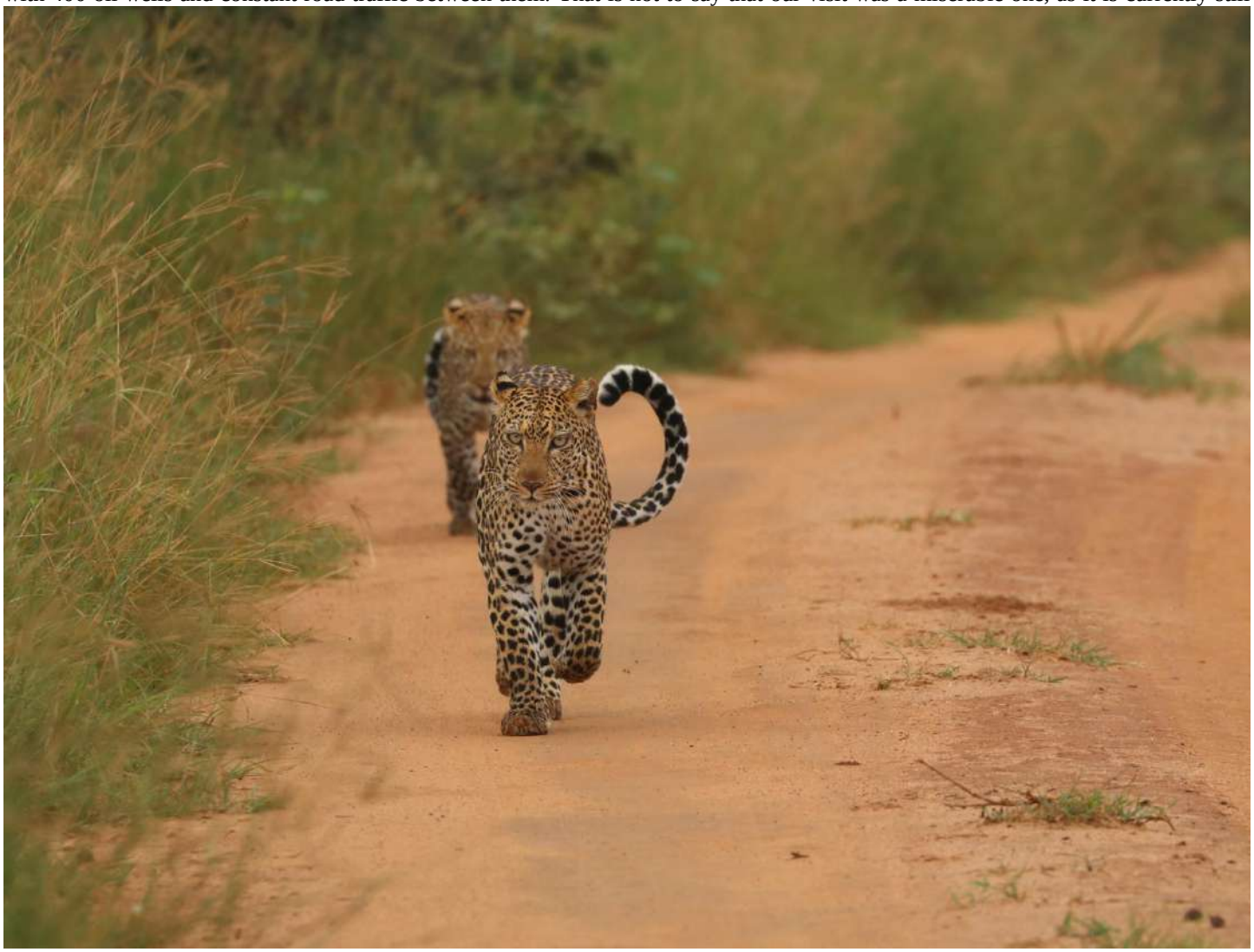
before first light, as we departed for the Lugogo Wetlands to search for sitatunga and shoebill, we actually had to keep the noise down to avoid disturbing the peaceful slumber of these ferocious slavering monsters. In addition to the distinctly prehistoric looking shoebill, which I have always seen here and was again successful with at distance, Lugogo protects a small population of sitatunga and I have to confess that, whilst our guide was doing his very best to find us the peculiar bird, I was mainly scanning for the antelope. One had been seen three days earlier, by a birder with the same guide, but sadly we were not fortunate and that would prove to be the case regarding this animal for the duration of the tour. The night walk back at Ziwa had though been productive, with



excellent views of an African civet, running within a few metres, a common duiker, lying in the undergrowth on the edge of the forest, and a bunyoro rabbit, the first I had ever seen beyond Murchison Falls. There were also a large number of hares, but Ziwa is one of a few destinations in Uganda where the savanna hare and cape hare overlap and given that most of the guides and biologists who I have discussed the issue with, cannot tell the two species apart in the field, or even usually from photographs, it is difficult to confirm exactly which hare occurs here. The answer could certainly be both and having encountered multiple hares across three sites where their confirmed range does overlap, it is equally likely that both species were observed during the course of the tour. However, we would have missed more or less everything else if I had attempted to photograph dozens of hares to try to identify later and for the purpose of this report, I have therefore included just the savanna hare as a confirmed sighting, as I know that only this specific animal occurs in some regions and therefore must have been seen. Common duikers are far easier to identify and were also observed during the day at Ziwa, along with several striking bushbuck and the supremely elegant Uganda kob, which we would undoubtedly encounter in large numbers at our next destination, Murchison Falls National Park. I have to admit that I travelled to what was once one of the regions premier national parks, not to mention a personal favourite of mine, with some trepidation, as oil had been discovered here before my last visit and the infrastructure was being built in order to access and remove it. As I outlined in the corresponding trip report, the initial exploration had already had a significant impact on the resident wildlife and sadly when I arrived this time, my worst fears were realised and large sections of the reserve resembled a construction site. Where the Paraa ferry had once carried passengers across the Victoria Nile, a huge concrete bridge now stands and the road that runs directly into the park from the river now looks more like a motorway than a safari track. Having lamented the crushing poverty that exists across so much of Africa, I appreciate that it is difficult to now argue that Ugandans do not have the right to exploit these resources to some degree, but in this age of at least partially irreversible climate change, fossil fuels are not a long term solution and many environmental groups within the country are deeply concerned regarding the potentially devastating ecological impact of the project. They are particularly worried in terms of the pipeline that is being planned to export the crude oil over 1,400 kilometres through Uganda and Tanzania to the Indian Ocean, from where it will be shipped around the globe. EACOP, or the East African Crude Oil Pipeline to give it its full title, will run through some of the most sensitive biological areas on the continent and above ground a 30 metre-wide corridor will be cleared along its entire length,

causing immense damage to the surrounding environment and a host of already vulnerable species. The French oil giant Total, one of the largest investors along with the China National Offshore Oil Corporation, plan to build more than 400 oil wells inside the national park and there have already been many cases of impoverished families being evicted from their land to make way for the development. Hardly any have received the compensation they were promised when they were more or less duped into relinquishing their homes and one family were offered the equivalent of £8.30 for the land that currently sustains three generations of already poor

Africans. Ignoring even the possibility of a catastrophic oil spill, which could devastate the Lake Victoria Basin, a critical watershed for some 40 million people in the region, in the year of the latest United Nations Climate Change Conference, where world leaders vowed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 45% within less than a decade, it is almost impossible to justify this continued long-term reliance on fossil fuels. Indeed, environmental campaigners have estimated that the pipeline will produce more than 34 million tonnes of carbon annually and whilst the Ugandan government expects to earn $2 billion a year from the project for up to 30 years, you have to worry at what long-term cost. The French and Chinese clearly have no interest in the likely environmental impact of a development of this kind and the obvious concern is that this is just another example of foreign powers exploiting African resources at the cost of her people and, it has to be said, her wildlife. It was ever thus of course and whatever the long term impact is likely to be, there remains the very real possibility that one of Africa's indisputable gems will now be lost forever. Certainly I cannot see why I would ever return to Murchison Falls and you have to wonder how easy it will be to convince other tourists to visit a national park with 400 oil wells and constant road traffic between them. That is not to say that our visit was a miserable one, as it is currently still



possible to avoid the worst areas and for now a great deal of wildlife continues to endure, albeit against a sadly less inspiring landscape in places. The famous waterfall aside, which has changed significantly since my last visit, but does still remain enormously impressive, the real beauty of a safari at Murchison was always the high density of plains animals you were guaranteed to see. This also remains the case, at least to some degree, and we were able to enjoy the spectacle of substantial herds of elephant, buffalo, giraffe, the endangered rothschild's subspecies, and Uganda kob, again a subspecies and one of two animals that appear on the Uganda coat of arms, the other being the grey crowned crane. Hartebeest, oribi, waterbuck and warthog were also routinely encountered and on the river hippopotamus and crocodiles were just as common, including a few massive crocodiles up on the sandbanks of the Victoria Nile, which are easily seen on the boat ride to the base of the falls. Lions were relatively scarce, just one pride of ten and a couple of lone females in different areas, unless you include a mating pair, which were viewed on so many occasions and by so many vehicles, that we actively tried to avoid them towards the end of our stay, just to give them a little peace. Another pair, this time of leopards, were also seen fairly regularly and whilst it was not as easy to make out when they were lolloping along branches in typical leopard fashion, as soon as you saw them on the ground, you could tell that it was a mother and her sub adult young. We had three encounters with these graceful predators, including watching them attempting to ambush an oribi, ultimately without success, and sauntering towards us along a dirt track, for what remains one of my favourite photographs of the trip. I was less successful with our first side-striped jackals, which were mainly seen at dusk or on night drives and usually at distance, but I was able to take a few reasonable hyena pictures during what was by far my favourite encounter at Murchison, essentially as a result of our own knowledge and experience. Having seen maybe four or five hyenas scattered in the distance, we could have easily just taken a few long range shots and driven on, as per every other safari vehicle that passed us. However, I noticed that there were also a few vultures in the vicinity and asked our guide to make his way towards them, where we stopped and waited. After a while it became clear that there were scraps remaining of something that had been killed and dragged away, as there was no carcass visible and the vultures were not massed together in characteristic fashion on a kill. I hoped that this might provide sufficient interest for the hyenas

to investigate and indeed an adult and young did keep approaching before loping away again. As I explained to our guide during the hour or more that we lingered, it was a question of remaining patient and even when there were no longer any hyenas in sight, we just watched the vultures and continued to wait. Eventually the adult and young hyena returned and after picking at the scraps of meat and skin they could no doubt smell, they walked directly towards us and crossed just in front of our vehicle. At some destinations, particularly where lions do not exist or their numbers are low, it can be easy to encounter hyenas during the day, but that was not the case on this trip and these were the only hyenas that we would see in daylight across 30 days and ten major reserves. In fact, apart from two individuals on night drives here at Murchison, we would not chance upon these noble and much maligned beasts again. The only other carnivores seen during the day were dwarf and slender mongooses, but we did find the three diurnal primates that we were hoping for here, patas monkey, guereza colobus and tantalus monkey, all of which were new species for the tour. The patas monkey was particularly important, given that it does not occur at any of the other reserves we were due to explore, and it is always a pleasure

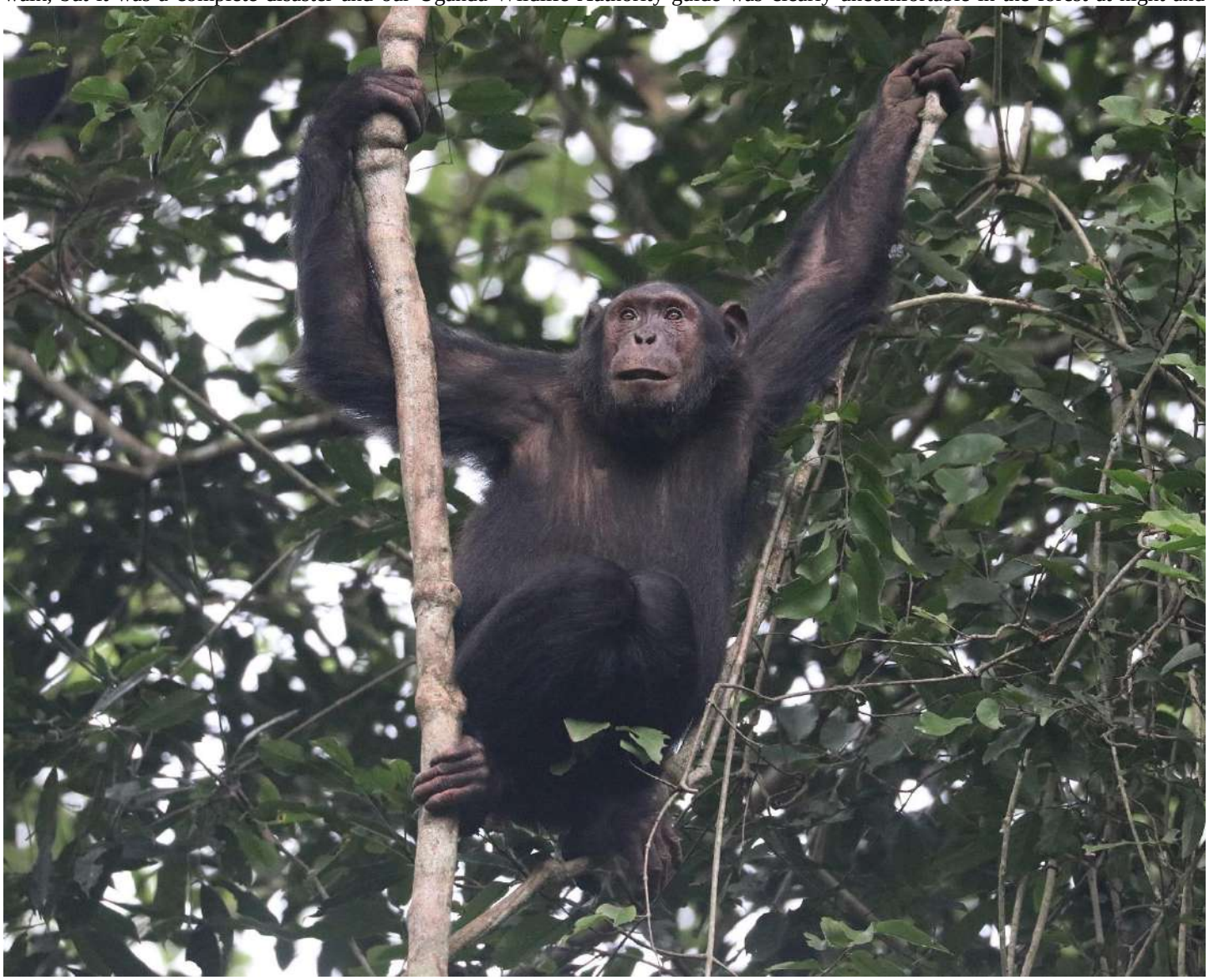
to catch a glimpse of this highly distinctive colobus, which I grew up knowing simply as the black and white colobus, for obvious reasons when you see it. The tantalus monkey, formerly considered to be a subspecies of the grivet monkey, but now recognised as a separate species, is very similar in appearance to the vervet monkey and they are more or less indistinguishable in the field. As such, they are often identified by their home range and the common consensus is that the tantalus occurs exclusively in the reserves to the west of the country, which meant that on this trip we would encounter tantalus everywhere except Lake Mburo, where only vervets exist. Based on my own research and the advice of a couple of experts, I am reasonably happy to accept this assessment, but in general it can be problematic to identify species based purely on their supposed range, as the Lake Mburo and Queen Elizabeth reserves are not that far apart, for example, with no natural barriers in the form of major rivers or mountains to prevent either species spreading in either direction. To further illustrate the issue, just a few days later I would discover a species considerably beyond its known range and this has happened more times than I can recall. In any case, and despite all the upheaval, Murchison Falls was still producing an abundance of wildlife and if anything the night drives were even more fruitful. We never went out for less than four hours and in addition to lions, hyenas and side-striped jackals, our long spotlighting sessions were rewarded with a surprisingly high number of small carnivore sightings. That is not to say that we encountered a huge variety of species, but more that we were seeing the same species repeatedly. White-tailed mongoose was the most common by far, I stopped counting after having identified at least fifteen on the first evening, and there were also multiple African civets and large-spotted genets. Despite the inevitable delays as they hid from the light in the long grass, I made a point of attempting to identify every genet, as Murchison Falls was always a reliable site for the common genet and I believe that I have encountered them here on every visit. I was delighted to maintain that record with two lone animals in the Pakuba region on the White Nile, which incidentally, is where we saw most of our bunyoro rabbits. These were the only common genets of the tour and are easy to distinguish from the more prevalent large-spotted genets by the distinctive white tip on their tail. Porcupines are unfortunately far less straightforward to tell apart and although I am confident that we spotted at least

two cape porcupines, the crested porcupine also occurs at Murchison and some were just too quick for us to identify or photograph well. I have a few blurred shots of porcupines disappearing into the bush as fast as their stubby little legs will carry them, but I have not been able to conclusively identify any and nor can the various specialists I have checked with. I was not even able to get a blurred shot of the lone sengi that darted past our vehicle like a bullet out of a gun, on range it would probably have been a short-snouted sengi or a dusky-footed sengi, but at least I was able to photograph the most wondrous mammal of this or any other trip, a truly magnificent giant pouched rat. Utterly sublime and talking of which, no article featuring Murchison Falls should neglect to mention

the falls themselves, which remain breathtaking, despite the fact that the water levels have risen considerably since my last visit and the massive boulders that I photographed James on in 2013 are now entirely submerged. At 43 metres the actual waterfall is not especially high, certainly not in comparison to the 108-metre central drop of Victoria Falls, but what makes Murchison Falls so impressive, is its sheer volume of water and immense power. Every second 300,000 litres are forced through a gorge less than ten metres wide and to truly appreciate the spectacle you have to stand in the spray at the top, where you can get considerably closer than the boats on the Nile are ever allowed to reach. A visit to the falls is a highlight of any stay here and I was delighted to learn that the

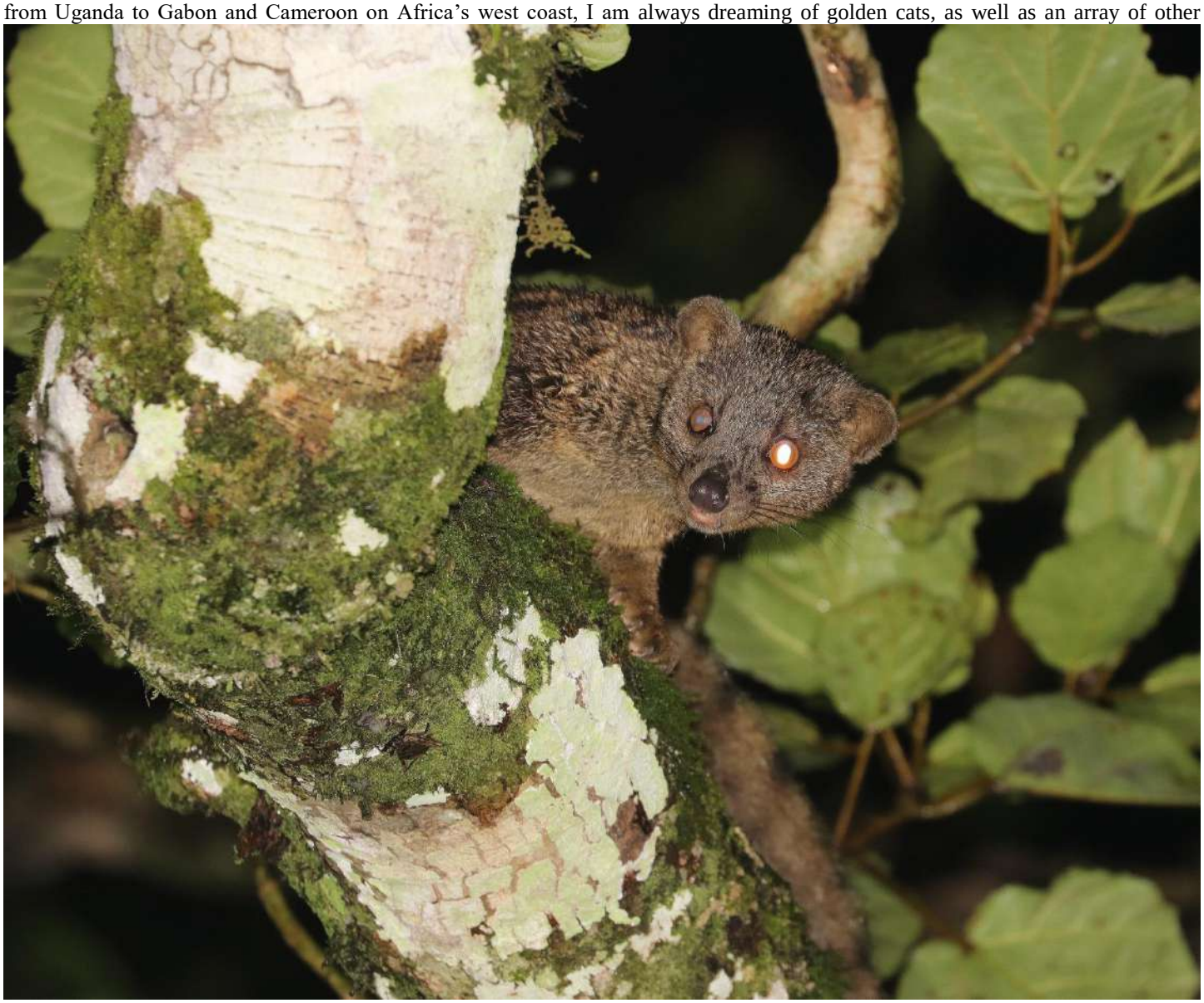
Ugandan government had rejected a proposal to build a hydro electrical dam in the park, although the cynical side of me cannot help think that the decision was probably more about protecting the oil extraction than conserving the most visited national park in Uganda. This one reserve attracts almost a third of all park tourists, so, for now at least, Murchison Falls endures, but you cannot help wonder for how long? You have to ask yourself, why would you choose to take a safari in an oilfield, which is what this grand old park is about to come, over some of the best reserves and wilderness areas this extraordinary continent has to offer? It is a question that I fear will come back to haunt the Ugandan government, when the money has all been spent and the damage has been done. From Murchison Falls we travelled south to Kibale National Park, which is said to be home to thirteen primate species and markets itself accordingly as the 'Primate Capital of the World', which is not strictly accurate when you consider some of the competition across the Congo Basin, but is certainly impressive. I believe that thirteen species is probably correct for the region, but no two sources seem to agree on the exact list and in all we were able to find eleven, although that ultimately had almost as much to do with the nearby Bigodi Wetland Sanctuary and our guides there, than Kibale itself. The two we missed were tantalus monkey and spectacled lesser galago, one of three resident galagos, but not one that we would observe elsewhere either. Of course most people visit Kibale to see chimpanzees, as the forest here is home to around 1,500, the largest population in Uganda. Our chimp trek would take place on our second day and our first afternoon was spent at Bigodi, mainly to search for Uganda mangabey, previously the grey-cheeked mangabey, but now assessed as an entirely independent species. I was also hoping to find ashy red colobus and red-tailed monkey, as they would be new for the tour as well and seeing them early would take some pressure off later hikes in the main forest. Although it could never be described as pristine, Bigodi is actually a precious little gem and I always support what is a tiny but really significant reserve, both in terms of the rich variety of wildlife it protects and the benefits that it produces for the local community, who manage and conserve it. In addition to a fresh water project that delivers clean drinking water to more than 2,000 families, secondary and nursery schools have been built from the revenue generated by tourism, which apparently totals more than $150,000 each year and has transformed the lives of thousands of people in so many different ways, from education and healthcare to employment and housing.

Bigodi is a particularly important birding site and although I was not able to ascertain exactly how many species have been recorded on the reserve, the range was anywhere from about 140 to 200, depending on who you asked, I do know that the great blue turaco is one of several local specialties. They are pretty enough in the right light I suppose and we saw five all together on our four and a half kilometre stroll around the reserve, during which we also encountered all three of the primates I had been hoping for and a small group of guereza colobus. We were greeted by a troop of olive baboons as we returned to our lodge within Kibale, which meant that we had so far seen five of the thirteen species that occur here. I was hoping to increase that number significantly on our first night walk, but it was a complete disaster and our Uganda Wildlife Authority guide was clearly uncomfortable in the forest at night and



insisted that we remain on the trails within close proximity of the park headquarters and infrastructure. At one stage the noise of the camp generator was drowned out by a radio and unsurprisingly we saw nothing at all. Having not been able to spotlight in a single forest for the duration of the tour, this was deeply disappointing and I was so relieved that the next evening we would be returning to Bigodi with a local guide, as opposed to a UWA employee who was frightened of the animals he was looking for. James and I continued on our own around the lodge for a little while and just when I thought that things could not get any worse, something dashed across the path that I fear might haunt me. Missing animals is all part of the wildlife watching experience, but even now I have nightmares that it may have been something incredibly rare, as you come to learn how most animals move and I just did not recognise how this one ran or its actual form. I did think that it was almost certainly a small carnivore and it was very much at the forefront of my mind that the unbelievably elusive alexander's cusimanse, a mongoose species of about the right size, had recently been photographed in the vicinity. I will never know of course, but having managed to photograph a mammal that had only previously been captured on camera traps during my last visit to Uganda, the pousargues' mongoose at Semliki National Park, it would have been pretty special to find something almost as rare. We continued to search the area for some time, but without any serious conviction by this stage and eventually we accepted defeat in order to get at least a few hours sleep before our chimpanzee trek early the next morning. We could have actually slept for considerably longer, as there were a surprisingly large number of groups for one chimpanzee hike and it took well over an hour to complete all of the usual formalities and to then sit through the induction. As such, the habituated chimps were moving by the time that we found them and although there were around 40, both walking across the forest floor and moving through the trees overhead, there were just too many groups of tourists, all clambering to see them at once. With the park guides constantly moving us on, we kept finding ourselves either interrupting another group or having our own encounter disturbed and in the end I told our guide that I would prefer to spend time with one or two animals away from the crowds. Whilst that did improve things to some degree, it was still not quite the magical experience that I am used to with these remarkable great apes and I am not certain how satisfied I would have been if this had been my only opportunity to see chimpanzees on the tour, let alone in my lifetime, for those who would not be fortunate enough to be able to return. This is why I always arrange my activities on an entirely private basis, and whilst that is not usually possible for gorilla or chimpanzee treks, where you are generally part of a small group, we

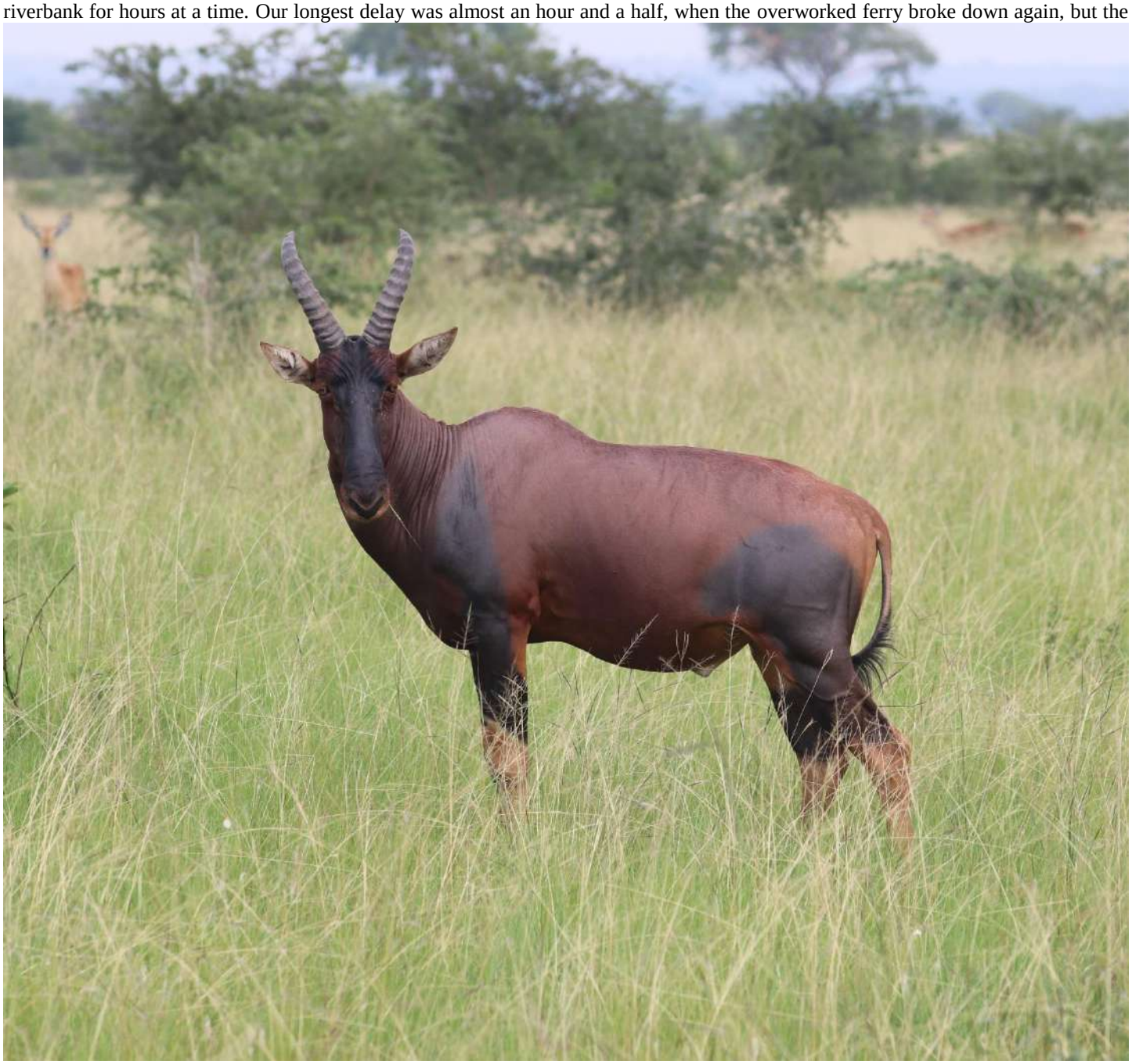
were back on our own for what would be our final hike at Kibale. In fact, I was even more on my own than I thought, as James had to drop out in order to deal with a matter back home and it was just me and the guide for what would turn out to be one of the most enjoyable hikes of the trip. Ostensibly my main targets were the two diurnal primates that we had not seen at Kibale, so l'hoest's monkey and blue monkey, but really whenever I am in this exceptionally diverse band of equatorial forest, that stretches basically from Uganda to Gabon and Cameroon on Africa's west coast, I am always dreaming of golden cats, as well as an array of other



similarly scarce mammals, of which the aforementioned alexander's cusimanse is just a solitary example. As you would expect for someone who works in the forest, my guide had seen several golden cats over the years and made sure that our walk included what he considered to be the most likely areas. Whilst it was not to be on this occasion, more than anything I relish the opportunity to explore and in supposedly searching for a golden cat, we were able to observe a gorgeous weyns's duiker, a red-legged sun squirrel and the quite remarkable tally of seven different primates on a single walk, including both of the target monkeys. So with the chimpanzees from earlier, we had now encountered eight of Kibale's thirteen primates and we had a reasonable chance of adding a few more later that evening at Bigodi, given that of the five missing species, only the tantalus is not nocturnal. As it was, and keeping in mind that we had not even been able to enter a forest at night until the previous evening, the entire nocturnal forest element of the trip was about to be salvaged by one spectacular spotlighting walk lasting less than three hours. Such are the vagaries of what I love to do and after almost three weeks of extreme frustration, Bigodi would finally produce clear and close views of most of the animals I would have expected to see elsewhere. Namely, an African palm civet, sitting directly above us at one point, two East African pottos, five demidoff's dwarf galagos, two pairs and an individual, and a brief distant view of what our guide was certain was a thomas's dwarf galago. I was slightly less sure of this last sighting, as I did not have sufficient time to fully identify what was clearly a galago or to photograph it to check later. However, my guide was evidently confident and I have therefore included this species on the strength of his unquestionable knowledge and also because this particular animal was observed at a far greater height than the other galagos, which is characteristic of thomas's. Indeed, they are typically recorded above twenty metres and we actually lost this particular individual in the canopy, well in excess of that height. Having encountered one here in 2013, we missed the sitatunga this time and also the white-bellied pangolin that an exceptionally fortunate group had chanced upon two nights earlier, as if to further demonstrate the entirely implausible and unpredictable nature of wildlife watching and tourism. For my part, I realised many years ago that there is no point overly worrying about what you might have missed and neither of us would have swapped our fantastic sightings here, particularly as we had been lucky enough to find three of the four nocturnal primates and had encountered eleven primates in all at Kibale. This would be our final total and we moved on to Queen Elizabeth National Park in excellent spirits, at which point more or less everything went entirely wrong. That is perhaps exaggerating the situation somewhat, but it is the case that we had more issues here than anywhere else in Uganda and that Queen Elizabeth was consequently our least productive and sadly our least enjoyable destination. There were still wonderful highlights as always on safari and some of the issues were just downright unlucky, but others

could have been avoided with a little thought and I should have been notified of some of the more serious problems. The main one was that the Katunguru Bridge on the Kazinga Channel had been closed for repairs and that the only way to cross now was by an old car ferry, which was only operating from 6am to 6pm and kept breaking down. Even when it was working, each crossing could take several hours, certainly when you consider the volume of traffic that utilises that bridge and the tiny number of vehicles the ferry could carry on each trip. We would need to cross at least twice a day, as all of our activities were on the Ishasha side of the channel, that is to say, the opposite bank to where we were staying. None of these factors in themselves would have been significant, if my

local operator had informed me of the situation, as the bridge had been closed since early June and we had plenty of time to change our accommodation to one of the many lodges on the Ishasha side. This would have saved us countless wasted hours over the course of the next three days and a great deal of hassle, some of which had fairly serious consequences for this section of the tour. We missed the chimpanzees at Kyambura Gorge, for example, purely because we arrived too late in the morning and they had already moved on. This is the first time that this has happened to me at what is one of my favourite destinations in all of Uganda and in turn we missed our cruise on the Kazinga Channel, which runs 32 kilometres between Lake George and Lake Edward, basically because we were waiting to catch a ferry across exactly the same stretch of water in order to catch it. To be fair, I was immensely grateful that I was in an obvious safari vehicle, as tourists were prioritised at each crossing and some poor local truck drivers had to sit waiting on the riverbank for hours at a time. Our longest delay was almost an hour and a half, when the overworked ferry broke down again, but the

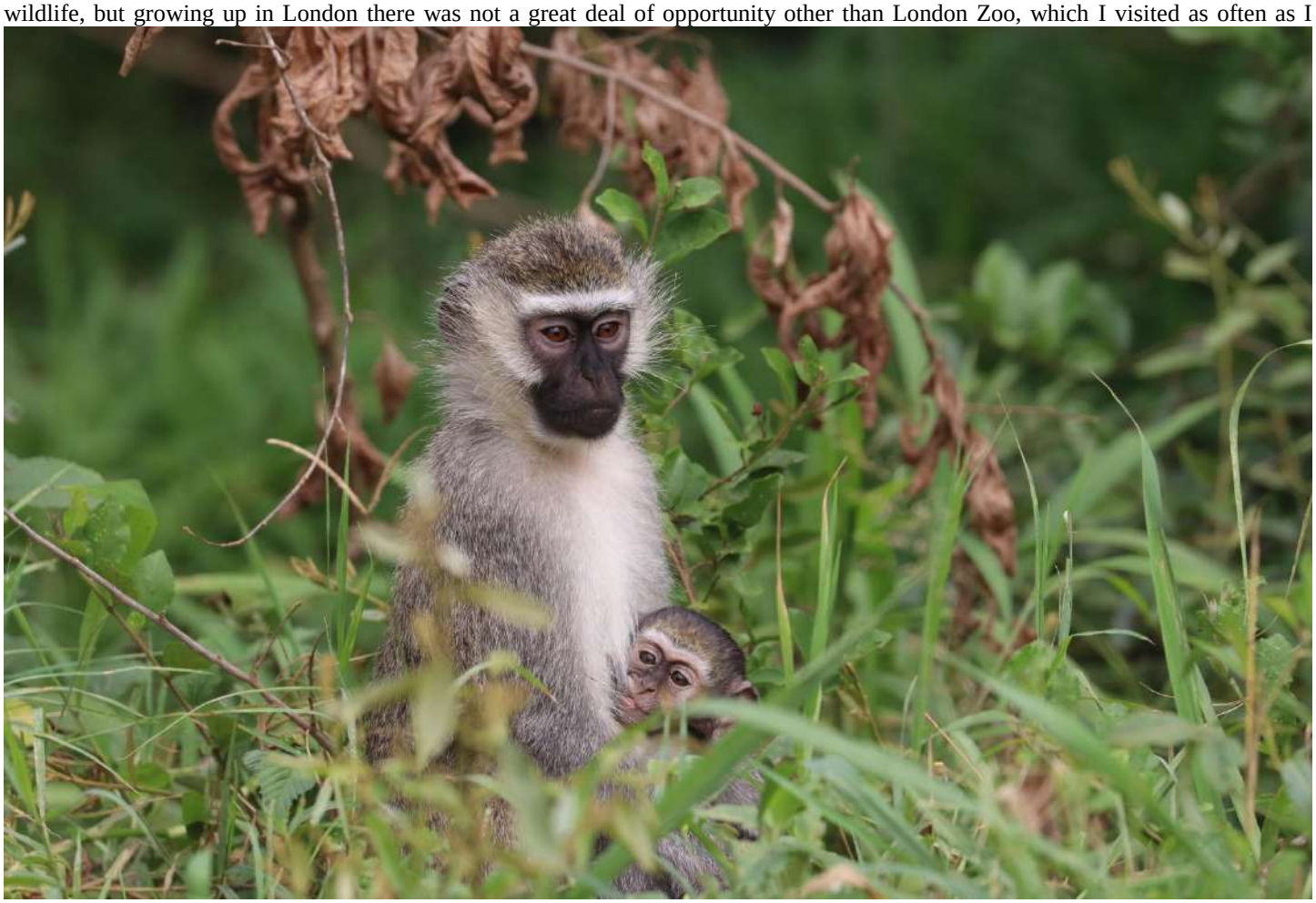


fact that the last crossing was at 6pm was a far more serious problem, as we had to be back each evening before 5pm to begin queuing and therefore had very little time to explore the southern Ishasha section of the park. In fact, we had to begin the long drive back within a couple of hours of reaching the nicest area of the reserve beyond Kyambura Gorge and had no opportunity to spotlight either in the south or back through the highly promising Maramagambo Forest, which had always been my original intention. I generally either spend a couple of nights at Ishasha or visit it for a full day on the way to Bwindi, but on this occasion I deliberately did neither, just to ensure that we would definitely be on the road that passes through Maramagambo at night and could spotlight back as slowly as we wanted. Instead, we found ourselves driving back in the middle of the afternoon and the highlight of our short excursion south was watching hippos migrate from the DRC into Uganda on the Ishasha River, which acts as a border between the two nations and flows north into Lake Edward, over which our lodge was idyllically perched on the Myeya Peninsula. In addition to several herds of elephants, the Ishasha region also produced our first topis in Uganda and our only Egyptian mongoose of the entire tour, which darted across the road in front of our vehicle at the beginning of the drive south. Just a few hundred metres further on, a large family of giant forest hogs began to slowly amble across in the same direction and as we cautiously approached for what would have been an exceptional view, a driver on a moped decided that he had waited long enough and scared them in. I was left with a single long range shot, but thankfully we had already encountered these prime porkers on the edge of Kyambura Gorge and would come across them on several occasions during the course of our stay. Most tourists visit Queen Elizabeth to hopefully see the famous tree-climbing lions that the Ishasha section of the reserve is renowned for and there are a number of expansive fig trees that all the guides know to check

on one main route. They are so popular that circular vehicle tracks have been formed around the trees and it is often possible to observe several lions sprawled along the branches of a single fig. However, less people are aware that lions climb trees fairly routinely at many destinations and whilst we barely had time to even reach their favoured trees in the south, back in the north of the park, we came across a big male lion sleeping in a candelabra tree on our very first drive. We saw three leopards all using the same type of tree to sleep in, including a mother and cub, as there is relatively little vegetation or cover in this savannah region and big cats will always make use of the shelter available. Sadly, most of the adult lions and leopards are collared in this area of the reserve, largely because so

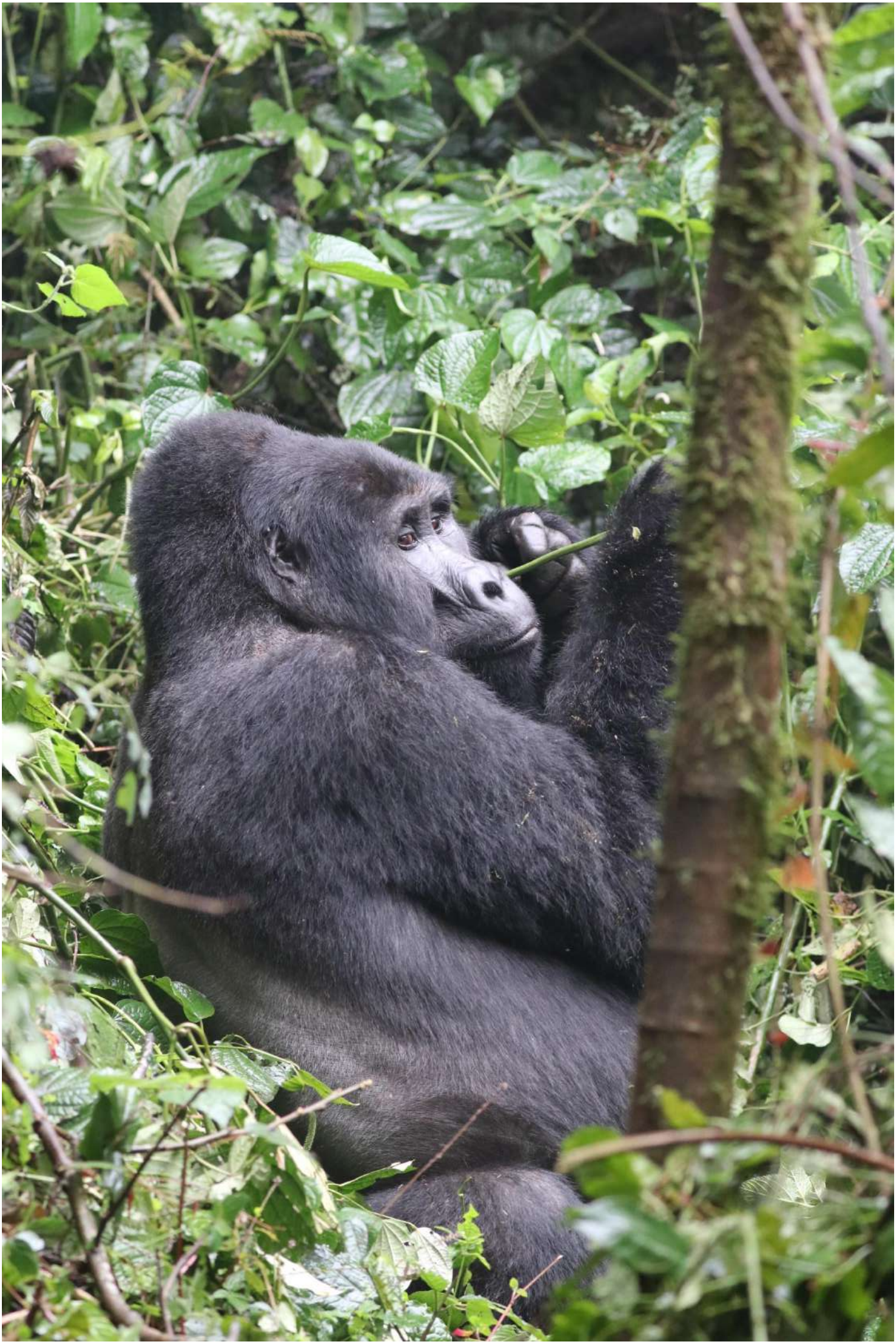
many people live right up to the edge of the park and they want to be able to locate all of the major predators if necessary. For me at least, this kills the experience and I tend to spend very little time with an animal that has been collared. I usually stop visiting the reserves where it is common as well, as the idea is that the animals should actually be wild and if you need to control them in such an artificial manner, it is very difficult to pretend that you are offering guests a genuine wilderness experience. This will probably apply to Queen Elizabeth now, as there are just too many wondrous destinations in Africa to keep returning to parks that are so poorly managed, they begin to feel more like zoos than the wild places I used to know. As a result of the curfew, which you could travel during, but not openly spotlight beyond the parks, all of our night drives took place on or around the Myeya Peninsula, which is undoubtedly the worst area for wildlife. One exquisite and very relaxed leopard aside, our nocturnal encounters basically consisted of multiple large-spotted genets and savanna hares and would have been a complete disaster, had it not been for a terrific collection of snakes. I have barely mentioned reptiles in this trip report, but they have always played a major part in my tours and I have a particular fondness for snakes, which I grew up fascinated by and always search for. In Rwanda we had seen two black mambas at Akagera, one of which was a tiny baby, and here at Queen Elizabeth we were thrilled to find a forest cobra, a puff adder and an African rock python, in that order. They really did rescue the night drives and James shares my passion for these prehistoric reptiles and filmed them all. He also filmed the colony of 30 or more banded mongooses that our guide found within the grounds of our lodge,

several of which were little more than balls of fluff and could have only recently left the safety of their den. Having missed them elsewhere, particularly at Murchison where they are usually common, these were a new species for the trip and we spent a very pleasant hour or so following them around the grounds. Despite the inevitable problems and occasional disappointments associated with wildlife travel, there is always something magical waiting just for you to find it and it was now time to introduce James to the place where that magic started for me, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. I have always enjoyed being around and looking for wildlife, but growing up in London there was not a great deal of opportunity other than London Zoo, which I visited as often as I

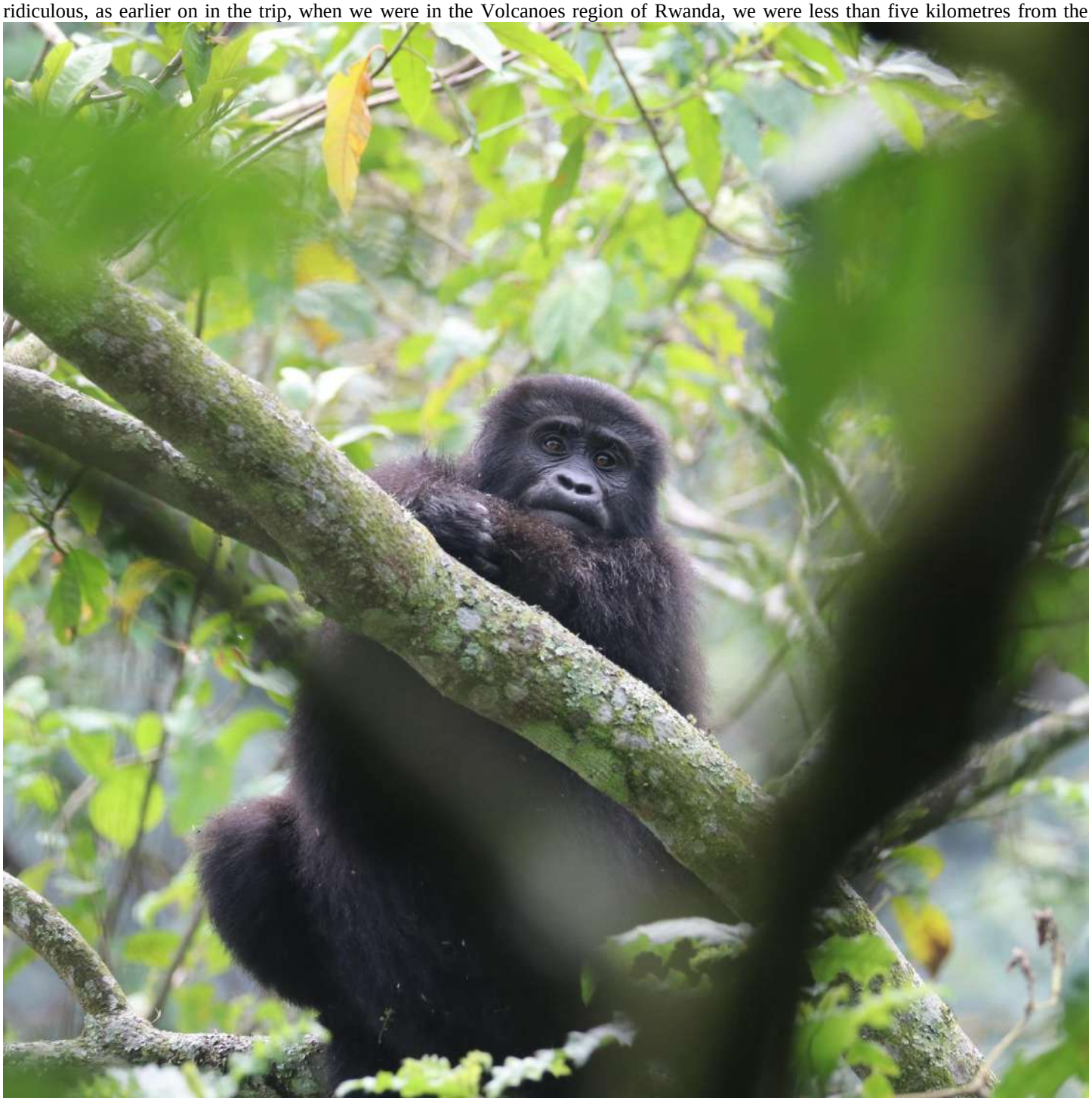


could as a young boy, even at night, when I would climb in, just to be able to spend time on my own with animals that I obviously knew were not wild, but that should be, somewhere. Trips further afield followed and if you have read the homepage of my website, you will know that, whilst I had travelled to other destinations, I had never been to Africa before and found myself in Uganda as a result of another trip being cancelled. Quite remarkably when I think about it now, after driving directly from Entebbe to Bwindi with no other stops, at least not involving animals, my first ever wildlife experience on this miraculous continent was sitting with a family of mountain gorillas. I had not even seen a monkey or an antelope at this point, just a life size wooden giraffe in a field that everyone

on our overland truck had mistaken for the real thing at distance, including me. Having grown up watching Guy the Gorilla at London Zoo, where he was the undoubted star attraction during my childhood, I was now sitting with a huge silverback watching me and I knew instantly which of those two experiences felt more natural. This was the momentous point in my life when I realised that anything is possible, even for a working class kid from London, and since then I have travelled the globe looking for wild animals, not just huge iconic species like these magnificent mountain gorillas, but anything really, from aardvarks to wolves and more or less everything in between. Indeed, just a couple of weeks before we flew to Rwanda I had the rare opportunity to photograph a hazel dormouse in daylight and I was as thrilled to see this rare little European mammal, as any of the creatures encountered on this tour. For those who are interested, Guy was actually a western lowland gorilla and not a mountain gorilla at all. He reigned at London Zoo for more than 30 years and his body is now on display at the Natural History Museum. I went to see it a few years after his death and that was the last time I ever set foot in that museum. This section of the trip had not changed from the original programme and was therefore fairly short, with gorilla trekking at both Bwindi and Mgahinga Gorilla National Park and not a great deal else. In choosing the Rushaga section of Bwindi I knew that I had sacrificed the opportunity to search for golden cat in the Ruhija region of the park, where they have been recorded a couple of times in recent years, but Rushaga is currently the only area from where it is possible to participate in the gorilla habituation process, which allows you to spend four hours with a family group that have not yet been fully habituated to our presence, as opposed to the one hour you are permitted with standard gorilla permits. They are entirely different experiences and I was ultimately glad that I chose this option, as the original tour had been designed largely to explore the three mountain gorilla national parks of Rwanda and Uganda and would not have allowed sufficient time to make visiting Ruhija worthwhile. I did lose a couple of spotlighting opportunities of course, but staying at Rushaga also provided me with the chance to search for otters on Lake Mutanda and our morning and late afternoon boat trips produced two groups of Congo clawless otters and two individual spotted-necked otters, the only otters we would see in either country. In between, we made an early visit to Mgahinga for the southern tree hyrax that our guide had told us are usually visible around the entrance, often in the surrounding trees and occasionally walking along the stone walls of the park headquarters. He even showed us a few photographs taken on his phone and it did appear that it would simply be a matter of turning up to see a species that is generally very difficult to observe elsewhere. I obviously should know better by now and we eventually spent so long searching, that we actually got back an hour late for our second

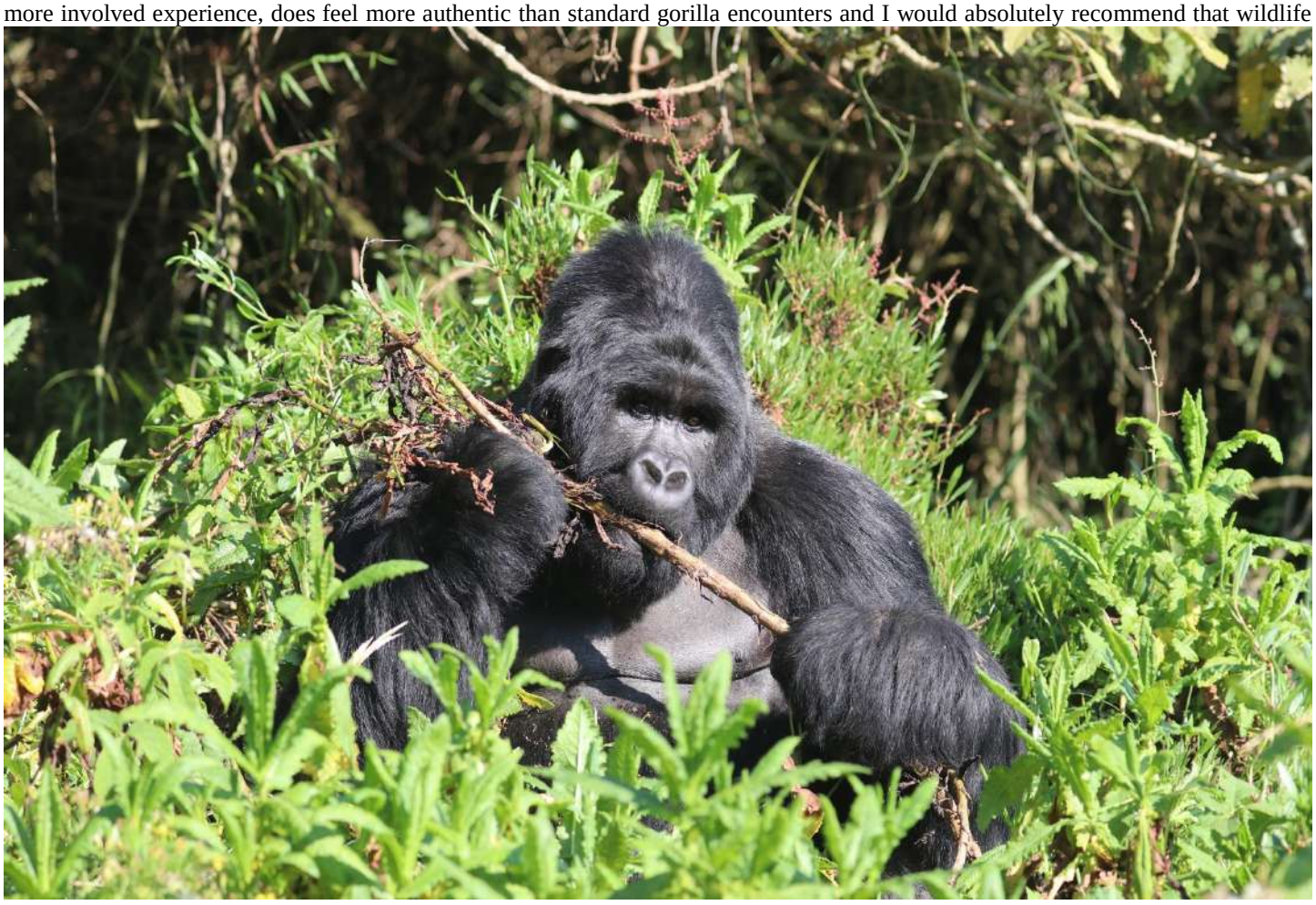


trip on Mutanda. As so often happens in these situations, everyone starts helping with the search and the longer it takes, the more people join in. Within about 30 minutes there were probably fifteen guides, drivers, cooks and other staff members all searching for hyrax on our behalf and an hour later that number had easily doubled. A park guide eventually found one deep in vegetation, but we had one of the office ladies to thank for the best sighting, a mother with two young that she spotted in a far more accessible position. Yet another example of how incredibly friendly the people are here, but at Mgahinga it was a case of going from the sublime to the ridiculous, as earlier on in the trip, when we were in the Volcanoes region of Rwanda, we were less than five kilometres from the



border crossing with Uganda and within twenty kilometres of Mgahinga itself. However, the land border between the two countries had been closed as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, so instead of maybe a 30-minute drive, we had to transfer several hours back to Kigali by road, catch an international flight from Kigali to Entebbe and then drive a full day back to Mgaginga. We obviously did not complete that last section directly, as I chose to visit other parks instead, but I still cannot really understand the difference between a negative PCR test result at an airport and one at a border crossing and can only shudder at our final carbon footprint for a journey that should have taken about half an hour. The original tour would have actually started here in the Bwindi/Mgahinga region and remains a really nice option that can be completed comfortably within fourteen nights. It includes all three mountain gorilla parks, Nyungwe for chimpanzees and finally Akagera for a more traditional savannah style safari to finish. Instead, as a result of all the enforced changes, we were ending at the beginning and of our last two gorilla activities, the habituation process would take place first at Bwindi. This is a very different experience to standard gorilla trekking, as the gorillas that you are taken to see are not yet entirely used to people and are likely to be more cautious and to keep their distance to some degree. By how much exactly will differ from group to group, in terms of whether you are put with gorillas just at the beginning of the process or towards the end, when they are far more accustomed to our presence. They are also unlikely to stay in one place for four hours, so you are moving a lot more and crossing different and often challenging terrain. On our trek for example, our family group of fourteen spent much of their time feeding in dense vegetation on a very steep hill, so part of our time was spent trying to watch them and the rest attempting not to fall

off the hill. Gorillas can also be fast when they move with purpose and sometimes it is a case of letting the trackers follow and just catching up when you can, as the last thing that you want to be doing during such a delicate process, is actively chasing gorillas and making a great deal of noise in so doing. We were warned beforehand that for all of these reasons it may be much harder to take the type of gorilla photographs we are all used to and I can confirm that this is certainly the case. That said, this longer and consequently more involved experience, does feel more authentic than standard gorilla encounters and I would absolutely recommend that wildlife



enthusiasts try it at least once if possible. I say if possible, as it is considerably more expensive, but you are certainly exposed to more natural behaviour for a great deal longer and it is well worth the additional cost as far as I am concerned, not least because you are not only helping to conserve the gorillas you are watching, you are helping to conserve an entire species. For my part, after so many adventures together over the years, I was just grateful to be able to share such a humbling experience with my son, particularly in a national park that holds so many special memories for me. Mgahinga Gorilla National Park does as well now, as our final gorilla activity took place here and during it I experienced one of those intimate and insightful moments that shape the way in which we perceive wild animals. It was certainly the single most memorable 40 seconds or so of the tour and if you were going to compare our three mountain gorilla activities, which I am always reluctant to do, it would be difficult to argue that our hour at Mgahinga was not the most rewarding of them all. Of the three groups habituated to at least some degree, these were the most relaxed and spent more or less the entire hour frolicking and feeding out in the open. There were only nine gorillas visible during our encounter, compared to sixteen at Volcanoes and fourteen at Bwindi, and our guide had mentioned that these were part of a larger family that had separated to feed in different areas. Fortunately for us, three massive silverbacks joined this group and at one stage we were able to watch all three in a single clearing in bright sunshine. One spent much of his time playing and rolling down a small hill, clearly just for the joy of it and if anyone tells you that animals do not play, they have not spent time with them in the wild. The picture at the beginning of this report was taken during this sighting and although it is by no means my best gorilla photograph of the tour, I have included it here as a permanent reminder of how incredibly gentle these animals are and of a very special mother who touched my heart. I had actually been sitting photographing another gorilla and had not initially noticed this female emerge from the trees and move towards me with her baby on her back. By the time that I was aware of her presence, she was within a couple of metres and it was too late to quickly clamber to my feet in case I startled her. Instead, to avoid disturbing her and her infant, I just sat completely still and decided to film her on my phone, which is highly unusual for me. At first she paid no attention and went to walk by, but then she suddenly stopped and just stood completely still for a few seconds, before gently turning her head to look directly at me. It was at this point that I realised my right leg was partially extended and as I slowly withdrew it, she took the opportunity to walk past. For all her power and the fact that she could have swatted me aside without breaking stride, she would not risk hurting me by stepping on my leg and instead politely asked me to move. Not only had I filmed the entire event, but one of the other visitors had also filmed me with this beautiful creature and whenever I hear how ferocious and dangerous animals can be, I make a point of showing people these films. In many ways, this would have been an idyllic way to end both the tour and this trip report, but we still had one destination remaining, Lake Mburo National Park, which I have always liked and is good for a number of species difficult to see elsewhere in Uganda. Unless you are visiting Kidepo Valley in the extreme northeast, where you will find some of these species, but not all, Mburo is the only reserve where you will see zebra, eland, impala, bushpig, dwarf mongoose and thick-tailed greater galago. Sadly, and this came directly from one of the head rangers, it is not currently being well managed and is in poor condition, which was evident during our visit. Wild animals are being denied access to the waterholes they have always relied upon and many are dying of thirst as a direct result. We came across numerous desiccated bodies, as well as several animals clearly struggling to reach water, and on the same drives watched hundreds of domestic cattle grazing within the park and drinking at the waterholes denied to the wild populations. Mburo also used to be considerably larger, but huge sections have been given to the same local communities that continue to exploit and encroach upon a reserve unquestionably damaged by such substantial levels of more or less unchecked human activity. Locals are also allowed to kill a certain number of wild animals for food each year and although it was stressed that they can only do so beyond the park boundaries, there are no fences, so any animals using their former range, can be

legally killed. Whilst I am able to say that we had a nice time at Mburo, it was not the quality time that we should have had and it is very hard to truly enjoy a national park when you are constantly watching herds of cattle and villagers strolling around collecting wood. The most productive sitatunga areas had all been disturbed by people fishing illegally before first light and we had to cancel a night drive to search for bushpig, when we were informed that they were unlikely to be seen at that particular location, because one had been shot there the night before. So it is probably more accurate to say that we had some nice sightings rather than an actual 'nice time' and again, I doubt that I would choose to return to Mburo, not unless I learn that what was once a lovely reserve is being well

managed again and has started to recover. Unsurprisingly, we did not see sitatunga here, which is actually one of the animals they hunt at Mburo despite their rapidly decreasing numbers, but we were able to observe eland on three occasions, having seen just one at distance in Rwanda, including a fairly substantial herd. In addition to the zebra and impala, rare species across most of Uganda, Mburo is a great park for mongoose, we regularly encountered slender, banded and dwarf, and probably the best in the country for thick-tailed greater galago. We saw at least eight on our one full night drive, including one bouncing along the ground between trees. There were noticeable variations in colour between several of the galagos and I was also interested to discover that bush hyrax occur here, some distance beyond their known range. I photographed a few and although I already knew that they were not rock hyrax, clearly, or tree hyrax, the local guides all informed us they are never observed in trees, at least not more than a couple of metres above

the ground, I have since had the identification confirmed by two mammal specialists. Tree hyrax can of course be observed on the ground and conversely bush hyrax can be observed climbing trees, but for these particular animals to more or less never be seen within the branches of the trees they live around, is reasonably conclusive. In addition, the hyrax we watched were largely diurnal, whilst tree hyrax are almost exclusively nocturnal. I have seen tree hyrax at Mburo before, so the two species must coexist here, which is not at all uncommon. I have also always seen bushpigs at Mburo, but when we missed them in their usual area a couple of times, I did begin to worry that we might be unlucky on this occasion, particularly when I heard that they were being shot. Indeed, we had more or less given up when we went out early on our final morning to have one last try for sitatunga, as these nocturnal pigs are generally difficult to see during the day. There was an outside chance this early, but we were not hopeful until James spotted what he thought was a bushpig running parallel with our vehicle. Whilst I was thinking possible warthog, he quickly confirmed that it was definitely a bushpig and we stopped just in time to watch it sprint out of the scrub and throw itself across our path at full speed. I fired off a quick set of pictures, including one of our flustered porker in mid-air, and although none are of great quality, I have included one here, purely because it was such a memorable way to finish our trip. We never did find a sitatunga, but you cannot have everything and it was a miracle in many ways that we had been able to complete the full tour more or less unscathed, certainly when you consider all of the changes and the incredible effort and planning that it had taken just to get here. That it had been so successful, despite the madness consuming the world, was once again largely due to the many wonderful people who worked so hard on our behalf, from the young trainee guide at Murchison Falls, who told us that she was happy to stay out all night to help us find what we needed, and meant it, to the tea ladies searching the forest on their hands and knees for hyrax at Mgahinga. Nowhere is perfect of course and there are serious conservation issues in both countries, particularly concerning the planned oilfields and pipeline at Murchison Falls, but in general this remains a spectacular region for wildlife and the people here have always been among the friendliest on this or any other continent.

Jordan or bust...

That should have been it of course, but during our last few days in Uganda, we had faced the choice of having to quarantine on our return to the UK or to travel on somewhere, so basically a country that would let us in coming from Uganda and from where we were allowed to return to the UK without having to quarantine. Jordan and Mexico looked to be the best options and we eventually decided that Jordan would make the most sense, partly because I had a tour in place that had only recently been cancelled as a result of the pandemic. So for several days we discussed the option of either spending eleven days in a small hotel room or slightly longer, just to make sure, exploring one of the most remarkably beautiful destinations on the planet. To be fair, there were reasons that the UK did make more sense, particularly in terms of work commitments and finances, so eventually we agreed that we would count to three and both announce our preference simultaneously. So, one, two, three...Jordan, and another pending chapter of our adventure.

No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Lion	Panthera leo	A pride of four at Akagera and further sightings at Murchison Falls and Queen Elizabeth.
2	Leopard	Panthera pardus	Two individual animals at Akagera, a pair at Murchison Falls and four at Queen Elizabeth.
3	Serval	Leptailurus serval	A single animal at Akagera.
4	Side-striped Jackal	Canis adustus	Low numbers at Murchison Falls and Bigodi.
5	Spotted Hyena	Crocuta crocuta	A solitary animal at Akagera and three sightings at Murchison Falls, including one during the day.
6	Congo Clawless Otter	Aonyx congicus	Two groups on Lake Mutanda, the first for more than half an hour.
7	Spotted-necked Otter	Hydrictis maculicollis	Two individuals on Lake Mutanda, one close to the boat.
8	Banded Mongoose	Mungos mungo	Large group within the grounds of a lodge at Queen Elizabeth and further encounters at Lake Mburo.
9	Marsh Mongoose	Atilax paludinosus	Individuals on successive night drives at Akagera.
10	White-tailed Mongoose	Ichneumia albicauda	One briefly at Akagera and routinely encountered at night at Murchison Falls.
11	Egyptian Mongoose	Herpestes ichneumon	One running across the road at the beginning of the track that leads to Ishasha in Queen Elizabeth.
12	Slender Mongoose	Herpestes sanguineus	A pair at Akagera and two individual animals at both Murchison Falls and Lake Mburo.
13	Common Dwarf Mongoose	Helogale parvula	Several encounters at Akagera, Murchison Falls and Lake Mburo.
14	African Civet	Civettictis civetta	One at close quarters on a night walk at Ziwa and several on night drives at Murchison Falls.
15	Common Genet	Genetta genetta	Two in the Pakuba region of Murchison Falls.
16	Large-spotted Genet	Genetta maculata	Regular sightings at Akagera, Murchison Falls and Queen Elizabeth.
17	African Palm Civet	Nandinia binotata	Single animal at close quarters at Bigodi.
18	Impala	Aepyceros melampus	Common at Akagera and Lake Mburo.

19	Hartebeest	Alcelaphus buselaphus	Regularly observed at Murchison Falls, but absent elsewhere.
20	Topi	Damaliscus lunatus	Common at Akagera and also observed at the Ishasha section of Queen Elizabeth and Lake Mburo.
21	Common Eland	Tragelaphus oryx	A solitary animal at distance at Akagera and three sightings at Lake Mburo, including a large herd.
22	Bushbuck	Tragelaphus scriptus	Regular sightings at Akagera, Ziwa, Murchison Falls Queen Elizabeth and Lake Mburo.
23	Waterbuck	Kobus ellipsiprymnus	Observed at Akagera, Ziwa, Murchison Falls, Queen Elizabeth and Lake Mburo.
24	Kob	Kobus kob	Routinely encountered at Ziwa, Murchison Falls and Queen Elizabeth.
25	Oribi	Ourebia ourebi	Relatively common at Akagera and Murchison Falls.
26	Roan	Hippotragus equinus	A group of four, including two young at Akagera.
27	Klipspringer	Oreotragus oreotragus	A group of four at Akagera.
28	Bohor Reedbuck	Redunca redunca	A mother and young at Akagera.
29	Black-fronted Duiker	Cephalophus nigrifrons	A pair and a single animal at Volcanoes and low numbers at Nyungwe.
30	Weyns's Duiker	Cephalophus weynsi	An individual on a forest hike at Kibale.
31	Common Duiker	Sylvicapra grimmia	Observed at Akagera, Ziwa, Murchison Falls and Lake Mburo.
32	African Buffalo	Syncerus caffer	Encountered at the savannah parks of Akagera, Murchison Falls, Queen Elizabeth and Lake Mburo.
33	Plains Zebra	Equus quagga	Only observed in two parks, Akagera in Rwanda and Lake Mburo in Uganda.
34	Giraffe	Giraffa camelopardalis	Regular sightings at Akagera, Murchison Falls and Lake Mburo.
35	African Elephant	Loxodonta africana	A single male at Akagera and large numbers at Murchison Falls and Queen Elizabeth.
36	Hippopotamus	Hippopotamus amphibius	Multiple sightings at every reserve with a major watercourse in both countries.
37	White Rhinoceros	Ceratotherium simum	Several sightings at Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary.
38	Black Rhinoceros	Diceros bicornis	An individual briefly at Akagera.
39	Eastern Mountain Gorilla	Gorilla beringei beringei ssp	Family groups at Volcanoes, Bwindi and Mgahinga.
40	Chimpanzee	Pan troglodytes	Two sightings at Nyungwe and one at Kibale.
41	Olive Baboon	Papio anubis	Regularly observed at Akagera, Murchison Falls, Kibale and Lake Mburo.
42	Angolan Colobus	Colobus angolensis	High numbers at Nyungwe.
43	Guereza Colobus	Colobus guereza	Encountered at Murchison Falls, Bigodi, Kibale and Kyambura Gorge.
44	Ashy Red Colobus	Piliocolobus tephrosceles	Three groups at Bigodi and one at Kibale.
45	Red-tailed Monkey	Cercopithecus ascanius	Sightings at Bigodi, Kibale and Kyambura Gorge.
46	Dent's Monkey	Cercopithecus denti	A small group at Nyungwe on the first chimpanzee hike.
47	Golden Monkey	Cercopithecus kandti	A large habituated group and a few members of a wild group at Volcanoes.
48	Blue Monkey	Cercopithecus mitis	Several sightings at Nyungwe and one each at Akagera and Kibale.
49	Vervet Monkey	Chlorocebus pygerythrus	One group outside Nyungwe and routinely encountered at Akagera and Lake Mburo.
50	Tantalus Monkey	Chlorocebus tantalus	Observed at several reserves in western Uganda, including Murchison Falls and Queen Elizabeth.
51	L'Hoest's Monkey	Allochrocebus lhoesti	Several small groups at Nyungwe, one sighting at both Bigodi and Bwindi.
52	Patas Monkey	Erythrocebus patas	Several encounters at Murchison Falls.
53	Grey-cheeked Mangabey	Lophocebus albigena	A small group on the return from chimpanzee trekking at Nyungwe.
54	Uganda Mangabey	Lophocebus ugandae	Two small groups at Bigodi and one at Kibale.
55	East African Potto	Perodicticus ibeanus	Two individuals at Bigodi in different trees.

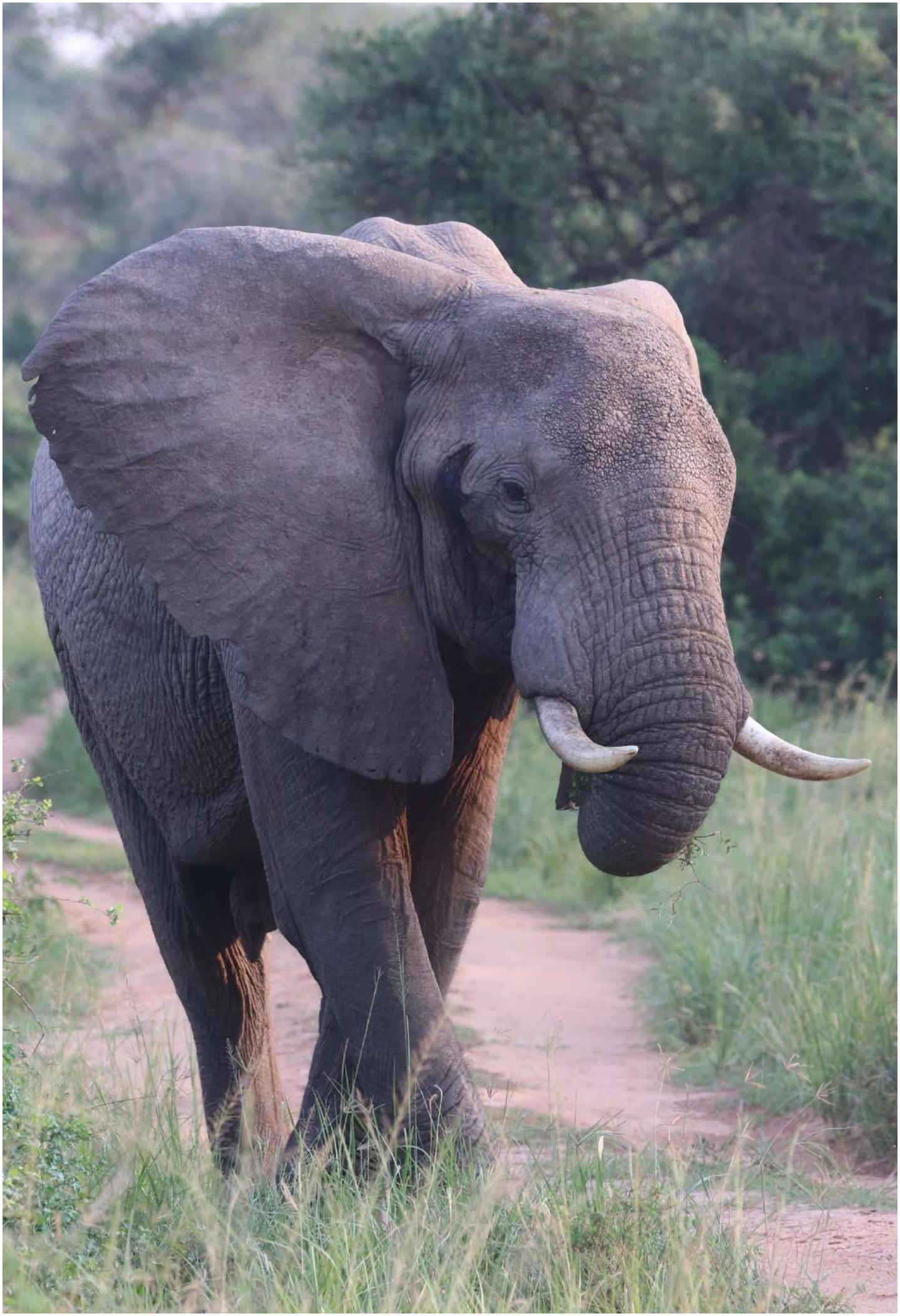
56	Northern Lesser Galago	Galago senegalensis	Seen on each nocturnal drive at Akagera, but not beyond.
57	Thomas's Dwarf Galago	Galagoides thomasi	A single animal just below the canopy at Bigodi.
58	Demidoff's Dwarf Galago	Galagoides demidoff	Two pairs and an individual at Bigodi.
59	Thick-tailed Greater Galago	Otolemur crassicaudatus	One obstructed view at Akagera and at least eight encounters on one night drive at Lake Mburo.
60	Common Warthog	Phacochoerus africanus	Common at every savannah reserve.
61	Bushpig	Potamochoerus larvatus	One running and crossing the road in front of our vehicle at Lake Mburo.
62	Giant Forest Hog	Hylochoerus meinertzhageni	Several sightings at Queen Elizabeth.
63	Southern Tree Hyrax	Dendrohyrax arboreus	An individual and a mother with two young at Mgahinga.
64	Bush Hyrax	Heterohyrax brucei	Low numbers at Lake Mburo.
65	Bunyoro Rabbit	Poelagus marjorita	One at Ziwa and several at Murchison Falls.
66	African Savanna Hare[1]	Lepus victoriae	Common at every reserve, but overlaps with cape hare at some destinations in Uganda.
67	Four-toed Sengi[2]	Petrodromus tetradactylus	Individual on a night drive at Akagera.
68	Cape Porcupine[3]	Hystrix africaeaustralis	Two confirmed at Murchison Falls and several that could have been either cape or crested porcupine.
69	Carruther's Mountain Squirrel	Funisciurus carruthersi	Several sightings at Nyungwe.
70	Red-legged Sun Squirrel	Heliosciurus rufobrachium	Single sighting while watching primates at Kibale.
71	Ruwenzori Sun Squirrel	Heliosciurus ruwenzorii	One in Kyambura Gorge whilst searching for chimpanzees.
72	Boehm's Bush Squirrel	Paraxerus boehmi	A pair on the same tree at Nyungwe.
73	Striped Ground Squirrel	Xerus erythropus	One at Ziwa and low numbers at Murchison Falls.
74	Forest Giant Pouched Rat	Cricetomys emini	One sighting for several minutes at Murchison Falls.

[1] Possible cape hare (Lepus capensis) at Ziwa, Murchison and Lake Mburo, where it overlaps with African savanna hare (Lepus victoriae).

[2] A second sengi species was observed at Murchison Falls, either short-snouted sengi (Elephantulus brachyrhynchus) or dusky-footed sengi (Elephantulus fuscipes).

[3] Possible crested porcupine (Hystrix cristata) at Murchison Falls, where it overlaps with cape porcupine (Hystrix africaeaustralis).

A number of additional species were observed, but not identified, including several squirrels, small rodents and a large variety of bats.



14 Greenfield Road, Eastbourne,
East Sussex BN21 1JJ, UK

Tel: +44 (0)1323 731865
Mob: +44 (0)7821 640118

Email: jason.woolgar@btinternet.com
Website: www.wildglobetours.com

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