

Early Christmas Dance for our Send Off Flights

Mesa to Seattle to Amsterdam to London to Kigali!!!! Departure on Sunday, 8am, 4 December to arrival at Thursday, 7:30am, 8 December. Crazy!!!!



It was only December 1st, so hard to get into the Christmas spirit, but I brought out the blinkies & we gave it a good try. Had a last minute scare with a possible Covid case at our previous Sunday dance, but YEA....we tested negative twice, so good to go! Fairly small attendance, but still great fun!





Finished up the dance with a fun after party. Getting us all ready for a fun month to follow.





We all met for an early morning flight from Phoenix to Seattle. All of us were cheery & ready to get the show on the road!!!



Unfortunately, we landed to find snow in Seattle & a delayed flight arrival for our trip to Amsterdam.



We have access to the Priority Pass Lounges at most airports, so we got to spend the time in a nice quite leisurely manor. Had a late breakfast & the time passed with not much trouble.



Unfortunately the late take off caused a domino effect for the next portion of the trip. We were all supposed to have connected with an easy KLM flight on to Kigali, Rwanda. We arrived in Amsterdam about 2 hours late and the flight was gone. We worked with an excellent representative & thought things were all set up. 6 of us rushed on to catch a flight to London with connection to a flight with Rwanda Air & on to Kigali. The remaining 4 would fly on to London a couple of hours later, but we'd all connect for the same flight. We had email confirmation, but no hard tickets. Even had seats assigned. It would put us several hours later for our arrival, but we were all just thrilled that we would soon be flying on. George & I got the 6 of us into a Priority Lounge at Heathrow & we thought we were all set.

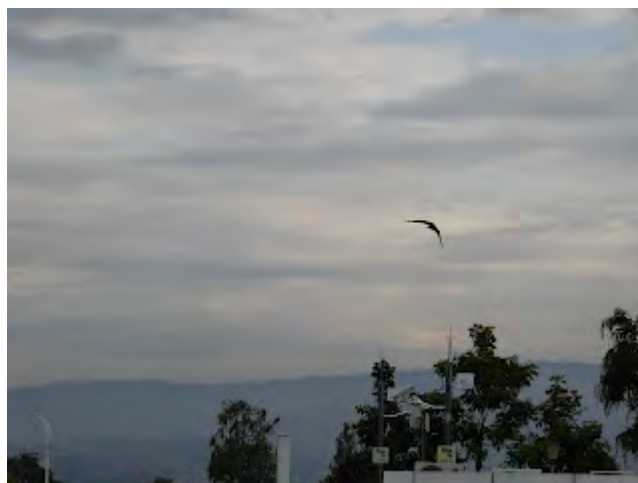


Then things all fell apart. Something went awry with the computer system for Rwanda Air & 4 of us (Anderson's & Hurd's) somehow got knocked off the flight. The other 6 all got on the flight, but we were stuck in London. I was so upset during our 2 night delay in London that I never even got a single picture!!!! Bottom line was that Davis's, Batcheller's, & Byler's arrived in Kigali and we were stuck in London for my birthday! They had a drink & sent me a picture to prove they were with us in spirit! At least we were given a nice hotel room at the airport (Holiday Inn Express) and all our meals were provided. But we were nervous wrecks & I thought that we would be taking our next flight back to Phoenix instead of on to Kigali!



Finally Finally Finally, we managed to get on a flight from Amsterdam & on to Kigali! Overnight flight with seats in the center 4 of the airplane, but we made it anyway!!!!

Kigali, Rwanda - 1st day - 8 December, 2022



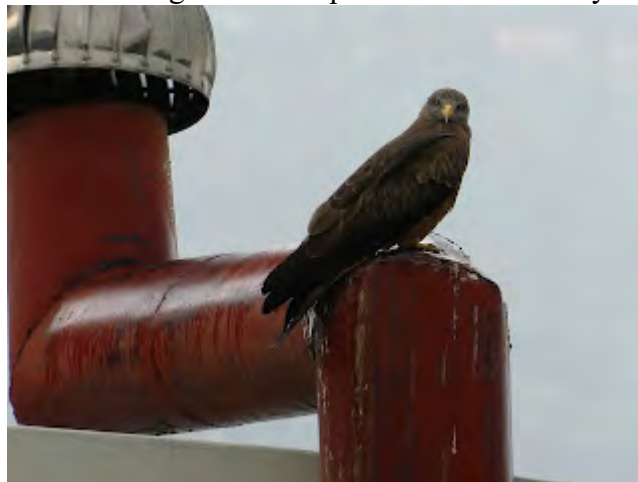


We finally arrived in Kigali, Rwanda at 7:30am on Thursday, Dec 8th. We were supposed to have arrived on Monday, Dec 5th at 7:30pm! Lost days - never to be recovered, but we're here & I immediately pulled out my camera & my binoculars & started bird watching! Spotted & identified a Black Kite & a Pied African Wagtail! With the help of our guide Isaac & Merlin!





Although we (Anderson's & Hurd's) were groggy from the long overnight flight, we had to hit the ground running. We drove to the the Mille Collines Hotel (Hotel Rwanda!) and got to hug everyone! They were all in the lobby waiting for us!!! Felt great to finally be with them! Isaac gave us 15 minutes to drop off our stuff & then meet back in the lobby to hear our first talk from Annie, a lovely professional Rwandan woman, about the status of women in the country. 80% of the government positions are filled by women!! She was wonderful.





We had a few minutes back in our room (I spotted a juvenile Black Kite right outside our window) and then we were off again!





We headed out in our bus for our first activity of the trip. I was snapping pictures left & right while we drove. The city is SOOOOOOO clean & looks quite prosperous.







During the drive, Isaac gave us info on how the government provides jobs for all physically able to work & pays them. We paused for a short stop at the Nyabarongo River to watch sugar cane being processed & loaded for transport. This swampy area was the location of many of the killings during the 1994 Genocide. Isaac said the waters ran red with blood & bodies of the dead.



Bicycles provide transport for much of the population. They are quite adept at balancing most everything!



The city is a contrast of new & old, basic cement blocks, straw huts, & amazing architecture. But everywhere we went, folks waved & smiled. It was awesome!





I never tired of spotting birds. This was my first of hundreds of Pied Crow. Couldn't identify the other 2 birds unfortunately.





Our destination was the Nyamata Catholic Church Genocide Museum. This is the site of one of the many massacres that took place throughout Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. This church had been a previous safe haven for the Tutsis since 1959, but on this horrific day, the refuge was overrun & it is estimated that 10,000 people lost their lives there on one day. We did not take any pictures, it was just too awful to consider lifting the camera. I downloaded these photos from on line. The doors still show the results of the hand grenade used to bust open the facility. The individuals huddled inside were shot from the roof. There are bloodied clothing remnants displayed on benches inside. Downstairs there are skulls that show the results of machete blows. We were in tears throughout the descriptive narrative from our guide. There is a mass grave outside that holds the remains of at least 45,000 people. It's just almost too heartbreaking to think about.













OAT is famous for the "learning and discovery" activities. This trip was definitely full of those! Isaac spotted one of the many bicycles loaded up to carry things to market & we'll stopped to chat & sample his goods. He had probably 350 lbs of pineapples!!!! We bought a few from him & Bachu sliced them up for us to eat. Yum Yum Yummy! So sweet & delicious. We were to discover that Rwanda has some of the best pineapples we have ever tasted anywhere. Dole should be ashamed to call theirs by the same name!!! Our guys took turns giving it a try. Don't think any of them want to actually peddle them down the road!! Holding the bicycle upright was enough!







Next stop was a Reconciliation Village. I understood that there are many of these villages throughout Rwanda. I haven't been able to verify more than 6 of them. The one we visited in the Bugesera district was very impressive. I don't write my travelogues as a history lesson, but in this case I think it is important for me to explain a bit of the history of Rwanda. Most folks have seen the movie *Hotel Rwanda*, but its presentation of sides is a bit skewed according to most reviews. Therefore, I read a bit more about what actually happened. To keep things simple, I am just going to paste in the explanation in our OAT travel guide:

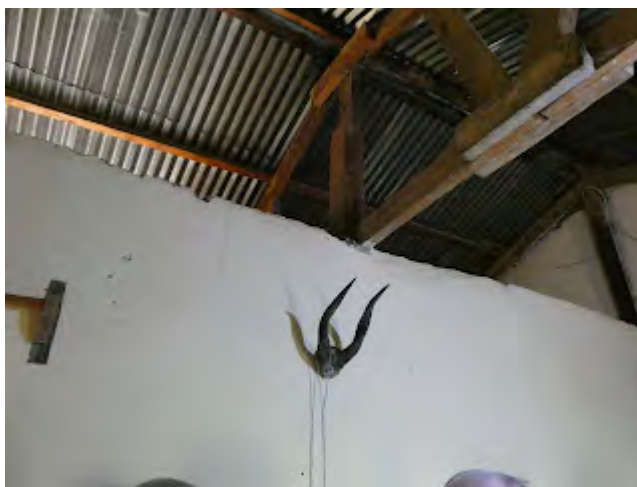
"These remarkable communities are a showcase of Rwanda's commitment to putting its gory past behind it. Here, survivors of the genocide live side-by-side with the very same people who perpetrated it; in these villages, both sides have agreed to put aside their differences, forgive the bloody transgressions of the past, and work together to end the cycle of ethnic violence to move toward peace and reconciliation. We'll get an introduction to the village at around 10:30am as we meet its chairman, Kaligwemo Fredrick, who will tell us about the community and how he and the rest of its residents came to live here. When the genocide started, Kaligwemo joined in with the extremists. He participated in the bloodshed, and was personally responsible for multiple deaths. For his crimes, he was sentenced to nine years in a maximum security prison, where he eventually sought and received forgiveness from the families of the people he killed. As a free man, he has dedicated his new life to a mission of repentance, healing, and reconciliation—an earnest devotion which eventually led him to be elected as the chairman of the village. At around 11am, we'll join Kaligwemo for a walk around the village, to see for ourselves how the genocide's victims and perpetrators have learned to put the past behind them and live together as neighbors once again. As we'll see, machetes and bombs have been traded for hammers and plows, as Hutu and Tutsi residents work alongside each other as unified Rwandans to perform the daily tasks that keep the village running. We'll wander through the village and meet locals as they tend to vegetable gardens, raise livestock and poultry, craft filters to provide potable water, and brew banana beer (we'll have a chance to try a taste of this unique local beverage). We'll share a traditional Rwandan lunch, which will likely feature local produce such as cassava, plantain, vegetables, roasted beef, arrow roots, chicken, beans, and fruit. As we eat together, we'll enjoy the opportunity to get our hosts' perspective of what life is like in an unusual community like this. Afternoon: At about 1:30pm, we'll join members of the village community to delve deeper into the Controversial Topic of the practical difficulties of nationwide reconciliation in the wake of the horrible crimes committed during the genocide of 1994. While the nation's government has its eyes set on the future, many who survived the genocide are unwilling to forgive what happened in the past. The official government policy toward the country's ethnic tensions is straightforward and clear: "Ndi Umunyarwanda (We are all Rwandan)." In an effort to let go of the ethnic divisions that led to the genocide, as well as the civil wars and violent clashes that preceded it, the country has formally banned the practice of separating the country's people along ethnic lines. However, while the residents of the Reconciliation Village are all firmly committed to burying their old hatreds and living harmoniously alongside their former enemies, many others in Rwanda are not so ready to forget about these divisions; there are many who still believe that justice cannot be served until those who perpetrated the genocide are tracked down and locked away. We'll spend an hour in conversation with up to three residents of the Reconciliation Village (depending on their availability) to get their firsthand perspectives of how and why they decided to move on from their dark pasts, and how they perceive the prospects of a future peace in Rwanda at large. In addition to Kaligwemo, the village chairman, we'll be joined again by Florence Kabanyana, a genocide survivor. We'll also meet Jackline Uwimana, who lost her parents and other relatives to the bloodshed. She found refuge in Burundi, and, upon returning to Rwanda, found the strength within to forgive the people who took the lives of her loved her ones, and to live alongside them as neighbors in

the Reconciliation Village project. Our speakers will provide a diverse array of perspectives on this complicated subject—Kaligwemo as one of the perpetrators of the genocide, and Florence and Jackline as survivors—giving us insights into the extent to which the people of Rwanda have accepted the government's push for harmony, and what obstacles are still yet to be overcome."











We were given a short tour of the village & they showed us some of their animals & gardens. Everything is maintained jointly.





We were invited inside one of the compounds & allowed to help in preparation for our meal. I snapped peas while a couple of the girls cut up carrots.



One of the leading lady members of the village had met with then Prince Charles last summer!







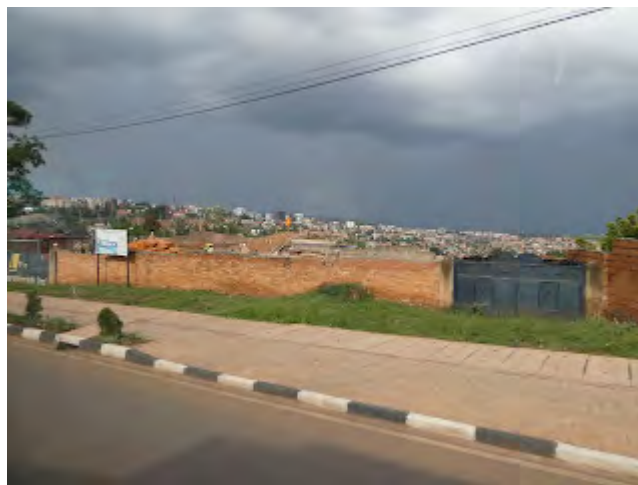






This was the most heart warming activity I have ever been involved with. How this group of people have been able to come together in forgiveness & love is mind blowing to me. I truly do not think I would be able to forgive the atrocities committed to my own family. But these people obviously have & it gives you hope for the future to see it, feel it, & know that it is working for them & their country. I will never forget the love & commitment that I felt while in their presence.







The City is called "city of a Thousand Hills" and rightly so. The surrounding terrain is lovely. It is right on the equator, so the weather is moderate year round (note all that greenery!). There was a bit of rain, but never stopped any of our activities. Seemed to subside at the right time!





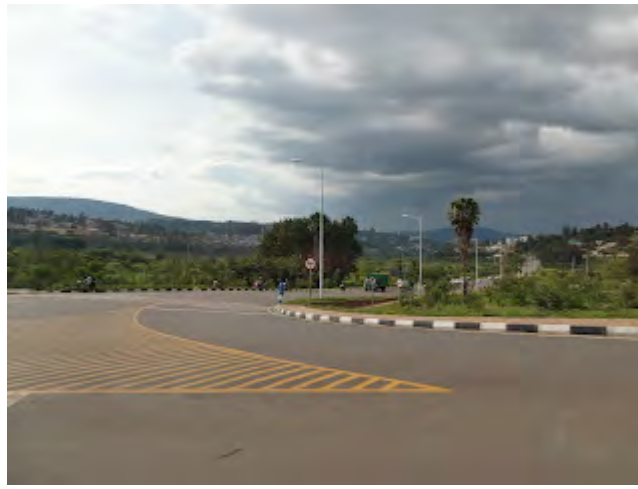
Circled around a huge Silver Back Gorilla statue in town, but couldn't ever get a good picture of it.









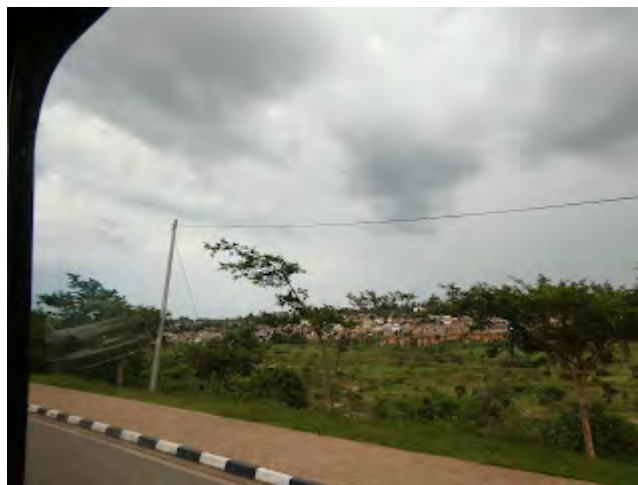


Those yellow umbrellas signify a local money changer. Interested system - they are legally allowed to accept debit cards to hand out cash. Folks do not go to an actual bank. Some of them just wear yellow vests. It's very interesting. You can call your local guy in advance & let him know you'll be there in a few minutes & let him know how much cash you need. You are not "borrowing" money, he has access to debit your bank account. They are everywhere!!!









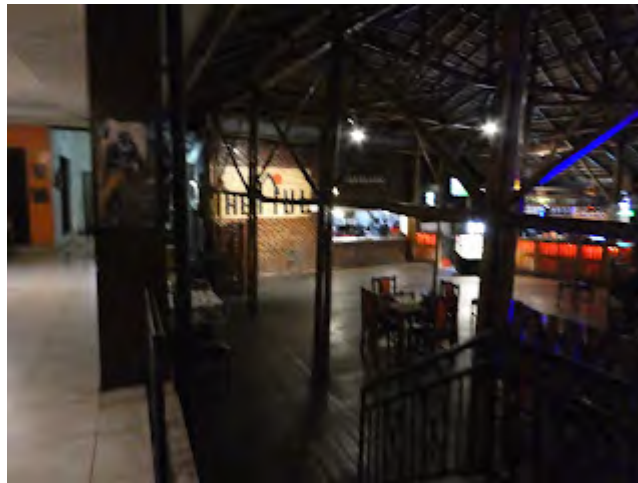




The lovely scenery made driving around very pleasant, but the traffic was scary. They weave in and out & don't really observe lane markings. At a signal light, the motorcycles will pile up sometimes 10 or 15 across. And they might have 3 or 4 folks on one or a bed frame or a basket of sugar cane. More on that later!!!!



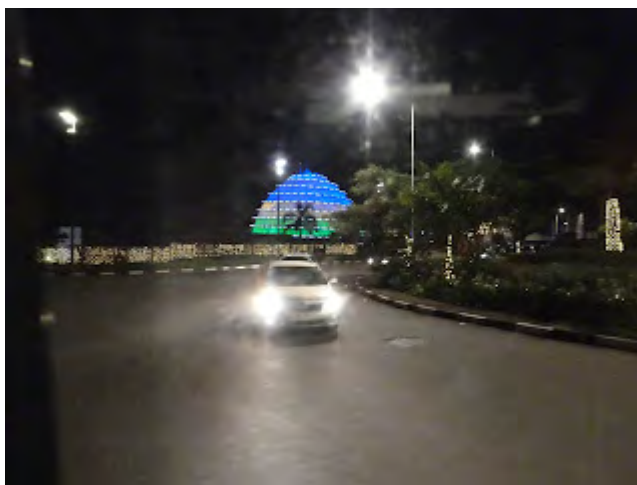
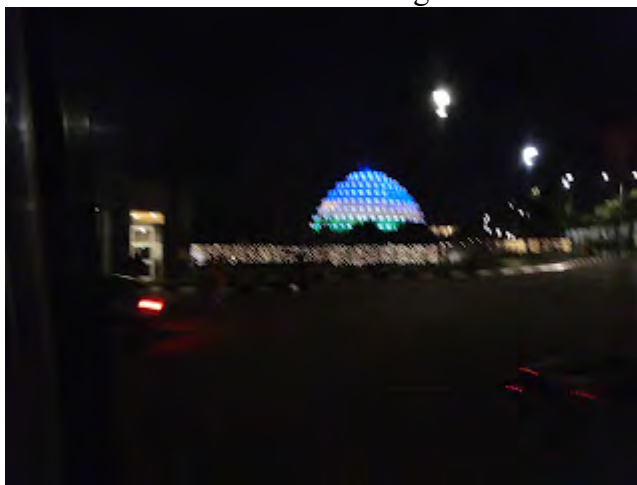
Back at the hotel for a couple of hours, we finished unpacking & reorganizing for our drive to the Akagera NP tomorrow morning. I got another photo of the Juvenile Black Kite that loves to hang around outside our bedroom window. I have been making plans for another trip to Africa in April 2024 with our beloved guide, Tinashe. We had arranged to call him while we were in Rwanda, so we managed the call using What's App, but the connection was awful. Usually on had a sentence or two before it disconnected. But nice to hear his voice & we're confirmed for the visit!!!! Yea!!!







Although the official Welcome Dinner had taken place on Tuesday night, OAT sprang for another one since we were just now all together! Went to The Hut, a lovely restaurant with a great menu, fantastic service, good views all around with the open venue and we were all ecstatic to be together!!!!





The best thing about the drive back was the awesome view of the "Bee Hive", the huge convention Center in the city. It's gorgeous. I downloaded a couple of pictures from wikipedia to supplement ours. The best picture is from Ken of course! And back to the hotel, we slept a short night to get prepared for a long drive to Akagera NP in the Northeast corner of the country.

Kigali to Akagera National Park, Rwanda

- Friday, 9 Dec 2023





Up early, breakfast & on the road by 9am. Such a pretty hotel, shame we missed the other nights here. But kept looking around & thinking about how it looked with the folks hiding here during the genocide. Movie scripts in my head. Regardless, we got checked out & on our way.





The easy drive out of town heading northeast was once again enjoyable as we viewed the lovely scenic views and we amazed at the flow of crazy traffic!!!





As a learning & discovery (& to stretch our legs!) we stopped alongside the highway to watch folks harvesting rice. These pictures are from Ken & Marlyn. The hut was the main reason we stopped. They are built to house rabbits over the water. The rabbits poop in the water & that is used to make a sheen on the water to protect the fish that they grow next to the rice fields! Amazing!!!



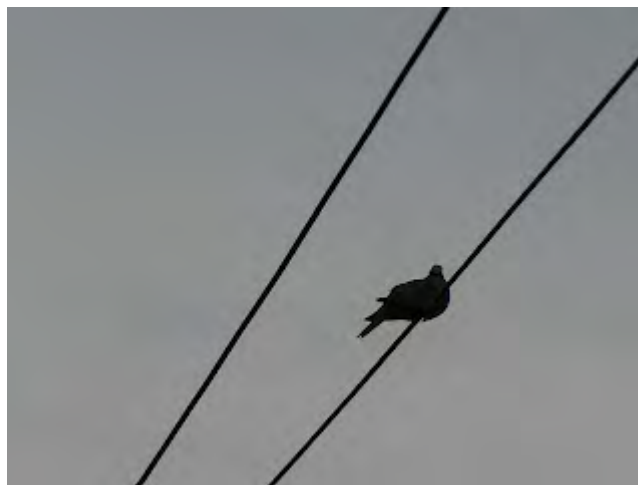




But I was more interested in the birds & saw White Faced Whistling Ducks, Black faced Heron, Fan Tailed Widow Bird, Common Greenshank, Little Egret, Long Toed Lapwing - those I got pictures of. Also saw many others that Isaac ID'd for me with no pictures. I have them listed on my ebirds account for my Life List!!!

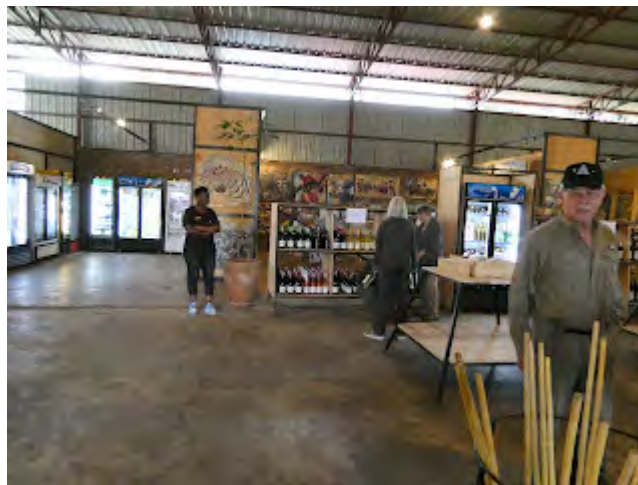








We only stayed at the rest stop for about 20 minutes, but not only did we get the history & explanation about the rice fields & fish ponds, but we loved watching the constant stream of travelers with all their crazy methods of transport!!! Hilarious to see the calf strapped to the bicycle!!!





We made a potty stop at a really nice gift shop that had a HUGE wine selection. We bought several bottles for our cabin at the National Park. Others bought some coffee. It could have been a gift shop in the US. Very well set up!









Just a few miles further on, we came to the Urugo Women's Opportunity Center in Kayonza. First went to the big main outdoor pavilion. They were already waiting for us & set up to dance. They put on an awesome demonstration!



Then they brought over scarves & dressed us all up so that we could dance with them!!! Woo Hoo! Fun Fun Fun!!!



Then we got to round dance for them!!!! We did Beach Party Cha. Unfortunately the music wasn't very loud, but they loved it. Especially the hip rolls down & up! It was soooooo very much fun!











Then we got a tour around the facility. There were multiple buildings that housed different training classes: one for basket weaving, jewelry making, a special type of tile making that could be used for pictures or building tiles (later I was given one of the special pictures) and even a kitchen that made beer & one that made yogurt!!!! It is all a facility for training women how to be self sufficient & provide for their families after the genocide when so many of the head of household males were lost either killed or jailed. It is an amazing facility!!



They had made us lunch too. Even got some local beer. It was very pleasant.



Just a short distance down the road, we passed Zipline, an American company that uses an automated drone system to deliver medications to rural areas. It's an amazing invention that is being used in multiple countries throughout the world. Even helped with Covid immunization deliveries.





After we left there, it was just a few more miles on to the entrance to the park. Isaac & Bachu went inside to pay for our entry.







We arrived at the Akagera Game Lodge (entrance photo from Marlyn) & spent an hour getting settled. Our room had a balcony with a beautiful view of Lake Ihema!!!



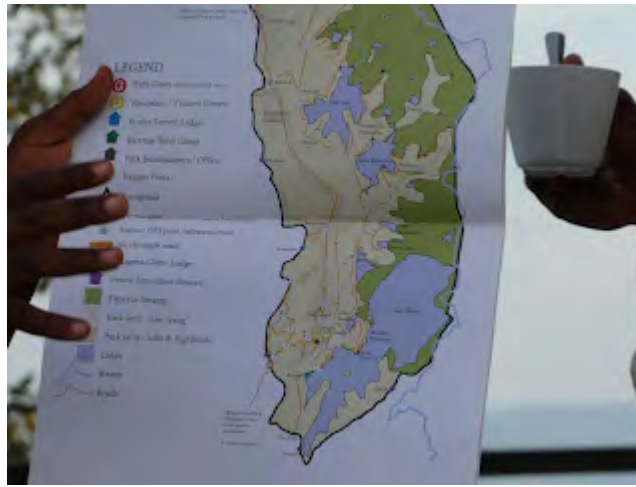




Saw a few birds, Common Bulbul, the Village & Masked Weavers just outside the door, Greater Blue Eared Starling (from Marlyn), a few unidentified. Just nice to be outside.







Issac had us meet up on the outside patio for a briefing about the history & location of the park. It had almost been destroyed by the Genocide. Afterwards, the government had to give up some of the lands for the farmers to use. But now it's thriving and they are trying to make it a Rwandan Ngorongoro Crater. We were at the southern end of it. It borders on Tanzania which is a bit of a problem with poachers coming across the border with few penalties from the Tanzanian government.





Next was a night safari with National Park guides. Both were named Manual & our jeep had Manual Senior. Although we didn't see a lot of animals, it was very interesting. We started with Baboons set up in the overnight roost in a tree. Then on to a mongoose, a Water Thick knee, 2 owls, 2 bucks, 2 buffalo, a night jar, 2 grey crowned cranes & lastly, a bush baby!!! My camera was not working for night shots at all, so about the only good picture was the Scops Owl. Ken's shot is the last one & it's great!











After dinner, I was surprised with a Birthday Party!!! I had a card signed by everyone & gifts from Michele and Issac. Marilynn had bought Amarula for everyone! The hotel provided a cake complete with flaming torch & my name written on the plate! It was a fabulous time!!! Unfortunately we were all still tired, so back to our rooms for an early night. But what a great day!!!

Akagera National Park

- Saturday, 10 Dec 2022





Early morning! Have to be in jeeps at 7am! Yipes. But we were all up & at em & ready to go.



Here's a map of the park. We started at Akagera Game Lodge near the west shore of Lake Ihema,

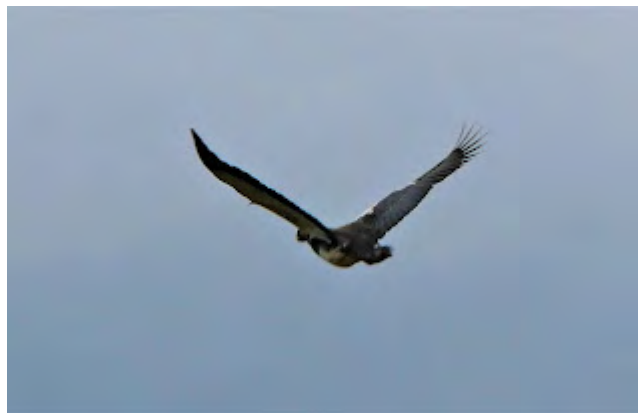








First we ran into a Cape Buffalo herd. We were all excited to get the Jeep's tops up & get started spotting animals. They had given us permission to take our shoes off & stand on the seats & we were quick to take advantage of that. The birds were everywhere & it was hard to stay focused! The oxpeckers were having breakfast on the buffalo.





The Spur-winged Goose that we spotted in a tree is a toxic bird. It's main diet is blister beetles, making the meat poisonous to those trying to eat the cooked goose.





The Gray-backed Fiscal seemed to pose for us. There were termite mounds everywhere, but there were not as large as we'd seen in other parts of Africa. The Yellow-billed Oxpecker was in the tree rather than on the buffalo this time!





We continued on, making our way to the Lone Tree Overlook to see the monument to Kriszhon Gyongyi, a Hungarian conservationist who fought to bring back the Black Rhino to Rwanda, only to be killed by one of them. But due to his untiring work, there are more than 20 surviving there now. They have also reintroduced White Rhinos to the park. The views from the peak are excellent.





We continued on the drive & came upon our first big Baboon Troop. They were santering along the road. We stopped & watched their antics for quite a while. They are very amusing.







We made a short potty stop on the Ihema lake drive. There were 2 hippos out away from the bank and numerous birds - Helmeted Guinea fowl, Both Wattled Lapwing & Water Thick Knee, Cattle Egret, African Jacana, Sacred Ibis & Hadada Ibis. And the ever present Pied Wagtail!













Back on the road, we started north towards Hago Lake. We found Vervet Monkeys, Impalas, more Baboons and Zebra.







At about 10:30am, we stopped for a coffee break at Lake Mihindi. Weather was pleasant & we just couldn't believe we'd already seen so much this soon! Their instant coffee was tasty & we got slices of banana bread that Isaac & Bachu said they had made. Not!!!!





















As we continued north, the grass was a little more lush and we started seeing a lot more Zebra, Impala, Warthogs, & Waterbuck. Finally found a little Dung beetle. He was having a hard time of it. Couldn't seem to control his ball of poo. Very sad, but we were careful not to hurt him. Isaac & Bachu pointed out how many of the zebras have an unusual color pattern on their backs. it is being researched as it seems to be prevalent throughout the herds in Uganda & Rwanda. There is much speculation - in breeding?











Besides the zebra & impala, just before we got to the northernmost lake, we spotted a Tower of Giraffe. They were imported from Kenya. Now there are at least 80 in the park & they are thriving. They are the only giraffes in Rwanda.



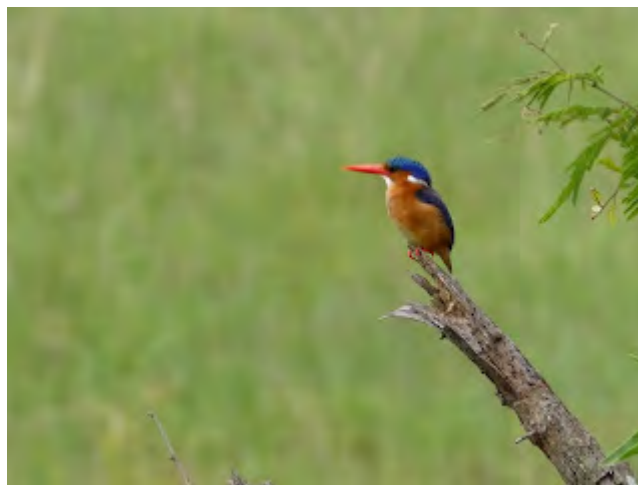






The first thing we noticed as we arrived at the water's edge was the smell! Then we spotted the dead hippo near the shore. It was being eaten by crocodile. Felt like National Geographic! Our original plan was to eat our box lunches while enjoying the wildlife around the lake, but the smell put an end to that idea.



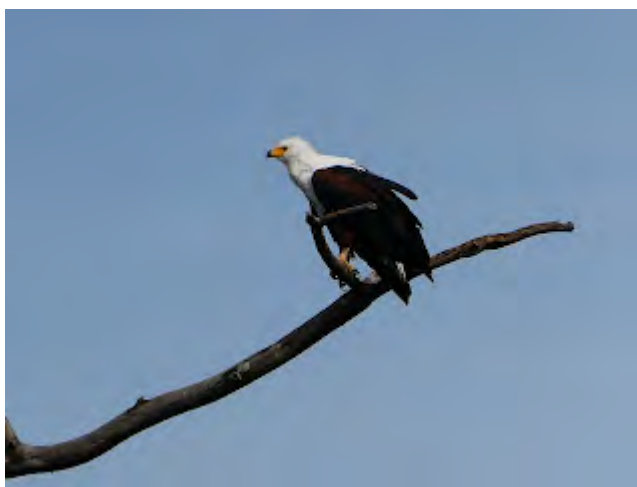




But before we left, I got some fun birds & a Topi that was playing king of the mountain!!! There was a Pied Kingfisher and a Malachite Kingfisher and then a Bare Faced Go Away Bird!!! Also the Long Tailed Cormorants. Cool Cool Cool!







Didn't take many pictures on the first hour of the drive back as we were busy eating our sack lunch!!! But finished up the many goodies & back to looking around us! Got some especially good close ups of a couple of Waterbucks and some really nice views of a Beautiful Fish Eagle. More Vervet Monkeys and thank you Marilyn for the fun photo of us in the Jeep with Marlyn & Michele.





Back at the lodge for a mere hour & I took a the short walk around the electric fence perimeter by myself. Spotted several birds, but only got pictures of the Yellow Faced Canary & the Splendid Starling. I did id a Red Cheeked Cordonbleu!!! He was beautiful flitting in the bushes, but too fast for me to photo!

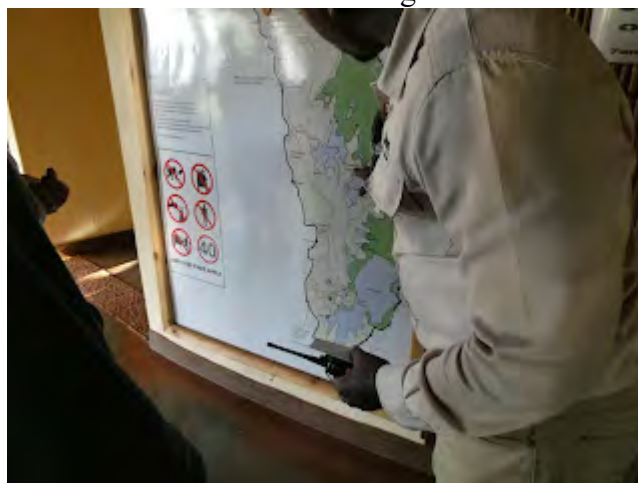


We met back in the lobby at 4pm for an afternoon Safari. Pat had elected not to join us - enough of the Jeep for her. The rest of us were there, if a little blurry eyed!





Saw our regular Baboon troop just outside the fence and snapped some lovely scenery views as we headed to the NP Visitor's Center for Issac & Bachu to ask about recent sitings & determine where we should go.





Only spent about 15 minutes at the Visitor's Center. Michele found a gorgeous silver pendant of a gorilla, but I put off buying it. My mistake! Never saw another like it, so missed the chance & saved some money!







Isaac must have gotten a good tip, because we almost immediately spotted 2 Rhinos. Albeit in the distance, but easily discernable.





Ken got some awesome pictures!! These are some of the White Rhinos that have been imported. They are doing well & there have been some babies born here.



We continued the drive & spotted several more White Rhinos in the woods. They were hunted & killed to extinction soon after the Genocide by farmers that were relocated here, but they began reintroducing them. The latest was a mass relocation of 30 white rhinos from South Africa in 2021. They are now thriving thank goodness.







We continued to spot rhinos along many other types of wildlife: zebra, lots of different antelope, giraffe, buffalo, & warthogs. I managed to photo a Fork-Tailed Drongo & and Gray-backed Fiscal. Saw lots of water & shore birds around a small pond. It was all just very pleasant & enjoyable.







We had turned around & were heading home. Marlyn, Michele, George & I with Bachu driving were in the second jeep. As we came around a sharp corner, Isaac put on his brakes & rapidly started backing up. Bachu immediately started backing up too. Suddenly a HUGE elephant came running at the first jeep - he was running pretty fast - it's amazing how fast that big animal can really move. A car was following the elephant, so effectively had him penned in. There was no way to turn around on the one lane dirt road, so both jeeps just continued to back as fast as possible. It was a pretty scary event. Especially when we found out that this same elephant had turned a car over last month!!!! Eventually he veered off into the bushes, but it felt like forever!!! I'm sure Ken, Sue, Marilynn, Tom, & Isaac were counting his nose hairs! Whew! That was a bit too close! Anyway, we headed back to the lodge. We had to be out of the National Park by 6pm. Only the National Park rangers are allowed to drive at night. Mostly so they can be assured that anyone driving at night is a poacher & they can apprehend them!!! Back at the lodge we enjoyed a lovely dinner and all called it an early night again!

Akagera National Park

- Sunday, 11 Dec 2022



Woke at 6am to a gorgeous morning. Headed to breakfast by 7am and had omelets made to order to go along with the amazing breakfast buffet. Wow oh Wow!!! Eating way too much, but loving it!



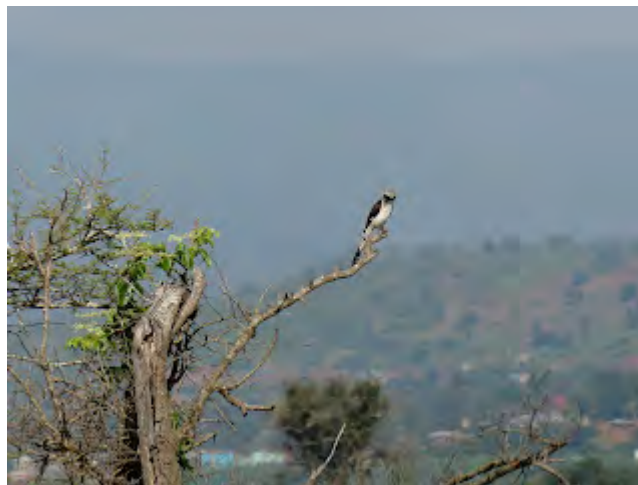


In the Jeep & ready for action from Marilyn





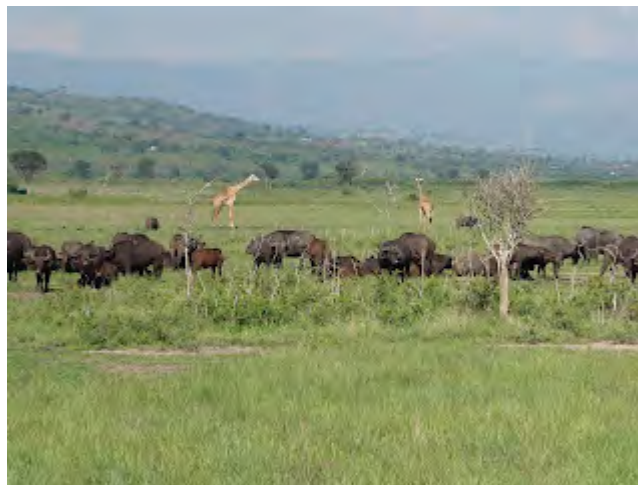
Fan Tailed Widowbird



Grey Backed Fiscal



Trilling Cisticola





Spur winged geese, Egyptian Geese, White faced Whistling Duck in the background

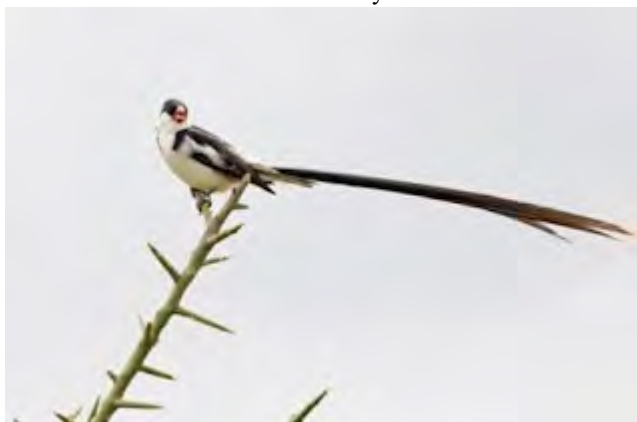
In the jeeps by 8am and had a beautiful morning. Saw & id's many birds & there was a huge herd of Cape Buffalo with other antelope & Giraffe.







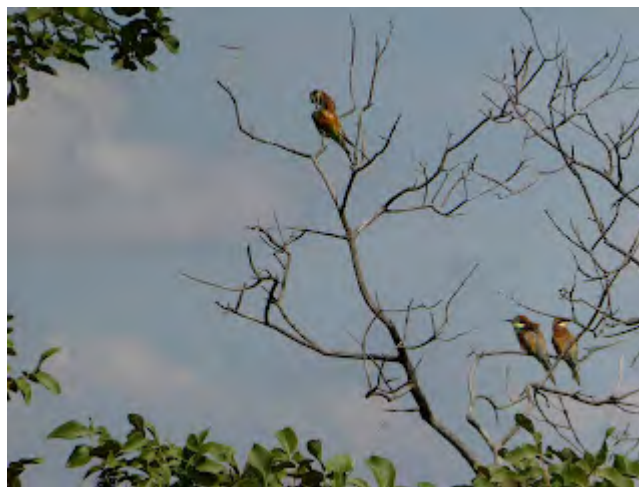
Pin-tailed Whydah



Pin-tailed Whydah from the internet

Made a stop at a watering hole to get better close ups of the many ducks & geese. As we were leaving Bachu spotted a Pin-tailed Whydah and told us a silly story about how to make a girl fall in love with you using a tail feather from the Whydah. Had something to do with peeing on it! Too funny!









On up to the top of the ridge to enjoy the gorgeous views & have some fun watching a flock of Bee-eaters - both Cinnamon chested & White Throated. Better picture from Ken - Thank you Ken!!!



Topi

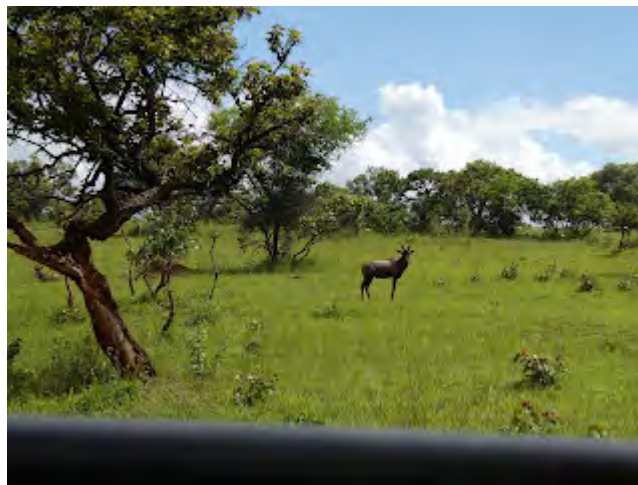


Black Bellied Bustard





Northern Grey Headed Sparrow



Topi



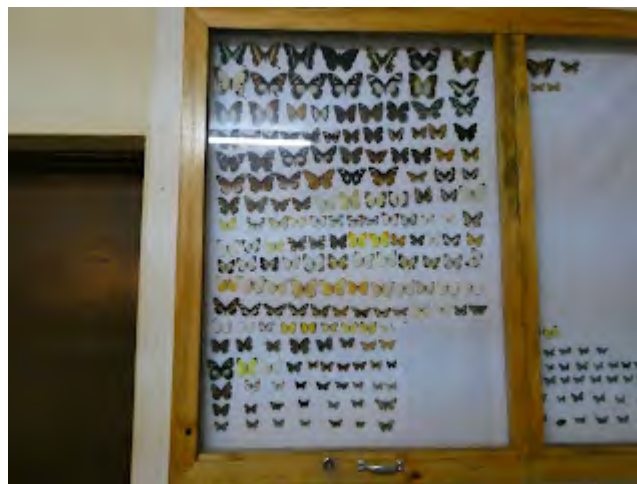
Our Group





We took our morning coffee break at a nice rest area with a pavilion. It even had clean toilets! Our guides laid out a spread of coffee/tea and & coffee cakes. We enjoyed the chance to stretch our legs & chat with the view of Lake Ihema in the background. We even took the time to take a few group photos. Most of the group pictures were from Marilyn. Thank you Marilyn!





Next stop was our 11am appointment for a tour of the Akagera National Park Headquarters. It was amazingly interesting. One of the park rangers gave us a briefing about the numbers of animals in the park & how they are working hard to manage them & increase the numbers. They fight hard against the poachers. Their main problems now come from those sneaking over from Tanzania. The park is right against the Country borders. The hope for Rwanda is to build up Akagera to rival Ngorogoro Crater in Tanzania. They are certainly on the right course. The scenery would rival it for sure. The back room was full of very technical equipment that they didn't allow us to photograph. They do a lot of GPS tracking of the animals and they also use drones. They

have very accurate information on where all 101 of their rangers are at all times & they have many of the animals collared, especially the ones that are in danger. They have recently increased the numbers of both white & black rhinos & they are doing really well. We certainly wish them luck & will help spread the word about how much we enjoyed visiting this park.



Confiscated bicycles from would be poachers

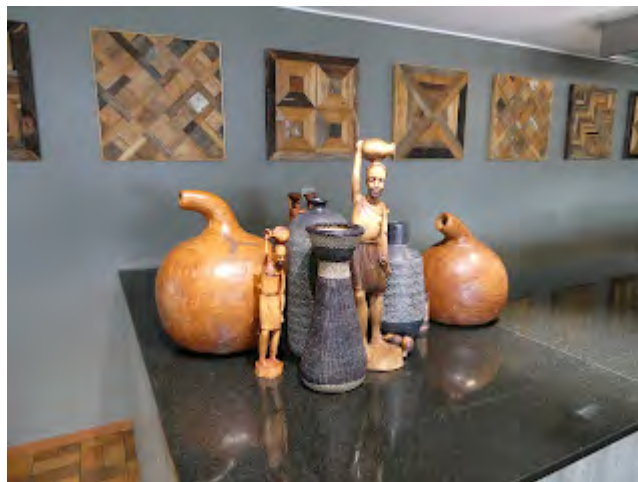




The last part of the tour was an demonstration of how the K9 team help with tracking & stopping the poachers. They were very well trained & very scary. The man had no chance of getting away when the dog wanted to stop him!!!! The dogs & the men looked to be in excellent condition! They breed their dogs from the local villages to help with tsetse fly immunity. It's funny to think that many of the poachers are on bicycles!!







We got back to the lodge to enjoy a marvelous lunch served outside on the open deck. It was fabulous. Finally managed to get a picture of the Wire-Tailed Swallows. Had to get a picture of some of the interesting object de art that are scattered around the lodge.



Baboon Family enroute to the lake



Reed Buck waiting for us at the dock







Elephant Dung!

After a short break we met again to leave the lodge for our Boating Safari on Lake Ihema. It was a short drive down to the small dock. On the way we saw our regular family of Baboons and there was a Reed Buck waiting for us down at the dock.

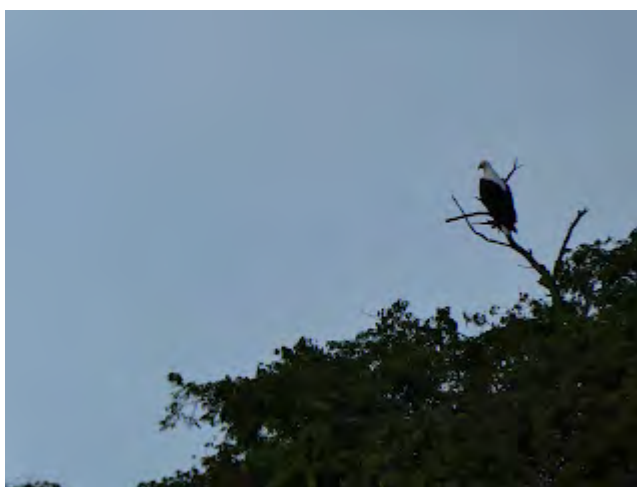
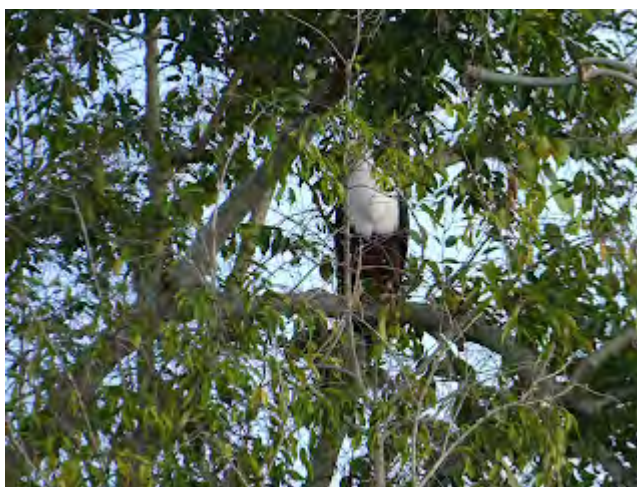


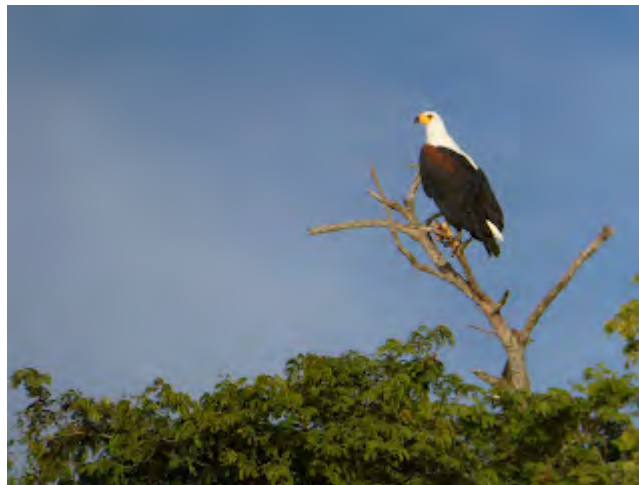






Once we were loaded and settled into the boat with our life jackets, we immediately headed across the lake. Our National Park Ranger (the same one we had for the Night Safari (Manual Sr) spotted an Elephant just inside the trees on the shoreline. We couldn't spot him at first, but he stomped around a bit, then came out in full view. My video follows him for much of our watch.

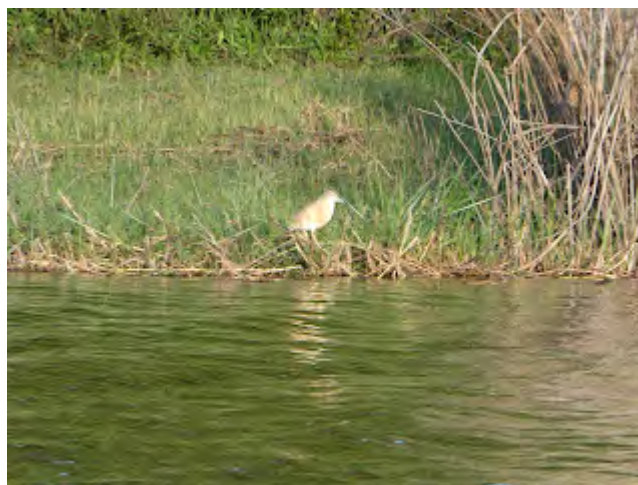




Another Fish Eagle



There were 2 beautiful Sea Eagles there also. Never tire of them - just like our Bald Eagle. The best picture is from Ken of course!



Squacco Heron



Little Heron



Cape Buffalo & Cattle Egret



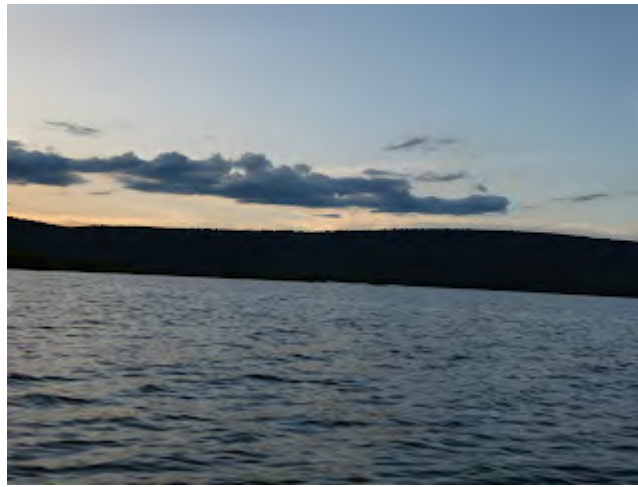


More Cape Buffalo & Cattle Egrets



Hippo, Cattle Egret, & Crocodile

We continued along the edge of the lake, enjoying the beautiful weather & tons of wildlife. It was a gorgeous afternoon!







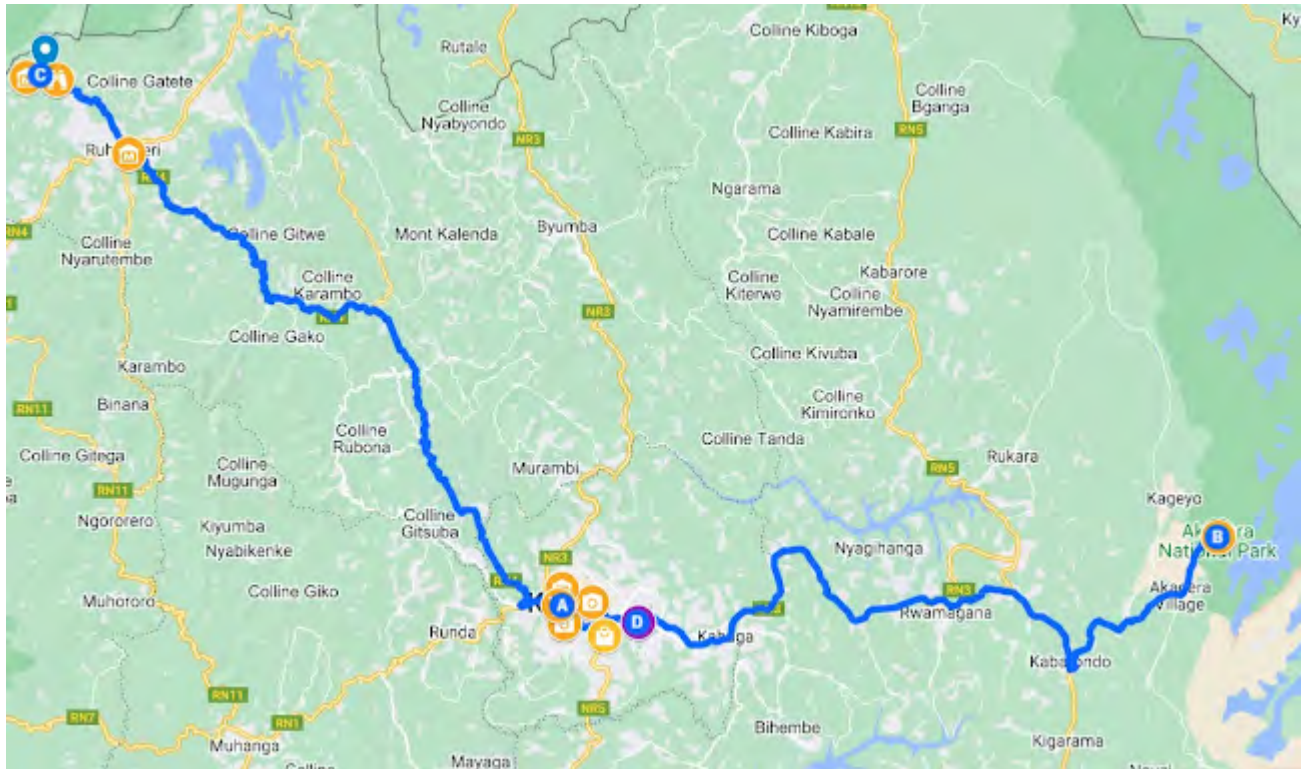
Crocodile in the shadows



The final part of our boat cruise took us to a huge flock of birds & more gorgeous views. We got another Sea Eagle in a huge Candalabra tree and an enormous crocodile in the shadows of the bushes. Photo was from Ken again of course! There was a mix of Anhingas & Herons & Egrets & they were lovely & noisy! So ended another beautiful day in Rwanda. Back to the Lodge & we had a lovely dinner before all heading to bed early again!!! We leave early & on to the west side of Rwanda for our long awaited Gorillas!!!!

Akagera NP across Rwanda to Volcanoes NP

- Monday, 12 Dec 2022



Gonna be a long drive today - all the way from Eastern Rwanda to Western Rwanda! With a stop in Kigali for Covid tests!! And to pick up Tom & Marilynn's long awaited luggage!!!





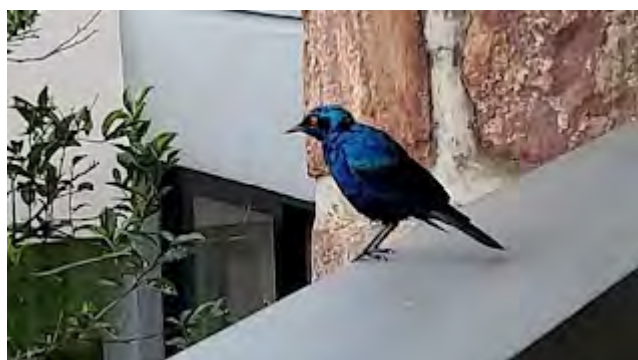


Wire-Tailed Swallow

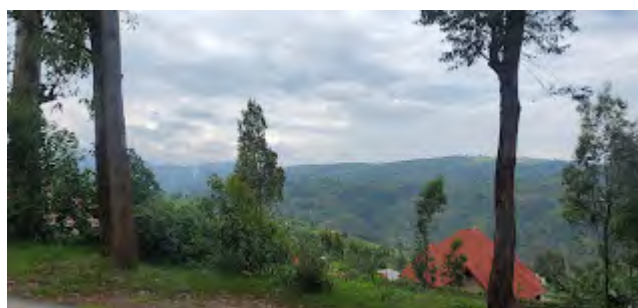




Up at 5:15am and bags out by 6:25am & on to breakfast. Tom & Marilyn were the only ones there! But the others all drifted in. Finally managed a picture of the Wire Tailed Swallow that were flitting around all the time. Also got a picture of Rose, one of our waitresses. She was just adorable. Took a few shots around the beautiful restaurant.



Greater Blue-eared Starling







Stopped at the entry way for a few last pictures of the scenery & got a fair close up of a Greater Blue-eared Starling. Couldn't resist one final picture of our room as we finished up our packing.







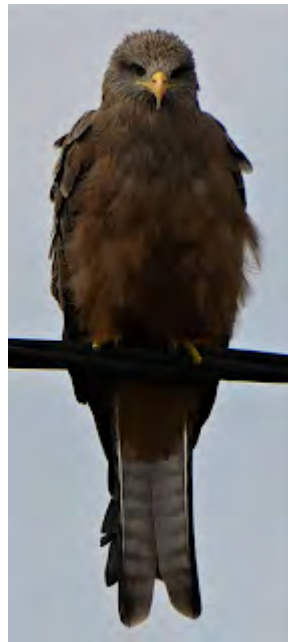


On the way out of the park we said bye to our faithful Baboon family. Then most exciting for me was spotting a Woodland Kingfisher! And our other faithful, a White Browed Coucal. Bachu spotted another Black Bellied Bustard, but I couldn't get a picture.









Black Kite



Pied Crow



Then we were back to "civilization" of a sort! At least more people & less wild animals! We made a quick stop for a pee break where we'd stopped before & George bought a couple of bottles of wine while I snapped pictures of the Black Kite looking for his mid morning snack! Just because, I took a picture of a Pied Crow. Just as an on the side, for some reason ebird doesn't allow a choice of a Black Kite, closest is a Black Winged Kite which is quite a bit different. Very strange.





We had to pass through Kigali as we traveled from the far east side of the country to the far west side. We made a stop there for several reasons. Issac peeled off to take Tom & Marilyn to the airport to collect their luggage, while we headed to the clinic to get our Covid tests to visit the Mountain Gorillas at Volcanoes National Park. Our group had no problems at all & then we waited a bit in an outside seating area for Tom & Marilyn and Ken & Sue. Bachu had realized that our battery was low, so he headed out to replace it while we waited. They had issues with finding the luggage, but finally showed up. Then there was a mix up with Marilyn & Sue's test, so we waited even longer. Finally it was all sorted out & we made a short lunch stop at a local restaurant with a buffet. Felt like we had waited forever, but we were at the restaurant as 12:30p and it was mobbed. Not to worry, the management were waiting for us & had a table reserved. We enjoyed our meal & got back on the road.







Toilet instructions for the men at the Pit stop







We had several hours of uneventful driving as we climbed into the mountains heading to Volcanoes National Park. The scenery got wilder & more beautiful. It drizzled off & on. We made one pit stop, just for the toilet. Bachu told us that the building & outdoor restaurant next door were owned by a local man that had made good. Started with nothing, but worked his way up & now helped other locals to make a go of it & sponsored children's education. Very impressive. Marlyn got a photo of the instructions in the men's toilet! The Virungas are the 5 volcanos looming nearer & nearer.









Issac was always on the look out for a Learning & Discovery and he found a really good one!!! There was a group of locals hand splitting logs! We all trooped over to watch. It was amazing. I wish I had taken a video. They made it look simple, so they let our guys try their hand at it. It was obviously not as easy as it looked! Ken & Rick both tried & said the major issue was trying to keep enough pressure on the saw blade to keep it in the slot. They pretty much failed! Issac tried & he didn't do much better. We were surrounded by children that were asking for our email addresses & looking for handouts. It was a fun way to get out to the jeep for a bit & stretch our legs!





It was only a few more minutes drive to our lodge. It was not the one we had in our books, apparently there was a last minute change. Our guide said this one was his preference because it was closer to the park. We were happy to get there & enjoyed some hot refreshments while Issac handed out the keys. It was a rather interesting entrance because of a rough dirt road up the side of the mountain. It was thundering strongly as we arrived and drizzling as we headed up the sidewalks to our cabins.





We were all very pleased with our rooms. They were huge. Each an individual cabin with a fireplace. Our view was lovely, even if covered in heavy clouds. A young man came to light the fireplace before we left for dinner.



Issac had us meet for a briefing on tomorrow's Gorilla hike. Gonna be an early one!! But we're all very excited! Have to be all geared up for the hike, gators & all!! We had a before dinner drink & chattered happily!





Dinner was delicious. Our chef was doing stir fry to order & we all enjoyed the flames as he spiced things up. There were lots of vegetable side choices and as usual we ate too much. After dinner no one hung around to chat, we scurried back up the sidewalks & found water bottles warming the foot of our beds! We had a leak in the shower that had the floor in the bathroom squishy. But there were slippers, so we managed okay. Sure enjoyed the fireplace! Finished up a bottle of wine & made a few notes in the journal. Got all the gear out & ready! Then to sleep. Tomorrow is the big long awaited day!!!!

The BIG Day - Gorilla Trek in Volcanoes NP

- Tuesday, 13 December 2022









Early early early morning! Up at 4:50am!!!! Had to be at breakfast at 6am and all geared up for hiking and in the jeeps at 6:30am. But we were all so hyped, it was pretty easy! And the day was clearing nicely! Isaac came in first thing to let us know that we were all cleared as Covid Negative! Yeah!!!









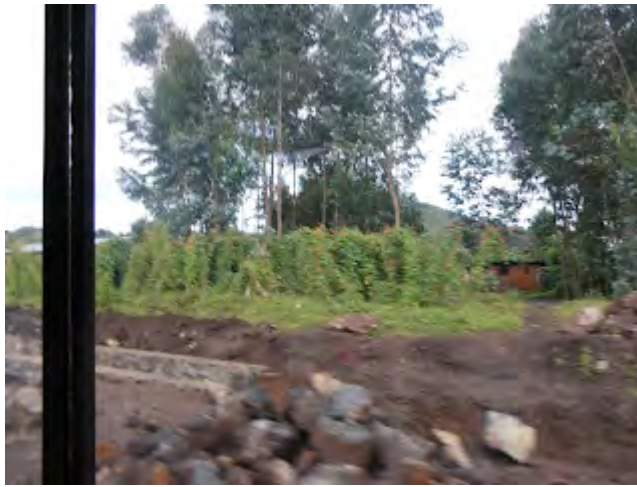
It was a beautiful morning drive to the Volcanoes NP Headquarters to get our team assignments. Took about 20 minutes to get there.





African Coffee - ordered for me by Bachu - it had Ginger & all sorts of other spices in it!!









Northern Gray-headed Sparrow



Isaac immediately took off to work out our teams. We couldn't go together because they only allow 8 tourists in each group. Since we were 10, they divided us up into 6 & 4. We were with Pat & Rick and the others went together. We had one other couple assigned to our group. He was a lively black man celebrating his birthday, but his wife was rather a pain. She was scared that we'd see a buffalo or elephant. There is a coffee shop with free coffee. I had ordered a black coffee, but before I could pick it up, Bachu came in and said I had to have an African Coffee. It was yummy - creamy with all kinds of spices. Ginger was the only one I recognized. Michele & I wandered around trying to identify birds. We saw an African Thrasher, a Northern Grey headed sparrow & a Speckled Mousebird. Then we waved goodbye as they took off with their group. Our guide, Iggy joined us in Bachu's jeep.





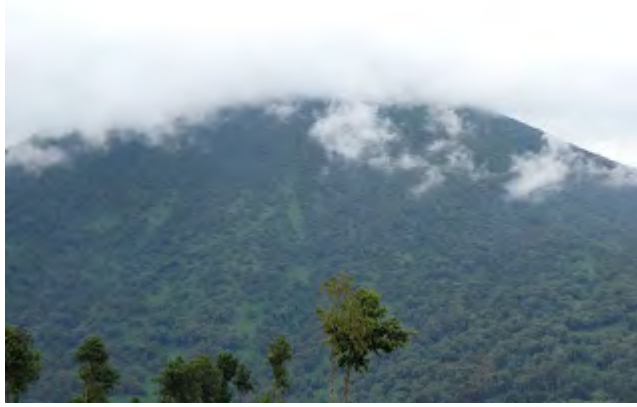




Short trip to get to the start point for our Gorilla trek, but along some really rough roads. No one there except our guides & porters. They handed out walking sticks & assigned our porters. OAT had arranged for each of us to have a porter (pretty much whether we wanted one or not!). My porter was Phocus (pronounced like Focus a camera). He had a big smile & stuck to me like glue. At first I was a bit skeptical, but he proved totally worth it by the end of the trip! He carried my pack & held my hand most of the way! I adored him! He spoke excellent English & managed to keep me at the front of the pack most of the time. George's was Juvenile & he carried his back back, but was otherwise non existent (George wouldn't hold hands with him!!! Ha Ha!).









Black & White Casqued Hornbill



We took about a half hour to get the short distance across pretty damp fields to the stone fence with a wooden style that marked our entrance into Volcanoes National Park. We stopped a few times enroute for our guides to give us some info. I spotted a few birds, but no pictures. There were some bright colored birds flitting nearby, but could only identify them as a type of Sunbird. A Black & White Casqued Hornbill flew over just as we got to the fence. These 2 pictures are downloaded from ebird.







We waited at the gate for a while as the guide sent a couple of National Park rangers in to confirm that our targeted Gorilla family had settled in for a morning snack & we could go to them. While we were waiting he filled us in on them. They are a family named Sabyinyo (after the nearest of the volcanic peaks) and are one of the most well known of the families & most visited. There are 2 silverbacks & one is the younger brother of the leader. He is allowed to mate. The most unusual aspect is that he is BALD! He's the only known bald gorilla & is being studied do to the strange anomaly! He has been bald for many years. There are 16 gorillas in the family & 2 babies, the youngest of which is 2 months old. Here's a link to read more about them

- <https://www.volcanoesparkrwanda.org/information/sabyinyo-gorilla-family/>

They also gave us instructions about how to make a purring/low growling noise that is considered comforting. Kinda like murmuring "it's okay, we're harmless." The guards were much better at it than we were & they did make it frequently when we got near the gorillas. They warned us to always follow their directions & to never run. If a gorilla came towards us, we were to slowly back away while making that noise. Hummm???



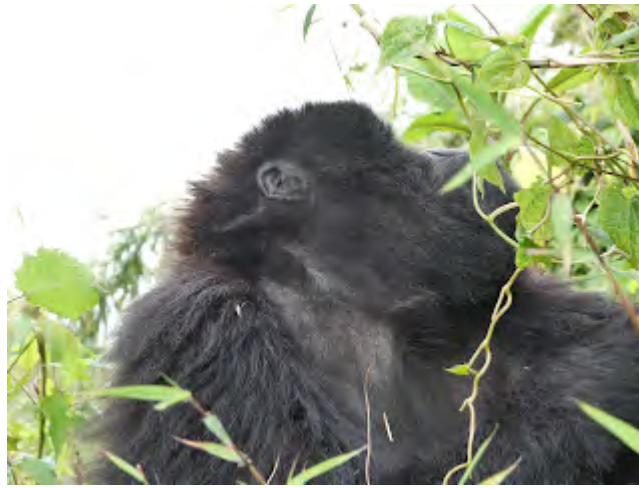






We got the come ahead about 9am and headed into the park with our 6 porters, 2 guides & gun toting security. We slogged through muddy fields & along creek beds. It was slippery at times & I was happy for both Phocus's hand, the walking stick, & my gaiters! We spotted a Golden Monkey & stopped for a few minutes to watch him traverse the heavy jungle. A real plus as tomorrow is the Golden Monkey day! We soon spotted Gorilla poo, so we knew we were on the right track. The 4 of us had no problems, but the complaining woman had some difficulties.

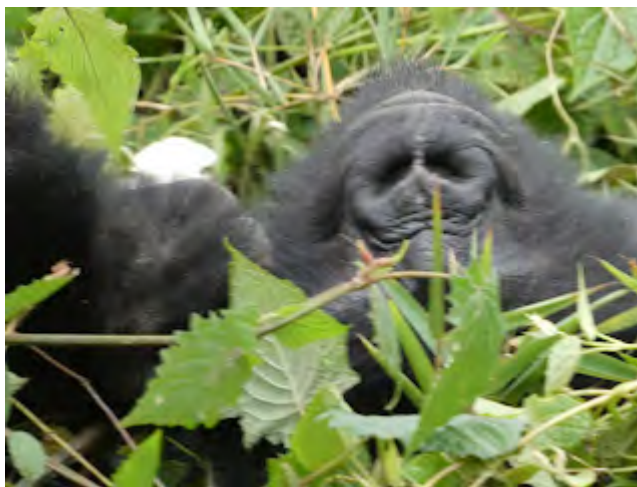






After about 40 minutes of walking, we found our first gorilla! SOOOOOOO EXCITING!!! We all took turns taking pictures of her. As soon as we were in position to actually see the gorillas, our porters were told to stay back and we had to put on our masks. The remainder of the time it was just the 6 of us and our 2 guides. There seemed to be some rangers or guards or something out of sight around us (our guides would sometimes talk to them), but it felt like we were alone with the family. Our guide made that murmuring noise often as he cleared the path.

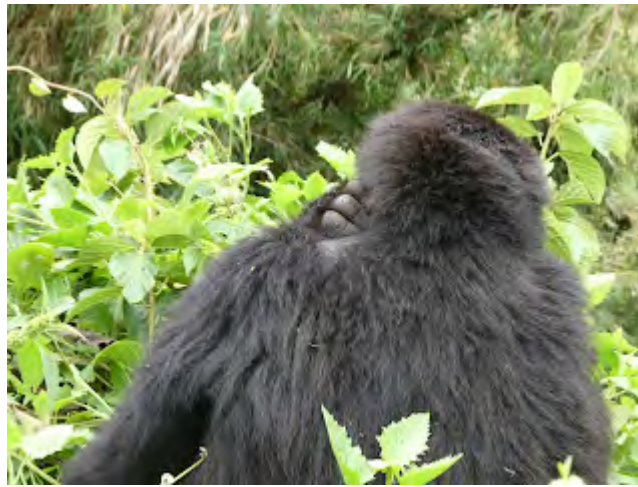






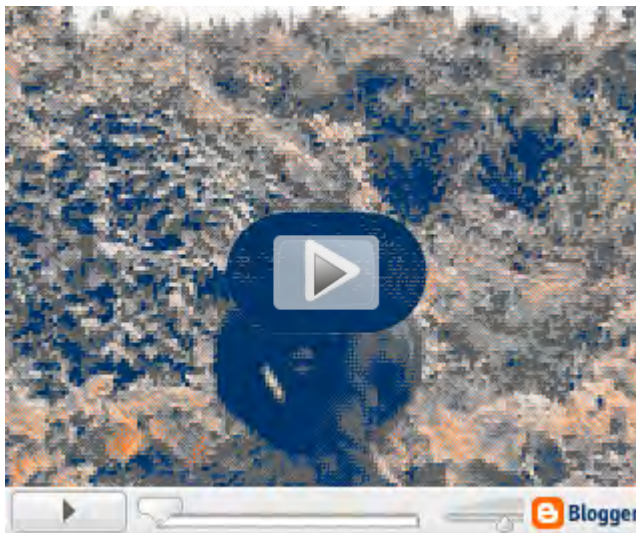






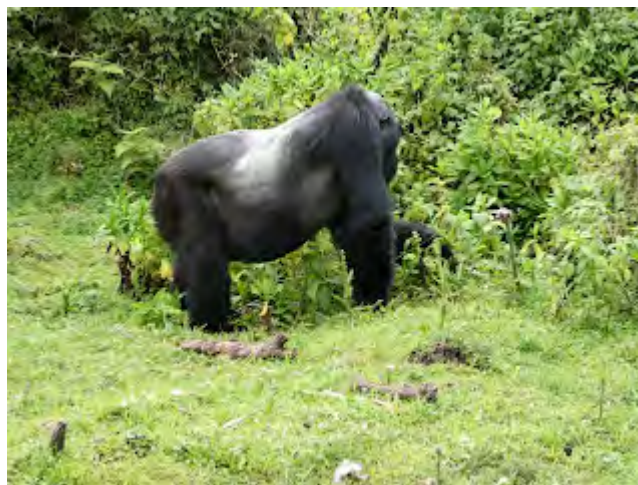


After finding the first gorilla, it seemed that we were surrounded by them. We could hear them in the vegetation all around us and as our guides used their machetes to cut our way through the brambles, we came upon different ones in every direction. They were climbing trees, sleeping, wandering, playing with each other & eating & eating & eating! It was extremely exciting. We were definitely climbing up hill, but it was hard to recognize the elevation change because we were moving through such thick vegetation. Thank goodness for the guides using their machetes. We could never have gotten through otherwise.



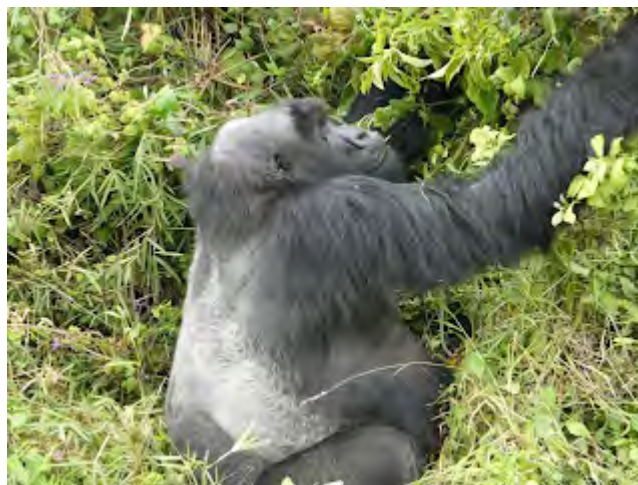
We kept running into one large male. Our guide called him a "trouble maker." He would appear to be totally ignoring us and then amble closer & closer. Once he came running right past & scared us. I had gorilla hair on my legs! Our guide would encourage us to back away from him slowly, but he followed us around quite a bit.





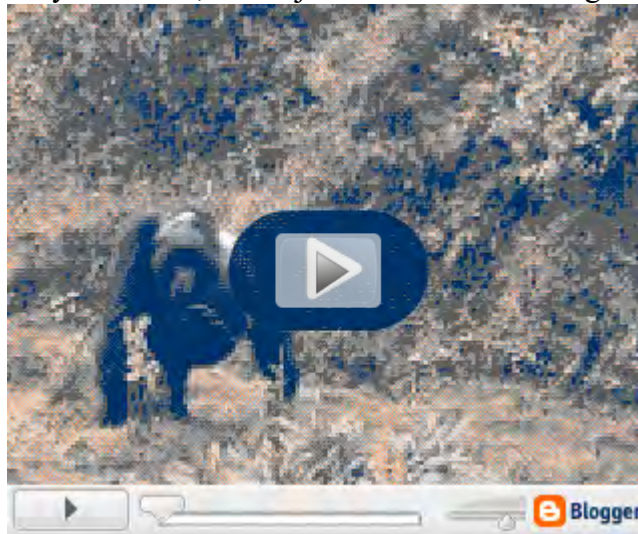








And then we found 1 of the Silverbacks. It was the bald one (I thought of him as Bob, the Bald Guy!!). We watched him for the remainder of our time. We were only to be allowed 1 hour, but it was really more like an hour and a half. We could have stayed forever, it was just a wonderful feeling to be near them.



Just to watch him eating was very exciting! He seemed very intent on getting just the right mix of the plants.



It was fun watching him pull at the vines. Such a huge animal to just enjoy munching on the vegetation!

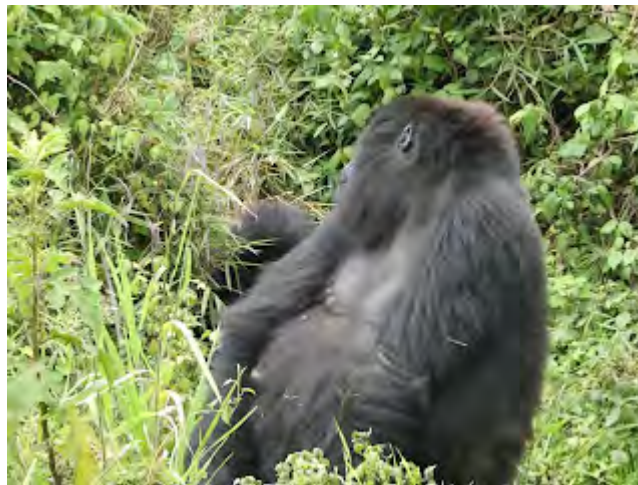
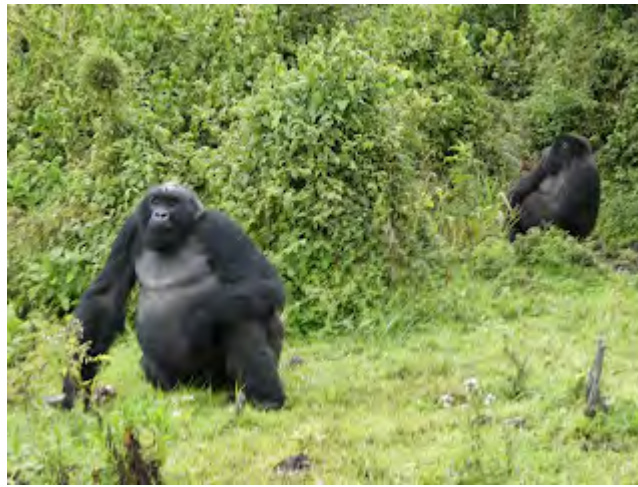


My such a big butt you have!! Wouldn't say that to his face though!!!



At one point the guide suggested the 4 of us stand with our back to him to get a picture. We had just gotten into place & he started motioning for us to move towards him. Unbeknowst to us, Bob had started moving towards us! Guess he wanted a better position in the picture!!!









He is the younger brother, but is allowed to breed and when one of females showed up, she immediately started grooming him. He seemed to quite enjoy that. We loved it when he stretched out on his belly to give her better access! He pretty much ignored us. We hated saying goodbye, but it was starting to look pretty dark & our guides were getting antsy. Sure enough, just as we moved away back to the clearing where we had left our porters, it began to lightly drizzle. Our porters quickly opened our packs & gave us our rain gear & covered our back packs with paunchos. I put away my camera & my phone and it began to pour! We hurried back the way we had come through a total downpour. We were slipping and sliding everywhere. I stepped in holes over my ankles a couple of times. I was soooooo relieved to have Phocus to lean on. He kept me from falling many times. I never actually fell, but it was close. Wouldn't have hurt anything (except pride), but would have covered me in muck!!

We got back to the starting point in record time and Bachu was there to greet us. The rain had slowed, so we were able to say bye bye to our porters & guides & give them tips. Then it was into the jeep & back to the hotel! Luckily it was not particularly cold, but we were shivery with excitement! Just babbled non-stop back to the hotel!

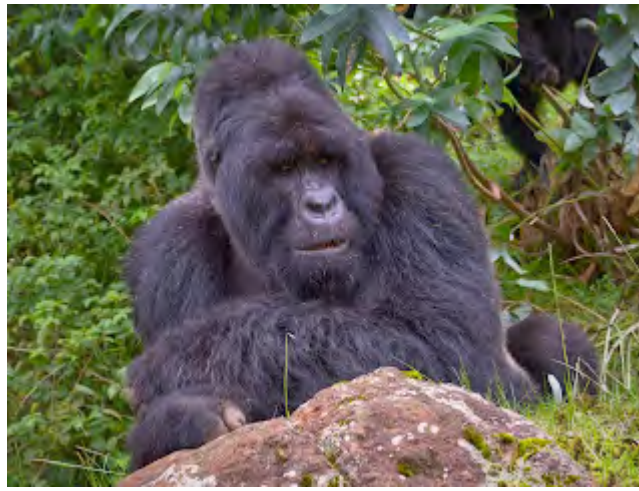
They met us at the door of the hotel with chairs & slippers in the front entry way. They quickly stripped off our wet/muddy gaiters, socks & shoes & ponchos. They bundled us in dry ponchos & put slippers on our feet & sent us to our cabins. It was not raining here at the hotel. We found Marlyn & Michele in the bar celebrating with whiskey's!! We all cheered & then we had an half hour to change into dry clothes & come back for lunch!

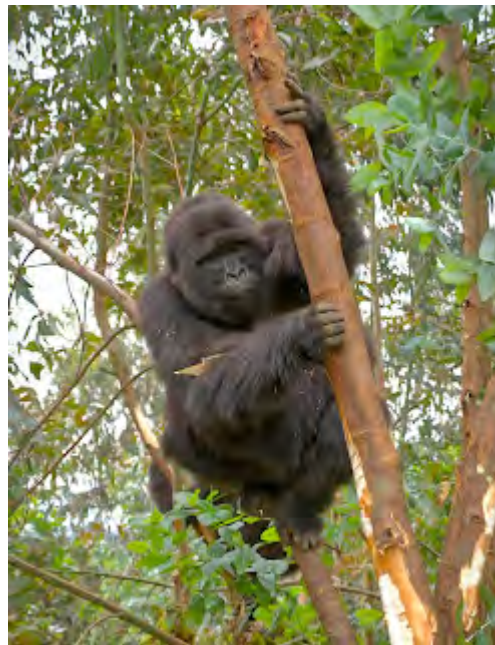














Didn't get any pictures of lunch, but we were all soooooo very excited & talked all over one another telling about our experiences. The others had had a much easier Gorilla visitation. They never even entered Volcanoes National Park! The Gorilla family had conveniently escaped over the fence to come see them. I will include a few of Ken's best pictures!!! Thank you Ken!!!









We felt very lucky to get to tour the Dian Fossey Museum sponsored by Ellen DeGeneres. It just officially opened up in February. <https://gorillafund.org/ellencampus/> It was very interesting. There is a surround sound/interactive movie room (unfortunately one screen was not working) and they had some awesome virtual reality glasses that made it seem like you were interacting with the gorillas. Michele said she had used much better ones in an airport lounge, but I was really impressed! There was a lot of history about Dian & her gorillas & a huge map showing gorilla families throughout the park. It was originally listed as an optional tour, but we all wanted to go. No "official" entry fee, but a suggested donation of \$20 each. We were happy to pay it!



After a complete tour of the downstairs, we all had coffee or tea at the bar (included free with the entry donation). I had another African coffee! Yummy! Huge fan!







We all then trooped upstairs to check out the conference room & the outdoor veranda where there can entertain & have outside dinner parties. It was lovely with views almost 360*. This is very close to the actual area that Dian had her camp.





Just before leaving, most of us wandered around the small garden area (it's built over the sewage recycling station). Saw the African Thrasher again. He looks like a Robin. Flowers were just starting to bloom. Will probably be very pretty in a few weeks. Saw another bird that we couldn't readily identify. Later I looked it up & think it was a Grauer's Swamp Warbler.



Back to the hotel for an hour in the room to warm back up & get ready for the evening. Our Fireplace man came in & built a lovely fire!





Back to the Hotel bar for an extremely interesting talk by Dr Noel for a talk on the Gorilla Doctors. He was a veterinarian, but well versed in everything gorilla. He was supposed to talk for an hour, but Michele kept asking questions & kept him going for more than an hour and a half. He was very interesting.

Then straight to dinner. Yummy tonight – mushroom soup & lots of choices. Rick had bought Irish Cream to share. It was yummy! George was still really cold, so we headed back to room about 8:30p. Our fire was already almost out, but George got it going a little to warm up the room again. Moved the heater back to the bathroom. I caught up the journal for today & ready for bed at 9:30pm. Cant' believe how early we're going to bed, but not sleeping good. Think it's the malaria pills. We took them at noon today to try & slide it to breakfast instead of lunch. George seems to have a cold – dry cough that's getting worse. Also, his nettle stings are still burning. Mine all went away.

Bed about 9:30pm. Fabulous day and lived up to the many years of expectation!!!!

Golden Monkey Trek in Volcanoes NP

- Wednesday, 14 December 2022







Another early morning. Breakfast at 6:15am and in the jeeps by 7am. But a glorious day! Clear skies & comfy temperature.



Once again, we passed by the park where they hold the annual Gorilla baby naming ceremony. It is not only to name the baby gorillas, but also to thank all the locals that help with keeping them safe & the tourist happy & willing to come visit!





Once again, we had a short wait while we were assigned to a group. This time we were allowed to stay together. We were only 9 today, Pat had to stay back at the lodge to nurse her foot. Had another African coffee!







It was a short drive to our starting point. I couldn't resist taking a lot of pictures, the mountain silhouette's were gorgeous this morning!!











Our starting point was near where the other group had started their Gorilla Trek yesterday. Didn't take any pictures at the drop off point - it was a very busy tiny village & there were several small shops with very pushy salespeople. I hurried through both sides to avoid them. But once again, we were just walking through fields to the edge of the park - marked by a small stone fence.











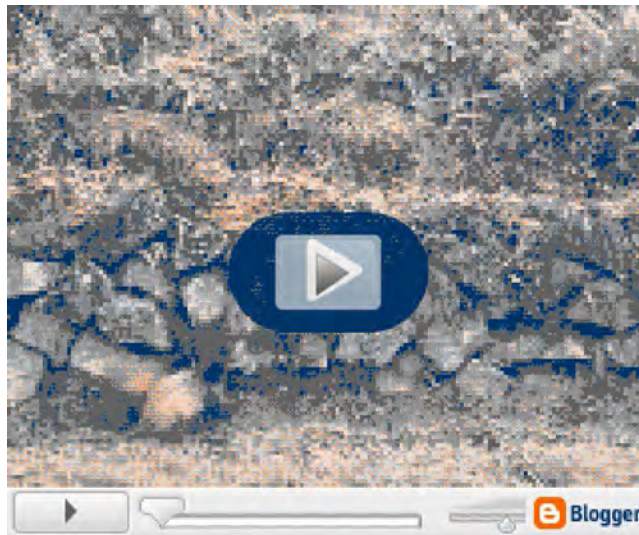




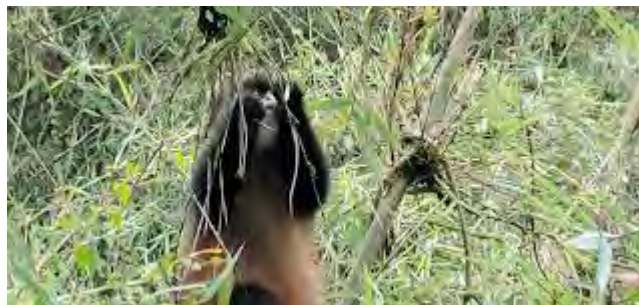
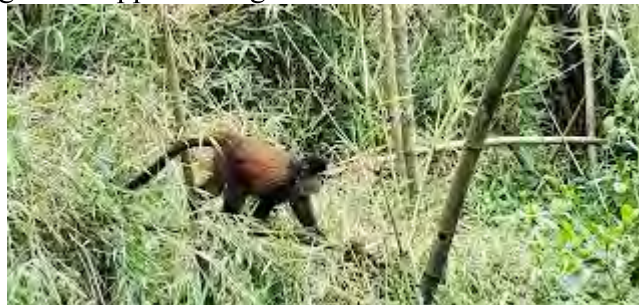




Once we found the monkies, we spent about a half hour in the field with them. The government subsidizes the local farmers for the potatoes that the monkies eat, so they will be there for the tourist. It took a few years for them to decide that potatoes were good to eat, but now they love them and provide an easy way for the tourist to see them & enjoy them. Quite a few of them had babies hanging on their chests. The babies had their tails tightly wrapped around like a rubber band to hold them on!!! They didn't pay much attention to us, so it was hard to get a full face photo.



One ran right between Ken's legs & I happened to get a video of it. Too cute.









We crossed over the sty into the park & spent another half hour watching the Monkey's in the trees. Our guide spent a bit of time talking about them & how they have intermingled so that some of them look very similar to the Blue & Silver Monkeys. They are all definitely related. It was really entertaining to see their antics as they jumped from tree to branch & ran nimbly across tiny limbs. There were lots of babies & plentiful food for them.

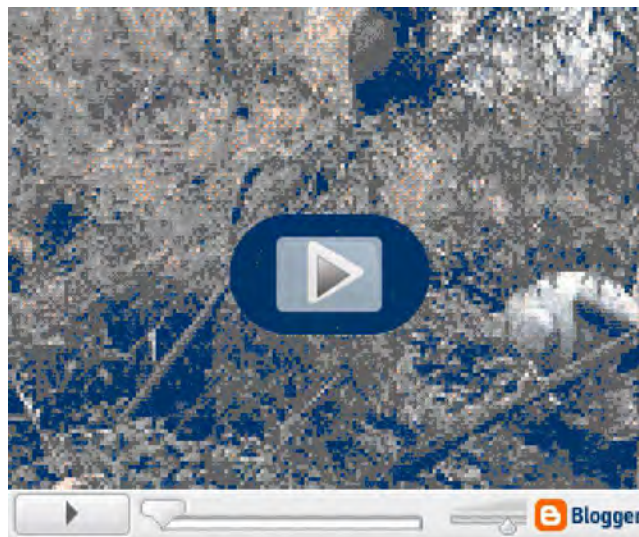
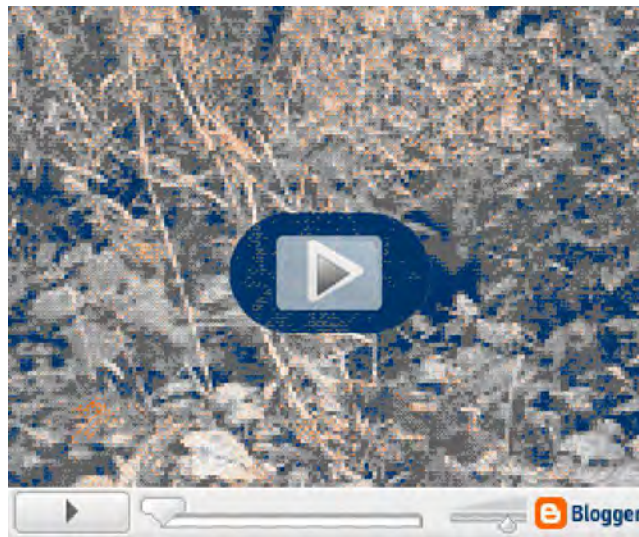








Ken of course had gotten the best pictures. Here's a selection of his for everyone's enjoyment! Thanks again Ken!!!!





Just a couple of fun videos of the monkey's in motion! It was a fun marvelous day!!!



Northern Grey headed sparrow



Pin Tailed Whydah



White Browed Robin Chat





On the way back out to meet Isaac & Bachu, I managed a few bird pictures. Added Grey headed Sparrow, White Browed Robin Chat & a Pin Tailed Whydah to the day's checklist. I did get a few pictures of the little village at the Trail head. Not much to look at & very pushy sales people. Rick did buy a nice walking stick that came apart for storage in the luggage.







We made a short stop back at Mountain Gorilla View Lodge for lunch (they met us to take our hiking shoes, gaiters & rain coats again!!!!) & then immediately headed back out. We stopped for a few souvenirs at a local gift shop. Isaac was looking for something to wrap my birthday present for shipment in my checked luggage & others just wanted to buy a few knick knacks. It was successful!!!





We continued on to the Will Barnhill School of Hope, but had a bit of a complicated trip as we found the roads to the school had been totally torn up & blocked! Isaac persisted & we wandered around the neighborhood. We were with Bachu & just followed. It was a mess. Glad we were in the Land Rovers!!!











But we arrived & after a short welcome by Simon, the over all manager, we were introduced to Jackie & she started our tour. As we walked through the compound, she first told us that she had designed & made her outfit! We were totally impressed already! First stop was where they took the originally sheared wool & cleaned & dyed it. They actually raise their own sheep, grow the plants & make their own dyes and do all the intermediary processing before actually weaving & matting all manner of clothes, blankets, & stuffed animals. It's incredible. This first stop showed us the cleaning & dying.







We moved through the grounds to another classroom where they continued the processing & winding the wool to make the small stuffed animals. The animals are all made without any seams, using felting. It's amazing.











We continued the tour to see some of the final piecing & a little shipping area where they finalize the stuffed animals for shipment to department stores & gift shops throughout the world. They make some precious little designs.







The final classroom we visited had spinning wheels for the processing of the yarn into skeins. This was a more familiar step for us! Looked like what we've seen in the US at Mountain Home & in other museums. Everything looked clean & well maintained.







Our final part of the tour was to see where they raise Angora rabbits. They shear them every 3 months for the furr. They make little wool vests for them to wear after shearing to keep them warm & protected. They let us feed them. They looked very happy & well taken care of! Great fun! And brilliant to add that step of full self support.





Olive Bellied Sunbird - my picture

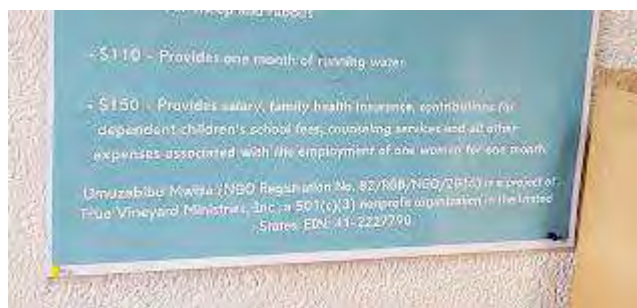


Olive Bellied Sunbird - picture complement of ebird.com



Olive Bellied Sunbird - picture complement of ebird.com

The icing on the cake for me was finding a sunbird in the flowering bushes beside the rabbits. Couldn't identify while we were there, but after we got back to the US, I processed my pictures & did a comparison and finally determined that this was an Olive Bellied Sunbird. Including a couple of pictures that I downloaded from ebird to show it full body.





Our final stop was to purchase our own gorillas to take home! I also took a picture of the explanation of how to donate. This is definitely a worthy cause! We waved goodbye to Simon & headed back to our lodge.

[Handspun Hope Website](#) Here's a link to a full explanation of their school & project.









We got back to the lodge & found a group of dancers waiting for us. They immediately started dancing & singing as we grabbed chairs & settled in for a show! They were a bit younger than the previous group & just as enthusiastic! We couldn't wait to join in!



They even let us play the drums! It was a fun group for sure! We had wanted to show them one of our dances too, but decided it would be too difficult in the grass outdoors. Just enjoyed our time with them!











George & Pamela with Bachu!

Our final night in Rwanda was a glorious Goodbye celebration. They had transformed the bar into an indoor barbeque and served us Banana Beer (ick) and wine. We said our goodbyes to Bachu & to Pat & Rick. The only worrisome thing was a call saying that our flight out of Kigali was delayed. Good part is that we can sleep in a couple of hours! Bad part is that we might miss our connection in Uganda. Humm? We gave tips to a couple of the special staff & I still had a few blinkies to hand out. Gave our tips to Isaac & Bachu also. Our Fire place guy followed us home & relit the fireplace to let us spend a last cozy night at the lodge!!! Tomorrow it's on to Tanzania!!!

Transition from Volcanoes NP to Kigali-Entebbe- Addis Ababa-Kilamenjaro & on to Karatu, Tanzania - Thursday, 15 - Friday, 16 December 2022





Up at 4:40am to finish packing & head to breakfast. We were the first there - even beat the staff!!! Originally we were not supposed to have had breakfast, we would have been long gone. But they trickled in & we all managed breakfast & a quick pee & toothbrush before loading up into the jeeps by 7am.





The morning was beautiful as I saw a bird, but couldn't id it. All the staff came out to wave goodbye to us. Bachu had had to leave, so we had a fill in drive to get us to the airport along with Isaac.





The drive was easy. There were lots of people out & about along the road, but minimal traffic.

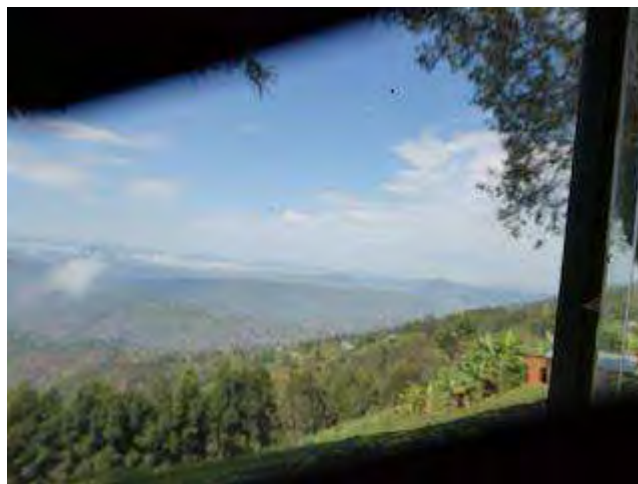






The mountains were living up to their names of Misty! We stopped once to stretch our legs & get a final group shot with the beautiful Misty Mountains behind & below us. Isaac even tried his hand at a selfie!!





The drive continued easily with beautiful views as we came down out of the mountains.



Picked up tons of traffic in Kagali & oh so many motorcycles!!! What a city!! We got to the airport fine. Discovered that our flight to Entebbe had been delayed again & we will definitely miss our connection! Isaac worked in a panic with OAT & they ended up deciding the best route was for us to fly to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia & connect with a flight there to Kilimanjaro. Lousy connection. We have a 6 hour delay in Entebbe & a 7 hour delay in Ethiopia. Really stinks, but can't see any other option. Apparently Rwanda Air had a melt down with 3 of their planes out of service & morning fog delaying/canceling half of their flights. Crap! Easily got checked in for our flight & we got everyone into the lounge at the airport to wait.





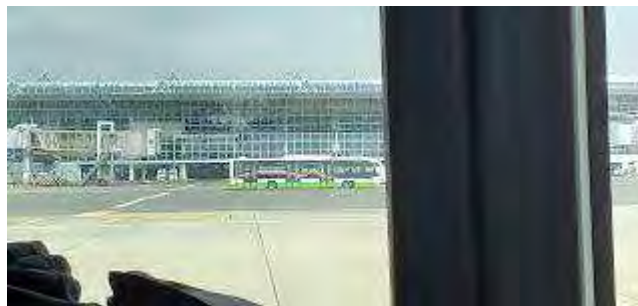
Flight took off about 4pm from Kigali and arrived in Entebbe about 45 minutes later. Easy flight, just annoying that we'll be facing a 7 hour delay there! They had put George & I in "business class" so we got a little extra leg room. Ticked off Michele because they were in the cattle car with the others, but it was only for the little short 45 minute flight & it had worked out well to get us all in the lounge!





OAT had gotten us into the Karibuni Lounge at Entebbe (we were even met by an official from Rwanda air who escorted us there!). So we had a nice place to relax, eat, & drink, & nap while we waited for the 2am flight to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia!!!





We landed without any incident at 5am at Addis Ababa. The airport is huge, but it was easy to find a quiet place with metal lounge chairs to wait out our 7 hour delay. We snoozed a little, walked a little and just tried to stay sane on the long delay. It was a mobbed airport, with tons of major upscale shops - fully international. OAT had tried to get us in the lounge, but the airport wasn't allowing it. We couldn't use our Priority pass either. Flight took off at 10:15am. We were all exhausted, but easily got on the plane & we were all in crappy seats at the back of the 1st section.





The flight was okay. At least it was not rough.



Michele arrives at Kilamenjaro - finally!!!! Picture compliments of Marlyn! Thanks Marlyn!!



Thank you Marilynn for the arrival pictures!!!



We landed easily at about noon, but getting through customs/passport control was kinda a mess, folks milling around with no good signage or instructions. We all finally got through and even with all our luggage. Our 2 guides were there to greet us which was a big relief. Alex was the main guide with Nixon as his associate. Already miss Pat & Rick - they didn't come on the post trip.









Immediately loaded into the jeeps & started out. Recognized some things as we drove - the location of our previous hotel & some of the markets. Also where we had stopped to help make baskets. Made a short pee stop at a service station. My camera shutter was not fully opening, so my pictures are for crap. Assuming it was the high humidity or maybe some dirt stuck in the shutter.









Alex decided we needed some entertainment, so he stopped at a Maasai Village. They all came out to greet us and after the initial introductions, they did a welcome dance & then had us join them.





They engaged us in a jumping contest. Marlyn & Tom got engaged! Both were pretty darn good! It was wonderful fun (especially after the past 24 hours of inactivity & depression!!!)





A demonstration of the Maasai method for starting a fire. They had quite some dexterity! First attempt was a bust, but then the expert stepped up & got it going.







A tour of their humble abodes followed. I went with Sue & we sat in the chief's hut while he tried to describe his daily life. It was dark & close in there! But didn't smell of anything, not even smoke, so that was a relief. I certainly prefer my RV for daily living!!! This is a compilation of all our pictures!







The rest of the drive was easy, just fought to stay awake. Arrived at Tloma Lodge about 6:45pm. Alex had us drop the luggage into our rooms (ours is lovely - pictures to follow) and then up to meet about the rest of our stay.



We chatted about our expectations. All of us agreed that while we enjoy the school visits - especially since the teacher would be called in from her holiday break - we would forego the school visit tomorrow & add in the Elephant Cave hike instead. So another early morning to get in as much of the Lake Manyard National Park as possible!! Our dinner was a lovely buffet on an outside veranda. Awesome. We will certainly enjoy our stay here. Met the lovely young hostess named Mariam. Alex called her Marry Him. Got everyone to giggling & set the stage for a lively visit to Tanzania!!! More tomorrow!!!