



Mother elephants gather to support their own as they bring forth life in Murchison Falls National Park on Easter Sunday. PHOTO BY ALLAN MARTINY.

The step into new world

We saw one elephant lying on the ground, wiggling and twisting. With a growl and a deafening trumpet, a baby elephant came out of its belly. It calmly stepped into the world as if it was the most natural thing.

BY AGGREY NSHEKANABO

In 2013, I accompanied British author Rachel Campbell-Johnston to northern Uganda for her book *The Child's Elephant*. Little did I know that thirteen years later, on Easter Sunday, April 5, 2026, I would witness an elephant giving birth, exactly 3.4 kilometers from the Paraa pier in Murchison Falls National Park.

I had not planned to spend my Easter in the park. My family had other ideas in Kampala. But then my friend Peter Van Gorder called. "Aggrey, would you take my wife, Pauline, and me to Murchison? We need to catch up," he cajoled. I hesitated. As a family man, I no longer have the license to go wherever I please. But something stirred in

me; perhaps a longing for the wild, perhaps the pull of an old friendship. I agreed. Soon, we were joined by Nadia Cathlyn Marawka, an American with a lifetime residence permit, and Allan Martiny, a retired journalist. Off we went for a wild Easter.

On Saturday afternoon, we visited the top of the falls. Nadia, who has a physical disability, had never been allowed past the sign reading: "I have been to the top of the falls." I insisted she goes down to where the Nile plunges through a seven-metre-wide cleft. "I thought Niagara was magnificent and Victoria spectacular," Nadia said, her voice trembling with wonder, "but Murchison is indescribable. Do you see the wonder of our Lord's creation?" On her crutches, she trudged down patiently, a few tourists stealing glances at us. The cold steam from the falling water wrapped around us like a blessing.

As the sun set and baboons carried their young off the warm road, we returned to our lodge. Peter asked, "What do you think tomorrow holds?" I had checked the weather: "A little drizzle tonight, cloudy morning, rainy mid-morning, then warm afternoon. We will have a lovely game drive north, but only in the afternoon."

On Easter Sunday, after a hearty breakfast, we drove into the park's belly. I suggested skipping the usual route. "Let us try the Pakwach route, then turn west past Pakuba to the Albert Nile." At the turn to the Pakuba airstrip, we found a lioness resting beside a male buffalo carcass, the head separated from the torso. She dozed off, her muzzle stained with blood. Other vehicles gathered, so we moved on.

West of Pakuba, herds of game welcomed us; dik-diks, hartebeests (the only animals known to suffer temporary dementia), waterbucks, and hundreds of Uganda kobs. Then the skies opened. Rain hammered the roof of our vehicle. We waited.

When it softened, we turned back. On

our way, several towers of giraffes bowed to us, including one dark-shaded individual that crossed the road repeatedly, showing off its grace. Shortly after, a herd of elephants gathered by the roadside. We thought it was because of the rain. Then we saw one elephant lying on the ground, wiggling and twisting. With a growl and a deafening trumpet, a baby elephant came out of its belly. It emerged not in a gush of fluid but steadily, almost calmly, as if stepping into the world was the most natural thing.

"Wow! In my seventy-five years, this is the most marvellous thing I will ever witness!" Nadia cried. Tears glistened in her eyes.

Before we could process that, another elephant went to its knees. Soon, another baby came out.

Pauline, usually quiet, said: "Look closely, a fourth baby is being born." Another mother on the ground twisted, and a slightly bigger baby elephant slid out, failed to stand. Its legs wobbled like saplings in the wind. An older matriarch used her trunk to steady it and shooshed it gently into the bushes. The whole herd stood in a protective circle, trunks occasionally reaching out to touch the newborns.

I counted. A dozen mother elephants had gathered to support their own as they brought forth life on Easter Sunday. There were no males anywhere. Not one. It was a sisterhood of birth, a communion of matriarchs. And within the herd was a *nalongo*, a mother of twins, breastfeeding her baby girls: Apiyo, the first-born, and Acen, her sister. They nursed quietly, oblivious to the miracle they had just witnessed.

We sat in silence for a long time. The rain had stopped. The sun broke through the clouds. And somewhere in the bushes, four new elephants took their first unsteady steps into a wild, beautiful world.