



A DATE WITH THE BEASTS OF QUEEN ELIZABETH

A warthog grazing in Queen Elizabeth National Park recently. Such animals are a common site when one visits the park. There are also several bird species in the area

BY JULIUS LUWEMBA

Any one visiting Queen Elizabeth National Park will concur that indeed Uganda is the Pearl of Africa! Apart from being the second-largest game habitat in the country, Kazinga national park (as formerly known), has the biggest number of birds in the country – with over 610 species – and animal species.

JOURNEY TO QUEEN ELIZABETH

When we first visited the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre (UWEC) – call it a zoo – in Entebbe, we got a glimpse of what is contained in Uganda's wildlife (a zoo is normally the eye of a country's wildlife).

After that, we set-off, in a group of 22 (17 Swedish nationals and five Ugandans).

Although the journey to Queen Elizabeth is an estimated six hours' drive from Kampala, our trip took more hours as we had to rest for refreshments and have picture moments on the way. Besides, I doubt any tourist can bypass the Equator line at Kayabwe, on Masaka Road, without stopping for a 'selfie'. That was the case with us too.

After the picture moment, we continued with our journey before having another stop-over at Lake Mburo National Park in Mbarara district, where we spotted zebras grazing together with cattle and antelopes as a couple of crested cranes stood on one side, as if watching over the animals.

By lunchtime, we had reached Mbarara town.

The meal in Mbarara was not the best, prompting Jonathan, our lead tour-guide,

to make an early booking for dinner at the guest house we were to spend the nights while in Queen Elizabeth National Park.

Even though most of us were already tired after hours of travelling, we casually stopped to stare in admiration at different physical features, including the Mount Rwenzori.

My Swedish friends were amazed by the green hills in Bushenyi, which were covered with tea plantations.

Travelling through this part of the country makes one feel lucky. As we were still being mesmerised by the beautiful physical features, a huge elephant, seemingly in its old age, started its reluctant stroll across the road. This is when it occurred to us that we had already entered the national park. Therefore, all our vehicles had to stop, to give way for the 'owner' of the area.

All of a sudden a beautiful sunset that gave a spectrum of coloured rays to the sky appeared. We surely would not complain in case we were told that was all we had for our trip.

ARRIVAL

Finally, we had arrived at Kazinga Guest House, our home for the next few days before return to Kampala.

As it turned out, our tour was a non-stop show because while having dinner, we could see several other families of animals freely grazing in the short grasses surrounding us. And as hippos grunted, roared and wheezed late in the night, the feeling of wild zone dawned on us further.

GAME DRIVE

We woke up to a sweet morning of



The group at the Equator in Kayabwe



A lion chases buffaloes as hippos enjoy the water

NUMBERS

100
The estimated number of lions living in Queen Elizabeth National Park. Unfortunately, the park recently lost a pride of 11 lions to poisoning

mixed melodies made by different birds, supplemented by the soothing air other than the usual vehicle and bodaboda hoots in Kampala.

Jumping into three different vehicles after breakfast, we cruised out for a game drive only making a short stop-over at the bridge that crosses the Kazinga Channel, where lakes Edward and George meet. Here, Jonathan showed us the rare papyrus Gonolek bird.

We were later greeted by a herd of water-bucks that seemed to dominate the jungle (in terms of numbers) plus warthogs (wild pigs) that could visibly be seen from a near distance.

We were later joined by several other vehicles, probably carrying tourists.

SHOW OF THE DAY

No sooner had we driven 1km into the wild than we found a pride of lions relaxing a few metres away from three buffaloes, seemingly having some sort of a cordial relationship. I was wrong to think the two animal species were friendly. Soon, one lioness was seen stealthily walking towards the three buffaloes.

As record would have it, no single lion can manage a grown up buffalo. So was this case in point; one buffalo was seen getting up and seemingly alerting others