

## UGANDA'S CONSERVATION AREAS

### The History of Conservation in Uganda

Conservation in Uganda is not a new thing but dates back to the British Colonial period (in the early 20th Century) and continues to shape the country's political economy as it also forms part of the tourism sector.

#### Fun fact :

- The collaborative Conservation and Management of Uganda's wildlife in the Uganda Protectorate started in 1923 with the establishment of the Elephant Control Department. The main goal of this Department was to minimize destruction to peasant agriculture by placing a limit on the size and range of elephant populations whereby culling programs killing over 1000 elephants every year.
- Uganda is endowed with a high density and rich diversity of both animal and plant species. Over 18,783 species of fauna and flora have been recorded in Uganda (NEMA, 2009)

#### Did you Know:

There are over 60 Conservation Protected Areas in Uganda that shelter a number of endangered, critically endangered, threatened and endemic species. There are so far 10 National Parks in Uganda that include Murchison falls, Kidepo Valley, Queen Elizabeth, Mount Elgon, Semliki Valley, Kibale Forest, Mgahinga Gorilla, Lake Mburo, Rwenzori Mountains and Bwindi Impenetrable National Parks while Wildlife Reserves in the country are Aswa-Lolim, Bokora Corridor, Ajai, Toro-Semliki, Matheniko, Pian Upe, Katonga and Bugungu Wildlife Reserves and Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary being one of the most popular Sanctuaries in the country.

#### Uganda Wildlife Authority

- Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) is responsible for conserving the country's rich natural heritages that ranges from plants, animals, natural features to their overall ecosystems. Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), established in August 1996 by the Uganda Wildlife Statute, 1996 (Wildlife Act, 2019) is mandated to manage wildlife within and outside Protected Areas. UWA's mission is to "conserve, economically develop and sustainably manage wildlife and protected areas of Uganda in partnership with the neighbouring communities and stakeholders for the benefit of the people of Uganda and the global community".
- Uganda's list of gazetted conservation areas encompasses 10 national parks, 8 wildlife reserves, 4 wildlife sanctuaries, and 9 Ramsar sites. National parks are accorded higher status and conservation priority than other reserves, and from the visitor's point of view, they are generally better developed for tourism.

## Meanings of the Categorization

The most meaningful way to categorize Uganda's various national parks and reserves is based on the type of habitat they protect. We occasionally refer to some national parks as *game or savanna reserves*, *forest reserves*, and *montane reserves*. In this sense, the term '*game reserve*' applies to any reserve or national park that protects a savanna habitat and supports typical plains animals. In contrast, the term '*forest reserve*' refers to any reserve or national park covering a forest environment and associated animals.

The three montane conservation areas considered national parks in Uganda can, in some circumstances, be classified with forest reserves. They all support montane and bamboo forests up to an altitude of about 3,000 meters above sea level, at what point the habitat gives way to *Afro-montane moorland* at higher altitudes.

## National Parks in Uganda

1. Bwindi Impenetrable | 310 sq km | Forest | *mountain gorillas, forest birds*
2. Kibale Forest | 766 sq km | Forest | *chimpanzees, monkeys, forest birds*
3. Kidepo Valley | 1,344 sq km | Savanna | *dry-country antelopes, predators, and birds*
4. Lake Mburo | 256 sq km | Savanna | *wide variety of antelope and waterbirds*
5. Mgahinga | 33 sq km | Montane | *mountain gorillas, golden monkeys, hiking, volcanic peaks*
6. Mount Elgon | 1,145 sq km | Montane | *hiking, forest birds*
7. Murchison Falls | 3,900 sq km | Savanna | *Murchison Falls, big game, waterbirds*
8. Queen Elizabeth | 1,978 sq km | Savanna | *big game, chimps, 612 bird species*
9. The Rwenzori Mountains | 996 sq km | Montane | *mountaineering, forest birds, Afro-montane plants*
10. Semuliki | 220 sq km | Forest | *hot springs, Rift Valley setting, 45 birds found nowhere else*

## Wildlife Reserves in Uganda

Although the list of conservation areas in Uganda includes wildlife reserves, most are merely adjuncts to one of the extensive savanna national parks. The only ones that have any tourist facilities at present are:

1. Toro Semliki Wildlife Reserve, 542 sq km in Western Uganda
2. Katonga Wildlife Reserve, 207 sq km in Western Uganda
3. Bugungu Wildlife Reserve, 473 sq km part of the Murchison Falls Conservation Area
4. Pian Upe Wildlife Reserve, 2043 sq km in Karamoja subregion of northeastern Uganda.
5. Kabwoya Wildlife Reserve, 87 sq km, Western Uganda
6. Kyambura Wildlife Reserve, 156 sq km found in Queen Elizabeth NP

## Forest Reserves

- Also, conservation areas in Uganda of interest to tourists are forest reserves. The **Budongo** and **Kanyiyo Pabidi forest reserves** south of Murchison Falls National Park

have well-established tourist sites offering camping facilities, bandhas, and guided forest walks. The Lake Victoria region supports large tracts of forest. The most accessible are **Mpanga Forest Reserve** near Mpigi and the **Mabira Forest Reserve** near Jinja. Both reserves offer reasonable accommodation and guided walks. **Kalinzu Forest Reserve** between Mbarara and Queen Elizabeth National Park is also developed for tourism. Chimpanzee tracking in Budongo and Kalinzu forests is significantly cheaper than in the national parks.

## Ramsar Sites in Uganda

Uganda has 9 Ramsar Conservation areas that BirdLife International recognizes as Important Bird Areas and provides a vital habitat for other threatened plants and animals. Ramsar sites offer extra protection to the habitats of endangered species such as the globally vulnerable Shoebill, the Papyrus Gonolek, and the Sitatunga, which attract several tourists into the country.

Ramsar sites in Uganda include:

- Lake Bisina Wetland System, 542 sq km in Kumi, Katakwi, Soroti
- Lake Mburo-Nakivali Wetland System, 268 sq km in Mbarara
- Lake Nakuwa Wetland System, 911 sq km in Kamuli Soroti
- Lake Opeta Wetland System, 689 sq km in Nakapiripirit, Sironko, Katakwi, Kumi
- Lutembe Bay Wetland System, 0.98 sq km in Wakiso
- Mabamba Bay Wetland System, 24 sq km in Mpigi
- Murchison Falls-Albert Delta Wetland System, 17 sq km in Masindi, Gulu
- Nabajjuzi Wetland System, 17 sq km in Masaka, Sembabule, Mpigi
- Sango Bay-Musambwa Island-Kagera Wetland System (SAMUKA), 151 sq km in Masaka, Rakai

Several other conservation areas in Uganda are also of interest for their natural history. These include

- Lake Nkuruba, near Kibale Forest
- Amabere Caves in Fort Portal near Kibale National Park
- Bigodi Wetland near Kibale Forest National Park
- Lake Bunyonyi in Kigezi en route to Bwindi Impenetrable Forest
- Echuya Forest in Kigezi,
- Sipi Falls near Mbale, Mount Elgon National Park

## References

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