



Harlequin Quail

Uganda

The Pearl of Africa

Tour Leader: Rob Ripma

August 25 - September 9, 2025

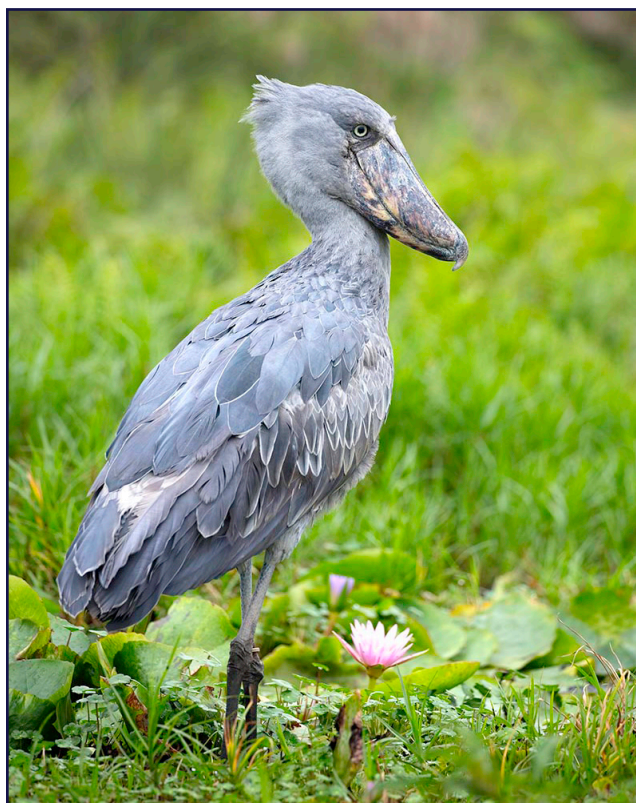
August 25: Arrival at Entebbe International Airport and Birding the Botanical Gardens

Most of the group enjoyed some light birding at our hotel, The Boma, while we waited for our last delayed participant to arrive before our first scheduled activity of the tour, an afternoon birding excursion to the Entebbe Botanical Gardens. At the hotel, we saw many common garden species, including Eastern Plantain-eater, Hadada Ibis, Meyer's Parrot, and several species of sunbirds.

Birding at the botanical garden was fantastic as we hurried around the property in search of our targets before it got dark. Soon after arriving, we spotted an African Pygmy Kingfisher, which provided us with amazing views. A little farther down the trail, we found one of our targets, Bat Hawk, perched in the open high up in a tree. In the weaver colony, we found both Orange and Golden-backed Weavers. Other highlights for the afternoon included Tambourine Dove, Ross's Turaco, Congo Pied Hornbill, Green Crombec, Gray-capped Warbler, and Splendid Starling.

We headed back to The Boma for the night, where we enjoyed a wonderful welcome dinner and got some rest before our first full day of the tour the next day.

August 26: Shoebills at Mabamba Swamp and Travel to Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary



Shoebill

After an early breakfast, we headed for the famous Mabamba Swamp. After a short drive across Entebbe, we boarded our boats for a trip across Lake Victoria to the swamp. We birded along the way and found our only Red-knobbed Coots of the trip and a rare for the area, Red-billed Duck. Once at

the swamp, we boarded smaller boats to allow us to get through the area more easily. It wasn't long before we spotted our first Shoebill! It flew a short distance across the swamp but was in a good spot when we caught up with it again. Since we found our biggest target so quickly, we had plenty of time to explore the swamp for more incredible birds. Over the next couple of hours, we cruised through the swamp and had many highlights, including African Swamp Hen, Lesser Jacana, Blue-breasted Bee-eater, Greater Swamp Warbler, Banded Martin, and Cape Wagtail.

We returned to The Boma for lunch and then packed up our vehicles and started our drive to our next destination, Ziwa Rhino Sanctuary. It was getting dark as we arrived, so there wasn't any time to bird before getting checked into our rooms. After dinner, we heard an African Scops-Owl but couldn't go looking for it because rhinos were roaming around the area where we heard it calling from!

August 27: Morning Birding and Rhino Trek. Afternoon Transfer to Murchison Falls National Park

After breakfast, we met the ranger who would take us on a rhino tracking excursion. After a short drive, we started our walk to find the rhinos. It didn't take long before we found the rhinos! We



Southern White Rhino

spent the next hour enjoying these incredible animals. While viewing the rhinos, we kept an eye and an ear on the birds that were around as well. Some of the highlights during this time were Lizard Buzzard, White-headed Barbet, and Lesser Blue-eared Starling.

We still had some time before we needed to start our drive to the next destination, so we birded near our lodge. We ended up having so many great birds that it was hard to pull ourselves away when it was time to go! Some of the best birds were White-crested Turaco, Lesser and Greater Honeyguides, Northern Puffback, and White-shouldered Black-Tit.

It was a short drive to our first stop, lunch and birding, at the well-known Kabalega Diner. After ordering, we spent some time birding the property while they prepared our lunch. The birding was slow at midday, but we did have a few good birds, Klaas's Cuckoo, Brown-throated Wattle-eye, and African Paradise-Flycatcher. After a delicious lunch, we continued on our way to Murchison Falls National Park.

Our first stop in the park was at the top of the falls. Murchison Falls is the largest waterfall in the world by volume, and that is not surprising when you stand at the top observing the incredible amount of water flowing there. The power of the water is remarkable! There's also a special bird that likes the open rocks around this part of the river, Rock Pratincole. We found several sitting on the rocks right along this fantastic part of the Nile River.

It was getting dark as we drove through the park to our hotel for the night, Pakuba Lodge. Luckily, there was still enough light for us to watch three Spotted Hyenas close to the roadside!

August 28: Morning Game Drive, Afternoon Boat Cruise, and Evening/Night Drive

After breakfast at our lodge, we headed out on a morning game drive in the northern part of Murchison Falls. We covered a lot of ground and ended up with 65 species for the morning. Highlights included Heuglin's Spurfowl, Namaqua Dove, Martial Eagle, Green Woodhoopoe, Abyssinian Ground-Hornbill, Red-necked Falcon, Moustached Grass-Warbler, Spotted Morning-Thrush, Beautiful Sunbird, Chestnut-crowned Sparrow-Weaver, and Shelley's Rufous Sparrow.

Next, we headed to the boat dock on the Nile for a trip up to the falls, birding along the way of course. Our biggest surprise of the trip was finding not one but two African Finfoot! Other highlights were Spur-winged Goose, African Skimmer, Saddle-billed Stork, Goliath Heron, and at the very last second before heading back to the dock, Giant Kingfisher!

In the late afternoon, we made another drive, and although it was a bit slow, we did find our only Bar-breasted Firefinches of the trip. After dinner, we loaded back in our safari vehicles for a night drive. We did very well with nightjars including Swamp, Long-tailed, Slender-tailed, and Square-tailed. We also saw Spotted Thick-knee and Verreaux's Eagle-Owl. It was an excellent end to an

amazing day!



Namaqua Dove

August 29: Drive to Masindi with Birding Along the Way

Today we packed up our bags and bid farewell to Pakuba Lodge. On our way out of Murchison Falls, we did more birding and found 91 species in just three hours! There were too many highlights to list, but we did see our only Northern Carmine Bee-eaters of the tour and got better looks at many species we had already seen! While driving out of the park a few of us also saw a Blue Malkoha.

As we drove toward Masindi, we made a few roadside birding stops along the way. Highlights of those stops included Western Banded Snake-Eagle, Cut-throat, Red-winged Gray Warbler, Foxy Cisticola, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting, Yellow-spotted Barbet, Chestnut Wattle-eye, and Yellow-mantled Weaver.

We arrived in Masindi late in the evening, got checked into our hotel, had dinner, and tried to get some rest before another full day of birding.

August 30: Birding in Budongo Forest-Royal Mile

On the way to Budongo, one of our safari vehicles started to have some issues and had to stop along the road. Once the other vehicle dropped some of the group with the local guide, it came back for the rest of the group while Judith stayed behind to figure out what was going on with the vehicle. We started birding in the farmland before getting to the forest and found some excellent birds. Highlights included Singing and Siffling Cisticolas, Compact Weaver, Yellow-mantled and Red-collared

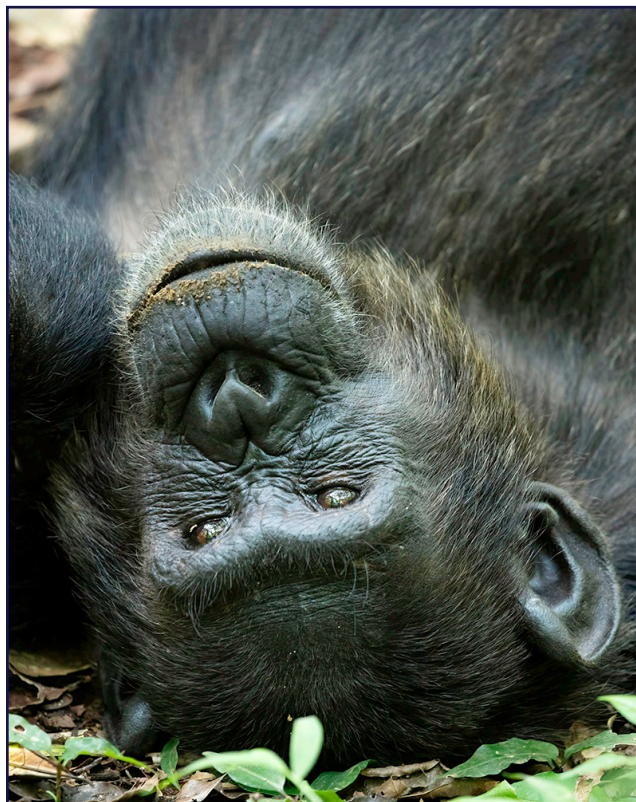
Widowbirds, Zebra Waxbill, Brown Twinspot, and Gray-headed Oliveback. Fortunately, just as we were ready to head on to the forest, Judith caught up to us with a working vehicle!

We spent the next five hours birding along the incredible Royal Mile in Budongo Forest. Highlights here included White-thighed Hornbill, African Dwarf Kingfisher, Eastern Yellow-billed Barbet, Willcock's Honeyguide, Golden-crowned and Brown-eared Woodpeckers, Ituri Batis, Western Nicator, Rufous-crowned Eremomela, Uganda Woodland-Warbler, Green Hylia, Scaly-breasted Illadopsis, Superb Sunbird, and Crested Malimbe. The rain that had been threatening for a while finally caught up with us, so we headed back to Masindi for the night.

August 31: Transfer to Kibale Forest National Park

Today was a travel day as we headed to Kibale Forest National Park, but we made several roadside birding stops along the way and found some wonderful species to add to our list. Highlights along the way included excellent views of Meyer's Parrot, Purple Starling, Baglafaecht Weaver, Bronze and Copper Sunbirds, Marsh Widowbird, Fawn-breasted Waxbill, Vieillot's Black Weaver, Brown-backed Scrub-Robin, and Black-crowned Waxbill. We arrived at our next lodge, Guereza Safari Lodge, where we had a delicious dinner and settled into our wonderful rooms for the night.

September 1: Chimp Tracking and Birding



Chimpanzee

We got an early start this morning with one target bird in mind before our chimpanzee tracking,

Green-breasted Pitta. We met up with our local guides and headed into the forest in search of this elusive species. It didn't take too long before our guides heard the bird, and it wasn't long after that before it was spotted! Although it liked to stay hidden, everyone enjoyed good looks! Along the way, we also found White-tailed Ant-Thrush, Red-capped Robin-Chat, and White-breasted Nigrita.

We headed on to find the chimps and after a relatively short walk, we were in the midst of a wonderful group of chimpanzees!

After lunch and a short break, we made a short drive to Bigodi Swamp. Our local guides were excellent and found us a bunch of new species including Jameson's Wattle-eye, Red-headed Quelea, Grosbeak Weaver, Magpie and Black-and-white Manakins, Red-headed Bluebill, Black-bellied Seed-cracker, and Golden-breasted Bunting.

September 2: Kibale to Queen Elizabeth National Park

Before starting our drive to Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP), we spent some time birding the excellent grounds of our lodge. Some of the highlights included Black-billed Turaco, Buff-throated Apalis, Red-throated Crag-Martin, five species of sunbirds, and Black-necked Weaver. Before leaving, we helped the lodge owner, Harriet Kemigisha, plant a fruiting tree that will grow to support even more birds on the property. Just as we were finishing up, an African Emerald Cuckoo made an appearance!

We made it to our next lodge outside of QENP in time for a late lunch. Of course, we were birding too and found our first Auger Buzzard of the trip during our meal. After checking in and having a short break, we headed out for the afternoon. We made a quick stop at the Kazinga Channel bridge



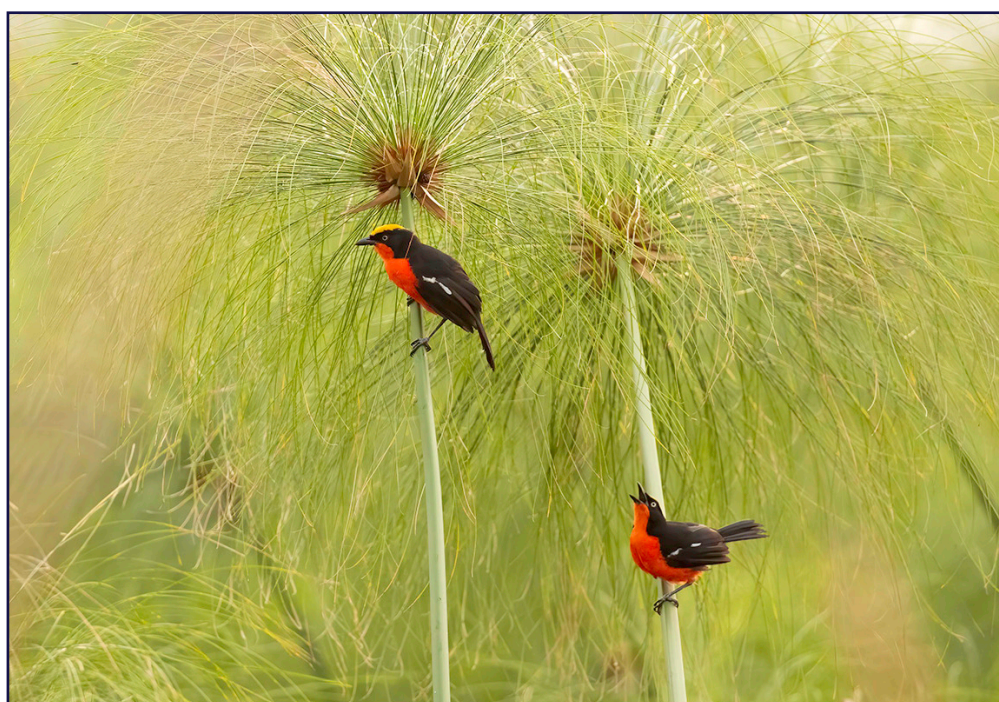
Small Buttonquail

and while the Papyrus Gonolek was calling, it wouldn't show itself. We did have excellent views of Carruther's Cisticola and Slender-billed Weaver.

Although we didn't have long before sunset, we made the most of it and found some incredible birds! Difficult to see species were very cooperative with Harlequin Quail, African Crake, and Small Buttonquail all staying in the open for extended periods of time for photos. We also added many of the expected species for QENP. As we were driving out at sunset, a flock of about 20 Collared Pratincole flew over. It was a wonderful way to end the day!

September 3: Morning Birding/Safari and Afternoon Boat Cruise on the Kazinga Channel

We started the day with another stop at the Kazinga Channel bridge and this time, the Papyrus Gonoleks put on a show for us! We also had good looks at Little Bittern and Lesser Swamp Warbler.



Papyrus Gonolek

We spent the morning birding and watching wildlife along the tracks through the QENP Lion Savannah, although there were no lions to be seen here today. Both the Harlequin Quail and Small Buttonquail were cooperative again, allowing for more photos to be taken. It seemed there were new birds around every corner! We had great looks at Water Thick-knee, Three-banded Plover, Senegal, Crowned, and Wattled Lapwings, and Kittlitz's Plover. Judith spotted a Quailfinch along the road and fortunately our first vehicle that had driven past was able to back up and everyone got excellent looks at this difficult to find species. After a full morning of birding, we headed to Mweya Safari Lodge for lunch and a short break before a boat trip on the Kazinga Channel.

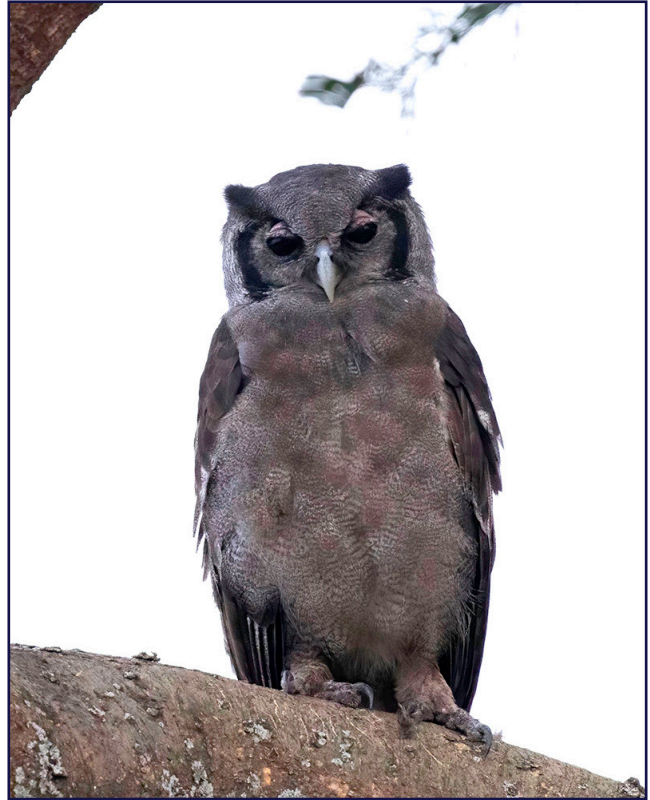
The boat trip on the Kazinga Channel is always one of the highlights of the whole tour and this trip was no exception! The diversity and density of birds here is incredible and you could really spend all

day exploring the area. Some of the species we found were Yellow-billed and Marabou Storks, African Spoonbill, Black Heron, and Goliath Heron. Our biggest highlight was finding a White-fronted Bee-eater which is an extremely rare bird in Uganda with only one previous report in eBird. We were unable to get photographs of the bird and it has since been photographed by many others.

On our way out of the park, a couple of Verreaux's Eagle-Owls perched close to the road allowing for great views.



Black Heron



Verreaux's Eagle-Owl

September 4: Queen Elizabeth National Park to Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park

It was time to head on from QENP and make our way to the famous Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. Before leaving our lodge, we did a little birding with the highlight being good view of Tropical Boubou.

Fortunately, much of the drive is through part of QENP so we were birding all the way. Some of the highlights we found along the way were Brown Snake-Eagle, African Yellow-Warbler, and Black-colored Babbler. Our biggest highlight of the morning was a mammal, African Leopard! We had heard reports of one resting in a tree and although a bit far, we all had good looks! After lunch, we learned that some lions had been found resting in a tree in the park, so we quickly headed off that way. Although there were many people looking, it took us a long time, but we finally found the lions!

After arriving in Bwindi, we dropped our luggage off at the hotel and headed out to bird the en-

trance road at the national park. We only had about 1.5 hours before dark, but we made the most of our time and found some great birds. Highlights included Least Honeyguide, Black-tailed Oriole, Lühder's and Many-colored Bushshrikes, Chubb's Cisticola, Brown-capped Weaver, and Streaky Seedeater.

September 5: Birding the Main Trail at Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park

We spent the whole day today birding along the main trail at Bwindi. We started out birding the secondary forest along the entrance where we found many great birds such as Speckled and Western Tinkerbirds, Elliot's and Buff-spotted Woodpeckers, Petit's Cuckooshrike, Pink-footed Puffback, White-tailed Blue Flycatcher, Black-throated and Gray Apalis, and seven greenbul species.

As we continued into primary forest, we found more and more new birds for our list. Some of the best birds we found here were Barred Long-tailed Cuckoo, Bar-tailed Trogon, White-headed Woodhoopoe, Willcock's Honeyguide, Fine-banded Woodpecker, African Broadbill, Black-faced Rufous-Warbler, Red-faced Woodland-Warbler, Pale-breasted and Mountain Illadopsis, Gray-throated Tit-Flycatcher, Red-throated Alethe, and Jameson's Antpecker. It was an amazing day to be out birding in Bwindi!



Mountain Gorilla

September 6: Gorilla Tracking at Bwindi Impenetrable Forest National Park

Our morning today was dedicated to Mountain Gorilla tracking. We started out at the park headquarters for a briefing on the activity and a wonderful welcome dance from a local women's group that happened to be from our hotel! After a bit of a drive to the trailhead, we started our hike to the

gorillas. Fortunately, the trackers had found this group quite close to the road, and it was a relatively short and easy hike! We reached the gorillas quickly and had an incredible experience watching these magnificent creatures.

After returning to the vehicle, we made a short stop just up the road to see if a small pond might have some African Black Ducks. We were in luck and the whole group got good views of this difficult to find species.

After a break back at our lodge, we returned to the national park to bird the entrance road one final time. Although we didn't add a huge number of birds to our list, we had a great afternoon and improved our views and photos of several species.

September 7: Bwindi to Lake Mbuo National Park

Since we had done so well in this sector of Bwindi, we decided to leave early and bird in a sector that is slightly higher in elevation and thus has some species we hadn't seen yet. It's a bit of a drive and we wouldn't have long to bird but, everyone was up for the adventure. On the way, we made a quick stop to see if we could finally find Black Bee-eater and we luckily found a pair! We also added Mountain Wagtail while stopped for the bee-eaters. Some of the group also saw a Rameron Pigeon but it flew before the second vehicle could get there.

We only had about 1.5 hours to bird once we got to the Ruhija sector, but we made the most of our time! Highlights along the Ruhija School Trail included Gray-throated Barbet, Rwenzori Batis, Black-faced and Chestnut-throated Apalis, Banded Prinia, heard only Grauer's Warbler, and the highlight of our time here, Regal Sunbird!



Gray-throated Barbet

We headed off on our long drive to Mbuero and still managed to add a few species along the way including Crowned Eagle, White-necked Raven, and African Stonechat.

Once we were close to Mbuero and our lodge, Rwakobo Rock Lodge, we spent some time birding along the entrance road. In our short time birding, we found a few new species including Brubru and Southern Black-Flycatcher. We got settled into the lodge, found a few new birds, and enjoyed an excellent dinner as we prepared for our final full day of the tour. Several of us heard some nightjars from our rooms overnight, Fiery-necked and Freckled, which we would be looking for soon.

September 8: Game Drive and Boat Ride in Lake Mbuero National Park

We spent the morning birding and watching all the incredible wildlife that calls this park home. Some of our bird highlights included Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove, Bare-faced Go-away-bird, Lilac-breasted Roller, Crested Barbet, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Red-headed Lovebird, Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike, White-winged Black-Tit, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Tabora Cisticola, Marica Sunbird, Holub's Golden-Weaver, and Long-billed Pipit. After our exciting morning, we headed back to our lodge for a break and lunch.

On our way to our afternoon boat trip, we made a quick stop when we spotted a perched Martial Eagle! Once we were on the boat, we enjoyed a cruise around Lake Mbuero. Highlights included African Finfoot, Little Bittern, and White-backed Night Heron. On our way back to the lodge, we took a different route and finally found our only Greater Blue-eared Starlings of the trip. As we headed back to the lodge, Davis and I had a Blotched Genet cross the road. As it disappeared into the grass-



African Fish Eagle



Blotched Genet

es, we feared that everyone had missed it, but it climbed up a nearby tree giving everyone excellent views!

September 9: Lake Mburo to Entebbe for Departure

After breakfast and packing up, the lodge manager took us around the property to see the roosting nightjars that he had found that morning. He got us fantastic looks at Fiery-necked, Slender-tailed, and Square-tailed Nightjars! As we headed back towards the main road, we continued birding and found some good birds! Highlights included African Pygmy Kingfisher, African Yellow-Warbler, Rufous-chested Swallow, Wattled Starling, Purple-banded Sunbird, and a large flock of Green-winged Pytilias!



Fiery-necked Nightjar

We had heard that people had recently seen a Shoebill in a swamp along the highway so we stopped along the road to see if it was around and what else might be in the swamp. We were treated to two Shoebills, hundreds of Gray Crowned-Cranes, and our only Rufus-bellied Heron. It was an exciting end to this wonderful tour!

We ended the tour with 494 species of birds and countless incredible encounters with wildlife.