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REFLECTIONS ON CENTRAL AFRICA

Part 3

*Robert Berghaier, Senior Keeper
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KAGERA NATIONAL PARK

akagera park is located in Eastern Rwanda along the Tanzanian border. It is predominately a savanna park. However, it also contains a gallery forest,apyrus swamps and several large lakes. The park is 970 square miles in size and, unlike other African parks, encompasses a complete ecological unit.

located next to the northwest sector of the park is the Mutura hunting area. In this zone of 115 square miles, sports hunting is allowed. Only eighty hunters are licensed a year. They are held to a bag of one each of male buffalo, impala, waterbuck, topi, and zebra. The hunters are allowed to keep their trophy head, plus the animals' hide. The Rwandian safari corporation keeps the meat which is sold locally. The hunters are charged a \$200 license fee for the privilege of using Mutura. The concept of having a hunting area next to a national park is a sound one. The habitat of Mutura instead of being turned into farmland, is preserved. The licensing fee provides the economic justification for this. The sacrifice of the targeted surplus males is a small price to pay.

The wildlife of Akagera is as varied as its habitats. There are some notable gaps compared with other East African parks. Giraffes are not found here. Rhinos and elephants are being reintroduced and their numbers are slowly building up. Vast herds of other ungulates abound. Large herds of buffalo of over a hundred head are common. Topi and zebra were often in sight. The buffalo and zebra found in Akagera are some of the largest recorded in Africa. Impala number in the thousands. Reedbuck, waterbuck,eland and bushbuck are sure to be seen in a visit of one or two days. Other antelope found here include roan, oribi and sitatunga and these are not often seen in other East African parks. Hippos are common in the lakes of the park. I saw all of the above-mentioned antelope and the hippos in a five-day visit. All the major African carnivores are present but I only saw lion. I did, however, hear hyena every night, plus leopard on one occasion. Smaller mammals that I saw were: African civet, side-striped mackerel, cape hare, banded and dwarfed moongoose, vervet monkey and baboon.

Because Akagera is so varied, birdlife is prolific. The larger birds I noticed were darter, longtailed cormorant, hammerkop, heron; purple, grey, blackheaded and night, cattle and snowy egrets, bittern, glossy ibis, open-billed stork, spurwing and egyptian geese, hooded vulture, eagles; fish, longcrested and martial, helmeted huineafowl, crowned crane, hoopoe, silver puraco, lilac-breasted roller. grey hornbill, kingfishers; pied, grey-headed and blue-breasted. I also saw crocodile and Nile monitor.

located in Akagera is Lake Ihema. You can take boat rides on this large lake on a vessel that looks rather like the "African Queen". Along the lake shore I saw during my trip not only aquatic bird life, but also impala, bushbuck, zebra and baboon. It was a novel method of viewing mammals.

There are two types of accommodations in Akagera for visitors. Two excellent hotels are there - The Gabiro Lodge in the north and the Akagera Hotel in the south of the park. The Akagera Hotel is situated on a hill-

REFLECTIONS ON CENTRAL AFRICA, Continued

top which overlooks one of the most beautiful vistas in all of Africa. On one side is Lake Ihema and views the hills on the Tanzanian border. On the other side is the game-filled Nyamwashama Valley. With a good pair of binoculars you can watch game by the hundreds move across its expanses. One the hotel's grounds is a saltlick that nightly attracts impala, zebra and waterbuck. A baboon troop roams about during the day along with the occasional crowned crane and fish eagle. Since the hotel sits up so high, raptors riding the thermals at your eye level are a common sight. Packaged tours to the lodge or car rentals are easy to arrange in Kigali, the capital. It is possible to camp in the park. One must be self-sufficient in food, plus have a rented vehicle for this. To drive in Rwanda a knowledge of French is essential.

Except for some recent rhino poaching, Akagera National Park is doing well. Its chief conservator, a Belgium national, is performing a fine job. Game numbers are good and the animals are easily approached by vehicle. The elephant reintroduction project has recently produced its first baby elephant. A potential future problem may result from Ugandan refugee camps encroaching on the northern borders of the park.

An address for further information is:

Office Rwandais Tourisme et des Parcs Nationaux
P.O. Box 905
Kigali, Rwanda

