

Rwanda Birding

Tourist Map



Rwanda Birding



Rwanda is a landlocked country in central Africa. Also known as "the land of a thousand hills." Rwanda has five volcanoes, twenty-three lakes and numerous rivers, some forming the source of the River Nile. The country lies 75 miles south of the equator in the Tropic of Capricorn, 880 miles "as the crow flies" west of the Indian Ocean and 1,250 miles east of the Atlantic Ocean – literally in the heart of Africa. Rwanda with a land area of 26,338 km², is bordered by Uganda to the North, Tanzania to the East, Burundi to the South, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the West.

Rwanda has one of the highest bird counts on the continent. Rated in the top five destinations in the world for those seeking a rewarding birding experience. Any serious birding expedition should incorporate both the wetter and more mountainous western regions, the drier savannahs of the east, and then time in some of the many wetlands and marshes and species rich forests. Birdlife International current count is 7 IBA's (Important Birding Areas) in Rwanda.



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Birding in Rwanda

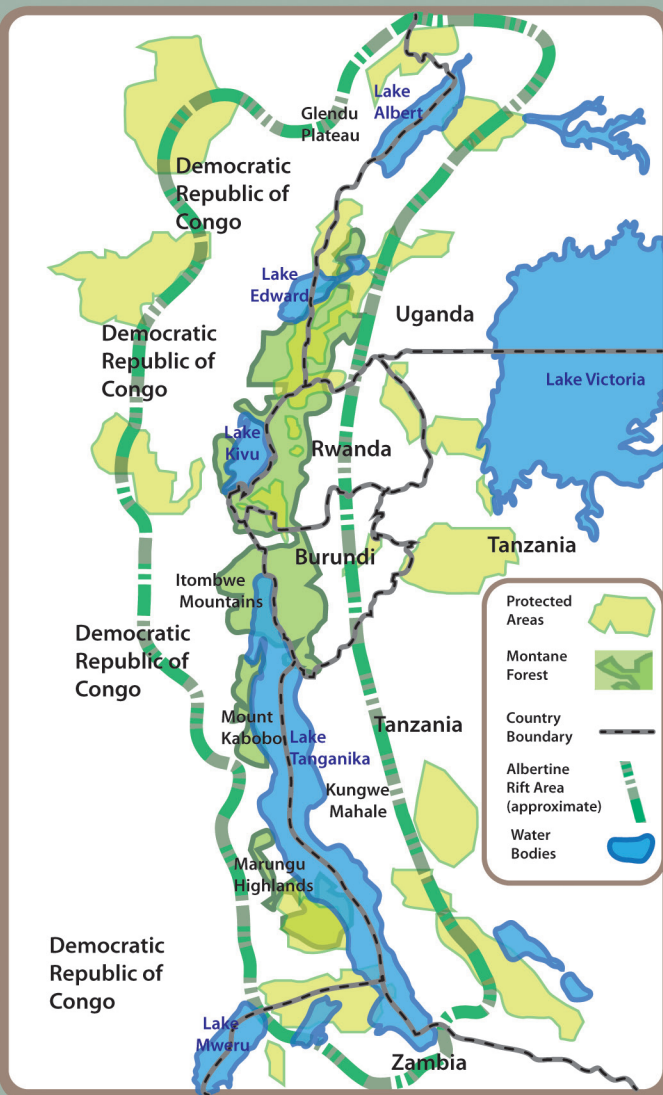


Dark-Morph Augur Buzzard, *B. r. augur*

Rwanda has one of the highest bird counts on the continent despite being one of the smallest countries in Africa, it's size 26 338sqkms. Include the high number of birding 'specials' to be seen, and the primate experiences as a bonus, and it's no wonder that most pundits rank it within the top five destinations for those seeking a rewarding birding experience.

Rwanda has at least 692 resident, visitors and occasional visiting bird species. An additional 5 locally extinct and another 5 are to be confirmed. This brings the total to a maximum of 702 species. (Vande weghe, J.P. & G. Vande weghe - 2011 in press - *Birds in Rwanda*, RDB). And of these, there are at least 27 birds known as Albertine Rift Endemics, a total higher than any country in Africa, other than the DRC.

Landlocked and lying just south of the Equator, Rwanda has a diverse topography that has been shaped by the dynamics of one of Africa's primary geological features, the Great Rift Valley. Tumultuous subterranean forces have over the last 50 million years contorted, ruptured and seared the crust, giving rise to a hugely impressive array of volcanoes, lakes, mountain ranges and forests that define the landscapes of today. Collectively, they make up the narrower and shorter Western Branch of the rift valley, or, because Lake Albert is its first discernable feature, The Albertine Rift or Albertine Eco-region.



The Albertine Eco-region

Comprising a chain of mountains formed through upliftment and volcanic activity, the Albertine Eco-region stretches across six countries and is regarded as the centre of the Afrotropical habitat. It is also a belt of exceptional faunal and floral endemism: over 40 bird species, 34 mammals, 117 butterflies, 34 amphibians and 16 reptiles are not found. It's no wonder why it's the most celebrated destination of ecological importance.



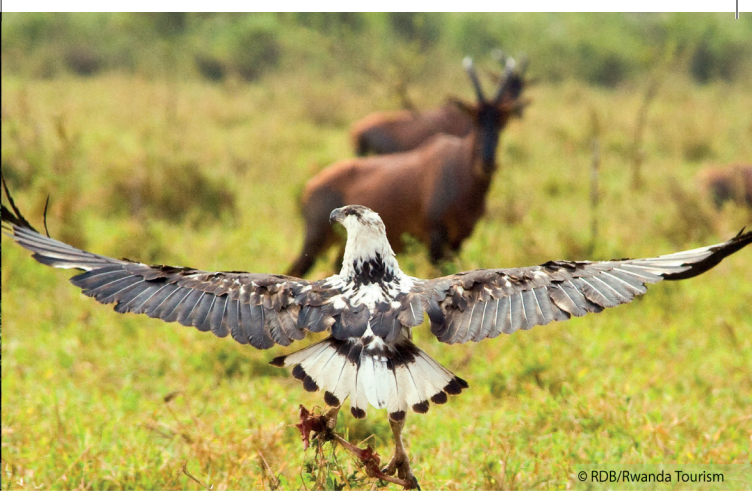
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Around Kigali

The Nyarutarama Lake, or "Lover's Lake" bordering the Kigali Golf Course, is surrounded by a track which offers excellent nature walks and bird watching opportunities.

The Nyabarongo Wetlands also offer walking paths and good bird watching. This protected area covers 142.62km² with two lakes – Lake Mirayi in the south and Lake Rumira in the north. The wetlands are fed by the Nyabarongo River, a tributary of the Nile, which empties into the Akagera River which, in turn, flows into Lake Victoria.



Cardinal Woodpecker, *Dendropicus fuscus* African Grey Hornbill, *Tockus nasutus*



African Rock Pigeon, *Columba guinea*

Brown Throated Wattle-Eye, *Platysteira cyanea*

Volcanoes National Park

To the north lies the **Volcanoes National Park**, which protects the Rwandan portion of the Virunga Mountains, a Transfrontier Conservation Area that includes protected areas in Uganda and the DRC. Forming a complex of mostly dormant volcanoes, it includes Rwanda's highest point, Mount Karisimbi (4 507m), and the two active ones, Mount Nyiragongo and Mount Nyamuragira. While more famous for its mountain gorillas and other primates, Volcanoes boasts almost 165 bird species, 17 Endemic to the Area.



Red-billed Fire Finch, *Lagonosticta senegalensis*

Cinnamon-Chested Bee-Eater, *Merops oreobates*



Dusky Fly-Catcher, *Muscicapa adusta*

Chubb's Cisticola, *Cisticola chubbii*

Nyungwe National Park

The **Nyungwe National Park**, a tropical mountain rainforest and one of Rwanda main protected areas, and lies on the south-western slopes of the highland region that forms the great divide between the Congo and Nile drainage systems. The park protects one of the region's largest and oldest remaining patches of montane rainforest and is home to 310 species of birds.

The forests Rwanda are increasingly being sought out for the incredible birding opportunities, particularly the numerous Albertine Rift endemics; 27 to be found in Nyungwe, the highest concentration found in any single park in Africa.

Amongst them are the; Regal Sunbird, *Cinnyris regius*, Red-Collared Babbler, *Kupeornis rufocinctus*, Rwenzori Turaco, *Gallirex johnstoni*, Handsome Spurfiowl, *Pternistis nobilis*, Rwenzori Batis, *Batis diops*, Grauer's Swamp-Warbler, *Bradypterus graueri*, Blue-headed Sunbird, *Cyanomitra oritis*, possibly the rarest of all endemic birds would be the Albertine Owllet, *Glaucidium albertinum*, known from only five records in the area.



Great Blue Turaco, *Corythaëola cristata*



Regal Sunbird, *Cinnyris regius*

The Akagera National Park

The **Akagera National Park** in the northeast still covers a sizeable chunk of savannah. A mix of rolling grassland interspersed with broad-leaved and acacia woodland, these lower-lying lands are dissected by the Akagera River.

The sought after species here would be; Red-faced Barbet, *Lybius rubrifacies*, Sousa's Shrike, *Lanius souzæ*, and White-Collared Oliveback, *Nesocharis ansorgei*, amongst others. The park has a mosaic of wetlands and lakes, along the course of the Akagera River and the eastern boundary.



Mocking Cliff-Chat, *Myrmecocichla cinamomeiventris*

Greater Blue-Eared Starling, *Lamprolaima chalybeus*



African Harrier-hawk, *Polyboroides typus*

Red-faced Barbet, *Lybius rubrifacies*

Favourite Birds to Spot in Rwanda



Malachite Kingfisher, *Alcedo cristata*

Yellow-Billed Stork, *Mycteria ibis*



African Fish-Eagle, *Haliaeetus vocifer*

Cape Robin-Chat, *Dessonoris caffra*



Black-Headed (Kandt's) Waxbill, *Estrilda atricapilla*

Bronze Sunbird, *Nectarinia kilimensis*



White-Naped Raven, *Corvus albicollis*

White-Browed Coucal, *Centropus superciliosus*

Amidst the papyrus and reed beds some of the prized species to be found are; Carruthers's Cisticola, *Cisticola carruthersi*, Papyrus Canary, *Serinus koliensis* and more.



Papyrus Gonolek, *Laniarius mufumbiri*

Shoebill, *Balaeniceps rex*



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Rwanda's wetlands and marshes, covering just over 10% of the country, include Rugezi, the fourth of the main protected areas, as well as two other locations, Akanyaru Wetlands and Nyabarongo Wetlands, that have been declared Important Birding Areas (IBA's) by Birdlife International.

If there's still time on the schedule, the keenest of birders can still head to a number of forest reserves scattered around the country.

'Any serious birding expedition should incorporate both the wetter forested and more mountainous western regions, the drier savannahs of the east and the many wetlands and marshes' Ian Michler: Safari Operator, Specialist Guide and Photojournalist

Interesting websites: African Bird Club www.africanbirdclub.org, Travelling Birder www.travellingbirder.com, Rwanda Tourism www.rwandatourism.com, Albertine Rift Program www.albertinerift.org, Birdlife International www.birdlife.org

Species with restricted distribution, present in Rwanda

Common name	Scientific name	Endemism	Status
Handsome Francolin	<i>Pternistis nobilis</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Rwenzori Turaco	<i>Gallirex johnstoni</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Rwenzori Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus ruwenzori</i>	Albertine Rift	Common at dawn and dusk.
Albertine Owllet	<i>Glaucidium albertinum</i>	Albertine Rift	Very rare
Dwarf Honeyguide	<i>Indicator pumilio</i>	Albertine Rift	Rare
Kivu Ground Thrush	<i>Geokichla tanganjicae</i>	Albertine Rift	Rare, unpredictable
Red-throated Alethe	<i>Pseudalethe poliopteryx</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Archer's Ground Robin	<i>Dessonoris archeri</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Red-Collared Babbler	<i>Kupeornis rufocinctus</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Rwenzori Apalis	<i>Oreolais ruwenzorii</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Mountain Masked Apalis	<i>Apalis personata</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Grauer's Swamp Warbler	<i>Bradypterus graueri</i>	Albertine Rift	Common, in high altitude marshes
Grauer's Warbler	<i>Graueria vittata</i>	Albertine Rift	Common, hard to see
Neumann's Warbler	<i>Hemitelia neumanni</i>	Albertine Rift	Common, hard to see
Red-faced Woodland Warbler	<i>Seiurus laetus</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Yellow-eyed Black Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis ardesiacus</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Rwenzori Batis	<i>Batis diops</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Stripe-breasted Tit	<i>Parus fasciventer</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Blue-headed Sunbird	<i>Cyanomitra alinae</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Rwenzori Double-collared Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris stuhlmanni</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Regal Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris regius</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Rockefeller's Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris rockefelleri</i>	Albertine Rift	Very rare
Purple-breasted Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia purpureiventris</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Strange Weaver	<i>Ploceus alienus</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Dusky Crimsonwing	<i>Cryptospiza jacksoni</i>	Albertine Rift	Common
Shelley's Crimsonwing	<i>Cryptospiza shelleyi</i>	Albertine Rift	Very rare
Congo Bay Owl	<i>Phodilus prigoginei</i>	Lake Victoria	To be confirmed
Papyrus Gonolek	<i>Laniarius mufumbiri</i>	Lake Victoria	Common, only in papyrus
Carruthers's Cisticola	<i>Cisticola carruthersi</i>	Lake Victoria	Common, only in papyrus
White-winged Swamp Warbler	<i>Bradypterus carpalis</i>	Lake Victoria	Common, hard to see
Papyrus Yellow Warbler	<i>Calamanostides gracilirostris</i>	Lake Victoria	Rare, localised
Red-chested Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris erythrocerus</i>	Lake Victoria	Common
Papyrus Canary	<i>Dendrospiza koliensis</i>	Lake Victoria	Common, around papyrus
Brown-throated Weaver	<i>Ploceus castanops</i>	Lake Victoria	Common
Red-faced Barbet	<i>Lybius rubrifacies</i>	Lake Victoria	Common
White-collared Oliveback	<i>Nesocharis ansorgei</i>	Lake Victoria	Rare

Table Contribution by Gael Vande weghe.