

Kwita Izina



The timeless Rwandan ceremony ***kwita izina*** (*to give a name*) is part of the celebration of the birth of a new child in a family. This name is selected by family members and is announced during the ceremony.

For three decades this same ceremony has been performed for Rwanda's newly born mountain gorillas by rangers, researchers and those charged with the safekeeping of these unique animals.

In 2005 this Gorilla Naming Ceremony became a public ceremony hosted by then ORTPN.

In 2007 the Ceremony was officially named Kwita Izina and has become an exciting part of Rwanda's tourism and conservation calendar. The event is a celebration of Rwanda's conservation efforts in protecting the endangered mountain gorilla.

CONGO – NILE TRAIL IN NYUNGWE NATIONAL PARK



Music and Dance



Music and dance plays an important role in the traditions of Rwandan people.

Performances range from demonstrations of bravery and excellence, to humorous dance styles and lyrics, to artistry based in traditional agricultural roots. Traditional songs are often accompanied by a solitary lilunga—a harp-like instrument with eight strings. More celebratory dances are backed by a drum orchestra, which typically comprises seven to nine members who collectively produce a hypnotic and exciting explosion set of intertwining rhythms.



Live dance performances can be seen at the National Museum of Rwanda and the presidential palace in Kanombe. The finest display of Rwanda's varied and dynamic traditional musical and dance styles is performed by the Intore Dance Troupes. Founded several centuries ago, the Intore—literally 'The Chosen Ones'—once performed exclusively for the Royal Court, but today their exciting act can be arranged at short notice through the National Museum in Huye.



A more modern form of Rwandan music is the upbeat and harmonious devotional singing that can be heard in any church service around the country. Rwandan pop stars are also developing a name for themselves in the country and in the region, winning regional competitions and performing and recording throughout East Africa.

Traditional Handicrafts



A wide range of traditional handicrafts is produced in rural Rwanda, ranging from ceramics and basketry to traditional woodcarvings and contemporary paintings. Rwanda's traditional Agaseke baskets have become famous the in the world. A good selection of painted and handcrafted artifacts can be viewed in craft villages, shops and numerous art galleries in Kigali. Excellent places to peruse and purchase modern art work in Kigali are CAPLAKI Craft Village, Ivuka Arts, Inganzo Gallery, African Gift Corner, Ishyo Cultural Centre, ATRAC Craft Village and Uburanga Art Studio to name a few.



A distinctively Rwandan craft is the Imigongo or cow dung paintings that are produced by a local co-operative in the village of Nyakarambi near the Rusumo Falls border with Tanzania. Dominated by black, brown and white whorls and other geometric abstractions, these unique and earthy works can be bought in Kigali, but it's worth diverting to the source to see how the paintings are reflected in local house decorations.

Eye-to-eye with wildlife thanks to canopy walk



The canopy walk at Nyungwe forest, set 50 meters above the ground with a 150-meter walkway, is the first of its kind in East Africa and the third on the continent after South Africa and Ghana. It allows visitors to see the forest from above the trees and be at eye level with birds and monkeys that inhabit the upper canopy of the forest.

It was no coincidence that the attraction was launched on this year's World Tourism Day 2011, celebrated on Friday under the theme *Tourism and Biodiversity*, given that the canopy walk is set to create awareness on the diversity of fauna and flora in Nyungwe National Park.

Nyungwe is unique indeed, since it is one of the largest Montane forests in Africa with an area of 1,019 km², and a natural resource that are widely recognized as being of global as well as national significance. And talking about biodiversity: the park is home to 27 endemic birds and 13 species of primate, including chimpanzees, as well as 148 species of orchids, 19 of them endemic.

"The park was deliberately chosen as the venue [of World Tourism Day] due to its wealth of fauna and flora species," explained Clare Akamanzi, Chief Operating Officer of the Rwanda Development Board (RDB).

The introduction of the canopy walk will also signify the launch of the modern Uwinka Interpretation Centre which gives tourists the chance to experience the forest before exploring it. Visitors can engage in an interactive learning about facts and images of the park as well as surrounding communities.

RDB wants to further increase the infrastructure at Nyungwe. "We want to diversify our tourism products by giving visitors of Nyungwe National Park the opportunity to experience the park in a new and exciting way," Akamanzi explained.

She highlighted other potential investment opportunities such as a guest lodge or a "zip line" (also known as the Flying Fox), which people on the canopy walk can use to slide below and above the bridge for better viewing.

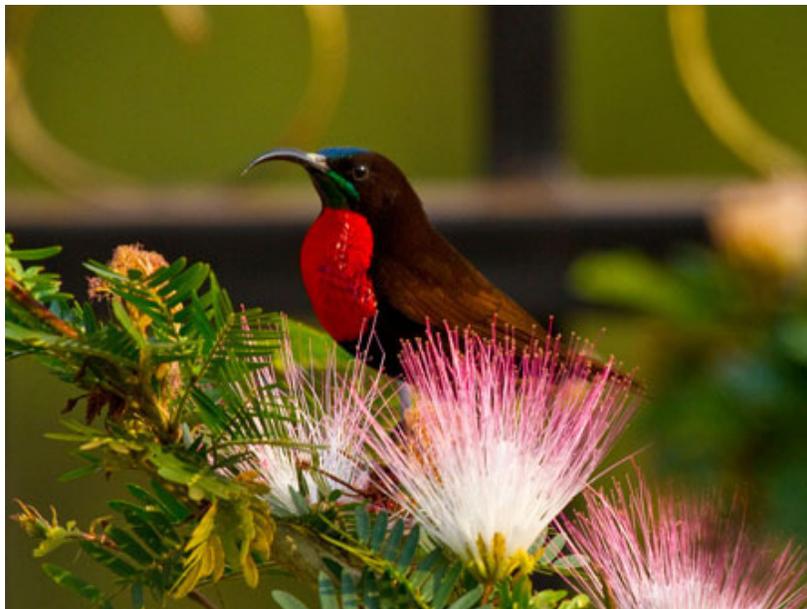
The introduction of new tourism activities are expected to increase revenues by 6.4% in 2012. The sector is expected to supersede US\$ 230 million this year, 2012 up from estimated US\$ 214 million in 2011.



BIRDS OF RWANDA



Sunrise over Kigali. Photo: John Caddick



Scarlet-chested Sunbird *Chalcomitra senegalensis* in Kigali hotel gardens, Photo: John Caddick

How long will the mass genocides of the mid-1990s lie heavily on the minds of the people of Rwanda and continue to deter foreign visitors? When will travellers realise that Rwanda is now a relatively peaceful, friendly country to travel in? The African Bird Club tour to Rwanda in July 2011 found

Rwanda to be a safe, friendly, clean and well-organized country with a superb selection of birds which are difficult to find elsewhere.

Since the days of Diane Fossey, Rwanda has been recognized as one of the best places to view gorillas, but few people know any more about the country than just this. Those that visit tend to hop across the north-western border with Uganda, to track gorillas in the Volcanoes National Park. This is one of the best sites to see Ladgen's Bush-Shrike *Malacanotus lagdeni*, but tourism activities are heavily focused on gorillas, and hiking and bird watching are so poorly promoted. Although 17 Albertine Rift Endemics have been recorded, most are more readily seen elsewhere. Fortunately Rwanda has much more to offer, especially to birders.

With the exception of out-of-bounds sites in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the best birding in the Albertine Rift is in Rwanda's Nyungwe Forest Reserve. Here, 27 Albertine Rift Endemics have been recorded, more than at any site in Uganda and currently second only to the Itombwe Mountains in the DRC. This reserve adjoins the Kibira National Park in Burundi to protect one of the largest areas of montane forest in Africa. Add to this some impressive primates - a group of owl-faced monkeys is in the process of being habituated - and utterly spectacular scenery, and you have one of the most rewarding ecotourism sites in Africa. Access is straightforward too. The tar road from Butare to Cyangugu on the DRC border runs through the heart of the forest, providing far easier access to high altitude habitats than to the more popular sites in Uganda, namely Ruhija in the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Mgahinga Gorilla National Park and Ruwenzori National Park. With regular public transport, a camp site (at the summit of the pass, in the centre of the forest) and an inexpensive guest house (on the western edge of the forest), this is a far better option for budget travelers than any of the parks on Uganda.

Nyungwe is the only safe site in the world where the spectacular Red-collared Babbler *Kupeornis rufocinctus* occurs. In addition to many of the species regularly found in Bwindi, the following species have been recorded in Nyungwe: Rwenzori Turaco *Ruwenzorornis johnstoni* (fairly common along the roadside), Albertine Owlet *Glaucidium albertinum* (very rare with about 5 records), Kungwe Apalis *Apalis (rufogularis) argentea*, and possibly Schouteden's Swift *Schoutedenapus schoutedeni* and Rockefeller's Sunbird *Cinnyris rockefelleri*. The large Kamiranzovu swamp provides far easier access to Grauer's Swamp Warbler *Bradypterus graueri* than at Bwindi in Uganda and was seen from the main road through the forest in 2011. Grauer's Warbler *Graueria vittata* can be heard commonly in bushy areas in Nyungwe, not just at Kamiranzovu, and was also seen along the roadside in 2011. When the *Symphonia* trees are in flower in June / July, Purple-breasted Sunbird *Nectarinia purpureiventris* can be seen displaying without leaving the main road. African Green Broadbill *Pseudocalyptomena graueri* does not occur here and can be found at Bwindi.

To the detriment of its wildlife, most of Rwanda lies on fertile soils that support a very high human population (one of the highest densities in Africa at c300 people / km²). Consequently, few sizeable patches of intact habitat remain. Rwanda's Akagera National Park, a savanna-dominated area in the north-east of the country that lies in the Victoria Basin, is still its largest, but has been reduced in size by over 60% in the last 10 years. Still, this area holds an interesting selection of species associated with a diversity of habitats: wetlands, woodlands, grasslands, riparian forest and bush country. Indeed, Akagera has one of the longest species lists for any conservation area in Africa: over 525 species have been recorded, with many birds reaching their northern limit here, such as Arnott's Chat *Myrmecocichla arnotti*, Purple-crested Turaco *Tauraco porphyreolophus*, Sousa's Shrike *Lanius souzae*, Tabora Cisticola *Cisticola angusticaudus* and Bennett's Woodpecker *Campethera bennettii*. The park is one of the best places to search for the localised Red-faced Barbet *Lybius rubrifacies*, which can be seen around the entrance of the recently rebuilt Akagera Game Lodge. Also worthy of special mention are papyrus associated species, most significant of which is Shoebill *Balaeniceps rex*, which should be searched for along the lake shore. Lastly, this is also a known site for one of Africa's rarest francolins, Ring-necked Francolin *Francolinus streptophorus*, although there appear to be no recent reports of this species from here. Camping is possible and there are also a number of other hotels less than one hour's drive from the reserve.

The final component of Rwanda that is of particular interest to birders is the number of wetlands, which occupy almost 10% of the country. Three of these are IBAs and the main wetlands are: Akanyaru and Nyabarongo on the southern border with Burundi, Rugezi in the north near the Ugandan border, Mugesera-Rugwero in the south-east and Kagera along the eastern border with Tanzania. These wetlands hold Papyrus Yellow Warbler *Chloropeta gracilirostris*, White-winged Warbler *Bradypterus carpalis*, Papyrus Gonolek *Laniarius mufumbiri*, White-collared Oliveback *Nesocharis ansorgei* and Papyrus Canary *Serinus koliensis*, but little information exists as to how these wetlands can be visited. In 2011, we visited several areas of Papyrus marsh south of Kigali and Akagera and all the special birds were seen except Papyrus Yellow Warbler. There is no protection for these sites however and some of the Papyrus is being cleared for crops.