

The Albertine Rift Landscape



The Albertine Rift covers a diverse range of landscapes including tropical forests, mountains, savannah and aquatic landscapes within Uganda, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Burundi and Tanzania.

These remarkable ecosystems within the Albertine Rift contain some of the richest areas of biodiversity in the world and are home to hundreds of endemic species.

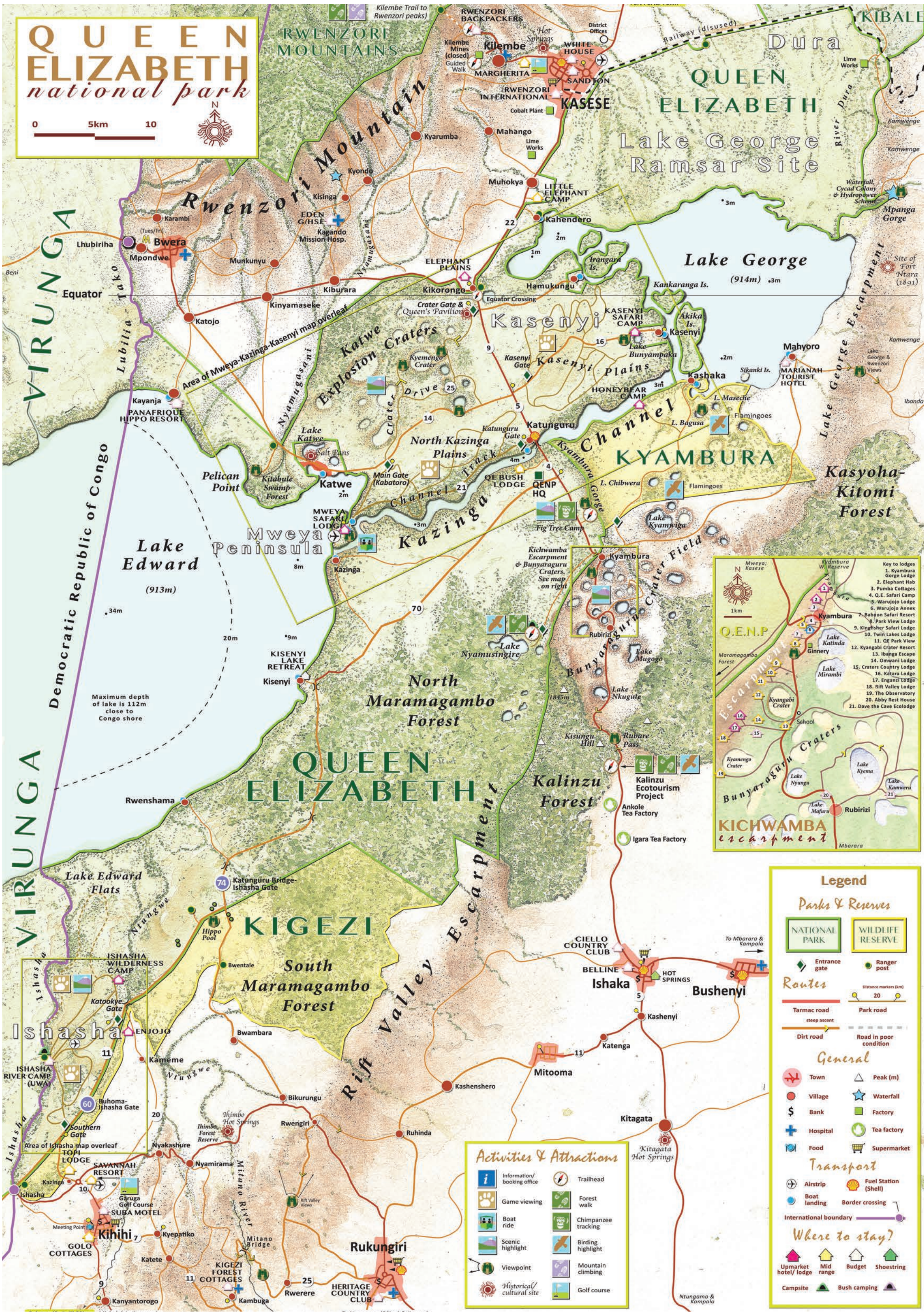
Since the 1950s a number of these landscapes have become part of national parks and nature reserves, aiming to protect the wildlife and ecosystems. This gallery highlights these fragile Great Ape habitats:

- Queen Elizabeth National Park
- Rwenzori Mountains
- Kyambura Gorge
- Bwindi Impenetrable Forest
- Mgahinga and the Virungas

We thank Andrew Roberts for the use of his maps and text.

Photographic credits: Blackbean Productions, Alexander Brackowski, Sinamatella, David Pluth, Volcanoes Safaris.

Queen Elizabeth Conservation Area



The Queen Elizabeth Conservation Area is in the heart of the Albertine Rift, along Uganda's border with the DRC. It is one of Africa's great national parks. In the 1950s, it had the highest biomass of game in Africa. Originally called Kazinga National Park, it was renamed in 1954 to commemorate a visit from Queen Elizabeth II.

The park is located between Lakes Edward and George, connected by the Kazinga Channel. The channel attracts large numbers of birds, reptiles and mammals including elephant, buffalo and hippo. Crocodiles, previously found only in the northern Nile system in Uganda, are now seen along the channel.

The Rwenzori Mountains



The Rwenzoris, or 'Mountains of the Moon' reach over 5000 metres at its highest point, Margherita Peak on Mount Stanley, the third highest peak in Africa.

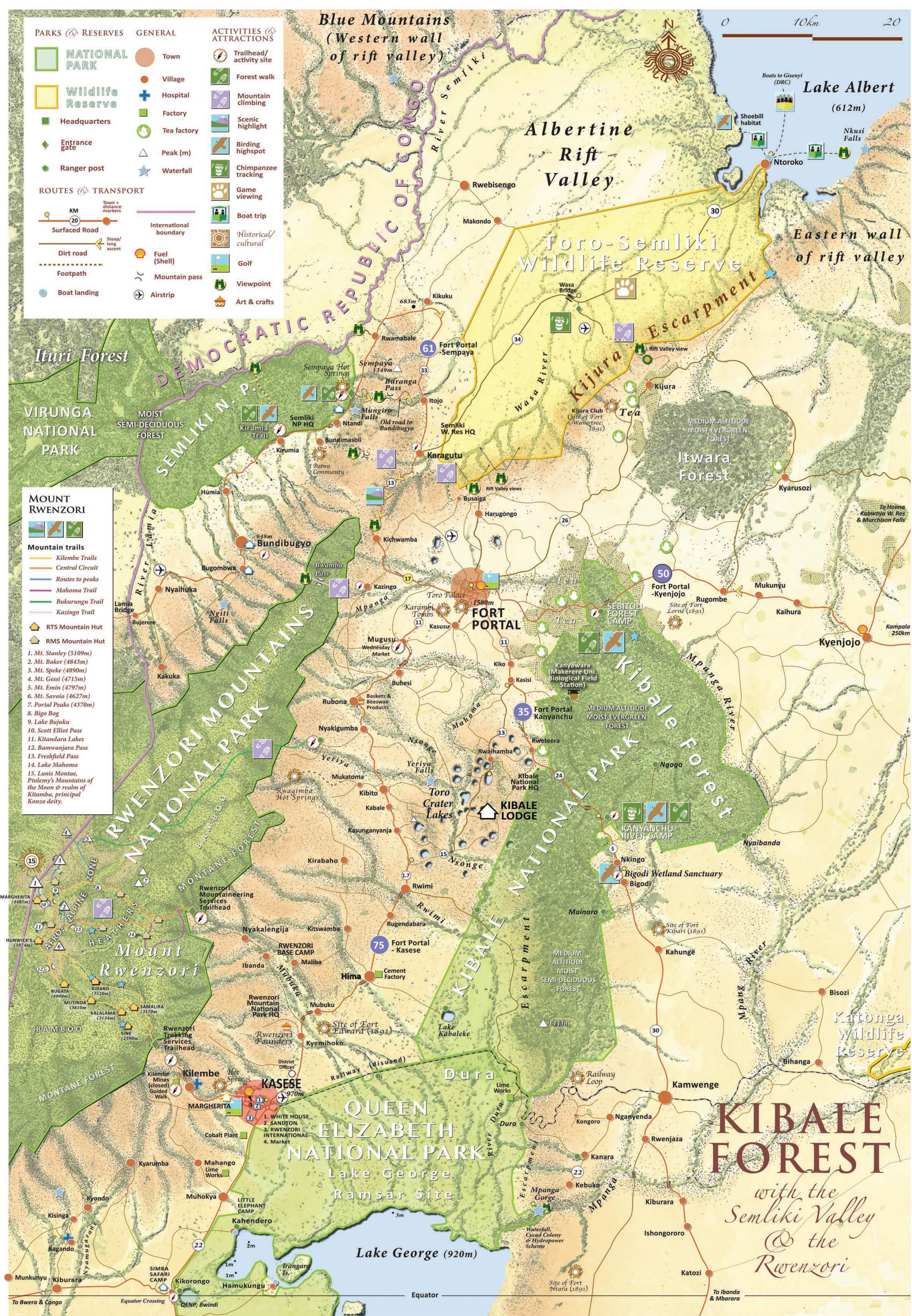
The Rwenzori Mountains, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, are protected as part of a 1000 km² national park which runs along the Congo border between Lakes Edward and Albert.



The five vegetation zones on the mountains are home to unique flora including the 10m-high giant lobelia, and fauna such as Angola colobus monkey, golden cat, southern tree hyrax and chimpanzee.

The glacial coverage on the mountains has reduced from over 650 hectares in the early 20th century to under 150 hectares today, due to global climate change. It is likely within a few decades, permanent snow and ice will vanish from the Rwenzoris.

Rwenzori Mountains and Kibale



Kibale Forest



Kibale Forest, *the Primate Capital of the World*, is one of Africa's best parks to view chimpanzees, with a community of 1,500 chimps within the 800 km² protected area.

Long term chimpanzee research has been conducted in Kibale by Uganda Wildlife Authority and the Kibale Chimpanzee Project, established by Professor Richard Wrangham in 1987. The 2023 Netflix documentary *Chimp Empire* followed the story of the Ngogo chimp community in Kibale.

There are 13 primate species in Kibale including: chimpanzee, red colobus, baboon, black and white colobus, L'Hoest, red tailed, vervet and blue monkey and the Uganda mangabey. Elephant and buffalo are also present but are rarely seen.

335 bird species are recorded including 23 Albertine Rift endemics including Cassin's spinetail, green-breasted pitta, masked apalis and blue-headed bee-eater.

Bwindi Impenetrable Forest

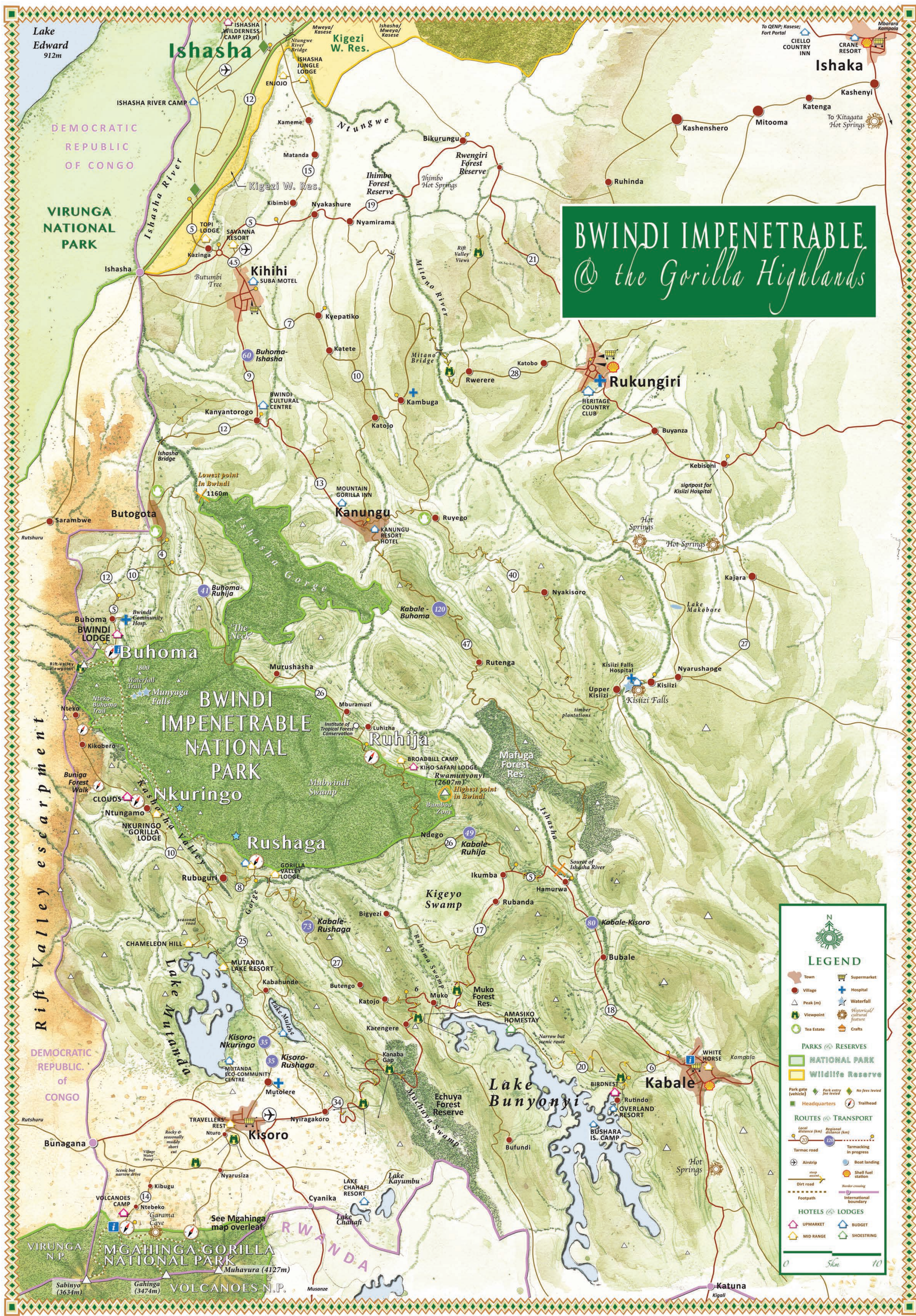
The ancient Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, 330 km², is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and home to about 460 endangered mountain gorillas, just under half of the total population.

There are around 50 gorilla families in Bwindi, including 20 habituated groups, within the 330km² national park. In conjunction with Uganda Wildlife Authority, gorilla conservation, monitoring and research is conducted by two of Volcanoes Safaris' key conservation partners: **Gorilla Doctors** and **Conservation Through Public Health**, founded by Ugandan-born Dr Gladys Kalema-Zikusoka.

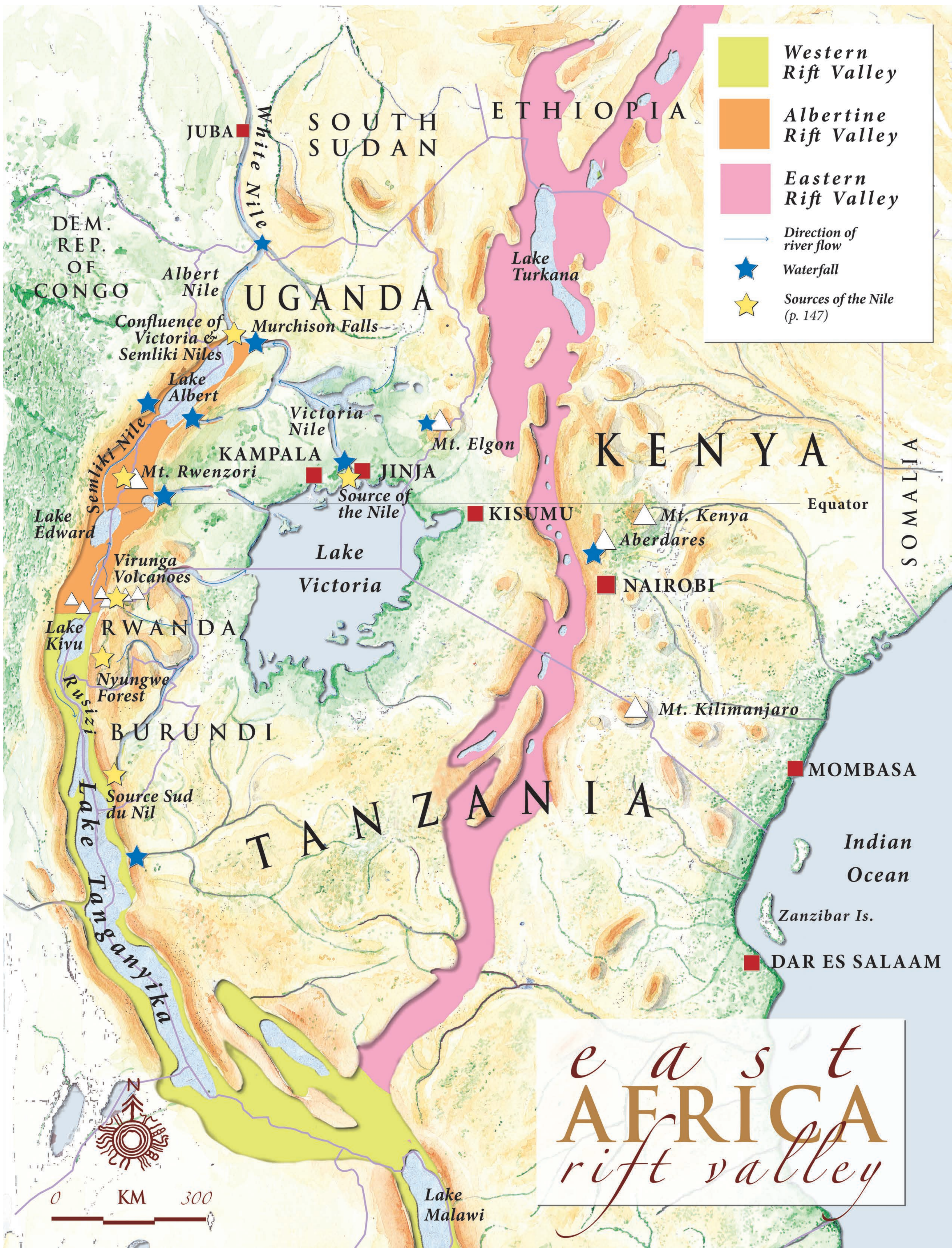
Bwindi has about 350 recorded bird species including 23 Albertine Rift endemics, 120 mammal species including 10 primate species. There are 310 recorded butterfly species including eight Albertine Rift endemics, making Bwindi the most important site in Africa for conservation of montane butterflies.



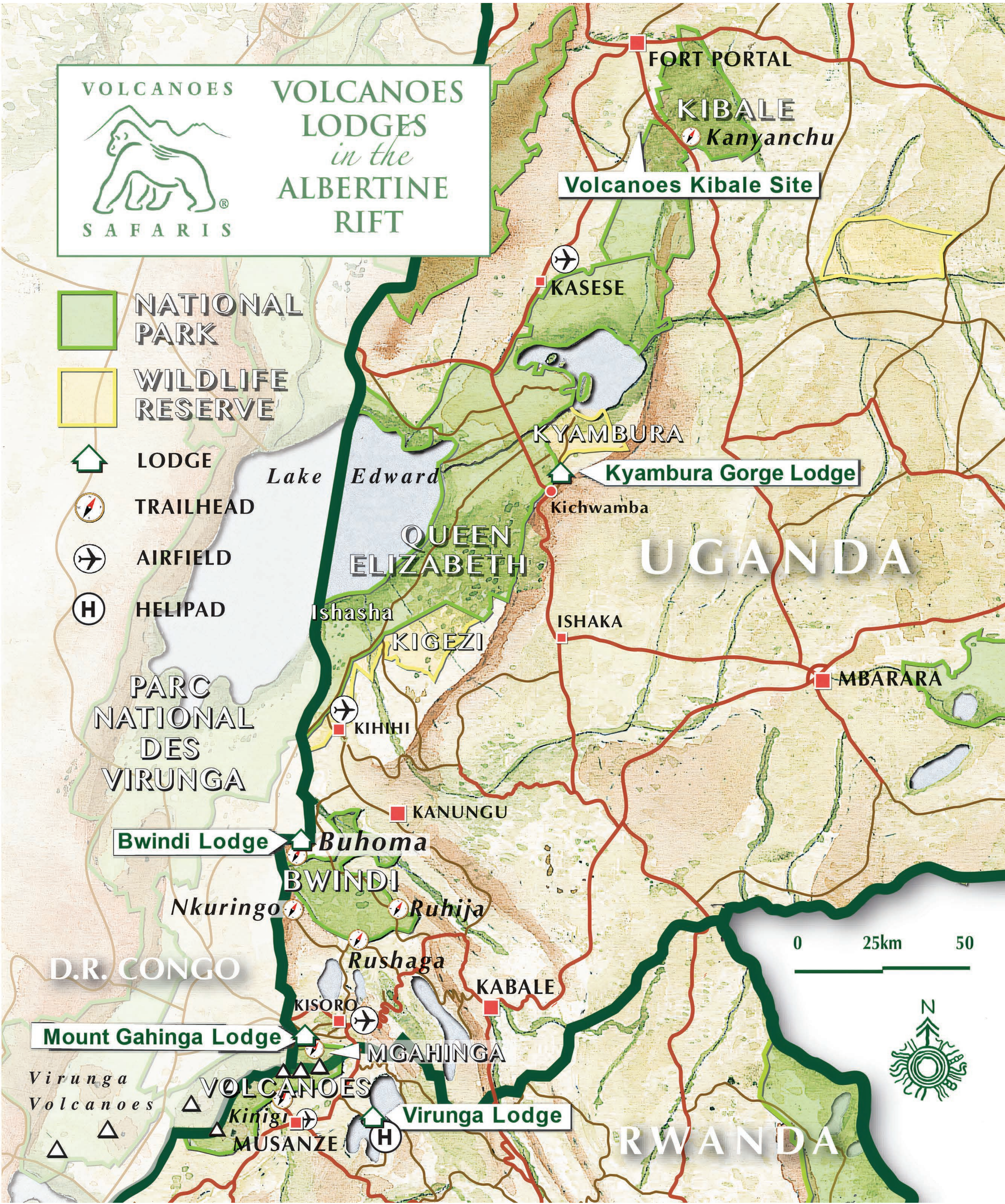
Bwindi Map



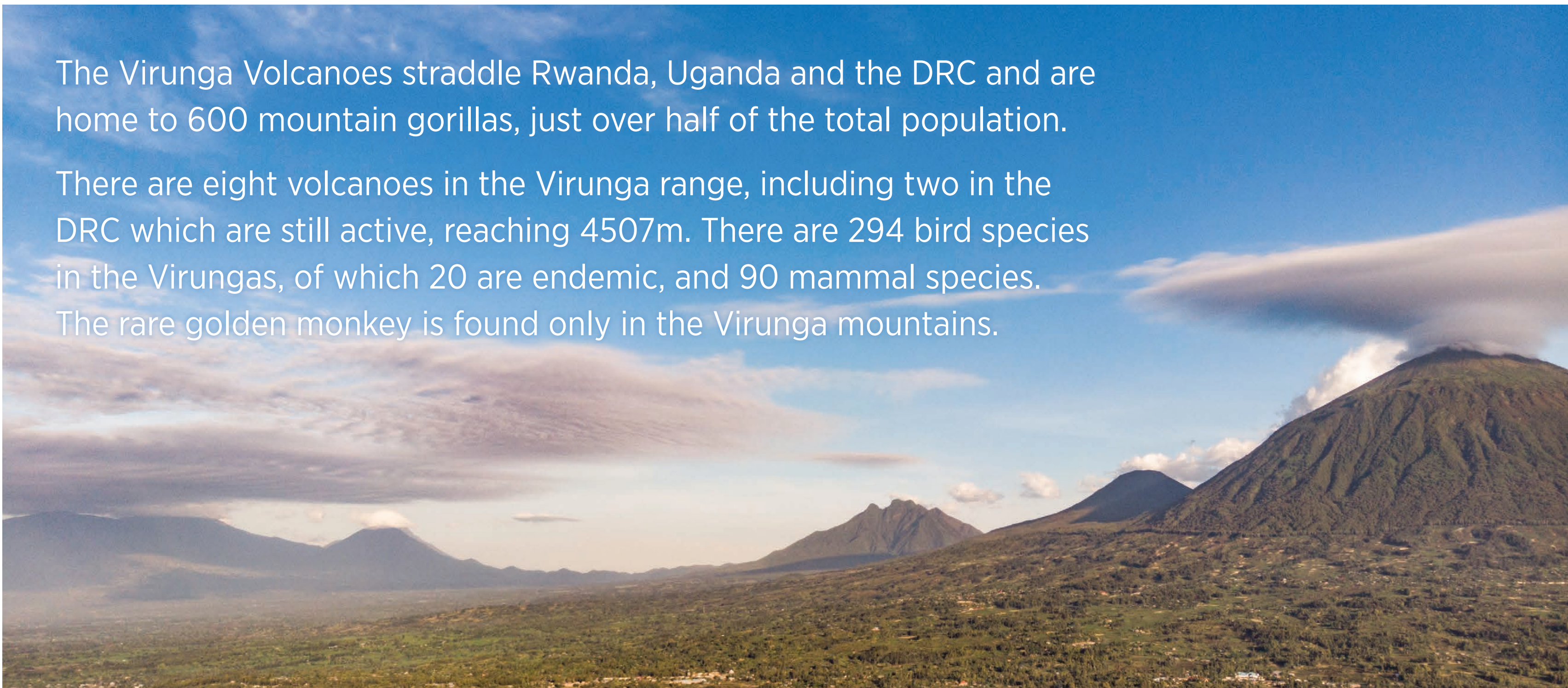
East Africa Map



The Albertine Rift



The Virunga Massif



The Virunga Volcanoes straddle Rwanda, Uganda and the DRC and are home to 600 mountain gorillas, just over half of the total population.

There are eight volcanoes in the Virunga range, including two in the DRC which are still active, reaching 4507m. There are 294 bird species in the Virungas, of which 20 are endemic, and 90 mammal species. The rare golden monkey is found only in the Virunga mountains.

Mgahinga National Park

Mgahinga, in southwestern Uganda, is the country’s smallest national park at 34km² and the smallest protected area in the Virunga volcanoes. The park is home to one playful gorilla group, the Nyakagezi family, led by a dominant silverback called Mark.


Praveen Moman first went walking in the foothills of Mgahinga with his father in 1966, aged 12.

In 1991 when the park was gazetted, the Batwa community, thought to be one of the oldest surviving indigenous people in Central Africa, were evicted. VSPT supports the Batwa community at Mgahinga through the Gahinga Batwa Village, Vocational Centre and Heritage Trail.


Volcanoes National Park

The Rwandan side of the Virungas is 160km² and is home to 14 habituated gorilla groups. The area surrounding the park is densely populated with up to 1000 people per km².

The Dian Fossey Map Room at Virunga Lodge has a permanent exhibition charting the ‘Explorers and Conservationists of the Virunga Volcanoes’. The Map Room was opened in 2017 to commemorate 50 years since Fossey set up the Karisoke Centre high in the Virunga Volcanoes in 1967.



The Gahinga Batwa Village



The Map Room Catalogue and Exhibition

Mountain Gorillas



The Virunga Volcanoes and Bwindi, with a combined area of 700 km², are home to the last 1100 mountain gorillas. For perspective, the Serengeti is 30,000 km² and the greater Yellowstone ecosystem is 70,000 km².

The mountain gorilla shares 98% of DNA with humans. Unlike other gorilla species, the mountain gorilla cannot survive in captivity, living only at altitude in these tiny, fragmented forests in the heart of Africa.

The population has increased from around 250 in the late 1960s to 1100 today. Dian Fossey predicted gorillas would be extinct by 2000. Tourism has helped protect the gorillas by providing a livelihood for the communities and contributing to conservation. Without tourism it is debatable how many would have survived today.

However, tourism must be sensitive and controlled to reduce the risk of disease transmission from humans to gorillas.

Volcanoes Safaris Partnership Trust partners with the **Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund**, **Gorilla Doctors** and **Conservation Through Public Health** to support gorilla research and conservation.



Mountain Gorillas