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# Joel Hartter Assistant Professor of Geography, College of Liberal Arts travels to Uganda

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## Joel Hartter

Assistant Professor of Geography - College of Liberal Arts

Professor Hartter traveled to Uganda in June to conduct research on the impacts of a forest park on rural livelihoods.



Getting reacquainted with a former participant

This summer, I traveled to western Uganda to visit the communities outside Kibale National Park. Kibale is not the typical national park when you think of Africa. Most people I know think of the vast savannah landscapes, such as the Serengeti teeming with wildlife. They think of hot, dry days, with the lions and antelope seeking refuge in what little shade they can find, while elephants and hippos try to keep themselves cool near the water. Kibale is so strikingly different to that picture because it is a relatively small park comprising almost entirely tropical rain forest. The park lies just above the equator about 200km west of the capital city Kampala an about 50 km from the Congo border. While Kibale may be less known than some of the other flagship parks of East Africa, it is an extremely important reserve for biological diversity. My research continues to focus on the relationship of the people who live around Kibale and park management.

I was extremely busy during my time in Uganda. I had two objectives with my trip. The first objective was to meet with and discuss results from previous research with Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) officials and the communities where I had worked. In addition, I was invited to a research symposium at Kibale to present results to UWA officials, park wardens and research scientists. I spent time meeting with individuals and new researchers to discuss my results and current conditions on the ground; and revisited villages and spoke with community members to learn about new developments and social change. My second objective was to learn about the social and institutional differences in the northern part of Kibale. Through discussions with UWA and park officials, research scientists, and local NGO's, I began to develop a sense of the social context that perhaps could shape the perceptions of local communities and how they were different from other areas around the park. I worked to start up a new set of interviews. My research

assistant from the area will travel in the coming six weeks to six new villages to discuss more issues related to the park.

On a more personal note, this summer was extremely beneficial to me not only to develop relationships with park officials and other research scientists, but also those people on the ground who are impacted everyday by the park. The Batoro and Bakiga give freely of their time to help me understand their lives and cultures in order to tell their story. They have rich cultures that began separately and have fused together in the Kibale region. Though the issues surrounding the park are the main focus of my research, I am confronted with other pressing social issues: extreme poverty (the daily working wage is about \$1/day), health and sickness (HIV/AIDS, malaria), and population growth (Uganda's population growth is among the highest in the world). These cannot be ignored and certainly play a role with my interaction in the villages. The hardest part about being a researcher there is that I am only one person here and the needs are many. Everyday I am asked to employ somebody's brother or friend, sponsor a child for school, or donate money to send a person to the clinic. Should I say yes? To whom should I give? How much? These are questions I think with which anyone would struggle. It takes time to figure out where I fit in and how I can help. I have since begun to find answers to the many questions through supporting rural libraries around the park (please visit [www.booksopentheworld.org](http://www.booksopentheworld.org)).



Joel and his lead field assistant Erimosi Agaba enjoying their usual lunch of peanut butter and jelly and roast maize

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