

WE LOVE... Rubondo Island, Tanzania

IN THE south-western corner of Lake Victoria, Rubondo might seem a strange place to find chimpanzees. However, just two hours' flight from the Serengeti, this pristine forested island is home to more chimps than humans and makes for some tantalisingly different post-safari R&R.

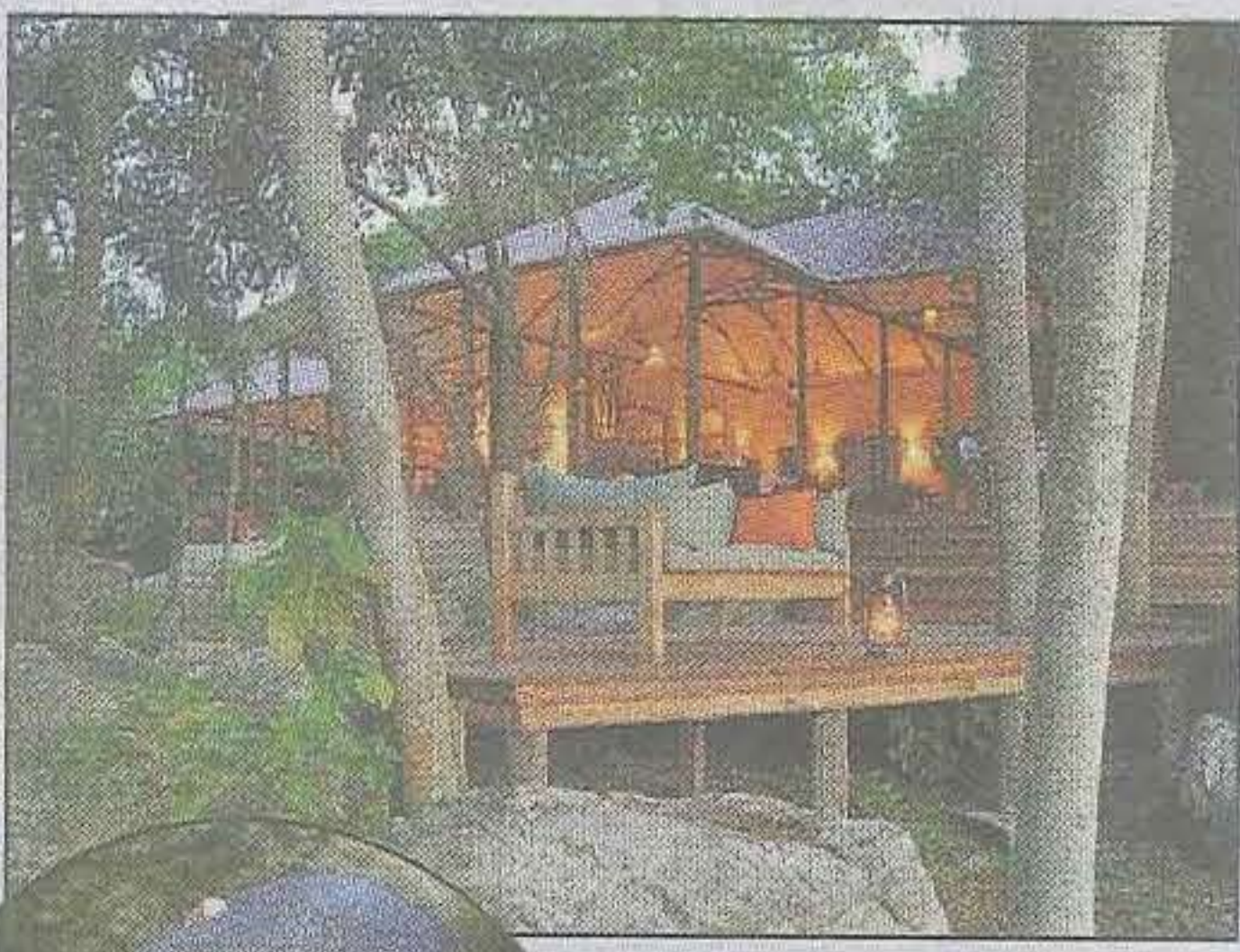
The apes arrived in 1966, brought by conservationists in the world's first attempt at rehabilitating captive chimps from zoos in Europe.

With Rubondo's 90 square miles of hills and valleys providing ample food and space they also brought elephants and giraffe which, like the chimpanzees, roam the forests.

Such a project affords visitors the chance to see these engaging primates for themselves and the only lodge on this otherwise uninhabited island has just been opened by leading luxury ecotourism company Asilia.

Rubondo Island Camp lies on the eastern shore, with superb views across Victoria.

Its eight en-suite cottages, rustically yet stylishly furnished and hand-built with local materials, are tucked back from the water's edge. If you fancy a dip, stick to the nearby



STAR TURN: The chimps are the main attraction for visitors to the magical Rubondo Island Camp, above



swimming pool and watch all the lakeside wildlife including crocs, hippos and gigantic Nile perch from the safety and comfort of the lodge's colourful lounge, bar and dining area. Not surprisingly, the fresh fish served here is delicious.

Rubondo Island National Park is ripe for discovery, its 10 islands covering 457 square kilometres. The lodge offers game drives, nature walks and boat trips, each feeling like a natural magical mystery tour as the island's inhabitants still surprise the guides and lodge hosts.

At camp a tame civet, a sleek cat-like creature, wanders around at night. Bella, the resident bushbuck, grazes on the lawns and flocks of black kites descend on fish in the water.

On game drives shy sitatunga antelopes dash across the track along with clouds of colourful butterflies.

Boat trips offer the chance to see otters duck and dive and hippos bob up and down in the lake while some of Africa's largest population of fish eagles swirl overhead, one of around 200 species of birds here.

However, the chimps are the real stars of Rubondo. On forest walks, trackers will teach you about the animals' lives, their nests, their families and the food, especially the fruit, they love. You'll probably hear them before you see them: their shrill squeals sound like playful, over-excited children.

If you do see them, cherish the moment, because these gorgeous, clever primates who are our closest cousins are becoming increasingly rare.

● GETTING THERE

Expert Africa (020 8232 9777/expertafrica.com) offers six nights in Tanzania including four nights at Rubondo Island Camp from £2,937pp (two sharing), full board. Price includes return flights from London with Kenya Airways, transfers and activities.

SUE WATT