

CEREAL

In this volume, we explore the theme of **process**. We converse with **Faye and Erica Toogood**, discuss garden design with **Luciano Giubbilei**, and perfumery with **Lyn Harris**. We visit the studios of **Stanley Whitney** and **Elliott Smedley**, and travel to the mountains of **Bhutan** and the hills of **Rwanda**.

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TREE
CLAD HILLS

Through Rwandan

Rainforest

words

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Low hoots murmur from the foliage, rising to an outburst of screeches, conjuring an image of lips curled back over enormous jaws, fangs bared. It is the unmistakable howl of chimpanzees. I exchange a look with Jonathan, the photographer. Christoff, our guide, tears away from the forest path and dives into the undergrowth. We follow him, skidding down muddy slopes, through knotted branches and sharp thorns, around low bushes and skeletal trees. Christoff signals with his hand for us to stop. Just ahead, framed in the surrounding undergrowth, I see the wide backs of two chimpanzees, shoulders sloping. I creep a step forward as they descend the slope away from us, watching their black fur disappear into the bush.

We trudge onwards through the forest, guided by their hoots and cackles. At first, they are ahead of us, but then, somehow, when we hear them again, they are some way behind us in the distance. Christoff's radio crackles sporadically as he communicates with the trackers. He has kind features and a quiet demeanour that are somewhat incongruous with his camouflage jacket and trousers. "The trackers have spotted another group of chimps deeper in the trees," he tells us, in a low voice. He leads us to a path, stepping gingerly around a legion of fire ants campaigning across the forest floor. I look up; the path ahead cuts into the side of a steep slope. We follow the narrow, muddy track around a bend, to where two trackers in camouflage are waiting for us. They peer down into the forest, pointing.

Twigs and nuts clatter down through the branches above me. Looking up, I make out the dark shape of a chimpanzee perched high in the foliage. I lift my binoculars. A chimp carefully climbs the trunk of a distant mahogany, reaching out onto a flimsy branch that bends under her weight. A troop of blue monkeys leap between trees with canopies the shape of parachutes. I crane my neck to the sound of whistling wings, and see not the fat, clumsy wood pigeons of home, but rather long ripples of white tail feathers. "Those are hornbills," Christoff says. "They are often spotted with chimpanzees." He places the emphasis on the second syllable of the final word. "They eat the same food." A tracker further along the path urgently beckons me. Another chimp has come into view. Jonathan points his camera. The shutter gives forth a rattling burst. A hornbill lets out a sardonic laugh before flapping into the sky.

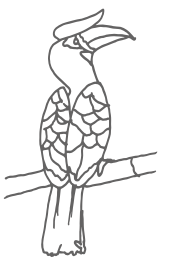
We watch as a chimp stretches languorously along a branch. A few dark shapes move in the trees. The guides relax, smiling. We wait patiently at the side of the path for clear shots of the nonchalant animals, resting in the rafters of the forest. A troop of 45 individuals live in this region, splitting up during the day into smaller groups to forage, before regrouping again at dusk. I wonder what distance they cover on these endless searches.

Nyungwe Forest, its name derived from the Kinyarwanda word for 'dense place', is the oldest and best preserved rainforest of its kind in East Africa, and has clung to Rwanda's southwestern mountains since before the last Ice Age. It is part of the Albertine Rift system, a chasm measuring almost 1,500 km from north to south, in the western part of the Great Rift Valley. Carving through Uganda, Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania, its depths are flooded with lakes, rivers, and lava flows. On either side, snow-capped mountains, volcanoes, and high, humid rainforests, rise out of slate grey soil.

Rich with volcanic minerals, this soil allows Nyungwe Forest to support an almost unimaginable diversity of life: 13 varieties of primate, 85 other mammal species, 275 species of birds, and over 1,000 varieties of plants have been identified within its boundaries. Much of this plant life has long been revered in local medicine. As I leave Jonathan with the chimpanzees and walk back to the road, I see begonias growing on the earthen banks alongside the forest trails. These can be crushed and placed as poultices on open wounds, or boiled as tea to sooth stomach problems.

Hornbill

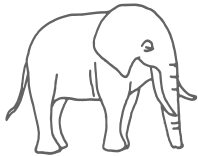
Hornbills enjoy the same fruit as chimpanzees, and are thus often spotted in their vicinity. The hornbill is easily identified by its curving beak, with a large helmet-like casque on top, as well as its particular, resonant cry.





Forest elephant

Once considered a sub species of the African bush elephant, the smaller African forest elephant is now recognised as a separate species entirely. It is darker than its larger relative, and smaller even than the Indian elephant, and possesses distinctive, straighter tusks. A slower birth rate than other species has meant populations have struggled to recover from the effects of poaching. There are only an estimated 100,000 African forest elephants remaining globally.



The *Carapa* tree is named ‘bitter oil’ by Rwandans, after the liquid produced by grinding its seeds. Their young leaves stand out vividly against the greenery, as bright as the petals of an enormous, sanguine flower. The fruits, similar in appearance to an avocado, although closer in scent to a squash, are the favoured food of blue monkeys and grey-cheeked mangabeys, whilst the seeds are eaten by humans to treat intestinal worms. I pick one from the forest floor, turning it over in my hands. A vivid yellow liquid seeps from a crack in its husk.

We drive along a sinuous road, navigating precipitous hills. We pass columns of security forces on patrol. Assault rifles in hand, their black boots thud to deter Burundian militia groups from attempting to cross the national border, hidden deep within the trees. The road continues to climb. Looking past the road’s edge, verdant hills blanketed in forest stretch far below. My conversation with Jamarie the driver turns to history: “Until the last century, this was all but impenetrable,” he says. “Many Rwandans would have considered the forest to be our western border. Not many people knew about the land on the other side, on the shores of Lake Kivu.” In testament to its remoteness, when Belgian forces invaded in 1916, they banished Rwanda’s royal family to this region beyond the forest. Nyungwe was granted national park status in 2005, putting an end to the encroachment of agriculture at its periphery. “Poaching has also declined,” Jamarie tells me, “but it was too late for the buffaloes and forest elephants.” The last Nyungwe elephant was killed in 1999 in Kamiranzovu swamp, a painfully poignant moment, given that the name comes from two Kinyarwanda words: *kamira*, meaning ‘to swallow’, and *zovu*, meaning ‘elephant’. Ever since, a virulent climbing vine has come to dominate much of the forest undergrowth, unchecked, spurring talk of reintroducing forest elephants to the region. “It is incredible to think elephants ever lived here,” says Jamarie, glancing out of the window at the endless hills. “The forest is so dense and steep.”

I feel a mix of melancholy and hope. Rwanda is the most densely populated country in Africa, but despite the hunger for land, some space has been found for the vibrant lungs of the forest to breathe. Jamarie pulls the car to a stop by the side of the road. “Come,” he says. We stand side by side, looking out over the precipice ahead. Nyungwe’s undulating canopy lies far below; an unbroken carpet of green. There is silence — the kind that rushes in after a heavy rain. Nothing moves on the road behind us, nor in the vast sky. The stillness is complete. I realise I will find it hard to leave this place.



