

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17



February 27 Arrival in Arusha / Introductions & Welcome Dinner

Africa or bust! This long-anticipated safari begins, and today was the day that our own herd assembled. Some of the group came early to Arusha, Tanzania, to rest up at the very welcoming African Tulip Hotel. Two joined Preston and Wilfred for a private safari to Arusha National Park, finding many animals and birds, including beautiful Black-and-white Colobus Monkeys. Linda and Peg were the last to arrive, flying a route through Doha on Qatar Air with an excellent fare. They found the others enjoying the hotel pool and garden, and quickly did the same. A woman was there just radiant from her safari experience, telling many stories. At our own introductions Preston would tell us, “Soon, you will have your stories, you will have so many stories!” How right he was.

The hotel was a gracious refuge within busy Arusha. It was in an embassy neighborhood and had lovely art and woodwork, a small pool and garden, a luscious and ample breakfast, and wonderful hospitality. Peg hosted a welcome dinner and round of drinks our first evening and Preston gave an overview of Tarangire, the first of several national parks that we would visit.

February 28 Arusha to Tarangire National Park

This morning after a delicious breakfast with lots of fresh tropical fruits (yeah, mango was in season!), we headed out. We learned just how many suitcases can fit in the back of a Land Rover with masterful packing (more than we thought!), and then headed out through Arusha. Peg noted how much cleaner and more prosperous the city seemed since her last visit.

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

With recent rain, all the road dust had settled and as pavement now reached almost to the park turnoff we made very good time. Watching the ebb and flow of daily life, people cooking, small roadside stores, Massai herding cattle, goats and sheep filled the first hour, then city life gave way to rural life and we saw many huts of native materials and brush pens to enclose the livestock at night. Drought had been severe and several cattle carcasses were attended by Abdim's and Maribou Storks. Where there was water we saw Hamerkop and our first African Harrier Hawk.



At the Tarangire National Park gate we got to stretch our legs and some really stunning species awaited us, including Golden-collared Lovebird in good number. A Red-chested Cuckoo called to us and we found it; Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu were common, and we had Crested Francolin strutting about the pathway.

We entered the park and very soon got sightings of our first Lilac-breasted Roller and Impala, both common but iconic species. The Impala looked sleek and well-fed; a trio grooming each other was fun to observe. Everyone got to start learning right away with Preston's encyclopedia patter, often delivered as if he were the animal telling you what it was coping with or revealing information to help you understand its situation and decisions.

Our next iconic bird was the African Gray Hornbill, posing for inspection with its imposing bill. Then there were Elephants, the first of many and many more to follow! What a thrill to be here at the "baby" time of year; every other group of elephants we encountered seemed to have a just-born infant with mothers

hanging near to each other, tending and caring for it. These little creatures defy CUTE as they explore and learn about the world. Preston estimated one we saw today to be just a few days old!

We had to force ourselves to get to the lodge and lunch, served poolside in the company of Rock Hyrax and Red-headed Agama lizards. The paths were lined with native stone, and Lynn commented on how inviting the view down the valley was with so much greenery.



After a rest, we went back out in the park for the late-afternoon where we marveled at century-old Baobab trees, palms interspersed, and fields of red termite mounds. And, we found our first lions! Three females perched on a ridge above the river, surveying the terrain. One had a lone cub that

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

clamored over her chewing on her neck and frolicking in the grass. Ring-necked Dove sang “Work Harder, Drink Lager” to us; a host of birds posed on shrubs, including such beauties as European and Little Bee-eaters, Long-tailed Fiscal, Magpie Shrike, and Brown-capped Tchagra. We saw four species of francolins and started learning about the landscape.



Upon return, dinner was served in a cozy dining room of African décor, our choices from the menu including meats, fish, and vegetarian dishes, and delicious desserts — tonight a coconut cake with caramel sauce.

March 1

Full Day in Tarangire National Park — Wonderland of Baobabs & Elephants



Today was amazing! On two game drives through the stunning woodland habitat of Tarangire National Park, we saw so many birds and mammals we hardly knew where to look at each stop. Preston calmly pointed out one wonder after another, interpreting animal behavior in his unique and informative way.

The morning highlights were many: more elephants, colorful Eurasian Rollers, endemic Rufous-tailed Weavers and utterly comical Helmeted Guineafowl to name a few. We watched as an African Fish Eagle displaced a feeding

Rufous-bellied Heron that Nick found. We spied Pygmy Falcon perched for viewing, and a Dik-dik family feeding in flowers. Go-away-birds were show-stoppers with their antics and calls and large size. Brown-capped Tchagra entertained us at the picnic area where, upon approach, we were thrilled to observe cliff-loving Klipspringers. Lunch at the cliffs was a time of eagles — three species in view at one time, including the very rare Verreaux's.

After lunch, we found tree-resting lions, hoisting themselves from the comforts of ground to seek shade. As we left the picnic ground we crossed paths with Elephant and found a cross-tusked female in the group, she seemed to have a two-year old in her care. We watched in this group as a young baby fell while trying to cross the road — several females responded immediately lifting it with trunks and tusks to help. Pretty amazing to see all this family action up close and



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

personal. Grants Gazelles, a lovely Three-banded Courser ... the morning wonders flowed by fast and furiously!



In the afternoon we left about 4:00 PM and headed out for the park's "river circuit." We saw Common Waterbuck, Zebra, and we passed into an open grassland area. We were thrilled to find Secretary Bird, a first for many, and such a dramatic bird — strutting by us at close range. Next was a big group of Buffalo, with calves, and then Elephant, a solitary male in the mud enjoying a bath.

We then moved on to a large group of Elephant, watching their behavior. It was an idyllic scene with a large

extended group of thirty or so, grazing in lush green grass. Three youngsters were testing strength and wrestling, trunks entwined. Another group approached from the hill, moving slowing into the herd, with quite a conversation. We listened to them trumpet, watched them greet, and were startled to see on



the far side of the valley what appeared to be a male aggressively approaching a vehicle, which backed up to avoid any conflict. When we looked close it was a male, likely an uncle to a week-old baby hanging tight to its mother. Probably agitated by the excitement of new arrivals, this male was on alert. We would be here quite a while; with his behavior, the road was "closed."

The male eventually left and crossed to join a very beautiful female with massive tusks and a two-year old,

and another mother/offspring pair. The female and tiny one followed, and it was heart-warming to watch the tiny baby, one that could still easily walk under its mom, greet the other youngsters. It ventured forth, rushed back to Mom, then made a bold charge to sniff and touch trunks — what an intimate view into the family life of elephants! We were here for some time due to the defiant male, so chose to turn back rather than make a loop. With great luck we came upon a Smooth Chameleon strutting across the road. Fun!



After dinner, Preston and Peg rescued a Giant Dung Beetle that had made its way into the lobby, a massive scarab-looking beetle. The guards thought it humorous to help us photograph it for our long-time entomologist friend Alex, helping with lights and objects for size comparison. One could readily fill your palm!

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

This evening we could hear elephants in camp beginning at about 10:00 PM. They wanted to come in and trumpeted as the guards turned them away. Perhaps all the green grass was tempting! Pearl-spotted Owl called and small bats patrolled the lights on our porches.

March 2 Tarangire National Park to Lake Manyara National Park

We navigated the pathways of our hotel in early light, past the pool and grounds under the watchful eye of Rock Hyrax, so numerous here. To them the rock walls of the lodge were similar to the natural rock of the site, and they used the tall thatch roofs as lookouts. Woodland Kingfisher and Black-headed Oriole liked the shade of big trees. Red-winged Starling were abundant here.

We left soon after breakfast, as we wanted more time afield among the huge spreading Baobab and acacia trees of Tarangire National Park. A pointed peak, a signature of the landscape, was also named Tarangire, a name which Winfred told us combines the Massai words for “river” and “warthog.” The land leaving the lodge slopes down to the river across from it, so this peak is always in view.



Morning light played beautifully on a herd of Common Waterbuck as we left the lodge. A stunning D’Arnaud’s Barbet perched almost motionlessly on a low, deep-red termite mound and Lynn was happy to see the cover of her field guide in real life. We found Black-faced Sandgrouse by a dry river crossing, both Tawny and Martial Eagles, and a troop of Olive Baboon with several small babies. A male and female Giraffe were starting an elegant dance of courtship, the female likely coming into estrous.

We made a brief stop at the gate where blooming Baobab trees created a nice oasis. Golden-collared Lovebird were feeding among fresh flowers. Then it was back out into rural Massai lands. The contrast of buildings and density of homes was striking between the dirt road and the paved road as we headed towards Lake Manyara. We did the necessary paperwork for our night drive there, scheduled for this evening, and headed on the lodge and lunch.



A male Paradise Flycatcher greeted us there, posing on the “Birds Bath” sign as it dipped into the tiny pool, wow! The star attraction at Manyara is water and water birds around the big lake, and we had so many to observe! But first we had a mid-day meal with a lovely view and good food, then a break before going back out at 3:00 PM.

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17



Right at the gate a huge rookery of Yellow-billed Stork was in sight, beautiful light playing on the birds coming into their breeding plumage. Their wings shone deep

green colors in good light, and underneath the lifted wings of the adults revealed a complex and fascinating array of feathers with cottony tips in a rich magenta color. Peg photographed this and blew it up on her computer to show us all at the evening meal. This afternoon, watching them land, gangly legs stretched forward to catch all-too-thin branches, was too much fun. There were several thousand in the park, at this spot they decorated the canopy like ornaments on a holiday tree.



All this was viewed as Wilfred and Preston did paperwork at the gate and then we were off, heading pretty much straight to the Hippo Pools and wetlands. We first spied 100+ White Pelican, a handful of Pink-backed Pelican mixed in. We parked in a place of Hippos; Nick got some video of their grunts and spouting. They were piled



densely, and birds used them as platforms for feeding. Our birders had a heyday here with so many new species to observe: Spur-winged Goose, Black Heron, various plovers, stints, and shorebirds, plus numerous storks and herons. Brilliant for all was the

lighting on a majestic Fish Eagle at close range. It gave its vibrant chirp-like call to another somewhere we could not see. African Jacana was quite abundant here, along with Egyptian Geese.

The swamp at Lake Manyara was teeming with life, and while Hippos were the grand attraction, the supporting cast of European and Lesser Moorhen, myriad shorebirds, and raptors on the wing was something to behold. We spied Black Heron, one mantling its wings to shade its fishing area. Water Dikkop lounged on the road, White-headed Whistling Duck delighted us with their high-pitched cries, and we found our first Purple Heron. Farther down the road Nick spied a Rufous-bellied Heron intent on feeding. Two species of terns, Gull-billed and Whiskered, patrolled the area and at a distance as we were leaving, Peg spotted our first Crowned Crane.

We packed it in today, catching a quick dinner before returning to the national park for a night drive. This was done with guides from a local concession, a company allowed to go in at night, and this was

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

the only park we would visit that allowed night game driving. We got into their open vehicle and almost immediately had a great sighting, right near the road: an African Porcupine! It did not stay in view long, but we got to see its long, rigid quills patterned with black and white, wow! In time we'd see White-tailed Mongoose, a nocturnal species, and Lynn spied an elegant Verreaux's Eagle Owl we got fine views of. One of our favorite sightings was of a sleeping pair of Silvery-cheeked Hornbill. We had seen them in flight, but to see them posing together, feathers touching and all tucked in to their branch for the night was something special.

We fell into bed, satisfied with a very full day!

March 3 Lake Manyara to Ndutu Conservation Area

After our late night, we had designed a leisurely morning that all enjoyed. It was a delight to wake up on the edge of Africa's rift valley. Recent light rain made for a morning of mist with wonderful sounds and smells. Announcing the day was a combination of village prayer song mixed with bird song, beautiful tones of White-browed Scrub Robin, Spotted Mourning Warbler, Common Bulbul, and the haunting of Gray-headed Bush Shrike. Breakfast had luscious fresh mango and a local melon, omelets to order and homemade bread with marmalade and jam. We walked on paved pathways through the forest patches between our tents and found a good mix of species, including two sunbirds: Scarlet-chested and Variable. Carboni's Greenbul added to the chorus.



At 10:00 AM we left to head to Ndutu, a southern part of the Serengeti Ecosystem and Ngorongoro Conservation Area, our next wildlife area to visit. But first was the obligate shopping stop. We had tried one large store and did not enjoy it, but this was a very small shop with a nice staff, not pushy, and some really lovely textiles, carvings, paintings, beadwork, and more. We made a good contribution to the local economy, including some beaded items to benefit the local orphanage, and were soon on our way.

We had our picnic at a most spectacular site, the rim of Ngorongoro Crater. Here a rainstorm was blowing in and the scenery was dramatic with dark clouds, mist, and light on the crater floor below. An Auger Buzzard flew by at eye level, mixed in with many African Black Swift. We were excited to see this World Heritage site, and to know we'd have two days to explore it as we returned from the Serengeti portion of our safari. On to Olduvai (to the Massai, Oldapia) Gorge!



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17



What a stunning drive between these two treasured places. We drove partway along the rim, then descended the other side, leaving behind the lush green forest of the rim and encountering grazed lands of the Massai, decorated by several villages, each with their huts and secure areas of brush corrals for cattle. Herders were busy keeping their livestock together with the storm coming in.



We arrived at Olduvai just as the rain came. We made a dash to the view of the gorge, where under the shelter of a ramada, John could give us an overview, an excellent summary of the four geologic formations and their inherent phases of anthropological and ecological clues in the form of artifacts and skeletal remains that helped the Leakeys and their research team trace the evolution of humankind. Right here at this spot, and we were here! A small museum gave ample information and a replica of ancient human footprints provided us more detail. Our couple of hours here went very quickly, but our next lodge was calling.

Wilfred kindly positioned the van for us to make a dash, and then the adventure began! It was more like taking a

boat than a vehicle as the rains had come in so hard they flowed like a river down the road. We watched cars come from the other direction spraying huge waves to either side, wild! We navigated that with our trusty Land Rover only to find a lineup of cars at a cement crossing, totally underwater with a raging muddy torrent that would not allow passage. Vehicles waited on both sides, and thankfully in about 20 minutes the rushing torrent calmed enough for us to pass.

On to our lodgings, where en route we crossed the most amazing congregation of wildebeest that we could imagine, with herd after herd mingling into groups of 1000s, as far as the eye could see! It was hard to take it all in and we were glad to know with Preston's urging that Peg had planned for three nights and several days here.

March 4 Ndotu — Place of the Wildebeest!

Ndotu is the place to be in February and early March; the congregations of wildebeest can hardly be described. This is the end point of the great Serengeti migration, the place they swirl around for over a month, feeding on fresh grass and giving birth. This morning we would be totally



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

surrounded by them, and we filmed them crossing a stream, youngsters hurling themselves in, reacting to water, perhaps their first feel on the belly.



We paused at a place with a big view, up and down a river corridor, and out to a far meadow. Peg spied a vehicle stopped there, beside it a big caramel-colored lump. This could only be a lion, and off we went to see it. There were actually two, one a big-maned male that captured us for quite some time. They were out in soft dirt, lounging with distended bellies. No sign of the rest of the pride or any kill, just two well-fed males planning to sleep off the day.

As we'd started early and it was still cool,

they were not yet tucked in the trees. Good luck and good timing!

We then got to watch a pageant of birds and mammals, stopping many times to learn from Peg and Preston's interpretations and taking time to observe behavior. By not rushing, our photographers could record in detail, while giving others time to scan, watch, and learn. Often our best birding was when we are stopped for a cat or for baby zebra or wildebeest.

On an open ridge, we looked for Bat-eared Fox but today, no luck. We found a grand group of Marabou Stork feeding on invertebrates. Lynn said they looked like old men at a funeral home; we got to calling them the grim reapers.



In the trees we found a group of Green Wood

Hoopoe, giggling their way through the trees. An African Harrier Hawk joined three species of eagles; how wonderful to be in a fully-intact ecosystem with so many predators!

On the ground we admired Two-Banded Courser, and found one with a chick, fun!

We were never away from the grunts of Wildebeest, which seemed equally at home in the woods or on the plain. Following them along a river course, we got wonderful photos and video of them crossing a river.

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17



We went out morning and afternoon and the highlights were many. Sometimes it was hard to decide: do we watch Zebra with babies frolicking, or catch up to a Hyena on the move? Do we stay with the Black-chested Snake Eagle, or move on to find other species, maybe a Long-crested Eagle? — Linda's favorite! When we would pull away from a good sighting, Preston would often reassure us, "The animals are here, there will be more!" How well he knew what was in store in the coming days!

March 5 Ndutu — Another Day in Wildlife Paradise

We had another full day in this amazing place, and wished only for many more! Our timing was good and this lodge was well situated for wildlife action. It was also very comfortable! They gave us wake up calls by bringing coffee to the tent, which we enjoyed on our screened in porches. When ready, we called for escorts in the morning if still dark. Since wildlife was free to enter the camp, a Massai would come to take us to the dining area, which had a big deck with view of Lake Masek, one of many of the alkaline lakes used by flamingoes. They were there, along with a few hippos, herds of Zebra and Grant's Gazelle.

Breakfast was a buffet with many choices; we could meet at 6:00 AM and be out by 6:30 AM, our early

strategy for seeing the predators. Thankfully this day we would be one of the first vehicles out.

"The animals are here, we will find them." Linda was alert, seated on the right as the road we passed each day to and from Camp followed a ridge with large open-canopy trees. When she said an emphatic "Stop," Wilfred did, and what a thrill, she had seen the dangling tail of a Leopard! We had this view all to ourselves, it was quite high in the tree, and we watched it get up, walk, stretch, and scratch its claws. It was dawn light, so our photos were total silhouette, recording harmony of cat and tree shapes in dawn light. Soon it descended, and we could see its rich spotted coat as it disappeared in thick grass and brush. WOW. This was going to be some day!



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17



The second cat stop of the morning was also a thrill, unexpected in an open area of bushes. We saw a couple of other vehicles attentive to one cluster of shrubs. We quietly pulled up and our guides expertly put us in just the right spot. BABY lions! Likely about 3 weeks old, they were parked here, and their mother kept them away from the others, taking time to keep them safe and create a bond. She had been away, and we were able to watch her nimbly return, instigating a wonderful greeting. She groomed the playful cubs that climbed and nursed and at times ventured out to the edge of the shrub cluster to look out at the very big world. This was as true of a National Geographic moment we were lucky to find, and we savored it quietly, taking it all in! Lesser Kestrel perched nearby, and both European White and Abdiham's Storks fed without fear within a couple of vehicles reach. A fresh Wildebeest kill, mostly consumed, signaled this well-fed lion's preferred prey.



Cat sighting number three was also alerted by vehicles so it was not as private as the leopard, but we joined in as we did not want to miss seeing FOUR Cheetah! We first thought this amazing mother had brought three cubs to near adulthood, but watching for some time Preston figured out it was actually a male, likely new to the group, paying attention to the female and putting the two almost full-grown cubs off a bit with unease. They bedded on the other side of the shade tree from their mother and suitor and eventually moved off without her, walking right between vehicles to select other shade. Climbing a massive fallen tree, they had a

good stretch, then barked to her in soft tones. One led the other off through the grass. The female got up with the male in pursuit, they went on a parallel but different direction. Such drama out here each day!

What a morning!

In the afternoon, we had several highlights, one being close when a giraffe decided to drink, a gangly behavior that makes them seem so vulnerable! Nick wondered how they avoided postural hypotension, standing up so quickly and raising that very long neck.

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17



We saw quite a few birds of prey, including Martial, Steppe, and Tawny Eagles. Rufous Chatterer piled onto each other in a bush, a Nubian Woodpecker put on a fine show, and Slate-colored Boubou provided us chorus. We found our only Hooded Vulture of the trip, and compared male and female Bateleur in the sky.

We found another lion, a lone one, and a grand array of Zebra, Warthog, gazelles, and ground birds: bustards, francolins, and guineafowl.

Back at camp they had a cozy fire on the deck with snacks of local peanuts and fresh popcorn for happy hour, ahead of a nice buffet. We went to sleep to sounds of Hyena, and in the night, a passing Lion.

March 6 Ndutu to Western Serengeti

This morning we had a bit of a “lie in,” planning for a full game drive morning after luggage was packed, as we would be driving on to Western Serengeti through the very long lines of wildebeest. We would leave them here, so once underway, we wanted to savor hearing their constant grunting communications, watch them run, watch one line go this way, one line go that way, witnessing first-hand this mass of animals in perpetual motion.

But first at camp we admired Diedric Cuckoo which posed to show off its vibrant colors in the sun. Bill joked with our Massai waiter, asking him to guess his age (Preston says in this culture they would always guess high with great respect, so Bill was most pleased with the evaluation of 70). Asked about the waiter’s job ambitions, he answered, “to be a guide.” The dining porch was so pleasant, with a view of Lake Masek, we were tempted to linger. But we wanted to be at the Serengeti National Park gate by noon so the road was calling.



We drove down by the river ahead of reaching the endless plain, and keen-eyed Preston spotted a distant Wildebeest giving birth. She was standing, and from behind you could spy two light hoofs and the placental sac dangling. She seemed to want to lie down, but kept up with the moving herd, holding it in for the right moment. Preston said within ten minutes it would stand and quickly it could run. She went down a few times, then up again; we left this drama as they passed out of view among the scattered trees.

Wildebeest were the main attraction; we could easily see several hundred-thousand from our vantage point. The numbers continued as far as the eye could see. Near the road we spied a den of Golden

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17



Jackal, great fun to watch two adults and their interactions with an inquisitive youngster that boldly approached our vehicle, only to scoot back to the den. Capped Wheatear, now common, and Kori Bustard were in view here as well.

We reached the park on schedule, with some time to spare. How wonderful to enter this place where so much ecological work has been done, so many films have been made, knowing so much wildlife awaited us!



We got to stretch our legs with a walk up the hill behind the offices where Wilfred checked us in. Preston pointed out Red-rumped Swallow, Black-lored Babbler, and Rufous-tailed Weaver, as well as other birds, and talked about some of the plants growing on this kopje. At the top there was a very large Mzama Flat-headed Agama male chasing females around the rocky terrain. Down the hill we could look off to the teeming herds of Wildebeest as far as the eye could see.



We had a picnic lunch here and were delighted that birds came to join us. We compared Hildebrandt's and Superb Starlings side by side and Wattled Starling, some in breeding plumage. Still with 112 KM to go, we headed out.

After entering the park, wildebeest were gathered along the road margin, taking advantage of puddles left by the recent rains that had also painted the landscape green with new grass. We found a trio of Hyena, our closest views yet on the trip, and soon realized the female was in estrous and a male found her most interesting. We learned a lot about Hyenas' genitalia (females appear like males) both from Preston's commentary and seeing it all in person! Nick alerted us to view the pond behind where several Zebra were up to their bellies, cooling off in the water. We spied Cape Teal, Pied Avocet, and several species of waterfowl here as well.



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

Soon we were on our way, and as so often happens, when you least expect it we found one of the highlights of the tour, a close-up view of a Serval! This was a first sighting in ten trips to East Africa for Peg — not an easy cat to find. Here it was, hunting along a grass-lined ditch, nose in the grass, its elongated body and tall legs readily apparent. It seemed to listen intently, so much so we thought we might witness a pounce, but we did not see it hunt successfully, but we sure enjoyed watching it try! Preston identified it as a fully mature male. When it bedded in the grass you could not see it at all, we waited another ten minutes or so and gave up, our twenty minutes or so of viewing a rare treat!



Reaching Central Serengeti, we crossed several river courses. From a bridge we spied Hippos, several Black Crake, Black-winged Stilt and other shorebirds, and a Serrated Hinged Terrapin at a Central Serengeti river crossing. Passing the airstrip we continued west. We passed huge troops and with two spotted romping groups of Banded Mongoose.

Linda got a great shot of the sunset over the Serengeti from her porch. This is the safari life! We were happy to land after a long, but fruitful day.

March 7 Western Serengeti

There were far fewer tourists in this far western reach of the Serengeti and on outings we enjoyed seeing few other vehicles. Being after the peak season for this area, we were also able to book a very high-end camp at better rates, and this we thoroughly enjoyed. Kirawira Tented Camp is listed as one of the small luxury hotels of the world, and they showed it with their impeccable attention to details. The small pool had a waterfall and was just a great place for an afternoon break. The dining was over the top; five courses keep the waiters busy changing out silver and showing off their really beautiful dishes. Lynn had read that the Serena chain was owned by the Aga Khan, who has done many philanthropic endeavors including schools and hospitals across Africa. We had plenty of menu choices and simply ate way too much! By the time we left, we were begging for simplicity!



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

While a luxury property, this was still a small tented camp, set in a forested area on a hill with a commanding view. Our tents had large bathrooms, great showers, and porches peering out to the endless plains. Wildlife was always near, Lynn found a beautiful Sulphur-breasted Bush Shrike and Bill and Judie had a snake on the outside of the tent, a small green one the staff assured them was “probably” not poisonous (to which Preston conferred). Butterflies were numerous about the plantings. Birding on the grounds revealed Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, various weavers, drongos, and the comical Bare-faced Go-Away-Bird.

Our morning drive started after a luscious breakfast served at dawn so we could be out early. Von der Decken’s Hornbill greeted us just outside the camp, and a Vervet Monkey proudly sat atop the trash. Nick admired the Camp’s old gas tank (still in use) and Helmeted Guineafowl scolded our passage. Once in the grassland, we admired the pretty meadowlark mimic known as Yellow-throated Longclaw and sorted out larks, sparrows, and sparrow-larks. We found both White-bellied and Black-bellied Bustards, an African Hoopoe, many fiscals (shrikes), and other species.

We drove up a side road to a seasonal camp not in use, and spied from a distance three Bat-eared Foxes. They were shy, and with our arrival, streaked away from the cool earth they had been resting on. Soon we found other canids, a pair of Black-backed Jackals, and at a distance, a third species trotting away, a Side-striped Jackal. Above us, beautiful European Bee-eaters turned graceful circles in the sky as we watched them.



We then drove to the river’s edge where we found four Nile Crocodile, two of which were sunning themselves and showing off their immense size. The river streamed over a natural cataract here, and a



Hippo was enjoying the current, rising and falling with the waves. We tried to catch his yawns with our

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

cameras while Preston explained the relationship between the two species, being equally dangerous and not in conflict for food, “no they don’t bother each other at this size, they have signed an agreement.” A Water Dikkop and several Common Sandpipers fed along the shore.

Topis were numerous here, their burnished buff hides shone well in the sun. We never got as close to them as we did the more numerous ungulates. They were not on the same breeding cycle as the others; their young were several months old. We spied Hyena several times, including one small male with a fat tummy that lounged on some cut earth close to the road. We took his photo and commented on his easy life, only to grimace as he started to stand, limping away on an obviously broken foot. Preston considered how the injury might have occurred and told us Hyenas were tough, with help from the clan he could heal and survive, and was expected now to still be “on patrol” and in communication with his unit. There must have been a kill way off to the north as we saw long flights of vultures heading that way. We made our way back for lunch and a break.

We went out again at 4:00 PM. Passing a freshly downed tree along the road, Preston chided that “the dinosaur was here.” This was evidence of elephants that now seemed scarce, yet we would indeed see a massive herd, the largest we’d seen with over 70 members, as we departed Western Serengeti. We watched a huge troop of Baboons with youngsters pass across the landscape, spread wide as if fearing nothing. Banded Mongoose romped between them. We watched the endemic Rufous-tailed Weaver work on nests, photographed a cooperative iconic Lilac-breasted Roller, and surveyed all that we found. Time passed quickly and soon sunset was a fine one!



March 8 Western Serengeti

We had another full day here, and broke it into morning and afternoon game drives, so those wanting a break could take it.



In the morning, we found Impala to be “the first survivor,” surveying all we could see, as Preston reminded us, of those that survived the night. No good sleep in predator-rich Africa! We found the Impala were sleek with feeding on all the greenery and males were congregating big herds. They would spread out to feed until he’d get uneasy, then we’d watch chase scenes as females wanted to move on and he wanted them to go “over there.” Big herds of bachelors awaited his eventual demise of energy.

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

We had lost all sense of time watching animals day after day and had a lively discussion on what day it was, which Judie settled in it with, “my pill box says its Wednesday.” The rhythm of safari had set in! The road out passed a verdant plain and Nick commented on its golf course appearance, seeming so well mowed that “you could putt on this beautiful green.”

We eventually found the same group of lions we had spied at dusk, with Wilfred using the low gears of the Toyota Land Cruiser to get us there. They were doing what cats do well, sleeping. The female was so relaxed she had her belly to the air, then to the side, a real snoozing sprawl. Her cubs were all good-sized; two in time had enough of the sun and trotted off to a wondrous tree. They climbed and we repositioned to watch them, rewarded with some great photos. We also had fun with the birds at this spot, as was so often the case a mammal would cause our stop and our bird list would benefit. This one Peg spotted in a small runoff area, a Steel-blue Whydah with its long streaming tail. We enjoyed this National Geographic moment with the cubs for some time, then moved along. Next highlights would



include a Leopard Tortoise feeding, Southern Ground Hornbill, one of which crossed paths with a Secretary Bird! They had flown past us during the lion watch, and it was great to see the white in their wings and their very huge size. Back to our gracious hotel perched on the hill for lunch and time to rest; two of the group tried the pool.



In the afternoon we started with Giraffe watching as a group of ten had assembled on the road out of the camp. Their elegant movement between feeding trees was fun to watch, and one female seemed to be coming into estrous.

She was moving about, standing by various males, all of which seemed more interested in chewing cud than any wrangling. One male however kept her in view, and when she got close to a smaller male, displaced him. Preston showed us first-hand how movement on this species of acacia initiates ants swarming, causing the giraffes to stay in motion.

A strutting Hartlaub's Bustard was one of several new bird species this afternoon. We found another species of chameleon, a small herd of wildebeest that fell behind the others, sunlit Topi, warthogs in good number, and we just admired the scenery with its many spreading acacias.

Another feast ensued upon our return, and off to bed under the beauty of a nearly full moon!

March 9 Western Serengeti to Ngorongoro Crater

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

We had reached the westernmost point of our exploring, and today turned back, crossing Africa's amazing Serengeti for the full day. By now, much of the wildlife was familiar, but we still found ourselves stopping for an elegant Giraffe, a pair of Black-backed Jackal, and anything else that caught our eye. We got better looks at Meyer's Parrot, and very close looks at Montegu's Harrier.



By far the most remarkable sighting of the day was to find a Caracal. Only Lynn and Preston spied the adult, and during confusion about how far it was from the vehicle, Bill spoke up and said firmly, "a baby!" There next to the road, was indeed a very young Caracal, trying to hide from us as if we could not see. It would sit immobile for some time, then scoot a bit to a new patch of grass. We did not stay long, wanting its mother to return. Though she was hiding in dense grass, she would be alert and not far to return. We had been SO lucky with mammals this was beyond hope or expectation!



We made good time, watching at water features for Ruff and Black-winged Stilts, taking in the return the herds of Wildebeest, stopping again to picnic by the Visitor Center and gate. We stopped for photos at the park entrance/exit gate, and then passed through Massai cattle lands, past a large Massai village in a very picturesque spot with a mountain view, and on into the Crater itself, stopping at a viewpoint.

It is hard to describe the impact of seeing this place so important over time to our understanding of African mammals and their ecology and behavior. It's a beautiful landscape and today the clouds put on quite a show.

We then followed the rim road another twenty minutes or so out to our rim-view rooms at a stunning lodge. We had to pinch ourselves we were staying here, thank you Preston!

Today was our day to visit a Massai Village, a fascinating experience with a small view into a lifestyle so different from our own, but one distinctly chosen by its followers and freely shared with us this day. We saw many aspects of village life, were able to ask questions, and left laden down with beaded goods and other treasures we'd long remember.

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

Dinner was a buffet, very ample, and we discussed our plans for the next day — into the Crater we would go!

March 10 A Full Day in Ngorongoro Crater

This morning we entered fantasyland. Descending into the crater at Ngorongoro felt like we passed through a secret door, entered through the tunnel effect of the Flat-top Acacia forest. Watered by almost daily mist, this forest had a cloud forest feel, with draping mosses and dense understory vegetation. It opened up to a shrubby woodland, and finally the grassland of the Crater floor.

As we descended, Preston spotted a female Lion close to the road, looking intently towards a group of Zebra. Scanning revealed five females in total, all intent, hunting. We watched the Zebra unaware of them, grazing, small foals wandering too far from the safety of their mothers. One glance would be peaceful grazing, the other stalking muscle on a lion frame, lifting one foot, arching a leg, slowly, slowly Finally, the lead lioness made her move, and to our surprise, she went down a ravine, out of sight!



Next we saw a Warthog, running for its life, tail up — escaping. This hunt was not successful; the lionesses gathered and greeted each other, and the warthog stood on a small hill, as Preston said, saying “nan a nan a nana....” While we had seen Lions much closer, this glimpse into the strategy and cooperation required for hunting was superb. Preston’s quiet and persistent narration wove the story and allowed us a fuller understanding of what went on.



From here on out it was a pageant of animals; grazing groups of sleek Elands, a few of the massive bulls weighing in close to a ton. European White Stork gleamed in the sun and over the course of the day we saw over 100 Crowned Crane, paired two by two, and in some areas larger groups. Several were close enough to the road you could photograph head shots, and all agreed this has to be one of the world’s most beautiful birds!

Preston and Wilfred spotted a prize on the hill: off to the side of a very large group of Buffalo was a Black Rhino and her calf, a large calf about half her size. They

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17



were a long way off from any disturbance, in a part of the Crater without roads. What a thrill to see this rare mammal!

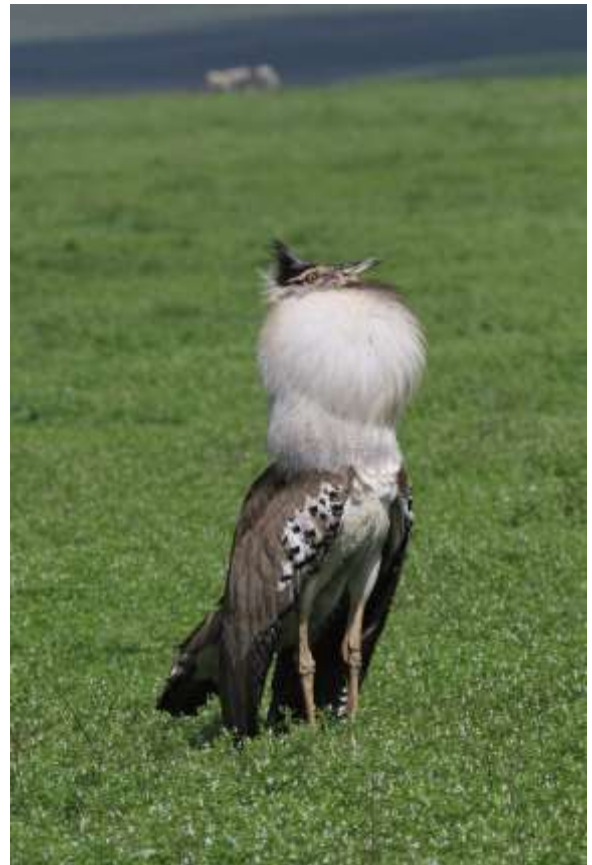
Coming around a corner, we spotted a fruiting fig tree along a small stream, and it was a great spot for birding.

Seeing a Helmeted Guineafowl up in the tree was out of character, and it was joined by a colorful African Green Pigeon. Atop the tree was an African Cuckoo, and we noted several small species, including the migratory Willow Warbler here.

We stopped at a Hippo pool where we watched Hippos, including one that Lynn saw roll over. There were 22 Black-crowned Night Heron, our first Hottentot Teal, and Lynn spied a lone Little Grebe. Plentiful waterfowl kept our cameras clicking, Sacred Ibis posing atop Hippos was hard to resist.

We had time at last with Zebra and their young, and they were not shy, providing wonderful photo opportunities and a great chance to observe behavior. We saw a stallion pursuing a female, and some foals so young they were learning the basics of how to stand up and lay down. Lots of nursing, mutual grooming, fun! The Crater also gave us time with non-shy Warthogs, which for the most part ran from stopped vehicles, here they did not, affording us a chance to watch them. We found five hyenas with the old remains of a carcass, the hindquarters of something long gone, and watched their jostling for it at a waterhole they had dragged it to.

In an open section with a far-reaching view we came upon one of the most memorable sightings of the trip — a male Kori Bustard in display! Standing tall, his leg feathers looked like fancy cowboy chaps. He puffed up his throat sac, making booming sounds like a prairie chicken, while walking, wagging his body to and fro, occasionally dipping down to the ground to catch a snack to refuel. This was just incredible to see at close range! He kept it up for over 20 minutes, and was still parading when we pulled away. Other vans came and took a lightning quick look — how glad we were to stay



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

intent with the moment and watch this incredible display. Every feather seems to play a role into enhancing the appearance of the throat, like a frigatebird he clacked the bill a bit on the sac when fully inflated. The sound carries a long way in open country, yet no females were in near view; we did encounter two about a mile down the road, perhaps working their way to the dance.

We found a long-distance lioness up the hill, several Hyena, and a good show of birds of prey, including Linda's favorite, a perched Long-crested Eagle. Many times we just stopped for beauty, vistas of the rim, so green with abundant grass, and lines and lines of animals. There were flamingos in the lake of the Crater floor, and at a lunch break we watched Sacred Ibis, other waterfowl, and Hippos. Judie dashed behind a rock as one hippo came out of the water. She and Bill watched amazed at two oblivious tourists who remained seated, eating their lunch. Hippos are one of the most dangerous animals in Africa,

always to be respected!



How lucky we were that we had a fully clear day, as fog is typical at the rim. We had clear views as we ascended, and stopped to watch Golden-winged Sunbird feeding in a bright orange, honeysuckle-like find in the acacia trees — nice!

We got back by 4:00 PM

with some time to enjoy our beautiful hotel and our rim-view rooms. We gathered by the pool to watch the sunset over the Crater. Sitting there in awe, one has to pinch oneself, am I really here!

Dinner was from the menu tonight, with gracious service in their lovely dining room, built with native stick and thatch but stretching 15 meters high for a feeling of grandeur blending so well with nature. Inspired architecture used some of the style of rustic elegance seen at Old Faithful Lodge in our iconic national park at Yellowstone.



This was the final evening of our main safari, two would leave us the next day. We celebrated under the immense, tall thatched ceiling of our native-inspired hotel dining room.

KENYA EXTENSION

March 11 Ngorongoro Crater to Amboseli National Park — Two Countries & Two Iconic Parks!

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

Today seemed like two worlds in one. Four of us continued on to Kenya with Preston, saying good-bye to Wilfred and hello to our Kenyan driver, Francis, at the border crossing.

We woke to sunrise over Ngorongoro Crater, such a hopeful, peaceful, almost surreal place. We really hated to go! We drove out along the rim, passing under graceful Flat-topped Acacias to the viewpoint and then the park gate. We made a short stop at a curio store for restrooms and for Peg to pick up her African carving purchased on the way out now over a week ago. The staff greeted us as old friends, "Jambo!" Arusha was not too busy with traffic as it was the weekend, so we were able to make good time to the African Tulip Hotel where we retrieved stored items and dropped off Lynn and Nick, who we envied as they had a leisurely afternoon to enjoy this lovely place. Sad to say good-bye to our flock, and then Wilfred, our wonderful driver in Tanzania.



On the road again, two hours to the border, and then a surprisingly easy crossing awaited us. Both sides have modern customs buildings, but the line was quick to go through on both sides and soon we were on our way. As the paved road in Kenya is on the other side of Amboseli at a different crossing point, this one gets less traffic, and the Kenyan side of this crossing is a washboard dirt road. Our driver Francis navigated it with ease. Bill joked that he must have driven for the fire-department before discovering tourism.



But we did start seeing wildlife right away and with surprise we saw two different Gerenuk, an arid gazelle of graceful beauty, a long neck from which it gets another name, the Giraffe Gazelle. We saw Giraffe, Grant's and Thompson's Gazelles all ahead of reaching the park gate.

We entered Amboseli at the northeast corner through a park gate. We took the short cut across the dry lakebed, getting a run on it and not stopping on the soft substrate. In just a few weeks when rains begin, this would be a lake. Today this lake was a barren alkali place of powder and dust, above which loomed magnificent Mt. Kilimanjaro. Bill braced himself to stand and film the first beautiful looks at the mountain. We got closer and closer, mesmerized by its beauty. Soon, more wildlife was there to find!



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17



A female hyena with a distended belly and milk bag trotted beside us for a ways on the road, and she led us to a second female that was at a den, nursing young. This was very close to the road, a series of holes led to connecting chambers. We watched as our trotting mama leaned into one of the holes, gave a soft sign, and up tumbled cubs! It became clear there must be multiple females as two big cubs had to move off to the side to wait, while two others nursed with vigor. Finally, a tiny inquisitive head poked out, a tiny cub never brave enough to venture from the den. So at least three females shared a den here, with a fourth within site and perhaps connecting underground.



After crossing this arid expanse, the luxuriant vegetation of the swamp seemed impossibly green and inviting. There were thousands and thousands of birds clustered here, herons and egrets of all variety, African Jacana, various plovers, and numerous Egyptian Geese and Glossy Ibis. The marsh was perhaps a mile across, and as far as the eye could see this mix of water birds continued. In between were Hippos, distant Elephants, and resting along the

shore, a female Lioness.



A cluster of vehicles alerted us to a resting cheetah. As we watched, a long line of Wildebeest passed her; she showed no interest even with many calves, just too many hoofs to avoid!

We arrived tired by our 12-hour day, but fascinated by this new geography. Here we were perched under another icon of Africa, to travel from

the rim of Ngorongoro Crater to sleep under the shadow of Mt. Kilimanjaro is a lot of serious landscape energy for one day!

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

March 12 Amboseli National Park

We woke to the lyrical calls of Spotted Morning Thrush, which mimics other birds like our thrashers. In the night, a Pearl-spotted Owl provided a serenade. Being drier here, the morning air holds a chill, and feels so fresh for the first part of the day. We bundled up a bit and got out right at dawn, eager to see what we could find. Bill elected a day off here and thoroughly enjoyed himself at the lodge, making some friends of other travelers, enjoying the pool, a good lunch, and time for laundry, internet, and just to be. The rest of us continued our obsession with finding each living creature we could, delighting in the show of light this morning.

Kilimanjaro was clear, so our first photos were Ostrich in front of Kilimanjaro, Giraffe in front of Kilimanjaro, gazelles in front of The allure of cats and adventure called us away from scenic and we headed for the swamps. Amboseli is a place of great extremes: an alkali, treeless plain that at times seems bleak adjacent to very lush well-watered swamps creates a mosaic, and the animals respond with daily movement, in and out of the swamp. Iconic photos here are of long lines of elephants making their way across the open plains, purposely moving, often in a single file line. We saw those today, with billowing clouds above, a wonderful sense of even a great animal like this being dwarfed by open sky.

We stopped to watch buffalo and Elephants, giant males immersed to their bellies and feeding. Water birds gathered around them picking up insects and crustaceans they would pull up as they moved. Younger males moved near them but always deferred, watching the way they ate twisting the grass with their trunks was fun. We were watching as one younger male moved across an area and at one point it jumped back, ears fanned out as if startled. Peg just happened to be videoing, and was lucky to catch the result: this Elephant put up an African mammal very hard to see, the African Civit! It popped up and was about to disappear, when the elephant bowed its head and moved towards it, as if saying, "Get out of here." It leapt and ran towards us, showing its patterned coat and dark throat and chest. It then disappeared in the grass and we all stood amazed. Preston said he had not seen this animal for probably 20 years.



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

We continued along the swamp, admiring the beauty of sunlight on the water birds. Goliath Heron, the world's largest heron stood tall above all others, the white herons were starting to get colored ceres and



breeding plumes, we identified Little, Intermediate, and Great — handy names for identification! There were many Long-toed Plover, Glossy Ibis, Egyptian Geese, and African Jacana. In smaller number we saw Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, and with delight, a Malachite Kingfisher that perched on the papyrus as their fishing piers.

We found a lone mother elephant with a two-year old baby; alone on the plain she carried no fear, in fact we watched her sleeping. Zebra were plentiful and we watched delicate young foals just a few days old exercise their lineated legs. Wildebeest are resident here, not migrating, and we noticed how much quieter they were, hearing only a few males grunting. There were many Wildebeest calves; in one woodland oasis we watched three rip around as if on a racetrack, oblivious to leopards and other fears. Oh, to feel so good!



We found several more hyena, Black-backed Jackal at a den, and numerous gazelles. As far as your eye could see we saw Elephant, marching in lines to the swamp, or in the

swamp, including family groups with females and young. Hippo were numerous; some we found submerged, their backs like islands to wading jacanas and Cattle Egret. Many Hippos were out of the water, lumbering about on the shore, especially in the cooler morning hours. Mud-caked was the mode of the day, most prominent in hippos and buffaloes.

We had a picnic lunch atop Observation Hill, flanked by Superb Starling and Fisher's Sparrow Lark all hoping for crumbs. A pair of White-necked Raven were on constant patrol. Preston brought the spotting scope up and we eyed flocks of African White Pelican feeding, Long-tailed Cormorant resting, Red-billed Teal and other waterfowl as well as the mammals.

We followed the swamp route home, finding a badly limping Zebra that would not likely last long. We searched for Leopard in the riverine trees, spotted Collared Pratincole and Northern Wheatear perched on Elephant dung, and savored our luck in seeing the mountain as it was now quite covered in clouds.

Back at the lodge we had time for some birding, adding



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

several new species such as African Silverbill, Southern Black Flycatcher, and Purple Grenadier. As we enjoyed a poolside drink, a Speckled Pigeon came in to drink. Dinner was good, with wood-fired personal pizzas as an option in addition to the typical beef – lamb – chicken – fish entrée selections.

Tonight was the full moon, but the mountain retained its clouds, so we enjoyed the glow of the moon over camp but not the mountain and retired.

March 13 Travel Day / Lake Nakuru National Park



The bird show was in full force as we went to breakfast at the lodge, with White-bellied Go-Away-Bird, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, and Speckled Mousebird feeding in a white flowering tree just outside the dining room. As dining was partly open-air, we could eat and watch, great fun. Décor here was lovely, African fabrics of the Massai decorated the chairs, and our tables had cloths with native animals. Fresh fruits, crepes, omelets, and wonderful Kenyan coffee was our breakfast fare.



We left at 7:15 AM for a travel day, passing marvelous views of Kilimanjaro as we departed. We stopped for photos a few times, as the entire ridge was clear, and we talked about how sad it will be when climate change denies Kilimanjaro of its cloak of snow. This is a mountain where art and ecology are in fusion, snow being both inspiration and the lifeblood of the water table required for humans and wildlife.

We saw Zebra and gazelles along the roadside, and near the road junction with the major highway from Mombasa we saw several small clouds of Red-billed Quelea, seed eating birds known to flock in massive numbers. Once on the main highway we witnessed a style of driving not for the faint of heart, with big numbers of trucks passing each other and livestock still crossing the road.

At Nairobi we took a wonderful break at Ole Serena hotel near the airport, having an exquisite lunch on the porch that overlooks Nairobi National Park. A decorative water feature brought birds in close and we had time to watch them as we lingered over the particularly scrumptious desserts.

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

Then it was back on the road, another 2.5 hours to Nakuru, serious driving for Francis and we certainly appreciated his skills. At the gate of Nakuru National Park we had fun with the local kids walking back from school, sharing our binoculars and asking their ages and names. Judie and Bill's grandma and grandpa skills helped us bridge the gap as they asked questions and found some delighted, but shy smiles.



Within the park, we were magically transformed from road noise and traffic to safari once again, watching a troop of Vervet Monkey and another of Baboon. We saw hundreds of Marabou and White-backed Vulture around a Buffalo Carcass and herds of Impala, with males herding females and other males looking for females, as Preston says, the story continues!

Flamingo Tented Camp was particularly gracious and welcoming; they have high thatched ceilings in the public rooms, ample and comfortable furniture, a bar, swimming pool, and view of the park. A crackling



fire was made for people to gather around ahead of dinner, which was excellent. We could tell right away they had a real chef, and we had fun watching him interact with the rest of the staff, teaching them and setting high standards. One of his skills was soup; we had one each night that combined flavors in a way to savor. And who can resist dessert when a Double-chocolate tart or Mango Pie were the choices? The mango season was on strong in March and we all commented their richness was unlike any mango we tried, luscious — we had them if we could three times a day!

March 14 Nakuru National Park

Preston was on a mission to show us Rhino today. This park has both Black and White Rhinos and knowing their habits he got us out early. We stopped a few times for perfect sunlight on various species, but kept going to a southern part of the park. Rounding a corner we found them, and had to ourselves a huge mother White Rhino with a three-month old calf. They were feeding on a hill above the road and slowly working their way down to the marsh at the end of the lake. This meant in time they would cross the road, so we had a half-hour or so to watch and film and photo. The baby was comical in not



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

having full command of its very robust body. It moved dirt, and got off balance climbing into a tree hole, running to its mother for reassurance. It nursed and stay very close to her all of the time. We watched until they disappeared in a sea of other animals, Zebra, Defassa Waterbuck, Buffalo, and Impala all grazing in big number.

We then traveled the park roads, watching for Lion and Leopard (no success on this today) and listening for birds (we saw many, including Bearded Woodpecker) and saw our first snazzy Pied Kingfishers. Our goal was to reach the lakeshore and to Peg, returning after several years absence, the shore was unrecognizable! The road sign that used to mark the road that ringed the lake was underwater, a perch for two species of cormorants and Gray-headed Gull. Gone was the big crescent beach, instead water birds perched on drowned trees and clustered onto one linear island. There hundreds of African White Pelican were gathered, and they started to leave in groups, flying off to catch thermals, glistening in the sun, and turning like kites in the wind.

Heading back, we found a pair of Hammerkop that were bringing sticks to construct their legendary nest (Preston tells us 8000 pieces of sticks). We paused to watch a lone buffalo calf that was bleating, separated from its mother. It walked down to the edge of a small pond which proved to be a bonus for us, as Peg spotted first one, then five Painted Snipe there! We don't see this species on every trip and felt quite lucky to do so. Driving back we enjoyed seeing good numbers of water birds, including Yellow-billed Stork and African Spoonbill and then, finally, a

huge and colorful Saddle-billed Stork. We watched it feed, and continued on to have lunch and a break at the lodge. Some enjoyed a swim, others a massage and for a few, a nap.

We left at 4:00 PM for our final game drive, as always going to out "see what we see." By choice, Preston turns off the radios that so many safari companies use, eliminating the constant chatter and stress of rushing off to find something that by the time you get there is often gone. We headed down to the lakeshore, and the light was lovely on Zebra with calves, Buffalo with calves, and numerous water birds. Offshore, there was a group of about 150 flamingoes feeding, at times it seemed like stage lighting was focused on them as the sun went in and out of gathering clouds. Preston told us that in 1961 Tilapia



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17



graham was introduced to help control mosquitoes at the lake. It then attracted fish-eating birds and today they occur in abundance. We watched large schools of cormorants feeding. Greater Cormorant had started nesting. They preferred the treetops of drowned trees and several stood white with a varnish of guano. With rich light and a backdrop of the eastern escarpment of the Rift Valley behind, the landscape was consistently captivating.



We then covered some of the best Leopard habitat in the park, an area with huge spreading Yellow-barked Acacia trees. We looked and looked, and there was ample prey with Impala and Baboon all around, but no luck for us today. We had to be content with the view of the lake at its current high water level blocking former roads and claiming much of the park's terrestrial habitat — quite a story as it seems all the Rift Valley lakes are rising — even during this period of drought — and no one is certain why.

We found a fun troop of Baboon with a rambunctious youngster and then had good looks at a feeding African Hoopoe that raised its feather crest at times — fun!

We had another wonderful dinner with fresh Tilapia and Judie tried a lasagna of butternut squash and spinach. Peg and Preston tackled the bird list to find we had tallied 100 species today!

March 15

The end of our safari was now in sight; we said goodbye to several species we would not see again. And oh, how we would miss this lovely Kenyan coffee each morning! That and a nice breakfast with fresh fruit, crepes, eggs, bacon, anything you wanted, we had today at delightful Flamingo Tented Camp, even an interesting millet porridge. We came to breakfast packed up for the day, off for a travel morning over to Mt. Kenya. Lest they thought we'd starve, we had a box lunch to snack on, and a full lunch upon arrival at Mountain Lodge. By now we felt a bit like waddling Hippos.



We watched street life as we drove, this time much more modern as we were in the land of the Kikuyu people. Many churches, mission signs, schools, and colorful local markets. We planned on a stopping

Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

point at historic Thompson's Falls. This was a lovely spot, an oasis with flowering trees and the sunbirds were in high motion — we found Green-headed, Variable, Tacazze, Bronze, and Northern Double-collared. There were lovely Yellow-bellied Waxbill and a Bronze Manakin. Preston heard turacos calling and soon two lime-green wonders were in front of us, Hartlaub's Turaco!



On the road again, we arrived at Mountain Lodge about 2:00 PM, delayed at the gate by an exciting find, Black-and-white Colobus Monkeys! Peg spied them high in the trees returning from the bathroom. "The animals are here, you will find them." They were feeding on leaves, their preferred food, and they were resting on massive limbs of the trees. They would make massive leaps between trees in time, just wonderful to watch.

We arrived at Mountain Lodge, quite an architectural behemoth of a building, with four wooden floors reaching up to an observation deck that gave one a surround-sound view. On one side was a well-lit waterhole allowing for viewing into the night. Mt. Kenya looms behind and this evening was dipping in and out of clouds. We watched sunset decorate the mountain as parrots and hornbills passed to their roosts. At night we observed many Buffalo, Hyena, and Giant Forest Hog.

March 16

We had the full day at Mountain Lodge, waking to so many new sounds, the loudest being Tropical Boubou. We had a knock in the night to wake us for Hyena, but no Leopard, alas. One had been seen on the road a few nights before, so we were hopeful.

Preston suggested we walk ahead of breakfast a short way out to the parking lot and gate, and his hunch was right — we got great views of the smallest antelope, Suni, out in the early morning sun. They grazed on fresh grass and seemed to enjoy the warmth on a chilly dawn. We also had super looks at Scaly Francolin, never easy to see. A fruiting tree drew in Hartlaub's Turaco, and we sorted out several of the smaller sunbird and passerine bird species.

Back to a meal of fresh fruit, baked goods, and eggs cooked to order, and at 8:30 we met our local guide for a walk, attended by a female park ranger carrying a gun, just in case the Buffalo got testy or an Elephant crossed our path. This was motivation to stay together as a group! It was a terrific morning of birding with some great finds, one of which was the male Narina Trogon. It called from a branch just above us, wow! We learned about the forest and it was great to have a chance to find the secretive species like robin-chats and more.



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

We met Bill who had sat out the walk (birded out), and by staying had a great show by a male Elephant who was frustrated not to be able to get down low enough to the ground to lick the mineral salts. Bill described it as having a temper tantrum, and indeed by his description any animal around would simply move out of the way.



We all relaxed for the afternoon, picked up a few last items at their excellent gift store, packed for our return plane ride, and in general gathered up the reality that we were indeed going home.

We walked to the gate again at dusk, went up on the top deck to watch sunset and species flying back to their roosts, ate one last too-large meal, and called it a night!

March 17 Return to Nairobi & Departure Flights

We had to leave very early for the first flights departing just after noon, early enough that Preston had to make special arrangements for the guards to open the gates. We saw nightjars on the road as our final birding and soon were on a modern road with traffic, heading into the city. We had a bit of a scare as traffic slowed to a near halt, until Preston realized it was the police academy graduation causing the delay. Traffic did move at a crawl, we had some great people-watching, and made our flight in plenty of time. Bill and Judie has a night flight, so relaxed at the Serena hotel, a lovely spot, before boarding. We were sad to leave, but were full of memories that would sustain us!



Tanzania Trip Report

Feb. 27 – Mar. 10, 2017, with Kenya Ext. Mar. 11 – 17

Caracol photos and Spotted Genet Night photo by Linda Shaw, other photos by Peg Abbott

