Tanzania Harris Mega Mammal Tour
November 2015
Trip Report by Lee Gutteridge

Jared, Mark, Jill, Becky, Van, Janet and Lee at heroes Viewpoint, Ngorongoro
Day 1 - 4th November

Upon arrival in Kilimanjaro International Airport I was met by our local Tanzanian driver-guide, Geitan Ndunguru. He descends from the Matengo tribe from Songea region in Southern Tanzania, near the Mozambique border. He is a quiet man with a great sense of humour (we were to soon find out!) and a great depth of knowledge which he is very happy to share. His English is very good, and he has been a guide in Tanzania and the surrounding countries since 1992.

Shortly after my arrival Jared, the first to arrive of my guests, arrived at the beautiful Ngare Sero Mountain Lodge with Geitan. We immediately settled in and planned an afternoon walk in the lush tropical grounds. The lodge is a beautifully renovated old farmhouse with flowers and palms in the gardens and huge old forest trees all around.

The large lounge area in the main house is beautifully appointed, with cushioned seating areas and a beautiful veranda facing out to the north east and to Mount Kilimanjaro, which can be seen with its snow-capped peak on a clear day. Jared and I had a beautiful view of the mountain that afternoon.

Below the garden and the veranda, down a steep hill, there is a beautiful pond and a natural spring, which gives the lodge its name, with flower lined walkways and trails criss-crossing the forested gardens. Ngare Sero means dappled waters. We walked the gardens and the edge of the pond and saw beautiful birdlife, such as:

1. White-eared barbet
2. Squacco heron
3. Hadeda ibis
4. Sacred ibis
5. Great white egret
6. Little grebe
7. Hamerkop
8. African grey flycatcher
9. Pied crow
10. African paradise-flycatcher
11. Red-winged starling
12. Brown-hooded kingfisher
13. Reed cormorant
14. Silvery-cheeked hornbill
15. Montane white-eye
16. African fish-eagle
17. Taveta weaver
18. Grosbeak (thick-billed) weaver

We also saw our first two mammals:
1. Sykes monkey
2. Guereza colobus monkey

The Sykes monkeys we saw were playful, leaping from tree to tree, acrobatically negotiating huge gaps many metres up in the crowns of the trees. The Colobus sat languidly, eating the blossoms and observing these two handsome primates, only putting down our binoculars and cameras when it became too dark to see them! Adults and babies foraged for leaves, engaged in play, and moved...
gracefully from tree to tree, with mind-boggling leaps across the deep chasms. A real treat for Jared, an anthropologist with a passion for monkeys and baby animals...

At about 8 o'clock I headed out with Geitan to collect the rest of the group, including my friend Van Harris, who in fact assembled the team for this tour, and has been on two trips with me in the past. Other guests included Mark and Janet who had been with me on a South African experience in 2014. Some new friends were Jill and Becky, who were about to have their first ever safari experience! Jill is a professional dancer, and is Mark's wife, and what a wonderful team they made, enjoying our safari to the maximum. Becky is an avid photographer and artist who was in for a real treat during this trip!

We got back to the lodge at around 11 pm, after clearing customs and getting the luggage and everyone, exhausted from the flight chose to head to bed after a quick welcome drink.

Day 2 – 5th November

This morning we awoke at 05:30 and headed for a wholesome breakfast at six, and then headed off to Arusha National Park. The park encompasses Mount Meru, which is an imposing natural structure, and is regarded as Africa's fifth highest peak.

But before heading out, around Ngare Sero's gardens over breakfast we saw a few creatures, including the following birds:

1. Tambourine dove
2. Red-backed mannekin
3. Hamerkop
4. Cattle egret
5. Pied crow
6. Red-winged starling
7. Brown-hooded kingfisher

And the following mammals:

1. Guereza colobus monkey
2. Sykes monkey
Then we headed out to the National Park. This Park is a real jewel, and contains savannah, forest, lakes and a huge volcanic crater.

First of all we headed into the savannah area of the park, and in the very first large clearing we saw a herd of African buffalo, some Common bushbuck, Burchell’s zebra’s, Warthogs and some Maasai giraffe! What an incredible start.

We had opened the top of our typical pop-top East African safari vehicle, and everyone crowded out to take pictures whilst I explained a little about the species before us. Little did we know that this was to be the pace for the day, with repeated multiple species sightings. Sometimes we hardly knew where to look there were so many animals around us!

We saw wonderful birds during today too including:

1. African stonechat
2. Common fiscal
3. Barn swallow
4. Variable sunbird
5. Black-shouldered (winged) kite
6. Blue-naped mousebird
7. Tropical boubou
8. Yellow bishop
9. Black-headed heron
10. Red-billed oxpecker
11. Chin-spot batis
12. Common bulbul
13. Mountain wagtail
14. Lanner falcon
15. Emerald-spotted wood-dove
16. Silvery-cheeked hornbill
17. White-eyed slaty-flycatcher
18. Greater flamingo
19. Lesser flamingo
20. White-eared barbet
21. Long-legged buzzard
22. Red-backed mannekin
23. Cape robin-chat
24. Cinnamon bee-eater
25. Black-backed puffback
26. Red-faced crombec
27. Southern pochard
28. Little grebe
29. Winding cisticola
30. Wood sandpiper
31. Blacksmith lapwing
32. Black-winged stilt
33. Sacred ibis
34. Egyptian goose
35. Trilling cisticola
36. Rufous-naped lark
37. Taveta weaver
38. Greater painted-snipe
39. Common greenshank
40. Little ringed plover
41. Pied avocet
42. Cape teal
43. Black-crowned tchagra
44. Grey-backed camaroptera

A bushbuck and a well hidden Cape buffalo

Several other species were seen during the drive too but these are some of the more notable ones!

Our first day's mammal list comprised of the following species:

1. Warthog
2. Maasai giraffe
3. Burchell's zebra
4. Common bushbuck
5. Guereza colobus monkey
6. Sykes monkey
7. Olive baboon
8. Hippopotamus
9. Harvey's (red) duiker
10. Common waterbuck
11. African buffalo

Probably a highlight of the day was an action packed primate extravaganza, with a sighting of baboon, colobus and Sykes monkey that kept us entertained for over an hour. Baboons fought, mated, chased one another and vied for higher political status all around our vehicle. Calls, screams and shouts punctuated the forest silence, as they performed and amazing array of antics and behaviours. The colobus, ever peaceable, fed on leaves and flowers, groomed one another and displayed their snow white babies on beautiful moss covered boughs of the giant forest trees. Sykes monkeys, dwarfed in size by their two companion species chased and leapt, adding the acrobatic element if this incredibly entertaining display of some if Africa's most interesting primates. We did not know which way to look, as there was so much to see, and I had a very hard time keeping the narrative going due to the many views and angles we enjoyed, and the barrage of excited and interesting questions from our group. This was undoubtedly a highlight for us all, but as we were to find, it was to be but one of many fabulous experiences. We stopped off at a tiny museum in the park, and took a little time to look at the skulls and stuffed birds contained in glass cases there, before heading up to the rim of an extinct volcano called Ngurdoto Crater. We headed up to the Mikindu view point, named for the Wild date palms which hang precariously to the crater rim. The caldera is 3km across (a little under two miles) and the base of it lies at an altitude of 1474 meters (somewhere around 4422 feet) and has a mosaic of woodland, grassland and dense papyrus swamp. Buffalo herds can be seen moving on the crater floor like so many black ants below. An amazing sighting of a long-legged buzzard, soaring below us above the swamp showed us the white windows on the upper side of the wings of this unusual raptor.
The roads in the park are well maintained, and undulate greatly over the rolling hills and valleys of the region. Lush tropical forest dominates the slope. By now it was midday, and we headed off to enjoy a packed lunch at the Momella lakes. We then circled the lake system and saw thousands of Lesser and Greater flamingos as they fed on zooplankton in the shallow waters. We also had our very first glimpse of the huge hippos which live in the lakes. As a special treat, in between two big adults in the waters of the lake, we saw a tiny calf who surfaced languidly, and occasionally, between his two humungous bodyguards!

Also along the shore, we found a huge old buffalo bull, hiding in the lakeside vegetation. He was so well hidden that there was only one angle through which he could be seen. Truly a case of death in the long grass! We all agreed we were glad we were not taking a lakeside stroll!

A final treat for the day was an old giraffe bull, who obligingly fed right next to our vehicle. We all took close up pictures of his stately white face and curling grey tongue as he fed. We discussed the life and behaviours of these iconic African creatures, learning much by observing him as he fed. Later that afternoon we returned to the lodge, very satisfied with our days viewing.

In camp we were greeted by sightings of African palm swift’s flying around the palms in the gardens and by a troop of Sykes monkeys outside our rooms.

We had a wonderful dinner when we got back, and then headed out on a night walk around the grounds. During this walk we saw some amazing insects and also two encounters with Wahlberg’s epauletted fruit bats! One huge grey moth took the initiative to fly from high up in a tree, and land directly on my hand...giving me the title for the evening of the moth whisperer! Then it was time for bed!
Day 3 – 6th November

Today we started off with an early morning walk around Ngare Sero lodge, before breakfast.

We saw many birds including:
1. African black duck
2. Klaas’s cuckoo
3. African jacana
4. Black crake
5. Ling-tailed (Reed) cormorant
6. Red-winged starling
7. Beautiful sunbird
8. Tawny eagle
9. Tambourine dove
10. Striated (Green-backed) heron
11. Squacco heron
12. Pied crow
13. Speckled pigeon
14. Ring-necked dove
15. Giant kingfisher
16. Brown-hooded kingfisher
17. Black-headed heron

Becky, Van and Janet also did a small photo shoot with one of the many Giant land snails which lives in the garden. I look forward to seeing some of those shots!

Photography in the gardens at Ngare Sero and a Maasai village

Then after our breakfast we packed the vehicle and headed out to Tarangire National Park. This was to be a drive through the town of Arusha, giving us an opportunity to change some money and to see some of the sights of this bustling city of several hundred thousand inhabitants.

We drove through plantations of red beans, ochra, tomatoes, sweet potatoes and paddies full of rice. Coffee is also one of the major crops grown in Tanzania, and it is very common around Arusha.

We drove through a Military Zone, where we were not allowed to take pictures, and saw many hundreds of soldiers in a long column doing a very long route march through the dry, desert-like region we now traversed. It was very different from the lush tropical area where we had stayed the nights before on the other side of Arusha.

We began to see Maasai people, in their traditional dress, and found their small villages dotted across the landscape. Goats, sheep, donkeys and cattle were everywhere, often attended by a young child-herder. It is improper to photograph the Maasai without obtaining their permission, so we had to refrain from capturing images with anything other than our minds, but the temptation was certainly there, with the tall proud-looking men in their bright red Shuka’s, and the young initiates, with their faces painted white for their circumcision rites. Their dark clothes contrasting with their white visage. Children played in the fields all along the route, and many people rode bicycles or on carts. Later in the tour we planned to visit a community of Maasai people, so the pictures would just have to wait! Eventually we passed into the Niyamakuyuni region, or the 'place of the Baobab', and
began to see these ancient African giants. These trees may live for many thousands of years, but due to the fibrous nature of the wood, and the complete lack of tree rings one cannot accurately determine an exact date! Estimates range up to about 2500 years, but we may never truly know.

At the Park we enjoyed a nice packed lunch at the gate, before entering, and watched the antics of some very cheeky Vervet monkeys, who were stealing any food they could get their hands on from unwary tourists. One large, blue-testicled male with a horrific pink scar on his black lip sat and posed before us, occasionally taking a bite of the gum exuding from the yellow bark acacia upon which he was perched. Once we had eaten our meal we commenced our first afternoon drive into the reserve.

The scar faced male Vervet, Van Harris viewing game and a Yellow-necked spurfowl

The landscape is beautiful, Baobabs in an incredible density are scattered across the landscape. These trees almost look like they are upside down with their gnarled leafless branches pointing up into the air like misplaced roots. Palms are also common, making an ideal perch for large birds such as Marabou’s and vultures.

A white-bellied bustard and an ostrich

We followed the course of the Tarangire River into the park, seeing many ostriches, Impalas, wildebeests, zebra and giraffe, spending time with each, and watching their behaviour. A Bohor reedbuck ram was laying in river crossing, slowly ruminating his mornings graze and a male Dwarf mongoose was scent marking like crazy on a roadside termite mound while his family foraged and dug for grubs nearby.
A Dwarf mongoose in his upside down pasting- pose and a male Impala

A flock of the endemic Ashy starlings gathered in a roadside tree, and beautiful Yellow-necked spurfowl (or yellow-necked chickens according to Mark) were common to see. A troop of Banded mongoose moved busily across the sandy ground, digging feverishly for grubs and beetles, communicating quietly to maintain group cohesion.

Along the way we also encountered a small group of White-bellied bustards, and watched them stretch and heard make their raucous call for the first time. Trees full of the nests of raucously calling Rufous-tailed weavers were seen along the road too, a new experience for us all.

An African elephant cow with her calf and a Red-headed rock agama

Beautiful herds of elephant cows, managing their babies lined the roadside along the river road. Tarangire basically means the 'River of warthogs' in the Fyomi tribal language, but River of Elephants may be more apt? A Cheetah was well hidden in the grass alongside the road, and graced us with a few moments of her sitting up and surveying the landscape around her. Even though it was a brief sighting, it was great to see her as she rested in the early afternoon heat. Diminutive Kirks dikdiks were everywhere, resting beneath trees and shrubs, or browsing on low growing leaves. These tiny monogamous antelope are little larger than a big hare, but way more cute.

As we neared the lodge we saw some huge buffalo bulls on a hillside near the road, and they posed aggressively, staring at our vehicle and I commented to the group that they were looking at us "as if we owed them money"! Baobab trees in the afternoon light are a beautiful sight, with their bark torn and stripped by that other giant of the African bush, the African elephant. Just before arriving at the lodge we had a final encounter with a Vervet monkey and a big female ostrich.
We then arrived at Sopa Lodge, Tarangire, in time to relax until dinner and then complete our checklist for the day.

The lists of animals and birds for Tarangire national park can be seen on my account of the 8th of November, where each species has been recorded.

Day 4 – 7th November

We headed out for an early morning drive, which started with a sighting of an African hoopoe at the nest, with a big juicy caterpillar. Hoopoes have extremely dirty nesting holes, in which the young birds defecate in order to prevent any predator interest. A special adaptation of the chicks is that their feathers are contained inside waxy sheaths until they actually leave the soiled nest, when they leap flightlessly out of the nest-cavity, with their waxy feathers only emerging over the next day or two as beautiful clean orange flight feathers! We also saw zebras dust bathing, Kongoni running like crazy, herds of buffalo grazing and elephants crossing the landscape filled the early hours of the day. Wonderful secretary birds walked nonchalantly past our car as we searched for the elusive leopard, in the flat-topped acacias alongside a swamp. Unfortunately the leopard evaded us this time, but amazing buffalo and elephant sightings kept us very busy!

I noticed some tracks and signs too, and showed my guests the nest of a Solifuge, or sun spider and explained the similarities of nest building style between Rufous-tailed weavers and White-browed sparrow-weavers.

Around lunch time we returned to camp for lunch by the pool and were entertained by the antics of the resident Vervet's. A Von der Decken's hornbill joined us for lunch, along with three playful bush squirrels and several Red-headed agamas!
The afternoon was absolutely packed with elephants. Herd after herd, bull after bull. We estimated we had seen in excess of five to six hundred elephants on this day, including an interesting interaction of a young red-mud covered bull from one herd and a young grey-mud covered cow from another. Janet mentioned that it would be wonderful to see them side by side, with such colour contrasts and in the beautiful light it would be a nice photo opportunity. Then it actually happened. She trailed the young male, calling to him, until he stopped, and they then approached each other tentatively. Slowly, one put its trunk in the others mouth to possibly facilitate identification through scenting the breath of the other. A few tense, open eared moments followed before we saw a total change in their comfort levels with each other. Suddenly they moved together, side by side, touching with trunks and seemingly very pleased to meet up with each other. They then stood and fed together for a long time. We chatted as a group in great humour and totally anthropomorphised the situation, telling a story of lost elephant companions from different (red and grey) herds, describing an elephant angled Romeo and Juliet style story! It was truly remarkable to see, and was most entertaining. We also saw white-bellied bustards and some D'Arnaud’s barbets.

We then headed back to camp for a good rest.

Day 5 – 8th November

We headed out on drive after we had had breakfast, and packed our luggage, and made our way to the so called “Little Serengeti” area. Great numbers of zebra and wildebeest were to be seen. A
lioness appeared for us, heading straight for the road, and passed right by our car. We watched her move gently away into the bush until she climbed atop a large termite mound, and posed right in front of a huge baobab. A beautiful sight indeed.

Maasai giraffe, Yellow-throated sandgrouse, Black-faced sandgrouse and a Spotted thick-knee with three chicks were also seen. At the gate we stopped to eat lunch, and climb the viewing platform around a magnificent Baobab. A flock of Yellow-collarred lovebirds was perched nearby.

Then it was time to head off into the Great Rift Valley and ascend the rim to the Serena lodge.

Mammals we saw at Tarangire included:

1. Waterbuck
2. Impala
3. White-bearded wildebeest
4. Kongoni (Cokes hartebeest)
5. Warthog
6. Grants gazelle
7. Vervet monkey
8. Olive baboon
9. African buffalo
10. Cheetah
11. Dwarf mongoose
12. Banded mongoose
13. African elephant
14. Black-backed jackal
15. Yellow-spot hyrax
16. Ochre bush squirrel
17. Spotted hyena
18. Kirks dikdik
19. Bohor reedbuck
20. Eland
21. Olive baboon

Birdlife included:

1. Superb starling
2. White-bellied go-away bird
3. Rufous-tailed weaver
4. Yellow-collared lovebird
5. White-headed buffalo weaver
6. Coqui francolin
7. Yellow-necked spurfowl
8. Red-necked spurfowl
9. White-bellied bustard
10. Northern white-crowned shrike
11. Grey-backed fiscal
12. Northern pied babbler
13. Red-billed buffalo weaver
14. White-backed vulture
15. Northern red-billed hornbill
16. Crested francolin
17. African palm swift
18. Ashy starling
19. Crowned lapwing
20. Blacksmith lapwing
21. Lilac-breasted roller
22. Nubian woodpecker
When we passed through a nearby town called Minjingu, we found a Maasai Sunday market in full swing, and got to see some of the people in their bright traditional clothing. Along the road were huge Milkweed tulips, (or Callitropis siyame), possibly brought in from China when the roads were built. Eventually we reached the town of Mnto wa Mbu, which loosely translates into the River of Mosquitos. This is a small village by Lake Manyara National Park. In the various stalls and shops one can purchase bananas, but here there are red bananas, which are fat, sweet and delicious. There is also a place to exchange money in the town. The Mbulu tribe are the people who live around Serena lodge. They are also known as Iraqwi, and they are a Nilo-Saharan farming culture. The Maasai are also Nilo-Saharan, but are more purely pastoralist.

Red bananas are very sweet indeed, and a view of lake Manyara with its pink flamingos

The name of the lake, Manyara, means Rubber-hedge euphorbia (Euphorbia tirucalli), a common plant in the region with poisonous white latex. This is a word in M’aa, the Maasai tribal language. We arrived at the wall of the Rift, and slowly began to ascend. Eventually we came out onto the plateau, and took a dirt track to Serena Lodge. The lodge is very beautiful, with an incredible view
over the Rift and Lake Manyara, pink with flamingos below. The swimming pool at the lodge seems
to go to the very edge of the cliff, and my guests spent some time there on this hot afternoon. We
had a lovely dinner, completed our checklists and then headed to bed.

Day 6 – 9th November

Today for our morning activity we descend into the rift to Lake Manyara National Park. On the way
we searched for Schalow’s wheatear, but to no avail. This rare bird did not seem to be at home
today. The scenic viewpoint over the park was very pretty, and local salesmen tried to sell us
massively overpriced trinkets. We managed to deter them, and enjoy the view for a little while
before heading to the Park.

The hippo pool view point is a lovely spot, and a Black heron fishes under his self-made umbrella

After signing in and using the ablutions we headed along well forested roads, crossing streams of
water which seep from the escarpment. Huge trees towered above us, the perfect habitat for our
next target animal, the Blue monkey. It was not long before we had our first sight of these grizzled
little monkeys. Their dark faces peering from the heights above us. We had many views of this
interesting creature as well as many photographic opportunities. Baboons were also plentiful, with
the usual display of antics such as playing babies, mating adults, chasing and fighting and lots of
grooming.

A Blue monkey and a Vervet, which is busy consuming an unusual diet of Acacia thorns

A very interesting sighting we had involved two rival troops of Vervet monkeys, who had a territorial
dispute around our vehicle. One large male was bitten open by the rival females, and sustained a
serious injury to his hind right leg. The threat displays and repeated attacks by both troops kept us
all watching for a long while, until peace was established once again, with the two troops
withdrawing to a safe distance. Some frantic grooming occurred in one of the troops, whilst they
kept an eye on their enemies. This was probably some type of displacement behaviour, pretending to do one thing, whilst actually dealing with stress and watching a dangerous foe! We also saw a big bushbuck ram on a hillside as we entered the park.

The fight unfolds, and the wounds are serious

The birdlife was also spectacular, with:

1. Grey-headed (Chestnut-bellied) kingfisher
2. Long-toed lapwing
3. A fishing Black heron
4. A non-breeding Pin-tailed whydah
5. Winding cisticola
6. Saddle-billed stork
7. Mountain wagtail

A Grey-headed kingfisher, Becky and Janet photographing zebra and a Winding cisticola

Around midday we left the Park and began to ascend the hills, back up out of the Rift Valley and then through the hills towards the Rhotia Valley. On the way we saw our Schalow’s (Mourning) wheatear, perched on a roadside rock. A big bonus and an interesting little bird to see. We travelled through the bustling Karatu town, and noticed a roadside stall called ‘Hillary Clinton’s Shop’. It sold all kinds of trinkets and curios. A sure sign of the resourceful minds of the local sellers!

Our next port of call was the well-known Gibbs Farm, where we enjoyed a home cooked lunch, which everyone rated as our best meal so far on the trip! The farm was first established by a German
farmer in the 1920’s and then taken over by the Gibbs family in 1972. Its main focus has been the growing of coffee.

After lunch we took an hour out to explore the beautiful gardens and look for some of the interesting birds. There are many pathways through the lush floral displays, which we all explored individually. We saw:

1. Green-headed sunbird
2. Bronzy sunbird
3. Collared sunbird
4. Baglafecht’s weaver
5. Golden-winged sunbird
6. Nyanza swift

We then climbed back into our vehicle for the journey up into the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. The huge and impressive gate with its small museum and curio shop kept us occupied whilst Geitan sorted out the paperwork.

Then we headed up the iron-red dirt track to the crater rim, noticing all of the excavated pits in the roadside from generations of mineral seeking elephants. The area is a mass of deep ravines, steep inclines, hanging lianas and lush forested slope, and the excitement of the group finally getting into the Ngorongoro area was palpable. Eventually we got to the Heroes Point Lookout and were met with a spectacular view of the (sixteen to eighteen kilometre across) caldera of Ngorongoro, the largest of its kind in the world. It was truly a spectacular view, with zebra, elephants, gazelles,
buffaloes and wildebeest all over like tiny ants 610 meters below. There was also a huge spotting binocular at the point for public use, which we all tried out!

There was a beautiful rainbow as we drove along the rim of the crater, through herds of Maasai cattle, to Ngorongoro Sopa Lodge where we checked in for the evening before dinner.

Mammals we saw today included:
1. Olive baboon
2. Vervet monkey
3. Blue monkey
4. Ochre bush squirrel
5. Hippopotamus
6. Warthog
7. Maasai giraffe
8. African buffalo
9. Common bushbuck
10. Bohor reedbuck
11. Defassa waterbuck
12. White-bearded gnu
13. Impala
14. Tree hyrax
15. African elephant
16. Plains zebra

Birds we saw today included:
1. Common ostrich
2. Helmeted guineafowl
3. White-faced whistling duck
4. Spur-winged goose
5. Knob-billed duck
6. Egyptian goose
7. Yellow-billed stork
8. Woolly-necked stork
9. Saddle-billed stork
10. Sacred ibis
11. Glossy ibis
12. African spoonbill
13. Squacco heron
14. Cattle egret
15. Grey heron
16. Great egret
17. Black heron
18. Reed cormorant
19. Yellow-billed kite
20. White backed vulture
21. Black-chested snake eagle
22. Bateleur
23. Common buzzard
24. Augur buzzard
25. Martial eagle
26. Black-winged stilt
27. Long-toed lapwing
28. Blacksmith lapwing
29. African jacana
30. Wood sandpiper
31. Common sandpiper
32. Whiskered tern
33. Speckled pigeon
34. Red-eyed dove
35. Ring-necked dove
36. Fischer’s lovebird
37. Purple crested turaco (call)
38. White-browed coucal (call)
39. African emerald cuckoo (call)
40. African palm-swift
41. Little swift
42. Speckled mousebird
43. Blue-naped mousebird
44. Grey-headed kingfisher
45. Striped kingfisher
46. Little bee-eater
47. Cinnamon chested bee-eater
48. Crowned hornbill
49. Grey hornbill
50. Northern red-billed hornbill
51. Silvery-cheeked hornbill
52. Southern ground-hornbill
53. Red-and-yellow barbet
54. D’Arnaud’s barbet
55. Greater honeyguide (call)
56. Brown-crowned tchagra
57. Black-backed puffback
58. Slate-coloured boubou (call)
59. Tropical boubou (call)
60. Brubru
61. Northern white-crowned shrike
62. Red-backed shrike
63. Common fiscal
64. African paradise flycatcher
65. Fork tailed drongo
66. Pied crow
67. Red-rumped swallow
68. Winding cisticola
Day 7 – 10th November

So today we made our first descent into the fabled Ngorongoro Crater. It was to be a wonderful day and it started with a cloudy drive though the misty crater rim forests, past giant Acacias and dense tropical woodlands with tall purple flowers.

We stopped off at the gate, presenting our permit to go down into the crater, and then headed down the steep roadway. The slope was not too steep and soon levelled off into a series of hilly grasslands and ravines. Our first animals were several young, highly photogenic Black-backed jackal pups who posed inquisitively next to our vehicle. The beautiful morning light glinted off their eyes as they stared at us.

A Kongoni on a distant hill watched us as an African marsh harrier glided overhead. The morning sunlight played on the hills, a truly idyllic scene. Some ostrich were busy courting next to the road, with the big male sporting a pink neck and head, common to the subspecies massaicus which is found here.

Then several vehicles on a small hill at the end of the crater indicated a possible sighting or predators so we went closer to investigate. We ascended the “round table” hill and found to our delight, a group of lions feeding on the carcass of a gnu. A young male tore and twisted, cutting between ribs with his carnassial teeth, shearing off bite sized chunks of meat. We were parked right next to him and could hear the scissoring sounds made by his terrible jaws. He posed unrelentingly in the morning light, instigating a constant clicking of cameras in response to his poses! We spent a good hour watching him, until he was replaced by a larger female, who likewise added great value to our photograph collections!
The young male eats until he is round in shape, then the larger female approaches

A pair of Pied crows snuck in and out, grabbing pieces of meat, then darting out to consume them. A second lioness also approached, but was met with the growled warnings of the lady feeding on the kill. This started one of the most subtle approaches to a carcass by a lioness that I have ever seen. We watched amusedly as she laid down a couple of metres away, and slowly rolled herself closer to the carcass, feigning stretches, inadvertent repositioning and several other highly surreptitious moves until she literally just had to stick her tongue out to taste meat!

One female feeds, whilst the other rolls, crawls and creeps in closer

We headed off after some time to see the vast herds of thousands of wildebeests and zebra below on the plains, and stopped off at a small marsh nearby to use the rest facilities there. A big buffalo bull was standing knee deep in the mud of the swamp, and never even graced us with a glance as we disembarked. A camaroptera (or bleating warbler) was sat in a nearby bush making a huge racket.

A baby warthog and a Spotted hyena

Warthog, Grant’s gazelles and Golden jackals were seen as we drove, heading out to the lake, a typical soda lake, with its Lesser flamingos. The water level was very low so a distant view was had, but it is an interesting area, with very soft shores. The trails of many animals were seen in the soft mud.
Northern ant-eater chats perched on small roadside twigs as herds of wildebeest grazed placidly and fearlessly mere metres from us. At a hippo pond there were sixty rotund aquatic behemoths with graceful pelicans fishing amongst them. Their yawns, grunts and grumbles entertained our group as we sat, with a raucous heronry of large white Sacred ibis nearby. All the while the clouded back-drop of the rim of the crater loomed above us, an iconic African scene! We headed off to a small picnic area, passing fat overfed Golden jackals as we went, and encountering some huge old, big tusker elephant bulls at the water’s edge. The elephants, once they become old, come down into this crater to the swamps of soft vegetation, eating this food which is gentle on their palates, so to speak, and often living here until their dying days.

Two of them moved languidly along the shore, occasionally stopping to feed on the grass plants, which line the shore. Others stood sleepily with groups of bull Cape buffalo...chatting with each other, as Geitan said! We had a fantastic lunch here, before moving on, taking carful note to watch for the very enthusiastic Black kites, which will swoop down and steal a sandwich or a chicken drumstick right out of your hand! Speke’s weavers and rufous-tailed weavers perched all around us hoping for a free meal of bread crumbs. Pelicans fished along the lake and the view was spectacular. What an amazing place to enjoy a meal.
We packed up from our lunch and then headed into the Yellow fever tree forests nearby, and encountered a beautiful herd of female elephants with their calves. This is an unusual occurrence, and the area normally only sustains bull elephants. We saw interesting agamas, a type of blue headed lizard on many of the rocks. They look very much like the Southern tree agamas, so common in Southern and Eastern Africa, but are in fact being separated into a wholly new species, the *Acanthocercus (Atricollis) gregorii*. We also saw an Isabelline wheatear.

During the rest of the day we had sightings of Golden jackals, a distant Black rhino, and zebras rolling in the dust and of Spotted hyena posing beautifully in soft light! What a day. We then travelled up the hills toward our base at Sopa Lodge, to have another wonderful dinner and to complete our check lists for the day.
Day 8 – 11\textsuperscript{th} November

We awoke to a rainy Crater, shrouded in mist, with massive clouds overhead. This did not deter us however, and we leapt into the vehicle with gusto. Down the hills and into the rim, ready for the next encounters. We had a close up view of a ram Grant’s gazelle, or Swala granti as it is known in local Swahili, and a beautiful Kongoni bull. Both were soaked with rain, and made for amazing images with their matted fur. An ant-eater chat posed in the rain and a Black-back curled up to avoid the down pour presenting a water soaked, small red and black bundle of fur.

A Serval, spotted by Van appeared on the scene, stalking through the grass of the wetland, then lions...many lions, twenty or more. It was a continuous barrage of mammals.

We did not know where to look. Lions running and playing, pouring past our game viewer. They gambolled and leapt, and one found the horn of a young wildebeest and held it in his mouth just like
a pipe. The pipe became the prize of a game played by four young lions, leaping and chasing, fighting and biting, but always the original owner, a young male came out tops.

What a beginning to our day in the crater bottom. Then a herd of buffalo crossed the scene, hundreds of them. Standing at the side of the road staring into our cruiser. We stayed for some time until we noticed a Black rhino, meandering in some shrubby vegetation nearby. He lay down and rested, barely visible so we moved on. Another day of wild mammals was in store with a special focus on the Spotted hyenas, which Geitan explained is a clan of around 175 individuals. We saw group after group of them, lying in puddles of rain next to the roads, in the roads and before our vehicle. The sun was out so they were taking advantage of the opportunity to wallow a little.

This type of blue headed agama does not yet have a common name, and a weaver looks for a meal. Once again Golden jackals made an appearance, as well as a Scrub hare, who posed beautifully for his picture to be taken! Thompson’s gazelles were common and we even saw a Warthog sow with three beautifully comical baby piglets, barely out of the burrow!

They performed and posed around the car until the next rain storm dampened their parade! Black-bellied bustards, Kori’s and Grey-crowned crane were so common we stopped looking at them after
a while, and astounding thing to me as they are such huge and dramatic birds! Our first bat eared fox was seen too, by Janet, who’s game spotting prowess amazed me many times of the trip. He was huddled, rain drenched, in some grasses right next to the road, giving us an amazing opportunity to view him. A bull wildebeest did a full demonstration of his territorial behaviour, including pawing the ground, pre orbital gland rubbing, horn ing the soil, rolling in the sand and defecating on his midden. He was the text book wildebeest. A great demonstration by a true master! A little later we saw two bulls hard at work in a big fight for dominance too, showing us what will happen if you don’t do it all right! And an interesting couple of marabou storks passed twigs romantically from beak to beak in an unusual courtship display, mere metres from our vehicle in the ankle deep waters of a pond.

Day 9 – 12th November

Today we left the amazing Ngorongoro, a place which no one in our group will ever forget. We passed by the refuelling point at park headquarters and saw the Hunter’s cisticola and the Jackson’s widowbirds in the grasses. It would have been amazing to see them displaying in their full plumage of long tailed black feathers, but they were dappled brown and yellow at this time of the year. A cool bird indeed.

Our first stop once we had left the crater was to visit a family of Maasai people. We went to the village, a low collection of cow dung and wood huts, where dancers performed their famous leaping dance, and sand interesting sounding songs. We then split off into individual groups to follow local
guides, who took us into the huts and showed us around the village. We were told of their way of life and had many opportunities to photograph people, in their traditional dress.

Jill and Janet join in the Maasai jump-dance, but in the end we left it to the experts

Some of the people we got to meet

When we left our journey continued down the path of history today, passing through time immemorial into our species deepest memories, and into the famed Oldupai Gorge. It was formerly and incorrectly known as Olduvai, a misinterpretation of the actual name. Oldupai refers to the Sansevieria heptegana plants which grow commonly here, a type of mother-in-laws-tongue known by the Maasai as Oldupai.

Richard Leakey, the Oldupai plant and a Taita fiscal
This site, made famous by the Leakey family, has yielded many interesting proto-hominid fossils, including *Proconsul, Australopithecus boisei* (*robustus*), *Homo Habilis, Homo erectus* and *Homo sapiens*. These finds have made this one of the richest sites in the world for information about our precursors and our ancient relatives. We visited the museum, had a lecture by a local guide on the historic finds and enjoyed a packed lunch accompanied by Speke’s weavers and Red-and-yellow barbets. There was even a guest appearance by a lone Rufous chatterer.

![The gorge viewed form the area where we ate our lunch](image)

Ndutu Lodge was to be our next destination. We drove along the southern boundary of the Serengeti into this wooded region, which is in itself a major part of the Serengeti ecosystem. The Lake Ndutu, a soda lake filled with flamingos stands before the lodge, about three quarters of a kilometre away. The tall Acacias dot the landscape providing perches for eagles and vultures.

We settled into the lodge for the afternoon after a nice drive in searching for wildlife, and enjoyed the homely atmosphere of this beautiful lodge. In the evening around sunset a family of genets climbed out of the roof and lazed happily on the walls of the dining area around us!

![Rosy-throated longclaw and the Fan-tailed widowbird in eclipse plumage](image)

Here is a list of the birds we saw in and around Ngorongoro, as well as during the journey to Oldupai and the Maasai village:

1. Common ostrich
2. Helmeted guineafowl
3. Coqui francolin
4. Crested francolin
5. Hildebrandt’s spurfowl
6. Grey-breasted spurfowl
7. Knob-billed duck
8. Hottentot teal
9. Southern pochard
10. Lesser flamingo
11. Egyptian goose
12. Yellow-billed stork
13. Saddle-billed stork
14. Marabou stork
15. Sacred ibis 66. Little bee-eater
17. Black-crowned night heron 68. Red-and-yellow barbet
19. Grey heron 70. Slate-coloured boubou (call)
20. Black-headed heron 71. Tropical boubou (call)
22. Pink-backed pelican 73. Northern white-crowned shrike
23. Secretarybird 74. Taita fiscal
24. Black kite 75. Common fiscal
25. African fish-eagle 76. Fork tailed drongo
26. White-backed vulture 77. African paradise flycatcher
27. Rüppell’s griffon vulture 78. Pied crow
29. Lappet-faced vulture 80. Red-throated tit
30. Bateleur 81. Rufous-naped lark
31. Western marsh harrier 82. Red-capped lark
32. African marsh harrier 83. Fischer’s sparrow-lark
33. Pallid harrier 84. Dark-capped bulbul
34. Augur buzzard 85. Banded martin
35. Tawny eagle 86. Barn swallow
36. Kori bustard 87. Rock martin
37. Black-bellied bustard 88. Red-rumped swallow
38. Common moorhen 89. Red-faced crombec
40. Black-winged stilt 91. Hunter’s cisticola
41. Blacksmith lapwing 92. Rattling cisticola
42. Crowned lapwing 93. Desert cisticola
43. African jacana 94. Pectoral-patch cisticola
44. Marsh sandpiper 95. Bar-throated apalis
45. Common greenshank 96. Grey-backed camaroptera
46. Wood sandpiper 97. Black-lored camaroptera
47. Common sandpiper 98. Rufous chatterer
48. Ruff 99. Wattled starling
49. White-winged tern 100. Superb starling
50. Chestnut-bellied sandgrouse 101. Hildebrandt’s starling
51. Yellow-throated sandgrouse 102. Yellow-billed oxpecker
52. Speckled pigeon 103. Red-billed oxpecker
53. Rameron pigeon 104. Cape robin-chat
54. Dusky turtle-dove 105. African stonechat
55. African mourning dove 106. Capped wheatear
56. Red-eyed dove 107. Isabelline wheatear
57. Ring-necked dove 108. Northern wheatear
58. Laughing dove 109. Northern anteater-chat
59. Fischer’s lovebird 110. African grey flycatcher
60. White-browed coucal 111. Golden-winged sunbird
61. Klaas’s cuckoo (call) 112. Eastern double-collared sunbird
62. Little swift 113. Rufous-tailed weaver
63. Lilac-breasted roller 114. Kenya sparrow
64. Speckled mousebird
65. Little swift
115. Northern grey-headed sparrow
116. Swahili sparrow
117. Red-billed buffalo-weaver
118. Speckle-fronted weaver
119. Baglafecht weaver
120. Speke’s weaver
121. Red-billed quelea
122. Yellow-bishop

Mammals included:
1. Olive baboon
2. Vervet monkey
3. Unstriped grass rat
4. Scrub hare
5. Bat-eared fox
6. Golden jackal
7. Black-backed jackal
8. Spotted hyena
9. Blotched genet
10. Serval
11. Lion
12. African elephant
13. Burchell’s zebra
14. Black rhinoceros
15. Hippopotamus
16. Warthog
17. Maasai giraffe
18. Thomson’s gazelle
19. Grant’s gazelle
20. Kirks dikdik
21. African buffalo
22. Common bushbuck
23. Bohor reedbuck
24. Defassa waterbuck
25. Kongoni
26. White-bearded gnu
27. Impala

Day 10 – 13\textsuperscript{th} November

After eating some breakfast we went out to the car park to depart and were greeted by a sight of four Fischer’s lovebirds in an Acacia. Unstriped grass rats foraged on Acacia seeds too. We headed along a stream bed to the open grasslands where we hoped to catch a glimpse of the lead portion of the wildebeest migration. On the way we found a family of bat-eared foxes, with a tiny baby and capped wheatears along the muddy roads. Chestnut-bellied sandgrouse were very plentiful and Blue-capped cordon bleu flew between trees. A huge secretary bird balanced precariously atop a small Acacia, allowing us to take wonderful pictures.
A Capped wheatear and a family of Bat-eared foxes

We saw zebra and eland, Thompson’s and grant’s gazelles and many different types of birds. We also encountered a big herd of elephant cows.

Blue-capped cordon bleu and a Secretary bird

Along one of the watercourses we eventually caught up with the lead animals of the migration, thousands and thousands of wildebeest, marching along, grazing as they go. The lowing and mooing of this huge herd was continuous. We searched along their ranks for lion or other predators but this was not to be our lot this morning, but we went home content with a great mornings viewing, and arrived just in time for lunch.

The lead animals of the Great Migration and some zebra below a beautiful rainbow
Shortly after lunch we headed out again, in search of lion or other predators, and soon climbed on board the vehicle to skirt around the Lake Ndutu into the area where the wildebeest were. We saw Grey-breasted spurfowl and Kongoni as we drove and also found a big Leopard tortoise. We also saw an interesting bird, a newly separated type of babbler, which Geitan said was to be named the Ndutu babbler. It looked very much like a Black-lored babbler, with which it is closely allied.

We encountered a beautiful Side-striped jackal hunting insects in a field, and spent quite some time watching this beautiful grey creature with its black-line flanks. Then we found a hyena, making very short work of a dead wildebeest. So, we were on the right track, and they lions appeared to be close by. A huge Lappet-faced vulture was sat alongside the hyena, as was a White-backed! We spent a good while watching the hyena dismantle the leg of the gnu, and even bite clean through the hoof of the beast, with a powerful scissoring action. It was quite astounding to witness the power of his jaws from such close range.
After some time we moved along, across the plains, in search of lion, and it was not too long before we located a pride of four big females and their seven cubs. It was just about playtime for the cubs and they soon were running around, leaping and playing with great enthusiasm. We sat for hours watching their antics, enjoying the interactions of the cubs and their more than game mothers, who also participated in tag-and-tackle type games.

This play was punctuated by the unexpected arrival of an unaware zebra. Fortunately for him his trajectory did not pass too close to the lionesses, and he ignorantly passed them by. However, a few moments later, an eighth lion stood up from his resting place forty metres from our cavorting cubs, and began to move down the slope towards the stream and the small marsh. He finally got to a point where his view of the land was good and then he began to roar. It was a big male, who decided it was time to advertise his presence. Two lions responded in the distance, presumably his brothers or coalition mates, and we got to enjoy the amazing sound of a big Tanzanian male lion roaring into the dusk! An incredible experience all around!

By now it was time to depart for lodge, but on the way we had yet another surprise, a Cheetah laying at the edge of the same stream! She was a beautiful creature, who appeared to be interested in taking a drink from the flowing water. However, she seemed to change her mind so we left her to rest and headed back to the lodge for a good supper and some genet style entertainment.

Day 11 - 14th November

Today I decided to rally my tired team a little earlier as I felt we had a better chance of getting some big cat action if we were out around dawn, so I arranged a packed breakfast with Geitan and we headed to the plains to see what we could find. We began searching in the area where the lions had been the previous day, but they had left no sign of their passing. Great numbers of vultures were
around indicating a possible kill site, but whatever it was had been cleaned away thoroughly by these large birds, the lion and possibly the resident hyenas.

A Rüppell’s griffon vulture, a Grey-breasted spurfowl and Becky taking a picture

A quick change of strategy led us to the area where we had seen the Cheetah the day before. We scanned the grasslands and I spotted her some hundred yards off, moving slowly across the grassy plain. She strolled nonchalantly toward a large tree, one of the few, and began an impressive array of behaviours such as scenting and urinating, in order to maintain her claim on this region. She may have smelled information about many other cheetahs as their home ranges often overlap considerably. Then she began to take note of the wildebeest and zebra grazing in the distance, even though these prey items are too big for her…but there were a few baby animals. I was hoping she was not going to try kill a baby zebra as this may have upset one or two of the guests! However, I also noticed some Tommie’s, and figured this must have been her actual interest. She suddenly got up, and trotted, head low to the north, totally missing the Tommie’s I thought she was after. So focussed, and then we realised there was a lone gazelle a hundred yards away. The gazelle lifted its head, she froze. Rigid, all muscles tensed! Head down, she moved, half a dozen steps. Head up, frozen. Now we became very excited as she was covering ground with very step, closing the distance. We moved our car away from her, opening the gap between us to prevent us drawing any attention to this feline hunter. We watched her stop start motion, the gazelle unknowingly grazing toward the Cheetah. Then she was off, the gazelle began to race away, with long strides and bounds, twists and turns. The Cheetah was right behind her, and she made a fatal turn allowing the cheetah to close the gap, and she was down! The cat had her in its jaws, dragging the kicking gazelle toward some longer grass and Solanum plants which she could use as cover to prevent any unwanted interest from vultures of other scavengers. What an incredible experience to witness this. We headed over to her side, watching her drag the prey for a last few metres. She lifted her head for a moment strangling the antelope, before settling down to catch her breath. We decided as a group to move away, as hyenas and lions recognise that vehicles indicate action, and we did not really want to cost her her hard earned kill, and as she was, ensconced in the thick vegetation our view would be very limited, so we headed off to enjoy our own hard earned breakfast packs!

Our Cheetah sighting was unforgettable
After the amazing Cheetah sighting and breakfast we slowly wandered to the big marsh area, and found a herd of at least 5000 wildebeests and zebras, and we watched them cross a small stream, running frantically then stopping, seemingly in confusion as to why they had run in the first place! And then another Cheetah, laying in the shade, enjoying the tranquil stream edge scenery. What a drive!

It was a real Cheetah and gnu morning

We then headed back to Ndutu for a good lunch before our next journey to the Serengeti. This was definitely going to be a highlight for all of us, and we were very excited as we said goodbye to the staff at Ndutu lodge and climbed into our cruiser. We drove in the muddy rainy conditions along the southern edge of the Serengeti, slipping and sliding in the deep black cotton soils. We saw white-winged terns hunting above the inundated grasslands and flocks of Yellow-throated sandgrouse flew noisily alongside our vehicle.

A tern and some sandgrouse in the Triangle of the southern Serengeti

We soon began to encounter large numbers of gazelle and then we crossed paths with a landscape of wildebeests. Many thousands, stretching from horizon to horizon could be seen. Heads down as they grazed oblivious to our vehicle. We soon got to Naabi Hills and the official gate to the Serengeti, and got ourselves signed in.

The entrance to the Serengeti and a White-bearded gnu
This was turning out to be an incredible day and we were not finished yet. We pulled up behind a vehicle along the way, and asked them what they had seen, they pointed next to the road, and there was one of Africa’s least seen mammals, and certainly one of the most sought after! It was a Ground pangolin, a creature which Geitan, our guide had not seen in his 24 years of guiding in the region! He was super excited, as were our guests, and we really enjoyed the privilege of seeing this usually nocturnal creature. My assumption is that because of the overcast rainy weather the ant-eating creature was searching for emerging flying ants or other easy food sources on this dark gloomy day. What an incredible sighting. We were alone with it for quite some time, but it remained in its defensive curled up position. Eventually we left, but it was certainly a fantastic mammal to add to our safari list and one which is unlikely to be seen too often again during our game drives!

Not long after this sighting we rolled into the Serengeti Sopa Lodge feeling very satisfied with our game viewing for the day! We had supper and then headed off for a rest after our very long day!

Day 12 – 15th November

The next morning we are breakfast and got out into the bush as early as we could, as the Serengeti was calling us! Near camp in the woodland we saw Olive baboon, Tanzanian red-billed hornbill, Black-lored babbler, Burchell’s zebra, Thomson’s gazelle, Impala, Defassa waterbuck and some Coqui francolin.

We then headed straight for Seronera, near the centre of the park, and it was not long before we found two leopards resting in a big tree. They were a distance away but we managed to have a very clear view and get some pictures of them. Once we had had our fill of the two leopard, a mother
and young, we went for a short leg stretch at the Picnic spot at Seronera where we could but a cup of hot coffee.

A juvenile Black-ored babbler and two leopards sleeping in a tree as we watch

In the picnic area we saw Slate-coloured boubou, Lesser masked weavers, Speckle-fronted weavers, Grey-capped social-weavers, Kenya sparrow, Mwanza flat-headed agama and striped skink. The trees were also full of browsing yellow-spot hyrax. A Purple grenadier male and his spotted female hopped around near one of the statues in the parking area too! There is also a small museum.

Slate-coloured boubou and a Grey-capped social-weaver

Male and female purple grenadiers

A male Mwanza flat-headed agama and hyena skulls at the little museum
We headed off on drive again, planning to be back at Sopa by lunch, and encountered a big lioness asleep up in the canopy of an Acacia tree. She looked very comfortable in the shade, so we left her to sleep. Then not too far down the road we found another two male lions, relaxing right beside the road. One decided our vehicle provided great shade and climbed right underneath the back of the cruiser!

A lioness up in the canopy of an Acacia, and a male lion below our cruiser

Our next interesting sight was a mixed herd of Kongoni and Topi, which we grazing together on the open grassland, just a few hundred yards from the big male lions. Not long after we saw them there was an awesome sight of a baby Black-winged lapwing, and some interesting interaction as its mother searched for it, walking back and forth and calling for it to come to her side. We watched this for a while before heading back to our lodge. On the way we saw a tree full of vultures and had yet another distant view of two lionesses, presumably leaving a kill.

A Kongoni and a lapwing family

After lunch we decided to explore the trails and woodlands around Sopa lodge, and we soon encountered another guide who had good news for us, but we would have to hurry! There was a huge male leopard seen a little earlier up in a tree on a side road, so we wanted to try get there before he climbed down. So we drove along, not stopping for every bird and animal as was our custom, and soon arrived in the described area, and there he was. Relaxing in the canopy, waiting to be photographed. We had a wonderful sighting, totally alone, for about thirty minutes, until he decided to descend from the tree and present us with mind blowing photographic opportunities. He moved from branch to branch, leaping over chasms, staring into our lenses, and looking around. In spite of his very full belly he could still have been looking for prey as leopards are incredibly
opportunistic and will catch prey even when they are hungry. Then after some time of posing he
dismounted from his tree, and walked into some green grass to avoid the sudden breeze that arose.
At that point we heard the sound of another vehicle approaching, and so did the leopard, which
stood up and slipped away into the bush. We were very fortunate, but it would have been nice if the
other cruiser full of guests had had the same fortune, but hey, that’s wildlife for you!

An unbeatable sighting of a big male leopard

After this sighting we were happy to wander along for a while, headed toward a lake with some
Flamingos. We saw a very wet Coqui francolin and a Pygmy falcon on the way.

A Coqui and a falcon

So after a day like this we thought we would bow to the rainy weather and head in toward our lodge
for a nice evening meal and a chance to fill in our checklists.
Day 13 – 16th November

Little did we know that today was going to be another crazy, action packed experience. We saw hyena from the lodge even before we departed on drive, during our morning coffee. As soon as we left on drive we encountered a herd of giraffe, with a baby suckling right next to our vehicle. Herds of buffaloes were all over, mainly groups of males with occasional females interspersed amongst them. We saw a huge nervous Eland bull and found a bull hippo in the river crossing coming from the lodge. The raised level of the river provided him with a good place to rest for the day.

And Eland and a hippo

Then we noticed a pair of guineafowl alarm calling because of the presence of a juvenile Martial eagle in a tree nearby. We found several flocks of Grey-backed fiscals, and a moth impaled on a thorn as part of their display 'larder'. We discussed this and the similarities with some of the North American species.

An impaled moth on a thorn and the Grey-backed fiscal

Then as we wandered out into the open grassland we encountered two lion males, attended by Spotted hyena and vultures. There was a kill near the road but we could not tell what animal the prey was.

The two male lions, of very different ages, possibly father and son
Then we decided to take a comfort stop up at white rocks, and we were looking at the flowers and birds and Iron Age mill stones when a guest from another group pointed out something below and asked me what it was. I put up my binoculars and realised it was a Cheetah, busy strangling a gazelle. We loaded up onto our vehicle and headed to the kill site. Then a moment later two cheetah cubs and their mother were seen 300 yards ahead, so we quickly went to see them before they disappeared! Then we encountered two leopards up a tree, and couple of big old lionesses laying in the shade of a tiny Acacia and a herd of elephants!

The cheetah drags its prey to cover and two lionesses use the meagre shade available

Too much had happened too fast, and we decided to go and rest back at our lodge for an hour or two over lunch, but what an incredible morning. At this point all the cat sightings were beginning to merge in my mind to I took to writing them all down as they happened to save confusion!

In the afternoon we took a drive in very gloomy skies, and Mark, Jill and Janet opted to enjoy the beautiful lodge instead of braving the very heavy rains and deep mud on the roads! The cloud cover was dense, and soon it began to rain even more heavily. We saw plenty of Defassa waterbuck and some Topi herds but otherwise it was quite still. One of the vehicles from a nearby lodge had slipped off the road, causing a traffic jam whilst he was towed out, but otherwise there was not too much action on this drive, which could probably be counted as our first quiet drive!

Wet weather, storms and rain soaked hippo tracks

Maybe mark, Jill and Janet had had the best idea, as they were happily and warmly, drinking cups of coffee when we got back to the lodge!

Day 14 – 17th November
This morning was dry, relatively sunny though there was a bit of cloud, and promised to be a beautiful day overall. We saw a young baby impala with a group of rams looking very lost and alone. Not too far off were some females, hopefully one of them was its mother! We encountered a group of five Spotted hyenas who were patrolling up and down the road to the lodge, and eventually found an old looking gnu kill. Two of them fed for a while and then we moved on.
Some hyena feeding and rolling in the wet muddy grass

We found four more bull buffaloes and then another two young hyenas, one of which spent some time by the vehicle rolling, and then suddenly running into the distance! The usual team of undertakers, the Marabous, were high up in the in the Yellow fever trees as giraffes walked in between them. One giraffe, for no apparent reason began to run at full speed across the grassland amongst the Acacias as his stationary and relaxed friends watched on in apparent giraffe amusement. Our hippo bull was still in his river crossing rest site, but had moved to the other side of the bridge today. The usual team of Vervet’s were in the road near the bridge and allowed us some good viewing of a mother and baby. We encountered a nice big buffalo herd as we reached the grasslands and took more pictures of grouchy looking bulls. Several tiny baby gazelles were seen in the now lightly falling rain, hidden in longer patched of grass from the predators, and the herds of adult Tommie’s were seen nearby.

A cranky buffalo bull and a resting Topi

Black-backed jackals patrolled, probably looking for those same antelope we had just seen. Then we crossed a deep channel of water and found a few vehicles watching Lions mating and eating the remains of a wildebeest kill. Hooded vultures were in attendance, and kept a wary eye on the big male guarding the food. We saw several mating sessions and then moved along, having a fantastic sighting of a Silverbird on a nearby tree. We saw many hippos as we meandered along the Seronera River with its landscape of palms and muddy trails. Banded mongoose and Dwarf mongoose were seen, with the latter attempting to mate. A small conflict ensued and several other mongoose got involved, seemingly breaking up the fight whilst some took the time to drink some water from a rock puddle nearby.

A lion feeds near to a mating couple and a Hooded vulture steals his share
We took a small visit to the Seronera visitors centre to use the facilities, and ended up watching the fantastic array of birds which visit the garden. An emergence of termites resulted in lots of interesting birds. We saw the following birds, amongst others:

1. Usambiro barbet (a subspecies of the D’Arnaud’s barbet)
2. White-browed scrub-robin
3. Buff-bellied warbler
4. Chestnut sparrow
5. Baglafecht weaver
6. Blue-capped cordon bleu
7. Grey-rumped swallow

A Baglafecht weaver, a scrub-robin, an Usambiro barbet and a grey-rumped swallow

Some more Spotted hyena arrived alongside the road, and in wayside mud puddles, looking into the vehicle nonchalantly. One young individual was found in very deep water at a crossing and posed beautifully for us, right next to the car.

A Silverbird and a young hyena

Then we were in for a real treat, as we found an interesting sighting of a lion pride, consisting of twelve animals, with seven fast asleep in a Sausage tree and five in an Umbrella thorn acacia nearby. This is a normal behaviour in this region, which brings the lions up to dense shade for
coolness, gives them access to breezy weather, allows them to see prey animals at a distance and probably most importantly gets them away from the many biting flies that plague them down at ground level! It was an amazing sighting which everyone enjoyed immensely, as the lions lazed literally above our heads in a most relaxed set of poses!

![Arboreal lions](image1)

We then headed back to camp, most pleased with our morning, and found a Woodland kingfisher perched in a Yellow fever tree above a fast flowing stream and a pod of huge hippos resting alongside. Finally we saw some walking around which excited everyone as we had only seen them relaxing up until now. There were even a couple of others yawning. Then we returned for our lunch at the lodge.

The afternoon drive included sightings of Topi, Impala, a very amusing Dung beetle with a huge dung ball, some hippo out of the water and the Grey, Von der Decken’s and Tanzanian red-billed hornbills! It was a beautiful sunny afternoon so we headed back to Lake Magadi (meaning soda) where we saw Lesser flamingo and Great white pelicans.

![Flamingos and pelicans at Lake Magadi](image2)

We also took the opportunity to take a group photograph with all of us on the shore of the lake! As we drove back to camp the rivers were full, after a lunch time rainstorm, pouring along streams and channels toward the Grumeti and its infamous crocodiles, which will eventually spill into Lake Victoria. Several hippos were out of the water, as the fast flowing rivers present a danger of drowning.

Day 15 – 18th November

Today was our departure day from the Serengeti, and we were scheduled to fly at 11 o’clock from Seronera, so we decided to get on the road early enough to see some game, and late enough as not to rush our final packing. So at 8’oclock we headed out from the lodge, and encountered many animals along the woodland road to Sopa. These included giraffe, a clan of hyenas, some Tommie’s,
Impala, Warthogs, Meyers parrots, White-headed buffalo-weavers, Vervet monkeys, White-backed vultures, Grey-backed fiscals, a coalition of four big male lions, some Lesser kestrels, Black-winged lapwings, an Abdim’s stork, some more Spotted hyena, a Scarlet-chested sunbird, a juvenile Dark chanting goshawk, some Red-rumped swallows and of course the ubiquitous Cattle egrets.

We arrived at Seronera in time for our flight in spite of all the amazing animals we saw, and flew over the Serengeti, Ndutu, Oldupai, Ngorongoro and Lake Manyara on the way home. It was fantastic to see all of these places from the air. We took a road transfer from Arusha Airport to Kilimanjaro Airport and checked in at the KIA lodge and our guest’s day rooms. I spent the night at this nice little lodge and met the guests at the swimming pool with its (somewhat clouded today) view of Kilimanjaro.

Everyone made their flights safely, and I was to wait till the next morning when I would fly home to South Africa via Kenya after this fantastic trip to East Africa.

Our mammal list is fantastic, with the following species:

1. Yellow-winged bat
2. Wahlberg’s epauletted fruit bat
3. Guereza colobus
4. Olive baboon
5. Blue monkey
6. Sykes monkey
7. Vervet monkey
8. Unstriped grass rat
9. Scrub hare
10. Bat-eared fox
11. Golden jackal
12. Side-striped jackal
13. Black-backed jackal
14. Slender mongoose
15. Dwarf mongoose
16. Banded mongoose
17. Spotted hyena
18. Blotched genet
19. Serval
20. Lion
21. Leopard
22. Cheetah
23. Yellow-spot hyrax
24. Tree hyrax
25. African elephant
26. Burchell’s zebra
27. Black rhinoceros
28. Hippopotamus
29. Warthog
30. Maasai giraffe
31. Thomson’s gazelle
32. Grant’s gazelle
33. Steenbok
34. Kirks dikdik
35. African buffalo
36. Common bushbuck
37. Eland
38. Bohor reedbuck
39. Common waterbuck
40. Defassa waterbuck
41. Kongoni
42. White-bearded gnu
43. Topi
44. Impala
45. Harvey’s duiker

Our complete list of birds for the trip includes the following species:

1. Common ostrich
2. Helmeted guineafowl
3. Coqui francolin
4. Crested francolin
5. Hildebrandt’s spurfowl
6. Yellow-necked spurfowl
7. Grey-breasted spurfowl
8. Red-necked spurfowl
9. Harlequin quail
10. White-faced whistling duck
11. Spur-winged goose
12. Knob-billed duck
13. Egyptian goose
14. Cape teal
15. African black duck
16. Red-billed teal
17. Hottentot teal
18. Southern pochard
19. Little grebe
20. Greater flamingo
21. Lesser flamingo
22. Yellow-billed stork
23. African openbill
24. Woolly-necked stork
25. White stork
26. Saddle-billed stork
27. Marabou stork
28. African sacred ibis
29. Hadeda ibis
30. Glossy ibis
31. African spoonbill
32. Black-crowned night heron
33. Striated heron
34. Squacco heron
35. Cattle egret
36. Grey heron
37. Black-headed heron
38. Goliath heron
39. Great egret
40. Black heron
41. Hamerkop
42. Great white pelican
43. Pink-backed pelican
44. Reed cormorant
45. Secretarybird
46. Black-winged kite
47. Black kite
48. Yellow-billed kite
49. African fish-eagle
50. Hooded vulture
51. White-backed vulture
52. Rüppell’s griffon vulture
53. White-headed vulture
54. Lappet-faced vulture
55. Black-chested snake eagle
56. Bateleur
57. Western marsh harrier
58. African marsh harrier
59. Pallid harrier
60. Dark chanting goshawk
61. Eastern chanting goshawk
62. Gabar goshawk
63. Common buzzard
64. Long-legged buzzard
65. Augur buzzard
66. Tawny eagle
67. Wahlberg’s eagle
68. Martial eagle
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Animal Name</th>
<th>Animal Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>69.</td>
<td>Pygmy falcon</td>
<td>Yellow-collared lovebird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70.</td>
<td>Lesser kestrel</td>
<td>Meyers parrot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71.</td>
<td>Greater kestrel</td>
<td>African orange-bellied parrot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72.</td>
<td>Grey kestrel</td>
<td>Purple-crested turaco (call)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73.</td>
<td>Lanner falcon</td>
<td>Bare-faced go-away-bird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74.</td>
<td>Kori bustard</td>
<td>White-bellied go-away-bird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75.</td>
<td>Black-bellied bustard</td>
<td>White-browed coucal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76.</td>
<td>Black crake</td>
<td>Diderick-browed coucal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77.</td>
<td>African purple swamphen</td>
<td>Klaas's cuckoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78.</td>
<td>Common moorhen</td>
<td>African emerald cuckoo (call)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79.</td>
<td>Grey-crowned crane</td>
<td>Red-chested cuckoo (call)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80.</td>
<td>Water thick-knee</td>
<td>African cuckoo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>81.</td>
<td>Spotted thick-knee</td>
<td>African scops owl (call)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82.</td>
<td>Black-winged stilt</td>
<td>Spotted eagle-owl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83.</td>
<td>Pied avocet</td>
<td>Verreaux's eagle-owl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84.</td>
<td>Long-toed lapwing</td>
<td>African wood owl (call)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85.</td>
<td>Blacksmith lapwing</td>
<td>Pearl spotted owlet (call)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86.</td>
<td>Senegal lapwing</td>
<td>African palm swift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87.</td>
<td>Black-winged lapwing</td>
<td>Nyanza swift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88.</td>
<td>Crowned lapwing</td>
<td>Common swift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89.</td>
<td>Common ringed plover</td>
<td>Little swift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90.</td>
<td>Little ringed plover</td>
<td>Speckled mousebird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91.</td>
<td>Kittlitz’s plover</td>
<td>Blue-naped mousebird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92.</td>
<td>Three-banded plover</td>
<td>Rufous-crowned roller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93.</td>
<td>Greater painted snipe</td>
<td>Lilac-breasted roller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>94.</td>
<td>African jacana</td>
<td>Grey-headed kingfisher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95.</td>
<td>Marsh sandpiper</td>
<td>Brown-hooded kingfisher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96.</td>
<td>Common greenshank</td>
<td>Striped kingfisher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97.</td>
<td>Wood sandpiper</td>
<td>Woodland kingfisher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>98.</td>
<td>Common sandpiper</td>
<td>Giant kingfisher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>99.</td>
<td>Little stint</td>
<td>Little bee-eater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100.</td>
<td>Ruff</td>
<td>Cinnamon-chested bee-eater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101.</td>
<td>Double-banded courser</td>
<td>European bee-eater</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102.</td>
<td>Collared pratincole</td>
<td>African hoopoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>103.</td>
<td>Whiskered tern</td>
<td>Green wood hoopoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104.</td>
<td>White-winged tern</td>
<td>Abyssinian Scimitarbill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>105.</td>
<td>Chestnut-bellied sandgrouse</td>
<td>Crowned hornbill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>106.</td>
<td>Yellow-throated sandgrouse</td>
<td>African grey hornbill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>107.</td>
<td>Black-faced sandgrouse</td>
<td>Northern red-billed hornbill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>108.</td>
<td>Rock pigeon</td>
<td>Tanzanian red-billed hornbill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>109.</td>
<td>Speckled pigeon</td>
<td>Von der Decken’s hornbill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>110.</td>
<td>Rameron pigeon</td>
<td>Silvery-cheeked hornbill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>111.</td>
<td>Dusky turtle-dove</td>
<td>Southern ground hornbill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112.</td>
<td>African mourning dove</td>
<td>White-eared barbet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>113.</td>
<td>Red-eyed dove</td>
<td>Red-and-yellow barbet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>114.</td>
<td>Ring-necked dove</td>
<td>D’Arnaud’s barbet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>115.</td>
<td>Laughing dove</td>
<td>Usambiro barbet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>116.</td>
<td>Emerald-spotted wood dove</td>
<td>Greater honeyguide (call)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>117.</td>
<td>Tambourine dove</td>
<td>Nubian woodpecker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>118.</td>
<td>Namaqua dove</td>
<td>Grey woodpecker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>119.</td>
<td>Fischer’s lovebird</td>
<td>Chinspot batis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>171.</td>
<td>Grey-headed bushshrike</td>
<td>220.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>172.</td>
<td>Orange-breasted bushshrike</td>
<td>221.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(call)</td>
<td>222.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>174.</td>
<td>Black-crowned tchagra</td>
<td>224.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>175.</td>
<td>Black-backed puffback</td>
<td>225.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>176.</td>
<td>Slate-coloured boubou</td>
<td>226.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177.</td>
<td>Tropical boubou</td>
<td>227.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>178.</td>
<td>Brubru</td>
<td>228.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>179.</td>
<td>Magpie shrike</td>
<td>229.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>180.</td>
<td>Northern white-crowned shrike</td>
<td>230.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>231.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>181.</td>
<td>Red-backed shrike</td>
<td>232.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>182.</td>
<td>Grey-backed fiscal</td>
<td>233.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>183.</td>
<td>Long-tailed fiscal</td>
<td>234.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>184.</td>
<td>Taiga fiscal</td>
<td>235.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>185.</td>
<td>Common fiscal</td>
<td>236.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>186.</td>
<td>Black-headed oriole</td>
<td>237.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>187.</td>
<td>Fork-tailed drongo</td>
<td>238.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>188.</td>
<td>African paradise flycatcher</td>
<td>239.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>189.</td>
<td>Cape crow</td>
<td>240.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>190.</td>
<td>Pied crow</td>
<td>241.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>193.</td>
<td>Rufous-naped lark</td>
<td>244.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>194.</td>
<td>Red-capped lark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>195.</td>
<td>Fischer’s sparrow-lark</td>
<td>245.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>196.</td>
<td>Dark-capped bulbul</td>
<td>246.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>197.</td>
<td>Mountain greenbul</td>
<td>247.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>198.</td>
<td>Black saw-wing</td>
<td>248.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>199.</td>
<td>Grey-rumped swallow</td>
<td>249.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200.</td>
<td>Banded martin</td>
<td>250.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201.</td>
<td>Barn swallow</td>
<td>251.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>202.</td>
<td>Rock martin</td>
<td>252.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>203.</td>
<td>Lesser-striped swallow</td>
<td>253.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>204.</td>
<td>Red-rumped swallow</td>
<td>254.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>205.</td>
<td>Red-faced crombec</td>
<td>255.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>206.</td>
<td>Red-faced cisticola</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>207.</td>
<td>Trilling cisticola</td>
<td>256.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>208.</td>
<td>Hunter’s cisticola</td>
<td>257.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>209.</td>
<td>Rattling cisticola</td>
<td>258.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>210.</td>
<td>Winding cisticola</td>
<td>259.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>211.</td>
<td>Croaking cisticola</td>
<td>260.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>212.</td>
<td>Zitting cisticola</td>
<td>261.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>213.</td>
<td>Desert cisticola</td>
<td>262.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>214.</td>
<td>Pectoral-patch cisticola</td>
<td>263.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>215.</td>
<td>Tawny-flanked cisticola</td>
<td>264.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>216.</td>
<td>Buff-bellied warbler</td>
<td>265.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>217.</td>
<td>Bar-throated apalis</td>
<td>266.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>218.</td>
<td>Yellow-breasted apalis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scientific Name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>268</td>
<td>Grosbeak weaver</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>269</td>
<td>Baglafecht weaver</td>
<td>284</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>270</td>
<td>Holub’s golden weaver</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>271</td>
<td>Taveta weaver</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>272</td>
<td>Lesser masked weaver</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>273</td>
<td>Speke’s weaver</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>274</td>
<td>Village weaver</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>275</td>
<td>Red-headed weaver</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>276</td>
<td>Red-billed quelea</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>277</td>
<td>Yellow-bishop</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>278</td>
<td>Fan-tailed widowbird</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>279</td>
<td>Jackson’s widowbird</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>280</td>
<td>Green-winged pytilia</td>
<td>295</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>281</td>
<td>African firefinch</td>
<td>296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>282</td>
<td>Jameson’s firefinch</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>