



KENYA - TRIP REPORT Aug 21 - Sept 9, 2005

By Adrian Binns

Day 1 / Sunday August 21

After a rather uneventful 8 hour flight we arrived at Kenyatta Airport in Nairobi at 9pm, met our charismatic guide Ben and his tall skinny driver BK who whisked us to the very plush Serena Hotel an hour later.

Day 2 / Monday August 22 – Nairobi National Park

Situated a stones throw from Nairobi is the Nairobi National Park, Africa's second National Park. Although small in size compared to the better known Kruger, it is a rather impressive way to begin a safari. The short drive to the Main Gate produced Pied Crows, Black Kites and a platoon of Marabou Storks wandering on top of the football stadium. By 6:45am we were inside the park with roosting White-backed and Ruppell's Griffon Vulture's, Bushbuck, Hadada Ibis, Common Bulbul and White-browed Sparrow Weaver being our first sightings as we drove through a short area of open woodland to the symbol of the park, a small circular pit of elephant tusk ashes symbolizing the end of trading in ivory. Though not linked directly to that tragedy this park does not have any Elephants. Our second mammal was a Silver-backed Jackal and it was not long before Common Zebra's, Eland and Coke's Hartebeests were seen in the plains, a vast expanse of rolling grassland dotted with acacias.

We took the perimeter track, basically riding the edge between the grasslands and the shrubland stopping to watch and photograph a multitude of new species. Olive Greenbul; the first of several species of the cisticolas, the Rattling Cisticola; Violet backed Starling; Speckled and Blue-naped Mousebird, a family of crested birds with long tails that travel in small groups and have an affinity for hanging upside down; the common Red-eyed Dove and its lighter cousin the Ringed-necked Dove, this being the bird that is so commonly heard calling in the background of all African wildlife programs; Tropical Boubou, what a name but it has a distinctive tropical call; Variable Sunbird; flocks of Yellow-rumped Seedeaters, African Firefinch, Baglafaecht Weaver, Rufous Sparrow, Common Waxbills and Bronze Mannikins; Brimstone Canary; a Yellow-throated Longclaw, which is the equivalent of our meadowlark; a pair of gorgeous Little Bee-eaters, and we also came across a dead Marsh Owl on the road, obviously hit by another vehicle during the night..... all this in our first hour! Grant's Gazelle, Masai Giraffe, Impala, the great wanderers of the plains the Wildebeest and a pair of Black Rhinos along with Ostriches soon followed. Some of the more common species that we would come across during the remainder of the day included Long-tailed Fiscal-Shrikes perched on low acacias, Fawn-colored Larks on the tracks, Tawny-flanked Prinias and Pectro-patched Cisticolas. In the air Red-rumped and Barn Swallows were common with additional sightings of Sand and House Martins, African Palm Swift and a few Black Saw-wing. In a Yellow-barked Acacia a Lesser Spotted Eagle was ripping apart prey and feeding it to its well grown chick. A large amount of white feathers soon caught our attention. It was a male Ostrich wooing its mate and before long she was sitting on the ground and they were mating. We then had a group of about twenty Impalas. It was the first of many bachelor herds we would see over the next several weeks. Some of the herds were very large numbering in the dozens. In contrast to the grasslands, Whistling-thorn Acacias grow to about 6 feet in height and seem to be devoid of most wildlife, other than Rufous Sparrows that use them for nest sites, due to the ants that inhabit the galls. Asking why we were not

seeing Lions, Ben, our guide, told us that a pride of 13 had recently been killed by local Masai farmers, because they were raiding their livestock, which reduced the numbers in half in the park. We finished the day amongst grass munching Cape Buffalo and watching our first cat of the trip a Several, a slender long legged small cat that is active in the early evening. What a start and could we top this day?

Day 3 / Tuesday August 23 – Blue Lodge; Mountain Lodge

Following a late start in order to miss rush hour traffic as we headed north out of Nairobi, we dodged pot holes on the poor uneven roads that lead through agricultural areas of coffee plantations, corn, bananas, potatoes, beans and pineapples. Our first stop an hour later is at the grounds of the Blue Lodge Hotel in Thika. A Brown-hooded Kingfisher greets us in the car park along with White-eyed Slaty Flycatchers. Walking through the grounds to one of the two large waterfalls we encounter White-browed Sparrow Weavers in the process of nest building. Actually they spend most of their time upgrading their nests and won't let another species nest in the same tree. One also knows that it is this species that has taken over a tree because all their nests, about 2 dozen in this case are only built on the west facing side of the tree. Another spectacular sight is a Giant Kingfisher, the mother of all kingfishers, perched on a low branch ahead of us. Though not rare they are at times hard to come across. At the Thiba River waterfall we pick up Mountain Wagtail and get a good look at Great Sparrowhawk as it crossed the water below us. From here we continue to climb in elevation passing roadside stands of charcoal and passing by common species such as Common Fiscals perched at regular intervals along telephone wires; Superb Starlings, Common Drongo's and Grey-headed Kingfishers. Raptor species are seen well, including our only Walberg's Eagle and African Harrier Hawks circling above the road, and what turns out to be about as common as a Red-tail back home, Augur Buzzards. They even look a little similar. The drive is long though we do make a few stops including at the Karatina Ponds for Little Grebes, Red-knobbed Coots, Grey Heron and Yellow-billed Stork and are amazed at the sight of 20 foot tall Giant Euphorbia's in small patches separating the road from agricultural plots.

It was gone 1pm by the time we reached the Mountain Lodge, but that was in part due to the dusty, dirty pot holed roads, with road works on some stretches, and frequent stops once near the lodge for Long-Crested Eagle, Common Waxbills, Common Stonechat, Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater and Cape Robin Chat. On arrival we were greeted with a warm washcloth to clean our face and hands and a cold refreshing juice - very civilized! The Lodge is set within the foothills of Mt. Kenya, at 2700m (8858') in a forest. It is not as well known as Treetops but probably the best of Kenya's 3 'tree' lodges. All the rooms face the watering hole, an opening in the forest, and we are warned about the monkeys – in a nutshell, if one leaves the window open a crack, there is a good chance that your belongings would be stolen, destroyed or exposed for all to see! There are two upper level viewing areas along with a lower level underground hide that allowed one to get eye level with the animals that visit the watering hole.

Following our buffet lunch, we opted to forego the 3pm armed guided walk into the forest, not for fear of encountering big game but due to threatening weather. Instead we took in all the activity that was around the lodge starting on the rooftop. A rising and falling rolling thrill from deep in the bushes alerted us to the presence of Hunter's Cisticola, while a plain Dusky Flycatcher, Streaky Seedeaters, Northern Double-collared Sunbird and Speckled Mousebirds could be seen flitting about. In the tops of the trees Red-billed Oxpeckers, Eastern Bronzed-naped Pigeons, Olive Pigeons and Red-fronted Barbets could be seen through the scope while Africa's largest eagle the African Crowned Eagle scoured the canopy for monkeys and Red-fronted Parrots screamed over the waterhole. In the forest, Tropical Boubou, Gray-capped Warbler and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird could be heard as a large group of Buffalo's wandered in to drink and the smallest of antelopes, the Suni, was spotted along a path before it vanished into the underbrush. We descended to walk the grounds as it began to thunder and rain drops began to fall, though it never got much worse. Beautiful Olive Thrushes, a rare Oriole Finch, Cape Robin Chats, Yellow-whiskered Bulbul, Ruppell's Robin Chat graced the path and we would get glimpses of Marsh Mongoose as they crossed the path along with numerous White-throated Guenon or Skye's Monkeys. Silver-cheeked Hornbills picked berries and then flicked them up into the air to catch and devour them and Hartlaub's Turacos played hide and seek in the tops of the trees and we spotted a small troop of Black-and-white Colobus Monkeys a good distance away.

As luck would have it, a feeding platform was just outside our room and a slab of meat was placed on it at dusk. Once it got dark a Small Spotted Genet climbed the rungs and settled into a gourmet meal, well out of reach of a White-tailed Mongoose that strolled about below. During dinner they bought around a list for us to mark down any animals that we would wish to be awoken for during the night, should they come to the watering hole. Leopard, Striped Hyena, Forest Elephant, Giant Forest Hog were marked off. We were then interrupted by an announcement that an elephant had shown up. Everyone left their tables and headed for the verandah to watch it drink and scratch itself against a giant boulder. 3 Spotted Hyenas and Waterbucks were also there. We crossed Forest Elephant off the list! Following dinner we attended a slide presentation by a very animated and amusing resident naturalist on the lodges' wildlife. We stayed up late editing photos while watching the watering hole! We didn't want to go to bed incase we missed something coming to drink, but after midnight and with no new species we turned in. Sadly, we were not awoken during the night for.....

Day 4 / Wednesday August 24 – Mountain Lodge; Samburu

The best time to see the glacier capped Mt Kenya is at first light before the clouds settle in, and today was no exception. At 5200 metres (17,060') it is Kenya's second highest peak. The watering hole held Egyptian Geese, Hammerkop, Green Sandpiper and Hadada Ibis one of the world's most boisterous species, and pigeons came down to take advantage of the natural salt lick. The monkeys of course were up with us and Rock Martin's perched on the verandah decking no doubt having spent the night there. We got looks though little satisfaction at two new raptors, African Goshawk and Little Sparrowhawk, both being juveniles. Following breakfast a last check of the Broad-leaved Croton trees around the lodge produced some nice activity with Paradise Flycatcher (yes it is as aptly named), Black-headed and Black-throated Apalis (old world warblers) and Kendrick's Starling. Small Mongoose and Olive Bush Squirrel were added to the list. Unfortunately we had to leave this wonderful spot but took our time on the long way out. Stopping for several Yellow-bellied Waxbills (what a gorgeous family); African Citril; a Dusky Turtle Dove perched atop a Podo tree; Black-headed Herons in what appeared to be out of habitat, but apparently not; and a tremendous gathering of around 40 Silver-cheeked Hornbills that kept us enthralled for half an hour as we watched them eat, fight, preen, display and chase each other throughout a rather open stand of Croton forest.

It was a couple of hours after leaving when we reached what would be the first of many equator crossings. We did the obligatory stop to be shown that we were actually standing on the Equator. This was demonstrated with water in a bucket – basically standing still on the equator, moving anti-clockwise beginning some 50 feet north of the line and clockwise once about the same distance south of the lines. Flush your toilets, you'll see what I mean and it won't cost you \$5! And neither will you get a certificate! This was also our first experience of window shopping Kenyan style – basically they are all the same type of shops lined up in a row, called Curio's, short for Curiosity Shops I presume. It took a little hard bargaining much to the amusement of the locals, especially when some unmentionable phrases happened to be stated when they wouldn't budge on the price. I though we did well, but later found out that one could get items like wooden giraffes and masks at the same price or better at the lodges, it really wasn't a bargain – but at least we all had fun, and did our bit to keep the economy going.

Continuing through the Central Highland Grasslands at around 9000', with large expanses of wheat and a few fields of snow peas, we passed numerous busy villages and small towns, all with a wide array of roadside stalls or kiosks though the common theme from place to place seemed to be a multitude of hotels, a very loose word for a shack with a roof over one's head. On the occasions that we were able to slow down we could see numerous Speke's Weaver nests line the roadside trees in the villages and pass by Cape Rook's and Common Fiscals. The "paved road", though by now this was another loose word, abruptly ended at a checkpoint in Isiolo and one was correct to assume that from here northwards to the Somali or Ethiopian border it was dirt roads all the way – and it's a long way! That did not mean it was better though! This particular stretch of 48km was undoubtedly the worse dirt road that we encountered on the whole trip. Along with a dirt road comes an abundance of dust, so we battened down the hatches, pulled a handkerchief-come-facemask over our mouths

and noses and hoped the kilometer sign was wrong. The torture receded half an hour later when we reached the main gate. Paperwork had to be filled out; money exchanged, and crafts, in this case jewelry purchased before we moved into the heart of the parks – actually 2 reserves, Buffalo Springs which consisted mainly of rolling plains and Samburu which is more rugged with rocky outcroppings.

Conditions weren't much better but the sight of Oryx standing in the shade of an acacia; Grevy's Zebra's, the ones with neat pinstripes; Elephants; Gerenuk's, tall antelopes, named after the Somali word for giraffe, that are browsers, standing on their hind legs to reach the acacia vegetation; Reticulated Giraffes and Common Waterbuck along with Secretary Birds, Red-billed Hornbills, Lilac-breasted Rollers and Bateleurs certainly made the journey easier. Just before 2pm we reached the electric fence compound that housed the lodge and were greeted by Somalians dressed in bright red garb, spears and all and a much needed washcloth. Tucked in the middle of the bush this is one of 3 or 4 lodges that catered to tourists visiting this part of the world, and what a stunning lodge it was. Our rooms were chalets stretching away from the main lodge and dining area under the tall acacia canopies and overlooking the Ewaso Ngiro River. At our buffet lunch we sat out in the open watching brazen Red-billed Hornbills and Superb Starlings take hand outs from the native marksman (a boy with the slingshot aimed at keeping the monkeys at bay) – this was heaven.

Being north of the equator the savannah bush habitat is drier and some species like the Gerenuk and Grevy's Zebra reach their southern limit here. Along with good numbers of other Land Rovers we set out at 4pm on our game drive and not surprisingly everywhere one looked there was something to see. Too much to handle? No way, just bloody amazing! As we wind our way through the rocky savannah with small hills as a backdrop we came across weaver nests in the vast majority of acacia trees. Most are unoccupied but nearby are their master craftsman....White-headed Buffalo Weavers, Don Smiths aka Donaldson-Smith's (Sparrow Weavers) and Black-capped Social Weavers. African Grey Flycatcher is a rather non-descript species but Pink-breasted Lark, Grey-headed Sparrow, Lesser Honeyguide and the Yellow-bellied Eremomela that we found in the scrub by the river are not. We did sight a Crested Bustard, a common dryland species and the smallest member of its family; Nyanza Swifts; Somali Fiscal; Crested Francolin, Yellow-necked Spurfowl and the ubiquitous guineafowls, Helmeted and the simply snazzy Vulture; Grey-headed Kingfisher; Abyssinian Scimitarbill named for its bright orange de-curved bill and a master at finding insects in bark crevices; the beautiful and dainty Namaqua Dove along with the larger Laughing and African Mourning Doves.

Along the wide river, which had about a good foot of running water from recent rains, Great White Egrets, Marabou Storks and Nile Crocodiles could be seen while in the riparian vegetation consisting mostly of tamarisk, a majestic Martial Eagle and a pair of Verreaux Eagle Owls was found on their roost. On a hillside we could see a congregation of vultures and once we reached the spot found a dead giraffe. There were no predators in sight so we climbed out the van to look for a cause of death. Could it have been of natural causes? Unlikely, though there was no clear evidence of it being mauled. Joining the vultures were several Tawny Eagles and other than some of them fighting there really was not going to be much happening until someone 'carved' the beast. A half hour after sunset we were back at the lodge. Not being allowed out of the compound at night, for obvious reasons, meant we got an early nights sleep.

Day 5 / Thursday August 25 - Samburu

The excitement was so great; sometimes you can not wait to get up! Our pre breakfast game drive led us along the river and began with the usual suspects, guineafowl, francolin, rollers, drongos, hornbills, spurfowl, doves, weavers and new species such as Northern Black Flycatcher, Northern White-crowned Shrike, African Hoopoe, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Spur-winged Plover, Black-cheeked Waxbill, Spotted Morning Thrush, Grey-Wren Warblers, Yellow-spotted Petronias, Eastern Pale Chanting Goshawks, Three-streaked Tchagra, Rosy-patched Bush-shrike, Slate-colored Boubou a shy ground forager in the bush-shrike family; White-bellied Go-away Bird named by hunters that found them to be noisy when a stalk was in progress therefore alerting game to the danger and enabling them to 'go-away'; White-headed and Blue-naped Mousebirds always seen in small

family groups and easily noticed in flight by their long tails; Bearded Woodpecker, Kenya's largest pecker at 8"; Somali Bee-eaters that are only found north of the equator and stay very low are rarely being seen above head height; Sunbirds including Black-bellied and Eastern Violet-backed which feeds more on insects than nectar; Eastern Yellow-billed and Von Der Decken's Hornbills and D'Arnaud's Barbet perched atop a termite mound and are the only species that nests in them and as one could guess they also feed on them.

As amazing as it was to see all these birds it was the mammals, in particular the Lions that took center stage. Returning to check on the status of the dead giraffe, we found a pride of 11 just finishing up dinner, with the youngsters at the table while the adults rested. The skin was peeled back and the ribs striped of any meat, thus setting the table for the waiting vultures. It was amazing to think that such a large mammal could be devoured so quickly. Talking of things to devour, breakfast was next!

With so much area to cover we were back on a game drive soon after breakfast. Our first Speckled Pigeon was in the grounds and though it remainder largely hidden, we would get to see many of the next week. Dwarf Mongoose slipped through the rocks before vanishing; Grant's Gazelles with their light colored flanks are very successful in this dry savannah and both males and females of this species have horns; and hornbills were relatively common moving from tree to tree and in the case of a Von der Decken's actively flicking berries up and into their large two-tones yellow and red bills. Down by the river we came across a pride of lions, more than likely the same pride we had seen earlier. They had come down to the river to drink and take advantage of the shade provided by the large trees. Most were getting some sleep, though some seemed very restless constantly changing positions. We were unaware of 4 young ones that came out from behind a shrub and walked through an opening to join or more appropriately annoy some of the others. One is memorized by the sight of these large mammals being so close, only feet away, and knowing full well what they are capable of. We are of course inside an open top vehicle but still, interactions between animals and vehicles are rarely heard of. Now man and those on foot is another matter! From our view point looking across the river we notice a herd of Elephants making their way down to the water. We move a short distance for a better look and watch 5 of them wander into the shallow water and proceed to cross to the other side pausing to drink and shower themselves. As one can imagine, everything eventually makes it way down to the water.

Early-afternoon saw us rest up and take advantage of the refreshing pool and at 4pm we were back on another game drive for almost 3 hours. East Africa's starlings are simply superb and I don't just mean that literally, a number are multi-colored and in the case of Golden-breasted Starlings have long tails. On the other hand a few are dullish and Fischer's is no exception, though the Wattled ranks higher in my books with its yellow bare facial skin and black wattles. Another family represented by numerous widespread species is the plovers. The beautiful Crowned Plover, a noisy plover of the dry grasslands with a white ring around the crown was the most common though we did see Spur-winged, a nice looking black, grey-brown and white bird that reaches the southern end of its range here. Passerines included Grey Wren-Warbler and Banded Parisoma a small warbler fond of acacia trees. Over the large uplifted hills that break the horizon several Fan-tailed Ravens are spotted, their short stubby tailed very evident, and perched atop an acacia a Black-shouldered Kite, while slightly more active was a Secretary Bird fixing her nest in a nearby toothbrush bush.

New mammals were sighted including African Cape Hare and Common Waterbuck to go along with Grevy's Zebra. At one stage we came across a herd of Elephants that were not happy with one of their own. As they saw the intruder approach a lot of trumpeting began, but that did not stop there and they charged each other. It was obvious that these mammals could cause a great deal of damage! One of the elephants had a noticeably shorter tusk on one side, and in this species we can tell whether it is left or right handed. The dominant 'hand' would be the shorter tusk, the one they would use most. On our way back Ben spotted a rare and very elusive African Wild Cat at the base of a bush, retreating into the dense tangle once we got close. On the soft sand at a dried river bed 50 to 60 Olive Baboons were preening, playing and aggressively chasing each other, their canine teeth very evident. It was another wonderful day!

Day 6 / Friday August 26 – Samburu; Naro Moru River Lodge

Following an early breakfast where a Nubian Woodpecker caught our attention as it came out of its nest hole besides the restaurant we headed back to our room where we found one of the staff collapsed and vomiting on the path. We got help and they took him away saying it was malaria that he had and that he would be in good hands, as they had 3 doctors at the lodge.

We loaded up the van and headed out along the river passing the only palm tree that has branches the Doum Palm, and coming across Dik Dik's foraging in the shrubbery and an adult and juvenile Palm Nut Vulture, a large vulturine eagle that likes to scavenge along floodplains. Wire-tailed Swallows flew over the water. A small flock of Green Wood-Hoopoe moved from tree to tree as they searched crevices in the bark for insects and we had a large mixed flock of Cutthroats with their scaly breasts and richly colored Chestnut Sparrows. A group of 30 or so sandgrouse was seen in flight and shortly thereafter Ben spotted the smallest member of this family a male Black-faced Sandgrouse besides the track. Stopping the van we peered down on the bird as it slowly moved away joining its mate.

Raptors were very evident with Martial and Tawny Eagles, Augur Buzzard and an African Harrier Hawk all seen well. Before we knew it, it was 10am and we were at the gate where local kids came out to hawk jewelry – following the fine art of haggling, snake bracelets were purchased and we were on our way. Heading out onto the long dusty bumpy road this time we were prepared and before we knew it we were on a paved road! We did pass a small clan of Somali tribal elders, dressed in fine garb, seated on the ground in a circle no doubt discussing the business at hand as they had been doing for centuries.

There are multiple police check points on all the roads with spiked grids on the road to stop you but they did not seem to be interested in us so all it did was slow us down. We stopped for a bathroom break at one of the tourist's areas that had all the carvings etc for sale. We found a nice wooden hippo but they were not interested in haggling with me and they wanted far too much for it so we left!

We drove back through Nanuyki climbing in elevation to around 8000' before reaching the Naro Moru Lodge. This is used as a base camp for those keen and fit enough to hike to the summit of Mt Kenya. We are greeted by Red-cheeked Cordon Bleus, Brimstone Canaries, Grey-headed Bush-Shrike, Cinnamon-chested Bee-eaters, Bronzed Sunbirds and Crowned Hornbills which are mostly black birds with white belly and a red bill, around the buildings of the extensive grounds.

In the afternoon, with the clouds thickening and weather threatening, we took a leisurely stroll along the banks of the Naro Moru and through the woodlands and scrub, some of which had been striped to make way for of all things a golf course. Somehow it just did not seem to fit in and certainly the loss of habitat will have an impact on species. Along the wooded river Chin-spotted Batis, Yellow-whiskered Greenbul, Northern Double-collared Sunbird, Black-backed Puffback, Grey-backed Camaroptera, a small warbler, and Mountain Wagtail with a few Black Sawwings flying overhead are seen. In the water we see movement followed by flight. It is a pair of very pretty though skiddish African Black Ducks that we are able to track down after back tracking. It was certainly worth it as we came across a male Paradise Flycatcher a stunner with a long rufous tail. In the open Gray Flycatchers, White-eyed Slaty Flycatchers, Streaky Seedeaters, Purple Grenadiers, Common Fiscals, African Citril Finch, mousebirds and White-browed Robin Chats were very cooperative.

A small dump site not far from one of the fairways (believe it or not they seemed about as smooth as some of the roads we have driven) had Cape Rooks, Hadada Ibis and a group of Sacred Ibis fly in. Singing Cisticola, that wonderful family of plain looking birds with magical names, did what it was named for though it was tough to decipher if the Rattling Cisticola was saying anything. Tawny-flanked Prinia, Yellow-rumped Seedeaters, Bronzed Mannikins and the beautiful Golden-breasted Bunting showed well as did a Sulphur-breasted Bush-Shrike after a little chase. A similar bird was a Purple-throated Cuckoo-Shrike an upper elevation arboreal forest specialty that is neither a cuckoo nor shrike. We encountered several weaver species including

Baglafaecht, Red-headed and Speke's and hear Spectacled calling as well as a female Red Widowbird. Returning at dusk to our rooms we find a Tree Hyrax sitting in the crotch of a tree overhanging the river. We would hear their weird eerie calls soon after.

Day 7 / Saturday August 27 – Naro Moru River Lodge; Sweetwater Sanctuary

A check of the trees around the buildings pre breakfast produced Red-fronted and Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Montane Oriole, Montane White-eye and more Crested Hornbills. By 8:15am we were on the road for the 1 hour drive to Sweetwater Sanctuary seeing Cape Rook, Speckled Pigeons, Superb Starlings along the roadsides and stopping for Northern Pied Babbler, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Rufous-naped Lark and a Black-winged Plover in the grasslands.

As we entered the gates there was considerable open areas of short grass and we were greeted by a large herd of zebra and elephants, the latter capable of eating several hundred pounds of grasses, leaves, fruits and berries a day; Grants' and Thompson's Gazelles, and Warthogs, whose neck muscles are not long or strong enough so they feed on their knees! Blacksmith and Black-winged Plovers, Red-capped Larks, Plain-backed Pipit and Grassland Pipits could be found on the short grass while Northern White-crowned Shrike's, Northern Anteater Chat, Rattling Cisticolas, Greater Blue-eared Starlings, Ruppell's Long-tailed Starling and White-bellied Tits perched on fence posts, fencing and atop teclea shrubs. The dense teclea thickets interspersed with taller grasslands is the perfect habitat for the browsing Black Rhinoceros. Standing upright we find a Black-bellied Bustard, oblivious to us being meters away and fully intend on continuing his display, where he slowly lifts his neck and head as far as he can and makes a 'hooeee' call and lowers his head onto his back and 'ploop', all this in slow motion.

We stopped by the Chimpanzee enclosure, a large holding and rehabilitation pen for those that have been abused, found for illegal sale and caged pets. Here along the path that lead to the river we saw several butterflies including Dark Blue Pansy and Citrus Butterfly, came across African Pied Wagtails, 3-banded Plover, Spectacled Weavers and White-browed Coucal but it was the secretive and often elusive African Finfoot that quickly crossed the dirty brown narrow river to take shelter under dense overhanging shrubbery that got as all excited. From here we moved through alternate habitats of shrub woodlands with troops of baboons; Black-tipped Mongoose; Bushbuck; Klaus's Cuckoo; Brown-crowned Tchagra; Augur Buzzards along with African Palm Swifts and Black Saw-wings, and marshy areas where we saw huge Marsh Cane Rats feeding in front of their den; Grey Crowned Cranes; Egyptian Geese; Yellow-billed Ducks; the stately Saddle-billed Stork and Defassa Waterbuck with their white rump ring that looks as though they have sat on a wet painted toilet seat.

While having a picnic lunch at the visitor's centers, a family group of D'Arnaud's Barbets, White-bellied Go-away Birds, Speckled Pigeons, Speckled Mousebirds and Grey-capped Social Weavers kept us entertained. With a storm fast approaching we headed back to the lodge picking up Nyanza Swifts, Bateleur and African Harrier Hawk on the way. The later is an odd raptor that has a vulture looking head with bare yellow skin than will turn red when annoyed or mobbed by other birds.

Day 8 / Sunday August 28 – Mweiga; Thompson's Falls; Lake Naivasha Country Club

By 8am we were on our way southwest-wards traveling across the plains towards the Aberdare range. On the way we saw many rhino's and a few birds such as Wattled Starling, Long-tailed Widowbird, Pied Crow, Rufous Sparrows, pipits, Namaqua Doves, Scarlet-chested Sunbirds and a Black-headed Oriole. The morning again was overcast and as usual the driving was interesting, driving on which ever part of the road has the least potholes and continually overtaking and narrowly missing the many bicycles that are on the road - often laden down with multiple people hauling huge bags of cabbages or potatoes. As it was Sunday everyone was out and about, heading to church or just hanging out - a lot of the kids were dressed in their Sunday best - hats and all!

A couple of hours later we stopped at Mweiga Quarry where we met Paul, the local bird authority or keeper of the roost. Guiding us down to the quarry to search for Mackinder's Cape Eagle Owl, we came across Red-knobbed Coot, Yellow-billed Duck, Great Cormorant, Hammerkop, Little Grebe, Rock Thrush and Yellow-crowned Canary, but no owl. Paul then took us up the road to his father's farmland, down a steep embankment, across a wet field and located the owl sitting out in the open on a rock ledge on the escarpment. When we got back to the car there was a young girl asking for a ride to a town 80km away - she was 14 years old and needed to get help for her mother - we gave her a lift. An hour later we made a quick stop at Thompson Falls where somehow Ben found an amazingly well camouflaged Von Honnel Chameleon. The girl wasn't pleased that we stopped so she found another ride. The roads had started out good but rapidly deteriorated being bumpy and dusty with a lot of roadworks.

We eventually made it to the Naivasha Country Club, which is at 6200' in elevation by 2pm. We were greeted with wash towels and juice, got settled in and then had lunch out on the lawn, with an entertaining juggler/contortionist/comedian and Scared Ibis wandering about. Naivasha is on the eastern edge of Kenya's Rift Valley and is one of the freshwater lakes along with Baringo that have a tremendous diversity of species. In the spacious grounds the open acacia trees held a number of species including Laughing and Ring-necked Dove, a large group of Superb Starlings taking a bath, White-eyed Slaty and Paradise Flycatchers, Black-headed Oriole, Grey-backed Camaropteras, Spectacled and Red-headed Weavers, Tropical Boubou, Red-faced Crombec, a very co-operative Klaus's Cuckoo, Black Cuckoo-Shrike, Grey Woodpecker and Amethyst Sunbird. As the trees gave way to the wetland circling the edge of the lake Blacksmith and Spur-winged Plovers became obvious as did Wildebeest, Waterbuck and a Hippopotamus that had wandered onto the short grass to graze near the boardwalk that led to the lake. This was unusual as they normally feed at night. The guards had him well monitored and people were told to keep their distance. At each place we stayed we heard stories of animal-people encounters, lions and hippos being the main culprits and neither are to be messed with.

Along the shoreline Common Sandpipers, Ruff, Marabou, Grey-headed Gulls, Great and Little Cormorants could be seen with 3 or 4 Pied Kingfishers hovering near the waters edge and Wired-tailed Swallows perched on boats while a blue flash streaked by, this being the tiny Malachite Kingfisher. We took a boat out into the lake where noisy Fish Eagle's greeted us and Pink-backed and Great White Pelicans loafed on the edge of an island along with African Spoonbills, Wood Sandpipers. Hottentot Teals and Little Grebes were in the water and Gull-billed Terns flew around us, but it was the large group of hippos that we glided towards. It is a sight to see them yawn as they slowly raised their upper jaw.

Day 9 / Monday August 29 – Lake Naivasha Country Club; Crescent Island; Nakuru NP

Fischer's Lovebirds nest in the palm trees next to our rooms and at first light they were beginning to stir and the noisy squawks of Hadada Ibis were very evident.

We were on the lake by 7:30am to board our small boat with a small outboard engine, in case you need to make a quick get away from the hippos! The water was so shallow that we had to keep away from the shore which made it tougher to photograph some species. Despite this we got shots of Fish Eagle and Malachite Kingfisher, and saw all the species we had last night along with Whiskered Tern, Red-billed Teal, Giant Kingfisher, Streaky Seedeater, Gray-capped Warbler, Variable Sunbird and Hunter's Cisticola.

Adjoining the country club property is Crescent Island, an exposed lip of a submerged volcanic crater which was used extensively in the film *Out of Africa*, because of the lack of danger from carnivores as well as for its sheer beauty - a vast open short grass plain dotted with stately Yellow-bark Acacia trees. We spend a couple of hours on the 'island' finding Brown Parisoma, Grey Woodpecker, Crowned Plovers, Black-lored Babbler, Red-winged Blackbird, White-headed Barbet, Green Wood-Hoopoes and coming across a large movement of swifts and swallows, including Plain Martin, White-rumped Swift, Africa Black Swift and Lesser Striped Swallow. We did everything we could to find African Rock Pythons but despite numerous bits of evidence and assurance that we would come across the mother of all pythons we did not! However we did find several Slender-tailed Nightjars sitting in the shade under shrubs.

It was only a short distance to Nakuru from Naivasha but the roads and wandering animals slowed us down. These were tarmac roads that had seen better days and were worse than the dirt roads if that is possible. 2 hours with a stop for water later, we arrived at the entrance to the park where we had to wait while the paper work (park fees) was being done. Standing outside the van a Vervet Monkey tried to get into the car. He jumped up on to the roof and as we had the roof open he was going to jump in. Jane tried to scare him away but he was not scared and aggressively went for her. BK saw what was happening and scared it off; they are obviously much more scared of the natives. However, it did not stop the monkey from taking a bag of popcorn out of the hand of a young girl leading to a tremendous flood of tears.

This park is fenced, to keep poaching to a minimum, and the only big 5 animal it does not have is the elephant. Four of the lakes in the southern part of the Kenya's Rift Valley are strongly alkaline, of these 'Soda Lakes' Bogoria and Nakuru are frequent gathering and feeding grounds for huge numbers of Lesser Flamingos - over a million of them. As we drove through Yellow-barked Acacia woodlands seeing Long Crested Eagle, White-browed Robin, rollers and starlings and turned a corner we are stunned by the sight of Lesser Flamingos literally turning its shores pink. Driving to the edge of the water we pass resting Marabous and Great White Pelicans and notice Little Stint, Kittlitz's Plovers and Ruffs along the shoreline, but they take a backseat to one of the greatest avian spectacle anyone could ever experience. Noisy and bright they are, at times even comical especially in the way they copy each others movements - if one bows, others follow, if one stretches, others follow, if one starts to run to take off, others follow.....this is endless and must have to do with small family groups interacting. They feed almost exclusively on the blue-green algae that is abundant in a handful of these soda lakes. They are the smallest of the six flamingo species and this is one of 2 main populations found in Africa, the other being in South Africa. They are highly nomadic, moving from one lake to another but due to their limited breeding sites, the closest being Lake Natron in Tanzania, they are classified as threatened.

Around the lake is an attractive range of wooded and bush grassland, woodland and rocky escarpments. We drove up to Baboon Cliff where Olive Baboons and Rock Hyrax loiter about and Little Swifts fly overhead. Here we took in the view of the sheer numbers of flamingos from a different perspective. What a sight. Descending to the lake we come across White Rhinoceros', these differ from Black's by being seen in small groups and by being grazers - their necks reaching the ground - and a Black-backed Jackal eating a flamingo with a Marabou, Lesser Spotted Eagle and Fish Eagle in attendance. The eagles stood by helpless while the Marabou did everything possible to distract the jackal and on several occasions was successful in lifting the remains off the ground only to drop it. This jackal-and-marabou game went on for some time and it was awesome to watch such an interaction.

We spent the last hour of daylight with the flamingos marveling at their comings and goings and having the large group of pelicans fly right by us on their way to roost. We headed back up to the Nakuru Lake Lodge that is set up on the hill overlooking the lake, stopping to view Verreaux Eagle Owls and a Fish Eagle on the way. At night the Rock Hyrax spend some time the roof knocking, crying and scuffling about!! Just another great day in Africa.

Day 10 / Tuesday August 30 – Nakuru

We were up for a 6.30 am breakfast and on the road for a game drive at 7am. We were on the hunt for Leopard. It was a beautiful clear bright morning and we saw large herds of impalas some with Red-billed Oxpeckers on them as we wind our way through woodlands and grasslands. They are in the same family as starlings and though they have a fondness for ticks, they also break them open to drink the blood, and while in the ears of mammals help themselves to the wax which it turn probably keeps their bright bill colors in full color. Red-chested Cuckoo is a rather elusive canopy cuckoo whose descending 3 note call was often heard, and this morning we got great looks at them. Arrow-marked Babblers were conspicuous as were Grey-backed Fiscal and we came across a Broad-billed Roller, a small brown bird with large yellow bill, Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike, Hildebrandt's Francolin, White-fronted Bee-eater and the ubiquitous Lilac-breasted Roller.

The impressive Rothschild's Giraffes were seen for the first time and a pair of Secretary Birds were actively hunting in the grasslands along side Common Zebra's and Impalas, by stamping their feet as they combed the area kicking up insects. Elands are the largest of the antelope family and its small head seems disproportionate to its large body and could be seen amongst all the other ungulates. Raptors included a pair of Lesser Spotted Eagles on a nest at the top of an Acacia and a Gabar Goshawk, a small dark woodland hawk. An astonishing site was the size of a Hammerkops nest, about 3 feet in height with a large round opening on the side. It takes them a year to build consequently they only raise young every other year. Coming around a bend we catch a glimpse of a Leopard walking down the dirt track and melting way into the undergrowth. Just that brief look was breathtaking, but we could not get any better looks other than seeing pieces of it as we followed its movement through the dense vegetation.

The afternoons game drive continued right where we left off. While watching a family of White Rhinos a Leopard was spotted wading across the short grassland towards the road and us! We watched along with several other vehicles as it crossed in front of us and headed into the shrubbery. While all this is going on the impalas and gazelles were fully alert making sure they knew exactly where the predator was.

We still have not seen a lion here which is surprising as there is an awful lot of food for them - plenty of young tender buffalo, zebra, grants and impalas. Maybe it is because there is only one pride and they tend to rest during daylight hours. We finished the day again on the shore of the lake surrounded by noisy flamingos and pelicans - just breathtaking. Ringed Plovers and Black-winged Stilts were additional shorebirds today. We headed back to the lodge at 7pm for dinner and to listen and danced to the local African choir that were excellent.

Day 11 / Wednesday August 31 – Nakuru; Lake Baringo Club

One more game drive before we made our way out of this wonderful park produced Yellow-throated Longclaw, which looks just like a meadowlark; White-crested Helmet Shrike; an assortment of starlings, flycatchers, fiscals and doves; Augur Buzzard; 3 Yellow-breasted Apalis; a dozen Green Wood Hoopoes foraging as a family group making their chattering calls and lifting their tails; Tawny-flanked Prinias; Black-headed Oriole; rattling Cisticola; a pair of Black Cuckoo-Shrikes; Spectacled Weavers nest building and displaying; Helmeted Guineafowls; White-browed Robin Chats, but on this bright sunny day where we saw all the usual animals including a Spotted Hyena crossing in front of us but in spite of 2 hours of searching we were unable to find the leopard that people had seen with 2 cubs. We did have one last look at the flamingos and in the process found a dead marabou stork that was about to be eaten by the other marabous!

For 1½ hours we head north on what are pretty good roads passing agricultural areas, farms, yucca plantations, wool factories and numerous roadside honey stalls but our stretch of smooth road ends and the last hour is a mixed blessing with chances to see Leopard Tortoise, Black-headed Heron, Yellow-billed Storks, White-faced Whistling Ducks and Black-chested Snake Eagle and the very common White-browed Sparrow Weavers. Once we got close to the Lake Baringo Club one of the bridges had been washed out and we had to take a detour through the bush to get back to the road.

Lake Baringo is a freshwater lake situated in the lower elevation of the Rift valley some 250km north west of Nairobi, and is the start of the transition zone between north-east and north-west of the country. Like Naivasha, the grounds are lush with stately trees and mowed lawn that lead to the water, which is buffered with a broad band of reeds. Being warmer, due to the lower elevation, than other parts of the country that we have visited the termite mounds are shaped differently. They are tall chimney-looking structures as high as 15' build to keep the termites cool, and as in Samburu a favorite of Red-and-Yellow Barbets.

The large feeding station, basically a stone table, had Northern Masked, Jackson's Golden-backed and White-billed Buffalo Weavers while on the grounds while having lunch we saw Beautiful Sunbird, Spotted Morning

Thrush, D'Arnaud's Barbet and Northern White-crowned Shrike. An afternoon walk of the grounds produced Ruppell's Long-tailed Starlings; Red-billed Queleas, arguably the world's most numerous bird; Nubian Woodpecker; Red-fronted Barbet; Brown Babbler; Bristled-crowned Starlings; Fan-tailed Raven; Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird; Lesser Honeyguides flashing their white outer tail feathers; Jackson's Hornbills that were nesting in the car park and pecking the mirrors of cars; White-browed Sparrow Weaver; Hunter's Sunbird on yellow oleander; Northern Puffbird; Red-fronted Tinkerbird that headed into its nest hole; Cardinal Woodpecker; Rufous Chatterer's following each other; Fischer's Lovebird; the appropriately named Little Weaver; Little Bee-eaters; Verreaux Eagle Owl and Red-chested Cuckoos.

Lake Baringo is a dirty brown color year color due to an iron imbalance, but that does not stop the birds and Nile Crocodiles. At the waters edge where a couple of young kids were in the water fishing (yes, with crocs) we could see African Pied Wagtails, Black Crake, Pygmy and Malachite Kingfisher, Squacco Heron and a Chestnut Weaver. Some after hours (night time) grunting outdoors turned out to be a hippo on the lawn.

Day 12 / Thursday September 1 – Lake Baringo; Lake Bogoria

Heading down to the dock at 7:15am we find the boardwalk (wooden pallets) broken in a number of places and splattered with dung as was our boat! This was the work of a hippo. Dung showering as it is known is the result of a ritual between territorial bulls. We met our boatmen Peter and he took us for a 2 hour boat ride. It was very tough to photograph as the wind was strong and there were enough waves to rock the boat, but we got great looks at Red Bishops, Yellow Bishop, Madagascar Bee-eaters, Lesser Masked, Northern Masked and Jackson's Golden-backed Weavers nest building. The males build the nest and attract the females by clinging upside down to the nest and fluttering their wings. If the female is not impressed by the abode she'll rip it apart and move on, and he'll start over again. Peter had a fish and he whistled and called in a Fish Eagle that came and took it out of the water. A Zitting Cisticola calls continuously as we glide near the waters edge. Barn Swallows cover a couple of dead shrubs that stick out of the water and Comb Ducks are spotted flying away from us. On the grassy edge Great and Little Egrets are joined by African Spoonbills, African Jacanas, Squacco Herons, White-faced Whistling Ducks and a Long-toed Plover, the largest of the wetland plovers. On the home stretch we slow down to look at a Green-backed Heron, Yellow-billed Stork, Malachite Kingfisher and African Darter and find a Nile Monitor basking on a rock.

This afternoon we headed south to Lake Borogia an hour away seeing a number of species on the way including Cape Hare, Red-billed Hornbill, Beautiful Sunbird, Green Sandpiper, Northern Crombec, Ostrich and Marabous as we neared the entrance. Being a reserve the natives are allowed limited use of the land. At the start there were goats everywhere. We drove towards the edge of the alkaline lake, stopping briefly to help some Germans who had a flat tire. Their jack did not work so we lent them ours and that did the trick.

Rufous-crowned Roller and two Silverbirds allowed us to approach closely while on the lake there were about a thousand Lesser Flamingos along with a few Greater Flamingos, these being larger and whiter. Marsh and Common Sandpiper were along the edge and at a small freshwater channel leading into the lake, 17 Cape Teal were resting. Continuing south along the western edge of the lake we find Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Pygmy Batis before reaching the rather impressive Hot Springs and Geysers with the impressive Siracho Escarpment in the background. The lakes high salinity offers limited feeding opportunities for most waterbirds. Small pools in the sand next to the hot springs had a few Curlew Sandpipers, Little Stints, Ruffs, Kittlitz and Ringed Plovers. Heading back late afternoon an odd looking grebe is spotted on the water. It turns out it is an albino Black-necked Grebe.

Mammals and a large Leopard Tortoise were the highlights on way out. Zebra's Impalas, Rock Hyrax, Vervet Monkey, Klipspringer a small antelope that lives on rock outcroppings, and several Greater Kudo's a shy and secretive beautifully patterned antelope with long twisting horns.

Day 13 / Friday September 2 – Lake Baringo; Kakamega

We returned to the lake for another boat ride first thing this morning to try for better photos of some of the species. The numbers of swallows had doubled with 1000's being seen along with White-rumped Swifts. We were after the Goliath Heron and found one that was pretty co-operative. It took a little while as they kept perching in awkward spots for shots, but finally a Red Bishop obliged. A Cuckoo Hawk was a surprise as it flew towards us, around the boat and away.

Next up was the base of the Baringo Basalt Cliffs a stones throw from the Club, a stone scrub habitat, where we picked up a young local friend of Ben's named Francis whose motto was "All birds are available (for a fee)". Being mid morning this was probably the hottest part of our trip. Here we found Hemprich's and Jackson's Hornbills, Northern Brubru, Bristle-crowned Starlings, Northern Puffback, Eurasian Kestrel, Dietrich's Cuckoo, Black and White Cuckoo, Brown-tailed Rock Chat, Cliff Chat, Rufous-crowned Roller and three target species, a pair of White-faced Scops Owls, Spotted Eagle Owl and Spotted Thick-Knees.

Leaving Baringo we see a new species, a Dark Chanting Goshawk on a telephone wire, but a case of the 'baringo belly' means we can't stop. By 11:15 we were on the road and on our way to Kakamega, climbing from 900 to 2700 metres. The Rift Valley is a 6400km crack in the earth's crust between two faults that sank. It stretches from Jordan to South Africa and here in this part of Southern Kenya the valley is at its narrowest. We had to drive up over the eastern escarpment of the Rift Valley and then back down into it where the acacias were thick with lots of goats and cows and then take the slow and steady climb up the western side. The change in the temperatures was amazing - it soon cooled down. We stopped and had a packed lunch at one of the highest points, with Fan-tailed Ravens, Brown-chested Snake Eagle and Gambaga Flycatcher. This is the beginning of the Western Highlands where all the world-class long distance Kenyan runners come from - they are used to walking up and down the mountain! Maize seems to be the predominant crop growing here and as we near Kakamega, tea plantations are very evident. A stop in a marshy area produces Hartlaub's Marsh Widowbird, Fan-tailed Widowbird, ibis and herons.

After 5 hours we reached this forest island. The road had been good until we entered the forest when it became dirt and then it was hairy as it had started to rain. We passed a truck that had slid into the ditch. The road was packed with people on their bikes and walking and herding cows and goats - it was a zoo. We almost hit a man getting off one of the little buses - he ran out in front of it as we were overtaking it!

Situated in western Kenya along the northern edge of the Lake Victoria basin at an altitude of about 1500 metres, Kakamega is all that is left of a rainforest, which once spanned the equator from the west coast to east coast of Africa. The National Reserve now encompasses 36 square kms, only a fraction of the forested area. It has a unique collection of central African lowland species as well some highland species. It is also the Kenya's last refuge for the Grey Parrot, where numbers are now counted in single digits. Specialties include Shelley's Greenbul, Red-headed Bluebill and Blue-headed Bee-eater, and all were seen very well. With overcast and darkening skies we head through the forest seeing Black and White Colobus Monkeys, Olive Baboons and Syke's Monkeys along with Black and White Casqued Hornbills, and hope for better weather in the morning.

Day 14 / Saturday September 3 – Kakamega Forest

Someone had parked behind the van, blocking it, so it required waking everyone up before breakfast to find the culprit. Once at the forest center we were met by our local guide - yet another Ben, and we walked the trails, some of which were wet and muddy - mostly your typical rainforest habitat, dense understory and tall canopy. The hornbills were seen again and we added Red-legged Sun Squirrels and Red-tailed Monkeys; Sender-billed, Yellow-whiskered and Cabanis's Greenbuls; Dark-backed and Black-billed Weaver; White-headed Saw-wing; Brown-chested Alethe; Blue-headed and White-throated Bee-eater; Ugandan Woodland Warbler; Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird; African Thrush; Yellow, Chestnut and Common Wattle-eye; Petit's Cuckoo Shrike; Snowy-headed Robin Chat; Grey-headed Negro Finch; Olive, Green, Collared and Green-throated Sunbird;

White-chinned Prinia; Least Honeyguide; Black and White Mannikin; Grey-throated Barbet; African Shrike Tanager which wags its tail from side to side; Northern Black Flycatcher; Black-faced Rufous Warbler which sounds like an ambulance; White-tailed Ant Thrush; Mountain Illadopsis; Yellow-crested Woodpecker and Olive-green Camaroptera. This was really a great few hours before stopping in at the Rondo Retreat for breakfast.

Unfortunately we were unable to stay here, but this is without a doubt the place to stay in this area. Set deep in the heart of the forest it is a gorgeous place with beautiful grounds that produced Vieillot's Black Weaver and Stuhlmann's Starling along with species we had already seen. Late morning we walked a tiny bit of their extensive grounds, first in the manicured section and then along their well-groomed path through the forest down to the pond. Double-toothed Barbet was nice to see as it bounced back and forth across the road near the entrance gate. The hornbills are huge and by comparison the sunbirds, including the Green-headed are amongst some of the smallest birds we saw, while African Thrushes had that beautiful waxy look to them. White-chinned Prinia and African Blue Flycatcher are added and we came across a large rotund reddish-brown marked Toad. While watching the toad, Emerald Cuckoo is calling and Grey-winged Robin Chat, Brown-chested Alethe and the stunning Red-headed Bluebill, are seen. A short distance away we catch a glimpse of it bathing in a shallow pool. Chubb's Cisticola (I love their names, they tell it as it is) and Red-chested Cuckoo are also about and as we search the upper canopy we are lucky to find two Great Blue Turacos. This large arboreal species can be hard to locate as its blue and green plumage blends in very well.

Following a picnic lunch we took another set of paths, but it seemed a lot quieter especially vocally, though we were able to dig out some good stuff, such as Western Black-headed Oriole; Square-tailed Drongo; dueting Yellow-billed Barbets; Equatorial Akalat a small robin like bird of the undergrowth with a tail that sticks up; female Pink-footed Puffback, a small canopy dwelling bush-shrike; the aptly named Grosbeak Weaver and another forest weaver, the striking Red-headed Malimbe with its black body and scarlet head; Olive-green Camaroptera and its cicada like call; Little Sparrowhawk and a pair of Dusky-crested Flycatchers, a slate blue colored pewee look alike.

Up to this point we had not seen a great many butterflies at all, and here at least we did see a good variety including many Layman, several Green-tailed Swallowtails, False Chief, *Catuna crithea*, Elegant Acraea (a clearwing), an Eggyfly and a Morpho looking species but many remain to be identified.

On our way back to town we stopped at a bridge where Little Swifts were hawking insects over the river and Yellow-backed Weavers were nest building as an Augur Buzzard watched on.

Day 15 / Sunday September 4 – Kisumu at Lake Victoria; Masai Mara

We got up this morning having got no sleep. Even the waiter greeted us by saying I know that you had a bad night. There had been an all night party with a DJ blaring out tunes! We headed south to Kisumu on Lake Victoria and Dunga Beach. It was a one-hour drive on good roads, through lush green agricultural areas as we dropped in elevation. Healthy stands of trees surround small agricultural plots and there is of course a generous portion of speed bumps. Most of the villages had busy roadside kiosks, shops and markets full of pedestrians, 14 passenger taxis and bikes. It should come as no surprise that it is the women and children that are doing most of the work, the former often carrying considerable loads on their heads. All the villages looked alike with similar stores, kiosks and stands consisting of fruits, vegetables, milk bars, churches and a constant reminder of religion next to batteries, tire repair, welding, barbers, used shoe shops, salon boutiques and my favorite the Joy Ride School of Driving, though the names of hotels were always amusing, especially the very plain two room Hilton Hotel!

Before reaching Kisumu we had seen a few Brown Babblers and Black Kites along with a long tailed Pin-tailed Whydah. Kisumu is on the very eastern edge of Lake Victoria and headed for Dunga Swamp and Hippo Point. This is where the Lou tribe lives and they are fisherman. They had the catch from last night which the ladies

were cleaning on the edge of the lake, while lots of Hammerkops, Yellow-billed Storks, Sacred Ibis, Great and Little Egret looked on patiently waiting for free meals of the fish innards. While we photographed the church was preaching very loudly as seems to be the local custom - some even use bullhorns so it is inflicted on you whether you want it or not! The singing was very good! Along with the mentioned waders, African Jacana's, Marsh Sandpiper and a Greenshank were feeding amongst the rocky shoreline; an African Openbill Stork was a distance away working along a sand spit; male and female Dietrich Cuckoo's and Bronzed Mannikins perched on wires; Woodland Kingfishers on bare snags; several Red-chested Sunbirds moved about various nectar sources; Red-cheeked Cordon Bleus, Speckled Mousebirds and Blue-spotted Wood Dove were besides the dirt road; near the church in the scrub a Black-headed Goney and Swamp Flycatchers obliged posing for photographs while Northern Brown-throated Weavers would perch on the masts of the fishing boats.

By mid morning we were on our way south heading towards Kissii, seeing Black-headed Herons, Sacred Ibis and White-faced Whistling Ducks, African Spoonbills, Hammerkops and egrets amongst the rice paddy fields. Kissii is a densely populated rural community with rich soils that have been extensively cultivated. Banana plantations seem to be the favored crop. After Kissii the roads become pot holey and as we descended down the temperatures went up. Around 2pm we pick a spot in the middle of nowhere for lunch though by now the clouds had thickened considerably. Purple Grenadiers, Dietrich Cuckoo, Yellow Bishop and 20 or so Eurasian Bee-eaters join us along with 3 young girls looking after a herd of cattle who were delighted that we gave them all the lunch leftovers. As we make the final push towards the Mara from the west coming over the Esoit Ooloo Escarpment through Masai territory, we begin to see Common Zebras and Olive Baboons as well as Blue-headed Tree Agamas. The Masai are highly nomadic people moving their cattle from place to place in this semi-arid environment. We came across a small group of a dozen or so warriors, spears, make up, masks and all in full battle cry running up the road having come from an initiation ceremony that may well have included stalking a lion. As we descended to the gates of the Mara Conservancy at about 5000' above sea level, we get our first look at the landscape that is etched in our minds from numerous hours of television programs. Mara means dotted plains and it is well named, as the vast sea of undulating grassland plains in front of us is dotted with acacia trees. Being part of the Serengeti-Mara ecosystem it is one of the world's great wildernesses.

The excitement builds as we could see impalas, warthogs and buffalos as we waited to enter along with waxbills, grenadiers, Red-necked Spurfowl and a subspecies of the D'Arnaud's Barbet, the Usambiro Barbet which some consider a separate species as it is larger and stockier which a more distinct breast band than the nominate race. Once inside the park Yellow-throated Longclaws, Rufous-naped Larks, Grassland Pipits, Lilac-breasted Rollers, yellow-rumped Seedeaters, Yellow-fronted Canary's, Northern Anteater Chats, Greater Blue-eared Starlings and Egyptian Goose are a common sight and we also pick up Sooty Chat, Stout Cisticola, Yellow-billed Stork, White-backed Vultures and Tawny Eagle. With storms approaching from both sides we stopped to watch a female Saddle-billed Stork, with its bright yellow eye, wading in the water while her two offspring wait on the banks.

Shortly before arriving at the excellent Serena lodge set on a hill above the Mara River, the heavens opened and a storm raged for a while. We checked in and went to our rooms with umbrellas but we still got soaked and the paths were flooded. By the time we were through with dinner the storm had passed and we listened to the sounds of zebras baying, crickets and frogs calling as well as watching Montane Nightjars catch moths in the spotlights that lit up the grassland below our room. An African Marsh Owl silently glides across the opening for our last species of the day and we await the anticipation of what tomorrow will hold.

Day 16 / Monday September 5 – Masai Mara

We left at 7am for our first game drive. Sadly it was overcast with poor light but thankfully it was not raining but everything was very wet. In this section of the Mara we are allowed to go off road with the vehicles but as with everywhere in the park one must stay inside the vehicles. We began finding Brown Babblers; Common Drongos; Banded Martin, a large version of a Bank Swallow with two-toned underwings; Crowned Plovers; Black-bellied Bustards; Wattled Starlings; Zitting and Winding Cisticola; Ruppell's Griffon Vultures and Secretary Birds.

The mammals just continue to get better and better. Wildebeest stretched out over the plains for as far as the eye can see in the thousands. They are without a doubt the clown princes of the plains, very playful and resembling a hodgepodge of animal parts - a horse's tail, grasshoppers head, warthog's mane, goats beard and buffalo horns. Large numbers of Zebras dot the plains and are often seen together with Wildebeest. Elephants are darker in part due to the soil color; Spotted Hyena's always looking like they are up to no good and running away from something; Silver-backed Jackals, omnivores that spend a fair bit of the day scavenging, their quickness helping them to steal morsels from the kills of larger predators. We came across 1 male lion and 4 females sleeping with a wildebeest next to them. We missed the kill, which usually takes place at night, but got to watch them at very close quarters. They had not eaten any of the kill, no doubt exhausted from the chase, and eventually moved out of the sun to get under the shade of a nearby tree.

The vultures were circling in the sky aware that a kill had occurred but they can do nothing about it until it is opened. The Lappet-faced's bill is large enough to tear open a kill, but rarely does so unless absolutely needed, preferring to let the lions do the work. Ruppell's and White-backed along with Lappet-faced have long necks which enable them to feed deeper into the body, whereas smaller necked vultures such as the Hooded have to wait their turn and take what is left. In all we counted 23 vultures and a Bateleur. Within 48 hours the kill will be stripped clean.

When looking at the landscape one cannot believe the sheer number of prey, mainly ungulates, that are available to the predators. It is very impressive. A new mammal is the Topi, and as is often the case with antelopes we found them in single sex herds. Being a member of the same family as Hartlebeest and Wildebeest their front legs are taller than their hind legs, built this way for galloping. They seem to prefer the shorter grasses and can be seen standing with their long front legs on termites mounds, either proclaiming their territory or keeping a look out for predators. Gazelle's, both Thompson's and Grant's as well as Impala's are everywhere, maybe not in the numbers that other animals are but it is still very impressive.

19 Elephants were by the airstrip not far from our lodge. Broad-tailed Warbler; Fischer's Sparrow-Lark a specialist of the short grass plains; Barn Swallows; Common Bulbuls; Rufous Sparrows; Yellow-billed Oxpeckers told from the Red-bills by the light colored rump in flight have zygodactyl toes (2 forward and 2 backwards) enabling them to get a better grip as they hang upside down on mammals; Rose-breasted Longclaw; weavers and a number of raptors including Tawny Eagles, Bateleurs and a White-headed Vulture rounded out the morning's avian species.

We headed out again at 4pm for the afternoon drive seeing Red-billed Oxpeckers this time on Zebras; the aggressive threat display of Crowned Plovers; Slaty-colored Boubou; we were lucky to see a pair of nocturnal Bat-eared Fox that had just come out of their burrow to begin their search for food. They seem to survive very well amongst herbivores preferring to pick through dung piles for insects; a troop of about 30 Banded Mongoose just appeared and scattered once they realized we were there; another dung-pile forager are the Red-necked Spurrows and once they get onto something there is no stopping them; Pectoral-patched Cisticola was a new one and one that was quite common in the Mara.

We drove down near the river to see if we could find any signs of wildebeest crossing. It had just rained, yet again, and the drive was horrendous. It was a bit nerve racking with a few hair-raising moments. Some areas were very muddy, slippery and treacherous and we almost got stuck in the black mud. The van got caked in mud! BK, a graduate of the Joy Ride Driving School, was able to master these roads and to the amazement of some of the other drivers we all made it back in one piece.

Day 17 / Tuesday September 6 – Masai Mara

A dark Marico Sunbird that is similar looking to a Purple-banded was fluttering about the car park as we were loading up to head to the southeastern part of the Mara. Taking the lower river track towards the Mara Bridge,

Elephants were browsing amongst the croton thickets and Warthogs were running from some unseen danger with their tails raised skywards. The phoebe-like call of Rufous-naped Larks resounded as we pass through short grasslands and into bush grassland a similar looking species though larger, the Red-winged Lark, with black neck patches that Rufous-naped lack, is seen well. Yellow-throated Longclaws are relatively common and we come across a Yellow-mantled Widowbird.

Within a short distance the habitats changed and we were in very open short-grassland dotted with small mounds – termite mounds. Billions and billions of termites provide protein for mongoose, rollers, bee-eaters, wheatears and nocturnal creatures such as Aardwolves and Aardvarks; nest chambers for hyenas, jackals and Bat-eared Foxes as well as lookouts for Cheetahs. And sure enough Ben's sharp eyes picked out a Cheetah on a mound and we are the first vehicle to spot her. Though not one of the Big 5, it surely is one of the most sought after species. A daytime solitary hunter that only eats what it has killed, unlike other predators; they can reach speeds of up to 65mph, but can not sustain it for much longer than a couple of hundred meters. It is the fastest mammal with 20 foot strides at full speed. Their main prey items are the smaller gazelles, Thompson's being a favorite. Surrounding her are many tommy's, and she no doubt has her mind set on making a kill and they are certainly well aware of her. From this vantage point she searches for one that is close enough to strike as well as one that is not aware of her presence. That's tough! She's gets into various positions, sitting upright, laying down, peering from behind the mound, checking out all the angles before descending upon a victim. Crouching low, though in this open landscape only surprise is going to make a fully exposed predator successful, her steps and pace are cautious until she feels she is within striking distance. But as she moves closer to her victim, it moves nonchalantly that little bit further way, obviously with one eye on the Cheetah and knowing exactly how far it has to be away from her. It's a cat-and-mouse game and it's breathtaking to watch, but with her prey aware of the situation, it can only mean that his hunt will be unsuccessful - and that was the case after a halfhearted chase that never reached maximum speed. As is often the case as soon as one vehicle is seen to have spotted something, others come to investigate 'what you have' and sure enough by now we had a small gathering of vehicles. The Cheetah returned to the mound, came to drink from a small puddle of water and decided to investigate one of the land rovers by jumping onto the bonnet, playing with the wipers and checking out those taking pictures of her from the open top roof. Only with a Cheetah could one be allowed to be this exposed. The results would have been far different with either a lion or leopard.

After three quarters of an hour we moved on and spotted a Lion laying on a mound and one higher up on a hillside. As we went around the hill we discovered that a Lioness had just killed a male Lion and the rangers would not let us look at it until they had checked it out. More than likely this was the result of a young lion that was rejected by the pride and reluctant to move on. We passed zebras drinking and huge herds of wildebeest – the numbers are breath taking, dotted throughout the landscape. We saw a bachelor herd of Eland that was skiddish not allowing us to get very close and as we headed onwards we looked down to the river and saw a massive gathering of Wildebeest. This could only mean one thing. They were getting ready to make the most dangerous crossing of their lives and we were about to witness part of what is arguably the greatest game show of them all - the wildebeest migration.

Every summer waves of Zebras, Thompson's Gazelles and Wildebeest head out of the Serengeti and into the greener pastures of the Mara during this dry season. Once in the Mara they have several rivers they'll have to cross before finishing their journey. There had been no crossings or Cheetahs seen in a week - what a morning we were having. As we anxiously waited for 5000 of them to start to cross, we jostled with rangers and others for the best possible view. As the animals started to descend down the bank along well-worn paths, or chutes since they were so steep, they jumped into the river and began the desperate swim across to the near side while being swept down stream. A large number got across and then 3 hippos swam by and they stopped crossing at that point. They face danger from the swollen river, being crushed or attacked by Nile Crocodiles. We were waiting for such an encounter, but once most had crossed, the few hundred that remained backed off. Though we could not see it coming they had noticed a giant crocodile working its way towards them and decided that they could wait for another time. At this point a lot of them started to return to the plain to feed and no more seemed in the mood to cross so we moved on. What an amazing phenomenon and how lucky we were to be there at the right time to see it.

Then we spotted a hippo up on the embankment of the river. He was walking along the top trying to find a place to descend back to the river when he came across a land rover that was in his way and he got very upset and ruffled and went charging back along the bank. All quite a spectacle to watch as it played out. A Grey Kestrel flew out of a tree next to the van and across the river. We came across Singing Cisticolas, Grey-headed Kingfishers and flocks of Yellow-rumped Seedeaters as well as a Martial Eagle sitting high and majestic in a tree next to the river with a Vervet Monkey frozen only meters away from him. This was another “who was going to be more patient’ moment, but we had to move on, driving through herds and herds of wildebeest, picking up a very plain looking Buff-bellied Warbler at the gates to the Mara triangle and seeing a dead Wildebeest floating down the Mara River. At one stage we ventured into Tanzania, but there was little fanfare only a single stone column marking the border.

The grounds of the Keekorek Lodge are very nice and spacious with many birds about including Bare-faced Go-away Birds, Northern Brubru, African Hoopoe, Yellow-fronted Canary, Cordon Bleus, Hildebrandt’s Starlings, Marico and Hunter’s Sunbirds, Paradise Flycatchers and Nubian Woodpecker. There is a board walk down to the hippo pool which is a nice waterhole that has a “Hippo Bar” bar where you can get drinks, rest and relax and watch what ever may be at the waterhole, namely hippos!.

As we chatted to our neighbors in the next door room and looked at some of their photos black clouds rolled in again along with thunder and lightning. By 4pm when we were due to go on a game drive it was pouring. We headed out anyway; soon seeing Spotted Thick-knee, Black-bellied Bustards, Marabou and Ostrich’s and found a pride of 11 lions resting in the drizzle. They seemed restless though and a couple had their eyes set on gazelles feeding a hundred meters away. Then to our amazement, just like that a female took off and separated a young “tommy” from its mother and got a kill. The rest of the pride, mainly youngsters demolished it in no time at all - all very exciting. One cub had a bad limp and had trouble keeping up with them all - sadly; we do not think that he will survive very long.

We then headed down to a Cheetah that was tagged on the ear - #155. She must just have eaten too as she was cleaning herself and you could still see traces of blood on her. Her belly was very large and we think that she was pregnant. It was amazing to see 2 cheetahs in one day - apparently there are less than 30 left in the Mara. By the time we headed back to the lodge the rains had passed through and we finished up by seeing a nice baby Waterbuck.

This is not a fenced compound so there are Masai guards at night to escort you to your room as the animals especially hippo come in very close to the rooms.

Day 18 / Wednesday September 7 – Masai Mara

Following breakfast while waiting for BK to arrive, we watched a group of about 30 Little Swifts in a tight formation feeding. BK eventually showed, with the excuse being a pride of lions had spent the night around and under the van. Some gentle prodding was necessary to get them to move.

Our next destination was the Intrepids tented camp. First we looked for cheetahs that had been reported the day before basking on a rock outcropping, but could not find them, though we did get great looks at a Brown Snake Eagle and Striped Kingfisher before coming across 3 lions on a wildebeest kill. There are a lot of kills to be seen since the food supply right now is very plentiful due to the migration.

We continue on through an area of brush thickets dominated by crotons, brown olive and teclea, an area known as Kissinger - named after the secretary of state, who famously got stuck here a few decades ago. We pause to view Green Pigeons, rollers, oxpeckers, White-headed Barbets, Black-shouldered Kite and Giraffes and turn a corner only to be confronted by an Elephant and her baby. She made a move towards us and BK reacted by putting his foot down, clearly wanted to avoid a potentially devastating outcome. Further on we see several vans all stopped and looking at something so we headed in that direction to see what was going on.

When we got there they said that they had seen Leopard. We waited and then scouted out the area. When we returned to the original area a striking male Leopard walked out of the bushes and down the hill passing between the vehicles, feet in front of us, and disappeared into the bush.

Cocqui Francolin, Fischer's Sparrow Larks and Secretary Birds are seen before reaching the Talek gate and once there a couple of Red-faced Crombecs and a Chin-spotted Batis in the acacias shading the park building. We pass hundreds of Topi's, another Yellow-mantled Widowbird and a male Pallid Harrier quartering over the tracks. This is not a direct route, but the only way to get to Intrepids.

We arrived at the Tented Camp by 1pm and were greeted by the manager Tom and the Masai naturalist Joseph, who was very friendly and informative. We were taken to our tent set next to the river. No keys, just zippers; a concrete floor with concrete walls to the bathroom but the rest is a tent; carpets, furniture and 2 mosquito draped beds - very pleasant.

At 4pm with the sky looking ominous, very black with storms and rain in the distance we left for a game drive. There is an airstrip right outside the lodge and as we headed out the gates we saw vans parked next to the airstrip and found a pride of sleepy lions in a variety of poses. As we had no other direction that we could head to we went towards the storm. Scouring the area we spotted 4 massive turkey-sized Southern Ground Hornbills moving through the very tall grass. At first only the heads were visible, so we maneuvered onto another track to get better looks. They certainly obliged, combing the grass as a family group for anything they could find and ignoring us.

Further down the road we came across many vehicles watching lions mate. This was our first adult male lion with a mane and was it ever impressive. We arrived just as they finished mating so we thought that we had missed it. But in reality there was still a great deal of unfinished business. Once the female comes into estrus, usually for 3 days, the male will mate her up to 150 times, making sure that she never leaves his side during this time. Sure enough, 5 minutes later she moved, he followed, she lay down and they mated. Within 10 seconds it was over and both collapsed exhausted and fell asleep. He had a second female in attendance and more than likely he'll mate with her in the coming days. Life is good in the pride. It's good to be the king. It is hard to pull away from such an event.....We left them to it and headed down to the river where we came across a Giraffe by the water. We had a different perspective being on the embankment and looking down on the Giraffe in the riverbed. 5 of its friends were further down the side of the river and obviously concerned about it. They paced about, while the one in the water found a path to ascend back onto the plains and join the others. On our way back to the lodge at the end of the drive we found the pride of lions again at the airstrip. There were quite a few cubs in this pride and they were very mischievous, chewing the ropes and playing around.

During dinner, which was outdoors under a thatched roof, we had a pair of Greater Galagos or Bush babies, one black and the other white, wandering about the beams looking for handouts. We were also treated to a traditional Masai warrior dance. We expected them to be tall, but few of them reached 6 foot. It was amazing to see how high they were able to vertically jump. Being in a tent one could hear all the noises of the night and you were regularly woken by hyraxes screaming.

Day 19 / Thursday September 8 – Masai Mara

On our way to an early breakfast we are serenaded by the rich whistled phrases as well as chattering notes of White-browed Robin Chats. At the feeders Grey-headed Sparrows, Hildebrandt's Starling and Hildebrandt's Francolin are kept busy on the mornings donations while a Common (or Brown-throated) Wattle-eye sings in the trees above.

We started early with Crowned and Wattled Plover's, Ostriches, White-bellied Bustards, Fawn-colored Larks, Brown Parrots, Woodland Kingfisher and a host of other common species including finding the same 4

Southern Ground Hornbills again. The mating lions were going at it so we spent a little time seeing if the frequency had slowed down - no!

Big Cats - the BBC film crew were here filming Leopards and they were at the river looking for one that they had briefly spotted at first light, but in spite of 4 lookout positions they were not having any success. These shy predators are so elusive. Further up the river, in woodland we saw Olive Baboons eating the remains of an Impala, no doubt stolen out of a tree from an overnight Leopard kill. In a large fig tree were about a dozen or more White-headed Barbets, Black-backed Puffbacks and Speckled Mousebirds busy feeding on small figs, while along the water course Grey-headed Kingfishers were excited about something and a flash of blue indicated a Malachite Kingfisher flying upstream. A large congregation of mixed vultures had assembled on a hillside but upon further investigation we could not find any kill so it was probably a daily gathering to discuss the goings on in the Mara.

Back at the camp for lunch we had 7 Brown Babblers and a monster band of Banded Mongoose pass through in high fashion searching for whatever insects they could find.

Our final afternoon game drive produced excellent looks at the largest of the sandgrouse, the Yellow-throated, Black-winged Plover, a large flock of Red-capped Larks and Temminck's Courser which loved to run away staying low and then lift their head just as they come to a stop. It was very overcast and windy with the occasional short burst of late afternoon sun through the clouds. We came across the mating lions again - this time they had moved location. We also found a new antelope hunkered down in a wetland, the Bohor Reedbuck with its short horns hooked forward.

As the light was fading we noticed a gathering of vehicles on one side of a narrow tributary to the Talek River. All eyes were on the other side. It was a pride of 14 lions and a herd of buffalos. The lions seemed intent on taking down a buffalo. The buffalo were chasing the lions. In awe we watched as some circled a buffalo and cornered it only to have some of the herd come to the rescue of a fellow buffalo and force the lions back. The numbers seemed to favor the lions, 14 against 1 (most of the time), but their inexperience showed with younger members moving forward and blowing any surprise that the elder lionesses knew they would need in order to be successful. At times the buffalo seemed oblivious to the well camouflaged lions, and careful stalking would mean they would get within a few meters but always at the last moment the Buffalo would turn towards them showing its horns and keep them at bay. The lions were so close, yet so far. It was great fun to watch the action unfold. Sadly the lions were not able to make the kill while we were there. You are not allowed out past dark so we had to leave the stalk. We did see two Water Thick-knees in the headlights besides the track on the way back to the camp. What a great ending to a fantastic day.

Day 20 / Friday September 9 – Masai Mara; drive to Nairobi

It was an early departure for the long trek to Nairobi but also so that we could take our time as we headed out of the Mara. The sight of 7 lions wandering the plains at first light meant that their inexperience lead them to a failed hunt overnight. Though very enthusiastic they will sooner or later have to learn to be patient and wait for the experienced elders to show them how to hunt. There is such an abundance of prey, and the prey know that they are potential meals, that only a patient stalk will succeed.

We would pass Emerald Wood Doves, Ostrich, Plain-backed Pipits, Black-bellied and White-bellied Bustards, Wattled Plovers before coming across a large gathering of vultures on a zebra kill. It was dominated by Ruppell's. There was a great deal of hissing and squawking going on as they jostled for position. Some even chased others away by making large hops looking very ungainly on the ground. This gathering gives them a chance for social interaction and to re-act to one of their own species. A couple of Lappet's were also in attendance, along with numerous White-backed and Hooded Vultures that have to wait for the others to have their fill before scrounging for scraps.

Moving on we get last looks at Helmeted Guineafowl, Sooty Chats and have to bring the van to grinding halt as a Coqui Francolin decides to freeze in the middle of the track. I'm sure we could have picked it up and moved it to the other side, but we waited it out until she moved on her own accord. For a short distance we kept pace with a Spotted Hyena as it ran alongside the track, no doubt having sniffed a meal somewhere out on the plains. After having enough of us it double backed on itself and eventually left us. Then just as we had on the first day, we watched a Several at close quarters for 5 to 10 minutes stalk a rodent, with success.

By 10:30 we reached the Sekanani gate on the eastern side of the Mara where Masai women do their best to have us purchase their wares. If it wasn't for the fact that we have been through this a number of times over the past 2 weeks and picked up pretty much everything we really wanted as well as everything that we really did not need, we may have been a bit more generous in our offers. I mean how many bracelets or masks does one need to take home? If nothing else, the experience is something to remember.

On the last stretch of dirt road we pick up Wire-tailed Swallows, Grey Hornbill, Rattling Cisticola, Grey-headed Silverbill, Speckle-fronted Weaver, Black-tipped Mongoose and Acacia Rats before reaching the paved road (though not necessarily any better) an hour later. The Lolita Plains are well grazed by livestock with short Whistling-thorn Acacias scattered and flat-topped Acacia trees dotted about but about the only species we see is a dark-morph Augur Buzzard. Following lunch in Narok with Red-billed Firefinch, Black-headed Weavers, Cutthroats and believe it or not House Sparrows fighting for the last drop of water in a trough we make one final search for Kori Bustards, that have somehow eluded us to date. Cape Rook, Grey Flycatcher, Northern Anteater Chat, Crowned Cranes.....then Ben spots our bird deep in a fallow field filled with acacia. We got terrific looks as it allowed us to walk up on it - its size astonishing and somehow it blended into the landscape perfectly. Actually there were 2 birds, one of which took off and flew a short distance away. At around 40 pounds this is the world's heaviest flying bird and it showed. As Ben would say, "So far so good". You bet! More than satisfied, it was onto Nairobi....unfortunately.