



KENYA - TRIP REPORT Aug 22 - Sept 6, 2006

By Adrian Binns

Day 1 / August 22 – Nairobi NP

A stone's throw away from the bustle of the city lies a wonderful 110 sq km National Park, where we spent the majority of the day on two game drives. Following looks at Bronzed and Variable Sunbird, African Dusky Flycatcher, African Pied Wagtail, a small group of African Penduline-Tits, and the first of many Black Kites, Pied Crows, Hadada and Sacred Ibis around our hotel we headed straight for the park. The birds, all new to the group, came fast and furious with exceptional views of nearly all we saw beginning with Red-eyed Dove, Common Fiscal, Bronzed Mannikins and Red-cheeked Cordonbleus before we got through the gate. Our first stop amongst the Orange-leaved Croton shrubs and Common Croton trees produced many Yellow White-eyes, Tawny-flanked Prinias, Yellow-throated Apalis, a fleeting glimpse of a Tambourine Dove, Sulphur-breasted Bush-Shrike, Black-backed Puffbacks, Red-faced Crombecs, Collared Sunbird, White-eyed Slaty Flycatchers, stunning African Paradise Flycatchers, Baglafaecht Weaver, Black Cuckoo-Shrike, Rattling Cisticola and a beautiful Amethyst Sunbird. As we made our way towards the Ivory Burning Site, symbolizing the elimination of poaching elephant tusks, an African Goshawk flew across the road and we had distant views of an Augur Buzzard with closer looks at African Firefinchs. Our first mammals were a small group of Impalas and a female Bushbuck. Walking around the historic site, an area of mowed grass with a round pile of white stone where the ivory was destroyed, we picked up a selection of species including Variable, Collared and Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Red-billed Oxpecker, Grey-crowned Cranes, Common Waxbills, Singing Cisticola, Streaky Seedeater, Holub's Golden Weaver as well as a Baglafaecht, 2 juvenile Great Sparrowhawks circling overhead, many Black Saw-wings, 2 downy feathered Saddle-billed Stork chicks atop an Acacia tree, Red-winged Lark, Speckled Mousebird, a Red-collared Widowbird with its long tail still intact, White-backed and Ruppell's Griffon Vultures and Cardinal Woodpecker, which was excellent for $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour in one spot. Moving on we came across many Stout's Cisticolas and got great comparisons of that specie and Winding Cisticola; an African Moustached Warbler, White-browed Coucal, White-headed Barbet, Bateleur, along with Vervet Monkey, Coke's Hartebeest and what turned out to be a great day for seeing Giraffes. In all we probably had over 30 with some very close encounters.

At the Impala Lookout we stretched our legs while eying Common Ostrich in amongst Warthogs, Coke's Hartebeest and Grey-crowned Cranes in the savannah. The shrubs around the lookout held White-browed Scrub Robin, Purple Grenadier, Cape Robin Chat, Grey-backed Camaroptera and the stunning Little Bee-eater. Workers were busy painting the signs, benches and posts green, on which we found a Striped Skink with a green belly (of course), stuck to the paint! As we headed out of the park and back to the hotel for lunch we were kept busy with additional sightings of Yellow-throated Longclaws, uncommon Zebra Waxbills, Grey Heron, Long-tailed Fiscals, Hammerkop, Fawn-colored Larks, Banded Martin, Red-rumped Swallow, White-winged Widowbird and Red-billed Quelea. On the pond where the heron was, we found basking Serrated-hinged Terrapins and by the exit several Olive Baboons.

By the time we returned mid afternoon, the mornings clouds had given way to a beautiful sunny afternoon. First up was a Lesser Honeyguide, not the prettiest of birds though, followed by Red-billed Firefinch and a large group of Helmeted Guinea-fowls. Little Bee-eaters enthralled the photographers and we tucked in to more cisticola identification this time with Pectoral-patched and Rattling being nailed down. To our astonishment we came across more small flocks of Zebra Waxbills and all got to see Common Waxbills well. A large Nile Crocodile was taking a rest besides a cattail ringed pond which held a Cattle Egret and a couple of Long-tailed Cormorants. In a nearby marshy area we had a Blacksmith Plover and two chicks and on a whistling thorn acacia a magical look at a Black-shouldered Kite. Rufous-naped Lark and White-browed Coucals were more confiding than this morning and new species included Yellow-rumped Seedeaters, Ring-necked Dove and Yellow-billed Oxpecker on the back of an Eland. A double digit gang of African Pied Babblers noisily worked their way from shrub to shrub as they filed passed us, and along with a group of 7 female Common Ostriches we got to see a family of Red-billed Oxpeckers catch the last rays of the day with Long-tailed Fiscals on top of a shrub. Common Zebra's, Grant's Gazelles and a Suni rounded out the mammal list for the day.

Day 2 / August 23 – Limuru Pond; Lake Naivasha; Lake Nakuru

What a day today turned out to be with visits to 3 incredible sites and 125 species seen along with a wonderful assortment of other wildlife, not the least was both Black and White Rhinoceros at Nakuru and a baby Rock Python at Naivasha. Our first stop was a freshwater pond, a rare commodity in this part of the world, where we picked up 8 duck species, Red-billed Teal, Hottentot Teal, Yellow-billed Duck, Southern Pochard, Maccoa Duck, White-backed Duck, White-faced Whistling Duck and Egyptian Geese, as well as Little Grebes and Red-knobbed Coots. A great find was a Madagascar Squacco Heron and we had good numbers of Glossy Ibis. In the flowering shrubs several sunbirds put in appearances including a juvenile Bronzed in yellow and green plumage and a Tacazze, while Plain Martin's flew over the pond.

On route to Naivasha, the road was surprisingly good (paved road that is), with Cape Rooks becoming a common sight and the exquisite White-fronted Bee-eater seen well. The setting at Lake Naivasha Country Club is simply stupendous with stately Yellow-barked Acacia trees dominating the manicured lawns that were dotted with Sacred Ibis, African Hoopoes, Superb Starlings and Defassa Waterbuck. The trees provided endless excitement with White-headed Barbet; Black-headed Orioles; male and female Black Cuckoo-shrikes; Nubian Woodpeckers feeding young; Grey Woodpeckers; a female Red-headed Weaver, Klaas's Cuckoo; a pair of Green Wood-hoopoes; Grey-backed Fiscals; Tropical Boubou and Black-lored Babblers. Approaching the dock, Brimstone Canaries and Citril Finches were feeding amongst the thistles while a Long-crested Eagle patiently sat along the edge of the woods. Our two hour boat ride on the freshwater lake was very exciting with many species seen at very close quarters. Highlights included Curlew Sandpipers including one still in breeding plumage, many Ruffs and Reeves, Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns, a pair of Giant Kingfishers, Black-tailed Godwits, Hottentot Teal, squadrons of Great White Pelicans, a Goliath Heron and two Black Herons. Following our boat ride the passerines continued with White-bellied Tits, Yellow White-eyes, Red-faced Crombec, Lesser Honeyguide, African Paradise Flycatcher, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Spectacled Weaver, African Dusky Flycatcher and Brown Parisoma all in one tree!

After lunch we made the short journey, in miles, to Lake Nakuru over some pretty shaky terrain, better known as paved roads! The further north we went the more ominous the weather became until with hit dark skies and light drizzle. Following a lengthy checking in at the Nakuru National Park gate where the antics of Olive Baboons and Vervet Monkeys kept us amused, we began our way around

the soda lake driving through the Yellow-barked Acacias pausing for Red-chested Cuckoo, Lilac-breasted Roller, Ruppell's Long-tailed Starlings and Red-billed Oxpeckers. The lake was ringed in pink - Lesser Flamingoes that is! What a sight, and it was even better as we approached the lake where Marabou storks loafed about including a pair that was presenting each other with sticks. Nearby a large group of Great White Pelicans had gathered, and we got great comparisons of Greenshank, Wood and Marsh Sandpiper as they fed along the shallow water edge where a Three-banded Plover was also feeding. The sun broke through the bands of dark clouds just before it was to set providing the perfect light to this amazing setting as small groups of flamingoes and pelicans flew about rearranging themselves for the evening.

Day 3 / Lake Nakuru National Park

With all the activity around it was tough to get us out of the lodge compound this morning. We watched swifts and swallows from the breakfast balcony getting to grips with African Palm, Black and Little Swifts along with Red-rumped and Wire-tailed Swallows. Large flocks of Greater Blue-eared Glossy Starlings swarmed the buildings and Speckled Pigeons came down from their roosts to drink at the watering hole. Three White-headed Barbets perched on a bare branch for us while the morning light caught the scarlet chest on a pair of Scarlet-chested Sunbirds in the distance. A Silver-backed Jackal strolled up the slope between Impalas, Buffalo and Olive Baboons but never made it as far as the watering hole in front of the verandah. As we worked our way towards our van, Little Rock Thrushes caught our attention and these were soon followed by Black-headed Orioles, White-eyed Slaty Flycatchers, Diederik's Cuckoo, Rufous Sparrows and in one acacia tree three Chin-spot Batis, two Buff-bellied Warblers and a Yellow-throated Apalis.

We never ventured more than several miles from the lodge, headed down through the woodland and out into the open short grassland before reaching the edge of the lake. Northern Anteater Chats were numerous as were Rattling Cisticolas and Common Drongos. A stop for a cuckoo which turned out to be an African Cuckoo also produced Ruppell's Long-tailed Starling, Red-faced Crombec, a female Black Cuckoo-shrike, Rufous-naped Lark and little further down an Augur Buzzard. Another stop in the woods produced White-bellied Tit, White-browed Robin-Chat, Grey-backed Camaroptera and Baglefecht Weavers. Once we reached the open grassland mammals became a common sight with many Common Zebra, Buffalo, Impalas including a pair of young males sparring, Grant's and Thompson Gazelles, Warthogs feeding on their knees and Rothschild Giraffes, which included at least 2 young ones. A Tawny Eagle sat low on an open branch for great views and a Gabar Goshawk flew over the van, while in the short grass three Grassland Pipits were in search of insects. We found our first Crowned Plovers; had decent looks at Wing-snapping Cisticolas; watched Lilac-breasted Rollers feeding their well grown young; had side by side comparisons of two eagles, a juvenile Martial Eagle and a Tawny Eagle perched in the shade branches of a small tree, and added a couple of other eagles with excellent looks at two immature Imperial Eagles and a Long-crested Eagle in flight. If that was not enough, we had 7 White Rhinoceros's including a young one working their way along the edge of the Yellow-bark Acacias and grassland. On our way back to the lodge, we came across large flocks some in there hundreds of Red-billed Quelea's.

The lodge grounds were relatively quiet during the early afternoon hours with the exception of a couple of Rock Hyrax's running over the room roofs, a Tropical Boubou, a Red-faced Crombec and cooing Speckled Pigeons. The afternoon game drive was cut short when a storm came in from the north and put an end to what we had hoped would have been a spectacular late afternoon with the flamingoes. Never the less we did come across a group of about a dozen neatly patterned Grey-crested Helmeted Shrikes as they worked their way through the Yellow-barked Acacias; a female

African Cuckoo; White-tailed and Red-capped Lark; Grassland Pipits; a pair of ridiculously close Cocqui Francolins that worked their way under the van and out the other side; a couple of Tawny Eagles; Grey-headed Woodpecker; Grey-backed Fiscals and a pair of Southern Ground Hornbills that were working their way through the savannah. By the time we reached the Baboon Cliffs the storm was almost upon us, but we did have enough time to see a few Kirk's Dik-diks, many Olive Baboons including what was probably a day old baby and Rock Hyrax's, and amongst the avian species, Rock and Plain Martins and Cliff Chat.

Day 4 / August 25 – Nakuru NP; Kericho; Kisumu, Dunga Beach; Rondo Retreat

A couple of stops on the way out of the park produced looks at Martial Eagle, a pair of Bearded Woodpeckers; Striped Kingfisher; Black-and-White Colubus monkeys and the briefest of looks at Hildebrandt's Francolin before reaching the northern edge of Lake Nakuru, where we finally had great light to view the thousands of Lesser Flamingos before us. As we pulled in we found a Hunting Dog lying in the grass, which as those that have been to Africa know is one of the rarest mammals. This one was particularly beautiful with its white tail and large ears. For an hour we kept an eye on the dog (making sure it did not venture too close) as we watched and photographed the flamingos, scanning through the edges for additional species. We did come across 5 Greater Flamingos as well as Hottentot Teals and Pied Avocets along with the usual waders and shorebirds.

A brief stop for bathrooms at a hotel in Kericho with lovely grounds produced a pair of Black-and-White Casqued Hornbills; a family of Cape Robin Chats and 2 Jackson's Three-horned Chameleons, likely a male and female as one had 3 horns and was bright green and the other had one horn and was a darker green and well camouflaged.

We finally pulled into Kisumu on the edge of Lake Victoria following a long and occasionally arduous drive through a variety of denuded agricultural areas as well as miles of tea plantations. Red-chested Sunbird is the specialty here and we were not disappointed with half a dozen seen. Yellow-fronted Canary, Yellow-rumped Seedeater, White-throated Bee-eaters and a Greater Honeyguide which whizzed by completed our first stop. On our way to Dunga Beach Nancy spotted a gorgeous Black-headed Gonolek on the wires and we got Grey-headed Sparrow as we pulled into the beach car park. A Shikra flew overhead as we walked towards the papyrus swamp and a White-browed Coucal flew into a shrub. Hammerkops were everywhere including half a dozen on fence posts; White-winged Terns flew around the lake; and Little Egrets and Yellow-billed Stork along with the Hammerkops helped themselves to the offering the fisherman handed out. We also had great looks at a feeding African Open-billed Stork that seemed to be oblivious that 5 of us were photographing it at close quarters. Heading out we stopped for an Eastern Grey Plantain-eater, a rare bird for Kenya at the eastern edge of its range, and a Woodland Kingfisher and were teased when a Brown Parrot screamed by before most could get on it.

As we pulled into the Rondo Retreat we got the last light of the day and a few new birds including 6 noisy Great Blue Turaco's looking for a roost site, a number of Stuhlman's Starlings, an African Blue Flycatcher and a Bronzed Sunbird.

Day 5 / August 26 – Kakamega Forest

A post-breakfast pre-departure bird of the grounds around our house was a success with many Black-and-white casqued Hornbills flying over; Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird continuously calling; Bronzed Sunbirds checking out the flowers; African Green Pigeon alighting at the top of the canopy; Grey-throated Barbets at their nest hole and Double-toothed Barbets working their way through the upper levels of the mid-canopy while White-headed Saw-wings flew around the grounds.

Not far from our Retreat, is the Environmental Educational Center and we began our mornings forest birding around the center with Yellow White-eyes, White-chinned Prinias, African Blue Flycatcher and a Red-chested Cuckoo along the edge of the forest. 7 species of sunbirds were working the Bottlebrush trees with Northern Double-collared, Amethyst, Green, Green-headed, Green-throated, Bronzed and Collared all seen very well. Occasionally our attention was drawn away for Dusky Flycatchers, Grey-headed Sparrows, Cardinal Woodpecker, Bronzed Mannikins, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird, both Petit's and Black Cuckoo-shrike, and Grey-headed Negrofinch while Common Wattle-eye and Diederik's Cuckoo were heard.

We spent three hours along the Pump House Trail in the dense tropical rainforest (the only remaining one in Kenya) getting to grips with greenbuls, including Yellow-whiskered, Joyful, Shelley's and Slender-billed; had several Red-headed Malimbe's including one at a nest; came across a group of Dark-backed Weavers and finished up with a female Grosbeak Weaver. In between we finally caught up with the singing Uganda Woodland Warbler; caught glimpses of a pair of Black-faced Rufous Warblers; heard and briefly saw a Grey-winged Robin-Chat; had a great look at a Blue-shouldered Robin-Chat along a narrow path; saw a very confiding Equatorial Akalat; brief looks at a Ludher's Bush-Shrike as it posed for a split second and later crossed the path and almost as good a looks at a White-tailed Ant-thrush! Both Yellow-billed Barbet and White-spotted Flufftail in the forest along with Emerald Cuckoo and Chubb's Cisticola on the edge were heard and we had great looks at three monkey species, Blue, Black-and-white Colobus and Red-tailed along with a Red-legged Sun Squirrel that rushed down a tree trunk. One final walk along the stretch of road leading out of the forest produced Cabanis Greenbuls, Common Wattle-eye and Grey-backed Camaroptera while on the journey back to the Retreat we stopped for Brown-capped Weaver at a nest. With it being such a pleasant and sunny morning the butterflies were out in full force including the Layman, Blue Mother of Pearl, Elegant Acraea, Neave's Judy to name but a few, mainly because I have not ID's others!

Our afternoon walk was somewhat thwarted when a storm came through putting a hold to the proceedings for an hour and a half. During that time we enjoyed sitting on our porch, having a cup of tea and checking out the hornbills, African Pied Wagtails, White-eyed Slaty Flycatchers, Cinnamon-chested Bee-eaters and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds sit out in the rain. As the rain subsided Ben saw 7 Grey Parrots fly over the canopy, but unfortunately we never got on them. By late afternoon we walked around the perimeter of the grounds seeing Green-headed Sunbird, two distant and high Pied Crows and a Snowy-capped Robin Chat before heading down along the Stream Walk. Though it was dark we did get to see Black-faced Rufous Warbler very well foraging on the edge of the pond, several Common Wattle-eyes, Snowy-capped Robin-chat posing nicely; the briefest of looks at a Red-headed Bluebill; Black-billed Weaver; Joyful Greenbul; African Thrush; White-chinned Prinia and Northern Double-collared Sunbird. We all came tantalizing close to seeing a calling White-spotted Flufftail feet away from us but he never showed, and when we had made the loop back through the forest and back into the gardens we picked up a female Purple-throated Cuckoo-shrike and a couple of Northern Black Flycatchers.

Day 6 / August 27 – Kakamega; Eldorat; Iten; Baringo

Following an early breakfast, first light saw us stroll around the grounds of the retreat viewing a Brown-capped Weaver putting the finishing touches on his nest; a Cardinal Woodpecker looking for an early meal and a pretty active Bocage's Bush-shrike. Heading down the lower garden circuit, Snowy-capped Robin Chat could be seen along the path and we had 3 Black-collared Apalis in view for a while at head height on the edge of the shrubs. Black-billed Weavers, White-chinned Prinia's, Black-faced Rufous Warblers and Great Blue Turacos were all seen very well while yet another

calling Yellow-billed Barbet eluded us and an all too brief view of a Grey Parrot, yet again, meant the majority of the group had yet to see this rarest of rare Kenyan parrots. We did manage to call in a White-spotted Flufftail having it come down the slope of the open area and cross the pathway before disappearing into the dense vegetation.

Heading out of the forest we made one final stop concentrating on a very short section of the main dirt road which was highly successful. The brilliant Red-headed Bluebills sitting on bare branches more than made up for the fleeting glimpse yesterday; a party of Dusky Tits bopped about the mid and upper canopy; Eastern and Northern Double-collared Sunbirds made repeated forays to the same tree for comparisons of these closely related species; a pair of Oriole Finches fed on fruit besides the road; we located the nest of a Bocage's Bush-shrike which saw the male and female change incubating duties; Dark-backed Weavers were pretty numerous amongst the mid-canopy vines; we got re-acquainted with greenbuls, these being Yellow-whiskered and Cabanis'; an African Green Pigeon was heard calling, as was a Tambourine Dove and a Western Black-headed Oriole, but at least after some searching we were able to locate the latter two, and while searching for a calling Grey-capped Warbler right in front of us (which we never found) we came up with a Buff-spotted Woodpecker. The best find of the morning, though the Bluebills are hard to top, may have to go to the pair of African Broadbills that sat patiently on a moss covered branch above us just off the path. Amongst the 'other' critters we had exceptional views of Red-legged Sun Squirrel having a meal and a Montane Side-striped Chameleon along with vast numbers of butterflies, though most were Laymans.

We broke up the 4 plus hour journey with a couple of stops, first seeing a male Pin-tailed Wydah with its long tail on a snag, Yellow-fronted Canaries besides the road and then at a papyrus marsh where a Greater Swamp Warbler was heard; seeing a number of ibis, egrets, Black-headed Heron and several Fan-tailed Widowbirds.

We picked an excellent lunch spot overlooking a cattail marsh with more than a dozen displaying Jackson's Widowbirds with their long black tails (reminiscent of a roosters) on a lek, jumping up and down, some higher than others, as they tried to attract females. A couple of Fan-tailed Widowbirds were there also checking out the Jackson's displays and a Little Rush Warbler was heard amongst the cattails. In amongst a group of Barn Swallows there was 1 Grey-rumped Swallow all of whom were flying around the widowbirds several times while a Black-shouldered Kite, Common Stonechat, Grassland Pipit and Rufous-naped Lark were also seen in the area. The complete surprise at this (lower) elevation was a couple of stunning Scarlet-tufted Malachite Sunbirds, some 11 inches in length with their long tails, which the drawings in the guide books could do no justice to.

A brief stop at Iten on the edge of the Western Escarpment of the Rift valley at some 2500 meters in elevation produced a few Fan-tailed Ravens amongst many Pied Crows. From here it was down the escarpment and through the thick acacia bush stopping to see a Rufous-crowned Roller on a telephone wire before nearing the Baringo Cliffs where an immature Greater-spotted Cuckoo shot across the road and alighted onto of a tree, for a great look at this species which seemed to have reached its wintering grounds many weeks ahead of schedule, though Ben did say he had seen a couple in the previous weeks. Here we also came across 3 Hemprich's Hornbills on the cliffs and the first of what would be many African Mourning Doves.

By late afternoon we had reached the Baringo Club on the shore of the Lake and were soon greeted with a half dozen weaver species to sort through! The feeding table had just been stocked with stale

bread crumbs and the White-browed Sparrow Weavers and White-billed Buffalo Weaver were easy enough to separate. Amongst the yellow colored weavers Jackson's Golden-backed and Little stood out based upon coloration and size which left us with having to basically pick out the different eye colors on Northern Masked (dark) and Lesser Masked (white) from the ubiquitous Black-headed (red) as all three of these have similar black masks. And then there were the females, but at least we had different eye colors to help us! On the grounds, the buffalo-weavers were busy building their huge stick nests at the tops of a couple of trees and a very large mixed group of *Ploceus* (weavers) were eagerly displaying, being very vocal as they tried to attract mates to their nests located around a small pond. The grounds were also exceptional for other species including White-bellied Go-away Birds; Wattled, Ruppell's and Superb Starlings; D'Arnaud's, Red-and-Yellow and Red-fronted Barbet, the latter seen at a nest hole; Red-fronted Tinkerbird; Brown Babblers; Spotted Morning Thrush nest building with beak full of mud; Green Wood-Hoopoe; Common Drongo; 2 male white-morph African Paradise Flycatchers; Beautiful Sunbirds; Lesser Honeyguide; Black-headed Oriole; Blue-naped Mousebirds; Nubian Woodpecker; Woodland Kingfisher; Laughing Dove and Speckled Pigeon, and about half a dozen Yellow-winged Bats, some seen in flight. What a great start the hour and half was to this outstanding location.

Day 7 / August 28 – Lake Baringo; Lake Bogoria

It was just one of those incredible days (yet again) where we got to experience a number of wonderful events. After breakfast we spent 3 hours on a boat ride on the lake beginning with Yellow-crowned and Northern Red Bishops, many Madagascar Bee-eaters and African Jacanas before working our way slowly, because of the shallow water, along the reed beds. A small group of Lesser Flamingos at this freshwater lake was certainly a surprise, given their affinity to the soda lakes, as was a male Greater Painted-Snipe and Collared Pratincole, both seen in flight. Several heron species were seen very well including Grey, Purple, Squacco and Goliath. African Spoonbills swinging their bills from side to side and chasing down fish in a run reminiscent of Reddish Egrets; Yellow-billed Storks were a little more patient; White-faced Whistling-Ducks, Knob-billed Duck and 3 Spur-winged Geese along with the ubiquitous Egyptian Goose were the only waterfowl. A couple of smaller species were located including Namaqua Doves, the beautiful Malachite Kingfisher and the non-sunbird looking Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird while Hemprich's Hornbills flew along the shore line where boulders created a 20 foot height cliff. Here we found a perched Fish Eagle who was all too keen on flying in to take our hand out of a couple of fish we had just purchased from 2 very pleasant fishermen. Though we saw many Nile Crocodiles, most of which were small, there was one that frightened the passengers on our boat as it flipped itself beside the boat! Though more dangerous, the hippos were quite sedate and allowed for close approach. On the boulders we came across a dozen or so basking Nile Monitors, some of which were at least 4 feet.

Back on dry land we stopped by a new colony of weaver nests where we were treated to an extraordinary cacophony of sound made by Black-headed, Little, Jackson's Golden-backed and Lesser Masked Weavers, some of which were still nest building, others fighting over nesting material, and others happily displaying for any female willing to check out their master craftsmanship.

Following lunch we took a short stroll, which turned into a long one, as we came across Lilac-breasted Roller, Beautiful Sunbird, Red-billed Hornbill, an all too brief look at a African Pygmy Kingfisher, Black-headed Oriole, a pair of Jackson's Hornbills at their small nest hole searching for berries to feed their young and finally our target species (the reason for our walk) Verreaux's Eagle Owl, on a nest loosely constructed on top of a Hammerkop nest. After getting the views we wanted most of us began our walk back only to be called back by Nancy who had just seen a well grown

youngest raise itself up and stand besides its mother! If that was not enough excitement, we had an immature Red-chested Cuckoo fly in front of us and land above a path, and proceeded to witness it beg and be feed by a Spotted Morning Thrush!!

What remained of the afternoon was spent an hour away at Bogoria Reserve, where Common Ostriches walked besides the road and we came across a tree full of nesting and displaying Chestnut Sparrows and Chestnut Weavers; Dark Chanting Goshawk perched atop an acacia; Lesser Flamingoes, in far greater numbers than we had seen here before ringed the lake, including a dozen or so Greater Flamingoes, often seen behind them in slightly deeper water; a family of Three-banded Plovers were running about the cooler waters of the Hot Springs and a Kittlitz's Plover was eventually pulled out from amongst many Little Stints. On the return journey through the reserve as the sun was setting, not only did we see a couple of Silverbirds and another Verreaux's Eagle Owl we got to see one of the rarer mammals, the splendid Greater Kudu. Though it was the best mammal we did also see Cape Hare, Gunther's Dik-dik, Kirk's Dik-dik, Common Zebra, Impala, Grant's Gazelle, Common Rock Hyrax, Vervet Monkey, Warthogs and Egyptian Mongoose.

Day 8 / August 29 – Baringo Cliffs; Samburu

We met our local guide Francis a short distance from the lodge where he immediately took us to see a White-faced Scops Owl roosting in an acacia tree. Unfortunately it just lost its mate a few days early in a collision with an automobile. High on the cliff a couple of Red-wing Starlings perched briefly and Cliff Chat could be heard. Closer to the action, a Jackson's Hornbill was taking food to its nest hole and a White-browed Scrub Robin was feeding her brood at the base of a small shrub while Blue-naped Mousebirds, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove and Namaqua Doves were close by.

Our second spot was equally productive with a pair of Greyish Eagle Owls roosting on the basalt boulders, Green-winged Pytillas feeding in the bare soil and Northern Crombecs, Northern Grey Tit, Grey Wren Warbler and Beautiful and Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird bouncing about the acacias. Our next spot produced at least three nightjars which were studied carefully but still caused some confusion. Likely they were Slender-tailed Nightjars. One final stop besides the road yielded a pair of gorgeous Hueglin's Courser's, Greater Honeyguides and a female Pygmy Falcon, Africa's smallest raptor.

From here we had to take to southern route (due to fuel shortages) to Samburu which meant a longer journey, giving us places to get fuel, through coffee plantations, around the foothills of Aberdere's mountain range, passed a cloud covered Mt. Kenya and over the central highlands where we did stop periodically to check out White-bellied Bustards, Long-tailed Widowbirds, Yellow-necked Spurrows, a multi-level Speke's Weaver condo and an African Harrier Hawk, before finally descending into the lower plateau and the reserves, Buffalo Springs and Samburu that make up this part of the arid northern region of Kenya.

Just before entering the reserves a Black-chested Snake-Eagle circled overhead and an hour later we had a Brown Snake Eagle. Not to be outdone, we had another two specie family day - coursers, with 2 adult and 2 juvenile Somali Coursers seen running after insects. White-headed Buffalo Weavers with their brilliant red rumps were numerous and we had a few Donaldson Smith's, another weaver species; several Orange-bellied Parrots at the roost hole on a Doum Palm and a pair of Black-faced Sandgrouse foraging along the dirt road. The mammal show as expected here was tremendous with new northern species such as Reticulated Giraffe, Gerenuk's, Grevy's Zebra and Beisa Oryx seen in large numbers, in particular the oryx's when we intercepted a group of about 80

walking single file towards the river, which was one of those magical encounters one comes across once on a while.

Day 9 / August 30 - Samburu

An almost fully fledged Verreaux's Eagle Owl spent most of the night begging for food next to our cabin and at first light the bird was on another roost between the cabin and dining area. While checking her out we had a party of Green Wood Hoopoes fly in to the tree next to her but they seemed to ignore her as did the Vervet Monkeys. On the sandy river bank outside our rooms we had a pair of resting Water Thick-knees.

The mornings game drive was a great success with highlights that included being amongst a large group of grazing Somali Ostrich's; groups of Grevy's Zebras; Elephants surrounding the base of an acacia tree resting in the shade; Gerenuk's on their hind legs browsing; a Reticulated Giraffe that had come down to the river to drink - watching him from behind spread his legs apart and lower his long neck down to the water and Unstriped Ground Squirrels scurrying about from bush to bush. Different families of birds were well represented with White-backed, Ruppells and Palm-nut Vultures, Pygmy Flacon, Eastern Pale Chanting Goshawk, a pair of nesting Booted Eagles, Martial and Tawny Eagle and Bateleur amongst the raptors; Donaldson-Smiths, White-headed Buffalo, White-crowned Sparrow and Black-capped Sparrow amongst the weavers; Orange-bellied Parrots; White-bellied Go-away Birds; Black-faced Waxbills and Green-winged Pytilla; Crested Francolins, Helmeted and Vulturine Guineafowl and Yellow-necked Spurfowl amongst the gallinaceous birds; dozens and dozens of Black-faced Sandgrouse coming into to drink; Brubru, Northern White-crowned Shrike and Taita Fiscals amongst the shrikes; White-headed and Blue-naped Mousebirds; African Silverbill; Bearded Woodpecker; Eastern Yellow-billed, Red-billed and Von der Decken's Hornbills; Abyssinian Scimitarbill; Superb, Fischer's and 2 dozen Golden-breasted Starlings, surely one of Africa's most beautiful birds; African Mourning, Ring-necked, Laughing and Namaqua Doves, Emerald-spotted Wood Doves and Speckled Pigeons.

The afternoon game produced a number of bustards, the majority being Buff-bellied or Crested as they are now known along with a pair of White-bellied. Our first pair of Rosy-patched Bush-shrikes showed up just as a Somali Golden-breasted Bunting alighted in the same bush. Two Gabar Goshawk, one being a black morph, and a juvenile Red-necked Falcon, alighted in the same bush and for 5 minutes we were able to study the three birds. In perfect light we came across a very confiding Lappet-faced Vulture perched on top of an acacia tree, feet away from us. One huge surprise was coming across a Striped Hyena that had found a bone. At that time we had a steady drizzle for about 5 minutes but that did not stop us from viewing the beast and getting a little wet, as it sat down to see the rain out before continuing to feed. We also finally came across our first cats – a couple of lionesses resting along the sand bank being watched by 7 weary giraffes less than 50 feet from them. Once the first giraffe got up enough courage to walk past them the others decided they were brave enough and followed.

Back at the lodge, poor Ben waited for us at our dinner appointed time only to have us show up some 20 minutes late, all because we had just witnessed leopards mating and got chatting with an English gentleman who had just witnessed it with us, and who, encountered tales of his previous 25 years of annual visits to this part of the world. Enough about him...the Leopard show was simple out of this world. Backtracking in time a little....upon our return from our game drive, I picked up some liquid amber at the bar and headed to my room. Running into the pool attendant I enquired about when they were going to bait the Leopard post which was situated in the food lit section across the river. To my

surprise he said, "Didn't you see it? It was just there!" I ran to my room, alerted everyone and could see a large group assembled some 100 yards away in front of the dining room, looking towards the food lit pole. They obviously had seen it, and we had missed it. The baboons were very agitated, making alarm calls, which at least alerted us to the presence of the Leopard in the vicinity. Some 20 minutes later one strolled into view and jumped onto the pole and began to feed on the bait. This was followed by a second one, its mate, who sat patiently in full view. The views through the binos were incredible. The view through the scope simply magical! It was 15 minutes before the one ripped off the bait, an impala leg from what I could tell, and walked away, only to be followed by its mate. With no appearance in the following minutes all those in front of the dining area retreated to dinner and we hung around having a drink or two in celebration of the sighting. 10 minutes later, to our astonishment, they both returned, and with the exception of our group and those staying in the cabin next door (the Englishman and his wife) we witnessed a mating ritual which consisted of the female pacing up and down and walking besides the male several times before laying down and allowing the male to mount her. Seconds later it was over and off they strolled into the night.

Day 10 / August 31 – Samburu; Naro Moru

Our pre-breakfast game drive produced lions. The first group consisted of several females and their 6 month old cubs which was terribly exciting as they were on the move once we arrived on the scene. We then spotted a mother and two smaller cubs, these being only a couple of months old and decided to drive closer. Patiently waiting for them to get up and move, we were rewarded when they crossed the track in front of us and walking towards 2 Gerenuks, and a group of Impalas, all of whom were watching the lions very carefully. Though the ungulates let them get within 30 meters before they took off, it was apparent that the lions were not on the hunt at this time. Another mammal sighting was a pair of Lesser Kudus on their way down to the river to drink. These stood almost motionless in the shade under a tree waiting for us to continue on our way. The bird highlights included a Bare-eyed Thrush and Northern Brownbul in the same view; Pygmy Falcon, Gabar Goshawk and Eastern Pale Chanting Goshawks; many Black-bellied Sandgrouse and a Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse at a puddle in the track; Red-billed Buffalo-Weavers; the amazing Golden-breasted Starlings and Shinning and Black-bellied Sunbirds and Rufous Chatterers, all before breakfast. The late morning game drive on our way out of the reserve produced a pair of the enormous Kori Bustards; Speckled fronted Weaver, African Gray Hornbill, Taita Fiscals as well as a Leopard Tortoise and three Dwarf Mongoose peering out of holes in a termite mound.

The drive between the reserve and the lodge, was uphill most of the way as we climbed into the central highlands where a front was passing through bringing overcast skies, cooler temperatures and rain in some spots though thankfully not where we happened to be. We stopped for lunch at a filling station where a table had been 'reserved' for us. Dusky Turtle-Doves cooed above us and Common Quail could be heard in the adjacent wheat field while Olive Thrushes, Baglefect Weavers, Rufous Sparrows, Montane White-eyes, Bronzed Sunbird, African Paradise Flycatchers and Cape Robin Chat were seen amongst the trees and shrubs. On one stretch of road raptors could be found sitting on telegraph poles and these included Augur Buzzards, Tawny Eagles and a Lanner Falcon. Our third Kori Bustard sighting stood out like a sore thumb as the lone object, 3 feet tall, in a golden wheat field.

The late afternoon walk around the extensive grounds of the Naro Moru River Lodge produced a number of sunbirds including Green-headed, Amethyst, Northern Double-collared, a Collared building a nest with spider webs and a large Tacazze. Mountain Wagtails were on the stream bed boulders while Montane Orioles, Black-backed Puffback, Chin-spot Batis, Yellow-whiskered Greenbul, Dusky

Flycatcher and White-eyed Slaty Flycatchers were close to the water. Venturing further a field (around the unfinished golf course – what were they thinking?), Black-crowned Tchagra, Crowned Hornbills, White-bellied Tit and Rattling Cisticolas were all seen and just after sunset the clouds cleared just enough on Mt. Kenya so that one could see the peak and one of the glaciers.

The evening chorus of Tree Hyrax is always exciting as anyone hearing them for the first time is astonished to find out that these peculiar groundhog sized mammals make all these odd and eerie sounds.

Day 11 / September 1 – Mt. Kenya: Met Station & Mountain Lodge

The morning was spent at the base of Mt. Kenya where though it was a little windy the conditions were excellent. At the entrance gate we alighted and walked several hundred yards seeing Red-fronted Parrots perched on the tops of bare branches and having several groups of Olive Pigeons fly over. Black Saw-wings and Hunter's Cisticolas were everywhere and by morning's end we had a Sharpe's and an Abbott's Starling, an East African endemic, seen well. A pair of Hartlaub's Turacos, another East African endemic, flew into a tree besides the road and after a few minutes wait they worked their way through the dense foliage and up towards the top in the open. As we worked our way through the Podo trees and bamboo, coming across Mountain Greenbuls and Montane White-eyes we had a pair of Golden-winged Sunbirds and three Mountain Yellow Warblers. By the time we had reached the Met station at 10,000 feet and the base camp for those climbing Mt. Kenya, Eastern Double-collared Sunbirds showed themselves very well, Mountain Buzzards became a common sight as were Yellow-fronted and Yellow-crowned Canaries. It was not long before we located an Alpine Chat and two very confident Jackson's Francolins, another East African endemic.

Following lunch we headed to another section of Mt. Kenya, the Mountain Lodge at 7,200 feet where some rooftop watching produced an abundance of Eastern Bronzed-naped Pigeons, a few Red-fronted Parrots, Waller's Starlings, Southern Black Flycatchers, Montane Oriole, 3 Black-throated Apalis, Thick-billed Seedeater and Cape Wagtails around the watering hole which had a couple of Bushbucks licking salt from the edge of the pond. We took a short walk around the front of the lodge once the drizzle ended and the skies cleared before sunset which produced great looks at Huet's Bush Squirrel, Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, Mountain Yellow Warbler, Hunter's Cisticola, 20 plus Alpine Swifts, African Goshawk and Great Sparrowhawk, Slender-billed Greenbul, Grey-headed Nigrofinch and Black-headed Apalis, but one species that we would really have liked to see, a Lemon Dove, flew around the group and out of sight before most could see what it was.

Once it was dark, the baited platform attracted 3 Large-spotted Genets which for us was excellent as the platform was right in front of our rooms! The highlight though were 4 Forest Elephants, including a youngster, that strolled along the back of the lit watering hole and around the far edge to the well at the front of the pond for a drink, before settling down for some family bonding on the far side. A Spotted Hyena also put in a brief appearance and as I turned in for bed a Marsh Mongoose made the rounds along the watering hole and a White-tailed Mongoose did the same around the lodge.

Day 12 / Sept 2 – Mt. Kenya: Mountain Lodge; Masi Mara

None of us were awoken in the night for any of the specialty mammals that we had ticked off on the 'request to be woken should they appear at the watering hole' list. By day daybreak a slow family parade of buffalos with Red-billed Oxpeckers on their backs made it to the water but other than the Green Sandpiper that came in during the night hours nothing else was new. Just before leaving we checked out the vegetation around the parking area where the best birds were 5 Golden-winged

Sunbirds, one of which was a breeding plumage male. On the drive down the hill, two species that eluded us at the lodge were seen, the first a perched juvenile Crowned Eagle and the next a group of Silvery-cheeked Hornbills that were joined by three African Crowned Hornbills.

We arrived at the airfield at 9:30 and after sorting our luggage out, putting the tags to the Mara Serena on each one, our 60 seater plane that was 2/3rd full arrived. By 10:10 we were airborne flying south over the Aberdere's and onto the Mara. By 11:00 we were descending for our landing and the lines of Wildebeest on the move that snaked through the savannah like lines of ants could easily be seen with some even having to disperse as we came in to land. BK, our driver, met us at the airstrip with some good news in regards to mammal sightings. With an hour or so to spare before lunch we headed out into the grassland coming across small groups of Quail Finch, Ruppell's Griffon Vultures, Northern Anteater Chats and Sooty Chats as well as Bateleurs and a pair of soaring Secretary Birds. BK's surprises included a Cheetah with 4 cubs, which was spectacular. We first spotted her when Wildebeest must have spooked a female Dohor Waterbuck which alerted the Cheetah enough to allow her to make a few quick strides before stopping on a termite mound to scan the landscape. The distance and lack of surprise no doubt convinced her it was a futile attempt. Heading back we could see her cubs coming to greet her, before she climbed up a large termite hill that had good vegetated cover and above all shade. Her cubs soon joined her and though they were mostly hidden, we get to see her face and a couple of the cubs as they jostled about getting into a comfortable position to rest in the mid-day heat. Not far away we came across a pair of Secretary Birds that had come to a pool of water to drink and under a nearby tree laying in the shade a pride of 9 lions that included a male and 5 cubs. Though the male did rear his head on a couple of occasions when disturbed by the young ones as did one of the females, it was mostly the cubs that were active playing with branches or rolling around. And if that was not enough we had an enormous concentration of Wildebeest all around this section of the Mara which was an astonishing sight.

At the beautiful Serena the grounds held Dwarf Mongoose, Common Rock Hyrax, Red headed Agamas, Marico Sunbirds, Yellow-breasted Apalis, African Paradise Flycatchers and Northern Black Flycatchers and from our vantage point high on a knoll we could see a gathering of a thousand wildebeest crossing the Mara river below us.

Since the numbers of Wildebeest were so large, we decided to concentrate our late afternoon game drive around the river in the hopes that we would witness a crossing. Crossing the short grass plains the abundance of Wildebeest was very clear with hundreds and hundreds of these comical beasts dotted throughout the landscape and for as far as the eye could see. We stopped for groups of non-breeding Yellow-mantled Widowbirds, Pin-tailed Wyahts, a few Red-winged Larks, Tawny Eagle, Lappet-faced and Ruppell's Vulture, White-bellied Bustard and three Green-winged Pytillas feeding besides the river bank. From our view points along the river we could see concentrations of Wildebeest on the far side thinking about crossing. They would move about as a group along the top of the escarpment but never make a commitment to head down of the 'shutes' that lead down 40 feet to the river that those before them had already created. For an hour they continued to think about it. Did they know there was at least 1 Crocodile below them? The hippos were certainly not a concern to them. They then moved further way from us and others soon joined them, so we drove the short distance down the river, following them. We came across a few Common Zebras on our side that looked as though they had made the crossing and were trying to coax the remaining handful of their friends along, as well as all the Wildebeest. Families of Elephants also had been to drink and were now browsing the shrubs along the river bank. It was not long before the first Wildebeest descended the embankment with others in tow, thus followed the beginning on an extraordinary crossing that saw

an estimated 10,000 mammals head down the 40-50 foot embankment and swim 60 yards across the river, just to get to the other side. The dust kicked up by the stampede really set the mood and the noise of wildebeest calling as they crossed, along with seeing a few young ones return back to the river and reverse-cross as they no doubt were looking for their mothers, made this one amazing spectacle. Though we only saw the very end of it, we did notice a wildebeest separated from the group crossing heading down the river and being pulled under by a large crocodile. This alone gave concern to the remaining Wildebeest who stopped crossing shortly after, though by then all but a handful had made it.

By the end of the day, this had to be the best wildlife experiences I had encountered in a day – the last few minutes of the plane ride over the Mara; seeing lines of Wildebeest following age old traditional worn paths; the Cheetah with her 4 cubs; a whole pride of lions and of course witnessing one of the worlds greatest wildlife spectacles an estimated 10,000 Wildebeest crossing the Mara for 25 minutes - brilliant.

Day 13 / September 3 – Masai Mara

Rosy-breasted Longclaws seemed to be everywhere along one particular stretch of track this morning with a few of their more common cousins Yellow-throated and Red-winged Larks. Zitting and Pectoral-patch Cisticolas and 5 Temminck's Coursers were new for the trip as was a rare sighting of an uncommon Black Coucal. We did come across several groups of mixed vultures – Lappet-faced, Ruppell's and White-backed mixed in with Marabouts, as well as a hand full of White-bellied Bustards some of which were seen in flight, but maybe the best birds were the Secretary Birds that were walking through the tall grass and amongst the Zebras and Wildebeest towards us. As for mammals, the Wildebeest spectacle continued to awe everyone with streams of them in single file walking and running in wavy lines towards a large assembly of them numbering in the many thousands, possibly even tens of thousands. We again came across the Cheetah family, mother and 4 cubs, this time she was surveying the Thompson's Gazelles from on top of an open termite mound with the cubs at the base in the shade. It was a shame that we did see the cubs until we were asked to move on by one of the rangers, whom claimed that the film crews needed time with them!

At lunch one of the naturalists at the Serena showed us a chameleon, which turned out to be a Flap-necked Chameleon, or possible sub species of based upon the description in the field guide though for some reason it looked out of place according to the range map, though the habitat was perfect.

The afternoon game drive produced Pectoral-patched Cisticola, Grey Kestrel and Wattled Plovers that were new for the trip. While watching a large roosting group of Ruppells Vultures a Saddle-billed Stork came flying out of the swamp and in perfect light flew right past us. Hippos were in the river in small groups some with Red-billed Oxpeckers on their backs. Yellow-billed Oxpeckers were also found on a giraffes neck. At several points along the river we found large 10 plus foot Nile Crocodiles basking, and mating, and in one spot, three of them were guarding a Wildebeest carcass they had killed during yesterdays crossing. A large party of Banded Mongoose was feeding amongst the Hammerkops and Impalas in the swamp and we finished with a group of Speckled Mousebirds dustbathing in the road inside the lodge compound. It seemed that no one had a crossing today....maybe tomorrow!

Day 14 / September 4 - Mara

Kills (Wildebeest carcasses) were the main order of the morning beginning with Warthogs and a juvenile Bateleur. We then found a pair of Silver-backed Jackals at another kill with a warthog trying

to get his fill as well, but without too much success. White-backed and Ruppell's were also there but as soon as a Lappet-faced showed up the jackals gave way to the large vulture and moved off. One other kill held the same three vulture species as well as Marabous, but this time the carcass looked as though it was waiting for the vultures to break it open. That job was left to the Lappets who certainly obliged, tearing and pulling at the top of the front leg joint. Whenever it looked as though they were having any success, the smaller Ruppell's and smaller still White-backs would jump on the kill, hiss, flail their wings and jump about all in social interaction as well as to show who really was the dominant subordinate, while the patient and often sneaky Marabous waited for the carcass to be open up in earnest before helping themselves to as large a portion as they tear.

At the base of the lodge a couple of narrow strips of marsh held a female Saddle-billed Stork which we spotted from the dining room. We spent a little time with her watching her jab her huge and brightly colored bill, at times three quarters of the way into the water and mud trying to get mudfish to flush. For a few minutes at a time she would go through the same routine, resting, watching and then jabbing. One on occasion she was successful getting a 4 inch fish and flicking it up into her bill.

The western escarpment at Oolololo gave us a tremendous panoramic view of the Mara Triangle, with vast expanses of golden grassland dotted with acacia and Balantites trees and the lush green riverine forest community that followed the Mara River. We reached the Mara West Camp on the escarpment a little behind schedule which restricted the number of birds we saw, but never the less we did get to see a wonderful raptor show with Bateleurs, Martial Eagle, Black-chested Snake Eagles, Tawny Eagles and of course vultures. In the trees African Green Pigeons were taking siestas and African Grey Flycatchers making occasional sorties while a few Golden-breasted Buntings flitted about the rocky ground areas. In the pond Little Grebes showed themselves well and an African Water Rail was a little more elusive spending more time just out of view than in the open. Walking back up to the camp we had a Klipspringer bound away and flushed a Common Duiker before coming across a Spot-flanked Barbet feeding in the tall trees surrounding the camp fire.

Back on the plains, a Dark Chanting Goshawk was perched on top of an acacia and three Red-faced Crombecs were bouncing about the lower branches. At the Maji-ya-ndege Swamp it was alive with an extraordinary number of mammals and birds. We counted some 10 species of mammals – Elephant, Giraffe, Waterbuck, Warthog, Banded Mongoose, Eland, Buffalo, Impala, Zebra, Wildebeest, and amongst them three Southern Ground Hornbills walking about. There was considerable excitement when we saw the buffalo get up and run away, as well as the plovers, ibis and egrets taking flight, only to have us find a Martial Eagle come in to land on the ground with Banded Mongoose running straight for it. We thought it had nailed a mongoose, but once it got off the ground there was nothing in its talons.

Further down the swamp the activity continued with a mixed flock of Sacred Ibis, African Spoonbill, egrets, 5 resting Spur-winged Geese and a lone Hottentot Teal; very active African Jacanas and all three large herons, Goliath, Grey and Black-headed. African Fish Eagle, Squacco Heron and Malachite Kingfisher were all seen patiently waiting for an opportunity to get a quick meal. At a break along a steep embankment, a pair of hippos were sleeping nuzzle to nuzzle, one lone Striated or Green-backed Heron was seen perched on branches at the waters edge and a Dusky Turtle Dove was perched along our track which took us through Teclea shrubs. There was brief excitement when I yelled "Python, straight in front of us", only to find upon further inspection that it was a combination of shadows and white on a long narrow sign inches off the ground!

As we worked our way back to the lodge, amongst the Thompson Gazelles and Wildebeest, a stately Kori Bustard was walking across the open very short grass plain occasionally pausing to pick up an insect.

Day 15 / Sept 5 - Mara

We had a very exciting morning game drive, coming across a huge black maned male Lion walking through the tall grass. We followed him for ½ a mile or so, watching him pause to mark his territory; walk with his eyes closed; stop and lay down briefly right in front of our van; growl at us, before leaving him to continue on his way. From here we found a couple of females with four cubs resting in the shade of an acacia tree. Though the cubs were active from time to time they were down in the grass which made for tough viewing. The females however spent most of the time on guard watching over the landscape where the only prey was a considerable distance away. African Harrier Hawk and a group of ten Yellow-throated Sandgrouse could be seen at a distance but at least the later flew towards us landing not too far away. Unfortunately we were occupied with other things and by the time we worked the area over they were gone. Plain-backed Pipit was added. We followed two Secretary Birds that were scouring the grasses for food and come across a small group of plovers that included side by side by comparison of two similar species – Black-winged and Senegal.

We came across our second cat of the morning when we joined two young male Cheetahs at a kill. Sometime earlier in the morning they had tracked down a “tommy” and by the time we got there they were well underway at the table so to speak. Blood was all over their faces and they were each biting and pulling at opposite ends. While this was going on, a steady stream of vultures were arriving, landing about 100 feet away. Firstly White-backs, followed by Ruppell's and then Lappet-faced which made for a large congregation. A Hooded Vulture also joined in, giving us 4 species along with a couple of Marabous. Out of the blue we caught sight of a family of Warthogs, including 2 very young ones, heading towards the cheetahs, meanwhile the vultures moved in half the distance. Suddenly one of the Cheetahs realizing the warthogs were within 20 meters started towards them only to have the male warthog chase the cheetah for several hundreds meters, which in turn alerted the vultures to their opportunity – which they took in seconds, chasing the remaining Cheetah away as well. The Lappets got right to work, though this time the carcass was wide open. Fights, arguments, strutting, and thievery followed as the order of dominance was very obvious with Ruppell's and White-backs getting in at every opportunity. The Hooded didn't do too badly either and helped himself before moving away to finish his piece and watch the rest of the proceeding. Within 10 minutes the carcass was history; the warthogs had moved on victorious and probably totally unaware that they gave the vultures a greater meal than they expected, and the cheetahs were left to console each otherso goes life in the natural world...it's just another day and life goes on.

One last stop was at the spot where the BBC's Big Cat Weekly was filming the mother cheetah and her (now) 3 cubs, resting and playing in the dense shade of a large Teclea shrub. We watched for half an hour as the cubs would chase each other, tumble about, jump up and rough-house while their mother rested perfectly happy to have them have their playtime before they no doubt took their midday siesta.

The afternoon game drive was taken on our way south to Sarova Mara Tented Camp. Shortly after leaving the Serena a young male Bohor Reedbuck was grazing beside the road and along the Mara river we would come across herds of several thousands Wildebeest contemplating a crossing, but we had to keep moving. Ben located a Bare-faced Go-away-Bird tucked into a tree, and upon further investigating it turned out that there were three, all of which climbed to the top and flew away one at a time. A small flock of Grey-capped Social Weavers were feeding on the ground and flying up to their

nests in an acacia and at the base of the tree an elephant dung pile was being worked over by a pair of Acacia Rats. We crossed the Mara Bridge and were now in the Mara Conservancy area. Three Southern Ground Hornbills crossed the road in front of us and allowed for our closest views of these large terrestrial feeding birds while a lone Brown Parrot flew over head. A short distance away a small herd of Wildebeest were very attentive looking in one direction and about 150 meters away we could see a young male lion lying in the tall grass. It turned out there were two of them. This was one of the few herds of Wildebeest or Zebra that we would see, indicating that the migration had no doubt already come through this section of the park and no doubt explained the incredible concentration in the Mara Triangle. With the late afternoon light casting an amazing golden glow over the grasslands we continued across the plains taking us close to the narrow stream which had intermittent pools of water. White-browed Coucal, a pair of Verreaux Eagle Owls, a dark morph Booted Eagle, Common and Grey-backed Fiscals, Banded Martin and Northern White-crowed Shrikes were all seen well, and just before reaching our luxurious camp small groups of Topi, Coke's Hartebeest, Impalas, Buffalo, Wildebeest and 2 Lions.

Day 16 – Mara Sarova

Leopard was the order of the morning and after stopping at what we called the 'bird tree', where there was White-headed and Spot-flanked Barbet, Brown Parrot, Bare-faced Go-away-Birds, Greater Honeyguide, Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Green Pigeons and Violet-backed Starlings we found a lone tree surrounded by vehicles and a male Leopard sprawled across the upper branch in the shade. A second Leopard was resting in the grass, but we did not get to see it until it raised its head and walked down to the tree, where it proceeded to climb up the trunk and join the other one. Here she got comfortable and eventually fell asleep.

Following a late breakfast we walked the beautiful and extensive grounds of the Sarova, where we got great looks at a number of species we had already seen including Marico and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, Black-backed Puffbacks, Slaty-coloured and Tropical Boubous, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Grey-backed Camaroptera, Spot-flanked Barbet, Black-headed Oriole, Purple Grenadier, White-browed Robin Chat, Spectacled Weaver, Common Wattle-eye and four Grey-headed Bush Shrikes that were new of the trip, taking our total over 450 species seen.

The final leg of our journey was taken on an 18-seater Twin Otter flying out of the Mara and over the Rift Valley to Nairobi, giving us an overview of undisturbed landscape, until we got into metropolitan Nairobi 40 minutes later. *Hakuna Matata*.

Adrian Binns