

KENYA TRIP REPORT AUGUST 2008

August 1 / LAKE NAIVASHA & NAIVASHA COUNTRY CLUB

I awoke to a steady drizzle that accompanied me on our journey through Nairobi and to the Longonot Escarpment which begins the descent to the Rift Valley 1500' below. At least it was clear enough so one could see a good distance across the valley but the skies remained heavily overcast. A lorry failed to negotiate a bend and was on its side but there was enough room for one lane to get by. Once on the valley floor Pied Crows and Cape Rooks became common roadside birds, and in one place they were feeding on a pair of road kill hyenas. In a wheat field 3 Secretary Birds, terrestrial feeding raptors, kept their distance from each other and worked the rows searching for something to eat.



Once we reached the entrance to the Naivasha Country Club a Bronzed Sunbird was busy feeding on *Leonotis* flower heads. Kenya Rufous Sparrows and Streaky Seedeaters were amongst the short grasses while a Rufous-naped Lark was singing from on top of a stalk. In the car park one was immediately struck by all the different colors of the *bougainvillea* bushes. A Tropical Boubou was collecting nesting material and a White-headed Barbet and Red-eyed Doves were quite happy feeding in a berry tree as a Red-chested Cuckoo's 3-noted calls rang out from the top of a Yellow-barked Acacia, locally known as a fever tree. Once on the manicured lawns of the grounds Sacred Ibis wander about as peacocks would on an estate and Superb Starlings are constantly busy moving about from the lawn to the lower tree branches. Speckled Pigeons, African Hoopoe and an African Grey Hornbill rounded out those species seen near the outdoor seating. A Black Sparrowhawk circled overhead and a dark morph Gabar Goshawk was seen over the adjacent property. Speckled Mousebirds always seem to be entertaining and in this case we had 5 perched on a stem one above the other, with Grey-backed Camaropteras flitting about the bushes below.

Generally seen in flocks, Speckled Mousebirds are endemic to Africa

A walk down to the boat ramp produced Northern Anteater Chat, Hunter's Sunbird, Hunter's and Winding Cisticola, a female Black Cuckoo-shrike, several Western Citril and the first of many Pied Kingfishers. The lake is set in the rain shadow of Mount Longonot and the most conspicuous bird here is the African Fish Eagle. Pairs of them were spaced out along the shoreline often dueting and circling together. For two hours we took a leisurely boat ride hugging the shoreline as best we could though it was shallow even a good distance from the edge. Pelicans were numerous with Great Whites outnumbering Pink-backs. On boulders strewn along the shoreline Great Cormorants were found in large numbers while individual Long-tailed Cormorants preferred the reeds. Three species of kingfishers were seen. The aforementioned and ubiquitous Pied along with a few brilliantly colored Malachite's and a Giant, perched in the shade of a fever tree. Individual African Spoonbills, Great, Intermediate and Little Egrets along with a few Grey and Goliath Heron's stood out while along the edge there was Ruff, Common Sandpiper and several Marsh Sandpipers. Amongst the reeds and papyrus beds we found two basking Rock Pythons with Black Crakes, Common Moorhens and Purple Swampheens seemingly oblivious to any potential danger. Hippos were bunched together in the water covered area near the short grass area though we did come across a baby with its mother not too far away. Defassa Waterbuck was the only other mammals sighted today.

Returning to Nairobi the fog was very dense in particular around the escarpment. Once we reach Limuru the visibility got considerably better. The wetlands held immeasurable numbers of Red-knobbed Coots, Little Grebes, Yellow-billed and Red-billed Ducks along with African Jacanas, two Southern Pochards and a few Maccoa Ducks.

Day 1 / August 2 – Nairobi; Thika Ponds; Blue Post Lodge; Mt. Lodge

Frank, Beth and Holly arrived late night from half way across the States and were rearing to go this morning. The hotel gardens were very active with a number of common backyard birds including Variable Sunbird, Speckled Mousebird, Dark-capped Bulbul, Kenya Rufous Sparrow, African Pied Wagtail, Red-billed Firefinch, Bronzed Mannikin, Sacred Ibis, Pied Crow, Baglefecht Weaver, and the less common Spectacled Weaver and a surprise, Holub's Golden Weaver. We had several hundred kilometers to cover which meant we had to tear ourselves away. Once again there was a steady drizzle as we left Nairobi.

Our first stop was the Thika sewer ponds, a rather extensive treatment plant with many ponds. Spur-winged Lapwings were very noisy and one pair had just hatched 4 chicks. Hadada Ibis and Egyptian Geese gave the lapwings a run for most vocal. Yellow-billed and Red-billed Ducks along with seventy Little Grebes were very conspicuous. The concrete slope on the edge of the ponds held Three-banded Plover and swallows and martins were using it and the slews to rest on them – the most common being Plain Martins followed by Barn Swallows and Lesser-striped Swallows. A pair of African Palm Swifts also flew over. Common Waxbills and Red-billed Firefinches could be found going back and forth between shrubs and the fence while Baglefecht Weavers and Fischer's Lovebirds conversed with each other in the tree canopies.

From here we made a stop at a super market for bottled water. It turned out that half the vehicles in the car park were part of wedding party. I'm not sure why they had to make a stop there. The groom knocked on our window and proudly presented his bride. Two minutes later he introduced us to another one! Life is good. While this was going on we watched a driving instructor attempt to park his compact car in what looked like a normal sized parking space. He had a difficult time negotiating the turn into the space. Pretty straight forward really, but it took three tries and two left side scrapes of the car park next to him before he made it in. He got out and nonchalantly walked behind the vehicle towards the supermarket as if nothing had happened. Someone watching pointed out to him what he had done. A short conversation

and a check of both vehicles no doubt convinced him of his wrong doing and just maybe, cast a doubt in his mind as to whether this was the correct job for him. This would be the first of two hilarious vehicular incidents today.

On the outskirts of Thika we made a brief stop at the Blue Post to check out the waterfalls and managed to have African Green Pigeons fly into a tree top and found a tree which hosted Nubian Woodpecker, Spot-flanked Barbet, Black-backed Puffback and a horde of White-browed Sparrow Weavers. Continuing on the drizzle began to ease up by the time we crossed the Tana River, Kenya's longest. Augur Buzzard, African Harrier-Hawk and Grey-crowned Cranes were spotted from our van before we made the turn up the slope of Mount Kenya to the Mountain Lodge. We made numerous stops along the way with some being very productive. A pair of Slender Mongoose were fossicking in the road with one in particular standing upright as if it was looking for another of the party. A Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird showed well besides the van and Collared Sunbirds, Common Waxbills and Streaky Seedeaters became a common sight. In a marshy area Western Citril, Grey-headed Negrofinch, Common Stonechat, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher and Cape Wagtail were new. A Montane Oriole and Hartlaub's Turaco were calling while a Long-crested Eagle was perched on top of a low bush. Our first mammals were Black-and-white Colobus and a lone White-throated Guenon (Sykes Monkey) and a glimpse at the back of a Red Duiker. At the lodge gate we encountered a Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, Ruppell's Robin-chat and Eastern Double-collared Sunbird and shortly thereafter three Forest Elephants besides the road. Lunch beckoned at this late hour and we made it just in time. The three story lodge is wonderfully set amongst the forest with a view out back of the watering hole and a backdrop of Mt. Kenya on a clear day.



Forest Elephants at the Mountain Lodge watering hole

After lunch we began on the roof top with herds of Buffalo and Elephants along with Bushbucks and Defassa Waterbucks gathered around the watering hole, the center of which is a sedge bed in the shape of the African continent. Cape Wagtails walked the water's edge as Red-billed Oxpeckers relieved various buffalo of ticks. Tropical Boubous, Baglefecht Weavers and White-eyed Slaty Flycatchers kept busy along the shrub line as Olive Pigeons outnumbered Eastern Bronzed-naped Pigeons in the tree tops. Two

nice flyovers included an African Goshawk and a pair of Silvery-cheeked Hornbills. We heard the sound of a rifle shot close by which meant that the afternoon forest walk with a ranger had a close encounter with an elephant. It would have been a warning shot. We took a walk around the front of the lodge getting looks at both, Eastern and Northern Double-collared Sunbirds, a very confiding African Dusky Flycatcher and Mountain Thrushes. Slender-billed and Yellow-whiskered Greenbul were seen working the edge of the vine covered shrubs while the Mountain Greenbul was a little more elusive. Several individual raptors were overhead including Mountain Buzzard, Great Sparrowhawk and an unexpected Bat Hawk while the swifts and swallows consisted of a Black Roughwing and a White-rumped Swift. The sparrowhawk was escorted out to the area by 4 pairs of Red-fronted Parrot. Slightly less cooperative was a Hartlaub's Turaco who tantalized us with views of its red wings in flight and a pair of Grey-capped Warbler but when are they ever? Montane White-eyes and an Oriole Finch were seen well and the calls of Cinnamon Bracken Warbler and Hunter's Cisticola often heard. Mammals were very vocal with the Colobus's deep howls in all likelihood warning others of a Crowned Eagle and a rogue Elephants trumpeting. We did get a look at a Marsh Mongoose crossing the road and saw the diminutive Suni antelope while successfully searching for White-starred Robin and Ruppell's Robin-Chat.

We witnessed our second poor example of driving when a van decided for whatever reason to back up along the entrance road. The first sign of trouble came when he went into the grass verge and made a lot of noise spinning his tires trying to reverse. When he finally did he reversed a short distance before finding the grassy verge on the other side! So far it was not looking good. When he finally got out of that mess and back on the tarmac he continued reversing until he got the lodge barrier. The guards let him through and less than 50 feet later he found the edge of the road once again. This time there was a concrete post protecting a concrete culvert. The post did not fair too well and neither did the back left end of the vehicle. He got out to check and made a feeble attempt to straighten the post – no chance, especially after a drink or two. It was only 4 o'clock! I am sure that there would be many stories told about this escapade amongst the staff this evening.

After dark at the floodlight waterhole Large-spotted Genet, Scrub Hare and White-tailed Mongoose all put in appearances and the wide range of eerie vocalizations that Tree Hyraxes make were on display.

Day 2 – Mt. Lodge; Imenti; Samburu

Though only a portion of the clouds cleared long enough for only one of Mt. Kenya's peaks to become visible for a few seconds it was a pleasant hour on the rooftop this morning nevertheless. The dominant family were the pigeons with huge numbers of restless Olive Pigeons and Eastern Bronzed-naped Pigeons. An Oriole Finch flew by while a distant owl that flew to its roost was likely an African Wood Owl. The usual suspects were below us flittering about the grounds and a gorgeous male African Paradise Flycatcher with its long tail was a new species. After breakfast a short walk along the entrance road produced Chestnut-throated Apalis and Black-headed Apalis, Ruppell's Robin-chat, and better looks at the three common greenbuls, Mountain, Slender-billed and Yellow-whiskered. By mid morning we were heading back down to the mountain. Three birds in quick succession were new, these being a pair of Grey Apalis, a White-headed Wood-hoopoe and the most majestic adult African Crowned Eagle at here nest.



African Crowned Eagle, a monkey-eating specialist of the forest

Heading north the drive was rather quiet. There were a few Superb Starlings, Pied Crows, Cape Rooks and Northern Anteater Chats, all common roadside birds, along the way. We made the obligatory photo-op at the equator and stopped to see a massive colony of Speke's Weaver nests, some in the process of being completed. We had our box lunches at the Imenti rest stop with Dusky Turtle-Doves, Yellow-crowned Canaries, Bronzed Sunbird and a Cape Robin Chat in the gardens and Little and White-rumped Swifts overhead.

After lunch we dropped out of the central highlands and into arid acacia thorn scrub habitat on our way to Isiolo and beyond to the entrance gate to Buffalo Springs and Samburu National Reserves. By 3:30 we were done with the duties at the gate and the pleasantries with the Samburu salesmen and were now on our first game drive. For three hours we were enthralled with all the sightings and activity. It began while looking at Red-billed Hornbills and seeing Fork-tailed Drongos, Pale Flycatcher, a Pink-breasted Lark and African Silverbills when we paused to look at distant Grevy's Zebra.

Soon Grant's Gazelles and the lanky Gerenuk could be seen feeding, the later on its hind legs browsing the tallest parts of an acacia. Gamebirds we often spotted including many Yellow-necked Spurfowl, the dapper Vulturine Guinea-fowl, Helmeted Guinea-fowl and individual White-bellied and Buff-crested Bustards. A large group of Somali Ostrich could be seen in the distance while a herd of Grevy's Zebra had a Common Zebra amongst them. This enabled us to compare the difference in size and stripes between them. Beisa Oryx another of Samburu's specialties showed well in pairs. We came across a Cheetah on a side track with a 4 month old cub following behind. It looked as though they had just come from having a drink in a small stream. We followed behind and watched as she tried to track down the diminutive Kirk's Dik-Dik but they were one step ahead. The avian species continued, Ashy Cisticola, Tawny-flanked Prinia, flocks of Black-capped Social Weavers with Chestnut Sparrows and Grey-headed Sparrows mingled in; Black-faced Sandgrouse in the road; 3 shrike species Northern White-crowned, Rosy-breasted and Taita; an adult Eastern Chanting Goshawk and later an immature eating a bird; Orange-bellied Parrot and a Reticulated Giraffe all kept us busy.

Day 3 – Samburu

It was an exceptional 5 hour game drive. Being our first morning at Samburu we barely got out the gate before we were looking at all kinds of new birds. A bush produced Crested Francolins feeding in the shade with a Spotted Morning Thrush joining them. An Emerald-spotted Wood-dove was wandering between bushes as a family of Blue-naped Mousebirds alighted on the bush and proceeded to work their way across. On the next bush over sitting at the top was a stunning Golden Palm Weaver, Dodson's Bulbul and a Von der Decken's Hornbill. At the Ewaso bridge we could see flocks of Black-faced Sandgrouse flying in for their mornings drink. A Common Sandpiper was the only other bird along the river's edge while in a tree besides the bridge had a wet immature Shinning Sunbird trying to dry itself. White-headed Mousebirds and a pair of D'Arnaud's Barbets were catching the first of the mornings rays as a Three-streaked Tchagra, Fischer's Starlings, Black-cheeked Waxbill and Slate-coloured Boubous rummaged about the shrubs and Dwarf Mongoose crossed the track meters away. In the air were Lanner and the first of many Tawny Eagles.

One the absolute stars of Samburu is without a doubt the Golden-breasted Starling especially when seen in perfect light. The iridescent colors of blue, purple and turquoise in contrast with the golden breast is simply exquisite. We were lucky enough to come across several small flocks. Close by a pair of Little Bee-eaters perched long enough for us to get a good look and Lesser Kudu's walked down the slope towards us as a Gabar Goshawk crossed in front of us and White-bellied Go-Away Birds began to show themselves.



*31 species of starlings are represented in East Africa
including the stunning Golden-breasted Starling a dry country specialist*

We had a constant soundtrack of high pitched mournful calls from Blue-naped Mousebirds and the squeaky chatter of White-browed Sparrow-weavers and Northern White-crowned Shrikes as we drove around. Weavers and shrikes are certainly the conspicuous families here with White-headed Buffalo-Weaver, Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver, Donaldson Smith's Sparrow-Weaver, Black-headed Social-Weaver, Taita Fiscal, Rosy-patched Bush-shrike, Grey-headed Bush-shrike, Three-streaked Tchagra and Brubru to go along the two just mentioned.

A group of 5 Beisa Oryx were surprisingly confiding allowing us to get very close as 3 of them were happily laying down in the shade besides our track.

We paused along the track to watch a large herd of two dozen Reticulated Giraffes cross in front and behind us, and along the river a lioness was resting the shade of an acacia with guineafowl and impala not too far away from her. Dik-Diks were often seen in pairs or threes, this being this year's offspring, in the shadow of a shrub or never too far from it. Impalas were the most common of the antelopes with bachelor and breeding herds, some as many as 50 strong a regular sight, and there were a handful of Vervet Monkeys. It was tough to tear ourselves away from lions, elephants, giraffes and Eastern Chanting Goshawks feeding on rodents but lunch was beckoning.

Following our siesta we left at 4pm for the afternoon game drive. A Grey-headed Kingfisher and small troop of Olive Baboons gave us a send off and we were soon looking at African Mourning Doves and a group of 11 Rufous Chatterers, part of that noisy family of babblers. We worked the other side of the river finding a handful of new species including Yellow-spotted Petronia, Pygmy Batis, Cardinal Woodpecker, Red-fronted Warbler, Rattling Cisticola, Somali Short-toed Lark and Brubrus. Better looks were had of Donaldson-Smith's, Pale Flycatcher and Three-streaked Tchagra and along with a herd of Elephants we had a baby Grevy's Zebra and her mother. Along the river it was relatively quiet with a giraffe and a couple of elephants nearby and a Martial Eagle looking for a roost site on the upper branches of dead trees.

Day 4 – Samburu

At first light along the sandy river bank in front of our rooms a Slender-tailed Nightjar was busy finishing up an evening of work while a few Marabous and Social Lapwings patrolled the area. Olive Baboons could be seen on the far bank and a Hooded Vulture and Palm Nut Vulture were perched on the tree in front of the dining area. The vehicle parking area produced a pair of Grey-headed Bush-shrikes.

The morning's game drive began with a nice assortment of new birds. First up was an Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird followed by a Somali Golden-breasted Bunting, Black-bellied Sunbird and an Abyssinian Scimitarbill along a narrow ravine. George spotted a very tawny African Wild Cat looking right at us from deep with a bush. It would not be our only cat of the day but it took us the rest of the day to find another one. A group of three beautiful Rosy-patched Bush-shrikes were feeding along the tracks and we would come across a Grey Wren-Warbler, Cardinal Woodpecker and Little Bee-eaters before reaching the river. Here we followed the riverine habitat stopping to see Tawny Eagles and martial Eagles in flights, the later at one stage bringing a rodent to the nest for what looked like a fully fledged chick. An African White-backed Vulture was sitting at the top of a bare tree with a Ruppell's Vulture beside it for comparison. The beautiful two toned colored bill of the Namaqua Dove with its matching purple wing spots could be seen at very close quarters as it looked for seeds in the sand soil. In the air a few Mottled Swifts and African Palm Swifts would zip by while a pair of Fan-tailed Ravens crossed from one hillside to another. Along the Isiolo river which was more like a good sized stream Chestnut Weavers and a few Cutthroat Finches were taking turns bathing. At the meeting point with the Ewaso Nyiro and isiolo rivers Black-headed Herons and a Green-backed Heron along with Nile Crocodiles were patiently waiting for prey to come their way. Nearby a female Black Cuckoo-shrike and Buff-bellied Warbler were playing hide-and-seek with us at the top of an acacia. We watched a pair of African Orange-bellied Parrots with the male regurgitating food to the female as a prelude to several very brief matings. On the return journey 3 male Pygmy Falcons were stalking prey from the tops of various acacia bushes. Two African Bare-eyed Thrushes stood motionless in the shadows of a large bush and in the open acacia scrub we came across White-bellied Canary and Yellow-vented Eremomela.

As we pulled into the lodge a Lesser Honeyguide was examining one of the buildings eaves and it turned out to be one of many birds in a mixed flock moving through the canopy. The bulk of the party comprised

of Red-headed Weavers with individual Black-headed Oriole, Black-bellied Sunbird and a female Black Cuckoo-shrike. At the far end of the cabins a pair of Verreaux's Eagle Owls were roosting near to their massive nest and a Narina Trogon was quietly perched in the shade of the huge trees. Along the path to the cabins we came across Grey-backed Camaroptera's and Brown Parisoma's while there was great euphoria amongst the four Taiwanese photographers as they came to get us to show us an African Pygmy Kingfisher they had just found hunting in a dry gully.



Inhabitants of semi-desert bush Beisa Oryx are less dependent on water than any other large antelope

At 4pm we ventured out for the afternoon game drive picking up a lone Singing Bush Lark and amongst a large flock of Chestnut Sparrows and Black-capped Social-Weavers a single breeding plumage Red-billed Quelea. A pair of Secretary Birds must have just flown up onto their nest on top of an acacia shrub as one of them was bowing and raising its wings as if to greet its mate before they both settled down for the evening.

We could not locate the lioness and her three two week old cubs yesterday but today word came over the radio as we were beginning to head back to the lodge that she had been sighted. A 10 minute drive was all it took and the usual array of vehicles alerts us to her presence. Resting between shrubs the cubs were only feet away from her. She got up and stretched her legs walking a few paces before laying down once again and having the cubs climb over and play with her. Whenever she could she would lick them and two of them settled down to suckle while she nuzzled with the third. Time always seems to go by just like that but dusk was setting in and we had to get back.

Day 5 – Samburu; Naro Moru

For our final few hours at Samburu we ventured into another part of the park. We stopped for a Silver-backed Jackal walking home from a night on the town and located a Hunter's Sunbird. We made numerous stops trying to locate anything we had not seen to date. Grey Wren Warbler, Pale Flycatcher, Yellow-vented Eremomela, Cutthroats, Chestnut Sparrow and a pair of Pygmy Batis we had all seen but new were Northern Crombec the tiny warbler without a tail, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, a large flock of Somali Short-toed Larks and the huge Kori Bustard. There was considerable excitement amongst a small group of Crested Francolins as they had spotted an Eastern Chanting Goshawk which flew into the tangled shrub and tree which they were hiding under. It was not long before the noisiest one came out followed by another. The goshawk was on the wrong side with too much vegetation between it and its prey. We thought we were going to see action but it turned out that the goshawk just scared the francolins as it flew to a better vantage point.



Amongst the mammals, we came across a small family of Gerenuks with the male on his hind legs showing the younger one just how one reaches the upper and juiciest branches of acacia. A rather large elephant herd cut right across the road in front of us and walked parallel to the road with us for a while. Beisa Oryx had become common on this particular trip and we got our last looks at a herd of Grevy's Zebra with a couple of calves came just a few hundred meters before the Ngare Mara Gate. From here it was back onto the bumpy dirt road (soon to be paved) and the steady uphill drive to the Central Highlands.

In the Somali language the word Gerenuk means 'giraffe necked', so named for its elongated posture as it stands on its hind legs to browse.

By early afternoon we had reached the Naro Moru River Lodge. Following a short break we took advantage of the sun as there was thunder rumbling and dark skies approaching from the vicinity of Mt. Kenya. As it turned out we put in 3 hrs wandering around the grounds basically spending time in 3 locations two of which were looking at 2 trees, a bottlebrush full of sunbirds and a Yellow-barked Acacia with an assortment of species flittering about.

We began by checking the river and finding our two target species, a Mountain Wagtail and those shy African Black Ducks. African Dusky Flycatchers and Slaty White-eyed Flycatchers are pretty numerous here. The wide variety of nectar producing flowers make this a haven for sunbirds and we saw 7 species, Amethyst, Green-headed, Collared, Variable, Northern Double-collared and Tacazze on a bottlebrush and also saw Scarlet-chested in another spot.



Sunbirds with their iridescent plumage and curved bills can be found wherever there is an abundance of nectar producing flowers. 53 species can be found in East Africa with most being solitary or seen in pairs. The widespread Scarlet-chested Sunbird is found in gardens and woodland edges.

The fever tree produced Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, Chin-spot Batis, Red-faced Crombec, Red-fronted Barbet, Yellow-throated Apalis, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird and below it Ruppell's Robin-Chat, Red-cheeked Cordon-blues and Purple Grenadiers. A section of scrub along with a narrow line of trees by the staff quarters was a great success with Tropical Boubou, the stunning Sulphur-bellied Bush-shrike, Thick-billed Seedeater and Yellow-whiskered Greenbul, along with Western Citril and Speckled Mousebirds hanging onto the dripping spigot and having a drink. Perched atop the shrubs going up the far side of the depression was a Yellow Bishop and a Brown-crowned Tchagra. Black Saw-wings were almost always in view and a couple of Wire-tailed Swallows perched on the tennis court fence. Mammals were represented with a Black-and-white Colobus peering down at us and a Southern Tree Hyrax on the trunk of a large tree doing the best it could to get some sleep. Once it became dark their eerie calls sounding like kid goats crying along with a short loud tight flatulence emission often broke the silence of the night.

Day 6 – Naro Moru; “Mackinder”; Thompson Falls; Nakuru NP

Following an hour and a half's drive around the Solio Plains we met Paul at his farm where we were duly shown the MacKinder's Cape Eagle Owl on her nest ledge with a chick estimated to be about 3 weeks old. African Black Swifts were flying all around us and likely using the cliff face as a nesting site. An African Harrier Hawk circled over our heads and a pair of Black-chested Snake Eagles were in the adjacent valley. A long search for Golden-winged Sunbird only gave us the briefest of views while a Bronzed Sunbird was more cooperative. Western Citril and Brimstone Canary showed really well and we heard Green-backed Camaroptera. At the quarry Hamerkop and Malachite Kingfisher both perched on rocks in the water.

By noon we had crossed the equator 3 times within the space of ½ a mile, the only problem being that the first two locations were ‘faux equators’ with vendors trying to attract visitors before the real one! Nearby we stopped at Thomson Falls a 400 foot waterfall that flows into a wooded valley. Being next to the main road this is a major attraction and was full of schoolchildren dressed in their individual school color uniforms. Our only find here was a Von Hohnel’s Chameleon besides the path.

After having lunch at the picnic table of yet another equator kiosk we reached Kenya’s 4th largest city, NaKuru. On the southern end of the town lies Nakuru National Park with the soda lake being the dominant feature. The entrance road had a pair of Southern Ground Hornbills walking through the tall grass fields while at the main gate the look and feel of the entrance to the park was different. It was being rebuilt and the usual cheeky Vervet Monkeys were nowhere in sight, though there were plenty of Ruppell’s Long-tailed Starlings. Also different was a large dark storm moving down from the escarpment towards us and by 3.30 it felt like dusk with cooler temperatures, drizzle and a few claps of thunder. It was soon obvious that Rattling Cisticolas were very happy here as there was a plethora of them. Even a Hunter’s Sunbird had had enough and was chasing 2 of them. Several dark morph Augur Buzzards were getting wet as was a Long-crested Eagle with its occipital crest drooped forward. A small party of White-crested Helmet-shrikes passed us by flying short distances from branch to branch never seeming to pause long enough to catch their breath. Two Grey-backed Fiscals alighted on a dead branch low to the ground as we exited the acacia woods and entered the wide open short grass area that buffers the soda lake. The lake was rimmed with rather large pockets of Great White Pelicans primarily where the freshwater was being fed down the slopes in small streams to the lake. The Lesser Flamingo show that Nakuru is famous for was not to be seen with only a few hundred dotting the edge. Being highly sensitive to changes in chemical composition in these shallow lakes means they could abandon one in favor of another at a moment’s notice. There are only a handful of soda lakes here in the Rift Valley and they must be further north at Bogoria or at Natron on the Tanzanian border where they breed. We’ll find out in a few days time. Nevertheless the sea of white, well if you looked close enough almost peach colored, was quite spectacular and I’m sure they numbered close to one hundred thousand here. Marabou Storks and a handful of Yellow-billed Storks along with egrets added to the spectacle, while smaller shorebirds and waders included Blacksmith Lapwings, Kittilitz Plovers, Little Stints, Curlew Sandpipers and Black-winged Stilts. A large group of Grey-headed Gulls bathed in the fresh water and on shallow sandy spits both White-whiskered and White-winged Terns were roosting with the former far outnumbering the later.



Great White Pelicans, the largest of the two species of pelicans that occur in East Africa

Back on the grassy flats Red-capped Larks took off from in front of our vehicle and we slowed down to watch three White Rhinoceros. A trip up to Baboon Cliffs produced a Leopard Tortoise and the usual monkeys, or should I say baboons, in the drizzle. Heading down we took the upper road coming across a half dozen Rothschild's Giraffe's, a pair of African Cuckoos and Hildebrandt's Francolins. The highlight was certainly the 45 minutes we spent looking first at a lioness walking through the grassy scrub and then spotting a male Lion resting. They seemed to be moving about slightly and soon we realized that we had 3 females, the male and a three week old cub. We could get glimpses of some and occasionally all but the vegetation was really too thick. A male Impala was well aware of their presence and kept snorting and walking closer always making sure that he could see each of them. It looked as though he was within 30 meters at his closest point, but once he realized he had lost sight of the male, and that the females looked as though they were intent on making a kill, he bolted. Probably a good move and he certainly lived another day. The pride continued to walk slowly up the slope towards the road. By now almost a dozen vehicles were jockeying for the best bet for 'the' perfect view. Though we were not in the front row it was wonderful to watch as they ambled across the road with the cub running to catch up and the male bringing up the rear. The king of the beast had just walked right by us. One could not have asked for such a perfect end to the day.

Day 7 – Nakuru NP

At breakfast we could see a large hippo in the small pond in front of the dining room. The small but lovely grounds of the Lodge produced Chin-spot Batis, Red-faced Crombec, Buff-bellied Warbler and a Little Rock Thrush. This morning's game drive through the beautiful Yellow-bark Acacia woodland along the east side of the lake had a continuous soundtrack of Rattling Cisticolas some in display mode. We began with a couple of male Impala's fighting horn to horn until one was chased away. A male Ostrich and his three females were amongst a couple of courting Warthogs. A small pool of water held a Wood Sandpiper and Pied Kingfisher and along a narrow body of pooling water several Greenshanks and Blacksmith's Plovers bathed as an African Fish Eagle called from a perch high up an acacia. Hunter's Sunbirds, Grey-backed Camaroptera's and African Hoopoes were fairly numerous and a Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater was catching insects and returning to its nesting burrow a foot off the ground along the road. A little further down three White Rhinoceros happily fed on the short grass though one did get a little agitated when a branch got in the way of its horn. Both Black-crowned and Brown-crowned Tchagras moved through the understory and possibly the same party of White-crested Helmet-shrikes that we saw yesterday moved through the mid level of the acacias in quick fashion as they are prone to do. We came across two woodpecker species Bearded and Grey, the later in the same tree as a Black-headed Oriole, Diederik Cuckoo, Red-fronted Tinkerbird and African Paradise Flycatcher. There was a glimpse or two of Red-chested Cuckoo, as one would expect it did call frequently, but we made up for it with several Black Cuckoos and a Black Cuckoo-shrike. Brown Babblers, Mountain Thrush, Brown Parisoma, Streaky Seedeater, Red-headed Weavers nest building and a striking male Violet-backed Starling in the light made up the remainder of the sightings. Along the lakes edge where a small freshwater stream entered, hundreds of Great White Pelicans were roosting as a few dozen Greater Flamingos feed in the shallows. Red-knobbed Coot, Glossy Ibis and Little, Intermediate and Great Egret were also there as was a Malachite Kingfisher and Green Sandpiper in the stream. The show here at the lake certainly belonged to the pelicans as scores were in flight circling above the acacias and occasionally peeling off and coming back down to roost or feed.

This was a gorgeous day for a siesta before the afternoon game drive. As we were getting ready a Lioness walked passed outside the lodge compound and sat down 200 meters away making this a great start. We took the Makalia Falls circuit in the hopes of seeing a Black Rhinoceros or Leopard. First up was an African Grey Hornbill, a pair of Black-chested Snake-eagles and Silver-backed Jackals. For a change we came across something other than a Rattling Cisticola, this time 3 Zitting Cisticolas chasing each other.

Sitting on top of a Buffalo were a couple of Wattled Starlings and other new birds included Schalow's Wheatear and Plain-backed Pipit. Mammals were very common with the bulk being made up of Impalas, Zebras and Buffalo. Several groups of Rothschild's Giraffes slowly moved through the tall acacias and troops of baboons numbered in the 70's each.

Three wonderful mammal experiences were encountered. The first being very comical. At one of the few picnic sites there was a small congregation of about 10 people sitting and lying down on the ground listening to a lady, who was standing, talking (preaching?) to them. In the next row behind the audience, listening intently was a male Olive Baboon. He blended in so perfectly that I had to believe that this was not the first time this group had shown up for a meeting. Not far away we came across a large herd of Impala. There was one male that was trying to control one of his many females, but for about 30 individuals it seemed to be play time. They would chase each other around turning on a dime, jumping, hopping, and leaping in a most extraordinary way, either lifting their front legs high up and then going forward or stretching and raising their hind legs, which would make their backs curve downwards. For 5 minutes this went on and it was a special sight to witness. Then came the hardest of the Big 5, the Leopard, laying down on a Yellow-bark Acacia branch about 15 feet off the ground and in full view. One could not have asked for better. It must have just climbed the tree as it was focused on hunting, looking around in all directions for prey. Nearby were zebras, but they are too big. It was not long before it descended the trunk and vanished into the scrub, only to resurface behind the vehicles in a heavily vegetated section. It then proceeded to cross the track in front of us and climb 6 feet into the crotch of another acacia, using this as another lookout. Once again it looked all around and then climbed down and walked further away from us, but by now the zebras were fully aware of what was going on and all of them were giving him their full attention.



Though the most numerous and widespread of the big cats, the Leopard is the most elusive of the “Big 5”

Day 8 – Nakuru NP; Baringo CC

As we exited the lodge grounds Zebra's were grazing either side of the road as we descended towards the lake. Several twosomes were jostling and playing with each other. Around the pools of water in the open low grasslands we came across African Spoonbill, Yellow-billed Duck and a Hottentot Teal, the smallest African duck named after the smallest African tribe. Singing on the edge of the road was a Rufous-naped Lark the first of many we would encounter, and feeding in the taller grasses were non breeding Long-tailed Widowbirds while Zitting Cistoclas chased each other around. The highlight here was watching a pair of Pin-tailed Wyhdahs displaying, the male in flight with his long tail swaying as he slowly bounced his way towards the female. We made our way through the carpet of 'waste-paper' flowers to the lakes edge and drove along the mud flats. Pelicans of course were numerous with a few Lesser Flamingos dotted about. Terns and gulls loafed near the waterline where Greenshanks and 3 Marsh Sandpipers could be found. Other new species included Banded Martin, Grassland Pipit, Little Sparrowhawk, Arrow-marked Babblers, Yellow-rumped Seedeaters, White-fronted Bee-eaters, Wahlberg's Honeyguide, White-bellied Tits gathering food for their chicks and a group of Black-winged Lapwings. Tawny Eagle, Grey-backed Fiscal, Three-streaked Tchagra, Hildebrandt Francolin and Red-capped Lark were all seen well. A large group of puddling Abyssinian Admirals and a few Citrus Swallowtails made up the bulk of the butterflies.

The park is an excellent showcase for the mammals, usually always having something in sight. Today we concentrated of trying to locate rhinos. White's were actually fairly easy to come by with groups of 3 to five seen on 4 occasions. The tougher one is the Black Rhinoceros and while watching White's, Buffalo and their calves and a Spotted Hyena walking along the mud flats, no doubt questioning where all the flamingos had gone, George spotted a pair of Black's in the distance. We could see that the structure was different to the Whites. The Black's having a more de-curved back and shorter neck, better suited for browsing and a prehensile upper lip for grasping shrubbery as opposed to the White's wide and straight mouth.



Poached almost to extinction in the 1970's the Black Rhinoceros is the smallest and rarest of the two species encountered on safari

The 2 ½ hr journey north from the main gate at Nakuru NP to Lake Baringo was rather uneventful. We arrived in time to get in an hour's walk around the grounds. The water level on the lake was considerably higher than even last year and had wiped out a stunning 12 foot termite mound. African Fish Eagles noisily proclaim their dominance of the area with a nest at the top of a tree bang in the middle grounds. Around them are stick nests belonging to White-billed Buffalo-Weavers and a good number could be seen sitting on a nearby branch with wings outstretched displaying to prospective females. Black-headed Weavers and Jackson's Golden-backed Weavers were busy collecting blades of grass to put the finishing touches on their intricate nests. Those that had finished could be seen hanging upside down and flapping their wings in an effort to draw attention to any female to might be willing to inspect their masterpiece. If she is suitably impressed then his efforts will be well rewarded. A few Lesser Masked Weavers and Little Weaver s were also around. With the lack of vegetation separating the water from the grass Black Crakes could be seen right out in the open. The grounds have a good offering of large trees which make them favorable to all kinds of birds from the large White-bellied Go-Away-Bird to the brilliantly colored Woodland Kingfisher to the tiny iridescent Beautiful Sunbird. Breeding activity was in full swing with a Red-fronted Barbet busy excavating a nest cavity and a Bearded Woodpecker flying into her nest. D'Arnaud's Barbets were very noisy while the more colorful Red-and-Yellow Barbets gathered in a group of 5 to catch the last of the day's rays before heading in for the night. This is a wonderful place for woodpeckers and we also saw Cardinal and Nubian Woodpeckers. With the water levels so high the acacia shrubs that would normally be on dry land have died back and what reed habitat is now well underwater. All we could see in this area was a few Pied Kingfishers and a Malachite Kingfisher.

Day 9 – Lake Baringo; Baringo CC; Lake Bogoria NP

It was a full day of birding that began sunny and warm and finished with a spectacular double rainbow and storm over Lake Bogoria. The mornings birding around the Country Club grounds produced a Red-fronted Barbet digging out his nest hole, the first of many Madagascar Bee-eaters, a White-throated Bee-eater, Northern Masked Weaver, African Pygmy Kingfisher and African Grey Flycatcher. Following breakfast we picked up Francis and headed into drier acacia shrub and located a beautiful pair of Hueglin's Coursers and Black-headed Lapwings. We were now back into White-headed Buffalo Weaver habitat and also saw Buff-bellied Warbler and White-bellied Canary.



The distinctive call of the African Fish Eagle is known as “ the voice of Africa”

We then boarded a boat called the “Skimmer” for a couple of hours and ventured out onto Lake Baringo. Madagascar Bee-eaters were a common sight sitting atop the dead waterlogged acacias along with a few Little Bee-eaters. Green Wood-hoopoe, Namaqua Doves and a Hemprich’s Hornbill all flew by along the tree line while Striated Herons, African Darters and Long-tailed Cormorants could be found perched low in either the acacias or on the boulders. The local Njemps fisherman make small one man rafts out of Ambatch which is similar to balsa wood and that they paddle with small hand paddles. We purchased a few fish (perch) from one of the Njemps fisherman and continued of our way further out into the lake where we whistled up an African Fish Eagle from the top of a distant tree. Throwing out a fish it duly took off and we watched it approach, then turn and swoop in to grab the fish much to the delight of the photographers and a memory that will certainly be etched in our minds for a long time. Francis spotted a snake coiled up a few feet off of the water in an acacia. It turned out to be a Red-spotted Beak Snake. Nile Monitors and Nile Crocodiles basked on the rocks while a nice grouping of hippos were found together. On the edge of the wet grass African Spoonbill, Yellow-billed Stork, Little and Great Egret were busy feeding while four Greater Painted-Snipe were spotted tucked into the grasses. The water levels being so high made it tough to locate much else. There was a Squacco Heron that flushed out of the vegetation and on the Island we came across a Senegal Thick-knee.

At lunch we watched a great number of birds come into feed on a large flat slab of stone that was the main feeding station. After providing rice for breakfast the balanced diet called for moist bread crumbs for lunch. We counted 18 species that paid a visit – Arrow-marked Babblers, Rufous Chatterers, Spotting Morning Thrush, Grey-headed Sparrow, Jackson’s Golden-backed Weaver, Little Weaver, Black-headed Weaver, Northern Masked Weaver, Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, Red-billed Hornbill, Jackson’s Hornbill, Superb Starling, Ruppell’s Starling, D’Arnaud’s Barbet, Red-and-Yellow Barbet, Dark-capped Bulbul and African Mourning Dove. Of note was an individual White-billed Buffalo-Weaver that came in with a nice bright green acacia stem, placed it down, proceeded to stuff himself with bread, paused to stop a weaver from picking up his stem, then continued on eating before picking up the stem and flying off.

Lake Bogoria is almost an hours’ drive south of Baringo and noticeably warmer. As the road conditions worsened the closer we got we began to see Common Ostriches here and there, some in groups of as many as 10. Of all things we found one House Sparrow at the entrance gate. A Northern Brownbul was also there. On the long drive over the pot holed riddled road to the Hot Springs at the southern end we began with Red-billed Oxpeckers on goats, a pair of Dark-chanting Goshawks and we were back in White-headed Buffalo Weaver country. Pygmy Batis could be heard and Eastern Violet-backed Sunbirds showed their brilliant iridescent color. The skies were full of Black Swifts, White-rumped Swifts and to a lesser extent Little Swifts and Lesser Striped Swallows no doubt flying low and in front of the impending storm. Grey-headed Kingfishers, Blue-naped Mousebirds, Emerald-spotted Wod-Doves, Rattling Cisticola, Grey-backed Camaroptera and African Firefinch were regulars down the acacia lines road. From time to time we could see that lakes edged lines with concentrations of flamingos, nearly all being the deep pink of Lesser’s. Every once in a while a line of flamingos could be seen extending out into the deeper water, these being the flamingos swimming, one behind the other. Beside the road a White-browed Coucal was busy feeding on a grasshopper while a Hamerkop and Striate (Green-backed) Heron were searching for their meal. Vitelline Masked Weaver, Abyssinian Scimitarbill, White-bellied Go-Away Bird, Black-throated Barbet and African Grey Flycatcher all perched long enough for a quick look before flying away. The beautiful Silverbird was far more cooperative flying short sorties and returning to the shade of the lower acacia branches. We caught sight of 4 Cape Teal flying along the shoreline but they must have landed out of sight as we could not relocate them. Black-cheeked Waxbills and Red-cheeked Cordon-blues inched their way down from the roadside banks to get a drink of water from a puddle.



Masses of Lesser Flamingos ring the salt water lakes of the Rift Valley

As we neared the Hot Springs the sky was visible darker, the color of the flamingos a deeper shade of pink, white caps dotted the rough blue green algae water as the wind picked up and a rainbow began near the water line and extended up against the 1300 foot eastern side hills and over the top to descend further down the lake. We made a 15 minute stop at the Hot Springs and did our best to hold our balance against the wind. The hot spray could be seen blown well across towards the road. We stood by a small bubbling pool and marveled at the intermittent warm and cool breezes we were feeling between the springs and the storm as we watched the storm come across the water towards us. Some flamingos decided to bare it out while other took to the skies and did their best to stay on course with many being blown in our direction as they tried to head away. Once the rains began we decided to head back through the park keeping one step ahead of the main portion of the storm. A Black-headed Lapwing landed in an open stony section and a large flock of Ostrich were feeding alongside the road. Just after we reach the country club the storm caught up with us.

Day 10 - Baringo Cliffs; Baringo CC

We arrived at the basalt cliffs in time to watch the sunrise at 6:40am over Kowka, the largest of the islands in Lake Baringo. The rains last evening made for some interesting walking conditions with shoes caked in mud that had to scraped off frequently or else they became too heavy to walk in. As the sun caught the cliff face the birds began to warm up and appear. First up were Little Weavers and Three-streaked Tchagras followed by Jackson's Hornbills, White-bellied Canary and White-browed Scrub Robin. The Grey Wren Warbler has a most interesting display, very similar to that of hummingbirds, dropping down about 4 feet and rising up about 8 feet in an arc and repeating this over. Small birds included Pygmy Batis, Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit, Pale Prinia, Yellow-spotted Petronia, Northern Grey Tit, Eastern Violet-backed Sunbirds, Green-winged Pyillias and Red-fronted Warblers. African Grey Flycatchers could be found in small family groups. On the cliff a pair of Lanner Falcons took off from their roost. Bristle-crowned Starlings flew along the escarpment, perched briefly and then dropped out of sight. Black-throated Barbets and Brown-tailed Rock-Chats chased each other about the large boulders strewn all down the slope and the high pitched call of the Rock Hyrax could be heard.

An hour and a half of birding zipped by and we returned for breakfast where we added four new species to our feeder list, Brown Babblers, Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver, Speckled Pigeon and Magpie Starlings. An hour later we ventured back to the cliffs to find Slender-tailed Nightjar sleeping at the base of an acacia blending in so well amongst the rocks. Black-throated Barbet, Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Hunter's

Sunbird and White-bellied Go-Away Birds accompanied us. Our next stop was to see Spotted Thick-knee. On the way we stopped to look at Ruppell's Rock Agama and Hildebrandt's Starling. The evening's rain had meant that the owls had relocated themselves and finding them proved harder than anticipated, so we returned back to the club. Here Speckled Mousebird, Nubian Woodpecker, Bearded Woodpecker, Black-headed Oriole, Slate-coloured Boubou and White-bellied Go-Away Bird were relatively noisy which alerted me to a pair of Verreaux Eagle Owl's roosting under the top of a flat-topped acacia.



The savannah dwelling Verreaux Eagle Owl with its distinctive pink eyelids is the largest of the owls

At 11:30 George came to notify us that Francis had found 'owls'. We all piled back into the van and made the short drive beyond the airstrip. We passed by a Red-chested Cuckoo and were soon whistling in a Pearl-spotted Owlet. Two responded but one was given away by the calls of mobbing birds. Next up was a pair of Northern White-faced Scops Owls, one of which somehow managed to conceal itself amongst the acacia branches and the other was more out in the open on top of the tree. It was then back for lunch where we had our 23rd species in the feeder area, a Lesser Honeyguide.

The afternoon walk throughout the grounds and neighboring Robert's Camp was rather slow with the usual suspects. One cannot say enough about the aptly named Beautiful Sunbird. Not only are they abundant, they are busy defending their nectaring flowers from each other and when they come out into the sunlight the iridescent green, yellow, red and black combination is certainly something no adjective can describe. We had been regularly hearing Red-chested Cuckoo and once we heard it again we were

able to track it down. Beth needed to get a look at African Pygmy Kingfisher and as luck would have it we came across one perched in the shade.

Day 11 – Baringo CC; Kerio Valley; Western Highlands; Rondo Retreat

Hippos were on the lawns in front of our rooms before day break. A walk down to the dock produced a Goliath Heron and a couple of Bristle-crowned Starlings flying from fruiting tree to tree. Leaving the club Holly spotted a Savannah Monitor peering out from the top of a termite mound.



Africa's second largest reptile, the Savannah Monitor, is a solitary reptile that favors termite mounds away from water

Today was mainly a travel day as we traversed the great Rift Valley going over the Tugen Hills and down through the Kerio Valley. A stop at the river produced several calling Hartlaub's Turacos and looks at Green Wood-Hoopoes, Silverbird, Black-headed Oriole, Northern Puffback and African Cuckoo. Climbing the Western Rift escarpment we made a brief stop at the Iten overlook and located Brown Parisomas at a nest. We took our picnic lunch adjacent to a cattail marsh and wheat fields where we were treated to displaying Red-collared Widowbirds and Jackson's Widowbirds, the later with its unique pathetic jumping display, barely a foot off its grass stalk. At one point about 15 of them rose up all in unison to about 15 feet as a female came into sight. The Fan-tailed Widows spent more time just flying about over the cattails. A Malachite Sunbird gave tantalizing views as it flew by and the black and white subspecies of Common Stonechat *albofasciata* could be seen well. We made a bathroom stop in Eldorat and had Bronze Mannikins and Yellow White-eyes in the gardens. West of Eldorat the road conditions worsened making the ride very bumpy. The good news was at least someone was making an effort to fill the pot holes. A stop to check out a marshy area along the road produced Long-toed and African Wattled Lapwings. Nearing Kakamega Forest tea plantations became more numerous and the weather looked very promising with bright sunshine.

At 4 o'clock we pulled in the beautiful Rondo Retreat and were soon out amongst the manicured grounds to see what was about. Noisy Black-and-white Casqued Hornbills were hard to miss as were Struhlmann's Starling flittering about the canopy. Bronzed Sunbirds are the most numerous birds in the grounds. Grey-headed Negrofinch, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird and Yellow White-eyes put in an appearance while on the lawn Northern Black Flycatcher and Yellow-fronted Canaries could be seen feeding. The striking Double-toothed Barbet showed well and once inside the forest path we came across a family of Grey-breasted Barbets. Yellow-whiskered and Kakamega (Shelley's) Greenbuls were easily spotted and a Mountain Illadopsis showed really well on the edge of the path. The skies had darkened and thunder was rolling in as we made our way back into the open gardens. Just as the rains began a Great Blue Turaco began to call and two Snowy-capped Robin-Chats were busy chasing each other through the hedgerow.



Two of Kakamega's most sought after birds, the turkey-sized arboreal fruit-eating Great Blue Turaco (l) and the forest insect-catching Blue-headed Bee-eater (r)

Day 12 – Kakamega

The morning began with the remains of yesterday evening cloud cover and after a few hours' sun and blue sky replaced it. Starting in the gardens a Double-toothed Barbet visited a fruiting tree and a Ross's Turaco flew over our cabin, Blue Monkeys could be seen moving about the mid canopy and a Red-legged Sun Squirrel was busy gnawing on nuts. Though there was considerable bird song those that dominated the morning chorus belonged to Blue-spotted Wood Doves, Yellow-rumped Tinkerbirds, Yellow-billed Barbet and Joyful Greenbuls, the later sounding a lot like a group of babblers. Our first encounter with a pair of Chubb's Cisticola's began here and our only African Blue Flycatchers were seen by the main gate.

Eastern Bronzed-naped Pigeons flew over head and a couple of African Green Pigeon lit in the canopy. African Dusky Flycatchers were busy just outside the main gate along with Tawny-flanked Prinias and an African Thrush, and a Snowy-capped Robin Chat obliged by sitting at the base of the evergreen hedgerow. We walked for over three hours taking our time and covered about 1km of the road. There was a steady procession of mainly bicycles carrying plastic milk jugs but also a few cars. A number of birds were only heard and these included Common Wattle-eye, Ludher's Bush-shrike and Tambourine Dove. Small parties of Black-collared Apalis, White-chinned Prinias and Black-crowned Waxbills were often encountered, the later liking areas with thick patches of Honey Sunflowers in the sun along with Western Citrils and Yellow-fronted Canaries. It took a while for us to draw it out but in the end a Black-faced Rufous Warbler showed. Yellow-crested Woodpecker was heard and seen pecking away at the dead wood high in a canopy tree and a male Petit's Cuckoo-shrike alighted on an open branch as both Black and White-headed Sawwings patrolled the dirt road, and an African Goshawk circled overhead. A Red-tailed Monkey climbed a tree and sat long enough for us to see while Black-and-white Colobus were often sighted. Several forest weavers were found including a Black-billed putting the finishing touches to its nest, several Black-necked and the female Brown-capped, which just happens to have a black cap, working its way along a branch just as a woodpecker would. One of the stunning forest species is the Blue-headed Bee-eater and we got to see 3 or 4 make numerous sorties. Along with a multitude of Joyful Greenbuls, a Slender-billed Greenbul and Red-tailed Bristle-bill were the other members of this family we came across. A female African Shrike-Flycatcher had caught an insect and was trying to bang it against the branch to kill it before devouring it. A small party of Dusky Tits descended from the tree tops to mid level to where we could easily see their red eyes. With the sun out butterflies began to get active and we had Brown Pansies, Layman, Black-and-Orange, *Acraea perenna*, Large Vagrant, Sudan White Caper, *Eagris lucetia*, *Bicyclus funebris*, *Celaenorrhinus proxima*, Pearl Charaxes, Mocker Swallowtail, Mother of Pearl and the stunning (at least from the underside) White-banded Charaxes.



The beautiful grounds of the Rondo Retreat

After lunch we took it easy on the porch in the company of a Jackson's Forest Lizard, Tambourine Doves and Ross's Turaco's. The afternoon began full of promise as we pulled away from the Retreat and heading towards the bridge. Soon after we got out dark clouds and thunder began to roll in and all we got was about half an hour's birding in before it really came down. There was a Turner's Eremomela singing high in the canopy, a Honeyguide Greenbul amongst vines and a Grey-capped Warbler and Buff-throated Apalis showing themselves. We turned up a road going uphill and had a White Spotted Flufftail, Blue-shouldered Robin Chat and Olive Sunbird singing and as we began to track them the rains began!



The crimson wings of a Ross's Turaco in flight are unmistakable

Day 13 – Kakamega

The evenings rains were gone and we were able to get in a good mornings birding beginning near the Kakamega Environmental and Education Program (KEEP) center with a Square-tailed Drongo and assorted greenbuls (Yellow-whiskered, Kakamega, Joyful and Slender-billed) and sunbirds including Western Olive and Green-throated. A Scaly-breasted Illadopsis was calling from the undergrowth and Brown-eared Woodpeckers tapped on the tree trunks as White-chinned Prinias worked the lower shrubs. Both Bocage's and Ludher's Bush-shrikes were seen very well. In the open area by the planted tree section both Bronze and Black-and-White Mannikins were feeding on grass stalks and a Lesser Honeyguide was seen flying away. On the Pump House Trail, if one took away all the Joyful Greenbul chatter things would have been rather quiet. Several Equatorial Akalat's showed well as did Western Black-headed Oriole, Dusky Crested Flycatcher and Yellow-spotted Barbet. At the pumped house we came across a party of Banded Prinia's and Holly spotted our first Great Blue Turacos, two of which quietly flew over our heads into the high canopy. Butterflies began to show themselves where the sun shone through to the vegetation lining the path with Orange Sprites, Little Commodores, African Wood Whites and *Neptis metella* amongst others.

Just after we got into our vehicle there was some excitement amongst us as a Black Mamba crossed the road. We continued on to the bridge where we left off yesterday. We found this section rather quiet as

well. Common Wattle-eyes, Brown-capped Weavers and a flock of 8 White-headed Wood-Hoopoes put on a nice show while Dark-backed Weaver, Square-tailed Drongo and Red-headed Bluebill move through at a good pace. On the edge of the forest we found a Mackinnon's Fiscal and a female Vieillot's Black Weaver.

There was a little bit of excitement after lunch when a Western Banded Snake-Eagle landed in the large tree in the center of the compound. It then headed into the edge of the forest which set off the Colobus Monkeys and sent a Great Blue Turaco back into the tall trees in the compound to feed. A couple of Blue-spotted Wood-Dove were also feeding in the shade on the well manicured lawn. For the afternoon walk we headed back into a section behind KEEP that we did not do this morning. It started out well with a Scaly-breasted Illadopsis, Olive-Grey Camaroptera and Cabanis Greenbuls just after entering the forest. Square-tailed Drongos along with Cabanis and Joyful Greenbuls were the most conspicuous birds of the afternoon along with Blue Monkeys and Black-and-White Colobus'. We certainly got better looks at Brown-eared Woodpecker, African Thrush and Dark-backed Weaver and another great view of Blue-headed Bee-eater. Every so often we would come across a butterfly, the best being the Hobart's Red Glider and Lurid Glider but also a pair of King Foresters, *Catuna* and *Neptis nicobule*. After a long period of seeing next to nothing we had a Black-faced Rufous Warbler and Brown-chested Alethe to finish up in that section of the forest. Back at the Retreat we walk the Pond Trail for half an hour before the rains came and had a pair of the spectacular Red-headed Bluebills coming down to drink from the small stream.



Consummate vegetarians, Black-and-White Colobus Monkeys with their flowing white tail and long hair, are one of a number of primates likely to be encountered

Day 14 – Kakamega; Kisumu; Masai Mara

It was mainly a long travel day covering about 300kms and an assortment of poor road conditions. If it isn't the potholes that get you then all the speed bumps will. After a couple of hours we reached the edge of Lake Victoria on the southern outskirts of Kisumu, one of the main centers of the post election violence. We call this area the Hippo Pools and we did indeed come across a couple of them. The birding was pretty good with cooperative Black-headed Golelele, Red-chested Sunbirds and Carruther's Cisticolas. A Greater Honeyguide was being chased around by a pair of Woodland Kingfishers as we were looking at Black-billed Barbets. We also got our first Black Kite here. A wooden elevated 100' boardwalk has been constructed since I was last here 11 months ago and this certainly was an added bonus. It enabled us to get in deeper into the scrub habitat and small patches of papyrus. A Little Bittern called and we had a good look at Swamp Flycatcher. Continuing on, the paddy field just outside Ahero produced a dozen African Open-billed Storks sitting on the raised field edges along with a few Long-toed Lapwings.



Our first look at the Mara, which means 'dotted plains', as we enter from the north- west and descend the Olooloo escarpment

Heading towards the Olooloo Escarpment which is part of the western edge of the Rift our only birds of significance were 4 Southern Ground Hornbills. Common Zebras in small herds would be seen grazing amongst the Masai cattle. By 4:30 we were getting situated into our lovely tented camp at Kichwa Tembo. The view stretches out over the golden grasses dotted with Balantine trees, giraffes, buffalo, wildebeest and zebras as Warthogs happily feed on the mowed lawn separating the Mara and our accommodations. It was not long before we were on our game drive. Red-necked Spurfowl could be found along the tracks and a Brown Snake-Eagle was perched on a bare tree likely having settled in for the evening. Rufous-naped Larks, Winding and Stout Cisticolas could be seen singing from short acacia bushes and we looked long and hard at a female bustard before determining that it was indeed a Black-bellied Bustard. The mammal show was spectacular with Masai Giraffe and Coke's Hartebeest wondering the plains in family groups and a large concentration of Topi's, Common Zebra, Elephants, Wildebeest and Buffalo in and around a wet area. We came across a pair of sleeping Lions that showed all the signs of being in the long and protracted ritual of mating. The act is usually over with fast followed by going to sleep for a short period before repeating the process over and over again for about 3 days while she is in estrus. It turned out that there was another Lion and Lioness close by so with a lull in the action we turned our attention to the other male before he fell asleep. On the way back to camp we caught sight of a running Bohor Reedbuck, a rather shy antelope usually associated with wet areas.

As I write this a few rain drops are falling on my heavy canvas tent and the sounds of hyenas and zebras can be heard in the adjacent grasslands. I was awoken well before dawn by a Lion roaring within several hundred meters and a Spotted Hyena ‘whooping’ even closer. We are deep in the African bush and this is our lovely soundtrack.

Day 15 – Masai Mara NP

We spent this morning between Tembo and Serena working sections of the Mara River coming across Nile Crocodiles and many hippos, some even venturing out to amble around the river’s edge. A wildebeest crossing would have been the ultimate but about a thousand of them along with a handful of zebras opted to stage on the far side of the river and not cross into the Mara Triangle, the north western section of the Mara that is bordered by the Mara River and the Olooloo escarpment. Maybe this afternoon? Red-necked Spurfowl, Yellow Bishop, Usmabiro Barbets and a Spot-flanked Barbet were all seen before we made it to the Olooloo gate. Once inside Sooty Chats lined the main road and Yellow-billed Oxpeckers were busy cleaning ticks off of Buffalo. A small group of Yellow-rumped Seedeaters and Yellow-mantled Widowbirds could be seen near the road and Zitting Cisticolas were a common sight. Following an Olive Baboon troop was a Grey Kestrel, one of three we would see this morning. As the troop moved across the short grass landscape foraging the kestrel would stay a step ahead getting first pickings at whatever insects would be flushed. A large group of Banded Mongoose scurrying across the terrain completed our mongoose family species for the trip. Once again lions dominated the session. A group of circling vultures alerted us to a possible kill and sure enough the remains of a wildebeest carcass had already been picked clean by the time we had reached it. However, a male Lion was walking about between vehicles making his way to the river to drink, before returning and then laying down and taking in all the attention that was focused on him. Meanwhile 2 Lappet-faced Vultures, the largest, and a Hooded Vulture, the smallest, were amongst the African White-backed and Ruppell’s Vultures that help clean the carcass.



The largest of East Africa’s vultures, the Lappet-faced is able to tear open a carcass

Well rested we headed out at 4pm for the afternoon game drive. It was certainly a gorgeous afternoon with beautiful light. Trying to find something new proved tough but we did get close to a pair of Southern Ground Hornbills, 2 sleeping male Lions with their tails flicking flies off of them and a large herd of Elephants with 3 very young babies. A surprise was coming across a rare female Black Rhinoceros standing in the shade against a large stand of Orange-leafed Crotons with her calf laying down asleep.

Day 16 – Masai Mara; Siana Springs

We had a long drive ahead of us going from the northern end down to the south and then eastwards out of the park. With that in mind we made our way down the main road with a stop for two male Lions and a sleeping Lioness. The number of males that we have seen on this trip has been exceptional. The bulk of the mammal activity has yet to reach this part of the Mara Triangle and the Wildebeest migration as we found out is still in the south eastern part of the park. We came across a dead Wildebeest beside the road that an animal had begun to feast on and that began to draw in a few vultures but the general consensus was that they had to have been full and were not in any hurry to ‘tuck’ in. Bohor Reedbucks were seen once again this time an adult chasing a young one away. The only new bird for the morning was a Wahlberg’s Eagle that was looking for prey amongst the low termite mounds; however we did get to watch a Secretary Bird walking through the tall grasses shuffling its feet to rattle up some prey. The Serena Airstrip was full of activity as the President was about to fly in and spend some time promoting the park from the Serena Lodge. We had our picnic lunch under the shade of a Balantyne tree in an area set aside with table and makeshift branch benches.



The ‘king of the beasts’ the largest and most powerful of the predators in the savannah

At the Mara River Gate Grey-capped Social Weavers and Speckled-fronted Weavers were feeding near the building and had their hanging nests in the surrounding trees. At the bridge Wildebeest carcasses had washed up on the rocks, in all likelihood from those that had drowned on an attempted recent crossing. This is rather commonplace and it was estimated that 10,000 had drowned making the crossing on their way back to the Serengeti late last year. These in turn bought in hundreds of vultures; all four species could be seen, along with Marabou storks to feed on them. A short distance away we stopped for the sake of stopping at the Mara-Serengeti border which separates the parks in name as well as being the border between Kenya and Tanzania. Our only Bare-faced Go-Away Bird happened to fly towards us here. At

this point it became obvious that the migration was definitely going on in this section of the park. The sheer number of Wildebeest and good numbers of Zebra were spread out for many kilometers. At one point they were concentrated by a narrow gully still unsure as to how they were going to cross this harmless ditch. This is what one hopes to see when you come to the Mara at this time of year – migration is full swing, and it is very impressive to see so many thousands of mammals strewn out over the rolling landscape. There would be one more surprise, a Cheetah and 4 cubs that could not have been more than about 3 weeks old. The soft light colored hair that covers their nape and back contrasting with the spots on the remainder of their bodies was priceless. It looked as though she was actively in hunting mode, constantly moving with the cubs trying to keep up. Every so often she would pause on a tall termite mount to scan the surroundings but from what we could see there really was nothing there for her in this particular spot. Her wanderings and area she covers over the coming weeks, maybe even months, will be considerable as she does everything possible to keep her cubs out of harms way.



Cheetahs are generally solitary cats with the female caring for her cubs for up to 2 year. The cubs support a fluffy white mane down their back for the first couple months of their lives.

Once out of the park's Main Gate and away from all the colorful Masai saleswomen it was back onto some rough roads as we worked our way onto the Siana Plain. Rufous-crowned Roller and Grey-headed Silverbill were the first birds followed by Purple Genadiers and Slate-coloured Boubous as we wound our way in to the Siana Springs Intrepid Tented Camp.

Day 17 / August 18 – Siana Springs to Nairobi

An hour's worth of birding after breakfast behind the Tented Camp produced a nice mixed flock of female Black Cuckoo-shrikes, Blue-naped Mousebirds, a male Red-headed Weaver, Purple Grenadiers, Red-cheeked Cordon-blues, Red-fronted Tinkerbirds, Yellow-fronted Canaries, White-bellied Tit, Swahili Sparrow, Yellow-rumped Seedeaters, Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrike, Chin-spot Batis and a Tiny Cisticola. Returning back to Interpids we had a Red-fronted Barbet.

We loaded up our bags and left at 9:20. The road was rough with a few good new stretches and a lot still under construction and needless to say the drive was dusty. We took a couple of breaks one of which gave us our best looks at Hildebrandt Starlings amongst the foraging Acacia Rats! Besides the road on a telephone wire our first Common Kestrel was seen. At 2 pm we began the long climb up the Longonot Escarpment and out of the Rift Valley.

The temperature had certainly changed a half hour later when we climbed out the van at Limuru Ponds. For the first time it was chilly. Red-knobbed Coots were the most numerous birds and amongst them a couple of Moorhens. Ducks were represented with Yellow-billed and Red-billed as well as Hottentot Teal, White-backed Duck and Maccoa Duck. Out of the main body of water Intermediate Egrets and a Glossy Ibis could be seen feeding in the marsh and a White-faced Whistling Duck stood on a muddy ridge. Our next stop was Nairobi about 30 kms away and for once there was little traffic and the drive into the city went smoothly. After checking into our day rooms it was off to the airport for the evening flight home.



Topi, Common Zebra and Defassa Waterbuck in the Mara

August 19 / NAIROBI to TSAVO EAST

Ben and I headed out of Nairobi at 11am going south east on the Mombasa road to Tsavo. The good news is that the road is being reconstructed and though they have made some good progress there is still a long way to go. We had to stop at the main Tsavo West gate to make our park payments. Here we had a Pearl-spotted Owlet and the first of many Fischer's Starlings. It is about a 50 km drive to the Tsavo East gate and we made it there in 45 minutes and were in the park by 4:30.

The bulk of the park is at an elevation of under 1400' and the red sand dominates the landscape along with towering hills all parts of ancient volcano's that break up the flat terrain and give the park its character. On either side of the tracks the scrub is made up of *Acacia commiphora* most of which were leafless at this time and the evergreen *Boscia curiosa*. The birds here are fairly similar to those in the arid north such as at Samburu. Our first birds were pairs of Black-faced Sandgrouse. Bustards were fairly common along the track we took with a few Buff-crested, a pair of White-bellied and a Black-bellied flying down the track and past us. Other 'chickens' included Crested Francolins and Yellow-necked Spurfowls to go along with the Vulturine Guineafowls we had seen early besides the main road. Golden-breasted Starlings light up any tree and one can never get enough of them. Small birds included Grey-capped Social Weavers as well as Black-capped, a few Red-billed Quelea, Yellow-spotted Petronias and Parrot-billed Sparrows. Taita Fiscals and a Common Fiscal stood out as they perched on top of acacias as was an eastern Pale Chanting Goshawk. Hornbills were represented by Von der Decken's and 4 Eastern Yellow-billed. In a burnt field 3 Secretary Birds caught our attention as they flew up from just having fed, and landed in a lone acacia tree. Elephants certainly seem to dominate the park today with encounters of small herds including one that was not happy to see us, so we kept moving. Being the dry season water is concentrated in a few places and all the herds we saw were either at one of these spots or near it. It was nice to see 2 Masai Giraffes come into drink as well. Interestingly both spread their front legs to bend to drink, but only one would drink at a time while the other kept watch. Close by was a pride of Lions feeding on a Buffalo kill most likely one they made this morning. Once the matriarch of the herd had finished drinking she began to make her way over to the lions to harass them. This is also a good park to find Lesser Kudus and we came across 3 females.



Elephant and Giraffes sharing a watering hole in Tsavo East

Once we made the turn at the Voi Gate where the park headquarters is, the vegetation along the riverine habitat is primarily evergreens, consisting of Toothbrush Tree and *Boscia curiosa*. It seems to be a good place for raptors with pairs of African White-backed Vultures, Black-chested Snake-eagle, Bateleurs and Tawny Eagles sighted. We reached the Ndololo Tented Camp at dusk and got escorted by a Masai warrior by the name of John (why would you think it would be anything else) to our tent set well away from the lobby and dining area. The neatest thing was having a Masai Giraffe walking about 100 feet beyond our tent. There is no fence to protect us from the wild animals. We are truly in the bush and once it was dark and just before the nearly full orange moon rose above the distant trees there was a family of 6 Elephants at the small unlit watering hole in front of our tent – 60 feet away. The rule here is that we are always escorted in darkness and should there be any funny business from wild animals then we are to shout ‘*Masai, Masai, Masai*’, and hope he comes running with his spear in hand.

August 20 / TSAVO EAST

The night was actually very quiet with the exception of African Scops Owl and Pearl-spotted Owlet calling on occasion. Above the dining area just after breakfast there was a Grey-headed Bush-shrike working its way up the large open branches.

This morning we did the pipeline area within view of the Voi Safari Lodge, some of which was recently controlled burnt grassland. White-bellied Go-Away Birds, African Hoopoes, D’Arnaud’s Barbets, Yellow-necked Spurfowl, Blue-naped Mousebirds and a few Zanzibar Sombre Greenbuls, Dodson’s Bulbuls and Northern Brownbuls were regulars along the tracks though the most common was probably the Parrot-billed Sparrows, Red-billed Buffalo-Weavers, Black-faced Sandgrouse, Long-tailed Fiscals and Northern White-crowned Shrikes. Taita Fiscals could be seen shortly after leaving the camp as was a pair of Rosy-patched Bush-shrikes. In the Voi Gate area Green-winged Pyillias, Beautiful Sunbirds, Eastern Violet-backed Sunbirds, Grey Wren Warbler and Red-fronted Tinkerbirds kept us busy along with Little Bee-eaters and a Black-throated Barbet. Our first mammal-bird interaction was when Red-billed

Hornbills were following behind Dwarf Mongoose as they began their days foraging through the undergrowth. We would later see Von der Decken's Hornbill doing the same thing. Kirk's Dik-dik's, Gerenuk's, Defassa and Common Waterbuck, Lesser Kudu's and Fringe-eared Oryx were seen along with the more common Zebras, Elephants, Giraffes and Buffalo. As we reached the edge of the burnt grasslands a White-headed Vulture and Tawny Eagle were being harassed by a Pied Crow. A Pangani's Longclaw feed besides the road and about 18 Somali Ostriches had come for a drink with the Zebras. Soaring over the burnt area were Black-chested Snake-eagles and a Secretary Bird while Chestnut-headed Sparrow-Larks and Cutthroat Finches blended in surprisingly well on the ground. A Wood Sandpiper was on the edge of a pool of water, our only shorebird out here. At a small rock outcropping a Rock Hyrax sat out in the open and a little further on while watching a Verreaux Eagle Owl roosting Pearl-spotted Owlets began dueting.

We had some excitement shortly after returning to camp. Heading along the long path to our tent we came almost face to face with a bull Elephant. It was not happy as its head was swinging from side to side and coming towards us. Cries of "*Masai, Masai, Masai*" went up as we ran back towards the dining area, with the elephant behind us. John the Masai and his gang of cohorts came running and screaming. There was a little give and take before they were able to head the bull in the opposite direction. We choose to have lunch before going to our tent and in that time the elephant did indeed walk out of camp. At lunch a Greater Honeyguide was calling and a Yellow-headed Dwarf Gecko inched its way up the tree trunk next to our table. At our tent the watering hole was beginning to dry up and we watched a large troop of Yellow Baboons come through for a drink along with a Warthog.



Yellow Baboon troop coming in for a drink

The afternoon drive began with a couple of White-bellied Bustards before we took the Kanderi Swamp loop road. The number of Elephants along this short stretch was very impressive with at least half a dozen family units. Zebras were chasing each other around and a Coke's Hartebeest was very focused on something. Even a few Zebras were and Elephants seemed to be looking in one particular direction as a dozen Yellow Baboons kept watch from a couple of dead trees. A predator had to be out there somewhere. In the surrounding trees not paying any attention to what might be brewing in the lush green riverine area was an immature Martial's Eagle, 5 Woolly-necked Storks and a handful of Hamerkops. Back on the main track we followed a Silver-backed Jackal until it turned off into the bush. Golden-breasted Starlings lit up a few shrubs even on this overcast afternoon while the bird sighting of the day may have been a couple of male Golden Pipits chasing each other, their bright yellow under wings and flight pattern reminding me of what a giant yellow butterfly would look like. On the road a pair of Black-faced Sandgrouse were guarding their cryptically colored 3 chicks no more than 24 hrs old. Brubru, Lesser Masked Weaver, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Cardinal and Nubian Woodpecker rounded out the birds along this particular stretch. By 5pm we had reached the open short grass area near the Aruba Dam where there is a waterhole near the windmill. We found a pair of Somali Coursers that were attending a nest. Black-headed Lapwings were also seen along with a Secretary Bird at the watering hole. Laying at the base of a lone acacia tree right next to the road were 2 male lions one of which was on his back with his rear legs in the air. We returned back to the Kanderi Swamp to witness the elephant spectacle at dusk when more seem to come drink. There must have been close to 200 of them. However our attention was drawn to a herd that was packed tightly together in a broad front hell bent on chasing 2 lionesses and their 2 cubs away. It is some sight to witness a herd trumpeting and charging them. It soon became obvious why. The lions had recently killed a baby elephant and there was still one lioness feeding on it at the base of a distant shrub. We watched as the elephants made repeated efforts to move the lions, and when we thought it was over a group of 5 elephants of various ages decided to take matters in their own hands and went after the lions. We left them having pushed the lions further away but still not to their satisfaction.



Buffalo, Common Zebra, Elephants and Giraffes in the Kanderi Swamp, one of two areas that remain wet in Tsavo East during the dry season

At dinner we were serenaded by an African Scops Owl and had 2 Lesser Galagos (bushbabies) in the trees above our table.

August 21 / TSAVO EAST to TSAVO WEST

Once again it was an overcast start to the day. The elephant dung pile right next to our neighbors' tent showed that they do indeed come in awfully close. The dark skies and drizzle meant that the pop up roof was down on a number of occasions today though the activity was found in spurts. In the burnt grassland section there were over a dozen Secretary Birds and we watched two chasing each other around with wings outstretched as they ran and every once in a while they would get airborne for a short distance. The ease and speed with which they covered a great deal of ground was astonishing. On a Buffalo we had Red-billed and Yellow-billed Oxpeckers working together doing all the cleaning. At one stop a couple of shrubs had Spotted Morning Thrush, Northern Crombec, Three-streaked Tchagra and White-browed Scrub Robin in them while Orange-bellied Parrots were a little further away Crested Francolin and Yellow-necked Spurfowls dug in the dirt as Spotted Thick-knees stood besides them. Other birds seen included Tsavo Sunbird, Somali Golden-breasted Bunting, Red-wing Lark, Ashy Cisticola, Black-necked Weaver, Pale Prinia, Northern Grey Tit, Blue-capped Cordon-blues, Bare-eyed Thrush, Black-headed Lapwings, Red-and-yellow Barbet and it was a good day for raptors with Gabar Goshawks, Lanner and Black-chested Snake-eagles. One outstanding bird was a Golden Pipit that preened while we photographed it. On the way to the park exit we stopped at Mudanda Rock a whale backed 1 mile long rock outcropping about 50 feet high and estimated to be between 570 and 4,550 millions year old. It certainly gave us a wonderful panoramic of the park and the Yatta Plateau in the distance and we had an African Harrier Hawk circling over the pond that abuts the outcropping.



Golden Pipit



Mudanda Rock

It is only a short distance along the main road between leaving Tsavo East's Manyuni Gate and entering Tsavo West at the River Gate. The scrub habitat here is thicker than in the Tsavo East and we were soon in Tsetse fly country, though it was more of a nuisance than bad just for a short while. Rosy-patched Bush-shrike, African Hawk Eagle and Pygmy Batis all showed well and we caught sight of co-operative hunting between 3 Eastern Pale Chanting Goshawks from the tops of the acacia shrubs and at ground level as they each helped one another flush it out. Though we could not see what they after we suspected it was an Unstriped Ground Squirrel. We paused at a dry river bed bridge and had Rock Hyraxes, Rainbow Skinks and Red-headed Rock Agamas, Hunter's Sunbird and Brubrus. We drove along the western edge of the huge Rhino sanctuary and by the Ngulai Hills to reach the Ngulai Bandas at 1pm. Lunch was waiting in the open air dining room overlook the Ngulai Valley below us. There was some

decent activity around the balcony including Vittelline Masked Weavers, Dodson's Bulbuls, Red-cheeked Cordon-blues, Collared and Variable Sunbird, Pale Prinia and Yellow-rumped Seed eaters. Flying around were Red-rumped Swallows and Rock Martins with the stars of the show being 5 Crowned Hornbills that seemed to have descended from the hill above us to feed.

At 3:30 we headed out to the Chaimu area looking for Leopard. We must have gotten close as the two vehicles in front of us did get to see one even if only for a short time. New birds along here included Amethyst Sunbird, Winding Cisticola, Rufous Chatterer, Red-faced Crombec, Black-headed Oriole, Purple Grenadier, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Three-banded Plover, Grey Heron, Wahlberg's Eagle, White-browed Coucal and African Pygmy Kingfisher. On the northern edge of Rhino Valley Bohor Reedbucks could easily be found in the moist grassy areas, while further along the road we had the good fortune to see a Common Duiker and picked out three Klipspringers on the rocky hill slope.



Male Bohor Reedbucks have forward curving horns. These shy medium sized antelopes inhabit marshy areas in open grasslands

August 22 / TSAVO WEST

At breakfast bread crumbs were put out for the birds on the small stone feeding table in the tree by the verandah. Vittelline Masked Weavers and Dodson's Bulbuls were joined by Red-and-yellow Barbets, D'Arnaud's Barbet, Slaty-coloured Boubou, Black-necked Weaver and an Ochre-bellied Bush Squirrel while Grey-headed Bush-Shrike and Northern Puffback came into the surrounding shrubbery. We left just after 7am with high hopes as the sun was actually beginning to show itself. A small pond held 3 Marabous, Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, 3 Banded Plover and good numbers of Black-faced

Sandgrouse that came in to drink. Wahlberg's Eagle and immature Bateleurs were seen nicely as they preened in leafless Baobab trees. Chestnut Weavers were amongst of group of Vitelline Masked and a Pygmy Falcon put in a brief appearance but flew off before we got to study it. The call went out that there was a pride of 16 Lions around but by the time we got there all we could see were 3 of them moving about and a half a dozen alert Impalas keeping an eye on them.



Tvaso West

It was another overcast afternoon as we headed out around the Chaimu Lava flow with the impressive 5 Sisters and Chyllu Hills, remnants of ancient volcanos as a backdrop across the Kilaguni Plain. Bird life was rather slow as we searched once again for Leopard and paid a visit to an area where Hunting Dogs had recently been seen. Unfortunately we came up with neither. The highlight was a displaying Buff-crested Bustard that flew straight up about 50 feet in the air and parachuted back down with his prominent black underside on show. In the thicker scrub this is his way of getting a females attention should she be in the area.

August 23 / TSAVO WEST; KOMBOYO GUEST HOUSE; HUNTER'S LODGE; KIBOKO SAFARI NATURE TRAIL

Finally we saw a sunrise, actually a rather pretty one with a full orange sun rising over the hills to the east and with the tops of the hills behind us covered in rain clouds. The sun was to be with us throughout the day. It was not long after we left the lodge that Shelley's Francolin's called and briefly popped their heads out from the grasses before scurrying back in. Black-cheeked Waxbills flew across the road and we spent a little time in the company of a couple of Lilac-breasted Rollers. Ashy Cisticola's were prominent this morning in a couple of places and the dark morph Gabar Goshawk that we had been seeing flying around the past few days was found perched low on the edge of a shrub looking for his breakfast. An African Hawk Eagle flew overhead the first time we had see it in flight as the others had all been perched. A Short-necked Skink was sunning itself on a termite mound. Nubian Woodpecker, Northern Grey Tit, Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird, Green Wood-Hoopoes, Little Bee-eaters, Helmeted Guineafowl, Long-tailed Fiscals and plenty of White-bellied Go Away Birds to go along with two Tiny Cisticolas completed our drive before we reached the Komboyo Guest House by the Kenyan Wildlife Service Rangers Headquarters. We decided to check it out as someone had recently said it was the best elephant experience he had ever had. Maybe he has not been charged by one! They had a second story balcony that overlooked a dry (at the moment) watering hole. 5 Elephants were awfully close getting their water from

a small concrete water basin as a large congregation of Buffalo ambled in to drink. Even with the elephants surrounding the only water source a dozen Buffalo confronted them until finally one of the elephants trumpeted and mock charged to send the buffalos away until the elephants had finished. There was also a small stone feeder table with a bird bath. At one stage there was an impressive array of color on display there with the iridescence of a Hildebrandt Starling, Superb Starling and Greater Blue-eared Starling along with a Lilac-breasted Roller. We reached the Mitto Andei Main Gate at 11am where groups of Red-billed Quelea's were drinking from several of the small bird baths and a Southern Black Flycatcher made short flights from the acacias in the car park.



The multi-colored Lilac-breasted Roller is a common sight in the acacia savannah

An hour's drive up the road is the Hunter's Lodge and here we walked the grounds before having our picnic boxes for lunch overlooking their large pond. The bridge across the pond was in a state of repair so we only stayed on one side. A Long-tailed Cormorant was perched low over the water on an overhanging branch as a Marabou and Black-headed Heron circled overhead. Three kingfishers were seen here Malachite, Grey-headed and Giant, while Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Spot-flanked Barbet and Grey Hornbills were high up in the Yellow-barked Acacias. Almost across the road is the Kiboko Safari Nature Trail. Though we did not venture down the whole trail, leaving that to the small troop of Yellow Baboons that were preening on the trail there was some activity near the entrance with our 4th kingfisher, a pair of Brown-hooded, Southern Black Flycatcher's, Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrikes, Spectacled Weaver, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Red-cheeked Cordon-blues and a Striped Ground Squirrel. From here it was another 3 ½ hours before we got into Nairobi. One interesting observation was the slogan on the back of a bus that a company must have felt necessary. It read "We Lead Others Follow". Fair enough I thought. Later I came across its main competitor and noticed that they have the upper hand. Their slogan read, "We Lead the Leader".

August 24 / DRIFTER'S LAKE NAIVASHA

A couple of hours walking up and down the short boardwalk at the Drifter's floating restaurant on the south shore of Lake Naivasha first thing this morning was productive. Lining the east side were clumps of papyrus while the west side had a great deal more sedges some with vacant Grosbeak Weaver nests attached to their stalks, and a shallow and narrow channel of water leading towards the lake, which was mostly filled with water hyacinth. A Giant Kingfisher flew right by me as I was about to begin my walk. From the shaky boardwalk it was a good place to see Black Crakes and they criss-crossed the floating vegetation and briefly disappeared into the sedges. An African Water Rail would tease me as it moved from one clump to another and then show up in a completely different spot. Purple Swamphens and Common Moorhens preferred the wet grasses areas while a Long-toed Lapwing walked gingerly in my direction before deciding that I was imposing a sight and took flight. The Purple Heron froze thinking that he was well camouflaged. A couple of African Reed Warblers worked their way up and down the papyrus and a Winding Cisticola did the same through the sedges and shrubs. On the edge of the lake Pink-backed Pelicans, Yellow-billed Storks, Sacred Ibis, Spur-winged Lapwings, Pied Kingfishers and small flocks of Ruffs could be found while a Black Sparrowhawk caused some alarm as it flew low over the marsh. Along the channel I would catch sight of a blue flash and before long I was able to locate a pair of Malachite Kingfishers. They were perching low and making very short drops into the water with one coming up with a crayfish.



While most crakes have a reputation for being difficult to see, the Black Crake (l) is a common wetland species and often feeds in the open for extensive periods. The boardwalk leading to the Drifter's floating restaurant (r)

August 24-28 / MASAI MARA

The migration was now getting into gear in the southern part of the Mara with huge herds of Wildebeest dotting and snaking their way across the savannah with a handful of Common Zebras amongst them. The Keekorok area in the south certainly was the place to be with prey in view almost everywhere we went. During our first afternoon game drive we came across 3 groups of lions, a pride of 8 with all but the oldest three sleeping; 4 young males that had devoured a Buffalo the day before and were still completely stuffed, and two lioness' with 3 cubs. It was interesting to see that when 6 Coke's Hartebeest came walking towards our vehicles they saw that all the attention was on the lioness's and both stared each other down from a distance of about 200 feet with the Hartebeest making all the posturing and snorting alarms before they high tailed it out of there. The game is pretty much over once the prey are aware of the predator, and as long as they stay their distance and keep them in sight they will live another day.



A handful of Common Zebra are often found amongst the Wildebeest. At this time of the year there is an abundance of prey for the predators.

The cat show continued in the morning.



We did not have to go far to find that the males had killed a Wildebeest and Spotted Hyenas were looking to take a piece of the action. This kill was less than 300 yards from their last Buffalo kill.

Next up was a large concentration of Wildebeest on a gently sloping rise. On the edge was a male Cheetah but we could not see it from where we were. The herd then began to panic and run towards us with a few Zebra leading the way. The Cheetah must have made its move. Soon the herd slowed down but still there was no sign of the Cheetah.



We then moved on and not too far away found a Spotted Hyena doing all it could to keep feeding on a Wildebeest carcass as African White-backed and Ruppell's Griffin Vultures surrounded him doing all they could to take it over. It was not long before that is exactly what happened and the feeding frenzy began in earnest.

We returned to the Cheetah and found him feeding on a young Wildebeest. We surmised that he had killed the carcass the hyena was at. Consequently, having been driven away from his meal by the hyena he was forced to kill again this morning. The second time he was left in peace and it was not until he had had his fill that vultures began to descend from the skies. Two successful kills back to back is some feat.





It is not often that one comes across tree-climbing lions, but a lioness had climbed a sausage tree and found herself a nice branch to straddle and fall asleep on. Her four brothers and sisters were below her asleep in the grass. It was an amazing morning.

At this time of year one is in the Mara hoping to catch a part of the Wildebeest migration when they cross the Mara River for greener pastures on their never ending anti clockwise journey between the Serengeti and the Mara. The crossings can be dangerous. Though the river is neither that deep nor really that wide, it can be perilous. The currents can force them to use more energy than the strong have or the weak can afford. There is the danger of the masses pushing and crushing each other as they drop down an embankment to get to the water. Once in the water there is the fear of the unknown. We would see a Wildebeest struggling to make head way and realize that a silent killer, a Nile Crocodile, had grabbed it from below the surface without any warning. Then there is the bank on the far side. We noticed many carcasses floating down the river toward where we were watching the crossing and surmised that they had a problem making it across. We later saw what the problem was. They were crossing where the embankments were very steep and where the current was taking them towards a rocky section. Desperate to get up they climbed on the rocks. Wet and slippery they likely fell, broke a leg and slide back down into the water. Calves get lost once they have crossed, having lost contact with their mothers somewhere along the crossing. Confused and bewildered it is usually some of the calves that can be seen re-entering the water and going back across to where they came from in search of the mothers. If they still have not been weaned no other mother will care for them and they are doomed. The sight of a massive herd assembled on a bank with some beginning to forge their way across the water is impressive and long lasting as is the sound of thousands grunting and bleating as they splash in the water as they snake their way across the water. This noise is heard across the plains and signals other wildebeest that it is time to cross and they come running in single file snaking their way along narrow tracks from the distant grassland. It is an extraordinary event to witness.



After staging together, one Wildebeest decides it is time to leap in and the others follow



Wildebeest beginning their journey across the Mara River



Once they reach the far side of the river they have to negotiate the embankment



Once safely across the river, they will disperse over the savannah in search of fresh vegetation



Next up was to look for a pair of mating Lions that began two days ago, so this was in all likely hood their final day. The drivers like to call these cats during this time “The Honeymooners” for obvious reasons. We found them in a scrubby area not too far off the road to the Olooloo Gate and no one else was around except another male lion. Over the course of an hour and a half there were four matings though the time between the last two was almost an hour. For as short as 10 seconds he would mount her as she lay down, bite her nape, then as it was finished they would both snarl at each other. This was followed by both of them laying down to cat nap and when he was ready once more, it was back to business.



Two Cheetahs, likely brothers, had made a kill at first light and were now resting on a termite mound surveying the proceedings on a full stomach.

My previous visit the week before was short and we had concentrated on finding the cats and seeing the migration, consequently it was no surprise that I came across avian species the second time around that we had previously missed. African Quail-Finch, Saddle-billed Stork, Long-crested Eagle, Rosy-breasted Longclaw, White-headed Vulture, Temminck's Courser, Yellow-throated Sandgrouse, Brown Parrot, Grey-backed Fiscal, Woolly-necked Stork, Flappet Lark, Black-lored Babbler, Coqui Francolin, African Cuckoo Hawk, Fischer's Sparrow-Lark, Capped Wheatear and Kori Bustard were all new.



Wildebeest in the Mara at dawn

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