



KENYA and TANZANIA TRIP REPORT Sept 25-Oct 23, 2009

PART 1 - Classic Kenya

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Sept 25 / Day 1: Blue Post Thika; Castle Forest

We began the morning with an unexpected Little Sparrowhawk followed by a Great Sparrowhawk, both in the skies across the main road from the Blue Post Hotel in Thika.



The lush grounds of the Blue Post are bordered by the twin waterfalls of the Chania and Thika, both rivers originating from the nearby Aberdare Mountain Range. It is a good place to get acquainted with some of the more common birds, especially as most can be seen in close proximity and very well.

Eastern Black-headed Oriole, Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, Little Bee-eater, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Collared Sunbird, Bronzed Mannikin, Speckled Mousebird and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird were easily found.

Looking down along the river course and around the thundering waterfall we found a pair of Giant Kingfishers as well as Great Cormorant, Grey Heron and Common Sandpiper, and two Nile Monitors slipped behind large boulders. A fruiting tree provided a feast for Yellow-rumped Seedeaters, Violet-backed Starlings, Spot-flanked Barbet (*right*), White-headed Barbet as a Grey-headed Kingfisher, an open woodland bird, made sorties from a nearby perch.





It was a gorgeous afternoon at the Castle Forest Lodge set deep in forested foothills of the southern slope of Mt. Kenya.

While having lunch on the verandah, overlooking a fabulous valley below, we had circling Long-crested Eagle (above right), a distant Mountain Buzzard and African Harrier Hawk. A Broad-billed Roller was a wonderful surprise. There was a far bit of activity around the 'castle' with Brown-capped Weavers, Kikuyu White-eyes, Tacazze and Northern Double-collared Sunbirds, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher and Pin-tailed Whydahs with around the 'castle', and Scarce Swift, Lesser Striped Swallow, Barn Swallow, Little Swifts, Black Saw-wing, Mottled Swift, Mosque Swallow and Alpine Swift flying all around.



The afternoon walk down the road was a great success, beginning with a pair of nesting Abbott's Starling in a distant tree. Sadly, the Waller's Starling's were not any closer. It was not long before the raucous *khaw* calls of Hartlaub's Turaco were heard all around us. One showed well and this was followed by a few more flying through the canopy.

There was a steady stream of birds that kept use enthralled, which included Brown Woodland Warbler, a

Spectacled Weaver beginning his nest building, Thick-billed Seed-eater, the huge Silver-cheeked Hornbill, noisy Red-fronted Parrots flying over on their way to roost, Eastern Bronzed-naped and the larger Olive Pigeons, Eastern Olive and Eastern Double-collared Sunbirds, Black-throated Apalis (right) and Grey Apalis, as well as hearing a Tambourine Dove calling.



Before turning back we followed a Long-crested Eagle from perch to perch as it hunted in the late afternoon. To round out our stay we had a pair of Hunter's Cisticolas and a Grey-headed Negrofinch at last light and an African Hill Babbler on the drive down the mountain early the next morning.

Sept 26 / Day 2: Wajee Bird Sanctuary; Buffalo Springs NR

Set on a steep sloping hillside, the 22 acre Wajee Bird Sanctuary harbors one of Kenya's most endangered birds, Hinde's Pied Babbler (*left*); named after Sidney Hinde, a British naturalist and early twentieth century Provincial Commissioner in Kenya and is one of only a handful of Kenyan endemic avian species.

On our way down the track through the woods we stopped for Cape Robin Chat, Ruppell's Robin Chat, Tropical Boubou, a juvenile White-starred Robin, Chin-spot Batis and Yellow-whiskered Greenbul. These were all new trip birds so it was exciting. As we neared the Mongoose Glade in the lower section of the hill Red-cheeked Cordon-blues could be seen on the trail, and to everyone's relief, babblers were heard. Now we could track them down! Actually they were very cooperative this morning with at least four Hinde's Babblers showing very well. After viewing them to our satisfaction we moved on to look at a Jackson's Three-horned Chameleon that George found, well camouflaged on a vine. As we began our walk back up a pair of Ayer's Hawk-Eagles were tussling with each other over the peak of the sanctuary.

As we head north through the Central Highlands, we cross the equator at Nanyuki, 200 kilometers north of Nairobi. The elevation here is about 6400 feet and the Equator almost divides Kenya in half. Heading north we now enter the hot, arid region of the country.



On the outskirts of Nanyuki we stopped along the roadside to look at the extraordinary complex of Speke's Weaver nests piled one on top of the other in a single lone acacia tree. It can only be best described as an avian condominium. As with some of the other weavers it is a gregarious colonial nester, favoring to nest near human habitation. Unlike many weavers it is unique in that it retains the same plumage all year.

Samburu is the northern most reserve that we visited and the name that the three adjacent National Reserves, Samburu, Buffalo Springs and Shaba, generally goes by. Shaba is to the east, and unfortunately our planned visit was nixed as the park has been overrun by cattle and their herdsmen escaping the drought. The Ewaso Nyiro river links the two main reserves, Samburu to the north and Buffalo Springs to the south. To get to Samburu we have to go through Buffalo Springs.



Reticulated Giraffe and Besia Oryx walking by Down Palms and Flat-topped Acacias

This arid region has been severely affected by the drought. The river was dry and most of the landscape was brown and bare. Carcasses were scattered throughout, though these mainly belonged to cattle. In spite of the this, much of the riverine habitat was green and along with Doum Palms swaying in the wind on the banks of the river and isolated mountains rising from the plains, this a stunning location.

Buffalo Springs was alive from the moment we arrived. The 3 hours we had from the gate to the lodge was extraordinary, the kind you wish for on every game drive. Endless avian activity meant many stops for Pink-breasted Lark, Eastern Yellow-billed (*right*) and Red-billed Hornbill, Taita Fiscal, Rosy-patched Bush-shrike, Nubian Woodpecker, Eastern Chanting Goshawks, Somali Golden-breasted Bunting and for a plethora of weavers, White-headed and Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver, Donaldson-Smith Sparrow-Weaver and the smaller Black-capped Social-Weavers that we in flocks with Chestnut Sparrows. Other sparrows included Parrot-billed and Yellow-spotted Petronia.

Amongst the mixed flocks of warblers that we would come across there were Mouse-coloured Penduline-Tit, Northern Crombec, Red-fronted Warbler, Banded Parisoma, Pygmy Batis and Northern Grey Tit. Overhead African Palm Swifts, Nzanza Swifts, Bateleurs and Tawny Eagles ruled the airways.





The cryptic Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse (*above right*) was very evident in good numbers, likely due to the dry conditions, while other game birds included pairs of Buff-crested (*above left*) and White-bellied Bustard (*right*), and large flocks of Helmeted and the striking cobalt-blue Vulturine Guinea fowl. A wonderful surprise was a perched African Swallow-tailed Kite, a species that does not normally venture this far south.

All these birds were interspersed with three arid country specialists Grevy's Zebra, Beisa Oryx and Gerenuk as well as Unstriped Ground Squirrel, Kirk's Dik-dik, Grant's gazelle, Impalas, Buffalos, Reticulated Giraffe and Elephants.

We caught sight of a lioness outlined on a ridge. Driving up the steep track towards her we found that she had four cubs, about 6 months old, and a second lioness was also in attendance. One of the cubs had the remains of an impala leg, that it was learning to keep for itself. From that vantage point the dominant female had a 360 view of the surrounding plains and any potential future prey.





At dinner we celebrated Jan's belated birthday with the Serena kitchen staff presenting Jan with a cake and singing "*Hakuna Matata.....how old are you?*" To top off the evening we had a Pearl-spotted Owl outside our rooms.

Sept 27 / Day 3: Samburu NR; Buffalo Springs NR

Upon leaving the Serena we first crossed a sand bed where a large troop of Olive Baboons (*right*) were interacting, playing and grooming each other - this was their social hour. This morning we crossed the Ewaso Nyiro bridge, 2 km from our lodge, and ventured into the Samburu reserve.

The first bird we stopped for was the white-vented race of Variable Sunbird which reaches its southern limit of its range here. D'Arnaud's Barbets were dueting only feet away from us and Crested Francolins, just as vocal, dug up insects and seeds below them. Small flocks of Blue-naped Mousebirds alighted on the shrubs and proceeded to work their way into them. A couple of smaller birds were new sightings, these being Yellow-bellied Canary, Yellow-vented Eremomela, Eastern Paradise Whydah and a Brubru, the smallest of the shrike family. Yet another species of hornbill was added to the list, the common Von der Decken's. As the morning heated up raptors could be seen circling over the hills. Along with the ubiquitous Tawny Eagle, there was Walhberg's Eagle, Ruppell's and White-backed Vulture, African Harrier Hawk and a couple of Fan-tailed Ravens.



We heard the alarm calls of Vervet Monkeys and carefully checking the area Ben and George caught sight of a tail low in a tree. It was 4-6 month old Leopard cub. By the time we positioned the van to see her, she came down and smelted away into the salt brushes. Continuing on we drove round the track and spotted her deep in the shade of the undergrowth of a toothbrush shrub. She was not settled, and moved away which allowed us to see her well, though briefly, as she wound her way through the shrubs until she vanished.

We came across a handful of Fischer's Starlings moving through the shrubbery. Wanting better looks we backed up to where we could get a good view. What we found was an additional five starling species, Superb, Wattled, Golden-breasted, Violet-backed and Magpie!



The return drive took us through the riverine habitat along the dried out river. It is a good place to find additional birds and look for reposing cats. While the cats were elusive, the birds did not disappoint. Foraging on the soft sand were Namaqua Doves, the shy Bare-eyed Thrush, Spotted Morning Thrushes, Black-cheeked Waxbill, and a pair of Black-necked Weavers. Marico and Hunter's Sunbird (*left*) showed well, as did White-headed Mousebird, Lesser Masked Weaver, Red-headed Weaver and Abyssinian Scimitarbill.

As thunder echoed in the distance and the skies darkened we took an after lunch walk along the pathway leading to the western end of the Serena lodge. It was productive with Black-bellied Sunbird, Dodson's Bulbul, Grey-headed Kingfisher,

Rufous Chatterers, Abyssinian White-eyes, African Yellow White-eye, both Greater and Lesser Honeyguide, Red-faced Crombec, Grey-headed and Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrike, Golden Palm Weavers, Black Cuckoo-shrike and Red-chested Cuckoo. While following a fast moving flock of White-crested Helmet-shrike, we paused to locate the tapping on a tree. It turned out to be a Nubian Woodpecker, but while watching the woodpecker and a Northern Black Flycatcher sallying from the top of sprinkler, we saw a Northern Puffback. The male was displaying to a nearby female, puffing up his grey back feathers, hence his name, that she must find enticing.



Eerie silence falls on the dry savanna during the heat of the midday hours. Mongoose and ground barbets retreat to the cool, underground labyrinths of termite mounds. Noisy hornbills and go-away birds rest quietly in the canopy of stately Yellow-bark Acacias. Giraffes, elephants and Impalas take up sentry positions in the shade of majestic *Acacia tortilis* trees, always on the lookout for any predators; they do not have much to fear, as the cats and hyenas are all napping at this time of day, some well hidden in the shadows of dense toothbrush thickets. It is a perfect time for all of us to rest or take a break.

The silence is broken only by a lovelorn or overly-optimistic Red-chested Cuckoo, who seems to be up at all hours loudly proclaiming, "*It-will-Rain*" over and over again. The cuckoo's odds at getting it right

are as good as any weatherman's. The annual long summer rains (April and May) - critical for this arid region - never materialized. It has been almost a year without rain. The landscape is parched, bare and brown. The lifeline of the park, the Esawo Nyiro River has been reduced to a wide bed of sand.

Suddenly, the distant sounds of singing enhanced my daydreams of Africa. As the sounds grew louder, I realized it was not a dream. Drawn by the sound, we ventured to the low compound wall that separates the river from our lodge. From there we saw Samburu natives (*below*) moving down the dry Esawo Nyiro river bed, chanting and walking rhythmically. About 27 colorfully dressed women, most carrying a long stick and a few with babies on their backs, were doing a rain chant, asking the heavens for the much-needed rains. They paused several times as they went, each time apparently changing leaders. Not far from where our small group stood in awe, they turned around and retraced their steps back to the village, singing continuously. The sound faded as they retreated. It was wonderful to bear witness to an ancient tradition that was not being 'put on' for tourists. We were privy to a glimpse of their way of life, for a brief moment in time.



Samburu Rain Dance along the Esawo Nyiro riverbed



For our afternoon drive we worked the drier slope, below the river on the Buffalo Springs side, which stretches towards the airstrip. The long necked gazelles of these arid regions are Gerenuks (*left*). We watched a pair on their hind legs reaching the mid level of an acacia to browse. Bird wise it was slow, producing little other than a Pale Prinia, sandgrouse and a mixed pair of Gabar Goshawks, one black and one grey. It was good timing that we got word that a female Leopard had been spotted up a tree.

We made our way into Samburu, driving through a very brief light shower, to find 13 vehicles queued up in front of us, all vying for a look at the Leopard. She was standing on a branch high up in a toothbrush tree and in the process of turning around. She soon lay down facing away, where all we could see was her rear end and tail!

Returning at dusk, it was wonderful to have two elephants walk by our rooms, stopping to feed on an acacia, so close we could hear them ripping the branches and chewing on them.

Sept 28 / Day 4 - Samburu / Buffalo Springs GR

This morning we returned to the Samburu side, beginning with a Wahlberg Eagle bringing nesting material to its nest near the entrance gate. Interactive beneficial relationships are always exciting to watch. We witnessed Dwarf Mongoose (*below*) and Yellow-billed Hornbill cooperatively hunting. As the mongoose forage an area, the hornbill will be able to feed on anything that has eluded the mammals, and in return the hornbill is able to keep an eye to the sky for any marauding raptors.



Most of Africa's iridescent starlings as simply stupendous, maybe none more so than the sight of a Golden-breasted Starling. Their long blue tail trailing behind as they quickly move through the arid acacia dominated landscape. Flocks of Eurasian Bee-eaters have just shown up on their wintering grounds, and their liquid calls could be heard throughout the day. After a great deal of searching we did manage to find a Somali Bee-eater, perched only a few feet off the ground. Along the way we encountered many White-bellied Go-Away Birds, a Three-streaked Tchagra, Pygmy Falcon and Fawn-coloured Lark. Down by the river an adult Martial Eagle was on the lookout for an easy meal, possibly a dik-dik. We also had an immature African Hawk Eagle, a Verreaux's Eagle Owl and an Elephant with a wobbly week old baby.



By the Asnil Lodge, the river was reduced to narrow elongated pools that had attracted thirsty Grevy's Zebra's (*left*), Somali Ostrich, Warthogs, African Spoonbill, Marabou, Yellow-billed and Woolly-necked Storks, Wood and Common Sandpiper and Greenshank. Along another stretch there was an immature Palm Nut Vulture in a riverside Doum Palm, and a gathering of vultures that included African White-backed, Ruppell's, Lappet-faced, and unexpectedly, an Egyptian Vulture. Nearby, a mother Elephant was in the shade protecting her one week old calf, still wobbly on its feet, from the baking sun.

Around a small area of fallen trees, there was a great deal of activity and scolding by Black-cheeked Waxbills, Grey Wren Warbler, White-browed Scrub Robins, Spotted Morning Thrush, Somali Golden-breasted Bunting, Northern Crombec and Abyssinian Scimitarbills - though we could not see a snake, I am sure that it was what had got them all agitated.

Once again during the mid afternoon hours we were able to witness the rain dance chant. I wonder how many days that it has been since they started doing this?

Highlights of the afternoon game drive along the southern side of the river in Buffalo Springs included the ubiquitous Rattling Cisticola; a pair of Verreaux's Eagle Owls (*right*), roosting apart from each other under the canopy of an *Acacia tortilis*; and a short distance away a Pearl-spotted Owlet; Eurasian Golden Oriole and a Kori's Bustard in flight.



Sept 29 / Day 5 - Buffalo Springs GR; Naro Moru River Lodge

As we were getting ready to leave after breakfast, George loaded the van with our packed lunches, closed the sliding door but left the pop up roof open. A cheeky Vervet Monkey George had not noticed, until it was too late, seized the opportunity and descended from the acacias in the parking area, climbed up the back of the van and into the back seat, opened a picnic box and made off with our bananas!

We watched four female Somali Ostriches casually walking through the light savanna brush when one must have said something to make one of them very unhappy. What followed was the ostrich that took offense proceeded to chase after one of them, nipping at her body, before taking it out on another, while the fourth ostrich was quite happy to be a bystander. We will never know what that was all about, but it certainly was a light moment for us.



As we drove north along the Ewaso Nyiro towards the Ashnil Lodge, amongst an area of sparse salt-bush we come across a Cheetah that has recently killed a female Impala (*left*). Once they have caught their breath, they will eat as quickly as possible, as they never know when vultures, hyaenas or lions might show up to claim a free meal. She was completely bloated and we only a

few minutes to watch her eat before she left the carcass to rest and digest her meal in the shade.

Several hundred meters further up a large bull Elephant stops us in our tracks. We were far enough away, but having 5 or 6 tons of pachyderm walking towards us gave us reason to be cautious. Males can leave the family herd as early as 7 years old and certainly by age 15 they lead solitary lives, or occasionally joining a bachelor herd, and only rejoin the females to breed. How old this one was was anyone's guess as it had one short right tusk and a very well worn, barely visible, left tusk. To our relief the bull moved away from the track and towards an acacia adjacent to us. It then placed its head and trunk against the tree trunk and proceeded to push (*left*), giving it four healthy attempts, making the Black-capped Social Weaver nests and the top of the tree sway, before realizing that it was not going to topple. Their diets are varied - grass, fruit, seed pods, twigs, bark - but in this case it was interested in the succulent leaves in the center of the crown.



There is a small narrow marsh near where the Isiolo River feeds into the Esawo Nyiro, that attracts a great deal of wildlife. Common Waterbuck were at home here as were two hippos, a large Nile Crocodile and a Monitor Lizard. Black Crakes, African Spoonbill and Cattle Egrets were very active, while Striated Heron, Squacco Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron and Intermediate Egret exhibited far more patience as they all waited to feed. On the other side of our track we had a Zitting Cisticola and a Three-banded Plover fanning its tail for distraction. Looking around and found two well camouflaged eggs.

We arrived at Naro Moru River Lodge in front of an approaching storm, but before it put a halt to the afternoons proceedings we did have a few excellent sightings. The grounds are lush and full of flowers making it a haven for sunbirds that included both Eastern Double-collared and Northern Double-collared (*below left*), Tacazze, Bronze (*below right*), Variable, Scarlet-chested and many Amethyst.



Yellow-whiskered Greenbul, Dusky Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Apalis, African Paradise Flycatcher were easily spotted, and along the river a pair of elusive African Black Ducks showed well. This was followed by a couple of Mountain Wagtails working their way along the small boulders strewn throughout the watercourse. Betty spotted a Hartlaub's Turaco (*below left*) sitting motionless in plain view over the river. Wow!



Relaxing on a porch as the rain fell harder we could see Crowned Hornbills and Montane Orioles. After dinner we could clearly hear the wonderful calls of Tree Hyraxes and Montane Nightjars.

The next morning before leaving we found obliging Golden-breasted Bunting, Cape Robin Chat, Brimstone Canary and the Crowned Hornbills (*right*) feeding on the fruit of Prickly Pears, commonly called Cactus Tuna.





The Solio Plains with the Aberdare Mountain Range in the distance

A slow drive across the bumpy dirt road that traverses the Solio Plains allowed us to enjoy many wonderful birds on this windy morning. A flock of Long-tailed Widowbirds included several males in full breeding plumage flew across the road and alighted on a wire fence. Along the roadside, amongst the short grasses there was a steady stream of Yellow Wagtails, Northern and Isabelline Wheatear, Plain-backed Pipits and Red-capped Larks. We came across one or two small flocks of Black-winged Lapwing, a few Cape Rook, and many Northern Anteater Chats. While searching for Sharpe's Longclaw we found Somali Short-toed Lark. On the rolling plains there were a few Thomson's and Grant's Gazelles, small herds of Zebra and the isolated Laikipia race of Coke's Hartebeest, known as Kenya Highland Hartebeest (*below*).



A stop along the main road at Paul's quarry, produced a nice scope look of Mackinder's Eagle Owl. The water in the quarry held Yellow-billed Duck, Red-knobbed Coot and along the edge Cape Wagtail. In the surrounding acacia we found Red-fronted Barbet, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Chin-spot Batis, Eastern Black-headed Oriole and Western Citril.

By late morning we reached the Ark gate, one of the eastern entrances to the Aberdare Mountain Range in Central Kenya. It is a long 6 hour journey through the National Park and over the range, winding our way through various ecosystems, rising in altitude to the highland grass tussocks and down the western side.

As we begin our climb from 6800' through the lower elevation forests we encounter Hunter's Cisticola, Golden-winged Sunbird, Long-crested Eagle, a pair of Crowned Eagle circling high above us, Scaly Francolin, Hartlaub's Turaco, Cinnamon Bracken Warbler, Grey-headed Negrofinch along with Black and White Colubus, Sykes monkeys, Forest Buffalo, Warthogs, Bushbuck, Defassa Waterbuck, and three Giant Forest Hogs (*below*).



After a pleasant roadside picnic lunch where a Great Sparrowhawk glided over our heads we moved through the Broadleaf Croton and Dense Bamboo stands that give way to the lovely moss-covered *Hagenia* glades above the forest. Flying above the steep drops that lead to valleys below, there were many Plain Martins, White-rumped Swifts, Horus's Swifts, and African Black Swifts. For other birds it was rather quiet with only Mountain Greenbul, White-starred Robin, Brown Woodland Warbler and Whinchat all seen well.

Above the tree line we entered the scenic rolling alpine moorland at around 10,000 feet and encountered a new set of fauna. Montagu's Harrier quartered over the tussocks; a migrating Black-shouldered Kite was perched on a small bare tree, and Jackson's Francolins (*below center*) slowly walked the grassy roadside edges. Along with Golden-winged and Eastern Double-collared Sunbirds we watched several Malachite's and caught site of an immature male Scarlet-tufted Malachite. Moorland Chat's (*below right*) were very confiding and our only Aberdare Cisticolas (*below left*), a Kenyan endemic, came when we stopped after hearing one, and had several perch for us.



Mammals included a Common Duiker crossing the road and two Chandler's Mountain Reedbuck tucked into the moorland.

Our last stop in the National Park was at the small though spectacular Chania waterfalls. This being the headwaters for the same river that flows through Blue Post in Thika. We arrived just as a flock of Slender-billed Starlings (*right*) descended to bathe and drink at the point where the river cascades over the falls.



Once out of the park, it was a bumpy drive along rough dirt roads to the Kinangop Grasslands, west of the range, where there is a small population of endemic Sharpe's Longclaws. Unless areas can get protected, the future looks bleak as increasing crop cultivation is replacing the short grasslands. However, in fading light we had two birds, one which flew closer to us and was out in the open as it walked along the edge of a gully.

Oct 1 / Day 7 - Lake Naivasha; Kariandusi; Nakuru NP

The stately Yellow-barked Acacias that adorn much of the Lake Naivasha County Club grounds are truly a magnet for birds. Tropical Boubou, Fischer's Lovebirds, Eastern Black-headed Oriole and Red-chested Cuckoo certainly were the most vocal. It is a wonderful location to see the emerald and white Klaas's Cuckoo, and that did not disappoint. Red-faced Crombec, a small cinnamon-colored warbler without a tail that acts like a nuthatch, White-bellied Tit, Grey Woodpecker and Black Cuckoo-shrikes could all be seen successfully feeding on berries or insects.



Northern Anteater Chats were busy getting ready to nest in holes along the banks of ditches, and both White-browed and Ruppell's Robin-Chats spend a good deal of time foraging on the ground. As we walked towards the boat ramp the landscape opened up and we found Hunter's Cisticola, Grey-capped Warbler, Grey-backed Camaroptera, and Black-lored Babbler amongst the *nicotiana* plants. Once we reached the boat ramp, which ended well before the water, Western Citril, Variable Sunbirds, Streaky Seedeaters and Grey-backed Fiscals showed well as did Common House Martin, Nyanza Swift and Wire-tailed Swallow.

As Ruppell's, Red-winged and Superb Starlings foraged on the mowed lawn, the guttural call of a Lilac-breasted Roller (*right*) got my attention. Looking up I noticed that it was displaying, making aerial maneuvers that consisted of twists and turns and diving with open wings. It did this several times above the acacia canopy, before flying to a post. Once it had landed we could see a green snake, about a foot long dangling from its mouth. Did it catch it in the canopy and was it displaying with it? It certainly looked as though it wanted to present it to a female. It was only after several minutes of looking around and not seeing a female, that it began to swallow it.



Lake Naivasha had suffered tremendously from the drought and the water level was considerably below normal. Consequently, we were only able to do the boat ride around the Crescent Island loop, nevertheless it was a most



enjoyable hour and half. The exposed mudflats provided a feast for Ruffs, Spur-winged Plovers, Blacksmith Plovers, Marsh and Wood Sandpipers, Greenshank, Little Egrets, Common Ringed Plover and Little Stint. Sitting on boulders that line a good deal of the western side were Great and Long-tailed Cormorants as well as the beautiful Grey-headed Gull (*right*). Hugging the shoreline in the shallows were Little Grebes and Red-knobbed Coots, while Whiskered, White-winged and Gull-billed Terns patrolled most of the southern edge.



The largest of the Kingfishers, appropriately named the Giant (*left*), posed nicely for photos, while the diminutive Malachite was far more active at kept its distance from us. Many pairs of African Fish Eagles could be seen as we drifted around this small part of the lake and we could watch and hear them duetting as well as tussle with each other when one ventured into another's territory.



Our encounters with Hippos were close, but not too close! It is a treat to be able to watch them from a boat, at almost the same level as they are. Since they can spend up to six minutes under water, one never knows exactly how many there in a pod or where they will surface! Most seemed to be napping, their heads out of the water while most all of their body is under water. One or two would surface and others would go under. Occasionally one would snort and one even yawned - no it was not bored with tourists - this is a threat gesture, though in this case meant for one of her companions and surely not for us.

On the way to Nakuru we made a slight detour at Kariandusi to look for Schalow's Wheatears (*right*). It did not take long, with numerous cooperative birds, posing for a minute on chalky vantage points as they actively searched for insects. Fischer's Lovebirds flew over and Red-cheeked Cordon-blues were bathing in what was left of the stream. Bronze, Golden-winged and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds fed on wilting orange *Leonotis* flowers as we watched Cardinal Woodpecker and Chin-spot Batis working their way through an acacia tree.



Oct 2 / Day 8 - Nakuru NP; Lake Bogoria

Over the course of yesterday afternoon and this morning we did a full circuit of the lake and while the birding is excellent, here the mammals were heavily featured.

As with Lake Naivasha, Lake Nakuru's water level had receded tremendously making the anticipated Lesser Flamingo show greatly diminished with fewer numbers. Sadly, the flamingos along with Great White Pelicans were well away from the shoreline since it was so shallow. Where a narrow stream of freshwater enters the soda lake, shorebirds such as Curlew Sandpipers, Whimbrel, Black-winged Stilts, Pied Avocets, Kittlitz's Plovers and Little Stints were actively feeding, alongside Garganey and tiny Hottentot Teals, named after Africa's smallest tribe.



In the marshes the statuesque Saddle-billed Stork patiently stalked, the opposite of the feeding frenzy that Glossy Ibis were exhibiting. Our first Eurasian Marsh Harrier flew effortlessly over all the activity.



We stopped in more open areas to look at Rufous-naped and Red-capped Larks, Yellow-throated Longclaw (*left*), Pin-tailed Whydah, three cisticolas Winding, Pectoral-patched and Zitting the latter two requiring identification separation, Grey-backed Fiscals, White-fronted Bee-eater, Isabelline Wheatear and an immature Pale Chanting Goshawk feeding on what was left of a small rodent.

A walk around the Nakuru Lodge grounds after breakfast showed that there is no shortage of Speckled Pigeons and Speckled Mousebirds here! While looking for Little Rock Thrush we also found Grey-headed Sparrow, Red-fronted Tinkerbird and Buff-bellied Warblers.

Once in the wooded sections that border most of the lake, we could clearly see that the drought had taken a toll on the grasses in particular, opening up the understory. Though it did not help us when looking for a calling Hildebrandt's Francolin! A beautiful Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrike slowly worked its way towards us as we stopped for a party of Green Wood-hoopoes, and Arrow-marked Babblers.



The mating ritual of Ostriches (*above*) caught our attention. A male was displaying as he strutted behind a female, having his black-and-white wings raised in the shape of a heart. He then got down on his knees - actually for birds it is their ankles - spread his wings out, and swayed his neck from side to side, like a snake, and back behind him. This display went on for several minutes. Needless to say the female was not impressed, preferring to continue feeding, and that put an end to any hope the male had on this occasion.

From the marsh we had noticed a Black-chested Snake Eagle (*right*) circling. It was not until later that we came across it standing in a depression. Since about all we could see of it was its head, though we could see it looking down and stomping, we surmised that it had to have caught a snake, which makes up most of its diet. It must have felt vulnerable in this dip and on two occasions walked out, before flying off without its catch. Since it had left, we did the same. A short while later we saw one with a snake in its talons, eating it on the wing. Maybe it returned to that spot and picked it up?



We were fortunate enough to see nocturnal Bat-eared Foxes at the entrance to their dens at first light. Shortly thereafter two Black-backed Jackals crossed in front of us as they followed a scent through the grasses. In spite of the hardships that lay ahead, there were many mammals that had recently given birth including Zebras, Buffalo (*left*) and White Rhinoceros. We were able to get close to a White Rhinoceros with a one month old baby as they grazed the short grasses adjacent to the southern section of the lake.



Whilst amongst a group of Rothschild Giraffes (*left*) and Impalas, we spotted a Black Rhinoceros in the distance. It was not long before monitors with the Rhino Project showed up in their land rover. As they headed towards the rhino we spotted a pride of Lions in the shade of a Yellow-barked Acacia. The monitors got out their vehicles and as they were walking towards the rhino, 11 lions got up and ran in a line away from them, crossing the track that we were on. We left the giraffes, and went towards the lions. Once the rangers had checked on the rhino and left the area, the lions returned to the shade of the acacia. By now the giraffes

were well aware of the lions and strolled over to a safe distance, about 80 meters away, to make sure that they knew exactly where their main predators were camped out.



Heading north out of Nakuru, Kenya's 4th largest town, we crossed the equator once more on our way to another of the Rift Valley's soda lakes, Bogoria. Being at the lowest elevation of the trip so far, 3160 feet, as well as mid afternoon once we arrived, it was hot!

There is only one poorly-conditioned road that skirts the western side of the lake, 16 kms to the Hot Springs and we took our time. Beginning in the more open areas Ostriches rested in the shade, and we came across White-bellied Canary, Yellow-rumped Seedeater, Jackson's Golden Backed Weaver Pale and Spotted Flycatcher, while in the thorny scrub Little Weaver, Vitteline Masked Weaver, Black-throated Barbet, Eastern Violet-backed and Beautiful Sunbird, Blue-naped Mousebird and Magpie Starling got our attention.



The lake was ringed in pink - with certainly more flamingos here than at Nakuru. Fish Eagle have taken to feeding on flamingos here, as there are no fish in the soda lake. Cape Teals are associated more with soda lakes than freshwater ones, so finding a flock of over 20 was not a surprise. There was also a couple of Black-necked Grebes out on the water.

At the Hot Springs (*below right*), we alighted to get a good feel of the heat that the springs generate. Flamingos continuously fly along the waters edge and an assortment of expected shorebirds, Curlew Sandpiper, Pied Avocet, Ruff etc., feed around the mudflats. Around the parking area we found a Striped Ground Squirrel and Rock Hyraxes, while along the road Leopard Tortoise, as well as a chance to compare the nose differences of Gunther's and Kirk's Dik-diks. Towards the end of the day we keep a watch for secretive Greater Kudu's (*below left*) coming down from the thickets for a drink, and we were lucky enough to see a male, two females and two younger ones including a fawn.



Oct 3 / Day 9 - Lake Baringo

The grounds of Baringo Club and adjoining Roberts Camp were alive with birds. Two owls to start the day is a good omen - a Verreaux's Eagle Owl was by the pool and behind the rooms, an African Scops Owl had settled in for the day.



It is only a short drive from the club to the basalt cliff escarpment (*left*), where we had a successful morning's walk through the dry acacia scrub before the heat of the day. Green-winged Pytilia, Northern Grey Tit, Mouse-coloured Penduline Tit, Abyssinian White-eye, Black-throated Barbet, Grey Hornbill, Lesser Honeyguide, Red-fronted Warbler soon showed, and there was a brief look at a Lead-coloured Flycatcher. High on the escarpment ridge a calling Lanner led us to a Rock Kestrel, this being the resident race of Common Kestrel, as well as Brown-tailed Rock Chats chattering and wing flapping.

Further down the cliff, Rock Hyraxes were making their screeching calls as Jackson's Hornbills and Bristle-crowned Starlings moved about the single trees growing out of the cliff face.

Francis, the young and enthusiastic local guide who we have taken under our wing, came through with flying colors, showing us a pair of Greyish Eagle Owl and Northern White-faced Scops Owls, Spotted Thick-knee, a pair of Hueglin's Coursers (*right*) and chick, and a Slender-tailed Nightjar - all brilliant views.



For a couple of hours before lunch we ventured out on the lake by boat. Pied Kingfishers were numerous and Long-tailed Cormorants along with African Darters posed for photographs. All the expected terns and egrets were seen as well as a Goliath Heron catching a fish. Flashes of blue meant only thing, that Malachite Kingfishers were eagerly moving from perch to perch to find the best fishing spot. They were successful. Along whatever section of muddy lake edge we could get near, due to the low water level, we would see African Jacanas and Long-toed Plover, and we had a Hemprich Hornbill fly by.

We purchased a few fish from an enterprising Njemps fisherman (*right*), who had paddled out to meet us. With these we headed towards the large island of Olkolkwa, and proceeded to whistle in an African Fish Eagle. It was another excellent photo-op! Circling the island we found several Senegal Thick-knees (*left*) and Yellow-billed Storks.



Between watching the large round stone bird-feeding table at lunch and walking the grounds there was a nice mix of birds. Unfortunately, being so dry it meant that the weavers were not yet nesting. However they were still here - Northern Masked, Little, Jackson's Golden-backed, Black-headed and Chestnut Weaver. White-billed Buffalo Weavers use narrow sticks to make their large and rather untidy nests. A few were seen adding a twig to nests situated in the tallest tree on the grounds, just below the Fish Eagles massive nest. Woodland Kingfisher, Rufous Chatterers, D'Arnaud's and Red-and-yellow Barbet, Beautiful Sunbird, Red-fronted Barbet, Nubian Woodpecker, Black Cuckoo-shrike, Crested Francolin, African Silverbills were all seen. Two Fan-tailed Ravens alighted on the roof and Bristle-crowned Starlings (*right*) came in to drink from the lawn sprinkler.



Having missed Mocking Cliff-Chat this morning, we returned to the cliff for an afternoon walk, this time working another section to the south. It only took a few minutes and we had our bird. Each time it landed on large boulders it would have its tail raised and then slowly bring it down. There were confiding Green-winged Pytilias and Brown-tailed Rock Chats, a Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Red-winged and more Bristle-crowned Starlings. Ben spotted a snake slithering along branches at about head height. We had intruded upon a Speckled Sand Snake in the process of devouring a Little Weaver! An unexpected storm came over the cliffs and caught us totally unprepared. Being in a gully with little protection, we covered up as much as we could and opted to make it as quickly as possible to the waiting van about a kilometer away. In a way that was the good news. The bad news was that the steady rain turned the red soil into mud, caking an additional thick layer of muddy soil to the bottom of our footwear, making the trek slow.

Oct 4 / Day 10 - Marigat Mitigation Fields; Kerio River; Kigwa Swamp; Rondo Retreat / Kakamega Forest Reserve

Two African Scops Owls called at first light and Ben located one before we left Baringo.

Today we had a long journey ahead of us as we traversed the Rift Valley westward to Kakamega. A Shikra caught our attention on the way to the Marigat Mitigation Fields where we had dozens of Northern Red Bishops, but only one if full regalia. Grey-headed Silverbills, Crimson-rumped Waxbills, White-headed Barbet, Dark Chanting Goshawk were also seen along the edge of the fields, which were very dry.



As we crossing the Rift Valley we stopped for Rufous-crowned Rollers along the road and spent about an hour and half along the Kerio River (*left*). We began our walk with Yellow-billed and a Woolly-necked Stork circling above. A White-crested Turaco was spotted in flight but in spite of help from local children and time spent searching for it, it was only heard. Bush shrikes featured prominently with several Black-headed Gonolek's, Grey-headed and Sulphur-breasted showing well. We also had five hornbill species - Jackson's, Von der Decken's, Red-billed, Grey and Crowned.

We made the steady climb up the western wall of the Rift to the Elgeyo Escarpment and the Iten Overlook. Two Fan-tailed Ravens were flying amongst many Pied Crows. It is on the edge of this western plateau that Kenya's elite middle and long distance runners come to train.

Lunch was near a cattail marsh which was really too dry for the widowbirds, producing only fleeting distant views of Jackson's and Red-naped Widowbird. The Kigwa Swamp was more productive with displaying male Fan-tailed Widows, Yellow-backed Weavers, Grosbeak Weaver and Holub's Golden Weaver. A Copper Sunbird was a nice find and a Lesser Swamp Warbler perched long enough for everyone to see.

The road between Kapsabet and the turn off to Kakamega Forest has gotten worse and the short drive, which can not be much more than 20 kms, took almost an hour! Once in the Kakamega Forest Reserve we soon had the large canopy dwelling Black-and-white Casqued Hornbills flying over. Being late afternoon we headed straight to the Rondo Retreat.



After checking in, we were able to birding the grounds of the Rondo Retreat for about 45 minutes, venturing only a short distance from our cabana. Struhlman's Starlings were everywhere. A pair of stunning Double-toothed Barbet were courting besides our porched cabana. Blue-spotted Wood-Dove and African Thrush were on the manicured lawn. Vielliot's Black Weaver, Green Pigeon, Brown-capped Weaver, Green Sunbird, Swahali Sparrow and African Blue Flycatcher (*left*) could be seen in the huge trees that towered over the guesthouses. Then the rains came!

Oct 5 / Day 11 - Kakamega Forest Reserve

Kakamega Forest Reserve is Kenya's last remaining stand of rainforest. It also marks the eastern most range for a number of Congo Basin species. Staying at the Rondo Retreat in the heart of the forest meant that we were close to the main birding spots, though one full day in the forest is not enough.

We began the day around the KEEP (Kakamega Environmental and Educational Programs) nursery with what would become a regular sighting over the next hour, Grey Parrots, between three and six of them flying back and forth over the forest opening. Another Ben, "Kakamega" Ben, was our local guide. A number of sunbirds were busy feeding in the surround trees, favoring the bottlebrushes. Green-headed, Western Olive and Scarlet-chested were joined by an unexpected Orange-tufted Sunbird. Slender-billed Greenbuls worked the outside of the trees flicking their wings as the moved and Cinnamon-chested Bee-eaters flew sorties from higher in the canopy. A Scaly-throated Illadopsis was heard calling and though we were unable to locate it, we did find Eastern Bronzed-naped Pigeon, Joyful Greenbul and Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird.



Just before entering the Pump House Trail, Bronze and Black-and-white Mannikins could be seen feeding in the grasses, and we got wonderful looks at Common Wattle-eye, Kakamega Greenbul, Grey-throated Barbet and Red-headed Malimbe on the edge of the forest.

Forest monkeys make a chipping sound, that is very similar to a bird's chip - it is the female Blue Monkeys (*left*) that give this call to alert other members of the troop. In this case we witnessed several monkeys chasing each other throughout several fruiting trees, as others continued to feed. It was likely that this aggressive behavior was between subadult and juvenile males and all about food.

As we walked through the rainforest on this beautiful morning there was a considerable activity on either side of the trail all the way to the pump house. Mid level birds included Vieillot's Black Weaver, Petit's Cuckoo-

shrike, Uganda Woodland Warbler, Yellow-billed Barbet, Cabanis Greenbul, Yellow-whiskered Greenbul, Western Black-headed Oriole, and Square-tailed Drongo, while Black-collared Apalis, Banded Prinia, Jameson's Wattle-eye, Black-faced Rufous Warbler and Common Waxbills were all seen at eye level or below, with Mountain Illadopsis only providing the very briefest of looks.



It was late morning by the time we left the trail and headed back to the Rondo. Here we spent an hour before lunch walking the forest road to the east, with some tremendous sightings. Being the only main road through the forest, as one can imagine it was busy, with trucks, motorbikes, bicycles with milk can on the back and women carrying firewood. An Equatorial Akalat sat low in the open on a branch; a small flock of White-chinned Prinia foraged amongst hanging vines as Black-crowned Waxbills feed amongst roadside grasses. Higher up the trees we came across a Yellow-spotted Barbet, Luhden's Bush-Shrikes including one that dropped down close to us, Honeyguide Greenbul, Western or Blue race of Yellowbill, a male Brown-capped Weaver building a nest and finally after considerable work Blue-headed Bee-eaters. Surprisingly, the butterflies were few and far between, though there were plenty of Laymen and a Little Commodore.

We were back out shortly after lunch. Walking the short Fish Pond Trail that leads from the grounds through a gully in the forest and back. On the way down we had Northern Black Flycatcher, a Yellow White-eye on a nest and Mackinnon's Fiscal. this was followed by Grey-headed Negrofinch, Buff-spotted Woodpecker, a fleeting look at Giant Kingfisher and a perched African Pygmy Kingfisher on a bench. Black-billed Weavers were busy in the dense tangles, and once back out on the road, Tambourine Dove, Snow-capped Robin-Chat, Northern Double-collared Sunbird, Bocage's Bush-shrike (*right*), Black-faced Rufous Warbler and Chubb's Cisticola rounded our walk.



A single Black-and-white Colobus was curious enough to watch us bird! They are long-tailed, long-haired leaf-eating monkeys that are distinguished from other primates by having a small stub as a thumb, and this was one of several sightings in the forest.

Once again the afternoon's rains stopped play, but at least it was only for an hour. We still had one big to get - GBT! As we wandered the grounds either an Eleanora's or Sooty Falcon quickly flew over without positive identification. With some persistence and help from Betty we were able to track down Great Blue Turacos at dusk as they noisily came through the canopy edge of the gardens.

Oct 6 / Day 12- Kisumu south to the Mara

As we loaded up the van, we noticed a group of Dusky Tits, that had eluded us the previous day, roosting in the tree above the reception area. We were on our way south to the Maasai Mara via Kisumu, pausing along the road out of the forest for a Brown-chested Alethe.



Kisumu, the countries third largest city, lies on the eastern side of Lake Victoria. We made two stops that took the better part of 3 hours and was very successful. At Dunga Swamp a Papyrus Gonolek was tantalizing close but never showed. The equally stunning Black-headed Gonolek (*left*) on the other hand showed well. Along the edge of the papyrus we saw Northern Brown-throated Weaver, Slender-billed Weaver, Swamp Flycatcher, Lesser Swamp Warbler and Water Thick-knee.



As the fishermen were returning with the morning's catch, women were eagerly waiting to purchase and clean the fish - Hamerkops and Little Egrets waited patiently on the rocks for discarded pieces. A Red-chested Sunbird perched on *Leonotis* and Village Indigos fed on the short grass as a Shikra circled not too far away. A Hamerkop was standing on top of its dome nest having bought in what looked like cloth to add to this enormous structure.

In a wet field adjacent to the road Openbills were feeding amongst Jacana's, Intermediate Egrets, Hadada and Sacred Ibis. At Hippo Point, two pairs of Black-billed Barbets rested in the shade of a fig tree. We managed to coax out Carruther's Cisticola and Blue-headed Coucal from the dense papyrus, and watched Slender-billed and Western Black-headed Weavers bringing back long stripes of reeds to weave into their nests.

The drive from Kisumu through the busy market town of Kisii gave us an overview of the bustling street life. Vendors selling everything from modern black shoes to plastic containers. There was even a glimpse of a bygone era - at a cattle auction, one bartered with goods for cattle. The landscape consisted of lush green rolling hills with a mix of vegetable, wheat, corn and tea fields. The rains that most of eastern Kenya so desperately needs, have been very kind to this tropical part of the country.



Once off the main road the last 60 kms are on a dirt road of various degrees of comfort - these being bad and worse! Dozens of times we came across herds of cattle (left) blocking the road and watched the Maasai get the cattle far enough to one side so at least our vehicle could slip past. They were bringing them back to their bomas for the night. This is a daily routine and small slice of life in rural south western Kenya.

Along the road two birds caught our attention, a Red-throated Wryneck and a Holub's Golden Weaver feeding on the ground in the same spot. A Golden-breasted Bunting was also seen, but the excitement really came when a Schalow's Turaco swooped down in front of the van, as it made its way across the road and into a tree. While it perched we all had an open view of the gorgeous bird before it hopped into the denser canopy.

Set on the Olooloo Escarpment our Mara West tented camp overlooks the Maasai Mara. Could there possibly be a more idyllic and peaceful setting. Below us wildebeest dot the northwestern plains (*right*). The spectacle of migration is extraordinary, and there is a tremendous concentration in this part of the Mara Triangle. A herd of Elephants is spotted walking along a croton thicket on their



way up the escarpment slope to a watering hole. It is a journey this herd, that numbers around 50, takes every day. Since the camp is not fenced wild animals are free to roam about which means that we must have a Maasai escort to and from our tents. On the way back from dinner we came face-to-face with a Maasai Giraffe that was quite happy strolling between our tents.

Tented camps are wonderful as the nighttime sounds of the savanna, ring loud and clear, with zebras barking, hyenas *whoo-o-o-p*, and a lion's deep *huh...huh....huh-huh* to lull you to sleep.

Oct 7 / Day 13 - Oloololo Escarpment; Maasai Mara

The morning was spent on the Oloololo Escarpment beginning with a walk towards the Mara West pond (*below*). Green-headed and Marico Sunbird visited the garden by the dinning area. Green Pigeons, Black-backed Puffback and Violet-backed Starlings were catching the first rays of the day in the tops of trees.



We tracked down several Rock-loving Cisticolas and had six Tawny-flanked Prinia's together with them. A Ross's Turaco flew passed us and down the hill to alight in tree with another one. The pond only produced a Black Crake and Malachite Kingfisher while in the adjoining woods we had a pair of Narina Trogon's (*right*), African Blue Flycatcher, Greater and Lesser Honeyguide, Cardinal Woodpecker and Chin-spot Batis.



Our walk was followed by a drive along the escarpment road produced Bare-faced Go-Away Birds, Sooty Chat, Secretary Bird, Grassland Pipit, Cinnamon-breasted Rock Bunting, Western Citril, Blue-spotted Wood Dove, Whistling Cisticola, Rufous-crowned Roller, Red-fronted Tinkerbird, a better look at Ross's Turaco's, and Familiar Chats working the slopes. A walk through the acacia woodland on the upper ridge gave us wonderful looks at Common Scimitarbill, Spot-flanked Barbet, Buff-bellied Warbler, Red-fronted Tits, Speckle-fronted Weaver and the bird we were after Long-tailed Cisticola.

Following an excellent lunch on the deck at Mara West we were eager to get into the Mara, which we could see in the distance below us. It is a short drive to the Oloololo Gate to the Mara Reserve at the base of the escarpment. The remainder of the afternoon was spent in the upper portion of the Mara triangle. The wildebeest had already crossed the Mara River and the concentration of ungulates was extraordinary. Zebras mixed in with Wildebeest (*below*); Eland and Buffalos; Grant's Gazelles and Topi's, many with young, and all grazing around us. As we weaved around these herds we were spellbound by the sheer numbers.



The common cisticola in the Mara grasslands is Stouts, and there is no shortage of them. A few Red-necked Spurfowl walked the berm ridges that allow for water drainage. Pallid Harriers cruised over the savanna and a Grey Kestrel was perched atop a tree waiting for invertebrates or a small rodent to show itself. The aggressive African Wattled Lapwings were walking along a track besides a narrow marsh. Tucked behind a tuft of aquatic vegetation on the edge of the water we found a sleeping male Greater Painted-Snipe. The last bird of the day was an African Moustached Warbler before making it back to our tent porch for sundowners as we watched the sun's glow dissipate over the Mara.

Oct 8 / Day 14 - Maasai Mara

We awoke to the sounds of calling Montane Nightjars and Hyaena's calling. At first light three Oribi, an uncommon small antelope for Kenya, watched us walking to breakfast. It was hard to drag the ladies away from Andrew, the host at Mara West, but we had a long day ahead of us, having to traverse the Mara. The morning began with a handful of raptors including Gabar Goshawk, African Goshawk, Black-shouldered Kite, Tawny Eagle, Bateleur, Black-chested Snake-Eagle, Black Kite and Augur Buzzard. There was mixed group of birds feeding on the ground near the Oloololo Gate that included Yellow-throated Longclaw and Usambiro Barbets. We soon added Trilling Cisticola and Brown Snake-Eagle.

We frightened a Common Duiker which quickly moved from one thicket to another, and came across a male Bohor Reedbuck in another thickets. With all the prey that was about, where were the predators - Lions and Cheetahs?

Oxpecker's are cooperative breeders and we witnesses this at a nest hole with a Yellow billed Oxpecker (*right*) having animal fur in its bill and several others helping to place in it the nest. Their bills are flattened on the side enabling them to shear fur from the animals hide.



At the Musiara Swamp what little water remained attracted Red-billed Teal, Woolly-necked Stork, Yellow-billed Stork, Defassa Waterbuck, Marsh Mongoose and near here Ann spotted our first Spotted Hyaena.

At the Mara River, vehicles were concentrated on the far side. If they were there in anticipation of a Wildebeest crossing it was odd as the Wildebeest were already on our side. We soon figured out that they were anticipating an encounter between a crocodile and a zebra. Zebras were coming down to the river for a late morning drink, and one of the huge Nile Crocodiles was making an effort to stalk a zebra that had ventured into the water, instead of drinking at the edge. The zebra played it awfully close, backing away just before the crocodile could strike.

In the heat of the day most of the animals like to take a break and rest in the shade. For three Maasai Giraffes this meant standing under a lone tall *Acacia tortilis* (below).



Lunch was at the Mara Serena where Yellow-spotted Bush Hyrax and Mwanza Flat-headed Agamas (*right*) kept the photographers entertained. Following lunch our journey south took us away from the Mara Triangle and the wildlife was noticeably sparse though we did see some wonderful birds. Rosy-breasted Longclaw, Yellow-throated Sandgrouse and Sue spotted a Temminck's Courser close to the road. We watched it walk in a semi circle doing an astonishing display. First it would pause, stand upright by lifting its body and bringing its neck down, then, stand upright and sticking its breast out, and finally, puff out and pump its breast. Quickly walking on it would stop and repeat these same three steps. Extraordinary to watch.



In the White-thorn Acacia stands we had a flurry of activity with Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Red-faced Crombec, Chin-spot Batis, White-bellied Tit, Buff-bellied Warbler, Banded Parisoma, Red-fronted Barbet, White-browed Scrub-Robin, Brown-crowned Tchagra and many Grey-capped Social Weavers.



After crossing the South Mara River bridge, and the obligatory stop along the Tanzania border which delineates the boundary between the Mara to the north and Serengeti to the south, we found a few more new birds. A large flock of Yellow-mantled Widowbirds, Black-bellied Bustard and Meyer's Parrot to go with White-bellied Bustards, Montagu Harrier's and Zitting Cisticola. Finally we found a cat! But not one of the ones we expected. It was a Serval (*left*) walking through the tall grasses, beginning its late afternoon hunt. As a bonus we also saw a Side-stripe Jackal, an uncommon sighting.

Oct 9 / Day 15 - Loita Plains; Limuru; Nairobi NP

We spent the night at the Ol Tome Tented Camp in the Siana Springs area just east of the Mara Reserve. The night sounds included hyraxes, hyaenas prowling the compound fence and African Scops Owl.

It is another long drive as we head through the Loita Plains and across the Rift Valley to Nairobi. While loading the van we could see Amethyst and Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Eastern Black-headed Oriole and Yellow-fronted Canary in the trees around us. Once on our way the first third of the journey is on poor dirt roads. It is mainly an open landscape with a few Maasai bomas, punctuated with stands of acacias.



Along the way we saw Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Usambiro Barbet, Silverbird and paused for a group of vultures on a cattle carcass, including African White-backed and Ruppell's and a Hooded looking for any little piece that the Marabous would allow it to take. A break in the drive at the Olare Gift Stand left Sue lighter in the wallet.



Once through Narok, one would not know that you were now entering the Great Rift Valley as the descent is barely noticeable. It is not until we reach the Longonot Escarpment (*left*) on the eastern side that one realizes this most distinctive geological feature that opened up about 65 million years ago, shortly after the dinosaurs became extinct. It is because of escarpment like this as well as the one we climbed several days ago at Iten, that the Rift

Valley is deepest and therefore most noticeable in Kenya. In fact it extends 6000 kilometers, from Lebanon in the Middle East to Mozambique in Southern Africa, and ranges in elevation from below sea level at the Dead Sea to over 6000 feet in southern Kenya.

Limuru Pond was very shallow and the hoped-for waterfowl were not there, having to settle for Ruff, Black-winged Stilt, Yellow-billed Duck and Red-billed Teal.

Following a mammoth feast at Nairobi's National Parks Rangers we entered the park for three hours covering a great deal of the parks circuits. We had a few target species in mind beginning with a pair of Nairobi Pipits, split from Long-billed Pipit. Several groups of Long-tailed Fiscals perched nicely on acacias along the track as did a small group of Northern Pied Babblers. Though it was terribly overcast with heavy dark patches of clouds we did not get any rain. We had hoped to locate some of the ducks that we were still missing but the dam and various water courses were bone dry. Two new species were added, Spur-winged Goose in a strip of marsh and a



Dusky Turtle Dove. Groups of White-winged Widowbirds would burst out of the grasses as we drove by. We were surprised by a pair of White-bellied Bustards, that for some reason decided to challenge us by duetting vociferously and charging towards us. There was nice mix of mammals including Serval, Coke's Hartebeest, Buffalo, Wildebeest, Elands and White Rhinoceros.

End of Part 1