



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

### PART 2 - Tanzania

*text and photos by Adrian Binns*

#### Oct 10 / Day 16 - Amboseli NR

From Nairobi we took the better of the two roads (though longer, distance wise) to Amboseli National Reserve. Fischer's Sparrow-larks, Hildebrandt Starlings, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, Pale Chanting Goshawk, Kori Bustard, Rufous-crowned Roller and Kori Bustard were seen along the road before we turned south at Emali and onto a new good road!



It was a beautiful morning, and from a distance of about 100 kilometers it was clear enough to see Mount Kilimanjaro (*above*), Africa's highest peak, looming to the south. It is made up of three peaks, with Kibo (right side) being the highest point at 19,341 feet and Mawenzi (on the left) at 16,893 being Africa's third highest peak after Mt. Kenya.

Once in Amboseli, we soon came across two male lions, one of which walked into a culvert to get into the shade. The Olkenya Swamp, one of two permanent swamps in the park that is fed from run-off from Kilimanjaro, creates a green belt in an otherwise flat, dry, barren landscape. Elephants and Buffalos were feeding in the swamp as egrets, African Spoonbills, White-faced Whistling Ducks, Long-toed Plovers, Knob-billed Ducks, Goliath Heron and Spur-winged Geese fed amongst the aquatic vegetation. We watched several Collared Pratincoles fly in and land close to us.

On the lush grounds of the Olukai lodge Taveta Golden Weavers were busy nest-building and attracting mates near the entrance gate, while near our rooms a (Blue) Yellowbill was spotted working its way through the Yellow-bark Acacias. A walk after lunch produced African Hoopoe, Eastern Black-

headed Oriole, Wood Warbler, Red-faced Crombec, Cardinal Woodpecker, Black Cuckoo-Shrike, Grey Flycatcher, and Marico Sunbird. While looking for a Slender-tailed Nightjar, I accidentally scared an African Civet from the underbrush. Family groups of Yellow Baboons and Vervet Monkeys wandered the grounds. While watching five Vervet's grooming each other in a tight group, it was interesting to see how protective they all were of a day-old baby and how they would not let him out of reach.



The afternoon game drive began with Red-capped Larks, Kittlitz's Plover, Eurasian Marsh Harrier, Kori Bustard and Grey-crowned Cranes. In the distance we could see a storm brewing and we were mistaken in thinking that it would miss us. Slowly it began to engulf the whole park and everyone was caught in a

tremendous sand storm that reduced visibility to only a few feet. It lasted four hours, well into the early evening. The last animals we saw were four elephants crossing the road (above) in front of us before we had to creep back making sure we did not either bump into an elephant or end up in a ditch.

#### **Oct 11 / Day 17 - Amboseli NR; Laiboro Plains, Arusha**

By daybreak the storm was gone, leaving Kilimanjaro covered in clouds. One of our targets, Double-banded Courser, was located before we reached the Enkongo Swamp. We worked our way around the eastern side of the swamp where there was a great deal of bird life. Amongst hundreds of Knob-billed Coots, there was Garganey and a sleeping pair of White-backed Ducks. A lone juvenile Purple Heron matched a Goliath Heron in patience, as they stood gazing at the water's edge. Squacco Herons numbered in the dozens and African Jacanas walked amongst the lilies as a Spur-winged Plover closely guarded her three newly-hatched chicks. In one spot three Malachite Kingfishers (*right*) lined up along the bank and were picking off damselflies.



A pod of hippos (*above*) emerged together from the swamp with two of them opening their mouths in a mock fight. At the Sinet Causeway, Winding Cisticolas, Red-rumped and Wire-tailed Swallows, Long-toed Plovers and Black Crakes took our attention away from the Buffalos wallowing in the swamp.

We came across a Greater Kestrel sitting on the sand as we crossed the dry Amboseli Lake bed. The area near the exit gate had received rain overnight, and we had to get to the gate. A vehicle ahead of us sank deeper into the mud the further it went, until they came to halt. The occupants all had to get out and push the vehicle. George attempted to cross in another spot and we got the same results (*below*), though his driving skills were considerably better. We managed to back out without any of us having to push! It now meant we had to make a considerable detour to get to the gate, which we did.



By late morning we were in Namanga at the border crossing. Once all the formalities were finished, we swapped vehicles and drivers for our seven-night stay in Tanzania. The road south had many diversions and was very rough having been temporarily created until the new Namanga to Arusha road is completed.

In the rain shadow of Mt Meru lies the Lariboro Plains, an area of very short grass and low, wind-shorn acacias. This wind swept area is extensively grazed by Maasai cattle. Today we feared we would be in the middle of another sand storm but by the time we arrived, the storm was on the other side of the road and heading away from us. Nevertheless, it was very windy. It is here that the highly localized and endemic Beesley Lark (*right*) lives. All eyes were on the plain and, as expected, Sue spotted two. They were quite cooperative as they walked towards us, feeding all the while. It seems that they even used the vehicle to protect themselves when the wind really got up. Capped Wheatear and Fawn-coloured Lark, also known as White-browed Lark, was also seen.



Once through the bustle of Arusha, beyond endless sleeping policemen that line the main road, we reached the Mountain Village Serena. Roosting under palm fronds at the entrance to the main building were three Epauette Fruit Bats, an eight-inch bat with small white tufts at the base of the ears. The gardens are covered in tropical shade trees and bougainvilleas of all different colors. We found that the flowers were favored by Specked Mousebirds, Dark-capped Bulbuls and Collared Sunbirds. A large group of Thick-billed Grosbeaks fed on a fruiting tree. Black-backed Puffback, Slender-billed Greenbul and Brown-hooded Kingfisher were seen from the patio while a walk along the newly created walking trail produced Western Citril, astonishing looks at Klaas' Cuckoo feeding on a caterpillar low in a bush and Brown-breasted Barbet.



## Oct 12 / Day 18 - Arusha; Tarangire NP

We searched the gardens at the Mountain Village for Wood Owls that were seen on a previous trip, but came up empty. Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Ruppell's Robin Chat and Eastern Olive Sunbird were added to the day list.



Our three-hour journey to Tarangire National Park was broken up with a brief stop along the road for Yellow-collared Lovebirds, Northern Grey-headed Sparrow and Yellow Bishop, and a half-hour walk around Joseph's Shirima Farm. Here the expected dry savanna-scrub species were easily located - White-bellied Go-Away Bird, Banded Parisoma, White-browed Scrub Robin singing away, Beautiful Sunbird and Eastern Violet-backed Sunbird which looks more like a warbler, White-bellied Canary, Abyssinian Scimitarbill and Kenya Rufous Sparrow.

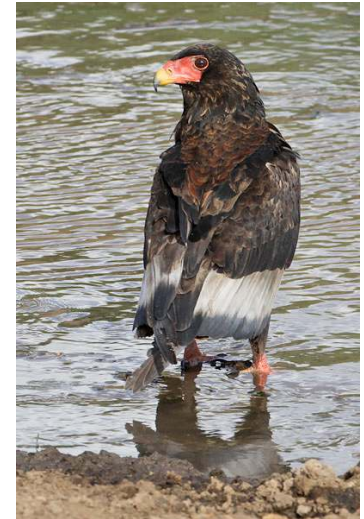
An hour at the Tarangire entrance gate went by quickly. We walked the acacia dominated open thickets around the visitor's center and car park, engaged by a pair of Nubian Woodpeckers, Green-winged Pytilia, Slate-coloured Boubou, Banded Parisoma (*left*) and Buff-bellied Warblers. We got our first looks at Ashy Starlings foraging on the ground. Standing in one spot there was a great deal of activity around us with Blue-capped Cordonblues outnumbering Red-cheeked, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Arrow-marked Babbler, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Spotted Morning Thrush and Rattling Cisticola. On our way to the lodge we

encountered Rufous-tailed Weavers, Red-billed Buffalo Weavers and while watching Wildebeest crossing the track we found a Northern White-crowned Shrike on a nest.



Once we reached the Tarangire Safari Lodge we settled into our tents before going to lunch. Situated on a bluff with a wonderful vista of the park this is an idyllic setting. The surrounding landscape is dotted with acacias and baobabs and was extremely dry. From the patio we could see Elephants drinking from the remaining shallow pools along the Tarangire River (*above*). A Pygmy Falcon was perched on a bare tree next to the tents as a Grey Woodpecker tapped on the trunk and Mottled Spinetails flew by at high speed.

Our afternoon game drive was spent within the Lemiyon region where there is a high concentration of baobabs, open savanna, woodlands. A pair of Secretary Birds were circling in unison high above the lodge as we left. With their rounded wings and long tail and legs these unique raptors are very distinctive in flight. As we followed the western bank of the river southwards, three lions were well concealed in the shade of shrubs. On one all we could make out were paws sticking up as it slept on its back. Two White-headed Vultures (*left*) were flying over the far side of the river searching for a meal. Unlike the other vultures, these striking birds keep to themselves and find their own food. The wetter stretches of the rivers produced an assortment of waders methodically prodding the soil for aquatic invertebrates.



A common and widespread raptor over Tarangire, for that matter all of East Africa's savanna's, is the striking Bateleur (*right*). It's name comes from the French for acrobat or tightrope walker, after its extraordinary flying skills - twisting, tilting and teetering - as it covers hundreds of miles in a day gliding effortless with few, if any, wing beats. We were fortunate enough to have an adult pose for us when we came across it having a drink in the river.

One of many magical moments came when we encountered a large gathering of Wildebeest and Zebras walking along the eastern bank of the river. As Elephants moved along the river bed and away from us, the ungulates began to come down to drink and we had a front row seat. Some jostled for prime positions, though only they knew what those were, while expressed their displeasure at having someone next to them. One younger elephant was lagging behind the rest of her herd. She was upset with all the commotion, turned to face them and then thought better of it and ran to join the rest of the family. For fifteen minutes hundreds of animals streamed in, drank, and then moved on.



Four turkey-sized Southern Ground Hornbills could be seen methodically working their way through the tall golden grasses, with eyes fixed to the ground, ready to pick off anything that they could find. We also encountered Orange-bellied Parrots, Black-faced and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, and heard Cocqui Francolin calling. We ended the day with a Martial Eagle flying to its nest, framed by a red-orange sunset melting behind silhouetted baobabs.



## Oct 13 / Day 19 - Tarangire NP; Ndarwarkai



Overnight, an elephant had visited the baobab between my tent and Jan's, and with its tusks had stripped the bark. It then proceeded to the swimming pool for a drink, which did not sit too well with the night watchmen, who had to escort it out!

A walk around the open compound before breakfast produced Abyssinian White-eyes, Scaly Francolin and Striped Kingfishers around the trees below the patio, a pair of African Scops Owls and Pearl-spotted Owlet (*left*) that alighted during breakfast on a bare tree on the patio. Needless to say we all ventured out to photograph it.

For the remainder of the morning we worked the tracks along the western edge of the park searching for a Leopard. We never did locate a Leopard, but enjoyed many other sights. Along with numerous herds of elephants, there was a band of Banded Mongoose scurrying through an open patch of soil. We saw a Steinbok, as well as a lone Buffalo on the run with Yellow-billed Oxpeckers hanging on! It stopped to stare at us. Unhappy that we were there, it made a half-hearted attempt to scare us off.



At a huge baobab (*left*) with an entrance opening near the base, we were allowed out the vehicle, to go explore inside the cavity. Mottled Spinetails nest in these dark cavities and we found about five of them roosting along with a bat, 25 feet up.

Magpie Shrikes (*below*) continued to be a common sight as were Long-tailed Fiscals. The sleek Namaqua Dove was seen walking the bare earth for seeds, and Blue-naped Mousebirds moved from thicket to thicket. In a section of woods we came across Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrike, Black-necked Weaver and Bearded Woodpecker, though the latter was hard to see as we were in the

process of negotiating a steep and rough section of track. Silverbird, Red-and-yellow Barbet, Buff-crested Bustard, Bare-faced Go-Away Bird and an African Hawk Eagle rounded out our stay in this beautiful park.

We made our way eastwards through Arusha, with a stop at the Cultural Heritage Center before turning north and taking a road between Mt. Meru and Mt. Kilimanjaro. After a further hour-plus drive along roads of various degrees of comfortability, we reached Ndarakwai Ranch, a sprawling 10,000 acre wildlife preserve. We had a little time to bird around our tents before dinner, finding White-crested Helmet-shrikes and Hunter's Sunbird, and Sue and Betty flushed a Plain Nightjar near their tent.





Our main objective for coming to Ndarakwai was to break up the drive to the Usambara Mountains and be able to go on a night game drive. At dinner, a pair of Greater Galagos (*left*) paid us a visit, looking for a piece of fruit. In an open land cruiser we drove out into the night for a couple of hours, covering a great deal of the ranch in search of nocturnal creatures. Our first mammal was an African Civet, followed by Lesser Galagos and several Spring Hares, that look like miniature kangaroos. Other than mammals normally seen during daylight hours, sadly, there was little else. A Verreaux's Eagle Owl was spotlighted eating a rodent, and a Spotted Hyena trotting along with a Spring Hare in its mouth, rounded out the evening.

### **Oct 14 / Day 20 - Ndarwarkai; Pagani River; Western Usambara Mt's**

We arose early and walked the acacia woodlands that surrounded our lovely tents, eager to see what we could see. A couple of barbets were the first sightings - Spot-flanked and Brown-breasted. Chin-spot Batis, Rufous Chatterers, Spotted Morning Thrush, Slate-coloured Boubou and Red-fronted Tinkerbird soon followed. Higher up in the trees Cardinal Woodpecker, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Abyssinian White-eye and Eastern Black-headed Oriole were all found before breakfast.

Leaving Ndarwarkai, White-headed Mousebird, Abyssinian Scimitarbill and an African Goshawk gave us a reason to pause along the dirt road. Once we were on the main road we passed through endless Cissal plantations and red soil landscapes. We were stopped by the police for an exorbitant amount of time as they quizzed Ben about such mundane things as his nationality. At the town of Same we took a break for lunch at the Elephant Hotel, where a fruiting fig tree held Silvery-cheeked Hornbills and Eurasian Golden Orioles.

One more stop an hour later at the Pagani River gave us a chance to walk along the narrow, reed-lined river. Taveta Golden, Black-headed and Lesser Masked Weavers were busy attracting mates at their nests. A white-phase Booted Eagle glided overhead, as a Black-bellied Sunbird darted over the acacias and Crimson-rumped Waxbills preened on lower branches. We were surprised to find a usually secretive forest species, Yellowbill, out in this rather open habitat bordered with agricultural plots. Small flocks of White-naped Ravens were encountered beside the road before reaching Mombo.

Situated between Mount Kilimanjaro and the Indian Ocean, the Usambara Mountains (*below*) rise steeply from the surrounding Maasai plains. The drive from Mombo, up the windy road takes in some wonderful mosaic scenery of small uncultivated and cultivated plots leading to the largest town, Lushoto. Sadly, these slopes have lost their forests as more and more people pursue agriculture as a means of self sufficiency. Even the lush shallow ravines are farmed, but it is along the top of them that we find Mocking Cliff-Chats. From Lushoto a dirt road leads for 14 kms to Mueller's Mountain Lodge which we reach at dusk. These mountains were favored by Germans in colonial times and European style homes are dotted throughout the range, exemplified by Mueller's.





## Oct 15 / Day 21 - Mueller's; West Usambara Mts

We spent the morning in the Magamba forest. Beginning in a more open area, we soon have African Stonechat and Dark-capped Warbler in the field below the road and a Cinnamon Bracken Warbler along the hedgerow. A Banded Green Sunbird flew into the trees lining the road, where we also saw Usambara Mountain Greenbuls, Eastern Olive and Amethyst Sunbird, and Cape and White-browed Robin-Chats hopping out of the low bushes to feed on the road.

As we passed a puddle in the dirt road, Mosque Swallows alighted to pickup mud for their nests. Walking into the forest the activity was relatively quiet with the exception of Yellow White-eyes, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler and a Usambara (Eastern) Double-collared Sunbird (*right*) that baffled us upon first appearance.



A section of open forest was far more productive as Black Sawwings were everywhere picking off insects on the wing. This is what undoubtedly attracted Black Cuckoo-shrikes and a Grey Cuckoo-shrike. As Kendrick's Starlings kept landing on bare branches at the tops of trees, Stripe-faced Greenbul, White-tailed Crested Flycatcher and Cardinal and Olive Woodpecker worked the insides of larger trees. We watched several Usambara Weavers, which are only found on the western side of the mountain range, bring nesting material to a

nest. Our only mammal was a Red-legged Sun Squirrel, and we had a couple of Usambara Two-horned Chameleons (*below right*) in different locations, each with a camouflage suited to the specific background.

The afternoon session combined areas along the stream with edge of the forest birding. Black-backed Puffback, Horus Swift, Placid Greenbul, Slender-billed Greenbul and Southern Black Flycatcher were added. There were two White-starred Robins moving from low perches to the ground to feed, and back again. A Mountain Buzzard showed well as it flew over a valley, and a pair of African Hobbys were located close to their nest near the top of a Norfolk Pine. The day ended with a flock of twenty White-winged Widowbirds dropping into sedges to roost.



## Oct 16 / Day 22 - West Usambara Mts; East Usambara Mts

We retraced our tracks back to the more successful of yesterday's spots. An Evergreen Forest Warbler was tantalizingly close, calling from a dense shrub, feet away from us, but it never showed. A little further up we got good looks at two African Hill Babblers, and glimpses of an Orange Ground Thrush as it moved about behind low hanging vines. Red-faced Crimsonwing, Eastern Nicator and Fullerborn's Boubou were all heard, but the boubou, which looks like a State-coloured, did show itself as it moved



through the mid-canopy. The track that had the Usambara Weavers yesterday was far quieter today. Though we did not find the weavers, Waller's Starling, Usambara Double-collared Sunbird, Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler and African Tailorbird (*right*) were all seen well.



By late morning we were on our way back down the mountain. Heading east we passed numerous Kapok trees with white, fibrous cotton hanging from the seed pods as well as Coconut Palms, a sure sign that we were dropping in elevation and getting closer to the ocean. Before reaching the Indian Ocean we turned north at Muheza and headed for the Amani Nature Reserve in the Eastern Usambara Mountains. The five sawmills on the edge of town gave us an indication of what lay ahead. While acres upon acres of hillside had been logged, we were unprepared for the amount of devastation that this caused to the habitat along the southern part of the lowland forest.

After the necessary paperwork was complete at the Reserve gate, we spent the remainder of the afternoon walking the road, checking the overhanging branches over the river in the hopes of finding a Half-collared Kingfisher. Unfortunately it was flowing far too fast, the recent rains having elevated the water level and turned the water brown. As we approached a bend in the road a vocal Green-headed Oriole in the canopy kept ahead of us. We did well to locate two Narina Trogons as they moved through the forest. A Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbird flittered about in front of us as Black-bellied Starlings flew over. Above us in the top of a bare tree, a Peregrine Falcon was busy eating a small bird.

## Oct 17 / Day 23 - East Usambara Mts



We met Victor, one of the forest guides, at breakfast and proceeded on a lengthy drive over rough roads and through tea plantations to the Kwamkoru Trail (*left*). A Green Barbet was the first bird to greet us, followed by Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler and Little Greenbul. The Long-billed Tailorbird is a small, secretive forest warbler, with two isolated populations, one in Mozambique, and a larger group here at Amani, estimated at about 200 birds! The first location we tried failed to produce a sighting, but along this wonderful primary forest trail there were Green-backed Twinspots feeding on grass seedheads; a Southern Banded Snake-Eagle moving

from perch to perch; Fischer's Turacos calling, Grey Cuckoo-shrike and more Green-headed Orioles.

Along a slope across from a narrow stream, there was considerable activity moving through the understory. The mixed flock included African Paradise Flycatchers with their long tails trailing behind them as they flew to pick off insects. Yellow-streaked Greenbuls and Dark-backed Weavers foraged through vines and amongst the roots of towering trees. Two trogons were spotted, one Bar-tailed and one more common Narina. Higher up in the mid story a Square-tailed Drongo sallied for insects that

eluded the flock below. Other creatures we encountered on this morning's walk included a six-inch African Giant Snail, a miniscule Vermiculated Tree Frog and numerous butterflies - *Catuna* (*below right*), Usambara Glider, Black-bordered Charaxes and various *Acraea* and *Bicyclus* species. On the way back to the Amani Research Center for lunch, we walked a stretch of the river and quickly located two beautiful Half-collared Kingfishers (*below left*).



Following lunch we headed to another section of the forest, searching again for the Long-billed Tailorbird. Along the way a Cabanis Bunting was perched on a wire and White-eared Barbets coming to a nest cavity greeted us upon our arrival at a known tailorbird territory. While White-chested Alethe was heard calling from the forest undergrowth, a Fischer's Turaco flew into the canopy above us. Finally we located a pair of Long-billed Tailorbirds. They were very vocal, making it easy enough to track them, but since they are known for their sulking behavior, it required patience before we were rewarded with wonderful short but close views.

Our last birding for the afternoon was along a stretch of forest that abutted a tea plantation. Eurasian Orioles were in eucalyptus trees, a Moustached Green Tinkerbird showed very briefly, there were two Black Cuckoo-shrikes, Green Banded and Purple-banded Sunbird and a Great Sparrowhawk.

Once we returned to the Amani Guest House, we found that a power cut left us without water and electricity! While we were at dinner, Victor heard a Usambara Eagle Owl calling, so we walked along the road and into the forest following the river as it meandered through the forest for half a kilometer. Sadly there was nary a sighting or a hoot.

### **Oct 18 / Day 24 - East Usambara Mts; Tanga;**

Tremendous overnight rains continued into the morning hours, removing our option to bird here, however briefly. We left Amani and slowly made the trek down the mountain. The rain lessened as we descended in elevation. Along the way we passed bamboo huts plastered with mud, plots of Yam vines and Cassava trees. We also saw Red-faced Cisticola, Brown-hooded Kingfisher and a mixed group of non-breeding plumaged Zanzibar Red Bishops and Black-winged Red Bishops.

Back on the main road, it was only 45 kms to Tanga, Tanzania's second largest port. We made one stop to check out the roadside scrub, finding Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Golden Palm Weaver, Zanzibar Sombre Greenbul, Northern Puffback and getting a better look at Purple-banded Sunbirds. Entering Tanga, Indian House Crows became the most common bird. One small dump hosted hundreds of them!



We had lunch outdoors at the Mkonge Hotel (*above*), where the gardens overlooking the ocean attracted White-browed Coucal, Brown-hooded Kingfisher and Brown-breasted Barbet. A Whimbrel walked the water's edge while Sooty Gulls soared around the dhows (small boats).

The first of many Northern Carmine Bee-eaters were seen on our way north to the Tanzanian-Kenyan border. We quickly made it across the six kilometer stretch of no-mans land, where there were two Southern Ground Hornbills. After another half-hour of official business at the Lunga Lunga border, we were back in Kenya.

## **End of Part 2**