



Tanzania Birding & Wildlife Safari Trip Report (Mar 28 - Apr 11, 2024)

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As far as this guide is concerned the most enduring memories, from our Eagle-Eye safari in Tanzania (March-April 2024), are of a frequent rekindling of happiness as we became immersed in the incredible life-diversity that still flourishes within that tapestry of landscapes spread across Northern Tanzania. A diversity noted, in the forty-nine species of mammal and well over four hundred of birds, encountered along our route. A four hundred kilometre imaginary water-line linking the snowy crowns of Mount Kilimanjaro to the floating papyrus islands of Lake Nyanza-Victoria. Although one is being driven along a relatively short transect, of a large country, the traveller experiences many profound and dramatic shifts in climate and hence in the associated vegetation communities and their wildlife. Not to mention a great diversity of peoples who still manage to maintain unique living connections with this land.



Black-backed Jackal © Rita Friesen



Lilac-breasted Roller © Rita Friesen

2023-2024 has been marked by an El Niño event. As a consequence there were many days in our tour when we experienced some rain. However, in the whole month of April there was only one day, in fact only one afternoon, during which we could not “BirdBig” due to the adverse weather conditions. In Tanzania the green season of April is always accompanied by magnificent skylines. Amazing cloud formations that complement perfectly the terrestrial beauty of northern Tanzania.

Simply wonderful!



Tanzanian Landscape © James Wolstencroft

If you add to this the incredible diversity of mammals, many of whom are still flourishing, and the lengthy bird list, the insects and the magnificent trees and all the varied morphology of the colourful flowers, the result is a superlative ecological adventure in a holiday of only sixteen days.



Baobobs in Tarangire National Park © Dale Floer



View from Tarangire Safari Lodge © Dale Floer

Witnessing this unfailingly demonstrates the foresight of the founders of the nation of Tanzania, and the sacrifices that have been made by subsequent generations. All to ensure that privileged souls, such as ourselves, may enjoy such unique experiences. Our safari began with at night or two at KIA Lodge a tranquil place beside the infrequently used runway of the international airport and continued with two days in the thickly forested slopes of Mount Meru. Here we were introduced to our first African bird families. Species that ranged from the soon-to-be familiar Speckled Mousebird (an every-day bird) to the fabulous Hartlaub's Turacos who were snatching olive-green Rauwvolfia fruits almost out in the open. We were treated to close views of the simply unbelievably gorgeous Grey Crowned Cranes tending their chicks and were able to drive up to the magnificent flamingo flocks on the brackish Momella Lakes. The highlight here for me was the mixed flock of over eighty migrant falcons that wiffled out of the thunderclouds as we stood on a hilltop beside these lakes. There were wonderful mammals here in the evergreen forests such as glowing Red Duikers and the exquisite Eastern Pied Colobus monkeys.



Gray-crowned Cranes © Rita Friesen

Leaving the cool mountains, skirting Arusha city on the new ring road, we descended into the Great Rift valley to visit Tarangire and Lake Manyara national parks. Here among the incredible Baobabs we found our first Savanna Elephants, our first big flocks of weavers, our first Impala and first prehistoric-looking Southern Ground Hornbills. Here we enjoyed an unrivalled vista of the “quintessential” savanna Africa. A view we could soak-in from the porches of our very comfortable tents. There were birds galore: scops owls, kingfishers, bee-eaters, great raptors and those equally impressive old-world vultures and a variety of small mammals too: particularly the Banded and Dwarf mongooses and the Unstriped ground squirrels; all helped to inspire our growing sense of wonder.



In the bottom of the Rift Valley, at an elevation of barely 1,000 metres, Lake Manyara is typically the hottest point on the safari and also the busiest in terms of tourists. We certainly consumed a lot of water in our afternoon here. In the late afternoon near the lake we watched Spotted Morning Thrush and it's close relative the Collared Palm Thrush perched on the very same branch - certainly a first for me in nineteen years of bird-watching in Tanzania. From the small town of Mto wa Mbu at the base of the escarpment we climbed back into the cool highlands. This is where the Wairaqi people live and after a night at a very comfortable lodge the next morning we enjoyed a forest walk in the buffalo-mists of Endoro which cloaks the hills above the legendary Gibb's farm. "Gibb's" is an old yet thriving organic coffee-and-vegetable estate further enlivened by a somewhat sleepy family of Verreaux's Eagle-owls, by various fabulous sunbirds, nesting Red-rumped swallows and confiding "big-eyed" slaty-flycatchers and on this visit the simply unforgettable Schalow's Turacos. Leaving the fertile red soils of Karatu town we climbed further into the real highlands and discovered the indescribable beauty of Ngorongoro Crater. Most definitely this is a wonder of our world. I have made a great many visits to this Crater yet each time as we leave, via the zig-zag ascent road to the crater's rim, I have become spellbound by the experience. This wetter year it was the water birds that, for me, stole the show. Every time you see something unique: on this occasion we lucked-in on a rare migrant, a Spotted Redshank, feeding whilst swimming, in a well vegetated flash beside the track. And thankfully on this visit we managed to get reasonably close to the critically endangered Black (also called Browse) Rhinoceros who survive in the crater, largely thanks to the extra tight security it affords them. We were lucky too to find a couple of Bushpigs, next day in the morning mist, at a "secret" site that I always insist we visit!



Flamingos in Ngorongoro Crater © Dale Floer



Black Rhinoceros © Rita Friesen



Bush pig © Rita Friesen



Zebras in Ngorongoro Crater © Dale Floer

From the Ngorongoro Highlands, of the classical Maasailand, we descended into and subsequently across the amazing, unpeopled and mammal-rich, vastness of the Serengti plains (and hill ranges) westwards towards Lake Nyanza-Victoria.



Serengeti National Park © Dale Floer

It was a real thrill to be back among herds of Giraffe and to enter into the multitudinous throng of the wildebeest and zebra migrations. The unique spectacle, the “movable feast”, for which this land is so rightly famous. We stayed first at the magnificent Ndutu Lodge (which is most people’s

favourite, among the excellent selection of accommodation available on this tour) and then at a relatively new mobile camp beside the western corridor. Despite the occasional heavy shower in the Serengeti resulting in some muddy road conditions we were amply rewarded for our perseverance. On this first safari we managed to get extremely close to some Cheetahs. In the evening at Ndotu we were extremely lucky to find a female Caracal hunting grass rats in the soft golden light of the setting sun. This land is busy with big mammals and some very special birds. In particular we saw a healthy number of Secretarybirds here. A tribute to the enduring vastness of the Serengeti protected area system.



Caracal © Rita Friesen



Lake Ndutu © Dale Floer

After several days observing wildlife almost entirely from within the confines of our open-roofed, long wheel-base, Toyota Land Cruiser it was a great joy to spend many hours wandering in the lake-shore grounds of Speke Bay Lodge. By now we were all becoming a little familiar with the “everyday birds of the safari circuit” and so we could better devote ourselves to tracking down “skulkers” such as the unforgettable Black-headed Gonolek, the ventriloquial Scaly-throated Honeyguide and Grey-capped Warbler.



Lake Victoria © James Wolstencroft



Birding in Tanzania © James Wolstencroft

Eventually it was time to fly back from the wealth of waterbirds at the lake, including some tame and iridescent Allen's Gallinules in rice fields near to Mwanza city, to Kilimanjaro Airport, and to the place where our Tanzanian nature adventure began, KIA Lodge. Here we enjoyed several special birds of the trip including close encounters once again with delightful Slender-tailed Nightjars as they came to drink and display right beside us at the hill-top swimming pool.



Our group 2024



Brown Snake-Eagle © Rita Friesen



Pearl-spotted Owlet © Rita Friesen



Red-cheeked Cordonbleu © Rita Friesen



Dark Chanting-Goshwak © Rita Friesen



Squacco Heron © Rita Friesen



Von der Decken's Hornbill © Rita Friesen



Elephants in Tarangire National Park © Dale Floer

[Tanzania Birding and Wildlife Tour species list 2024-1](#)