

## To Tanzania for a special event. We start out as two and pick up strays as we travel.

The Plan. To be at Ndutu Lodge for a significant Birthday. OK. It coincided with the arrival of a few thousand Wildebeest for their own birthing event and that made booking well in advance a necessity.

The Admin. After checking flights we opted, as usual for KLM to JRO as the best option even if the return leg via DAR is a drag. We thought we had been clever getting a cheap flight by booking for Christmas Day but that was almost our undoing. Everybody knows it will snow on Christmas day, Bing Crosby made a career out of the fact. So plane tickets were bought in March and Ndutu Lodge was booked as the core event of the trip.

The trip Elizabeth wanted to re-visit Ndutu and Selous and I wanted to see Ruaha and also take her to some places I had been before so the whole trip was panned out at 42 nights which is a lot even for us. Then KLM made it an extra day as they cancelled the Christmas day flight so we had to start out a day earlier.

The Route. Arriving JRO late evening made a night stop in Arusha necessary and due to KLM's flight change we had arranged two nights there. 24<sup>th</sup> & 25<sup>th</sup> December. We would then fly Coastal to Ruaha on 26<sup>th</sup>, then to Selous and on to Zanzibar. Not for the Beach but Dolphins and Jozani Forest for birds and Kirk's Red Colobus. I had a good contact with Coastal so it fell easier to use their properties in Ruaha, Selous and Mbweni on ZNZ. This worked well and thanks very much Flo, Boni, Pascal and the team!

From ZNZ we would hop to Saadani NP for a few nights then be picked up and driven to Amani in the Usumbaras, Mkomazi and on to old favourites Tarangire, Ngorongoro, Serengeti and back via Lake Manyara before flying home on 3<sup>rd</sup> February. That was "The plan"!

The Outcome. Unseasonal Snow in Europe (It should only go on Christmas cards) caused a hiatus when the idiots in MAN closed the airport so KLM quickly and efficiently re-booked us on Emirates via Dubai, Dar es Salaam to JRO. So we spent Christmas Day in Dubai. Thank goodness we still made the Coastal flight on 26<sup>th</sup> and everything after that worked like a dream. Lucky or was it my brilliant planning?

Following our delayed arrival in Arusha where we spent the evening of Christmas Day at the modest but comfortable "Outpost" and finally met up with our Driver Guide, Roger Msengi, who had spent the whole day waiting at JRO for us. I had engaged Roger before ([www.rogersafaris.coolix.com](http://www.rogersafaris.coolix.com)) so knew him well and his skills as a birder and careful driver. Roger's immediate task was to get us to Arusha airport for the 8am "Coastal" departure to Ruaha National Park but he would be joining us later in Saadani to drive us on the rest of our extended trip.



As we were the only pax for Ruaha that day Coastal had put on 5H-VIP which is the standard Caravan but with only 6 Club Seats laid out like a Limo. Superb.

The trip had no need to

call at stops so the flight only took 2 hours instead of the scheduled three and a half.



**Ruaha National Park.** We let down to a green and pleasant land and had to wait until the Giraffe and Zebra were cleared from the runway. Ruaha is truly beautiful with a remote feeling and quite mountainous too. Our Camp, **Old Mdonya River Camp**, was about a 45 minute Game drive away during which we saw many Kudu etc., a few birds (ahem!) and even investigated alarm calls indicating a Leopard on the Prowl.



We spent five nights here in very comfortable surroundings. The Camp is flexible and you can order meals either at the Camp or as Bush Breakfasts/Lunches etc., as you wish. We mixed and matched.

Recent rain had made some 'roads' tricky and one self-driver had to be rescued well after dark. Away from



the mountain area the Park runs into a mini Serengeti along the Ruaha River so the scenery is changing constantly.

Highlights were a family of three Leopards just by the Camp entrance, plus Dad marching through camp the next morning as bold as only male Leopards can be. Also



the very close contact with a young **Pearl-spotted Owlet**. She seemed to be caught in thorns so I had the rare privilege of handling her to get her free. She then obliged by posing for some of the best Owl Pictures ever. I had to use Macro settings.

New Year's Eve had us flying to Selous and Lake Manze Camp where 'celebrations' took place on the Beach under a moon. Before that however we had met the local pack of 14 Wild dogs on the drive from the Airstrip. A fantastic end to the year.

**Lake Manze** is another "Tented

Camp" set, would you believe, on the shore of Lake Manze. Birdlife is prolific and I snapped my first of the beautiful Boehm's Bee-eater as well as Collared Palm Thrush and numerous Woodpeckers. Again you could run the mix of Bush breakfasts etc., plus Boat and walking Safaris. We found three lots of Lion and had some fun with one family as other cars got stuck





in the mud when trying to get closer. Elephant are frequent in camp and I was once woken from my post prandial snooze on the porch by a very loud, and close, belly rumble. Eyes opened to find me face to face with a very large lady. Curiosity satisfied she ambled down to the lake to bathe and I breathed out.



It was not over. On our final drive to the Airstrip several Impala were fleeing wild eyed straight at us. I stood up to spot the pursuing **Wild Dogs** and the driver dough nuted the car back in pursuit. We caught up as the Impala was being demolished and though gruesome we managed to photograph a sight rarely witnessed as it is over so quickly. Pictures to die for! Well the poor Impala did.



Some page fillers to end this section with:-



Collared Palm Thrush



Slender Mongoose.



Carmine Bee-eater.

So we arrived in Zanzibar on **4<sup>th</sup> January** and were collected and taken to Mbweni Ruins Hotel. It had been raining and the ground was wet. We did some sleeping and settled in. We do not care for Stonetown so this was not on our Itinerary other than to pick up some cash. Mbweni do a free shuttle service.

We were then joined by Chris who had flown out to join us. We organised a trip to



Jozani Forest to meet **Kirk's Colobus**, visit the Mangrove Swamps to seek a Kingfisher and a very worthwhile Green Turtle project where we fed them on Sea Lettuce. We used Juma a Freelance Tour guide for this. He also took us down to Kizimkazi in the hope to spot Dolphins. He was born there and knew his way around. In no time we were aboard a fishing boat, having waded out to it due to no jetty. This trip was very successful and

we rapidly had close encounters with both Humpbacked and Bottle-nosed Dolphins. The latter



were more playful and we got lots of photos. Towards the end we called the trip off as we

were beset by speedboats who were trying to muscle in and drop swimmers. This was plain stupid and dangerous. As far as we could make out nothing was achieved other than the Dolphins took off having been unnecessarily harassed (IMHO) and that was that. Juma can be contacted on [jumataxi@hotmail.com](mailto:jumataxi@hotmail.com) and is extremely competent as a guide and fixer.

Mbweni Ruins had a Generator so Zanzibar's "Blackout" did not affect us too much. Nice Hotel and we would stay there again. **4<sup>th</sup> January** To the airport for a charter to Saadani NP where we had not been before. Processing was fun due to no Electric for the scanners etc., so they rifled through our belongings looking for Armaments for the Coup we were planning in Saadani. We arrived Saadani and swapped plane seats with the Lodge Owner who was leaving. Is there a message here? Saadani is a lovely Park and well worth a visit. We stayed at "Tent with a View" but were disappointed to find it 40km from the airstrip and outside the NP. This is not what it said on the tin.



However it was very nice and the park is interesting enough. Very wet though with many tracks closed. So bad that even the temporary 'by passes' had temporary "by passes". There are lots of birds just outside the Tent for the Birders.



Bushbabies came to dinner each night too. On 10<sup>th</sup> we were out walking when our Driver, Roger, arrived ready for the morning departure on schedule. So we took him birding with us. Wildlife Highlights. **Lichtenstein's Hartebeest**, Black-headed Batis and Tereck's Sandpiper.



**11<sup>th</sup> January** had us on the road towards the Ferry at Pangani after which we turned onto a minor road to Muheza through endless Sisal Plantations. There are birds to be seen there too. Slowly the Usumbara Range became clearer as we approached and we got slightly lost by the improved "road" from Muheza to Amani.

Improved is a relative term in this part of Tanzania but it WAS better than last time. Amani is at 5,000 feet in splendid Forest. Our stay here was at the Government Resthouse. The only mammals of note were several Sun Squirrels chittering from the trees but people come here for the Flora and the Endemic birds some of which, such as the Amani Sunbird, are named for the area. Our forest walks were very productive but boring for the non-birder so enough of that. A beautiful area and well worth a visit.

**14<sup>th</sup> January.** We left Amani and headed north for Same and the Mkomazi National Park. As we entered the Park we had already encountered several of the birds we had come to see and many Mammals too. Our stay here was to be in the relative luxury of **Babu's Tented Camp** where I had stayed in 2007. On our walk to Dinner the first evening we saw a Wildcat sitting by our path. A taste of what was to come? The Wildlife not the Dinner.



This park was only gazetted in 2007 and wildlife is still scarce but there are Elephant, Buffalo, Zebra, Greater and **Lesser Kudu**, Gerenuk and Coke's Hartebeest in good numbers. Lions are rumoured and a Cheetah and small cub were reported



recently. On a sadder note we encountered an Aardwolf that had been run over and killed by a thoughtless motorist. Such a sad end for a rarely seen and beautiful animal but at least it shows they are present. One day we had a visitor to our tent. A lovely Speckled Sand Snake slipped down the tree and attempted to gain entry. Mildly venomous so he was



not encouraged. Everywhere was beautiful and green after the rains which had left some tracks tricky. We were the first car through to Kisima for some weeks and on the way we had a nice picnic by a small waterfall. Kisima is the home to the George Adamson Wildlife Preservation Trust and the Black Rhino

and Wild Dog re-introduction programmes run by Tony Fitzjohn. Visits are possible but not actively solicited due to little provision for such events but we had been invited so the visit went fine.

A highlight of our stay in Mkomazi was a beautiful Caracal out hunting at Dusk. This is only the second one that I have ever seen. Among the birds noted were the ubiquitous Red-bellied Parrots around Camp, numerous Cuckoos, Rosy-patched Bush-Shrikes and Pygmy Falcons and both Harlequin and Common Quails. Babu's really looked after us well and we had to drag ourselves away for a brief overnight stopover at the Elephant Hotel in Same before leaving for Arusha and the start of the final stages to the Serengeti. For those wondering "Same" is pronounced Sarmay.

Having risen early at the Elephant Motel we set off towards Moshi in order to pick up our second Guest, David who had arrived yesterday and stayed at the Kilimanjaro Airport Lodge where he hoped to catch a glimpse of the eponymous Mountain if she did not prove too shy! Well as we could see something large and topped with white almost as soon as we left Same we knew he must have enjoyed the usual Whiteknuckles team luck as we still had almost 200km. to drive. And so it proved. Introductions over we then set off for Tarangire National Park and one of my favourite Lodges, Tarangire Safari Lodge. Set as it is on a cliff overlooking the ever flowing Tarangire River it has to score maximum points on location alone. The tents are comfortable, the food good and the grounds are frequented by birds and mammals. You can 'safari' from your tent with a cool beer to hand if you wish..



Tarangire Safari Lodge Tents. The view from the tents Yellow-collared Lovebirds  
So we stayed here three nights and saw lots of elephants, birds and just as we were leaving David saw a glimpse of his first African lions.



We then transferred to Rhoatia Lodge near Karatu for the next two nights. We liked the place a lot for its isolation and enjoyed several walks for birds and small mammals on the edge of the Ngorongoro Conservation area. Two of the highlights were this **Little Sparrowhawk** by my tent and a large **Flap-necked Chameleon** by the restaurant.



Then it was time to head further west towards our long anticipated stay at Ndutu Safari Lodge on the edge of the Serengeti National Park. This was where Elizabeth had asked to

spend her birthday. On the drive there we had to travel along the rim of the famous Ngorongoro Crater. This is

an extinct Caldara measuring 12 kilometres in diameter with the rim 2000 feet above the crater floor. The crater is home to many species of wildlife not least the endangered Black Rhinoceros plus some very impressive bull elephants. So we decided to pay the fee and descend into the crater for a day to see what we could.

We covered a fair distance on the numerous tracks and found lion, wildebeest and Zebra easily enough but the stars have to be the Rhinos, we saw 12, the elephants and nice Serval out hunting and being totally ignored by the folks seeking lions and yet more lions. We far preferred the **Serval**.



And so after our friends had had their fill of the wonders of the Crater we proceeded to Ndutu and the eponymous lodge which was to be our base for eight nights. Well she was worth it and who was I to complain?

It would be tedious to relate a day by day account of the eight days so first a few photos with an explanation to follow.





The marsh area is a good place to start and what could have been nicer than to find a cheetah with two very young cubs? Ndutu is very good for Lions and the scavengers who keep the place tidy despite being quite efficient killers in their own right. And with the wildebeest arriving in their thousands to calve the predators were lining up for their annual feast.



And the little guys were in the thick of it too.



Common (Golden) Jackal    Hyena gorging on Wildebeest and a cute Bat-eared Fox.  
Despite the carnage the food supply was undiminished. They just kept coming!





On one drive my hunch played off and we found a lone Black Rhino that was very shy. Not so the lovely little Dwarf Mongoose families.



Time for a couple of birds to even out the choices. 469 species of Birds were noted, & some even sat still long enough for a decent snapshot.



One Greater and several Lesser Flamingo      White Storks and      a Kittlitz Plover.

But the main draw at Ndotu are the Cats. Everywhere and all watching for their opportunity.



Watching,      watching      and watching!





Of course one elusive cat is often found in a tree and deserves a special place in this report:-



He was sound asleep when we found him but we managed a quick snap of him taking a look around when I nipped out of the car to change seats with the others.



Of course other mammals hang out in trees too. Such as this Yellow-winged Bat. On one morning drive we completely ruined a Honey Badgers walk when we caught him returning from a night out. Fearsome creatures with an even more fearsome reputation it went a bit like this:-



“Hello? What’s that ahead? Wow! A Honey Badger. Get closer!” But Mr Badger was having none of that. He just rounded on us and made very threatening noises which we interpreted as “Keep your distance and if you don’t clear off I will have to deal harshly with you and your truck.”





And we never doubted it for a minute.



So we let him proceed in peace.

A lovely animal really but one not to be messed with. Lions can come off worst in a fight.

Whilst in story telling mode there now follows a sequence of Thumbnails without commentary which show the creature of the African Savannah at work. At first they are resting but ‘watching’ and eventually decide that Wildebeest could on the menu.







So that was that. They killed and ate well and we left them to eat it in peace.



The females were producing plenty more to make up for losses. This was the peak of the calving season when the 2.6million wildebeest migrate down to Ndutu to drop their calves on the nutritious calcium rich short grasses that grow on the soil brought on the winds from when Kilimanjaro erupted millennia ago.

We had one further cat experience before leaving Ndutu for Lake Manyara. It happened as we were finishing up our late evening drive when we espied an African Wildcat out hunting.



I will end Ndutu with a few photos one of which sums up the place in an apt manner.





We left Ndutu for the return trip over the Ngorongoro Highlands to the start of the Great Rift Valley where we lodged at another old favourite from my early days in Tanzania. Kirurumu Tented Camp. (See “2000 Tanzania on the loose” and “1996. Tanzania my second trip!” among others.)

We were here for three nights so plenty of time to enjoy the nearby Lake Manyara National Park or just laze about in the immediate area.

There were good birds to be had in Kirurumu’s own large grounds as these three examples show: - left to right **Straw-tailed Whydah, Red-cheeked Cordon Bleu**



and **Violet-backed (Plum coloured) Starling.**

Meanwhile down in the National Park we happily found lots of elephant in the Groundwater forest and Zebra, Giraffe etc., out on the lake side savannah. The Ellies here are quite relaxed and permit close approach provided you stick to the rules and let the ellie make all the moves. If they approach you they are happy for you to be there but if you charge up to them they are not.



Even when the tourists are nervous they are not at risk as the following shows. Note how the girls move away as the animal gets close.





But Lake Manyara was not all about Ellies and I am certainly not going to end this report on thirteen pages.  
So let's have a final look at what else was there:-



Zebras and thousands of Pink Flamingo as well as Spotted Hyena and cubs as well as quite a few birds such as Cuckoos, Turaco and Usambiro Barbets left to right below:-



Mr and Mrs Chin spot Batis at Kirurumu ends this report as we make our way home via Kilimanjaro, Dar es Salaam, Amsterdam and are greeted with this sight as we descend into Manchester.

