

Elephants Galore and other things. Kenya Trip Report September 4th -29th 2011.

Fred & Elizabeth Hodgson & David Kinrade.

Preliminary information etc.

We were first invited to Kenya to enjoy the 'unique access' to Elephants offered by David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust in 2008. It was superb and plans were hatched to return this year. This is how it worked out. KLM did a nice fare, we booked Ithumba Camp for six nights, were persuaded to take four nights at the new Umani Springs 'lodge' and three at another place by Angela and it was done. I should mention that DSWT properties are booked en bloc so you have the whole camps to yourselves. No sharing which is very nice indeed. Great for a party of friends. David Kinrade came with us as he was on the first trip too. We decided it was also time to visit Amboseli for the Kilimanjaro backdrop and Lake Nakuru for Flamingos and Rhino which is covered in another report.

Kenya is two hours ahead of GMT and one from Europe. Easy! No seasons to speak of but we had timed the visit to coincide with the end of the dry time so that wildlife would be more visible as they come to permanent water.

Entry requirements: - A visa costs \$50 and is readily available at the Airport on arrival.

Local currency is Kenyan Shilling. Around 150/£ or 95/US\$. We carried folding money as most was prepaid from home.

Getting there, back and around. We used a private vehicle for the DSWT properties and AllSeasons tours for the later 8 day tour to Amboseli, Nakuru etc.,

Food & Drink. Beer is readily available, Tusker being the main brand and quite good. We self catered although some cooking was done by local staff. We bought fresh supplies as needed. After swapping to All Seasons we were in Lodges.

Bugs, n Bowels. Peel it, boil it or forget it. We were relaxed on food hygiene here and suffered no ill effects. Malaria is a problem but we saw few mossies. We used the nets at Amboseli but Kembu Cottages is at 7,200 feet and nothing to worry about. In fact we ceased taking our Lariam and saved the Pills for next time.

Accommodations. We had booked DSWT properties for the main part and then Amboseli Sopa and Kembu Cottages which I had booked direct. Two nights in Nairobi pre trip were at the excellent **Wildebeest Camp**.

Kit carried. We had decent binoculars, my Fuji FS100. Elizabeth her faithful 5700. We took lots of spare batteries, chargers etc., Kenyan sockets are UK 13 amp.

Books. Fanshawe and Stevenson. "Birds of East Africa" which David also had on his Notebook thingy plus a new Android Check list he has worked on.

The Start. 4th September. Picked up by David early only to find a 2 hour delay at IOM. We got a free Breakfast. Eventually we flew to Manchester to connect with KLM to Amsterdam with plenty of time. Then onwards with Kenya Airways overnight to Nairobi where we arrived on time at 6.15.

5th & 6th September. We had a meet & greet arranged with Wildebeeste Camp and despite the early hour they managed to get our Tents ready for us. A nice place in its own grounds. A bit backpackerish but just what we needed. We did some shopping locally and some birding in the grounds. We visited a Crocodile Farm and went to the DSWT Orphanage to pay our dues and do the 'parents evening with Maxwell. We also got the tick list off to a good start.



Maxwell in Nairobi.

7th – 10th September. The pick up by Dickson our driver/guide and mentor for the next 13 days was on time and after a call for fresh produce we set off for the drive to Umani Springs. Once clear of the appalling Nairobi traffic we made good time and we picked up a few more birds by the roadside but David did not get all of them as I was in the front pax seat. Umani Springs is about 40 minutes south of the tar at Kibwezi and what a gorgeous place it is. There are four Bungalows that



Umani Springs

sleep 10 folks in all. We chose the ones we liked best. We intended to cook for ourselves but there was a resident and very competent cook who insisted so we let him use our supplies and get on with it. Two mornings we rose early and headed out on foot for the Springs and a tour of the area. Very dry and beautiful with the natural springs creating a green oasis in the trees. Great birding, with Lesser Moorhen, Striated Heron, Black Crake and Night Heron on the list straight away. Kenyan Tufted Guinea Fowl too. Lots of wild elephant signs around but they are very

shy here at the moment. It will get better. Most days we met the orphans of course. One day James, the Warden, accompanied us to Chyulu Hills National Park where DSWT help out with Game control and anti poaching activities. Here we saw Kongoni and Eland in some numbers as well as more birds including our only Stonechats and Capped Wheatears of the trip. We climbed right up to the summit of the hills where it was decidedly chilly. We were told the views were normally excellent but heat haze and smoke limited it for us. We loved Umani Springs and wish it every success.

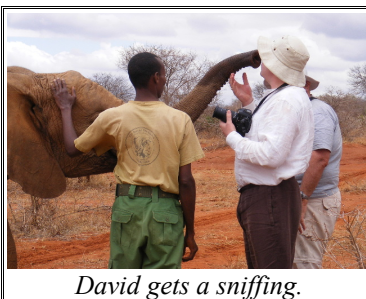
11th – 13th September. We reluctantly took our leave of Umani Springs with a firm resolve to return in the Green Season. We headed for Mitito Andrei where we stocked up with fresh bread and other provisions. Then through the gate into Tsavo NP. Although our home was not in the park we did share part of the route as far as the Galana river. Along the way we saw our first Lesser Kudu and Orange-bellied Parrots plus other birds. **Saa Nane** is set on the southern bank of the Galana river and is quite idyllic. Again we took our choice of Bedrooms. Elizabeth chose ours down in the 'cave' where it was cut into the rock. Very cool and airy as well as private. (if you don't count the Hyrax and Geckos.

Our stay here was very good and we did get to do the cooking although the staff insisted on waiting on table. We took walks in the area again amid much Elephant sign but they are shy here also. On one walk we did bump into a Hippo and there were lots of Waterbuck etc., around. A large Crocodile was in residence so no swimming. There was a very nice Pool for that. On our middle day we took a trip down to the Voi Stockades which involved a ride through the NP proper during which we saw our first Lions and Wild Elephants, Giraffe etc., We took lunch at Voi Safari Lodge (literally a taste of things to come) to which we invited Dickson. [REDACTED] was very nice and we could spend more time there next time.



Swimming Pool.

14th – 19th September. Where better to spend a Wedding anniversary than Ithumba? So we took our leave of [REDACTED] and after picking up more bread and supplies headed the long way round to Ithumba in the far north of Tsavo East. We had planned to head over the river on a direct route but

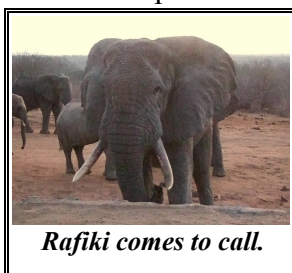


David gets a sniffing.

fresh water coming down prevented that. And so we got to Ithumba in time for a late sandwich before heading to the Stockades at 5pm for the Orphan's return. A nice surprise was to find Lualeni there, along with her inseparable friend Kora. Did she know we were coming?? We got a friendly sniffing which made rather a mess of David's shirt but no matter. It was the thought that counted. Then the keeper dependent orphans all arrived and of course Elizabeth went off to help with the feeding while David and I sat with Hassan outside the Stockades as first Lualeni and then Kora came to check us out once more. They

were later joined by Wendi who is, shall we say, somewhat bigger. All Ellies were quite relaxed including the wild ones who now come for fresh water when they hear the tanker arrive. We are sitting, unprotected, within 10 yards of full grown wild Elephants. Our daily routine evolved into rising early to be at the Stockades by 6 to let the orphans out, after their morning bottles, and accompanying them on the first part of their walks into the Bush. We did not spend as long doing this as last time for a variety of reasons mainly concerned with other large Mammals in the

immediate vicinity due to the pressure of the dry season. No matter, we enjoyed the times that we had and the presence of many Elephants waiting the tanker more than made up for that. To mix with them in safety was something we never expected. One morning old Rafiki was there and came right up to where we were standing to check us out. He must weigh all of 7 tons and stand 13 feet+ at the shoulder. He towered



Rafiki comes to call.

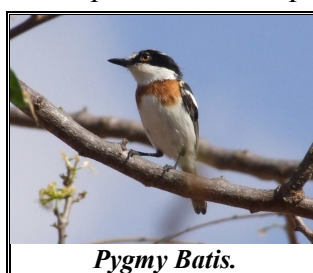
over us and yet still responded to “no” when required. To see the Tanker Crew flicking off these huge bulls with only the back of their hand or a small Besom is something I will never forget. We also joined the orphans at



Patiently waiting.

their Elevenes and wallow. Many wild ones also showed up to take part too. Again a great thrill to be in such close proximity to such animals. Orphan Ithumbah really enjoyed the mud and dusting. She was also very friendly with us and invariably came to greet us, morning and afternoon. A new arrival from Nairobi, Olololo, was very precocious too and was always pushing his luck in a friendly way. One night he did not come back with the others at 5pm lock up but stayed out with Lualeni and Kora despite being only 2 yrs old. We worried all night about this especially when some Lions called not far away. Needless of course as he was back with the others in the morning. Lualeni had brought him home around 8.30pm. Probably fed up of his antics by then.

Our spare time was spent either on game drives or lounging at camp trying to get a decent picture of Pygmy Batis, the many Sunbirds or the two resident Gabar Goshawks who patrolled the bird bath to snatch a meal.



Pygmy Batis.

The highlight of our second morning (if not the trip) was meeting Wild Dogs on the track from the Stockade to Camp. Not just a fleeting glimpse either. The four pups were giving grief to some Baboons while Alpha Dad just looked on from the side. In all we had around 20 minutes with them before



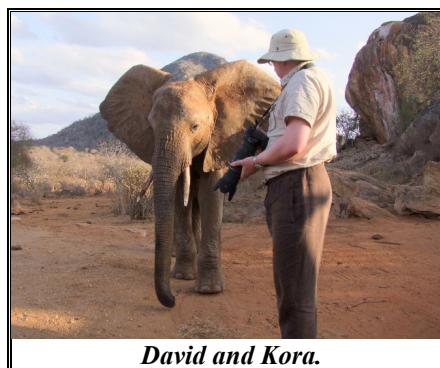
Wild Dogs.

they moved off to join others that we assume were around but unseen. Magic moments with these lovely animals.

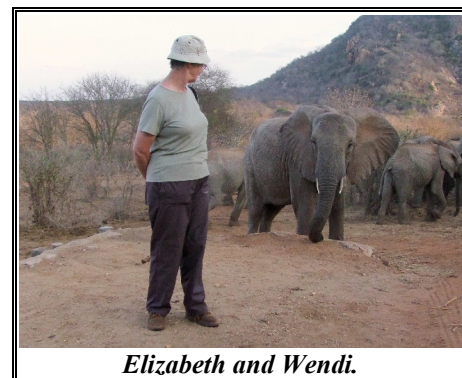
One day we did a long drive (100km) right down to Lugard Falls which was very interesting. We had two Rangers with us so were permitted to walk along the river banks among the wildlife although we were told that some tourists had complained that we spoiled their view from the observation point on the hillside above. On this trip we also found a nice herd of Gerenuk close enough to the road for a chance photograph. The area is just at the foot of the Yatta escarpment in very dry scrubby bush and quite desolate. We loved our time at Ithumba and will be making plans to return again to enjoy more unique Elephant moments. Pictures do more than words.



Lualeni and Fred with Kora getting in on the love in.



David and Kora.



Elizabeth and Wendi.