

Tanzania Wildlife & Birding | Trip Report February 4 – 17, 2020 | Written by Peg Abbott



With Guides Preston Mutinda & Peg Abbott, and Julie, Jean, Marvin, Trina, Kathy, Pat, Mike, Mike, Jack, and Nancy





Tues., Feb. 4 Tanzania!

Several of our group and I arrived by land to Tanzania today, coming from safari in Kenya. Recent rains completely washed out a bridge we needed to take for the route planned to cross into Tanzania at the border crossing at Namanga. We like that route, but we could not make that crossing without a bridge, so we went out an alternate route, missing a morning game drive but seeing a lot of scenery and local village life.

From Kenya's Amboseli National Park, we bumped along a dirt road leading east to the main road and there we welcomed pavement. This major road comes south from the Mobassa-Nairobi highway and trucks use it to carry agricultural goods and more. Crossing here went pretty smoothly, we had a health check and then passport inspection. Traveling around Mt. Kilimanjaro, we eyed a good cross-section of rural life, with an almost continuous village alongside the road. This area is lush, full of farms and garden plots, the most prominent being plantains. We watched women carrying huge loads of them, perfectly balanced on their heads. Lots of color and street life to observe today!

Lunch was at the African Flower Hotel which did a great job for us and we continued on our way into Arusha.

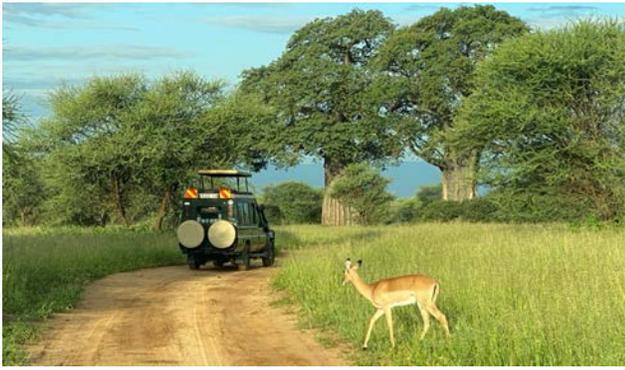
On arrival, Arumero Lodge was most welcoming, and we arrived in time to walk the gardens, looking at several pair of very tame Dik-Dik. We found Ashy Flycatcher, Gray-backed Camaroptera, and had a lot of fun watching a courting pair of Hamerkop.

And here we met up with four travelers that flew in, joining all participants and forming our "herd" today, as the main Tanzania safari commenced. All four had come in early and were full of stories of what they had seen. It was good fun meeting them and doing introductions. Peg hosted a round of drinks as we got to know each other. All the staff were all smiles!

Dinner was lovely, with good selections of lamb, beef, fish and chicken dishes, nice sauces and seasonings. Off to bed!

Wed., Feb. 5 Arusha to Tarangire National Park

A morning walk led by Preston around the grounds revealed a Gabar Goshawk, a flyby of a Palm-nut Vulture, and several songbirds that those just arriving had not yet had a chance to see.



We left at 8 a.m., heading west on the new bypass highway (no Arusha traffic, wow!), passing through rural villages and open areas where we started to see local Masai with their herds of cattle and goats. Abdim's Stork were abundant in the fields. We got to the Tarangire National Park gate late morning, with time to walk around, stretch, and watch Yellow-collared Lovebird, Ashy Starling, Red-chested Cuckoo and more.

We aimed to get to the Sopa Lodge in time for lunch, but wisely grabbed some snacks. There were so many things to see, from birds to mammals, to the wonderful landscape of Baobab trees and red-dirt termite mounds. It was 2:30 p.m. when we rolled in, so we made a serious dent in the excellent buffet there. Perfectly battered tilapia fish was a treat, also Pork Stroganoff and some really nice roasted vegetables – a long line of choices – too many!

After an hour break, we headed back out, winding through the Baobabs to a view of the Tarangire River which was running red and fast after all the rain. Too fast to cross, we would focus on this side of the river for our following days. Some of the marsh areas would not be accessible, but we found over 50 bird species with ease in the short afternoon drive. We also sighted week-old baby Impala, big herds of Cape Buffalo, distant views of Giraffe, and our first sighting of Kongoni. For many the time with Elephants was magical. They appear so red here, having wallowed in the red muds near the river. We found a large group with several young babies and lots of two and three-year olds. They were walking through the lush grass, noses up like snorkels as they sensed us and wanted to smell. It was so memorable watching them roam so free in this abundant setting.

Rock Hyrax, much at home at this lodge, greeted us home. We had dinner in the high-ceiling, spacious dining room and did our checklist, then were led by guards to our rooms—as Elephants were free to come into the property, they wanted us to be safe.

Thurs., Feb. 6 Full day at Tarangire National Park

We had the full day to enjoy the park today, though we packed up as we moved to a lodge in another section of the park. A highlight was watching a small troop of Vervet Monkey feeding on fig fruits, all the while tending



their young. Two tiny babies romped around totally comfortable with height, agile and able to problem solve if their mother sent up a branch they could not reach, they would backtrack to find a more secure way to tag along.

Tarangire Safari Lodge was an immediate hit, such tasteful gardens, sculptures, furnishings and African textiles – the whole place is fabulously welcoming. Best of all though is a huge stone patio with a view over the Tarangire River and a vast stretch of the park. We all had big smiles on our faces, happy to have two nights here and to look forward to time to sit and drink in these views (with creature comforts and drinks in hand!). Impala grazed below, along with a lone big male Elephant. Colorful Speke’s Weavers were in shrubs just below the patio, and nesting very close to the path to our rooms was a brilliant pair of Red-headed Weaver, very busy working on their nest. Pat and Jack immediately took up positions on the chairs outside their tent, sitting under the shade of a massive Baobab tree. Wow, this must be Africa!

The afternoon drive was peaceful, with dramatic light as some clouds moved in. We finally got close to Giraffe, four males that were feeding, but also pushing on each other, testing strength. Black-faced Sandgrouse dust-bathed in the road, as did Red-billed Hornbills. A thrill was Pat spotting a family group of massive Southern Ground Hornbill. We could at first barely see them in the long grass, but with patience we got good looks.

A tiny African Scops-Owl had been found roosting by Preston just ahead of our afternoon safari. We came back to the loud tones of Pearl-spotted Owlet, which flew into his imitation of the call. Two owls in short order, nice!

We had dinner, then gathered for our checklist, adding several new species for the day. Walking back after doing some work emails, the guard showed Peg an African Barred Owl, 3 species then for the day!



Friday, Feb. 7 Second Full Day at Tarangire National Park

We decided to leave very early, just at dawn, taking coffee at 6 a.m., and getting out before other vehicles in hopes of finding cats. While we did not find cats (yet!) we had a spectacular morning for animal behavior. We watched a group of male Elephants in the shade, resting and napping. Two BIG ones plopped down as if they were limber three-year olds to nap. They were flat to the ground, tucking their massive bodies into soft spots in the soil. How do you sleep with huge tusks! We then watched Southern Ground Hornbills up in a tree chase off a Knob-billed Goose they did not want to share space with. We watched a big band of Ostrich cross the road, several getting right down in the dust to itch their necks and bodies in the dirt. They flapped their wings like big dust mops as they got up, then clustered under some trees. Four large Giraffe passed behind them, so picturesque!

The birding was great as well. In one binocular view we had Eastern Paradise and Pin-tailed Whydah. In a wet area, Red Bishop and busy weavers which worked on nests, the latter acting like a lek species with females inspiring them to display at the nest sites. We saw Wahlberg's Eagle and not long after, Tawny Eagle for a good comparison of bill size. We found both White-throated and Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, sallying out from their perches. Village Indigobird, Jacobin and Diederik Cuckoos all were good views this morning.

It was nice today to have a good break, some did laundry, some napped, some walked, and some worked on trip notes and eBird. The view from the terrace included a big herd of Elephants with young. They went to the river to drink, then slowly made their way back up the valley.

We all thoroughly enjoyed our break. Some cooled off for a swim, some wandered with their cameras (Von der Decken's Hornbill Nest, Nubian Woodpecker, Red-headed Barbet nest building...) and some napped. The view was hard to beat, so peaceful looking out across the Baobab and Acacia dotted plains.

At 4 p.m., we headed out again, not getting very far before a Knob-billed Duck posed nicely in beautiful light atop a sculptured dead tree—wow. We headed on to find a small cluster of vehicles—gathered around a recent Cheetah sighting. It had gone down in a bush, surrounded by tall grass and we got only the barest of peeks. We had super patience, waiting upwards of an hour, but not this time... Entertaining us while we waited were Yellow-necked Francolins, dust-bathing Northern Red-billed Hornbill, a Double-banded Courser, and a large group of Elephants in the distance.

Driving back, we encountered this Elephant group, getting some nice end of the daytime with Elephants in terrific light for photography. Back to final sunset from the terrace where they had the bar open, a very relaxing end to a great day.

Tomorrow on to Ndotu and the great Wildebeest migration!

Sat., Feb. 8 Tarangire National Park | Ngorongoro Crater Viewpoint | Serengeti Gate | Ndotu

How does one bid adieu to Baobabs—it was a stunning sunrise framed by their magnificent branches as we got out early today. It was to be a day of butterflies, scores and scores of them, almost like snow falling they were so thick. One of the “whites” we watched them circle Giraffes and baby Elephants and calling hornbills. Magic!

Leaving the park, we got wonderful views at a Martial Eagle. We stopped at the gate briefly, where Peg and Nancy had fun watching a female Nubian Woodpecker digging diligently into the bark of a tree. We passed out into the farms and villages, watched street life as we climbed up in elevation, eventually reaching the edge of



the forest where we entered the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. Baboons have become aggressive about picnic lunches here, and we almost had an international incident when Mike nicely thought he'd dispose of our trash. Phew, on our way we went.

The next stop was the viewpoint down into the crater, a breathtaking moment to soak it all in. We had a tantalizing peek at the herds below, finding two Black Rhino in with a large herd of Cape Buffalo—from this distance just dots, but it filled us with hope that later in the week we would find them. The bird life here and at the gate was quieter than most years, none of the mixed flock higher elevation species appeared, though a pair of more wide-ranging Black-backed Puffback did entertain at the gate.

The drive down from the rim is one of the most scenic in the region, passing windswept acacias that frame views of an adjacent fertile crater, so green and lush—with herds of Masaai cattle and goats mingling with herds of Zebra and the first sightings of Wildebeest. We passed the turnoff to Olduvai Gorge, to return for a visit on our way back.

The Serengeti Gate marked our turn to Ndutu, a part of the greater Ngorongoro Conservation Area with mineral soils prized by the migrating herds of Wildebeest and the Zebra that move with them. This is the apex of the huge loop they make each year between Kenya and Tanzania, the place for calving. Today there were Massai children at the gate, ready for us with smiles and hopes of selling us bracelets. Peg started it off by buying a few, but John stole the show, his sweet personality and kindness soon had him decorated to the nines and we had to pull him away.

Going into Ndutu, late in the day, we had one of the most thrilled half hours of our trip—we encountered a hunting Serval, and while watching it an equally hard to find Denham's Bustard! The two had interaction going on, one of intense awareness of each other while acting aloof. It was just incredible to watch. Amid it all, a Lanner Falcon flew in and landed on the road. Biological wonder overload! With the tall grass we had to watch carefully, but we saw the Serval drink, the bustard walk intently after it and put it up off a rest spot, and then the two walking almost parallel to each other in the grass. Finally, we just had to go to get to our lovely tented



camp. Due to high water we could not go in the usual way, and we had some challenge to find crossings. Our wonderful skilled drivers, John and Wilfred, got us there in the end.

A warm welcome, excellent dinner fare, and good beds were then most welcome.

Sun., Feb. 9 Ndotu (Ngorongoro Conservation Area)

Ndotu never fails to bring daily wonders. With calving going on there are predators lurking and finding them was our main intent. But the routes to get to areas they might frequent were marvelous and varied, often following stream courses that run between a chain of lakes here. Along the stream were storks and shorebirds, even gleaming flamingoes. We spotted our first Wildebeest calves, so wobbly and vulnerable. One watercourse held thousands of White Storks, wintering here from Europe. The more upland areas had pairs of Two-banded Courser, Crowned and Blacksmith Plover in good numbers. Two Great Spotted Cuckoo were hunting insects in the open area—fun!



A wonderful find, one that we could visit again and again, was the den of Bat-eared Fox, four kits and mom were sprawled out and sleeping, they would get active at nightfall, fanning out to feed on termites and insects. For now, they scratched and slept. Big-eyed as well as eared, we had great fun watching them.



The drama of the day was surely watching two female lionesses, fat and possibly with cubs on the way, hunting. We found them in a dense group of shrubbery, rimmed by vehicles it seemed like we might not get a view. But first one, then the other emerged, on either side of our vehicle. The first was alert, grooming a bit, but also watching a Wildebeest herd, about the length of a football field or more away. What eyesight! She must have sensed that the tight-knit group of females meant a calf was being born. Despite her full belly, hunger being a different pull to hunt than stalking for cats, off she went. She navigated a straight line, placing herself exactly in position to separate mom from newborn. It barely had stood up when she simply walked over and claimed it with a quiet firm bite of her jaw. The confused mother was so difficult to watch. We were glad to have to hold on to the vehicle as we traced the lion's path to





the kill site. Cameras were clicking away to capture the poignant moment of her walking off, dangling this tiny meal, into the shade.

One of the safari vehicles had engine trouble about this time, but many drivers offered to shield them until they got underway, leaving the lion to her meal.

At days end we climbed up on the treehouse platform above the bar for sunset cocktails, admiring the view of the lake and expansive savanna. Dinner was again a treat; this tented camp had a real chef and each meal was a delight to partake in. We sat as a group at a long table, enjoying our recounting of the sightings of the day. Peg helped us tally our bird and mammal sightings and it was off to bed.

Mon., Feb. 10 Ndotu (Ngorongoro Conservation Area)

Another wonderful day ahead. We had an early start, winding out from the camp we had five regal Giraffe holding court and several good bird sightings as well. On a road with open soil we found a group of Ostrich, two decided to take a fine dust bath right in view. Two young Black-backed Jackal also enjoyed the fine dirt of the road as a rest spot, they barely lifted their heads as we came through. In time they were too curious, and we got some wonderful photographs.

We drove through thousands of Wildebeest, watching two young males sparring, we saw big-bellied females, and a few new calves. Breakfast was served up on a hill overlooking it all. Scrumptious baked goods and fruits and yogurt, nice strong coffee—pretty nice! A Gray Kestrel came in to find us as well as two species of canary.

Lunch was back at camp, and then we had some delightful siesta time. The tents were spacious, with high ceilings, lovely furnishings, great outdoor showers—all very comfortable and a light footprint on the landscape. It felt good to stretch a bit, walk around, catch up on notes and enjoy the views from our porches. Many had a nest or two of Speke's Weaver being built, something you can watch for hours in admiration of their weaving skill.

Predator sightings today included our first good view of a large male Lion, a thrill to find, but intent on sleeping. We also drove through another camp, wondering what for, when our drivers found the prize—a mother Cheetah and her two large cubs, trying to get comfortable in the shade. Preston had heard they were frequenting this area and his hunch of where they might be proved to be a good one. Sadly, we were not alone in watching



them, but they seemed fairly oblivious to their admiring throng and were more concerned about avoiding biting insects and finding shade. By the size of her belly, this mom was a good hunter and provider, and these cubs had a good future ahead.

Earlier in the day, some of our group had found a pair of roosting Spotted Eagle, heard the night before, and several of us checked on them once we drove back into camp. Never a dull moment!

Cleaned up and ready to gather, it was fun to find dinner tonight was served in a circular room, open to the sky, with stars overhead, a fire dancing in a raised pit, and staff ready to serve us barbecue of all kinds of meats. A lovely and congenial evening.

Tues., Feb. 11 Ndotu to Serengeti Gate | Naabi Hill Lookout | Through Serengeti to Kubu Kubu Tented Camp

It is always hard to leave Ndotu, the daily wildlife drama here in February is so intense that you hate to miss anything. And this green year we may not see again for some time, in 2019 we left in a dust storm! But we still had much to see in Serengeti thankfully, so we dutifully packed up to go. Passing through Wildebeest by the thousands, we saw some very young babies, by next week there would be more and in two a sea of new life.

Passing back through the area we had encountered the Serval, we had an Eastern Chanting Goshawk put on a show, strutting alongside the road as it searched for food. Its long legs extenuated the rhythm of its strides. We found a good number of Kori Bustards; they seem to be doing very well this year. Three Spotted Hyena were in an area with soft mounds, one particularly alert left the others and started on patrol, time for food finding—the other two lounged.

We stopped at the park gate where some visited the shops in search of guidebooks and curious, Preston, Peg and a few walked up the hill for one of the finest views around. Below were thousands and thousands of Wildebeest and Zebra, in the sky, a Martial Eagle. Colorful Agamid lizards were sunbathing on the ancient rock, interesting succulent plants and some scattered trees brought us views of songbirds.



As we drove towards the extensive open grasslands, billowing clouds danced around the horizon. Three stately Giraffe were in the road, intent on feeding on some low acacias at the margin. They slowly ambled out of the way. We found a troop of Baboon in the road near a patch of large Yellow-fever acacias at a well-watered area. And we found Hippos lounging near a nesting group of Black-headed Heron, and our first BIG Nile Crocodile.

Iconic Kopjes (weathered outcrops of granitic rock rising over the grassy plains) were beautifully shown off by the clouds – prompting a photo stop with awe. There were many birds, including some ponds to scan, but we had a way to go to reach Kubu-Kubu tented camp.

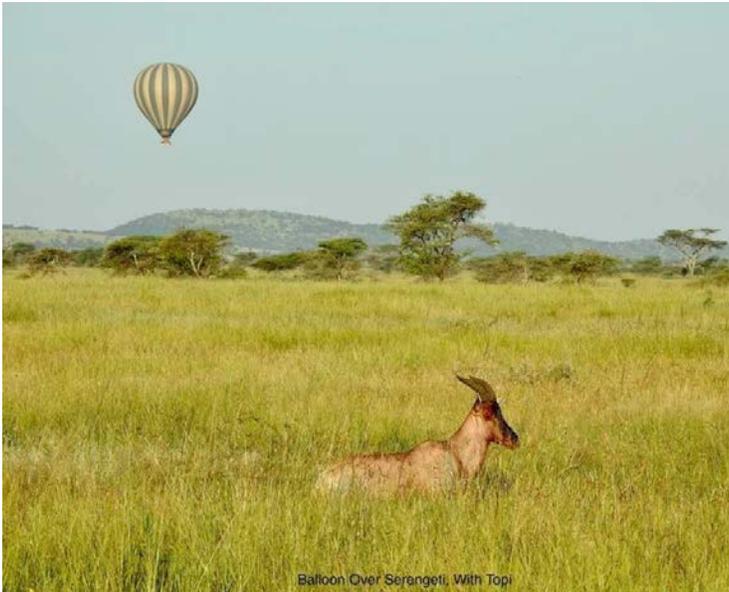
What a welcome we had! On their fabulous deck overlooking a vast expanse of Serengeti, they had a table full of drinks, from Champagne to Gin and Tonics and wonderful snacks. We toasted to our grand fortune of being here, so comfortable at the edge of a remote and wild realm, with wildlife in view. And we discovered what Julie would fondly label, “the best outdoor showers in Africa”. A super touch to our luxurious and spacious rooms—still simple with a light touch on the land.

Dinner awaited us, served by friendly staff. As with most days we counted our “riches”, doing our species checklist before retiring. What a night sky here, so far from any city. We were accompanied to our tents by Maasai warriors, I know many of us stepped out onto our porches to take in the thousand dancing lights of stars.

Wed., Feb. 12 Full Day in Serengeti National Park

Early breakfast was out and ready, hot potato tortes, various egg dishes, fresh fruits, baked goods, local coffee—such a life!

We had predators to find! After finding them with ease the previous years, Preston and our drivers were stumped by Leopard. In the long grass, our only hope was to find them in the trees. We missed one that had put on a show earlier in the morning (oops, all those bird stops!) but we tried a couple of other areas. Cheetah were not a bad substitute, and a mother with two big cubs, posing atop a termite mound at a distance, from which they surveyed the herds out of site to us on the farther plain, was a joy. At first it was just the female, then one by one the cubs joined her. On to a group of Lion on a kopje, hard to see amid quite a vehicle jam-up but we still got a few peeks. Two females were in view, grooming themselves nonchalantly on the rocks. Numerous vultures



were present at another lion site, but they slipped away in the grasses. A lone Cheetah was mostly sleeping so we let him be.

We went past several other camps, had time at the main Visitor Center with its fine exhibits, close-up Rock Hyrax and views. Driving back out onto a high open area where we got very close to Giraffe, taller than us standing in our vehicles. We admired the beauty of Rufous-crowned Roller.

We found Topi, a beautiful antelope that looks like it got polished each morning. Marabou Storks rested on the riverbanks and we got good views of a mature Lappet-faced Vulture. Klaas Cuckoo, Hoopoe, Pygmy Falcon, Nubian Woodpecker, lots of Magpie Shrikes, Silverbird, and Pin-tailed Wydah were among the many bird species – over 80 species today while spending time with big cats!

The afternoon we tried again to find elusive Leopard, but contented ourselves instead with an active band of Mongoose, and watching a huge Hippo crossing between ponds on land, more than belly-high in grass! We also saw another Serval, with time to watch it for a time—a two Serval trip is a good one!

Thurs., Feb. 13 Serengeti National Park | Olduvai Gorge | Ngorongoro Crater Rim

Mike had struck up a friendship with our Maasai watchman, and it was fun to watch them trade moves, Mike an expert in martial arts, and they in the moves of their culture. Some fun photos ensued as we said our good-byes.

Our route back to Ngorongoro Crater today let us pass again for the morning through Serengeti. Bare-faced Go-away-birds perched up for us, alongside White-browed Coucal. Watching lovely Three-banded Plover at a pond area, Jean spied a larger shorebird which turned out to be a pair of Painted Snipe—WOW! A Hamerkop frequented the same pond. We watched African Gray Hornbill, colorful Fischer's Lovebirds, diminutive Buff-bellied Warbler, various martins and swallows, White-winged and Fan-tailed Widowbirds, and a bright male Red Bishop.

We found a different mother with this time three big cubs, lying in the grass, then getting up to follow each other away. Then, tree-climbing Lions! Whether long grass or insects drove them into the branches, two big females were WAY up in a tall, shading acacia, and their three cubs were lower in the ample crotch of the tree, trying to get comfortable and from time to time checking out if they just might go higher. It was a postcard





scene. This and the trifecta of rollers, Lilac, Rufous-crowned and European was grand. At our fuel stop two grazing Cape Buffalo made it sporting to use the rest room!

Coming into view again of the iconic Simba Kopje—this time with SIMBA! Wilfred was ecstatic, as were we all, watching them at first lying regally at a distance. One by one these lovely females got up, sleek and powerful, they showed off as they did cat-version yoga poses, before descending! In time they walked right past our vehicles on the road! We were amazed to the full sense of the word. Again, this morning we “just-missed” a Leopard as it made its way to a daytime roost tree, but hey, this show by Lions was something to behold and no one was going to complain!

We rested a bit at the main park site, having a picnic lunch, and then headed to Olduvai Gorge, the turn now indicated there by a new and impressive sculpture. It has been gratifying to see this site improve each year with more exhibits and space for interpretation. We got to see the gorge and the geologic layers that have held so many clues to the evolution of mankind. In this arid spot, we had some good bird sightings too, including several singing sunbirds and a Red-faced Crombec by the gate.

Between Serengeti and Olduvai, we also got to cross back through the 10,000+ herd of Wildebeest and Zebra, and we found both Capped and Northern Wheatears and more Secretarybird, Grey-crowned Crane and Kori Bustard. Between Olduvai and the rim of Ngorongoro Crater, more and more Maasai cattle and goats were interspersed with the wild herds, until it was mostly domestic livestock as we drove up in elevation, passing villages along the way. A beautiful Mountain Buzzard was spotted in with the more common Augur Buzzards that we had seen almost daily.

All this rain made for a rough road around the Crater Rim, and we had an exciting time watching a vehicle that was quite stuck, and then navigating that same patch of road. Making it through, we surprised a group of Elephants that gave us quite a trumpet! As it was getting late in the day, Kathy said “this could be a serious Safari beer night!”

On to our very comfortable digs on the rim at Sopa Lodge—with grand views from the pool and patio as we sampled a new set of higher elevation species. Beautiful Golden-winged Sunbird teed up for good views kept company by Northern Double-collared Sunbird, a family of Northern Wheatear, courting Hunter’s Cisticola, Tropical Boubou, Streaky Seedeater and more. After settling in, we returned to the grand dining room for a fabulous buffet, and songs by the staff with dancing, and yes, Safari beer and other libations.

Fri., Feb. 14 Ngorongoro Crater Descent | Full Day in the Crater

Waking up to a view of the Ngorongoro Crater is pretty fine. We had an early breakfast and drove down through the arching canopy of graceful acacias festooned with lichens and mosses—so green! As the landscape opened up, we saw many Anteater Chats, males flying and calling everywhere. Abdim’s Stork fed alongside graceful Grey-crowned Cranes, this time at close range. Preston took off on a hunch that proved good—on a bluff with a



good lookout we got to see a magnificent Lioness with very tiny cubs. She had a commanding view of much of the crater—nice!

We had the full day here, highlights so many hard to name. Huge bull Elephant crossing the road, oblivious to us. Black Rhino feeding, then several together grazing and resting near the lakeshore where water birds lounged. Beyond them a group of lionesses, and then a courting pair. We were sure their antics would lead to mating, but they did not—perhaps they were winding down. We watched them arch and stretch and make face grimaces, she was not receptive at this time, but he was going to do his best to perform if she got there.

Speke's Weavers tried to get into our vehicles at lunch, and Mike did a headstand with Marabou. We got back to the lodge with time to enjoy our lovely rooms and views, then had a couple of surprises at dinner. First was our greeting with a rose for Valentine's and a glass of champagne, nice! The second was a very fun, Happy Birthday dance and song by the staff, complete with a cake that Jean and Julie had arranged for Preston and Peg, birthdays close together this week. It was a total surprise, and much appreciated!

Sat., Feb. 15 Maasai Village Visit | Lake Manyara | Optional Night Drive

This morning the group had a good visit at the local Maasai Village, learning about their culture, and getting a chance to ask questions, see dances and demonstrations, and enjoy some shared photos. Many of the Maasai have cell phones now so the photo taking goes both ways. A few stayed back at the lodge to bird, and flock of African Green-Pigeon on the wing was their prize.

We left late morning to head down in elevation, to our last wildlife area at Lake Manyara. This area has changed a lot due to the rising waters all over Kenya's Rift Valley. They really need a wildlife boat concession—we could drive just so far on any road, then returned to take the next fork possible, never reaching the lake shore. Each spot had good birds, African Jacana, Water Thick-knee, Greenshank, and the various plovers by now we could sort with ease. We found a Saddle-billed Stork, an immature, and nine Black Heron feeding with their queer tenting motions. Squacco Heron was in good view with African Spoonbill and in the distance an African Fish-Eagle. At another stop we watched Gray Hornbill and D'Arnaud's Barbet, just before a quick flyby of an African



Hobby. Preston spied a Northern Brownbul in good light, and Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove, normally common made a first appearance on the Tanzania list for us today.

Our hotel had big trees and birdy grounds, so as we went to meals, we'd find Willow Warbler, Bronze Manakin, Spotted Flycatcher, and Gray-backed Camaroptera. Meals were served at a long table on a patio, so nice to be outside in the beautiful air.

Many had booked the optional night drive here, so had a quick early dinner and were off by 7:30 p.m. It was one of the longer night drives we've experienced, a full three hours or more due to a fussy engine which kept stalling out. But despite the problems we saw Square-tailed Nightjar, sleeping Silvery-cheeked Hornbill and a Rock Python as long as the road slithered across and over some downed logs—most impressive. We did well on the night mammals, with good views of African Civet, Porcupine and a White-tailed Mongoose. Wildebeest were resting in the water at the lake edge, perhaps an anti-predator strategy. Fireflies were a real treat, we soaked in their glow.

Sun., Feb. 16 Birding by our Lodge | Return to Arusha

We had a bit of time this morning to bird, watching mainly for songbirds in the trees, many now familiar to us. Even at breakfast, we sat on the porch of the dining room so always had something in view. Sunbirds fed on flowering shrubs at close distance as we walked to our rooms. Sad to go, we were duly packed with the long-haul flight in mind. Many had to stuff those gifts into suitcases, but Jean had showed us all the trick of “leave-behinds” so some actually had a lighter load. We hated to say good-bye to Preston with all of his stories telling us the secret behaviors and instincts of these animals. And Wilfred and John, who spend countless hours watching the wonderful wildlife of Tanzania. They shared their knowledge and their home so graciously.

What a journey to Africa! And little did we know mid-February that by mid-March the world would be gripped by a monstrous, fast moving pandemic and these almost dreamtime moments with animals would begin to blur. How important it is to pack our own mental suitcases for when life's journeys take a difficult turn...

Mon., February 17 Flights Homeward...



Photo Credits:

Giraffes, Peg Abbott (PA); Lion, Julie Moss-Lewis (JML); African Paradise-Flycatcher, Jack Jordan (JJ); Tawny Eagle, PA; Olive Baboon, JML; Bat-eared Fox, PA; Serval, JJ; Nubian Woodpecker, PA; Cape Teal, PA; African Grey Hornbill, JJ; Black-backed Jackal, JJ; Elephant, JJ; Boabob trees, PA; Rainbow, PA; Wilfried & John, PA; Cheers, PA; Dusty road, PA; Rock Hyrax, JJ; Red-chested Cuckoo, JJ; Relaxing at the tent, PA; Impala, JJ; Elephants, JJ; Ostrich, PA; Tawny Eagle, JJ; Double-banded Courser, JJ; Southern Ground-Hornbill, JJ; Nubian Woodpecker, PA; African hoopoe, PA; Knob-billed Duck, PA; Crested Francolin, PA; Giraffes, JJ; Black Rhino, JJ; Serval, JML; Wildebeest, JJ; Massai Tribe, PA; Ndutu photos, PA; Cheetah, JJ; Kori Bustard, JJ; Agamid Lizard, JJ; Black-headed Heron, JJ; Spotted Hyena, JJ; Nile Crocodile JJ; Lions, JML; Topi, JML; Martial Eagle, PA; Marabou Stork, JJ; Cheers!, PA; Augur Buzzard, JJ; Zebra, JJ; Lions, JJ; Posing at the National Park, PA; Grey Crowned-Crane, JJ; Secretary Bird, JJ; Massai view, PA; Golden-winged Sunbird, JJ; Hunter's Cisticola, JJ; Serengeti pix, PA; African Fish Eagle, JJ African Spoonbill, JJ; Water Thick-Knee, JJ; African Jacana, JJ; Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, JJ; Dinner, PA; Egyptian Goose, JJ; Elephant, JJ.