

Kenya's Masai Mara

Naturetrek Tour Report

23 October – 1 November 2015



Leopard by Paul Siklos



Lions by Ian Turner



Little Bee-eater by Ian Turner



Wildebeests at the Mara River by Ian Turner

Tour report kindly supplied by client Ian Turner
Images courtesy of Ian Turner & Paul Siklos



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Tour Participants: Various Local Guides with Fifteen Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Friday 23rd October

We left home in Essex at 6.10am and boarded BA65 from Heathrow on time at 9.45am. We were a little late taking off but by 10.30am we had started the long flight to Nairobi.

We arrived at 7pm our time, 9pm local time and had to get a very hot crowded bus to the terminal (due to recent fire damage?). Customs was slow with fingerprints taken but we eventually found the other members of our group and were led to the car park. We loaded up into our three safari vehicles, then started a half hour journey through the chaotic Nairobi traffic to the hotel. At this stage we still hadn't formally met our guides but apparently we leave here at 9am!

There was a tree full of weaver nests across the road and I could hear the birds calling from inside but none were visible.

Day 2

Saturday 24th October

The first birds of the trip were seen from the Silver Springs hotel window in the morning: Black Kites, at least four, and about 20 Little Swifts wheeling around the buildings. A pair of Pied Crows were the first "new birds" for me. After breakfast we met Davis and the two Peters, who were to be our guides for the trip, and had a briefing in the car park. It was a bit protracted giving me time to look up at lots of Black Kites, Pied Crows and a huge Marabou Stork which was circling with the Black Kites. As a keen birder I was pleased to hear that, despite this being a mammal trip, our guides would be more than happy to stop and look at birds, reptiles, insects and anything else that we happened to find! An African Grey Flycatcher was identified in the grounds and my first Variable Sunbird sang from the top of a tree. Finally we were on our way and, as we drove out of the car park, an Olive Thrush fed on the grass.

We drove out along the rather rough main road which climbed gently all the time. Our first stop was at a Rift Valley viewpoint where some of us sampled the delights of the souvenir shop. It started to rain, which hampered the view of the valley somewhat, but I did get good views of some Baglafecht Weavers. As we continued our journey there were small groups of Olive Baboons on the roadside and two large birds on a tree top were probably Auger Buzzards. Many other birds were glimpsed as we sped by, most of which were only tentatively identified but most of which would soon be confirmed with much better views.

We arrived at Elsamere on the shore of Lake Naivasha, checked in to our luxurious lodge and had a very pleasant al fresco lunch over which we all got to know each other. Davis explained the plan for the rest of the day which gave us an hour or so to explore the grounds before we were to go on a Nature Walk with the local guide, Ruben. The most obvious inhabitants at Elsamere were the Black-and-White Colobus monkeys. They came down in ones and twos to feed from the tray of fruit that had been put out for them, providing great entertainment. I strolled around the lawn and started to get close views of some of the birds. There were Common Bulbuls, Spectacled Weavers, iridescent Variable Sunbirds, striking White-browed Robin-Chats, a few spectacular Superb Starlings looking for left-overs, and a couple of Tropical Boubous making their loud, fluty calls. A White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher showed very well and I found my first very active African Paradise

Flycatcher. The biggest surprise was a Giant Kingfisher roosting motionless in a tree. Close inspection revealed a second bird nearby then both Bearded and Grey Woodpeckers in the same tree.

At about 3pm we met Ruben and were then taken on the “nature walk” along the shore of the lake. Ruben proved to be very good on birds and knew the calls well. Species seen included an immature Purple Heron, Cattle and Little Egrets, 2+ Squacco Herons, a Grey Heron, a skulking but distinctive Striated Heron, and a Black Heron seen in flight. My first Hamerkop was also a fly-by but another Giant Kingfisher was watched looking for fish – impressive birds. Also impressive was an African Fish Eagle which sat on top of a tree. Passerines included Ruppell’s Long-tailed Starlings, a female Streaky Seedeater, Purple Grenadiers, a Chin-spot Batis and 6+ Speckled Mousebirds, extraordinary birds, hanging in an almost motionless group a bit like giant Bearded Tits. A couple of Mottled Swifts and both Ring-necked and Red-eyed Doves were identified, and there were more African Paradise Flycatchers. There was another African Grey Flycatcher, a Tawny-flanked Prinia, a Grey-backed Camaroptera, and a Grey-capped Warbler which called loudly but was very reluctant to show itself. The best find however was a Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike which was tracked down by following the call – apparently it is a rare bird here. Back on the lake there was a Long-tailed Cormorant, at least one White Pelican and an Egyptian Goose.

Another Olive Thrush hopped over our lawn in the evening and Hadada Ibises flew noisily in to roost in the trees. Then just after it got dark we had the excitement of our first close game animals: a Giraffe, just metres from our lodge, which turned out to be semi tame and quite friendly, and half a dozen Zebras which stayed and grazed the lawn for most of the evening. We were collected from our lodge by a guard just in case of marauding Hippos and Hyenas, and had a very enjoyable dinner.

Day 3

Sunday 25th October

Looking out from our lodge early in the morning, I saw two Kirk’s Dik-Diks run nervously through the grounds. We had another Nature Walk early in the morning. Looking across the lake we could see some distant Impala, Zebras and Giraffes on the opposite bank, and a Coypu swam across in front of us. It was the birds that again took centre stage this morning however, mostly expertly found and identified by Ruben. The species confirmed today included Speke’s Weavers, a Lesser Swamp Warbler, a very showy Squacco Heron, more Variable Sunbirds, a very smart Grey-capped Warbler, seen well today, a Black-breasted Apalis, a Brown-crowned Tchagra, more Purple Grenadiers and, amongst all the exotica, the surreal sight and sound of a singing Willow Warbler. On the lake the Purple Heron was still present, both Long-tailed and Great (White-breasted) Cormorants were seen well and a Fish Eagle soared high. As we climbed the bank away from the lake, we found two African Hoopoes which were a more intense richer colour than the European birds. Two more Mottled Swifts flew over and there was a very smart African Pied Wagtail. Three or four White-browed Sparrow-Weavers fed on the ground as did a Rufous Sparrow while a Rattling Cisticola sang conspicuously from the top of a bush. There was an African Citril, another Streaked Seedeater, Grey-backed Fiscals and Common Fiscals both showing well, a female Yellow Bishop, Arrow-marked Babblers, Superb Starlings and Ruppell’s Long-tailed Starlings. Finally another Bushshrike showed well, this time a Grey-headed Bushshrike, a very satisfying tally before breakfast!

Over breakfast we were told that a boat trip on the lake had been arranged for us this morning. On the way to the “quay”, a group of Water Buck and a Black-headed Heron showed very well. The trees in the vicinity of the

quay were dotted with huge Marabou Storks and African Fish Eagles. Cattle Egrets fed around the “car park” and, as we got on the narrow boats, I was distracted by a pair of Blacksmith Plovers, and a Black Crake feeding along the shore.

The boatman nosed the boat between the dead trees and as close to birds on the shore as he could. Yellow-billed Storks were spectacular, African Spoonbills, Little, Cattle and Great White Egrets mingled with more Marabou Storks, Hadada and Sacred Ibises, Grey Herons, Squacco Herons, another Striated Heron and two Black Herons. One was even seen using its “umbrella” feeding technique. I also got really good views of the strange-looking Hamerkops. We got close to some White Pelicans and three Pink-backed Pelicans and passed a couple of Grey-headed Gulls. There were a few more Black Crakes and two African Jacanas, a juvenile and a superb adult walking over the vegetation. White-breasted Cormorants were very distinctive and common and there were lots of Long-tailed (or Reed) Cormorants too. There were around a dozen Pied Kingfishers and at least two more Giant Kingfishers, one of which was watched catching and “tendering up” a very large fish. Then we watched two groups of Hippopotamuses at close range, heads snorting and blowing bubbles, and later found two half out of the water. We tried to get close to a flock of 25 Greater Flamingos which circled around the back of the lake before settling and then flying off to a different area again. They really are spectacular in flight. On the way across the lake, we went through a large flock (100++) of Red-knobbed Coots. Waders seen included two Black-winged Stilts, a Wood Sandpiper, Common Sandpipers, a Greenshank, Black-tailed Godwits and a few more Blacksmith Plovers. Little Grebes were frequent and we saw two African Black Ducks and a Hottentot Teal. The stars of the trip, however, were the African Fish Eagles. The boatman had brought out a few (rather small) fish. When he spotted an Eagle on a distant tree top he would give a whistle, throw the fish out and, if it was hungry, the Eagle would come down, circle until it spotted the fish then plunge in feet first to take its free meal. Spectacular!

Back on shore I found a Diederik Cuckoo high in a tree and the Black-headed Heron was still showing well. Over lunch we watched the Colobus monkeys again. One female was carefully holding a very young baby and it was fascinating to see that the babies are pure white! Later I found a Sunbird building a nest and, on my way back to the lodge, I saw a Slender Mongoose run across the path showing a black tip to its tail.

During the afternoon we had our first game drive, making use of the pop-up roof on the comfortable and spacious Safari vehicles. We headed down towards an adjacent soda lake where there have been Lesser Flamingos in the past, but the water level there was too high for them at the moment. En route we saw Masai Giraffes, Zebras, Wildebeest, Thompson’s Gazelles, Impala, and Warthogs feeding on their knees – what a strange habit! Olive Baboons were looking for discarded scraps on the roadside and we found a herd of Eland. There was also a Coke’s Hartebeest with the Impala but I was quickly distracted by a rather distant Lilac-breasted Roller and a much closer Red-chested Cuckoo. On the lake itself there was a group of White Pelicans feeding in a tight circle and three more Pink-backed Pelicans. Rain however made us beat a hasty retreat passing a Black-Lored Babbler on the way.

Back at Elsamere a Red-eyed Dove showed well and a Common Drongo was added to the list. Arrow-marked Babblers, White-browed Robin-Chats and a Grey Woodpecker were again on the lawn by our lodge.

Day 4

Monday 26th October

We woke to another wonderful dawn chorus, Hadada and Sacred ibises flying over and a White Pelican on the lake. We were ready to leave the camp by 7am for the long journey down to the Masai Mara game reserve.

We passed more Zebras, a Vervet Monkey on a wall and a Northern Anteater Chat on the way, then had a “comfort”/souvenir stop in Narok where we succumbed to the haggling purchasing technique! I was more comfortable outside the shop, where Speke’s Weavers and White-browed Sparrow-Weavers occupied separate trees and, across the road, there was a third species of Weaver – Chestnut Weavers. Little Swifts, Superb Starlings, Ring-necked Doves, Laughing Doves and House Sparrows were all present.

After we left Narok, the road quickly turned in to a very rough track on which we travelled for the next hour – the African massage! As soon as we got through the gate in to the Masai Mara reserve we started to see a lot more animals: lots of Thompson’s Gazelles, at least two Grant’s Gazelles, with white above the tail on their rears, Impala, Eland, Topi, Zebras, Giraffes and Warthogs. We passed a Southern Ground Hornbill showing its red wattle and a male Ostrich.

Finally we arrived at the Ilkeliani camp, crossed the rope bridge for the first time and were welcomed with a cold fruit drink and a hot flannel. Our very comfortable en-suite tent had a huge bed and was only 5 yards from the river bank. On the river, I found a Green Sandpiper, Common Sandpipers and a smart Three-banded Plover. A couple of Little Bee-eaters fed from the bank below our tent: captivating colourful birds. There was also a Northern Black Flycatcher and Black Saw-wings with the Brown-throated Sand Martins over the river. As we ate our first three course lunch I watched a spectacular White-fronted Bee-eater and a D’Arnaud’s Barbet. Two large Bare-faced Go-away-birds were a welcome surprise, high up a tree in the grounds, and I was already getting the feeling that this camp site was going to be superb!

Our first afternoon game drive in the Masai Mara started at 4pm. It soon became clear that we were on a mission to get somewhere. We paused briefly at a Kirk’s Dik-Dik, a Wattled Lapwing, some Black-winged Lapwings and a White-bellied Bustard. We had a good look at a Lappet-faced Vulture sitting on the top of a small tree and passed more Topi, Wildebeest and lots of Thompson’s Gazelles. We came across two Black-backed Jackals with four cubs in a den close to the track and watched them for a while, but Davis explained that we should move on while we still had some light as there were “other things to see”. He didn’t tell us exactly what until we found them - a beautiful female Leopard on the move with her five-month-old cub. She was completely unconcerned by the gathering of 12 or more vehicles and we got amazing views. She was discovered by three Jackals who barked at her incessantly. We thought for a moment that this would be a problem but it was soon clear that the Leopard was more than a match for some Jackals and, although she did turn on them a couple of times, both she and the cub were very relaxed. The barking did, however, attract a Hyena which could have been much more of a threat to the cub. As it got closer, however, one of the Masai drivers got out and chased it away! The Leopards sat in the centre of the ring of vehicles for a while, then on a small mound. Once the cub even went under a Jeep! Incredible luck on our first game drive!

A Lilac-breasted Roller provided a brief diversion at the Leopard spot and, as we returned, we passed more Giraffes, some Guineafowl and several Wheatears off the road.

Back at the camp we returned to our tents to freshen up. We had been told not to wander around the camp at night as animals can, and do, come and go at will. So, when we were ready, we flashed a torch around outside and, as if by magic, a Masai guard appeared out of the bush to escort us to dinner. In the bar that evening large Yellow-winged Bats flew around and inside the bar tent catching moths and beetles! Dinner was greatly enjoyed by all.

Day 5

Tuesday 27th October

We were up early this morning for a 6.15 game drive. As we walked to the vehicles a Brown-throated Wattle-eye sang at close range, just above head height, but it was still a little dark for photography. As we drove away from the camp, a fine Water Buck sat and watched us go by and a small group of Giraffes looked very smart in the morning sunshine. Yellow-billed Oxpeckers fed on their necks, along with one pair of probable Red-billed Oxpeckers. These proved to be much the scarcer of the two Oxpeckers during the week, only a few being confirmed but these Red-billed birds also showed a yellow eye ring and no pale rump when they flew off. A Greater Blue-eared Starling posed nicely in the sunshine and we started to recognise Red-naped Larks singing from the tops of bushes. These large larks showed red in the wing rather than a red nape and they proved to be common here, their fluty song often drifting across the plain.

We came across a group of Banded Mongooses and then some Hyenas: at least four well-grown young, with long pale coats, and several adults, one of which was carrying part of a leg, probably a Warthog. They all looked well fed. Shortly afterwards, a young Impala ran across the track behind us and disappeared in to the scrub. A few minutes later it ran out again persued by two Jackals. One leapt up and bit the Impala's neck bringing it down. Almost immediately a Hyena ran in, picked up the prey by its rear leg and carried it in to the scrub where it was quickly joined by the rest of the pack. I doubt whether the Jackals got much to eat at all!

Moving on, I got good views of Black-winged Plovers, Slate-coloured Boubous, a Yellow-throated Long-claw and a Hamerkop standing on top of a dead tree trunk. There were also good views of the surprisingly colourful Helmeted Guineafowl and a Hildebrandt's Starling was clearly distinguished from the Superb Starlings. A Sooty Chat was found and a White-browed Coucal, the "Water Bottle bird", named after its distinctive call, creeping around at the base of a bush. We passed lots of Zebras, quite a few Wildebeest and Topi and another herd of Eland showing well, then we found our first Elephants. There were around 10 altogether including a large matriarch with crooked tusks, and several young, one of which was still suckling. Shortly afterwards our first Lions were found, just lazing around in the scrub, three males and three females. Then two superb Lilac-breasted Rollers showed their long tails and stunning plumage at close range. There were several large Buffalo with their attendant Oxpeckers, more obliging Zebras and Giraffes and four Ostriches including a displaying (and mating) pair.

Well satisfied with the morning so far, we stopped for a sumptuous, packed breakfast under a tree looking at the antelopes around us, the Marabou Storks standing about and a couple of vultures circling above. On our way back to camp, we saw a Bateleur with its distinctive wing shape, another Lappet-faced Vulture on a tree and a dark-looking Swallow with a deep pink rump which was probably a Lesser Striped Swallow. Another Yellow-throated Long-claw showed well too. We passed close to the Lions, Elephants and Buffalo again. One of the Lionesses was still sound asleep in a ditch but the others had woken up and were now on the move. One female

marked a bush as she went. There were four baby Elephants and one or two larger ones with the adults. Getting close to an imposing Buffalo with two Oxpeckers on its head is quite an experience!

Back at the camp, we were greeted by a Bushbuck which had been reared by one of the camp staff after it had been abandoned by its mother. It was now free to roam where it liked but had no fear of humans. There was a Northern Black Flycatcher by our tent again, and a family of three more were seen after lunch. I confirmed that the Swallows over the river with the Brown-throated Sand Martins were Wire-tailed Swallows, and a Vulture that flew over showed the tell-tale pure white streak up the rump and lower back of a White-backed Vulture. A Three-banded Plover was on the river again and a flock of birds that came down to drink looked a bit like mini Hawfinches. They were, in fact, Grey-capped Social Weavers. Also coming down to the river were Purple Grenadiers and two Red-billed Firefinches. A small plain looking bird with a bright red bill coming down with them was first thought to be a Waxbill but research suggests that it was a Red-billed Quelea – just one of the most numerous bird on earth! Having missed at least two in the last couple of days, I was particularly pleased to find and ‘scope a Malachite Kingfisher, a real little gem. Little Bee-eaters also showed well below our tent again as did Speckled Mousebirds, two Chin-spot Batis and a non-breeding male Yellow Bishop. Over lunch, one of our party decided to start feeding the birds at the edge of the tent. This proved to be an excellent idea, immediately producing superb views of Common Bulbuls, D’Arnaud’s Barbets, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus, Speckle-fronted Weavers, Speke’s Weavers, Purple Grenadiers a Slate-coloured Boubou and Long-tailed Ruppell’s Starlings!

After lunch a thunderstorm blew in and it rained heavily. I watched from the observation platform. Some of the birds actually seemed to enjoy the rain. A Pale Flycatcher showed well and had a rain bath, and a Woodland Kingfisher appeared on a dead tree, another spectacular bird which also bathed in the rain. When the rain stopped another Malachite Kingfisher was found on this stretch of river and Wire-tailed Swallows were found resting on a ledge under the platform. It was hard to drag myself away from my best-yet views of Little Bee-eaters but I did wander around a different part of the grounds and found an adult male African Paradise Flycatcher with full tail streamers, a Red-faced Crombec, two more Brown-throated Wattle-eyes, more White-browed Robin-Chats and perhaps best of all, a Red-fronted Tinkerbird. More Variable Sunbirds showed well and another Bare-faced Go-away-bird was watched, again high in a tree. Finally some very approachable Wire-tailed Swallows were photographed on the bridge before we left for another game drive at 4pm.

A Kirk’s Dik-Dik was the first animal to pose for a photograph, then four Temminck’s Coursers were found. This was followed by more Baboons and a Reedbuck poking its head and big ears out of the vegetation. Then yet more Giraffes with Oxpeckers and this time two Red-billed Oxpeckers were confirmed. Both Lappet-faced and White-backed Vultures were well observed on their tree-top perches. Crowned Plovers were also seen well this afternoon and a male Montagu’s Harrier flew through. A Hamerkop was seen again as were two of their enormous nests, completely out of proportion to the size of the bird. Peter our driver then spotted two Bat-eared Foxes. They were moving away from us all the time but when they turned and looked at us it was clear that they did indeed have very large ears! We were lucky to see these as they are largely nocturnal and rarely seen during the daytime. Unfortunately, some of our group in the other vehicles missed them.

Another 8+ Sandgrouse flew over, presumably Yellow-throated, and 20+ Helmeted Guineafowl showed well. We saw another White-browed Coucal, more Hildebrandt’s Starlings, a Grant’s Gazelle amongst the Impala and a lot of Wildebeest. The unanimous star of this evening’s game drive however was a Secretary Bird, an

extraordinary bird watched at close range steadily striding over the plain searching the grass for food. Finally we admired a glorious African sunset behind a stark lone tree with some animals dotted along the horizon. A closer look however revealed that those ten dots were actually Ostriches. You can't get much more African than that!

Day 6

Wednesday 28th October

Up early again for a 6.15 game drive. The first birds seen this morning were some Sandgrouse, this time on the ground so that I could confirm that they were Yellow-throated Sandgrouse. Hildebrandt's Starlings and Crowned Plovers showed well, there was a Wattled Lapwing, and we got close to an Eland, lots of Zebra, Warthogs and a Grant's Gazelle. A Stork that flew in and landed on top of a tree was identified as a Woolly-necked Stork – a good find. We moved on finding Helmeted Guineafowl and a male Ostrich doing its spectacular display. We found a tree full of Grey-backed Fiscals, two White-backed Vultures in a tree and a large group of Banded Mongooses. Another White-browed Coucal skulked around a bush.

We then got close to one female and two male Lions. She had a cub but kept it well hidden under the scrub. A scaly Ruppell's Vulture was found on top of a tree and we admired a fine group of Giraffes, one with his legs spread so that it could reach the ground and two sitting down but the undoubted star of the morning was a Cheetah. We found it crouched on top of a ridge, watching some invisible prey on the other side. It ran along the ridge and stalked for a short distance but it must have been spotted because it gradually lost interest, sat in front of some bushes and posed beautifully for us, eventually lying down. Sleek, graceful yet powerful, it was a beautiful animal.

We enjoyed breakfast under a tree again and I watched a distinctive White-headed Vulture circling the plain and a Montagu's Harrier flying through. Breakfast consumed, we headed more or less straight back to the camp where some of us elected to join a guided tour of the adjacent Masai Village. I was a little hesitant about spending some of our valuable time on this optional activity but it turned out to be a fascinating and very worthwhile experience.

Over the lunch break, I photographed two superb White-fronted Bee-eaters and more Wire-tailed Swallows on the bridge and, on the other side of the camp, there were more African Paradise Flycatchers, Red-billed Firefinches, Purple Grenadiers and a White-bellied Canary. An immature Lanner Falcon flew over the camp showing heavily streaked underparts.

The afternoon game drive started at 3.30pm today and we drove along the river for a change. It began with a pair of Warthogs complete with two very small piglets which all ran off with their tails in the air. There was a large group of Wildebeest, perhaps a sign that something unusual was happening, and a Grassland Pipit was positively identified. Lots of these had been glimpsed previously. There were Impala, Giraffes and Helmeted Guineafowl again, and we found one very large Crocodile, out on a sandbank, just before it slipped back into the water. The main target however was an S-bend in the river where Hippopotamuses were wallowing and sometimes "yawning" at each other. This is exactly how I had imagined seeing them and we were even able to get out of the vehicles to watch them. There were a couple of Yellow-billed Storks here too and a pair of Spur-winged Plovers. A Common Drongo and more Guineafowl followed as it started to rain. We moved on again and found a pride of Lions, looking miserable in the rain, and some Elephants nearby. They became aware of each other and for a

moment the lions crouched down for a face off but the Elephants just kept coming with their ears spread and the Lions turned tail and slunk away.

Also seen were three more White-bellied Bustards, Crowned Plovers, a Montagu's Harrier and a Tawny Eagle sitting on a tree top. There were two Black-backed Jackals and a large group of Hyenas, maybe 20 or so. Whilst watching them another Secretary Bird came down a slope behind us and a fine adult Lanner Falcon was found on a tree top. Almost immediately it took off and flew past us fast and low towards two Doves on the ground. Only one escaped!

As we made our way back, we admired another spectacular African sunset.

Day 7

Thursday 29th October

We had done very well for mammals. The only member of the "Big five" that we hadn't seen was Rhinoceros and this was going to be a long-shot, as there are apparently only c50 left in the Mara. Some of our group had expressed an interest in seeing the Mara River. Initially our leaders were not very keen – it was a long way and the Wildebeest migration was over. But the previous night they had received news that there were a lot of animals down there so this morning, we had another early start and set off towards the Mara River.

We passed the usual Giraffes, Impala, Thompson's Gazelles and Warthogs, a lone Hyena and another Secretary Bird showed well - a smart male. A Jackal family with four more cubs was followed by a Topi with a baby then three more new birds: a Red-legged Spur-fowl, a pair of Coqui Francolins and a Black-bellied Bustard.

Two pairs of Crowned Plovers were watched in distraction display trying to prevent two Jackals from finding their nests, seemingly without success. There were more Grey-backed Fiscals, a White-backed Vulture and a very close and photogenic Wattled Lapwing.

We came across a big herd of Buffalo then an extraordinary long line of Wildebeest, all walking single file along the same track. Further on there were hundreds scattered over the rolling plains and a long "S" of animals meandering into a big grazing herd. We came across a Lion and two Lionesses at very close range. Interestingly, one of the Lionesses had shadow spotting. Then we found a Ruppell's Vulture on the ground standing, as if expectantly, next to a very healthy and rather indignant Thompson's Gazelle. A Rufous-naped Lark was seen well, and a pair of Sooty Chats were well observed. Pectoral-patch Cisticolas were identified, the short-tailed males engaged in their display flights, then a Black-shouldered Kite was found, like most raptors, perched on top of a tree.

As we approached the river, there were two Lappet-faced Vultures and 5+ Hooded Vultures gathering in a separate tree. There were more very close-range Lions looking satiated, then the Wildebeest, maybe 4000 in a dense herd on the other side of the river. They were moving parallel to the river and getting a little closer but there was a conspicuous white safari vehicle right next to the river on our side. Our driver tried to reach him on the radio but there was no response. He tried flashing his headlights at him but still no reaction. The Wildebeest were not going to cross whilst he was there. Eventually Davis drove down and "had words" with the driver. They both came away and almost immediately the herd started to move quickly through the bushes and to a steep river bank. A few came down to the water but something wasn't to their liking and they retreated and

moved further along. Suddenly the crossing was in full swing, animals slipping down the bank and plunging in, some taking spectacular leaps into the river, others stumbling and falling in uncontrollably then swimming across en masse in a fairly narrow band. On the other side, they gathered in a seething mass, struggling to get a foothold and then scrambling up the steep bank. Unsurprisingly, some had been injured in the process and further down the river were the corpses of the few that didn't make it on previous crossings. Still they came in their hordes and, with them, a few families of Zebras including a baby. They were much more cautious than the Wildebeest and went in rather nervously at a different point on the river. All made it safely across. It was an incredible spectacle and again, what luck! Twenty minutes later and we would have missed the whole thing!! Looking around and behind us for a moment, I noticed two Hippopotamuses were standing out of the river on a sand bank and ten more were lying in the river or on the mud. A Crocodile started floating down the river to pick the left-overs from the crossing.

We drove back through the Wildebeest that had just crossed, all looking completely unconcerned and unaffected by what they had just done. We found a tree under which to have breakfast surrounded by the gently moving herd – magical!

After breakfast we drove back, managing to avoid running over a Leopard Tortoise and a Dung Beetle rolling a ball of dung with its mate hitching a ride on top. There were some Mongooses raiding Crowned Plover nests – they seem to get a raw deal out here! We found some more Elephants, three females, three young and a young male which was a little frisky when it was startled by an engine starting up! Three Lesser Kestrels were identified, a female Montagu's Harrier flew through and three Ground Hornbills were seen well. One in particular “played” with and displayed to a plastic bag, throwing it in the air and jumping around it. Five more Lesser Kestrels also showed well, hovering and dropping to the ground beside us. What a morning!

Back at our tent, a splendid male Black-headed Oriole showed very well along with Holub's Golden Weavers, a Spectacled Weaver and a real surprise, a pair of Marico Sunbirds. Around camp after lunch, I found three Malachite Kingfishers on the river with the Woodland Kingfisher still there too, Northern Black Flycatchers, Red-billed Firefinch, several Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus, a Black-backed Puffback, an adult male Red-faced Crombec that looked a bit like a mini Nuthatch, a Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Speckle-fronted Weavers, a Grey Woodpecker, a Grey-backed Camaroptera, a pair of Yellow Bishops and I finally connected with the small troop of Vervet Monkeys which have been raiding some of the tents in the camp!

On the afternoon game drive, we found Northern Wheatears, an Isabelline Wheatear, a Lilac-breasted Roller, a Buffalo, a troop of Olive Baboons and two close, male Ostriches. It soon became clear though that we were on another mission to find something special. We bounced along the tracks, through ditches and up through a more scrubby area until we arrived at a tree in which there was a Leopard, our second Leopard, lying along a branch under a small part of his latest kill! He was asleep, however, and didn't look as though he was going to do anything soon so having looked at him from the best angle we could, we left him alone and started retracing our tracks. However our haste and frequent radio contact suggested we were still looking for something else. It was a hectic drive, often doubling back on ourselves and trying a different route. We were the last of our vehicles to arrive but eventually, in fading light, we found our quarry – three Black Rhinoceroses, a youngster and two big adults, one of which had two huge, long, sharp horns. The other adult had one large horn but the other was little more than a stump. They were very impressive and at one stage they turned to face each other in a bit of a face-

off in the gloom. They were great to see but unfortunately there was not really enough light for photography. The “big five” were now complete. What a day!

Day 8

Friday 30th October

We were allowed a bit of a lie-in this morning, the game drive left at 6.16am! It had rained a lot overnight and the Mara was full of birdsong. We passed “Tommys” Topi and a few Hyenas but we headed more or less straight back to the area where we had seen the Rhinos last night. When we were still some distance from the area, Peter our driver stopped, picked up his binoculars then turned to us all with a huge grin on his face and said one word – “lucky!” The Rhinos were there, out in the open on the rise across the next ditch. It took us another ten minutes to cross over there and get close to them but it was well worth coming back to see and photograph these impressive animals in good light. They were, in fact, very wary of our vehicles and soon made for the cover of some low bushes. They moved quickly with remarkable ease for such large animals. They were light on their feet and trotted off with their tails in the air, a bit like giant warthogs. The young one was quite “playful” and bounced around the adult as they ran down the hill. We drove to the other side of the scrub and watched them come out towards us again – amazing!

There were more Hyenas on the way back, a Topi with a newly born calf, still with the umbilical cord attached, another White-bellied Bustard and surprisingly, a Black Stork. This is described as a scarce migrant in Kenya. The icing on the cake this morning however came in the shape of a pair of Grey Crowned Cranes – the only two of the trip. They were spectacular in pristine plumage and even indulged in a little display and synchronised walking.

As we crossed the last ditch before getting back to camp we got stuck in the mud! This ditch had been bone dry two days ago, now one rear wheel sank up to the axle and it took 15 minutes of 4-wheel drive effort backwards and forwards and many stones under the wheels before we finally got out!

We had to wait a few minutes for the other vehicles to return by a different route, but we were met at the camp by Masai guide Wilson who was going to take us on a Nature Walk. Birds featured heavily again, 49 species of them in fact, and despite my efforts around the camp in the last few days, Wilson managed to find 11 new species for me! The highlights were a Brown Parrot high in a tree at the start, a Lesser Honeyguide glimpsed flying away from its favourite tree where there was a bees’ nest, and a pair of Silverbirds nest-building which particularly pleased Wilson as this is an attracted species which can be difficult to find. There were Blue-naped Mousebirds, which proved to be quite common once I learnt the call, and we disturbed a large Verraux’s Eagle Owl from its roost. It flew to a different tree and looked down at us suspiciously. Add to that two pairs of Green Wood Hoopoes, a Grey-headed Kingfisher and an African Blue Flycatcher and it became a very successful morning’s birding. Away from the birds, we also saw a Tree Agama Lizard with a bright blue head, and flushed a Cape Hare from cover. Some interesting plants were pointed out too, including a Sandpaper tree, a plant that produces the ochre which the Masai use for colouring their skin, Wild Peppermint and an insect repellent. He also explained how they squeeze water from elephant dung!

A pair of Red-cheeked Cordon-bleus entertained again over lunch and by our tent and around the camp after lunch I saw the Grey-headed Kingfisher again, a Malachite Kingfisher, a Three-banded Plover, and a dark woodpecker-sized bird with a white head and a white rump turned out to be a White-headed Barbet. Best of all,

a spectacular and very large Black-and-white- casqued Hornbill flew over the camp and then back out again as we got in to the vehicles for the afternoon game drive.

This afternoon's expedition started with a couple of Warthogs with small babies, then two big Buffalo, Giraffes and a Three-banded Plover on a puddle left over from last night's rain. A Grassland Pipit and another Black Stork were seen, then a pair of Ostriches running at speed. They both displayed to each other and the female continued for some time but the male lost interest and walked away. The highlight this afternoon however were the Lions. We found a pair mating, twice in ten minutes while we were there. Apparently this continues every 15 minutes or so for 24hrs! There was much "yawning" from the male. There was another female lying nearby. Then another male appeared on the other side of the track, then a third male. At first we thought there might be trouble as they were going to try to muscle in on the action but, surprisingly, they just muzzled up together and sat on a small mound surveying the scenery and indulging in some synchronised yawning! Presumably they were brothers or at least close relatives from the same pride. They were handsome individuals. Another ten Ostriches were seen on the way back to the camp.

Day 9

Saturday 31st October

Our final morning around the tent and the camp. Black Saw-wings were seen again and a Three-banded Plover and a Hamerkop were on the river. Northern Black Flycatchers and White-browed Robin-chats were by the tent as usual. And so after we had said farewell to the staff, we had a last couple of hour's game drive on our way back to the rough entrance track. The usual animals were seen, Giraffes, Impala, Thompson's Gazelles, Warthogs and two groups of Mongooses. There were two Cattle Egrets, two Wattled Lapwing, two Black-backed Jackals, a Topi, a Wildebeest, a group of Guineafowl, a male Ostrich then another pair, more Wildebeest, Zebras, 2+ Yellow-throated Sandgrouse, Green Sandpipers taking advantage of the lingering rain puddles, and another Temmink's Courser was very welcome. A Hyena was seen munching on a piece of left over animal and it could be heard crunching through the bone! (Hyena scats are white due to the bone content.) A male Sooty Chat was seen well, then our finale. We found ourselves back at the Leopard's tree. He was there again, a bit lower this time, panting and surveying his territory but after just a few minutes he got up, turned around and began making his way down the tree. He carefully came all the way down, head first, Peter repositioned our vehicle and a superb big male Leopard walked towards us and passed within a few feet giving breath-taking views of its beautiful coat. It walked off in to the tall grass on the other side of the track and suddenly you could see how such a magnificent coat could provide amazing camouflage. So we started our time in the Masai Mara with amazing views of a female Leopard and her cub and we finished it with this beautiful male. Incredible luck!

On the journey towards Narok I saw another Sooty Chat and a Shrike with a white head, a black mask and tail, a white rump and a brown back – a new bird for the trip, a Northern White-crowned Shrike. We stopped at the Mara gate for a comfort stop and I had a decent look at the Weavers here. They had a big black mask and black stripes on the mantle – Village Weavers, another new bird for the trip.

Moving on, we made a large Giraffe gallop across the road and there were still a few Gazelles to be seen. Our last lunch stop was at Narok again. The White-browed Social Weavers and the Speke's Weavers were still in their respective trees and I found my last new bird for the trip – Grey-headed Sparrows. There were at least four of them including a pair nesting on the corner of the building – how did I miss them last week? They were not the

most exciting new birds to finish the tour with but to get another new bird at all at this stage and three new birds on the last morning cannot be bad!!

We checked in to our temporary rooms in Nairobi to freshen up, eventually worked out how to get hot water out of the shower (you switch it on!) and settled to our evening meal. Just as we were finishing, we got news of our flight delay, a seven hour delay! So we had to get to the airport and check in, then British Airways transferred us to the Hilton Hotel where we could have another free meal and try to get some sleep before we were collected at 3.30am. An eventful way to end a spectacularly successful trip, success which was due in no small part to the expertise and field craft of our three guides. Well done and a big thank you to Davis, Peter and Peter!

Day 10

Sunday 1st November

Return to the UK

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African Fish Eagle by Ian Turner



Cheetah by Ian Turner

Species Lists

Birds (✓ = recorded but not counted; H = heard only)

	Common Name	Scientific Name	
1	Common Ostrich	<i>Struthio camelus</i>	Seen daily from our Game Drives in the Masai Mara with a maximum of 13 on 27 th .
2	Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>	Common in the Masai Mara. Some groups in excess of 20 birds.
3	Coqui Francolin	<i>Peliperdix coqui</i>	2 birds (a pair) seen from our morning game drive on 29 th .
4	Red-necked Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis afer</i>	A single bird from the morning game drive on 29 th . Some members of our group saw at least one other bird from the camp.
5	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	Common both at Lake Naivasha and in the Masai Mara.
6	African Black Duck	<i>Anas sparsa</i>	2 seen from the boat trip on Lake Naivasha on 25 th
7	Hottentot Teal	<i>Anas hottentota</i>	2 from the boat trip on Lake Naivasha on 25 th
8	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis capensis</i>	Numerous on Lake Naivasha
9	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus roseus</i>	25 from the boat trip on Lake Naivasha on 25 th
10	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	Described as regular but uncommon migrant in Kenya it was a surprise to find a single bird on the morning game drive on 30 th and another in the afternoon.
11	Yellow-billed Stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>	6+ on Lake Naivasha on 25 th , 2 from a game drive on 28 th and another 2 around the camp on 30 th .
12	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	1 from the morning game drive on 28 th .
13	Marabou Stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumenifer</i>	Seen throughout the trip, even in Nairobi but the highest numbers c20+ around Lake Naivasha on 25 th .
14	African Sacred Ibis	<i>Threskiomis aethiopicus</i>	Small numbers seen around Lake Naivasha
15	Hadada Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>	A noisy resident at Elsamere and about 30 seen around Lake Naivasha on 25 th . Only 2 seen in the Masai Mara.
16	African Spoonbill	<i>Platalea alba</i>	5+ seen from the boat trip on Lake Naivasha on 25 th .
17	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>	1 at Elsamere on 24 th and another 2 the next day.
18	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	8+ seen around Lake Naivasha
19	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	Over 30, mostly around Lake Naivasha

	Common Name	Scientific Name	
20	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	5 scattered records
21	Black-headed Heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>	1 showed very well near Lake Naivasha on 25 th .
22	Purple heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	1 seen on the Nature Walk at Elsamere on 24 th and the same bird seen again the following day.
23	Great White Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	Just 1 on Lake Naivasha on 25th
24	Black Heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>	1 in flight at Elsamere on 24 th and 2 from the boat trip on 25 th , one of which was watched using its "umbrella" feeding technique.
25	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	7+ around Lake Naivasha
26	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>	At least 7 around Lake Naivasha, 3 from Masai Mara game drives and another 3 from Ilkeliani Camp.
27	Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	A few singles from Elsamere on 24 th were followed by 30+ on Lake Naivasha and the adjacent lake on 25 th .
28	Pink-backed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus rufescens</i>	C6 around Lake Naivasha on 25 th .
29	Long-tailed (Reed) Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo africanus</i>	Common on Lake Naivasha
30	White-breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>	This bird, common on Lake Naivasha, is variously considered a species in its own right or a subspecies of the familiar Great Cormorant <i>P. carbo lucidus</i>
31	Secretarybird	<i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i>	4 sightings of these extraordinary birds on the Masai Mara Game Reserve.
32	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	1 on our drive to the Mara River on 29 th .
33	Hooded Vulture	<i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>	5 in a tree at the Mara River on 29 th .
34	White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>	The most common vulture species, 5-10 seen daily in the Masai Mara.
35	Ruppell's Vulture	<i>Gyps rueppellii</i>	Only 2 positively identified from game drives on the 28 th and 29 th but many vulture sightings were not specifically identified.
36	White-headed Vulture	<i>Trigonoceps occipitalis</i>	1 distinctive bird identified over breakfast in the field on 28 th .
37	Lappet-faced Vulture	<i>Torgos tracheliotos</i>	A total of 7+ individuals seen from game drives in the Masai Mara on 26 th , 27 th and 29 th .
38	Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>	At least 6 seen on our drives around the Masai Mara Reserve
39	Long-crested Eagle	<i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>	1 seen whilst driving from Lake Naivasha to the Masai Mara on 26 th .
40	Tawny Eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>	1 showed well from a game drive on 28 th .

	Common Name	Scientific Name	
41	Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	1 or 2 seen daily in the Masai Mara with 4+ on 29 th .
42	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Only seen around Nairobi where there were 20+ on 24 th .
43	African Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>	After our first sighting at Elsamere 24 th , 12+ of these impressive birds were seen around Lake Naivasha on 25 th .
44	Augur Buzzard	<i>Buteo augur</i>	2 whilst driving from Nairobi to Lake Naivasha and another 2 on the journey to Masai Mara
45	Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	8 were seen well from a game drive on 29 th .
46	Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>	3 individuals seen including one watched making a kill on the evening of 28 th .
47	White-bellied Bustard	<i>Eupodotis senegalensis</i>	A total of 8 scattered sightings around the Masai Mara
48	Black-bellied Bustard	<i>Lissotis melanogaster</i>	A single bird seen on 29 th .
49	Black Crake	<i>Amaurornis flavirostra</i>	5+ seen from the boat trip on Lake Naivasha on 25 th .
50	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Common around Lake Naivasha
51	Red-knobbed Coot	<i>Fulica cristata</i>	100+ from the boat trip on Lake Naivasha on 25 th .
52	Grey Crowned Crane	<i>Balearica regulorum</i>	A fine pair in pristine plumage were seen from the morning game drive on 30 th .
53	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	6 from the boat trip on Lake Naivasha.
54	Blacksmith Lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>	4 around Lake Naivasha on 25 th .
55	Spur-winged Plover	<i>Vanellus spinosus</i>	2 were seen on the River Talek with the Hippopotamuses 28 th .
56	Black-winged Lapwing	<i>Vanellus melanopterus</i>	A total of 8 identified from game drives on the Masai Mara Reserve.
57	Crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>	A total of 20+ seen on the Masai Mara Reserve.
58	African Wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus senegallus</i>	5 scattered records on the Masai Mara Reserve.
59	Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>	1 was resident on the river below Ilkeliani camp and 4 others were seen on various roadside puddles after rain on the Masai Mara Reserve.
60	African Jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>	1 adult and 1 juv showed well from the boat trip on Lake Naivasha on 25 th .
61	Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	C6 on Lake Naivasha on 25 th .
62	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	2 birds on Lake Naivasha on 25 th .
63	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	1 seen from the boat trip on 25 th .

	Common Name	Scientific Name	
64	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	1 on the Talek River and 3 on roadside puddles after rain in the Masai Mara.
65	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Small numbers seen on Lake Naivasha and on the Talek River. A total of 8 sightings.
66	Temminck's Courser	<i>Cursorius temminckii</i>	4 from a game drive in the Masai Mara on 27 th and 1 on 31 st were the only records.
67	Grey-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus</i>	2 from the boat trip on Lake Naivasha on 25 th .
68	Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	1 on the Nature walk at Elsamere on 24 th and another on 25 th .
69	Yellow-throated Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles gutturalis</i>	All of the Sandgrouse in the Masai Mara positively identified were of this species, 3 on 26 th , 9 on 27 th , 12 on 28 th and 2 posing well for a photograph on 31 st .
70	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	A few Feral Pigeons were seen in Nairobi and at "Comfort stops" on 31 st .
71	Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>	A few were resident at Elsamere and also present in small numbers at the Ilkeliani camp.
72	Ring-necked Dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>	Common in gardens and camps throughout the trip
73	Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>	Common at the Ilkeliani campsite and on the Masa Mara Reserve
74	Meyer's Parrot	<i>Poicephalus meyeri</i>	A single bird pointed out on the Nature Walk at Ilkeliani camp on 30 th .
75	Bare-faced Go-away-bird	<i>Corythaixoides personatus</i>	2 on 26 th , 1 on 27 th and 2 on 30 th , all on the Ilkeliani Campsite.
76	White-browed Coucal	<i>Centropus superciliosus</i>	The call of the "Water-bottle" bird was often heard on the Masai Mara but only 4 were seen, 1 on 26 th , 1 on 27 th and 2 on 28 th .
77	Diederik Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>	1 on the shore of Lake Naivasha on 25 th .
78	Red-chested Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus solitarius</i>	1 on an afternoon game drive from Elsamere on 25 th .
79	Verreaux's Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo lacteus</i>	An impressive bird was seen on our Nature walk at Ilkeliani camp on 30 th .
80	Mottled Swift	<i>Tachymarptis aequatorialis</i>	2 were seen on the Nature Walk at Elsamere on 24 th and 2 more the next day.
81	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	Frequent sightings over Ilkeliani camp appeared to be this species.

	Common Name	Scientific Name	
82	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	c20 over our hotel in Nairobi on 24 th , c10 around Narok on 26 th were seen again on 31 st and a few more around bridges over rivers close to the Masai Mara.
83	Speckled Mousebird	<i>Colius striatus</i>	Common, seen daily throughout the trip
84	Blue-naped Mousebird	<i>Urocolius macrourus</i>	c12 identified in the Acacias just outside Ilkeliani camp on 30 th .
85	Lilac-breasted Roller	<i>Coracias caudatus</i>	A rather distant bird was seen from our game drive near Elsamere on 25 th . 1 or 2 birds were then seen daily from our drives around the Masai Mara Reserve, some showing their stunning plumage at close range. c10 birds in total.
86	Grey-headed Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon leucocephala</i>	1 on the Talek River near the Ilkeliani camp on 30 th .
87	Woodland Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>	1 on the river from Ilkeliani camp from 27 th -29 th with 2 there on 28 th .
88	Malachite Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis cristatus</i>	9+ were seen on the various river systems in the Masai Mara
89	Giant Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle maxima</i>	Seen from Elsamere and on Lake Naivasha, 3 on 24 th and 2 on 25 th including one watched at close range from the boat trip, dealing with a very large fish.
90	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	6 on 24 th around Lake Naivasha, c12 from the boat trip on 25 th and 1 with the Hippos on the Talek river on 28 th .
91	Little Bee-eater	<i>Merops pusillus</i>	10+ of these delightful birds were seen daily on the river from Ilkeliani camp.
92	White-fronted Bee-eater	<i>Merops bullockoides</i>	A migrant here, 1 was watched over lunch at Ilkeliani on 26 th but was gone the next day. 2 more were photographed on the bridge on 28 th .
93	African Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops africana</i>	2 on the Nature Walk at Elsamere on 25 th and 1 on the morning game drive on 27 th .
94	Green Wood Hoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>	4 were found on the Nature Walk at Ilkeliani camp on 30 th .
95	African Grey Hornbill	<i>Tockus nasutus</i>	A pair were photographed on our way to the Mara river on 29 th .
96	Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill	<i>Bycanistes subcylindricus</i>	1 flew over the Ilkeliani campsite on 30 th .
97	Southern Ground Hornbill	<i>Bucorvus leadbeateri</i>	2 were seen as we drove along the approach road to the Masai Mara on 26 th and 3 during a game drive on 29 th .

	Common Name	Scientific Name	
98	Red-fronted Tinkerbird	<i>Pogoniulus pusillus</i>	1 at Ilkeliani camp on 27 th and another there on 29 th .
99	Spot-flanked Barbet	<i>Tricholaema lacrymosa</i>	2 from the Nature Walk at Ilkeliani camp on 30 th .
100	White-headed Barbet	<i>Lybius leucocephalus</i>	1 in the grounds of Ilkeliani camp on 30 th .
101	D'Arnaud's Barbet	<i>Trachyphonus darnaudii</i>	A family party were seen daily just outside the Ilkeliani campsite with a maximum of 5 birds on 27 th .
102	Lesser Honeyguide	<i>Indicator minor</i>	1 glimpsed disappearing in to cover at the Ilkeliani camp on 30 th .
103	Bearded Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicos namaquus</i>	2 at Elsamere on 24 th and another 2 on 25 th .
104	African Grey Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicos goertae</i>	3 at Elsamere on 24 th , 2 there on 25 th and singles also seen at Ilkeliani camp on 29 th and 30 th .
105	Chinspot Batis	<i>Batis molitor</i>	1 was seen at Elsamere on 24 th , 2 there on 25 th then 2 were at the Ilkeliani camp on 27 th and another from the nature walk on 30 th .
106	Brown-throated Wattle-Eye	<i>Platysteira cyanea</i>	3 were identified at the Ilkeliani camp on 27 th .
107	Grey-headed Bushshrike	<i>Malacorhynchus blanchoti</i>	After following the call for some time 1 was eventually seen well at Elsamere on 25 th .
108	Orange-breasted Bushshrike	<i>Chlorophoneus sulfureopectus</i>	1 was seen well at Elsamere on 24 th where it is apparently a rarity.
109	Brown-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra australis</i>	1 from the Nature Walk at Elsamere on 25 th .
110	Black-backed Puffback	<i>Dryoscopus cubla</i>	1 was found in the grounds of the Ilkeliani camp on 29 th and another there on 30 th .
111	Tropical Boubou	<i>Laniarius aethiopicus</i>	3 or 4 were seen (and heard!) daily at Elsamere but at Ilkeliani they were replaced by the next species.
112	Slate-coloured Boubou	<i>Laniarius funebris</i>	1 on 26 th , 6 on 27 th and 2 on 29 th at Ilkeliani.
113	Black Cuckooshrike	<i>Campephaga flava</i>	A single female was identified on the Nature Walk at Elsmere on 24 th .
114	Common Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>	1 at Elsamere on 25 th
115	Northern White-crowned Shrike	<i>Eurocephalus rueppelli</i>	1 between the Mara Gate and Narok as we left on 31 st .
116	Grey-backed Fiscal	<i>Lanius excubitoroides</i>	The most common shrike at both Lake Naivasha and in the Masai Mara where there were some groups of 7 or 8 birds.

	Common Name	Scientific Name	
117	Long-tailed Fiscal	<i>Lanius cabanisi</i>	2 from a game drive in the Masai Mara on 29 th and 2 on the Nature Walk at Ilkeliani on 30 th were the only records.
118	Common Fiscal	<i>Lanius humeralis</i>	1 on the Nature Walk at Elsamere and a few singles from game drives in the Masai Mara.
119	Black-headed Oriole	<i>Oriolus larvatus</i>	1 flew over Elsamere on 25 th . A superb male showed very well by our tent at the Ilkeliani camp on 29 th and a female was seen from the nature walk on 30 th .
120	Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>	One of the first species seen in Nairobi and a few along the main road towards Lake Naivasha. Also several in Narok.
121	African Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>	A fairly common bird both at Lake Naivasha and at Ilkeliani campsite but only two had full length tail feathers.
122	African Blue Flycatcher	<i>Elminia longicauda</i>	1 seen on the Nature Walk at Ilkeliani camp on 30 th .
123	Northern Black Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis edolioides</i>	Frequent at Ilkeliani where up to 6 were seen daily.
124	White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis fischeri</i>	4+ seen in the grounds of Elsamere on 24 th and 25 th .
125	African Grey Flycatcher	<i>Bradornis microrhynchus</i>	1 in Nairobi and 2 at Elsamere on 24 th .
126	Pale Flycatcher	<i>Bradornis pallidus</i>	2 at the Ilkeliani camp on 27 th , 2 on 29 th and 1 on 30 th .
127	Silverbird	<i>Empidonax semipartitus</i>	2 building a nest were a good find on the Nature Walk at Ilkeliani on 30 th .
128	Rufous-naped Lark	<i>Mirafra africana</i>	Common on the Masai Mara reserve where they were seen and heard from our safari vehicles.
129	Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>	Common in suitable habitat throughout the trip.
130	Black Saw-wing	<i>Psalidoprocne pristoptera</i>	2 over the river at Ilkeliani on 26 th and 27 th and 1 on 30 th .
131	Plain Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>	Also known as the Brown-throated Martin, 6-12 birds were almost always present over the Talek River.
132	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Regularly seen in small numbers throughout the trip.
133	Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>	After some probable sightings at Lake Naivasha this distinctive swallow proved to be common around the river at Ilkeliani.
134	Lesser Striped Swallow	<i>Cecropis abyssinica</i>	A rather dark swallow with a red rump seen from a game drive on 27 th was almost certainly this species.

	Common Name	Scientific Name		
135	Red-faced Crombec	<i>Sylvietta whytii</i>	1 at Ilkeliani on 27 th and another on 29 th .	
136	Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>	1 seen and heard singing at Elsamere on 25 th and a single at Ilkeliani on 27 th and 30 th .	
137	Lesser Swamp Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus gracilirostris</i>	1 was seen by the lake at Elsamere on 25 th .	
138	Rattling Cisticola	<i>Cisticola chiniana</i>	1 watched singing on the Nature Walk at Elsamere on 25 th .	
139	Winding Cisticola	<i>Cisticola marginatus</i>	1 on the Nature Walk at Ilkeliani on 30 th .	
140	Pectoral-patch Cisticola	<i>Cisticola brunnescens</i>	The common Cisticola on the Masai Mara reserve, often heard and seen in display flight on game drives.	
141	Tawny-flanked Prinia	<i>Prinia subflava</i>	1 seen well on a Nature Walk at Elsamere on 24 th and another on 25 th .	
142	Black-throated Apalis	<i>Apalis jacksoni</i>	1 was found on the Nature Walk at Elsamere on 24 th .	
143	Grey-capped Warbler	<i>Eminia lepida</i>	After 1 was heard clearly on the Nature Walk on 24 th , 6 were seen at Elsamere on 25 th . Also 1 at Ilkeliani on 30 th .	
144	Grey-backed Camaroptera	<i>Camaroptera brachyura</i>	1 or 2 were seen daily, both at Lake Naivasha and at the Ilkeliani camp.	
145	Black-lored Babbler	<i>Turdoides sharpei</i>	1 was seen near Lake Naivasha on 25 th .	
146	Arrow-marked Babbler	<i>Turdoides jardineii</i>	c6 around the grounds at Elsamere on 24 th and 25 th . Also 2 on the Nature Walk at Ilkeliani on 30 th .	
147	Ruppell's Starling	Long-tailed	<i>Lamprotornis purpuropterus</i>	Common at both Lake Naivasha and on the Masai Mara.
148	Greater Blue-eared Starling		<i>Lamprotornis chalybaeus</i>	Frequently encountered in the Masai Mara.
149	Superb Starling		<i>Lamprotornis superbus</i>	Common throughout the trip.
150	Hildebrandt's Starling		<i>Lamprotornis hildebrandti</i>	Less common and seen only in the Masai Mara but small groups encountered daily.
151	Yellow-billed Oxpecker		<i>Buphagus africanus</i>	By far the most common Oxpecker in the Masai Mara.
152	Red-billed Oxpecker		<i>Buphagus erythrorhynchus</i>	Eventually 2 were confirmed on 27 th on the neck of a Giraffe. The lack of a pale rump in flight is a helpful feature.
153	White-browed Robin-Chat		<i>Cossypha heuglini</i>	Common in gardens and campsites both at Lake Naivasha and the Masai Mara.
154	Isabelline Wheatear		<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	1 was identified during a game drive on 29 th .
155	Northern Wheatear		<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	4 records from game drives on the Masai Mara

	Common Name	Scientific Name	
156	Anteater Chat	<i>Myrmecocichla aethiops</i>	1 flew up from the ground on to a fence as we travelled from Lake Naivasha towards the Masai Mara on 26 th .
157	Sooty Chat	<i>Myrmecocichla nigra</i>	1 was seen from a game drive on 27 th and a pair showed very well on 29 th .
158	Olive Thrush	<i>Turdus olivaceus</i>	1 at the hotel in Nairobi on the morning of 24 th and 1 at Elsamere in the evening.
159	Marico Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris mariquensis</i>	A pair were seen well at Ilkeliani campsite on 29 th .
160	Variable Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris venustus</i>	Common. Seen in Nairobi and numerous at Lake Naivasha and the Ilkeliani camp.
161	White-browed Weaver	<i>Plocepasser mahali</i>	3 were seen on the Nature Walk at Elsamere on 25 th and a small colony were nesting in a tree at the Narok comfort stops on 26 th and 31 st .
162	Grey-capped Social Weaver	<i>Pseudonigrita amaudi</i>	c10 came down to drink at the river at Ilkeliani on 27 th and 6 were seen at their nests from the Nature Walk on 30 th .
163	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	6 were seen at the Rift Valley viewpoint on 24 th
164	Rufous (Kenya) Sparrow	<i>Passer rufocinctus</i>	1 was identified on the Nature Walk at Elsamere on 25 th .
165	Northern Sparrow	<i>Passer griseus</i>	The last new species to be identified, 5 at the Narok lunch stop on 31 st .
166	Speckle-fronted Weaver	<i>Sporopipes frontalis</i>	1 showed very well over lunch at Ilkeliani camp on 27 th , then another on 29 th and another on 30 th .
167	Baglafecht Weaver	<i>Ploceus baglafecht</i>	Around 20 were seen at the Rift Valley viewpoint on 24 th .
168	Spectacled Weaver	<i>Ploceus ocularis</i>	Small numbers present at both Elsamere and Ilkeliani camp
169	Holub's Golden Weaver	<i>Ploceus xanthops</i>	Present at Elsamere, more numerous at Ilkeliani camp
170	Speke's Weaver	<i>Ploceus spekei</i>	Seen at Elsamere, Ilkeliani camp and nesting in a tree at the Narok lunch/comfort stop.
171	Village Weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>	A small colony was nesting in trees by the gate to the Masai Mara Game Reserve.
172	Chestnut Weaver	<i>Ploceus rubiginosus</i>	A colony was watched coming down to the ground to feed opposite the Narok comfort stop on 26 th .

	Common Name	Scientific Name	
173	Red-billed Quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>	1 confirmed in the Ilkeliani camp on 27 th and a flock of small birds on a game drive was probably this, the world's most numerous species.
174	Yellow Bishop	<i>Euplectes capensis</i>	A female was seen on the Nature Walk at Elsamere on 25 th , a male was in the Ilkeliani camp on 27 th , a pair there on 29 th and another 2 on 30 th .
175	Red-billed Firefinch	<i>Lagonosticta senegala ruberrima</i>	2 in the Ilkeliani camp on 27 th and 28 th and another on 29 th .
176	Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu	<i>Uraeginthus bengalus</i>	2 showed very well at Ilkeliani on 27 th , 3 on 29 th and another pair on 30 th .
177	Purple Grenadier	<i>Uraeginthus ianthinogaster</i>	6+ were seen on the Nature Walk at Elsamere on 24 th and 10+ around the grounds the next day. At Ilkeliani camp they were seen on most days with a maximum of 10 on 30 th .
178	African Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>	The first of these striking birds was seen on the Nature Walk at Elsamere on 25 th , another just before we left on 26 th and 1 at Ilkeliani on 27 th .
179	Yellow-throated Longclaw	<i>Macronyx croceus</i>	1 was seen on the morning game drive on 27 th , 3 by the Mara River on 29 th and 6 just outside the Ilkeliani camp on 30 th .
180	Buffy Pipit	<i>Anthus vaalensis goodsoni</i>	2 birds watched during breakfast on the Mara on 27 th looked very "Plain-backed". The taxonomy of these Pipits in Kenya is somewhat confused.
181	Grassland Pipit	<i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i>	Once I confirmed the identity of some birds on 28 th these proved to be common on the Masai Mara reserve.
182	African Citril	<i>Crithagra citrinelloides</i>	A single bird was seen on the Nature Walk at Elsamere on 25 th .
183	Yellow-fronted Canary	<i>Crithagra mozambica</i>	4 were seen on the Nature Walk at Ilkeliani camp on 30 th
184	White-bellied Canary	<i>Crithagra dorsostriata</i>	1 was seen well at the Ilkeliani campsite on 28 th .
185	Streaky Seedeater	<i>Crithagra striolata</i>	2 or 3 were seen on the Nature Walks at Elsamere on 24 th and 25 th .

Mammals

1. Warthog.

Seen daily in the Masai Mara and on the game drive from Elsamere on 25th.

2. Hippopotamus.

c30 on Lake Naivasha on 25th, 27 on the Talek River on 28th and 15 on the Mara River on 29th.

3. Masai Giraffe.

After our first semi-tame individual at Elsamere and about a dozen on our game drive from there they were seen daily on our game drives in the Masai Mara.

4. Kirk's Dik-dik.

2 ran through the grounds at Elsamere on 25th then one was seen in the Masai Mara on 27th, 2 on 28th and 1 on 30th.

5. Bushbuck.

One which had been rejected by its mother and raised by the local guides roamed around the Ilkeliani camp.

6. Eland.

A herd of c15 were seen from our game drive from Lake Naivasha on 25th, c20 in the Masai Mara on 26th and c15 on 27th and 28th.

7. Common Waterbuck.

C10 were near Lake Naivasha on 25th but just 1 in the Masai Mara on 26th.

8. Bohor Reedbuck.

A single animal was seen hiding in the scrub on 27th and another on 28th.

9. Topi.

Common in the Masai Mara where they (100+) were seen daily.

10. Coke's Hartebeest.

1 was seen on the drive from Lake Naivasha on 25th. Some of our group saw a family party in the Masai Mara on 29th.

11. Blue Wildebeest.

Surprisingly numerous in the Masai Mara as rain encouraged them to return, culminating in the spectacle of 4000+ crossing the Mara river on 29th and thousands more meandering in single file and dispersing through the plain.

12. Impala.

Abundant, hundreds seen daily in the Masai Mara.

13. Grant's Gazelle.

Much less common than the next species. Just 1 or 2 seen on most days.

14. Thomson's Gazelle.

The most abundant animal of the trip, hundreds seen daily on the Masai Mara.

15. African Buffalo.

4 of these imposing beasts were seen from a game drive on 27th, 5 on 28th, c20 on 29th and 2 on 30th.

16. Burchell's (Plains) Zebra.

After 5 appeared on the lawn outside our lodge at Elsamere on the first night, these proved to be a common sight throughout the trip.

17. Black Rhinoceros.

2 adults and a youngster were found after a hectic drive late in the afternoon of 29th. Fortunately they were still in the same area the next morning, in much better light for photography.

18. African Elephant.

We found our first group of c10 on 27th, another 10 including several young on 28th, c12 on 29th and 7 on 30th.

19. Cape Hare.

1 was flushed from cover during the nature walk on 30th.

20. Black-backed Jackal.

1 was seen from our game drive at Lake Naivasha on 25th then 2 adults with 4 cubs were seen from our first game drive in the Masai Mara reserve on 26th. 3 more were seen shortly afterwards pestering our first Leopards. There were a dozen more sightings over the next few days.

21. Bat-eared Fox.

A pair of these rarely seen animals were found on a game drive on 27th.

22. Slender Mongoose.

I saw 1 run across the path at Elsamere on 25th. Others in the group watched 1 by the river at the Ilkeliani camp on 27th.

23. Banded Mongoose.

Always seen in groups of 12 or more 20+ were seen on 28th and one or more groups were seen every day in the Masai Mara.

24. Spotted Hyaena.

Seen daily from our game drives in the Masai Mara reserve. There were several large extended family groups and a few lone individuals.

25. Lion.

Our first pride of 7 were seen from a game drive on 27th, a further 8 the following day, close encounters with a well-fed group by the Mara River on 29th and a mating pair, another Lioness and 2 more magnificent males on 30th.

26. Leopard.

Having just arrived in the Masai Mara we were incredibly lucky to see a female and her cub out in the open on our first game drive on the afternoon of 26th. We found a male sleeping up a tree with the remains of his kill on 29th and as we left the reserve on 31st we found him there again but on this occasion he came down from his tree and walked within a few feet of our vehicle – an amazing finale to the trip.

27. Cheetah.

This proved to be the most elusive of the large cats for us but 1 was watched stalking along a ridge on 28th then sitting down and posing beautifully for us.

28. Olive Baboon.

10+ were seen along the roadside on our game drive at Lake Naivasha. Troops were frequently encountered in the Masai Mara with 50+ on 27th. They were often seen foraging across the river from the Ilkeliani camp.

29. Vervet Monkey.

1 was seen on the journey from Lake Naivasha to Narok. 6+ raided the camp on 29th.

30. Eastern Black and White Colobus.

Around 10 including a female protecting a very young baby frequented the grounds of Elsamere on 24th and 25th, and came down for “tea” each day.

31. Yellow-winged Bat.

1 flew to the window at Elsamere on 24th and 1+ flew around our tent or around and inside the bar tent every night at the Ilkeliani camp. Also seen in the morning on two occasions, looking for somewhere to roost.

Reptiles

Nile Crocodile.

A very large individual was seen slipping in to the river Talek on 28th and another floating down the Mara River after the crossing on 29th.

Leopard Tortoise.

We managed to avoid running over 1 as we returned from the Mara River on 29th.

Blue-headed Tree Agama

1 spectacular individual was seen from the nature walk at the Ilkeliani camp on 30th.

A large lizard by our tent on 26th and two small grey lizards on a tree trunk on 29th went unidentified.



Grey-crowned Cranes by Ian Turner



Mother Elephant and baby by Ian Turner