

# Wildlife of Kenya's Maasai Mara

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd October – 1st November 2023

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African Elephant



Hippopotamus, Lake Naivasha



Topi, Maasai Mara



Giraffes

Tour report and photos kindly compiled by client Alan Knight

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Tour participants: Davies Muthamia and Stephen Kameme (Local Guides) with 12 Naturetrek clients

## Day 1

**Monday 23rd October**

We leave London Heathrow on BA 65 at 10.30 am with the weather being so clear that we can see the peaks of the Alps with snow on the higher tops, as we pass over at 37,000 feet. We then follow the Adriatic coast, over Greece then join Africa near Cairo and eventually lose the sand as the light deteriorates, arriving at Nairobi at 8.45 pm Kenya time. After surviving the chaotic customs system, we meet up with our fellow group members and are whisked over to the Boma Hotel where we get our heads down about midnight.

## Day 2

**Tuesday 24th October**

There is so much variety of food for breakfast that it proves difficult to decide what to leave out, but with travelling about to be involved we have to be selective. A walk into the garden gets the birding underway as I find Common Bulbuls flying around with some White-browed Sparrow Weavers on the lawns. We are summoned to meet up in the car park where we meet our guides Davies and Steve, and Davies gives us a briefing, that isn't at all brief, so I keep my eye out for birds (while listening of course). Yellow-billed Kites and Wire-tailed Swallows are circling above, with Speke's Weavers in the trees and Pied Crows across the road. We eventually load up our luggage into the Land Cruisers provided for our convenience during the holiday. Six people sit in three rows of two, in each vehicle, so that everyone has a window seat, they also have pop up tops which prove so good for viewing and photography later on. We are assured that all aspects of natural history will be catered for which is good to hear but it is what we were told and expected.

We pass through downtown Nairobi, en route to Lake Naivasha, which is very much like any capital city with modern buildings, nice parks and attractive purple-blue Jacaranda trees but as we get to the outskirts we see a big difference. The buildings are made of wood or concrete, there is lots of hustle and bustle from the people or chilling when the heat rises, but the thing that surprises me the most is the number of motorbikes, with some very ingenious uses, as we shall see later on.

The roads are good with tarmac top until we get to the Mara, later in the trip, although I do wonder if some official has an interest in speed bumps, especially around Lake Naivasha. The driving is interesting with some liking a challenge but our men are well aware and we are always comfortable. Our first stop is at an overlook of the rift valley where the flat land stretches miles. A cafe, toilet and souvenir shop are on site but so are Baglafaecht Weavers, with a family of Olive Baboons on the roadside as we get underway.

We notice some small plots of cultivated land growing various crops but mostly sweet-corn and potatoes, also grassland with sheep, cattle or goats, so it came as a surprise when we see a Giraffe behind the field along with an Augur Buzzard on a tree top. As we near Naivasha there are several nurseries with rows of poly-tunnels growing anything from mushrooms to Roses with lots coming to the UK.

Surviving the speed bumps we arrive at Elsamere on the shore of Lake Naivasha where we are given a very warm welcome by the staff bursting into a special "Welcome to Elsamere" song, setting the tone for the way we are served throughout our stay. We are then allocated our rooms which overlook the lawns, through the trees and down to the lake.

We enjoy our buffet lunch before another briefing to inform us of a pending boat trip later this afternoon, before which there is time to explore the grounds. Superb Starlings are ever-present and difficult to ignore with the camera due to their stunning colours. Our resident Fish Eagles are flying around then perching up making quite a din with their screeching calls, while on the ground we find African Pied Wagtail and White-crowned Robin Chat with Nubian Woodpeckers and Green Wood Hoopoe in the trees.

A Pair of White-browed Sparrow Weavers are on the ground near the car park as we leave for our boat trip. We negotiate the speed bumps as we drive to the boat landing where we pay our fee, as this is an extra, but most essential to the trip. We are taken to our long boats that have three rows of two seats with one at the front and the boatman at the rear. We follow the shoreline at a distance so as not to disturb the wildlife but give us good views, with the first few birds being Great White Egret, Blacksmith Lapwing and an African Jacana, when a group of Waterbuck come down to drink. The strange looking Hamerkop is walking with a more familiar Little Egret and other birds that make us feel at home include Little Stint, Greenshank, Black-tailed Godwit and Black-winged Stilt. Long-toed Lapwing are on the shore line with a Black Crake running about the grass behind while both Reed and White-breasted Cormorants are on some snags, drying in the sun. Pied Kingfishers are everywhere but the Giant Kingfisher is special and is accompanying a Yellow-collared Lovebird in a dead tree.

We see many dead trees in the water, apparently due to a rise in levels over previous years. The boat is swung around to give us good views of the pod of Hippos who are doing usual Hippo things like snorting, belching and yawning but all good entertainment. A mixed flock of birds near the shoreline include Spoonbill, White Pelican, Yellow-billed Stork and Little Egrets, while Red-knobbed Coots are everywhere along with Yellow-billed Duck. A Goliath Heron is resting in the shallows and a Spur-winged Lapwing on an island.

The boatman now decides to do his party trick, by throwing a small fish into the water and whistling to attract a perching Fish Eagle. It works like a dream the eagle flies in, swoops down, and picks up the fish; dinner is served, with great photo and viewing opportunities. On the way back Little Grebes are ducking and diving while a group of three Black-crowned Night Herons are skulking beneath a bush and African Sacred Ibis are on the shore as we return the boats.

With the light fading we return to Elsamere to enjoy a super dinner.

## Day 3

## Wednesday 25th October

Following a filling breakfast, we load up for a short drive to Hells Gate National Park where we are to walk along a gravel road through the Park with wildlife around us. Helmeted Guinea fowl are scratching the grass near the entrance with an Anteater Chat in a nearby bush. Hopping around the rocks is an Abyssinian Wheatear with a Mocking Cliff Chat proving difficult to see as it flits about the undergrowth. The road has grassland each side but gradually turns to woodland to our left and sheer cliffs to our right. A Yellow-billed Kite is circling around, soon to be joined by a Lanner Falcon in aerial displays. Also up above are Barn and Wire-tailed Swallows, soon to be joined by their Red-rumped cousins. All were soon eclipsed by the imposing figure of a Lappet-faced Vulture arriving on the scene.

Warthogs are rooting amongst the tufted grass while a herd of Zebra, with several foals, graze the more succulent shoots accompanied by several Grant's Gazelle. Steve does a strongman stunt when he raises a lump of rock above his head with one hand, which looks impressive until it is found to be pumice stone, however a real show of strength comes from a dung beetle rolling its lunch along. Up above we have an Augur Buzzard with a Northern

Fiscal spotted on a bush and a Richard's Pipit on the ground. Towards the end of the valley we find the Buffalo herd slowly chewing their way across the savannah, towards a waterhole which contained many of the aforementioned animals, clustered around with a Ring-necked Dove in a tree.

What looks like smoke is coming from the distant hillside but in actual fact it is steam omitted from the natural Rift Valley fault. On our way back to Elsamere we pass the power station where the steam is being harnessed to make electricity.

Back at Elsamere we are welcomed by the Black and White Colobus monkeys up in the trees and then a mother with babe in arms comes down to feed on fruit and veg, put down by the staff. Also making use of this feast are Common Bulbuls, Speckled Mousebird and White-browed Sparrow Weavers. There is a good comparison of male and female Baglaffeht Weavers with both showing well along with a Grey-headed Woodpecker, Dusky Flycatcher and a Ruppell's Starling.

After another super lunch we have a look in the adjoining museum which contains memorabilia of Joy and George Adamson also Elsa the Lion, all of Born Free fame, then we take a walk around the grounds with a local guide. The resident Warthog family are behind reception with the youngsters enjoying a mock battle while mother looks on. There are several colourful flowers showing well with a Hadada Ibis probing beneath. A White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher and Streaky Seedeater are in the bushes with a Purple Grenadier on the track and an Isabelline Wheatear in the field. An enormous Hamerkop's nest is found with the owner nearby, also a Red-eyed Dove in an adjacent tree, beneath which an African Thrush is hopping around. In another large tree there are two Spotted Eagle Owls sitting very still but surveying the local area.

We are told to flash a light when it's dark and a guard will escort us to/from the room at dinner time, because of dangerous animals. During another super dinner we are invited to take a torch-lit look outside, and there are two Hippos grazing the lawn, so point proven.

## Day 4

## Thursday 26th October

Following breakfast we leave the Hamerkop and cormorants on the lake edge to retrace the road back to Mai Mahau then turn right, on to Narok then the Masai Mara NP. It isn't unusual to meet traffic passing far too close, donkey carts slowly moving along, but the real interest is the ingenious use of motorbikes. One has a wooden 4x3 pallet on the back seat fully laden with plastic trays to about 70 cm up above the drivers head while another is carrying a bicycle strapped across the passenger seat with a wheel sticking out each side. Another has planks of wood of about three metre lengths strapped to the seat, but the one that really takes the biscuit is the metal mover, who has 4m (at least) long metal rods fixed to his rear carrier at one end with the other trailing along the road behind, however one rod had escaped and was lying in the road while driver and mate are wondering how to remedy. Three on a bike is quite common and crash helmets an optional extra.

Cattle are seen grazing or being driven along the roadside but they may need to cross for water or new grass, so we come to a sign that says "slow down animal crossing zone 200m ahead", and then further on "End of Animal crossing zone" but it seem to be working as crossings are made.

Then disaster, we have a strong smell of burning rubber so Steve pulls to the roadside to find the fan belt shredded. All is not lost as a kindly local on a motorbike (naturally) stops to inquire if he can help with our dilemma, so Steve relates the problem and the biker disappears. A little later another motorbike arrives with several fan belts hanging

on the handlebars and the driver is a mechanic, with the correct sized spanners in his pocket, who soon gets us going. Very impressive the system really works.

Local women are sitting with their vegetable stalls on the outskirts of any town, selling potatoes, sweet-corn, onions, tomatoes and others we are unable to recognize while moving but we could recognize the trainers that two guys had laid out on the kerb and the carcasses hanging in the butcher's windows.

We stop for lunch at a cafe/ souvenir shop where we consume our pack up and some take retail therapy, but I was more interested in the birds with a Variable Sunbird in the tree and behind the building where some trash is found, along with Kenya Sparrows and Vitelline Masked Weavers and also a D'Arnaud's Barbet. On the road again we see more health & safety with riders on top of lorries and scaffold poles made of tree branches on new buildings. A few more speed bumps and cattle jams and we arrive at the Masai Mara National Game Reserve.

The smartly dressed ladies are here with their trinkets for sale but once inside the reserve we are back into wildlife mode with our first bird a Speckled Pigeon. The road surface is now just natural graded stone so rather bumpy but with the seats being well sprung and padded it is quite comfortable although the advice to take sports bras was appreciated by some of the ladies by the week's end. The vista is composed of grassland, single parasol shaped trees and stands of bush particularly near to water, with woodland in the far background.

An Impala male stands majestically as though planted for photos as an Anteater Chat runs around, near to four uninterested Buffalo as they chew their cud. Zebra, Wildebeest and Topi silently graze while a Masai Giraffe reaches the best bits on tree top. Little Bee-eater and a Bare-faced Go-Away-Bird perch on branches in the sun but a pair of Magpie-Shrikes prefer the shade, while Crowned Lapwing stand on the ground. A strange fruit is seen hanging on a Kigelia tree, this is better known as the sausage tree due to the shape of these fruit which can be up to 60 cm long and weigh up to 7 Kg. They are also poisonous to humans although several animals can eat them.

In the distance is a gathering of a few vehicles, always a good sign, so we join them to find two Cheetahs with a recently killed Topi; they are probably two brothers as the feeding is very amiable with each taking its turn. They are obviously well into the carcass as their blood stained heads testify and seem a little wary of the increasing number of Ruppell's Vultures gathering for the leftovers. This is Africa - we have arrived.

Pulling ourselves away we next find a pair of Grey-crowned Cranes, a Yellow-throated Sandgrouse, a distant Southern Ground Hornbill and a Temminck's Courser. More Impala and a flock of Marabou Storks guide us to our camp.

Basecamp Mara is beside the Talek River which is a tributary of the Mara River, with both being low at this time of year. We had been travelling beside wide open grassland but as we approach the river we notice the green build up of permanent trees. As we are on the park side we have to cross the river to our accommodation just outside and to do this we have a swaying rope bridge with wooden planks on the bottom to negotiate. The tents are situated next to the river which meanders round in a semi-circle, so naturally gives each tent a river view although with the shortage of water it is really a small stream. The tent has a large bedroom area with en-suite facilities, and a canopy with seats overlooking the river, all very comfortable for our duration. Good internal pathways take us to reception and dining room.

The dining room has open sides and ends allowing birds and monkeys to watch from the perimeter. We have our first excellent dinner with the standard maintained throughout. As with the other camp a guard is used to escort us from tent to dinner and back in the dark, with Hippo, Hyena, and particularly Baboon being the main potential problems, although we don't have any.

## Day 5

## Friday 27th October

Up at 5.20 am (this is a holiday) to get our tea/coffee at 6 and in the vehicle by 6.15am for the first game drive. Over the rickety bridge we notice the hot air balloons taking off across the savannah. Giraffes are stretching their necks to get the flowers and tasty leaves on a Gardenia tree, with Red-billed and Yellow-billed Oxpeckers on their neck. A Dark-chanting Goshawk and a Black-shouldered Kite are perched on trees, whereas an Ostrich and its smaller simile a White-bellied Bustard prefer the ground. Other ground birds found are Red-necked Spurfowl and Wattled-Lapwing. A Spotted Hyena is seen before finding our first Lioness, which gives us a menacing stare, before thinking it's just more tourists, and does what Lions do - lay down and go to sleep but how she can sleep with all those flies on her face I don't know. While watching the Lion a Black-bellied Bustard is approaching from the opposite side of the vehicle along with a Crowned Lapwing. Herds of Thomson's gazelle and Topi fill the grassland with Brown-Chested Lapwing running around.

Then we find our first Elephant herd consisting of four females with three young, two of which are still suckling. Soon after another, larger, herd comes over the brow, about 12 strong and looking much more aggressive with ears flapping, heads and trunks swaying but this is probably normal as they are eating as they come forward. Again it is a mixed bunch with a big matriarch supporting large tusks down to small youngsters, but provides a very memorable sight.

The track goes down and crosses a stream containing a lone Hippo but it must be a little concerned as there is a skeleton of its mate on the bank. A Malachite Kingfisher is on the reeds and a pair of Reedbuck is feeding on the other side with a Black-headed Heron on the fringe.

A breakfast tree is found and while consuming our pack up a group of Buffalo, with three adults, two half grown and two calves trundle past in the distance. Also two Topi stand alone with a small calf, possibly only hours old looking very exposed away from the herd.

Soon after we locate the herd with lots of Topi, Tommy's, Warthogs and our first Eland present. Half a dozen Wildebeest sit peacefully further along followed by two young Giraffes that have found a shady spot under a bush with an Oxpecker close by biding his time. An Ostrich is walking across the plain so we stop to observe and it walks between the two vehicles without hesitation. We then find ourselves driving parallel to a Secretary Bird which has such a deliberate gait, as though walking on eggshells, wearing plus fours. It looks rather prehistoric in shape but quite attractive with distinct colouring and its long crest on its nape blowing in the wind. A Tawny Eagle sits with two White-headed Vultures either waiting for the next meal or resting from the last and also a Red-capped Lark is running around here.

Approaching our camp for lunch time siesta we notice half a dozen local men spread in a line, picking litter off the grassland. It is understandable why Kenya has introduced a ban on plastic bags.

Lunch is served by waiters and waitresses in local dress with very bright reds, yellow, pink and blue, all exceedingly smart. A Vervet Monkey is keeping its eye on us from the dining room's perimeter fence.

Over by the river we find a Nubian Woodpecker knocking on the tree with a Ruppell's Starling showing off its iridescent plumage, by moving in the light and changing from blue to turquoise to purple, depending on how the rays are catching its feathers. Perching on the branches over the river we have a Bare-faced Go-away-bird, along with a Woodland Kingfisher and the ever-present Speckled Mouse-bird. Egyptian Geese are in the water with a Common Sandpiper, when a local herder brings his cattle along the far side bank, however this doesn't discourage the resident White-fronted Bee-eater from flying around its favourite perches.

The afternoon game drive starts with a very muddy Warthog, using its kneeling down technique for grazing. More very smart Impala quietly graze as a Silver-backed Jackal takes a rest in the hot sun, while a Lappet-faced Vulture circles over surveying the area for any carrion. We then find two Cheetahs lying in the shade, beneath a lone stunted tree, as one begins to stir and sits up to have a look at us (probably thinking "more tourists"). As he slowly prepares to walk away his brother gets up to promptly scent mark the tree and he gives it enough to ensure others take note. They both walk in line with heads up and eyes looking distantly forward as if something is on the menu although we can see no prey. We leave them to it, but further along we find what would interest them when we encounter the herd of Thomson's gazelles, and even more so females with young. Another Black-winged Kite is on a high twig overlooking a Black-lored Babbler scratching around on the ground, when we find two Lions.

A male and female, both lying on their backs with feet in the air, fast asleep, dead to the world. The female eventually stirs and slowly gets to her feet and wanders off to about 100m away. The still sleeping male is totally out and unaware of her missing, so when he does eventually awaken he groggily looks around and slowly realises that she has gone. He staggers to his feet and sniffs the grass, to quickly pick up her scent and plod along following her line of travel. When he finds her it is straight into some rough mating which eventually becomes a little more passionate, but when finished he stands up with a very vacant look towards us, as though saying "do you think you could do any better?". They both then roll over onto their backs with feet in the air, dead to the world. Quite an encounter!

With the light fading we drive back to camp for another splendid dinner.

## Day 6

## Saturday 28th October

Balloons are going up as we see a Hippo feeding on the opposite side of the river to our camp, as an Isabelline Wheatear and a Crowned Lapwing along with the resident Dark-chanting Goshawk greet us on the start of the morning game drive. We soon encounter a Ring-necked Dove and a Sooty Boubou perching in bushes but the brightly coloured Yellow-throated Longclaw takes the attention as it scratches in the grass. Then four Lionesses are looking to be on a mission as they walk across the savannah but then do what Lions tend to do by lying down beneath a bush in the shade.

More birds are seen with both Winding and Rattling Cisticola deep in the bush, a Grey Kestrel and a pair of Bateleur Eagles are in tree tops. Plain-backed Pipits are scurrying around and a Grey-backed Fiscal is on a bush as we look for a breakfast tree.

Although we call them breakfast trees, they are *Balanites Aegyptiaca* or Egyptian Balsam which produce a date that is edible but very bitter although some animals do eat it. The tree has a vertical trunk with circular leaf line with a domed top, to resemble parasols scattered across the grassland. It is ideal for our picnic as it will give shade and an all round vista in case of animals. We lay out a groundsheet to sit and consume our substantial pack up. We do notice that some groups have tables and chairs with waiter service but they are not on our budget. Looking to the distant horizon we see a herd of Topi quietly grazing.

Our first bird after the stop is a stunning Lilac-breasted Roller with colours ranging from white to brown but with lilac, azure blue and blue/purple in between. A Giraffe is quite close, when we encounter another water hole with Wattled Lapwing, Egyptian Goose and our own Grey Heron. A resting Cheetah is seen and never far away some Thomson's Gazelles. Another Secretary Bird, then back for lunch.

The resident Banded Mongoose tribe are chilling on the grass just beyond the dining room. Apparently these are encouraged around the camp to take care of any snakes that might try to make an appearance. Down on the river sandbank we see a non-breeding Yellow Bishop alongside a Grey-headed Sparrow with a Usambiro Barbet close by. A good comparison can be made between the Superb and the Hildebrandt's Starling when one of the latter is seen in a tree beside our tent, finding it to be darker overall with red eye and lacking the white band from belly to breast. A Grey-capped Warbler, Spotted Flycatcher and a Laughing Dove are on the far bank with a Sacred Ibis paddling on the water's edge.

The afternoon game drive starts with a Warthog family of two adults and four piglets trotting across the savannah with a group of male Impala showing very well to give us a good comparison with the Grant's Gazelles just up the track. Zebra are walking around, and then we find two adolescent male Lions shading beneath adjacent bushes, both looking in good order, so the one seen mating yesterday may have to beware.

A bull Elephant is destroying a green bush by wrapping his trunk, pulling lumps off and eating, but as always one survives at the others expense. A White-bellied Bustard points the way to some more Zebra who seem very restless, they are biting and kicking each other, generally quite unruly. Steve tells us that they do this when rain is in the air with approaching storms. It must have some relevance as we do have to close the pop up roof before going back to camp.

We notice some vehicles are hanging around a bushy area so go to look and there we find a large pride of Lions with several cubs. At first a couple of Lionesses come out into the open followed by others and the cubs. We count around twelve cubs although it is difficult as they keep going in and out the bush, but those in view are playing merrily with jumping, rolling, boxing and wrestling, all learning for times to come. This goes on for some time and makes very interesting viewing but we have to pull away as Davies has a tip off from another driver. We drive on to a distant tree where we find a Leopard resting beneath. Unfortunately this is the only one we see on the trip but it is a really good looking specimen.

The moon is out as we hurry back to camp for diner.

## Day 7

## Sunday 29th October

Today is to be our full day game drive down to the distant Mara River, so we take breakfast before departure.

The local Baboon tribe are walking along the grass just over the river bank, so it's important that we have securely locked the tents up before leaving. The Giraffes are stretching their necks up into the juicy bits of the tree but the young one have to be content with the lower offerings. How do they rip those leaves without thorns going into the tongue? We see a distant Giraffe reaching straight up to the tree it almost looks like a pole on legs. A Lion with a flowing mane is sitting with his mate, who is chewing the last remains of meat off a bone; no doubt this is why we are seeing so many clean bones and part carcasses spread across the park. We soon see some of the providers of these bones with a herd of Tommy's and Topi, several with young. A Montagu's Harrier is quartering the savannah while in the tree there is a Black-chested Snake-Eagle and a Black-winged Lapwing on the ground.

There is a water hole down behind the Topi herd with a lone Hippo wallowing but seeming very venerable. A Black-headed Heron and a Woolly-necked Stork are on the bank while a Water Thick-knee is skulking in the reeds. A white paper flower surviving at the water's edge is one of the few creating any colour. A Buffalo takes a drink with the customary oxpeckers on his back. Another lone Lioness walks up to a mound to stand and consider her options but obviously not too good as she slowly walks away from us. As we approach the Mara River we see



herds of Zebra, Buffalo and Elephant, with the latter having their usual age range very evident from small possibly still suckling, to adolescents and adults, some with impressive tusks.

At the river we immediately see Hippos lying quietly in the water or walking along the edge with Crocodiles lurking around weighing up their options. I'm not sure that they would tackle a fully grown fit Hippo but no doubt a calf is a different matter. Birds here include Yellow-billed Stork, Intermediate Egret, Spur-winged Lapwing and Greenshank.

Now we need a lunch (not breakfast) tree however the criteria is the same - shade, lone with good vision. As we spread the ground sheet we are accompanied by some Marabou Storks who patrol the outskirts of our patch, looking like old men dressed in tails with hands behind their backs. Further back Hooded Vultures fly in but both species go away hungry. Today's distant horizon feature is a group of about a dozen Giraffe, which looks like many cranes on a building site but as we get closer one of them demonstrates the splayed legs and neck down feeding method.

We cross the river to say we have been to Tanzania as we stand next to a border post with KE on one side with TZ on the other. Back over to Kenya we use the car park next to the bridge where there are some loos and a welcome to Kenya building where all seems fairly informal. Out front of the building is an impressive display of various animal skulls including Elephant, Buffalo, antelope, crocodile and Hippo with some really large canines and incisors.

We are escorted by two armed rangers to take a walk alongside the river. As we approach the bridge we find a Purple Grenadier in the bush and a Pied Kingfisher overlooking the water, and down beside the bridge a pair of Mwanza Flat-headed Rock Lizards, with the male being a stunning red and blue colour. The water is low at this time but it is evident by the debris how much higher it can be and when we are shown a favourite place where the migrating herds cross it looks fairly simple but with higher water and many crocodiles it will be tricky; also Wildebeest never look the brightest so may well try on the steeper banks. There is still enough water for Hippos to only be showing head and shoulders with one having a Common Sandpiper on its neck. Crocodiles can be seen lurking at the edges biding their time.

Back in the car park it is interesting to see a Village Weaver constructing a very intricate new nest, with a Little Bee-eater looking on. We now head for home to find a Walberg's Eagle overlooking the grassland from its prominent perch with a Southern Ground Hornbill walking around the tufted grass. Two more lazy Lions are lying beside the track with the male on his back, feet up and the female yawning, looking at him, fed up and probably thinking "look at the state of that". In the background a White-browed Coucal is skulking in the grass by the waterhole. Further along a Common Kestrel sits on the roadside with its dinner in its talons. The Impala herd sees us into the camp where we have some time to look for wildlife before dark and dinner.

Down on the sandbank is a Spectacled Weaver and a Pied Wagtail while a Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater has a perfect perch to oversee the river. A Bushbuck appears on the bank adjacent to our tent to provide a good sighting to end the day.

## Day 8

## Monday 30th October

Our vehicles are parked over the bridge as usual with our two on one side of the area and two of the camps own on the other. When we load up we notice that the troop of Baboons are close by and when we are seated, we see one run across and jump into the nearest vehicle that has open windows. It looks around, sniffing as it moves to

the back seats where it finds something, then a length of silver foil is ejected and the Baboon is scoffing its contents down. No doubt someone is going without breakfast this morning and I do hope there isn't a memento left on the seat.

On the road we see a Silver-backed Jackal showing interest in some Impala but as they disappear into the bush, he slinks off. As we are watching a Northern Fiscal a cry goes out for Bat-eared Fox with this being a first for the trip. It is running between small bushes to make viewing spasmodic and difficult to photograph, however everyone got a view of an interesting animal that is not particularly easy to see in daylight and a new one for the list.

A Silver backed Jackal is found eating something while two others are keeping a Warthog at bay by running to and fro between the two. Eventually the Warthog gives up and runs off across the plain but I fear minus one piglet. A Fork-tailed Drongo is perching on a twig as a line of Zebra steadily march in front of a "breakfast tree" giving a great photo opportunity. Three Buffalo are by the track to give good comparisons of differing horn shape, one with the ubiquitous oxpecker on its back.

Further on we see the majestic shape of a female Cheetah, sitting statuesque on a small mound at the edge of the bush. Then, looking over her shoulder we see an adventurous cub attempting to climb a small tree when two other siblings appear from behind a bush, soon to be joined by a fourth. What a splendid sight when all get together, with mother sitting upright and four cubs around her. I just wonder if she will be able to keep the cubs fed and out of harm's way but she has got this far so obviously a great mother.

On to the next waterhole to find another Black-headed Heron, along with Green Sandpiper, Temminck's Courser and a Three-banded Plover, all close to a Morning Glory flower at the water's edge. Termite mounds are all around and have been all week, but we are looking at one here that looks as though it's been made with a kiddies bucket and spade, with six turrets emerging from the ground. Hartebeest had been a difficult antelope to find, but we now have some in sight along with another herd of Eland which really is a big antelope, tall and chunky. A Crowned Lapwing is flitting around and bombing a pair of Mongoose, trying to keep them away from her nest or young but to no avail by the looks of one of the Mongooses' mouths.

We return for lunch and as we wobble over the bridge, see the resident Mongooses on the water's edge beneath.

Following the final lunch at the camp some of our group visit the local Masai village where everyone is made welcome by singing, chanting, dancing and their traditional high jumping. A guided tour into one of the home-made houses gives an insight into the cultural living of these people and the tables of trinkets/souvenirs allowed some retail therapy.

For the wildlife watchers around the camp there is Common Bulbul, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, and Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, looking over the river while a loud noise is coming from the big old tree that anchors the bridge. When we investigate it is being made by a White-headed Barbet, a relatively small bird compared with a female Black-and-White Casqued Hornbill sitting quietly in an adjacent tree. As we leave our tent to go on the afternoon game drive, we notice a family of Olive Baboons down by the sandbank, so we must ensure that the tent is properly secured or we may have the same problem as the vehicle this morning.

The first sighting this afternoon is some Hyena excrement (we do look at everything) which is pure white and Steve explains that this is because of the bones eaten. We pass a water hole, with a Black-crowned Night heron hunched up beneath a waterside bush, and a Black-bellied Bustard in the longer grass, before noticing some vehicles gathered together in the distance. We arrive to find a pride of Lions feeding on a recent Buffalo kill. The Buffalo's under belly had been ripped open and several Lions had their heads inside the carcass to find the juicy bits. It is mainly the Lionesses that are feeding now with the cubs gradually pressing for their turn to taste the

spoils. One Lioness takes her head out which is totally blood stained but the male is on hand to tenderly lick her clean. One of the youngsters maybe over indulged as he goes to one side to have a smelly poo, and when finished the waiting Hooded Vultures are straight in to eat it, which is quite disgusting but obviously “the law of the jungle”. Great sightings with lots of action.

As we leave the Lions to their meal we find some colour in the grasses with a Pinball Lily showing brightly. Four half-grown Jackals are out sunbathing near their den with Ostrich and Topi in the background. Next we have a surprise encounter with a Serval cat sitting in some undergrowth seemingly unperturbed by our presence. A large Tawny Eagle is on top of a tree and a lone Wildebeest with a Hyena fairly close, see us home to end another day.

## Day 9

**Tuesday 31st October**

We take breakfast at the camp dining room, as this is our last morning with the Hadada Ibis in the water, Baglafetcht Weavers on the far chair backs and a Vervet Monkey on the roof. We wobble across the bridge for the last time, say goodbye to our superb hosts, who looked after us so well, to go on our last game drive towards the Park gate. We have wildlife in the vehicle as an attractive moth is found on the seat (better than a Baboon).

We are passing many of the previously seen animals and birds, as though they are saying goodbye. A Hyena slouches off across the plain, while Giraffes are still stretching their necks up into the tree and our favourite Impala herd munch their grassy breakfast. An Ostrich is alone while Zebra and Wildebeest form small herds as the Warthogs root and scurry around.

When we pass through the gate we find the tarmac road and are on our way. The sights and sounds are much the same as our arrival journey with lots of hustle and bustle in some villages and towns where it is obviously market day. The cattle and sheep herders are evident along the roadside and an odd cattle jam is occasionally experienced. We stop again at the same cafe/souvenir shop as on our outward journey, where lunch and retail therapy take place with Speke's Weavers still feeding around the back.

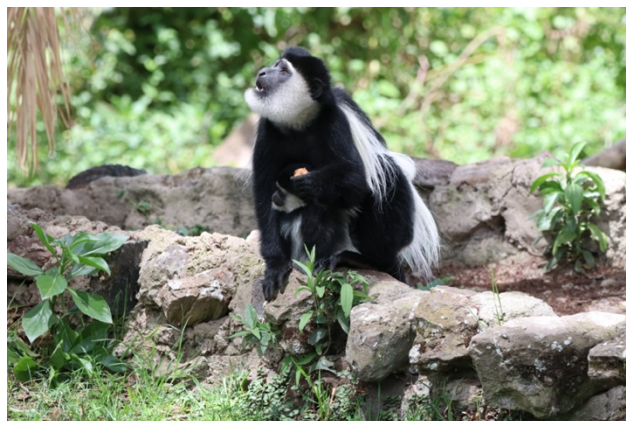
Our drivers manage to negotiate a jack knifed lorry and safely return us to a Nairobi airport hotel, so we can freshen up and change for our flight home.

## Day 10

**Wednesday 1st November**

Arrive London early morning to then drive home.

Great holiday, very good company and Guides.



Clockwise from top left: Warthog, Black & White Colobus, Impala, Eland

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