

# The Reptiles & Amphibians of Kenya

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd March – 6th April 2024

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Mount Kenya Side-striped Chameleon (*Trioceros schubotzi*)



Red-banded Rubber Frog (*Phrynomantis bifasciatus*)



Rhinoceros Viper (*Bitis nasicornis*)



Usambara Vine Snake (*Thelotornis usambaricus*)

Tour report compiled by Mirthe Aarts. Photos courtesy of Neil St John.

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Naturetrek Mingledown Barn Wolf's Lane Chawton Alton Hampshire GU34 3HJ UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: [info@naturetrek.co.uk](mailto:info@naturetrek.co.uk)

W: [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

Tour participants: Mirthe Aarts (Leader), Ferry Katana (Herpetologist), Dan Lay (Naturetrek Operations Manager) with six Naturetrek clients.

## Day 1

**Saturday 23rd March**

In flight to Nairobi from various locations.

## Day 2

**Sunday 24th March**

We set out from Nairobi for the western rainforests, travelling through the scenic Great Rift Valley and past the lakes of Naivasha, Elementaita and Nakuru. Nestled within Kakamega Forest, Rondo Retreat welcomed us with its magical ambience and set the tone for the trip.

We were on the trails that afternoon, following a small stream where we found plenty of amphibians from typical African genera, such as Nutt's River Frog (*Amietia nutti*) and East African Puddle Frog (*Phrynobatrachus acridoides*). After dark, the pond behind Rondo Retreat was truly enchanting, with a full frog chorus. Numerous Reed Frogs were present, among them Cinnamon-bellied Reed Frog (*Hyperolius cinnamomeiventris*), Side-blotched Reed Frog (*Hyperolius lateralis*) and also Mackay's Forest Tree Frog (*Leptopelis mackayi*). Leaving the pond, we were pleased to spot our first Boulenger's Pygmy Chameleon (*Rhampholeon boulengeri*).

## Day 3

**Monday 25th March**

We walked deeper into the forest, following the stream as it wound through increasingly thick bush. Early in the morning, a small but striking Green Bush Viper (*Atheris squamigera*) crossed our path. The dense canopy held more wildlife; we observed Syke's Monkey and Forest Giant Squirrel.

Thick undergrowth provided perfect camouflage for the elusive and incredible Hairy Bush Viper (*Atheris hispida*), which our guide Dickson expertly spotted hidden among the bushes. In the afternoon we encountered one of the most sought-after species of the trip – a beautifully patterned Rhinoceros Viper (*Bitis nasicornis*).

The night walk at the pond was magical again with a multitude of species such as Common Reed Frog (*Hyperolius viridiflavus*), Marsabit Clawed Frog (*Xenopus borealis*) and included a seldom-seen Yellow-flanked Snake (*Crotaphopeltis degeni*).

## Day 4

**Tuesday 26th March**

We embarked on a full-day trek to the Yala River and found another Rhinoceros Viper (*Bitis nasicornis*), larger than the first and superbly camouflaged among rain-soaked foliage. Black-and-white Colobus watched us from the other side of the track. As the clouds cleared, the forest lit up and a flurry of butterflies danced around us. Our local guide shared insights into Kakamega's remarkable butterfly diversity, which included stunners such as African Map Butterfly (*Cyrestis camillus*).

In the afternoon we enjoyed the birdlife at Rondo Retreat, where a Crowned Eagle was nesting; a Great Blue Turaco flew by; and, after hearing their calls, we had close views of Black-and-white-casqued Hornbills.

That evening, a two hour walk through a different section of the forest produced more Boulenger's Pygmy Chameleons (*Rhampholeon boulengeri*). Keen to expand our chameleon list, we persisted and were rewarded with Montane Side-striped Chameleons (*Trioceros ellioti*).

## Day 5

### Wednesday 27th March

After a brief morning stroll in Kakamega Forest we returned to the Great Rift Valley, overnighing at a charming working farm. The afternoon was quiet due to rain, but the evening turned dry and allowed a productive search for High Casqued Chameleons (*Trioceros boehnelii*). Our efforts paid off: we counted at least 83 individuals! We also found a Striped Skink (*Trachylepis striata*) and a large Garman's Toad (*Sclerophrys garmani*).

## Day 6

### Thursday 28th March

We set off early for the long journey to the slopes of Mount Kenya. In Nanyuki we paused for lunch and stocked up on supplies before continuing our ascent, reaching about 3,000 metres above sea level. In the evening we searched around our cabins for chameleons without success, but stumbled upon a Kivu Reed Frog (*Hyperolius kivuensis*), which was unexpected. As night fell, hyraxes vocalised from the mountainside, while Waterbucks lounged peacefully in the grass around the lodge.

## Day 7

### Friday 29th March

Mount Kenya greeted us in its majestic morning glory. We packed lunch for a long day in the field and ventured even higher. Our efforts were rewarded with Mount Kenya Side-striped Chameleon (*Trioceros schubotzi*) — males displaying vivid colours, with females more subtly brown but still stunning - surely one of the most one of the most stunning of the world's chameleons.

The hike felt like a treasure hunt for endemics. A true highlight was the Kenya Montane Viper (*Montatheris hindii*). We also encountered Alpine Meadow Lizard (*Adolfus alleni*) and the East-African endemic Alpine Meadow Skink (*Trachylepis irregularis*), adding to the abundance of unique alpine species.

## Day 8

### Saturday 30th March

Encouraged by yesterday's success, we tried again for another Kenya Montane Viper, but overcast weather limited our luck. Undeterred, we switched focus to frogs, with Naturetrek's Dan enthusiastically leading the way. We found the fantastic Kinangop Dainty Frog (*Cacosternum kinangopensis*) and Lönnberg's Toad (*Mertensophryne lonnbergi*).

In the afternoon we descended and stayed at a motel beside a stream, where we found a Jackson's Chameleon (*Trioceros jacksonii*) and the endemic Kenya Hornless Chameleon (*Kinyongia excubitor*), rounding off the day with more excellent discoveries.

## Day 9

### Sunday 31st March

Leaving the Mount Kenya region, we headed towards drier habitats, though unexpected rain accompanied us. On the road we encountered a deceased Red Spitting Cobra (*Naja pallida*), an unfortunate traffic casualty. Despite the

long drive, highlights included a Flap-necked Chameleon (*Chamaeleo dilepis*) and many Red-headed Rock Agamas (*Agama lionotus*) along the roadside.

At camp in Tsavo, an evening walk to a nearby pond revealed diverse frogs and toads. Highlights were Senegal Running Frog (*Kassina senegalensis*), Red-banded Rubber Frog (*Ptynomantis bifasciatus*) and Guinea Snout-burrower (*Hemisus guinensis*).

## Day 10

Monday 1st April

A short walk around camp produced a small Speckled Green Snake (*Philothamnus punctatus*), admired from a distance as it climbed among branches. A game drive delivered classic wildlife: Elephants, Zebras and Giraffes — plus Ostriches, Northern Red-billed Hornbills and Lilac-breasted Rollers. We also encountered a huge Rock Monitor (*Varanus albigularis*).

Despite hopes and keen searching, we did not see any other snakes today.

## Day 11

Tuesday 2nd April

We started with fresh excitement. The Tsavo ecosystem had enjoyed substantial rain, leaving lush habitat that makes spotting snakes harder. Just as we finished lunch, Dickson spotted a Boomslang (*Dispholidus typus*) high in the trees — a wonderful sighting. We admired its large eyes, stunning colouration and agile body before heading back to camp. On the drive, we saw Lesser Kudu and more Elephants, plus a Gerenuk with its elongated neck, and a Martial Eagle.

In the evening, wildlife viewing began with a Spotted Hyena, followed by a small African Shovel-snout (*Prosymna stublmanni*) and numerous amphibians, including Nile Ridged Frogs (*Ptychadena nilotica*) Wamba Sand Frog (*Tomopterna wambensis*), Keller's Bubble-nest Frog (*Chiromantis kelleri*) and multiple Edible Bullfrog (*Ptyxicephalus edulis*). Geckos were numerous including Nyika Gecko (*Hemidactylus squamulatus*)

## Day 12

Wednesday 3rd April

A walk in Tsavo produced two beautiful Link-marked Sand Snakes (*Psammophis biseriatus*), their slender, patterned bodies standing out against the unusually green backdrop. We also found a baby Leopard Tortoise (*Stigmochelys pardalis*) and Tsavo Dwarf Gecko (*Lygodactylus tsavoensis*). Later we drove to a small town on the coast and enjoyed a stunning afternoon at the ocean.

Our evening concluded with a night walk on the edge of Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, where we saw another Shovel-snouted Snake (*Prosymna stublmanni*) and a White-lipped Snake (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*).

## Day 13

Thursday 4th April

We spent the full day in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. A guided walk yielded a rare glimpse of the endemic Golden-rumped Elephant-shrew plus Speckle-lipped Mabuya (*Trachylepis maculilabris*). We drove deeper into the forest to a picturesque pond filled with vibrant purple lilies and saw a Nile Monitor Lizard (*Varanus niloticus*) which

quickly swam away. As rain began, we returned for lunch, but Dickson and Dan stayed out, seeing a Green Keel-bellied Lizard (*Gastropholis prasina*), a stunningly patterned Argus Reed Frog (*Hyperolius argus*), Tinker Reed Frog (*Hyperolius tuberilinguis*) and secured an Usambara Vine Snake (*Thelotornis usambaricus*). We also found both *Mochlus sundevallii* and *Mochlus afer*, alongside a Witu Forest Tree Frog (*Leptopelis concolor*).

In the evening, we encountered four Speckled Green Snakes (*Philothamnus punctatus*), one Northern Stripe-bellied Sand Snake (*Psammophis sudanensis*), and several Flap-necked Chameleons (*Chamaeleo dilepis*) high in the trees.

## Day 14

Friday 5th April

We started by spotting a Rough-scaled Plated Lizard (*Broadleysaurus major*) basking in the early sun. We took a boat to one of the offshore islands to search for Coral Rag Skink (*Cryptoblepharus africanus*) in pristine habitat that suits these small reptiles. After exploring a nearby cave, where more Plated Lizards were present along with some lovely Teita Toad (*Mertensophryne taitana*), we ended the day with an evening drive through Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, seeing a Loveridge's Snouted Toad (*Mertensophryne micranotis*), numerous Foam-nest Tree Frogs (*Chiromantis xerampelina*) and their distinctive foam nests.

We concluded this superb trip with a delightful sighting of the Kenya Pygmy Chameleon (*Rieppeleon kersteni*) — the perfect end to an amazing safari.

## Day 15

Saturday 6th April

We used the morning to reflect on an incredible journey before flying back to Nairobi to connect with our flights home. A great trip, filled with unique wildlife and breathtaking landscapes across many different habitats.

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