

The Reptiles & Amphibians of Kenya

Naturetrek Tour Report

18th January – 2nd February 2025



Blue-morph Green Speckled Bush Snake
(*Philothamnus punctatus*)



Red-necked Spitting Cobra
(*Naja pallida*)



Golden-rumped Elephant Shrew



Crowned Eagle

Tour report by Mirthe Aarts
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Day 1

Saturday 18th January

The group arrived late in Nairobi and retired straight to bed to ensure everyone was well rested ahead of the journey to western Kenya.

Day 2

Sunday 19th January

After meeting as a group in the morning, we travelled to Kakamega Forest in western Kenya. En route, we enjoyed mammal sightings including Zebra, Masai Giraffe and Olive Baboon, with birds such as Lilac-breasted Roller and Augur Buzzard. After settling into our accommodation, we made our first evening foray into the forest. The pond behind the lodge was characteristically lively, the chorus of frogs accompanying views of Clawed Frog (*Xenopus borealis*), Common Reed Frog (*Hyperolius viridiflavus*) and Kivu Reed Frog (*Hyperolius kivuensis*).

Day 3

Monday 20th January

Following breakfast (and an excellent view of a Crowned Eagle in the garden) we undertook a long forest walk. Reptile and amphibian activity was relatively low by day, but the birdlife was superb, with Ross's Turaco, Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill and Cardinal Woodpecker among the highlights. Red-tailed Monkey showed well in the canopy. On the way back, our guide Dickson located a beautifully-coloured Large-eyed Green Tree Snake (*Rhamnophis aethiopissa*).

That evening, we encountered further Large-eyed Green Tree Snakes resting on branches (a wonderful sight) and concluded the night with one of our target species, Boulenger's Pygmy Chameleon (*Rhampholeon boulengeri*).

Day 4

Tuesday 21st January

We continued exploring Kakamega Forest, with the group splitting to allow for birdwatching and herping. Birders enjoyed more views of Ross's Turaco, Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill and Crowned Eagle, while the herpers recorded additional Large-eyed Green Tree Snakes. Blue Monkey and Red-tailed Monkey were frequently observed before lunch. Around the lodge, Tropical House Geckos (*Hemidactylus mabouia*) and Striped Skinks (*Trachylepis striata*) were active.

An afternoon shower over a nearby open field stimulated amphibian activity, and we noted Striped (*Ptychadena porosissima*) and Nile Rocket Frogs (*Ptychadena nilotica*). A presumed snake on the track revealed itself as a fascinating East African Highland Grass Lizard (*Chamaedura tenuior*). The evening's highlight was a rare Yellow Forest Snake (*Homonotus modestus*).

Day 5

Wednesday 22nd January

We departed Kakamega and returned east to Nakuru, focusing our night search on frogs and chameleons. High-casqued Chameleon was abundant: after counting around thirty-five individuals we stopped tallying! Further amphibians included Clawed Frog (*Xenopus borealis*) and Nile Rocket Frog (*Ptychadena nilotica*), with a new species for the trip: Garman's Toad (*Sclerophrys garmani*). A Spotted Eagle-Owl provided a memorable end to the evening.

Day 6

Thursday 23rd January

We made the long drive to Mount Kenya, enjoying sightings of Reticulated Giraffe, Zebra, Vervet Monkey and Beisa Oryx, with a particularly special encounter with a White Rhino. We arrived in the afternoon to superb views of the mountain. After dinner we took a short stroll (restricted by Lion activity in the area) and recorded High-casqued Chameleon (*Trioceros boehmei*) and several De Witte's River Frogs (*Amietia wittei*).

Day 7

Friday 24th January

After a cold night, we drove up to around 3300m to search for East African (and Kenyan) endemics. Dickson quickly located Alpine Meadow (*Trachylepis irregularis*) and Variable Skinks (*Trachylepis varia*). As we approached a waterfall, we observed many female Mount Kenya Side-striped Chameleons (*Trioceros schubotzi*), before finding the striking blue-and-yellow males. Surprisingly, High-casqued Chameleons were present at this altitude too.

On the return, we recorded Mount Kenya Alpine Meadow Lizard (*Adolfus alleni*), and then paused to enjoy magnificent views of Kenya's highest peaks. In a magical moment, an Elephant emerged from the forest to cross the plains and, as temperatures dropped, we ended the day early.

Day 8

Saturday 25th January

We made a final attempt to find Kenya Montane Viper (*Montatheris hindii*), spending about four hours searching in fine weather; despite our efforts, we did not succeed. We then transferred to a small town at the base of the mountain to shorten the following day's drive to Tsavo. The area was quiet, allowing time to relax together, though we still noted well-fed Striped Skinks (*Trachylepis striata*) and Lesser Bushbaby on the hotel grounds.

Day 9

Sunday 26th January

We set off early for Tsavo, exchanging the cool highlands for heat and red soils. Large Elephant herds delayed our journey in the best possible way. At the conservancy entrance, rangers excitedly reported snakes entering a drainage pipe. Dickson investigated and carefully removed three Speckled Sand Snakes (*Psammophis punctulatus*), which were safely released into nearby bushes. White-headed Dwarf Geckos (*Lygodactylus mombasicus*) were common on surrounding trees.

Around camp, we enjoyed iconic Red-headed Rock Agama (*Agama lionotus*), Five-lined Skink (*Trachylepis quinquetaeniata*) and plentiful birdlife. At the pond behind camp, we saw a Speckled Green Snake (*Philothamnus punctatus*) resting high in a tree, and a Battersby's Green Snake (*Philothamnus battersbyi*) gliding slowly through the

vegetation. The pond held Edible Bullfrog (*Pyxicephalus edulis*) and Anchieta's Rocket Frog (*Ptychadena anchietae*). A perfect end to an excellent day included another Speckled Green Snake sleeping in the branches near camp.

Day 10

Monday 27th January

We drove to one of our key areas in search of snakes, repeatedly delayed by superb wildlife. A Lion on the track led us to her pride with cubs; shortly afterwards a Martial Eagle lifted from a perch and soared over Helmeted Guineafowl in a predatory sweep. Giraffe, Zebra and Elephant were regular, with the unique, long-necked Gerenuk among the day's highlights.

A Leopard Tortoise (*Stigmochelys pardalis*) briefly interrupted us, before we found a Smith's Racer (*Platyceps brevis*). Speke's Sand Lizard (*Heliobolus speki*) and Southern Long-tailed Lizard (*Latastia longicaudata*) darted ahead as we explored. Before dinner, Dickson discovered a Semi-ornate Snake (*Meizodon semiornatus*).

Our first night drive produced several Graceful Chameleons (*Chamaeleo gracilis*). After a quiet spell, a Brown House Snake (*Boaedon fuliginosus*) appeared on the road. Soon afterwards, Dickson spotted a Red-necked Spitting Cobra (*Naja pallida*) at the roadside: it was a breathtaking semi-adult perfectly matched to Tsavo's soil. On the way back to camp, we observed eyeshine and a young Caracal slipping into cover. Some of us were greeted by a beautifully coloured Puff Adder (*Bitis arietans*) near the tents, which made an unforgettable finale to a superb day.

Day 11

Tuesday 28th January

We revisited the same area, photographing lizards en route and adding a Link-marked Sand Snake (*Psammophis biseriatus*), which was approaching a shed and appeared unusually dark. Back at camp, we photographed Five-lined Skink (*Trachylepis quinquetaeniata*), Red-headed Rock Agama and Short-necked Skink (*Trachylepis brevicollis*), and were surprised by another Speckled Sand Snake.

Night conditions were quieter for reptiles, though frogs were plentiful, including Keller's Foam-nest Frog (*Chiromantis kelleri*), Guttural Toad (*Sclerophrys gutturalis*), Somali Running Frog (*Kassina somalica*), and an attractively patterned Tropical House Gecko. The mammal highlights were outstanding: a brief sighting of Bat-eared Foxes followed by extended views of a beautiful Serval, making a fitting end to the night.

Day 12

Wednesday 29th January

We reluctantly left Tsavo, noting Grevy's Zebra (a rare encounter outside northern Kenya) and Beisa Oryx on the way out, with a magnificent Secretarybird as a highlight. Just before exiting the park, we found Somali Painted Agama (*Agama persimilis*): a perfect farewell.

By afternoon, we had reached the coast and took time to relax by the beach. A short night walk to a nearby pond proved fruitless as the water had dried up, but spirits remained high for the days ahead.

Day 13

Thursday 30th January

Today we visited Arabuko Sokoke Forest, Kenya's last true coastal forest. While we searched for the characterful Elephant Shrew, Dickson focused on snakes. We had fleeting views of Golden-rumped Elephant Shrew, but it was of course a privilege to catch a glimpse of such a special species. Heat and humidity built, and we returned to the resort; Dickson persevered and was rewarded with Hissing Sand Snake (*Psammodphis mossambicus*). The day's standout for many was a stunning blue-morph individual of the Green Speckled Bush Snake (*Philothamnus punctatus*).

Day 14

Friday 31st January

The group split for different activities. One party returned to Arabuko Sokoke Forest and enjoyed excellent views of Golden-rumped Elephant Shrew and an impressive Great Plated Lizard (*Broadleysaurus major*). Others explored the beach in search of African Coral-rag Skink (*Cryptoblepharus africanus*), finding many in the coastal scrub, and had glimpses of marine life, including Starfish.

Later, we tried a different section of Arabuko Sokoke for the elusive Sokoke Scops Owl; despite our efforts, we did not connect. We concluded the trip with a short evening walk, locating several beautiful Flap-necked Chameleons (*Chamaeleo dilepis*). It made a perfect close to a memorable expedition.

Day 15

Saturday 1st February

After a final morning at the beach, with dolphins for some and snorkelling for others, we transferred to the airport and flew back to Nairobi. We left Kenya on a late flight, reflecting on a journey rich in wildlife, remarkable sightings and outstanding company.

Day 16

Sunday 2nd February

We arrived back home in London early in the morning.

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