

Tanzania's Highlights

Naturetrek Tour Report

10th – 24th January 2026



Lion hunting Zebra



Secretarybird



D'Arnaud's Barbet



Leopard

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Tour participants: Martin Malya and Wilfred Mollel (leaders) with 12 Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Saturday 10th January

We flew from Heathrow to Addis Ababa overnight.

Day 2

Sunday 11th January

Having transferred to an international flight in Ethiopia, we stepped off the plane at Kilimanjaro airport into warm sunshine and blue skies; it was such a contrast with what we had left behind in the UK. Our guide, Martin, welcomed us warmly, and soon got us and our luggage loaded into a bus for the one-hour journey to the Serena Arusha hotel. It was a Sunday, and many people were in their best colourful clothes for church. We passed market stalls piled high with watermelons and tropical fruits, women balancing boxes and baskets on their heads, and beautiful lilac Jacaranda and red Flamboyant trees along the way.

We gathered in the shady grounds of the hotel with our guides, Wilfred and Martin, for an initial briefing, followed by a walk in the grounds and to the shores of the nearby lake. We immediately started spotting birds darting about in the foliage (during the trip we recorded over 315 bird species: I only mention a few in this report). On the shores of the lake, we saw Pied, Malachite, and Giant Kingfishers, an African Fish Eagle, and Grey and Purple Herons. It was a promising start to the trip!

Day 3

Monday 12th January

We had an early breakfast and left at 7.00am to drive to Arusha National Park in our two safari vehicles. It didn't take long before we spotted our first animals: a "dazzle" of zebras and a "tower" of Giraffes (new collective nouns for me: when Giraffes were walking, they were a "journey"). The park had a forested mountain surrounded by plains, known as the "small Serengeti", and this was a good location for animals, including Cape Buffalo and Warthog. We saw Mantled Guereza (or Colobus), one holding a little ball of white fluff that was a baby, Blue Monkeys and a bushbaby (Greater Galago).

We picnicked by the shores of Momella lake and saw Greater and Lesser Flamingoes, African Sacred Ibis, Black-winged Stilts, Pied Avocets, bee-eaters, Common Fiscal, an Augur Buzzard and a Western Marsh Harrier. We also walked to a waterfall on the lower slopes of Mount Meru, accompanied by two rangers with guns.

Day 4

Tuesday 13th January

We had another early start to drive to Tarangire National Park. It was interesting to see people going about their daily lives: children in school uniform, people selling avocados, maize, mango and papaya, small businesses, buses crammed with people, and donkeys. As the landscape became more rural, we spotted goats and cattle being herded by Masai people. Some Masai boys wore black clothes, and our guide explained that this meant they had recently been circumcised and that their behaviour would be monitored for over three months to see if they were ready to pass through a “washing” ritual to become warriors.

We arrived at Nyikani camp and settled into our individual tented accommodation (with flushing toilet). After a short sharp burst of rain, we headed out for a wildlife drive. We saw our first Leopard, lazing in a tree, Savanna Elephants, mongooses, Dik-diks, Secretarybirds, Vervet Monkeys and Giraffes.

Day 5

Wednesday 14th January

After a good breakfast in the communal tented dining room, we had a full day of safari drives. There were seemingly birds on every tree and bush, and around every corner. A few highlights for me were Pygmy Falcon, Tawny Eagle, Bateleur, Lilac-breasted Roller, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater and Superb Starling.

We watched a group of Elephants, including baby ones, squirting themselves with mud and water, another Leopard in a tree, Warthogs, Impalas, Common Reedbuck, Waterbuck, Dik-diks, Vervet Monkeys with tiny babies, and a Nile Monitor lizard.

After lunch at the camp and a rest, we headed out again until sunset, and saw our first Lions, rolling around in the grass. We also saw mongooses running in and out of their holes in a termite mound. Then it was back to the camp for a “talking shower”; a man outside your shower tent filled up a bucket on a pulley with warm water, and you released the water as you needed it.

Day 6

Thursday 15th January

We packed up at the camp and did a safari drive through Tarangire NP, spotting more wildlife on the way, including Elephants, Giraffes, Zebras, mongooses, Rock Hyrax, a Martial Eagle and an Eastern Chanting Goshawk.

We drove on to Lake Manyara National Park, where we had lunch at the Serena Lodge and checked into our rooms. Our afternoon drive was in the dense forest that surrounds the lake, a very different environment from the savannah. We saw Elephants, Olive Baboons carrying babies, Vervet Monkeys, Blue Monkeys, Warthogs, and some Crested Guineafowl. My bird highlights were a beautiful Green Wood Hoopoe, and a Red-and-yellow Barbet.

Day 7

Friday 16th January

We started the day with a visit to a tanzanite exhibition. Tanzanite is a blue mineral (a zoisite), found only in small areas in Tanzania. The Masai used the stones for a game, but it is highly-valued due to its rarity for jewellery, having been branded by Tiffany & Co. in 1968.

Then we headed through the Ngorongoro Conservation Area, with a stop at the crater (to which we would return in a few days' time), en route to our destination in the Serengeti National Park. We passed Masai villages: round huts in enclosures with lots of cattle and goats.

On entering the park, we immediately found a male Lion with three cubs, and group of females lying in the grass nearby. It was fascinating to watch the interaction between the male and the cubs. The Serengeti was THE place for Lions: we saw seventeen on our first day there. Most impressive were the thousands of Blue Wildebeest and Zebras on their migration. It was staggering to see the continuous line of so many animals trudging in the same direction as far as we could see across the flat plain of the Serengeti.

We also saw Thomson's and Grant's Gazelles, Topi, Impala, Vervet Monkeys, Cape Buffalo, Hippos wallowing in a pool, and of course many birds, including Eastern Chanting Goshawk, Tawny Eagle, Black-winged Kite, Lappet-faced Vulture, Montagu's and Pallid Harriers, Greater Kestrel, three types of bustard (Kori, White-bellied and Hartlaub's Bustard) and some small birds too, including a Rattling Cisticola.

Day 8

Saturday 17th January

This was another full day of safari drives in the central Serengeti with many species of birds, starting with the bright yellow Vitelline Masked Weaver, Speckle-fronted Weaver, Lesser Striped Swallow, Speckled Mousebird, Diederik Cuckoo, Croaking Cisticola, Brubru, the colourful (despite their names) African Grey Woodpecker and Brown Parrot, Common Ostrich, Woodland Kingfisher, Beautiful Sunbird, Steel-blue Whydah, Black-headed Oriole and two Fischer's Lovebirds.

There were plenty of mammals too, including Elephants, our first Spotted Hyena, Black-backed Jackals, and more antelopes, gazelles and dik-diks (always in pairs). We spotted our first Cheetah very near the camp, but it moved away quickly.

Day 9

Sunday 18th January

We drove south-east from the central Serengeti towards our next camp, near Lake Ndutu. We spotted a Cheetah and had time to observe it eating its kill, a young wildebeest. We saw a Serval with its striking markings, a Leopard

in a tree, two male Lions on a large rock surveying the land, a pink and blue agama lizard, a terrapin, Common Dwarf Mongoose, Plains Zebra and Blue Wildebeest together with their young, Topi, gazelles and Impala, and more birds.

The bird highlight was a Purple Grenadier, and we also saw a Southern Red Bishop, Montagu's Harrier, Black-winged Stilt, a Kori Bustard coming in to land, Marabou Storks balancing precariously in the treetops, and more Ostriches.

Day 10

Monday 19th January

We had another whole day of safari, with a morning drive and another one after lunch until sunset. We were fortunate to see another Cheetah, this time a mother with four cubs. Sadly, we learned that there was a high mortality rate, as the cubs are predated by lion and hyena. Near the Cheetah, we saw two Bat-eared Foxes sitting in the grass, and some jackals.

We came across a Leopard, for once not in a tree. A lot of safari vehicles had gathered around it and we watched, fascinated, as the Leopard used the vehicles as cover to approach a group of Wildebeest and Zebra. But it couldn't get close enough and it abandoned the stalking. We also saw a lot of newly-born Wildebeest calves, and eagles eating the placentas.

Day 11

Tuesday 20th January

We drove along the shore of Lake Masek, where there were many different waterbirds. The lake was very still, and the Greater and Lesser Flamingoes were reflected as if in a mirror. There were African Openbill, Pied Avocets, Curlew Sandpiper, Black-winged Stilts, Cape Teal, Little Stints, Chestnut-banded Plover, Three-banded Courser, Great White Pelicans, Augur Buzzards, Marsh Sandpiper, Gull-billed Terns, hornbills, and smaller birds too, including Collared Sunbirds and European Rollers. We saw Wildebeest with calves, Thomson's and Grant's Gazelles, and some Elephants and Zebras lurking in the bushes near the shore.

We arrived at the Olduvai Gorge, where we had a picnic lunch overlooking the gorge. Excavations here in the twentieth century by Louis and Mary Leakey proved that the human lineage originated in Africa. The museum had important artefacts (fossils and tools, and casts of skeletons) which were displayed and explained well.

After the visit, we retraced our steps to the Ngorongoro crater, where we were due to stay for three nights. The Serena Lodge was on the rim of the crater, with wonderful views into the caldera: it's the world's largest intact example.

Day 12

Wednesday 21st January

We were up early to catch the sunrise over the crater rim. We drove down the rough track to the plain and lake. Today was like a microcosm of everything we had seen during the trip so far. But there was one animal that we hadn't previously seen: the Black Rhinoceros. We saw four of them during the day.



Black-bellied Bustard



Lion



Lilac-breasted Roller



Lion and cub

We had a picnic breakfast near a lake and later had a picnic lunch, so we were out all day long (there were a few bathroom facilities in the crater). We watched a Wildebeest being born: within six minutes it was up, unsteadily, on its feet. They can run after about fifteen minutes! We saw a Lion waiting patiently in a hole while Zebras walked past it; then, when the youngest Zebra passed, the Lion leaped out of the hole and gave chase. The zebra narrowly escaped.

Everywhere we looked there was wildlife. We had our first clear view of a Spotted Hyena, with four cubs, a Lion with two cubs, a Golden and a Black-backed Jackal, Common Eland, Impala, Giraffes, Zebra, Elephants, Cape Buffalo, Olive Baboons, White-tailed Mongoose and Hippos. There were eagles, Whinchat, Grey Crowned Cranes, White Storks, African Sacred Ibis, flamingoes, snipes, rails, Black-bellied Bustards and a Rosy-throated Longclaw.

Back at the lodge, we were able to watch Masai acrobats and musicians, while sipping a Tanzanian cocktail (*dawa*) or a Kilimanjaro beer.

Day 13

Thursday 22nd January

We left before sunrise again, to admire the sun rising above the rim of the crater. As we drove down the track, we saw the silhouettes of a Lion and three cubs. We drove slowly down the track, spotting lots of birds including Yellow Bishop, Abyssinian Wheatear, Common Fiscal, Rock-loving Cisticola, Pale Flycatcher, African Hobby, Whinchat, White-browed Robin-Chat, Anteater Chat and Little Bee-eater.

We went to a different part of the crater and drove past an enclosure with White Rhinoceroses, which were being acclimatised ahead of introduction to the park: it was good to know that there were conservation efforts underway.

Again, we had a picnic breakfast, giving us maximum safari time. We saw more Spotted Hyenas, Hippos out of the water, a Tawny Eagle dive-bombing a Black-backed Jackal, vultures, and near the water, Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns, and Northern Shovelers. We returned to the hotel for a late lunch and had a final walk in the grounds with our guides spotting birds and Bushbuck, and admiring the crater views.

Day 14

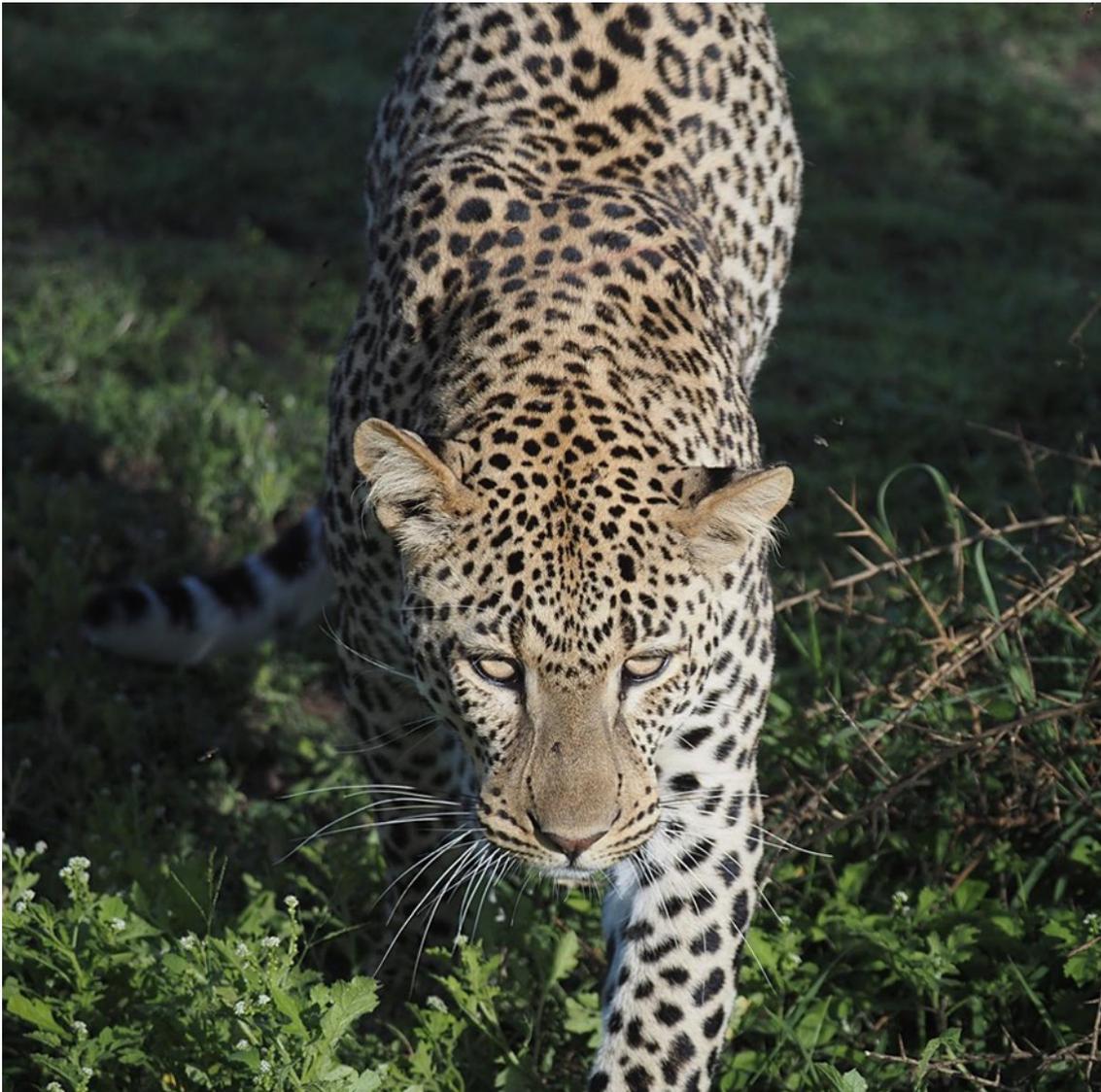
Friday 23rd January

We left after breakfast to start on the journey back to Arusha. We stopped for lunch at a restaurant, where we ate in the gardens, and then we had a stop at our first hotel in Arusha to freshen up before saying goodbye to our guides, Wilfred and Martin, and to our safari vehicles. We clambered on to our bus and were taken to Kilimanjaro airport, to begin our journey home.

Day 15

Saturday 24th January

Everyone arrived safely home after long flights.



Leopard

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