

On Safari: Kenya



**12 days in Kenya's National Parks and Reserves
September 2018**

Stephen Ingraham: The Point and Shoot Nature Photographer

12 Day Safari in Kenya, September 2018

A safari in Kenya is hours of dusty, bumpy, mostly uncomfortable travel interrupted often enough by intense, almost unbelievable, wildlife and bird encounters, to make it all worthwhile...to make it, in fact, for most of us, the experience of a lifetime. I researched and booked a 12 day safari through many of Kenya's best known parks and reserves for September 2018. Two couples who had traveled with me on other adventures decided to join me, and the 5 of us met in Nairobi to begin our journey.



Steve Hanson, Melanie Tait, John and Pat Fojut, Stephen Ingraham at Elsamere Lodge on Lake Naivasha, Kenya

Tsavo East National Park

Our first stop. Voi Safari Lodge at the edge of Tsavo East. This is the view from the main building. Elephants were there to greet us.







Rock Hyrax, Elephant, Zebras, Yellow-throated Francolin





Tsavo East has some of the last of the big-tuskers. This image captures, I think the wildness of the African Elephant. John, our driver (or pilot as he liked to call himself) said..."No one rides our elephants!"





Opposite: Impala, doe and fawn, Male Gerenuk, Female Gerenuk, doe and fawn Waterbuck. Above: Kori Bustard in full display.



Kori Bustard, Crowned
Lapwing, Tsavo East
landscape.

Yellow
Baboon
family





Oryx, Rosy-patched Bush-shrike, Southern Ground Hornbill, Vervet Monkey







We discovered these three lions late in the afternoon. They decided to approach the van, and came to within 6 feet of us before turning and crossing the road behind us. Very exciting!









More of the big-tuskers of Tsavo East!



Grant's Gazelle, Pangani
Longclaw, Opposite: Cape
Buffalo came to breakfast
on our last morning at
Tsavo East





Tsavo West National Park

We stayed at Ngulia Lodge deep in Tsavo West. The landscape of Tsavo West is considerably different than Tsavo East...with sharp hills and more woodlands.



The Kirk's Dik Dik is the smallest antelope in Africa. Not much bigger than a tall rabbit



Our first
Leopard
encounter. We
were alerted
by another
van, and
drove back to
see it. It was a
long way off,
barely within
reach of my
camera. And
this was our
first Roller of
the trip: the
Rufous-
crowned
Roller.





Lesser
Kudu, Go-
away Bird,
Hartebeest
Baobab
tree.





A Leopard comes one night in 30 to the bait at Ngulia Lodge in Tsavo West. We were there the right night. Taken under floodlights without flash, using Sony's Anti-motion Blur mode.



White-browed Coucal, Impala, Grant's Gazelles, Buff-crested Bustard.



First Lilac-breasted Roller of the trip. Not our last by far, but one of the birds I was really looking forward to seeing in Kenya.





The lava fields of the Shetani Flow. This happened recently enough so the memory has been passed down in the local community. From Tsavo West we headed due east “cross-lots” you might say, on bush roads through native conservancies and communities, all the way to Amboseli...some of the worst roads we drove. The Giraffe is running free, not in any park. Taken from the van window as we passed.

Amboseli National Park



Amboseli National Park is at the foot of Kilimanjaro, the tallest mountain in Africa, but on the Kenyan side of the border. The water from the mountain drains down through porous lava rock to feed the marshes and remnants of the great Lake Amboseli, providing lush grazing for a wonderful variety of abundant wildlife. During the rains much of Amboseli is a marsh or bog. When we visited, unusual June rains had left large shallow pools, full of Lesser Flamingos.





The lodges and camps where we stayed were a part of the trip that was certainly **not** uncomfortable.

Accommodation and food were well beyond our expectations. This is Voi Safari Lodge at Tsavo East



At Amboseli and Masai Mara we stayed at tented camps, but the Kenyan idea of a tent is something else all together. Stone or wood floors, full tiled baths in their own extension, porches under thatch. I had a jacuzzi in my tent at Osero Camp.



Dust is a constant in Amboseli. The air is full of it, and the light at ground level is often filtered through it. It is rare not to see dust-devils somewhere in the view.







Most days at sunset, the Amboseli herd of elephants crosses one of the roads. The trick is being in the right place at the right time.







John, our pilot, found a group of male and female Ostrich. The males were in a mating mood, but the females showed no signs of reciprocating the feeling. Lots of displays. Lots of chasing. No action.





The plains
of Amboseli
looking
north.
Wildebeest.



Elephants
under
Kilimanjaro.
Reedbuck.







Opposite: What remains of Lake Amboseli, the huge body of water that covered this whole savanna once upon a time. The wetlands still provide grazing for a huge herd of elephants, as well as hippopotamuses and a host of water birds. Lesser Flamingos, Whiskered Terns, African Jacana, Blacksmith Lapwing, Black-winged Stilt, Little Egret.







Just before heading back to the lodge, John, our pilot, chased down one more lion sighting. He heard it on the radio and raced to get there before it was over. "Maybe if we hurry, we get a piece of the cake!" And we did. Our first adult male lion of the trip.



The Rift Valley

The Great Rift Valley is a huge trench where volcanic forces are splitting the African Plate into two plates and the surface of the earth is falling into the widening crack. This view is from the escarpment between Nairobi and Naivasha town. The Kenyan Rift is known for its lakes: Lake Naivasha, Lake Nakuru, Lake Elmenteita, Lake Bogoria, and Lake Baringo, all of which are alkaline lakes except for Lake Naivasha. We stayed at Elsamere, the home of Joy Adamson of Born Free fame, on Lake Naivasha, and visited nearby Hell's Gate Park, as well as spending a day in Lake Nakuru National Reserve.



Hamerkop,
Hadada Ibis,
Little Egret,
Marabou
Stork

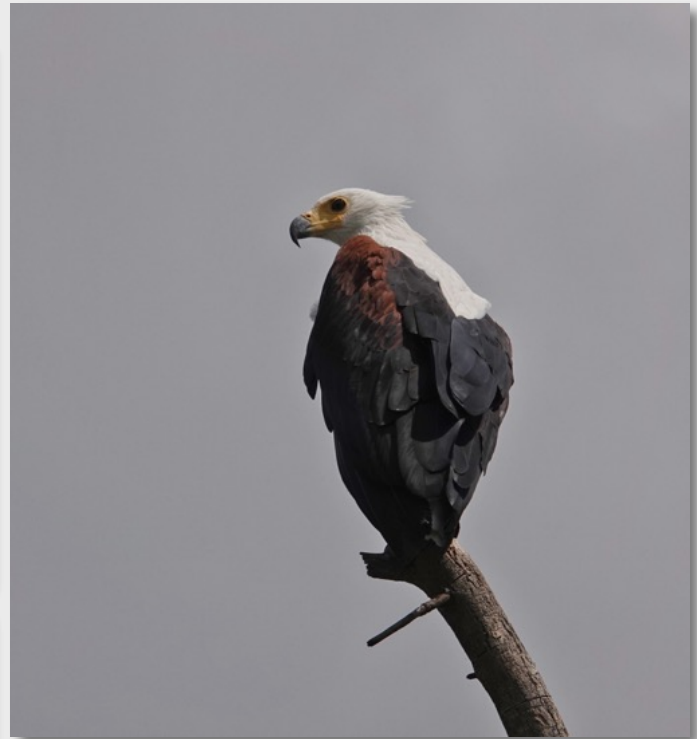


Our first adventure in the Rift Valley was a 2 and half hour boat ride on Lake Naivasha. An hour ride is usual, but John negotiated 2 hours for us, as we wanted to see birds and the boat was the best opportunity so far, and the boatman was in no hurry to get us back. He seemed to enjoy our enjoyment of the birds. Pink-backed Pelicans.



Hippos close to
the boat,
Squacco
Heron, Yellow-
billed Duck

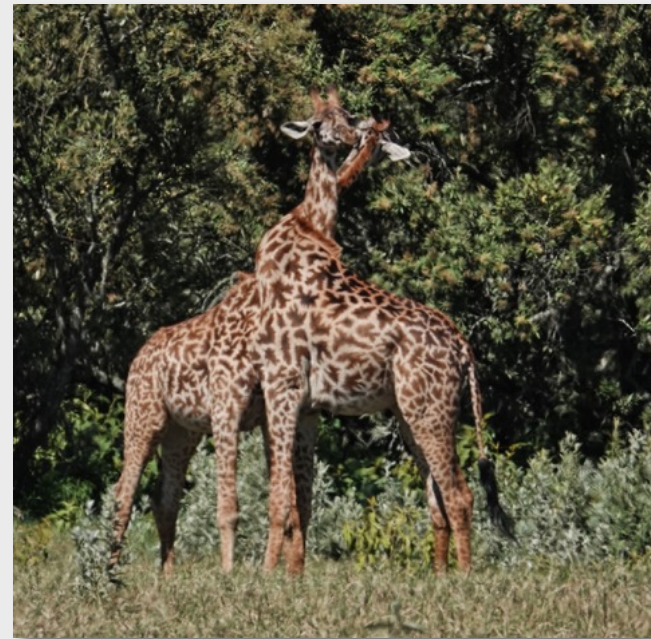
Sacred Ibis,
African Fish
Eagle, Pied
Kingfisher







Hell's Gate National Park was made possible in part by the estate of Joy Adamson, and it protects a unique volcanic area of hot and cold springs in a fairly deep canyon...as well as a variety of wildlife. Being close to Naivasha Town, and open to bicycles and hikers, it is a very popular destination.



Warthog, Impalas sparring, Hell's Gate Canyon, two male Masai Giraffes "necking." which, like the sparring of the Impalas, is a form of establishing male dominance.



Eastern Black and White Colobus Monkeys on the grounds of Elsamere Lodge on Lake Naivasha. I was surprised and delighted to find a good size troop.



Red-chested
Cuckoo,
Green Wood-
Hoopoe,
Tropical
Boubou,
Arrow-marked
Babler



White-fronted
Bee Eater, Red-
cheeked
Cordon-blue,
Vitelline
Masked
Weaver. African
Hoopoe,
Striped
Kingfisher, all
within a few
yards of each
other at Lake
Nakuru

Lake Nakuru



Along the southern end of Lake Nakuru, Lesser Flamingos, one of the last remaining White Rhinoceroses in the world. Better named the "wide lipped rhinoceros".









Opposite: Lesser Flamingos and Cape Buffalo, Lanier Falcon, View from the hill. Above: Rothschild's Giraffe, a rare species or variety. There is a healthy herd in Lake Nakuru Reserve.



A small herd of Zebra, probably the most common wildlife we saw in Kenya...they were everywhere. Opposite: Saddle-billed Stork, our only sighting on the trip.





Due to the distance, we decided not to go north to Lake Baringo. Instead we spent a morning on Crescent Island, where Out of Africa was filmed, walking among the birds and wildlife. Fischer's and hybrid Yellow-collared Lovebird, Waxbill, Tacazze Sunbird



We walked through Thompson's Gazelles and Impalas to get to the Giraffes. Mare and colt Zebra.





Thompson's Gazelles
sparring. Wildebeest.
More Thompson's
Gazelles.



One of Crescent Island's Giraffes right up by the road.



Masai Mara

Not huge by Tsavo East standards, the Masai Mara still encompasses such a wild variety of habitats over such a large area that it is difficult to encompass it with your mind...and difficult to do it justice in the little over 2 days we had there..



First lion in Masai Mara, our first evening, before we had even checked in at the lodge. Off on a side track...there were probably 15 vehicles on this group...way more than the 5 the park rules allow.



Our closest good view of a Cheetah. Lilac-breasted Roller. Note the underwing color. Woolly-necked Stork





A pride of 9 lions in the shade of brush on top of a rock. Masai Mara is full of 'tracks'...informal roads that crisscross the savanna wherever wildlife is regularly found. You can not drive "off-road" without a special permit, but the tracks go most places you would want to go. It is often possible to drive right up to wildlife. As we did with this pride of lions.





There are fewer Elephants in Masai Mara, but we still saw these on our first evening game drive. Opposite. More of the lion pride, and a lone Eland. We saw very few Elands.





Our goal on our first full day in Masai Mara was to reach the Mara River and get back in time for supper. We did. Hippos and Crocodiles in the River. Opposite: Two full-grown but young male lions with a Wildebeest kill, sleeping it off.







Opposite: Mara
lunch, same male
lion, now awake,
Here: Spotted
Hyena, Black-
winged Lapwing,
Bulbul, Black Crane



Yellow Baboons,
Grey-crowned
Crane, Elephant.
Notice how big it
is, and how small
the tusks. Typical
of the Mara.



Stalking lion and very aware Thompson's Gazelles...not wanting to be stalked.
A family of Banded Mongoose.



Topi under the Equatorial sun. The light of Masai Mara, only a few degrees south of the equator, is always strong and direct. Topi sleep nose to ground. Opposite: Little Bee Eaters at the tunnel nest, and Black-bellied Bustards, the third Bustard species we saw in Kenya.



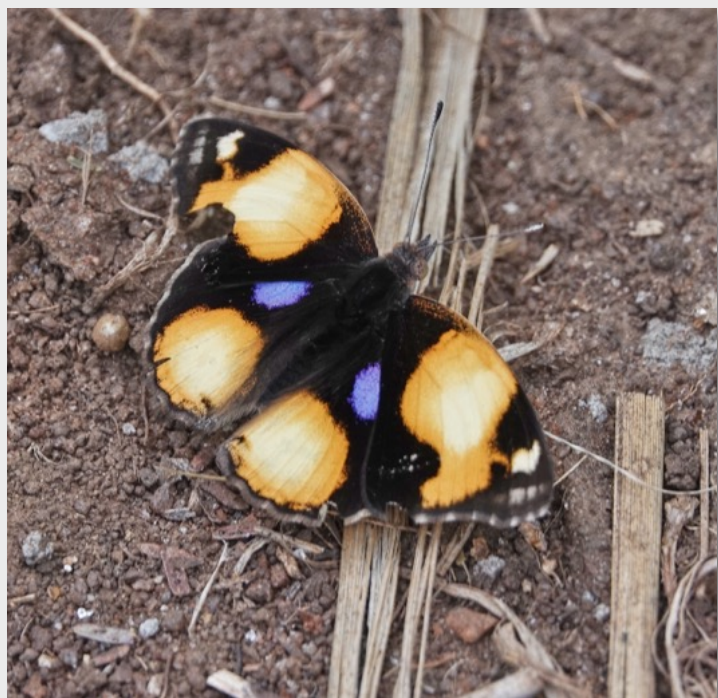


As I mentioned, the Lilac-breasted Roller was one of my most hoped for birds on this trip...and we saw them everywhere, and closer than I expected.



Nothing like and eye to eye view of an Elephant.





Yellow
Pansy
Butterfly,
Scarlet-
chested
Sunbird,
Marico
Sunbird.





John took the safari van through a steep stream crossing to put us on this Leopard with a kill. Best shot I could manage.



My volunteer Masai bird guides on our last morning in the Mara. They were highly competitive, each one trying to show me the best birds, and then they decided to be birds for me to photograph in the tree.



So there you have it. This is only the highlights. In particular, as birders, we saw and photographed over one hundred species. Most of those were "record" shots more than great photos, but exciting none the less. Having visited Kenya once, there will always be a part of me that is homesick for the savannas and marshes, lakes and hills...and yes even for the dust and barely passable roads (Tsavo massage, Mara Massage, etc)...for the whole experience of Kenya and its wildlife. Until next time.



