

KENYA MAMMAL TOUR 2016

- *A Two Week Tour of Laikipia, Amboseli and Tsavo West and East*



Mount Kilimanjaro from Amboseli.

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1 Introduction

Despite having previously visited much of central and southern Africa and having seen a good number of Africa's larger mammals, I had never been to Kenya. Partly this was down to other places taking priority but I confess I have always had a prejudice against Kenya, imagining the parks to be crammed full of tourists. There's not much fun in joining twenty other safari vehicles at a lion kill and so I always avoided Kenya. But quite a few species are much easier to see in Kenya than elsewhere and my African mammal list still had a few alarming gaps that I knew Kenya could put straight. So, when I found that Greentours were running a reasonably priced tour to Amboseli and Tsavo I decided to take the plunge.

To get the most out of the trip I added on a three day and night "pre-tour" to Laikipia, thus making it a thirteen day tour. This was also organised by Greentours. The whole tour ran from October 30th to November 12th 2016.

2 Objectives

As usual I had a lengthy shopping list. Some targets I expected to be straightforward: for example Lesser Kudu, Gerenuk, Beisa and Fringe-eared Oryx, Yellow Baboon and Grant's and Thomson's Gazelle. Others, such as Oribi, Striped Hyaena, Desert Warthog and Egyptian Mongoose, I thought might require a bit more effort. The extremely rare Hirola, which I knew had been introduced into Tsavo some time ago, wasn't really on my radar since I could find almost no information on how and where to look for it.

Kenya is, of course, a great place to see cats and I eagerly looked forward to seeing Leopard and Cheetah again as well as, hopefully, one or two of the smaller species such as Caracal, Serval or Wildcat.

3 Logistics

With everything organised by Greentours there were no logistical problems to think about. Greentours were very good and everything ran smoothly. Ian Green and his new wife Seda led the main part of the tour and were excellent. I can thoroughly recommend Greentours to anyone thinking of using them.

I flew Safarilink between Nairobi and Nanyuki (en-route to Laikipia), a flight which takes about forty minutes and is a piece of cake if you stay at the Wilson Aero-club the night before. The club is on site at Wilson airfield and a three minute taxi ride from the check-in desk. Beware the weight limit however (15 kilograms). I exceeded it by around seven kilos but they let me off a surcharge.

Laikipia Wilderness Camp is a luxury tented camp set in glorious dry savannah about a two hour drive from Nanyuki airstrip. (The camp will arrange transfers). It costs a fortune to stay there but it's worth it. The surrounding area, though protected, isn't a National Park and so there's no restriction on walking or night driving. The place is heaving with wildlife and has a good record on cats, (including Golden Cat which sometimes passes through). It also boasts a good population of Grevy's Zebra, Beisa Oryx and Elephant. The big draw, however, are

the two locally denning packs of Wild Dog which can be seen quite readily as the location of the dens is known and several of the animals carry radio collars.

In Amboseli we stayed at Ol Tukai Lodge, located alongside wetlands which draw huge quantities of birds and game. Everything really was quite luxurious at Ol Tukai. The accommodation and food were excellent and the staff were unbelievably cheerful and attentive. An elephant fence keeps the big stuff away from residents but smaller members of the fauna can come and go at will, which makes for added entertainment when not out on a game drive. Night drives are on offer at the extortionate rate of \$80 per head.

In Tsavo East we stayed at Voi Safari Lodge. This wasn't quite as up-market as Ol Tukai. The rooms were a bit cramped and the food was a bit ordinary. But it had a terrific grandstand view of a floodlit water hole from the restaurant and meals were frequently interrupted to watch the peregrinations of Elephant, Waterbuck, Buffalo and so on. The grounds are home to Bush Hyraxes, Baboons and Impala and, according to the security man on the gate, a friendly local Leopard which occasionally comes in at night. Night drives are possible but at an even more usurious rate than Amboseli - \$100 per head.

4 Results

Outstanding! I recorded 64 mammals including five cats (Lion, Leopard, Cheetah, Caracal and Serval), all of the target ungulates and the enigmatic and critically endangered Hirola. I had four sightings of Wild Dog, three at Laikipia and one in Tsavo West en-route to Voi. The night drives produced Striped Hyaena, Rufous Sengi, Aardvaark and Springhare. Things could scarcely have gone any better and, by the end, I was running out of targets.

The only significant misses were Klipspringer (which I expected to see at Voi), Steinbok (which I thought would be common in dry, scrubby areas and Crested Porcupine (which I expected to see on the night drives).

5 Daily Log

The following is an account of each day. The first sighting of each species of mammal (and particularly interesting sightings) are highlighted in bold.

Sunday October 30th

I flew British Airways from London Heathrow to Nairobi, a flight which took around nine hours, and then stayed overnight at the Wilson Aero-club hotel at Wilson Airport. These days I like to have a proper night's sleep after a long haul flight even if it does add to the cost.

Monday October 31st

With the Safarilink flight to Nanyuki not leaving till 11.00am I had time for a lie-in and a slap up breakfast at the Aero-club. The flight itself gave brief views of Nairobi National Park and I could just make out some game below – the little black dots I could see were probably Cape Buffalo. Forty minutes later we were at Nanyuki airstrip where a taxi was waiting for me.

This transferred me to Nanyuki town where I met Stephen, the manager at Laikipia Wilderness Camp, who took me to my final destination.

En-route, even though it was the middle of the day, we saw a fair bit of wildlife including **Yellow-spotted Bush Hyrax**, **Beisa Oryx**, **Grevy's Zebra**, **Reticulated Giraffe** and **Impala**.



Yellow-spotted Bush Hyrax at Laikipia.

Then, after lunch and a bit of a siesta, we were off for the first game drive. Pairs of **Guenther's Dik-dik** were everywhere, as were Impala and both Common and Grevy's Zebra. The first big target, however, was the local pride of **Lions**. This didn't turn out to be too challenging since one of the members of the pride was carrying a radio collar, a legacy of a former research project. We soon homed in on the signal and eleven members of the pride of fourteen were quickly located resting in thick grass and acacia scrub. The cats were obviously habituated to the presence of a vehicle in their midst and we parked up only five metres from the nearest animals before switching off the engine and settling down to watch them. Of course, the Lions totally ignored us.

With evening approaching the local **Wild Dog** packs would soon be leaving their dens to hunt and so we tore ourselves away from the Lions and set off in the direction of a known den location on a rugged nearby hillside. We arrived on the scene as the light was beginning to fade and not a moment too soon. Seven members of the pack were already making their way down the slope ahead of us, sending **Black-necked Rock Hyrax** scurrying for cover and agitating a troop of **Olive Baboons** who were perched precariously (but presumably safely) on a cliff face. They descended onto the savannah below and we able to follow them for a short way. Some Impala, which had had hitherto been peacefully grazing, left the scene in a

hurry. In fact, the dogs did a pretty good job of clearing the immediate area of all other wildlife! We kept loosely in contact with them for a while watching their excited greeting ritual on several occasions. But as darkness closed in we lost them and we went looking for other targets.



Guenther's Dik-dik in Laikipia.

An hour's further night driving got us a Bat-eared Fox and a White-tailed Mongoose. There were also quite a few bats though I couldn't identify any of them. Later, in the early hours of the morning, I was woken by movement right outside my tent. I crept outside, torch in hand, to see what was about and, switching on the light, abruptly came face to face with a Grevy's Zebra. I'm not sure which of us was most surprised by the encounter!

Tuesday November 1st

There were now four of us in camp, a family group of three having arrived the previous evening. We were up before dawn for a drive, coffee and biscuits being delivered to our tents at the ungodly time of 05.45.

A group of four female **Greater Kudu** were high up on a hillside above camp as dawn broke and before long we had found **Dwarf Mongoose** and **Elephant**. By mid-morning we had found plenty more of the latter. At a nearby man-made dam several family groups came in succession to drink and wallow in mud. At the height of proceedings some forty Elephants were visible in front of us, watched all the while by an avian audience of Egrets, Egyptian Geese, African Spoonbills and Yellow-billed Storks.

We re-visited the Lion pride once again locating them by radio. This time there were nine or ten females and juveniles, the two males I had seen the previous day having temporarily decamped.



Lion pride at Laikipia.

As we made our way back to camp for brunch we came across a Grant's Gazelle, a rare species for Laikipia. On close scrutiny it appeared to be a **Northern Grant's Gazelle** (*Gazella granti notata*), the original Grant's Gazelle species now having been split into at least three species: Grant's, Bright's and Peters' Gazelle. This specimen had dark flanks, a tail with a white base, prominent pygal stripes and nearly parallel horns.

The afternoon and evening drive focused on finding the Wild Dogs again and dusk saw us once more at the hillside where the pack was denning. Our arrival at the site was greeted by the sudden eruption of some twenty or more Impala from nearby scrub. The Impala absolutely exploded out of the bush – there is no other word than “explosion” to describe it – the animals then rocketing past us at warp speed. I have never seen Impala flee at such a rate. Then came a pregnant pause of four or five seconds. Of course I knew what was coming next! Six dogs then came hurtling out of the same scrub at about the same harum-scarum speed as the Impala and, without stopping to consider us, followed in hot pursuit of the Impala. We set off in turn hoping to stay in contact long enough to witness a kill. In the event the Impala all escaped but one unlucky Dik-dik did not. We heard a short squeal followed by the gruesome crunching of jaw on bone. Moments later we arrived at the scene to find several dogs ripping the carcass to pieces. One dog departed carrying a whole leg in its jaws; the others devoured what remained on the spot. Within a minute or so nothing was left, the whole body having been either eaten or carried off in pieces. Just a snack it

seemed! The dogs were soon off looking for more and we managed to follow some of them a short way before losing them in the gathering darkness.

The rest of the night drive produced relatively little. We found **Common Genet**, **White-tailed Mongoose** and a **Black-tailed Scrub Hare** but nothing particularly exotic.

Wednesday November 2nd

During the night Stephen had heard what seemed to be two Leopards calling to each other and so we set off at dawn to try to locate them. We crunched our way off-road through endless dense thickets but without reward. We found a lone **Spotted Hyaena** but no Leopard.

However, we had better luck with the **Wild Dogs**. We quickly located them by radio and intercepted the pack at a dam where they came down to drink. For about thirty minutes we watched them playing and socialising, often only a few feet from our vehicle (which they completely ignored). I counted nine animals. Eventually playtime was over and the pack trotted off back up the nearby hillside to return (presumably) to their den. We decided not to pressure them further and left them to it.



African Wild Dogs in Laikipia.

Later that morning we took a walk along the river, finding a lone female **Hippopotamus** guarding her pool and snorting angrily at us. But we were up on a high bank and despite her protestations we were no threat to her nor she any threat to us. We walked a mile or so before meeting up with one of the camp's vehicles which took us to a nice brunch spot by a

big pool further upstream. It was now getting quite warm and activity was slow though we did find both **Striped** and **Unstriped Ground Squirrel**.

That afternoon we split into two groups. The family took one vehicle and set off for a sunset vigil on a nearby hillside, primarily to relax, enjoy the view and drink a few sundowners. Hannah, (who was working at the camp as a trainee), and I took a second vehicle and set out with the more ambitious plan of finding cats. What happened next of course was entirely predictable. The sundowner cruise found two Cheetah and enjoyed prolonged views of those glorious cats at close range. We found only a Leopard Tortoise and a few common ungulates. Worse, we broke down and had to be rescued by a back up vehicle.



Leopard Tortoise.

With dusk falling both parties found themselves back at camp each in an entirely different mood to the other! We then decided to consolidate our efforts into one vehicle and go night driving to try to re-locate the Cheetah. We failed to find the cats but scored some very good consolation prizes. First, we found bright yellow eye-shine on a boulder-strewn hillside which eventually turned out to be a **Striped Hyaena**. At first it was sitting down and difficult to see but obligingly it stood up and revealed itself in all its glory. A fabulous animal! Then we stumbled across a Sengi hopping in its inimitable way across the track ahead. Later research led me to conclude this was a **Rufous Sengi**, the only species of Sengi to occur in Laikipia. Several Common Genet and a White-tailed Mongoose came our way but the highlight of the evening came at the end of the drive – a **Zorilla** which we found in an open grassy area. We had one brief but quite good look before it ran off and we lost it. So, no Cheetah, but a good selection of nocturnal mammals nonetheless.

Thursday November 3rd

My last morning at Laikipia was spent fruitlessly trying to find Leopard and/or Cheetah. Only a colony of Dwarf Mongoose came our way however. We found fresh Cheetah tracks all over the place but there was no sign of the cats. By mid-morning we had to give up. I had a flight to catch at Nanyuki at 11.40 which was in itself a two hour drive away.

By early afternoon I was back in Nairobi where I checked into the Boma Inn hotel and had a siesta. That evening the rest of the Greentours party arrived and I caught up with the leader Ian Green, his wife Seda and my room-mate for the next ten days Nigel Sawyer.

Friday November 4th

We had a gentle start to the main Greentours programme, beginning with a leisurely drive around Nairobi National Park. The park is a huge expanse of dry savannah set immediately adjacent to the bustling city of Nairobi. Surprisingly it seems to get only modest attention from local visitors and we encountered only a handful of other vehicles on our way round a circular route. We had at our disposal two more or less identical safari vehicles and two drivers, John and Peter, who in the subsequent days were to prove themselves superb at spotting and identifying wildlife.

We quickly found **Thomson's Gazelle**, **Blue Wildebeeste** and **Impala** as well as Common Zebra and **Cape Buffalo**. Ian spotted a very distant **Black Rhinoceros**, just about identifiable in the haze and there were a few **Southern Grant's Gazelle** around, many of them sporting side stripes and looking not too dissimilar to the slightly smaller Thomson's Gazelle.

About half way round the loop I noticed something in the distance that merited closer examination and which turned out to be our first Lion. Two more were quickly spotted but the trio departed before our second vehicle could arrive on the scene. No matter, we soon came across three more – a big male and two females. The old boy was some distance away and marched off over the crest of a ridge and out of sight. But the two ladies stayed put and gave us prolonged views at medium range.

The most interesting find of the morning was a small antelope which we found skulking in thick bush. After some deliberation we confirmed the identification as **Oribi**, its distinctive black cheek spot being diagnostic. Time, however, was not on our side and with a four drive to Amboseli looming we had to move on. A few sounders of **Common Warthog** crossed our path on our way out of the park together with yet more of the commoner species of ungulate.

The drive out of Nairobi seemed to take an eternity but eventually we got out into open countryside where a few gazelles broke the monotony. In the early afternoon we turned off the main road and headed down a long, dusty, pot-holed track to Amboseli. The bush looked very dry and over-grazing was obviously an issue. We came across herd after herd of ribby cattle, most of them being driven by local pastoralists to man-made bore holes to drink.

As we got closer to the park gate a bit of wildlife began to appear. I was delighted to find both **Lesser Kudu** and **Gerenuk**, the latter playing to the gallery by standing on its hind legs to browse. I spotted some Dik-diks though with time getting short we didn't stop to look at them. At the gate we gazed out at the completely dry Lake Amboseli, a vast dustbowl devoid of life. (Apparently Amboseli in Masai means "lots of dust"!). With everyone now desperate for refreshment and the prospect of missing lunch now increasingly real we took a short cut across the dry lake bed and sped towards Ol Tukai Lodge, our home for the next three nights.

Gradually, as we approached the Lodge, Amboseli came to life. At the far side of the lake there were wetlands and everything became greener. (I was starting to think the place should have been called *Umberseli*). Big herds of Elephant, Common Zebra, Blue Wildebeeste and gazelles came into view. It was obvious that most of the big game was concentrated around the wet areas. I surmised that, in turn, predators would also be there. As we turned into the Lodge we found lush vegetation and trees, obvious magnets for smaller mammals and, sure enough, **Vervet Monkey** and **Yellow Baboon** were present to greet our arrival. There were also local Masai boys in traditional dress and armed with sticks and catapults on hand to stop the mischievous primates from raiding the open restaurant area.

After lunch and a siesta we set out to explore Amboseli properly. Our route took us along the marshes and huge numbers of waders and wildfowl were in residence. In minutes we had accounted for Wood Sandpiper, Greenshank, Blacksmith Plover, African Jacana, Black Crake and a host of other common wetland species. The birders among us were beside themselves, not least because everything seemed so confiding and easy to photograph. After all, how often in the UK can you get within five metres of species like Wood or Marsh Sandpiper?

There were also huge numbers of ungulates in sight. Groups of Elephant could be seen in all directions, along with Cape Buffalo, Zebra, Wildebeeste and both Southern Grant's and Thomson's Gazelle. There were **Bohor Reedbuck** in good numbers too and a few Hippopotamus submerged in the wet ooze.

The skies had been darkening since lunchtime and it wasn't long before the first spots of rain began to fall. This rapidly became a series of sharp downpours which rather limited what we could do. A couple of hours previously the park looked as if it hadn't received rain for a century. Now the ground was sodden and puddles were suddenly forming in the dusty ground. We tried our best, partially successfully, to drive beyond the rain but in the end the fading light and intermittent showers forced us back to the Lodge.

I noticed on our return a billboard that offered night drives in the park, a prospect that I immediately investigated with the hotel staff. The going rate for a two hour drive was apparently \$80 but it soon became obvious that the night drive was an option rarely taken up by visitors. The ranger who led the drives was very vague about what we might see stressing that "there were no guarantees". We eventually squeezed out of him that Serval was sometimes seen along with Springhare, Civet and White-tailed Mongoose. We

provisionally planned to do the drive the following night, dependent on both weather and the numbers of people willing to cough up \$80 for what might well turn out to be a damp squib. (A minimum of four were needed).

Saturday November 5th

The morning drive produced birds, birds and more birds. All the usual ungulates were on show too and it was an impressive sight to see thousands of Elephant, Buffalo, Zebra and so on scattered over a vast open area. We soon found Spotted Hyaena, a species which proved to be very common in Amboseli and several **Black-backed Jackals**.

In fact, though it was nice to see the Hyaenas so well, their abundance was a mixed blessing as it rather limited the chances of seeing Cheetah. Apparently there were no resident Cheetah in the park though some animals did pass through every now and again. I surmised that it would be too difficult for Cheetah to keep their kills so great was the chance of them being stolen by Hyaenas.

The afternoon drive produced a very nice interlude with a pride of **Lions**. Half a dozen other vehicles were already on the scene when we arrived so it was hardly a "wilderness experience" but what followed was a joy to watch. There were two adult females and seven cubs, their size variability suggesting that we were seeing at least two different litters. We had about thirty minutes of entertainment watching the mock fighting, tail chasing and pouncing that so characterises cats at play. The two adults bore it all stoically, their occasional tail swishing revealing a degree of impatience with their boisterous offspring. In the distance a line of Common Zebra traipsed across the plain and the grown-ups stared at them pensively. Soon it would be dark and time to hunt. Feeding so many young mouths would doubtless keep them busy. And, as the light began to fade, playtime was over and the cubs were shepherded into a thick stand of palms away from the prying eyes of Hyaenas and other enemies. We too had to leave as that night was to be our shot at the night drive.



Spotted Hyaena in Amboseli.

In the event six of us turned out for the drive. We also had on board an official spotter armed with two fairly weak spotlights. I suspect he was expecting us all to sit in our seats and wait to be shown whatever he found and so it probably came as a surprise to find Ian and Seda armed with much more powerful Led Lenser X21s and the whole group of us standing on our seats eagerly looking for eye-shine.

And it didn't take long to find our first nocturnal mammal. Seda almost immediately found bright reddish eye-shine to our left which we quickly identified as **Senegal Galago**. Two more Galagos followed in the next fifty metres, all of them leaping with incredible agility between branches.

After about a hundred and fifty metres we came to the end of the Lodge's access road where the thick trees and lush vegetation gave way to open ground. This time it was Ian's turn to find eye-shine: a **Bat-eared Fox** at medium range. But before we had time to take that in something else appeared walking nonchalantly from left to right at around twenty metres. It was obviously a cat and my first thought was African Wildcat. This was soon amended to **Serval** as Ian re-directed his beam to the much closer object. We followed it for a while with the beam as it plodded off to our right. Several times it stopped to gaze back at us. We contemplated reversing back down the track to stay in contact but decided that would be too difficult and so reluctantly we let it slip away into the night. What a start! We hadn't even gone two hundred metres and already we had Galagos, a Fox and a Serval.

We headed out through the marshes where we found innumerable bats and nightjars. At the Hyaena den the **Spotted Hyaenas** came out in force to greet us, the cubs sniffing the

wheels of our vehicle in curiosity. All the diurnal mammals were present too of course and gradually we began to distinguish between ungulates and nocturnal creatures worth stopping for.

Before long we found a very bright orange eye-shine that bobbed up and down in a most peculiar manner. I knew straight away, having seen the animal before in Namibia, that it was a **Springhare** and as we got close enough to tell my diagnosis was confirmed. This bizarre creature bobs along like a wallaby and is unmistakeable. Several more Springhares followed, much to the delight of everyone in the vehicle, none of whom had seen one before.

Other Hyaenas, Springhares and diurnal animals came and went. We saw several Hippopotamuses grazing and encountered Elephants at very close quarters. The last truly nocturnal addition to our growing list of mammals was an **African Civet** which we picked up at some range on the far side of the marsh. The drive had been a complete success and well worth the \$80 per head.

Sunday November 6th

Our morning drive produced an encore of the Lions we had watched the previous afternoon though this time only one of the adult females and two cubs were visible, the others being hidden (we assumed) in the thick palms beyond. Later, we found more Spotted Hyaena and some distant Black-backed Jackals. But the main focus that morning was a trip to Observation Hill, a lookout where we could leave the vehicles and scan from a high vantage point all around.

The journey to the hill took us past endless herds of Zebra and other ungulates as well as flocks of White Pelicans and Lesser Flamingos. On the hill top we could see for miles all around and in the scope I found three Spotted Hyaenas going about their nefarious business near the airstrip.

A major disappointment of the morning drive was missing an Egyptian Mongoose which dashed into thick grass and down a hole before I could get on it. I particularly wanted to see this species having somehow avoided it on all my previous trips to Africa. The afternoon drive, however, did eventually put the record straight. Ian spotted an Egyptian Mongoose ahead – which once again shot into thick cover before any of us could react. I said something devoutly unchristian under my breath. But then, moments later, Seda spotted a second, this time behind us. This one didn't get away and we all had good views of it at quite close range. At last!

I had expected the grounds of Ol Tukai Lodge to produce one or two interesting mammals after dark but thus far only a few unidentifiable bats had presented themselves. So, after dinner, Ian, Seda, Nigel and I set off armed with torches to see what we could find. It didn't take us long to find two **African Civets** and, by taking a circuitous route and thus avoiding the attention of the security man, we soon found ourselves in the gardens at the front of the Lodge. This area was very close to where we'd seen the Galagos on the night drive and, sure enough, we quickly found a dozen or more **Senegal Galagos** leaping around in the

branches. Satisfied with our efforts we went back to our rooms to turn in for the night but no sooner had I entered our room than a series of shrieking alarm calls got me back outside again. I grabbed my torch and pointed it up into the nearest tree, from where the calling seemed to be emanating. Two bright red eyes gazed back down at me and quite a large, grey, thickly furred Galago revealed itself. From the size (about twice that of Senegal Galago) and the white-tipped bushy tail I knew straight away that it was a **Small-eared Greater Galago**, a great find! I went to bed feeling very pleased with myself.

Monday November 7th

We had time, on our last morning in Amboseli, for one last game drive. I thought we might have already sucked the juice out of it but soon after setting out the driver, Peter, announced that Cheetah had been seen a short while earlier. We quickly headed for the spot where the cats had reportedly been seen but found only two Spotted Hyaenas, hardly a good sign. Then, word came through that the Cheetahs were now close to the spot where we'd started our chase. So back we went and found a long line of vehicles parked up. I guessed we might be in luck and so it proved. At about a hundred metres range three male **Cheetah** were in view. One was already on the move, mounting a big log and pausing a moment to survey what lay ahead. The other two were resting on the ground. Within a few minutes all three were mobile, heading leftwards along the edge of thick stands of palms. I would have been satisfied with that glorious view of the three marvellous cats but what followed was simply incredible.

To our left there were about a hundred Wildebeeste and a few Thomson's Gazelle and Common Zebra. Up to this point the congregation had watched the Cheetahs respectfully but without undue interest or concern. Indeed one of the Gazelles was actually sitting down looking very relaxed. Then, as the Cheetahs drew closer, the whole gathering began walking purposefully towards them. They stopped about thirty or forty metres short and lined up, animals at the back jostling those in front for a better view. I had never seen anything like it. Prey animals do sometimes cautiously approach their predators to keep tabs on them – after all, it's not going to be the predator *you see* that kills you. But for a whole herd to march forwards competing for a ringside seat was simply extraordinary. It was as if none of them had ever seen a Cheetah before and couldn't hold back their curiosity. The three Cheetahs ignored the attention of the crowd and carried on in their set direction giving us unforgettable views all the while. Then, finally, they melted away into the undergrowth beyond leaving both their human and animal audiences with nothing more to gawp at. The herd slowly retreated, ambling off to the right in a long line, like football fans leaving the stadium after a match.

There was still time to find another Egyptian Mongoose, an obliging animal which gave us quite prolonged views before eventually disappearing irrevocably out of sight. But we had a long day ahead of us, our plan being to head through Tsavo West to the adjoining Tsavo East before finishing up, hopefully before dusk, at Voi Lodge. So we had to say goodbye to Amboseli and head for the public road where a two hour drive would get us to Chyulu Gate and the beginning of Tsavo West.

My first impression of Tsavo West was very positive. It had a very interesting feel with a variety of habitats. There was woodland, rocky hillsides, bits of more open dry savannah and even some extensive black lava fields. As we bounced and jolted our way along the rough track we encountered several Lesser Kudu and one Greater Kudu, along with a few Common Zebra. On a bend we ran into a very nice group of **Fringe-eared Oryx**, their extravagant ear tassles catching our eye. Our first real stop was Mzima Springs where a series of inter-connected spring-fed pools made an oasis in the otherwise dry savannah. It would have been interesting to have visited here either at dawn or dusk when all sorts of animals might have been around, but at midday when we arrived all was very quiet. There were some **Sykes' Monkeys** loitering around and four or five Hippos in the lower pool. But otherwise nothing much was stirring. Then it was on to Kilaguni Lodge where we stopped for lunch. There were **Ochre Bush Squirrels** around the gardens, a species that proved to be common in the days ahead in East Tsavo.

Our deadline for reaching Tsavo East gate was 18.00, after which we would not be able to reach our final destination, Voi Lodge, and we'd have nowhere to stay for the night. So, with time passing, we pressed on. There was still quite a long way to go. However, our progress was halted spectacularly not long after setting out from Kilaguni. One of our group wanted a photo of a good Baobab tree and, when we spotted one in the distance, Ian asked Peter to stop for a moment. As we drew level with the tree I was surprised to find Peter suddenly applying the brakes in what felt like an emergency stop. "Blimey", I thought, "no need for that; the tree's not going anywhere". Then Peter quietly announced "Wild Dog" and there, sitting down barely ten metres to our right were four or five **African Wild Dogs**.

None of us could believe our eyes. What a find! Careful scanning produced more dogs and eventually we counted at least twenty-five; there may have been more. We sat there watching them for perhaps ten or fifteen minutes before the pack finally melted away into the bush. Of course, for me this was the fourth Wild Dog encounter of the trip, but it was by far the most rewarding. No radio signals used to find these dogs!

We reached the entrance to Tsavo East in good time and trundled through the new park to Voi Lodge. There were a few Lesser Kudu and **Masai Giraffe** en-route as well as some **Peters' Gazelle**, a species split from Grant's Gazelle and distinguished by the completely dark dorsal surface to the tail, the nearly parallel horns and the prominent dark pygal stripes. In the other vehicle Seda spotted two Lions which evidently we had driven past without seeing.

We arrived at Voi Lodge in near darkness exhausted but delighted at a wonderful day's mammal watching.

Tuesday November 8th

At breakfast there were Bush Hyrax running around the Lodge and Waterbuck and Elephant at the water hole. We had been promised "red Elephants" in Tsavo and, sure enough, these animals were a startling reddish-ochre, a consequence of rolling in Tsavo's iron-rich red dust.

It didn't take us long to find Lion on the first morning's drive. Three females were being chased out of town by an Elephant which then stood triumphantly on the very spot where the cats had previously been lying, waving its trunk up and down and flapping its ears. Taking the loop around Kaweri Swamp (now a dustbowl) we found three more, albeit at some distance. A lone Black-backed Jackal trotted along in the foreground.

We found all the usual ungulates, Cape Buffalo, Hartebeeste, Waterbuck, Fringe-eared Oryx and so on, and a gang of **Banded Mongoose**. The birders were delighted with Golden-breasted Starling and Red and Yellow Barbet, both spectacularly coloured birds.

Back at the Lodge we explored the viewing hide next to the water hole. A long descending stairway takes you down through a tunnel to a hide right next to the water hole where you can watch the coming and goings at eye level. Personally I preferred the grandstand view from the restaurant above where you could see for miles in a sweeping 180 degree arc.

In the afternoon we set off in the opposite direction towards some hills and what soon became dubbed "cat alley". (More about that in a moment). En-route we passed through open grassy areas which looked promising for Cheetah and on which Gazelles, Zebra and Hartebeeste were dotted about. But it was the Warthogs that got my attention. For quite a while all the Warthogs in Tsavo had been assumed to be Common Warthog but research has shown them, in Tsavo East anyway, to be mainly (if not completely) **Desert Warthog**. In fact, I understand that the park might well have to remove Common Warthog from its official list of mammals unless some Commons can be found and verified! The Desert Warthog displays minor morphological differences to Common – the tips of the ears are folded back rather than erect, the snout is broader at its base and the jugal warts are hooked rather than conical. These characteristics are not always easy to determine in the field, (many animals are unwarmed for example), but I found enough animals with distinctly folded ear tips to convince myself that all the ones we were seeing were indeed the Desert species.

Beyond the open savannah are rugged hills strewn with boulders and pitted with cliffs. They looked good for Klipspringer but, despite scanning most of them, I couldn't find any. We did, however, find some more Lions: three of them stretched out on some rocks. Two of them were youngish females still carrying juvenile spots; the other was a young male with a straggly, half-formed mane.

This led us on to "cat alley", a track which ran along the edge of open savannah and which skirted a scrubby area of bush at the base of the hills. It looked perfect for small cats, offering both cover and a potential source of prey. We found any number of Guinea fowl and Yellow-necked Spur fowl along the roadside. And, as we'd hoped, we ran into a small cat. About a hundred and fifty metres ahead of us a cat, just about identifiable as a **Serval**, dashed across the road. It wasn't the sort of view we wanted but at least it confirmed that small cats were present. We would be back!

Wednesday November 9th

We had a very quiet morning drive which produced nothing we hadn't seen before. There were Hyraxes on some rocks, the identity of which we puzzled over since some appeared to

be Bush Hyrax and others Black-necked Rock Hyrax. In the end we presumed that both species were present. Otherwise we just saw the same ungulates that were more or less omni-present.

The afternoon drive continued in much the same vein. We drove for miles through open grassland and scrub finding virtually nothing. In fact the lack of animals was quite startling. Then, at last, as we headed back towards “cat alley” in the early evening we began finding a few stragglers: Common Zebra, Hartebeeste and Gazelles. My mind was wandering, particularly towards the night drive that we had planned for later that evening, when Peter suddenly stopped the vehicle and calmly announced “Leopard!”.

I wasn't quite sure where he was pointing but noticed that an acacia tree about seventy metres away had something unusual sitting on one of its horizontal branches. My suspicions were confirmed as soon as I'd focused the binoculars: a **Leopard** indeed! Apparently Peter had first spotted it on the ground but it had run off and climbed the tree on our approach. Now it had draped itself over the branch in a classical pose, its forelegs dangling each side. It was a young female, a beautifully marked animal with a fluffy white tip to her tail. For about five minutes she sat there giving us perfect views. Then, something caught her attention behind and she turned round to investigate. For a moment she sat up and stared into the bush. Then she was gone, slipping fluidly away down the back of the trunk and out of sight.

Time, however, was not on our side and with the night drive booked for 19.00 we had to get back to the Lodge quite quickly. There was just time for a celebratory Tusker beer before we were off again.

We had first to go to Voi gate to pick up an armed ranger, a pre-condition of getting permission for the drive, but at least that gave us an opportunity to spotlight the three kilometres from the Lodge to the gate. We found eye-shine quite quickly – two bright yellow eyes that looked cat-like. Several of us called “Wildcat” but, on closer examination, it was in fact a Common Genet. Another issue was the great number of Dik-diks whose eye-shine we kept finding close to the road. But gradually Ian, whose was spotting, got their measure. It helped of course that there were generally two Dik-diks together and so two pairs of white-yellow eyes close together could often be discounted quickly.

With the ranger on board we set off to do the Kaweri Swamp loop. I would have preferred Cat Alley but Voi gate was in the opposite direction from the Lodge and we only had two hours, so time was precious. Lots of diurnals were around and we soon found Lesser Kudu and a Lion sitting on a rock. As for proper nocturnals, we bagged White-tailed Mongoose, Black-backed Jackal and Bat-eared Fox. But with more than half of the drive gone we still hadn't found anything of real note.

Then, Ian picked up eye-shine at about fifty metres that looked suspicious. Once we'd stopped and got the beam on it we found a medium sized animal sitting on its haunches. It had big “Bugs Bunny” ears, something of a snout and legs that were distinctly darker than the greyish looking body. “Bat-eared Fox” was someone's first diagnosis but that didn't look right to me. I was stumped. In fact, I wasn't sure I'd seen anything quite like it before. We debated its identity for a while; (you've probably already got it?). Then it got up, turned its

back to us and trundled off showing a white tail. “White-tailed Mongoose” was the unanimous verdict – which stood until sometime later when the penny finally dropped. Of course Mongooses don’t have big ears and don’t usually sit on their haunches. But **Aardvaarks** do! And, obviously, that was what it was. We all felt quite foolish at not recognising immediately one of the principal targets we’d actually set out to see!

Our last mammal, which we found in a bush close to the Lodge, gave us piercing yellow eye-shine. Once again we all thought we had a small cat. But once again our “cat” turned out to be a Common Genet when it descended from its branch and showed us its black and white ringed tail.

Thursday November 10th

We had a fairly uneventful morning drive finding Banded and Dwarf Mongoose, Ochre Bush Squirrel and Desert Warthog in addition to the usual ungulates. The photographers euologised over the Red and Yellow Barbets and Golden-breasted Starlings we also found and spent what seemed an eternity to me trying to take the perfect picture of them. But the most significant event occurred on our return to the Lodge when I bumped into two Australians and got chatting about what we’d each seen. To my astonishment they’d had Hirola that morning. Naturally, I squeezed all the relevant details out of them. Apparently they’d seen two groups: one in “the usual spot” near a windmill just past Aruba on the Satao Road and another a bit further on. I relayed this information to Ian who, to my pleasant surprise, was enthusiastic about adding a diversion to Aruba to our itinerary. (I’d expected to be the only person in the group interested in going miles out of our way to try to see them. In fact I doubted (correctly) that anyone else in our group had ever heard of them). Plans were set in motion to do this jaunt on our last morning two days hence. It would take us in exactly the opposite direction to the one we needed to go on our return to Nairobi but – who cared? – Hirola was one of the rarest mammals on the planet and this might be our only chance!

The afternoon drive was also quiet though we did get an extremely brief glimpse of a Caracal along Cat Alley disappearing into thick scrub. I saw only the rear end and couldn’t have told you what species it was. But Ian and Peter were convinced that it was indeed a Caracal.

Friday November 11th

We took as early a breakfast as we could and set out for a long morning trip to the River Galana, an area of slightly different habitat – more wooded and less open where different species might be present. Ian also hinted that it might be a good area for cats.

Our route took us past the spot where a couple of days previously we’d seen Leopard. Lightening couldn’t strike twice, could it? Well, it did, but sadly only for those in the first vehicle. I was in the second and, as we drew up, I saw that Ian was holding his head in his hands. The same Leopard had apparently been sitting in a nearby tree until seconds before our arrival. We had got there just in time to be too late.

Consolation came later that morning. Once again we saw that the first vehicle had stopped and that everyone was gazing at something to the left. Ian signalled us to draw up behind them and pointed to the left. **Cheetah!** I found a very impressive looking female with a cub in tow but evidently there had been two more cubs. I was too reluctant to let the adult cat out of my sight to look for the other cubs and so I only saw two out of the four cats. Good enough for me though!

We eventually reached the Galana River by which time it was already very hot. The river itself was quite narrow, a muddy stream rushing and gurgling its way through smooth rocks in a series of pools and cataracts. We quickly found a Hippopotamus and, later at a second spot along the river, a number of good-sized Nile Crocodile and a single Nile Monitor. The birders/photographers were delighted to find a Carmine Bee-eater too. In the mud there were a few interesting footprints. A Leopard had gone down to the water, probably the previous evening, and some Hyaena had been around not so long ago too. I would have liked to have been at the river either at dawn or dusk but with night driving prohibited (except on expensive two hour night drives) that wouldn't have been an option. With temperatures approaching 30 degrees I was relieved to get back into the vehicle and find some shade.

The afternoon was generally quiet though we did find a few Lions. Three were sitting out in the open grass not far from the Lodge and, later, we found two more in thick scrub.

Saturday November 12th

We set off at dawn and, with time at a premium, headed quickly towards Aruba. We stopped a couple of times for Gerenuk doing their party piece (standing on their hind legs to browse) and for a lone Spotted Hyaena (quite a rare species in Tsavo East). But otherwise it was an express journey to the Australians' Hirola site.

A couple of kilometres beyond Aruba, on the Satao Road, we found the windmill (which powered a nearby bore hole and around which were various Hartebeeste and Peters' Gazelle). We were on the point of driving on but decided to have a quick scan first. I found only Hartebeeste in my binoculars but Ian, who was scanning further to my left, calmly declared "I've got one". And indeed he had! The animal in question was on the perimeter of the Hartebeeste herd and immediately looked more compact and lower in the shoulders. More critically, the horns were a peculiar "lyrate" shape and the tail was completely white. We'd got our **Hirola!** Seconds later we found a second to the rear of the Hartebeeste herd.

We tried the Satao Road for a further couple of kilometres to look for the other group the Australians had seen but without success. They'd probably wandered off out into the open savannah and were now too far from the road to be seen. It occurred to me that, in this part of the park where there were relatively few roads, you'd have to be quite lucky to catch the Hirola close enough to the road to see them. Our best information was that the Hirola population, (introduced to Tsavo in 1960 and 1996) stood at around 80 animals. With other populations in Eastern Kenya and Somalia under enormous pressure (the latter possibly being extinct altogether) it seemed likely that the total numbers surviving in the wild might be under 300 and perhaps considerably fewer. So we might have been looking at around 1%

of the total wild population that morning. (There is also a captive herd of about 100 at Ishaqbini it is worth mentioning).

It was as well that we'd found the Hirola quickly because by now we really did have to get a move on. We sped back to Voi Lodge past a big herd of Cape Buffalo, some really impressive bull Elephants with massive tusks and several gangs of Banded and Dwarf Mongoose. Mission accomplished!

We'd finished on a real high but now a long drive lay ahead of us. After breakfasting at the Lodge and settling our bar bills we were on our way. We took about an hour to clear Tsavo East and then it was a long seven hour slog back to Nairobi, most of which was spent stuck behind slow moving lorries. Consequently, we arrived in Nairobi too late for dinner. The British Airways flight was then held up for two hours on the tarmac while a software fault with the navigation system was corrected. Such are the joys of long haul travel!

6 List of Mammals Recorded

Species	Latin Name	Notes
Aardvaark	<i>Orycteropus afer</i>	One in Tsavo East.
Small-eared Greater Galago	<i>Galago garnetti</i>	One in lodge at Ol Tukai.
Senegal Galago	<i>Galago senegalensis</i>	Common around Ol Tukai Lodge.
Sykes' Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus mitis</i>	Common at Mzima Falls, Tsavo West.
Vervet Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus aethiops</i>	Common around human habitation.
Yellow Baboon	<i>Papio cynocephalus</i>	Common throughout.
Olive Baboon	<i>Papio anubis</i>	Common Laikipia.
African Wild Dog	<i>Lycaon pictus</i>	Four sightings of three packs.
Black-backed Jackal	<i>Canis mesomelas</i>	Several sighting sat Amboseli & Tsavo East.
Bat-eared Fox	<i>Otocyon megalotis</i>	Laikipia and Amboseli.
Zorilla	<i>Ictonyx striatus</i>	One at Laikipia
African Civet	<i>Civettictis civetta</i>	Three sightings at Amboseli.
Common Genet	<i>Genetta genetta</i>	Seen at Laikipia, Amboseli and Tsavo East.
Dwarf Mongoose	<i>Helogale parvula</i>	Common in Laikipia and Tsavo East.
Slender Mongoose	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>	Common in Laikipia.
Egyptian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>	Two sightings in Amboseli.
White-tailed Mongoose	<i>Ichneumia albicauda</i>	Amboseli and Tsavo East.
Banded Mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>	Common in Tsavo East.
Spotted Hyaena	<i>Crocutta crocutta</i>	Common in Amboseli.
Striped Hyaena	<i>Hyaena hyaena</i>	One at Laikipia.
Cheetah	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>	Amboseli and Tsavo East.
Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	One sighting in Tsavo East.
Lion	<i>Panthera Leo</i>	Laikipia, Amboseli and Tsavo East.
Serval	<i>Felis serval</i>	Amboseli and Tsavo East.
Caracal	<i>Felis caracal</i>	Very brief sighting in Tsavo East.
Bush Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>	Laikipia, Amboseli and Tsavo East.
Common Zebra	<i>Equus quagga</i>	Common throughout.
Grevy's Zebra	<i>Equus grevyi</i>	Common in Laikipia.
Black Rhinoceros	<i>Diceros bicornis</i>	Distant sighting in Nairobi NP.
Yellow-spotted Bush Hyrax	<i>Heterohyrax brucei</i>	Abundant in Tsavo East.
Black-necked Rock Hyrax	<i>Procavia johnstoni</i>	Common in Laikipia.
Desert Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus aethiopicus</i>	Common in Tsavo East.
Common Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>	Common in Amboseli.
Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	Common throughout.
Reticulated Giraffe (1)	<i>Cameleopardis reticulata</i>	Common in Laikipia.
Masai Giraffe	<i>Cameleopardis tippelskirki</i>	Common in Tsavo East.
Coke's Hartebeeste	<i>Alcephalus busephalus cokei</i>	Common throughout (except Laikipia).
Hirola	<i>Beatragus hunteri</i>	Two individuals in Tsavo East near Aruba.
Blue Widebeeste	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>	Common in Amboseli.
Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>	Abundant throughout.
Grant's Gazelle (2)	<i>Gazella granti</i>	Common throughout.
Peters' Gazelle	<i>Gazella petersi</i>	Common in Tsavo East.
Thomson's Gazelle	<i>Gazella thomsonii</i>	Abundant in Nairobi NP and Amoseli.
Gerenuk	<i>Litocranius walleri</i>	Common in Tsavo East.
Cape Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	Common throughout.
Common Eland	<i>Taurotragus oryx</i>	Fairly common in Tsavo East.

Greater Kudu	Tragelaphus strepsiceros	Several in Laikipia.
Lesser Kudu	Tragelaphus imberbis	Fairly common in Tsavo East.
Bush Duiker	Sylvicapra grimmia	One in Amboseli.
Beisa Oryx	Oryx beisa	One in Laikipia.
Fringe-eared Oryx (3)	Oryx callotis	Fairly common in Tsavo East.
Cavendish's Dik-dik (4)	Madoqua cavendishi	Abundant in Tsavo East.
Guenther's Dik-dik	Madoqua guentheri	Abundant in Laikipia.
Oribi	Ourebia ourebi	One in Nairobi NP.
Defassa Waterbuck	Kobus defassa	Common in Laikipia.
Common Waterbuck	Kobus ellipsiprymnus	Common in Tsavo East.
Bohor Reedbuck	Redunca redunca	Common in Amboseli.
Ochre Bush Squirrel	Paraxerus ochraceus	Common in Tsavo West and East.
Unstriped Ground Squirrel	Xerus rutilus	Common in Laikipia.
Striped Ground Squirrel	Euxerus erythropus	Fairly common in Laikipia.
Black-tailed Scrub Hare	Lepus saxatilis	Fairly common throughout.
Springhare	Pedetes capensis	Several in Amboseli.
Yellow-winged Bat	Lavia frons	Abundant in Laikipia.
Rufous Sengi (5)	Elephantulus rufescens	One in Laikipia.
Total Species Recorded	64	

Taxonomic Notes

Taxonomy is based mainly on the 2011 listing by Peter Grubb and Colin Groves. As ever, it is unlikely that everyone will agree with these taxons but at least it provides a consistent basis for the list.

- (1) The Giraffes listed here are two of eight species recognised by Groves and Grubb.
- (2) Grant's Gazelle may be further split into Northern Grant's (*Gazella granti notata*) and Sothern Grant's (*Gazella granti granti*). We saw both of these - the former in Laikipia and the latter in Nairobi NP. To further complicate matters, the Southern apparently has two sub-races - *rooseveltdi* and *serengetae* and the Northern also two sub-races - *laccum* and *rainey*. However, for consistency I have treated all of these as races of Grant's Gazelle rather than full species in their own right. What a fantastic mess!
- (3) Treated by some authorities as a race of Beisa Oryx. But the extravagant tassles on the ears and generally darker and more beige coat give these animals a very distinctive appearance.
- (4) Formerly included under Kirk's Dik-dik (*Madoqua kirkii*) but apparently now split on the basis of a different chromosome count. I am told that Kirk's and Cavendish's cannot be split in the field by observation alone.
- (5) As far as I can tell the only *Elephantulus* species present in Laikipia is *rufescens*. The North African Sengi is found only north of the Sahara and the other eight *Elephantulus* species are all in Southern Africa.

7 Birds Recorded

I didn't keep a comprehensive list of birds. We saw most or all of the usual East African species including popular "tourist birds" such as Lilac-breasted Roller and Superb Starling. We had a lot of waders and wildfowl including Little Stint, Wood Sandpiper and so on. The most striking birds were Red and Yellow Barbet, Golden-breasted Starling and Rosy-patched Shrike. Raptors were a bit scarcer than I would have expected though we did see Pallid Harrier, Imperial Eagle and Gabar Goshawk. As expected, Tawny Eagle and Pale Chanting Goshawk were common. From what I gather the group's bird list was around 260 which seems impressive enough to a part-time birder like me!