

My wife and I visited Tanzania and its famous Northern parks of Serengeti, Ngorongoro and Tarangire in August 2015. We loved the country and we wanted to go back to Tanzania to visit the Southern parks that I read were much less crowded with tourists and remained more pristine. We went this time during the wet season in December 2017 and did a tour to visit the following parks: Selous – Mikumi – Ruaha and Udzungwa by car from Dar Es Salaam.

We travelled with our parents so it was more a family trip to enjoy together both Christmas and New Year's Day in such gorgeous places rather than a "hardcore" wildlife watching trip. The itinerary and logistics were all organized by Leopard Tours Ltd, taking into account my expectations and targets in terms of species to see. I would recommend them for their professionalism and fairly good pricing. We actually knew them from our first trip in 2015 and we were happy about their service so that is why we kept on using them for this second tip. The 4x4 car we had was in very good shape and our guide, Omary, was good and very knowledgeable of all the parks we visited although maybe not the best animal spotter I've ever seen in my life. However, he did well globally speaking and for example found us in Ruaha a group of wild dogs with very little info from the other guides who saw the dogs on the previous days.

The parks of Southern Tanzania are indeed much less visited than their Northern counterparts. As a very positive consequence, we often saw very few other cars during our full day game drives. Combining such a low crowd with the fact that both Ruaha and Selous are very large, beautiful and unspoiled parks was a great thing and made us feel we were enjoying wild Africa for us only. On the negative side though, when we say less cars, it also means less guides to communicate with on where the animals are. In addition, the wet season led to very nice green but thick vegetation that was not helping. As a conclusion, I found it was much more difficult to see wildlife in Selous or Ruaha (not so much in Mikumi) compared to the North of Tanzania. Udzungwa is a different situation since we use walking trails to look for animals in the mountains. Don't get me wrong, the animals and diversity are there in the parks but not in numbers. As the animals are widespread, we did not see for example a single flock of zebras, buffalos or elephants. The only noticeable exception were giraffes: I've never seen so many of them in my life and we saw literally hundreds of them in Selous !

I also found the animals to be very shy in Selous. I sometimes had to use a 500mm lens to take pictures of elephants there !! The fact that the area open for tourists is adjacent to the immense Game Reserve is probably explaining such a behavior although our guide told us hunting in the Selous Game Reserve is no more allowed. I don't know if this information is true...

Anyway, we were able to observe during this trip 40 different types of mammals, which is not bad knowing that we didn't do any night drive nor night spotting. If mammal watching was a bit challenging in those Southern Tanzanian parks, they are on the other hands clear heavens for birders during the wet season. Birds were everywhere !

We stayed in the following camps during our trip:

- Sable Mountain Lodge and Selous River Camp for Selous. The latter is a nice little rustic camp next to the Rufiji river. There are a lot of small animals in the forest adjacent to the camp: we saw there elephant shrews, Angola black-and-white colobus and red squirrels for example, even a galago at night;
- Mikumi Safari Lodge for Mikumi;
- Tandala Camp for Ruaha. A very nice mid-range camp owned by a Greek-Tanzanian couple;
- Hondo Hondo Camp for Udzungwa. This camp has been described before in several trip reports posted on Jon's Mammal Watching website and this is indeed a very nice location to visit the area. In addition, the ground next to the restaurant is full of animals: we saw there baboons, both slender and banded mongooses and even a Harvey's red duiker and Iringa Red colobus;

All these camps were comfortable with nice staffs, proposing good food and were affordable. On the other hand, all had the disadvantage to be outside of the national parks more or less far away from the park gates. We thus lost time every day since the Tanzanian park rangers are not the most efficient guys (to say the least ☺) to complete all the paper work and payment fees. This also prevented us to be very early or stay late inside the parks were the density of animals was the most interesting. I knew this when I booked the trip so I don't complain too much since this was a family trip with more focus on comfort than on serious mammal watching as I was mentioning before. Anyway, we saw most of the animals we had targeted and even observed some unexpected ones. The only noticeable mammal we missed was the Lichtenstein's hartebeest and this was a surprise to me as I would have never thought it would be this one...

Below is the list of mammals observed during this trip (lifers in red) – thanks to Charles Foley for sending me the list of mammals to see in each park:

<b>Mammals with photos or well seen</b>				
<b>Species</b>	<b>Espèces</b>	<b>Latin Name</b>	<b>Where seen</b>	<b>Pic</b>
Udzungwa Red colobus	Colobe bai d'Iringa	Ptilocolobus gordonorum	A few seen in Udzungwa	X
Angola black & white colobus	Colobe d'Angola	Colobus angolensis	Several seen in Selous and Udzungwa	X
Yellow baboon	Cynocéphale	Papio cynocephalus	Common everywhere	X
Sanje Mangabey	Mangabey Sanje	Cercocebus sanjei	A (habituated) group seen in Udzungwa	X
Vervet monkey	Vervet bleu	Cercopithecus pygerythrus	A few seen in Ruaha	X
Mitis monkey	Cercopitheque à diadème	Cercopithecus mitis	Several seen in Selous and Udzungwa	X

Small-eared greater galago	Galago de Garnett	Otolemur garnettii	1 seen at night in camp in Selous	
African savanna hare	Lièvre à oreilles de lapin	Lepus microtis	1 seen running escaping from a hawk in Mikumi	
Striped Bush Squirrel	Ecureuil de brousse rayé	Paraxerus flavovittis	Several seen in Selous	X
Red bush squirrel	Ecureuil à ventre rouge	Paraxerus palliatus	3 or 4 seen in the forest around camp in Selous	X
Side-striped jackal	Chacal à flancs rayés	Canis adustus	2 individuals in Selous	X
Black-backed jackal	Chacal à chabraque	Canis mesomelas	A few seen in Mikumi and Ruaha	X
African wild dog	Lycaon	Lycaon pictus	A pack of 8 observed in Ruaha	X
Banded mongoose	Mangouste rayée	Mungos mungo	Groups seen in Ruaha and Udzungwa	X
Dwarf mongoose	Mangouste naine	Helogale parvula	2 seen running in Ruaha	
Egyptian mongoose	Mangouste ichneumon	Herpestes ichneumon	1 observed in Ruaha	X
Slender mongoose	Mangouste rouge	Galerella sanguinea	Several seen in Selous, Ruaha and Udzungwa	X
Spotted hyaena	Hyène tachetée	Crocuta crocuta	A few seen in each park	X
Leopard	Léopard	Panthera pardus	2 individuals in Ruaha. One eating its pray in a tree	X
Cheetah	Guépard	Acinonyx jubatus	2 individuals in Ruaha	X
Lion	Lion	Panthera leo	Several seen in each park. Mating couple in Ruaha	X
Peter's Elephant Shrew	Musaraigne-éléphant de Peters	Rhynchocyon petersi	3 seen in the forest around camp in Selous	X
Bush hyrax	Daman des steppes	Heterohyrax brucei	Several observed in Ruaha	X
Savanna elephant	Eléphant d'Afrique	Loxodonta Africana	Several seen in each park	X
Plains zebra	Zèbre de Grant	Equus quagga boehmi	Several seen in each park	X
Common hippopotamus	Hippopotame	Hippopotamus amphibius	Common in Selous, Mikumi and Ruaha	X
Common warthog	Phacochère commun	Phacochoerus africanus	Several seen in Selous, Mikumi and Ruaha	X
Giraffe	Girafe massai	Giraffa camelopardalis tippelskirchi	Common in Selous, Mikumi and Ruaha	X
Cape buffalo	Buffle d'Afrique	Syncerus caffer	A few seen in Selous and Mikumi	X
Bushbuck	Guib harnaché	Tragelaphus scriptus	A few seen in Mikumi and Selous	X
Greater kudu	Grand koudou	Tragelaphus strepsiceros	Groups seen in Selous and Ruaha	X
Common eland	Eland du Cap	Taurotragus oryx	Groups seen in Selous and Mikumi	X
Bush duiker	Céphalophe couronné	Sylvicapra grimmia	1 quickly seen in Mikumi	
Harvey's Red Duiker	Céphalophe de Harvey	Cephalophus harveyi	1 observed in Udzungwa	X
Kirk's dik-dik	Dik-dik de Kirk	Madoqua kirkii	Only a few seen in Ruaha	X
Bohor reedbuck	Rédunca Nagor	Redunca redunca	A few seen in Mikumi and Ruaha	X
Waterbuck	Cobe à croissant	Kobus ellipsiprymnus	A few seen in Selous and Ruaha	X
Impala	Impala	Aepyceros melampus	Common in Selous, Mikumi and Ruaha	X
Common wildebeest	Gnou bleu	Connochaetes taurinus	Several seen in every parks	X
<b>Total Species Recorded = 39</b>				

I'm adding to this report some pictures of the most iconic species we observed during that trip or those new to me:



Udzungwa Red colobus



Angola black & white colobus



Sanje Mangabey



Striped Bush Squirrel



Red bush squirrel



Side-striped jackal



African wild dog



Egyptian mongoose



Slender mongoose



Spotted hyaena



Leopard



Cheetah



Lion



Peter's Elephant Shrew



Bush hyrax



Savanna elephant



Greater kudu



Common eland



Harvey's Red Duiker



Bohor reedbuck