

## LAIKIPIA (KENYA)

01-09 OCTOBER 2016

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Last July I had to cancel my holidays, so I planned again a mammalwatching trip for this October. The main target was the African Wild Dog, and surfing a little on internet I found a very reliable place not too much far from Europe: Laikipia plateau in central Kenya.

Laikipia is really a wonderful place: huge and totally unfenced, with wildlife not restrained but free to wander everywhere. There are very few tourists and a lovely tented camp, Laikipia Wilderness Camp, where I spent a full week. <http://www.laikipia-wilderness.com>. A different and much more rewarding experience than the “open zoos” of South Africa and other East African National Parks.

The owners of the Camp are Steve and Annabelle Carey, and the staff is local. They are extremely efficient, and organize daily excursions in search of Wild Dogs and other wildlife, long or short hikes in the bush, and other activities. In Laikipia Wilderness Camp I slept every night with the sounds of Elephants wandering into the camp, Lions roaring and Hyena calls. A truly “Wilderness experience”.

In Laikipia, just one place, I saw 34 mammal species. The most special were the **Wild Dogs**. I observed them 6 times, 4 of which on very close and long encounters. Hunting, trying to prey a Beisa Oryx (with the Oryx lowering the head and pointing the horns towards the dogs), interacting, socializing, wading a small river, drinking, playing, killing a Dikdik and a Hare, bringing the regurgitated meat to the alfa female. And an unforgettable encounter: I was seated along a track and the Wild Dogs came for sniffing my new walking shoes!



To hike in the bush is a wonderful experience. Maybe less wildlife encounters, but many things to know and learn. For example the scratching of a Leopard on an acacia trunk with the remains of an Impala left in the canopy, or the bird calls. Steve knows everything of the bush!

The arid biome holds some special mammals, like **Grevy's Zebra** and **Reticulated Giraffe**. Elephants are abundant, a **Lion** pride including at least 2 full-maned manes was seen three times, and during the short night drives I saw many **White-tailed Mongooses**, **Common Genets** and a **Zorilla**.

Scanning a cliff with a Black Eagle nest, we found two **Leopards** on a rock. They came down and climbed a big tree.

The checklist:

1. OLIVE BABOON – common in rocky areas
2. VERVET MONKEY – a few in the most humid valleys
3. SENEGAL GALAGO – one spotted in a night drive
4. YELLOW-WINGED BAT – a few during night
5. SCRUB HARE – very common during night drives
6. UNSTRIPED GROUND SQUIRREL – common in the dry areas
7. BLACK-BACKED JACKAL – a few pairs, including a den with puppies
8. AFRICAN WILD DOG – magical encounters with this fabulous and never boring mammal!



9. ZORILLA – one on a night drive was an unexpected bonus
10. DWARF MONGOOSE – common in dry areas
11. SLENDER MONGOOSE – brief views of one or two in the day
12. WHITE-TAILED MONGOOSE – seen on almost every night drive
13. SPOTTED HYENA – one in daylight, four on night drives, heard from the Camp
14. COMMON GENET – a few during night drives, a couple came regularly near the Camp
15. LEOPARD – two crossed the road in different days, other two seen together in a rocky area
16. LION – a pride of 12 females and youngsters plus 2 adult males. Always impressive to see in the wild, and to hear at night from your bed!



17. ROCK HYRAX – abundant in the rocky areas
18. AFRICAN (BUSH) ELEFANT – everywhere! Big herds drinking and interacting along the river or the ponds, and some came even into the Camp!
19. COMMON ZEBRA – less numerous than the Grevy's, but present in good numbers

20. GREVY'S ZEBRA – common and easy to see



(WHITE RHINOCEROS *ssp. cottoni*) – the last 3 living individuals are kept in a boma in Ol Pejeta Conservancy. You can visit them and learn the sad story of this subspecies extinct in the wild

21. HIPPOPOTAMUS – a few in the river

22. COMMON WARTHOG – quite common but not abundant

23. RETICULATED GIRAFFE – easy to see. Nice to find a herd of 20 individuals!

24. AFRICAN BUFFALO – 4 adult males in various day

25. GREATER KUDU – a group of 7-8 just beneath the camp

26. ELAND – not common but present in good numbers

27. STEINBUCK – one on a night drive

28. KLIPSPRINGER – a few in the rocky areas

29. KIRK'S DIKDIK – abundant

30. WATERBUCK – 2 males near the river

31. THOMSON'S GAZELLE – present at Ol Pejeta and very few in Laikipia

32. GRANT'S GAZELLE – singles at Ol Pejeta and Laikipia

33. IMPALA – everywhere

34. BEISA ORYX – small herds and singles in the dry areas.

I didn't care about small rodents, but a few were seen during night drives.

Honorary mammals: MARTIAL EAGLE, BLACK EAGLE, VERREAUX'S EAGLE OWL, VULTURINE GUINEAFOWL, LEOPARD TORTOISE AND NILE MONITOR.



Vulturine Guinea fowls

I missed just the Aardwolf. Aardvark is present, but comes outside the holes only late at night. Caracal is present too, but requires a good degree of luck.

In the not too far Ol Pejeta Conservancy, with time, is possible to spend a morning drive in search of the Black Rhinos. Gerenuk is present in Laikipia in other months of the year, but it is possible to visit nearby sites where they are common.

Combining Laikipia with one or two other places in Kenya is not difficult to reach more than 50 species.

Sorry for my bad English, and good mammalwatching!

Best wishes

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