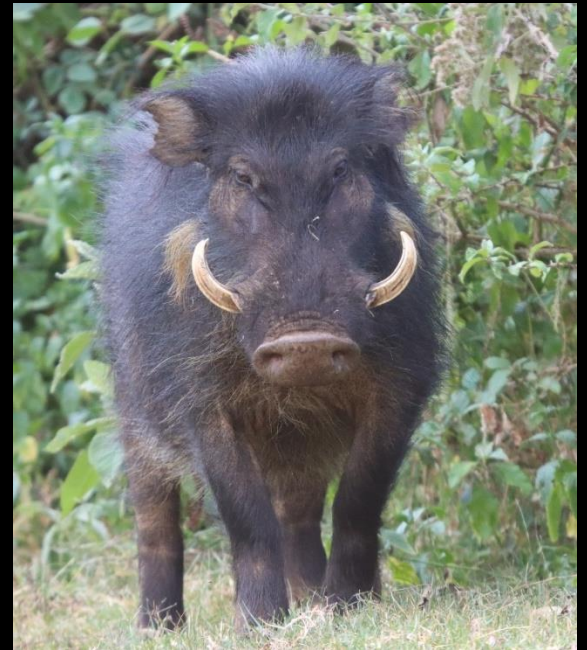




Mammals of Kenya

Ben Chapple

January – October 2022



Clockwise from top left: Maned Rat, African Wild Dog, Giant Forest Hog, Cheetahs/Hartebeest



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Reticulated Giraffes, Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Introduction

I started my PhD in late 2020, and originally intended to spend several months of 2021 in Kenya on fieldwork. This plan was soon scuppered by COVID-19, however, and everything was pushed back. Although this was initially disappointing, it did mean that all my fieldwork plans were consolidated into a single trip, allowing me to spend most of 2022 in Kenya. When several exciting trip reports from 2021 (especially from Alex Meyer, Jon Hall and Venkat Sankar) started to come through on mammalwatching.com, I realised that I would have the opportunity to look for a pretty spectacular variety of mammals.

The Mpala Research Centre, in Laikipia County, was my base for the majority of my time in Kenya. Not only was Mpala itself a fantastic place for wildlife, but it was also within a few hours' drive of many of the country's top mammal-watching destinations, including Aberdare and Meru National Parks, Samburu National Reserve, and Ol Pejeta Conservancy. I was mostly restricted to places within a weekend's reach of Mpala for my main fieldwork period (February-September), but I managed to explore further afield on a number of occasions, especially at the beginning and end of my trip.



Gunther's Dik-dik, Mpala Research Centre

For my fieldwork, I purchased a versatile 4x4 vehicle (a Toyota Hilux Surf). This was a huge asset for mammal-watching purposes too, as it gave me the freedom to travel around Mpala and beyond whenever time allowed. The car, which I named 'Sue' after the Maasai word for African Wild Dog ('suyian'), performed superbly almost everywhere I took it (although many remote roads were so terrible that frequent repairs were necessary). I self-drove all around Kenya, with the exception of my trip to Ishaqbini and the Tana Primate Reserve; not trusting myself to deal with any security issues, I arranged to visit these remote destinations with Zarek Cockar (incidentally probably the best guide I've ever had). Kenyan parks are not set up with self-drivers specially in mind, as they are in South Africa, but they are still mostly well-suited to this purpose.

Roads were often excellent, and I never had any problems with navigation; Google Maps worked well, so long as I confirmed the location of my destination in advance (some campsites are misleadingly placed), and I generally found that journeys took significantly less time than the app estimated (read into my driving style what you will). As an aside, if you are getting a local SIM card for your phone, make sure it's Safaricom – data was infinitely more reliable than Telkom, and it allows you to use the payment system M-PESA (accepted for entry fees at many reserves).

Despite an occasionally aggressive approach to overtaking (and the astonishingly brutal assessment delivered in a recent mammalwatching.com report), my experience was that Kenyan drivers were perfectly fine on the whole. Certainly, no-one should be put off a self-drive trip due to fear of the roads (although Nairobi can be a bit crazy). The people themselves were great – friendly, polite and often helpful throughout the country. Not once did I feel unsafe, which is not something I can say about many places I've visited in Africa (or indeed elsewhere).

With a few exceptions, I either stayed in campsites or in budget accommodation. As long as you're prepared to self-cater, excellent examples of both are easy to find, and generally provide access to wildlife equally as good as much more luxurious options. I tried to hire local guides as much as possible, both for their knowledge of wildlife and because of the importance of connecting wildlife conservation to livelihoods (especially in the wake of the pandemic).



**Simon's Campsite,
Soysambu Conservancy**

For those who are interested, my PhD research focuses on the impacts of climate change and tourism on conservation and livelihoods. I'm using the African Wild Dog, and the social-ecological system around them, as a model for understanding whether tourism can sustainably support conservation and development, in light of its contribution to climate change. It's a problem close to my own heart, as I'm sure it is for many mammal-watchers – if I'm to continue travelling around the world to experience nature, I want to know that I'm contributing to the conservation, and not the extinction, of the species I encounter.

Acknowledgements

I was originally going to put this section at the end of the report, but I had to give it more prominence. So many people made extraordinary contributions to the success of my time in Kenya; without them I would have seen infinitely fewer mammals, and had far less fun.

My biggest thanks go to the fantastic Zarek Cockar. Zarek is undoubtedly one of the best guides I've ever encountered – his knowledge, passion and dedication are unmatched, and the week I spent with him in October was the clear highlight of my entire trip. Zarek is such good company, with such an engaging love for Kenya's natural history, that it would probably have been so even if we hadn't seen any wildlife. Furthermore, Zarek kindly provided general mammal-watching advice and contact details for guides all around the country, which were invaluable when I was planning my own excursions. I would urge anyone considering a visit to Kenya to travel with Zarek.

I am deeply indebted to Venkat Sankar for his incredible 2021 report – it is the Holy Book of Kenyan mammal-watching and was the inspiration for so many of my expeditions. At first, I scarcely thought it possible that I would see more mammals in nine months than he and Zarek did in three weeks. Several other reports on the mammal-watching website were invaluable, especially those by Jon Hall and Alex Meyer. Venkat also generously helped me identify rodents, as did Leo Malingati, who allowed me to go out regularly with his small mammal trapping team at Mpala. I am grateful to Paul Webala for his help with bats and their identification.

Special thanks go to all the guides (and other helpful people) I met around Kenya, whose local expertise enriched my experience immeasurably. In particular, I want to mention the following for their contributions to my mammal-watching exploits: the late great David Ngala and Willy Nganda (Arabuko-Sokoke), Simon Kajengo (Watamu), Benson Lombo (Taita Hills), Joseph Ole Kodonyo (Lake Elementaita), Ken Kelempu (Nguruman), Samwel Ole Naikada (Nyakweri), Kiano Sempui and Jackson Shonko (Mount Suswa), and Blasto Okomo and Mike Wilson (Rusinga). I apologise to anyone I've missed from this list.

Finally, thank you to all the friends and family members who accompanied me at various times. Everyone made the experience much more enjoyable, and helped to subsidise (often inadvertently) my numerous quests for obscure mammals. Thanks to my mother for treating me to a wonderful week in the Maasai Mara, and to my father for eating all the cake at Mpala. William Searle has my eternal gratitude for spotting the black Leopard. Of the many researchers I met, several deserve special mention for their willingness to get caught up in my weird obsession: in particular, Pat Milligan and Charlotte Christensen, Gabby Mizell, everyone from the University of Manchester, and Koen Betjes (who also tipped me off about Spotted-necked Otter on Lake Victoria). Last but far from least, Tullio de Boer and Charlie Mamlin (the 'Rat Pack') shared one of my favourite trip moments at Trout Tree, and also endured a less successful late-night Bongo vigil at the Rhino Retreat; I hope we'll have many more opportunities for mammal-watching together in the future.

Overview

On all accounts, my time in Kenya was a huge success. In total, I recorded 155 species of mammal, nearly twice as many as I've seen in any other single country (although it did take me six months to reach the figure Venkat Sankar and Zarek Cockar managed in three weeks – you can draw your own conclusions about our relative skill levels!). If all members of three largely “difficult” groups – bats, shrews and rodents – are removed from the checklist in Musila et al. (2019), Kenya's mammal list stands at 144 species. Of these, I saw 98, or just under 70%. Most species I missed are rare or present in inaccessible areas, with only a small number of surprising omissions.

There were almost too many highlights to describe here, but some of my favourite species encountered were 'Taita' Tree Hyrax, Aardvark, Golden-rumped Sengi, Crested Porcupine, Naked Mole Rat, Maned Rat, Tana River Mangabey and Red Colobus, African Trident and Harrison's Giant Mastiff Bats, Caracal, African Wild Dog, Striped Hyaena, Aardwolf, Bushy-tailed and Somali Dwarf Mongoose, Honey Badger, Zorilla, African Clawless and Spotted-necked Otters, Grevy's Zebra, Giant Forest Hog, Weyns's Duiker, Sable Antelope and Hirola. Overall, I saw 9 species of Afrotherian, 2 lagomorphs, 25 rodents, 14 primates, 1 hedgehog, 32 bats, 25 carnivorans, 4 odd-toed and 43 even-toed ungulates (including a dolphin).

I arrived in Kenya very much a beginner when it came to bats and small rodents, and I would still place myself firmly in that category. It was extremely dry in most places I visited, and rodents were consequently scarce; seeing a single one on an Mpala night drive, for example, was a rare occurrence. This limited both the number of species I managed to record, and my ability to familiarise myself with identification. I have only included species in this report where I am reasonably confident of the ID.



**Maghreb Roundleaf Bats,
Jaika Cave**

I have tried to do the same for bats. When visiting caves, I sometimes identified species based on previous expert reports from that location. While in Kenya I acquired a bat detector (Echo Meter Touch 2 Pro), and some IDs were partially reliant on analysis of sonograms. Paul Webala from Maasai Mara University was kind enough to offer his invaluable expert advice on several occasions. I have tried to make it clear when I'm suggesting an ID on the balance of probabilities, and have mostly tried to avoid double-counting within the same genus. Nevertheless, errors are certainly possible – please do point them out if you notice any.

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Detailed Report

As any kind of chronological report would be unreadable for such a long trip, I have structured the following by location, many of which I visited on at least several occasions.

Mpala

I was based for the duration of my PhD fieldwork at the Mpala Research Centre (MRC) in Laikipia County (www.mpala.org). The institutional mission of the centre, which was founded in 1994, is “to support research that improves ecosystem functions, conserves biodiversity, and enhances the livelihoods of employees and their families who are predominantly traditional pastoralists.” The MRC is situated on the Mpala Ranch, a 48,000-acre ‘living laboratory’ where landscape-level ecological and conservation work can be conducted. More importantly for the purposes of this report, however, Mpala is located on the Laikipia Plateau, at the heart of the Ewaso ecosystem; despite an almost complete lack of formal protection, the profusion of wildlife here is rivalled in Kenya only by the Maasai Mara. In total, I saw over 60 species of mammal at Mpala alone. For convenience, I’ve separated this part of the report into sections, covering species seen within the research centre itself, and species seen on the wider Mpala Ranch (including mammals seen through trapping, and on night drives).

Mpala Research Centre

The MRC itself is set amongst natural vegetation, and many species were easy to see around the camp. The perimeter fence seemed effective at keeping out elephants and buffalo, but most other species wandered through freely. On one of my first mornings, I came face to face with a **Spotted Hyaena**, and both Lion and Leopard were seen inside camp during my time (although not by me). Smaller carnivores around the centre were **Common** and **Large-spotted Genet**, and **White-tailed**, **Slender** and **Common Dwarf Mongoose**, and I also caught **Striped Hyaena** and (to my surprise) **Zorilla** on a camera trap right outside my hut.



Bush & Rock Hyraxes, Mpala Research Centre

Ungulates seen within the fence included tame **Gunther's Dik-dik**, **Cape Bushbuck**, **Greater Kudu**, **Impala** and **Waterbuck**. Both **Bush** and **Rock Hyrax** were common, as were **Cape Hare** and **Ochre Bush Squirrel**, while **Striped Ground Squirrel** and **Rufous Sengi** made occasional appearances. **East African Gerbil**, **Emin's Tateril** and an **East African Thicket Rat** were also seen at night. **Crested Porcupine** quills could often be found by the greenhouses, and I once saw one outside my hut at around 1am.



Lander's Horseshoe Bat & Cape Hare, Mpala Research Centre

There were some nice bats around the camp. I occasionally saw **Yellow-winged Bats** – they had a few regular perches on the main buildings. **Free-tailed Bats** (probably Little) roosted under the metal roof of the dining area, while one of the office toilets often had wonderful little **Lander's Horseshoe Bats** (echolocating at c.110kHz) and slightly larger **Ruppell's Horseshoe Bats** at night (c.61kHz) – I sometimes went to lie on the floor and take photos. A much bigger *Rhinolophus* (c.45kHz), seen around the camp at night and day-roosting in an abandoned building by the river, was almost certainly **Eloquent Horseshoe Bat**. The men's toilets in the Princeton Dormitories sometimes had a lone **Slit-faced Bat** (most likely Egyptian or Large-eared), and while the thatch roof of the banda (hut) next to mine was being redone, several *Scotophilus* bats used the open structure after dark. Based on pictures, Paul Webala thought they were probably **Andrew Rebori's House Bat**, although *Scotophilus* clade 2 couldn't be ruled out. There were many other vesper bats that I was unable to identify.

Mpala Ranch

I have to start by mentioning the incredible **African Wild Dog**, the species at the centre of my PhD research. A few years ago, Laikipia supported over 300 of these unique canids, but in 2017 a catastrophic outbreak of canine distemper virus wiped out all but a single individual female. She was joined in 2018 by two unknown males and, amazingly, they denned and successfully raised pups, raising hope that a new population might rise from the ashes. The appropriately named 'Phoenix Pack', still led by the same alpha female and now numbering 12 individuals, was denning again when I arrived at Mpala. They had chosen a prominent rocky outcrop called Mukenya – Laikipia's dogs typically den in such inaccessible locations, in contrast to those in Southern Africa.

For the first couple of months, I saw the pack a few times a week. Although the den itself was high up amongst the rocks, I was able to observe the entrance through my telescope; it was a privilege to watch the tiny puppies as they first emerged. The adults could easily be followed as they descended the mountain to hunt, but keeping up with them was near impossible. Unusually, these dogs generally avoid larger prey, mostly eating dik-diks – each one is little more than a snack! After they left the den the pack became extremely mobile and harder to locate, but I still enjoyed fairly regular sightings.



African Wild Dog (the 'Phoenix Pack'), Mpala Ranch

Alongside wildlife, Laikipia supports significant populations of people and livestock, and thus most other large carnivores are scarce and/or shy. The county has around 200 **Lions** across 10,000 square kilometres – I had sightings once or twice a month while at Mpala. **Leopards** are more numerous but I encountered them at a similar rate, and almost exclusively at night. According to researchers, Mpala has around 30 Leopards (in 200 square kilometres), but they are seen much less frequently than this density might suggest.

Laikipia is a hotspot for melanistic Leopards – there are six known individuals in the landscape, with one black female having a territory on Mpala. After six months of near misses, and having to endure tales of other researchers’ sightings, I finally got lucky. I had friends visiting from the UK, and as we drove into her territory I told them to keep an eye out for a big black cat, not thinking for a moment that she might actually appear. Moments later, someone calmly announced that “one of them is lying under that bush.” Sure enough, to my utter amazement, there she was! She was right on the verge – for around 30 seconds she sat perfectly still, while my violently shaking hands almost made photos impossible. I barely managed a few before she slunk into cover. We switched off the car, hoping she would re-emerge, but another passing vehicle startled her and she burst across the road, disappearing into dense vegetation on the far side. This was, without doubt, one of the most spectacular wildlife encounters I’ve ever had. My friends, however, had never seen any kind of Leopard before, and I had to explain that they’re not all black...



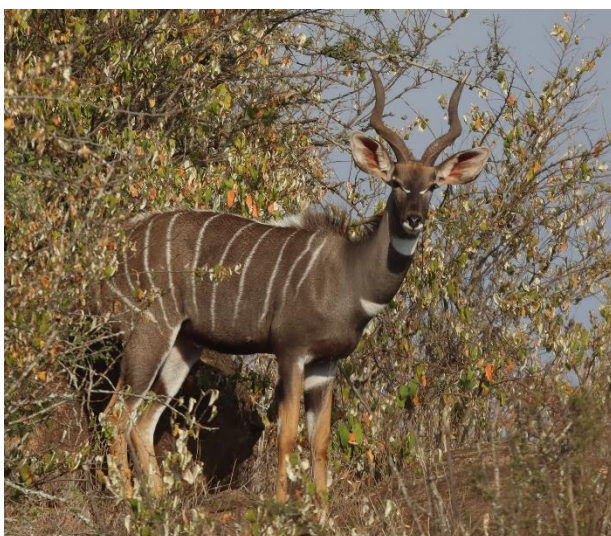
Black Leopard, Mpala Ranch

The Ewaso ecosystem supports a significant number of **Cheetah** (perhaps 300-400 individuals) but they are not often seen. I had just one encounter at Mpala, of a female and her well-grown cub, and I only heard of four or five other sightings in total while I was there. **Spotted** and **Striped Hyaena** were both seen regularly, but mostly at night (see below).



Reticulated Giraffe & Cheetah, Mpala Ranch

I saw an excellent variety of ungulates at Mpala. Special mention goes to the hyper-abundant **Gunther's Dik-dik**, which occurs at over 200 individuals per square kilometre. Other commonly seen antelope included **Cape Bushbuck**, **Greater Kudu**, **Common Eland**, **Impala**, **Steenbok**, **Bright's Gazelle**, **Waterbuck** and **Beisa Oryx**. Less frequent were **Gerenuk**, **Thomson's Gazelle**, **Hartebeest (Jackson's)**, **Lesser Kudu** and **Klipspringer**. Klipspringer were apparently much more common before the Wild Dog pack ate most of the individuals on Mukenya! **African Savanna Elephant**, **Reticulated Giraffe**, **Common Warthog** and **Plains Zebra** were numerous, but the area's **African Buffalo** population suffered severely from the drought, with many dead and emaciated individuals seen. Mpala's **Common Hippopotamus** were presumably also badly affected, although it was never difficult to find them along the Ewaso N'gyiro.



Lesser Kudu & Lion, Mpala Ranch

Once, while driving back from Nanyuki, I saw a **Black Rhinoceros** on the neighbouring Ol Jogi Conservancy. Amongst smaller species, **Striped** and **Unstriped Ground Squirrels** were both seen, along with **Olive Baboon** and **Vervet Monkey**. One of my favourite species on Mpala was **Grevy's Zebra**, which was wonderfully common, especially after some rain in April. Up to several hundred individuals use Mpala – a substantial proportion of the world population.

One of the wonderful things about Mpala is the diversity of research going on – there are wildlife experts of all different kinds. This includes a team studying small mammals, led by Leo Malingati, a PhD student at the University of Wyoming. His group goes out trapping on twelve consecutive days every two months, and Leo was kind enough to let me join whenever I had time. I first did so in late March, when Mpala was still incredibly dry and rodents were consequently scarce. On my first day, over 200 traps resulted in just a single capture – a **Hinde's Rock Rat** – although the early start also produced a pride of **Lions** with cubs. My next outing was more productive – two more Hinde's Rock Rats, plus **Grey Climbing Mouse** (a rare species here), two **East African Pouched Mice**, and a single **East African Gerbil**. Again, a large male **Lion** was near the plots, and one of the traps contained an irate **Slender Mongoose**! My third excursion in March also turned up a **Rufous Sengi**. Despite some rain in the interim, small mammals were still few in number when I joined again in May and July (with some sampling days recording zero captures) – just the four 'regular' species were caught (the above minus Grey Climbing Mouse).



East African Gerbil & Rufous Sengi, Mpala Ranch

Night drives at Mpala were often excellent, with by far the most productive area being around the main airstrip (0.353041, 36.893845). Regular species throughout my time included **Striped** (often multiple sightings per drive) and **Spotted Hyaena**, **Cape Hare**, **White-tailed Mongoose**, **Bat-eared Fox**, **Black-backed Jackal**, **Senegal Galago** (unmissable along the river, especially at Hippo Pools) and **Common Genet**, with occasional sightings of **Lion**, **Leopard**, **Serval**, **African Wildcat** and **White-bellied Hedgehog**. For most of my time at Mpala, it was rare to see any rodents at all on night drives, but I did see **East African Gerbil**, **Emin's Tateril**, **East African Pouched Mouse** and **Pygmy Mouse**, along with several unidentified murids.



Striped Hyaena & Crested Porcupine, Mpala Ranch

The long rains (March-May) largely failed again in 2022, but whenever we did get something of a shower, it seemed to lead to a surge in activity for at least a few days afterwards. On the 3rd of May, I was driving down the airstrip when an unusual shape caught my eye in the grass – an **Aardwolf**! Ecstatically, I hurried off-road in pursuit, enjoying excellent views until my car suddenly disappeared down a gigantic Aardvark hole. Whatever the Aardvark had been digging for must have been quite some prize, because my chunky 4x4 was now substantially underground, the back wheels spinning pathetically in mid-air. This should have been the end of the evening's entertainment, but no! While we awaited rescue, a **Serval** strolled by, and then the approaching recovery vehicle flushed not one but two **Aardwolves** to within a few feet of us. Nevertheless, I became more cautious off-roading at night from this point on.

The same pair (presumably) of Aardwolves was regularly seen from this point on; from mid-September, they had a den at the western end of the airstrip and the adorable youngsters sometimes cautiously emerged before dusk. Other species that first appeared in this period included **Crested Porcupine** (some amazing encounters) and **Zorilla**, which was scarce during my time at Mpala but can apparently be abundant under the right conditions.



Aardwolf, Mpala Ranch

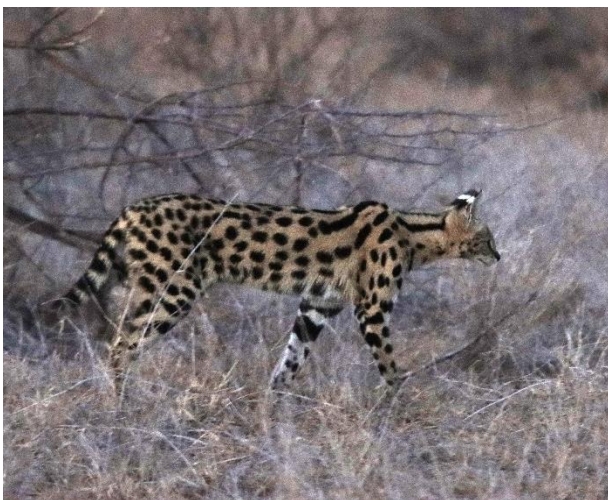
However, the absolute highlight came around the end of June. For about a week, I and others were blown away by a series of outrageously good **Aardvark** sightings. The first, on the 20th of June, reduced me to a gibbering wreck as a huge male trotted calmly across the road at point-blank range. But the very next night was even better, as what seemed to be a smaller individual emerged and foraged nonchalantly by the car. It was almost gut-wrenching to leave Mpala for a night on the 22nd (to make a third attempt for Maned Rat, described elsewhere), but the 23rd of June produced sightings of two individual Aardvarks. They weren't quite so regular after this extraordinary series of sightings, but I saw Aardvark again five times, for an incredible total of nine encounters at Mpala. It is worth noting that I wouldn't have found most of these without my thermal scope – the animals don't reliably produce good eyeshine, but have a very distinctive shape that is obvious even from a distance.

One of my target species at Mpala eluded me until mid-August, when I finally managed superb views of a pair of **Honey Badger** – to my knowledge, no-one else saw this species during my stay.



Aardvark, Mpala Ranch

Night drives sometimes featured comical misidentifications, my favourite being a friend calling eyeshine from near the top of a tree as a bushbaby (it was a giraffe). Another excellent moment came one night as we passed a clearing, where we were met with a mass of eyeshine. These glades are usually full of Impala at night, so we initially thought little of it and drove on. But something didn't seem quite right... upon reversing, we discovered a pride of Lions, three Black-backed Jackals and a Leopard, all fixated on the carcass of a Plains Zebra foal!



Serval & Spotted Hyaena, Mpala Ranch

Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Ol Pejeta is a 360-square-kilometre conservancy, just outside Nanyuki and less than an hour's drive from Mpala. After the Maasai Mara, it has the highest predator density in Kenya, and supports the largest wild population of Black Rhinoceros outside of Southern Africa. Deserving special mention are also the last two Northern White Rhinos in the world – I went inside their enclosure twice (it costs \$60pp) and surprised myself by how moving I found the experience. Ol Pejeta proved a great place to take visitors, and I made five separate trips (26th Feb, 20th May, 29th/30th May, 27th July and 14th August). On most visits I stayed at The Stables, a cheap and cheerful budget option (fully catered), but I did once spend the night at the beautiful Ewaso Campsite on the river. Ol Pejeta is broadly divided into two parts – east of the river is the smaller, more visited section, while the western side is the 'wilderness zone', where many of the tracks are 4x4 only.



White Rhinoceros, Ol Pejeta Conservancy

On each visit, I saw broadly similar species during the day. One of the highlights was numerous **White** and **Black Rhinoceroses** – Ol Pejeta has around 160 of the latter, and I saw many small calves. The conservancy rangers head out daily (on foot) to track every single rhino – if a particular individual is not found for several consecutive days, a full military-style search operation is launched. As a result of this extraordinary dedication, not one rhino has been lost to poaching in over five years.

Perhaps as a consequence, the Black Rhinos were, on the most part, considerably more relaxed than those I've seen elsewhere (e.g., in South Africa and Namibia). However, on my very first afternoon, as I drove through some dense vegetation on the western side of the river, I suddenly became aware of an ominous drumming sound. As I turned, a rhino erupted in full charge from the foliage, heading straight for me. Slamming the accelerator, I barely managed to make it through before the beast reached the road, but even after this it continued its pursuit. I was pretty shaken up, and needed several beers to calm down once I made it back to the campsite.



Black Rhinoceros (adult & calf), Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Other consistently common mammals were **African Savanna Elephant, Olive Baboon, Vervet Monkey, Black-backed Jackal, Spotted Hyaena, Plains Zebra, Common Warthog, African Buffalo, Common Eland, Impala, Steenbok, Bright's and Thomson's Gazelles, Waterbuck, Hartebeest and Reticulated Giraffe**. Patas Monkey, although probably still present in the reserve, is now extremely elusive – since 2017 there has been no more than a single troop of these grassland primates here, and they continue to decline.



Lion, Ol Pejeta Conservancy

I rarely had trouble finding **Lions** at Ol Pejeta. The rangers usually know where some are, and will often flag down visitors and offer to direct them to a sighting. I had some fantastic encounters this way, including a pride of 14 individuals on a recent buffalo kill. Ol Pejeta also has a relatively high density of **Cheetah** – its 15-20 individuals are part of the wider Ewaso ecosystem population of around 400. I had two excellent sightings here – one on the afternoon of the 27th of July, and another the next day.



Cheetah, Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Night drives (\$60pp and conducted in open Landcruisers) were great, and I did one on every visit (five total). Three of these produced superb sightings of **Zorilla**. The first, on the 24th of February, was of an active individual that nevertheless stayed in view for at least a minute. The next, on the 30th of May, was even better – it stood motionless by the roadside, allowing for some decent pictures. More good views were obtained on the 27th of July. All three sightings were in the eastern section of Ol Pejeta, the second and third both very close to the rhino graveyard – this seems like an excellent area to try for them. There can't be many reserves more reliable for this beautiful mustelid.



Serval & Zorilla, Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Out of five night drives at Ol Pejeta, I saw **Aardvark** twice – on the 27th of July, I watched a huge male digging calmly right next to the vehicle, and another showed brilliantly out in the open on the 14th of August. Again, on neither occasion would we have seen them without the thermal scope.

Other species seen at night were **Serval** (on three occasions), **African Wildcat** (once), **Lion**, **Common Genet**, **Striped** (once) and **Spotted Hyaenas**, **Black-backed Jackal**, **White-tailed Mongoose** and **Cape Hare**. One of the most spectacular of all my Kenyan sightings came on the 20th of May, when we found two large male **Lions** on a recent Plains Zebra kill, attended by around 40 **Spotted Hyaenas** and 15 **Black-backed Jackals**! We watched in awe as the sea of scavengers was repeatedly parted by the Lions' charges – despite being vastly outnumbered, they still owned their prize when we pulled ourselves away. The next morning, not a trace of the zebra could be seen besides a few blood-stained blades of grass.



Aardvark, Ol Pejeta Conservancy

Nanyuki

The remarkable Maned Rat was one of my most-wanted species in Kenya. Having read of Jon Hall and Venkat Sankar's success in finding them at the Trout Tree Restaurant near Nanyuki (the closest town to Mpala), I made my first overnight visit to the on-site Creaky Cottage on the 31st of March. The restaurant itself is gorgeous, built around a huge fig tree and complete with tame **Guereza Colobus** and **Southern Tree Hyrax**, and the cottage is equally lovely. But on this first occasion I spent very little time in it, as I relentlessly patrolled the grounds on my rat quest. I roamed continuously from around 7pm until midnight, and then again for an hour at 2am, seeing **Large-spotted Genet**, **White-tailed Mongoose** and a superb **Southern Giant Pouched Rat**, but sadly nothing else.



Guereza Colobus & Southern Tree Hyrax, Trout Tree

I told Zarek Cockar of my failure, and he suggested trying Bantu Mountain Lodge – just across the road from Trout Tree – instead. Its grounds are much more extensive, with a great deal of riverside vegetation, and so there would be a larger area to search. I eventually visited on the 28th of April, accompanied, to my immense surprise, by around 10 other researchers who were both bemused and fascinated by my obsession with “the rat”. After dinner, we split up to scour the lodge's surroundings, promising to make loud bird noises if we located our quarry. Wandering by the river, I heard something scrambling noisily down the far bank and, crouching for a better view, came face to face with a stunning **African Clawless Otter**. As it reached the water's edge it paused, staring at me for a good 30 seconds until I tried reaching for my camera, whereupon it slipped into the stream and was gone. The rest of the night produced a few more mammals, including **East African Thicket Rat**, **Southern Tree Hyrax**, **White-tailed Mongoose** and **Suni**. Again, the Maned Rat proved elusive, but the otter (a lifer for me) more than made up for this.

Although I'm sure there are good numbers of Maned Rat around Bantu Mountain Lodge, the staff there were largely unaware of them, whereas those at Trout Tree were both enthusiastic and knowledgeable about their habits (they even mention the species to

ordinary visitors at lunch!). Therefore, for my third attempt I decided to return to Creaky Cottage, this time on the 22nd of June with two more friends from Mpala.

On this occasion the quest was not in vain – within about ten minutes of searching we found a glorious **Maned Rat** sleeping in a cupboard below the restaurant. This was almost overwhelmingly exciting, especially after previous failures. Retreating to a safe distance, I watched it through my thermal scope while it (very adorably) dozed, yawned and groomed itself. Eventually, it stirred and made its way out into the open, but at this point I'm afraid our enthusiasm got the better of us, and we went after it a bit too quickly. It was clearly disturbed but, rather than make for cover (the closest option), its response was to waddle backwards, almost beneath our feet, until it had re-established itself in the cupboard! Another half-hour passed before it emerged again, when we followed it more carefully, and enjoyed the farcical sight of it very nearly failing to squeeze through a fence hole. What an extraordinary, bizarre and magical creature!



Maned Rat, Trout Tree

We were all elated and retreated to the cottage, where for the next three-and-a-half hours we celebrated with beer and vodka-Red Bulls (a bad choice). At midnight, we headed out again, finding perhaps the same Maned Rat in dense thickets by the main gate. Finally, at 0115, we arrived back at the cottage to discover yet another individual literally inside the porch; it pootled away through the little garden and disappeared into the night.

I went back to Trout Tree on the 14th of July, accompanied by two different friends who were keen to see Maned Rat themselves, but we were unsuccessful. It seems that some luck is required to find this species, even in places where it's relatively common. If it's a top target, I'd therefore recommend devoting at least two nights to the search; both Creaky Cottage and Bantu Mountain Lodge are great bases for trips up Mount Kenya, so your daylight hours wouldn't be wasted.

Aberdare National Park

Camping

I first visited the Aberdare National Park on the 5th of March, intending to camp overnight and explore the Salient (lower-lying forest). Sadly, my car broke down almost immediately after entering the park, and once I'd been towed back to the Ruhuruini Gate I spent the next 48 hours in an agonising state of purgatory while I waited for spare parts to arrive from Nyeri. Camping next to my vehicle, I could explore a little on foot, but not far enough to find Giant Forest Hog, which remained painfully out of reach. I did get chatting to one of the rangers though, who assured me that for a mere KES10,000 he could guarantee a Bongo sighting. Sceptical, but intrigued against my better judgement, I agreed.

I returned to the Aberdares on the 18th of March, camping first at the Prince Charles campsite. On the first afternoon I had phenomenal views of at least 20 **Giant Forest Hogs**, with 30+ the next day. Other species seen in the Salient included **Cape Bushbuck**, **Olive Baboon**, **Common Warthog**, **African Savanna Elephant** and **Waterbuck**. I made a day trip on the 19th to the moorlands, finding few mammals besides **Common Duiker** and **East African Mole Rat** (writhing around in the bill of a Black-headed Heron).



Giant Forest Hog, Aberdare National Park

The morning of the 20th saw me meeting up again with my ranger friend from Ruhuruini. We set off from the gate at around 0430, heading for the park sub-HQ – I hoped we might encounter some interesting nocturnal creatures, but we saw nothing besides abundant **African Savanna Hares**. Parking by the Rhino Retreat (a cute-looking cottage managed by Rhino Ark), we set off on foot through the thick and thorny vegetation, aiming for a natural salt lick often used by Bongos. It took well over an hour of pretty serious scrambling to reach it, and it was clear that the chances of a sighting were minimal. A dilapidated treehouse, previously used for monitoring the antelopes, overlooked the small clearing; if this were rebuilt, an overnight stay could offer a reasonable chance of a sighting (indeed, there are some incredible photos taken from the hide on the Bongo Surveillance Project's Facebook page). Despite not seeing one myself, it was fantastic to explore their habitat on foot.

Arriving back at the Rhino Retreat, I had a chat with the caretaker, Sammy – my jaw nearly hit the floor when he showed me a video he had taken on his phone (from the cottage's living room window!) of a herd of Bongos. I knew I'd have to come back! There are, I was told, perhaps 50 wild Bongos now living in the Aberdares, up from a low in the 20s, with most of them essentially confined to the Honi Valley in the north of the Salient. Back in the 1970s and '80s, problem Lions from Laikipia were relocated to the Aberdares, with a devastating effect on the park's Bongos. The big cats have now been eradicated, and although Bongo numbers are still precariously low, they have been increasing.

My final camping trip to the park was on the 27th of August, when I stayed at the public Reedbuck Campsite, up in the moorlands. Driving around this high-altitude area produced **Bohor Reedbuck**, a very fluffy **Spotted Hyaena** and lots more **Common Duiker**, while staking out uncovered molehills gave me superb views of **East African Mole Rat**. My main target this time was **Black-fronted Duiker** – after a lot of effort, I finally managed a good sighting on the main road, near the Karuru Falls/Sapper Hut junction.

The Ark Lodge

I stayed at The Ark Lodge on three separate occasions (2nd April, 14th and 28th May). It's a nice spot, with various viewing decks overlooking a natural clearing, at the centre of which is a small lake. On each occasion the species seen were essentially the same. The salt lick beneath the lodge provided intimate views of **African Savanna Elephants**, **African Buffalo**, **Cape Bushbuck** and **Olive Baboon**, while **Waterbuck**, **Common Warthog** and **Suni** also made regular appearances. Each visit produced views of introduced **Coypu** out on the lake. **Giant Forest Hog** inevitably appeared in late afternoon, usually coming quite close after dark, when **Large-spotted Genet**, **White-tailed Mongoose** (including several black-tailed individuals), **African Savanna Hare** and **Spotted Hyaena** were also commonly seen. On the morning of the 29th of May, a short drive through the Salient produced a **Leopard** lying on the road.



Large-spotted Genet & Coypu, Aberdare National Park

There's a buzzer system in operation at The Ark, by which guests can be woken if something exciting turns up during the night. The full five buzzes indicate a God-tier-level sighting, and so when just such an alert was issued in the early hours of the 15th of May, I wasted no time in hurrying outside. There I was met by a sheepish-looking spotter, who announced that there had been a hyaena and some buffalo, but that they were "gone now." Wonderful.

Rhino Retreat

The Rhino Retreat is a hidden gem. Located in the northern part of the Salient, close to the park sub-HQ, it is an exquisite cottage looking out over a small clearing. Sammy, the caretaker, puts out salt to attract animals – the species seen are practically identical to those at The Ark, but at even closer range (and you have them entirely to yourself). At KES25,000 per night, it is also much cheaper than The Ark if you visit as a group (up to six people can be accommodated). Although it's advertised as self-catering, Sammy can help with the cooking if necessary. Bookings are made through Rhino Ark, the charity that manages the cottage.

I stayed twice, for two nights each time (17th/18th June and 25th/26th July). Mammals, many of which came right up to the windows, included **African Buffalo, Cape Bushbuck, Common Warthog, Giant Forest Hog, African Savanna Hare, Spotted Hyaena** and **White-tailed Mongoose**. Worthy of special mention, though, were the **African Savanna Elephants** – I've been to many places where these giants can be viewed at close quarters, but Rhino Retreat is possibly the best of the lot. Up to 20 individuals were seen from a few feet away, including huge bulls and a mother with twins.

It was Bongos that initially drew me to Rhino Retreat, and although I think staying here does offer a chance of seeing them, a huge amount of luck would still be required. I was not so fortunate (despite pulling a couple of all-nighters), although occasional appearances were recorded in the cottage's sightings book.



African Savanna Elephant, Aberdare National Park

Mt Kenya National Park

Although it was clearly visible from Mpala, I only made a few brief visits to Mount Kenya. The first, on the 20th of February, was a day hike on the Naro Moru side, starting at the Meteorological Station. The scenery was stunning, and although it was mostly quiet mammal-wise, I did get good views of two **Afroalpine Vlei Rats**. **Waterbuck** were also present by the park entrance, and a tame troop of **Blue Monkeys** tried to steal our lunch.



Blue Monkey & Summit, Mount Kenya National Park

On the 21st of May, I stayed overnight at Castle Forest Lodge, on the mountain's southern slopes. The forest here is breathtaking, and would definitely warrant further exploration. Unfortunately, the weather was poor during my brief visit, and the only mammal I saw was **Guereza Colobus** from the hill above the lodge.

My third and, as it turned out, final visit (I had originally intended to climb the mountain at some point, mostly to try and see Four-striped Grass Mouse and Zena Brush-furred Rat), was another day trip, this time on the northern Sirimon side. There were **Plains Zebra** and **Waterbuck** lower down, and up in the moorlands we saw a herd of **Common Eland** and several **Common Duikers**. On the way back down, my friend noticed a weird sound emanating from the engine – opening the bonnet revealed a very shaken-looking **Rock Hyrax**, which had either hopped in on the mountain or possibly even travelled all the way from Mpala! Although we attempted to catch it for release in more suitable habitat, it bolted and disappeared into the dense forest, where we can only hope it made friends with its Southern Tree Hyrax relatives.

The Mount Kenya forests are one of the only places in Kenya where Bongos still exist, although there are precariously few of them here. Still, work is underway to recover the population, with the first steps being the release of captive-bred individuals into an 800-acre enclosure. Eventually, it is hoped that they will contribute to the wild population, which the government is aiming to bring to 750 by 2050.

Meru National Park

High on my list of weekend destinations from Mpala was Meru National Park, where other mammal-watchers had recently seen Naked Mole Rat, Somali Galago and Somali Dwarf Mongoose. I eventually made it there on the 6th of May, staying for one night at iKWETA (just outside the Murera Gate), and pitching my tent at the park's Bwatherongi Campsite for the second.

I chose iKWETA because of Jon Hall's success in seeing Naked Mole Rat here, and I had communicated with the camp manager in advance to arrange an excursion to look for them. At 1630 on my first afternoon, I headed out with a member of staff, only to discover that he had already caught a **Naked Mole Rat**, which was waiting in a covered box by the camp entrance. It was fascinating to see this weird little creature up close, but I was keen to see it released as soon as possible; after taking a few pictures we carried it back to its colony, where it quickly disappeared underground. There was abundant evidence of Naked Mole Rat presence all along the main road, including many small mounds of earth, some of which were still spewing dirt like tiny volcanoes. By waiting quietly above an active hole, I achieved several glimpses of the rodents.



Naked Mole Rat, Meru National Park

iKWETA Camp itself is very pleasant, being situated in an island of regrown natural vegetation, surrounded by farmland. The safari tents were cool and comfortable, and the swimming pool was a nice luxury in the afternoon heat. It is, however, totally overrun with cats, putting a bit of a dampener on my hopes of finding small mammals. I spent my one evening here birding, taking a short night walk after dinner, on which I was surprised to find a **Somali Galago** resting in a low tree.

After breakfast the next morning, I headed into the park itself, where there appears to be a really interesting mix of species from different regions of Kenya. General game seen during my visit included **African Savanna Elephant, Unstriped Ground Squirrel, Olive Baboon, Vervet Monkey, Black-backed Jackal, Plains Zebra, Desert Warthog, Hippopotamus, African Buffalo, Impala, Bright's Gazelle, Kirk's Dik-dik, Waterbuck, Hartebeest and Reticulated Giraffe**. Despite making several visits to the spot where Venkat Sankar and Jon Hall both saw Somali Dwarf Mongoose, I couldn't find them. I also made a lunchtime visit to the park gate by Adamson's Falls, seeing many **Heart-nosed Bats** roosting in a building behind the ranger post.

Bwatherongi Campsite was lovely, with lots of space and shade (I was the only person staying). It's a great place for Somali Galago and Acacia Rat at night, but I made little effort as I had begun to feel seriously unwell (the only time I was really ill in Kenya). I passed a fitful and extremely sweaty night in my tent, not helped by my air mattress spontaneously deciding to deflate at 2am. At dawn the next morning, just as I was leaving the campsite, a stunning **Somali Galago** bounded across the road and paused for a few seconds in a small bush.



Heart-nosed Bat & Bright's Gazelle, Meru National Park

Samburu/Buffalo Springs/Shaba National Reserves

I made two mammal-watching trips to these reserves. Samburu and Buffalo Springs are adjacent, separated by the Ewaso N'yiro River, with Shaba lying to the east on the other side of the main A2 highway (an excellent road, with the journey from Nanyuki taking less than two hours). Previously, an agreement between Samburu and Isiolo Counties made entry fees valid for all three reserves, but at the time of my visits this had fallen through, and separate tickets had to be purchased for Buffalo Springs/Shaba (Isiolo) and for the Samburu National Reserve. In my experience, although the species encountered were broadly similar on both sides of the road, the Samburu/Buffalo Springs area had a higher abundance.



Grevy's Zebra & Somali Dwarf Mongoose, Samburu National Reserve

On my first visit, in early June, I stayed for three nights at the excellent Sarova Shaba Game Lodge (inside Shaba NR), where the pool was refreshing and the banana daiquiris irresistible. My second visit, over a weekend in mid-September, was based at Samburu Riverside Camp (within Samburu NR), an affordable and pleasant little place that is owned by a member of the local community. This provided spectacular **Lion** sightings and the excitement of a massive bull elephant spending the night half-inside my tent's bathroom.

This complex of reserves is famous for the so-called 'northern specials', many of which – particularly **Grevy's Zebra**, **Gerenuk**, **Beisa Oryx** and **Reticulated Giraffe** – I had already become familiar with in Laikipia. Nevertheless, it was great to see them in such good numbers, alongside other general species such as **African Savanna Elephant**, **Unstriped Ground Squirrel**, **Olive Baboon**, **Vervet Monkey**, **Slender Mongoose**, **Black-backed Jackal**, **Plains Zebra**, **African Buffalo** (somehow surviving the drought), **Impala**, **Bright's Gazelle**, **Waterbuck** and abundant **Kirk's Dik-dik** (a few **Gunther's Dik-diks** were also seen, mostly in drier areas away from the river).

The area also produced excellent views of **Desert Warthog** (much less skittish than those in Tsavo East), and a single female **Greater Kudu** on the Sarova Shaba entrance road. One morning in Buffalo Springs, we came across a mating pair of **Lion** and, nearby, an incredibly miserable-looking **Hippopotamus** – it seemed like it could barely stand, and was shakily trudging through the dust in the middle of the day.

Having missed it in Meru, perhaps my most-wanted species was **Somali Dwarf Mongoose**. I knew they occurred in the area, but had no specific idea of how to find them, so I was delighted when at least two appeared (at midday), showing well under a small bush by the main road through Samburu NR ([here](#)). A couple of days later, in the Shaba NR on the road to Hereri Springs, I had another sighting of a much larger group. My September visit also produced regular sightings, including a big troop along the river – this seemed like the best area for them.

Sarova Shaba Lodge itself is located in a lush oasis on the banks of the river – a dramatic contrast from the barren surrounding landscape. At night, by the restaurant, I was surprised to see **Small-eared Greater Galago** – I hadn't thought the species occurred this far north. Every evening, many small **Epauletted Fruit Bats** emerged, sometimes perching on the ceiling of the bar. To the naked eye they seemed tiny, making me think of East African Epauletted (*E.minimus*), although I cannot be certain.



Gerenuk & Epauletted Fruit Bat, Shaba National Reserve

Nairobi National Park

I first arrived in Kenya late on the 29th of January and spent the first few days around town doing boring but necessary fieldwork preparations. The one redeeming feature was that my room at the Panari Hotel looked out over Nairobi National Park, and through my telescope I spotted my first Kenyan mammals: **Maasai Giraffe**, **African Buffalo**, **Hartebeest**, **Plains Zebra** and **Thomson's Gazelle**. On the 31st, I even got good (albeit distant) views of a mother and calf **Black Rhinoceros** reacting cagily to an oblivious group of three grazing **White Rhinoceroses**. Having bought a car, I did a morning drive into the park on the 1st of February, which gave me a few additional mammals, including **Ochre Bush Squirrel** near the entrance, **Hippopotamus** in Hyena Dam, **Grant's Gazelle**, **Impala** and a huge bull **Common Eland**.



Lion & Blue Wildebeest, Nairobi National Park

I spent another few hours in the park on the morning of the 24th of April, seeing (in addition to many of the species described above) **Black** and **White Rhinos**, **Blue Wildebeest**, **Lion** and three **Mountain Reedbuck** in the Athi Basin area (my main target). There was also a single male **Bohor Reedbuck** close to Nagolomon Reservoir, in vegetation by the Mokoyeti River. A third visit, on the 13th of August, produced more of the same, including much better views of Lion and Bohor Reedbuck.

On the 17th of September, I stayed overnight inside the park at Nairobi Tented Camp. Given its proximity to the city centre, this had a wonderfully remote feel, with comfortable accommodation and good food. After dark, the camp was alive with **Small-eared Greater Galago** calls, while an early morning drive produced a lone **Spotted Hyena**.

Nguruman

After reading of Venkat and Zarek's success in the area, I was especially keen to visit the Nguruman Escarpment, west of Lake Magadi in the far south of the Kenyan Rift Valley. Lantorre Lodge was a little over my budget, but I was able to arrange an independent trip (5th-7th August) with Ken Kelemu (+254705797497), one of the lodge guides, who I met through the Mammals of East Africa Facebook group. Ken was superb in all respects, arranging everything and even using his days off to accommodate us. We stayed at the Nguruman Front Waters Guesthouse in the village of Entasopia, a basic but lovely spot with wonderfully friendly owners. It cost just KES3500 per night, and was a short 15-minute drive from the entrance to Ol Kiramatian Conservancy, where Lantorre Lodge is located. Ol Kiramatian and the neighbouring Shompole Conservancy are stunningly beautiful, and we didn't once see another vehicle.



Heart-nosed & Yellow-winged Bats, Nguruman

Driving down from Nairobi on the 5th of August, we met Ken at the Lake Magadi barrier, from which it took us approximately two hours to reach Entasopia. Along the way, we started to see our first mammals, including **Grant's Gazelle**, **Impala**, **Gerenuk**, and **Maasai Giraffe**. We also stopped at a few roost sites for bats; the first two, in abandoned buildings near villages, contained **Heart-nosed Bat**, while the Lale'enok Resource Centre had a colony of **East African Epauletted Fruit Bats**. Darkness was approaching as we neared our destination, and we started to see the first of many **Yellow-winged Bats**.

The next morning, we set off for the conservancies at 5am. As we passed through woodland on the edge of the village, we had excellent views of a probable **Natal Multimammate Mouse**. The northern part of Ol Kiramatian was utterly devoid of grass, and ludicrously dusty. In fact, the whole area was undoubtedly the dustiest place I've ever been – parts of my car were coated in over an inch of the stuff by the end of our visit. Nevertheless, we found two tiny *Gerbillus* gerbils here – after consulting Venkat, it seems that *G.harwoodi* and *G.pusillus* may be sympatric in this area.

Before dawn, we also found **Cape Hare**, **Senegal Galago**, **Common Genet** and three **African Wildcats**, while general game included **Plains Zebra**, **Impala**, **Grant's Gazelle**, **Cavendish's Dik-dik**, **Beisa Oryx** and **Blue Wildebeest** (White-bearded). The morning's highlight, however, came after we stopped for coffee on a small hill at the base of the escarpment. Diligently scanning the surrounding Shompole Plains, Ken spotted a seemingly agitated group of Grant's Gazelles. A nearby herd of Plains Zebra appeared unconcerned, which immediately made us think **Cheetah** – sure enough, a mother and small cub appeared as we approached. They were pretty wary and we didn't attempt to follow them for long, but it was still a brilliant encounter – Cheetah are rarely seen in this area.



Least/Harwood's Gerbil & African Wildcat, Nguruman

After breakfast back in the village, we did a short walk up the escarpment, seeing some good birds but just a single **Ochre Bush Squirrel** on the mammal front. We relaxed until dusk, when lots of probable **Little Free-tailed Bats** emerged, alongside several **Somali Serotines** (identified from spectrograms).

We headed out again for a night drive (9pm-12.30am), exploring the same areas as in the morning, and seeing **Cape Hare**, **Emin's Tateril**, **African Wildcat**, **Common Genet**, **Spotted Hyena**, **White-tailed Mongoose**, **Bat-eared Fox** and (best of all) an excellent **Zorilla**.

Our final excursion was a morning drive on the 7th (6am-9am) on which, in addition to species already mentioned, we found **African Savanna Elephant**, **Unstriped Ground Squirrel**, **Olive Baboon**, **Vervet Monkey**, **Guereza Colobus**, **Common Warthog**, and a single male **Lesser Kudu** (on a rocky mound in the Shompole Plains). The Nguruman area was one of my absolute favourite Kenyan locations, and I can highly recommend contacting Ken to arrange a visit.

Mount Suswa Conservancy

I had originally planned to camp here on the 15th of September, on my way back from Lake Victoria, but a breakdown forced me to stay in a dingy Narok hotel instead. Fortunately, after a late night at the mechanic my car was in better shape, and I was able to spend the day exploring this amazingly scenic conservancy, just off the B3 highway a few hours west of Nairobi, on the 16th.

The Mount Suswa Conservancy has an excellent [website](#), and I organised my visit with the head guide, Kiano Sempui. Kiano wasn't available on the 16th, so it was with another local, Jackson Shonko, that I headed up towards the reserve's famous caves and spectacular views. Of course, the main attraction for mammal-watchers is the colony of **Harrison's Giant Mastiff Bats** and these did not disappoint, being without doubt one of the most fantastic bat species I've ever seen. Also seen in the caves was a single **Lander's Horseshoe Bat** (echolocating at c.110kHz as it fluttered around our heads), while there were **Rock Hyrax**, **Ochre Bush Squirrel** and **Olive Baboon** around the entrance. Jackson mentioned that he has, on occasion, encountered a sleeping Leopard in the darker corners of the caves.



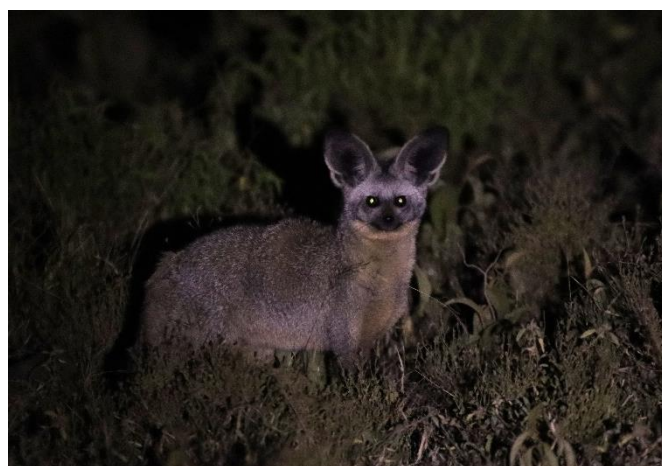
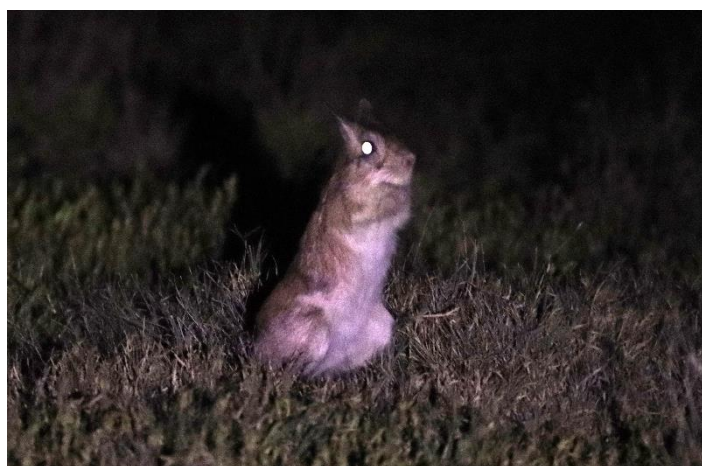
Harrison's Giant Mastiff Bats & Caves, Mount Suswa Conservancy

As we descended the mountain, Jackson commented on how remarkably quickly I was able to drive over rough terrain. This gave me pause for thought; perhaps it was recklessness that was partly to blame for my car's regular mechanic issues...

The Mount Suswa Conservancy really is incredibly beautiful, and is absolutely on my list of places to revisit when I return to Kenya, as much for the landscape and hiking as for its wildlife.

Lake Elementaita

I and two friends visited the Soysambu Conservancy, on the shores of Lake Elementaita, for a couple of nights from the 8th of July. We camped at Simon's Campsite, a beautiful spot surrounded by huge fever trees and overlooking the lake. Self-driving at night is allowed at Soysambu as long as you're accompanied by a ranger (cost just KES2000), and on our first evening we headed out from 8-11pm, seeing **Spotted Hyaena**, **White-tailed Mongoose**, **Black-backed Jackal**, **Common Genet**, **African Savanna Hare**, **Cavendish's Dik-dik** and an astonishing 30+ **Bat-eared Foxes**. The highlights though were many fantastic **East African Springhares** (including one mobbing a White-tailed Mongoose), our first **Northern Giraffes**, and good views of a surprise **Marsh Mongoose**. It was very dry at the conservancy and we saw no small rodents at all during our stay.



East African Springhare & Bat-eared Fox, Soysambu Conservancy

The next day, we met up with a local guide that Zarek Cockar had recommended, Joseph Ole Kodonyo (WhatsApp +254733415826), to explore the conservancy and, in particular, visit the Diatomite Mines to look for bats. Entering the tunnels, we were soon wading through an immense pile of bones – buffalo, waterbuck, impala and much more – the accumulated remains of years of Spotted Hyaena meals. It was really very creepy indeed, reminding me of the scene in 'Lord of the Rings' when Aragorn and co descend into those haunted mountains to find the King of the Dead. Nevertheless, the two **Bent-winged Bats** also mentioned in Venkat Sankar and Jon Hall's reports (*Miniopterus* clades 7 and 8) were easy to find. At one point I thought I heard something fairly large moving through the bones ahead of us; telling myself it was probably just a big bat, I pressed on, hoping to discover the Egyptian Slit-faced Bats and two *Rhinolophus* species also present in the caves. But that went out the window when a huge **Spotted Hyaena** suddenly emerged from the pitch darkness. After a brief "oh no!", Joseph turned and fled without so much as a backwards glance. We stood frozen to the spot until the animal began aggressively running at us, at which point our own hasty retreat seemed like a good idea.



Spotted Hyena leftovers & Bent-winged Bats, Soysambu Conservancy

Somewhat adrenalized, we spent the rest of the afternoon driving around the conservancy, seeing **Northern Giraffe, Waterbuck, Grant's and Thomson's Gazelles, Common Eland, Cavendish's Dik-dik, Common Warthog, African Buffalo, Hippopotamus, Olive Baboon, Vervet Monkey** and huge numbers of **Plains Zebra**.

On the 10th, we met up with Joseph again off Soysambu to visit a couple of nearby locations for bats – the Kariandusi Mines and Jaika Cave. Kariandusi too was made up of a series of mining tunnels (mercifully devoid of bones and hyaenas) and contained more **Bent-winged Bats** (clades 1 and 4 recorded), but they were quite flighty and I couldn't confidently tell which were which. There was also a single roosting *Rhinolophus* – according to Paul Webala, the only species recorded here is **Geoffroy's Horseshoe Bat**.



Maghreb Roundleaf & Persian Trident Bats, Jaika Cave

We then proceeded to Jaika Cave. As Joseph had not previously visited this site, we picked up a local guide en route. However, it was soon clear that he didn't know the cave's location either, as he directed us to a small, entirely bat-free hole in the ground. Thankfully, Zarek had given me the proper coordinates, and after a short drive we embarked upon a rambling, Google Maps-led trek down some indistinct trails. Eventually, we reached a cave, its entrance largely obscured by vegetation. The overwhelming stench of bat shit emanating from the depths was an enormous relief, and upon entering we were met by thousands of **Maghreb Roundleaf Bats**, along with singles of **Persian Trident Bat** and **African Sheath-tailed Bat** (ID from Jon Hall's report of visiting with Paul Webala). Amazingly, several Brown House Snakes were hunting the bats along the cave walls and ceiling – we saw two of the reptiles subduing and beginning to swallow their unfortunate prey.



Brown House Snake with Maghreb Roundleaf Bat, Jaika Cave

I made another very brief visit to Soysambu on the morning of the 20th of August, hoping to defy the hyaenas and find a few more bat species in the depths of the Diatomite Mines. As I was there for less than three hours, I organised a guide (Isaac) through the conservancy. This turned out to be much more productive – Isaac, unlike Joseph, had entered the caves on multiple occasions and knew which tunnels were safe. Although we did meet two **Spotted Hyaenas** again on entry, we pressed on into an area that, based on the absence of bones, they rarely used. On top of feeling less life-threatening, these tunnels had many more bats – a winning combination! Besides the two **Bent-winged Bats** seen previously, there were also **Egyptian Slit-faced Bats**, although they were challenging to photograph. Deeper inside, we were confronted by a mass of *Rhinolophus* – tiny **Lander's Horseshoe Bats** (c.110kHz) and much larger **Eloquent Horseshoe Bats** (c.44kHz). If you're visiting for bats specifically, I'd recommend using a conservancy guide who knows the caves, perhaps as well as Joseph (who is probably unrivalled in the area as an all-round naturalist).

Lake Nakuru

I spent just a single night, on the 20th of August, in the Lake Nakuru area, staying at Punda Milias Nakuru Camp with three friends visiting from the UK. This was a delightful option, with comfortable accommodation and delicious food at a much lower price than other nearby lodges. Its location, nestled between Lake Nakuru National Park and the Soysambu Conservancy, was also perfect for exploring both reserves.

The drive to Nakuru afforded the opportunity to stop off at the Menengai Caves, just north of town on the edge of a spectacular volcanic crater (the second largest caldera in Africa after Ngorongoro). Although I obviously didn't give my friends a choice, they seemed happy enough to try for some of the exciting bats that can be found. The main caves are a Christian sacred site and tourist attraction, and were as devoid of bats as they were full of mumbling worshippers. They are, however, absolutely beautiful and well worth taking a few minutes to explore – there were also a few **Rock Hyraxes** outside.



Bent-winged Bats & Cape Hairy Bats, Menengai Caves

But it was in another cave, a short walk away, that the real action was. As for Jaika Cave (described above), I had the GPS coordinates of the entrance but no more specific instructions. Finding it therefore took a fair bit of trial and error – it's on the western side of a little ravine than we initially approached from the east, but before long we were staring at a promising dark hole in the ground. Inside, the first sight that greeted us was a massive clump of small, dark **Bent-winged Bats** (*Miniopterus* clade 1) on the ceiling, amongst which were several much bigger, cream-coloured **Cape Hairy Bats/Temminck's Myotis** (*Myotis tricolor*). Further inside, the walls were lined with little clusters of a larger, paler **Bent-winged Bat** (*Miniopterus* clade 4), while the darkest depths of the cave had more Cape Hairy Bats and a large **Horseshoe Bat** echolocating at c.44kHz (probably **Eloquent**).

Although finding the caves wasn't too much of a problem, they seem to be on private land – the few people we met were helpful and friendly, but it still felt slightly awkward to be exploring on our own. On top of this, worshippers clearly stay overnight even in the bat caves – if I return, I will probably do so with a local guide (even if they didn't much know anything about bats, or the caves).



Bent-winged Bats & Entrance, Menengai Caves

Lake Nakuru National Park has stunning scenery and excellent birding, but we saw a fairly generic set of mammals on one short afternoon drive, including **Olive Baboon, Vervet Monkey, Plains Zebra, Common Warthog, African Buffalo, Impala, Waterbuck** and (the highlight) around 10 **White Rhinoceroses**. At the southern end of the lake, an enormous crowd of vehicles indicated a Lion sighting, but as we approached my car broke down, prompting a change of plan.

Maasai Mara

In April, my mum and sisters came to visit for a week, which we spent in the Maasai Mara – we stayed for three nights at Mara Serena (in the Mara Triangle), and three nights at Fig Tree Camp in the main Maasai Mara National Reserve. In contrast to most of the rest of Kenya, which was astonishingly dry, we experienced some torrential downpours in the Mara, to the extent that some drives (particularly in the afternoon) were cancelled. In both camps, we did guided morning drives and self-drove in the evening. I returned to the Mara in September, staying at Mara West Camp on the edge of the Triangle.



Maasai Giraffes, Mara Triangle

Common species throughout the Mara (in addition to those described in more detail below), included **African Savanna Elephant, Banded Mongoose, Black-backed Jackal, Plains Zebra, Common Warthog, Hippopotamus, African Buffalo, Common Eland, Impala, Grant's and Thomson's Gazelles, Cavendish's Dik-dik, Waterbuck, Topi and Maasai Giraffe.**

Mara Serena

Mara Serena is a beautiful camp, perched on a hill overlooking the Mara River. It is one of only two permanent lodges in the Mara Triangle (the western part of the reserve). As a result, there are few other vehicles around – we had almost all our sightings (including of big cats) entirely to ourselves. Part of the appeal is also that night drives are allowed, but all of our attempts to go out were foiled by bad weather.

Bush Hyrax was common inside the camp – **Olive Baboon, Vervet Monkey, Common Dwarf Mongoose** and **Cape Bushbuck** were also seen. The grass in the surrounding area was very long, making it hard to spot small mammals, but **Lions** were abundant – we had up to four sightings per drive. **Spotted Hyaena** too was seen on every drive, and some early herds of a

few hundred **Blue Wildebeest** were found close to the Tanzanian border. Perhaps the best sighting at Mara Serena was of a mother **Black Rhinoceros** and her calf, crossing from one riverside thicket to another. At the time of our visit, there were just 11 rhinos in the Mara Triangle, and perhaps fewer than 20 in the whole reserve – these are the last entirely natural (never reintroduced) rhinos in Kenya.



Black Rhinoceros (calf) & Topi, Mara Triangle

Fig Tree Camp

I had especially hoped to get good views of **Cheetah** in the Mara, but none had made an appearance by the time we moved to Fig Tree Camp. Here, though, our luck turned dramatically, and we had numerous sightings, including three hunts (one of which was successful). The most dramatic of these came on our last full day, when we found the three remaining members of the famous Tano Bora coalition (formerly five males). At first they strolled calmly through the grassland, but then without warning they started moving at pace – unable to see what had piqued their interest, we followed for a few minutes until a pair of fighting **Hartebeest** appeared on the horizon. The antelope were oblivious until the last moment, when the Cheetahs broke into an all-out sprint; they were on their quarry in an instant, but didn't have the strength to bring it down, and after a heroic struggle the Hartebeest broke free. Incredibly, it immediately returned to sparring with its rival. Even more astonishing was that we had the whole experience to ourselves! A video of the chase – one of my best ever sightings – is [here](#).

Fig Tree Camp itself is set in vegetation on the banks of the Talek River, and was a good base for exploring the main national reserve. At night, **Large-spotted Genet** came to a feeding station, and there were **Wahlberg's Epauletted Fruit Bats** (probable) in the trees. Thick-tailed Greater Galago is usually regular, but hadn't been seen for a week when we arrived.



Cheetahs & Cavendish's Dik-dik, Maasai Mara National Reserve

This side of the Mara River was vastly busier than the Triangle, and there were at least two or three other vehicles at most predator sightings. The most farcical gathering came at a **Leopard** sighting (of 'Split-nose', a well-known male) – the cat, lying in the grass, was surrounded by a ring of maybe 20 vehicles. Unbeknownst to us, this was in a 'no off-roading' zone – rangers soon appeared, fining each of the offenders in turn (which took some time!).

Mara West Camp

I returned to the Mara Triangle in September, staying at the lovely Mara West Camp (9th-11th). Although I was mostly using this as a base for exploring the nearby Nyakweri Forest (see next page), I did a few drives into the reserve. Having seen only small numbers of **Blue Wildebeest** in April, it was particularly thrilling to encounter the tail end of the migration, with herds still many thousands strong. While watching one such group, their agitation alerted me to the approach of a female **Cheetah** with four tiny cubs – apparently a rare sight in the Triangle. Using the assembled cars for cover, she crossed the road and tore off after a pair of **Thomson's Gazelles**, narrowly failing to make a kill.

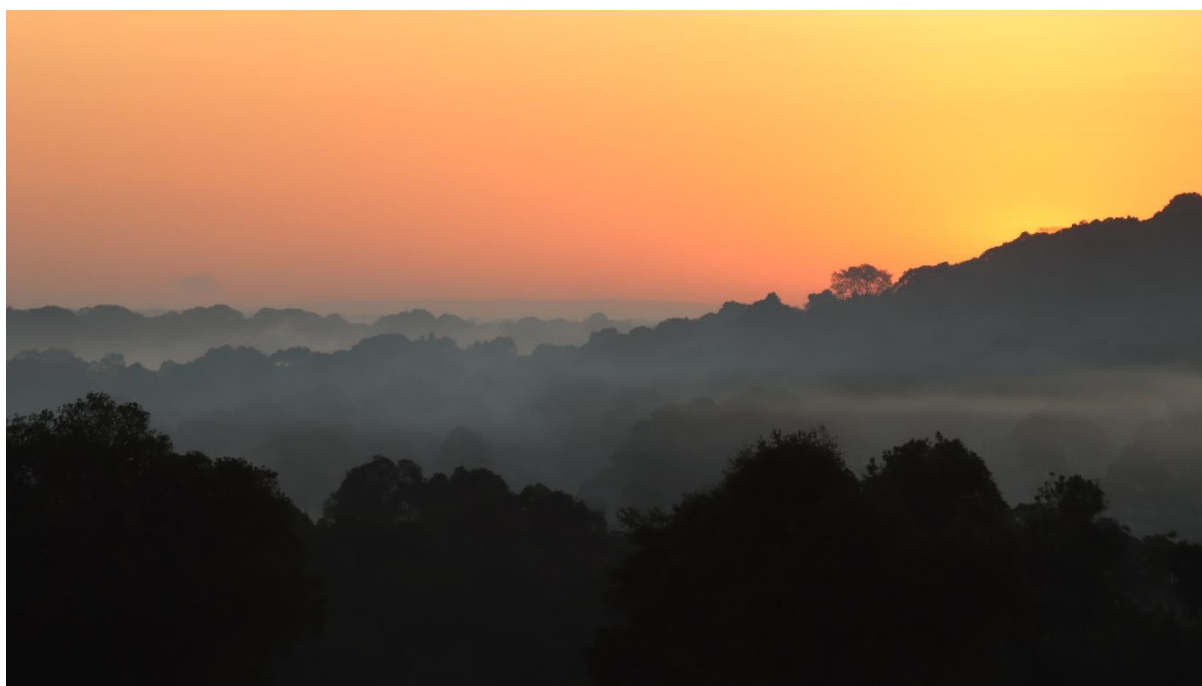
One of the few achievable antelope still missing from my Kenyan list was **Oribi**, so I spent a few hours scanning any gently rolling rocky slopes I could find, eventually finding success with a pair [here](#). I also enjoyed my best ever sighting of a **Serval** in a marshy area near the river – I watched for several minutes as it hunted, sometimes at point-blank range from my car window, finally catching an **African (Maasai Mara) Grass Rat** (which was still wriggling, therefore countable). Of course, my camera ran out of battery at precisely this moment.

I can highly recommend Mara West Camp. It has stunning views over the Triangle and comfortable, well-priced accommodation. There were **Southern Tree Hyraxes** around the campsite, and plenty of other wildlife in the small surrounding Mara West Conservancy. I had thought I might be able to do an independent night drive around this private land, but I was quoted \$400 for an hour by the camp staff; this seemed ridiculous and I can't help thinking there must have been some miscommunication.

Nyakweri Forest

Like many of the other places I visited in Kenya, Nyakweri Forest first came to my attention through Venkat Sankar's 2021 trip report. This rainforest sits on the top of the escarpment above the Mara Triangle, and is home to some really astonishing mammals – the scarce Weyns's Duiker was my top realistic target here, but I was also intrigued by reports of Giant Pangolin sightings.

Once again, Zarek Cockar came through with a contact for a local guide, Samwel Ole Naikada (+254 (0) 723396724), who was helpful and responsive. Slightly off-puttingly, however, he asked me several times whether I was certain I wanted to visit, warning me that the scale of recent deforestation had left Nyakweri barely recognisable. As he assured me that duikers remained visible, I persisted, spending time in the forest between the 10th and 12th of September with Mara West Camp as a base, although on the night of the 11th I stayed in Sam's house instead to allow more time for late-night and early morning walks. If I return to the forest, I will stay with Sam for the duration, as the commute from Mara West used up some productive time.



Charcoal smoke at dawn, Nyakweri Forest

On the afternoon of the 10th, I met Sam in the village of Kawai and we proceeded to the forest, passing through some beautifully intact patches but also seeing just how much habitat has already been cleared, mostly for charcoal and crop farming. Some of our first sightings were of species like **Impala** and **Plains Zebra**, in places that had been closed-canopy rainforest just months previously.

After some tea at Sam's house, we set off on foot, aiming for duikers before dusk. We found one almost immediately, although it turned out to be **Common Duiker**, while the trees were busy with troops of **Blue** and **Red-tailed Monkey**. It wasn't long, however, before we picked up a flash of deep-red fur in the undergrowth – a **Weyns's Duiker**! We saw no fewer than six individuals in the remaining hour of daylight, although they were all fairly shy. Sam suggested that this species has become more common in Nyakweri with the deforestation; it seems there is evidence that they prefer disturbed habitat, although of course the more depressing possibility is that they simply have fewer places to hide. Nevertheless, it was exciting to encounter this elusive and little-known antelope.



Weyns's Duiker, Nyakweri Forest

Our walk continued for several hours after dark, and produced a number of interesting sightings, including **African Savanna Hare**, **Cape Bushbuck**, **Common Eland**, **African Buffalo**, **Cavendish's Dik-dik**, many **Large-spotted Genets** and a pair of jackals that could have been Side-striped. Many of these species, of course, would not have been present in intact forest. We also found **Thick-tailed Greater Galago** (black form), **African Grass Rat** and a *Dendromus* species that Venkat identified as the *nigrifrons* form of **Grey Climbing Mouse** (a likely future split). Perhaps most exciting of all, however, was finding what Sam assured me were fresh Giant Pangolin diggings. I can't be sure myself, but through my thermal scope I did spot a large pangolin-shaped animal walking low to the ground in the distance. Agonisingly, we couldn't relocate it when we reached the area. Although it was almost certainly something else, I still lost a considerable amount of sleep over what felt like a near-miss! Sam, and most other people I spoke to, had seen pangolins in Nyakweri – I do believe they could be findable here with more time, although the population is highly threatened, in part by electrocution on livestock fences.

After spending the night at Mara West, I returned to the forest the next afternoon, staying overnight with Sam. Although we did a lengthy night walk, and another early the next morning, sightings were much harder to come by. Perhaps the most unexpected moment came when a herd of **African Savanna Elephants** started breaking through the wall of Sam's compound in the middle of the night – Nyakweri is a crucial nursery area for this species within the wider Maasai Mara ecosystem. We also saw **Spotted Hyaena** and found an enormous dead **Aardvark**. Most striking of all though was the view over the forest at dawn. At first, it seemed a picture-perfect scene, the sun rising above a spectacular mist-clad canopy. But it wasn't mist at all – the effect was produced by dozens of little bonfires, each representing another grove of lost trees.

It was a stark reminder of how fragile and diminished Nyakweri is. Much has disappeared already – Sam mentioned that within living memory the forest still had Great Blue Turaco, a bird normally associated with the great jungles of Central Africa (and only found in Kenya in Kakamega). Sadly, they are now long-gone, likely along with many unnoticed species of mammal and other wildlife. However, Nyakweri Forest retains some fabulous diversity – it is essential that the remaining habitat is protected, and a visit here can only help to encourage this. I can highly recommend adding it to an itinerary – even a single afternoon should be enough to find Weyns's Duiker.



Thick-tailed Greater Galago & Grey Climbing Mouse, Nyakweri Forest

Ruma National Park

I spent a night in Ruma (12th September), between visiting Nyakweri Forest and Rusinga Island. The public Fig Tree Campsite, where I pitched my tent, was pleasant – some **Free-tailed Bats** were roosting in the toilet building and the camera trap I set up along the entrance track captured a **Bushpig** overnight.

Most of the interesting mammal action takes place in the open grasslands in the north and west of the park. The very friendly lady at the park entrance also assured me that this would be the best area to search for Ruma's most prominent resident, the **Roan Antelope**. Ruma is the last place in Kenya that this species survives, and I spent a total of almost ten hours scouring every inch of savannah for them. It wasn't until after I visited that I learnt that all remaining individuals (14) had in fact been moved to an enclosed section of the park's north-west. Luckily, I did explore this area, seeing 100% of Kenya's Roan in a single herd, although I didn't realise this at the time! The enclosure is quite large (similar to the annual home range of a wild herd) and although it's hard to claim that these individuals remain genuinely wild, I've included them on my list due to their significance. The fenced area also contained several **Oribi** and a huge Rock Python.



Roan Antelope & Oribi, Ruma National Park

Other mammals seen in the main park included **Plains Zebra**, **White Rhinoceros**, **African Buffalo** and **Topi**. On the afternoon of the 12th the plains were full of more **Northern (Rothschild's) Giraffe** than I could count, and I had a brief sighting of a family of **Bushpigs** first thing the next morning. Although Ruma is not one of Kenya's premier mammal-watching destinations, it makes a nice single-night addition to any itinerary in the west of the country.

Lake Victoria

This area was not initially on my mammal-watching radar, but it attracted my interest after I heard it offered a good chance of Spotted-necked Otter. I chose to stay on Rusinga Island, as it's connected to the mainland via a road bridge, and because it seemed as well-placed for otters as any of the more inaccessible islands. My base for two nights (13th and 14th September) was Wayando Beach Eco Lodge, a modestly priced option with lovely rooms, beautiful grounds by the water and plentiful food. On my first afternoon, one of the staff took me out looking for roosting bats around the island; we found a family of **Hairy Slit-faced Bats** huddled up under an office roof, and a large group of **Epauletted Fruit Bats** (maybe Wahlberg's or Ethiopian) in a lakeside fig tree. Back at the lodge, another pair of Hairy Slit-faced Bats roosted above the dining area, where they also use the beams as hunting perches at night. Fruiting trees in the garden attracted more *Epomophorus* after dark, and Straw-coloured Fruit Bat is occasionally seen. A **Large-spotted Genet** also passed through at one point.



Epauletted Fruit & Hairy Slit-faced Bats, Rusinga Island

Finding the otters turned out to be a bit more challenging. Although they are often seen from shore, I had no luck on my first evening. It seems the water levels in Lake Victoria have risen substantially in the last couple of years, covering many of the rocky areas that were once reliable (including around Rusinga Island Lodge). I went out by boat the next morning at 9am, doing a slow circuit around Ngodhe Island and then passing close inshore to the east of Wayando. This seemed too late in the day, but the lodge staff said the best time was actually mid-morning, when local fishermen pull in their nets and otters come to snatch escapees. I suspect that this is good advice (I heard it independently from a few other people), although at the time I was mostly suspicious of their unwillingness to get out of bed. Nevertheless, we were unsuccessful, and my mood did not improve when the boatman tried to charge me more than double the agreed rate. I went out again at 5pm, this time in a small hand-paddled fishing boat, but saw only a few **Hippos**.

I was still certain that dawn would be the best time, so the lodge put me in touch with a British expat called Mike Wilson (+254 718 106 969), who offered to take me out the next morning. Mike is based in Mbita on the mainland, and knew a few likely spots for otters. By 6.30am we were out on the water in his homemade (and only slightly leaky) vessel, heading for the tiny Mbasa (or 'Bird') Island; home to spectacular numbers of roosting waterbirds, Mike had regularly seen otters here. A steady loop around the smaller adjacent island produced nothing, but as we combed the western side of Mbasa a distinctive ripple caught my eye. At first that was all, but then a glorious **Spotted-necked Otter** surfaced less than ten metres from the boat. When we switched off the engine, its initial wariness turned to curiosity and it came right towards us, almost 'spy-hopping' to get a better look. After several increasingly close-up appearances, it submerged for the last time, not to be seen again. It was a fabulous encounter, and well worth the wait – I was told by Mike's son, Maurice, that they are becoming increasingly difficult to find, perhaps due to a combination of pollution and the changing water levels. Still, Mike sees them regularly and is happy to be contacted by anyone looking for otters.



Spotted-necked Otter, Mbasa Island

Tsavo East National Park

I passed through Tsavo East three times. On the first occasion (2nd-4th February), I stayed at Voi Safari Lodge on the western edge of the park. The landscape here is considerably lush than further east, and I actually experienced quite a bit of rain during my visit. Common species in the area included **Bush Hyrax, African Savanna Elephant, Unstriped Ground Squirrel, Yellow Baboon, Vervet Monkey, Lion, Plains Zebra, African Buffalo, Common Eland, Impala, Peters's Gazelle, Hinde's Dik-dik, Hartebeest** and **Maasai Giraffe**. On my first night, 16 **Lions** (including some young cubs) came to drink at the camp waterhole.

On the 4th, I drove east through the park, passing through the Aruba Dam and Satao Camp areas, before exiting via the Bachuma Gate. In addition to the species above, this drive gave me my first **Spotted Hyaena, Black-backed Jackal, Desert Warthog**, and (Fringe-eared) **Beisa Oryx**.



(Fringe-eared) Beisa Oryx & Unstriped Ground Squirrel, Tsavo East National Park

My second visit to Tsavo East came at the end of June, as I travelled back to Nairobi from Watamu. I stayed for one night at Kulalu Camp, just outside the park's Sala Gate – there was very little game in this area, but tiny **Banana Serotines** were numerous at dusk.

The next day, I did a long drive through to the Ndololo Public Campsite. The best (and by far the most unexpected) sighting came north-east of Satao Camp (around [here](#)), where I came across a group of five **Hiroa**. They were distant, but it was still nice to see this critically endangered species. The campsite itself was pretty, with a lot of wildlife passing through, including **Wahlberg's Epauletted Fruit Bat** at dusk. Despite public campsites being open to all visitors, this was actually the only occasion during my time in Kenya when I had company.

We also passed through the park with Zarek on the 5th of October, entering through Sala Gate and leaving at Voi on the way to Shimba Hills. This time, the undoubted highlight was a surprise sighting of the rare coastal form of **Topi**, near Aruba Dam.

Rukinga Conservancy

I sadly spent just a single night, on the 10th of February, in this excellent conservancy – nowhere near enough to do it justice. The daytime highlights were a handsome bull **Lesser Kudu** and a surprise lone **Grevy's Zebra**, alongside other species such as **African Savanna Elephant**, **Yellow Baboon**, **Plains Zebra**, **Desert Warthog**, **African Buffalo**, **Common Eland**, **Gerenuk**, **Hinde's Dik-dik**, **(Fringe-eared) Beisa Oryx** and **Hartebeest**.

As a private conservancy, Rukinga offers many more freedoms to visitors than the neighbouring Tsavo East National Park. Unfortunately, this no longer includes the right to solo walks, but self-guided night drives remain permissible. I took myself out after dinner, learning for the first time just how difficult it is to simultaneously control a spotlight, thermal scope, binoculars and a large 4x4 on your own. I must have missed a lot of stuff, but did see **Senegal Galago**, **Common Genet** and **Black-backed Jackal**.



Hinde's Dik-dik & Gerenuk, Rukinga Conservancy

Taita Hills

I overnighted here on the way back to Nairobi on the 11th of February, staying at the University of Helsinki's TERRA Research Centre. During daylight hours, I saw **Blue** and **Vervet Monkeys**, but the real highlight came after dark – a night walk in Ngangao Forest (guided by Benson from the centre) produced several sightings of the currently undescribed local **Tree Hyrax**. The Kingdon field guide considers it a form of Eastern Tree Hyrax, but it has several distinctive features (including a unique call) and is likely to be confirmed as a separate and endemic species. Also glimpsed was **Small-eared Greater Galago** and the forest's subspecies of Kenya Coast Dwarf Galago, but my own views were not sufficient to count. Ngangao is one of just two major fragments of native forest left in the Taita Hills, but it barely covers one square kilometre! I'd like to return here to catch bats with researchers.

Ishaqbini Hirola Conservancy

When I first heard about the Hirola, I convinced myself that it was a species I would never have the opportunity to see. Almost mythically bizarre in its appearance, and seemingly on the verge of extinction in a dangerous and unstable part of Africa, the prospect of encountering one in the wild felt so remote that I hardly gave it any thought. Even after I started reading occasional reports mentioning the Ishaqbini Conservancy, in most cases the challenging security situation or even poor road conditions appeared to foil attempts to reach the reserve. It was only really in the last year or so that I realised that a trip to Ishaqbini would in fact be totally feasible and safe, and it became an absolute must-visit destination during my time in Kenya.



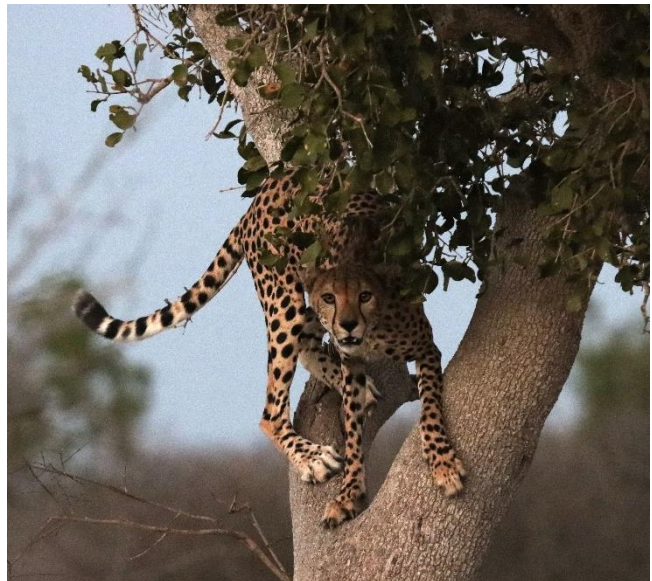
Hirola, Ishaqbini Hirola Conservancy

Nevertheless, I felt more comfortable travelling here with a guide, rather than on my own. Having read several fantastic reports featuring Zarek Cockar, I was massively keen to do a trip with him myself – Ishaqbini became the perfect first-night stop on a week-long tour at the beginning of October that also took in the Tana River Primate Reserve, Watamu, Shimba Hills and Diani. Zarek is great company and a superb guide – travelling with him hugely enhanced the experience. What's more, getting to the conservancy was not at all straightforward (there are no road signs, for example), so I was especially glad to go with someone who had visited Ishaqbini before.

Zarek picked us up from Malindi Airport on the morning of the 1st of October, and we immediately headed towards Ishaqbini. A pod of **Hippopotamuses** was in the Sabaki River from the bridge just north of town, but our attempts to stop here were scuppered by some overenthusiastic policemen. Closer to the conservancy, we were surprised to see a pair of enormous **Desert Warthogs** mating in the centre of a village.

We reached Ishaqbini in early afternoon – after registering at the conservancy HQ, we headed off towards our campsite. On our way, we caught sight of a strange antelope staring at us through the brush – a **Hirola**! Unusually, it appeared to be on its own, but it gave fantastic views for at least a couple of minutes before disappearing. We couldn't have wished for a better encounter with (possibly) the world's most endangered antelope – Zarek thought it was the most relaxed individual he had encountered. This was lucky, because it turned out to be our only sighting, despite a great deal of further searching. Although I had previously seen Hirola from the translocated population in Tsavo East, observing a truly wild individual in the species' native range felt much more meaningful. The core of Ishaqbini is a predator-free, fenced sanctuary containing (at the time of our visit) around 40 Hirola (many had recently been moved outside to improve a heavily male-biased sex ratio); the surrounding area also supports small but reasonably healthy numbers, although they may have been more spread out than normal on account of the drought.

Our campsite was situated under old-growth trees near the edge of Lake Ishaqbini, which had sadly dried up. It was a beautiful spot, made even more enjoyable with the dome tents, foam mattresses and excellent food provided by Zarek's cook and camp attendants. Short walks in the vicinity of the camp produced our first brief views of both **Tana River Red Colobus** and **Tana River Crested Mangabey**, but we didn't try to get closer as we knew these would be easier in the Primate Reserve across the river.



Lesser Kudu & Cheetah, Ishaqbini Hirola Conservancy

Game in Ishaqbini was abundant both inside and outside the sanctuary, despite the parched conditions. Common daytime mammals included **Yellow Baboon**, **Vervet Monkey**, **Plains Zebra**, **Desert Warthog**, **Reticulated Giraffe**, **Lesser Kudu**, **Kirk's Dik-dik** and **Gerenuk**, while we also saw **Black-backed Jackal** and **Common Dwarf Mongoose**.

Perhaps the greatest surprise of our time in Ishaqbini came at dusk, when we found two male **Cheetah** by the side of road, one half-way up a tree. They were wary of our vehicle, but still allowed superb views – we followed for a few minutes before losing them in the darkness and dense bush. Cheetah distribution in this part of Kenya is poorly understood, and they are rare at Ishaqbini – our ranger had seen the species just a handful of times in over ten years. We then spotlit our way back to base, seeing **Cape Hare**, **Yellow-winged Bat** and our first beautiful **Somali Lesser Galago**. Then, close to camp, we came up on a stunning **Caracal** crouched in the road! Although we startled it, it just strolled a short distance from the track, looking back at us disinterestedly. This was only the second Caracal I'd seen in nine months in Kenya, but it was well worth the wait.



Somali Lesser Galago & Caracal, Ishaqbini Hirola Conservancy

Over dinner, we watched and listened to **Small-eared Greater Galagos** in the trees above us, before heading out again, seeing **Emin's Tateril**, a *Gerbillus* gerbil (most likely **Least Gerbil**), **Common Genet** and (almost certainly the same) **Caracal**.

The next morning produced many of the aforementioned species (but no Hirola). As we left, a troop of **Somali Dwarf Mongoose** passed by the conservancy HQ, their coats distinctively shaggier than those of the Common Dwarves.

I had high expectations of Ishaqbini, and it exceeded them all. Of course, seeing wild Hirola in their native range has to be the highlight, but the supporting cast of mammals was so spectacular that it almost stole the show. Ishaqbini should have a permanent place on any serious Kenyan mammal-watching trip, not least because every traveller makes a substantial contribution to Hirola conservation; we were just the fourth visiting group of the year, so it's incredibly important to spread the word about this extraordinary place, which is now entirely safe.

Tana River Primate Reserve

After visiting Ishaqbini, Zarek took us across the Tana River to the eponymous Primate Reserve, where we hoped to get better views of the two endemic monkey species. Most of the Tana forests have been cleared or severely degraded, but this small reserve protects some beautiful habitat. The general surroundings are incredibly arid, but along the river itself is a narrow band of lush, dense forest, sometimes only a few hundred metres wide. Once inside, the illusion is remarkable – standing on the riverbank, I could easily imagine that I was deep in some remote jungle.



Tana River Primate Reserve

In early afternoon, we arrived at the park HQ, where some Free-tailed Bats were roosting. We then proceeded towards our riverside campsite, seeing two **Red (Harvey's) Duikers** shortly after entering the forest. An abandoned tent had several roosting Slit-faced Bats – previous trip reports have recorded these (based on tragus shape) as **Large-eared Slit-faced Bat**, so I have tentatively done the same. From there, we proceeded down to the river, where a small troop of **Blue Monkeys** was feeding out in the open, along with a few distant **Bushbuck** and **Waterbuck**. We then found a troop of **Tana River Red Colobus** feeding in the canopy, these individuals seemingly less shy than those at Ishaqbini.

After a brief stop at camp, we headed out again in search of the mangabeys. As there were apparently many elephants in the area, we were not able to venture far, but fortunately it didn't take long to locate a large party of **Tana River Mangabeys**. I was amazed by how rapidly they moved through the leaf litter as they foraged, and for a while all we managed were brief glimpses of disappearing backsides. However, after some persistence the mangabeys seemed to relax slightly, permitting much more satisfying views. We spent an hour or so with them, before returning to camp, where we saw **Red Bush Squirrel** and more **Tana River Red Colobus**.

Later in the evening, we took a night drive through a combination of riverine forest and adjacent scrub. Within the forest itself were species like **Small-eared Greater** and **Kenya Coast Dwarf Galagos**, while **Senegal Galago** was numerous outside. Also seen in the drier, more open areas were **White-tailed Mongoose**, **Hinde's Dik-dik** and a *Gerbilliscus* species that looked to be **Black-tailed Gerbil**. At one point, we had to change our route when confronted by an enormous bush fire, but luckily it didn't seem to reach the forest.



Tana River Red Colobus, Tana River Mangabey & possible Large-eared Slit-faced Bat, Tana River Primate Reserve

The next morning, we first wandered to the riverbank, which was spectacular in the dawn light. We then went to look for the mangabeys, finding them and enjoying another relaxed encounter – they even wandered through the edge of camp. Other highlights were a single **Red (Harvey's) Duiker**, **Bushbuck**, and a brief glimpse of a sounder of **Bushpigs** as they charged off. As we headed out of the forest, I checked a camera trap that I'd set up on the entrance road, finding that it had captured a beautiful **African Civet**. Overall, I cannot recommend the Tana River Primate Reserve highly enough – it's a stunning place with unique biodiversity, and is perfect in combination with Ishaqbini.

Watamu

I visited Watamu three times in total, initially for four nights from the 6th of February, when I stayed at the Turtle Bay Beach Club. **Blue Monkeys** were present in the car park as I arrived. On my first afternoon I made a brief visit to the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, seeing a **Golden-rumped Sengi** cross the road before I'd even reached the ticket office. I hired a local guide for a couple of hours and we took the short trail behind the office, seeing **Suni** and several more sengis – this is certainly the most reliable place for them (and they're a bit less shy than elsewhere).



Golden-rumped Sengi, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

Afterwards, we took a short drive to an artificial water point on the edge of the forest, where a large breeding herd of **African Savanna Elephants** came to drink at dusk. Especially nice to see was the crowd of locals, including many children, who had come to enjoy the spectacle. Arabuko-Sokoke is now surrounded by an elephant-proof fence, and although this has prevented their long-distance movement (particularly between the forest and Tsavo East), it has dramatically reduced human-wildlife conflict and, at least here, appears to have encouraged a more appreciative attitude towards the pachyderms. After dinner, I saw several **White-bellied Hedgehogs** in the grassy areas in front of the hotel.

Most of the 7th was spent working, but in the evening I met up with the incomparable David Ngala for a night drive. I was shocked and saddened to hear, a few months later, of David's tragic death in a motorbike accident. Even spending such a short time with him, I was astonished by both the extraordinary depth of his knowledge and by his dedication to protecting Arabuko-Sokoke. Were it not for his remarkable efforts over the last few decades, it seems certain that the forest would be in significantly worse shape – his passing is clearly a great loss for conservation.

As darkness fell, we started to see the first of several **Four-toed Sengis**. Unfortunately, we couldn't find Sokoke Dog Mongoose, but this was made up for by a superb encounter with a **Caracal**. Noticing some eyeshine reflecting distantly in the headlights, I peered through my binoculars and could just make out its distinctive pointed ears. I then switched the car off and followed the cat through my thermal scope as it slowly approached, eventually coming to within about 20 feet! At this point I switched on my torch, but in doing so accidentally whacked it against the side of the car; the Caracal was illuminated just as it bolted for cover. Cursing silently, I chatted to David for a minute or two in the dark before we decided to move on. To my immense surprise, the relit headlights revealed the Caracal, back and at point-blank range! For the next five minutes we watched as it sat, totally relaxed, by the roadside, once or twice even attempting to catch moths drawn to the light. This was one of the absolute highlights of my time in Kenya.



Caracal, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest

The next day, David and I went birding, also seeing **Red Bush Squirrel**, more **Golden-rumped Sengis** and a single **Zanj Sun Squirrel** by the main entrance. At dusk in the same area, we saw a **Small-eared Greater Galago** and heard several Kenya Coast Dwarf Galago. On the 9th, I took an early morning boat trip from Turtle Bay and found an obliging pod of **Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphins**.

I passed through Watamu again at the end of June, and took the opportunity to visit a few of the bat caves mentioned in other reports. I arranged this with Kajengo (+254719660743), who was an excellent guide. In order, we explored Pangayambo, Kaboga and Makuruhu Caves – this sequence was perfect, as the experience became more and more spectacular as we went on. Each cave cost KES10,000 to enter – a flat rate regardless of the number of visitors.

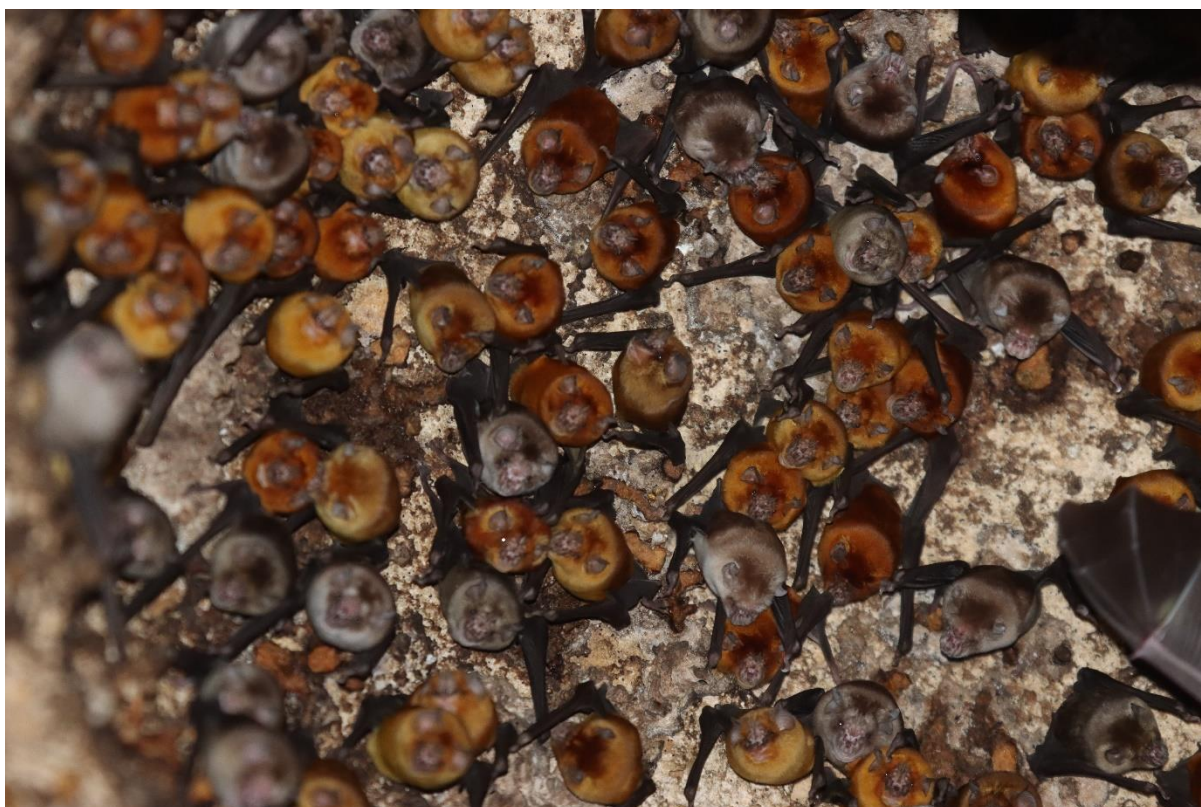


Striped Leaf-nosed Bat, Kaboga Cave

Pangayambo was pretty, and contained perhaps a hundred or so **Heart-nosed Bats**. Kaboga was on a different level though, with many thousands of individuals of several species. There were large numbers of “**Least**” **Bent-winged Bats** (*Miniopterus* clade 2), along with many **African Sheath-tailed Bats**, but the highlight was a huge colony of stunning **Striped Leaf-nosed Bats** on the ceiling of the main chamber.



African Sheath-tailed Bat, Kaboga Cave



African Trident Bat, Makuruhu Cave

Kajengo saved the best until last – Makuruhu Cave was unlike anything I’ve ever seen, with untold numbers of bats swirling through the air, coating the walls and filling every crevice (a video is [here](#)). There were more great clumps of “Least” Bentwings, alongside smaller groups of **“Greater” Bent-winged Bat** (*Miniopterus* clade 5). **African Sheath-tailed Bats** were, again, abundant, and a few **Hildegard’s Tomb Bats** were roosting in weep holes overhead. Finally, there were also thousands of **Cape Roundleaf Bats**, and the ceilings were bejewelled by swathes of gorgeous **African Trident Bats**. It was an incredible spectacle, and I stood, gazing up in slack-jawed awe until a strange taste began accumulating in my mouth.

Later that day, I independently went looking for the Watamu Cave in the centre of town. The GPS coordinates took me to a small, walled off plot of land behind the Blue Marmalade supermarket. Climbing up and peering over, I could just about see the entrance to a cave, but it was obviously private land and I was reluctant to jump over. Fortunately, I got chatting to a man nearby who said he knew the owner, and he helped me get inside – visible just within the cave entrance was a large colony of **Egyptian Fruit Bats**.

I visited Watamu a final time with Zarek in October, staying at A Rocha. Frustratingly, night drives were not really possible (apparently due to the recent presence of a Lion), so our chances of Sokoke Dog Mongoose were limited, but we did get good views of **Kenya Coast Dwarf Galago**. On the morning of the 4th, we saw a **Straw-coloured Fruit Bat** being chased by an African Goshawk near the Arabuko-Sokoke main entrance.

Shimba Hills National Reserve

The Shimba Hills National Reserve covers around 190 square kilometres, making it one of the largest remaining coastal forests in East Africa (after Arabuko-Sokoke). I visited twice, the first time for two nights (4th and 5th February) and then again for a single night with Zarek (5th October). On both occasions we stayed at Shimba Hills Lodge, an attractive option overlooking a small clearing and waterhole. Some of my best mammal encounters took place at the lodge itself – a troop of **Angola Colobus** was often present, and some gorgeous **Red Bush Squirrels** waited for scraps at the restaurant. Both evenings in February, a family of seven **Bushpigs** (two adults and five young) appeared below the dining area, giving wonderful views. After dinner during my first visit, a **Small-eared Greater Galago** came to feed on the fruit left out for it. On neither occasion was I able to find Black-and-rufous Sengi (despite some dedicated searching in its regular spot at the top of the lodge entrance road).



Bushpig & Red Bush Squirrel, Shimba Hills National Reserve

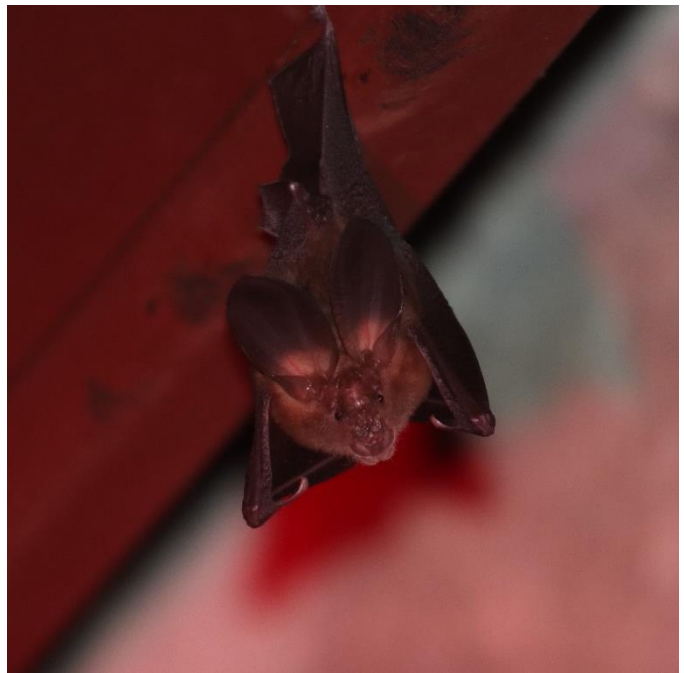
Some brief spotlighting with Zarek along the entrance road produced a good sighting of **Kenya Coast Dwarf Galago**. The staff also allowed us to climb into the lodge attic, where a small colony of **Slit-faced Bats** was roosting.



Sable Antelope, Shimba Hills National Reserve

Mammals were not abundant in the reserve itself, but I still had some nice sightings. Of course, my main target was Kenya's only **Sable Antelope** – after many hours of searching, I finally located a herd of 14 individuals (nearly 25% of the total population) on the evening of the 5th of February near Risley Ridge (a regular area for them). When I visited with Zarek in October, we were lucky to spot (not far from Sable Bandas) a superb adult male along with two females and a tiny calf – it was great to see evidence of breeding.

Across the two visits I also came across **Yellow Baboon**, many more **Angola Colobus**, **Common Warthog**, **African Buffalo**, numerous **Suni**, **Impala**, **Waterbuck**, **Hartebeest** and both **Blue** and **Red (Harvey's) Duiker**. Eastern Tree Hyrax is apparently seen (and heard) at night at the Sable Bandas (the KWS accommodation within the park).



Angola Colobus & Slit-faced Bat, Shimba Hills National Reserve

Diani

Diani was the final stop on my week with Zarek, when we stayed at the lovely The Sands at Nomad Hotel (6th October). The facilities were excellent, but the main appeal here was the small patch of coastal forest within the grounds. Here we saw habituated **Angola Colobus**, **Yellow Baboon**, **Blue** and **Vervet Monkeys**, **Red Bush Squirrel** and many **Suni** during an afternoon walk. We were unable to find any Black-and-rufous Sengi, but did observe **Four-toed Sengi** at dusk, when **Kenya Coast Dwarf Galago** also emerged. A brief post-dinner spotlight (c.21:45) almost immediately produced a fantastic pair of **Bushy-tailed Mongoose**, as well as **Small-eared Greater Galago**. Interesting, this same species was seen again at 07:00 the next day, in broad daylight – shortly afterwards, we also located five **Zanj Sun Squirrels** all foraging in adjacent trees.

After breakfast on the 7th, we travelled south to visit the bat caves at Shimoni and Three Sisters. As described in other reports, Shimoni is a tourist attraction due to its past association with the slave trade, and the bats here are highly disturbed by visitors and artificial light. Nevertheless, the colony of **Giant Leaf-nosed Bats** was spectacular – some of the smaller numbers of (very similar-looking) **Striped Leaf-nosed Bats** were also picked up on the bat detector. Other species noted in the cave were many **African Sheath-tailed** and **Hildegard's Tomb Bats**, alongside a single **Lander's Horseshoe Bat**.



Hildegard's Tomb & Giant Leaf-nosed Bats, Shimoni Slave Cave

We then proceeded to the nearby Three Sisters Caves, which was altogether a more overwhelming experience (in several ways, as it turned out). Accessing the main colony within the first cave (Kisimani) required commando-crawling through a tiny crack in the rock, all while half-submerged in cockroaches and shit. To add to the indignity of the situation, my shorts caught on something jagged and were almost ripped clean off. Nevertheless, the hardship all seemed worthwhile when we reached the chamber, which was teeming with countless bats, mostly **African Trident**, **African Sheath-tailed** and **Bent-winged** (*Miniopterus* clade 2) **Bats**, but there were also good numbers of **Eloquent Horseshoe Bats**.



Striped Leaf-nosed Bats, Three Sisters Caves

The second cave (Pangani) was not quite as spectacular, but still had a huge colony of **Striped Leaf-nosed Bat** roosting on the ceiling. However, Ndenyenye, the final cave, was perhaps the most astonishing of all (even though we failed to find the tiny Percival's Trident Bat – our main target). Here there was an inconceivable abundance of **Egyptian Fruit Bats** – the wall of eyeshine reflected in our torches was mind-blowing, and the bats swarmed through the air like a plague, continually slamming into our faces. One even hitched a ride on my neck for a few seconds. It was, without doubt, one of the most intense wildlife experiences I've ever had, and I loved every minute of it (a video is [here](#)). For people who really *really* love bats, Three Sisters Caves should be a must-visit destination. Having said that, this does seem like an appropriate moment for a little warning – after my return to the UK, I became seriously ill (with various horrible symptoms including vomiting, dizziness, fever and headaches). After a few weeks, I was eventually diagnosed with histoplasmosis, a fungal infection that can result from exposure to bats. In the end, I was off work for well over a month, and the after-effects lingered for much longer. Although I absolutely cannot bring myself to say that I regret visiting Three Sisters, I will probably wear a mask next time!

Despite the long-term impact on my health and career, Diani was a fantastic place to end not just my trip with Zarek, but also my time in Kenya. I will certainly hope to return.

What I Missed

As I mentioned in the introduction, there were not many species I missed that I had expected to see. Perhaps the only real examples, given the locations I visited, were Side-striped Jackal, Egyptian Mongoose and African Civet, each of which I had anticipated encountering at some point in my travels. A pair of jackals seen poorly in Nyakweri Forest may have been Side-striped, and I caught African Civet on my camera trap in the Tana River Primate Reserve, so even these were close calls. Another species I originally thought I would have a decent chance with was Patas Monkey – Laikipia County was formerly something of a stronghold for this savanna primate, but now they have all but disappeared.

There were obviously numerous rodents that I missed – the drought conditions around Mpala (and most of the rest of the country) meant that these were extremely scarce throughout my trip. Likewise, many bats went either unseen or unidentified (especially Vesper Bats). I did not encounter a single species of shrew in Kenya.

I did put in considerable effort for a few difficult (or near impossible!) species, including Sokoke Dog Mongoose, Bongo and Giant Pangolin. Of these, the mongoose felt the most likely – a total of five night drives in Arabuko-Sokoke Forest ought to have offered a reasonable chance. Bongo and Giant Pangolin were always massive long shots, although both could be achievable with more time and better planning. Encountering other rare or unpredictable species like Ground Pangolin, Jackson's Mongoose and Aders's Duiker would have required some stupendous luck (although I did see the last species in Zanzibar, along with Black-and-rufous Sengi, which didn't show in either Shimba Hills or Diani).

When I return to Kenya, I will focus on western areas that I didn't have time to visit in 2022. Kakamega Forest, Mount Elgon, Saiwa Swamp and other locations should provide an opportunity for species such as Forest Giant Squirrel, Lord Derby's Anomalure, East African Potto, De Brazza's Monkey, Sitatunga and perhaps even White-bellied Pangolin.

Mammal Species List

Locations: MPA = Mpala, OLP = Ol Pejeta, NAN = Nanyuki area, ABE = Aberdare NP, KEN = Mt Kenya NP, MER = Meru NP, SBS = Samburu/Buffalo Springs/Shaba NRs, NAI = Nairobi NP, TSE = Tsavo East NP, RUK = Rukinga, TAI = Taita Hills, ISH = Ishaqbini, TAN = Tana River Primate Reserve, WAT = Watamu, SHI = Shimba Hills NR, DIA = Diani, NGU = Nguruman, SUS = Mt Suswa, ELE = Lake Elementaita, NAK = Lake Nakuru, MAR = Maasai Mara, RUM = Ruma NP, VIC = Lake Victoria, NYA = Nyakweri Forest

No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Locations	Notes
1	Rock Hyrax	<i>Procavia capensis</i>	MPA, NAK, SUS	<i>ssp. johnstoni</i>
2	Bush Hyrax	<i>Heterohyrax brucei</i>	TSE, MPA, MAR, SBS	
3	'Taita' Tree Hyrax	<i>Dendrohyrax sp.</i>	TAI	Included within <i>D. validus</i> by Kingdon, but likely undescribed species
4	Southern Tree Hyrax	<i>Dendrohyrax arboreus</i>	NAN, ABE, MAR	
5	African Savanna Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>	TSE, WAT, RUK, MPA, OLP, ABE, MAR, MER, SBS, NGU, NYA	
6	Aardvark	<i>Orycteropus afer</i>	MPA, OLP	11 sightings in total
7	Golden-rumped Sengi	<i>Rhynchocyon chrysopygus</i>	WAT	
8	Four-toed Sengi	<i>Petrodromus tetradactylus</i>	WAT, DIA	
9	Rufous Sengi	<i>Galegeeska rufescens</i>	MPA	
10	Cape Hare	<i>Lepus capensis</i>	MPA, OLP, NGU	
11	African Savanna Hare	<i>Lepus victoriae</i>	ABE, ELE, NYA	
12	East African Springhare	<i>Pedetes surdaster</i>	ELE	
13	Crested Porcupine	<i>Hystrix cristata</i>	MPA	
14	Naked Mole Rat	<i>Heterocephalus glaber</i>	MER	
15	Coypu	<i>Myocastor coypus</i>	ABE	Introduced species
16	Unstriped Ground Squirrel	<i>Xerus rutilus</i>	TSE, MPA, MER, SBS, NGU	
17	Striped Ground Squirrel	<i>Euxerus erythropus</i>	MPA	
18	Zanj Sun Squirrel	<i>Heliosciurus undulatus</i>	WAT, DIA	

19	Ochre Bush Squirrel	<i>Paraxerus ochraceus</i>	NAI, MPA, NGU, SUS, ABE	
20	Red Bush Squirrel	<i>Paraxerus palliatus</i>	SHI, WAT, TAN, DIA	
21	East African Mole Rat	<i>Tachyoryctes splendens</i>	ABE	ssp. <i>rex</i> – likely split as ‘King Mole Rat’
22	Southern Giant Pouched Rat	<i>Cricetomys ansorgei</i>	NAN	
23	East African Pouched Mouse	<i>Saccostomus mearnsi</i>	MPA	
24	Grey Climbing Mouse	<i>Dendromus cf. melanotis</i>	MPA, NYA	Species group
25	Black-tailed Gerbil	<i>Gerbilliscus nigricaudus</i>	TAN	
26	East African Gerbil	<i>Gerbilliscus vicinus</i>	MPA	
27	Emin’s Tateril	<i>Taterillus emini</i>	MPA, NGU, ISH	
28	Least Gerbil	<i>Gerbillus pusillus</i>	NGU?, ISH	<i>G.pusillus</i> in Ishaqbini. Individuals in Nguruman <i>G.pusillus/harwoodi</i>
29	Maned Rat	<i>Lophiomys imhausi</i>	NAN	
30	Afroalpine Vlei Rat	<i>Otomys orestes</i>	KEN	
31	African Grass Rat	<i>Arvicanthis niloticus</i>	MAR, NYA	‘Maasai Mara’ Grass Rat, <i>A.(niloticus) muansae</i>
32	Hinde’s Rock Rat	<i>Aethomys hindei</i>	MPA	
33	East African Thicket Rat	<i>Grammomys cf. ibeanus</i>	NAN, MPA	Species complex
34	Pygmy Mouse	<i>Mus cf. minutoides</i>	MPA	Species complex
35	House Mouse	<i>Mus musculus</i>	NAN	Introduced species seen in Nanyuki town
36	Natal Multimammate Mouse	<i>Mastomys natalensis</i>	NGU	
37	Somali Galago	<i>Galago gallarum</i>	MER, ISH	
38	Senegal Galago	<i>Galago senegalensis</i>	RUK, MPA, OLP, NGU, TAN	
39	Kenya Coast Dwarf Galago	<i>Paragalago cocos</i>	TAN, WAT, SHI, DIA	
40	Thick-tailed Greater Galago	<i>Otolemur crassicaudatus</i>	NYA	ssp. <i>argentatus</i> . Sometimes considered full species <i>O.monteiri</i>
41	Small-eared Greater Galago	<i>Otolemur garnetti</i>	SHI, WAT, TAI, ABE, SBS, NAI, ISH, TAN, DIA	ssp. <i>lasiotis</i> and <i>kikuyuensis</i>
42	Tana River Mangabey	<i>Cercocebus galeritus</i>	ISH, TAN	
43	Olive Baboon	<i>Papio anubis</i>	MPA, OLP, ABE, MAR, NAI, MER, SBS, NGU, SUS	

44	Yellow Baboon	<i>Papio cynocephalus</i>	TSE, WAT, RUK, SHI, DIA	
45	Vervet Monkey	<i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i>	TAI, MPA, TSE, OLP, MAR, NAI, MER, SBS, NGU, ISH, DIA, ELE, NAK	
46	Red-tailed Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus ascanius</i>	NYA	ssp. <i>schmidti</i>
47	Blue Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus mitis</i>	WAT, TAI, KEN, ABE, NYA, NAI, TAN	ssp. <i>kolbi</i> , <i>albotorquatus</i> and <i>albogularis</i>
48	Angola Colobus	<i>Colobus angolensis</i>	SHI, DIA	ssp. <i>palliates</i>
49	Guereza Colobus	<i>Colobus guereza</i>	NAN, KEN, NGU	ssp. <i>kikuyuensis</i> and <i>matschiei</i>
50	Tana River Red Colobus	<i>Piliocolobus rufomitatus</i>	ISH, TAN	
51	White-bellied Hedgehog	<i>Atelerix albiventris</i>	MPA, WAT	
52	Egyptian Fruit Bat	<i>Rousettus aegyptiacus</i>	WAT, DIA	
53	East African Epauletted Fruit Bat	<i>Epomophorus minimus</i>	NGU, SBS?	Known colony in Nguruman. Individuals seen at Sarova Shaba possibly this species
54	Wahlberg's Epauletted Fruit Bat	<i>Epomophorus wahlbergi</i>	MAR, TSE, VIC?	
55	Straw-coloured Fruit Bat	<i>Eidolon helvum</i>	WAT	
56	Yellow-winged Bat	<i>Lavia frons</i>	MPA, NGU, ISH	
57	Heart-nosed Bat	<i>Cardioderma cor</i>	MER, WAT, NGU	
58	African Trident Bat	<i>Triaenops afer</i>	WAT, DIA	
59	Persian Trident Bat	<i>Triaenops persicus</i>	ELE	
60	Giant Leaf-nosed Bat	<i>Macronycteris gigas</i>	DIA	
61	Striped Leaf-nosed Bat	<i>Macronycteris vittatus</i>	WAT, DIA	
62	Cape Roundleaf Bat	<i>Hipposideros "caffer" clade 5</i>	WAT	
63	Maghreb Roundleaf Bat	<i>Hipposideros cf. tephros</i>	ELE	Jaika Cave
64	Geoffroy's Horseshoe Bat	<i>Rhinolophus clivosus</i>	ELE	Kariandusi Mines
65	Lander's Horseshoe Bat	<i>Rhinolophus landeri</i>	MPA, ELE, SUS, DIA	c.110kHz
66	Eloquent Horseshoe Bat	<i>Rhinolophus eloquens</i>	MPA, NAK, ELE, DIA	c.45kHz
67	Ruppell's Horseshoe Bat	<i>Rhinolophus fumigatus</i>	MPA	c.61kHz
68	Hildegard's Tomb Bat	<i>Taphozous hildegardae</i>	WAT, DIA	

69	African Sheath-tailed Bat	<i>Coleura afra</i>	WAT, DIA, ELE	
70	Hairy Slit-faced Bat	<i>Nycteris hispida</i>	VIC	
71	Egyptian Slit-faced Bat	<i>Nycteris thebaica</i>	ELE, MPA?, TAN?, SHI?	<i>Nycteris</i> at Diatomite Caves ID'd by Paul Webala as <i>thebaica</i> . Those seen at Mpala, Tana PR and Shimba Hills Lodge possibly this species or <i>macrotis</i>
72	Harrison's Giant Mastiff Bat	<i>Otomops harrisoni</i>	SUS	
73	Little Free-tailed Bat	<i>Chaerephon pumilus</i>	MPA?, NGU?	Probable in many locations. Other molossids not ruled out
74	"Natal" Bent-winged Bat	<i>Miniopterus</i> clade 7	ELE	Mid-sized, uniform dark brown, with shorter fur
75	"African" Bent-winged Bat	<i>Miniopterus</i> clade 8	ELE	Large, grey back, paler front, with long fur
76	"Greater" Bent-winged Bat	<i>Miniopterus</i> clade 5	WAT	Large, dark – small groups
77	"Least" Bent-winged Bat	<i>Miniopterus</i> clade 2	WAT, DIA	Tiny, black back and grey front – large groups
78	Bent-winged Bat sp.	<i>Miniopterus</i> clade 1	NAK	Small, dark – on ceiling in large groups
79	Bent-winged Bat sp.	<i>Miniopterus</i> clade 4	NAK	Larger, grey – on walls in small groups
80	Somali Serotine	<i>Neoromicia somalica</i>	NGU	c.90-65kHz
81	Banana Serotine	<i>Afronycteris nanus</i>	TSE, SBS	c.70-35kHz
82	Andrew Rebori's House Bat	<i>Scotophilus andrewreborii</i>	MPA	Probable, but may have been <i>Scotophilus</i> clade 2
83	Cape Hairy Bat	<i>Myotis tricolor</i>	NAK	
84	Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>	TSE, MPA, OLP, MAR, NAI, SBS	ssp. <i>melanochaita</i>
85	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	MPA, MAR, ABE	ssp. <i>pardus</i> . Melanistic female at Mpala
86	Serval	<i>Leptailurus serval</i>	OLP, MPA, MAR	
87	Caracal	<i>Caracal caracal</i>	WAT, ISH	ssp. <i>caracal</i>
88	Cheetah	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>	MPA, MAR, OLP, NGU, ISH	ssp. <i>jubatus</i>
89	African Wildcat	<i>Felis lybica</i>	MPA, OLP, NGU	OI Pejeta sighting may have been a hybrid

90	Common Genet	<i>Genetta genetta</i>	RUK, MPA, NGU, OLP, ISH, ELE	
91	Large-spotted Genet	<i>Genetta maculate</i>	NAN, ABE, MAR, NYA	
92	Spotted Hyaena	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>	TSE, MPA, OLP, ABE, MAR, NGU, NAI, NYA	
93	Striped Hyaena	<i>Hyaena hyaena</i>	MPA, OLP	
94	Aardwolf	<i>Proteles cristata</i>	MPA	
95	Bushy-tailed Mongoose	<i>Bdeogale crassicauda</i>	DIA	
96	White-tailed Mongoose	<i>Ichneumia albicauda</i>	MPA, OLP, ABE, NGU, MAR, NAN, TAN, ELE	
97	Slender Mongoose	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>	MPA, SBS	
98	Marsh Mongoose	<i>Atilax paludinosus</i>	ELE	
99	Somali Dwarf Mongoose	<i>Helogale hirtula</i>	SBS, ISH	
100	Common Dwarf Mongoose	<i>Helogale parvula</i>	MPA, MAR, WAT, ISH, TSE	
101	Banded Mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>	MAR, TSE	
102	Bat-eared Fox	<i>Otocyon megalotis</i>	MPA, OLP, ELE, NGU	
103	Black-backed Jackal	<i>Lupulella mesomelas</i>	TSE, RUK, MPA, OLP, MAR, NAI, MER, SBS, ISH, ELE, NYA?	Sighting in Nyakweri may have been Side-striped Jackal
104	African Wild Dog	<i>Lycaon pictus</i>	MPA	
105	Honey Badger	<i>Mellivora capensis</i>	MPA	
106	Zorilla	<i>Ictonyx striatus</i>	OLP, MPA, NGU	
107	Spotted-necked Otter	<i>Hydriectis maculicollis</i>	VIC	
108	African Clawless Otter	<i>Aonyx capensis</i>	NAN	
109	Grevy's Zebra	<i>Equus grevyi</i>	RUK, MPA, SBS	
110	Plains Zebra	<i>Equus quagga</i>	TSE, RUK, MPA, OLP, MAR, NAI, MER, SBS, ELE, NGU, NYA, ISH	ssp. <i>boehmi</i>
111	White Rhinoceros	<i>Ceratotherium simum</i>	NAI, OLP, RUM, NAK	ssp. <i>simum</i> (introduced)
112	Black Rhinoceros	<i>Diceros bicornis</i>	NAI, OLP, MAR	ssp. <i>microchloa</i>
113	Desert Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus aethiopicus</i>	TSE, RUK, MER, SBS, ISH	ssp. <i>delamerei</i>
114	Common Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>	TSE, SHI, MPA, OLP, ABE, MAR, NAI, NGU	ssp. <i>massaicus</i>
115	Giant Forest Hog	<i>Hylochoerus meinertzhageni</i>	ABE	ssp. <i>meinertzhageni</i>
116	Bushpig	<i>Potamochoerus larvatus</i>	SHI, RUM, TAN	ssp. <i>larvatus</i>

117	Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	NAI, MPA, MAR, MER, SBS, WAT, ELE, VIC	
118	African Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	NAI, TSE, SHI, RUK, MPA, OLP, ABE, MAR, MER, SBS, RUM	ssp. <i>caffer</i>
119	Cape Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus sylvaticus</i>	NAN, MPA, ABE, MAR, NAI, NYA, TAN	
120	Lesser Kudu	<i>Tragelaphus imberbis</i>	RUK, MPA, NGU, TSE, ISH	ssp. <i>australis</i>
121	Greater Kudu	<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>	MPA, SBS	ssp. <i>chora</i>
122	Common Eland	<i>Taurotragus oryx</i>	NAI, TSE, RUK, OLP, MPA, MAR, KEN, NYA	
123	Suni	<i>Nesotragus moschatus</i>	SHI, WAT, DIA, ABE, NAN, NAI,	ssp. <i>kirchenpauri</i> , <i>moschatus</i>
124	Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>	NAI, TSE, SHI, MPA, OLP, MER, SBS, NGU, RUM, NYA, MAR	
125	Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>	MPA, OLP	ssp. <i>neumanni</i>
126	Gerenuk	<i>Litocranius walleri</i>	RUK, MPA, SBS, TSE, ISH	
127	Grant's Gazelle	<i>Nanger granti</i>	NAI, MAR, NGU	
128	Bright's Gazelle	<i>Nangeri notatus</i>	MPA, OLP, MER, SBS	
129	Peters's Gazelle	<i>Nanger petersii</i>	TSE	
130	Thomson's Gazelle	<i>Eudorcas thomsonii</i>	NAI, OLP, MAR, MPA	
131	Cavendish's Dik-dik	<i>Madoqua cavendishi</i>	MAR, ELE, NGU, NYA	
132	Gunther's Dik-dik	<i>Madoqua guentheri</i>	MPA, SBS	ssp. <i>smithii</i>
133	Hinde's Dik-dik	<i>Madoqua hindei</i>	TSE, RUK, TAN	
134	Kirk's Dik-dik	<i>Madoqua kirkii</i>	MER, SBS, ISH	
135	Oribi	<i>Ourebia ourebi</i>	MAR, RUM	In fenced area at Ruma NP
136	Mountain Reedbuck	<i>Redunca fulvorufula</i>	NAI	
137	Bohor Reedbuck	<i>Redunca redunca</i>	NAI, ABE	ssp. <i>wardi</i>
138	Waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymus</i>	TSE, SHI, MPA, OLP, KEN, ABE, MAR, ELE, NAK, MER, SBS, TAN	ssp. <i>defassa</i> and <i>ellipsiprymnus</i>
139	Sable Antelope	<i>Hippotragus niger</i>	SHI	ssp. <i>roosevelti</i>
140	Roan Antelope	<i>Hippotragus equinus</i>	RUM	Last 14 Kenyan individuals inside fenced area
141	Beisa Oryx	<i>Oryx beisa</i>	TSE, RUK, SBS, NGU, MPA	ssp. <i>beisa</i> and <i>callotis</i>

142	Hartebeest	<i>Alcephalus buselaphus</i>	NAI, SHI, RUK, OLP, MPA, TSE, MAR, MER	ssp. <i>cokii</i> and 'Jackson's'
143	Hirola	<i>Beatragus hunter</i>	ISH, TSE	
144	Topi	<i>Damaliscus lunatus</i>	MAR, RUM, TSE	ssp. <i>jimela</i> and <i>topi</i>
145	Common Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>	MAR, NAI, NGU	ssp. <i>mearnsi</i>
146	Common Duiker	<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>	ABE, KEN, NYA	
147	Blue Duiker	<i>Philantomba monticola</i>	SHI	
148	Red (Harvey's) Duiker	<i>Cephalophus natalensis</i>	SHI, ABE, TAN, NAI	Treating <i>C.harveyi</i> as conspecific with <i>C.natalensis</i>
149	Black-fronted Duiker	<i>Cephalophus nigrifrons</i>	ABE	
150	Weyns's Duiker	<i>Cephalophus weynsi</i>	NYA	
151	Klipspringer	<i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>	MPA	
152	Northern Giraffe	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>	ELE, RUM	ssp. <i>rothschildi</i>
153	Reticulated Giraffe	<i>Giraffa reticulata</i>	MPA, OLP, MER, SBS, ISH	
154	Maasai Giraffe	<i>Giraffa tippelskirchi</i>	NAI, TSE, MAR, NGU	
155	Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin	<i>Tursiops aduncus</i>	WAT	