



Servals and Caracal Photo Tour 2023 – Trip Summary

Serval and Caracal tour dates: November 10th - November 17th, 2023

Group: Sebastian Kennerknecht and Rachel Tobias as trip leaders. We had four cat expedition guests.



Highlights of the Trips

Servals: In total, we photographed five different serval, including an extended hunting event. Sightings averaged thirty minutes, at an average distance of twenty meters. For our closest encounter, we had the serval at just four meters!



Cheetah: We had about over a dozen different cheetah sightings. We saw a hunt from a distance, but the highlight for sure was watching a mom carry her five kittens one-by-one to a new den.



Lions: Though not our target wild cat species, we had nice sightings of lions, including males relaxing on kopjes, a mating pair, and females that were pushing out a male of their pride.



Spotted Hyena: Hyenas were numerous throughout the tour. We kept seeing them look for weak wildebeest as the migration came through.



Serval and Caracal Photo Tour Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival in Kilimanjaro Airport. Drive one hour to our hotel in Arusha. Settle in, enjoy the grounds and the birds. Dinner at hotel.

Day 2: Morning bush flight to the Serengeti. Game drive until sunset towards the lodge. Dinner.

Day 3-7: Morning and afternoon safari in eastern Serengeti.

Day 8: Game drive towards the airport. Fly to Arusha, drive to Kilimanjaro airport. Fly out.

Detailed Trip Summary of our 2023 Serval and Caracal Photo Tour

Day 1: All of our guests decided to do an extension pre-tour in other parts of the Serengeti, so Rachel and I arrived by ourselves in Kilimanjaro. We drove to the hotel, and crashed, since we were exhausted from the international flights.

Day 2: After an early breakfast, we made our way to Arusha airport to catch our 1.5 hour flight to Seronera in the central Serengeti. We were picked up by our fabulous local guide Moinga there. From there we drove east, towards our lodge, meeting two of our clients along the way. They were already with their first serval, which had spent the late morning hunting in the savanna. We couldn't have been happier that they had already seen their first cat. We got word our second couple had just landed so wanted them to come as quickly as possible to see this serval. We never saw it again (it was hiding in thick cover), but luckily enough we saw a second cat shortly after, so by the first afternoon everyone had seen serval. The pressure was off! This was especially true since we classify serval at a difficulty level of "difficult", hoping to have one good photo opportunity with the cats.



Day 3: We spent all day in the eastern Serengeti with serval and caracal as our main targets. This trip is designed for these two cats, so we spent little time with other cats. That was of course until Rachel found a female cheetah that had five three-week-old kittens. We watched her for a while, ate breakfast, and then returned, right when she started to move each cub individually. She would pick one up, and walk quite a way, 800 meters to the new den site. Most of the time, she would drop the kitten a few times. The kittens were none the wiser and seemed happy to get a free ride. We saw one more cheetah in the afternoon, but the mom was definitely the highlight of the day.



Day 4: We spent the morning looking for caracal specifically but came up empty. We had nice sightings of Bat-eared fox pups and a female cheetah. For the afternoon, we explored a new area, again with caracal and serval as our goal. Just as the light was fading into dusk, we found a beautiful serval, as it was hunting for rodents in a rocky area. The sighting was brief, less than five minutes, but we were all elated! Plus, an aardwolf on the drive was the cherry on top.



Day 5: No serval or caracal this day, but we had a great session with a pair of mating lions. The male was very impressive, and we stayed for a while watching them doing their thing.



Day 6: The morning started with a couple of secretary birds that were gathering nesting materials. It is hard not to find these birds comical at times, but they are also majestic in their own right. Shortly after leaving the secretary birds, we were stopped in our tracks by a black-bellied bustard, which decided the road was the best place for his courtship display. Again, we were happy to oblige watching his performance.

After the bustard walked off the road, we encountered four female lions that greeted each other with lots of nuzzling, having spent the night apart from each other. A sub-adult male slowly walked up to them and too was greeted with seeming affection. That lasted only a short while as the females started pinning back their ears and snarling at the male. Talking with Moinga, he agreed, the females were trying to tell the male It was time to go. He wasn't so convinced, and we watched two more physical confrontations with the female swatting at the male.



The afternoon was quiet in terms of cats, though we once again targeted caracal. We did, however, enjoy the millions of wildebeest which had now moved into the area as part of their migration south, to their calving grounds.

Day 7: As we were searching for melanistic servals in a particular area of the eastern Serengeti, we came across a beautiful, relaxed cheetah, which gave us many opportunities to photograph her as she was scanning the savanna for suitable prey. We were able to get incredibly low angled photographs of her, which everyone was excited about.

After leaving her we saw a Thompson's Gazelle alarm calling. Knowing there was probably a predator close by, we Investigated, finding a spotted hyena who had just tracked down a calf

and was carrying it off. Those types of sightings always provide mixed emotions, and we moved on after a short while.



Day 8: Our final day, half day really, as we utilized the drive to the airport as our morning game drive. After a quick rain shower, we were greeted with a beautiful rainbow. I took it as a sign of good luck and had a good feeling about finding a small cat. Moinga recommended we check out this particular area, and he was spot on. Within a couple of minutes, we found a serval that was actively hunting.

We watched closely, in fascination as the cat slowly and meticulously zig-zagged through the tall grass. Its big, disproportionate ears always slightly twisting as it was listening for rodents walking through the grass. After a few minutes it stopped dead in its tracks. It had obviously heard something it knew it could hunt. Its ears moved more vigorously, pinpointing the exact location of the rodent. Like a house cat, the serval tucked its rear legs closer to its front legs, under its hips. It was coiled like a spring, ready to jump when the moment was right. With a tremendously quick motion, it leapt five feet into the air, front feet outstretched ready to pin down its prey. It missed, and in that typical cat fashion walked on as if it meant to do it all along. After a quick rest, it continued the hunt.

After just a few minutes the same action as before repeated itself. It stopped, listened, and then pounced. This time, however, the pounce was much shallower, closer to the ground. It pinned down the rodent with its front paw and quickly dispatched it with a bite to the back of the neck. It ate it with its face hiding behind a bush, but we could hear the crunching of the bones. It was a long sighting, with fantastic behavior and we were all beyond excited!

Somehow that wasn't even the end of our luck, as we spotted a second serval before returning to the Seronera airport. We sadly never did see a caracal for the duration of the tour, but we were thrilled with all the numerous sightings of servals and other felines.



Species List for the Serval and Caracal Photo Tour 2022:

Mammals

African Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>
African Savannah Hare	<i>Lepus victoriae</i>
Yellow-winged Bat	<i>Lavia frons</i>
Cheetah	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>
African Wildcat	<i>Felis lybica</i>
Serval	<i>Leptailurus serval</i>
Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>
Egyptian Mongoose	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>
Banded Mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>
Spotted Hyena	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>
Aardwolf	<i>Proteles cristata</i>
African Golden Wolf	<i>Canis lupaster</i>
Side-striped Jackal	<i>Lupulella adusta</i>
Black-backed Jackal	<i>Lupulella mesomelas</i>
Bat-eared Fox	<i>Otocyon megalotis</i>
Plains Zebra	<i>Equus quagga</i>
Common Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>
Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>
Masai Giraffe	<i>Giraffa tippelskirchi</i>
Coke's Hartebeest	<i>Alcelaphus buselaphus cokei</i>
Blue Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>
Topi	<i>Damaliscus lunatus</i>
Grant's Gazelle	<i>Nanger granti</i>
Thomson's Gazelle	<i>Eudorcas thomsonii</i>
Kirk's Dik-dik	<i>Madoqua kirkii</i>
Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>
Cape Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>
Common Eland	<i>Taurotragus oryx</i>
Bohor Reedbuck	<i>Redunca redunca</i>

Birds

Common Ostrich	<i>Struthio camelus</i>
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>
Red-billed Duck	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>
Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>
Coqui Francolin	<i>Francolinus coqui</i>
Shelley's Francolin	<i>Francolinus shelleyi</i>
Gray-breasted Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis rufopictus</i>
Speckled Pigeon	<i>Columba guinea</i>
Ring-necked Dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>
Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>

Yellow-throated Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles gutturalis</i>
Black-faced Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles decoratus</i>
Kori Bustard	<i>Ardeotis kori</i>
White-bellied Bustard	<i>Eupodotis senegalensis</i>
Black-bellied Bustard	<i>Lissotis melanogaster</i>
White-browed Coucal	<i>Centropus superciliosus</i>
Spotted Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus capensis</i>
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>
Blacksmith Lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>
Senegal Lapwing	<i>Vanellus lugubris</i>
Crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Double-banded Courser	<i>Smutsornis africanus</i>
Temminck's Courser	<i>Cursorius temminckii</i>
White-winged Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
African Openbill	<i>Anastomus lamelligerus</i>
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
Abdim's Stork	<i>Ciconia abdimii</i>
Marabou Stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumenifer</i>
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Black-headed Heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>
Secretarybird	<i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i>
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
White-headed Vulture	<i>Trigonoceps occipitalis</i>
Lappet-faced Vulture	<i>Torgos tracheliotos</i>
Hooded Vulture	<i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>
White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>
Ruppell's Griffon	<i>Gyps rueppelli</i>
Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>
Black-chested Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus pectoralis</i>
Brown Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>
Martial Eagle	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>
Tawny Eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>
Gabar Goshawk	<i>Micronisus gabar</i>
Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>
Spotted Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo africanus</i>
Verreaux's Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo lacteus</i>
Marsh Owl	<i>Asio capensis</i>
Pearl-spotted Owlet	<i>Glaucidium perlatum</i>
Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
African Gray Hornbill	<i>Tockus nasutus</i>

Little Bee-eater	<i>Merops pusillus</i>
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>
Lilac-breasted Roller	<i>Coracias caudatus</i>
D'Arnaud's Barbet	<i>Trachyphonus darnaudii</i>
Bearded Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicos namaquus</i>
Gray Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicos goertae</i>
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>
Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Greater Kestrel	<i>Falco rupicoloides</i>
Lanner Falcon	<i>Falco biarmicus</i>
Fischer's Lovebird	<i>Agapornis fischeri</i>
Brubru	<i>Nilaus afer</i>
Brown-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra australis</i>
Slate-colored Boubou	<i>Laniarius funebris</i>
Fork-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>
African Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>
Isabelline Shrike	<i>Lanius isabellinus</i>
Gray-backed Fiscal	<i>Lanius excubitoroides</i>
Magpie Shrike	<i>Corvinella melanoleuca</i>
Cape Crow	<i>Corvus capensis</i>
Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>
Fischer's Sparrow-Lark	<i>Eremopterix leucopareia</i>
Rufous-naped Lark	<i>Mirafraga africana</i>
Flappet Lark	<i>Mirafraga rufocinnamomea</i>
Red-capped Lark	<i>Calandrella cinerea</i>
Rattling Cisticola	<i>Cisticola chiniana</i>
Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
Desert Cisticola	<i>Cisticola aridulus</i>
Arrow-marked Babbler	<i>Turdoides jardineii</i>
Hildebrandt's Starling	<i>Lamprotornis hildebrandti</i>
Wattled Starling	<i>Creatophora cinerea</i>
Ruppell's Starling	<i>Lamprotornis purpuropterus</i>
Superb Starling	<i>Lamprotornis superbus</i>
African Gray Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis microrhynchus</i>
Silverbird	<i>Melaenornis semipartitus</i>
Sooty Chat	<i>Myrmecocichla nigra</i>
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
Capped Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe pileata</i>
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>
Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver	<i>Bubalornis niger</i>
White-headed Buffalo Weaver	<i>Dinemellia dinemelli</i>
Rufous-tailed Weaver	<i>Histurgops ruficauda</i>
Lesser Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus intermedius</i>
Black-faced Waxbill	<i>Estrilda erythronotos</i>
Red-cheeked Cordonbleu	<i>Uraeginthus bengalus</i>

African Pied Wagtail

African Pipit

Plain-backed Pipit

Yellow-throated Longclaw

Pangani Longclaw

Rosy-throated Longclaw

Yellow-fronted Canary

Motacilla aguimp

Anthus cinnamomeus

Anthus leucophrys

Macronyx croceus

Macronyx aurantiigula

Macronyx ameliae

Crithagra mozambica



Hi everyone, we are Rachel and Sebastian! We own and lead tours for Cat Expeditions and Whale Expeditions, bringing people eye-to-eye with wild cats and cetaceans. We care deeply about providing extraordinary experiences for our guests, prioritize small group tours for intimate interactions, insist on ethical photography and tourism, putting the welfare of the wildlife first.

Conservation is the backbone of our beliefs and our business, and we give 10-20% of our tour costs to local conservation projects. We select tour locations in places that provide and support economic incentives for local communities to own and steward long-term conservation.