

Trip Report: Kenya – January 2024

We spent three weeks in Kenya in January 2024. We hired a brilliant guide (Zarek Cockar – he has his own company and guides independent safaris <https://www.zarekcockarsafaris.com/about>). I would have no hesitation in recommending him for something more interesting than the standard Kenya safari circuit. Zarek booked everything except our international flights which made it very easy for me.

Andy and I share a passion for wildlife in all its forms, particularly mammals, but we also enjoy birds, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates (except for mosquitoes, ticks, leeches and tsetse flies!). Andy is a keen photographer and I do the research, planning and processing of all the photos afterwards. We've done safaris in other parts of Africa before, so were looking for something a bit different – we weren't interested in jockeying for position with 50 other vehicles at a lion sighting, and instead wanted to focus on some of the less well known animals and also enjoy some interesting wildlife behaviour.

We were travelling in January, so in theory the short rains should have finished in November, the grass would be dry and gold (excellent for rodents) and many of the bushes would have lost their leaves. The herbivores should have returned to the better grazing in the national parks in reasonable densities and the lower grass and thinner bush should have made it easy to spot wildlife. However, a combination of El Nino and climate change meant that the short rains were much heavier and lasted much longer than they typically do. We had rain while we were in Tsavo East and Aberdare National Park, and it rained the day before we arrived in Amboseli. All this meant that the grass was lush and green, there were weeds and flowers everywhere and the shrubs were thick with leaves. All the extra greenery made spotting animals tough, and the herbivores were all dispersed into the buffer zones and conservancies that surround the national parks. Many rodents also didn't like the damp conditions and some species that should have been easy to spot we didn't see at all. However, all the greenery meant the scenery was spectacular, the roads were less dusty than they otherwise would have been, and many of the birds were in their breeding plumage, displaying courtship behaviour or had chicks.

Saturday 6th January

We had an early morning taxi to Heathrow and checked in to find that we had been upgraded to business class! We had a great flight and were one of the first off the plane which meant no queue at immigration and then just a short wait for bags. We were collected by our driver and taken to the Eka hotel for the night. Unfortunately, we were both still on UK time, and I was excited about the start of the holiday so we didn't get a lot of sleep.

Sunday 7th January

After a reasonable breakfast in the hotel we met Zarek and started our drive North. We made good time as there was very little traffic and got as far as Nanyuki in 3 hours. We then carried on, stopping to pick up some beers en route, and made it to Meru National Park entrance gate around 1pm. Kenya had just had its best rains in a very long time, so the park was, rather unexpectedly, a sea of green, with lots of flowers and thick bush. Our first mammals were a small group of **waterbuck**. We spent some time watching and photographing an assortment of birds (the highlight of which was probably an African Fish Eagle). Then we found a **Reticulated Giraffe** (our first one) and some **Bush Hyrax**, plus the remaining half of a zebra that had been consumed by lions the previous night (no lions though). We drove slowly through the park to our accommodation – one of the park houses for rent next to the ranger station – where we were greeted by a family of **vervet monkeys** in the back garden.

After lunch and a break to recover from the journey we headed out on an afternoon game drive. Due to the thick bush the wildlife was fairly hard to spot, but we managed plenty of **Kirk's DikDik**, some **Buffalo**, **Impala**, a couple of very distant **hippos**, and plenty of **vervet monkeys** and **olive baboons**. The birds were again very much in evidence. We had gone looking for Pel's fishing owl, which we couldn't find, but were compensated by a fabulous sighting of a juvenile **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl**.

We headed back for dinner, then out again for a walk around the ranger station to look for Somali Lesser Galago, plus whatever else we could find. There were plenty of moths and spiders, and some interesting geckos and scorpions. We had a couple of sightings of galagoes and genets, but they were fleeting at best. However, Zarek found us an excellent **Acacia rat**, and also an **African Scops Owl**. There were also large numbers of bats flying around an

abandoned building, but none of them were stationary, so it was impossible to work out what they were and we decided to return again the following day.



Mount Kenya Dwarf Gecko, African Fish-eagle, Pallid Thicktail Scorpion, Kirk's Dik-dik, Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, Sundevall's Acacia Rat, West African House Gecko, Hottentotta eminii (scorpion), Crested Francolin

Monday 8th January

We started just before sunrise, armed with our cameras and binoculars and a packed breakfast. We headed to the rhino reserve section of the park where the **white rhinos** were very much in evidence. Again, there were plenty of birds around, but not so many mammals. We managed to glimpse the end of the nose of a **naked mole rat** by peering down into an active hole. There were also a few solitary male **elephants** going about their business, all fairly distant. We saw our first **Bright's Gazelle**, a small group close to the road. This was to be the first of a number of sightings. We spent some time watching a family of **olive baboons** in a large tree by the river. There were plenty

more **reticulated giraffes**, although these ones were very skittish, and a number of **unstriped ground squirrels** that ran along the road in front of the jeep. We found a mother and baby **gerenuk** – they were very beautiful and our first encounter with this species. I'd been wanting to see one for ages so I was very pleased! Our final special animals of the morning were a family of **desert warthogs** – another first for us. We returned to the bat colony on the way back and discovered they were **round leaf bats**.

After a break of lunch and a rest, we headed out again at around 4pm. Again, this was mostly birds, with highlights of a pygmy falcon and an Eastern chanting goshawk.

After dinner we went for another walk around the ranger station. This time the animals were much more obliging, with a proper (but still brief) look at a genet, plus some truly excellent views of a **Somali Dwarf galago**. One of the rangers found a **Spiny mouse** which was incredibly cooperative. We even managed a quick look at a juvenile **spotted hyena** and a **sharp nosed rocket frog**.



Black-winged Kite, Southern White Rhino, Naked Mole Rat, Bright's Gazelle, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Grant's Zebra, Old World Leaf-nosed Bats, African Buffalo, Spiny Mouse, Sharp-nosed Ridged Frog



Old World Leaf-nosed Bat, Olive Baboon, Somali Lesser Galago

Tuesday 9th January

Today we left Meru National Park. We took a long meandering route out. It was fairly quiet on the mammal front, although we did manage a brief but decent sighting of a **Lesser Kudu**. The birds, however, were plentiful, with the avian highlight being a pair of palm nut vultures in the top of their namesake tree.

We then worked our way back to Nanyuki – more traffic than on the way up, but still a smooth journey. From there, we made our way onto the Laikipia plateau and into the wildlife conservancy area. Game viewing was certainly easier here than in Meru and we swiftly found some **Grevy's Zebra** (another lifer), **Grant's Gazelles**, **Impala**, **Greater Kudu**, **Guenther's Dikdik**, **Plains Zebra** and **Elephants**. The journey to Loisaba took slightly longer than planned as we got a bit lost, but we made it eventually. The lodge is in a spectacular setting and feels very luxurious after Meru. We went straight out on a late afternoon game drive where we were quickly taken to see a **leopard** who was dozing. We carried on and met a grumpy bull **elephant** in must who took exception to our jeep. We continued on and found a **striped hyena** (Yet another excellent lifer). He didn't hang around for long, but we all got a really good look. Then, just as we were heading back for sundowners we ran into the same **leopard** again who was now up and about and patrolling his territory. We followed him for a while, and he walked right past the jeep on two occasions, which was just amazing. Then it was back to the lodge for a nice dinner before heading out for a short night drive. Night drives here are done under red light only, with a red filter on the camera flash. The first find of the night was a **spotted hyena** who was lying in the middle of the road. There were lots of dikdiks and other grazing animals, a pair of **hippos**, an **elephant** and lots of **African Savannah hares**. We went to investigate the eyeshine of what we thought was another hare, only to discover a female **leopard**. She didn't stick around, but ambled slowly away. Finally, we found a **common genet** in a tree who very obligingly posed beautifully for us. Then it was back to the lodge for a quick nightcap and a well-earned sleep.



Tree Locust, Nubian Woodpecker, Village Weaver, Reticulated Giraffe, Striped Ground Squirrel, Palm-nut Vultures, Striped Hyena, Lesser Kudu, Zebra White Butterfly, Darkling Beetle



Gerenuk, Grevy's Zebra, Leopard

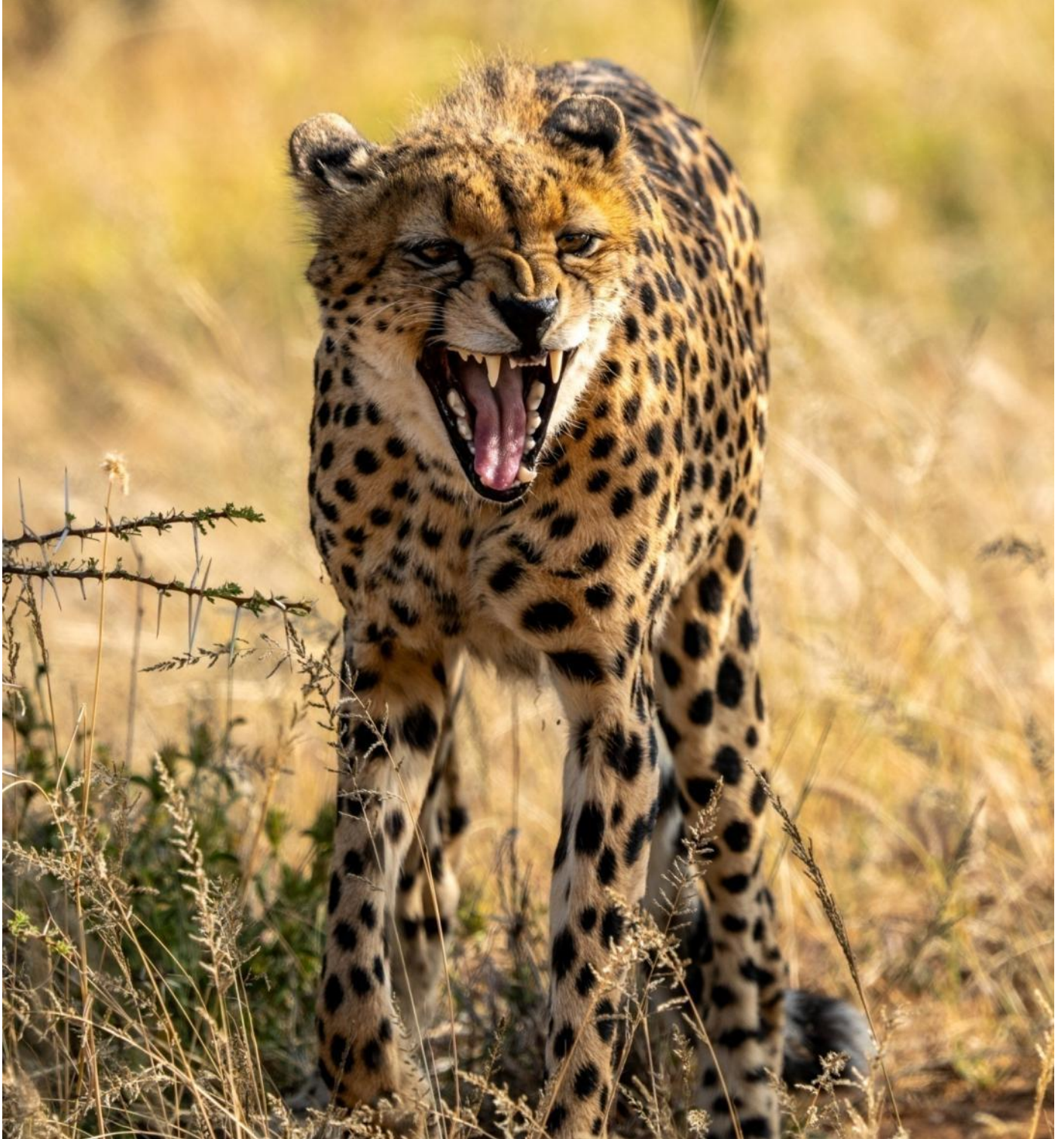
Wednesday 10th of January

Today we began with a morning game drive. Shortly after starting we had a brief sighting of a **spotted hyena**. We then carried on and found a coalition of three **cheetahs**. We stayed with them for most of the morning, watching their interactions with each other, only stopping in the middle for a lavish bush picnic breakfast. We returned to the lodge for lunch and a swim in the infinity pool (it had to be done!)

We then did an afternoon and evening drive, returning for dinner at around 8:30pm. It was generally fairly quiet – we had gone in search of a black leopard. We did, however, see **Beisa oryx**, **Grant's gazelle**, **Jackson's Hartebeest** and Grey-crowned Cranes. We were just about to stop for sundowners when we found 3 male **lions** who were ambling down the dirt road. The night drive was uneventful except for a **white-tailed mongoose** and a brief sighting of a **spotted hyena**.



Hippos, Cheetah, D'Arnaud's Barbet, Leopard Tortoise, Ochre Bush Squirrel, Impala, Gunther's Dik-dik, Beisa Oryx



Lelwel Hartebeest, Lion, Cheetah

Thursday 11th June

We went in search of a pride of lions with cubs this morning, however, the lions proved to be elusive. Instead we found lots of **reticulated giraffes**, **elephants** and a displaying Kori bustard. We also found a family of **common dwarf mongoose**, which was our first decent view of them, and some **eastern rock hyrax**. After a sumptuous bush breakfast we carried on via the **cheetahs** and then down to the dam. Here we watched several groups of **elephants** come down to drink, and then one group playing in the water with total abandon – they were having an absolutely brilliant time. We also saw an interesting “altercation” between an African Fish Eagle and a Tawny eagle. The afternoon game drive was very quiet – we went out in search of the black leopard, but didn’t manage to see her. There were some vultures and more tawny eagles and a herd of **buffalo**, but that was pretty much it. No night drive as they have changed the rules in the conservancy from today to prepare for the arrival of the new rhinos and night drives are now prohibited. We went for a walk around the camp after dinner instead, but didn’t find anything of note.



Kori Bustard, White-bellied Bustard, Common Dwarf Mongoose, Crowned Lapwing, Kori Bustard, Rock Hyrax, Grant's Gazelle, African Bush Elephants



African Bush Elephants, Bush Hyrax, Greater Blue-eared Starling, Lappet-faced Vulture, Chinspot Batis, Little Bee-eater, Ruppell's Griffon Vulture, Tawny Eagles, African Savannah Hare, Brown-veined White Butterfly

Friday 12th January

We had our final morning drive in Loisaba. The highlights were a brief sighting of a large male **leopard** and a large family of **elephants** who came down to the water for their morning drink, with much excited trumpeting. We also saw a family of **black-backed jackals** and a few **eland**. After a nice breakfast we returned to Nanyuki, with some game viewing en route (ostrich, **Grant's** and **Thompson's gazelles**, **bush hyrax**, a territorial dispute between two female **dikdiks**, **black-backed jackal**, **greater kudu** and some **warthogs**. Just outside of Naro Moru we stopped to look for Sharpe's Longclaw (an endemic bird) – it took a while, but eventually we tracked them down. Then we had a short drive to Creaky Cottage. This cute little place is in a small patch of forest and there are lots of habituated animals plus some great birds – we had **Kikuyu Guereza Colobus** and **Sykes' (Kolb's) monkeys** and **Southern Tree Hyrax**, plus some Silvery-cheeked hornbills. However, our main reason for going was to look for the **maned rat**,

which we saw. He comes to the bottom of a hole and you can peer in and see him. He's very cute – full of character. However, do be aware that you stand at the top of a hole and look down into it, which isn't ideal for photography as you only get the back. It would be better to stand further down where you can see him go into and out of the base of his hole. We had a camera trap with us, and left it overnight, which got better photos. So if you want to get photos, this would be a better place to wait. Also, do be aware that they are very sensitive to light – a red torch is a must here. An **Ansorge's/Giant Pouched Rat** was another great mammal species seen that night.



Leopard, Vulturine Guineafowl, Three-banded Courser, Speke's Weaver, African Bush Elephants, Common Eland, Hoopoe, Helmeted Turtle, Common Dwarf Mongoose, Ochre Bush Squirrel, Gunther's Dik-dik, Black-backed Jackal

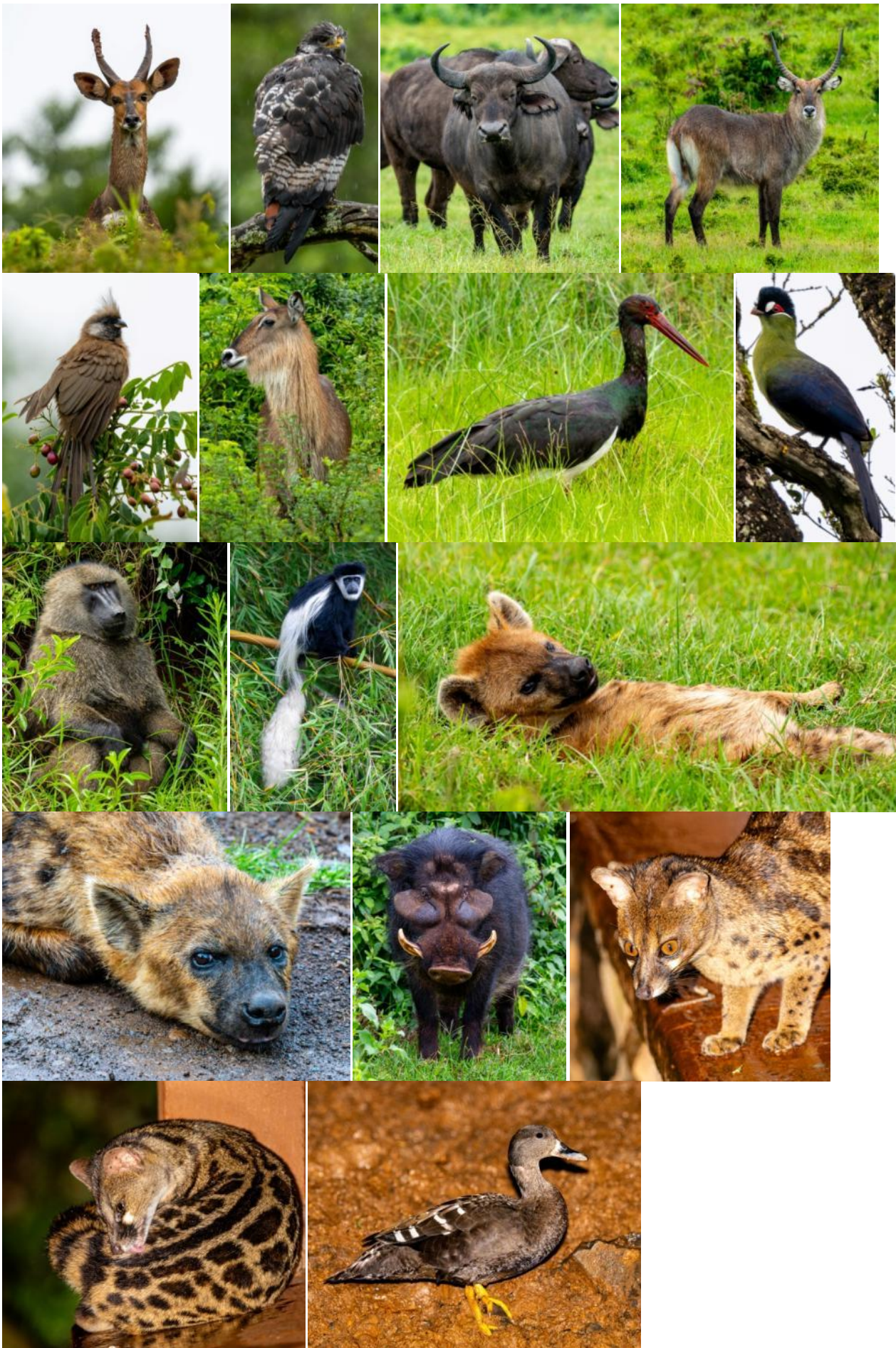


Greater Kudu, Sharpe's Longclaw, Southern Tree Hyrax, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Eastern Black-and-white Colobus, Bronze Sunbird, Southern Giant Pouched Rat, Maned Rat

Saturday 13th January

We had intended to start the day with some birding around creaky cottage, however, the heavens opened so we drove straight to Aberdare National Park. It continued to rain heavily for a couple of hours, but eventually stopped, although it remained overcast. We drove through the park up to the high moorlands with sightings of **bushbuck**, **giant forest hog**, **buffalo**, **defassa waterbuck**, **colobus** and **sykes monkeys**, **baboons**, **warthogs** and a few different dozing **spotted hyenas**.

We arrived at the ark shortly before sunset. The waterhole was quiet, with just a few **buffalo**. It started raining heavily again during dinner, but stopped an hour or so later. A pair of **large-spotted genets** came out and were hunting insects in the floodlights (the best place to see them was the lowest floor level). No other interesting animals were sighted during the night, but that did at least mean we got some sleep.



Southern Bushbuck, Augur Buzzard, African Buffalo, Defassa Waterbuck, Speckled Mousebird, Defassa Waterbuck, Black Stork, Hartlaub's Turaco, Olive Baboon, Eastern Black-and-white Colobus, Spotted Hyena, Giant Forest Hog, Rusty-Spotted Genets, African Black Duck

Sunday 14th January

We spent the day driving around Aberdare National Park. We saw plenty of **colobus monkeys** and **bushbuck**, plus also some **Sykes monkeys** and some **elephants**. We stopped at a campsite to look for some **East African Root Rats**, which rewarded us with a brief glimpse. In the same location I found a **Kenya Montane Viper** (which made Zarek's day as it is endangered, endemic and very hard to find) as well as two **helmeted chameleons**. We were also on the lookout for duikers – we had a couple of fleeting glances of **common duiker**, but they never stuck around for long enough for a photo, but eventually one obliged. We thought we were going to miss the **black-fronted duiker**, but later in the day we managed a couple of brief sightings. We also stopped at a couple of waterfalls which were spectacular after all the heavy rain. The second one had the added bonus of **Mesic Four-striped Grass Mouse** and **Zena Brush-furred Rat** at the trailhead. On our way back out of the park we saw a large group of **elephants** in one of the clearings, and also a group of **giant forest hog**. There were also a number of **African Savana hares**, but they all bounded away from the road as soon as they saw the car.

Our overnight stay was in Sandai lodge, which had a lovely family run vibe, although was spoiled slightly by the group of VERY loud Americans who completely dominated the dinner conversation. We went for a short night drive/walk after dinner, but it didn't produce very much – some more **hares**, **bushbuck** and nightjars, plus a **Guttural toad**.



Long Crested Eagle, Kolb's Monkey, Jackson's Spurfowl, Kenya Montane Viper, Helmeted Chameleon, Northeast African Root Rat, Bush Duiker, Black-fronted Duiker



Mesic Four-striped Grass Rat, Zena Brush-furred Rat, Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, Southern Bushbuck, Guttural Toad

Monday 15th January

We left Sandai, stopping to look for the Nairobi Grass rat en route, however, all the rain meant they didn't want to oblige. We made good time and got to Ol Tukai Lodge in Amboseli early enough to then go out for a late afternoon game drive after we checked in. There had been plenty of rain, so the park was very green, which is very unusual for this time of year. We hadn't gone more than 100 metres from the entrance gates before we saw our first **elephant**. There were plenty more, plus **Maasai Giraffe**, **Grant's** and **Thompson's Gazelles**, **Zebras**, **Ostrich**, loads of **grey crowned cranes**, **Eastern White-bearded wildebeest**, **Hippos** and **buffalo**. The park was also teeming with birds – everywhere you looked there were an assortment of wading and water birds.



Maasai Giraffe, Blue Wildebeest, Long-toed Lapwing, Grey-crowned Crane, Hippo

Tuesday 16th January

We started the day on a quest to get photos of elephants with Mt Kilimanjaro in the background. The elephants obliged and the clouds around the mountain kind-of did as well. We continued to search for the African Golden Wolf (unsuccessfully – the area around the usual den site was flooded and the den itself obscured by very long grass). However, the birds made up for it. We did find a large troupe of **baboons** in a small area of acacias, and Zarek showed us some **Slit-faced bats** by the airstrip on the way back to lunch. The afternoon continued in the same vein – lots of birds but no golden wolf. As we were rushing back to the lodge we saw 10 **hyenas**, one of whom had caught a catfish. Back at the lodge Zarek heard and then found some **Mauritian Tomb Bats** in the roof just outside the hotel reception.

We finished the day with a surprisingly productive night walk around the lodge grounds. It started with a fleeting glimpse of **Senegal Galago**, then a good look at three **white-tailed mongoose** who were scampering around. We then heard, and subsequently found a group of **small-eared galagos**, then finally a small **mouse** of some kind in a hole in a tree.



African Bush Elephants, Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Spotted Thick-knee, Common Ostrich, Cape Teal, Great White Pelican, Wood Sandpiper



Greater Flamingo, Malachite Kingfisher, African Striped Skink, Common Snipe, Fulvous Whistling Duck, White-faced Whistling Ducks, Olive x Yellow Baboon Hybrid, Marabou Stork, Slit-faced Bat, Hammerkop, Red-billed Duck, Vervet Monkeys



Vervet Monkey



Hadada Ibis, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Goliath Heron, Squacco Heron, Pied Kingfisher, White-bellied Bustard, Thomson's Gazelle, Plains Zebra, Spotted Hyena, Mauritian Tomb Bat, White-tailed Mongoose



Small-eared Greater Galago

Wednesday 17th January

We were up very early this morning as we decided to have another look for the **African Golden Wolf** before we left Amboseli. It turned out that this was absolutely the right decision! We could have gone looking for lions instead, but we had already established that it was a pair of male lions that had been seen recently and we've seen plenty of lions asleep under a tree before. We checked all the same spots as yesterday and were almost about to give up when Andy spotted some movement which turned out to be our wolf. He ran parallel to the road for quite some way, and we kept track of him, then he eventually stopped and was greeted by another smaller wolf. We watched for a bit, but nothing more was happening, and we had a long drive to do, so we left. We had gone about 100 metres down the road when I spotted another wolf, this time really close to the road. She trotted down the road for a short distance, and then crossed it, and was greeted by two adolescent puppies. After a little bit she headed off, leaving the pups behind. They lay down in the grass, and we then headed off towards the park gate. We thought our morning in Amboseli couldn't get any better, but then Zarek spotted a family of 9 **bat-eared foxes** hanging out on a dirt patch. They were really cute to watch, with some of them playing, and others just enjoying the early morning sun. We were also able to take the photo that we wanted, of an **elephant** having a dust bath with Mt Kilimanjaro in the background.

The downside of having a great morning in Amboseli is that we were then much later than planned entering Tsavo West. By the time we got there the sun was hot, and like all the other National Parks, the foliage was thick and the grass long. This made general game viewing difficult. We did, however, see some **free-tailed bats** at the entrance gate. We were hoping for Mountain Reedbuck and Klipspringer, both of which we missed. However, this was made up for by a fabulous courtship display by a pair of **Martial Eagles**, who were flying around and talon grappling right above us. In the park we did find **fringe-eared oryx**, **plains zebra**, **Hinde's Dikdik**, some distant **eland**, **yellow**

baboons, Maasai Giraffe, Elephants. At the springs we also saw a group of **Vervet monkeys** with two tiny babies and some **white-throated Guenons** (a Sykes' monkey subspecies). There were butterflies everywhere and loads of birds. We then had a long drive out of the park and arrived at Ndovu house in Rukinga conservancy quite late. We had a quick dinner and then headed out on a quick night drive. We found a group of **Senegal Galagos**, plus a group of **bat eared foxes**, as well as a nightjar and a set of unidentified eyes that were possibly a genet. Our drive was stopped by an **elephant** on the road so we gave up as we were all knackered!



Saddle-billed Stork, African Wolf, Bat-eared Fox, African Bush Elephant in front of Mt Kilimanjaro (Finally!), Free-tailed Bats, Martial Eagles, Kenyan Rock Agama, Vervet Monkeys, Coke's Hartebeest, Fringe-eared Oryx, Eastern Paradise-Whydah



Bateleurs, Black-headed Lapwing, Madagascar Bee-eater, Northern Lesser Galago

Thursday 18th January

We were up early to search for the rufous sengi and the klipspringer, both of which we failed to find. We did, however, get a brief sighting of a **Black Mamba** in a tree.

We had a long break and a sleep over lunch, which was sorely needed, then out again for a late afternoon drive, which was fairly quiet, although we did get a nice view of a family of **common warthogs**, plus some **giraffes** in the sunset.

After dinner we did a night drive which turned out to be very productive indeed – we had a family of 3 **Greyish eagle owls**, plus another individual later on, loads of **Senegal Bushbabies**, a **Common Genet**, a nightjar, two **East African Gerbils**, and a **lion**.



White-bellied Go-away Bird, Bateleur, Black Mamba, Red-cheeked Cordon-Bleu, Von der Decken's Hornbill, Red-billed Parrot, European Roller, Northern Red-billed Hornbill, Common Warthog, Greyish Eagle Owl



Greyish Eagle Owl, East-African Gerbil, Northern Small-spotted Genet

Friday 19th January

We resumed our search for the klipspringer and the **rufous sengi**, this time with some success. We had a fleeting glance at the sengi (no photos unfortunately) but a nice view of the **klipspringer** on a rocky cliff in the morning light. From there, we carried on into Tsavo East National Park. The park was, like all the others, unseasonably green, with very low densities of game.

We arrived at Satao lodge in time for lunch. The lodge is a classic African unfenced tented camp, with plenty of wildlife in the grounds. There was a large group of **impala** by reception with the male very busy rounding up his females and chasing off intruders. We also saw a relatively obliging **unstriped ground squirrel** and a group of **banded mongoose** who were running around.

The weather was very hot, with a baking hot dry wind – like standing in front of an open oven door. We went out for an afternoon game drive which featured **elephants, gerenuk, hartebeest, zebra, impala, gazelle, oryx** and plenty of birds. We had gone looking for the hirola in the usual place, but didn't see any – according to the lodge guides they haven't seen them for a month, so it looks like our chances will be slim. On our way back to the lodge there were three female **lions** asleep by the side of the road surrounded by a cluster of jeeps, so we left fairly quickly.



Klipspringer, Tsavo Dwarf Gecko, Vervet Monkeys, Unstriped Ground Squirrel, Superb Starling



Banded Mongoose, Impala, Hartlaub's Bustard, Hinde's Dik-Dik, Peter's Gazelle, Somali Ostrich, Grant's Zebra, Lion

Saturday 20th January

We went back in search of the hirola again today. We didn't find it, but were more than adequately compensated by our other wildlife sightings. We started very well, with a pair of courting **hyenas** running towards the road, sniffing around and doing lots of digging. After a while they trotted off down the road and we left them to it. We carried on and had some nice birds, including a peregrine falcon. We saw about 50 jeeps driving in the opposite direction – there had been a lion sighting, but the lions disappeared into the bush – we were very glad not to be part of the lion car-jam! We did get a brief sighting of 2 young lions later on in the drive.

We went out again at 3 o'clock. It was much cooler than the previous day – with an overcast sky and the occasional bit of drizzle. We were carefully checking every group of **hartebeest**, **zebra**, **oryx** and **gazelles** for any stray hirola, but no luck. Our first great sighting of the afternoon was an **Egyptian vulture** – a very special bird. We then carried on and came across a small pride of **lions** asleep on the sandy road. There was a female with three cubs on the road,

plus a male with another female lying off to one side. There were no other vehicles around so we had them all to ourselves. We cracked open the sundowner drinks and watched for a while. They didn't do very much – the occasional yawn and a bit of paw licking – and eventually we had to give up and head back to the camp. All was going well to just make it back to the camp in time, when we came across a lone male **elephant** walking slowly down the road, stopping to feed periodically. There was no way we could get past – the road had steep banks and the vegetation was thick, so we just had to wait until he decided to get out of the way. He eventually allowed us to sneak past, but then tried to chase us back down the road – an exciting end to a great day.



Southern Ground Hornbill, Spotted Hyena, Common Waterbuck, Harlequin Quail, Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Common Long-tail Lizard, Painted Dwarf Gecko, Golden Pipit, Lions, Martial Eagle, African Bush Elephant

Sunday 21st January

We left Tsavo East today – the drive out of the park was fairly quiet, but we did have excellent views of a **Martial Eagle** who was in a low tree close to the road and completely unbothered by the passing vehicles. We arrived at

Mwamba Field Study Centre in Watamu, simple, but comfortable enough. After a couple of hours for lunch and a bit of downtime we headed to Arabuko-Sokoke Forest. We stopped just by the park entrance to look at a pair of roosting **African Wood Owls**, then carried on to look for the **Sokoke Scops Owl**. Albert, the local birding guide Zarek contracts there, found them easily. They are tiny and very cute!



Yellow Baboons, Martial Eagle, Heart-nosed Bat, Kenyan Rock Agama, Olive Sunbird, Sokoke Scops Owls

Monday 22nd January

We headed into Arabuko-Sokoke forest again this morning. We walked around near the visitor centre and had fleeting glimpses of **Coastal Suni**, **Four-toed Sengi** and **golden-rumped giant sengi**. We also went back to the African Wood Owl roosting site and they were showing much better today. We then carried on to a more open area to look for some grassland birds. There were loads of frogs hopping around which made me very happy.

In the afternoon we headed to Turtle Bay hotel to look at two weaver colonies and then we stopped at Gelato Non Solo which was fabulous – highly recommended (and I’m a complete ice cream snob, and very picky about my gelato!). We then carried on back to Arabuko-Sokoke forest to try and get better views of the Suni and Sengi, but it was all very quiet. We were told that it is no longer possible to do night drives or walks inside the forest reserve, so we did the next best thing and did a night drive along a quiet dirt track than borders the park. There were plenty of galagos, both **Kenya Coast Dwarf Galago** and **Small-eared Galago**, but none of them stuck around long enough for a photo.



Golden-rumped Sengi, African Wood-Owl

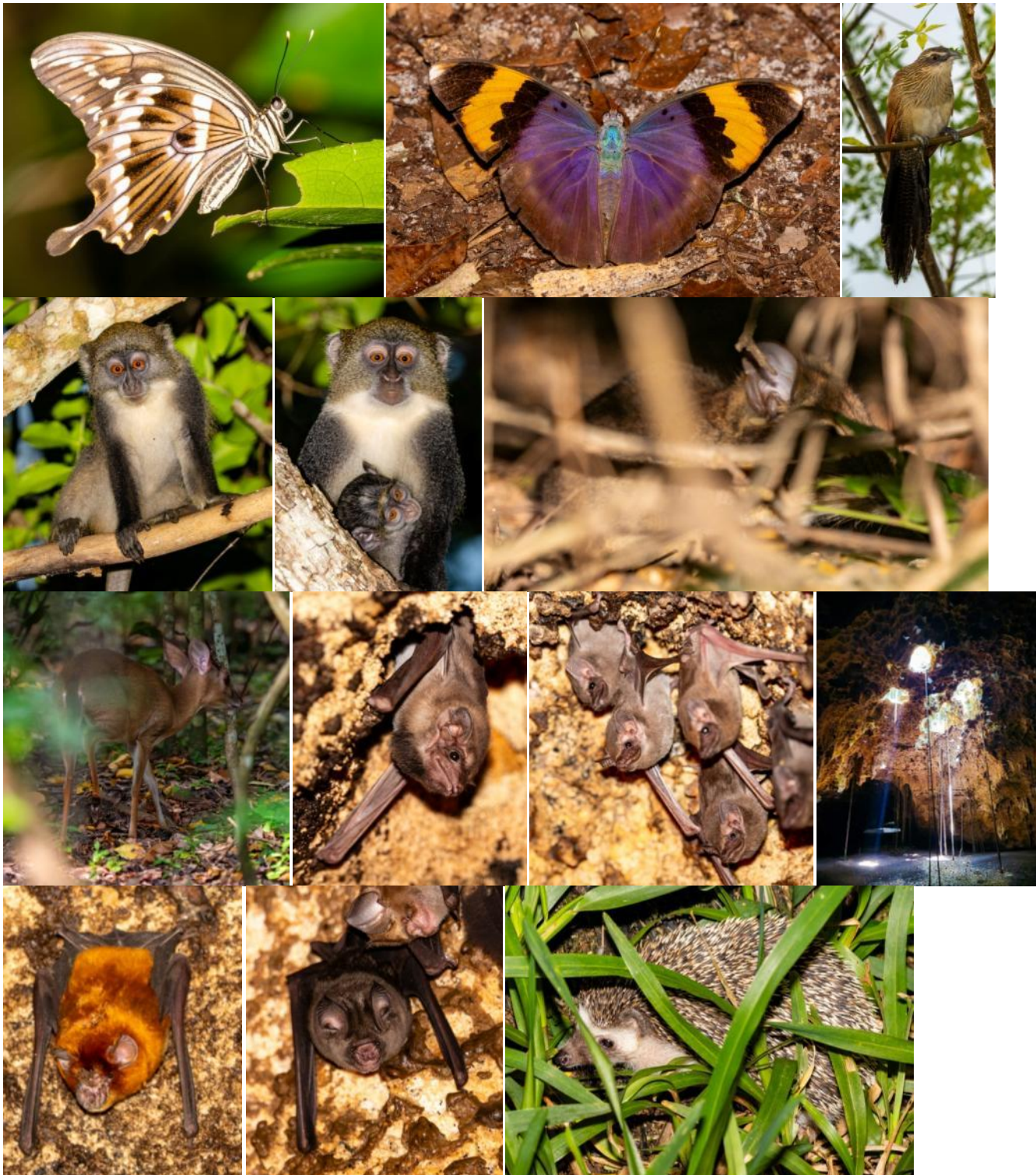


Sykes' Monkey, Speke's Sand Lizard, Malini Pipit, Citrus Swallowtail, Black-and-white Mannikin, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Schilluk Ridged Frog, Red-vein Drop-wing Dragonfly, Kenyan Rock Agama, African Golden Weaver, Golden Palm Weaver, Eastern Dotted Border Butterfly

Tuesday 23rd January

We were back in Arabuko-Sokoke forest in the morning, again trying for better views of sengi and suni. Using Zarek's thermal scope he found **golden-rumped sengi**, **four-toed sengi** and **sun**i, but again, we only got brief glances before they disappeared into the undergrowth. We were investigated by a group of **Sykes' monkeys**, who came right down and checked us out, which was very nice. I also spotted an unidentified small **mouse** who disappeared into his nest hole in a tree before I could get a photo – all we could then see was his bedding material shuffling around. From there we went to the bat caves, which was more of an adventure than anticipated. We had just made it into the first cave and were about to start taking photos when Kajengo, the local bat cave guide, shouted "Bees – run!". It turned out we had inadvertently disturbed a swarm of bees who were temporarily nesting in the cave. We

scrambled out as quickly as we could and then ran, trailing cameras and binoculars, until the bees gave up and stopped chasing us. Both Kajengo and Zarek got stung, but we weren't quite as far into the cave so managed to escape them. Luckily none of us were allergic. The second cave was less eventful, but completely spectacular and definitely recommended. We both thought it was brilliant. You go in and there are big holes in the ceiling with shafts of light coming through and strangler fig roots coming down and bats everywhere, both still on the walls of the cave and also flying around. It was simply magic! The species highlights in these caves include **Hildegarde's Tomb Bat**, **Striped Leaf-nosed Bat**, **African Trident Bat**, **African Sheath-tailed Bat**, and **Sundevall's Leaf-nosed Bat**, all of which we saw. Because of the bees, we missed the Giant Leaf-nosed Bat and Least Long-fingered Bat in the first cave. After a well-earned shower and lunch we went to Mida Creek for some coastal birding where Zarek got very excited about an oystercatcher, which Andy and I thought was funny as they are relatively common back in the UK. After dinner we headed back to Turtle Bay resort to look for **hedgehogs**. We found two of them, both absolutely adorable.



Constantine's Swallowtail, Gold-banded Forester, White-browed Coucal, Sykes' Monkeys, Four-toed Sengi, Suni, Hildegarde's Tomb Bat, African Sheath-tailed Bat, African Trident Bat, Sundevall's Roundleaf Bat, Four-toed Hedgehog

Wednesday 24th January

We were up very early today for our day trip to Tana River Primate Reserve. It was very hot and humid and we all sweated buckets! However, it was completely worthwhile as the **Tana River Mangabeys** put on an amazing show for us. To start with we only got short glimpses of them while we struggled through the undergrowth, but then they headed up into a big tree with bare branches to feed on Acacia gum. This gave us great view. Then a second group (including a mother with a tiny, still pink baby) were on the ground near the campsite so again, we had great views. We also had some nice clear views of the **Tana River Red Colobus** in the trees.

We were on our way home, travelling along the road between Gedi and Watamu, when we spotted a monitor lizard on the road with his head stuck in a white plastic jar. Zarek stopped the car and we held our breath as a matatu (the local minivan public transport) passed right by the lizard's head. As soon as it had passed, Andy dived in and grabbed the monitor lizard off the road and out of danger from the passing traffic. He held it down while Zarek removed the plastic cup and then released it, and we all watched it scamper quickly into the bush at the side of the road. We were all filled with a warm rosy glow after that – we'd managed to save the lizard from otherwise certain death – either from the traffic, or starvation. We stopped for celebratory gelato back at gelato non solo on the way home.



Tana River Crested Mangabeys, African Woolly-necked Stork, Tana River Red Colobus, Crowned Hornbill, Tana River Crested Mangabeys

Thursday 25th January

We said goodbye to Zarek this morning as we had the last few days on our own in Watamu to relax and catch up on some sleep before heading back to the cold winter weather in London. We watched the bird ringing at Mwamba – very interesting, and we both got to release a bird which was very nice.

After that we headed to the Watamu

Snake Park which was fascinating – we had a great guide who showed us all the snakes, and also got to see a very feisty red spitting cobra being milked for its venom (which gets sent off to manufacture antivenom).

We did a night walk around the nature trail at Mwamba, but only saw spiders and moths.

Red Spitting Cobra, Bearded Scrub Robin



Friday 26th January

We started the day with a timed swim – this is where you go snorkelling for one hour in a particular area of the marine national park and try to count all of the sharks and rays. Our group of 6 people managed a total of 30 observations, including **masked rays**, **ribbontail rays**, **honeycomb rays**, **sharpnose rays** and **guitar sharks**. I think it helped that Andy and I knew what we were looking for! We then carried on snorkelling out to the small patch of reef – there were lots of tourist boats full of screaming people and petrol fumes from the engines – but once we were away from the general scrum it was ok – not a patch on South East Asia though!

In the afternoon we went on a rescue mission to capture a **white-tailed mongoose** who had fallen down a dry well and was stuck. The previous day they had cut some long branches in the hope he could climb out on his own, but this didn't work, so Andy fashioned a trap from a large canvas sack, some sticks and a long piece of rope. He was then encouraged to go in using a water container on another piece of rope. As soon as he was in the bag, he was hauled up and released.

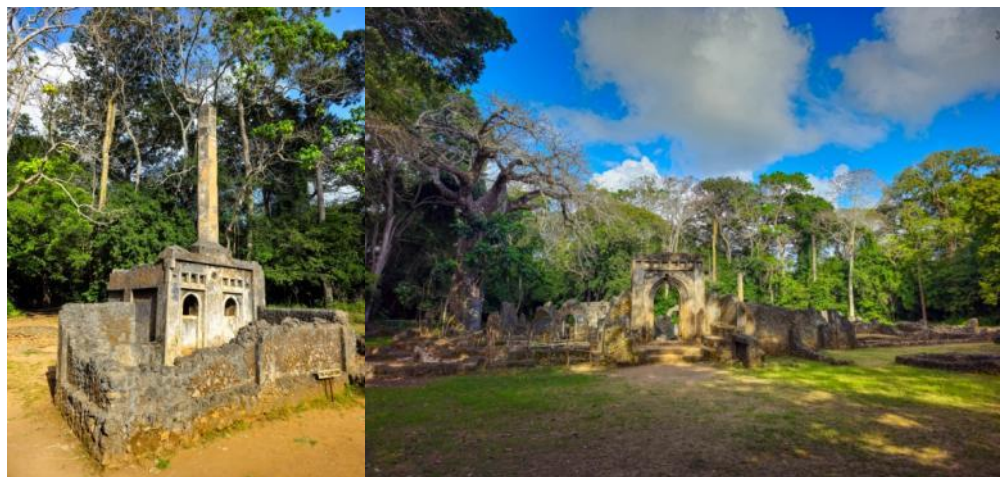


Indian Ocean Bluespotted Maskray, Reticulate Whipray (Honeycomb Ray), Indian Lionfish, Bluespotted Fantail (Ribbontail) Ray, White-tailed Mongoose

Saturday 27th January

We did an early morning trip to Gede ruins. We arrived early, before the 7am opening time, but the ticket seller was very late and didn't arrive until 7:40, which was extremely frustrating, as we had to leave by 9am, and our prime reason for going was to try to see some squirrels and get a better look at a golden rumped senghi . No senghi or squirrels, but we did get a nice look at a **Verreaux's Eagle Owl**.

The ruins themselves are ok, and the forest setting is nice. Then we were off to Malindi airport for our flight to Nairobi, before heading home to London.



Final Thoughts...

We had a great trip and I would definitely recommend Kenya as a wildlife destination, and Zarek as a guide. If we were doing the trip again I would potentially swap the first night in Rukinga conservancy for a night in Tsavo West, which would have meant we might be able to see black rhino in Tsavo West and would have made the day we drove through Tsavo West less knackered. However, this was partially because we had such a great final morning in Amboseli, so we left much later than planned.

If we had more budget it would have been great to add in Ishaqbini Hirola reserve and Diani, and I also would have added in a night in the Aberdares at the fishing lodge which would have given us access to the moorlands in the early morning and late afternoon, and if we'd been more organised and booked earlier we could have swapped Loisaba camp for Laikipia Wilderness which would have been a bit cheaper and given us a much better chance of black leopard as well as possibly wild dogs. However, we did also have some excellent wildlife sightings in Loisaba which made up for not being able to get into Laikipia. Two days after we left, Loisaba also reintroduced 50 Black Rhinos into their conservancy, so it should be an excellent place to spot them in the future.

We are now talking about a return to Kenya in a few years time to do the Mara migration, Western Kenya, a bit of the rift valley, Laikipia Wilderness and potentially a return to the Aberdares, however it will need to wait a few years as we are heading to North Queensland later this year, then the Amazon in 2025, so it will be 2026 at the earliest! I would like to thank all the people who have previously posted trip reports on this forum who provided the inspiration for this trip.