

15-23 February 2025

Mammal Watching in Central Kenya

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Introduction

In February 2025, John Sadler, Mark Hows, and I visited Kenya on what was primarily a mammal watching trip. With only 9 days at our disposal, we concentrated on sites located in the centre of the country. These included Aberdare National Park (NP), Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Meru NP, Samburu National Reserve (NR), and Soysambu Conservancy.

We recorded 70 mammal species, including **Mountain Bongo**, **Maned Rat**, **Naked Mole-rat**, and **Harrison's Giant Mastiff Bat**.

Itinerary

15/02: --- Arrived in Nairobi overnight. Morning exploring Nairobi NP, before driving to Aberdare area. (O/N Rhino Watch Safari Lodge).

16/02: --- Full day in Aberdare NP. (O/N Rhino Retreat).

17/02: --- Departed Aberdare NP at dawn, arriving at Ol Pejeta Conservancy mid-morning. Afternoon exploring park, followed by a night drive. (O/N Pelican House).

18/02: --- Early morning in Ol Pejeta, followed by drive to Meru NP. Afternoon in the park. (O/N iKWETA Safari Camp).

19/02: --- Early morning drive in Meru, before making our way to Samburu NR. (O/N Samburu Simba Lodge).

20/02: --- Full day in Samburu NR (O/N Samburu Simba Lodge).

21/02: --- Morning drive in Samburu NR, before heading back to Nanyuki (Aberdare area). (O/N Creaky Cottage).

22/02: --- Departed Nanyuki early morning, stopping at a mall to purchase supplies. Arrived at Soysambu Conservancy early afternoon, in time to visit the Diatomite Caves. Early evening exploration around Lake Elementaita, followed by night drive. (O/N Simon's Camp).

23/02: --- Early morning visit to Jaika Cave aborted due to problems with local guide. Drove direct to Mount Suswa Conservancy arriving midday. Returned to Nairobi in time for our evening flight back to UK.

Travel Details

Although I much prefer to self-drive on my trips, renting a car in Kenya can be expensive. Rental vehicles are often in poor condition, with mechanical breakdowns a regular occurrence.

With time at a premium, we decided to hire driver/guide Shem Mwathi (WhatsApp +254724395560), who came recommended by several other mammal watchers. Shem has a very spacious Toyota Landcruiser, complete with an open-top roof (for game viewing).

For the most part, we didn't regret this decision. Shem proved to be a decent driver and guide, helping us spot, and identify wildlife throughout the trip. He was also happy to organise local guides when needed (e.g. to visit the various bat caves), and his many contacts proved useful in adding several mammals to our list.

I booked all the accommodation myself, often direct with the property. We tried to stay within a reasonable budget, although this can be difficult to do, particularly if you want to stay inside the parks.

Most accommodation exceeded our expectations, and the food was fantastic throughout.



Mark and John, excellent travel companions. (© Mike Richardson)

Nairobi National Park (15 February)

Once Shem had collected us from our airport hotel, we wasted little time heading towards Nairobi National Park, where we spent our first morning.

It wasn't long before we found a pair of **White Rhinoceros**, closely followed by **Vervet Monkeys**, and our first **Plains Zebra**.

As it was the weekend, the park was busy with other tourist vehicles, and reports of a Cheetah sighting over the radio led to a huge traffic jam. Ethical wildlife viewing went out of the window, with many guides driving off-road and into the long grass, so their clients could glimpse the animal. Having all seen Cheetah on previous trips to Africa, we decided to leave without seeing the cat.

A second traffic jam alerted us to a couple of **Lions** that were stalking a herd of **Impala**. Other mammals seen included **Hartebeest**, **African Buffalo**, and **Eland**.

Our primary target in the park was **Masai Giraffe**, a species we would not see anywhere else on our itinerary. We eventually enjoyed great views of several animals, with the Nairobi skyline in the background.



Masai Giraffe (© Mike Richardson)



Common Hippopotamus (© Mike Richardson)

A visit to a dam produced **Common Hippopotamus**, **Cape Bushbuck**, Nile Crocodile, and many bird species. Unfortunately, we missed the Bohor Reedbuck that are usually seen in the area.

Our final sighting was of a group of **Blue Monkeys** (ssp. *kolbi*), in the wooded area near the main park entrance.

Aberdare National Park (16-17 February)

Arriving in the Aberdares, we checked into Rhino Watch Lodge, situated about 15 minutes outside Aberdare NP. Although the food and accommodation were fine, the hotel grounds were devoid of mammals, even after dark. The security guards were clearly not used to guests walking about at night and directed us back to our rooms at every opportunity.

We entered Aberdare NP early the next morning, spending much of our time in the Salient – the heavily forested area that covers the lower part of the park.

The vegetation was thick, and the road narrow, making it difficult to spot wildlife. Occasionally we would pass a natural clearing where many of the larger mammals like to feed. Despite our best efforts, we were unable to find any of our target species.

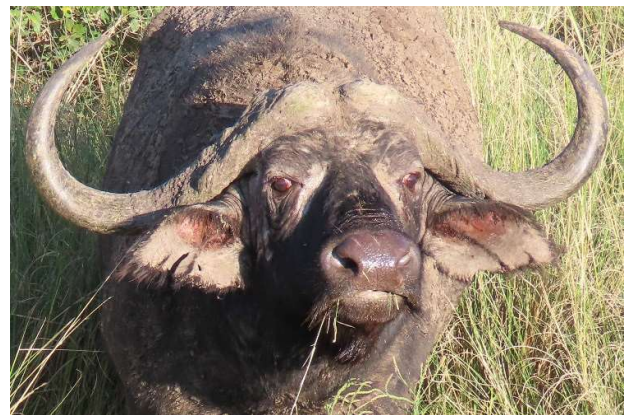
After a while we spotted an **African Elephant** feeding at the bottom of a ravine. This was quickly followed by a troop of **Olive Baboons**, and an **Ochre Bush Squirrel**.

The best sighting of the morning was of a pair of duikers that crossed the road in quick succession. Both animals were dark brown, with blackish legs. Although we were unable to get clear views of the face, we believe they were most likely **Black-fronted Duiker**.

Climbing up into the higher section of the park, we entered the bamboo zone. Here we saw **African Buffalo** and a troop of **Blue Monkeys**.



Blue Monkey (© Mike Richardson)



African Buffalo (© Mike Richardson)

Finally, we reached the moorland, stopping at the Chania Waterfall trailhead to eat our packed lunches.

Rodent numbers were pleasingly high in this part of the park, with both **Zena's Brush-furred Rat**, and **Mesic Four-striped Grass Mouse** easy to find.



Zena's Brush-furred Rat (© Mark Hows)



Mesic Four-Striped Grass Mouse (© Mike Richardson)

We had less luck with the African Root Rat, despite excavating some tunnels. With limited time to explore the moorland further, we failed to find any black morph Serval or Mountain Reedbuck.

Our decent back into the Salient produced more Elephant and Buffalo, together with **Waterbuck** and **Cape Bushbuck**. Eventually we connected one of our most wanted targets, when a huge, male **Giant Forest Hog** crossed the track in front of our vehicle.

We arrived at Rhino Retreat mid-afternoon, and quickly became acquainted with Joseph, the live-in caretaker of the property. The cottage is owned by Rhino Ark (a conservation charity that protects Kenya's mountain ecosystems) and offers a fantastic opportunity to observe the various animals that visit the saltlick behind the accommodation.

Top of our wish list was Mountain Bongo (ssp. *isaaci*), an extremely elusive forest antelope that occasionally visits the cottage. Joseph informed us that although he had seen a Bongo the previous evening, sightings are rare and unpredictable.

Late afternoon we enjoyed an unexpected, but exhilarating mammal experience, when two African Elephant families visited the saltlick. At the time we were sat several metres away, with only a flimsy fence between us and the elephants.

Watching these spectacular animals interact with each other, at such close range, was a trip highlight for all of us.

The Rhino Retreat is self-catering, so we cooked dinner ourselves in the well-equipped kitchen. We then turned our attention to the plentiful wildlife that was around the property.

A small group of **Giant Forest Hogs** emerged from the forest to feed on the lawn behind the cottage, while buffalo and elephants monopolised the floodlit saltlick.



African Elephant (© Mike Richardson)



Giant Forest Hog (© Mark Hows)

Southern Tree Hyrax called from nearby trees, and at least two species of bat foraged overhead. A pair of **Spotted Hyenas** was our last mammal sighting, before we retired to our individual bedrooms. Joseph promised to wake us should a Bongo visit before sunrise.

Throughout the night I kept checking on the saltlick, as did John and Mark. Apart from the buffalo and elephants, the only visitor was a male **Cape Bushbuck**.

I awoke the next morning disappointed not to have seen our target. Heading to the shower, I consoled myself with the fact Bongos are extremely rare, and a sighting during a one-night visit to the Aberdares would be extraordinary to say the least. In fact, many rangers have spent years working in the park and have yet to see a Bongo in the wild.

My shower was suddenly interrupted by Mark knocking on my door, shouting at me to look through my bedroom window. Dripping wet, I made it just in time to see a beautiful male **Mountain Bongo** nonchalantly walking back into the forest.

I'm indebted to Mark for raising the alarm, consequently missing out on a fantastic photo opportunity for himself. Fortunately, he did manage to take some record shots on his phone, at least providing photographic proof of our fantastic encounter.



Mountain Bongo (© Mark Hows)



Mountain Bongo (© Mark Hows)

Ol Pejeta Conservancy (17-18 February)

Leaving Aberdare NP shortly after dawn, we drove to Ol Pejeta Conservancy, located just outside Nanyuki. Our first **Thomson's Gazelles** were seen enroute, as we passed through a neighbouring reserve.

Highlights from our morning in Ol Pejeta included **White Rhino**, **Bright's Gazelle**, **Common Warthog**, and **Reticulated Giraffe**. We also recorded Plains Zebra, African Buffalo, Impala, Hartebeest, Waterbuck, Thomson Gazelle, and African Elephant, along with Vervet Monkey and Olive Baboon.

After lunch and a rest at our fantastic accommodation (Pelican House), we enjoyed an afternoon drive, adding two **Black Rhino** to our mammal tally.



Black Rhino (© Mike Richardson)



Bright's Gazelle (© Mark Hows)

Our principal reason for including Ol Pejeta in our itinerary was the opportunity to see some of the more elusive nocturnal mammals, such as Aardvark, Zorilla, and Serval. Night drives are not permitted in most Kenyan national parks, so only private reserves offer the chance to look for these species.

The night drive got off to a good start, with **Black Rhino**, **Spotted Hyena**, **Black-backed Jackal** all seen well. We also managed to find a pair of **Lions** that were half-heartedly stalking some Impala. Further interest was provided by several **White-tailed Mongoose**, and a Red-lipped Snake.

Hares (*Lepus*) were very common, and past trip reports from the area suggest that **Cape Hare** (*L. capensis*) is the species found at Ol Pejeta, perhaps due to more favourable habitat. However, Savanna Hare (*L. victoriae*) is also found on the plateau, and we made no effort to identify the hares to species level.

Unfortunately, we failed to find any of the rarer nocturnal mammals, despite our best efforts.

Meru National Park (18-19 February)

After a long, but uneventful drive from Nanyuki, we arrived at our next location in time for lunch.

Located just outside Meru National Park (Murera Gate), iKWETA Safari Camp is a semi-natural oasis, surrounded by farmland. Unfortunately, the owner of the property is an avid cat enthusiast and lets her many pets roam freely as a form of 'rodent and snake control.' As a result, wildlife around the grounds was rather limited.

Our primary target here was Naked Mole-rat- a unique, fossorial rodent, with a fascinating life history. As we drove into iKWETA, we noticed some farmers cultivating a neighbouring field that was riddled with mole-rat excavations. Shem casually mentioned to them that we were very interested in seeing a live mole-rat, and to call him should they come across any fresh activity during the next day or so.

We had barely finished lunch when Shem received a phone call. The farmers had captured us a **Naked Mole-rat** and were waiting outside the camp gate! After a very brief photo opportunity with the mole-rat (in the shade, and away from the cats), Shem ensured the animal was released back to its colony unharmed.



Naked Mole-rat (© Mike Richardson)



Lesser Kudu (© Mark Hows)

The less invasive way to find a Naked Mole-rat is to look for freshly excavated burrow openings, that resemble miniature volcanos. Often, they will be spewing out dirt, indicating activity just below the surface. With patience, it is sometimes possible to catch a glimpse of the mole-rat by peering down the opening.

We spent the afternoon exploring Meru National Park, searching for a suite of mammals that are largely restricted to northern Kenya.

Game viewing was often difficult, not helped by the dense vegetation in many areas. However, we slowly, but surely built up a decent mammal list.

New species for us included a pair of **Lesser Kudu**, a single **Beisa Oryx**, a few **Unstriped Ground Squirrels**, and several tiny **Kirk's Dik-diks**. Eland, Waterbuck, Impala, Thomson's Gazelle, Bright's Gazelle, Plains Zebra, African Buffalo, Reticulated Giraffe, Vervet Monkey, Olive Baboon and African Elephant were also seen during our time in the park, along with Nile Crocodile, and some stunning Kenyan Rock Agamas.

We had less luck with a couple of our other targets. We failed to find Somali Dwarf Mongoose, despite checking every termite mound for den sites. We were also disheartened not to find the colony of Heart-nosed Bats that could previously be found in an old gatehouse. The site had been abandoned after part of the roof had been removed.

Back at iKWETA Safari Camp we decided on a night walk around the property. It turns out some wildlife can evade the domestic cats and survive there.

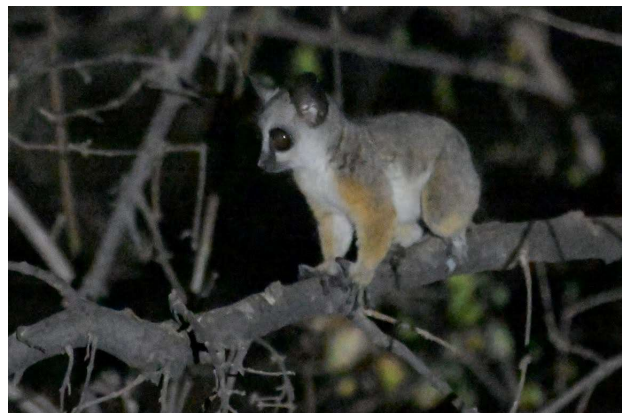
Our first mammal of the evening was a spectacular **Small-eared Galago**, found in the trees near our safari tents. We had another sighting nearby an hour or two later, presumably the same individual.

Many bats were spotted, including an unknown species of **Epauletted Fruit Bat**.

Walking the short nature trail I was very happy to find a **White-bellied Hedgehog** foraging alongside the vegetable plots. John and Mark also saw a White-tailed Mongoose.



White-bellied Hedgehog (© Mark Hows)



Somali Lesser Galago (© Mark Hows)

The next morning, we headed back into the park before sunrise. A couple of **Somali Lesser Galago** were seen briefly in the hotel grounds. Once we had gone through the park gates, a showier individual appeared.

In the park, we enjoyed plenty of mammal sightings, including a pair of **Lions** sleeping next to the road. We also saw our first **Gerenuk**, adding another northern speciality to our tally. Before long, it was time to leave this fantastic reserve and travel to our next destination.

Samburu National Reserve (19-21 February)

This is another beautiful park where the ‘northern specials’ can be found, and we were eager to spot a couple of mammal species that had eluded us in Meru NP. Immediately upon entering the reserve, it became apparent that game was much easier to view here, perhaps because of the more open landscape.

Beisa Oryx and Gerenuk seemed particularly numerous, compared to Meru NP. Other common species included Plains Zebra, Reticulated Giraffe, Impala, Bright’s Gazelle, Thomson’s Gazelle, African Buffalo, Olive Baboon, Vervet Monkey, Lion, Black-backed Jackal, and African Elephant.

We stayed two nights inside the reserve, at the fantastic Samburu Simba Lodge. This gave us plenty of opportunities to explore large sections of the park in search of our targets.

On our first afternoon game drive it took some time to locate our first **Grevy’s Zebra**, although it was worth the wait for such a spectacular animal. We were equally excited to find several sounders of warthog nearby, although closer inspection of their facial warts led us to believe they were Common Warthog, and not the Desert Warthog we were looking for.

Turning our attention to dik-diks, we were able to pick out some **Gunther’s Dik-diks** from the many **Kirk’s Dik-diks**. The former has an elongated snout, although it’s not always obvious to see without a good view.

We also saw many **Neumann’s Grass Rats**, which at the time of our visit were undergoing a population explosion. They could often be seen crossing tracks or darting between bushes in many parts of the park. This in turn had attracted many predators, including various raptors and herons.



Neumann’s Grass Rat (© Mike Richardson)



Grevy’s Zebra (© Mike Richardson)

Like many good safari camps, Samburu Simba Lodge proved to be a great place to look for wildlife. During the day Unstriped Ground Squirrel and Neumann's Grass Rat were very common around the grounds, together with Rough-scaled Plated Lizards and various skinks.



Heart-nosed Bat (© Mike Richardson)



Heart-nosed Bat roost (© Mike Richardson)

A friendly security guard took us to a storage shed that housed a colony of **Heart-nosed Bats**, while at dusk hundreds of **Little Free-tailed Bats** emerged from the gatehouse roof to feed over the reserve.



Little Free-tailed Bat roost (© Mike Richardson)



Little Free-tailed Bat (© Mark Hows)

Our only **Greater Kudu** was spotted along the boundary fence. Inside the camp **Cape Hare**, and a pair of tame Kirk's Dik-dik could usually be seen feeding on the lawns.

On our first night, we enjoyed a very productive walk through some of the private areas of the camp, accompanied by the same security guard who had shown us the bat roost.

In the area behind the restaurant, we spotted an **African Civet**. This was closely followed by an inquisitive **Sundevall's Acacia Rat**.



Sundevall's Acacia Rat (© Mark Hows)



Yellow-winged Bat (© Mark Hows)

After pausing to watch an African Elephant that was feeding on the other side of the boundary fence, we started to find many **Yellow-winged Bats**, most of which were using the waist-high lamps that lined the path as hunting perches. Interestingly, we also saw a **Heart-nosed Bat** hunting in the same way. Finally, we saw a **Large-spotted Genet**, as we walked back to our accommodation.

Other nocturnal mammals commonly seen around the grounds of Samburu Simba Lodge include Northern Crested Porcupine and Striped Hyena.

We spent our remaining time in Samburu NR looking for two target species that had eluded us so far.

Having missed Somali Dwarf Mongoose in Meru NP, we meticulously checked every termite mound for den sites with no success. Eventually, we found a colony around lunchtime on our second day, although we very nearly missed them. Only one mongoose head was sticking out as we drove passed, and I very nearly asked Shem to keep on driving, thinking it was just a rock. However, as we reversed back in the truck, a whole family of **Somali Dwarf Mongoose** appeared, providing fantastic views.

Common Dwarf Mongoose are also found in the area, but the Somali species has a grey head, contrasting against a reddish body. The fur has a grizzled appearance.

We enjoyed a second Somali Dwarf Mongoose sighting on our last morning in the park, when we came across a small group out hunting.



Somali Dwarf Mongoose (© Mike Richardson)



Desert Warthog (© Mike Richardson)

Our final mammal target was Desert Warthog, another ‘northern special’ that we missed in Meru NP. Previous trip reports suggested that this species is relatively easy to find in Samburu NR.

In arid environments Common Warthog and Desert Warthog can look very similar and can be found in the same habitat. Both species can have short manes and brown hair (the latter is influenced by the soil colour).

However, in the field Desert Warthog can be identified by several morphological differences. These include ear shape, head structure, and the shape of the genal warts.

A typical Desert Warthog should have an egg-shaped head, and ear tips that bend backwards (giving the appearance of blunt ears). The genal (cheek) warts point downwards (like fingers), in contrast to the cone-shaped warts of a Common Warthog.

We found quite a few warthogs in Samburu NR, particularly on our last morning when we focussed on areas of short grass, which both species favour. However, none showed evidence of the finger like facial warts, and we wrongly discounted the other pro-Desert Warthog features. After some discussion, we erroneously recorded them as Common Warthog.

It wasn’t until I published my trip report on mammalwatching.com, that I was contacted by Tom Butynski who is an expert on Kenyan mammals. His comment is included below.

“The adult female in the photo is a Somali (Desert) Warthog. Flipped-back ears and relatively weak hind-quarters. Also, the skin is wrinkled. Congratulations. Yvonne de Jong, Jean-Pierre d’Huart, and I, are confident of this ID. We have seen 100s of Somali Warthogs in Samburu, Buffalo Springs, and Shaba...but not one Common Warthog...yet!”

Many thanks to Tom and his colleagues for sharing their expertise. We are very happy to add **Desert Warthog** to our trip list.

Nanyuki (21-22 February)

Leaving Samburu mid-morning, we arrived in Nanyuki in time for a late lunch. We then checked into Creaky Cottage, located in the grounds of the Trout Tree Restaurant, in Naro Moru.

Situated on the banks of the Burguret River, the site also includes a working trout farm, and at first glance may seem a peculiar place for a wildlife enthusiast to visit. However, Trout Tree is home to one of Kenya's most sought after mammals, along with several other interesting species.

Immediately after arriving on site, we met with Joseph, a security guard who has worked at Trout Tree for many years. He proved to be an outstanding naturalist and wasted little time showing us around the property.

First, we visited an outbuilding that was home to several sleeping **Southern Tree Hyrax**. These animals are easy to find at night due to the loud calls they make, however, views are usually brief. It was a treat to see such a fantastic mammal so well.



Southern Tree Hyrax (© Mike Richardson)



Guereza Colobus (© Mike Richardson)

Next, we walked along the riverbank, where we were introduced to a troop of habituated **Guereza Colobus**. A couple of **Blue Monkeys** were also present.

Cape Clawless Otter are regular visitors to this section of the river, and a couple of spraint sites were visible. We returned to the restaurant area where several **Ochre Bush Squirrels**, and a Southern Tree Hyrax, were hanging out.

At dusk, it was time for the main event. We followed Joseph down a poorly defined path, crossing ditches and traversing trout ponds. In a short while we arrived at the den site of a Maned Rat - one of our most wanted trip targets.

Joseph scattered some vegetable peelings down the hole, and minutes later a stunning **Maned Rat** appeared to feed.



Maned Rat (© Mike Richardson)



East African Thicket Rat (© Mike Richardson)

The rat did not seem bothered by our presence and continued to feed intermittently for the next 15 minutes. Amazingly, it was soon joined by a baby, which also showed well.

Returning to our accommodation on a mammal watching high, Joseph had one last treat in store when he showed us a couple of Jackson's Chameleons.

Back at the cottage we enjoyed a delicious dinner prepared by the Trout Tree chef. Mark soon noticed a mouse feeding out of the waste bin and managed to capture it in a Sherman trap. It turned out to be an **East African Thicket Rat**.

During a pre-dawn walk around the property we found a **Black Rat** in the cottage garden, along with a couple of Southern Tree Hyrax.

Soysambu Conservancy (22-23 February)

Soysambu Conservancy is a delightful reserve located in Kenya's Great Rift Valley.

We stayed at Simon's Camp, overlooking Lake Elmentaita. Here we enjoyed luxurious safari tents, and a very talented private chef.

One of our main reasons for visiting the area was to look for bats in the old Diatomite Mines. After picking up a local guide, we wasted little time escaping the midday heat and exploring the cool network of tunnels.

The local Spotted Hyenas utilise the mines as a food larder. In some sections, the floor was knee deep in bones, accumulated over many years. Fresh hyena droppings indicated some animals were still home, although we were able to avoid any confrontations by sticking to the main grid system of tunnels and being careful when entering a dead end to avoid a surprise encounter.

Fortunately, the bats were easy to find. Two *Rhinolopus* were identified as **Eloquent Horseshoe** and **Lander's Horseshoe**. The latter species was noticeably smaller. We also found two species of undescribed bent-wing, formally named 'Natal' and 'African,' but now temporally known as **Miniopterus Clade 7** and **Miniopterus Clade 8**.



Diatomite Mines (© Mike Richardson)



Lander's Horseshoe Bat (© Mark Hows)

There are other bat species in the mine, including Egyptian Slit-faced Bat. Unfortunately, we ran out of time before we could find them.

Late afternoon we drove around the conservancy, quickly spotting some beautiful (reintroduced) **Nubian Giraffes** and several pairs of **Cavendish's Dik-dik**. Other mammals observed included **Nile Grass Rat**, **Grant's Gazelle**, Thomson's Gazelle, Impala, Common Eland, Plains Zebra, Common Warthog, and African Buffalo. As we approached dusk, a couple of Spotted Hyena were also seen.



Nubian Giraffe (© Mike Richardson)



Spotted Hyena (© Mike Richardson)

We briefly returned to camp to collect the compulsory conservancy guide, before embarking on a two-hour night drive around the reserve.

By now, the wind had picked up considerably, and visibility was poor due to a dust storm. Such conditions are common at Soysambu, but they made spotlighting difficult.

It was still a relatively productive evening. Many Spotted Hyena were recorded (although we stopped counting at 30), along with a few Black-backed Jackal, and several White-tailed Mongoose. Savanna Hare, and Cavendish's Dik-dik were also common.



Cavendish's Dik Dik (© Mark Hows)



East African Springhare (© Mark Hows)

Our main target for the night was **East African Springhare**, and before we returned to camp, our guide suggested a try a particular area of grassland where they are often found. His local knowledge paid off and we spotted several pairs of this fantastic rodent.

Overnight we set some Sherman traps in the scrub around our tents. We managed to capture three species, including **Striated Grass Mouse** and **Nile Grass Rat**.



Striated Grass Mouse (© Mike Richardson)

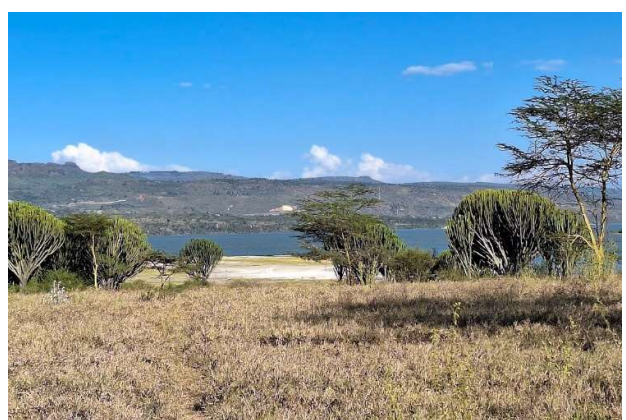


Nile Grass Rat (© Mike Richardson)

The third species was most likely a juvenile *Aethomys*. I have tentatively identified it as **Hinde's Veld Rat** based on tail to body length ratio, uniform colour of tail, and location. However, I would be happy to be corrected on this.



Hinde's Veld Rat (© Mike Richardson)



Lake Elementaita (© Mike Richardson)

Mount Suswa Conservancy (23 February)

We had to abort our early morning plan to visit Jaika Cave due to reliability issues with Shem's local contact. Instead, we proceeded to Mount Suswa Conservancy, where we met Kodoyo, our excellent Maasai guide.

There are many caves on the mountain, and most people visit 18a; a spectacular lava tunnel that is home to a remarkable species of bat.

Access to the cave is relatively easy, although it involves a fifteen-minute hike, much of it climbing over rocks. Just before we reached the main chamber, we passed the 'baboon parliament,' made famous by the BBC wildlife documentary *The Great Rift: Africa's Wild Heart*. Here the rocks have a glassy-smooth surface, polished over hundreds of years by the hands and feet of Olive Baboons, who use the cave for shelter.

Shortly after, we found our final new mammal of the trip - **Harrison's Giant Mastiff Bat**. As bat enthusiasts, we were particularly excited to observe this species. The sight of thousands of individuals, including many babies, made for an impressive spectacle.



Kodoyo at cave entrance (© Mike Richardson)



Harrison's Giant Mastiff Bat (© Mark Hows)

Our guide thought some neighbouring tunnels might contain a different species of bat. We checked chambers (14a and 14b) but only found more Harrison's Giant Mastiff Bats. Also of note, were some **Ochre Bush Squirrels** around the cave entrances. We missed the Rock Hyrax that are often seen, perhaps because they were sheltering from the oppressive heat.

We would have liked to have spent time exploring some more larva tunnels in search of bats, but all too quickly it was time to drive to Nairobi, in time for our evening flight back to the UK.

Species list

1.	Southern Tree Hyrax <i>Dendrohyrax arboreus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heard calling at Rhino Retreat, Aberdare NP. - Common at Trout Tree, Naro Moru.
2.	African Bush Elephant <i>Loxodonta africana</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Many sightings throughout, although absent from Nairobi NP and Soysambu Conservancy.
3.	Guereza Colobus <i>Colobus guereza</i> <i>ssp. kikuyuensis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Habituated troop at Trout Tree, Naro Moru.
4.	Olive Baboon <i>Papio anubis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common throughout.
5.	Vervet Monkey <i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i> <i>ssp. arenaria</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common throughout.
6.	Blue Monkey <i>Cercopithecus mitis</i> <i>ssp. kolbi</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small troop observed in Nairobi NP. - Several seen in Aberdare NP. - At least three in grounds of Trout Tree.
7.	Small-eared Greater Galago <i>Otolemur garnettii</i> <i>ssp. kikuyuensis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At least one in grounds of iKWETA Safari Camp.
8.	Somali Lesser Galago <i>Galago gallarum</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Three seen early morning in grounds of iKWETA Safari Camp. - One in roadside scrub near Murera entrance gate of Meru NP (pre-dawn).
9.	Ochre Bush Squirrel <i>Paraxerus ochraceus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One seen in Aberdare NP. - Several in grounds of Trout Tree. - Common in Mount Suswa Conservancy.
10.	Unstriped Ground Squirrel <i>Xerus rutilus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Several in Meru NP. - Common in Samburu NR.

11.	Maned Rat <i>Lophiomys imhausi</i>	- Fantastic sighting of female with kit, Trout Tree, Naro Moru.
12.	Zena's Brush-furred Rat <i>Lophuromys zena</i>	- Several seen around Chania Waterfall trailhead, Aberdare NP.
13.	Neumann's Grass Rat <i>Arvicanthis neumanni</i>	- Abundant in Samburu NR.
14.	Nile Grass Rat <i>Arvicanthis niloticus</i>	- Two recorded in Soysambu Conservancy, including one individual that was live-trapped.
15.	East African Thicket Rat <i>Grammomys cf. gigas</i>	- One captured in kitchen of Creaky Cottage, Trout Tree.
16.	Striated Grass Mouse <i>Lemniscomys striatus</i>	- Two live-trapped in Soysambu Conservancy.
17.	Black Rat <i>Rattus rattus</i>	- One seen in garden of Creaky Cottage, Trout Tree.
18.	Mesic Four-striped Grass Mouse <i>Rhabdomys dilectus</i>	- Common around Chania Waterfall trailhead, Aberdare NP.
19.	Sundevall's Acacia Rat <i>Thallomys paedulcus</i>	- One seen well at night in Samburu Simba Camp, Samburu NR.
20.	Hinde's Veld Rat <i>Aethomys hindei</i>	- An <i>Aethomys</i> live-trapped in Soysambu Conservancy was probably this species.
21.	East African Springhare <i>Pedetes surdaster</i>	- Several pairs seen on night drive in Soysambu Conservancy.
22.	Naked Mole-rat <i>Heterocaphalus glaber</i>	- One captured by farmer, on agricultural land neighbouring iKWETA Safari Camp, Meru NP.

23.	Cape Hare <i>Lepus capensis</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This was most likely the species seen in Ol Pejeta Conservancy at night. - One seen in Samburu Simba Camp, Samburu NR (according to IUCN, <i>L. victoriae</i> is not found in the area).
24.	Savanna Hare <i>Lepus victoriae</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common in Soysambu Conservancy at night. Although <i>L. capensis</i> is also within range (according to IUCN), past trip reports, and reserve species lists, suggest that the habitat in Soysambu favours <i>L. victoriae</i>.
25.	White-bellied Hedgehog <i>Atelerix albiventris</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One seen at night in iKWETA Safari Camp, Meru NP.
26.	Epauletted Fruit Bat <i>Epomophorus sp.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Several seen at night in iKWETA Safari Camp, Meru NP.
27.	Eloquent Horseshoe Bat <i>Rhinolophus eloquens</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good numbers recorded in old diatomite mines, Soysambu Conservancy.
28.	Lander's Horseshoe Bat <i>Rhinolophus landeri</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good numbers recorded in old diatomite mines, Soysambu Conservancy.
29.	Heart-nosed Bat <i>Cardioderma cor</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large colony observed in storage shed, Samburu Simba Camp, Samburu NR. - One seen hunting at night, Samburu Simba Camp, Samburu NR.
30.	Yellow-winged Bat <i>Lavia frons</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common at night in Samburu Simba Camp, Samburu NR.
31.	Little Free-tailed Bat <i>Chaerephon pumilus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large colony seen emerging from gatehouse roof at dusk, Samburu Simba Camp, Samburu NR.
32.	Harrison's Giant Mastiff Bat <i>Otomops harrisoni</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large colonies observed at two caves in Mount Suswa Conservancy.

33.	'Natal' Bent-winged Bat <i>Miniopterus</i> Clade 7 (Formally <i>M. cf. natalensis arenarius</i>)	- Good numbers recorded in old diatomite mines, Soysambu Conservancy.
34.	'African' Bent-winged Bat <i>Miniopterus</i> Clade 8 (Formally <i>M. cf. africanus</i>)	- Good numbers recorded in old diatomite mines, Soysambu Conservancy.
35.	Black-backed Jackal <i>Lupulella mesomelas</i>	- Observed in Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Samburu NR, and Soysambu Conservancy.
36.	Lion <i>Panthera leo</i>	- Several great sightings in Nairobi NP, Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Meru NP, and Samburu NR.
37.	Large-spotted Genet <i>Genetta maculata</i>	- Single seen at night in Samburu Simba Camp, Samburu NR.
38.	African Civet <i>Civettictis civetta</i>	- One seen at night in Samburu Simba Camp, Samburu NR.
39.	Spotted Hyena <i>Crocuta crocuta</i>	- Recorded in Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Aberdare NP, and Soysambu Conservancy.
40.	White-tailed Mongoose <i>Ichneumia albicauda</i>	- Common at night in Ol Pejeta Conservancy and Soysambu Conservancy. - Single sighting in iKWETA Safari Camp, Meru NP.
41.	Somali Dwarf Mongoose <i>Helogale hirtula</i>	- Two observations in Samburu NR.
42.	Grevy's Zebra <i>Equus grevyi</i>	- Several sightings in Samburu NR.
43.	Plains Zebra <i>Equus quagga</i>	- Common in all reserves visited (with exception of Aberdare NP).
44.	White Rhinoceros <i>Ceratotherium simum</i>	- Common in Nairobi NP. Several sightings in Ol Pejeta Conservancy.

45.	Black Rhinoceros <i>Diceros bicornis</i>	- Two sightings in Ol Pejeta Conservancy.
46.	Giant Forest Hog <i>Hylochoerus meinertzhageni</i>	- Large boar crossed road in front of vehicle mid-afternoon, Aberdare NP. - Three observed feeding in grassland behind Rhino Retreat (Aberdare NP), at night.
47.	Desert Warthog <i>Phacochoerus aethiopicus</i>	- Several groups seen in Samburu NR.
48.	Common Warthog <i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>	- Common in Ol Pejeta Conservancy, and Soysambu Conservancy.
49.	Common Hippopotamus <i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	- Several seen in dam, Nairobi NP.
50.	African Buffalo <i>Syncerus caffer</i>	- Common at all reserves visited.
51.	Lesser Kudu <i>Tragelaphus imberbis</i>	- Several of these beautiful antelopes seen in Meru NP.
52.	Greater Kudu <i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>	- One recorded in Samburu NR.
53.	Cape Bushbuck <i>Tragelaphus sylvaticus</i>	- One observed in Nairobi NP. - Several sightings in Aberdare NP.
54.	Mountain Bongo <i>Tragelaphus euryceros</i> <i>ssp. isaaci</i>	- Brief, but excellent sighting of male, early morning at Rhino Retreat, Aberdare NP.
55.	Common Eland <i>Tragelaphus oryx</i>	- Recorded in Nairobi NP, Meru NP, and Soysambu Conservancy.
56.	Black-fronted Duiker <i>Cephalophus nigrifrons</i>	- Two dark duikers seen briefly in Aberdare NP were most likely this species.

57.	Cavendish's Dik-dik <i>Madoqua cavendishi</i>	- Common in Soysambu Conservancy.
58.	Kirk's Dik-dik <i>Madoqua kirkii</i>	- Common in both Meru NP, and Samburu NR.
59.	Gunther's Dik-dik <i>Madoqua guentheri</i>	- Several identified in Samburu NR.
60.	Thomson's Gazelle <i>Eudorcas thomsonii</i>	- Recorded in Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Meru NP, Samburu NR, and Soysambu Conservancy.
61.	Grant's Gazelle <i>Nanger granti</i>	- A small number observed in Soysambu. Conservancy.
62.	Bright's Gazelle <i>Nanger notatus</i>	- Common in Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Meru NP, and Samburu NR.
63.	Gerenuk <i>Litocranius walleri</i>	- Small numbers seen in Meru NP. - Common in Samburu NR.
64.	Waterbuck <i>Kobus ellipalprymnus</i>	- Recorded in Aberdare NP, Ol Pejeta Conservancy, and Meru NP.
65.	Impala <i>Aepyceros melampus</i>	- Common at all reserves visited.
66.	Hartebeest <i>Alcelaphus buselaphus</i>	- Recorded in Nairobi NP, and Ol Pejeta Conservancy.
67.	Beisa Oryx <i>Oryx beisa</i>	- Small numbers seen in Meru NP. - Common in Samburu NR.
68.	Nubian Giraffe <i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i> <i>ssp. rothschildi</i>	- Several sightings in Soysambu Conservancy.

69.	Reticulated Giraffe <i>Giraffa reticulata</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Common in Ol Pejeta Conservancy, Meru NP, and Samburu NR.
70.	Masai Giraffe <i>Giraffa tippelkirshi</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good numbers recorded in Nairobi NP.