



Amboseli NP

Kenya self-drive 2021/2022

Jan Ebr

One of the mammal reports from Kenya that I read before the trip started with a resolute statement in the spirit of “Kenya is definitely not a self-drive destination”, which may be quite discouraging to anyone considering such an endeavor. Luckily, I can now easily explain how deeply wrong that statement is.

Summary

We (me and my wife) have spent 25 days in Kenya over the Christmas of 2021 and New Year of 2022. We rented a 4×4, which I drove myself, and camped in public campsites, made no reservations ahead of time (apart from the car) and used no services of any guides. Overall, we saw **84 species of mammals** (and had we really wanted, we could probably have squeezed a few more species of bats from ultrasound recordings), which was the most mammals we ever saw in one trip. From these species, 56 were lifers for us; from the remaining 28, we have seen only 5 outside of our previous trip to southern Africa (which was our only other visit to the Afrotropical realm). We also recorded at least 412 species of birds (also our personal best), 18 species of herps, but also 59 species of butterflies. Kenya is a fascinating natural destination thanks to the unparalleled diversity of habitats found in a relatively small area (“relatively”, as we still had to drive 5300 km to cover it). It’s neither the easiest nor the cheapest place to go to, but it’s almost surprisingly well set up for a fully independent trip as all the national parks and other KWS reserves allow independent entry and camping and so do even some private conservancies. The main obstacle for a self-drive trip in Kenya thus remains the cost and availability of rental 4×4s.

Recently, I am less and less willing to plan anything much in advance and so my preparations for the trip consisted of arranging the car, flights, the mountains of pointless covid paperwork and reading the Lonely Planet guide and mammalwatching.com reports (which I mostly did on the plane from Argentina, two days before the trip itself). Kenya is – understandably – one of the most popular destinations among mammalwatchers, so there are many reports to read, but quite a few of them are from people who were on a traditional safari and the rest mostly cover all the same set of locations. During the trip itself I have thus used only the most handy ones, which are the two from Jon and the 2021 report from Venkat Sankar. The latter is an extraordinary document for two reasons - not only did Venkat report a jaw-dropping 126 species (120 in the IUCN taxonomy that we use), but he also inadvertently wrote a full-fledged “where to find mammals in Kenya” guide in the process. Venkat is also apparently a pretty swell guy, as I managed to get in touch with him while I was in Kenya and he

immediately started providing me with tips for sites and IDs of my photos, for which I owe him big thanks. A very good community is also the FB group “Mammals of East Africa”, which is run by Zarek Cockar (Venkat’s guide on his legendary mission), who was also very keen to provide us with tips.

Now comparing our 84 species to the ultimate list of 120, one probably can’t help but wonder - where did we go wrong? Is the independent approach so much less efficient? First of all we are not that into bats - and in Kenya, this attitude of ours is amplified by the impossibility of visiting most of the bat caves without a guide – removing bats from both lists, we suddenly are “losing” only to 78 to 95. This remaining difference then can be partly explained by the fact that we are just bad, impatient and lazy – and Venkat and Zarek are brilliant! But it also relates to my staunch refusal to take any guides - in particular in Arabuko-Sokoke (where we saw almost nothing) a local guide could have been quite efficient. We also couldn’t visit the Tana reserve for the endemic monkeys (as no rental company allows a self-drive visit to that area) – on the other hand, we visited some really good sites in the west that Venkat couldn’t do, which brought us quite a few extra species. By staying overnight mostly in national parks, we were often limited in nighttime activities, which may explain why we missed a lot of rodents and a few carnivores. I somehow missed that Mountain Reedbucks are found in Nairobi park so we didn’t make the time to look for them there; we did look a lot for the Somali Dwarf Mongoose in Meru, but they were just nowhere to be found. We saw a large amount of Galagos in several places, but all those that could be photographed well enough to ID were for some reason either Senegal or Somali; we were also somewhat unlucky with all sorts of duikers. Finally, we did not really go out of our way to see species that were not lifers, so our list has no rhinos and no leopards.

Practical

As Venkat’s report summarizes Kenya’s mammal sites in a systematic way, I will focus here only on our personal experience and information relevant to independent travel.

Itinerary and planning

Our **itinerary** was, night by night, unless noted differently, as follows

- Naivasha lake – Camp Carnelley’s
- Mara – Oloololo campsite (2 nights) + 1 night in Aruba Camp in Talek
- Lake Victoria – Dunga Hill Camp
- Kakamega – UDO’s campsite
- Mt. Elgon – Rongai campsite (2 nights)
- Saiwa Swamp
- Kembu Farm
- Aberdare – 1 night at Reedbuck campsite and 1 at Ruhuruini campsite
- Samburu
- Meru – Bwatherongi campsite
- Mwea – “Bongo” campsite
- Tsavo East – Ndolo campsite
- Arabuko-Sokoke – 1 night at the viewpoint, 1 night in Mida Creek Eco Camp
- Shimba Hills – “Professional” campsite
- Rukinga – Kivuli camp (2 nights)
- Tsavo West – Kamboyo campsite
- Chyulu Hills – Satellite campsite
- Amboseli
- and a (too) brief stop in Nairobi park before departure

I would also like to stress that while all of these sites are absolutely brilliant, the “real” Kenya, **outside of the reserves**, is the polar opposite – it’s chaotic, dirty (some of the villages are so full of rubbish that you just wonder why the people do that to their own living environment) and for a white person, the atmosphere varies between annoying and outright hostile – in any case, it’s not possible to do anything without attracting lots of attention. There are only very few campsites outside of the parks and main tourist areas and the occasional local accommodations which you see along the roads are ... unappealing, to say the least - needless to say that with the attitude of locals to foreigners and heavy population density in most areas, wild camping is out of the question. Combined with the fact that everything is way further than it looks on the map, because the roads are often either in a terrible condition or completely blocked by slow-moving lorries, this poses a bit of a logistical challenge when planning where to stay - this for example explains why we decided to visit the obscure Mwea reserve: it was simply the only campsite within hundreds of kilometers. Similarly the Dunga Hill Camp was a huge lifesaver for us, as the only campsite between Mara and Kakamega, despite being barely a campsite now, because of flooding from the rising levels of Lake Victoria. The entrance fees to the parks are valid for exactly 24 hours – as those are expensive, one could be motivated to try to squeeze as much time as possible, but that really would not be very practical. We instead typically used the least productive midday hours for transfers even if that meant exiting almost every park a few hours earlier.

Parks and reserves

With the exception of Rukinga, which does ask you to get in touch and pay at least a day in advance, you can just **show up** at all of the sites **unannounced** – we only called ahead for the Dunga Hill camp and Kemu farm to make sure they are open, but it wasn’t necessary (I also tried to call ahead to Aberdare to check payment methods, but the only phone I managed to reach was a private cellphone of a rather surprised former ranger). The **KWS public campsites** do not even accept reservations and are first-come-first-serve. This was not a problem as we were there mostly completely alone or with just a few other people – with the big exception of Samburu, which was for some reason so crowded that we had to pitch at a site that was clearly not usually used. This is a great advantage compared to, say, Botswana and Namibia, where everything needs to be pre-booked, but we are not entirely sure what happens when the sites get full - the KWS website clearly states that guests are expected to share the campsites with others, but in Samburu, we have seen the typical behavior when a group occupied a “sub-site” and acted like it’s their sovereign territory. If you want to avoid the uncertainty of the public campsites, there are also “special” campsites in many parks - usually more remote and exclusive, but they have to be booked in advance, are a little more expensive, and for example in Mara Triangle, you are required to hire armed security to camp there. Note that most parks – even some really large ones, such as Tsavo East – have just one public campsite and thus when you plan to use those, you don’t really have a choice of an area to stay in.



Mara Triangle



Oribi and baby Common Dwarf Mongoose, Mara Triangle

The standard **fees at the parks** (per person per 24 hours including camping, for foreigners) vary roughly between 50-100 USD, depending on the park. In 2021, KWS has dropped the fees considerably - by up to 50% for the most expensive parks – to attract more visitors in reaction to the minimal tourist traffic in the covid times; this discount has been scaled back in 2022, but the foreigner fees are still lower than pre-covid (all the while resident fees have hiked). Had we known this, we could have planned the more expensive parks first to do them in 2021 and saved some money, but alas. Note that these discounts do not apply to Samburu and the Mara Triangle, which are not managed directly by KWS (they do apply to Mara NR though).

To actually enter the parks, you need to be able to **pay the fee**, which is not as easy as it may seem and you need to have various payment methods at hand. While most bigger parks happily accept payments by card, Samburu demanded cash USD, Arabuko-Sokoke (which is locally managed and not related to KWS) asked for cash Kenyan shillings (which are not accepted at all by KWS parks), and for Kakamega, Mt. Elgon, Saiwa Swamp, Mwea, Shimbu Hills, Rukinga and Chyulu Hills I had to use the MPESA mobile payment (at Elgon, they would accept the cards in theory, but a miracle would have to occur for their card reader to connect to the network). MPESA is a mobile wallet attached to your Safaricom SIM card – you can get the service activated at any Safaricom outlet just with your passport and then you can top it up with money (shillings) at any time in all kinds of shops and kiosks even in remote villages. It is, in principle, possible to pay with MPESA in most parks -

which seemed attractive at first to me, because exchanging Czech money to dollars, bringing them to Kenya, and exchanging them to shillings gives me a much better rate than paying with a card abroad - but the park fees are set in USD and actually converted to shillings at a very bad rate (for the customer), so it ends up being almost exactly the same, only with more hassle.

Inside most of the parks, you are expected to **move around** only in your car, with the exception of Kakamega and Saiwa Swamp, which both have an extensive network of



Lion's ultimately unsuccessful attempt on a Buffalo, Mara Triangle

hiking trails, and Mt. Elgon, which has at least some hiking trails (but you can't just walk in from the outside); there are also a few very short trails available in Aberdare and even Tsavo West. There is a general ban on night driving in all KWS parks and reserves, which is why the private Rukinga (Tsavo Conservancy) which freely allows night drives is such a gem. In principle, one could find some interesting roads for night driving just outside the parks (as we did around Talek and Mida), but this requires you to also stay outside the parks overnight, which is not always easy (or at least not cheap). We have generally at least returned to camps very late and left very early to get some dawn/dusk action and in some places, we got interesting results by just walking around the camp at night, even though that is also generally discouraged or outright prohibited, as the campsites are mostly not fenced and the wildlife poses significant danger at night.



Senegal Galago and Grey Climbing Mouse, Talek

Getting in and around

To **enter Kenya**, you have to first get an e-visa for about 50 bucks per person. This is valid for three months, meaning that from the first day of the validity, you have three months to enter Kenya – only during the immigration control you get the actual permit, which is then valid for another three months. This gentle detail has become important for us, because we had to postpone the trip for over two months because of my health, so the original three-month period would have run out during the shifted trip. As for covid, Kenya was not interested in our vaccination status, but we had to get a PCR test before departure and then get it validated through a maze of online systems; the resulting QR code had to be presented printed on a paper for some reason. For a few days it seemed that for the journey back (through Dubai), we would have to get two PCR tests before departure (48 and 6 hours ahead), but as the omicron variant spiked in Kenya, the flights were swiftly canceled altogether and we eventually bought new tickets with Turkish, for which we needed to do no covid dances whatsoever. Here I would like to note that despite the fact that the flights were canceled by them, not us, Emirates are staunchly refusing to refund us any significant amount of money and I am never flying with these crooks ever again.

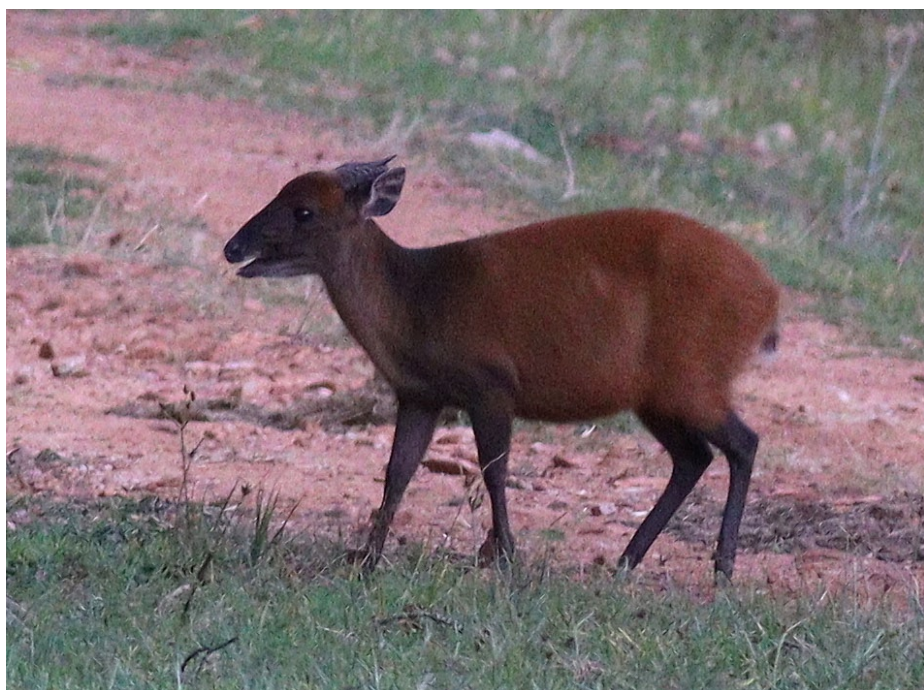
The cornerstone of any self-driving trip is the **rental of the car**. Kenya must be one of the most expensive countries to rent a car in, as the Hilux we got from Roadtrip Kenya cost 139 Euro per day – over the 25 days, we thus paid about as much as what I paid to buy my first three cars combined. My opinion of this rental is, frankly, a little mixed. Peter, who delivered the car to us, was extremely friendly and he provided 24/7 support over WhatsApp, which was not limited to car-related issues - he basically became our only friend in Kenya. The Hilux was a full-on 4x4, with extreme clearance, fantastic mud tires and was capable of navigating any terrain we threw at it. On the other hand, it was far from being in perfect condition - it was 10 years old with almost 250k kms on it, smelly interior, a broken display for radio, satnav and the rear camera and some other minor annoyances, such as a completely useless handbrake.. We also did not figure out how to honk or turn on A/C, which however was a failure in communication.



Hammer-headed Fruit Bat and East African Potto, Kakamega

Most importantly though, the car broke down (lost alignment of one front wheel to the point of being undriveable) after two days in Mara – supposedly because I failed to disengage 4x4 on a dirt road, but still, I didn't really go very fast. Additionally, upon return, we learned that two leaves of one of the rear leaf springs broke, which didn't have a direct impact on the trip, but was potentially dangerous. Overall, the car was a steady source of weird noises, most of which I was eventually able to track down to something benign, but it was constantly concerning. After the breakdown, Peter swiftly arranged for towing (from the middle of Mara) and repair, so that we were on the road again after just 8 hours, which was great, but he charged me the 230 USD for it – on the other hand, he did not charge me for the leaf spring, even though the contract would technically allow him to do so. My personal impression of the company is that they are reasonable people trying to do business in difficult conditions, but it is important to adjust your expectation as to what you are getting for the outstanding price. Also note that there are other companies that offer similar cars a bit cheaper, but with limited kilometers. When I was researching the rental, I got an offer from Central Rent a Car with a limit of 150 kms/day, but even with the penalty for exceeding the limit (as we drove 5300 km in 25 days), it would have been some 10-15 % cheaper – I do not regret though having paid that for the peace of mind not having to think about how many kilometers we are doing.

Driving in Kenya was by far my worst experience behind the wheel, but I would still recommend it to everyone as a way to get insight into, so to speak, the national psyche of the country. Because after a few hours on a Kenyan road, it becomes obvious that the idea of most Kenyans being cordial and deeply cultured people, so often perpetrated in guidebooks or even reports, is utter romantic nonsense. On the road, everyone shows absolute disregard to



Weyns's Duiker, Mt. Elgon



*Mt. Elgon bats – if one could judge by the species previously found in the same caves, they are *Miniopterus* clade 1 and *Rhinolophus clivosus* clade 2*

anyone but themselves. Every second of their time is apparently so precious that it's worth risking the lives of everyone around for it. The concept that the other lane should be free before they start to overtake is alien to a Kenyan driver; they routinely push others onto the hard shoulder and if you just keep in your lane, minding your own business you will die from a head-on collision within five minutes. Their aggression on the road is simply unparalleled. It's important to understand that this is not just about Kenyans being bad drivers, or having a "different driving style", it's about them being total selfish assholes. It's also not about a few bad apples, but 95 % of people in possession of any vehicle. The situation is so bad that the government constantly makes public statements begging people to drive even a little less recklessly to save lives, but to no avail. A pair of older Brittons that we met along the way told us they would rather drive the painfully corrugated roads along the entire endless length of Tsavo East than drive on the Mombasa Highway ... and I am really not blaming them. So before you really decide to rent a vehicle, consider whether you are up to the task of driving in such conditions.

We used mostly **Google Maps** for navigation, which was reasonable, with the exception of some parks, where they simply don't have all the tracks - for that purpose, OpenStreetMaps usually works (through maps.me or mapy.cz apps). I have read in several reports that people recommend to multiply the driving time by 1.5, which I cannot really confirm from my experience – this was true when driving from Nairobi to Mara and on to Kisumu, but later the times got much closer to the predicted ones. The main sources of delay are some really - but really! - bad stony roads - for example the road from Talek going north, where I sometimes felt that just driving through the countryside parallel to it would be faster – and heavy lorry traffic on the main roads, where overtaking may be a bit suicidal. But for example the routes from Aberdare to Samburu, or from Mwea to the Mombasa Highway were on perfectly smooth and relatively empty pavement. An interesting situation occurred on the way to Shimba Hills, where Google Maps pointed us to a track that was barely wide enough for a motorbike; a local has quickly approached us with very detailed instructions for a detour, which were clearly completely useless, but he was nice, so we pretended to listen and found the way anyway. An interesting problem is that the locations of some campsites are wrong on Google, I will note that in the site notes.

Miscellaneous

I was a bit worried about what damage would **covidism** do to the comfort of the trip, as all sources only stated that “masks are required in public spaces”, which says absolutely nothing about the reality, but in most places, nobody really cared. I had to wear a mask while shopping and I was even told that I have to wear it on the street in a city, but that was only a small portion of the time – in most of the reserves and small villages, nobody mostly seemed to notice that there even is a pandemic.

It was surprisingly difficult to

get **supplies**. In the central and western part of the country, there were reasonable supermarkets, often with deli counters inside, where we sometimes got ourselves pretty nice lunches, but around Meru and both Tsavos, the country is really empty and all that you find are small kiosks and street vendors of fruit and vegetables. In small villages it's sometimes difficult to get even bottled water ... Things are even more difficult for non-meat-eaters, such as my wife, because the only common street food is straight up grilled meat. Upon my request for a meatless dish, we were provided with rice with ... cabbage. On two separate occasions. I have lost almost 10 kilos during the trip, which however can not be in any way considered a negative.

The **total cost of the trip** per person excluding airfare was almost exactly 4000 USD, nicely split between \$2000 for the rental, \$1000 for park entrances and camping, \$500 for gas and other car expenses and the remaining \$500 for food, visa and Malarone. It was still the most expensive trip we have ever taken, but I really don't see a way to do Kenya much cheaper, as the car rental and park fees make up most of the cost - yes, Kakamega and Saiwa Swamp are doable on public transport, but much of the other parks aren't. No rental company allows taking a non-4x4 car to any park, many of the parks would probably not let you in anyway and there were many places where we were very happy to be driving the Hilux.



Praomys sp. and Common Rufous-nosed Rat, Saiwa Swamp

Site notes

The table lists all the species observed, sorted in a descending order by the frequency of their observations on iNaturalist, with mammals IDed only to genus or worse added at the end. For those that were not overwhelmingly common, sites of observations are listed with numbers of sightings.

1117	Giraffe	Giraffa camelopardalis	
1006	Savannah Elephant	Loxodonta africana	
1002	Lion	Panthera leo	mara 2, meru 1, ruinga 2, nairobi 1
911	Plains Zebra	Equus quagga	
713	Spotted Hyaena	Crocuta crocuta	
696	Impala	Aepyceros melampus	
649	African Buffalo	Syncerus caffer	
528	Cheetah	Acinonyx jubatus	tsavo east 1, ruinga 1
526	Vervet Monkey	Chlorocebus pygerythrus	
524	Hippopotamus	Hippopotamus amphibius	
492	Olive Baboon	Papio anubis	
491	Waterbuck	Kobus ellipsiprymnus	
481	Common Wildebeest	Connochaetes taurinus	
467	Common Warthog	Phacochoerus africanus	
414	Grant's Gazelle	Nanger granti	
366	Black-backed Jackal	Lupulella mesomelas	
356	Thomson's Gazelle	Eudorcas thomsonii	
339	Blue Monkey	Cercopithecus mitis	
316	Common Eland	Tragelaphus oryx	
294	Hartebeest	Alcelaphus buselaphus	
292	Tsessebe	Damaliscus lunatus	
264	Kirk's Dik-Dik	Madoqua kirkii	
238	Grévy's Zebra	Equus grevyi	only samburu (many)
230	Gerenuk	Litocranius walleri	samburu, outside amboseli
187	East African Oryx	Oryx beisa	samburu, ruinga, tsavo east
187	Mantled Guereza	Colobus guereza	
161	Yellow Baboon	Papio cynocephalus	
151	Bush Hyrax	Heterohyrax brucei...	tsavo west 1
146	Rock Hyrax	Procavia capensis	mt.elgon-kitum caves 1
143	Bushbuck	Tragelaphus scriptus	many (mt.elgon, aberdare, chyulu hills)
130	Banded Mongoose	Mungos mungo	mara triangle min. 3
89	Bohor Reedbuck	Redunca redunca	aberdare 2–4, amboseli (several)
78	Unstriped Ground Sq.	Xerus rutilus	many (samburu, meru, tsavo, ruinga)
75	Common Dwarf Mng.	Helogale parvula	mara triangle 1, meru (many)
74	Lesser Kudu	Tragelaphus imberbis	ruinga 1, tsavo east
67	Desert Warthog	Phacochoerus aethiopicus	only(?) samburu (many)
64	Bat-eared Fox	Otocyon megalotis	samburu 1
60	Serval	Leptailurus serval	mara triangle 1, kembu 3, ruinga 1
56	Ochre Bush Squirrel	Paraxerus ochraceus	ruinga-camp 1
54	Rusty-spotted Genet	Genetta maculata	kakamega 2
53	Angola Colobus	Colobus angolensis	shimba hills 1
46	Southern Tree Hyrax	Dendrohyrax arboreus	aberdare-ruhuruini camp 1
43	White-tailed Mongoose	Ichneumia albicauda	samburu-camp 1, ruinga-dam 1

39	Suni	<i>Nesotragus moschatus</i>	aberdare 1
33	Bush Duiker	<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>	kembu farm 2, aberdare, amboseli 1
26	Giant Forest Hog	<i>Hylochoerus meinertzhageni</i>	aberdare (several)
22	Common Slender Mng.	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>	meru 1
22	African Savannah Hare	<i>Lepus victoriae</i>	talek, mt.elgon 1, aberdare 1, amboseli 1
22	Red-tailed Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus ascanius</i>	kakamaga (several)
20	Northern Lesser Galago	<i>Galago senegalensis</i>	aruba 1, saiwa 1, rukinga 4+, amboseli 1
20	Striped Ground Squirrel	<i>Euxerus erythropus</i>	meru 2
18	African Civet	<i>Civettictis civetta</i>	saiwa swamp 1, rukinga 1, amboseli 1
17	Northern S-s Genet	<i>Genetta genetta</i>	rukinga 2
15	Hiroia	<i>Beatragus hunteri</i>	tsavo east 2+5ex.
14	African Wolf	<i>Canis lupaster</i>	amboseli 1
13	Cape Hare	<i>Lepus capensis</i>	rukinga 1
11	Ichneumon	<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>	saiwa swamp 1
11	Zanj Sun Squirrel	<i>Heliosciurus undulatus</i>	shimba hills 2-3
10	Side-striped Jackal	<i>Lupulella adusta</i>	aberdare 1, kembu farm 1
9	Oribi	<i>Ourebia ourebi</i>	mara triangle 4
9	De Brazza's Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus neglectus</i>	saiwa swamp 3-5
8	Egyptian Rousette	<i>Rousettus aegyptiacus</i>	mt.elgon-kitum caves (a lot of ex.)
8	Somali Lesser Galago	<i>Galago gallarum</i>	meru-camp 1
5	African Clawless Otter	<i>Aonyx capensis</i>	mt.elgon-near the camp 1
4	Naked Mole-rat	<i>Heterocephalus glaber</i>	meru 1 (+molehills, also around tsavo east)
3	Four-toed Sengi	<i>Petrodromus tetradactylus</i>	arabuko sokoke – outside reserve 1
2	Sitatunga	<i>Tragelaphus spekii</i>	saiwa swamp 2-3
1	C. Rufous-nosed Rat	<i>Oenomys hypoxanthus</i>	saiwa swamp 1
1	Forest Giant Squirrel	<i>Protoxerus stangeri</i>	saiwa swamp (several)
1	East African Potto	<i>Perodicticus ibeanus</i>	kakamega 1
1	Emin's Gerbil	<i>Taterillus emini</i>	rukinga
1	NE African Root Rat	<i>Tachyoryctes splendens</i>	aberdare-reedbuck camp 1
0	Weyns's duiker	<i>Cephalophus weynsi</i>	mt.elgon (several, 2x photographed)
0	Grey Climbing Mouse	<i>Dendromus melanotis</i>	talek-outside mara 1-2
0	Hammer-headed F. Bat	<i>Hypsignathus monstrosus</i>	kakamega 1
1	Vlei Rats	Genus <i>Otomys</i>	mt.elgon (several, no photo)
17	Bent-winged Bats	Genus <i>Miniopterus</i>	mt.elgon-kitum caves
0	Soft-furred Mice	Genus <i>Praomys</i>	saiwa swamp 1
5	Thicket Rat	Genus <i>Grammomys</i>	mwea-camp 1-2
3	Acacia Rats	Genus <i>Thallomys</i>	kembu farm 1
-	another sp. of Gerbil	Subfamily Gerbillinae	rukinga 1
79	Epauletted Fruit Bats	Genus <i>Epomophorus</i>	samburu-camp 1
-	,small' Horseshoe Bats	Genus <i>Rhinolophus</i>	mt.elgon-kitum caves (many ex.)
-	,large' Horseshoe Bats	Genus <i>Rhinolophus</i>	chyulu hills-lava tunnel 5ex.
	dead shrew sp.	Family Soricidae	saiwa swamp 1
	galago sp.		arabuko sokoke-outside NR 3 (no photo)
	genet sp.		aberdare-ruhuruini camp 1
	hare sp.		kembu farm

All mammal sightings with photos:

https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?d2=2022-02-01&place_id=7042&taxon_id=40151&user_id=opisska



De Brazza's Monkey, Saiwa Swamp

many, many **Vervet Monkeys**. More interesting to me was the fact that in this area, **Plains Zebras**, **Impalas** and **Grant's Gazelles** roam freely around the roads and between villages, with the zebras grazing in the middle of a highway.

We passed through the Mara NR on a transit permit and spent two days in the **Mara Triangle**. As a good classic safari park, I had the Triangle earmarked for second place “best safari” for most of the trip, until Amboseli snatched the trophy at the last minute. With rolling grassy hills, grand vistas over the vast Serengeti plains in Tanzania, lush swamps and many good river viewpoints, it's an enjoyable place even while confined to the car. It was not as overflowing with animals as Samburu, but it was easy to see **Elephants**, **Giraffes**, **Plains Zebras** (in particularly epic numbers around the less-traveled tracks in the NW part of the triangle), **Common Warthogs**, **Impalas**, **Thomson's Gazelles**, **Grant's Gazelles** (even though we did not notice at that time that they weren't Thomson's), **Red Hartebeest**, **Topi**, **Olive Baboons**, **Elands**, **Waterbucks**, **Buffalos**, **Spotted Hyenas**, with a few **Black-backed Jackals** and **Banded Mongoose**.



Acacia Rat, Kembu Farm

Interestingly, there were no **Wildebeest** in the Triangle proper, but we passed some in the NR. The Oloololo campsite with its open exposure to the wilderness is truly immersive – sometimes even too much, as we found in the first morning, when Ivana abandoned her trip to the toilets, because there was a **Hippopotamus** hurriedly passing by a few dozen meters behind the building! The campsite was also pretty open to wind – on the second evening, we found our tent unbolted and tied to a tree and learned that the rangers found it some distance downwind in the bushes ...

Side-striped Jackal, Aberdare

The following text is just an anecdotal diary of interesting notes without an ambition for completeness.



Northeast African Root Rat and Suni, Aberdare

Early the first morning, our first **Serval** ran across the road in front of us and we could watch it for a short moment in tall grass; a random detour to a side track through the riverine bushes brought several **Common Dwarf Mongooses**. After a bit of searching, we found several Oribi towards the Tanzanian border – they were mostly laying around and were not easy to photograph through the heat haze of the noon, but were still distinctive enough. In the evening, we were lucky enough to watch a lone Lion take on – unsuccessfully – a Buffalo, probably the best “National Geographic moment” I have ever seen. We tried to explore the slopes at the NW side of the Triangle to look for some less plains-loving species, but found nothing of note; the area is also not generally very easy to access.

The second morning, we skipped through the Triangle without much delay, hoping to explore the NR before our tickets would run out, but not far after crossing the river, the right front wheel ball joint gave out and we had to call for help. Two hyenas watched our situation with interest, but the mechanics were unphased, because “hyenas are no problem”. We have gotten the car repaired soon enough that we were able to take a night drive around **Talek**, just outside Mara NR which, using mainly our Pulsar XQ38F IR monocular, produced several **African Savanna Hare**, a few hyenas and, most interestingly, **Grey Climbing Mouse** – in a field where it had absolutely nothing to climb. Already during the day, while we were just relaxing around Aruba Camp, waiting for the car to be repaired and watching **Olive Baboons**, **Vervet Monkeys** and many birds, the local Maasai security guard has told us that bushbabies can be seen in the trees on the camp, so we went to check those out after the night drive and quickly located a **Senegal Galago**. No IR is needed for that, as galagos have the brightest eyeshine I have ever seen – so bright that it’s almost impossible to take a picture when they are looking straight at you because the eyes overexpose everything.



Southern Tree Hyrax and Giant Forest Hog, Aberdare



Epauleted Fruit Bat, Samburu

After a long drive with an overnight stop at the shores of Lake Victoria, we finally arrived in **Kakamega** in the middle of the next day. We first tried the Forest Reserve, where we were strictly told that we are required to take a guide with us, so we turned around and went to the National Reserve. There, at a marvelous and empty forest campground we met a ranger, who told us to do whatever we want here and then left as it was December 24th and he had probably better things to do than to watch us. Kakamega NR isn't particularly large but has quite a network of walking trails – some of which aren't drawn at any maps we had, but are signposted. It is possible to also drive for a few kilometers to get to the more remote parts, but we really enjoyed the ability to just walk. Already at the campsite, there were **Mantled Guerezas**, later we also found **Blue Monkeys**, **Red-tailed Monkeys** and **Olive Baboons**. As it got dark, we gradually transitioned to IR observations and spotlighting – first we found a really confusing pair of eyes which eventually turn out to be part of a very well hidden, upside-down hanging **Hammer-headed Fruit Bat**, later we encountered two **Rusty-spotted Genets**, one on the main (driveable) track, one at the campsite, and some unidentified hares. The main star was however an **East African Potto** found thanks to eyeshine in trees above one of the random trails

closer to the entrance. Kakamega is definitely the main place where I regret that we haven't stayed at least one more night, because the potential for night walks is endless there.

A place where we did choose to stay an extra night was **Mount Elgon**. This surprisingly large park allows you to drive through forests of various sea levels, all the way to the open landscape above the forests. It has several hiking paths but we also took a few random walks along the roads - nobody seemed to mind us doing that at least during the day. Unlike Kakamega, it requires a car to get to the trailheads and night driving is prohibited, the options for night walks are thus limited. We have found a track in the upper left corner of the Rongai campsite clearing, which we took both evenings, at first finding only **Bushbucks**, but in the second night, we followed a side trail left towards a stream in which my wife briefly saw what was very likely **African Clawless Otter**. During the day, we saw mainly **Waterbucks**, **Plains Zebras**, **Mantled Guerezas** and **Blue Monkeys**. Several times, mostly in early mornings and late afternoons, we encountered **Weyns's Duikers** while driving through the lower-altitude forest.. Along the road climbing towards "Road End" (from where one could reportedly relatively easily climb Mt. Elgon), we have seen several rather large, really dark rodents quickly cross the track - unless someone comes up with another plausible ID, I put these down as **Vlei Rats** (*Otomys* sp.). The rocks in front of Kitum caves had **Rock Hyrax** and the campsite at night **African Savanna Hare**. We tried several times to look for animals from the Elephant lookout and we hiked up in the morning to the Endebess Bluff, but found nothing of note.



White-tailed Mongoose, Samburu

One of the main attractions of Elgon are the caves. The large Kitum and Makingeny caves are well signposted and are reached by straightforward trails from the road. These two had the most bats: **Egyptian Rousette** and some species of “small” **Horseshoe Bats** (*Rhinolophus clivosus* clade 2 is reported from there) and **Bent-winged Bats** (*Miniopterus* clade 1 by location). There are two other caves, harder to find – one is in a bend about 1 km past the Endebess bluff parking, without any signposts or an obvious parking spot (just a widening of the road), the other one has a signposted parking next to the lower of the two roads (not far from the Elephant lookout), but the trail from the parking to the cave is a bit hidden; neither of the caves had any bats, but in one we found a porcupine quill. Note that while the lower parts of the park (including the Kitum cave) are visited by locals even in normal cars, some of the roads were in a pretty bad state when we visited and moving around was surprisingly slow. The road up towards “Road End” is doable only in a hardcore 4x4 and with sufficient courage – there is a rather steep, narrow and muddy part with several fallen trees where I would really not like to meet a car going the other way ...



Bat-eared Fox, Samburu

On the main road near Kitale, we noticed a group of monkeys, which we, based on the maps in our book, suspected of being Tantaluses, but we have been later told that these maps are wrong and there are only Vervet Monkeys in Kenya. **Saiwa Swamp** provides the ultimate respite from having to be in your car, as there are no roads, only walking paths. In the afternoon, an **Egyptian Mongoose** crossed a path right in front of us. After sunset, we found a couple of distant antelopes in the swamp, but they were probably all **Bushbucks**. Only after dark did we find a **Sitatunga**, conveniently near the nearest lookout tower from the campsite. Watchtower 5 was closed, watchtowers 2 and 4 did not have much view of water, so we tried to look for otters from bridges on the path across the swamp, but with no success. However the night walks were really rich with a likely **Praomys sp.** near the path from watchtower 4, **African Civet** a few hundred



Observing Naked Mole-rats in Meru: the „volcano“ shaped mound at the side of the road, the hole after the mound is removed and the snout of the animal after the patient wait.





Thicket Rat, Mwea

meters south of the campsite, **Common Rufous-nosed Rat** in the thick branches just north of the campsite and a **Senegal Galago** near the nearest watchtower. Next morning, we walked the entire northern circuit, seeing several **Giant Forest Squirrels** and finally finding a **De Brazza's Monkey**. The key realization was that there were just single individuals of De Brazza's, moving around with the numerous troupes of **Mantled Guerezas** and thus each individual monkey had to be investigated. Somewhere along the northern circuit, we also found a **dead shrew** of unknown species. The entire

reserve was also spectacular in terms of birds, especially the mix of forest and abandoned plantations around watchtower 5.

We have picked **Kembu Farm** near Njoro for an overnight spot because it had camping and promised easy chameleons around. Soon after arrival, we met the owner of the entire farm (which extends far beyond the camping/cottage area), who immediately invited us for a night ride with his family around the farm in his old Landrover. The ride brought several **Servals**, one **Side-striped Jackal** and some **Bush Duikers** and **Hare sp.** We didn't have enough and so we then walked around a bit and found an **Acacia Rat** in a tree a few hundred meters NW of the central area. The owner's son taught us how to find the chameleons at night and in the morning, they invited us to their house to meet their pack of rescued tree hyraxes that they are taking care of. The visit to Kembu was one of the highlights of the trip - the unstoppable friendliness of the owner and his family was as big of an experience as the interesting animals we observed. If I ever go to Kenya again, this is the one place I would like to revisit.

In one of the most unexpected sightings of the trip, we watched a **Side-striped Jackal** sniffle around the Mutubio western entrance gate to **Aberdare** just as we were sorting out the tickets – at 3187 meters a.s.l., this site is outside the reported altitude range for the species. Soon after crossing the gate, we found that the road conditions were terrible - and it was true all around the park as recent rains made everything incredibly muddy. I optimistically tried the turn-off to Karura Falls only then to have to back up for 15 minutes to get back to the main road - since then I was more careful, but even with the Hilux, some tracks were scary. The highlands had plenty of **Bushbucks** and a few **Bohor Reedbucks** – we have first seen several reedbucks in the distance with a minimal chance of reliably determining the species, but eventually some appeared relatively close to us walking across the road. There were also quite a few **Bush Duikers**, usually appearing out of nowhere in front of the car and quickly disappearing into the bushes, and a pack of **Blue Monkeys**. We set up camp at the Reedbuck campsite accompanied by a friendly **Bush Duiker** and **African Savannah Hare** and we noticed molehills in a large part of the site. I opened up two freshly-looking hills and after an hour or so we noticed that one of them is closed again, so we removed the hill completely to expose the hole below and my wife watched it in IR. When the **Northeast African Root Rat** started emerging, she alerted me and I took some pictures of its nose. To make its life easier, we covered the hole back again afterwards.



Hiorolas, Tsavo East



Four-toed Sengi, Arabuko-Sokoke

Down in the Salient, the wildlife was even richer with **Waterbucks**, **Bushbucks**, **Spotted Hyenas** and even **Buffaloes** and **Elephants**. The later two were best observed at a swampy clearing along the Ark road where they were accompanied by several **Giant Forest Hogs**. Unlike in other reports I have seen, those were really easy to observe, not only there, but also at other random places in the Salient – the only thing to be aware of is that there are also **Common Warthogs** here. When going back uphill to our camp at the Ruhuruini gate

we noticed something small run close to the road but we did not really get any look, so we parked a bit uphill from the place and watched the road only to eventually spot a **Suni** - well we honestly thought it's yet another Bush Duiker at first, but at second look it was quite different. The Ruhuruini campsite is where Jon has reported a **Southern Tree Hyrax** and we have indeed heard one call in the night and quickly found it in the trees; there was also a **Genet sp.** in the campsite and an unidentified squirrel briefly seen in trees.

After a long time spent in green and wet areas, the change of scenery after driving down north from the plateau around Mt. Kenya was dramatic; **Samburu** itself is basically a desert. Shortly after arrival to the Samburu NR, while exploring mostly the riverside, we started ticking lifer after lifer: **Grevy's Zebras** and **East African Oryxes** were very common and immediately obvious; a little less obvious at first were the “weird Impalas” which were actually **Gerenuks** and a little more focus was needed before we concluded that all the numerous warthogs around were actually **Desert Warthogs**. The area close to the campsite was best for **Unstriped Ground Squirrels**. At that moment we also considered the **Grant's Gazelles** a lifer, unaware that we had actually already seen them in Mara and Naivasha. From less exciting species, plenty of **Giraffes**, **Elephants**, **Plains Zebras**, **Olive Baboons** and **Vervet Monkeys** were present, as well as some **Black-backed Jackals**. At night, we embarked on a brief and stealthy walk around our campsite (which would be clearly not approved by local rangers by the sight of it) – directly above our tent an **Epauletted Fruit Bat** was roosting and only a few steps away we came across a **White-tailed Mongoose**. In the morning, we drove north further from the river into the hills, where we could finally observe the **Generunks** grazing in the iconic Gerenuk way and also found 2 **Bat-eared Foxes**. During the entire stay, we have photographed dozens of **Kirk's Dik-diks** in the search for a Gunther's - the upper lip may sometimes look quite enlarged but then if you continue observing the animal for a while, it starts to look like a good old Kirk's and thus we didn't find any suitable Gunther's candidate.

After the sheer safari glory of Samburu, the visit to **Meru** was much quieter when it came to animals – but also when it came to people, so we weren't against that idea. The whole area was very green – according to a friendly older British couple living in Kenya that we met there, it was really exceptional – which looked nice, but made searching for animals more difficult as there weren't many open spaces. There were some **Giraffes**, **Dik-diks**, **Plains Zebras**, **Grant Gazelles**, **Impalas** and **Elands** together with **Baboons**, possibly of unclear color, a pride of **Lions** casually blocking one of the bigger tracks and also **Hippos**. The latter are the focus of a very ... Kenyan attraction, where a sign next to a track invites you to visit a “Hippo pool” and a short footpath brings you to a rickety wooden platform some 20 meters from the Hippos themselves. The logic beyond the idea that this is the one place you should actually leave your car somewhat eludes me ...

However we came looking mainly for the smaller stuff. We did not find any Somali Dwarf Mongooses, despite looking at the exact coordinates from Jon's report - elsewhere in the park, we repeatedly saw dwarf mongooses



Zanz Sun Squirrel and Angola Colobus, Shimba Hills

crossing the tracks, but any animals we could get a good look on always turned out to be **Common Dwarf Mongoose**; there was also one **Common Slender Mongoose**. Not far from the Somali Dwarf Mongoose site, there were some **Striped Ground Squirrels** on a termite mound, while **Unstriped Ground Squirrels** were also present throughout. In the evening at the public campsite (which is not entirely easy to find, it's not close to the gates as some maps would suggest, but near the park HQ and airstrip) we looked for and relatively quickly found a **Somali Lesser Galago** – to the surprise of the aforementioned couple who were clearly skeptical towards any chance of success of such an activity. They were even more skeptical when we told them about our plan to look for Hirolas in Tsavo East – they were aware of the species (and actually personally knew the guy who introduced them to Tsavo decades ago) but considered it impossible to find given the expanse of Tsavo. If you are reading the report in sequence, this story has a great conclusion later!

The campsite is a really nice place, surrounded by trees, but it has basically only three sites, so in case of more traffic, there may be troubles with “site hoggers”. The next morning, we went southeast from the campsite, aiming to exit the park at the SE corner. In this direction, we soon entered a maze of trails that were not frequently used – on many of them, there were no car tracks at all, just water damage, indicating that we were the first to drive there since the last big rains. There were also several fallen trees, some of them somewhat bypassable through the bushes, some of them not. At one point, I was almost sure we were going to have to pay for another day here, but we eventually found a way out after a lot of backtracking and exited towards the SW corner of the park. Along the way, we looked for **Naked Mole-rat** mounds to explore; we eventually identified the proper procedure for Naked Mole-rat observation: 1. make sure that the mound you are watching is not an old termite mound (yes, it happened), 2. watch a random mound fruitlessly, 3. drive around some more and notice a mound with a geyser of dust, 4. watch it fruitlessly some more before deciding to remove the mound to expose the hole, 5. finally see a snout after trying to be as steady as you can for a long time.

Considering the distance between Meru and the Voi gate of Tsavo, we decided to break the journey at the tiny Mwea reserve. The Meru couple suggested that we instead enter



Melanistic Serval, Rukinga

Tsavo from the northwest and drive through it, but that had the problem of no suitable public campsite and also of a lot of driving on possibly terribly corrugated roads, which we were not very keen to do. **Mwea** is a funny place, a small piece of fenced-off bushy land above a big reservoir from a hydro-electric dam. It has some animals, but it feels a bit like a zoo enclosure considering the size; the biggest highlight was the discovery of probably **Thicket Rats** (*Grammomys* sp.) at night around the not-too-aptly named “Bongo” campsite.

After a long and occasionally hair-raising drive on the Mombasa highway, we finally arrived at **Tsavo East**. The vast plains are a sight to behold and even while exploring a relatively small part of the park, we felt truly immersed in the wilderness. The wildlife included species such **Yellow Baboon**, **Kirk's Dik-Dik**, **Grant's Antelope**, **Oryx**, **Waterbuck**, **Impala**, **Plains Zebra**, **Black-backed Jackal**, **Hippo**, **Unstriped Ground Squirrel** and even a **Cheetah** which we encountered in the open grassland SE of Satao. Our main goal was however the **Hirolas** and thus we headed for the „Hirola Drive“ – a road that starts 10 kms SSE from Aruba dam and heads E, then NE towards Satao – straight after arrival. In previous reports, we read stories about people having had to check large number of **Red Hartebeest** herds and thus we were little concerned by the general lack of those in the area, but this lack actually made the search quite easy, because already the second „Hartebeest“ group we encountered turned out to be two Hirolas, quite close to the point where Jon has recently seen them. After that we turned back on the track and soon found a group of five more. Relieved that we won't have to spend the entire time here just driving up and down this road, we explored the areas around Voi, Aruba dam and then the vast plains SE of Satao, all of which were quite nice. In the latter area, some roads were closed and some in pretty bad shape, but it was worth it to try to navigate those as it meant we were completely alone for the entire next morning. Close to the Voi gate, Ivana briefly spotted a Kudu, presumably Lesser, but not certainly enough for us to count it.

Exiting east from Tsavo, we got quickly to **Arabuko-Sokoke**. As expected, the ranger at the gate tried to push a guide on us, but soon realized the futility of such an effort and let us in by ourselves. The campsite at the gate doesn't seem to exist anymore and the campsite is now at the Nyari viewpoint. We are not entirely sure where exactly it is foreseen that people will camp there, but we have built a mosquito net right at the viewing spot, as that is the only place with some breeze, making the rather extreme climate there at least slightly bearable. The forest isn't large, but the roads are rough, so it takes a considerable amount of time (hours) to reach the viewpoint by car. We drove around a bit more, deep into dusk (as there didn't seem to be anyone to stop us from doing so), walked some more at night around the viewpoint and then in the morning around some tracks and eventually also around the nature trail closer to the headquarters, but found very little in terms of mammals – just **Yellow Baboons** and **Blue Monkeys**. From the nature trail, we have several times glimpsed a shadow of an animal on the ground, which may have been the Giant Sengis, but the only one of those I actually saw for a split second looked more like a squirrel. We tried waiting around the spots when we saw them, aware that they always run the same paths, but without success.



Emin's Gerbil and some other gerbil, Rukinga

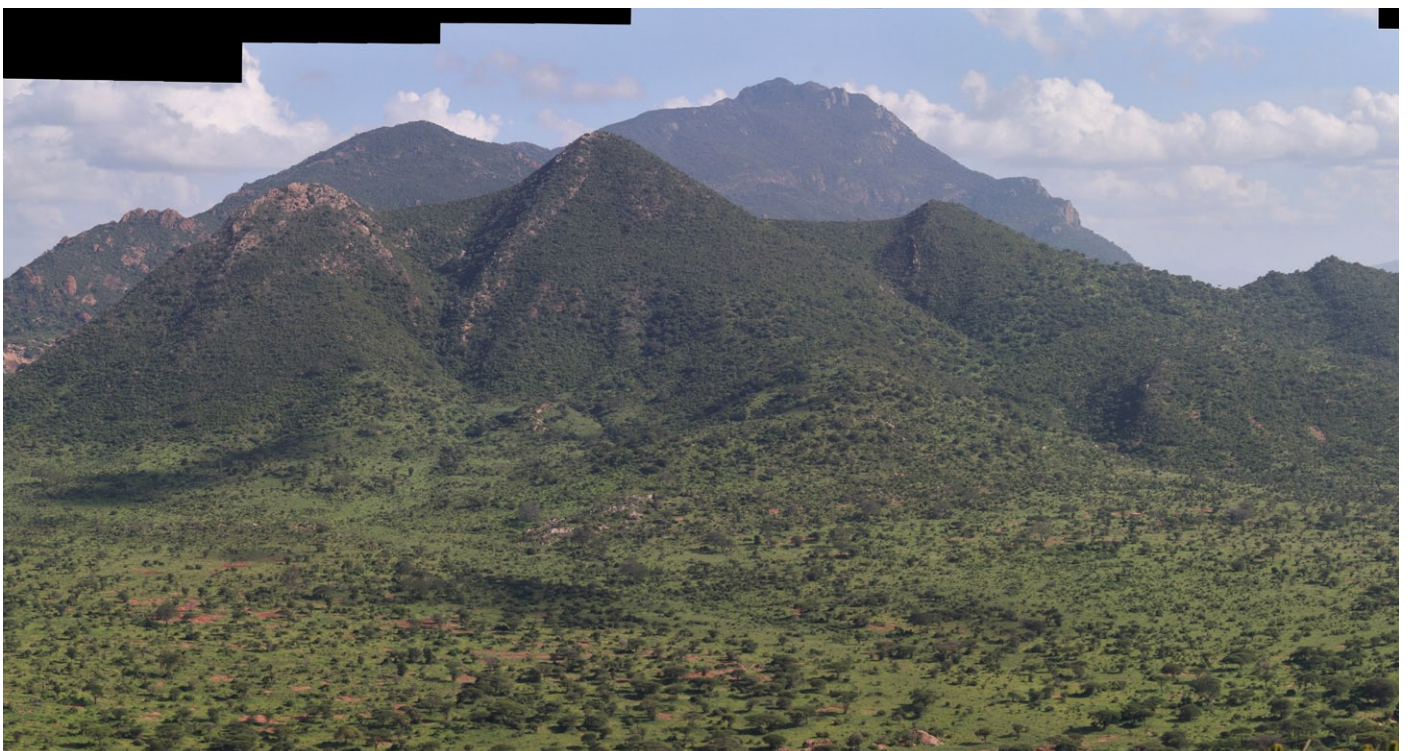
As the morning turned to day, the heat was becoming oppressive and we thus gave up and spent the afternoon relaxing in the Mida Creek Eco Camp at the shore of some lovely Mangrove-lined tidal creek with good birds. In the evening, we explored a track nearby, parallel to the main road, cutting through a freely accessible part of the forest, where we found a **Four-Toed Sengi** a few meters from the track using IR. There were also several Galagos in the trees showing bright eyeshine, but none of them allowed any closer look.

Driving down to **Shimba Hills**, we followed Google Maps and successfully avoided Mombasa, however at one point, the app asked us to turn towards a path barely wide enough for a horse, so we had to take a significant detour. At the

gate, the ranger asked us whether we wanted to camp alone or with others and when I stated the obvious choice, he directed us to the „Professional campsite“ which we indeed had completely to ourselves. Although the landscape was very pleasant, there wasn't much wildlife, just the occasional **Buffalo**, **Yellow Baboon** or **Common Warthog**. At the Ocean Viewpoint, there were several **Zanj Sun Squirrels** – and also the only really good cell phone reception in the park which allows us to buy them air tickets home. We then took the longest road south towards Kidongo gate to look for **Angola Colobus** and indeed found some just crossing the road in trees above it. Using the IR, Ivana found several „Duikers“ in the forest around the road, but we never got any useful views. We did photograph an interesting squirrel there, which we suspected to be Red Bush, but Zarek has put forward convincing arguments on iNaturalist that it was another Zanj Sun. As we were alone at the rather remote campsite, we did a night walk around, but only found sleeping birds.



*Horseshoe Bats, probably **Rhinolophus hildebrandtii**, Chyulu Hills*



Tsavo West



African Wolf and African Civet, Amboseli

Even after hearing good things from mammalwatchers about **Rukinga**, I was a bit reluctant to go there, as it's a private reserve and those often tend to force people to stay in overpriced lodges and do „activities“ with guides. Well, how wrong I was! Rukinga is really different - the only obstacle is that you must arrange the entrance beforehand, but after that's done, it's a very free place, with self-drive allowed also at night. The campsite is nice and cheap and the entrance fee is NOT per day, so once you enter, you can stay as long as you want to. Sadly, you are still not allowed to walk around outside of the camp, but for good reasons - the elephants have recently killed even some rangers! The landscape is mainly flat and monotonous, but with a good selection of animals: **Waterbuck, Yellow Baboon, Warthog, Impala, Elephant, Giraffe, Oryx** and **Unstriped Ground Squirrel** were easily seen during the day drives and **Ochre Bush Squirrels** live directly in the camp. The main show starts after sunset though: **Senegal Galagos** are ubiquitous in the acacias and IR/spotlight drives brought additionally **White-tailed Mongoose**, a melanistic **Serval**, **African Civet**, **Black-backed Jackal**, **Cheetah**, **Small-spotted Genet**, a pride of sleeping **Lions** (somewhat disturbingly discovered immediately after I had been walking around the car trying to free it from a ditch), but also **Kirk's Dik-dik**, **Eland**, **Lesser Kudu** (finally!) and **Cape Hare**. At two places – near the dam south of the camp (which had the lions) and the water reservoir north of the camp, we found small rodents. Venkat has IDed one family as **Emin's Gerbil**, and is pretty sure the others are something else, but a more specific ID has proven elusive so far. Venkat also previously reported Rufous Sengis from the camp – we looked for them a lot, but there weren't even any “highways” or other signs present so we have concluded that they have probably moved somewhere else. We have spent two nights in Rukinga and would highly recommend anyone to do the same! If you do, check the water reservoirs on the toilets for frogs :)

With some time to waste due to the new flights being a day later and everything having gone unexpectedly smoothly so far, we went on to visit some more parks that we hadn't really planned beforehand. **Tsavo West** had some absolutely stunning vistas, but really not that many animals, with just a few **Dik-diks**, **Unstriped Ground Squirrels**, **Elephants**, **Giraffes**, **Warthogs**, **Waterbucks**, **Hippos** (in yet another slightly suicidal Hippo Pool setting at Mzima Springs) and again some unspecified **Kudus** running briefly across the road. Our main goals there were to look around rocky areas for Klipspringer (fruitlessly) and **Bush Hyrax**, which we saw on a rocky ledge quite close to the track that climbs from Rhino Valley towards Chainu Crater. For some non-mammal entertainment, we recommend Mzima Springs where you can watch fish from an underwater observatory - and generally walk around a nice environment. The KWS Campsite is in the northern part toward Mtito Andei smack in the wilderness. We were the only guests and there was nobody around, but there were plenty of scary animal noises and my wife was a bit sick from some bad food, so we did not do any nighttime exploration; an early morning drive with IR was not productive either as there was a lot of thick vegetation along the tracks.

In **Chyulu Hills**, there were even less animals, namely one lone **Bushbuck**, one lone **Red Hartebeest** and a troop of Yellow Baboons, but there were also some very nice and easily accessible caves with some “large” **Horseshoe bats** (a different species than on Mt. Elgon, probably *Rhinolophus hildebrandtii* based on location).

As we were climbing out of those caves, we heard some people - and it was actually the couple we met in Meru. It was a miracle of destiny, because this allowed us to show them our Hirola pictures and prove their skepticism towards us finding those wrong! The campsite in Chyulu is high in the green grassy hills, with a very pleasant climate and endless views over the Tsavo, somewhat making up for the lack of animals. We have gotten some intel that one could in principle continue south across the hills towards Amboseli without backtracking to the Mombasa highway, but the tracks were reportedly very rough and cut through a scary incline, so we passed on that opportunity.

Amboseli, categorized as a „premium park“ by KWS has quite lived up to the expectations, as this was probably the place with the highest concentration of animals in the entirety of the trip. The wetlands were rich with **Bohor Reedbucks**, much easier to see here than in Aberdare. Besides the usual **Yellow Baboons**, **Spotted Hyenas**, **Common Warthogs**, **Hippos**, **Wildebeest**, **Gerenuks**, **Plains Zebras**, **Elephants**, **Thomson's Gazelles**, **Grant's Gazelles**, **Giraffes**, **Black-backed Jackals** and **Lions**, we have also seen **African Savanna Hare**, an **African Civet** early in the morning and an **African Wolf** in broad afternoon. The KWS campsite is surrounded by and extensive encampment of staff quarters and other buildings, fenced off from big game and thus quite safe to walk around - a night walk there brought a chameleon, the attention of local guards and a surprising **Bush Duiker**; in the morning, there was a **Senegal Galago**. All of this had the towering silhouette of Kilimanjaro as a backdrop and a huge supporting cast of birds, as Amboseli is surely also one of the best birding sites in Kenya. A fun part of the visit was looking for the campsite - the one described in Lonely Planet is quite derelict and no longer managed by KWS - a local guy claimed it was a „community campsite“ and we could have stayed there, but we would have to pay again as the camping fee we paid at the gate does not apply there. The real KWS campsite is a bit hidden near the eastern gate.

Finally, we arrived in Nairobi and decided to spend a few hours in the – rather expensive for this purpose – **Nairobi Park**. However the terrible traffic around the airport has reduced the visit to just two hours and we hadn't really had much time to explore anything, thus our list from there consists of just **Impala**, **Lion**, **Red Hartebeest** and **Giraffe**. Most crucially, we didn't do our research and didn't know that we should have looked for Mountain Reedbucks there and thus we are still missing them. The park looks small and flat from the airplane while landing at Nairobi, but on the ground it's pretty big and there are many rough tracks through slightly hilly terrain - it definitely needs a full day to be properly explored.



Impala, Nairobi Park