

Pictus Safaris Trip Report - East Africa, September 2021

Abstract

Pictus Safaris were delighted to run a private departure for two clients to East Africa in September and early October of this year. Whilst, due to COVID restrictions in place at the time, we were unable to have a tour leader escort our clients for the duration of the tour and we were therefore not able to keep a detailed mammal and bird list, the tour was a real success. Several key target species were well seen, and the generic game-viewing was superb.

As it is central to our ethos to drive ecotourism in less-visited corners of Africa, regardless of whether or not visitors choose to travel with us, the below report is designed to provide an overview of each area visited and the mammal-species seen. Our contact details are included at the bottom of this report should anyone have specific questions about what was seen and where, and how to arrange a visit.

At a Glance

Dates	September 6 th – October 5 th , 2021
Number of Clients	2
Countries Visited	Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania
Key Targets	African Wild Dog, Dugong, Kipunji, Maned Rat
Total Mammal Species Recorded*	81

^{*}most rodents and bats not recorded on this tour due to absence of a tour leader



Itinerary

Day	Destination	Accommodation
September 6 th , 2021	Vilanculos, Mozambique	Eden Bay EcoLodge
September 7 th , 2021	Vilanculos, Mozambique	Eden Bay EcoLodge
September 8 th , 2021	Vilanculos, Mozambique	Eden Bay EcoLodge
September 9 th , 2021	Vilanculos, Mozambique	Eden Bay EcoLodge
September 10 th , 2021	Dar es Salaam, Tanzania	Hotel Blue Sapphire
September 11 th , 2021	Nyerere NP, Tanzania	Siwandu Camp
September 12 th , 2021	Nyerere NP, Tanzania	Siwandu Camp
September 13 th , 2021	Udzungwa Mountains NP, Tanzania	Udzungwa Forest Tented Camp
September 14 th , 2021	Udzungwa Mountains NP, Tanzania	Udzungwa Forest Tented Camp
September 15 th , 2021	Ruaha NP, Tanzania	Jabali Ridge
September 16 th , 2021	Ruaha NP, Tanzania	Jabali Ridge
September 17 th , 2021	Ruaha NP, Tanzania	Jabali Ridge
September 18 th , 2021	Iringa, Tanzania	Kisolanza Old Farm
September 19 th , 2021	Kitulo NP, Tanzania	Camping
September 20 th , 2021	Mt Rungwe, Tanzania	Camping
September 21 st , 2021	Mbeya, Tanzania	Utengule Coffee Lodge
September 22 nd , 2021	Zanzibar, Tanzania	Unguja Lodge
September 23 rd , 2021	Zanzibar, Tanzania	Unguja Lodge
September 24 th , 2021	Zanzibar, Tanzania	Unguja Lodge
September 25 th , 2021	Nairobi, Kenya	Tamarind Tree Hotel
September 26 th , 2021	Ol Pejeta, Kenya	Kicheche Laikipia
September 27 th , 2021	Ol Pejeta, Kenya	Kicheche Laikipia
September 28 th , 2021	Ol Pejeta, Kenya	Kicheche Laikipia
September 29 th , 2021	Ol Pejeta, Kenya	Kicheche Laikipia
September 30 th , 2021	Nanyuki, Kenya	Creaky Cottage
October 1 st , 2021	Nanyuki, Kenya	Sandai Farmstay
October 2 nd , 2021	Nanyuki, Kenya	Sandai Farmstay
October 3 rd , 2021	Ishaqbini Hirola Conservancy, Kenya	Camping
October 4 th , 2021	Tana River Primate Reserve, Kenya	Camping
October 5 th , 2021	Nairobi, Kenya	Tour End



Daily Report

Day 1 - Bazaruto, Mozambique

Our guests arrived into Vilanculos from Johannesburg after a short flight with Airlink. COVID testing was undertaken in Johannesburg, and is a pre-requisite for visits to Mozambique currently. They were met at the airport by the team from Eden Bay and transferred north to the ecolodge itself.

Eden Bay, run by Paul Saayman and his team, is primarily a fishing lodge, but its location makes it a great base to explore the Bazaruto Archipelago. Quieter than many other parts of the Mozambican coast, Bazaruto protects a rich diversity of marine life, and this has only improved under the ever-careful stewardship of African Parks. The ecologge is situated just to the north of Vilanculos, and we arranged for a private boat for our clients to visit the archipelago each day, as well as a private chef for those few moments spent at the lodge. The lodge benefits from a large beach that, although not strictly private, is rarely frequented by anyone other than lodge guests, and is significantly more affordable than the luxury lodges on offer offshore.

Days 2-4 - Bazaruto, Mozambique

These three days were dedicated to exploring the archipelago by boat. For those keen on snorkelling, Bazaruto is a real gem and, in our opinion, far surpasses the snorkelling on offer in neighbouring Tanzania and South Africa. The coral reefs in particular have so far escaped the extensive damage one sees, for example, in Zanzibar. The key mammal target here was **dugong**, which were seen on four occasions very well indeed – there is no question that Bazaruto, and the spots we know here, are the most reliable for sightings anywhere on the continent. At this time of year, the migration of **humpback whales** and their calves up the eastern coast of the continent is in full swing, and several sightings were also recorded. The relatively sheltered waters west of the archipelago also produced **Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin**, **spinner dolphin** and, perhaps most excitingly, a pod of **Indian Ocean humpback dolphin** with a very young new addition in tow.

Day 5 - Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Having undergone PCR tests in Vilanculos during their stay, our guests today transferred with Airlink to Dar es Salaam, via Johannesburg.

Day 6 - Nyerere NP, Tanzania

Having arrived into Dar es Salaam in the wee hours, our clients were collected from their hotel by our local partner this morning. From here, it is a lengthy drive to Nyerere National Park, formerly referred to as the Selous Game Reserve. Nyerere is an ecosystem in steep decline, and its inclusion in this itinerary was primarily a result of its status as the most reliable spot for wild dog sightings in Tanzania. It remains home to the 'Big Five', although there are better spots for all of these species in Tanzania, and the scale of elephant poaching in recent decades here is truly alarming – it is now possible to visit for several days and not see a single elephant.

Day 7 - Nyerere NP, Tanzania



I think it is fair to say that Nyerere was perhaps the least productive spot during this tour, largely owing to the fact that night drives were not available. Nevertheless, our clients recorded sightings of **bush elephant**, **lion**, **buffalo** and a host of other species. Perhaps the highlight here was the trip's first sighting of **leopard**, which are not well-seen in the Selous generally speaking. The thick forest on the banks of the Rufiji River is reliable for sightings of **black-and-rufous sengi** and **Angola colobus**, and the charismatic **Lichtenstein's hartebeest** is often seen. Our key target here, the African wild dog, had moved through the area a few days prior to our clients' visit and did not make an appearance. By all accounts, the wild dog population has, in recent years, dropped off in Nyerere, although in such a large wilderness area it is likely that this is at least partly driven by their utilisation of areas outside the main game-viewing circuit.

Day 8 - Udzungwa Mountains NP, Tanzania

Much of today was a driving day, taking our clients from the Selous to the Udzungwa Mountains – part of this drive takes you through Mikumi National Park, where lion are often seen from the road. No such luck today, although **Bohor reedbuck** were seen. Our accommodation of choice here was the Udzungwa Forest Tented Camp (also known as Hondo Hondo), which is really the only passable accommodation in the area. The forests inside the national park are in good nick, although fragmentation outside the park is well established. What this means in practice is that several of the species endemic or near-endemic to this area are hyper-localised to very small sections of forest, which are typically inaccessible. This is something visitors should bear in mind if they visit and expect to see kipunji, grey-faced sengi and Abbott's duiker – your chances are slim! Our visit, though, was primarily geared towards the more 'gettable' primates nearby.

Day 9 - Udzungwa Mountains NP, Tanzania

The key targets here were **Sanje River mangabey** and **Udzungwa red colobus**. The colobus are extremely easily seen from Hondo Hondo, where they frequent the camp. The mangabey require a bit more effort, but long gone are the days when sightings occurred only a few times a season. Several troops of mangabey have been studied extensively and, as a result, the staff at Hondo Hondo generally know which areas they are using. There is the option to trek into the national park and stay overnight, although the permissibility of spotlighting is hit and miss, but with luck it is possible to pick up mountain dwarf galago and a handful of other nocturnal rarities.

Day 10 - Ruaha NP, Tanzania

Another lengthy drive today took our clients first to Iringa, and then to Ruaha National Park. Ruaha is, by some distance, the best area for a typical 'big-game' safari in southern Tanzania, well-known for its sand rivers to which large densities of wildlife gravitate during the dry season. Almost all visitors stay between the Mwagusi and Great Ruaha rivers, and this area offers access to the koppies that form the backdrop to the sand rivers, as well as the arid savanna to which the koppies occasionally relent. Ruaha is also a great spot for night drives. The accommodation we used, Jabali Ridge, is relatively new and is well-situated amongst the koppies – be warned that the tsetse flies in Ruaha are as ferocious as any on the continent!

Days 11-12 - Ruaha NP, Tanzania

The cat-viewing in Ruaha is world-class, and our clients enjoyed superb views of **lion** and **leopard**. This season has been poor for cheetah and wild dog viewing in Ruaha – wild dog sightings have been unreliable for many years here now – so both of these targets were missed here. However, the generic game here is



always entertaining, with booming populations of **bush elephant**, **buffalo**, **giraffe**, **greater kudu** and much more. **Lesser kudu**, roan and sable are all present, if not reliably seen. Whilst not a mammal, nature-lovers should keep an eye on the canopies of the trees that line the sand rivers, as this is a favourite haunt of African rock pythons.

Day 13 - Iringa, Tanzania

Today was a driving day, taking the clients first east to Iringa and then south-west towards Mbeya. The journey was broken with an overnight stay at the Old Farmhouse at Kisolanza.

Day 14 - Kitulo NP, Tanzania

The drive ended today in Kitulo NP, a little-visited area not too far from the city of Mbeya. Kitulo is dominated by wildflower meadows, making it a great spot for botanists and birders in the wet season, although access can be a little tricky if there has been recent rain. There is no decent accommodation near the park, so visitors should be prepared to be self-sufficient. The main area of mammal-watching interest is the Livingstone Forest, which is essentially contiguous with the forests of Mt Rungwe. Abbott's duiker and the recently described Rungwe dwarf galago are present here, but rarely seen. Kitulo has been, though, for many years the most reliable spot for sightings of the kipunji. This weird primate, a physiological aberration akin to a combination of baboon and mangabey, was for a time seen regularly even by day visitors. Alas, Kitulo has stopped being so productive this year, and our brief visit here was not rewarded. The meadows did, though, produce **southern reedbuck**.

Day 15 - Mt Rungwe, Tanzania

Fortunately, we know of a reliable spot on Mt Rungwe a short distance away where **kipunji** can be seen. Within just a few hours of walking from camp, kipunji were seen well by both clients, with excellent video taken. Kipunji were arguably the main target for the entire trip, so to see them so well was a real privilege. A quick trip out with a spotlight after dark also delivered a sighting of **Rungwe dwarf galago**, a recently described addition to the world of primates.

Day 16 - Mbeya, Tanzania

After a couple of nights under canvas, today our clients headed to the Utengule Coffee Lodge near Mbeya for a hot shower and some rest ahead of their flight tomorrow.

Day 17 - Zanzibar, Tanzania

This morning our guests flew to Zanzibar from Mbeya, via Dar es Salaam, with Air Tanzania. En route to Unguja Lodge, PCR tests were taken as the next stop on the tour was Nairobi. Unguja Lodge is the best accommodation option in the south of the main island on the archipelago, Unguja. This area was selected as it is an excellent base to explore mammal-watching in what is typically a 'fly and flop' destination. The beaches remain excellent, particularly in the north and east of Unguja, but visitors should be aware that the reefs are deeply degraded here, especially when compared with Bazaruto. Whale- and dolphin-watching is decent here, although again not as rewarding as in Bazaruto.

Days 18-19 - Zanzibar, Tanzania

The primary targets here were the **Zanzibar red colobus** and the **Aders' duiker**. As far as targets go, few are as easy to see as the red colobus, which are present in good numbers around Unguja Lodge, as are



suni, blue duiker and black-and-rufous sengi. If you are determined to see the colobus so closely you can count the ticks on their ears, then a visit to Jozani Bay is easily arranged. The Aders' duiker are altogether trickier to see – Charles Foley, of mammal-watching royalty, introduced many of us via Jon Hall's excellent report several years ago to a spot near the village of Mtende where this elusive ungulate could be spotted. Sadly, in recent years, sightings have become significantly less reliable, perhaps owing to the area being taken over by a professional hunting outfit. After extensive engagement with the forestry department, we were informed that the hunting outfit in question would need to permit us to arrange a visit – this permission was not forthcoming. However, following a bit of wrangling with some contacts locally, we were able to secure a brief visit to the area in question – by all accounts, the hunting pressure on this relatively small section of forest is intense, so it is little wonder that the duikers seem to have largely evaporated. This having been said, our clients were lucky enough to catch a fleeting glimpse of this rarest of mammals as it bounced off into the bush, no doubt hoping that we hadn't brought our .243s with us.

Day 20 - Nairobi, Kenya

Today our clients flew from Zanzibar to Nairobi with Precision Air, after a last-minute cancellation by Safarilink, overnighting at the Tamarind Tree Hotel.

Day 21 - Ol Pejeta, Kenya

An early morning flight with Safarilink took our clients to the famed OI Pejeta Conservancy. Boasting the highest densities of predators in Kenya outside of the Mara, there is plenty here to entertain everyone from first-time safari-goers to ardent mammal-watching enthusiasts. Kicheche Laikipia is a superb base from which to explore the park and private drives, including night drives, revealed some superb sightings.

Days 22-24 - Ol Pejeta, Kenya

These three days rivalled Ruaha for productivity, and perhaps edged it based on the quality of the night drives. During the day, there was excellent viewing of **lion**, **cheetah**, **spotted hyena**, **bat-eared fox** and a litany of big game. Ol Pejeta regularly produces striped hyena, but we missed them on this occasion, although there were excellent sightings of both **aardvark** and **zorilla** by night – we rather bookended the alphabet in that respect. The species seen during our clients' stay are too numerous to list individually, but more info is included in the mammal list below.

Day 25 - Nanyuki, Kenya

After a hugely productive stay in OI Pejeta, it was time to head off in search of one of the trendiest mammals of 2021, the maned (or crested) rat. It is undoubtedly a weird and wonderful mammal and, until recently, sightings were very much a matter of luck rather than judgement. However, the Trout Tree restaurant south of Nanyuki, which is a fishery with a restaurant and self-catering cottage on site, has found itself at the centre of a bit of a mammal-watching storm due to the ease with which the maned rats there can be seen. This is a double-edged sword. The rats are very easily seen, and our clients saw one in habitat in the early hours today. But, as with many such sites, there is a steep learning curve for local staff when it comes to ethical wildlife-viewing. In this instance, water was poured down the rats' hole to flush one out on our clients' arrival – this is of course not something we endorse and something our client addressed directly with the team there, and we have since had a frank discussion with management about this. Other reports of rudimentary trapping have also been mentioned to us.



There is an interesting discussion to be had about the approach to be taken in cases such as these, where targeted ecotourism is very much nascent. We, as an operator have a responsibility to our clients to deliver enjoyable and ethical wildlife-viewing, and to wildlife to ensure all species are treated responsibly. This being said, we also have a serious responsibility to local communities in the areas we visit, to deliver not only economic benefit but also to equip staff in the longer term to be able to meet the demands of ecotourists ethically. If we withdraw from these properties entirely, rather than educate and assist, we run the risk of failing to deliver a core element of our raison d'etre. After careful engagement with management, our response has been to refuse to send clients to the property in the absence of a tour leader, as we do not have confidence that such a visit would not be damaging to the wildlife in question. On our next visit with a tour leader, in 2022, a view will be taken as to whether appropriate safeguards are now in place – if not, we will not re-visit the property.

Day 26 – Nanyuki, Kenya

The original plan was to spend two nights at Trout Tree, but given the experience the decision was made to move our clients to Sandai Farm for the next two nights, rather than one, instead. Sandai is a well-run and attractive property, within striking distance of Aberdare NP and a few other areas of interest. Maned rat are seen here, although not as regularly as at Trout Tree, but this is currently the best chance to see this species in a property that offers full-board accommodation and a range of game activities.

Day 27 - Nanyuki, Kenya

Today our clients opted for a game-drive into the beautiful Aberdare NP. Forest hog were easily seen, and longer stays have the potential to produce all of the 'Big Five', although if you manage this here I'd recommend you purchase a lottery ticket as soon as possible. The jewel in the crown of Aberdare from a mammal-watching perspective is the small population of bongo, which we are making a special effort to locate on our 2022 visit. Today's visit also produced a skittish black-fronted duiker.

There was time later today for a visit to Solio Ranch, famed for its horned residents, but also a great spot for **Beisa oryx** and several other grazers.

Day 28 – Ishaqbini Hirola Conservancy, Kenya

Our clients linked up with the inimitable Zarek Cockar today, transferring back to Nanyuki Airport for a charter flight with Boskovic Air Charters to the Tana River area. Whilst there is an airstrip in Ishaqbini, we chose instead to fly into the larger airstrip at Hola, which is about an hour's drive north of Tana River Primate Reserve. Whilst hirola are easily seen in Tsavo East, we much prefer to take clients to native populations rather than translocated populations wherever possible – this is a matter of personal preference, rather than a criticism of those who would disagree with this approach. Regardless, after a bit of effort, Ishaqbini produced several sightings of this deeply endangered antelope today. Other species included gerenuk and Egyptian mongoose. A night drive produced excellent views of Garnett's greater galago, Somali dwarf galago and Kenya coast galago. The highlight of the stay in Ishaqbini, though, must have been a superb view of a caracal having a doze on the roadside. A big push was put in to locate wild dog, which are seen frequently here, but they turned up a week late (when they rogered a hirola) – this population is fascinating, and is likely to consist of the same dogs that are recorded in Bushbush NP in Somalia and have been photographed swimming between the mainland and Lamu Island.



The key targets here were the endemic **Tana River mangabey** and the **Tana River red colobus** – both are easily seen. Whilst enjoying the views of the mangabey, excellent sightings were also enjoyed of **Harvey's duiker** and **bushpig**. There are no permanent accommodation options in Tana, so a comfortable tented camp was arranged for our clients. A night drive here produced **crested porcupine** and plenty of **white-tailed mongoose**.

Day 30 - Tour End

This morning, our clients flew back to Nairobi on a charter flight, underwent a final PCR test administered by the highly-recommend Ponea Health, and boarded their homeward flights.

Mammal List

Species	Scientific Name	Location(s)*
Carnivora – 17 species		
Cheetah	Acinonyx jubatus	OP
Side-Striped Jackal	Canis adustus	NNP
Black-Backed Jackal	Canis mesomelas	NNP, RNP
Caracal	Caracal caracal	IQ
African Civet	Civettictis civetta	OP, RNP
Spotted Hyena	Crocuta crocuta	NNP, OP, RNP
Common Genet	Genetta genetta	OP, RNP
Large-Spotted Genet	Genetta maculata	RNP
Common Dwarf Mongoose	Helogale parvula	NNP
Egyptian Mongoose	Herpestes ichneumon	IQ
Common Slender Mongoose	Herpestes sanguineus	RNP
White-Tailed Mongoose	Ichneumia albicauda	IQ, OP, RNP
Zorilla	lctonyx striatus	OP
Banded Mongoose	Mungos mungo	NNP, OP, RNP
Bat-Eared Fox	Otocyon megalotis	OP
Lion	Panthera leo	NNP, OP, RNP
Leopard	Panthera pardus	NNP, RNP
Cetartiodactyla – 34 species		
Impala	Aepyceros melampus	NNP, OP, RNP
Hartebeest	Alcelaphus buselaphus	NNP, OP
Hirola	Beatragus hunteri	IQ
Aders' Duiker	Cephalophus adersi	ZN
Harvey's Duiker	Cephalophus harveyi	TR
Black-Fronted Duiker	Cephalophus nigrifrons	ANP
Common Wildebeest	Connochaetes taurinus	NNP, OP
Thomson's Gazelle	Eudorcas thomsonii	OP
Giraffe	Giraffa camelopardalis	NNP, OP, RNP
Common Hippopotamus	Hippopotamus amphibius	NNP, OP, RNP
Forest Hog	Hylochoerus meinertzhageni	ANP
Waterbuck	Kobus ellipsiprymnus	NNP, RNP
Gerenuk	Litocranius walleri	IQ
Kirk's Dik-Dik	Madoqua kirkii	RNP



Humpback Whale	Megaptera novaeangliae	BA
Grant's Gazelle	Nanger granti	OP
Suni	Nesotragus moschatus	ZN
Beisa Oryx	Oryx beisa	SR
Desert Warthog	Phacochoerus aethiopicus	IQ
Common Warthog	Phacochoerus africanus	NNP, OP, RNP
Blue Duiker	Philantomba monticola	ZN
Bushpig	Potamochoerus larvatus	TR
Steenbok	Raphicerus campestris	OP
Southern Reedbuck	Redunca arundinum	KNP
Bohor Reedbuck	Redunca redunca	MNP
Indian Ocean Humpback Dolphin	Sousa plumbea	ВА
Spinner Dolphin	Stenella longirostris	ВА
Common Duiker	Sylvicapra grimmia	ANP
African Buffalo	Syncerus caffer	NNP, OP, RNP
Lesser Kudu	Tragelaphus imberbis	IQ, RNP
Common Eland	Tragelaphus oryx	OP
Bushbuck	Tragelaphus scriptus	NNP, OP, RNP
Greater Kudu	Tragelaphus strepsiceros	NNP, RNP
Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin	Tursiops aduncus	BA
Hyracoidea – 3 species	. a. s. special and . s. s	- · ·
Southern Tree Hyrax	Dendrohyrax arboreus	NK
Eastern Tree Hyax	Dendrohyrax validus	RNP
Bush Hyrax	Heterohyrax brucei	NNP
Lagomorpha – 1 species		
African Savanna Hare	Lepus victoriae	OP, RNP
Macroscelidea – 1 species	,	·
Black-and-Rufous Sengi	Rhynchocyon petersi	ZN
Perissodactyla – 3 species		
	Ceratotherium simum	Withheld
Perissodactyla – 3 species	Ceratotherium simum Diceros bicornis	Withheld Withheld
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Proboscidea – 1 species		
African Savanna Elephant	Loxodonta africana	NNP, OP, RNP
Rodentia – Most species not recorded		
Crested Porcupine	Hystrix cristata	TR
Maned Rat	Lophiomys imhausi	NK
Sirenia – 1 species		
Dugong	Dugong dugon	ВА
Tubulidentata – 1 species		
Aardvark	Orycteropus afer	OP

^{*}ANP=Aberdare NP, BA=Bazaruto Archipelago, IQ=Ishaqbini Hirola Conservancy, KNP=Kitulo NP MNP=Mikumi NP, MR=Mount Rungwe, NK=Nanyuki, NNP=Nyerere NP, OP=OI Pejeta

Conservancy, RNP=Ruaha NP, SR=Solio Ranch TR=Tana River Primate Reserve, UM=Udzungwa Mountains NP, ZN=Zanzibar

Misses

With multiple short stays in some areas, our clients did dip on several targets. Perhaps most disappointing was narrowly missing African wild dog in both Ishaqbini and Nyerere – we might need to change our name! Despite lengthy night drives each night in OI Pejeta, striped hyena also evaded detection, although excellent sightings of zorilla and aardvark rather softened the blow.

There are a whole host of mammals that were possible in at least one of the destinations visited but that weren't seen. All the typical whale and dolphin species in Bazaruto were seen, but it is not uncommon to see several rarer species, which weren't seen on this occasion. Multiple night drives in OI Pejeta, Ishaqbini and Ruaha didn't produce serval, wild cat or honey badger. Several localised species in Kenya and Tanzania, such as grey-faced sengi, Abbott's duiker and Jackson's mongoose also failed to surprise our clients by putting in an appearance.

Overall, it was perhaps only the wild dog and striped hyena that were particularly notable misses, with more than enough species stepping in to make up for their absence.

Contact Details

Pictus Safaris can be contacted by email at contact@pictus-safaris.com or via our website at www.pictus-safaris.com. We are a tour operator specialising in small-group and private departures across Africa, with 2022 destinations including Zakouma NP, Chad, Lomako FR, DRC and Gola Rainforest NP, Sierra Leone.