

Tomes

This trip report is dedicated to my dad Avraham Ben-Yehuda, who loved wildlife about as much as I do. This trip which started as an exciting African safari ended in the worst way possible, where my dad had what we first thought was a minor stroke, and ended up being an aggressive cancerous growth in the brain which took his life less than 2 weeks after the end of our trip. He will be missed and loved forever. I started writing this report before we knew the severity of the situation, and that's why the tone and excitement of the report and the wildlife encounters don't reflect the sadness and pointlessness that's associated with them now, in retrospect, considering how it ended.

I spent 12 days in amazing Tanzania with both my parents and my sister, visiting several parks in the Northern Circuit. I have never been to Africa before, but it is a whole new class of wildlife experience, even compared to the most intensely biodiverse places I visited in Latin America and other continents. The itinerary was as follows:

Day 1: Arrive in Arusha, stay in Meru Mbega Hotel

Day 2: Arusha NP in the morning; Transfer to Tarangire and game view; Night in Tarangire Safari Lodge

Day 3: ½ day in Tarangire; Transfer to Lake Manyara and game drive; Organized night-drive in Lake Manyara; Stay in Kirurumu Tented Camp

Day 4: Morning in Lake Manyara; Guided visit to Mto Wa Mbu; Drive to Lake Eyasi and night in Kisima Ngeda

Day 5: Early morning visit to Hadzabe bushmen tribe; Visit to Datoga community; Drive to Ngorongoro Crater; Night in Sopa Lodge

Day 6: Early morning start and all day in Ngorongoro Crater; Night in Sopa Lodge

Day 7: Visit to Olduvai Gorge; Visit Masai Boma (village); Afternoon and night in Serengeti NP, stay in Kati Kati mobile camp in Seronera Valley

Day 8: All day in Central Serengeti

Day 9: Early morning in Central Serengeti; game drive to South Serengeti and around Gol Kopjes to Ndutu; Night in Ndutu Safari Lodge

Day 10: All day in Ndutu area

Day 11: Ndutu in the morning; transfer to Manyara Ranch Conservancy; Night drive in Manyara Ranch and stay the night there

Day 12: Early morning guided walk on Manyara Ranch property and game drive until lunch; transfer to airport

I will not include pictures in this report for the sake of saving time, but the pictures from this trip will be ready some time in the next few months on my Flickr account, at

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/benyehuda/collections/72157632935424572/>

(I also posted an album on Facebook but with WAY less pictures, especially of bird species)

Here are some general notes about the logistics of the trip:

First of all I should say that I got most of my information from Charles Foley who is the guru of Tanzanian mammals, and who's book Mammals of Tanzania is coming out soon. He knows so much about animals which most 'regular' people don't see very often at all, and exactly where to find them. I also received some information from Colin Beale, who identifies on a few online forums and databases as TZBirder, and of course I got some good info by posting questions on the Mammal Watching forum and reading previous trip reports.

We took RA Safaris (<http://www.rasafaris.com/>) after consulting and conversing with several companies. The company was great in logistics, and was able to get us in all our desired accommodations, even ones which other companies claimed had no availability due to our late booking. As a company they had excellent service and were also very helpful on the last day, when we had our medical emergency which I won't elaborate on in this report. The guide we received, however, was surprisingly uninterested, non-talkative and definitely NOT a good spotter, despite how much we emphasized to them through all our email conversations how important those qualities are in a guide. We kept emphasizing how much we are interested in ALL the animals, not only the "big 5" and also specified like 20 'less common' animals we wanted to see, just so that they know who they're dealing with. Despite all the promises, our guide spotted 0% of the cats and we strictly relied on big compilation of cars to lead us to interesting cats, and on my sister and I's sharp eyesight to spot the smaller mammals. He did spot our first elephants and the rhino in the Ngorongoro crater, but missed very obvious things including the only pair of steenboks we saw. In addition he also tried to suggest late departures in the mornings and we always had to be very assertive about what time we wanted to start, but in his defense he was always on time. In the last few days he seemed especially annoyed and disinterested, and throughout the whole trip was just in general not a very good guide, despite how much we tried to stay in denial and give him credit for the little things he did. So when I go back some time in the future I will try to give another company a chance and see how their guides compare, because maybe our expectations were simply too high, but regardless we managed to observe and identify just over 50 mammal species and TONS of birds including some very interesting species, so I won't complain too much 😊.

Day1

The first day of the trip I met my parents in Meru Mbega lodge just outside of Arusha National Park, after they arrived the night before from the United States (I just moved to Israel and came from there). Immediately I was amazed by the abundance of different bird species and the nice scenery of the area. In the lodge there is a 2-story tower which looks over the surrounding bush/forest and I immediately saw so many species of birds from families that I never saw before, like my first ever (and second) *Barbet* species: *Spot-flanked* and *Brown-breasted*, sunbirds, bee eaters, paradise flycatchers, *speckled mousebirds*, *weavers* etc., and also my first mammal species of the trip which was the **Ochre Bush Squirrel**. The service in that hotel is OK+ but the natural beauty and location more-than make up for it. Plus the food was pretty good. At night there were various **bat species** flying around which I didn't really take the time to try to identify, but there were some really big ones and smaller ones... That sounds pretty terrible for a description on the mammal watching report but you all know I'm not huge in bat-identification. However, I did hear some stuff in the trees, and asked some of the staff if they had bushbabies around the lodge. I don't think they knew what bushbabies were, but the answer was "no". Anyway, I decided to walk with a flashlight and within minutes I spotted my first ever prosimian, also my first ever non-monkey primate! The galago which is mostly likely identified as **Brown Greater Galago** interestingly resembled my old friend the Olingo in some ways, despite the latter being a carnivore and the galago a primate. After getting excited and trying to take some pictures I got my mom & dad to walk around the property with me in search of some nocturnal creatures. In our 25-30 minute walk we also saw a pair of **Cape Hares**, in the grass around the observation tower, and more unidentified bats.

Day 2

In the morning I saw more new species of starlings including the awesome *violet-backed starling* in breeding plumage, and more *sunbirds*, *brown-breasted barbets*, some *kingfishers* and *swallows* among others. Then we met with our guide Emanuel and drove the very short drive to Arusha National Park. Not 5 minutes upon entering the park we saw our first-ever groups of **African Buffalos**, **Zebras**, **Giraffes** and **Warthogs**. After a few minutes of excitement and picture-taking we turned around and started driving up the mountainous parts to try and spot the Colobus monkeys. Driving through the forest, a **Slender Mongoose** crossed the road and a few shy **Olive Baboons** ran away before we spotted our first **Black&white Colobus** monkeys. Up on the hill with the lookout toward Ngurdoto crater we saw a bunch of **B&W Colobi**,

and **Blue Monkeys** on the adjacent trees. We also saw our first ever Tuaco – *Hartlaub's turaco*, which is a very nice bird from yet another family I've yet to encounter. Inside the crater were a couple more buffalos visible with binoculars, and a *Long-crested Eagle* which I had hoped to see. On the decent from the crater we saw many more **Blue Monkeys** and **Baboons**, and also *Augur Buzzards*, our first *Fish Eagle*, some cormorants and other water birds which I didn't write down, and a **Red Forest Duiker** which disappeared quickly before I could get a photo. Further inside the park we saw a ton more zebras, giraffes, warthogs, baboons, and some buffalo, as well as our first **Bushbucks** and the **Defassa** variety of **Waterbucks**. There is a small hill with a lookout to a lake where **Hippos** reside, which is where we saw our first hippos of the trip, as well as some other water birds including a pair of the *Gray-crowned Crane*, which was another nice lifer. They also had chicks with them and made for some very nice photos. Near the lake was also a rock with some lizards (striped?) and what my guide referred to as a *sand snake* which looked like it was very close to dying in the sun. Or maybe it was just dry, but didn't look very happy. Later in the park we drove to another lake where I think mostly Lesser Flamingos were seen closer than any other place we would see them in the trip, so we stopped to take photographs, and some **giraffes** were closer to the road than before so that was nice as well. The park is also very picturesque and we sat at a picnic site which has a nice lookout point to Mt. Meru for which the weather and light angle allowed nice views and pictures. We also saw a few new species of bee-eaters, and our first *Helmeted Guineafowls* which were extremely abundant throughout the trip, joined by a *Sacred Ibis*. As far as mammals go, we had better/closer views of **bushbucks** and **waterbucks** than before, and a few **Red Forest Duikers** who posed nicely for a couple of pictures. Around 1:30pm we departed the park and went to meet up with the other guide who had picked up my sister from the airport, since she arrived 24 hours after me because of work restrictions. Then we made the 2-2.5hr way to Tarangire National Park. On the way to Tarangire we saw a HUGE *Leopard Tortoise* on the main road, which we didn't stop to take a picture of.

Tarangire National Park is considered one of the (if not *the*) most underrated and sometimes overlooked parks of the northern circuit. During the dry season, 1000s of elephants can be seen roaming throughout the park especially near the river, as can many many other species of herbivores and predators. At the end of February, however, the park was rather empty and even a bit boring/disappointing at times. But we did score some nice new species there. As we entered the park we saw our first photogenic *Superb* and *Ashy starlings*, *Red-billed Hornbill* which was the first ever species of hornbill I saw and was very excited because hornbills are large, colorful at times, and remind me of the Latin-American toucans which I like so much. Within half an hour inside the park I spotted a pair of **Dwarf Mongoose** on an abandoned termite nest, and about 2-3 minutes later my sister spotted a huge family of **Banded Mongoose** on the other side of the road, on another abandoned termite nest. We photographed both species and enjoyed watching the Bandeds' young-rearing behaviors and interactions. Notice that my sister and I spotted the mongooses, and not our guide, at which point I started to be worried that if we hadn't point them out, he wouldn't have seen them either. Regardless, we also stopped to photograph some *Lilac-breasted* and *Eurasian rollers*, *guineafowls*, *sandgrouses* and *spurfowls* of all kinds, *orioles*, *Von Der Decken's hornbills*, *cordon bleus* and other nice birds which were all new to us, as well as our first **Impala** of the trip, more banded mongooses (which were the most common mongoose species by far), and more **warthogs**. On the way to Tarangire Safari Lodge we also added to our list the *Ostrich*, *White-bellied Bustard*, and the *Yellow-collared lovebird*. Once we got to Tarangire Safari Lodge we were immediately mesmerized by the view from the terrace, which looks over the Tarangire River. Even though this was not the prime season, a herd of over 50 **buffalos** was visible on the far side of the river, and upon scanning of the savannah from the terrace, more **impalas**, **waterbucks**, **baboons** and also **Vervet Monkeys** were found. On the way to our tents (which comprise about half of the accommodation, the other half being cabanas), a few **Kirk's Dikdiks** were hanging out just off the trail and were not too shy, thus allowing approaches for nice pictures. The dikdiks also stayed there throughout the evening and night. **Vervet Monkeys** also hung out for a while near the main area and terrace before dinner. I forget why I went to my tent in the middle of dinner, probably to grab something, and with my maglight I spotted a **Common Genet** just off the path, as well as some more **dikdiks** and a few **waterbucks** which were a little further but still pretty close to the tents. My dad was tired and went to sleep first, but I told my mom and my sister I'd find them the genet as proof that I saw it, and indeed, by walking slowly and scanning the trees and bush on the side of the path opposite of the tents we saw another (or the

same) **Common genet** sitting comfortably in a tree. This was the end of our FIRST day of actual safari... New mammals seen today: 18. Wow. That's almost my entire Costa Rican trip around this time last year...

Day 3:

In the morning we started at 6am to hopefully see some goodies in the early light. *Orange-bellied Parrots* were in the trees near the reception area, and some kingfishers were hanging out as well as *Von Der Decken's hornbills*. As we started driving we saw my sister's first **giraffes**, a *Tawny Eagle* (the most common eagle, unless we misidentified all the brownish raptors as Tawny Eagles), some nice *Souther Ground Hornbills*, a *Fork-tailed Drongo* and distant **Elephants** as we were crossing the Tarangire river. Across the river we came across some kopjes which hosted at least 2 **Yellow-spotted Hyrax (Bush Hyrax)**, and our first old-world vulture – the *White Backed Vulture* which was hanging out near another *Fishing Eagle*. A *Saddle-billed Stork* and our first *Marabou Stork* were seen from afar by the river, followed by a group of **Black-backed jackals** which were ripping apart a poor dikdik. One of them got the head with the front 2 legs, another one got a leg, and a third one ran off with a leg and some of the other back parts. Finally we came across a photogenic group of **African Bush Elephants** which allowed close and prolonged views. Later we saw more **vervet monkeys**, tons of **Impalas**, more **banded mongooses**, our first *Red-and-yellow Barbet* which didn't stick around for a picture, more **bushbucks**, **baboons**, *Buffalo weavers*, and a single **Unstriped Ground Squirrel**. Back by the lodge, between a huge mixed herd of baboons, impalas and bushbucks we also saw our first *Secretary Bird*. Also, right before returning to the lodge for breakfast, we saw a group of 3 or 4 cars stopped along the road and when we asked what they were looking at, they said that a **Leopard** was laying down in the tall grass. We were kind of in a hurry because we didn't want to miss breakfast completely since this was nearing 8:30, and we stayed just long enough to see its head moving whenever it decided to get up and walk a little bit. But we were reassured that in Central Serengeti and in the Ndutu area we will have more chances to spot the leopards. The drive after breakfast was rather uneventful, with more of the usual including another pair of **dwarf mongoose**, until we saw a bunch of cars looking at what turned out to be a small pride of 6-7 **Lions**. This was our first encounter with the cat, so we stayed for a long time to watch them as one lioness briefly started chasing a **waterbuck** but quickly gave up. We drove around to get closer and spent some quality time with the lions which didn't have any full-grown males, but a few young ones which were just starting to grow a mane. Aside from a female *Red-headed Agama* we didn't see much in terms of new species. Since we saw that this park was not at its peak, we asked our guide Emanuel if he thought we would have more luck in Lake Manyara, and he didn't really give us a straight answer, but we started driving there anyway. One notable encounter along the way was of a young *Black Mamba* racing across the road. It was insanely fast, I've never seen a snake this fast! Though it wasn't a full-length adult and was pale grayish pink in color, it was definitely another mini-highlight.

We got to Lake Manyara National Park in the midst of the day and the heat. Immediately we saw very large troops of **baboons**, and many many **Blue monkeys** as well. A few more **Bushbucks** in the forest and a single, far-away **Thomson's Gazelle** who was hanging out far outside the park. Driving through the forest did not yield too much at all, mainly because of the heat, but a single *Crowned Hornbill* was a nice addition, and many pelicans and storks around the hippo pool. Here we also saw our first **Hippos** outside of the water, which was interesting to see. Also in Lake Manyara we saw our first **Blue Wildebeest** which were scattered in the plains, with **zebras**, **baboons**, **buffalos** and **impalas**. Again, seeing how it was the heat of the day and not much was happening besides a far-away flying *Bateleur*, we drove up to Kirurumu Tented Lodge which was a very pleasant surprise because we didn't initially book this lodge, but the one we did book had to cancel because of facility issues, and Kirurumu far exceeded our expectations in terms of comfort, location, service, food quality and the view from the room and the bar area. But we knew that we wouldn't have much time to enjoy it because we had our first night drive scheduled for today. We had to be picked up from the main entrance by 7:30 to make it by 8 to the park entrance. At the park entrance we were greeted by the company which organizes the night drive and a park ranger which joins to make sure all the park's rules and regulations are followed. I know it's not nice to say, but these guides immediately surpassed our guide in terms of enthusiasm and willingness to

share their knowledge about the wildlife and ecosystem with us. They even laughed when they asked what our guide told us about bushbucks and we said “that it’s really shy”. The amount of guidance, spotting ability and interactive information-sharing they exhibited was what I would have expected from a guide who is assigned to take us on a safari for 12 days... but I digress. Upon climbing the open-top vehicle we were briefed with an introduction, signed our lives away in case we get eaten by something, and started. They asked if I had any specific interests, so of course I mentioned I was interested in seeing honey badgers, armadillos, armadillos, servals, and pangolins, all which they informed me were difficult to see. First the team spotted some **buffalo**, followed by a **bushbuck**. Later we were treated to some **Senegal Galagos** which were way too spastic to photograph, and several “scrub hares” also known as **Savannah Hares**. **Elephants**, *Water Thick-knee* and some *Nightjars* were followed by a single **Northern Greater Galago**, and a pair of sleepy *Silvery-cheeked Hornbills*. Later on, around the hippo pools we saw **Hippos** in the forest, actually pretty far from the water which was cool, a few **zebras**, our first **Spotted Hyena**, several **White-Tailed Mongoose**, which were very hard to photograph, our trip’s only *Verreaux’s Eagle Owl*, and a better **Northern Greater Galago** which posed nicely for some pictures. The night drive was around 2.25-2.5 hours and they really do a good job spotting whatever happens to be around. An animal which we didn’t see on our night tour but which is actually seen on occasion (or even somewhat often) is a **Porcupine**. I’m not sure which species, the crested or the cape porcupine, but anyway we didn’t have luck with them. They also did spot a **genet** at 2 different times, but they were too far away and disappeared into the bush so we couldn’t identify the species. The tour ended around 10:20 and we were in our rooms by 11.

Day 4:

Today started off without anything of particular interest. Our guide Emmanuel tried to convince us to leave the hotel by 9am because of yesterday’s long day, but we pushed him towards 8:30. After breakfast and an observation of a single **Ochre Bush Squirrel**, we descended down to Lake Manyara yet again and saw no new species if I recall correctly. But we did see the 3 primate species again, the 2 common species of mongoose, and the common stuff like zebras, warthogs, buffalo and waterbuck. At one point there were a bunch of vervet monkeys climbing trees and making their distressed call, which our guide told us was most likely to be a warning from a leopard, so we waited for several minutes but with no results. Lake Manyara is also famous for its tree-climbing lions, which apparently aren’t very easy to find at all, or maybe this isn’t the season. All-in-all I thought Lake Manyara would be a different experience; I thought you get right up to the lake, with plenty of open fields around it where Serengeti-like concentrations of animals are found, but it turns out it’s not at all the case. Most of the park is forested and some of it is semi-arid. You can drive for an hour and not see anything until you get to the open fields (the transitional zone between forest and lake) where only the common animals are present in large numbers. You don’t at any point get right up to the lake shore to see the flamingos, which, as our night-drive guides explained to us, can also be attributed to the continuous drying of the lake. Notice that our night-drive guides explained it to us, and our own guide which we paid very good money to have didn’t explain to us anything about the ecosystem or the behavior of the animals. After the not-so-interesting game drive we departed for a village visit to Mto Wa Mbu. There we met our cultural guide named Nehemiah. I won’t go into detail about the village visit since this is a wildlife watching report, but it was definitely interesting to see the plantations, the locals’ homes, the wood-carvers (with whom my mom and my sister spent a good 45 minutes bargaining) and the local bar with the beyond-nasty banana beer, that had flies in it. (More detail will be in the pictures on Flickr, which will probably be posted before the end of summer 2013). After the village visit we started our way towards Lake Eyasi, which is a less-frequently visited but very interesting area. We stayed at Kisima Ngeda, which I will elaborate more about, with its beyond-exceptional service and comfort, and its interesting opportunities to see less-frequently encountered animals such as **Striped Hyena**, **Armadillos**, **Marsh Mongoose**, **African Civet**, and **Bush Pig**, among others. Most people don’t go to Lake Eyasi area to see animals; Lake Eyasi is considered a break from the safari routine, and people visit the area primarily to visit the Hadzabe (Bushmen) which is a freaking highlight in itself! The lake itself is located just outside the Ngorongoro Conservational area and it’s an extremely picturesque and scenic area with mountains and forests overlooking the reddish-colored salt-water lake. Birdlife is prolific as well, with several species of shorebirds, and also a

visible abundance of colorful bee-eaters and sunbirds including the *Beautiful Sunbird*, which I only saw here at Lake Eyasi. When we got to Kisima Ngeda we were greeted by Mariana or Nani, the owner of the property along with her husband Chris. They are an extremely nice young couple and they are as fascinated with wildlife as anyone on the mammal watching website. Nani is especially interested in mammals and has shared with me her knowledge, stories and encounters with several species on the property including **Leopards, Caracals, Servals, Honey Badgers** and the **Hyenas**. After a short briefing, Nani showed us around the property and took us to the hide she's building above the water hole in the forest where **Aardvarks** come almost nightly during the dry season. The plan was for me to come back here with either Nani or her husband, or a masai guide from maybe about 2:30 until 3:30-4 and try my luck with any animals. The hide is raised to prevent the animals from smelling the observers and is planned to be finished by June/July 2013 with mosquito nets and decently comfortable beds, and watchmen to wake up the users when animals come. Really – a first-class service for mammal watchers. Based on the pictures Nani and her family collect daily from the motion-activated cameras, **Bushpigs** and **Civets** are the most frequent visitors, followed by **Aardvarks, Bushbucks, Marsh Mongoose**, and **Porcupines**, then the occasional **Hyena** (striped or spotted), **Serval, Honey Badger** and so far, a single **Leopards**. Nani even reported seeing an unidentified species of mongoose which, based on pictures viewed by Charles, was most likely a not-yet described species but unfortunately it was eaten by hyenas. In the forest and on the camp grounds, **Vervet Monkeys** can be seen at almost any point during the day, and she has also mentioned that **Hippos** live in Lake Eyasi and rarely come through the property when the lake is full after heavy rains. On the way to the hide and back, Nani showed us several Aardvark diggings and an Aardvark den, but she mentioned it hasn't been occupied for a while based on several weeks with 0 results from a motion-activated camera which was pointed at it.

After settling in our luxurious tented rooms my sister and I were escorted to the top of the cliffs from where you can usually see the **Striped Hyenas** as they leave their den in the late afternoon and around the sunset. The guy who escorted us there also brought some beer and chips so that we can enjoy the sunset and have something to munch while we're waiting for the hyenas. First of all the view from up there is amazing, and you can see both the Lake side where the forest meets the lake with a transitional zone of grass and the sun sets over the lake, and the other side which is forested and hilly as far as the eye can see. Very gorgeous views. Mix that with some Striped Hyenas and you got yourself a winning afternoon. Unfortunately we didn't get lucky with the striped hyenas and they never came in or out of their den despite the den being active right now with some 4-month old pups. The hyenas have been in this den for several years, apparently, and there were generations of young hyenas that used to come around the camp and sit around the bonfire with the guests. Other time periods were more problematic, where hyenas had rabies and even once bit a visitor. Now they're pretty calm and in a few days' stay you should be able to see them. Slightly disappointed with our luck with the Hyenas, we walked back down to the camp and were immediately greeted by **Senegal Bushbabies (Lesser Galagos)** which are everywhere in the evening and at night. They were very approachable and even curious and came within feet of us. Photographing these hyper jumping balls is another story and I got maybe 2 recognizable pictures though at least 1 of them is out of focus. Back in the lodge after hot showers and some wine by the bonfire, we enjoyed a delicious dinner, and saw a couple of bats, most likely **Roundleaf Bat** species.

Day 5:

At 1:45ish AM I met my Masai guide at the reception area and he was to guide me from the back way using the main road towards the hide. This was so that if any animal is currently visiting the water hole, we wouldn't chase it away. The walk to the hide proved to be longer than I had anticipated, and lasted about 40 minutes or so, through which we saw **MANY Senegal Bushbabies**. We also saw a very very fresh Aardvark digging, after which we shined our lights in the nearby open field and the guy said "This is our animal!" but that turned into a **Dikdik**. DAMN. It was very warm even at night, but the moon was full and rose around 8:30-9, setting in the morning, which doesn't make for successful Aardvark watching. That proved to be the case after about an hour and a half of watching the hide in full moon yielded *no* mammals, besides more bushbabies which came onto the platform on which we were hiding. This was somewhat to be expected due to the fact that A. this is NOT the prime season for mammal watching in the Lake Eyasi area, since there is

water everywhere and the animals don't need to come to this watering hole. B. There was the brightest moon possible shining throughout the entire night. But the following morning when I hung out with Nani again she showed me pictures and videos of animals in the motion-activated cameras and assured me that a few-day visit to Kisima Ngeda in the dry season (End of June/July-September) will yield both aardvarks and bushpigs. Make note! I should mention that this is a luxury tented camp and therefore it isn't cheap by any means, but they do also have a basic camping option, and I'm not sure if the hide will be complimentary when it's fully functional, but you can contact Chris and Nany on their Facebook page and they are very responsive. I can't say enough nice things about them, their enthusiasm towards wildlife and friendliness in general. I already listed a bunch of mouth-watering animals that can be found in the area, but I should just mention that so far Nani has only seen a **Caracal** once and didn't get a chance to photograph it, so don't count on this species. But she did show me several pictures of **Servals** on the trails at night and even mentioned she sometimes sees them throughout the day, but again, this is not the prime place to see that species. But there are a few goodies that make a trip here definitely worth it.

I went back to sleep around 4am and woke up at 5am with the rest of my family to go see the Hadzabe tribe. Besides the wildlife encounters, the Hadzabe was by far the most intense experience of the trip, as this is one of VERY few tribes left which are genuine and authentic. They don't care when you're coming, they go hunting when they're ready, and the entire experience is completely uncensored and even graphic. When we first got there they were skinning a baboon they caught the previous day and eating parts of it... Again, this is a mammal watching forum so I won't elaborate on this experience too much but pictures with captions will be on Flickr. They did catch an Ocre Bush Squirrel while we were with them, and again, it was very graphic. After the Hadzabe experience we came back to Kisima Ngeda for breakfast and a bit of relaxation. My parents and sister went to see the Datoga craftsmen tribe, but I was tired from the long night out so I decided to stay back. Nani suggested that we can try our luck again with the Striped Hyenas so we went up there, but as expected it was already getting too hot and they weren't around. I then wanted to go back to the hide and see if anything turns out by chance during the day, because you never know and surprises do happen sometimes. This turned out to be a terrible idea, which I won't elaborate too much about, but what happened was that she showed me the way there and I thought I was confident enough to find my way back, but after being bored at the lack of animals and starting to get thirsty I made my way through the trail only to realize I have no idea where I'm at. I made turns from one trail onto another and to another, losing my sense of directions and starting to panic. On top of that my mouth was so dry and I wanted to drink so bad, that the periphery of my sight was starting to black out and I was feeling dehydrated. This was a 30-40 minute episode in which I honestly thought this might be it – I was lost in the African forest (which I saw the previous afternoon goes as far as the eyes can see) and this is how it starts, when you later read about people who died because they were stupid. I also found myself on paths which I thought were trails but they ended up being dry streams and I was totally lost, but to make a long-story short, I decided to climb a tree to find the lake, assuming that once I know where the lake is I will be able to find the camp. By luck I ended up just getting out of the bush to the open transitional zone after not finding a tree suited for climbing, and half-dehydrated I walked towards the left hoping this is the right direction, waving down a random Tanzanian guy and begging him to drive me on his motorcycle back to the lodge. Phew. I swore that I would never wonder again in the wild without a guide or at least a well-marked trail system. In retrospect, Nani later informed me that there is a fence around the whole property so worst case I could just follow it back to the camp. And for future reference, Nani mentioned she wouldn't leave people out in the bush unguarded, but since I kinda went back and forth to and from the hide a few times already, she trusted me to leave me there. Plus she also mentioned that if I weren't back in an hour she would come get me, so it was stupid of me to wonder off by myself. After this nice episode was over, I decided to just take a cold shower and relax in the hotel until my family comes back for lunch. I did see both *Gray-Headed* and *Pied Kingfishers*, some *Little Bee Eaters*, and other small birds. We then left for the Ngorongoro Conservation area, stopping at the gate to visit the visitor's center and observe a particularly scary troop of **Baboons**. After entering the conservation area and stopping to photograph the crater from the view point, we continued towards Sopa Lodge, spotting a single **Marsh Mongoose** on the way up. This was the first new mammal species in over 24 hours...

Once we arrived at Sopa Lodge we settled in our rooms and I did a little bit of bird watching around the lodge, where I saw a single *Schallow's Turaco*, and several species of sunbirds including *Tacazze*, *Variable* and *Golden-Winged* among others. I also threw a piece of banana in front of the window of my room in hopes that a honey badger or something along those lines would come by, but it just rotted there until we left 2 days later...

Day 6:

We met with our guide at 6am at the entrance to Sopa Lodge, which, by the way is an amazing lodge and shares a private entrance to the crater with Lemala Lodge. Besides the "regulars" I was REALLY hoping to meet with a **Serval** in the Ngorongoro Crater, since I've heard it's one of the better places to see them, and I've seen so many pictures and read so many reports where people have seen them in the crater and its periphery. I also heard of **Caracals** seen in the higher elevations on the descent to the crater. Another guide from RA Safaris told me there is a specific bush area where he has seen caracals recently. But our guide keeps giving us the same story that it's just a matter of luck. We were down by 6:20-6:30 and saw our first **Zebras** of the morning, and the first **Buffalos**, as well as our trip's first *Kori Bustards*. We then saw our first large groups of **Thomson's Gazelles** and new species **Grant's Gazelles** and **Coke's Harabeest**. We also obtained our first close views of **Spotted Hyenas**, and another group of **Lionesses**. It's also worth mentioning that *Abdim's Storks* were beyond numerous, as were *Gray-Crowned Cranes*, *Marabous* and *White-Backed Vultures*. Here we also saw our first *Hooded Vultures* and our only (unsatisfying) views of *Ruppell's Griffon Vultures*. Further on were more *ostriches*, *Gabar Goshawk*, **Wildebeest**, **Black-backed Jackals**, **Warthogs** everywhere and our first **Golden Jackals** and **Common Eland**. Driving around the crater's floor consists mainly of driving in circles along the regular paths, trying to find the rhinos and any chases or anything interesting that happens. During the green season (Nov – May?) the **Black Rhinos** (which are Critically Endangered) hang out on the crater floor with the rest of the animals and at one point during the day someone finds them and communicates via radio to other guides in the area. There are also **Leopards** and **Cheetahs** in the crater, and some companies are good at finding them but my guide told us that both species are very difficult to find in the crater. After breakfast we saw another **Roundleaf Bat** (most likely **Sundevall's**), some *Woodland Kingfishers*, some **Bushbucks** and **Waterbucks** in the forest, many many more gazelles and wildebeests including a wildebeest that was JUST born and was learning how to walk, many *Lesser* and probably some *Greater Flamingos* in the lake, and another group of **Lions** which included our first fully grown males with impressive manes! All of the grazers, hyenas, jackals, ostriches, storks and cranes are super common everywhere in the crater. Later on we saw our only close **Elephant** in the crater (we saw many from afar) and some **Hippos** outside the water near the hippo pool which is another mini-attraction in the crater. Then suddenly our guide stopped the car, raised his binoculars and a few seconds later said "There are the black rhinos". Sure enough, pretty far out we saw 3 blurry **Black Rhinos**, which later materialized as they got a little nearer and walked across the grasses. Then we visited the hippo pool for a while, where there were several of them including a very young one who was occasionally popping out of the water near its mother, and a few more groups of lions and lionesses. We stopped in the usual place where everyone eats lunch, where many *Helmeted Guineafowls*, *Augur Buzzards*, *Weavers*, *Starlings* and other birds congregate to try to steal food from unwary visitors. There are also **Hippos** in the pond near the lunch grounds. After lunch we got closer and better views of a **Rhino** which also allowed for some decent photographs, and at one point he was within 150ft or so from us. Throughout the whole day I had my eye out for a Serval, but unfortunately we did not see one, and our guide didn't seem to think there are any places which are particularly good for finding them. We did see a Spotted Hyena chase and kill a baby wildebeest from afar, and then carelessly walking way too close to some sleepy lionesses which we expected to end in a lethal fight, but it didn't happen – they couldn't care less about the hyenas walking practically in-between them. As we ascended back up the crater we observed and photographed our first *Lappet-Faced Vulture* and some **Blue** or **Syke's Monkeys** back up at the lodge, including trees on the property and the roof of the main building. I tried to find and photograph another Schallow's turaco since my pictures from the previous day didn't suffice, but I didn't see another one. Another bird species I had hoped to see was the Narina Trogon but we never came across one. Anyway, overall this was another exceptional day with at least 5-6 new mammal species, despite the absence of Servals.

Day 7:

Today we didn't wake up particularly early, ate breakfast, and left towards the Serengeti. After about half an hour, while still circling the periphery of the crater towards the "regular" lodges, there was a clearing on the left which had some **Bushbucks** and some smaller antelope species which I hadn't seen before. I told my guide I thought I saw something and he said maybe they were **Reedbucks**, but didn't stop for me to get a better look or try to photograph. Further out into the Conservation area towards the Serengeti we started seeing **wildebeests** along Masai cattle, then we started seeing many **Giraffes**, TONS of **Thomson's Gazelles**, and some **Impalas** and **Grants'**. We stopped by the Olduvai Gorge which was super interesting, followed by a village to a Masai Boma which was nice. As we approached the Serengeti entrance the open grass fields were FULL of literally tens of thousands of **Thomson's Gazelles**, **Zebras**, **Wildebeests**, *Ostriches* and the occasional **Spotted Hyenas**. It was definitely impressive to see SO many birds and animals filling up all the open areas as far as the eyes can see. Within 15 minutes of entering the Serengeti National Park we saw an accumulation of 4 or 5 cars and realized there's probably something interesting going on. From afar I could see a **Cheetah!** We got closer and then realized it was creeping towards a baby wildebeest, so we stayed there. Our guide was trying to tell us that we can't stay where we were because we were blocking the road, but I ASSURED him that nobody is going to be driving by without stopping. Sure enough by the time the Cheetah got within running distance of the wildebeest cub, another 30-40 vehicles blocked this part of the road and we couldn't move anyway. A few minutes later we were watching a National-Geographic-style Cheetah chase which lasted maybe 5-7 seconds before the poor baby wildebeest was caught and suffocated to death. Wow. We have the entire thing on video and in pictures shot at high-speed to capture the progression of the chase. What a nice way to start our Serengeti experience! Shortly thereafter we continued onto Nabi Hill towards the picnic grounds where *Marabous*, *Superb* and *Hildebrandt's Starlings*, *Blue-Breasted Cordon Bleus* and many other birds were abundant, and if you look closely, **African Grass Rats** run around in the shrubs between the parking lot and the picnic area. After lunch we decided not to go to Kol Kopjes today since it was getting a bit late and we wanted to be able to enjoy it with leisure, so instead we continued straight to the Seronera Valley and decided to do Gol Kopjes on the return trip in 2 days, before exiting the Serengeti and going towards Ndutu. Knowing what I know now I would have probably spent all afternoon around Gol Kopjes and sped through the Central Serengeti just in time to get to our hotel. But anyway, on the way up the Serengeti we did see another **Cheetah** just besides the road and our first of many **Topis**. **Giraffes** and **Elephants** were abundant in the Seronera Valley which was nice, with herds of **Zebras**, **Topis**, and some **Hartebeests** here and there. Also upon our arrival in the Seronera Valley our guide started scanning the trees for leopards but didn't find any, until we saw a small compilation of cars who were looking at a tree so we assumed (correctly) that they saw a **Leopard**. There were actually 3 leopards between 2 adjacent trees; a mother and 2 cubs. This was exciting considering our extremely unsatisfying encounter with the one in Tarangire, which resulted in no pictures and only 3 of us could really say that we actually saw it. But these leopards were awesome, and picturesque, though a bit boring behavior-wise because this was in the afternoon when the sun was still fully out. On the way to Kati Kati tented camp we were also able to add *Black-Bellied Bustard* and *Bare-Faced Go Away Bird* to our list of birds, as well as better views of the *Lappet-faced Vulture* and some more **Black-backed Jackals**. Kati Kati was another success. It's the least "convenient" of the tented camps we stayed at since it's a mobile camp, which changes location seasonally; hot water for shower was only available upon request and lasted for 5-7 minutes after which there was no water at all, unless you asked for more, but we never had to. But the food was as awesome as everywhere else, the beds were comfortable and the location was pristine. As in every other lodge or camp I asked the guys who escort you to your room what animals they see at night, or specifically if they see Honey Badgers which I was so keen on seeing, especially with the "Crazy Nastyass Honeybadger" video that's running around on YouTube. They said that they have never seen a honey badger, but spotted hyenas aren't uncommon. Under the main building with the restaurant, **African Grass Rats** were common as well. We didn't hang around after dark and went to sleep so that we can have a pre-breakfast drive.

Day 8:

Pre-breakfast drive didn't add any new species in terms of mammals, but we did see our trip's ONLY *Nile Crocodile* in the Seronera River near some **Hippos**. On the way out of the lodge right around sunset we spotted some **Black-backed Jackals** again and 3 **Spotted Hyenas**. New bird additions this morning were *Ruppell's Long-tailed Starling*, *Usambiro Barbet*, and *African Gray Honrbill*, and another *Bateleur* which again didn't provide for a good picture. Again, **Elephants** and **Giraffes** were overly abundant as were some of the other usuals. We did also see a very large pride of **lionesses** and cubs devouring an adult-sized buffalo, and our friends the 2 **Leopard** cubs from yesterday in the exact same trees, but the mom was MIA. We stopped at a gas station which also has a small library nearby, where **Bush Hyraxes** were hanging out in an old, abandoned vehicle and a nearby abandoned building, and we also saw our first bright male *Red-Headed Agama* lizard. We then visited the Seronera Visitor Center and walked around the trail, spotting both **Bush Hyraxes** and the larger and browner **Rock Hyraxes**, and a few **Dwarf Mongooses** below the bridge with the crocodile bronze statues below. Here we also saw and photographed more photogenic *Red-Headed Agamas*, and right as we exited I was able to snap a quick picture of a young *Martial Eagle* flying not too far away. Several **Topis** and **Elephants** later we were back at Kati Kati for breakfast. We took a break for the heat of the day and left again for an afternoon drive, where we first saw *Fischer's Lovebirds* and our first "for sure" pair of **Reedbucks**, which didn't stop for a good picture. In the late afternoon we saw more of the usuals including many **Impalas** and **Dikdiks**, TONS of **Vervet monkeys** which we hadn't yet seen in the Serengeti, and several more **Topi**.

Day 9:

Early breakfast and leaving around 6:30 or 6:45, we didn't see much of anything special besides a very large pride of **lionesses** which was hanging uncomfortably close to **zebras** and **wildebeests**, but they all ran away when they realized the lionesses were there. One of the lionesses then spotted a pair of **Buffalo** with their young and decided to go for the young. She walked very far away from the pride, probably half a mile or so, and then started running after the Buffalos. Just as this chase started they all disappeared over a small hill and we couldn't see the end of it, though we assume she got the little one since she didn't come back and the rest of the pride later followed. We then drove towards Gol Kopjes, and when we got closer to the Southern Plains and Nabi Hill, the planes filled up again with endless numbers of **Thomsons'** and **Wildebeests**. I forgot to mention that the Central Serengeti was generally empty when looking around, unlike the Southern Plains which were teeming with grazers as far as the eye can see. Around Gol Kopjes we stopped to ask another car if they saw anything interesting. BTW let me mention that this had become my guide's way of finding stuff, stopping next to every parked car and asking their guide in Swahili if he saw anything interesting. Well it turned out a very impressive male **Lion** was sitting right under a bush at the entrance to the Gol Kopjes area, right before the first big group of rocks you drive through, and our guide missed it. So we turned around and saw it, it was indeed very impressive with his fully-grown mane. We then kept driving further down the trail between the Kopjes, seeing mostly **Thomson's Gazelles**, *Kori Bustards*, the usual *Helmeted Guinea fowls*, *Sandgrouses*, *Francolins*, and *Ostriches*. Around 11am we were pretty much in the furthest part of the Kol Kopjes area, where most of the grass was yellowish and there weren't many animals around when suddenly I spotted a pair of **Golden Jackals** being chased by a **HONEY BADGER!!!** I must have yelled out (loudly, in excitement) "Honey Badger! Honey Badger! Honey Badger!" like 6 times. Throughout my yelling I heard Emanuel saying "No" followed by "Oh yes!" Then I started yelling "Stop Stop Stop," meaning stop the car so I can take pictures! Instead of stopping my guide started driving after the Honey Badger, getting off the trail (which I think is illegal without a special permit), getting extremely close to it until it was running alongside within a few feet of our vehicle. At this point my sister and my dad who were standing on the other side of the car came over and saw it as well. I asked my mom "are you getting this on your video camera?" but she said "No, the ride is too bumpy!" Not a minute later, as we are driving closer and closer to the running badger, just as we started to take in this awesome encounter, the Honey Badger ran into a burrow and we all said "Awww!" since we didn't get a chance to photograph it. In extreme stupidity, our guide stopped RIGHT NEAR the burrow! Really?! Can we at least give the animal 20 yards to

breath?! Maybe it will even come back out so we can take a picture! After standing practically on top of the burrow I suggested to Emanuel to get back on the marked trail and give it some space so maybe it would come out again. He of course was trying to blame the animal disappearing on my yelling “Honey Badger!” really loud, which I laughed and slightly agreed, even though deep inside I know I stopped yelling maybe a minute before he crawled into the burrow, which he did after being chased by a large vehicle... Really, this was the moment when, after being in denial about his poor spotting abilities and bad guiding skills I had to come to terms with it. Not only did he not believe me (I heard him saying “no” as I was yelling, thinking I was talking about the Jackals) but then he got off the trail and chased the animal into a burrow. On the brighter side, this was one of the animals highest on my wish list for this trip, so I was beyond excited. Emanuel proceeded to tell us that there are so many burrows around, and that he heard that if you come here at 6-7am you can see like 20 of them, so make note... Gol Kopjes – early morning! I don’t know where the exact location is, but I can say that it’s about as far as you can drive out from Nabi Hill towards Gol Kopjes without making rights or lefts off the main trail/road. Of course this information came too late as we were already on our way out of the Serengeti, but now it’s common knowledge so hopefully it’s taken advantage of by fellow mammal watchers ☺. Thrilled with the encounter and disappointed with the lack of pictures we continued on out of the National Park and into the Conservation Area.

Shortly after turning towards Ndutu, after experiencing some nice spinning columns of sandstorms, I spotted a plain-looking small antelope species, which I pointed out to my guide and he informed us they were **Steenboks**. The first and only pair we saw on our trip, so this was pretty cool. Considering the season, Ndutu was supposed to be the cherry at the top of our safari, because this is the season when all the grazers give birth, dotting the Ndutu plains, where cheetahs casually chase thomson’s gazelles, etc. etc. etc. But the truth is that it hadn’t rained there in a while and the plains weren’t that full of animals. Not even as much as the ones in the Southern Serengeti around Nabi Hill. But here and there were still groups of 10s of **wildebeests**, some **giraffes** and the usual **Banded Mongoose** and **Lions**. Driving on the rather empty planes I spotted a small animal walking into some bushes, and pointed it out to my guide, who said it was a **Long-Tailed Mongoose**. After coming back from Tanzania and doing a little bit of research I realized this is a local name for the **Egyptian Mongoose**. This was our 6th species of mongoose this trip, so that was pretty cool, especially since it came out of the bush after we waited patiently for a few minutes so we got some pictures. We spend much of the afternoon looking at some groups of **cheetahs** which were laying around on the grass, not really doing anything, but they were very close to us so that was cool as well. Once in a while were pairs of **lions** laying on their backs under treeshades, and a superb view of the *Long-Crested Eagle*, which is one of my favorites. The good thing about the conservation area, especially around Ndutu is that you are not restricted to the roads/trails and can pretty much go wherever you want to get better views of animals or try to find them. Before getting near the lodge my guide drove around in an area, without telling me that this was a particularly good spot for **Bat-Eared Foxes** until I spotted some. When I shouted “foxes!” he said “Oh, did you find some? This is a good area for them”, so we hung around for half an hour or so to watch them. They are very cute and weird animals, and apparently they’re insectivores. I never heard of fox species that are strictly insectivores so that was a nice little bit of info that my guide was so kind to share with us. The rest of the drive to Ndutu Lodge wasn’t super exciting, but we had already seen a few neat new species today so I was content. In the lodge there are plenty **African Grass Rats** everywhere in the shrubs, some **Yellow-Winged bats** hanging down from the ceiling at the entrance to the guest bathrooms, **Dikdiks** everywhere on the grass, and **Common Genets** hanging out in the bar above the guests. I asked the lady (one of the owners, I think) about where the causeway is between the lakes, since I heard and seen pictures of **Caracals** sighted there. It’s not a common sight by any means but there are definitely some there. **Servals** also hang out on the causeway, apparently. On the lodge grounds, *Scarlet-breasted* and *Variable Sunbirds* can be seen in the gardens, *Fischer’s Lovebirds* are numerous behind the restaurant and around the bird pond, there are some *Gray Woodpeckers* around, as well as the endemic *Rufous-tailed weavers*, and a group of birders staying in the lodge also pointed out a *Pearl-Spotted Owlet* to us after locating it by the sound. We also saw a pair of *Von Der Decken’s Hornbills* which came up close. The whole lodge and area is so relaxing and scenic, and the genets running around on the wooden supports of the bar and restaurant definitely add to the wild feel of the place.

The plan for tomorrow morning was for me to go with our guide by myself out to the causeway and hang out until around 8 or so, then come back and meet with the rest of the family who didn't want to wake up so early, and continue our game drive for the day.

Day 10:

Started out at 6am as was planned. On the walk from my room to the entrance I saw a couple **Common Genets** – probably some of the locals who hang around the bar. Instead of driving towards the causeway, Emanuel suggested that we go around the other side towards lake Ndutu because caracals sometimes hunt the flamingos which hang out in the lake. It was still dark so I was using my maglight to shine around on both sides like you do with a spotlight. We drove around the lake and saw a male **Lion** walking toward the lake, which was cool because so far we only saw them laying or sitting. We also saw a **Spotted Hyena** walking around the muddy lake shores. We drove around to the causeway and didn't see any cats, though we saw some footprints of what Emanuel said was probably a **Serval**, because Caracals have bigger footprints. We tried following them but they just faded as we went along. We ate breakfast on the causeway and didn't see anything besides **Dikdiks** and some storks eating turtles. We came back to the lodge to meet with the rest of the family and left shortly afterwards for a game drive. This morning was particularly quiet, to a point where we started getting bored. Another *Bateleur* flying high made for at least a recognizable picture, some *Tawny* and *Long-crested Eagles* were seen, until finally we saw a small groups of cars stopped near a tree which proved to be another **Leopardess**. This was the closest and best view we have had of a leopard, which was pretty cool. After some more cars joined the group, she got frustrated and climbed down from the tree and walked along, giving us good views and angles for photography as well as different backgrounds as she got out from the tree and started walking through the grass, bushes and sand patches. The whole parade of cars followed her, of course, until she settled in a bush that hid her pretty well. After several minutes we drove around and found some more **Cheetahs**. These were particularly boring for a while and then started playing around which was only somewhat entertaining after having seen so many the previous day. Driving back to the lodge for lunch we came across more **Lions** laying around. We took a long break for the heat of the day again, played some cards, and left again around 4-4:30 for a 2-hour afternoon drive. We visited the causeway again in hopes of seeing the cats, but all we saw there were many more **Dikdiks**. Around Lake Masek which is the lake on the other side of the Causeway we did encounter a few extremely large herds of several hundred **wildebeests** which came down to drink. That was pretty impressive, with all the noises and the young ones suckling and a few brave ones going further into the water to drink. Definitely a sight worth seeing. We spent probably about an hour with those groups, since we couldn't pass anyway, with the density of wildebeests, so we enjoyed seeing them running, settling, drinking, then getting scared and running again. Later along the lake shore were also 1000s of wildebeest carcasses, skeletons and random bones. The occasional **elephant**, **giraffe** and **zebra** were also around and we did see some more **banded mongooses** and another single **Marsh Mongoose** on the way back to the lodge. Then we settled in for the evening. Before dinner, while my parents were still in their room showering, my sister and I sat around the bonfire outside of the restaurant, and listened to another safari group talking to their guide. Their guide was telling them about tomorrow's activities, and told them about what animals they were after. He told them that a large group of about 20 **Wild Dogs** was seen along the Serengeti/NCA border and they wanted to try to find them. Then the group split into 2 where some of them went South-West and the other part – I didn't understand where he said they went. This raised 2 points in my head: 1. I hadn't mentioned **Wild Dogs** even once in this report, even though they were high up on my wish list. It's partly because I knew we weren't going to prime Wild Dog habitat (like Selous and Rwaha, or northern Loliondo which is an area visited in the dry season) and secondly I knew that in the Northern circuit, wild dog sightings depend on luck and on word-of-mouth info, and I specifically asked my company and guide to try to find out info about them, but Emanuel never had any prior info on the uncommon species I had asked about. The second point was that this guide who was sitting around the bonfire with his group was what I had hoped to have as a guide: someone who is interested enough to sit with his group and hang out with them, unlike our guide who seemed like he just wanted to get rid of us at the end of the day, and more importantly, someone who is interested in the wildlife and goes out of his way to get up-

to-the-minute information about species like wild dogs!! We emphasized it so much in the email conversation! I don't know how we landed upon this company after talking with so many, but next time I go I would probably take someone like Good Earth or Indri (even though I have to say I did talk to Indri and they're expensive, but I'm sure their service is superb and their knowledge about birds and of course mammals is clearly exceptional). So all-in-all I now realized more than ever before, that our guide is not what we asked for. I know we might come off as needy, but I have had SO many guides in so many places, and my expectations are ALWAYS high, but I've never disliked a guide before and I always keep positive attitude, connect with the guides, joke around with them etc. even on days where we don't find the animals I'm looking for. On as side note, this was also the day we noticed something was definitely going on with my dad, as he suddenly started becoming disoriented and falling a few times while walking.

Day 11:

This morning again at 6:15am only my sister and I went cat-watching on the causeway, with the hopes of seeing one of the 2 medium-sized cats which I so desperately wanted to see. Of course Emanuel said you can go months without seeing a **serval**, and mentioning he hasn't seen a **caracal** since 2010. But in Charles Foley's "big mammal day" he managed to see all 3 of the big cats plus an African Wildcat and a Serval all within 24 hours, and I really didn't think seeing a serval was supposed to be questionable in a 12-day safari. Well, long-story short – we didn't see either of them again, but we did see some **hippos** walking around on the causeway and many more **dikdiks** and **Impalas** of course. We returned for breakfast around 7:15 and were ready to depart around 7:45. We drove back outwards from the conservation area, but through some plains where it finally rained yesterday so the grass was green and once-again full, I mean FULL of grazers which was cool to see. This was how you would imagine the Serengeti – TONS of grazers, with vultures and eagles on just about every tree, though we didn't stop to identify each one, unfortunately. Some more **Spotted Hyenas** were also found between the grazers, and I think we also saw some lions if I'm not mistaken. The drive back up through the Ngorongoro heights was amazingly green and picturesque and full of colorful little Masai villages. In the higher altitudes *Red-collared Widowbirds* became somewhat common with their amazing long tails, though my guide always reacted a little too slow for me to try to photograph one, and *Red Bishops* were also notably common. We stopped once more in the Ngorongoro Crater lookout point where the sun was at a good angle for pictures, and continued out of the conservation area, stopping for bathrooms and **Baboons** at the gate.

After a late lunch on the way combined with some shopping by my mom and sister, we reached Manyara Ranch Conservancy which is a LUXURIOUS tented camp that's also priced accordingly, but has the best night drives in all of Tanzania, according to Colin Beale and Charles Foley, among others. There are several reasons to come to Manyara Ranch: first and foremost are their night drives, which for mammal watchers are super interesting because of the high likelihood to see **Aardvarks** (Colin Beale saw 3 in 1 night) and **Aardwolves** which are pretty reliable there according to Charles and Colin. They also have a den of **Striped Hyena** on their property, which they are familiar with and go there to wait for several minutes sometimes. **Servals** are also not uncommon, as are **leopards** and **lions** and the regular diurnal grazers. As an added bonus, **Springhares** are practically guaranteed, which was cool since we hadn't seen them yet. Other reasons to visit Manyara Ranch is that the area is a natural corridor between the Lake Manyara ecosystem and the Tarangire ecosystem, so many species roam around, such as the **Lesser Kudu** which is seen weekly, **Oryx** is sometimes seen in the dry season, and a single, lost **Gerenuk** which wandered off, found a home with a local group of Impalas, though he is only seen about once a month. After settling in our tents we were taken by our guide and a local Masai guide on a game drive. Two notes to make here: 1. The managers Peter and Allen were exceptional in their knowledge and professionalism, and did everything in their power to give us advice on where to find specific animals and make sure we have the best time we can while we're there. 2. The Masai guide who came with us both on the afternoon drive and the next morning drive didn't know the names of animals in English and anyway, he and my guide chit-chatted among themselves and acted annoyed when they barely agreed to stop for me to take a picture of a *White-fronted Go-away*

Bird which I hadn't seen very well until this point. They would stop on occasion without telling us why, and it seemed like my guide was teaching the Masai guy names of birds in English, without even mentioning to us what bird they were looking at. It was an annoying experience, and I was already very frustrated with Emanuel as it was. We stopped near what is used as a hide in the dry season, but in the green season there is too much water around so animals don't come to any specific location to drink. There were TONS of Yellow-billed Storks on the trees near the water, and I also spotted a bee eater which the Masai guy said was a European Bee Eater, but I knew he was wrong so I looked in the bird book and identified it as a *Blue-cheeked Bee Eater*. But the highlight of the afternoon was several female **Lesser Kudus** with their young, which the Masai guide did find for us, at our requests. We also stumbled upon a leopard laying down in the middle of an open field which looked like it was dead. Upon closer inspection, not only was it dead, it was perfectly beheaded, which probably means a Masai person or people illegally walking through the protected area killed it. Throughout the game drive around Manyara Ranch we did also see tons of **Zebra**s and **Wildebeests** and another *Leopard Tortoise*, though it wasn't as big as the one we saw on the road to Tarangire. We returned for showers and dinner, after which we had our night drive. Before dinner we sat around the fire and told Peter about what animals we wanted to find. Of course our main targets were the Aards (Aardvarks and Aardwolves) but unlike what we heard from other sources he didn't seem to think either was very common. He mentioned that these animals generally hang out on the other side of the river, and they usually don't go there during the night drive. I was hoping that through our conversations he would realize I REALLY wanted to see them, and maybe go there anyway.. The night drive started right after dinner, at 9pm. This was a totally dark night, unlike the night drive in Manyara and the hide experience in Kisima Ngeda a week earlier. The moon wasn't new, but didn't rise until like 2-3am, and though it wasn't hot out, it wasn't cold and wasn't very windy either. These conditions supposedly make it very decent for a night game drive. Throughout the night drive we did see a male **Lesser Kudu** which was cool, several **Impalas**, **Buffalos** (which are considered rare on the property), a *chameleon* but I don't know which species, **Scrub Hares**, **Springhares**, **Bat-eared Foxes**, and another pair of **Reedbucks**. We stopped by the **Striped Hyena** den but didn't see them, as they were probably out and we only stayed for 5 minutes, and we also saw some eye shines which were too far to identify. The last animal we saw was what first looked like an **African Wildcat**, but upon closer inspection was either a house cat or a cross breed of Wildcat X House cat. But to my dismay, we didn't see any Aardvarks, Aardwolves or medium cats, namely the Serval. The thing is, it was the 4 of us plus a couple which were on their honeymoon, and I'm pretty sure they just went on the night drive for the romantic/adventurous aspect of driving around in a safari at night, and they could care less what animals we saw on the way. So Peter probably had to cater to all the participants and couldn't take us on a 3-hour night drive or to the other side of the river. I know there is so much more potential there because there wasn't a 10-minute time period without seeing animals, and every few minutes we would come upon a new species. We also saw some raptors sleeping and didn't really identify them, but at least one of them was most likely the overly abundant *Tawny Eagle*. I know that if I had stayed there for a few nights, A. we would probably find both Aards (they would drive around until we found them) and B. my pockets would be a little emptier when I got back. So that pretty much sums up the mammals that we saw during our trip. The last day (DAY 12) consisted of an early morning walk in which we saw **Elephants** by foot which was scary and exciting, some more of the regular birds, including again the *Red-and-yellow Barbet*, and then started driving towards the airport. On the way to the airport my dad wasn't feeling well at all and lost his balance once while walking on a bathroom stop. Long story short, we called some family members in the medical field to consult with them and the preliminary guess based on symptoms was that of a very minor stroke, so we ended up taking him to the hospital, and my mom stayed with him there while my sister and I had to fly back to Israel. This was sadly the last day I ever spent with my dad, and the last time I saw him, as I was rushing to the airport to try to make it on time and didn't really say goodbye properly, especially because now that I thought it was a minor stroke I never thought of the option that he would die, especially not within less than 2 weeks (1 of which they spent in Kenya, in a hospital). What a tragic end to an otherwise amazing and adventurous trip. I really can't believe I'm sitting here today writing about my dad in past tense. May his memory be blessed and may his spirit continue to guide me throughout the rest of my life.

Mammal List:

				Ngorongoro Conservation Area			Serengeti National Park			Manyara Ranch
	Arusha NP	Tarangire	Lake Manyara	Lake Eyasi	Crater	Ndutu and area	Southern Planes	Seronera Valley	Gol Kopjes	
1) Yellow-Spotted Rock Hyrax (<i>Heterohyrax brucei</i>)		X						X		
2) Cape or Rock Hyrax (<i>Procavia capensis</i>)								X		
3) African Bush Elephant (<i>Loxodonta africana</i>)		X	X		X	X	X	X		X
4) Senegal Bushbaby (<i>galago senegalesis</i>)		X		X						
5) Northern Greater Galago (<i>Otolemur garnettii</i>)			X							
6) Brown Greater Galago (<i>Otolemur crassicaudatus</i>)	X									
7) Vervet Monkey (<i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i>)		X	X	X				X		
8) Blue Monkey (<i>Cercopithecus mitis</i>)	X		X		X					
9) Olive Baboon (<i>Papio Anubis</i>)	X	X	X		X					
10) Black&white Colobus (<i>Colobus guereza</i>)	X									
11) Springhare (<i>Pedetes capensis</i>)										X
12) Unstriped Ground Squirrel (<i>Xerus rutilus</i>)		X								X
13) Ochre Bush squirrel (<i>Paaxerus ochraceus</i>)	X		X	X						
14) African Grass Rat (<i>Arvicanthis spp.</i>)						X	X	X		
15) Cape Hare (<i>Lepus capensis</i>)	X									
16) African Savanna Hare (<i>Lepus victoriae</i>)			X							X
17) Yellow-winged Bat (<i>Lavia frons</i>)						X				
18) Roundleaf Bat (<i>Hipposideros spp.</i>)				X	X					
19) Cheetah (<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>)						X	X			
20) Lion (<i>Panthera Leo</i>)		X			X	X	X	X	X	
21) Leopard (<i>Panthera pardus</i>)		X				X		X		
22) Common or Small-spotted genet (<i>genetta genetta</i>)		X	X			X				
23) Marsh Mongoose (<i>Atilax paludinosus</i>)					X	X				
24) Slender Mongoose (<i>Galerella sanguinea</i>)	X									
25) Egyptian Mongoose (<i>Herpestes ichneumon</i>)						X				
26) White-tailed Mongoose (<i>Ichneumia albicauda</i>)			X							
27) Common Dwarf Mongoose (<i>Helogale parvula</i>)		X	X					X		
28) Banded Mongoose (<i>Mungos mungo</i>)		X	X			X	X			
29) Spotted Hyena (<i>Crocota crocuta</i>)			X		X	X	X	X		
30) Golden Jackal (<i>Canis aureus</i>)					X		X		X	
31) Black-backed Jackal (<i>Canis mesomelas</i>)		X			X	X	X	X		
32) Bat-eared Fox (<i>Otocyon megalotis</i>)						X				X
33) Honey Badger or Ratel (<i>Mellivora capensis</i>)									X	
34) Burchell's or Plains Zebra (<i>Equus quagga burchellii</i>)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
35) Black Rhinoceros (<i>Diceros bicornis</i>)					X					

36) Warthog (<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		
37) Hippopotamus (<i>Hippopotamus amphibious</i>)	X		X		X	X		X		
38) Giraffe (<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>)	X	X	X			X	X	X		X
39) Coke's Hartebeest (<i>Alcelaphus buselaphus cokii</i>)					X		X	X		
40) Blue Wildebeest (<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>)			X		X	X	X		X	X
41) Topi (<i>Damaliscus lunatus</i>)							X	X		
42) Grant's Gazelle (<i>Gazella granti</i>)					X		X	X		
43) Thomson's Gazelle (<i>Gazella tomsonii</i>)			X		X	X	X		X	
44) Kirk's dik-dik (<i>Madoqua kirkii</i>)		X		X		X		X		X
45) Steenbok or Steinbock (<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>)						X				
46) African Buffalo (<i>Syncerus caffer</i>)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
47) Lesser Kudu (<i>Tragelaphus imberbis</i>)										X
48) Common Eland (<i>Tragelaphus oryx</i>)					X					
49) Bushbuck (<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>)	X		X		X			X		X
50) Harvey's or Red Duiker (<i>Cephalophus harveyi</i>)	X									
51) Impala (<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>)		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
52) Waterbuck (<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>)	X	X	X		X			X		X
- Defassa Waterbuck (<i>K. e. defassa</i>)	X	X	X							
- Common Waterbuck (<i>K. e. ellipsiprymnus</i>)					X			X		X
53) Bohor Reedbuck (<i>Redunca redunca</i>)					?			X		X
**Domestic Cat X African Wild Cat breed? (Seen clearly but looks too much like a ginger house cat)										X

Notable Bird list: (*This list consists of all the species that were either pointed out to me by name, or ones I identified because they interest me like colorful ones, big ones, etc. So it's totally incomplete)

- Ostrich
- Grebe Species
- Great White Pelican
- Cormorant species
- Gray Heron
- Hamerkop
- Yellow-billed stork
- Abdim's Stork
- White Stork
- Saddle-billed Stork
- Marabou Stork
- Sacred Ibis
- Glossy Ibis
- Greater Flamingo
- Lesser Flamingo
- Egyptian Goose
- Black-shouldered Kite
- Black Kite
- African Fish-eagle

Hooded Vulture
White-backed Vulture
Ruppell's Griffon
Lappet-faced Vulture
Bateleur
Pale Chanting Goshawk
Gabar Goshawk
Augur Buzzard
Tawny Eagle
Martial Eagle
Long-crested Eagle
Secretary Bird
"Gray" Falcon (Not sure which recognized species this is)
Francolin species
Red-necked Spurfowl
Yellow-necked Spurfowl
Helmeted Guineafowl
Gray-crowned Crane
Kori Bustard
White-bellied Bustard
Black-bellied Bustard
Water Thick-knee
Blacksmith Lapwing
Crowned Lapwing
Black-faced Sandgrouse
Fischer's Lovebird
Yellow-collared Lovebird
Red-bellied Parrot
Schalow's Turaco
Hartlaub's Turaco
Bare-faced Go-away bird
White-bellied Go-away Bird
White-browed Coucal
Verreaux's Eagle Owl
Pearl-spotted Owlet
Nightjar species
Speckled Mousebird
White-headed Mousebird
Gray-headed Kingfisher
Woodland Kingfisher
Pied Kingfisher
White-fronted Bee Eater
Little Bee Eater
Cinnamon-chested Bee Eater
Blue-cheeked Bee Eater
European Bee Eater

European Roller
Lilac-breasted Roller
Hoope
Red-billed Hornbill
Von Der Decken's Hornbill
Crowned Hornbill
African Gray Hornbill
Silvery-cheeked Hornbill
Southern Ground Hornbill
Spot-flanked Barbet
Brown-breasted Barbet
Red-and-yellow Barbet
Gray Woodpecker
Wire-tailed Swallow
Red-rumped Swallow
Lesser Striped Swallow
Bulbul species
White-browed Thrush
African Paradise-Flycatcher
Banded Sunbird
Collared Sunbird
Hunter's Sunbird
Tacazze Sunbird
Bronze Sunbird
Golden-winged Sunbird
Malachite Sunbird
Eastern Double-collared Sunbird
Beautiful Sunbird
Variable Sunbird
(I suspect we saw more sunbird species but I couldn't get picture of all of them for identification)
African Golden Oriole
Common Shrike
Fork-tailed Dorongo
Rueppell's Glossy-Starling
Superb Starling
Hilderbandt's Starling
Violet-backed Starling
Ashy Starling
Yellow-billed Oxpecker
White-headed Buffalo Weaver
Rufous-tailed Weaver (endemic)
Red Bishop
Red-collared Widowbird
Red-billed Fie Finch
Blue-breasted Cordonbleu
Red-cheeked Cordonbleu