

## Africa 2

Lynn and I made our second safari trip to Africa September 29 through October 20, 2010. Our first trip was in 2007 and took us to Kruger Park in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana and a bit of Namibia. You can read about that trip at <http://www.fefox.com/fefoxAfrica.html>. This year's trip was also run by Overseas Adventure Travel (OAT) and our group for the main trip had 13 persons, counting us. Once again everyone got along just fine and we made several new friends.

Our trip was to Kenya and Tanzania, but was restricted to parks near the Kenyan-Tanzanian border and all of it was just south of the equator. We did the pre-trip to Masai-Mara, and the main trip included: Lake Naivasha, Lake Nakuru, Amboseli Park, Tarangire National Park, Lake Manyara, Ngorongoro Crater, Oldupai Gorge (not a misprint), Lake Masek, southern Serengeti and northern Serengeti. During the pre-trip to Masai-Mara, there were only 9 of us. Six of us (Marty, Jeanie, Herb, Sharon, Frank and Virginia) came as a group and they shared one safari truck whereas the three of us (Rose Marie, Lynn and I) shared the other (Marty joined us because there was more room for picture taking.). Our guide and driver was Jon, a Masai (also spelled Maasai) warrior who was also an expert on vultures. On the main trip the same six shared one truck and the remaining seven of us shared the other. Every two days we would switch trucks and driver-guides so that we all became acquainted with both of our guides, Gabriel and Ally. Both were educated guides born in the region and Gabriel had done research on wildlife (with Dr. Craig Parker of the University of Minnesota).

Oldupai Gorge is not on the map below. It is located between Ngorongoro crater and Serengeti Park. In most of the world it is spelled Olduvai, after a misreading or misspelling by an early German explorer. The gorge is named for the Masai word Oldupai, a wild sisal plant (*Sansevieria ehrenbergii*) that is plentiful near the gorge and is used by the Masai for its strong fibers. In 2005 the official name, Oldupai, was adopted and is used at the site.



Travel was almost exclusively along dirt tracks, one vehicle wide. These tracks were unmarked, rutty, muddy, dusty, bumpy and rocky all in turn. Often the guides would go off-road altogether, at times taking us far from any habitation or other safari trucks. One can only see these regions with an experienced guide since roads are unmarked, no signs of any type are present and existing maps are

inadequate except for the most well traveled roads, of which there are few. It was said: “the roads may be bumpy, but at least they’re dusty.” The camps ranged from very comfortable lodges with rooms that had hard walls to tented camps with bucket showers. The tented camps, however, were not bad. The living space was usually large and there were private toilets and showers. One tent even had a tub. The quality of accommodations was judged by: does the electricity work (can you recharge a camera battery?) ?, does the toilet actually flush more than once?, is the shower stream adequate ?, and can you really sleep on the beds ? Three yeses out of four was generally the case, and there were a few places with four yeses.



[This tent on Lake Masek had an outdoor shower and solar panels for heating the water stored in the green water tank.]

After 31 hours of flying and waiting in airport lounges, we arrived in Nairobi on September 30 at 9:30 pm local time. That was one long trip. We spent the night in the Intercontinental Hotel, the prime choice in Nairobi for politicians and businessmen. Security guards with automatic weapons were plentiful. You do not walk around Nairobi at night. Lynn soon discovered that she forgot to bring a

cord for her camera battery recharger. One of our companions loaned her one for the night and on the morning of **October 1** Lynn and I walked the nearby streets of Nairobi to a SONY store where she bought another cord and an extra battery. When we returned to the hotel we noticed that the many acacia trees around it were covered with Maribou storks. They appear to prefer to nest in downtown Nairobi. That afternoon, our group (9 of us) flew in an 18 seat plane to Masai-Mara to begin the safari proper. From the air we saw Masai villages, or *bomas*, which are characterized by outer circles that are brush fences to keep out wild animals, inner circles to pen their cattle, goats and sheep for the night, and family houses made of straw, cattle flop, mud and sticks. Herds of cattle could be seen grazing in the sparse landscape and we also saw 5 elephants, all from less than 10,000 feet. We landed on a dirt airstrip where we were met by 2 safari trucks for the trip to a Sentrim Lodge (Sentrim is a company that owns many lodges and tented camps). This trip was about 2 hours long and served as our first game drive.

Immediately we joined several other trucks to watch a leopard in a tree. The leopard was watching some impala, eventually descended from the tree and took off into the bush after one of them. Although out of sight it is probable that it did not succeed this time. During this brief game drive we saw 4/5 of the “big five”, leopard, lion, buffalo and elephant. Only the rhino remains to complete this old hunter’s list. Note that while the hippo and the giraffe also are “big” they are not considered dangerous to hunt, hence not members of the “big five.”. On our previous Africa trip we were never fortunate enough to see a leopard.

I will now list all of the creatures we observed this first day: Maribou stork, leopard, white headed vulture, lilac breasted roller (the national bird of both Botswana and Kenya!), red billed oxpeckers on zebras, male warthog (tail up and fleeing), wildebeests (many), topi (juvenile), Cokes hartebeest, Thomson’s gazelle (many), cape buffalo (many), elephant (male juvenile in “full display”), common zebra (many), impala (many), lion (2 fat lazy males digesting a kill), flat topped acacia (very common in these parts and a favorite food for giraffes), whistling acacia (contains nodules full of aggressive ants that protect the tree and get nectar for their trouble), sausage tree, candelabra tree (a euphorbia, *euphorbia candelabrum*), jacaranda (in full bloom), bougainvillea (in full bloom).



[Two male lions digesting a kill.]

Euphorbia (*euphorbiaceae*) are succulents but should not be confused with cacti (*cactaceae*). Euphorbia have a milky sap that can be very caustic and can even cause blindness if put in an eye. Some saps are used for arrow and spear tip poison. Some young warriors have suffered from this by being careless while preparing poisonous arrows.

We get comfortable at our camp, have a good dinner and go to bed early. After dark you do not walk around without a guide (usually armed with a club, spear or bow and arrow). There can be lions and hyenas in camp, just to mention a few of the dangerous creatures that are around the camp. The “tents” at Masai-Mara are a combination of stone work and canvass walls. They are spacious and have all the amenities. They will be our home while we are in Masai-Mara.

Today, **October 2**, we do a morning game drive for which we arose at 5:30 am. In the afternoon we will do another starting at 4 pm. Our driver/guide is Jon , a 24 year old Masai warrior who grew up in this area. He knows where all the roads

(dirt tracks) go and where to look for various species. The morning drive included a stop at the oldest lodge in the Mara, one created by Jomo Kenyatta. It is high end but the cabins are like a motel whereas our “tents” are more like an authentic safari experience. On both drives we saw some repeat species, such as topi and Masai giraffe, and also some new ones. For me the highlight was when I spotted a black rhino in the bush while we were driving off road. He was looking right at me as we drove by. The driver was unable to maneuver for photos before the shy creature disappeared in the bush. I have already seen 5/5 of the “big five.” Jon confirmed that the place in which I spotted the rhino was indeed the habitat where it could be seen and where it had been seen before. There is also the “little five.” They are the ant *lion*, the *rhinoceros* beetle, the *elephant* shrew, the *buffalo* weaver and the *leopard* tortoise. We end up seeing only 3 of these, missing out on the beetle and the shrew.

It is amusing to recount why black rhinos are called black, since they are gray. The other type of rhino is the white rhino (also gray). This is a multilingual error stemming from its very wide mouth (*wijd* in Dutch and pronounced *white* by the English). The other type of rhino has a narrow mouth and is called *black* since it is not *white*.

Today’s new sightings: common ostrich (male and female), Egyptian goose, secretary bird (2), African white-backed vulture (Jon is an expert on vultures, having done research on their territoriality), helmeted guinea fowl, southern ground hornbill (4 very large birds), African dusky flycatcher, Ruppell’s long-tailed starling, yellow-billed oxpecker, hippos (18), Masai giraffe (5), bushbuck, oribi, eland (herd), common waterbuck, black rhino !, tree hyrax (2), a band of banded mongooses (7), spotted hyena (4), cheetah, black-faced vervet monkey, striped skink, leopard tortoise, square marked toad and yellow barked acacia tree (also called the fever tree).



[Cheetah relaxing.]



[Southern ground hornbill with catch.]

The hyrax deserves a comment. It is often said that they are the closest living relative to the elephant in spite of its small size. They share a number of physiological properties as does the dugong ( a manatee relative). Recent DNA studies appear to confirm these connections [[hyrax](#)].

On **October 3** we did an all day game drive. The destination was the Mara grasslands or savannah. When in it, all you see for miles in all directions is grass, spotted by lone trees and occasional small streams edged by bushes and trees. In these treed areas one finds cheetah, lions and some other shy creatures. In parts of the plains where it has rained recently the grass is green and there are thousands of wildebeests, zebras and assorted other animals including giraffes, elephants, topis, eland, hartebeest, Thomson gazelles (Tommies), impala, etc.. Sometimes there are animals as far as one can see and densely packed at that. Today there were many repeat sightings and many new ones as well. Midway we ate lunch on the banks of the Mara river (after first checking for lions, crocs and snakes). At this time of year the water is low and the banks are steep and 20-40 feet high. There are plenty of hippos and crocs. New sightings included: hamerkop [[hamerkop](#)], yellow-billed stork, Ruppell's griffon vulture, lappet-faced vulture, Coqui francolin, crowned plover, bare-faced go-away bird, Verreaux's eagle owl, Madagascar bee-eater on the banks of the Mara, grey-backed fiscal shrike, Ruppell's robin chat, many more Masai giraffes, several common waterbuck, thousands of common zebras, another band of banded mongooses, lions with cubs just 3 week old, a cheetah with 5 cubs (an unusually large number) and Nile crocs.



[Hippo on the bank of the Mara river.]



[Hamerkop in characteristic pose.]

All the roads were dirt roads, mostly one lane and totally unmarked. Only the guides know where to go and where to find the animals. For example, we searched a stream bank off road until we located lions with cubs that Jon had seen on a previous safari drive. They had moved but not too far.

A Masai warrior goes through several steps to qualify. The key step appears to be circumcision as a teenager, done without sedation and without flinching in the slightest. This is witnessed by the whole tribe. Failure (e.g. flinching) results in tribal shunning for a few years. In the past they were also expected to kill a lion with a spear. This practice caused a significant depletion of the lion population in Kenya and Tanzania and has now virtually stopped. Also in the past was the practice of raiding other tribes and taking all their livestock. The Masai believed that they were by nature the owners of all animals on earth. When caught thieving they would say: "I am not a thief. I am reclaiming my lost animals." They no longer wear dyed sheepskins but instead wear commercially available woven cloth with colorful patterns, usually in red but also in blue in Tanzania. Their footwear is sandals made from truck tires. Their beaded belts have modern buckles. Their spear tips are made from modern scrap steel. 200 years ago they had no steel, no metal buckles, no woven cloth, no tire treads and no cattle to herd. They were nomadic hunters and raiders originating in the northern Nile river region. The Masai are called *nilotic* tribesmen.

After our morning game drive on the morning of **October 4** a young warrior took several of us on a nature walk around the camp. He explained how they use various plants.

*Acacia* bark is used (chewed) for sore throat and stomach ailments.

*African green hut* is used as a toothbrush (twigs stripped of bark).

Roots and bark are used to treat syphilis and gonorrhea.

*Sodom apple* is used to treat wounds. Squeezed acid is dripped into wound.

*Bush mint tea* is used to clear sinuses.

*Orange leaf croton* is used to make a sweeping broom that repels insects.

*Red metallensis* (sp?) has very poisonous leaves and fruit.

*Sand paper bush* makes a good sandpaper. It is used for walking sticks for elders and is considered holy.

*Magna* (sp?) is used for tissue paper and as a deodorant.

*Wait-a-bit tree* has very sharp, sticky thorns. If you get caught....

Earlier in the morning we did a game drive to look for the black rhino. We returned to the area in which I had spotted him two days ago. No luck ! We saw many repeats of other animals which remains a treat. This time we were in areas not rained upon recently. The grass was tall and brown and there were few animals one could see. There were occasional elephants and Masai giraffes. We saw a ring-necked dove and a pair of crowned plovers with two tiny chicks. The chicks were about 2 inches tall and the short grass in which they ran must have seemed like a forest. We left in the afternoon for an airstrip (a black-backed jackal ran across our path) and returned to the Intercontinental Hotel in Nairobi. Dozens of Maribou storks welcomed us.



[Crowned plover with chicks.]

At breakfast on **October 5** we met the remaining two couples who had arrived for the main safari (Don, Yvonne, Allen and Teresa). They would join us in our truck and we became fast friends during the following days together. We took off for Lake Naivasha and the Simba Lodge northwest of Nairobi. As we left Nairobi we stopped at the Rothschild Giraffe Preserve where this endangered sub-species is bred, grown and protected. We got up close and personal with the giraffes, hand feeding them pellets of food and giving them a hug (from a high porch that matched their 5 meter heights). Along the road I saw a pair of glossy ibises.



[Lynn feeding a Rothchild giraffe.]

There is lots of poverty in and around Nairobi. Tribesmen and families come to the city looking for work and end up in the slums. Traffic is awful with diesel exhaust and dust filling the air. In a tree where we ate lunch there was a black kite (a raptor). We also visited the Karen Blixen museum and grounds. For me she represented much of the bad in colonialism (she was condescendingly paternalistic towards her staff of hundreds and she enjoyed killing animals for sport). Using the

pseudonym Isak Dinesen she wrote the book *Out of Africa*. In a large tree on the museum grounds were two tree hyraxes. The trip to Lake Naivasha was a long one.

On **October 6** we arose early to see hippos from Lake Naivasha on land after a night of foraging. We were too late. They had already reentered the water. After dinner, however, the guide from the morning attempt met Lynn and me and we went to the property fence on the other side of which were 3 hippos foraging in the dark. Hippos kill more people in Africa than any other big animal, usually while on land. If you walk between them and their water they will charge for safety, right over you, and they can go 40 miles per hour. They also like to capsize small boats. The lodge at Lake Naivasha was very modern and like a hotel with multiple units having half a dozen adjoining rooms with all the amenities.

Later in the morning we went to Lake Nakuru National Park for our game drive. This is a mild soda lake that attracts flamingos, *greater* and *lesser*, as well as baboons, waterbuck, Rothschild giraffes and rhinos. We saw 18 rhinos including a large male black rhino and many white rhinos. This is a lot of them to see in one day, even for the guides. The long drive was an experience given the crazy driving habits of the local population. Many new sightings were recorded: great white pelican, great cormorant, cattle egrets, black-headed heron, more hamerkops, white stork, sacred ibis, greater flamingo, lesser flamingo, long-crested eagle, African fish eagle (mature and juvenile), grey-crowned crane, red-knobbed coot, blacksmith plover, black-winged stilt, pied kingfisher, several hoopoes, black-headed weaver, superb starling, wattled starling, pied crow, 4 Kirk's dik diks, Defassa waterbuck, Grant's gazelle, olive baboon (many of all ages), scorpion, flame tree, candle bush, aloe, frangipani, pyjama lily and Sodom's apple.



[Masai giraffe.]



[Flamingos at Lake Nakuru.]



[A herd of white rhinos.]



[Superb starling.]

One baboon, a large male, managed to sit atop a wooden pole along side the road. His base was quite a bit larger than that of the pole. He affected a Buddha like pose and seemed to enjoy watching the safari trucks stop to photograph him.



[Baboon on a post watching us go by.]

On **October 7** we drove from Lake Naivasha to Amboseli Park. The drive was long and arduous. The air is polluted by diesel trucks and driving is hazardous. The small towns along the way are very poor. Streets (all dirt and gravel) will have vendors for one product, all in a row. Buildings are small and in disrepair. The people appear mostly happy. Many roadside vendors exist. Red onions were in great supply. As we neared Amboseli we saw ostriches, camels, goats and sheep. As I write this from the deck of my tent just outside Amboseli, Maribou storks fly overhead to avoid the heat.

We see Mount Kilimanjaro looming large to our south. On the morning trip we stopped at a Masai boma and school. We attended a class on fractions. I

thought I could show the teacher a better way to teach fractions but refrained. The village men were very friendly. The women are mostly kept in the background. We were invited inside a typical hut. It was earthen with cow flop walls and very dark. There were beds and a fireplace for cooking, all in very small spaces. From our warrior I bought his *ebon*, a club made from an ebony tree that grew in the foothills of Mt. “Kili.” He had smoothed it using the leaves of a sandpaper tree. I see another warrior cleaning his teeth with a twig from an African green hut tree. At breakfast the next day I see 4 von der Decken’s hornbills, in two pairs.

We do a game drive into Amboseli Park on **October 8**. There are many elephants in a vast swamp fed by underground water. The elephants are often in up to there armpits. The babies must be careful. The size of the swamp is impressive. We see many repeats, such as crowned cranes, zebras, gnus (wildebeests) and warthogs. I especially enjoy seeing warthogs. They are very industrious and self-important. New sightings include: squacco heron, black crane, red-knobbed coot, African jacana, long-toed plover, scarlet-chested sunbird (a real beauty), Grant’s gazelle, white rhino, and yellow baboon.



[Elephants in the swamp.]



[Crowned crane.]



[Male warthog.]

On Saturday, **October 9**, we make the day-long drive into Tanzania. Passport control is quick. The setting is the city Arusha which is very poor. Poverty and filth is everywhere but the people are mostly pleasant and seemingly content. Driving is an ordeal, very dangerous and on roads that change from paved, to paved with potholes, to bumpy dirt roads and back again. We pass Masai bomas and more modern habitations. It gets very hot. We make a stop for tanzanite, a very rare gemstone only mined near Arusha, and now running out. The shop also has many fine wood carvings but at exorbitant opening prices. The carved giraffe we saw in 2007 in Zimbabwe for \$400 is now \$2,000 in Tanzania.

We drive about in Tarangire National Park on **October 10**. There are many baobab trees. At the gate to the park one baobab has a few flowers and fruits. This is said to be a harbinger of the fall rains (I surmise that before the rains proper the humidity increases and this is sensed by the baobabs). All the rest of the baobabs are still bare of leaves because it is so hot and dry. Baobabs can live thousands of years and can become enormous. They are fun to see. Unlike true trees that have a living bark but a non-living woody interior, baobabs are fibrous and alive all the way through. They can store a great deal of water in their oversized trunks. Elephants inflict considerable damage gouging out large chunks of trunk to eat for the water content. Many old baobabs show signs of these attacks. Some have caves large enough for people to live inside. When we were in Africa in 2007 it was said that no one knows what a young baobab looks like and indeed we saw none. I asked Gabriel about this and he explained that elephants like to eat the young trees altogether. Where we were now seeing only mature trees there were no elephants when the trees were young. Now there are many elephants and young trees don't have a chance. Later Gabriel showed us a young tree alongside the road in a populated area where the elephants don't go. For the first few decades the trees have narrow trunks and the leaves look different. Eventually they fatten up and become enormous. I have now seen a young baobab !



[Modest sized baobab trunk and giraffe.]



[Baobab with gouged out hole.]

In the park we see lions, and cheetahs with a recent kill. The lions are mating and keeping cool in the shade of a tree and some bushes. Many elephants are seen as are many antelopes (Antelopes are in the family *Bovidae*. Antelope is singular and plural. I use antelopes to refer to multiple kinds of antelope.). The prize sighting of the day is a rock python curled up overhead on a tree branch.



[Rock python in tree.]

Other new sightings include: black-shouldered hawk, speckled mousebird, red-billed hornbill, capped wheatear, black-capped social weaver, white-headed buffalo weaver, red-billed quelea (huge flocks), ashy starling, gerenuks, and banded mongooses. The weavers build hanging basket nests that hang from tree branches. There can be several dozen nests in one tree. The different types have their own nest types (size, shape and the color of the grasses from which they are made). While we see many quelea, they sometimes have flocks so large that they can darken the sky. Gerenuks are thin antelope with long necks. They try to be giraffes by standing on their hind legs and stretching their front legs as high as

possible on bushes in order to get at the tastier leaves. They are unmistakable from a distance when they are feeding in this way.

On **October 11**, we drove through the Lake Manyara region. It is forested and contains baboons, blue monkeys and many other elusive creatures. The forest was nice but when we drove out into the open area near the lake, the temperature soared by 15 °F and the humidity rose as well. Many hippos lounged in the sun, along with warthogs and antelopes. White pelicans and flamingos were there along with a lone fish eagle. Afterwards we had lunch in a banana plantation. We ate local foods and enjoyed them (These foods were also often served at the various camps. They included maize, beans, lentils, spinach, collard greens, beets, cabbage, lettuce, eggplant, rice, potatoes, pasta, eggs [custom made omelets], bacon, sausages, cassava [fries], watermelon, bananas, pineapple, chicken, pork, beef, and lamb). We were hounded by trinket salespersons, which was an oppressive experience. Then we visited a local food market which was both interesting and alarming. Alarming because of the adjacency of food and filth. At the end of the day we ended up in a very nice lodge in a coffee plantation. New sightings included: long-tailed fiscal shrike, blue monkey, unstriped ground squirrel, and a savannah monitor lizard sunning atop a termite mound (this mound was 5-6 feet tall).



[Monitor lizard on termite mound.]

The morning of **October 12** was a cultural experience. We visited a farm belonging to an Iraqw elder named Daniel. He is in his 66<sup>th</sup> year as he put it. He is an expert in the history of Africa and! the US. He lectures effectively for over an hour. We learn that Tanganyika and Zanzibar earned independence and joined to form Tanzania = Tan(ganyika) + Zan(zibar) + nia (“goal” in Swahili). In 1993 Daniel went to a conference about sustainable farming and learned how to convert cow manure and urine into methane in underground tanks. The methane now powers his lighting and stove. His tank is 10 cubic meters and holds 10,000 liters of a water-urine manure mixture in the proportions 4 to 2 to 1 (?). The byproduct of the fermentation is forced out of the tank by the gases and serves as an excellent fertilizer. Every three months or so he must refill his tank. He has tried to teach neighbors the technique but with only modest success (often they fail to refill their tanks). I noted that he also had a solar panel and electric wall switches. With only an eighth grade education he and his wife raised 11 children, several of whom have professional or advanced degrees. He also rebuilt a traditional Iraqw underground home that his tribe used to use to foil the raids by Masai warriors “trying to

retrieve their lost animals.” The government made such homes illegal, but this one is now considered a cultural attraction.

We returned to the lodge (“Farm House Lodge”) and had brunch outside in a garden setting. This was interrupted by grounds keepers killing a 7 foot eastern green mamba with sticks. Mambas are dangerous to be sure but I disliked seeing this one killed. I would have preferred to see it captured by a naturalist and relocated. Alas, our guides were not herpetologists.

In the evenings I am now making a habit of having a shot or two of Amarula. This drink is a bit like Baileys Bristol Cream and is made from the fruits of the Marula tree. When these fruits start to ferment on the trees, elephants come for them and overindulge. The prospect of a drunken elephant in camp is real and not particularly welcome. Some of my companions also learned to like this characteristically African drink.

Today, **October 13**, we drove over the rim and into the Ngorongoro crater, and then to Oldupai Gorge and finally to our tented camp on the edge of the Serengeti at Lake Masek. This was a wonderful day in spite of rough roads, heat and dust (“the road is rough but at least its dusty”). Oldupai is misspelled Olduvai worldwide. Serengeti means “endless plains.” The good roads are gravel, the bad ones are just ruts. As far as one can see it is savannah. No billboards, no telephone poles, no gas stations and no McDonalds. Only occasional bomas, or Masai herders with cattle, goats or sheep. Often a single young boy is the herder. As evening approaches we leave the main road for an unmarked one lane path.

Earlier, as we entered the crater we saw some areas that were burned to kill an intrusive weed. Looking for insects are many Kori bustards, even a few white-bellied bustards. The Kori bustard is Africa’s largest bird that can still fly. It is a large elegant bird and we saw many. Later we see a griffon vulture, large warthogs, and two rhinos in the distance. The usual antelopes, zebras and buffalos are abundant. The crater experience is significant. A 360° view yields crater wall some 1,500 to 2,000 feet above the floor inside the crater. Animals can make it in and out over the crater wall but most are permanent residents.



[Kori bustard.]

On **October 14** we take a game drive starting at 6 am. We see lions, a mom and 3 adorable cubs. They enjoy watching us for awhile and then leave. We see at least 6 bat-eared foxes, in mated pairs. They have very big ears. There are jackals and antelopes as well. Last evening, on our way to the lodge, a tented camp, we watched a jackal dig up and catch, then eat, a mouse. The mouse has now “traded up” and is jackal. Sightings the past day and a half include: grey heron, Augur buzzards (several), Kori bustards, white-bellied bustards, spotted thick knee (a bird), yellow-throated sand grouse, Speke’s weaver, two African hares, common (or golden) jackal, black-backed jackal, bat-eared foxes, honey badger (while chasing one off road through the bush in our truck, we hit a ditch hidden in the brush. Lynn’s camera was partially broken and Rose Marie suffered bruised ribs).



[Bat-eared foxes.]



[Black-backed jackal.]

A nature walk is planned for 4:30 pm. At 4:15 I am scanning the horizon near the lake with my binoculars and spot a cheetah. I see two! Pictures are taken by others and then the guides arrive for the walk. They decide to drive us down to see the cheetahs close-up. There turns out to be a mother with 4 male cubs about 2 years old. This is a very unusual sighting. We watch them lie around and interact by mutual grooming. Eventually they take off for a hunt. We follow in the trucks. We witness a kill, a dik dik, and observe them tearing apart the carcass and gently fighting over the scraps. As darkness falls we leave them to digest their small meal and perhaps hunt for more.



[Cheetahs sniffing a dik dik's spoor and setting out for the hunt.]

The day of **October 15** starts well enough. We drive for an hour or so and find a pride of 9 lions recovering from eating a kill. They are piled one on top of the other. The cubs are nearly full grown. Then we find 2 more females clearly sated from another kill. We have been driving around and across dried lake beds. The 2 lions are next to a lake bed containing ground water so that many tall grasses are growing and are green. In the grasses I spot the head of a white-headed vulture.

It is eating from the lions' kill, a cape buffalo. A herd of buffalo graze a hillside on one of the lake's banks. They are oblivious to the fact that one of their own has "traded up" to lion. Later we are traversing a vast dry lake bed. The surface features change from almost smooth sand to cakey soda/salt flat scales. As the truck begins to cross this surface the tires begin to sink into sub-surface mud caused by permanent ground water. We are soon stuck up to the hubs.



[Stuck in the mud up to our hubs.]

The other truck is not to be seen (the two trucks often took separate paths to increase the chances of sightings). Cell phone service does not exist but the truck radios are still in contact. Finally the second truck appears but stops about ¼ of a mile away, on safe soil. Wood and rocks are collected from nearby hills. The stuck truck is jacked up and these materials are put under the wheels. No luck! The mud is too gooey. Gabriel takes one truck to look for high ground and cell phone service. All of us are now out of both trucks with all the luggage (we were changing camps today). We have our box lunches and plenty of water. There is a strong, cool breeze and rain can be seen on ¾ of the horizon (the baobab was

right). A safari truck goes by at a distance but ignores us, even though they plainly see us and our plight. Bad form! Eventually (~5 hours later) a tractor arrives from a nearby camp phoned by Gabriel (everyone is still in good humor). I predict that the tractor will get stuck too. Prediction comes true! We manage to get 13 clients, one guide and 15 bags into one truck and take off for our new camp in the southern Serengeti. Three of us are standing (the roofs of safari trucks are removed for viewing on drives), several are two to a seat and 2 bags are tied down on the roof to the cab. We make the hour and a half journey to our mobile tent camp. This camp is really rustic with a bucket shower. On the way we see several beautiful kopjes (Serengeti granite rock formations) but can't stop for photos. There are antelopes, ostriches and other birds along the way, sometimes in great numbers. One guide, Ally, has been left behind with the stuck truck, a stuck tractor, 2 tractor attendants and several backpacks. They will sleep out there with lions and hyenas, and will hopefully show up here at the camp tomorrow morning. New sightings include: yellow-necked spurfowl, many Fischer's lovebirds (beautiful !), magpie shrike, dung beetles (all dead from caustic soda in the lake bed, except for the few that fly by).

On **October 16** we do a game drive in the southern Serengeti. Ally and the others got the truck out at 11 pm and he arrived at our new camp at about 6 am. Today we see cheetahs, lions and a leopard ! This is in addition to the vast herds of zebra and antelopes (zebras are horses, *Equus quagga*, not antelopes, a varied and eclectic group of many types but not including cattle, goats or sheep). The leopard was especially noteworthy. They are difficult to see. An antelope was spotted hanging over a branch in a large tree, a sign of a fresh leopard kill. A few trucks were parked so that the clients could photograph the kill, a reedbuck "trading up" to leopard. I began scanning the area with my binoculars for the leopard. Suddenly I spot an ear in the tall grass at the base of the tree. Then two ears and finally the whole head. Ally confirms the sighting. He says we should wait. The leopard will eventually climb the tree and eat. All of this comes to pass as other trucks arrive to view the spectacle. Later when we come back this way the leopard is draped over the branch sleeping off the meal. We also sight hippos and 2 crocs. One hippo does kayak rolls, as if trying to get certified. In the water, on his back, only the four stubby feet show for a moment. He puts on quite a show. We have lunch at an information center in the absolute center of the Serengeti. This is beside a kopje

and a nature walk goes through the kopje. It is the best such walk, with information signs and animal sculptures, that I have ever seen anywhere. There are myriads of rock hyraxes (quite used to humans) and a lone dark chanting goshawk at the apex of the kopje. New sightings include: dark chanting goshawk, black-bellied bustard, African pied wagtail and rock hyraxes.



[Leopard on branch with kill above on another branch.]



[Leopard eating kill.]



[Close-up of leopard.]

We explore more of the Serengeti on **October 17**. Yesterday's leopard has made good progress eating its kill. We visit a small river that stinks from hippo excrement. The low water level has partially dammed the river and nearly 200 hippos produce a lot of excrement. Until the rains come in November the water will be bad. The hippos don't seem to care. A male mounts a female. Her nostrils appear only every minute or so. The copulation lasts a long time and is slow, unlike that of lions (lions copulate every 20-30 minutes for several days but each event is ~5 seconds long).



[Hippos in *flagrante delicto*.]

When hippos excrete they wag their tails, spreading their dung around. A hippo backs up to the copulating male and begins to spread his dung. I swear that the copulating hippo turned towards his assailant and grimaced with disgust, and then returned to his mount. (Hippo and elephant dung is mostly grass and twigs. You would not mind picking it up in your hand. The big cats, on the other hand excrete what you would recognize as shit and you would not want to touch it. Antelope

exhaust is in between, and it is easy to learn to identify the spoor of each type of antelope.) We drive to a big kopje and see a leopard resting in the sun on a rock ledge. Then we take off for northern Serengeti and another new camp. The terrain is bushier, hilly and dotted with granite boulders and kopjes. The camp is minimal. Tomorrow will be the last day. New sightings: little bee-eater (beautiful), D'Arnauds barbet (stunning), Bohor reedbuck (alive), dwarf mongoose troop at the information center and termites (we have seen hundreds of mounds but for the first time Allen and I break into one to see the termites).



[D'Arnaud's barbet.]

**October 18** is our last day in the bush. We are in northern Serengeti, near the border with Kenya. The terrain is hilly with granite boulders and kopjes. We immediately spot agama lizards. The males are brilliant red and blue and the females are gray. They are all over the big boulders and the males jerk up and down to attract females. There are also klipspringers, hyraxes and antelopes (waterbuck, impala, Thomson gazelle, Grant's gazelle, eland, etc.). We also see elephants and giraffes. Two lions are spotted in two different kopjes. Banded

mongooses scurry into termite mounds where they live. We see 3 living leopard tortoises and 2 dried carapaces. One tortoise is on a big smooth boulder. He tries to get down but when the slope is too steep he reverses direction. This goes on for quite awhile, like an automaton toy. Eventually he finds a way down, perhaps the reverse of the way he got up there. Klipspringers are a novelty for awhile. Their rubbery hooves enable them to easily maneuver on the rocks. At times we are surrounded by tens of thousands of wildebeests. There are some zebras too, but mostly wildebeests. We head down to the Mara river. There are hippos and crocs in the water, and wildebeests getting ready to cross. We just miss witnessing the crossing of some elephants. Then we see what we came for: many wildebeests jumping into the river with big splashes and swimming across the wide river. One mother crosses and comes back looking for her offspring, and then another mother does too. A young wildebeest swims across by itself and is reunited with its mother. But the other mother is not so lucky. At one spot we see 11 crocs waiting for lunch. At another are hundreds of vultures, mostly griffons, and some Maribou storks. There are also several wildebeest carcasses in the water. On the way back we see a standing mother warthog nursing 3 piglets at the same time. New sightings: Bataleur eagle, tawny eagle, Hartlaub's turaco, cliffchat, common duiker, klipspringer and agama lizard.



[Wildebeests jumping into and crossing the Mara river.]



[Warthog mom with three piglets. Count the legs.]

We fly from a dirt airstrip to Arusha. From the air we see Lake Natron on one side and the volcano Ol Doinyo Lengai on the other. From Arusha we drive to Nairobi for one more night at the Intercontinental Hotel. The next day, **October 19**, we visit the Kazuri bead works in Nairobi and the Nairobi National Museum. We also go to the Cultural Center where Lynn purchases a pear-cut, green (very rare) tanzanite stone of 6.18 carats. Late that night we began another 31 hour trip home.

Identification of animal and plants was aided by the safari guides (Jon, Gabriel and Ally) and the book: Collins Traveller's Guide: *Wildlife of Kenya, Tanzania & Uganda* by Davis Hosking and Martin Withers. I could not find such a book in the US and had to get it from Amazon UK.

All photographs were taken by Lynn. Those used in this chronicle were selected from about 3,400.