



Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.

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TANZANIA

Date - August 2012

Duration - 18 Days

Destinations

Dar es Salaam - Ngorongoro Crater - Serengeti National Park - Katavi National Park - Lake Tanganyika - Mahale Mountains National Park - Gombe Stream National Park - Kigoma

Trip Overview

After a slightly unsatisfactory experience in southern Tanzania in 2009, I wanted to try a new local operator and eventually chose a company, following a great deal of research and several recommendations, with private safari camps in some of the main wildlife destinations across the country. I decided to concentrate my trip mainly around the national parks in the west, as I had not visited these reserves for a while and needed to check that they remained as outstanding as I remembered them, particularly in terms of the chimpanzee viewing. The easiest way to assess a new guide is to take them to a relatively straightforward destination that you are very familiar with and I therefore added a few days in Ngorongoro and the Serengeti. Although I prefer parts of the larger conservation area, I did not have time to visit those on this trip and always make a point of spending at least one day in Ngorongoro Crater. I love the fact that, due to the relatively small and enclosed area that you are searching, there is always something exciting happening and that it is possible to drive from one incredible sighting to another within a matter of minutes. Given that I generally prefer huge expansive regions and always try to avoid small fenced reserves, this is perhaps surprising, but for me Ngorongoro works in a way



that other smaller reserves do not, perhaps because the restrictions here are completely natural. It probably also helps that I have relished so many extraordinary encounters over the years, although that was not really the case on this occasion and I still thoroughly enjoyed my brief stay. One of the most exciting elements of a visit to Ngorongoro is arriving in the early afternoon and taking in the sprawling panorama that greets you with such promise before you first venture down into the crater itself. Apart from taking a while to accept that I did not want to join a queue of twenty vehicles to photograph



a sleeping lion sprawled at the side of the road, my first guide, I had different guides for the crater and Serengeti, was very good and we were soon exploring the quieter areas away from the main traffic. Despite seeing a lot of wildlife as always here, no one sighting was what you could call spectacular and instead I spent long periods observing the fascinating natural behaviour of several animals, which is generally what I prefer in any case. One of the most entertaining stops was to watch two very young lion cubs climbing all over their clearly exhausted but exceedingly patient mother. They had far more energy in the hot afternoon sun than she did and when they were not harassing their beleaguered parent, they pounced on each other, instinctively practicing the techniques that will no doubt account for a number of ungulates over the coming years. Another encounter was equally interesting, although far less enjoyable, as a spotted hyena returned from a mornings scavenging to find that one of its pups

had been killed. As is often the case, the hyena spent a long time nudging the body in an attempt to get the pup to stand up and follow and that period of not understanding why it will not move, to realising that it cannot, is always extremely difficult to watch. I have

seen these pitiful displays a number of times and eventually the parent will leave, but on this occasion the hyena refused to abandon its offspring and proceeded to pick up the body and carry it away out of sight. My only full day in the crater was actually a poignant one, as I also encountered an old bull elephant that I had known for twenty years. Sadly this ancient giant had clearly lost condition since our last meeting and was now eating the soft plant life around the edge of the swamp, as all elephants eventually do when they can no longer chew and digest tougher and more nutritious food. I stayed with him for over an hour and as I drove away and left him in the distance, I reflected that we were unlikely to meet again. Not all of my encounters were as melancholy and the sight of a black rhino always lifts the spirits. I only saw one this time, but it was fairly close, unlike my brief view of a cheetah, which was distant, even through binoculars. Whilst I was slightly disappointed not to come across one within range of even my camera, I had at least maintained my 100% record in terms of seeing these beautiful cats on every visit to Ngorongoro. As you would expect for one of the greatest wildlife destinations on the planet, the pace picked up as I moved to the Serengeti and I spent three days basically flitting from one magnificent sighting to another. I spent my first afternoon with a lioness hunting warthogs, not for a few minutes or over the course of one quick dash, but for the best part of two riveting hours.



The warthogs were blissfully unaware of the lion as they fed in their characteristic stance, with their front legs bent at the knee. The lion, however, was acutely aware of their presence and whenever the warthogs changed direction, she did the same in the long grass. At one stage the stalk had gone on for so long and the warthogs had moved so far, that I thought the hungry lion had possibly lost interest, but instead she was circling her prey and eventually settled behind a fallen tree in front of a small natural pool that the warthogs were inexorably eating their way towards. I imagine that she has hunted here before, as she now barely looked at the walking feast and settled down to wait patiently for them to arrive. When they did, she allowed them to drink and relax for a few



minutes, before beginning to slowly creep closer. Even this stage lasted for more than ten minutes until suddenly the lioness decided that she was within striking distance and sprinted straight at her apparently helpless quarry. Fortunately for the warthogs, their one instinctive defence mechanism saved them, as they always scatter in several directions to confuse predators and the lioness, who had initially charged at one, was distracted by the sudden movement of a second and changed direction. At this point her chance instantly disappeared and the warthogs lived to drink another day, although perhaps not at this particular waterhole. I watched the entire event with fascination and as much objectivity as possible, as I always wanted the prey to escape when I was younger, until I began to understand just how hard life can be for the apex

predators and that even a few unsuccessful hunts can be life and death for them as well. Now, whilst I remain uncomfortable at watching animals killed, I try to just observe and let nature take its course. I witnessed two more unsuccessful lions hunts during my stay, including one half-hearted effort that involved chasing a hippo into the river more out of belligerence than any real intent, as well as a pair of lions lounging high in a tree pretending to be leopards. This of course attracted a great deal of attention and vehicles, which was fortunate for me, as I quickly left the throng and was soon watching an actual leopard in a tree with just my guide for company. I saw four of my favourite spotted cats on this visit, but the real highlight was watching a cheetah in full flight. I actually picked her up late and by the time my binoculars were focused, she was already in a slow jog, closing the ground on a small group of grant's gazelle. They had still not seen her when she almost imperceptibly slipped gears and the jog instantly shifted into an electrifying sprint. Unlike the lion, she did not waiver from her target, but gazelle are fast and the actual chase lasted no more than ten seconds, as the cheetah realised that she was not going to be successful and quickly stopped to conserve energy. After such a memorable experience I decided to stay with the cheetah for as long as possible, as I knew that she must be fairly hungry given the effort expended on that pursuit and that she was likely to hunt again. Having waited patiently while the exhausted cat rested in the shade of a tree for almost an hour, I was eventually able to follow as she resumed her quest and began to look for more game. Sadly, she did not stay within sight of the road for very long and although I got close enough for a few reasonable pictures, including the classic shot on a termite mound, she did not hunt again in my presence. Not all of the unforgettable encounters were quite as dramatic and one of the best involved a herd of about 30 elephants drinking and playing in the river. At first it was just the juveniles cavorting



joyfully in the refreshing shallows, but all elephants love water and soon most of the adults had joined them and were rolling around gleefully with the youngsters. As captivating as it was to watch fully grown elephants partially submerged with their legs kicking in the air, perhaps the most amusing moment of my stay involved a spotted hyena attempting to cool down in the smallest patch of mud imaginable. It persistently tried every position possible and, when it had more or less obliterated the tiny pool, lay down in the middle of the road to sleep in the bright afternoon sunshine. Even vehicles could not shift the oblivious creature and by the time I departed, four had already driven into the savannah to go round it. My trip came full circle on my final morning, when I again encountered lions attempting to harass a hippopotamus walking back to the water after a long night feeding. However, on this occasion the three young male lions had misjudged both the size and disposition of the hippo, which did briefly amble away, before obviously deciding that the immature cats were no real threat and that attacking them made far more sense. The enraged hippo charged directly at the by now hesitant cats and any last remnants of wavering courage gave way completely as they capitulated and fled in different directions. Startled warthogs came to mind as the hippo marched triumphantly on to the water. It was a nice way to finish and my next stop was Katavi, a fabulous remote reserve and one of the least visited destinations in Tanzania. On our first afternoon drive we were immediately welcomed by large herds of elephants walking along the riverbank, as well as the hundreds of hippos, and almost as many huge crocodiles, for which Katavi is famed. The game driving continued in much the same vein throughout my stay, with herds of around 2000 buffalo roaming the gorgeous and appropriately named Paradise Springs section of the park. Katavi, as per many other reserves all over the world, is most productive during the dry season, when rivers diminish and water holes shrink and large concentrations of animals congregate around the remaining water

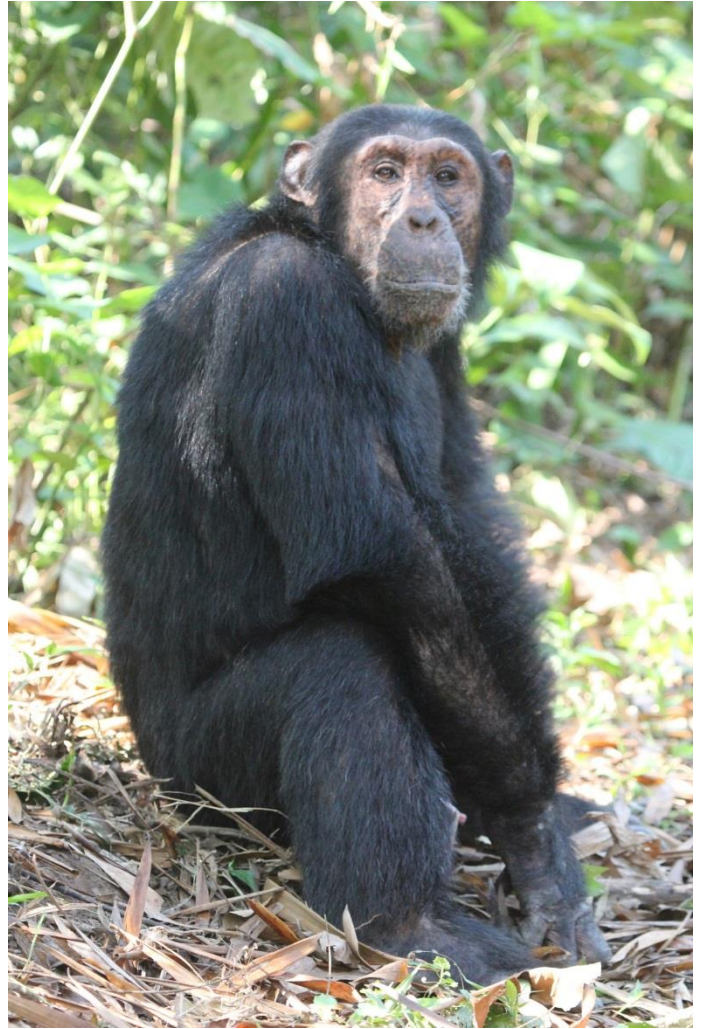
sources. The process had already begun by my visit and most animals were abundant and highly visible as a result. Bushbuck, impala, dik-dik and vervet monkey were all seen around the beautiful woodlands and across the desiccated floodplains zebra and giraffe mingled with roan antelope, topi and southern reedbuck. Striking waterbucks and elephants were constantly viewed against the stunning backdrop of the meandering if dwindling river and large numbers of lions slept in full view during the day, in what is a time of plenty for them. To me Katavi looks and feels like the old Africa, it has a special atmosphere and guests are able to experience an authentic wilderness experience away from the crowds that flock to many other reserves. As with most of the wildlife destinations across the country, Katavi's only failing is the lack of night game drives, as there are many nocturnal species here and for decades

visitors to Tanzania, at least those who visit just the major national parks, have only been allowed to see half the picture. Whilst I do not believe that reserves should be opened up at night to the amount of traffic that occurs during the day, I do think that lodges should be able to operate a strictly controlled number of nocturnal drives, just to allow guests to see a wide variety of animals they would otherwise miss. The lodge manager informed me that this is now being considered and I am hopeful that when I return it will be possible to explore Katavi by night. As it was, I conducted a few night walks around the lodge and was rewarded with nice sightings of a northern lesser galago and a common genet. On the day of my departure one final drive produced two new animals for this reserve, my first and only banded mongooses of the trip and my fifth and final leopard, which was sprawled obligingly



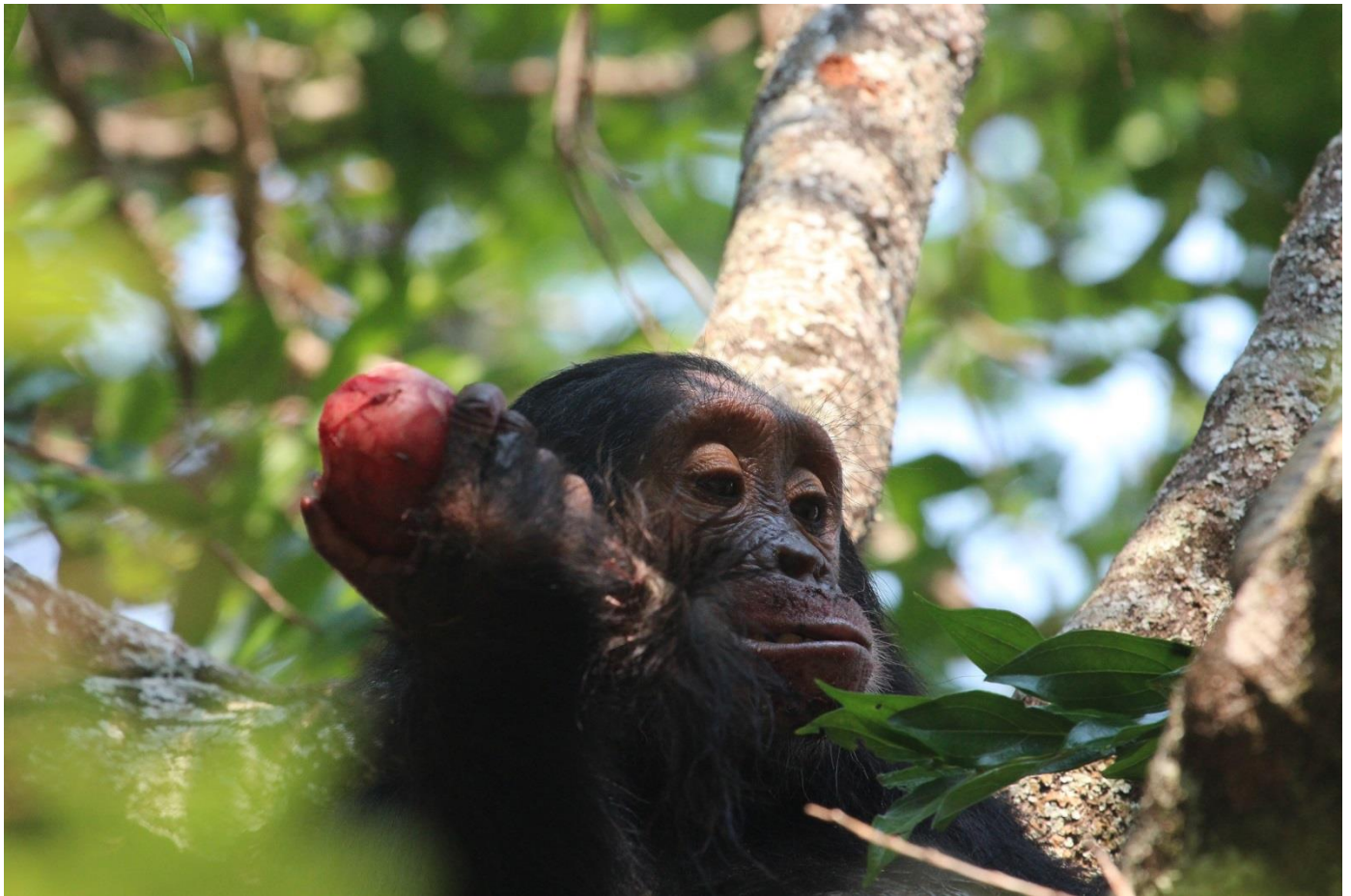
in the open, along the branch of a tree, obviously pretending to be a lion. As I flew on to catch a dhow to Mahale Mountain National Park I knew that the traditional part of my safari had come to an end and that I would now be looking for a largely new set of animals, including chimpanzees. What I did not know and could never have guessed, is that I was about to have two of the most extraordinary wildlife experiences of my life. Mahale lies on the shores of Lake Tanganyika, the world's longest freshwater lake and, as I arrived late in the afternoon and it was incredibly hot, my first task was to dive into the crystal clear waters of the lake from the end of the jetty. There were no activities available at this time, so I enjoyed diving under to see the multi-coloured fish until a troop of red-tailed monkeys turned up at my lodge, which was situated in a stunning setting on the beach, and I went and photographed those. I had chimpanzee treks booked for each of my two-day stay and set off early the next morning to begin the first. It did not take long to find the apes and I settled down to enjoy my hour observing their behaviour and taking photographs. I have walked with chimpanzees on several occasions, but after about 55 minutes of my hour, I was already reflecting that this was one of the better encounters, as there

were over 40 chimpanzees in the immediate vicinity and there was a great deal of activity in almost every direction. Chimps were climbing trees and buttressing, while mothers fed their young and several males squabbled boisterously over one of the females. I was even fortunate enough to watch a pair mate and at one stage was sitting with four very sedate apes grooming each other quietly. I had put my camera down and was savouring the last of these special moments when a male called Darwin walked along the path and sat down directly beside me. After a minute or so Darwin reached for my hand and sat holding it gently. I cannot really explain the feeling of overwhelming privilege to be able to interact with such an amazing creature in this way, but Darwin had not finished and eventually he stood and lightly tugged my hand for me to follow him into the forest. I was not really sure what to do at this stage, as I was aware that we were not allowed to touch these animals and therefore walked a few steps with him and looked to the guides for instruction or at least advice. By now everyone was filming me with Darwin and the guides had no idea what to do either, so I carefully pulled my hand away from Darwin and let him walk away along the trail. I will never forget him checking back over his shoulder to see if I was following or the feeling of regret for not having done so, but I did not feel it would end well for him if he became accustomed to physical contact with visitors. At the end of the visit one of the researchers came and asked me about the event and informed me that in nearly 50 years of chimpanzee study at Mahale, there had never been a recorded incident of a chimp instigating contact with a human being, including any of the researchers. Whether that is accurate or not I am unsure and I did not overly care, as for me it was one of the special moments of my life and I will never forget how incredibly gentle this hugely powerful animal was, as if he was aware that he had to be careful with something so puny. I knew already that he could have ripped my arm from its socket without breaking sweat, but the entire event took on yet another perspective a few days later at Gombe. Meanwhile, the rest of the day was spent on a boat ride that I was far too preoccupied with earlier events to take in, despite the exotic birdlife and large numbers of hippos, and that evening, after chatting with him for some length about the animals in the area, the lodge manager invited me to a section of forest behind the main camp that bushpigs forage in each evening. As I was taking pictures of these rarely observed animals, a thick-tailed greater galago made an appearance in a tree above me and I got some fairly nice photographs to round off a rather superb day. My second chimp trek was never going to be quite as memorable as the first, but it was still hugely enjoyable, as this time I was on my own for most of the hour with a group of eight chimpanzees, including two babies. The encounter was far less frantic than the previous day and I was able to quietly watch the chimps tender interaction and the way they communicated using a number of complex vocalisations, touches and gestures. The infants for their part just wanted to escape and play and soon realised they could do so, if they climbed in an upwardly direction and not away from their mothers. On the way back I saw my first red colobus monkey of the stay and had a brief glimpse



too late and trudged straight back into the vegetation. I spent the rest of the afternoon kayaking on Lake Tanganyika, mainly looking for spotted-necked otter, only to return and see one within a few metres of where I had started three hours before. Perhaps Caesar was looking out from a high tree and smiling to himself. I had to leave the next morning, but before doing so retrieved my camera traps and went through the pictures with the manager at the lodge. He was so excited to see nocturnal images of a beautiful leopard and an equally alluring porcupine, not to mention a large number of bushpigs, that he offered to buy one of the traps to begin using around

of a blue duiker running, which is about all I have ever seen of this species. I had expected that to be the end of my chimpanzee watching at Mahale, but when I returned to my safari tent after lunch to collect some equipment, I saw the entire troop of chimps from the first day making their way directly towards my tent. Darwin was clearly one of them and for the next hour I watched as they climbed and fed in the fig tree directly adjacent to my veranda. I quickly rushed off to tell the rest of the guests and within a few minutes we were all enjoying an impromptu display of climbing, swinging and buttressing that was as unexpected as it was thrilling. A few moments after the last of the apes had departed, a young male called Caesar emerged from the forest and walked slowly towards the fig tree. Caesar was clearly not the brains of the operation and stood scratching his head and looking at the empty tree for several moments before he realised that he was perhaps



camp. I gave him one as a gift for helping me to photograph the bushpigs and, inadvertently, the galago. A boat ride, a flight to Kigoma and another boat ride saw me arrive at my final destination, Gombe Stream National Park, an area made famous by the ground breaking chimpanzee research undertaken here by Jane Goodall since the 1960's. Due to time restrictions, I only had two nights at Gombe and just the one chimp trek, scheduled for the next morning. I did not expect too much given my previous good fortune and just hoped that I would be able to see the chimpanzees, as they can be more difficult here, despite the fact that the park is much smaller than Mahale. Indeed, it took us several hours to find the apes and much of the trek was up steep hills and through dense vegetation. The highlight of the first two hours was finding a huge python that had recently consumed a bushpig and was lying with a massive bulge in its stomach and a rather guilty look on its face. It is no wonder that these snakes are so vulnerable after feeding, as this one could not move and my guide and I took turns photographing each other directly beside it. When we did find the chimps, they were close, but fairly high and we settled down on the edge of the hill to see how things developed. Quickly and terrifyingly were the answers, as we first heard and then saw, a group of about eight chimpanzees rampaging through the trees. At first I thought that this must be a fight between males, as the noise was intense and the activity was far too specific



to be a general squabble. It was only then that I saw the red colobus monkeys and realised that I was witnessing chimpanzees hunting. It did not actually last long, as two of the monkeys were driven into other chimps and were ripped to pieces by a combination of the chimps hands and teeth. The terrified creatures were literally torn limb from limb and the commotion continued as various chimps tore at sections of colobus before coming to rest and eat in the tree directly in front of me. After all the hunting I had observed over the previous days, and all the near misses, I guess that it was only a matter of time before the luck of one unfortunate animal ran out, although I certainly did not expect a primate to be doing the killing. My guide informed me that five colobus monkey had been killed the previous day and that the chimps hunt far more here than at Mahale because the

reserve is so small, it is actually the smallest in Tanzania, and there is consequently less food available. That made sense, but whatever the reason, it was incredible to watch and I consider myself exceptionally lucky to have been able to observe behaviour that people will go a life time without seeing, despite the fact that it was so unpleasant. As calm was restored and I sat and watched the chimps eating, I was able to appreciate just how social and highly developed these animals are, as they were now sharing the food calmly and

a female chimpanzee was tearing off lumps of flesh and feeding apes as they approached her submissively. At this point my mind turned back to Darwin and how gentle he had been with me and I could not help wondering what unknown bonds, as apes ourselves, we share with these sophisticated and highly evolved creatures. I had a forest walk booked for that afternoon, but I almost cancelled it, as it did not seem fitting after such a spectacular end to the trip to even begin looking for other animals. I only went as I had arranged it with another guest and on normal days I would have been delighted to see blue monkey, Angola black and white colobus and a chequered elephant shrew, but on this occasion my mind was elsewhere and I barely took a picture. Both the events of the day and the heat had been intense and when I reached the inviting lake I did not even hesitate and jumped in fully clothed. It had been that sort of day and that sort of trip. As I took the boat to Kigoma the next morning to fly home, I saw another spotted-necked otter and, far more poignantly, a small group of red colobus monkeys sitting on the shore of the lake, well away from the forest.

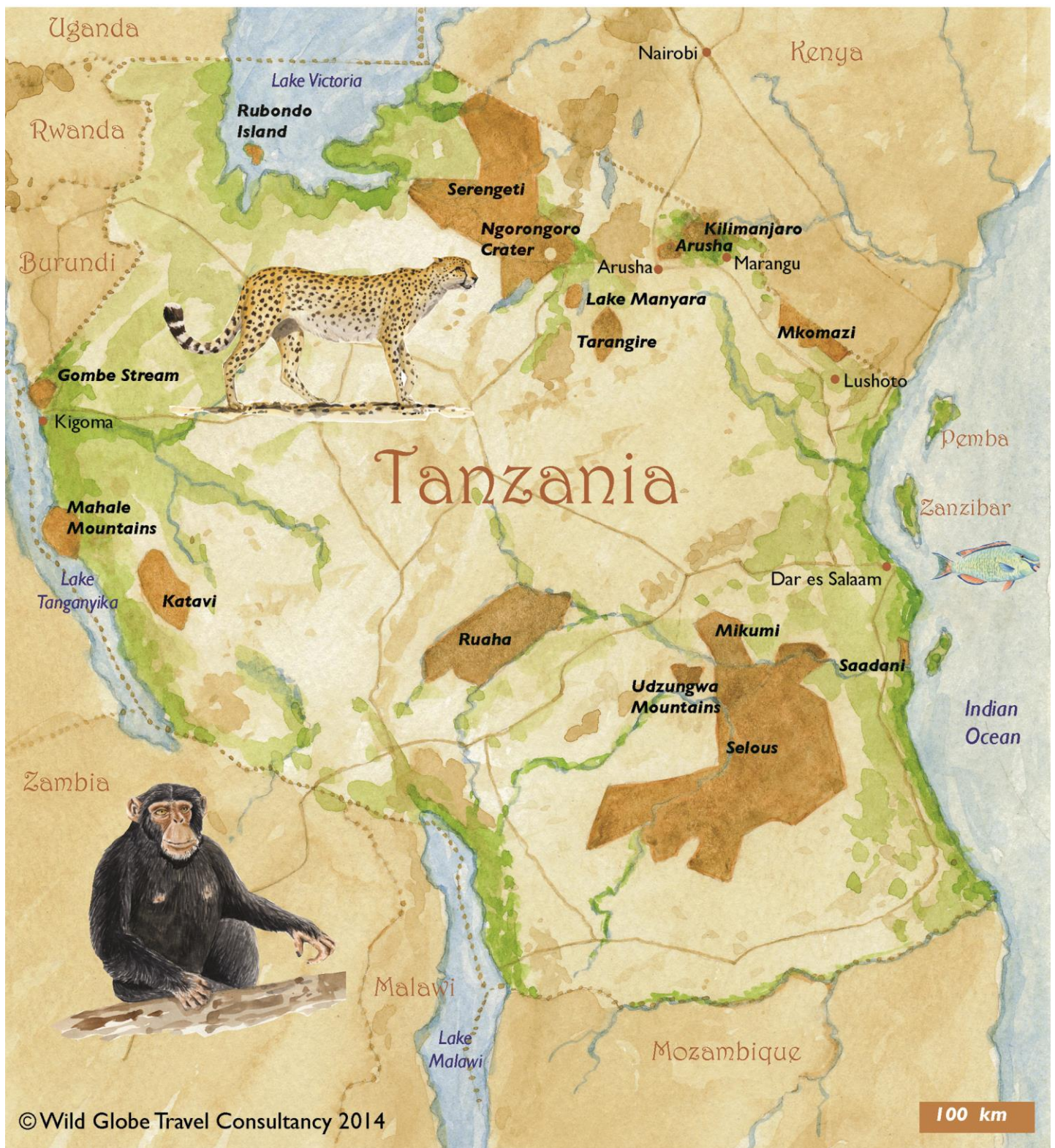


No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>	Over 40 in Ngorongoro, the Serengeti and Katavi.
2	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	Four in the Serengeti and one at Katavi.
3	Cheetah	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>	One at distance at Ngorongoro and five in the Serengeti.
4	Black-backed Jackal	<i>Canis mesomelas</i>	Two in Ngorongoro and regularly seen in the Serengeti.
5	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>	Several in Ngorongoro.
6	Bat-eared Fox	<i>Otocyon megalotis</i>	Group of four in daylight at the Serengeti.
7	Spotted Hyena	<i>Crocota crocuta</i>	Several sightings at Ngorongoro and the Serengeti.
8	Spotted-necked Otter	<i>Lutra maculicollis</i>	Two seen at Gombe.
9	Banded Mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>	Large group running at Katavi.
10	Slender Mongoose	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>	Solitary animal in the Serengeti.
11	Common Genet	<i>Genetta genetta</i>	Lone individual at Katavi.
12	Grant's Gazelle	<i>Gazella granti</i>	Large numbers at Ngorongoro and the Serengeti.
13	Thomson's Gazelle	<i>Eudorcas thomsonii</i>	Large numbers at Ngorongoro and the Serengeti.
14	Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>	Regularly seen in the Serengeti and at Katavi.
15	Roan Antelope	<i>Hippotragus equinus</i>	Several individuals and small herds at Katavi.

16	Defassa Waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus defassa ssp</i>	A few in the Serengeti, abundant in Katavi.
17	Common Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>	Large numbers at Ngorongoro and the Serengeti.
18	Topi	<i>Damaliscus lunatus</i>	Abundant in the Serengeti and at Katavi.
19	Blue Duiker	<i>Philantomba monticola</i>	Solitary animal running away at Mahale.
20	Klipspringer	<i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>	Several in the Serengeti.
21	Southern Reedbuck	<i>Redunca arundinum</i>	Around twenty at Katavi only.
22	Hartebeest	<i>Alcelaphus buselaphus</i>	Common at Ngorongoro and the Serengeti.
23	Common Eland	<i>Tragelaphus oryx</i>	Low numbers at Ngorongoro and the Serengeti.
24	Kirk's Dik-dik	<i>Madoqua kirkii</i>	Maybe ten in total in the Serengeti and at Katavi.
25	Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>	Maybe ten at Katavi.
26	African Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	Large numbers at Ngorongoro, the Serengeti and Katavi.
27	Plains Zebra	<i>Equus quagga</i>	Common at Ngorongoro, the Serengeti and Katavi.
28	Giraffe	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>	Abundant in the Serengeti and at Katavi.
29	African Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>	Common at Ngorongoro, the Serengeti and Katavi.
30	Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	Seen at every destination, vast numbers at Katavi.
31	Black Rhinoceros	<i>Diceros bicornis</i>	Lone individual at Ngorongoro Crater.
32	Chimpanzee	<i>Pan troglodytes</i>	Several sightings at Mahale and Gombe.
33	Olive Baboon	<i>Papio Anubis</i>	Common at all reserves except Katavi.
34	Yellow Baboon	<i>Papio cynocephalus</i>	Several groups at Katavi.
35	Angola Colobus	<i>Colobus angolensis</i>	Group of four at distance in Gombe.
36	Tana River Red Colobus	<i>Procolobus rufomitratus</i>	Small numbers at Mahale and Gombe.
37	Red-tailed Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus ascanius</i>	Small groups at Mahale.
38	Blue Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus mitis</i>	Pair in Gombe.
39	Vervet Monkey	<i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i>	Common at Ngorongoro, the Serengeti and Katavi.
40	Thick-tailed Greater Galago	<i>Otolemur crassicaudatus</i>	Solitary animal at night at Mahale.
41	Northern Lesser Galago	<i>Galago senegalensis</i>	One on consecutive nights at Katavi.
42	Common Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>	Abundant at Ngorongoro, the Serengeti and Katavi.
43	Bushpig	<i>Potamochoerus larvatus</i>	Group of a dozen or more behind the lodge at Mahale.
44	Rock Hyrax	<i>Procavia capensis</i>	Large numbers in the Serengeti.
45	African Savanna Hare	<i>Lepus microtis</i>	Two in the Serengeti.
46	Chequered Elephant Shrew	<i>Rhynchocyon cirnei</i>	Solitary individual in Gombe.
(47)	Cape Porcupine	<i>Hystrix africaeaustralis</i>	Camera trap only at Mahale.
48	African Grass Rat	<i>Arvicanthis niloticus</i>	Around ten at the entrance gate to the Serengeti.







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