



Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.

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KENYA

Date - February 2010

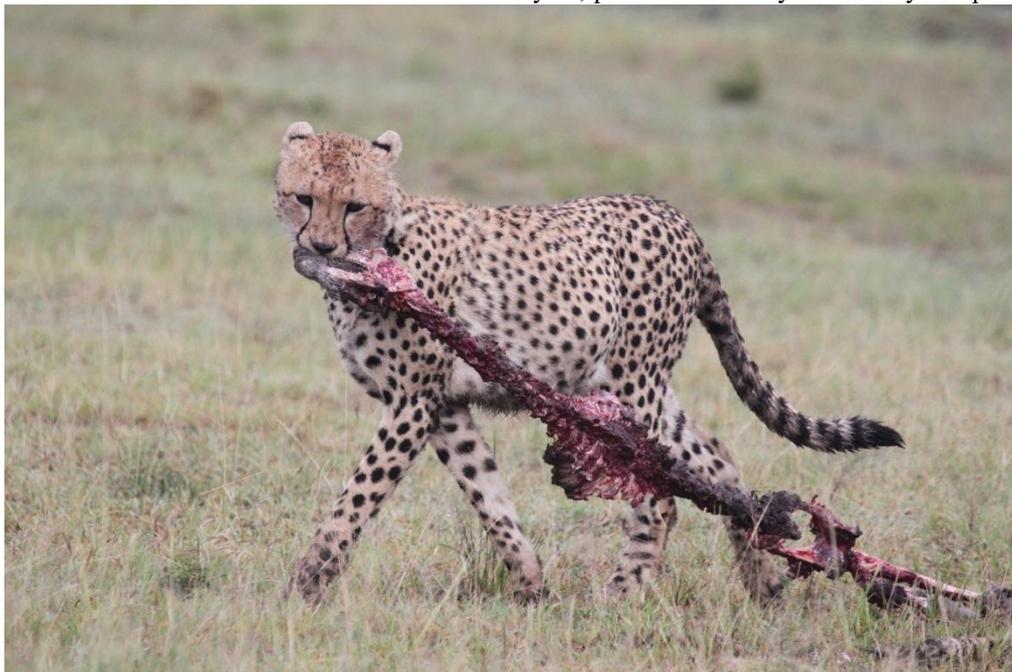
Duration - 31 Days

Destinations

Nairobi - Maasai Mara National Reserve - Lake Nakuru National Park - Ol Pejeta Conservancy - Lewa Wildlife Conservancy - Samburu National Reserve - Buffalo Springs National Reserve - Shaba National Reserve - Meru National Park - Tsavo West National Park - Tsavo East National Park

Trip Overview

This was a follow up tour to my long trip of 2009, mainly to visit the destinations that I did not have time to include on that trip and to assess additional accommodation at reserves I had already stayed at. I used the local operator who arranged my 2008 and 2009 trips, as he had been extremely efficient, and the same guide that I used in 2009, as again, he had been excellent. For further background information on some of the reserves visited last year, please refer to my 2009 Kenya Trip Report. Sadly, I did not have time to visit



the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust on this occasion, although Wild Globe continues to support the essential work that the trust undertakes and I would always highly recommend a visit to their orphanage in Nairobi. After an enjoyable transfer from the airport with my local operator and guide, both of whom I had stayed in touch with during the year, I had one night in Nairobi before an early morning drive to the Maasai Mara, which I was visiting again in order to try several lodges and to spend time in a few of the more remote areas. On my previous visit, a beautiful family of five aside, cheetahs had been in short supply, but on this occasion I was fortunate to see eleven, including adult groups of two, three and four. Technically, given the distances that cheetahs can travel to establish their

own territory, any of these coalitions could have been the young of the extremely capable mother encountered the year before, but the group of four were very close to the same area and it was intriguing to ponder whether all four cubs had been male and had stayed together. Pairs and coalitions of three are common enough, but groups of four or more are fairly rare and I was privileged to encounter two on this trip. I did not get to spend a great deal of time with the four, as they walked away from the road within a few minutes of our arrival, however, I was more fortunate with the group of three, one of which had just killed a wildebeest calf. The cheetahs were very close to the vehicle and for almost two hours we had the best possible view as they feasted on the young antelope. What is immediately apparent when observing cheetahs feeding together, is how cooperative they generally are and how they are happy to share food, either by eating collectively side by side or by taking it in turns to feed. There are very few of the aggressive outbursts associated with lions and some other cats and their behaviour more resembles that of wild dogs, which often let the weak and the young feed first. Apart from the stomach, which was discarded intact, the cheetahs wasted very little and at one point two of them each took an end and pulled the demolished carcass apart. When there was no more to eat, they slouched in the grass cleaning each other and playing affectionately in the sun, occasionally with what remained of the wildebeest. They were probably still fairly young, but it was clear that they had an extremely close bond and it was a wonderful way to begin the trip. The next major sighting was less

harmonious and involved a pair of mating lions. Whilst lions never appear to be overly fond of each other when mating and are often aggressive, these two were particularly uncompromising and continued to snarl at each other long after their alliance had been consummated. Eventually they settled down a safe distance apart, but you could tell from the condition of the male that their mating cycle had only just commenced and I could barely imagine how rough things were going to get after several days together without food. As always in the Mara, we encountered a lot of lions, including, as had been the case the previous year, two hefty brothers consuming a buffalo and a large number of cubs. Despite the fact that we did not see a leopard,



most of the other major predators were very much in evidence and, in addition to the numerous lions and cheetahs, we regularly encountered spotted hyena, black-backed jackal, side-striped jackal and bat-eared fox, although I use the term predator extremely loosely in regards to the highly endearing and almost equally timid foxes. Common genets were exactly that on night game drives and in all we observed four different mongoose species, banded, slender, dwarf and white-tailed. Our first banded mongoose sighting provided one of the highlights of our stay, when we came across a colony with very young pups, many of which were attempting to escape the clutches of their nervous parents. I guessed that they were probably moving den and at one stage there were four parents

with squirming pups hanging out of their mouths, as they attempted to carry them to the safety of their new home. We were also fortunate to witness the mobbing behaviour of the same species on two separate occasions, when the individuals of a colony, generally if they feel threatened, immediately mass together to create one heaving mongoose phalanx which charges directly at the perceived threat. The first occurrence appeared to be reasonable enough, when a jackal paid them just a little too much attention and was quickly and efficiently discouraged. However, on the next occasion, a different colony swarmed when inadvertently approached by two utterly perplexed Egyptian geese, which had absolutely no idea what to make of the writhing mass of bodies running at them and promptly took to the air. The tactic is usually astonishingly successful, although it did not work as well in Zambia a few years ago when I



watched it employed against an experienced female leopard, which simply darted nimbly to one side, grabbed a mongoose on the flank and proceeded to eat it in a tree whilst the mongoose army marched on one member short. Having observed most of the major animals in East Africa more times than I can recall, it is this type of sighting that makes a trip so interesting and no two visits to any one destination are ever identical. Of course, the Mara is renowned for huge numbers of plains animals, even before the annual migration reaches these lush grazing grounds, and we observed significant herds of elephant, buffalo, giraffe and zebra, as well as the characteristic assortment of handsome antelope. Around fifteen species of antelope are usually encountered during a stay of any length and common wildebeest, defassa waterbuck, coke's hartebeest, topi and eland are just a few that

you can expect to see. We were delighted with a large herd of around 60 eland on our visit and the topi that were viewed here, a number of which were standing in their customary position atop termite mounds on sentry duty, were the only ones we would see on the trip. From the Mara we drove on to Lake Nakuru for two nights, principally to see a few leopards and black rhinos before travelling further north. As it was, we found only one leopard this time, and then only for a few seconds as we drove towards the lodge on our first afternoon, but our stay at Nakuru was memorable for two particular sightings, one of which was fairly rare and the other I had never witnessed before. Both events occurred on the second day in the reserve and the first was a wonderful encounter with a striped hyena, which, unlike the more common spotted hyena, are generally strictly nocturnal and are rarely observed during the day. We were very lucky with this one, as we were the first vehicle in the park and almost immediately spotted a black rhino partially obscured in dense vegetation. I would normally always spend time with one of these magnificent creatures, but I was aware that other vehicles would soon pull up behind as we waited for the rhino to possibly emerge and therefore suggested that we move on. Within less than a minute we came across the hyena, which was obviously late returning to its den that morning. We drove alongside it for a couple of minutes before it crossed our path and disappeared into the bush. It was the first time in thirty years that my guide

has seen a striped hyena at Nakuru and if we had waited with the rhino for two more minutes, we would certainly have missed it. Looking for wildlife can be as random as that, although fortunately you usually do not know what you have missed whilst watching something else. This was highlighted again later in the trip when we had a tricky decision to make at Samburu, but for now we were both elated and continued on for what proved to be an excellent day. It is rare now for me to be able to say I have experienced a first in East Africa, certainly in most of the major reserves, but later that afternoon I was thrilled to do so, when we came across an open area playing host to nine rhinos, which I of course instantly assumed were white rhinos. We had already spent a lot of time with white rhinos that day and as I indicated that we could probably bypass this group, my guide told me to wait a



moment and stopped the vehicle. As he reached for his binoculars, I automatically did the same and was astounded to see that all nine were in fact black rhinos. I would like to say that my mistake was as a result of the moving vehicle or because they were a fair distance away, however, the truth is that I missed them because for once I looked briefly and simply saw what I expected to see and not what was actually there. Although it is not an oversight that I intend to repeat, in some ways it was understandable, as black rhinos are almost exclusively solitary animals and I have only ever encountered even up to four together on a handful of occasions, certainly in truly wild conditions. My guide was as perplexed as I was and for the second time in a few hours, thirty years of experience counted for very little. Neither of us could understand it and we kept using our binoculars to double check that they were all indeed black rhinos. I did know that in small enclosed breeding reserves, it is occasionally possible to see a few together, but even in those more artificial conditions it is extremely rare and whilst Nakuru is not a large park, it is not that small and my guide later told me that

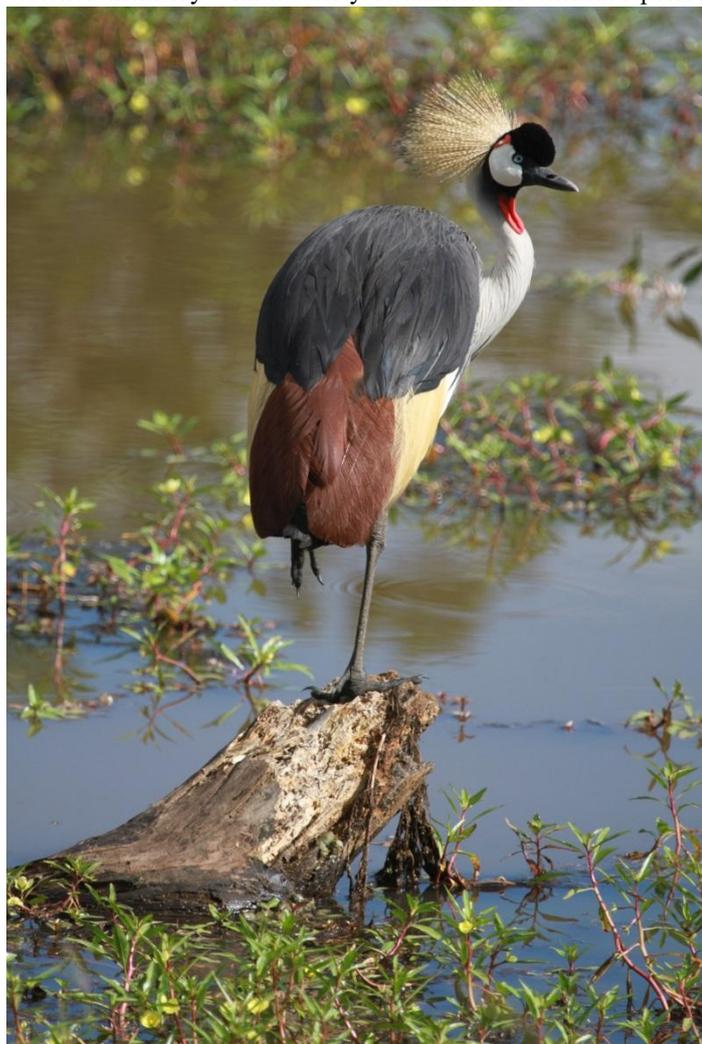


he had probably spent over 1000 days in the reserve and had never witnessed anything like it. Of the nine, two were calves and at one stage both young and four adults were all standing together in a group in the middle of the barren plain. Despite a series of superb sightings during our two days at Nakuru, including lions feeding, an active clan of spotted hyenas and a young waterbuck that eventually found its mother after two incredibly risky hours wandering alone, all we could talk about as we drove away was the extraordinary sight of nine of the rarest animals in Kenya standing more or less together, as if one of them had called an urgent meeting. The tone had been very much set for the rest of what proved to be an exhilarating trip and the next major encounter occurred within a few hours of reaching Ol Pejeta Conservancy, although this one was far more intense and could not be said to be of the uplifting variety. I first visited Ol Pejeta in 2009 and had been incredibly impressed by the commitment and vision displayed by an organisation that believes, as I do, that conservation begins within the local communities and that it is impossible to protect animals when families cannot provide their children with even the basic necessities of life, including healthcare, food and education. By funding a number of significant community programmes, which are making a real difference to the daily lives of a large number of people, the owners of Ol Pejeta, the charity Fauna and Flora International, have inextricably linked the welfare of the local people to the welfare of the local wildlife, which has to be the future of conservation across the globe. As you explore the reserve the results are



tangible and on our drives, amid some truly stunning scenery, we savoured outstanding views of both rhino species, cheetah, lion, elephant, buffalo, grevy's and plains zebra, jackson's hartebeest, beisa oryx and many other equally impressive animals. On the first evening, after enjoying the antics of the northern lesser galagos around my tent, I went on a night drive, which are always conducted by Ol Pejeta guides, who of course know the best areas to search. Within a few minutes we had encountered lions, more specifically, four female lions that appeared to be in the middle of a committed hunt. I had already asked my guide not to shine our spotlight on antelope if we encountered predators, as staying alive in Africa is tough enough without having a tourist reveal your exact location, but, as he scanned ahead of the hungry cats in search of more, he inadvertently highlighted the lion's quarry, a herd of thomson's gazelle. Given their approach, the lions had clearly already seen them and, at that exact moment, all four instantly charged, scattering the startled gazelle in every direction. In these harsh lands, life and death can hinge on a moments hesitation or a single bad decision and one young gazelle sadly committed each of these cardinal sins, initially failing to react and then belatedly choosing to run to one side of the lead lioness, which pounced to her left in one fluid movement and grabbed the doomed gazelle around the neck. I initially thought that the thomson's neck had probably been broken on impact, but as the gazelle began

struggling in the lion's mouth and kicking its tiny legs, it appeared that the poor animal had not even been severely injured. This was the cruellest possible outcome for the young antelope and I feared the worst when the lioness lay down with the screaming gazelle under one of her huge front paws and made no attempt to kill it. This is typical behaviour in terms of cats with small prey, as I have watched them toy with a variety of animals for extended periods, before almost absentmindedly deciding to despatch them. On one



memorable occasion I even witnessed a young oryx escape when a lioness dallied just too long and gave the extraordinarily fortunate antelope a realistic chance to run. The lioness could possibly have caught the oryx if she had made any effort, but she was totally disinterested and simply watched as it disappeared into the distance. What surprised me slightly this time, was that all four of the lions were quite lean and it looked as if they were hunting with intent because they needed to feed, which is not always the case with these often opportunist predators. As it was, the young antelope continued crying and struggling for more than fifteen minutes before the lion eventually decided, again almost as an afterthought, to make an end of it and bit the gazelle's head until we heard its skull crack. Relieved that the poor creature's ordeal was finally over, I now expected the lioness to begin feeding and was staggered as the gazelle, which had been lying prostrate and was no longer under the lion's paw, somehow staggered to its feet and stood bleating pitifully for its mother. You become more used to death when you spend so much time with wild animals, but I have never become immune to it and this was as distressing an experience as I have endured. Thankfully, even the lioness seemed surprised by the tiny antelope's almost implausible resilience and she quickly swatted the gazelle to the ground with one swipe of her paw before biting it ferociously around the throat. This time the antelope's head was almost severed and the last we saw of the lion, she was carrying the lifeless body into the bush. I very rarely spurn an opportunity to be out in the field, but I was done that night and asked my guide to take me straight back to the lodge. I spent the rest of the evening quietly watching rhinos and antelope at the waterhole and at the same time reflecting on the emotional highs and lows that come with being passionate about wildlife. Fortunately, for every brutal reminder of the harsh reality of life in the wild, there are dozens of life-enhancing experiences and I would not swap any of it. As if to prove the point, the next morning I was again watching black rhinos and marvelling at the efforts

some people will make to protect them. Not only does Ol Pejeta support the largest black rhino population in East Africa, it is now home to four of the last eight surviving northern white rhinos on the planet, which were moved here from a zoo in the Czech Republic a few months prior to my arrival, in a desperate attempt to save this white rhino subspecies from extinction. I did not make any effort

to look for these precious animals, as I knew that they would all be heavily guarded and did not want to make an already difficult job even harder for the rangers attempting to protect them. However, it was wonderful to know that they were back where they belong and were being given the chance to lead a natural life. One of my final sightings at Ol Pejeta was also one of the most curious of the trip, as I spent an extended period watching a very large rodent swimming in one of the reserves' pretty pools and only later discovered that it was actually a coypu, which are native to certain parts of southern and central South America. I had observed them in Chile and Argentina previously, but had no idea there were feral populations in Kenya. I had been so impressed with Ol Pejeta on my last trip, that I decided to add another conservancy



in the Laikipia region to this tour and almost everyone I asked recommended the same destination, Lewa Wildlife Conservancy. After three wonderful days there, I was extremely pleased they had. Like Ol Pejeta, Lewa is a charitable organisation heavily involved in conservation and community development programmes. A former cattle ranch, part of which was converted to the Ngare Seroi Rhino Sanctuary in 1983, Lewa has played a fundamental role in the conservation of Kenya's black rhinos, as well as in the successful introduction of the white rhino. Large numbers of both species have bred at Lewa, many of which have been moved to other breeding programmes and reserves, and now the former farm is entirely devoted to wildlife. You cannot take your own vehicle into the reserve

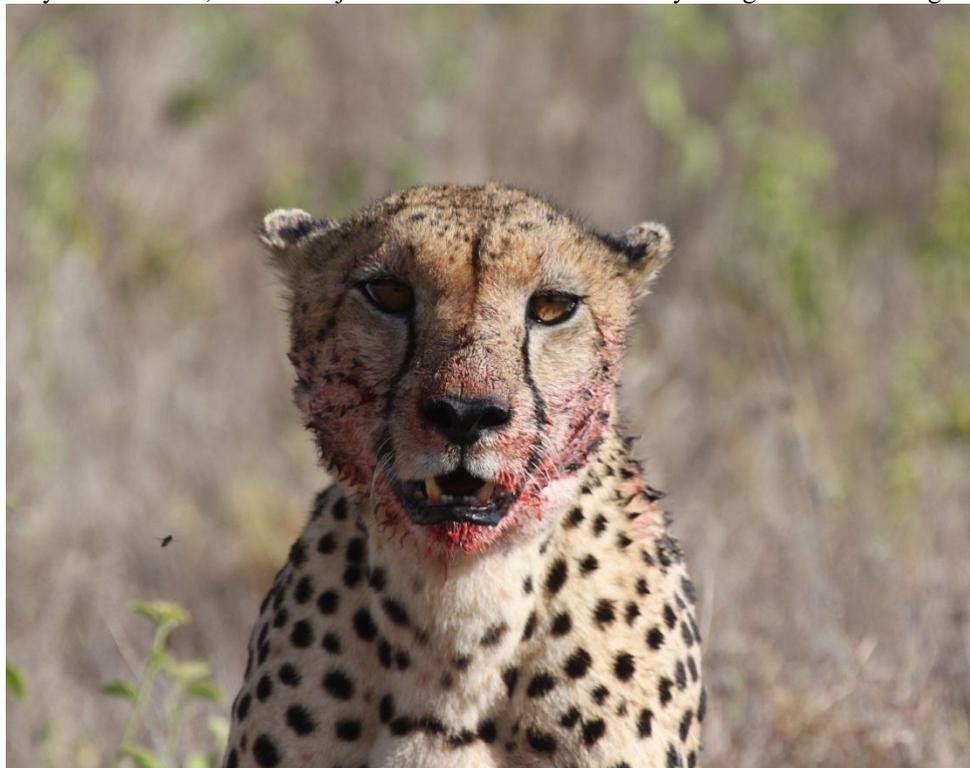
and instead you are provided with a private guide and open-sided vehicle for the duration of your stay, which meant that I had to say goodbye to my own guide for a few days, who had arranged to visit some local family members. The game driving hours are your



own to choose, including at night, and I had a fantastic local guide who was as enthusiastic as I was regarding wildlife and was more than happy to spend long periods exploring an area he had grown up in and clearly loved. This was a fantastic bonus for me, as I always use my own guides and vehicles wherever I can, mainly to avoid the ludicrous game driving hours that the majority of lodges operate simply because it is more convenient for them. Whilst it is generally true that the early mornings and late afternoons are the best time to search for some wildlife, particularly in hot climates where the animals are more active during the cooler periods of the day, I have had literally hundreds of wonderful encounters during the day and would have probably missed half my sightings and experiences if I had accepted the game

activity hours that most guests are subject to. The two drives a day schedule of course suits some people, those who are only partly visiting for the wildlife and are just as interested in the lodge facilities, but I have stayed at some lodges where no wildlife activities have been scheduled between around 9am and 4pm and up to seven hours of imposed downtime is just too much. This was not a problem at Lewa and the other massive bonus was that the guides were not obliged to stay on the road or to drive the same congested circuits all day. This also applied at Ol Pejeta and on both reserves, which are privately operated and do not therefore have to conform to the regulations enforced in the national parks, the guides are allowed to leave the roads, either in search of wildlife or when they want to approach an animal spotted in the distance. Although the rules regarding the game driving circuits are certainly necessary within the national parks, where there are many more visitors, both Ol Pejeta and Lewa receive relatively few guests and driving off

road does not therefore become a problem. The guides are also incredibly respectful of the wildlife, they will never approach an animal that they feel will be disturbed, and no more than two vehicles are ever permitted at a single sighting. The resulting freedom is truly magnificent and my guide and I enjoyed many wonderful hours exploring a staggeringly beautiful reserve in the finest weather imaginable. When you add the dazzling array of majestic animals, at times Lewa felt like paradise and at others, I was certain it was. On my very first afternoon, after my guide had almost instantly abandoned the road, we went to look for the reserve's celebrated Three Brothers, a trio of cheetahs that have appeared in a number of wildlife documentaries due to their preference for hunting as a pack and bringing down prey that no individual cheetah could overcome. Although this behaviour among male cheetah siblings is not actually that rare, the three brothers at Lewa have become so adept at hunting together, they are an obvious choice for wildlife filmmakers looking to capture such spectacular footage. That we found them so quickly was entirely down to my exceptional guide, who had gone out that morning during his time off to check certain areas for when I arrived. It was above and beyond anything expected of him, but he was that type of guide and I could not have been more grateful for the additional effort he made on my behalf. He told me that the cheetahs had been hunting that morning and when we found them, they were about to start feeding on a young zebra they had only recently killed. We sat within a few metres of them until another vehicle appeared and it was only when a third arrived an hour or so later that we left. Again there had been sadness involved, with the female zebra hanging behind long after her herd had departed, continually calling to her missing infant, but it had also been special to watch these famous cheetahs interacting and to observe the deep bond which they clearly shared. I saw several cheetahs during my three-day stay, all of them solitary, as well as a healthy pride of lions with some extremely cute and lively cubs, one of which was playing with the leg of what appeared to be another unfortunate young zebra. Not surprisingly, given its well deserved reputation as one of Kenya's principal rhino sanctuaries, we also routinely encountered rhinos, of both the black and white variety. Hearteningly, a large number of these had calves and it was genuinely inspiring to see these mighty



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creatures thriving again, particularly as I have spent so much time in Tanzania, Botswana and Zambia, where poaching has more or less eradicated these animals. Elephants are also common at Lewa, so common in fact that serious plans are being discussed with the Mount Kenya Trust to create a wildlife corridor for them to the Ngare Ndare Forest and beyond to Mount Kenya, as the elephants have been deprived access to much of their former territory and many have been forced to live permanently at Lewa and in the surrounding area. This has placed a great deal of pressure on both the conservancy and the local farming communities and the corridor would ease this pressure and allow the elephants to access their ancient migratory routes. For all of these splendid sightings of the



larger animals, much of the appeal of Lewa is the way in which all wildlife can be observed, as there is a tranquillity about the conservancy that is difficult to define, but that certainly permeates your disposition the longer you stay. The spectacular scenery undoubtedly helps, as does the enthusiasm of your guide and it was brilliant to see him so animated over one encounter in particular. We had discussed animals that we would both like to see and on several occasions we visited the same outstandingly scenic area of light forest, glittering blue pools and a vivid green marsh adorned with dozens of gorgeous grey crowned cranes, which are for more beautiful than their name suggests. This was no hardship for me of course, as the entire area was mesmerising and we had seen a great



deal of wildlife here, including black rhino. However, after maybe our fifth visit I turned to my guide and asked him what he was looking for, as I knew that he must be searching for something specific and thought that perhaps it was a good spot for leopard. He turned to me and said that he had not wanted to say anything in case we were not successful, but three days before a sitatunga had been spotted here for the first since he had worked at the conservancy, which was several years, and that he had never seen one before. I had seen them and they are not uncommon in some countries, but they are generally difficult to spot, given their secretive nature and predilection for the deepest sections of swamps and marshes. As they feed mostly on grasses and reeds, they have little need to relinquish the security of the tall reed beds and encounters are usually a matter of chance. They are also very rare in Kenya, I had only ever seen one, on a private reserve on the western side of the Mara, and at Lewa we were at the easterly extreme of their range. I had not therefore expected to find one on this trip, but, now that I was aware they were here and that my guide had never seen one in his life, the Lewa ambiance took over and I told him that we should return in a few hours, as I knew that we had more chance towards the evening. We planned to get back for around 4pm and as we approached, with far more hope than one sighting in several years should justify, I immediately saw what was either a sitatunga or a bushbuck, as the two species look very similar at distance. I quickly motioned to stop the vehicle and we both reached for our binoculars, although I could tell that it was a sitatunga before I had even been able to focus mine, primarily due to the fact that my guide had started jumping up and down in his seat and was punching the air in delight. It was a joy to see such exuberance in a guide and I have never seen one drive as carefully as he tried



to get us closer for a better view. In the end we got fairly close and were able to spend about fifteen minutes with this rare animal until it wandered off into the reeds. As we turned the vehicle around to move away, standing directly in front of us was a large male black rhino, that must have wondered what all the fuss was about and why an antelope was being photographed instead of him. That night, which was my last at Lewa, my still exultant guide informed me that we could spotlight for as long as I wanted as repayment for

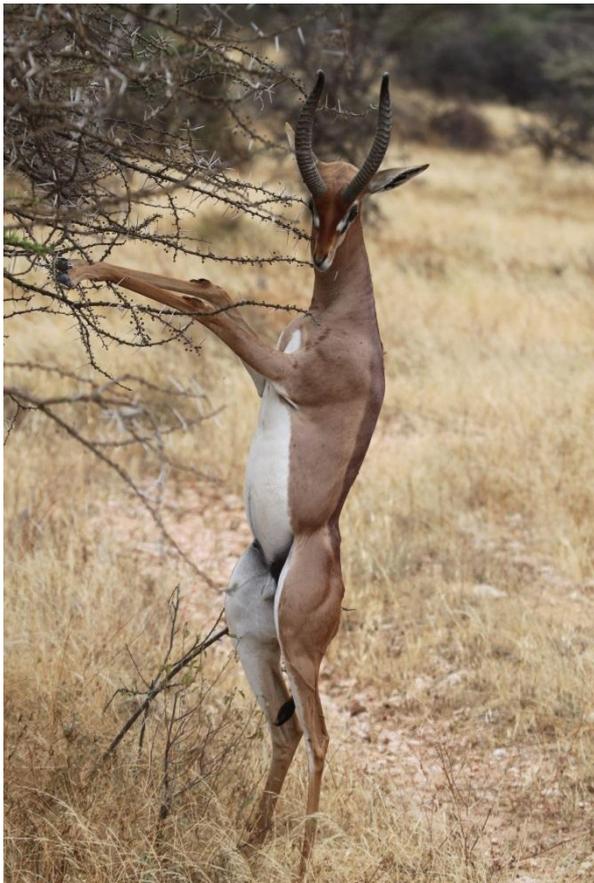
finding him the sitatunga, although in truth he had driven long hours every night for me and we had found the antelope more as a result of his perseverance than my fortunate hunch. In any case, he was a man possessed that night and we spent almost five hours searching before I eventually suggested that it was probably a good idea if we both stop and get some sleep. He had intended to find me a leopard and whilst that was not destined to be, I was more than happy with several common genets, white-tailed mongooses, side-striped jackals and cape hares, a northern lesser galago, a pair of crested porcupines and a honey badger. It was almost a superb end to a superb stay, but the next morning, after passing another white-tailed mongoose that was going to bed even later than us, I took a horse out for a magical ride among elephants, rhinos and a host of antelope, at one point parking my trusted mount next to a mixed group of giraffe, zebra and impala, which barely gave me a second glance. That would also have been a fitting climax to my wonderful visit, had I not then boarded a vintage biplane and experienced an authentic taste of a bygone age, flying low over the



enthralling African plains with the wind in my face and nothing to obstruct the timeless spectacle. Now that's the way to finish.



After my time at Lewa, the next destination had a great deal to live up to and happily it more than did so. Technically, the next seven days were split between three different national reserves Samburu, Buffalo Springs and Shaba, but all three are situated around the Ewaso Ngiro River and they all share a rugged semi-arid ecosystem which supports a variety of species generally only found in this



region, including the reticulated giraffe subspecies, grevy's zebra and gerenuk, all of which were observed at Ol Pejeta and Lewa, a short distance to the south. Although there are differences between the three, and Samburu certainly protects the greatest concentrations of animals, for wildlife purposes they really just combine to form one large reserve and I have always viewed them as such. In fact, Samburu and Buffalo Springs were partitioned for purely economic reasons, as they each sit in different Kenyan districts, separated by the natural boundary of the Ewaso Ngiro, and for both districts to receive a share of the income generated by visitors, the powers that be decided there had to be two unique reserves. I had four nights on the north bank of the Ewaso Ngiro at Samburu and three nights on the south bank further east at Shaba, with the option of exploring the Buffalo Springs section from either base. Samburu is famous as the home of Kamunyak, a young lioness celebrated for adopting and attempting to raise an oryx calf, whilst Shaba is best known as the home of Joy Adamson, wife of George Adamson and the writer of *Born Free* and other books about Elsa, a lioness raised by the pair from a cub. Sadly neither story ended well, as the oryx calf was ultimately killed by a male lion after two weeks and Joy Adamson was murdered by a former employee at Shaba in 1980. Kamunyak adopted further calves before she disappeared in 2004 and there is a painting displayed in her memory as you enter the park. After being reunited with my guide, our initial foray into Samburu was fairly relaxed, with first views of greater kudu and unstriped ground squirrel, before we stopped for a while to enjoy a few elephants wading contentedly in the river. Beisa oryx, gerenuk and guenther's dik-dik were all common and we again paused to admire several gerenuk browsing in customary fashion on their hind legs. Given the dry conditions, the river attracts the highest density of wildlife and huge crocodiles, one of which lived permanently along the riverbank at my lodge, monitor lizards and hippos were as abundant as the impressive raptors and

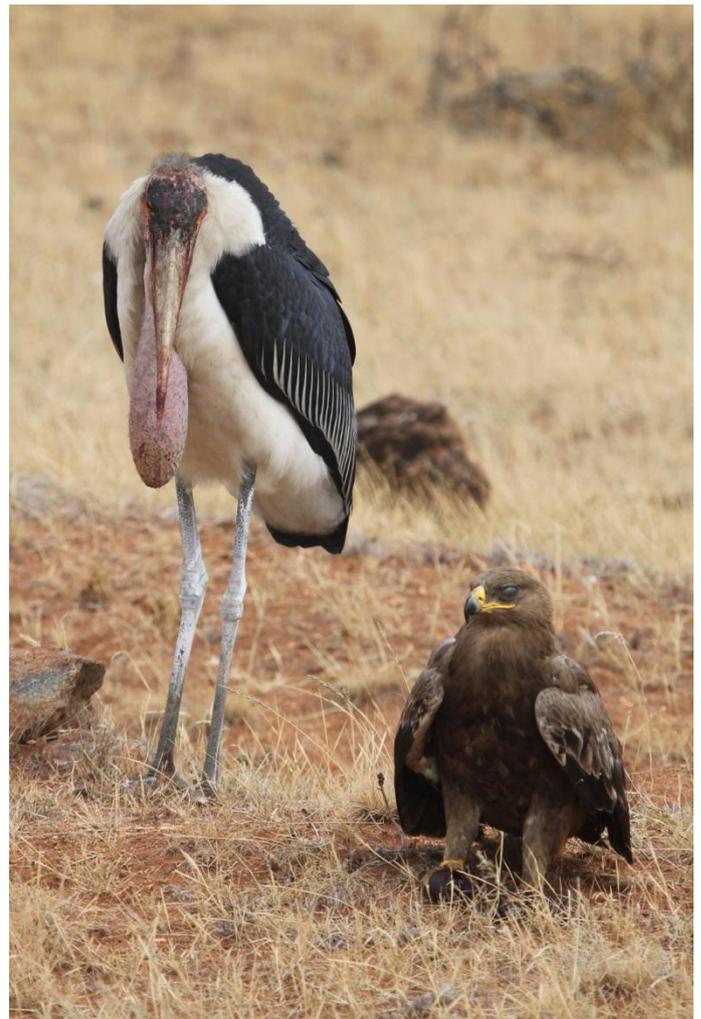
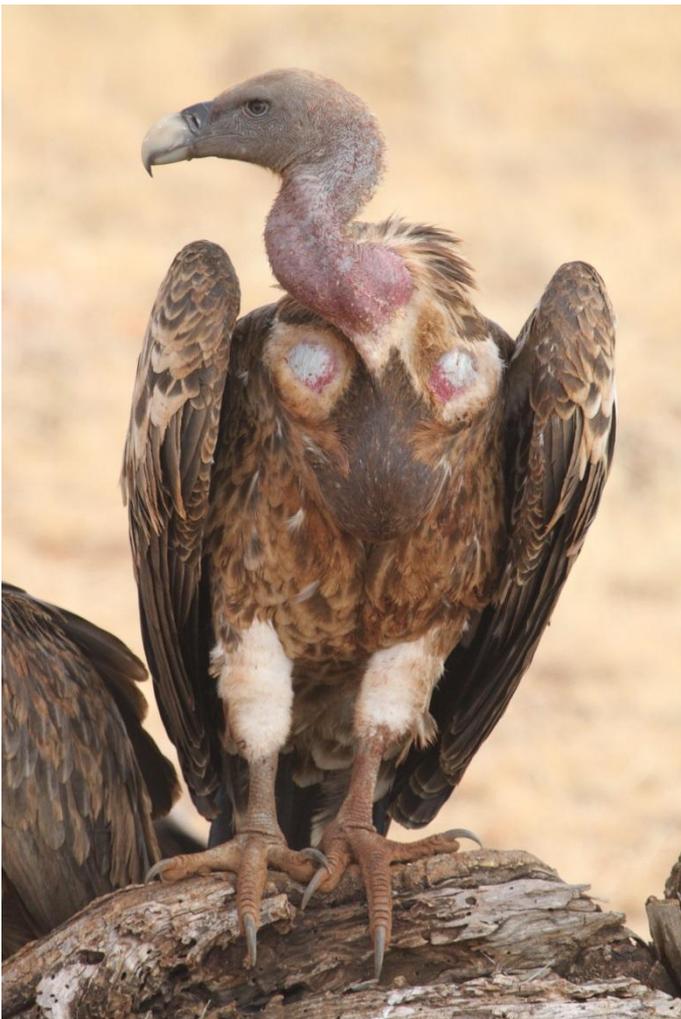
many other birds found in the area. A large troop of olive baboons patrolled the road alongside our vehicle, while vervet monkeys fed in the trees around the lodge and dwarf mongooses pounced on unsuspecting insects just a few metres from my room. It was a nice start to my stay and the next morning we came across the unusual sight of a dead camel being eaten by a lion. Camels are used by the local cattle herders and this one had apparently died of natural causes and been left for the wildlife to dispose of. One solitary lioness was doing her best to oblige and had used the camel's anal passage to open a gaping wound that she was feeding from. Despite the

fact that she clearly did not have her own pride, the lioness had two young cubs, which were several months away from the weaning process and had no idea how to tackle the bloody feast before them. As the mother ripped away at the camels rear, the cubs attempted to imitate her, sucking at the wound and covering themselves in blood. As soon as she had finished eating, the mother spent more than

an hour affectionately cleaning her offspring and playing with them as they climbed all over her and tumbled exuberantly upon one another. Eventually, as they tired and began nuzzling at her underbelly, the patient lioness rolled over and the two cubs suckled ravenously for several minutes. It was a tender scene, but we were both aware that the cubs chances of survival without a pride were not high and that this lioness would have to prove to be an exceptional mother and huntress if they were to live until adulthood. She appeared to be well prepared for the difficulties ahead and was very alert, constantly sniffing the air and eventually moving her cubs on when she sensed that possible danger was approaching. She was



right, for within only a couple of minutes of the families departure, two spotted hyenas walked out of the bush and began their own contribution towards the disposal of the camel. A carcass of this size was too good to ignore and we returned on a number of occasions over the next few days to find hyenas, jackals and hundreds of vultures all eating their fill. On one visit a tawny eagle ripped off a lump of flesh that was so big it made taking to the air again difficult and the eagles inconvenience was immediately seized upon by a marabou stork. The stork was too nervous to actually attempt to part the eagle from its meal and instead stood next to it, waiting for an opportunity to grab at the meat as the eagle tried to fly. Of course the eagle was having none of it and stood its ground with the food in one powerful talon. I was still smiling at the stand off as we drove away, as both birds were situated no more than ten metres from three quarters of a camel, each refusing to either eat or move, as dozens of other birds feasted gleefully beside them.





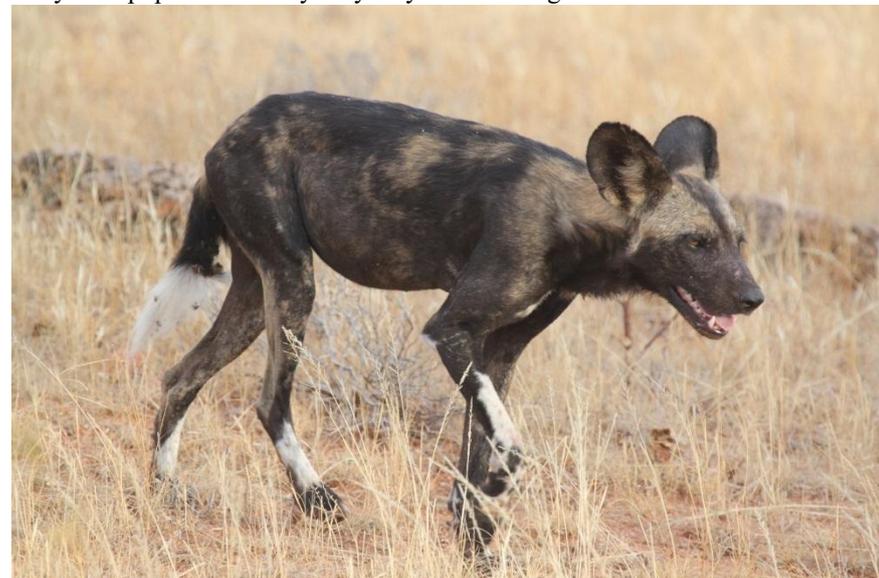
Whilst most of my game driving took place at the more productive Samburu reserve, I did take time out to explore the Shaba and Buffalo Springs areas and was rewarded with nice views of both klipspringer and common waterbuck at Shaba, as well as a herd of over 80 elephants and a pride of lions, one of which was unfortunately collared. In many ways the stunning scenery at Shaba



compensates for the fact that the animals are more elusive there and I enjoyed a superb alfresco lunch at one particularly sumptuous spot along the river. It is rare that I sit down to a formal lunch when looking for wildlife, but this was an idyllic setting and it was nice to stretch my legs having spent so much time in the vehicle. As my guide and I savoured the lunch prepared by the lodge, we were soon joined by two impressive monitor lizards and I guessed that this must be a very popular picnic site and that these resourceful reptiles had probably received more than their share of titbits over the years. A while later, the tranquil scene was completed by a small herd of elephants that came down to drink on the opposite bank. The weather was very hot throughout my stay and on another afternoon I took an impromptu swim in one of the springs after which Buffalo Springs is named. Having refamiliarised myself with much of the area

over the first couple of days, my focus turned back to the wildlife and early one morning I found myself with one of those dilemmas you actually long to be in. Given that we had only experienced one frustratingly brief leopard sighting during the entire trip, we were

both delighted when my guide spotted one sleeping in a tree beside the road and we settled down to see if it looked likely to move. As we did, my guide answered a call from a colleague on his radio and I joked with him to forget it, whatever it was, as we had only just found this leopard and were going to stay with it. He turned round and smiled at me and said that was fine, but he thought he should probably tell me that a pack of wild dogs were running through the reserve. I pondered the information for all of five seconds, but really I had no choice and decided to leave one of my favourite animals in order to try for the creatures that I love seeing in Africa above all others. The area the dogs had been seen in was about a 30-minute drive, but we found what we believed was the entire pack in less than fifteen, as they fortuitously ran in our direction. It was then a case of trying to keep up and praying that they did not stray too far from the road. I counted twelve dogs in all as we followed alongside the pack, a few of which appeared to be last year's pups. Thankfully they stayed within sight of the road for most of the pursuit and when they did finally turn off, it was to



come to a complete stop, at which point another adult and two much younger pups rushed to join them. There were fifteen in all now and we discovered later that night that this was their latest denning area and they had been using it for almost a week. The sighting itself was magnificent and I spent over three hours watching them that day, but it was even better to know where they were denning, as we were able to return on two more occasions and even drive with them running as a pack again when they departed on another hunt. When we eventually left them after the initial encounter, I suggested that we try the hastily abandoned leopard again, more as a joke really, considering how long it had been since we rushed off. As it was, when we returned we found the sleepy cat in almost exactly the same position and were just in time to see it climb to its feet, stretch and then flop back down facing the other direction.

I think that was probably the first time it had moved in several hours and we departed when we quickly realised it had no intention of doing so again for a while. The next day, after spending a large part of the morning with the wild dogs, we had far more luck with leopard, when we found another perched in a tree. On this occasion, however, the leopard was not sleeping and was instead intently focused on a dik-dik that had wandered into the clearing. The tree was not a tall one and when the tiny antelope appeared I thought

there was every chance that we were about to witness the incredibly rare sight of a leopard pouncing from a tree onto its prey. That this did not occur, was mainly down to a second vehicle arriving, which disturbed the dik-dik momentarily, during which time it walked several metres from the tree sheltering the leopard. Unperturbed, the leopard silently slipped from the low branch onto the ground and slinked towards the unsuspecting antelope, taking cover behind an old tree trunk. As the dik-dik continued to feed, blissfully unaware of the imminent danger, it moved further away from the leopard and at one stage there were probably 25 metres separating the two animals. It took the stealthy cat over twenty minutes to narrow the gap, as the tiny antelope kept moving position

and the leopard inextricably followed, hunched and stalking, one silent paw at a time. Eventually the dik-dik, which had still shown no indication that it was aware of any threat, made its way out onto the dirt road just ahead of us and, at the same time, the leopard took its opportunity and stole behind a bush by the roadside, almost imperceptibly closing the gap to little more than two metres. One insubstantial thicket now separated the leopard from its meal and the dik-dik from its doom and we knew that the moment the antelope walked past the bush, the leopard, which was lying pressed flat against the ground, would strike. That is exactly what occurred, but in rising from its prone position, the predator gave the antelope a millisecond to respond and it reacted in a heartbeat, sprinting back towards the open clearing.



The leopard had pounced at almost exactly the same time and it turned just as quickly when it saw its quarry dart away. It was now a straight race across the clearing, if the dik-dik made it to the shelter of the thick vegetation first, it would almost certainly survive, but it was still several metres away as the leopard closed in, sprinting flat out, jaws and body tensed for the final decisive leap. It was at this point that the terrified antelope played the last card that any antelope can play when it knows it cannot outrun a predator, it changed direction. It did not turn to one side or arc round, it simply changed direction on the spot at full speed. The leopard instantly attempted to respond, but it was not quite as agile as the nimble dik-dik and its speed and higher centre of gravity sent it just beyond the point where the antelope had turned. This one brief pause was all the relieved dik-dik required and it dashed into the safety of the bush, leaving the leopard looking sheepishly towards its breathless audience. As always, I had tried to remain emotionally neutral throughout a highly charged and equally exhilarating experience, but I did break



a smile at the tenacity of such a physically insignificant creature managing to elude such a fearsome hunter. In addition to it being an immense privilege to observe, the encounter also demonstrated just how tough life can be for predators as well, as the leopard had done very little wrong and yet it had still failed to kill an animal a fraction of its size and strength and would go hungry for at least a few more hours. Less than thirty minutes later we were parked near some elephants when another dik-dik emerged cautiously from the vegetation and walked across the path just behind our vehicle. I am not sure what made it stop midway, but one moment I was watching a live, healthy dik-dik and the next I was watching a martial eagle eating a dead piece of meat. In the blink of an eye, the eagle had swooped out of nowhere and broken the tiny antelopes neck. Having watched one diminutive dik-dik evade a powerful leopard,

this one had just been killed without even knowing it and it was another timely reminder of just how tenuous life can be in the African bush. Having checked its victim was dead, the formidable eagle gripped the lifeless antelope in both talons and flew to the top of a nearby bush, where it began feeding immediately. Our last day at the three reserves was less dramatic, but no less captivating, as we spent most of the morning watching elephants frolic joyfully in the Ewaso Ngiro River. There is nothing quite like watching these oversized creatures playing in water and on this occasion many of the adults could not resist the temptation and joined their young as they rolled deliriously in the invigorating water. Fortunately, in a way, they eventually left the river and traipsed seemingly reluctantly across the savannah, as I had not wanted to leave them, but we were due to drive to Meru National Park. Less than three days after my departure, following periods of severe drought in the region, the Ewaso Ngiro River experienced a flash flood and several lodges, most of which are positioned directly on the riverbanks, were either destroyed or severely damaged. The riverfront cottage that I had slept in was totally submerged and the Save The Elephants research facility and safari camp were completely demolished. I was just about to leave Meru when I heard the news and my guide told me that the cottages at my lodge had all been occupied and that the guests had to climb onto the roof, as all their possessions were swept away. There were no fatalities reported in the actual reserve, but

people had died in other areas along the river and of course many animals would have suffered, particularly those with young. I had been very lucky and I did consider returning to assess the situation for myself, before deciding that I would only be in the way and would have to check how things had developed when I returned home. Following enormously rewarding stays at all of our previous destinations, for the second year in succession Meru suffered to some degree in comparison, partly due to the fact that we had already

enjoyed so many amazing sightings and partly due to the plain fact that some of the animals here can be more difficult to observe. Our three-day stay was still highly productive and if I had visited this reserve first, I would have been more than happy with the healthy populations of buffalo, elephant, lion, giraffe and zebra encountered, particularly given the gorgeous surroundings. We also had the immense pleasure of finding a white rhino and many beautiful antelope, including a large herd of eland, smaller groups of lesser kudu and several common waterbucks, three of which all looked towards my camera at exactly the right moment. The unanticipated rhino sighting aside, the highlight of our stay at Meru was a frustratingly brief view of a four-toed hedgehog, as these nocturnal animals are more commonly observed in urban areas and I have only ever seen one in an actual reserve, on a night game drive at Lake Manyara in Tanzania. The last destination of my tour would be Tsavo National Park, where I had eight nights in order to assess a number of different lodges and a few new areas. This has always been one of my favourite reserves and I was very excited at the prospect of having so long to explore it properly, with no real time restrictions. As the park is divided into two sections, Tsavo East and Tsavo West, by the main road from Nairobi to Mombasa, I decided to split my nights equally and to spend four at each. Rather incredibly, given the dramatic events with the leopard and martial eagle at Samburu, within fifteen minutes of entering the park, we came across a leopard with a dik-dik hanging out of its mouth. It must have killed the small antelope within the last minute or so and I guessed that it had probably pounced on it from the same tree that it quickly returned to with the carcass clamped firmly in its mouth. There was no real cover to suggest the dik-dik had been ambushed on the ground and I had therefore almost certainly missed leopards falling on prey from above on two occasions within a few days, one as a result of a vehicle arriving at exactly the wrong moment and the other by maybe only a few seconds. It was still lovely to



watch the athletic cat leap up into the tree whilst carrying its prize and by the time that we drove away, there was very little of the dik-dik remaining. Having been successful previously, I was hoping to see wild dog again at Tsavo and on our first morning we decided to visit the Shetani lava flow in the Chyulu Hills, as a pack had been spotted there a few days previously. Given the great distances wild dog can cover in a single day, it was not that much to go on, but it still made sense to check and we set off early in torrential rain. It did not take long to reach the area and almost immediately I spotted two rather bedraggled wild dogs huddled together at the base of the tree. As we surveyed the immediate surroundings, we observed eleven more dogs, all similarly taking shelter from the heavy rain. At this point a colleague of my guide contacted us and mentioned that he was watching four male cheetahs and again I had to decide

whether to leave one superb encounter for the chance of another. Given my penchant for wild dogs, my guide knew my answer before I had even responded and we sat down to wait for the weather to improve, which took over an hour. When it did, the dishevelled dogs began to leave the scant cover of the vegetation and make their way to the road, shaking themselves dry as a domestic dog would after jumping in a pond for a stick. We then noticed that two had been missed on our initial count and that the pack actually consisted of fifteen. As the sun emerged and the dogs began to dry out, two or three lay down in the middle of the road warming themselves and the rest just played, jumping on top of each other and running along the track, before turning sharply and sprinting straight back. They appeared to be even happier about the rain stopping than I was and



it was a real privilege to watch these persecuted and misunderstood animals playing so exuberantly, just for the sheer fun of it. I was reminded even more of domestic dogs when one of the group started dragging and gnawing at a fallen branch and on several occasions my guide had to spin the wheels of our vehicle, as the wild dogs thought that it was great fun to take turns attempting to pierce our tyres. Sadly, as always, the frivolity could not last and when one of the sleeping dogs suddenly jumped to its feet, the rest instantly froze before following the lead dog into the bush. We would see the same pack on two further occasions during my stay, including while I was sitting at a waterhole very early one morning and several black shapes emerged from the treeline, scattering



every animal in the vicinity. This waterhole has always been one of my favourites and to see an entire pack of fifteen wild dogs sprinting towards it and taking it in turns to drink, was another major highlight of the tour. After the initial wild dog sighting, we



decided to try for the four cheetahs and, although we were fortunate to find them fairly quickly, we were less lucky with the weather and it started to pour again. We had another long wait as the cheetahs went to ground, but it was certainly worth it, as the sodden cats were in no hurry to move on once the rain stopped and we spent a large part of the afternoon watching them interact at close quarters. Eventually they turned their attention to hunting and strolled away from the road and out of sight. Almost every day at Tsavo was the same, as the reserve is packed with predators and we encountered eleven cheetahs and nine leopards in all, as well as more lions than I could remember. However, the real bonus came at night, as my lodge at Tsavo West had been allowed to operate night game drives and I managed to book three during my four-night stay. Collectively these were incredibly successful and over three nights we observed all of the animals you would

expect to see spotlighting, including lion, leopard, spotted hyena, black-backed jackal, bat-eared fox and white-tailed mongoose, as well as many that you could never anticipate and I was delighted to find. My personal favourites were an armadillo, which we disturbed in a feeding hole on the side of the road and desperately tried to follow, and a naked mole rat, which, if anything, are even rarer than armadillos. This one was actually spotted in the middle of the road and is I believe the first I have seen completely out in the open, as they are usually observed as no more than a glimpse in a burrow. Wild cat, African civet, small-eared greater galago and a puff adder were all seen for the only time on the trip and we also encountered several African savanna hares, common genets and crested porcupines. The real surprise was a cheetah, not so much because we found it at night, although that is rare enough, but because we found it actively hunting. Given the way in which they generally predate, chasing prey down over open ground in daylight, cheetahs are thought to be one of the few cats that never hunt at night and I had always believed this to be the case, despite the fact that I had seen a couple around antelope at night previously. I had always assumed that they were probably just passing through an area or had been disturbed by a larger predator, but now I am not so sure. This cheetah was definitely hunting impala and not by attempting to get close enough to chase one down across the plains, which would never work in the dark. This was a



different tactic entirely, there was no open ground and the cheetah was actively stalking the impala through thick vegetation. This was ambush hunting, leopard style and my only regret of the trip was that I did not have the opportunity to witness the outcome, as I was fascinated by what, for me at least, was completely new behaviour from an animal I had spent countless hours watching and thought I knew intimately. If we had been in a private reserve we could have left the road and studied the entire event, but we were not able to



in a national park and the impala were gradually moving beyond our view. The last I saw of the cheetah, it was hunched low, still stalking the antelope and it did not appear to be in poor condition or starving, which could have accounted for such an apparent aberration. The inability to be able to follow animals away from the road can be immensely frustrating at times and at Tsavo it also denied us the opportunity to witness the conclusion of a lion hunt involving six sleek lionesses and a herd of nervous zebra, which we had watched patiently for the best part of an hour. It had taken us a while to pick up some of the lions, as they were in their usual hunting formation, spread out over a wide area, with several lying low in the grass, as others attempted to flank the unsuspecting zebra. I have watched this tactic more times than I can remember, with one or two of the more visible lions pressing and eventually running their prey towards those lying in wait in

the long grass. Unfortunately for the lions, and ultimately for us as well, the zebra were aware of their presence reasonably early and kept moving on, never quite allowing the lead lions to get into exactly the right position to trigger the ambush. The lions hiding in the grass had to continually change position and we eventually lost them in the distance, beyond the view of even our binoculars.

Happily, there were plenty of other wonderful distractions during our stay, including large numbers of the characteristic red elephants that Tsavo is famous for and a final afternoon spent following a magnificent leopard, as it carefully marked its territory by spraying urine at obviously designated points and by rubbing the scent glands in its cheeks across a variety of shrubs. Our time at Tsavo ended the next morning almost as it had begun, with a leopard sitting majestically in a tree, although there was still just time to narrowly avoid a vivid green chameleon, that my guide saw late as it walked across the road. The entire tour had been a complete success and whilst I encountered less mammals this year, that was purely because I visited fewer reserves and therefore less differing habitats. Shimba Hills alone had accounted for eight of the 77 mammals observed on the previous trip and I did not visit any coastal areas on this occasion. In combination, the two tours had yielded a remarkable 82 major mammals, again excluding many bats and small rodents, but, and far more importantly as far as I am concerned, a number of extraordinary experiences that I will never forget.



I did not record every destination that each mammal was observed at on this trip and it is therefore likely that some of the animals listed were also viewed at additional destinations.

No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Lion	Panthera leo	Encountered in good numbers at every reserve.
2	Leopard	Panthera pardus	One at Nakuru, four at Samburu and nine at Tsavo.
3	Cheetah	Acinonyx jubatus	Thirty at the Mara, Ol Pejeta, Lewa and Tsavo.
4	Wild Cat	Felis silvestris	One on a night drive at Tsavo West.
5	African Wild Dog	Lycaon pictus	Packs at Samburu and Tsavo West.
6	Black-backed Jackal	Canis mesomelas	Common at every reserve.
7	Side-striped Jackal	Canis adustus	Several sightings in the Mara and at Lewa.
8	Bat-eared Fox	Otocyon megalotis	Large numbers in the Mara and five at Tsavo.
9	Spotted Hyena	Crocuta crocuta	Observed at every destination visited.
10	Striped Hyena	Hyaena hyaena	Individual in the early morning at Lake Nakuru.
11	Honey Badger	Mellivora capensis	One on an extended night drive at Lewa.

12	African Civet	<i>Civettictis civetta</i>	One on a night game drive at Tsavo West.
13	Banded Mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>	Common in the Mara and elsewhere.
14	Common Dwarf Mongoose	<i>Helogale parvula</i>	Regular sightings in the Mara and at Samburu and Tsavo.
15	White-tailed Mongoose	<i>Ichneumia albicauda</i>	Common at night at most reserves, one in the day at Lewa.
16	Slender Mongoose	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>	One each in the Mara and at Tsavo.
17	Common Genet	<i>Genetta genetta</i>	Several at Lewa and Tsavo.
18	Grant's Gazelle	<i>Gazella granti</i>	Encountered at most reserves.
19	Thomson's Gazelle	<i>Eudorcas thomsonii</i>	Common in the Mara and at Ol Pejeta and Lewa.
20	Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>	Large numbers at every reserve.
21	Sitatunga	<i>Tragelaphus spekii</i>	One at Lewa Wildlife Conservancy.
22	Common Waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>	Good numbers at Shaba, Meru and Tsavo.
23	Defassa Waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus defassa ssp</i>	Observed at the Mara, Nakuru, Ol Pejeta and Lewa.
24	Common Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>	Abundant in the Mara, lower numbers at Tsavo.
25	Topi	<i>Damaliscus lunatus</i>	Abundant in the Maasai Mara.
26	Oribi	<i>Ourebia ourebi</i>	Individuals observed in the Mara and at Tsavo West.
27	Common Duiker	<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>	Just one photographed at Ol Pejeta, but probably seen elsewhere.
28	Gerenuk	<i>Litocranius walleri</i>	Seen at every reserve from Ol Pejeta to Tsavo.
29	Lesser Kudu	<i>Tragelaphus imberbis</i>	Low numbers at Meru and Tsavo.
30	Greater Kudu	<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>	Several small herds at Samburu.
31	Beisa Oryx	<i>Oryx beisa</i>	Several sightings at Ol Pejeta, Lewa, Samburu and Tsavo.
32	Klipspringer	<i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>	A few individuals and pairs at Samburu, Shaba and Tsavo.
33	Bohor Reedbuck	<i>Redunca redunca</i>	Only observed in the Maasai Mara.
34	Hartebeest	<i>Alcelaphus buselaphus</i>	Two subspecies seen across most reserves.
35	Common Eland	<i>Tragelaphus oryx</i>	Encountered at most reserves.
36	Kirk's Dik-dik	<i>Madoqua kirkii</i>	First sighting in the Maasai Mara and likely elsewhere.
37	Guenther's Dik-dik	<i>Madoqua guentheri</i>	Healthy populations at Samburu, Meru and Tsavo.
38	Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>	Several in the Mara and a handful at Ol Pejeta and Lewa.
39	Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>	Only two photographed in the Mara and one at Tsavo, but probably seen elsewhere.
40	African Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	Abundant at every reserve visited.
41	Plains Zebra	<i>Equus quagga</i>	Common at every reserve.
42	Grevy's Zebra	<i>Equus grevyi</i>	Low numbers at Ol Pejeta, Lewa and Samburu.
43	Giraffe	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>	Various subspecies observed across every reserve.
44	African Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>	Large numbers at every reserve excluding Nakuru.
45	Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	Common at most reserves.
46	White Rhinoceros	<i>Ceratotherium simum</i>	Good numbers across Nakuru, Ol Pejeta, Lewa and Meru.
47	Black Rhinoceros	<i>Diceros bicornis</i>	Common at Nakuru, Ol Pejeta and Lewa.
48	Aardvark	<i>Orycteropus afer</i>	One on a night game drive at Tsavo West.
49	Olive Baboon	<i>Papio Anubis</i>	Seen at every reserve excluding Tsavo.
50	Yellow Baboon	<i>Papio cynocephalus</i>	Large numbers at Tsavo.
51	Guereza Colobus	<i>Colobus guereza</i>	Small group in adjacent trees at Nakuru.
52	Vervet Monkey	<i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i>	Widespread at every reserve.
53	Small-eared Greater Galago	<i>Otolemur garnettii</i>	One at night at Tsavo West.
54	Northern Lesser Galago	<i>Galago senegalensis</i>	Several at Ol Pejeta and Lewa.

55	Common Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>	Abundant at every reserve.
56	Rock Hyrax	<i>Procavia capensis</i>	Several groups at most reserves.
57	Yellow-spotted Hyrax	<i>Heterohyrax brucei</i>	At least two in the Mara and probably elsewhere.
58	Cape Hare	<i>Lepus capensis</i>	Numerous sightings at Mara, Ol Pejeta and Lewa.
59	African Savanna Hare	<i>Lepus microtis</i>	Large numbers at night at Tsavo.
60	Crested Porcupine	<i>Hystrix cristata</i>	Two at Lewa and six at Tsavo.
61	Four-toed Hedgehog	<i>Atelerix albiventris</i>	Brief sighting of one running into bushes at Meru.
62	Naked Mole Rat	<i>Heterocephalus glaber</i>	One in the road on a night drive at Tsavo West.
63	Coypu	<i>Myocastor coypus</i>	One individual swimming and cleaning at Ol Pejeta.
64	Striped Ground Squirrel	<i>Xerus erythropus</i>	One brief sighting at Lake Nakuru.
65	Unstriped Ground Squirrel	<i>Xerus rutilus</i>	Several at Samburu and Tsavo.



