

NORTHERN TANZANIA

A Wildlife Safari and Beach Holiday for the Hilger's extended family: from the Serengeti & Ngorongoro Crater to the Indian Ocean



DAILY NOTES

July 18th. Arrival into Kilimanjaro Airport, Arusha Tanzania: we all met up at departures in Schipol, Amsterdam airport for the direct KLM flight to Kilimanjaro airport in Tanzania, departing at about 10am. Arrival was on schedule at about 8pm, but there was a large queue and a long wait in Immigration before getting out of the airport to meet our driver/guides Roger and Moses. Being close to the equator with more or less the same 12 hours light and dark each day, it was by now night-time and we made the 45 minute or more drive to Ngare

Sero Lodge along badly lit roads with badly lit vehicles arriving with time for a quick check-in and a late, but welcome supper of bread and soup before getting to our rooms – including two useful and very large family suites.

July 19th. A day to relax at Ngare Sero: There was an 8.30am breakfast scheduled, but some folks were more tired than others and arrived a little later, enjoying a cooked breakfast out in the open beneath still quite cloudy skies. I was up earlier looking at the birds in the grounds, finding some of the special species such as a pair of African Black Ducks and Giant Kingfishers. Thereafter the morning was spent relaxing and recovering from the long journey from the USA to Tanzania. The extensive and attractive gardens and grounds of Ngare Sero provided lots to do including taking short walks around the lake, swinging on swings, petting the pet cats and closely watching a lovely group of Black-and-White Colobus Monkeys with their young.

There was a substantial lunch at about 1pm, where Anthony Raphael, friend and the owner of our ground agent Tanzania Birding joined us. It was a pleasure to meet again his daughter Rhenny Stella who was home from her first year at University in Switzerland. Thereafter there was more down time for swimming for some, snoozing for others or just chilling until supper at 8pm.

July 20th. On to Tarangire National Park: After a 7.30am breakfast we were all packed and headed out in our two Toyota Landcruisers by 9am. The journey westwards to Tarangire National Park took up much of the morning, along paved roads, arriving at a very busy entrance to the National Park by about midday. While Roger and Moses did the paperwork to get us into the Park we had a quick look at some birds – brightly coloured Blue-capped and Red-cheeked Cordonbleus and Red-billed Firefinches were at a little bathing pool (a valuable commodity at this very dry and dusty time of year). White-browed Sparrow-Weavers, Magpie Shrikes and White-crowned Shrikes plus gaudy White-headed Buffalo-Weavers were all noted. From there we continued to the nearby Tarangire Safari Lodge for lunch. The lodge was our first introduction to the wilds of Tarangire, overlooking the Tarangire River below, complete with distant Elephants. After a welcome break and a good lunch, we took a short wander in the lodge grounds where my contact Jacob staked out a couple of lovely roosting African Scops Owls for us and we saw first endemic Ashy Starlings, more brightly coloured Superb Starlings and Yellow-collared Lovebirds.

We then returned to our vehicles to continue on with a game drive this afternoon taking us further into the National Park and on to our overnight stay at Tarangire Sopa Lodge by 5pm. Along the way, apart from some brightly coloured birds such as Saddle-billed Storks, Bateleur Eagles, Helmeted Guineafowl and Lilac-breasted Rollers we spent a good bit of time enjoying ever-increasing and closer views of our first encounters with this National Park's star attraction - African Elephants - of which there were many! Small herds of Zebra mixed with Wildebeest, and our first few Giraffes were welcome additions and added to the initial excitement.

The evening meal at the Tarangire Sopa Lodge was livened up by the customary wonderful singing from the staff choir – they probably perform something every night but still seem to spontaneously enjoy doing it. Once that had finished, they surprised me with a further song and dance to our table to present me with a “Welcome Back” cake – a “thank-you” for returning again and again over so many years – all very kind if a little embarrassing!

July 21st. Tarangire National Park: We set off for the morning at 8.30am to explore this distinctive National Park. The habitats here reflect a drier region subject to seasonal rains and drought. Thornbush is studded with distinctive giant Baobab trees, which are useful stores of moisture for the large Elephant herds in drier times. The Baobab's gargantuan trunks are scarred through generations of gouging by Elephant tusks. Running through the centre of the Park is the Tarangire River with wide grassy palm-dotted flood plains that attract game animals at this dry time of year. One of the main aims this morning was to reach Silale Swamp, which we did, and made the circuit back to the Lodge in time for lunch at about 1pm followed by some down time until a further optional game drive in the late afternoon.

Tarangire is always the best place in northern Tanzania to see large numbers of Elephants and we did very well this morning viewing close-up the large Elephant herds, big matriarchal groups and large lone bulls. It was on our return that we had the best encounter when a large group complete with small young came to a roadside mud pool and began wallowing, splashing mud over themselves and having a grand time before departing to the river for a drink.

Other game seen this morning included a few Impala and Giraffe, small herds of Zebra and Wildebeest, larger herds of Cape Buffalo and a few Bohor Reedbuck and Waterbuck. It was fun to come across a group of about 15 Banded Mongooses (not Mongeese!) that decided a shady spot in the middle of the road in front of us was a good place to rest.

Tarangire is also good bird-watching territory, and we paused occasionally this morning for some of the more colourful, obvious and interesting species. Brightly coloured Superb Starlings and Lilac-breasted Rollers vied with Brown Snake Eagles, Northern Pied Babblers, Bare-faced Go-awaybirds, Von Der Decken's Hornbills and Crested Francolins. As we made our way to and from Silale which had more water remaining than expected. Out in the lush swamp vegetation were numerous Elephants and a small variety of waterbirds were found along the edges. On the return journey we paused to look over the river on one of the few bridge crossings and first found a bright Nile Monitor, then Moses spotted a fine 6-8 foot long Python in a riverside bush – a rare sight indeed as we watched it slowly snake its way through the bush into cover.

After a good lunch and some downtime, we popped out for a short afternoon game drive along the Tarangire river. It was all very pleasant and relaxed, with further large groups of Buffalo and Zebra, but greatly enlivened by a dash to a sighting of our first Lions of the tour. They were quite far away but conveniently lounging on thick branches of a tree allowing prolonged nicely lit views. At first it was just one animal very high up with just a paw or two showing, but it was eventually joined by two more – a mother and large cub as they chose the safety of the tree when a group of Elephants wandered through. They clearly had prey killed nearby as several trees held attendant White-backed and Hooded Vultures waiting for a chance to scrounge a meal from the remains.

As the evening meal drew to a close the staff put on another fine singing and dancing performance, finishing with a “conga line” dance around the tables. Lillian passed by our table and took little Zeller off to join the line which was enjoyed by all – including Zeller!

July 22nd. Tarangire National Park and on towards the Rift Valley: We left the Sopa Lodge at about 8.30am doing a game drive as we headed for the exit of the National Park. Along the way we paused occasionally to watch the groups of Elephants, Zebras, Wildebeest and Cape Buffalos that we passed. A few additional birds of note were seen including Bearded Woodpecker, Coqui Francolins by the roadside and perched African Hawk Eagles. We took a few short detours, firstly along the Tarangire River where some distant waterbirds included Three-banded Plover, African Spoonbill, African Sacred Ibis plus Marabou and Yellow-billed Storks. Closer to the exit, a swing out onto the open, grassy plains found us our first close encounters with a large group of Olive Baboons sauntering across our path.

Once out of Tarangire we headed back along the paved road, further westwards and wound up the steep incline to the top of the Rift Valley cliffs overlooking Lake Manyara below. We made a brief stop at a very large emporium selling everything a tourist to Tanzania could possibly want to buy as a souvenir – but we are a group that wanted little, so we continued on to Karatu and our overnight lodge. We arrived quite late for lunch at a fairly new, small lodge called Martina's Retreat with spacious cabins and a swimming pool that was deemed too cold to enter! The remainder of the afternoon was free that some used to take a wander into the local rural environment on the outskirts of Karatu to see how the locals live. There were a few typical Crater Highland birds in the limited lodge grounds – Baglafaecht Weavers, Tropical Boubous, Bronze and Variable Sunbirds and a very noisy White-browed Robin Chat plus a fly-over Augur Buzzard.

July 23rd. The Ngorongoro Crater. After an early breakfast we set off at about 7.45am on the road that took us into the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA). The check-in and paperwork was surprisingly quick, but as we entered the NCA and began winding up the road through thick forest towards the crater rim, the substantial traffic of safari vehicles ground to a halt and was stuck for half an hour or so while a broken down lorry, blocking the road was towed clear.

It was a cold and very misty morning as we went up through the forest and turned right onto the crater rim road taking us anti-clockwise to the road down into the crater past the old Sopa Lodge. However, as we descended, the mist cleared, and we were treated to a cool, clear visit for the day until we headed out for the Serena Lodge at about 4pm.

The Ngorongoro Crater, sometimes called "the eighth wonder of the world" lived up to its name today with masses of absurdly close resident Zebra and Wildebeest milling about in dense, noisy groups. Spotted Hyenas meandered through and around them causing occasional panic, while two lots of Lions were more relaxed and cryptic having seemingly eaten well the night before! We enjoyed our first Grant's and Thomson's Gazelles and many more Cape Buffalo. Sadly, there were no sightings today of the Black Rhinoceros that survive here – the time of year made a lot of the grassland very dry and unpalatable for them, and they were probably lurking in lush bush on the crater slopes. The fresh and soda lakes and associated swamps are now very much more extensive than in past years but provided some great looks at our first Hippopotami – many of them out of the water as it was such a cool day and they had no worries about sunburn! The wet areas also provided us with a whole new and extensive array of birds – masses of different ibises, herons, egrets, ducks and shorebirds, Grey Crowned Cranes, Great White Pelicans, Yellow-billed Storks, masses of flamboyant pink Greater and Lesser Flamingos. Other more interesting species during the day were bright little Malachite Kingfisher, several huge Kori plus Black-bellied Bustards, Martial Eagle, Black-winged Kite and Augur Buzzard. Despite there being large numbers of other landcruisers present, it wasn't too disturbing and obtrusive to our enjoyment of this unique place.

By the late afternoon we began our exit via the one-way ascent road to our nearby lodge. The drive up the steep switchback road through thick forest was impressive as is the location of the lodge at 7,500 feet ASL, nestled in forest on the crater rim with panoramic views of the crater floor of the immense caldera of Ngorongoro below. I did a bit of birding in the grounds of the Serena Lodge soon after arrival and found it surprisingly active despite it being outside the breeding season. Extremely close and often multiple views were had of Bar-throated and Brown-headed Apalises, White-eyed Slaty and Dusky Flycatchers, White-browed and Cape Robin-chats, Streaky and Thick-billed Seed eaters, Northern Double-collared, Bronze and Amethyst Sunbirds, Dusky Turtle Dove, Eastern Mountain Greenbul, Spectacled and Baglaffeht Weavers, Chinspot Batis and more. The acrobatic performance was watched and enjoyed by the group prior to a good evening meal at about 7pm.

July 24th. To The Central Serengeti: A bit of pre-breakfast birding at the lodge produced a few extra species – Tacazze Sunbird and Mbulu White-eye included. We left the lodge and the Ngorongoro area by about 8.30am on our continuing journey west, first a little further around the crater rim, then a descent into the start of the vast Serengeti plains. The road was bumpy and dusty, but we arrived at our first stop by mid-morning to visit a Maasai village complete with herds of cattle, goats and sheep and a welcoming group of Maasai to show the group what it is like living in the Maasai tradition. They showed us something of their sometimes nomadic way of life and traditions living in simple, temporary mud and skin huts and put on some song and dance plus the "hard sell" at the end of the tour. We then went further west into the flatter plains at the start of the Serengeti, arriving at the archaeological site of Olduvai Gorge shortly afterwards. Here there was a brief introductory talk followed by a leisurely wander around the fairly new and highly informative museum that plotted the rise and fall of various hominids including our own species. The whole place overlooks the layered rocks of the gorge where all these discoveries were made. While the group were doing that, I took a short wander in the dry acacia scrub around and added some more birds to the list such as White-browed Scrub-Robin, Southern Grosbeak Canary, Rock Martin and Yellow-bellied Eremomela.

Now it was time, at 11.30am, to head more determinedly towards the Serengeti National Park – a longish drive along further rutted and dusty roads into the central Seronera area and beyond to the Serena Lodge. We were driving for many miles across open short grass plains encountering plenty of Thomson's and Grant's Gazelles along with Zebras, a few Giraffes all mixed in with the Maasai livestock. At the official border between the NCA and the National Park we turned off on the side road towards Ndutu and stopped out in the middle of nowhere to have our picnic lunch. Our first Black-backed Jackals and African Golden Wolf were seen before we got our permits at one of the Ranger Posts and went on to Naabi Gate to check into the Park driving past numerous Kori Bustards and a surprising number of Secretarybirds.

Once on our way past Naabi we motored resolutely on, arriving at the lodge by about 4.30pm across many miles of the Serengeti appreciating the huge scale of this ecosystem that we will now be travelling through for several days. And the Serengeti really is huge – a vast preserve of 5,675 square miles, with a further 3,200 square miles protected in the surrounding Ngorongoro Conservation Area – the whole ecosystem is the size of Belgium or the state of Maryland!

After checking in to the very attractive lodge Joan and I did a bit of birding in the grounds accompanied by one of the trainee naturalists. There was a good selection of classic dry country birds seen – Red-cheeked Cordonbleus, Purple Grenadiers, Green-winged Pytilia, Slate-coloured Boubou, Sulphur-crested Bush-shrike, Fork-tailed Drongo, African Hoopoe, Red-headed Weaver, Emerald-spotted Wood-dove, White-bellied Canary, Grey (African) Penduline Tit, Red-throated Tit and Mariqua Sunbird included.

July 25th. The Central Serengeti: We set off for a morning game drive at about 8am heading towards the Seronera River area with its braided small meandering streams and associated riverine or gallery forest of Yellowbark Acacias ("fever" trees). The weather was pleasantly warm and sunny and on the way there we came across a substantial pride of Lions – 16 or more, all females with well-grown cubs, that sat out on low rocks gradually appearing one by one and walking briefly towards us before disappearing into a hollow with some wetter vegetation until there was only one left which could have been easily overlooked had we not seen the majority of the group meandering in view beforehand. Thereafter we drove around the various tracks and trails of Seronera finding many wallowing Hippopotami in the rather squalid, smelly patches of water remaining in the riverbed. Most just loafed, largely submerged, staying out of the sun, while a few others were seen wandering along the banks. The first couple of Nile Crocodiles were seen by one of the vehicles. We had no luck in finding Leopards, who favour spending their days in the cool safety of suitable large acacia trees along the meandering river courses, but there was plenty else to keep our interest including mating attempts by a couple of the many Elephants. There were plenty of birds seen along the way in great sunlight – Fischer's Lovebirds in the same tree as Meyer's Parrots and Lilac-breasted Rollers couldn't get much more colourful.

We took a short break at the Seronera Visitor Centre while Moses and Roger attempted in vain to find some diesel for the vehicles. The Visitor Centre had been totally gutted and rebuilt since I was last here in January but still held some interesting displays and information and a few small birds of interest – Grey-capped Social Weavers, Purple Grenadiers, Kenya Rufous Sparrow and Speckle-fronted Weavers for example.

The open grassland and scant acacia scrub held an abundance of Cape Buffalo, smaller gazelles and big herds of Zebra which we watched coming down to drink by one of the Hippo pools – it could barely be called drinking water – more like liquid sewage from the Hippos upstream! Back a little after 1pm, we took a break until going out again at 4pm.

Roger & Moses took us along some minor roads free of most other tourists and landcruisers, more directly from the Serena Lodge towards the Seronera area this afternoon, taking us across vast areas of seemingly endless short grass plains full of Thomson's Gazelles and Impala plus better and first looks at Coke's Hartebeest (Kongoni) and a few Topi classically standing atop a large termite mound. While watching these we noticed that many were staring in one direction and on closer scrutiny noticed that there were a couple female Lions quite

close to the road and very obvious to all the game around. They were clearly not in hunting mood and spent their time preening and cleaning one another in an affectionate bonding session. Driving further along these pleasantly quiet tracks far from the crowds we came across a pair of White-bellied Bustards in the road, then a large dark lump in the distance – my first ever Black Rhinoceros in this part of the Serengeti! It was a long way off, but some of us managed scope views and it was a very welcome and unexpected bonus after having not found them in their usual haunt in Ngorongoro Crater.

Roger and Moses did a sterling job his afternoon timing the return perfectly as the sun set over this magical place, the birds went to roost and the game animals began their nighttime alert as the Hyenas and other predators stirred after we'd returned to the lodge by 7pm.

July 26th. To The Northern Serengeti: We set off from the lovely Serena Lodge at about 8.30am on safari into the northern areas of the Serengeti. First was a gentle game drive through the backtracks from the lodge towards the Seronera area where some of the group caught up with their first large Crocodile. Elephants and Giraffes, large herds of gazelles and Zebra dotted the vast and inspiring landscape. We then motored a little more swiftly north towards the Ikoma Gate entry/exit to the National Park, pausing occasionally for close roadside Giraffes, Elephants and more. The roads north to Kogatende in the north of the Serengeti are poor within the Park, so we left and made a journey along rural roads through villages to the Tabora Gate near Mugumu where we re-entered the Serengeti and had our picnic lunch. Of course, there were many birds seen en route - Dark Chanting Goshawk, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Striped Kingfisher, Red-faced Crombec, Sooty Chat and Black-necked Weaver, all being new.

Once back in the Serengeti National Park we were travelling through further huge areas of savannah and scrubby open forest with a slightly different mix of trees – miombo with acacia. We had plenty of time available so made our way directly to the famous Mara River in the hope that we might coincide with truly large numbers – tens of thousands perhaps – of Wildebeest. As we neared the river we came across the superb sight of more and more herds of Wildebeest mixed with Zebras out on the rolling grasslands. The Wildebeest are now towards the top end of their 500-mile clockwise circular migration as they follow the rains and the resultant regeneration of green grasses all the way north to the Mara area of Kenya by August. As we got closer to the river, we became aware of increasing numbers of Wildebeest in determined long lines mindlessly following each other and when we reached the Mara it was obvious why! There was a truly unique, memorable, indescribable spectacle going on as thousands of Wildebeest were crossing the water in massed groups scrabbling in and scrabbling out up the steep muddy slopes. It looked like utter chaos and bedlam even if they had all been going in a single direction, but absurdly, hundreds crossed in one direction then similar numbers turned about and came back. It all seemed frenzied, and inexplicably mad. Roger explained that some/much of the chaos might be due to last year's young, now 6 months old, but still tagging along with their mothers, becoming lost or left behind, causing the hubbub of calling and backtracking. This whole extraordinary scene went on for over half an hour before quietening down a little, by which time we witnessed the sad scene of lost and trampled animals, some stuck in the mud, others washed downstream – all very upsetting and pointless from an anthropomorphic viewpoint, but given that there are well over a million Wildebeest in this population, then the chaos and resultant carnage is all part of “the circle of life” as Disney would have us believe! However, I came away wishing I could persuade them all to quietly go over the river just the once and back each migration and do it in an orderly unpanicked fashion! Away from the Mara River thousands more Wildebeest were peacefully grazing in contented herds right the way up to and in front of our Tented Camp – but no doubt they may well be joining the craziness of the river crossing themselves sometime soon.

The Tented Camp was a stark change from the luxury of the lodges we'd been staying in up till now, but everyone seemed to adapt and appreciate the difference – out in the middle of nowhere with just 12 tents and no crowds of other tourists and animals all around.

July 27th. The Northern Serengeti: After a night of listening in our tents to the sound of Hyenas and passing Wildebeest, we set off on safari at 8.30am, heading in a winding trail down to the Mara River again. We passed

the first large concentrations of vultures we'd seen during the holiday – Ruppell's Griffons and White-backed Vultures mainly, with a few Marabou Storks, Lappet-faced and Hooded Vultures too. These were clearly here to cash in on the abundance of food available as some of the Wildebeest gathered and failed to survive crossing the river. Eventually we were in position on the river edge where Wildebeest were congregating and anticipating crossing over. Numbers built up and eventually they went ahead in the same frenzied and chaotic manner as we saw yesterday afternoon. We wondered why they chose such an awkward rocky place to cross as numerous animals struggled and fell, got stuck between boulders and succumbed. I know it is all part of the plan and “nature's way”, but it is gruesome at times and very sad to watch. Making matters more interesting/horrific this morning were the large Nile Crocodiles in attendance, all of whom leisurely swam about selecting exhausted animals to grab, drag under the water and eat. At least one of the more sensitive souls in our group was reduced to tears and several others of us were close! Further along the river we managed some slightly more dispassionate views of many huge Crocodiles hauled out on the sand banks – even admiring them and admitting they have to make a living too.

A few new and bright birds lightened the atmosphere a little – a Brown Snake Eagle was seen catching a snake (nobody cried for the snake!). Wattled, Spur-winged and Crowned Lapwings all showed well as did Lilac-breasted Rollers, a fine perched Grey Kestrel, soaring Bateleurs and a massive Martial Eagle. At the other end of the spectrum, some in my vehicle feigned a modicum of interest in side-by-side comparisons of Rattling and Winding Cisticolas.

Back for lunch by about 12.30pm., we took a break in the heat of the day (and it was hot today) until a final game drive at 4pm – copiously avoiding the river and any possible carnage of Wildebeest. We didn't avoid the Wildebeest themselves – there were still uncountable thousands of them scattered across every horizon – some in races of “follow the leader” for no obvious reason, others more tranquil as they grazed the open plains and into the bush country. We explored along the Mara River for a while finding more huge Crocodiles and then went inland through some of the small kopjes and longer grass – all looking great habitat for Cheetahs and Leopards, but sadly no sign of either from any of the other landcruisers we passed. However, it was a beautiful drive through amazing country with a few interesting birds added to the list – White-headed Barbets in a remarkable large fig tree growing on top of a kopje and a young Martial Eagle perched up ready to go to roost. We were back late after a glorious sunset.

July 28th. Return to Arusha and onwards to the Indian Ocean: We had a short game drive this morning on the way to the Kogatende airstrip which allowed us to wave goodbye to the thousands of Wildebeest still walking round in circles on the northern Serengeti. The airstrip was extremely busy with landcruisers going back and forth with many tourists arriving and departing. However, with our private charter the check-in was simple, and the 12-seater plane arrived on time to fly us back to the domestic airport in Arusha to refuel and then on to Kwajoni airstrip on the Indian Ocean coast near Pangani. The pilots flew us directly over Olmoti Volcano on the first leg and Kilimanjaro stood out high above the clouds. At Arusha airport there was a brief mess-up when the staff unnecessarily took our bags off the plane to go through security, despite being a self-contained charter only stopping to refuel. The stop took an hour instead of the 10-15 minutes due to the slow arrival of all the red-tape and paperwork that the pilots needed to set off again. However, we were circling over the Kwajoni airstrip to check it out before landing, by about 2.30pm, and on our way the short distance to the Emayani Beach Resort soon after. The resort, as its name suggested, was right on the beach, all very open plan and airy – hopefully a pleasant relaxed last couple of days of the holiday with everyone “doing their own thing”.

In late afternoon I wandered north up the beach to where a small river enters the sea and back down a track slightly inland through mangroves, coconuts and casuarina trees. It was a surprisingly pleasant temperature with a breeze and not too humid, and the birding was interesting. At the river's mouth out on the sand spit were a good selection of shorebirds, some local species mixed in with northern species obviously not bothering to migrate north this season to breed. c.15 Eurasian Whimbrel, c.6 Grey (Black-bellied) Plovers and Common Sandpipers, 3-4 Terek Sandpipers plus single Ruddy Turnstone and Sanderling shared the beach with large numbers of Lesser and Greater Sandpipers and a single, more local White-fronted Sandplover. Best of all was a

group of 4-5 Crab Plovers. With them were several Greater Crested Terns and single Caspian Tern. Returning inland was equally interesting, finding Olive, Collared and Purple-banded Sunbirds plus a couple of Eastern Black-headed Batises and a group of Black-bellied Starlings seen well.

At supper we met with the local dive master to arrange a snorkel trip to the nearby Maziwe Marine Reserve for 11am tomorrow.

July 29th. At Emayani, on the beach: We all showed up at about 8.30am for breakfast, but a little later were informed that the winds were too strong – and predicted to get stronger – for the snorkel trip which involves a 30-minute fast boat ride each way. So, the morning was spent relaxing at the resort – kids swimming in the pool, some folks walking to the nearby village and generally “chilling”.

After lunch we did a mid-afternoon walk up the beach to the river again, finding a similar range of shorebirds in good light and close up - the Crab Plovers were as impressive as ever. Additions were Curlew Sandpiper on the beach, African Fish Eagle and Black Kite overhead and Dimorphic and Little Egrets and a couple of Pied Kingfishers fishing in the shallows. One of the kingfishers caught a good sized fish and was watched bashing it into submission on a branch before swallowing it whole. Unfortunately, the walk through the inland path from the beach produced almost nothing at all this afternoon. Once back at the lodge some enjoyed scope views of the many Epauletted Fruit Bats hanging high in the open palm-frond roof – quite good looking for a bat!

In the Evening Anthony, owner of Tanzania Birding arrived, ready to do some exploration of a fairly nearby forest reserve with me tomorrow morning. The group met with the diving guy again and arranged for a morning snorkel session tomorrow.

July 30th. At Emayani, on the beach: The group were up and having breakfast at 7am just as Anthony and I were heading off for the morning's birding exploration. Our journey took us 1.5 hours along unmade roads, alongside a new road in process of being built and many twists and turns to reach the village of Sakura where we were joined by the local Park Ranger to set off for the forest edge. The area is protected, but suffers from illegal wood-cutting and poaching, and has one long, straight unmade road going through it that we spent the morning from about 8.30am until midday walking – c.5-6 km in total. The main goal was for Anthony to check whether the local race (possibly to be split) of Barred Owlet was present. We didn't find one but got a lot of response to playback of its call from the small birds of the forest suggesting that they are present. It was a fun and different thing to do, and we found a few birds of interest for me that I'd not seen in many years. Best of the bunch were 2-3 Tanzania Illadopsis – possibly split from Pale-throated. Also present were Yellow-streaked Greenbul, but we only heard Lowland Tiny Greenbul. Madagascar Bee-eaters, Boehm's Spinetail, Purple-banded and Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbirds, Ashy Flycatcher and Square-tailed Drongo were among the more interesting species found.

We got back to the Lodge at about 2pm and were surprised to discover that the group who had gone out snorkelling at 8am this morning was still not back. They appeared a little later, ready for lunch and with tales of a fairly choppy boat crossing and snorkelling experience that wasn't quite as idyllic as hoped for! The younger members found conditions difficult and hadn't had the experience to know how to cope in such conditions, but apparently the second location, snorkelling off the beach was a little better and some fine and colourful fish were seen.

Whilst chatting after lunch the little bird bath by the lodge produced Reichenow's Woodpecker and a small group of Bronze Mannikins, while Lauren spotted a very out of season Osprey fishing directly offshore. Anthony and I walked up the beach to the river mouth to look at Crab Plovers which he rarely sees, but this afternoon there were none. However, the usual good range of shorebirds were present which kept him amused. On the way back through the scrub we found a quartet of lovely Brown-breasted Barbets which were new for the quite impressive list of birds seen by us so far at the Lodge.

July 31st. Homewards: It was very convenient to be able to keep our rooms at the Emayani Beach Lodge until time of departure at 2pm this afternoon. It allowed for final dips in the pool, dips in the sea, walking to the village and a bit of birding for Anthony and myself. We wandered in and beyond the grounds after breakfast towards the village finding Grey-Olive Greenbuls, African Golden Oriole, Mangrove Kingfisher and a Broad-billed Roller. After a mid-morning break at the Lodge, we did a final walk up to the river mouth where there were some splendid Crab Plovers for Anthony amidst the usual good array of shorebirds. We also had fly-over African Openbill Storks and more Broad-billed Rollers.

We had lunch at about 12.30pm and did final packing, paying bills etc. before setting off on the short but bumpy ride to the Kwajoni airstrip where our charter plane awaited us, allowing an ahead of schedule departure on the short flight to Dar Es Salaam domestic airport. Here, as arranged, the Hotel Blue Sapphire was there to meet us and transfer us the 15 minutes to a reasonable cool hotel, for a wash and brush up, evening meal and repacking prior to the evening KLM flight to Amsterdam departing at 11.15pm.

August 1st. Homewards: We arrived on schedule into Schipol at about 7.30am and went our separate ways – the group into Amsterdam for a day or two to break the long journey home and myself back to Islay where I arrived by the evening on two more short flights and long periods of time enjoying the interiors of Amsterdam and Glasgow airports!

Note: The accompanying checklist of wildlife is an accumulation of everything that I recorded during the tour. “h” = heard only and “x” = present but not counted.

