

NORTHERN TANZANIA BIRDING **JANUARY –FEBRUARY 2024**

Birding & Wildlife in the Serengeti, Ngorongoro Crater & Beyond

January 18th – February 7th 2024

Participants: Alan & Margaret Heavisides and Andrew & Sheila Barker

Organised & Guided by Peter Roberts

Driver – Geitan

Ground Agent – Tanzania Birding & Beyond Safari

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TOUR NOTES

January 18th. Depart UK. We all set out from Edinburgh on a Qatar Airlines flight to Doha which, as far as flying goes, wasn't too bad. We arrived into the massive, modern Doha airport at about midnight and transferred fairly directly to the onward flight to Tanzania.

January 19th. Arrival into Tanzania. The Qatar Airlines flight from Doha, direct to Kilimanjaro was being done in a much less pleasant Oman airlines plane. We arrived more or less on time, got our visas, collected all our luggage and met up with the transfer vehicle to the very nearby KIA Lodge, just a few minutes away. They weren't too busy and we'd arranged to get to our rooms immediately on arrival at about 8am.

It was a dry and sunny day and the gardens were very lush after the recent unseasonal rain. Birds were all over the place and Andrew and Alan were up for a bit of birding, despite the lack of sleep. Sunbirds were particularly active – lots of Variable and Scarlet-chested in family groups. Spotted Morning Thrushes, Superb Starlings, Lesser Striped Swallows, Scarce Swift, a very smart Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrike and several Blue-naped Mousebirds got us off to a good start. We paused for mid-morning coffee with Margaret and Sheila who had managed a quick nap, then took a break, some of us making use of the pool. I wandered the grounds further looking for the two bat species and the Spotted Eagle Owl that I know to be here. Bumping into one of the garden staff called Laser, whom I'd met on previous visits turned out well. He is interested in the birds and wandered with me, his sharp eyes picking out 3 different Barn Owls roosting. Eventually, by the pool, at the bottom of an overhang that I'd never dream of looking at, he found the Spotted Eagle Owl, sat below us on a nest! Luckily the others were on the spot, by or in the pool and all got a good look at the ferocious, glowering face staring up at us. We rounded the morning off with a quick look at one of the Barn Owls which was right outside one of our cabins.

Lunch was supposed to be at 1pm, but some, myself included had set the wrong time and turned up at 2pm! Never mind, the cold beer was welcome. A further break with a plan to go birding in the grounds again at 4pm was scuppered by a change in the weather as huge towering cumulus clouds gathered and thunder rumbled threatening rain with an accompanying strong wind.

January 20th. To Mkomazi National Park: The planned pre-breakfast birding was abandoned due to awakening to more thunder and rain which had just about stopped by the time we were due to leave KIA Lodge at 8.30am. Geitan, our driver/guide introduced himself, loaded the Toyota Landcruiser and off we went, east towards Mkomazi National Park located in North Eastern Tanzania bordering Tsavo National Park in Kenya. Happily, we left the rain and clouds behind on a fairly long morning drive through rural, agricultural Tanzania, through Moshi and on to Same. We made one stop in suitable dry *Commiphora* bush habitat where a number of special bird species can be found only here within Tanzania. These include birds at the southern limit of their range and needing specialised habitat conditions. Despite the heat of the late morning, we wandered on foot through some suitable scrub and found a small selection of these - Pink-breasted Lark, Somali Bunting, Grey Wren-Warbler and Red-fronted Prinia. Most impressive here was the remarkable view of Mt. Kilimanjaro. Quite often on these tours I don't see the mountain, or much of it at all, but today it was in full view from the lower slopes to the flat peak with glaciers and snow cover.

After a reasonable picnic lunch out in the bush, we decided to continue the short distance to our accommodation, check-in, take a short break and go out and try our luck again after it had cooled down a little. This short afternoon excursion on the approach road that winds up into the South Pare Mountains produced a couple of further good localised species, best being superb views of male Hunter's Sunbird., along with more widespread species such as a quintet of displaying D'Arnaud's Barbets, Lappet-faced Vulture and Red-chested Cuckoo,

Although I'd mentioned that the Elephant Motel was not the greatest place to stay in, and that all other accommodation should be much better on this tour, everyone seemed OK with what they found, had a decent, simple supper with staff that are friendly enough.

January 21st. Mkomazi National Park: A quick wander around the gardens/grounds of the hotel pre-breakfast was very quiet indeed, with still no sign of the hoped-for large hornbills. After a meagre breakfast we headed out at 8am for a full day to explore the different habitats in Mkomazi National Park. Covering over 3,200 km² dominated by *Acacia/Commiphora* vegetation, Mkomazi offers further good chances to find some of the species sought for yesterday, plus other special birds we'd not find elsewhere. In these one day runs around such rich areas, it is inevitable that some species will go unseen, but we did fairly well with a sprinkling of quite special birds. Best of all was the cool, cloudy, but dry weather (at least until 4pm when we were heading back).

Buff-crested Bustard was heard close and loud, but couldn't be coaxed into view. After so much unseasonal rain of late, the Park was incredibly lush and verdant with tall, thick grass and plenty of leaf cover on the trees and bushes, making it lovely for the birds, but tricky to see them. The really great finds were Golden-breasted and Fischer's Starlings, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, Ashy Cisticola, Eastern Yellow-billed Hornbill (one of four hornbill species today) and Northern Carmine Bee-eater. There were plenty of other good birds and first sightings causing excitement along the way such as Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Tawny Eagles, Red-billed and White-headed Buffalo-Weavers, Red-headed Weaver and very spiffy male Pin-tailed Whydahs. On the return it did rain as some black storm clouds caught up with us. We had the roof down for a while, but happily the rain stopped and we popped the roof up at some marshy areas with tall vegetation where a lovely trio of breeding-plumaged birds were strutting their stuff - White-winged Widowbirds, Black-winged and Zanzibar Red Bishops.

With the vegetation so lush, our hopes of finding many of the game animals were much reduced, and none of the more special mammals were found. However, about 20 Giraffes, a lone Elephant and a few Dik-dik, Grant's Gazelles, Zebra and an Impala kicked things off. Throughout the day in Mkomazi we were amazed and delighted with the massive numbers of butterflies of umpteen different species. Huge numbers of "whites" fluttering over the grasslands and dense groups of bright yellow butterflies

in puddles and on mud in the road, along with gorgeous swallowtails, monarchs, and species resembling Orange-tips, fritillaries and sulphurs,

January 22nd. To Ndarakwai: Still no sign of the large hornbills before breakfast and away on a long drive returning westwards straight afterwards at 8am, We had an hour of birding in the dry scrub again, near to where we'd been on the way in two days ago. It was still slow-going, but we managed to add a few species including localised birds such as Southern Grosbeak Canary, along with more widespread stuff – White-browed Scrub-Robin and Golden-breasted Bunting.

After that welcome break it was driving for the remainder of the morning to reach Ndarakwai by lunchtime. The weather stayed good; dry with a few clouds. However, previous rains had washed away the “usual” track into Ndarakwai and we had to be guided in by a staff member in a landrover along a different route. We arrived by a little after 1.30pm and went straight for lunch – a very good meal indeed after the basic fare at Elephant Motel. Then a quick check-in to our tents and meeting up again for an afternoon of birding on foot, having had quite enough of driving this morning.

Ndarakwai is a huge tract of private land bordering close to Amboseli National Park in Kenya. We met again at about 3pm for a wander of the grounds, then took a walk with an armed guard further afield from 4pm until about 5.30pm. The rains had made everywhere here incredibly lush and green, and the birds seemed to appreciate it as there was plenty of activity. In the grounds were called in Red-fronted Tinkerbird, first Klaas Cuckoo and Beautiful Sunbird. On our walk we found African Firefinches, Tawny-flanked Prinias, Chinspot Batis, Hildebrandt's Starlings, Speckled and Blue-naped Mousebirds – all giving excellent views. We called for our ride back at 5.30pm and enjoyed a G&T and first Black-backed Puffbacks on the patio of the dining area before heading to our rooms to clean up prior to supper.

This is the only place on our tour where it is possible to take a night drive and so we set out after a splendid supper in the open landcruiser with a driver and spot-lighter out across the concession to see what we could find. As expected, with so much unseasonal rain, the vegetation was profuse and made it nigh-on impossible to pick out any small nocturnal mammals – disappointing, but you never know until you try. We did see the eyes of a 2-3 fast-disappearing Bat-eared Foxes and a few antelopes, but otherwise the interest was a few nocturnal birds. We heard Slender-tailed and Square-tailed Nightjars, and saw several nightjars in the road in front of us – one at least was certainly Square-tailed. Best find was a pair of Three-banded (Heuglin's) Coursers seen close and well by the roadside.

January 23rd. Ndarakwai and return to Arusha. We awoke to a very impressive dawn chorus including wintering Nightingales. Birding pre-breakfast produced a few new birds – Bare-eyed Thrush and Red-fronted Barbet being particularly noteworthy.

As we wanted to arrive at Ngare Sero in good time this afternoon, and Geitan needed to head off to Mwanza to meet us two days hence, we decided on a short morning game drive/birdwatch in Ndarakwai followed by early lunch at 11am, which all worked very well.

We went out in the lodge's open landcruiser and had a lovely, slow and productive time finding many good birds. I was particularly pleased to find two less often noted cisticolas – Tiny and Stout, both seen well. More colourful finds included numerous White-browed Scrub-Robins, Taita Fiscal, Chinspot Batis, Beautiful Sunbirds, Rufous Sparrows, Brown-crowned Tchagra and African Pygmy Kingfisher. “Other stuff” included first Laughing Dove and Bateleur, a couple of Foxy (now lumped back with Fawn-coloured) Larks, and Ovambo Sparrowhawk, It was fascinating to watch a Yellow-throated Rock Sparrow tackling and eating a caterpillar almost as big as itself. Back at the lodge at the end of the drive there was a gorgeous male Golden-backed Weaver performing by the little pool.

Returning right on time at 10.30am, we were able to pack and get ready for a prompt departure at midday, arriving at Ngare Sero by a little after 2pm. For the first time since I've been staying here we

were given huge rooms in the main building – wonderful hang-overs from a grand colonial time. We had afternoon tea and coffee on our own verandah and then set out for a leisurely wander in the grounds at about 4pm. Ngare Sero Lodge is very pleasant with flower gardens, the lake and a swimming pool. The birding wasn't as productive as I'd have wished for, with several of the target species not showing (yet!). We did see the usual African Fish Eagle and nesting Grosbeak (Thick-billed) Weavers plus a trio of pretty little Mountain Wagtails. First out however, we stood too close to an ant's nest or column and had a fine old game being bitten as the large, frustrated ants bit into us up our trouser legs and beyond! It had been a good, dry and sunny day again, cool this morning, but heating up quite a bit this afternoon, so eventually towards the end of the afternoon the swimming pool won out over birds, though Alan did manage to see our first Silvery-cheeked Hornbill late in the day.

After supper we stood out on the lawns and eventually called in a couple of the resident African Wood Owls – calling back to us noisily, but only giving fly-by views as they emerged from the thick canopy of one tree into another.

January 24th. Arusha National Park. The day started with some optional pre-breakfast birding where Alan and I independently found the African Black Duck – a family of them in fact. Also present on the lake was the Giant Kingfisher. Around the lodge grounds were African Emerald Cuckoo, White-eared Barbets, Olive, Collared and Amethyst Sunbirds and more.

Unfortunately Margaret was out of action with an upset stomach, so it was just four of us setting off for the day in nearby Arusha National Park, with our driver/guide Godbless at 8.30am. The Park is dominated by rugged Mt. Meru (14,979 ft.), and it was crystal clear in a bright sunny sky for much of the day. This small jewel of a park (just 55 sq. miles) is remarkably diverse. At the entrance gate, just 20 minutes or so from the lodge, we called in a very confiding couple of Singing Cisticolas, after which the morning was spent in the thick moss-laden forest on the slopes of Mt Meru at about 6,000 feet. On the way to the ascent road we paused to admire a group of Cape Buffalo on one of the grassy plains, where a lone Black Stork was a welcome addition. We also came across a remarkably confiding Harvey's (Natal Red) Duiker in the forest – the only place we are likely to find one on the tour. Once Godbless had done a magnificent job of driving us up a tortuous track to the Fig Tree Arch, we were out of the vehicle and birding for a good hour and a half. Forest birds never give themselves up easily, and we certainly missed a few, but saw some gems. On the way up we had roadside Crowned Eagle perched in a tree above us – not a bad start. Once up at Fig Tree Arch we were soon watching a splendid Bar-tailed Trogon. Thereafter, all sorts of other good birds popped by. Nesting Abyssinian Thrush and Eastern Grey Woodpecker were noteworthy, along with plenty of Kilimanjaro White-eyes, occasional Eastern Mountain and Cabanis's Greenbuls and a last minute White-starred Robin. We had our picnic up high on the Kilimanjaro view site, then went gently down to the Ranger Station, finding good looks at Hartlaub's Turaco on the way.

The afternoon was spent in very different habitats of open scrub and grassland and the Momella Lakes complex – nominally soda lakes, but not so much recently with the excessive rains. On the way over to the lakes we came across a nice group of Giraffe along with a few Waterbucks, Zebra and attendant Red-billed Oxpeckers. We were hearing Trilling Cisticolas and occasional Moustached Grass Warblers all around us and I played calls confidently thinking we'd see them both quickly and easily. How wrong! We finally got full frame views of the Cisticola an hour or more later as we left the lakes, and got brief looks at the warbler on our way out of the Park later on still. The wetland areas including soda lakes held some lovely views of Lesser and Greater Flamingos, but all the ducks except Cape Teal had gone since I was here in November. A few waders were the first of the trip – Ruffs, Blacksmith, Three-banded and Spur-winged Plovers, a few Wood Sandpipers and Stilts, plus lone Marsh Sandpiper and Avocet.

On the way around the lakes Godbless received a call from Anthony to say that our flight to Mwanza had been cancelled – no reason, just cancelled. This put us in a huge problem and the only solution

already being worked on by Anthony was to reschedule to another flight into the Western Corridor of the Serengeti to allow us to keep to the itinerary and keep the tour going. All that inconvenience plus extra cost, but unavoidable. Once back at the Ngare Sero Lodge we had the arrangements confirmed – a horribly early 5am departure, but getting us to Speke Bay in good time and on schedule.

January 25th. To Lake Victoria. This morning we were up early and on our way to the Arusha Domestic Airport on the other side of town, with Godbless doing a sterling (Stirling Moss!) job of a rapid transfer through the early morning gloom and traffic. The flight to Grumeti in the Western Corridor of Serengeti National Park took a while as it called in at two stops along the way. However, we arrived a little after 10am with Geitan awaiting us. There had been further rain in the area, making for muddy driving conditions, but we made our way in reasonable time to the shores of Lake Victoria and Speke Bay Lodge by about 12.45pm. On the way saw a few mammals – a fine bull Elephant and small numbers of the resident Wildebeest herd with 1-2 young. We made one planned bird stop in the Whistling Thorn Acacia groves and called out the very local Karamoja Apalis. Secretarybird was another good first find.

Speke's Bay Lodge, situated right on the shores of the lake, was as welcoming as ever. We had a good lunch and then Andrew, Alan and myself took much of the afternoon for some birding in the extensive and easily watched grounds on the edge of the immense Lake Victoria. Margaret was feeling better, but still not that great, and the chance to relax in such a lovely setting was too much for Sheila to resist.

A good number of special birds not found elsewhere on our tour were found in this initial foray, along with other new, but more widespread species. The water levels remain high, making access to the margins of emergent vegetation of papyrus, reed and sedge tricky. However, we notched up plenty of interest, with good views of most. African Openbills sailed past in the distance while Swamp Flycatcher, Red-chested Sunbird, Woodland, Brown-hooded and Grey-headed Kingfishers, Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, Green-winged Pytilia, Dark-chanting Goshawk, Water Thick-knee, Purple Heron, Black-headed Gonolek, Eastern Grey Woodpecker, Grey-backed Fiscals, Grey-capped Warbler, Silverbirds, Northern Brown-throated, Slender-billed, Golden-backed and Village Weavers were all seen well, some species very much "everywhere" including in the open-air dining room. It was mercifully drier here than what we'd seen so far in the Serengeti, but it was quite hot and humid with little breeze, causing us to call it a day by 5.30pm and enjoy a cold beer on the verandah, watching the dozens of Pied Kingfishers hovering often miles out over the lake to catch their fish. As I went to my cabin I heard the gruff, soft hoot of a Verreaux's Eagle-Owl and found it in a large tree nearby – hopefully it will be there tomorrow. Then, as I left my cabin for the evening meal there was an African Scops-Owl quietly calling in a low tree on the path – great, but brief views of a bird not often seen here.

January 26th. To The Central Serengeti. Alan and I did an hour's birding pre-breakfast this morning I found the Verreaux's Eagle-Owl again and Three-banded Coursers later on. After a lovely al fresco breakfast with many attendant weavers, most folks were either not well enough to wander far from a loo, or happy to relax. But another hour or two of birding was done piecemeal with everyone until about 10.30am. We relocated the Verreaux's Eagle-Owl, and did a "spiffybird tour" for Sheila and Margaret, looking at the Gonolek, kingfishers, bee-eaters and anything else big enough and bright enough to appeal. A perched Brown Snake-Eagle was seen well, and Alan and I tried to coax out of the dense foliage one of the singing Eastern Olivaceous Warblers, but with no luck.

Having decided to depart earlier than usual with a picnic from Speke Bay, we were heading back to Serengeti National Park by 11.30am via the local town's Duka La Dawa (Pharmacy) for some Immodium – we found the last packet in town! The run back to the central Serengeti is unavoidably long, fully experiencing how huge the place is as we drove 50 miles or more straight eastwards. Stops en route were made for a good array of game including a decent-sized Zebra herd mixed with many Impala. Birds too played their part, though many of the smaller LBJs had to be passed by as time is always limited on this long drive. Good finds included Black-bellied Bustard, several Southern Ground Hornbills, first Ostriches and African Wattled Lapwings in exactly the same spot as I'd seen them last November!. A raptor stop along the way produced what, to all intents and purposes, looked like a

lightly marked adult Short-toed Eagle – quite a rarity in Tanzania. There were plenty of cisticolas, but we passed most by, as we could “do” these at a more convenient time if required; but aerial displays from Zitting while stopped for Elephants were not overlooked.

At one of the stops to try (with no luck this visit) for the Eastern Grey Plantain-eater, we scoped Schalow's Turaco high in the riverine gallery forest, close to African Green Pigeon and a Shikra. With the afternoon fast disappearing and still seemingly a long way to travel into the middle of nowhere to our tented camp, we carried on, stopping for less, but had to call a halt for a close, perched Pygmy Falcon.

January 27th. The Central Serengeti. The Serengeti is a vast preserve. At 5,675 square miles, it is larger than the entire state of Connecticut or 4 times the size of Kent. With a further 3,200 sq. miles protected in the surrounding Ngorongoro Conservation Area, the total is as large as Vermont or New Hampshire - or larger than Wales. It certainly felt that large today as we did our game drive after an 8am departure from the Kontiki Tented Camp. It took nearly half an hour just to negotiate the muddy, bumpy track to the “main road”, which, after these excessive and unseasonal rains, were in almost as bad condition. However, despite dark blue thundery skies early on, it remained dry and hot all day, before we made an early return at 4pm.

We started very well, with some good mixed herds of game animals – Zebra, Eland, Topi, Grant's and Thomson's Gazelles, with a very fine lone Cheetah walking through the tall grass between us and them. We admired this gorgeous beast for a good while before heading towards the central areas of Seronera to continue the day's exploration. While other areas may hold the bulk of the famous Wildebeest herds at this time of year, there are many other important habitats with different and special birds and wildlife to be found. Most importantly, this is the best area for finding Leopards, and this was our main focus today, though we sadly didn't come across any – and neither did the other numerous landcruisers scouring the Seronera River area with its braided small meandering streams and associated riverine or gallery forest of Yellowbark Acacias (“fever” trees) where Leopards often hang out.

There was plenty else to keep us interested. Our first big gathering of Hippos wallowing in a large area of muddy water were well-received, if a bit gross! These wet areas also harboured a couple of very large Nile Crocodiles. A loo stop at the Visitor Centre at Seronera, and our picnic lunch there later on, produced some good birds – Meyer's Parrots, Wire-tailed Swallows, Lesser Masked Weavers building their clever nests, Speckle-fronted Weavers, Superb Starlings and Grey-capped Social Weavers all ridiculously close as they scavenged for crumbs. A variety of raptors were found including several Tawny Eagles and Dark Chanting Goshawks, first Lesser and Grey Kestrels, Black-chested Snake-Eagle, Lappet-faced Vulture and Common/Steppe Buzzard. The tall grassy plains went on for miles and miles and were full of Rufous-naped Larks, Rattling, Zitting, Croaking and Winding Cisticolas, plus 1-2 Pectoral Patch Cisticolas. First Double-banded Coursers, Black-faced Sandgrouse, Magpie Shrikes and Flappet Larks buzzing in the air, were notched up with decent views. Diderick Cuckoo was active and calling, Striated Herons showed well.

We circled round a few small kopjes (pronounced “copies”) - large isolated, weather-smoothed and rounded lumps of granite, some the size of large houses, interrupting the vast flatness of the plains. With a couple of the group still not 100% we called it a day early and got back by 4pm with a bit of down-time at the camp prior to supper and as the skies again went dark blue and thunder began to rattle through the air. I had a quick look around the grounds, adding Red-cheeked Cordonbleu and Arrow-marked Babbler to the list.

January 28th. To the South-eastern Serengeti. We had a 7am breakfast and headed out eastwards towards Ndutu by 7.40am. Despite yesterday evening's black rain clouds, it was dry, bright and sunny all day – just like it should be at this time of year! We didn't have a lot of free time en route, as the entrance permits run on a 24 hour system, meaning we had to be registering out of the National Park

by a little before midday. Geitan timed it very well, along 70km of dirt roads – some smoothish, others badly rutted or muddy due to the rains. Thus the morning was spent mainly driving along the “main road” towards Naabi Gate entrance, gradually leaving the tall grass plains of the central Serengeti behind and opening out into the huge, almost treeless short grass plains with a subtly different fauna and flora - especially of course the grasses that make all the difference to the composition of antelope species. Soon after setting out we were treated to a pair of bright Yellow-throated Longclaws on the track. We paused for a loo stop at the Seronera Visitor Centre where a Banded Parisoma was quickly called in to show well, and along the way were other good birds – Greater Kestrels, as usual, perched in one of the few bushes out on the plains, a fine male Montagu's Harrier – now sadly becoming so scarce. A perched pair of African Hawk Eagles gave stunning views, a single roadside Spotted Thick-knee plus Black Coucal in one of the damper patches we passed. To start with there wasn't a lot of game obvious, despite the huge expanse of rich-looking grasslands. Then, out of nowhere a huge herd of at least 600 Cape Buffalo appeared, slowly wandering in a long line across the plains. We also found our first Lion, right beside the road. She was seemingly a lone female playing with a piece of black plastic sheeting she had found – just like a domestic cat might play with a toy. The dusty, bumpy road meant fairly slow progress which ground to a halt close to Naabi where various vehicles were stuck in a bad patch of mud. The landcruisers, building up by the minute, eventually negotiated a bumpy way around and we were on our way again, passing large numbers of Abdim's Storks scattered across the plains.

At Naabi a little before midday we had our picnic lunch early, sitting among all the birds waiting for crumbs to fall – Superb and Hildebrandt's Starlings, Black-lored Babblers, Northern Grey-headed and House Sparrows. A walk to the top of the Naabi Hill gave us some great panoramic views out across the vast areas we'd just covered and the equally vast areas ahead – dotted with ever-increasing amounts of game. An immature Martial Eagle put on a fine display overhead, complete with distinctive mewling call, while at our feet we watched our first bright, purple and coppery-coloured Mwanza Flat-headed Agama lizard and Crimson-rumped Waxbills noted at a little water feature.

The arcane and illogical rules of entry and exit into the Park/Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) meant we couldn't take the direct route towards Ndotu, but had to continue down the main road for quite a few more kilometres before turning right. As daft as this was, we had plenty of time and it turned up some great wildlife. Best find was a pride of Lions, with seven well-grown cubs sat low in the grassy tussocks, while three other females were much further out, barely heads showing, intently watching a group of Eland. We waited and watched for a good while, but Lions are much more patient than humans, and we eventually left them to their impasse. Along this route were various very close Spotted Hyenas – probably all from one clan, but again scattered across the plains and doing a great job of keeping almost invisible in very short vegetation. First Kori Bustards, large numbers (c.50) of Ostriches and the odd sight of Gull-billed Terns hawking insects over the plains far from water all paled into insignificance as we scanned across the seemingly endless flat landscape amazed at the sheer numbers of game animals as far as the eye could see – loads of Grant's and Thompson's Gazelles, Zebra and Wildebeest in an almost 360 degree panorama.

Once at the lodge we settled in and enjoyed some time to relax and enjoy this lovely place. Zebra were grazing just feet away on the lawns and a little further out were Wildebeest and Giraffes – a fantastic setting! Alan and I did a little birding in the grounds adding great looks at Vitelline Masked Weavers, a Great Spotted Cuckoo, Gabar Goshawk, young Greater Honeyguide and Slate-coloured Boubous. Everyone seemed to love this lodge – my favourite in Tanzania - and the final confirmation of what a great place it is came with the supper-time appearance of the gorgeous Common Genet into the lounge area for its nightly feed and posing for photos for all.

January 29th. The Ndotu area. We set out at 8am this morning across the open grassland and scant acacia scrub to see what we could see. First long stop was for a movement of quite a few Zebra in the direction of Lake Ndotu, with another group of Wildebeest coming in the opposite direction. A very pleasant and tranquil scene as they ambled past one another.

Still top of the wish-list was Leopard, and Geitan had heard on the driver's grapevine of a Leopard with kill "out there somewhere" in the vastness. The tell-tale sign of circling vultures gave the location away, along with a line-up of other landcruisers! It was Alan's birthday today, and he hopefully had a memorable start as we homed in on, and found the Leopard and spent a substantial amount of time enjoying it. It was an exceptional and unusual bit of game-viewing in several respects. Firstly, the Leopard had killed a Zebra – not a small foal, but seemingly a well-grown animal, which is bigger than they normally might tackle. This meant that it couldn't drag it up a tree for safety, and instead had eaten and moved away into tall grass and vegetation nearby. We could see it raise its head every now and again, giving some fine looks – plenty enough to satisfy us. Equally unusual was the realisation that there were a couple of Lions nearby. These two big cat species don't get along and had the Lions realised the presence of the Leopard, it would have run a mile – but they seemed oblivious. Eventually the Leopard got up and walked past the gathered vehicles and up into a tree. At this point we left it to take a peek at one of the Lions, but returned when messages came on the radio that the Leopard had come back down the tree and was tucking into the partially devoured Zebra. To see a Leopard chomping on food in the middle of the day and on the ground was a first for me. Even Geitan, who has been guiding for 30 years or so, commented several times how special it all was. It was good to see that there were plenty of other vehicles enjoying the spectacle, but all keeping a respectful distance and not upsetting the Leopard in any way.

The rest of the morning was spent gently motoring over to the marsh area where we immediately encountered one of the large male Lions out in the open, exactly where I'd taken photographs of him and one of his brothers in November. He was doing the same trick of trying to find shade in the lee of one of the landcruisers, but eventually gave up and sauntered over to a shady bush and slumped down there. In between the smashing game viewing were some great birds: first Black-shouldered Kite, Pallid Harrier, Kittlitz's Plover and Chestnut Sparrow included. Back at Ndutu Lodge for a lovely lunch at 12.30pm, we took some time off until afternoon tea at 3.30pm and a further short game drive at 4pm.

Geitan took us down to Lake Ndutu to drive as close along the shoreline as we are allowed, being outside of the National Park. We admired the few remaining flamingoes – all Greater. There were many thousands here in November, but the rains have diluted the soda content of the lake and made it temporarily less attractive to them. However, we added the localised, specialist Chestnut-banded Plover to the list plus saw a few common migrant waders including Greenshank, Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers. Working our way further along we had a brief fly-by Montagu's Harrier and first Augur Buzzard before Geitan made us aware of a message to say that Wildebeest were piling past further down where the lake ended. So we drove off as fast as practical and came across a very impressive tail-end of a fast-moving line of Wildebeests all heading west, that had been going on for half an hour or more by the time we arrived. The run continued for a further 10-15 minutes and totaled close to 1,000 animals all hell-bent on going wherever the wildebeest in front was going to. There is often no rhyme or reason for these sudden bursts of activity other than one or two animals being spooked and others following "just in case". Whatever the reason, it was an impressive sight.

All the while this was happening there were some very menacing black clouds building from the west and eventually a torrential downpour ensued, curtailing any further game drive by about 5pm. But we'd had a brilliant, interesting and productive day, made all the more fun by it being Alan's birthday finishing with a wonderful Happy Birthday sing-song from the lodge staff and a birthday cake after a good supper.

January 30th, The Ndutu area. After further rain at times overnight, it was a dry morning, but the main topic of conversation over the radios between the drivers in their landcruisers was the state of the tracks and getting stuck in mud out on the short grass plains. Thus, Geitan thought it best to visit some safer areas for the morning game drive, setting out at 8am. We returned to work along the edge of Lake Ndutu and then up along part of Lake Masek, which turned out to be a fairly productive few hours. Bird of the excursion was undoubtedly a pair of Martial Eagles, the huge female perched

beautifully in front of us atop a flat-top acacia with prey (probably a mongoose?), which we watched for ages. A very fine sight and specimen indeed – especially for Alan and Andrew, so keen on their raptors. At the top of Lake Ndotu where the road crosses, there was a large gathering of 70+ Marabou Storks and a similar number of Black-headed Herons along with a few Yellow-billed Storks, Sacred Ibis, Grey Herons and a lone African Spoonbill. Quite why they had all got together, not really feeding, I'm unsure, but it was an interesting sight, the Marabous especially being so plum-ugly! A little further along in the damp, sandy flats with tamarisk-type bushes, there were a couple of male Lions lying in the bushes, with full bellies, covered in flies and not doing very much. Elsewhere, were Hippos in Lake Masek and the usual nice mix of game animals including 2-3 Giraffes half walking out into the shallows of Lake Ndotu, but deciding against crossing in the end. There were plenty of other good birds too. The cool, post-rainy conditions had brought out lots of small species – Chestnut Sparrows, Rufous Sparrows, Social Weavers, Cordonbleus, Grenadiers, White-bellied Canaries and more. Several Dark Chanting Goshawks were noted including a young bird bathing in a roadside puddle. Nearer to home we came across Black-cheeked Waxbills and a Nubian Woodpecker.

During our few hours of down-time at lunch, the dark blue storm clouds gathered yet again, but I did get out for a stroll along the edge of the cabins and call in a Pearl-spotted Owlet. After a cup of tea at 3.30pm, three of us set out again for a game drive, but it soon began to rain heavily and we returned to the lodge by 4.30pm amid grey skies all round.

January 31st. To The Ngorongoro Crater. We left Ndotu Lodge a little before 8am in a cool foggy mist that created an interesting aura across the short-grass plains as random Zebra and Wildebeest came and went into view like phantoms.

There was much to try and see on the way as we covered many tens of kilometres eastwards towards Olduvai. The mist gradually burnt off revealing vast areas scattered with countless hundreds and thousands of Wildebeest, Zebra, Thomson's and Grant's Gazelles. Here too were many single, loping Spotted Hyenas – presumably part of the same clan, but doing their own thing wandering out over the flat plains seeing if there was anything to eat – and there was plenty! The anticipated Capped Wheatears were found easily, as were African Pipits, but Red-capped Larks were harder to come by. Much more impressive was a displaying Kori Bustard with its tail flared over its back, neck puffed out and wings held out looking quite bizarre, but presumably impressing the females. Equally amazing was the sheer number and extent of the game this morning. All the way to Olduvai and beyond in the afternoon, were Wildebeest, Zebra and the gazelles in profusion over a very green and lush-looking pasture that at other times of the years looks like a dry, dusty desert. There were hundreds of Abdim's Storks feeding in the green-flush and substantial numbers of Marabou Storks circling high on thermals, presumably functioning much like vultures waiting over the thousands of game animals for something to die or be killed. As we drove, we could appreciate the huge scale of this ecosystem that we've been travelling through west to east for several days now — all the more remarkable for being preserved almost fully intact.

During our journey to Olduvai we had our first (and last) bogging down and getting stuck in the mud. The track, for most part was fine, but every now and then there was an inexplicably muddy, waterlogged patch. One of these got the better of us, but eventually a helpful passing landcruiser pulled us out with ease.

At Olduvai by a little after 11.15am, we took a short, not very productive bird walk then spent a good length of time in the museum. The archaeological site of Olduvai Gorge is very special. The museum had masses of detail about our ancestors and there was an interesting short talk given as we had our picnic, overlooking the layered rocks of the gorge where the Leakeys made their discoveries of early hominids.

After Olduvai, we came through more of the rudimentary Maasai villages and livestock, still mixed with wild game animals. Their way of life as open plains pastoralists is little changed over the few hundred years they have been in this area – though most have mobile phones nowadays!

By mid-afternoon we were at the descent road overlooking the rim of the immense caldera of Ngorongoro where we took our first look at where we were going tomorrow and where I called out the very local Wailing Cisticola. A little later and we were at the Serena Lodge on the Crater rim with fine, panoramic views into the crater below. After settling in, Alan, Andrew and I wandered the small area of grounds and managed to find some of the special birds of the high altitude (7,500') forest. Brown-headed Apalis called in quickly in exactly the same spot as it did in November. Baglaffeht Weavers and White-eyed Slaty Flycatchers put on a good show. Two of the lovely higher altitude sunbirds – Tacazze and Eastern Double-collared - appeared and showed off, while a pair of Cinnamon-chested Bree-eaters were seen feeding young. Hunter's Cisticolas put on quite a performance of their vigorous dueting song display and a splendid Schalow's Turaco flashed its crimson wings.

February 1st. The Ngorongoro Crater. Alan and I did a little bit of pre-breakfast birding at the lodge, finding further good views of species seen yesterday evening along with some new – White-necked Ravens with massive bills, Mbulu White-eye and Cinnamon Bracken Warbler included. We spent much of the rest of the day down in the amazing Crater, sometimes called "the eighth wonder of the world" for good reason. On the way to the descent road I was pleased to find Red-cowled Widowbird out on the open grassy scrub around the crater rim. Here, we also caught up with Cape Rook, missed in the Serengeti and found a couple of rather out of place Brown Parisomas. As we descended from 7,500 feet to 5,000 on the crater floor, we found Abyssinian Wheatear and once on the crater floor we popped into the loos at the bottom of the descent road before heading out.

The Crater certainly came up to all expectations and hopes today. It was a fine sunny day until late afternoon when a thunder storm passed over just missing us. The Crater was greener and wetter than I've ever seen it, but full of life. The large resident population of Wildebeest, chunky Cape Buffalo, Thomson's and Grant's Gazelles, Common Zebra, and Eland were all very evident, very close and very photogenic. Spotted Hyenas were liberally scattered across the crater floor – we probably tallied 20 or more today, including one walking right down the road beside us.

Our main goal was views of some of the 15 to 20 Black Rhinoceros that survive here, and we were very lucky with these too, finding a total of 6, including 4 close together and fairly close to the road, so giving very acceptable views and photos. The main soda lake was enormous due to the heavy recent rains, with comparatively few flamingoes present, but a splendid variety of waterbirds generally, both here and on all the freshwater and flooded areas that are normally dry grassland. We caught up with a number of additional duck species – Red-billed and Blue-billed (Hottentot) Teal, wintering Northern Shoveler and a pair of Southern Pochard. First Grey-headed Gulls and breeding plumaged Whiskered Terns were noted amidst loads of the usual waders, African Spoonbills, hundreds of Abdim's Storks (some going up in thermalling flocks), Red-knobbed Coots, masses of egrets, including plenty of Intermediates, Sacred Ibis and a few Great White Pelicans. A few Hippos here included one wandering about, out of the water in full-fat view.

With all the excessive, out of season rain, the roads would have been impassable if it were not for lorries dumping hardcore in the bad spots. Unfortunately they had not got around to making the Hippo Pools accessible, and where they had dumped hardcore, they'd not had time to level it, thus tracks were very rough in places. We managed to see a very close, very lethargic trio of roadside Lions, hunkered down by a bridge over a stream, almost using the large water pipe below as a hiding place.

Great birds were popping up all the time. A great favourite were the plentiful Grey Crowned Cranes – voted "supper spiffy" by all. Another popular sight was a couple of displaying Kori Bustards. We also found a Black-bellied Bustard doing its bizarre soft "burp and pop" display call in the vast areas of open, short-grass savannah, now so thick and verdant. At the picnic site by the big freshwater lake, it

was more like Picadilly Circus as all the landcruisers that spread out quite nicely on the game drives, congregate in the one place. However this is the stake-out for Speke's Weaver and absurdly close looks at the Rufous-tailed Weavers, Yellow-billed Kites and Helmeted Guinea fowl looking for dropped crumbs. Cisticolas were much in evidence, but other less esoteric delights prevented them from receiving much attention. However, a very obliging Red-faced Cisticola was called in very close at the top of the descent road in the morning. Other odds-and-ends were a lone Grey-rumped Swallow picked out by Alan, sat among dozens of Barn Swallows (the swallow not Alan!), and an Anteater Chat that wouldn't fly to show us the white wing patches,

As we began our exit from the Crater in the afternoon, we drove through the edge of the extensive Yellow-bark Acacia forest where 20 or more Elephants – adults with young – were close by the road and at one point making a lot of noise and doing much ear-flapping as others joined them. These were part of at least 80 Elephants in the crater floor on this visit – unusual to see so many here other than the usual splendid old bull Elephants with their massive tusks.

I did another short birding session in the Serena grounds on our return and found further birds of interest. There was a roosting movement of African Olive Pigeons and the Schalow's Turacos put on a fantastic show, with one bird sat, calling, full-frame in the scope for 5-10 minutes.

February 2nd. The Crater Highlands. Alan and I did another brief pre-breakfast birding session around the lodge, not finding too much new or of note, though there were 1-2 additional and better views of species seen previously.

We were heading out by 8.30am, on a fairly short drive around the rim of the Ngorongoro Crater and then winding down through the forest to exit the NCA onto smooth paved roads towards Karatu and Gibb's Farm for lunch. Soon after leaving the lodge as we drove through some of the currently quite green and lush high level grasslands, I called a stop and scanned to find several Jackson's Widowbirds doing their amazing bouncing up and down displays. This was a good find and a first for me in this area of the highlands. We also paused briefly at the final viewpoint down onto the Crater floor, but it was full of darned tourists getting in our way, so we didn't linger too long.

After a fuel and ATM stop in Karatu we were up at Gibbs Farm by about 10.30am. Gibbs has some gorgeous gardens and some interesting birding possibilities, but it was "relax mode" as soon as we arrived, with lovely coffee from their own plantation, taken on the sunny lawns. We had plenty of time before lunch to wander around admiring the lush, flower-filled gardens and the birds therein. Grosbeak Weavers were nest-building in the pond in the garden and Bronze Sunbird and Holub's Golden Weaver were welcome additions to our list. A huge Crowned Eagle was noted soaring over the adjacent forest.

Gibbs Farm has become very upmarket and has a well-deserved reputation for excellent food. Our lunch today, on the patio overlooking the gardens, was, as expected delicious and much enjoyed. It was very tempting to relax further in such pleasant surroundings, but Alan, Andrew and I had a forest walk to do. Sheila and Margaret stayed back to look further at the glorious flowers in the gardens and the extensive, well laid out and varied vegetable gardens, while Geitan drove us three the very short distance to the start of the Endoro Hike. The local bird guide Emmanuel was there and we were also accompanied by a young woman ranger complete with an AK47 to guard against errant Elephants and Buffalo. The trail was muddy and it was another sunny, warm day, so we didn't reach the end of the trail, but did find a decent, small selection of the special high altitude forest birds. Female Purple-throated Cuckooshrikes started the ball rolling and during our 2-3 hours we notched up special birds such as African Hill Babbler, Grey-headed Nigrita, White-tailed Blue Flycatcher, Eastern Mountain Greenbul, African Emerald and African Cuckoos, Mbulu White-eyes, Brown-headed Apalises and brief looks at Spectacled Weaver. Back at the start of the trail, at the end of our walk, we were treated to superb views of a nesting Red-capped Robin-chat. Here Geitan awaited us, having taken Sheila and Margaret to nearby Tloma Lodge earlier to check in and use the swimming pool. We were

all reunited at Tloma by 5pm with time for a swim before dusk when we took our drinks back to the lovely swimming pool and called in the Montane (Abyssinian) Nightjar.

February 3rd Lake Manyara National Park. Alan and I had a good circular walk around the extensive gardens, vegetable and coffee plantations of Tloma Lodge before breakfast, but didn't see a great deal other than a group of Arrow-marked Babblers at the outset by the restaurant.

It is only a short drive to Lake Manyara National Park, so it was a leisurely departure as we motored down the smooth tarmac road winding its way down the very steep and clear Rift Valley cliff. It was another hot and sunny day – possibly the hottest we've had so far. This combined with the limited access within the National Park due to the excessive rains and resultant size of the lake itself, meant that the birding and wildlife were more limited than my previous experiences 5 or more years ago. However, the drive through the magnificent forest at the bottom of the Rift Valley slope, was impressive in its own right – the trees huge and there due to the run off of small streams percolating through the rock (complete with Mountain Wagtails). As expected, there were large groups of Olive Baboons on show, mooching, playing, sleeping and interacting with one another in various ways at the side of the track. Their antics, (many of them so much like our own!) could be watched for ages. Here in the forest were the hoped-for Silvery-cheeked Hornbills – huge creatures, their massive bills and noisy behaviour impressing us all. We tried in several places on the forest edge, both on the way in and out, for Purple-crested Turaco but had no luck other than a distant brief call. We got luckier with the Collared Palm Thrush which is known here from just a small patch of palms, with the bird popped up in view for a short time. It was useful to have better looks at African Fish Eagle, Grey Kestrel, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove and Black-winged Bishop, while Saddle-billed Stork was a good new find.

Game animals have probably been driven out to some extent by the increase in lake size, though we did find a Bushbuck and a few Elephants, Cape Buffalo, Impala and Zebra plodding about. We had our picnic at one of the few designated sites, along with quite a few other people, some having lavish sit-down cooked lunches in the excessive heat – I'm glad we just had a simple DIY picnic in a paper bag. This is a usually good spot to find the very spiffy Red-and-Yellow Barbet, and although they weren't pecking about under the tables as I've seen them before, we did find a pair and had good scope looks at this ultra-flashy bird.

With limited access, a hot afternoon and fairly quiet conditions, the lure of the infinity pool at the Manyara Serena Lodge was too much to ignore and we headed out early, arriving at 3pm or so, with plenty of time for a lovely swim, a cold drink by the pool and some much appreciated down time in this very pleasant lodge before a very good evening meal. There were a few additional birds noted, including Red-winged Starling and Yellow-bellied Greenbul by the pool and Spot-flanked Barbet on a walk around the grounds a bit later.

February 4th. To Tarangire National Park. With Tarangire only a fairly short drive on mostly paved roads, there was no need to race off particularly early from Serena Manyara Lodge. Alan and I did some early morning birding in the grounds before breakfast and found a few birds of interests. Alan caught up with Yellow-bellied Greenbul and we also saw Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Southern Citril, Yellow-breasted Apalis and Red-billed Firefinch, with the sun rising over the Rift Valley below us.

After a bit of shopping in the lodge gift shop, we headed out at a little after 9am and enjoyed the smooth ride until we reached the turn-off for Tarangire about 90 minutes later, where it went back to bumpy and dusty on the way to Tarangire National Park entrance. There was a classically illogical and nonsensical mess up with paperwork at the entrance, when it was discovered the permits to enter the Park were overpaid by two dollars. Normally, in a sensible world, with sensible people and working, pragmatic systems in place, this wouldn't be a problem. We of course said “keep the extra \$2”, but the Jobs-worth behind the counter countered that the system couldn't cope with such largesse! Geitan had to then call the office (on a Sunday with nobody there), and eventually, an hour later, cancel the original paperwork and get new documents emailed to my phone with the correct amount noted.

Once on our way, it was only a short run to the Tarangire Safari Lodge where lunch awaited. First of many Elephants and bizarre Baobabs meant one or two stops, but we arrived in good time. My usual contact to find the African Scops-Owl was off work, but another guy stepped in and quickly located this incredible little owl for us – in a spindly tree in the busy car park, un-phased by the noise and bustle. Scope views and photos all round was followed by a very good al fresco lunch in the continuing hot, sunny weather. There was time after lunch for a short wander to the viewpoint looking down on the bend in the Tarangire River, running through the centre of the National Park with wide grassy, palm-dotted flood plains. The river looked quite full and flowing strongly – further indication of heavy recent rains. Endemic Yellow-collared Lovebirds and Ashy Starlings were showing well.

We were heading to our overnight accommodation at the Sopa Lodge by about 2.30pm and sauntered gently down the main road watching some very cute young Giraffes and many more Elephants, The habitats here reflect an often drier region subject to seasonal rains and drought, even though it is very lush at the moment. Thorn-bush is studded with giant Baobabs 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 and it was interesting to see a large female Elephant doing just that, and gouging what looked like fairly unappetising bits of Baobab off to eat. Other game animals seemed quite scarce, but there is a lot of rich, tall grass growing which may have dispersed the herds somewhat. A few birds were seen on the way – 3 White-faced Whistling Ducks on a roadside flood and an immature Martial Eagle perched atop an acacia being the best finds.

At the lodge by 3.45pm, we had a quick check-in and then dispersed – to the pool, to our rooms to cool down, to afternoon tea and to some birding before meeting again before supper.

We met by the pool a little before dusk to try and call in the Freckled Nightjar, which worked rather well on this occasion. The birds began calling early on and with playback came and landed on the roof of one of the low buildings by the pool allowing proper views with binoculars and reasonable photos to be taken. It was a delight to meet up with waitress Lilian again, who looked after us at a very good buffet supper.

February 5th. Tarangire National Park. Apart from a calling Hildebrandt's Francolin, there wasn't much doing on my pre-breakfast birding in the grounds of the lodge. We set off after breakfast at about 8am, heading for Silale Swamp on the eastern edge of the Park. The drive took us through some fine bush country, up and over a small ridge to then run south along the edge of the swamp for several miles. Soon after setting out we halted for a Wahlberg's Eagle sat in the top of an acacia making a lot of noise. The noise was possibly due to it sharing the tree with an immature Martial Eagle! There were plenty of Francolins and Spurfowl on the sandy, narrow track we drove down – Red-necked and Yellow-necked Spurfowl and Crested Francolins, who, like the small groups of Black-faced Sandgrouse we encountered seemed reluctant to leave the path and just flew a few feet ahead of us each time flushed. There was a reasonable range of other birds noted on the way – Tawny Eagles, a Secretarybird and a fine Verreaux's Eagle Owl on a branch over our heads. Bare-faced and White-bellied Goawaybirds were duly noted and Geitan commented on the “Boring Cisticola” for us after I'd noted Rattling, Winding, Zitting and Croaking!

Silale Swamp was disappointing. We came across a long stretch of open water looking ideal for all sorts of waterbirds, but the area was virtually empty. I can only assume it is due, once again, to the excessive and unseasonal rains recently experienced? Perhaps the birds are spoilt for choice, or the conditions are no longer suitable. Whatever the cause, where I've previously seen the place hooching with herons, ibises, storks, ducks and terns, there was just a handful of African Jacanas and White-bellied Whistling Ducks.

On our circular drive back to the lodge, we were livened up by some good Elephant sightings including a group where one individual had decided that, rather than the lush grass all around, it was much better to feed on the central grassy strip down the middle of the track – and work its way directly towards us.

Back at the lodge by about 1pm, we had a far too large lunch by the pools (burger and chips a novelty/treat for us all), followed by some down time in what was a very hot afternoon. For the first time on my safaris here, everyone opted for an afternoon off, rather than going out on the final game drive. As Geitan was looking rather tired and unwell, I figured it would be a bit of an imposition to make him go out just for me, so I was committed to a period of “attempted relaxation” which failed miserably! I ended up doing a bit of birding in the lodge grounds when it became a little cooler and found a few further interesting birds, best being African Golden Oriole and Eastern Black-headed Oriole.

Another very good supper was enlivened by the Sopa Lodge staff doing a great set of local songs to much applause.

February 6th. Return to Arusha. Alan and I had a quick look around the lodge grounds pre-breakfast and caught him up with the Eastern Black-headed Oriole. We were all paid up and checked out, leaving by 8am, with time for a few stops along the way to the exit to Tarangire, which we reached by about 10.15am. A few final interesting birds popped up including a magnificent Long-crested Eagle. We also said our farewells to the last of the large mammals, with Giraffes crossing the road in front of us and several groups of red-stained Elephants, a large herd of Cape Buffalo, a few Impala and an occasional Warthog.

Once out of the National Park, we motored back to Arusha along smooth, paved roads to Arusha, arriving by about 12.30pm. There was time before and after a good buffet lunch at Cultural Heritage, to do some last minute shopping and visit the impressive gallery displaying some superb pieces of artwork in the purpose-built gallery mimicking the Guggenheim!

It was good to have the chance to meet up with Anthony Raphael, of Tanzania Birding, who came out to meet us and join us for lunch. But by 2.45pm it was time for the hour-long drive eastwards to Kilimanjaro Airport to check in for our flight on Qatar Airlines departing at 6.10pm.

February 7th. Home: The flight arrived into Doha about on time and connected with the onward flight to Edinburgh. Although it was late arriving, I still managed to get through immigration and bag reclaim in time for the 7.55am bus from the airport direct to Glasgow Buchanan Street Bus Station. Unfortunately this bus was 15 minutes late, which whittled away the connection time at Glasgow for the onward bus to Kennacraig, which would connect with the 12.45pm ferry, getting me home to Islay by 3pm. As the Edinburgh bus pulled into Buchanan Street I saw the Kennacraig bus pulling out – missed by a couple of minutes, causing a further 5 hours delay before reaching home – darn! The joys of living on an island.....

MISCELLANY

Books & Websites:

- A thoroughly recommended book entitled “Africa – A Biography of the Continent” by John Reader, published by Penguin, covers in a very readable way, everything from the geological formation of the continent, through origins of man, ecology, history, right up to colonisation and modern politics.
- This website is worth a look if you want to be amused by genuine, but humorous scientific names: <http://www.curiooustaxonomy.net/> I particularly like these found on the Etymology / Named after people page: *Agathidium bushi*, *A. cheneyi* and *A. rumsfeldi* Miller and Wheeler, 2005 (slime mould beetles) Named after the former U.S. president, vice president, and defence secretary.

The Checklist: In the following checklist of birds and other animals seen, an “x” in the column means seen but not counted. An “h” in a column means heard only. Numbers given are only very approximate.

