

NORTHERN TANZANIA BIRDING **NOVEMBER 2024**

Birding & Wildlife in the Serengeti, Ngorongoro Crater & Beyond

1st – 14th NOVEMBER 2023

Participants:

Group – Michael & Diana King (USA), Jay & Diane Nicholson, Rachel Angus (UK)

Guides:

Guides – Ken Chapman & Peter Roberts

Drivers :

Moses & Godbless

Ground Agent – Tanzania Birding & Beyond Safari

www.tanzaniabirding.com

THE TOUR

November 1. Arrival and Ngare Sero Lodge: I arrived off my Qatar flight into Kilimanjaro by about 7.50am to a bright sunny Tanzania and waited for Ken and his group to come in a little later on the Kenya airways flight. We all met up and were whisked off by our driver guide Donatus to Ngare Sero Lodge. We settled in, met up with Michael and Diana who had arrived yesterday evening, and relaxed until lunch at 1pm.

The afternoon was, as planned, a very casual stroll around the quite lush grounds with its open lawns, mature trees, flower-beds and, most importantly, the large lake. We came across a decent selection of the hoped-for birds, with the very localised Taveta Weavers actively nest-building. Grosbeak (Thick-billed) Weavers were active too, while on the water were, eventually, African Black Duck, African Jacana, with various herons, Hamerkop and Long-tailed Cormorants more abundant. African Fish Eagle posed well at times as did a splendid Giant Kingfisher. The thicker cover in the garden produced Olive and Collared Sunbirds, large numbers of White-eared Barbets. White-throated Robin and African Emerald Cuckoo were welcome additions. We tried calling in African Wood Owl after supper, but only heard it briefly as the rain started and continued quite heavily over night.

November 2. Arusha National Park: The planned early, pre-breakfast birding was an almost total write-off as quite heavy rain persisted until breakfast at 7am. Pale White-eyes and Collared Sunbirds were seen close to the rooms, but not a lot else, though there were masses of large, flying termites bringing into view some acceptable looks at Scarce Swifts. Luckily the rain ceased by 8.30am when Donatus and the other driver, Abel took us off towards Arusha National Park for the day. Happily it stayed dry throughout, only raining again well after dark tonight. There is never enough time to do this little gem of a Park justice, but as per usual, the morning was spent up higher in the forest on the edges of Mt. Meru, out of the vehicles watching and waiting for birds to show at the Fig Tree Arch. It seemed a bit quiet, but eventually a few goodies came into view. Hartlaub's Turacos were very vocal with their raucous calls and one did come in and flash its brilliant red wings for us. Bar-tailed Trogon was heard but wouldn't be lured in. More esoteric finds were Kilimanjaro White-eyes – a local and different species confined to the higher elevation forests – plus Brown Woodland Warbler, Sharpe's and Kenrick's Starlings and Eastern Bronze-naped Pigeon – all quality birds!

We motored back down the track (very rough in places) to have our picnic at the Momella Gate facilities, then spent the afternoon driving out to and around Momella lakes. We called in a few interesting LBJs on the way – Singing and Trilling Cisticolas and Moustached Grass Warbler included. At the lakes were a fine display of mostly Lesser Flamingoes, some nest-building, plus a few Greater too. These lakes, some fresh others more saline, attract a good range of waterbirds – many Little Grebes, Southern Pochard and Cape Teal, a couple of Red-billed Ducks and a single Maccoa Duck, along with a few waders – Black-winged Stilts and Avocets, Ruff and first Three-banded Plovers. Raptors were few, but an African Harrier-hawk showed well and there was a brilliant look at an unexpected Spotted Eagle-Owl in a lake-side acacia.

On our return in the late afternoon, still passing by without stopping for Zebra, Giraffes and Cape Buffalo, which we'd spend more time on later, we came across great looks at one of the Duikers, but with taxonomic changes, very difficult to work out which species (though eventually nailed as Harvey's race of Natal red Duiker). Large groups of Olive Baboons included one of the few resident albino animals were an interesting diversion. Invasive House Crows were noted on the turn up towards the Lodge from the main road – they seem to be slowly working their way inland from the coast.

Back at the lodge after supper, we called out the African Wood Owl and had good looks at it before calling it a successful first day.

November 3. To Lake Victoria: Rain overnight and into early morning foiled yet again our plans for some easy pre-breakfast birding, though we did manage to catch up with scope views of a group of Colobus Monkeys in the tall garden trees.

We were packed and away by 8am, joined by Anthony Raphael and two Australian clients who were travelling with us to Mwanza and on to Speke Bay Lodge. It was intermittently raining and continued to do so all the way during the flight arriving at about 12.40pm. Three landcruisers were there to meet and greet us and drive us the 2+ hours to Speke Bay Lodge, eating our picnic lunches as we went. The rain got ever more intense and continued as we arrived at the Lodge in a proper deluge of over an inch of rain in a short space of time. With so little time to spend here, it was all a bit depressing not being able to get straight out and take a wander through the large open areas of grassland, gardens and acacias. Eventually, by about 4pm, rain abated and we all poked our heads out of the door and took a very gentle stroll along the paths, umbrellas at the ready for a hugely successful, albeit short, bit of birding before it got too dark at about 6pm. Slender-billed and Northern Brown-throated Weavers were everywhere. Red-chested Sunbirds, Silverbird feeding young, African Paradise Flycatchers, Grey-capped Warblers, Black-headed Gonoleks, Blue-capped Cordonbleus, Woodland Kingfishers, Cardinal Woodpeckers, Usambiro Barbets all added a quick succession of colour to the afternoon. A Verreaux's Eagle-Owl gave intermittent deep and gruff hoots which led us to the tree it roosted in and some very decent looks at this large owl. Plenty of other species gave a

final welcome rush of activity to the last couple of hours of the day, saving it from being a fairly complete wash-out.

A good supper, with us being the only folk here made it a very pleasant evening with the hope for a break in the weather tomorrow morning to continue our short time here with no further hitches.

November 4. Speke Bay and to the Central Serengeti: A dry morning allowed us to wander through the extensive grounds of the lodge on a pre- and post-breakfast session. It was still wet and muddy under foot after all the rain – and not helped by big puddles in large hippo footprints. George, the local bird guide/bar man escorted us and took us off pre-breakfast to seek out nightjars and coursers with great success. We had scope views of an incredibly cryptic Square-tailed Nightjar, plus a couple of flighty Three-banded (Heuglin's) Coursers. Along the way there were many other good sightings, the place, particularly around the cabins and lodge, absolutely alive with birds – especially weavers feasting on insects (especially termites) attracted in to the lights overnight. There were birds from huge African Fish Eagles to dainty Winding Cisticolas and everything in between, with the water edge acacias holding a bustling colony of nesting Village Weavers.

The post-breakfast ramble first saw us heading off in the opposite direction, finding African Pygmy, Grey-headed and Brown-hooded Kingfishers, and all of the remaining "special" weavers – Golden-backed (Jackson's) and Black-headed, along with more Northern Brown-throated and Slender-billed. Long-crested Eagle was admired, various woodpeckers plus Angola Swallow and Swamp Flycatcher being specialities of this location. Eventually it was just Michael and myself with George heading off to get a better look at the coursers. On the way some good views of Jacobin Cuckoo were had and then some stunning, full-frame scope views of two gorgeous Three-banded Coursers rounding the morning off nicely – with time spare for a quick cup of coffee and a sit down before getting to our cabins to pack prior to a 12pm lunch.

Away by 1pm, we were soon at the entrance to the Serengeti and driving the full length of the Western Corridor to reach our tented camp by 6pm in the central Serengeti. A long and, in places quite bumpy fast ride, but with many birds and masses of game animals along the way. We tried calling out the very range-restricted Karamoja Apalis in the Whistling Thorn Acacia habitat that runs for miles, but had no luck. Our other main target was Eastern Plantain-eater - a bird we'd see nowhere else - was on the edge of the Grumeti River. A pair popped up and gave some fine views atop the tall riverine forest trees. In between were serendipitous stops for a wide range of other birds. Lots of new species for the tour, some classic such as Secretarybird, others included three species of vultures, Wattled Lapwings, White-headed Buffalo Weavers and Red-cheeked Cordonbleu.

The plains were littered with Zebra: small groups to large scattered herds, often mixed in with Wildebeest. There were masses of Topis too – a species we only usually see in this central Serengeti area, but not in the large herds we passed today. Giraffes, Elephants (including a feisty bull as we neared the camp), Impalas and occasional Dik-diks were all happily noted. Best find however was a Side-striped Jackal with cubs dug into a roadside termite mound. The cubs were cute and the species rarely seen on this tour.

We arrived at our camp, up a winding track into open wooded savanna, just as light was fading, got to our tents and sorted ourselves out and prepared for supper.

November 5. From central Serengeti to the north: A long, but very productive day travelling from central Serengeti right up to the north. Setting out at a little after 8am, we arrived at the next camp at 6pm, but much of the day was spent in a game drive, apart from a mid-section going out of the National Park at Ikoma Gate and back in again at Tabora Gate. Birding was good all along the way, with many new species added and seen well. Highlights included Kori's and White-bellied Bustards, occasional Secretarybirds, various raptors such as Bateleurs, Tawny Eagles, and a dead tree with a Eurasian Hobby and Grey Kestrel perched. At Ikoma Gate was a nest of Wahlberg's Eagles. Smaller fry included very bright pair of Sulphur-breasted Bushshrikes,

African Hoopoes and Lilac-breasted Rollers.

Throughout the day, the travel was punctuated with great mammal sightings. Soon after leaving in the morning we came across a pride of 14 or more idling Lions. Three others showed a little later. There was a fairly constant stream of Zebras – we must have seen many thousands during the day, all mixed in with smaller numbers of Wildebeest, seemingly, slowly heading south through the wooded savanna. I've never seen so much activity in this part of the central Serengeti at this time of year before. Another brief diversion was made in the morning for a wonderful family group of Cheetahs – a mother with three well-grown cubs. They were walking along, the mother intent on game animals on the horizon, the youngsters intent on playing about. Wandering close to and crossing the road, we left them after 20 minutes or so. Ken's vehicle caught up with them a little later and in between us going and Ken arriving they had made a kill of a Thomson's Gazelle.

Once back in the Park in the mid-afternoon we motored over further vast areas of savanna dotted with further good birds and mammal sightings. The final grand prize was a message via the driver's network that a Black Rhino was in view. We sped along and joined just a few other landcruisers watching a lone Rhino out in the grasslands close to the very pleasant tented camp.

November 6. The northern Serengeti: Sadly, this morning a couple more had fallen foul of the lurgy and weren't be more than a few yards away from a toilet for more than 10 minutes. Thus the morning game drive was just myself with Michael and Diana, heading off to the Mara River by 8am until lunchtime. There had been no river crossings by Wildebeest for several days apparently, and there were none this morning either – in fact no Wildebeest at all. However, there were large numbers of Zebra, our first Defassa Waterbuck, Bohor Reedbuck and Elands, along with three sleeping male Lions under a bridge to keep our interest going. Birding was good, with plenty of good looks at new species. A huge Goliath Heron flew down the Mara River. LBJs were well-represented with Plain-backed Pipit, Stout, Rattling and the localised Tabora Cisticolas seen and several other cisticolas heard. We caught up with yesterday's first sighting of Bare-faced Go-away Bird, plus Wahlberg's Eagles and scoped a dark Steppe Eagle – nostril shape and gape length duly noted. A bit of colour was added by a pair of Golden-breasted Buntings and a Rose-throated Longclaw, while great views were had of a pair of uncommon Rufous-chested Swallows nesting under a bridge. The weather held bright and sunny all morning until a short heavy rainshower hit at lunchtime.

Those of us who were still fit went out again in the afternoon to explore other areas in the vicinity, but further impending rain meant a slightly shorter drive. Temminck's Stint was a good find in some roadside pools with Little Stints, Green and Wood Sandpipers and Three-banded Plovers around too.

November 7. Return to central Serengeti: Happily everyone was feeling closer to recovery this morning as we set out at 8am from our camp in reasonable bright sunny weather, retracing our route back towards the central Serengeti. As one of the major attractions and features of being up in the northern part of the National Park is to view wildlife around the Mara River, we did a short game-drive along the river's edge so that those who were confined to camp yesterday could savour a little of the areas splendour – even if there were no Wildebeest in evidence.

By about 9.30am we were making more determined tracks towards Tabora Gate and southwards after seeing a few birds of interest – African Green Pigeon, Plain Martin, Mosque Swallows, Coqui Francolin, Violet-backed Starlings, a few Bare-faced Go-away-birds, Striated Heron and Isabelline Wheatear. A White-browed Sparrow-Weaver at Tabora Gate was an unusual find. We arrived at the Park entrance at Ikoma in time for our picnic lunch before taking a more leisurely drive to the night's camp allowing us to stop and start for birds, mammals and photos as we went. However, news came on the radio about a Leopard sighting, so we made a concerted effort to get there to see it. The animal had been up a tree where it had stashed its kill, but had come down before we arrived and only 1-2 of us saw it walking off in the distance into tall grass.

It had clearly been raining here more than further north, and some of the tracks were slick with mud, but it didn't deter or deflect us from some good game-viewing of the many more Wildebeest, Zebra, Topi and Cape Buffalo down here compared to up north. Good birds along the way included Pygmy Falcon close up, a pair of Black-chested Snake-Eagles, Double-banded Coursers, Common Scimitarbill, Southern Ground Hornbills, Red-backed Shrike and masses of Silverbirds.

There were further dramatic-looking, black and deep blue storm clouds in the skies dropping further light rain at times and with them mass of winged termites of several sizes flying in great mesmerised swarms to the lights of the camp after dark, when the Spotted Hyenas started their nightly howling.

November 8. From central Serengeti to the Ndotu area: We set out from the central Serengeti at 7am for some, 8am for others, to spend a decent length of time game-viewing before having to set off for Naabi Gate and exit the National Park by 1pm. It was pleasantly cool with light cloud, but not threatening rain. The birds were active from the start, with Abyssinian Scimitarbill called in at the camp before leaving and a range of other good species as we wound our way across the open grasslands dotted with occasional flat-topped acacias. Despite there being plenty of tourists in the park, we saw very few other people. This was all the better when Moses spotted a Leopard up a small tree at mid-distance as we had it all to ourselves! The Leopard climbed down from the tree after a while and disappeared into the grass: short and fairly distant views, but always good to see one. We continued on our way, slithering over some quite wet and muddy trails, stopping at times for further birds. Then Moses made another halt at a larger, denser-foliaged tree, closer to the track - there was Leopard number two within a mile or so of the first and within the same hour! We spent a decent amount of time admiring this fine specimen, getting the scope onto it to see its face when it turned at times – though it was very well camouflaged and partly hidden by branches. Moses contacted our other landcruiser and they came along and saw it a little later on. After leaving the Leopard we came across a very close roadside Saddle-billed Stork – huge, gaudy and bizarre – plus a pair of Rufous-crowned Rollers.

We ended up at the Seronera Visitor Centre for a leg-stretch, walk, coffees and a bit of birding before heading straight down the main road to Naabi. A lone young male Lion by a roadside bush was a bonus and we managed to find a few more birds of interest such as flocks of Collared Pratincoles at the last pool with Hippos. There were two target species along this stretch of road out in the flat grassy plains – Cape Crow and Greater Kestrel, which we managed to see well close to Naabi. There were impressively large numbers of Zebra all the way along our route this morning – increasing in number towards Naabi where we stopped for our picnic lunch for a while.

The afternoon was a liesurely run out across even more immense flat areas of short-grass plains to Ndotu Lodge, with massive Kori Bustards, diminutive Fischer's Sparrow-larks and plenty in between – Montagu's Harriers, Red and Yellow Barbet for one vehicle and loads of Yellow-throated Sandgrouse included across the still quite dry plains with wandering herds of Wildebeest and our first Grant's Gazelles and African Golden Wolf (aka Golden Jackal) of the trip. We arrived at Ndotu Lodge by mid afternoon and everyone seemed happy to call it a day, relax and watch from the open lounge areas and cabin verandahs. We did a little bit of birding in the grounds adding drab little Buff-bellied Warbler to the list and a Pearl-spotted Owlet in the acacias where we sat having our pre-prandial cocktails. As anticipated, the post-prandial entertainment was provided by a gorgeous Common Genet coming in to the lodge roof beams for its supper and posing for photos.

November 9. Ndotu in the SE Serengeti: We set out for a morning game drive at about 7.45am, heading to the Marsh area, covering a bit of the open, short-grass plains and finally the shore of Lake Ndotu. Having previously seen Cheetah very well, the pressure was off for that species and one of our goals was finding Bat-eared Fox. There were very few people staying at Ndotu Lodge and we saw only a couple of other

Landcruisers out on the plains all morning, giving us a wonderful sense of having hundreds of square miles of the Serengeti all to ourselves. The flipside of that of course is that there is no feed-back on what is being found and seen, so we had to do it all on our own. However, we did! A pair of very attractive Bat-eared Foxes were found and later, on the return journey a couple of magnificent male Lions were located allowing phenomenally close looks as they dozed in the shade of some acacia bushes. In between were some very impressive numbers of Zebra and especially Wildebeest. There were huge herds dotted across the plains, some tranquil and grazing, others moving determinedly from A to B in long trotting lines. They seem to have reached the short grass plains early this year as they are not due to calve until January/February.

Of course, there were also some good bird sightings. Fischer's Sparrow-larks were out on the plains where we finally got some proper looks at Pectoral-patch Cisticola. Another Taita Fiscal was found in the open acacia bushes and plenty of the endemic Grey-breasted Spurfowl. Along the marsh and lake shore were good numbers of waders – Little Stints, Ruff, Greenshank, Marsh, Wood and Curlew Sandpipers plus the star-attractions of Kittlitz's and Chestnut-banded Plovers. The lake was full of both species of flamingos looking brilliant in the sunshine with no hint of rain yet today.

Back at the lodge for lunch we took a break until 3.30pm. and then took a game drive towards nearby Lake Masek. The lake was quite full and a short but substantial downpour of rain persuaded us not to try driving round too much of the lake edge where I've been stuck in mud before. The open, scrubby acacia savanna with occasional taller trees surrounding the lake provided plenty of interest, both before and after the rain. Small mixed flocks of Blue-capped Cordonbleus, Purple Grenadiers, Speckle-fronted Weavers, Buff-bellied Warblers and White-bellied Canaries kept us on our toes. It was interesting to find both Dark and Eastern Chanting Goshawks in the same area – I wonder what differences there are in their ecology to allow them to be sympatric here? A couple of groups of Rufous Chatterers was a welcome addition and on the way back as the light failed, we had a wonderful close-up study of a fine, large male Giraffe feeding on tall acacias – gently stripping the fiercely thorny twigs and branches. At dusk there were a couple of brief fly-bys of Slender-tailed Nightjar.

November 10. Nduvu to Ngorongor via Olduvai Gorge: We were away from Nduvu Lodge a little before 8am this morning, heading eastwards again towards Ngorongoro Crater via Olduvai Gorge. Driving slowly through the open acacia woodland we came across pairs of Tawny Eagles in trees, and once out onto the vast, flat, snooker table green of the short grass plains we were encountering large numbers of Yellow-throated Sandgrouse with the bonus of a small group of Chestnut-bellied showing quite well. Here too were Montagu's and lovely male Pallid Harrier, Temminck's Coursers and Kori Bustards. Some areas looked quite dry still, but others were emerging green from recent rains. The main target out here were the larks and we managed some decent looks at numerous Red-capped Larks – one of the more distinctive species. Rufous-naped and Fischer's Sparrow-larks were common as were African Pipits and Northern & Capped Wheatears. In their midst were 1-2 Isabelline Wheatears and Fawn-coloured Larks. As we joined the main road out of the Serengeti (still horribly rutted and bumpy) we found a family of Greater Kestrels, then drove with roof down and at a better speed until we turned off through the dusty, sparse acacias towards Olduvai by mid-morning. A short bird walk at Olduvai produced catch-up Red-and-Yellow Barbet for Michael and Diana. The museum was viewed and there was a lecture at the overview given by one of the staff after we'd had an early picnic lunch.

Away again by 1pm, we were motoring up and away from the wonderful Serengeti plains into the Ngorongoro highlands on the jarring dirt road, stopping for a break at the descent road into the Crater. Here I called out the very localised Wailing Cisticola before we continued on to the comfortable Serena lodge, arriving by mid-afternoon. Most folk opted out and relaxed, while Ken, Michael, Diana and I gently wandered the limited area of grounds around the lodge. Despite the frustration of not being able/allowed to wander at will through all this lush highland forest, we managed to find a good variety of the special birds here on our first foray until about 5pm. Top of the list was Golden-winged Sunbird flitting about in a gorgeous flowering

Jacaranda tree. Almost as pretty, close-up, was Eastern Double-collared Sunbird. Both Streaky and Thick-billed Seedeaters showed well, along with White-eyed Slaty and African Dusky Flycatchers, Baglafaecht Weavers, Cape Robin-Chats, Hunters Cisticolas doing their marvellous duetting songs, Long-tailed Fiscals and Tropical Boubous and a whole lot more. We finished up with a G&T on the verandah overlooking the crater below – a magnificent sight, made all the more special when I met up with the local lodge wildlife guide who borrowed my scope to find a Black Rhino down on the Crater floor. Sadly, this was after everyone else had left for showers.

November 11. The Ngorongoro Crater: Rain overnight persisted into the first part of our day in the Ngorongoro Crater. The day started with fog and swirling mist around the lodge perched on the crater rim, which put a stop to any of the intended birding – though I did call in a very close Cinnamon Bracken Warbler and several Brown-headed Apalises. It was a good job we did the birding in the grounds of the lodge and called in the Wailing Cisticola at the top of the descent road yesterday, as it was nigh-on impossible to do anything much this morning.

As we went down the paved road into the crater, with roof firmly closed against the rain, we did manage to see a few Abyssinian Wheatears and Northern Anteater Chats. The rain had more or less stopped by the time we edged up to the greatly over-sized lake on the crater floor, watching where the freshwater poured into the soda lake. There were masses of birds here: flamingos, Gull-billed Terns, a couple of Grey-headed Gulls, ducks of all sorts including a few Northern Shoveler and a big variety of waders including Marsh and Curlew Sandpipers. The Hippos here were wallowing and half submerged in deep lake-edge mud, and because temperatures were so low they were not needing to stay cool in the water. A female with a small calf wandered along the lake edge making a strong contrast to the backdrop of colourful, elegant flamingos.

Further along we headed towards the Hippo pools, where again, the Hippos were behaving quite differently to normal with the cool, damp conditions allowing many of them to be out grazing. The pools held some further good birds with African Rail, a bright pair of Malachite Kingfishers and numerous drab Lesser Swamp Warblers being the targets found and seen well. Here too were many Black-crowned Night Herons, Long-toed Lapwings, a few Great White Pelicans, African Spoonbills and further ducks. The whole crater was very wet and big areas usually grassy plains were extensive marshes and floods with loads of waterbirds present that have found the temporary flood to their liking. Masses of Red-knobbed Coots, many ducks, waders and a couple of Fulvous Whistling Ducks were odd sights on what is normally dry, short grass plain. The cool and damp also meant that there were many hirundines feeding low and perching on the spiky grass tufts across the plains. Amidst the many Barn Swallows were several other species and we managed to pick out sGrey-rumped Swallows – not a species I record very often at all.

As the rain eased off and skies brightened a little, we noted more of the big game in the crater – predominantly Wildebeest in their hundreds/thousands, but also Cape Buffalo in substantial numbers, Thompson's and Grant's Gazelles, Zebra and a few Coke's Hartebeests scattered across the extensive flat crater floor. We motored on to reach the picnic area by the freshwater marsh and lake by lunchtime, where most of the landcruisers gather, allowing toilet breaks and leg-stretches for a while. A fine pair of Lanner Falcons greeted us near the smart new toilet block and groups of not very well-plumaged Fan-tailed Widowbirds were flitting around the lake edge.

After our picnic we decided to drive out of the crater via the northern road, passing the Sopa Lodge. This would give us a better opportunity to find some of the special high altitude, crater rim forest birds. So after pausing for a distant look at a couple of Lions, we motored on, through more wildebeest, a group of seven Spotted Hyenas and grasslands decked with flamboyant Grey Crowned Cranes, before making the ascent out of the crater, through a gate where a large Elephant was in the process of blocking the way. One landcruiser turned to drive a short distance out onto the large area of flat high moorland where large numbers of Maasai have now settled fairly permanently. We passed donkeys laden with firewood, being driven along by Maasai

men, while Maasai women walked along as heavily laden with firewood as the donkeys! Our one-bird target here was the fairly drab Moorland Chat, which we found very quickly by the roadside, allowing us to turn about and start birding our way around the long crater rim road, pausing here and there for any birds seen or to try calling particular species in. There was some moderate success, but it is always frustrating having to watch from the vehicle in a superb, large area of glorious forest that you can only view from the road. Red-faced Cisticola came in briefly to call. A pair of Schalow's Turacos flew in, flashing their red wings, but all too briefly and distantly. White-eyed Slaty Flycatchers and Robin-Chats were common. Mbulu White-eyes, Southern Citrils, and Cinnamon-chested Bee-eaters all brightened up the afternoon before we headed back to join the main road at the viewpoint overlooking the crater. Here we paused again and found and scoped a Rhino with calf down on the crater floor. This attracted much attention and the scope was gratefully used by quite a few other tourists present who had no chance of seeing it otherwise.

November 12. To Tarangire National Park: Early morning birding in the Serena Lodge grounds produced a few extra birds and additional views. Brown Woodland Warbler and Cinnamon Bracken Warbler showed well. Away by about 8.30am, we paused briefly for a final view of the Ngorongoro Crater, but there was a fair bit of swirling mist obscuring the view at times. Then we wound our way down through further forest on the road out of the Conservation Area and onto the tarmac for the first time in over a week. Apart from a brief pause to look over the steep Rift Valley escarpment down on to Lake Manyara National Park, and an ATM stop in Karatu (where I again became a TZ Shilling millionaire) it was a straight run to the entrance to Tarangire National Park. There were still a few short but strong rain showers and we didn't linger long here, or on the way until our lunch stop at the Tarangire Safari Lodge. Here the weather brightened a little and allowed us an hour or more of down time to enjoy a sit-down lunch, a bit of birding and to meet again with Anthony Raphael and his two Australian guests whom we'd met at Speke's Bay. The birding was good with Arrow-marked Babblers and Orange-breasted Bushshrike seen. Local lodge employee Jacob, as usual, found me the roosting African Scops Owl for all to admire in full-frame telescope view.

We said cheerio to Anthony and set out for Tarangire Sopa Lodge, on an afternoon game drive by about 2.30pm. Tarangire always produces a new range of birds we'd not see elsewhere, and we quickly added species such as the endemic Ashy Starling and Yellow-collared Lovebirds, plus Yellow-necked Spurfowl, Meyer's and Red (Orange)-bellied Parrots as we motored deeper into the centre of the National Park. A short diversion onto one of the river circuits got us our first Black Stork.

Along our way, after not encountering many other landcruisers, we suddenly came up to a traffic jam of 15 or more vehicles. The excitement was, as anticipated, a Leopard. This was a splendid view of a young female sat, not high in a tree, but at more or less ground level on a termite mound. She was fairly close to the road, but completely unphased by all the noise, of people and landcruisers jockeying for position. The view through the telescope was full-frame of the head and shoulders in great light.

The stormy conditions with glowering rain clouds on the horizon was clearly making the termites fly and we saw large numbers of swifts at high altitude feeding along with several falcons, only 1-2 coming close enough to ID as Eurasian Hobby. A group of Northern Pied Babblers were a welcome addition and towards the Sopa Lodge was our first African Hawk Eagle.

Arriving by about 5pm, we were given the usual welcome, pep-talk and got to our rooms for some down time. I called in the resident Freckled Nightjar by the pool just before birdlist, drinks and supper from 7pm onwards.

November 13. Tarangire: A coolish, cloudy, but mostly dry morning allowed us to do a bit of pre-breakfast birding and get away to Silale Swamp for the morning at 8am. The drive over there produced a few interesting birds, but not much game other than a few Elephants. First Beautiful Sunbirds and Dideric Cuckoo were welcome additions and small gatherings of Steppe-type Common Buzzards indicated some recent

migration and arrival. Once at the edge of Silale we motored down to find water, but disappointingly few waterbirds. Ken's group had a kettle of Openbill Storks, there were plenty of Cattle and a few Intermediate Egrets, Glossy and Sacred Ibises on the marsh but few ducks - White-faced Whistling Ducks and a lone Knob-billed Duck. A few breeding plumaged Whiskered Terns were a lovely sight, but there were none of the hoped-for Widowbirds and Bishops. A flock of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters brightened things up for a while amidst all the other common stuff. Nubian Woodpecker and White-headed Vulture (now quite a scarce bird) were noted and a large group of Dwarf Mongooses caught Michael up with that species.

We arrived back at the lodge by 1pm for a far too large, but very good lunch and a break until 3.30pm. Dodging heavy but brief rainshowers, we made our way along tracks on the lodge side of the Tarangire River. There were good views of a couple of catch-up species, finding a very nice roadside group of Hildebrandt's Spurfowl and on our return a trio of Meyer's Parrots feeding in a sunlit baobab. Larger numbers of Elephants began to show up this afternoon, including some fine groups with small young. However, the top sighting must go to a very unexpected 5th Leopard of the tour, hunkered down in the shady grass between a row of acacias. Not as visible as yesterday's, but still a real treat. The animal eventually sloped away after eyeing up a Warthog with two small piglets – the adult Warthog probably too formidable an opponent, but the young a tasty snack if it could get one: we'll never know the outcome!

The evening's supper was enriched by a brief set of tuneful and lively singing by the lodge staff – waiters, cooks, admin all joining in performing a few local, very rhythmic songs.

November 14. Return to Arusha: Leaving at about 7.30am we had time to do a bit of a game drive along the Tarangire River circuits as we departed the National Park this morning. We added Black-faced Sandgrouse to the list and caught some up with African Openbill Storks. There was a fairly large gathering of vultures – both White-backed and Ruppell's Griffons roosting in the riverside palms and just beginning to take to the wing in towering thermals. A fine display and array of Elephants was present to give us a good send off as we finished our safari.

Arriving in Arusha by a little after midday, we spent time at the Cultural Heritage Centre for a spot of lunch and some shopping amidst the somewhat overwhelming array of shops and items on offer. Joining us for a last lunch together were our drivers, God-bless and Moses, plus my good friend Lilian and her son Elemelck who has just finished university.

After this we motored towards KIA Lodge adjacent to the airport. The new southern Arusha by-pass allowed us to avoid the horrendous traffic in the city, but an attempt for one vehicle to finish up with some final birding in dry bush country near the airport ended in failure. There had been so much rain that tracks that should have been quickly and easily negotiated were in places impassable, and we all gave up and went to KIA Lodge together. A little bit of final birding in the grounds produced a few pretty farewells such as Variable and Scarlet-chested Sunbirds, plus a first and final look at the peak of Mt. Kilimanjaro popping out above the clouds. The peak now seems almost devoid of any ice or glaciers.

A last supper was taken early, as Ken, Jay, Diane and Rachel had a very early (4.30am) start to check-in for their flight out. Michael and Diana had a more leisurely schedule, meeting up with the local specialist bird guide Martin and driver Moses again tomorrow to take them off for their extension eastwards into Mkomazi National Park, the Usambaras and beyond. My schedule was even more relaxed as I have a day free tomorrow at KIA Lodge before meeting my Spanish friend to escort and guide another safari for the following 10 days.