

# Tanzania Birding & Wildlife Safari | Jan. 30 – Feb. 11, 2023 | Trip Report | by Peg Abbott



With guide Peg Abbott and participants: Bill, Bob, Carin, Carol, Cathy, David, Denise, Jan, Lori, Phil, Sandy, Sarah, Scott, Tom and Woody



## Mon., Jan. 30 Arrivals

On landing in Arusha, Tanzania, one's senses are immediately called to action as you step out into tropical air, take in views of Mt. Meru, the bustling energy of Tanzanian street life, and brilliant flowering trees. First Africa birds fly about the airport — Little Swifts, Superb Starlings and Pied Crows. Our group members came in at various times, happy to be met by smiling drivers. As the airport is easy to navigate it is a quick meet-up and ride out to our historic lodgings outside the city at Ngare Sero Mountain Lodge, which dates from 1905. The atmosphere is wonderful, in large part due to the lushness of huge trees that grace the grounds, inviting a wonderful array of birds at every turn.



Our Naturalist Journeys leader Peg was actually the last to arrive, coming fresh off a trip to Japan with a quick jaunt home to switch out gear, but she found a happy group, some of whom had arrived early and had been here a couple of days. They enjoyed guided outings coordinated for them to explore Arusha National Park and for also the Lark Plains where the sought-after Beazley's Lark and some other arid habitat associated species can be found. Those who went to Arusha National Park spoke glowingly of their experience, 80+ bird species and numerous mammals, including stately giraffes they could view at close range when walking with an armed ranger. Arusha National Park offers a walking safari available here but in few other parks. Already the group was having fun and exchanging sightings, and the energy to start the safari was high.

**Tues., Jan. 31**

### **Gibb's Farm | Lake Manyara Serena Lodge**

The lodge served up ample and delicious food, much of it raised on property. Early birding down to the pond proved to be productive. After a full breakfast, we packed up and headed out — with so much anticipation for the next two weeks of exploring. Poor Sandy had luggage delays, so she and friend Sarah headed out early for shopping. We picked her up at a surprisingly familiar store, Woolworths, where she found some pants, shirts and other needed items. Arusha was busy in the morning, with traffic of every variety and people on foot, going to work, going to school, selling wares. Women walked by gracefully carrying bananas on their heads, as we headed out of town we noticed their burdens turned to heavy jugs of water, balanced without use of their hands. We drove past farms where big flocks of Abdim's Stork fed along the margins. The countryside turned to open acacia woodland, dotted by giant Baobab and odd-looking Candelabra trees, giant euphorbias with many stems spread wide among shrubs and grassland. We passed a military installation where we started to see Zebra and a few Wildebeest.

We drove a couple of hours and then had lunch in a very birdy spot, much to the delight of all. Gibb's Farm is a lush oasis en route to Ngorongoro Crater, and we were led up the hill to a lovely dining room with huge open windows and a view. A White-browed Robin-Chat was nesting in the vines of the entryway. Our lunch was scrumptious and much of it is raised right here on the farm. Conversation flowed freely as we got to know each other and reunited with friends. Woody Wheeler, a guide emeritus for Naturalist Journeys was here with his wife Lori and friends, adding a special element to the trip.

After lunch we walked the grounds, finding some great birds. Golden-tailed and Mountain Gray Woodpeckers both called and we had fun watching them fly tree to tree. We saw Tambourine Dove which can be secretive,





Tropical Boubou, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, African Black-headed Oriole, Abyssinian Thrush and other species. We walked on a wide path and there were so many flowers, with huge Citrus Swallowtails and other colorful butterflies flitting in the sun. We had to tear ourselves away from Gibb's Farm — next year we will stay here!

But this year we had another idyllic setting calling, not all that far away, our lodgings for the night at Lake Manyara Serena Lodge. Perched up on the top of the Rift Valley, the view from the lodge was sublime from every angle, from our rooms and the dining area. We could see down the Rift as if it was a rugged coastline with the wall of the rift standing above a very full Lake Manyara. Dinner was served as a huge buffet and after our ample lunch we did not make a proper dent.

Tonight we had scheduled a night drive with a concessionaire permitted to go into Lake Manyara National Park after dark. We met at the park gate and piled into a large, open-air vehicle. A ranger accompanied us and carried a large torch to spotlight. Soon we found sleeping Silvery-cheeked Hornbills and not long after, three sleeping Lions! We got very close to a large Elephant alongside the road. Closer to the lake margin we saw Hippos out and grazing. Time passed quickly, quite the end to our first full day.

### **Wed., Feb. 1                      Lake Manyara NP | Ngorongoro Crater Rim | Ndutu**

We had breakfast with the birds, perched out on the patio of the dining area where we could watch a troop of Vervet Monkeys in the trees and numerous songbirds sallying out from their perches. We headed from here into Lake Manyara National Park to explore in daylight, driving first through lush forests of Yellow-Fever Acacias and moving into dense clusters of palms and then to the lakeshore. We found Sykes Monkeys at close range, and at the lakeshore had an explosion of birds. The lake has been rising for several years and the high water level drowned out shoreline trees making for an eerie landscape. Today, wading birds readily fed between the trunks and current shoreline including Openbill Stork, Black-necked Stilt, Yellow-billed Stork, Hamerkop, and more. A noisy flock of Green Woodhoopoe back up in the woodland was fun to observe. After a full morning in the park, we continued up in elevation, driving up the escarpment of the Rift Valley past some enormous Baobab trees and on into forests that rim Ngorongoro Crater. We stopped at the park gate where we were warned to be



careful of naughty Olive Baboons that eagerly watched for vehicles carrying picnic lunches to grab them. Our adaptable cousins looked formidable and we complied by keeping doors shut! The view of the rim was astonishing, with blustery clouds putting on a light show on the caldera floor 2000 feet below. This verdant valley was teeming with wildlife, far enough to appear like dots, but recognizable dots, mostly African Buffalo. Among the buffalo were two Black Rhino, rare enough to see that Phil grabbed his scope so we could get a better look. This caused a commotion with many people lining up for a look. But we were okay for time, and we also posed for photos, so beautiful was the scene.

We enjoyed a picnic not far from here, but like the viewpoint there were many other people doing the same, so most of the tables were full. Light rain and mist was starting to fall, but several of our group ventured to the far side to sit around a campfire area, perched on logs. Into the mix swooped an agile Black Kite intent on grabbing Woody's piece of chicken. The raptors grasp was so quick no one saw it coming. Woody felt a talon and was glad the chicken was not near his face! Other than this drama, the picnic area was good for birding, the show-stopper being a displaying male Red-cowled Widowbird. Not far down the road we also got a good show by displaying Jackson's Widowbird leaping up out of lush grass.

We continued on, passing a large and scenic Maasai village, and once downslope stopped to observe and photograph a large "tower" of giraffes. There were dozens of these gracious beasts and they moved in harmony, bending to feed on low bushes of acacia with relish. Giraffes rarely go down into the crater, but they are often in this section on the other side of the rim in number. Zebra grazed with them. We got to see the Giraffes' slow, graceful canter as something spooked them and part of the group took off. Much smaller, along the road our first chameleon was a great find with another interesting gait.

We passed the road that veers west to the famed Serengeti (our next stop) and continued on to Ndotu, in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. Ndotu is magical in February as it is the turn around point for the great Wildebeest Migration, its rich mineral soils a magnet for the females that are calving to get enough nutritious grass for nursing. Their numbers can be staggering, and predators come in, attracted to the congregation. There are two large lakes near the lodges and tented camps here and today the margin was full of flamingoes, both Lesser and Greater. They were crowded in massive number, amazing to see. We stopped to see many species





along the shoreline that our gracious hosts at Gnu Migration Camp seemed particularly happy when we arrived, not lost or further delayed. We had a briefing about safety under the shade of acacia trees; here we slept in

spacious tents and large animals were free to roam amongst us, which they did readily after dark. We would be guided by a guard to and from our tents. En route it was wonderful to take in the stars and night sounds! Dinner started with a nice yellow lentil soup, a salad with greens and feta, chicken or beef with mashed potatoes, onion and vegetables and mango mouse for dessert. We felt very welcome, in Swahili, Karibu! They made a roaring campfire but few of us lingered long, our comfortable beds were calling after a full and fulfilling day.

### **Thurs., Feb. 2 & Fri., Feb. 3**

### **Two Full Days with the Herds in Ndotu**

We had ample time to explore here and filled every day with wonder. In the conservation area we were allowed to drive off road and so could wind our way through the shrubs and acacias often away from other vehicles. We returned to camp for lunch and the chef fed us proudly. There was a daily menu board display and dishes like pork with peanut ginger sauce, fish, grilled goat meat or vegetable curry and lots of salads, fruits and vegetables. The dishes were kept hot in lovely clay pots and we dined at a long table with camp chairs. This kind of camp keeps a light footprint on the landscape and is perfect in such a seasonal and animal-rich environment.

Our route out from the camp took us down through shrubbery where we got good looks at Brubru, Fork-tailed Drongo, Taita Fiscal, Fischer's Lovebird and European Roller. We crossed a water course and then drove past the lake where we could admire over 1000 flamingoes and many shorebirds including Chestnut-collared Plover, Three-banded Plover, Ruff, Common Greenshank, Terek Sandpiper, a lone Green Sandpiper and a Little Stint. One morning a good number of Giraffe had come down to drink and watching their graceful movements to find a comfortable spot to do so was a delight. The actual art of drinking for such a tall animal requires special care and adaptive features to make it all possible. A local group of Lions was encountered several times, the challenge was waiting for them to wake up, so satiated they were with all this prey! We always had the top of our vehicle popped so we could stand up for good views. We even found Bat-eared Fox, one of Peg's favorite species.

Ndotu is a good area for birds of prey and we enjoyed good looks at Black-chested Snake Eagle, Wahlberg's Eagle and Eastern Chanting Goshawk our first morning, as well as a group of thirty or so Lesser Kestrels. That afternoon we had good looks at a Martial Eagle on the ground, finishing up a meal. We saw Tawny Eagle and vultures of several varieties: Lappet-faced, Hooded, White-backed and Rupell's Griffon. We also saw three types of bustards, White-bellied, Black-bellied and most impressive, the stately Kori Bustard. Both Chestnut-bellied and Yellow-



throated Sandgrouse seemed to like the seed fall found in vehicle tracks and we dodged quite a few. An uncommon find was a Common Quail. Some birds alerted us with call, including both Blacksmith and Crowned Plovers, and the Dideric Cuckoo. Little bird parties included Purple Grenadier, Black-faced Waxbill, Banded Parisoma, Red-billed Firefinch and Speckle-fronted Weaver. In flowering areas we found Beautiful Sunbird, a stunning creature!

One morning we went into the shorter grass area to look for Cheetah, which we found, a mother with large young. We watched as they investigated a lone acacia, atop which were a pair of Secretarybirds starting to nest. The big cubs scratched and wanted to climb but mom said move on and off they went. Another good find this day was two different pairs of Honey Badger! The first pair were skittish and ran, but the second were feeding and not about to move; we watched this often-elusive mammal for some time. We watched birds, mammals and anything of note, that list included Dung Beetles rolling their almost golf-ball size prizes about. This open area gifted us a Pallid Harrier, sightings of Eland in a big group in the distance, and singing Pectoral-patch Cisticolas which put on a good show. We stopped often to watch behavior, and we found a male Giraffe keen on a female that was not yet receptive, they moved closely together among a herd that was feeding. Watching those long tongues pull off tiny leaves is quite an art! We watched Zebra groom each other and tussle in their dominance hierarchy. We saw tiny calves of Wildebeest and many Thompson's and Grant's Gazelles. One morning returning to camp we happened on a Thompson Gazelle giving birth, we sat silently and watched as the mother licked the baby clean and watched it take its first steps and find the milk source — incredible! We saw both Hildebrandt's and Superb Starlings regularly, as well as Rufous-tailed Weaver and Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver, the latter often by their massive nests.

Our final afternoon we happened on to a pair of Lanner Falcon, quite a treat. We had good looks at Nubian Woodpecker and found a flock with Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Buff-bellied Warbler and Tawny-flanked Prinia. One of the group favorites was the highly patterned Great-spotted Cuckoo, an impressive bird. Ground birds included Helmeted Guineafowl, Coqui Francolin and Gray-breasted Spurfowl. After each full day of game viewing and birding, our hosts were so welcoming, tending to our comfort and doing so with joy. The final night they sang and played guitar — fun!





**Sat., Feb. 4**

## **On to the Serengeti!**

On our final morning flamingo numbers were off the charts with a big increase of Lesser Flamingoes; we estimated 8000 on our eBird list! We went to watch an area where sandgrouse gathered to wet their feathers before heading back to nests. We saw about 80 Chestnut-bellied and over 200 Yellow-throated, wow! We found Kittlitz's Plover and a Siberian (Tibetan) Plover and got good views and then added to our shorebird species both Curlew and Marsh Sandpipers. We parked both vehicles together where we could comb through the shorebirds and give them a good study. Washington decided we'd try the back route into Serengeti, a longer route but new terrain for us and we were in search of numbers of Wildebeest. It would prove to be a long day but a good one, and we did find a good size herd by a water feature. We had a picnic at the southern park gate where we could get out and stretch, watch birds and enjoy the breezes and shade. Present were these crazy Stick Grasshoppers with horns projecting out — we looked at nature big and small! Continuing on, we saw Bateleur and Steppe Eagles, new for the trip, and Dark Chanting Goshawk. African Gray Hornbill posed for us in nearby shrubs at one point, and we enjoyed watching Lilac-breasted Roller, D'Arnaud's Barbet and showy Ruppell's Starling. Yellow-throated Longclaw reminded all of our meadowlarks back home, and we were able to observe Swahili Sparrow. Along the route, we marveled at the ancient granite rock kopjes, domed features rimmed by lush trees, wonderful oases and often a place Lions like to rest. We found one Lion group high up and sacked out, doing what Lions do best, sleeping! We could not pass by a line of large acacias known to house Leopards and today we were not disappointed. We found a healthy one with prey stashed in the tree, napping below its kill in a crotch where it could straddle its front legs around a branch for a secure hold. It was hot, and panting, and being admired by many. It did not seem bothered by the vehicles that jostled for best photos and views. Amazingly there were two in this area, in separate trees not all that close, but closer than solitary Leopards normally are.

Some of the birding highlights of our route included a Klaas's Cuckoo, Long-crested Eagle, Little Bee-eater, Greater Honeyguide seen at close range not far from the ranger station, Red-faced Crombec, Silverbird, Variable Sunbird, stunning Red-headed Weaver, Vitelline Masked Weaver working on their intricate nests and Pin-tailed Whydah males showing off their plume-like tails. We were also happy to find Kenya Rufous Sparrow and get good looks. Our lodgings here were the most upscale of our trip, and so welcome after the long dusty drive. Kubu Kubu Lodge has a commanding view of the Serengeti Plains and we enjoyed it from the patio with drinks upon arrival. Tom relished his nice cold beer! There is a lovely infinity pool and each room has an outdoor



shower, complete with view, so you never leave the sense of wonder at being here, totally immersed in African nature.

## Sun., Feb. 5 **Balloon Ride over the Serengeti | Game Drive**

On the first morning from here, those that chose the balloon ride were picked up before dawn so they could lift off at sunrise. Most of the group joined this special adventure this year and all agreed it was an incredible highlight of the trip. Phil and his guard saw the eyeshine of Lion as they walked to the parking lot! A few “night species” like Spring Hare and Scrub Hare were seen en route, a bonus to getting up so early.

The adventure of loading up into the balloon and lifting off, gliding above herds of wildlife and such an impressive landscape created indelible memories. The sensation of seeing such an expanse of open landscape, full of animal life was so humbling. All celebrated with a spectacular champagne brunch shared with a troop of Banded Mongoose.

Those not on the balloon enjoyed some additional time to watch birds, and Southern Ground Hornbills were one of the highlights. We watched a group of five Ostrich, saw a Lappet-faced Vulture perched on what appeared to be a nest, and were entertained by a family group of highly interactive Magpie Shrikes. We saw Flappet Lark, were able to photograph Rattling Cisticola, and found a couple Yellow-spotted Bush Sparrow.

We joined up at the Serengeti Visitor Center, those not on the balloon doing some great birding along the way. The visitor center is built around a kopje and on walks guided by local interpreters, we got to see Rock Hyrax at close range, a number of birds, and to learn about the Wildebeest migration and about the ecology of this famous park. Slate-colored Boubou rang out with its bell-like tones from the rocks, while Little Swifts swirled overhead. In one of the shade structures we spooked up a pair of nesting Gray-rumped Swallow, new for the trip. We learned of research done over the last five decades and at the end saw skulls of all the various species we’d observed, fascinating to be able to see them up close and feel their relative weights. Engraved in a plaque from a pioneer who first filmed the marvel of Serengeti in a film entitled *Serengeti Shall Not Die*:

*“But when, fifty years from now, a lion walks into the red dawn and roars resoundingly, it will mean something to people and quicken their hearts whether they are Africans or Europeans, or*





*whether they speak English, German, Russian or Swahili. They will stand in quiet awe as, for the first time in their lives, they watch twenty thousand zebras wander across endless plains.”*  
Bernhard Grzimek, 1959

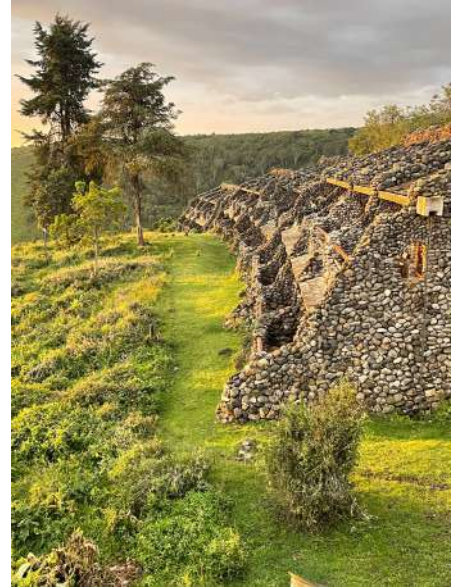
Leaving this area we went to a pond where Hippos were resting in the water and we saw a large Nile Crocodile. Black-headed Heron and Eurasian Moorhen were there alongside Three-banded Plover and Blacksmith Plover. A real treat was finding a colorful Quailfinch at the water edge. We saw two more later in the afternoon as well as Fan-tailed Widowbird and a Rosy-throated Longclaw; a good birding day.

Our lunch picnic was up on a small rise where shade trees were welcome. In one was a coiled python that was sound asleep and somehow not bothered by scores of Superb Starling and other birds. Leaving here we passed a huge pile of Lions, right ON the road. Truly kings of the jungle they did not want to move and we had to navigate around them. A few large cubs with spotted tummies kept things lively but the adults were not ready to budge.

Everyone wanted some time to relax, take a swim or bird from our porches at our lovely lodge so we headed on in to take a break. Meals were lavish here, we were not losing weight on this trip for sure. And, we had a full moon at this lodge, wonderful timing as we could watch it rise over such an expansive view.

## **Mon., Feb. 6                      Serengeti NP | Oldapai Gorge | Ngorongoro Crater**

On the way out of the lodge, we had a good time watching male and female Ostrich standing taller than the Zebra they mingled with. There were big herds of Zebra, Lion on the Kopje and so much to see going out. New for our observations were Temminck’s Courser, a lovely delicate-looking bird that seemed to thrive in open harsh conditions. We saw Eurasian and Greater Kestrels as we left the park in the open stretch leading to Oldapai Gorge where there were also numerous Capped and Isabelline Wheatears, the former quite a striking species. Near Naabi Gate and the park exit, we picked up Red-tailed Shrike, Fischer’s Sparrow Lark and Speke’s Weaver. The visit to Oldapai was very interesting, and at the gate and visitor center we were able to purchase some local baskets. Local guides gave us a summary lecture of the excavations of the Leakey family over several decades and the significance of their findings. We were able to drive down into the gorge which gave us a totally different perspective. The visitor center had some excellent exhibits and gave us a shaded spot to have our picnic lunch.



Our photographers loved the many species present at small water features to photograph. From the arid, open habitat of Oldapai the habitat changed a lot as we climbed up the Ngorongoro Crater Rim, passing circular thatch-roofed homes of the Maasai. Windswept acacia trees and mountain vistas made this route especially scenic, and we looked for Mountain Buzzard, getting good views along the way of its two-toned underwing.

By afternoon we checked into our extraordinary lodge on the rim, a historic structure that could best be described as a marvelous maze of rock and timber. We peered out from rock windows, heard Schalow's Turacos calling as we checked into our rooms. A wonderful place to land and explore! This was higher elevation than we had had time to bird at yet so there was a host of new species, notably in the late-afternoon Hunter's Cisticola calling often from shrubs just off our porches. This is a big lodge as Ngorongoro is one of Tanzania's prime attractions. They had a show of Maasai dancers performing in the bar before dinner, Sarah joined in when invited and we enjoyed her big smile.

## **Tues., Feb. 7                      Full Day in Ngorongoro Crater**

We woke to watch sunrise over the crater from our porches, wow! It was brisk in the morning air at this elevation. Nyanza and White-rumped Swifts swirled overhead. Cinnamon-chested Bee-eaters sallied out for food from moss-covered branches. Dusky and Speckled Pigeons are present as we load our vehicles. Off we went, as early as they would let us. Birding our way down into the crater floor, descending over 1500 feet on a winding road was great fun. We found both Brown-crowned and Black-crowned Tchagras and listened to the differences in their songs. Red-and-yellow Barbets dueted and flew back and forth across the road. We spied a Tawny Eagle and six White-necked Ravens. Washington worked us through our Cisticola identification finding (by call) Singing, Wailing, Winding and Zitting this day. Mbulu White-eyes appear in a small flock as did Southern Citril. In dense shrubbery we found a White-throated Robin. Sunbirds were common and we spotted Scarlet-chested, Beautiful and Bronze with ease. As the forest opened up and we were in open grass we found Northern Anteater-Chat and Abyssinian Wheatear. By mid-morning we have over 70 species of birds tallied.

And there were mammals. We saw more Eland than we had previously and many Zebra, Wildebeest, small antelopes and Black-backed Jackal. We drove and spotted, photographed, observed, and then saw four cars





pulled over with observers who are very intent. We were close so we quietly joined them and quickly saw a female Lion with two two-thirds grown cubs sitting up, alert in tall grass, intently staring at a Zebra. The Zebra was unaware and walking down to a water course that the Lion's grassy gully led to. We were at some distance, but thankfully Bill was ready with his iPhone to video, for in the next minutes we held our breath and watched her make a spectacular single-Lion kill. She lowered her torso to move through the grass undetected and when in range exploded with speed. She leapt onto the back of the Zebra, hanging on to it from the side, out of range of the wild kicks it was making to break free. She used her strength to get up to the neck; as it did so both went out of sight for us, and we saw only a dust cloud and no more. She was probably holding it down, waiting for its breath to stop before calling the cubs in for their sustenance. The whole drama took less than a minute once she bolted, and not a one of us will ever forget it.

A bit incredulous for what we'd just seen, we continued slowly on, finding a Black Rhino this time at much closer range, grazing. This is a massive animal and endangered; we were lucky to see it so well. There were Wildebeest grazing near, with very young calves and numerous Grant's Gazelles.

We went to Lake Magadi for our picnic lunch where there was a restroom and from a high point we could see many Egyptian Geese, Red-billed Duck, three species of lapwing: Crowned, Black-winged and Blacksmith, Black-headed Heron, African Sacred Ibis, a Cardinal Woodpecker and in the reeds, showy Southern Red Bishop. At a smaller water feature farther out along the crater floor, we stopped to scan and found a Water Rail, sweet! With it we found a half-dozen Blue-billed Teal, Cape Teal, Little Grebe, Red-knobbed Coot, Black Crake and not too far off at least 40 Gray-crowned Crane, just magnificent birds, fairly oblivious to us watching them as they were in a prime feeding area. There were numerous Abdim's Storks and White Storks. One Saddle-billed Stork paraded about, showing off its colors.

It was time to make our way back, all vehicles must be out of the crater by sunset and the rules are strict. But we lingered as long as we could near a culvert at a small stream crossing where we found another cat — this time a Serval, a species not easy to see. We watched it move among the grass until it came out in the open, showing off its large ears as it listened for prey. We had to tear ourselves away. Yet with no time to spare ... there was a road block! A huge bull Elephant was exactly in the middle of the road and dust bathing, taking his time. We filmed it only a car-length away as our driver gunned the engine as a hint to move. The ground was wet on either side,



with no easy passing and we were required to stay on the road. The standoff continued until we saw first a foot shuffle, then a gradual give way. We made it up and out with only seconds to spare! We got back with some time to freshen up, and one of the lodge staff eagerly showed us a few more birds around the lodge at dusk. We gravitated to the bar, stopping to photograph the sunset. Tonight's show included highly athletic acrobats, wow! We did not join in this one, but admired their skills. Dinner was a feast but soon we are off to bed, comfortable in these lovely accommodations.

### **Wed., Feb. 8                      Ngorongoro Crater | Burunge Conservation Area**

We witnessed another glorious sunrise. This morning we enjoyed birding the lodge grounds and in the open viewing area of the parking turnaround. Rameron Pigeon, a species of the higher elevations flew by. Sunbirds were busy feeding and we saw Amethyst, Tacazze, Golden-winged and Eastern Double-collared all well. A Streaky Seedeater popped into view, and with some effort we found Bar-throated Apalis, Willow Warbler and Eurasian Blackcap (both migratory species that winter here), Cape Robin Chat, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher and Scarce Swift. We made a few stops along the road around the crater, did our paperwork at the park gate as we exited, and in the small town below the crater, we stopped for an ATM and at an all-too-tempting craft store. Our destination today was Burungi Tented Lodge on the shore of Lake Burungi. We arrived there in time to do some birding from a wide deck that had a distant view of the lake. There we saw Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, a Dideric Cuckoo that perched out in the open, a noisy Gray-headed Kingfisher, Spotted Flycatcher and Spotted Morning-Thrush. We found a Black Bishop as well as several Southern Red Bishops, all showy birds dressed in red and black, present alongside Eastern Paradise-Whydah, Steel-blue Whydah and Village Indigobird. It was very pleasant out on the deck and to our delight two Elephant bulls came to the waterhole. They were younger bulls, perhaps 25 years old and eager to tussle, test their strength and push each other around. We dined in the open air, a lovely meal and good company.

### **Thurs., Feb. 9                      Burungi Tented Lodge | Tarangire National Park**

We took a pre-breakfast super-productive morning birding walk from the lodge. We had scope views of Red-fronted Tinkerbird, close views of Nubian Woodpecker, both Beautiful and Variable Sunbirds gleaming in the sun, and a surprise species, Thrush Nightingale. Crimson-rumped Waxbills joined the more common Blue-capped





Cordonbleu and Village Indigobird. We had a lovely breakfast out on the wide veranda with views of the lake, Greater Flamingoes flying by in the distance. We packed up and headed on, this morning entering Tarangire National Park through the back gate at Sangaiwe. We got out for a nice leg-stretch at the gate where White-bellied Go-away-birds entertained us and we saw a nest of Wahlberg's Eagle. There was quite a collection of animal skulls here and we could not resist posing for photos next to the massive Elephant skull. Driving along we saw red soils, massive Baobabs, big red, towering termite mounds — this park was a magical place. We found Straw-tailed Whydah, Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Red-chested Cuckoo, Eastern Chanting Goshawk, Ashy Starling, Rufous-tailed Weaver and more. Knob-billed Ducks perched up in nest trees, we spied Water Thick-knee, Bare-faced Go-away-bird, a stunning Martial Eagle, beautiful European Roller, a noisy flock of White Helmetsrike, Gray-headed Silverbill and several Magpie Shrikes. We watched Giraffe feed on acacias, and saw family groups of Elephants that seemed to enjoy the lush vegetation. We made many stops, enjoyed learning about behavior and took way too many photos. At day's end we pulled into our lodge, happy to land.

Tarangire Lodge has a fabulous location, up on a bluff overlooking the river. After checking into our cottages, we met for cocktails to soak in the view and review the day. We shared our popcorn with clever Red-billed Hornbills that the waiters kept chasing away. Everyone felt satisfied, we'd seen so much crossing into the park. Our time was coming to a close, but we still had one more full day before us, and a final night game drive.

## **Fri., Feb. 10                      Tarangire National Park | Silale Swamp | Night Drive**

Birding from the walkway that ran along our casitas as we headed out for the day, we heard and then found a Pearl-spotted Owlet just below us, fun! We then spied an African Scops Owl in the parking lot, starting out with a two owl day! We then headed out, watching both Yellow-throated and Black-faced Sandgrouse along the tracks of the road, along with Crested Francolin, Yellow-necked Spurfowl and Coqui Francolin. We saw two White-bellied Bustards and got to watch them feed, then found even larger ground dwellers — finally getting really good views of Southern Ground Hornbills. A Common Cuckoo called and posed in shrubs. Our goal today was to reach the Silale Swamp area, and here we found a huge group of Elephants with babies. It was absolutely wonderful to watch their antics, rolling in mud, drinking, feeding. We saw another large African Rock Python in a tree over the road, and from various spots scanned for water birds. We found many, including Black Crake, African Jacana, Green and Wood Sandpipers, Black-winged Stilt and Collared Pratincole. We got good views of a lovely Rufous-bellied Heron and a Great White Pelican flew overhead. Just driving through this park was



rewarding, there are so many species, both birds and mammals, but the backdrop of red-termite mounds, fanciful Baobab trees and lush vegetation makes it so pretty to explore. The park is known for raptor sightings and we had good views of Tawny Eagle, Black-chested Snake Eagle, a family of Bateleur perched, and Eastern Chanting Goshawk. The day passed quickly and we enjoyed another round of patio cocktails and a delicious buffet dinner. We then joined local guide Abdul and boarded an big open-air vehicle for the lodge-hosted night drive with spotlighting. Almost right away we spotted a Bat-eared Fox, getting quick views but enough to see those wild big ears so tuned in for hunting (hearing termites). We saw Spring Hares and Scrub Hares and were delighted to find our third owl of the day, two massive Verreaux's Eagle Owls. We spied four Genets, and got looks at Lesser Bush Baby. And we saw a number of animals we had also seen by day including Elephant, Spotted Hyena and Cheetah. A very successful night drive!

## Sat., Feb. 11                      Tarangire National Park | Return to Arusha

We wound our way out of Tarangire National Park, passing massive Baobabs and admiring the scenery and a few birds. From here we headed out to the main highway and back to Arusha. Washington had arranged a final lunch at a nice hotel with gardens there. We dined outside and had a chance to share highlights of the trip. It was time to give thanks to our amazing team of drivers and guides, as they had made this an incredible safari sharing all their skills so generously. As our flights departed at different times there are several rounds of good-byes. A few of us stayed the night to fly out the next day. Africa was all we hoped it would be and more!

*Group Photo (Peg Abbott – PA), Elephant (Bob Hill – BH), Von der Decken's Hornbill (PA), Eastern Double-collared Sunbird (BH), Lilac-breasted Roller (BH), Flamingos (BH), Zebra (BH), Gray-crowned Crane (BH), Lioness (BH), White-bellied Go-away-bird (BH), Spotted Thick-knee (BH), Northern Double-collared Sunbird (BH), Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater (BH), Enjoying Ngorongoro Crater (PA), Chameleon (BH), Lodging (BH), Crowned Eagle (BH), Giant Kingfisher (BH), Speckled Mousebird (BH), Bearded Woodpecker (BH), Elephants (BH), Group Birding (PA), Impalas (BH), Warthog (BH), Yellow-billed Stork (BH), Giraffes (BH), Cheetah (BH), Zebra (BH), Northern Red-billed Hornbill (BH), Ostrich (BH), White-bellied Bustard (BH), Sykes' Monkey (BH), Group Birding (BH), Group lunch (BH), Mountain Gray Woodpecker (BH), Silvery-cheeked Hornbill (BH), Giraffe (BH), Fischer's Lovebird (BH), Safari Camp (BH), Hot Air Balloon (BH), Lion (BH), White-bellied Bustard (BH), Hyena (BH), Leopard (BH), Vervet Monkeys (BH), Elephants (BH), African Scops- Owl (BH), Woodland Kingfisher (BH)*