

This is an account of part of a longer trip that started in Kenya and travelling through Tanzania and Rwanda to Uganda. September 2017.

The reports of the other sectors will appear under the relevant countries.

After crossing into Tanzania we turned hard right for the gravel track to Lake Chala Lodge where we were booked in for two nights in comfortable cabins perched on the rim of the Crater Lake. Dinner was taken with Bush babies scampering over the dining room floor to their feeding station. Our inner needs were also taken care of by the excellent fare on offer from Carolyn and her team. This lodge does not get many visitors and it is hard to see why as it has wonderful views of the area including the nearby peak of Kilimanjaro. It is a firm favourite of ours. It is in a wildlife area and there is much to do including guided walks and swimming safely in the lake. We enjoyed our all too short stay at this charming camp just walking and birding the area and enjoying the excellent food.



But it was time to move on and we headed first for Arusha and a coffee appointment with Mzee Achmed Phillips of Basecamp Safaris with whom I had corresponded for years but not yet met. Great coffee and great company and with an office close to a good Forex for a top up of TZSh, what more could we want? Emmy's niece, working in Arusha, was due to meet him and as she arrived it transpired that Bwana Achmed had been 'chatting' to her last evening. Small world.

We tore ourselves away in time to face the Arusha traffic and the drive to our new base at Roika Tarangire Lodge which was a last minute booking with neither Tarangire Safari Lodge or Ol Mesera open to us and we wondered what we would find. Our spirits shot up when after checking in to the



usual warm towel and cold drink ceremony we were told we could not get to our tents due to elephants blocking the path. Elephants in camp!! This seems like my kind of place and the food was good too.

No more self-catering! When will I wake up to find I am dreaming? No Concession Fees either as we are outside the NP although the wildlife does not seem to bother about that small matter as we have seen. Next morning we set off for the short drive, 6km, to the park gate and enjoyed a

full day in the park where we met plenty of elephant and giraffe

and many birds. Tarangire is looking up and remains my favourite park. We saw **Cheetah**, a first here for me, several lions and a **lazy leopard** on this drive.



Our final day here was spent exploring the local area on foot keeping a good look out for wildlife as we sought out more birds for our growing list such as this lovely **Sulphur-breasted Bush-Shrike**.

We needed to rest our indomitable driver as the next sector was a full 700km to Ruaha National Park but the drive was uneventful as the road south as far as Iringa was new tar with the Tanzanian Highways Agency having been kind enough to open the final 13km only days before we were to pass. How kind is that?



We made Iringa, after driving through absolute 'forests' of Baobabs, in good time to top off the tanks before taking to the dirt road for the final 100km to Tandala Tented Camp where we arrived just after dark and were made very welcome by owner Yanni. After dinner we settled into our 'tents' for a four night stay with Maasai guides as there were elephant in this camp too. Bliss! We enjoyed a sound sleep punctuated by Hyena cackles and quarrels and the odd rumble from ellies and even a lion roaring.



Another good choice of camp which is full of wildlife of various sizes and temperament.

We tore ourselves away for a day in Ruaha NP but it seemed quiet after so much action back in camp. Ruaha is a splendid Park with different scenery to the northern circuit with many

Baobabs and we saw many fine things. The park is bisected by the Ruaha River which was quite small in the dry season so fish eaters were giving the resident Catfish and Squeakers a very hard time. Away from the river the landscape was dry and barren and quite rocky.



Our packed lunch, taken in a small TANAPA shelter, has to take an award for originality and quality. Pasta salad, Samosa and Quiche. Not a hardboiled egg, road killed chicken leg or cheese sandwich was to be found. The fact that we had cold beers in the car fridge was pure coincidence but a great help. After a long day we headed back to camp for another excellent dinner in the open air under the stars.

The camp waterhole was a great draw for animals with everything from ellies, giraffe, kudu and other antelope putting



in regular appearances and all visible from our elevated Tent on Stilts. The stilts would be a great safe haven if caught in the open by a wandering elephant but I am sure they are too well mannered for that at Tandala. The waterhole was provided so the ellies did not drink the



swimming pool dry with guests in it. However the local leopard shuns this and prefers drinking at the bird bath by the dining area as his tracks show each morning. We never saw him but his carpentry kept us wake some nights as he chatted up the local girls. The lions used the main waterhole mainly after dark

Next morning after we had been seeking out more birds around camp Yanni came up

and told us we had missed a visit by wild dog whilst wasting our time with birds. Dang. A photo opportunity missed. Not so, as Elizabeth, ever alert even early in the morning, had seen the dog from our tent and grabbed her camera and got some shots. Wonderful woman that she is. As it happened the dog was seen later resting under a tree and we set off to find her. Yes, we found her and that's how I know the gender. She was calling for her pack as she had seemingly had got separated. She seemed very tired and was resting so we left her to rest. Later in the afternoon she



came back to the waterhole, more pictures, and was seen in hot pursuit of an Impala. We think she may have scored as we never saw her return. Wild Dogs at the camp waterhole!! Definitely top marks for Tandala Tented Camp. And all the while our bird list was growing larger with the highlights being a large Goshawk at the waterhole, all life passes by there, and White-bellied Tits in the trees.



After four excellent days at Tandala we dragged ourselves away for our next location at God's Garden (Kitulo NP) in the Livingstone Mountains. A poor road delayed us and a cheating shop owner sold us a 12 pack of suspect water which had suspended matter in it. But the birding continued good amongst excellent scenery. The main road was undergoing "Rehabilitation" and even when we could speed up the TZ Police were out in force looking for miscreants. We got fined 30,000 TZ for not stopping at a Zebra when there was NOBODY on or near it. Then the cheeky beggar asked for 'some water'. So reaching into the dodgy pack we said 'Here mate, have four bottles and a happy day!' We often think of him. What comes around goes around! Inshallah!

After more progress when the road works finished we turned off the tar and ascended the "Hamsini



na Saba" (57 bends) pass to the Kitulo Plateau and our next base. Even my Garmin was seeing birds. We had not been able to book at God's Garden Guest House and one contact had told us it was closed which was a pity as I liked it last time. However when it was proving difficult to find a place I got fed up with our local guide and got out of the car and set off to where I remembered God's Garden GH was located. I found it straight away, open, and booked three rooms at 15,000TZ a room. Mama Moshi was pleased to see us and hurried to hire a cook for our meals. She had

closed when her husband had retired but got sent back by TANAPA to finish her tour. Or the old man threw her out? Who knows? We had beds. It was a bit neglected and not the vibrant bar I remembered from 2012 but OK for now.

The chicken for dinner was a bit tough. Just as well our Beer supply was lasting.

Breakfast was fine with hot fresh scrambled eggs, toast and fruit.

Next day our guide, Jafiri, called to take us to park HQ for our permits. No concession fees here! Ha Ha! Then up the stiff road and into the park for more birds. We were looking for Buff shouldered Widowbirds and Kipengere SeedEaters. Each to their own so no sniggering please. We found them and many other species too. We drew a blank on Livingstone's Turaco which was a disappointment as I had promised this to Emmy but there is so much encroachment and tree burning that I think the poor birds have nowhere to live. We saw no mammals either which was strange but the highlight was that Jafiri was a great botanist so he and Chris had a great time together with the many flowers around despite it being off season. We queried the burned areas and were told "Poachers!" Not after Bushmeat but plants for sale in Zambia. They burn the grass so that the bulbous plants can be seen easily. We saw heavily armed Rangers on patrol so they mean business as it is big money.

We took some hikes on the plateau which was good exercise after so many car days.

After two nights we decided to leave after lunch on the third day to break the long journey to Katavi which was a good decision as it turned out. We left the mountain and having negotiated the chaos of Mbeya settled in for a night at the Ifisi Community Centre about 20km west of town where we had a comfortable night in a suite for TZ80,000 (\$40) with breakfast.

We needed the rest for the trials and disappointments of tomorrow.

When last this way in 2012 Roger and I had driven the whole way from Kitulo to Katavi in a day.

This despite the B8 road north from the Zambian border town of Tunduma being progressively tarred and huge stretches of dusty 'diversions' off piste to be negotiated. It was so bad that we had to stop and clean out the air filters three times to stop the engine choking to death. Our lungs were not in a much better state either and our appearance on arrival at Flycatchers was more like the survivors from

a mining disaster or a skirmish with the Desert Rats in WW2.

Five long years had passed and the research now showed that the tar had been extended as far north as our turn off to Katavi at the village of Kisi. Just over 300km of nice new smooth tar would be a piece of cake.

So we awoke in ICC to a very nice morning and prepared for a lunch stop in Sumbawanga and maybe even a game drive in Katavi before checking in at the Flycatcher's Fig Tree Camp. There were a few small works on the TanZam highway to Tunduma but nothing to delay us too much. Even the Police presence seemed low key. Maybe they had drunk some bottled water they should not have?

At Tunduma we pushed on passed the usual line up of Lorries waiting for the border to where I knew the junction to the new shiny B8 was. **Or it should have been.** The roundabout was there but the B8 that led from it was not. It had been dug up and blocked although we could see the shining tar beckoning us about half a mile ahead. So first it was back passed all those darn Lorries as we tried to find a clear way through town to this much anticipated tarred B8. We eventually did so and set off north in high spirits. OMG. How wrong could I be?

The tar was there alright but getting out of third gear was proving difficult to say the least. Every small village had invested in speed bumps and 50kph signs. Some settlements were no larger than one man and a three legged donkey but he had his bloomin sign AND a white uniformed policeman as back up. I swear we could see the next "50" sign ahead as we cleared the 'derestriction' post for the one we were in. And this went on and on and on for all of our way to Sumbawanga where the settlements were thinner on the ground. 308km in SEVEN hours. Roger and I did better in the road works in 2012!! Lunch was late. VERY late!

We did a quick Bank stop for more TZ shillings which was the quickest we had moved all day.

After Sumbawanga matters did improve slightly and progress was better with the last 181km taking just on 3 hours including our time in the NP. Indeed there was a small and pleasant surprise in store for us when we turned off at Kisi. Instead of the expected gravel road there was a nice new piece of tar almost to within 10km of the NP south gate. And no bloomin villages!!

The GPS took us straight to Fig Tree Camp even though I knew the way from last time. We received the usual warm welcome and after the hot towel and cold drinks bit, we got to our tents and settled in. The tents are laid out in a row overlooking the river and flood plain and with an expensive lodge over the other side. We got the same views and wildlife for much less. Next morning we did an early drive and located many of the elephants and other creatures for which the park is known. The river was low and split into pools that were crammed with Hippo and Crocs.

The stink was appalling. We saw plenty of giraffe and even found two male lions resting under a bush. Birds of course were new and we were delighted to find the lovely **Boehm's BeeEater** which was an unexpected treat and a 'lifer' for Emmy.



This was our routine for the next two days. A highlight was when sitting outside our tents we noticed a small party of elephant coming over the river plain in our direction. They came right into camp and indeed **the matriarch checked out our laundry line** whilst junior drank from the shower at the rear of the tent. Our only problem was in paying the Park Fees as the



Ranger came to us with his all singing Credit Card machine but could not get a signal to connect up. We had five goes without result. Technology in action. As a footnote I later found my Bank had noticed these five attempts marked "IKUU airstrip, Tanzania" and had gone into meltdown and blocked the card. So we went 'LoTech' and paid cash.



Other birds of note at Flycatcher Fig Tree were a lovely Purple-crested Turaco and a White-headed Black Chat similar to Arnott's Chat but now said to be a different species, the **Ruaha or Collared Chat**.



And so ended our stay in Katavi and indeed Tanzania's National Parks. We ended on a high with a sighting of a large herd of Eland in a hurry followed by a nice pack of Wilddogs who posed for our cameras but not as a group.

More photos here:-

<https://whiteknucklesgallery.shutterfly.com/pictures/2069> Birds

<https://whiteknucklesgallery.shutterfly.com/pictures/1909> Main.



The next phase of our journey is where we spend an interesting night in an interesting "Hotel", the wheel falls off the car and we continue into Rwanda and Uganda by taxi and fall foul of Uganda's dishonest interpretation of the rules regarding the new EAC Visa.

I had spent ages planning the next stages which were to take us to Emmy's Broadbill Forest Camp in Bwindi. Two routes offered themselves to us:-

1. North up the B8 used to be off limits due to banditry and a bad road so in 2012 Roger and I had swung east to Tabora and Nzega before continuing to Mwanza and back to Arusha.

If we chose part of this route we could reach Nzega in a day and then swing back west for Rusumo Falls in Rwanda and cut through to Uganda.

2. Or we could brave the B8 and cut the total journey distance if not time by 250km. Favourable blogs from fellow travellers induced us to try the B8.

So we left Katavi and headed north up the tarred B8 from Sitalike to Mpanda where after topping off our fuel tanks we continued on the now gravelled B8. The going, as promised, was fairly good and we made good time through some lovely scenery along the Burundi border. Villages were few and as



one blogger had stopped in Kibondo overnight at the Hotel Sekele we made that our destination for the day. And so after 400km from Mpanda we arrived in **Kibondo**. A sizeable township and we sought out the **Hotel Sekele**. It looked OK in an African way so after

checking they could feed us as well we took three rooms. They were self-contained but not brilliant.

They had no beer but the young manager volunteered to go and buy some for us after he took our order for dinner. We ordered 'chicken' so they went out, hired a cook and strangled two chickens! At least it was fresh chicken. We asked for Irish Potatoes and veg.

The beer when it came was cold, we had stressed “Baridi”, and that is what we got. Dinner was slow in coming but eventually bowls were set before us in which floated the hacked up parts of a “chicken”. Not sure if this was soup or mains. Anyway more chicken arrived with chips and veggies with fresh fruit as Desert. We ordered more beer. The meal was not particularly inspiring but wholesome and filled us up. We did not risk asking for a packed lunch next day. The odds were too high that it would involve the death of another chicken. We ordered an early breakfast of Eggs and Fruit and retired.

Next morning we re-fuelled and set off for our booked accommodation in Kayonza in Rwanda some 300km away. The road was now atrocious with many diversions until after 90km we reached the tarred B3 at Nyakanazi where we turned west for Rwanda. The ‘tarred road’ now became appalling with more potholes than the surface of the moon. This was the very same road we had driven back in 2010 (see “**Jun 2010: East Africa continued. Into Tanzania.**”) Seven years later it was a wreck. Our average speed suffered quite a bit as it fell to 40kph and then 30kph. It had been quicker on the gravel. For some time there had been an ominous knocking from a wheel but on inspection we could find nothing amiss so continued slowly. Well on that surface we could not go faster anyway. However the knocking persisted and we finally had to stop. The front wheel bearing had failed in a big way.

We were stuck 20km short of the Rwandan border. A spare part could be obtained but how would it reach us and not get tied up in customs at a border? This part of Tanzania is remote from large centres and either Kigali, 200km up the road or Kampala in Uganda, even further, would involve a border crossing. However Emmy is both resourceful and capable and was confident it could be done in a couple of days but what to do with us? He said we should continue with the scheduled stops by car and promptly flagged down a passing car, the driver of which was persuaded to take us and our luggage to the Rwanda border. From there we would take another car to our Hotel some 100km further on. Emmy would telephone our Hotel with news later. . And so it transpired.

For this final part of our Saga search under **Uganda** as it is not worth giving Rwanda a section as we were only there one night.