

Visiting the Orphans of Tsavo.!

Fred and Elizabeth's 1st visit to Kenya. 7th-15th December 2008

Preliminary information etc.

This is not a bird report but an account of our first trip to visit the "Orphans of Tsavo!"

We are Elephant people and are supporters of the David Sheldrick Wildlife Trust and their work with orphaned Ellies needs no introduction here. www.sheldrickwildlifetrust.org for more. We sponsor some orphans and thus receive news and correspondence from time to time. As sponsors/adopters we have "Visiting rights" and during correspondence we were invited to visit 'if passing'. Well, we do pass so we did visit. As our oldest adoptee "Lualeni" is now out at the release site/finishing school in Ithumba in the wilds of East Tsavo, a kind invitation from Angela Sheldrick to go there was discussed and readily accepted. There is a Self catering Visitors Camp at the release site and in Angela's words "Access to the Elephants is unique." This was the understatement of the decade. It was fantastic. The Camp was one of the finest we have ever stayed at and to have the exclusive use of this just added to the joys if that were possible. OK! Fred had to do the cooking but nobody died!

Now to the trip itself:-

December 7th This saw us flying from IOM to Manchester, and catching an earlier flight than booked to Amsterdam to give us a more comfortable connection time in Amsterdam. This was nice. At Amsterdam the plane was Kenyan Airways KQ117 and very nice indeed. Very friendly staff and decent food. We took off on time, ate, drank and got some sleep on the overnight flight.

December 8th We arrived in Nairobi on time and after a lengthy queue got our Visas and were re-united with our luggage. We met our courtesy car for the Fairview Hotel and launched into the chaotic Nairobi traffic. After a lot of 'stop go' we arrived at the Fairview and took breakfast while our rooms were made ready. This is a very secure Hotel as the Israeli Embassy is on the other side of the street. We had reserved rooms here direct via Email for the night and again for our return the following week. After a nice breakfast we settled in. Lovely gardens with Pool and jumping with birds. Ticked African Thrush, Weavers and Waxbills. Well what else am I to do? We then took a car to get to the Nairobi Orphanage for our appointment to settle accounts for the Ithumba trip. This we did easily and were invited to stay for



the 'Little ones' midday bathe and milk.

The babies have to be encouraged to bathe by the keepers throwing mud at them with a spade. After our visit we went 'home' via a Supermarket to buy supplies for our stay in Ithumba which was an experience not to be missed. Then back to the Hotel for some relaxation before an excellent meal and retiring to our comfortable and spacious rooms.

December 9th Next morning it was an early breakfast and get ready for Perm, our driver, to take us and our belongings to Ithumba. This was a long dusty drive through Nairobi and out onto the Mombassa road. This will be a nicer road when it is finished but fairly horrendous at the time of our trip. We re-routed through some beautiful green mountain scenery for part of the way. After we turned off the main road we sought out fuel, not easy, and then went through busy villages where we also stopped to buy fresh food



and Vegetables from the local stalls. We resisted the entreaties to patronise the Meat stalls. Our companion, David Kinrade, who had not visited Africa before, was enthralled. Then after a further bumpy 100km we passed the Park Gate and arrived at Ithumba Camp which was to be our home for the next five nights. Towards evening we drove the short distance to the Elephant Camp and made ourselves known to Lualeni and her fellow Orphans. We also agreed the programme for the next five days.

Which was... Arrive at Camp at 5.45am for early feeding of the very young ones, then follow them out on foot to wherever they went to. At around 11.00 they generally headed for a Mud/Waterhole for more milk and then water, bathe and just get down and dirty in the mud. They have to be taught all of this as they have never had mothers to show them. They catch on really quick. Then lock up was around 5.30 again where they are given browse and ground up Coconut to top up the daily intake. We took time off to eat and rest in the heat of the day just like the Orphans although they did not have to suffer Fred's cooking at night. As this was David's first experience of Africa we also toured



the area looking for other animals and succeeded in finding Zebra, Buffalo, Warthog, Jackals and Kudu etc., as well the world's largest population of Dik dik. They were everywhere! We also bumped into Wild Elephant from time to time who were usually quite shy. Except for "Rafiki" who did not like cars and stood his ground to make his point! On one occasion another released bull joined in the bathing fun but did not give us any trouble.



I had hoped to do this in two pages but it looks like Page Three is going to be necessary.
The tale continues.....

As each day passed the Elephant got to know us as friends and we could name almost all of them by sight.



We had several very enjoyable close encounters during our fantastic five days and it really was a unique experience. There are pictures on our Gallery but here are a few 'Highlights' of the visit. I am particularly fond of the sequence below where Nasalot simply strolls up to

Elizabeth, sniffs her shoes, leaving a mark and then stares into her eyes. Magic moments indeed!



So that was our five days at Ithumba, we could not have wished for a more enjoyable and fascinating time but it was time to head back to Nairobi.

December 14th. We said our final Good-byes to the Orphans and their hard working and dedicated surrogate Mums and took the bumpy road south to the very busy and congested Mombassa-Nairobi road which was even worse than we remembered a week earlier. On the way back we did manage to find some Giraffe and Impala for David to add to his African list. On arrival at the Fairview we bade goodbye to Perm and checked in again. David was to take it easy here for a couple of days and we were to fly on to Uganda. There appeared to be a mix up over David's extended stay but after some thought, Fred asked in a different way and the problem disappeared. We had a nice farewell dinner together, paid our dues and retired to bed.

December 15th. It was an early start for us as our flight was at 8.15. We had checked in on line and all proceeded well with no trace of the Immigration Problems we had had on the way in. Nairobi is a strange airport where Arrivals and Departures are one and the same place and where after waiting at your Gate you just head out over the tarmac towards several similar planes in the same Kenyan livery and hopefully get on the correct one. We arrived in Entebbe so we must have guessed correctly.

Birds. Not the reason for our trip but I ticked 125 species including Fischer's Starling, Orange-bellied Parrot and Von der Decken's Hornbill which do not appear on the Ugandan list I took along. I also saw my first flocks of the beautiful Vulturine Guineafowl. We found a Crested Francolin's nest and saw a Black-headed Heron catch and eat a large snake.

