

## On the loose in Tanzania. October - November 2000.

This is a trip in two parts. I had not been back to Tanzania since my trip in 1996 when I climbed Mount Meru and wandered at large in the Ngorongoro Highlands so it was time to return. My vehicle for doing so was to sign up for a promoted trip by Naturetek entitled “**Eastern Tanzania - A birdwatching tour.**” To which I added my own extension to visit Selous for the first time and then head back to Mto wa Mbu and from my base at Kirurumu Tented Camp to wander at will in the area.

So on 27<sup>th</sup> October with Passport with Tanzanian Visa I embarked for Ronaldsway airport to take the 14.30 hop down to LHR to meet up with the rest of the team on the Gulf Flight to DAR via all stations in the Gulf States. The overnight flight and two changes of plane got us into DAR at 15.50 next day a bit the worse for wear. We then boarded our Land Rovers that would take us to Kola Hill Hotel near Morogoro at the foot of the Uluguru Mountains for our first night. Some Joker had included a bird walk before dinner in the itinerary but had obviously forgotten/neglected the fact that it got dark at 18.30. Arrived at 20.00 so dinner and retire to bed after 21 hours travelling. Next morning we then did some birding and added a few birds to our list before driving on to the Udzungwa National Park where our trip details stated we had been upgraded to the simple but comfortable Udzungwa Mountain View Hotel. Well it was certainly simple and it sort of had a view but if this was an upgrade heaven knows what the other place was like. The routine for the next three days was to bird the busy road looking for Iringa Red Colobus and Sanje Crested Mangabey monkeys as well as the many birds. One day we walked/climbed the Sanje Waterfall trail to the top of an impressive set of falls but saw few of the promised birds. Well with 17 birders and two guides all huffing and puffing up the mountain this was only to be



expected. However the view at the top was nice. The group however was not in a particularly pleasant mood as they had paid to see birds.



You can tell this from the cheerful expressions on their faces and the fact that the leader, Tony Williams, seems to be reading his contract.

After two days of roadside birding I and a couple of others decided to give birding *en masse* a miss and walk instead to the nearby village for some local colour. We were made very welcome despite the language barrier and watched artisans making everything from tapestry to wooden



bed frames. So much for the promised plethora of birds. The checklist was progressing at the nightly call over but contained nothing of note apart from Tony calling “Bat hawk” from a moving vehicle in the pitch black. The biggest excitement was a Vine Snake falling out of a rose bush as we sat having a beer in the Hotel’s Rose Garden. Well Rose Garden is artistic licence for a grassy patch with seats and roses but you get the idea.

Now we retrace our route back over the narrow wooden bridge over the almost dry Great Ruaha to the Genesis Motel in Mikumi Town. This was said to be 'on the boundary of the NP'. Well it may well have been but the gate was a good ten mile drive away each day and the stop start for birds severely delayed our entrance each day. How many times can you stop for birds on a ten mile drive would make a good tie breaker question on Mastermind? Eventually on day two it was decided no stopping and of course that was when we missed two star birds including an immature Martial Eagle on a roadside Telegraph pole. The park was better than expected and we quickly



found Eland, Wildebeest, Zebra and Impala with some nice birds too. The amusing event of the visit was when we came upon a lion by the trackside and all the birders rapidly dodged down from the pop up hatch and wound up their windows. Perhaps they thought the cat would jump through a 2 foot square window when instead it just posed for a few photos and wandered off. And so our Birdwatching trip came to an end and it was time to return to Dar es Salaam where I was to have lunch with the team before being picked up to start my private jaunt whilst the others headed home. It was a bloomin long way to come for six days of birding.

I did not get lunch as of course we were late arriving in Dar, no prizes for guessing why, and my



lift arrived just after the soup. Off to the airport for the hours flight to Mtembwe strip in the Selous Game Reserve where we landed on time and were transferred the short distance to Rufiji River Camp for a five night stay.

My five full days were spent either on Game drives most mornings and evenings of boat trips on the mighty Rufiji Rover which was inhabited by some of the biggest crocodiles I have ever seen.



Of course we were picking up lots of new birds and my driver/guide was learning to recognise them quickly. I don't think he could read the description to name the bird but he could quote the page number of the Field Guide where they appeared. That was some skill in itself. He found the usual mammals such as elephant and buffalo etc., but the highlights have to be the day we came upon a pack of Wild dogs sheltering under some low Palm bushes and almost hidden from view. That was quite a find only topped by my first ever Chequered Elephant Shrew.



As if that were not enough we spent a lovely hour watching a pride of lion cubs and their mother playing on a fallen tree. Evariste said he had never seen that in all his years guiding.

Top marks for an amusing event must go to the young buffalo that we came across firmly stuck in the mud. He had been there some time and was well baked in and was doomed to die as the herd had moved off or so we thought after a good look round. So we decided to rescue him and if necessary hand him over to the Park Staff to hand rear. Well that was the theory but first we had to get him onto *terra firma*.

He did not come with handles and we had no rope so we had to resort to pulling him by the horns. Slowly but surely we gained purchase although he was a dead weight as no doubt his legs

were numb from the struggles. I did help but paused to take this photo as we got him close to where we could manhandle him the rest of the way. I also trickled water into his mouth as he was very dehydrated indeed. And so we got him out and as he stood there shivering re-gaining the strength in his legs we wondered how to get him into the truck. He made the decision for us when letting out a mighty bellow he showed his gratitude by butting us both so hard we had to take refuge in the truck. And then his mother appeared with a few of her friends. They must have not been that



far away despite us having a good look around at the start. As mum rushed to his side to let him suckle we knew he would be safe from any predator and left them to it.

Well that was the end of my five enjoyable days in the Selous. A place to which I intend to return when next in Tanzania if I can.

So it was back aboard another light aircraft for Dar es Salaam and a night in the lovely Sea-cliff Hotel. Sadly the pre-arranged meet and greet at the airport failed to appear so I had to negotiate a taxi. The Seacliffe was lovely overlooking the Indian Ocean. At dinner with a Dhow under sail and a full moon it was a shame my wife was not with me to share the romance of the setting. Sob. Next morning the no show of the transfer was repeated despite an apologetic phone call the previous evening and promising to be at the Hotel at 7.30 sharp to catch the 9.00 plane to Arusha. So at 7.45 I took another taxi to find my arranged driver at the airport with the sob story that when he phoned the Seacliffe at 7.30 he had been told I had checked out early. Yes! I was bloody stood outside waiting for him and anyway what was he doing telephoning at 7.30 when he should have been there!

At least the plane was on time and having got the right hand front seat next to the pilot and once established in the climb I was amused to see him reach for his newspaper read some of it and then do the crossword breaking off only to level out and re-trim for the cruise. As we approached our destination I got nice views of Kilimanjaro to the north. And on landing guess what? No pick up again. This is too bad. However my pilot kindly got me a replacement taxi and as we arrived in Arusha we were amused to see my Hoopoe car racing to the airport. At Hoopoe's Offices I was re-imbursed for my taxi fares in Dar.

And so we set off for Mto wa Mbu (Mosquito river) and a quick game drive in Lake Manyara National Park before arriving at Kirurumu Tented Camp for six nights.



Kirurumu is a nice place situated on the edge of the Rift Valley wall overlooking the plain below. I had stayed there before and got my usual tent "Chui" with a good view from its elevated platform. I am re-united with Milau who I shared walks with on my last visit. I tell him my itinerary is flexible and to prepare for some exercise. Next morning after breakfast I am sitting on my veranda when Milau arrives and suggests a walk to check out the new E Unoto lodge that Glen Brock, previous manager of Kirurumu is building. So we head along the ridge through villages and descend to the plains and through the well watered Shambas. This is all ground water from the Ngorongoro Forest and if the trees are cut down the

water will stop. We arrive at E Unoto but Glen is in Arusha. The place is nowhere near finished so we stop at an enterprising Masai girls 'Pop shop' under a shady tree and are greeted by several of Milau's family and we share Soda's. We all then head the final 6km to Mto wa Mbu and go to the Zebra Gardens where we enjoy a cold bottle of water to slake the throat before having a Fanta we could taste. Having rested we can now climb the cliff back to Kirurumu as the sun was setting. Staff were very relieved to see us and had become quite anxious when I did not appear for lunch. After a pleasant alcohol free dinner sleep came very easy that night.





Next morning was my birthday and I awoke to a family of Mongoose squabbling on my veranda. Take breakfast as Milau arrives to enquire as to the day's programme. No decision made so had a quiet day in camp, read a little and met with Milau's family who work as Askaris at Kirurumu and talk about our different countries and life styles. They had difficulty grasping how my apartment was six stories above ground and that the passing jet above was actually 12kms above the Earth and had maybe 200 people on board. They had of course seen the local bush flight with maybe 10 passengers but 200 was more than they could grasp. "How long were we up there?" "What do you do during a ten hour flight?" "Are there toilets?" "Why does the plane make white smoke?" I hope my explanations helped. They were hoping for rain as the cattle were thin. "Did we have droughts in my country and did my cattle die?" I explained that I had no cattle and bought my meat from a butcher and milk from a shop (Duka). Milau thought it sounded a good place to live and would visit when he had finished building his new house.

Not a bad way or place to spend one's birthday.

Next morning we set off for Campi y Simba (Lion field) via a deep gorge in the cliff face where we see Eagles, Bushbuck and Baboons. Milau does not like baboons. I just throw things at them and they keep their distance. Then we see a male lion under an acacia which slopes off when we draw closer. Milau laughs and calls it a silly old man. Strange that lions don't bother him but baboons do. We return to camp before it gets too hot and had lunch after radioing for a car to come on Thursday to visit Lake Eyasi. After lunch I took a short stroll between showers and read a while. At dinner there were some friendly Spaniards who had no English so Mgunbe asked me to help. One girl had some French, about as bad as mine, so dinner was served. Ebenezer (waiter) did not understand how all wazungu could not communicate in one language and I explained there was no Kiswahili in Europe and we all had our own "tribal" languages. The meal went well and the waiters were persuaded to sing for the ladies.

Next morning the Spaniards were leaving and I persuaded Kisamu, one of the Masai Askaris, to show interest in one of the Spanish girls whilst waiting for her luggage. She could not understand what we were saying or why we were feeling her arms for strength so I told her that Kisamu thought she would make a good wife and had offered her Fiancé four cows and six goats for her. This caused much merriment particularly when her boyfriend thought it a good offer and shook hands on it.

Afterwards Milau and I descended Serena Gorge for 300 feet to the pumping station serving Kirurumu with water and enjoyed a cup of 'Masai tea' with the guard. Strong and sweet. Then we continued down, crossing the river several times on plank bridges until emerging opposite the gates to Manyara NP. We then walked into Mto wa Mbu and I got a stiff arm shaking hands with so many Masai that we met. We stopped for refreshments at a Masai bar until Mgunbe passed on his Harley and suggested we call at his bar for a beer and BBQ.



The Nyama Choma was excellent with chilli sauce to taste.

Mgunbe in the Yellow Bandana as befits all Harley riders. And then it was time to return to Kirurumu at the top of the cliff but having fortified the

inner man we made good time and there was ample time to read in the afternoon and relax

before dinner. I have talked about our walks up and down the Rift wall and despite it being quite a height gain the path was fine and we could generally get to our destination faster on foot than if we drove the 15 km round by road and track.

Here is what the cliffs look like from afar but up close you don't see it.



The photo was from in front of my tent at Kirurumu.

Next day as promised the car has arrived and we set off with a packed lunch for Lake Eyasi. The road as far as Karatu is OK but after we turn off the main road our way becomes little more than a track comprising dust and ruts. Eventually after about an hour we sight Lake Eyasi below. It is quite beautiful and not like one would imagine from descriptions of a soda lake. We meet up with a hunting party of Hadzapi people and after introductions conducted by Milau in their strange 'click language' more common in



Southern Africa we are invited to join them. After a while a Monkey is cornered up a large Baobab tree and shot down with an arrow.





Very quickly a fire is started in the traditional manner of rubbing two sticks etc., and once well alight with dry wood the victim is placed on the glowing embers skin and all as



the family all gather for the feast.

The small children get the kidneys and limbs (Four drumsticks to a monkey) etc., the ladies get the back meat and the head is severed and given to “Granny” who scoops out the brain.

The family unit comprises 10. 3 adult males, 2 adult females and 5 young children. Overall there are about 3,000 in the tribe and in a desperate plight as they need game to feed themselves but the Government does not seem to care. If they had four legs there would be an outcry from conservationists but because they are human nothing seems to get done apart from unrealistic attempts to ‘civilise’ them which they firmly resist.

After spending some time being shown how they find roots etc., we sadly say farewell and return up the bumpy track to Kirurumu where I must pack for my departure next day on the long trip home.

On the way back to Arusha we would make a trip into Tarangire NP for some ellie moments but we actually had some encounters as we left Kirurumu as a small herd crossed the road in front.



After stopping in Arusha overnight I got on the plane to DAR via Zanzibar. Only two pax so I got the right hand seat again. Landed DAR half hour late which was no problem as it made less time to wait for my Gulf flight home. The flights home were not without problems, mainly unruly passengers, but we eventually arrived in London. You could tell I was back in UK when they tried to confiscate my Hadzapi Arrow which had successfully transited three other airports on the way home. I had breakfast and waited for my

flight to the Isle of Man having telephoned to announce my return on schedule. The last bit was easy.

A great trip overall and the Arrow now sits on my study wall as a reminder of my experience.