

TANZANIA! A December visit in relaxed mode.

OK. So we were off to Tanzania (again) for Christmas and New Year and a fair bit of time each side. The “we” comprising Elizabeth, Chris and myself.

Getting to Tanzania. After the usual debate over going via Nairobi and/or Turkey or the Gulf we opted for the simplicity of KLM from Manchester via Amsterdam and direct to JRO and back via DAR. Quicker by far and we felt the extra time saved was worth the extra money.

Last year in Uganda we felt we had spent too much time clashing to see everything and all agreed that we needed to change pace. To see much more of fewer places. A requirement of four nights in each place. Spend time sitting on balconies and seeing what came by.

The three essentials were 3”B”s. Bed, Balcony and Beer.

The concept was dubbed “Whiteknuckles Lite!” and it worked well.

We were birding and had target species and felt a total list of 250+ would be a reasonable goal.

So for the early part we shunned Game drives and opted for places that had views and where we could walk more and drive less. We would see what we would see and shed no tears over anything missed. Indeed we never even bothered with a 'fixed' car and driver for the first four places but simply paid for transfers where they were not offered 'free'. All bookings were made direct with Lodges without much hassle and payments/Deposits made by electronic means where necessary. This also applied to the eventual use of car and guide for the Safari bit. No problems at all.

Without going into a day by day account of our 28 days which will bore me as much as you, here is how it worked out. Comments on Lodges will be brief.

KLM got us into JRO on time at 20.40 so the natural choice for us was **KIA Lodge**. We were cleared through Visa promptly, even the new system seemed to work. No YF asked for. \$50 each, “Karibu Tanzania!” KIA lodge car then took us to check in and find our rooms. Freshen up, a couple of cold “Safari!” and we turned in. Breakfast early and a bit of birding before our car came to take us to **Mount Kilimanjaro View Lodge** promptly at 9. <http://www.mtkilimanjaroviewlodge.com/> is a

community run lodge high up on the edge of the National Park at around 8,000 feet. Access is via a dirt road 16km uphill from Moshi which was most interesting in the wet. Cottages, all with views down the mountain, were comfortable and staff helpful in the extreme. Yes, you could see the Kibo summit when the rain stopped. Birding was excellent and this was the first lodge where I have seen Feeders used by Sunbirds. Due to inclement

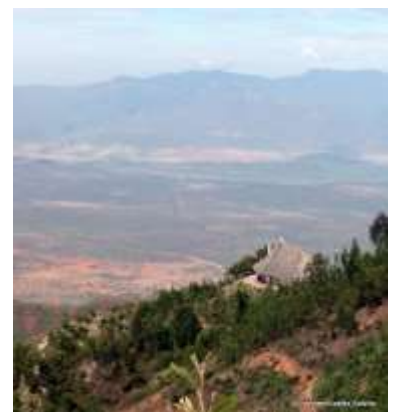


weather, this is a mountain, our walking had to be curtailed but a good start was made on the species list including the beautiful Hartlaub's Turaco.

At the

end of our stay we were returned to Moshi where we linked up with Tony Evans for the long drive to **Mambo View Lodge**.

<http://www.mamboviewpoint.org/> This is in the Usumbaras and accessed via Lushoto on tar and then 60km north over dirt roads in debatable condition. The lodge is in a stunning setting perched Eyrie like on a cliff with views down to the Plains below.



A lovely spacious cottage was the icing on the cake.

Host Herman made us welcome and Tony took us birding in some nearby forests on request. My target species of Taita Falcon gave several agile flying displays to my balcony. I call this a big win. We had more rain as the North East Trades were dumping thunderstorms daily but we were undeterred as it soon dried up. A lovely place and one to return to.

Now for the fun bit. Tony was heading out on a trip and was to take us to our next stop at Lake Chala. He knew a 'shortcut' down the mountain that did not involve



leaping off the cliff. It would save an hour, he said. He got that just a bit wrong. We descended a very hairy road and even stopped the car to photograph it crossing some rough stuff to record our brave adventure. Then when we reached the plain and thought it was all over we noted the recent rain had carved a huge deep gully right across the track. There was no way around through the bush. We had to cross. There were signs that a Motor bike had passed recently and there appeared to be just enough room at the extreme right hand side where the gully was not so deep. Tony felt the Landrover would cope provided it did not slip left into the deeper part. We got out to film the event and obtained some very interesting



footage of a Landrover doing its best but not making it and eventually slipping left into the deeper part where after almost rolling over it stuck firmly with the rear jammed against one wall and the front appearing to want to climb back up to Mambo view. Time for the spades and jacks and to gather large rocks. If the road has gone we must build a new one. After clearing to the rear of the truck to gain 'space' the spare wheel was laid down and used as a base for the Hi Lift Jack. Inch by inch the car was raised and rocks placed where our new road would be. Then the process was repeated time and again. Even a small tree stump had to be chopped away as it fouled the underneath of the car barring progress. Eventually some two sweaty and dusty hours later we had a road of sorts and the Landrover was lowered back down onto its wheels. We had "unsteepened" the way out and all went well as the car regained its equilibrium and the level road. A few miles later we passed Mambo View lodge perched high above us that we had left some five hours earlier. So much for that Shortcut but good fun in the bush.



Our way north was now back on tar but we did find time to visit Nyumba ya Munga, about 5 miles west of the tar road for some lake birding. Later still as we neared the turn off towards Hima with only a few miles to go to Lake Chala we started to think of Rob's cold beer and even imagined we could hear the chink of the bottles being opened. What we actually heard was the rear tire going flat on us. But this was soon fixed and, having been on the road 9 hours we arrived at **Lake Chala Lodge**. <http://www.lakechala.com>. So much for "Whiteknuckles Lite" today.



I had been here solo in 2012, see report, but camped as the "Luxury Tents" were just empty platforms then. This time they were up and running and great tents they are too. They do not look out over the Lake, that view is reserved for the Restaurant. The "Tents" look down on a Waterhole and the surrounding bush and on a clear day Kilimanjaro. Now we had a change of scenery and environment. Having spent the trip so far at altitude in lush Montane Forest we were

in Savannah with its different wildlife. There was elephant sign but none around. There are smaller mammals and no doubt Leopards too, but it was relatively safe to wander around in the bush. Rob does provide guided walks and other activities but that is not the Mission statement for Whiteknuckles Lite. We walked one morning to the high point of the rim and happily ticked off a number of birds and some lovely butterflies too. I refuse to 'do' Butterflies as there are too many and I am too old to learn them all now. On other days we picked a distant target such as a large Baobab and struck out along paths to there and back. One track came across a large river bed, invisible from even close to. The sandy shore was pock marked with signs of large mammals using it but we never got to see them.



However there was still plenty to interest us both in and around camp. As we returned one morning we saw a large patch of white in a tree which with binoculars morphed into a substantial Eagle. So we picked our way closer to find an African Hawk-Eagle. Slowly approaching and snapping away in case it flew, it didn't, we got very close and some great pictures. It had fed and its crop was very prominent. No doubt lethargy prompted it to remain for us but we did not wish to take liberties and went no nearer than 10 metres. Other birds for those still awake were Deiderik Cuckoo, Spot-flanked Barbet and Cardinal Woodpecker. On another walk we found a gaggle of various birds scolding something in a small tree. Ho. "I bet there is an owl or something robbing a nest". So we investigated. We got right inside before we espied a large Cobra seeking lunch and it was coming our way. We made excuses and left. Lake Chala is lovely, the food good, the chef had had lessons. His Beetroot and

Orange Salad has to be tried. The Breakfast Sausage was the best I have tasted in Africa. All food grown on the plot or sourced in Moshi. As our four days ended, Mt Kilimanjaro came out as a farewell gift and made a great backdrop for Rob's tents which have to be some of the nicest I have slept in. The balcony and the beer ticked the other two boxes.

Our next driver, Amos, appeared on time and we left for Mto wa Mbu and our next 3 Bs via a short stop in Arusha to meet Romeo (S.R.Rwezaura) and fund the purchase of the necessary NCA Card for later. In the unfortunate absence of Roger Msengi our usual driver we had used **Safarimultiways** <http://www.safarimultiways.com/> and they were very good to deal with.

Then after the madness of Arusha Traffic we headed west in quick order to **OI Mesera Lodge**, 11km up the road to Lake Natron from Mto wa Mbu. <http://www.ol-mesera.com/> where I had stayed before and was keen for Elizabeth to meet the equally lovely Barbara Lavrich-Winani. It was dry season last time but lovely and green now. The tents are not new but much work had been carried out and a lovely Baobab trail laid out in the 'grounds' for guests to explore. Food has always been excellent if simple but a new young chef, Lucas, has managed to improve on the already perfect. A bird bath outside the bar made the watching so easy for us. A real pleasure and so nice to celebrate Christmas Day Maasai style. We spent our time walking many tracks and seeing many birds including the magnificent



Imperial Eagle, Rock Thrush, White-throated BeeEaters, Goshawks and even had flyovers by a flock of Skimmers and about 300 Great White Pelicans. On the Mammal front we met a tribe of Dwarf Mongoose, Grant's Gazelle, Impala and Zebra but the highlight for me was finding a Den of Bat-eared Foxes complete with cubs within quarter of a mile of camp and oblivious to our presence. The walking here is quite easy and relatively level but this is Whiteknuckles Lite and we had a fair bit of Balcony time too in our five day stay. It was Christmas and not being a total Scrooge we had booked Amos to return late on 26th, so he could have Christmas at home. So 27th December was a choice of Lake Natron or Lake Manyara. Manyara won. Skipping breakfast we took a hamper with Luas providing the picnic box. As we approached Mto wa Mbu we were delighted and surprised to see a Carmine BeeEater well at its furthest south.

Entering the park by the new access road following the flood damage of last year we had a picnic breakfast by the Hippo Pool with Amos setting out the tablecloth in fine style. Several hungry/envious looks from other cars as they crept by.

Lots of birds here with fine views of Bataleur, Palm Nut Vulture, Turkestan Shrikes and both Temminck's and Double Banded Coursers. We had lots of happy Elephant moments with the friendly inhabitants of Manyara including a good time with a huge male Tusker. Photo Ops were restricted by the firm attention of his two 'minders' which were quite big in themselves. We then proceeded to the Maji Mkubwa Springs where we took lunch while watching masses of Flamingo



feeding on the algae of the springs. Then as it got hotter the Tsetse decided it was their lunchtime too which induced us to head back north. Our bird score was enhanced by Buzzards and Broad billed Rollers along with Red-chested Cuckoo, Usumbiro and White-headed Barbets. Lots of various Larks and Capped Wheatears by the track back to Ol Mesera ended our day and stay here. With regret we left Ol Mesera but cheered up as Nduu was our next call. This time we were to take the Endulen track 'shortcut' to the south of Mount Lemagrut. This track leaves the Crater rim by the Airstrip and heads over country reminiscent of the Yorkshire Moors. Different eco system, different birds. Among the Zebra and Jackals we managed to find Schalow's Wheatear and both Jackson's and Red-collared Widowbirds. Further on we also found the lovely Schalow's Turaco with his foppish crest. Amos professed to know this track so we left it to him until my sixth sense felt the sun was in the wrong

part of the sky and we should not be in sight of Lake Eyasi either. As we entered the small village of Kakesio I knew we were wrong. I switched on the Garmin and this indicated we were well south of where we should have been. After some really bad sections of road, but some lovely birding, we crossed into Maswa Controlled area and a junction with a road that seemed to head where we needed to be. Garmin (Gladys to her friends) said Nduu lay 24 miles due north which matched the direction of this track. So we took it with Amos shaking his head in denial. Good surface, many animals including the gathering Wildebeest and with the sun setting to our left I felt we were on the right track, literally. And so it came to pass. Amos cheered up when we sighted Naibor Hill to the North East and Naabi Hill to the North West with trees on the horizon ahead. Shortly thereafter we rolled into Nduu via the track from the airstrip. Serengeti really is a featureless flat ocean of grass out there and there ain't no signposts. That Safari Baridi sana was really earned today.

Nduu Safari Lodge. A place I have been visiting since 1993 and a firm favourite. www.nduu.com where we were to see in 2014 with a five night stay. Not cheap but this was our end of year splurge. We were seeing more promises of rain and the night skies were often backlit by lightening. The Lodge and the whole area was busy with visitors and we do not think we will return at such times again. We were somewhat taken aback by the number of other Camps in the area which made a mockery of the looked for Wilderness experience. There are even Balloon trips now. So many camps made it look like a Refugee area as little or no attempt seems to have been made to screen them from view. So very sad that people seek wilderness but end up destroying the very thing they sought. Enough.

Our routine was an early start, back for Breakfast or lunch, siesta or wandering around, before another drive at 15.00 or so.

This was where we had some problems in communicating with our driver Amos. He was fixated on Lions and sure enough he always seemed to end up in a vehicle jam, yes, even in Nduu now folks! However we did find a Leopard and two cubs snoozing under a bush and two Cheetah boys out on the plains. Not bad for our first day. Shame I did not back up my photos that evening. I even lost my



artistic attempts with the many Flamingo and their reflections in the Lake.

Next day started well with some friendly Elephants posing quite politely, a cooperative Hoopoe and splendid sightings of a Melanistic Gabar Goshawk. By now my camera Disc was 'unable to write' so I continued on Mr. G's. We had the same model (Fuji HS30EXR) and often picked the wrong one up anyway. This was discovered when I muttered about 'my' camera seemingly having defaulted to settings I did not use each time I picked it up. Mr. G said the same thing was happening with



his. Then the penny dropped! Duh!

The afternoon was quiet except for some Steenbok, a Reedbuck and Wildebeest although a very full Ruppell's Vulture co-operated well. And of course we got to see bloody lions enlivened by several cars behaving both badly and stupidly standing on the car roof or bonnet.



New Year's Eve started well with a pair of Pygmy Falcons and a lovely family of Bat-Eared Foxes where the cubs were induced to come out and pose for us too. Then we got to the big marsh and lots of waterbirds were added to the list. Painted and African Snipe, Marsh Harriers, Grey Crowned Cranes to name but four. Even a Cheetah was out there for a drink. But by 11.00 we were with some lions. (Again!) Happily we then moved to the plains and were entertained by a cheetah and her half grown cub for over thirty minutes. Lovely photos of the

young one being encouraged to hunt his mother's tail and then joining her on the lookout tree. They even came to the car for a sniff at one point. The afternoon drive was curtailed as rain threatened and very quiet. We heard of one car getting stuck until being rescued at 23.00. Then it was back to camp to wash up ready



for the evening Special Banquet with such dishes as Turkey, Roast Beef, BBQd Suckling Pig and Lamb with Mint Sauce. Equally scrumptious

desserts but this is a Trip report not a Gastronomic account. An interesting spin was the 'presents' in the Crackers were all Maasai trinkets. I got a Key Fob which I still use.

We still managed an early start next day when we ventured into the Acacia woodlands. We were delighted with



Silverbird, Great Spotted Cuckoo, and both Nubian and Grey-headed Woodpeckers before venturing out onto the Naibor track where we found a single Cheetah. He was half-heartedly looking at some Gazelle but was maybe hung over and grumpy and he lay down and took a nap. We then went off on a tour of Lake Maisek. We encountered an adult Martial Eagle calling for her mate as she had a Dik Dik to share which was a nice surprise. We then met and entertained a lone Bull Elephant with only one tusk before leaving him by the Lake. Other birds included Red-throated Tit, Wattled Starlings, White Storks and another Pied Wheatear. A Pallid Harrier was seen devouring what looked like a

Pangolin. We also saw our first Ducks in the form of Cape Teal. The proposed afternoon drive was a complete washout with heavy rain making even the Lodge grounds into a lake. Very thrilling Thunder and Lightning though. Now sadly it was time to move on. We took the more 'usual' route away from Ndutu, spotting more wildlife, such as Jackals and Hyena as well as a lovely male Pallid Harrier, some replete Vultures and our first Cape Rooks. The main road was busy so we detoured to the east via Olduvai Campsite and over the dry river to the plains below Lemagrut. There we met Kori Bustard, some Eland and a Taita Fiscal. Continuing up to the Crater rim it was interesting to see heavy rain had made the Crater very wet indeed. Our next Lodge was **Rhino Lodge** www.ngorongoro.cc/ where we had two nights. We were not going down into the Crater but planned to tour the rim and the Endulen track once more. The hoped for Schalow's Turacos failed to appear but we did score Grey-capped Warbler and both Golden-winged and Tacazze Sunbirds within the Lodge gardens. Further afield we saw Olive Pigeon, Senegal Lapwing, Red-winged Larks and a



Yellow Wagtail. On the drive to Nainakanoka we had a brief but jaw dropping moment when a Male Leopard crossed the road in front of the car.

Next morning a drive over Endulen track and a climb up the slopes of Oldeani gave great views over the area to Lemagrut and down to Lake Eyasi. A mystery insignificant LBJ was finally nailed down as Brown Parisoma after several incorrect attempts at naming it.

In the wee hours of our last morning I was 'detailed' to investigate strange noises outside the room. A torch revealed many shining eyes and further investigation showed around 100 Buffalo had come to graze the lawn. They were still there at dawn and indeed lingered until folks stirred for Breakfast when, after threatening some guests who climbed the barriers and ventured too close, they meandered off and disappeared into the Bush. This Lodge may not be on the Crater rim but it is surrounded by wildlife and you do need to heed the safety warnings and not walk too far.

We left Rhino Lodge in a good mood as both my guests agreed that it was one of the nicest Lodges they had stayed at. We did not take lunch boxes as we only had a short journey to Tarangire and our next Lodge. Before leaving the rim we paid our respects to Michael



Gryzmek and his father and were pleased to see the Memorial to them is being looked after. There were even fresh flowers. After completing exit formalities for the NCA we settled in for the journey to the famous/infamous Boundary Hill Lodge, who were expecting us for lunch! Or so we thought! I had read lots about this place and was curious to see which side of the controversial reports I would find the more accurate. In Karatu we managed to add Straw-tailed Whydah to our ever growing species list. We took a stop at the Rift Valley to get a picture of Lake Manyara NP and drove on through Mto wa Mbu to Makayuni Junction and the track to Boundary Hill Lodge. As rumoured this track is not good and after recent rains we took it slowly especially over the Black Cotton soil of the swamps. We covered the 40km to the Lodge in about 90 minutes so it was not too bad. We saw Yellow-collared Lovebirds in large flocks as well as our first Woodland Kingfishers and some Brown Crowned Tchagra. The last few Km up the Hill to the Lodge were gruelling and the Tsetse were out to welcome us. The Lodge itself looked lovely. And so it was. Sadly the welcome was anything but. Indeed it was non-existent. Despite confirmation by the owners we were not expected and there was no lunch for us either. Not even a cup of tea as they seemed to have used the last teabag!! So we whiled away the time settling in to our lovely bungalow, #2, and did some discreet birding. It was after 20.00 when finally got something to eat. Next morning we set off down Tsetse drive full of expectations of lots of Elephants etc., and saw Klipspringers, White-crested Helmet Shrikes, Red-



bellied Parrots, Northern Pied Babblers and Plum-coloured Starlings which were very iridescent in the sunlight. A Maasai pond in the swamp held a solitary Cattle Egret and the ubiquitous Three-banded Plover.

The only wild large Mammal was a family of three Giraffe. Returning to the Lodge two Tawny Eagles, dark and light phases were eking a drink at a muddy pool. The afternoon drive, taken very late, yielded European BeeEaters Brown Snake Eagle, White headed Buffalo Weaver and Greater Blue-eared Starlings. Next day our morning drive was much more eventful. It started well with Meyer's Parrots and a nice Red-backed Shrike. Still a paucity of mammals though. Then some delightful singing led us to not one but three Rosy-patched Bushshrikes. We got some modest pictures but after waiting patiently one of the males obliged, came out in the open and sang his little heart out for the cameras. Regret? Should have switched on the video for the sound. After this lovely performance our first sighting of a Purple Roller was not as climatic as it should have been.



Today was to be a late night drive so we spotted from the Balcony as per the Mission statement of Whiteknuckles Lite. This yielded Holob's Golden Weaver which we were watching when a flyby was wrongly called "Parrots" and only when they perched did we see they were African Black-headed Orioles. By now our list was over 300 and we had already revised our target up from 250 to 300. Would we make 350? Well a lovely Green Pigeon made it one more before low light made me try out the EXR setting. This is a Fuji device for low light which thinks for you. Sometimes it takes

3 shots as one and merges them. Crazy but it works. Reasonably noise free shots of Slaty Boubou and

Cliff Mocking Chat were taken for practice purposes.

So to the night drive with “Commander” up on the luggage rack with Spotlight. Very soon we had seen Bushbaby, Genet, White-tailed Mongoose and a Steenbok as well as many Impala which we took care not to dazzle. We found a group of the strange kangaroo like Springhares but they eluded the camera as I needed time to persuade the thing to focus in the dark. However a co-operative Nightjar was more patient and I got usable pictures without flash. (Those Mickey Mouse pop up



flashes are useless outside the house.) Then having got into practice we came across a very nice Violet-tipped Courser. A “tick” for the trip and a lifer for Mr.G.

Our third morning drive was fairly quiet and I don't think we took many photos. However part of our “plan” was a full 24 hours in Tarangire so we set off for there after lunch to enter at 14.00 and what a drive we had. I have honestly never seen so many elephants. The Silale Swamp held hundreds in big family groups. We had a brief encounter with one herd but the Matriarch looked unsettled with us so we moved on. Then the highlight. I spotted, no pun intended, a shape in the grass. We stopped despite others seeing

nothing. Had I boobed? Nope. My binoculars confirmed a lovely Leopard. So we moved closer and had great views of her. Quite relaxed and indeed at one point we lost sight of her as she was too close to the car. I hoped she would jump in but she just sniffed the wheels and then wandered off to check out some other smells. A few more poses and she lay down in the shade of a bush. We had had around 20 minutes of her time and we left her in peace. No other cars. The joy and pleasure of our own sighting and not one picked up from others was enormous. Further along were some open patches of water and we quickly added Dabchick, Open-billed Stork, Long-toed Lapwing and Black Terns. Also seen were a Reedbuck, Blue-cheeked BeeEaters and a very young Verreaux's



Eagle Owl. Then with a bulging Check list we headed back to the Lodge and Dinner. Tonight was a special occasion as we shared our table with the Idiots Abroad from Minnesota. Not that they lived up to their soubriquet. We also know them as Jim, Idiot He, and Sheila is Idiot She! A very pleasant evening in their company and what was maybe the best meal of our stay at this Lodge. They had cold beer too.



Our last day had us packed and after good byes heading for the NP Gate after a couple of stops for birds. Only a few Ellies in the swamps as they had been in the woods overnight. However lots were heading out for the day and we had great viewings. We parked up for one group in particular with many babies at foot as they looked to be going to pass close by. They did so

with anxious mums and aunts keeping a close eye on us. Then it seemed one maiden aunt was detailed to “Shift that Car” and she duly attended to us. We stayed put despite a few close approaches, each run getting nearer until she was in touching distance. You could imagine her stamping her foot but from her body language we were comfortable she would not present any danger despite us needing wide angle settings on the Cameras. We eventually left her to it and were surprised to find the encounter had only lasted 12 minutes or so. After that we commenced the long drive to Tarangire Main gate passing as we did so, many more Elephant, Giraffe, Zebra and Impala. A



smooth drive to Arusha and a courtesy call on Romeo before taking tea at the Bayleaf with Sam and Lucia of Safari Infinity. Then on to the airport and the check in for our KLM flight home. Another trip was over.

Thanks to all the Lodges that catered for our needs so well and provided wholesome food, a Balcony and a regular supply of “Safari Baridi” in support of the concept of Whiteknuckles Lite.

Thanks to Romeo of Safarimultiways for the use of a car. Thanks to driver/guide Amos for his patience with us birders. Not forgetting Tony of www.kanyambosafaris.com for guiding us at Mambo point and the two transfers there and back. You could not get stuck with a nicer person in both senses of the word.

Total checklist of bird species was 358 including several new species I had not seen in TZ before.

Whiteknuckles Lite was a success.

All photos to be found on the Gallery.

