

Tanzania. August – September 2012. A solo long distance tour.

How it came about. The plan.

Lots of 'new' places crop up and if they arouse interest they get "filed away" for future use. Then when planning a new trip I get to draw a few of these into the overall itinerary. This is what happened with places like Lake Chala, Tanga, Kitulo and Katavi plus new untried lodges in the normal 'northern circuit.' So when the idea came for me to take off on my own for 'one last time' to Tanzania I put all of these into the pot whilst still including a couple of unmissable old favourites and this is the result. Initially the plan was for some time in April or May 2013, as I have never been in the green, but events overtook me and it was decided with Elizabeth's concurrence, (should I be suspicious?) that September 2012 was the time. After toying with cheaper routes via NBO and the shuttle I lost interest in the logistics and KLM to JRO was booked. Far quicker, so yielding much more ground time.

The route is a (very) rough circle in a clockwise direction starting and finishing, hopefully, at Kilimanjaro Airport where I spent the first evening in the KIA Lodge.

Our Land Cruiser 4x4 was a private hire with Roger Msengi as the competent and trusted driver I have used before. Not new but in good working order. That's the car not Roger although I dunno! I took my new Garmin GPS with traks4Afrika Card. This proved a useful tool off the beaten track and also for good steers through towns on the route. This is the list of where we stayed for ease of reference rather than include them in the body of the report which I shall endeavour to keep to a simple account of the trip. So skip this bit if you like, indeed skip the lot. It makes no matter.

1. KIA Lodge at JRO. Arriving late off KLM this was a handy place to rest up prior to the start of the trip. Good grounds for birds and reasonable value for money at \$157 for a single.

2. Lake Chala Camp. Soon to be a Luxury tented camp. Still just tents for rent or BYO. Mine cost \$17 per night. Comfortable enough with a handy ablution block although night visits need extra care as Elephants are around. Good walks guided or unguided. No Crocs in the lake now, they say. Good dry country birding.



3. Emau Hill Forest Camp. Amani Reserve in the Eastern Usumbaras. A new venture by a Danish charity. Access from Amani HQ up a further 5km of narrow, 4x4, track or you could walk. Lovely setting with Long-billed Tailorbird actually in the garden. Fischer's Turaco commonly seen and heard. Comfortable roomy tents but not en suite. Great cooking by enthusiastic ladies. A Bar. \$65 single.



4. Tanga. We found an excellent B&B but sadly I think they are selling up. \$50 per night. Great views over, and access to, the Ocean from the garden. We ate at **Rusho Roho Restaurant** where good African food was pleasant and wholesome. Chicken 6000/-, etc.

5. Hondo Camp. Udzungwa. Nice place. Usual Ensuite tents under thatch but the sylvan setting was somewhat marred by traffic noise along the main Kilombero road which is a heck of a lot busier now. Tar road from Mikumi turn off until the power station on the Ruaha. Good dirt thereafter. Take care at many bridges as only single width. Take care with organised trips and check prices first. It left a sour taste to be charged \$120 for a day to Kilombero in my own bloody car! Also be aware that "African" drivers are not encouraged to visit the restaurant/bar. \$144 single.

6. Kitulo National Park. Good tar from Mikumi via Iringa and Chimala to the switch back road mentioned in Bradt guide. There is now a very quaint Lodge/guest House at Matamba some 7km from the park proper. Called "**Kitulu Gods Garden Hotel**". Reservations via Mr Mushi, the Head

Ranger of the NP, who made us very welcome. Accommodation is in terraced bungalows set around a pleasant green lawn and gardens. A clean and welcoming place. I liked it a lot and not just because they sold Kilimanjaro at cost price. Cooking was excellent and nourishing. Menu, fish, chicken etc., Breakfast is anything you requested at any hour you like. We had an early start on our last day, to reach Katavi NP and they opened at 5.30. \$20 per night. Food cost around 6,000 TZ for three courses.

7. Flycatchers Fig Tree Camp, Katavi National Park is just by the airstrip so very well located. Be aware that Flycatchers is a 'special campsite', not a lodge, so a Camping fee of \$30 pppn is charged by TANAPA over the Park entry Fee of \$20. How daft is that?

Flycatchers looked after us very well. Nice Tents, a tad worn, with en suite facilities. Set Meals in a mess tent nearby. A dodgy walk in grass after dark. I liked the wilderness feel of the Park. \$190 per night. Cheaper than the other places but not cheap.

8. Nzega. We had no booking for an overnight stop but saw a sign to **Forest Inn Hotel** and called. Good rooms for TZ20000 or TZ30000 for a 'suite'. I took the suite. Nice place, very comfortable and away from traffic noise. Dinner was from a handwritten and flexible menu.

9. Serengeti Stopover. Nice en suite bungalows with good nets. Excellent food. Spacious grounds jumping with birds. Some traffic noise. \$50 per night. 3km from NP Gate so day trips possible.

10. Robanda Lodge. A couple of km outside Serengeti's Ikoma Gate. I got the luxury tent which was very nice but pricey. A great place when the migration passes through the area and much wildlife around the camp so an escort is necessary. He carried a Bow and Arrow which I felt was a great comfort. \$155 and Beer at \$3

11. Ndutu Lodge. My favourite place so still included in the ground breaking trip. **See our report for 2010.** Out of season but never dull. Well managed. My sixth visit since 1993. I can never pass the door or try some of the upstart places that have sprung up nearby. Not tents but stone built bungalows with comfortable furnishings. Wildlife in the grounds. Three endemic birds at the birdbath. Who needs more than that? \$175 but worth it.

12. Rhino Lodge, Ngorongoro. Very nice rooms in a wooded location. On the crater rim but with no view of the crater but four Schalow's Turaco in the same tree outside my room made up for that, as did the Tacazze Sunbirds on the flowers. The balcony permitted excellent views into the forest so plenty of birds and some visiting wildlife including elephant and buffalo so you will be escorted even when birding. Food was a set menu in a pleasant restaurant. This place was the home/HQ of the first Warden and has great atmosphere. Wimps from warm climates will be glad to learn that there is a stove in each room and a Hot water bottle you can fill.

13. Ol Mesera Tented Camp, near Mto wa Mbu. Barbara Lavrich-Winant's lovely rustic camp. Ol Mesera is Maa for Baobab and the Restaurant/Lapa is set around one of these giants. Accommodation is in Tents on Platforms with sitting out area. Keep em zipped because of Monkeys. Well fitted out and refurbished or in course of. Lovely views to the rift valley walls to the west. Being outside any NP you can walk freely around although you are in a wildlife corridor. Dinner was fixed menu and breakfast was to order. This made a pleasant alternate stay away from the madding crowds and yet only 30 minutes from Lake Manyara NP gate... \$115 per day F/B.

14. Tarangire Safari Lodge. My other firm not to be missed location with its fine view down to the



river. From the porch I counted over 50 elephants in the river and on another occasion around 500 Wildebeest drinking. A lioness with three cubs was clearly visible down below and I watched several attempts by her to get a meal. Yellow-collared Lovebirds and Nubian Woodpeckers spiced up the birding too. En suite tents both roomy and comfortable with a dressing area between bed and Bathroom. Again night visits are common and an escort is needed after dark. Food is table service for dinner with a choice of main course and of a good standard. Breakfast was buffet. Both taken in the large Restaurant with Coffee or

Beer in the adjacent comfortable lounge area. A large "patio" overlooks the river. \$225 F/B (and worth it.)

Now to the trip itself. About time too!!

30th August. KLM got me there on time and fresh and I was smoothly transferred to KIA Lodge. I had eaten on the plane so had my first Kilimanjaro baridi and discussed the trip with Roger

31st August. Waiting for Roger next morning I got started with my tick list adding African Black-headed Oriole and Cutthroat Finches among others. We then set off towards Moshi where I topped off all the tanks as it was take it empty and return it empty. 156 litres. Ouch!

Roger had not seen a Garmin before and was baffled by how easy it got us through Moshi. The turn off to Lake Chala from the Taveta road is not marked but I had programmed the Garmin so we found it easy enough. By now the lady voice was nicknamed Gladys. 11km later and still ticking off birds we arrived at the Camp. Elephants are finding sanctuary there from nearby Shambas on their migratory route from Kilimanjaro. There were around 50 at the waterhole as we arrived. Bird wise we were treated to a great flying display by a nesting pair of Peregrine Falcons. In the evening sitting with a post prandial Kili with the manager Robbie there were noises off and we both said "Ellies". Sure enough a small herd marched over the campsite so we flashed our torches to divert them around us. Which they did, so I never spilled a drop.

1-2 September. Next day we set off for the Eastern Usumbaras down a decent tar road and despite several stops for local Police we made good time to Muheza on the Tanga road. A broken bridge caused a slight hiatus to Gladys but soon we were back on track and climbing the tortuous road up to Amani Forest Reserve. Amani is where the African Violet (*Saintpaulia ionantha*) was discovered and the Usumbaras are part of Tanzania's Eastern Arc of Mountains that form a Galapagos in the sky. We found our camp, Emau Hill, in a beautiful setting and moved in.



Next morning we walked off into the forest, unguided, and starting an impressive list of new birds including Green-headed Oriole, Southern Banded Snake Eagle and the gorgeous Fischer's Turaco. The much sought after Long-billed Tailorbird obligingly lives in the Lodge garden. Lots of Sunbirds too. I was particularly taken by their nests hanging by footpaths with chicks in. Evidently they have learned that keeping close to paths discourages predation. Clever little buggers! Look closely.



3-4 September. After two nights we headed back down the hill to Muheza buying fresh Mango and Paw Paw by

the road side and turned left for Tanga and the Indian Ocean. Intriguingly we

passed through a small village called "Tanganyika". Was this how the country was named I wondered?



Our B&B was a beautiful private roomy cottage overlooking, and with access to the shore of, the Indian Ocean at low tide. Bushbabies came to be fed at dusk. This was 'only' a B&B so we ate in a charming small restaurant in town. Lovely local food of chicken and fish dishes mainly. Next day we had booked a trip to explore the islands off shore and this is when I discovered Roger hated boats. "A bit late young man. Get on!" So he did.

After a nice cruise he was quite relaxed about his trip. We then walked the beach at low tide amongst local folks gathering shellfish whilst we noted the Shorebirds including Di-morphic Egrets. You don't really want to know them all do you? Thought not! In the afternoon we drove north and took a track down river birding and picked up some more rarities. We ate again in town at the same restaurant.

5-6 September. After another of Lynn's hearty breakfasts we embarked on the first of our long runs south. Topped off the rear tank and headed out for Chalinze and Morogoro where we arrived some four hours or so later. After a rest stop in Morogoro we passed through Mikumi NP and saw more wildlife including Elephant. Entering Mikumi 'village' I was shocked by how it had grown since I was last there in 2000. Turning left just out of town we had about 80km to run before our next lodge, **Hondo Hondo (Hornbill)** on the edge of Udzungwa NP. Another Galapagos Range with its own

Endemics including two species of Monkey only discovered late last century. Iringa Red Colobus and Sanje Crested Mangabey. And, as you would expect, some birds too. The Udzungwa Partridge is infamous for the way it was discovered in 1991. Its 'discoverer' had eaten it for dinner. I kid you not!



We birded the local Shambas and a relict part of the Forest that is technically part of the Selous Reserve where we found the Iringa Red Colobus in some numbers as well as its 'common' Black and White cousin.

Next day we set off to the Kilombero River and marshes where three special birds were to be found. Two Cisticolas, White-tailed and Kilombero and the Kilombero Weaver. Birders? Eh!

Having driven through Ifakara we arrived at Kilombero Ferry dock and embarked on a Makoro. Roger vanished after having dropped me off. Well, he was probably due a day off. We poled our way upstream at first past friendly fishermen and into marshland. We saw plenty of birds including BeeEaters etc., before disembarking at a lonely spot where cattle had grazed the banks. Or were they Buffalo? We checked out some Weavers and Widowbirds until I noted a very small brown bird almost at my feet. There was the White-tailed Cisticola calm as you please. Quite smart too. Not your usual LBJ. Retracing our 'wake' we passed the ferry landing and continued on to



where the river really widened. Lots of Pratincoles on the bank and White-fronted BeeEaters displaying.

The Kilombero Weaver was also much in evidence. Two out of three ain't bad. Back to the landing and during a late lunch in the wreckage of the Ferry that capsized ten years ago killing hundreds of people we found Roger and the car. With "Gladys" to guide us made good time back to Camp.

8th -10th September. An early breakfast and check out with an unfortunate argument over the charges for excursions in our own vehicle, ouch, and we were on the road back to Mikumi but to turn left for Iringa and the west. We were heading for God's Garden or **Kitulo National Park**. Our route took us through lovely Mountain scenery on the famous Tanzam highway as we cut along the Ruaha valley passed Iringa and on to Makambako. More fuel uploaded in Iringa.



We were keeping the front tank as reserve and topping up the rear so never being less than half full. One tank (80 litres) would take us 600km or thereabouts. As we approached the small town of Chimala we received the first of many helpful phone calls from Mr Mushi, the Head Warden of Kitulo NP to steer us into Park HQ at Matamba where we were to lodge at God's Garden Hotel. At Chimala we turned off Tanzam and ascended the road known as "Hamsini na Saba" which name reflects the number of hairpins as we clawed our way to 8000 feet. Further guidance was received in Matamba as we arrived at God's Garden Hotel where Mr Mushi was there to welcome us. He turned out to be

a lovely man and very pleased to welcome tourists to his under visited but lovely National Park. I liked this Lodge a lot. Still partly as Work in progress, the finished bungalows were ideal for me with friendly and obliging staff. Meals in a small Bar/Restaurant where locals also gathered. Truly a nice part of 'real' Africa. Next morning we paid our NP Fees, \$20, and set off to see what this park had to offer. We took along a local Guide and climbed a further 1,000 feet through Eucalyptus Forest to the park gates. The park authorities, Mr Mushi, are getting rid of these non-indigenous trees and replanting with native species. At the gates our first new bird was the Malachite Sunbird, a long tailed beauty in shimmering green. Hands up those that thought Malachite was blue? What else did we find up there? Denham's Bustard, Shelley's Francolin and Montane Marsh Widowbirds and the endemic Kipengere Seedeater. But God's Garden is





named for its flowers although we were in the wrong season for most of the flowers. Come in the rains and the place is full of Iris, Orchids, endemic Red Hot Pokers (*Kniphofia kirkii*), Proteas and many more. God's Garden (Bustani ya Mungu) or Serengeti of Flowers is said to be wonderful. Lots of Pipits and Larks including Rufous-naped and Red-

capped. Raptors included Martial Eagle and Lanner Falcons. Will this do? The landscapes were truly reminiscent of the Scottish Borders with rolling treeless hills. Great Hiking country. We also saw several of the rare Mountain Reedbuck which is the only large mammal up there. On return to the village we birded and wandered the small roads and woods around the village. Holob's Golden weaver and White-headed Saw wings were added to the list while Green Pigeons flew overhead and Woodpeckers teased us in the trees. We found a very obliging African Cuckoo Hawk who posed for several photographs.



11th- 13th September. Next day was the marathon run of nearly 600km so an early start was made and we were on the road by 6.15 for what "Gladys" promised was a nine hour drive for a 15.00 arrival at Flycatcher Camp in Katavi. So much for the theory. We should have left by the same road but Roger mistakenly tried a shorter, on the map, track via Kikondo to pick up the new tar road to Mbeya. This was slow going and very twisty and rough.

Eventually we got down and into Mbeya where we topped off the tank again. Then on to Tundumu by the Zambian Border. In fact our road took us right passed the Border Guards and of course we got snarled up in truck traffic waiting to leave the country. We forced a way through and turned right, north, for Sumbawanga and Katavi. This is where it unravelled a bit. The road was under repair and we suffered miles and miles of diversions whilst tantalising glimpses of new smooth tar were out of bounds. The dust was incredible so windows shut and air conditioning at full blast. And still we choked. I wondered how my driver could actually see the road at times. But we hit nothing and nothing hit us and after a terrible beating we made Sumbawanga at around 15.00 where we stopped for a break and cleaned the air filter with an air hose. All this time the Garmin (Gladys) was putting back our ETA and I got concerned that we may get locked out of the NP at dark. After Sumbawanga the road 'improved' in that it was not under repair, so was just bad and not awful. We worked out that turning off at Chisi or Kisi we could cut through the escarpment and make it to our camp much sooner than going the official way via the main gate at Sitalike. It was getting dark and we were looking for Fig Tree Camp near the southern airstrip, which was on Garmin. Roger did not mention this so we missed it and ended up at the wrong Ranger post who knew nothing about our unorthodox arrival and nearly arrested us. However we were free to proceed to the right place and our camp. So ended an interesting drive of over 13 hours. We were covered in dust and could not decide on laundry and shower or just shower fully clothed and accomplish both tasks at once. I had a beer and felt better. Then a shower whilst the clothes were taken for their wash.

Fig Tree Camp, run by Flycatcher Safaris, a Swiss firm based in Arusha, was nicely laid out with semi-permanent tents with bucket showers and hot water brought in a jug. Dining was in a mess tent under a large Fig Tree, there's a surprise, and whilst they were not quite ready for us the friendly staff made us welcome. The campsite is central to the main plains and next day when it was light I could see various Mammals coming to drink without moving from my tent. We had several Game drives and met lots of animals and birds. Many Elephant were coming for water and our score of birds

mounted with Storks and other waterbirds such as Spoonbill etc. On one drive we were treated to an illustration of how intelligent Elephant really are. We met one herd the vanguard of which, including very young ones, hurried off into the bush away from the river whilst the Aunties gave us a few threats to keep our distance. Left behind was a smaller group of ‘Teenagers’ in the care of a mature but not old bull. He looked us up and down, rising from one front leg to the other as he worked out who we were. The young ones obviously wanted to pass us to join the others but dare not. The young Bull then appeared to lose interest and wandered down river a bit and we thought he was leaving but he then circled around behind us and returned much closer but walking parallel to us. He stopped and shook his head giving a rumble at which sound the younger ones all proceeded to walk by on the far side of him. He had worked out to place himself between us and his young charges for their protection. I think that was one of the cleverest things I have seen an Elephant do. Or was it all a coincidence? Around camp were Broad-billed and Racquet-tailed Rollers, Boubou and Brubru, Heuglin’s Robin, Black-headed Oriole and African Green Pigeons. And a pride of nine Lions. I better give them a mention. It made going to dinner interesting. We had only seen one or two other cars, usually self-drive campers, so Katavi is by no means crowded.

14th September. Our three nights were up and it was time to leave Katavi and head for the Serengeti. Our plan was to head for Mwanza via Tabora although “Gladys” stated firmly this was “not recommended” on her little screen. What does she know? We left the park after taking some nice pictures of a Bataleur Eagle eating a dog on the road. Up to Mtpa where we left the ‘main road’ and struck out east for Inyonga. The road was not that bad, compared to what we had endured on the way in, and reasonable progress was made but it was to be another long day. We were in thick forest most of the way which was a change from scrub and bush. It was also quite hilly in places so quite attractive country. We got to Inyonga in time to beat the local bus from blocking the road and stopped to buy some local Honey for which this area is world famous. We needed Gladys’s help to leave town as the roads seemed to point every which way and end up in a field. We pressed on to Nzega where the tar began. My Bradt guide showed there was a decent place here called **Forest Hill Hotel** so we found it and took two rooms. Mine cost 30,000TZ complete with a Sofa a TV and Air Conditioning. Now Gladys and I had our first “Tiff”. She advised the road to Mwanza was Gravel and yet here we were bowling along on nice Tar. She should get out more. Not up to date. Lake Victoria hove into sight as we neared Mwanza. Booked into **Serengeti Stopover** for three nights.



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15th- 17th September. Lots of birds including Silverbird, Black-headed Gonalek and Sulphur-breasted Bush-shrike to name but three. We visited Speke Bay and also tried a drive up the main road to view the Serengeti but yet more



road works marred the experience and the famous Grumeti River was doubling as a car wash. On our last day we entered the Serengeti proper on a 24 hour ticket to max our usage. Lots of Wildebeest, Zebra and Topi. We got our first Pygmy Falcon and the endemic Grey-breasted Spurfowl plus a few more.

18th – 20th September. Next day it was into the Serengeti early with until 16.00 to clear the Ikoma Gate. The road was not too busy until we met the

usual Ranger Safaris Cavalcade heading in convoy at high speed. Do they tour in packs? The scenery was quite hilly and very dusty. We did a few De-tours and loops off the main track disturbing one Tourist parked on the narrow concrete bridge over the Grumeti where he had stopped to photograph Hippo alongside a notice that read “Do not stop on the Bridge” in three languages. Mebbe he needed four? The tracks varied in quality but the road out to Ikoma Gate was faster and sadly beset with more practice sessions for the Serengeti Grand Prix. At the turn off for Robanda, two guest houses were called White House and The Pentagon. Is there something we should be told? Around Robanda is a Wildlife Management area and in season these plains are black with Game. We had many encounters with friendly Elephant and Giraffe here. But we were safe enough in camp as the guards have bows and arrows to protect us. And for the birders, Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Grey-headed Silverbill and Chinspot Batis. We toured this area for two days before re-entering the Serengeti for the drive to N’Dutu.



21st & 22nd September. It was a leisurely ride to Nduu via the Central Serengeti. We made good progress although there was an increase in traffic. This was country I knew well. We met up with several friendly families of Elephants doing their Elephant thing. But the bad behaviour by tourists and their drivers was becoming more prevalent. We stopped at a water hole where we judged a distant party of Ellies were heading for a drink. Cars came and wondered what we had found but did not stay. The Elephants eventually came to drink and promptly more cars appeared. Some even pushed in front of our strategically parked car to get the Shoot and Scoot

shots and hang the rest of us. We also met a Kruger sized road jam of over twenty cars, each one pressing towards a tiny road side bush. Evidently somebody, probably long deceased from boredom, “thought they had seen a Leopard”. Really? Mebbe the Leopard had passed away too? We pushed through the mob, to some angry glances, and carried on our way. We then headed up the headwaters of the Serengeti ‘river’ to its source in isolated country. This was really beautiful country and true wilderness. Gladys was very quiet for a while. Hardly a track to follow but we were NOT off road. As we climbed we encountered swampy bits with Reed Buck and water birds such as Black Crake and Glossy Ibis. And some friendly Ellies of course. Eventually the track led us to Simba Kopjes and the main road to Naabi Hill. There we encountered another Jam where even commercial trucks were stuck. What were they looking at? Five Lions squeezed under bush out of the sun. I think there were five. We did not stop. After the usual delays at Naabi Hill Gate (those fancy Exxim Cards don’t speed matters up) there are still reams of paperwork and three desks to Q at. I spent a fruitful time with Hildebrandt’s Starling, Rufous-tailed Weaver and a quite unconcerned Grass Rat that was investigating the litter dropped by cars.



After Naabi we turned off the busy main road and headed due south for Nduu. Immediately we were seeing many more antelope, Thomson and Grant’s gazelle, Topi and Wildebeest. The plains were full of them. Some hungry Hyena and Golden Jackal were present also as was one of my favourite mammals, the Bat-Eared Fox. Ostriches and Caspian Plover too. Through the woodlands until Gladys announced our arrival at “Endootoo Lodge”. We had arrived. Check in was friendly as usual.

Nduu is very dry in September and the dust was bad. This was not helped by grazing Maasai goats and sheep. And “No, I do not want to buy any nicnacs thanks and you have just disturbed the animal I was trying to photograph!” But the place was worth the visit as always. We headed



through the woods for the Serengeti Boundary, no trespassing, but there was not much about. Happily the woods and marsh were very productive. Some of my best Elephant moments here as we watched the kids playing while an Aunty kept a very close eye on us to keep us in line. Down at the Marsh were many water birds and 100s of both Yellow-throated and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse. We also got very excited, *moi?* with what we thought was a new Apalis until the penny dropped and we were looking at Bar-throated Parisoma (Look it up!)



Timing our Marsh visits to Ellie wallow time also paid off. One visit the ladies and kids were joined by three mature bulls. Mixed bathing. Alpha Bull removed his two henchmen from the area and courted the ladies by showing how fond of the kids he was. When they left they had to squeeze by us and we sat tight. We got some hard stares but they knew what we were and made the call not us. Great video. You can hear Roger

sweating! Both lakes held some water, there were some Flamingo and lots of waders including Chestnut-banded Plovers with tiny chicks the size of fluffy ping pong balls. We also experienced how Hyena protect their cubs. Mum and Dad, how can you tell? Lazed by the bush but the kids were ordered to make themselves scarce up the hillside. At dinner and again at dawn we were serenaded by Lion, two clearly visible in the firelight as we ate.



Breakfast was taken with a backcloth of Fischer's Lovebirds and other birds coming to the birdbath.

23rd – 24th September. Then it was on to Ngorongoro Crater with Lemagrut growing larger on the horizon with each mile. Dust, dust and more dust on that road. Thankfully **Rhino Lodge** was set back in the forest as I had wished. Whilst I was disappointed that I could not bird along the road for fear of being run down or choked to death, the grounds of Rhino were very good and held many birds. Tacazze Sunbird and four Schalow's Turaco in the same tree says it all. Sadly they came both days when the light was fading so photographs are bit grainy. One morning we explored the back road from the Crater towards Endulen and it was truly a different world along there. Beautiful wooded valley and Maasai kids totally impervious to wazungu. They had not been behaviourally conditioned by tourists. As we were not visiting the Crater, one night may have sufficed here in view of the restricted birding. Make no bones about security though. We had many Buffalo and even Elephant enjoy the garden during our visit. You do need to keep a lookout.



25th – 27th September. Our next stop was Ol Mesera Camp some 14km north of Mto wa Mbu along the Engaruka/Natron "road!" This was in lovely surroundings overlooking the Rift wall and one of the nicest friendliest places I have stayed. Resident owner/manager Barbara made us very welcome indeed. Even sent out for more Beer one evening. Hospitality with a capital T. Birds in the garden included Silver-bills, Brown-crowned Tchagra, Melba Finch and Grenadiers. In the area we ticked off Short-tailed Lark, Black-necked Weaver, and Pearl-spotted Owlet with its back to front head and the aptly named Beautiful

Sunbird. Mammals in the area included Lesser Kudu, Giraffe, Zebra and Wildebeest. The valley floor is a migration corridor between Manyara and Natron. Elephant signs but we never met any on our walks. Night time serenades from Hyena but too many Maasai around for a Lion's comfort. We did a day trip into Manyara NP, a full day of course. The Hippo pool area was quiet but we had a great day



out with our lunch taken, and shared, with Cardinal and Nubian Woodpeckers and the beautiful Usambiro Barbet. Down at *Maji Moto Kubwa* there were many waders by the outflow including our first Avocets and Stilts. The waders were continually flushing as a hungry Lanner Falcon kept trying for her picnic too. Elephant moments were few but this included one of the few times we have ever had to 'back up' on the Bull's orders. I don't like backing off as it can encourage them develop the habit to chase cars. This chap meant every word, did not want us around and this was not a time try and debate the point. Three nights well spent with Ol Mesera and



rewarded on the drive out by a pair of African Hawk Eagles.

28th – 30th September. Now my eager anticipation of Tarangire were tinged with the knowledge that we were on the last lap. I had been out a full calendar month!! Of course Tarangire fulfilled all expectations and more. The river was drawing in wildlife from the dry country around. We timed our arrival for 14.00 to maximise our 24 hour tickets to leave at 13.59 on the fourth day and we were hardly through the gate when we were surrounded by Elephants heading for an afternoon drink. Again much splashing and wallowing once the thirst was quenched. I was visiting only the second place I had visited previously, out of 14 destinations, but who can resist Tarangire Safari Lodge? I can't. Checked into Tent 22 & I was home. You really could game watch from your easy chair. I saw herds of Wildebeest, Zebra, Reedbuck and Impala coming to the river below. Many many Elephants and Giraffe and even a lion with three young cubs to feed was lurking down there trying for a meal on both afternoons I was on watch. Impala and Dik Dik wandered by my tent as I sat quietly and the



bushes held many birds including Yellow-collared Lovebirds, and Red & Yellow Barbets whilst Augur Buzzards, Bataleur Eagles, Lappet-faced and White-backed Vultures soared on the up currents from the cliff. Did we really need Game drives? Well for some encounters of course we went out. I was impressed by how many Eland we saw which was very nice but sadly we never got a glimpse of a Spotted Cat. Lots of Elephant of course including quite a drama with one herd who wanted to use the road we were on. So we pulled to the side and obliged. They were very grateful and 'nodded' their thanks as they passed by. Other creatures encountered included Dwarf Mongoose in their Termite Mound home, a pair of lovesick

Ostriches, Buff-crested Bustard and White-headed Buffalo-weavers.

There was a Black Ant hatch one afternoon and we counted many Red-billed Hornbills and Magpie Shrikes and Buffalo Weavers fighting over the feast.

My slumbers were disturbed by Elephant feeding on the thatch and he came back at breakfast to delay my breakfast. For a Photo Opportunity I hasten to say. A pair of mating Lions on my balcony tried to delay dinner but seemed to have a good grasp of Anglo Saxon. Well, they left on my command!

So that was Tarangire Safari Lodge where I am well known enough to have Kilimanjaro baridi brought to my dinner table with a "Utopian" smile without even asking! I will be back. Many times I hope.

I have a few photos left out of the text so I may as well just end with a short gallery to fill the following and final page.



And it not all been about birds:-



1st October. And so like all good things, the trip came to an end with a smooth flight to Amsterdam, a scrambled connection to Manchester, where I made it but the luggage did not, and a warm welcome home on the Isle of Man.

5000km without a puncture during which we consumed 650 litres of diesel at a cost of \$900. 14 Destinations visited without a problem. 413 Species of birds seen including 44 new ones.