

Northern Tanzania Trip Report. Fred Hodgson & Bill North,

September 19th – October 8th 2007

Preliminary information etc.

Fred had been to Tanzania four times previously in 1993, 1996, 2000 & 2002. Bill had never been to the North although he had visited the Selous and Dar. He wanted to see the Serengeti and Ngorongoro etc. My brief was to arrange this to fit within the preferred timescale of 10/11 days. No way I was coming home so soon so I explored the idea of a trip to Amboselli as an add on. This did not work out but read on!

Tanzania is three hours ahead of GMT. The usual African twelve hours of daylight and twelve of night time and not much seasonal change. Our visit was timed for the end of the dry season, i.e. before the “little rains” of mid October November. This would concentrate wildlife to permanent water although we would miss out on migrant birds. We knew many of the Gnu would be most likely in Kenya but the Ellies would be in Tarangire and Lake Manyara. Gnus are not news.

Entry requirements: - We would need a Visa but contrary to what is advised these are available on demand at the point of entry. At \$50 a time they should be gift wrapped with Air miles.

Local currency is the Shilling (TzSh) Import/Export not allowed but £ & US\$ readily exchangeable. I will give prices where appropriate in US\$. Exchange Rate whilst we were there was around 1200 TSh/US\$. Most Tourist Lodges etc., quote in \$ anyway. We carried folding money with only a small reserve in T/Chqs.

Getting there, back and around. The Capital city is Dodoma and only diplomats go there. Dar es Salaam is the main port and where most international flights arrive/depart. This is well served by most large carriers. However the Northern set of parks is more accessible from Arusha. This Safari Capital is more easily accessed from either Kilimanjaro Intl or Nairobi in Kenya. KLM are the only major carrier into KIA (*Ed. At that time*) but Nairobi is a large hub. It was decided to use KLM via Amsterdam from Manchester with Bill returning the same route. Fred took an open jaw with the return leg from Nairobi due to his intention to visit Kenya. Or maybe he just likes travelling by Bus? As Fred intended to visit Mkomazi Game reserve in the Pare Mountains, research indicated that a Safari firm called SWALA (Antelope) in Arusha could arrange this so we decided to use them for the entire trip instead of our usual Hoopoe who seem to have gone a bit upmarket. A bit of a risk using an untried firm but their Website was very transparent and informative so we gave them a go. Good communications were set up and prices obtained.

Food & Drink. Beer is produced in Tanzania, the three main brands in order of strength being Safari, Kilimanjaro and Serengeti. The latter only 3.7% and a bit sweet. A reasonable bottle of Red wine was between \$15 & \$25 depending on the establishment. Gin is made locally (Konyagi) and good and cheap. We were Full board for the joint part but on my solo bit good meals could be had for about \$6. Bottled Water cost around \$1.5 but we were provided with freebies in our Lodge rooms.

Bugs, n Bowels. Peel it, boil it or forget it is the golden rule here. Hygiene standards appeared acceptable in the main Lodges but do not drop your guard. Tap water, when available is definitely a “No No!” Not even for tooth brushing. Malaria is a problem so Prophylactics are strongly as is the use of a net if the room/tent is not screened. We were in the dry season however and saw/heard only a couple of Mossies. The same could not be said of Tsetse. I actually came through unscathed but Bill appeared tasty. The only snake I saw was a large Puff Adder in Mkomazi.

Accommodations. For the joint trip I used mainly places I had been to before and the standard was Ok. Maybe the food in some Lodges could be a bit more imaginative/wholesome (How many ways are there to cook a chicken?) I will describe individual lodges as we come to them.

Daily Routine. We aimed for at least two nights in each place for two reasons. 1. I hate living out of a suitcase. 2. This gave a full day in each location and a longer point to point Game drive when re-locating. We rose at 6. Depending on location/opportunity we either went straight out and returned for brunch or breakfasted first and stayed until the heat of the afternoon drove us back. We rarely availed ourselves of the Lunch box. If shifting location we aimed to get there for lunch, settle in and go out at 15.30 until dark. I had organised the Lodges to be within reasonable distance of each other.

Kit carried. We both had decent binoculars and my faithful Fuji S5000. 3 sets of re-chargeable batteries and one set of

ordinary just in case. I took a battery charger and conversion plug but Tanzania is on 'British' Square sockets. Most lodges had reliable power sources but I remain wary of Generator spikes.

Books? Tanzania is East Africa and comprehensively covered by good bird books. My library consisted of the invaluable Bradt Guide. Coverage is comprehensive as Phillip Briggs calls it all. I carried "Birds of Africa, south of the Sahara" by Sinclair and Ryan and Bill had Stevenson & Fanshawe. I took along maps but rarely referred to them

Now to the trip itself: - 19th September. I had checked us both in On line from home (KLM open at ETD-30hours) printed out boarding passes and flew to Manchester to sleep near the airport as our departure next day was 06.05.

20th September. Met Bill at 4.00 and booked the luggage right through to JRO. As usual I wore my Hiking Boots just in case luggage did go astray. Having checked in ourselves we had good seats. Transfer time at AMS was about 2 hours and no problem at Schipol. BAA please note. We arrived on time at KIA at 19.50 on 20th September and were met by Boniface having been re-united with our Luggage and granted 3 months Visas. We had arranged overnight at Mount Meru Game Sanctuary. Rooms were clean and we settled in. Being late and having been plied well in flight we skipped dinner and settled for a Beer. Paid over the balance of Money to Boniface and retired. He was to return at 7am to take us to Arusha airport for the 08.00 flight to Lobo Camp in the Serengeti where we would meet up with our car and driver/guide. We did this (\$200 each) to save the outward drive to position us favourably for the whole trip. This worked well.

21st & 22nd September. Lobo. Awoke to a knocking on door at 06.00. I was unlucky and it was only Boniface to pick us early as roads may be congested with waving crowds. These would not be for us but for a Presidential visit. Hurried Bfast and off to Arusha. Checked in and boarded plane (A Caravan) which was to stop at Tarangire and Manyara before taking us to Lobo in the northern Serengeti. IFE was rubbish and the Pilot uncommunicative. We did see Ellies and Giraffe on approach to Tarangire and had nice views of **Ol'Donyo Lengai** (Mountain of God) smoking away. On arrival at Lobo I tipped the Cessna on its tail. We were met by Roger Msengi, our driver/guide for the trip. Into the car (a Discovery with hatches) and off to check out the bird and animal life. There were two Eland actually grazing the Airstrip approach. This area is quite beautiful with hills and Kopjes etc., quite unlike the southern plains. We booked in to Lobo Lodge which had been renovated and was quite nice, set amongst Kopjes on a hill. Rooms were good standard and clean and the



bar and Restaurant areas well served. There is a swimming Pool and Veranda area overlooking game rich area. We saw Ellies, Giraffe and Buffalo plus usual Antelopes etc., the Lodge grounds were jumping with birds including some quite confiding **Mocking Cliff Chats**. During one of our drives we heard some very upset Francolin (when are they never?) and watched a Serval trotting off with one for her tea. Other highlights were a friendly bull Elephant and some nice Eland at the infant Grumeti river. Jackals, Vultures and two Hyena squabbling over someone's left overs. On the bird front Yellow-fronted Sand Grouse with chicks and a pair of Verreaux's Black Eagles on one of the Kopjes. That will do nicely.



23rd -24th September. N'dutu. The longest drive of the Safari down to Seronera and then cross country to Lake N'dutu. On the way we saw Cheetah and Cubs and Bat Eared Foxes. A stop at a small pond produced Black Crane, Green-backed Heron and a **Three-banded Plover with a minute chick**. Amazing. Lunch stop was punctuated by various Finches, Starling and our first Usumbiro Barbet. After the cross country bit, away from the horrible 'new' Trans Serengeti road we arrived at N'dutu. A place I have tried to re-visit since 1993. It was as lovely as ever but a bit dusty in the dry season. Spacious well fitted Tented Bungalows facing the lake over land populated with animals and birds. A giraffe checked us in. I remembered the Cuisine here and it was just as good and wine prices reasonable enough. N'dutu is 'famous' for the **Genets that come into the open restaurant** along the beams and keep the



rodents down. Just outside there is a drinking pool and this is well used by birds. **Fischer's Lovebirds**, **Crimson Waxbills**, etc., all attended regularly. Even the Impala came to drink within feet of where you are standing if



you keep still. A great place, fully up to my memories, and I will come back again before long. The lake is used by both Greater and Lesser Flamingo, Stilts, Avocets, Terns etc., and I have never seen as many Secretary birds in one place. Plenty of Raptors too. Two more Bat Eared Foxes and even a fleeting glimpse of another Serval and an African Wildcat. Bird species list reached 162.

25th September. Ngorongoro. An early start over the plains at first and then re-joining that awful road around Oldupai. After changing a wheel which had become loose we entered the Ngorongoro Crater. From the rim it was a clear day and we could see the lake was full from the recent rains. There were many cars around so the recent hike in Park Fees is no deterrent. A big gaggle of cars announced a pride of Lions at the Hippo Pool. **We watched a hunting Serval instead** and then went to the Pool for the water birds which added to our count with some Teal and Shoveller etc., On our way for lunch, one of the few days we accepted lunch boxes, we watched two Elephants in the swamp **when out walked a Cheetah.** She came on towards us and after waiting patiently for some



cars to disperse, we got in position to where she eventually came right towards us and passed the car. The lady was expecting cubs. We left her to get on with life and went to the Picnic site, more like Blackpool Pleasure Beach but where more birds were ticked. After lunch it became quite hot but we eventually picked up a pride of lion starting a hunt



towards some Wildebeeste and Zebra. We went off to get distant view of Rhino and Calf. Then back to the Lions. They were playing as one was on her back with her legs in the air. We watched for a while then moved on only to get a puncture within yards of them. Roger changed the wheel while I stood guard with an eye on them cats. We got a couple of hard stares but they made no move towards us. We had left our car doors open for rapid entry had they come over to help! Up the private exit road to an overnight at Sopa Lodge without further incident. This Lodge's situation on the Eastern rim is its attraction with great sunsets. We had two spacious Rondaval type bungalows, well equipped and functional. They are let down by the lack of ambience and food quality in both the bar and the restaurant. The worst of the trip which is a shame. There again some of the guests deserved no better. Ooooh!

26th -27th September. Lake Manyara. After an unimaginative non-descript breakfast we drove off along the Crater rim. It was quite windy so birds were in cover which was a shame as there are several there that we would have wished to have seen. We did pick up a couple of Thrushes and Bee Eaters. The road from the 'Gate' is now smooth tar all the way to Arusha and beyond. Whether this is an improvement I dare not say. It only brings more tourists at break neck speeds. What happened to Wild Africa? We got to Lake Manyara and entered this small but interesting Park. We ticked a million Pelicans at the Hippo Pool as they come in to wash off the lake soda in the fresh groundwater. We checked in to Kirurumu Tented Lodge where I had been many times before. This is a nice place on the rim of the Rift Valley. Tents are spacious and with all mod cons. They are set apart from each other for privacy but this means a longish walk to the more 'remote' ones. The paths are lit at night and patrolled by Maasai Askari so safety is not a problem but the stone paths can be quite uneven in places. The Cuisine and friendly service is beyond reproach. After lunch we returned to the park and enjoyed some time with friendly Elephants. The 2nd day followed the same pattern but an earlier entry got us the birds including **Hildebrandt's Francolin,** Mountain Wagtail and Crested Guinea Fowl. On the way out we actually saw two of the **Tree climbing Lions** that this park had built its reputation on. It did nothing for mine as I had recently gone into print saying I had never seen the things.



On the way out we actually saw two of the **Tree climbing Lions** that this park had built its reputation on. It did nothing for mine as I had recently gone into print saying I had never seen the things.



28th -29th September. To Tarangire and a highpoint. Some staff had remembered me from earlier visits but Milau was missing the last twice. He was the Maasai who had walked around the area with me in 1996 (ed. See report 1996 Mt Meru) & 2000 and we had had good times. I had asked after him in 2002 but no one seemed to know where he had gone. It was therefore a highlight when in driving out of Mto wa Mbu I spied a familiar figure walking the track. I turned the vehicle around and retraced our way back to him, wound down the window and greeted my old companion. He greeted me by name and we had both put on a few years since we last met. He is married with two wives and six children and works with his cattle full time now. However he will trek with me should I return which I will. We promised to keep in touch and it was time to go. Driver Roger was stunned that I had picked him out of the many Maasai we were passing and even more that Milau remembered me! We continued along the tar road to Makyuni where we turned right for Tarangire and later to enter the

Park. Tsetse became a problem in parts so we checked in and took lunch. I had been here twice before also, once as long ago as 1993 and it remains a favourite. **The Tarangire Safari Lodge** is on an excellent site overlooking the



permanent river and so providing much needed water for all the animals. You can watch them all coming to drink from your chair outside the Tent. The Tents are the usual spacious ones shaded under a thatched roof with the usual facilities out back. Electricity and running water installed as you expect. There is a central restaurant and bar area and a large open Patio overlooking the river. There is also an inviting Swimming Pool. Food was more than acceptable, multiple choice buffet style and the service friendly. Highlight of the afternoon drive would have been seven **Painted Snipe** several **Yellow-collared Lovebirds** had we not bumped into a party of friendly elephants. I persuaded Roger to switch off and let them approach which he reluctantly did. (I suppose guides have to be cautious but these Ellies looked quite relaxed



despite having young ones with them.) Anyway the Mothers moved clear of us by a few yards and this is how it should be, the choice being theirs to make. The Younger Adults made no such moves and simply came on to pass either side of the car within inches of us. One chap was actually right in front and debating whether to protest at our obstructing him but he just rumbled a bit and came on round us like the rest. When clear we all started breathing again. The defining Ellie moment of the trip! Next day another early rise had us catch up with hundreds of Wildebeeste as they streamed to the river. The column was well over a mile long and contained young ones too. Tarangire has a migration just like Serengeti one. They move between Kilimanjaro/Amboselli and Tarangire in a clockwise fashion dependant on rains. Best birds were Pearl-spotted Owllet, Red & Yellow Barbet and Orange-bellied Parrots. The endemic Ashy Starling was everywhere! Also ticked Nubian and Grey Woodpeckers and Black-faced Sandgrouse. Bird count now 250.

30th September. Arusha. This is Bill's last day and after the usual Game drive in the Park where we met a family of Eagle Owls, 1,000s of Wildebeeste, and even another Lion up a tree. We left the Park at 11.00 and headed back to Arusha where we showed Bill the Clock Tower that marks the half way point between Capetown and Cairo and took lunch at AruMeru Lodge. This was well laid out and good value. Then back to Mount Meru lodge where I had reserved a room for tonight. Bill finished packing and at 6pm we took him to the Airport to begin his long flight back to Manchester. The snowy peak of Kilimanjaro was visible above the slight cloud cover in the evening sun. This time I did sample dinner at the Lodge and found it most acceptable with a good choice on the Menu. The room I had was even better than the first one and looked out on the Sanctuary.

1st & 2nd October. Mkomazi. I had long wanted to visit this Reserve, now gazetted as a National Park, as it is the southern extension of Tsavo in Kenya. There is also a rhino and wild dog re-introduction programme run by Tony Fitzjohn that I was keen to visit. Our journey took us through Moshi and to the town of Same. Swala had originally booked me into The Elephant Motel but we switched when I found there is now a Lodge within the Park. This saved the drive in and out each day. We are now in the Pare Mountains and rain is not long away. We arrived at Babu's Camp for lunch having had good views of Pangani Longclaw and some Starlings which we decided were Fischer's. Babu's is yet another Tented Lodge but these Tents were even bigger and very well equipped. Strangely the toilet and shower were outside the rear of the Tent in the open (with a modesty screen of course.) Showers were by application when they fill the tank with Hot water. Electricity by Generator. Again the Tents were well spaced for privacy but the linking paths were rough stone. Dining area/Lounge, with a good library was in a large Mess Tent. Cuisine was probably the best of the trip. Mammals are plentiful but very shy as this was a hunting area until recently. There was a small dam some miles north which we visited and added Woolly-necked Stork, Little Grebe and Black Herons to the list. Plus a large Puff Adder on the drive back. Next morning I snapped a **Scops Owl** that had been piping all night outside my tent and



then we went over to The Rhino Project and learned all about it. Despite giving notice we were not expected but made welcome even though we interrupted Tony at Breakfast. We took the tour and saw lots of animals and birds but drew a blank on the nine Rhino. The fenced area is 40 square km so it was not really surprising. On the way back we saw a nice **friendly Gerenuk** and a nice **Rosy-patched Bush-shrike** plus Kudu and Eland. After another excellent lunch we explored some of the tracks (Roger had not been here before either) and it is quite a beautiful place and deserving of visitors.



3rd & 4th October. Lushoto. We fitted in an early pre breakfast drive to the Dam and caught several parties of mammal drinking including more Zebra, Eland and Kongoni (Hartebeest) plus three Storks and some obliging Black-chested Snake Eagles. After Breakfast we set off further east for Mbongo and Lushoto in the West Usumbara Mountains. Light rain falls most mornings from now on and the Mountains are very green, when you can see them. The road to Lushoto is single track with passing places just like home with steep drops to a river and many waterfalls. We are checked in to Muller's Lodge which is an old German Farmhouse with bungalows set in the spacious grounds. My home was a nice



building with two private s/c bedrooms sharing a central lounge. The climb was a bit steep. The main building was very cosy with log fires; it is cooler up here at 6,000 feet or so, with a Guest Lounge and Dining rooms. There are further bedrooms in the main building. Sadly the cooking whilst good was not as good as its reputation and the staff appeared a bit confused as to where things like knives and forks were kept. Maybe the Manager is away? We took a walk in the forest over a log bridge. The bridge was a log! We encountered many forest birds, new for the trip including Black- faced Bush shrike, Moustached Tinker bird and a very striking Hartlaub's Turaco. Back for dinner and bed. Next day instead of promised rain we had blue skies so we set out for a trek to the Magambo forest area with many interesting birds on the way. This is a long walk, mostly up hill where the highlight birds were another **Hartlaub's Turaco**, Double collared Sunbird and our only **Red-chested Cuckoo** of the trip. On the return we



found a **large Chameleon**. I am not sure of the species but it had three horns on its head. It did not like being handled either. After lunch we did another walk along the river but it was getting hot and sticky so we did not stay out too long or go too far.



5th & 6th October. Amani Reserve. surprised the staff by wanting some. By 8.30

Lushoto for Mbongo where we turn east again for the Eastern Usumbaras. Clouds are thicker now and as we take the fork to Tanga it starts to rain. We reached the signed turn off to Amani after 25 km and then the climb begins. We have 39 km of bad road and the last 9 are dreadful. Deep mud and steep with the car sliding towards the sheer drops for an extra buzz! We get there and find our lodging at the Medical Research Centre. Pleasant netted room with s/c facilities that work. Everything clean and presentable! To be honest it is the first place where the combination of hot water, taps

Breakfast was a surprise. I.e. we are heading back through



and a working sink plug come together. The caretaker will do the simple cooking for us 'on demand' but he has no Beer! Our first hike into the montane forest produces a **Southern Banded Snake Eagle**, nesting **Collared Sunbird**, and 'that' Warbler! We met 3 Canadians who had been looking for five days and had yet to find it. I am concerned at the state of the road and the length of the drive back to Arusha which would mean a 4am start on Sunday if I am to make my Bus at 14.00. I decide only one night here and to leave after lunch tomorrow. Next morning dawns bright and a further trek produces more Warblers, Green Pigeon and a Green-headed Oriole. The drive down the track takes 90 minutes and then four hours back to



Same. I take a \$20 room at the Elephant Motel. This is a pleasant place just out of the town. The room is well appointed and furnished, even a TV! More than adequate for me. They have other rooms at \$30 & \$50 and the latter have a spacious lounge with sofa etc., which would be ideal if staying longer than one night. The Restaurant & Bar are cheerful enough and the staff friendly. Sadly I got the worst meal of my trip here, if not of my life. The meat was fused to the bone and totally inedible. Chips were ok. They did exchange it but the replacement was raw inside. I don't eat raw meat except in Ethiopia.

7th October. Homeward bound. Packed and away by 7.30 and we got to Arusha at 11. OLCI and Email home from Internet Café. Quick lunch and onto shuttle for 14.00 departure. Shocking road but border facilities at Namanga much improved. Arrive NBO Ok and flight left on time. I got a nice seat and good nights sleep. My transfer at AMS went OK and into MAN on time. A wait for a gate and the carousel ate into my 40 mins margin but I made it with 10 to spare. Off to IOM and met by Elizabeth. We arrive home by 10.30. Total Bird count 308 including 50 new ones.