

## May 2014 Southern Tanzania Udzungwa & Mikumi National Parks & Ras Kutini Resort Area

I had several reasons for traveling to this region of Tanzania. The first was that I had a group of 14 travelers scheduled for a two day Mikumi safari in November. Second, seeing new areas of Africa is always a pleasure for me. The third is that new areas of Africa provide me the best opportunity to see new life mammals.

My May 27 transfer from the Mt. Meru Game Lodge to the Kilimanjaro Airport was uneventful. I checked in at the Precession Air counter. My checked baggage was weighed and came in well under the 34 lbs. limit. In the East African travel industry we had been told that the limit for both checked and carryon is 34 lbs., but with this flight and my last year's flight to Zanzibar (ZNZ) this was not the case. On both flights my carryon and book bag (holding my field guides) was never weighed. Check-in and the obligatory security check and the plane departed 10:30 AM nearly full. Before arriving at Dar the plane landed at ZNZ where about half the passengers disembarked. However, they were nearly all replaced by those flying to DAR after their Zanzibar holiday. I arrived in DAR at 12:45 and after collecting my luggage I entered the Arrival Halls where I was met by a Simba Safaris Ltd rep, Shyrose, and my driver/guide for the next 4 days ,Zawari. Shyrose told me that I had a long drive ahead and suggested that I take some food with me. I chose a quick takeout order of chips masala (*very tasty*) and a sausage roll (*less so*) and two Cokes (*all I really needed*) and we set off getting on the road by 1:30. Zawari immediately told me that we would have to take a detour through Dar to save us some time until we connected with the Great Northern Road (GNR). This turned out to be a convoluted series of back roads through a variety of neighborhoods from poor to middle to relatively well-off Tanzanians. It gave me an interesting insight into urban life in Dar and, according to Zawari, saved us two hours of drive time.

The GNR originates from the port of Dar es Salaam and goes west to Chilgo where a branch goes north, first to Tanga on the coast, then to Moshi at the foot of Kilimanjaro and then to Arusha, the center of the northern Tanzania safari circuit. From Chilgo the GNR continues west to Morogoro where it divides again. A branch heads north to Dodoma, the new capital of Tanzania, then to Mwanza on Lake Victoria and eventually to Kigali Rwanda & Bujumbura Burundi. The other branch turns south to Iringa, Mbeya and into northern Zambia, eventually ending in Lusaka. This means that any goods entering Dar and heading to these destinations and any goods or products en-route east to Dar from these places has to use the GNR. This two lane highway is incredibly important to economies of Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi & northern Zambia. Although the road is relatively well maintained by African standards, the resultant amount of traffic makes it one of the most treacherous roads I have ever been on. There were huge trucks often hauling large cargo containers, petrol trucks carrying two linked tanks of fuel, buses full of passengers, matatu vans jammed with folks, regular sedan cars with tourists or local officials and businessmen, motorbikes, bicycles, the occasional human pulled cart and our 4 x 4. Complicating this are Tanzania weight stations at each major interchange that had hundreds of trucks stopped in each direction. This necessitated everyone else going in either direction to weave through these traffic bottlenecks. Along with the weigh stations Tanzania traffic police were stationed on random locations on the road to check driver licenses and vehicle owner records, and to make sure that each vehicle has proper insurance. Any type of vehicle can be pulled over for a traffic police check at any time.

For the first four hours the road passes through mostly either heavily farmed areas or small villages and the occasional small town. There was very little bird life evident except for pied & hooded crows. Just before Morogoro we reached the Uluguru Mountains. Although not as striking as the scenery in northern Tanzania, the cloud covered peaks were impressive. Just after Morogoro I started seeing more livestock being tended by red checkered robed herders similar in appearance to Maasai. When asked Zawari who these people were he said they were Maasai but I had my doubts. I found out the next day that these were Sukuma herders. The Sukuma homeland is the area south of Lake Victoria and from what I have been told they have migrated to other areas of Tanzania to find new grazing lands. I was told that their arrival in other regions of the country is not welcomed by local residents.

By 6 PM we reached the eastern border of Mikumi NP. Once the GNR enters Mikumi National Park (MNP) strict speed limits are posted and there are colorful road signs, each with its own species of mammal, that post the fines in \$ USD for colliding with and killing them. I remember impala being about \$100.00 and buffalo \$ 1,200.00. Whether the fines are actually collected I do not know. At the legal speed limit the drive through MNP takes about a half hour which allows some opportunity for game viewing; however, there are also posted signs stating that taking wildlife photos from the road is illegal and doing so will result in fines. While driving through MNP I saw some Maasai giraffe and a few yellow baboons. By 7 PM we reached the village of Mikumi on the western border of the Park and turned south. The paved road ended by the time it got dark then the road became heavily rutted and our speed was reduced to a crawl. It was pitch black with the only light coming from our headlights, the small villages we drove through and the headlights of motorbikes, buses and trucks (some quite large) that were either passing us or heading towards us. I always have to explain to first-time travelers to Africa that you don't want to be on the roads at night. It is not because one can be robbed by bandits or that your vehicle could be attacked by wildlife, although in some areas of Africa both are a possibility. It is the danger posed by other vehicles and the possibility of hitting dark skinned pedestrians walking on the roads in dark clothing which often one does not see until the last minute. On this drive, in my case, it was "do as I say, don't do as I do"! It was a slow, agonizing drive. At 9 PM I asked Zawari how far we had to go to the lodge. He replied 13 kilometers. I asked how long this would take. He replied one hour! At least he got us to the lodge without incident but that was at 10 PM, 8 ½ hours after leaving the airport. If anything, Africa will teach you patience.

Fortunately Simba Safaris had phoned ahead to Hondo Hondo Forest Lodge informing them of my late arrival. Hondo is located adjacent to Udzungwa Mountains National Park (UMNP). Established in 1992 this 1,900 km. Park is one of most biologically diverse areas in East Africa. It is supposed to have the highest bird diversity in Africa just behind the Ituri Forest of the Congo. There are also three species of diurnal primates I had not seen – Iringa red & Angolan black & white colobus monkeys and the Sanje mangabey. The mangabey was not described by western scientists until 1980. I was also hoping to do some night spotting at Hondo looking for bush babies and whatever animals I could see. A two hour chat with the lodge bartender / night manger Boka filled me in on what mammals are about. Elephants roam through the lodge grounds at night making night spotting dangerous, especially since elephants in this region of Tanzania are under extreme poaching pressure. Boka pointed out that the light chopping-wood-like sounds I was hearing were actually East African tree hyrax vocalizations. During the day the

red & black & white colobus, yellow baboon, blue monkey red duiker and bushbuck are frequently seen on the forest adjacent to the lodge. Hondo is also known as an exceptional birding location and one of the guides here is in frequent demand by hard core birders. I got to my tent by midnight and was up by dawn.

May 28 was a misty morning which means that diurnal primates usually have a late start so there was no visible activity. However, once the mist cleared I could see that forest adjacent to the lodge and the Udzungwa escarpment provided stunning scenery. After an excellent cooked British breakfast I met the Scottish born manager of Hondo who gave me some further details on the long range plans for the lodge. Hondo is negotiating to purchase the adjacent farms to allow them to revert to natural forest with the long term plan of establishing an elephant corridor. If you plan to overnight in the area, Hondo is the place to stay based on location, accommodations, food & service, natural environment and conservation mission.

My late arrival at Hondo led to me not seeing the mangabey. There is a research team at UMNP that studies a particular troop. When given advance notice they will track the study troop to its night nesting area the evening before. With an early start the next morning they will lead you to the troop before the mangabeys start their days forging which, almost guarantees sightings. However, due to getting at the lodge late on May 27 Hondo was not able to contact the research team. Zawari and I drove to Park HQ located ten minutes from the lodge. I asked Zawari to find me the guide most experienced in primate tracking and he introduced me to Nicco. At first I teamed up with a Polish forester and we set off in the forest. Nicco told me that seeing the mangabey was unlikely but seeing both colobus was a good possibility. The forest is lush montane growth with waterfalls with the occasional dried elephant & buffalo droppings that showed that both species are present. We passed several campsites within the park that had warning signs about it being dangerous to leave the camp site at night, easily explained by the presence of potential dangerous big game.. Nicco quickly found a dark, almost black squirrel which he identified as a tree squirrel. On my return home after referring to Kingdon's East African Atlas of Evolution, I am sure this was a Tanganyika tree squirrel (*Paraxerus lucifer*) and a new life mammal! Nearby he found a small group of Iringa red colobus, my second new mammal of the day. He said that he heard some very distant mangabeys. Although I do list heard mammals on my life list I could not differentiate that sound. Trying to find the Angolan colobus proved frustrating since during the previous three days this species was roaming around the UMNP HQ and staff quarters. Here, however, we did see the bird of the day for me, an African harrier-hawk. This was too much quick movement for the Pole who wanted a slower-paced guided tour so Nicco assigned him another guide. While Nicco tried without luck to contact the mangabey researchers I struck up a conversation with two scientists from Penn State University one of whom had previously worked for Conservation International (CI) and had been involved with the Bioko Biodiversity program for which I co-led four expeditions. Sometimes even Africa is a very small place. They discussed their current work with me and shared their knowledge of local conservation issues.

To his credit Nicco wanted one more try for the Angolans. We drove to another campsite down the road from the HQ. We got out and walked over a stream to the top of a hill, however no primates in sight. I was already resigned to not seeing the mangabey and was now resigned to not seeing my other target specie. We were ready to enter our vehicle to drive away when Nicco

heard, then pointed out another group of the red colobus. He mentioned that both colobus species often form mixed groups and then he saw and directed my eyes to several Angolan black & white colobus (third life mammal of the day) and a blue monkey for three species primate group. I thanked him much (tipped well) and told him that he made this day one of my best in Africa. If you get to Udzungwa and are looking for a determined guide who knows the forest well and speaks excellent, easily understood American/Brit English, ask for Nicco.

Zawari and I were now headed for two nights at Vuma Tented Camp located on the south side of the GNR. Today on the same road we had to drive at a snail's pace last night; we made better time but I could now see what last night's darkness hid. Along the north side of the road was the scenic forest and escarpment of UMNP. Looking for primates en-route Zawari found a lone male blue monkey. Later we passed two waterfalls including the impressive Sanje Waterfall, the location for which the mangabey is named. The south side, which is part of the Kilombero Valley, is covered by fields of sugar cane. We reached the GNR at Mikumi Village and the plan was to drive to Mikumi NP HQ, get our permits in order and then drive to Vuma for check-in a shower and change of clothes. From the road we saw more giraffes, yellow baboon, plains zebra, African buffalo and to both Zawari's and my great surprise, two male maned lions right on the north side of the road.

I not only wanted to have a look at MNP for my November group but also to see if it was an easily accessible area for wildlife enthusiasts to be able to see some of the southern African species such as sable antelope, Liechtenstein hartebeest and Nyassa wildebeest, that cannot be seen on the heavily visited northern Tanzania safari circuit. Greater kudu, which are rare in the north, are supposed to be found here as well along with African wild dogs. Yellow baboons, not found on the northern circuit as previously mentioned are easily to see here. I wondered if MNP could be sort of a "poor man's Selous" with easy access from Dar. My experience driving from Dar showed that easy access was not a given. However part of MNP is also within Miombo forest which gives a different habitat types for birds and smaller mammals not found in the north. At 4 PM I set out with Zawari thinking I was doing a game drive on a route that followed the base of the Vuma Hills, prime Miombo habitat. Instead we drove through savanna woodland where we saw zebra, a lone male Nyasa wildebeest, impala, several groups of elephants and a slender mongoose. The condition of the road was poor since MNP road repair crews had not yet gotten to this area. The plains game seemed jumpy and moved off quickly when we stopped and the elephants seemed initially tense as well. The route we were on was close to the GNR so the behavior observed to me is an indication that wildlife is being hunted from the road. One person familiar with the area noted that the number of trucks supposed broken down on GNR segment that traverse MNP which sometimes take days or weeks to repair. They remarked that they wondered just how many of those trucks had real mechanical problems versus those pretending to be disabled to allow the "repair" crews to do some illegal hunting. Tsetse flies were also annoying which made photography and close bird identification somewhat of a chore. However, of the bird species observed, two I had previously seen (or properly id.) were common & harlequin quails.

We returned to the tented camp by dusk and I got changed for dinner. There I formally met the camp manager who introduced me to her nocturnal mammal viewing plan. She has worked out a diet supplement for small-eared greater galagos that attracts up to ½ dozen each night. Left over

scraps from camp meals is placed just below the bar veranda. This attracts an assortment of not easily seen nocturnal mammals. In quick succession I saw large spotted genet, African crested porcupine and honey badger. I just missed seeing African civet that evening. The camp manager also said that giant pouched-rats show up a few times per month as well. The camp also has spotted hyena and leopard that walk the grounds at night. Certain times of the year Angolan colobus and blue monkeys can be seen from the camp as well. Vuma Tented Camp is a definite mammal watching hot spot. That evening I also found out that of the 4 safari vehicles among my fellow five dinner companions, Zawari & I were the only ones to see lions. However, that morning a French couple visiting from the Comoro Island of Mayotte got a brief glimpse of the mangabey on their guided hiking tour of the Sanje Waterfall. Most likely at the same time, Zawari and I were driving by.

Overall May 29 proved to be one of those days when nothing quite goes right in Africa. I thought to give Zawari a bit of a break so we would start our game drive at 8 AM. Target species today was the Liechtenstein hartebeest. From an old MNP guide (bought on my first trip to Tanzania in 79) to the Park I had an approximate idea where to find them in the Chamgore region north of the main wildlife viewing areas of central area. We reached the Park Gate and were ready to drive through when a rather stern female MNP ranger started going on about the mzungu (the white man). It was determined that Zawari had the correct vehicle permit and his permit to enter Mikumi but did not have mine. Zawari then had to drive back to Vuma where he eventually found the mzungu's permit and got us into the Park an hour later at 9 AM. While passing through the checkpoint I stood up in the 4 x 4 and announced that "I have been emancipated". This got a deep hearty laugh from the Tanzanian's at the Gate. Heading north we saw a few buffalo, zebras, warthogs, impalas, giraffes several lone male territorial wildebeests and some distant elephants. The birding highlights were a crowned hornbill and a martial eagle. Driving thorough a high grass wetland I started seeing reedbuck. I first thought Bohors until Zawari said Southern reedbuck. I didn't have enough time to think about his comment before we came upon what appeared to be an impassable mud hole in the middle of the road. Zawari stopped and let a sedan car pass us. We started across and got stuck fast in black cotton soil trap. Zawari tried for over two hours to free us. I got rocks to use as a base for Zawari to steady his jack that got each wheel of the 4 x 4 eventually out of the hole. Unfortunately his backward path was leading our vehicle off the road into even deeper water and black cotton soil. Two + ½ hours later a passing sedan car on a day safari trip from Dar pulled us out. Zawari was so mud covered I decided to have him drive us back to Vuma, where he could get cleaned up while I had lunch.

At 4 PM we reentered Mikumi and drove to the Kisungura area. We saw more zebras, impalas, one male yellow baboon, a small group of hippos & black-backed jackal and family groups of elephants ranging closer to the Park HQ as dusk approached. The MNP elephants are smaller than those found in Northern Tanzania and nearly all have thin tusk the point straight down much like forest elephants. The Vuma Hills manager told me that at certain times of the year larger elephants from the Selous range into MNP and it is then that the smaller size of the resident elephants is very noticeable. We returned to Camp by 7 PM and this evenings' mammal viewing produced more bush babies, some porcupines and a large spotted genet. Again I missed the civet. On my return to the USA I did some research on the Bohor's/Southern reedbuck question. According to Kingdon Southern reedbuck are rare in Tanzania and according to the Tanzania Mammal Atlas Project both species have been recorded in Mikumi. I only had brief glimpses of

nearly one dozen reedbucks that day. I am very familiar with the recent sightings of Bohors I have had in Kenya and Tanzania, and I have seen and photographed Southern reedbucks in Zimbabwe & Botswana. If I had a clear look at the horn shape of the male of either species I could easily determine what species I had seen. I did not see any males, but I do remember seeing some female reedbucks that looked larger than others. If I saw both species of reedbucks it would have made a total of 18 species seen at MNP during a two night stay. Compared to the northern Parks predators are scarce. During my stay only Zawari and I and the French couple saw lions. Zawari said that a leopard is seen perhaps once per week. The Vuma Hills manager said that wild dogs are now rarely seen and she herself has not seen sable, greater kudu or the Liechtenstein hartebeest. However, she did say that she rarely goes on game drives.

May 30 Zawari informed me it was to be a long day. We got an early start after breakfast. I needed to check the other MNP tented camp – Stanley's Kopie Tented Camp located north of the GNR. En-route we saw giraffes & zebras. The bird of note seen today was an African hawk eagle. We headed back towards Dar. While I admit the drive on May 27 was interesting, but to do it in reverse was tedious and at times dangerous. Near Chilgo Zawari was pulled over by a traffic policeman. The reason was a questionable overturn (pass) near a congested area. When Zawari questioned that the officer of the legality of the stop the officer then said that the reason was now that Zawari did not have the proper driving license. After Zawari produced that the real reason for the stop became evident. Some distance from our vehicle Zawari and the officer had a long conversation. During all this I did not say a word, did not look at the traffic officer and just kept writing in my trip diary. One half hour later from when we were first stopped we were on the road to Dar. Zawari then told me that this traffic officer had stopped him before and had let him go without a fine. This time was to be different. Zawari asked what amount of fine would settle this. The officer told him words to the effect of I don't know, what do you suggest? Zawari offered 30,000 Tanzania shillings (TS), about \$ 20.00 USD. The officer then said a 30,000 fine means paperwork that he would need to turn in. Zawari then asked if 10,000 TS (about \$ 7.00 USD) would be preferred. Cash handed over we were off and on our way. As soon as we got to Dar traffic slowed to a crawl. This day and the next I experienced the worst traffic I have seen in East Africa. I was told that in the city center during the day it can take a car four hours to drive ten miles!

We slowly crept into the Dar harbor and arrived at the Kigamboni ferry dock that would take us across Dar Harbor to the road to my accommodation for the evening. The ferry ride was an authentic developing world experience. There are two ferries on this route, one takes 20 vehicles, the other 40. It took us an hour to get on board. Then any foot passenger that can afford to pay the toll came aboard as well. The ride took about ½ hour and upon landing everyone - vehicle and pedestrian disembark at the same time. By 5 PM we crossed the harbor and by 6 PM Zawari dropped me off at the Amani Beach Resort part of the Protea and now Marriot Hotel chain. The Ras Kutini area is known in the Tanzania travel industry as a less developed, more nature oriented Indian Ocean beach resort. I have sent travelers here previously so I needed to see his area.

I got to Amani at 6 PM. I had a quick meeting with the resort manager. We had a short discussion about the wildlife in the area and I checked into my spacious chalet and then took a quick walk around the grounds quickly seeing that black faced vervets are common. Walking

outside the resort property I photographed what I think are suni dung pellets and nearby saw mall tracks. On the way back to my chalet near dusk I heard what I think were small-eared greater galago calls. To help clear up my multiple tsetse fly bites from Mikumi I took a quick swim in the Indian Ocean. Instead of dinner I had my last Tanzanian beers – Kilimanjaro lagers and with Kingdon's African Mammal guide quizzed the lodge manger on what animals can be found within the resort. He pointed out yellow baboon which are very shy here and mentioned that locals have reported leopard. In my opinion this is significant as these leopards could be genetically the closest to the Zanzibar leopard which is most likely extinct on the island. This coastal area of Tanzania is under heavy development pressure. If the Amani Resort and the Ras Kutani Lodge can manage their grounds jointly, they have the chance to save one of the largest undeveloped coastal forest closest to Dar. Angolan black & white colobus & Sykes monkeys can still be found here and according to the resort manager there are hares about as well as an unidentified social mongoose species, most likely banded mongoose. On May 31 I was met at Amani at 6:30 AM which gave me less than twelve hours to explore the resort and its environs. Within that short period of time I saw the potential. For those looking to do a post Tanzania safari beach holiday or honeymoon with some interesting natural attractions and wildlife, either Ras Kutani (if your budget can afford it) or Amani Beach would be an excellent choice

On May 31 I looked at five Dar es Salaam beach hotels and resort. Of these none was worth commenting on as far as a natural history destination except for the Sea Cliff and White Sands Beach resorts at which some shorebirds can be found. It was then on to the International Departure Terminal for my flight back to the USA.

*A brief note about elephant poaching in this region of Tanzania. A survey done last year showed that the elephant population for the entire Mikumi / Selous ecosystem has dropped from 70,000 to less than 15,000 elephants in 10 years. As a result the Selous Reserve has recently been placed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites in danger. Each person I spoke with who is familiar with the area confirms that the poaching is still going on and that elephants in this region of Tanzania are in danger of local extinction. When this many elephants are killed in a protected area in such a short period of time one has to wonder how serious the Tanzania Government is about ivory poaching.*