

November 2013 Kenya

Daphne Sheldrick Animal Orphanage, Langata Giraffe Center, Nairobi National Park, Ole Pejeta Conservancy, Mount Kenya Forest Reserve, Nakuru National Park, Lake Naivasha and Masai Mara National Reserve

In November 2013 I had the opportunity to lead a group of 18 staff & volunteers from the Philadelphia Zoo on an 8 night/9 day Kenya safari. This was my twelfth trip to Kenya. My first was in 1979 followed by 89, 91, 92, 95, 2000, two separate trips in 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008. I was also interested in seeing the changes since my last visit as to the people of Kenya, tourist infra-structure and of course, wildlife. Kenya also has had several recent misfortunes with a major fire at the Jomo Kenyatta Airport in August and a Somali terrorist attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi in September. Since I work in the African travel business I needed to see what effect if any these incidents have had on Kenya's tourism.

I departed Philadelphia Airport the evening of November 1st on a British Airways flight to London Heathrow. The next morning Nov 2nd after transferring between terminals and having to clear Heathrow security at each transfer I connected with my BA flight to Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta Airport (JKIA) I arrived in Nairobi to the warmest evening weather I have experienced in the city. I exited the plane and boarded a bus to a building that appeared to be an old warehouse converted to a temporary Arrivals Terminal. I got my Kenya visa (cost \$50.00 USD), quickly cleared Kenyan immigration formalities, collected my luggage and just outside met my in-country tour operator rep and driver. I was the last of my group to arrive and was told that everyone else in my party was already checked in at our hotel. We left the JKIA and turned on the Mombasa/Nairobi Road and headed for downtown Nairobi. I mentioned out loud that on my last arrival on a BA flight to Nairobi in 2008 I saw a small group of zebras just outside the airport entrance. My driver then said that we had just passed a few zebras along the road that I had missed seeing. What I have found in all my trips to Kenya is that free-ranging wildlife can turn up in unexpected places. I arrived at our hotel near midnight. This was the Sentrim Boulevard, an older basic and inexpensive 3 star hotel. The rooms are sparse but clean and the Sentrim has a restaurant and two bars, a pool and a helpful attentive staff. The hotel grounds include an attractive garden adjacent to the Nairobi River which makes for some interesting birding if one has the time. My only other stay at the Boulevard was in 95. What I remember most about that stay was the number of "working girls" parked in the hotel's lobby. For the benefit of my group the "girls" had since moved on to other locations.

November 3rd our first full day in Kenya was spent in the Nairobi area starting at the Daphne Sheldrick Orphanage. Between 11am and 12 noon every day you will see orphaned elephants calves of three different age classes being fed and played with. In addition, there is a keeper who will give a talk about the elephants, where they came from, how they are getting on, and how some of the previous orphans are progressing. The concept of the Sheldrick Orphanage looks well thought out to this ex-zookeeper, especially since the ultimate goal is to reintroduce these elephants back into wild elephant groups in Tsavo East National Park. The orphanage also takes in young rhinos which we did not see. Unfortunately with the current level of ivory and rhino horn poaching in Kenya the Orphanage will mostly likely be receiving more youngsters of both species in the future. Since the Sheldrick Orphanage is adjacent to the Nairobi National Park (NNP) some wildlife is present. We saw a male bushbuck, warthog and a female Thompson

gazelle as well as several species of birds. Since one can walk through parts of the facility it could make an interesting birding location.

Our second stop was the African Fund for Endangered Wildlife Kenya Limited. Better known as the Langata Giraffe Center, it was founded in 1979 by the late Jock Leslie-Melville, a Kenyan citizen of British descent and his wife, the late Betty Leslie Melville, an American citizen from the Philadelphia area, my hometown. The Center acts as a combination environmental educational and Uganda (Rothschild) giraffes breeding facility. Tourist visits fund the main mission. Having seen firsthand the positive effect of being able to see the effect of feeding the giraffes has on Kenya's school children (many of whom for financial reasons will never see any of their country's wildlife in their lifetime) has shown me the great value of having such a facility close to a major African city. Langata has also certainly raised the profile of the Uganda sup-species within Kenya which, through introductions into several reserves within country, has increased its range. The Center grounds also have resident warthogs that I have always seen in all my visits here. There is also an adjacent nature trail that has a good variety of birds, dik diks and other small mammals. In 2012 a lioness and her three cubs moved in from NNP. Their presence caused a panic not only among the local human residents but also among the Langata giraffes. As a result one their calves ran into a fence and broke its neck. Two of the cubs were eventually captured by the Kenya Wildlife Service while the female had to be shot. The fate of the third cub remains unknown.

After a hardy lunch at the nearby Karen Blixen Restaurant our final stop for the day was NNP. We got there by 3 PM which would allow a 3 hour game drive since the park gates start closing at 6 PM. As I have previously written for mammalwatching.com N.N.P. is one of my favorite places on the planet. On my previous visits, the first being 1989 my last until this trip in 2008, NNP has always amazed me with the variety and numbers of large wild mammals that can be found in a natural area adjacent to a city of 3 + million. For any group that I lead to Kenya I always try to have either a half, or if possible, a full day of game viewing here. As with my previous visit this one did not disappoint. Mammal sightings started with a large male black-faced vervet in parking lot of the main gate entrance most likely looking to raid some unattended vehicle for food. Entering the NNP forest we passed a large troop of olive baboons and a lone Maasai giraffe. Upon reaching the savanna area and using binoculars we saw herds of common zebra, eland with the occasional African buffalo up against the NNP northern border fence totaling several hundred head of game. Continuing on we found 3 lionesses sleeping next to the road and were later on to see two more rather thin yearling lions. While watching and photographing these two cats we realized that a solar eclipse was taking place overhead. Although this was an overcast day we did quickly glance up to catch glimpses of it. That was a definite first for me, mammal watching during a solar eclipse! As we got further in the Park we saw small groups of warthogs, kongoni (Coke's hartebeest), impala, Grant & Thompson gazelles. In my previous visits I had never failed to see black rhino. My personal record for N.N.P. is 5 individuals. Today there were no black rhino' to be seen, however we did see two distant white rhinos, a new species in the Park for me since they had been introduced after my last visit. The last new species, number 13 for the day were a few eastern brindled gnu. It was close to N.N.P. closing time so we exited by the East Gate just in time to avoid having the Gate close before the last of our 3 vehicles exited. Fifteen species, while not close to my record for one game drive in the Park (18), was respectable. Within minutes we were back

within the skyscrapers of downtown Nairobi and back in the comfortable confines of the Boulevard Hotel.

November 04 we left Nairobi heading north towards the town of Thika on a newly built four lane highway! This road was one example of the vast improvement in Kenya's road network since my last visits. Nearly every main road we traversed on this safari was well paved, well maintained and well designed. Definitely not the roads I remember from my last extensive Kenya road safari in 2004. Between Nairobi & Thika the countryside is now an extended suburb of Nairobi. At Thika the road reverted to a two lane highway as we headed to the town of Nanuyki, about two hours further north. En-route the countryside was more like the Kenya I remember from previous visits, rural with small shamba farms and villages. Also en-route we experienced some of old Kenya. Our vehicle was pulled over by a Kenyan Police speed trap. This had happened to vehicles I was riding in on past trips; however once the police saw that there were tourist muzungu (whites) in the vans we were waived through. Not this time. Our driver guide PoPo told me quietly that this policeman was looking for a bribe. PoPo held his ground by refusing to leave the vehicle and 15 minutes later we were sent on our way. We reached Nanuyki and turned to the west. Similar to my Tanzania experience in May, once you leave the main roads the condition of the secondary roads is poor. After a bumpy slow half hour ride we reached the entrance of the Ole Pejeta Conservancy.

Ole Pejeta's Conservancy (OPC) is a fenced 300 square km private game reserve. This was my 4th visit to OPC and my 4th stay at the Sweet Waters Tented Camp. I was there on two separate stays in 2002, another in 04 and this trip. Formerly a combination game & cattle ranch, OPC is now primarily a wildlife reserve although the sanctuary is still a working cattle ranch with rare pure-breed African domestic cattle breeds like Jiddu Boran cattle from Somalia and Ankole cattle from Uganda. OPC plans to show not only that cattle and wildlife can co-exist but having both wildlife and a cattle grazing together actually improves grazing for both! The wildlife mission of the Sanctuary includes the only chimpanzee rescue center in Kenya, the only group of northern white rhino believed to be in Africa, breeding programs for Grevy zebra and Jackson's hartebeest. The Jackson's hartebeest is a species of concern in Kenya. Interestingly Jonathan Kingdon considers the Jackson as being a hybrid of the Lelwel and kongoni subspecies. OPC main conservation priority is a population of 100 black rhinos, making this, one of the largest populations of this species in East Africa.

When we arrived we had some rainfall, which delayed our afternoon game drive. We started at 4 PM and quickly visited the Jane Goodall Chimpanzee Center, where along with the chimps we saw some olive baboons. Later at the Rhino Education Center we visited Baraka, a blind black rhino used for close contact educational purposes. We then did a quick game drive in which we saw elephant, plains zebra, warthog, reticulated giraffe, **Jackson's hartebeest**, African buffalo, impala, Defassa waterbuck, Grant & Thompson gazelle and two lions. With nearly 70 lions within 300 sq. km. O.P. C. has a dense lion population which in an enclosed reserve does present wildlife management issues. The highlight for me was a new life mammal, a marsh cane rat. This being my 29th trip to Africa, getting new mammals has become difficult. My driver/guide pointed out what he thought was a tree hyrax on the ground. I took a glance at it and realized that it was not a hyrax and got my binoculars on it. Once I did that getting the correct ID was easy.

While staying at Sweet Waters for \$90 USD one can join a night game drive. This night's drive was very successful with Cape hare, white-tailed mongoose and 11 lions. This was a group of 3 adult males, one of which was in heavy pursuit of a lioness while his two companions kept together away from the courting pair. The other seven - 2 lionesses with 5 cubs kept moving ahead of the courting pair. In retrospect I now wonder if the courting female was actually in a "pseudo heat" to draw the 3 big males away from the 5 cubs. One of my group went on a late night drive after 9 PM and added white rhinos to our species count. Overnight most of us were woken up by the territorial screams of several dueling tree hyrax. The next morning we delayed our departure until after breakfast to allow more time for game viewing before leaving for our next destination. We added black-backed jackal including a family with pups, Beisa oryx, two Grevy zebras and the wildlife highlight of our OPC game drives, a pack of 24 African wild dogs (Awd) - 8 adults and 16 pups. I had not seen this species in my Kenya trips since 1989 in the Western Masai Mara and this was the largest group of this species I have ever seen. OPC has recently become a fairly reliable location to see wild dogs not only in Kenya but perhaps in all of East Africa. While reviewing the Sweet Waters wildlife observation book I noticed that this pack was being seen several times per week. In May of last year one of my tour groups saw a pack of 7 adults here as well. The future of this sized pack will be intriguing to watch. Based on the size of the Conservancy and its large lion population their future is not a given since lions have been recorded to be the biggest cause of mortality for Awd in conservation areas. Leaving the OPC we also saw some of the herds of the Ankole and Boran cattle which I must admit are very handsome animals.

With our stay here my group saw a total of 20 different wild mammal species in two game drives and with the tree hyrax being heard, a total of 21. Ole Pejeta is an exceptional wildlife area. Species that I have seen here on my previous trips were serval, spotted hyena, black rhino, steenbok, eland, Bohor's reedbuck and a Senegal bushbaby. In 2002 one of the groups I was leading saw both aardvark and zorilla on the same night drive. Unfortunately I chose to take the 9 PM night drive that evening and missed both. Of the private game reserves or conservancies in Kenya Sweet Waters Tented Camp has one of the least expensive accommodations. Now operated by Serena Hotel & Lodges, Sweet Waters has comfortable warm tents, good food and a professional and attentive staff. Night drives at 7 PM and 9 PM, escorted game walks and camel-back safaris can be arranged at additional cost. If you are serious about mammal viewing and your budget can afford it, a one or better yet a two night stay here is worthwhile.

November 5th we drove back to Nanyuki and headed south to Kiganja where we turned left and headed to the slopes of Mount Kenya. We were to stay at Mountain Lodge (MtL). While the Aberdares just west of Mt. Kenya has both Tree Tops and the Ark, MtL is the only wildlife centered accommodation on Mt. Kenya. I had previously stayed here in 79, 92 & 2004. This was to be my 4th here. Unless one is trekking up Mt. Kenya, like the Aberdare lodges, a one night stay should suffice. The road from Kiganja to just outside the entrance to the Mt. Kenya Forest Reserve and MtL is in good condition since there is a Kenyan Presidential retreat en-route. The normal stay at MtL is as follows. You arrive at lunch time. There may already be some wildlife around the lodges waterhole/salt lick, usually Sykes monkeys, bushbuck and perhaps waterbuck. There is an optional forest walk at additional cost with an armed ranger which I highly recommend. I have done this walk twice. In 2004 we saw black & white colobus monkeys and on this trip we got a quick glimpse of a crowned eagle. What struck me the most on my walks

was the openness of this montane forest. Having done four research trips to the island of Bioko located off the coast of Cameroon in West Africa in similar forest I quickly saw the difference in seeing a forest impacted by large herbivores. The MtL has good populations of African buffalo and elephant; Bioko has neither. After the optional walk you have dinner and you can stay up as long as you can watching whatever shows up, either from your room or two balcony overlooks, or face to face in an observation hide reached below ground. One can also make request to woken for any particular animal ones wishes to see. During this stay my group saw spotted hyena (those found here have thick fur and on occasion black color forms have been seen), blotched (large spotted) genet, marsh mongoose, 4 giant forest hogs, buffalo, bushbuck, Defassa waterbuck, Sykes monkey and a banana bat. I also heard tree hyrax and black & white colobus in the early morning. In my previous visits I have seen elephants on every visit except for this one, white-tailed mongoose, small eared galago, tree hyrax, suni, Harvey's duiker (once in 79), bush pigs (79 & 92), bush squirrel and red-legged sun squirrel. So in my four one night visits I have seen a total of 20 different species of mammals. I have never seen leopard here but one was seen a week before our visit fighting off a group of hyenas.

The morning of Nov 06 we left early after breakfast since we had a long day's drive ahead of us. Leaving the MtL entrance my driver/guide pointed out the gate attendant who moved with a stiff limp and crutch. He told me that this man in October had shot and killed a rhino poacher at a nearby private wildlife reserve after being shot and wounded by the same man. Throughout Kenya and the rest of Africa there is a war going on whose casualties are not only the animals we care so much about, but also the men, and on the rangers side, the occasional women who either protect the targets or try to kill the same animals to insure their livelihoods. As with all wars this is visceral, vicious conflict with a waste of lives and financial resources that can be better used for the benefit of both wildlife & humans. On a less pessimistic note I was very pleased to see that Serena Hotel & Lodges, current managers of MtL, have set up a project to replace the exotic alien forest of Scotch pines and eucalyptus with indigenous trees. Planted by British colonial foresters these plantation forests are very unfriendly to local wildlife. When writing this report I went back through all of my trips notes and saw how much I complained about these alien forests when I first visited MtL in 79. It was such a pleasure to see that 34 years later at least this part of Africa is changing for the better for local wildlife.

We drove south back to Kiganja, then west towards Nyahururu. We did a quick stop at scenic Thomson Falls where I was pleased to see that the local community is now charging a nominal fee to get close to the Falls. It was then off to Nakuru Town and Nakuru National Park (NakNP). I planned to this itinerary to have a quick stop at Hyrax Hill a Kenya National Museums Anthropology site. Due to rain this stop did not go as well as I thought however we had a picnic lunch, a quick tour of a very good museum and then it was off to NakNP. The Park is adjacent to Nakuru Kenya's fourth largest city that has a population of over 1 million. Like Nairobi N.P. NakNP is another remarkable wildlife area at the "front door" of a major metropolitan area. It is also another one of the fenced Kenyan National Parks which now include NNP fenced on 3 sides, Aberdares N.P., now completely fenced, and Mt. Kenya N.P. which is in the process of being completely enclosed as well. With a human population of 40 million plus and still growing, this may be the only long term future Kenya conservation areas have.

I had already seen in the distance en-route something that I had first learned from recent travelers that I had sent here. The level of the lake is higher than any time in recent history and as a result most of the tens of thousands of flamingos once found here have left for better feeding areas. Upon our arrival I saw that the park's northern entrance is closed as well as the northern road network (once one of the best places to see leopards and rhinos in Kenya) and western roads to the Baboon cliffs (which once gave the best views of Lake Nakuru and the NakNP. We entered through the Lanet Gate and I quickly saw how the increased lake level has forced the park's large mammals into a more confined area. There I saw herds of large herds of African buffalo, zebra and impala with the family groups of warthogs close to the road. We checked in at the Lion Hill Sarova Lodge and as a result our afternoon game drive started late. Our main goal was to get as close as possible to either of the two species of rhinoceros. We eventually found a group of 4 white rhinos close to the road along with Defassa waterbuck, Grant & Thomson gazelles and the 1st spotted hyena I had seen here. Primates are always easy to see at NakNP and we saw small troops of olive baboon, vervet and one lone black & white colobus. What I found most interesting is how the park's remaining flamingos (still numbering several thousand) have adapted to the increased lake level. I never thought I would see greater and lesser flamingos foraging for food in flooded yellow-barked acacia forest and submerged grasslands.

We spent the night at the Lion Hill Sarova Lodge. It is a good accommodation with comfortable rooms, exceptional food & service. While having dinner that night some of my fellow travelers told me about a small rat/mouse animal that they saw on the lodge grounds. I pulled out my Kingdon Guide to Mammals of Africa to find a possible match. Using the best available light to read, I went where the lodges food was being served. I had my Guide turned to two pages of likely possible rodents when I looked to my right to see two Lion Hill food servers with open mouths in shock thinking that I was looking for a rodent that I had just seen in their well maintained and clean restaurant. I quickly explained the situation and we all had a good laugh. Later that evening on the way back to my room I saw several scrub hares and un-striped grass rats. On Nov 7th the morning game drive was centered on finding Uganda giraffes which we eventually found in acacia forest south of the flooded lake. This was our last new mammal for this visit to NakNP which totaled 14 species.

On my first visit in 91 NakNP may have been the best place in all of Africa to see Bohor's reedbuck. The shores of the lake had dozens of them along with numerous Defassa waterbuck. On that late afternoon game drive in 1991 along with a leopard and the first free ranging Uganda giraffes I had seen, I may also have seen the 1st white rhinos introduced to the Park. On that visit (1st of seven- 91, 95, 2000, 2002 twice, 04 & 13), NakNP was still dealing ecologically with a recent expansion. The Park changed from a 62 km sq. reserve that was primarily a bird sanctuary to its present size of 188 sq. kms, to more of a big game reserve with four of the big five with only elephants missing. NakNP conservation priority is now breeding black & white rhino in Kenya for introduction to other protected areas of the country. I have seen white rhino on every visit and black rhino with 2 in 2004. Other species I have seen here are leopards (one each in 91, 02 & 04), and several lions in 2002. A few years ago some of the NakNP lions were responsible for killing and partially eating a female Kenya Wildlife Service ranger. I have also seen eland (91, 95, 02 & 04) bushbuck (a female in 00), dik dik (00), black-backed jackal (2 in 00), 1 hippo (00) and common duiker & bush-pig in 1991. A species I have not seen here since 95 were the once numerous Bohor's reedbuck. In 2000, 02 + 04 my groups got to the top of the

Baboon Cliffs were we saw rock hyrax. On my 02 safari I had several driver/guides who had been with me for several safaris. Knowing these men had been raised in conservative Christian communities I was not surprised when they saw hyrax here that they asked me if I thought that this animal was related to elephants. I quickly saw that there was a female rock hyrax nursing her young from her breasts located on her chest between her two front legs. I pointed out to them that they all know that female elephants also nurse their babies in a similar fashion. On that safari I heard no more about my thoughts on evolutionary theory. So with a total of seven visits and 18 game drives I have seen a total of 27 species of mammals in NakNP.

After finding the giraffes we left the park through the Lanet Gate and reached the main road drove south to Gil Gil and Naivasha Town and its lake of the same name. From previous trips I knew this route to be very scenic but also potentially dangerous due to heavy truck traffic. A petroleum pipeline from Mombasa ends in Nakuru and all the petrol destined for western Kenya, southern Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and the eastern Congo is transported by fuel trucks from here. That combined with imported goods also originating from the port of Mombasa and being shipped to and exported from the aforementioned countries, can make for some congested traffic by themselves. When buses, matatus (minivan taxis) and local vehicles are added to the roads driving becomes challenging. However, our drivers were up to the task and we quickly and safely traveled the 60 + kilometers. Since the road passes through some private wildlife sanctuaries en-route I did see a few small groups of zebra and the occasional impala. We reached our first stop, the Elsamere Center where we had a very good lunch. Elsamere, once the home of the late Joy and George Adamson, is situated on the southern shore of Lake Naivasha. It was here that Joy nurtured some of her orphaned big cats. The area is still a haven for wildlife with its own small troop of black and white colobus monkeys. Since it was a dizzy day it took us a bit of time to find a group of half dozen. Elsamere is a combination environmental center and lodge. The Lake Naivasha area still has some free-ranging wildlife and Elsamere prominently displayed a camera trap picture of a large leopard recently taken on their grounds.

Lake Naivasha has been under a variety of environmental threats, almost too numerous to mention. Many are directly related to proliferation of greenhouses for raising flowers for the European export market. This industry has increased the human population which in turn resulted in pollution of the lake, natural habitat loss and poaching of wildlife. For those interested in these issues, they are covered in a very well written book - *Wild Flower - An Extraordinary Life and Untimely Death in Africa* by Mark Seal. It is about the Jan. 13, 2006 murder of conservationist / wildlife photographer Joan Root, shot to death in her bedroom on Lake Naivasha.

Our original plan was to have boat ride on the lake and a guided walk on Crescent Island. However, with the potential of rain my drivers recommended that we delay these activities until the next morning. We then drove to the Naivasha Simba Lodge for overnight. The Naivasha Simba Lodge, while more of a resort than a game lodge, does have some watchable wildlife about. It is adjacent to the lake next to a wildlife sanctuary. On the lodge grounds was a healthy population of Defassa waterbuck and a walk in the sanctuary for some of my group, escorted by a lodge security guard, turned up Maasai giraffe, zebra, Kirks dik dik and hippos off shore. Later that night on the way back from dinner a few of my group saw a white-tailed mongoose.

Early the next morning on Nov 08 we left the lodge for our wildlife cruise on the Lake. Like Lake Nakuru, Lake Naivasha now has a high water level that has flooded much of the shore line. My drivers are of the opinion that the high water levels in both lakes is due to the Kenyan government clearing illegal farming settlers out of the forest reserves located in the watershed areas of both lakes. With less use of water for irrigation by the farmers they think that more water is entering the Lakes. An alternative explanation could be that the soil sediment runoff produced by the farmers has raised the bed of both lakes, causing the flooding. This was the third time This was my 3rd boat cruise on Naivasha, and I have always seen numerous birds as well as small groups of hippos. I did ask the boat men about otters and they said that they see them on occasion. While on the cruise we landed and had a guided walk on Crescent Island, which is often called Naivasha's best kept secret. There are more animals per acre than any other Kenyan reserve and as a result, many movie companies have filmed here. In fact much of the wildlife film footage from "Out Of Africa" that was supposed to be at the Masai Mara was filmed on Crescent Island. On the island we walked by herds of impala, Grants & Thompson gazelles, wildebeest, impala, zebra and Maasai giraffe. Unexpectedly we also saw a pair of bat-eared fox and a scrub hare. Compared to my last walk on the Island in June 2002 the grass looked rather sparse. Due to the high water level the size of Crescent Island has been reduced and finding the desiccated carcasses of several wildebeest may be an indication that the Island is now heavily overgrazed.

On my only other stay on Lake Naivasha I led a group in June 2002 that spent two nights at Loldia House a high-end accommodation on the north shore of the Lake. Wildlife on this side of the Lake was more diverse since Loldia House has night drives on its 32 sq. kilometer private reserve. Mammals I saw on the night drives were black-backed jackal, bat eared fox, white-tailed mongoose, common genet and bush rats. We also saw spring hares on the local village football pitch. Loldia also had numerous otter droppings on its boat dock, most likely from Cape clawless otters. These, unfortunately, I did not see. Other mammals that we saw on the private reserve were hippos, eland, buffalo, impala, warthog, black-faced vervet monkey and black & white colobus at the nearby Crater Lake Sanctuary. So in my two extended stays to Lake Naivasha I have seen a total of 19 different species of mammals.

After the boat cruise we departed the Naivasha and rejoined the main road south towards the town of Kijabe. En-route we passed a few small groups of zebras and the occasional gazelle. At Kijabe we turned right on the route to Narok and the Masai Mara. On my previous 8 drives (89, 91, 95, 00, 02 twice, 04 & 06) on this road I always paid particular attention to an open savanna area between the dormant volcanoes of Longonot & Suswa. I had always seen good numbers of game on both sides of this road – Grant & Thompson gazelles, kongoni, Maasai giraffe and zebra. This was an impressive concentration of wildlife outside a formally protected area. My drivers told me that they would, on occasion, see lion and cheetah here close by the road as well. In 1989 Dr. Peter Kat of the Kenya National Museum mentioned to me that there was even a pack of wild dogs in the vicinity. At that time there were some serious discussions with the local Maasai ranchers to form a community game sanctuary here. I would notice that on subsequent drives there was more cultivation encroaching from the west. When checking my trip notes from my last drive in 06 I was still pleased to see a fair amount of game but at a distance further from the road. On this drive I saw only a few scattered gazelles. More noticeable were fallow fields of wheat stretching off into the distance. That impressive concentration of wildlife I first saw 24

years ago now seems to be gone. Sad, but inevitable, I suppose. The road itself was in very good condition. Good roads, however, often encourage fast driving. We saw the results of that near the village of Pinyin outside of Narok where we passed an elephant that had been struck and killed by a speeding cattle truck loaded with 35 cows, 3 of which according to Kenya news service reports had to be eventually destroyed. When we arrived the Kenya Wildlife Service, the police and numerous locals were already on the scene. On our return on the same road on Nov 10, all that remained of the dead elephant was a big pile of elephant entrails. The locals had obviously made good use of the results of a tragic accident.

We had a brief stop in the town of Narok. It has been interesting for me to see how this town has grown since my first drive through here in 89. Our drivers needed to get petrol and one of my group managed to access an ATM machine at a local bank. That was a pleasant surprise. We continued west to the village of Ewaso Ngiro then turned south. Shortly afterwards the good road ended and we had one hour on a rutted washer board road. This is the type of Kenya road I remembered from my previous trips. What I quickly noticed was the amount of increased settlement on this route with numerous small villages and large herds of goats and sheep. I also noticed that wildlife was sparse as well. In years past I had always seen territorial male wildebeest and topi on this route along with both species of gazelles. On this trip, except for a few male wildebeest just past the Mara National Reserve (MNR) Sekenani Gate, there was no game except for a few gazelles. This was in spite of much of this route passing through two local wildlife conservancies, Siana and Koiyaki.

As soon as we entered Masai National Reserve (MNR) wildlife became obvious. We quickly saw kongoni, topi, small groups of wildebeest, zebra, impala, Defassa waterbuck, eland, both Grant & Thompson gazelles, giraffe, buffalo and warthog. We arrived at our tented camp – Mara Sarova, in time for a quick lunch before a late afternoon game drive. Just before our departure a “run” on carnivores started with a group of 3 marsh mongoose seen in a dry stream bed. Our drivers were trying to get us moving quickly without having to stop for pictures of the more common plains game. Two of our vans found a group of banded mongoose and a serval. My driver and I were ready to encourage our van to push on until we noticed the cat getting ready to pounce. It did and came up with a fat grass rat in its mouth. We then drove on quickly until we saw a large tree surrounded by vehicles. Here we found a comfortably positioned female leopard draped over a large branch. This cat was only the 3rd leopard I have ever seen in the Mara. While watching the leopard we saw a few other vehicles drive towards a large handsome male lion. We followed this cat for a bit and then drove back to the leopard as she stood up on the tree limb to watch the lion move off away from her. It was then that I saw a nearby male Bohors reedbuck move away from the area and like reedbucks quickly dropped down and disappeared into a gully. We started back to our camp since all vehicles need to be either out of MNR or if staying in a lodge or camp within MNR by dusk.

When close to our camp I noticed several herds of Maasai cattle being driven out of MNR and back across the reserve boundary. I saw this the next day as well and it continues a trend that I first saw in 02. Having herds of cattle within MNR is supposed to be illegal. MNR is actually administered by two different Kenyan regional governments. The Eastern part we were in on this safari is administered by the Narok County Council. The Western section is administered by the Trans Mara County Council and is referred to as the Mara Triangle. Of the two the Mara

Triangle is the better administrated and protected. In my opinion they are two separate ecosystems. My wildlife observations on this report will only be of my safaris in the Eastern MNR and have not included the four I have done in the Mara Triangle. The Narok side of MNR has always had the most lodges or camps and therefore the more game viewing vehicles. The Mara Triangle has less capacity of accommodations and with stricter ranger patrols means less congestion, particularly around predators. With rare exception each of the large cat sightings we had on this trip also had up to 20 other vehicles nearby. Of my six safaris in the eastern MNR I have stayed in Keekorok in 91, Mara Sopa in 92 (just outside the southeastern border), Mara Simba (just outside on the Talek River near the Sekenani Gate) in 2000 & 2004 and Mara Sarova Tented Camp 02 twice and this safari. As good as this tented camp was previously it has raised its level of service and food quality. With Keekorok, Mara Sarova is the only accommodation located within the eastern MNR. Staying at either means that you will be out on the roads within the Reserves looking for interesting wildlife sightings and you will arrive long before the other lodges on the border or in the adjacent conservancies enter MNR.

That evening I went to my tent to shower and I noticed a couple of flying white ants (termites). I thought I would catch them up after my shower and release them outside. I then looked at the drain and saw about 20 ants there. I open my shower curtain and saw about a hundred ants flying around my bathroom. I then realized my tent was now the sight of a white ant nuptial swarm. I left my bathroom and saw hundreds of ants flying within my tent. I went to the front and realized that a small opening I had left on my lower tent zipper had allowed a swarm of termites inside. Being a biologist I knew exactly what was happening. After the rains white ant colonies release thousands of male drones and potential female queens that take flight looking for places to set up potential new ant colonies. When the ants find a likely place they drop to the ground, drop their wings and the drones mate with the females. The drones quickly die and the females look for a place to burrow in the ground to start a new colony. These unlucky ants unfortunately picked an evolutionary dead end by entering my tent. I turned out my tent lights and got dressed by flashlight trying not to mash the ants under my feet. I got to Sarova Reception and told them what happened. On my return to my tent after dinner I could smell the “bug bomb” they had set off. The domestic staff had surprisingly managed to sweep up nearly all of the ants. The only remains I saw the next morning were a few ant wings on the floor. After the rest of my group retired for the night I took a walk down to the camp’s waterhole where I saw a bushbuck and another marsh mongoose.

Nov 9 the plan was to leave for a morning game drive as quickly as possible after breakfast. The main goal today would be cheetah and a visit to see the hippos and large crocodiles on the Mara River. After a detour to see a pride of lions our drivers got word of a female cheetah. We found her along with a young cub on top of an old termite mound. There are strict rules in the Mara about how close vehicles can approach cheetahs, particularly females with cubs. Our three vans and the others with us took turns getting close enough for a few pictures and then returned to the road to look at the cats from a distance. We then drove west and found 3 male lions on a wildebeest kill. As a light rain started I began to notice that we were starting to see some good sized herds of wildebeest. One of my group asked me how many I thought we had in front of us. I made a quick estimate of 2,000 to 2,500. We then crossed the next ridge and I suddenly realized that we were looking at tens of thousands of wildebeest along with scattered groups of zebra and the occasional eland. Much to mine and my drivers surprise we realized that Serengeti

migration had crossed back into the MNR after leaving the area in September. This movement is very unusual and may be unprecedented. Since my return I have been reading accounts that all the Mara's rangers and tour drivers have never seen this in their careers and some of these individuals have been at this for over 20 years. Along with the large pack of wild dogs seen at Ole Pejeta seeing the migration at this time of year in MNR was my biggest surprise on this safari.

We then drove to the Mara River and had a brief stop at the South Mara River Bridge ranger post. Here we saw a few hippos and one huge crocodile. There was also the smell of decaying flesh and a large pile of bones on the river bank. This was all that remained of several hundred wildebeest that drowned during a September river crossing up river from where we stood. I have read accounts from several different sources of what happened to cause this. It has been reported that dozens of vehicles, many full of Chinese tourists had the exit route for a major migration crossing point blocked by their vehicles. Some of the other safari drivers asked the vehicle to at least pull back some, to allow the wildebeest a clear path. These drivers reported that the Chinese tourist threatened their drivers that they would not tip them if they moved. As a result the wildebeest had to cross further downstream in an area that had rougher terrain. As a result hundreds drowned, and produced the mass of bones we were looking at. We then started working our way back to our Camp and added a spotted hyena, black-backed jackal, dik dik, and a family group of elephants to our MNR mammal list for a total of 23 species in three game drives.

Our last game drive on this safari was to start at 3 PM. We asked for black rhino or something of equal interest. We did not see black rhino but we did see several things of much more interest. The first was a large male leopard (my 4th in the Mara) doing a long stalk along the road taking advantage of any cover he could find. What amazed me the most about this cat's behavior was that he was being followed by nearly 20 tourist vehicles including at least two that had tourists standing on top of their vehicles. This cat was not fazed by all this and just missed catching a male reedbuck. When we saw this concentration of vehicles our driver, Dickson, asked if we wanted to avoid the crowd and go to find a female and male lion just off the main road. We chose this option and when driving to this sight I noticed a lioness quickly moving away from us to the east. We found the male lion who, after watching the lioness went into a bush lined gully. We worked our way back to the main road and saw the last death throngs, of a female zebra who had been caught by the lioness we had seen previously. One of my groups vans saw the entire kill. They had stopped to photograph a female grey hornbill and looked to their right and saw the lioness pull down the last of 4 zebras traveling up a road side drainage ditch. In all my trips to Africa this is only the second large cat kill I have ever seen.

The eastern Mara is an incredible wildlife area among the best on earth. Species I had seen previously in this area of the Mara were – a scrub hare (92), bat-eared fox (00, 04). one black rhino in (00). The Mara Simba Lodge has a great bar whose lights attract some interesting animals including white-tailed mongoose (04), blotched (large spotted) genet (00 & 04). dwarf epauletted fruit bat (00) and silt-faced bats (04). In 91 at Keekorok Lodge I saw several un-striped grass rats, in 2002 I saw tree hyrax at Mara Sarova and on this safari I heard them. With a bit of initiative on my part I would have seen then on this safari. So with my seven safaris in this part of MNR I have seen 36 species of mammals. On each of those safaris I have seen numerous

lions, cheetahs in all but one safari here and four leopards. As an African tour consultant I have always said that when the Serengeti migration enters the Masai Mara Reserve the MNR is the best wildlife area on earth. When the migration is not there MNR is the 2nd best wildlife area on earth.

On our return trip to Nairobi on Nov 10 we had a short stop at a curio shop while driving up the east side of the Rift Valley towards Nairobi. Here we saw bush squirrel & rock hyrax which gave us a total of 48 species of mammals. Even though this total includes 2 subspecies of giraffe (reticulated & Uganda) and one hartebeest (Jackson's) this is a very healthy mammal species count. When I professionally design safaris I have always related to prospective travelers that in Kenya you should see more species of mammals and birds that you will see anywhere in Africa. This safari not only had diversity of mammals but with the unexpected return of the Serengeti migration it also had the most animals I have seen anywhere. After twelve visits here, Kenya continues to surprise me with the diversity and numbers of wildlife one can see. Give it some serious thought when planning your first or second trip to Africa.