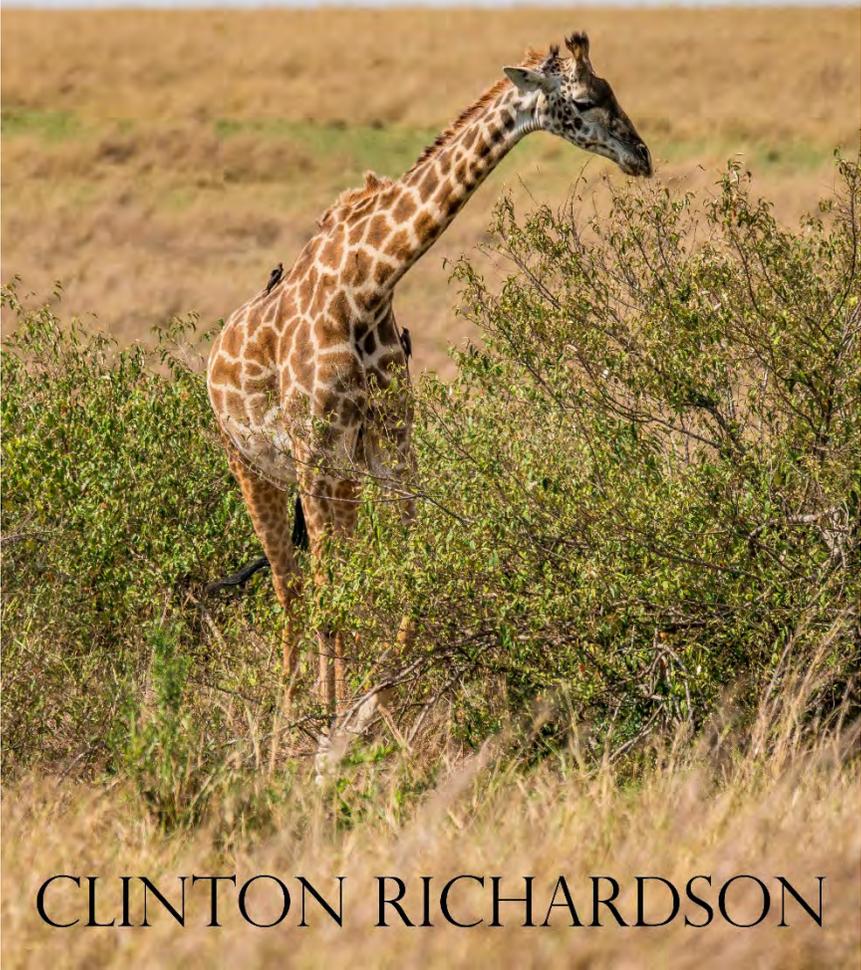


PASSPORTS IN HIS
UNDERPANTS



CLINTON RICHARDSON

Also by Clinton Richardson

*The Venture Magazine Complete Guide
to Venture Capital*

*The Growth Company Guide
(Six editions)*

*Ancient Selfies
(2017 International Book Awards Finalist)
(2018 eLit Awards Gold Medal Winner)*

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PASSPORTS IN HIS
UNDERPANTS

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A PLANET FRIENDLY PHOTO SAFARI

CLINTON RICHARDSON

To the gracious Maasai people for making
eco-friendly safaris possible.

I never knew of a morning in Africa
when I woke up and was not happy.
- Ernest Hemingway



If there was one more thing I could do,
it would be to go on safari once again.
- Karen Blixen

JOIN OUR SAFARI

Take the trip of a lifetime without leaving your home. Join us on a Kenyan safari complete with tented camps, Maasai guides, and intimate encounters with Africa's wildest animals.

If you have not been on safari before, make our safari your first. If you have, join us and let us inspire your return.

Whatever your status, join our remarkable 12-day safari into the heart of Africa. Let my camera be your eyes on a photo safari like no other. Leave your inhibitions and preconceptions at home. They will be shattered on this journey.

Our trip will take us to eco-friendly camps on wild conservancies leased from the native Maasai. The animals will be abundant. And, with experienced guides in off-road vehicles, we will get closer, much closer, than expected to the wildest creatures on the planet.

Join us inside a pride of 28 lions as they surround and separate a herd of zebras. Follow us to a waterhole and watch a bull elephant confront four thirsty male lions with a surprising and fragrant rebuke.

Share our surprise as a massive cape buffalo leaps to mount a female only to land on top of a bull. And, help celebrate with a baby rhino who prances after zebras and warthogs on the Maasai plain.

We will puzzle over sleepwalking elephants and be enthralled as a mother cheetah trains her cubs to hunt. An adult leopard will get so close that our hearts will skip a beat.

The people will be memorable too. Like the seasoned traveler who keeps his passports in his underpants. Or, the young woman from Sidney whose hands shake as she describes a lion brushing against her tent the night before.

Meet the Maasai who live in two vastly different worlds - a pastoral one of small, mud-house villages and a modern one with cell phones, motorcycles, and bush planes.

How many wives does it make sense to have in a changing world? Our Maasai guides will give you their answer.

Our travels will take us to some of Kenya's wildest conservancies. One, where we start, will be in a wildlife park near Nairobi. It may be the only place in the world where you can see wild zebras and rhinos with an urban skyline in the background.

After two nights there, a bush plane will take us to the Selenkay Conservancy near Amboseli National Park. We will camp in the shadow of Mount Kilimanjaro where elephants, lions, wildebeests, zebras, impalas, gazelles, hippos, ostriches, gerenuks, and giraffes abound.

Our outings will include night game drives and day hikes, one with Maasai guides to see their village. But the highlight of the visit will be a trip to the Amboseli wetlands, one of Africa's jewels.

Next, we will head to the Ol Pejeta Conservancy in the foothills of Mt Kenya where rhinos are plentiful. We will have two days and nights with game drives and walks while camping near an active waterhole.

From there it is on to the Olare Motorogi Conservancy for four days and nights with a chance to spot the elusive leopard. The area is also home to lions, cheetahs, zebras, cape buffalos, elephants, rhinos, hippos, hyenas, jackals, mongooses, and warthogs.

From here, we will also explore the Maasai Mara Reserve and take a full day to follow the Great Wildebeest Migration. Come with us

and watch the herds approach the river, wait, and then race across. Be there when a lion jumps a wildebeest right in front of our vehicle as other wildebeest wait anxiously to race to the river and cross.

Would you like to see a male lion tricked out of its kill by his female companions? Or, a pair of male topi fight for dominance over their herd?

Join us. Take a safari like no other. And, do it without leaving your chair.

* Portions of *Passports in his Underpants* first
appeared in the author's Venture Moola photo blog
as part of his Safari Series
at www.readjanus.com/venture-moola

Additional images from our photo safari can
be viewed at www.trekpics.com

SNEAK PEEK



Nightfall in the Selenkay



Rhino Grazing Outside Nairobi



Vulture High Step in the Olare Motorogi



Landing Field Welcome Party



Amboseli Marsh



Reticulated Giraffe in Ol Pejeta



The Elusive Figlet

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Back Cover: Come On A Safari

PASSPORTS IN HIS UNDERPANTS

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THE JOURNEY BEGINS

1: THE HUNT



Lions on the Hunt

We begin near the end of our trip with exactly what you would expect from a safari – a hunt. Only this is a photo safari so the animals will do the hunting. In this case, the area’s largest pride of lions is on the prowl for zebra.

We are 11 days into a 12-day safari spanning four camps, two national parks and three Maasai conservancies. We know the routine. Up at 5:45 for a 6:15 start with a breakfast packed for a 9:00 break on the plain.

This morning we start from the Porini Lion Camp in the Olare Motorogi Conservancy. We hop into our open Land Cruiser and head out. It is crisp outside with clearing skies. We bundle up. The open-air design of the Land Cruiser provides a cold breeze as we drive.

There are four of us today filling six available seats. Our driver and spotter are in front. Both are Maasai warriors and dressed in the bright traditional style of the bush, only this morning they wear heavy green coats over their bright red tunics because of the cold.

Our drive into the conservancy finds us on wet roads after evening rains. We cross a small stream swollen and muddy from the rain and head onto open grassland. The vehicle slides in the wet muck as we drive down the embankment and through the stream.



Leaving Camp

Ahead of us is a gently sloping field with a small herd of topi, all of whom are standing upright and looking in one direction. Across the field is a stream and a grassy field on a gently sloping hill.

Immediately, our driver veers off the road and onto the field with the topi and heads for the stream. As we look across the field, we see what the topi are seeing - lions, lots of lions, dotting the hill on the other side of the stream. They are heading our way.

By the number of brown bodies, our guide knows this is the area's largest pride. Soon we are at the stream just as the first of 28 lions reach the other bank.

There is hesitation. Then the first lion jumps over the stream to the other side. Moisture from the night rains flies off his back.



Wet Lioness Jumps Over a Stream

Then another lion makes the leap. And, then another and another.

A second line of lions forms a bit upstream to make their aerial crossing from there. One large female misses her landing and slides back into the stream. She scrambles up the muddy embankment.



Upstream Crossing

Once the stream is forded, the group heads up the hill on our side. About seven or eight march single file near a path. The rest spread out in the grass. No one makes a sound.



Marching Single File

Several jackals gather behind the pack, yipping loudly. One charges toward the lions and then scurries back when a lion turns its head.

Our vehicle moves with the pride. Sometimes we are slightly behind most of the lions. Other times we move ahead, and the procession walks toward and around us.



Jackals Behind the Pride

Some pass right next to our vehicle as they walk by. Some come close enough to touch. These powerful creatures show no fear. They

control these grasslands. As they surround our vehicle and pass by, my pulse quickens.

Soon we crest a hill and the lions continue down toward a large open plain. There are trees but they are few and far apart. On the plain is a herd of zebra.



Spread out in the Grass

The lions continue down the hill, some move ahead, some spread to the sides, and others stop to watch or explore. One youngster trots along with a bundle of sticks in his mouth. Another stops to climb a termite hill.

The organization may not be clear, but the activity is certainly practiced. Some, particularly the young, are not as far along the learning curve as others.

The zebras stiffen as the lions make their way down the hill. Their ears perk up and heads turn toward the lions. They freeze in place and assess the threat.

The lions move closer. One darts into the center of the herd. The zebras bolt and break into two and then four groups.



Getting Close

The zebras freeze again as the lions reassess the situation. Some of the lions begin moving again, getting closer to the zebras.

We get ready to move on. Our goal was to watch the method, not see the result.

As we drive off, my gaze fixes on five zebras who are standing bolt upright behind a termite mound. Will they all survive the day?



The Hunted

Later, we learn that the zebras were spared that morning. Apparently, a warthog stumbled into the pack and immediately became breakfast. While the lions were distracted, the zebras escaped.

It all seems incredible.

In our open vehicle, we joined a giant pride of lions while they hunted. We watched them ford a stream, their backs still wet from the evening's rain. We followed them across a plain and watched them surround and divide a herd of zebra. At times, we could hear them breathe, they were so close.



Close to Our Vehicle

2: OFF TO NAIROBI



Nairobi Skyline

Our flight arrives in Nairobi at 9:00 p.m. local time. A bus takes us to a large hanger where we work our way through customs, gather our bags, and walk outside to meet our outfitter's agent.

It is cool and dark with just the hint of a breeze. We are not tired so much as excited to be in Kenya.

Traffic is light as we leave the airport. Life size metal statues of wildebeest and zebra grace the medians along the roads. As we drive down a freeway, we see people walking near the road.

When we reach our hotel, a large metal gate opens to admit our car to a staging area where a guard stops us and walks around the car. When we enter the hotel door, another guard takes our luggage and puts it through an airport-style screening machine. We are escorted to the front desk for check in.

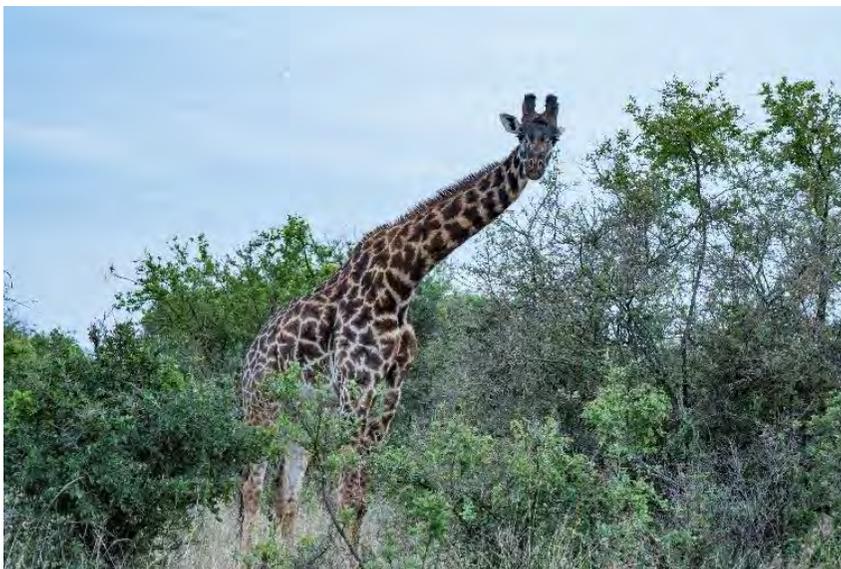
The next morning the process reverses itself. We check out and are met by two young men representing our outfitter. They have a car waiting that takes us to our first park. We will start our journey with

a two-night stay at a tented camp in Nairobi National Park. It takes less than 10 minutes to get there.

We are later told that the Park is the world's only wildlife park that is adjacent to a major city. We are in a wild and unique place.

At the Park gate, we switch guides and load our stuff into an open top safari vehicle. Men in military uniforms man the gate.

Once through the gate, we drive on a one lane road with trees lining both sides. We think we are heading straight to the camp but soon discover that we will be taking a game drive through the park first.



Roadside Maasai Giraffe

As this news is sinking in, we turn around a bend and stop. A giraffe, 18 feet tall, is standing in the middle of the road eating the leaves off the tops of a nearby tree. We are shocked and delighted. He is large and colorful and totally unconcerned about us.

I am unprepared as I grab my small travel camera and stand up to take a photo out of the top of the car. The giraffe moves on as I fumble the shot. The adrenaline and surprise yield a shaky image and me wishing I had not packed the good camera for this leg of our trip.

But, photography aside, things just get better as we drive on. As we pull out of the woods onto a dirt road that leads into grasslands we are greeted by a mingled herd of giraffes and Thompsons gazelles.

Above in the treetops, go-away-birds are making a racket. A few minutes later, a herd of zebra appear on our right. I am beginning to wonder if we are going to see everything on this first drive.

Before we reach the camp, we also see ostrich, gazelles, wart hogs, impala, rhinos, hartebeests, and cape buffalo. Not bad for a first drive.



Ostrich in the Grass

When we arrive at our camp, we find it to be as advertised. A tented greeting area with sofas and tables, a separate tented dining hall, and large tents for the guests that feature a king size bed, writing table, and bathroom with running water, flush toilet, sink, and a bucket shower. A small porch outside each guest tent has two chairs and a table.

We unpack and get ready for lunch. The dining tent is open and inviting. The adjacent lounge has a large sofa and books about Africa.



Inside Our Tent

There is a small fire pit outside with chairs set around. Evenings in front of a fire before dinner will be a part of our routine for the next two weeks.

The food served is fresh and better than expected. We meet and talk with the other guests as they arrive. Most, like us, are just getting started so we exchange backgrounds and talk about what is to come.

There are no fences around the camp, so animals come and go freely. A small antelope greets us outside our tent. At lunch the next day, a warthog wanders in and then saunters off.

We are off to a good beginning.



The Dining Tent



Africa's Smallest Antelope, the Suni

3: TENTED CAMPS AND GAME DRIVES



Outside our Tent

Okay, it is only fair that you get to see the outside of a tent after seeing the image from inside. Here our guide is showing us to our tent at Nairobi National Park. It is your basic non-heated tent but with interior lights powered by the camp's solar batteries.

All the tents we stay in on our safari will be like this one. You zip yourself in when you are there and zip it closed when you leave. At night, you leave only with a Maasai warrior for an escort. Somehow, one always seems to be nearby when you need one.

With none of the camps being enclosed, animals wander through freely, especially at night. During our stay, the grounds near our tents will be visited by cape buffalo, hippos, elephants, and wart hogs. Lions and hyenas will make night noises that are loud enough to wake us.

This first night in Nairobi National Park is full of sound. The loudest and most constant is from a pair of screaming hyenas who are close

enough for a ranger, dressed in her military uniform and toting a rifle, to patrol the area as we head to our tents for the evening.



Spotted Hyena

The next morning my wife is eager to speak with our host about the armed guard. Was she here to protect us from bandits or was it a precaution because of the hyenas? The thought of marauding bandits unsettled her.

Our host laughed when he heard the question.

"No" he said. "No one worries about bandits in the night. You'd have to be crazy to wander around here at night. With the hyenas, lions, and hippos around, something would surely get you."

The guard had come because of the proximity of the hyenas. Somehow, this was reassuring. After all, we were zipped into our tents and escorted when we went out after dark.

Our concerns addressed, we headed to the mess tent for breakfast and got ready for the morning game drive. We would be driving with a couple from Hong Kong and another from Toronto, all first-time

safari goes. The mood is upbeat and expectant. Our drive the day before gives us reason to be optimistic.



White Rhino Calf



Female White Rhino

It was early, as it always would be before morning drives. Up at 5:45 with coffee and biscuits delivered to the tent, then a hot breakfast in the mess tent, and off in our safari vehicle by 6:30.

Before we were 200 yards out of the camp, we spot a lion in the grass, one of the contributors to last night's serenade. Later we get close to a pair of white rhinos - mother and child. It is surprising how close we get.



Hartebeest in NNP

The rhinos are followed by sightings of hartebeests, warthogs, gazelles, ostriches, and a pair of jackals. It is a short drive this morning which gets us back to camp by 10:00 so we can head out to the nearby David Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage.

Once at the orphanage, we gather with a crowd of locals and tourists around a roped off area of open dirt. Several handlers dressed in green lab coats and white hats wait patiently. Then from a distance, a host of baby elephants come running toward us.

They bound quickly into the roped off area and head straight to the handlers. Each receives a bottle of milk, which is quickly consumed. We watch the feeding and play that follows until the young elephants are led off and another, slightly older, group of young elephants comes running in to feed.



Feeding Time at the Elephant Orphanage

Our driver and Maasai guide are excited to visit the elephant refuge. The animals are revered for their imposing size, intellect, and gentle family ways. "Eeles, we call them," our guide Jon tells us.

We return to camp for a 1:00 lunch, some rest, and then a 4:00 afternoon ride. As we make our first turn out of the camp we are forced to stop.

Dozens of baboons are walking down the road toward us. The leaders in the front of the group move off into the woods just before they reach our vehicle. They show no interest in us.

As we sit and watch, wave upon wave of baboons make their way down the dirt road, stopping here and there to inspect the ground, the bush, themselves, and each other. They are in no hurry.



Baboons on the Road



Crossing the Road

As they get close to our vehicle, they follow the leaders into the brush. Eventually they are gone, and we make our way up the road.

The rest of the drive yields viewings of cape buffalo coming out of the woods into the grasslands and later up close, standing in a herd, blocking our dirt roadway.

We also spot a serval cat at some distance on the side of our roadway. She disappears quickly into the tall grass when our vehicle approaches.



Serval Cat

And later, we see our first kill remains. Bleached bones beside the road. We will see bones repeatedly on the trip.

Toward the end of our drive, we head over to a pond and catch our first sighting of the African crocodile. As the sun begins to set, we catch sight of ibis in a pond feeding as night falls.



Crocodile Resting



Ibis as Night Falls

We leave the pond and head back to camp in the soft light just before sunset. As our road heads into bushier terrain, we hear a crash in the bushes to our left and then see a large rhino on the run.

Its speed and power are startling. Our driver tries to match its speed on the road to give us a chance to see it, but our glimpses are fleeting.

Is it a white rhino like the ones we have seen? Or could this be the black rhino with its distinctive back and beaked mouth? The terrain suggests a black, who grazes mostly on bushes.

Another crash and the rhino comes tantalizingly close to our vehicle at a gallop before disappearing into the bush. Then it is gone, and we slow down. Nothing. We come to a full stop and wait.



Black Rhino Ahead

Then ahead of our vehicle a giant black rhino walks out of the brush and onto the road. Once there, it stops and turns its head toward us. And then it walks away.

We start the vehicle and head back to camp. Once there, we clean up and gather in lawn chairs around a fire to share stories and to get to

know one another. The cool evening air, dark skies, and blazing fire provide a perfect conclusion to the day.

The other guests are from London, Mumbai, and Hong Kong. The conversation is lively.

While we wait for dinner, a new couple from Melbourne joins our group. Both are in their 80s and expatriated from South Africa "to give our kids opportunities for a better life." He was active in South Africa's progressive movement leading up to the abolishment of apartheid.



Around the Fire

After the introduction, the conversation turns to Australian football, personal interests, and sightings of the day. Before long we were called to dinner.

4: PASSPORTS IN HIS UNDERPANTS



Roadside Lion

We were heartened to see this magnificent male lounging in the high grass on our second day at Nairobi National Park. And, we were tickled to watch the old fellow use his hind leg to scratch his ear.



Satisfying an Itch

We spotted him on the afternoon of our second and last day at Nairobi National Park. The next day, we would head by bush plane to the Porini Amboseli Camp in the Selenkay Conservancy.

A 5:45 a.m. departure was set to get us to the Wilson Airport in Nairobi in time for our early morning flight. It was while making these connections that we got to know the Aussie couple who joined us around the fire pit the night before.

He, at 84, was a retired barrister and businessman with an engaging conversational style that was peppered with pointed questions and good humor. He was an ardent fan of Aussie football and wore a baseball cap that had an Australian flag on the back. His intensity reminded me of eager students I had as law school classmates.

He and his wife were a comfortable pair but not well organized, as we learned on our flight to the Selenkay Conservancy. They were late and not certain about where they were going.



View from our Bush Plane

Outside the entrance to Wilson Airport he even disappeared for a while causing concern within the group. Was he lost? Would he return in time?

About ten minutes later he returned, passports in hand. It turns out, he confessed quietly, that he left to find a private place to retrieve his passports from his underpants.

As with all our travel, we were escorted by our outfitter's representatives from the camp until we were on our plane, a twin prop with twelve passenger seats. The flight to our next camp was uneventful and flew low enough to let us take in the scenery below.

We landed on a grass field near the Amboseli Camp in the Selenkay Conservancy less than 90 minutes after we took off. Our spotter and driver were waiting for us with an open-air Land Rover.



Nanny Giraffe and Young

After getting off the plane and learning our Aussie friends were headed, unbeknown to them, in a separate vehicle for a different camp, we unpacked our cameras and hopped into our vehicle for the drive to our camp.

We did not have to go far before we came to a full stop. Less than 50 yards from the landing strip, we found ourselves surrounded by a

tower of Maasai giraffe, more than a dozen spread out among the trees and brush before us.

It was breathtaking. There were dozens of these giants close and busy feeding in the upper reaches of the trees around us.

Our guides took us off road into the bush to get closer and we learned a critical difference between a conservancy and a national park. In the parks you stay on the roads but in conservancies you can go wherever your vehicle will take you.



Moving Maasai Giraffe

We stayed and soaked in the novelty of our situation. Blue skies, cool weather, and a most unusual nursery filled our senses. We watched adults grazing to our left while the young giraffes grazed together separately under the watchful eye of a single adult.

When the young moved, they loped ahead in a hurry to get to the next tree. The adults were more patient, grooming the trees as they walked from place to place.

We arrived at our camp before noon and were shown to our tents. After lunch we had our first hot afternoon while we rested in our tent. It was not Georgia summer hot but something in the 80s.

By 4:00 it was already cooling down. Our driver Julius and spotter Daniel, both Maasai, led us out into the conservancy in our open Land Rover. Our companions were an English schoolteacher who worked in a private school in Nairobi and a young married couple from Sydney. She was originally from Hungary and he from Brazil.



Amboseli Camp Accommodations

This afternoon's drive culminated with a visit to a waterhole full of elephants. Next to the waterhole was a raised platform for viewing.

We would spend the better part of an hour here watching the elephants and participating in our first sun downer, a safari tradition where you stop in the wild to watch the sun set and enjoy refreshments.

There were at least 20 elephants around the waterhole although it was hard to count because they came and went in small groups. They drank and splashed and rolled in the mud. The mothers interacted tenderly with the young and, of course, the young played.



Waterhole Gathering

The elephants monopolized the waterhole, paying close attention to approaching zebras and warthogs and running them off when they got close.

They did not seem the least bit disturbed by our presence. One adult male would stop and stare at the platform from time-to-time but most of the others paid us no attention.

The exception was a young male who seemed to delight in our attention. He would toss dust over his head and then run from the waterhole toward the platform. Before getting close, however, he would prance back to the herd.

For the most part, we were ignored while they bathed and interacted with one another. Adults wrapped trunks with one another and with their young. The young played and experimented with their trunks, frequently resting them on the backs of another.



Elephant Interaction



Mother and Child

We were witnessing the interactions of a close and tender family. This was our first encounter with elephants in the wild and, already, we were beginning to understand why they are so revered.



Prepping for a Mock Charge

5: NIGHT LIONS AND AMBOSELI



Lions at Night

As our dinner winds down on our first day at the Amboseli Camp, the staff announces that lions have been spotted approaching the nearby watering hole. An impromptu night drive is announced, and we gather cameras and hop into our vehicles.

The night air is cool and the only lights other than those on our vehicle are those above in the sky. Even so, the clear night combined with a near full moon provides light for the cats to make their way through the brush.

The lions approach the water hole cautiously. Moving forward slowly and then waiting in the grass or bush. A few elephants remain near the water and are taking their time departing.

Our vehicles catch up with the lions and shine their large red spotting lamps at the lions. The cats seem bothered by the intrusion, so I am ready to head back after a short drive.

The next morning, we are up early for breakfast and a full day game drive. The destination is Amboseli National Park, a 90-minute drive on dirt roads through the Selenkay Conservancy.

Along the way we stop and head off road to follow lion tracks seen on the road. Remarkably, our driver sees these prints while driving 30 miles an hour. When he backs up to confirm them, we can all see them clearly in the roadway.



Gerenuk Grazing

The lions elude our attempt to find them off road, but we do catch a glimpse of the odd fellow above. He is called a gerenuk. The long neck enables him to feed on trees and bushes at levels above where his gazelle cousins graze and below the tops that are so popular with giraffes.

As we continue our drive toward Amboseli, the terrain changes from bushy and tree filled, too more open but with frequent bushes and trees and then, at park's edge, to a wide open grass plain with occasional acacia trees in the distance.

The grasses are high, 3 feet and higher, and they are everywhere. There has been lots of rain this year.



The Grasslands

We have been driving for almost two hours when our driver pulls us into the parking lot of a small airstrip within the park. We are the only ones there.

A table is set out with refreshments and, as we talk, our eyes are drawn to a female ostrich out in the grass. A male ostrich in the distance is heading her way. After they meet, a short dance follows that seems not to impress the female.

The disappointed male heads off until he spots another male heading his way. We watch with anticipation.

When the two males meet, they quickly begin interacting. A fight ensues that seems as much dance as fight but with plenty of contact.

After a few minutes, the challenger prevails and heads off to try his luck with the reluctant female. We pack up to head further into the park.



Males Dancing?

We proceed from the airstrip to a marshy area. The wildlife gets more and more abundant as we get close.



Zebra and Elephants

Along the far horizon, we can see families of elephants marching toward the marsh in single file. Between the horizon and the marsh are more families walking to the marsh. Zebras, wildebeests, gazelles, warthogs, elephants, egrets, and rhinos are all about.



Approaching from the Horizon



Enjoying the Water

Elephants are everywhere. On the hill heading to the marsh, at the edges of the marsh, in the marsh, and even partially submerged in the marsh.

The temperatures are mild, the skies are open, and there are only a few safari vehicles on the road. In front of us, the marsh is full of animals grazing or walking.

We sit and watch as family after family of elephants make their way to the marsh and as zebras, wildebeests, and gazelles graze. There are hippos too, in the marsh and grazing on its grasses.



Family of Four

Eventually tummies begin to rumble, ours not theirs, and we make our way to a picnic site on top of a nearby hill. From there we can see miles of grassland and the large marsh that fuels the parade of life we are witnessing.



Zebra and Elephants Mingle

We are not alone. School buses unload groups of uniformed school children on holiday and other tourists fill the hilltop with us. It has been a full morning.



Hippo Grazing Below the Picnic Grounds

6: SLEEP WALKING GIANTS



Napping Elephants

It took us awhile to realize what we were seeing when we came upon this family. We were driving deeper into Amboseli Park after lunch when our driver stopped the vehicle a few feet from these elephants.

Like other families, this one had been heading from the horizon toward the marsh. But unlike the others, this family was not moving.

They were stock still. In fact, they looked downright catatonic. Nothing distracted them. They would be perfectly still for a few minutes and then move, only a few feet, strike a pose and become perfectly still again.

After letting us speculate, our guide finally explained. The family was sleeping in mid-day in the middle of their march. They had likely traveled a long distance and needed time to rest. We realized then that everyone's eyes were closed.

At one point, the little one sat, and the others huddled protectively around her. We took our cue and moved on.



Protecting the Young Napper

We were now on a dirt road near the marsh that provided lots of opportunities to see elephants interacting.



Nuzzling Elephants

None of them paid us much attention. The families walked in front of our vehicle. The big bulls sauntered by within a few feet of us.



A Big Bull Approaches

Elephants and zebras and wildebeests were everywhere. In the wetter areas' elephants were sometimes sitting deep in the marsh.



How Does She Breathe?

We head toward a nearby lake and find it teeming with another kind of life. Birds were everywhere, especially the flamingo.



Flamingos

We drove our vehicle through the water on a flooded dirt road. No one moved when we approached, not the spoon bill, the flamingo, the pelican, nor even these two blacksmith lapwing chicks.



Blacksmith Lapwing Chicks, Small as a Feather

After a full day at Amboseli, we head back to our camp in the Selenkay Conservancy. Once back, we cleaned up and enjoyed a late dinner. No night drive tonight. We were ready to turn in and prepare for the next day's drive.



Great White Pelicans



White Stork

7: POOH ON YOU



Argh

Once you have been around the elephants you get an appreciation for how smart, compassionate, and special they are. The Maasai have lived with them for centuries and hold them in high esteem. Everyone does.

When we watched them around the waterhole the first day at the Selenkay Conservancy we were impressed with how communicative they were with their body language and tummy rumbling. The young were playful and curious. The adults watched them and coached them through their activities.

There were compassionate moments between the young - trunks flung over siblings' backs, leaning, chasing, and play - and between the adults. It was also apparent that there was order and structure.

And, they were aware. While they did not seem bothered by our presence you could not watch them without knowing that you are were being observed as well.



Around a Waterhole

So, what happens when the elephant is confronted by another special creature of the African wild, the lion? The healthy adult elephant has no reason to fear the lion but its young, sick, and elderly can fall prey to an active pride of lions.

We had a chance to answer that question, at least in part, on our third day in the Selenkay Conservancy. Toward the end of our afternoon drive we turned a corner and happened on four young male lions heading together toward the waterhole where we had viewed the elephants earlier.

It was nearing sunset, a time when the elephants might be vacating the waterhole, and the lions were meandering toward the pool. We scrapped plans for the normal sundowner and stayed with the vehicle, keeping close as the lions slowly made their way.



Heading to the Waterhole

The four boys were in no hurry, likely timing their arrival to coincide with sunset. They would stop and roll around in the road, then wander off a bit and then head back to the road and stroll in the direction of the waterhole.



Taking Their Time

At one point, the four of them plopped down in the middle of the road and just laid there. Then, one by one, they got up and moved again.

All the while, they paid little attention to our vehicle. This let us get close enough for photo ops like the one below.



Up Close

Once they reached the clearing where the pond was, three of the lions approached the waterhole. As they got close and the sun dropped lower, a herd of elephants, who had been commanding the space around the waterhole, began to leave. The adult elephants gathered their young and retreated deliberately into the surrounding brush.

One massive bull, however, remained behind just across the waterhole and stared at the lions. The three lions crouched low to the ground and crept cautiously to the edge of the water and began drinking. Their eyes were fixed on the bull.

Then the bull moved, all six tons of him, directly toward the lions, stepping onto a rise in the middle of the waterhole. He was less than ten yards from the lions.

The bull turned his massive body around and pointed his rear quarters at the lions. The lions were transfixed. The one on the right sat up. The others stopped drinking.

Then the bull defecated and peed a great yellow stream into the water. The sitting lion pulled his head back and winced.

The Confrontation



The lions ease their way to the edge of the waterhole



A lone bull remains and walks toward the lions



A pile of poop and a stream of pee

I guess this is how you express your displeasure when you do not have a middle finger. The body language and facial expression of the upright lion says it all.

Shortly after this exchange the elephant left. Message delivered.

8: LION ROARS AND BUG BITES



Waiting for the Elephants to Leave

The morning after our return from Amboseli we greeted a nervous guest at the breakfast table. She was part of the young couple from Sidney, he originally from Brazil and she from Hungary. It was their first safari and she had experienced a difficult night.

A lion had been in the camp. All of us heard him growl and ruff through the night. But her tent was close enough to hear him moving about. It kept her awake and anxious. Her hands shook as she talked about it.

Over breakfast, she shared what she experienced. The lion had come so close to her tent that she worried it might get in.

"I know no one has been eaten by a lion in these camps," she said. "But what if I am the first!"

Conversation and a hot breakfast calmed her nerves and she was ready to go when the morning drive started. When it was time, we loaded into our safari vehicle and set off on our morning drive.

That drive treated us to giraffes, zebras, elephants, weaver birds, and more. It was another beautiful and temperate day in the bush. Below, one of the younger giraffes is curious about what she sees.



Curious Maasai Giraffe



Time for a Snack

As we learned from our guides, giraffes are called a tower when they stand or graze in a group and a journey when they move together. Mother giraffes do not stay with their calves after they are born. Instead, one female takes over the task of raising all the young.

Everywhere we drove this day we saw trees full of elaborate weaver bird nests. Often, a tree would contain nests from several varieties of weaver birds. Smaller nests from the white-browed sparrow-weavers and grey-capped social-weavers and larger nests from buffalo weavers.



White-Browed Sparrow-Weaver

The dark headed white-browed sparrow weaver above is headed into her nest. The four birds with their nest below are the grey-capped social weavers.



Grey-Capped Social-Weavers

This day also surprised us with this majestic elephant. She caught us unaware when she emerged silently from the tall grass a few feet from our vehicle while we were watching a nearby tower of giraffe.



Surprise Visitor

She stayed for a while to watch the giraffe and then we moved on. It was a busy day. Animals around every bend. We spotted white bellied go-away-birds whose tall tufted heads would make a cardinal envious.

On a termite hill long abandoned by its builders, we spied a family of dwarf mongoose. They had taken residence and filled the hill with their tunnels. They watched us as intently as we watched them.



Dwarf Mongoose on a Termite Hill

After our morning drive, we took a walk near our camp with a Maasai spotter, a driver, and two Maasai guards armed with rifles. We followed a dirt road onto an open field. We explored the plants and saw giraffe and gazelles as we walked. The giraffes are much bigger when you are walking.

Daniel, the English name of our Maasai spotter, answered questions as we walked. A fallen weaver bird nest gave us an opportunity to examine its structure. And, an annoying fly gave us insight in the Maasai mind.

As we walked, I kept getting buzzed by a fly. He would dive into my ear and then around my head. My fruitless swatting caught Daniel's attention.



Investigating a Weaver Bird Nest with Daniel

He walked over and gently plucked the annoying fly out of my ear. Then he showed it to me and walked over to a bush to release it. I probably would have done physical harm to the little beast, but he treated it gently and moved it.

It was totally in character with what we were learning about the Maasai. They have a deep relationship with their environment and the animals that inhabit it. They do not hunt, relying instead on cattle for their meat. They respect all life. Even the flies.

After the walk and a short rest, we headed out for our afternoon game drive. We did not have to go far. After just a few minutes we sighted a single Maasai giraffe standing next to our path.

On and around him were half a dozen red-billed oxpeckers. They flew around his neck and head and landed here and there to groom him. One even landed on his lower lip to pick items out of his mouth.



Maasai Giraffe with Oxpecker Toothbrush

Our giraffe seemed to take pleasure from the cleaning. He stood patiently while an oxpecker worked its bill around his lips.

And then he leaned and stretched out his long neck to accommodate other oxpeckers, who were grazing there. As he stretched, his ears extended out and back.

After a while, we headed off toward a nearby Maasai village. It was time to meet the camp's landlords.

9: THE MAASAI



Maasai Villagers

Our gracious hosts were members of the Maasai tribe, a semi-nomadic people who own the conservancies and reside near the game parks. The picture shows the people from a Maasai village near our camp in the Selenkay Conservancy.

The safari camps operate on land leased from the Maasai. Because the Maasai do not hunt wildlife, the conservancies established by these leases make great places for safari camps. The camps themselves are eco-friendly, relying on solar power and organized to leave as small an impact as possible on the land.

Our visit to the village started with seven Maasai warriors. They met us during a game drive and walked us to their village.

They were brightly dressed and wearing lots of beaded jewelry. Each carried a long wooden pole for protection. Their shoes were sandals made from old tires by a local merchant.



Maasai Warriors We Met

We walked for less than a mile when we spied a small village surrounded by a chain link fence. We walked through an opening in the fence and into an open area that housed the village.

The Maasai were proud of the fence, which they used to keep predators away at night. It had been purchased with funds from a gift and served a vital purpose.

The village consisted of groups of mud homes and a livestock pen. The homes were constructed of mud, sticks, grass, cow dung, and cow urine. The women build and maintain the homes, which are dark and cool inside.

The livestock pen was a great piling of sticks in a large circle with one open entry. In front of the entry were makeshift scarecrows, intended to ward off any predators who breached the chain link fence.



Mud Homes

When we entered the village, we were greeted by dozens of children and their mothers. Each of the villagers was introduced and, with the help of our guides, conversations about their lives and ours followed. Then there were demonstrations of day-to-day skills. Pottery making, fire starting, and ceremonial jumping were all demonstrated.



Scarecrows Guarding Livestock Pen



Maasai Warrior

The men and women were all colorfully dressed. Both wore brightly colored bead necklaces, and bracelets. The women also sported large beaded earrings. The children were active and curious, exchanging phrases in Swahili and English with the guests.



Woman with Child

The men showed us how to spin sticks on a wooden pallet to make fire. Then, they danced while the women and children chanted. Each of the men took turns jumping straight up in the air in time with the chants. The children watched and practiced their jumps as the music continued.



Leaping Maasai

After these demonstrations and more conversation, our visit ended. The entire village walked us outside the fence to a waiting safari vehicle, where we said our goodbyes.



Maasai Herding Cattle to Market

While we would see and interact with Maasai men every day - they ran the camps and conducted the game drives - we would not see the Maasai in their traditional lifestyle again until late in our visit. On market day in the Maasai Mara, we would see Maasai warriors taking their livestock across the open plains to sell and trade.

These are the same plains where we watched lion and cheetah hunt. The Maasai warriors escorted their livestock on foot, carrying only long stick poles for protection.

The Maasai are under pressure to adapt to modern ways. Many, including those who work in the safari camps, live and work in two different worlds. Notice the cell phone case next to the traditional knife on the warrior's belt below. A sign of change.



10: ON THE MOVE



Departing Amboseli

We are five days into our trip, and it is time to pack up and head to our next camp. Before we do, I stop in the small Maasai gift shop on the camp property to make a purchase.

The handiwork of the Maasai is displayed in a plain wooden shack with a dirt floor and no lighting. I chose an item and negotiate an acceptable price, but it takes some doing.

There are no fixed prices and I am not surprised when the asking price starts at four times what the item's sticker price appears to be. The back and forth is in good spirits until we eventually agree on a price.

Our plane is scheduled for mid-morning, giving us time for one last short game drive at the Amboseli Camp. We are pleased to get a last look at the Maasai giraffes near the spot where we will meet our bush plane.

Our plane takes us back to the Wilson Airport in Nairobi and then by separate plane we fly to Ol Pejeta and our outfitter's Rhino Camp. Two guests from Mumbai join our flight. They are headed to a different camp but will rejoin us at the end of our journey.



Maasai Giraffes

As the plane's engine starts, we begin talking about the interesting history of Daniel, our spotter in Amboseli. His story was the talk of our table the night before.

As a boy, he and others were out watching the village's livestock when a dog they had with them began barking at some nearby elephants. One of the elephants took notice and charged at the dog.

Daniel and his friends ran for their lives. Unfortunately for Daniel, the dog followed him as he fled. The elephant, in a rage, caught them both. Daniel survived but only after the elephant stomped on him and left him with a severely broken leg.

The gentle Maasai who would not hurt a fly on our walk had been the

unwitting victim of an elephant's anger. It was a reminder of just how unpredictable life can be in the African bush.

Our flights to Nairobi and then to Ol Pejeta were uneventful, except for the late arrival of our passports-in-underpants friends from Melbourne. They had challenges making their connection.

Our flight to Ol Pejeta landed on a grass landing strip. This time with a mixed herd of zebra and cape buffalo next to the strip.

After loading into our land cruiser, our driver took us directly into the herd, which was now grazing on the landing strip. After several passes, the animals moved off the landing strip allowing the plane to take off.



View From our Tent

It was a short drive to camp through open plain and then downhill through high grass and gnarled acacia trees. Once there, we were greeted by our hosts and shown to our tents.

The dining tent here sits across a small stream from a waterhole. A fire pit for evening sundowners sits between. Our tent is near and looks out over the same waterhole.

That afternoon we took our first game drive in the Ol Pejeta Conservancy. Before we left, however, a small family of elephants visited the camp waterhole. The youngster below was photographed from our tent. He seemed intent on making improvements.



Improving the Waterhole

Once in our Land Cruiser, our drive quickly yielded sightings. In short order, we saw gazelles, impala, zebras, jackals, white rhinos, and cape buffalo.



Thompson's Gazelles

The rains had been good earlier this year and the animals were taking advantage of the tall grasses and plentiful water. There were young animals everywhere.

True to the camp's name, the rhinos were especially plentiful. This white rhino was one of many we saw that first day.



Grazing White Rhino and Oxpeckers

11: CRASH IN THE GRASS



Black Rhino in Acacia Trees

Our game drives at Ol Pejeta were always productive. Both the white and black rhino were abundant. But so too were the cape buffalo, zebra, impala, gazelle, jackal, and hyena.

The black rhino above was waiting for us one morning just outside our camp. You can see the tall grass and twisted acacia trees that lined our path into and out of camp each day.

On this drive, we found ourselves in the middle of a herd of cape buffalo on the flat grass plain near where we landed. They were powerful beasts who looked us straight in the eye.

They were grazing when we arrived. Some moved to make way for our vehicle as we drove slowly through them on the road. Most were unaffected, grazing in the grass and looking about from time-to-time.

Then, as I looked to the left, I noticed a large bull trying to hook up with a female. She was not interested and moved just as he jumped to mount her. You can see the result in these two pictures.



Mating Attempt



Unintended Result

Her movement left him flopped on top of a nearby bull. The leaping bull's expression says it all. Nobody is happy.

If that was a crash of one kind on the African grassland what follows is a true crash of another kind. A family, or crash, of white rhino we found a few minutes later proved equally entertaining.

After making our way through the cape buffalo herd, we came upon a male and female white rhino grazing together. A newborn calf was with them.



Mother and Calf White Rhinos

The mom and calf meandered down the road as we approached. Dad, off to the side, continued his grazing.

The calf started galloping around mom in a circle until she spotted us. Then she came to an abrupt stop.

She was small, no older than a month or two by our guide's estimation. But while she may have been small, she knew no fear. As we watched, she faced us down and threatened to charge.



Squaring Off

Then she raced back to her mom and ran in a wide circle.



Father Rhino and Calf

Then she sprinted to her dad only to run more circles around him. Neither mom nor dad raised their head while she did this. Then she stopped briefly to graze next to dad.



Zebra Chase

But she was not done. Soon, it was back to mom to follow her for a bit. And then she was off again.



Warthog Chase

This time she was after a bird, then a zebra, and then a wart hog. Each chase was enthusiastic and bounding.

Who knew a rhino could run so quickly? After three short chases of a bird and a zebra, she was back after the zebra for one more try.

All her targets avoided her easily, but she was undeterred. The joy was in the race. It was like watching a puppy run in a park. Only, this was a very big puppy with the beginnings of a fierce horn on her head.



Bounding Baby White Rhino

12: SUNDOWNER SURPRISE



African Sunset

Because we are on the equator, the days and nights both last 12 hours and the sunrises and sunsets happen quickly. There is great light for photographs around sunrise and sunset. Beautiful hues of reds and blues filled the skies on this partly overcast night as the sun began to set.

This evening, however, will be remembered for what happened just before sunset. A surprise came just as we were opening wine and snacks on a picnic table set up next to our vehicle. We had driven off the dirt road to park on grassland and enjoy the sunset.

Everyone was chatting and reliving the day when the driver and spotter began quickly gathering up the food and chairs and directed us to get back in the vehicle.

"Lions," our driver said. "There are lions nearby."

We moved quickly into the vehicle. It is one thing to see lions from

inside the safety of a vehicle. It is quite another thing to be told they are nearby when you are standing on the grass.

Once we were in the vehicle, the spotter explained that he had seen a pride of lions gathered on a nearby hill maybe 200 yards away. He started the vehicle and began driving toward the pride.



Girls on a Hill



Waiting with the Pride

We counted 12 lions, mostly female, lounging in the grass on the hill. They were sitting, looking out into the grass.

Seeing so many lions in one place gave us an opportunity to see how distinctive they were from one another. It was easy to tell one from another.



Waiting Intently

The one walking below had been sitting with the lioness on the left. Note how spotted her legs are.



Changing Position

After watching the pride for a while, a second safari vehicle arrived, and we pulled up to make room. We left awhile later before the lions moved off the hill.



Females Watching

When we got back, we cleaned up and gathered around the fire pit set in front of the mess tent. Folks from the other vehicle arrived and we exchanged stories. As we talked, we could hear something across the small stream that separated us from the waterhole.

It was too dark to see anything but the sounds we heard suggested something big. Dinner was called before we could get a flashlight to see what we were hearing. Our imaginations would have to fill in the blank.

13: STALAG PANZEE



Fence Around the Chimpanzee Rescue Center

If you are old enough, you may remember a TV program called Hogan's Heroes. It was a comedy set in a fictional German prison camp during World War II. Hogan was an Allied prisoner and head of a Special Operations unit operating secretly within the prison that kept foiling the best efforts of Camp Commandant Wilhelm Klink and his incompetent sidekick Sergeant Hans Schultz.

I found myself thinking about that old program when we took a trip one afternoon to the Chimpanzee Rescue Center located in the Ol Pejeta Conservancy. It has a fence worthy of a prison camp and the earnest young Kenyan who guided us around the property had a slight stutter that sometimes interrupted his otherwise flawless presentation. The combination somehow tickled my brain and brought back memories of old TV.

Our guide was gracious and gave us a thorough tour as we walked around the fence that enclosed the area dedicated to the

chimpanzees. There were only a few chimpanzees to see, however. It turns out they do not come out of the shade when it is hot. Since the facility does not open until 11 a.m. and closes at 4 p.m., my guess is visitors rarely see many of the chimpanzees who have been sent here for rehabilitation.

None of this diminishes the good work they do at the Center. They shelter and protect chimpanzees sent to them from outside Kenya. Chimpanzees, it turns out, are not endemic to the area.



Reticulated Giraffe

Our visit to the chimpanzee conservancy came toward the end of a morning drive that treated us to our first sighting of reticulated giraffe. Their distinctive markings give them a quite different look from the Maasai giraffe we had already seen.

Our first sighting was from a distance. Above, you can see several of them cresting a distant hill.

We caught sight of them while we were watching a mother and young rhino in some tall grass. We were learning to tell the white and black rhino apart. The white grazes on grasses. The black is smaller and

grazes principally on bushes. The location of this pair suggested they might be black rhino.



Black Rhino Mother and Calf



Black Rhino Calf

It was their upper lips that finally gave them away. Unlike the white rhino whose lip is flat, the black rhino's upper lip is pointed to pick

leaves off a bush. The close-up of the calf shows the distinctive upper lip.

We were absorbed following the two rhinos for some time before we realized the giraffe were near. When we finally looked up and beyond the rhino, we saw six reticulated giraffes watching us from a safe distance.



Black Rhino Calf with Reticulated Giraffe

The closer view below, taken after we left the rhino and headed out, gives a better view of their distinctive coat pattern. There were two more giraffes off camera to the right.

We left this spot and traveled on. Wart hogs, jackals, hartebeests, elephants, storks, gazelles, and impala filled the rest of our morning drive.

Our afternoon drive included the sundowner surprise we shared in the last chapter. That same drive gave us our first close contact with a spotted hyena and its cubs.



Reticulated Giraffe

We were late heading back that afternoon and it was getting dark. It was the first time our vehicle had its headlights on. As we drove, we noticed four giraffes to our left. Oddly, none of them were grazing. Instead, each was staring intently in the direction of the camp.

"Leopard," our guide said. "She must be up ahead."

Our spotter turned on a bright red lamp near the windshield as the driver slowed down. Then a leopard darted out from the bush in front of the vehicle and quickly belly-crawled back into the bush and out of sight.

It happened in a flash. And I missed it entirely from the back of the vehicle. Our companions up front caught a glimpse and were happy to provide full descriptions over dinner that night.

Would I see a leopard on the trip? We still had six days on safari and four of those days were in lion country.

14: BUMP IN THE NIGHT



Cape Buffalo

Our first night at the Rhino Camp in Ol Pejeta was like our nights at the other camps. The tent was similar and located a short walk from the dining tent. And, we were escorted to our tent and zipped in after dinner by one of our Maasai hosts.

What distinguished it, however, were the chewing sounds and grunts that woke me up in the middle of the first night. They were coming from directly behind the bed. Outside the tent, mind you, but close enough to be able to tell that horns of some sort pushed against the tent wall.

Surprisingly, I did not feel any concern. We were zipped in after all. But in the morning, we discovered just how big our visitor was. A large, steaming buffalo paddy sat next to the walkway between our tent and the dining tent.

A waterhole across a small stream from our tent also reinforced how close we were to the wildlife. During our short stay we saw elephants, gazelles, baboons, rhinos, and monkeys there. The steep banks of the stream provided a natural barrier from the waterhole, but less than 50 yards separated us from the animals.

Our ride out each morning took us through a grassy area filled with short acacia trees up a hill to an open plain. The first morning out we spotted a mature male lion in the trees by the side of the road. Our driver tried to follow him as he walked away but could not get through the thick and spike-filled trees.



Black Rhino

Most of our time exploring, however, was spent in and around the abundant grasslands. You would expect the rhino to be plentiful near a Rhino Camp and they were. These two black rhinos were representative of the many we saw.

The lions were everywhere we visited. And everyone, especially the guides, get excited when one or more are near. Not only do they elicit interest. They also garner respect.

They are very interactive and superb at hunting as a group. They are so respected that each is given a name by the savanna's human residents. So too are the leopards and cheetahs. The only other animal given this distinction is the elephant, perhaps the most revered animal in Africa.



Eland

But other species we saw were interesting in their own ways. Take the eland, Africa's largest antelope. The massive adult male stands five feet tall at its shoulder and can clear a four-foot fence from a standstill.

Africa's great birds range from eagles, to ostrich, to secretary birds. The latter has the legs of a crane and the head of an eagle. Often roosting in a thorny acacia tree, it prowls the ground on foot for his prey. It can often be seen stomping on a lizard or snake to secure a meal. At more than four feet tall, it is a formidable predator. Long quills on its head that look like writing utensils inspired its name.



Secretary Bird

The ostrich is intriguing for its own reasons. It is an even taller flightless bird that can sprint up to 43 miles per hour and run at 31 miles per hour for extended distances. And it is strong. An adult ostrich can kill a lion or a man with its kick.



Ostrich

Then there is the banded mongoose, a creature who lives in colonies and has a complex social structure. They eat insects, small reptiles, and birds. Here they are seen foraging for insect larvae.



Banded Mongoose



Waterbuck

The waterbuck has the distinction of being a less favored prey of the lion. Its furry neck makes it less appetizing to predators. As their name suggests, they are rarely far from water.

Our other neighbors at Ol Pejeta included the zebra, abundant and pregnant everywhere we went, as well as gazelles, warthogs, hyenas, and jackals. The image below is typical of what we saw, many pregnant zebras in every group.



Pregnant Zebras

15: DRY SEASON SHOWERS



Black Rhino

Reports of an extended drought in Kenya made me hesitant about scheduling our trip. You must do it well in advance, almost 12 months, and at the time we made reservations parts of Kenya had been in drought for years.

I could never tell from my home in Atlanta whether the areas we would be traveling to had suffered from the drought. I was not familiar enough with our destinations to match them to the online drought reports I was seeing. In the end, I deferred to the advice of our outfitter.

Our leap of faith was rewarded with a wet spring and summer in Kenya before our trip and an abundance of game when we arrived. All during our travels, we were reminded of this rain by the tall grasses and large numbers of young and pregnant animals. Among the zebra, it seemed like every third animal was either heavy with child or nursing one.



Nursing Zebra

Years of hearing about steaming jungles and hot equatorial regions had me anticipating heat and lots of it. As it turned out, my preconceptions were wrong. The climate was much more temperate than I expected. We were not in sweltering jungles but, instead, cooler in high altitude grasslands.

Our equatorial African weather was what you would expect if you moved the wildlife to Denver for the summer. Cool mornings and evenings with moderate temperatures in the afternoon. I had been told this by a friend before we left but it was still a surprise.

We were traveling in the dry fall season, expecting little or no rain. Our experience with clear skies, however, changed abruptly on our second day at Rhino Camp. Clouds gathered during our morning game drive and then, just before our scheduled afternoon drive, the skies dropped buckets of rain throughout the region.

Muddy roads and high, fast flowing streams became the norm. For the next few days, here and at the Lion Camp, rains would come each evening raising creek levels and making the roads wet and slick with mud.

To our Maasai drivers and spotters this presented no problems. Drives went on as usual even when the roads got messy.



Muddy Roads

On our last day at Rhino Camp, the rain and a heavy wind hit just as we were starting our afternoon drive. We jumped into the vehicle and began rolling down the canvas side protectors with their vinyl window panels. Our guides worked frantically to secure the panels from the outside until the passenger compartment was mostly dry.

Our driver started the engine and began driving up the slick road. Wet cross winds whipped at the vehicle as we made slow progress. Visibility was low and our spotter was struggling with a front side

panel. It would not close completely and the rain was drenching the front compartment. There was no complaint from the spotter, but the other guests and we elected to suspend the drive and return to camp.

It was a good decision even though the skies cleared about 20 minutes later (which meant our sister vehicle was having a successful drive). We spent a cool afternoon around a campfire overlooking a busy waterhole.



Gazelles at the Waterhole

While we sat and exchanged stories, a small herd of grant's gazelles came and took their refreshment. And then a dozen or so baboons arrived and ran them off.

A troop of vervet monkeys started moving between trees next to the waterhole. The one below was returning to a high spot to keep an eye on the baboons.

When it got dark, we could no longer see what was happening across the stream that separated us from the waterhole. With an overcast sky far removed from city lights, it was very dark except for the

flames from the fire and muted lights in the nearby dining tent.

Just because we could not see the waterhole, however, did not mean it was abandoned. Notwithstanding our conversation, we could hear movement and the occasional grunt across the stream.



Vervet Monkey

Not bad for an afternoon off. Those who continued in the rain returned with stories of great sightings but none of us felt deprived.

16: HOW MANY WIVES WOULD YOU LIKE?



Cheetah Welcoming Party

There was no game drive on our last morning at Rhino Camp. Instead, we and two other guests were headed to Lion Camp in the Maasai Mara by way of Land Cruiser and small plane. The rains had made the nearby grass airstrip unusable, so we had a 90-minute drive ahead of us to reach our plane's new departure destination in Nanyuki.

By 8:00 a.m. we were off in a fully loaded safari vehicle with our driver, spotter, camp director and one other. The morning air was crisp as we headed off. We quickly passed the airstrip we landed on just days earlier and continued driving on dirt roads for a full 40 minutes until we reached the gates of the Conservancy.

While we were moving quickly, we still spotted animals as we drove by. The handsome wart hog below was just one example.

From the Conservancy gate, we drove on a wider dirt road that eventually became paved. We began to see people on the roadside and

the occasional one-story building. The children we saw by the road were all in school uniforms and a few buildings had hand painted signs.



Warthog

As we got close to the city, the streets and buildings got more elaborate and cars and motorcycles joined us on the road. Billboards began appearing after the road expanded to four lanes. One described a local bank as “the bank for interesting people.”

We turned off the four-lane road before reaching Nanyuki to make our way to the airport. After finding a closed gate where we hoped to enter, we doubled back to explore another route.

This took us through a gated animal club. A tree lined road led past open fields to another gate and then through the club’s animal orphanage. Young cape buffalo, hippos, and ostriches were kept in pens alongside the road.

When we reached the back gate of the club, we found ourselves on a dirt path that paralleled a black asphalt runway. Soon we were waiting on the tarmac near the plane.



Transportation to our Next Camp

We said our goodbyes to our hosts and exchanged stories while we waited for passengers from another outfitter to arrive. Our driver made his way into the cockpit to check out the plane. Had he flown before?

When we asked, he straightened his body and jumped straight in the air like the Maasai warrior he was. “Only like this,” he said.



The Maasai Warrior Jump

Of course, the jump looked different than the one above. Our driver was wearing a leather jacket and jeans. And, he was standing in front of an airplane.

Our flight from Rhino Camp to Lion Camp made two stops as we flew across the Great Rift Valley. In less than 90 minutes, though, we touched down on a large grassy field in the Maasai Mara region of south Kenya.



Great Rift Valley

There we met our Maasai hosts and boarded a Land Cruiser for the ride to Lion Camp. What would we see during our next four days? As the short ride into camp demonstrated, it would be plenty.

The traditional Maasai culture that is rooted in village life and dependent on cattle is still very much alive in Kenya. The Maasai we met during our travels are caught between two worlds and many are working thoughtfully to adjust.

Never was this more apparent than when a Canadian guest posed a question to the driver and spotter who picked us up from the airplane to take us to the Lion Camp.

"How many wives would you like to have?" She asked.

Our driver and spotter both appeared to be in their late 20s or early 30s and both were dressed in the colorful traditional attire of the Maasai. Each was married with one wife.

Our spotter answered first. "If I work hard and can afford more, I would like to have three or four wives," he said. "They will tend my cattle and increase my wealth."

Our driver agreed. He would like to have three wives. The number of children and wives you have define your prosperity in traditional Maasai society.

But not all the Maasai we met agreed. Our driver on later game drives was a prosperous man. He had taken the earnings from his guiding and invested in property. In addition to his cattle and livestock, he also owned apartments that he rented out to others.

"The world is changing," he said. "One wife is enough for me."

The questioning ended when we rounded a corner and headed down a hill a few minutes after leaving the landing strip. In front of us, beside the road were two elephants feeding their young near a meandering stream. One mother was alone with her calf. The other had company. Both were still nursing.

Shortly after this sighting, we came upon the mother cheetah and cubs pictured at the beginning of this chapter. They were lounging and not the least bit interested in us.

We arrived in camp in time for lunch and then settled into our tent. As with every other camp, our hosts were gracious and attentive. And, like the other camps, the management and staff were all Maasai.



Mother and Child Outside Lion Camp

This was Lion Camp. We would stay here four days and nights to cap off our trip. The camp was beside a river that was home to a pod of hippos. The guest tents faced out upon a vast plain of grass into the conservancy. Lions and elephants and other game would fill the nights with sound.

The afternoon game drive would start at 4 o'clock.

17: DISTRACTING HIS HIGHNESS



Roar!

This chapter is rated Feline X as we recount our first stop on an afternoon drive out of Lion Camp. After lunch and time to reconnect with friends from earlier camps, we headed out with a couple from California and a mother and daughter from Canada.

Our driver took us to a spot where several lions, and a few safari vehicles, were gathered. The lions, one male and several females,

were near a zebra kill that the male claimed. The male was standing guard over the kill while a single female attempted unsuccessfully to get close.



Guarding the Kill

He was not eating when we arrived. Apparently, he had had is fill. But he was intent on keeping others away. He might have been successful if the females did not have their ways.



Warning Growl

Above, you can see him barking at a female trying to get close. She stayed a respectful distance away while he remained near.



Two Females Nearby

Not far away two other females were completely ignoring him. Once he made his point to the encroaching female and she backed off, he walked past these two females to a nearby tree where three other females lounge in the shade.



Returning to Mate

He had not forgotten the kill. He stopped to turn around and roar in the direction of the kill before he engaged with these three females. It was enough to keep the lingering female away from her anticipated meal.



Another Roar

But then it was time to procreate. The male chose a female and started nuzzling her and then mounted her. Roars erupted from them when they were done.



Mating Roar

Then, slowly and panting, he ambled back to his kill. No one else approached the zebra carcass.

After standing next to the kill for a few minutes, he returned to the tree where the females were lounging and mounted another female. Again, when he was done both he and the female let out a roar and he left panting.

This sequence repeated itself a few times until the tired male sat with the females and watched the original encroaching female lunch on the kill. The picture below shows the moment when feminine wiles trumped the male's effort to monopolize the kill.



Male Rests While Female Dines



Mealtime

The female now had the carcass to herself and chomped away at what remained of the zebra.

Before long, though, she had company of another sort. A second female approached but did not challenge for the zebra. Instead, she waited close by.



Waiting Female

We drove on soon after this. We were less than an hour into our afternoon drive and had already seen a lot. Would we see anything as interesting during the rest of the day's drive?

The answer turned out to be yes. Before the day was over, we would learn how to eat a tree and watch a mother Cheetah and her three cubs search for prey on the plain.

18: HOW TO EAT A TREE



Lunch Break on the Savanna

Imagine your foot was redesigned to add inches of thick padding under your heel bone so that you could walk silently whenever you wanted. Kind of like a superpower. You and your similarly equipped friends could go about your way without making a sound.

Then add to that the ability to communicate at very low frequencies without opening your mouth. Say that these sounds could travel for miles and be heard by others like you. Like a whale, your messages could cover vast distances at the speed of sound.

What if your senses were so well developed that you could smell water more than a mile away and sense thunder at great distances from vibrations in the soil?

And what if you had an appendage that contained tens of thousands of muscles and not a single bone. An appendage with the strength to lift 700 pounds and so flexible that it can pick up a single blade of grass?

You would be remarkable. You would be part of a “memory” (or herd) of bright, caring, communicative and powerful individuals. You would also be perfectly designed to eat a tree. A gardener, of sorts, for the African wild.

Our travels through Africa showed us much of the handiwork of these gardeners. Mostly, swaths of trees and bushes pushed over, pulled up, and partially eaten.



Baby and a Tree Feast

Then one afternoon we got to watch the process with a small memory of elephants on the Maasai Mara savanna. In the image you can see the youngest one is still nursing and not participating in the green feast. The rest are consuming a tree they have just pushed over.

Below, a young elephant chews on a branch and then pushes the damaged tree to get to a chosen morsel.



Grabbing a Branch



Pushing

The trunk, obviously, is essential to eating a tree and to much of everything else the elephant does. It is used to gather water, express affection, and to give a young one a needed nudge.



Nudge from Mom

But consider what a challenge it must be to learn to use a trunk. Elephant babies are born with a short, recessed trunk that grows to full extension in just a few days.

With thousands of muscles and no bone, it cannot be easy to learn to control this all-important appendage. The images below show just a few of the skills needed to live with a trunk.

First, you must learn to avoid stepping on it. Then, to lift it and hold something. And, to twist it to bring that something to your mouth. Sometimes, while you are learning, a full body twist is needed to get the trunk in just the right position.



High Step



Trunk Curl and Hold



Twist to the Mouth



Full Body Twist



Success! Ready for Tree Eating

And then, when the practice is just too much, you might need a sibling to help you give your trunk a rest.



A Needed Trunk Rest

19: HUNTING WITH CHILDREN



Cheetah Up Close

In Kenya, the cats all have names. It is a sign of respect and a reflection of their relatively small numbers.

This cheetah is Amani, a mother to three cubs we became acquainted with while visiting the Lion Camp. Here we see her in the late afternoon of our second day at camp. She is scanning the grasslands of the Maasai Mara plain.

We were in our vehicle when our driver saw three young cheetahs playing in the grass on a hill. Mom was nowhere near but soon spotted down a hill and across a stream. A couple of safari vehicles were close by. We made our way towards mom and waited.

Just after we arrived, Amani turned toward her cubs who were at least 100 yards away. She chirped a few times, not loudly but distinctly, and her cubs came running.



Chirping to Call Her Cubs

Once together, the four made their way deeper into the high grasses of the savanna looking for a potential kill. As they prowled, Amani would stop and mount high objects to get a better view.



Climbing for a Better View

Sometimes it was a dead tree or an abandoned termite mound.



High Ground on a Termite Hill

Sometimes one or more of the cubs would join her and mimic her actions. More eyes see more.



The Cubs are Easily Distracted

Other times, the playful cubs would commandeer the high ground, leaving Amani to search from ground level. There were several safari vehicles watching their activities. Each kept a respectful distance and Amani went about her business.

She continued her wanderings followed loosely by her cubs. Sometimes all three gathered together. Other times one or more would wander off.

After more than a half hour, Amani settled down on a large termite hill to rest while keeping an eye on the surrounding grassland. We moved our vehicle to a spot with a clear view of the activities.



Four Keeping Watch

Her cubs joined her and kept watch for a while. As you can see, we had a great view. Notice the mantles on the cubs' backs. This extra fur stays with the cubs for a year. Many believe the mantle makes them harder to see in the grass.

After a while, two of the cubs began to play. A playful pat or swipe at the face from one cub to another. Then a chase around the bush near

the termite mound and a wrestling match in the grass. Then another chase followed by more tumbling and more wrestling.

The third cub watched from a position close to her mom. Careful at first, she eventually joined the ruckus.

Amani ignored the activity to search the horizon. When she finally left the termite mound, the cubs followed her off. We headed back to the camp feeling privileged.

CUBS AT PLAY



Chase!



Batting at Each Other



Squaring Off



Roll Over!



Oh No! Is Somebody Watching This?

20: BLUE JEAN SYMPHONY



Topi with Characteristic 'Blue' Haunch

Sometimes the narrative comes easily, like when we follow a large pride of lions hunting a herd of zebra or a smaller group of lions gets rebuffed by an elephant matriarch. The action drives you through the story.

But other times it is a challenge. The vastness and complexity of your surroundings overwhelms your ability to communicate through words.

The vitality and diversity of what you experience is so far removed from your day-to-day reality that it is difficult to describe. In a way, it feels like being immersed in a great symphony and then trying to use words to describe its beauty and grandeur.

On a safari, a passing moment will sometimes capture a bit of the magic of the surroundings. Here, our vehicle passed a waterbuck galloping in front of a family of elephants across the Amboseli plain.

In one moment, we capture the vast plains, its deep grasses, the movement of the waterbuck, and the nearby elephants making their way across the savanna.



Waterbuck and Elephants

Other times, a herd captures your eye and a detail tells you something special is happening. Here it is a group of topi, with their blue jean colored hind quarters, doing more than grazing.



Topi Grazing

On this morning, we were headed to see a male lion with a kill. As we passed this small herd, however, we noticed two of the topi were acting differently.



Two Males Chasing

Two of the males are interacting aggressively. One is jumping. The other is head down facing off his rival.



Squaring Off

It was a challenge for dominance. We stopped to watch. The two males chased and confronted one another repeatedly.

The females paid little attention. They had seen it all before. But, for us it was new, so we lingered.



Locked Together

The contest alternated between chases and square offs until one of the males backed off.

We then moved on. Time to catch up with the lion having lunch. Within minutes we were watching a gorged male and its kill.

We caught up with him in a clump of bushes just as he was finishing his meal. After casually noting our presence, he picked up the remains of his prey and walked into the bush to store it in a less visible location.

Then he settled down and dozed off. His belly was full. He was a voracious but ultimately drowsy element of our symphony.



Male Lion with its Kill



Moving the Kill to a Safer Place



After-Dinner Nap

We headed back to camp.

We had witnessed a small movement from the safari symphony on this drive. And while it was always fun to see a lion, the dance of the blue-jeaned topi reminded me of the many non-predators we had witnessed on our drives.

If the big cats and their antics were the melody to the symphony, then these non-predators were the background music that gave the symphony color and complexity.



Teamwork for a 360 Degree View

This bit of the background is an interlude that suggests wariness. The two zebras are not cuddling. They are watching the horizon cooperatively, each taking half and protecting the heard.

Dancing vultures bouncing across an old termite mound to air out their wings provide a light interlude.



Dancing Vulture

While a family of gazelles bring an alert sense of calm and order to the day.



Gazelles on the Move

21: AFRICAN NIGHTS



Another Colorful Sunset on the Savanna

As the sun sets on the African plain, safari protocol calls for a sundowner where drinks and snacks are served on picnic tables set up next to the vehicle. On a couple of occasions during our trip, this tradition was interrupted by more interesting activities.

Once we followed four male lions as they headed to a nearby watering hole (7: Pooh on You). Another time a pride of lions appeared on a nearby hill (12: Sundowner Surprise) causing us to get in the vehicle and head over to watch.

But usually we stuck with tradition, loading up the vehicle after a safari sundowner and heading back to camp as darkness approached. Typically, it was an uneventful trip back as the dark overtook us but sometimes something interesting happened, as when we stumbled on a leopard hunting nearby the road in the bushy terrain near Rhino Camp (13: Stalag Panzee).

Once back in camp, there was usually time for a quick shower before a late dinner. Guests would gather around a fire pit outside the dining room before dinner to relax and exchange stories.

At Rhino Camp, a waterhole sits 50 yards away from the fire pit across a small stream with a deep embankment. One evening there, we heard sounds coming from the waterhole and were greeted with this view when one of our Maasai hosts brought out a search light.



Rhinos at the Waterhole

Their quick unveiling and proximity gave new meaning to the concept of an intimate safari experience. There was no sense of imminent danger. Only one of awe.

I was not a big fan of our two-night drives. Yes, I was interested in seeing what was out an about at night. But the bright intrusive lights needed to view the animals and the sense that we were somewhere we should not be, left me with an odd feeling.

Nonetheless, the few images I took during these drives do illustrate how active the animals were while we were sleeping. And, how active they were while we were being escorted to our tents after dinner.

I was never concerned about safety during the trip except for a moment during one of our escorted tent walks at Lion Camp. The

setting there placed the tents in a line facing out onto an open plain of tall grasses.

The night before had been particularly noisy with what sounded like two prides of lions exchanging roars and barks late into the night. First, you would hear them off to the left. And then, a few minutes later, the roars would come from the right.



Night Lions

That same night we were awakened by the sound of heavy breathing and chomping behind the tent, likely a hippo from the stream behind the camp. And another guest reported elephants near their tent.

As related earlier (3: Tented Camps), the nights were full of sound. Everything from the indescribable wails of hyena to the snorts of cape buffalo and hippo, to the barks and roars of lions reminded you each night where you were.

But the back and forth serenade of the lions was something special to hear. It emphasized just how open our camp was and why Maasai warriors are good to have near.

The one night when the security and safety entered my mind, we were being escorted in the dark along a path to our tent in Lion Camp and talking about just how open the area was and just how long the grasses were. Certainly, tall enough to hide a lion.



Elephant Exposed

And then we noticed. Our escort was scanning the grasses with his flashlight when he was not shining it ahead on our path. A reasonable thing to do, for sure, but not very comforting when all he carried was a wooden pole.

We had headed back to the tent later that night than usual, having stayed in the dining tent after dinner to socialize and then, with a break in the cloud cover that did not last long enough, to try and photograph the night sky.

The equatorial sky shows more of the Milky Way than the Northern Hemisphere and even though we were near full moon it was worth trying to take a picture. Those of you who have followed my blog will know that night photography is a hobby, particularly photographing the night sky from remote locations.



Hippos Disturbed by our Bright Light

Our attempt that night failed. The clouds rolled in before we could take the shot. Still, the image we got does make for a nice representation of night in the Lion Camp.

What you see in addition to a cloudy sky with a few clear patches revealing a bit of the heavens, is a small gathering tent and some of the fence that surrounds the kitchen areas. The dining tent is off picture to the left.



Our Camp at Night

22: DINOSAURS ON THE WING



African Vulture

Airing out her wings on a termite mound overlooking the vast grasslands of the Maasai Mara, this vulture repeats a process her distant ancestors practiced in this same spot. As we watched this afternoon, she walked and bounced back and forth across the mound surveying the plains while she aired out her wings.



Plains Dancer

Modern paleontologists have firmly established a direct link between modern birds and ancient dinosaurs. They are part of the same family.

Some birds can draw a direct link to flying dinosaurs of the Cretaceous Period that ended more than 65 million years ago. Others follow from dinosaurs who took flight only after the end of the Cretaceous Period.



Wading Spoonbill

If you finished school more than ten years ago, forget what you learned about dinosaurs. Modern scientists using tools undreamed of decades ago are unlocking secrets about dinosaurs at a rapid rate.

The unique breathing system of birds that enables them to extract oxygen as they inhale and as they exhale was developed by their dinosaur ancestors. How did grazing dinosaurs reach sizes unheard of today? You guessed it. Part of what enabled such grand sizes was the dinosaur's more efficient breathing system still used today by birds.

But birds do not look like dinosaurs. Think again. Many dinosaurs, scholars know, sported feathers of one sort or another. Even the giant T-Rex with teeth the size of railroad spikes had primitive feathers.

And if you think there are no worthy avian heirs to the ferocity of T-Rex consider this. The common ostrich has leg muscles and claws powerful enough to dispatch a lion.



Two Male Ostrich Contending for a Female

But all dinosaurs were not T-Rex. For hundreds of millions of years, dinosaurs ruled the planet not by being fierce but by being adaptive and filling every available niche in the environment.



Lilac Breasted Roller

Which is why Kenya is the perfect place to connect with our modern dinosaurs. In Kenya, more than 1,000 species of birds fill nearly every available niche. That is more species of bird in one country than in all North America.



Kori Bustard Hunts on the Ground

If you want to see dinosaurs, this is the place to be. Everything from vultures to ostriches to spoonbills are here. So too are lilac breasted rollers, kori bustards, kingfishers, pelicans, secretary birds, eagles, hawks, Egyptian geese, and many more.

Take a closer look the next time you go bird watching. There is something unique and strange about these creatures. They come from a world now mostly lost and extinct, the world of velociraptors and the once mighty T-Rex.



Tawny Eagle



Secretary Bird



Marabous Storks



Pied Kingfisher

23: THE CROSSING



Wildebeest or Gnu

No one ever called this beast a gnu while we were in Africa. Instead, it was called the wildebeest or blue wildebeest. But it is also known as a brindled gnu. Here, you can see them crossing a river.

And, as you may have guessed by now, we are spending this day on a long game drive to take in the Great Wildebeest Migration. The river crossing we are headed for is in the Maasai Mara Reserve adjacent to the Olare Motorogi Conservancy where our camp is located.

It will take a couple of hours driving through the bush to get to where the wildebeest are crossing the river. This should give us a great chance to experience the breadth of the Reserve and to see the migration from several perspectives before we arrive for its dramatic conclusion.

As we drive across the plains our guides point out a herd of wildebeest in the distance. They are barely specs on the horizon but other wildlife, like the lion below, seem alert to their presence.



Lion Surveying the Savanna



Giraffe Keeping Watch

Then, further on and closer to the river crossing, our path and that of the wildebeest begin to converge. Above, a pair of giraffes inspect the area for predators as the wildebeest make their way.

Eventually we get close to a large herd of wildebeest with several zebra in their ranks. With the van stopped, we sit and watch.



Inside the Herd

We continue toward the river crossing, cresting a hill and driving down to the river. Soon, a group of wildebeest and a few zebras race down the same hill.



Downhill Sprint

Just 50 yards from the river, the wildebeest and zebra congregate near a lone tree in the grassland. Strength in numbers. They wait and so do we.

When will they make their dash for the river? No one knows. The grasses are high so if there is a predator between the wildebeest and the river, we cannot see it.



Waiting to Cross

Our vehicle and several others are parked and waiting off to the side of what would be a straight run for the wildebeest to the river. All our companions in the safari vehicle are standing, waiting for the wildebeest to charge.

Thoughts of television specials showing thousands of wildebeest racing across a river in a mad dash while crocodiles and other predators snap and grab at them cross my mind. Is this what we will see?

We are near the end of the migration season and the herd is not as big as my TV-spectacular-imagination has led me to expect. And

being late, some of the predators like the crocodile may be satiated.



Waiting

Still, anticipation is in the air. The wildebeest and their zebra companions are anxious as they wait. Then quickly, one and then another race toward the water and then the rest break away from the tree and charge as a group to the river.

It is a race to the water and down the bank and into the river. They cross quickly only to run into a steep embankment on the other side. Our van races to the riverbank too. We catch up as the wildebeest plunge into the river and work their way up the opposing bank.

Climbing the embankment is a challenge. One stumbles badly on the steep incline and falls. But the rest manage the river and climb without incident. No predators appear and we have witnessed a safe passage.

I confess to some disappointment. Not that I wished harm on any wildebeest or zebra, but I was surprised there was not more drama.



Climbing the Embankment





Loosing Footing

We pulled our van back from the riverbank and, with the other vehicles nearby, watch as more wildebeest run down the hill and gather under the tree. They will be next to charge the river.

And, that is when it happened.



Waiting for the Next Charge

A flash of black followed quickly by a flash of light brown in front of us. Tall grass parting as they moved swiftly. A wildebeest darts between the vehicles in a desperate attempt to evade a lioness.

The lioness pounces and catches the wildebeest by the hindquarters. In an instant she is on his back and a fierce struggle begins. We watched as the two wrestle in the tall grass.



The Lioness Grabs the Wildebeest

It is an uneven match. The lioness sinks its teeth into the wildebeest's throat and takes it to the ground. The wildebeest kicks wildly, struggling to get away the whole time.

Then the lioness grips the wildebeest's throat harder and patiently applies pressure. The wildebeest's kicks get slower and slower.

The lioness keeps her grip firm. After a few minutes, the kicking stops and the lioness drags the carcass into the bushes.



Jaws Gripped Tight on the Wildebeest's Throat



Moving the Kill to Taller Grass

Our lioness is winded from the struggle and sits panting before giving off a roar. With her kill hidden, she leaves the area to inform her pride.



Panting and Calling Out

All while this is happening, behind us some of the wildebeest are starting to move. First a few, led by a zebra, and then more and, like before, suddenly all of them were racing to the river.



Race to the River

Our vehicle hurries back to the riverbank to watch this second crossing. This time they crossed where the bank on the other side is not as steep. All of them make it across and we head back to camp.



Easier Second Crossing

Our drive back that afternoon includes a detour to a spotted hyena's den. It sits near some brush on a low hill. This is what we first spotted as our vehicle approached.



Spotted Hyena Guarding Den

After a few moments, she moved to the bushes just outside the den. There she stood with her gaze fixed on us as we sat and watched. She was tense and still.



Mother and Cubs

The cubs, perhaps less aware, stayed in their nest. We could see them interact with each other. They ignored us for the most part, raising a head only now and then to check us out.

We would be back soon.

24: HIPPOPOTAMI FOR BREAKFAST



Elephants in the Amboseli Marsh

The hippopotamus is one of Africa's most feared animals. Weighing up to 3,000 pounds, it has an aggressive and unpredictable temperament. And, despite its weight and short legs, it can run at speeds up to 19 miles per hour over short distances.



Hippo Grazing Near the Amboseli Marsh

For us, they had been an elusive background creature with our only sightings being from a distance around the marshes in Amboseli National Park. So, we were excited when we learned on our arrival that a pod of hippos lived in the river just behind Lion Camp.

Unfortunately, our raised expectations went unfulfilled for the first couple of days. Then our proximity was confirmed on an after-dinner game drive when our spotter's searchlight found several grazing in the grass not far from camp. (Chapter 21: African Night.)

On our third day in camp, we stopped mid-morning above a river for breakfast. The embankment on our side was steep, more than eight feet, and sheer, falling straight down to the river. Upstream, the river widened, and the embankments were more modest. Standing on shore some distance from us were two hippos grazing in the grass.



Two Hippo Grazing Down River

We could hear the rest of the pod in the water beneath our picnic spot before we could see them. As we set up breakfast, we would hear them snort as they came to the surface and exhaled.

To see the pod, we had to walk close to the edge of the embankment and look down. There in the water were more than a dozen hippos gathered loosely together. Further downstream an enormous crocodile was napping on shore.



Part of the Pod

Some of the hippos were wading with their heads just above the surface - eyes, ears, and nostrils visible but nothing else. Others were underwater until they surfaced and exhaled through their noses.

For some reason, the sight brought back to mind an old novelty Christmas song from 1953 about a girl who wants a hippopotamus. Performed by Gayla Peevey, the lyrics included this stanza:

*I want a hippopotamus for Christmas
Only a hippopotamus will do
No crocodiles, no rhinoceroses
I only likes hippopotamuses
And hippopotamuses like me, too*

But then this moment was quickly dashed. Our spotter walked to the edge of the embankment and kicked a clod of dirt down to the river.

The resulting splash woke the hippos from their drowsy repose and set them in a rage. All eyes turned to the disturbance and we could feel their aggression as they rushed at the embankment.



A Hippo Size Yawn

This yawn is not part of the aggression. It occurred later during a quiet moment. For a mostly herbivorous creature, those are some serious incisors. The stare below is what we received for several minutes after we rudely interrupted their peaceful river.

You might think of the hippopotamus as the Rodney Dangerfield of Africa's big animals. Rodney was an American comedian who made a living telling jokes about how he never got respect.

Hippos could claim that disrespect as well. Despite their size and ferocity, the hippo fails to make the short list, or Big 5, of African game. That honor is reserved for the elephant, cape buffalo, rhinoceros, lion, and leopard. After their reaction to the dirt clod, I would vote to expand the Big 5 to a Big 6 and let the hippo in.



Here's Looking at You

After our breakfast, we left the hippos and headed on. What I remembered most were their red eyes peering in our direction.

25: JOY AND SORROW



Spotted Hyena

When we planned our safari, we did not really know what to expect. Would we see lots of animals? Would they be off in the distance or would we get close? Would we see young animals? Or, would the area be depleted because of drought?

By now you know the answers to these questions. The abundance and variety of animals exceeded all expectations. And skilled Maasai guides got us close, not just to the animals but also to the action and drama of the African plain.

All this was illustrated as we headed back toward camp from the wildebeest migration. As we reentered the Olare Motorogi Conservancy near our camp, our guide detoured off the road to take another look at a spotted hyena den we had seen earlier. We were close to camp and the light had the soft color it gets just before sunset.

When we got close, we saw a large troop of baboons in the valley just below the small rise where the hyena had its den. There were at least 40 of them and they were on the move heading in the general direction of the camp.

Our guide drove right through the troop and then up a rise. As shown above, the mother hyena was coming out of the den as we arrived. Once she was out, one of her cubs started walking in and out between her legs.



Mother and Cub Interact

The mother seemed both attentive and, from time to time, a bit wary of the attention. There was no feeding going on. Perhaps she was finished for the day

As I watched this warm family moment from my seat on the right side of the Land Cruiser, my wife reached over and tapped me on the shoulder. "Look to your left," she said.



Mother and Cub

As I did, I noticed that all eyes in the vehicle were fixed on a baboon with her newborn baby. The hyena were no more than 10 yards from the right side of the vehicle and the baboon was less than 10 yards from the other side.



Baboon with Newborn

But something was not right. As we watched the baboon cling to her newborn, we noticed that the baby did not move.



Baboon with Newborn

The baby was limp in her arms. She was not responsive. And then, the mother released the stillborn infant and laid her in the grass.



Discarded Stillborn

The mood in the Land Cruiser dampened. We watched a bit longer to see if there was life in the infant but there was not. We headed back to camp.

26: SEARCHING FOR FIGLET



Vulture Surveying the Horizon

Our first pass at spotting a leopard was when we returned to the Rhino Camp after sunset one evening (13: Stalag Panzee). During the drive back, we noticed the heads of four giraffe all intently looking at something ahead of us.

It was getting dark and I was in a back seat. Our driver pulled out a bright spotting lamp and pointed it into the bush.

Just moments later a leopard bolted out of the bush, across the road and into the bush on the other side, disappearing into the darkness. I missed it entirely and wondered if we would get another chance to spot this elusive animal.

Our first game drive at the Lion Camp answered my question. We were having a good day when our driver headed out of the grassland toward a nearby stream. He was heading to an area where a leopard had been spotted earlier.

We drove for some time without finding a trace of a leopard. Then, we received a radio call. A driver nearby had spotted something. The young leopard Figlet was in the bushes further down the stream. We drove over and surveyed the area.

Not knowing if we would succeed and expecting it would be a quick viewing if the leopard was moving in the bush, I readied my camera to shoot into the bushes with a long 400 mm lens. A fast ISO speed, continuous shooting mode, and auto focus were what was needed. I was expecting lower light shooting into the shadows of the bushes and knew the faster ISO speed would give me faster shutter speeds to complement using a longer lens.

When we reached the other driver, it did not look promising. We found heavy brush in front of a meandering stream with a deep bank. There were lots of directions the cat could go without our seeing her.

Our driver pulled away and parked us in front of a spot where a small opening let you look back into the bushes. No one could see or hear a cat.

I secured my camera to my wrist, adjusted the viewing screen on the back so I could look down and see what the camera saw and lowered the camera as far as I could over the side of our vehicle, pointing it toward the opening in the bush. If the cat appeared, the photos would be from her eye level.

We sat with me leaning over the edge of the vehicle until our guides became nervous about my position. “No one is getting out to retrieve your camera if it falls,” they politely pointed out.

We waited quietly. Nothing happened.

Then, suddenly, there was movement in the bush. As I watched, the head of the leopard moved through the bushes toward the opening my camera was watching. I hit the shutter button and the camera took a dozen pictures in quick succession.

She was gone as quickly as she appeared but the thrill of seeing her remained. As did her image.

The autofocus worked imperfectly under these challenging conditions but did manage to focus on Figlet often enough to generate some great images. The one below shows her just as she walks through the opening in the brush.



Figlet Emerges from the Brush

We had seen the elusive leopard in her element and captured her image as she warily moved through the brush near the riverbank. She walked deliberately and low to the ground, taking in her surroundings with her large aqua marine eyes.

It was a great moment and one we did not expect to replicate. A couple of days later, however, our guides started our morning drive

looking for Figlet again. She had been spotted outside the conservancy (meaning there could be more vehicles following her) in a tree near a stream.

When we arrived, three safari vehicles already surrounded a large tree. People were standing in the vehicles, cameras in hand, scanning the tree for a glimpse of the leopard. We pulled up behind the vehicles but saw nothing. After a bit, we drove off, heading upstream to see if maybe the cat had moved.

As we drove through the grass near the stream, we passed the carcass of the animal the leopard had killed the night before. It was stripped to the bone. Next to it was a young hyena.



Hyena at the Leopard Kill

We followed the stream for several minutes. Along the way we saw several Dik-dik but no leopard.

Our driver got back on the radio and chatted with another driver in Swahili. Then we backtracked to approach the original site from another direction. There were still vehicles near the tree, but they were leaving.

We continued driving near the stream. From his radio conversation, our driver knew we were close and pulled up near the stream to watch.

The cat was in the bushes. Another vehicle pulled up behind us along the stream bed and then Figlet appeared walking away from the vehicle along the edge of the bushes giving us this spectacular view.



Figlet Beside the Stream

Our driver pulled our Land Cruiser ahead in the direction Figlet was moving. Another vehicle arrived. Figlet kept walking in the bushes and then turned and walked out into the grass.

Her path brought her directly to our vehicle where she stopped. She was only a few feet away.

Our eyes locked as I pressed the shutter button on my camera with its long lens. I hoped to capture those aqua marine eyes up close but when her eyes caught mine my heart raced and the camera shook, if ever so slightly.

The resulting fuzzy photo reflected a pulse-beating vulnerability I felt in that moment. She was close enough to jump in the vehicle. But, of course, she did not.



Figlet Approaches

Fortunately, I was able to catch her eyes in a longer distance shot when my hands were steady.

Once she walked off, we left as well and drove to an open spot for a picnic breakfast. Within a few feet of our vehicle were hippo tracks in the mud. I walked over to check them out.



Figlet Up Close



Hippo Tracks at Breakfast

27: SEA OF GRASS



Cheetah in a Sea of Grass

The great grasslands of Africa cover almost half of the continent's surface, or about 5 million square miles. Together they cover more space than the 3.8 million square miles of land in all the United States.

In Kenya, a temperate climate matched with wet and dry seasons provide the perfect environment for savannas. Lightning strikes and their resulting fires help keep trees from spreading and converting grasslands to woodlands. Elephants, known as the gardeners of the savanna, also help grasslands thrive by dining on trees and bushes.

Until you visit, it is hard to imagine how vast the open areas are. When we left Rhino Camp in Ol Pejeta it took us almost 40 minutes by car on dirt roads to reach the border of the conservancy. And, even then, there were miles upon miles of more grassland outside.

Seeing the broad vistas that come with these vast savannas inspires awe and humility. Even the great wordsmith Ernest Hemingway acknowledged how words fail to describe the beauty of Kenya's grasslands.

A brown land like Wyoming and Montana but with greater roll and distance . . . Nothing that I have ever read has given any idea of the beauty of the country.

Even the mountains conspire to enhance the effect. Mt. Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in all of Africa, stays invisible behind the savannas much of the time. It is so big, almost 20,000 feet high, that it creates its own cloud cover to shield it from view.



March to the Amboseli Wetlands

Here is Kilimanjaro behind a family of elephants marching toward the swamps at Amboseli National Park. All you can see is cloud cover. We stayed three days at the Amboseli Camp in the shadow of the great mountain and never saw it.

The grasslands were everywhere we traveled. They support an awe-inspiring diversity of life and make for an ideal travel destination.

When Ernest Hemingway first visited Kenya, he reported in *True at First Light* the following exchange with his wife Mary. They were sitting outside their mess tent enjoying a cool evening breeze from Mount Kilimanjaro when Mary said:

I want to go and really see something of Africa. We'll be going home, and we haven't seen anything. I want to see the Belgian Congo.

I don't.

You don't have any ambition. You'd just as soon stay in one place.

Have you ever been in a better place?

You will understand this sentiment once you have made your own visit to Africa's great sea of grass.



Amboseli Park Grasslands

In hopes that pictures can help where words fail, here are a few images from the African grasslands in Kenya.



Giraffe in the Grass



Impala Grassland View



Serval Cat in High Grass



Perfect Place for a Nap

28: AFRICAN TWILIGHT



Lion Following his Pride

We are following an old male lion and a young female who are trailing their pride across the plains. The pride is out of sight, but you can hear their ruffs and roars from time to time.

The male is large and formidable, even with his age. When he faces you head on, you notice his right eye is blood shot. He limps as he walks. He no longer has the fluid walk of his younger companion. Their progress is slow.

The female presents herself to him, but he ignores her and moves on. He is focused on catching up with the pride. She registers disappointment but he will not be deterred.

He listens, instead, for calls from the pride. They are far ahead, and he is determined to join them.



Focused on Catching Up to the Pride

Nightfall is coming soon. The color of the light has already softened. There is a breeze that brings cooler air to the plains. Our open Land Cruiser is moving slowly, matching the lions' leisurely pace.

They stop to rest. There is little hurry here. They will reach the pride.

From where they sit, they can survey the open plains before them. There is another roar and a ruff in the distance. With each call, the male raises his ears.

Soon they are up again walking toward the invisible pride. She walks ahead now but never too far from her male. His limp slows him, but he keeps a steady pace.

From time to time he stops to rest. Another distant call perks his ears and he is up again moving toward the sound.



Listening

Looking back on him from our vehicle, we can see that he is past his prime. Still, his stance is erect and alert. He is focused and powerful even if the years have robbed him of his grace and speed.



Powerful Despite His Age

He stops to survey his path. Another ruff sounds from just over a low hill ahead. He lifts his head and barks a reply.



Roaring to the Pride

It is twilight on the African plain.

29: UNDER FOOT



Cheetahs Resting

A mindfulness envelops you while on safari in Kenya. You are surrounded by wide open vistas and wild new sights and sounds. The busy Western world you left behind retreats while you are there to leave you at peace with the moment.

With limited Internet a result of your new tented lifestyle, you can choose guilt free to turn off your smart phone and live your life in the moment. Gracious Maasai hosts facilitate this with their welcoming ways.

Bucket showers made my wife nervous. Would she have enough hot water? Of course, she did. Our hosts made sure of that. And, for me it was an interesting part of the adventure. A small reminder of how wild a place we were visiting.

And then there was the wildlife. So abundant and accustomed to

safari vehicles that you could find them napping in the grass right in front of you.



Spotted Hyena



Lion Cub

Under foot, you might say, like a spotted hyena resting near our path. Or these lions, who were sleeping near a clump of bushes atop a small hill. Our guide drove our vehicle into the center of the napping pride without disturbing a single lion.



Lions Resting

This newborn Grant's gazelle was abandoned by her herd when our vehicle approached. She sat perfectly still before racing off.



Grant's Gazelle

This jackal and spotted hyena were no more than 30 yards away. The jackal had been checking out the hyena's nearby den.



Jackal and Spotted Hyena

Even birds were under foot, like this nesting mother who would not leave her ground nest when we appeared.



Blending In

And, this nocturnal bat-eared fox made a brief daylight appearance before scurrying back into its den.



Bat-Eared Fox

We hope these reflections on our first safari to Kenya will inspire you to consider a trip yourself. As we have tried to describe, there are many exhilarating and diverse experiences waiting for you on your first or next Kenyan safari.

With these last images, we put the wildlife viewing to rest at least for now. From preparation to long distance flights and then short-hop safari flights and tented camps it has been a grand adventure.

The many game drives, fire pit conversations, unexpectedly good meals, and exceedingly gracious hosts have made for a memorable experience. Surely, our outfitter and the Maasai hosts they work with deserve our thanks for the good works they do for wildlife conservation in Kenya.

30: THE TRIP HOME

With our Safari coming to an end, we savored one last game drive and reminisced around the fire pit while we waited for our last dinner. Our two weeks on Safari have been so engaging that we hardly missed the outside world.

The next morning, we caught our last bush plane from a field near our camp. To get there we drove one last time in an open safari vehicle. Our route took us past the tree where we had earlier spotted the mother cheetah lounging with her cubs and then up the hill where two mother elephants and their calves greeted us on the day we arrived.

Our short flight gave us our last view of the vast African savanna before we landed at Wilson Airport in Nairobi. We were met there by a driver who would show us around. With a late departure for our flight home, we had most of a day to explore the city.

Our driver's name was Gideon, a tall well-dressed man with a soft, deep voice that reminded me of James Earl Jones. He had immigrated to Nairobi from Malawi and now worked for our outfitter.

Our first stop was at the Kazuri Bead Factory in Karen, a suburb named after Karen Blixen, the author of the novel *Out of Africa*. All the bead makers at Kazuri (Swahili for small and beautiful) are women with children who do not have husbands. It is part of the company's mission to provide employment to this disadvantaged group and there is always a waiting list of applicants for openings.

Gideon arranged our tour with a gentleman who oversaw operations. Our guide showed us around the plant and explained the various parts of the process from shaping to baking to coloring and finishing the beads.

Afterwards, Gideon took us to Tamambo for lunch. This restaurant on Karen Road is on the site of the original farmhouse that served as the working center of the Blixen property.

We sat outdoors in an area that looked and felt like a colonial country club. When it cooled down with the threat of rain, our server set out a small coal-burning appliance next to our table. The napkins were linen and the service deferential.

As we drove afterward through the streets of Karen, we talked. Where was Gideon from? Did he have family? Where did he live?

He was very curious about America and responded with as many questions as answers. What were houses like in the United States? Did the houses have walls like those in Karen?

The walls. They were everywhere we drove in Nairobi. So many and so high that you could not see what lay behind them. And, in the high-end residential areas they were often topped with razor wire. Homes protected like luxury prisons.

We stopped next at an art gallery surrounded by a wall and iron gate. It was very lovely inside and housed some beautiful pieces.

Once we were done there, we decided to head to the Nairobi Airport for our flight home. Was there any last thing we should do, we asked Gideon? He could not think of anything that interested us, so we suggested he take the long way to the airport.

And, then he had a thought.

"I could drive you by the slums," he said. "It is good to see them because it reminds us of how fortunate we are."

We agreed and began a slow trip to the airport through town. After a while, Gideon pulled the car to a stop at the top of a hill and invited us to get out.

There below us for miles to the left and right and abutting right up to modern city buildings were ramshackle buildings with rusted corrugated tin roofs and scrap wood and metal walls. The buildings were so crowded together that we could not make out where roads or walkways might be.

After weeks of taking photographs, I could not bring myself to take a picture. The scene was too much, too overwhelming. I had seen pictures, in the movies even (think *Slum Dog Millionaire*), but until now I had no direct experience, no sense of scale.

I was sure I could not do it justice with a camera. How many people must live in this area? And, what kind of life do they have? What government services could even reach into the depths of this maze of shacks?

Could he take us closer, I asked? Yes, he could drive us along the edge as we make our way into the city on our long route.

And so we did.

It was dusk when we began driving down a street that abutted the edge of the slum. On our left for blocks and blocks were the tin and wood shacks we had seen from above. In front of them were beaten up booths, mostly empty now that night approached.

On our right, just the other side of a four-lane road, were the tall fences and walls common around Nairobi. Behind them but only visible above the fences were the buildings and activities of a modern city.

There were lots of people out and about, both adults and children. None had a scrubbed or tailored look. I tried to look down the passageways that entered the slum. But all I could see in the

diminishing light were dirt pathways, narrow and winding into the back parts of this rusting city beside a city.

"They can't get services in." Gideon noted. "When someone gets sick or injured, they have to carry them out because an ambulance cannot get in."

I looked again into the slum. Three children left the street in front of us and followed a darkening path into the maze of the slum that led to who knows where.

AFTER WORDS

ELEPHANTS AND ENGLISH



The Bridge

We came across this bridge in Ol Pejeta during our visit to Rhino Camp. It was one of the few bridges we saw while we were in the conservancies.

To look at it, you would think there was nothing remarkable about the bridge or its construction. It looks ordinary enough.

But then, after you drive over it you find this most unusual sign painted on a large boulder nearby:

NOTICE

THIS BRIDGE IS FOR A
MAXIMUM OF **11**
TONS ELEPHANTS
ARE THEREFORE
REQUESTED TO
CROSS **TWO** AT
A TIME ONLY

Which brings me to this final question. Why is the sign written in English?

No, that is not really my question. What I wonder is whether the person who painted this sign believed elephants could read his “request.” Or, whether instead, the Kenyan people just have a great sense of humor.



The Sign

After meeting and interacting with many Kenyans on this trip, I know what I believe. But you decide for yourself.

PLAN YOUR TRIP

An amazing trip awaits you to Kenya, one that will invigorate you and help support the Kenyan people. When you come, you will find the people welcoming and thought provoking.

We all want Kenya to flourish because we share a humanity and history with their people. In fact, the first humans emerged from Kenya ages ago.

Travel to Kenya helps preserve some of the wildest ecosystems in Africa. Traveling in a way that helps expand and preserve these ecosystems helps preserve the very animals that make an African Safari so amazing.

You can take this trip with a clean eco-conscience by traveling with a conservancy-based outfitter.

The outfitter who hosted our safari leases land from the Maasai that they set aside in game conservancies. The lease arrangements set strict human density limits to preserve the wild nature of the area.

The Maasai receive rent for the land and employment for its people in the safari camps located on the land by the outfitter. The result is more habitat, employment, and revenue for the local Maasai, more wildlife in the conservancies, and a premium wildlife experience for visitors.

If you are interested in taking a safari in an eco-friendly manner, contact the outfitter we used, and they will help you make arrangements. You can find Gamewatchers Safaris online at www.porini.com.

ABOUT THE IMAGES

A woman attended a photo exhibit at a stylish gallery in New York City and happened upon the photographer.

“Your work is beautiful,” she remarked. “You must have a very good camera.”

The photographer was offended by the backhanded compliment but thanked the woman nonetheless.

It happened weeks later that the photographer was invited to attend a dinner party at the woman’s home. As the after-dinner drinks were being served, our photographer was asked how he liked the meal.

“It was delicious,” he said. “You must have a very good stove.”

Notwithstanding the story, I take no offence when people ask about the camera I use to photograph wildlife. I am happy to share.

All but a few of the images in this book were taken with a full-frame Sony a7R iii 35mm camera using Sony’s FE 4.5-5.6/100-400 GM OSS lens. The remaining images, including the great cheetah-in-the-grass image at the beginning of Chapter 27, were taken with a full frame pocket camera, the Olympus Tough TG-5.

All the images were captured in RAW and converted to JPEG for this book. I generally used fast shutter speeds and handheld the camera for all shots except the night sky image in Chapter 21.

Good luck with your photography!

AUTHOR & PHOTOGRAPHER

Clinton Richardson is a husband, father, and grandfather who enjoys travel and photography.

A retired business attorney, Clinton is the author and photographer of [Ancient Selfies](#), a 2017 International Book Awards Finalist and the 2018 eLit Awards Gold Medal Winner in History. *Ancient Selfies* uses ancient coins to illustrate a first-person history of the Persian, Carthaginian, Greek, Roman, and Celtic leaders who created Western civilization.

Clinton has also written successful business books including the *Venture Magazine Complete Guide to Venture Capital* (1987, out of print) and the critically acclaimed [Growth Company Guide](#) series, now in its 5th edition. Both titles help entrepreneurs succeed in fundraising.

Passports in His Underpants is Clinton's first travel book. Portions have appeared earlier in Clinton's Venture Moola photo blog, available to all at readjanus.com/venture-moola. The Venture Moola Safari Series also appeared online at www.porini.com, the website of Gamewatchers Safaris.

A savanna landscape with acacia trees and a cheetah in the foreground. The scene is set in a vast, open plain with tall, golden-brown grasses. In the distance, several acacia trees are scattered across the horizon under a clear, light blue sky. In the foreground, a cheetah is lying down in the grass, looking towards the camera. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

COME ON A SAFARI

Join us on our maiden voyage into the heart of Africa for a photo safari like no other.

Stay in tented camps run by Maasai warriors and travel deep into the African wild. Get close to lions, elephants, wildebeests, rhinos, hippos, leopards, cheetah, hyenas, giraffes, and more. Meet interesting people and enjoy a front row seat to the Great Wildebeest Migration.

Take the trip of a lifetime. And, do it without leaving your home.