Day 0:
The first day was spent birding and relaxing at our lodge near Kilimanjaro International Airport while we waited for everyone to arrive. The open Acacia savanna surrounding the lodge is always very productive and notable sightings included Speckled and Blue-naped Mousebird, Augur Buzzard (the first of many!), Mourning Collared Dove, Little and Alpine Swift, Grey-headed Kingfisher, Cardinal Woodpecker, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Northern Crombec, Common Whitethroat, Garden Warbler, Buff-bellied Warbler, Winding Cisticola, Spotted Flycatcher, Red-tailed Shrike, Superb and Wattled Starling, Spotted Palm Thrush, Scarlet-chested and Variable Sunbird, Red-billed Firefinch, African Silverbird, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu, Yellow-fronted Canary and Reichenow’s Seedeater, while the calls of both Black-bellied and White-bellied Bustard emanated from the plains. Small flocks of both Lesser Kestrels and Amur Falcons were seen overhead. A mammal highlight was the distinctive Yellow-winged Bat while a colourful Flap-necked Chameleon hiding away amongst the yellow flowers of a Crotalaria bush was a reptile treat. As a bonus, our lodge was perfectly situated for spectacular views of Mount Kilimanjaro, Africa’s highest mountain and the highest free-standing mountain in the world.
Days 1-2:
We spent two full days exploring the grasslands, lakes, woodlands and forests of Arusha National Park. On the way to the Park for the first day we were treated to spectacular views of Pangani Longclaw along the road not far from our lodge, while flocks of Abdin's Storks were found in the agricultural fields. Soon after we entered the Park an open grassy meadow produced good numbers of Common Zebra and African Buffalo with numerous Red-billed Oxpeckers in attendance. Other mammals found in the grasslands and woodlands included Giraffe, Warthog, Waterbuck, Kirk's Dik-dik and Banded Mongoose, while the forests held Bushbuck, Harvey's Duiker and the diminutive Suni. An Olive Baboon with a pure white coat due to leucism stood out amongst its troop mates in one of the numerous troops we encountered.


Stilt, Pied Avocet, Ruff, Little Stint, Kittlitz’s Plover, Spur-winged Lapwing and White-winged Tern. Two juvenile Palm-nut Vultures was a nice surprise along the shore of one of the lakes.

Arusha National Park is well-known for the extensive montane forests on the slopes of Ngurdoto Crater and Mount Meru and these did not disappoint. We had good sightings of both Guereza (Black-and-White) Colobus and Sykes’ Monkey in the trees. Forest birds were plentiful and the undoubted highlight was excellent views of Crowned Eagle with both Narina and Bar-tailed Trogon a close second. Other forest birds included Mountain Buzzard, Black Sparrowhawk, African Goshawk, Hartlaub’s Turaco, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Scaly Francolin (superb views!), Green Malkoha (Yellowbill), African Emerald Cuckoo, Montane White-eye, African Dusty Flycatcher, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, African Paradise Flycatcher, Eurasian Blackcap, Collared Sunbird, Olive Sunbird, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, White-eared Barbet, Moustached Tinkerbird, Grey-headed Nigrita, Black-headed and Yellow-breasted Apalis, Tambourine Dove, African Olive Pigeon, Black-fronted Bushshrike, Spectacled Weaver, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Rüppell’s Robin-Chat, Mountain and Stripe-faced Greenbul, and Kenrick’s and Waller’s Starling.
Day 3:
The next day we headed for the dry and open plains in the rain shadow of Mount Meru, north of the town of Arusha near the Kenyan border. Here our main target was the incredibly localised Beesley's Lark, one of the rarest birds in Africa, and after some searching we finally managed to find two birds foraging quietly in front of us. Other larks on the plains were Short-tailed and Red-capped Lark as well as Fischer’s Sparrow-Lark. The plains also held Crowned Lapwing, Lesser Kestrel, Taita Fiscal, Capped Wheatear, Eastern Chanting Goshawk, Red-tailed and Red-backed Shrike, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse and Namaqua Dove.

For lunch we headed into the surrounding Commiphora scrub which was very productive and here we added many birds not usually seen during the remainder of the tour such as Black-throated Barbet, Red-and-Yellow Barbet, White-bellied Go-Away-Bird, Foxy Lark, Pygmy Batis, Rosy-patched Bush-Shrike, White-browed Scrub Robin, African Grey Flycatcher, Red-fronted Warbler, Grey Wren-Warbler, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Banded Parisoma, Southern Grosbeak-Canary and Somali Bunting.

Following a successful afternoon, we headed for our accommodation situated on Lake Manyara and found Bronze-winged Courser in the early evening along the entrance road to the lodge, while Slender-tailed Nightjar was seen at the lodge.

Day 4:
After a hearty breakfast looking out over Lake Manyara, we packed our bags and headed off for our next destination, Ndutu via Ngorongoro Crater, but not before birding the lodge grounds and surrounding palm savanna. Lake Manyara produced dense sheets of both Greater and Lesser Flamingo, African Spoonbill, Great Egret, Gull-billed Tern and Great White Pelican. The lodge grounds had Silverbird, Yellow-necked and Red-necked Spurfowl, Long-tailed Fiscal, Beautiful Sunbird, Village Indigobird, Collared Palm Thrush, Rufous-tailed Weavers nesting in the Acacia trees and African Palm Swifts nesting in the palms. A pair of Secretarybirds close to the lodge was a great find.

Nearby, the mixed Acacia and palm savanna with marshy areas were alive with birds such as Knob-billed Duck, Crested Francolin, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Bare-faced Go-away-bird, Diederik Cuckoo, Blue-naped Mousebird, Lilac-breasted Roller, Woodland Kingfisher, Pygmy Falcon, Grey Kestrel, Fork-tailed Drongo, Red-faced Crombec, Violet-backed Starling, the endemic Ashy Starling, Grey-capped Social Weaver, Pin-tailed Whydah, Golden-backed Weaver, Black Bishop and Black-chested Snake Eagle. We also had our first sightings of Black-backed Jackal, Blue Wildebeest and Impala.

En route just before reaching the town of Mto-wa-Mbu we managed to record Blue-cheeked Bee-eater, Yellow-collared Lovebird and Yellow-crowned Bishop. Driving through the town of Mto-wa-Mbu at the base of the escarpment we were treated to a spectacle of Yellow-billed Storks, Marabous and Pink-backed Pelicans, most of which were nesting in the large fig trees in town. At the top of the escarpment a viewpoint towards Lake Manyara produced several soaring White-backed Vultures and Rock Martins.

After entering the Ngorongoro Conservation Area we made a stop at the scenic viewpoint overlooking the world-famous Ngorongoro Crater where we spotted large herds of African Buffalo down below, as well as African Elephant, Black Rhino and even our first Lions! Nyanza Swifts soared above and the forested slopes below had Schalow’s Turaco, Tropical Boubou, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Baglafecht Weaver and Streaky Seedeeater. Then we descended into the Serengeti Plains in the west where we encountered the first of many Kori Bustards, along with a single Denham’s Bustard. There were large numbers of Thomson’s and Grant’s Gazelles as well as Blue Wildebeest with small numbers of Eland on the short grassy plains.
**Days 5 - 6:**
The habitat at Ndutu comprises a mix of Acacia savanna and open grassy plains along the western extremity of the Oldupai Gorge, centred around Lake Ndutu. Our comfortable lodge had a very active colony of Lesser Masked Weavers closely watched by its brood-parasite, Diederik Cuckoo. The resident pair of Spotted Eagle-Owls gave us excellent views and Western Barn Owl was also present.

The Acacia savanna held a large selection of birds including African Cuckoo, Jacobin Cuckoo, Pearl-spotted Owlet, European Roller, Green Wood-hoopoe, Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Von der Decken’s Hornbill, Usambiro Barbet, Nubian Woodpecker, Fischer’s Lovebird, Northern White-crowned Shrike, Lesser Grey Shrike, Buff-bellied Warbler, Black-lored Babbler, Superb and Hildebrandt’s Starling, African Grey Flycatcher, Silverbird, Grey-capped Social Weaver, Rufous-tailed Weaver, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, Speckle-fronted Weaver, Red-billed Quelea, Blue-capped Cordon-blue, Steel-blue Whydah and White-bellied Canary.

Ground birds consisted of Common Ostrich, Hartlaub’s and White-bellied Bustard, Coqui Francolin, the endemic Grey-breasted Spurfowl, Spotted Thick-knee, Temminck’s Courser and Yellow-throated Sandgrouse. The open plains were alive with displaying birds such as White-tailed and Athi Short-toed Lark as well as cloudscraper Cisticolas such as Zitting, Desert and Pectoral-patch. Chestnut-banded Plover was seen foraging along the shore of Lake Masek.

Raptors were everywhere and we had good sightings of Black-winged Kite, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Bateleur, Long-crested Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Steppe Eagle, Gabar Goshawk, Dark Chanting Goshawk, Montagu’s Harrier, Secretarybird, both Common and Lesser Kestrel, Pygmy Falcon and Augur Buzzard. Carcases on the plains were often covered in large numbers of Rüppell’s and White-backed Vultures that were joined by small numbers of Lappet-faced and Hooded Vultures.

The plains around Ndutu were packed with thousands upon thousands of Wildebeest and hundreds of Common Zebra as they migrated through the area and we witnessed several converging migration fronts. This was the spectacle we all came to see and we were not disappointed!

Although birding was excellent and the wildebeest migration a spectacle, predators stole the show at Ndutu, and no-one will ever forget that first morning when a lone **Caracal** strolled nonchalantly past us soon after we left the lodge on our early morning game drive. Shortly thereafter we encountered a Black-backed Jackal having a large rodent for breakfast and it was not long before we had excellent views of Side-striped Jackal. The following day saw us adding both Bat-eared Foxes at their den and Common (Golden) Jackal to our list. We also had good Lion sightings but the Cheetahs were phenomenal! We had a Cheetah mother and her two large cubs right next to our vehicle one afternoon after watching another Cheetah stalk a Thomson’s Gazelle on the plains earlier in the day. There were a few wildebeest kills in the area and some had large numbers of Spotted Hyaenas in attendance, while vultures dominated the older kills.
Days 7 - 9:
After Ndutu, we headed for the Serengeti National Park via Naabi Hill where our lunch stop resulted in good views of Hildebrandt’s Starling, Black-lored Babbler, Red-fronted Barbet, Black-faced Waxbill, Red-rumped Swallow and Little Weaver. From the hill we had a 360 degree panoramic view of the short grassy plains below which were covered in Wildebeest as far as the eye could see.

The three nights we stayed in the Park allowed us ample time to explore its woodlands and plains, and we were rewarded with a long list of mammals. Apart from Wildebeest and Zebra, we also recorded Thomson’s and Grant’s Gazelle, Impala, Elephant, Hippo, Topi, Hartebeest (Kongoni), Warthog, Giraffe, African Buffalo, Bohor Reedbuck, Banded and Dwarf Mongoose, Rock and Tree Hyrax, Vervet Monkey, African Grass Rat and the agile Senegal Lesser Galago at our lodge.

Predators were plentiful in the Park with Lions taking centre stage. We had many Lion sightings but the best was a huge male Lion in a tree, something not often seen, while two females and their cubs lounged in another tree nearby. A female Leopard with her large cub in tow walked in the road next to us but eventually took shelter in a large Sausage Tree along a watercourse. Even though we had a Cheetah stalk, chase and catch a Bohor Reedbuck in the long grass, the predator highlight for all was the Serval we saw on our last morning in the Park. This cat completed the set of Big Five cats for us and provided excellent views as it meticulously searched for, and eventually flushed, an African Savanna Hare from its hiding place and fortunately for the hare, it managed to escape unharmed. A special reptile sighting was a huge Black-necked Spitting Cobra in a tree.
Although the Serengeti is well-known for its mammals, birding was just as good, and we managed to record a long list of birds, including raptors such as all the vultures seen at Ndutu with the addition of the rare White-headed Vulture, Martial Eagle, Wahlberg’s Eagle, African Hawk-Eagle, Tawny Eagle, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Black-winged Kite, Bateleur, Western Marsh Harrier, Montagu’s Harrier, Dark Chanting Goshawk, African Fish Eagle, Secretarybird and Greater Kestrel. We had great views of Kori and Black-bellied Bustard. The plains supported Ostrich, Yellow-throated and Rosy-throated Longclaw, White Stork, Saddle-billed Stork, Double-banded Courser, Gull-billed Tern, Plain-backed Pipit, Capped Wheatear, Fan-tailed Widowbird, Yellow Wagtail, Whinchat, Quaifinch, White-browed Coucal, Cape Crow, White-tailed and Rufous-naped Lark, and several Cisticola species consisting of Winding, Croaking, Zitting, Desert and Pectoral-patch.

Highlights in the woodlands were Meyer’s Parrot, Bare-faced Go-away-bird, Pearl-spotted Owl, Purple and Lilac-breasted Roller, Striped Kingfisher, Green Wood-Hoopoe, Tanzanian Red-billed Hornbill, Von der Decken’s Hornbill, Eastern Grey Woodpecker, Nubian Woodpecker, Usambiro Barbet, Slate-coloured Boubou, Brubru, Magpie Shrike, Grey-backed Fiscal, Red-throated Tit, Grey (African) Penduline Tit, Flappet Lark, Mosque Swallow, Rattling Cisticola, Red-faced Crombec, Willow Warbler, Banded Parisoma, Rüppell’s, Superb and Hildebrandt’s Starling, Rufous-tailed Weaver, Grey-capped Social Weaver, Swahili Sparrow, Red-billed and White-headed Buffalo Weaver, Speckle-fronted Weaver, Holub’s Golden Weaver, Speke’s Weaver, Red-headed Weaver, Purple Grenadier, Black-faced Waxbill, Blue-capped Cordon-bleu, Straw-tailed Whydah, White-winged Widowbird, Marico Sunbird and Golden-breasted Bunting, while a family of Freckled Nightjars at our lodge provided excellent views.

Day 10:
Eventually it was time to say goodbye to the Serengeti but we had the Ngorongoro Crater to look forward to next. En route we made a stop for lunch at Oldupai Gorge, the world-famous archaeological site best known for its paleoanthropological discoveries that played a definitive role in our understanding of human evolution. We visited the new museum and found several Heart-nosed Bats roosting under the eaves of the roof. We also birded the area, enjoying good sightings of White-bellied Canary, nesting Vitelline Masked Weaver, Abyssinian White-eye, Variable Sunbird, Cut-throat Finch, Cinnamon-breasted Bunting and White-browed Scrub-Robin.

After lunch we proceeded to our lodge on the rim of the Ngorongoro Crater and shortly after leaving Oldupai found a Zebra carcase with White-necked Ravens and large numbers of Rüppell’s and White-backed Vultures in attendance. Birds seen in the highlands and at our lodge included Dusky Turtle-Dove, Northern Fiscal, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Cape Robin-Chat and Mountain Greenbul.

Day 11:
We all looked forward to spending a full day in the Ngorongoro Crater and enjoying its magnificent scenery and wildlife. As we descended into the crater Abyssinian (Schalow’s) Wheatear and Hildebrandt’s Francolin showed well. Further down we had Helmeted Guineafowl, Long-billed Pipit, Brown-crowned and Black-crowned Tchagra, Rufous-tailed Weaver, Yellow Bishop, Southern Citril, Kenya (Rufous) Sparrow, Anteater Chat and Lanner.
At the bottom, Lake Magadi and surrounding wetlands hosted Spur-winged Goose, Cape and Red-billed Teal, Hottentot Teal, Northern Shoveler, Little Grebe, Greater and Lesser Flamingo, Yellow-billed Stork, Glossy Ibis, African Spoonbill, Black-crowned Night Heron, Purple Heron, Great, Intermediate and Little Egret, Hamerkop, Black Crane, Common Moorhen, Grey Crowned Crane, Grey-headed Gull, Black-winged Stilt, Long-toed Lapwing, Common Ringed Plover, Marsh Sandpiper, Common Greenshank, Wood and Common Sandpiper, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruff and African Snipe. There were also Lesser Swamp Warbler, Sedge Warbler, Southern Red Bishop and Malachite Kingfisher.

The grasslands produced Common Ostrich, Banded and Brown-throated Martin, Speke's Weaver, Kori Bustard, Quailfinch, Secretarybird, African and Plain-backed Pipit, Red-collared Widowbird, Grey-rumped Swallow and the colourful Rosy-throated Longclaw while a pair of White-headed Barbets was a nice surprise in fig trees along a watercourse. Jackson's Widowbird was a particular favourite and we were entertained by several males doing their jumping-Maasai-warrior-display.

Mammals were abundant and we had large numbers of Blue Wildebeest, Plains Zebra, African Buffalo, Thomson's and Grant's Gazelle, and smaller numbers of Elephant, Warthog, Eland, Hippo, Hartebeest (Kongoni), Bohor Reedbuck and Black Rhino. A large herd of **African Buffalo** had both **Red-billed and Yellow-billed Oxpeckers** on board. Predators consisted of Common (Golden) Jackal, Spotted Hyaena, Lion and Egyptian Mongoose.

On the way back to our lodge the forests on the crater rim produced Green-headed Sunbird, Placid Greenbul, Black Saw-wing and Spectacled Weaver. Back at our lodge we managed to find a pair of Brown-backed Woodpeckers as well as Thick-billed and Streaky Seedeater in the garden, and in the early evening had excellent views of Montane Nightjar.

**Day 12:**

The final morning was spent birding the grounds of our lodge and we managed to record huddling **Cinnamon-chested Bee-eaters**, Bar-throated Apalis, Grey-capped Warbler, Brown Parisoma, Red-winged Starling, White-browed Robin-Chat, Tacazze Sunbird, Eastern Double-collared Sunbird, Dusky Turtle-Dove, Baglafecht Weaver and Mountain Buzzard. The gardens of the hotel where we had lunch and the lake nearby produced Reed Cormorant, Hadeda Ibis, Crowned Hornbill, Brown-breasted and White-eared Barbet, nesting Bronze Mannikin, Red-headed Weaver, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Grey-olive Greenbul, Collared Sunbird and Olive Sunbird.
At the end of the tour we recorded a total of 420 birds and 53 mammal species.