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 always provides a very productive start to the tour and notable sightings included Speckled and Bluenaped Mousebird, White-browed Coucal, Mourning Collared Dove, Little and African Palm Swift, European Roller, Grey-headed Kingfisher, African Hoopoe, Red-backed Shrike, Long-tailed Fiscal, Dark-capped Bulbul (the first of many!), Northern and Red-faced Crombec, Willow Warbler, Eastern Olivaceous Warbler, Tawny-flanked Prinia, Buff-bellied Warbler, Garden Warbler, Winding Cisticola, Spotted Flycatcher, Spotted Palm Thrush, Superb and Violet-backed Starling, Scarlet-chested and Variable Sunbird, Red-billed Firefinch, Blue-capped Cordon-bleu, Crimson-rumped Waxbill and Reichenow’s Seedeater, while Yellow-winged Bat showed well at the lodge. 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. Close to the entrance of the Park we found a breeding colony of Taveta Weavers supported by a few Golden-backed Weavers and an obliging Brown-breasted Barbet. Soon after we entered the Park an open grassy meadow produced good numbers of African Buffalo with numerous Red-billed Oxpeckers in attendance, as well as Bushbuck. Other mammals found in the grasslands and
woodlands included Common Zebra, Giraffe, Warthog, Waterbuck, Kirk's Dik-dik and numerous troops of Olive Baboons, while the forests held Harvey's Duiker and the diminutive Suni. A brief sighting of Serval provided much excitement.


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 highlights were Hartlaub's Turaco and Narina Trogon. Other forest birds included Crowned Eagle, African Harrier-Hawk, Black Sparrowhawk, African Goshawk, Green Malkoha, African Emerald Cuckoo, Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, Crowned and Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Scaly Francolin, White-eared Barbet, Moustached Tinkerbird, Golden-tailed Woodpecker, Black-throated Wattle-eye, Black-backed Puffback, Tropical Boubou, Brown Woodland Warbler, Montane White-eye, Abyssinian Thrush, Ashy and African Dusky Flycatcher, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, African Paradise Flycatcher, White-starred Robin, Collared and Olive Sunbird, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Lemon and Tambourine Dove, African Firefinch, Black-fronted Bushshrike (spectacular views!), 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 soon after starting our search found three obliging individuals foraging quietly in front of us. Other larks on the plains were Short-tailed and Red-capped Lark as well as many Fischer’s Sparrow-Larks. The plains also held Crowned Lapwing, Kori Bustard, Greater Kestrel, Taita Fiscal, Capped Wheatear, Eastern Chanting Goshawk, Red-backed Shrike and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse.

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 White-headed Mousebird, Common Scimitarbill, Black-faced Sandgrouse, Black-throated Barbet, Red-and-Yellow Barbet, White-bellied Go-Away-Bird, Foxy Lark, Pygmy Batis, White-browed Scrub Robin,
Abyssinian White-eye, Bare-eyed Thrush, Yellow-spotted Petronia, Black-necked Weaver, Black-faced Waxbill, Steel-blue Whydah, African Grey Flycatcher, Red-fronted Warbler, Grey Wren-Warbler, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Banded Parisoma and Southern Grosbeak-Canary. We also had beautiful views of Slender-tailed Nightjar on the ground.

Following a successful afternoon, we headed for our accommodation situated on Lake Manyara but en route were notified that the lodge was inaccessible due to flooding after recent heavy rains. We then made a detour to another lodge situated on the shore of Lake Burunge.

Day 4:
After a hearty breakfast looking out over Lake Burunge, 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. The recent heavy rains in the area resulted in the formation of many standing pools of water, and these, as well as the larger Lake Burunge attracted water birds such as White-faced and Fulvous Whistling Duck, Knob-billed Duck, Grey Heron, Black-winged Stilt and Great White Pelican. The mixed Acacia and palm savanna with areas of cultivation around our lodge were alive with birds such as Yellow-necked and Red-necked Spurfowl, African Palm Swift, Blue-naped Mousebird, Red-fronted Tinkerbird, Slate-coloured Boubou, Grey-headed Bushshrike, Yellow-bellied Greenbul, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Lilac-breasted Roller, Common Whitethroat, the endemic Ashy Starling, Fork-tailed Drongo, Spotted Palm Thrush, Grey-capped Social Weaver, Black-necked Weaver, Green-winged Pytilia, Red-billed Firefinch, Crimson-rumped Waxbill, Village Indigobird, Pin-tailed and Straw-tailed Whydah, Long-tailed Paradise Whydah, Beautiful Sunbird and Black Bishop.

En route to the town of Mto-wa-Mbu we managed to record Brown Snake Eagle, 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 and Rüppell’s 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 the occasional Hippopotamus. Scarce Swifts and Black Saw-wings soared above and the forested slopes below had Tropical Boubou, Mountain Greenbul, Red-faced...
Cisticola, Bar-throated Apalis, Grey-capped Warbler, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Eastern Double-collared Sunbird, Baglafecht Weaver, Thick-billed and Streaky Seedeater. Then we descended into the Serengeti Plains in the west where we encountered the first of many Thomson’s and Grant’s Gazelles as well as Blue Wildebeest. The recent heavy rains over the short grassy plains made the going difficult and after many near-misses eventually found ourself stuck in the late afternoon not far from our lodge. While waiting for the lodge staff to arrive to help us out we found we were in the midst of large numbers of wildebeest and several sneaky Spotted Hyenas that came rather close to the vehicle! Our vehicle had to remain behind and the journey to the lodge with the lodge vehicle just barely negotiating the treacherous muddy roads was an eventful trip that few will forget, but we stayed vigilant and between all the excitement managed to find Spotted Eagle-Owl, African Savanna Hare and Wild Cat along the way.

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. Fischer’s Lovebirds were flitting about their nesting tree and in the evening Western Barn Owl showed well. African Grass Rats scuttled about along the footpaths to our rooms.


Ground birds consisted of Common Ostrich, White-bellied Bustard, Coqui Francolin, the endemic Grey-breasted Spurfowl, Spotted Thick-knee, Temminck’s Courser, Double-banded Courser and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse. Gull-billed Terns foraged over the open plains while cloudscraper cisticolas such as Pectoral-patch, Zitting and Desert displayed overhead. Chestnut-banded Plover, Black-winged Stilt, Common Greenshank, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint, Ruff and Curlew Sandpiper were seen foraging along the shores of the wetlands in the area, while Greater and Lesser Flamingo, Cape Teal, Red-knobbed Coot and Great White Pelican were found at Lakes Ndutu and Masek.

Raptors were everywhere and we had good sightings of Black-winged Kite, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Bateleur, Martial Eagle, Long-crested Eagle, Tawny Eagle, African Hawk-Eagle, Steppe Buzzard, Secretarybird (including a bird on the nest), 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 smaller numbers of Lappet-faced and Hooded Vultures.

Although birding was excellent, predators stole the show at Ndutu with Cheetahs and Lions taking centre stage. A Cheetah mother with her almost fully grown cub at a recent wildebeest kill was fascinating to watch. Several lions were seen and in the evenings their roaring reverberated across the plains. Early one morning shortly after we had left the lodge for a game drive a cheeky Serval shot past us across the plains. Black-backed Jackals and Spotted Hyenas were also often seen on the plains. Apart from predators, other mammals consisted of Blue Wildebeest, Common Zebra, Eland, Kirk’s Dik-dik, Giraffe and Hartebeest (Kongoni), while a reptile highlight was Leopard Tortoise.
Days 7 - 9:
After Ndutu, we headed for the Serengeti National Park via Naabi Hill and on the way to our lodge had good sightings of White-bellied, Black-bellied and Hartlaub’s Bustard. We also had our first herd of Elephants and family groups of Tanzanian Red-billed Hornbill and Southern Ground Hornbill showed well near the lodge.

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 Elephant, we also recorded Blue Wildebeest, Common Zebra, Thomson’s and Grant’s Gazelle. Impala, Defassa Waterbuck, Hippo (often large numbers wallowing in muddy pools), Topi, Hartebeest (Kongoni), Warthog, Giraffe, African Buffalo, Banded and Dwarf Mongoose, Rock and Tree Hyrax, Vervet Monkey, African Grass and Acacia Rat, and the agile Senegal Lesser Galago at our lodge. Predators were plentiful in the Park. We had many Lion sightings, often very close to our lodge, but the best was when a lioness gave a Leopard sleeping high in a tree a huge fright as she walked past to take an elevated position in a nearby tree to scan the plains. We also had good sightings of Side-striped and Black-backed Jackal, and a party of five Bat-eared Foxes in the road was a nice surprise late one afternoon.

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, Tawny Eagle, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Black-winged Kite, Bateleur, Dark Chanting Goshawk, melanistic Gabar Goshawk, African Fish Eagle, Secretarybird, Pygmy Falcon and Grey Kestrel. The plains supported Ostrich, Yellow-throated Sandgrouse, Pangani, Yellow-throated and Rosy-throated Longclaw, White Stork, Double-banded Courser, Gull-billed Tern, Plain-backed Pipit, Fan-tailed Widowbird, Quailfinch, Cape Crow, White-tailed and Rufous-naped Lark, Red-billed and Cardinal Quelea, and several Cisticola species consisting of Winding, Croaking, Zitting, Desert and Pectoral-patch.

Highlights in the woodlands were Meyer’s Parrot, Black-faced Sandgrouse, Bare-faced Go-away-bird, Pearl-spotted Owl, Purple and Lilac-breasted Roller, Striped and Woodland Kingfisher, Green Wood-Hoopoe, Von der Decken’s Hornbill, Eastern Grey Woodpecker, Bearded Woodpecker, **Usambiro Barbet**, Common Cuckoo, Grey-crested Helmetshrike, Slate-coloured Boubou, Brubru, Magpie Shrike, Grey-backed Fiscal, Grey (African) Penduline Tit, Silverbird, Flappet Lark, Mosque Swallow, Rattling Cisticola, Long-tailed Cisticola, Red-faced Crombec, 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, White-winged Widowbird, Marico Sunbird and Golden-breasted Bunting, while Freckled Nightjar was found at our lodge.

Day 10:
Eventually it was time to say good bye to the Serengeti but we had the Ngorongoro Crater to look forward to next. On 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 also visited the new on-site museum and after lunch proceeded to our lodge on the rim of the Ngorongoro Crater with Eastern Chanting Goshawk showing well along the road. Birds seen in the highlands and at our lodge included Dusky Turtle-Dove, Northern Fiscal, African Stonechat, Red-collared Widow, Hunter’s Cisticola, Brown Parisoma, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Cape and White-browed Robin-Chat, Schalow’s Turaco, Tacazze and Bronzy Sunbird, Yellow-crowned Canary, Red-winged Starling and Brown-backed Woodpecker.

Day 11:
We all looked forward to spending a full day in the Ngorongoro Crater and enjoying its magnificent scenery and wildlife. Going down into the crater we managed to see Hildebrandt’s Francolin and Augur Buzzard along the road and were entertained by a family of Anteater Chats as soon as we were on the crater floor, but not before finding the first lions of the day!

At the bottom, Lake Magadi and surrounding wetlands hosted Spur-winged Goose, Fulvous Whistling Duck, Cape and Red-billed Teal, Hottentot Teal, Little Grebe, Greater Flamingo, Yellow-billed Stork, Saddle-billed Stork, Glossy Ibis, African Spoonbill, Black-crowned Night Heron, Squacco Heron, Purple Heron, Great, Intermediate and Little Egret, Hamerkop, Lesser Moorhen, Grey Crowned Crane, Grey-headed Gull, Whiskered and White-winged Tern, Black-winged Stilt, Pied Avocet, Long-toed Lapwing, Kittlitz’s Plover, Common Ringed Plover, Common Greenshank, Wood and Common Sandpiper, Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Ruff. There were also Lesser Swamp Warbler and Southern Red Bishop.

The grasslands produced Common Ostrich, Banded Martin, Speke’s Weaver, Kori and Black-bellied Bustard, Quailfinch, Secretarybird, African and Plain-backed Pipit, Red-collared Widowbird, Grey-rumped Swallow and the colourful Rosy-throated Longclaw, while White-headed Barbet, Brown-crowned and Black-crowned Tchagra, Kenya (Rufous) Sparrow, Scaly-throated Honeyguide, Purple Grenadier and Eastern Grey Woodpecker were seen in the woodlands. Jackson’s Widowbird was a particular favourite and we were entertained by several males doing their jumping-Maasai-warrior-display. Verreaux’s Eagle was the best raptor of the day, closely
followed by Lanner, while Yellow-billed Kite provided lots of laughs as it tried to steal food from unsuspecting picnickers.

Mammals were abundant and we had large numbers of Blue Wildebeest, Common Zebra, African Buffalo, Thomson’s and Grant’s Gazelle, and smaller numbers of Elephant, Warthog, Eland, Hippo, and Black Rhino. Predators consisted of Common (Golden) Jackal, Spotted Hyaena and Lion.

On the way back to our lodge the forests on the crater rim produced Brown-headed Apalis and we heard Common Quail call from the upland grasslands. Other forest birds seen included Brown Woodland Warbler, Black Saw-wing, Spectacled Weaver, Mountain Greenbul, Abyssinian Crimsonwing, Montane White-eye, Thick-billed and Streaky Seedeater, and in the early evening had excellent views of Montane Nightjar at our lodge.

**Day 12:**
The final morning was spent birding the grounds of our lodge to try and catch up with birds we have not seen yet, notably **Golden-winged Sunbird**, and we were eventually successful in locating this beautiful sunbird in a field of flowering Leonotus shrubs. En route to our lunch stop we managed to find European Honey Buzzard at the Lake Manyara viewpoint. The gardens of the hotel where we had lunch and the lake nearby produced Reed Cormorant, Hadeda Ibis, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Collared and Amethyst Sunbird, White-eared Barbet and Bronze Mannikin.

At the end of the tour we recorded a total of 409 birds and 48 mammal species.