Day 1: 
We started the day off right outside our cabins overlooking a lively marsh. Here we enjoyed a great mix of marsh species including our first sightings of the highly localised *Taveta Golden-Weaver*. Following breakfast, we headed to Arusha National Park where we spent the whole day birding and mammal viewing. En-route an excellent patch of habitat along a stream produced a trio of highly vocal Ruppell's Robin-Chats, a couple Gray-olive Greenbuls, and a Hamerkop nest building among others.

Upon entering the park, we had our first taste of mammal viewing in a grassy plain where Plains Zebras, Giraffes, Warthogs and a few secretive Bushbucks gave us a small taste of the superb game viewing later in the trip. Red-billed Oxpeckers joined the zebras while Spot-breasted Barbet and Chinspot Batis were the trees above us.

The remainder of the day was spent birding in prime Afromontane forests and on top of an incredibly scenic crater rim, where we had superb looks at some of our target birds including three Narina Trogons and a pair of Hartlaub’s Turacos. As if this wasn’t enough, we enjoyed several ‘bird parties’ moving through the trees dominated by Montane White-eyes, Gray-backed Camaropteras and several species of greenbuls, where Yellowbill, White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher, Cinnamon-chested Bee-Eaters and Northern Puffbacks joined in. A pair of fig trees offered some of the best birding of
the day with four species of localised starlings, Black-fronted Bushshrikes, Black-headed Apalis, Mountain Thrush and a Gray-headed Nigrita. Raptor viewing certainly stole the show with superb views of a Martial Eagle, African Hawk-Eagle, two Ayres' Eagles, several Long-crested Eagles and several African Crowned Eagles, which were displaying overhead! Not a bad day to start off the tour...

Day 2
Once again, we headed back to highly productive Arusha National Park for a second full day of birding but this time exploring the other half of the park. A flock of Retz's Helmetshrikes put on a show as well as both Green-backed Honeybird and Scaly-throated Honeyguide. Scanning the lakes within the park, we encountered Lesser Flamingoes, Cape and Red-billed Teal, several species of waders and incredible views of a stunning Gray Crowned Crane! Hippos were also seen including a couple out of the water which is always something to see.

Moving up in elevation along Mt Meru's fantastic forests, some of the best in Africa, we enjoyed prolong views of our main target of the day - a pair of Bar-tailed Trogons. Other birds in the area include Silvery-cheeked Hornbills, good numbers of Hartlaub's Turacos, a Lanner Falcon overhead and the East African endemic, Hunter's Cisticola. To add to the mix, we also had great sightings of several small antelope including Kirk's Dikdik, Harvey's Duiker and Suni.

Day 3
After breakfast we headed for the lark-rich plains north of the town of Arusha near the Kenyan border. Here one can find the incredibly localised Beesley's Lark, one of the rarest birds in Africa. From beneath the rain shadows of Mt Kilimanjaro, it didn't take long before we were watching four Beesley's singing and foraging right in front of us. Other larks present included Foxy, Red-capped, Athi Short-toed, Short-tailed, and Fischer's Sparrow-Lark. Besides larks, Tawny Eagle, Eastern Chanting-Goshawk, Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse, and others utilized the open plains.

For lunch we headed into the surrounding commiphora scrub where we were treated to a great diversity of birds. Here we had our first Pygmy Falcon, White-bellied Go-Away-Bird, Blue-naped Mousebird, Red-throated Tit, Banded Parisoma, Eastern Violet-backed and Beautiful Sunbirds, Chestnut Weaver, and Steel-blue Whydah of the trip along with our only sightings of White-fronted Bee-Eater, Black-throated Barbet, Pygmy Batis, Rosy-patched Bushshrike, Tiny Cisticola, Red-fronted Warbler, Gray Wren-Warbler, Crimson-rumped Waxbill, and Southern Grosbeak-Canary.

Following a successful afternoon, we headed for our accommodation situated on Lake Manyara. Along the entrance road, we added many new species to our trip list including a calling Harlequin Quail and our only sighting of Dwarf Bittern.
Day 4
Only a short drive away, we spent the majority of today birding Tarangire National Park, a park famous for its elephant herds, baobab trees and tree climbing lions. Driving the various park roads, we enjoyed superb views of D'Arnauld’s and Red-and-yellow Barbets offering a great comparison, our only Southern Ground Hornbills, Mottle Spinetails and Black-necked Weaver of the trip, as well as our first looks at Secretarybird, Lilac-breasted Roller, Green Wood Hoopoe, Buff-bellied Warbler, Black-lobed Babbler, Silverbird, Black Bishop and the very showy Long-tailed Paradise-Whydah, which is always a crowd pleaser! Mammals didn’t disappoint either with excellent looks at Elephants, Zebra, Warthog, Giraffe, and two Lions in a tree, while overhead White-backed and Lappet-faced Vultures, Brown Snake-Eagle, Bateleur, African Harrier-Hawk, Gabar Goshawk, and Wahlberg’s Eagle were some of the raptor highlights.

Birding the dirt road back to our lodge, Yellow-necked and Red-necked Spurfowl scurried off to the sides while Yellow-collared Lovebirds and Brown Parrots screeched overhead. We also had excellent views of a Gray Kestrel teed up on a small tree as well as of an African Cuckoo and a small flock of Ashy Starlings. The grounds around the lodge hosted a myriad of interesting birds including Spotted Palm Thrush, Reichenow’s Seedeater, and our first looks of Rufous-tailed Weavers. Before dinner, we enjoyed watching the sunset overlooking Lake Manyara. Hundreds of thousands, perhaps close to a million Lesser Flamingos, covered the lake while White-bellied Bustard called in the distance and Collared Pratincoles and Slender-tailed Nightjars hawked all around us.

Day 5
After a hearty breakfast looking out over Lake Manyara and the sea of flamingoes, we packed our bags and headed off for our next destination - the famous Ngorongoro Crater. Lunch time found us at a scenic overlook along the rim of the Rift Valley as an Ayres’ Hawk Eagle and other raptors soared over the valley in front of us.

After discovering a large troop of Blue Monkeys on the edge of town we finally arrived at the Ngorogoro Crater gate and

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slowly made our way up through the forest to the crater rim and onwards to our accommodation. Schalow's Turaco, Cinnamon Bracken Warbler and Brown-headed Apalis, were all recorded as we periodically stopped to scan and listen. From the scenic overlook, we scanned the vast crater floor plains below picking out Elephants, Zebra, Black Rhinos, Hippos, African Buffalo, Eland, Blue Wildebeest and more while Hunter’s Cisticola and Gray-capped Warbler sung and sat out in the open right in front of us with the scenic drop in the background. Before arriving at our lodge, which was perfectly positions on the edge of the crater rim, we had close views of Spotted Hyenas crossing the road in front of us while half of the group had incredible and unexpected views of a Leopard!

Day 6
We spent the whole day birding the crater floor where tens of thousands of mammals graze and interesting birds can be found. On the decent into the crater, we were already adding new trips birds such as several Anteater Chats. At the bottom, Lake Magadi hosted Greater and Lesser Flamingos, Cape, Red-billed and Hottentot Teal, Gull-billed and Whiskered Terns, Gray-headed Gull, and a dozen species of waders including our first Kittlitz’s Plover of the trip.

The vast open grasslands hosted good numbers of large mammals including Elephants, Zebras, African Buffalo, Eland, Defassa Waterbuck, Thomson’s and Grant’s Gazelle, Hartebeest, and Blue Wildebeest, which lesser numbers of Common and Black-backed Jackals, Spotted Hyenas, and Lions were seen. Elsewhere in the plains, Amur Falcon Kori Bustards, Rosy-throated Longclaw, and no less than five Secretarybirds put on a good show. Before we knew it, it was time to start heading back to our lodge. En route, we picked up dancing Jackson’s Widowbirds, Brown Parisoma, and our sixth species of sunbird for the day - the striking Golden-winged Sunbird. After dinner, Montane Nightjars called from the lodge grounds.

Day 7-9
Leaving the crater and mountains behind, we descended into the vast Serengeti Plains. En route we made a quick stop for lunch at Oldupai Gorge, one of the most significant locations in the world on the history of human evolution. Before reaching our lodge, we already had good sightings of birds and mammals including a Cheetah and kitten, Lions, and certainly everyone’s highlight of the day - tens of thousands of Blue Wildebeest on the move.
For the next three nights we used an excellent lodge in the park as home base as we explored the surrounding plains. Raptors certainly put on a great show including six species of vultures - Egyptian, Hooded, White-backed, Rueppell’s, White-headed, and Lappet-faced. Other highlights from the plains and woodlands included Grey-crested Helmetshrike, Tanzanian Red-billed Hornbill, Greater Painted-Snipe, Black-faced Sandgrouse, Lilac-breasted Roller catching a Water Scorpion, Black Coucal, and three species of owls - African Scops-Owl, Verreaux’s Eagle-Owl and Pearl-spotted Owlet. An excellent picnic site produced Usambiro Barbet, Hildebrant’s Starling, Purple Grenadier and more.

Of course, the Serengeti is a lot more known for its mammals rather than birds! We had continued great looks of the massive wildebeest herd daily as well as great sightings of Spotted Hyenas, Lions, Elephants, Bushbuck, Eland, Kirk’s Dikdik, Bohor Reedbuck, Topi, Hartebeest and -- the excellent Leopard of course! Around our lodge, Yellow-winged Bats and Senegal Lesser Galagos kept us entertained in the evenings.
Day 10-12

After a successful and exciting several days in the Serengeti, we birded our way out of the park and headed for our final stop - Ndutu. We witnessed hundreds of Black-winged Lapwings moving across the plains on our approach to our lodge. Before dinner, we took a quick drive through the surroundings finding out first Black-chested Snake-Eagle and Chestnut-banded Plover. Of course, the nine Lions and three Bat-eared Foxes stole the show! During dinner we were accompanied by the resident Common Genets that hang out in the thatched roofs of the lodge.

We spent the following whole day exploring the bush and plains surrounding Ndutu and continued adding new species to our trip list including Greater Kestrel, African Wattled Lapwing and Olive Bee-Eater. On the mammal front, a total of fifteen Lions for the day was an impressive count! Great views of Secretarybird and Yellow-throated Sandgrouse were added. Fischer’s Lovebirds were nesting in the lodge grounds, and the waterhole was excellent for many species including Blue-headed Cordon-bleu.

The final morning we headed to the airport with a lunch stop on the edge of the Great Rift Valley. As we assembled for our group photo - our final new bird for the trip called from a tree nearby - a Red-fronted Tinkerbird.

We ended the two weeks with 426 species recorded (including a few heards)!