Experience the Natural Beauties of Tanzania’s National Parks!

TANZANIA
Saturday, February 1 – Wednesday, February 12, 2014

TOUR ITINERARY

DAY 1, Saturday, February 1: ARRIVAL AT KILIMANJARO AIRPORT

Arrival at Kilimanjaro Airport. Transfer to the Impala Hotel (http://www.impalahotel.com/) in Arusha; meals or refreshments will be available and you are likely to retire early for the night after your long flight.

DAY 2, Sunday, February 2: ARUSHA NATIONAL PARK

After breakfast the group will drive to Arusha National Park. This peaceful little gem of a park has fabulous scenery and beautiful views of both snow-capped Mount Kilimanjaro and of Mount Meru. There are many viewpoints in the Park where we can get out of our vehicle and admire and photograph the scenery and animals. The Park’s close proximity to our hotel in Arusha will allow us a leisurely pace for our first day on safari!

The Arusha National Park covers an area of 33,800 acres and consists of three spectacular features: the Momella Lakes, Ngorudoto Crater, and the majestic Mount Meru. In addition to being an excellent park for birders, Arusha National Park is one of the few places in Tanzania to see the elusive and beautiful black-and-white colobus monkey.

Arusha National Park is well-known for its abundance of bird species (over 400 species have been recorded there!), including the crowned eagle, hornbills, turaco, trogons, and bee-eaters. Within Arusha, the Momella Lakes area is one of the best places in Tanzania to see waterbirds; pelican, little grebe, a variety of herons, ducks, and waders are common. During the short dry season in January and February, when other lakes in northern Tanzania are drying out, thousands of lesser and also some greater flamingos come to the alkaline Momella lakes. This is the time to see them, because these lakes are not really their preference under normal conditions!

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Also within the park is a small crater one-and-a-half square miles in area—a sort of miniature Ngorongoro. This crater is called Ngurdoto, and here we can find resident herds of Cape buffalo, water buck, bush buck, bush pigs, and some reed buck and duiker. Augur buzzard (the Eastern Hemisphere's answer to our New World red-tailed hawk, Buteo jamaicensis), Verreaux's eagle and other cliff-associated raptors can often been seen flying above Ngurdoto Crater.

Other mammals in Arusha National Park we may see are blue Sykes monkey, shy and elusive red duiker, and the world's smallest antelope, the suni. Here we can also find many bushbuck and dik dik, Cape buffalo, waterbuck, reedbuck, as well as some hippo and elephant.

After this exhilarating beginning to our trip, we will overnight at the Impala Hotel.

DAY 3, Monday, February 3: LAKE LAGARJA & NGORONGORO CONSERVATION AREA

After breakfast, we meet at 8am and begin the 200-mile journey to our Private Tented Camp near Lake Lagarja on the southeastern Serengeti Plains (for more information about the Private Tented Camp, please see the description provided by Tanzania Guides, Limited, also available on the NYC Audubon website).

Our first leg, 110 miles on a well paved road, will take us about two hours directly west of Arusha town. We will drive into the Great Rift Valley to the village of Mto wa Mbu, situated at the foot of the escarpment. From hereon we will climb steadily through rich farmlands up to the Lodoare entrance/exit gate to the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (for more about Ngorongoro click here and here). After checking in at the gate we'll continue to climb, driving through lush forest areas, until we reach the south rim of the crater. We will enjoy our first view of this magnificent natural wonder, before driving northwest along the rim to a point where we descend onto the Serengeti Plains, some 2,600 feet below.

We'll arrive in time for lunch at our Private Tented Camp, which will have been set up the day before and be waiting for us. Our camp staff will receive us with refreshing drinks before our bags are taken to our tents. Washbasins with hot water to wash off the dust of the journey are situated on the verandah of each tent. We will have lunch in the spacious and comfortable dining tent after which we may want to relax for a while, before taking our first game drive of this safari. We will return to camp by 7pm for hot showers, cocktails around the campfire, and a candlelight dinner, after which we retire for the night—often to the sounds of lions communicating with each other!

DAYS 4-6, Tuesday, February 4-Thursday, February 6: CAMPING IN THE SERENGETI

We will spend these three days and nights in the area around Lake Lagarja, in the southeastern Serengeti. At this time the migration of 1.3 million wildebeest should be on the short grass plains, and with them will be more than 600,000 other herbivores—Burchell's zebra, Grant's gazelle and Thomson's gazelle—and of course many predators such as lion, cheetah, spotted hyena, and both golden and silver-backed jackal. Sometimes the wildebeest move off southwestward or westward of this area, depending on the weather and food situation, but we usually find them!
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Each morning during this safari, wakeup call is with coffee, tea, or cocoa, plus cookies at the bedside, usually at about 5:30am, followed by hot water in our washbasins on the verandah of the tent. We’ll take an early morning game drive at 6am, returning to camp for a late breakfast at about 9:30-10am. Then there will be a shorter drive after breakfast, returning for lunch at around 1pm, with time to relax before the afternoon drive at 4pm. (Park regulations in Tanzania prohibit driving between 7pm and 6am so we always return to camp before the deadline!)

Hot showers await us on our return to camp each evening, followed by cocktails around the campfire. Dinner by candlelight is usually served at 8pm, or whenever it suits us. We do not use generators in our camps. In the sleeping tents we use 12-volt halogen lamps for lighting, and hurricane kerosene lamps are placed outside each tent at night.

The above daily routine will be the general pattern throughout the safari, on the days that we are not traveling from one destination to another. While camped in the Serengeti we will spend a day game-viewing in the area around Seronera to the northwest, taking a packed lunch with us, and returning to our camp in the afternoon.

At Seronera we are likely to see the topi antelope, whose range does not extend as far east as the plains around our campsite. Other mammals that may be seen in the Serengeti are reed buck, steinbok, dik dik, Cape buffalo, elephant, bat-eared foxes, various species of mongoose, caracal, ratel, wildcat, hare, water buck, eland, serval cat, giraffe, and wart hog.

Over 500 bird species have been recorded in the Serengeti national park. Many of these birds are very colorful, and some are endemic to this area whilst others are endemic to Tanzania. On the plains the enormous kori bustard abounds; it is reputed to be the world's heaviest flying bird, which is probably the reason it is seldom seen in flight! Ostriches and secretary birds are numerous, as are the species of starlings, raptors, and larks present in this area.

To the north of our campsite, beyond the Naabi Hill entrance gate, are many rocky, granite outcrops known as the Gol kopjes. We hope to visit this beautiful, peaceful area. While there one cannot help but feel extremely privileged to be allowed to intrude in this private place of the wild animals.

DAY 7, Friday, February 7: OLDUPAI GORGE & SOPA SAFARI LODGE

We leave camp immediately after an early breakfast and head for the Oldupai Gorge about two miles from the main road. The late Dr. Mary Leakey made many significant discoveries during the 50 years she spent there. There is a very nice little museum, with many photographs and text, illustrating the history of work undertaken there.

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We will continue our journey to Ngorongoro. We arrive for lunch at the Sopa Safari Lodge (http://www.sopalodges.com/ngorongoro-sopa-lodge/overview), situated on the north rim at an altitude of 7,800 feet, and overlooking the crater floor, 2,000 feet below.

After lunch we relax a little before driving to the crater floor at about 2pm for more game viewing. Most other operators take their clients back to the lodges (there are a total of four on the crater rim) at around the time we return to the crater floor. This is perfect for us because we then have far less traffic and dust to deal with, and the animals and birds are also much more at ease when approached.

**DAY 8, Saturday, February 8: NGORONGORO CRATER & NAINOKANOKA**

We awake very early, as usual, and take a picnic breakfast with us when we leave the lodge at 6am. We reach the crater floor in 20 minutes, and begin exploring this “Garden of Eden.” It is in the early mornings and late afternoons that the remaining black rhinoceros are up and about, moving along gracefully to and from their daytime pastures. These beautiful and gentle creatures are the last and only group of accessible black rhino in East Africa in their natural habitat—we won’t have to view them behind fences or moats!

Many other mammals, birds and plants dwell within this crater and along the rim, and all are very interesting. At the present time there are some 20,000 mammals residing in the crater and innumerable bird species, especially between the months of October and April, when the northern birds spend the winter months in these warmer climes.

At this time of the morning we often have the whole 120 square miles of the crater more or less to ourselves, as most visitors stay at lodges on the rim, taking their breakfast first, and therefore do not arrive on the crater floor until about 9:30am. At about that time we will take our picnic breakfast at a secluded spot away from the dust and main traffic.

We are likely to see thousands of wildebeest, buffalo and zebra, masses of Grant’s and Thomson’s gazelle, some hartebeest, eland, many wart hogs and some bat-eared foxes. There are about 30-40 resident adult bull elephants of all ages (no cows at all), 30-40 lion, hundreds of spotted hyena, many silver-backed and golden jackals, and a few rarely-seen and very nocturnal side-striped jackals. Serval cats and cheetah are often seen. Leopard, though numerous, are rarely seen during the day—in fact the crater is reputed to have the highest density of carnivores of any place in the world.

We will then slowly make our way back to the lodge, passing through other areas of the crater, arriving in time for lunch. We’ll relax for a short while at the lodge before driving towards Nainokanoka and the northern highlands where the local Maasai have their bomas and livestock.

**It is definitely possible to go by Lake Manyara National Park. It is on the way from Ngorongoro to Tarangire. So if the group made an early start from Ngorongoro, it then would be possible to spend several hours in Lake Manyara. But be aware that it is the lowest elevation of any of the places that you will visit...so it might be a bit warm!**

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DAY 9, Sunday, February 9: DEPART FOR TARANGIRE NATIONAL PARK

We breakfast at 6am and depart Sopa Safari Lodge for the Tarangire National Park, a drive of some two-to-three hours. Our route takes us along the east rim of the crater and we exit at Lodoare Gate. Early in the morning there is always a slight chance of seeing a leopard or other animal on the road.

From the gate we take the same paved road back towards the village of Mto wa Mbu that we passed through on our way out to the Serengeti. We then continue our journey to our Private Tented Camp in the Tarangire National Park. Soon after entering the park we may come across elephants on their way back from the river to their feeding grounds, and probably also see other mammals and birds, viewing these at leisure en route. We will arrive at our camp well before lunch: there we will meet the same camp staff, who will have transported our entire camp and all our equipment from the Serengeti to Tarangire for us. We will take an afternoon drive shortly after lunch, returning to camp before 7pm. As usual, after hot showers we have cocktails around the campfire before dinner.

DAYS 10-11, Monday, February 10-Tuesday, February 11: CAMPING AT TARANGIRE

As always, each morning we are brought coffee, tea, cocoa, and cookies at the bedside just before dawn so that we can move off as soon as possible after it gets light. We start the day with an early morning game drive, returning to camp for a late breakfast at about 9:30-10:30am, and drive out again for an hour or two before returning for lunch. We relax for a while before an afternoon drive at 4pm.

Birds we may see include goliath heron, little grebe, woodland kingfisher, magpie shrike, both Fischer’s and yellow-collared lovebirds, orange-bellied parrot, bateleur eagle, secretary bird, Masai ostrich, beautiful sunbird, and paradise whydah.

The park is particularly well-known for its large elephant herds, sometimes up to a thousand but more often in their hundreds. Large baobab trees are scattered thickly throughout the area.

Much of the park consists of acacia woodlands, but we also come across grassy plains areas on black cotton clay soils, which are very tricky to negotiate in the wet seasons. Areas of heavy bush country, swamps, and rocky granite outcrops are known as inselbergs or kopjies, and can be found in Tarangire as well.

Apart from the large elephant herds there are many other mammal species here, including fringe-eared oryx, Cape buffalo, eland, giraffe, zebra, wildebeest, waterbuck, reedbuck, dik dik, Coke's hartebeest, wart hog, Grant's gazelle, olive baboon, vervet monkey and several species of mongoose, and sometimes the elegant and beautiful lesser kudu.

We cannot forget of course the masses of impala antelope roaming here in Tarangire, which have a symbiotic relationship with the Acacia tortilis; the impala are dependent on the acacia pods for their protein and the acacia seeds do not germinate until they have passed through the stomach of the impala!
Lion and cheetah are usually seen here and more leopard are encountered nowadays. Spotted hyena, silver-backed jackals, and bat-eared foxes are also found here. In the past Tarangire was best known for its large population of black rhino which, sadly, are all gone. One can still however see some bushbuck, gerenuk, klipspringer and rarely, greater kudu. Over 430 bird species have been recorded in this park.

**DAY 12, Wednesday, February 12: ARUSHA TOWN & DEPART FOR KILIMINJARO AIRPORT**

After breakfast we say goodbye to our camp staff who have taken such good care of us, both in the Serengeti and here in Tarangire. We depart for Arusha town, arriving in good time for lunch and some shopping if we so wish. Apart from a greater variety of curios, Arusha is also the main center for the truly beautiful and rare **Tanzanite gemstone**, not found or mined anywhere else in the whole world!

We depart for the Kilimanjaro International airport in the late afternoon. On arrival at the airport you check-in before the large numbers of passengers arrive.

From Dr. Susan Elbin, NYC Audubon:

“I hope you will join us on NYC Audubon’s bird tour in Tanzania! Having lived in Africa for two years, I know how quickly the rhythm of the country becomes a part of your soul… the magnificent beauty of the birds, and the mesmerizing sounds of animals in the night! I have known Patricia and Bjorn for more than a decade – I know we will have an experience of a lifetime.”

From Patricia D. Moehlman, Tanzania Guides, Limited:

“It will be very hard to leave Tanzania, and the yen to return will persist for a long time - in fact probably until one returns again for another visit!

“We thank you very much for visiting us in Tanzania, and we wish you a good journey home!”

Kwaheri ya Kuonana - Karibu Tena
(Until We Meet Again) - (Welcome Back)

Giraffe © Patricia D. Moehlman

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