

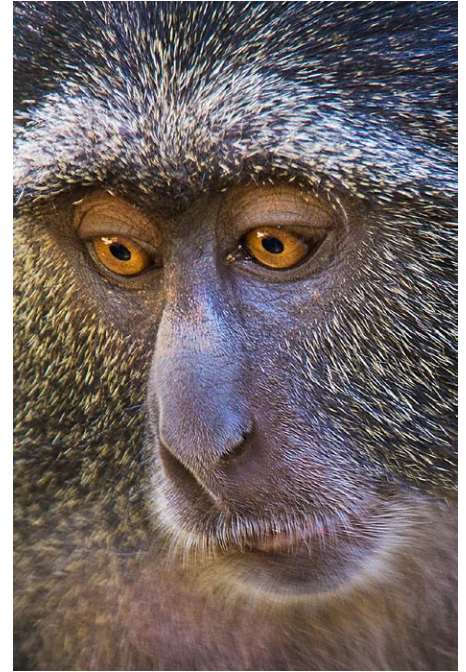
Tanzania 2013 Trip Report

Day 1

After a seamless trip to Tanzania (Everyone arriving on time and with all luggage in hand) and a night at the comfortable African Tulip Hotel we met our drivers and headed out of Arusha, through the rural countryside and up the wall of the Great Rift Valley to our first lodge, the Manyara Serena. Our game drive was designed to be a starter course that included getting used to safari vehicles, our photographic logistics like how and where to place super telephoto lenses, communicating with the driver, game spotting, holding on for dear life, etc.) At the same time it was a full fledged game drive that included lots of dark spotted giraffes that are common



to Manyara, close up elephants, crowned cranes, cute blue monkeys, and a specialty of the park; the famous tree climbing lions. In our case it was the famous tree climbing lion; a 3 year old male who is just getting his mane. He was resting in on an open area of one of Manyara's groundwater forest trees from which he gave us several nice poses and one yawn. All in all a nice first day.



Day 2

You can count on a morning in Manyara to be a pretty good photo shoot. This was our last “warm up” before going to the main event. The north meadow had lots of zebras and buffalo, ground hornbills, and even a hippo out of the water, making a bee line for the lake! The forest was filled with blue monkeys, but the big surprise was having an African crowned eagle fly into a tree and perch right over our heads! This was a new bird for me.



Back to the Lodge for breakfast, pack up the vans and off to Ndutu, my favorite place on Earth to photograph! The rains have been good and the thunder heads were all around us. We're hoping the rains will trigger the wildebeest birthing cycle.

Our first Ndutu game drive was a smashing success! Animals and birds everywhere. The question is, can you start hunting for cheetah, stop for a newborn impala, a perfectly perched spur fowl calling for a mate, and still get to the mating lions in time? The answer is...YES. We saw the lions across a marsh and did our very best to make it on time. Just as we got to the top of a rise they started in earnest! We were at eye level while the lions mated at a perfect angle in perfect light.



After that the female climbed 30' up a tree and went to sleep. Back to the lodge for a drink by the fire, dinner and bed.

Day 3

Out before dawn and rewarded by our 2 mating lions continuing their efforts by a lovely pond. God bless the D4 low noise high ISO! The predawn light was magic and the reflections in the pond were perfect. Then we drove to the Makau Plains for a cheetah hunt. On the way were steenbok, a few birds and Cape buffalo. We drove across the open grasslands until we saw a few vehicles in a group...cheetahs! It

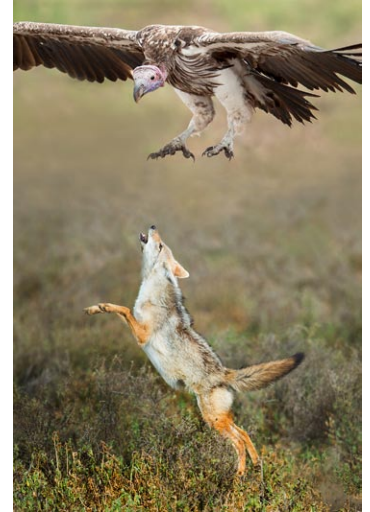




took longer to get there than we at first thought because off to the left was a mother cheetah and 2 cubs that no one knew about. We stayed with them for a while but heard the other cheetahs had a gazelle kill. Well...let's GO! 5 cheetahs were having breakfast. They ate for an hour till there was nothing left. Their next move was to move through the vans and take off after another group of gazelles! It was a half hearted attempt and it felt like they were chasing them simply because they were there. The halfhearted chase turned deadly serious when they spooked an African hare right in front of us! 5 cheetahs running full

speed in circles as the hare tried to evade capture...with limited success. One of the cubs caught it and paraded along side of us.

When we left the kill we tried to find the original 3 cheetahs, but instead found 3 golden jackals that had made a kill of what looked like a Thompson's gazelle who was in mid-birth. One of the jackals took the baby and ran for it, followed by a tawny eagle and us. He tried to put the moves on us by setting the kill in an aardvark den and walking away. As soon as it left the eagle, followed by a vulture dove at the kill. The jackal put his fur up and charged the birds. I started firing as the birds took flight and kept firing as the jackal jumped 5 feet into the air!!! I couldn't believe it and now have one of my favorite safari photographs of my life. Breakfast for US was under an acacia tree, then back to the lodge. It will be tough to top this one, but we sure will try.



Our afternoon drive consisted of driving out the big marsh to hunt for leopard, finding the leopard, and waiting for the leopard to come out of the tall grass and climb a tree. It did that twice, but the setting wasn't that pretty. She has 2 little cubs that we never saw. Maybe tomorrow!



Day 4

This morning's plan was to find the mating lions' pride; the one with all the females and cubs. Then go see if the leopard was active and finish with the cheetahs. Best laid plans and all that...It seems there was a group of campers last night who got lost and set up camp right where the lions have been mating. In the middle of the night they were surrounded by 10 lions. They did a QUICK pack up and went to the Ranger's Post and spent the night there. Not only did the campers leave the area, but so did the lion pride, so we came up empty this morning. We split up so 2 drivers went to the leopard with cubs and 2 of drivers went to the

planes for cheetah. The Macau Planes cover a huge area and it was hard to find the cheetahs. When we found them the family of 5 had another Tommy kill. The situation was even better than yesterday. Soft, clouded light allowed us to change positions often and with only 3 vehicles on the scene it was easy to find great openings as they fed, yawned, stretched, played, and groomed. Purple and white flowers and soft green grass made a nice backdrop for the set. After eating they walked a kilometer to the huge lone acacia tree for some shade and a climb. It's amazing to see these huge cats climber the sheer face of this 80 foot tree.



Photo by James Chifete

Those who went to see if the leopard would bring out her cubs were rewarded with an amazing show. She picked them up in her mouth and moved them from the bushes to a new tree! I can only dream of this once in a lifetime opportunity! The photos are terrific.

Our afternoon was spent on the Makau Planes with 5 different cheetahs. These are the same family from last year when the cubs were 3 weeks old. These guys were just going from here to there looking for something to hunt. The young male cub was the leader as they approached a black dirt clearing that turned out to be black mud. The poor cat sunk to his knees and struggled to get out while the rest went



around. After that he limped around trying to get the mud from between his toes. He will forever be known as Black Socks. They were still on the hunt and climbed on fallen logs for a look around. They surprised a caracal (a new sight for me) who dove into a hole in the ground. All of Black Socks' limping around disappeared when they flushed a steenbok. He put on the afterburners and literally FLEW after the tiny antelope. It was an unsuccessful chase but was great to see and photograph. The cheetah tally is up to 13!

There's always action! Here a golden jackal defends a kill from a Griffon Vulture!

Day 5

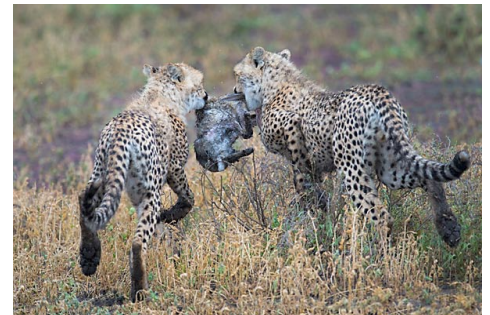
I swear to God I'm going to get to that leopard and cub...but not this morning! We got side tracked by cheetahs again. This time it was a mother and 2 cubs hunting on the Macau Planes. The mother captured an African hare and training began. She brought it to the cubs, released it and watched as they chased and took down the hare. They didn't really



know how to make the kill so it happened time and time again. It was great photography for us, wonderful training for the cubs, and a REALLY awful day for the spring hare. When they finally made the kill, the mother let the cubs eat before going on a real hunt for gazelles. One the way back to the lodge we

stopped for some elephants and got a flat tire. Once that was fixed we realized it was a good thing to have happened. If we had gone straight to the lodge we would have missed the birth of a brand new zebra colt. Every year there is at least one amazing event that I have never seen before and this falls into that category. The mother nudged the colt to his feet, nosed it's head up and taught it to stand, walk, nurse and run; all in about 15 minutes.

This afternoon was for the birds...Lots and lots of birds. An Eagle owl, African hoopoe, tawny eagles and more. It's kind of cool to have an afternoon without the big cats that allows for more varied subjects...That being said...WHERE'S THE LEOPARD?!





Day 6

A morning for the birds. This time 2 eagle owls hooting at each other, snake eagle, black shouldered kite, bateleur eagle, lilac-breasted rollers and a KILLER martial eagle in flight. On the way home we found one of the cheetah families of five hunting, catching, training cubs with a baby impala. After that the mom with 2 cubs...then ANOTHER mom with 2 cubs that we had never seen before. The cheetah count is now 18!



The afternoon drive was all about the leopard! Driving to the area where the mother leopard was last seen we were rewarded by seeing her in a meadow hunting guinea fowl. Before we could get into position we could only watch as she run at a bird. When it took off she launched 8 feet into the air and clipped a wing. Feathers were flying but the bird stayed in the air long enough to escape. She climbed a small acacia tree and slept for the rest of the afternoon. I thought she would come down to nurse the cubs, but it took a long time. Just before sunset she stretched, yawned and came down the tree in an amazing headfirst descent. We go some great chances at her as she walked through short grass and open areas to where we think the cub are now tucked safely away. Maybe she'll show them to us tomorrow.

I love relationships in nature photography. If it reflects aggression, humor, or love...I'm happy! If you've followed the posts from this safari you will know who Black Socks is. The cub in front of the mother is him one year ago!



Day 7

There was another rain storm last night and the herds will be coming in. The morning was misty as we went to the planes. Huge herds of zebras appeared and disappeared into the fog. Bright patches of fog had silhouettes of zebras, wildebeest, and ostrich in the distance.



We were absolutely ecstatic as a family of hyenas appeared out of the mist carrying a newborn zebra (again, great for the hyenas, great for us, not so great for the zebra). They chased each other across the planes whooping and laughing as they fought over the kill. Then mating zebras, golden jackals, bat-eared foxes, LIONS. We finally found the Marsh Pride! They were asleep, but we know where to find them.



Day 8

Lions in the morning! The pride of 10 was out and active; playing, drinking from the dew covered grass, climbing in trees...lots of that. As we watched the lions at play a Lilac breasted roller flew in, caught a huge beetle, beat the crap out of it, tossed it in the air and swallowed it. When they went to the tall grass we started our hunt. First up was a hyena with the ugliest wildebeest skull imaginable. I'm not sure I will share that with anyone...ever.

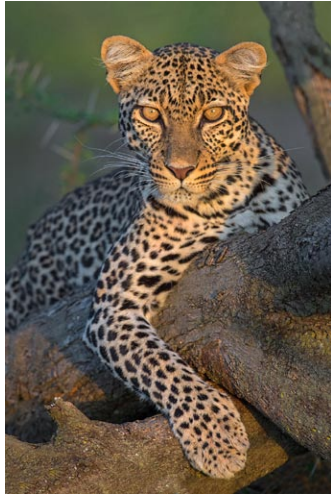




Black Socks and his cheetah family were hunting in the woodlands. There were grants gazelle and zebras. While she waited for the zebras to clear out 3 Thompson's gazelles ran across the meadow right to the waiting mother. The chase was over before it began as she took a pregnant gazelle. The feeding was fast and intense with the cubs eating the most. Best shots were when she brought the kill to the cubs and any time they lifted it to change position.

Day 9

We had a fantastic morning and afternoon of shooting! There's that rhythm of safari where you need to know when to be done with a shoot and get on to the next thing. Today was like that. We had so many great things including a 3 day old giraffe, crested eagle, and the most amazing white storks. They migrate from Europe by the thousands and drop into Ndotu. We happened to be along a stream in the valley when the started landings in the mirror smooth water. They waded and drank; creating perfect reflections! Photo Heaven! On the way home as the light turned golden I said. "Nico, it looks like leopard light." He said 3 seconds later (I'm not lying!) "Good, because there is the leopard!"



On a branch, sitting upright, she let us get within 30 feet. I didn't want to spook her so we stayed there. No one else on the planet but us! She ended up getting down TO CHASE A BABY ZEBRA!!! She missed, but walked all over the meadow and allowed us to follow. Up another tree in the GOLDEN light of the setting sun, she sat and posed on a branch 8 feet off the ground and 15 feet from us!! until we had to leave. She gave us the most memorable 40 minutes you could imagine. I still can't breathe.



Day 10

Our last morning in Ndotu and it's the first clear morning where we can expect that golden first light. In the dark before dawn we found one of the big marsh Pride males, all alone on a small grassy rise by the marsh. As the sun came up and hit him the whole world turned golden for the most beautiful lion portraits I have ever seen.

Back for check out and the drive to Serengeti. I got the chills at the Nabi Hill Gate when I saw a book in the gift shop. It's a book I collaborated on with David Martin; Game Parks of East Africa. I shot the front and back covers and lots of the interior photos. It's been out of print for years but they must have found a box of them somewhere.

The afternoon in the Serengeti was completely taken by a leopard mom and her 2 month old cubs. They were in a sausage tree. The 2 cubs hopped down to explore as a hyena approached. The mother panicked and dropped the kill. The hyena grabbed it and prevented the cubs from climbing back into the tree.



The mother leaped from the tree as 15 elephants approached and surrounded the tree, chasing the hyena off. They all put their trunks up when they smelled the leopard; the two cubs scrambled into the tree as the elephants looked on....ASTOUNDING.

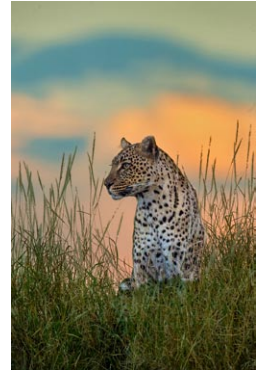
Then she needed to nurse as the mother growled her displeasure as if to say "I've had a really bad day!"

Day 11

Today was all about flight. With so many raptors around and few trees for them to perch on all we needed was the right wind. With wind and sun at our backs we were able to get action filled flight photography of auger buzzard, secretary bird, long crested, martial and tawny eagles. Then it was off to the ponds for grey heron, crowned cranes, and saddle-billed stork. WOW on all of that.



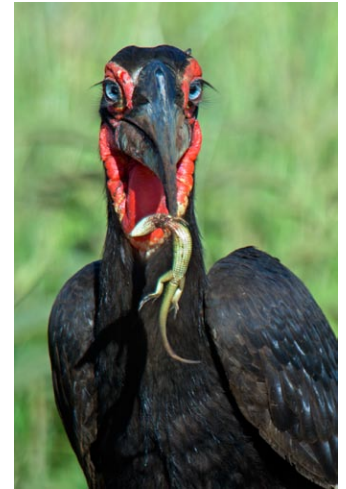
Leopards in the afternoon! Some went to see if the big male would come down to hunt...it did. We went to see if the mother and 2 cubs would come down and play...they did! Just as the sun turned golden they all came down from the fig tree and played along the road. There were no vehicles there but us as the cubs played “ambush Mom” and “ambush the other cub” 15 feet from the van. The capper was when mom left the cubs to play, went up a termite mound at our eye level with sunset clouds behind her. YIKES!



Day 12



It's a travel day so we're up early for a short game drive to the hippo pool to see if there's any action there. You can usually see a yawn or two and some light sparring from a nice vantage point in morning light. Today was different. The short rains were good, to pool full of clean water and the hippos were ready for action. We photographed hippo fights all morning long. We took breaks



from the furious action to get portraits and the occasional yawn. This was the best morning of continuous hippo action I've ever had. On the way back to breakfast there were ground hornbills hunting close to the road. We stopped in perfect light just as one of them caught a beautiful green lizard, shook it around and ate it looking at us the whole time. The Serengeti does not disappoint.



Day 13

We're on the Crater floor before sunrise searching for lions. On the first pass we struck out and settled for buffalo, elephants, zebras fighting, and a pair of crowned cranes doing an intricate courtship dance. We backtracked as soon as we heard the 2 black maned lions from the Mungu River pride were out for portraits in the golden morning light. Some people found kori bustards displaying for a mate, others waited a 2 black rhino ambled across a meadow to the road, while our group watched as a



zebra mare gave birth to a foal. Just at delivery time a huge hyena came in and tried to grab the newborn only to be chased away by the protective stallion. When more hyenas came near we left, not wanting to see the sad end of the story. Just before breakfast we watched as a lioness crept in close to a herd of buffalo to steal a calf. The largest female buffalo tuned the tables and came after the lioness like a freight train. The wide eyed look of terror on her face as she ran toward us was priceless. It's the Crater!

Day14



The lions were out in the meadow, but the real story was the big tusked elephant in the hippo pool. When we got in position and started shooting 3 more big bulls moved in from the plane. The 4 bulls moved out of hippo pool and did some trunk twisting and tusk



jousting. Our last stop was on the second curve of the Mungu River. It was crowned crane heaven with 300 spectacular birds dancing, flying and courting.

Tonight was our good bye party with our guides and a slide show to show them what we were able to do thanks to their efforts. Everyone's photos were GREAT!

Day 15

We packed all our luggage EARLY and hit the Crater floor at 6:30. Lake Magadi was bigger because of a local rain storm last night, so the flamingos were much closer to the road. Jackals were hunting and the zebras were drinking but best was a male kori bustard displaying on a hill in perfect light. As he patrolled back and forth making his thrumming, low frequency call with his white neck feathers puffed out like a giant powder puff. The best kori bustard ever.

It's time to wind the safari down, have lunch at Gibbs Farm, shop at the Cultural Heritage Center and say good bye to those who are returning home after a memorable Tanzania Gustafson Photo Safari. Next stop Rwanda!

