Tanzania: Wildlife Spectacular Tour Report 2025

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Serengeti, Ngorongoro, these are names that resonate with many keen wildlife photographers and indeed there is almost nothing that rivals a safari in the northern circuit of Tanzania. It is a wondrous adventure filled with light, wildlife, colours, sounds and smells. The 2025 Wild Images photo tour in beautiful Tanzania had plenty of experiences for every sense and our group of photographers hence assembled in Arusha in the evening of the 16th of April with so much enthusiasm at the start of the trip, the excitement in the air was palpable.

I had heard about a number of wonderful sightings our Birdquest trip had enjoyed just prior to the Wild Images tour and, as the leader of the trip, I held my breath and hoped that we would continue on from the success of the Birdquest tour. I also heard that the rainy season was not as bountiful as in 2024 and this would prove to be a blessing.

The two weeks that followed indeed brought us encounters with huge herds on the annual migration, many incredible encounters with Lions (we saw over 100 during the trip), four Leopards including a small cub, six Cheetah and three Servals. On the herbivore side, there were Cape Buffalos with their incredible stare, close encounters with roaming and even fighting Elephant bulls, as well as antelopes of all sizes from giant Eland to tiny Kirk's Dik-diks. The remarkable diversity of Tanzania also rewarded us with so many bird encounters that towards the end, we commonly lost track of how many bird species we photographed, probably over a hundred. Since our trip took place during the rainy season, it was wonderful to see so many beautiful African birds not only in breeding plumage but actually displaying, mating and breeding.

Tarangire

Before leaving Arusha, we already changed the plan, as Lake Manyara NP, our planned destination, was still mostly flooded and hence we arranged a half-day visit to Tarangire National Park at short notice. We left Arusha in the early morning and travelled along a plain of flat country dotted with Maasai bomas, herds and shepherds. To our surprise, the first zebras and gazelles we saw on the trip were actually grazing on the pastures close to Maasai cows! Two hours later, we arrived at the entrance gate to Tarangire. It was our first chance to test our cameras and get comfortable with taking photos from our car. After checking in at the park gate, we encountered Vervet Monkeys, Olive Baboons, beautiful Hadada Ibis and tiny Three-banded Plovers. The first giraffes and buffalo appeared but at such distances that we rather focussed on the birdlife such as Red and Yellow Barbets, Lilac-breasted Roller and wader species which were sitting either on or right next to the road. We also saw our first Lioness who had climbed into a tree and was getting a bit nervous as an Elephant bull headed in her direction. The bull, however, changed course and after coming within ten metres of us, made its way towards the river. After a casual picnic lunch overlooking the currently mighty Tarangire river, we continued and left the park in the early afternoon.

Ngorongoro Crater

Leaving Tarangire at around 2:30 pm, we drove up towards the crater rim and arrived just in time to make a stop at the lookout over the entire crater. It quite literally took our breath away, as the altitude of 2300 metre above sea level meant rather thin air. Before and below us was the crater floor with herds of wildebeest and buffalo, and so much water. In between gaps in the fantastic isolated clouds rushing over the crater floor, even the sun came out. All of us were in awe. We took some photos from the lookout and continued our journey around the crater rim. As the sun went down, we checked into our stunning lodge where all of our rooms had spectacular views over Ngorongoro crater. We were all speechless about our views and our first dinner was introduced by a Maasai show while we watched the last rays of light dance over one of Africa's finest wildlife destinations. What an incredible introduction to one of Africa's most famous wilderness areas!

As a safari guide, you always hope that you can show your clients some amazing species, including and beyond the famous big five. I had a mental checklist that included seeing elephants, Black Rhino, lions, hyenas, zebras, buffalo and wildebeest for the crater days. What I didn't realise was that our first day in the crater would actually tick off every single item on my mental check list with one exception: we

missed seeing a Lion on the first day.

We started our three days in the crater with breakfast in the dark at 6 am, but by the time we arrived in the crater, there was enough light to think about photography. We came across the first hyena and also a hunting Serval, but the distance was too great to think about photography. In the eastern part of the crater, the first Black Rhinos were spotted in the distance but we managed to find one that was well within photographic range. I was relieved by this first good rhino opportunity because while it is normally straightforward to see Black Rhino in the crater, getting close enough to photograph one is a different matter. A bit later, we had our first encounter with some of the magnificent Elephant bulls of the crater and their enormous tusks. They come to the crater for the soft grass which they can easily chew with their worn teeth.

After our lunch break, we encountered two Black Rhino and initially, they were a bit far and the heat distortion was still omnipresent. This gradually changed and they finally were within fifty metres! This meant we observed and photographed them for over half an hour before we unfortunately had to leave them in the beautiful evening sun. We had spent eleven hours in the crater but the time went by so quickly. Nevertheless, everyone was tired by the time we reached the lodge but the views over the crater from our balconies were once again a real treat and so was the dinner thereafter.

The second day in Ngorongoro started dull and grey and after the fabulous encounters of the previous day, we started to search for cats. After a few minutes, we found a Lioness with cubs and spend over an hour with them, as they were walking and playing. The interactions of Lions never cease to elicit a strong photographic response. Afterwards, we checked the longer grass and there were two younger male lions watching a group of wildebeest. Just as we thought about giving up we noticed the Wildebeest had clearly seen the two male Lions and out of nowhere a third Lion, a female, jumped up and within a second had grabbed a Wildebeest by its throat. We witnessed a successful Lion hunt but none of us managed to take any photos. We watched as the lions started to feed but the grass was rather high, hence the resulting pictures were not great,

The beautiful thing about being in Tanzania during the rainy season is that you see so many wonderful birds in breeding plumage and lots of fantastic behaviour which makes for wonderful photos. We found displaying Pin-tailed Whydahs with their stunning streamer-like tails flying around and got close to desperation trying to photograph Jackson's Widowbirds that were always perching nicely but flew off before we could take photos. We managed to capture some beautiful images of Grey Crowned Cranes that were so close we got some great portraits of these stunning birds. I started to wonder if the real magic of this safari was going to be in all the birds we managed to see and photograph. After some nice Elephant bull encounters, we found the two Black Rhinos again at the eastern side of the crater and as they were lying relatively close to a road, we decided to stay put and wait. This turned out to be a good decision, as they got up and started coming towards us during the nicest evening sun. They only stopped 15 m in front of the car and we filled our memory cards. The hardest thing about being in Ngorongoro is actually leaving Ngorongoro and getting out before the gate closes. It is always so hard to leave! Today was no different. Once again, we managed to get out of the crater just in time with ten minutes before gate closure.

Enjoying three days in Ngorongoro really gives you a chance to complete a portfolio of sightings in Ngorongoro and our third day produced some wonderful encounters once again. We drove to the edge of Lake Magadi which was more than twice its normal size due to the heavy rains last year. This, however, attracted many Greater Flamingos and we spent some time practising our bird in flight techniques until everyone managed to obtain a number of decent flight shots. We also enjoyed close encounters with a number of wader species, such as Black-winged Stilt, Kentish Plover and the tiny Little Stint. Speaking of tiny, we found a freshly born Thomson's Gazelle calf that was merely a day old and still a bit shaky on its legs. The intimacy between mother and calf kept us occupied for quite some time. After a brief encounter with a pair of Lions that were trying to find some shade, we made our way to the usual picknick site for lunch. David was busy photographing birds and he alerted us to the challenge of trying to capture Speke's Weavers in flight with nesting material, a challenge we all accepted but also found very challenging indeed.

During the afternoon, we spend additional time with the Greater Flamingos of Lake Magadi and they continued to provide us with opportunities. We were positively the last car to leave the crater and arrived at the gate ten minutes before closing time.

What an incredible few days of photography. I think at this point some of us were starting to wonder if we would run out of memory cards or disk space we'd seen so much. Following our last dinner, we saw the staff of our hotel joining us to sing our farewell from Ngorongoro in the evening. It made it so hard for us to leave!

From the crater highlands to the Serengeti

To reach the famous Serengeti region of Tanzania, you must depart the edge of Ngorongoro crater and drive past many Maasai bomas to get there. We did leave relatively early at 7 am and, after making a stop at a lookout to get our last glimpses of the crater highlands, we continued westwards. On this day, our transit day to the Serengeti, we had our first close encounters with giraffes of the trip which was very exciting. Even for someone who has seen thousands of giraffes, your first sight of them wandering around in search of food is always wonderful. Our sighting this morning was somewhat special as the giraffes were feeding on *Acacia drepanolobium* trees, a small species of Acacia which produces galls in which ants live. They, in turn, defend the tree against browsing giraffes, a classic example of a symbiosis or mutualism. The giraffes, however, were not disturbed and we watched them rip of the young leaves from the top and we found it hard to imagine this not being rather painful with all the long thorns.

We drove further and visited a little Maasai boma where we managed to see some of the famous Maasai dancing where men leap high into the air. We also managed some decent portraits of Maasai in their homes. This was a lovely little village and a warm introduction to the Maasai people in this area. Their smiles certainly lingered with all of us long after we left. I am sure they smiled as well after we left as none of us managed to bargain enough to get a reasonable price for the souvenirs we bought!

We drove on towards the famous Oldupai Gorge, the site of Mary and Richard Leakey's most famous excavations of the world's early hominids *Australopithecus* and *Homo habilis* and *Homo erectus*. At Oldupai, we took a small tour of the excavation site museum and before we finally left to drive out to the gates of the Serengeti, we visited the flower patches around the museum site and were luckily rewarded with very good photographic opportunities of stunning sunbird species, such as the aptly named Beautiful Sunbird, Variable Sunbird and the gorgeous Scarlet-chested Sunbird.

SERENGETI

Before arriving at the Naabi Hill entrance gate, we stopped at the border between the Ngorongoro Conservation Area and Serengeti National Park. We continued to the gate and stopped there to have lunch, accompanied by Superb Starlings, Hildebrandt's Starlings and African Grass Rats. Afterwards, we headed to the east to check out the Gol-Kopjes, a famous area for Lion and Cheetah. As the Serengeti was lush and green, some big herds were still in the area and hence we drove through thousands of Wildebeest, Zebra, Eland, and this is where we saw our first Topi and Kongoni (Coke's Hartebeest), Hartebeest species closely related to the Wildebeest. Later on, we found a pride of Lions resting in the shade. While the females were sleeping, there were young cubs only a month or so old and they were rather active and so were we. A bit later, we found another pride and there were 16 Lions in total, twelve cubs and four mothers and they walked right next to us. As it was getting dark, we finally reached the main road to Seronera and the north of the Serengeti and we were happy to arrive at the beautiful lodge at 7 pm. What an exhilarating day and everyone was very tired but glad to be in bed soon after dinner.

With the next morning, we were back to our routine of early breakfast at 6 am and early departure at 6:30 for a full day game drive with lunchboxes. As we drove into the Seronera valley, we encountered a beautiful Lioness on a Kopje and she really posed for us in the morning sun. A little bit later, we found a whole pride of Lions, again with small cubs and mothers in the tree. We could hardly prevent laughing at the clumsiness of Lions in trees and our good spirits continued as we encountered a Pygmy Falcon which was perched at 2 m height right next to the road. I needed a toilet stop and that turned out to be possible at a nearby picnic site. As we arrived, our driver-guide Exaud shouted snake and indeed a Battersby's Green Snake was sunning itself on top of a sun shade. After this exciting and diverse morning, we enjoyed our lunch break. Afterwards we received a tip via radio and made our way to a spot north of Seronera. High up in a tree, hardly visible, was a Leopard. We decided to wait for it to come down and this gamble paid off after a wait of two hours. We were treated to half an hour of Leopard observation and there were some decent photographic opportunities as well. The first full day in the Serengeti had brought a set of additional photo opportunities and our Tanzania portfolio was steadily taking shape.

Next day, same procedure, same game drive location: Seronera valley. Initially, the avifauna was kind to us, from a beautiful Brown-headed parrot to a Red-necked Francolin beautifully perched to one of the most powerful eagles in the world, the majestic Martial Eagle. After a brief stop to fill the tank at Seronera petrol station, we receive a tip via radio. Luckily, we were not far and we managed to get a glimpse of a Leopard cub in a tree before it followed its mother down into bushes. What a sight and just as we caught our breath, right next to us on the other side of the road a cheetah appeared, a rare sight indeed in Seronera valley. We were thrilled by this, our first opportunity to photograph a cheetah. The afternoon gives us ample more chances to enlarge our Lion portfolio with embarrassingly clumsy Lionesses in a sausage tree, later on we find more Lions on a Kopje. As the light starts to disappear, it was finally time to leave the Kopjes and head north again but we are held back by another Leopard in a tree, which luckily stretched and descended to the ground

just with enough light to photograph it. We finally managed to get back to the main road and back in time for another delicious dinner at the lodge. What an amazing day with so much besides three cat species.

From the Serengeti to Lake Ndutu

On our last Serengeti morning, we packed up our vehicle and safari'd our way south. We tried our luck in the Seronera valley again, but this time not much caught our photographic interest. Towards the Gol Kopjes, the short-grass plains were relatively empty but out of nothing, a stunning cheetah stood on top of a termite mound. As we approached it, it was busy scanning the horizon for potential prey which allowed us to photograph it in this beautiful setting. Shortly afterwards, we reached the Kopjes and found a pride of Lions. As they were, as most of the time, sleeping, we left them as we had to leave the Serengeti at 1 pm due to the 24 hour permits. We were held up by another male Lion and when it moved into the shade, it was a fitting farewell to our time in this magnificent, gigantic park.

Lake Ndutu

Our final stop of the tour, Lake Ndutu, was waiting for us, so we took a slow safari drive around the edge of the Serengeti to yet another incredible location. The big advantage of Lake Ndutu from a photographer's point of view is the ability to go off-road if needed. Therefore, everyone in the group was very excited about the prospect of close encounters over the coming four days. We reached the lodge at 4 pm and some of us went on a little afternoon game drive until darkness. I had hoped to have our first dinner there with the resident Genets, but unfortunately they never appeared that night. Although Ndutu lodge is a little more simple, we all instantly fell in love with it due to the super friendly staff and the homelike feel of this wild bush camp that is still privately owned, unfenced and on the frontier of stunning Lake Ndutu.

The next morning, we woke up again early to enjoy coffee and breakfast, this time with the resident Genets who live in the roof of the lodge at Ndutu, before we went off on safari at 6:30 am. We made our way to the open plains and for the first 90 minutes, not much happened. We came across a lake at the hidden valley and from a distance we could see a magnificent herd of Wildebeest and Zebra crossing the lake. We decided to try and get close and we managed indeed as more and more animals arrived and crossed the lake with us parked right next to them. We estimated that between 20000 to 30000 animals crossed and the spectacle took around 90 minutes. Needless to say, we took quite some photos of this incredible migration event that was like the famous river crossings in the Mara in August. On the way back to the lodge, we stopped to photograph very photogenic male Giraffes and Kongonis. It was here at Lake Ndutu where we could finally enjoy a midday break, so we returned to the lodge for lunch and had 1-2 hours of rest. Some of us used the rest to photograph sunbirds and weavers around the lodge.

After lunch, we went back out on safari and we headed to the short grass plains in search of Cheetah. Before reaching it, we were stopped by two Giraffe that were intensely play-fighting for half an hour. On the plains, two Bat-eared Foxes stepped in to provide us with nice photographic opportunities. We also bumped into decent herds of wildebeest and zebra with some Thomson's Gazelles in between. The way back to the lodge was during gorgeous evening light, so we were back just before darkness. Another delicious dinner was a nice ending to the day, this time with genets walking around the beams of the main lodge building.

The next morning saw us slipping into the Lake Ndutu routine with early breakfast and early-morning game drive. We went to the Lake Masek area in search of Serval, but with no luck. We did a bit of Flamingo photography and at the end of the morning game drive, we found a pride of Lions in two different trees which gave us ample opportunities for head portraits and other shots to complete our Lion in trees portfolio. We were back at the lodge at 12 noon and enjoyed the lunch and the rest. Bird photography again proved popular with some of us and a very cooperating Diederik Cuckoo was a nice appetizer.

The afternoon game drive started at 3.30 pm and while it was not overloaded with wonderful sightings, we caught a Tawny Eagle which had caught a Grass Rat and was busy eating it in the beautiful evening light and just as that light was starting to disappear, we found the Lion pride again which we had seen just before noon and we practised available-light photography.

The next morning started early again and this time we drove to the plains at a different location. This was initially rewarded with a very nice sighting of a Long-crested Eagle and as we arrived on the plains, we found a large herd of Wildebeest. A bit in the distance, Exaud spotted two cheetah and while they were initially quite shy, this eased and hence our photographic opportunities increased. As they were about to hunt, we kept some distance. While not successful, it was really interesting to see them walk right up to the wildebeest to start a panic. Afterwards, we approached them again and were treated to over an hour of quality Cheetah time. Afterwards, we spent a few minutes with a pride of lions and were hence back at the lodge at noon again.

After lunch, we had an opportunity to photograph a Flap-necked Chameleon which had been found by one of the employees of the lodge. We could observe it at close quarters and finally left it at the base of a tree. We spent the rest of the afternoon on the plains but only as we got back to the wooded savannah around Lake Ndutu, we bumped into three Elephant bulls play-fighting intensively. We watched in awe for over half an hour and two times, one of the bulls came so close we could have shaken hands with its trunk. This was a fitting finish of the day and back at the lodge we enjoyed a last dinner in the bush, augmented by the sounds of wildebeests and hyenas calling.

As has been the case with our numerous safaris at Ndutu over the years, it was hard to get everyone to leave. Our final morning photography safari actually started even earlier as we left at 6 am for a final push towards the plains. The sunrise was stunning and so was a Black-chested Snake Eagle who perched in truly gorgeous morning light for us. After receiving a tip, we arrived at a clump of grass and there, well-hidden, was a Serval. We spent over an hour with it and saw it stalking and almost catching a quail. Back to the lodge, we quickly packed our stuff and off we went on our last drive out towards Ngorongoro and then on to Arusha, I think all of us felt a great sadness to be leaving such an incredible safari trip with so many sightings. As we were on the plains for a final time, we found two carcasses and lots of vultures noisily fighting for access to them. From the enormous Lappet-faced Vulture to many Rueppell's and White-backed Vultures and the much smaller Hooded Vultures, we had not seen such a vulture feast in twelve days and now two within two hours. They were coming in, fighting, leaving, just as we thought our photographic opportunities had ended with the Serval sighting this morning, the memory cards filled once more.

What an extraordinary journey through Tanzania! I think we all ended up shooting more pictures than we ever expected to do on a safari tour due to the extreme variety and outstanding sightings but what more can a safari guide ask for? Of course not everything worked out as I had hoped, but you always need a (photographic) reason to come back. My final thank you goes to our wonderful driver Exaud who got us through everything and to my fellow photographers. I was a real pleasure travelling with you and I believe we were a real team and learned a great deal from each other.

I think the only complaints were that the editing workload from the trip would be huge with so many images and memories to process.

Our next tour to Tanzania will be in April 2026 and I am sure it will be a roaring success!