KENYA

Exotic Birds & Big Game

August 16 - September 3, 2027

As a child, I eagerly awaited each Saturday's installment of the British Broadcasting Corporation's natural history series. I was glued to my seat by the incredible footage from the savannas of East Africa—immense herds of big game, and all those fascinating predators, especially the big cats. David Attenborough's enthusiasm and fascinating narration are permanently engraved in my memory. I never doubted that one day I would experience the drama of those wildlife-packed plains myself.



A magnificent alpha male Lion © Andrew Whittaker

My first day in Nairobi National Park in 2020, convinced me that anyone who truly loves nature must experience an East African safari. As Hemingway once wrote, "I never knew of a morning in Africa when I woke up that I was not happy."

Our exciting tour is scheduled to coincide with the Great Wildebeest Migration, the largest mass migration of animals on our planet, in which endless columns of countless thousands of Wildebeests,

zebras, elands, and gazelles stream onto the nutrient-rich grasslands of the Masai Mara. Though it is never precisely predictable, we will be in the best areas at the best time to witness this world-class spectacle on these vast expanses of rolling grasslands dotted with acacia trees. These vast herds of herbivores attract one of the greatest concentrations of large predators, giving us excellent chances to observe and enjoy lions, Leopards, Cheetahs, Spotted Hyenas, and even the delicate Serval. Big game simply abounds on this tour, with delightful herds of African Elephants, Giraffes of three distinct subspecies, White and Black Rhinos, Hippos, Buffalos, an assortment of spectacular antelope, rare Grevy's Zebra, Beisa Oryx to the odd Gerenuk and several primates.



Wildebeest and Common Zebras © Andrew Whittaker



The iconic Secretarybird © Andrew Whittaker

Kenya is a mecca for birders, too. Tallying 1,150 species, Kenya boasts the richest avifauna in all of Africa. In the course of our trip, we can expect to enjoy over 400 species, representing such classic endemic families as ostriches, colorful turacos, mousebirds, wood hoopoes, and even blood-loving oxpeckers! Kenya's birds are also very confiding, offering great and easy birding plus excellent photographic opportunities. Our daily lists often exceed 100 species.

The Kenyan people are delightfully friendly and extremely courteous; our local guide is fun to travel with and an exceptional birder and naturalist. The country also boasts a great tourist infrastructure. Traveling here is safe, and the standard of food and accommodation is high. Our excellent eco-lodges and private comfortable Tented Camp in the center of the Mara are perfectly located in Kenya's world-famous game reserves: Masai Mara and Samburu National Reserves, and Lake Nakuru, Baringo, and Aberdare National Parks, all are simply brimming with birds and big game. Even during our midday breaks, there is a chance for some mouthwatering birding on the lodge grounds or our camp site.



A mother Serval hunting with her kitten © Andrew Whittaker

Our tour begins in Nairobi National Park, famous for its endangered White and Black Rhinos and abundant game, with a bird list of more than 500 species. A marvelous six days in the Masai Mara follows, the crème de la crème of East African birding and big game viewing. We then visit the delightful East African Rift Valley, where we will explore two mid-elevation lakes, Nakuro and Baringo. Waterbirds simply abound here, with throngs of flamingos, storks, herons, pelicans, cormorants, migrant shorebirds, and terns. Enjoying a delightful boat trip on Lake Baringo. There are also many raptors and more exciting big game around Lake Nakuru, including the localized Rothschild Giraffe.

In stark contrast, our next stop is in the cooler highland forest of the Aberdare Range, where our base for two exciting nights is the famous Ark. Here we enjoy an exciting mammal show at the salt lick and large pool right outside our rooms. We enjoy this spectacle from the lodge's unique multi-level decks, with herds of Elephants, shy bushbuck, buffalo, hyenas, and Giant Forest Hogs entertain us. Also explore the birdlife off the elevated boardwalk. The surrounding lush forests are home to a wealth of colorful and exciting birds, too, including Crowned Eagle, Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Red-fronted Parrot, Doherty's and Black-fronted Bushshrikes, Hatlaub's Turaco, Golden-winged and Malachite Sunbirds, Red-throated Wryneck, Abyssinian Crimsonwing, and endemics like Jackson's Spurfowl.

We finish with three days in the exceptional Samburu National Park, a very different habitat of semi-arid and seasonally dry forest and savanna dissected by the Ewaso Nyiro River and home to a unique set of sought-after birds and mammals. Especially notable among the mammals here are the Reticulated Giraffe, Grevy's Zebra, Bright's Gazelle, Kirk's Dik-dik, Lesser Kudu, (Long-necked) Gerenuk, and magnificent Beisa Oryx.



Herd of male Reticulated Giraffe © Andrew Whittaker

The full set of big cats and elephants are here, too. Avian stars include the Somali Ostrich, Kori and Buff-crested Bustards, Vulturine Guineafowl, Pygmy Falcon, Somali Bee-eater, Somali Courser, Rosy-patched Bushshrike, Taita Fiscal, Golden-breasted Starling, Golden Pipit, Donaldson-smith Sparrow-weaver, Somali Bunting and Lichtenstein's, Black-faced, and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse.



Golden Pipit © Andrew Whittaker

"How can you explain the fascination of this vast, dusty continent, whose oldest roads are elephant paths? Could it be because Africa is the place of all our beginnings, the cradle of mankind, where our species first stood upright on the savannas of long ago?" – Brian Jackman

August 16-17, Days 1–2: Travel to Nairobi, Kenya

Participants should arrive at Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (airport code NBO) no later than August 17. Those wishing to minimize the risk of delays are encouraged to consider arriving a day early. On request, VENT will be happy to help you with additional lodging arrangements and transfers if you want to be sure of starting the tour well rested.

Nairobi, Kenya's bustling, colorful capital, takes its name from the Nairobi River, called by the Masai "cool water." At an elevation of almost 6,000 feet, the days are warm and evenings and early mornings are cool and pleasant.



The dashing Superb Starling © Andrew Whittaker

You will be met at the airport by our local ground staff for the 20–30-minute transfer from the airport to our delightful hotel, where a room will be reserved in your name. From your private balcony overlooking famous Nairobi National Park, you have a panoramic view of the savanna. During our scouting, we enjoyed observing—right from our room—a pride of Lions that had killed a Cape Buffalo. You may view your first wild Ostriches.

The hotel restaurant overlooks an active waterhole, often teeming with birds. The rule here is never to be without your binoculars! The hotel gardens are home to Red-throated Crag-Martin, African Sacred Ibis, Black (Yellow-billed) Kite, Pied Crow, African Pied Wagtail, and often colonies of Speke's and White-browed Sparrow Weavers. Abyssinian Thrushes and Cape Robin-Chats haunt the lawns, while acacias harbor African Paradise Flycatchers, Superb Starlings, Wire-tailed Swallows, Scarlet-chested and Variable sunbirds, and more.

NIGHTS: August 16, aboard aircraft on international flights

NIGHTS August 17, Emara Hotel Ole Sereni, Nairobi

August 18, Day 3: Nairobi National Park

An early start and a short drive will get us to the park just at opening time. Kenya's oldest reserve, established in 1946, occupies 45 square miles, with a road network giving access to all the major habitats. In addition to an astonishing variety of big game, the park boasts an incredibly diverse avifauna, with an all-time list exceeding 520 species. We can expect to encounter close to a hundred species today.

Open-country birding is delightfully easy here, and birding and game watching from our specially designed open-top Safari vehicle is superb. Sandbags stabilize our cameras for sharp images and excellent video right from the top of the vehicle.

Big-game highlights should include Lion, Black-backed Jackal, Masai Giraffe, Common Zebra, Hippo, Common Warthog, African Buffalo, Eland, and Kongoni (Hartebeest). We can also hope for Thomson's and Grant's Gazelles and Impala. But the park's outstanding specialty is the endangered White Rhino. If we are very lucky, we may encounter the much rarer Black Rhino, too.



A mammal highlight, the endangered White Rhino © Andrew Whittaker

Among many iconic African birds, the savanna is home to such greats as the Common Ostrich and the much sought-after Secretarybird, pairs of which stride through the grass on long legs in search of snakes, lizards, and large insects, which they stomp to death.

Damp areas hold the odd-looking Hamerkop, the subject of local superstition and myth. Just as sorcerers and witches require an object belonging to the person they plan to bewitch, Hamerkops collect all kinds of strange ornaments to decorate their immense domed nests, the largest of any African bird.

In the park's rich marshes and lakes, we can expect great studies of Blacksmith, Spur-winged, and Long-toed Lapwings, while camouflaged Water Thick-knees rest, and Three-banded Plover's scurry around on the shore. Forested islands provide perches for African Fish Eagles, African Darters, and Reed Cormorants, while noisy Egyptian Geese and Red-billed Teal enjoy the open water. Pied, Malachite, and Gray-headed kingfishers hunt for a juicy fish breakfast, and the banks are patrolled by Gray Herons, African Spoonbills, Marabou Storks, African Openbills, and Hadada and African Sacred Ibis. With luck, we might even see our first Saddle-billed Storks or Gray Crowned Cranes.

Out on the grasslands, we should encounter Black-headed Heron and our first bustards: Black, White-bellied, and the rare Hartlaub's bustard are all possible. Harsh calls may alert us to Yellow-necked

Spurfowl or the localized Shelley's Francolin. Long-tailed and Northern Fiscals are both fairly common. Today will also be our introduction to the cisticolas, tiny warbler-like birds with names like Wing-snapping, Singing, Winding, Croaking, Siffling, and Stout. The skies are home to White-backed Vultures, Tawny Eagles, Black-chested Snake-Eagles, and one of the finest of all buzzards, the striking Augur buzzard, while Black-winged Kites hunt by hovering over the grass in search of prey.

We will enjoy our picnic lunch or breakfast from a forested hilltop overlooking the plains. We'll keep a sharp eye out for raptors or for Crested Francolins feeding under the shrubs. We will encounter flocks of bickering Helmeted Guineafowl, and if we are lucky, a nosy flock of White-crested Helmet-shrikes. Speckled Mousebirds and White-bellied Go-away-birds also await us here, each representative of an endemic family. The go-away-birds, relatives of the turacos, often allow a close approach for excellent views and photography.



The delightful Little Bee-eater © Andrew Whittaker

Little and Cinnamon-chested Bee-eaters sally out from perches as Cape Robin-Chats and Red-backed Scrub-Robins hop through the grass. Equally colorful are seedeaters such as Purple Grenadier and Red-cheeked Cordonbleu, Yellow-breasted Apalis, and dazzling Variable, Scarlet-chested, and Amethyst Sunbirds. We will enjoy many other possibilities before returning in the mid to late afternoon with a bird list of well over 100 species.

NIGHT: Emara Hotel Ole Sereni, Nairobi

August 19, Day 4: Masai Mara National Reserve

After an early breakfast, we will check out and drive southwest to the Masai Mara. Our first stop will be at a rich wetland site in the highlands, where one of our prime targets among the abundant waterfowl will be the localized White-backed Duck. Other species should include Yellow-billed Duck, Blue-billed Teal, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Red-knobbed Coot, African Swamphen, Little Grebe, Squacco

Heron, and Yellow-billed Egret. There is always the chance of something special, too, like the African Snipe or the uncommon African Marsh Harrier.



The charming White-browed Robin-Chat
© Andrew Whittaker

We continue climbing and cross the forested highlands leading down into the impressive East African Rift Valley, where our first Olive Baboons may line the roadsides. The landscape becomes more arid as we come nearer to the famous Mara.

The Mara's rolling grasslands and wide-open savannas are home to immense herds of big game, especially at this time of year, when up to an incredible 2 million large mammals arrive to graze the lush pastures. Together with the contiguous Serengeti and Ngorongoro Crater Parks in Tanzania, these savannas cover a staggering 18,650 square miles.



A safari in the Masai Mara © Andrew Whittaker

After entering the park, we will shift into safari mode as we head to our private and comfortable tented camp for an excellent lunch. We will settle into our spacious Tents each with a large twin bed, private bathroom with hot shower and flushing toilet with wild Africa literally at our doorstep. Our

camp is situated in an extensive forested area with shade and some great birds including the stunning Schalow's Turaco, Narina Trogon, Green-backed Woodpecker, Gray-headed Bushshrike, African Scops Owl, Swamp Nightjar, Meyer's Parrot and African Paradise-Flycatcher. Early breakfasts here will allow us to be among the first visitors at the park's hotspots. The open grassy areas around our camp can abound with birds—and sometimes grazing Common Zebras! Other species nearby we hope to enjoy Gray Kestrels, Lesser Striped Swallow, Bare-faced Go-away-bird, Mocking Cliff-chat, Marico Sunbird, Hildebrandt's Starling, Eurasian (African) Hoopoe, African Paradise-Flycatcher, Purple Grenadier, both cordonbleus, and Yellow-fronted and White-bellied Canary, along with Mountain Gray, Cardinal, and Green-backed Woodpeckers. Lizards here may include the spectacularly colored Mwanza Flat-headed Rock Agama. Yellow-winged Bats are common here, too.

At dusk, we can relax with drinks around our camp fire or in our comfortable lounge or dining area. The nightly chorus is spectacular as we hear the bizarre snorting, grumbling, and wheezing of the Hippos, howling Hyena or the distant roar of the king of the Mara the Lion.

NIGHT: Private tented camp, Masai Mara National Reserve



Hippos and bloodthirsty oxpeckers © Andrew Whittaker

August 20–24, Days 5–9: Masai Mara National Reserve

Designated as a sanctuary in 1961, the Mara has been expanded since then to protect almost 600 more square miles of grassland and acacia woodland. Large predators such as Lions, Leopards, Cheetahs, and Spotted Hyenas are easily seen all year round, but the reserve truly blossoms from August to October, during the wildebeest migration.

We have five full days in the Mara, longer than most tours spend here. You'll very quickly see why: this is a naturalist's paradise. The reserve is named for the Masai people, who call this expanse of land "Mara," or "spotted," for the acacia trees and wildlife dotting the plains. The Masai have maintained many of their traditional rituals and lifestyle, living in harmony with the wildlife. Income from ecotourism benefits the Masai tribes, ensuring the survival of the reserve and its abundant wildlife.

The plains are scattered with zebras, Masai Giraffes, Grant's and Thomson's gazelles, and Topi, while the Mara and Talek rivers are brimming with hippos and crocodiles. There's no better place for the Eland, the world's largest antelope. The extra days we spend here also improve our chances of encountering some of the more difficult or rarer mammals or a rare chance to observe a successful hunt by one of the main predators. We have been lucky enough to witness both Cheetah and lioness kills on past tours! With luck, we may encounter the delicate Serval, seen on our last three tours. The termite-loving Bat-eared Fox was seen on our scouting trip, and in 2023, the endangered Black Rhino.



Martial Eagle © Andrew Whittaker

The Mara is also an exceptional birding hotspot. The king of the raptors here is the Martial Eagle. Capable of bringing down a small antelope, this huge eagle also loves monitor lizards. Southern Ground-Hornbills forage, preen, and sunbathe in family groups. Riparian forest may hold the strikingly beautiful Ross's Turacos, the turquoise-rumped Meyer's Parrot, Klaas's Cuckoo, African Pygmy Kingfisher, or White-throated Bee-eater. Open acacia woodland is home to the truly awesome Lilac-breasted Roller; always a tour favorite.

The striking Magpie Shrike, Sulphur-breasted Bushshrike, and Gray-headed Bushshrike are also among our objectives. Brushy habitats hold the near-endemic Red-throated Tit, the Usambiro Barbet, and Arrow-marked Babbler. Drier grassy areas are home to Coqui Francolin and Black-bellied Bustard, and we should also find the stunning Rosy-throated and Pangani Longclaws. Yellow-throated Sandgrouse live in the sparse, rock-strewn grassland. We will also search for Two-banded and Temminck's Coursers, two striking shorebirds of these dry habitats.

Our carefully timed visit provides a great chance to experience the world-famous Great Wildebeest Migration across the Mara-Serengeti ecosystem. This phenomenon cannot be predicted with total precision, but our previous trips have witnessed immense columns of wildebeest, zebras, and antelopes pouring into the Mara. At the Mara River, they mass on the banks before finally plunging into the raging waters to risk the swift currents and immense Nile Crocodiles.

A major goal in the Mara is to afford quality time with East Africa's apex predators. We have extremely high chances of finding Lions, Cheetahs, and Leopards, which we have never missed. In 2023, we were privileged to witness a Cheetah hunt and kill up close!



Cheetah with a male Thomson's Gazelle © Andrew Whittaker

We can always dream of a rare encounter with the crepuscular Aardwolf or a Ratel, better known as the Honey Badger, famous for its ferocity.

The Mara is home to a large and photogenic lion population; each pride including 15 or more adults. The Black Rock Pride is the largest in Africa with over 30 individuals. African Buffalos are the usual prey here, but in this season of migration, Wildebeest and Common Zebra are often hunted as well. All of our past trips have observed a Lion pride at a kill.



Lioness and cub at a kill © Andrew Whittaker

Thankfully, vultures still occur here in large numbers, making it easier for us to locate a kill. The speed with which these scavengers clean up after big cats and hyenas is almost incredible. Lappet-faced Vultures (the largest) may be the first to arrive, followed by African White-backed and smaller numbers of Rüppell's Griffons. Standing by on the sidelines are Hooded Vultures and Marabou Storks. Jackals also get their chances. Incredibly even an adult zebra can be reduced to bones and hide in less than an hour!

The park's list of close to 50 raptor species includes the African Harrier-Hawk, Black-chested Snake-Eagle, African Crowned Eagle, Wahlberg's and Tawny eagles, Black Goshawk, and Dark-chanting Goshawk. Colorful Bateleurs drift effortlessly against the blue skies like so many children's kites.

Outrageously glossy starlings abound, among them the Violet-backed, Superb and Rüppell's. Quiet marshes are home to the elusive Greater Painted-Snipe, certainly one of the world's top shorebirds, and to Wattled Lapwings, amazing Saddle-billed Storks, and rare Rufous-bellied Herons.



The exquisite Saddle-billed Stork © Andrew Whittaker

We schedule daily breaks in the heat of the day to rest in our private shaded tent or in the comfortable sofas found the lounge. And if you just can't get enough, you can bird the grounds—or relax in your tent and let the birds come to you.

NIGHTS: Private tented camp, Masai Mara Reserve



Immense Lappet-faced Vulture is the boss at Lion kill. © Andrew Whittaker

August 25, Day 10: To Lake Nakuru

As we leave the park early this morning, we will be keeping an eye out for a few targets such as the stunning Silverbird and the locally distributed Double-banded Courser, along with trying for two very rare birds, the Southern Grosbeak-Canary and Karamoja Apalis. Along the way, we may also meet up with the Augur Buzzard or a stunning White-fronted Bee-eater. Gaining elevation as we pass through

the agriculturally rich highlands, we'll keep alert along the roadsides for Abyssinian Wheatear or, with luck, the near-endemic Jackson's Widowbird. We will make a stop in search of the endemic and very localized Sharpe's Longclaw.

We will arrive at our lodge in time for lunch. The feeders here attract Greater Blue-eared Starlings, Red-eyed Doves, Vitelline Masked Weavers, and even Hildebrandt's Spurfowl. After a mid-afternoon rest, we will briefly explore the delightful grounds in search of Klaas's and Red-chested Cuckoos, Eurasian (African) Hoopoe, Amethyst Sunbird, White-bellied Tit, Black Cuckoo-shrike, Northern Puffback, African Golden Oriole, Little Rockthrush, and Arrow-marked Babbler. We will continue with an exciting drive into the park, where we may find flocks of colorful flamingos gracing the lakeshores, along with Pink-backed and Great White Pelicans, Great (White-breasted) and Reed Cormorants, White-winged Tern, Hadada and African Sacred Ibis, Yellow-billed Duck, and Cape and Blue-billed teal. Among the throngs of migrant shorebirds, we will be looking especially for the uncommon and cute Kittlitz's Plover. Raptors may include Long-crested or the impressive Martial Eagle, African Hawk-Eagle, and African Fish Eagle. Taller woods harbor the sought-after Gray-crested Helmetshrike, Green Woodhoopoe, and Banded Woodpecker.

The park is home to the very local Rothschild Giraffe, the tallest of the three species found in Kenya. The area also boasts a healthy herd of Southern White Rhinos and other big game.

Night: Sarova Lion Hill Game Lodge, Nakuru



Flamingoes, Lake Nakuru, Kenya © Vorobyev Dmitry/Shutterstock

August 26, Day 11: Nakuru and Lake Baringo

After an early breakfast, we will check out and enjoy the non-stop avian action along the lake shore before we bird our way out of the park. The sewage treatment pools often provide a host of such species as Saddle-billed Stork, Long-toed Lapwing, Squacco Heron, African Jacana, Northern Anteater-Chat, Highland Rush Warbler, and Golden-backed or Grosbeak Weaver. After exiting the park, we will stop en route for lunch. We may stop off at Lake Bogoria where its National Reserve can sometimes be the site of one of the world's greatest natural spectacles, the gathering of half a million Lesser Flamingos. These birds can unexpectedly move from one lake to another, but if we find them, the experience will simply blow your mind.

After pulling ourselves away, we will drive to our air-conditioned lodge on the shores of Lake Baringo. Excellent birding starts right on our doorstep, where Beautiful, Eastern Violet-backed, and Hunter's sunbirds visit the flowering shrubs. Fascinating colonies of both Village and Lesser Masked Weavers will keep us amused. The calls of White-bellied Go-away-birds and the beautiful songs of African Black-headed Orioles fill the air. As temperatures drop, the acacia scrub can come alive with birds. The striking Gray Crowned Cranes right on the lodge's waterfront will take your breath away.

NIGHT: Soi Safari Lodge, Lake Baringo



Gray Crowned Crane and Yellow-billed Stork © Andrew Whittaker

August 27, Day 12: Lake Baringo

At dawn, we will set out on an exciting boat trip exploring Lake Baringo. Working our way along the lake edge and through reed-clogged channels offers fabulous birding and photographic opportunities in the fine early morning light. Flashy Malachite and Pied kingfishers are numerous, and, with luck, we may also find the uncommon Giant Kingfisher or a skulky Little Bittern. The huge Goliath Heron, the world's largest, is another species we will be especially looking for. Hamerkops can be numerous, and we should see their immense stick nests. African Harrier Hawks use their long, flexible legs to extract prey from tree cavities or birds' nests. Among the season's intertropical migrants, we should encounter Olive (Madagascar) Bee-eaters visiting from the south.



Goliath Heron © Andrew Whittaker

Dainty African Jacanas skip across floating mats of reeds on incredibly long toes. African Darters and African Swamphens are common. We'll also keep an eye out for Northern Red Bishops, Senegal Thick-knees, and colorful Greater Painted-Snipe, as flocks of Wire-tailed Swallows swoop overhead.

The local human fishermen are proud of their charismatic African Fish-Eagles, and we will certainly purchase some fresh fish for them. With cameras ready, we can enjoy incredible views as they swoop right in front of our boats to expertly pluck the fish from the water.

Once back on land, we'll focus first on owls, ranging from the supercool Northern White-faced Owl to the huge Grayish Eagle-Owl; our expert local guide knows their favorite roosting sites. The beautifully patterned and incredibly well-camouflaged Three-banded Courser is another prime target. Crepuscular and nocturnal in their habits, these wonderfully camouflaged birds can be very difficult to find but, with luck, a pair of these dainty beauties may be roosting in the shade of the bushes.

We will make our careful way among the thorny bushes and cacti of open sandy and rocky areas in search of roosting Slender-tailed Nightjars and Spotted Thick-knees. Other East African Rift Valley specialties may include Gabar Goshawk, Rufous-crowned (Purple) Roller, Hemprich's Hornbill, Nubian Woodpecker, Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Pygmy Batis, Brubru (a delicate shrike), and the brightly colored Green-winged Pytilia.



An iconic African Fish-Eagle © Andrew Whittaker

After our siesta, as temperatures fall, we will drive to the nearby Baringo Cliffs to explore this scenic area on foot. These cliffs are home to an incredibly high concentration of Rock Hyrax, the preferred prey of the rare Verreaux's Eagle, a massive black raptor with a striking white back and rump. The echoing alarm calls of the hyrax are often the first indication of this magnificent raptor's presence.

Fan-tailed Ravens soar overhead, and if we're lucky, a caterpillar infestation in the acacias may attract Pied or Great Spotted cuckoos. Both Jackson's and Northern Red-billed hornbills (the latter perhaps an undescribed yellow-eyed form) can be fairly common in fruiting trees. Playback should pull in Black-throated Barbets or the tiny diurnal Pearl-spotted Owlet. This is a prime location for Bristle-crowned Starling, Rufous Chatterer, Brown-backed Scrub-Robin, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Red-fronted Prinia, Somali Tit, Crimson-rumped Waxbill, and even perhaps the rare Gambaga Flycatcher or Brown-tailed Chat. The loud, rolling duets and distinctive displays of the stunning Red-and-yellow Barbet here remind your leader of certain dry-country puffbirds in South America.

NIGHT: Soi Safari Lodge, Lake Baringo

August 28, Day 13: Lake Baringo to Aberdare National Park



A gorgeous Red-and-yellow Barbet © Andrew Whittaker

After breakfast, we will move on to Aberdare National Park, perhaps with a stop along the way at a Cape Eagle-Owl roosting site. Rainforest, spectacular waterfalls, and wild moorlands make Aberdare a wildlife paradise; its cool climate and cold lakes and streams a world away from the sunbaked hills and savannas of other reserves. As we enter the park, we will keep our eyes open for Jackson's or Scaly Spurfowl, African Crowned Eagle (seen twice on our first visit), Ayres's Hawk-Eagle, and Mountain Buzzard.

We will reach our lodge for a late lunch. From the lodge's multi-tiered decks, we will enjoy amazing views of matriarchal herds of African Elephants at the salt lick and waterhole below. Photo taken from above and from the ground-level "bunker," where animals can be extremely close, are superb.

Other regular visitors include the attractive Bushbuck, Giant Hog, buffalo, and Spotted Hyena. But anything can turn up here under the lights, including Black Rhino, or even the rarely seen Bongo, a strikingly attractive striped forest-dwelling antelope. At night the lights attract a host of insects that the uncommon African Black Duck, Cape Wagtail, or Montane Nightjar love to feed on.



Elephants at the Ark waterhole © Andrew Whittaker

Late in the afternoon we will enjoy a stroll along the short, raised boardwalk leading to an active bird feeder. Highlights should include the magnificent Hartlaub's Turaco with its flashy crimson wings visible in flight, Golden-winged and Eastern Double-collared Sunbirds, Rüppell's Robin-Chat, Abyssinian Thrush, White-eyed Slaty-Flycatcher, Kikuyu Mountain or Yellow-whiskered greenbul, Black-collared Apalis, Baglafecht Weaver, and Hunter's Cisticola. Mammals could include Slender Mongoose, Red Forest Duiker, a shy forest deer, Suni or even the cute Brown Greater Galago.

NIGHT: The Ark Lodge, Aberdare National Park



Brown Greater Galago @ Andrew Whittaker

August 29, Day 14: Aberdare National Park

Following a wonderful early breakfast, we will explore the forested roads through the enchanting reserve and enjoy another set of different avifauna. Targets may include Narina Trogon, Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, Blue-headed Coucal, White-headed Woodhoopoe, Common Scimitarbill, Red-

fronted Parrot, Doherty's or Black-fronted Bushshrike, Kikuyu White-eye, White-starred Robin, Purple-throated Cuckooshrike, Malachite Sunbird, Abyssinian Crimsonwing, and Yellow-bellied Waxbill.

The lush forests of Aberdare are also home to Leopards and several primates, including the striking Black-and-white Golobus and Sykes Monkeys. They in turn make this the ideal home for one of Africa's most powerful raptors, the massive Crowned Eagle which love primates!

NIGHT: The Ark Lodge, Aberdare's National Park



The magnificent monkey-eating Crowned Eagle © Andrew Whittaker

August 30, Day 15: Aberdare to Samburu National Park

After a full breakfast, we will make our way out of the park, hoping to run into Silvery-cheeked Hornbill, Sharpe's Starling, or Red-throated Wryneck, a bizarre but attractive woodpecker species. As we descend from these lush forests, the scenery abruptly changes back into farm brush and dry acacia scrub and grassland, where we will be on the lookout for Black-headed Lapwings and Fischer's Lovebirds on the roadside.

Once at the Samburu Reserve, we will shift into safari mode, enjoying a variety of exciting new birds and mammals as we proceed to our lovely lodge. We may encounter our first Reticulated Giraffe, an

immense Somali Ostrich, or a flock of staggering Golden-breasted Starlings, certainly one of Africa's top birds.

Our lovely lodge nestles into the ruggedly beautiful floodplain of the Ewaso Nyiro River in the Great African Rift Valley. From our spacious, well-furnished rooms, we have fantastic views over the African plains. A large terrace faces the river valley, ideal for enjoying birds and herds of big game below. The forested grounds are a birder's delight: birds are simply everywhere and incredibly tame as well.



Somali Ostrich © Andrew Whittaker

A pathway, parts of it covered, leads through the gardens and scrub forest. There is always something to watch here, from the tiny resident Pearl-spotted Owlet to pairs of Northern Red-billed Hornbills taking insects from the ground. The secluded pool often hosts a group of Vervet Monkeys, and occasionally a troop of Olive Baboons or a Lesser Kudu passes through.

After a terrific day, we can cool off with a dip in the swimming pool or take our places in the shaded lounge to watch the wildlife drinking at the lodge's watering hole.

NIGHT: Samburu Simba Lodge, Samburu National Reserve

August 31 - September 1, Days 16–17: Buffalo Springs and Shaba National Reserves

Between them, these two reserves protect more than a hundred square miles of rugged and arid terrain, bisected by a ten-mile stretch of the Ewaso Nyiro River. The river is the heart of the area, its densely vegetated banks attracting wildlife all year round. The reserves are famous for their red elephants, colored by the river mud they cover themselves with to keep cool and protect against parasites.

Several exciting new mammals await us here. The elegant and endangered Beisa Oryx shares the plains with Grevy's Zebras, Bright's Gazelles, and Common Waterbucks. In the acacia groves, we may find Lesser Kudu or the odd-looking Long-necked Gerenuk. This unique antelope's ability to balance on its hind legs while reaching high up into the bushes to browse is fascinating. The secluded bushy habitat is also favored by the shy and tiny Kirk's Dik-dik. The big cats are well represented here, with Lions, Cheetahs, and Leopards, and we'll watch for smaller cat species, too.



Leopard © Andrew Whittaker

Among the park's more than 400 bird species, the vividly colored Vulturine Guineafowl is a target; found here in flocks of up to 70 individuals. The grasslands are also a stronghold of one of the largest of all flying birds, the elegant Kori Bustard; males can weigh up to 42 pounds and stand an impressive five feet tall. Damp spots nearer the river are good for Greater Painted-Snipe and Gray Crowned Cranes and are a favorite site for Reticulated Giraffes and Elands, offering stunning photographic opportunities.

We will also concentrate on finding the breathtaking Golden Pipit which enjoy early rains. In flight, this bird looks like a huge glowing birdwing butterfly!

The reserve is a bustard lover's paradise, holding both Black-bellied and White-bellied bustards. Drier, bushier habitats mixed with grass are home to the odd Buff-crested Bustard; its harsh calls often reveal its presence.



Elegant Vulturine Guineafowl are fairly common. © Andrew Whittaker

In more open country, we will pay particular attention to the localized Somali Courser, Red-necked Falcon, and larks such as the Pink-breasted, Tawny, and Foxy. This habitat is shared with Fischer's and Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Larks, Red-headed Weavers and Straw-tailed Whydahs.

We should also encounter Desert Warthogs as they trot through the dry bush, tails held high and erect. We hope to find the scarce Lichtenstein's or Chestnut-bellied sandgrouse; both are especially fond of water holes. Black-faced Sandgrouse are common here, and unlike most of the family, allow a close approach and great photographic opportunities.

A loud, far-carrying song could lead us to a pair of Rosy-patched Bushshrikes, their sandy-brown body plumage contrasting with a brilliant, pink-striped breast and bright pink rump. Somali Bee-eaters, solitary and shy, perch unobtrusively in the shade; Striped Kingfisher are usually much easier to spot. Hornbills are well represented by the Eastern Yellow-billed and Von der Decken's, and we'll scan the skies for African Hawk-eagles and rare White-headed or Egyptian Vultures.

Pairs of Pygmy Falcons search for prey from treetop perches in extensive semi-bush country. These delicate birds are so small that they can breed in the nests of White-headed Buffalo-Weavers!



Black-faced Sandgrouse © Andrew Whittaker

Other finds should include Red-bellied Parrot (with an orange belly), Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove, Namaqua Dove, Taita Fiscal, Pygmy Batis, Fork-tailed Drongo, Pringle's Puffback (unsalted), White-headed Mousebird, Abyssinian Scimitarbill, Eastern Violet-backed and Black-bellied Sunbirds, Golden Palm Weaver, Donaldson-Smith's Sparrow-Weaver, Cut-throat, African Silverbill, Green-winged Pytilia, Red-cowled Widowbird, Cinnamon-breasted and Somali Bunting, and large flocks of Red-billed Queleas. Riparian specialties could include the uncommon Palm-nut Vulture or African Bare-eyed Thrush.

Among the mammals, we'll be watching for the Somali Dwarf Mongooses energetically foraging on the ground. At night, we also hope to encounter the ever so cute Lesser Galago (Bushbaby), which is resident on the lodge grounds.

NIGHTS: Samburu Simba Lodge, Samburu National Reserve

September 2-3, Days 18–19: Return to Nairobi via Karimenu River Camp, and departures for home

After an early breakfast, we will set out for the drive back to Nairobi. Along the way, we will visit the charming Karimenu River Camp for some birding and a wonderful homemade lunch on its delightful, wooded deck. The highly sought-after African Finfoot can sometimes be seen on the small stream here. Noisy groups of the endemic Hinde's Pied Babbler are fairly common, and flowers and shrubs attract Variable Sunbirds and Black-throated Wattle-eyes, while the feeders are a hive of activity with African Golden Weaver, Red-cheeked Cordonbleu, Red-billed Firefinch, and hordes of cute Ochre Bush Squirrels; great for photography.



A male Pygmy Falcon © Andrew Whittaker

We plan to arrive at our comfortable Nairobi hotel by mid-afternoon. Private day rooms will be provided to wash, change, and pack before our final checklist and farewells. Our local ground agent will provide transfers to the airport for our flights either tonight or tomorrow. Please note that night flights should not be booked before 23:00.

DAY ROOM: Emara Hotel Ole Sereni, Nairobi (September 2) Return flights arrive home (September 3).

Essential Tour Information

TOUR SIZE: This tour is limited to 6 tour participants.

TOUR LEADER: This tour is led by Kevin Burke, with the assistance of local guides



Kevin Burke is originally from the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. He grew up running around in the woods and trails of Shenandoah National Park. His family spent many summers camping and hiking in the park. One of Kevin's favorite activities was jumping in the river and turning over every rock to see what was underneath. This eventually earned him the nickname "Hellgrammite Kid." This early exposure to the natural world has vaulted into a lifelong obsession with the outdoors. Kevin was introduced to birding while spending summers in Rhode Island at his grandmother's house. She would point out all the feeder birds and help him identify them. These early encounters helped foster a love for birds. An early Ornithology class at Hocking College in Ohio rekindled his love for birds. He has been birding every day since. He went on to get a Bachelor of Science in Ecotourism and Conservation Ecology from the University of Idaho. Kevin has been involved with leading bird trips in some capacity for almost 20 years. He has led birding trips all throughout the United States, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and the Dominican Republic. His birding journeys have also taken him to some spectacular locations such as Portugal, Colombia, The Bahamas, and Canada. This is truly a lifelong obsession. He currently resides with his family in Hendersonville, North Carolina. Kevin's wife and two kids also enjoy birding. They have fun kayaking, hiking, and camping in the mountains that surround their home. One of their favorite activities is jumping on the paddle board and kayaks and leisurely floating the French Broad River near their house.

TOUR COSTS & PAYMENT INFORMATION:

TOUR FEE: $21,325 per person based on double occupancy or **$22,650** for a person requiring single accommodation. This includes all meals from breakfast on Day 3 to breakfast on Day 18, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, all ground transportation during the tour, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does **not** include airfare to nor from the starting/ending city; however, flights within the tour (if any) are included. The fee also excludes laundry, personal expenses, and other items of a personal nature. For information about gratuities, please see the "TIPPING" sub-section below. If the minimum group size is not met, each participant will be charged a small-group supplement—shared equally and communicated in advance—to allow the tour to proceed.

REGISTRATION & DEPOSIT: You may register for this tour through the VENT website or by calling our office (512-328-5221). The initial deposit for this tour is **$1,000** per person. At 180 days VENT will collect a second deposit that brings the total deposit amount to 40% of the tour price. We accept MasterCard and Visa for both deposits.

PAYMENTS: All tour payments may be made by credit card (MasterCard or Visa), check, money order, or bank transfer (contact the VENT office for bank transfer information). These include initial deposits, second deposits, interim payments, final balances, special arrangements, etc. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days (April 18, 2027) prior to the tour departure date.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: Tour prices are based on the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If rates change drastically, it may be necessary to impose a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges have been passed on to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

FUEL SURCHARGES: Our prices are based on fuel prices at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TIPPING: An important part of the value of a VENT tour is knowing that tips for local service providers at our destinations—restaurant staff, hotel staff, drivers, local guides, and various other support staff—are included in your tour fee. If you would like to offer any of your local guides an additional tip, $5 to $10 a day is a common amount.

Tips for your VENT tour leader(s) are **not** included, but it is customary to tip one or both if you feel that you have received exceptional service. To assist in your planning, we recommend tipping your VENT tour leader(s) $15 to $20 per day, or the equivalent of approximately 2–4% of the tour fee.

If you plan to give tips by cash, they should be given directly to your tour leader at the end of the tour and **not** sent to the VENT office. Some of our tour leaders use mobile payment applications such as

Venmo, PayPal, and Wise. If you would like to use this method, please ask your tour leaders directly whether they can accept tips through such an application.

We emphasize that tipping is optional and that these amounts are only recommendations. The amount you decide to tip is based entirely on your experience and at your discretion.

CANCELLATION & REFUNDS

CANCELLATION BY PARTICIPANT:

- **More than 120 days prior to the tour start date:** A refund of all monies paid will be issued, less 50% of the deposit (including initial and second deposit)
- **120 days or fewer prior to the tour start date:** No refund will be provided.
- **Optional add-ons:** Some tours offer optional add-ons that are designated as non-refundable. Any such add-ons are clearly identified as non-refundable at the time of booking. By selecting and purchasing an optional add-on, the participant acknowledges and accepts its non-refundable status. Fees paid for non-refundable add-ons are not refundable under any circumstances, regardless of when the tour is cancelled.

This cancellation policy applies to all participants and all tours (Pre-Tours and Extensions are considered self-contained tours separate from the main tour). Because unexpected events can occur, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance.

CANCELLATION BY VENT: If VENT cancels a tour prior to departure without cause or good reason, VENT will provide the participant a full refund, which will constitute full settlement to the participant.

If VENT cancels or delays a tour or any portion of a tour as a result of any Force Majeure event, VENT will use its reasonable best efforts to refund any payments on the balance of the tour fee to participant; provided that, VENT will have no obligation to provide a participant with a refund and will not be liable or responsible to a participant, nor be deemed to have defaulted under or breached any applicable agreement, for any failure or delay in fulfilling or performing any term of such agreement. A "***Force Majeure***" event means any act beyond VENT's control, including, without limitation, the following: (a) acts of God; (b) flood, fire, earthquake, hurricane, epidemic, pandemic or explosion; (c)

war, invasion, hostilities (whether war is declared or not), terrorist threats or acts, riot or other civil unrest; (d) government order, law or actions; (e) embargoes or blockades; (f) national or regional emergency; (g) strikes, labor stoppages, labor slowdowns or other industrial disturbances; (h) shortage of adequate power or transportation facilities; and (i) any other similar events or circumstances beyond the control of VENT.

This VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy does not apply to air tickets purchased through VENT or to any special arrangements, such as additional hotel nights, that fall outside of the services described in the tour itinerary.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of $50,000. CST #2014998-50.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE/PROTECTION REQUIREMENT: This tour visits remote locations where immediate access to primary medical care may not be available. **For this reason, travel insurance/travel protection which covers you for emergency evacuation is required for participation on this tour**. This coverage is included in the **Ripcord Rescue Travel Insurance™** program. Alternatively, comparable service can be obtained through **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist** plan. If you choose not to purchase insurance/travel protection through Ripcord or Medjet, you are required to obtain it through another provider. Please read the remainder of this section for additional information.

SUGGESTED OPTIONS: To safeguard against losses due to illness, accident, or other unforeseen circumstances, we strongly recommend the purchase of travel insurance as soon as possible after making a deposit. VENT has partnered with **Redpoint Travel Protection** as our preferred travel insurance provider. Through Redpoint, we recommend its comprehensive **Ripcord** plan, which includes a medical evacuation benefit**.** With this in mind, it is important to note that medical evacuation is not offered by Redpoint as a stand-alone policy or benefit. For travelers not interested in comprehensive travel insurance, VENT recommends **Medjet** and its **MedjetAssist®** plan. Medjet is not an insurance company, and Medjet Assist is not an insurance product; rather, Medjet is a

membership-based air-medical transport company specializing in moving hospitalized travelers from an admitting hospital to a medical facility of choice. Medjet does not provide medical evacuation service from the point of injury or illness; yet, the MedjetAssist plan offers robust enough travel protection to satisfy the medical evacuation insurance requirement in place for many VENT tours.

About Redpoint Travel's Ripcord Plan

Ripcord is a completely integrated travel insurance program with single contact for emergency services, travel assistance, and insurance claims. Critical benefits include comprehensive travel insurance for trip cancellation/interruption, medical evacuation from your point of injury or illness to your hospital of choice; medical expense coverage, death of pet, and much more. Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as evacuation coverage in case of a natural disaster or political or security reasons, waiver for pre-existing medical conditions exclusion, and a "Cancel for Any Reason" benefit. Ripcord is available to U.S. and non-U.S. residents.*

For a price quote or to purchase travel insurance, please visit: **Ripcord Travel Insurance;** or click the **Ripcord** logo on our website (click Help > Preparation and Insurance > Trip Insurance); or call +1-415-481-0600. Pricing is based on age, trip cost, trip length, and level of coverage.

*To be eligible for the pre-existing medical condition exclusion waiver and the optional Cancel for Any Reason (CFAR) upgrade, you must purchase your policy within 15 days of making your first trip payment. The CFAR benefit provides reimbursement for 75% of covered costs, and increases the policy premium by approximately 50%. Policies may be purchased either for the full value of the tour fee at the time of deposit or in segments as individual tour payments are made (deposit, second deposit, final balance, additional arrangements, etc.). The "pay as you go" approach reduces up-front expense and ensures that the amount paid toward your full policy premium is in proportion to the amount paid toward the full tour fee. If you choose to "pay as you go," you must cover each deposit or payment within 15 days, and insure all non-refundable trip costs in order to maintain the CFAR benefit. Please refer to the policy for a full description of coverage.

About Medjet's MedjetAssist Plan

MedjetAssist is a membership program that functions like AAA for motorists. The company's primary service is air medical transport. Critical benefits of MedjetAssist include a staff on call and ready to provide assistance 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; all-expenses-paid air medical transport in the United States and internationally to medical facility of choice, regardless of medical necessity; repatriation of remains; and no exclusions for pre-existing conditions.

For travelers under 75, MedjetAssist may be purchased as Short-Term Memberships of 8, 15, 21, and 30 days, or Regular Annual Memberships from 1 to 5 years. For travelers 75–84, Medjet offers a Diamond Membership that is the same program but with a few additional conditions.

For a price quote or to purchase MedjetAssist, please visit: Medjet.com/VentBird or call 1-800-527-7478. Pricing is based on type and term of membership.

GETTING THERE & REQUIRED TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

AIR TRAVEL: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Per person fees apply for each set of travel arrangements: $50 domestic; $75 international.* Many of our travelers choose to make their own air travel arrangements, but we emphasize the benefits to using our services. If you book your air arrangements yourself, Victor Emanuel Travel is unable to provide support in managing any flight delays and/or cancellations that could occur before and during a tour. When you purchase air tickets through Victor Emanuel Travel, our staff has ready access to your air ticket record and can provide assistance as problems arise. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements. **Please be sure to check with the VENT office prior to purchasing your air ticket to confirm that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate. VENT cannot be held responsible for any air ticket penalties.**

*An air ticket will be purchased by Victor Emanuel Travel on behalf of the traveler with the traveler's consent. A purchase is considered final upon receipt of payment. If a ticket is subsequently reissued at the behest of the traveler (i.e. voluntary change of plans), the same fee rates apply for the reissue process, in addition to any fees that may be charged by the airline.

BAGGAGE: Please limit baggage to one piece of luggage and one carry-on. The airlines now strictly enforce baggage regulations. Excess baggage charges, which can be substantial, are the personal responsibility of each participant. Please consult your pre-departure materials and/or airline to find out specific weight restrictions.

As a precaution against lost luggage, we suggest that you pack a change of clothes, toiletries, medications, important travel documents, optics, and any other essential items in your carry-on bag. Due to ever-changing circumstances in the government's attempts to improve airport security, we recommend that you check the website of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) for information pertaining to permissible carry-on items.

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

PASSPORTS: A passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure from Kenya is required.

VISAs: Visas are required for U.S. citizens traveling to this destination. If you hold a passport from another country, please check with your consulate or embassy for the most accurate guidance. Visas are not available upon arrival and must be obtained prior to your visit. To obtain your ETA (electronic travel visa), please visit: https://etakenya.go.ke/

IMPORTANT: The visa details above are current for U.S. citizens as of December 5, 2025. Because entry requirements can change without notice, we kindly remind all participants to double-check the latest information before traveling. Travelers using non-U.S. passports are responsible for confirming any entry requirements that apply to their home country.

For Help obtaining a VISA: If you need assistance with your VISA, we recommend working with Travel Document Systems (https://www.traveldocs.com/ or 202-640-0257 in Washington, D.C.by phone), a company which efficiently handles visa procurement. Non-United States citizens should check with your local consulate or embassy for instructions.

WHAT TO BRING

CLOTHING: Neutral colors (grays, tans, and khakis) are most appropriate for birding. Easily washable, quick-drying clothes are useful. All lodges have reasonable laundry services, so you can pack light.

Alternatively, to lighten your load, you may consider bringing some clothes you plan to discard. These can be worn on the tour and left behind—and are very well received by local staff that we meet. Casual clothes are adequate throughout. Remember, please, to leave the fancy jewelry at home.

- **Mix of T-shirts and long-sleeved and lightweight blouses or shirts:** the weather is variable, so depending on the heat and your susceptibility to the sun, pack accordingly
- **One warmer layer:** for cooler or cold temperatures
- **Shorts:** okay to wear shorts in most situations around the lodges
- **Light-weight, washable pants (especially ones that convert to shorts by unzipping legs):** preferable because they offer additional protection from sun, thorny plants and biting insects
- **light sweater or sweatshirt:** for cooler evenings
- **Easily packable rain jacket:** ideally windproof; **MANY** of our early morning safari rides and our boat trip on Lake Baringo can get cold, especially if it's a little misty or if there is a cold front
- **Sunhat/cap and ultra-violet blocking, polarized sunglasses:** strongly recommended
- **Swimwear:** all of our lodges have very nice swimming pools

FOOTWEAR:

- **Lighter walking shoes:** adequate for our purposes as there are few opportunities for any serious hiking

EQUIPMENT: Having the right equipment makes the travel experience more enjoyable. Below is a list of items that will ensure you are well-prepared:

- **Belt pack or day pack:** for carrying books, sunscreen, extra film, etc.

Binoculars: We strongly recommend you bring a pair of good binoculars of 8x32, 8x42, or 10x42 magnification. Please do not bring mini-binoculars of any kind. Some people like them because they are small and lightweight; but they have an extremely small field of view and very poor light gathering power. You will find that 8x32 binoculars are compact and light enough.

Spotting Scopes: Your tour leaders will have scopes available for group use throughout the trip, but if you have one and wish to bring it, please feel free to do so.

DESTINATION INFORMATION & LOCAL CONDITIONS

CLIMATE & WEATHER: Weather patterns in Kenya have become less predictable in recent years, but we anticipate mostly dry conditions with cool to warm—and at times hot—daytime temperatures, generally between 77° and 89°F. Lake Baringo can be slightly hotter, while occasional fronts may bring brief periods of unusually cool weather. Evenings are typically pleasant, though temperatures can drop into the mid-50s, especially in Aberdare National Park if it's rainy. Overall, the climate is comfortable, and we schedule our activities so that the hottest part of the day is spent relaxing at the lodge. Layers are recommended, as they can easily be adjusted and left in the safari vehicle as temperatures change.

CONDITIONS: Accommodations throughout are very good: clean, comfortable rooms with private bathrooms, and all in lovely locations which offer excellent birding on the grounds. There are delightful swimming pools and well-stocked bars at all lodges (wonderful to hang out and have a refreshing cool dip), and good shops offering gifts, clothing, and practical items are found at the Mara, Samburu, and Nairobi lodges/hotels. Excellent service.

TRANSPORTATION: The group will be traveling in excellent, comfortable specially built four-wheel-drive Land Cruisers (six window seats in each, so enough for everyone) with a driver/guide in each vehicle. Each vehicle has an excellent open-top system that is superb for birding and mammal watching and protects us from the sun. Sandbags, magnificent at stabilizing for sharp images and excellent video, are provided. An ice chest holding cold drinks is always available in each vehicle.

CURRENCY & SPENDING: There are opportunities to exchange small amounts of U.S. dollars for Kenyan shillings at some of the lodges, but you will not need large amounts. Almost all places (including souvenir and gift shops) accept U.S. dollars and major credit cards. There are ATM machines in Nairobi if needed—bring your PIN number.

ELECTRICITY: Kenya uses Type G plugs—the three-rectangular-pin style also used in the UK—and operates on a 240V electrical system.

INTERNET ACCESS: Internet is available at all lodges, though it may be slow or unreliable, particularly away from the central reception and dining areas.

LANGUAGE: Swahili and English are the official languages

TIME: 9 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time

LAUNDRY SERVICE: Laundry service is available at all lodges.

HEALTH & SAFETY

HEALTH: VENT follows Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendations for standard travel precautions, which includes vaccination against a variety of preventable diseases. Among these so-called Routine Vaccinations are measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) vaccine, diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT) vaccine, poliovirus vaccine (boosters for adult travelers), and Varicella (Chickenpox). You should also be up-to-date with Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B vaccinations.

If you are taking personal medication, prescription or over-the-counter, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

SUN EXPOSURE: The sun's ultraviolet rays are dangerous under prolonged exposure (sometimes only a matter of minutes), even in winter and early spring. Anytime you are outdoors you will want to protect your skin, including your lips, eyes, nose, and ears. A severe sunburn is potentially very painful and will affect your level of enjoyment. Always protect yourself when outdoors and be sure to bring an ample supply of high SPF sunscreen and lip balm.

SUGGESTED READING & TRIP PREPARATION

A number of traditional booksellers and online stores list excellent inventories of field guides and other natural history resources that will help prepare you for this tour. We recommend **www.amazon.com** which has a wide selection; **www.buteobooks.com** and **www.nhbs.com** which specialize in ornithology and natural history books; and **www.abebooks.com** for out-of-print and hard-to-find titles.

FIELD GUIDES:

Birds

Stevenson, T., and J. Fanshawe. 2020. *A Field Guide to the Birds of East Africa: Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi.* 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press. This is the one to buy if you do not already have the Zimmerman field guide. Well illustrated, up to date, and recommended.

Zimmerman, D. A., D. A. Turner, and D. J. Pearson. 2001. *Birds of Kenya and Northern Tanzania.* Rev. ed. Helm Field Guides. This is a detailed, comprehensive, and well-illustrated field guide, very good for birding this region and no larger than the Stevenson guide. The smaller, paperback edition is more suitable for field use.

Mammals

Kingdon, J. 1997. *The Kingdon Field Guide to African Mammals.* London: Academic Press. A complete and informative guide to African mammals; full of information and good illustrations.

Kingdon, J. 2016. *The Kingdon Pocket Guide to African Mammals.* 2nd ed. London: Christopher Helm. A much smaller, lighter pocket version of the excellent field guide above, but still with excellent information and the same illustrations. Suggested if you are on a mission to reduce weight!

Stuart, C., and T. Stuart. 1998. *Southern, Central and East African Mammals: A Photographic Guide.* Chelsea Green Publishing Company. For those wanting a much lighter reference, this is your book. Excellent photos and good brief text for most of the mammals we are likely to see, in a very compact, pocket-sized format.

Estes, R. D. 1991. *The Behavior Guide to African Mammals.* Berkeley: University of California Press. A splendidly detailed book with masses of information on the ecology of all the wonderful large mammals we shall see.

BIRDING RESOURCES AND GENERAL NATURE:

Spawls, S., K. Howells, R. Drewes, and J. Ashe. 2002. *A Field Guide to the Reptiles of East Africa.* Academic Press. A super-comprehensive, though large and heavy, guide to reptiles.

S. Spawls, K. Howells, and R. Drewes. 2006. *Pocket Guide to the Reptiles and Amphibians of East Africa.* Christopher Helm Publications. This is a lightweight and portable guide, partly adapted from the popular and highly acclaimed field guide cited above. Covering the most prominent 150 reptiles and 80 amphibians found in the region (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi), with concise text, photographs, and a map for each, this is a convenient and attractive pocket guide for a diverse and often conspicuous group of animals.

Branch, B. 2005. *A Photographic Guide to the Snakes, Other Reptiles and Amphibians of East Africa.* Struik. A very handy, slim, but fairly comprehensive little guide to reptiles and amphibians.

Blundell, M. 1999. *Wild Flowers of East Africa.* New York: HarperCollins. A handy field guide with good photographs for anyone especially interested in botany.

HISTORY AND CULTURE:

There is a wealth of material available for this region. Suggested good general reading about Africa, its wildlife, and its history includes:

Douglas-Hamilton, I. 1975. *Among the Elephants.* New York: Viking Press.

Grzimek, B. 1968. *Serengeti Shall Not Die.* New York: Dutton.

Matthiessen, P. 1995. *The Tree Where Man Was Born.* Penguin.

Moss, Cy. 1982. *Portraits in the Wild: Animal Behavior in East Africa.* 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Packer, C. 1996. *Into Africa.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Reader, J. 1998. *Africa: A Biography of a Continent.* Penguin.

Schaller, G. 1976. *Serengeti Lions: A Study of Predator-Prey Relations.*

Zimmerman, D. A. 2015. *Turaco Country*. Portal, Arizona: Sky Island Press. A masterfully written memoir of the author's 30 years of fieldwork in east Africa (Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda). Zimmerman writes extensively about birds, mammals, butterflies, and plants, from the perspective of both a professional biologist and an accomplished birder and natural historian. Much attention is given to the author's early visits to the region in the early 1960s, and, as such, the book provides an

evocative account of a time when visitors on safari could tent-camp virtually anywhere. This book makes excellent pre- and-post-tour reading, and the photographic selection is remarkable, but it is too big and heavy to carry with you on tour.

CORNELL LAB OF ORNITHOLOGY APPS & ONLINE RESOURCES

eBird: Among the largest and most successful citizen science projects in existence, eBird is an essential tool in promoting bird study and conservation. Among a range of benefits, eBird allows users to keep a variety of lists in a single application. When taxonomic splits are incorporated, lists are automatically updated. Additionally, trip leaders can share daily lists, so one only need accept a shared list and it will upload to your files! **Highly recommended.**

MERLIN BIRD ID: Merlin is an app designed as a birding coach for beginning and intermediate bird watchers. Excellent for use in the field, Merlin asks the observer a series of questions regarding his or her bird sighting, including date and location, and color, size, and behavior of a bird. Merlin then processes the viewer's responses to present a shortlist of possible identifications, from which the user can choose the likely bird. Species profiles include a brief physical description, photographs, and sound samples. The Photo ID feature allows anyone with a camera to snap a photo and obtain a list of suggestions. Merlin's Sound ID feature allows identification of birds through audible recognition. To use Merlin, download the app, followed by the appropriate regional "pack."

TERMS, CONDITIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc., a Texas corporation, and/or its agents (together, "***VENT***") act only as agents for the participant in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the participant or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT accepts no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in airfare or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, terrorism, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will be borne by the participant, as tour rates only provide for arrangements for the time stated.

VENT reserves the right (i) to substitute hotels of similar category, or the best reasonable substitution available under the circumstances, for those indicated and (ii) to make any changes in the itinerary that are deemed necessary by VENT or which are caused by third party transportation schedules (i.e. railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, etc.).

VENT reserves the right to substitute leaders or guides on any tour. Where VENT, in its sole discretion, determines such substitution is necessary, it will notify tour participants.

VENT reserves the right to cancel any tour prior to departure with or without cause or good reason. See the VENT Cancellation & Refunds policy set forth above.

Tour prices are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on November 4, 2026, and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change thereto.

VENT reserves the right to decline any participant's Registration Form and/or refuse to allow any participant to participate in a tour as VENT deems reasonably necessary, in its sole discretion. VENT also reserves the right to remove any tour participant from any portion of a tour as VENT deems necessary, in its sole discretion, reasons for such removal include but are not limited to, medical needs, injury, illness, inability to meet physical demands of a tour, personality conflict or situations in which such removal is otherwise in the best interest of the tour, the tour group and/or such participant. A participant may also voluntarily depart from a tour. If a participant is removed from a tour or voluntarily departs from a tour, such participant will be responsible for any expenses associated with such removal or departure, including but not limited to, transportation, lodging, airfare and meals, and VENT will have no obligation to refund or reimburse any such removed or departed participant for any tour payments or deposits previously paid by such participant.

Baggage is carried at the participant's risk entirely. No airline company, its employees, agents and/or affiliates (the "***Airline***") is to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time participants are not on board the Airline's aircraft. The participant ticket in use by any Airline, when issued, will constitute the sole contract between the Airline and the purchaser of the tickets and/or the participant. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for VENT tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airlines Reporting Corporation.

View the complete Terms and Conditions on our website.

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