

GIRAFFES BEFORE COFFEE

(MY ADVENTURES IN KENYA)

by Susan Fox

January 13-February 5, 1999

Introduction:

A childhood dream was coming true at last. I was going to Africa. I had wanted to see East Africa since I was 12 or 13 years old and I was now 45. The trick was, as far as was possible, to avoid the packaged tour scene. The solution: an Earthwatch Institute funded project at Lake Naivasha called “Kenya’s Wild Heritage”, combined with five days at a (very basic) tented camp in the Masai Mara. I found the company with the camp (Guerba, Ltd.) on the Internet. Earthwatch I learned of at a wildlife art show in Seattle. My main purposes were to experience Kenya, have an opportunity to do real field science and gather reference for my work as a wildlife artist and illustrator. I shot 78 rolls of film in 21 days, a new personal best.

The morning of January 13 arrived at last. I had been inoculated against anything that moved and was taking my Lariam. I had planned out what to wear on the plane (as many layers as possible to save suitcase space while still being able to move). I had succeeded in stuffing my own pillow into my suitcase, which was full of cotton khaki clothes, sun screen, bug death, the Earthwatch project briefing, film and sketch materials. I had two Nikon camera bodies with three lenses, a Tamron 28-200mm, a Nikon auto-focus 70-200mm and a Tokina 500mm mirror- reflex. I had my binoculars. I had books to read. I had my passport with the appropriate visa and the plane tickets. I had money to spend. I’d even gotten a decent night’s sleep. We finally left for the airport. Eleven time zones from now, I would be in Africa.

Note: This is a transcription of the journal that I kept every day during my trip. The text in italics was added after I returned for clarification and to add things that I didn’t jot down at the time, but were part of my wonderful “safari” (which is Swahili for “journey”).

The Journal:

1-4

Arrived Nairobi, 10 pm. *Succinct and to the point, I was utterly wiped out after two days of travel and next to no sleep. Frankfurt International was awful. Cold and confusing since the gate area where I arrived was like a fun house of reflective metal so that the gates, which were arranged in a circle, all looked alike. We had to walk outside down a ramp to take a shuttle bus to the plane which we boarded by climbing a steep flight of stairs. The temperature was maybe 40F at around two in the afternoon. Did I mention that I followed the advice that is everywhere these days and didn’t check any luggage? The trade-off, an overall lack of anxiety because I knew my stuff was with me, was balanced against having to unexpectedly drag it all down and up the steep stairs at Frankfurt and then up an absolutely malevolently constructed ramp at Nairobi International. It had little horizontal mini-bumps in it just high enough to make wheeling a suitcase almost impossible and it seemed to stretch for miles from the ground to the terminal door. (The soldiers in fatigues toting machine guns didn’t add to the ambiance, but it was also less than six months since the embassy bombing.) After departing Frankfurt, I finally fell asleep for awhile somewhere over south central Europe and woke up just as we crossed the Mediterranean coast over Egypt. The sun was going down along a horizon that seemed to go on forever. Below it was pitch dark except for an iridescent ribbon of fiery light - the Nile. At this point, it hit me how far from home I was and a little voice in my head said, “WHAT are you DOING? Then I thought about all the time we’d spent making the arrangements and ensuring my safety and decided that I would just cope the best I could*

when I got to Nairobi and that it would all be fine. Which it was. The driver was there with one of those little hand-written signs with my name on it. The hotel was noisy because of the adjacent casino, but ok.

1-15

Day One- Camp Kicheche

10 am- flew Airkenya to Masai Mara; saw wildebeest, zebra from air; cloudy, overcast; met by Daniel, a Wakamba; did game drive on 10 km drive from dirt airstrip to camp- hippo pool and then Tommys (*Thompson's Gazelle*), wildebeest, zebra, impala, topi, maribou storks & vultures, jackals, wildebeest carcass, eland, warthogs + Masai herd boys; arrived at Camp Kicheche, which I have entirely to myself. (*An amazing stroke of good fortune!*) Arranged stuff, spotted tan shapes way across on plain, got binoculars - 2 giraffes. Excellent lunch with Daniel to sound of barking zebras and Masai cow bells. Now writing this to sound of cow bells and happy talk between Richard and Daniel. On way here had great fun sliding and skidding through the famous sticky black mud as it had rained for the previous three days. Daniel says that we can visit a Masai manyatta. -Incredibly peaceful, but not quiet. -2:40pm Laying on my bed as the wind rustles through the trees, this mornings game drive seems like a wonderful dream; one that I get to repeat in less than half an hour. -As I putter about the tent getting gear together, I think, "I can pretend like I'm on a real safari (old style) in Africa." Correction: I am on an old style safari. Camera trips before leaving are paying off. I know what I want and how to pack it. -There is the skull of a cape buffalo wedged into a tree next to the table where Daniel and I ate lunch. 2nd game drive: Elephants. Daniel drove toward a group moving up onto a wooded rise. Three calves. At least six adults. Stop, take photos, watch, hear, crunch/crash behind car. VERY large bull with 4-5 ft. tusks emerges. Walks slowly behind car with head cocked. Circles out about 30 ft. away from car. Turns. Starts to walk directly toward car side that Daniel and I are sitting on with both windows rolled down and the hatch open. (*The ignition was off, too.*) At about 10 ft., angles past corner of hood, coming within 3 ft. (Daniels's estimate) of car. It occurs to me that he could stand over car and pluck either of us out with trunk. Daniel has suggested silence so I am not taking photos since both cameras have motor drives. I am holding my breath, staring, instead. Having made his point, bull (dangling primary quite large genitalia the whole time) turns head back for one last look and walks slowly with attitude to join rest of herd. Our place in his cosmic scheme of things has been made quite clear. An elemental experience. *Described this incident in May to wildlife artist John Seerey-Lester, who said that the elephant was, in fact, "posturing" to send a message.* -All the usual suspects, plus ostriches. -Giraffes again.

We encounter another car and then another. Apparently the hot topic is why they're all crammed 4-8 to a vehicle and I have one to myself. It's almost embarrassing. -Lions. Word from another car. Daniel says nothing until we get there. Then says "Lions" with a grin in his voice. Safari rigs have converged on a wooded glen like hyenas and jackals on a kill- of which there happens to be one. An otherwise intact but totally hollowed out zebra. Attended by a number of stuffed and totally zonked out lions. Rigs jostle for position; move to one side and the other of glade. We wait. Daniel finds a spot where I can see one adult lioness and an older cub. Much amused when his head slips off paw and thunks on ground. We wait. Surrounding shrubbery starting to look like a herd of elephants went through it. Rigs start to leave one by one. Interested in seeing, not watching. Finally pull into a prime spot near zebra. Only one mini-van behind us. Our reward: one lioness on our right gets up and calls cub who is on left. Cub answers. Lioness walks past us to cub. Much affection and play. No one else can see but us. Juvenile gets up and starts to play and scratch-stretch on tree directly in front of us. Mom and cub continue. Juvenile joins them. Cub starts to stalk juvenile, then both come on alert. Second juvenile rushes first juvenile. Playful swatting. Last rig is gone. We stay a few more minutes. Saw Grant's Gazelle on the way back. (I'm sitting under my porch as the rain pours down. I just looked up and in the fading light are two zebra grazing maybe 50 yards away.) (More zebra and wildebeest heading this way.) (One of the askari has just brought me a kerosene lamp.) Just another day on the Mara. Got back to camp just as the rain really started. -Saw a

second kill and later some white vertebrae and part of a skull scattered beside the track. Sated with images. Dinner in dining tent with Daniel. Barely made it through main course. Asleep by 8:30. Raining. *Poor Daniel. Stuck for five days, he may have thought, with a woman who can't even stay awake through dinner. There was just enough of a language barrier that I wasn't sure that he understood my explanation. By the end my stay, we laughed about it, but staying awake in the evening when it got dark (You know the saying, "when night fell"? Well, on the Equator it does, right about 7:30, every night.) without other visitors for conversational diversion was very difficult when I was still trying to adjust to the time difference.*

1-16 Day 2- Giraffes before coffee

Woke up at 2:45am. Laid in bed listening to sounds. Got up about 6:30, in time to see sunrise. Stepped out of tent as Masai askari with blanket wrapped around him quietly walked by. Sat in chair and saw a giraffe. Masai and cattle audible, but not visible. A gentleman with ear plugs just brought a pitcherful of hot water. Watched a small herd of wildebeest file by, heads down and looking a little chilly. Cloudy, but not raining.

Morning game drive- Looking for cheetah, but more elephant, plus one hyena, lion on kill (*We had gone back to the zebra kill of the day before and there was a juvenile male chewing on it*), one golden backed jackal, buffalo and an adventure- After one and a half hours of sliding in mud, fording a small river and clambering over rocks that tilted the car 30 degrees, we are driving on a level plain with no rocks and boom- flat tire. Cool, I think; can't have a real safari without the vehicle breaking down at least once. The best part is that I HAVE TO GET OUT OF THE CAR, normally forbidden. I ask if I can walk around. Daniel says no problem. Twenty minutes later it is clear that the jack is broken. Daniel asks if I'll be safe and ok if he walks back to camp (about a mile). I can't believe my ears. Can I walk around between these three acacias, I ask. Yes, he says. Goody, I think, that's close to 100 yards in each direction. So, off he goes and there I am, just me with the wildebeest, something I'll bet that few visitors ever experience. Finally, Daniel returns with another man from camp. They both work on the jack. No luck. A little while later, a truck arrives with three more men, one a Masai, and a jack. We're ready to go in five minutes, but wait, across the valley, it's another safari rig and there are people standing around outside of it. Are they in difficulty? Out here, you go and find out because the next time it could be you. We get there. Hood's up, radiator's steaming. They were on their way to the airstrip for a 2:15 flight. It's ten till two. They won't make it. All we can do is go back to our camp. I'm not quite clear on what action was taken (*Never did find out.*). Wind is blowing and it's starting to rain a little. Thunder. On the way back to camp saw a Masai couple on way home from market, 50k each way- one day there, one day back. Two donkeys with sacks of maize flour tied neatly on their backs.

Second game drive- This is starting to get a little unreal. Leave at four to look for cheetahs. Hapana. 3 hyenas, impala, etc. Meet many rigs. Everyone looking for cheetah. Hapana. *The use of the word "hapana" was a conceit that I picked up from a Robert Ruark safari book that I read when I was about 13. He uses it to mean "nothing or none", although my Swahili phrase book says that "si kitu" means "nothing" and "hakuna" is the word for "none".*) Many hapana for Big Five- lion, leopard, elephant, rhino, buffalo. Daniel tells them where we've seen all but the leopard and rhino (*which we hadn't seen either*). 2-3 rigs drove a ways up from south because no game down their way. They give it up. We keep looking. No cheetah. Egyptian geese, sparring Tommy's, vervet monkey, secretary birds, no cheetah. Head back. Oh well. Then starts what Daniel is telling his campmates about right now. Suddenly he stops the car. "Buffalo". Indeed. Three, including a huge bull about ten feet from the car. Many photos. (*That very large bull walked so close by the car that if I had swung the door open I would have barely missed his nose. My head was swimming with stories of African buffalo and how they are mean and unpredictable and are the only animal that will double back and lay in wait for the hunters that have wounded them. Only because of stupidity or really bad luck would I have ever dreamed of being that close to one. But apparently since they haven't been hunted for a long time or because we were in a*

vehicle and no threat, we were soundly ignored.) Drive on maybe 100 feet. Stop. 1-2-3 lions. Big cubs crouched by bushes on left. Warthog heading straight for them on right. Cubs charge. Warthog reverses course. Probably still running. With cubs is a juvenile male. Many more photos. Continue on for camp. Daniel states that we will see cheetah tomorrow on the way to see rhino. Less than five minutes from camp. Sun down. Light gone. "Cheetahs." Two of them, heading out for dinner. (*Two brothers, apparently.*) Tomorrow Daniel will tell the drivers about this amazing HALF-HOUR, even though he knows they won't believe him. I'm not sure I believe us. There are evidently carloads of people driving around for hours in vain with maybe one lion to show for it. But, as Daniel now says, "We lead. The others follow."

Day 3 1-17

About 10 pm last night I heard the drumming of hooves in the distance, a couple of drawn-out, high-pitched barks, then silence. Then something with small hard hooves (zebra?) galloped past the tent, then silence. Maybe 10-15 minutes later a lion roared. Then a possible hyena whoop. Next two-three roars sounded like "Take one more step and I'll break your neck." More roars, successively more distant. Quiet. Then...something has approached the tent. I hear footsteps on the plastic groundsheet. My heart starts pounding. There is a loud "whuuf" at the bottom of the door. Oh, no, my boots are outside! Hyenas eat boots. Where are the askari? What should I do? I creep out of bed to the tent door, zip it up about two feet, reach out, grab my boots and tevas, zip the door closed and jump back into bed. I turn on my flash light and shine it at the tent wall. Silence. I turn off the flashlight. The noise starts again. I make a loud 'go away' noise. Silence. Noise again. It sounds like a very large tin cup being crumpled over and over again. What could it be? Has a hyena dragged a bone from the kill next to my tent? The sound could also be large teeth scrapping and crunching on bone. With that as a tentative explanation, I try to go back to sleep. I think the noise goes on at intervals for quite awhile. Morning. 6:30 am. Was it all a dream? Richard comes to tell me coffee and food is ready and asks how I slept. Is he kidding? I tell him everything. He agrees. Yes, there was a kill. Yes, it was closer than usual and pointed out 3-4 hyenas on the side of the rise across from camp busily sniffing around. I tell him about the noise next to my tent. Hyena? No, he says casually, it was probably the leopard. THE leopard? There's a leopard? Oh yes, it lives in the woods behind the camp and is quite shy. Oh. I talk with Daniel while having breakfast and he suggests that it could have been a porcupine. *I still don't have the faintest idea what was out there. I looked all over the ground next to the tent the next morning and saw no sign of anything. If I hadn't written it all down right away the next morning, I know I would have wondered if I'd dreamed it.*

The rain has passed. Just a few white clouds. Today it will start being the hot weather I expected. On the agenda- the cheetahs and a visit to a Masai village. *Actually, it never got hot, It was quite lovely, really.*

Game Drive 1-

Looking for cheetah. Hapana. However, in one stretch all mixed together: wildebeest, zebra, warthogs, baboons, Tommys, one waterbuck (very unusual), eland, cape buffalo, impala, banded mongoose- just a taste of what it was like in the past. Fighting zebra, heard the impact as one rear-kicked another. *It sounded like two large football players colliding.* Visited a Masai manyatta. Got to see inside a boma and pet two Masai cats-no names- kept to catch rats. Was sung to and bought nice things. Only visitor present. Chief is a woman. *She was elected by the rest of the tribe. A smart no-nonsense woman, evident even with the language barrier.* Money goes to fund for building school (*a pre-school as it turns out,*) and a hospital for the Masai. "Ashi" is "thank you" in Masai. (Ashi ole). Then up the hill to the rhinos. All three of them. Guarded 24 hours a day by volunteer Masai wardens whose only pay is what they get from visitors.

Lunch

Game Drive 2-

Still looking for cheetahs- when it rains it pours. See parked rig. Go over. Mother and two almost grown cubs finishing the last of an impala fawn (Daniel could tell from the leg bone.) Many pictures. Onward. I remark that I haven't seen a full-grown male lion yet. Now we are looking for lion and we find- another mother cheetah with two month-old cubs and a male Thompson's gazelle carcass. A jackal shows up. The

mother starts eating. Jackal moves in. To my amazement, the cubs chase the jackal away until it finally settles in at a discreet distance to wait. Spend a long time watching. Work our way back looking for lions. Get a split instance look at a jackal cat. Second one Daniel has seen in 12 years. First time with a client. Am told that I am VERY lucky. Then we see two Kirk's dik-dik. Then back to camp. HOT, heavenly shower. Raining. Dinner soon.

Day 4 1-18

Slept better last night. Have come to the conclusion that it was/is an utter waste of time and materials to try to paint Africa- landscape and animals- without having come here.

Game Drive 1-

Saw a lioness in the distance. Went 25k to Leopard Gulch. Took about an hour. Another driver said leopard had been seen six days ago. Just a short way out and we see a single hartebeest. My luck for the morning as it turned out. They are around but uncommon. On to the leopard. He apparently likes certain trees (in the fig family) and we checked them all. Hapana. Drove down the gulch. Great trees and rocks. Saw hyrax, agama lizard and a hyena tucked up in a little cave. Drove around the area. Saw two different mother giraffes, one with three month old, one with a seven month old. Worked our way back by way of Mara River and one of the hippo pools. Continuing on- lots of impala, another giraffe and one of three rigs stuck in the mud for a short time.

Game Drive 2-

Went over to the Mara Safari Camp to cash some traveler's checks. No luck. Drove by Mara River for a ways. Stopped by hippo pool. Then went through area that had been packed with animals. Most gone. However, there was a large herd of female cape buffalo, some with calves. Out onto plain. Almost totally deserted. Very odd. Went back along bushes where we saw the jackal cat. One hyena. Can see rain off to the east on mountain. Daniel stops, says must get back to camp before rain gets there. So I found out how fast you can go out here when you need to. Rain starts. We stop to roll down the plastic. Can see front advancing. Acacia trees disappearing. It starts coming down hard. We make it in. I realize why it was important. The trails are probably already impassable and getting stuck would not be good. The front is passing over complete with lightning. One of the heaviest rains I've seen. *By this time, Daniel knew I was a good sport and he had probably stayed out longer that he might have with a car load of visitors, especially since it was getting pretty close to sundown. I think that he wanted to see the jackal cat again too. We really had to run for it to beat the storm, which was great fun after jouncing around at the stately speed of five miles an hour for four days.*

Day Five- 1-19

7:10 am. Sitting outside and a long, lithe grey African wild cat runs silently by.

Game Drive-

I wanted to buy some Masai cloth, so Daniel took me to the tiny village where there is a school (400 students), 3 bars, and a store- "The Masai market". He was kind enough to promise to bring them the money later since all I had was traveler's checks which are ridiculously hard for people to cash. So, back to the lodge. On the way to the village, saw three hyenas with a wildebeest head and bone. One looked either pregnant or nursing and a male had been injured. On the way to the lodge, saw the cheetah with the two young cubs. Saw her again on the way back and got to watch her stalk impala. Then saw warthogs in a mud wallow. On the way to the airstrip (4th try) Daniel spotted a crocodile in the Mara River. It was huge and once we got to the bank we saw two more smaller ones. *The plane was very late because of storms to the south, but Daniel waited with me until it arrived as he said he was required to do. I almost hoped it wouldn't make it because then I could spend another night at the camp, although it would have screwed up my rendezvous the next morning.*

What an extraordinary five days! Daniel (who has been doing this for 13 years), commented after the first couple of days that "The animals are coming out for you." I had no complaints. It was a perfect experience. The camp was comfortable, the food was excellent, the staff was great and boy, did the animals "come out".

One of the amusing things that I didn't note down at the time was The Lemon Tart Story: For dinner one night, the dessert was lemon tart. I believe that the entree that evening was impala, but anyway, Richard, the boss, brought to the table in the dining tent where Daniel and I were sitting across from each other a lovely lemon tart in an oval shape. He handed me a knife to cut a serving for myself. I sliced into it- or tried to. The crust was tougher than rhino hide. The dinner knife barely dented it. I sawed away. Richard and Daniel started to chuckle. I decided to play into the situation and sawed away even harder. We all started to laugh. I muttered about it being like an old gazelle carcass and then Richard and Daniel really lost it. Finally, I managed to carve off a hunk and pass the rest to Daniel. We were all wiping tears from our eyes. It actually tasted quite good. Leaving Camp Kicheche was not easy, although my body had taken all the game driving it could what with fording streams, bumping over rocks and generally getting jerked around on the uneven ground.

1-20 Nairobi- Wednesday morning

Fairview Hotel is lovely. Had coffee on bench outside room. Bills itself as "the country hotel in the city". It probably was in the country when it was built. Temperature is perfect. Cool, just like home. Met the Earthwatch team in the lobby and went out to Elsamere. Then climbed (300 ft.) hill to see lay of the land. Saw giraffe, Tommy's and vervet monkeys plus birds (Including a Verreux's Eagle Owl).

1-21 Elsamere- Thursday

Ended up on the crayfish project with Dr. Harper, Ed (Weiss) and Priscilla. Spent the morning ripping apart water hyacinth to collect crayfish. The experiments: 1. Try to learn food preferences from 15 large and medium ones. 2. Try to learn "lifestyle" preference- 3 bottles, mud only; 3 bottles, mud and hyacinth; 3 bottles-hyacinth only; 1 small, 1 medium, 1 large crayfish in each bottle. 3. Cannibalism preferences- 3 pans each with 1 large crayfish and two small dead ones; 3 pans each with 1 large crayfish and 2 small live ones. Also went on the boat over to where Dr. Harper found water lilies last October. No luck. *Saw a house that had been built by one of the Dutch flower farm owners in the riparian zone with no permits. This had caused much anger and disgust among those who care about the lake and was presented as an example of the corruption that plagues Kenya. However, the El Nino rains had caused the lake level to rise by almost 10 feet the previous fall. The house, which hadn't been occupied yet was cut off and partially inundated, making it uninhabitable. This was a cause for much happiness amongst our companions who are studying the lake.*

1-22 Friday

Spent the morning out on the boat sampling crayfish by a number of methods: 1. Trapping with half a tilapia for bait; 2. Scooping- taking a ½ meter square screen and lifting out a set amount of water hyacinth and then extracting and measuring every crayfish we could find; Scrubbing- rubbing a net under the hyacinth roots and counting/measuring every one we found. In the afternoon we repeated the process in a different location. Watched a video on the Rift Valley after dinner. Finally got a good, full night's sleep. *Finally got grabbed by a crayfish after handling a few hundred of them. It really hurt. She wouldn't let go and Cheggi, the boatman, had to deftly pull her claw open to remove it from my finger. I think that everybody on the crayfish project got pinched at least once, We all got rather blasé about it in the end.*

1-23 Saturday

Spent morning on lakeshore sampling crayfish in five lagoons formed when water level come up. Once again used traps and also did visual observation. After lunch, went into Naivasha to get hardboard with which to make covers for tubs with crayfish. Bought hand-done cards from an art student. Stopped to find out what records on crayfish some fishermen had. They stopped harvesting crayfish when the E.U. banned all fish exports from Kenya because of an isolated problem with one fish species in Lake Victoria, so they have no market for their catch except for small orders from the local hotels. Met a woman, Margaret, with a 9 mo. old son, James, plus some other children. One little boy got scared of me and ran away. Got an e-mail from David.

1-24 Sunday

Set up the “Dining Preferences Experiment” to see if crayfish prefer one type of food over another. Used various combinations of water lily, water pennywort and water hyacinth. Crayfish curry for lunch. Afternoon- set up screened boxes with crayfish in them to see if anything will predate them. Went to Joan Root’s home. Saw video about her and her ex-husband, Alan Root, top wildlife photographer. *Joan would do crazy things like provoke a spitting cobra into spitting at her while she was wearing glasses so that Alan could film it in slow motion. It is quite a dramatic piece of footage.*

1-25 Monday

Day trip to Hell’s Gate. Got to walk around and sketch for a couple of hours. Dinner and after talking with Mbogo Kamau about Kenya and Kenyans. Very enlightening.

1-26 Tuesday

Joined Maureen Harper, Brenda and Liesje on the fish eagle project. Spent most of the day on the lake. Big boat in the morning. Rubber boat with Dr. Harper “driving” in the afternoon. Good video on the Rift Valley. Met Diana Bunny, artist. *She is a local artist, a white Kenyan, who Maureen introduced me to.*

1-27 Wednesday

On lake from 9-1. Warmest day yet. Got to go onto Crescent Island. Overcrowded with privately owned wildlife- wildebeest, zebra, waterbuck, impala. Met Dutch wildlife photographer. Plotted eagles and nests on map. Getting dark. Catchment and water teams not back yet. Boy, will they be tired. Jan’s rolled up in a blanket taking a nap on the ground. She’s on the ground beetle team.

1-28 Thursday

Sat up till 11:30 last night. Silly and fun. Hit the lake a little after 9 am. Did final third of lake. Saw hippos, buffalo, skimmers, poachers, flamingos, along with fish eagles.

1-29 Friday

E-mail from David. Quiet morning with Liesje doing data entry. After lunch she and I and Maureen went to Peter Robertson’s to view paintings, have tea with him and Diana Bunny. He’s 50 years plus in Kenya, born in Ceylon, spent his career in tea (30 years). Cold front with heavy rain moved through at sundown. Most of team off on “Kitaka’s Disco Experience” in Naivasha. *Which consisted of going to one of the dance clubs in Naivasha and carrying on until around 2 in the morning.*

1-30 Saturday

2nd day off - eight of us packed into a mini-bus and drove 2 hours to Lake Nakuru National Park. Well worth it. Warthogs, waterbuck, impala, zebra, a LEOPARD!, two RHINO!, flamingos, pelicans, misc. shore birds, baboons, buffalo, two ground hornbills on a kill (a buffalo), a leopard kill in a tree, lovely buffet lunch at a posh lodge, shopping in Nakuru.

1-31 Sunday

Began ground beetle project with Ed and Liesje. Drove all over Hell’s Gate picking up plastic cup traps that had been set by previous team. Climbed a small volcano. Visited Hell’s Kitchen; steam vent formations. *We got a kick out of the fact that a couple of the cups had been stepped on by zebra. Not helpful to John, who was running the experiment, though.*

2-1 Monday

Picked up traps at a flower farm and a produce farm in the morning. Got to stop in town for film, kangas, and scarves for gifts. Spent the afternoon picking out beetles, arachnids and insects from traps and bottling/labeling them. Catchment/water teams out overnight. Weather a little dicey.

2-2 Tuesday

Picked up traps from Joan Root's (5 of 10 stolen by poachers) and Longonot Farm (6-7 K back to base of Longonot volcano) where a fire had swept through between when the traps were set and when we picked them up. Tops a little melted but otherwise ok. Finished processing a little before 3. Went to Elmenteita Handweavers at 4. Got goodies. Velia's for drinks. Great party. Talked to Michael about coming to America. Velia showed and demonstrated old radio that belonged to Joy Adamson, Dave H. got attacked by a bat, much good cheer all around. On way back, group that left ahead of us on foot encountered hippos. Big one charged Priscilla. Stopped short about three feet away. She's scared, but ok. After dinner and talk by John (beetles), stood on patio watching hippos. Irony is that Ed and Gigi had just said that they were going to stay up tonight until they saw one. Hadn't until now. Be careful what you wish for. *Velia was the warden of Elsamere. She was sacked in a nasty bit of business that was building up while we were there and came to a head a few months later. She was born in Kenya and remembers the "Happy Valley Set" from when she was a child. Although I describe it dispassionately in my journal, the incident with the hippo was really quite terrifying for all concerned. Priscilla could easily have been killed. In over ten years of Earthwatch teams coming to Elsamere, this is the first time anything like it had happened. I found out when we visited Dave and Maureen Harper in Leicester in July of 1999 that the askari that was supposed to guard us had been charged a few minutes earlier so instead of being on the job to protect and escort us, he was hiding in the bathroom. The three people involved had done everything wrong however, probably due to everyone having had a drink or two and feeling happy. They went back down the road from Velia's to Elsamere in the dark, with no flashlight and no African to accompany them. The group I was with was minutes behind them, but we had Mbogo with us and he had a flashlight. We walked right past where the hippos had been, but didn't know anything had happened until we got down to the office where the others were standing. Priscilla was leaning up against the wall of the office with eyes as big as saucers. We asked what had happened and everyone started talking at once. Priscilla said that she'd been three feet from a hippo. At the time, I thought that was rather cool and I envied her. I even said to her that I would have traded places with her. However, at dinner the whole story came out and I told her afterward, and it was nothing against her, that I withdrew the offer. If any of us needed reminder that we weren't in a safari park or Disneyland, we got it. Oh, and this was the same evening that someone saw a snake on the patio, which Mike King moved off onto the grass with a stick. One of the Africans later mentioned that it was a black mamba. Maureen wasn't sure that that was true, but still.*

2-3 Wednesday

Last day- packed, rested in am. Big lunch with guests. Fish eagle feeding/swimming trip in boat. Saw turaco bird prints. *Which were magnificent works of art that were kept in a meeting room on the Elsamere property.*

2-4 Thursday

Relaxing morning at Elsamere sitting together. Left for Nairobi about 11 am. Stopped at gallery, Naivasha, (saw Peter). Arrived Fairview- went to City Market and Masai Market; had a Tusker beer on the Delamere Terrace of the Norfolk Hotel. All went out for Indian food, then Dave, Maureen took me, Brian, Mike, Priscilla and Liesje to airport. *Peter was the young man selling cards that I had met on an earlier trip into Naivasha. A whole crew of us went to the markets, led by Cara, an American college student who had already been in East Africa for a couple of months doing research and home stays by the time she and her mom joined up with us for the project.*

The staff at Camp Kicheche:

Campmaster (“Big boss”) Richard Matheka

Driver: Daniel Mwololo Ng’alu

Cook: John Muli

Masai askari: Michael Ole Ringa

Patrick Liaram

Steve Liaram

The staff of the Earthwatch Institute’s “Kenya’s Wild Heritage” Project:

Principal Investigator: Dr. David Harper, University of Leicester

Consultant: Dr. Kenneth Mavuti, University of Nairobi

Project Investigators: Ms. Nzula Kitaka, Mr. Daniel Mbogo, Mr. John Njoroge, Mrs. Maureen Harper

Wildlife seen on trip:

Mammals:

Lion
Leopard
Cheetah
African Wild Cat
Jackal Cat (?)
Black-backed Jackal
Silver-backed Jackal
Spotted Hyena
Elephant
White Rhino
Hippopotamus
Masai Giraffe
African Buffalo (Cape race)
Warthog
Common Zebra
Kirk's Dik-Dik
Thompson's Gazelle
Grant's Gazelle
Waterbuck
Coke's Hartebeest (Kongoni)
Topi (Jimela race)
Wildebeest
Impala
Klipspringer
Common Eland
Rock Hyrax
Banded Mongoose
Savannah Baboon
Vervet Monkey
Colobus Monkey

Birds:

Ostrich
White Pelican
Long-tailed Cormorant
White-necked Cormorant
Little Grebe
Squacco Heron
Great White Egret
Little Egret
Yellow-billed Egret
Hammerkop
Goliath Heron
Grey Heron
Purple Heron
Sacred Ibis
Hadada Ibis
Yellow-billed Stork
White Stork
African Spoonbill
Lesser Flamingo
Greater Flamingo
Marabou Stork
Yellow-billed Duck
Egyptian Goose
Ruppel's Griffon Vulture
White-headed Vulture
White-backed Vulture
Lappet-faced Vulture
Egyptian Vulture
Nubian Vulture
Secretary Bird
African Fish Eagle
Auger Buzzard
Long-crested Eagle
Black-shouldered Kite
Osprey
African Marsh Harrier
Eurasian Marsh Harrier
Coqui Francolin
Helmeted Guineafowl
Crested Guineafowl
Moorhen
Red-knobbed Coot
Black-bellied Bustard
Kori Bustard
Crowned Crane
Blacksmith Plover
Crowned Plover

African Jacana
Whiskered Tern
Grey-headed Gull
African Skimmers
Speckled Pigeon
Speckled Mousebird
Lilac-breasted Roller
Pied Kingfisher
Malachite Kingfisher
White-fronted Bee Eater
Grey Hornbill
Ground Hornbill
African Barn Owl
Verraux's Eagle Owl
African Pied Wagtail
Clifchat
Grey-backed Fiscal
Bronze Sunbird
Purple Grenadier
Spectacled Weaver
Yellow-billed Oxpecker
Superb Starling
Splendid Glossy Starling
Pied Crow

Reptiles:

Agama Lizard
Five-lined Skink
House Snake