


Birding Ecotours

KENYA: 21-DAY PHOTO AND BIRDING ADVENTURE

17 AUGUST - 6 SEPTEMBER 2019



Martial Eagle (photo Stephen Hammer) is one of our photographic targets on this trip.

This is a photographic birding tour that gives you time in one of Africa's most photogenic countries. Kenya has a unique and diverse array of habitat types, ranging from the snow-capped mountains at about 5000 meters above sea level, tropical lowlands, highland forests, vast savannas, and rolling plains and grasslands to the coastal dry forests and the shores of the Indian Ocean. There is a total of 1100+ bird species recorded on the country's checklist from its 62 Important Bird Areas (IBAs), with 117 of these being migrants from the Eurasian region. This 21-day tour will enable us to find around 600 bird species and will take us through many spectacular habitats. We'll experience some fantastic birding and truly excellent large game viewing, so there will always be something to draw the eye – and the lens. We'll have a chance to walk in the forests and drive among the many large game animals that the plains of East Africa are famous for. This tour is particularly designed for photographers, provides awesome and rather easy photographic opportunities, and allows time for brilliant bird and wildlife shots.

Please note that the detailed itinerary below cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors.

Itinerary (21 days/20 nights)

Day 1. Nairobi

At your arrival at the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) in Nairobi you will be met by our drivers and the tour leader and transferred to the Nairobi Serena Hotel.

Overnight: Nairobi Serena Hotel, Nairobi

Day 2. Nairobi – Samburu National Reserve

We leave Nairobi soon after breakfast to avoid the bustle of the morning rush hour and drive northwards through the Central Kenya Highlands. On the way we'll see the pineapple plantations of Thika and the neat subsistence farms of the Kikuyu. We travel between the Aberdare Range and Mount Kenya, and if it is clear we may get a chance to see the second-highest mountain in Africa with its snow-capped peaks. We proceed past the Mount Kenya region to the semi-arid Northern Frontier District. Our hosts here are the Samburu people, who are pastoralist cattle herders like their brothers in the south, the Maasai.

On the drive we pass through spectacular scenery, and the grasslands along the roadside are a great place for **Black-winged Lapwing, Black-winged Kite, Dusky Turtle Dove, Greater Blue-eared Starling, Cape Crow, Long-tailed Widowbird, and Speke's Weaver**. We cross the equator into this unique African wilderness, arriving in time for lunch at the Samburu Serena Safari Lodge.

We'll take an evening drive in search of the unique birds and animals in Samburu National Reserve.

Overnight: Samburu Serena Safari Lodge

Days 3 – 4. Samburu National Reserve

Samburu is one of the most exciting reserves in Kenya and possibly East Africa, and we will spend two full days here. The semi-desert habitat and the rich woodlands along the Ewaso Ng'iro

River are teeming with wildlife. Exploring this fantastic reserve will always produce the most overwhelming array of bird species, such as **Hooded Vulture**, **Bateleur**, **Martial Eagle**, **African Hawk-Eagle**, **Crested Francolin**, **Yellow-necked Spurfowl**, **Vulturine Guineafowl**, **Buff-crested** and **White-bellied Bustards**, **Black-faced** and **Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse**, **Red-bellied Parrot**, **African Scops Owl**, **Pearl-spotted Owlet**, **Somali Bee-eater**, **Purple Roller**, **Von der Decken's Hornbill**, **Red-and-yellow Barbet**, **Bearded Woodpecker**, **Pink-breasted Lark**, **Bare-eyed Thrush**, **Rosy-patched Bushshrike**, **Hunter's** and **Black-bellied Sunbirds**, **Golden-breasted** and **Fischer's Starlings**, **Donaldson Smith's Sparrow-Weaver**, and **Cut-throat Finch**, among others.

Mammal life is also prolific, with many species not seen elsewhere on our tour. Just a few of the many possibilities are Olive Baboon, Vervet Monkey, Common Dwarf Mongoose, Grevy's Zebra, Reticulated Giraffe, Kirk's Dik-dik, Common Waterbuck, Gerenuk, and the magnificent Beisa Oryx.

We have morning and evening game drives, searching for different species of birds and mammals in this fantastic park.

Overnight: Samburu Serena Safari Lodge

Day 5. Samburu National Reserve – Mount Kenya National Park

We depart after breakfast for Serena Mountain Lodge on the slopes of Mount Kenya, while we'll continue to bird Samburu en route before we get to the park entrance. We'll be keeping an eye out here for **Long-tailed** and **Red-collared Widowbirds** along the roadside. We should arrive at our lodge at lunchtime.

From Serena Mountain Lodge, looking down on a waterhole and salt-lick, we can watch the many African Elephants, African Buffalos, Bushbucks, and Common Warthogs that are attracted to the minerals. In the evening we take a bird walk in the forest around the lodge.

Overnight: Serena Mountain Lodge

Day 6. Mount Kenya National Park – Lake Nakuru National Park

In the morning we'll bird the forest around Serena Mountain Lodge. Here we'll be looking for **Red-fronted Parrot**, **White-starred Robin**, **White-headed Wood Hoopoe**, **Narina Trogon**, **Cabanis's Greenbul**, and any of the other many species we should come across here.

We depart after breakfast for Lake Nakuru National Park, allowing time to search for several key species along the way, with a stopover at Thomson's Falls at Nyahururu. Nyahururu is one of Kenya's highest towns, at 2360m above sea level. Just outside the town lies Thomson's Falls on the Ewaso Narok River. It falls 72m, with the mist feeding the dense forest below. At Thomson's Falls we're likely to see **Chestnut-winged Starling**, **Slender-billed Starling**, **Rock Martin**, and **Grey Cuckooshrike** around the scenic waterfall.

In the early afternoon we'll arrive at Lake Nakuru National Park, home to one of the greatest birding spectacles on earth! Huge numbers of **Lesser Flamingos** feed in the shallow alkaline water, sometimes up to a million, with smaller numbers of **Greater Flamingos**. Sometimes the Lesser Flamingos migrate to other Rift Valley saline lakes due to shortage of algae (spirulina), which is their main food source. If there is heavy rain we will check the other lakes for this species. Lake Nakuru National Park was recently named an Important Bird Area (IBA) by BirdLife International, due to the huge bird population and number of species in this magnificent park. A large rocky escarpment en route is a favorite roosting spot for Mackinder's Eagle-Owl,

the local subspecies of **Cape Eagle-Owl**, and we may be able to find this highly sought-after bird hidden in a dusty crag.

The *Acacia* scrub in the park is a favorite haunt for **Little Rock Thrush**, **Mocking Cliff Chat**, **Pale Flycatcher**, and **Purple Grenadier**. Exploring the *Acacia* woodland and the lakeside marshes we will no doubt come across many wonderful avian delights, such as **Great White Pelican**, **White-breasted Cormorant**, **African Spoonbill**, **African Fish Eagle**, **African Harrier-Hawk**, **Hildebrandt's Francolin**, **Grey-headed Gull**, **Levaillant's Cuckoo**, **White-browed Coucal**, **Green Wood Hoopoe**, **Red-throated Wryneck**, **African Grey Woodpecker**, **Black Cuckooshrike**, **Anteater Chat**, **Grey-backed Fiscal**, **Brown-crowned Tchagra**, and **African Firefinch**.

Mammals are also quite common in the park, and this is one of the few places in East Africa where both the endangered White and Black Rhinoceros can be found. Some of the other mammals we hope to encounter are Rothschild's Giraffe and Bohor Reedbuck.

Overnight: Sarova Lion Hill Game Lodge or similar

Day 7. Lake Nakuru – Kakamega Forest National Reserve

We'll make a pre-breakfast bird walk, and after we've eaten we'll drive to Kakamega Forest National Reserve, allowing time to search for several key species along the way. We should arrive at Rondo Retreat in time for lunch.

The Kakamega Forest is Kenya's only true tropical forest, and this area is alive with birds. We'll have a full day tomorrow to explore this bird-rich area.

Overnight: Rondo Retreat, Kakamega

Day 8. Kakamega Forest National Reserve

We will spend this day enjoying the sights and sounds of this unique forest. We'll walk the numerous forest trails here in search of many of Kakamega's 194 bird species. The forest is West African in character, and many birds here are not found elsewhere in Kenya, reaching the eastern extent of their range here. The rainforest here is a haven for butterflies and other insects, along with the vast avian riches.

In this tropical greenhouse we'll get a chance to see **Great Blue**, **Ross's**, and **Hartlaub's Turacos**, gemlike **African Emerald Cuckoo**, **Narina** and **Bar-tailed Trogons**, **Jameson's Wattle-eye**, and the cacophonous **Black-and-white-casqued Hornbill**.

A range of primate species such as Blue and Red-tailed Monkeys and Eastern Black-and-white Colobus, as well as DeBrazza's Monkey, can also be seen in this forest. Forty percent of the total butterfly population of Kenya is found in Kakamega Forest as well. We'll also get a chance to experience more of the diverse African culture of the Luhya people.

Overnight: Rondo Retreat, Kakamega

Day 9. Kakamega Forest National Reserve – Lake Bogoria National Reserve

We'll be up early in the morning to have a walk in the compound before we go for breakfast. After breakfast we load up and head for Lake Bogoria.

This drive takes us through the beautiful scenery of the Kerio Valley. We stop in the valley for a picnic lunch and do some birding, looking for **White-crested Turaco** and **Orange-breasted** and **Grey-headed Bushshrikes**, among others.

We arrive at Lake Bogoria in the afternoon and have a chance to go birding as we enter Lake Bogoria National Reserve. The lake has only one river inlet, hence it is not affected by heavy

rains, which can dilute the spirulina. Therefore we have a good chance to see **Lesser Flamingo** here, when Lake Nakuru is diluted by heavy rain. We also have the opportunity of visiting the hot springs. The lake has woodland dominated by *Acacia* and *Ficus*, and to the north is a papyrus swamp. Birds unique to this area include massive congregations of **Lesser Flamingos** and a few **Greater Flamingos** too.

In the surrounding parkland and rock cliffs we can find **Steppe Eagle**, **African Fish** and **Tawny Eagles**, **Black-necked Grebe**, **Three-banded Courser**, **Slender-tailed Nightjar**, **Greyish Eagle-Owl**, **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl**, **Lichtenstein's Sandgrouse**, **White-bellied Canary**, **Mocking Cliff Chat**, **Brown-tailed Rock Chat**, **Golden-breasted Bunting**, **Emerald-spotted Wood Dove**, **Common Kestrel**, **Hemprich's** and **Jackson's Hornbills**, **Little** and **White-throated Bee-eaters**, **Speckle-fronted Weaver**, **Northern Masked Weaver**, **White-billed** and **White-headed Buffalo Weavers**, **Gabar Goshawk**, **Dark Chanting Goshawk**, **Cardinal**, **African Grey**, and **Nubian Woodpeckers**, **Red-and-yellow** and **D'Arnaud's Barbets**, **Purple** and **Lilac-breasted Rollers**, and many others.

Overnight: Lake Baringo Country Club

Day 10. Lake Baringo National Reserve

We'll take an early morning walk to check the cliffs for **Hemprich's Hornbill**, **Verreaux's Eagle**, and **Rock Hyrax**, the eagle's main prey. With the help of the local naturalist we'll walk along the famous Tugen Hills, known for their great diversity of raptors, owls and interesting passerines.

We return to the lodge for breakfast and later drive to Lake Baringo, where we use motor boats to navigate the lake for waterbirds. Herons are a main target here, with **Goliath** and **Purple Herons** as well as **Great** and **Little Egrets**.

We get back to the lodge for lunch and will spend the afternoon birding the grounds.

Overnight: Lake Baringo Country Club

Day 11. Lake Baringo National Reserve – Lake Naivasha

After breakfast we depart for Lake Naivasha, arriving at the Elsamere Lodge and Conservation Centre, the former home of George and Joy Adamson, the latter of *Born Free* fame, in time for lunch.

After lunch we head further south to Lake Oloidien. This is a volcanic crater lake found at the south-west corner of Lake Naivasha. It separated from the main lake in 1979. Since then it gradually became saline, increasing the level of the spirulina, a blue-green freshwater algae, which attracts **Lesser Flamingos**, since it forms their major food source. The birds first discovered this site in July 2006 and have used this area as a feeding site ever since.

Overnight: Elsamere Lodge and Conservation Centre

Day 12. Lake Naivasha, Crescent Island Game Park

We wake early and do some morning birding around the center and the lodge before breakfast. Elsamere is a birdwatcher's paradise; over 200 bird species can be found in and around its wonderful lakeshore grounds.

After breakfast we head for Crescent Island Game Park. This is a game sanctuary on the eastern side of Lake Naivasha. It was created in 1988, and following a sudden drop in water levels in 2000 Crescent Island became part of the mainland and is now a peninsula. Big game, including Plains Zebra, Thomson's Gazelle, Impala, and Masai Giraffes, are all up-close. Other wildlife

includes Defassa Waterbuck, Common Eland, and Blue Wildebeest. This park supports a wealthy variety of terrestrial bird life as well. Among the birds around the lake we might find **Black Crake, Red-knobbed Coot, African Jacana, Black-headed Heron, Squacco Heron, and Marabou Stork**. We'll have a chance to do some night birding around the lodge for **Verreaux's Eagle-Owl and Northern White-faced Owl**.

Overnight: Elsamere Lodge and Conservation Centre

Day 13. Maasai Mara National Reserve

We take an early morning bird walk before checking out and departing for the amazing Maasai Mara National Reserve. This drive will already present some special rewards, with all kinds of great birds and game animals – **Grey Crowned Crane, Secretarybird, Blue Wildebeest, Thomson's Gazelle, Plains Zebra, Impala, Black-backed Jackal, Common Duiker, Vervet Monkey, and even Masai Giraffe** – roaming freely in the field and using the road together with the traffic, long before we even enter any game reserve.

We'll arrive in time for lunch and then take a late afternoon game drive for some of the big game animals and local birds like **Kori Bustard, Secretarybird, and several of the seven species of Vulture** here, which include **Egyptian, Hooded, Rüppell's, Lappet-faced, and White-headed**.

Overnight: Mara Serena Safari Lodge

Day 14. Maasai Mara National Reserve

We have a full day of birding in the park with a picnic lunch. We'll visit the Mara River, hoping to see part of the great wildebeest migration crossing the river, but this can of course not be guaranteed. We'll also check for the "big five": African Elephant, Lion, Leopard, rhinoceros, and African Buffalo. We will also see Hippopotamus and other plains game like Thomson's Gazelle, Topi, Masai Giraffe, and Black-baked Jackal. Among the birds in the area we'll be looking for **Helmeted Guineafowl, Red-necked Spurfowl, Kori Bustard, White-bellied and Black-bellied Bustards, Secretarybird, Lappet-faced, White-backed, Hooded, and Rüppell's Vultures**, and many other raptor species like **Martial, Long-crested, Tawny, and Wahlberg's Eagles, Black-chested Snake Eagle, Bateleur, Shikra, and African Goshawk**. Several species of bee-eaters are possible, as well as kingfishers, rollers, cuckoos, and a profusion of starlings and finches. The grasses and woodlands are also home to apalises, cisticolas, francolins, pipits, and larks.

Overnight: Mara Serena Safari Lodge

Day 15. Maasai Mara National Reserve – Nairobi

We depart soon after breakfast from the Maasai Mara and have a game drive en route in the rolling savanna grass of the Mara as we proceed to Nairobi.

We stop at a sudden surprising, stunning outlook from a viewpoint at the top of the escarpment over the width of the Great East African Rift Valley, with Rock Hyraxes also enjoying the view.

We arrive in Nairobi in time for lunch, and in the afternoon we can visit the National Museum and the bird gallery.

Overnight: Jacaranda Hotel, Nairobi

Day 16. Nairobi – Tsavo West National Park

After breakfast we proceed to Tsavo West National Park, birding along the way. The Tsavo habitat is a relatively dense thicket of savanna dominated by *Acacia* and *Camiphora* bush with

baobabs, grassy plains, riverine woodland, and the Mzima Springs. We arrive in time for lunch at our accommodation, Ngulia Safari Lodge.

In the afternoon we take a game drive in the park, which supports a large number of big game such as African Elephants, rhinoceros, Lion, huge herds of African Buffalo, and more. There will be a large number of new species for us here, including **Splendid** and **Hildebrandt's Starlings**, **Common Ostrich**, **Hartlaub's Bustard**, **African Grey** and **Northern Red-billed Hornbills**, night birds including **Donaldson Smith's** and **Freckled Nightjars**, **Pearl-spotted Owlet** and **African Wood Owl**, **Black** and **Abyssinian Scimitarbills**, and several species of larks, pipits, chats, and cisticolas, among others.

We'll also visit Mzima Springs with an underground water hide, where you will enjoy watching hippos and fish as well as **Malachite** and **Grey-headed Kingfishers**.

Overnight: Ngulia Safari Lodge

Day 17. Tsavo West National Park – Taita Hills

We will bird in the park en route to the forests of the Taita Hills, where we hope to see the endemic "Taita three": **Taita Apalis**, **Taita White-eye**, and **Taita Thrush**. Other specialties here include **Striped Pipit**, **Yellow-throated Woodland Warbler**, **Stripe-cheeked Greenbul**, and more.

Overnight: Sarona Salt Lick Game Lodge, Taita Hills

Day 18. Taita Hills – Watamu

We leave for the Indian Ocean coast to the beach resort of Watamu (meaning sweat). Today we relax in the cool tidal breeze on the snow-white sandy beaches after our adventurous journey.

Overnight: Turtle Bay Beach Club, Watamu

Day 19. Arabuko-Sokoke National Reserve

Today we take a short drive to this unique natural area, where we'll be walking trails around the forest. It is one of the last remnant indigenous forests in Kenya, the largest and most intact coastal forest in East Africa, and by far the largest remnant of the forests that once dominated Kenya's coastal fringe. The Arabuko-Sokoke Forest supports remarkable biodiversity. It contains at least three distinct vegetation types, which provide the habitat for several endangered species, and has a very high number of species in relation to the size of the area. Twenty percent of Kenya's bird species and about thirty percent of its butterflies have been recorded in this small part (0.07%) of Kenya. At least 24 rare or endemic bird, mammal, and butterfly species are restricted to this stretch of coast.

This high proportion of endemic species, some known only from Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, makes the forest a key part of the East African Coastal Forests Endemic Bird Area. The forest holds some rare endemic species like **Sokoke Scops Owl**, **Sokoke Pipit**, and **Clarke's Weaver**, as well as other species like **Amani Sunbird**, **Fischer's Turaco**, **Crested Guineafowl**, **Spotted Ground Thrush**, **Trumpeter Hornbill**, **Chestnut-fronted** and **Retz's Helmetshrikes**, **Black Cuckooshrike**, **Scaly-throated Honeyguide**, **Eastern Nicator**, **Mombasa Woodpecker**, **Mangrove Kingfisher**, **Blue-mantled Crested Flycatcher**, and **Black-bellied Starling**.

Overnight: Serena Beach Hotel and Spa, Arabuko-Sokoke National Reserve

Day 20. Mida Creek

Mida Creek, part of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, is a large inlet that opens into the sea south of Watamu and rises and falls with the tides. Mida Creek is one of Africa's largest mangrove creeks and a very important part of the marine ecosystem in the Watamu/Sokoke World Biosphere Zone. The mangrove roots provide a rich source of food for fish, crabs, shrimps, and oysters. The fish and crustaceans then provide the food for Mida's legions of birds.

Mida Creek is an excellent birdwatching area. Thousands of migratory birds regularly visit the creek, and Crab Plover is its star attraction. We walk on the boardwalk to Mida village through the mangrove habitat, looking for birds like **Dimorphic Egret, Yellow-billed Stork, African Spoonbill, Fulvous Whistling Duck, Water Thick-knee, and African Sacred Ibis**, and if we're lucky we may find **Crab Plover**.

Overnight: Serena Beach Hotel and Spa, Arabuko-Sokoke National Reserve

Day 21. Departure

After breakfast we transfer to the Moi International Airport in Mombasa or to the airport in Malindi for your flights back home.

Duration: 21 days
Group size: 4
Date: 17 August – 6 September 2019
Start: Nairobi
End: Mombasa or Malindi

Price: US\$14,928 per person sharing
Single Supplement: US\$1358

Price includes:

Accommodation as specified
 All meals
 Guiding fees
 Local birding guide
 All park, conservation, and entrance fees as described
 Excursions and activities as detailed in itinerary
 All transport while on tour

Price excludes:

Items of a personal nature
 Drinks
 Laundry service
 Gratuities
 International flights
 International airport taxes
 Visa
 Insurance
 Medical curtailment of safari

Photo tours are slightly more expensive than equivalent non-photographic birding tours because we keep three seats empty in a 7-seater vehicle – for camera gear.