



**19-DAY TANZANIA: SAVANNA BIRDS, WILDEBEEST
MIGRATION, AND EASTERN ARC MOUNTAIN ENDEMICS**

11 – 29 APRIL 2024



Yellow-collared Lovebird is an incredibly striking Tanzanian endemic.

Tanzania surely comes closer to what people expect of Africa than any other country; the vast plains of the Serengeti National Park, the Ngorongoro Crater, and Africa's highest mountain (Kilimanjaro) epitomize the continent. Our Tanzania birding tour allows one to see the wildebeest migration, the big cats, an abundance of birds (East Africa is the easiest place on the continent to amass a huge bird list very fast with hardly any effort), and then a suite of Tanzanian endemics that lurk in the Eastern Arc Mountains and on Pemba Island (a more idyllic version of Zanzibar). Tanzania has lots of endemics, is one of Africa's greatest wildlife havens, and boasts varied, spectacular scenery.

We start our Tanzanian birding safari in the famous (for wildlife) northern parts of the country near the Kenyan border. After arriving at Kilimanjaro International Airport we head for Arusha on a journey that (weather-permitting) will give us good views of Africa's highest mountain. We spend a good amount of time in the great parks such as the Serengeti and the Ngorongoro Crater, finding not only the great herds and accompanying predators, but also localized lovebird species, **Grey-crested Helmetshrike** and other Kenya/Tanzania endemics, along with birds like **Rufous-tailed Weaver** that inexplicably don't cross into similar habitat on the Kenyan side. Birdlife absolutely abounds, and we also find a lot of more widespread African species. We then head southeastward from mountain range to mountain range, looking for afro-montane forest endemics (many of them restricted to Tanzania).

Eventually this epic Tanzania birding tour ends at the tropical Indian Ocean city of Dar es Salaam, from where there is the option of joining a short extension to Pemba Island for its four endemics and/or a "rough" extension to some of the more remote Eastern Arc Mountains for endemics we won't see on the main tour. Please ask us at info@birdingecotours.com if you are interested in either or both of these extensions.



Rufous-tailed Weaver is not too difficult to find.

Itinerary (19 days/18 nights)

Day 1. Arrival at Kilimanjaro International Airport, the Lark Plains, and Arusha

This is an exciting day as we arrive in northern Tanzania, weather-permitting with views from the plane of Mount Kilimanjaro rising out of the vast African plain below us. We'll stop for photos of Africa's highest mountain as we head for our site for the Critically Endangered (IUCN) **Beesley's Lark** (less than 200 remaining). This is also an excellent place for other larks, **Yellow-throated Sandgrouse**, **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse**, pretty wheatears, shrikes, and many others. Many of the Serengeti-type birds can also be found here in the grassland and whistling-thorn habitat. **Red-throated Tit** is possible, as are some fine barbet species. We also hope to see our first mousebirds in the form of **White-headed Mousebird**. The colonially nesting **Grey-capped Social Weaver** is always a delight, and we may see (and hear the loud call of) **Nubian Woodpecker**. After birding this area we eventually head to Arusha for the night (depending on flight arrival times, sometimes we bird the Lark Plains the next day).

Overnight: Korona House, Arusha



*A male and female **Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse** touch down.*

Days 2 – 3. Serengeti: wildebeest, predators, and a dazzling array of spectacular birds

We embark on a spectacular journey that few people would ever forget. We head out from Arusha to Serengeti National Park, having lunch (being careful not to have your food taken from your hands by opportunistic **Yellow-billed Kites**) on the rim of the Ngorongoro Crater on the way. If you've never been to Africa before, you're likely to be amazed by elephants, buffalos,

and the sheer number of bird species. After an exciting drive we'll eventually reach the Serengeti, where we look at the wildebeest migration, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of **Plains Zebras** and **Thomson's Gazelles**. This is one of the best places on the planet to see big cats – we've sometimes seen **Lion**, **Leopard**, and **Cheetah** in a single day. Finding a kill should allow us to see a good number of vulture species. Birds of prey are everywhere, including the most colorful of the world's eagles, **Bateleur**. **Secretarybird** regally roams the plains, and **Common Ostrich** tries to be regal but without much success. Smaller birds absolutely abound, and so many of them are brightly colored – bee-eaters, barbets, lovebirds, and all the others. Interestingly, the Serengeti is home to quite a few extremely localized bird species. **Karamoja Apalis**, which favors the weird whistling thorn habitat we'll visit mainly for this species, is one of these range-restricted birds; it only occurs here and in a tiny part of northern Uganda (it has a strangely disjunct distribution). **Red-throated Tit**, **Fischer's Lovebird**, and **Grey-crested Helmetshrike** are other examples. The Tanzanian-endemic **Rufous-tailed Weaver** is also one of the Serengeti's target birds.

Overnight: Serengeti



Cheetah in a savanna landscape is quite a scene.

Day 4. The incomparable Ngorongoro Crater

The crater rim is wetter and more forested than the crater floor, and we spend some time here, looking for localized birds such as **Golden-winged Sunbird** and **Brown-headed Apalis**. The prehistoric-looking **Schalow's Turaco** adds a spectacular flash of crimson and green, and, if one gets a good view, the spectacular crest leaves even a hardened birder gobsmacked. **Grey-capped Warbler** is one of those more widespread, characteristic East African species we might also encounter here. Sunbirds such as **Eastern Double-collared Sunbird** as well as **White-eyed Slaty Flycatcher**, **Thick-billed Seedeater**, and others are also often present in this area.

Descending into the crater floor is an unforgettable experience. There's a high density of **Lion** and large herbivores, some of them to some extent "trapped" by the natural enclosure formed by this huge, nicely intact caldera. About 25,000 large mammals, which also include **Black Rhinoceros** and a pool with **Hippopotamuses**, inhabit the crater floor. With luck we might also see **Serval**, **Bat-eared Fox**, and other amazing smaller mammals. The highlight for many people is, however, the **African Golden Wolf**, formerly classified as an African variant of the Eurasian Golden Jackal but now thought to be more closely related to the Grey Wolf. As always, however, our main focus is on birds, although we stop for other wildlife too, and we expect many additions to our growing bird list – **Lesser Flamingo**, **Pallid Harrier**, **Montagu's Harrier**, **Pectoral-patch Cisticola**, **Abdim's Stork**, **White Stork**, and many others are expected.

The big African animals, spectacular birds, and stunning scenery combine to make this one of the most incredible wildlife experiences planet Earth can offer you. The rim of this amazingly intact crater rises spectacularly 600 meters (2000 feet) above the plain at the bottom (which has a diameter of 24 km (15 miles).

Overnight: a lodge on the crater rim with spectacular views onto the floor far below



Yellow-throated Sandgrouse can be seen anywhere within the crater.

Day 5. Transfer to Karatu with a possible visit to Lake Manyara National Park

Time-permitting, we can visit Lake Manyara National Park today, where we usually add quite a number of birds to our list, which might include the beautiful **Spotted Palm Thrush**, bee-eaters, tinkerbirds, barbets (the spectacular-looking **Red-and-yellow Barbet** often joins us during our picnic lunch), **Crowned Hornbill**, the huge **Silvery-cheeked Hornbill**, various storks and ducks, **Collared Pratincole**, **Great White Pelican**, and more. Troops of thickset **Olive Baboons** are common here.

Today, if we are still missing them, we also look for some extravagant-looking seedeaters such as **Long-tailed Paradise Whydah**, **Straw-tailed Whydah**, and jet-black indigobird species.

Overnight: Karatu

Days 6 – 7. Tarangire National Park

We visit Gibb's Farm, which is a great place to have a meal and add new birds to the growing list. Eventually we continue to Tarangire, a breathtaking place of red (because of the soil) elephants, baobabs, savanna-clad hills, and wild rivers: the real Africa as far as scenery goes. Here at magnificent Tarangire National Park we have some localized Northern Tanzania specials and endemics to find: **Yellow-collared Lovebird**, the long-tailed **Ashy Starling** (but duller than the much more widespread **Superb Starling**), and the charismatic **Northern Pied Babbler** are some of them that we usually find rather easily.

Overnight: Tarangire National Park



*The aptly named **Superb Starling**.*

Day 8. Back to Arusha

We head back to Arusha, where we spend a night before heading to the endemic-rich central parts of Tanzania after a week in the famous (for wildlife in general) northern parts near Kenya. We will bird en route today, and even in Arusha we sometimes find some good birds such as **Green-backed Honeybird**, seedeaters, **Spotted Eagle-Owl**, and quite a number of good birds on a short walk from our guest house.

Overnight: Korona House, Arusha.

Day 9. South Pare – start of our Eastern Arc birding

We leave the north to seek a plethora of Tanzanian bird endemics of the beautiful (and off-the-beaten-track) Eastern Arc Mountains further south, starting with a drive to the South Pare Mountains. En route we'll bird a site that allows us to find quite a number of arid-area Kenyan birds that marginally cross the border into Tanzania – these are Tsavo-type birds not shown on the distribution maps for Tanzania! We'll also start looking for endemics such as **Usambara Thrush** and **Usambara Double-collared Sunbird**.

Overnight: South Pare Mountains

Days 10 – 11. The next range: birding the West Usambara Mountains

We traverse some arid areas containing widespread African birds such as the beautiful **Lilac-breasted Roller** and a lot of others. Rocky slopes will be explored for **Mocking Cliff Chat** and **Striped Pipit**. The real targets are, however, the mountain-forest endemics once we reach our next destination, which will hopefully include **Usambara Weaver**, **Usambara Akalat**, and **Spot-throat**, among quite a number of others. **Hartlaub's Turaco**, even more spectacular than many of the other turaco species and a classic East African mountain endemic, will hopefully be found without too many problems. The gorgeous **Black-fronted Bushshrike** with its strange calls, **Cinnamon Bracken Warbler**, **Evergreen Forest Warbler**, and **African Wood Owl** are also often encountered here.

Overnight: West Usambaras

Days 12 – 13. Birding in the East Usambara Mountains

We continue looking for Eastern Arc forest endemics, including **Long-billed Forest Warbler**, **Sharpe's Akalat**, **Banded Green Sunbird**, **Uluguru Violet-backed Sunbird**, **Usambara Hyliota**, **Dapple-throat**, **Pale-breasted Illadopsis** (a unique subspecies), **Usambara Eagle-Owl**, **Ruwenzori Nightjar** (another unique subspecies that could be split into "Usambara Nightjar"), and a lot of others. A few of these species are highly enigmatic, and some require immense luck. Pairs of **Fischer's Turaco** are not too difficult to find, and **Green-headed Oriole** gives its presence away with its liquid calls emanating from the canopy.

Overnight: Amani

Day 14. Miombo woodland birding

Miombo (*Brachystegia*) woodland is a beautiful dry forest that boasts a lot of south-central-African endemics, extending from southern Tanzania to Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Angola (see our [blog on miombo birding](#)). Since we'll be in a completely new, very unique habitat, we're bound to add a lot of new birds to our burgeoning list. Mikumi National Park is where we search for miombo-woodland birds – and we have to be quite careful, as there are stacks of big game (some pretty dangerous) around. **Racket-tailed Roller** sits quietly on more concealed perches in thicker woodland than other rollers. **Shelley's Sunbird** and various other more widespread sunbird species might be around. **Miombo Rock Thrush** sings beautifully

from under the canopy. **Pale-billed Hornbill**, **Böhm's Bee-eater**, **Dickinson's Kestrel**, and a bunch of other brilliant birds will also be looked for.



A Pale-billed Hornbill seen in miombo-type woodlands

Leaving the national park and heading to our accommodation, we'll stop if we see **Black-winged Red Bishop** (Fire-crowned Bishop being an alternate, nicely descriptive name for this species, which does look like it's on fire), the stunning little **Half-collared Kingfisher**, a vulture that rarely eats meat, **Palm-nut Vulture**, and stacks more.

Overnight: Morogoro

Days 15 – 16. Sampling the vast Udzungwa Mountains

While the Udzungwa Mountain National Park warrants a mini-expedition to see some of the best endemics, such as Udzungwa Forest Partridge and Rufous-winged Sunbird (we can arrange this as part of the remote extension – please ask us), the more remote parts of the park are beyond the scope of the main tour. Instead we focus on other quality birds, such as the brilliant **Livingstone's Flycatcher** (or Livingstone's Warbler, as it might be more of a warbler than a flycatcher), **Green Malkoha**, **Lesser Seedcracker**, **Green Barbet**, and many other south-east-African birds.

Overnight: Udzungwa Mountains

Day 17. Undescribed species of the Kilombero Valley Floodplain

Today involves a lot of driving on a rough road, but it's worth it, as the Kilombero Valley Floodplain is an intriguing place. The fact that it's a mission to get to could explain why it has two very distinctive yet undescribed **Cisticolas** and the recently (1990) described, endemic **Kilombero Weaver**. All three of these birds are easy to find here, along with a range of other excellent water-associated species such as coucals (the massive **Coppery-tailed Coucal** being a highlight), herons, lapwings (such as the attractive **White-crowned Lapwing**), kingfishers, the quite localized **Marsh Tchagra**, etc. The beautifully colored **Orange-breasted Waxbill** can sometimes put in an appearance. The floodplain is heavily used by humans for fishing and cattle-grazing, so it's quite a scene to behold.

Overnight: Udzungwa Mountains



Kilombero Weaver

Day 18. Transfer to Dar es Salaam

We start the day by trying to clean up on the mountain birds before heading gradually to the tropical East African city of Dar es Salaam on the warm Indian Ocean. Here we'll look for terns, shorebirds, and other species.

Overnight: Dar es Salaam

Day 19. Coastal birds and departure

We'll bird until we take our flights for home or to one of the extensions.

Please note that the itinerary 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. In addition, we sometimes have to use a different international guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling.

Duration: 19 days
Limit: 4 - 8
Dates: 11 – 29 April 2024

Start: Kilimanjaro International Airport near Arusha (The order of the tour is sometimes reversed. Please check with us before buying air tickets.)
End: Dar es Salaam
Prices: US\$12,182 per person sharing, assuming 4 – 8 participants (2024)

Single supplements: US\$1,087 (2024)

Pemba Island: On request

Southern Highlands: On request

Price includes:

Accommodation as specified
All meals
All park, conservation, and entrance fees as described
Excursions and activities as detailed in itinerary
Ground transport

Price excludes:

Flights
Airport taxes
Items of a personal nature, e.g., laundry, gifts, etc.
Drinks
Gratuities (please see our [tipping guidelines blog](#))
Visa
Insurance