

UNIQUE SAFARIS

Bush Report March 2010

Wildlife and activities experienced in February



Photo courtesy of Charles Hamm

Migration and Weather in the Serengeti

It has been a wild and wonderful February with wildebeest calving in full swing in the Serengeti, as well as in Ngorongoro Crater. The beginning of February was quite dry, with the zebra herds moving to central Serengeti for the long grass and the wildebeest moving down to Kusini near the Maswa area for about the first 10 days of February. Calving began in the Maswa area but by the third week in February, rain re-appeared and herds moved back to the Ndutu woodlands, Naabi Hill and the Gol Kopjes, providing clients with the spectacle they had been hoping to see. Calving continued in the month of February on the more accessible southern plains of Naabi, Ndutu and Gol. By the end of February, the Gol Kopjes were filled with wildebeest and calves. Main roads were in good condition, but some areas of the southern plains were very difficult to drive on with the rain toward the end of the month, with travel being especially difficult near Kusini. One driver guide described the southern plains as "the maternity ward."

Migration and Weather in Tarangire National Park

The grass is quite high in Tarangire National Park but clients have been seeing large numbers of elephants and giraffe. At this time of the year, when the grass is high, some of the best viewing for elephants is along the Tarangire River. The birding in Tarangire has been wonderful as well and serval cat was seen as well. Clients saw all species of hornbills, Fischer's lovebird, Orange-bellied parrot and Yellow-Collared lovebird, red and yellow barbet, open-billed stork, Verreaux's Eagle Owl, African jacana, martial eagle, bataleur eagle, tawny eagle and long-crested eagle. Roads in Tarangire were more difficult to drive on due to the wet conditions.



Safari Highlights

- Many of clients made Buffalo Luxury Camp and northern Loliondo their first stop on their safari. While the large herds are in central and southern Serengeti, there are still resident animals in northern Loliondo and clients enjoyed large herds of buffalo, giraffe, elephant, impala, hartebeest, topi, baboons and vervet monkey are always in the area. Smaller resident herds of zebra and wildebeest are seen. There is a pride of 24 lions in the area, many hyenas and the birdlife at this time of the year is spectacular as well, including great spotted cuckoo, lilac breasted roller, shrikes, Bare-faced Go-Away bird, tawny eagle, black eagle, red-billed hornbill, grey hornbill, crowned cranes, wattled plover, ground hornbill and blacksmith plover. Sundowners overlooking the vast Serengeti Plains were extraordinary.
- The best highlight was seeing 8 wild dogs near Lake Masek, successfully hunt a wildebeest calf. There is a small pack of wild dogs that have been in the southern Loliondo area and near Ngorongoro Conservation Area. Wild dogs have been sighted near Nasera Rock, which is in this area. It is believed that these dogs are part of this pack and they ventured as far as Lake Masek and Lake Ndutu woodlands while hunting for food. The dogs are unable to penetrate further into the Serengeti because of the high population of hyena and lions in the southern and central Serengeti. Wild dogs are unable to protect their kills from these powerful predators. The Frankfurt Zoological Society has collared the entire pack (from the area of Sanjo in southern Loliondo), but has been unable to collect them to translocate to the Western Corridor. They are following this pack with great interest because they are highly endangered, with requests from the Sanjo to please remove the dogs to protect their herds.

- Many of our clients enjoyed a trip to Nasera Rock, a holy site for Maasai to the east of the Gol Kopjes. Here they were able to walk with Maasai and it was particularly wonderful because of the large herds that were in the area at the end of February.
- At the beginning of February, clients were seeing the large herds near Kusini, which is a scenic area of the southern Serengeti. Kusini has a particular type of black cotton soil, which when wet becomes very difficult to drive on. As the rains started again, some clients had long difficult drives in this area, but the wildlife yielded excellent herds, large prides of lion, good kills, bat eared fox, jackals, hyena, cheetah and a lucky find of a caracal.
- Our clients often report that their private mobile experience was the highlight of their safari experience. One set of clients were amazed to hear lions close by in the middle of the night, but were even more surprised to drive less than 1 km from the camp and find a pride of 10 in Ndutu feeding on their wildebeest kill.
- Other clients were lulled to sleep listening to the barking zebra and grunting wildebeest that surrounded their private camp at Naabi Hill.
- The southern plains were awash with European storks. Interspersed among the flocks were other birds, including a black headed heron that has hunted a grass snake, but had to hurry to swallow it alive because another heron was chasing it to steal the snake away.
- Clients witnessed a Crowned Eagle feeding on guineafowl chicks while the mother was screaming and trying to chase the eagle away.
- There were a number of successful hunts seen, including lions, hyena and cheetah. Food is abundant and often easier for hunting due to the vulnerability of pregnant wildebeest and zebra, as well as the many Thomson gazelles.
- Clients were treated to a mother and 6-month leopard cub less than 20 meters from the vehicle and with no other vehicles nearby.
- The Seronera River Valley is always wonderful for leopard, elephant, buffalo, lions, zebra and the many other gazelles and antelopes.
- Huge herds of more than 300+ buffalo were seen in the central Serengeti near the Seronera airstrip.



Photo courtesy of Steve Morello

- There are many areas of the central Serengeti to explore, including the Maasai and Sametu Kopjes, the Moru Kopjes and access to the Barafu Kopjes as well. Cheetahs were abundant near the Maasai Kopjes in the middle of February.
- In three days, one family recorded 35 lions, 12 cheetah including one very pregnant female, 3 leopard, 10 bat-eared fox and the full view of the huge wildebeest herd calving.
- Rhino in the Crater were amazingly abundant for viewing in February. This is due to the rhinos coming into the central area of the Crater floor for excellent grasses to feed on. Clients were seeing between 6-14 rhino on the Crater floor.
- The flamingos on the soda lake inside the Crater were in huge numbers in February.
- When the Crater is 'good', it is an amazing place to be. February appeared to yield wonderful sights. Clients watched a tawny eagle feeding on a recent kill of a small newborn Thomson gazelle.
- Clients were able to be down on the Crater floor by 6:15 am when they were staying at the Crater Sopa Lodge and they enjoyed the beautiful early morning light as they were photographing hippos at the small hippo pool down in the Crater. Suddenly, they noticed a huge caracal walking toward the hippo pool. The caracal jumped up into the air twice and then walked away into the tall grass, obviously hunting and hopefully having been successful hunting for birds. Caracal is extremely rare to find as they are very elusive and enjoy the protection of the tall grass, which makes it even harder to spot them.
- Many of our clients want to experience all aspects of life in Tanzania and be exposed to different tribes to learn about the country's make-up. Clients are able to visit the Hadzapi tribe near Lake Eyasi. The Hadzapi are Tanzania's Bushmen, still speaking in clicks and living a nomadic life of hunting and gathering. On one such visit, we stopped to purchase maize flower, cooking oil and tobacco to bring to the family being visited. The younger boys were out hunting and came back with a young kudu, which they skinned and roasted the meat over the fire. In the area, it is also possible to visit the DaToga tribe, who are pastoralists like the Maasai, but they also have the skill of blacksmithing. DaToga used to live in the Crater, but constant conflict with the Maasai forced the government to move them to Lake Eyasi, where they herd cattle and produce metal goods as well.

Hadzapi man stringing his bow





Photos courtesy of Frank Walsh

- Lake Manyara is always spectacular for viewing baboons and clients can often watch their antics for hours on end. On one particular safari, clients were also able to watch a lioness kill a warthog in the Majimoto area of Manyara National Park, with the pink flamingos serving as a backdrop. The Sykes or Blue Monkey is also easily seen in Lake Manyara.
- Clients had a more rare sighting of the Palm Nut Vulture at Lake Manyara National Park, a highlight for serious birders.
- There were beautiful views of a pride of seven lions in Tarangire, drinking from the Tarangire River with the sun setting in the background. Nearby was a lioness from the same pride nursing two very young cubs in clear view of the clients.
- As one driver guide wrote, "Although there were no wildebeest and zebra in Tarangire, the quantity of the elephants, giraffe and the variety of the birds plus the lushness of the grasses and the baobab and date trees made the park a unique experience for my clients."
- Clients should not overlook Arusha National Park and it is often a good idea to plan an extra day in Arusha to recover from the long flights. Arusha National Park is an ideal 'first game drive' with beautiful views of Mount Meru and Mount Kilimanjaro, excellent giraffe that are very habituated to vehicles, black and white colobus monkey and wonderful birding. Clients were treated to see violet-backed starling, Hartlaub's Turaco, Ross's Turaco and Bare-Faced Go-Away Bird. Clients can also walk in the lower forest of Mount Meru with an armed ranger.

We welcome you to submit your images for our next Bush Report. *If you have a photograph you are particularly proud of or want to share with others, please email images to meg@uniquesafaris.biz and we will be happy to include them in the next reports and credit you for the image. It is wonderful to share your pictures and experiences and we would love to include them in our future reports.*