



TREK TALES OF 2022

The December festivities are now a warm distant memory; we turn the page and open a new chapter for the beginning of a new year.

A very happy New Year to you all, may 2023 bring all the joy and happiness for a wonderful year ahead!

Firstly, the weather, although I sound like an eccentric old neighbour, who has nothing better to do than gossip about the forecast!

Kenya is still in the throes of a severe drought, but if you look back in history there is a definite pattern and although it is the normal human element of complaints - too dry, too hot, too wet, we never seem satisfied.

However, this is nature's way of eliminating the unwanted, the weak and a period of dormancy; I suppose one can call it that.

Lots of life seems to perish, is that not a good thing we tend to ask?

Is it not what is needed from time to time?

Or is just cruel?

Heartless statements indeed!



But, this is nature, a reality of what the store has on its shelves for a better, healthier choice!

Rain will come, and then everything will explode into life - drought forgotten, a crisp smell to the air, happy bird song will echo forth and fresh new blossoms bursting into life!

It is the most wonderful sight to behold and a gorgeous time to travel through the wilderness, observing new life regenerating, fresh new smells wafting past ones nose, there will be new life from a bounce in step for the wildlife, to the beautiful butterflies floating across the plains.

THE JOURNEYS OF 2022

What an extraordinary year, 2022 was.

Full of wonderful new friends, a number of first time wildlife sightings for me, a treasure trove of memories, beautiful scenes and finally an abundance of amazing photographs even though I say it myself!



It all began in February!

A safari into the depths of Laikipia, a vast beautiful wildlife area, the scenes are stupendous, from the beginning to the end of each day, with gloriously dramatic sunrises and sunsets, and in between the scenes and wildlife did not disappoint.

This was a special family safari, a first time for the 3 young lads, but a second time for parents Laura and Rob. It was truly special to share the insights of our fabulous wildlife, people and gorgeous topography with this wonderful family!

Laikipia provided a host of sights from rhino, cheetah with a fresh kill, to daily searches for lion, in particular after hearing their lazy grunts at night.

We rushed out each morning hoping for a sight of these huge cats, but alas not to be found, well not just yet, as I had to leave something for a little later on the safari to keep their interests from waning!

Our first port of call was El Karama Lodge, a family managed and practicing cattle ranch, littered with huge amounts of wildlife, not only that, but a chance for one to get out of the vehicle and walk with the animals. This we did one morning, with a slight detour as there was a huge herd of elephant lazily browsing where we intended to walk.

Walking in the bush never disappoints, an occasional little adrenalin rush, when you are on the same level as the *big game*!

A realization dawns that there is a whole new world of 'animals' on the ground, in the plants, in the trees, not seen nor noticed when sitting in a vehicle driving through the bush.



There are dung beetles, termites, animal droppings, symbiotic relationships with ants and trees. Weaving trails across the plains, are filled with different hoof patterns, pug marks of cats, territorial markings of other creatures and so much more.

Plants too, their fragrance, interesting uses and medicinal purposes, it all creates a marvelous introduction to our world of guiding in the bush and what to look out for!



Breakfasts in the bush play an integral part of our daily activities, pool side lunches and bush dinners were all par for the course, some as surprises, which were quietly arranged.



I had told a ‘fib’ that we had forgotten the sundowner cocktails for the evening, perhaps we could borrow a few bottles from a set up bush dinner for another group.

An insistent “no don’t worry; we can wait till we get back to camp!”

“Well let’s see if we can borrow at least a bottle of wine”

The same insistence of no we don’t have to have a sundowner...”oh well I will let the cat out of the bag and this beautiful bush dinner is all for you!”

Delight is an unpretentious term to use in this circumstance, as there were better distinctive phrases used to share their joy.

From Laikipia to the Maasai Mara, an hour’s flight and within minutes our lack of lions was about to change!

A family of 9 lion lay right beside camp, from then on we were clearly spoilt for choice!

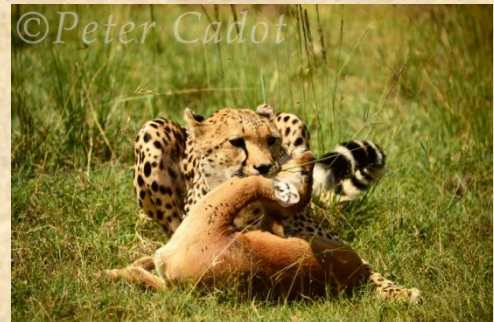


Cheetahs too, were on the viewing menu and some behavior I had not witnessed before, was a hyena stealing a fresh kill from a cheetah mother and cubs, not a nice thing to watch, but that is nature.



These were not the only cheetah we found. We were lucky enough to witness a cheetah chasing a young impala. The breathless cheetah completed its race right beside the vehicle, with a young impala clutched firmly in her jaws!

Meals on wheels and service with a smile...!



A quick break from safaris, in May, to a full-on maintenance assignment in a Camp in the Masai Mara, where I had to re-build 3 tent bathrooms as part of an upgrade project, just before the camp opened. It is very challenging to complete these tasks without modern shopping conveniences around the corner, or workshops with all the necessary tools on hand! Luckily, armed with my experience and together with a great team, the project was completed on time.



Our Safari days seem to slot one into another with so many wonderful new friends made, including welcoming back some for their second and fourth safari with Olive Trek Safaris!

However, before I start my rambles, many a guest asks that pertinent question and I will briefly state my opinion.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND WHAT CAMERAS DO I BRING?

Photography, I shall turn to, as many a guest have asked the where's, why-for's, which lens and what to bring, on safari?

I am a Nikon man and have had Nikon for many years, so this is the camera I am used to, but it doesn't say that you have to go out and buy one, as the choice is yours and what you are comfortable and happy with.

I have a Nikon D810 which is wonderful, but there are many more up graded versions, that I have not tried, including the mirror-less camera!

To capture a sharp image at the right exposure, with the right settings, there is nothing more gratifying.

On Safari I will attempt to show you how, assist with your settings, etc. but the rest is up to you, your creative eye and capabilities on how you frame your photos and capture that moment. I do believe that each individual will have a different artistic eye, which will capture different aspects of the scene, or animal, which is what, makes photography such fun, but also hypnotic.

Indeed there will be many that you view, then hit the 'delete' button, but there is that 'one' special photo to treasure.

Each time you pick up your camera, you will learn new things, hit new buttons, sometimes by mistake, other times on purpose, but it is deeply satisfying when you 'click' that button and know you have a great shot.

When you book your Safari and you are looking for the right camera and indeed there are so many choices, but either a Nikon or a Cannon, you cannot go wrong.

Now lenses, yes there are the expensive ones, ones that you can rent, but there are other lenses that are Nikon or Canon, etc. that are compatible for either camera – Tamron, sigma or similar, but a general rule of thumb, is anything from 18 - 24mm for wide angle shots and there are many scenes that you will wish you had a wide angle lens for, and for those objects a little way a way, the maximum of a 500mm lens.

Now, what I have found is, that a zoom from 50mm – 300mm is a great spectrum, but having had a 50mm - 500mm for a while now, I love this and because I take thousands of photos and being a typical photographer, I would love a further lens of at least 600mm, with a little more aperture, but that's me!

I have also used a 200mm – 500mm which was excellent, but wished I had another body handy with a different lens on to cover that little gap and that would be 50mm – 200mm.

However, with Gorilla photography the wonderful creatures can be right at your feet or a little distance away that is where my 50 – 500mm comes into play, but it is a heavy camera to carry!

I believe that the 50mm – 500mm is not available now, but anything from 100mm or 200mm – 500mm is available.

I digress a little, but with a 50mm - 300mm you cannot go wrong.



SLEEPING IN TENTS

There are many Olive Trek Safari friends who have booked and undertaken a fabulous safari, but their initial perception of a 'sleeping in a tent' was of great concern. Their perception of this is a small abode, bed on the floor or small camping bed, no running water, but a simple camping experience.

However, their first introduction to their luxury sleeping tent is a picture and a jaw dropping moment.

'I never envisage this, this is 5 star luxury!'

This means that the beautiful night sounds of African bush will invariably lull you into peaceful sleep. You begin to appreciate what it means to be part of this magnificent wilderness.

Camp life has a special quality, in particular sleeping in a large comfortable tent, as it does not have thick



cement walls, buzzing electricity, glaring bulbs, noisy next-door-neighbours, hooting traffic, but just peace and quiet, with roaming wildlife, which means sounds are accentuated.

There are of course many visitors, who are concerned or have a little apprehension, but it is perfectly safe and it is the best by far to sleep or stay in this marvelous environment in the African bush.

I have copied an extract from my diary when I was undertaking 'luxury' camping safaris where we had set up camp in our private conservancy, we had retired for the night after a long wonderful day...this is what I love about the African bush!

'No sooner, as it seemed, that we had nestled into our warm haven, a deep bellow echoed round camp, then a reverberating growl ended a life of whatever beast had been ensnared by hungry predators.

Silence prevailed, but only temporarily, a deep rumbling

vicious snarl, then another as two lions fought over their spoils elbowing their way into the cavernous belly of their feast.

A distant hyena began its haunting whoop, another followed, the troops were amassing, and this was their call to arms as free food had become available. The deep booming voice of a lion began its reply, and then decreasing in grunts echoed once more round camp.'



SOME EXTRAORDINARY SAFARIS OF EPIC PROPORTIONS

Each safari is specifically designed for each individual person or group, from 10 days to 20 days, Each safari itinerary is carefully selected, in order to give an insight to the many wonderful facilities and cover some of the most spectacular areas that Kenya has to offer, but the icing on the cake for many, is a trip to Rwanda and the Gorillas!

This last epic year of sharing with many new found friends, ended with a jumble of superlative events, which left me reeling in what had just occurred.

I am now tripping over the events with overwhelming excitement. How can I create a synopsis of one episode to another, as I am at a loss for which angle to begin with, as there were so many?

But to create or justify suitable verse that will project the emotions that are tumbling through my mind will take a book!

Many captivating moments were thrown at us, as we travelled through Kenya and Rwanda, traversing the hills, savannahs and deep thickets, each minute creating new and wonderful heart stopping moments when we least expected it.

Many of our friends, obviously subconsciously manifested some extraordinary magic, and it came our way, which we grasped with both hands and reveled in amazement of what transpired throughout each Safari.

However, I think it best if I tell you through photographs of our magical safaris and diarize a little of what transpired...!



Our first camp, Kicheche Laikipia Camp, extremely comfortable, overlooks a busy waterhole, but nights and mornings were crispy cold and the hot water bottle in your bed is very welcoming!

The mornings, although crisp, were mesmerizing and of course to have subjects willing to pose for the camera, turning each way, with glorious Mount Kenya as one's backdrop, is a photographers dream!

There were many friends that had perhaps seen a rhino in the distance or not at all, but one does not expect to have them so close and of course being in a conservancy, there are many to photograph and admire.

An unexpected cheetah, by chance happened to be just in front of us this is rather rare in the conservancy, as they tend to travel great distances, so being fortunate enough on our safari to come across this, is to treasure!

How can we better that I asked myself, but there again, the trend began on the first and throughout each safari, with roaring lion, lion being chased by elephant, copulation lions, black & white rhino, elephant, bat eared foxes, jackals, baby hyenas, (which I had coaxed out of the comforts of his den) reticulated giraffe, a journey or a tower, the metaphor became a choice of either by the dozen or just a few highlighting the landscape or distant horizon.



To head further north to Lewa wildlife Conservancy and Lewa House, perched on top of a hill commanding fine views across the plains, certainly took your breath away and leaves one with a delightful feeling of euphoria. This huge conservancy, although has suffered from the drought conditions and most of the big game had headed towards greener pastures.

Even so, our days were filled with a veritable feast of wildlife, from lions, elephants, hyena, greater kudu, to a surprise on one early morning at the beginning of our game drive, a charging black rhino! We certainly had a boost of adrenalin

and ready for anything else to be thrown at us thereafter!

The course gorgeous views from our daily breakfasts in the bush, with different settings and a plethora of game, probably rather indignant by our grunts of deep satisfaction.

Many of our friends so looked forward to these bush breakfasts and they became a constant reminder of how lucky we were.

There was many a moment of reflection, a few of those precious moments when you can just stop, take it all in, look out in awe and the magnificent landscape, that never ceases to take your breath away.



On our next safari and destination was further North West to the tip of Laikipia and Ol Malo, a delightful private homestay or perhaps lodge as some would describe.

Each room has open air balconies, vistas that are always changing, with an extravaganza of different lighting, to wonderful cacophony of bird song, but my main reason was to introduce not only the wonderful Samburu culture, but to experience the wonderful freedom the ranch offers.

But to cap it all the helicopter flights, more about that in a minute.

The Samburu tribes are cousins to the Maasai, but live and have created their extraordinary existence in the beautiful, although rather barren land of Laikipia country.



My most favoured antelope – the greater kudu - male has huge spiraling horns, beautifully elegant, hard to see as they blend particularly well into the landscape.

Apart from these wonderful creatures, there was elephant, elegant reticulated giraffe, zebra, Dik Dik, mongoose and many more.

A walk down the valley, I had persuaded Bert to experience this amazing feeling of freedom, but his concerns and apprehensions were overruled, when we marched in-between 18 elephant, then immediately after surrounded by 20 giraffe.

The euphoria and milieu can only be felt when you are part of this wonderful experience!





We ended up on the Ewaso Ngiro river (pronounced E-waso Nee-yiro) where a delightful picnic lunch was set up on the beach and as we sunk into our chairs to savour a deliciously cold beer to quench our thirst, a few goats, sheep and traditional Samburu came tumbling down the rocky slope to the rivers edge.

We sat in awe, took in the aura of this spiritual moment of this daily occurrence, when they come down to the river with their livestock to drink, but to refresh themselves in the cool waters and a chance for a little natural laundry.

Returning to the lodge, our morning began with the golden sun, a hot cup of coffee, staring out admiring the ever changing landscape, but a time was set for our helicopter ride.





I was fortunate with two helicopter flights last year, but each one had “jaw-dropping” scenery, which not only had us speechless, but exhausted from taking in these magnificent flights with landscape you can only dream of!

To fly like a bird, doors open, wind rushing through your hair, to explore where few tread, a sense of total freedom, where else can you create those incredible feelings, that leave you with a sense of awe?

Words do this not justice, but some photographs perhaps will give you an insight to what we experienced!

To the village we turned and what an enthralling, joyful experience for us all, with the warm welcome of the ladies and to have an insight to their rich culture!

We were all mesmerized by this colourful display and glowingly immersed ourselves into the occasion.

TO THE MAASAI MARA AND THE VAST PLAINS LITTERED WITH WILDLIFE, WAS OUR NEXT DESTINATION.

Kicheche Mara Camp is set up in the heart of the Mara North Conservancy, in a picturesque valley, surrounded by indigenous trees and bush, commanding beautiful views across the valley and beyond to the Maasai Mara Reserve.

It was here that in June (written about at the beginning of this newsletter) I had been, but never the less I had not expected to see the camp full of wildlife, all round the camp, it was mesmerizing, and so I knew we were in for some noisy nights!

Each time we landed in the Maasai Mara, I had enquired about leopard sightings, and was told that one had not been seen for a while, but Lo’ and behold – look what we found!



Each time, although I had told everyone that we would be lucky to find a leopard, but better to just enjoy the beautiful scenery, plethora of plains game, the golden sunrise and sunsets, but each safari, we were privileged to observe these magnificent cats if we found any!

However, we did indeed find these wonderful cats, whether they were on the ground dozing, prowling across the savannah, to stalking its prey, but each time

we had a fabulous sightings!

Cheetahs too, were in abundance for a change, as these can be very hard to find, but to have another of my first sightings, when a huge male lion sauntered across the plains, looking rather resplendent with an elegant huge black silky mane as if he had just come from the ‘hairstylist’!

Suddenly, he saw the cheetah his demure changed and started stalking, his intent clear! Luckily for the cheetah, they saw his approached and managed to escape his charge!



It would not have ended well if it were under different circumstances!

Sleeping bull elephant – well this was another first for me, when a dozing, rather large bull elephant, decided to just lie down on his side, curl his trunk up and within minutes fell asleep - happily snoring away!

As usual the Mara laid bare all its secrets and there were days that I had to keep pinching every nerve, as our days were filled with continuously faultless, almost too perfect simulation of magical happenings!

The pictures will tell the story....





Sadly each visit swiftly came to an end, but on reflecting back on those wonderful days, there was no time to take it all in, not truly, until you sit quietly and re-look at all those photos that were taken, then you are thrown into the turmoil of how extraordinarily lucky we were.

Let it be said, that not all Safaris are like this, but if you have an open mind, lower your expectations, have a dream, just take in the beautiful views, smell the clean air, listen..... Then you will be pleasantly surprised at how lucky you really are.

RWANDA AND THE GORILLAS

Rwanda THE land of a thousand hills!

I have so enjoyed Rwanda and the people, country, of course the Gorilla treks which have left me enthralled by the sheer presence of these huge gentle creatures, captivated by the boisterous young, as well as the wonderful habituated groups, mostly seen in open glades, but needless to say the dedication and passion of the guides cannot go unmentioned.

On a few of our Safari journeys the trip was almost complete - a little apprehension of that long flight across the seas to return home, lingers in the back of everyone's mind, but this was soon forgotten as there is a few more exciting days ahead, with a short evening flight from Nairobi to Rwanda, Kigali, of one & a half hours.

The following morning there is an air of excited apprehension, after good nights sleep in the Kigali Serena Hotel, our morning of travel by road to the district of Musanze to the Volcanoes National Park, and the Virunga mountains the home of the Gorillas.

The drive is fascinating, as the countryside unfolds before you, the curling roads, snaking their way between 'hilly' terrains, with each new view, excitement bubbles beneath the surface, those massive tropical peaked Virunga Mountains become clearer.

We settled in to a delightful lodge, called The Bishop's House on the outskirts of Musanze town, close to misty



hills of the great Virunga Mountains.

This large old Bishops mansion, if I may call it that, has now been renovated as a small Hotel. Tall ceilings, dawned with African art off the main reception area, a larger winding stair case snakes its way up to the first floor, where 4 comfy bedrooms, open plan deck looking down to the main lounge.

On the bottom floor, more bedrooms, cozily decorated, off to one side a well stocked wine cellar, but continue on a long corridor leading out to the swimming pool, bar and restaurant.

There is always a warm smile of welcome from Steve, our host and his staff, who take care of your every need, from putting on gatters, to unclasping then on your return from the gorilla trek. Your shoes are slipped off, taken away and cleaned ready for the next day's trekking.

After settling in to our cozy rooms, we descended to the bar lounge for our pre-dinner cocktails, meeting the day's trekker's, excitement bubbling forth, we listening intently to their morning's escapades and gorilla experiences, this is what we had come for!

After an early breakfast, we headed to the park headquarters to be allocated our group of gorillas, we were going to trek to.



There are 12 or more habituated, groups of gorillas, each carefully named, some after the 5 peaks, others due to their behavior. Our groups of gorillas, which we were told, were close to the park boundary, but the steep trek through the huge rose wood forests, bamboo, some dense foliage, spilling over with elephant ear like leaves, beautiful bamboo forests, had us puffing like a steam train, but we were soon rewarded and the climb forgotten.

The Large silverbacks we saw were impressive, but most of all, one in particular did not like all the attention being focused on his son! He can sauntering out of his deep vegetation, plopped down against a log, elbow resting on top, posed with great dignity, allowing us all some fabulous photography!

A truly spiritual and special experience, which will never be forgotten!

I have so enjoyed Rwanda and the people, country, of course the Gorilla treks which have left me enthralled by the sheer presence of these huge gentle creatures, captivated by the boisterous young as well as the wonderful habituated groups, mostly seen in open glades, but needless to say the dedication and passion of the guides cannot go unmentioned.

There were many of our guests, when asked "what was your most special moment on Safari?"

Many had difficulty to identify just one, but several were acknowledged, but many concurred that the Gorillas were one of the highlights of so many.

As I draw to a close, I am deeply indebted to each and everyone, for being who you were, real troopers, with open minds, but above all, we thank you for your kind words, friendship and great support for **Olive Trek Safaris!**

I am grateful for many truly wonderful friendships forged and developed, on these remarkable safaris.



“A journey becomes an adventure, an adventure becomes an experience, but the experience becomes lifelong friendships and unforgettable memories!”

Safari Njema!

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