

Birds of the Serengeti

and Ngorongoro Conservation Area



Adam Scott Kennedy

Birds of the Serengeti

and Ngorongoro Conservation Area

Adam Scott Kennedy



PRINCETON
press.princeton.edu

Published by Princeton University Press,
41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 6 Oxford Street,
Woodstock, Oxfordshire OX20 1TW
nathist.press.princeton.edu

Requests for permission to reproduce material from this work should be sent to
Permissions, Princeton University Press

Copyright © 2014 Adam Scott Kennedy

Copyright in the photographs remains with the individual photographers.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a
retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publishers.

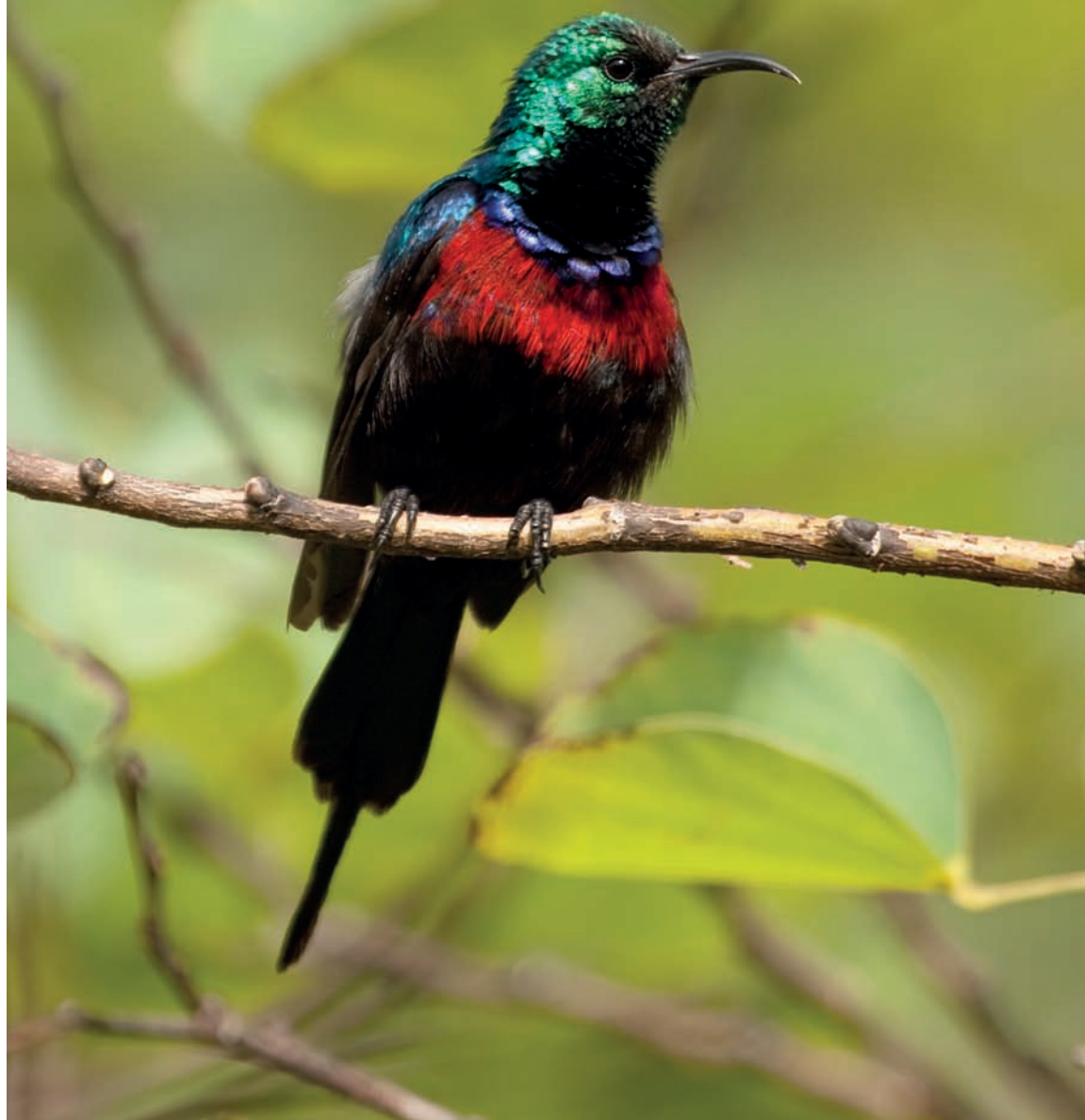
British Library Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available

Library of Congress Control Number 2013950254
ISBN 978-0-691-15910-2

Production and design by **WILD**Guides Ltd., Old Basing, Hampshire UK.
Printed in China

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is dedicated to my beautiful
God-daughter, Elvi Wren Clay, who is
destined to become a fabulous naturalist.



Contents

About this book	9
The habitats	12
Plains	13
Marsh and water	14
Woodland, scrub & garden	15
Acacia scrub	16
Village	17
Forest	18
Up in the air	19
Nightbirds	20
Lake Victoria specials	21
Map of the Serengeti and Ngorongoro Conservation Area – NCA	22

BIRDS OF THE PLAINS

The Big Ones: 1 – Ostrich	24
The Big Ones: 2 – Secretarybird and Grey Crowned Crane	26
Bustards – Kori, Black-bellied and White-bellied Bustards	28
Small plover & coursers – Double-banded and Temminck's Coursers and Kittlitz's Plover	30
Vanellus plovers – Crowned, Senegal and Black-winged Plovers	32
Sandgrouse – Black-faced, Yellow-throated and Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse	34
Storks and ground hornbill – White and Abdim's Storks and Southern Ground Hornbill	36
At the carcass – Marabou Stork and Rüppell's and White-backed Vultures	38
Vultures – White-headed, Hooded and Lappet-faced Vultures	40
Vultures in flight – all species for comparison	42
Black-and-white eagles and Egyptian Vulture	
– Martial and Black-chested Snake Eagles and Egyptian Vulture	44
Black-and-white eagles – Verreaux's Eagle, Augur Buzzard and Bateleur	46
Brown raptors – Black Kite and Tawny and Steppe Eagles	48
Raptors in flight – all species for comparison	50
Grey raptors – Pallid and Montagu's Harriers and African Harrier Hawk	52
Large falcon and grey kite – Lanner Falcon and Black-shouldered Kite	54
Small falcons – Grey, Common and Lesser Kestrels	56
Rollers – Lilac-breasted and Eurasian Rollers	58
Oxpeckers and starling – Red-billed and Yellow-billed Oxpeckers and Wattled Starling	60
Little brown jobs or 'LBJs'	
– Pectoral-patch and Zitting Cisticolas and Red-capped and Rufous-naped Larks	62
Sparrow lark and chats – Fischer's Sparrow Lark and Sooty and Anteater Chats	64
Wheatears – Capped, Northern and Pied Wheatears	66
Upright birds of the plains	
– Yellow-throated and Rosy-breasted Longclaws and Buffy and Grassland Pipits	68
Bishop and widowbirds – Yellow Bishop and Yellow-mantled and Jackson's Widowbirds	70

BIRDS OF MARSH AND WATER

Flamingos – Greater and Lesser Flamingos	72
Wetland storks – Woolly-necked, Yellow-billed and African Open-billed Storks	74
Stork and ibises – Saddle-billed Stork and Sacred and Hadada Ibises	76
Small herons – Hamerkop and Striated and Squacco Herons	78
Large, dark herons – Goliath, Grey and Black-headed Herons	80
Egrets – Cattle, Little and Great White Egrets	82
Fish eagle – African Fish Eagle	84
Smaller ducks	
– Red-billed Teal and White-faced Whistling and Fulvous Whistling Ducks	86
Larger wildfowl – Spur-winged and Egyptian Geese and Knob-billed Duck	88
Birds of the water's edge – Black-winged Stilt, African Jacana and Black Crake	90
Wetland plovers – African Wattled, Blacksmith and Spur-winged Plovers	92
Waders: 1 – Water Thick-knee and Ruff	94
Waders: 2 – Common Greenshank, Marsh Sandpiper and Three-banded Plover	96
Waders: 3 – Wood, Common and Green Sandpipers	98
Kingfishers – Giant, Malachite and Pied Kingfishers	100
Wagtails and waxbill – Yellow and African Pied Wagtails and Common Waxbill	102

BIRDS OF WOODLAND, SCRUB & GARDEN

Open woodland raptors – Brown Snake and Long-crested Eagles and Steppe Buzzard	104
Bustard, thick-knee and courser	
– Buff-crested Bustard, Spotted Thick-knee and Heuglin's Courser	106
Spurfowl – Red-necked, Grey-breasted and Yellow-necked Spurfowl	108
Gamebirds – Helmeted Guineafowl and Coqui and Crested Francolins	110
'Collared' doves – Ring-necked, African Mourning and Red-eyed Doves	112
Distinctive pigeons and doves	
– Speckled and African Green Pigeons and Emerald-spotted Wood Dove	114
Doves and mousebird – Namaqua and Laughing Doves and Speckled Mousebird	116
Parrots and hornbill – Fischer's Lovebird, Meyer's Parrot and African Grey Hornbill	118
Large cuckoos and relatives	
– White-browed Coucal, Red-chested Cuckoo and Bare-faced Go-away-bird	120
Three green gems – Klaas's and Diederik Cuckoos and Little Bee-eater	122
Bush kingfishers – Striped, Woodland and Grey-headed Kingfishers	124
Hoopoes – Green Wood-hoopoe, Common Scimitarbill and Hoopoe	126
Barbets – Usambiro and Spot-flanked Barbets and Red-fronted Tinkerbird	128
Honeyguides and woodpecker	
– Greater and Lesser Honeyguides and Bearded Woodpecker	130
Woodpeckers – Green-backed, Nubian and Cardinal Woodpeckers	132
Large bushshrikes and oriole	
– Grey-headed Bushshrike, Tropical Boubou and Black-headed Oriole	134
Small black-and-white birds	
– Brown-throated Wattle-eye, Chin-spot Batis and Black-backed Puffback	136

BIRDS OF WOODLAND, SCRUB & GARDEN (continued)

White-fronted shrikes

- Common and Grey-backed Fiscals and Northern White-crowned Shrike 138

Black birds of woodland edge

- Common Drongo, Slate-coloured Boubou and Northern Black Flycatcher 140

Tchagras and bulbul – Brown-crowned and Black-crowned Tchagras, Common Bulbul 142

Thrushes, scrub robin and babbler – Spotted Morning and Olive Thrushes,

- White-browed Scrub Robin and Arrow-marked Babbler 144

Attractive flycatchers of woods and gardens

- White-eyed Slaty and African Paradise Flycatcher 146

Little brown jobs or 'LBJs'

- Rattling Cisticola, Red-faced Crombec and Tawny-flanked Prinia 148

Green warblers – Yellow-breasted Apalis, Grey-backed Camaroptera and Grey-capped Warbler 150

Sunbirds: 1 – Scarlet-chested, Collared and Variable Sunbirds 152

Sunbirds: 2 – Marico, Beautiful and Bronze Sunbirds 154

Colourful birds of bush and garden

- White-browed Robin Chat and Rüppell's and Greater Blue-eared Starlings 156

Brightly coloured starlings – Superb, Hildebrandt's and Violet-backed Starlings 158

Yellow weavers – Spectacled, Baglafaecht and Village Weavers 160

Waxbills – Purple Grenadier, Red-cheeked Cordon-bleu and Bronze Mannikin 162

Striking small birds of open bush

- Pin-tailed Whydah, Golden-breasted Bunting and Yellow-fronted Canary 164

BIRDS OF ACACIA SCRUB

Acacia barbets and go-away-bird

- Red-and-yellow and Red-fronted Barbets and White-bellied Go-away-bird 166

Medium-sized birds of acacia scrub

- Blue-naped Mousebird, Abyssinian Scimitarbill and Von der Decken's Hornbill 168

Shrikes – Brubru, Taita Fiscal and Magpie Shrike 170

Small birds of acacia scrub

- Silverbird, African Grey Flycatcher, White-bellied Canary and Foxy Lark 172

Acacia weavers: 1 – Grey-capped Social, Speckle-fronted and Vitelline Masked Weavers 174

Acacia weavers: 2 – Red-billed Buffalo, White-headed Buffalo and Rufous-tailed Weavers 176

VILLAGE BIRDS

Village sparrows – Swahili, Kenya Rufous and House Sparrows 178

Common village birds – Red-billed Firefinch, Village Indigobird and Pied Crow 180

FOREST AND CRATER HIGHLANDS BIRDS

Large forest birds – White-necked Raven, Schalow's Turaco and Crowned Hornbill 182

Small birds of forest edge and open areas

– Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater, Streaky Seedeater and African Stonechat 184

BIRDS OF THE AIR

Black swallows and dark martins

– Black and White-headed Saw-wings and Plain and Banded Martins 186

Swallows with red rumps

– Mosque, Red-rumped, Rufous-chested and Lesser Striped Swallows 188

Swallows with dark rumps – Wire-tailed, Angola and Barn Swallows 190

Swifts – Little, White-rumped, African Palm, Nyanza and Common Swifts 192

Bee-eaters – Eurasian, Blue-cheeked and White-throated Bee-eaters 194

NIGHT BIRDS

Owls – Pearl-spotted Owlet, Verreaux's Eagle Owl and African Scops Owl 196

Barn Owl and nightjars – Barn Owl and Square-tailed / Gabon and Slender-tailed Nightjars 198

LAKE VICTORIA SPECIALS

Birds of the lakeside

– Blue-headed Coucal, Swamp Flycatcher and Black-headed Gonolek 200

Sunbird and weavers – Red-chested Sunbird and Grosbeak and Slender-billed Weavers 202

Lakeside weavers – Northern Brown-throated, Golden-backed and Yellow-backed Weavers 204

Terns and gull – Whiskered and White-winged Black Terns and Grey-headed Gull 206

Cormorants and small plovers

– Reed and Great Cormorants and White-fronted and Common Ringed Plovers 208

Further reading and useful resources 210

Acknowledgements 211

Photographic credits 212

Scientific names of the bird species included in this book 213

Index 217

Short Index inside back cover

A view over the
Ngorongoro Crater.
The forest here supports
many wonderful birds.



About this book

The Serengeti is world-famous for the spectacular Wildebeest migration and the predators that prey on them but few visitors anticipate the incredible birdlife that the National Park has to offer. Well over 500 species have been recorded within the park's boundaries and many more in the neighbouring Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA). Although several books cover the birdlife of the East African region, until now there has been no dedicated field guide to the birds of the most visited National Park in Tanzania. It therefore gives me great pleasure to introduce 264 of the species most likely to be encountered on a safari to the Serengeti and surrounding area.

To the uninitiated, identifying birds can be a bit of a nightmare but becoming a confident and competent birdwatcher, or birder, is no different from becoming a good soccer player, gardener or writer – it just takes time and practice. Since my first birding trips at the age of four (you can never start too young!) I have found that watching birds with more experienced people is by far the best way to learn and I very much hope that by writing this guide I will be able to help you get the most from your journey, or safari as we say in East Africa.

I shall never forget the time, while on a game-drive with a small group in southern Tanzania, that our guide called a Heuglin's Courser a Harlequin Quail – two species that really shouldn't be confused. As it happens, I was fortunate enough to work closely with that particular guide for several months afterwards and his ability to soak up all the bird-related information I could share with him was quite remarkable. In return, he was keen to share with me the reasons why he had struggled to identify birds using the standard field guides to the region: he was unable to relate the illustrations to real birds and did not understand the technical language used in the text. As a direct result of my conversations with this guide, I decided to produce this bird guide, and others in the Wildlife Explorer series, based on high-quality photographic images, and to avoid OTJ – ornithological techno-jargon – at all costs.

Heuglin's Courser

Harlequin Quail
(female)



My wife Vicki was not a birder when I met her and, in polite company at least, will not confess to being one now. But her interest in birds has grown and she is now quite capable of identifying most of the species illustrated in this book. However, the minute I start pointing out greyish supercilia, spotted median coverts and ochre rectrices (all classic OTJ), she switches off. I firmly believe that it doesn't help to bore or baffle people about birds when they're starting out. My message to the professional guides is this: by all means share the really interesting information and your own personal experiences, but leave the OTJ for those who understand the language. Serious birders may sneer at some of the simple terms I have used, but if Vicki and the uninitiated can understand them, anyone can – and that is what this book is all about. For this reason, I have opted not to include a diagram of the feathers and body parts of a bird (definitely OTJ) as I hope that everyone using this book will know the difference between a head, a wing and a tail.

As you can probably tell by now, I have tried to keep this book as light-hearted as possible and there are several pieces of text that I hope will raise a smile. After all, the life of birds and the people who named them are fascinating and, believe it or not, quite entertaining too!

About the images

In collating the photos for this book, I have tried to capture and include the most suitable images to show the variations in sex, age and plumage throughout the year (for example, breeding and non-breeding plumages), both within and between the species. Where I have failed to capture the bird in a desired plumage or pose, the lovely people at **WILDGuides** have very kindly liaised with Greg & Yvonne Dean and Andy & Gill Swash at WorldWildlifeImages.com and obtained the images required. For that I am very grateful to all concerned, as these photos complement the book beautifully. Thanks also to Vicki for letting me use some of her images, which are wonderful. All the images that were not taken by me are fully credited on *page 212*.

A Little Bee-eater
eating a dragonfly.



How to use this book

When it comes to organizing which species follows which, most field guides follow a standard order, or systematic list. For this reason, in Africa at least, the Ostrich comes first and the buntings are last. For seasoned birders, this is great because they can pick up almost any bird guide and know that birds of prey (raptors) are quarter the way through, pigeons are somewhere in the middle, and finches are near the back. For those not so familiar with this order, it may require a dip into the index. But if you are not sure what species you are looking for, only that it is a finch of some kind, that's not much help. So this book, which is aimed at all levels of birding ability, adopts a habitat-based approach. Put simply, first decide where you are watching the bird, and then decide from the offering in that section which species you are most likely to be looking at. If you are out on the plains and you see a streaky lark with chestnut in its wings, check out the *Plains* section and there you will find it – Rufous-naped Lark (*page 63*). If you are in the dry acacia scrub and see a streaky lark, check out the *Acacia Scrub* section and you will find the Foxy Lark (*page 173*). I hope you find this as simple and straightforward as it is intended to be.

Of course, birds are very mobile creatures that move around from one place to another – so there is every chance that you may encounter a species away from its typical habitat. Birds such as swallows and swifts spend much of their lives in the air and may not be restricted to any particular habitat. For that reason, such species have their own 'habitat' – up in the air – but guidance is still given about where you are most likely to find them. Similarly, nocturnal birds hide away very well during the daytime and are most likely to be seen on tracks and roads at night, so a section for nocturnal birds was also required.

The English names used for the birds in this book are those most widely used in Tanzania. As these may differ from the names given in other books, the most frequently used alternative names are also referenced. A list of the universally recognized scientific names for each of the species covered in this book is included on *pages 213–216*. The sizes shown for each bird indicates its length from the tip of the bill to the end of the tail and are given in both centimetres (cm) and inches ("). To help you keep a record of the birds you see, a small tick-box has been included next to each species description.

Ostrich with Thomson's Gazelles

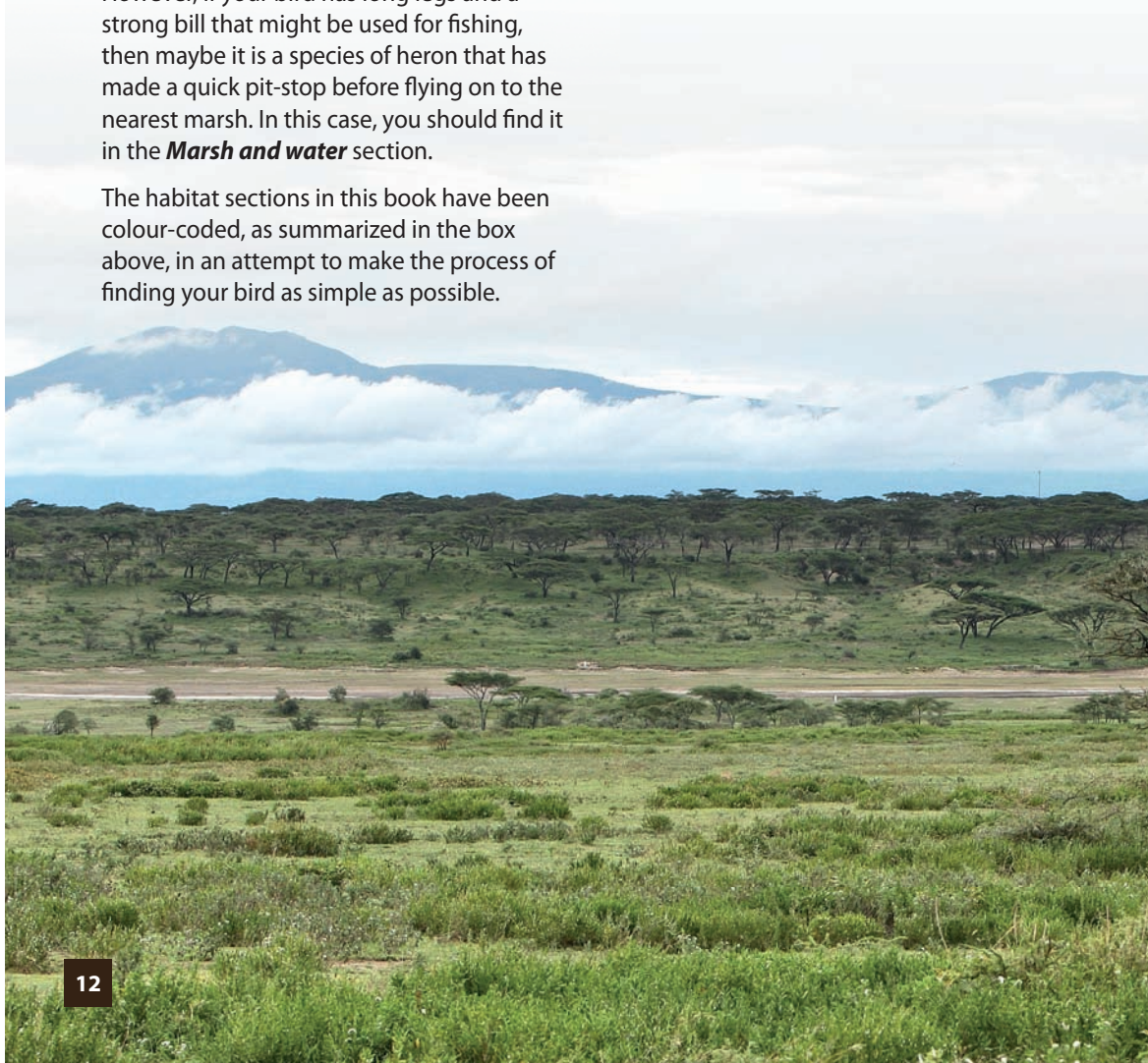


The habitats

Nature does not permit easy categorization, and deciding which species is associated with each habitat is not always simple and straightforward. For example, in the middle of a vast grassy plain you may find a single thick bush with a bird sitting on top. Which habitat section of this book would you open to find and identify your mystery bird? The best place to start would be the **Plains** section – but if that fails try the **Open woodland, bush and garden** section. However, if your bird has long legs and a strong bill that might be used for fishing, then maybe it is a species of heron that has made a quick pit-stop before flying on to the nearest marsh. In this case, you should find it in the **Marsh and water** section.

The habitat sections in this book have been colour-coded, as summarized in the box above, in an attempt to make the process of finding your bird as simple as possible.

Plains	24–71
Marsh and water	72–103
Woodland, scrub and garden	104–165
Acacia scrub	166–177
Village	178–181
Forest	182–185
Birds of the air	186–185
Nightbirds	196–199
Lake Victoria specials	200–209



Plains

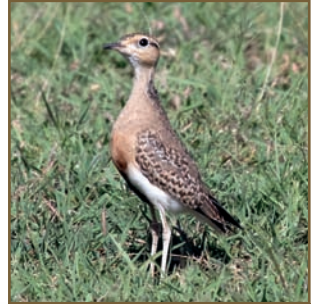
Pages 24–71

The grassy plains covering the majority of the Serengeti and Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) can be divided into two main types: short and long.

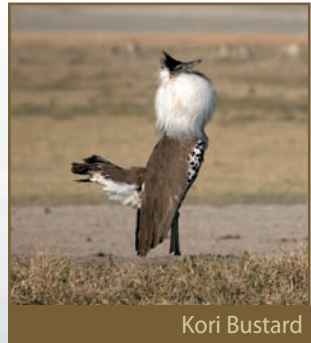
The short grass plains are continually grazed by the game and, in the conservancy lands, also by domestic animals. They provide limited protection for the birds that live there but do allow these species to see danger coming from afar. Common species include various plovers and the smart **Temminck's Courser** (page 31).

The long grass plains consist of grass species that are not particularly palatable to grazing animals. These areas afford protective cover for ground-nesting birds such as the various **bustards**, **longclaws** and **larks**. Other species, including the **Buffy Pipit** (page 69), prefer to feed on the open short grass plain but nest in the longer grass.

The plains are typically characterized by a variety of grasses and low shrubs, with occasional trees.



Temminck's Courser



Kori Bustard



Marsh and water

Pages 72–103

The Grumeti River is the most significant water body in the National Park but various smaller rivers (*e.g.* Mbalageti) also flow through it and there are also some impressive marshes (*e.g.* Olbalbal).

There are also some impressive lakes in the NCA (*e.g.* Magadi and Masek), where gatherings of flamingos, waterfowl and shorebirds can be spectacular at certain times of year.

After any substantial rainfall, many of the grassland areas of the reserve become waterlogged and afford feeding grounds for a number of typically wetland bird species such as **Hamerkop** (page 78) and **Three-banded Plover** (page 97).

A feeding flock of Lesser Flamingos on Lake Magadi in the Ngorongoro Crater.



Pied Kingfisher



Hamerkop



Woodland, scrub & garden

Pages 104–165

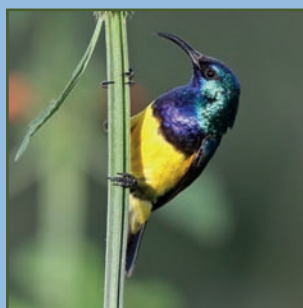
Many camps and lodges are located amongst tall trees that afford some protection from the sun's heat during the middle of the day. Camps such as Grumeti River Camp are situated in riverine (or riparian) woodland, while others such as Serengeti Serena have a different array of tree species in their impressive gardens.

Several lodges, such as the decadent Ngorongoro Crater Lodge, even have wonderfully manicured gardens with exuberant flowers and lawns, all of which offer superb feeding and breeding sites for a wide array of species that may be difficult to see elsewhere. An early morning walk with a guide or resident bird enthusiast around the camp or lodge where you are staying is highly recommended as a great way to connect with a good variety of African garden birds. Aim to start between 6 am and 7 am to get the most from your experience.

Hotel and lodge grounds can be very rewarding for birding.



Fischer's Lovebirds



Variable Sunbird



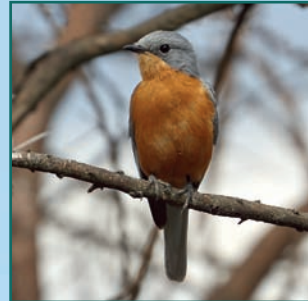
Acacia scrub

Pages 166–177

A quintessentially African tree family, acacias are a varied mix of hardy trees and bushes that support a unique selection of birds. Although you may see scattered acacias almost anywhere in the National Park, the best acacia scrub habitats are found in the south and east of the park and within the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA).

Many of the acacia-dwelling species, such as **Silverbird** (page 172) and **Abyssinian Scimitarbill** (page 168) cover vast areas in a day, so expect to spend some time searching for them.

Whistling Thorn dominates large areas of the Western Corridor and the NCA.



Silverbird



Village

Pages 178–181

As with every other human habitation around the world, the towns, villages and Maasai *bomas* around the reserve are home to some resourceful species that have adapted successfully to a world created by people.

Crows and several species of **sparrow** and **finch** are most easily found around these places and many will be common close to some larger camps and lodges too.

A typical Maasai village in the Ngorongoro Conservation Area.



Pied Crow



Red-billed Firefinch



Forest

Pages 182–185

The mature forests surrounding the rims of the numerous volcanic craters of the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (NCA) support a number of special birds that are rarely found elsewhere. In particular, the huge fruiting fig trees are the main attraction to a number of fruit-eating birds such as **hornbills** and **turacos**.



Crowned Hornbill



Schalow's Turaco

Up in the air

Pages 186–195

A flock of Little Swifts



Many birds can be seen flying from one place to another but there are two families of bird that spend most of their lives 'up in the air': the **swallows and martins** (pages 186–191) and the **swifts** (pages 192–193). Because they can cover such large areas in the course of the day, these birds are likely to be encountered over many different habitats – but their true habitat is the sky where they feed and, in the case of swifts, even mate on the wing.

Night birds

Pages 196–199

Owls and **nightjars** are birds of the night and although you may be fortunate enough to see them during the day, usually roosting, your best chance of an encounter is during a night-drive.

If you are staying within the National Park boundary, do check with your accommodation about the possibility of night-drives although typically they are not permitted. However, if you are staying in one of the surrounding conservancies then a night-drive may be permitted and is highly recommended for nocturnal birds and some rarely seen mammals.

The Square-tailed or Gabon Nightjar is frequently encountered on roads and tracks at night.



Verreaux's Eagle Owl



Lake Victoria specials

Pages 200–209

Situated just a few kilometres from the western Ndabaka Gate of the Serengeti are the sandy shores of Lake Victoria and the calming waters of the Speke Gulf.

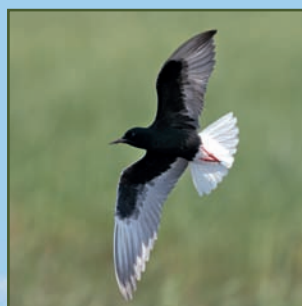
On a good day, you could be forgiven for thinking you have just been transported to a “tropical island”, such is the tranquillity of the area, but better still there are lots of new birds to be found here that are unlikely to be encountered even in the nearby Serengeti.

The bird-rich gardens of Speke Bay Lodge are where I photographed many of the images presented here and they also have a resident bird guide offering walks and advice.

The reedy margins of Lake Victoria are home to many of the species shown on *pages 200–209*.



Yellow-backed Weaver



White-winged Black Tern



Map of the 'Greater Serengeti area'

showing locations mentioned in the text



Key wildlife watching locations

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 Ngorongoro Crater | 6 Ndutu Plains |
| 2 Seronera Valley | 7 Olduvai Gorge |
| 3 The Western Corridor | 8 Angata Kiti and Gol Mountains |
| 4 Olmoti and Empakaai Craters | 9 Grumeti River |
| 5 Moru Kopjes | 10 Lobo Valley |