

Kenya

Mammal Watching

A Greentours Itinerary

Kenya has perhaps the richest mammal fauna on the whole continent. The extensive system of long-protected areas means that nature is both pretty much as it should be within the national parks but also well-habituated to viewers.

But what of Kenya's rarer and more elusive mammals? Golden-rumped Giant Sengi or Giant Forest Hog, Aardvark or Maned Rat? To see such species you need to visit the right habitats and know where to look! This tour visits three contrasting areas selected to produce a fantastic range of mammals.

Day 1

Arrive Nairobi

We'll arrive late evening into Nairobi and spend the night in the Four Points by Sheraton Hotel close by the Airport

Days 2 - 4

Arabuko Sokoke Forest

The next morning we'll fly to the coast for a three night stay at the Turtle Bay Beach Resort in Watamu. This excellent resort is right by the sea, has a nice swimming pool, and most importantly is close by the Arabuko-Sokoke Forest!

The Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, along with some relict coastal forests in Tanzania, form a biome with many unique species and yet covering only a small area. Mammals endemic to these coastal forests include Golden-rumped Giant Sengi and Four-toed Sengi, Harvey's and Ader's Duikers, Zanzibar Sun Squirrel and Sokoke Dog Mongoose. However unlike many of Kenya's mammals, this is a decidedly difficult bunch to connect with! That said we'll have no problem seeing the Golden-rumped Giant Sengi, these curious little insectivores buzz back and forth across the forest tracks well before it gets dark. Four-toed Sengi are less common but still pretty easy to find. Daylight will allow us to catch up with Sykes' Monkeys and the pretty little Zanzibar Sun Squirrels. Harvey's Red Duiker are tolerably common, Ader's Duiker is less easy to find. Once darkness falls the place is alive with Kenya Coast Galagos and we should also have no problem seeing Small-eared Greater Galagos. Blotched Genets will be seen regularly and we'll hopefully see Coastal Suni. Finding the Sokoke Dog Mongoose would be a highlight but is very much in the hoped for bracket as are Caracal, Side-striped Jackal and Aardvark, all of which are found within the forest but are shy and rather scarce. Four-toed Hedgehogs can be found around the hotel grounds.

The Arabuko-Sokoke Forest is a great place for bats. We'll visit two caves both with substantial bat colonies. Kaboga Cave is full of Striped Leaf-nosed Bats, African Sheath-tailed Bats and Least Long-fingered Bats, these flying in droves

around us as we traverse the guano-covered floor of the cave. The bats are even more varied in Makahuru and the numbers even more impressive. Thousands of bats fly around us, some of the same species as at Kaboga, but also Sundeval's Roundleaf Bat, Little Free-tailed Bat, and orange African Trident Bat.

Days 5 & 6

Tsavo East National Park

Famous Tsavo East National Park is all about prime game-watching in a majestic Baobab-dotted savannah-scape. You need do nothing more than sit above the waterhole and watch as herds of Elephant, Cape Buffalo, Zebra and Eland come in to drink. Lions, Black-backed Jackals, Blotched Genet and Bat-eared Fox can all be seen from the lodge. We've every chance of seeing other cat species during our visit including Leopard, Cheetah, and the elegant ear-tufted Caracal. Serval can be found in the grasslands just northwest of the lodge though like the Caracal daytime sightings are not easy. Tsavo East is a great place to watch the antics of Gerenuk who are only too happy to show off their 'browsing walk'. Tsavo is one of the only places in the world where you can come across the super-rare Hirola, an elegant antelope whose wild population is down to a few hundred individuals. The tiny population in Tsavo is a translocated one but nonetheless important.

Other mammals we'll see include Coke's Hartebeest, Hippos, Fringe-eared Oryx and the beautiful Lesser Kudu. The local warthog is the Desert Warthog and sharing a similar distribution is the local variant on dwarf mongoose, the Somali Dwarf Mongoose, which is easily seen amongst the impressive termite mounds that dot the landscape. Families of Banded Mongoose are always fun to watch as they 'hoover' through the bushed savannah. Tana Gazelle, now split from Grant's Gazelle, are very common, and we'll see lots of Giraffe too. The latter offer an interesting taxonomic puzzle here as we are full square in the 'Galana River Hybrid Zone'. It is possible to see animals that look fully like Reticulated Giraffes and others that more resemble Massai Giraffes, and a range of intermediates too. Klipspringers step daintily across the rocks on a hill close to the lodge and around the lodge itself Yellow Baboons and Yellow-spotted Bush Hyrax are ever-present. And all that's before we start the nocturnal activities.

Game drives at night in Tsavo are superbly productive. We'll see African Civet, African Wild Cat, White-tailed Mongoose, and plenty of Spotted Hyenas. We have seen Serval, Aardwolf and Striped Hyena on night trips here too, though all three are uncommon and a sighting of any of these should be regarded as a bonus. Taterils and Grass Rats scurry across the track. Senegal Bushbabies peer at us from Acacia foliage.

Days 7 – 10(am)

Aberdares National Park

East of the Great Rift rise the Aberdares, a highland area that is still largely forested, and which is home to a number of rare and local mammals. Unlike the

open plains of many of Kenya's national parks the Aberdares makes the mammal watcher work much harder! But the rewards are great.

We'll have one night at the famed Ark. This lodge has an exceptional record of providing sightings for many sought-after species. Whilst the super-rare Bongo may not make an appearance (OK, perhaps I should rephrase that – it won't – it turns up once a year!) while we are there, we'll certainly see plenty of the impressive Giant Forest Hogs. Other hard-to-see species in the area include Harvey's Duiker, Black-fronted Duiker, Lesser Cane Rat and Ochre Bush Squirrel. Both Duikers occasionally turn up round the lodge and we'll look for them along the forest tracks too in the daytime too. Spotted Hyenas visit the waterhole in numbers each night and you'll see White-tailed Mongoose and Genets too. Elephants provide endless entertainment while Waterbuck and beautiful Bushbuck are common. Brown Greater Galago and Marsh Mongoose are more rarely seen. You'll hear Southern Tree Hyrax but spotting them from the confines of the lodge at night is less easy. In daylight Mountain Suni crouch under the bushes around the lodge. Other common animals likely to be seen during the day around the park include Eastern Warthog, Bushbuck, Striped Ground Squirrel, Common Zebra, Slender Mongoose, Impala, Reticulated Giraffe, East African Eland and troupes of the elegant Mount Kenya Guereza.

We've chosen to spend one night at the Ark only as you are confined to the building at night there and there's no chance to walk or drive around. This is not the case at the Aberdare Country Club and indeed the grounds of this pleasant hotel, which are extensive and back on to conservancy land, have become well-known as a good site to see certain mammals. In daylight Ochre Bush Squirrels scamper around the hotel building whilst a sortie out onto the lawns even in daylight should reveal Harvey's Red Duiker, indeed we'll also see Zebra, Impala, Bushbuck and Warthogs too. At dusk Mountain Suni emerge and feed around the lawn edges and we'll see Scrub Hares and Southern Tree Hyrax, the latter much easier to see here. The weird and wonderful Maned Rat has recently started appearing in the grounds too. Up into the moorlands and bamboo forests above we'll find Sykes' Monkey and Mountain Reedbuck.

Day 10 (pm) Depart Nairobi

In the afternoon of Day 10 we'll descend to Nairobi and have dinner before catching our late evening flight.

Day 11 Arrive UK/Europe

If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

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