

KENYA'S MASAI MARA RESERVE

AFRICAN EDEN

Part Two

Nothing compares to this legendary,
easily visited and truly unique wildlife
photography destination



Cheetah Acinonyx jubatus ■
surveying their range from
a vantage point.
On the previous page, African
lioness Panthera leo with baby
warthog prey.



Male Impalas ■
Aepyceros melampus
at dawn.

TEXT BY ANDREA FERRARI
PHOTOS BY ANDREA & ANTONELLA FERRARI

In the first part of our Masai (or Maasai) Mara story we have focused on the technical details of Kenya's legendary Nature Reserve - how large it is, how it came into being, which animal species inhabit it and so on. But what about the Masai Mara experience? Well, let us just start by saying that in a lifetime of exotic travels in search of wildlife photography opportunities we have never experienced something like the Mara. This place is just special - the open landscape, sprawling forever under the unmistakable dome of the African sky, is home to a truly surprising variety and number of animals, and the ridiculous

ease with which the Reserve and its lodges can be reached from Europe almost tempts one to think of it as an extended weekend destination. The great variety in accomodation - from luxury camps to basic lodges - and the wide variation in the price ranges will suit any taste (but do remember that this remains a luxury destination, as most famous National Parks and Nature Reserves in Africa), and the wonderful proficiency in game tracking and spotting shown by the local Masai drivers and guides guarantees excellent sightings and formidable photo opportunities in most instances.

continued on page 8 ➤



African leopard
Panthera pardus
pardus.



Male African lion
Panthera leo.

WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

In fact, the only problem one could have in the Mara is a feeling of complacency - hardly a day passes without a great sighting, a good photo opportunity or both. As most experienced wildlife photographers know all too well from bitter experience, this is a rare if not unique feeling - in most areas it is not uncommon to spend day after day hoping in a decent encounter only to be sorely disappointed and go back to camp at sunset empty-handed, bitterly disappointed and worried for the success of the trip. It has happened to us so many times - time is tyrant on such expensive, demanding trips, and every day counts - lack of success can easily transform what was supposed to be a wonderful, joyous adventure into a depressing nightmare with long faces, gloomy expectations and flaring tempers - both among clients and guides themselves. Wildlife photography is usually far from being a relaxing, satisfying experience - rather, it usually means long hours of frustration and physical effort with big

continued on page 10 >





■ *Superb starling*
Lamprotornis
superbus, one of
the Mara's most
colorful and
most commonly
observed bird
species.

■ Male
Waterbuck
Kobus
ellipsiprymnus.

expenditures of time and money but little results to be shown in return. Many times we have been tempted to say "Never again!" when a lovely , lomg-planned and expected holiday turned into a nightmare of frustration and disappointment. Not so in the Masai Mara - expect quite the opposite instead!

A VARIETY OF SUBJECTS

For the uninitiated, driving across the Mara can even be somewhat disconcerting - the number of animals artfully positioned in the scenic landscapes, their apparent indifference to vehicles and the ease with which they can be approached can easily give rise to feelings of complacency and even boredom in the casual visitor (of which in the Mara, sadly, there are many). In fact, it is quite surprising seeing how many people come to visit the place without having the slightest idea about its dynamics and what to expect - we heard tourists asking their amused Masai guides what the animals feeding hours were, for example. The price of success, alas! But if one steers clear of the crowds, satisfaction in the Mara is

continued on page 13 >





Left, Saddle-billed stork or saddlebill *Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis*; top right, Purple Grenadier *Uraeginthus ianthinogaster*; bottom right, Rosy-throated Longclaw *Macronyx ameliae*.





Coke's Hartbeest or ■
Kongoni *Alcelaphus*
buselaphus cokii.

African leopard ■
Panthera pardus pardus.



guaranteed - even with species rarely observed elsewhere as cheetas or notoriously secretive as leopards. In fact, we have taken some of our best leopard portraits ever right here in the Mara! Part of this is due to the fact that single animals or families and their ranges are well known to guides, being constantly monitored in their daily activities with information being shared in real time among drivers by mobile phone or radio - most of the predators, for example, even have their own individual or collective name, like the famous "Marsh pride" of lions. To be fully honest, this is not a practice we are fond of - knowing a leopard or a lion or any other big predator by a fancy name takes a lot of its mystique away, creating a false sense of familiarity shared by countless armchair "experts" worldwide sitting in front of their keyboard and enquiring about the daily whereabouts of their favourite kitten. We'd rather go with specific identifications only for scientific and field research purposes, but that's just us apparently. In any case, the welcome familiarity with wild animals living in the Mara shown by the Masai guides who share their land with them is a winning factor when it comes to locating one's camera subjects. It is a very comforting thought to the time-pressed wildlife photographer knowing that his guide knows exactly where to locate a specific animal, and that there are always excellent chances of finding it at any given location.

continued on page 24 ➤

■ African lioness
Panthera leo.





■ Left, Cardinal woodpecker *Dendropicos fuscescens*. Right, Grey kestrel *Falco ardosiaceus*.



■ *Pride of African lion Panthera leo feeding on a wildebeest.*





Far left, Bateleur eagle *Terathopius ecaudatus*. Left, Secretary bird *Sagittarius serpentarius*.

■ African lion *Panthera leo* cubs - adorable and inquisitive.





■ Top left, Superb starling *Lamprotornis superbus*; top right, Lappet-faced vulture or Nubian vulture *Torgos tracheliotos*. Bottom left, Coqui francolin *Peliperdix coqui*; bottom right, Rüppell's Glossy-Starling *Lamprotornis purpuroptera*.



African leopard █
Panthera pardus pardus.



■ African leopard
Panthera pardus pardus
at dawn, with Spotted
hyena and a herd of
wildebeest in the
background.





■ Top left, Greater Blue-eared Starling *Lamprotornis chalybaeus*; top right, Ostrich *Struthio camelus*. Bottom left, Southern ground hornbill *Bucorvus leadbeateri*; bottom right, Lappet-faced vulture or Nubian vulture *Torgos tracheliotos*.



■ *Black rhino*
Diceros bicornis.




THE WINNING FACTORS

As usual, time is of paramount importance in the Mara too, as anywhere else - one cannot and should not expect miracles, and nothing is ever to be taken as granted in nature. But the reader should turn these pages and judge by himself - the images illustrating Part 1 and Part 2 of our Masai Mara story were taken over a two-week period, which may sound a long time for a holiday trip but which is next to a very short stay by wildlife photography standards anywhere else. Regardless of the artistic quality of our images - which one might like or not - the number of species and the variety of behavior illustrated here speak volumes. Much of this is due to the open nature of the Mara's environment, which generally facilitates encounters and long-distance sightings, and above all to the extraordinary proficiency and experience demonstrated by the young Masai who work in the lodges as trackers, guides and vehicle drivers. These young but usually very experienced professionals are incredibly proud to show the beauty of their land to visitors, and very focused in helping out wildlife photographers in getting the best shots. This makes the difference - our Masai guides in the Mara are hands-down the best we have ever had anywhere...with a very few exceptions represented by personal friends.

continued on page 31 >



Male Impala 
Aepyceros melampus.

Nile crocodile
Crocodylus niloticus.





■ Left, Yellow-billed
oxpecker
*Buphagus
africanus* feeding
on ticks on a Cape
buffalo; right,
African wattled
lapwing *Vanellus
senegallus*.



■ African leopard
Panthera pardus
pardus using a
vehicle as cover
during a hunt.






Left, Black-
chested snake
eagle or Black-
breasted snake
eagle *Circaetus*
pectoralis;
right, Steppe
eagle *Aquila*
nipalensis.





Nile crocodile 
Crocodylus niloticus.



Top, African lioness *Panthera leo* charging a herd of wildebeest; Bottom, Spotted hyena *Crocuta crocuta*.



STUPENDOUS GAME VIEWING

Make no mistake, enjoying wildlife photography in the Mara is a rather demanding job, and choosing to stay in a comfortable, luxurious and very expensive lodge can be rather disappointing after all, since one will be frustratingly spending so little time in it. Forget enjoying the well-appointed premises, the comfortable safari library by that inviting fireplace and having a cocktail by that refreshing turquoise swimming pool - if you are serious about your wildlife photography as we are, your trip will be probably better described as a boot camp. Wake-up at 4.00 at the latest (possibly earlier), a quick coffee or tea and you're off for a pre-sunrise, bumpy, dusty and usually freezing ride on an open 4-wheel drive
continued on page 34 ➤

Cheetah
Acinonyx jubatus.






■ Male African lion
Panthera leo.



Left, Topi ■
Damaliscus
lunatus jimela;
right, Thomson's
gazelle *Eudorcas*
thomsonii.



A lone African elephant stands in the foreground of a vast, rolling savanna landscape. The elephant is facing the viewer, with its trunk slightly curved. The background consists of rolling hills and plains under a clear sky, with a line of green trees in the distance. The overall scene is a classic African savanna landscape.

■ *A lone African elephant*
Loxodonta africana on
the endless, rolling plains
of the Masai Mara.

vehicle which is ideal for photography but not really the best to keep out the elements. Woe to those with a weak back! A short picnic breakfast in the middle of the bush at mid-morning - possibly among a herd of peacefully grazing herbivores - will bring some welcome and much-needed respite, but then it'll be non-stop driving again until lunch time (if you opt to go back to camp, that is - sometimes we don't). A short pause to grab a bite at the lodge's restaurant and download the morning's photos (presumably hundreds) in your tent, and then it's on the car again until sunset and dinner. Those stronger than us will stay up late by the fire (and usually be a wreck by the following morning), but we normally crawl to bed, download the afternoon's work (more hundreds of photos!) and fall fast asleep by 20.00...And then the morning after we start all over again. Not everybody's idea of a relaxing holiday - believe us, two full weeks working at this beat can break one's back. But what makes the difference in this case is that the Masai Mara makes every single moment of the experience worth it. ●



■ African leopard
*Panthera pardus
pardus with zebra
foal prey.*



■ Nile crocodile
Crocodylus niloticus feeding
on a wildebeest
carcass.





African White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* and Rüppell's Vulture *Gyps rueppellii* at carcass site.



■ *Marabou stork*
Leptoptilos
crumenifer.



■ African lion
Panthera leo - a
dominant male
and two females
from its pride -
feeding on a
wildebeest.



African leopard
Panthera pardus pardus.



Black rhino
Diceros bicornis.



*Male African lion
Panthera leo - a truly majestic
and impressive sight.*



Left, male African lion *Panthera leo* with the remains of an impala; right, Cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* mother and young.





*African leopard
Panthera pardus pardus
emerging from a wooded
grove at dawn.*



■ African lion
Panthera leo.





Left, soaring
Rüppell's Vulture
Gyps rueppellii;
right, African
paradise
flycatcher
*Terpsiphone
viridis*.



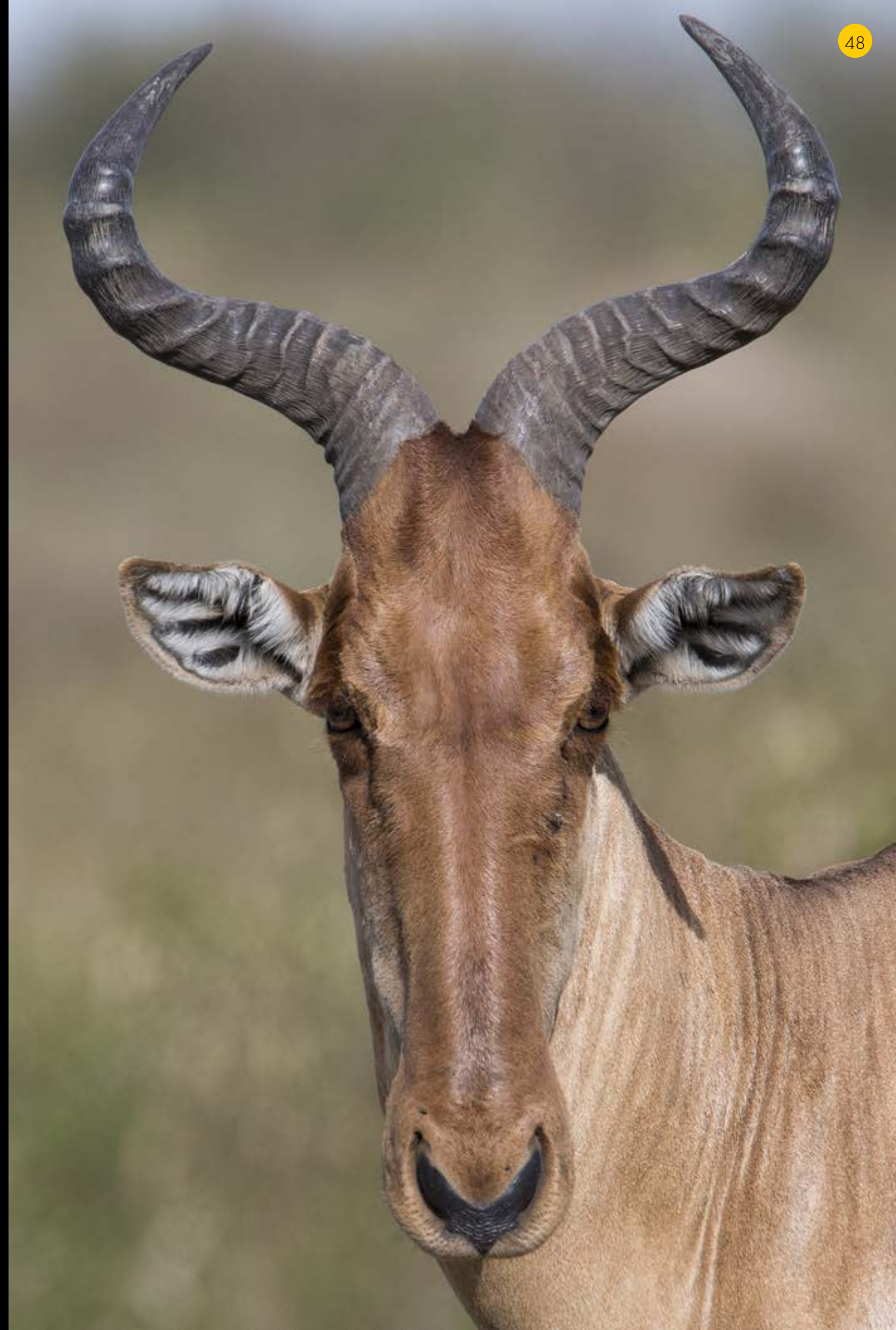


Left, African lioness *Panthera leo* charging after fleeing Wildebeest *Connochaetes taurinus*; right, African leopard *Panthera pardus pardus* feeding on zebra foal prey.





Coke's ■
Hartebeest or Kongoni
Alcelaphus buselaphus
cokii.





■ A rare sight -
Serval *Leptailurus*
serval with a bush
rat it has just caught
in the tall grass.

■ *Wildebeest*
Connochaetes
taurinus crossing a
dry riverbed and
Nile crocodile
Crocodylus niloticus.






African White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* and Rüppell's Vulture *Gyps rueppellii* at carcass site.



African leopard
Panthera pardus pardus
on the hunt and
migrating Wildebeest
Connochaetes taurinus.



Mwanza
Flat-headed
Rock Agama
Agama mwanzae.



■ African leopard
Panthera pardus
pardus.