

Kenya The Great Migration – Masai Mara, Lake Nakuru and Lake Naivasha

19 - 29 September 2026

Report by Paul McDougall

Tour participants Paul McDougall (photographic Guide), Isaac (specialist guide) David (Driver Guide) and James (Driver Guide) with 2 Touch the Wild clients – trip booked privately

Summary

The Great Migration in Kenya's Masai Mara is one of the most spectacular wildlife events on Earth. Every year, more than 1.5 million wildebeest, accompanied by hundreds of thousands of zebras and gazelles, make an epic journey from Tanzania's Serengeti into the Masai Mara National Reserve in search of fresh grazing lands and water. Driven by seasonal rains, this continuous cycle of movement is a remarkable example of nature's resilience and the interconnectedness of ecosystems across East Africa.

One of the most dramatic moments of the migration occurs at the Mara River crossings. Here, vast herds gather along the riverbanks before plunging into crocodile-infested waters. The crossings are scenes of both danger and determination, as animals brave strong currents and predators in their quest for survival. These breathtaking events attract wildlife photographers, filmmakers, and nature enthusiasts from around the world, eager to witness one of nature's greatest spectacles.

The migration also supports an abundance of predators in the Masai Mara. Lions, leopards, cheetahs, hyenas, and crocodiles thrive on the seasonal influx of prey, creating a dynamic and balanced ecosystem. Visitors to the Mara during migration season often have exceptional opportunities to observe dramatic predator-prey interactions and a wide variety of wildlife behaviors in their natural environment.

Beyond its ecological significance, the Great Migration plays a vital role in Kenya's tourism industry and in the livelihoods of local Maasai communities. The event draws thousands of visitors each year, generating revenue that supports conservation efforts and sustainable tourism initiatives. For many travelers, witnessing the endless columns of wildebeest stretching across the golden savannah is an unforgettable experience and a powerful reminder of the beauty and importance of protecting Africa's wild landscapes.

Often described as the "Greatest Wildlife Show on Earth," the Great Migration is not merely a movement of animals but a symbol of the natural rhythms that have shaped the African savannah for centuries. Its scale, drama, and ecological importance make the Masai Mara one of the world's premier destinations for wildlife observation and conservation.

Kenya during the migration is incredible and this trip provided warm weather, with very little rain. We had excellent company and amazing sightings which made this week one to remember with some of the best photographic opportunities and sightings I have ever had. This really was a trip for lions. As someone who has photographed and guided in the Mara for 25 years my clients were treated to a real lion spectacle – we had lions hunting, young cubs, backlit lions, lions mating, lion silhouettes and everyone got some truly amazing images, as well as lions we had leopard, cheetah, hyenas, brilliant elephant sightings and so many birds. The birds in Lake

Naivasha were also excellent with some brilliant African Fish Eagle Sighting. Lake Nakuru provided lions, black and white rhino, flamingo, pelican and an incredible baboon encounter.

Crossings were quiet on this trip with 2 small crossings; the wildebeest were there in large numbers but unfortunately on most occasions away from the river. But the sunsets and sunrises that we had the opportunity to experience more than made up for this.

One of the biggest surprises was how quiet Masai Mara was, considering it was high season and that usually means lots of vehicles, this year it was very quiet which is highly unusual, but it did mean that we had so many encounters with just us or very few vehicles.

We stayed in the beautiful and small Olive Bush Camp, located just 10 minutes away from all of the main crossing points and right in the heart of the mara. The food was extremely good. The two boat trips in Naivasha were brilliant. With great Fish Eagle Images taken from the boat, flamingos in Lake Nakuru were also a highlight as were the wildebeest at sunrise, in fact, each day had something very special and was thoroughly enjoyed for its variety of experiences. Every day was full of activity, varied and very successful photographic opportunities. My clients enjoyed viewing great wildlife, learning new photographic techniques and having fun. The safari was a huge success.

Day 1 Saturday 19th September

I arrived on the Friday evening and tried Nairobi Airports new meet and greet service which basically means you skip all of the queues at immigration It was impressive and made such a difference and I will now be using it every time. My clients arrived early on Saturday morning. After a relaxing morning, We met in the afternoon for a beer and discussed what their requirements were for the safari and the type of images that they wanted to create and also what they wanted from me photographically. This was their 3rd trip with me and they had previously visited Kenya 35 years ago, so it was nice to catch up with them. We then retired to our rooms to get some rest ready for the next morning's drive to Masai Mara.

We stayed in the lovely Weston Hotel which is always where I try to stay in Nairobi.



Day 2 Sunday 20th September

We had an early breakfast at 6:30am. We checked out of the hotel and departed after breakfast. We travelled in Isaac my friend and our specialised guides small car which was quite comfortable for the journey. We stopped briefly at the Rift Valley viewpoint for photographs and

toilets and continued to Narok. Traffic was slow due to an accident. We stopped just outside Narok for toilets. We continued to Masai Mara and reached the main Sekenani Gate at around 12pm. We were met by David our Masai safari driver/guide and transferred to our customised safari vehicle which was set up especially for photography with unobstructed side views and the opportunity for low angle images due to the open sides. It was very comfortable and spacious. We then started our journey to our camp which was an hour's drive. On the way we drove past herds of wildebeest, but we didn't stop as we wanted to get to the camp as quickly as possible.

We reached our camp – Olive Bush Camp at around 2pm. We checked in and had lunch. The camp wasn't particularly busy as most people were out on game drives, so we relaxed for a while and enjoyed the beautiful views of the river (the camp is right on the bank of the Mara River. At around 3:30pm we left for a short afternoon game drive. On the road into the camp I had noticed a group of hippos in one of the side channels, so we headed there first. This was the first opportunity we had a chance to do some creative images as the sun was lighting only one side of the hippos and almost creating a silver tone to them. We got some images there and then continued our drive. We then photographed some of the wildebeest and zebra herds. A bit later I noticed some elephants on a distant hillside. The clouds were beautiful, so we tried a few silhouettes. We then headed back towards our camp. As we were near to the camp, we came across 2 lions that had killed a zebra. These are part of a group of 5 male lions. We were able to get a few portrait shots of one of the males laying in the open before the light completely faded. It was a really good start to the safari and a good introduction to Mara. We got back to camp dropped our cameras off in our tents and put batteries on charge and then went for dinner. We slept early as we had an early start the next morning.







Day 3 Monday 21st September

We had an early breakfast at 5:30am. We are usually out of the camp by 5am but due to us seeing the lions so close to camp last night we decided to leave a bit later and try and get them as the sun came up. Our initial search for lions was unproductive but after a while we heard on the radio that they had been seen so we went to see them. We found 2 males laying in the open just resting. We took a few portrait images and the light was lovely; we also tried some different ICM techniques with camera tilts and zoom bursts. After a while we noticed a herd of wildebeest approaching the lions. Most of the herd diverted off but one wildebeest continued walking towards the lions. Our guide thought that the wildebeest was likely sick as it walked straight up to the lions. One of the males got up and chased the wildebeest a very short distance. The other male joined to assist in taking the wildebeest down. Our first full morning and we had seen a kill. We then watched as the one male dragged the kill in to the shade. After this, 2 other males walked across to the kill but continued walking. They were obviously full after the previous day's meal. We'd spent a couple of hours with the lions so left them. We soon found 2 hyenas walking along one of the roads, due to the unique nature of our vehicle we were able to achieve some low angle images of them as they walked towards the vehicle. The light and scene were stunning. Another great sighting. We then continued our drive and headed towards Olkiombo. We noticed a few vehicles so went to see what they were looking at. Some hyenas had killed a very young baby giraffe. What we witnessed then for the next hour was unique and very emotional. The mother giraffe was trying to protect her baby even though it was dead. Hyenas would approach the kill from one side, and she would chase them off and then hyenas would then come in from a different direction and start feeding she would then run back to the kill to chase them off. This went on for some time and every so often she would stand near the kill and sniff or lick her baby almost like she was trying to wake it up. Sometimes you can become a little de-sensitised when you see predators feeding on a kill, but this was incredibly emotional and you could not help feeling sorry for the giraffe mother. Baboons were also approaching the kill at times and were chased off by the hyenas. It was a tough watch, and the images only show half the story but witnessing this behaviour and emotion will stay with all of us for a long time. After the giraffe we went to have our bush lunch and then continued, we photographed some of the more common species including buffalo, Topi and crocodile. After

lunch we found a cheetah relaxing under a bush and a large pride of lions relaxing under a shady tree. By now it was very hot, but we did take a few different images. We then went to the river to check for wildebeest build ups. There were a few but not significant numbers, we did see a large pod of hippos with lots of young. We watched them for a while, and it was interesting to see them interact and at one point something spooked them and they all moved and splashed around in the water. We then moved on to a large herd of wildebeest and zebra and spent some time photographing these using all sorts of different techniques. We finished the day with more lions. They were very sleepy and after waiting a while to see if they would get up, we returned to the camp. We went to our tents to start downloading images and then went for a lovely dinner where we discussed the day and what was an outstanding start to the safari.

















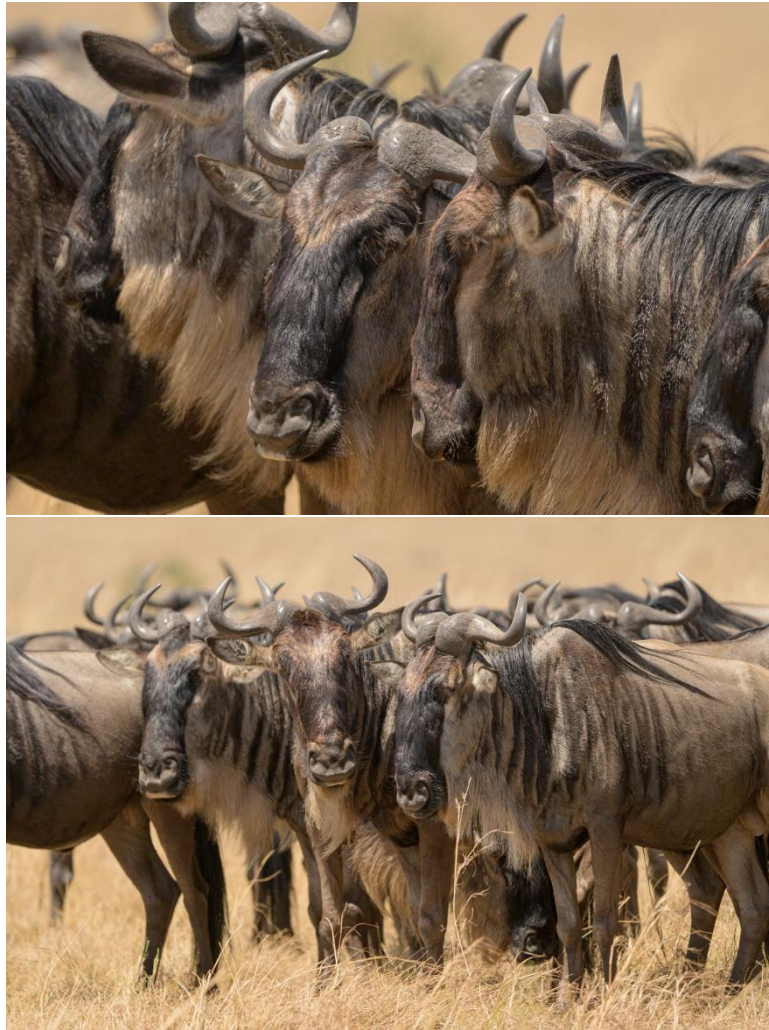


Day 4 Tuesday 22nd September

Today my clients went on a balloon safari so were up early and out of camp by 4:30am. I had a leisurely morning. After a bit of rest and relaxation we left at 10:30am for our safari. We headed towards the river. We found a large herd of wildebeest in lovely light with a nice background. We photographed the wildebeest and then headed to the river. We had heard that there was a build up of wildebeest at the river, so we were hoping for a crossing. We then spent a frustrating day watching the wildebeest approach the river, go down the bank and even reach the water and drink, but then they would run back up again. We had a break for our packed breakfast and then another one later for our packed lunch. After a while the wildebeest dispersed so we decided to see what else we could find. We came across a lovely male leopard laying out in the open and were able to capture some images of this as the light was starting to fade. We then returned to the camp. Today was probably the quietest day we had. But it was very interesting to watch the behaviour of the wildebeest and zebra, and I also think that having days like this just means you appreciate the big days where everything seems to go right even more. We had another lovely meal and sat and discussed the day over a beer.







Day 5 Wednesday 23rd September

After yesterday we decided to follow the same plan and take a packed breakfast and a packed lunch. We had coffee at 5:15am. We left the camp at around 5:30am. The focus was the same in the morning, looking for any subjects that we could photograph with the sun. We were initially frustrated with finding subjects, but we did manage to get a few images of one of the lonely acacia trees against the beautiful orange sky. We planned today to travel to a different area of the Masai Mara around Governors Camp. It was a long drive, but we hoped it would be productive. We found a group of hyenas with young around their den. The sun was still below the horizon, and I knew if we positioned ourselves in the right place, we would get some stunning backlit images. We started to photograph the hyenas and their young and the images were beautiful; the light was stunning and was just getting better as the sun started to rise. As it cleared the horizon a group of Topi walked on to the horizon, so we repositioned the vehicle and were able to get a few silhouettes of the Topi with the sun. We returned to the hyenas and captured more backlit images including a minor disagreement between 2 of them. We then repositioned the vehicle to get images in different light. After a good few hours with the hyenas we continued our journey, our next sighting of note was a kill with a lot of vultures on it. There were also a few hyenas. The sun was behind the kill, but it made for some interesting images when the hyenas chased the vultures. We continued and then came across a herd of elephants. This area of Mara is one of the best places to photograph elephants during migration time, and we photographed them coming out of the trees with lovely backdrops. Our morning so far had

been incredible with so many beautiful images. We then had heard from another driver that lions had made a kill in some trees and that these lions had very young cubs. So we went to see if we could see them. As we approached the area in some trees, we saw one of the lionesses eating the kill. The other lions were resting in the shade, and the cubs were hidden away deep in a bush. We left the lions with the plan to come back later in the day. We drove to an area near the river and had our packed breakfast. Whilst we were having breakfast some elephants came to drink at the river, so we watched them. It was a perfect breakfast stop. After breakfast we went back to check on the lions, we knew it would probably be a wasted trip but went to look anyway. They were still sleeping. As we left the lions, we saw a big group of elephants in the marsh as we approached them, we could see that they were all having a mud bath. For the next hour we spent a wonderful time with the elephants and watched babies submerged in mud and adults spraying it all over them. It was an amazing time with these incredible animals. This area of Mara is also good for Serval and Leopard, so we planned to spend some time looking for both species before returning to the lions. During this drive we saw some incredible birds and in the space of an hour had photographed Brown Snake Eagle, Black-Chested Snake Eagle, Juvenile Martial Eagle and Long Crested Eagle. We then had lunch and continued exploring this area of the Mara. We found another Brown Snake Eagle eating a large frog and then a monitor lizard relaxing in the sun on a termite mound. We then returned to the lions. As we approached, we could see that the cubs were out. David our driver got us in a great position opposite a tree. I hoped that the cubs would play on the tree as it was a suitable shape and easy for them to climb. After a while this is exactly what happened with all 3 cubs playing in the fork of this tree. The older cubs also sometimes joined in, and it was an amazing sighting. After a while all of the lionesses got up, and the cubs ran for a bush. A male and female lion appeared and despite the obvious annoyance from the other lionesses they moved away, and the male and female came in to feed. Gradually the pride returned but the cubs stayed distant with one of the adults. As we had a long journey to get back to camp, we left the lions to it. We arrived back in camp around 6:30pm and after putting everything on charge and downloading cards we had dinner and went to our tents for another early night.









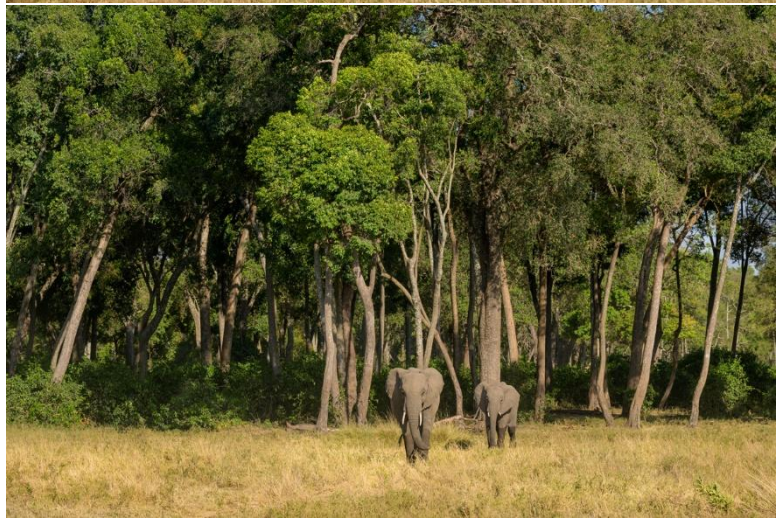






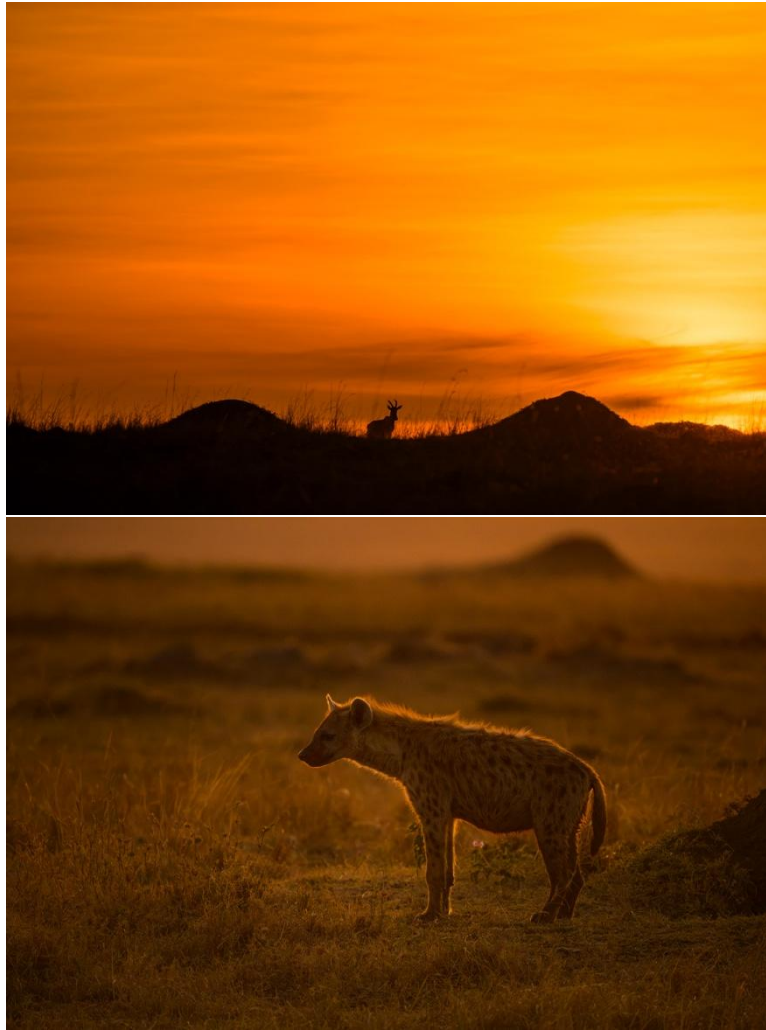












Day 6 Thursday 24th September

After yesterday we decided to follow the same plan and take a packed breakfast and a packed lunch. We had coffee at 5:15am. We left the camp at around 5:30am. The focus was the same in the morning, looking for any subjects that we could photograph with the sun. As we left the camp David our driver caught sight of a lioness in the headlights. She was hunting a herd of wildebeest. We quickly positioned the vehicle and waited. It was still very dark so we could not take any images, but we watched as she edged closer to the herd. Whilst we were waiting, we heard a male lion roaring behind the herd. As the sun came up, we could start to make out the shapes of the horns of the wildebeest, and it was a nice image. Then a male and 2 female lions walked in from the right, the wildebeest caught sight of them and were immediately on high alert. The hunting lioness sat up in the grass knowing that her attempt at hunting was over for this morning. The light on her was stunning and we got some beautiful images of her sat in the grassland. We then positioned ourselves to see if we could get the lions greeting each other. We were able to do this and then captured images of the lions walking in front of the wildebeest herd. The females made their way to a rocky area of grassland and the male followed. It was a great opportunity to pan the lions as they walked through the grass which we did with some success. The female lions made their way to the rocks and laid down. The male approached and one of the females approached the male. Isaac our guide said to be ready for something to happen and sure enough the male and female had a brief fight with the male leaping in the air. My clients got some lovely images of this. Unfortunately, my camera was still on my panning

settings and so I missed the action. But as always, it is vitally important that my clients get the images and if I get some then great but if not then it is one of those things. After the lions we went to see a mating pair of lions. This was the one we heard roar behind the herd originally. We watched as they mated and then watched as the female teased the male and at one point walked right underneath him. It was great to see and photograph, and it was another amazing unique lion image to add to our portfolios. After the lions we had our packed our breakfast and then headed towards the river to see if the wildebeest herds had returned from yesterday. On the way we found a herd of wildebeest and zebra drinking. We got some nice images here including some images of them coming down a steep dusty bank. It was a good opportunity to pan them. We then went to the river. There was a small gathering of wildebeest that were approaching the river, so we patiently watched and waited. They kept approaching and returning and then repeating this again until they all turned and ran away from the river. We had a break for our lunch and waited another couple of hours. By now all the wildebeest had moved away so we decided to go and look for other things to photograph. We found a giraffe on the horizon with a stunning cloudy sky which made for some great images. Then we had Thompson Gazelle in wonderful light and then an Eland backlit with oxpeckers on it. By now the light was starting to fade so after stopping for a silhouetted ostrich we returned to our camp. We had another lovely meal and slept early.

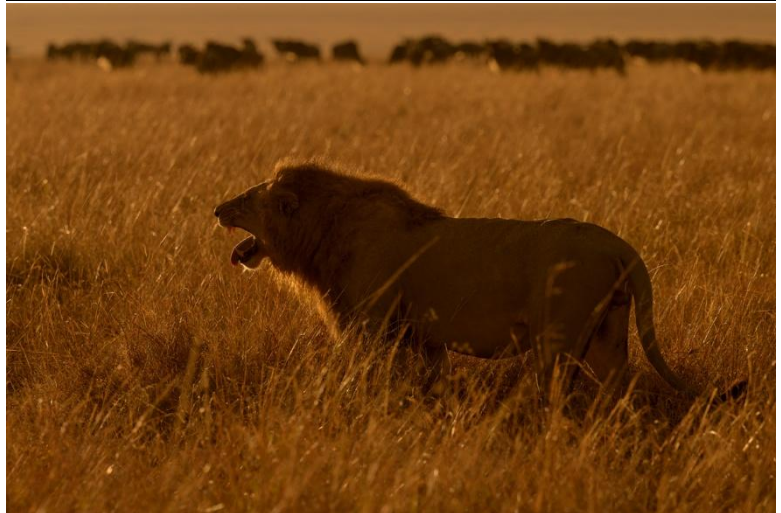










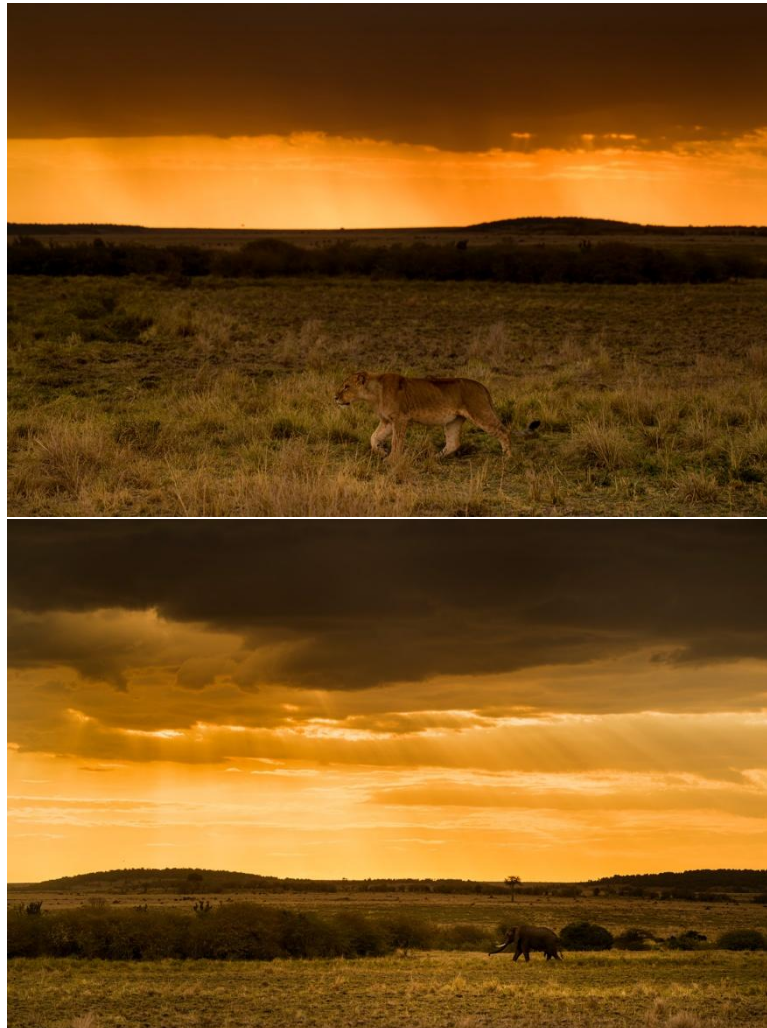




Day 7 Friday 25th September

After an early breakfast we started our last full day game drive. On our way out of camp we saw a Serval, but it was too dark for images, and it soon disappeared in to the longer grass. We started the day with sunrise shots of trees with marabou storks sat on them and then silhouettes of wildebeest and zebra on the skyline. We had all decided we were going to spend the day looking for wildebeest build ups at the river. There were none along the Mara River, so we headed towards Sand River. On the way we found a leopard which we watched for a while. We then had some nice opportunities to photograph ostrich and Egyptian geese and then a warthog with young piglets. This was one of the things my clients had wanted to photograph and to everyone's surprise they didn't run away. In fact, the piglets suckled on their mother, and it made for some good images. After this we found a beautiful older male lion laying in a bush. He had the most spectacular full mane and despite having seen so many lions this made for some more different images. We left the lion as he was not as relaxed with us as some of the other lions. As we got closer to Sand River there were thousands of wildebeest. We were able to take a few herd images and made our way down to the river. The wildebeest were approaching the river in great numbers and this time over the next few hours we got lucky with a few crossings. It was great to see, and we were able to get a few images of them jumping up the bank to exit the river and it was a great chance again to try panning shots. Having said all this a Sand River crossing lacks the volume of water and the drama of a mara river crossing but in the whole 6 days we had been in the mara no river crossings had taken place so unfortunately this is the best we could

manage. After the crossings we headed back to the main river and on the way photographed some elephants with lovely reflections and some nice, banded mongoose. At the river we had lunch and as there were no wildebeest anywhere, we continued. We then saw a line of wildebeest heading away from the river, so we were able to photograph some of the wildebeest in nice light. We then came across a small group of lions. Although we had photographed many lions. The sky behind them was dramatic and so we decided to wait for the sun to set and see if we could get something different. We were able to get some very dramatic final images of the lions. We then returned to camp. We had our last meal accompanied by a cake that the camp had made for us as we had stayed for a few days and it was my 4th time here. We slept early as the next day we would be leaving for Naivasha.















Day 8 Saturday 26th September

We had breakfast at 6:30am and packed. We then said our goodbyes to the incredible staff at Olive Bush Camp. David transferred us to the gate. We said our goodbyes to David who again provided us with some excellent opportunities to get images. We then left Masai Mara bidding it a very fond farewell and started our long journey to Lake Naivasha. We were tired with the early starts and the constant photographic opportunities, so we slept during the long journey. We had a toilet stop at Narok. We reached Elsamere Conservation Centre at around 2pm and checked in. We then had lunch. At 3pm we went on our scheduled boat trip on Lake Naivasha, the primary focus was to photograph the African Fish Eagle. On the boat trip our brilliant boat guide Jarrod throws freshly caught fish out for the eagle and you can capture some dramatic images of them swooping down for the fish. The number of fish that can be given to the eagles is closely controlled but since Jarrod had done no trips that day, we had a few extra fish. For anyone who has never done this before it is challenging, the eagles are close and they come down quite fast, but by the end both my clients had got some images that they were pleased. One of my clients had only learnt the technique for birds in flight on this trip and yet she was achieving some amazing diving images. It was brilliant to see. We also got some lovely opportunities to photograph Pied Kingfisher and other water birds. We returned to the lodge and had a few hours

to relax before we met for dinner at 7:30pm. We decided to go to our rooms after dinner and sleep early.







Day 9 Sunday 27th September

After an early 5:30am breakfast we were picked up by our driver guide James, and we left for Lake Nakuru. I usually add Lake Nakuru into the itineraries to give everyone the opportunity to photograph both black and white rhino. Lake Nakuru is one of my favourite parks anyway and has so much to offer photographers – not just rhino. We arrived at Lake Nakuru at approximately 8:30am. We entered the park and headed towards the dead trees on the Lake Shore. On the way

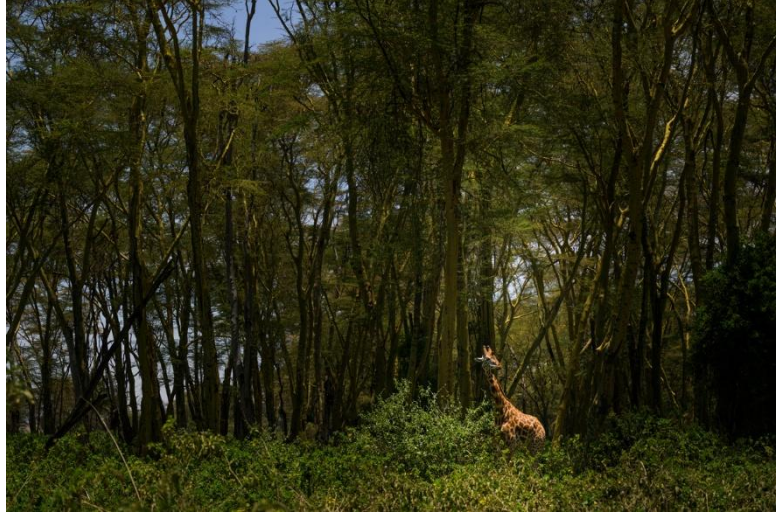
we managed to see a Black Rhino resting and then 2 White Rhino. We were able to get some nice images of them and also some buffalo. We then spent a great couple of hours at the dead trees photographing Pelicans and Flamingos. After the birds we continued around the lake, we found a few zebras drinking and then a great male baboon relaxing on a tree stump. It was amazing photographing him as he yawned and relaxed. Then a female baboon joined him bringing her tiny newborn baby. We just sat watching her and it was like she was showing us her baby. She looked so proud and it was an amazing encounter. We continued around the lake and stopped a few times for some birds. We then found a herd of Rothschilds Giraffe which was lovely to photograph. We then saw some male lions relaxing under a tree. On the surface it didn't seem worth waiting for the lions as we had photographed so many. But I knew that this was a brilliant opportunity for a unique high key image. We just needed the one of the lions to stand up. To our amazement after a while the lion did just this and it stood up. We got some lovely different images and then headed to Lake Nakuru Lodge for lunch. We left the lodge at around 2:30pm and went for a short drive. We were aiming to be at the causeway for the pelicans at around 4pm as the light is much better then. On this short drive we saw lions with cubs sat in a tree which despite poor harsh light was a great sighting and then we saw more Black and White Rhino. After this we headed to the causeway. Our focus here was pelicans and flamingos. With the light the way it was we were able to capture some lovely low-key images using the water to create black backgrounds around the flamingos and African stilts. As well as this we were able to photograph lots of pelicans coming into land as well as spoonbill and several other birds. At around 5:15pm we had to leave to return to Lake Naivasha. We arrived back at Elsamere at 8pm and went straight for dinner. We then went to our rooms to rest and relax.

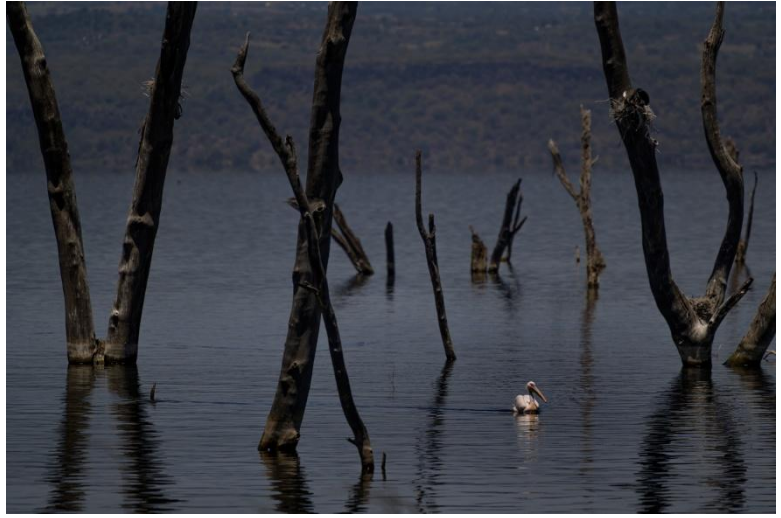


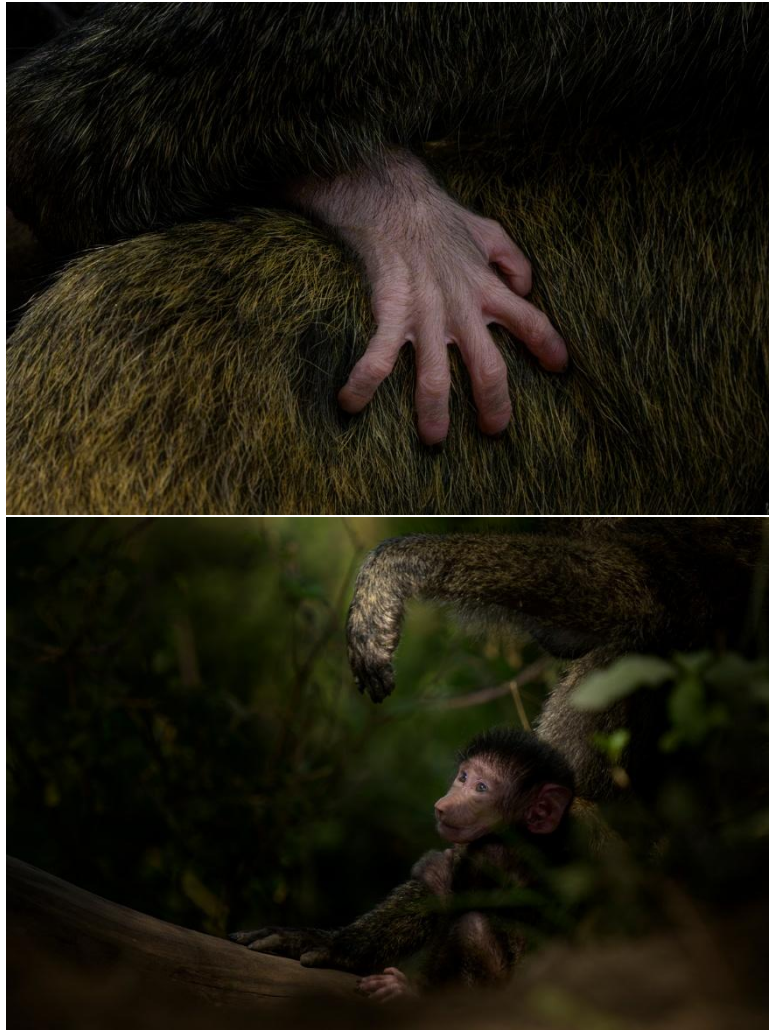








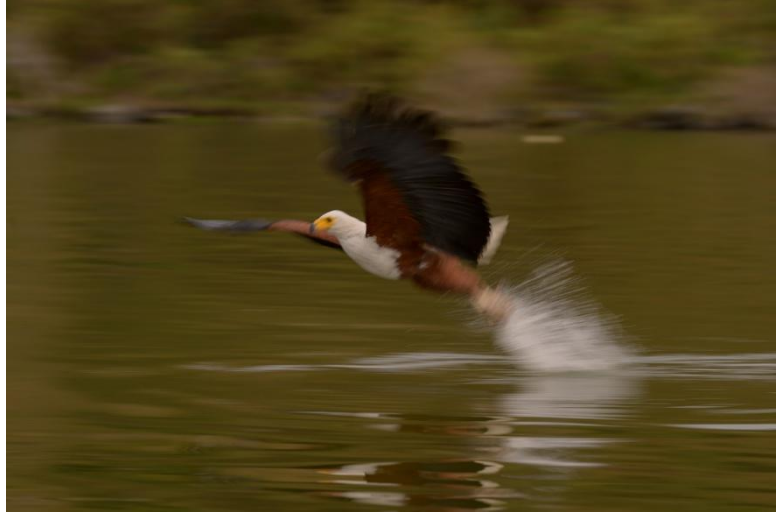




Day 10 Tuesday 19th August.

We had a second boat trip booked for 7:30am and after all of the early starts over the past week this was a relatively late start. The boat trip was again superb with many photographic opportunities both with eagles and the many other birds, after the boat trip we packed and then checked out. We spent an hour relaxing at Naivasha before I left for Nairobi and my clients left to continue their Kenya Trip with Isaac and James. I had commitments for workshops back in the UK so needed to be back whilst they continued to Lake Bogoria. So, after saying our goodbyes we all left for our destinations.







This Masai Mara Trip was a great trip. The wildlife sightings were superb throughout; every day we got some outstanding images. The light during the week and the backdrops and colours were spectacular. It was a little disappointing we didn't get any spectacular crossings, but that is wildlife. The week before we arrived there were lots of crossings. All you can do is pick the best period to visit the Masai Mara and hope that you get lucky with the build-up of wildebeest. We saw tens of thousands of them over the 6 days, but they just were not crossing. All you can do when this happens is make the most of what you get, and we did that. I have a creative and

different approach to photography and I am always trying new things with light and camera settings and when you have clients that are prepared to trust you and follow your guidance to try things out of their comfort zone, that is when you come home from a photographic safari with a truly incredible portfolio of images.

My 2027 and 2028 trips are full but if you are interested in 2029 then please get in touch