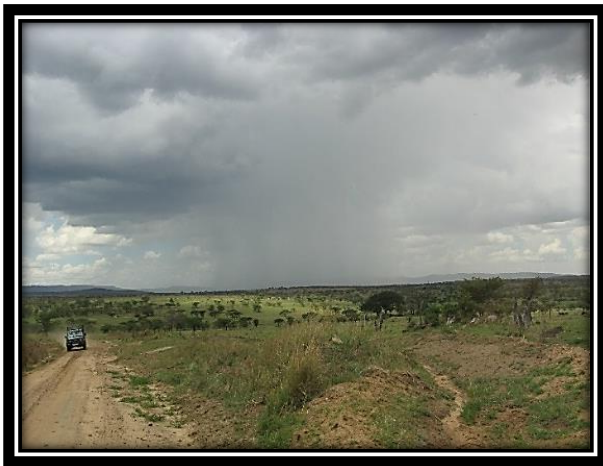


## 10. Game Drives in the Serengeti

About 9:30 that morning we saw ten jeeps lined up along the road, blocking it. “That must be a kill,” said our guide, “and there are already so many jeeps there that our chances of seeing anything are small. We already had the best of it with the kill we saw.” We turned around and left and were rewarded with sights of many animals: Impalas, Topis, Baboons, a breeding herd of Impalas, Vervet Monkeys, our first Klipspringer on top of the kopje, too far to see well or photograph. “The Klipspringer is called Africa’s dancing antelope,” said our guide, “because of how agile it is leaping and jumping around in the kopjes.” We saw Warthogs digging in a dry area with thin trees and not too many animals, and then some Topi came galloping past us, “probably getting away from a predator,” said our guide. We saw a group of seven Giraffes, then two more, a big female Lion under a tree, then another one under another tree and then two female Lions joined by two more. One of them was stalking something and then pounced on it, but we were too far away to see what had been caught. We saw a Jackal, more groups of Zebras, Impalas, and Warthogs, and a herd of about 10 Elephants under a small group of trees. One started to walk out, then backed up into the group. Some Wildebeests crossed the road at a gallop in front of us, “maybe joining the hundreds of Zebras and Wildebeests that are still going north,” said our guide. “The tail end of the migration.”



“Most of the animals have already gone into Kenya,” continued our guide. “We are seeing the tail end of the migration. Some of these animals that are still here may decide to just stay here now that the rains are coming.”

And the rains did come, sheeting down about 11:45, turning the roads into slick quagmires, but our jeeps maneuvered them expertly. We saw this gentle Reedbuck, and a herd of about 40 Cape Buffalos in the distance, along with Elands, Topi, and six Ostriches.



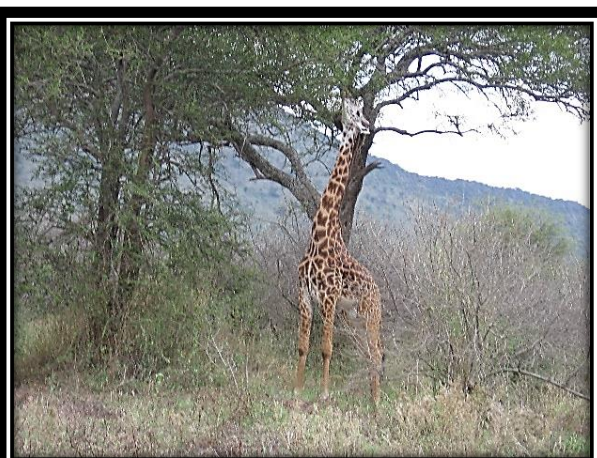
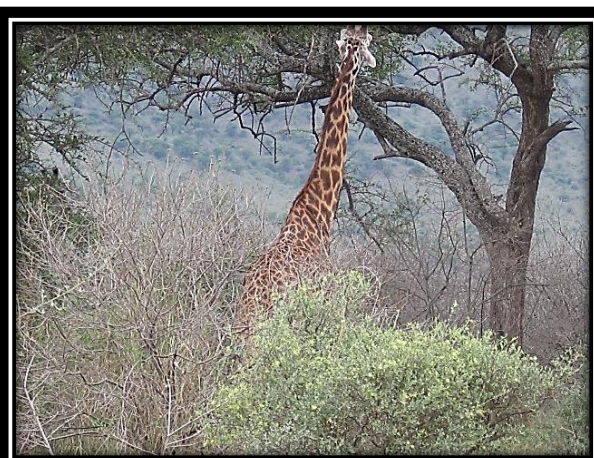
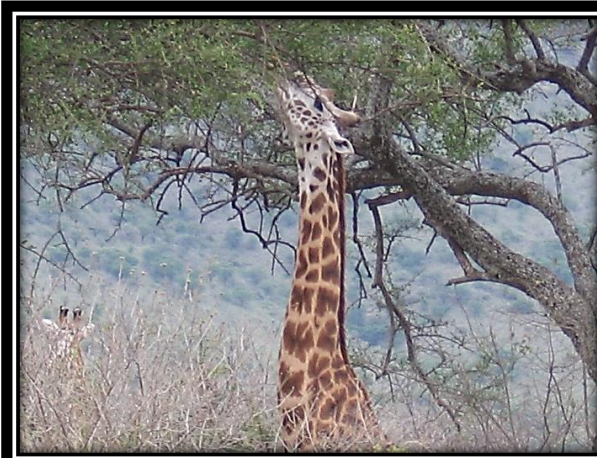
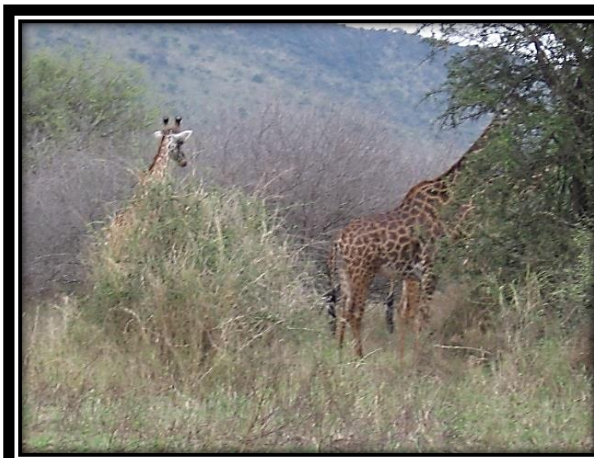
We arrived at the gate near the border of Tanzania and Kenya about 12:30. The rains had stopped, and we had a nice lunch of quiche, pasta, apples, bananas, bread, peanut butter, soda, and water. As we started back an hour later, we found this baby Hartbeest in the middle of road, just born during the time we were eating our lunch. It was a very moving experience for all of us, to see the cycle of life and death playing out in such an immediate and raw way. “The little one is so vulnerable!” “What is to keep it from becoming food for a lurking predator?” “Nothing. It is just born and lies there helpless.” “But has it been abandoned by its mother?” “No, not at all. If you look carefully up that hill, you will see her hiding in the bushes watching us. As soon as we are gone, she will come down to be with her baby. The amazing thing is that in six hours this helpless baby will be able to walk and join its mother and the rest of the animals on the migration.” We slowly and carefully drove around the baby, giving it a wide berth. Myrtle and I sent silent kisses to the little one



as we passed and started the long trek back to the Serengeti. We passed lots of Zebras and Wildebeests, a herd of six Elephants, some Black-faced Vervet Monkeys in a tree, Baboons, two male Lions sleeping, eight Giraffes eating. Our jeeps pulled over to let us watch the Giraffes eat, and it was most interesting to see them stretch those impossibly long necks high into the acacia trees to get the choice morsels they wanted. We all continued to be amazed at how they manage the wicked thorns on the acacias. "Some of those thorns are three inches long!" we exclaimed.

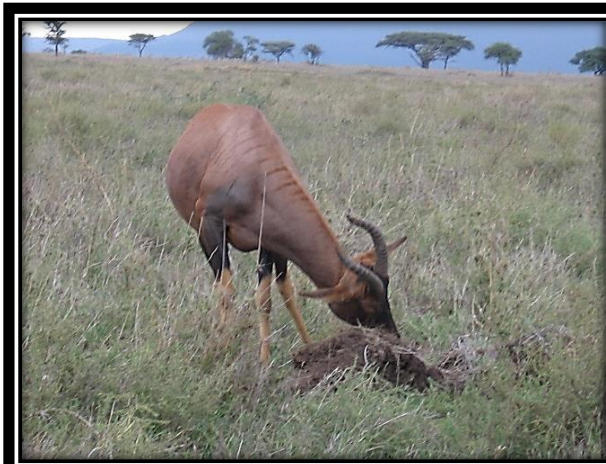
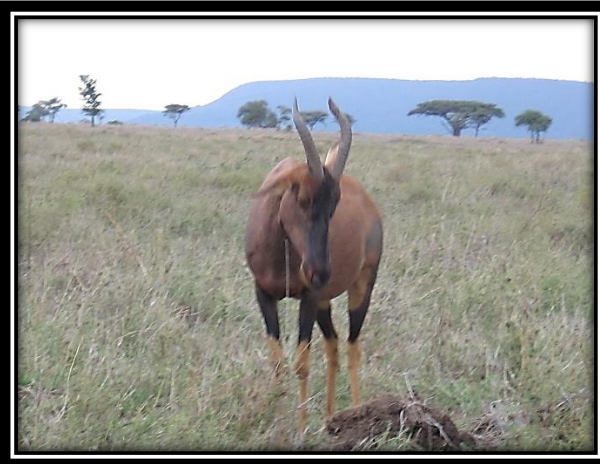






About 4:15 that afternoon we came across two Topi Antelopes very near the road, and they did not run away, so we stopped to observe them. One of them came closer to us and leaned down to rub its horns on a large rock lying in the grass. After a good rub, it looked up, looked around at us, looked down at the rock again as though to decide if it wanted to do another rub, then proceeded to do just that. It did this repeatedly, and Myrtle and I had to giggle a bit because each time the Topi raised its head, it seemed to be saying, "Hmm, that felt pretty good; I think I will do it again."





We arrived back at camp about 4:30, to be greeted as usual with welcoming hot towels and a cool drink of juice, “as though we are big-time adventurers!” I gloated to Myrtle. “Well, we ARE just that!” she responded with a sniff. There was time for a warm shower, and to wash some clothes before again sitting on our verandah with a relaxing glass of wine and some happy marveling at everything we had seen that day. During our dinner in the mess tent the skies opened up with a downpour, and most of us chose to simply stay in the mess tent eating more and drinking to a spectacular day. Our



guides relaxed and told us about the marriage protocols in their tribes, and I was relaxing so happily that I did not write anything in my journal, so all I remember is that one of our guides was from the Chagga Tribe, the main tribe in the Kilimanjaro area, and the engagement/wedding process in his tribe can take three to five years!

The next morning's wake-up call was at 5:30, and I found to my chagrin that the bar of laundry soap I had accidentally left out on our verandah table when I had done my laundry the day before was nowhere to be found. Myrtle and I looked all around. She smirked, "Well, JoJo, our guide did warn us not to leave anything out overnight." "But a bar of SOAP?" I snorted. "What animal eats a bar of SOAP?" I asked our guide, and I remembered that during the night there was a big ruckus not too far from the tent, going on for over an hour. But our guide told us that was a herd of donkeys. "There was a Nightjar screaming and squawking for about an hour," he said, "But the birds typically don't take something like a bar of soap." I pointed to the Baboon watching us from the nearby hill; but the guide said he thinks it was the Hyenas that took the soap. "They are true scavengers and will take anything and everything." We left for our first game drive at 6:15, with another beautiful sunrise.



Soon we spotted a family of 18 baboons high in tree, just waking up and ready to come down to start their breakfast foraging. The babies and young ones were adorable, clambering from branch to branch and then shimmying down the tree so agilely.







This Giraffe was close to the road and patiently waiting for us to pass. One of the guides spotted a Cheetah in the distance and our guides had a mini conference to decide whether we should try to follow it to see if it would make a kill. We drove for a while, but the Cheetah went off into an area we could not follow. We saw some Rock Hyraxes standing on a stone in a kopje, but they are so skittish and dart so fast that I did not try to take pictures. We came across a large herd of elephants, most of them huddled under a tree for shade.







There were also Wildebeests and Zebras gathered under trees. “These animals now will likely remain here and not join the migration,” said our guide. “The annual migration between the Serengeti and the Maasai Mara in Kenya happens when the Serengeti gets too dry to support the herds. Then the animals head north into Kenya. They follow the rains. When the rains return to the Serengeti, they return.” We drove on roads heavily rutted from rain, but our drivers drove slowly and carefully, and we never got stuck.





We came across this strange tree, which our guide said is called a Sausage Tree. “This tree is not common in the Serengeti,” he said. “It is more common in other areas of Africa, and it has many different names, the most common one being *Kigelia Africana*. Sometimes you hear it called the Cucumber Tree, and most of the African tribes have their own names for this tree. Its most distinctive feature is the large sausage-like things it grows, about 15-18 inches long and four inches fat and weighing in at a hefty 20 pounds. Animals can eat them and seem to like them, but the sausages are toxic to humans, although I have heard that some tribes make beer from the sausages.” “Probably has a real kick to it,” laughed one of the men in our group. “Like mushrooms, I bet,” said another. Myrtle and I were glad the guides chose not to stop to sample the sausage tree’s delights.

To be continued . . .