

3. Safari Time



At 4:30 that afternoon we went on a walking safari with a Maasai guide who showed us how to identify medicinal plants and trees and track animals by following their spoor. “You mean their poop?” asked one woman. “An animal’s feces is only one part of its spoor,” replied the Maasai. “We also use tracks in the sand or the dirt, bushes and trees eaten or bent out of shape, bits of fur stuck on acacia thorns, smell etc. Expert trackers have an extremely keen sense of smell.” He showed us stick bark to get antibiotic for wounds, the Sticky African Camphora tree, the Desert Date with its fruit that ripens yellow. “We use the leaves to treat chickenpox,” he said. “We boil the leaves and drink the bitter tea. We also pound the bark and use it as dynamite in fishponds. It kills the fish and we can catch them easily. We also use its powder to kill pesky snails in the garden. This tree grows to become a big tree with fleshy thorns, and it is mostly evergreen.” He showed us the Grewia bush that women use when they bleed too much in the menstrual cycle. Women boil the roots, mix that with sheep fat, and drink it.

As we continued to walk, the guide would stop frequently to identify and explain the various plants and trees we passed. “This shrub is the Sodom Apple. It grows in areas where a fire has been. We use the unripe fruit to treat pneumonia. You squeeze it in a glass of water and drink that twice a day for two days. The ripe ones are antiseptic, and you chew the roots for stomach problems.”

He invited us all to pick a leaf from the Lantana bush, saying, “Notice its strong mint smell and rough leaves. When we must carry meat, we pack it in lantana leaves and the meat stays fresh. It has a nice aroma. Wrapping meat in lantana leaves also shows respect, like when a boy is presenting food to a girlfriend’s family. In our culture, the First Wife is an arranged marriage. The boy’s father picks the girl. After that, the man picks his own wives. I know a man with 26 wives.”

“Now here is the Acacia Nylotica,” he continued. “We use the bark. When boys go into the field for a month, they boil beef with Acacia bark and drink the soup. It makes them feel fearless, so they won’t be afraid of the lion. It is probably a little hallucinogenic. We also use the bark’s fragrance to scare lions away. And the bark is also used for female circumcision, which is still practiced in some tribes as a rite of passage. In those tribes the girl will not be considered a woman until she is

circumcised. She will be considered a child and not respected. There are still a few places where a circumcised boy who cries at his circumcision is killed because it dishonors his family if he cries.”

Then we came to this most splendid and unusual tree, the Baobab. I fell instantly in love with its free-form oddity, and throughout our time in Africa I took so many photos of the Baobabs that Myrtle threatened to hex me and turn me into one. “You could be matchy-matchy when you are having a bad hair day, JoJo,” she said with a smirk. “Nice try, Myrtle! You’d best be careful what you ask for because Baobabs can live for 2500-3000 years,” I replied with a Hmmph.



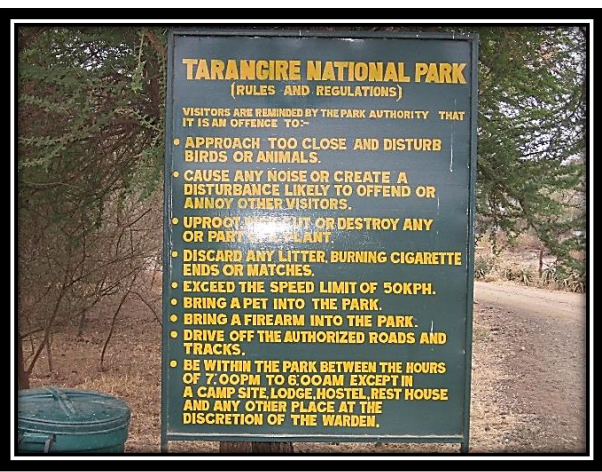
Our guide pointed out this Weaver bird nest and then picked up a small skull from just off the path. “This is from a male Dik-Dik,” he said. There were some giggles as one man said, “A Dick Dick?” The guide spelled the name and continued, “The Dik-Dik is one of the smallest antelopes, about 15 inches tall and weighing less than ten pounds. They get their name from the warning call the female makes when she senses danger, a sort of whistling, clicking sound she makes through her long narrow snout, which Dik-Diks can move up and down freely. They have very large brown eyes that seem to take up much of their faces. The Dik-Dik is so small that in the rainy season it cannot see over the grass, and it moves to another location where the grass doesn’t grow so tall. They can move quite fast, however, up to about 25 miles an hour. The Dik-Dik mates for life, and the male and the female mark their territory with small twigs. Their scat is tiny pellets.” One of our guides was

wearing this Endangered Feces shirt that we all thought was a must-have, and I do think that all of us bought these shirts on our last day. Our Maasai guide spent a lot of time identifying scat for us, saying, "Scat is an important part of not only tracking animals but also staying safe. If you find fresh Cape Buffalo scat, for example, you would be wise to leave the area quickly because the Cape Buffalo is very aggressive. The scat in these pictures is from Jackals, fresh and dried, and Wildebeests.



We saw beautiful specimens of the Candelabra Cactus as we walked. The guide pointed out an Eagle Owl and gorgeous yellow-winged bats that started to emerge as the sun went down. We walked back at 6:30 for a 7:15 briefing and dinner. Tomorrow will be game drives in Tarangire National Park, so our wake-up call is 5:30 and we must be on the jeep by 6:15. We can have coffee and tea before we go, but we will eat breakfast on the road. As we ate another wonderful dinner of pumpkin soup, barbecued pork rib, braised carrots, fried baby corn, potatoes, green

salad, and chocolate cake for dessert, with beer and tea, our guide told us a brief history of Tanzania. “Tanzania was created in 1961. ‘Tan’ was taken from Tanganyika and ‘Zan’ from Zanzibar when the two countries united. There were 9 million people then. Today there are 36 million, with a 2.8% population growth. The annual per capita income is \$365. I’m not sure how they calculate that because the wealth of the Maasai, for example, is in their cows. Education is good in Tanzania. There are seven years of primary school followed by a national exam, four years of secondary school followed by another national exam, and two years of post-secondary school followed by another national exam. If a student passes all these exams, he or she can begin college at age 21. Health care can be free, but not completely. If the free doctor and hospital cannot deal with the medical problem, the patient must go the private doctor, and many people cannot afford the private doctor. The country is 44% Christian, 25% Muslim, and different tribes still keep their old-time tribal religions. We vote every five years. In my opinion, the country right now is generally doing well under current leadership.”



The next day we were all up early and on the jeep by 6:15, arriving at the Tarangire National Park by 7:30. On the way into the park we saw these two Dik-Diks, and our guide said we were lucky to spot them because they are often hard to see, as small as they are.





At the entrance were these skulls of a Cape Buffalo and an elephant. Myrtle and I each put our hands reverently on the massive elephant skull, marveling at how poachers can fail to appreciate the magnificence of such an animal.



This fresh termite mound intrigued all of us. Our guide explained that this mound is young and still growing tall. The termites live underground three feet deep. After the rainfall when the dirt is soft, they dig. Worker termites use their saliva with dirt to build a mound. Soldier termites protect the mound from predators. The queen termite mates with the king termite and produces all the termite eggs. She can produce 30,000 eggs a day. The termites nurture and care for an underground fungus garden that is important for the ecosystem.



The Impalas with their big ears always turned to watch us with curiosity. We saw zebras, Wildebeests, Warthogs, and an Eagle eating eggs from a nest in a tree.



When Myrtle saw me taking this photo of large, fresh elephant scat and almost immediately a photo of a zebra relieving itself, she laughed and said, “Boy, you really do have poop on the brain, JoJo!” “All in the name of science,” I assured her with a smile. We saw an Eland, largest antelope in the world, a Hornbill bird, more Dik-Diks, a Plover bird, a Tawny Eagle in a distant tree, hundreds of Cape Buffalo far away, a White-headed Vulture in the palm trees and a Sausage Tree, which the animals eat. Humans can make beer from its sausages. We saw lots and lots of these gorgeous Wildebeests, my favorite; and the funny little Warthogs galloping by with their tails high.



All around us the Zebras and Wildebeests were busy munching the grass, even though to me the grass looked dry and brown. We saw an Elephant with a two-year-old baby, a Zebra carcass, some Black-faced Vervet Monkeys, and a baby Elephant nursing. The guide estimated the baby’s age at 9 months. We saw a Maasai Giraffe. “The Maasai Giraffe is not reticulated,” said our guide. “The males have a lot of melanin.” Then we came upon a herd of 21 Elephants that decided to cross the road in front of our three jeeps! Of course, Myrtle and I had to pinch each other, whispering, “Oh, this is awesome! Just awesome!” There was a really little baby that mama Elephant was determined to keep between her and a juvenile Elephant so that we could not see the baby.



Our jeep edged a little closer and mama got mad and turned toward us throwing her ears out and trumpeting. “Oohh,” I breathed in a whisper, “She is telling us to back off, in no uncertain terms.” We all remained silent and still, and mama Elephant continued walking, still carefully shielding her little one.



We were so enthralled watching these lumbering beasts move in such a stately manner across the road that we almost missed our first sighting of Giraffes, two of them. Our guide said they were

juveniles, about 11-13 feet tall. “Amazing!” cried Myrtle. “How can they hold up their heads on those long, long necks?” “Magic,” I responded with a joyous smile, “Pure magic!” About 9:00 we stopped on top of a plateau to eat our picnic breakfast with this wonderful view of the savannahs below us. Our guides did kitchen duty, laying out the picnic and cleaning up when we were finished. “Ah,” sighed most of the women in our group, “This is the life! I love being served!”



Gorgeous birds came close to us fearlessly, waiting for crumbs. Here are a White-headed Buffalo Weaver, a Red and Yellow Barbets Bird, and a Rueppell's Long-tailed Starling, which our guides called a Superb Starling. Myrtle and I agreed that we liked the name Superb Starling best, Myrtle especially because she fell in love with this bird and insisted I take two million photos of it. “JoJo!” she squealed. “Look at his elegant fat belly with his iridescent blue vest and white belt! Can't you just see a gold pocket watch dangling from that vest! Oooh, I would like to hug the little bugger.”



“Well, Myrtle,” I responded, “look at his eyes. I suspect that if you tried to hug him, he might peck yours out!”



“This Hyena poop is white from the calcium in the bones of the animals the Hyenas eat,” said our guide. “The black scat is from fur and skin. The little pellets are from Antelopes.” “Ha!” whispered Myrtle with a snicker, “I wonder if they are all dehydrated like I was after that long flight. My first pooh came out in little pellets just like those!” TMI, Myrtle, TMI. And we piled back into our jeep.



I was always amazed to see how the Elephants stripped the acacia trees, which our guide informed us helps to keep down the population of harmful ants, another wonderful way nature works in harmony and synergy.





When Myrtle saw this wonderful picture below of two Wildebeests (which she stubbornly continued to refer to as “White-bearded Gnu Antelopes” of course,) she looked at it a long time and finally said, “JoJo, I think you have found a new critter: a ZeGnu, a cross between a Zebra and a Gnu.”



Hmmm. I confess that I looked at this photo a long time also and struggled to find the full Zebra. Can you find it, dear reader? I finally figured out that the source of confusion is the horns of the Wildebeest facing the camera. “What a great photo!” I said to Myrtle jubilantly. She sulked for only a few minutes before saying, “You know, I agree! I claim it!” Whatever.

To be continued . . .