

Serengeti 2020(3) by Walt Anderson

Our early 2020 (pre-pandemic) safari occurred at an exceptionally wet period in East Africa. Usually the “short rains” have ended by mid-January, and the vast herds of wildebeest and zebra in the Great Migration are in the short-grass plains of the southern Serengeti for the breeding period. El Nino was more than generous in terms of rain that year; camps in the Masai Mara just north of the Serengeti had to have evacuations from flooding.

We had wonderfully green landscapes at all the Tanzania parks we visited: Arusha, Tarangire, Lake Manyara, Mkomazi, Ngorongoro, and finally Serengeti. I have posted images from each park little by little, and I have had two on the Serengeti already, but in the five days we were there, I got so many good pictures that it looks like I will have four more small collections to share.

The Serengeti speaks to me in ways that are hard to put into words. It is a vast, wild place where ecological dramas are right there for us to observe. But I don’t take it for granted.

We have five days in Serengeti the two safaris that are scheduled for this coming August. There is still space on the second safari if you’d like to join us for the trip of a lifetime:

http://www.geolobo.com/?page_id=522 . In the meantime, I hope you enjoy these photos of a magnificent place, and I hope you will be part of the effort to assure a beautiful and productive planet for those who follow us. Thank you if you do!



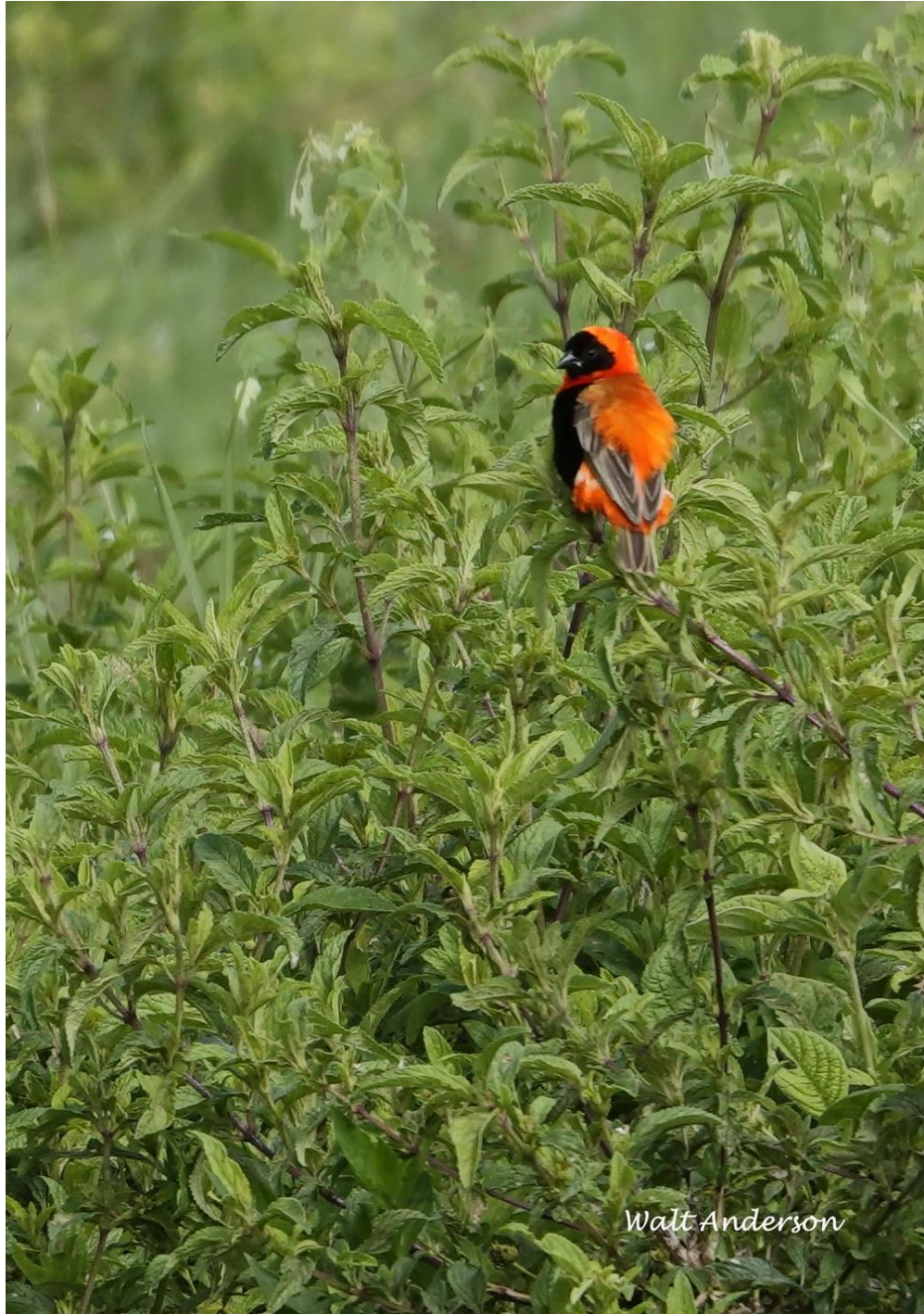
Storm clouds and distant rain with the lush landscape filled with animals as far as the eye can see.



A rainbow blesses the central Serengeti where two antelope species—topi and kongoni—take advantage of the nutritious harvest provided by the wet year. But bounty is often followed by physical challenges, as droughts come along and put most creatures to the test. There is concern that climate change could alter the timing of precipitation in ways that might affect the productivity of this ecosystem, perhaps destroying the Great Migration itself. What we do in America has ripple effects worldwide, and it is our responsibility to learn to live responsibly and sustainably.



Lush vegetation has its pros and cons for a hunting Cheetah. Prey species (gazelles and hares, for example) are more plentiful and bearing good crops of young, but the denser cover can interfere with the Cheetah's sprint and give prey more hiding places. In the long run, grasslands and savannahs could be converted to woodlands, which would negatively affect Cheetahs. Our greenhouse gas emissions as we go about our life routines may have consequences that many people are only now beginning to wake up to. It is definitely time to take swift and decisive action to slow down and reverse the changes we have contributed to.



A Southern Red Bishop in all his courtship finery. Many birds invest in extravagant plumages and displays in these good times and then molt into drab non-breeding garb at other times. It is costly to be so fancy, so nutrition really matters.



East Africa has many species of weavers, like this Lesser Masked Weaver. They too put on quite a visual and vocal show during breeding season.



Walt Anderson

Here a female Vitelline Masked Weaver peeks out of the fresh nest that she and her mate have constructed at the tip of an acacia twig where they should be safe from climbing rodents and snakes. I am blown away by the birds' abilities to create such elaborate nests.

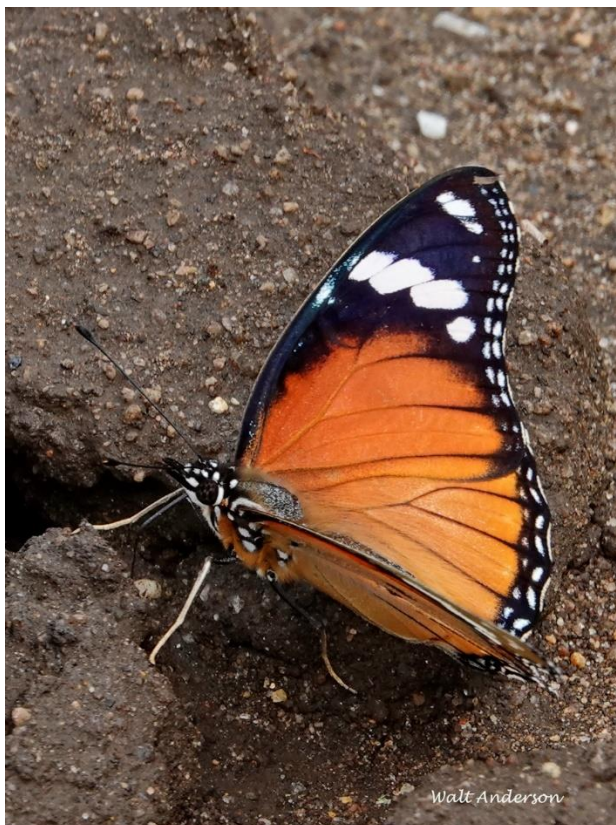


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It looks as if this Hildebrandt's Starling is directing the orchestra, and though that is purely my imagination speaking, it does reflect my thrill in capturing this rare moment.



Gloriosa superba, a gorgeous wild amaryllid, thriving after the rains.



The African Queen (isn't that a movie?) or African Monarch, a close relative of our North American Monarch. It also has spectacular migrations and feeds upon milkweed.



The Black-winged Stilt is an elegant waterbird found in many lakes in East Africa. Of course, waterbirds require water, but it's not quite that simple. Varying salinities can determine if the right kinds of food items are there or not. Kenya has had an extraordinary amount of rain this past year, and lakes are flooding out human communities that never worried before. There is a good chance that hypersaline Lake Bogorio in Kenya may overflow and alter freshwater Lake Baringo, ruining the fishing for the thousands of people who depend on it. Many of those have already been flooded out. As is becoming very obvious, the future is not what it used to be.



The stilt's close relative, the Pied Avocet, turns up its bill at the normal shorebird way of pecking for food items. Instead, it sweeps its scythe-like beak back and forth in the water, snatching up invertebrate tidbits.



One of my favorite ducks is the Cape Teal, a bird of the alkaline (soda) lakes. Though this bird is common now, climate change could certainly affect it in ways we may not be able to predict.



The giraffes are all lined up to see what happens next.



I've been in East Africa during rainy seasons before, but this January-February 2020 was one for the record books in terms of surface water (and locusts in Kenya and north). Safari vehicles are amazing in ruggedness, and this is the kind of adventure one will never forget, but there are limits. Another foot of water, and even this intrepid driver would not have made it through this normally dry swale.

Ecotourism like I have been involved with for decades has the potential to build both public and political support for protecting ecosystems and wildlife. Ecotourists have life-changing experiences, and many commit to helping endangered wildlife. That's good, but unless governments and the people they influence really step up to deal with climate change, this will be an experience only in the history books. I am torn between my love for nature's incredible and lovely diversity and my awareness that it is all at risk unless humans quickly and intelligently change their habits. What an incredible world we live in! Can't we make sure that future generations can have the same veneration and inspiration that we have been lucky enough to receive?