

A Field Guide to the Larger Mammals of Tanzania

By Charles Foley, Lara Foley, Alex Lobora, Daniela De Luca, Maurus Msuha, Tim R. B. Davenport, and Sarah Durant. 2014. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, NJ, USA, 08540-5237. 320 pages, 29.95 USD, Paper.

When I first saw this book I was disappointed by the title “Larger Mammals.” I have long been frustrated by African film makers extreme focus on Lions, Leopards, Buffalo, Elephant and Rhino to the exclusion of all else. I have seen three brief videos of the Honey Badger, totalling less than 15 minutes. This is surely one of the most inscrutable mammals of Africa. It is strong, fearless, tireless, tough and courageous. They will defend against any animal, regardless of size. Lions usually lose this fight. Their thick loose skin is impenetrable to bee stings, porcupine quills, and animal bites. They eat anything – insects, frogs, tortoises, rodents, turtles, lizards, snakes, eggs, birds, honey, fruit and vegetables.

They are immune to the venom of cobras, mambas and adders. Surely such an astounding beast is worth a few hours of TV time.

When I opened the book I sighed with relief. The Honey Badger was included, as well as many other not-so-large mammals. In fact the authors cover galagos as small as a 12 cm (5 inches). So mongooses, weasels, civets, genets, porcupines and hedgehogs are all incorporated. And all creatures are treated equally. The Lion has a two page coverage, but so does the diminutive White-bellied Hedgehog. The authors cover 135 of the 340 species officially recorded in Tanzania. It does not cover rodents (except three of the big ones), bats or

shrews that make up 60 percent of the mammal list. I did see and photograph one mouse; a Natal Mastomys, *Mastomys natalensis*, that took me two years and multiple emails to identify (by an expert in Belgium). The authors provide a URL for The Field Museum in Chicago (archive.fieldmuseum.org/tanzania/index.html – try it, it is worth a look) that provides an excellent, on-line field guide to all the mammals of Tanzania. Only 16 species of confirmed sea mammals are in this book and the authors state this needs further research, as more species are listed for neighbouring Kenya. Oddly the Field Museum lists 24, but the unconfirmed ones have no detail.

The species accounts are tremendous. The text covering description biology distribution and population is sound. The range maps are large and easy to follow. The authors have added a text box on where to look for each species. This is very useful to all tourists. I do not feel so bad for not seeing a (common) Ground Pangolin when they say you are “very lucky if you do see one.”

Each species has at least one and often two or more photographs. They are consistently admirable. Some (Bush Hyrax, White-bellied Hedgehog, Clawless Otter, Cheetah and many antelope) are really cute. The night photos of animals show the eyes as white or red disks that look a little odd. I thought that it would look better if they were photo-shopped, but it is realistic and likely what you with a flashlight.

One animal was quite a surprise; the Kipunji. A close relative of the mangabes, it was the first new monkey to be discovered in 20 years. Only about a thousand of these mammals live in a small corner of Tanzania in a few forest reserves and national parks, making it critically endangered. Its habitat is degraded and fragmented and it suffers from hunting and illegal habitat destruction. No wonder it has a sad look.

There are seven pages of photos that were not labelled so they confused me until I back referenced the pages in the index. They are “Species comparison spreads” – a set of photos with similar species in close proximity. So the reader can compare all the spotted genets and civets, all the mongooses, the antelope and so on. This is so useful for field comparison of look-alike species. When the text notes there are similar species it points you to the correct comparison page.

There is a very important section on the National Parks and major protected areas. Each site has a large photograph overlaid by a locator map and some basic facts. Text boxes list the mammals present with a letter and coloured code indicating their visibility and the chance of seeing one on a two or three day trip. Coupled with the information on the individual species this provides valuable information when planning a trip.

This book is an absolute must for a person going on a safari in Tanzania. It is better than the other mammal guides I own or have seen. It will set you up on where to look. It will help you separate similar species and it will add wonder to your trip. The only other comment I have is that I would like to have this information on Kenya. There is no need to repeat most of the text. A visitor would only need the range maps and the National Park section. Kenya also has a few additional mammals (Grevy’s Zebra and White Rhinos for example) so some type of supplement would be nice.

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Reviewers note: While researching the White-tailed Mongoose I was taken aback to find a page devoted to the hunting exploits of a decorated “conservationist.” He had arranged to have baited traps set by his safari hosts. Not only did he pot his White-tailed Mongoose, his trusty Remington nailed a Striped Hyena, two Honey Badgers, a Rock Hyrax, a Crested Porcupine, a Black tailed Mongoose and an African Wild Cat. These hardly seem good “trophies” or good to eat.