

# HOWARD SAUNDERS

*Professional Guide*

The  
Original  
*Ker & Downey Safaris Ltd.*

Est.  
1946

PO Box 86, Karen 00502  
Nairobi, KENYA  
Tel: (254 20) 884 054  
Fax: (254 20) 891 564  
Mobile: 254 722 742 310

Email: [safaris@howardsaunders.com](mailto:safaris@howardsaunders.com)

Website: [www.HowardSaunders.com](http://www.HowardSaunders.com)

## NOVEMBER 2005 NEWSLETTER

Once again it is time to share a few of my Safari experiences with all of you who have an interest in Africa. Stephanie and I have just returned from an absolutely incredible week long honeymoon in the Seychelles. It was everything we had dreamed of, especially the private paradise on Cousine Island. This was certainly the perfect way to unwind after a busy season full of adventure in the East African wilderness.

### **The Long Awaited Wedding**

After a long and busy season, and an even longer wait by our families, Stephanie and I were finally married in late October this year. We are both very, very happy and feel fortunate to have found each other, as well as such a magical life out here in Kenya. We're so glad many of you have also been able to experience the beauty of this land.



Howard & Steph - the wedding day arrives!

Following the small wedding in Nairobi, which was in the beautiful garden at Ngong House where many of you have stayed while here in Kenya, we flew to the Seychelles. These tropical Islands sprinkled across the Indian Ocean must be one of the most romantic places on the planet. Our last few days were spent relaxing on Cousine, a haven for sea-birds, giant tortoises and nesting Green and Hawksbill turtles. I couldn't imagine a more luxurious way to enjoy the natural beauty of the tropics.



**Steph with one of the giant Indian Ocean tortoises on Cousine Island.**

## **2005 Safaris**

There were so many highlights of the 2005 safari season; it is always hard to know which to write about. However, several stand out which were nothing less than incredible! Just to show how the African wilderness is continually full of surprises, I witnessed two sensational cheetah kills on the Mara plains, both while taking a final game drive to the airstrip! Each time it meant we held up our charter flights, unable to draw ourselves away from the great spectacle of the fastest animal on land launching into full sprint after its stealthy stalk.

For Suzanne Lovell and her kids Alice and Will, this rated as one of the highlights of a thrilling safari in June. Some close encounters with two black-maned male lions while out spotlighting one night was another extremely exciting moment. For the Montgomery family in early July, the cheetah action marked the grand finale of the trip of a lifetime.

Also this year, we continued to enjoy greatly fulfilling cultural experiences with the Masai and Samburu tribes, both in Amboseli and Namunyak Conservancy. Visiting the "singing wells" with good family friends Sharon van Valin and Richard Tait from Seattle, we had the privilege of watching the ancient rituals of Samburu warriors hauling water for their cattle.

Such scenes remind us of how these hardy folk live closely attuned with their environment, and give us new-found respect for the remarkable living they have carved out of it.



**Getting to know the Samburu people.**

There are some moments on safari that make such an impression on both my guests and me, that the story becomes part of Ker & Downey's rich history. While on safari in Amboseli this July with John & Laura Foster and their 3 boys, we had a surprise guest for dinner! This chap is one of the very friendly old elephant bulls who has become accustomed to people due to the many years of study, which is part of Cynthia Moss' research project in the area. On our final evening in camp, he decided to sample a few of the veggies we had in the kitchen, not to mention washing it down with the water from our basins right outside our tents, and having a close inspection of our desserts! A very exciting evening.



**One of the great bull elephants of Amboseli.**

## Ballooning in the Masai Mara - A Story of Hot Air

An early morning scenic flight over the Masai Mara in a hot-air balloon is rated at the very top of the list of "100 things to do before you die". While on safari, setting a morning aside to drift over the endless plains filled with zebra and wildebeest, and the winding rivers alive with hippos, is sure to grant a breathtaking experience.

Naturally, this event becomes a day to look forward to throughout the safari, and there is much anticipation, even about the notorious 'champagne breakfast' to be consumed on touchdown.



**Hot Air Balloon over the Masai Mara Migration.**

On this particular safari, we had planned our hot-air balloon ride for the final day. The action began early as we drove out of camp in the misty pre-morning darkness. After several wrong turns, and a few close calls with some elephant road blocks, I managed to get our party to the balloon take off point in time to all scramble aboard. With dawn's rays piercing the still starlit sky, the basket, and all of us inside it, were whisked up, up and away. We were greeted by picturesque views in every direction as we floated along with the wind. I carried on with the usual 'safari' conversation with the pilot, discussing with experience the many options for scenic breakfast locations and balloon landings along the Mara River.

There is a great deal of planning that goes into timing a balloon landing. The feast that needs to be prepared, along with uncorking of the champagne bottles is all co-ordinated with much precision. So, as usual I continued this impressive dialogue with the pilot who flew a similar, but never identical

path most days throughout the season. With delight, my guests and I viewed countless animals below, and as time drifted by with the scenery, we began also to look forward to the marvelous cuisine that was already being cooked for us.

With his casual yet skilful demeanour, and never short of relevant humour, our pilot began steering us towards the most exquisite picnic breakfast you could ever behold. White linen tablecloths and sizzling bacon awaited our successful touchdown. All created minutes ago, alongside the crocs and hippos, dozing along the riverbank in the morning sun.

With crocs and hippos comes the Mara River; a wide stretch of steep-banked, tree lined water. And with watering mouths as we approached this magical setting, a gust of wind, like the breath of some tinkering Greek god, blew our astonished basket-load straight over our breakfast and the waiting, smiling, welcoming scene below. We were blown right across the Mara River, and left wondering at the whims of nature; one balloon pilot and one safari guide feeling rather embarrassed about this unforeseen miscalculation.

Needless to say, breakfast came later and colder than had originally been hoped for. However, the long drive around to the nearest bridge provided a pride of conciliatory lions...and the food never tasted better than what we ate that morning!

---

I look forward to seeing you out 'on safari' sometime soon,

**All the best,**

**Howard & Stephanie.**