



We are a Family!

Global Family Day, celebrated annually on January 1st, is dedicated to promoting peace, unity, and a sense of global togetherness. The day emphasizes that all people are part of one human family and encourages spending quality time with loved ones while bridging generational and cultural gaps. Originating from the UN's peace initiatives, it serves as a reminder to focus on shared humanity, love, and mutual respect. People often celebrate by connecting with family, biological or chosen, and fostering community bonds, reflecting on compassion, understanding, and the importance of nurturing relationships for a more harmonious world.

#HAPPY NEW YEAR

December Aur January Ka Rishta

The two months recreated as two individuals, two entities, two different personalities, and yet, complementing each other



Gladed to share a beautiful poem, December aur January ka rishta, received from a friend. Very mean-

कितना अजीब है ना,
दिसंबर और जनवरी का
रिश्ता?
जैसे पुरानी यादों और नए
बादों का किस्सा...

दोनों काफी नाजूक है
दोनों से गहराई है,
दोनों वक्त के राही है,
दोनों ने ठोकर खायी है...

यूँ तो दोनों का है
वही चेहरा-वही रंग,
उतनी ही तारीखें और
उतनी ही ठंड...
पर पहचान अलग है
दोनों की
अलग है अंदाज़ और
अलग हैं ढंग...

एक अन्त है,
एक शुरुआत जैसे
रात से सुबह,
और सुबह से रात...

एक मे याद है
दूसरे मे आस,
एक को है तजुर्बा,
दूसरे को विश्वास...

दोनों जुड़े हुए हैं ऐसे
धामे के दो छोर के जैसे,

पर देखो दूर रहकर भी
साथ निभाते हैं कैसे...

जो दिसंबर छोड़ के जाता है
उसे जनवरी अपनाता है,
और जो जनवरी के बादे है
उन्हें दिसम्बर निभाता है...

कैसे जनवरी से
दिसम्बर के सफर मे
११ महीने लग जाते है...
लेकिन दिसम्बर से जनवरी बस
१ पल मे पहुँच जाते है !!

जब ये दूर जाते है
तो हाल बदल देते है,
और जब पास आते है
तो साल बदल देते है...
देखने मे ये साल के महज़
दो महीने ही तो लगते
हैं, लेकिन...
सब कुछ बिखेरने और
समेटने का वो कायदा
भी रखते है...

दोनों ने मिलकर ही तो
बाकी महीनों को
बांध रखा है,

अपनी जुदाई को
दुनिया के लिए
एक त्यौहार बना रखा है...!



Elephant Herd.



Sunayan Sharma
IFS (Retd.), Ex Field
Director, Project
Tiger, Sariska &
Keoladeo National
Park, Bharatpur

Few years back, my fascination for wildlife took me to the world's most famous NP, Maasai Mara, located in the Southern part of Kenya and spread up to border of Tanzania, another nation of East Africa, and equally famous for its myriad wildlife. Wildlifers from world over pour here to be part of this garden of God, with numerous animals including big fives like Lions, Elephants, Cheetahs, Rhinos and wild buffaloes. But to me, a wildlife freak, the chief attraction was watching beautiful Zebras, Giraffes and uncoun ted wildebeests spread over its huge grasslands with scattered shrubs and acacia trees.

The most fascinating was to watch herds and herds of zebras with beautiful shining striped coats and wildebeest, following them, to cross over the Mara river, to reach their homes in the serenity of Serengeti Reserve of Tanzania.

Several of them lose their lives during this process, either by simply slipping back into the river or falling victim to carnivores like lions, leopards, cheetahs and crocodiles, camping at the crossing points on either side of Mara.

It was almost mid of September, season was awesome, though there was little water in the Reserve, to support such a great number of large beasts. Mara too was silent and just good enough to provide hiding bush to hippos.

I was very curious to learn as to



what makes these wildebeests and zebras take up this arduous journey, full of risk to their lives, every year, without fail.

This had aroused my curiosity to peep in to the other side of Mara, in to the plains of Serengeti to understand the phenomenon to satisfy an old wildlife manager's inquisitiveness.

Several things happened in last one decade to keep me from making this adventure trip, but it was my dream, so these obstacles or not, I decided not to let them deter me from making this trip at long last. Ultimately last September 2025, I flew to Tanzania to land at its small airport, Kilimanjaro, named after the mount having highest peak (5895 mtr) in entire African continent. It is also the highest volcano in the Eastern hemisphere.

I was accompanied by my friend Ramjilal Agrawal, who was with me also on the last Masaaimara trip. We drove to Arusha, a fairly good town with people from different ethnicities. Arusha hosts mountaineers and wildlife enthusiasts from world over, with a majority from Europe. Bill Clinton, the then President of USA, nicknamed it, 'Geneva of Africa.' The town has ample number of good Indian restaurants.

While heading to Arusha for the

night stay, our guide with pride shared that the Christian dominated Tanzania, with 7 crore of people, is home to Muslims too, with about 40% of the population and several lakh others practicing different faiths/religions including Hindus and Sikhs. He boasted Tanzania to be among most peaceful countries in the continent.

With high yields of tea, coffee, cotton, cashew and tobacco, it is an agro-based country but earns huge revenue from export of gold, diamond, tanzanite, chrome, oil and gas.

We did not encounter much problem during this trip as English too is an official language along with Swahili, this otherwise highly diverse country, inhabiting about 125 ethnic groups of people speaking more than 100 languages.

Early morning, we started from Arusha with bag and baggage in the vehicle with convertible roof, specially made for jungle trips. Also, a small fridge was fitted in its luggage compartment.

Though Tanzania possesses 22 National Parks, but of all of them, the Serengeti, located on its North, is richest in wildlife. In fact, Serengeti ecosystem is much bigger than the Serengeti National Park and encompasses other wildlife reserves like Ngorongoro Conservation Area and Tarangire National Park.

I had begun with my immense fascination for elephants, an extraordinary animal, that I started this wildlife expedition in Tanzania from the Tarangire National Park, which supports a mentionably high elephant population.

This 2400 Sq km reserve is located about 120 kilometer West of Arusha, the tourist hubspot. It was a pleasure driving through a new highway, with sparse vehicle, very unlike Indian roads. In fact, this entire landscape, more popular as Serengeti, is home to semi-nomadic pastoralist tribes like Maasai and Barbeig, living in harmony with the wild inhabitants from times immemorial.

Yet, with the rise of awareness about human rights and political support, the locals are showing their resentment against growing man-animal conflicts, especially during dry season when animals in large number raid their crops. Government is running several schemes to provide safe corridor to such migrating populations and also running welfare schemes for the people falling victim to such raids by herbivores and attacks by carnivores.

It was interesting to note that tiny school kids had lined up at the Park entrance gate under supervision of their teachers. With sun high in the sky, it seemed bit too much for these kids, yet, they

#EASTERN AFRICA



Lunch spot inside Tarangire NP.

seemed okay. Also, some photo sessions were going on, arranged by the schools for individuals and groups, to capture these moments. Unlike Indian Wildlife Reserves, this booking place had adequate washroom facilities for the visitors. The waiting compound was full of safari vehicles with tourists, mostly Europeans. Interestingly, alike ours, all the vehicles were loaded with suitcases and other luggage, indicating that most of these were heading to Serengeti National Park after completing this visit.

At the entrance gate were two huge, gigantic trees. The guide identified this to be 'Baobab (Adansonia digitata) tree,' an iconic tree to this reserve and the larger landscape. Of course, this huge, branchy tree spread in this entire reserve adds unique beauty to the

landscape by forming skyline. It is believed that a baobab tree lives for centuries. Though all kinds of animals, birds enjoy its shade, but it is a favourite of elephants, as to them, it is the only tree which can provide adequate shade during hot hours, considering the size of the beast. Also, Baobab is believed to store thousands of liters of water in its trunk for its survival through the draughts. Like Peepal (Ficus religiosa) in India, this African baobab bears high cultural value for Tanzanians, they ascribe to it endurance and wisdom.

While we were searching for some elephant herds, suddenly, the guide spotted a huge python (African Rock Python) wrapped around branch of an acacia tree. Its skin decorated with attractive patterns/ blotches was shining under



Author at Kilimanjaro Airport.

sunlight. There was a pair of horn-bill birds, not very far from this monster who was cautiously inching forward to take these in its grip.

The birds, busy in conference with each other, seemed totally unaware of the carnivore's movement. We were impatiently viewing this drama of nature. The clever python motionlessly kept crawling ahead till the tall birds' hanging tail came in its range. And then, suddenly, the giant leapt upwards opening its tunnel like mouth to grab the birds. The impact of the act was so intense that it could stop any onlooker's breath for a while. Our eyes were riveted to the scene.

While serving Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur for half a decade, I had the opportunity to witness pythons catching even big animals but it was something new to

me too, a new understanding of animal behaviour. The birds had seemed foolish not to notice the mighty enemy's presence, and suddenly sensed its presence and fled away clean.

Ramji, my friend, not much conversant with this science of nature, exhaled a big sigh of relief at the failure of this trap; to me, it was witnessing an interesting drama.

We were not very far from the Tarangire river, the lifeline of this reserve. Being noon, it was not a good time to expect much activity on the land, therefore, I asked the driver to check the river side. I was hoping to see some elephant herds there. While rushing towards the river side, we witnessed a small herd of 'fringe eared oryx' resting under a huge baobab tree. This beautiful animal was a new species



Zebras.

for me. Tarangire supports a good number of this antelope.

Mostly, they are nomadic and travel in herds in search of new pastures. Peculiarly, a dominant female leads the herd while a dominant male works as a guard and protector by staying at the tail. Rarely, some males live solo; marking their territory by their dung like the Indian Nilgai.

While crossing through the semi-dried grassland, I sighted two wild bear like animals. These were Warthogs, a relative of Wild boar, though pretty different in anatomy and appearance.

These grey skinned animals bore a mane of long, dark brown hair on their spine but rest of the body had sparse hair. They had two pairs of tusks, of which the sizably huge one, set upper side was typically curved upwards unlike wild boars, belonging to the same family. The guide told that it is used for fights and establishing individual's superiority over others. 23 pairs of bumps on their snouts too made them appear so different from Wild boars. The guide shared that their razor sharp lower tusks are more deadly than the longer ones. This reserve is full of these animals as 'Tarangire' means 'River of Warthogs.'

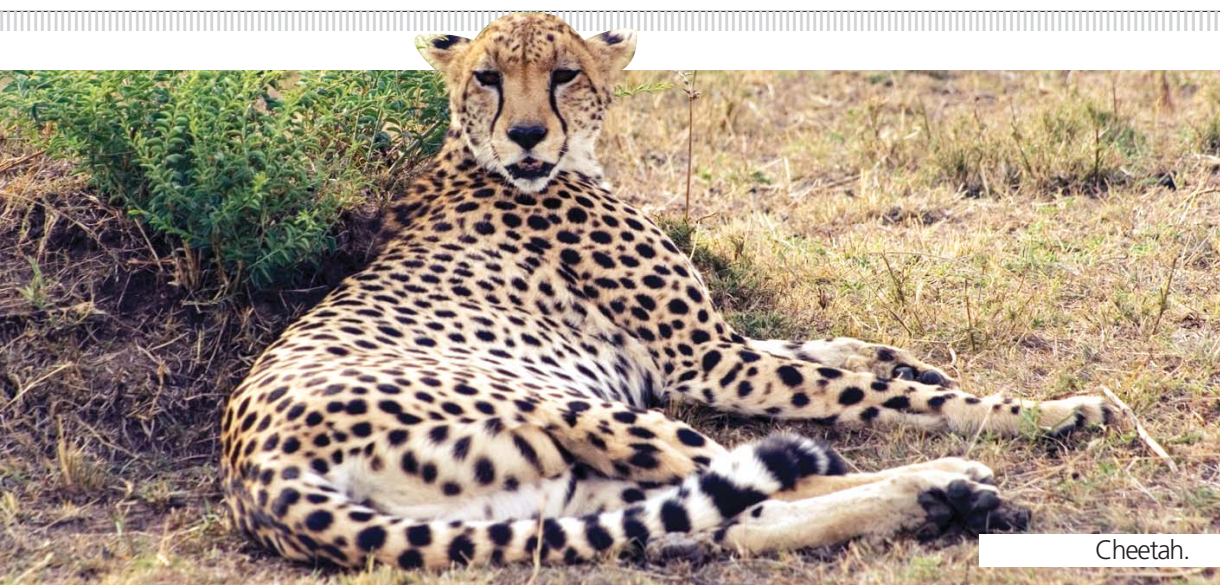
This prolific breeder certainly serves as great prey base for the carnivores here like lions, leopards and cheetahs.

Apart from savanna with shrubs and scattered baobab, acacia trees, the reserve is a treasure of river valleys and swamps, supporting huge number of animal species. The granitic ridges covered with thin grass and scattered trees, shrubs add special affect to the beauty of the wilderness.

While I was busy capturing views of grasslands and valleys, a small herd of elephants came close to us. I was still engrossed in my job, when my friend Ramji nudged me with a whisper an alert about the approaching 'bigs.' Oh my God; the female elephant with a calf was almost upon us. I ducked down into the safety of the vehicle, lest it pick me up by its loosely hanging huge trunk.

I asked the driver to pull back but he did not; perhaps, he was more knowledgeable about elephant behaviour in this part of the world; well in India, it was impossible to save yourself if a wild elephant comes so close to you. Perhaps, here, the elephants were more used to tourist cars like the tigers in many of Indian National Parks.

Inspite of the driver's assurance, I was not ready to take any chance with elephants coming so close to us. I insisted to move towards the river. September in Tanzania, being a dry season, the



Cheetah.



river had narrowed considerably, yet, there was enough water for playful elephants and their calves. Unlike Indian subcontinent, in Africa, female elephants too bear tusks like the males. It was difficult to distinguish their gender except for presence of calves who keep sticking to their mothers.

The tusks' ivory shining under the sun rays spraying from the western granite hills partially covered with short grasses and scattered trees, had increased the mesmerizing effect of the scene before our eyes. More and more elephants were joining this group, enhancing the size of the herd. Generally, they were silent but the small herd of some male elephants, grazing at not much distance from the female herd, were not so quiet.

The tallest of this group was pushing another tusker, who seemed no match to it in size but was resisting it by trumpeting and kicking dust now and again. Seemingly, the smaller one was not ready to give up in the presence of the females, though at a distance. This friendly fight was not only a feast to our eyes but also to the female elephants, who gazed at them occasionally. And then suddenly, the taller giant attacked the smaller one with intention to knock

it down; here, the poor fellow gave up and ran away towards the river-side for life, ending the duel.

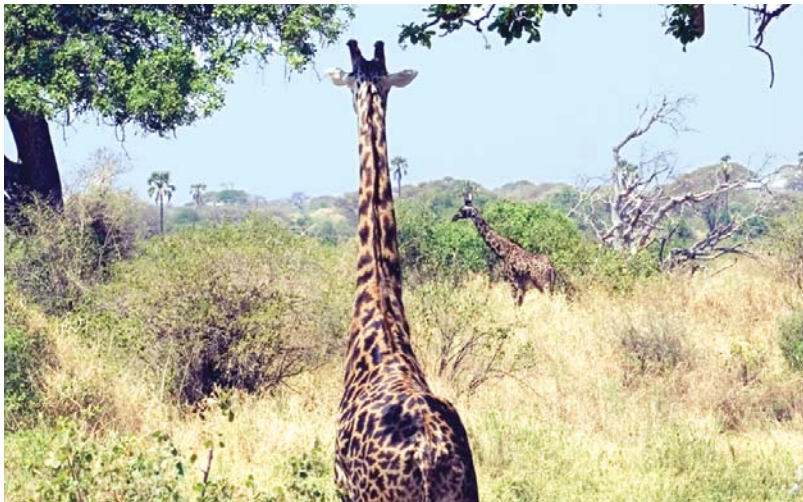
The presence of several young and very young calves was a proof of healthy elephant population in Tarangire.

It was impressive to find a designated proper lunch site inside the Park, consisting of one open platform and another one guarded by an iron mesh against intruding animals, especially the Vervet monkeys, fond of visiting such picnic areas; but we encountered none. Ofcourse, after lunch while heading towards the northern side, we found a troop of Baboons, resting under the shade of a huge Baobab tree; they otherwise are commonly found around the waterholes. But for a short tall and peculiar back, its front resembles the Indian Hanuman langoor.

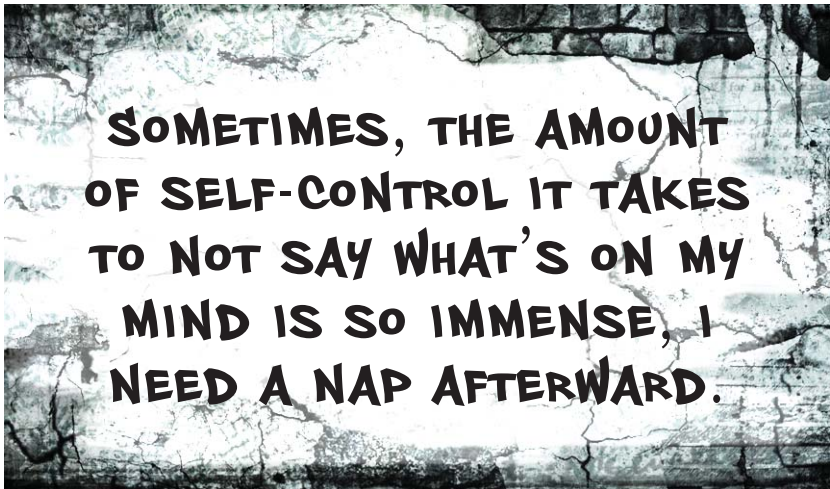
I knew that asking for cheetah sighting was bit too much at this hot hour of the day, yet, our eyes were roving all around for it. The driver wanted to leave the reserve soon, in order to reach the night halting place, at Karatu, some 100 km away from here. While I wanted to hang around bit longer and try our luck for cheetah sighting. The driver was scared of strict police rules against speedy vehicles especially on highways and was in hurry to exit. Unwillingly, I gave up knowing that we had him with us for the entire trip and little roughing could spoil our Serengeti trip as well.

We headed towards the exit, and then, on a turn found a medium sized cheetah, resting under an Acacia tree. It was a great sight, a feast to our eyes and my camera, and I went crazy capturing this beautiful animal; that we lost in Indian jungles 3/4th century back. All sighting that could be wished for accomplished by grace of God.

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Giraffe.

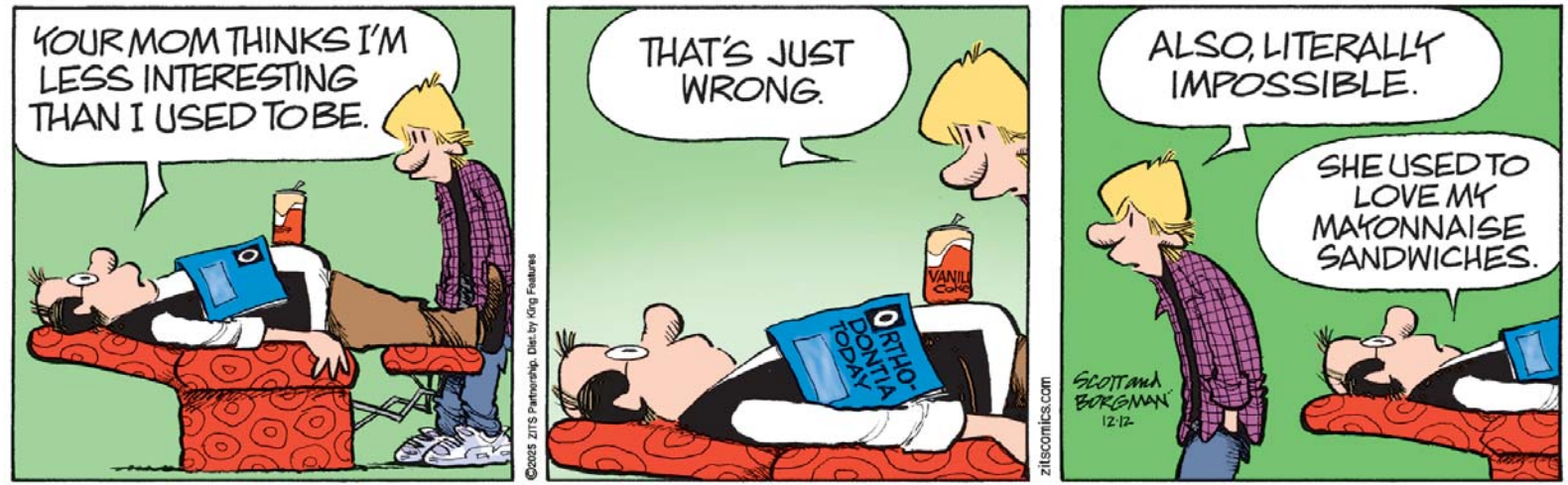


BABY BLUES



By Rick Kirkman & Jerry Scott

ZITS



By Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman