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Lake Manyara National Park

Manyara is a small but scenic park, excellent for birdwatching, a good area to find elephant, which offers the chance to spot a legendary Lake Manyara tree-climbing lion. Manyara is often visited for half a day at the start or end of a safari, as it lies on route to Ngorongoro and the Serengeti.

On reaching the National Park you first encounter a small museum, or rather a room packed with an ageing and dusty collection of badly stuffed birds and animals. It is probably a better idea to continue into the park and take a chance with whatever might come your way in its full bodied and living form. The park is often awash with butterflies, particularly just after the long rains, at the end of May and through June. Manyara is a good soft introduction to the safari experience, a pretty park through which a mainly forested driving route wends its way between the banks of the soda-water Lake Manyara and the impressive rise of the Great Rift escarpment. Elephant, giraffe, buffalo and wildebeest can be found grazing in unexpected clearings or heading towards the water to drink or wash, and the rivers and riverbeds provide scenic vistas for animal-spotting. Warthogs seem to thrive here, growing fat and tuskered, and it is a natural playground for baboons and monkeys.

The legendary tree-climbing lion of Lake Manyara, although notoriously rarely seen, have inspired extensive theorising about the wonders of evolution. It has been suggested that they may have developed their scrambling skill to escape the tsetse flies that bite below, or to get a better view of prey amid the denser thicket. Lions have also reportedly been seen up trees in Tarangire Park and the Serengeti, although these are even more rarely spotted than those in Lake Manyara, where the low branches of the numerous spreading acacia provide a fine frame for apprentice climbers.