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## **Further information about the Selous Game Reserve**

The Rufiji River with its lagoons, sandbanks and lakes, and the surrounding forests and woodlands that make up the Selous Game Reserve create a unique and very unusual safari environment. The spectrum of wildlife is equally diverse, and distinct in that this southern location attracts a unique combination of East and Southern African wildlife, both resident and migratory, and particularly a curious and colourful assortment of over 440 known species of birds. The vast area contained within the boundaries of the Selous Game Reserve accounts for 5% of the landmass of Tanzania, and yet there are just a few options for tourist accommodation, and all are high quality, low-impact lodges that maintain high standards. The freedom to take walking and boating safaris within the reserve means that guiding standards are also especially good and can extend to include excellent options to fly-camp overnight in the bush. All of these allow visitors to enjoy memorably varied perspectives on life in this green and lush southern corner.

Covering almost 50,000 square km, an area greater than the size of Switzerland, the Selous game reserve is one of the largest areas set aside for wildlife preservation anywhere in the world, although only a small northern portion is allocated for photographic tourism. This is also an area that naturally appeals to a photographic lens, as the waterways and plains reflect all the changing colours of the sun and attract numerous well-feathered water birds and raptors.

The Selous was declared a 'World Heritage site' by the UN in 1982, but the number of visitors is still below 5,000 per year and this lack of mass tourism ensures that those who do visit the Selous enjoy a true wilderness experience. The tourist sector north of the Rufiji River extends to Stiegler's Gorge in the west and the TAZARA railway in the north, and contains all the various forms of vegetation to be found in this ecosystem. A combination of the Rufiji River with its meandering streams, ox-bow lakes and swamplands, as well as open woodlands, plains and dense thicket forests makes the Selous an interesting ecological environment and an ideal location to explore over a number of days by vehicle, on boat trips and on foot.

### ***Landscape and bearings***

The scenery is varied, with unusually green grasses and tangles of vegetation, and inspires a film depleting string of photographic moments with each turn in the path. The river routes are characterised by legions of tall Borassus Palms along the banks that grow up to 25m tall, and leave a tall headless totem when the water courses change direction and they become too thirsty to survive. The same demise is thought to explain the spooky

silhouettes of ancient leadwood trees that remain preserved intact when they die after up to two millennia of life, leaving a skeletal perch for songbirds and raptors that retains a perfect yet utterly lifeless photogenic poise. The Selous conserves a surprisingly colourful African landscape, and the white forms of the leadwoods are in stark contrast to the surrounding vibrancy of well-watered greens and a ranging palette of sandy terracottas that reflect with the moods of the sun on the waters. The eastern area of the reserve around Selous Safari Camp, Rufiji River Camp and Mbuyu Camp is mainly a grassy woodland, with a mass of Terminalia trees and sweet-scented African mahogany providing fragrant shady areas through which to enjoy walking safaris. Further north, and westwards towards the rise of the Beho Beho Mountains, the land is mainly covered by low miombo woodland. These can be reached as a full day trip from the south-easterly camps such as Mbuyuni. The Western reaches of the reserve are the least developed, with Sand Rivers Selous presently the only camp in the area, and the elevation gives magnificent views across the woodlands and plains of the southerly hills. Here the Rufiji River forms a narrow 8km creek through a chasm in the hard rock. This scenic region is now called Stiegler's Gorge, after the unfortunate Swiss fellow who came to a sorry end when he met an elephant here at the turn of the last century.

### ***Wildlife and birds***

The many intricate waterways and tributaries of the ever-meandering Rufiji River Delta attract a healthy population of elephant, and are packed full of grunting hippopotami and yawning crocodile that lumber ominously into the water at the first sound of a boat. The banks attract different sized herds of plains game depending on the season. Herds disperse after the rains and then later regroup when the water sources concentrate and they are forced to venture into the open to drink, so risking predator attacks with the protection of the crowd. A mass of water birds can be seen along the sandbanks, lagoons and riverine channels, where colourful-legged terns and long legged yellow-billed storks make up a comical feeding trio with huge beaked pelicans in the shallows, and twitchers might watch out for the Madagascar Squacco or a White-Backed Night heron. The swift and elegant flight of African Skimmers is a delight to see, as is feisty interaction between birds - such as the statuesque Goliath heron vying for territory with a broad-chested African Fish Eagle. Boat trips along the river are coloured with glimpses of at least eight different species of kingfisher, and up to nine different bee-eaters can be found in the woodland areas. Special examples of the latter include the Bohm and Swallowtail bee-eaters and, in the height of summer, the northern species of carmine bee-eater can be seen. The lucky birdwatcher may also catch an evening glimpse of Pel's fishing owl, a small nocturnal fellow who only fishes under the cover of night.

Safaris in the Selous provide a rare opportunity to spot an uncommon range of animals, but the terrain makes chances of seeing them much harder than flat, short grass plains - such as those of the Serengeti. Nevertheless, these woodlands and savannah support a wide range of wildlife, particularly antelope and wildebeest and a famously large population of elephant.

A number of lion prides reside in the Selous, and there is always the possibility of a chance encounter in the bush. More often their roars can be heard from your lodge beds at morning and night, and their trails then spotted nerve-rackingly close to camp. The

river and bush habitat also suits the reclusive nature of the leopard, who have a reputation for being frustratingly hard to find although they are also prolific in the area, and again it is possible to catch a tantalising glimpse of scratches and signs of their activity in trees. There remains a fair chance of spotting leopard, or at least arriving at camp just the day after reports of the best sightings all year. Much less likely is the hope of seeing cheetah here, although there is a reported tiny population, whereas they are prolific on the Serengeti plains. Conversely, African Wild Dog are a rare and protected species throughout Africa, but are thriving in the Selous where they are less plagued by hyenas than elsewhere in Tanzania, (although hyenas are also common here). Giraffe seem to extend their necks above bushes around every turn in the road, and are often surprised into their cinematically slow motion but surprisingly graceful flight. Skittering zebra are an impressive sight against the burnished grasses, and you might encounter either of the two resident species of wildebeest, the black-bearded gnu and the southern species of Nyasa wildebeest, or come across a herd of grumpy buffalo.

There is a possibility of a chance sighting of a less moody but more beautiful rare sable antelope around Matambwe and up to Stiegler's Gorge, and sometimes the impressive figure of a greater Kudu is seen standing proudly with its long spiralled horns aloft. The Selous is home to large herds of eland, the largest antelope of all, and the Selous eland are reputed to grow the longest horns of any in East Africa. These huge record-breaking antelope with astonishing agility for their size are a fairly common sight. You may also come across an Eastern Bohor reedbuck, smaller than an impala, or the hefty features of the Lichtenstein's Hartebeest, a breed unique to the Selous. Maybe you will see a shy white-banded bushbuck or more common waterbuck, with its target-like ring characterising its round rump.

### *Types of safari*

Walking and boating safaris are generally a morning or afternoon excursion, but can be extended if required and arranged with your guides. Both are exciting and always varied, according to the unpredictable nature of the bush and the swirling waters. All walking safaris should be accompanied with an armed ranger, for your own safety. Selous Safari Camp and Sand Rivers Selous can organise fly-camping expeditions into the bush, in which guests walk with a guide and set up camp each night. These have previously been available for one night only, but these have been extended to run for several days in response to popular request. Such expeditions require a great deal of organisation and personal service, and are consequently often more expensive than the usual daily rate for the lodge, but extremely worthwhile if they can be afforded.

Fishing with a line is permitted in the reserve, with the potential to catch either a tiger or catfish, on the condition that your lodge will supply a permit,.

Selous Safari Camp and Sand Rivers Selous have good swimming pools for a post-safari dip