



**GOING PLACES**

**JOHN GOONEY**

# **ROAR OF THE LION**

Imagine a time before Covid, when the world was still our oyster and adventures could still be had. Imagine lying on a bed in Africa, in a tent, in the evening, in the middle of a wildlife reserve. Birds have quit singing. Monkeys have stopped leaping on the canvas roof and swinging from the ropes. Imagine staring through the open flap at a triangle of darkness. Then imagine, suddenly, in the silence, a ROAR! A sharp, explosive, repeated ROAR! And imagine the hair standing up on the back of your neck as you realise (gulp!) ... IT'S A LION!

**W**e'd seen several that afternoon. And when this one roared a second time, I realised it probably wasn't that close. It probably was a safe distance from our camp ... probably on the far side of the dry riverbed ... and it had probably just scored a hot meal.

Probably ...

But half an hour later, as I nervously walked through the trees towards a lit-up dining area and the smell of barbecued steak, my heart was still beating faster than usual.

"You hear that lion?" I asked casually. And they had, of course. "But don't worry," assured our Kenyan friends. "Lions never come into the camp." Although, just the week before, two angry males had staged a grand battle on the opposite bank, in full view of a willing lioness plus a campful of tourists.

"My parents taught us what the lion's call means," explained Jack, our driver. And he gave a fair imitation of a deep, grunting roar (in English!): "**WHOSE LAND IS THIS? WHOSE LAND IS THIS? MINE ... MINE ... MINE!**"

Welcome to Africa ...

**O**ur campsite was five hours north of Nairobi, past shanty-towns and roadside markets, along the pot-holiest 'highway' I've ever endured. Our tents sat on decks under trees along the dried-up Ewaso Nyiro River – a stunning location, oozing with atmosphere. And, as I dozed in a deckchair after lunch, I saw birds everywhere: weavers, hornbills, and lilac breasted rollers. Tiny squirrels foraging in the dry grass. And cheeky monkeys daring me to ignore the signs and leave my tent unpeeped.



Lilac breasted rollers

On a nearby rocky outcrop some angry baboons got into a screaming contest. But I never found out who won. It was now 4pm, and we were off on a game-drive.

**I**n the cool of late afternoon, Africa's wildlife starts waking up. And, less than 10 minutes along a bumpy track, Jack spotted a leopard, a big specimen, slinking through the undergrowth, clearly unimpressed by a 4WD with humans dangling cameras out the open top. Two kilometres on we interrupted an alert lionesses, scoping the grassland – dinner for her cubs?





52 CARDS = 1 DECARDS.

The thrills kept coming, thick and fast: a traffic jam of plump stripey zebras ... graceful impala flicking their white tails at us ... cute gazelles sprinting off, almost airborne at times ... towering giraffes, snatching a drink from a mudhole ... and a big bull kudu with massive upright curly horns, eyeing us nervously.

Incredible! I honestly couldn't believe my luck ...

**N**ext morning, after early coffee around an open fire, it was back to work. We'd seen proof the night before that elephants were here – a trail of smashed trees, and elephant-poops the size of footballs. But no elephants.

Maybe this morning?

Five wide-awake warthogs trotted along in front of us, tails high in the air. A huge cape buffalo glared at us

grumpily as we steered around him. A squadron of ugly vultures arguing over the remains of a kill. Then, suddenly, we were amongst them – elephants, dozens of them, everywhere – mums, mainly, with long tusks, ever protective of their young – and a playful little baby, just a month or two old.

Talk about better-than-advertised!

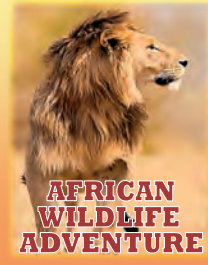
And as we drove back to camp for a well-deserved breakfast, the hot sun rose higher in the sky. Another ordinary day in Africa had begun ...

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WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN JOHN & ROBYN COONEY ON A MAD MIDLIFE SAFARI TO KENYA & TANZANIA? IT ALL DEPENDS ON COVID, OF COURSE, AND WE'LL ONLY TRAVEL IF IT'S SAFE. BUT HOPEFULLY THAT'LL BE AUGUST 2022 – AND WE'VE STILL GOT ROOM FOR YOU! PHONE GLEN (BOOKINGS MANAGER) 0800 323 333 – OR EMAIL [INFO@MIDLIFEMADNESS.TOURS](mailto:INFO@MIDLIFEMADNESS.TOURS).

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