

September Program Review

By *Tim Johnson*

On September 4, about 70 armchair travelers assembled to hear Jim Esten, photo editor of *The Lark Bunting*, present a slide show drawn from his travels to Africa. Esten, a longtime Colorado resident, won the trip to the Zulu Nyala Safari Game Lodge in South Africa at an auction in 2015. He traveled to Tanzania for a privately organized trip in February 2018, visiting Tarangire National Park, the Ngorongoro Crater, and Serengeti National Park.

Esten's presentation was a basic travelogue. He introduces himself on his website as "just an amateur", but his talent was evident from the pictures he shared. Since his full presentation is available at the past programs page on the DFO website, I will mention only what I thought were a few highlights.

Esten introduced the talk with some advice for would-be wildlife photographers. He uses a manual "raw data" setting rather than JPEG or other formats in order to maximize detail to work with in a finished shot. He is a fan of photography clubs, finding the critique process stimulating, if at times exasperating. Finally, he urges spending money- the bigger the lens, the better the detail. Esten carried two cameras with him, one with a 500mm lens.

A variety of animals roam the grounds of the Zulu Nyala Safari Game lodge, including ungulates and a cheetah. Notable images and sound from this site include a tree full of weaverbird nests, looking like hairy grapefruit; the Hadeda Ibis, with its famed loud call; Jackass Penguins, with the "braying" for which they are name; and Vervet Monkeys quietly watching a sunset.



Jim Esten was the presenter at the September program. His wife Karen traveled with him to Africa.

In Tarangire National Park, Tanzania, Esten encountered some excitement - an elephant having a temper tantrum. The animal's belligerence blocked the road and forced the photographers to hunker down in their vehicle and photograph through the windshield. Finally, the elephant stomped away, destroying a termite mound in the process. In addition to many birds, Esten captured a leopard stalking a warthog and a herd of Cape buffalo.

Esten spoke about the baobab trees in this landscape. They can be as tall as 100 feet in height and up to 36 feet in diameter. They can store thousands of gallons of water to carry them through times of drought. Bird images from this site included the Bateleur, a colorful, short-tailed eagle and Crowned Hornbills.

At the Ngorongoro Crater, Esten's most arresting shots were of a Grant's gazelle giving birth; the baby was walking within 15 minutes.

Images of Serengeti National Park occupied about half of Esten's presentation. His tent camp had a resident lion and he shared the lions' wildebeest breakfast complete with sound effects. Among Esten's favorite shots at this site were a rare daytime sighting of an aardvark; a White-Headed Buffalo Weaver; a Secretary Bird, which subdues prey by stomping on it; and a hyena lazing in a river. My personal favorites are the images of the strange Hamerkop; Marabou Storks, which accompany vultures to carrion; Ground Hornbill; and the Vulture Smorgasbord, which reminded me of the current Senate Judiciary Committee's Kavanaugh confirmation hearings.

I urge readers to visit Esten's web site and the recording of his full program on the DFO website. Better yet, go to Tanzania! I'll have that privilege soon and hope it measures up to Esten's portraits.