

A LONG WAY FROM anywhere

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHS **ROBERT J. ROSS**

The Selous Game Reserve in southern Tanzania is not only Africa's largest and oldest protected area, it is one of the wildest and least known on the continent. I took what I thought would be a 10-day trip there in 2009 to photograph and write an article on one of the hunting blocks that had been converted to photographic tourism. Once there, I realised that the Selous offered and deserved more. The wildlife, birdlife and landscapes are exceptional by any measure. That short visit morphed into a six-year project, taking me to all corners of the 50 000-square-kilometre reserve. The result was the recent publication of *The Selous in Africa: A Long Way from Anywhere*.

The game reserve, until recently home to one of the two largest elephant populations on the continent, also hosts more wild dogs than any other protected area, a handful of black rhinos, the Nyasa wildebeest and many other animals not seen elsewhere. More than 460 bird species have been recorded there, including Böhm's Bee-eater, Palm-nut and Rüppell's vultures, Great and Pink-backed Skimmers, countless Southern Ground-Hornbills and the seasonal treat of flocks of thousands of Northern Carmine Bee-eaters. I was fortunate to photograph the first recorded sighting of Wattle-crane in the game reserve, as well as the lone Humblot's Heron that has been seen on the African mainland.

The Selous, larger than Switzerland and hiding in plain sight south of Dar es Salaam, is definitely worth a visit. >



above A pair of Northern Carmine Bee-eaters rest while waiting for a warthog to start moving and stir up insects for the birds to catch. The bee-eaters are seasonal visitors to the Selous.

previous spread A Black-winged Stilt glides over a still Lake Siwandu. The oxbow lakes of the northern Selous were created following a shift that occurred in the course of the Rufiji River during the 1960s.



above An African Fish Eagle, one of the large raptors to be found in the Selous, takes off with a young Nile crocodile gripped securely in its talons.

right The African Jacana is sometimes referred to as the Jesus Bird for its seeming ability to walk on water thanks to its extremely elongated toes. The species has a symbiotic relationship with hippos, receiving food in return for ridding the mammals of unwanted insects and parasites.





left Great Egrets and borassus palms are commonly found in and around the lakes and rivers of the game reserve.

below During the breeding season the Yellow-billed Stork's feathers turn from white to a delicate shade of pink and its bill becomes a deeper and brighter yellow.





The White-browed Sparrow-weaver is resident in the reserve. Its nests are positioned on the leeward side of trees; breeding nests have a single entrance, whereas those used for roosting typically have two. It is not uncommon for a tree to support more than 50 sparrow-weaver nests.

Pink-backed Pelicans share the landscape with a vast array of mammals, including the Cape buffalo and Masai giraffe seen here, as well as wild dogs and one of the largest elephant populations in Africa.



Robert J. Ross's *The Selous in Africa: A Long Way from Anywhere* is published by Officina Libraria, Milan. ISBN 978-88-97737-64-3. Hardcover; 276 pages. US\$65.

Available to order from Peter Hyde Associates through any South African bookstore or from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) for international orders.