

Serengeti Song

Every ecosystem is an amazing, carefully choreographed symphony of many parts. And so it is with the vast subtropical grasslands of east Africa, the Serengeti and Masai Mara. The grass lands are essential to the continued survival of the grazers like the zebra, and the grazers, who mow, fertilize and reseed the plains, are equally essential to the maintenance to the of the savanna.

In *Serengeti Song*, I detail some of the elements and animals which share in the shaping and maintaining of this sea of grass. In the lower left is one of the ancient volcanoes which spewed out the nutrient rich ash, forming the volcanic soil that is the foundation of the savanna. Next to the volcano is an *Acacia tortillis* tree, the iconic umbrella - shaped tree whose leaves, bark, bloom and shade nurtures much of the life on the plains. Above the volcano and tree are some of Africa's' heavyweight, such as the elephant, a keystone species with the ability to transform its environment. With their prodigious appetites, and nomadic ways, over long periods of time, they create woodland from grassland and grassland from woodland. Above the elephant and rhino are small antelope, which use their tiny mussels to pluck the tender shoots from between the stubble of the taller grasses, which is left by the bigger grazers such as the wildebeest.

At the top of the drawing are the predators, lion, leopard and cheetah, whose job it is to keep the numbers of the prey species in check. By weeding out the old and the weak, the predators not only strengthen the prey animals' gene pool, but also their own.

Every element and being, even the clean-up crew in the form of the lowly dung beetle the bottom of the drawing is an essential note in the grand symphony of the savanna system.