

A Big Mammal Day

Last month I believe I set a new world record for number of mammal species seen in one day. It helps of course that nobody has tried it before, but that is of minor consequence to me in this period of triumph and glory. In preparing for the endeavour I had to decide what rules I would follow, with the big question being whether to count trapped specimens or only include free-ranging animals. Small rodents and bats can be difficult to see and often impossible to identify to species level in the field so trapping is considered standard practice in the mammal community. The problem though is how to create a level playing field. Almost every country has a bevy of regulations controlling the capture and handling of wild animals, and few outside the scientific or wildlife community are able to obtain the necessary permits. If trapping were allowed this would restrict this activity to a select group of individuals, and limit its potential for dramatic world-wide expansion. The gentlemanly thing to do, I decided, was to allow everyone a fair chance; I abandoned the idea of trapping and instead followed the rules set by the American Birding Association. Hearing an animal call would count, and, for species such as rodents and bats that are hard to identify to species level, identification could occur at genus level, with only one animal of that genus allowed per list. Participants would also have to find the animals without assistance from others.

Of course while keeping the rules fair is the honourable thing to do, it doesn't prevent one from stacking the odds in one's favour by selecting the very best viewing environment. I happen to live in Tanzania close to the Serengeti ecosystem, and chose this as my stomping ground. On the 29th May 2004 I started at midnight on the rim of Ngorongoro Crater, then gradually meandered down to the southern Serengeti, and finished off with night viewing on the short grass plains. And the final tally was ... 42 species (see the full list attached). OK, so a very modest day out by birding standards, but excellent when your target animals have four legs. The final sighting of the day was of a young leopard trying to swat a very angry porcupine who put up a fierce display of stomping the ground and rattling its quills (the leopard backed off). While I don't imagine there are many other wild places that afford the wildlife viewing of the Serengeti plains, I humbly lay down the gauntlet in case anyone wishes to challenge the record. I would also encourage others to set their own targets – big mammal day North America perhaps? Good luck and let us know how you got on.

List of mammals seen	Latin Name
Yellow winged bat	<i>Lavia frons</i>
Hildebrandt's horseshoe bat	<i>Rhinolophus hildebrandti</i>
Lesser galago	<i>Galago senegalensis</i>
Vervet monkey	<i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i>
Olive baboon	<i>Papio anubis</i>
Golden jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>
Black backed jackal	<i>Canis mesomelas</i>
Bat eared fox	<i>Otocyon megalotis</i>
Common genet	<i>Genetta genetta</i>
White tailed mongoose	<i>Ichneumia albicauda</i>

Banded mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>
Spotted hyeana	<i>Crocota crocuta</i>
Striped hyeana	<i>Hyeana hyeana</i>
Cheetah	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>
African wild cat	<i>Felis libyca</i>
Serval	<i>Felis serval</i>
Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>
Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>
Rock hyrax	<i>Procavia johnstoni</i>
Bush hyrax	<i>Heterohyrax brucei</i>
Savanna Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>
Burchells Zebra	<i>Equus burchelli</i>
Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>
Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>
Bush pig	<i>Potamochoerus porcus</i>
Giraffe	<i>Giraffa camelopardis</i>
Coke's hartebeest	<i>Alcelaphus buselaphus cokii</i>
Blue wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>
Topi	<i>Damaliscus lunatus topi</i>
Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>
Kirks dikdik	<i>Rhynchotragus kirki</i>
Common waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus ellipsiprymnus</i>
Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>
Thompson gazelle	<i>Gazella thomsoni</i>
Grants gazelle	<i>Gazella granti</i>
Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>
Cape eland	<i>Taurotragus oryx</i>
Cape buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>
Cape hare	<i>Lepus capensis</i>
Unstriped grass rat	<i>Arvicanthis spp.</i>
Porcupine	<i>Hystrix cristata</i>
Spring hare	<i>Pedetes capensis</i>

This article appeared as a letter in the March/April 2005 issue of *Birding*, a publication of the American Birding Association.

Charles Foley is a biologist working for the Wildlife Conservation Society in Tanzania.