

# **Riverine Rabbit and other mammals on Dunedin Farm**

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**Trip dates: 19 – 22 March 2016**

## **Summary**

After our visit to the nearby Karoo National Park, my father (Clide Carter) and I booked a night at the Riverine Rabbit Retreat on Dunedin Farm (Western Cape, South Africa). We had low expectations of seeing the rare, endemic Riverine Rabbit but after some pointers from Johan Moolman, the farm owner, we had great views of one before sunset; and with Johan the next morning we saw another two. We extended our stay for two more nights once we realized the potential for other smaller mammals and reptiles. Our trip total of 19 mammals included Aardwolf, Bat-eared Fox, Round-eared Sengi, Cape Sengi and Hewitt's Red Rock Hare. This trip report morphed into a site guide as there is nothing else published and I believe it is most likely the best place to look for Riverine Rabbit.

## **Dunedin Farm and Riverine Rabbit Retreat**

Dunedin Farm is a working farm owned by Johan and Marietha Moolman. They and their two sons are very keen on the local wildlife and were extremely helpful in giving us a detailed rundown on all the species and locations that they knew of. Manus (13) is especially keen and a local authority on the resident birds which include some Karoo specialties.

The farm is halfway between Beaufort West and Loxton in the Western Cape (South Africa); and is within the Sak River Conservancy. Guests at the farm stay in the Riverine Rabbit Retreat guesthouse which is a very comfortable, fully-contained farmhouse about 5 km from the Dunedin farmhouse (home of the Moolmans). The Retreat has 5 bedrooms, with space for at least 10 guests. It is set up for self-catering. Rental is very reasonable and rates are per person. For reservations contact Marietha at [moolmankaroo@gmail.com](mailto:moolmankaroo@gmail.com)

Directions to Dunedin from Beaufort West: Take the N2 road towards Johannesburg. After about 1 km you turn left (north) on the R381 and follow that for 56 km to the Dunedin Farmhouse. It would take about one hour without stops. The first 14 km is sealed road (along the eastern edge of the Karoo NP), followed by 10 km good gravel road through the Molteno Pass. After this gravel section there is a further 32 km (sealed road + gravel) to the Dunedin Farm main gate. Dunedin Farmhouse is 200 m off the main road. Note that the upper parts of the Molteno Pass is worth spotlighting if you stay in Beaufort West when visiting the Karoo NP.

## **Riverine Rabbit**

The farm holds a good population of Riverine Rabbit with ongoing research in the area. Johan mentioned that the best time to see them is at dusk and dawn (and not necessarily at night) and showed us the two key areas (R1 and R2 on the google earth images below) along the banks of the Sak River and its tributaries.

We saw one very well at the R1 area at 6.30 pm; 30 minutes before sunset; it was grooming and foraging about 20 m off the main track. The next morning, with Johan, we walked the road through the R2 area for an hour and saw another two at around 7.15 and 7.30 am (sunrise was 6 am).

Riverine Rabbit at R1



Riverine Rabbit at R2



The Endangered Wildlife Trust's Drylands Conservation Programme (EWT-DCP) has camera trapping underway on the property. The R2 area has numerous camera traps on it.

- [https://www.ewt.org.za/newsletter%20articals/Camera%20trapping%20riverine%20rabbits\\_Rona\\_BS\\_CJBEdits.pdf](https://www.ewt.org.za/newsletter%20articals/Camera%20trapping%20riverine%20rabbits_Rona_BS_CJBEdits.pdf)

Other links on the Riverine Rabbit:

- <http://www.farmersweekly.co.za/article.aspx?id=50852&h=Farmers-work-to- conserve-the-riverine-rabbit>
- <http://blog.sa-venues.com/provinces/western-cape/rare-riverine-rabbit/>
- [http://www.edgeofexistence.org/mammals/species\\_info.php?id=3](http://www.edgeofexistence.org/mammals/species_info.php?id=3)
- <http://www.arkive.org/riverine-rabbit/bunolagus-monticularis/image-G142556.html>

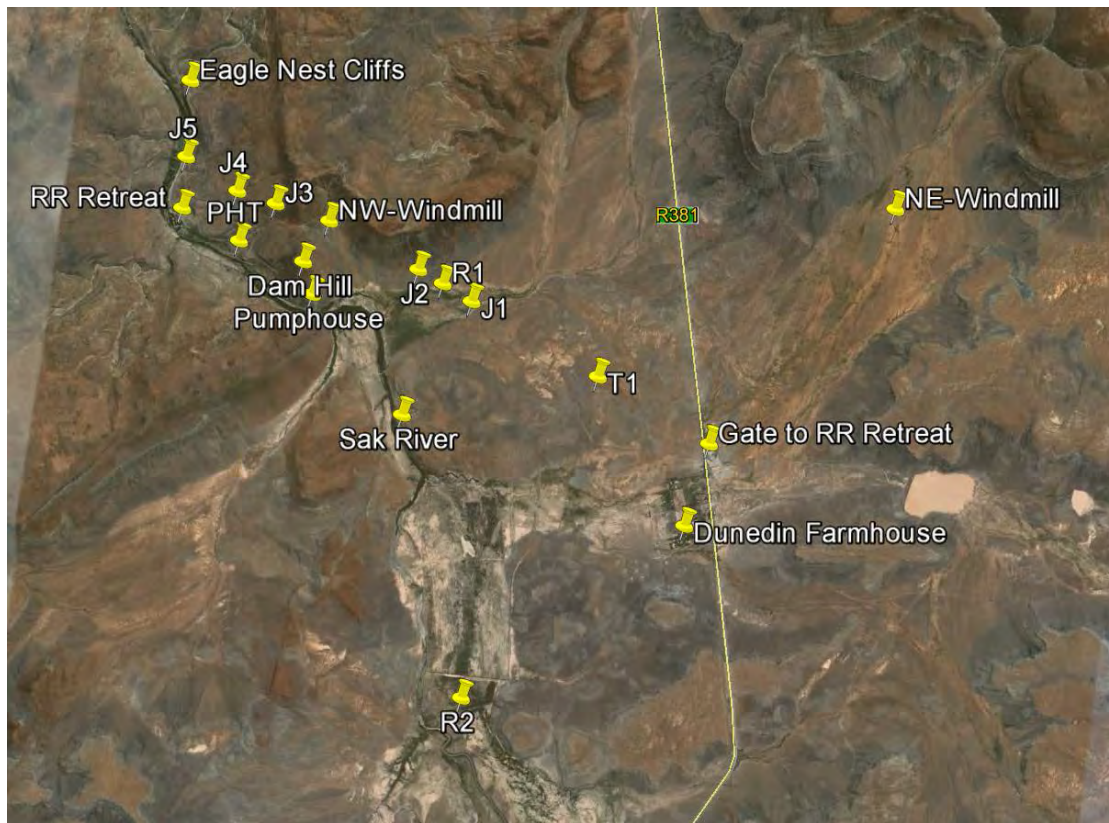
### Wildlife Sites

Key sites are marked on the two google earth maps below. The first map shows the northern area around the retreat; the second shows the southern area. For mammals I suggest focusing on the areas around Dam Hill, R1, T1 and the Retreat.

- **The track to RR Retreat** starts 600 m north of the gate to Dunedin Farmhouse. The R1 area is between track junctions J1 and J2 (2.2 km and 2.7 km from the main road). The Retreat is about 5.5 km from the main road. Points T1, J1 to J5 lie along this track. A good road for a night-drive.
- **The R1 area** is the closest area to work for Riverine Rabbit. Pygmy Hairy-footed Gerbil also seen here and Bat-eared Fox was common (2/3 nights).
- **Dam Hill:** Dolerite hill with large boulders. Hewitt's Red Rock Hare common after sunset in the areas with smaller boulders (see photo). Aardwolf was seen here and Cape Eagle Owl roost here. I also found a Coral Snake (venomous) one night. Cape Sengi like to sunbath late afternoon; they come out close if you sit quietly.
- **Riverine Rabbit Retreat House:** Porcupine and Small-spotted Genet at night. Spectacled Dormouse recorded at the house. Bats night-roosting in the sheds (Long-tailed Serotine).
- **Pump-house Track:** The track from the Retreat to the pump-house (at the dam wall) is about 1.5 km long. Round-eared Sengi was seen 200 m before the pump-house; Aardvark burrows are common; there is Karoo Bush Rat lodge on the track edge just before "car-wreck gully" (near the PHT pin on the map); Cape Sengi occur in rocky areas upslope from the pump-house; Clawless Otter at the dam; Spectacled Dormouse known at the pump-house and Dam Hill. Small-spotted Genet on the cliffs near the old grave-yard.
- **Eagle Nest Track and Cliffs:** a good area to try for Aardvark; Verraux's Eagle nest here.
- **The Track to NE Windmill** starts 600 m north of Dunedin Farmhouse. Cape Fox is reported along here and the track to R1. There is a Ground Squirrel colony at the windmill.
- **The R2 area** is 2.2 km SW of Dunedin Farmhouse; the track starts from the back of the Dunedin Farmhouse.
- **Dunedin Farm-house:** Karoo Bush Rat colony behind the house near the blue-doored building.
- **Phone Tower Hill:** access to this area is from a track which starts opposite the Dunedin Farmhouse; the hill is a particularly rocky area and worth exploring further if time permits. 4WD is needed on the hill. There is a suricate colony on the way to the hill. Sengi seen; Hewitt's Red Rock Hare also present.



The Northern Area including R1 (Map Data: Google Earth):



The Southern Area, including R2 (Map Data: Google Earth):



## Mammal List

The mammal list below shows 50 species confirmed to date on the farm. It is based on this trip (19 species) as well as sightings and information from the Moolmans (column M below) and records by Trevor Morgan (2014) on bats on the property (the 9 bat species listed). There has been no other small-mammal work on the property so further spotlighting and trapping should easily produce more species. Species names are those used by the IUCN.

<i>Genus-Species (IUCN)</i>	<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Comments and Records</b>	<b>PC+CC</b>	<b>M</b>
<i>Chlorotalpa sclateri</i>	Sclater's Golden Mole	Golden Mole reported by the Moolmans at Dunedin Farm House is presumably this one. The only golden mole on the Karoo NP checklist.		1
<i>Macroscelides proboscideus</i>	Round-eared Sengi	Photographed on rocks alongside Pump-house track at about 200m before pump-house (PC). Nocturnal unlike other Sengi.	1	
<i>Elephantulus rupestris</i>	Western Rock Sengi	Reported at nearby Karoo NP. IUCN: "occupies habitats that are very arid".		
<i>Elephantulus edwardii</i>	Cape Rock Sengi	Not distinguishable in the field from Western Rock Sengi. The sengi photo'd (PC) on Dam Hill and the Phone Tower area were close to dams and water and not very arid so were most likely Cape Rock Sengi.	1	1
<i>Eptesicus hottentotus</i>	Long-tailed Serotine	Recorded by Trevor Morgan. Photographed (PC) at night in the RRR sheds.**	1	1
<i>Neoromicia capensis</i>	Cape Serotine	Recorded by Trevor Morgan		
<i>Miniopterus natalensis</i>	Natal Long-fingered Bat	Recorded by Trevor Morgan		
<i>Myotis tricolor</i>	Temminck's Myotis	Recorded by Trevor Morgan		
<i>Cistugo lesueuri</i>	Lesueur's Wing-gland Bat	Recorded by Trevor Morgan		
<i>Tadarida aegyptiaca</i>	Egyptian Free-tailed Bat	Recorded by Trevor Morgan		
<i>Nycteris thebaica</i>	Egyptian Slit-faced Bat	Recorded by Trevor Morgan		
<i>Rhinolophus capensis</i>	Cape Horseshoe Bat	Recorded by Trevor Morgan		
<i>Rhinolophus clivosus</i>	Geoffrey's Horseshoe Bat	Recorded by Trevor Morgan		
<i>Papio ursinus</i>	Chacma Baboon	Occasional (JM-MM).		1
<i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i>	Vervet Monkey	Seasonal visitor (JM-MM).		1
<i>Lepus capensis</i>	Cape Hare	Common (JM-MM). One probable but not seen well (PC).		1
<i>Lepus saxatilis</i>	Scrub Hare	Common. Most hares seen were Scrub Hare (PC).	1	1
<i>Pronolagus saundersiae</i>	Hewitt's Red Rock Hare	Common at Dam Hill area (PC). And Phone Tower Hill (JM). Split from Smith's Red Rock Hare ( <i>Pronolagus rupestris</i> ).	1	1
<i>Bunolagus monticularis</i>	Riverine Rabbit	Seen at R1 and R2 areas (PC). Occasional road-kill on main road (JM).	1	1
<i>Xerus inauris</i>	Southern African Ground Squirrel	Seen at NE Windmill.	1	1
<i>Graphiurus ocularis</i>	Spectacled Dormouse	Resident in roof at RRR (JM). One record at the Pumphouse; dead in water bucket (MM photos). Common prey of the Cape Eagle Owls (ManusM). Afrikaans: Gemsbokmuis.		1
<i>Cryptomys hottentotus</i>	Common Mole-rat	Mounds locally common; the only mole-rat species in the region.		
<i>Hystrix africaeaustralis</i>	Cape Porcupine	Seen 11 pm at the RRR garden (PC).	1	1
<i>Gerbillurus paeba</i>	Pygmy Hairy-footed Gerbil	Seen in the R1 area (PC).	1	
<i>Rhabdomys pumilio</i>	Four-striped Mouse	Seen at the NE Windmill (PC).	1	1
<i>Otomys unisulcatus</i>	Karoo Bush Rat	A colony known behind the Dunedin Farm House (near the blue-doored building). Also photographed at a rat lodge on the PH track (near the car wrecks in gully). Syn: Bush Karoo Rat.	1	1
<i>Vulpes chama</i>	Cape Fox	Known on the area between R1 and NE Windmill (JM-ManusM).		1
<i>Otocyon megalotis</i>	Bat-eared Fox	Common in the R1 area.	1	1

<i>Canis mesomelas</i>	Black-backed Jackal	Resident on the start of the road to RRR (JM).		1
<i>Aonyx capensis</i>	African Clawless Otter	Resident at the dam (ManusM).		1
<i>Atilax paludinosus</i>	Marsh Mongoose	Roadkill seen on main road opposite DH. Syn: Water Mongoose.		1
<i>Cynictis penicillata</i>	Yellow Mongoose	Common. Seen on the road to the Cell Tower (PC).	1	1
<i>Herpestes pulverulentus</i>	Small Grey Mongoose	Seen near the dam (CC).	1	1
<i>Ictonyx striatus</i>	Striped Polecat	Common but hard to see (JM-MM).		1
<i>Suricata suricatta</i>	Suricate (Meerkat)	A colony known on the road to the cell-phone tower (JM).		1
<i>Genetta genetta</i>	Small-spotted Genet	Seen at RRR garden and cliffs on PHT (PC).	1	1
<i>Proteles cristatus</i>	Aardwolf	One seen on Dam Hill (PC).	1	1
<i>Felis silvestris</i>	African Wild Cat	Common but hard to see (JM-MM).		1
<i>Caracal caracal</i>	Caracal	Common but hard to see (JM-MM).		1
<i>Orycteropus afer</i>	Aardvaark	Widespread (JM).		1
<i>Procavia capensis</i>	Rock Hyrax	Common on rocky areas e.g. Dam Hill	1	1
<i>Tragelaphus oryx</i>	Common Eland	Occasional (JM-MM).		1
<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>	Greater Kudu	Seen at R1 and Pump-house track (PC).	1	1
<i>Oryx gazella</i>	Gemsbok	Introduced to Dunedin.		1
<i>Redunca arundinum</i>	Southern Reedbuck	Fairly common (JM-MM).		1
<i>Redunca fulvorufula</i>	Mountain Reedbuck	Fairly common (JM-MM).		1
<i>Antidorcas marsupialis</i>	Springbok	Common (JM-MM).		1
<i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>	Klipspringer	Resident (JM)		1
<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>	Steenbok	Common. Seen (PC) at the RRR and Phone Tower areas.	1	1
<i>Dama dama</i>	Fallow Deer	Occasional (JM-MM). Introduced.		1
Total: 50 species			19	38

\*\* The bats photographed were roosting in groups of 4 to 30 bats, tightly clustered; not present during the day. They had a "knife-shaped" tragus about 25-50% of ear length; fur was bicoloured: dark brown base and pale/yellow tips. See Fig 242 and 233 in Monadjem et al "Bats of Southern and Central Africa" for comparison).

The following species are probably present but not yet recorded on Dunedin Farm:

<i>Crocodyria cyana</i>	Reddish-grey Musk Shrew	Seen on neighbouring farm. Not yet confirmed on Dunedin (MM).
<i>Nycteris nana</i>	Dwarf Slit-faced Bat	No yet recorded.
<i>Kerivoula lanosa</i>	Lesser Woolly Bat	Not yet recorded. On western edge of range.
<i>Malacothrix typica</i>	Gerbil Mouse	Syn: Large-eared Mouse
<i>Aethomys namaquensis</i>	Namaqua Rock Mouse	Seen at nearby Molteno Pass (PC)
<i>Aethomys granti</i>	Grant's Rock Mouse	Listed at Karoo NP.
<i>Petromyscus collinus</i>	Pygmy Rock Mouse	Listed at Karoo NP
<i>Mus minutoides</i>	Pygmy Mouse	Not yet reported but should be present.
<i>Mus musculus</i>	House Mouse	Likely present.
<i>Mastomys coucha</i>	Southern Multimammate Mouse	
<i>Saccostomus campestris</i>	Southern African Pouched Mouse	
<i>Parotomys brantsii</i>	Brants's Whistling Rat	Possibly present.
<i>Parotomys littledalei</i>	Littledale's Whistling Rat	Possibly present.
<i>Desmodillus auricularis</i>	Cape Short-eared Gerbil	Not yet reported but probably present. Syn: Cape Short-tailed Gerbil
<i>Felis nigripes</i>	Black-footed Cat	Known on nearby farms (JM-ManusM). Syn: Small-spotted Cat.
<i>Mellivora capensis</i>	Honey Badger	Known on nearby farms; not yet seen on Dunedin (JM-MM).
<i>Poecilogale albinucha</i>	African Striped Weasel	Not yet recorded on the farm (JM-MM).



## Birds

Birds included Rufous-eared Warbler, Lark-like Bunting, Karoo Eremomela, Spike-heeled Lark, Karoo Lark, Black-headed Canary, Cinnamon-breasted Warbler, Ludwig's bustard, Rufous-cheeked Nightjar, Karoo Thrush. Cape Eagle Owl roost at Dam Hill. Verreaux's Eagle nest at Eagle Nest Cliffs.

## Reptiles seen this trip:

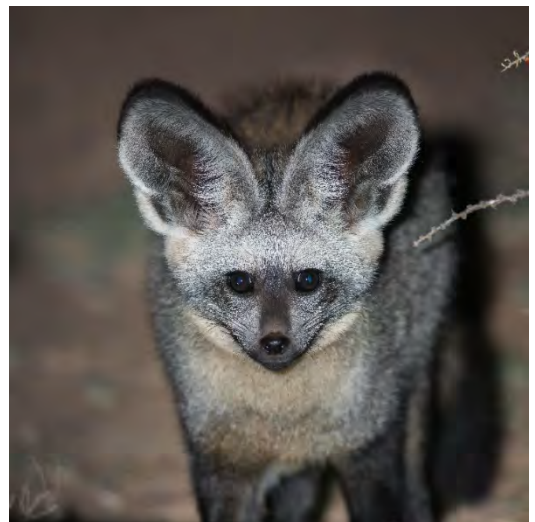
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|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Golden Spotted Gecko      | <i>Pachydactylus oculatus</i>   |
| • Bibron's thick-toed Gecko | <i>Pachydactylus bibronii</i>   |
| • Ground Agama              | <i>Agama aculeata</i>           |
| • Karoo Girdled Lizard      | <i>Cordylus polyzonus</i>       |
| • Western Rock Skink        | <i>Mabuya sulcata</i>           |
| • Variegated Skink          | <i>Mabuya variegata</i>         |
| • Spotted Sand Lizard       | <i>Pedioplanis lineocellata</i> |
| • Coral Snake               | <i>Aspidelaps lubricus</i>      |

## Photos

Hewitt's Red Rock Hare on Dam Hill.



Bat-eared Fox



Karoo Bush Rat at lodge entrance.



Round-eared Sengi





Cape Sengi



Small-spotted Genet



Long-tailed Serotine (night-roosting at the sheds).



Coral Snake (venomous, this one 25 cm long, they grow to 60 cm).





Golden Spotted Gecko (and not Spotted Gecko; based on scale pattern).



Vegetation at riverine rabbit area R1 (and showing Dam Hill in the upper left).



View northwest from Dam Hill along Sak River and Pump-house Track; the Retreat house is amongst the distant group of trees.

