

SOUTH AFRICA: 4-17 JULY 2010

Introduction

What had been planned as the ultimate trip, two weeks in South Africa watching the Three Lions win the World Cup, combined with some quality mammal watching, quickly came unstuck when England were knocked out before I even arrived. Nevertheless the mammal watching still made it worthwhile.

The highlights were undoubtedly the four Leopards in a day in Kruger including a male that chased off a pack of Wild Dogs, but they were run close by superb views of Black-footed Cat at Benfontein,, Serval in Kruger, both Spotted-necked & Cape Clawless Otters at Marievale Bird Sanctuary & a totally unexpected Cape Dune Mole-rat in West Coast NP. Great views of Aardvark, Southern Right Whales & three African Civets were also noteworthy.

On the downside Kruger was hard work (probably due in part to the amount of vehicles tearing about on the roads post World Cup), no Cheetahs in 5 full & 2 half-days & only four Lion sightings (I normally manage that in a day), & I still missed Cape Gysbok & Liechtenstein's Hartebeest but at least they're only ungulates.

All in all a pleasant trip and 60 species in 2 weeks cannot be bad when for the most part I only had one pair of eyes to look for things.

Richard Webb - 18 July 2010

Site details

Rather than reinventing the wheel please refer to the following key references which provide details of all the sites visited.

- Southern African Birdfinder (Cohen, Spottiswoode & Rossouw).
- Kruger National Park visitors guide
- <http://www.mammalwatching.com/Afrotropical/afrotropsouthafrica.html>

Marievale: For otters at Marievale visit the Otter Hide which lives up to its name, at least on my visit. Then Otter Hide is at point B on the map in the Southern African Birdfinder & is best accessed via the directions given in that book on the rough road running past the old RAF base. Note this is not the main entrance to the reserve but allows access at dawn.

Kruger:

- Don't bother staying at Berg-en-Dal unless you have no choice, the area is rubbish for mammals. If short of time stay at Lower Sabie & concentrate on the areas south to Crocodile Bridge & north to Tshokwane, Satara (still the best all round area with lots of alternative drives) & Olifants.
- Note the night drives at Kruger are now very hit & miss depending on who the driver is. All the old experienced drivers appear to have left & many of the new guides make a lot of basic ID mistakes, e.g. mixing up the genets completely & making it worse by even quoting the wrong ID features. Worse still the spotting is done by the paying customers so if the people with the lights do not know what they are doing you are in for a long cold night. The best approach is to get there early (20-25 minutes prior to departure) and grab one of the seats with the lights. On the larger 23-seat vehicles these are immediately behind the driver, on either side of the back row & on the seat immediately behind the step into the vehicles. It is worth the effort getting there early. We saw far more on the nights that I had one of the lights!

Itinerary

4 th	Arrived George airport mid-afternoon & drove west to Swellendam. Brief visit to entrance road at Bontebok NP & managed to get myself locked in. Could have been useful if prepared but called the emergency number to get someone to let me out & returned to Swellendam for night.
5 th	Early morning spotlighting along road to Bontebok NP, morning in park then drove to De Hoop. Enjoyable afternoon with great views of Southern Right Whales then spotlighted back from Malgas to Swellendam & along entrance road to Bontebok NP. Night Swellendam.
6 th	Spent morning driving to Yzerfontein. Early afternoon unsuccessfully looked for dolphins offshore & then spent rest of afternoon in West Coast NP. Relatively uneventful. Drove back to Yzerfontein with brief views of Caracal on route. Drove back out along road west of Yzerfontein spotlighting hoping that World cup semi-final would mean little traffic. Proved true but Cape Fox was the only mammal of note. Night Yzerfontein.
7 th	Morning West Coast NP the highlight being a Cape Dune Mole-rat crossing the road, otherwise quiet as was another abortive attempt for Heaviside's Dophins. Returned to Cape Town & flew to Bloemfontein where spent night.
8 th	Brief visit to west end of Soetdoring Nature Reserve in morning where saw the only South African Ground Squirrels & Meerkats of the trip. Then drove west to Kimberley where 3 Sable from the road were an unexpected bonus. Spent early afternoon successfully looking for Western Rock Sengi at Marrick Game Farm. Met up with Beryl Watson & the doyen of Black-footed Cat studies, Alex Sliwa, to go looking for cats. Spent first three hours looking for uncollared cats the plan being to trap & collar one. No joy although we did see eyeshine from a collared cat. The supporting cast was great though Aardvark, 10+ Aardvoles, several Bat-eared Foxes, Cape Porcupines & Springhares. Absolutely terrific! After returning to base went back out on Benfontein & had superb views of the radio-collared cat. Far better than the views on my previous trip. Night Kimberley.
9 th	After a lie-in headed north to Warrenton & immediately had brief views of a Cape Clawless Otter in the same area that I scored two years ago. After a further 90 minutes saw a group of 4 otters again all too briefly then decided to head north. Aborted plans to visit Sandveld & changed booking to stay at Suikerbosrand a night early. Eventually arrived having followed the incorrect directions provided when I booked & ended up driving through the reserve to get to the correct entrance after dark. Night Suikerbosrand.
10 th	Headed off to Marievale Bird Sanctuary arriving at Otter Hide in the mist shortly after sunrise. After 20 minutes peering into the gloom returned to the car to find a group of 5 otters on the road, they quickly disappeared but as the mist lifted 5 more appeared & there were 10 Spotted-necked Otters in the pool. Unfortunately they quickly disappeared but an hour later four reappeared for a few minutes. Spent the rest of the morning checking other pools on the reserve before returning to nearby Nigel for lunch & to amend my Kruger bookings. Returned to reserve early afternoon & rewarded with further views of 6 Spotted-necked Otters which disappeared to amazingly be replaced by two Cape Clawless Otters a few minutes later. Spent the rest of the afternoon hoping for more views of otters & Water Mongoose but had to be satisfied with brief views of an unidentified otter from Flamingo Hide & nice views of two Marsh owls at dusk. Returned to Suikerbosrand.
11 th	Decided against a quick drive for Black Wildebeest & Oribi for the trip list & headed off east for Kruger arriving at Berg-en-Dal at 1300. In hindsight probably a bad move as the afternoon produced little of note other than four separate Slender Mongooses. Night Berg-en-Dal.
12 th	Spent morning driving to Pretoriuskop looping around various side roads but with little reward. Continued up Voortrekker Road the highlight of the morning being a total of five White Rhinos. Spent early afternoon looking unsuccessfully for Liechtenstein's Hartebeest before joining a rather uneventful three-hour sunset drive. In fact it was an absolute yawn or would have been had it not been so cold.

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13 th	<p>An absolutely amazing day. Clearly not the unlucky 13th. After two early White Rhinos the day warmed up with what at first appeared to be four Wild Dogs lying close to the road. These four suddenly became six when a Black-backed Jackal alerted the dogs to a distant Leopard. After 10 minutes the dogs leapt to their feet as the Leopard appeared close by & chased after them. After checking their scent the Leopard then proceeded to give chase across the road picking a careful route between the parked vehicles.</p> <p>Continuing north & missing a single Lion by a couple of minutes, on a whim I decided to give N'watimhiri Road a try, an inspired decision when a large male Leopard appeared briefly 20 metres from the road, I was on a roll. 30 minutes later it nearly got even better but I missed another Leopard, this time a female with a cub by less than a minute. I then continued north to Satara stopping briefly to unsuccessfully try to see some sleeping Lions deep in the bush.</p> <p>After a short break went back out on the road to Orpen & about 20 kms out bumped into my third Leopard of the day, a male stalking Impalas near the road. Unfortunately gate closing time prevented me from seeing the stalk's conclusion.</p> <p>After eating went back out on the Satara night drive & it turned out to be a great night the highlights along Sweni Road being another Leopard, six Lion on a fresh kill, an African Wildcat, four Spotted Hyaenas, African Civet, both Small- & Large-spotted Genet, Cape Porcupine & two Lesser Bushbabies. The end of a truly great day.</p>
14 th	<p>As expected something of an anti-climax, a loop of S100, S41 & the Satara-N'wanetsi road producing nothing other than a large heard of Cape Buffalo. Sweni Road was more interesting with Slender, Dwarf & Banded Mongooses & I just missed the Leopard on the Orpen road again but not quite up to yesterday's standards. The afternoon was equally uninspiring the circuit around S90, S41 & the Satara-N'wanetsi Road only producing the same herd of Cape Buffalo & a Spotted Hyaena with 3 young at its den. The night drive although not up to last night's standards was still enjoyable with the Orpen road producing great views of a Serval, two African Civets & two Small-spotted Genets.</p>
15 th	<p>Drove west along the Orpen road at dawn before heading north to Timbavati & continuing north past Ratelpan seeing two Spotted Hyaenas. Stopping to check the map proved fatal as 200 metres later came across a couple who had just seen a Leopard. To add to my woes they then backed into my car & while I was checking the damage 100 metres up the road they saw the Leopard again. My luck had run out. Continued north to Olifants then returned to Satara along S90 seeing little of note other than poor views of two Lions asleep near the main road north of Satara. Returned to the camp for a siesta.</p> <p>After a longish break joined the Satara sunset drive & we returned to the Lions north of the camp. This time they were active & I enjoyed great views of at least 18 Lions including cubs close to the road before it got dark. The rest of the 3-hour drive was somewhat disappointing compounded by the presence of a loud South African women who didn't stop talking for the whole time. Four Spotted Hyaenas, three White Rhinos & a Cape Porcupine were the highlights.</p>
16 th	<p>Drove north out along S90 this morning looking for Cheetahs, then headed back along the Ngotso Weir Road before heading south along Hi-4 back to Satara. After a brief stop for food headed back out along S90, S41 & back along S100 looking for Cheetahs. No joy but a lone Lion cub along S100 at midday was unexpected. No sign of its parents or siblings unfortunately. After lunch headed back out west on the Orpen road but despite much effort little of note. The night drive out along S90 was slightly more rewarding despite failing to get one of the spotlights myself, two Small-spotted Genets, Cape Porcupine, seven Spotted Hyaenas & eight hunting Lions being the highlights.</p>
17 th	<p>A long drive south to Crocodile Bridge this morning with stops at Tshokwane, where two Bushbucks were an unexpected bonus, & Lower Sabie before a final attempt to see Cheetah, again unsuccessful, near Crocodile Bridge, c'est la vie. Left the park at 1140 for the long drive back to Johannesburg for my evening flight.</p>

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Checklist

1	Western Rock Sengi	Excellent views of one at close range for 10 minutes at Marrick Game Farm, Kimberley.
2	Chacma Baboon	c.40 De Hoop, several troops of similar size in Kruger.
3	Vervet Monkey	Seven Berg-en-Dal, one along H20 NE of Berg-en-Dal, small numbers Satara, two near Gudzani East.
4	Lesser Bushbaby	Kruger: Two along the Sweni Road on the first Satara night drive.
5	Cape Hare	10+ Benfontein.
6	Scrub Hare	Two Suikerbosrand . Kruger: two seen during the day along the Orpen road west of Nsemani Dam. Seen on all 5 night/sunset drives a total of 11 individuals being seen.
7	Cape Porcupine	Three Benfontein, one Suikerbosrand & my first in Kruger, two on the first Satara night drive & singles along S100 on the Satara sunset drive & along S90 on the third Satara night drive.
8	Springhare	Ten Benfontein.
9	Cape Dune Mole-rat	Totally unexpected, one crossing the road towards Potberg in West Coast NP mid-morning.
10	Four-striped Grass Mouse	Two Bontebok NP.
11	South African Ground Squirrel	10+ Soetdoring Nature Reserve.
12	Tree Squirrel	Kruger: Seven seen in scattered localities.
13	Spotted Hyena	Kruger: heard Berg-en-Dal. Two just south of Satara on the first night drive & two more on the same drive near the lion kill, a female with 3 young at a den along Satara N'wanetsi Road, two just south of Piet Grobler dam, four along Mamanga Adventure Trail on the Satara sunset drive, & seven including a group of six along S90 on the final Satara night drive.
14	Lion	Kruger: relatively few sightings. Six on a fresh buffalo kill on the first Satara night drive. 18 (out of a pride of 20 including several cubs) along the HI-4 4 kms north of Satara, bizarrely a single cub between Gudzani & Nsesane in the middle of the day, & finally a group of 8 hunting NE of Satara on the final night drive, the latter possibly being part of the larger pride.
15	Leopard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kruger: An amazing male which chased off a pack of Wild Dogs along the Skukuza road c.20 kms E of Pretoriuskop, then sniffed the area where they had been lying, presumably to pick up their scent & then followed them across the road picking a route between the convoy of vehicles that had assembled to watch the dogs. A huge male seen briefly two hours later along N'watimhiri Road S of Skukuza, a third male just E of Bobbejaan Krans along the Satara-Orpen road the same afternoon & amazingly the 4th for the day along the Sweni Road on the first Satara night drive. • And to think I missed another two, a female with a cub by less than a minute S of Nkuhlu the same day & another by less than a minute two days later at Goedegun N of Satara. I would have seen the latter had a vehicle not reversed into me!
16	Serval	Kruger: Superb views of one at close range for several minutes along the Orpen road on the second night drive at

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		Satara.
17	Caracal	One, unfortunately all too brief, c.4 kms west of Yzerfontein at dusk, flushed as soon as I tried to move the car to get a better view.
18	Black-footed Cat	Fantastic views of a radio-collared female (the collar not at all visible) for 15-20 minutes at ranges down to 30-40 metres at Benfontein.
19	African Wildcat	One seen distantly along the Sweni Road on the first Satara night drive.
20	Bat-eared Fox	Six Benfontein.
21	Cape Fox	One c.5 kms west of Yzerfontein
22	Black-backed Jackal	Four Benfontein. Kruger: One c.20 kms east of Pretoriuskop, one along the Orpen road on the second Satara night drive, 3 along S90 NE of Satara, possibly the same three the same night on the final Satara night drive.
23	Wild Dog	Kruger: An unexpected bonus, six lazing around in the early morning sunshine along the Skukuza road c.20 kms east of Pretoriuskop, totally uninterested in two Warthog feeding metres away. Things changed dramatically when a barking jackal revealed a large male Leopard about 500 metres away. The dogs immediately became alert & eventually had to flee when the Leopard chased them off. Awesome!
24	Cape Clawless Otter	Four Warrenton, a single seen briefly as soon as I arrived at the causeway to the west of the town & four seen equally briefly 90 minutes later. Two seen well at Marievale Bird Sanctuary mid-afternoon near Otter Hide shortly after a group of six Spotted-necked Otters!.
25	Spotted-necked Otter	Marievale Bird Sanctuary: five on the road near Otter Hide just as the mist cleared at dawn were followed into the pool by Otter Hide by five more, the group then split into two and quickly disappeared. An hour later four appeared briefly in the same pool and later in the afternoon (1445) six appeared in the same pool and swam through the culvert under the road into the next pool. No further sightings despite staying until dusk. Another unidentified otter was briefly seen in the pool visible from Flamingo Hide.
26	African Civet	Kruger: One along the Sweni Road on the first Satara night drive and two singles along the Orpen road on the second Satara night drive, great views of all three and my first in Kruger.
27	Large-spotted Genet	Kruger: One along the Sweni Road on the first Satara night drive
28	Small-spotted Genet	One along Sweni Road on the first Satara night drive, two along the Orpen road the following night & two along S90 on the final Satara night drive. An unidentified genet on the first night 3 kms south of Satara.
29	Meerkat	Four Soetdoring Nature Reserve
30	Yellow Mongoose	Singles between Malgas & De Hoop, De Hoop, Soetdoring Nature Reserve & Marievale Bird Sanctuary.
31	Slender Mongoose	Kruger: four in the Berg-en-Dal area on the 11 th , two along S120, one along S114 & one along S118. One along Sweni Road.
32	Small Grey Mongoose	One De Hoop
33	Banded Mongoose	Kruger: A nice band of at least 13 along the Sweni Road.

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34	Dwarf Mongoose	Kruger: four Voortrekker Road, three north of Tshokwane, two groups of 4 & 5 individuals Sweni Road, & three along H7 east of Nsemani. One along the HI-4 north of Satara.
35	Aardwolf	10+ Benfontein
36	Aardvark	Prolonged views of one at Benfontein
37	Rock Hyrax	c.10 De Hoop
38	African Elephant	Kruger: common throughout with several generally small breeding herds. One breeding herd of more than 50 individuals near Gudzani east of Satara.
39	White Rhinoceros	Kruger: Three south of Afsaal, two singles along Voortrekker Road, one Shithave, mother plus calf 12 km east of Pretoriuskop, one along HI-4 north of Satara, two along the Mamanga Adventure Trail on the Satara sunset drive & one along H10 north of Rietpan.
40	Hippopotamus	Kruger: one Shithave, seven Nsemani Dam, six south of Gudzani, seven Ratelpan, 13 Gudzani & 5+ Mazithi north of Tshokwane..
41	Warthog	Kruger: surprisingly scarce, not seen daily & only 35-40 individuals seen in total.
42	Giraffe	Kruger: small numbers daily with a particularly nice group of seven adults and four young near Gudzani.
43	Burchell's Zebra	One Benfontein (introduced). Kruger, common other than between Berg-en-Dal and Pretoriuskop. Very common (several hundred) along the H10 between Tshokwane & Lower Sabie particularly on the stretch north of Rietpan.
44	Cape Mountain Zebra	Five Bontebok NP
45	Blue Wildebeest	Two West Coast NP (introduced), c.20 Marrick Game Farm (introduced), c.20 Benfontein (introduced) and seen in Kruger on all bar the first afternoon. Large numbers as normal on the plains around Satara.
46	Red Hartebeest	Seven Bontebok NP (introduced), two Benfontein (introduced), two Suikerbosrand..
47	Sable	Three Bonnievale Game Reserve NE of Kimberley (introduced).
48	Bontebok	50+ Bontebok NP, c.40 De Hoop & 15 West Coast NP.
49	Common Duiker	Kruger: one along H12 NE of Berg-en-Dal, two east of Pretorisukop, two along Sweni Road on the first Satara night drive & one along S90 on the final Satara night drive.
50	Springbok	Four West Coast NP & common Benfontein (all introduced)
51	Steenbok	One Bontebok NP, one west of Yzerfontein, 15+ West Coast NP & seen daily in Kruger with at least 25 individuals being seen.
52	Impala	Common in Kruger, commonest from Pretoriuskop northwards.
53	Grey Rhebok	13 Bontebok NP, six De Hoop
54	Cape Buffalo	Kruger: common so different to my first visit when I saw two. Large herds of 150+ animals (some considerably larger) near Berg-en-Dal, west of N'wanetsi, just south of Balule, along S90 NE of Satara, at Nsemani Dam west of Satara & along H10 just N of Lower Sabie.
55	Eland	Re-introductions. 38 De Hoop, c.20 on the first day and 72 including a herd of 70 on the second day in West Coast NP, and a single Suikerbosrand.
56	Kudu	Kruger: a total of 70 seen, mainly in groups of 4 or 8, Particularly common along R10 N of Rietpan where at least

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		20 seen.
57	Bushbuck	Kruger, female plus fawn Tshokwane
58	Waterbuck	Small numbers on all 7 days, commonest at Mazithi north of Tshokwane (19) & along the S41 south from Gudzani East to N'wantetsi where up to 30 seen.
59	Cape Fur Seal	One Yzerfontein
60	Southern Right Whale	9+ De Hoop. Great views close inshore.

Unidentified species

Bat sp	2+ probably Cape Serotines along the entrance road at Benfontein at dusk.
Free-tailed Bat sp	One hawking with Little Swifts at dusk at Satara
Mouse sp	One crossing the road at night in Suikerbosrand
Mongoose sp	One along the N12 60 kms south of Klerksdorp