

SOUTH AFRICA 2013 AND A BIT OF SWAZILAND: AN ORGIA OF MAMMALS

13th August-17th September

It was my fifth trip in South Africa. After reading CURTIS Hart's trip report (see Mammalwatching) I decided I had to go again in South Africa because I saw there was a good place to see Aardwark, Aardwolf and Black footed cat. I also wanted to see Brown Hyaena in the Kalahari.

I hired a car for my 5 weeks trip. Car hire are really cheap in South Africa.

Here are the places I visited:

KRUGER NATIONAL PARK (MPUMALANGA)

After arriving in Johannesburg I directly drove to Nelspruit where I spent the night. The following morning I rushed to Krüger (Numbi gate). But things have changed and even the campsites were full. So I booked my stay for the end of the trip and drove to Malolotja Game reserve in Swaziland. I stayed only 3h30mn in Krüger, but saw: 1 Giraffe, a few Wildebeest and Burchell's Zebras, 1 Hippo, 1 Klipspringer, 120 African buffalos, circa 10 Waterbucks and 15 Elephants and just before leaving, near Berg en Dal, 1 White rhino and a female Cheetah with 3 large cubs.

MALOLOTJA GAME RESERVE (SWAZILAND)

I stayed only 1 night there. I wanted to see again the Southern Bald ibis colony. But I was informed the trail was closed in order not to disturb the birds. But after asking they told me that with a guide it was possible to go there. But apparently they have only 1 guide who has to drive the tourists to the Canopy tour. So the next morning when I asked for a guide they told me the guide didn't want to go there because it was a "critical time" for the birds. Last time I was there during the breeding season and went to see the birds without disturbing there. I think they get more money with the Canopy tour and are not interested to guide birdwatchers.

During my stay I saw far less than last time (for example no Black wildebeest). Just 6 Elands, circa 10 Rheboks, 150 Blesboks, a few Warthogs, a few Chacma baboons, 2 Common reedbucks, 1 Grey duiker, circa 10 Rock hyraxes and best of all by night at least 6 very confident Natal red rock rabbits (in the campsite). I heard also 2 Black backed Jackals.

Then I drove on the way to ITHALA GAME RESERVE in South Africa, but as it was late I didn't reach this place before night.

ITHALA GAME RESERVE (KWAZULU NATAL)

I slept 2 nights in the camping where I didn't see any mammal by night. Ithala is very interesting with a great diversity of mammals. I saw: 3 White rhinos, 2 separate Black rhinos (of which 1 too much curious and approaching the car by 4 or 5 meters and trying to smell me. I closed the window and didn't move. Black rhinos are more aggressive than the White ones), 1 Slender mongoose, 3 Tsessebe (the only place where they are in Kwazulu Natal), circa 10 Rd hartebeest, 25 Mountain reedbucks, 20 Waterbucks, a lot of Impalas, 3 Grey duikers, 3 Bushbucks, circa 15 Nyalas, 120 Wildebeest, 50 Burchell's zebras, a few Chacma Baboons and Vervet monkeys, 3 Southern reedbucks, 1 Rock hyrax and a lot of Warthogs.

PRIVATE FARMS BETWEEN ITHALA AND MKUZE

Several Nyalas.

HLUHLUWE AND IMFOLOZI NATIONAL PARK (KWAZULU NATAL)

I camp outside of the park south of Hluhluwe village. By night I saw twice 2 Greater Bushbabies used to come at a feeder. They have sometimes 3. Near the entrance I got a Red duiker.

I stayed a full day inside the park, but except the rhinos, I saw very little. But the rhinos are great. It is the place where the last White rhinos of the southern subspecies were saved. All the animals we can see elsewhere are descendants of these animals (the last animals of the northern cottoni subspecies have apparently disappeared from the former Zaire). White rhinos are easy to see, I got 30 including a female with a baby milking. I saw also 200 African buffalos, 20 Wildebeest, 20 Burchell's Zebras, a few Warthogs, 3 Giraffes, 10 Waterbucks, 40 Impalas and a few Chacma baboons. Black rhinos are difficult to see like everywhere in South Africa.

UMLALAZI RESERVE (KWAZULU NATAL)

I slept 2 nights in the campsite . Red duikers are common and very tame. I saw at least 25 of them, plus Vervets monkeys, 1 African clawless otter and 1 Water mongoose (the latter early morning at the border of the reeds along the lagoon). But my main aim to go there was to try again to see my last African kingfisher: Mangrove kingfisher. And finally after a lot of searching I saw one on my last morning.

CHEMLSFORD GAME RESERVE (KWAZULU NATAL)

This place is well known for its large population of Oribis. I saw at least 20 of them, plus 150 Blesboks, 5 Southern reedbucks, a lot of Springbucks (not native), 8 Yellow mongooses in the campsite, 1 Black backed jackal, 100 Black wildebeest and Cap fox (2 at dusk at the gate of the camping and 1 at the same place the following morning).

WILLEM PRETORIUS GAME RESERVE (ORANGE FREE STATE)

Each time I have been in South Africa I have stopped there because of the sheer numbers of antelopes. I saw: 60 elands, 150 Black wildebeest, 500 Blesboks, 15 Giraffes, 5 Southern reedbucks, a lot of Springbucks, 50 Red hartebeest, 1 Steinbuck and a few Sable antelopes. This time no luck with the White rhinos. I saw only the piles of dungs.

MARRICK SAFARIS PRIVATE RESERVE near KIMBERLEY (marrick@safari.com; T: 27538337004; cellphones:0836499964;0828081676)(NERTHERN CAPE)

I stayed 2 nights there after seeing Curtis Hart's trip report. I did 2 organised nightdrives. The guide, RIAN, and the driver know well their job. They were perfect. And the place is also perfect.

First night drive: 3 sightings of Aardvarks, including 1 right in front of the car; 2 sightings of Aardwolf, 5 Bat eared foxes, 1 Black backed jackal, 1 Porcupine, 1 Black footed cat (a little far, but seen during more than 5 minutes), 1 Scrub hare, 2 Cap hares and a lot of Springhares.

Second night drive: 3 different Aardwolwes, 3 Bat eared foxes, a lot of Springhares and 3 Porcupines.

During my stay, from the kopje next to the guest house I also saw several Giraffes, 1 tame young Suricate at the accommodation, 3 Grey duikers, a lot of Springbucks, a few Burchell's Zebras, 30 Red hartebeest, 30 Black wildebeest, 6 Gemsboks, several Greater kudu and 2 Smith's red rock rabbits on the kopje (1 by night and 1 by day). I also saw a mongoose passing twice near the guesthouse. For me it was a Cap mongoose. Rian told me first they are no Cap mongoose there. But after a week, the owner sent me an email, telling me that Rian had seen the mongoose, and agreed it was a Cap mongoose. Surprising, because this species doesn't seem to reach this latitude.

KAROO NATIONAL PARK (WESTERN CAPE)

I got 50 Red hartebeests, 35 Gemsboks, 5 Steenboks including a pair with a calf milking, 20+ Cap mountain zebras, 50 Burchell's Zebras, 2 Greater kudu, 30 Rock hyraxes, 5 Klipspringers, Vervet monkey, a lot of Chacma baboons, and only dung of Black Rhino.

I did a night drive with unexperienced and noisy guide and driver. I saw nothing except a Red hartebeest, 2 Zebras and a Gemsbok. Frustrating, when the guide tell you: Don't expect anything, it is very difficult to see night mammals, and spend the time speaking.

BEAUFORT WEST TO SWELLENDAM (WESTERN CAPE)

3 Cap grey mongooses, 1 dead Striped polecat, Yellow baboons, 1 Rock hyrax.

BONTEBOK NATIONAL PARK (WESTERN CAPE) (1 night)

50 Bonteboks, 3 Red hartebeests, a few Cap mountain zebras, 6 Rheboks, 1 Porcupine by night in the camping.

DE HOOP NATIONAL PARK (WESTERN CAPE)

I didn't sleep there. It was really expensive: even the campsite.

30 Bonteboks, 150 Elands, 4 Cape mountain zebras, 1 Yellow mongoose, 1 Cap fur seal, at least 17 Southern right whales.

HERMANUS (WESTERN CAPE)

It was raining and crowded. I saw only 1 Southern right whale and several Rock hyraxes along the seaside. I didn't stay there.

YZERFONTEIN (WESTERN CAPE)

Several Rock hyraxes along the seaside, including on the walls in the harbour, 1 Cap fur seal, 1 Humpback whale, 3 Southern right whales, 4 Heaviside dolphins.

WEST COAST NATIONAL PARK (WESTERN CAPE)

While visiting this park and Yzerfontein I slept in the Langebaan campsite (clean and cheap). In the park and from the park I saw: 10 Cap mountain zebras, 25 Bonteboks, 30 Elands, 2 Steinbucks, 2 Grey duikers, 4 Southern right whales, 1 Heaviside dolphin, 5 Cap grey mongooses, 4 Red hartebeests, 40 Springbucks, 2 Scrub hares, 3 Wildebeests, several Four striped grass mouse and Bush Karoo rats, circa 1000 Cap fur seals on 1 island. I drove at dusk inside the park, but didn't see anything special.

LAMBERT'S BAY

This place is famous for the Gannet colony. But at the back of the birds there is also a colony of Cap fur seals (several hundreds).

LAMBERT'S BAY (WESTERN CAPE) TO UPINGTON (NORTHERN CAPE)

3 Yellow mongooses and 1 Slender mongoose.

UPINGTON TO KAGLAGADI TRANSFONTIER PARK (formerly KALALHARI GEMSBOCK)(NORTHERN CAPE)

3 Yellow mongooses (including one near my tent in Upington campsite), 1 Slender mongoose, 1 dead Aardwolf, 1 dead Bat eared fox, 1 dead Striped polecat, 1 Springhare in a campsite south of the park and 1 dead on the road, several Gemsboks and Sprigbucks, 1 Meerkat.

KAGLAGADI TRANSFONTIER PARK (NORTHERN CAPE)

I slept 1 night just south of the park (full), 2 nights at Mata Mata and 1 at Twee Rivieren. In total I stayed 3 full days and 2 half days in the park.

I saw 1 Brown hyaena by 17h30 on my first afternoon in the park (it was my target mammal there), 3 times Spotted hyaenas (1,3,2), 2 different Lions (males at 2 places), a few Ground squirrels-far more common in Mata Mata campsite where they opened my pot and ate my cooked sweet potatoes, 2 Yellow mongooses, 2 Slender mongooses (rufous), 2 groups of Meerkats (7,2), Red hartebeest (7, 6), circa 30 Giraffes (reintroduced), 8 Steenboks, at least 15 Black backed Jackals, +500 Springbucks, +200 Gemsboks, circa 100 Wildebeests, 1 Honey badger by 9h45 (they are regularly seen early morning near each camp), 2 dead dry Elands.

I did a night organized drive, again without interest. The guide was able to drive only and unfortunately I couldn't grab a torch (see Richard Web 2010 trip report- Try to grab one- It is not always easy, even if you arrive early).

AUGRABIES NATIONAL PARK (NORTHERN CAPE)

I slept only 1 night: the staff has the right to camp on the grass, but not the clients. At the campsite were Chacma baboons and Vervets monkeys. The last ones are really a pest.

I walked 1 morning and did an afternoon drive until night. I saw 60 Elands, 40 Kudus, 50 Springboks, 2 Red hartebeests, 10 Gemsboks, Hartmann's mountain zebras (4 and 1) (introduced, they are normally only on the north side of the Orange river, 2 Slender mongooses (1 grey, 1 rufous), 2 Yellow mongooses, 9 Klipspringers, hundreds of Rock hyraxes and only faeces of African clawless otter.

I did also a night drive with a good driver-guide spotlighting on 1 side of the car. I spotlighted on the other side. We got 2 African wild cats, 1 Common genet, 2 Smith's rd rock rabbits and Scrub hares.

I went on the night drive after asking who was the guide. As it was Mario, recommended by Sjeff Ollers, I booked. I agree with Sjeff that this guide is very good.

SANDVELD GAME RESERVE (ORANGE FREE STATE)

One night only with Grey duikers and Black backed Jackal in the camping. I did 2 drives and saw: circa 50 Sable antelopes, 3 White rhinos, 1 Yellow mongoose, 2 Ground squirrels, circa 70 Tsessebe, several Springboks, 10 Gemsboks, and several Steenboks and Grey duikers.

BLOEMHOF GAME RESERVE (NORTH WEST PROVINCE)

This reserve is next to the latter. I didn't visit it. But from the road I saw 1 Blesbok and 30 Black wildebeests.

KRUGER NATIONAL PARK (MPUMALANGA AND LIMPOPO)

I arrived there on the 12th of September, so slept in Hazyview. Then I slept 1 night in Skukuza, 3 in Satara and 1 in Pretoriuskop. I did 1 night drive in Skukuza and 2 in Satara. All the three were good (each time I got a spotlight).

By night: 5 Lesser bushbabies near Skukuza, 1 unidentified Genet, 1 Large spotted genet, 1 Common genet, 2 White tailed mongooses, Scrub hares, African wild cat (1 near Satara), 12 Spotted hyaena near Skukuza, 2 sightings of Leopard near Skukuza (the same?), 4+1 Porcupines, 1 African near Satara, White rhino each night, 1 African civet, .

By day: Bushbucks (2+2 near Skukuza along the river, 1 near Pretoriuskop, 1 north Satara), same place for 5+2 Nyalas, 3+2+1+1 Dwarf mongooses, 1+2+1+1+1 Slender mongoose, Lion(1 male near a killed Giraffe, 2 south Satara, 2 cubs north Satara, 1 femelle+3 cubs far south of Satara, 3 south Satara, 14 far south Satara of which 2 attacked a Buffalo), 8 Lycaons crossing a bridge north of Skukuza, Spotted hyaena (2 north Skukuza, 1+2 cubs and 1+2 cubs south Satara, 1 near Satara camp), 1 Leopard along river near Skukuza, 1 Klipspringer on a rock in the middle of the river below Olifants and 3 south Satara, 150 African buffalos, White rhinos (3+2 north Satara, 3 south Satara, 3+1 north Satara; 1 elsewhere, 4+3+2+1+1 near Pretoriuskop), Tsessebe (1+6+7 east Mopani), Elephants (300+; 2 groups of 50 each east Mopani), Southern reedbucks (4 east Mopani, 3 Pretoriuskop), Banded mongoose (3 in 1 group), White rhinos(27 mainly between Pretoriuskop, Skukuza and Lower Sabie, but also around and north Satara), Black backed jackals (2+2+1), Side striped jackal (1 south Satara), Black back Jackal(2+2 Satara to Lower Sabi), Chacma baboons (very few), Vervet monkeys (very few), Steinbucks (very common), Grey bushduiker (common), Impalas (very common), Giraffes (+60), Epaulette fruit bat (1 at Olifants reception, 5 at Skukuza shop like indicated by Curtis Hart, Wildebeest (300+), Burchell's zebras 300+), Greater kudu (common in small groups), Waterbucks (120+), Bush squirrels (circa 15, mainly in camps), Warthog (at least 30 every day), African buffalo (400+ Klipspringer (1 near Pretoriuskop), Hippos (common), 1 Cheetah near Pretoriuskop, Greater kudu (common).

BETWEEN KRUGER ET JOHANNESBURG

1 dead striped Polecat

I hope I have not forgotten too many sightings.

Dominique BRUGIERE