

Trip Report – Western Cape to Kruger, South Africa, August & Sept 2010

We toured across the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces visiting the following wildlife destinations: Cape Peninsula, Hermanus, De Hoop Nature Reserve, Tsitsikamma National Park, Mountain Zebra National Park, Tillietudlem Game and Trout Farm, and some hiking in the Drakensberg. We explored the Kruger from south to north, staying at Lower Sabie, Olifants and Punda Maria camps. Before leaving South Africa we spent three days at Marievale after otters.

At Cape Point we saw **blesbok**, **eland** and **baboons** – indeed, one stood outside our car and watched studiously while we ate a snack. Off the coast at Simon's Town we saw a single **southern right whale** breaching and **cape fur seals**. There were **cape grey mongoose** readily seen even in gardens. From the shore at Hermanus we had even better viewing of southern right whales and a pod of perhaps a hundred **common dolphins**. Seeing huge baleen whales so close to shore that they're almost in the surf is amazing. We took a whale-watching boat out and saw plenty more southern right and a young **humpback whale**. We had hoped for Brydes whale but didn't get lucky.

At De Hoop NR we got plenty of **mountain zebra**, **grey rhebok**, **blue wildebeest** and more eland, blesbok and baboons. Tsitsikamma was our first sight of a **bushbuck**, but no luck with the blue duiker. We also saw four **bottlenose dolphins** very close to shore – the steep dropoff is what allows shore-based cetacean watching right along this coast. In both these places we were looking out for cape clawless otters, but saw none despite plenty of old spoor.

The N9 road across the Karoo is pretty good for wildlife watching even at speed. We saw **yellow mongoose**, **suricate**, **mountain reedbuck** and **vervet monkeys**. Mountain Zebra NP is a beautiful place for game viewing, on a high plateau up in the mountains at the edge of the Karoo. We saw **black wildebeest**, **greater kudu** and a distant sight of **black rhinoceros** along with plenty of mountain zebra, eland, bontebok, springbok, rhebok, baboons and vervet monkeys.

Tillietudlem is a farm that is being managed back to a more natural state, and the effort seems to be paying off well - we found a **reedbuck** that had definitely been leopard killed (as well as seeing plenty of live reedbuck). We saw **oribi**, **waterbuck**, eland, blue wildebeest and **plains zebra**. Our target species at Tillietudlem was cape clawless otter again, and we had some excellent otter sightings on the top and middle dams (i.e. on the trout lakes, referred to as "dams" in South Africa). The surprise was that they were **spotted-necked otters** rather than cape clawless. Mike, the manager, tells us that cape clawless are definitely present, but it's hard to know for certain as he was referring to the family we saw.

Hiking in the Drakensberg we saw **four-striped grass mice**, **angoni vleirat** and probable rhebok. We also saw cape clawless otter spraint high up mountain paths, where they are presumably moving between mountain streams.

Reading Richard Webb's recent report (lucky guy!) I have to agree that the quality of game drives is totally dependent on getting a decent guide and someone useful spotlighting. We did a morning drive at Olifants (the sightings book suggested they were seeing more than on night drives!?) and the “best” we saw was distant white rhinos.

Lower Sabie was by far the best camp for wildlife. We got great **white rhino** sightings, lots and lots of **elephants** and **hippopotamus**, really good **spotted hyena**, endless **impala** along with kudu, bushbuck, grey duiker and steenbok. There were **giraffe** and zebra in numbers, and a few **buffalo** along the river. We had a glimpse of a lioness. Our night drive guide was good, but the guest spotlighters were hopeless. I managed to spot a **white-tailed mongoose** (not even by eye-shine; it was right by the car and they missed it) and we ended up at a pride of **lions** lounging by the Sabie road.

Olifants didn't add much to our tally, though there were good lion viewings on the way to and from the camp, and **banded mongoose**. Also **tree squirrels** in camp.

The northern camp, Punda Maria, was the most pleasant stay – but true to expectation didn't yield much game. We did get to see **tsessebe** and lots of **nyala**, and then several **sharpe's grysbok**, **springhares** and a **small-spotted genet** on a better night drive (we were the only two punters, so we had the lights!).

On our final day we back south for the entire day and were rewarded with a **leopard** sighting not far from the road, along with more lions and a hyena. In total over the five days we saw 31 different individual lions in 8 sightings, but we lucked out on cheetah and wild dogs.

Our final stop in South Africa was Marivale Bird Sanctuary in Gauteng, as a last chance to see cape clawless otters. We dedicated 3 solid days to viewing.

Photos from this trip at www.otteradrift.com – the blog for our year-long round the world trip. The next trip report will be two weeks in Madagascar.

Complete list for the South African leg of our year around the world

(64 mammals in 7 weeks, excluding several unidentified bats and voles, and 34 to add to the life list)

Species	Life List
Chacma baboon	
Bat-eared fox	Yes
Black-backed jackal	
Honey badger	
Black-footed cat	Yes
Yellow mongoose	
Slender mongoose	
Aardwolf	Yes
Spotted hyena	

Cheetah	Yes
Lion	
Common warthog	
Aardvark	Yes
Plains zebra	
Blue wildebeest	
Black wildebeest	Yes
Giraffe	
Red haartebeest	
Grey duiker	
Springbok	Yes
Steenbok	
Gemsbok	Yes
Greater kudu	
Waterbuck	
Scrub hare	Yes
Cape hare	Yes
Spring hare	
Ground squirrel	
African porcupine	Yes
Suricate	Yes
Rock dassie	Yes
Klipspringer	Yes
Eland	Yes
Vervet monkey	
Southern right whale	Yes
Cape grey mongoose	Yes
Bontebok	Yes
Cape fur seal	Yes
Common dolphin	
Humpback whale	
Grey rhebok	Yes
Mountain zebra	Yes
Bushbuck	Yes
Mountain reedbuck	Yes
Black rhinoceros	Yes
Reedbuck	
Spotted necked otter	Yes
Oribi	Yes
Hippopotamus	
White rhinoceros	Yes
Elephant	
White-tailed mongoose	Yes
Banded mongoose	
Tree squirrel	Yes
Small-spotted genet	Yes

Sharpe's grysbok	Yes
Nyala	Yes
Four-striped grass mouse	Yes
Angoni vleirat	Yes
Buffalo	
Tsessebe	
Leopard	
Impala	