

Trip Report to South Africa, October 1-23, 2016

I've been wanting to go to South Africa ever since I knew about Africa... I don't know how I ended up in Tanzania **before** South Africa, but I'm happy to have done it this way, so I could "knock out" some of the bigger stuff like the big cats, black rhino, etc. and then concentrate on some of the South African specialties while I'm here.

The trip was a 23-day trip, of which the "safari" days were planned by me, and the "scenic" and "cultural" days were planned by my mom. I made a list of 20 mammal species I really wanted to see. I actually had realistic chances for all the species on that list other than pangolin (even though there have been exceptionally frequent sightings this year in Kruger than ever before, partly because of the biggest drought in 14 years) and the spotted-necked otter, which I gave up by compromising Mariavale for mom's scenic stuff.

The itinerary was as follows:

- 30-Sep: Land and drive to Nelspruit for the night
- 1-Oct: Panoramic Route & highlands to Amanda, outside Orpen gate of Kruger
- 2-Oct: Orpen to Satara (Kruger NP)
- 3-Oct: Satara (Kruger NP)
- 4-Oct: Satara to Skukuza (Kruger NP)
- 5-Oct: Skukuza (Kruger NP)
- 6-Oct: Skukuza to Crocodile Bridge (Kruger NP)
- 7-Oct: Crocodile bridge early morning, to Pretoria to Lesedi Cultural center
- 8-Oct: Lesedi to Sun city and Pilanesberg, sleep in Mogwase
- 9-Oct: Pilanesberg to Marrick
- 10-Oct: Marrick-Mokala-Marrick
- 11-Oct: Marrick to Mountain Zebra NP, sleep in Cradock
- 12-Oct: Mountainz Zebra morning, to Port Elizabeth to Jeffrey's Bay
- 13-Oct: Jeffrey's Bay to Tsitsikama, to Plattenberg Bay, to Knysna
- 14-Oct: Featherbed Reserve to Oudtshoorn
- 15-Oct: Cango caves, Ostrich ranch (yes...) to De Hoop
- 16-Oct: De Hoop
- 17-Oct: De Hoop to Arniston caves to Cape Aghulas, to Hermanos
- 18-Oct: Hermanos to Stony Point to Stellenbosch
- 19-Oct: Stellenbosch to West coast NP
- 20-Oct: West Coast to Cape Town
- 21-23-Oct: Cape Town

On Sept. 30th we rented a Hunday sudan from Johannesburg airport and drove straight to Nelspruit. We saw 1 herd of **Springbok** on the way, and some birds. Our hotel was right at the edge of town, overlooking some forest. I recently read in Fiona Reid's report about her friends seeing a Serval in the middle of Dullstrum (another town in the same general region) So I was fantasizing about seeing one before even entering Kruger. I spot-lit from the fence of the hotel but saw nothing, and got shocked from the electric fence... Oops.

1-Oct – I woke up at like 6am because I heard tons of bird calls and I was like "shit, I'm in AFRICA, so I should go outside and see what I can find". Anyway, I did get to see my first species of Turaco and Barbet of the trip, along with some other cool birds, but no mammals. After breakfast we visited Lone Creek falls (where we spotted another turaco

species), Mac Mac falls, and Blyde's canyon. There was terrible fog so we skipped some of the lookout points, but insisted on going to God's Window, from where there was 0 view, but we did do the hiking trail which was very nice and actually got sunny at some points. Then we stopped at Lisbon falls and Berlin falls, before visiting Bourke's Luck



Potholes which was a very nice walk. As soon as we entered the walkway from the parking lot we saw our first **Vervet Monkeys** and took photos of them before continuing down the path. While walking down toward the river my sister said "Look, here's another mammal species.. a mouse." So I looked at the pile of rocks, and there was an **Eastern Rock Elephant Shrew** just out in the open. I was super excited because it was the first species of elephant shrew I've ever seen. We took some pictures

and a video before it ran off . We were able to relocate it a few times before it ran too far off on the rocks. We also stopped at the Three Rondavels before continuing down to the "town" of Amanda, outside Orpen gate of Kruger. On the way down we saw our first troupe of **Chacma Baboons** crossing the road, and when we got down to the lowlands, there were numerous private reserves of either side of the road. They were all fenced,



but through the fences we saw some **Greater Kudus, Nyala, Waterbuck, and Impalas**, but I don't know how many of them you can really "count" other than a few **Warthogs** which were out on the road. We saw all of these antelopes later on, anyway. When we got to Fleur-de-Lys Ranch, there were a bunch of **Impalas** and some **Common Reedbucks** on the farm. I asked the owner (I forget his name but he's a really nice guy) if it was a "game ranch", he said no, but that there's some "general game" in the fields, including mostly impalas and reedbucks. But someone also saw a leopard in the fields just a few days ago. I spotlit a little around the huts, seeing mostly **impalas**, and a single **Common Grey Duiker** that lived in the bushes behind the huts. I also asked the owner about servals, and after explaining to him it looks like a mini Cheetah, he said he had seen one in the neighboring farm. After walking around with the torch for a while, we sat down for dinner in the outdoors kitchen... and right after I was already showered and ready to go to sleep suddenly I got a knock on the door. It was the owner of the ranch, and he asked me, since I was "so interested in seeing the wild animals", if I wanted to take a quick ride in his open-back truck and spotlight around, "see what we can find". I couldn't say no, so off we went. That was really nice of him!

Almost immediately we saw some more **reedbuck** **Scrub Hare**, **Impalas**, **Bushbuck**, **Waterbuck**, and a single **Red Duiker** which was running along the farm fence, to get away from the light. He also told me he has bush pigs on the property and that he sees them occasionally.



2-3-Oct – I was really excited for Kruger, plus the road from Orpen to Satara is notorious for some great wildlife spotting. But this wasn't the case with windy overcast conditions. Well, before we even entered the park, still driving along the outside fence, we came across a herd of what must have been a few hundred **Buffalos**, and we stopped but didn't even take a picture because it was already past 8am, and I was in a hurry to get inside the park and try our luck with the things I was after. I was also sure that if we saw this many before even entering the park, then we would see even larger herds inside... but we never saw a herd that was even close to this size again. Oh well. We did see some more **Kudus** and a pride of **Lions** on the opposite side of the river that someone else pointed out to us. I should say that over the past 6-7 month, I've been checking the "Latest Sightings" app to see where wild dogs and small cats are being seen, as well as sable antelopes, pangolins, and everything besides lions and leopards. So I had pretty high hopes about knowing where to look for what. I really overestimated the distances between the camps and the gates... but we drove slow, so the GPS times between locations were about doubled, which was in-line with my over-estimation. So over the next 2 days in Satara we saw **Blue Wildebeest**, **Plains Zebras**, **Giraffes**, **Elephants**, tons of **Impalas** of course, and **Warthogs**, several **Steenboks**, **Baboons** and **Vervet Monkeys**, **Kudus** and **Waterbuck**, a few **Spotted Hyenas**, very few **Black-backed Jackals** and **lions** every day. The second morning we were POSITIVE that we found a side-striped jackal, but re-evaluation of the photo proved that it was just another black-backed in a weird light. At the camp were several cool birds including 2-3 species of hornbills, and **Common (Smith's Bush) Tree Squirrel**, and **vervet monkeys**, but despite walking around camp for over 40 minutes looking for honey badgers after the night drive, I found none! Apparently they've become a problem, so many have been caught and released elsewhere. Serval was my main target for the Satara area, and on the first night drive I offered the guide a large tip if he found me one. He said that they used to see them sometimes when the rains were "regular" but they haven't seen them in a while... Also, it was irregularly cold for this area this time of the year. Nevertheless, we were out on the drive by the order of arrival pretty much (we booked all night drives months in advance, when we booked the accommodations) but it didn't matter that much because there were at least 2-3 spotlights spread throughout the truck, plus anyone was able to use their personal light and I recently bought a really good LedLenser P17R, which has a 400m range. It might be a bit too white, I still can't decide if yellower light such as the park's spotlight might be better for picking up eyeshine or not. But regardless, we spotted several more **Scrub Hares**, **2 Cape Porcupines**, one really close.. Actually, when we stopped for the first porcupine and the driver (who was very cooperative and a good identifier, btw) reversed till we told him to stop, the porcupine disappeared behind a bush and then "shape-shifted" when a slightly smaller, spike-less rodent ran out of the bush, but we never got an excellent look at it. It looked like it must have been a **Cane Rat** but I can't "count it". We also saw a lot of the diurnal antelopes and **giraffes** but I

ignored them. Then almost right back at the lodge, the guide found an **African Wild Cat** hunting in the grass, and we got some excellent close-up views of it. I was surprised that



we still had some time left, and instead of turning into the lodge we continued onwards, shortly finding two **Lionesses** on the road which were 0-m away, and later a **Genet** species, which was unidentifiable from the only picture I got of it. But that concluded our night drive, apart from a chameleon species the driver pointed out to us. On the second morning we had our first long encounter with **Chacma Baboons** after the previous brief sighting, and added **Banded Mongooses** which crossed a dry stream. But despite following board sightings of wild dogs, we

saw none. In the afternoon, we made a loop that goes north-wards and comes back down the main road between Satara and Olifants. Aside from countless **Steenboks**, **warthogs**, **Impalas** and **Kudus**, we also added a **Honey Badger** around 16:30pm. Funny enough, the only reason we saw it was because I thought I saw something in the tall grass, so I had my mom stop the car, and when I looked close with my binoculars, I realized it was just a log, but then I picked up the Badger in my binoculars. It hung around for a while, but pictures were just sufficient for ID in the tall grass. Recognizable, for sure, but not what I wanted. Another nice sighting was a red-crested Korhaan performing its crested dance to a nearby female.



After the Honey Badger fiasco which lasted a few minutes, we were kind of in a hurry because everyone had to pee since lunch! (Of course stopping and going behind a bush in Kruger is not a good idea...) so we kind of hurried the rest of the way to Satara lodge because we still had about an hour's drive, during which I spotted a pair of **White Rhinos** pretty far off the road, also in tall grass. We took some pictures and continued to the lodge. The second night drive was very cold again, and also windy. Almost right away, we saw a **black-backed jackal**, then pack of **Lions** followed by **Hyenas**, and spent an

unfortunate length of time with them, especially since the lions had a fresh zebra kill.

After having enough of the lions we continued to follow mainly the same paths as the previous night, stopping over the bridge where a hippo carcass was seen earlier that day, with over 20 **hyenas** seen in the vicinity of the carcass. I also spotted a **porcupine** again from the bridge but I don't think anyone was interested in seeing it. We went to the chameleon again, which was suspiciously in the same position on the same leaf... and then we drove down another path where the guide claimed "usually we see civets and genets right here, but maybe because of the cold they're not around". That was disappointing, but we did see another **White Rhino** just right next to the truck, as well as two species of owls (Verraux's eagle and white-faced).

4-Oct we were again out when the gates opened, and took the H6 West again toward the westernmost border of the park, then drove south on the S37 then S35, where a very knowledgeable guide I spoke with the previous day told me I might find a serval and a honey badger den. For the most part we didn't see too much on that road, but we did stop at a few water holes where **Hippos** and crocodiles were hanging out both in and out of the water, and seeing obvious otter dens in the bush-covered small cliffs along the river sides. But no actual otters around. This was visible also in Tshockwane picnic site as well, later on. We saw more of the same game along the way, with elephants, giraffes and antelopes, our only group of Southern Ground hornbills of the trip, and a huge group of **Dwarf Mongooses** not far from the turn to Tshokwane Picnic Site. The rest of the



afternoon was none-fruitful besides another **White Rhino** laying in the sun really far away and some nice birds. We also stopped to double-check every **steenbok** to see if it was a suni by any chance, not realizing that sunis only occur further north in Kruger. When we checked in at Skukuza, my mom suggested we check out the restaurant since it was our only chance to see it during daylight, and there I saw our first of only 2-3 **Nyalas** across the river. If the

afternoon drive wasn't productive, it was nothing compared to the night drive! We actually had the **WORST** guide/driver I've ever encountered, that night. He gave a very promising speech in the beginning, ending with "welcome aboard" in like 8 languages. But then it turned out that all he wanted to do was hear himself talk, giving long and unnecessary lectures about every little animal we saw, long after it was gone, starting with the **scrub hare**. My sister and I (along some of the other participants) spotted several eye shines in the bushes, including **genets** and potential **civets**, but he dismissed all of them by saying "let's try to find something more interesting" and saying "I like talking more about the big animals". Yes, he actually said that. But the **WORST** part was yet to come... a lady from the back of the truck shouted **STOP!** She had spotted a **leopard**, and it was hunting some **monkeys!** We actually heard all the commotion, and it sounded like a terrible, deadly fight. Crazy stuff! after a few seconds when the noises

settled down, she said she now again has the leopard still in the light, but what did our guide do? Instead of waiting, or reversing 2-3 meters so everyone can have a better view of it? He turns the truck around, and starts driving AWAY. Everyone was yelling at him and asking him what is he doing, so he said he's going to bring us closer to where the leopard was. At this point, only the lady and her boyfriend as well as my sister, who was sitting on their side, actually saw the leopard and everyone else wanted to see it as well. After a ~15 minute detour we got to where supposedly the hunt happened, but nothing was there. Wow, this guy was a MORON. Then, on top of not seeing anything interesting besides **elephants** (for which he gave a literally 7-8 minute speech about, 5 minutes after the elephant was nowhere to be seen anymore), he stopped the truck and he and his buddy went to go pee behind the truck; an unwelcomed stop. He also gave a speech about that, which NONE of the participants found amusing, because everyone was upset with him. At the end of the night drive, nobody said "thank you" to him or anything, and everyone just kinda walked off disappointed. Luckily, to uplift the spirit a bit, after spotlighting the whole way to our hut, we found an **Epauletted Fruit Bat** (Peter's?), which was making an high-pitched sound, and at last, right beside our hut, a single **Bushy-tailed (greater) Bushbaby**. For some reason my ISO was turned low, and so the pictures of both animals were extremely blurry, despite very clear views of both. (This is a still frame from a



video I took after unsuccessful pictures).



The next morning (5-Oct) I planned a route based on the past few months' Wild Dog and Sable Antelopes sightings. The latter have been seen repeatedly around Pretorioskop and at the Shitlhave dam. We were at the gate at like 5:31 but were the 20th-something car out. The morning, which I thought was a sure bet for wild dogs, considering I thought I knew where a den was, turned

into a long and heated debate about the importance of being out early. But suddenly, we found ourselves at the end of the Doispane Road, having missed the wild dog den. We decided to keep going on the loop and hope to encounter the dogs later on. We went south on the S3 toward Pretorioskop. The only thing we saw was another pair of **lions**, more **common grey duikers**, and other antelopes, 3 **White Rhinos**, and added an **Oribi**

the mammal list, before my mom and sister decided to go for breakfast at Pretoriuskop. During their breakfast, I went to check out a loop where a German guy told me he saw wild dogs this morning on top of some very small kopjes, but only elephants were there when I got there. I wanted to try to find wild dogs desperately, but my mom and sister wanted to find a leopard after last night's failure, and since it's the only "big 5" we haven't seen yet. I was a little annoyed because we have all had excellent, close and prolonged views of all the big cats in Tanzania, but they wanted a leopard, so leopard we chased. We did make a quick stop to the Shitlhave dam, where only **waterbuck** were found, but luckily I drove up the tiny little loop-around to the adjacent water hole there, where a single **Sable antelope** was standing out in the open! After waiting for a while



and taking pictures, it actually came closer to drink from the water hole. Wow! For once my research actually paid off. That was a good sign. But that was it besides a few more **White Rhinos** along the main road down to Malenle gate and more of the same other things. We went to three different leopard sighting spots without seeing one, and no wild dogs either. I personally wanted to go back to Skukuza earlier, to rest after all these late nights and early morning, because I was starting to be really tired and irritated from the lack of sleep. Also, I wanted to look for wild dogs based on the board and the Latest Sightings App, so I was a little tired of chasing the invisible leopards, which we have all seen before. Back at Skukuza, we saw that no wild dogs were seen on the Doispans Road that day besides one close to S3 which was too far for us now, because we only had about 1.5 hours to leave and come back before the gates closed. But we decided that we can chase 1 wild dog sighting that wasn't too far. We only saw **tree squirrels, steenbok,**



Bushbuck, baboons, and right before turning into Skukuza itself, a **Slender Mongoose** along the road which was very unconcerned by our presence.

Of course as luck would have it, back at the restaurant I saw a report on the app of 30 wild dogs on the road we were JUST ON, about 15 minutes after we were there. The report was accompanied by a picture, and a huge disappointment on my part. Because of the early mornings,

and due to last night's disappointment, my mom and sister decided not to come on the night drive, which was a mistake on their part because it was the exact opposite of last night's! In fact, the same terrible guide was there again (I was VERY concerned) but he told me to go to the OTHER truck, where another guide was driving. This one actually held his own spotlight, and was phenomenal! Within a few minutes, we found a pair of **Honey Badgers** right by the road and got some good pictures and videos of them. Then



we got my first **African Civet** in a bush, which I didn't get a picture of, but was happy to see, and then the driver took us to a place where he found a **leopard** for us. The leopard was very far and I couldn't get any good pictures. Our guide signaled the other truck which was far back, with the shitty guide. Here is the differences between the two guides:



OUR guide (the good one, this time) drove back after having spotted the leopard. We didn't understand why he was doing that, all-while the other truck stuck by the initial leopard sighting. But then we realized the leopard was walking our way, and was in fact getting closer and closer, until he crossed the road about a meter away from us. We had a very long time to observe it and take as many photos and videos as we wanted

Meanwhile, the shitty guide was still parked where the initial sighting was, way back, giving his poor passengers a long speech about the leopard, and the **rhinos** that were there, instead of trying to follow the leopard, which was LONG GONE by then. What an idiot! Seriously.

6-Oct – After seeing my pictures from last night, my mom and sister were ever so eager to find a leopard! I wanted them to see it as well, to “knock it out of the way” so that we can concentrate on finding the wild dogs, since this was our last full day in the park. By this morning I was already sleep-deprived and also my eyes were itchy because of the dryness and I was considering changing out my contacts for glasses. So my sister did most of the spottings this morning, but nothing new. We finally arrived at a big traffic jam on a bridge, where a leopard was seen, and the kill was still in the tree. After waiting at the bridge and not seeing much for about 10-15 minutes, we saw the **leopard** running across the dry river bed back to the tree with the kill. It was about a 4-second sighting and then the leopard was in the bush. My family wanted to keep waiting for it to climb up the tree, but by this point we were already being honked at and even cursed, to move and allow other people to view it as well. This was strange, as everyone else up to this point was extremely nice, but some foreign tour guides who wanted to show their clients the leopard were being ‘not so nice’. Ok, so we moved on. Somewhat content with the sighting, we carried on to Lower Sabie, where we looked at the board and saw 3 different wild dog sightings all on the S29 we took off and tried to look for them but with no success. This road does seem like an EXCELLENT road to game drive through. After lunch back at lower sabie, we continued toward Crocodile Bridge, where I was counting on seeing the Serval that has been reported by several people on the mammal watching blog. In fact, in Crocodile bridge I booked both the night drive AND the Pre-dawn drive, which was to be the last game drive for us in Kruger. We saw no more new mammals during the day but we did see a black mamba crossing the road, and a spotted bush snake at Crocodile bridge when we checked in, plus our closest **White rhino** yet, on the afternoon drive. At night, it finally warmed up, and no wind, and we picked up another few **civets** and **Small-spotted Genets** plus finally a photogenic **Porcupine** and a couple



of **White-tailed Mongooses** which didn't stick around for any sort of good picture. After some diurnal species including 2 old **buffalos** that the guide gave a speech about, we saw no other mammals for the next hour and a half or so, driving through dense bush, until just before the lodge I picked up an eye shine that manifested itself as a **South African (lesser) Galago**. Of course this bouncy guy did not stick around for a picture, nor did the

driver, who was mediocre. He was really good at identifying the animals, but was only partially patient with sightings of anything other than the big 5. We were about 40 minutes late coming back to the lodge, so my mom&sister decided they weren't going on the pre-dawn drive.

7-Oct – I was the only one in my group for the sunset drive, and was accompanied by several people who have just now entered the park for the first time (since crocodile bridge is both a camp and a gate), and who were really excited to see a **giraffe** and an **elephant**. Unfortunately, we had the same guide, and I say unfortunately mostly because of how tired he must have been, working both the “late night” shift and the subsequent “early morning” shift. So his patience was ever shorter for the few eye-shines we picked up before the sunrise, which included yet another **porcupine** and at least one **Genet**. I asked him again about the Serval, but he (like the guides in Skukuza) said that it's one of the hardest things to see. I guess he's just not that good of a spotter, because of course an Israeli couple we met randomly later on our trip said they saw a Serval on the night drive at crocodile bridge ☺ just a day or two before us. So we added no new species on this sunrise drive, and just saw more **hyenas**, **elephants**, **giraffes**, **implalas** and **kudus**, **white rhinos** and an active pride of **lions** that also had an unsuccessful hunt. I was again late



coming back to the lodge by about 40 minutes, which wasn't good because we had a long drive to Pretoria and then to Lesedi Cultural Center. So at this point I left Kruger, EXTREMELY tired after long, sleep-deprived days, having seen a lot of cool stuff, but missing perhaps the top two targets for Kruger – the wild dogs and the serval. But there were still too many other targets on the list to worry about that, plus there was a small chance of encountering either of those at Pilanesberg. In retrospect, I would concentrate more on the Wild Dogs, and less on leopards and other stuff, but I had to be considerate. Also, having a sedan as opposed to a jeep or any higher-seated car surely didn't help either, but what can you do. We drove to Pretoria and then to Lesedi, which was a welcomed pause from the intense hours of mammal (and bird and reptile) watching. I needed that sleep and the mental rest of not scanning the bush for anything that moves or

that slightly stands out from its surroundings. I won't say too much about Lesedi because this is a mammal watching report, but it is a very nice place where they explain a lot about the cultures of South Africa, with small performances and rituals, and we also slept there at what was one of the most fun rooms of the trip. Their dinner was excellent as well, and it was a great break for our drive from Kruger to Pilanesberg. There were some obviously non-native Rabbits in the gardens of Lesedi, I think they were just **Domestic Rabbits**. I asked the tour guide where they came from and she said they just "invited themselves" but they were clearly not a native species.

8-Oct – After a leisurely breakfast we left for Sun City, which is said to be the “Las Vegas of South Africa”, but it's really not. Basically it's one large resort with 3 hotel options and some time shares, and not a small city where you can freely walk around between the hotels as you can in Vegas. You also have to pay to park at the Sun City parking lot, and for every little attraction there. But we did spot some road-side **Blesboks** on a golf course along the way, not sure if they were “just accidental visitors” or introduced. But we would see them again anyway. At 1:15pm, we met Jaco Rautenberg at the welcome center of Sun City, and went on our way into Pilanesberg. Jaco said that he found out from other guides about a lion kill near the Sun City entrance, so that would be a good place to look for the **Brown Hyena** late afternoon and early the next morning. The Hyena was the main target for Pilanesberg. That was after Jaco suggested the following tips:

1. Spend at least 3 full days in the park to make your chances~80%
2. Do not come on a Saturday, Sunday or a school holiday
3. Come as close as you can to the 1st of September or the 1st of November, when the gate open times change, as it gives you the most time in the park during dark.

Unfortunately, our itinerary was set and non-flexible, and we happened to be at Pilanesberg on a Saturday afternoon-to-close, and Sunday Open-to-10am, during the tail end of a school holiday.. Oh boy. So Jaco said he'd do his best, and also mentioned that the morning drive is more crucial than the afternoon drive for the brown hyenas. At the gate we saw some **banded mongooses**, **Impalas** and **Kudus**, and more general game. Jaco definitely has extremely sharp eyes, especially for animals further away, which I took a few seconds to find after he pointed them out. He also obviously knows this park like the back of his hand, and is always up-to-date on latest sighting locations, as he's friends with many of the guides from the lodges around. The park is also more picturesque than Kruger for the most part, and like Kruger, general game is always around. **White Rhinos** were particularly numerous as Jaco had promised, and we also had the chance to photograph **Springbok**, which from this point on, was the most common antelope, surpassing impala. We also photographed **Tsessebe**, for the first time.



We saw 2 **leopards** that afternoon, and added **Cape / Rock Hyrax** in the Kopjes where Jaco tried to find us Klipspringers, which we missed in Kruger as well. However, we did not succeed with our Brown Hyena expedition for the evening. I was starting to get worried with the lack of success we were having with the “rare” animals for this trip. But Jaco also said that the chance for seeing them early in the morning is about 5X higher than in the late afternoon, because they walk way too far at night in search of a kill, and then they have to go all the way back to their den in the morning. After parting from Jaco we ate at a Kwa Maritane lodge per Jaco’s recommendation. In order to go into this hotel, as with the other few hotels inside the park, you actually go around the perimeter and then RE-ENTER the park via small road that is open 24-hours. For Kwa Maritane you only drive through the park for less than 1km, but that was enough to really upset a huge herd of **Elephants**, to flap their ears and trumpet at us, then start coming toward us until we backed up in reverse all the way past the gate.

Then one of the guides from Game Trackers who was just finished with the very short “past-official-gate-hours” spotlighting session yelled at us to turn off the bright lights because the elephants don’t like it. We were already back outside the gate at this time, but still turning our lights off completely was scary because it was dark and we couldn’t see if the elephants calmed down or kept approaching us. My mom and especially sister kinda freaked out, and we have this whole episode on video ☺. After the elephants passed, we continued back into the park, behind the hotel vehicle who was spotlighting the way to the restaurant, finding nothing additional. But at the lodge itself, there’s a hide that’s inside the park, that’s open 24 hours a day. An Israeli guy who was sitting there after we finished our dinner told us that he saw Rhinos, Elephants and other cool animals drinking from the water hole at night for the past 3 nights. They also have a channel on their hotel TV, which broadcasts this waterhole live. Cool stuff, but we didn’t see anything when we were there.

9-Oct – So Jaco picked us up at our hotel in Mogwase at 5:30, but drove back to the Sun City gate as opposed to the Mogwase gate, because that was where the lion kill was. We were about the 4-5th car in the gate, but we still couldn’t actually see the lion kill, we just knew the vicinity of where it was supposed to be.

After driving for about 30-45 minutes, we passed a lodge-operated truck, which Jaco thought was looking at the **elephants** nearby, but as soon as he passed it I spotted a **Brown Hyena** just out in the open! We enjoyed the Hyena for about the next 10 minutes, and followed it as it got closer to the road





and crossed far in front of us. We tried to get closer, and we did get some superb views but it wasn't very friendly and every time we got a little closer it went way further.

But regardless, we were very happy with our encounter. Since it wasn't even 7am, we still had some time to look for the other targets. Jaco took us to some Kopjes where he immediately spotted a pair of **Klipspringers**. The female

was standing on a rock in the most iconic position for photography of this species, but some stupid b***** who was poking out of her sun roof to take a picture of it scared it away before we could get to the perfect position for photography. Not only is it not allowed in Pilanesberg to pop out of your sun roof, but it wasn't even necessary because it was right by their passenger side window. Oh well, we still got a very decent look and some pictures. So we continued down to the main vlei and started making our way up north toward Mogwasi gate so that we could get to our B&B by 10am and start the long drive to Marrick Safaris. On the way we saw more of the regular game plus another **Slender Mongoose**,



and one cool bird to note, the red-breasted shrike. We saw no cats on the way, despite looking in the areas where caracals and black rhinos are sometimes seen. It's noteworthy that according to Jaco, caracals and servals aren't that common, and Jon having seen 3 caracals one 1 day was exceptionally lucky! Jan Keltchermans did recently see a Serval unexpectedly in Pilanesberg, so I had the fantasy of repeating his luck, but nope. Also there's no realistic chance to see Sable in Pilanesberg anymore, as they're dying off, with a few individuals remaining there. The population is deemed non-viable, according to Jaco. Another note is that there are no longer night drives in the park, and the only way to do spotlighting there is by taking the very expensive private game drive with Game Trackers out of Sun City, which leaves at 18:30 or 19:00 and comes back 3 hours later. But Jaco also told me that night drives in Pilanesberg are generally not very productive, and nocturnal animals like caracal and hyena aren't seen very often at all. Mostly Nightjars and hares..

So we were on our way to Marrick, seeing some more Springbok along the way, as well as **Ground Squirrels** along the road. We reached Marrick about 16:30 and after playing with their pair of adopted Meerkats, Tom & Jerry, we showered, had a lovely dinner with Trevor and Hubre, and were set to go on our first of two night drives. There was another very nice couple from South Africa who was also there, and who also wanted to find the

nocturnal animals, especially the Aardvark. It was pretty cold (like 10-13C), but not super windy. Johnny, the spotlight holder and spotter (the most impressive spotter and identifier I've ever seen) told us that last night were extremely strong winds, and no aardvarks were seen. On the contrary, 3 nights prior, they broke the record for spotting the most black-footed cats in 1 night, which was now 5 sightings. Over the next 3 hours we saw TONS of **Springhare**, and **Cape Hares**, a **South African Hedgehog**, a few **Bat-eared Foxes**, 2



sightings of the **Black-footed cat** 2 **Aardwolves** and a single **Gerbil Mouse**, and a couple of **Porcupines**, as well as our first sightings of **Black Wildebeest** and **Red Hartabeest**, which we would see more of the next day. But no Aardvark! I would really echo some of the advice I received on the Mammal Watching blog – to spend at least 2-3 nights in Marrick in order to "guarantee" an Aardvark sighting. Unfortunately, the other couple only had 1 night, and this was their second attempt to see an Aardvark..

10-Oct was the day of Mongooses. We were going to check out Mokala National Park for some of the desert antelopes like the Roan antelope, which, again thanks to



MammalWatching.com I now know were actually introduced to the park. But there are also several naturally-occurring species there. Trevor from Marrick told us to take the "back" way (which is actually more direct) to the park, and said we would see game along the way. He was right. As soon as we got on the un-named gravel road, I spotted a family of **Meerkats** on a termite mound a bit far off the side of the road, and just got 2 pictures before they ran away. Less than 10 minutes later, a **Yellow Mongoose** crossed the road, and we tried to follow it as it went into the tallish yellow grass, barely getting recognizable



pictures of it . And about 3 minutes later, a Water Mongoose, also known as the **Marsh Mongoose** crossed the road! Unfortunately, we didn't get a picture of this one, despite trying to follow it, too, as it went into the yellow grass, but it disappeared quickly. Now, I know that back in Tanzania I posted a picture in my trip report of a Slender Mongoose that my guide misidentified as a Marsh mongoose, but since then I've learned my mongooses, and I'm certain that this was marsh mongoose. There were a few more **Yellow Mongooses** along the way, as well as **Ground Squirrels** , and many introduced antelopes in the fenced game reserves on both sides of the road. These included mostly **Roan** and **Sable** antelopes, as well as **Gemsbok, Blesbok** and **Springbok**. Inside Mokala itself, which we only reached just before noon, we saw more **Black Wildebeest** and **Red**



Hartabeest as well our first **Elands** of the trip, and both "regular" **zebras** and **Quagga**-like Zebras. We also had a couple more **Yellow Mongooses** in the park, and some other animals including some nice birds and some giant tortoises, one which I saved from certain death, as it found shade underneath the back wheel of a giant SUV which would have probably backed up and crushed it. We didn't see any meerkats in the park despite looking for a short while, but we did find the very easy **Roan** antelopes, which, despite being introduced, look natural and make for decent pictures. I know I can't REALLY



"count" them, but to me they were still cool, and they suffice for me having seen them in a natural setting. Sable are still cooler in my opinion.

Back at the lodge, this was our day to find Aardvarks after not having seen them the previous night! My mom & sister stayed back at the dinner room to watch the first presidential debate, so I was actually out on a solo night drive. The conditions were perfect.. no wind, much warmer than the night before... I had high hopes. I told my guide about my mongoose sightings today, and he told me he has seen the exact same

mongooses in the area, plus dwarf mongoose, which I found to be strange because they're not "known" to occur there. Speaking of mongoose, the first animal we saw was a **Yellow Mongoose** again. We saw most of the same animals from the night before plus an **African Wild Cat**, and 3 **small-spotted genets**, which was now the new record for genet sightings in 1 night! We also saw a Kori Bustard, which this was the 4th time Johnny has ever seen one on the farm. After some more **Hares, Bat-eared Fox, porcupines** and 1 **black-footed cat** (no Aardwolves that night), we FINALLY saw an **Aardvark!!!** Phew! That was my number 1 target species for the trip ☺. He wasn't even all that excited to see



one, because they see them so often, but he did tell me that they used to see up to 7 animals a night, and nowadays they're struggling to find 3. The Aardvark was far, but was coming our way-ish. We stopped the engine and waited. I was able to get a couple of recognizable shots in even though at one point he started walking a bit farther away, but he did end up crossing the road about 20-30 meters in front of us. I was so happy with the Aardvark sighting, that I was ready to move on, and find some of the other animals including the red rock rabbit, and perhaps polecat and caracal, which are sometimes seen on night drives. Caracal is much rarer though. So we went to the Kopjes, and I was just telling Johnny about how we saw the **Eastern Rock Elephant Shrew** earlier on the trip, when he actually spotted one on the rocks! This was his Fourth time seeing one on a night drive. But it was skittish and didn't stay for a pic, plus I already had a near-perfect picture of one from earlier in the trip, so we tried to look for the **Smith's Red Rock Rabbit**, which Johnny said are 50%-50%, but not a minute later he found one on top of the



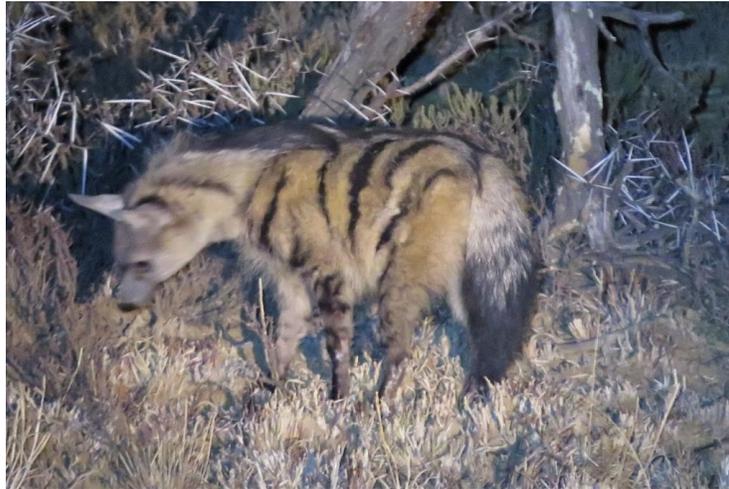
Kopjes and then another one just a couple of minutes later. Then, on top of the rocks and near the water tank he saw a pair of eyes which he identified as a cat. He thought it might be a caracal but the



eyes disappeared and we didn't make too much effort to try to see it again, I don't really remember why. I think because it was already past 10pm and we were all a bit tired, plus it was getting a bit cooler... and in my naivety I thought I'd see one in either De Hoop or West Coast later on. So I asked Johnny if we could maybe try to look for the Zorilla before dropping me off at my cabin. We gave it a shot, but no zorilla (polecat). Before dropping me off I said "Do you really think that cat could have been a caracal?" and Johnny said "yeah, the eyes were too far apart for wild or house cat", and then it occurred to me that we should DEFINITELY try to go back and find it, so we went back to the Kopjes but the mystery animal was not there anymore. Regardless, this was a VERY successful night drive, and I was extremely happy with Johnny and Ben, and of course Trevor and Hubre for the hospitality and just the whole experience at Marrick.

11-Oct – we left Marrick after breakfast and headed toward Mountain Zebra National Park, which was a long way away. During the drive we saw of course **Springbok** along the way, as well as some **Ground Squirrels**, a few **Yellow Mongooses** and a single

Meerkat in some concrete ruins that I think used to be a house. We also saw the first blue cranes of the trip... first of many. At Mountain Zebra we slept in the town of Cradock. We arrived in time for an afternoon nap, a late lunch (too late, as most restaurants close at 17:00 so we found the only one that was still open), and then a night drive at Mountain Zebra National Park. An interesting thing takes place at Mountain Zebra for external visitors: You are allowed to enter the gate any time before the drive (which begins at 19:30) even though the gate's closing time is officially 19:00. Of course we called in advance, to get the phone number of who we need to call in case there's nobody at the gate. But even more interesting is what happens after the night drive ends. They open the camp gate for you, and you just drive leisurely toward the exit for several kilometers inside the park! Like 20-40km, I don't remember exactly. Then when you reach the front gate, you call the number and a guy opens it for you. I'll get back to that in a minute. So Mountain Zebra is a very scenic and beautiful park, and on the way from the gate to the headquarters, we were asked to give a local guide a ride to his cabin. He was really nice and we also asked him about some of the animals. We saw some **Mountain Zebra** along the way as well. We had an extremely knowledgeable guide named Dan, who also knew a lot about the wildlife in the park, and who wanted to do the night drives the "right way", i.e. only stop for nocturnal species, and not species that you can find during the day. Along the drive we found so many **Bat-eared Foxes, Springhares, Black-backed Jackals, and Aardwolves**. In fact, we had the best aardwolf sighting in this park. Dan told us that one day he saw 25 aardwolves between the main gate and the camp, and that the most he's ever seen on a night drive, specifically, is 12. Of course I also asked him about Polecats and Caracals – He sees the caracals on night drives about once a month (the most sightings he had on a single night was 2) and Polecats he's only seen 2 since he started a few years ago. The only new species we



added to the animal list were our first Puff Adder which was really cool, right on the road, and the trip's only **Black Rhino**. Black rhinos are reintroduced in this park, but they're doing ok. It was obvious that Dan expected the rhino to be there because he stopped specifically at that bridge and asked us if we see anything, so I found it in the bush. I asked if they collar the rhinos, and he said "no, but when you have black rhinos in your park you always have to know where they are"... I'm guessing he sees them quite

frequently on the night drives then. After the night drive was over, Dan opened the camp



gates, and we embarked on our 20-minute slow drive to the front entrance. My mom wouldn't let me spotlight both because it was officially not allowed, and because it was already late and we still needed to get gas and go to sleep. But we did see plenty of **Kudu** and **Gemsbok** along the way, plus some unidentified eye shine. Had I known this in advance, I would have tried to sneak in a little spotlighting on the way to the gate. I think that Mountain Zebra was where our "rare animal" luck went out. Realistically, after having missed the Serval and the Wild Dogs up North, I only had 3 more targets on my list: Caracal, Zorilla and Clawless Otter.

12-Oct – We went back to mountain Zebra NP in the morning, not super early though. We saw another Yellow Mongoose running across the road before entering the park, and then in the park we saw a lot of **Gemsbok**, **Springbok**, **Mountain Zebras**, a **Lion** right near the road, **Eland**, **Black Wildebeest**, **Bontebok**, etc. but nothing new. We continued onto Port Elizabeth, which is the most boring city in the history of the planet (we walked around town and then spent over an hour and a half at the supermarket standing in line for 2 tomatoes, a cucumber, 2 Bell Peppers and a liter of Milk). Then we continued to Port Jeffrey's, where we had an inexpensive hotel room right on the water, which turned out to be a 150sq. meter suite with another 60 sq. meter balcony overlooking the ocean. We enjoyed dinner and wine and then went to bed.



13-Oct – We were promised dolphins in the morning but we didn't have any. From Jeffrey's Bay we continued to Tsitsikama national park, which is known for its Blue Duiker. We had a very scenic walk there, but we had no time to actually look for Duikers, as this was my mom's planned day and we had too many other activities planned. We hiked to the hanging bridges (I kept my eye out for otters there but didn't see any) and then had lunch, went to another few view points overlooking the ocean, went to see the world's highest bungy but didn't have time to actually do it (☹) then to Robberg National Park overlooking Plattenberg Bay, where we only had about an hour and a half to hike the peninsula. We did the shortest walk but added short parts of the "medium" hike by getting into them and then going backwards. Interestingly, almost EVERYONE we saw along the hike at this place was Israeli! During the hike I spotted a few **Cape Fur Seals** in the water, and a HUGE colony of them at the very end of the peninsula, where we didn't have time to hike to. But I took a picture regardless [insert picture]. The other animal we added right before sunset was **bottlenosed dolphins**, which I spotted inside Plattenberg Bay.



14-Oct – We woke up in the town of Knysna, and actually took an organized tour my mom booked to the Featherbed private reserve, which overlooks the opening of the Knysna lagoon into the ocean. The reserve is also home to the Blue Duiker, along with Caracals who ate two resident duikers that were kept in small enclosures so that tourists can see them. Also bush pigs, Clawless otters, porcupines and genets, among others. I had some hope of seeing the Blue Duiker, especially since they have a breeding program there, and then they release them back into the reserve. But with an organized tour of ~100 people, chances were low. You board a ferry to the reserve, and then take massive jeep-trains up the hill from where you walk down. I tried to stay further back than all the people, because keeping in the front wasn't possible, as we were in the second "train". I did keep quite a distance from the rest of the group, besides my mom and my sister who thought it was a bad idea to stay way in the back, so my mom made us walk closer to the people. I also asked the guide repeatedly about the duikers, and she, not being a naturalist or anything like that, actually was extremely knowledgeable and gave me tips on how to find them. She also showed me where she and another tourist have seen clawless otters before, and at the end of the tour she took me to the Duiker breeding center, but told me not to tell anyone from the huge group. So I took a picture of some captive blue duikers, who will later be released into the reserve. She also said that they sometimes see the duikers in the garden right next to the breeding center, and sometimes from the parking lot where you take the jeep "trains", because there's a track of a little cart that goes straight up the hill. So the duikers sometimes cross that track. In retrospect, knowing what I know now, I should have stayed at the parking lot and just tried to see if anything crosses there, instead of going along with the group. But how could I have known? Plus, there are some really nice views of the ocean and the lagoon, and we saw a whale/dolphin watching boat and followed it with the binocular, glimpsing some **dolphins** which based on the lighter patch on their side, could have been either *Common* or *Dusky*



dolphins, but since I didn't get a really good and conclusive view, I can't add them to the list. We also saw the **Cape Fur Seal** again from the same lookout point. We then continued to Oudtshoorn, where we slept. On the way we stopped at a few "whale-watching view points" along the road but didn't see any whales. We also went up to a mountainous view called "Map of Africa" where the river curves in a shape that does resemble the map of Africa. The drive there is also extremely beautiful and forested, and you cross over some streams where perhaps otters could be seen, but not by us. Up at the top of the view point we saw our only African Paradise Flycatcher which was really nice, and also our first **Cape Grey Mongoose**, which was walking on the road just long enough for me to take a picture of, had it not been chased into the bush by a dog that also spotted it. Oudtshoorn is in the Little Karoo, which is probably a good place for spotlighting, but we didn't do it there. We had a nice dinner and I spotlit the ground of the lodge, seeing nothing.

15-Oct – We had a 9:30 tour of the Cango Caves, which is nice, but the 1 hour-ish tour there is exactly the right length. There is a more adventurous tour which requires crawling and climbing but not with my mom... We did see some Cape Horseshoe Bats in the cave. Afterwards we went to an Ostrich Ranch where we had a 45-minute tour, which included riding an ostrich for almost 8 full seconds, and then continued to De Hoop Nature reserve, where we would spend the next two nights. While getting closer to De Hoop, the birds and roadside animals picked up, with several *Mice* running across the road (none that we identified or photographed) and a single **Grey Rhebok** far off the road. A lot of pretty birds and a few **Bonteboks** later, we entered De Hoop. There is some EXCELLENT habitat for wildlife viewing in De Hoop, with open sections of short grasses where you couldn't miss anything that was walking through there. But there are also some densely bushy areas as well. So before reaching the restaurant/office area we saw plenty of **Eland**, **Bontebok**, **Mountain Zebras**, ostriches and a single **Cape Hare** who seemed to like being photographed by tourists. We put our stuff in the cabin, and rushed over to Koppie Alleen to try to see the whales before dark, and hoping we would see more surprises along the way. But we also wanted to gauge the ease of driving on the main road to Koppie Alleen because I wanted to spotlight that road at night, and my mom said that she read that the road in De Hoop is terrible and dangerous (which turned out to



be bullshit). It was cloudy and windy, but despite that, the dunes of Koppie Alleen were extremely picturesque and the **Southern Right Whales** with their calves were numerous. We watched them until just before the sun went down, and then headed back, seeing

another friendly **Cape Grey Mongoose** at the parking lot of Koppie Alleen. On the way back, the conditions seemed perfect for caracal... it was sunset, mostly cloudy but not too windy, and anyway we didn't see one despite looking, and even spotlighting when it got dark. We did see some lesser flamingos in





the water hole right near the junction of turning onto the main road back toward the gate and office/accommodations. After a decent dinner only my sister and I went spotlighting with her driving and me shining my flashlight out the passenger side. The moon was full and shined all night, which may or may not have to do with the fact that we saw absolutely zero nocturnal animals. I really wanted to see a polecat, with some chance for caracal, which I thought I would get at West Coast. But all we saw were **Elands**, **Bonteboks**, and **Cape Hares**. We were also quite tired, and I knew I had to wake up super early for the otters, so we only drove around for an hour and kind of gave up after not seeing anything.

16-Oct – I woke up at 5:10 and went straight to the boat house, where fellow mammal watcher Jan Keltchermans (owner of Europe's Big 5 and also a very nice guy) saw otters on his only try. As I pulled up to the nearest parking lot, I saw another **Cape Porcupine**, which I ignored and went straight to the Boat House. Then when I sat down, the Porcupine came out of my side of the bushes and walked within 1.5 meters of me before leisurely going into another bush. I sat behind the boat house for about 2 hours but didn't see any otters. In retrospect, I think I sat on the wrong side of the boat house that morning, and perhaps too close to the den. As soon as I got up and walked away from where I was sitting, another **Cape Grey Mongoose** came out of the bush I was just sitting by. Back in our cabin for breakfast, my sister found a colony of **Four-striped Mice** in the rocky wall that separates our cabin from the main grass where the bonteboks and the ostriches roam. . After breakfast we walked the extended vlei walk from Point 1 (a picnic site just uphill from the boat house) to Point 8, which is one end of the vlei that we were advised might also have otters. But all we saw along the way were **Cape Hyrax**. We went back to Koppie Alleen and saw more **Whales**, and also spotted another **Cape Grey Mongoose** on a far away dune on the way back, but no caracal. Back at the lodge I took a nap and woke up at 4pm to go back to the vlei and try the otters in afternoon until after sunset. I waited by a point on the cliffs where there's a picnic table and from where you can also see the boat house. I was there for about 3 hours but saw no otters ☹. After dinner I went spotlighting by myself and went almost all the way to Koppie Alleen, where a ranger said that a Snake Researcher guy (I forget his name) sees caracals regularly in the early morning. I should have found the researcher guy and told him to take me to the den... But between my nap and the otter trials, I missed him. Regardless, the bright full moon was up again after dinner and only set about half an hour after sunrise. I saw no new species while spotlighting by myself, driving really slow and trying to cover all the exposed areas. I was quite disappointed that night, realizing that I would probably not see the polecat/zorilla on this trip. But the disappointment was not yet over...



17-Oct – I tried the otters again for the 3rd time, sitting uphill from the boat house next to a bush, to try to blend in. I was up there by 4:40am and waited until 7:10am, without seeing the otters. I did see a Spotted Eagle owl, which was my 5th species of owl for the trip. But oh, the disappointment. Around 7:10 I decided to declare defeat against the otters and try to go back to the caracal "area" so I drove back to Koppie Alleen, now seeing several **Grey Rheboks** out in the open (interesting that they were completely



absent the past two days) and several mice, at least one which stopped long enough in the middle of the road for me to identify it as a **Namaqua Rock Mouse** according to the pocket mammal book I had. I almost got a picture of it, but it ran away in the last second. There were other species probably too, as suddenly between 7-7:30 there were so many mice on the road, but then they disappeared after 8. I saw all the same antelopes again including **Eland** and **Bonteboks** and even a **Steenbok**, but nothing new.

When I talked to a ranger during breakfast he said that he hasn't seen otters since the vlei water levels rose after the recent rains... Not sure if that has anything to do with it, as they don't see them regularly anyway. Perhaps the picnic site where Jon saw them is better because it's not so close to the main tourist complex. For instance, while I waited in the afternoon, people came walking right through the boat house and down to the cliffs I was overlooking. Also a staff member took out the boat over to the house across the vlei, came back less than an hour later, and then took the boat out again right after sunset...
Damn.

So realizing I have now missed both the otters and the zorilla, we left De Hoop. I napped in the car since I was up from 4:30, but my mom and sister woke me up when a **mongoose** crossed the road. Don't know which one, but probably it was another Cape Grey. Since I was already up, I kept looking at the roadside, spotting some more small antelopes far off the road, which I hoped would be Grysboks, but upon binocular inspection they all turned out to be **Steenboks**. The wildlife highlight of the day came in the form of a mollusc. The first place we visited was some Arniston sea caves, which you can only see during low tide. This was of course part of my mom's scenic, non-mammal day. Well, when the tide is low, some fish and other sea creatures get trapped in water-filled holes in the rocks, and one of these fulfilled a wish for me. That wish was to see a wild octopus from close range. I noticed something breathing in one of the holes, covered mostly in sand. I knew immediately that it was an octopus! I bent down and BOOM – sure enough was a common octopus right there! The next stop was Cape Aghulas which was a nice walk along the coast. I did see a **burrowing mammal** right alongside the trail, but couldn't ID it, as it went right into its freshly dug burrow. It was still digging and flicking sand out of the hole but it didn't peek



out. But there were **Hyraxes** along the coast wherever there were rocks. In Hermanos itself, we checked into the hotel and went to the coast to one of the very many whale watching spots, spotting some more **Southern Right Whales** from afar. I was way too tired to try to spotlight in the forest behind the lodge, despite knowing there are bush pigs and Cape grysboks in the area.

18-Oct – From Hermanos we continued to Stony Point to the Penguin Colony, where along with the penguins and other water birds they also had infinite Cape Hyraxes, including some really cute ones with their tiny babies . Apparently the "enemies" of the penguins are large-spotted genets, clawless otters, cape leopards and caracals, so I'm guessing they all exist there in some numbers. I asked the guy at the gate and he says that sometimes they see the otters right in front of the gate right around when they close.. makes sense. From there we continued to a nice winery and then to Stellenbosch. My mom and sister went out for a walk around town but I was too tired.



19-Oct - We toured Stellenbosch a little bit by foot, seeing a single (but introduced) **Grey squirrel** near our lodge. After some shopping (ew) we were out of there, and headed toward West Coast National Park. We got to the park around 2pm and went straight to check in and then to the restaurant, asking everyone about caracals along the way. We were told that from the gate to the first junction is good, and around Abramskaal Water Hole. During lunch we saw our first of several Mole Snakes. Honestly, we didn't see too many mammals at west coast, unfortunately. But we did see more snake species here than anywhere else, and more individuals as well. We spent much of the time at the Abramskaal hide, which I think was not a good bet. The vegetation around was too dense, to the point where a **steenbok** that was visible from the trail leading to the hide was not visible from inside the hide. That steenbok was the only mammal we saw that afternoon. I did see another mammal of similar size and color jumping one time between the ostriches, but it was definitely un-ID-able. Could have been another steenbok, could have been a caracal.. who knows. So long story-short, the official hours on the hotel check-in thing say you must be back by 19:00, and we allowed ourselves to be back around 19:20, driving slow and looking for caracals without success.. At the Duinepos Chalets, I walked around the perimeter with my flashlight, and then my sister and I spotlit by foot the gravel road from the main road (the one that goes to the restaurant) to the chalets. We saw no mammals again, despite it being warm and non-windy. Also the moon started shining later that night. Maybe I should have been a little more brave to drive around the park and flashlight, but then again, Jan Keltchermans told me that he got caught by a ranger and told to go back to his accommodation. Plus my mom was not keen on me breaking the rules inside official national parks.

20-Oct – At 4:30am I woke up to once again walk with the torch around the perimeter of the chalets site (it's completely open to the park, and they 'occasionally' see caracals there) and also up the gravel road back toward the main road, seeing nothing. At 5:20ish we had a quick breakfast and by 6 (yeah, that's not so quick ☹) we were back out the

door because that's official park hours, and mom doesn't want to break the rules... In retrospect... break the rules. So first we drove down to the restaurant because there's some really open grasses there, but they were covered by fog. Then we drove toward the gate but that was right in front of the quickly rising and blinding sun, so we tried scanning the open sections to either side of the road, but didn't see anything special (other than many many ostriches all the time – far and close. Oh and also 100s of tortoises.). We drove back to Abramskaal Water Hole but didn't go into the hide, just looked where there is some open area around, seen from the short path to the hide (and not from the hide itself). Then we drove back out and decided to take a chance exploring the northern section, going toward Postberg which is closed besides August and September. This way the sun is behind us. Along the way you drive through some dense bush, but then it opens up to some really good potential spots. Around 7am we started seeing a ton of mice again along the road, but we didn't stop to photograph any of them except for an obvious **Mole Rat** which stopped in the middle of the road almost long enough to snap a picture of it, but my sister wouldn't stop because she had to pee .. arrghh. In the open areas we again saw some grazing **steenboks**, all of which we checked for Grysbok-isms but found none such traits. We did reach the northernmost end of that peninsula, but it was already getting really bright and sunny outside, and I felt the chances for caracals running out. Well, I was right. All in all I would say that this park was the biggest disappointment, mammal-wise. Birdwise it was nice (greater and lesser flamingos, blah blah blah) but I would but the disappointment of not seeing a caracal which was my #2 mammal target, right after Aardvark was settling in. I know they're not easy to find. But almost all the people who have visited these areas (especially De Hoop and West Coast) and spent time in the field looking for them have seen them. But not I. Not this time.. Our friend Captain Hindsight would say "well, Tomer, you really didn't spend too much time between sunset and sunrise looking for caracals, so how did you expect to find them?!" and also comment "At De Hoop you spent a total of 2.5 hours night driving over 2 nights.. what did you think, that the zorillas and the caracals will just come knocking on your front door?" Ah! Maybe I was a little tired from spending longer nights and early mornings earlier on this trip, and maybe I wasn't motivated enough going out completely by myself, with my mom and my sister preferring to stay in the lodges and drink Amarula.. But in my defense, driving after dark at both De Hoop and West Coast is explicitly not allowed. But at De Hoop they REALLY don't care and as long as you appreciate nature they really wouldn't do anything if they "caught" you, or so it seemed. West Coast is another story. Before declaring total failure we also went up north on the other side of the lagoon towards the North Entrance, seeing a single **Bontebok**, and I spotted an **Eland** in the dense bush from one the top of a lookout point. We also saw several snakes crossing the road, like every few minutes. I think at least some of them were more mole snakes, and at least 1-2 were boomslangs, but unfortunately no cape cobras (that I know of anyway). I did also see a snake the previous day swimming in the Abramskaal water hole which could have easily been a cobra because of how it kept its head up, but it was too fast and I didn't see a hood. Another small antelope hopped across the road in front of us from the dense bush on one side to the dense bush on the other side, for a split second and it was gone. It was probably a Steenbok, though of course it could have been a Grysbok After lunch we drove to Cape Town where we spent the rest of the afternoon not mammal watching.

21-Oct – we woke up early for the Duiker Island boat tour. There are clearly no duikers on duiker island.. but we did see yet another **Cape Grey mongoose** on the road in the



city, and 1000s of **Cape Fur Seals** on the tour. I had my eye open dolphins but they never came. It was also rainy that morning, but then it started to clear up and we made our way to the Penguin colony and then to the Cape Point reserve, which is part of the Table Mountain National Park. In the afternoon we reached the park, and honestly that place seems as good as any to find a caracal. There are TONS of open areas and even a cabin you can rent inside the park. From the Cable Car thing up to the actual Cape Point I spotted a far-away whale(s) splashing, which the good people of Mammalwatching.com helped me identify as **Humbback Whales** based on the videos. This would be the last new species on the trip. At the Cape of the Good Hope there's also a colony of **Cape Fur Seals**. But on the way back, right before the gates close, we took the "Circle Drive" route that starts near the visitor center, and actually had like a mini-safari spotting another **Mongoose** (grey or marsh) crossing the road, many **Bonteboks** and ostriches. There's



also a caracal study/survey taking place in Table Mountain National Park, so I'm sure they're there.. I just wonder how the density compares to places like West Coast and De Hoop.``

22-Oct – It was really cloudy again in the morning but we went to Lion's Head Park, which could also produce some cape mammals but not after 9:30am which is when we got there. From there we went to Rhodes Memorial,

which is a nice park that has some **zebras**, which I caught a glimpse of from the road, but not when we actually got there. It was also raining but then cleared out, and some birds came out to play including some pretty bee eaters. The rest of the afternoon was spend in the city, where we again saw the **Grey (?) squirrels** which are very wild as you can see in the picture.



23-Oct – was to be the last day of the trip, and we saved Table Mountain for that day but because of the very nice people of United Airlines, we didn't have much time that day. That's because they kindly put us on flights that didn't exist, then corrected it to flights that land after the connection is scheduled to have departed, then to a flight leaving from Los Angeles to Las Vegas on November 13th instead of Cape Town to Addis Ababa on October 23rd (I'm not making this up!) and then just told us that we would have to speak to a representative at the airport ☺. Oh, bless you, United. But we did squeeze in Table mountain, seeing only **Rock Hyraxes** at the top. And we also spent literally 31 minutes at the famous Kirstenbosch Botanical gardens, where the guy at the information office told us that REAL otters sometimes (rarely) come to the pond with the otter sculpture. I wonder if this is another good place to stake them out, maybe after most of the visitors have left...? Don't know.

24-Oct – After 3 hours of phone arguments between the Ethiopian Airlines representative who helped us and the incompetent United Airlines supervisor over the phone, we missed the check-in time, but then un-missed it when the flight was miraculously delayed by 2 hours. In that time Ethiopian (seriously good job for straightening this out for us) made an exception and let us check in. Long-story short, we were in Ethiopia for 8 hours and took a city tour. But one of the places was a forested hill where we saw the Ethiopian, bearded subspecies of the **Vervet Monkey**, which was really cool. In that area, our guide asked some locals if they see any other animals, and they mentioned mongooses and the "small cheetah", aka Serval. Nice.

To sum it up (this was LONG and detailed. You're welcome.) we had a nice trip, seeing well over 70 species of mammals, most of which I have never seen before. With that said, I missed 5 of my top 10 targets (Caracal, Serval, Wild Dogs, Polecat and Otters), all animals which area feasible in the time frame and the itinerary we had. But except for the Otters, I might run into these species in other places I still need to visit, so I'm not rushing to do a repeat trip, even though I loved SA and I will visit again. It is also noteworthy that seriously everyone is SO nice in SA!! And really, genuinely nice! Coming in October may have also been inferior to coming in September, especially in Kruger. Also coming to SA with non-mammal watchers may have put a damper on my target species (of course I love my family and we had a great time, they just don't have the urge to see more and more species, and "Tomer, ANOTHER night safari? Aren't you getting bored with seeing animals?"). But well, we saw a lot of cool stuff and we had fun. Till next time.

Mammal List:

Species	Panorami c Route	Satara Area	Skukuza- Pretoriouiskop	Crocodile Bridge	Pilanesberg	Marrick and Area	Mokala	Mountain Zebra	Garden Route	De Hoop	West Coast	Cape Town and Area
1 Eastern Rock Elephant Shrew (<i>Elephantulus myurus</i>)	1					1						
2 Aardvark (<i>Orycteropus afer</i>)						1						
3 Cape Hyrax (<i>Procavia capensis</i>)					1			X	XXX	XXX		XXX
4 African Bush Elephant (<i>Loxodonta africana</i>)		XXX	XXX	XXX	X							
5 South African Galago (<i>Galago moholi</i>)					1							
6 Bushy-tailed Galago (<i>Otolemur crassicaudatus</i>)				1								
7 Vervet Monkey (<i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i>)	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX							
8 Chacma Baboon (<i>Papio ursinus</i>)	5	XXX	XXX	XXX	XXX	X		X	X	X		
9 Cape mole rat (<i>Georychus capensis</i>)												1
10 Cape Porcupine (<i>Hystrix africaeaustralis</i>)		3-5	A few		2	3-6		1-2		1		
11 Springhare (<i>Pedetes capensis</i>)						XXX		XXX				
12 South African Ground Squirrel (<i>Xerus inauris</i>)						XXX	XXX	XXX	X			
13 Tree Squirrel (<i>Paraxerus cepapi</i>)		XXX	XXX									
14 Gerbil Mouse (<i>Malacothrix typica</i>)						1						
15 Namaqua Rock Mouse (<i>Aethomys namaquensis</i>)										XXX		?
16 Four-striped Grass Mouse (<i>Rhodomys pumilio</i>)										XXX		?
17 Smith's Red Rockhare (<i>Pronolagus crassicaudatus</i>)						2						
18 Cape Hare (<i>Lepus capensis</i>)						XXX		X		X		
19 Scrub Hare (<i>Lepus saxatilis</i>)		XXX	XXX	XXX		XXX		?				
20 Southern African Hedgehog (<i>Atelerix frontalis</i>)						1						
21 Peter's Epauletted Fruit Bat (<i>Epomophorus crypturus</i>)			1									
22 Cape Horseshoe Bat (<i>Rhinolophus capensis</i>)									XX			
23 Southern Right Whale (<i>Eubalaena australis</i>)									XX	XXX		
24 Humpback Whale (<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>)												X
25 Bottlenose Dolphin (<i>Tursiops truncatus</i>)									X			
26 Black-footed Cat (<i>Felis nigripes</i>)						3-4						
27 Wildcat (<i>Felis silvestris</i>)	1					1						
28 Lion (<i>Panthera Leo</i>)		XXX	XXX	X				2				
29 African Leopards (<i>Panthera pardus</i>)			2 (3?)		2							
30 African Civet (<i>Civettictis civetta</i>)			1-2	2-3								
31 Small-spotted Genet (<i>Genetta genetta</i>)		2?	?	2-3		3						
32 Marsh Mongoose (<i>Atilax paludinosus</i>)						1						1?
33 Yellow Mongoose (<i>Cynictis penicillata</i>)						XXX	X		X			
34 Cape Grey Mongoose (<i>Galerella pulverulenta</i>)									XX	3-5	1?	2-3
35 Slender Mongoose (<i>Galerella sanguinea</i>)			1		1							

