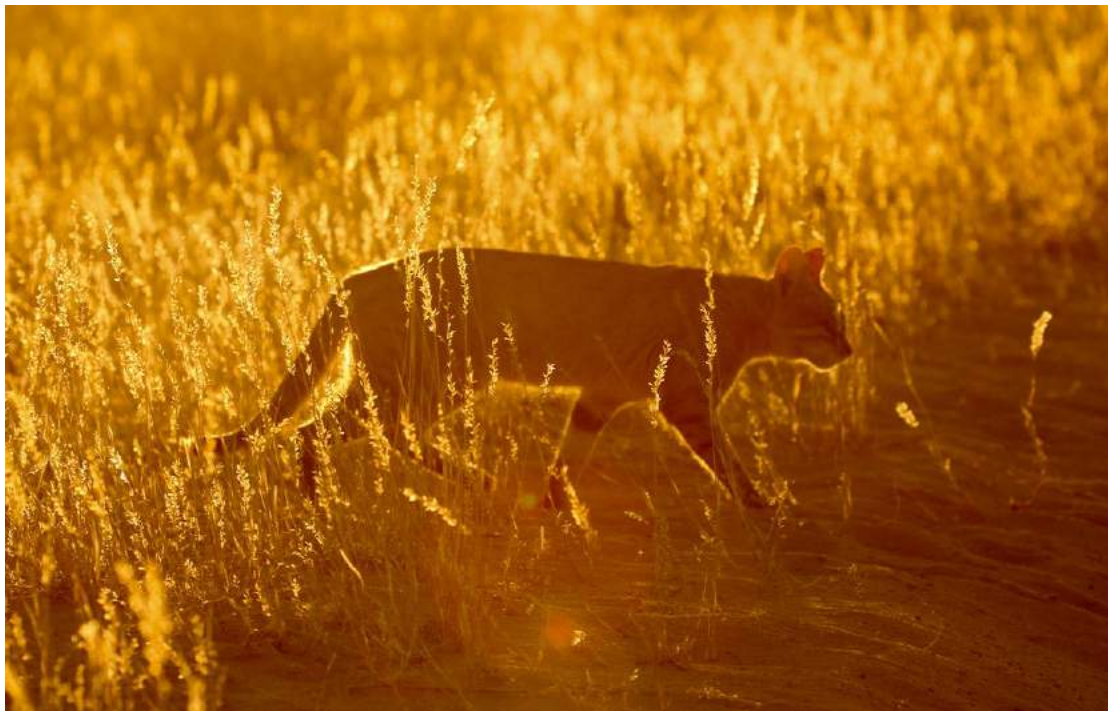


## South Africa, Northern Cape, November 2016

*Report by Sjeff Öllers*

Our fourth trip to South Africa was a slow tour centred around an extended visit to Kgalagadi. To balance things out Marrick, Witsand and Augrabies were added. All in all, a very enjoyable trip, which at times almost felt like a proper holiday. Highlights were Brown Hyena and Honey Badger (both seen twice). Also memorable were seven different African Wildcats including two kittens on one morning game drive. Sometimes things got very real with two Cape Crows brutally killing a Cape Turtle Dove and an incredible encounter between a Honey Badger, a family of Bat-eared Foxes and two Black-backed Jackals, which ended badly. If this wasn't enough, witnessing a successful hunt by a Cheetah at 3.30 in the afternoon at 38 °C was one of those amazing wildlife experiences that I never thought I would see! Compared to the fabulous mammalwatching the birding highlights were relatively modest but a gathering of 20+ Lappet-faced Vultures, 30+ White-backed Vultures, three Secretarybirds, a Bateleur, several Tawny Eagles and one shy White-headed Vulture at the Polentswa Tented Camp waterhole was spectacular.



*African Wildcat at sunrise*



*Cheetah seconds away from a kill*

## Itinerary

November 3	Flight to Johannesburg – Overnight at airport
November 4	Flight to Kimberley / Marrick
November 5	Marrick
November 6	Marrick
November 7	Transfer to Witsand Nature Reserve
November 8	Witsand Nature Reserve
November 9	Transfer to Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – Twee Rivieren
November 10	Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – Kieliekrankie
November 11	Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – Kieliekrankie
November 12	Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – Kalahari Tented Camp
November 13	Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – Kalahari Tented Camp
November 14	Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – Nossob
November 15	Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – Nossob
November 16	Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – Grootkolk
November 17	Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – Polentswa Tented Camp
November 18	Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – Polentswa Tented Camp
November 19	Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – Rooiputs Lodge
November 20	Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – Rooiputs Lodge
November 21	Drive to Augrabies National Park
November 22	Augrabies National Park
November 23	Morning Augrabies / Drive to Marrick
November 24	Morning Marrick / Afternoon Mokala national park
November 25	Morning Mokala national park / Afternoon flights home



*Swallow-tailed Bee-eater*

## **Introduction**

We had visited Kgalagadi in 2011 and spent four nights there, which my partner and I both felt was way too short. We had also narrowly missed Brown Hyena on that visit, so I was keen to go back and “deal” with the hyena. Southern Namibia was initially also included in the trip plans but in the end we decided to limit the driving distances, do a slow trip and focus on a few reserves and national parks in the Northern Cape.

## **Car Hire/Driving**

We hired a 4WD Ford Kuga through [www.economycarrentals.com](http://www.economycarrentals.com); the car was provided by First Car Rental. Friendly and helpful staff at First. The car was fine, but we both got a little frustrated with the total overkill on useless, intrusive and often illogical electronic technology. We need a “dumber” car next time, long live mechanics.



*Male Lion with wildebeest kill near Polentswa Lodge*

## **Accommodation**

We booked the Kgalagadi accommodation one year ahead (November 2015) and even then several camps in Kgalagadi had already been fully booked for most days of our travel schedule. The wilderness camps and Nossob in particular can be a real problem. Booking accommodation in Au-grabies and Mokala a few months in advance was no problem, but both were busier than during our 2011 visit.

## **Weather**

Southern Africa had been experiencing a drought for months when we arrived, and it showed in all the parks. Mokala in particular looked extremely dry and ravaged in comparison to our previous visit.

In Kgalagadi and Witsand daytime temperatures were invariably high, usually 34-38 °C, but several days in Kgalagadi our car suggested it was 39-41 °C, and that's the way it felt. At night we regularly saw distant thunderstorms in Kgalagadi, but it never rained anywhere near where we were. In Augrabies it was humid and quite cloudy but the temperatures were lower, 29-34 °C. Mokala was bone dry with temperatures similar to Augrabies.

The outlier was Marrick where we unfortunately had rain or showers on all days that we stayed there and experienced rather strong winds on all evenings, resulting in less than optimal spotlighting conditions. One night we had to cancel our night drive because of heavy rain and lightning all afternoon and evening.



## Sites Visited

### *Marrick Game Farm*

This place needs little introduction. One of the better places in Africa to see Black-footed Cat and Aardvark and a good supporting cast that may include Aardwolf, African Hedgehog, Bat-eared Fox and Cape Porcupine. Striped Polecat sightings have recently become more frequent at Marrick, but consider yourself lucky if you see one. The daytime mammalwatching at Marrick was more mundane, but with some luck you can find Meerkats in the daytime. The birding at Marrick was good: African Quailfinch, Ludwig's Bustard (present after rain), Northern Black Korhaan, Blue Crane, Grey-backed Sparrowlark, Double-banded Courser and Acacia Pied Barbet were among the more interesting species seen.

They have a variety of accommodation options; we stayed at the safari tent that overlooks the pan on one side and a small waterhole on the other side. The tent is a five-minute drive or a pleasant and birdy 20-40 minute walk from the farm (and the other accommodation options).



*Aardvark*



*Black-footed Cat*

### *Witsand Nature Reserve*

A pleasant but small reserve about halfway between Upington and Kimberley. Both the chalets and camping area are very nice. The reserve is well signposted along the N10. From the turn-off on the N10 to the reserve is about 42 km by dirt road (one hour drive). For the first 18 km the road was badly corrugated, but after the signposted turn-off to the left to the Padkloof Pass and Witsand, the road gets much better.

Theoretically Pangolin, Striped Polecat, African Hedgehog, Black-footed Cat and Aardvark all occur in Witsand but two park rangers told me independently that

sightings of all these animals are extremely rare (even for them). For Aardvark one of the rangers (unsurprisingly) recommended the winter months. Visitors had seen a Black-footed Cat three months ago while spotlighting, but one of the rangers said it was the first time that he recalled that visitors had seen this species. The other park ranger reckoned that the nearby Langberg mountains and dirt roads in the area are better places to look for Pangolin, Striped Polecat, and Caracal, but since the gate closes around dusk, it would mean you have to stay outside the reserve. More likely but still not commonly sighted in the reserve (according to the park ranger) are Bat-eared Fox and Cape Porcupine. Still, the freedom to drive around after dark in the reserve was a nice change from the usual restrictions. We stayed two nights but if time is an issue, an afternoon and morning is enough to see the white dunes, visit the hide and spotlight in the evening.



*Cape Grey Mongoose*

We did spotlight the very limited road network in the reserve on the first night. Plenty of common mammals but nothing out of the ordinary, not even a genet. Unfortunately a storm ruined our spotlighting plans for the second evening. The storm brought some rain to the area around Padkloof Pass but not in the reserve.

Just before the storm we explored the rocky area at the parking of the roaring white sand area at dusk. I was looking for Smith's red rock rabbit, which we didn't find (although lots of droppings), but we did have excellent views of a Western Rock Sengi and plenty of Cape Rock Hyrax.

Birding in the reserve is good. The area around the chalets and campground is excellent for birding on foot. Best of all though is the Sandgrouse Bird Hide, which is superb for close up views of three sandgrouse species and other birds (and some mammals too). It is imperative that you sit still, shut up and don't make sudden movements. You are so close to the birds that they are easily startled, the sandgrouse in particular. I was a little flabbergasted that several hardcore birders (of all people) could not shut up and sit still in the hide and hence the birds remained skittish. Once they had left, we were the only

ones in the hide and we had Gemsbok, Springbok, Common Duiker, Scrub Hare, Cape Grey Mongoose, a meeting of the Leopard Tortoise Fight Club (up to four fighting!) and two dozens of Double-banded Sandgrouse less than two meters in front of us. Several sandgrouse in the group were less than one meter away from us. Magic!



Double-banded Sandgrouse at dusk from the hide

### ***Mokala National Park***

An odd zoo-like park but a decent place to see a large number of antelopes easily. The park management had sold a large batch of antelopes (i.e., hundreds) earlier this year, and the park did indeed appear much emptier than during our 2011 visit.



*Grey Duiker*



*Kudu*

When we checked in (around noon), I was unpleasantly surprised to find out that a sunset/night drive was not possible because this had not been booked in advance. When I told the reception staff that none of their official information sources (website, official park brochure, etc.) informed visitors about the necessity of advance booking of activities, the manager was called in. She said she would try to find a solution. Probably

unaware that I could understand Afrikaans well enough, finding a solution involved telling off the people at Lilydale Restcamp for telling me that Mosu offers activities such as sunset/night drives. Nice! Incredibly amateurish and annoying because we could easily have called a couple of days earlier to book the sunset/night drive in advance. The sunset drive we did in 2011 was amateurish as well. I am done with Mokala, I will spend my time elsewhere next time that I am in the Kimberley area. The restaurant in Mosu was still nice though. Good red wine, proper filter coffee and a very decent main dish made up for the tiresome discussion with the manager.



*White Rhinoceros*

### ***Augrabies National Park***

We visited this park in 2011 as well, but arrived late in the afternoon and had to leave the next morning around 10 am, so we decided to stay two nights this time.

The first night we did a night drive, which surprisingly was one of our worst night drives ever in Africa (it was pretty windy for most of the drive which may not have helped). The only notable sighting was a half-decent sighting of Smith's Red Rock Rabbit.

The next morning we hiked the Dassie Trail, which was not as productive as in 2011, the birding being particularly slow. Birding around the camp was also underwhelming this time: most exciting sighting was a Crested Barbet. From about 7.45-8 am we drove the 94-km loop to the Quiver Tree Monitoring Area (the loop is sometimes called The Wilderness Road). It takes about 5-6 hours to complete the entire loop. We didn't encounter a single car all morning. Brilliant. While the mammal and birdwatching was fine, for us the highlight of the drive was the wonderful (semi-)desert scenery.

Mammals seen included Giraffe, Steenbok, Red Hartebeest, Gemsbok, Klipspringer, Cape Grey Mongoose and Yellow Mongoose, and a Western Rock Sengi.





Karoo Korhaan, Mountain Wheatear, Larklike Bunting, Karoo Scrub Robin, Karoo Long-billed Lark, Pririt Batis, Bokmakierie and Red-billed Quelea in full breeding plumage (and a variety of colour morphs) were the more interesting bird species seen.

The Quiver Tree Monitoring Area itself was a little disappointing but driving the loop was well worth doing. If you want to save time, you could make a shortcut by following the Lekkerwaterloop (these shortcuts are shown on the new park map that you get when you register at the reception). This loop shortens the route by about 15 km. A 4WD is not needed to complete the loop.



*Western Rock Sengi*



*Four-striped Mouse*



*Klipspringer*

In the afternoon and the next morning we spent our time at various viewpoints (mainly Oranjekom, Echo Corner and Ararat) and exploring the area around the viewpoints on foot. All viewpoints were well worth visiting. Echo Corner was very reliable for Verreaux's Eagle during our stay. The only disappointment was not encountering Dassie Rat.



### ***Kgalagadi National Park***

We stayed 12 days in the park. I was a little worried that we might get bored after a week, but apart from the odd quieter afternoon drive, there was hardly a dull moment during our entire stay in the park. The morning drives in particular always yielded interesting sightings.

Quite a number of antelopes in Kgalagadi were skinny as a result of the drought; the Eland antelopes in particular were all emaciated. The Eland we saw in Kgalagadi were either animals that had recently died or animals so skinny that they would probably not have lived longer than a week.

The only disappointment in Kgalagadi was the (non)availability of sunset/night drives. When we checked in at the entrance in Twee Rivieren we were told that sunset/night drives in Nossob had been suspended because the guide had died and in Mata Mata, a single tour operator had fully booked all seats for the sunset/night drives for several nights in a row. So to have at least one shot at night-active mammals, we immediately booked a sunset drive in Twee Rivieren for our first evening in the park.

The entire situation with sunset/night drives appeared a bit fragile. Because the one tour operator block-booked sunset and night drives in Mata Mata, the vehicle and guide from Twee Rivieren had to be brought in to help out at Mata Mata, which left Twee Rivieren nightdrive-less for several nights. During our stay it seemed that actual night drives had been cancelled altogether and only sunset drives could be booked. Not such a big deal if their website would actually be a realistic reflection of the availability of activities, because the activities listed on their website and park brochures are currently definitely not a permanent and reliable service, which is in line with our 2011/2012 South Africa visits: cutting corners on activities and (the quality of) guides seems the norm and not the exception.



*African Wildcat at dawn near Rooiputs*

### *Twee Rivieren Rest Camp*

The camp itself remains a bit soulless, but has a well-stocked shop, a professional and efficient reception and an okay restaurant. The chalets are a bit tired looking but otherwise fine. Because the rest camp is on the edge of the park you usually need to drive about 10-15 km up the Auob and Nossob river valleys before things get interesting. Both the area between Leeudril and Melkvlei/Gunong and between Houmoed and Auchterlonie provided good mammalwatching. However, the action might start sooner: at the Samevloeiing waterhole/crossroads just north of Twee Rivieren we had a brown hyena this time and lions in 2011.

The sunset drive from Twee Rivieren was pretty productive with a male lion, brown hyena, three genets, 5+ wildcats, eight Cape foxes and five bat-eared foxes, springhares, jackals and three owl species. Although we saw the brown hyena just when it was getting dark and the light was less than optimal for photography, I was really glad that I had my 2011 Nemesis in the bag within less than six hours in the park.



*Northern Black Korhaan*



*Lanner Falcon*

### *Kieliekrankie Wilderness Camp*

The camp is situated along the Lower Dune Road and can easily be reached with a sedan vehicle. The camp is on top of a dune so you have beautiful views in all directions over the red dunes. Only minor disadvantages are that the waterhole is quite far from the chalets (a scope is not a luxury) and it can be rather windy. We weren't very lucky with sightings at the waterhole (best was an African Wildcat), but the visitor's book showed that all cat species (including Caracal), Brown Hyena and Spotted Hyena show up at the waterhole. During our stay our friendly neighbours from Cape Town called us over to have a look at the African Wildcat that was relaxing completely unconcerned next to their chalet.

The location of the camp is pretty strategic. The Auob river valley is only 10 minutes away and the Kij Kij area can be reached in about 45 minutes. In the morning the dune road can produce good sightings as well. On the morning of November 11 we drove from

Kieliekrankie to Kij Kij and Melkvlei. On the dune road we surprised two female lions on a fresh gemsbok kill at Tierkop, and then arrived first on the scene at Kij Kij where two of the four lions were in hunting mode around the waterhole. The lions were a bit half-hearted in their attempts but still pretty entertaining.



*Wildcat relaxing in the shadow of one of the cabins at Kieliekrankie*



*Sunset at Kieliekrankie*



*Dawn in the Auob River Valley*

### *Kalahari Tented Camp / Mata Mata–Kamqua area*

A more pleasant accommodation alternative than the nearby Mata Mata camp with the added bonus that it is possible to join the sunset/night drives that depart from Mata Mata (they pick you up in the camp, you are not allowed to drive to Mata Mata). The waterhole at the camp was a little disappointing during our stay (giraffe, black-backed jackal, springbok and wildebeest).

The area between Mata Mata and Gemsbokplein always seems to produce something interesting. To cover the area between Kamqua and Gemsbokplein/Auchterlonie it is better to stay in Kieliekrankie or even better Urikaruus (if you are lucky enough to get

accommodation there). From Mata Mata or KTC, driving up to Urikaruus/Kamqua is about the maximum distance that you can cover in a morning. No need to drive further anyway because there should be more than enough action on that stretch if you look carefully. During our stay Cape Fox and Meerkat were regularly seen, Bat-eared Fox slightly less so, but the area proved particularly good for Cheetah and Lion. Spotted Hyenas were less commonly sighted. Leopard and Brown Hyena are around, but we didn't hear of anyone seeing those in the area during our stay.



*Meerkats on the alert because of a nearby Martial Eagle*

On our first morning drive from KTC we first saw a big male lion drinking from the waterhole at Craig Lockhart, then a female lion guarding an Eland carcass at Dalkeith. We then watched a Cape Fox family at their den slightly east of Dalkeith for a while. In the 13<sup>th</sup> Borehole area we saw from a distance a group of Springbok in tight formation staring intensely in one direction; just when we arrived on the scene a group of wildebeest came running in the direction of the springboks who then panicked and raced off. Seconds later we saw the first two cheetahs cross the riverbed and head up into the dunes and a second later 2-3 more. We drove towards the cheetahs but they had quickly moved up the dunes. So we saw them for a couple of minutes on the top of the dunes before they moved on. A little frustrating to arrive five minutes too late on the scene.



*The Cheetah males*

Other goodies that morning were a slender mongoose, Ludwig's bustards feeding in the Auob riverbed and an African Wildcat that ran across the riverbed near Sitsas and then crossed the road right in front of our car.

On our way back in the late morning we found a female cheetah with one of her cubs not far from KTC. It wasn't quite clear whether she was just going to relax or do something, but after waiting for an hour in the blistering sun and running out of water, we refuelled the car, bought more water and went back. The cheetah mum was still there but in a different spot and now together with three fairly large cubs. After watching them for quite some time we abandoned them again to have a quick late lunch at home (KTC) and then return.

When we returned there was definitely something in the air, the female was constantly looking around and very alert; at some point she headed straight in the direction of a group of springbok. She stalked them for a while (this was at 3 pm at 38 °C) but for some reason she suddenly ran back in the direction of the cubs although I don't think she had been "compromised". We lost her for a good 10-15 minutes when she suddenly had rematerialized under a tree on the edge of the riverbed.

After sitting for a few minutes under the shady tree she suddenly got up again and walked straight back in the direction of the springbok herd. What followed was a classic cheetah hunt (see photos at the end of the report). It was amazing to see how close she got to the Springboks without being particularly concealed while run-walking towards the Springboks only slightly crouched. Initially it looked like her direct approach had been too bold but after the initial confusion she zoomed in on one animal that got separated from the herd and then closed a 20-metre gap between her and the Springbok in less than 2-3 seconds. Impressive to see how she turned on turbo mode and caught up with the springbok. We could just see how she knocked down the antelope and then we only saw a dust cloud. She caught the antelope just beyond the first low dune at the other side of the riverbed so we were spared the gory details of the actual kill. When we got back to KTC, we wanted to take a break but the ranger told us that lions had just killed a wildebeest 1 km west of the camp. So on we went and indeed two female lions were disembowelling a wildebeest close to the road but they had concealed it well enough under a bush so I couldn't make really any decent pictures.



The other morning drive in the KTC/Mata Mata area started off nicely with a male and a female lion that had installed themselves on top of one of the dunes at the edge of the camp to catch the first sunrays. The cheetah mum and three cubs were still in the same area (about 3 km east of KTC) where they had killed the springbok. Close to the Craig Lockhart waterhole the car in front of us suddenly slowed down and quickly I found why: a Honey Badger next to the road! The badger was trotting up the dune but to my amazement the car in front of us left almost immediately (I doubt they took pictures)

and a car behind us blasted past us at high speed without even looking or stopping. Wow, a honey badger at prime time and no one else is interested. What a treat! The badger stayed in view for about a minute, so this was my first opportunity to get some record shots of a honey badger.



*First Honey Badger*

*Steenbok*

### *Nossob*

Nossob was undergoing major building/renovation works. They are building new chalets along the fence overlooking the Auob riverbed and revamping the camping area. Probably great once it's finished, but the ongoing building works and noise ruined the atmosphere in the camp a bit. We stayed in the old chalets, which looked very tired.

Nossob is undeniably an interesting area in the park, but in 2011 we hadn't been very lucky and also this visit it looked like we were going to be disappointed again. After almost two full days of dedicated effort we had not seen a single Brown Hyena, Leopard or Cheetah, but lion activity had been pretty good though this time. Our last morning in the Nossob area my wife took a break from the game driving, so I went out on my own. Waiting at the office to pick up the permit, one of the photographers told me that a brown hyena had been seen at Mariesegat waterhole yesterday evening. I was a bit torn but changed my original plan to drive in the direction of Cubitje Quap and headed south instead. The slow drive to Mariesegat waterhole produced absolutely nothing of note and at the waterhole only two jackals showed up. I admitted defeat and drove back to the camp slowly. A kilometre south of Rooikop waterhole I saw a group of wildebeest nervously snorting and tightly grouped together. Mmmm, this demanded some scanning and indeed on the other side of the riverbed there was a lioness. She got up, the wildebeest were now close to a nervous breakdown but just before they ran away in panic, the lioness lay down again; the situation remained tense (for the wildebeest at least) but I was not convinced that the lioness was very eager to hunt.

While contemplating what to do, I suddenly saw beyond the lioness in the distance some brown shagginess running fast. Several enthusiastic expletives followed, a brown hyena was running straight in the direction of Rooikop waterhole! I abandoned the lion and wildebeest stand-off immediately and when I cautiously approached the waterhole the brown hyena was just about to cross the road towards the waterhole. For a few seconds we looked each other in the eyes (me amazed and exhilarated, the hyena wary and unsure what to do). After a few seconds he crouched down and was then completely invisible despite the fact that he was only 15 meters from the road in fairly low grass cover. I was worried that he would run off so I repositioned the car several tens of meters away from the hyena and luckily about 30 seconds later he cautiously crossed



the road. The hyena was now in the right light and at the right distance for photos. Brilliant! It then still took him another 15 minutes with several stops and cautious scanning before he actually dared to drink at the waterhole. What a magnificent beast!



*Brown Hyena*

Although the Nossob area is considered a good area for brown hyena, it was interesting to hear that a lot of visitors in Nossob struggled to see this species. There was one group of photographers who had been in Nossob for a week with the aim to see brown hyena but still had not seen one! Kwang and Cubitje Quap are often quoted as good waterholes for the hyena but during our stay most of the sightings appeared to be south of Nossob, and one even showed up at the waterhole in Nossob camp in the morning while most people were out gamedriving.



*Pregnant or well-fed?*

### *Grootkolk Wilderness Camp*

A lovely camp in a relatively remote area on the South African side of the park. If you drive up to Grootkolk, the (semi)desert scenery changes; the dunes become flatter and the landscape feels more desolate. Near Grootkolk the dunes rather abruptly become higher again and there is a sudden sprinkling of trees (the term woodland would be an exaggeration), which feels pretty lush after the stark scenery that preceded. On our arrival day we resisted the urge to drive in the afternoon and just sat down to watch what would show up at the waterhole in the camp.

The camp has a reputation for good leopard and brown hyena sightings at the waterhole, but no such luck during our visit. In the afternoon a nervous group of seven wildebeests showed up followed by a cautious but less hysterical group of six kudus. At dusk and dawn not much happened apart from a few jackals and a couple of spotted eagle owls coming to drink and two rufous-cheeked nightjars hawking around the light. I checked out the waterhole twice in the middle of the night and just before sunrise, but only saw a black-backed jackal. About one hour after sunrise two lionesses and a cub showed up at the waterhole. All in all a very pleasant camp, but we felt one night was enough, unless you want to experience the quietness and solitude of this place. It is a great place to unwind and do nothing.

Before we headed back south again to Polentswa Tented Camp, we drove up to Union's End. The roads are less often graded here and hence more corrugated, and during our visit this area was still rather quiet (with only a handful of cars seen). Birds and mammals, even the common antelopes, were scarce in this area in daytime, but the footprints around waterholes showed that the complete set of large predators and antelopes is around.



*Lappet-faced Vulture*

### *Polentswa Tented Camp*

[Ta Shebube](#) has two fairly luxurious lodges just across the border on the Botswanan side of the park. Location-wise I slightly preferred Polentswa Tented Camp over Rooiputs Lodge; the views across the pan are fabulous and the camp is at a more secluded location than Rooiputs. Rooiputs may have more varied mammalwatching though. Otherwise both lodges are pretty much equally interesting. The chalets/tents at both lodges are wonderful. The food at Polentswa was good to excellent. Attentive and friendly staff. To reach both lodges a 4WD (or just high clearance) is recommended as parts of the access road are quite sandy (although you will probably just make it in a regular sedan if you navigate carefully and keep a regular speed).

On our first morning game drive we ran into a group of lions that had made a wildebeest kill just a few hundred meters from the lodge and the kill seemed to be less than a couple of hours old. We then drove south, all the way down to Bedinkt waterhole. Despite making a dedicated effort to see cheetahs we kept seeing more lions. Relaxing on our deck at the lodge we saw red hartebeest and two emaciated near-dead Eland bulls. The afternoon drive produced more lions. Other sightings of note were two lappet-faced vultures at Polentswa waterhole, a group of meerkats, two bat-eared foxes and a pair of red-necked falcons.



If you are keen to see Lappet-faced Vulture on the South African side of the park, it is worth checking the area around/above Polentswa Pan between 1 and 4 pm. If you are not staying at Polentswa campsite or Polentswa Tented Camp, you are not allowed to drive the 4x4 road that leads along Polentswa Pan (and towards the tented camp and camp site). However, from the turn-off along the main road to the campsite and tented camp you are allowed to drive the first kilometre until a roundabout after which there is another sign telling you that entry is prohibited for “non-residents”. I would park at the roundabout in the afternoon and scan the sky for vultures. At some point a Lappet-faced Vulture will probably fly past. We also saw them at dusk one afternoon at the Polentswa

Waterhole along the main road, but not sure how reliable the waterhole is for Lappet-faced Vulture (Tawny Eagle, Bateleur and White-backed Vulture were present almost constantly). On both days that we stayed at Polentswa Tented Camp the first vultures started arriving around noon to drink at the lodge's waterhole and all of them flew out of the pan area on cue between 4 and 4.30 pm.

You can organize a full-day game drive to transfer from Polentswa to Rooiputs, but we drove ourselves. We encountered two Lions at Cheleka testing the nerves of a group of Gemsbok, Brant's Whistling Rat, three groups of Kudu and a single Bat-eared Fox.

### *Rooiputs Lodge*

The view from Rooiputs Lodge combines elements of the views at Kieliekrankie and Grootkolk: a mix of beautiful red dunes and the homeopathy version of woodland. The waterhole unfortunately was little visited when we were there (mainly a few common bird species and occasionally red hartebeest and gemsbok passed through), but the lodge is right in the middle of the excellent game drive area between Leeuwdril and Gunong. Staying at Rooiputs ensures that you can get into this area ahead of the crowds staying at Twee Rivieren. The food at Rooiputs was good during our stay but less inventive than at Polentswa.

The only disappointment at the Ta Shebube lodges during our stay was the guide. The fact that he introduced himself with the same name as the actor whose character has an extreme jewellery fetish in the 80s series *The A-team* may have been an omen, but was welcomed by us as eccentrically retro for such a relatively young guy. After a couple of game drives it was clear though that he was a friendly and good-humoured people's person but his mammal knowledge was sketchy and his birding knowledge substandard. Especially on the slower afternoon drives he was struggling to make the game drives interesting, because he simply had little to tell. He guided us at both lodges, so can't comment on the other guides.



*Lions overlooking Rooiputs waterhole*

Rooiputs Lodge has a resident group of meerkats that come out in the late afternoon, so you would have to skip an afternoon game drive to see them. Lions had been present at or near the lodge for several months, some of them occasionally sleeping under the cabins. There is also a resident leopard that shows up in and around the camp regularly but since lion activity had been very high recently, the leopard hadn't been seen at the lodge for several months.

The morning game drive in the Rooiputs area on November 20 was almost too intense. Remarkable were five sightings of (at least) seven different African Wildcats – kittens and adults. The antics of two Cape Fox families were highly entertaining too, especially because a single Meerkat had joined one of the fox families and acted like he was a family member. Seemed like dangerous living, but interesting to see. We also managed to see twelve different Lions that morning, anything from tiny cubs to fully grown black-maned males. Nevertheless, the lions only proved to be the sideshow that morning.



*African Wildcat kittens*

About one hour after sunrise a bat-eared fox ran away from our vehicle, tail up in the air and back hairs all puffed up. First we thought the animal was somewhat irrationally upset by our presence. The adult bat-eared fox then came running towards the car but suddenly made a U-turn, clearly in distress. This was not normal behaviour, something was going on here. Then for a moment I saw a black shape resurface from a burrow in the corner of my eye, but luckily I saw just enough and whisper-yelled: honey badger! A little later the honey badger showed itself while inspecting various burrows at the den site of the foxes. We noticed that a second adult bat-eared fox higher up the slope was carrying a puppy to safety. Further to the right and several tens of meters higher up on the edge of the low calcrete ridge a black-backed jackal appeared to be casually looking at the spectacle between the honey badger and the foxes. The first bat-eared fox parent kept running back and forth trying to chase off the badger while every now and then checking on what seemed another emergency den site higher up the slope. The badger was checking the entire den area (above and below ground) in the typical restless wolverine-like fashion, but fairly systematically. The fox was clearly too scared of directly confronting the badger and backed off whenever the badger moved in the fox's direction. I kept focusing on the honey badger because how often do you see one for minutes and minutes without taking much notice of you. Again no other cars around! I think we were all expecting the badger to resurface at some point from one of the dens with one of the bat-eared fox puppies that still appeared to be left behind in the den.

While this was going on, I saw another jackal appear from the left. The second bat-eared fox made several shrieking alarm calls and quickly carried a pup higher up the slope and disappeared over the ridge. Only about 15-20 seconds later about 50 metres to the right a series of heartbreaking cries could suddenly be heard. When I looked up there, I saw the first fox parent still holding a puppy in her mouth while the first jackal was trying to pull the puppy violently out of her mouth. It was terrible to see how the puppy was

mauled by the jackal. The fox parent would not let the puppy go but the jackal kept aggressively trying to grab it and carry it off. The distress calls of the foxes made the honey badger walk up there and inspect what was going on, but at the same time the second jackal came trotting in from the left while the second bat-eared fox came running down the ridge alarmed by the cries of its family members. And a Pale-chanting Goshawk briefly joined the mayhem to see if there was an opportunistic food opportunity. This all happened in a few seconds. When the honey badger had almost arrived at the scene, the honey badger quickly turned around when he saw the second jackal coming. In the 3-4 second mayhem (badger coming and leaving, second jackal arriving) the parent fox must have been distracted for a second and must have lost the grip on the puppy for a second because we then saw the first jackal race off with the bat-eared fox puppy in its mouth with both parents and the second jackal in pursuit. The puppy appeared to be dead by then but the bat-eared fox parents and the second jackal both ran across the road at full speed and managed to corner the first jackal under a tree while the second jackal watched for an opportunistic opportunity to step in. In the dark understorey of the tree it was difficult to see what was going on exactly, but there was a fierce stand-off between the two foxes and the first jackal. The last thing we saw was the first jackal (still with the fox puppy in his mouth) running at high speed into the dunes with both parents in hot pursuit and the second jackal giving up. Strong coffee would have been very welcome at this point, but the game drive was still young at that point.



*Honey Badger*

The afternoon game drive inevitably could not live up to the morning drive and seemed to proceed relatively tame. When we were watching three lions under a tree about 50 meters away, a photographer in another vehicle casually informed our guide: “you do know that you have a tyre that is flat down to the rim”. This resulted in 20-30 minutes of quality time for our guide; the lions curiously inspected how our guide was changing the tyre but they remained stationary under the tree.

Rooiputs Lodge was our last stop in Kgalagadi. On the morning of November 21 we decided that it had been enough and we headed straight for the gate in Twee Rivieren. Unbelievably we had a last stroke of luck on our way out: a vehicle just south of Leudril

waterhole alerted us to a leopard. The leopard was quite close to the road but it almost completely melted away in the dense tangles of branches of a dead tree that had fallen on the ground. After 10-15 minutes it suddenly walked to the other side of the riverbed where it seemed to settle down and relax under a large tree. But after a couple minutes it started staring intensely in the direction of the waterhole and suddenly raced off into the dunes. Maybe lions or hyenas had shown up at the waterhole. We were completely happy with this perfect ending to our stay in Kgalagadi so we did not drive back to check out the waterhole and drove out of the park.



*Red Hartbeest and Brown Hyena*

## Trip Lists

As per usual, the species nomenclature in the trip lists is entirely based on whatever takes my fancy. Index to the mammal and bird lists below:

AU = Augrabies National Park

KTC = Kalahari Tented Camp in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

KTP = Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

MAR = Marrick Game Farm

MOK = Mokala National Park

WIT = Witsand Nature Reserve

2R = Twee Rivieren area in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park



*Young Cape Fox*



## MAMMAL LIST

Cape Serotine Bat *Neoromicia capensis* – seen in most parks

[Egyptian Slit-faced Bat *Nycteris thebaica* – two distinctly slower and differently flying bats in KTP were possibly this species]

Chacma Baboon *Papio ursinus* – three sightings of a group of about 15 individuals in AU

Vervet Monkey *Cercopithecus aethiops* – one group in WIT and one group in AU

Large-eared/Gerbil Mouse *Malacothrix typica* – 1-2 on the night drives in MAR

Western Rock Elephant Shrew *Elephantulus rupestris* – one in WIT, one in AU

Highveld Gerbil *Gerbilliscus brantsii* – 1-4 on the night drives in MAR

Desert Pygmy Mouse *Mus indutus* – one in our chalet in Nossob, and one seen well on the last night drive in MAR

Four-Striped Grass Mouse *Rhabdomys pumilio* – common in KTP, 2-25 seen daily, a few in AU

Brant's Whistling Rat *Parotomys brantsii* – two seen well in KTP in the area north of Nossob, once near Polentswa, several probable sightings in KTP on the dune roads and in the Nossob area

Black-tailed Tree Rat *Thallomys nigricauda* – two on the night drive in KTC

Cape Hare *Lepus capensis* – seen at MAR, WIT, AU and KTP

Scrub Hare *Lepus saxatilis* – seen at MAR, AU and WIT

Smith's Red Rock Rabbit *Pronolagus rupestris* – one on the night drive in AU

Springhare *Pedetes capensis* – common in MAR, about 20-25 on the night drive at 2R and a few on the night drive in KTC, also about 20 on the night drive in WIT

Ground Squirrel *Xerus inauris* – common in KTP, MOK, WIT and AU

Cape Porcupine *Hystrrix africae australis* – common in MAR (4, 3 and 7 were seen on the drives in MAR); not seen on the night drives in KTP and AU

Cape Fox *Vulpes chama* – a total of ten sightings of at least 23 individuals; most sightings were family groups with pups.

Bat-eared Fox *Otocyon megalotis* – less conspicuous in KTP in the daytime than during our 2011 visit, seven sightings of 15+ animals.

Black-backed Jackal *Canis mesomelas* – common in KTP including several family groups with pups, 1-2 daily in MOK, WIT and MAR



Young Black-backed jackals

Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis* – one near Craig Lockhart, one between Rooiputs and Kij Kij

[Striped Polecat *Ictonyx striatus* – only seen as a roadkill in the north]

Cape Grey Mongoose *Galerella pulverulenta* – one in WIT at the hide, a total of five sightings in AU, two in MOK

Slender Mongoose *Galerella sanguinea* – one in KTP near 14<sup>th</sup> Borehole, one in MOK on the Nieltjie Loop

Yellow Mongoose *Cynictis penicillata* – common in MAR and KTP, also regular sightings in MOK, a few sightings on route; a mother with cubs were seen at Grootkolk and Mata Mata

Meerkat/Suricate *Suricata suricatta* – three sightings of wild groups at MAR (plus Jerry, one of the two half-tame animals), a total of nine sightings in KTP including at least 5 near Leeudril on Nov. 10, 17+ near Rooiputs on Nov. 10, 9+ near Gemsbokplein seen on Nov. 10, 11 and 12, and a resident group at Rooiputs Lodge. Several meerkats were seen about 25-30 km south of Twee Rivieren (outside the park).



Meerkats

Small-spotted Genet *Genetta genetta (felina)* – three on the night drive at 2R

Spotted Hyena *Crocuta crocuta* – three at Bataluma on Nov. 12

Brown Hyena *Hyaena brunnea* – one at dusk on the night drive at 2R, one at Rooikop waterhole near Nossob

Aardwolf *Proteles cristatus* – a single animal on Nov. 5 and 21 in MAR

African Wildcat *Felis lybica* – pure (1-2) and hybrid (1-4) animals seen on the night drives at MAR. A total of 21 animals was seen in KTP; seven different animals including two kittens were seen on the morning drive on Nov. 20

Black-footed (or Small Spotted) Cat *Felis nigripes* – seen at MAR on all night drives (6 including three kittens, 3 and 2 were seen on the three drives, respectively)

Cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus* – one sleeping under a tree near Melkvlei, a mother with three youngsters between KTC and Sitsas, at least four males near 14<sup>th</sup> Borehole, and a mother with three medium-sized cubs near Kannaguass

Lion *Panthera leo* – multiple sightings daily in KTP; the highest total for one game drive was 12, in total we saw at least 35 different animals in KTP and had 65+ lion sightings. Reliable waterholes for lions during our visit were Kij Kij, Dalkeith, Bataluma and Polentswa

Leopard *Panthera pardus* – one near Leeudril at around 7.30 am on Nov. 21



Leopard

Aardvark *Orycteropus afer* – seen at MAR (our score was 1, 0, and 2 on the three night drives)

Rock Dassie/Hyrax *Procavia capensis* – common in AU, a few in MOK

Burchell's Zebra *Equus burchellii* – common in MOK, small numbers in MAR

White Rhino *Ceratotherium simum* – five on Nov. 24 and two on Nov. 25 in MOK

Warthog *Phacochoerus aethiopicus* – about 6-7 on route between MAR and MOK, fairly common in MOK

Giraffe *Giraffa camelopardalis* – two in MAR, several groups in AU (a group of 13 near the Hartmann's Loop turn-off), fairly common between Kamqua and Mata Mata, uncommon in the 2R area, not seen north of Kij Kij

Buffalo *Syncerus caffer* – one group in the Lilydale area in MOK

Eland *Taurotragus oryx* – fairly common in MOK, four were seen on the night drive in AU; in KTP one near Montrose, one near Gembokplein, two bulls at Polentswa Tented Camp on the first day (only one left the next day); the eland in KTP were in very poor condition and we saw several intact but emaciated carcasses of animals that seemed to have died from starvation 1-2 days earlier

Nyala *Tragelaphus angasii* – seen at MAR

Kudu *Tragelaphus strepsiceros* – scarce in KTP: a group of six at the Grootkolk Camp waterhole, eight at Cubitje Quap waterhole, six near Rooikop waterhole, six near Kaspersedraai, and five near Cheleka; fairly common in MOK

Sable *Hippotragus niger* – 5 animals in the Lilydale area in MOK, also at MAR



Cape fox

Sable

Roan *Hippotragus equinus* – two groups of about 15 animals in the Lilydale area in MOK, also at MAR

Gemsbok *Oryx gazelle* – fairly common in AU, between 5 and 100 daily in KTP, several tens in MOK

Mountain Reedbuck *Redunca arundinum* – two at MAR

Black Wildebeest *Connochaetes gnou* – common in MOK, also about a dozen in MAR

Blue Wildebeest *Connochaetes taurinus* – fairly common in MOK

Red Hartebeest *Alcelaphus buselaphus* – scarce in KTP: about ten near Houmoed on Nov. 11, two at Rooikop waterhole, four sightings of singles elsewhere, a single animal passed through the lodge area at Rooiputs; small groups in AU (especially near Lekkerwater), also seen in MOK where fairly common

Bontebok *Damaliscus dorcas* – occasionally seen on hunting farms en route

Blesbok *Damaliscus phillipsi* – only a few sightings of small groups or singles in MOK, several tens in MZNP, occasionally seen on hunting farms en route

Tsessebe *Damaliscus lunatus* – common in MOK

Impala *Aepyceros melampus* – only two in MOK

Springbok *Antidorcas marsupialis* – common in KTP, but only small herds around Nossob, much larger groups (up to 50-100) in the Mata Mata area, also common north of Twee Rivieren towards Rooiputs.

Klipspringer *Oreotragus oreotragus* – about 5-6 on the night drive in AU, one on the Dassie Trail in AU, a family group at Echo Corner and several singles between Oranjekom and Echo Corner

Steenbok *Raphicerus campestris* – 1-6 daily in KTP, a total of about ten sightings in AU, and about 7-8 sightings in MOK, a few seen in MAR

Common Duiker *Sylvicapra grimmia* – a few seen in MAR, very common in WIT (25+ on a short night drive), fairly common in MOK (easy to see from the hide)



*Cape Grey Mongoose*



*Ostrich dust-bathing*

## BIRD LIST

Common Ostrich *Struthio camelus* – common in all national parks and nature reserves

Reed Cormorant *Phalacrocorax africanus* – one near Kakamas, about 5-6 in AU

White-breasted Cormorant *Phalacrocorax lucidus* – about 4-5 in AU

African Darter *Anhinga rufa* – one in AU

Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* – a few near MAR, several en route

Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala* – three at the Vaalpan waterhole in KTP

Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* – one at AU along the river, one near Langberg Farm

Hadeda Ibis *Bostrychia hagedash* – 2-4 daily at MAR, common two in AU, but scarce in KTP

Egyptian Goose *Alopochen aegyptiaca* – a pair at MAR, a few at MOK

Secretarybird *Sagittarius serpentarius* – common in KTP (up to 3-10 daily) but scarcer in the north

Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius* – one in KTP north of Lijersdraai

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* – common in KTP (3-8 daily)

African Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus vocifer* – two adults in AU from the viewpoints Echo Corner and Oranjekom

White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis* – one or two daily at Polentswa Pan, quite shy, they would only land to drink and stay for a few minutes. They stayed on the ground much shorter than the other two vulture species.



*Black-breasted Snake-Eagle*



*White-headed Vulture*

White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus* – one 10 km north of Molopo Lodge en route to KTP, quite scarce during our first 4-5 days in KTP, from then on more regular, especially between Dikbaardskolk and Union's End, larger gatherings at Polentswa Pan (25+ daily) and in the Kwang/Bedinkt area; only 1-2 daily in flight over AU

Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus* – two at Polentswa waterhole about half an hour before sunset, otherwise only seen at Polentswa Pan from Polentswa Tented Camp (20+ daily)

Black-chested Snake Eagle *Circaetus pectoralis* – 2-5 almost daily in KTP

Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus* – fairly common in KTP, 1-7 seen on most days, highest numbers in the Nossob and Polentswa area

Black Harrier *Circus maurus* – only two sightings in KTP: one immature near Montrose waterhole, another immature bird near Leeudril; no adult birds seen in KTP!

Pale Chanting Goshawk *Melierax canorus* – very common in KTP, fairly common (1-4) in MOK, WIT and AU

Gabar Goshawk *Micronisus gabar* – two sightings in KTP: one near Mata Mata, one north of Lijersdraai

Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* – one in MOK, one near Kimberley, one at MAR

Jackal Buzzard *Buteo rufofuscus* – a juvenile in KTP in the Auob Riverbed

Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* – 1-6 daily in KTP

Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii* – three sightings in AU of six different birds, five adults and one immature

Booted Eagle *Aquila pennatus* – one in AU at Arrowpoint viewpoint, one north of Lijersdraai in KTP

Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus* – regular sightings between 2R and Dikbaardskolk and between Auchterlonie and Kamqua but less evident around Mata Mata and in the north

Pygmy Falcon *Polihierax semitorquatus* – one in WIT near the hide, one in MOK, in KTP: one near KTC, one along the Upper Dune Road, one seen twice near Kousant

Rock Kestrel *Falco rupicolus* – a handful sightings in KTP, most sightings in the north

Greater Kestrel *Falco rupicoloides* – four sightings in KTP: one on the Second Dune Road, two at Bedinkt waterhole, one near Urikaruus, one south of Kousant

Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera* – 1-3 seen about every 2-3 days in KTP. A good place to see this species and Lanner Falcon is in the daytime at the hide in Nossob where both falcon species regularly perch and hunt in trees along the fence close to the hide. Watch for quelea, dove and Cape Sparrow activity at the waterhole and the falcons will show up at some point. The Rooiputs-Melkvlei and Polentswa area also appeared to be a good areas for this species.

Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus* – 1-4 seen on most days in KTP, especially in Nossob River valley; one hunting around Grootkolk camp

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* – one in AU

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* – a few seen on route

Blue Crane *Anthropoides paradiseus* – a pair at MAR

Kori Bustard *Ardeotis kori* – common in KTP (between 5 and 15 daily), one in WIT

Ludwig's Bustard *Neotis ludwigii* – Just like in 2011 the stretch from KTC to Kamqua is a good area to see this species. Also seen in MAR (one on Nov. 6, four on Nov. 23). They show up after the first rains in Marrick, so usually from November onwards.

Karoo Korhaan *Eupodotis vigorsii* – one seen very well in AU near Lekkerwaterloop

Red-crested Korhaan *Lophotis ruficrista* – one on our way to WIT, one in MOK

Northern Black Korhaan *Afrotis afraoides* – three sightings in MAR, a total of about ten sightings in KTP, mostly males, a few sightings in AU

Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris* – scarce in KTP,

Spotted Thick-knee *Burhinus capensis* – seen in MAR, WIT and KTP; about ten sightings in total

Blacksmith Lapwing *Vanellus armatus* – a pair at one of the waterholes in MOK

Crowned Lapwing *Vanellus coronatus* – common in all places visited



*Crowned Lapwing*



*Ludwig's Bustard*

Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricollaris* – fairly common in MAR, two in AU,  
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* – one at the waterhole in Polentswa Tented  
Camp on Nov. 17

Double-banded Courser *Rhinoptilus africanus* – fairly common in MAR; I was surprised  
that we did not see them in KTP this time

Namaqua Sandgrouse *Pterocles namaqua* – common in WIT and KTP; quite easy to see at  
the waterholes Cubitje Quap, Kij Kij, and Cheleka but seen throughout the park

Burchell's Sandgrouse *Pterocles burchelli* – two in WIT, a few at Kij Kij in KTP, small  
numbers at waterholes 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Borehole, two at Kwang,

Double-banded Sandgrouse *Pterocles bicinctus* – over 100 seen in WIT at the hide

Speckled Pigeon *Columba guinea* – common



*Namaqua Sandgrouse*

Cape Turtle Dove *Streptopelia capicola* – common throughout the tour, seen daily

Laughing Dove *Stigmatopelia senegalensis* – common, seen almost daily, especially abundant in WIT

Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* – common in the north, uncommon to fairly common in the south, many seen in AU and KTP, lower numbers in MZNP, MOK, Benfontein, DHO and WCNP

Dideric Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx caprius* – one in MAR, one in WIT at the campground

Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba* – nesting at the tented camp in MAR, three on the night drive in 2R, one roosting in Nossob Camp

Spotted Eagle-Owl *Bubo africanus* – seen several times in MAR, also in the daytime, fairly common in KTP including five on the night drive in 2R, one the night drive from KTC/Mata Mata, and 1-2 showed up after sunset at pretty much every waterhole of the camps we stayed in

Verreaux's Eagle Owl *Bubo lacteus* – two on the night drive in 2R, six juveniles near Urikaruus, two at Grootkolk Camp, two at Kieliekrankie Camp at the waterhole

Rufous-cheeked Nightjar *Caprimulgus rufigena* – one on the night drive in AU, a few on the night drive in Nossob, two on the night drive in MOK, commonly seen at night around waterholes in rest camps in KTP

African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus* – seen in AU, KTP, and on route.

Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* – common in AU, also seen in MAR and MOK

Common Swift *Apus apus* – small numbers at MAR, several tens near the falls in AU, also a few sightings in KTP, also seen on route.

Little Swift *Apus affinis* – common, except for KTP where seen fairly regularly but not daily

White-rumped Swift *Apus caffer* – fairly common

White-backed Mousebird *Colius colius* – seen about every other day, only in small numbers (usually singles or pairs)

Red-faced Mousebird *Urocolius indicus* – a group of five in AU

African Hoopoe *Upupa Africana* – common, 1-5 seen almost daily in protected areas and occasionally en route

Common Scimitarbill *Rhinopomastus cyanomelas* – two near 13<sup>th</sup> Borehole, one near Montrose, one at Grootkolk Camp, a resident pair at Polentswa tented Camp, one near Polentswa waterhole

Purple Roller *Coracias naevius* – one sighting in KTP near Bataluma



Purple Roller



Lilac-breasted Roller *Coracias caudatus* – common around Mata Mata and Polentswa but scarce to absent elsewhere in KTP  
 Swallow-tailed Bee-eater *Merops hirundineus* – common in AU and KTP, also a few seen in MOK  
 European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* – a few seen in WIT  
 Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill *Tockus leucomelas* – 1-3 on drives between Kamqua and Mata Mata, three in MOK  
 African Grey Hornbill *Tockus nasutus* – two on the unpaved road to Witsand  
 Acacia Pied Barbet *Tricholaema leucomelas* – two at MAR, two in WIT, one in AU  
 Crested Barbet *Trachyphonus vaillantii* – one in AU  
 Cardinal Woodpecker *Dendropicos fuscesmalacens* – one in WIT, one in MOK  
 Golden-tailed Woodpecker – one in MAR  
 Pririt Batis *Batis pririt* – three single animals in WIT, a pair and a single male at MAR, one at Grootkolk Camp  
 Fiscal Shrike *Lanius collaris* – common  
 Brubru *Nilaus afer* – one in WIT in the camping area  
 Bokmakierie *Telophorus zeylonus* – two in MAR, several in WIT, two tame birds at Kieliekrankie, one in AU  
 Brown-crowned Tchagra *Tchagra australis* – one in MOK  
 Crimson-breasted Shrike/Gonolek *Laniarius atrococcineus* – common in KTP



*Levitating Gonolek*

*Namaqua Doves at Nossob waterhole*

Fork-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus adsimilis* – common throughout the tour  
 Cape Crow *Corvus capensis* – daily sightings in KTP  
 Pied Crow *Corvus albus* – common around Kimberley, MAR and MOK, and en route between reserves, but not seen in AU and KTP  
 Ashy Tit *Parus cinerascens* – common in WIT, 1-3 in AU, MOK and MAR; in KTP seen in Nossob Camp  
 Cape Penduline Tit *Anthoscopus minutus* – one at Polentswa Tented Camp  
 Eastern Clapper Lark *Mirafrasi fasciolata* – a few in MAR  
 Fawn-coloured Lark *Calendulauda africanoides* – fairly common in KTP, also seen in AU, MOK and MAR  
 Karoo Long-billed Lark *Certhilauda subcoronata* – one in AU near the Echo Corner turn-off  
 Spike-heeled Lark *Chersomanes albofasciata* – common in MAR, also seen in WIT, KTP and AU  
 African Red-eyed Bulbul *Pycnonotus nigricans* – common in AU and MOK  
 Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica* – small groups and singles in KTP,  
 White-throated Swallow *Hirundo albicularis* – only seen in AU



*Cape Sparrow (and a few Red-headed Finches)*

Rock Martin *Ptyonoprogne fuligula* – common, particularly in AU but seen throughout  
 Greater Striped Swallow *Cecropis cucullata* – common, seen in MAR, WIT and AU  
 Lesser Swamp Warbler *Acrocephalus gracilirostris* – one in AU  
 Icterine Warbler *Hippolais icterina* – one near Polentswa Pan  
 Yellow-bellied eremomela *Eremomela icteropygialis* – one in MAR  
 Levaillant's Cisticola *Cisticola tinniens* – seen in MAR and WIT  
 Desert Cisticola *Cisticola aridulus* – a few sightings in KTP, not seen well, but had seen the species before  
 Rufous-eared Warbler *Malcorus pectoralis* – at least one seen and photographed in the Kij Kij/Melkvlei area in KTP (one or two more appeared to be present)  
 Black-chested Prinia *Prinia flavicans* – common throughout  
 Long-billed Crombec *Sylvietta rufescens* – one at Polentswa  
 Chestnut-vented Tit-babbler *Parisoma subcaerulea* – very common in WIT, also seen at MAR, AU  
 Orange River White-eye *Zosterops pallidus* – only seen in AU  
 Cape Wagtail *Motacilla capensis* – common in WIT, two in AU, a few in MAR  
 African Pipit *Anthus cinnamomeus* – a few in KTP  
 Cape Glossy Starling *Lamprotornis nitens* – common throughout  
 Burchell's Glossy Starling *Lamprotornis australis* – one in Nossob camp, one near Rooiputs  
 Pale-winged Starling *Onychognathus naboroupe* – common in AU  
 Groundscraper Thrush *Psophocichla litsitsirupa* – one between Nossob and Dikbaardskolk  
 Karoo Thrush *Turdus smithii* – a few in AU  
 Cape Robin-Chat *Cossypha caffra* – common in AU, two in the garden at MAR, a few in MOK

Kalahari Scrub Robin *Erythropygia paeon* – few daily in KTP, common in MOK and MAR.  
 Karoo Scrub Robin *Erythropygia coryphaeus* – two in AU  
 Capped Wheatear *Oenanthe pileata* – several in MAR, two in AU  
 Mountain Wheatear *Oenanthe monticola* – quite common in AU; all colour morphs were seen  
 Familiar Chat *Cercomela familiaris* – common, seen throughout  
 Ant-eating Chat *Myrmecocichla formicivora* – common in MAR, fairly common in AU, scarce in KTP  
 Short-toed Rock Thrush *Monticola brevipes* – one male in MAR  
 Chat Flycatcher *Bradornis infuscatus* – uncommon in KTP, but seemed more common in certain areas in KTP  
 Marico Flycatcher *Bradornis mariquensis* – common in KTP  
 Fiscal Flycatcher *Sigelus silens* – several seen in MAR in MOK  
 Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* – one in MOK  
 Dusky Sunbird *Cinnyris fuscus* – seen in WIT, AU and KTP  
 House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* – only in AU at the reception and in towns  
 Cape Sparrow *Passer melanurus* – common throughout  
 Southern Grey-headed Sparrow *Passer diffuses* – common in AU and KTP, also seen in MOK, WIT and MAR  
 White-browed Sparrow-Weaver *Plocepasser mahali* – common in WIT, AU and KTP, also seen in MOK and MAR  
 Sociable Weaver *Philetairus socius* – common throughout  
 Scaly-feathered Finch *Sporopipes squamifrons* – common in AU and MAR, abundant in KTP, also common along roads in the north (N14, R360). A few sightings in MOK.  
 Southern Masked Weaver *Ploceus velatus* – common, seen at most sites on the tour but scarce in KTP  
 Red-billed Quelea *Quelea quelea* – common throughout, several sightings of massive groups (>1000) at waterholes in KTP



*Red-billed Queleas*

Southern Red Bishop *Euplectes orix* – only seen in WIT, a few males in breeding plumage

Green-winged Pytilia *Pytilia melba* – a few in WIT  
 Red-headed Finch *Amadina erythrocephala* – common in MAR and KTP, also seen WIT  
 Violet-eared Waxbill *Granatina granatina* – a pair at Grootkolk, another pair in a group of queleas near Melkvlei and brief views of two at WIT  
 Common Waxbill *Estrilda astrild* – two groups in AU and group at the waterhole in MAR  
 Black-faced Waxbill *Estrilda erythronotos* – fairly common in WIT, also seen in MAR  
 Pin-tailed Whydah *Vidua macroura* – only seen in WIT including two males in breeding plumage  
 Yellow Canary *Crithagra flaviventris* – common to abundant in all areas visited  
 White-throated Canary *Crithagra albogularis* – a few seen in AU  
 Lark-like Bunting *Emberiza impetuani* – common in AU  
 Cinnamon-breasted Bunting *Emberiza tahapisi* – one in MAR and one in MOK  
 Cape Bunting *Emberiza capensis* – about 3-4 in WIT, a few in AU  
 Golden-breasted Bunting *Emberiza flaviventris* – several at the hide in WIT, fairly common in MOK



*Lappet-faced Vulture at Polentswa Waterhole*



*Bateleur*



*Barn Owl*

## OTHER WILDLIFE

We saw numerous lizards, agamas, geckos, skinks, etc. and 3-4 snakes, but most of the herps I could not identify with certainty.

Leopard Tortoise *Stigmochelys pardalis* – up to four in WIT, one in MAR

Marsh Terrapin *Pelomedusa subrufa* – a few in WIT

[Girdled Lizard species – a few sightings, not sure which species]

Mole Snake *Pseudaspis cana* – one in KTP

Augrabies/Broadley's Flat Lizard *Platysaurus broadleyi* – good numbers in AU

Ground Agama *Agama aculeate* – common in KTP, especially north of Nossob

Western Rock Skink *Trachylepis sulcata* – fairly common in AU and KTP

Striped Skink *Trachylepis wahlbergi* – a handful seen



*A Thick-toed Gecko species I think?*

## Books

*Sasol Birds of Southern Africa* by I. Sinclair, P. Hockey, W. Tarboton and P. Ryan is probably the best field guide for Southern Africa. Sounds recordings of the birds were compiled from the 6-CD set *Birds of Southern Africa* by Guy Gibbons and recordings on Xenocanto, but I barely used them.

For mammals I used Stuart's *Field Guide to Mammals of Southern Africa*, a major improvement on the *Field Guide to African Mammals* by J. Kingdon that I used on previous trips.

At the airport in Johannesburg on the way home I bought *African Dogs On The Frontline* by Brendan Whittington-Jones (Jacana Publishers). Although the writing and content is a bit repetitive at times, there are numerous spot-on oneliners and summarizing paragraphs that make it an interesting and sobering account on what conservation work in South Africa actually entails in an environment where animals inside and outside national parks have become trade commodities.

### Photo Appendix – Kwang waterhole

We had a couple of pretty entertaining sessions at the Kwang waterhole. During this one a number of white-backed vultures were initially just drinking and washing themselves. The first black-backed jackal that appeared immediately chased off the vultures aggressively but was then harassed and somewhat intimidated by a pale-chanting goshawk! A little later a second jackal came with back hairs up, face down and ears flattened. A short confrontation followed but in the end there were just bruised egos.





## Lions





## Half-hearted hunting at Kij Kij







**More Lions**



## Hyenas



**Springbok**



**Cape Fox**



## Cheetah Hunt in Auob Riverbed



*Up to this point she had stalked the springbok already for several hundred meters...*



*and started to run here - even at this point the Springbok had not noticed her*





*Still it seemed she had started the sprint too soon and at this point I thought she had blown it; However, a second later one of the Springbok made the fatal decision to turn to the right.*



*Cheetah turns on the turbo*



*About 2-3 seconds later*



*Game over for the Springbok! The Cheetah's tail tip was the last thing we saw before she pulled down the Springbok out of view into the low depression in front of the trees*

**The drama: puppies for breakfast**



Honey Badger investigating Bat-eared Fox den



*Bat-eared Jackal approaches the badger with puffed-up tail and back hairs up*



*Bat-eared Fox trying to carry the puppy to safety;  
this was about a minute before the jackal attacked*



*Last seconds of the Bat-eared Fox puppy*