



South Africa: Kruger, Sani pass, Karoo and Cape

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In October 2023, I spend a month in South Africa, crossing the country from Kruger and Sani Pass area all the way to Cape Town. Focus was on mammals (100+ species) and birds (400+ species). It was a trip with my girlfriend, so there were some elements of “balance”, especially in the Cape area. Species highlights include Meller’s Mongoose, Cape Spiny Mouse, Wild Dog, multiple Aardvarks, three species of molerats and all seven cat species of South Africa.

Spotlight: Best new places/insights

Blyde River Canyon could be a mammalwachers dream. With Meller’s Mongoose, Jameson’s Red Rock Rabbit, Chestnut Climbing Mouse (common), Bush Hyrax, both galagoes as well as a variety of other potential or observed species, this place deserves a visit. The walking trails offer a safe way to explore the two habitats (bushland and montane rainforest) and day views are simply fantastic. The KhoiSan Karoo Conservancy could become the next Marrick. We only visited one night, but had a fantastic Aardvark observation, as well as Aardwolf, Hottentot Mole Rat and Blue Korhaan. With the other supposedly regularly seen mammals such as Cape Fox, Meercat, Karoo Four-striped Mouse, Karoo Bush Rat, Sengis as well as the re-introduced Hippos, there is more than enough quality species to look out for in a few days. The owner PC has a conservation optimism (re-introducing Caracal in sheep county) that is worth to support as well!



Figure 1 A Hyrax at Blyde River Canyon. Cover image: Sloggett’s Vlei Rat at Sani pass

Logistics and Preparations

Itinerary

Our trip was divided into four parts: Part 1 to Sani Pass, Part 2 around Kruger, Part 3 Johannesburg to Cape Town and Part 4 Cape area.

We added Sani pass later, when the Safari was booked, otherwise it would be better to switch part 1 and 2 to save quite some driving.

Our routine on the driving days was to try and arrive at the accommodation with an hour or so of sunlight left, do some birding, a short nightwalk, go to bed early and be up with the first light before for some morning wildlife watching, before we drove again over midday. We found it rewarding to be up early – midday stops were seldom very good.

Guides, Car and Safety

We were sometimes guided – more details in the relevant sections. It is not absolutely necessary, but enhanced the experience for us quite a bit. All areas including Kruger can be done yourself, and all except Sani pass in a standard rental 2wd, the roads in the national parks are mostly tarred and good. Getting guides was also great get a break from driving ourselves, as we had enough long driving days and many other activities such as game drives are car-based as well. We slashed two tires in a pothole in the middle of nowhere with no reception in the Karoo. We were lucky to be helped out by a local farmer and then our host, but recommend to take the bigger, better roads and/or ask locals which road is ok, especially in the interior of the country. On this day we also had to drive in the night and it is not fun with ruthless trucks, potential free-walking livestock and vehicles/people without light, so best to avoid (this is also what the locals said). Driving smaller roads lead to more animal sightings though. We used Google Maps and MapsMe for orientation. The driving time estimation from Google Maps are quite precise. Generally, we felt safe, but we followed some common-sense safety measures and followed recommendations by the locals. The general safety situation probably impacted mammalwatching mostly at night: Night walks are sometimes not possible outside of the accommodation property.

Wild Card

There is the option to buy a Wild Card, which is a yearly pass to enter the national park and some reserves. For us worth it from the start, as we planned to visit quite a few National Parks. In hindsight even more worth it, as we could enter multiple times in case the weather changed or at some small parks (such as Midmar Reserve), where cash payment is not possible.

Accommodations

All accommodations were the same, but some were better for mammalwatching... I will mention these in the appropriate sections. Outside of given accommodations (National parks, Marrick...) I tried to choose interesting accommodation based on the satellite picture. I was tricked a few times, because what looked like promising forest turned out to be eucalyptus, rather lifeless for night walks and morning birding alike. In hindsight, we could have tried to sleep inside National parks a few times more: Mostly there is at least a bit of bush in the (fenced) camps and night walks are safe, both from people and animals.

Planning, species identification, apps

To get an idea which animals are observed where, I used ebird for the feathered side-projects and iNaturalist for the hairy main-targets. iNaturalist gave an impression of the observation frequency of

a certain species, including sometimes even colonies/hotspots, such as *Otomys*. iNaturalist is also fairly up to date with the newest taxonomy, for example for *Rhodomys*.

Stuarts' SA Mammals App often helps with ID, especially small mammals, as it has some comparison pictures. Some range maps need updating. The bird app Robert's Bird Guide 2 has a very helpful map with many birding sites in the tab "My location". This helps to find natural areas, how to get in, and sometimes the text even mentions what mammals occur and where. We also had Sasol's Bird Guide and Smithers Mammals of Southern Africa, which did their job and helped to study the species on long drives. The most useful trip reports were Jon Hall (2007/2017) and Mark Hows (2019) from mammalwatching.com, as well as John Kinghorn's Bats of Kruger (John Kinghorn, <https://www.birdingecotours.com/bats-of-the-kruger-national-park-part-1/>) and Paul Carter's excellent Dunedin Farm Mammal Guide (<https://www.pacapix.com/tag/riverine-rabbit-retreat/>). The publication by Smit et al 2008 in the *Journal of Mammalogy* is very helpful to identify Karoo Sengi species.

Is it a natural Park or a Zoo?

Many natural parks in South Africa are heavily managed and fenced. Antelopes and other animals can be (re-)introduced, but also frequently exchanged between the areas or moved within the same. Management can be as much a political than ecological question. The many game farms with both native and non-native "livestock" don't make the whole situation easier to understand. Obviously introduced, game farm animals I do not list. Animals in bigger nature reserves I do list, but remark where animals are away of the known historical distribution (checklist and text) or where I have other reasons to be critical, for example small reserves with a too low number of animals to be self-sustaining long-term (text).

Impact and people

All my sightings are on iNaturalist – ID's can change, so surely worth a look:

https://www.inaturalist.org/observations?d1=2023-09-01&d2=2023-10-31&place_id=6986&subview=map&taxon_id=40151&user_id=vmoser&verifiable=any

I left some donations for the Black-footed Cat project in Bloemfontein Nature Reserve lead by Alexander Sliwa, as well as the for the Gauteng And Northern Regions Bat Interest Group in the name of Dawn Cory Toussaint, who helped me ID my bats, especially with bioacoustics. Also, a big thanks to all people including guides that helped with advice or identifications: Moolman family, Gavin Sims, Kyle Finn, Stuart McLean, Norman and crew, PC and crew, Venkat, as well as many others.



Figure 2 Yellow Mongoose at KhoiSan Karoo Conservancy



Figure 3 Sani pass landscape

Part 1: Sani Pass/Golden Gate National Park

This part was quite a bit of driving. We added this part to look at some montane habitat with its special species and Lesotho. The area holds some birds and mammals harder or not possible to get later. My camera died on the first day, so we only had Ayla's, and I had to go and replace in Johannesburg when back, though I missed out on good (=to identify) pictures in a few moments.

Golden Gate National Park

We stayed one night at Kiara Lodge, which was a perfect location to get used to both mammals and birds of South Africa. In hindsight we could have stayed an extra day to recover from the overnight flight. A short night walk yielded the first Cape Porcupine. In the morning we did a walk around the lodge, up the hill and found many target species already: Eland, Black Wildebeest and Grey Rhebok all showed themselves, as well as some very close Red Hartebeest that we surprised behind a hill crest. Rock Hyrax live in the cliffs too.

In the park itself we did the two loops, Blesbok and Oribi. The first is nice for landscape, had a few antelopes as well, on the Oribi loops there are more, as well as a Vulture hide with a Cape Culture overhead. Some zebras, more of the antelopes and many Black Wildebeest.

Sani pass

We had two nights in the area, first the Sani Pass Backpackers, then Lake Glencairn. Both were reasonably good for some evening/morning birding. Around both should be some (more) antelopes. I found Duiker at the Backpackers, as well as quite some birds, and Common Reedbuck at Lake Glencairn. At Lake Glencairn I also tried for Otter, but only found a huge cage trap placed at the water's edge...

For the pass itself we had the help of bird guide Stuart McLean ()with his 4x4 – who knew his birds, but also everything else. He looked hard with us to find Mountain Reedbuck, Common Reedbuck, Eland and Grey Rhebok on the drive up. Only the Oribi evaded us (like on all of the trip...). The scope came in handy, as a few times on the trip, to look at distant antelopes. We also did well with the birds with excellent observations of both Sugarbird and Rockjumper. For me the highlight were the "Icerats" (Sloggett's Vlei Rats) closer to the top and in the highlands of Lesotho, very easy and everywhere, the most confident probably around the pub. We also searched some den sites of Cape

Fox, but no luck. Driving down again, I flushed an *Otomys* species behind the male toilet block on the South African border post. They came out again, but due to the camera situation, many people and a generator starting at the worst time I didn't get good pictures, even though I saw them a few times more. If you go and get pictures, please let me know!

Further down, Stuart showed us some more Common Reedbuck together with all three Cranes and a Flufftail in the farmlands. With a bit more birding at the accommodation, we were close to 100 bird species and some excellent mammals, what a day!

Drive back: Midford Dam and Grootvlei

The next day we started early and drove back to Johannesburg to spend the night near Grootvlei. We did a midday stop at Midford Dam, where we had easy access thanks to the wildcard. We tried again for Oribi, but only found some Zebra, Black Wildbeest, Impala, Red Hartebeest. In hindsight, this is one of the places I would have been a bit skeptical to tick something: Small reserve, small numbers of certain species, no predators, people walking around (for fishing). Still a lot of nature, and we hit the birding jackpot when we flushed some Painted Snipes. On we went, and when approaching our accommodation Pepe Piatto Lodge near Grootvlei we saw the first of quite a few Yellow Mongoose on the road. The accommodation was alright, settled in farmland. Again, a Duiker at night, also a weird network of burrows. I sat there in the night and, after some waiting, had a heat flash in the thermal. I waited hoping it would fully come out... In hindsight the burrow network was the work of a Golden mole - the right reaction would have been to try and see the animal as quickly as possible. At least I also recorded a Multimammate Mouse, Natal or Southern.



Figure 4 Hartebeest near Kiara Lodge



Figure 5 Blyde River Canyon Forever Resort

Part 2: Safari in Kruger

This part was planned with my parents who could not join due to medical reasons. Ayla and me were therefore alone with our private guide Gavin Sims from Lawson's safari. Gavin's excellent eye and blind understanding of Kruger helped to make the best out of this park. We generally tried to stay away from the crowds at the main roads and were rewarded with many good sightings "without bystanders" - although usually it doesn't take long for cars to show up. The open safari vehicle was a true advantage, as the higher seating position allows easier scanning into the high grasslands, also with the thermals. Most mornings, I could use the thermal for the first hours, and it was a nice addition to looking with eyes and binoculars only.

Accommodations

We started the trip by visited Dullstrom (1 night) and Blyde River Canyon - Forever Resort (2 nights) and then about 6 days in Kruger itself (2 nights in Satara, 2 Lower Sabi, 1 Pretoriuskop).

Accommodation was mostly simple with access to a Braai area. Instead of full board, we went with Breakfast only – a very good decision, as it gave the day some flexibility and with usually late breakfast after the morning game drive, some snacks during the day was sufficient until dinner.

Johannesburg – Dullstrom – Blyde River Canyon incl. Mount Sheba

We started the safari by going to an urban wetland near the airport. Quite some waterbirds are easiest around Johannesburg/Pretoria, so it's worth to have a look at the recent sightings on ebird.

When we arrived in Dullstrom, it was foggy. When we left Dullstrom, it was foggy. The main targets here were Oribi and the mountain birds. The later we had mostly seen already around Sani pass, so we decided to stay only for the night and instead two nights at Blyde, a very good decision in hindsight! At our only morning in Dullstrom, the fog didn't lift until 10, when we ran out of patience. Surely a bit unlucky, but if you are not interested in mountain birds, consider driving to Blyde directly.

As we left Dullstrom early due to the weather, we were at Blyde River Canyon Forever Resort early enough to have time for a hike. A good decision, as it allowed me to explore the area already a bit and plan for the first night. Blyde has bushland in the upper section, while the lower section are remnants tropical mountain forests with small streams. The sections were connected by an excellent

walking trail network, as well as two paved roads to lookout points. This allowed me some extensive and long night walks. The observations don't come easy – but the diversity and quality of species is excellent! The garden of the manager had some Klipspringer during the day, which I also saw multiple times later in the light or early morning. The upper, rocky sections had Jameson's Red Rock Hare, Bush Hyrax, Namaqua Rock rat and a common Climbing Mouse, maybe Brants's. In the camp I found Greater Galago, Lesser Galago, Fruit Bats, Klipspringer and Common Genet. In the forest section, I found Meller's Mongoose, Lesser Galago and Bushbuck.

I searched hard for Red Duiker, first in the night and after realizing they are more crepuscular/diurnal also the last morning, as apparently they are seen in camp from time to time. No luck for me, same with Otter or Sengis. Bats I recorded the usual Free-tailed Bats and Cape Serotine, but maybe there is more to be found.

During our full day we went to a montane tropical forest fragment on Mount Sheba. Information on access can be found in Robert Bird Guide 2 app. Here we focused on Knysna Turaco and Narina Trogon, which both also occur at Blyde, but are easier here in this spectacular forest. Eventually we found both, along with many other forest specialists. We had a group of Gentle Monkeys close to the main buildings. I was looking out for Red Duiker without look.



Figure 6 Dwarf Mongoose in Kruger

Kruger: Satara, Lower Sabi and Rest Camp area

This section is a bit special: I will not repeat my sightings per camp, but cluster some topics together – hopefully this gives a better overview.

Kruger how to and rare species

Self-driving in Kruger is easy. The roads are good and information is shared generously. Kruger is safe and the atmosphere relaxed. We avoided Numbi gate due to recent crime activity and took other gates.

For the diurnal, large and medium mammals, there seem to be very common (eg Elephant), reasonably common (eg Lions) and rare (eg Sable, Nyala, Cheetah, Wild Dogs) stuff, but not much in-between. The common species should be no problem within 2-3 days. For the other, I try to share what I learned. Additionally, there are sometimes outdated/imprecise magnet boards in the camps, where some of the more desired species can be marked. The app "Kruger Sightings" can also help track sightings in real time and sometimes things like Sable are posted. Some camps (Pretorioskope had one) also have a book for rare antelope's sightings.

For the less common species, the sighting boards should help with Leopard, Cheetah and Wild Dog. We did not twitch anything except the Wild Dogs, which are often stationary during the day. Leopard was the most difficult of the big 5, we saw twice (once on a night drive). Cheetah is rarer and by no means guaranteed – we saw four, two found by us/Gavin. No information on Rhinos are shared, poaching is still a big problem, we had a handful of observations. Two antelopes we observed almost exclusively in camps: Bushbuck (camps only besides Blyde) and Nyala (camps and Orpen entrance Road). Klipspringer we had just once, check iNaturalist for places. Mongooses (Dwarf, Slender, Banded) we found only a of couple of times each, in no way guaranteed. We lucked out with a Side-striped Jackal one early morning.

For the night drives, the observation frequency of many species is difficult to judge due to the guides giving very different answers, thermal imagers changing species-specific observations and season including grass length probably with a big effect. Species of interest seemingly regularly seen include Large-spotted Genet (once), White-tailed Mongoose (once) and African Civet (miss). There is always the chance to see something rarer like Aardvark (once, but see below), Bushbaby (miss) or Honey Badger (miss). We also lucked out with the rarely seen Serval. We always had Scrub/Savannah-what-ever-it-is Hare.



Figure 7 Wild Dog in Kruger

Nocturnal species: Night drives

Night drives can be booked at Kruger (such as most other national parks in South Africa) at the reception and are mostly done with big buses. Also, other activities like walks or evening drives can be booked that way. Night drives in Kruger is a special experience. It's mostly more about the show than the animals and predators are everything. Quality (and understanding for mammalwatchers with thermals and special wishes) is therefore fluctuating. I started showing the thermal to the guides and sometimes also people before the trip to make some "friends" to increase tolerance when I wanted to stop for something that was not a cat. Mongooses was just about tolerated, Hares only when it was really slow-going, rodents I didn't really dare – most people would have really not cared admittedly. Some (most?) had no binocular so it is difficult to spot anything smaller than a Lion anyway, and even that seemed hard sometimes! I had one tell-tale experience in the Pretoriuskop Rest Camp, where I spotted a Leopard stalking an Aardvark. Guess what I saw from my lifer Aardvark? The head for a split second – then we followed the Leopard...

Wildlife in the camps: Thermaling and bats

In all camps I found at least some wildlife. Besides the antelopes, I mostly found some Genets (both species), as well as African Wild Cat in Satara. Also a few rodents each, Chestnut Climbing Mouse and Tete Veld Rat at Satara, Common Grammomys at Lower Sabie, as well as Common Grammomys and an *Otomys*-species at Pretoriuskop. In Lower Sabie especially, buffalo and elephant came close to camp in the night, allowing good views.

In all bigger camps (including day visits), I found Epauletted Fruit Bats. Apparently call frequency (a high ping) is different between the two species, so maybe do some research and call recordings. In Lower Sabie I recorded Banana Serotine, Egyptian Free-Tailed Bats, Long-Tailed House Bats and Yellow-Bellied House Bat, as well as Angolan Free-Tailed Bats, Little Free-Tailed Bats, Egyptian Slit-faced Bat and Sundevall's Leaf-nosed Bat roosting.

In Satara I recorded Banana Serotine, Egyptian Free-Tailed Bats as well Angolan Free-Tailed Bats and/or Little Free-Tailed Bats and Cape Serotine or Schlieffen's Bat, with inconclusive recordings. Just outside Satara, on the night drive, I recorded the ultra-rare Cohen's Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus cohenae*)! I had Angolan Free-Tailed Bats and Little Free-Tailed Bats roosting in Satara. In Pretoriuskop I recorded Midas free-tailed bat and Ansorge's Free-Tailed Bat, as well Angolan Free-Tailed Bats and Little Free-Tailed Bats while finding roosting Yellow-bellied House Bat and Egyptian Slit-faced Bat.



Figure 8 Brave heron in Kruger



Figure 9 Egyptian Slit-faced Bat roosting in one of the camps



Figure 10 Karoo landscape at Riverine Rabbit Retreat

Part 3: Karoo with Marrick with Mokala National Park, Karoo Conservancy, and Riverine Rabbit Retreat with Karoo National Park

The Karoo was partly in flower and left a lasting impression on us with stunning landscapes, great (nocturnal) mammalwatching and long drives.

Marrick

We stayed three night, two of which we did a night drive. Marrick was great, but maybe not as exceptional as I hoped for. With night drives and habituated Sengis, they have a great starting program. We saw Aardvark, Aardwolf, Wildcat, even a Caracal in two-night drives, the wildlife was great. However, I also felt the routine has adjusted more for tour groups and photographers (who are happy with habituated birds and squirrels) and less for mammalwatchers wanting to see everything. So maybe my expectations were too high, but with the steep prize (ZAR 3500) for the (private) night drives, I feel my expectations are at least somehow justified. Due to poor planning and bad luck I missed the Smith's Red Rock Hare and had only one rodent species (Bushveld Gerbil). Night drives started (too?) early, as they had to fit two sessions in and seemed to focus entirely on Aardvark. Information given out where we could see what with which frequency was sparse or unprecise, making it hard to set priorities properly. The routine felt much the same between private night drive and what the others did – maybe I communicated not strongly enough.

What can you do better: Be very clear what you want – for example insist to visit the Kopje already at the first chance, as the Rock Hares don't seem guaranteed, especially in cold nights. Private night drive maybe only worth if you have specific targets – but in my experience the usual schedule was not much adjusted. Do a night walk in addition to the night drives (best to ask before though). I had two unidentified rodents (+ Rock Hyrax) before the sun was rising when I was trying again unsuccessfully for the Rock Hares at the Kopjes. Black-footed Cat seems difficult at the moment due to the high grass. Bats recorded at Marrick where an unknown Rhinolophus at 33khz and Egyptian free-tailed bat. It would be very interesting to get more bat recordings from Marrick – this 33khz species seems strange, so please let me know if you find manage to get more recordings!

A note to the habituated Sengis – on iNat the suggested ID was Eastern Rock Sengi – not the often-reported Karoo Rock Sengi. I think this might be correct based on distribution records and identification criteria's I could find myself. We did have brief looks at the only Meercats we saw for the trip with lots of luck at Marrick property because local birder Brian took us to see a Pygmy Falcon

Nest. We were lucky to visit a nearby research project with Black-footed Cats, where we also observed our only Bat-eared Fox.

We did a day visit to Mokala National Park with local birder Brian. The park is used as a breeding area for rare antelopes Tsessebe, Sable and Roan, which we all saw, as well as some White Rhino. It was a rainy day. As far as I know, Mokala is not within the historical distribution for the Antelopes, however, populations were big with young, so I would consider this self-sustaining and though tickable.

On the way to Marrick from Johannesburg we did a midday stop at Sandveld Nature Reserve. Nice to have a break, not much activity. Introduced Tsessebe on the game-drive and then Yellow Mongoose and our first South African Ground Squirrel when walking on the hotel grounds.



Figure 11 Aardvark at KhoiSan Karoo Conservancy

KhoiSan Karoo Conservancy

We stayed one night – the place is also called New Holme Nature Lodge. Gavin gave us the tip pro visit this place with the owner PC. PC has many projects – many of them conservation and community oriented. With the reintroduction of hippos into the local river a further step to rewild the farm is done. This place needs mammalwatchers to visit and further develop where and what can be found – the potential is there that this place offers some exceptional mammalwatching. With Blue Korhaan and other special Karoo birds, there is some feathered highlights as well.

Due to our pre-planned schedule, we only had one night. The highlight of the night-drive was a close Aardvark that we observed for a little while. Aardwolf and our only Cape Hares, as well as countless spring hares also made an appearance, as well as Porcupine, Black-backed Jackal, Springbok, Steenbock and Blue Korhaan. We missed Cape Fox, which was seen about every second night at the time of our visit. The next day, we only had time for a birding morning drive (with a close Yellow Mongoose and Ground Squirrels), so missed the chance to look for regularly seen Meerkat, Karoo Four-striped Mouse, Karoo Bushrat or Sengis. I managed to get brief looks at a Common Mole Rat though! A bat box had some very probable Egyptian free-tailed bats, which I recorded as well the night before together with the usual Cape Serotines.

Riverine Rabbit Retreat

Rabbits no more – after I dipped already at Marrick with Smith's Red Rock Hare, here I dipped on both Riverine and Hewitt's Red Rock Hare. The trip reports of Paul Carter and Jon Hall are a great help and show how knowledge about a space can be accumulated if mammalwatchers keep visiting. Luckily, my main target was (still) night-roosting in the Guesthouse barn: Lesueur's hairy bat *Cistugo lesueuri*, a special species of bats that is also part of a unique bat family.

During the fruitless early-morning searching for the Riverine Rabbit in area R1 (see Carter 2021), a Karoo Bush Rat made an appearance. During the day I also had a Small Grey Mongoose in the yard, as well as abundant Rock Hyrax, including in the barn next to the guesthouse. In the afternoon I had a Western Rock Sengi on the rocky slope north of the guesthouse. In the same place I recorded Namaqua Rock Rat in the night.

The day was great, the night slow. I did one evening/night of mammalwatching, where I started by waiting at the dam, but no luck with Otter or Marsh Mongoose. At the top of the Dam Hill, I had a rodent in the thermal, but did not get my light on it, and as mentioned before, no appearance of the Rock Hares. The rest of the night walk I also saw very little, maybe because of the cold and partly windy weather. Maybe I moved too much – it could be better to wait a bit in good areas.

What can you do better: Spend a bit more time at the Retreat – this habitat has great species, but needs some time! We sacrificed a night for Karoo Conservancy – I think with 3 nights we would have been luckier. If you are a birder, ask about the birds, they know them as well as the mammals and there is some great species on the property.

On the way to the Cape area we did a stop at Karoo National Park. We did the Lammertjiesleegte, but did not see much besides a few Gemsbok and the first Mountain Zebras in the rainy weather. We then also did the Klipspringerpass – with some Klipspringer and more Mountain Zebra, as well as Red Hartebeest, Common Eland and Greater Kudu recorded as well in the park.



Figure 12 Caracal at Marrick



Figure 13 Cape point

Part 4: Cape area with Hermanus and Simons Town

This part was a bit fixed as we had a Pelagic booked in Cape Town with Cape Town Pelagics during 4 possible days – unfortunately all cancelled! The choppy sea meant spotting dolphins and whales was also difficult for us from land and we did not see any new marine species after Hermanus despite some efforts around Cape Town and in West Coast National Park. We even got unlucky on a Whale Watching Tour from Simon’s Town! The bad weather also meant that both Cape Point and Table Mountain was often in clouds, and we had to adjust our plans accordingly. We were happy to have some flexibility there.

Hermanus, Rooi-Els and Stoney Point

We stayed two nights and, as hoped for, had some great, close sightings of Southern Right Whale. Also abundant were the Brown Fur Seals and Rock Hyrax and we got lucky observing a huge school of Common Dolphin – with two what watching boats cutting right through unfortunately. We did probably the least intrusive trip out to the sea, with Kayaks. Some quite close whales and seals, a great experience! We did some walks along the coast and Fernkloof Nature Reserve. We also snorkeled the first time Hermanus, in the Old Harbour. As everywhere, not easy to see fish, and they are often shy, but spectacular underwater scenery with the kelp forest.

We visited Rooi-Els one morning to look for Rockjumper. It was cold and windy and the Rockjumper was very difficult. Eventually we saw one. The highlight was two young Cape Rock Sengis in a rock crack which I picked up with the thermal. The penguins at Stoney Point are fun, but the colony at Miller’s point seemed nicer, maybe because the Stoney Point boardwalk was damaged by a storm at the time of our visit. We did some snorkeling at the southern side of Rooi-Els beach, the highlight being a Puffadder Shy Shark.

West Coast National Park

This National Park is good for birds and seawatching, as Mark Hows 2019 has proven. Bigger mammals we did not see many (some Bontebok and seals), but plenty of Four-striped Grass Mouse crossing the road, particularly in the section between Tsaarbank and the intersection with the Gate Road, where we also saw a Cape Gray Mongoose. There is also a Karoo Bush Rat colony around the toilet block at Tsaarbank (-33.147946, 18.001864). While at midday they were nowhere to be seen, at 15:00 I saw some briefly, and I am sure later or early morning they are quite reliable.

Cape Town activities around Simon’s Town, Cape Point and Table Mountain

We spend the last four nights in the nicest apartment of trip, including seaview: Vitamin-Sea Holiday Hideaway, -34.240719, 18.474674. During the storm (south-westerlies), the wind blew some seabirds close enough for me to enjoy some comfy seawatching from the deck. I also saw some seals, but no cetaceans unfortunately. The road was reasonably quiet, so I did some half-relaxed night walks down the road in direction Cape. The species were good: Cape Spiny Mouse and Brants's Climbing Mouse, accompanied by some fireflies. I also tried (a bit desperately) to find Cape Grysbok, including a nightwalk around the gates of the Cape Point National Park, no luck in general.

We visited Cape Point National Park on two occasions. The first visit was an early morning walk from Olifantsbos Beach (Shipwreck Trail), hoping for otter. No otter, but frustratingly fresh tracks near Olifantsbos Cottage. There were some Bontebok and Baboons along the road and best, a Caracal on the road to Olifantsbos Beach. It pays to be the first vehicle of the day! The second visit was during the storm. Quite an experience, but not best for mammalwatching and besides an Eland close to Cape Point parking nothing seen, although it was fun to see the Cormorants battling the wind trying to land on the cliff. During the (unsuccessful) whale watching excursion from Simon's Town, we saw some distant Bontebok grazing at the Cape.

We also visited False Bay Coastal Park (formerly Strandfontein Sewage Works), the old wastewater treatment system, as we had not seen a number of waterbirds. Inside, I came across a system of Cape dune mole-rat mounds. The owner appeared very quickly (few minutes), too quickly for me, distracted with birding. Fortunately, the animal was very persistent, re-appearing quickly when I opened up the hole up again and I eventually saw it. I did try some trials with red light, and with weak red light it also appeared (not with strong). Worth some trials if that works with other species as well! Ah yes, we also saw plenty of waterbirds!

We also visited a famous cave that is supposed to have a bat colony. The bats were not found, but some signs that someone is living in the cave, including fire pits...

We did visit the Botanical garden and climbed Table Mountain via Skeleton Gorge. For the climb, a Grey Squirrel was the "best" mammal of the day. The forest is beautiful and there are some rare forest birds, we found some Olive Woodpeckers. In the adjacent Botanical Garden, we spend a morning looking for mole-rats and Golden Moles with Sisa, who works in the garden and sometimes manages to catch these species for visiting mammalwatchers – I was unlucky, but the visitor before me saw both within a morning. Best to contact him early, so he can scout better: +7784687412. The visit to the garden was still great, many (close) birds and my girlfriend and Sisa saw different rodents a few times, which I managed to miss every single time. A bit frustrated I opened a mole rat burrow with fresh activity. I had to wait 40 min (and honestly gave up, but couldn't admit my girlfriend we spend a morning looking for "rats" and I didn't even see one), a Cape Mole Rat ran across the open section and then proceeded to close it. Victory times two!



Figure 14 Southern Right Whale in Hermanus

Species list

Latin Name	Common Name	Golden Gate NP	Sani pass area	Midford Dam	Grootvlei	Blyde	Satara	Lower Sabi	Pretoriuskop	Sandveld NR	Marrick	KhoiSan	Dunedin	Hermanus	West Coast NP	Cape
<i>Elephantulus edwardii</i>	Cape Elephant Shrew													Rooi-Els		
<i>Elephantulus myurus</i>	Eastern Rock Elephant Shrew										1					
<i>Elephantulus rupestris</i>	Western Rock Elephant Shrew												1			
<i>Orycteropus afer</i>	Aardvark								1		1	1				
<i>Heterohyrax brucei</i>	Bush Hyrax					1										
<i>Procavia capensis</i>	Rock Hyrax	1	1			probably					1		1	1		
<i>Loxodonta africana</i>	African Bush Elephant						1	1	1							
<i>Galago moholi</i>	Moholi Bushbaby					1										
<i>Otolemur crassicaudatus</i>	Brown Greater Galago					1										
<i>Cercopithecus mitis</i>	Blue Monkey					Mount Sheba										
<i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i>	Vervet Monkey						1	1	1	1						
<i>Papio ursinus</i>	Chacma Baboon	1	1			1	1	1	1				Karoo NP			1
<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	Eastern Gray Squirrel															1
<i>Xerus inauris</i>	South African Ground Squirrel									1	1	1				
<i>Paraxerus cepapi</i>	Smith's Bush Squirrel						1	1	1							
<i>Dendromys mesomelas</i>	Brants's African Climbing Mouse															1
<i>Dendromys mystacalis</i>	Chestnut African Climbing Mouse					1	1									
<i>Acomys subspinosus</i>	Cape Spiny Mouse															1
<i>Gerbilliscus leucoqaster</i>	Bushveld Gerbil										1					
<i>Aethomys ineptus</i>	Tete Veld Rat						1									
<i>Grammomys dolichurus</i>	Common Grammomys							1	1							
<i>Micaelamys namaquensis</i>	Namaqua Micaelamys					1								1		
<i>Rhodomys intermedius</i>	Intermediate (Karoo) Four-striped Grass Rat												Karoo NP			
<i>Rhodomys pumilio</i>	Xeric (Cape) Four-striped Grass Rat															1
<i>Otomys sp.</i>	Vlei Rat sp.		1						1							
<i>Myotomys sloggetti</i>	Rock Karoo Rat (Sloggett's Vlei Rats)		1													
<i>Myotomys unisulcatus</i>	Bush Karoo Rat												1			1
<i>Mastomys sp.</i>	Multimammate Mouse sp.					1										
<i>Pedetes capensis</i>	South African Spring Hare										1	1				
<i>Bathyergus suillus</i>	Cape Dune Mole-rat															1
<i>Cryptomys hottentotus</i>	Southern African Mole-rat											1				
<i>Georchus capensis</i>	Cape Mole-rat															1
<i>Hystrix africae australis</i>	Cape Porcupine	1									1	1				
<i>Lepus capensis</i>	Cape Hare											1				
<i>Lepus saxatilis / victoriae</i>	Scrub Hare / Savannah Hare						1	1	1		?					
<i>Pronolagus randensis</i>	Jameson's Red Rock Hare					1										
<i>Epomophorus crypturus / wahlbergi</i>	Peters's / Wahlberg's Epauletted Fruit Bat					1	1	1	1							
<i>Hipposideros caffer</i>	Sundevall's Leaf-nosed Bat							1								
<i>Nycteris thebaica</i>	Egyptian Slit-faced Bat							1	1							
<i>Rhinolophus sp.</i>	Horseshoe Bat sp										1					
<i>Rhinolophus cohenae</i>	Cohen's Horseshoe Bat						1									
<i>Afronycteris (Neoromicia) nanus</i>	Banana Serotine						1	1								
<i>Chaerephon pumilus</i>	Little Free-tailed Bat						1	1								
<i>Chaerephon (Mops) ansorgei</i>	Ansorge's Free-tailed Bat															
<i>Tadarida aegyptiaca</i>	Egyptian Free-tailed Bat		1		1	1		1			1	1	1			
<i>Mops midas</i>	Midas' Free-tailed Bat								1							
<i>Mops condylurus</i>	Angolan Free-tailed Bat						1	1	1							
<i>Eptesicus hottentotus</i>	Long-tailed House Bat							1								
<i>Scotophilus dirnganii</i>	Yellow-bellied House Bat							1	1							
<i>Neoromicia capensis</i>	Cape Serotine				1							1	1			

<i>Cistugo lesueurii</i>	Lesueur's Wing-gland Bat														1				
<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>	Cheetah					1	1												
<i>Caracal caracal</i>	Caracal											1							1
<i>Felis nigripes</i>	Black-footed Cat													Benfontein					
<i>Felis silvestris</i>	Wildcat					1						1							
<i>Leptailurus serval</i>	Serval					1													
<i>Panthera leo</i>	Lion					1	1												
<i>Panthera pardus</i>	Leopard							1	1										
<i>Genetta genetta</i>	Common Genet					1	1	1	1										
<i>Genetta maculata</i>	Rusty-spotted Genet							1											
<i>Cynictis penicillata</i>	Yellow Mongoose				1							1	Mokala		1				
<i>Galerella pulverulenta</i>	Cape Gray Mongoose															1			1
<i>Galerella sanguinea</i>	Slender Mongoose						1	1	1										
<i>Heloqale parvula</i>	Common Dwarf Mongoose					1	1		1										
<i>Ichneumia albicauda</i>	White-tailed Mongoose																		1
<i>Mungos mungo</i>	Banded Mongoose					1	1												
<i>Rhynchogale melleri</i>	Meller's Mongoose				1														
<i>Suricata suricatta</i>	Meerkat													1					
<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>	Spotted Hyena					1	1												
<i>Proteles cristata</i>	Aardwolf													1	1				
<i>Canis adustus</i>	Side-striped Jackal					1													
<i>Canis mesomelas</i>	Black-backed Jackal					1	1							1	1				
<i>Lycaon pictus</i>	African wild dog								1										
<i>Otocyon megalotis</i>	Bat-eared Fox													Benfontein					
<i>Arctocephalus pusillus</i>	Brown Fur Seal																		1
<i>Equus quagga</i>	Plains Zebra	1		1		1	1		1										
<i>Equus zebra</i>	Mountain Zebra																		Karoo NP
<i>Ceratotherium simum</i>	White Rhinoceros					x	x	x						Mokala					
<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>	Common Wart-hog					1	1		1										
<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	Common Hippopotamus					1	1		1										
<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>	Giraffe					1	1		1			1	Mokala						
<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>	Impala			small herd		1	1		1										
<i>Alcelaphus caama</i>	Red Hartebeest	1		small herd															Karoo NP
<i>Connochaetes gnou</i>	Black Wildebeest	1		small herd															
<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>	Blue Wildebeest					1	1		1										
<i>Damaliscus pygargus</i>	Blesbok / Bontekok	1		small herd															1
<i>Antidorcas marsupialis</i>	Springbok											1	1	Karoo NP					
<i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>	Klipspringer					1	1												Karoo NP
<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>	Steenbok											1	1	1					
<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	African Buffalo					1	1		1					Mokala					
<i>Taurotragus oryx</i>	Common Eland	1	1																Karoo NP
<i>Tragelaphus angasii</i>	Nyala					1													Berg-en-Dal Rest Camp
<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>	Bushbuck					1	1	1	1										
<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>	Greater Kudu					1	1		1										Karoo NP
<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>	Bush Duiker		1	1		1	1		1										
<i>Oryx gazella</i>	Gemsbok																		Karoo NP
<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>	Waterbuck					1	1		1										
<i>Pelea capreolus</i>	Vaal Rhebok (Grey Rhebook)	1	1																
<i>Redunca fulvorufula</i>	Mountain Reedbuck			1															
<i>Redunca redunca</i>	Common Reedbuck			1															
<i>Eubalaena australis</i>	Southern Right Whale																		1
<i>Delphinus delphis</i>	Short-beaked Common Dolphin																		1
<i>Dama dama</i>	Fallow Deer													Benfontein, introduced					
<i>Damaliscus lunatus</i>	Common Tsessebe													introduced	Mokala, introduced				
<i>Hippotragus equinus</i>	Roan Antelope														Mokala, introduced				
<i>Hippotragus niqer</i>	Sable Antelope														Mokala, introduced				

