

Cape Town & the Western Cape

For the April school break, my family and I traveled to Cape Town, South Africa. While this trip wasn't aimed directly at mammal watching, we are always on the lookout for mammals! We saw mammals in a total of 5 places over 6 days: the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, Cape of Good Hope, Waterfront at Cape town, !Khwa Ttu Cultural and Nature Reserve, West Coast National Park, and Table Mountain National Park.

Before the wild mammals, we spotted some behemoth urban mammals in the form of rugby players, as we went to see a match in Cape Town. Yet even then, as we used a water taxi boat to navigate the canals and make our way to the waterfront and stadium, we saw plenty of **Cape Fur Seals**, lolling about on docks and platforms. My mother and middle brother claim they saw Cape Clawless Otters on a similar outing, but I am highly doubtful. Or maybe I'm just jealous.

The following day, we toured the Cape of Good Hope and the towns around False Bay, including Muizenberg Beach where we saw a ton of surfers but no wild mammals. We didn't spot much as it was more for sightseeing and getting to know the region and its history, but Boulders Beach is an amazing place to see **African Penguins**. We also saw a few **Rock Hyraxes**, or Dassies as they call them in South Africa. The penguins at Boulders Beach number more than 2,000 strong. It's on the standard tourist circuit but still well worth it.

We then went to Cape Point, or the Cape of Good Hope. This is the most south-western point in Africa. This is in the Cape Point Nature Reserve. While climbing to the Cape Point Lighthouse, I heard and then saw a small creature rustling in the bushes. At first, I thought it was a lizard but I saw the fur and some stripes. I came to the conclusion that it was a **Four-striped Grass Mouse**. Four-striped grass mice are in South Africa exclusively. The views from the lighthouse to the Atlantic were amazing and we also later spotted ostriches and **Blesbok** and more Cape fur seals down the rocks.

After we finished our tour of the Cape Peninsula, the next day we climbed Table Mountain via the Platteklip Gorge Route. More brilliant views of the city, the ocean, and the mountains. I added some birds to my life list up the hike, like the **Cape sugarbird**. I also saw **Yellow Mongoose** crossing the road before we even began the trail. I was lucky enough to look behind and see it. (My brothers saw a Small Gray Mongoose at the next place we went to: the Western Cape.)

The next day, our guide drove us to the West Coast National Park. I saw, on the outskirts of the park, two **Grey Rhebok**. We also toured Langebaan Lagoon and spent some time on the beach where I saw a **Dusky Dolphin**. West Coast National Park is covered in strange fynbos plants and shrubs. Unfortunately, much of the national park is closed except for during the flowering season in August and September. 😞 I had really hoped to see Caracals and maybe even a Cape Fox, but, alas, we spotted little more than **Common Eland** and **Southern Giraffe**.

We stayed at the !Khwa Ttu Nature Reserve, which is primarily a museum and cultural heritage center for the Khoi-San people. We learned so much about history and the Khoi-San (the museum is top rate) but the reserve also has a small wildlife area. It got the job done. During some short hikes and drives, we saw **Springbok**, **Cape Mountain Zebra**, **Bontebok**, and **Common Duiker**. We also spotted more eland and four-striped grass mice. We also stopped to look at some mounds over burrows and tunnels of the Cape Mole Rat, but our guide said you can only see males sometimes emerging after it rains. Overall, I would recommend going to the area in September during the flowering season, as you will see more mammals and it is also the whale watching season.

Now you are maybe asking yourself why there is a “!”, or exclamation point, in the name !Khwa Ttu. The Khoi-San people speak a language using clicks and the “!” as well as other symbols mark various kinds of clicks you need to make with your voice. The cultural aspect of !Khwa Ttu alone makes it a must go. The museum shows the complex and troubling history of the San and how they are doing in the modern day. My favorite aspect about the place is the bush walk, as you get to walk in this garden where they explain medicinal plants. We also had the chance to roast and try out Springbok meat. I highly recommend going to !Khwa ttu Nature Reserve. They have higher end rooms but we stayed in a self-catering cottage called the Bush House out in its own area.

Overall, I feel like I have to go back to Cape Town and the Western Cape again one day. Whether !Khwa ttu or Robben Island, Table Mountain or West Coast National Park, there is just so much to see and do. And I’ll spot that Caracal one day.

Scientific name	Common name	Place(s) seen
<i>Rhabdomys pumilio</i>	Four-striped grass mouse	!Khwa ttu, Cape point nature reserve
<i>Damaliscus p. pygargus</i>	Bontebok	!Khwa ttu, Cape point nature reserve
<i>Arctocephalus p. pusillus</i>	Cape fur Seal	Cape town waterfront, Cape point nature reserve
<i>Cynictis penicillata</i>	Yellow mongoose	Table mountain national park
<i>Lagenorhynchus obscurus</i>	Dusky Dolphin	West coast national park
<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>	Common Duiker	!Khwa ttu
<i>Antidorcas marsupialis</i>	Springbok	!Khwa ttu
<i>Tragelaphus oryx</i>	Eland	!Khwa ttu, West coast national park
<i>Pelea capreolus</i>	Gray Rhebok	West coast national park
<i>Equus z. zebra</i>	Cape mountain Zebra	!Khwa ttu
<i>Procavia capensis</i>	Rock Hyrax	Boulders Beach











