

Introduction

A short introduction is needed as this was not a trip organised by myself, but rather by a big travel agency from the Netherlands. I helped plan the trip and was responsible for 9 tourists at a time in South Africa.

When I didn't have any tourists I usually was busy with some other things including but not limited to going to (new) hotels, testing out safari operators and trying to catch up with some sleep.

Itinerary

01 sept Landing, went to accommodation

02 sept Visit rietvlei for training day

03-05 sept Visit Pilanesberg for some further training days

06-07 sept Visit Blyde river forever resort

08-12 sept Lower sabie (via Mt Sheba)

13-16 sept Skukuza

17-20 sept Letaba

21-23 sept Satara

24-25 sept Punda Maria

26 sept travel day towards pretoria

27 sept Marievale

28 sept Departure

During this trip report I will go over different areas and not give a day by day report.

Notes

Safety was always a thing, but even more so because the people I was “guiding” weren’t seasoned travellers. Often time flashing too much money and not being aware of their surroundings. This wasn’t a problem in the Kruger, but wasn’t great around the panorama route.

I also had some training days for which I spent time in Rietvlei (close to Pretoria) and Pilanesberg. More on this during the specific segments.

Being there for the tourists meant two things for me:

1. I didn’t get to spend my time looking for the animals I wanted.
2. Spending time with the big 5 was the most important part of the trip.

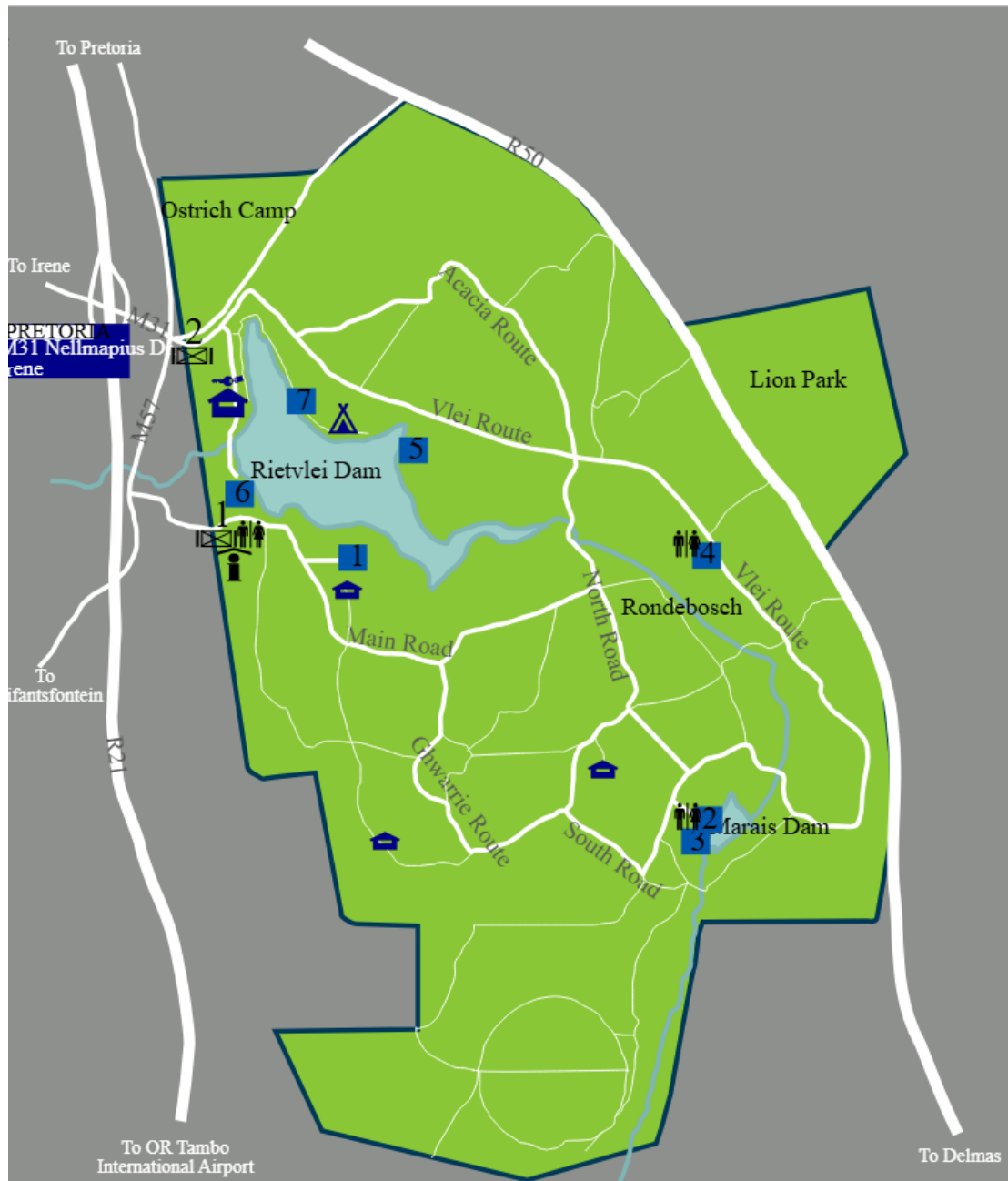
A big part of organising the Kruger part of the trip meant reading a lot of information about where to find which animals. Sadly not all accommodation was available and with tourists I visited Lower Sabie, Skukuza, Letaba and Satara. Punda Maria was done after the tourists had already left.

My thermal imager sadly broke during the flight which meant I had to do any spotlighting the old school way.

Mammals seen will be in **bold** and not seen but present will be underlined. Any special sighting (mammals or something else) will be *cursive*.

Rietvlei

Rietvlei is a lovely little nature reserve close to Pretoria. I visited one full day on the 2nd of September. Except for the **white rhino** seen here all animals were truly wild. Now I don't know if all animals are in their original range. I don't count the white rhino as having seen them here.



When you enter rietvlei via the main road you come close to the rietvlei dam. There is a birdhide there and sometimes cape clawless otters are seen, but not by me. Continuing on the road you go through some hills and there were some animals there, but all quite far away.

A big patch of grass was burned and this meant many **zebras**, **black wildebeest** and **bontebok** were seen there.

We did a drive via the vlei route and acacia route and saw **eland** and more black wildebeest and zebras. After that we spent some time in the conference center and did a shortish afternoon drive where we saw much the same plus **waterbuck**, **red hartebeest** and **yellow mongoose**. Sadly no cape clawless otter which is known to occur. The water smelled horrible and probably contributed to the fact we didn't see it. They are seen most around otter bridge and in rietvlei dam.

Meerkat are also sometimes seen, especially in the south-east corner where there's at least 1 group.





Pilanesberg

So I had to continue some training in Pilanesberg but also got quite ill as one of my wisdom teeth burst open during the second day I was there. I was supposed to do 5 drives and get some explanation about habitats, but did 3 drives in the end.

I stayed at the Bakgatla resort by my own request as white-tailed mongoose had been seen quite a bit before I went there. The resort was okay, but I wouldn't advise staying there. The first night I needed to catch up on some sleep and the nights after I didn't feel great as my wisdom tooth was pulled and I was on antibiotics. During the day I saw **vervet monkeys** and **smith's bush squirrel**.



During a combined 3 hours of spotlighting only **bushbuck** and **impala** were seen well. Also got very short views of a **genet** species, but unsure which one.

Drives in the park were good, but it felt a bit like a zoo from time to time. Most safari vehicles all concentrated on one sighting and the core zone of the park was rather busy. While other areas weren't as busy.

Having said that; we spent most time around the core zone as well.

Good observations around Mankwe dam were had of **waterbuck, impala, zebra, blue wildebeest, greater kudu** and **southern giraffe**. Additionally, away from the core zone of the park **elephant, white rhino, black rhino, red hartebeest, rock hyrax, common slender mongoose** and **buffalo** were seen. Both **leopard** and **lions** were seen the morning of the second day when lions chased a leopard up a tree. I missed the afternoon drive of the second day and morning drive of the third day when cheetahs were seen but sadly I was at the dentist.

When I could I spent my time at Rathlogo hide as it was close by. Great observations of *elephants* here, **single-striped grass mouse** was also seen here multiple times. Once from the hide and multiple times walking from the car to the hide.

Highlight here was definitely the **brown hyena** the first afternoon and the **African wildcat** seen close to Bakgatla gate leaving the park the third evening. Also saw another possible *African wildcat* of which I will include a photo below. As I'm not sure yet if it's truly a wildcat.



African wildcat or domestic cat? I'm leaning towards domestic, but would love to hear opinions.



Blyde river forever resort

This place is really nice. There's some nice mammals around, but mostly it's just a great place to explore the panorama route. You also get some nice viewpoints from which you can see the canyon, which was absolutely amazing. I think most information about mammals is given by *Valentin Moser in 2023* so please check his report for more information.

There's some mole-rat hills at the entrance to the resort but I didn't have time to stake them out. I didn't see klipspringer or meller's mongoose here.

The upper rocky section is the most interesting in my opinion and during the day **rock hyrax** and **yellow-spotted rock hyrax** were virtually guaranteed. From the lookout point there's a big mixed colony. Also saw some **smith's bush squirrels** on the rocks and a lovely **eastern rock sengi** was observed very well for over 30 minutes.

I also visited the panorama route during the day and saw **vervet monkey**, **chacma baboon** and more **rock hyrax**.

At night is when this place truly comes to life. I will divide the observations in three parts: upper section, camp and lower section.

The upper section was definitely my favourite and I spent a lot of time here at night. **Jameson's red rock hare** were incredibly easy in the garden and multiple were seen. Also saw them walking around the upper section on the trail, but views weren't as good. **Namaqua rock rat** were abundant but seen poorly. I feel like it would've been easier with a working thermal imager, but well... **Bushbuck** were seen both during day and night.

The lower section was fantastic for two species: **Lesser galago** and **common duiker**. I didn't see the meller's mongoose Tomer saw.

In the camp the highest number of mammals was found. I saw more **smith's bush squirrels** during the day close to the swimming pool. Also many **chacma baboons** and **vervet monkeys** were present. During the night there's a lot of **lesser galago** in when walking towards the restaurant. I saw well over 10 whenever I walked that stretch of road at night. **Greater galago** were present close to the campsite. Where I also saw an owl by pure chance. There were climbing mouse here and also some other rodents but I'm not sure which species as observations were rather short.

Notes I think there's more to be seen here, especially because I saw a lot of signs of more rodents. I didn't have time to look for any of the rodents. There's spotted-necked otters and cape clawless otters in the blyderivierspoort dam, but getting there wasn't so easy so I didn't try to.

On my way from Blyde river to Lower Sabie I made a stop at Mt Sheba for about 2 hours as I would have the next 2 days (at Lower Sabie) for myself. Mt Sheba was very nice and I saw **red forest duiker** and **blue monkey** (*samango monkey*).



Kruger in general

Just some general information here and things I want to say in advance. I think the Kruger is phenomenal for the fact you can self drive during the day. It's cheap, easy to navigate and information is widely available on the internet. I didn't choose the camps, but we stayed in some of the best camps in my opinion and... We also stayed at Letaba which is honestly not one of the better camps for game drives.

There's a lot of different animals that visit the camps and night walks are very nice to do. I found that the more vegetation there was in the camp, the more rewarding the walks were.

Sunset drives and night drives varied a lot in quality. How much you would see was largely dependent on your driver/guide, how well prepared they were, if the equipment worked and on the other people in your vehicle. I had one night drive at Satara where other people had a thermal imager and the guide was very good so we saw a lot. At Lower Sabie I had a night drive where I saw nothing(!) mostly because the driver was driving well over 80km/h at any given time.

General game is abundant and I will not report those species. Species seen during drives from any camp include **buffalo, elephant, zebra, impala, giraffe, blue wildebeest, hippo, kudu, warthog, steenbok and african savanna hare (scrub hare?)**.

Main stuff I missed was cheetah and porcupine. I have seen them before in Kruger, just not this time around. If I was alone I would've twitched the cheetahs as they were visible multiple days in a row in the crocodile bridge area, while we were staying at Skukuza.

Lower Sabie

Lower Sabie is most famous for numerous predator sightings and all big 4 predators can be seen here. I had 2 days here on my own and then some full day organised game drives to try out different safari companies.

A lot of time was spent on 2 areas: going south towards crocodile bridge and going west towards Skukuza. Going north has some nice landscapes and a nice hill where some good species can be seen.

Going south I saw numerous **African wild dogs, lions, leopards, baboons, vervet monkeys** and general game.

Going north I didn't see a whole lot of special stuff, but saw my one and only **sable antelope** and some **lions, vervet monkeys**, my only **spotted hyena** of this area **and baboons**.

Going east more good sightings of **lions, leopards, baboons and vervet monkeys**. At Nkuhlu picnic spot there's some **Sundevall's roundleaf bats** which I also saw in camp.

Additionally great observations of **Nyala, banded mongoose, dwarf mongoose** and **waterbuck**. Had one of my few **Klipspringer** sightings around renosterkoppies. **Common slender mongoose** was seen once.

In or from camp I saw **African civet, bushbuck, spotted hyena, lesser galago, large-spotted genet, greater canerat** and **bats**. Bats seen included at least the following species and possibly more, because I'm not good at identifying them. So I only included those which I'm sure about. **Sundevall's roundleaf bat, epauletted fruit bats, Angolan free-tailed bat, Egyptian slit-faced bat** and possibly little free-tailed bat.

Night drives and sunset drives were really bad from this camp. Had 1 guide (2 times) who just was speeding all the time. I did see 1 **white-tailed mongoose** during the sunset drive. During the night drive we saw nothing.. The other night drive was kinda bad in the sense that the guide just stopped for everything. Elephant? Stop. Giraffe? Stop. We didn't see anything special because of this.

Lower Sabie is fantastic to see a big number of leopards and lions and definitely the place to go if you want to see those. Cheetahs are quite common (for Kruger standards) going south and north, but I missed them.





Skukuza

This camp is busy... Like very busy. I didn't like it at all, but there's some decent species around and definitely in the camp. I was with the group I was "guiding" here so most time was spent trying to see the big 5. We would be moving to Letaba after Skukuza and there's not a lot of rhino around Letaba.

We saw **white rhinoceros, African wild dog**, (lots of) **lions, leopards, dwarf mongoose, common slender mongoose, nyalas, spotted hyenas, vervet monkeys, baboons, klipspringer, black-backed jackal** and some general game. Interestingly we didn't see any waterbuck from Skukuza, although we also didn't try at all. *Afsaal* has resident **Mauritian tomb bats**.

Want to highlight the klipspringer here as it seemed like a very reliable spot at Stevenson-Hamilton memorial lookout.

With the tourists I did 2 night drives and 1 sunset drive. The sunset drive started out nicely, but we got caught by a huge hailstorm. The 2 night drives were mediocre. You drive in a train of 2-3 trucks and it's pure luck if you are 1st, 2nd or 3rd. If you drive in the front the species seen can be quite nice. Luck was on our side and we saw a very close **leopard**. Other species seen during the night drive were **small-spotted genet, large-spotted genet, bushveld gerbils (seen many times), common duiker**, many **steenbok** and **African civet**. Some other cool stuff were multiple *snakes and owls*. Including a *blind snake*!

Wildlife in camp was decent. There's a lot of bats, but mostly 2 species. **Epauletted fruit bats** were seen at the post office. **Mauritian tomb bat** were seen at the toilet building close to the river and in a *culvert* at the camping site.

There's supposedly a resident cape porcupine in camp, but even though I tried very hard I didn't see it. I did however see **honey badger, african wild cat** (melanistic!) **greater cane rat** and **bushbuck** at night. The honey badgers visit the campsite every night multiple times. They stayed in the same culvert as the Mauritian tomb bat which is how I found the bats. During the day more **bushbuck, vervet monkeys and baboons** were seen in camp. At night I'm 99% sure I saw sundevall's acacia rat and namaqua rock rat but didn't get any photos and was hesitating when I saw them, so will not count those.

If (when) I go to Kruger again I would probably spend 1 night here at most just so I can have a chance to look for some more bats and maybe some more spotlighting at night.



Letaba

The third camp visited and possibly my favourite camp at night and the camp I disliked the most during the day. Nighttime sightings were fabulous. Day sightings were bad at best. The area around Letaba has a lot of mopani trees. The mopani trees start growing just south of the Olifants river and continues all the way up north. The area from Olifants river to just past Mopani rest camp is the most densely forested area.

This has a couple pros and a lot of drawbacks. During the day it's hard to see mammals because you can see about 20 meters into the bush. However, any open area is fantastic as most mammals congregate there. Huge mixed herds of **zebras and blue wildebeest** were seen here. Sometimes even mixed with **buffalo**.

During the day I didn't see any big predators except **spotted hyenas**. They were seen often. There's multiple wild dog packs going towards Phalaborwa from Letaba, but we missed them. The best observations of **waterbuck** were all in this region. I also saw **rock hyrax**. We made our way all the way to Satara one day just so the tourists would see some predators.. I've included those sightings at the "satara" part.

At the camp multiple animals were seen during the day. Most numerous and omnipresent are the **smith's bush squirrels**. I had never seen that many before. Bushbuck is quite common in camp as are many bat species. I'm to this day not sure of all the bat species I saw, but am sure I saw the following: **Yellow house bat, Epauletted fruit bat** and free-tailed bats although I'm not sure which species of the latter. Saw many more bats, but quite badly. Will add photos of many bat species that I'm not sure of at the end of the report.

Letaba at night is fabulous. Night drives were extremely good and the camp was (if possible) even better. During night drives we saw **meller's mongoose, side-striped jackal**, many **springhare, leopard, Sundevall's acacia rat, Tete veld rat, both genet species** and many rodents which I couldn't ID.

In or from the camp at night again both **genet** species. Plus **woodland dormouse, greater galago** (many) **spotted hyena**, more **Sundevall's acacia rat, honey badgers** and **African savanna hare/Scrub hare**.

Night drives were great species wise, but the guides were mediocre. The first guide was decent, but clearly mainly focussed on leopard and lions, much to the delight of my guests. The second driver wasn't able to ID the acacia rat, meller's mongoose and side-striped jackal... The other people on the night drive were very pleasant and didn't mind stopping for rodents.



Satara

Possibly my favourite camp in Kruger and it didn't disappoint. It's in a wide open savanna. All roads around here are good and you have the chance to see big predators anywhere. Quite possibly the best place to see **lions** in the Kruger.

We saw many **lions, leopards, African wild dogs** and even got a great observation of a **white rhino** chasing three **lions**.

Other goodies during the day included **common slender mongoose, dwarf mongoose, duiker, spotted hyena** and a lot of general game. In fact it is here where you see the highest concentration of game in the entire Kruger.

On the last morning we saw an **African wild cat** crossing the road.

I did two spotlighting sessions in camp by myself and 1 night drive with the tourists. During the *night drive* we saw so much that I feel like I will probably forget half. But it included: **lions, leopard, white-tailed mongoose, both genets, honey badger, black-backed jackal, side-striped jackal** and *flap-necked chameleon*.

In or from camp I saw **large-spotted genet, greater galago, African wild cat** (resident!) **honey badgers, black-backed jackal** (roaming the fence) and a couple of **epauletted fruit bats**.

The best observations of African wild dogs were here as a pack was roaming the tar road up to Olifants and was resting next to the road for all days we were here. Which is also the reason most time was spent going towards Olifants.





Punda Maria

The northern most regular camp of the Kruger. I was leaving all the tourists behind as I had some meetings here up north. Meetings were during the day and luckily didn't take too long, so I had quite a bit of spare time.

I had to make my way north from Satara and passed Olifants, Letaba, Mopani and Shingwedzi. Good sightings were had during this drive. The area around Punda Maria is not great for predators, but has some nice ungulates. Sadly the waterhole at the camp was empty and I would advise not going there until the waterhole is fixed. On my way North I saw **Roan, klipspringer** and **Tsessebe**.

Sightings driving around the area were okay, but the weather was not great and I didn't have a lot of time. Sadly as this is probably the best place to see four-toed sengis in South Africa. **Nyala** was very common. **Smith's bush squirrels** were abundant. Specialty of the region are the nice **sharpe's grysbok** and some were seen.

On my trip to the very lovely *Crooks corner* I made a stop at Thulamela archeological site and saw **yellow-spotted rock hyrax**.

I went around spotlighting a lot in Punda Maria and even joined a night drive at the last minute. The nightdrive was very nice with **side-striped jackal, black-backed jackal, two white-tailed mongoose, large-spotted genet, springhares** and according to the guide a red veld rat although I'm not convinced so don't count it.

In camp many **genets** were present, both **small-spotted** and **large-spotted**. **Greater galago** were abundant and many were seen. There's a lovely walking trail where one can see quite a few rodents, but having no thermal imager hindered me a lot here. Absolute highlight of the camp are the present four-toed sengis which I missed. And the absolutely amazing looking **southern giant pouched rats**. The rats are found mostly around the tented camp and are rather quick. **Greater cane rats** were seen again to my surprise. I saw those before seeing the giant rats and I got quite excited for about 2 seconds. There's **sharpe's grysbok** around the walking trail and many **bushbuck**.

There's a couple bat boxes in camp, but I've not been able to ID the bats yet as the photos I took weren't the best. I've included some of them at the bottom of this trip report.



Marievale, pretoria and Johannesburg

I left Punda Maria and made my way towards the *Magoebaskloof* which has some good species. I mainly wanted to visit for the blue monkey as my sighting at Mt Sheba was rather short. Sadly the weather was not good at all and after missing the monkeys I decided to push on for some better weather towards Pretoria.

I stayed in the city centre of Pretoria and made a stop at the lovely *Pretoria Botanical Gardens*. Here many **Rock hyrax** were seen and a **common duiker**. Just before leaving I saw a lovely hare, which I think is **scrub hare** here.

The next day I visited *Moreleta kloof* to see some cool species here. There's introduced springbok and zebra. There's also **mountain reedbuck**, **bushbuck**, **common duiker** and **Impala**. Although I'm not sure which ones are introduced here or not.

Marievale is a lovely little place mainly catering for birders. There's not a lot of mammals around, but absolute highlights here are **spotted-necked otters** and cape clawless otters. Other species I saw here were **marsh mongoose** and **yellow mongoose**.

The *spotted-necked otter* I saw was just sitting at the side of the road and stayed there for about 30 seconds. Sadly he was partially covered by bush, so no great photographic opportunities. *Yellow mongoose* have a burrow at the north end of the reserve in the grasslands.

I visited one afternoon and one morning. Didn't see a whole lot during the afternoon because the weather was horrible. The next morning was fantastic.

The next day, after visiting Marievale, I visited the Johannesburg zoo. Here many **South African ground squirrels** were seen and were also the reason for my visit.







List of species seen

A list of species seen. **Lifers in red**. Total amount of identified species seen was 69

This excludes some species seen which didn't have viable populations (e.g. springbok at Moreleta kloof) and species which I'm not sure about (e.g. climbing mouse at Blyde river)

BR - Blyde river; LS - Lower Sabie; Sk - Skukuza; Sa - Satara; Le - Letaba; PM - Punda Maria; MK - Moreleta kloof; Pi - Pilanesberg; Ma - Marievale; PB - Pretoria botanical garden; JHB - Johannesburg zoo; Ri - Rietvlei; MS - Mt Sheba

English name	Scientific name	Location seen
Bushveld gerbil	<i>Gerbilliscus leucogaster</i>	Sk
Eastern rock sengi	<i>Elephantulus myurus</i>	BR
Greater cane rat	<i>Thryonomys swinderianus</i>	LS, Sk, PM
Single-striped grass mouse	<i>Lemniscomys rosalia</i>	Pi
Smith's bush squirrel	<i>Paraxerus cepapi</i>	Pi, BR, Le, PM
South African ground squirrel	<i>Geosciurus inauris</i>	JHB
Southern Giant pouched rat	<i>Cricetomys ansorgei</i>	PM
Springhare	<i>Pedetes capensis</i>	Le, PM
Sünderwall's Acacia rat	<i>Thallomys paedulcus</i>	Le
African civet	<i>Civettictis civetta</i>	LS
African wild dog	<i>Lycaon pictus</i>	Sk, Sa
African wildcat	<i>Felis lybica</i>	Pi, Sk, Sa
Banded mongoose	<i>Mungos muno</i>	LS, Sk
Brown hyena	<i>Parahyaena brunnea</i>	Pi
Common dwarf mongoose	<i>Helogale parvula</i>	LS, Sk
South African small spotted genet	<i>Genetta felina</i>	Sk, Le, PM
Common slender mongoose	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>	Pi, Sk, Sa
Honey badger	<i>Mellivora capensis</i>	Sk, Le, Sa
Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	LS, Sk, Le, Sa
Marsh mongoose	<i>Atilax paludinosus</i>	Ma
Meller's mongoose	<i>Rhynchogale melleri</i>	Le
Large-spotted genet	<i>Genetta tigrina</i>	LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM

Side-striped jackal	Lupulella adusta	Le, Sa, PM
Spotted hyena	Crocuta crocuta	LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM
Spotted-necked otter	Hydriectus maculicollis	Ma
White-tailed mongoose	Ichneumia albicauda	LS, Sa, PM
Yellow mongoose	Cynictis penicillata	Ri, Ma
African buffalo	Syncerus caffer	Pi, LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM
Black rhinoceros	Diceros bicornis	Pi
Black wildebeest	Connochaetes gnou	Ri
Blue wildebeest	Connochaetes taurinus	Pi, LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM
Bontebok	Damaliscus pygargus	Ri
Bushbuck	Tragelaphus sylvaticus	Pi, BR, LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM
Common duiker	Sylvicapra grimmia	LS, Sk, PB
Common eland	Tragelaphus oryx	Ri
Common tsessebe	Damaliscus lunatus	PM
Common warthog	Phacochoerus africanus	Pi, LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM
Greater kudu	Tragelaphus strepsiceros	Pi, LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM
Hippopotamus	Hippopotamus amphibius	Pi, LS, Sk, Le, PM
Impala	Aepyceros melampus	Pi, LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM, MK
Klipspringer	oreotragus oreotragus	LS, Sk, PM
Mountain reedbuck	Redunca fulvorufula	MK
Nyala	Tragelaphus angasii	LS, Sk, Le, PM
Plains zebra	Equus quagga	Ri, Pi, LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM, MK
Red forest duiker	Cephalophorus natalensis	MS
Red hartebeest	Alcelaphus buselaphus	Ri, Pi
Roan antelope	Hippotragus equinus	PM
Sable antelope	Hippotragus niger	LS
Sharpe's grysbok	Raphicerus sharpei	PM
Southern giraffe	Giraffa giraffa	Pi, LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM

Steenbok	Raphicerus campestris	Pi, LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM
Waterbuck	Kobus ellipsiprymnus	Pi, LS, Sk, Le, PM
White rhinoceros	Ceratotherium simum	Ri, Pi, Sk, Sa
African bush elephant	Loxodonta africana	Pi, LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM
African savanna hare	Lepus microtis	LS, Sk, Le, Sa
Brown greater galago	Otolemur crassicaudatus	BR, Le, Sa, PM
Chacma baboon	Papio ursinus	LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM
Jameson's red rock hare	Pronolagus randensis	BR
Lesser galago (mohol galago)	Galago Moholi	BR, LS, PM
Rock hyrax	Procavia capensis	BR, Le
Scrub hare	Lepus saxatilis	PB
Sykes' monkey	Cercopithecus mitis	MS
Vervet monkey	Chlorocebus pygerythrus	Pi, BR, LS, Sk, Le, Sa, PM
Yellow-spotted rock hyrax	Heterohyrax brucei	BR, PM
Angolan free-tailed bat	Mops condylurus	LS
Mauritian tomb bat	Taphozous mauritanus	Sk
Wahlberg's epauletted fruit bat	Epomophorus wahlbergi	LS, Sk, Le
Sundevall's roundleaf bat	Hipposideros caffer	LS
Egyptian slit-faced bat	Nycteris thebaica	LS

Bats (including some not identified yet)





