



My Big Cat Year – A brief visit to South Africa for **the Black-footed Cat and Cheetah** – 29/09/26 to 05/10/26

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Earlier this year in January, I missed out on the **Black-footed Cat** in Marrick, Kimberley. Apparently, it hadn't been seen for over a year already and the place doesn't seem to be any good anymore for the **Black-footed Cat**.

So, when I was in Colombia at the beginning of September and I received a text message from **Max van Waasdijk**, saying he could help me with finding this species, I was immediately switched on. Max is an **experienced guide** and **birdwatcher** who lives in South Africa (his company is named **Sugarbirdsafaris**), and he explained to me that he follows My Big Cat Year.

He knows very well what a Big Year is, as he travelled a few months with **Arjan Dwarshuis's Big Year in 2016**. Max knew I missed the **Black-footed Cat** in South Africa in January and offered me his help as he has seen it this year already a couple of times in **Khoisan Karoo Reserve in the Northern Cape district**. The reason it is seen there so often, is that there is a **research project going on with the Black-footed Cat and one has a radio collar**. By **using the Telemetry system**, they can locate and find the cat.

Summarized, Max was going for three days in October to **Khoisan Karoo Reserve** again and I would join him and his two clients, **Gerda and Leo Lengton**.

As I also missed the **Cheetah** in January in Kruger due to the flooding, I booked one night in **Dinokeng Reserve**, 100 kms north of Johannesburg, for a chance for the **Cheetah**.

I flew out on the 29th of September from Amsterdam to Paris, where I transferred on the flight to Johannesburg. I arrived the following morning at around 10 AM but it took me over an hour to go through Customs. I picked up the rental car and started driving on the N1 towards **Khoisan Karoo Reserve**, around 750 kms south-west of Johannesburg.

The landscapes are amazing so I enjoyed the ride. I had two short stops and around 8 PM I arrived in the dark at **Khoisan Karoo Reserve**. I was greeted warmly by the **owner PC (Piet Coevaars)**. Within 5 minutes he also briefed me about the drama the day before ... the car with the Telemetry Equipment tried to traverse through a water crossing ... the water was too high and car was stuck and totally flooded.

Long story short, the Telemetry Equipment was dead, there was no reaction at all anymore.





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They put it in a basket of rice to get the water out of the equipment. This works often quite well. Last year I experienced this with the iPhone of my son **Daan** when we were in West Papua. While walking we were surprised by a heavy storm and got totally soaked. His phone was dead. We put it in a plate of rice and after a few days, it slowly started functioning again.

The problem, it costs time and time was something I did not have. I planned 3 nights at **Khoisan Karoo Reserve** and normally that should be fine and you would have a very big chance of finding the **Black-footed Cat**. However, that scenario applies with a working Telemetry. Without and only using thermals and spotlighting, it is extremely difficult.

However, as we say in Dutch **'It is what it is'** and we needed to start working with a **scenario without the Telemetry**. PC really felt so sorry for me and I felt he would do everything to make it work again and for me to see the Black-footed Cat.

We quickly discussed the program for the night, I would drop my stuff in my room, have a short dinner (the food is great!) and at 9 PM we would go for a night drive. As it was already quite late and the area of the **Black-footed Cat** is around 15 kms from the property, we decided to do the drive closer by and focus on some other mammals. As Max, Gerda and Leo would come the following day, this was a logical plan.

So, after dinner, PC introduced me to **Tommy and Kathryn**. They arrived the day before, are true conservationists and very experienced in many areas relating to wildlife, they would stay there for three months and help PC out with all kinds of research work at the property. This included bird ringing, catching rodents and other small mammals so as to have good insight about the population on the property and to be able to steer programs towards conservation.

We started talking and they said they had just spent 6 weeks in **Mongolia** with the same kind of work activities. I asked if they were with Yumchin. They could not believe what I said! They were indeed with Yumchin, who is the owner and wildlife guide of Soaring Expeditions. I was with **Yumchin** in May in Mongolia in search of the **Snow Leopard**. The three of us made a selfie together and they sent it to Yumchin, who was surprised as well. What a small world!

The four of us, PC, Tommy and Kathryn went on the game drive and we had a **great night with many sightings**. I love the **Karoo**, it is an **arid, dry landscape** but with an **amazing variety of mammals and birds**.





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That night we got **3 Aardvark!**! A difficult and much sought after species. Also, we had multiple **Aardwolf, Bat-eared Fox, Cape Porcupine, Cape Hare, Cape Shrub Hare, South African Spring Hare, Steenbok Antelope** and even an **Afro-asiatic Wildcat**. However, we suspected it to be a hybrid, i.e. a mix between an Afro-

Asiatic Wildcat and a Domestic cat. Biggest surprise to me that night was a **Striped Polecat**. A stunning mammal which I had missed out before on several trips, so I was more than happy.



We got stuck one time in the mud with the Toyota Landcruiser and it took the four of us 15 minutes to get it loose. We were back around midnight and I had a good rest.

Next morning, the 1st of October, we were out again at 6 AM on a morning drive. Next to PC, Tommy and Kathryn, there was very nice British couple joining us. She was born and raised in South Africa and he lived there for 25 years. They love coming back and we had some nice and interesting talks.

The **morning drive was nice** and we had a **good set of mammals and birds**. As PC also has imported some regular game mammals on its 8000 hectares, we got to see them as well.





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Over the coming days, we saw **Blesbok, African Buffalo, Warthog, Greater Kudu, Impala, Eland Antelope, Red Hartebeest** and **Sable Antelope**.



Nice were a group of **Meerkat** next to the road and a **Yellow Mongoose**. Over the coming days, we would see those more often. Birds were great and highlights were the **Blue Bustard, Blue Crane, Black Bustard** and a **Secretary bird**.

We were back at around 09:30 and had a nice breakfast. PC's wife Mariska cooks together with a local cook and they provide some excellent food. We had some great breakfasts and dinners!

At 1:30 PM **Max** arrived together with **Gerda and Leo** and we could finally meet in person. Over the coming days, we got along great and we had a good time. Max is a very experienced wildlife guide, has some good humour and takes care of his clients. He lives in Nellspruit together with his wife Mariska. Gerda and Leo live in Gorinchem. Gerda still works and Leo is retired. It was already their third trip with Max in South Africa as they like to visit locations off the beaten track. They like photography and love mammals as well as birds. Gerda is really into the Wildcat species and was excited to be there to have a chance for the **Black-footed Cat**.

However, to have a good chance for the **Black-footed Cat**, **a working telemetry is essential** and every single day we discussed the status of the telemetry. And as we expected with the rice, every day the equipment showed more life. **However, was it in time for us? We had only two-night drives and the first night would be without the telemetry.**

So, we left after dinner, at around 7 PM and made our way to the area, 15kms further, of the **Black-footed Cat**. **PC** drove and was assisted by both **Tommy** (with the Thermal) and **Kathryn** with the spotlight. I used both the thermal and the spotlight. However, I was not in good shape. My camera was not working well and while driving I was working on the settings. My





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flashlight fell and I thought at the bottom of the truck ... not so ... it had fallen through one of the holes and was lost. I thought that when we would leave the area, perhaps I could find it on the track ... fingers crossed.

It did not help with my focus and I felt the whole drive miserable, about my camera, my lost flashlight and the missing telemetry ... **would we be able to find the Cat?** However, Max told me he had seen it there twice purely with flashlight so it should be possible!



In terms of the sightings we had a good drive; several **Aardwolf**, many **Bat-eared Foxes** and **Cape Porcupines**, **Mountain Reedbuck** and again an **Aardvark**! But **not a single sign** of the **Black-footed Cat**. While leaving the area, we suddenly saw my flashlight in one of the tracks ... and my camera

was working again ... lucky me! We were back around 23:30 PM and had some well needed rest.



Next morning, the 2nd of October, again a morning drive at 6 AM with PC, Tommy, Kathryn, the British Couple and Max, Gerda and Leo. A good drive and **best mammal was a Cape Fox**, new for me and most of the people. Nice to see it during daylight. Birds were good with **Blue Bustard**, **Ludwig's Bustard**, **Burchell's Courser** and **Double-banded Courser** being the highlights. Returning

at around 10 AM we again had an excellent breakfast.

I did some work on my laptop and during the afternoon Tommy and Kathryn showed their work regarding the **bird ringing station** they made. Extremely interesting and I was impressed how skilful they are. I am sure they will create some good results the coming 3 months.





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Again we discussed the status of the Telemetry and PC told us it is slowly functioning again. I thought to myself, if it functions tomorrow, I could extend my stay with a day as I had basically one spare day between **Khoisan Karoo Reserve** and **Dinokeng Reserve**, so as to spend an extra day at either location depending on the results.

During the night drive, we went again to the **Black-footed Cat** area with PC, Tommy, Kathryn, Max, Gerda and Leo. But now we used two big spotlights, one on each side of the car. Max used his thermal and I used my own spotlight. We were ready for a good night!!



We had a **good drive** with **3 Aardvark**, several **Aardwolf**, a **Large-spotted Genet** and again a **Cape Fox**. But **no sign** of the **Black-footed Cat**. We were back at 00:30 AM and quickly went to sleep.

Next morning, the 3rd of October, again a morning drive at 6 AM. The morning drive was nice, we stopped for a while at one specific spot at the river where a single **hippo** (the others died unfortunately, once there were eight) survives. We stood at the riverside and suddenly Max said, there it is! Weird and also a bit sad to see the **only surviving hippo** in the **whole Karoo region** (where they used to live long ago). PC is trying to get more **hippo's** there so that they can bring the species back to where it once lived.





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We stood there and we were talking about the **African Clawless Otter** which also lives there. Just 2 minutes later, **Max was excited and said, “there it is!”**. And we all managed to see it, thanks Max for the good spotting! We also managed to see the **Karoo Bustard**, a nice bird with a great camouflage.

We returned at 09:30 and **PC briefed us that the researcher stated that the Telemetry seems to be working**. Too early to confirm it but he would be in contact with the researcher at around 12 AM to confirm the latest status. The weather forecast did however not look good at the time and if it would stay like that, it would not be possible to drive on the tracks. We agreed to leave it there, see at 12 AM what the status of the Telemetry and the weather would be, then we would make the call.

We had a nice breakfast and our **spirits were up** because there may be an opening for a **working telemetry** and a chance on the cat! Max discussed it also with Gerda and Leo to stay one extra night which they were in favor of. We left it there and said that we really had to wait until 12 AM as we then received further news upon the status of the Telemetry.

At 12 AM we received word and PC informed us that the Telemetry was working. Also, the latest weather forecast did not look too bad, there would be some rain but not dramatically, meaning we would be able to drive on the tracks.

Only problem was that as it is a Saturday, the weekend, we would **not be able to drive on the neighbor's land in case the Cat would be there**. They have an agreement that during weekdays they are allowed to drive on the neighbor's land but not on the weekend. That's why they offer the **Black-footed Cat** guided trip only during weekdays. We had a long talk about and suggested contacting the neighbour to have an exemption only this weekend for some extra money or a bottle of whiskey. However, PC explained us that wouldn't work. We understood it really could not be changed and accepted it.

But we all decided we would go on the night drive to have a good chance with the Telemetry and the involved researcher!! That afternoon I did some work and had a rest. For 30 minutes or so there were heavy rains and I really thought that would be a showstopper. However, it stopped suddenly and although it was very cloudy and at times there was some drizzle, it felt that it would be dry enough to drive on the tracks.





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We had a nice dinner and as I would be leaving to Dinokeng Reserve the next morning at 6 AM, I **thanked Max, Gerda and Leo warmly for the great company and good time together.** And a **special thanks for Max** who gave me this opportunity for a chance for the **Black-footed Cat**. He got one of the worlds famous (😊) My Big cat Year T-shirts, a collector's item.

So, after dinner, around 7 PM we left the property towards the **Black-footed Cat** Area, 15 kms further. Close to the area we picked up **Ricky**, the researcher together with the Telemetry equipment. **Tommy** and **Kathryn** used the spotlights, **Max** his thermal and I was spotlighting as well.

After 10 minutes or so, we stopped and **Ricky got out of the car to use the Telemetry.** He explained to us how it all worked and how the cat behaves. Very interesting to hear about his experiences. Unfortunately, no 'ping' yet, ie. the Cat could not yet be localized. Probably it was still too cold and the Cat was hiding deep in the den.

We drove on and 10 minutes later, we came upon a blockage on the track so we tried to circumvent it by going off track for only 10 meters or so. We immediately got stuck and it took all of us almost half an hour to get the car loose. But we managed and it was a good team effort.

We continued and Ricky explained us we would have to go to the hills in the area. The telemetry equipment picks up the signal much better when you are on higher grounds. As soon as we arrived, **Ricky went out again and climbed on the hill. Unfortunately, no signal yet.** We drove on to another area and went spotlighting again and got some other mammals we had seen before.

About 30 minutes we arrived at the hill again and Ricky got out of the car and used the Telemetry. **We heard the 'ping'!! Excitement rose. Max asked 'is it reachable?'. And Ricky replied with very much disappointment in his voice 'unfortunately not, it is in the neighbours area, 2 kms further on'.**





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We all knew what it meant and we asked Ricky for advice. He explained that we could wait here and see if the cat would move towards our direction. However, he explained the chances would be very slim. In his experience, once when it is hunting in a certain area, it would stay there for the night and would not traverse big distances. **We were all disappointed but we understood the situation and it is what it is!** And we **decided to make a move back to the property for a good sleep**. On our way back we got another **Aardvark**, my eighth at Khoisan!!

Next morning at 6 AM I left for **Dinokeng**, 100 kms north of Johannesburg. The trip in total was close to **800km** and should take me **8 hours**. I was planning to get there around 15 hours, in time for the afternoon game drive.

The drive went smoothly and I love to drive in **South Africa**. It got beautiful landscapes and you got some wildlife close to the road. Also, many farms have imported some game mammals so you will see those occasionally. I managed to see **Black Wildebeest, Zebra, Greater Kudu, Red Hartebeest, Impala** next to the highway. Some **Chacma baboons** and a **Vervet monkey** crossed the road.

I arrived indeed around 15 PM at Mongena Camp in the Dinokeng Reserve. As I stayed in the **Little Mongena Tented Camp**, ranger **Rebecca** brought me from the main camp to the tented camp. We started talking and she explained she would do the afternoon and tomorrow mornings gamedrive. I started explaining about My Big Cat Year, the challenge and the wish to see the **Cheetah** as I missed out on in January.



We talked a lot about the **Cheetah** population in South Africa which is under threat. Especially, the free roaming cheetah's, outside the national and private games parks, is under threat and the population has declined to 119

individuals. The population in the National and Private games Parks is more than 1000 individuals.





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She understood the challenge I was undertaking and said that **Dinokeng Reserve** has a good **Cheetah** population (which I knew, that was the reason I went there) and we would have a good chance to see them. Especially a mother with 4 cubs was seen regularly.

When we arrived at Little Mongena Tented Camp, I dropped my luggage in my tent and had a quick late lunch. At 16 PM we were on the game drive, **Rebecca driving** and guiding and **4 other Dutch people** who also stayed in the Tented Camp. I soon found out it was the Pilot and Co-Pilot of the flight I would have the next evening with KLM back from Johannesburg to Amsterdam.

Katrien (the pilot) had a friend with her, **Marieke**, both living close to Den Bosch. What a small world! And **Bram the Co-pilot**, had **his mother** with him. We got along well and enjoyed the games drives and the meals we had together. We had some interesting and enjoyable talks during the dinner and the breakfast the following morning.



The game drive was great, **Rebecca was very skilful and knowledgeable**. We quickly found the **Cheetah** mother with the 4 cubs! My **23rd species for the year and 26th in life!** I was happy! We continued the drive and saw a mother **White Rhino** with her Sub-adult young. In the dark, when we returned to the camp for dinner, we even had a **Honey Badger** devouring a

Leopard Tortoise. A **Black-backed Jackal** was curious and tried to get some leftovers, but it always remained its distance to the **Honey Badger**, one of the fiercest mammals in Africa. A real bonus this one!

Next morning at 6 AM, we were out again on the Game drive and had a prolonged sighting of a mother **Lion** with her three subadult young. We could follow them for close to half an hour and got to see their behaviour.





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Around 9 AM we came back for breakfast and at 10 AM Rebecca brought us to the main camp where we thanked **Rebecca** for her great guiding. I also said goodbye to **Karien, Marieke, Bram** and **his mother** who went back to Johannesburg. I would see them on tonight's flight! I stayed at the main camp and worked on my laptop until 16 PM when I drove back to the airport in Johannesburg. After returning the car, I had another 4 hours as the flight would leave at 23:15 PM. When checking in, I ran into Marieke and Bram's Mother again and when entering the plane, I was greeted by Karien, what a welcome.

At 10:20 AM the 6th of October I was back at Schiphol, and taking a train back to Den Bosch, I was home at 12 AM. Giving me some time for a meeting I had that afternoon and time for preparing the **trip to Brazil**. Tomorrow, the 7th of October, I need to be at the airport again at 10 AM for the flight to Campo Grande in Brazil. What a fun 😊! More and more, I am longing for the end of the year to start with a regular life again.

The Big Cat Year is not just about spotting wild cats. It is also about habitat and wildlife conservation. The aim is to support a project/organization in every country visited. With regard to South Africa, we will make a contribution towards Khoisan Karoo Conservancy; [KhoiSan Karoo Conservancy - Explore the Karoo - Hanover area](#)

Would you like to contribute to supporting these important projects and/or organizations in the world with regard to conservation and protection of nature and wildlife, please have a look at the [funding page](#). All help is appreciated! Big and small, it all counts. You can already help by buying the projects a coffee, <https://buymeacoffee.com/mybigcatyear>





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Mammal List South Africa Oktober 2026

	Seen	New / Before	Kholsan Reserve Conservancy	Next to the highway	Dinokeng
Name					
Aardvark	1	Before	8 x		
Aardwolf	1	Before	12 x		
African Buffalo	1	Before	3 x		
African Wildcat	1	Before	1 x (hybrid)		
Bat-eared Fox	1	Before	> 30 x		
Black Wildebeest	1	Before		1 x	
Black-backed Jackal	1	Before			4 x
Blesbok	1	Before	2 x	1 x	
Cape Clawless Otter	1	Before	1 x		
Cape Hare	1	Before	> 20 x		
Cape Porcupine	1	Before	> 30 x		
Cape Scrub Hare	1	Before	> 10 x		
Chacma Baboon	1	Before		1 x	
Cheetah	1	Before			1 x
Common Duiker	1	Before			1 x
Common Eland	1	Before	10 x		
Common Warthog	1	Before	1 x		
Common Wildebeest	1	Before			1 x
Greater Kudu	1	Before	4 x		1 x
Hippopotamus	1	Before	1 x		2 x
Honey Badger	1	Before			1 x
Impala	1	Before	10 x	1 x	10 x
Lion	1	Before			1 x
Meerkat	1	Before	3 x		
Mountain Reedbuck	1	Before	4 x		
Nyala	1	Before			1 x
Plains Zebra	1	Before		1 x	2 x
Red Hartebeest	1	Before	1 x	1 x	1 x
Sable Antelope	1	Before	1 x		
South African Ground Squirrel	1	Before	5 x		
South African Large-spotted Genet	1	Before	1 x		
South African Spring-hare	1	Before	> 50 x		
Southern Giraffe	1	Before			1 x
Springbok	1	Before	> 10 x	5 x	
Steenbok	1	Before	> 20 x	1 x	
Vervet Monkey	1	Before		1 x	
White Rhinoceros	1	Before			2 x
Yellow Mongoose	1	Before	> 20 x		
Cape Fox	1	New	2 x		
Large-eared Field Mouse	1	New	1 x		
Striped Polecat	1	New	1 x		
Total	41				

