

South Africa

November 2019



A Bird and Mammal Watching Trip Report by Ian Merrill

South Africa 7th to 24th November 2019

Introduction

Where

Although fraught by political turmoil and rampant inequality, the magnificent landscapes and appealing climate of South Africa still provide a relatively civilised platform from which to savour some of the world's finest bird and mammal watching opportunities. In light of highly focussed birding trips to western South Africa in 2002 and eastern South Africa in 2008, plus an extensive tour of Namibia in 2009, birding targets were very few in number. This trip therefore focussed on some of the most sought-after mammalian specialities of the region, with a thin smattering of bird list omissions strung between. It was conducted with my largely non-birding wife (who is an avid mammal watcher), and was therefore carried out at a very relaxed pace (bar the first two days!).

In terms of mammal watching the trip could not have been more successful, as we notched up in excess of sixty mammal species including Karoo Rock Sengi, Smith's Red Rock Rabbit, Aardwolf, Brown Hyena, African Wild Cat, Black-footed Cat, Painted Dog, Honey Badger, Suricate and Aardvark. Birds took a back seat in light of previous successful trips, but a number of listing holes were plugged including Shelley's Francolin, Black-eared Sparrow-lark and Magpie Mannikin.

Flying into Johannesburg, we initially headed east to Polokwane Game Reserve and then on to Kruger NP. Next our route headed north to Madikwe, close the Botswana Border, and then west to Marrick, close to Kimberley. A long drive took us to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park for a prolonged stay, before we worked our way south through Bushmanland and The Karoo. Stop-offs at Brandvlei, Calvinia and Ceres delivered us to Hermanus, on the Cape Coast, where we spent a couple of days before flying home from Cape Town.

Our complete itinerary was as follows:

Day 1: Thur Nov 7th

Arrive J'Burg 16.30, pick up hire car and drive to Polokwane. Accom: [Plumtree Lodge](#), Polokwane.



Hunting Lions, Kruger NP

Front cover: Gemsbok, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Day 2: Fri Nov 8th

First light at Polokwane Game Reserve (Shelley's Francolin, Bushveld Pipit, Short-clawed Lark). Breakfast at Plumtree Lodge, then drive to Tzaneen (Magpie Mannakin). Continue east to Kruger NP, checking into accommodation and then taking a short game drive. Braai (South Africa BBQ) and mammal watching at Orpen Rest Camp (Large-spotted Genet). Accom: [Orpen Rest Camp](#), Kruger NP.

Day 3: Sat Nov 9th

Morning game drive into Kruger NP, as far as Satara Rest Camp (Lion, Painted Dog). Exit park, then long drive back west to Mabusa Nature Reserve (Short-tailed Pipit, Cloud Cisticola). Drive back to Jo'berg. Accom: [Road Lodge](#), Randburg.

Day 4: Sun Nov 10th

First light at Rand Park Golf Course (Karoo Thrush). Drive north to Madikwe Game Reserve and check into Moseitlha Bush Camp. Afternoon/evening game drive (White Rhino, Lion, African Wild Cat). Accom: [Moseitlha Bush Camp](#), Madikwe.

Day 5: Mon Nov 11th

Dawn game drive, birthday breakfast back at camp (for Vic!). Lunch then afternoon/evening game drive (Lion, Small-spotted Genet). Accom: [Moseitlha Bush Camp](#), Madikwe.

Day 6: Tue Nov 12th

Dawn game drive (Cheetah), breakfast and check out. Long drive to Kimberley, stopping in town for self-catering provisions. Check into Marrick, braai, then night drive (Aardwolf, Black-footed Cat, Aardvark, Smith's Red Rock Rabbit, African Porcupine, Bat-eared Fox). Accom: [Marrick Safari](#), Kimberley.

Day 7: Wed Nov 13th

Early morning birding (Short-toed Rock Thrush, Spotted Eagle Owl, Small Grey Mongoose, Suricate). Breakfast, siesta, swimming. Afternoon excursion to nearby kopje (Karoo Rock Sengi). Night drive (Aardwolf, Aardvark, African Porcupine). Accom: [Marrick Safari](#), Kimberley.

Day 8: Thur Nov 14th

Early morning birding, breakfast, check out. Long drive to Kgalagadi, stopping off in Upington for self-catering provisions. Accom: [Kgalagadi Lodge](#), just outside the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.



Sunrise in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Day 9: Fri Nov 15th

Self-catered breakfast at Kgalagadi Lodge (Yellow Mongoose), waiting for gate opening time. Drive through Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park to check in at Mata Mata. Evening mammal viewing (Lion, African Wild Cat), self-catered dinner at Mata Mata, then park night drive (Lion, Cape Fox, Brown Hyena, Bat-eared Fox). Accom: [Mata Mata Camp](#), Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

Day 10: Sat Nov 16th

Dawn mammal watching drive south of Mata Mata, returning for self-catered brunch and siesta. Evening drive (African Wild Cat, Brown Hyena) and return for self-catered dinner. Night drive (Small-spotted Genet, Brown Hyena, Cape Fox, Bat-eared Fox). Accom: [Mata Mata Camp](#), Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

Day 11: Sun Nov 17th

Dawn mammal watching drive south of Mata Mata (Yellow Mongoose), back for self-catered brunch and check out. Drive south to Twee Rivieren Camp (Suricate). Evening mammal watching drive north of Twee Rivieren (Honey Badger). Self-catered dinner, then night drive (Lion, Cape Fox, African Wild Cat, Small-spotted Genet). Accom: [Twee Rivieren](#), Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

Day 12: Mon Nov 18th

Dawn mammal watching drive north of Twee Rivieren (Lion, Honey Badger), back for self-catered brunch and check out. Long drive south to Brandvlei, heading straight out to recce birding area east of town. Check into accom, then dinner at [Die Windpomp Restaurant](#). Accom: [Kolaritas B&B](#), Brandvlei.

Day 13: Tue Nov 19th

Dawn birding east of Brandvlei (Suricate), breakfast and check out of accommodation. Birding west of Brandvlei (Red Lark, Black-eared Sparrow-lark), then drive to Calvinia. Check into accommodation (Karoo Thrush), short siesta, then evening recce of birding sites south of town. Dinner at very good [Die Blou Nartjie Restaurant](#). Accom: [African Dawn B&B](#), Calvinia.

Day 14: Wed Nov 20th

Dawn birding south of Calvinia (Karoo Eremomola, Namaqua Warbler), breakfast and check out of accommodation. Brief visit to the scenic Akkerendam Nature Reserve, then long drive south to Ceres. Call in town for two nights self-catering provisions, then check into Klondyke Cherry Farm. Evening walk around property and self-catered braai. Accom: [Klondyke Cherry Farm](#), Ceres.



Karoo Eremomola habitat, south of Calvinia

Day 15: Thur Nov 21st

Early morning walk around property (African Wild Cat), brunch, cherry picking on farm. Afternoon drive north into Karoo thwarted by puncture. Self-catered dinner. Accom: [Klondyke Cherry Farm](#), Ceres.

Day 16: Fri Nov 22nd

Early morning walk around property, self-catered brunch and check out of accommodation. Drive south to Stony Point (African Penguin, Southern Right Whale), then onwards to Hermanus. Check into accommodation (Cape Sugarbird) then evening meal at [Harbour Rock Restaurant](#). Accom: [Anchor's Rest](#), Hermanus

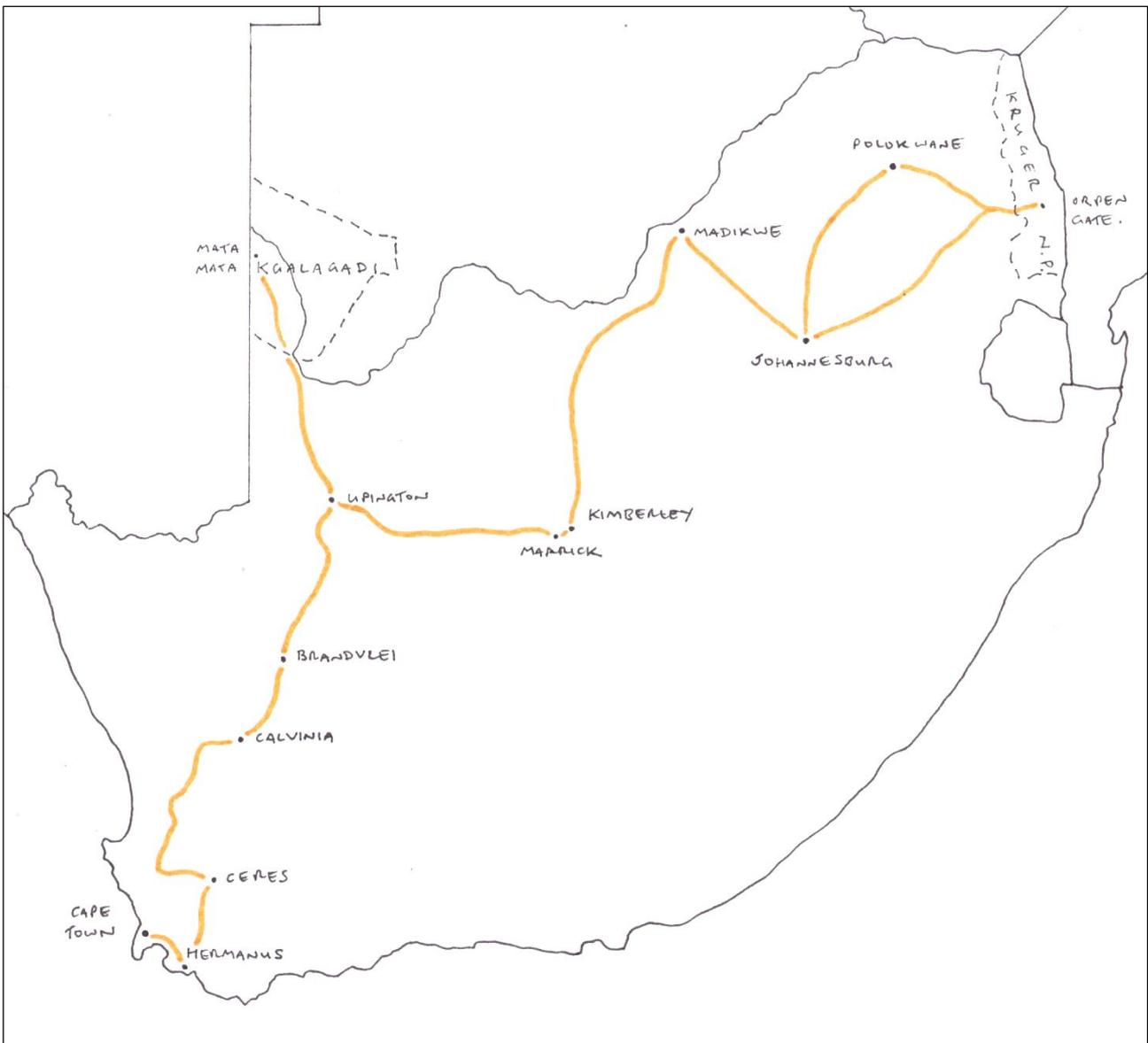
Day 17: Thur Nov 23rd

Dawn walk at Fernkloof Nature Reserve, Hermanus (Ground Woodpecker, Cape Siskin). Breakfast at the excellent [Betty Blue](#), Hermanus. Afternoon winery tour of Aarde Valley with [Hermanus Wine Hoppers](#). Evening fish and chips at [Fish Express](#), Onrus, then sunset walk on Onrus Beach. Accom: [Anchor's Rest](#), Hermanus

Day 18: Fri Nov 24th

Dawn walk at Fernkloof Nature Reserve, Hermanus (Orange-bellied Sunbird, Cape Grassbird). Breakfast at the excellent [Betty Blue](#), Hermanus. Check out of accommodation and drive to Cape Town Airport for flight home.

Map of Full Route Taken (5603 km driven in total)



Specific South African Sites

Kruger National Park

The archetypal South African game reserve, we found Kruger to be very crowded and touristy. The park is easily accessible and traversed largely on tarmac roads, making for huge numbers of visitors. As a consequence any interesting sightings are rapidly broadcast, by two-way radio and open car window, causing 'mammal jams' to rapidly develop.

This distraction aside, it is undoubtedly a hugely rewarding area for viewing game in unfenced, natural surroundings. We only had one night in the reserve, a decision driven entirely by the chance of seeing Honey Badger at Orpen Rest Camp. Honey Badger is a nightly visitor at the camp, as it was on our single night, but we failed to see one! Although the camp guards and several other guests saw a pair, we stayed up half the night and failed miserably, concluding that sightings are by no means guaranteed. Some consolation did, however, come in the form of a very obliging pair of Large Spotted Genets.



Large Spotted Genet, Orpen Rest Camp, Kruger NP

The cabins were very well equipped and although there is a nicely stocked shop on site, it is best to bring in your own food supplies. Our accommodation was booked at relatively short notice via the [SANParks](#) website. On top of the accommodation fee a hefty daily park entry tariff is charged and if an itinerary incorporates multiple national park visits on multiple days a [Wild Card](#) may prove a more economical option, in spite of it's R4850 per couple price tag.

In terms of mammal viewing opportunities, our brief visit (two hours in an evening, four the next morning) clearly demonstrated the potential, with three Painted Dogs, seventeen Lions and twenty Spotted Hyenas counted, plus intimate roadside encounters with Elephant, Giraffe, Burchell's Zebra, Kudu and a host of other impressive game. We saw a rather scant selection of birds in the continuing drought conditions at the park.

Madikwe Game Reserve

South Africa is dotted with a profusion of fenced private game reserves, which I have to admit have always felt very much like glorified zoos to my purist eye. They do, however, serve a valuable purpose in protecting some wonderful habitat and the many creatures which naturally inhabit such regions. Madikwe is one of the largest and best run of these fenced game parks, and within Madikwe the [Mosetlha Bush Camp](#) is a really outstanding eco-lodge.

There is no electricity or running water, but the lodge is so cleverly run that this actually enhances the experience rather than detracts. The rustic rooms are excellent, the showers unique, and the standard of

food is outstanding. Well trained guides take guests out on 05.15 and 16.30 game drives, with the latter including a night drive on the return leg.

All of the large mammals are 'managed' to some degree, even the pack of Painted Dogs for which the site is renowned. The Dogs were actually absent during our two nights stay, as they had taken up residence on an adjacent private reserve across the boundary river. We saw 'managed' Lion, Cheetah and White Rhino, plus 'real' African Wild Cat and Small Spotted Genet. Brown Hyena is regular, with one being reported in the camp during our second night, but we failed to find one.



Burchell's Zebra, Madikwe

Marrick

[Marrick Safari](#), as Trevor Datnow's remarkable Kimberley eco farm is branded, was the unanimous highlight of our whole South African trip. Trevor has removed the fences from what was his father's working cattle farm, allowing the large tract of land to re-wild and transform back to the grassland habitat favoured by a most remarkable set of nocturnal mammals. Lifelong employees of the family farm, Jonny Boy and his father Ben, have an unparalleled understanding of the nocturnal wildlife and conduct the most fascinatingly informative and exciting open-back Land Cruiser safaris, after the sun has set.

We collected food supplies in Kimberley, just twenty minutes to the east, for our two nights of self-catering and never left the property for the length of our stay. Our farm cottage was extremely spacious and superbly equipped, whilst we were offered free reign to walk the entire property by day, plus use of a sizeable swimming pool. Night drives commenced at 19.30 and ran for around 2½ hours, depending upon success rate, and I have never experienced more enthralling nocturnal mammal viewing. There was not a moment when multiple eyeshine was not visible, in many cases dozens of mammalian eyes reflected the spotlight back at us, as Jonny Boy swept the grassland.

Our first night-time tally, from 19.30 to 22.15, ran at Spring Hare c200, Scrub Hare 1, Cape Hare c10, Aardwolf 1, Aardvark 3, Black-footed Cat 3, Highvelt Gerbil 1, Large-eared Mouse 1, African Porcupine 5, Bat-eared Fox 3, Smith's Red Rock Rabbit 2. On night two we went out from 19.30 to 22.00 and recorded Spring Hare c100, Cape Hare c10, Aardwolf 3, Aardvark 3, Highvelt Gerbil 1, African Porcupine 2.

During the afternoon of our full day at Marrick we also went out on a late afternoon drive to a specific kopje, just a ten minute drive on trails across the farm, to look for Karoo Rock Singe. Jonny Boy knew exactly where to search for this fascinating little creature and soon we were enjoying close up views of one of South Africa's least known mammals.



Jonny Boy's 'Singe Safari', Marrick

Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Kgalagadi was another firm favourite location of the trip, being much more wild and remote than any of the other game reserves visited. In spite of its isolated location the park is very popular with visitors from Cape Town and accommodation is booked incredibly early; even eleven months before our visit we were very limited in available accommodation options!

We picked up self catering supplies en route at Upington, and spent the night before our park entry at the excellent [Kgalagadi Lodge](#). Staying inside the park would have been our first option, but availability did not permit this and as it turned out the lodge offered outstanding facilities and evening meals at a very reasonable rate. We also had an inquisitive Yellow Mongoose at our chalet breakfast table!

The park gates did not open until 07.00, and we used our Wild Card to good effect in order to mitigate the rather high entry fees (not that contributing to well-founded conservation causes has ever been an issue!). Our first two nights were spent at Mata Mata Camp, where our room had somewhat basic self-catering facilities. All of the camps are fenced, with no access or egress permitted outside daylight hours.

We went out on pre-booked nocturnal game drives on both nights of our Mata Mata stay, which were well worthwhile. On the first night we encountered Lion 2, Black-backed Jackal 14, Cape Fox 2, Brown Hyena 1, Spring Hare 2, Bat-eared Fox 2. On the second outing we saw Small-spotted Genet 1, Spring Hare 2, Brown Hyena 1, Cape Fox 3, Black-backed Jackal 8, Scrub Hare 4, Bat-eared Fox 4, Namaqua Rock Mouse 1.

In daytime self-drives from the camp was also saw Lion, Brown Hyena, African Wild Cat, Yellow and Slender Mongoose, and enjoyed some wonderfully relaxed and intimate periods with many of the parks more numerous mammalian inhabitants.

One night was spent at Twee Rivieren, in a much more modern and well equipped chalet. The night drive here was less productive, giving us Lion 2, Cape Fox 3, African Wild Cat 1, Black-backed Jackal 6, Spring Hare 3. Daylight sightings between Twee Rivieren and the Kij Kij Waterhole were outstanding however, with two different hunting Honey Badgers, numerous Lions (including cubs), Black-backed Jackals and our only Eland of the trip.



Honey Badger hunting alongside Black-backed Jackal, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

When

Although the timing of our trip should have hit rains and breeding birds in the east, a prolonged draught caused us real problems in this area. Birds were not at all vocal and consequently everything was tough to locate. Kruger was brown and barren, whilst Kgalagadi has been experiencing a severe drought which has now been ongoing for three years. In the Karoo we were told that the wild flowers blooms which once attracted visitors to the region are fast becoming a phenomenon of the past, as our plant tragically slips into a manmade climate crisis.

Although a birding trip will be pitched at the Austral Spring season, mammal watching can theoretically be exciting at any time of year. October to December is probably the best compromise period in terms of timing, drought permitting of course.

How

We flew seamlessly into Johannesburg and out of Cape Town with [Emirates](#), at a very good price. Our Nissan Qashqai was booked with Budget, sourced via [Rentalcars](#). There is a significant mark up on car rental costs for the 'return to a different location' element, however there was no way around this with our chosen route.

The Qashqai is a two-wheel drive high clearance SUV, fine for 90% of the trip but it did cause a few wobbly moments on the sandy roads close to Mata Mata, in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. One regular visitor to the park told us how the roads had deteriorated due to the long term drought conditions, making a full 4x4 pretty much essential for anyone venturing deep into the Park. We never actually needed to be towed out, but several times we seemed to be a hair's-breadth from being stuck in deep sand, with all the associated inconvenience. South Africa is blessed with a wonderful highway network, generally free of traffic outside the larger towns. Good roads, and the wonder of Google Maps, made for driving pleasure throughout the trip.

I cannot help but mention safety, always something which everyone asks when South Africa is mentioned. Although we had no issues whatsoever, we were endlessly told to look after valuables, be careful where we parked our vehicle, not drive at night and to avoid certain areas. Maybe it's because of the Country's reputation, but we never felt entirely at ease. One always has to be alert to danger and this can be a distraction from the joy of such a road trip, compared to most others we have undertaken. Such a perception is not without good reason as we subsequently heard about a group of Dutch tourists who were forced off the road and robbed at gunpoint just to the west Kruger NP, only days after our visit.

For our time around Johannesburg and across to Kruger to were accompanied by Selwyn Rautenback, long time birding friend and resident of Johannesburg. Selwyn's knowledge of the birds of the region is outstanding and he's a great all-round field birder. His help certainly produced a few species which would have otherwise eluded me, and his presence led to a much more comfortable trip in some of the less hospitable surroundings mentioned above. Selwyn offers freelance bird guiding and can be contacted at info@ableremovers.co.za or by WhatsApp on +27 (72) 152 5160.

All accommodation was booked in advance, mostly via [TripAdvisor](#) or [SANParks](#). Establishments worthy of particular commendation were [Mosetlha Bush Camp](#) and [Marrick Safari](#), as detailed above, and also [Klondyke Cherry Farm](#). The latter gave us a superb self-catering cottage is a beautiful location within the grounds of a family-run cherry farm. Our favourite eatery of the whole trip was [Betty Blue](#), Hermanus.

As ever, bird information used in the planning of the trip was sourced almost exclusively from the invaluable [eBird](#) online resource, supplemented by a couple of excellent mammal watching trip reports published on Jon Hall's brilliant website, [Mammal Watching](#). I must also acknowledge Richard Webb for his mammalian help and advice and Faansie Peacock, who assisted greatly on the birding front in the west. Ian Haynes, of SANParks, was a major source of advice in planning the Kgalagadi leg of the trip.

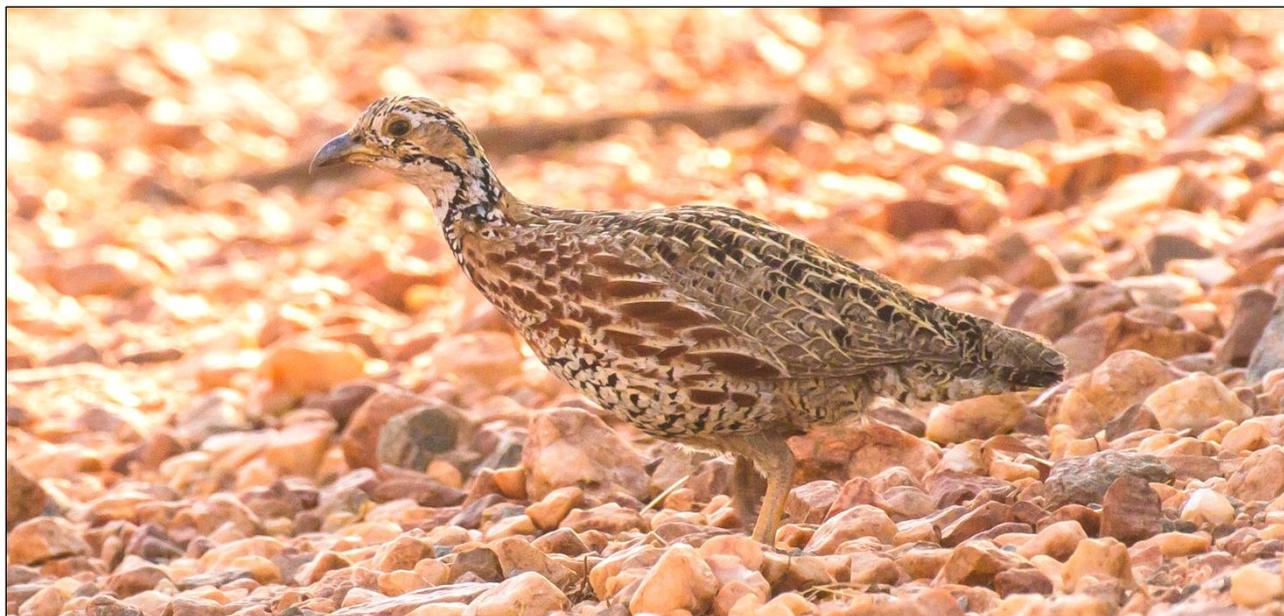


Klondyke Cherry Farm, Ceres

Notes on Personal Target Bird Species (my only new species on this trip)

Shelley's Francolin *Scleroptila shelleyi*

Two pairs of this highly localised species seen at Polokwane Game Reserve early on the morning of 09/11/19. The first pair were heard calling and then responded to playback by enthusiastically flying in, though they could not be relocated on the ground S23°58'59.71", E29°28'27.17". The second pair eventually performed superbly well, slowing coming in to playback to call close to the track, eventually crossing it and continuing to call from the opposite side S23°59'30.36", E29°28'10.77".



Shelley's Francolin, Polokwane Game Reserve

Black-eared Sparrow-lark *Eremopterix australis*

A single chance encounter of two males, only seen in flight, some 8 km west of Brandvlei on the R357 gravel road. Seen at around 11.00 on 19/11/19, one initially flew south over the road, after which it briefly performed a fluttering display flight that attracted the attention of a second bird. An extensive search of the area in very hot conditions sadly provided no more sightings. S30°27'52.29", E20°23'45.47".

Cloud Cisticola *Cisticola (textrix) major*

A likely future split from the isolated western nominate race, which will then become 'Cape Cisticola'. c6 seen amidst short grassland habitat on the southern boundary of Mabusa Nature Reserve, just north of the town of Verera, late on 09/08/19.

Namaqua Warbler *Phragmacia substriata*

A strongly territorial male was located adjacent to the dry bed of the Oorlogskloof River, just south of Calvinia, early in the morning of 20/11/19. The bird was inhabiting thorn scrub adjacent to an extensive Phragmites reedbed, exactly as per preferred habitat descriptions in the field guides! I parked at the nearby Shell petrol station to get easy access to the river. Bird seen at S31°28'44.98", E19°46'22.22", though no other territories located in an extensive search of the dry river bed.

Karoo Eremomola *Eremomela gregalis*

A group of three birds was seen south of Calvinia, soon after dawn on 20/11/19, close to the site of an eBird record just a month previously. The birds initially responded to playback, but never sang, just called occasionally. Unbroken dry, sparse, Karoo scrub habitat ran away in all directions from the R355 gravel road site. The birds were watched feeding for an hour or more, always remaining in a fairly tight group and at one stage in the company of a pair of Rufous-eared Warblers. S31°30'31.37", E19°44'17.38".



Namaqua Warbler and Karoo Eremomola, Calvinia

Karoo Thrush *Turdus smithi*

Our encounters with this bird during the course of the trip seem to go some way to explaining its omission from my previous trip lists, namely that we only ever saw it in obscure 'cultivated' settings where little time is usually spent birding! Common in the environs of Randpark Golf Course, Randburg, Johannesburg, on both 07/11/19 and 09/11/19, where double figures were counted on the second date. Not seen again until 19/11/19, when a pair were frequenting the garden of our accommodation at African Dawn B&B, Calvinia on both days of our stay.

Magpie Mannikin *Lonchura fringilloides*

Up to ten present with a flock of around 100 Bronze Mannikins, on the outskirts of the town of Tzaneen, on the afternoon of 08/11/19, at the junction of Aqua Laan and Alan Burman Street. They demonstrated a somewhat bizarre habitat selection, being seen in degraded scrub adjacent to the manicured gardens of a new development, where the birds were watched at close range feeding on lawns and visiting a garden birdbath. S23°49'09.82", E30°08'37.60".



Magpie Mannikin, Tzaneen and Karoo Thrush, Calvinia

Short-tailed Pipit *Anthus brachyurus*

A single bird flushed twice on the southern boundary of Mabusa Nature Reserve, just north of the town of Verera, late on 09/08/19. Sadly only seen in flight, flushed from dry short grassland adjacent to sparse scrub, but call and distinctive white outer tail feathers clearly noted. S25°25'24.30", E29°03'03.97".

Bushvelt Pipit *Anthus caffer*

A single bird seen feeding on the ground and briefly perched, within Polokwane Game Reserve, early on the morning of 09/11/18. Actually observed on the access track to the reserve campsite, below acacia scrub, at S23°59'29.36", E29°28'04.63".

Notes on Mammal Species Seen (following Smithers' Mammals of Southern Africa)**Forest Shrew** *Myosorex varius*

One found its way into our cottage at the Klondyke Cherry Farm, Ceres, on the evening of 20/11/19. It finally squeezed out underneath the closed door, having evaded capture in every room!

Karoo Rock Sengi (Elephant Shrew) *Elephantulus pilicaudus*

Wonderful views of this endearing little creature on a rocky kopje located on the Marrick estate on 13/11/19. This species has a very sparse distribution across its range and is a real speciality of Marrick. At this site Jonny Boy is familiar with individual territories, which are surprisingly large and can cover several adjacent kopjes.

Note that this species has been referred to Eastern Rock Sengi *Elephantulus myurus* in some earlier reports, but the experts on the ground at Marrick now appear convinced that Karoo Rock Sengi is the correct identification.



Karoo Rock Sengi, Marrick

Brants' Whistling Rat *Parotomys brabtsii*

A tragically brief encounter of this species on 17/11/19, as it was dug from its deep sand dune run by a Honey Badger and instantly consumed. Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, north of Twee Rivieren.

Karoo Bushrat *Otomys unisulcatus*

One seen briefly in a dry Karoo river bed, south of Calvinia, on 20/11/19.

Namaqua Rock Mouse *Aethomys namaquensis*

One seen whilst spotlighting south of Mata Mata, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, on 16/11/19.

Black Rat *Rattus rattus*

One seen at dusk in the Randpark suburbs of Johannesburg on 07/11/19.

Highveld Gerbil *Tatera brantsii*

One seen well whilst spotlighting at Marrick on 12/11/19.

Large-eared Mouse *Malacothrix typica*

This distinctively marked rodent was observed at close range in the Marrick spotlight on 12/11/19.

South African Ground Squirrel *Xerus inauris*

One of the most regularly encountered mammals of the trip, seen daily between Marrick and Calvinia, being most numerous in the Kalahara; up to fifty per day seen in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

Tree Squirrel *Paraxerus cepapi*

Several seen or heard daily whilst at Madikwe.

African Porcupine *Hysterix africae australis*

Only seen whilst spotlighting at Marrick, with five recorded on 12/11/19 and three on 13/11/19.

Springhare *Pedetes capensis*

Seen in large numbers at Marrick, with three-figure counts on both 12 and 13/11/19. A couple of 'Kalahari Kangaroos' were also recorded on two of our Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park night drives, on 15/11/19 and 17/11/19. Always constantly 'springing' in the spotlight, making photography challenging!



Springhare, Marrick

Cape Hare *Lepus capensis*

Only seen with certainty at Marrick, which clearly suits the open grassland habitat requirements of this species. Up to ten per night on 12 and 13/11/19. Black ear tips are a distinctive identification feature.

Scrub Hare *Lepus saxatilis*

Widely encountered throughout the trip, between Polokwane in the east and Ceres in the west.



Cape Hare, showing black ear tips, Marrick and Scrub Hare, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Smith's Red Rock Rabbit *Pronolagus rupestris*

Two spot lit around the rocky kopjes close to the farm, at Marrick, on 12/11/19. A much-wanted Leporid, this beautifully marked and neatly proportioned rabbit was one of many Marrick highlights.

Rock Hyrax *Procavia capensis*

Surprisingly, only encountered on the Southern Cape coastline. They were approachable and clearly habituated to human presence at the Stony Point African Penguin colony and were also seen in the Hermanus suburbs.

African Elephant *Loxodonta africana*

Commonly encountered during our short visit to Kruger and in Madikwe, with up to thirty per day counted at both sites. The animals dusted in red earth, set against the green Madikwe landscapes, were particularly memorable.

Burchell's Zebra *Equus burchelli*

Recorded at Kruger and Madikwe, though much more numerous at the latter with up to forty per day counted. These unique equines are surely one of the most photogenic inhabitants of the African savannahs?

White Rhinoceros *Ceratotherium simum*

One seen at Madikwe on 11/11/19 was our only rhino encounter of the trip. It was sad to learn that the decision has been taken to remove all rhinos from Kruger National Park, purely on account of the risk imposed by armed poachers.

Warthog *Phacochoerus aethiopicus*

Just a handful each day at both Kruger and Madikwe.

Giraffe *Giraffa camelopardalis*

Up to thirty a day in Kruger, ten a day in Marrick, and in numbers somewhere between in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. At the latter site we spent hours savouring the behaviour and socialisation of these incredible 'tall horses' at close range.



Giraffe, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Black Wildebeest *Connochaetes gnou*

Double figures observed on a distant hillside at Mabusa Nature Reserve on 09/11/19.

Blue Wildebeest *Connochaetes taurinus*

Up to ten a day in Kruger, twenty a day in Marrick and forty a day in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

Red Hartebeest *Alcelaphus buselaphus*

c10 at Madikwe on 11/11/19 and two at the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, north of Twee Rivieren, on 18/11/19.

Bontebok *Damaliscus Dorcas*

c10 daily at Marrick, where they are introduced.

Blesbok *Damaliscus pygarrus*

Six observed on a distant hillside at Mabusa Nature Reserve on 09/11/19.

Common Duiker *Sylvicapra grimmia*

Several seen on both visits into Kruger, on 08 and 09/11/19.

Springbok *Antilocapra americana*

This attractive little antelope was first seen at Marrick, then daily on our route through the Kalahari and down into the Karoo, with final sightings at Ceres. Up to 100 seen daily whilst in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.



Springbok, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Klipspringer *Oreotragus oreotragus*

Just one seen on the trip, at Akkerendam Nature Reserve, Calvinia, on 20/11/19.

Steenbok *Raphicerus campestris*

A handful seen daily at Madikwe, plus five seen on the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park night drive out of Twee Rivieren on 17/11/19.

Impala *Aepyceros melampus*

Up to fifty counted on both visits into Kruger, smaller numbers daily at Madikwe.

Grey Rhebok *Pelea capreolus*

A group of six seen on a hillside at Madikwe, on 10/11/19, was the only record.

Roan *Hippotragus equinus*

c10 daily at Marrick, where they are introduced.

Sable *Hippotragus niger*

Six seen at Polokwane Nature Reserve on 08/11/19.

Gemsbok *Oryx gazelle*

Arguably Southern Africa's most impressive antelope, we counted around forty per day in the arid environs of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

African Buffalo *Syncerus caffer*

Just a handful on both visits to Kruger, then up to forty per day in Madikwe.

Kudu *Tragelaphus stepsiceros*

Single figure counts made on both visits into Kruger, where the boldly marked adult males were something of an antelope highlight.

Nyala *Tragelaphus angasii*

A group of three recorded in a river valley just west of Kruger on 08/11/19.



Nyala and Kudu, Kruger NP

Bushbuck *Tragelaphus scriptus*

Only recorded around the Orpen Rest Camp lodgings at Kruger, where they were habituated to human presence and very approachable. Up to four seen on 08 and 09/11/18.

Eland *Taurotragus oryx*

Only one recorded, a huge adult male at Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, north of Twee Rivieren, on 18/11/19.

Reedbuck *Redunca arundinum*

A group of six recorded in a river valley just west of Kruger on 08/11/19.

Waterbuck *Kobus ellipsiprymnus*

A handful recorded on both trips into Kruger.

Aardwolf *Proteles cristatus*

One of the principal reasons for our visit to Marrick, and we were not disappointed! One watched feeding at very close range and for a prolonged period on 12/11/19 and three seen on our night drive on 13/11/19, though rather more distantly. According to literature these attractive insectivorous hyenas consume 300,000 termites per night!



Aardwolf, Marrick

Brown Hyena *Hyena brunnea*

A major target species for this trip, we were disappointed to draw a blank at Madikwe, which is traditionally a reliable location. Mata Mata, in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, proved to be *the* place for Brown Hyena with three sightings over our two night stay. On 15/11/19 our night drive produced prolonged and relatively close views of one animal around a waterhole and what was presumed to be the same individual on the return leg. On 16/11/19 one was seen close to the road, at dusk, just 2km south of the Mata Mata gate. On our 16/11/19 night drive one was again seen at a waterhole, where it was observed drinking. It may have been the same as the previous night's animal, but we could not be certain.

Spotted Hyena *Crocuta crocuta*

Only observed at Kruger NP, however at this location it was seen in surprisingly high numbers and at very close range. Eight seen on 08/11/19 and twelve on 09/11/19. One clan had a den below the road, and a 'creche' of four or five youngsters of varying ages was observed here.

Cheetah *Acinonyx jubatus*

Two males watched at close quarters early on 14/11/19, at Madikwe.

Lion *Panthera leo*

Quite a remarkable succession of sightings, commencing early on the morning of 09/11/19 in Kruger NP, where we were met with the incredible sight of a pride of seventeen lionesses travelling rapidly through roadside vegetation, apparently in hunting mode. On 10 and 11/11/19 different single males were seen at

Madikwe, both of which were highly vocal. Two were seen on each of our initial three days inside the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, with sightings split between Mata Mata and Twee Rivieren, both in the daytime and on night drives. A final highlight came on the final Kgalagadi morning of 18/11/19 when a female with four young cubs, plus a separate pair of Lions, were seen at close range north of Twee Rivieren.

African Wild Cat *Felis lybica*

A very attractive felid which provided us with another wonderful succession of sightings, beginning with one spotlighted on a Madikwe night drive on 10/11/19. At the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, Mata Mata gave us two enjoyable daytime sightings on successive days, plus another on a night drive out of Twee Rivieren. The final and most animated view came as a total surprise on the Klondyke Cherry Farm estate, when early on the morning of 21/11/19 a Wildcat leapt out of hiding to narrowly miss a startled Cape Francolin.



African Wild Cat, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Black-footed Cat *Felis nigripes*

Marrick is rapidly gaining a reputation as *the* place to find this very rare felid, and our first night drive certainly delivered the goods in this respect. Towards the end of our drive on 12/11/18 Jonny spotted some tell-tale eyeshine and soon had us close to a pair of kittens around a month in age. These were studied at length in the spotlight beam, whilst a nearby adult female was very quick to melt into the darkness soon after location.

Bat-eared Fox *Otocyon megalotis*

This characterful little canid was seen on both of our Marrick night drives, with three and two noted respectively. The dry river beds of Mata Mata also proved to be a favoured spot, with two and four seen on the respective spotlighting sessions from this camp within the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

Painted Dog *Lycaon pictus*

Sadly the Madikwe pack had ventured into an adjoining property and were inaccessible throughout our short stay, however our salvation was Kruger NP where three adults were observed c20km north of Orpens Gate on 09/11/19. Largely inert and in a relaxed state, the animals would occasionally stand and walk short distances to relocate their hold-up spot, when their intricately 'painted' pelage could be admired to its full.

Following page: Brown Hyena and Bat-eared Fox, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, Spotted Hyena and Painted Dog, Kruger NP



Cape Fox *Vulpes chama*

Only seen within the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, where it was recorded on all three successive spotlighting drives, with the nightly scores being two, three and three respectively.

Black-backed Jackal *Canis mesomelus*

Another canid surprisingly limited to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, at least in terms of our trip totals. It was recorded in good numbers around dawn and dusk but most frequently on night drives, with a peak count of fourteen individuals on 15/11/19.



Black-backed Jackal and Cape Fox, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Honey Badger *Mellivora capensis*

Having narrowly missed a roving pair of Honey Badgers at Orpens Gate, Kruger, we thought that this much-wanted mustelid had again evaded us. Our luck turned right around at the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, however, to provide sightings of two different animals and the most captivating wildlife-watching experience of the whole trip.

On 17/11/19 at last light, around 10km north of Twee Rivieren, we came across our first Honey Badger actively hunting for Brants' Whistling Rats in the company of three Pale Chanting Goshawks. The Badger demonstrated its supreme burrowing prowess by repeatedly digging itself below ground level in a matter of seconds, with Goshawks in close pursuit, before an unfortunate rat was finally extracted from its maze of deep runs and rapidly devoured.

On 18/11/19 we encountered a different animal (identified from photographic comparison of dorsal stripe variation), soon after dawn, again at the roadside north of Twee Rivieren. This individual was accompanied by a Black-backed Jackal and the two worked in close coordination, to search for more burrowing rodents. Views were obtained down to a few metres distance this time, though the hunting seemed much less urgent and animated. No kills observed.

Small-spotted Genet *Genetta genetta*

Two brief sightings, both one night drives. One at Madikwe on 11/11/19 and one at Twee Rivieren on 17/11/19.

Large-spotted Genet *Genetta tigrina*

Some great prolonged and close range views of a pair of these beautifully marked viverrids, around our chalet at Orpen Rest Camp, Kruger, on the night of 08/11/19.

Suricate (Meerkat) *Suricata suricatta*

Always a thinly-distributed species, we encountered it just three times on our entire trip. Wonderful views of a very active group of four at Marrick on 13/11/19, a single at its den mid-way between Mata Mata and Twee Rivieren on 17/11/19, and another group of four huddled at their den entrance to the east of Brandvlei early on 20/11/19.



Suricate and Yellow Mongoose, Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Yellow Mongoose *Cynictis penicillate*

Two encounters of this smart little mongoose on our travels. The first was whilst eating breakfast at our Kgalagadi Lodge chalet on 15/11/19, with an animal which was clearly very used to humans, and the second with another bold individual crossing the Mata Mata compound on 17/11/19.

Slender Mongoose *Galerella sanguinea*

A grey morph was seen at Madikwe, and two of the very attractive red morphs seen on consecutive days at Mata Mata and Twee Rivieren on 17 and 18/11/19.

Small Grey Mongoose *Galerella pulverulenta*

Just one record, of an extremely inquisitive animal which approached to within a metre as I sat quietly atop a Marrick kopje early on the morning of 13/11/19.

Chacma Baboon *Papio ursinus*

Troops of up to ten animals recorded daily between 08 and 12/11/19, at sites ranging from Kruger to Madikwe. The best encounters were of the Madikwe troops, which seemed oblivious to human presence and could be studied in a perfectly natural environment. Also seen on the Cape Coast at Fernkloof NR on 22 and 23/11/19.

Vervet Monkey *Cercopithecus aethiops*

Brief sightings of a handful of these diminutive primates between Kruger and Madikwe, often apparently singles.

Aardvark *Orycteropus afer*

Another Marrick special, we were treated to a memorable run of sightings of these bizarrely unique mammals, with three on each night drive, made on 12 and 13/11/2019. Several watched at close range and for prolonged periods, when Jonny was able to point out the dark-haired rear thighs of a male.



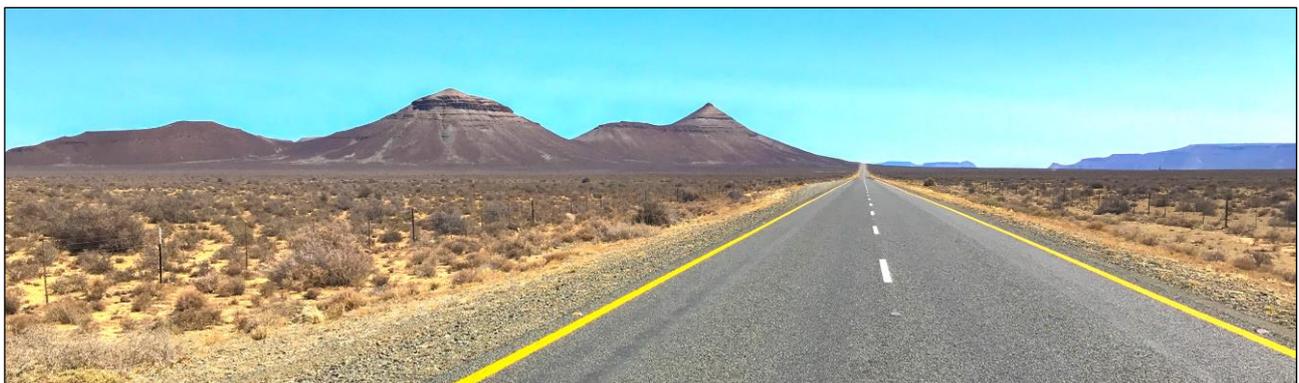
Aardvark, Marrick

Cape Fur Seal *Arctocephalus pusillus*

Three seen in the shallows off Hermanus on 24/11/19.

Southern Right Whale *Eubalaena australis*

The Hermanus Bay individuals had apparently departed just before we arrived, but one was seen distantly off Stony Point, Betty's Bay on 22/11/19.



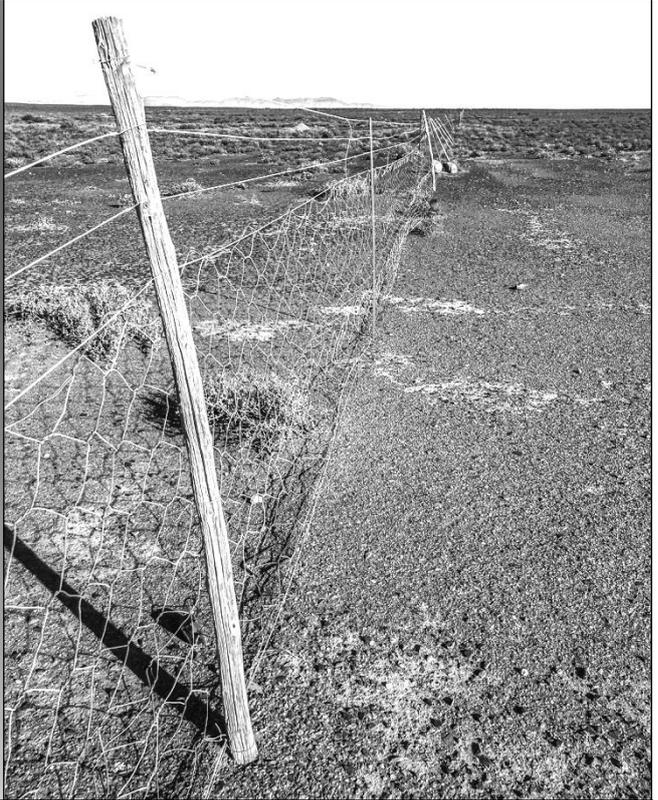
Nama Karoo landscape west of Calvinia

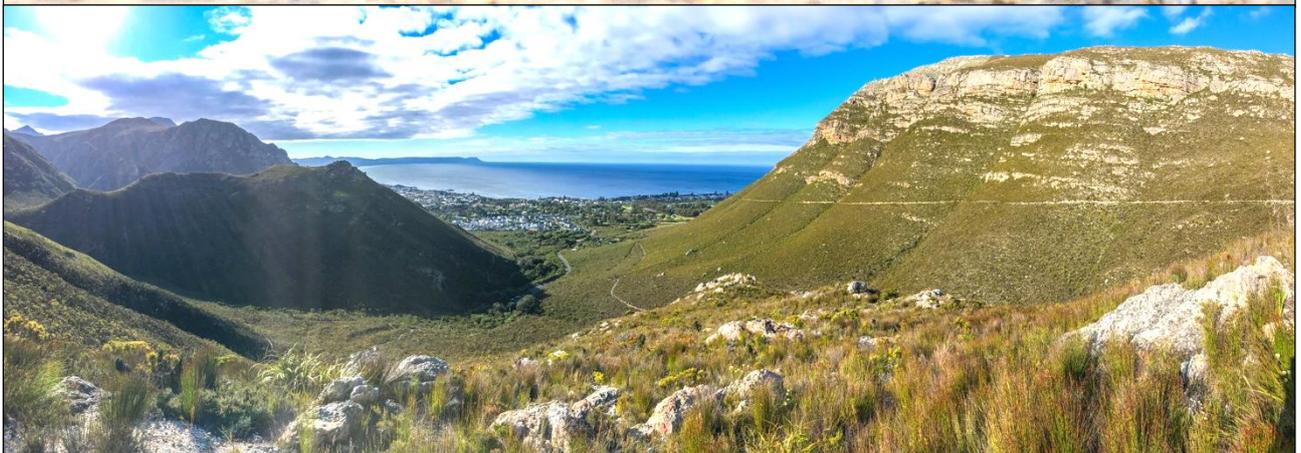
Following pages: Spotted Hyena and African Elephant, Kruger, Honey Badger, Kgalagadi; Cape Buffalo and Cheetah, Madikwe; Marrick, Burchell's Zebra and Cheetah, Madikwe, Akkerendam; Karoo and Kgalagadi; Honey Badger, Kgalagadi, Fernkloof, Rock Hyrax, Stony Point, South African Ground Squirrel, Marrick; Betty's Bay, African Penguin, Stony Point, Kgalagadi Lodge













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