

South Africa is where my wife and I discovered Africa eleven years ago (already!). We've been to this country several times and this time, I wanted to do something a bit different than the classical Kruger, Addo Elephant or Hluhluwe-Umfolozi national parks. In the meantime, I read many amazing reports about the Marrick Farm near Kimberley on Jon Hall's Mammal Watching website and I said to myself: this is where we have to go this year. In addition, thanks to the very nice reports written by Richard Webb we decided to combine Marrick with Madikwe, nothing else, since we only had 10 days for this new trip. Indeed, although being French with many days of vacation per year, this is not extensible indefinitely and moreover, we have to take our vacation during specific periods in the year. Therefore, this trip had to be done during the rainy season between Christmas and early January. I definitely knew that this wasn't the best time of the year to do night safaris at the Marrick Farm but we took the risk...and I'm glad we did.

After an uneventful but long overnight flight from France to Joburg, directly followed by a 6-hour drive to Kimberley, we finally arrived at Marrick, exhausted and under a burning sun with more than 40°C! We stopped en route in Warrenton to look for the otters mentioned in several reports but we saw nothing. This wasn't a good start... On the other hand, the good news we had when we arrived at Marrick (but not so much for the local people) is that the area was super dry and hot with barely no rain for months whereas the rain was supposed to start around October. As a consequence, the grass in Marrick was very short, which were perfect conditions for observations. The other good news is that we were alone at the Marrick Farm for the next 4 days and night safaris we booked there. We would have the truck for our own. Very cool!

A few words about the premises first: the farm is located in a fairly nice area and is surrounded by animals that are everywhere during the day with springboks, kudus, steenboks or mongooses roaming near the feeding areas. Bird life looked also pretty good. The guesthouse we had for our own was very large, comfortable although a bit outdated. The food was good and plentiful (a bit too much for me actually) and our hosts were very welcoming and friendly. They did their best to accommodate all of our desires. We initially booked 4 night drives but could only do 3 as one was cancelled after a full day of heavy rain (the rainy season actually started just after we arrived!) but they refunded it with no question and they also organized upon request a short day safari to look for the local elephant shrew. Johnny was our guide and I cannot praise enough how good he was to spot the animals during the night safaris and all the efforts he made to ensure we would see all the mammals in our long wish list.

Now, let's talk about the night drives themselves. What can I say? Although I read many excellent reports about those drives I was not close to imagine how good they actually are! First there are long: 3 full hours between 8 to 11pm. Second, I don't know if we were lucky or not (well at least I knew we were about the weather condition and grass height) but there were animals everywhere and every single night drive was rich in observations with often excellent views and great photo opportunities. The first night drive offered: 1 African wild cat, 1 aardvark, 6 aardwolves including a family of 4!, lots of porcupines, 1 large-eared mouse, lots of bat-eared foxes, both scrub and Cape hares and I don't even count all the springhares. We even saw 1 genet in a small tree but it was very skittish and quickly ran away. What a night to start with!... and all this in tee-shirts since the temperature at night was fairly warm. The second night drive was definitely windier and cooler but still very good with: 1 aardvark, 6 aardwolves again, several bat-eared foxes, 2 black-backed jackals, 1 desert pigmy mouse, several porcupines, and the usual springhares, scrub and Cape hares. Since the 3rd night safari was cancelled and we only had one remaining, I started to get concerned about not seeing my prime mammal target that was the black-footed cat but in the afternoon, Johnny told me that the weather / wind was good and that he had a good feeling. Man, he was right! This last night drive was the best with all the usual suspects (scrub and Cape hares, springhares, porcupines) but also 4 aardwolves, 3 aardvarks, 1 south African hedgehog, several bat-eared foxes including a mom with 5 babies, 3 black-footed cats (yeah ☺) and even a glimpse of a zorilla! Johnny jumped on his chair when he saw it crossing the track in front of the truck but I could not see more than a fast moving silhouette in the bush... Therefore, I'm not really counting it in my trip list below. As you can see, I loved Marrick and Johnny was definitely an excellent guide, not only for the night drives but also at day as he found us 3 different rock elephant shrews. From our long wish list, the only species we missed was the Smith's red rock rabbit so I was more than happy.

During the days, we visited the nearby Mokala National Park that I found very interesting with some nice landscapes, a couple of great hides and a very rich wildlife although not having big cats nor elephants. We saw many different species of ungulates including a few lifers like the mountain reedbuck; we observed meerkats very well, 3 species of mongooses (yellow, slender and Cape grey) and both the beautiful Roan and Sable antelopes. I also discovered in the park that springboks could be all black (melanistic form) and that people are trying to reproduce quaggas thanks to some specific breeding programs from Burchell's zebras. All in all, I found the first part of our trip in South Africa to be extremely positive.

The second part of our trip was Madikwe for which I also had high expectations given all the good reports I read about this park. There however, we were not lucky anymore about the weather and as a consequence, I came back a little bit disappointed about the park. I chosed Madikwe in order to see wild dogs and brown hyenas but we saw none... One explanation is that among the 5 days we stayed there, we had 2 days of non-stop rain, which for sure did not help for mammal watching, not only because it was warm, wet and the animals were hiding in the bush but also since on those 2 days most of the tracks were closed because of too much mud... We stayed in 2 different camps in Madikwe: Moseitha Bush Camp, the cheapest accommodation in the park but it was a good surprise. Although basic, the open bungalows were comfortable, nestled in a nice section in the center of the park and their drives (both in the morning and in the afternoon finishing in nigh drives) were longer than in our second lodge: Thakadu River camp, much more luxurious for sure and well located along the bank of a small river, which was positive for bird watching. I'm sure Madikwe is much better during the dry season and I must admit that we still saw quite a lot of animals despite the poor weather: lots of elephants, lions very

day, cheetahs twice, even 1 aardwolf at the end of an afternoon drive! I guess this is called luck there – I don't know why but we are always lucky with aardwolves as we saw such species several times during past trips in Kenya and South Africa. Buffalos are in Madikwe as well but not in great numbers. On the other hand, we saw lots of giraffes, the usual ungulates, a few black-backed jackals and I was impressed by the number of white rhinos we could observe, including several young ones. It is so nice to see calves of such an endangered species ☺. It was also our first time to observe a fight between a female defending her baby against a male! Terrific observation and quite amazing to hear how much noise rhinos can make when they fight. This will remain in my memory for a long time.

Globally speaking, we were satisfied about this trip to South Africa but I would definitely not recommend to visit Marrick and Madikwe during the rainy season so as to avoid issues with the weather. We were very lucky for Marrick as I'm pretty sure the weather and night drive conditions weren't representative of this period of the year. The risk is certainly high to have limited observations there if the grass is too high during the rainy season.

Below is the list of mammals observed during this trip in South Africa (lifers in red):

Mammals with photos or well seen				
Species	Espèces	Latin Name	Where seen	Pic
African buffalo	Buffle d'Afrique	Syncerus caffer	Small groups observed in Mokala and Madikwe	X
Black wildebeest	Gnou à queue blanche	Connochaetes gnou	Common in Mokala	X
Klipspringer	Oréotrague	Oreotragus oreotragus	Only a family of 3 seen in Madikwe	X
Blue wildebeest	Gnou bleu	Connochaetes taurinus	Common in Mokala and Madikwe	X
Common warthog	Phacochère	Phacochoerus africanus	Common everywhere	X
Eland	Eland du Cap	Taurotragus oryx	Only a few seen in Mokala	X
Giraffe	Girafe	Giraffa Camelopardalis	Common in Madikwe and Mokala	X
Grey duiker	Céphalophe de Grimm	Sylvicapra grimmia	A few seen in Mokala	X
Impala	Impala	Aepyceros melampus	Common in Madikwe and Mokala	X
Greater kudu	Grand koudou	Tragelaphus strepsiceros	Seen in every location but in small numbers	X
Mountain reedbuck	Redunca de montagne	Redunca fulvorufula	2 seen in Mokala and 1 in Marrick	X
Gemsbok	Gemsbok	Oryx gazella	Fairly common in Mokala	X
Burchell's zebra	Zèbre de Burchell	Equus burchelli	Common in Mokala and Madikwe + the tentative quagga reproduction in Mokala	X
Red hartebeest	Bubale du Cap	Alcelaphus buselaphus caama	Common in Mokala	X
Roan antelope	Antilope rouanne	Hippotragus equinus	2 herds seen in Mokala	X
Sable antelope	Hippotrague noir	Hippotragus niger	1 large herd + several individuals seen in Mokala	X
Springbok	Springbok	Antidorcas marsupialis	Common in Mokala and Marrick (+ black ones)	X
Steenbok	Raphicère champêtre	Raphicerus campestris	Several seen in Mokala and Madikwe	X
Tsessebe	Sassabi	Damaliscus lunatus	Common in Mokala	X
White rhinoceros	Rhinocéros blanc	Ceratotherium simum	More than 10 observed in Madikwe	X
Cape hare	Lièvre du Cap	Lepus capensis	Several seen in Marrick	X
Chacma baboon	Babouin chacma	Papio ursinus	A few seen in Mokala and Madikwe	X
Porcupine	Porc-épic du Cap	Hystrix africaeaustralis	Several seen in Marrick	X
Scrub hare	Lièvre des rochers	Lepus saxatilis	Several seen in Marrick	X
Black footed cat	Chat à pieds noirs	Felis nigripes	3 observed in Marrick	X
South African ground squirrel	Ecureuil terrestre du Cap	Xerus inauris	A few observed in Mokala and Madikwe	X
Southern African hedgehog	Hérisson d'Afrique du Sud	Atelerix frontalis	1 seen in Marrick	X
Springhare	Lièvre sauteur	Pedetes capensis	"Hundreds" seen in Marrick and a few in Madikwe	X
Vervet monkey	Vervet bleu	Chlorocebus pygerythrus	Several seen in Mokala and Madikwe	X
Aardvark	Oryctérope	Orycteropus afer	5 times seen in Marrick	X
Aardwolf	Protèle	Proteles cristata	Several times seen in Marrick + 1 in Madikwe	X
African wild cat	Chat sauvage d'Afrique	Felis lybica	1 observed in Marrick	X
Bat-eared fox	Otocyon	Otocyon megalotis	Several seen in Marrick	X
Black-backed jackal	Chacal à chabraque	Canis mesomelas	A few seen in Marrick, Mokala and Madikwe	X
Cape grey mongoose	Mangouste grise	Galerella pulverulenta	2 seen in Marrick and 1 in Mokala	X
Slender mongoose	Mangouste rouge	Galerella sanguinea	1 seen in Mokala and a couple in Madikwe	X
Small spotted genet	Genette commune	Genetta genetta	1 seen in Marrick	
Meerkat	Suricate	Suricata suricatta	A group observed in Mokala	X
Yellow mongoose	Mangouste fauve	Cynictis penicillata	Several seen in Marrick and Mokala	X
Desert pygmy mouse	Souris pygmée du désert	Mus indutus	1 seen in Marrick	X
Large-eared mouse		Malacothrix typica	1 seen in Marrick	X
Blesbok	Damalisque à front blanc	Damaliscus pygargus phillipsi	A few seen in Mokala	X
Waterbuck	Cob à croissant	Kobus ellipsiprymnus	1 observed in Mokala and another one in Madikwe	X
Karoo rock elephant shrew	Musaraigne éléphant du Karoo	Elephantulus pilicaudus	3 observed in Marrick	X

Lion	Lion	Panthera leo	Observed every day in Madikwe	X
African bush elephant	Eléphant d'Afrique	Loxodonta africana	A lot of them observed in Madikwe	X
Cheetah	Guépard	Acinonyx jubatus	3 seen in Madikwe	X
Smith's Bush Squirrel	Ecureuil de Smith	Paraxerus cepapi	3-4 observed in the grounds of the Madikwe camps	X
African savanna hare	Lievre des savanes	Lepus microtis	A few observed in Madikwe	X
Banded mongoose	Mangouste rayée	Mungos mungo	Several seen in the ground of Thakadu River camp	X
Bushbuck	Guib harnaché	Tragelaphus sylvaticus	3 seen in the ground of Thakadu River camp	X
Spotted hyena	Hyène tachetée	Crocuta crocuta	5 observed in Madikwe	X
Total Species Recorded = 62				

Below is a last mammal that I don't really count since I only saw a glimpse of his back and can tell the species just because our guide saw it...

Species	Espèces	Latin Name	Where seen
Zorilla	Zorille commune	Ictonyx striatus	1 seen in Marrick

I'm adding to this report some pictures of the most iconic species we observed during that trip and/or those new to me:



Aardvark



Aardwolf (mum and babies)



Bat-eared Fox (mum and babies)



Southern African hedgehog



African wild cat



Black-footed cat



Porcupine



Springhare



Karoo rock elephant shrew



Scrub hare



Roan antelope



Sable antelope



Red hartebeest



Buffalo



Black wildebeest



Gemsbok



Meerkat



Slender mongoose



Mountain reedbuck



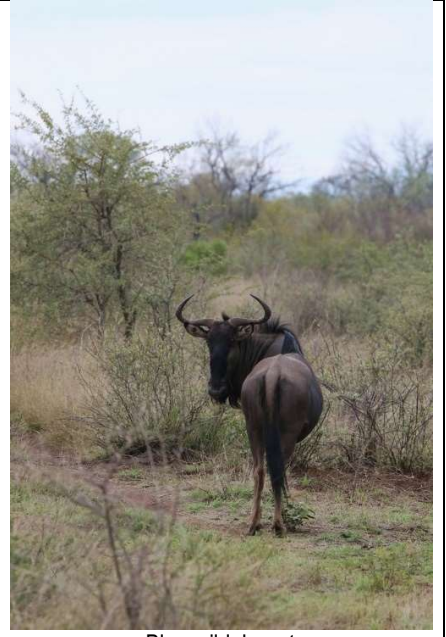
Steenbok



Cape grey mongoose



Springbok



Blue wildebeest



Burchell's zebra



Reproduction of "quagga" to show the difference



Grey duiker



Black springbok



Lion



Cheetah



White rhino



Spotted hyena



Klipspringer



Bushbuck



Smith's Bush Squirrel



Vervey monkeys