

South Africa 2019

Aug 3-17th

Struwig Eco Reserve; Ngala Camp (9 days), Kruger NP (1 day), Manyeleti Honeyguide Camp (5 days)

Summary: This was a travel ecology course for a community college, not a mammal watching tour. We contracted through Original Wisdom (Kersey Lawrence) and Nature Guide Training (Lee Gutteridge). Kersey and Lee are certified trackers and a large component of this trip was track and sign identification, ending with a CyberTracker evaluation.

We saw 39 species of mammal (including “Bat”, but not including the Honey Badger we captured on a camera trap).

Highly recommend this team! We had a fantastic experience. <https://www.originalwisdom.com/>

CODES EXPLAINED:

“How often was this species seen?” SS = single sighting of this species; MS = Two or more sightings of this species. May be same individual(s) but at different times.

“How many individuals did you see?” SI = single individual. This could be single individuals seen multiple times; MI = multiple individuals. This includes mother with young.

“What was your best photographic opportunity?” (Assumes competent amateur status with telephoto lens)

0 = essentially no realistic way to photograph (too far; too quick)

1 = voucher shot showing at least some identifying characteristics was possible

2 = good photo opportunity

3 = exceptional photo opportunity (very close, long encounter and/or interesting behavior)

Locations:

St = Struwig Eco Reserve, the location of Ngala Camp

KNP = Kruger National Park

Man = Manyeleti Game Reserve, Honeyguide Camp

SPECIES	DETAILS	LOCATION(S)	NOTES	
Grey Duiker	MS/MI/P2	St/KNP/Man	Commonly seen, skittish	
Impala	MS/MI/P3	St/KNP/Man	Extremely common	
Warthog	MS/MI/P3	St/KNP/Man		
Southern Giraffe	MS/MI/P3	St/KNP/Man	Saw young w/umbilical cord	
Tree Squirrel	MS/MI/P2	St/Man		
Greater Kudu	MS/MI/P3	St/KNP/Man		
Cape Porcupine	SS/Sl/P1	St	Night drive; Largest rodent in Africa!	
Scrub Hare	MS/MI/P3	St/KNP/Man		
African Lion	MS/MI/P3	St/KNP/Man	Watched 12 eat a Wildebeest	
Dwarf Mongoose	MS/MI/P2	St/KNP/Man		
Vervet Monkey	MS/MI/P3	St/KNP/Man		
African Elephant	MS/MI/P3	St/KNP/Man		
Leopard	MS/MI/P3	St/KNP/Man	Leopard w/cub and Impala in tree	
Bushbuck	MS/MI/P3	St/KNP/Man		
Waterbuck	MS/MI/P2	St/KNP/Man		
S. Lesser Galago	MS/MI/P1	St/KNP/Man	Night drives	
Bushveld Gerbil	SS/Sl/P0	St	In camp @ night	
Bat sp.	MS/MI/P0	St/KNP/Man	Probably several species; in flight	
Klipspringer	MS/MI/P1	St	Also vocalizing @ Leopard	
Nyala	MS/MI/P3	St/KNP/Man	Right in camp @ Ngala	
Woodland Dormouse	SS/Sl/P0	St	In camp @ night	
Hippo	MS/MI/P2	St/KNP/Man		
Small-spotted Genet	MS/MI/P1	St	In camp	
Plains Zebra	MS/MI/P3	St/KNP/Man		
Sharpe's Grysbok	MS/MI/P0	St		
Slender Mongoose	MS/MI/P1	St/Man		
African Wild Dog	MS/MI/P3	St	Personal favorite ☺	
African Wild Cat	MS/MI/P1	St	Night drives	
Steenbok	MS/MI/P1	St/Man		
Black-backed Jackal	MS/MI/P2	KNP/Man		
Cape Buffalo	MS/MI/P3	KNP/Man		
Wildebeest	MS/MI/P3	KNP/Man		
White Rhino	MS/MI/P3			
White-tailed Mongoose	SS/Sl/P0	Man		
Banded Mongoose	SS/MI/P0	Man		
African Civet	SS/Sl/P1	Man		
Southern Reedbuck	SS/MI/P3	Man		
Sable	SS/Sl/P2	Man	Completely unexpected!	39

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We flew Qatar airlines and used Sable Bus Tours to get from the Johannesburg airport to Hoedspruit. We were a group of 18, so we chartered our own buses at a very reasonable rate. In Hoedspruit, We were met by the team from Original Wisdom with two game viewer vehicles and a luggage trailer. This was also our grocery stop for snacks and forgotten items. The sun was just setting, meaning that our drive into the Reserve served as our first unofficial night drive. Since we were in two vehicles for the entire trip, many sightings were not shared. That was true of our first great species, the **Cape Porcupine**, seen by the people in my vehicle but not the other. We also had first sightings of **Grey Duiker, Southern Lesser Galago, African Elephants, Impala and Scrub Hare**.

Ngala Camp soon felt like home for us all. The students on this trip ranged in age from typical college age to retirees. We slept in simple canvas tents (two persons/tent) with full mattresses. In addition, the Camp featured full bathroom and shower facilities, solar powered charging station and electric perimeter fence, some hammocks and great fire pit and more. In the morning we were up early and off on our first official game drive. I would say that wildlife was common but vehicles were sparse. We shared a lion sighting with one other vehicle from a nearby lodge one morning but had all other sightings to ourselves.

In addition to typical game drives, we were free to get out of the vehicles whenever safety allowed. We stopped to investigate tracks often and that was a welcome change from my other African experiences. We even trailed animals a few times. Overall, it was a great way to learn more about the wildlife and ecology of the areas we visited. Personally, I have been pretty committed to track and sign identification for about ten years now and it was fantastic to watch others get excited about it as well. Lee and Kersey are certified at the highest levels by CyberTracker, the only organization that tests and certifies the skills of track and sign identification and trailing. At the end of our trip, we participated in a track and sign evaluation and several of us earned certifications.

Another way we interacted with mammals was through camera traps. Kersey has numerous camera traps out all year and I brought three of my own. We pulled SD cards from Kersey's cameras and performed a simple activity with the data.



A few highlights from our time at Ngala Camp:

-A pride of **African Lions** were at the river near camp one evening. Some time that night, they visited the waterhole near camp. We found their tracks in the morning and trailed them for a while. In the afternoon, we made plaster casts of their tracks to bring home.

-We spent a night sleeping in a dry river bed in the bush. We took turns standing watch during the night and camp staff were at either end of our group with rifles in case of an emergency. In fact we did find fresh female leopard tracks within 30 yards of us in the morning.

-We spent an entire day on foot, exploring. After ten hours, we had traveled less than 6 miles. 😊 Lee and Kersey seemed to know something about every tree, track, rock and bird.

-On one night drive, we encountered a pack of **African Wild Dogs**. Lee speculated that they may stop by camp at some point for the water hole. Although we were next to the Oliphant River, a water hole provides a much safer alternative for a drink. In the morning, I spotted two eagles in a tree near camp. That led us to spy a Wild Dog being harassed by a **Spotted Hyena**. Turns out the Dogs had killed a **Nyala** during the night and a hyena was trying to steal a meal. The dogs came to the water hole to drink. Wild Dog was high on my wish list so this was a real highlight for me!



Our single day in Kruger NP was bracketed by two nights at Timbavati Lodge. Luxuries like a pool and wifi were welcome, but several of the students said they already missed Ngala Camp. I enjoyed the trip to Kruger. It provided a nice contrast in people management as well as wildlife management. It was

crowded. We watched people feeding animals. In a traffic dispute, we watched an angry man exit his rental car to yell at someone while lions were present! KNP also provided our first looks at **Cape Buffalo, Wildebeest and Black-backed Jackal**.



On our way to Manyeleti, we spent the morning at Nourish! (<http://www.nourishnpo.co.za/>), a non-profit organization that does great work. We received a tour and assisted with two projects. They have a food truck along the road. Please consider giving them some business if you are in the area.



Manyeleti Game Reserve, Honeyguide Camp was a spectacular ending to our trip. The 56,000 acre reserve is owned by the Mnisi tribe and provides jobs and income to the local community. According to their website, this reserve welcomed non-whites during the apartheid era while other reserves and Kruger National Park excluded them. The food was glorious and frequently served. There was a pool, wifi and luxury tents with en suite bathrooms and showers. With no fence around the camp (or the reserve for that matter), animals frequented the water hole in camp all day and night. We were allowed to come and go from tents to dining area to pool during daylight hours but needed to be escorted to tents after dark. Elephants, hyenas, bushbuck, vervet monkeys and more were common within the camp. We even had a lion at the waterhole one evening after dark. The guides were great and we found the staff to be most helpful.

Mammal highlights at Manyeleti include:

-A **Leopard** and her cub eating an **Impala** cached in a tree.

-12 African lions feasting on a Wildebeest they killed.

-Four species of mongoose!

-On our final game drive, we were racing to a rare **Sable** sighting when we stumbled upon an almost equally rare pair of **Southern Reedbucks**.



