



Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.

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ZAMBIA AND ZIMBABWE

Date - July 2009

Duration - 17 Days

Destinations

Lusaka - Mfuwe - South Luangwa National Park - Livingstone - Victoria Falls - Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park - Hwange National Park

Trip Overview

A relatively short trip to assess lodges that I had not visited previously in South Luangwa National Park, Zambia and Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe. I split the two major reserves with a couple of nights at Livingstone near Victoria Falls, primarily to see how the recently introduced white rhinos were settling in at Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park. I must admit that I have not visited either Zambia or Zimbabwe as much as I would have liked in recent years, but they are two of my favourite African countries and each can



provide outstanding wildlife viewing, both in terms of large concentrations of animals and a rich diversity of species. The Luangwa Valley is particularly sensational and is home to three national parks, South and North Luangwa and Luambe. However, as I was fitting this trip in between much longer tours in Tanzania and Botswana, I did not have a great deal of time available and therefore had the choice of either visiting several national parks for a couple of days or staying at just two reserves for a week each. I chose the latter, largely due to the fact that I had not been in either country for a while and wanted sufficient time to explore each reserve properly. Sadly, this meant that of the three Luangwa Valley parks, I would only have time to visit one and I chose South

Luangwa principally because it is so easy to reach. Although I prefer the isolation and fly camps of North Luangwa, it is more difficult to travel to and its southern counterpart never gets what you would call crowded in any case. Indeed, most of the parks in Zambia have been habitually underused, which has led to some of the poaching and administrative issues that have blighted certain areas. The infrastructure of several reserves has been more or less ignored for prolonged periods and whilst it is possible to stay at any number of luxury lodges across certain parts of the country, other areas have almost no accommodation and the wildlife receives little protection in these regions. Consequently, and although I had a great time at South Luangwa with some excellent sightings, I would not generally recommend Zambia as a safari destination unless you have sufficient time to visit at least three or four different reserves, including one or two of the more remote parks. A tour of the entire country can be one of the great wildlife journeys, but there is no

point visiting just one reserve and hoping to see all of the major animals, as this is unlikely to occur. South Luangwa, for example, remains one of Zambia's premier reserves, but rhino and cheetah are not found there and at one stage black rhino were declared extinct in a country which had once been a stronghold for these magnificent animals. At least 12000 were massacred in a twenty year period and it was not until 2003 that rhinos again roamed their former range, when a small reintroduction programme was started in North Luangwa, which has been relatively successful to date and will hopefully lead to additional reintroductions in Kafue and Lower Zambezi National Parks. Although they do not naturally occur in the country, a few white rhinos have also been introduced and I intended to spend time with these before moving on to Zimbabwe.



Meanwhile, I had South Luangwa to explore and that generally means one thing, lots and lots of leopards. Luangwa has always been one of the best destinations in Africa to see these gorgeous cats, particularly in terms of activity during the day, and I was not to be disappointed during my stay. I encountered at least nine different animals across sixteen sightings and a couple of these were truly exceptional. The first occurred early one morning when we found a male spotted hyena with a partially eaten impala. I have a vast amount of respect for the much maligned hyena and I always take any opportunity to spend time watching these fascinating and social animals. That morning was no exception and as I settled down to savour an excellent view, I mentioned to my guide that it appeared nervous and was constantly glancing around. This is not rare behaviour for hyenas, particularly not a lone individual protecting a carcass, but he seemed more anxious than normal and we concluded that it could probably smell another predator approaching. Just as we were using our binoculars to search the horizon, a female leopard popped her head up from a ditch no more than ten metres from the feasting hyena. We guessed that the hyena had probably appropriated the carcass at some point before we arrived, from the size of his stomach he had clearly been eating for a while, and that the leopard had not entirely given up hope of retrieving it. This may or may not have been the case, but when the hyena saw the leopard it attempted to remove both itself and the unfortunate antelope and



began dragging the carcass away. Although the leopard was clearly nervous, appropriately when you consider the bite a hyena can inflict, the sight of her meal disappearing was clearly too much to bear and she leapt out of the ditch towards the hyena, which instantly dropped the carcass and ran. We thought that might be the end of the event, but as the leopard claimed her prize, the hyena returned in a frenzy of yaps and growls and this time the leopard fled. Over the next hour the scenario was repeated on a number of occasions and in all the impala, which thankfully was past caring, was swapped between the competing animals six times. At one stage, as the leopard dragged the carcass back towards the ditch, the hyena ran at her rear and we were not sure whether it was going to attack the leopard directly or again grab for the food. Thankfully it chose the latter and again the cat, which by now was visibly

frightened, let go and retreated. I never interfere in situations of this kind, but when another hyena appeared and my guide asked if it was ok to give the leopard a helping hand, I just smiled and let him make the decision. I knew that with the arrival of the second hyena the contest was no longer going to be a fair one and that there was a very real possibility that the persistent but outgunned cat was going to get seriously hurt. Taking my smile as an affirmative, which to be fair it was, my guide signalled to our driver to move

towards the two hyenas, which instantly backed off and allowed the tentative leopard to seize her opportunity. Initially she was unsure whether to approach or not, as we were within maybe only three metres of the carcass and she had been understandably cautious during the entire episode. However, she took one quick look at the returning hyenas and dashed in, grabbing the antelope around the scruff of the neck and making for the nearest tree, which she scampered up in a couple of strides as if totally unhindered. We knew that she had to be very hungry to risk so much and indeed she proceeded to eat for well over half an hour as we watched from below. We eventually left her sleeping contentedly and when we returned that night we found her in almost exactly the same position, now ignoring a carcass that had been stripped to the bone. I actually saw two leopards in trees with kills on this trip, as we



also came across a large male with a puku, a fairly rare antelope species that had sadly just become one member fewer, on one of the night drives. Given the lack of antelope in the area, I only saw kudu, waterbuck, impala and bushbuck of the larger species, it is not surprising that puku are a favourite prey of leopards and one of my other major encounters involved both animals. On this occasion the puku was at least still breathing and intact, but a stalking leopard was doing its best to ensure that did not remain the case for long,



when we found it hiding in long grass watching a herd of about 30 puku on the other side of the road. As the antelopes grazed they wandered slowly away from the road into cover, but the male did not follow his females and, as he fed with his back to the road, the leopard began creeping forward slowly to close the gap to a manageable distance for a final sprint and pounce. If the male puku had turned around at any stage it would have seen the encroaching leopard and fled to safety, but unbelievably, it appeared to be totally unaware of the imminent danger and just continued to feed, as the stealthy cat edged ever closer. I watched the leopard tense itself ready to launch what would prove to be the coup de grace, when suddenly an alarm call cried out and the male puku and leopard ran at exactly the same time. The puku may not have been the most observant animal in Africa, but



it certainly was not stupid and ran directly towards the area that his females had moved to, instantly sending a throng of bewildered antelope scattering in all directions. That was it for the leopard, as it had staked everything on catching the male and when it missed by less than a metre it had no chance of chasing multiple antelope running at full speed. I never saw which antelope gave the alarm call, but we guessed that one of the females must have seen the leopard through the bushes and her warning had been just enough to save the dominant male. The leopard did not appear to be too concerned, as it looked round for a few minutes quizzically before leaping up a nearby tree and promptly assuming the classic leopard position, with all four limbs trailing over one branch. Leopards



were very active at night during my stay and around half of my sightings came on the night drives, which were also very productive in terms of lions, spotted hyenas and a number of small carnivores. White-tailed mongoose were abundant and large-spotted genet were encountered reasonably regularly, but the real surprise for me was seeing a miombo genet in an area just west of their accepted range. I spoke to my guide about this and he informed me that they were observed fairly often and appeared to be increasing in number in that particular region. A couple of side-striped jackals and an African civet were also spotted at night and another highlight was a selous' mongoose, which we saw at dusk, just as we were setting out for a night drive. I had only seen this species twice previously and was very lucky with mongoose in general at Luangwa, finding six varieties in total,

including banded, dwarf and slender. Unfortunately, the last of the six species encountered was not a sighting I remember with any fondness. I was initially very excited to see a bushy-tailed mongoose creeping slowly through the vegetation as I returned from one nocturnal drive, but as I approached, I could see that it had actually been severely wounded and one of the guides told me that it had just been attacked by an owl. I went closer to look at the pitiful little creature hiding in the plants and, whilst I have only ever seen a handful of these elusive animals previously and have never been able to photograph one, I could not bring myself to take a picture. I was not sure how badly injured it was and we decided to give it the night to see if it had any chance of surviving. Sadly, we could see in the morning light that its spine had been badly damaged and that it was barely able to drag itself into cover when we checked it over. Although deeply distressing, we could not let it suffer any longer and one of the guides killed it painlessly, throwing the body

out into the bush so that another animal would at least have a meal and it would not have died totally in vain. The Luangwa Valley is a wild untamed place and in the north I once watched an epic battle between probably the largest and strongest buffalo I have ever seen and a pack of lions in an absolute frenzy. Certainly it was the bravest display I have witnessed, as a lone bull buffalo defied fifteen lions for the best part of three hours and counterattacked with such aggression that several lions were tossed aside, like a pet dog playing with a favourite toy. At one stage it seemed as if the buffalo might somehow survive, and I was certainly hoping that he would given his heroic stand, but these lions were no longer

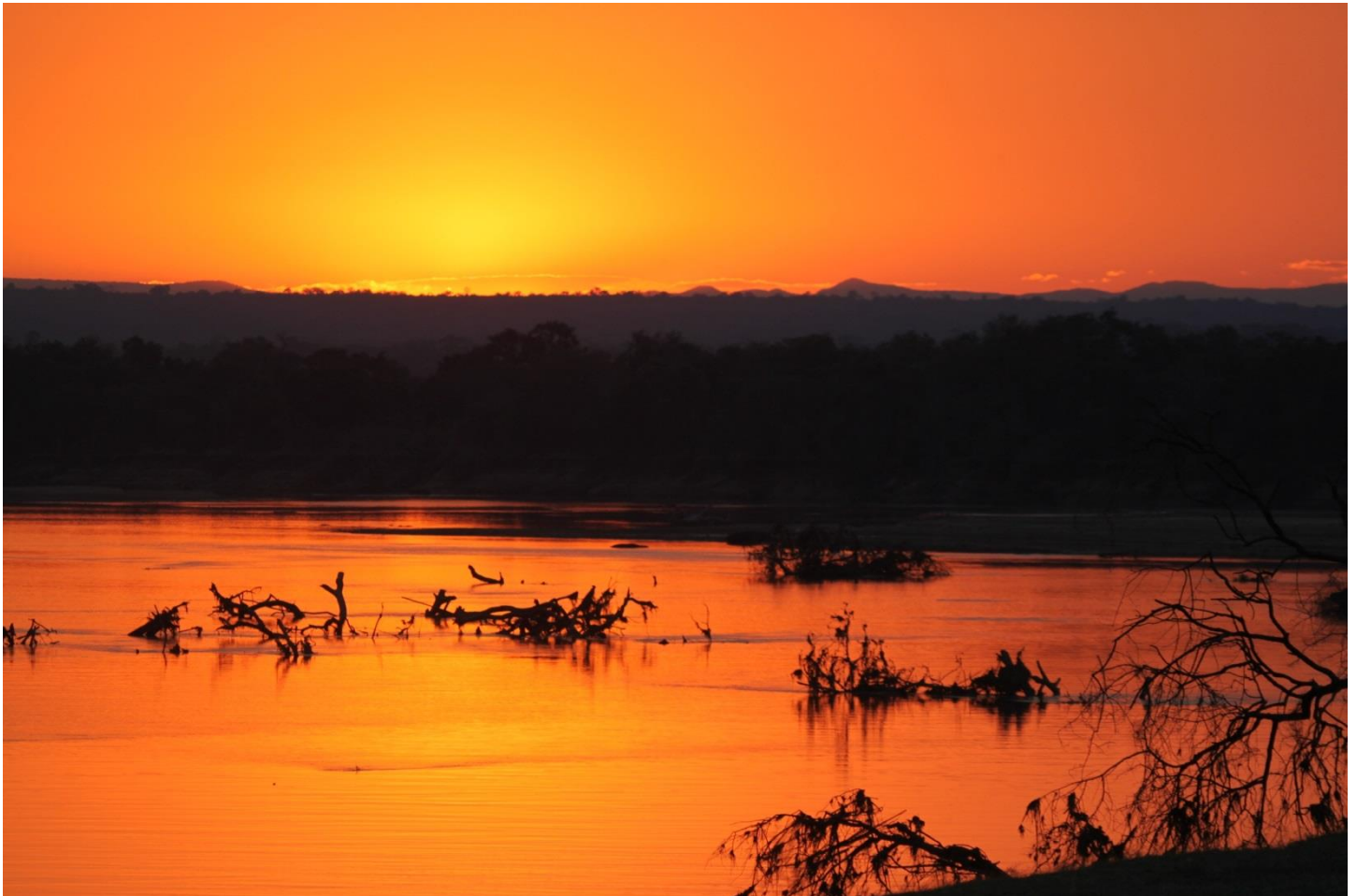


just hunting, more than one had been hurt and they were clearly angry. Apart from a few nursing wounds in the background, the majority of the lions had visibly lost control and when the buffalo finally went down I counted eleven individual lions on him, all biting at different parts of his body. Even then it took them several minutes to finally subdue the mighty beast and I will never forget its screams as they basically started eating it alive. The saddest part was that the buffalo had been part of a group of old bulls that were no longer able to stay with a herd, but the other seven had all continued to run when this one turned round and decided to make his final stand. Whilst the experience was incredible and has always stayed with me, I was not sorry to miss that type of event on this trip, although I only did so by a matter of minutes. We were actually considering taking a break for an hour when we came across a much smaller pride that had killed a buffalo in a dry part of the river and were resting beside the body before they began feeding. There were no males in sight and whilst I half expected one to emerge and take pride of place at the feast, that did not occur and instead the four lionesses started eating peacefully together. That same afternoon I went for a walk around the significant boundaries of our lodge,

where we were allowed to stroll unaccompanied despite the fact that there were no actual physical boundaries and the animals would come and go as they pleased throughout the day, including lions and leopards. It seemed a fairly strange rule that would allow individuals to walk where lions were roaming, but not one pace further, particularly as the grounds were so large and it was easy to meander a couple of kilometres from the main lodge. Nevertheless, it worked well for me, as I prefer to wander alone and I spent a few tranquil hours sitting quietly within a few metres of several buffalos and giraffes, as well as a very relaxed elephant happily ripping a number of trees to shreds. Part of the grounds overlook the devastatingly beautiful Luangwa River and as I strolled back watching the hippos, crocodiles and saddle-billed storks, it was impossible not to feel a real sense of a timeless Africa and of experiencing it in a way that the European pioneers must have in the mid 19th century. When I returned to the lodge, I asked my guide to take me to one of the many scenic stretches of river, where I sat



on the bank silently and let the sun slip away behind the most evocative of African landscapes. My next destination was not too shabby either, given that I was moving on to the resplendent Victoria Falls, one of the wonders of the continent, which I always visit



whenever I am even close to the area. Although I did spend time at the falls, including taking a helicopter flight over them when I found out that the microlights were not in operation, the other purpose of my short stay at Livingstone was to visit the white rhinos that had been recently introduced to the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park. I only spent an afternoon in the reserve, but the rhinos were easily found around their old holding pens and it was wonderful to see these animals in Zambia, despite the fact that white rhinoceros are not actually an indigenous species. To me, it is of almost no significance now where conservationists choose to relocate either black or white rhinos, as both animals have been so heavily persecuted they can no longer survive naturally and these essential breeding programmes are the only way to ensure their continued existence. In addition to an hour spent with the magnificent rhinos, I was fairly successful at Mosi-oa-Tunya, which is a very small reserve, and managed to find the large herd of buffalo in the north western section, as well as several elephants drinking in the shallows of the Zambezi. I also enjoyed a relaxing sunset cruise on this mighty river, to while away my final evening before leaving Zambia for Zimbabwe.



I had not visited Zimbabwe for a few years, but have always loved it and have always found the people here to be among the friendliest and kindest in Africa. What has happened to their country in recent years is a tragedy and as the people have suffered hardship and deprivation, inevitably the wildlife has suffered too. Poaching has increased, both for financial gain and also for food,



and deforestation is a major issue as entire areas are cleared to provide fuel in the absence of electricity to many rural areas. Although every African country has experienced poaching to a significant degree, historically, relatively few Zimbabweans have been involved in this barbaric business and the majority have always taken great pride in their country and in their wildlife. If you take the short journey across the border to Zambia you will never see a warthog near an urban population, as they are instantly killed and eaten. That was never the case in Zimbabwe, but any such sensitivities of course become irrelevant when you cannot feed your family. At the time of writing, gradual improvements are being seen, but the economy of the entire country remains precarious and only time will tell whether an inevitable change in leadership results in some stability for the people and wildlife of this wonderful country. Apart from the obvious signs, no fuel to power the pumps at the artificial waterholes in the parks and various food shortages, my trip was unaffected and it was lovely to return to Hwange after a number of years. In contrast to the largely fertile Luangwa Valley, Hwange sits in an arid region on the very edge of the Kalahari Basin and less than half of the mammals observed on the trip were seen at both national parks. Although some were just missed at Luangwa, I encountered eight new antelope species in Zimbabwe, including large herds of wildebeest and lower numbers of eland, roan and sable. Whilst my good fortune continued with small carnivores, the nocturnal animals changed as well and now I was seeing black-backed jackal, bat-eared fox, honey badger and common genet. The jackals and foxes were common during the day as well and my solitary honey badger ambled along when I had stopped to try and photograph one of numerous springhares, which were as frustratingly quick as they were abundant. Apart from the

ubiquitous lions, and a few species of antelope attempting to sleep and stay alive simultaneously, African civets were the only animals seen at night in both reserves. As has always been the case at Hwange, elephants are very much the dominant species and it was not unusual to watch 50 or 60 splashing about in a waterhole at a time. They were actually culled for a twenty-year period until 1986 and since then their numbers have increased significantly. At one stage I counted over two hundred elephants in a single afternoon and watched with amusement as a group of about twenty decided that a handful of buffalo had wallowed for far too long in one tempting pool and quickly removed them. There is not a great deal that can move a buffalo quickly, but several tonnes of elephant will certainly do the trick and the buffalo vacated the area as rapidly as if they themselves were chasing away warthogs. Giraffe, zebra and wildebeest were also widespread across the sandy plains and I was extremely fortunate to see one lone gemsbok, as these striking antelopes are exceptionally rare around the area that I was staying. I was less lucky in terms of large predators, with no leopards to



add to my tally at Luangwa and no cheetah for the entire trip. While it is always a disappointment not to see the most graceful of cats, it was not entirely unexpected on this occasion, as Luangwa does not support cheetah and they can be very difficult to find at Hwange. Lions were routinely encountered, but sadly several prides were being monitored by researchers and many were wearing collars, which I always find difficult to accept on such magnificent creatures. I also spent a great deal of time actively searching for a pack of wild dogs that were seen just before I arrived. Unless they are denning and known to be in a particular area, this is not really a very sensible approach, at least not when you consider the nomadic lifestyle of these beautiful painted dogs and that they can run at speeds above 50km per hour for extended periods. I would have actually been

extremely fortunate to have found them in this way and had more or less given up on both the wild dogs and cheetah when the manager at the lodge mentioned that some fuel had become available and that he intended spending the next day, my last full day of the trip, visiting as many of the artificial waterholes as possible and getting the pumps working again. Having seen how dry the conditions were and how desperately the animals depended on just a couple of remaining waterholes, I offered to give up my final day to help and we left before first light the next morning in order to cover as much ground as possible. After eleven hours we had

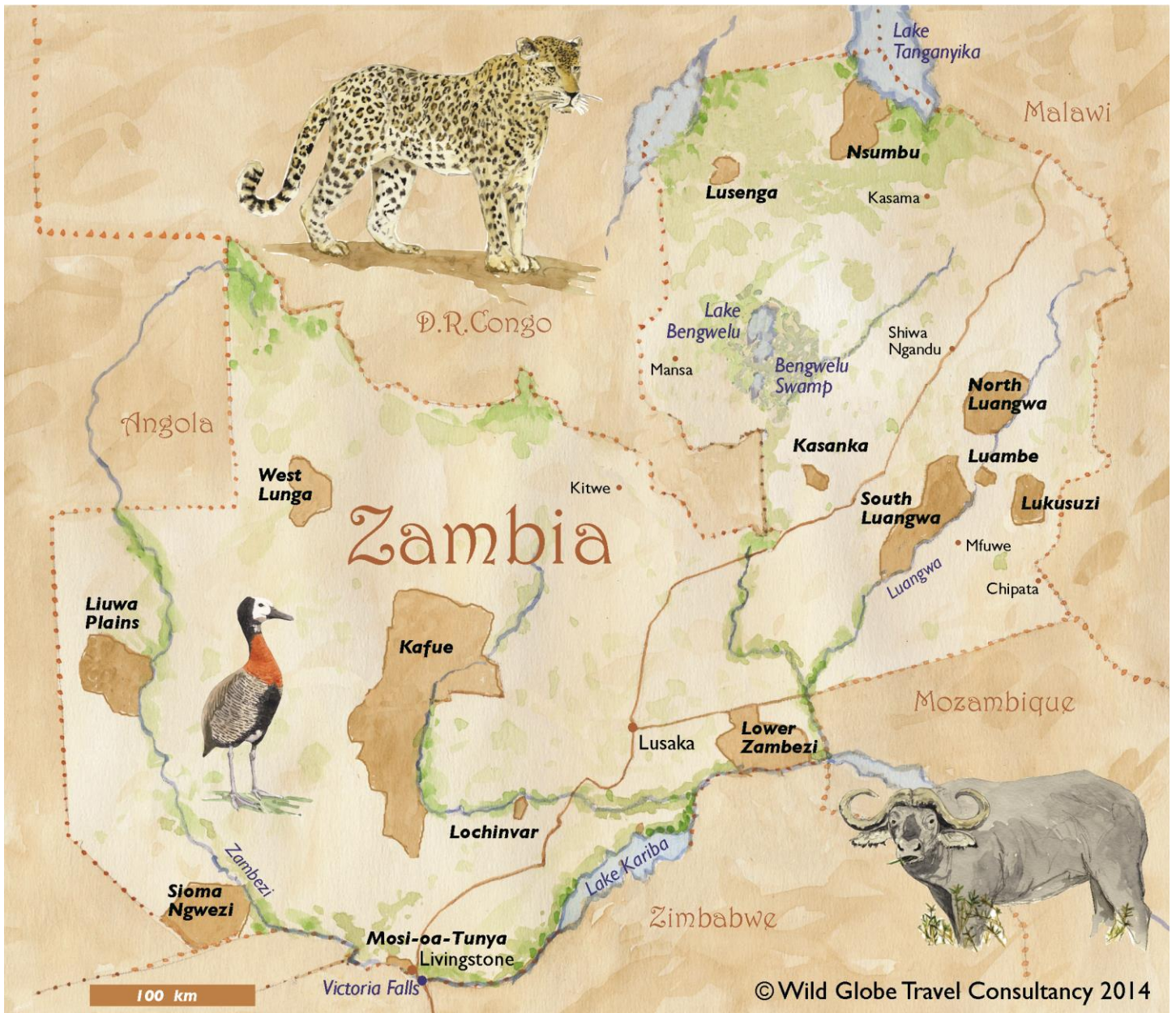
managed to get three pumps working in the more remote regions of the park and were within about 40kms of the lodge when I saw a dog running along the side of the road in the distance. I did not initially get excited, as it was a lone dog and not a pack and we had left the park a while back to use a faster road to hopefully get back before dark. In doing so, we had already passed a few settlements with domestic dogs and I presumed that this was probably another. However, as we got closer we could clearly make out the highly distinctive gait of a jogging wild dog and the lodge manager instantly accelerated and moved across the road in order to put some space between us and the animal we were now rapidly approaching. By this stage we could see that it was a wild dog and that my luck had come all at once after searching in vain for so many days. It got even better over the next few minutes, as it had slowed considerably and was soon walking parallel to the vehicle, as relaxed as these gorgeous animals always appear to be around people. We drove alongside for some time while I attempted to take photographs on the bumpy dirt road and then thankfully the alert dog took several sniffs of the air and stopped to rest a few metres in from the road. After posing considerably for pictures and having a quick nap, it obviously either heard or smelled its pack and was instantly gone, disappearing into the bush like a ghost. As encounters with a single animal go, this one was as exhilarating as it was unexpected, particularly as I had thought that in offering to help with the waterholes, I had more or less given up the opportunity of seeing the one animal I had spent several days looking for. It was a wonderful way to end a very special trip and as I departed the next morning, driving past another large herd of elephants, I reflected on the immense changes in Zimbabwe since my previous visit and how important it was that the people and animals were finally allowed the peace and security they each deserved.

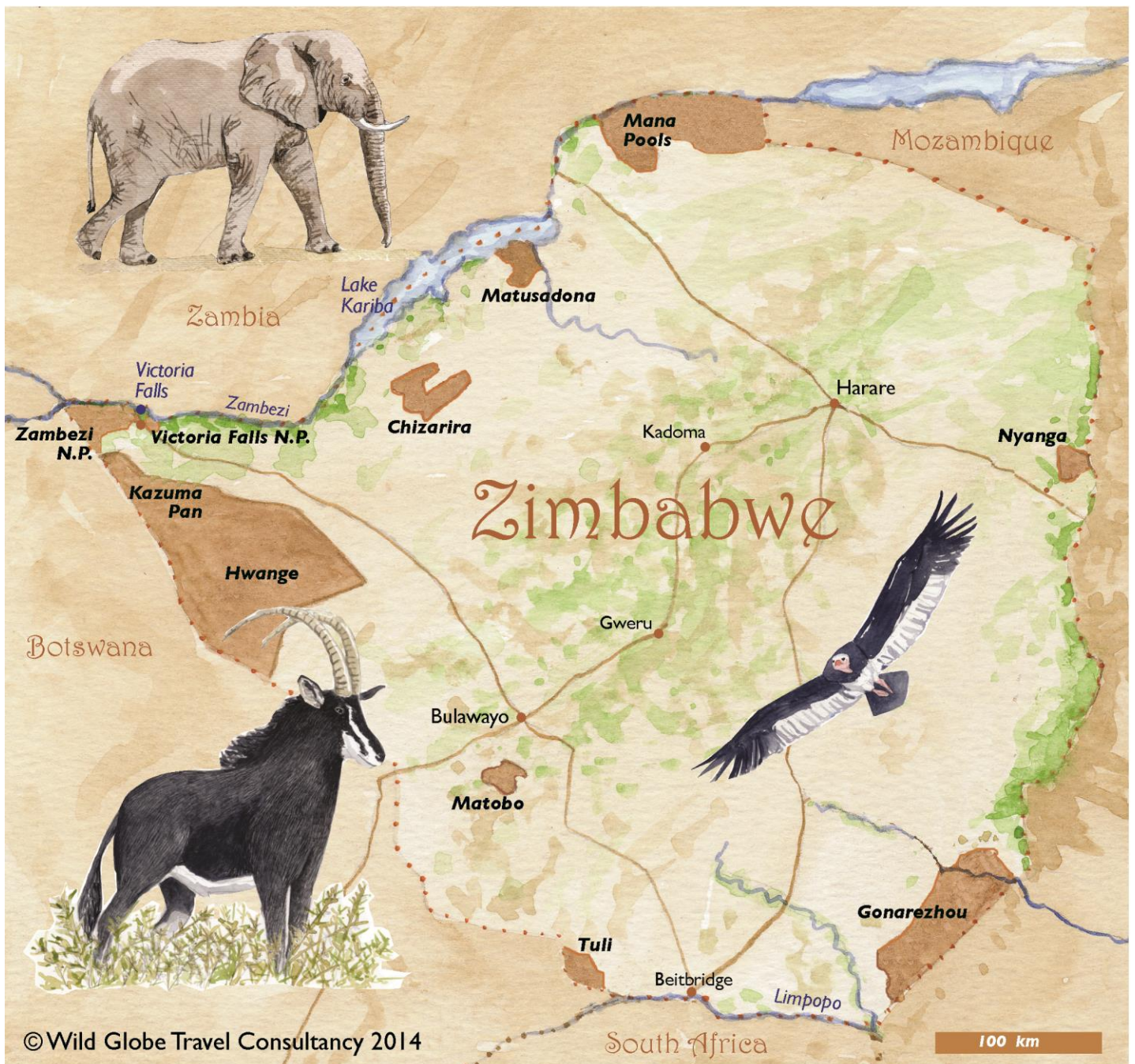


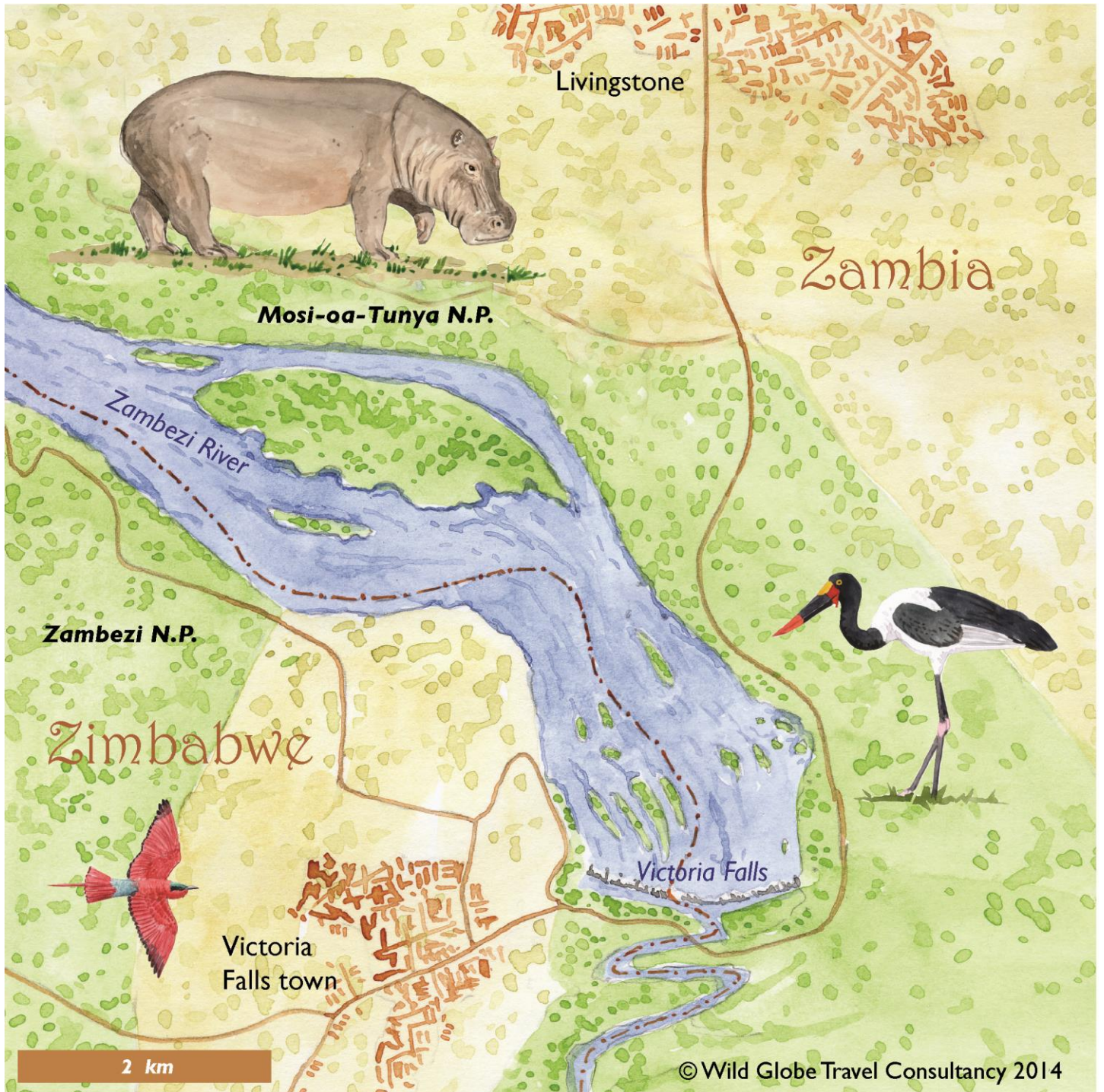
| No. | Species | Scientific Name | Notes |
|-----|---------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Lion | <i>Panthera leo</i> | Several at both major reserves. |
| 2 | Leopard | <i>Panthera pardus</i> | Sixteen at Luangwa, at least nine of which were different animals. |
| 3 | African Wild Dog | <i>Lycaon pictus</i> | Lone individual just outside Hwange. |
| 4 | Black-backed Jackal | <i>Canis mesomelas</i> | Several at Hwange only. |
| 5 | Side-striped Jackal | <i>Canis adustus</i> | Two at Luangwa at night. |
| 6 | Bat-eared Fox | <i>Otocyon megalotis</i> | Several at night and one at close quarters in the day at Hwange. |
| 7 | Spotted Hyena | <i>Crocuta crocuta</i> | Good numbers at Luangwa, two at Hwange. |
| 8 | Honey Badger | <i>Mellivora capensis</i> | One on the first night game drive at Hwange. |
| 9 | African Civet | <i>Civettictis civetta</i> | One at Luangwa and several at night at Hwange. |
| 10 | Banded Mongoose | <i>Mungos mungo</i> | Two large groups at Luangwa. |

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|----|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 11 | Common Dwarf Mongoose | <i>Helogale parvula</i> | Several groups at Luangwa and Hwange. |
| 12 | White-tailed Mongoose | <i>Ichneumia albicauda</i> | Abundant at night at Luangwa. |
| 13 | Slender Mongoose | <i>Herpestes sanguineus</i> | At least five at Luangwa. |
| 14 | Bushy-tailed Mongoose | <i>Bdeogale Crassicauda</i> | One animal mortally wounded by an owl at Luangwa. |
| 15 | Selous' Mongoose | <i>Paracynictis selousi</i> | One briefly at Luangwa. |
| 16 | Common Genet | <i>Genetta genetta</i> | Several on night drives at Hwange. |
| 17 | Central African Large-spotted Genet | <i>Genetta maculata</i> | Several at night at Luangwa. |
| 18 | Miombo Genet | <i>Genetta angolensis</i> | One at night at Luangwa. |
| 19 | Impala | <i>Aepyceros melampus</i> | Common at both reserves and at Mosi-oa-Tunya. |
| 20 | Sable Antelope | <i>Hippotragus niger</i> | Several small herds at Hwange. |
| 21 | Roan Antelope | <i>Hippotragus equinus</i> | Three at Hwange. |
| 22 | Common Waterbuck | <i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i> | Several groups at Luangwa, small number at Hwange. |
| 23 | Puku | <i>Kobus vardonii</i> | Large numbers at Luangwa. |
| 24 | Common Wildebeest | <i>Connochaetes taurinus</i> | Large numbers at Hwange. |
| 25 | Common Duiker | <i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i> | Lone individual at Hwange. |
| 26 | Greater Kudu | <i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i> | Several sightings at both major reserves. |
| 27 | Southern Reedbuck | <i>Redunca arundinum</i> | Small number at Hwange. |
| 28 | Gemsbok | <i>Oryx gazella</i> | One lone animal at Hwange. |
| 29 | Common Eland | <i>Tragelaphus oryx</i> | Several small herds at Hwange. |
| 30 | Steenbok | <i>Raphicerus campestris</i> | Small number at Hwange. |
| 31 | Bushbuck | <i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i> | One at Luangwa, several at Hwange and Mosi-oa-Tunya. |
| 32 | African Buffalo | <i>Syncerus caffer</i> | Large numbers at both reserves and Mosi-oa-Tunya. |
| 33 | Plains Zebra | <i>Equus quagga</i> | Several herds at both reserves. |
| 34 | Giraffe | <i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i> | Good numbers at both reserves and a few at Mosi-oa-Tunya. |
| 35 | African Elephant | <i>Loxodonta africana</i> | Large numbers at both major reserves and around Victoria Falls.. |
| 36 | Hippopotamus | <i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i> | Abundant at Luangwa and a few at Hwange. |
| 37 | White Rhinoceros | <i>Ceratotherium simum</i> | Four at Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park. |
| 38 | Chacma Baboon | <i>Papio ursinus</i> | Common at both reserves and at Mosi-oa-Tunya. |
| 39 | Vervet Monkey | <i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i> | Common at Mosi-oa-Tunya and a few at Hwange. |
| 40 | Common Warthog | <i>Phacochoerus africanus</i> | Common in all areas visited. |
| 41 | African Savanna Hare | <i>Lepus microtis</i> | Several on night drives at Hwange. |
| 42 | Short-snouted Sengi | <i>Elephantulus brachyrhynchus</i> | One near the lodge at Luangwa. |
| 43 | Springhare | <i>Pedetes capensis</i> | Abundant at night at Hwange. |









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