



Wild Globe Travel Consultancy

Tailored Wildlife, Wilderness and Adventure Travel Across the Globe.

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SOUTH AFRICA AND BOTSWANA

Date - December 2012

Duration - 20 Days

Destinations

Johannesburg - Kimberley - Mokala National Park - Dronfield Nature Reserve - Benfontein Nature Reserve -
Upington - Augrabies Falls National Park - Kgalagadi Transfrontier National Park

Trip Overview

A relatively short trip to try out a new guide for Southern Africa, including future tours to Botswana and Namibia. The trip was very well organised and highly successful in terms of wildlife, as we encountered 55 of the 57 mammals that I had thought we might see,



with only caracal and pangolin eluding us. The tour began in Kimberley with a visit to Mokala National Park, which was new to me and a nice surprise in terms of the variety of animals. The majority were ungulates, including healthy herds of sable antelope, greater kudu, topi, hartebeest and eland, as well as common waterbuck, buffalo and white rhino, which we would not encounter again, as the areas around the Kgalagadi are extremely arid and do not support these species. We also found a small group of nyala, the first of dozens of meerkats and a large herd of black wildebeest, a rare and highly nervous relative of the common wildebeest. Although our night game drives began relatively sedately, with just black-backed jackal, cape porcupine and a number of springhares to show for our first effort, it was largely our nocturnal success that made the trip so memorable, as I have rarely experienced so many superb sightings at night.

After a brief visit to the 'Big Hole', a vast open mine and the site of the diamond rush of 1871, we moved on to the Dronfield and Benfontein nature reserves, which, appropriately enough given their involvement in the diamond industry, are both owned by De Beers. The plan was to explore Dronfield by day and to visit Benfontein at night, as there are researchers at the latter studying the black-footed cat and we were going to join them for an evening to search for the smallest cat in Africa. Dronfield is not a massive reserve and we were able to see large numbers of both roan and sable antelope, as well as the ubiquitous meerkat and our first yellow mongoose. Our night at Benfontein was even better, for not only were we able to spend over an hour with a solitary black-footed cat, admittedly with the assistance of researchers and the aid of telemetry, but we saw seven aardwolves, an incredible number for such a generally elusive creature, and an armadillo, another highly secretive nocturnal mammal that I always spend time looking for, usually without a great deal of success. We were delighted to be able to observe the tiny, delicate cat for so long, but there is nothing quite like finding an animal for yourself and the next evening we were able to do exactly that, as we visited a nearby private reserve with a good reputation for armadillo, only to encounter another black-footed cat within the first ten minutes of our night drive. Two more armadillos followed, as well a family of bat-eared foxes and when we left the Kimberley area the next morning to drive to Upington, we did so in very high spirits. I had only visited Augrabies Falls National Park for a few hours previously, as the Kgalagadi



Transfrontier National Park to the north is one of my favourite reserves in South Africa and I have always travelled directly there when in the area. I therefore arranged to spend the best part of two days and a night at Augrabies, partly to assess the resident wildlife, partly to familiarise myself with the layout of the park and also to photograph the impressive falls and extraordinary Quiver trees, which I was fortunately able to do against the brightest of blue skies. As with many arid regions, the species at Augrabies are limited by the harsh environment and lack of plentiful grazing, but the park is certainly worth visiting, as we spent a lot of the time looking for caracal and still managed to find mountain zebra and smith's red rock hare, both specialities of the park, as well as rock hyrax, vervet monkey, slender mongoose, gemsbok, klipspringer, greater kudu and a fabulous black

spitting cobra. This was the highlight of the stay for me, as it is not often that you get good views of a spitting cobra and this individual was sufficiently lethargic, we found him basking in the sun on the warm road, to allow us to get out of the vehicle and film at close quarters. From Augrabies Falls we travelled north



to a private reserve bordering the Kgalagadi national park, where we camped for a few days, as there are no lodges and we did not want to waste time driving between the reserve and the nearest town each day. It was a very good decision, as we would not have been able to stay late each evening if we had opted for a hotel and the reserve was so productive at night that we often found ourselves still spotlighting at 1am. We saw zorilla, or striped polecat as they are known in Southern Africa, wild cat, porcupine, springhare and bat-eared fox on every night drive, as well three different aardvarks, several cape fox and two leopards, a juvenile sitting on the wall of a solar-powered pump at a waterhole and a large adult male. We actually lost count of the zorillas and porcupines at one stage and most of the animals were so prevalent that we abandoned the vehicle on several occasions and went to photograph them on foot. One great encounter actually was in the vehicle, when we saw an aardvark in the distance and attempted to get closer. As we did so, the aardvark bolted, as they are prone to do, but instead of dashing off into the scrub, it attempted to take shelter in a hole at the side of the road. Sadly for the rather confused aardvark, it had tried to hide in one of its own feeding holes and not an actual burrow and was left for several seconds with its hind quarters sticking up in the air before it eventually decided that running was the better option and we left it to scuttle off into the night. The nocturnal activity aside, the real beauty of our stay here, was that we were the only visitors, as this is private land which my guide manages and, as such, we could go where we wanted when we wanted with no possibility of meeting other tourists or safari vehicles. This is my idea of heaven and we had a number of interesting encounters as we explored the solitude, including a magnificently patterned cape cobra and a large puff adder, which shared our camp for three days, sleeping contentedly under a fallen tree five metres from my tent. This reserve and its resident leopards aside, we had not yet been in the right areas for the big predators, but that all changed as we moved on to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier National Park, a massive reserve shared between



South Africa and Botswana and one of my favourite destinations in Africa. Whether viewed from the Kgalagadi, the Central Kalahari game reserve in Botswana or from Namibia, there is something magical about the Kalahari, as it is not a true desert and its dramatic landscapes support far more life than an actual desert could. The result is a wonderful combination of bleak, haunting scenery, bathed in a glorious light and adorned by some of the most striking animals imaginable. The entire Kalahari is a photographers dream and the Kgalagadi section probably includes the most attractive areas and the highest density of animals, certainly wildlife is easier to see here than further north. We had twelve days in all to explore and split those between the rest camps and satellite camps on the South African side and campsites in Botswana, as the Botswana section of the reserve has almost no infrastructure. I would have liked longer of course, as

you can cover big areas each day here and this is certainly not a park to rush. Indeed, it can often make sense to sit quietly at one of the waterholes for a few hours and see what drifts in, as any available water is precious in these arid conditions and most of the drinking holes receive a great deal of activity during the day and at night. We saw a number of animals doing exactly this, including

brown hyena, several lions and our only honey badger of the trip. The only slight downside of the Kgalagadi is that you are unable to game drive independently at night and have to instead book a guided night drive at one of the rest camps, which are mixed at best and are generally with other visitors. To partially avoid this, we drove to the Kaa Concession in Botswana, which is actually just outside the national park and is not therefore subject to the park regulations. The drive was a fairly long one, but our efforts were immediately rewarded with yet another outstanding nocturnal drive. In addition to three wildcats, we saw our fifth aardvark and first spotted hyena of the trip, as well as a cape fox carrying and eating a rat it had just killed. The highlight of the night was an incredibly calm leopard, which we sat and watched for about fifteen minutes a few metres from our vehicle. On the drive back we were surprised by a large colony of banded mongoose. in just about the most southerly extreme of their range, and at the Grootkolk rest camp we spent the afternoon in the company of a lone spotted hyena and much of the evening observing the brown variety at the waterhole. Over the course of our last few days we visited





the Gharagab, Nossob, Mata Mata and Twee Rivieren camps, all well as the Mabuasehube area in Botswana, as I wanted to research the latest facilities and resident wildlife at as many locations as possible. We missed a caracal by a matter of minutes just beyond Nossob and our fourth and final leopard sighting occurred to the south of Gharagab, when another serene individual strolled along the



road beside us in the middle of the afternoon, before crossing within a few inches of the front of our vehicle. Gharagab was also the scene of some fascinating natural behaviour between three large male lions, one of whom was the dominant male in the area and had reigned for almost ten years, an incredibly long time for one lion to protect a pride and repel challengers to his territory. Sadly, his supremacy may have been about to come to an end, as a pair of brothers, much younger than the old king and very much in their prime, had entered his domain and began roaring challenges into the night. As we watched enthralled, the two intruders began scent marking where the older male had marked earlier and, at some point, the inevitable confrontation would take place. Whether the older lion had the strength to withstand one more battle is questionable, but it is unlikely that any eventual conquerors will be able to hold the same territory for as

long as that mighty animal. Lions were abundant in most areas, as is generally the case here, and we saw a number of different groups, including a large pride with several highly active cubs, all of whom were fighting boisterously as the adults took turns to eat a young wildebeest they had just killed. On another occasion we came across the ridiculous sight of four young males all trying to seek shelter from the midday heat under probably the smallest tree in the Kalahari. The paltry tree cast barely any shadow, but none of the lions were prepared to move and instead they all kept vying for the best position in a desperate attempt to find a tiny spot of shade. Cats in

general are widespread in the Kgalagadi and it is not uncommon to see all three of the larger species in a single day. In all we saw twelve different cheetahs, including cubs, and exactly the same number of wildcats, a few of which were spotted during the day. Despite the relatively low mammal diversity, those that do occur are fairly easy to see and we enjoyed countless views of common genet, meerkat, ground squirrel, yellow mongoose, black-backed jackal, porcupine and zorilla, as well as large herds of springbok, gemsbok, wildebeest and giraffe. At one point, we were watching a pride of lions lazing in the sun on one side of our vehicle and a pack of spotted hyenas at distance on the other, only to see a female cheetah suddenly break cover and run at a mixed herd of springbok and wildebeest at full speed. I absolutely love watching these graceful animals sprinting and although on this occasion she missed a springbok by a



matter of inches, when we returned later that evening there was a lone female springbok crying out for her lost young and we knew that the cheetah had been successful. Another dramatic event was not actually with a predator, as we came across a huge dust cloud on one of our drives and stopped to watch a herd of at least 300 eland emerging from the haze and running directly in front of us and away across the savannah. You rarely see this many eland together and it was another unforgettable experience in a unique destination that specialises in them. When time permits, I will arrange further trips to Namibia and Botswana with this guide, as he has a vast knowledge of all of Southern Africa and has personally visited every national park and reserve in all three countries.





No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>	Between 30 and 40 in the Kgalagadi.
2	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>	Four, all in or around the Kgalagadi.
3	Cheetah	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>	Multiple sightings of twelve animals in the Kgalagadi.
4	Wild Cat	<i>Felis silvestris</i>	Fifteen in the Kgalagadi and neighbouring private reserve.
5	Black-footed Cat	<i>Felis nigripes</i>	One at Dronfield with researchers and one at a nearby private reserve.
6	Black-backed Jackal	<i>Canis mesomelas</i>	Common at every location excluding Augrabies.
7	Bat-eared Fox	<i>Otocyon megalotis</i>	Over twenty at night and several during the day.
8	Cape Fox	<i>Vulpes chama</i>	Seven in total in the Kgalagadi and neighbouring reserve.
9	Aardwolf	<i>Proteles cristata</i>	Seven at Benfontein and two on a private reserve.
10	Spotted Hyena	<i>Crocota crocuta</i>	Several at various locations in the Kgalagadi.
11	Brown Hyena	<i>Hyaena brunnea</i>	Five in the Kgalagadi, all on the South African side.
12	Honey Badger	<i>Mellivora capensis</i>	Lone individual drinking early in the morning at the Grootkolk waterhole.
13	Zorilla	<i>Ictonyx striatus</i>	At least 20 sightings over three nights on the private reserve near the Kgalagadi.
14	Meerkat	<i>Suricata suricatta</i>	Abundant at every location excluding Augrabies.
15	Yellow Mongoose	<i>Cynictis penicillata</i>	Common at every location excluding Augrabies.
16	Banded Mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>	One group when leaving the Kaa Concession area.
17	Slender Mongoose	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>	Lone individual at Augrabies, several in the Kgalagadi.
18	Common Genet	<i>Genetta genetta</i>	Several individuals at night in the Kgalagadi.
19	Springbok	<i>Antidorcas marsupialis</i>	Encountered at every reserve.
20	Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>	Mokala and Dronfield only.
21	Sable Antelope	<i>Hippotragus niger</i>	Large groups just before Mokala and at Dronfield.
22	Roan Antelope	<i>Hippotragus equinus</i>	Several at Dronfield Nature Reserve.
23	Common Waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>	Small herd at a waterhole at Mokala National Park.
24	Common Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>	Large numbers everywhere excluding Augrabies.
25	Black Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes gnou</i>	Herd of about 50 at Mokala National Park.
26	Topi	<i>Damaliscus lunatus</i>	Several at both Mokala and Dronfield.
27	Blesbok	<i>Damaliscus pygargus</i>	Low numbers at Mokala and Dronfield.
28	Common Duiker	<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>	One or two individuals at Mokala and Dronfield.
29	Greater Kudu	<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>	Populations at every reserve visited.
30	Nyala	<i>Tragelaphus angasii</i>	Small group at Mokala only.
31	Gemsbok	<i>Oryx gazella</i>	Abundant at every reserve visited.
32	Klipspringer	<i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>	Two pairs and an individual at Augrabies Falls.
33	Hartebeest	<i>Alcelaphus buselaphus</i>	Common at every reserve.
34	Common Eland	<i>Tragelaphus oryx</i>	Widespread and a herd of about 300 in the Kgalagadi.
35	Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>	Scattered individuals at every reserve except Augrabies.
36	African Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	Herds at Mokala National Park.
37	Plains Zebra	<i>Equus quagga</i>	Herds at Mokala and Dronfield.
38	Mountain Zebra	<i>Equus zebra</i>	Two small herds at Augrabies Falls.
39	Giraffe	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>	Common at every major location.
40	White Rhinoceros	<i>Ceratotherium simum</i>	Just one in vegetation at Mokala National Park.
41	Aardvark	<i>Orycteropus afer</i>	Five at three locations.
42	Chacma Baboon	<i>Papio ursinus</i>	Several at Augrabies Falls.

43	Vervet Monkey	<i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i>	A small group at Augrabies Falls.
44	Common Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>	Abundant at every location.
45	Rock Hyrax	<i>Procavia capensis</i>	Several at Augrabies Falls.
46	Cape Hare	<i>Lepus capensis</i>	Two in the Kgalagadi.
47	Scrub Hare	<i>Lepus saxatilis</i>	Several, first seen at Dronfield Nature Reserve.
48	Smith's Red Rock Hare	<i>Pronolagus rupestris</i>	Two individuals at Augrabies Falls.
49	Bushveld Elephant Shrew	<i>Elephantulus intufi</i>	One at Nossob camp in the Kgalagadi.
50	Cape Porcupine	<i>Hystrix africaeaustralis</i>	At least ten over several destinations.
51	South African Ground Squirrel	<i>Xerus inauris</i>	Abundant in the Kgalagadi.
52	Springhare	<i>Pedetes capensis</i>	Common at most locations at night.
53	Brant's Whistling Rat	<i>Parotomys brantsii</i>	Several in the Kgalagadi.
54	Four-striped Grass Mouse	<i>Rhabdomys pumilio</i>	Widespread in the Kgalagadi.
55	Acacia Rat	<i>Thallomys paedulus</i>	One at Grootkolk rest camp.







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