

South Africa - Kruger

Naturetrek Tour Report

12 – 21 October 2015



Young male Leopard near Pretoriuskop



Oribi, Veloren Valei NR



Wild Dogs



Spotted Hyena

Report & images compiled by Jason Stewart



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Tour Participants: Jason Stewart (leader) with 4 Naturetrek clients

Summary:

As always the weather had its say. We started out with high temperatures around 37 degrees Celsius, to be followed by a high of 21 degrees Celsius. On the back of an open vehicle this is pretty cold and, thankfully, it warmed up again towards the second half of the trip. So thank you to the team for taking it in their stride with no complaints and always being on time for their drives. We had good sightings with some of the cats especially being very close and some of the Elephant even closer. It was a pity we didn't get the Sable, which was not through lack of trying, but we saw 36 mammal species during the trip. The group made it a most enjoyable guiding experience and we hope to see you back in South Africa one day.

Day 1

Monday 12th October

Flight from UK to O.R.Tambo International Airport, Johannesburg.

Day 2

Tuesday 13th October

Duck & Trout, Dullstroom

The flight arrived on time with three different Naturetrek tour groups together. After sorting out who was with which trip, our group headed towards Tshwane and a small nature reserve called Rietvlei. Here, we spotted some of the Highveld game species such as Blesbuck and Black Wildebeest, which we wouldn't get in the Kruger. After a short drive, it was back on the road heading east to Dullstroom, stopping at Alzu petrol stop before reaching our overnight accommodation at Dullstroom Inn at 2.15pm. It had been very hot and windy on the road. At 3.30 we went up to Verloren Valei Nature Reserve to try to spot a few other Highveld animals. We were successful in seeing Oribi and Grey Rhebok. A special sighting on the way up was of the endemic Blue Crane. We arrived back around 5.30 in time for a break and dinner.

Mammals for the day: 10

Day 3

Wednesday 14th October

Satara, Kruger Park

Waking to another clear and warm day, the group was up and eager, and by 6am we were back at the Verloren Valei, seeing Oribi again plus Blesbuck. After a tea break overlooking the area, it was back down for breakfast, spotting a Long-crested Eagle on the way down. We departed at 9am, travelling through the Strijdom Tunnel towards Hoedspruit, where we stopped for a short break to buy snacks, and then on to Orpen Gate. Here we met Carol-Anne, and changed to our open vehicle for the duration of the Kruger section of the trip. It was very hot, around 37 degrees Celsius, so we were not expecting to see much on the way in. As always in nature things run to their own tune, and we came across four female and one male Lion next to the road, in the shade, plus Elephant and plenty of plains animals. We arrived at Satara by 3.45pm, checked in and then went out again at 4.30, to be back by 6pm.

Mammals for the day: 16

Day 4

Thursday 15th October

Satara, Kruger Park

Starting with our morning tea and coffee, we then headed out north and then east onto the S90 and the Gudzani road. It was a fairly quiet morning, but we did have the normal plains game such as Zebra and Blue Wildebeest. Once on the S41 (Gudzani road), Dave spotted a male and female Lion, not very close but clearly visible through the binoculars. After leaving the sighting, a new mammal species was a group of Banded Mongoose that crossed the road in front of us and moved along fairly rapidly on their daily hunt. Also on this route was a family of Ground Hornbill, a threatened species and always good to see. Further along we had another male Lion, but this time we could only see his mane and so it was not a great sighting although, if we had had time, we would probably have seen a bit more of him when he moved. We then returned along the S100, back to breakfast and a break.

For the afternoon drive, we took the H7 west and, not far from Satara, we spotted another new mammal, a Side-striped Jackal. It had come onto the road and then darted back into the grass but we were able to get a good look before it disappeared. We then turned onto the S40 and headed North to the Timbavati picnic site. We came across another group of Lion, but again doing what they do best: we could just see bellies and the occasional paw in the air. Apart from Elephant and Dwarf Mongoose, the rest of the drive was filled with general plains game, and a Leopard Tortoise out after the brief rain shower which happened during our mid-day break. It was then back to camp.

Mammals for the day: 17

Day 5

Friday 16th October

Skukuza, Kruger Park

Today started very cool and windy. We took the S100 heading east in the hope of seeing Cheetah but it was a slow start, probably due to the weather. We always have good sightings of male Water Buck along here, with impressive horns, and other general game such as Impala and Zebra. We had a quick stop at Gudzani dam where the water level was very low. Here we got Hippo, crocodile and quite a few bird species, making most of the fish. A Yellow-billed Stork caught a fish, only to have it stolen by a Marabou Stork. This is a classic case of the survival of the biggest. On the tarmac road back west, the H6, we had two separate Spotted Hyena sightings. One was a lone female while the others were four adults, one suckling a pup. There was also plenty of Giraffe, Elephant, Zebra and Wildebeest on the way back to camp.

After packing and having a leisurely breakfast, it was time to leave Satara and head out to Skukuza, our next camp. On the way down we passed the Just Cats! group heading in the opposite direction. Although it was windy and cold, we had another two Lion sightings and some Buffalo. Satara, which is normally good for Buffalo, was very quiet this time. Most of the herds had moved south to where some rain had fallen and there was better grazing. We stopped at Tshokwane picnic site for a break before continuing on, picking up two new mammals with Klipspringer and Nyala. We arrived at Skukuza at 3.30.

After an hour's break, we went out along the Sabie River where we had a close encounter with a young Elephant that added some excitement to the drive. Shortly after it began to rain, so we turned back and, on the way, had

three Speke's Hinged-back Tortoises drinking water on the side of the road.

Mammals for the day: 19

Day 6

Saturday 17th October

Skukuza, Kruger Park

Our full day in Skukuza started out overcast and mild and we took the S42 towards Kruger Gate. On this short stretch we had a new mammal species: four Wild Dogs were running down the road towards us. We quickly turned round in the hope they would continue down the road. They ran with us for a short distance before turning into the bush and were gone. A brilliant start to the day!

We then turned onto the S1 (Diospane road). Along here, we came across our first White Rhino which was a female with one sub adult and a younger one. We then turned onto the S65 south and onto Transport dam. Not much was happening, so we turned back, to be stopped by another open vehicle who told us about a Leopard sighting, west down the road. Arriving at the sighting, there were a number of vehicles already present, and the sighting was of a Leopard on a termite mound. We didn't hang about too long as the view wasn't great, so we headed back east to take the H3 south. Here we came across three other vehicles and were told of another Leopard. We couldn't see anything at first, but then a nice male came out from under the road and walked away from us, giving us a great view. It was then back to Skukuza on the S114. It was a good morning and we had a great breakfast overlooking the Sabie River.

For the afternoon, we headed out along the Sabie River. There was no rain this time, and we had good sightings general game and plenty of Hippo. We went across the high level bridge onto the H12 and then north to Nwatindlophu dam. Just before, there were two Lion, male and female, that had been mating but this must have been at the end of her cycle as no action took place while we were there. Heading back to Skukuza, we then happened upon a young Southern African Python crossing the road, which is one of my favourites to see in the wild.

Mammals for the day: 18

Day 7

Sunday 18th October

Pretoriuskop, Kruger Park

It was another cool and overcast morning to start and, after hearing of a Leopard kill that was right next to the road, we took off in that direction. After crossing the low-level bridge, on the road in front of us was a pack of Wild Dog, five adults and twelve pups, which were finishing off a female Nyala. It was great to see the interaction with the pups and we spent a good while watching. From here we continued north, but did not get the Leopard. On the way back we also saw the male Lion from the previous day, but no female.

After breakfast it was time again to pack and head out to the next and last stop, Pretoriuskop. On the way we had three separate Rhino sightings, and a big Bull Elephant with some impressive tusks. It was hot by now, and we arrived at 2pm for a break. Out again at 4pm, we took the Fayi Loop south of the camp, seeing lots of general game and our first big herd of Buffalo. Some interesting interaction that we witnessed around the

Shabeni hills was of some young Dwarf Mongoose on a granite rock and a Giant Plated Lizard that ran out, bit one and chased them off. We then returned to our camp.

Mammals for the day: 24

Day 8

Monday 19th October

Pretoriuskop, Kruger Park

For our full day at Pretoriuskop, we took a long drive out to Afsaal on the H2-2 (Voortrekker road). Not far from camp, we had some Buffalo in the road. We stopped to have a look, at which point they started to move away. Stewart, sitting in the back then said “what’s that?” when seeing something move out the corner of his eye. It was a Leopard moving down a sloping tree; it went off in the direction of the Buffalo. Along the road we then saw Rhino, Elephant and Kudu and, just south of Afsaal picnic site, we came across another two Hyena. One was suckling two pups and a third, which walked past the two and into the bush, looked quite pregnant. On the way back to camp, we were stopped again by another vehicle to tell us of two young Leopard near camp.

Once in camp at breakfast, another guide told us of a young male Leopard sitting on the rocks close to camp. So after breakfast, we went back out, and there was the Leopard. After all this, I’m sure the one we saw in the morning was this young male because an adult female wouldn’t have wasted her time going after Buffalo. It was a great sighting. After this, we went back to camp and had a break. Our afternoon drive was along the loops around camp, and a new mammal for the day was the Common Reedbuck.

Mammals for the day: 16

Day 9

Tuesday 20th October

Departure

For our last drive we took the S7 (Albasini road) north in the hope of seeing Sable. After reaching the Diospane road, we turned around and made our way back to camp. There was once again good general game species, but no new ones. We then packed up and went to breakfast. Nic Squires then came to swap our open vehicle with a closed Quantum, and we then said farewell to the Kruger and headed up to O.R.Tambo airport.

Mammals for the day: 17

Day 10

Wednesday 21st October

Return to UK from Johannesburg.

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Species Lists

Mammals (✓ = recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	October							
			13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1	Peter's Epauletted Fruit Bat	<i>Epomophorus crypturus</i>						✓		
2	Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus aethiopicus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	White Rhinoceros	<i>Ceratotherium simum</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Southern Giraffe	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Common Duiker	<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Eland	<i>Taurotragus oryx</i>	✓							
8	Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>				✓	✓	✓		
9	Greater Kudu	<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
11	Springbok	<i>Antidorcas marsupialis</i>	✓							
12	Klipspringer	<i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>				✓		✓		✓
13	Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
14	Oribi	<i>Ourebia ourebi</i>	✓	✓						
15	Grey Rhebok	<i>Palea capreolus</i>	✓							
16	Blesbok	<i>Damaliscus dorcas phillipsi</i>	✓	✓						
17	Black Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes gnou</i>	✓							
18	Blue Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>		✓	✓	✓				
19	Cape Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
20	Burchell's Zebra	<i>Equus burchelli</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	African Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Tree Squirrel	<i>Paraxerus cepapi</i>			✓			✓		
23	Wild Dog	<i>Lycaon pictus</i>					✓	✓		
24	Black-backed Jackal	<i>Canis mesomelas</i>	✓							
25	Side-striped Jackal	<i>Canis adustus</i>			✓					
26	Honey Badger	<i>Mellivora capensis</i>				✓				
27	Cape Clawless Otter	<i>Aonyx capensis</i>						✓		
28	Banded Mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>			✓	✓				
29	Dwarf Mongoose	<i>Helogale parvula</i>			✓		✓	✓		✓
30	Slender Mongoose	<i>Galerella sanguinea</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓		
31	Spotted Hyena	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
33	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>					✓		✓	
34	Chacma Baboon	<i>Papio ursinus</i>		✓				✓		✓
35	Vervet Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus aethiops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Birds (E= endemic; NE=near endemic)										
1	Common Ostrich	<i>Struthio camelus</i>	✓		✓	✓				
2	Reed Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i>	✓							
3	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Black-headed Heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>		✓						
5	Goliath Heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Great Egret	<i>Casmerodiusa albus</i>	✓			✓	✓			

	Common name	Scientific name	October							
			13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
7	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>				✓				
8	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	✓	✓			✓			✓
9	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>								
10	Green-backed Heron	<i>Butorides striatus</i>		✓			✓			
11	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>		✓		✓	✓			
12	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>		✓	✓	✓				
13	African Openbill	<i>Anastomus lamelligerus</i>								
14	Saddle-billed Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
15	Marabou Stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i>			✓	✓	✓			
16	Yellow-billed Stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>			✓	✓				
17	African Sacred Ibis	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>	✓							
18	Spur-winged Goose	<i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>							✓	
19	Cape Vulture (E)	<i>Gyps coprotheres</i>					✓			
20	White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
21	Lappet-faced Vulture	<i>Torgos tracheliotus</i>				✓	✓			
22	Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>		✓			✓	✓		✓
23	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>		✓						
24	Jackal Buzzard (E)	<i>Buteo rufofuscus</i>	✓	✓						
25	Lizard Buzzard	<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>							✓	
26	Dark Chanting Goshawk	<i>Melierax metabates</i>							✓	
27	African Harrier-Hawk	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>						✓	✓	
28	Crested Francolin	<i>Peliperdix sephaena</i>		✓	✓					
29	Natal Francolin (NE)	<i>Pternistes natalensis</i>		✓			✓		✓	
30	Blue Crane (E)	<i>Anthropoides paradiseus</i>	✓							
31	Black Crake	<i>Amauornis flavirostris</i>				✓				
32	African Jacana	<i>Actophilomis africanus</i>					✓			
33	Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>				✓			✓	
34	Crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>	✓							
35	Blacksmith Lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>			✓	✓	✓			
36	African Wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus senegallus</i>	✓	✓				✓		
37	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>				✓				
38	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>						✓		
39	Water Thick-Knee	<i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>				✓	✓	✓		
40	Grey-headed Gull	<i>Larus cirrocephalus</i>	✓							
41	African Mourning Dove	<i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>		✓	✓					
42	Cape Turtle-Dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>		✓	✓		✓			
43	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>		✓		✓				
44	Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove	<i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>				✓				
45	African Green-Pigeon	<i>Treron calva</i>					✓			
46	Brown-headed Parrot	<i>Poicephalus cryptoxanthus</i>				✓				
47	Grey Go-away Bird	<i>Corythaixoides concolor</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
48	Red-chested Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus solitarius</i>				✓				
49	Deidrick Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>							✓	
50	Burchell's Coucal (NE)	<i>Centropus burchellii</i>				✓				
51	African Scops-Owl	<i>Otus senegalensis</i>			✓					
52	White-rumped Swift	<i>Apus caffer</i>	✓							

	Common name	Scientific name	October							
			13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
53	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>		✓	✓					
54	African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>	✓							
55	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>					✓			
56	Giant Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle maxima</i>					✓			
57	White-fronted Bee-eater	<i>Merops bullockoides</i>	✓							
58	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>							✓	
59	Lilac-breasted Roller	<i>Coracias caudata</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
60	African Hoopoe	<i>Upupa africana</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓		
61	Green Wood-Hoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>				✓				
62	Trumpeter Hornbill	<i>Bycanistes bucinator</i>		✓						
63	African Grey Hornbill	<i>Tockus nasutus</i>			✓			✓		
64	Red-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus erythrorhynchus</i>			✓			✓		
65	Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus leucomelas</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓		
66	Southern Ground-Hornbill	<i>Bucorvus leadbeateri</i>			✓			✓		
67	Black-collared Barbet	<i>Lybius torquatus</i>						✓		
68	Crested Barbet	<i>Trachyphonus vaillantii</i>								✓
69	Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>							✓	
70	Red-breasted Swallow	<i>Hirundo semirufa</i>			✓					
71	Greater Striped Swallow (E)	<i>Hirundo cucullata</i>		✓						
72	Lesser Striped Swallow	<i>Hirundo abyssinica</i>							✓	
73	Brown-throated Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>		✓						
74	Fork-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>			✓				✓	
75	Black-headed Oriole	<i>Oriolus larvatus</i>				✓				
76	Cape Crow	<i>Corvus capensis</i>	✓	✓						
77	Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>	✓							
78	Arrow-marked Babbler	<i>Turdoides jardineii</i>		✓			✓			
79	Dark-capped Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>					✓			
80	Mocking Cliff-Chat	<i>Thamnolaea cinnamomeiventris</i>							✓	
81	Ant-eating Chat (E)	<i>Myrmecocichla formicivora</i>	✓							
82	African Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	✓							
83	Rattling Cisticola	<i>Cisticola chiniana</i>				✓				
84	African Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>						✓		
85	Common Fiscal	<i>Lanius collaris</i>	✓	✓						
86	Magpie Shrike	<i>Corvinella melanoleuca</i>		✓	✓	✓				
87	Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>							✓	
88	White-crested Helmet-Shrike	<i>Prionops plumatus</i>							✓	
89	Retz's Helmet-Shrike	<i>Prionops retzii</i>								✓
90	Southern White-crowned Shrike	<i>Eurocephalus anguitimens</i>		✓						
91	Pied Starling (E)	<i>Spreo bicolor</i>	✓	✓						
92	Burchell's Starling (NE)	<i>Lamprotornis australis</i>		✓	✓		✓			
93	Greater Blue-eared Starling	<i>Lamprotornis chalybaeus</i>					✓			
94	Red-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus erythrorhynchus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			
95	Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver	<i>Bubalornis niger</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
96	Southern Grey-headed Sparrow	<i>Passer diffusus</i>			✓	✓				
97	Southern Masked-Weaver	<i>Ploceus velatus</i>	✓							
98	Red-billed Quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>			✓					

	Common name	Scientific name	October							
			13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
99	Long-tailed Widowbird	<i>Euplectes progne</i>	✓							
100	Blue Waxbill	<i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i>			✓					
101	Cape Canary	<i>Serinus canicollis</i>	✓							

Reptiles

Wilhelm's Flat Rock Lizard, <i>Platysaurus intermedius wilhelmi</i>	Striped Skink, <i>Trachylepis striata</i>
Rainbow Skink, <i>T. margaritifer</i>	Southern Tree Agama, <i>Acanthocercus.a. atricollis</i>
Nile Monitor, <i>Varanus niloticus</i>	Common Giant Plated Lizard, <i>Matobosaurus validus</i>
Common Girdled Lizard, <i>Cordylus vittifer</i>	Nile Crocodile, <i>Crocodylus niloticus</i>
Leopard tortoise, <i>Stigmaochelys pardalis</i>	Speke's Hinged-Back Tortoise, <i>Kinixys spekii</i>
Serrated Hinged Terrapin, <i>Pelusios sinuatus</i>	Southern African Python, <i>Python natalensis</i>

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