

South Africa - Kruger(BM)

Naturetrek Tour Report

19 – 28 October 2018



Cheetah



Spotted Hyena



African Elephant



Dwarf Mongoose

Report & Images compiled by Toby Esplin



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Tour Participants: Toby Esplin (leader) together with six Naturetrek clients

Summary

Although the big cat sightings on this tour were not as abundant as what they can be, with good sightings of most of the 46 different mammal species seen, it was an enjoyable and memorable trip for everyone involved. For the most-part, we were fortunate with the weather, and experienced temperatures ranging from a misty low of 8°C on our arrival into Dullstroom, but then for the remainder of the trip, clear skies and highs of around 34°C.

Day 1

Friday 19th October

The tour started with an overnight flight from London Heathrow Airport to Johannesburg.

Day 2

Saturday 20th October

Dullstroom

After clearing through passport control, we met with our local guide Toby and made a start to our journey through to the quaint Mpumalanga highveld town of Dullstroom. A refreshment stop at Alzu is always in order, and the first sightings of White Rhinoceros, African Buffalo, Eland, Sable Antelope, Blesbok, Springbok and Ostrich, made it a worthy break. As we started to approach Dullstroom, the weather started to close in, with dense and low cloud 10 kilometres before town reducing our visibility and hampering our chances of any good sightings in the Verloren Valei Nature Reserve. However, after an early lunch and checking in to our rooms, we decided to brave the rain and make the most of the opportunity to explore the region. Driving through the grasslands, our visibility was quite restricted and most things beyond 100 metres were completely hidden; however, we did have a fleeting glimpse of a Steenbok and several Cape Longclaws close to the roadside. Taking a left turn at the top of the reserve, and our perseverance brought reward, the low cloud cleared and despite the soft drizzling rain, sightings started to pick up. Grey Rhebok, Southern Reedbuck, Jackal Buzzard and several other bird and antelope species, as we followed farm roads that wind through private game reserves, turned what started out as a dismal afternoon into a worthy game viewing outing. Exhausted after a long day of travel, we returned to Dullstroom for an early dinner and bed.

Mammal species for the day: 12

Day 3

Sunday 21st October

Satara, Kruger Park

After breakfast, we decided to take a detour through the Verloren Valei Nature Reserve en route to the Kruger National Park, and what a great choice. With multiple Jackal Buzzard sightings, Long-crested Eagle and Buff-streaked Chat, then the highlight bird of the trip, Wattled Crane, the day was starting out to be pretty special indeed. Making our way down through the escarpment, we arrived at Orpen gate just before 1pm, where we transferred our luggage into the trailer and boarded our Open Safari vehicle, spending the rest of the afternoon exploring the Kruger National Park. En route to Satara rest camp we had lovely sightings of Giraffe, Elephant, a brief Leopard and plenty of general game species, but the highlight came with a Cheetah on a kill close to the

road. Checking in to camp as the gates closed and amazed at how much we had seen in such a short period, we all enjoyed a well-earned dinner and a good night's rest.

Mammal species for the day: 17

Day 4

Monday 22nd October

Satara, Kruger Park

This morning we woke to cold and windy weather, which is not normal for this time of the year, and while the chill factor made this morning's drive in the Open Safari Vehicle challenging for us, it seemed the animals had also taken shelter. With no significant sightings and even the Impala seeking refuge, we decided to return to camp and enjoy a hot chocolate and a warm breakfast.

After warming up, we headed north along the tar road and had some distant sightings of White-backed Vultures at a waterhole, Black-backed Jackal, Spotted Hyaena at a den-site under the road and, with the wind easing up, some good general game. Heading back to camp for an early dinner, we had a short sighting of the resident African Wildcat moving between the chalets. Later, three members of team decided to participate in a night drive with the South African National Parks and were fortunate to have some good sightings of Spotted Hyaena, Honey Badger and Large-spotted Genet.

Mammals for the day: 21

Day 5

Tuesday 23rd October

Skukuza, Kruger Park

While drinking our tea and coffee this morning, we had a wonderful start to the day with the resident pair of Honey Badgers moving between the chalets. After a short drive down the S100, Toby received a radio call about Black-backed Jackal pups just north of Satara, so with great excitement, we turned around and were rewarded with great sightings of five pups and two adults, interacting very close to the road. We sat with the Jackals for close to 45 minutes before heading back to camp to pack our stuff and head south to Skukuza. The drive south through the park turned out to be very rewarding, with a sighting of at least seven Wild Dogs resting in the shade of a tree, then some wonderful interactions between an old Elephant bull and a pride of Lions that were on a kill. The five females, one of the two males and four cubs were resting in the shade, until the Elephant decided to remind them of his size, causing everybody to promptly jump up and relocate to a safer distance. After his satisfaction with intimidating the Lions, the Elephant gave us a great display of his strength, pushing over a large Knob-thorn tree so that he could reach the upper branches and tastier foliage.

Moving on from such an amazing sighting and with the temperature starting to rise, the luck wasn't about to finish. Just before our breakfast stop at Tshokwane, a Leopard was walking on the dry river bank next to the road, before it disappeared down an old Aardvark hole... Some five or more minutes had passed, so we assumed it had curled up and gone to sleep in the cooler depths; however, as we started the car a Porcupine came running out with the Leopard not far behind it! With our appetites also building up, we stopped at Tshokwane for a late brunch, entertained by the Vervet Monkeys strategically planning their theft of tourists' food.

With the temperatures warming up, the drive through to Skukuza was relatively quiet, but after dropping the trailer off at camp and taking a drive along the banks of the Sabie river, we were able to add Hippopotamus and a few more birds to our growing lists, while also enjoying some lovely interactions and behaviours of Elephants coming down to drink in the cooling conditions of the late afternoon. After a lovely dinner, we all decided to explore the ponds at Skukuza in search of some frogs and managed to also find two young House Snakes, one of them digesting what may have been a small gecko.

Mammal species for the day: 25

Day 6

Wednesday 24th October

Berg en Dal, Kruger Park

Leaving Skukuza this morning, we took a short drive along the river and while scanning the banks at one of the loops that overlook the river, one of the participants was fortunate enough to have a short view of three Cape Clawless Otters!

After another wonderful start to the day, we were looking forward to some more special sightings after breakfast and we weren't let down. As we started to move south towards Berg en Dal, we were rewarded with sightings of White Rhinoceros and Elephant, and then three male Cheetah resting in the shade close to the road. We sat with them for half an hour and then moved on to Mpondo dam, where Elephants, Waterbuck, Blue Wildebeest, Burchell's Zebra and Giraffe all came down to drink, while Hippopotamus lazed in the cool water. It was a long and relatively uneventful afternoon drive to Berg en Dal, with controlled fires still burning in the area and on arrival into camp everybody was looking forward to a rest in their airconditioned rooms before dinner.

Mammal species for the day: 24

Day 7

Thursday 25th October

Berg en Dal, Kruger Park

Our pre-breakfast drive produced some nice game sightings with an abundance of African Buffalo, White Rhinoceros and some great Elephant interactions, though with the heat building up quickly after the sun had risen, we made our way back to camp for breakfast and a refreshing break before taking another short drive.

Much of the wildlife was hidden away in the shadows with the temperatures now exceeding 32 degrees, so we also opted to have an early afternoon back at camp and everybody headed out on another South African National Parks night drive, which produced lots of Hippopotamus, White Rhinoceros, Elephants, Buffalo and the highlight of the day, a White-tailed Mongoose.

Mammal species for the day: 23

Day 8

Friday 26th October

Pretoriuskop, Kruger Park

This morning we were blessed with more White Rhinoceros, Elephant and general game sightings, and after breakfast, made our way up to the Pretoriuskop rest camp via the Afsaal picnic site for a well enjoyed ice cream.

There had been several Lion sightings in the area earlier in the morning, but with another day of 30+ degrees, everything was hiding rather well under whatever shade it could find. A stop at Transport dam was enjoyed by everybody, and for most people was one of the highlights of the trip. Sitting at a waterhole in Africa, watching the interactions between several bachelor herds of Elephant, and while Hippopotamus and Nile Crocodile slowly moved around the water's edge, White Rhinoceros, Giraffe, Burchell's Zebra, Blue Wildebeest, Waterbuck, Impala and Warthogs made regular visits to either quench their thirst or wade in the muddy shallows of the water. Returning to camp, we enjoyed a lovely dinner and reminisced about the waterhole experience.

Mammal species for the day: 21

Day 9

Saturday 27th October

Johannesburg

Heading out for an early drive in one last unsuccessful search for Leopard or Lion, we visited the Shitlhave Dam and found a pair of Saddle-billed Storks and a pair Fish Eagles along with Hippopotamus and Common Greenshank. On our return back to camp, we packed our gear and departed Kruger, stopping in Nelspruit for a final brunch at Mugg & Bean, then travelled on through to Johannesburg, where we bid farewell to Toby and boarded our flight home.

Mammal species for the day: 17

Day 10

Sunday 28th October

Our overnight flight landed in the morning at London Heathrow Airport, where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

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Species Lists

Mammals (✓=recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	October							
			20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
1	Peter's Epauletted Fruit Bat	<i>Epomophorus crypturus</i>					✓			
2	Chacma Baboon	<i>Papio ursinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Vervet Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus aethiops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Scrub Hare	<i>Lepus saxatilis</i>		✓	✓			✓		
5	Cape Porcupine	<i>Hystrix africaeaustralis</i>				✓				
6	Smith's Bush Squirrel	<i>Paraxerus cepapi</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Black-backed Jackal	<i>Canis mesomelas</i>			✓	✓	✓			
8	African Clawless Otter	<i>Aonyx capensis</i>					✓			
9	African Wild Dog	<i>Lycaon pictus</i>				✓				
10	Honey Badger	<i>Mellivora capensis</i>			✓	✓				
11	Banded Mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>				✓				
12	Slender Mongoose	<i>Galerella sanguinea</i>			✓				✓	
13	Dwarf Mongoose	<i>Helogale parvula</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	
14	White-tailed Mongoose	<i>Ichneumia albicauda</i>						✓		
15	Large-spotted Genet	<i>Genetta tigrine</i>			✓					
16	Spotted Hyena	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	
17	African Wild Cat	<i>Felis lybica</i>		✓						
18	Cheetah	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>		✓			✓			
19	Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>				✓				
20	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>		✓		✓				
21	African Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Burchell's Zebra	<i>Equus burchelli</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	White Rhinoceros	<i>Ceratotherium simum</i>	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus aethiopicus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
25	Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Southern Giraffe	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
28	Greater Kudu	<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	
30	Common Waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Common (Southern) Reedbuck	<i>Redunca arundinum</i>								✓
32	Blue Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
33	Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Klipspringer	<i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>				✓		✓	✓	
35	Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
36	Common Duiker	<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	
37	Acacia Tree Rat	<i>Thallomys paedulcus</i>			✓					
38	Lichtenstein's Hartebeest	<i>Alcelaphus buselaphus lichtensteinii</i>	✓							
39	Springbok	<i>Antidorcas marsupialis</i>	✓	✓						
40	Black Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes gnou</i>	✓							
41	Blesbok	<i>Damilliscus pygargus phillipsi</i>	✓	✓						
42	Sable Antelope	<i>Hippotragus niger</i>	✓							✓
43	Grey Rhebok	<i>Palea capreolus</i>	✓							
44	Mountain Reedbuck	<i>Redunca fulvorufula</i>	✓							
45	Common Eland	<i>Tragelaphus oryx</i>	✓							✓
46	Nyala	<i>Tragelaphus angasii</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		

Birds (171 Species)

Common Ostrich, <i>Struthio camelus</i>	White-faced Whistling Duck, <i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>
Goliath Heron, <i>Ardea goliath</i>	Great Egret, <i>Ardea alba</i>
Little Egret, <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Western Cattle Egret, <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
Striated Heron, <i>Butorides striatus</i>	Hamerkop, <i>Scopus umbretta</i>
Woolly-necked Stork, <i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	Saddle-billed Stork, <i>Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis</i>
Marabou Stork, <i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i>	Hadeda Ibis, <i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>
Cape Vulture, <i>Gyps coprotheres</i>	Hooded Vulture, <i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>
White-backed Vulture, <i>Gyps africanus</i>	Lappet-faced Vulture, <i>Torgos tracheliotus</i>
White-headed Vulture, <i>Trigonoceps occipitalis</i>	Yellow-billed Kite, <i>Milvus aegyptius</i>
Tawny Eagle, <i>Aquila rapax</i>	Wahlberg's Eagle, <i>Aquila wahlbergi</i>
Martial Eagle, <i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>	Brown Snake Eagle, <i>Circaetus cinereus</i>
Bateleur, <i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>	African Fish Eagle, <i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>
African Harrier-Hawk, <i>Polyboroides typus</i>	Crested Francolin, <i>Francolinus sephaena</i>
Natal Spurfowl, <i>Pternistis natalensis</i>	Swainson's Spurfowl (NE), <i>Francolinus swainsonii</i>
Helmeted Guineafowl, <i>Numida meleagris</i>	Little Grebe, <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Grey Heron, <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Black-headed Heron, <i>Ardea melanocephala</i>
African Spoonbill, <i>Platalea alba</i>	Black-bellied Bustard, <i>Lissotis melanogaster</i>
Red-crested Korhaan (NE), <i>Eupodotis ruficrista</i>	Three-banded Plover, <i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>
Crowned Lapwing, <i>Vanellus coronatus</i>	Blacksmith Lapwing, <i>Vanellus armatus</i>
Egyptian Goose, <i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>	Yellow-billed Duck, <i>Anas undulata</i>
Common Sandpiper, <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Wood Sandpiper, <i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Greenshank, <i>Tringa nebularia</i>	Spur-winged Goose, <i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>
Black-winged Stilt, <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Water Thick-knee, <i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>
Ring-necked Dove, <i>Streptopelia capicola</i>	African Mourning Dove, <i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>
Namaqua Dove, <i>Oena capensis</i>	Laughing Dove, <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, <i>Turtur chalcospilus</i>	Brown-headed Parrot, <i>Poicephalus cryptoxanthus</i>
Grey Go-away-bird, <i>Corythaixoides concolor</i>	Purple-crested Turaco, <i>Tauraco porphyreolophus</i>
Burchell's Coucal (E), <i>Centropus burchellii</i>	African Cuckoo, <i>Cuculus gularis</i>
Reed Cormorant, <i>Microcarbo africanus</i>	Black-winged Kite, <i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
African Cuckoo-Hawk, <i>Aviceda cuculoides</i>	Long-crested Eagle, <i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>
Lesser Spotted Eagle, <i>Clanga pomarina</i>	Dark Chanting Goshawk, <i>Melierax metabates</i>
Jackal Buzzard, <i>Buteo rufofuscus</i>	Kori Bustard, <i>Ardeotis kori</i>
Black Crake, <i>Amauornis flavirostra</i>	Spotted Eagle Owl, <i>Bubo africanus</i>
Common Moorhen, <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	Red-knobbed Coot, <i>Fulica cristata</i>
Little Swift, <i>Apus affinis</i>	Wattled Crane, <i>Grus carunculata</i>
White-crowned Lapwing, <i>Vanellus albiceps</i>	Marsh Sandpiper, <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>
Pied Kingfisher, <i>Ceryle rudis</i>	Brown-hooded Kingfisher, <i>Halcyon albiventris</i>
European Bee-eater, <i>Merops apiaster</i>	White-fronted Bee-eater, <i>Merops bullockoides</i>
Little Bee-eater, <i>Merops pusillus</i>	Lilac-breasted Roller, <i>Coracias caudata</i>
Purple Roller, <i>Coracias naevia</i>	African Hoopoe, <i>Upupa africana</i>
Green Woodhoopoe, <i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>	Common Scimitarbill, <i>Rhinopomastus cyanomelas</i>
African Grey Hornbill, <i>Tockus nasutus</i>	Red-billed Hornbill, <i>Tockus erythrorhynchus</i>
Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, <i>Tockus leucomelas</i>	Crowned Hornbill, <i>Tockus alboterminatus</i>
Southern Ground Hornbill, <i>Bucorvus leadbeateri</i>	Black-collared Barbet, <i>Lybius torquatus</i>

Crested Barbet, *Trachyphonus vaillantii*
 Sabota Lark (NE), *Mirafra sabota*
 Lesser Striped Swallow, *Hirundo abyssinica*
 Fork-tailed Drongo, *Dicrurus adsimilis*
 Eastern Black-headed Oriole, *Oriolus larvatus*
 Fiery-necked Nightjar, *Caprimulgus pectoralis*
 Arrow-marked Babbler, *Turdoides jardineii*
 Speckled Mousebird, *Colius striatus*
 Giant Kingfisher, *Megaceryle maxima*
 Rattling Cisticola, *Cisticola chiniana*
 Acacia Pied Barbet, *Tricholaema leucomelas*
 African Pied Wagtail, *Motacilla aguimp*
 Cardinal Woodpecker, *Dendropicos fuscescens*
 Bokmakierie, *Telophorus zeylonus*
 Brubru, *Nilaus afer*
 Grey-headed Bushshrike, *Malaconotus blanchoti*
 Brown-crowned Tchagra, *Tchagra australis*
 Cape Starling, *Lamprotornis nitens*
 Greater Blue-eared Starling, *Lamprotornis chalybaeus*
 White-bellied Sunbird, *Nectarinia talatala*
 Southern Fiscal, *Lanius collaris*
 House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*
 African Paradise Flycatcher, *Terpsiphone viridis*
 Eastern Long-billed Lark, *Certhilauda semitorquata*
 Long-tailed Widow, *Euplectes progne*
 Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica*
 Yellow-fronted Canary, *Serinus mozambicus*
 Golden-breasted Bunting, *Emberiza flaviventris*
 Red-breasted Swallow, *Cecropis semirufa*
 Long-billed Crombec, *Sylvietta rufescens*
 Croaking Cisticola, *Cisticola natalensis*
 Desert Cisticola, *Cisticola aridulus*
 Common Myna, *Acrideres tristis*
 Red-winged Starling, *Onychognathus morio*
 White-browed Scrub Robin, *Cercotrichas leucophrys*
 Southern Black Flycatcher, *Melaenornis pammelaina*
 Buff-streaked Chat, *Campicoloides bifasciatus*
 Marico Sunbird, *Cinnyris mariquensis*
 Southern Red Bishop, *Euplectes orix*
 Green-winged Pytilia, *Pytilia melba*
 Cape Longclaw, *Macronyx capensis*
 Plain-backed Pipit, *Anthus leucophrys*
 Grey-headed Gull, *Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus*
 White-throated Swallow, *Hirundo albigularis*
 Speckled Pigeon, *Columba guinea*
 African Green Pigeon, *Treron calvus*
 Pied Crow, *Corvus albus*
 Southern Black Tit, *Parus niger*
 Dark-capped Bulbul, *Pycnonotus barbatus*
 Grey-headed Kingfisher, *Halcyon leucocephala*
 Trumpeter Hornbill, *Bycanistes buccinator*
 Tawny-flanked Prinia, *Prinia subflava*
 Chinspot Batis, *Batis molitor*
 Bennett's Woodpecker, *Campethera bennettii*
 Magpie Shrike, *Corvinella melanoleuca*
 Black-backed Puffback, *Dryoscopus cubla*
 Orange-breasted Bushshrike, *Telophorus sulfureopectus*
 White-crested Helmetshrike, *Prionops plumatus*
 Black-crowned Tchagra, *Tchagra senegalus*
 Burchell's Starling (NE), *Lamprotornis australis*
 Red-billed Oxpecker, *Buphagus erythrorhynchus*
 Southern White-crowned Shrike, *Eurocephalus anguitimens*
 Red-billed Buffalo Weaver, *Bubalornis niger*
 Southern Grey-headed Sparrow, *Passer diffusus*
 Cape Crow, *Corvus capensis*
 Chestnut-backed Sparrow-Lark, *Eremopterix leucotis*
 Blue Waxbill, *Uraeginthus angolensis*
 Wire-tailed Swallow, *Hirundo smithii*
 Streaky-headed Seed-eater, *Serinus gularis*
 Greater Striped Swallow, *Cecropis cucullate*
 Mosque Swallow, *Cecropis senegalensis*
 Lesser Swamp Warbler, *Acrocephalus gracilirostris*
 Neddicky, *Cisticola fulvicapilla*
 Yellow-bellied Eremomela, *Eremomela icteropygialis*
 Pied Starling, *Lamprotornis bicolor*
 Kurrichane Thrush, *Turdus libonyana*
 Grey Tit-Flycatcher, *Myioparus plumbeus*
 African Stonechat, *Saxicola torquatus*
 Ant-eating Chat, *Myrmecocichla formicivora*
 Cape Weaver, *Ploceus capensis*
 White-winged Widowbird, *Euplectes albonotatus*
 Red-billed Firefinch, *Lagonosticta senegala*
 African Pipit, *Anthus cinnamomeus*

Reptiles (13 species)

Serrated Hinged Terrapin

Nile Crocodile

Cape Dwarf Gecko

Rough-scaled Plated Lizard

Variable Skink

Striped Skink

Brown House Snake

Leopard Tortoise

Nile Monitor

Tropical House Gecko

Tree Agama

Rainbow Skink

Striped Skaapsteeker

Amphibians (3 species)

Common River Frog

Muller's Platanna

Painted Reed Frog