

South Africa – Kruger (Mammals)

Naturetrek Tour Report

2nd – 11th March 2020



Plains Zebras



Pack of African Wild Dogs



African Elephant



Plains Zebras



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Tour Participants: Leon Marais with two Naturetrek clients

Summary

This was a private version of the Bargain Mammals tour, with just two clients. Once again the Kruger National Park delivered a fun and rewarding experience, with some great sightings overall. Summer game viewing conditions are not the easiest – the tall grass layer and lush vegetation make it harder to spot animals, and the abundance of water leads to dispersal of both predators and their prey – but as the saying goes, there’s no bad time to be in the Kruger. We had good weather overall, with only one wet morning, and lower temperatures than the following week. Highlights included being surrounded by a pack of over 20 Wild Dogs; seeing a big pride of Lions showing some interest in Impala alarm calls; having a male Leopard walk across the road in front of us; and seeing two Southern White Rhinos and 8 Wild Dogs resting up in the shade a few meters from each other. Thanks to the participants for joining us on this tour.

Day 1

Monday 2nd March

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

Day 2

Tuesday 3rd March

Dullstroom

To start off the tour we had an 09:00 departure from AfricaSky Guest House, heading north to Reitvlei Nature Reserve to kick off the game viewing, this ‘highveld’ reserve having several species of game that don’t occur further east in the Kruger National Park, or at least in the part of the park we would be visiting in some cases. These included Red Hartebeest, Common Eland, Blesbok and Black Wildebeest, the latter two endemic to the grasslands of South Africa. We also got distant views of a group of Southern White Rhinos as a nice big game addition, as well as some great birds such as European Bee-eater, Common Ostrich, Secretarybird, Long-tailed Widowbird and others. We had a picnic lunch overlooking a dam replete with an African Fish Eagle and Sharptooth Catfish feeding in the shallows. After lunch we made our way out of the reserve and then had a 2.5 hour drive through to Dullstroom, arriving in time for some rest before dinner.

Mammals for the day: 9

Day 3

Wednesday 4th March

Satara, Kruger Park

Today we met up at 06:00 and headed out to a dirt road leading off the main road, along which we hoped to find Meerkats at a den site. They weren’t there however, perhaps using another den site within their territory, so after staking out the den site over a cup of coffee, we continued with a birding drive before heading back to town for breakfast and departure. We then had 3.5 hours on the road, making our way to Orpen Gate, where we grabbed

a bite to eat and then took the 50km drive through to Satara Rest Camp, seeing typical savanna species such as Elephant, Plains Zebra, Impala, Blue Wildebeest, Southern Giraffe etc. in good numbers and a nice assortment of birds on the way. We arrived in camp at 16:00 and then opted to relax for the rest of the afternoon before dinner in the camp's restaurant at 18:30.

Mammals for the day: 12

Day 4

Thursday 5th March

Satara, Kruger Park

Today we met up for tea / coffee at 05:15 on a glorious morning before a game drive departing at 05:30 as the gates opened. Our route took us south to the Sweni Plains, then along the Sweni Road as far as the Welperdiend Waterhole, then back towards camp with a detour down the Nwanetsi Road, which traverses some lovely open plains country and is a good area in which to see Cheetah. Unfortunately the big predators – bar Spotted Hyena – eluded us. We did see a rather distraught Zebra herd with an injured foal that seemed to have just been attacked by something, with frantic Zebra alarm calls in the background beyond our view, so the predators were there, just not visible to us! Other species seen included Black-backed Jackal, Elephant, Giraffe, Kudu, Blue Wildebeest and of course an assortment of birds. We arrived back in camp at 10:00 for a late breakfast and then took some time out before an afternoon drive from 15:00 to 18:00. This time we went north of camp, right up to the Ngotso Waterhole area and back, but again the big cats eluded us, and we arrived back for time to freshen up before dinner in the camp restaurant.

Mammals for the day: 17

Day 5

Friday 6th March

Lower Sabie, Kruger Park

Today we loaded the van and departed camp at 05:30, making our way southwards to Tshokwane Picnic Site, our breakfast stop for the morning. En route though we struck it lucky with a pack of more than 20 Wild Dogs (counts gave figures of 23 – 25, but it was impossible to get a 100% accurate head count) relaxing on both sides of the road, seeming to be enjoying the morning sun. Soon though they got up and mobile, and we had a fantastic time moving with them down the road, having them all around us, Wild Dogs being typically unperturbed by vehicles. As is often the case they were being tailed by Spotted Hyenas, which hang around waiting for scraps from kills or, if the numbers are right, to appropriate the whole kill (kleptoparasitic is the correct term). For the most part, the dogs seemed to ignore the Hyenas, though at one point there was a bit of an altercation, but that was over very quickly and the dogs carried on with their business. Moving on we had a breakfast stop at the picnic site, and after that had two Lions on the very edge of the road not far from the main Skukuza / Lower Sabie junction. Later on we stopped for a tea / coffee break at Mlondozi Picnic Site and then pushed on to Lower Sabie, checking in at 14:00 for a siesta followed by an afternoon drive down to Duke's Waterhole, which produced good general game but no new predator sightings. Back at camp we had time to freshen up before dinner on the deck overlooking the Sabie River.

Mammals for the day: 20

Day 6

Saturday 7th March

Lower Sabie, Kruger Park

Today we met up at 05:15 for a cuppa before departure on what turned out to be a wet morning, with heavy cloud and light drizzle at times. Our route took us across the river and soon after taking the S128 dirt road we spotted two Lionesses which were keeping an eye on a large herd of Buffalo. Although showing interest it was clear that they weren't going to go barging in, but were rather playing a waiting game, watching for opportunities from a distance. Soon they both sunk down into the thick grass and we moved on to look for other animals. Elephants, Zebra, Giraffe etc. kept us entertained until much later in the morning when we saw a pride of 16 Lions not far off the road, made up of four or five lionesses and their young (9 to 12 months old cubs). Although alert, they weren't doing much and after a while of observing them we were about to move on when they picked up on some nearby Impala alarm calls and started to look very interested. One lioness separated from the pride and crossed the road in front of us to work around to the other side of the thicket from which the calls were emanating. The other lionesses then also made their way forward slowly, followed by the rest of the pride. A bit of excitement for sure but no further action ensued and with no more visuals we headed back to camp for breakfast. After some time out, we did an afternoon drive down towards Crocodile Bridge and then back via the Gomondwane Loop, with some time watching the Hippos at Sunset Dam to end off the day. We then met up for dinner at 18:30, for an enjoyable evening on the deck overlooking the Sabie River, with a chorus of frogs and insects as the audio backdrop, and a pair of Spotted Hyenas running around in the camp on our way back to the rooms for some final excitement for the day.

Mammals for the day: 15

Day 7

Sunday 8th March

Pretoriuskop, Kruger Park

Today we had our customary brew before departing on a short morning drive, seeing a marauding Hyena on the way out of camp. We headed north, hoping to find Cheetah, but instead found two lionesses, possibly the same two from the previous morning. Back at camp we had breakfast, followed by departure. We struck it lucky at precisely 08:30 not far down the road with a big male Leopard walking nonchalantly across the road right in front of us, with a quick look back at us before disappearing into the dense foliage lining the river – what a great moment! Moving on, we trundled up to Skukuza for a break and then carried on down to Pretoriuskop, where we elected to rest out the day enjoying the peacefulness of the camp before an evening braai outside our rooms to end off the day.

Mammals for the day: 21

Day 8

Monday 9th March

Pretoriuskop, Kruger Park

Once again we met up for a brew at 05:15, and then headed out on a long, half-day drive, the aim being to get into the Skukuza area, which generally offers better game viewing than the Pretoriuskop area, at this time of the year anyway. It turned out to be a good morning, with a big area covered and two great sightings in particular. The first was a mating Lion couple – we came across several cars in the road, and learned that there was a Lion pair off to our left, though we couldn't see them at first. We made our way through the cars to the other side, and eventually got eyes on them, just as the female got up and ran our way a short distance, with the male in close pursuit, and a copulation ensued, though it did take place in some thick grass, but a great sighting nevertheless. We then got word that a Cheetah was seen nearby, so went off to investigate, but didn't have any luck there. Moving on towards Skukuza for breakfast we then came across a mother and calf Southern White Rhino lying in the shade not far off the road. Rhinos are unfortunately an increasingly rare sight in the Kruger these days (only 5 years ago they were quite commonly encountered in the southern part of the park). While we were enjoying the views of the Rhinos, a Wild Dog popped up from the shade almost between us and the Rhinos, when we suddenly realised that a pack of around eight dogs were also there, our attention at first having been taken up by the Rhinos! What a great moment, with two highly endangered mammal species resting up not ten meters from each other. Moving on, we had a pleasant breakfast at Skukuza before making our way back to camp for a rest. Other enjoyable sightings for the morning included a Pearl-spotted Owlet with a just-killed rodent sitting in the road in front of us; a posse of Banded Mongooses foraging with a Dark Chanting Goshawk tailing them (to pick off any fleeing prey items); and a clan of Dwarf Mongooses. We took some time out in the afternoon and then took a short drive along a few of the loops in the immediate area, but didn't manage to find anything new, besides the usual 'every day' mammals. Back at camp, we enjoyed a lovely lamb kebab, roasted potatoes and a green salad dinner on another glorious evening, with a full moon rising and Fiery-necked Nightjars calling all around.

Mammals for the day: 20

Day 9

Tuesday 10th March

Johannesburg

Today we had a three hour morning drive. We headed up to the Doispans Road, following up on reports of a Cheetah sighting, but with no luck on that score. We did however see a single male Wild Dog, which seemed to have been separated from its pack and was searching for them. We also saw another pair of Lions, a female and an impressive male. Back at camp we packed up and departed, with a breakfast stop at Afsaal Picnic Site before we exited the park via Malelane Gate at noon, and from there had an easy run to the airport, with a couple of stops en route, arriving at 17:00 for fond farewells at the end of a great tour

Mammals for the day: 14

Day 10

Wednesday 11th March

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

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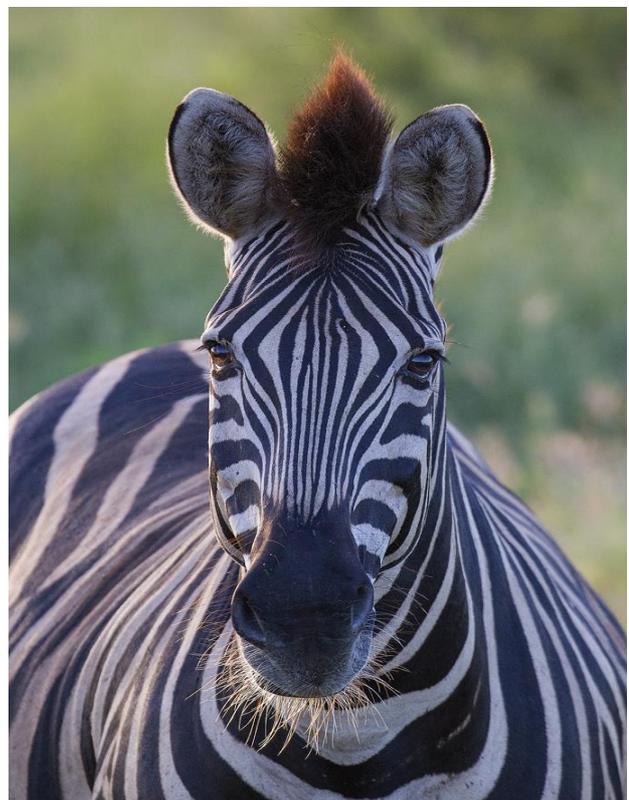
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Above: Southern Giraffe



Above: Plains Zebra

Species Lists

Mammals (X – Recorded, but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	March							
			3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	African Bush Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
2	Vervet Monkey	<i>Cercopithecus pygerythrus</i>		X	X	X		X	X	X
3	Chacma Baboon	<i>Papio ursinus</i>		X	X	X	X	X		X
4	Smith's Bush Squirrel	<i>Paraxerus cepapi</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
5	Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>				X	X	X	X	X
6	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>						X		
7	Banded Mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>						X	X	
8	Common Dwarf Mongoose	<i>Helogale parvula</i>							X	
9	Slender Mongoose	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>	X			X	X	X	X	
10	Spotted Hyaena	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>			X	X	X	X		
11	Black-backed Jackal	<i>Canis mesomelas</i>			X					
12	African Wild Dog	<i>Lycaon pictus</i>				X			X	X
13	Plains Zebra	<i>Equus quagga burchellii</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
14	White Rhinoceros	<i>Ceratotherium simum</i>	X			X			X	
15	Common Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
16	Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
17	Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
18	Red Hartebeest	<i>Alcelaphus buselaphis caama</i>	X							
19	Black Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes gnou</i>	X							
20	Blue Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
21	Blesbok	<i>Damaliscus pygargus phillipsi</i>	X							
22	Waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
23	Klipspringer	<i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>				X		X	X	
24	Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>		X	X			X		X
25	Common Duiker	<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>			X				X	
26	African Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>			X	X	X	X	X	
27	Common Eland	<i>Taurotragus oryx</i>	X							
28	Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>				X		X		X
29	Greater Kudu	<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>		X	X	X	X	X	X	
30	Giraffe	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>			X		X	X	X	
31	Peters's Epauletted Fruit Bat	<i>Epomophorus crypturus</i>			X	X				

Birds seen or heard during the tour

	Common name	Scientific name
1	Common Ostrich	<i>Struthio camelus</i>
2	Spur-winged Goose	<i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>
3	Knob-billed Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>
4	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>
5	African Black Duck	<i>Anas sparsa</i>
6	Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>

7	Crested Francolin	<i>Dendroperdix sephaena</i>
8	Natal Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis natalensis</i>
9	Swainson's Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis swainsonii</i>
10	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>
11	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
12	Yellow-billed Stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>
13	African Openbill	<i>Anastomus lamelligerus</i>
14	Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
15	Marabou Stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i>
16	Hadada Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>
17	African Spoonbill	<i>Platalea alba</i>
18	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
19	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
20	Black-headed Heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>
21	Goliath Heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>
22	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
23	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
24	Reed Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo africanus</i>
25	White-breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>
26	African Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>
27	Secretarybird	<i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i>
28	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
29	African Harrier Hawk	<i>Ployboroides typus</i>
30	White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>
31	Lappet-faced Vulture	<i>Torgos tracheliotos</i>
32	Brown Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>
33	Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>
34	Martial Eagle	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>
35	Long-crested Eagle	<i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>
36	Wahlberg's Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus wahlbergi</i>
37	Tawny Eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>
38	Lizard Buzzard	<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>
39	Dark Chanting Goshawk	<i>Melierax metabates</i>
40	Yellow-billed Kite	<i>Milvus aegyptius</i>
41	African Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>
42	Jackal Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufofuscus</i>
43	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
44	Kori Bustard	<i>Ardeotis kori</i>
45	Black-bellied Bustard	<i>Lissotis melanogaster</i>
46	Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>
47	Water Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>
48	Spotted Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus capensis</i>
49	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
50	Blacksmith Lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>
51	White-crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus albiceps</i>
52	Senegal Lapwing	<i>Vanellus lugubris</i>

53	Crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>
54	African Wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus senegallus</i>
55	Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>
56	African Jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>
57	Double-banded Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles bicinctus</i>
58	Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>
59	Ring-necked Dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>
60	Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>
61	African Green Pigeon	<i>Treron calvus</i>
62	Purple-crested Turaco	<i>Tauraco porphyreolophus</i>
63	Grey Go-away-bird	<i>Corythaixoides concolor</i>
64	Burchell's Coucal	<i>Centropus burchellii</i>
65	Levaillant's Cuckoo	<i>Clamator levaillantii</i>
66	Western Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>
67	Verreaux's Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo lacteus</i>
68	Pearl-spotted Owlet	<i>Glaucidium perlatum</i>
69	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
70	White-rumped Swift	<i>Apus caffer</i>
71	Speckled Mousebird	<i>Colius striatus</i>
72	Red-faced Mousebird	<i>Urocolius indicus</i>
73	Purple Roller	<i>Coracias naevius</i>
74	Lilac-breasted Roller	<i>Coracias caudatus</i>
75	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>
76	Brown-hooded Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon albiventris</i>
77	Woodland Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>
78	Malachite Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis cristatus</i>
79	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
80	Little Bee-eater	<i>Merops pusillus</i>
81	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
82	Southern Carmine Bee-eater	<i>Merops nubicoides</i>
83	African Hoopoe	<i>Upupa africana</i>
84	Green Wood Hoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>
85	Southern Ground Hornbill	<i>Bucorvus leadbeateri</i>
86	Southern Red-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus rufirostris</i>
87	Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus leucomelas</i>
88	African Grey Hornbill	<i>Lophoceros nasutus</i>
89	Crested Barbet	<i>Trachyphonus vaillantii</i>
90	Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
91	Amur Falcon	<i>Falco amurensis</i>
92	Magpie Shrike	<i>Urolestes melanoleucus</i>
93	Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
94	Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>
95	Southern Fiscal	<i>Lanius collaris</i>
96	Fork-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>
97	Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>
98	Rufous-naped Lark	<i>Mirafr africana</i>

99	Banded Martin	<i>Riparia cincta</i>
100	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
101	White-throated Swallow	<i>Hirundo albigularis</i>
102	Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>
103	Greater Striped Swallow	<i>Cecropis cucullata</i>
104	Lesser Striped Swallow	<i>Cecropis abyssinica</i>
105	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>
106	Cape Starling	<i>Lamprotornis nitens</i>
107	Greater Blue-eared Starling	<i>Lamprotornis chalybaeus</i>
108	Burchell's Starling	<i>Lamprotornis australis</i>
109	Pied Starling	<i>Lamprotornis bicolor</i>
110	Red-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus erythrorhynchus</i>
111	Yellow-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus africanus</i>
112	White-browed Robin-Chat	<i>Cossypha heuglini</i>
113	African Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>
114	Ant-eating Chat	<i>Myrmecocichla formicivora</i>
115	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
116	Southern Grey-headed Sparrow	<i>Passer diffusus</i>
117	Red-billed Buffalo Weaver	<i>Bubalornis niger</i>
118	Spectacled Weaver	<i>Ploceus ocularis</i>
119	Southern Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus velatus</i>
120	Red-billed Quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>
121	Southern Red Bishop	<i>Euplectes orix</i>
122	White-winged Widowbird	<i>Euplectes albonotatus</i>
123	Red-collared Widowbird	<i>Euplectes ardens</i>
124	Long-tailed Widowbird	<i>Euplectes progne</i>
125	Pin-tailed Whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>
126	Long-tailed Paradise Whydah	<i>Vidua paradisaea</i>
127	Cape Wagtail	<i>Motacilla capensis</i>
128	African Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>
129	Cape Longclaw	<i>Macronyx capensis</i>

Reptiles

	Common name	Scientific name
1	East African Serrated Mud Turtle	<i>Pelusios sinuatus</i>
2	Cape Dwarf Gecko	<i>Lygodactylus capensis</i>
3	Large-scale Snake Lizard	<i>Chamaesaura macrolepis</i>
4	Highveld Crag Lizard	<i>Cordylus melanotus</i>
5	Sekukhune Flat Lizard	<i>Platysaurus orientalis</i>
6	White-throated Monitor	<i>Varanus albigularis</i>
7	Nile Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus niloticus</i>