

South Africa - Kruger (Mammals)

Naturetrek Tour Report

23rd February – 4th March 2026



African Savanna Elephant



Lion



Leopard



African Savanna Elephants

Tour report by Leon Marais
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Tour participants: Leon Marais (leader) with four Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Monday 23rd February

Clients set off for South Africa on an overnight flight from the UK.

Day 2

Tuesday 24th February

Cool to mild and overcast

The group arrived without incident at O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, ready for a full day of touring to start the safari. We loaded the van and headed northwards out of the city to Rietvlei Nature Reserve, a lovely provincial reserve roughly halfway between Johannesburg and Pretoria. Skies were overcast and it was nice and cool: good conditions for a full morning of game viewing. We managed to see a range of antelopes such as Eland, Black Wildebeest, Red Hartebeest and Blesbok, as well as Plains Zebra, Common Ostrich and a number of other bird species.

Other mammalian highlights included a wonderful fifteen minutes spent with a pair of Yellow Mongooses alongside the road, a beautiful Black-backed Jackal foraging in the grass, and a close encounter with a group of Southern White Rhinos. We ended up seeing eleven of the latter over the day! At 1.30pm we left the reserve and spent a couple of hours making our way to Dullstroom, where we checked in and had a little bit of a rest before a wonderful first dinner.

Day 3

Wednesday 25th February

Partly cloudy and very hot

We started the day with a 7.00am breakfast, followed by departure for the Kruger National Park. It was a lovely day for the scenic four-hour drive through to Orpen Gate, gateway to the central regions of the Kruger National Park. At Orpen, we transferred to our open-sided safari vehicle, and the game viewing proper began: we had fifty kilometres to get to Satara Rest Camp. We got to grips with variety of plains game and some nice birds on the way, making for a great first afternoon on safari.

We did get word of a pack of Wild Dogs at Nsemani Dam, but on arrival there were nothing to be seen, nor any sign of them having been there, something that was to dog us, excuse the pun, for the rest of the trip, as we sadly failed to connect with any of the packs that were reported. It wasn't for a lack of trying! In the evening, we met for a wonderful dinner at the Cattle Barron restaurant, before calling it a night in anticipation of a wonderful day to come.

Day 4

Thursday 26th February

Partly cloudy and very hot

The early morning got underway with coffee at 5.15am before a half-day out in search of all manner of mammals and birds. Our route took us all the way north to Olifants Rest Camp, for a wonderful breakfast overlooking the river, and back to Satara in time for an afternoon siesta. Unfortunately, the predators eluded us, but we did have some wonderful general game sightings and some good birding, one of the highlights of which was watching a juvenile female Montagu's Harrier catch and consume a rodent in the road right in front of us.

Back at camp we had a good rest before heading out eastwards along the H6 route, where both Wild Dogs and Lions had been reported. The outbound route didn't produce any predators, but on the way back we came across a single Lion sitting up in the grass just off the road. There was no doubt that he had been there on the way out, but invisible in the dense grass cover, showing the difficulty of finding some animals during the wet season. We had good views of him before making our way back to camp, and going straight to dinner.

Day 5

Friday 27th February

Partly cloudy and very hot

Today we had a short morning drive towards Nsemani Dam, but unfortunately no predators were forthcoming (apart from a couple of Spotted Hyenas). And of course, there was the usual assortment of general game to be seen, as well as two troops of Banded Mongooses. Back at camp, we had breakfast at 7.00am before departing for Lower Sabie Rest Camp, some ninety-five kilometres to the south-east. It was a fun drive, with plenty to see, except for cats and dogs!



Plains Zebras

We arrived at camp for time to relax before a short afternoon drive along the Sabie River, which is usually quite good for both Lion and Leopard, but not on this occasion. We did see pretty good numbers of Giraffes, though, and decided it was a good 'Giraffeternoon'! Back at camp we had dinner at the Mug & Bean restaurant overlooking the river, with a small herd of Buffalo grazing just below us.

Day 6

Saturday 28th February

Partly cloudy and hot

Today we decided to go for a long morning drive all the way up the river, to Skukuza Rest Camp for breakfast, before returning via the Sand River and High-Level bridge. About halfway along the river towards Skukuza, we spotted a large male Leopard just off the road. While he didn't stay stick around for long, he did give us several good views as he walked down into the shrubbery along the riverbank. At Skukuza we had a wonderful breakfast at the Kruger Station restaurant, based on old Selati Railway platform, before heading back towards Lower Sabie.

On the banks of the Sand River, we came across a crush of vehicles, where there was a large male Leopard up in a big Jackal Berry tree. Ignoring the cars below the tree, it was actually a very good sighting, as the Leopard got up and made his way down the tree. He made his way off into the thickets between the road and the river. After a siesta back at camp, we drove north of the river into the open plains area, which is usually very quiet in terms of other tourists and vehicles, giving a real feeling of remoteness. While we found no predators, we did have a lovely time watching birds and just enjoying the vast open spaces of Kruger NP.

Day 7

Sunday 1st March

Partly cloudy and very hot

Today we were moving on from Lower Sabie, so we had a short morning drive up the river, hoping to find the resident Leopard and her two cubs that had been hanging out at the Lubyelubye bridge for quite a while; but we had no luck on that score. Back at camp, we had a wonderful breakfast on the deck overlooking the river, and then departed for Berg-en-Dal Rest Camp down in the south-western corner of the park.

There were reports of a pack of Wild Dogs down near Crocodile Bridge gate but by the time we arrived at the scene they had disappeared. We then carried on along the S25, following the river all the way westwards, arriving at Berg-en-Dal mid-afternoon in time for a bit of a siesta.

Afterwards, we took a short drive out along the tar road, hoping for something exciting. We had plenty of general game and birds (including a Water Monitor eating a small Southern African Python!) to keep us occupied. Back at camp we had a lovely dinner outside the restaurant in anticipation of our last full day of the safari.

Day 8

Monday 2nd March

Mild and overcast, with rain in the late afternoon

We decided to make a big day of our last full day, and started off as usual with coffee at 5.15am before departing camp just after 5.30am, taking a long drive all the way up to Skukuza again for breakfast at the golf club. The way there didn't produce any cats, but we did find three lovely Spotted Hyenas sleeping next to the road, and had a great sighting of a large, bright green Boomslang, one of Southern Africa's most venomous snakes.

The route back via the S114 dirt road didn't produce any predators either (apart from one emaciated Lioness), but we did have a wonderful session photographing Hamerkops and other birds at Biyamiti weir. We arrived back mid-afternoon and decided to call it a day as far as drives were concerned, which was a good move as not long after we got back it started raining: the first bit of inclement weather for the entire trip. In the evening, we had a wonderful final dinner, hoping for some luck on our last morning.

Day 9

Tuesday 3rd March

Cloudy and mild with a little bit of rain

The offer of a lie-in was on the table, but was firmly rejected by all clients, so once again we met at 5.15am for coffee, loaded the bags, and headed out for several hours before we had to leave the park. It turned out to be a good move to give it a last go, and in quick succession we had two Lionesses (the thin one from the day before and her partner in crime, which was a nice looking animal), followed shortly thereafter by a Leopard moving off the road, and not long after that a White Rhino bull sleeping fifteen metres off into the bush: we were in luck!

During the rest of the morning, we bagged a beautiful Elephant bull and, right as we left the park, some Buffalos grazing on the banks of the Crocodile River, thus giving us "the big five" for the morning! We met our driver and van at the Pestana hotel on the Crocodile River, where we transferred all our belongings from the safari vehicle to the van, and then had a lovely buffet breakfast overlooking the river.

It was soon time to hit the road for Johannesburg, which was an uneventful journey, and we arrived in good time at the airport for the official end of the tour.

Day 10

Wednesday 4th March

Clients arrived home after an overnight flight from Johannesburg.

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Species lists

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	February - March 2026						
		24	26	27	28	1	2	3
African Savanna Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>		✓				✓	✓
Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>				✓			✓
Yellow Mongoose	<i>Cynictis penicillata</i>	✓						
Common Dwarf Mongoose	<i>Helogale parvula</i>			✓		✓		
Common Slender Mongoose	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>			✓	✓	✓		
Banded Mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>			✓	✓			
Black-backed Jackal	<i>Lupulella mesomelas</i>	✓	✓					
White Rhinoceros	<i>Ceratotherium simum</i>	✓						✓
Black Rhinoceros	<i>Diceros bicornis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Plains Zebra	<i>Equus quagga</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Southern Giraffe	<i>Giraffa giraffa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hartebeest	<i>Alcelaphus buselaphus</i>	✓						
Black Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes gnou</i>	✓						
Blue Wildebeest	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>		✓	✓			✓	
Waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>			✓		✓	✓	
Cape Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Eland	<i>Tragelaphus oryx</i>	✓						
Greater Kudu	<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Southern Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus sylvaticus</i>				✓	✓		
Common Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Peters's Epauletted Fruit Bat	<i>Epomophorus crypturus</i>				✓	✓		
Vervet Monkey	<i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Chacma Baboon	<i>Papio ursinus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Smith's Bush Squirrel	<i>Paraxerus cepapi</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Birds

Common name	Scientific name
Common Ostrich	<i>Struthio camelus</i>
White-faced Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>
Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>
Yellow-billed Duck	<i>Anas undulata</i>
Red-billed Teal	<i>Anas erythrorhyncha</i>
Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>
Crested Francolin	<i>Ortygornis sephaena</i>
Harlequin Quail	<i>Coturnix delegouei</i>
Natal Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis natalensis</i>
Swainson's Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis swainsonii</i>
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>
Grey Go-away-bird	<i>Crinifer concolor</i>
Purple-crested Turaco	<i>Gallirex porphyreolophus</i>
Kori Bustard	<i>Ardeotis kori</i>
Northern Black Korhaan - E	<i>Afrotis afraoides</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Black-bellied Bustard	<i>Lissotis melanogaster</i>
Burchell's Coucal	<i>Centropus burchellii</i>
Black Coucal	<i>Centropus grillii</i>
Levaillant's Cuckoo	<i>Clamator levaillantii</i>
Jacobin Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>
Diederik Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>
Ring-necked Dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>
Speckled Pigeon	<i>Columba guinea</i>
Emerald-spotted Wood Dove	<i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>
African Green Pigeon	<i>Treron calvus</i>
Water Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>
Three-banded Plover	<i>Thinornis tricoloris</i>
Blacksmith Lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>
White-crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus albiceps</i>
Senegal Lapwing	<i>Vanellus lugubris</i>
Crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>
African Wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus senegallus</i>
African Jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
African Skimmer	<i>Rynchops flavirostris</i>
Grey-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus</i>
African Openbill	<i>Anastomus lamelligerus</i>
Yellow-billed Stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>
Saddle-billed Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis</i>
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>
African Woolly-necked Stork	<i>Ciconia microscelis</i>
African Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>
Reed Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo africanus</i>
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>
Hadada Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>
Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
Little Heron	<i>Butorides atricapilla</i>
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Western Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea ibis</i>
Black-headed Heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>
Goliath Heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>
Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
Verreaux's Eagle-Owl	<i>Ketupa lactea</i>
Secretarybird	<i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i>
Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
Lappet-faced Vulture	<i>Torgos tracheliotos</i>
Hooded Vulture	<i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>
White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>
Black-chested Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus pectoralis</i>
Brown Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>
Martial Eagle	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>
Long-crested Eagle	<i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>
Lesser Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga pomarina</i>
Wahlberg's Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus wahlbergi</i>
Tawny Eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>
Pallid Harrier	<i>Circus macrourus</i>
Montagu's Harrier	<i>Circus pygargus</i>
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>
African Fish Eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga vocifer</i>
Jackal Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufofuscus</i>
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
Red-faced Mousebird	<i>Urocolius indicus</i>
Speckled Mousebird	<i>Colius striatus</i>
Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
Green Wood Hoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>
Southern Ground Hornbill	<i>Bucorvus leadbeateri</i>
African Grey Hornbill	<i>Lophoceros nasutus</i>
Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus leucomelas</i>
Southern Red-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus rufirostris</i>
Trumpeter Hornbill	<i>Bycanistes bucinator</i>
Purple Roller	<i>Coracias naevius</i>
Lilac-breasted Roller	<i>Coracias caudatus</i>
European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>
White-fronted Bee-eater	<i>Merops bullockoides</i>
Southern Carmine Bee-eater	<i>Merops nubicoides</i>
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
Malachite Kingfisher	<i>Corythornis cristatus</i>
Giant Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle maxima</i>
Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
Woodland Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>
Brown-hooded Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon albiventris</i>
Crested Barbet	<i>Trachyphonus vaillantii</i>
Amur Falcon	<i>Falco amurensis</i>
Brown-headed Parrot	<i>Poicephalus cryptoxanthus</i>
Black-headed Oriole	<i>Oriolus larvatus</i>
Fork-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>
Magpie Shrike	<i>Urolestes melanoleucus</i>
Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>
Southern Fiscal	<i>Lanius collaris</i>
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>
Southern White-crowned Shrike	<i>Eurocephalus anguitimens</i>
Rufous-naped Lark	<i>Corypha africana</i>
Rattling Cisticola	<i>Cisticola chiniana</i>
Banded Martin	<i>Neophedina cincta</i>
White-throated Swallow	<i>Hirundo albigularis</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Greater Striped Swallow	<i>Cecropis cucullata</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Mosque Swallow	<i>Cecropis senegalensis</i>
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</i>
Common Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
Arrow-marked Babbler	<i>Turdoides jardineii</i>
Red-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus erythroryncha</i>
Wattled Starling	<i>Creatophora cinerea</i>
Common Myna - I	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
Burchell's Starling	<i>Lamprotornis australis</i>
Greater Blue-eared Starling	<i>Lamprotornis chalybaeus</i>
Cape Starling	<i>Lamprotornis nitens</i>
Pied Starling - N	<i>Lamprotornis bicolor</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
White-browed Robin-Chat	<i>Cossypha heuglini</i>
African Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>
Mocking Cliff Chat	<i>Thamnodia cinnamomeiventris</i>
Red-billed Buffalo Weaver	<i>Bubalornis niger</i>
Lesser Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus intermedius</i>
Red-billed Quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>
Southern Red Bishop	<i>Euplectes orix</i>
White-winged Widowbird	<i>Euplectes albonotatus</i>
Red-collared Widowbird	<i>Euplectes ardens</i>
Fan-tailed Widowbird	<i>Euplectes axillaris</i>
Long-tailed Widowbird	<i>Euplectes progne</i>
Long-tailed Paradise Whydah	<i>Vidua paradisaea</i>
Pin-tailed Whydah	<i>Vidua macroura</i>
Blue Waxbill	<i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i>
Cape Sparrow	<i>Passer melanurus</i>
African Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>
Cape Longclaw	<i>Macronyx capensis</i>
Yellow-throated Longclaw	<i>Macronyx croceus</i>
African Pipit	<i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i>

Reptiles

E=endemic	
Common name	Scientific name
East African Serrated Mud Turtle	<i>Pelusios sinuatus</i>
Cape Dwarf Gecko	<i>Lygodactylus capensis</i>
Large-scale Snake Lizard	<i>Chamaesaura macrolepis</i>
Highveld Crag Lizard	<i>Cordylus melanotus</i>
Sekukhune Flat Lizard - E	<i>Platysaurus orientalis</i>
White-throated Monitor	<i>Varanus albigularis</i>
Nile Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus niloticus</i>
Boomslang	<i>Dispholidus typus</i>