

South Africa - Just Cats!

Naturetrek Tour Report

18 - 27 October 2011



African Lions



African Elephants



African Lion



Leopard

Report and images compiled by Leon Marais



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Day 1

Tuesday 18th October

Blyde River Canyon

The group arrived on time at the airport and soon we were on our way eastwards on a windy and overcast morning. The journey was uneventful and after lunch in Graskop we headed on to the resort. We checked in and had time to relax before a trip up the canyon view site. Thankfully the sun came out to reveal the lower canyon in its full glory, and we also recorded Rock Hyrax and Klipspringer as our first mammals (in addition to the troop of Chacma Baboons which were playing on the roofs of our chalets). In the evening we headed down to the restaurant for a fine meal before retiring in anticipation of a full day to come.

Day 2

Wednesday 19th October

Skukuza Rest Camp, Kruger National Park

We awoke to a humid and unsettled day as far as the weather went. Three of us headed out on an early walk along the Tufa Trail, with great views of the Tufa Waterfall. The rest of the group came down in the vehicle to have a short walk along the trail, but failed to find the waterfall. We all met up at breakfast and departed shortly thereafter. We took in the Three Rondavels view site and Lisbon Falls before heading down to Hazyview where we picked up some lunch and then entered the Kruger. Our drive produced a wealth of game, as well as a fantastic sighting of a Lioness and three year-old youngsters, which crossed the road right in front of us. Later on we checked in at camp and then headed out on a short afternoon drive. This produced some great general game, and after heading back to camp we had time to freshen up before an al fresco barbeque dinner.

Cat Count: 1 Lion sighting (3 individuals)

Day 3

Thursday 20th October

Satara Rest Camp, KNP

Leaving camp at 05h30 after a cup of coffee we took a gamble on a long route south west of the camp. We didn't record any cats, but had some great general game as well as an encounter with a clan of Spotted Hyenas at their den, with some great interactions and photo opportunities.

We then headed back to camp for a wonderful 'English' breakfast and a bit of relaxation during the middle of the day. At 13h00 we headed out on an afternoon drive, with the goal of following up on a pride of lions we'd heard about. We didn't find them, but were rewarded with a fantastic encounter with an adult female Leopard along the banks of the Sand River. She popped out in front of us and it looked as if she wanted to cross the road, but she then turned back and walked past us and disappeared down into the river bed. Other highlights included a Bateleur eating a large snake right next to the road, a Secretarybird, a quartet of Southern Ground Hornbills and a pair of Senegal Lapwings and their chicks.

We returned to camp for high tea and then the group headed out on a sunset drive, recording Spotted Hyena and other mammals but no cats. Afterwards we met for another al fresco barbeque dinner.

Cat Count: 1 Leopard sighting (1 female)

Day 4

Friday 21st October

Satara Rest Camp, KNP

Leaving camp early once again we took the Sabie River Road, which runs along the southern bank of the river, to the high-water bridge where we crossed over and returned via the Sand River. Early on, we came across three male Lions ending their night of activity by soaking up the morning sun not far off the road. Further on we had a fantastic encounter with a herd of Elephants, one of whom had a new born calf in tow.

After breakfast at Skukuza we packed and departed for Satara Rest Camp, 92 kilometres to the north. Our journey took us past the still-sleeping male Lions, two large Buffalo herds, various species of general game, a second pride of Lions, a Cheetah on the hunt, and several massive Elephant bulls before we arrived in camp.

We had a short break before heading out on an afternoon drive. This produced two Lion sightings, though neither was very good in terms of visuals (a sleeping male and two distant females). Under a spectacular sunset we headed back to camp, where we had time to ourselves before an outdoor dinner, during which we were visited by a Small-spotted Genet.

Cat Count: 4 Lion sightings (numerous individuals); 1 Cheetah sighting (1 individual).

Day 5

Saturday 22nd October

Satara Rest Camp, KNP

Under a clear sky we left camp on another morning safari, heading northwards to the arid Mavumbye Plains region. We scored early with a great view of an African Wild Cat, Felidae species number four for the tour. The morning also produced a single Lion, as well as huge numbers of general game and two Hippopotamus bulls having a somewhat slow showing off session alongside a muddy waterhole.

Back at camp we had breakfast and then a short walk in the camp to see some African Scops Owls and a Fruit Bat colony. We then had time to relax before an afternoon drive, which was fairly quiet and included a near-miss with a Leopard - we could see the end of the tail, but that was it.

Back at camp we had some tea while watching the local troop of Vervet Monkeys raiding other chalets, and then the group headed out on another sunset drive, which was a great success with a sighting of an African Wild Cat and Kitten and a pride of 5 Lions on a very fresh Zebra kill. Then we returned to a fine barbequed rump steak dinner.

Cat Count: 2 Lion sightings (numerous individuals); 1 African Wild Cat sighting (2 individuals).

Day 6

Sunday 23rd October

Nkorho, Sabi Sand Game Reserve

A hot day... We kicked off with an excursion to the north of camp, which was unfortunately rather quiet in terms of cats, but we did of course see the usual range of general game and birds. Back at camp we had breakfast and then departed, seeing a sleeping Leopard on the way out to Orpen Gate.

Leaving the Kruger we made our way into the Sabi Sand Game Reserve via Gowrie Gate and checked in at Nkorho at mid-day. We had time to relax before lunch, and then headed out on an afternoon safari. First up was a White Rhino bull wallowing in the pan in front of the lodge. Due to the heat the predators were inactive, and after dark we encountered a young male Leopard moving through the bush on his nightly errands. We got some good views of him, despite the fact that he wasn't 100% 'vehicle friendly', and then headed back to the lodge for drinks and dinner.

Cat Count: 2 Leopard sightings (2 individuals)

Day 7

Monday 24th October

Nkorho, SSGR.

This was a day of two halves. The morning started off early and full of promise, nice and fresh after the heat of the previous day. Luck was not on our side however, and the only carnivore recorded was our smallest, the Dwarf Mongoose (a colony seen sharing a burrow in a termite mound with a Rough-scaled Plated Lizard). After the drive some of the group went on a very interesting bush walk, while the rest headed back to the lodge. We then had the day to relax and in the afternoon headed out again.

The first half was a repeat of the morning, but as the sun was setting we joined a sighting of a pack of 19 Wild Dogs, one of the highlights of the tour thus far. We encountered them on a short grass airstrip, and had wonderful observations of their interactions and social dynamics. Afterwards we enjoyed a celebratory sundowner stop, and then headed back to the lodge, seeing White-tailed Mongoose and Spotted Eagle-Owl on the way home.

Our wonderful supper was interrupted between mains and desert by a male Lion (the Styx male) pitching up at the waterhole in front of camp, and we rushed down in the vehicles to see him having a nonchalant standoff with a herd of Buffalo to end off a great day on safari.

Cat Count: 1 Lion sighting (1 individual); 1 Wild Dog sighting (18 individuals).

Day 8

Tuesday 25th October

Nkorho Bush Camp, SSGR.

Despite a cool and misty start, our morning drive was quiet. Cedric and Norman, our guide and tracker, followed up on several sets of Leopard tracks but without any success. After breakfast at the camp we packed and departed for our next lodge not too far away. The routine here was pretty much the same and at 16h00 we set off on what proved to be a highly successful drive. The two cat encounters comprised a pride of 5 Lions (4 adult males and a female), named the 'Majigelanes' (a term meaning 'Night Watchmen') asleep on a clearing. They were pretty inactive but did eventually move around a bit for some photo opportunities.

After the Lions we got word of a Leopard with a kill, and arrived at the scene just after dark. Under spotlight we watched a male Leopard - an individual known as Mati (Water) - move over to his Impala kill (which he had actually stolen from a female Leopard), feed for a while and then proceed to hoist the kill up into a tree. An incredible sighting indeed, and on a natural high we headed back to the lodge for drinks and dinner.

Cat Count: 1 Lion sightings (5 individuals); 1 Leopard sighting (1 male).

Day 9

Wednesday 26th October

Nkorho Bush Camp, SSGR

Our last full day began cool and cloudy after a storm had rolled through in the early hours. After coffee we set off and paid a visit to Mati, the young male Leopard from the previous evening. He was still there, resting in the open near the tree in which his kill was stashed. He wasn't too active, but it was good to get some close up views of him in the light of day. We spent our time scouring the far edges of the reserve for any animal activity that might have been missed. Back at camp we had breakfast and then had time to rest, relax and reflect upon the highlights of the safari thus far.

On the afternoon safari we headed to the site of the Leopard kill once again and found the young male Mati lying up on a termite mound, giving us exceptional views. After a while he came down the mound and lay out in the open, showing great interest in the vultures which began arriving on the scene (who knows how on earth they spotted the kill). After having the best of the sighting we headed on, having close up encounters with a trio of big Buffalo bulls and a huge White Rhino bull as further highlights for the evening. Some of the smaller highlights were a Lesser Bushbaby, Grey Tree Frog and species of Scorpion spotted with a UV light. Back at the lodge we had time to relax before a final evening meal. We went to bed to the sounds of a large thunderstorm rolling across the savannah, bringing some life-giving rain to the parched world around us.

Cat Count: 2 Leopard sightings (1 male).

Day 10

Thursday 27th October

Departure day

Our final drive proved to be a wonderful grand finale to a fantastic safari. First up was another encounter with Londolozi, the big White Rhino bull, followed by four female members of the Tshalala Pride resting out in the open on a short grass clearing.

For the final sighting we returned to the site of the Leopard kill and to our surprise found not only the young male Leopard there but two others as well, making for three Leopards in one sighting! One of the others (his sister, named Moya by the guides) was resting up in a Leadwood tree with a thirty foot vertical trunk, which must have been quite a feat to climb. The other, an adult female known as Salayexe, was resting in a dry mud wallow while Mati continued to feed on the remains of the kill. Incredible stuff, but soon it was time to head back to the lodge for breakfast and departure.

Cat Count: 1 Lion sighting (4 females); 1 Leopard sighting (2 females and 1 male).

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Species Lists

Mammals

	Common name	Scientific name	October									
			18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
1	Baboon, Chacma	<i>Papio ursinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Bat, Fruit (Peter's Epauletted)	<i>Mellivora capensis</i>					✓					
3	Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
4	Bushbaby, Lesser	<i>Galago moholi</i>									✓	
5	Bushbaby, Thick-tailed	<i>Otolemur crassicaudatus</i>			✓							
6	Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus scriptus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
7	Cat, African Wild	<i>Felis lybica</i>						✓				
8	Cheetah	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>				✓						
9	Dassie, Rock (Hyrax)	<i>Procavia capensis</i>	✓									
10	Duiker, Common	<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		
11	Elephant, African	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
12	Genet, Small-spotted	<i>Genetta genetta</i>				✓					✓	
13	Giraffe, Southern	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
14	Hare, Scrub	<i>Lepus saxatilis</i>			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
15	Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
16	Hyena, Spotted	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>			✓		✓			✓		
17	Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Jackal, Black-backed	<i>Canis mesomelas</i>					✓	✓				
19	Jackal, Side-striped	<i>Canis adustus</i>						✓	✓			✓
20	Klipspringer	<i>Oreotragus oreotragus</i>	✓	✓	✓							
21	Kudu, Greater	<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>			✓			✓		✓	✓	✓
23	Lion	<i>Pathera leo</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
24	Mongoose, Banded	<i>Mungos mungo</i>		✓		✓					✓	✓
25	Mongoose, Dwarf	<i>Helogale parvula</i>				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Mongoose, Slender	<i>Galerella sanguinea</i>				✓						
27	Mongoose, White-tailed	<i>Ichnuemia albicauda</i>							✓	✓		
28	Monkey, Vervet	<i>Cercopithecus aethiops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
29	Nyala	<i>Tragelaphus angasii</i>								✓	✓	
30	Rhinoceros, White	<i>Ceratotherium simum</i>				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
31	Squirrel, Tree	<i>Paraxerus cepapi</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
33	Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus aethiopicus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Waterbuck, Common	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
35	Wild Dog	<i>Lycaon pictus</i>							✓			
36	Wildebeest, Blue	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
37	Zebra, Burchell's	<i>Equus burchelli</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Total cat /Wild Dog stats: 20 sightings, 4 species of Cat.

Birds

1	Reed Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i>
2	African Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>
3	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
4	Goliath Heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>
5	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
6	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
7	Yellow-billed (Intermediate) Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>
8	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
9	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
10	Saddle-billed Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis</i>
11	Marabou Stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i>
12	Yellow-billed Stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>
13	African Sacred Ibis	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>
14	Hadedda Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>
15	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>
16	Secretarybird	<i>Sagittarius serpentarius</i>
17	Hooded Vulture	<i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>
18	White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>
19	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
20	Tawny Eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>
21	Wahlberg's Eagle	<i>Aquila wahlbergi</i>
22	African Hawk Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>
23	Martial Eagle	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>
24	Brown Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>
25	Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>
26	African Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>
27	Steppe Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>
28	Jackal Buzzard (E)	<i>Buteo rufofuscus</i>
29	Little Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter minullus</i>
30	Gabar Goshawk	<i>Micronisus gabar</i>
31	Dark Chanting Goshawk	<i>Melierax metabates</i>
32	African Harrier-Hawk (Gymnogene)	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>
33	Crested Francolin	<i>Francolinus sephaena</i>
34	Natal Francolin (NE)	<i>Francolinus natalensis</i>
35	Swainson's Spurfowl (NE)	<i>Francolinus swainsonii</i>
36	Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>
37	Kurrichane (Small) Buttonquail	<i>Turnix sylvatica</i>
38	Kori Bustard	<i>Ardeotis kori</i>
39	Red-crested Korhaan (NE)	<i>Eupodotis ruficrista</i>
40	Crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>
41	Senegal Lapwing	<i>Vanellus lugubris</i>
42	Blacksmith Lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>
43	White-crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus albiceps</i>
44	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
45	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
46	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
47	Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>
48	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>
49	Water Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>
50	African Mourning Dove	<i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>
51	Cape Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>
52	Laughing (Palm) Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
53	Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>

54	Brown-headed Parrot	<i>Poicephalus cryptoxanthus</i>
55	Purple-crested Turaco	<i>Tauraco porphyreolophus</i>
56	Grey Go-away Bird	<i>Corythaixoides concolor</i>
57	Diederik Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx caprius</i>
58	Burchell's Coucal (E)	<i>Centropus burchellii</i>
59	African Scops Owl	<i>Otus senegalensis</i>
60	Southern White-faced Scops-Owl	<i>Otus leucotis</i>
61	Pearl-spotted Owlet	<i>Glaucidium perlatum</i>
62	Spotted Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo africanus</i>
63	Verreaux's (Giant) Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo lacteus</i>
64	African Black Swift	<i>Apus barbatus</i>
65	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>
66	Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>
67	African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>
68	Speckled Mousebird	<i>Colius striatus</i>
69	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
70	Giant Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle maxima</i>
71	Half-collared Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo semitorquata</i>
72	Woodland Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon senegalensis</i>
73	European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>
74	White-fronted Bee-eater	<i>Merops bullockoides</i>
75	Lilac-breasted Roller	<i>Coracias caudata</i>
76	Purple Roller	<i>Coracias naevia</i>
77	African Hoopoe	<i>Upupa africana</i>
78	Green Woodhoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>
79	African Grey Hornbill	<i>Tockus nasutus</i>
80	Red-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus erythrorhynchus</i>
81	Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus leucomelas</i>
82	Southern Ground Hornbill	<i>Bucorvus leadbeateri</i>
83	Black-collared Barbet	<i>Lybius torquatus</i>
84	Crested Barbet	<i>Trachyphonus vaillantii</i>
85	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
86	Fork-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>
87	Eastern Black-headed Oriole	<i>Oriolus larvatus</i>
88	Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>
89	Arrow-marked Babbler	<i>Turdoides jardineii</i>
90	Dark-capped Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
91	Mocking Cliff-Chat	<i>Thamnodaea cinnamomeiventris</i>
92	African Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>
93	Cape Wagtail	<i>Motacilla capensis</i>
94	Magpie Shrike	<i>Corvinella melanoleuca</i>
95	Black-backed Puffback	<i>Dryoscopus cubla</i>
96	Grey-headed Bush Shrike	<i>Malaconotus blanchoti</i>
97	Retz's (Red-billed) Helmetshrike	<i>Prionops retzii</i>
98	Violet-backed Starling	<i>Cinnyricinclus leucogaster</i>
99	Burchell's Starling (NE)	<i>Lamprotornis australis</i>
100	Cape 'Glossy Starling	<i>Lamprotornis nitens</i>
101	Greater Blue-eared Starling	<i>Lamprotornis chalybaeus</i>
102	Red-winged Starling	<i>Onychognathus morio</i>
103	Red-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus erythrorhynchus</i>
104	White-bellied Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia talatala</i>
105	Red-billed Buffalo Weaver	<i>Bubalornis niger</i>
106	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
107	Southern Grey-headed Sparrow	<i>Passer diffusus</i>
108	Village (Spotted-backed) Weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>

109 Lesser Masked Weaver
110 Red-headed Weaver
111 Blue Waxbill
112 Yellow-fronted Canary

Ploceus intermedius
Anaplectes rubriceps
Uraeginthus angolensis
Serinus mozambicus