

# Tour Report

## Heart of the Delta Photo Safari

17 – 25 March 2025

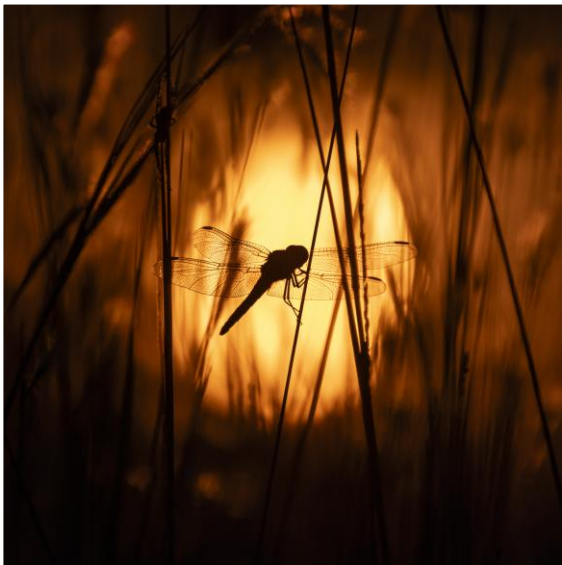
Leopard



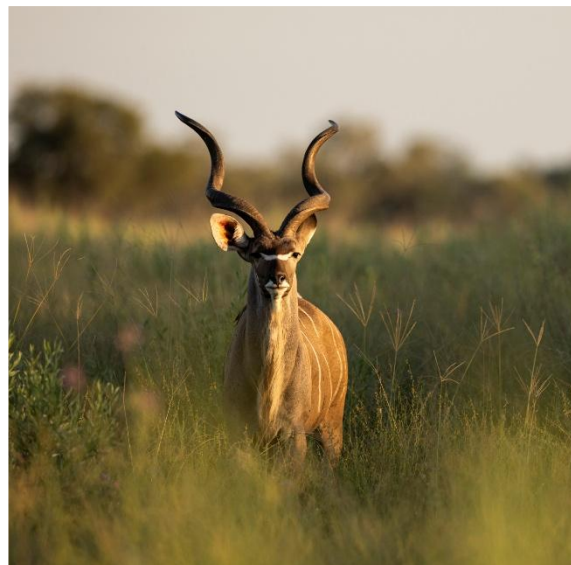
Lion



Dragonfly



Kudu



Compiled by Emma Healey

*Tour Leaders: Emma Healey*  
*Local guides: Ryder and Titus*  
*Local trackers: Lake and Sam*  
*Photos by Emma Healey (unless stated)*

An action-packed week of game drives in Pom Pom camp, to the north of the Okavango Delta, enjoying no less than seven leopard sightings, lions, birds, butterflies and a bit of everything the area has to offer.

## **Monday and Tuesday 17-18 March 2025**

### **Day 1-2:**

After a good flight to Johannesburg, the group continued to Maun and transferred straight to the domestic terminal to catch the final 20-minute flight to Pom Pom. It was the first stop on the 'shuttle' Cessna that travels to the various camps, and the flight is very scenic, showing the beautiful green landscapes that everyone was looking forward to exploring!

The guides and I were there to meet the group on arrival at the airstrip (after arriving a bit earlier to make sure it was clear of any four-legged interlopers!). After some introductions, we made our way back to camp to check everyone in.

After a quick turnaround, we met for afternoon tea and a briefing on how the week would work. Onks (camp manager) gave us an introduction to camp life, and I added some information, and before long, we were all set to head out on our first drive.

We had a leisurely afternoon drive, watching a large bull elephant enjoy the plentiful grasses, a tsessebe on patrol and a male impala with a huge hareem of females. As it's coming into breeding season, the male impalas are starting to be quite territorial, protecting their groups of females, and this male had a huge group! Passing a couple of ostriches, we came across some kestrels (lesser and Dickinson's) hovering and hunting among the grasses, and they came to rest on a tree, which at one point had five birds of prey on, including the kestrels and an amur falcon.



We passed a small breeding herd of elephants close to camp, with a youngish two to three year old that was being sheltered by Mum. We looked for big cats along the treeline, but unfortunately didn't see any. We did, however, find some green pigeons enjoying the fruit of the fig tree. A spotted hyena came past and paused for a few shots before heading into the long grass to lie in the shade.

We went for sundowners in the shade of a palm plantation to enjoy our first African sunset. As the sun disappeared, we began our drive back towards camp with the spotlight. We knew there were some lions nearby, and although we'd been unlucky in the daylight, it only took a minute or two to locate them, and we watched all nine of the pride pass close by the vehicles. A lovely start to the big cat viewing.

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On our return to camp, we sat down for our first dinner and celebrated the big birthday of one of the group before a much-needed early night.

**Wednesday 19 March 2025**

**Day 3:**

Leaving camp this morning, we made our way around the airstrip and came across a lone wildebeest walking through the tall grass. We positioned the vehicle to try and isolate him in the grass, but (not helpfully!) he turned and walked the other way. Luckily, we came upon two male kudus in beautiful morning light, who were much more accommodating. We stopped for a while and watched each other as they feasted on the greenery, providing some lovely photo opportunities.



We continued on, past some of the resident birds, including a rufous naped lark (the call of which you hear while driving around the flood plains), a striped kingfisher and little bee eaters. The bee eaters were huddled together on a branch, with four in a line. At one point, they were showing the yellow of their chests to attract the bees and insects.



After coffee, we made our way back to camp. We admired the beautiful flowers that were in bloom at this time of year, including the pretty lady pink flowers and the yellow stock rose (a kind of hibiscus). One group saw a leopard tortoise drinking from a puddle on their way back, which was a first for them and their guide!

As we were getting close to camp, we saw an elephant, who had clearly been enjoying some of the cool lagoon water nearby, near two palm trees. We watched as he approached the tree trunk and then, with a lot of force, shook the trunk to release some of the palm fruits to eat, which was lovely behaviour to observe.



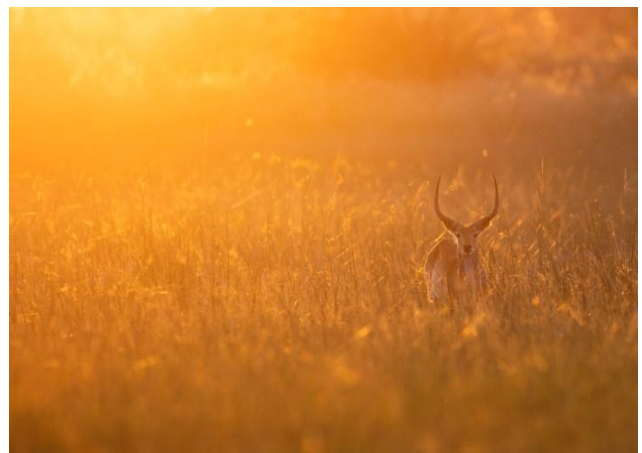
During our lunch break, we discovered a dead red lechwe under one of our tents near the main area. Clearly, a leopard had made a kill in the night and stashed it there. We left for the afternoon drive and explored the immediate area in case the leopard was resting nearby. With no immediate sign, we continued, enjoying some birds, including an African hoopoe and pipit, as well as some African monarch butterflies. We came upon a small troop of vervet monkeys playing in the trees, so we had some fun trying to photograph them between play fights!



As we drove past a sausage tree, we spooked a Verreaux's eagle owl, and it flew on from tree to tree. It's not often you see them flying, so it was an interesting experience. The light was dimming, so it was hard to get any shots of it in flight.



The sunset light was stunning, so we stopped by a herd of red lechwe in the tall grasses. As the light was getting really good, we got a call from Ryder – they'd found a leopard and it was on the move. Reluctantly, we left our lechwe and went to look for our first leopard. We drove over and arrived just after the sun had set, but we were able to see an old male (about nine to ten years old) resting in the grass before he lay down behind some bushes, looking like he was keen to hunt a herd of impala nearby.



The light had gone, so we decided to skip sundowners and head back to camp. We had heard in the meantime that there was indeed a leopard under one of our tents! On the way, the tracker spotted a genet on a termite mound. It was far away and therefore we only managed a quick record shot, but as they're not seen here often, it was lovely to see. When we got back, we crept over with Ryder and shone a torch towards the tent. At this point, the leopard came closer through the space under the tent to see what we were doing. We grabbed a couple of quick shots before leaving him to his dinner. This feeding continued into the night until a group of hyenas fought him for it and stole it around 1:30 am, from what we could hear.



**Thursday 20 March 2025**

**Day 4:**

The morning after the night before!

After catching up on the excitement of the leopard activity during the night, for those of us who were able to hear it (and/or unable to avoid it!), we left camp to some beautiful morning light, and headed east. We drove past two Southern ground hornbills in a tree and a tsessebe standing sentinel on a mound overlooking the flood plain.



Our tracker followed some leopard tracks that looked fresh, but unfortunately, there was no sign. Soon after, we drove out onto one of the flood plains, and there was a lioness walking through the long grass.

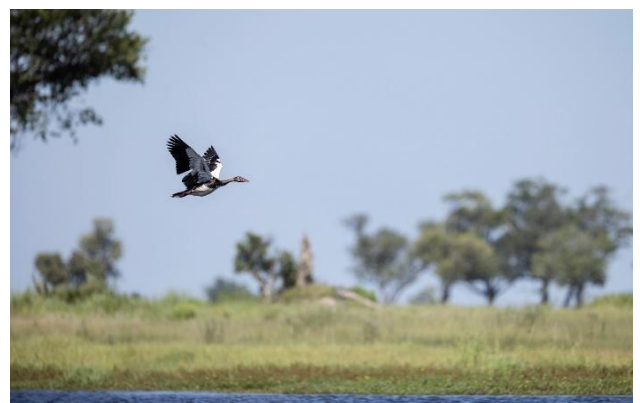
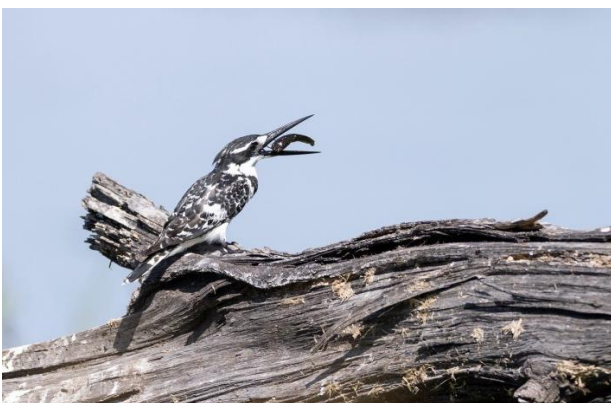
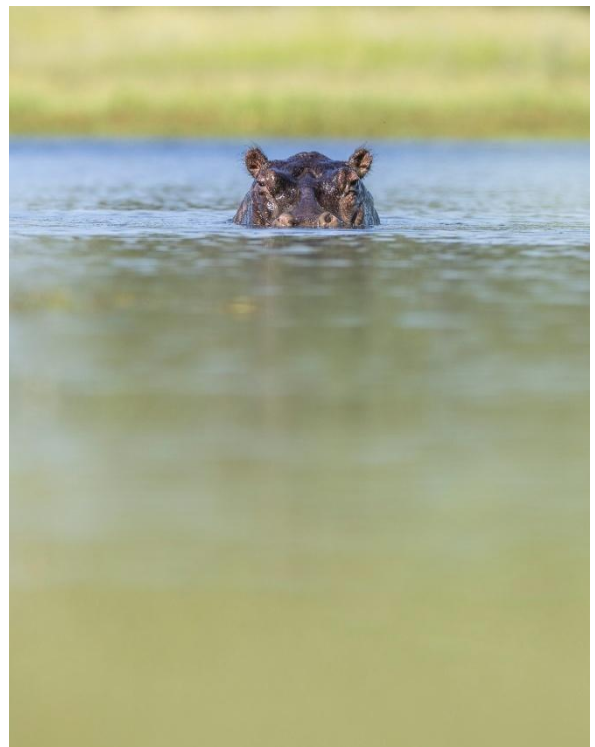
We followed her for a short distance through the tall grass, moving up onto an island and climbing into a tree. She stayed up there for some time, moving around the seemingly too narrow branches, and after a while, came down, rested briefly in the shade for a wash before disappearing into the bushes.



As we continued, the trackers identified more leopard tracks, but we decided it was heating up and time to head for coffee by one of the hippo-filled lagoons.

What a great spot for a coffee break! We were able to enjoy watching pied kingfishers and African fish eagles hunting, as well as other birds such as wood hoopoes, palm swifts, and spur-winged geese flying overhead, all while being watched by the inquisitive hippos who kept popping their heads up.

We had a brief sighting of a malachite kingfisher, but it flew off before we could photograph it, so it was still high on the target list. We finally dragged ourselves away, going back to camp for brunch and a rest.



After a break for lunch and some afternoon tea, we made our way north-west. We were aware of a herd of impalas looking intently to our left. Sam saw some movement in the tall grass, so we went to investigate. As we got closer to the bushes, we came upon two hyenas hiding in the grass, but they were quite shy and made their way away from us. We explored the bush to see what may have attracted them, but we couldn't see anything other than a badly camouflaged kudu trying to hide behind a small tree. As we went further round, we saw a buffalo. The guides suggested that the buffalo and the hyenas were what was likely to be alerting the impalas.

A small herd of elephants were slowly crossing the plain, so we went a little closer (almost running into a steenbok – I'm not sure who was more surprised). Some alarm calls had been heard earlier this morning, so we explored the area for any sign of predators, but couldn't see any and decided it was time for sundowners overlooking the plains with a beautiful sunset.

As darkness fell, we drove with the spotlight and came upon a young female leopard. The guides recognised her as the sub-adult cub of a well-known leopard in the area. Mum wasn't around, and she seemed a little nervous, so we left and made our way back to camp.

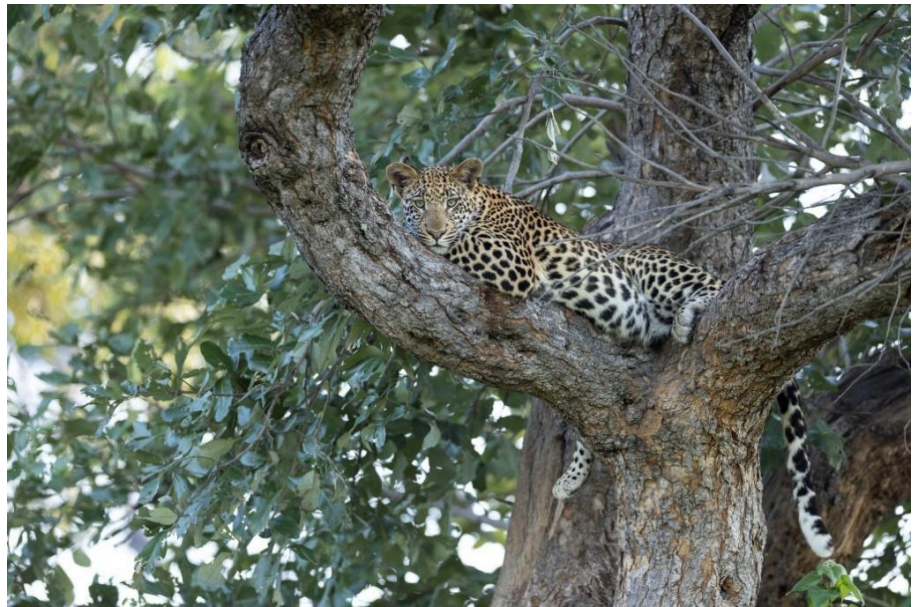
**Friday 21 March 2025**

### **Day 5:**

Some jackals were heard calling overnight close to camp, so we drove towards the direction that the jackals were thought to be and came across a young male leopard lying in the grass. We were hoping this would be the case, as jackals tend to alert everyone when a leopard is close. He was stalking a wildebeest who lay in front. He didn't try and go for it, but instead gave us a good show with a tour through his territory.



At first, he lay in the grass before hiding in the tall grass, in front of the red morning sky. Moving through the bushes, he tried to get into a bush, but it was a little too small, so he (very sensibly) chose a rain tree. He tried to climb into the top branches (and almost fell out!) before coming to rest for a while in the bough of the tree.



He jumped down, and we hoped that he would continue with his tour, but instead, he decided to hunker down in the bushes.

We drove across the plains to search for the lions in the area where we left them last night. It seemed quite peaceful, so we watched some wildebeest running around, including a territorial battle between one of the older males and a new one trying to muscle in. These opportunities are always good for panning, so we tried a bit of that, but unfortunately, they never seem to get the memo and often stop running as soon as you start panning!



We then noticed some impalas who looked alert, followed their gaze, we saw that there was a leopard ahead. It was the older male who had caught the lechwe under our tents. We followed him through the tall grasses for some time, and then he climbed a sausage tree where he stayed for some time, looking very relaxed!



Bird species spotted during the morning include a Verreaux's eagle owl, Wahlberg eagle, Amur falcon, Dickinson's kestrel, and we were kept entertained by the song of the rufous-naped lark sitting on top of termite mounds.



We stopped for a coffee in the shade of some trees, right next to where the lioness had been climbing the tree the day before. During our stop, we were also visited by Meyer's parrots. As we left, a huge herd of red lechwe crossed the channel close to the lagoon where we'd stopped, so we watched them for a while.

On our way back to camp, we saw a pin-tailed wydah posing, whistling ducks flying past, and another Verreaux's eagle owl in a tree. We drove past the male leopard, who was still lying in the tree, but had moved to a different one so the other half of the group was able to see him, as they'd not been there earlier. Then it was time for lunch.



As we left for our afternoon drive, a black mamba crossed the road in front of us and disappeared quickly into the grass. "Sightings" like that always make you wonder how many similar species we pass without seeing them winding their way through the grasses.

We were able to get quite close to a very calm elephant who was eating grass close to the airstrip. The light was quite harsh still, but we were able to capture some slightly more abstract images, which are achievable when you're able to remain close to them for a while.



We received a call over the radio that the other vehicle had spotted lions in the open. On the edge of the plains, right by the tree line, stood the lions. As we approached, we saw two males (one old and experienced, but looking tired) and one female. They were all lying down resting, when a lone wildebeest walked out towards a patch of water close to where they lay. Although alert, it continued towards them, and when it got closer, the female chased it, but the wildebeest was fast and it managed to escape. In the meantime, the older male had managed to stand up, but clearly decided that standing up was enough exercise and moved a few steps to lie down again in the shade, where they all fell asleep again. We decided to stay nearby and wait to see if they woke up as the sun was starting to go down. The light was about to be beautiful, but unfortunately, they didn't get up, so we went to enjoy sundowners.

On the way back, a young male leopard appeared in front of one of the vehicles. He turned off the main road and spotted some impala ahead. Slowly approaching them and hunched down in the road, we held back, and the trackers used the red lights (terrible for photography, but it needs to be done so as not to impact the animals' behaviour). We stayed for a while, but he was getting more attention from a couple of vehicles, and the impala moved off. We decided to head back to camp and leave him to it, but had a lovely little surprise in the bush as we drove into camp, a flap-necked chameleon on a branch welcoming us home.



Sunday 22 March 2025

**Day 6:**

We had breakfast this morning to the sound of not very distant hyena calls. We drove across the plains to see what had been bothering them. In general, it is either lions or leopards, so we had our fingers crossed. The trackers spotted lion tracks and the impala and lechwe were quite spread out and on guard, but despite this, we couldn't see any big cats, so we carried on with the smaller things for a while.

Some of the group found an African hoopoe in lovely morning light, and the others spent some time photographing coppery-tailed coucals coming and going from a nest. They came back with all sorts of critters, from dragonflies and cicadas to frogs! It was interesting to watch. Typically, the light was just getting lovely and warm when the call came over the radio: the 'Bunolo' had been found. She is one of the frequently seen leopards in the area and is very relaxed (her name translates as 'gentleness'), so we went straight over to where she was in the hope of some good photo opportunities.



Another vehicle from our camp had found her in the 'Ocean' area (a very incongruous name at this time of year for an area that's mostly underwater in flood season but currently very dry and open), so we drove over and found her in a tree, basking in the sunshine.



We spent some time with her before she got down and snuck into the tall grasses, stalking a herd of impala. They were on to her, so she lay down and rested in the grass. We left her to it and continued with our drive.

We came across some lovely birds, including swallowtail bee eaters and a grey-headed kingfisher that posed nicely for us, as well as the usual observers, the lilac breasted rollers.



We stopped for coffee on an island in the middle of the plains with lovely views across the grasses. Just as we were finishing, one client was scanning the area and suddenly spotted two lioness heads in the grass. We packed up quickly and headed to where they had been seen. They had ducked down again, making it hard to find them, but we found them in deep grass just as they got up, stretched and looked like they were considering crossing the channel close to them. We went to the other side in case they decided to drink or cross the water, but they stayed in the grasses and wandered towards a higher island.



As we watched them, we were treated to some lovely birds along the water's edge, including pied kingfishers, squacco herons and spur winged geese flying by.

The lions passed through the grasses and went over the island, where they came across a kudu. Luckily, they hadn't seen her baby that was hiding in the grass nearby, so she called, and we watched it run to safety. Thankfully, they were too far from where the lionesses were, and they both escaped.

We were just starting to think about heading back to camp when we got a call to say that the pack of wild dogs had been spotted nearby! We raced over to see them, lying in the shade of course, as it was about 11 am by this point and already quite hot. It's a pack of 19, and they were all lying down and resting. We watched for a while and then made our way back for a late brunch with our fingers crossed, hoping that they'd stay in the same area for the afternoon.



After a lunchtime workshop, a few of us were just packing up to get ready for the afternoon drive when we had a surprise visit from a Peter's epauletted fruit bat. The guides had shown us a group of them nesting in a tree near the entrance, but as they're nocturnal, you don't normally see them during the day. It flew in, hung for a few seconds and then flew back to the safety of the tree canopy. What a lovely surprise!



We drove back out towards where we'd seen the wild dogs this morning. On the way, our tracker picked up tracks of a lion and cubs. Until this morning, they didn't think there were any cubs in the area, but there had been a rumour that a tracker had spotted some tiny tracks. We drove around the area a little and found them resting on a termite mound in the shade, watching a herd of impala and wildebeest. There were two

lionesses and two small cubs (around five to six months). We watched them for some time, and were treated to the two babies suckling briefly until mum told them it was time to get off. After a while, we decided it was time to go and went to find the dogs.



As the area that we saw them earlier was close by, we drove over to look for them. Single we last saw them, they moved slightly into the open road. They lay for a while in the sun before a couple of them started moving with a little more intent. As soon as the matriarch got up and moved, they all gathered and started to trot along the road. We followed them as they split up, raced through the trees and across the plains, stopping to rest for a while in between, of course. It's very difficult to try and keep up with such a large pack, so we followed a few individuals and then stopped on the edge of the plain, hoping that some would come towards us in the lovely red sunset light. Frustratingly, the plan didn't come together, and the sun went under the horizon, giving them a better chance of sneaking around. After an hour or so of watching them, they came across a herd of impala and successfully made a kill. By this time, the sun had completely set, so we left them and made our way back to camp.



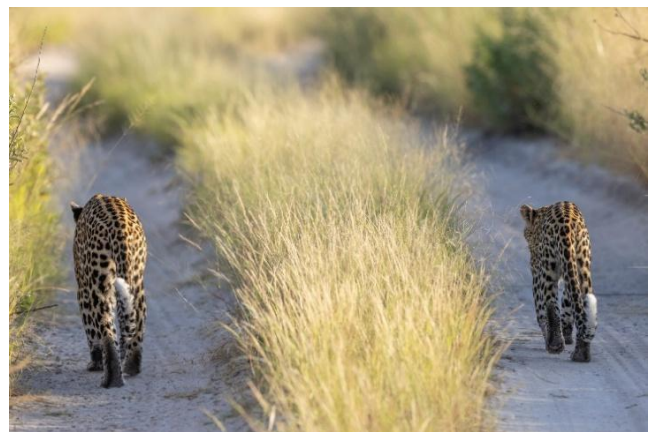
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Sunday 23 March 2025

**Day 7:**

This morning we decided to head north-west. The trackers spotted some leopard tracks, and we came upon an adult female. The guides recognised her as the mum of the sub-adult cub that we'd seen a couple of nights before. We drove with her for a while, and she started calling the cub, who ran towards her after a few minutes, and we were treated to a lovely reunion before they began to walk through the grasses and along the road.

We followed them for a while, until they went into the tall grasses. Unfortunately, we had some car troubles as the clutch went. We all had to jump in together for a bit while they fixed the Land Cruiser. The leopards took the opportunity to find some shade for a nap.



We drove on and photographed some birds, including a lovely woodland kingfisher, which was high on everyone's list. We then came upon a very new baby kudu – always nice to see the new babies and enjoy the cuteness factor!

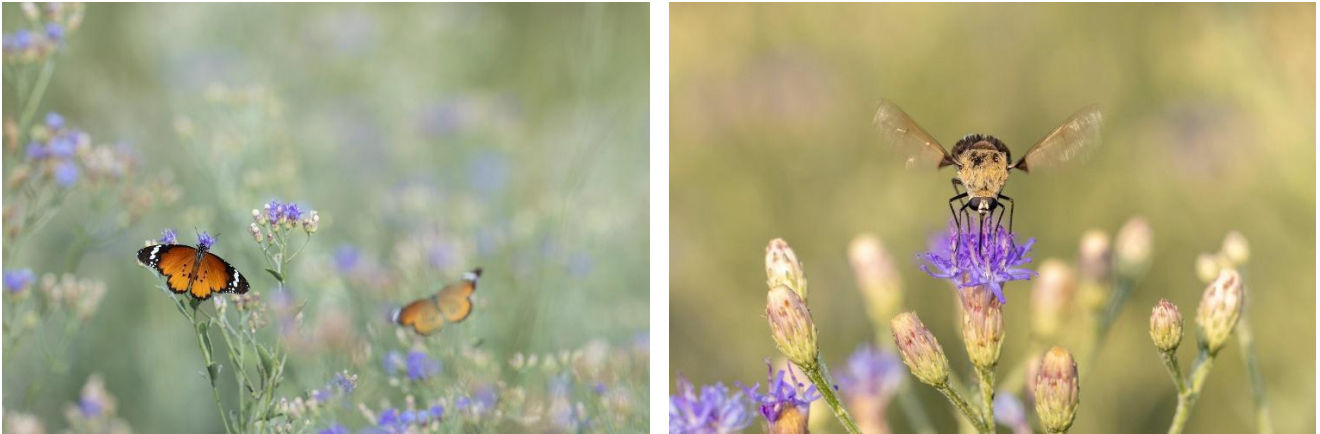


As the replacement second vehicle came to pick us up, they saw a large male leopard asleep on a termite mound. As soon as we split the group up again, we went to see him. He was fast asleep and hiding in the shade of the mound, so we left him to sleep.

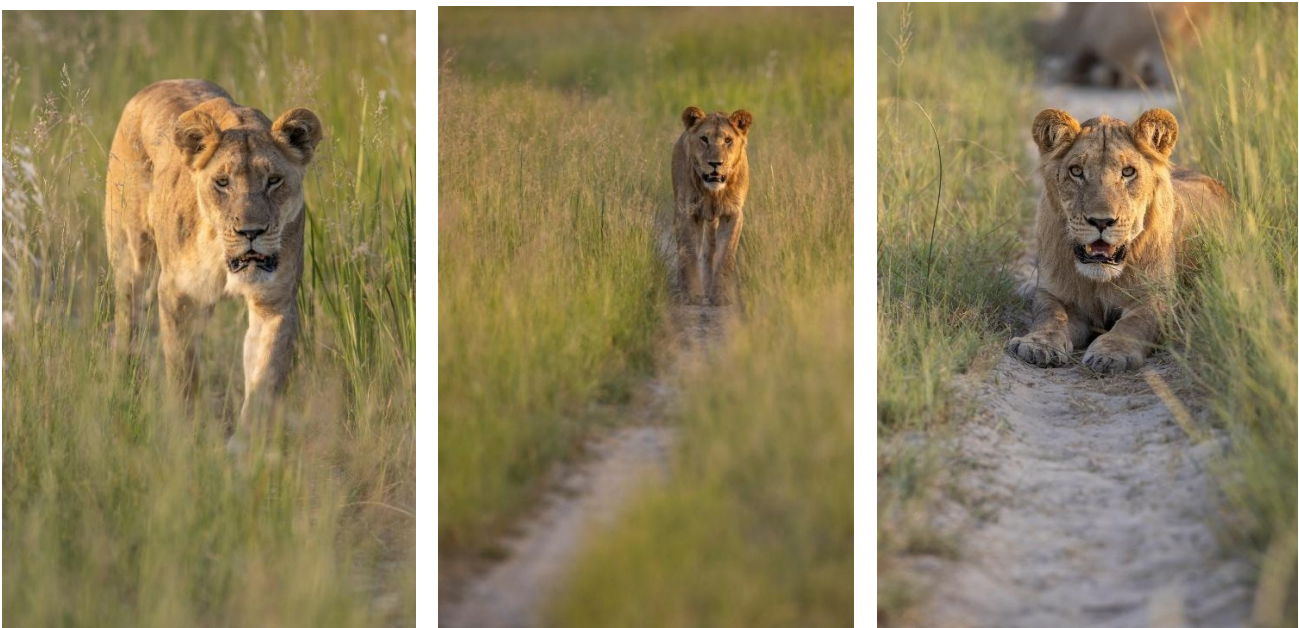
This afternoon at tea, we split into two groups. Some of us left to go and photograph butterflies and insects in a patch of cornflower Vernonia flowers (where we'd seen a lot of activity), whilst the other group went to see if they could find the leopard from this morning on or around the termite mound. They went with the hope that he might have climbed up a tree, but instead, he had retreated into the shade of the bushes.



Back at the Vernonia, there were a lot of African monarchs, various types of Acraea, swifts, pea blues, moths, weevils, mantids and bee flies among other things.



After 45 minutes or so, we were all starting to feel the heat of the late afternoon sun, so we decided to make our way to the hippo pool for sunset. We hopped back into the vehicle and went round the corner – only to find ourselves faced with the pride of nine lions making their way out of the grasses along the road. They also looked quite hot, so after walking for a couple of minutes, they sat and enjoyed the cool sand on the road.



We sat and watched them for a while and then made our way to the hippos. As the sun started getting quite low, we wanted to photograph the snowflake grass. For a bit of creativity, we stopped close to some that were backlit by the sun. Additionally, there was a bonus dragonfly that modelled in the setting sun.



We continued around the lagoon to catch the final colours of the beautiful sunset with our sundowners, before making our way back to camp.

It was a quick dinner for some of us as we were heading out to do some night sky photography. The sky in the area is very dark and provides fantastic views of the Milky Way. We decided to drive to a nearby baobab and use it as a foreground. Unfortunately, it was difficult to get the tree lit, but one group member managed a wonderful image with the milky way in the background (image below).



**Monday 24 March 2025**

**Day 8:**

As we left the camp this morning, right outside on the plains, we came upon three sub-adult lionesses playing with each other and attempting to hunt a wildebeest. They seemed more interested in playing and greeting each other, so the wildebeest was able to escape.



As we watched the lions, we heard a jackal alarm-calling close to the nearby island. This was likely to be due to a leopard around the next island. Someone went over and found a female leopard walking along the road. We saw her, but she was mostly hidden by the long grass. There were already a couple of vehicles with her, so we decided to stop with the black bellied korhaan, who was calling and displaying for a female.

We received a call to say that a group of adult lions with a couple of very young cubs had been spotted by one of the islands, so we decided to drive over. As we reached them, the four adults were all lying in the shade, resting, and the cubs were hidden in the bush. We were treated to a very brief view of the cubs as they ran out to see Mum and then back into the bush to rest.

We waited for a while but they didn't reappear, and the lions started moving into the shade.



We decided to go for a coffee by the plain, and on our way back, we went around the corner and saw a bird of prey sitting in the low branches of a tree. On closer inspection, it was a brown snake eagle...with a snake! We had discussed that we'd love to see a snake eagle with a snake, so we went closer to see if we could get any images. It was (as ever!) in terrible light, but it was fantastic to see. We returned to camp for lunch and a rest (when the baboons let us, as they were very happily using the rooftops of the tents as trampolines!).



Some of us left afternoon tea a little early to go and photograph the butterflies and insects in a patch of cornflower Vernonia flowers. We had seen a lot of activity over the past few days, and today there were a lot of African monarchs in flight and some other beautiful butterflies, but they were still quite mobile.

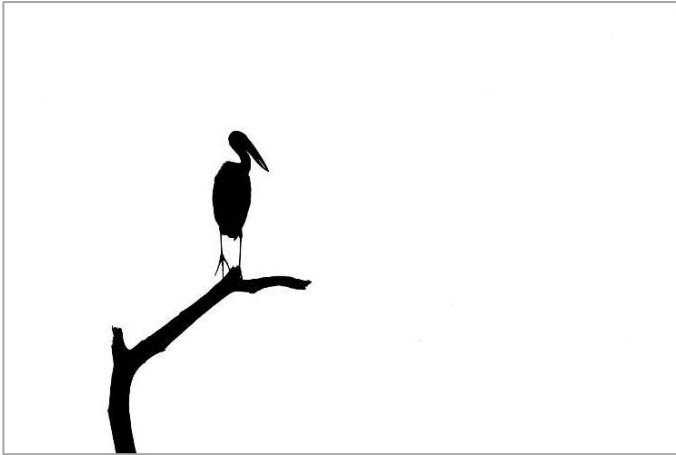


As well as the butterflies, there was plenty more to see, including some small moths, weevils, grasshoppers, dragonflies and mantids.



It was quite hot, so we continued to the hippo pool for our last sunset. Most of the group started at the side of the lagoon for some nice light on the hippos, then went to the other side for backlit opportunities as the sun set. As with wildlife, the hippos didn't do what we hoped in the exact spot we'd hoped (we're very fussy!), but it was lovely to watch as they started to move more and get ready to leave the lagoon for the night.

As we stood watching the light fade, we spotted the first open-billed stork we'd seen. It landed in a dead tree, which provided a lovely silhouette opportunity.



We enjoyed our final sundowners to a cacophony of hippo sounds before returning to camp for dinner.

**Tuesday 25 March 2025**

**Day 9:**

We started our final game drive with a lovely sunrise. It was quite quiet on the plains. We did, however, find the tsessebe standing guard on its usual mound, so that was a nice farewell, and an old lone buffalo who had been enjoying the mud.



A Verreaux's eagle owl sat watching us intently in the shade of a branch before sunrise, and then we continued to find a beautiful Bateleur eagle perched on a branch in the rising sunlight.



The trackers spotted some leopard tracks, which looked like the mum and sub-adult cub, but we couldn't locate them. We had to head back to camp for the group to freshen up before their flight, and it was time to say goodbye to the plains. On the way back to camp, a woodland kingfisher sat on a branch and posed nicely for a few final photos.

After brunch and a bit of time to freshen up, it was time to make our way to the airstrip for our final aerial views of the Delta before heading home.

**A big thank you to our wonderful guides and trackers:**



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