

## Tour Report

# Heart of the Delta Photo Safari

24 March - 1 April 2025

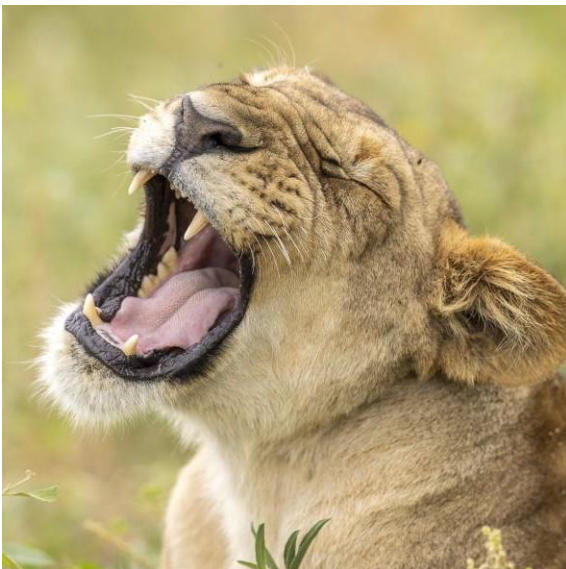
Leopard



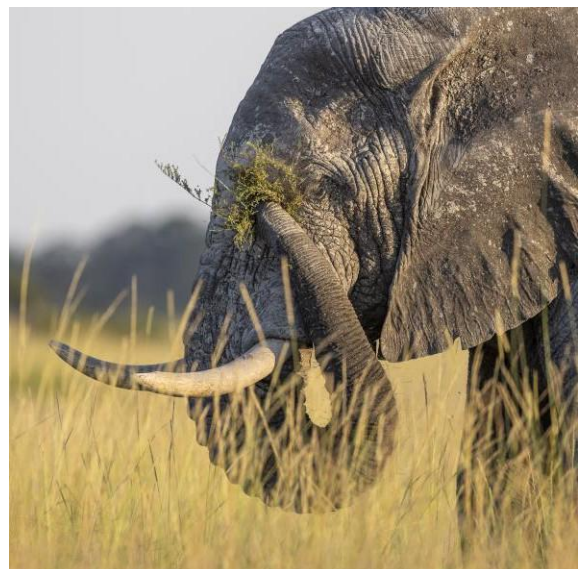
Wild dog



Lion



Elephant



Compiled by Emma Healey

**Tour Leaders: Emma Healey**  
**Local guides: Titus and Elmo**  
**Local trackers: Lake and Sam**

A cat-tastic week in the Okavango Delta, with leopards and lions galore, as well as a cameo by the wild dogs. A plethora of bird species, plains game and even a bit of rain to mix things up on our last day.

**Monday - Tuesday 24/25 March 2025**

**Day 1/2:**

The group arrived slightly late due to plane delays, so after Titus, Elmo and myself met them at the airstrip, we nipped back to camp for a quick freshen and briefing over afternoon tea before we headed out for our first afternoon drive.



It was a very hot day, so most things were (sensibly!) hiding in the shade. We came upon a wildebeest with very muddy horns, as he'd been trying to cool off in the mud and passed a pair of wattled cranes, looking for food in the shallow water. A little further on we found a Verreaux's eagle owl in the shade of a tree, a black-bellied korhaan and some of our first lilac-breasted rollers.

The red lechwe we saw were resting in the grass, as were the impala and even the large bull elephant was walking through the long grasses, making the most of the shade and bathing in dust to keep cool.

We drove to an open plain with lovely palm trees for sundowners and were welcomed by a troop of baboons, enjoying the rapidly cooling temperature. On our way back to camp for dinner, our trackers spotted two scrub hares with the spotlight as well as all the plains game trying to get through the night!



Wednesday 26 March 2025

**Day 3:**

As we had breakfast, we could hear the vervet monkeys in the trees around us alarming. We looked around and found a hyena quite close to the fire – obviously seeing if there were any leftovers from breakfast.

We made our way south from camp this morning, past the airfield, and the usual small herds of impala and wildebeest. We stumbled upon a jackal, running around in the tall grass not far from camp, so followed it for a while. It was exploring and searching for food, but alert, so we looked around and spotted three lionesses resting in the grass.



We approached the lionesses and as the sun started to rise, they stretched and began moving around. They were a very playful trio and for the next hour and a half, they treated us to a fantastic variety of playing behaviour, tree climbing and other interactions, which were just amazing to watch.



The sun had started to give out quite a bit more heat by this point, so they passed the vehicle and lay down incredibly close to us in the shade, spending a bit of time nuzzling before carrying on.



They attempted a hunt but didn't manage to catch the lucky wildebeest so they returned and hunkered down in the grass to rest.



We drove on, but as the heat was getting more intense, the animals were making the most of what was available, with a small herd of zebra enjoying some dust bathing. After enjoying the intense smells of the sage and turpentine grasses as we passed, we made our way back to camp for brunch.

Over lunch, some monkeys were alarming so as we left for our afternoon drive, we searched for tracks. A couple of different tracks were spotted, but nothing was visible close to the camp, so we decided to drive a bit further afield, hoping to get a glimpse of whatever passed through earlier.

We passed a large troop of baboons foraging in the grass and a lonely bull elephant who had just taken a mud bath. As we watched him enjoying a snack, a crested barbet appeared in the higher branches of a tree next to us, keeping an eye on all proceedings.



As we were driving towards the northwest, Lake noticed some movement in a bush so we went closer but couldn't see anything. As we pulled back, a leopard was suddenly in front of the small palm bush next to us. She walked through to the other side so we drove around and Titus got a glimpse of a tiny cub. We realised it was the female with one cub (about five to six weeks) that all the guides knew about but hadn't seen. What a treat! The mum got up onto a fallen tree and called the cub. We watched her lick it from above and the cub gingerly put its head up, considering whether to jump up, but eventually got spooked and went back into hiding under the trunk. Despite Mum's best efforts (and all of us silently crossing our fingers!), she couldn't coax it back out.



She walked through to the other side of the bushes and we saw the cub follow her. We raced around to the other side, where we had some fantastic views of Mum as the sun was setting behind, but the cub was too shy to make itself visible and after a short while, we left them so as not to disturb them too much. Time for sundowners to enjoy the beautiful sunset.



On our journey back to camp, there were sightings of scrub hares and a crocodile making its way along the road. During the evening and night, there were some indications that the lions had made a successful kill as the hyenas were making a fuss, but the lions sounded as if they were holding their ground... for now.

**Thursday 27 March 2025**

#### **Day 4:**

Many of us had woken a few times during the night to a chorus of lion calls, but as the morning dawned, they were increasingly far away. The trackers could see lion and leopard tracks on the ground, but nothing fresh so we decided to follow the direction of the leopard tracks just in case.

In a wide open area, we came up on a herd of female kudus, just as the light began to improve, which was lovely. Although a little cautious, some did stick their heads up for a few portrait images, even displaying their trusty red-billed oxpecker friends, who were feasting on their ticks.



As we were watching them, we received a call from Titus – they had found a male leopard sleeping and it had woken and started to move towards Rebecca’s field, so we headed over. As we arrived, we found him walking through tall grass. We spent some time watching him but he was scent-marking and moving constantly, so unfortunately, not good for photos. We left him to his morning walk and continued until we found a large troop of baboons close to a herd of wildebeest. One of the large males was sitting on sentinel duty atop a termite mound while the others were running around, playing, eating and fighting (as baboons generally do).



On our way to our coffee stop, we came across a very calm male giraffe having an ‘oxpecker facial’ and enjoying some shade.

Although the coffee stop is a lovely break and generally time to relax and enjoy our surroundings, there were a couple of little bee-eaters on a bush nearby catching some breakfast. Despite the tricky light, most of the group spent some time trying to photograph them. There were a couple of large elephants walking across the plains nearby, so there was something to see on all sides.



As we drove back in the direction of the camp, it was getting much warmer. A tsessebe was standing on sentinel duty on a termite mound as we passed, not attempting to hide from the sun. They are made of strong stuff! We spotted a southern ground hornbill on a low branch of a tree not far from the camp, so we pulled in to photograph it. As we turned and tried to figure out the best way to get an image in the harsh light (not an easy one) Elmo suddenly said... "There's a leopard in the tree, don't look"! Of course, we all turned and there was indeed a leopard in the tree, peeking over the top of the bough next to us. I think we may have woken her from her nap!

We reversed out to let the tracker into the vehicle for safety and then returned to photograph the leopard and let the other vehicle know she was there. We stayed with her for a while, but she was very sensibly staying in the shade and snoozing, so we decided to come back later in the hope that she would still be there. Everyone was keen to return to see if the leopard was still there.



After spending more time exploring the area, we drove a few minutes north and there she was. She was lying in the leadwood tree (and moved to a slightly different branch but hadn't got much further) and at times she looked like she may be ready to come down, but she kept changing position and getting comfy again instead.

As the sun began to get lower, it cast some really beautiful light on her, and we were happy to just wait and observe what she did. Of course, because at the end of the day, cats are cats and will do as they please, she only decided to make her way down after the sun had set, which was difficult to capture on camera due to the lower light levels. Despite the light, it was really nice to see her on the move and starting her nightly patrol.



We went a little further away from the area to find a sundowner spot and as we parked up, a head came up next to the tree. A hyena! On closer inspection, there were three. We were keen not to disturb them but it was getting darker and we were running out of options to stop, so we chose to stay. We got out of the vehicles and the hyenas were not in the least bit bothered by us. They stayed and snoozed for a bit by the tree and rolled in the mud, before inspecting us from afar and then disappearing into the grass. It's not every day you have a G&T with a hyena – what a fantastic way to end a great day.



Friday 28 March 2025

**Day 5:**

This morning whilst we were all being collected, news spread that there were lionesses in the camp. They had been seen close to the tents and then around the breakfast area, so the guides made sure it was safe before we were gathered. It was exciting to see the tracks on the path. As we left for our morning drive, we followed their tracks, only to find that the three lionesses we'd spent time with a few days ago had just made a successful wildebeest kill.



We spent over an hour with them, watching them eat, play and finally try to move the carcass into the bush to hide it as much as possible. They stretched their legs and walked around the area, with one jumping onto a fallen tree for a lovely pose, before they went off into the bushes – presumably to rest after their big meal.



We continued and came across three lions out on the floodplain (clearly, they hadn't received the message of the kill yet)! A male and a female were resting and one male was eating the grass (presumably to make himself sick). After he had his fill, he flopped down with the others and we left them to it as the light was getting quite harsh.

We stopped for coffee by a lagoon filled with hippos and a plethora of wildlife. Given the time of day, the hippos were resting, and an elephant passed near the water's edge, just behind a pied kingfisher hunting — a textbook African scene! We were also treated to some smaller visitors, including little bee-eaters, red-billed oxpeckers, swallows and palm swifts. Just before we began our return, we spotted an eastern dotted border butterfly drinking from the wet soil.



Over our lunch break, a few of us in the main area of the camp spotted lionesses across the floodplain. Sheltering under the tree and popping over to occasionally drink water, they slept and seemed happy on their side of the plain. It was surreal to see them so near.

We left a little early this afternoon as we were keen to try and find another pride of lions that included a large male with a dark mane. We passed through some beautiful scenery, including where we'd seen the leopard mum and cub, but unfortunately no sign of our male lion today. However, we did pass some areas of palm trees and long greases and stumbled upon two buffalos, one with 12 oxpeckers on his back!

We crossed a small channel and suddenly heard a commotion by the side of the vehicle. It turned out we had disturbed a water monitor lizard that must have been resting next to where we came out of the channel. As a result of the disturbance, it ran through the grass into the safety of the water before most of the group could see it, never mind photograph it!

We came close to small islands near a forested area with a variety of trees, some of which were adorned with vultures. We could see the remains of a red lechwe on the side of the mound, and it was clear there were predators around. A couple of minutes later, we found our predator, a large male mating with one of the females.



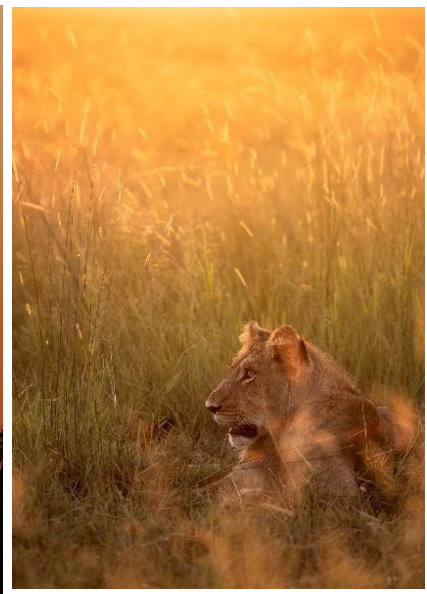
We stayed for a while to observe them, as generally speaking, when they are mating, they do it every 20 minutes or so. We were hoping that we'd be ready with our cameras for the next time, but of course, 20 minutes went by and neither of them moved other than to turn over. We then decided to move across to the next tree, where the rest of the pride was.

We found six in total: one male, three females and two sub-adult cubs (about 12 months old).

That meant we were up to 14 lions today! While the adults rested, the two young ones decided to have a little wander and explore, so we went with them. At one point, several vultures came down to the ground, and the young lions ran over to practice their hunting skills!



After a while, they, like the adults, decided it was too hot so they lay down as well. We went back to the mating couple and some of the group timed it perfectly; however, we were a little late and they were flat on the grass. They worked according to their own schedule! The sun was starting to get lower in the sky so we decided to go back over to where the cubs were lying and try to get some images of them in the tall grass with the beautiful light. Unfortunately, our planned photos weren't as successful as we'd hoped, as they didn't get up like we were hoping they would. Despite this, we still managed to get some images with lovely light and had sundowners watching the stunning sunset with some really interesting cloud formations.



**Saturday 29 March 2025**

**Day 6:**

This morning, we made our way southeast and stumbled upon one of the same lionesses from the island (across from camp), looking like she was going to hunt. Her two sisters came out from the bush, where they had been hiding, and they walked across the plains playing briefly and then they began to watch the lechwe.



The two walked towards the lechwe as if they wanted to try and corral them, but there wasn't even a hint of stealth and the lechwe were very aware of their presence. As we were wondering what they were going to do, we got a call from another driver from camp saying that a pack of wild dogs had been spotted and they were "highly mobile". We grabbed our things, left the lions, and made our way towards Kanana.

It took us just under half an hour, and we had arrived at a pack of around 20 dogs. They were scattered around the channel, running through the grass and hopping in and out of the water.



The sun was just coming up above the trees and after a quick fight with a hyena, the dogs decided that they were ready to go and just like that, they were off! We followed them along the road and then through the tall grasses. They always split up, so it's very difficult to keep track of where they go but the drivers and trackers do an amazing job. We were closely following them when they considered hunting a group of lechwe, but in the end, decided against it and carried on... with a lone hyena following close behind. We weren't sure if he was hopeful of leftovers or having an identity crisis!



The wild dogs finally came to a stop by a bridge in the shade of some trees. The hyena had followed them the whole way, a little behind, but when he came across them sleeping, he decided to take a rest in the shade too. We watched for a while in case they decided to move again, listening to an elephant trumpeting at something in the background, but they looked comfortable and were following the shade, so we left them to it.



When driving back to camp, there is always something else to see... A tawny eagle flew over us, a brown snake eagle sat in the shelter of leaves in a tree and we came across a flock of spur-wing geese on the road.

Suddenly, an older female leopard walked along the road in front of the vehicle. She was quite slow and looked a little frail, so we followed her into the shelter of some trees, where she rested briefly on a fallen tree before carrying on along the road. She looked tired, so we left her to wander alone.



It was time for some coffee, so we made our way past a Mum and baby giraffe that were eating with some female kudus. As we were nearly at our planned stopping point, we received a call from Titus saying that they had found a leopard where we had planned to stop. Of course! We sped over and Bunolo's brother

was lying in the shade beneath a bush, in the tall grass. We watched for a few minutes, but after some time he jumped up, climbed into a bush, and disappeared. During this encounter, we also observed an unusually single-wattled crane behind us.

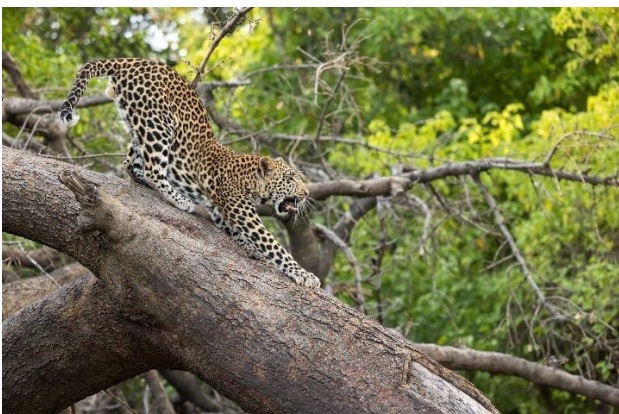
We left both of them alone and stopped to watch a large bull elephant cross the channel, drinking in front of us before bathing in dust. We decided to head back to camp and have coffee as it was already almost time for brunch. What a busy morning!



After lunch, we left camp, stopping briefly for a posing striped kingfisher and a little bee-eater on top of a dead tree. Driving out onto the open plains, we saw five male kudus. Two of them started to play fight so we stopped, watching them for a while. Not long after, they hid in the bushes and continued to eat. We carried on past what looked to be a pregnant female side-striped jackal.



Next on our journey, we went to investigate the area where we saw the young male leopard earlier in the day. We found him about to climb a dead tree and kept having to switch the vehicles periodically as it was a tight squeeze where he'd chosen to be. But in the end, we all had lovely views of him, stretching and climbing higher into the branches.



After we left him, we saw a small pride of lions across the channel and decided to try and get closer to them. Unfortunately, we got stuck... The ground had other ideas and it was much more swampy than Titus had originally thought. We called Elmo and the other vehicle came and rescued us. Luckily, we were just in time to go around and see the lions stretching and waking us as the sun set.



**Sunday 30 March 2025**

**Day 6:**

As we drove across the plains, we heard the call of a Verreaux's eagle owl from the trees. As we got closer, the owl flew out in front of us, gliding from one tree to a dead branch—much to our surprise, it was closely followed by another one! They flew into a tree and we went around to watch them. There, they sat chatting to each other. It was an amazing sight. We sat for some time and enjoyed the sounds of the owls, woodland kingfishers and many other birds. As the sun rose higher, we sat there and could hear lions calling nearby. What a dawn chorus!

Later, we crossed a nearby river and drove past a termite mound. Just then, a banded mongoose popped out, prompting us to stop. Suddenly, the entire mound was teeming with them! We sat and watched them run in and out of their burrow, before finally disappearing into the grass to begin their hunt.



Out on the vast open plain, we came across a large male lion walking alongside the road, weaving in and out of the bushes. We followed him through the bushes until he settled under a large tree in the open, where he lay down to rest for a long time. Nearby, the red lechwe were very aware of him. Though they were alert, he was no threat to them. We stayed close, watching as he slept. As the lion slept, the surrounding birds were full of life. A group of southern ground hornbills flew by, and in the water, a grey heron, egrets and saddle-billed storks fished for their next meal. The main excitement (strange when you're sitting next to a lion?!) was an African fish eagle. Perched nearby, it suddenly swooped down and

caught an enormous catfish. After a few attempts, it finally managed to get a hold of it and took his prize to a nearby branch to eat.



After that action, we went back to the male lion. Showing no signs of movement, we left him to sleep under a tree as the day got hotter. If he was sensible, he'd stay in the shade for a while—and it seemed he wasn't the only one with that idea. Not far off, we saw a lioness walk up to a termite mound, where she lay down in the shade as well. Both lions looked very well-fed, hot and tired, suggesting that it was likely they had been on a hunt together earlier that morning or perhaps the night before.

As the day went on, we stopped by a lagoon in the shade of some trees, including a huge sausage tree that was attracting some Meyers parrots, busy nibbling at the sausages. On our way back to camp, we had a lovely view of a Dickinson's kestrel on a dead trunk, which (against all odds) took off and flew straight towards us, giving us a chance to catch it in flight.



A few of us left early from our afternoon tea to head to the Vernonia flowers for some butterfly and insect photography. The hot temperature meant that a lot was still flying around, but some posed nicely for us and we found some other interesting things, such as a fantastic crab spider eating a bee while being mobbed by flies trying to get in on the action (below).



As we were walking around photographing the butterflies, we could hear an elephant nearby. He was behind us, eating the bushes, but despite our presence, he was happy to continue. The guides kept an eye on him to make sure he stayed a good distance away. It was a lovely soundtrack to our afternoon.

After we'd had our fill, we went to the hippo lagoon to meet the rest of the group, who were photographing hippos and a squacco heron when we arrived. We spent some time on the near side of the lagoon to make the most of the late afternoon light. When the light started to fade, we headed to the other side for sunset and our sundowners.

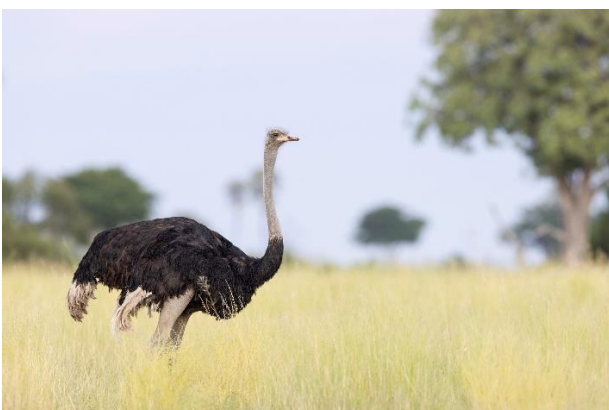
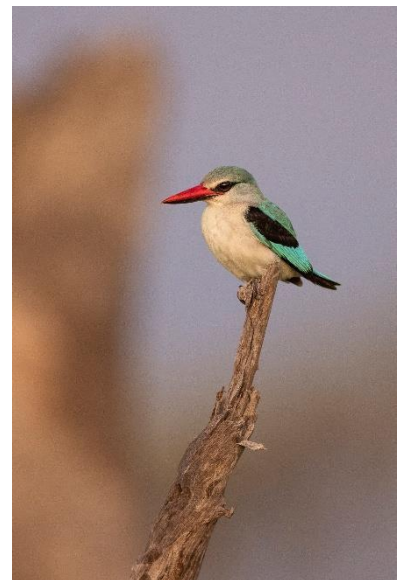
**Monday 31 March 2025**

**Day 7:**

When we arrived at breakfast this morning, we could tell something was amiss. A hyena had arrived just as the team had finished setting up and decided the food looked too tasty not to jump up and knock half the buffet over. This resulted in the team having to rush to get it all redone. After this show, it hung around and we were treated to some very close-up views of the hyena walking by. After breakfast, we decided it was time to head out and made our way northwest, accompanied by a beautiful sunrise, which the woodland kingfishers also seemed to be enjoying.

On our way out, we passed a jackal feeding on the remains of a kill and continued on to Rebecca's field—a beautiful open area with palm trees, termite mounds, water holes and lovely areas of tall grass.

A pair of ostriches greeted us and looked like they may be getting ready for mating season. Apart from the ostriches, we spent some time with large herds of elephants and a zebra that was eating and dust bathing in the beautiful morning light.



As we drove along the road, we fairly regularly came upon a Frankolin with a clutch of babies running along the road. More often than not, instead of jumping off into the grass on the side of the road, they'd run along the road for some time. It was amusing to watch, but I have a feeling there's a lesson being missed in the rearing of the chicks' road safety!

The sky was clear and the light already bright by around 08:00. We drove on, stopping for a brown snake eagle before heading up to the northern airstrip. We came across a large troop of baboons, with a few very sweet babies. We sat for a while and watched them run through the grass, play, drink, and stand guard.

As we continued along, we were treated to the usual (and slightly more unusual) sights. At one point, we almost ran over a water terrapin walking across the road, which was quite a surprise for everyone! Obviously trying to get to one of the nearby waterholes, it ran into the grass to escape as soon as it could. Further on, a journey of giraffes was crossing the plain—always a lovely sight to see them walking across open plains. As we went closer to get a better angle on them, we stumbled upon three hyenas gardening a den under a termite mound. They were obviously quite experienced; one had lost most of both ears, likely in a fight. Interestingly, it was displaying some quite odd behaviour, suckling from one of the older females,



so perhaps it was younger than it looked. It was a nice opportunity to see them up close, as they are usually in the tall grass or running away. We stayed and continued to watch them for a while, whilst enjoying the relative coolness of the shade.

As the day continued, we stopped for coffee close to a small bushy area. The first of the group headed to the 'bathroom' and on the edge of a termite mound, they discovered a beautiful golden orb web spider on its web. A group of us spent some time photographing her. What a beautiful spider!



We started making our way back and passed a juvenile fish eagle sitting in the low branches of a tree. We were confused at first as it still had a lot of darker feathers on its chest so it didn't immediately look like a fish eagle, but it was a beautiful bird.

We were driving at a fairly steady speed and, as we became used to hearing over the past couple of days (!), Elmo suddenly said, "Oh, there's a leopard!" We reversed past the termite mound and lo and behold, a beautiful female leopard was lying at the base of the mound. She moved up onto the mound and we could see that she'd obviously had a terrible eye injury. It looked like she'd lost sight in her eye. We were quite far from camp, which meant that she wasn't one of the cats that the team were used to seeing. We didn't have any more information, but it gives an idea of what these predators have to go through to survive in the wild.



We arrived back at camp a little later than expected. After all the excitement this morning, we were further away, so when we returned to camp, we had brunch and everyone went to their tents to rest and recharge (themselves and their batteries)! That wasn't to be, though... a few minutes later as I was leaving the tent, I saw a lion right outside, stalking past around ten metres from the edge of my balcony. I quickly messaged the group and as many of us as could, came out onto our balconies to watch what was unfolding. The three lionesses had moved close to camp and two others were across the flood plain on the island. One was

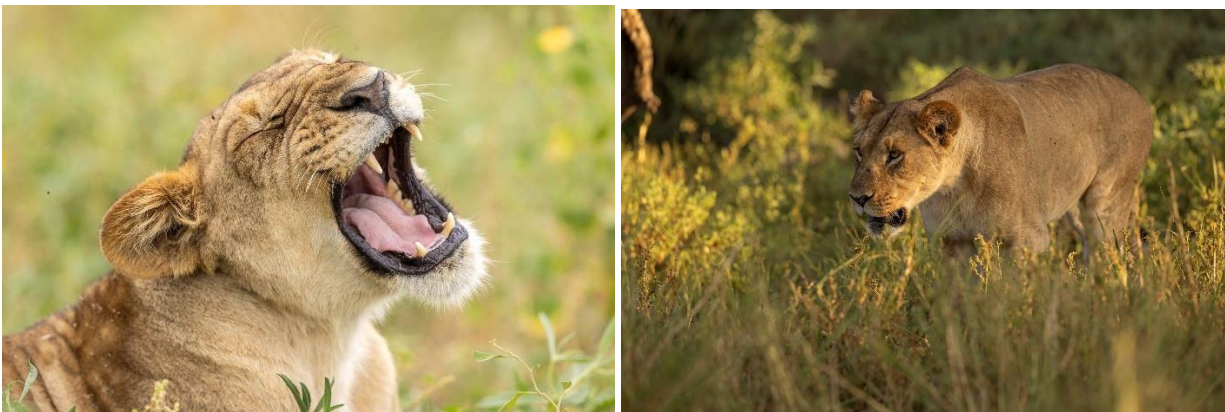
slinking past the tents in an attempt to hunt a wildebeest eating and drinking right outside the restaurant. The other two were too shy, so the one lioness was left alone and wasn't successful with her hunt, eventually going back to join her sisters.

As we were getting into the vehicles, one of Peter's Epaulet fruit bats that roost in the tree near the entrance was perched in the lower branches. A few of the group took the opportunity to photograph it.



We went straight over to the island across from the camp to see if the lionesses were still there. It turned out that they were fast asleep fairly hidden on the edge of the bushes. We then went back to Fisherman's Point, where the young male leopard had been, but he had moved on.

We returned to the lionesses just in case they'd moved slightly further into the open. A couple popped over to drink from a small waterhole. They started to look quite interested in the activity at our camp, so we radioed the team to alert them and advise that they should maybe stay out of sight for a few minutes and luckily the cats quickly lost interest. Other than moving a couple of metres, they didn't look ready to hunt or do anything other than rest, so we decided to find a sundowner spot.



We returned to Fisherman's Point for sundowners with a really pretty sunset. As we sipped our G&Ts, we watched a distant giraffe, pied kingfishers fishing, a wattled crane on its own as well as other birds flying past on their way to roost.



It was almost a new moon and after sunset, it got dark quite quickly. As the light disappeared, the group was keen to find out about stars. Titus knew quite a lot and was happy to talk for a little while about them. We drove out to an open area by the airstrip for safety and everyone got out of the vehicles. Titus talked through a number of the constellations, planets, and the Milky Way and watched Jupiter rising. We returned to camp for our final dinner, but not before we were treated to a wonderful traditional farewell dance by the whole camp staff.



**Tuesday 1 April 2025**

### **Day 8:**

Most of us were woken by an unexpected noise at around 3 am – very heavy rain hitting the tent roof. When we got up, only just over an hour or so later, the camp looked and smelled very different. The guides thought this was probably the final rain of the season. There tends to be a break, then one last heavy burst before the rains leave for the winter. We had breakfast under cover with no fire this morning and then went out on our final morning drive. The sky was still covered in a heavy blanket of clouds, but as the sun rose it began to break through. Our two vehicles went in the same direction, north, but split up to cover as much ground as possible. We had a call from Titus that they had found three lionesses in Rebecca's field. They were resting, and a hyena was walking around nearby before heading off into the grass.



They got up and moved every so often, and took it in turns to drink from a small waterhole before flopping back down. There was no sign of them moving so we carried on, passing a black-collared barbet and the usual woodland, grey-headed and striped kingfishers singing their morning song.



We saw some leopard tracks but lost them when it went off-road. We circled the area but there was no sign of the leopard. One of the benefits when it rains is that it can make it a lot easier to see the tracks, but unfortunately, when they go off-road, you're a bit stuck! It was unfortunately time for us to head back to camp and get ready for our departure. After brunch, we packed up the last of our things and said our farewells before starting our journey home with lots of fabulous memories and images.

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



Images by Emma Healey (unless stated)

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