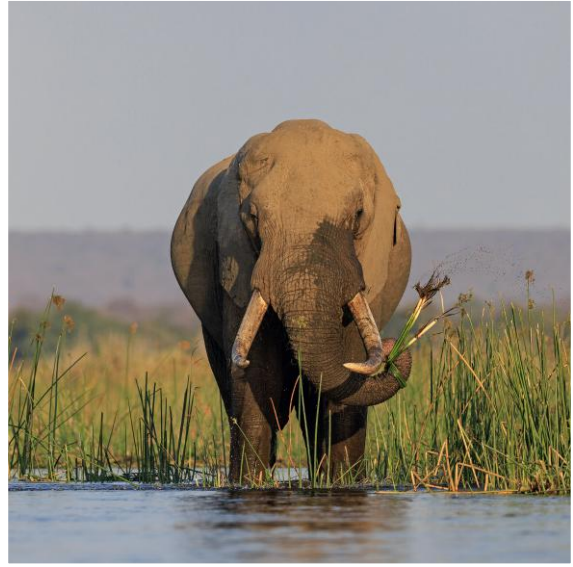


## Tour Report Lower Zambezi Photo Safari 31 May – 10 June 2025

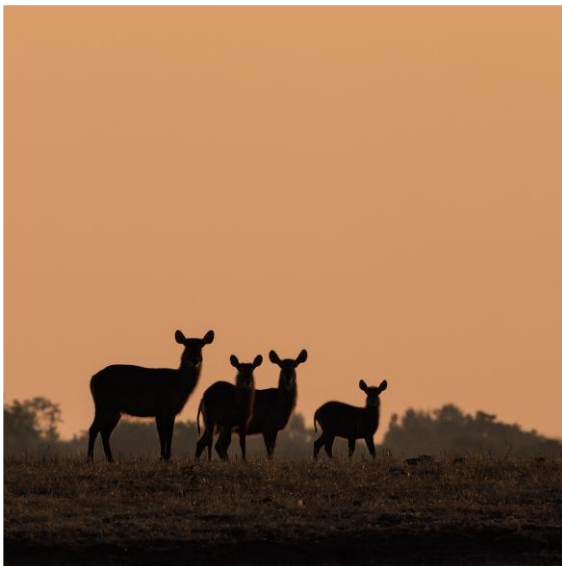
Lion in Kafue



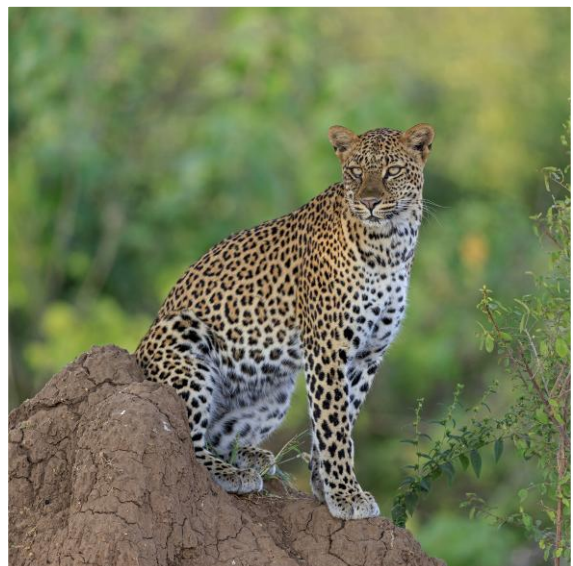
African elephant in the Zambezi



Waterbuck at sunrise



Leopard in Lower Zambezi



Compiled by Bret Charman

**Saturday 31 May 2025**

**Day 1:**

London Heathrow to Dubai

Most of the group were flying on the Emirates flight from London to Dubai. I met most of those at the gate, before we boarded the flight and took off on time for our flight to Dubai.

**Sunday 1 June 2025**

**Day 2:**

Dubai to Lusaka; charter flight to Lufupa, Kafue

We arrived in Dubai on time, with a few hours before our onward flight to Lusaka. Our flight to Lusaka, though, did not depart on time (due to issues with the buses to the plane) and subsequently, we arrived late in Lusaka.

Upon landing in the Zambian capital, we made our way through security as quickly as possible before collecting our luggage. There was a chance to use the facilities before we were escorted across to the domestic terminal. Here, we met the final member of the group that had been on the flight, and we were soon whisked through security and onto our charter flight to Lufupa airstrip in Kafue National Park.

We were running behind schedule, but were able to land at Lufupa with daylight to spare. Here, we were met by two of the trainee guides from Musekese Camp. Everyone was soon aboard the Land Cruiser with our bags packed in, and we were on our way to the boat for a short cruise along the Kafue River, landing on the other side just as the light was fading. Two vehicles were waiting for us on the other side. We enjoyed a gentle drive to camp, where we were met by the wonderful team.

Everybody was shown to their tents after a quick introduction, before reconvening for dinner on the main deck. It was here that we met the final member of the group. The group was treated to a braai on our first night in the bush. After a long day of travel, it wasn't long before we were ready for bed, and we all said goodnight before being escorted back to our tents.

**Monday 2 June 2025**

**Day 3:**

Musekese Camp, Kafue

Kafue National Park lies on an elevated plateau and the nighttime temperatures can be surprisingly cool during the winter months. We awoke to a fresh, starlit morning, gathering around the campfire for tea, coffee and breakfast.

Heading out of camp, the sun was just starting to bring light to this quiet corner of Zambia. The sound of Cape turtle doves filled the air, while puku grazed among the long grasses and impala were scattered on the higher ground. Our first focus was to head to a tree where a leopard had dragged a kill the previous night. As we got there, it was apparent that the leopard had lost its kill. There was no sign of the leopard, but there was a rather large 'present' left by a lion. Unfortunately, the leopard had chosen a branch that was easily accessible to both spotted hyena and lion, paying the price for choosing the wrong spot.

Despite our best efforts searching the area around the tree, there was no sign of the leopard, or any other predator for that matter. And so, we continued down to the lagoon to the south of camp, where we heard pukus alarming. No predator was sighted, but there were plenty of birds such as blacksmith lapwing, spur-winged and Egyptian geese, and African jacana.

It turned into a morning of birds. Meyer's parrot flew overhead, black-collared barbet and grey go away

birds hopped from branch to branch, while African green pigeon and emerald-spotted dove were perched in trees and on the ground alike. Down by the 'confluence'. A large bull elephant was feeding on the lush riverside vegetation, thrashing the vegetation with its trunk. It's common to see elephants wash their chosen food in this way, ensuring all mud is removed from the roots. This is key to stop excess wear on their teeth.



As the birdlife continued to delight, we slowly made our way to a spot for morning tea and coffee. On the way back to camp, there were brief views of some very nervous zebras, while saddle-billed storks were the avian highlight.

The surroundings of Musekese are beautiful. Nestled on an 'island' surrounded by lagoons and grassland, you don't have to go far to enjoy views of the local wildlife. During afternoon tea, the group was enthralled as a large herd of elephants, water monitors and vervet monkeys all put on a show.

Sure enough, it was soon time to head out on safari once more. Our focus was on a well-known leopard. The guides checked out all of her local haunts, searching everywhere they could think to find her. It seemed like she wanted to stay hidden, as we were unable to find her, despite our best efforts. Instead, we had to make do with beautiful birds (although these were all distant and not really suitable for photography), such as yellow-mantled widowbird, Schalow's turaco, bronze-winged courser and lizard buzzard.

Sundowners were fantastic, and on our night drive back to camp, one vehicle had very brief views of a leopard, while both spotted an African barred owlet. We were treated to an excellent dinner, with everyone retiring to their rooms once all our gastronomic delights had been consumed.

Tuesday 3 June 2025

**Day 4:**

Musekese Camp, Kafue

This morning was particularly cold. Noticeably colder than the previous morning. A wattled crane could be seen from the deck as the sun rose over the bush, and the group enjoyed their breakfast. Leaving camp pukus were busy feeding in the long grass, while the morning started with a wealth of birdlife as per the day before. There were a few new species today, including African openbill and brown snake eagle.

We had heard lions roaring before dawn broke (while we were still in camp), and we were determined to find out who was responsible for this spine-tingling sound. Working as a team, but covering different tracks, we were finally rewarded. It was a young male, and he was resting next to the banks of the Kafue River. It wasn't long before he rose to his feet and started to walk towards us, roaring as he made his approach.



He then turned into the long grass and started to wander away from the river. We kept on moving the vehicles well ahead of him, giving him plenty of space. It became apparent early on that he wasn't too keen on our presence; he seemed a little nervous. We persevered for a little while, always giving him plenty of space, doing our best to never encroach on him. Not only is this better for the animal, but it is better for photography.

By giving our subjects space to move freely, it allows us as photographers to build a greater portfolio of imagery. Not only can you capture beautiful environmental imagery, but you can also capture full-frame portraits with the animal looking relaxed. It also allows them to behave as they intend, and you never quite know what this may lead to. It may well be that the subject, if it is a big cat, decides to mate or even hunt. That's always part of the thrill of any photographic safari.



So as not to disturb him, we decided to leave him in peace. It's worth noting that the light was also starting to get a little harsh, and it was only going to get more severe as the morning went on. Carrying on, we worked our way along the river to a spot for morning tea, with plenty of birds along the way, including bateleur and grey-crowned crane. At our tea spot, a crocodile was lurking on the river's edge. It was soon time to make our way back to camp, but there was a surprise in store for the group. Instead of getting back to camp, we'd made a diversion to where the boat was moored. Today, we will be going out on the boat for a lunchtime river cruise. The table was laid; the drinks were at the ready, and a feast had been prepared for us.



Once everyone was seated, with cameras to hand, if necessary, we set off along the river to see what might present itself. Without a doubt, the highlight of the trip was a couple of African finfoot – a very special bird to see when on safari.

Other birdlife of note on the water included white-fronted bee-eater, white-breasted cormorant, African darter and striated heron. The only mammal we were able to see and, to a lesser extent, photograph, was the odd hippo along the edge of the river. These hippos were particularly nervous and were incredibly tricky to photograph

compared to other parts of Africa.

After a fabulous lunch and a sighting of a true rarity, it was time to head back to camp for a little downtime

before our afternoon safari. We went to check on a couple of sites, hoping we might find a spotted cat, before carrying on to the area where we left the male lion this morning. It wasn't long before we found him resting in the shade, only a couple of hundred yards from where he had been in the morning. He wasn't in a particularly good spot for photography, and we didn't want to disturb him. Our other vehicle had found a lioness, and so we decided to reunite and see what was what.

As we were driving down the track, we bumped into the lioness, with the other vehicle following her. We tried our best to get ahead of her, but she was on a mission, and the thick vegetation made it rather tricky. Eventually, she came out to the open grasslands before disappearing once more. There was a herd of puku close to the longer grass and scrub and we were sure that the lion was stalking them. Some Egyptian geese alarmed and flew off, and so now we know that she was there in the low ground. We couldn't get any closer, due to the soft, muddy ground, and so we sat and waited. Suddenly, the lioness erupted from the gulley and the puku scattered in all directions. On this occasion, she wasn't successful.



After realising she had missed her chance, she stood looking across the area of grassland, obviously frustrated by her failure. With the light fading, we headed off for a sundowner. For the most part, the night drive back to camp was very quiet.

**Wednesday 4 June 2025**

**Day 5:**

Musekese Camp, Kafue

After a cool night, we awoke to a beautiful, misty morning. As we left camp, we headed north, working our way along the edge of the grassy plain. The cats continued to elude us, particularly those of the spotted variety. We did come across a large bull elephant, feeding on the thick vegetation on the edge of the grassland. Our guides worked hard to try and find and track any of the predators that call the area home, but it seemed that lady luck was not with us this morning. It was a very quiet morning, mainly filled with

birding (not photography), with highlights including Schalow's turaco, goliath heron and African darter. We had heard that a leopard had been spotted by another vehicle, but as we arrived, it had disappeared in the miombo woodland. Despite our best efforts, we searched high and low, and we couldn't find the leopard and headed for morning tea and coffee. With the temperature starting to rise, it was time to continue to camp.

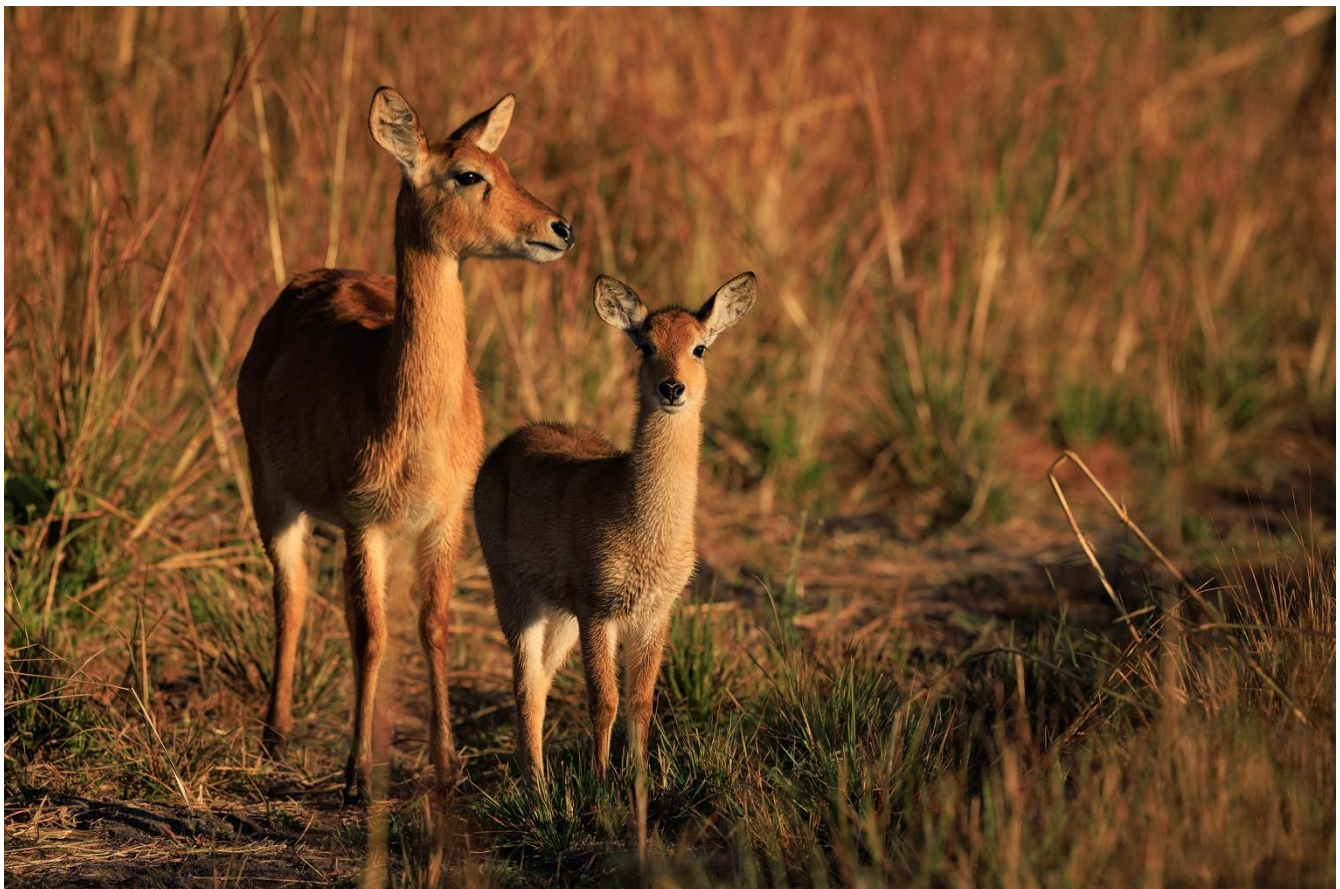
Having enjoyed a relaxing break during the heat of the day, we reconvened for afternoon tea before heading out into the vehicles once again. Unfortunately, this afternoon would prove to be the quietest of our time in Kafue. There weren't even many birds to keep us busy. Towards the end of the drive, we did come across some beautiful impala and a large herd of elephants along the river, but they were definitely not happy with our presence and moved off with speed. There was also a large troop of yellow baboons in the same area, but they were not going to cooperate and quickly disappeared as we arrived. This part of the Kafue is absolutely beautiful, and it was a real shame that our luck had deserted us. We slowly made our way towards camp, where we enjoyed a fabulous final dinner in the stunning surrounds of Musekese Camp.

**Thursday 5 June 2025**

**Day 6:**

Kafue National Park to Lower Zambezi National Park

We would have one final drive in the Musekese area of Kafue. Perhaps this morning our luck would change. It was another cool morning, and there was a layer of mist above the lagoon by the camp. Our guides were determined to send us off with a great final morning and found very fresh leopard tracks. They worked out where it was heading and where it had come from, but despite both vehicles looking intensely, the leopard was nowhere to be found. We did find some puku in nice light, which we spent a little time photographing.



Otherwise, it was a morning with some interesting birds such as wattled and grey-crowned cranes, trumpeter hornbill and black-collared barbet. There was also a large bull elephant right by the camp as we headed back. With a flight to Lower Zambezi National Park, we had to have our things packed and ready.

We were soon on our way to the boat, where we travelled along the Kafue River, where we saw hippos aplenty, before making the short journey to the airstrip at Lufupa. Our luggage was soon loaded, and everybody was in their seats. The flight took around an hour and a half, arriving at Jeki airstrip, where we met our guide, Given.

As soon as we were in the vehicle, the wildlife seemed to be everywhere. Driving through the winterthorn and mahogany forest, we saw hundreds of impala and common waterbuck, while there were Meve's starling galore, white-fronted bee-eaters, African pied wagtail and even an African golden oriole. We arrived at Chula, where we showed everyone to their rooms, before meeting in the open dining area for lunch. What a fabulous welcome we enjoyed.

There wasn't long before we would head out on our first drive. Chula Island Camp is, as its name suggests, on an Island. This meant there was a drive to the pontoon, which took us across the channel to the 'mainland', before then climbing aboard our safari vehicle and heading out in search of the wildlife.

Knowing we'd had a quiet few days in Kafue, the team at Chula were even more determined to give everybody some world-class wildlife and photography opportunities. As such, we decided to try and find the large pride of lions. With that in mind, we were on a bit of a mission as there was a fair bit of ground to cover. However, it was incredible how much life we passed. There were waterbuck and impala all over, while kudu, buffalo and zebra were also seen with relative ease. The birdlife of the Lower Zambezi is always superb, and we passed African fish eagle, southern ground hornbill and many common species such as red-billed hornbill and Meve's starling.

We found the lions doing what lions do best, lounging around. It was while we were here that we heard about a leopard in a tree nearby. You don't turn down a chance to see or photograph a leopard. Although the light was fading, we made our way the short distance to see what the sighting was like.



We found the leopard high in a tree and at first, the light was pretty good. She was sitting up above us, staring out, seemingly at an unknown prey species. As the light continued to fade, she lay back down, before

sitting upright once more and this time looking directly at us.



With the light levels continuing to drop, the photography opportunities were becoming particularly challenging. And so, with a fairly long drive back to camp, we begrudgingly called time and started to make our way back. I was spotlighting as we made our way back in the darkness and as we were driving, I spotted more lions resting by a termite mound.

We turned off the main track and headed to where the lions were sitting. Within moments of our arrival, the pride was up and they started to roar. We had lionesses and cubs alike, roaring to the rest of the pride whom we'd seen a little earlier. Being so close to lions as they roar is absolutely magical and a moment that you remember for quite some time.

We arrived back at camp a little later than planned and enjoyed a fabulous first meal in the simple but classy environment of Chula Island Camp.

**Friday 6 June 2025**

**Day 7:**

Chula Island Camp, Lower Zambezi National Park

Our first morning in Lower Zambezi, we awoke to warmer weather than Kafue (which is to be expected here), and there was light cloud cover to the east. As some of the group came down the path to breakfast, they came across fresh leopard tracks. So, we'd obviously had a visitor overnight.

After crossing the pontoon, we wound our way along the tracks to the east. The birdlife here is prolific and within the first ten minutes of our drive, we'd already seen helmeted guineafowl, hadeda ibis, lilac-breasted roller, shikra and hamerkop, just to name a few. Suddenly, the impala rams were alarming with serious intent. We knew there must be a leopard about, but at first we couldn't see it. Suddenly, it appeared in front

of us. I think we surprised it as much as it surprised us, and its nervousness got the better of it. Disappearing into cover, we tried to find an angle to enjoy better views, but alas, the leopard had decided that it didn't want to be seen. Knowing our efforts were futile, we decided to leave the cat in peace and see if we could get lucky somewhere else.

We headed up to the Jeki Plains, where waterbuck and zebra were busy grazing in the soft morning light. Down in the winterthorn forest, a large elephant was busy breaking high branches of the trees, with the soft morning light making this a particularly beautiful scene. We'd heard about another leopard sighting, and so we picked up the pace a little. As we were driving through a patch of mature riverine forest, some vehicles were parked up. There was another leopard, hidden under the shade of a mahogany tree, but there really wasn't any chance of decent photography, so we carried on. Two leopards in one morning, though – you can't complain about that.

Driving along the edge of a drying pool, a large bird swooped low and attacked a hamerkop, right in front of the vehicle. Luckily, for the hamerkop at least, the martial eagle missed its target and proceeded to perch up in a tree just behind us. Reversing the vehicle, we fully expected the eagle to take flight, but amazingly it just sat there posing perfectly as the group were able to capture some full-frame photographs. Just incredible views of this immature bird.



The leopard we had heard about was still in the same spot, and so in the end we decided to leave the martial eagle behind. It's worth noting that having a martial eagle so low in a tree is probably rarer than a leopard. Within ten minutes or so, we had arrived at the spot where the leopard had been spotted. Amazingly, there was only one vehicle watching her as she rested in a downed tree. Nobody else had stumbled across the snoozing cat, and the vehicle departed to allow us to enjoy the sighting in peace. After all our hard work over the past few days, we were finally being rewarded with an exceptional sighting and incredible photography opportunities.



We started off to the side of the leopard, before working our way round in front of this beautiful female cat. Sat on the large branch, in soft, diffused light, she was in the perfect spot for photography.

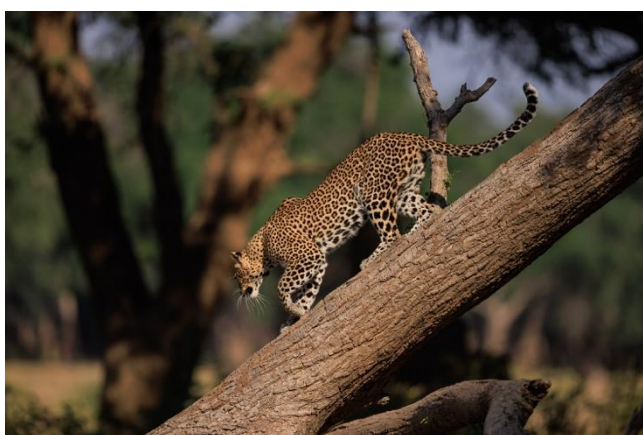


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We knew that as the sun continued to rise above the trees, the leopard would soon be in the direct sun. It would only be a matter of time before she would get too hot, rise to her feet and descend the tree. With that in mind, we decided to sit and wait to see what unfolded.



After the leopard decided to rise to her feet, she moved down the tree and to the gentle flow of the water channel. Here she quenched her thirst, drinking for quite some time right in front of the vehicle. Due to the grass, harsh light and angle, the photography was extremely limited, but it was wonderful to see.



Then, as quickly as she came down from the tree, she decided to move off through some cover. Under the expert guidance of Given, we moved the vehicle around to the other side of the thick scrub. We positioned ourselves perfectly as she emerged from the scrub, walked straight past a large tree and then approached a termite mound. She couldn't, could she? As she wandered nonchalantly across the open ground, her gaze went up to the top of the termite mound. Suddenly, she was up the top of the mound. There, right by the side of our vehicle, was a beautiful leopard in the most idyllic position. The group were able to build up an

impressive array of stunning imagery – a truly memorable encounter. Moments like this don't happen too often and you have to make the most of every second. You don't know how long it will last.



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It really was the most magical session, and what made it all the more rewarding was that she changed pose on several occasions. This allowed everybody to capture a wonderful collection of striking images of this beautiful cat. The light also kept changing, which meant the colours changed throughout.



How do you beat that? Well, it's hard to, but why not add some more felids to the equation and create an action-packed morning. After morning tea, in a beautiful spot, we went to find the pride of lions again. There, we found the whole pride resting in the shade (by now the temperatures were really starting to rise). Not long after we arrived at the site, the pride got up and started walking, moving right by us.

We moved the vehicle ahead of the pride, positioning ourselves across a small pool of water, letting them walk directly towards us. We enjoyed some lovely moments as the pride groomed one another and gathered in the shade after the drink. What a fantastic morning.



Having had such a busy morning, we were running rather late and still had a lot of ground to cover to get

back to camp. Therefore, we set about heading back, trying our best not to get too distracted on the way. We did make one worthwhile stop. We found a family of ground hornbills, high in a tree, with one of the birds feeding chicks (which we couldn't see) within their nesting hole.



Getting back a lot later than planned, we had lunch almost immediately upon our return, before having a little downtime before afternoon tea and our afternoon drive. We set out to the pontoon, and were soon on the other side and heading out for our afternoon safari.

It wasn't long before we stumbled upon the kudus again, before we found a young bull elephant feeding from the high branches of a winterthorn. Simple but wonderful photography.



The other highlight of the evening was a lovely family herd of elephants. There were fewer photographic opportunities on this drive, but after an action-packed morning, that's not unusual. After watching the elephants, we drove around looking for signs of the African wild dogs, but had to make do with a spectacular

sunset over the escarpment above the Jeki Plains. The hot, dry, dusty air makes for some wonderful sunsets, particularly with the hills that line the Lower Zambezi valley.



**Saturday 7 June 2025**

**Day 8:**

Chula Island Camp, Lower Zambezi National Park

Waking early, well before sunrise, we enjoyed breakfast and hot drinks around the fire. The sun was just starting to rise in the east as we headed aboard the island vehicles. A leopard had made a kill the previous night just off the main track on the island, and so we went to see if we could find out what had happened.

We searched around the area where she had been spotted, but it looked as if we were going to miss her on this occasion. Just as we headed back to the main track, I spotted some movement, and a leopard was walking underneath a mahogany tree. Then there was a second leopard. There was also a hyena in the area (the only hyena on the island), and we assume that the hyena had grabbed the carcass and moved it away from the leopards. As there are no lions or any other hyenas here, the leopards typically leave their kills on the ground, with no need to move them up a tree.

We spent the next 45 minutes working our way round the two leopards, capturing an array of images, from portraits to behavioural shots with the kill. The island is home to a number of adult leopards, and a couple of these had cubs or adolescents too. We had a very handsome young male who posed beautifully, while the female was a little more skittish.

You really can't ask for a better start to a day than having a couple of leopards put on such a good show. What made it even better was that, with no other camps on the island, we had the sightings all to ourselves.



Having had our fill with the leopards, and the morning already racing away, we decided it was time to head

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to the pontoon and see what else we could do in the main area of the park.

The forest was alive with the sound of turtle doves, while there was a bounty of other avian delights. Fork-tailed drongo, yellow-billed stork, bateleur, bearded woodpecker and African golden oriole were just a few of the feathered highlights. We reached the mature forest, where we had limited views of the leopard, and there were a couple of vehicles on patrol. We quickly realised the same leopard must be about, and so set about seeing if we could find her.

One of the vehicles spent a prolonged period following, but photographic opportunities were challenging to say the least. Just the odd moment when she walked between each piece of cover. By the time the second vehicle arrived on the scene, the leopard decided to cooperate a little more, stopping out in the open and posing for everyone.



After another action-packed, leopard kind of morning, it was time to stop for tea and coffee. We had now seen five different leopards (six sightings) within the last 48 hours. For any national park in Africa, that is a sensational return. After tea, we started to wind our way back to camp.



It was as we approached the western reaches of Lower Zambezi National Park that we stumbled upon a lovely bull elephant feeding on the edge of a water channel. He was reaching high into the canopy, breaking off branches before delicately placing them in his mouth. The elephant was so close that you needed a wide-angle lens in order to fit him in. Or in my case, nestled down in the front seat, I resorted to using my mobile phone. It was fabulous to get so close to a large elephant exhibiting a piece of behaviour for which Lower Zambezi National Park is famed for.

Arriving back at camp, there was a little downtime for people to catch up on some rest, alongside backing up imagery, before we returned to the communal area for lunch.

Having spent the past four drives exploring the eastern side of the park, we decided that this evening we would head out to the west. There had been a lone lioness seen in the area (with cubs), and we knew there was a chance we might find one as we explored the habitat here. Our road took us through the winterthorn forest until we reached the marshland, which fills one of the drying old channels of the Zambezi. It was here we saw a herd of zebra with foals, and impala and waterbuck all over. It was a beautiful sight, although not great for photography, and we were all the while keeping our eyes peeled for the lioness. Carrying on further west, we reached the dry riverbed of the Mwambashi River before heading back to the east and up to the Jeki Plains.

We also came across a troop of yellow baboons in the middle of the winterthorn forest. There were a couple of baboons sitting high on termite mounds, keeping watch for any potential predators. One large male, in particular, was posing wonderfully and gave the group an excellent opportunity to add these handsome primates to their portfolio.

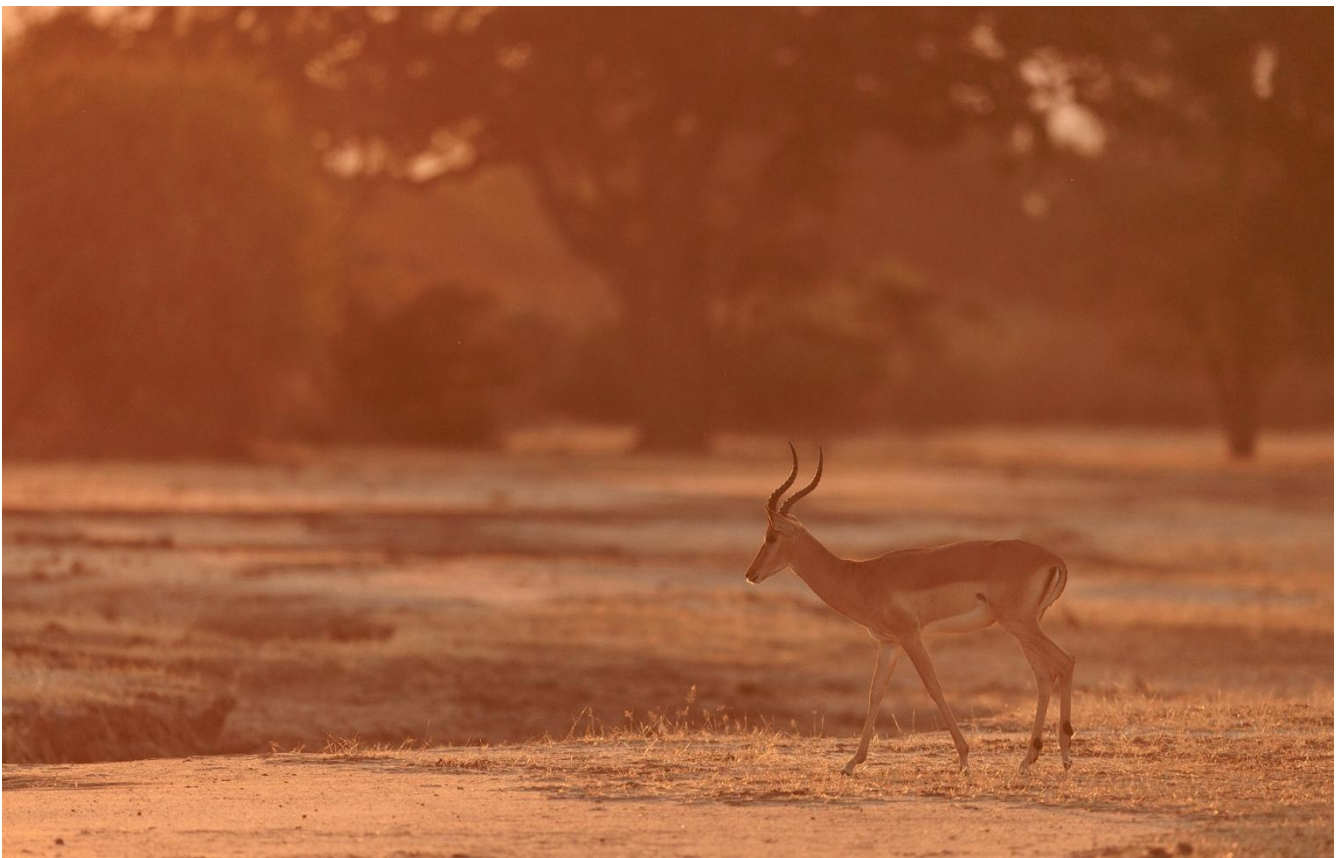


As we went up the sandy rise of the plains, there we gullies carved out by erosion, and we stumbled upon a family of warthogs emerging from their burrows. One by one, the family emerged, with the adults shovelling the soft sand out as they pushed their way through the narrow entrance.

As they lifted their heads, the sand that had accumulated on their snouts formed a 'sandfall', with the grains of sand cascading down and onto the ground. It was incredible just how many warthogs emerged from this one burrow, and photographically it was fabulous too.



Once reaching the open landscape of the Jeki Plains, we stopped for sundowners, while the odd impala walked by in the soft golden light.



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After the sun had set, we packed our glasses and empty bottles away, enjoying a night drive back to camp. Both of our vehicles had views of genet on the way back, alongside the antelopes which are prevalent across the park. We enjoyed another exceptional meal before retiring to our tents for well-earned rest.

**Sunday 8 June 2025**

**Day 9:**

Chula Island Camp, Lower Zambezi National Park

This morning was a little cooler, with clear skies above. We had an ambition to see if we could find the African wild dogs today. With that in mind, we set out and headed up to the plains – a favoured spot for the dogs when they're hunting. The morning air was filled with the sound of the turtle doves once again, while many of the usual species were also on show. There seemed to be even more impala around this morning, but they were all relaxed and so we carried on up to the plains.

As we reached the edge of the plains, there was a family group of waterbuck standing silhouetted in the open landscape. The sun was rising over the far side of the plains, casting beautiful golden light across the landscape.



After stopping and photographing these wonderful antelopes in this epic landscape, we carried on across the plains. All the while, we kept our eyes peeled for any sign of the wild dogs, namely antelopes running at full gallop. It wasn't dogs that caught our eye next, instead we stumbled across a family of ground hornbills.

Again, the light was magical. The family of hornbills was working its way across the plains, through some longer vegetation, picking up pieces of food and tossing them back before swallowing them. To see them out in the open, without them flying away, was a real treat. The whole time, as the family moved across in front of the vehicle, we were able to photograph them with the wonderful backlighting. What a fabulous start to the day.



Coming down off the plain, a large bull elephant was feeding by reaching high into the canopy, while another bull was working its way towards us.



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Despite our best efforts to look for the dogs and find tracks, they were nowhere to be found. They'd been quiet since we'd arrived in the valley, likely staying closer to their den. We'd heard about a leopard that had been sighted, and so we went to have a look and see if we could find it. It seemed like this morning might be another cat-free affair, but then we heard that the lions had been spotted in a dry riverbed. We found most of the pride spread out across the soft, relatively cool sand.



By now, the sun was rising high in the sky and having enjoyed a morning tea and coffee stop, it was time to drive back to Chula Island. On our way back to camp, as well as the regularly seen mammals, there was a constant supply of birds on show. We were soon back at the pontoon, and then we drove the short distance back to camp.

This afternoon was going to be an entirely different wildlife experience as we were going to head out on the water, enjoying a boat safari. Upon boarding the boat, we crossed to the Zimbabwean side of the river, where we quickly came across a large pod of hippos.



With the hippos proving to be less than willing subjects, we worked our way further upstream, and it was here that Given spotted an elephant feeding on the riverbank. By now, the light was absolutely beautiful, and as we approached the elephant, this golden evening glow lit the elephant from one side. As we sat photographing this elephant, Given spotted two more which might provide us with even better opportunities for photography.

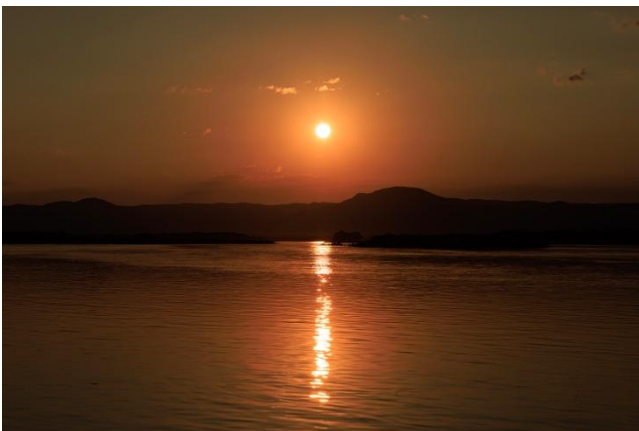


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We quickly realised that these were two large bull elephants, and they were busy feeding on the reeds that flanked the shallow waters of sandbars in the river. We focused our efforts on the large bull closest to the edge of the reeds, which was busy thrashing the vegetation after plucking it from the shallow water. Much like ourselves, elephants don't like gritty soil on their food and will spend a great deal of time washing and cleaning the roots before eating them. In the images on the previous page, you are able to see this behaviour, with watery soil flying through the air.



With the light starting to fade, it was time to make our way back to Chula Island. We had a rendezvous – a very special sundowners on the banks of the Zambezi. We arrived to find that the team from Chula Island Camp had set out the most magnificent spread of drinks and nibbles on a beautiful sandy beach. It was just fabulous.



As the sun set below the horizon, it was time to get back on the boat and head upstream. Within a few minutes, we were at our landing spot, and everybody was back aboard the vehicle for the short journey back

to camp. This was our last evening in Zambia, and we all enjoyed yet another excellent meal before retiring to our rooms for the night.

**Monday 9 June 2025**

**Day 10:**

Lower Zambezi National Park to Lusaka; overnight flight to the UK via Dubai

We awoke to another glorious morning and although we only had a shorter drive, due to our flight back to Lusaka, we were determined to make the most out of it. It had been a warm night, and it was already a warmer morning.

Having had our canid friends elude us for our time in the valley, we decided to make one last effort to see whether we might be able to find the African wild dogs. With that in mind, we set off for Jeki Plains to see if we might be in luck. Alas, no dogs could be found, but the plains had elephant, waterbuck and zebra grazing. We kept working our way across the flood plain, hoping to find any fresh tracks, but we only found some which were likely from the previous day.

A herd of elephants were feeding along the edge of the dry bed of the Chakwenga River and it was here that we heard that the male lions were nearby. It was a productive morning for birds, with saddle-billed stork and martial eagle among the more common but delightful species. And there they were. The two big males sprawled out in the long grass – it was next to impossible to capture any striking imagery. Trying to work a different angle, we heard of a possible leopard sighting and we made the decision to try and see if we would enjoy one last leopard sighting.

It seemed as if this little foray may be futile, as to start with, there was no sign of the leopard. There were several vehicles, and they seemed to have scared the leopard off into the undergrowth. With time running out, we parked the vehicle up, out of the way and waited for a few minutes to see if she might emerge once more. As I scanned the vegetation for any sign of movement, I clocked the head of the leopard in the bushes. Suddenly, she darted across the open to a number of scrubby bushes, before walking right past our vehicle. It was as she strolled by that we noticed she had a large wound on her back leg.



Although it looked particularly nasty, it didn't seem to be stopping her from moving freely and therefore she'd likely make a full recovery. We tried to follow her but quickly realised she didn't want to be seen anymore, and we decided to leave her in peace. What a fabulous way to round up our time in the Lower Zambezi.

After this great encounter, we found ourselves winding our way through the winterthorn forest, back to Chula Island. We enjoyed views of a plethora of birds, before finding a bull elephant drinking and then wandering through the trees. There were kudu and a large herd of buffalo on our way back, and suddenly we heard about another leopard sighting – not too far from the pontoon. Arriving in the area where the leopard had a kill in a tree, there was another bull elephant, this time in musth. Keeping our distance from the elephant, we tried to work out where the leopard was. She was hidden in the depth of some thick scrubby bushes and she was not happy at all. When we tried to get better views, she suddenly charged at us before standing and wagging her tail. We knew when we were not wanted and quickly left, aiming to come back on our way to the airstrip.



It wasn't long before we were back at the pontoon. We had a little time to pack our things, freshen up and meet back up in the communal area for an early lunch. We enjoyed a final meal at Chula Island Camp before driving the short distance to the pontoon and back to where we had left the rather angry leopard. Hoping she might have calmed down, we arrived back to find a large herd of impala alarming with some ferocity. There she was, sitting in a similar position in the scrub. She was still in no mood for company, and after a little time, we moved on.

We drove along the edge of the marsh where zebra, impala, waterbuck, warthog and yellow baboons were enjoying the fresh grass growth. It was time to leave Lower Zambezi National Park and fly back to Lusaka. Being driven up to Jeki airstrip, we arrived before the pilots and were able to use the facilities. Flying in two light aircraft, our luggage was loaded and the group were soon in their seats. The flight was smooth, with fantastic views of the Zambezi and the hills that make up the majority of the Lower Zambezi National Park.

Arriving in Lusaka one after another, we were whisked through with our luggage to the lounge. One of the group was being driven to a nearby hotel for an extra night, while the rest of us were flying on the Emirates flight later that evening. Once check-in had opened, the staff helped us with our luggage from the domestic to the international terminal. Having beaten the queues, the entire group quickly made it through security and immigration and had a relaxing wait to board the flight. We boarded promptly and arrived in Dubai with plenty of time for our onward flight home to London.

**Tuesday 10 June 2025**

**Day 11:**

Arrive in London, UK

We arrived in London at lunchtime and were soon reconvened in the luggage hall. As the group collected their luggage, we said our goodbyes and promised to keep in touch to share the amazing memories from a fabulous trip.

**Future departures only visit Lower Zambezi National Park. If you're interested in visiting Kafue National Park, [visit our website](#).**

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# Lower Zambezi Photo Safari



	Common Name	Scientific Name	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
	<b>BIRDS</b>										
1	White-breasted cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>			✓						
2	Reed cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax africanus</i>				✓					
3	African darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>		✓	✓	✓					
4	African spoonbill	<i>Platalea alba</i>					✓				✓
5	African sacred ibis	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>						✓		✓	✓
6	Hadedda ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Goliath heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>				✓	✓				
8	Grey heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>				✓	✓	✓			✓
9	Black-headed heron	<i>Ardea melanocephala</i>									✓
10	Great egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
11	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>						✓			✓
12	Squacco heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>			✓					✓	
13	Green-backed (striated) heron	<i>Butorides striatus</i>			✓					✓	
14	Yellow-billed stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>							✓		
15	Saddle-billed stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus senegalensis</i>		✓					✓		✓
16	African openbill	<i>Anastomus lamelligerus</i>			✓		✓				
17	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>				✓		✓			
18	Spur-winged goose	<i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				
19	Egyptian goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiacus</i>		✓				✓	✓		✓
20	White-backed vulture	<i>Gyps coprotheres</i>		✓	✓		✓				
21	African fish eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22	Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Martial eagle	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>						✓			✓
24	African hawk eagle	<i>Hieraaetus occipitalis</i>							✓		
25	Brown snake eagle	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>			✓						
26	Western banded snake eagle	<i>Circaetus cinerascens</i>			✓	✓					

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27	Lizard buzzard	<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>		✓	✓						
28	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>			✓			✓			✓
29	Little sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter minullus</i>		✓							
30	African harrier hawk	<i>Polyboroides typus</i>							✓		
31	Helmeted guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	Red-necked spurfowl	<i>Pternistes afer</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				
33	Swainson's spurfowl	<i>Pternistes swainsonii</i>						✓	✓	✓	
34	African finfoot	<i>Podica senegalensis</i>			✓						
35	Grey-crowned crane	<i>Balearica regulorum</i>			✓		✓				
36	Wattled crane	<i>Grus carunculatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				
37	Black-winged stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>							✓		
38	African jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
39	Water thick-knee	<i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>			✓	✓					
40	Bronze-winged courser	<i>Rhinoptilus chalcopterus</i>		✓							
41	Blacksmith lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				
42	White-crowned lapwing	<i>Vanellus albiceps</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓
43	Wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus senegallus</i>				✓	✓				
44	Cape turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>	H	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
45	Emerald-spotted wood dove	<i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
46	African green pigeon	<i>Treron calva</i>		✓		✓	✓				
47	Meyer's parrot	<i>Poicephalus meyeri</i>		✓	✓	✓					
48	Schalow's turaco	<i>Tauraco schalowi</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				
49	Grey go-away-bird	<i>Corythaixoides concolor</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
50	White-browed coucal	<i>Centropus superciliosus</i>							✓		
51	Senegal coucal	<i>Centropus senegalensis</i>		✓	✓	✓					
52	African barred owl	<i>Glaucidium capense</i>		✓							
53	Square-tailed nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus fossii</i>		✓							
54	Wire-tailed swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
55	Red-faced mousebird	<i>Urocolius indicus</i>				✓			✓		
56	Pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓		
57	Brown-hooded kingfisher	<i>Halcyon albiventris</i>				✓					
58	White-fronted bee-eater	<i>Merops bullockoides</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
59	Little bee-eater	<i>Merops pusillus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
60	Lilac-breasted roller	<i>Coracias caudata</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
61	Southern ground hornbill	<i>Bucorvus leadbeateri</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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62	Trumpeter hornbill	<i>Bycanistes bucinator</i>					✓				
63	African grey hornbill	<i>Tockus nasutus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				
64	Crowned hornbill	<i>Tockus albeterminatus</i>		✓				✓		✓	✓
65	Southern red-billed hornbill	<i>Tockus erythrorhynchus</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
66	Green wood-hoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>						✓	✓		
67	African hoopoe	<i>Upupa africana</i>			✓			✓			
68	Black-collared barbet	<i>Lybius torquatus</i>		✓			✓				
69	Bearded woodpecker	<i>Dendropicops namaquus</i>							✓		
70	Fork-tailed drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
71	African golden oriole	<i>Oriolus auratus</i>						✓	✓		
72	Arrow-marked babbler	<i>Turdoides jardineii</i>						✓	✓		✓
73	Common bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Yellow-bellied greenbul	<i>Chlorocichla flaviventris</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
75	African paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone viridis</i>						✓			
76	African pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla aguimp</i>			✓	✓			✓		
77	White-crested helmetshrike	<i>Prionops plumatus</i>									✓
78	Tropical boubou	<i>Laniarius aethiopicus</i>									✓
79	Black-crowned tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegala</i>					✓				
80	Greater blue-eared starling	<i>Lamprotornis chalybaeus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
81	Meve's (long-tailed) starling	<i>Lamprotornis mevesii</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
82	Wattled starling	<i>Creatophora cinerea</i>						✓	✓		
83	Red-billed oxpecker	<i>Buphagus erythrorhynchus</i>							✓		
84	White-browed sparrow weaver	<i>Plocepasser mahali</i>						✓			
85	Red-billed quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>				✓			✓		
86	Yellow-mantled widowbird	<i>Euplectes macroura</i>		✓	✓						
87	Blue waxbill	<i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i>			✓						
88	Red-billed firefinch	<i>Lagonosticta senegala</i>						✓	✓		
	<b>MAMMALS</b>										
1	African (bush) elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Vervet monkey	<i>Chlorocebus pygerrhurus</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Yellow baboon	<i>Papio cynocephalus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	Lesser bushbaby	<i>Galago moholi</i>		✓							
5	Smith's tree squirrel	<i>Paraxerus cepapi</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Greater kudu	<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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7	Bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus sylvaticus</i>		✓	✓						
8	Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>					✓				✓
9	Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	Puku	<i>Kobus vardonii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
11	Common waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus ellipsiprymnus</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Defassa waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus defassa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				
13	Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
14	Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15	Large-spotted genet	<i>Genetta maculata</i>							✓		
16	Spotted hyena	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>					✓		✓		
17	Slender mongoose	<i>Herpestes sanguineus</i>									✓
18	Banded mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>					✓				
19	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓		✓
20	Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>			✓		✓	✓			✓
21	Side-striped jackal	<i>Lupulella adusta</i>			✓						
22	Burchell's zebra	<i>Equus quagga</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	<b>Reptiles &amp; Amphibians</b>										
1	Grey foam-nest tree frog	<i>Chiromantis xerampelina</i>							✓	✓	
2	Nile crocodile	<i>Crocodylus niloticus</i>			✓				✓	✓	
3	Nile monitor	<i>Varanus niloticus</i>		✓	✓						