

Tour Report Rare Mammals of the Eastern Cape 21 – 29 October 2025

Lion



Secretary bird



Black-backed jackal



Elephant



Compiled by Emma Healey

Tuesday & Wednesday 21/22 October 2025

Day 1/2:

After a change in Johannesburg, we flew to Port Elizabeth and were picked up by our driver and driven the two hours to Kariega. Even driving into the reserve, we saw giraffe, zebra, a buzzard and a male bushbuck. We were met on arrival by Wayne and Brendan, our driver/guides for the week. We had a lovely welcome by the Ukhozi team from the lodge, who gave us a welcome/induction and then showed us to our rooms so we could settle in before meeting for dinner.

Thursday 23 October 2025

Day 3:

Making our way out this morning for our first drive, we drove down to the open plains with scattered herds of blesbok, wildebeest, springbok, kudu, giraffe and other ungulates. A lovely small herd of nyala were standing in the plains and one ran down to a dam wall where she stood to watch us pass. We drove up a rocky road, where we had a lovely, clear sighting of a pygmy kingfisher, which was sitting on a branch by the road. We were able to photograph it in a couple of positions before it flew off into the dense bush.



Crossing over the main road, we entered the larger section of the reserve, where we were greeted by more kudu and blesboks and a number of giraffes peppering the horizon. Descending into the valley and passing a scrub hare that was out looking for food during the day, one of the vehicles came face-to-face with a large male lion on a narrow road. Reversing towards the open space, the lion passed right by the vehicle and down the slope, making its way out onto the plains. As we watched it heading down the slope, his brother walked past the vehicle and out on the plains to join him.



The leader walked past us, crossing in front of a tower of giraffes, providing a lovely photo opportunity despite the light being quite bright at this point. After a while, his brother followed across and they made their way towards the river, where a goliath heron was watching over the events unfolding.



The first brother slowly walked into a dense bush, where a large family of warthogs had run. He heard them and slowly walked towards them, suddenly running into a bush and all we heard was a loud scream. He'd got one. We raced round the bush to see the rest of the family running away and the lion with his head deep in the bush, holding the baby warthog. We moved around to try and get a view, but it was impossible so we decided to leave him to it as his brother appeared and lay down across from him while he ate.

On our way back, we saw a lovely long-crested eagle, with its crest being blown in the wind, and stopped for a leopard tortoise that was crossing the road. There were also brief sightings of a black harrier, a herd of buffalo and a family group of four white rhinos.



Returning to the lodge for lunch, we had some time to explore the area and enjoy the wildlife around the

Find out more about our [Rare Mammals of the Eastern Cape](#) trip or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

grounds, including some lovely sunbirds in the tree by the car park.



Soon after leaving this afternoon, we came upon two white rhinos - a mum and baby suckling. The baby was squeaking for milk so we watched the lovely interaction for a while. It was quite windy, so a lot of the grazing ungulates, including nyala, eland, wildebeest, waterbuck and two zebra with interesting white-tipped manes, were enjoying the company of others to keep safe.



We decided to head into the valley to avoid the wind and had some drinks in an area called 'Gardenia', which resembles a beautiful, enchanted forest, but the light was quite dim with the heavy cloud, so we enjoyed our sundowners and made our way back to the lodge. One vehicle saw a small herd of mountain reedbuck on the way back.

Friday 24 October 2025

Day 4:

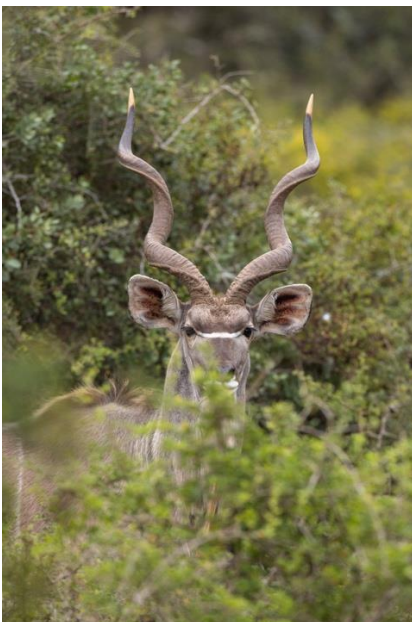
This morning started strong, with one vehicle having a good sighting of an aardvark as we reached the plains. This was a very rare sighting and even the guides were excited about it. We passed a group of female ostriches, and then came upon another white rhino mother with her calf in an area known for caracals. We watched them and a number of warthogs and could hear a hoopoe calling, so went towards it.



We drove on across the plains, stopping briefly for a rufous naped lark before we came across the hoopoe briefly resting in a tree. After a few minutes, we continued on until we stopped on the Serengeti for coffee, with a lovely outlook of the area.



After coffee, we found a lovely male kudu in the bushes and then spotted our first elephant from afar, enjoying the thick bush. We drove along the river under the euphorbia trees and saw a small troop of vervet monkeys enjoying the euphorbias.



As we were driving up towards the lodge, we suddenly received a call that a caracal had been seen where we had just been looking. We turned and raced back to find the vehicle standing by the bush, but the caracal had jumped into the bush about 30 secs earlier. We searched for a few minutes but there was no sign. Unfortunately, we admitted defeat and returned to the lodge for a break.

During the lunch break, some of us explored the grounds and found a few macro subjects, including moths, spiders, a praying mantis ootheca (egg case) and leafhoppers. We also had a couple of female bushbucks feeding and resting outside the dining room, giving us some lovely close-up views.



This afternoon we went down to the plains and had a lovely, relaxed start, enjoying a number of birds, including some crowned hornbills and a secretary bird making large strides across the open area, returning to its nest with some nesting material.



After the secretary bird was snuggled in its nest, we drove down to the waterhole, where we ran into a famous resident – Thandy and her calf. Thandy is well known across the world, having survived a poaching attempt in 2012, where she nearly died. A lot of experimental treatments were tried on her horn to try and heal the area and thankfully, one was successful. She is reportedly the only rhino to have survived such a horrific poaching attempt, and has even gone on to have four calves over the years including the one she had with her on this day. It was really lovely to hear about such a significant survival story and see Thandy thriving, and more importantly, relaxed, with us around her.



We spent some time by a lagoon in the valley watching village weavers coming and going from their nests and resting in between on some of the palm leaves as pied kingfishers flew past us in a flash.



Leaving the bushy area of the river, we passed a couple of cheeky vervet monkeys watching from the safety of a tree. One was soaking up the heat from the entrance to an aardvark burrow/termite mound until it decided to join its troop in the trees. We then had a lovely interaction with a cape long claw, watching us from the grass, before heading for sundowners past a couple of beautiful male nyala.



Our sundowners stop was a stunning hidden oasis, a small lagoon nestled in the hills, giving us some lovely views and shelter from the wind. We spent some time watching a beautiful hawk moth feeding on some flowers and then made our way back to the lodge, after both vehicles had a quick sighting of a wood owl.



Dinner this evening was a braai, but due to the weather, we did it inside and enjoyed the shelter and warmth of the fire. After the dancing had finished, we made our way out on a night drive to see what we could find. One vehicle spotted a chameleon on the way down the hill into the valley so both vehicles stopped to see and photograph it. The first vehicle then went down the hill and spotted an armadillo, but unfortunately it quickly disappeared into a burrow. Unfortunately, it had gone by the time the second vehicle arrived.



Continuing with the drive, we had some lovely sightings of spring hares, hippos leaving the safety of the water for the night, bushbucks an eagle owl and some thick knees. After the excitement early on, it was quite quiet, so we made our way back for some rest at about 23:30.

Saturday 25 October 2025

Day 5:

After our late night, most people had a lie-in this morning, meeting for breakfast at 09:00. We had some time to take some final photos and/or relax around the lodge, before our journey over to River Lodge. The sky was looking quite ominous, so we decided to leave by 11:00 in an attempt to avoid the rain and make our way the hour and a half or so to the lodge. We managed to avoid it and arrived just before it started to rain fairly heavily. As we entered the area of the reserve where River Lodge is, we came across a Neddicky bird a couple of ostriches with eight very small babies. Wayne had seen them a few days before with nine, so one hadn't made it but they were doing well to still have eight. We sheltered from the rain over lunch, leaving at around 15:30 for our afternoon drive as the rain seemed to be easing.



Leaving the River Lodge area, we crossed the government road into the area with the 'boxes' (boxed off areas of the reserve to protect the entrance along the river), known to be good for caracals, but there was no sign unfortunately of anything other than grazing herbivores including waterbucks, wildebeest, zebra and a family of white rhinos. Driving out towards the open areas of Serengeti, we were looking for the two male lions that had been seen earlier but saw the usual mix of giraffe, zebra, blesbok and waterbuck. A lone white rhino was in an open area, but we then heard that the lions had been found lying on a ridge. We made our way there and found one asleep and one grooming himself. As we waited, it started to rain slightly, adding some moody atmosphere to the scene and giving the lion a soggy look!



Before heading for sundowners by the river, we had a lovely sighting of a jackal, which lay down in the road next to us for a few minutes before running off. A herd of wildebeest ran past our vehicle, and the heavy cloud meant the low light provided some lovely panning opportunities and a nice variety to round off the afternoon.



Find out more about our [Rare Mammals of the Eastern Cape](#) trip or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

Sunday 26 October 2025

Day 6:

Last night it rained quite heavily so we woke to a much greener and lushier vista. It was still raining first thing, so we decided to wait a little longer for it to pass and left at 05:30. We decided to drive to the higher areas close to the fence line. As we got to the top of the hill, we spotted the two lion brothers walking along the fence away from us but the road was too slippery for us to follow them, so we decided to head back into the valley and drive up again further along. On the way, we passed a herd of eland with a huge male and two tiny babies.

As we got to the top, two heads were poking out of the tall grass – it was the two male cheetah brothers. They were sitting in the grass, looking alert. Watching across to where they were looking, we saw one of the lions walking along the fence line towards us. The cheetahs stayed for a while, posing in the rain, which had started again, but as soon as the lion crested the hill and walked towards us, they started to run the other way. Unfortunately, the road was too slippery for us to follow them.



We sat for a while and waited until the lions came towards us through the bushes. As we sat, we saw a grey-headed kingfisher sitting on the edge of a bush.



They gave us some fantastic photo opportunities, both from afar and as they got closer.



Being in the presence of these majestic cats felt very special, despite the rain! We had some lovely wide-angle opportunities. The first brother lay down for a few minutes and called loudly, before his brother came to the same spot, rested briefly and then walked past us towards where the cheetahs had gone. We left them and made our way back down the hill back towards camp to dry off.



Find out more about our [Rare Mammals of the Eastern Cape](#) trip or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com



After breakfast today, we planned to go out on the boat along the river but the rain was quite heavy so we waited for a while to decide what to do. At 11:00 we boarded the boat and made our way towards the sea slowly, but after about five minutes, the rain became much heavier and started to penetrate all sides of the boat. We had a few lovely sightings of some monkeys, grey-headed kingfishers nesting, common sandpipers, a goliath heron and a water monitor but the rain was too heavy so we decided to abandon the boat and return to the lodge.



Unfortunately, the rain didn't ease off over lunch, but we decided to head off at 16:00 to see how we did. We drove out to the open plains and found three large male kudus grazing among the smaller herbivores. The rain gave us some opportunities for some moody, atmospheric images.



As well as the kudus, there was also a scrub hare that seemed quite confused and was sitting out in the open. One of the vehicles had a lovely tower of giraffes.



The weather was not on our side and the rain was getting heavier, so we decided to make our way back to camp. As we passed by the river, we spotted two elands in the river and they looked like they were struggling. There was a large male standing out of the water watching the two females in the river and a herd on the other side but the bank was too steep. One managed to drag itself out and after a couple of minutes, luckily, the other one followed soon after.

We made our way back to the public road, past another area that was a possible location for caracals. As we were almost at the bridge, we had a call from Wayne to say he had a puncture further down the road, so we

Find out more about our [Rare Mammals of the Eastern Cape](#) trip or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

decided to go back and help. It turned out there were two holes in his tyre, but luckily he had some plugs and a pump so Wayne and Brendon managed to fix it and return to the lodge for a well and gin and tonic by the fire as we dried off before dinner.

Monday 27 October 2025

Day 7:



Thankfully, this morning we woke up to a clear sky, which made the sunrise all the more welcome. We left at 05:00 and went up to the top of the hill to look out over the open area for any sign of caracals. We saw a black wildebeest, potentially the only one in the area, who was having zoomies across the hills, and we had a brief view of a duiker across on the next hill. With no sign of any caracals, we decided to try down in the valley close to the lodge as one had been seen in the area a few days earlier, so we knew it was possible.

The sun was just rising and hitting the raindrops that had been left on the grass from the night before. We stopped to try some backlit images of a big herd of waterbucks, but it didn't work as well as we'd hoped.

Still no signs of any caracals, we decided to make our way to the main area. By the road, the break in the rain had encouraged the birds that live and nest in the grasses by the fence to become a lot more active. Yesterday, there had been no sign of them. There was a lovely mix of red bishops and cape weavers perched on the grass and flitting around, making nests.

One bush was alive with a flock of red-faced mousebirds, which were keeping an eye on us before flying off to the safety of a distant bush.



On the upper plains, there were seven white rhinos, including one of Thandy's previous calves. They were grazing alongside a large herd of buffalo. We decided to have coffee up the top, overlooking the area where we were regularly searching for caracals. Last year's group had good success and one has been seen recently, so we were keen to search as much as possible.

As we were leaving after coffee, not having any luck seeing the elusive cats, we saw a cardinal woodpecker flitting around a tree as we drove past and a spotted thick-kneed guarding an egg on its nest. We also came across a warthog family, with one old male who had huge tusks – Wayne guessed he would be around 15 years old and they only usually live to about 10, so he was doing very well.



On our way back, we watched a pair of African hoopoe flying around some Euphorbia and spotted two more leopard tortoises close to the road. We also passed the ostrich family with the babies, who were still at eight, which was good news!

At around 12 noon, we left River Lodge and made our way to Settler's Drift. The weather was so much better today than yesterday so no hiding from the rain! Conversely, the sun was shining and were able to enjoy the views as Wayne drove the boat along the river. After a few minutes, we entered the park and saw a few elephants grazing and we had fairly regular views of pied kingfishers hovering as well as catching termites mid-flight.

About halfway, Wayne slowed down as he had heard of a spotted eagle owl nest and within a couple of minutes, we spotted an adult on the bank and two chicks well hidden inside a hole. We were able to get fairly good views of them but the strong sunlight made it very difficult to see with the shadows. They were clearly bothered by our presence so we moved on and left them to relax. Slightly further down, we passed a rocky area, where we saw another spotted eagle owl and quickly after we saw around three dassies resting on the rocks. They were unhappy with the owl's presence and, despite their excellent camouflage, they rushed into the cracks to hide. There were also some buzzards circling overhead throughout the journey, making everything underneath slightly nervous.



We passed a number of common sandpipers, greenshanks and even had a brief view of a malachite kingfisher. We arrived at the dock close to Settler's Drift, where some weavers were making nests in the reeds, and were driven the couple of minutes up the hill to the lodge. We were grateful for the lovely weather as we could make the most of the stunning views from the terrace while we waited for lunch and our rooms to be ready.

Before we left this afternoon, Wayne pointed out a huge herd of elephants on the lower plains. We would have had to cross the river to get to them, so we drove down and waited to see if they would cross to our

side but it didn't look like they were heading there, so we carried on exploring the new area.

We passed a good number of ostrich, warthogs and nyala on the open plains and explored a couple of dry riverbeds. We stopped to photograph a shrike in nice light and tried a backlit warthog but couldn't quite get the right angle. We came across a couple of yellow mongoose running around some termite mounds and one ran across the road into a burrow with prey, which looked like a vole or vlei rat, perhaps.

The elephants were not interested in crossing the river, so we went over to their side and were able to immerse ourselves in the huge herd. We had various opportunities and angles of elephant photography. Being immersed in the herd enables you to watch their behaviour and enjoy small interactions, as well as being creative with wide-angle lenses.



The light was wonderful and gave us some lovely opportunities for backlighting and enjoying the slight haze that created a lovely mist around a lone elephant walking along the riverbank.



This evening we were able to enjoy an outdoor Boma dinner with some wonderful dancing and music before bed.

Tuesday 28 October 2025

Day 8:

This morning the elephants had moved on but we came across a lioness with four subadult cubs, soon after a brief sighting of a Black rhino. The cubs were trying to improve their hunting skills and tried (confidently) to chase a warthog (they didn't succeed!).

Find out more about our [Rare Mammals of the Eastern Cape](#) trip or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com



Photo by Wayne

We found the elephants further along on the plains and one elephant walked straight past the vehicle, almost within touching distance. One of those moments where you hold your breath in disbelief and awe.

As we were expecting to head back to the lodge for breakfast, the vehicles pulled around a corner and we were met with a lovely sight of a fire, fully set table and a few members of the team. Time for a bush brunch! We were on a slightly raised area, overlooking the plains with grazing nyala, impala, wildebeest and warthogs.

After a wonderful meal, we made our way back to the lodge. We enjoyed the views over lunch of the giraffe, impala and other herds of ungulates enjoying the grasses.

Our first discovery this afternoon was a group of nyala enjoying the shade under a tree. Two were males and soon they started asserting their dominance, which involves puffing up their tail and back to make themselves bigger and slowly prancing towards each other. Luckily, it was all bluster and nobody decided it was worth a fight, so they backed down and continued eating.

A flock of mousebirds were making a noise in the top of a bush – they seemed to all work in sync and move as a group. Soon after, we came across the large herd of elephants from the previous afternoon, who were grazing along the riverbank. We were on the other side, so we were able to get some lovely images of them walking along the raised riverbank. Some were heading down the bank, which is always great, but slightly concerning when you see their great weight sliding down the bank and wonder how they're going to get back up!



Driving down the road alongside the river, we came across three giraffes grazing in the peace and quiet of a clearing. Nearby were some vervet monkeys hopping around the euphorbia trees and a hamerkop taking a quick break in another tree between collecting nesting materials.



We decided to make the most of the lovely, bright afternoon and head for sundowners overlooking the 'Serengeti' area. On the way, we passed a jackal enjoying the later afternoon sunshine, a pair of African hoopoes hunting for dinner and as we arrived at our stop, a grey-headed kingfisher was posing beautifully to provide a silhouette. We watched the lovely sunset over the plains, listening to the song of a Bokmakirrie. On the way back to camp, we passed a group of white rhinos and a couple of spotted eagle owls.



Wednesday 29 October

Day 9:

This morning we made our way back to the open plains and spotted the two male cheetahs quite early on from a distance. They were lying down by the treeline, so we moved on for the moment and decided to check in with them later. Driving past a lovely fiscal flycatcher and white-browed scrub robin chirping atop Euphorbia, we found another grey-headed kingfisher posing for a portrait and a sunbird zipping around the bush. After a while we approached the cheetahs, who were still lying down but they looked quite alert, stretching and looking around for some potential prey, before lying down again. A white rhino and calf were not very far away, so we were wondering if they may risk it but they seemed quite relaxed. We had a call to say that someone had spotted a caracal so we raced towards the area. Unfortunately, other than a brief view of a jacobin cuckoo and four more white rhinos, we had no luck.



After a coffee stop, we had a fairly quiet drive through the plains, stopping for a couple of warthogs who decided to pose rather than the usual position of running away from us! We saw the cheetah again, who had moved around one kilometre from where we'd seen them earlier, but they still looked quite relaxed so we made our way back along the river road.

Over lunch, as ever there was time to explore the grounds, including enjoying some of the birds that live in the trees around the lodge. One of these is the Cape Batis – a very fast little bird, that very occasionally stopped long enough for a photo!



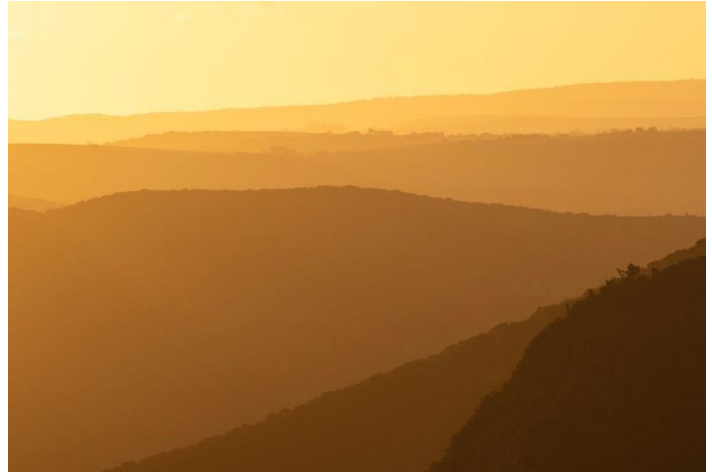
This afternoon we decided to make our way up into the hills known as the 'red cliffs', as the lioness with the cubs had been spotted with a kill from a distance. A relatively new area of the reserve in the north east, the roads were slightly less well-travelled and it was a steep ascent. Wayne had a good idea of where they were, so we went off-road into the bushes and lo and behold, we found them resting after a feast on a waterbuck. The light was very difficult for any good photography, and the bush was dense, so we enjoyed it as a sighting rather than anything else, particularly enjoying the inquisitiveness of the younger lions who were very happy to have some food so close by.



As we sat and watched them, a yellow-billed kite was flying overhead, giving us some great photo opportunities and good for 'birds in flight' practice.



After we had spent some time watching them, we made our way out of the bushy area and along the ridge past a red hartebeest, to another surprise – the team had set up an incredible sundowner spot overlooking the valley, where we could enjoy the beautiful sunset, which created some lovely misty layers across the hills.



As we were driving back to the lodge with our spotlight, we spotted another chameleon by the road so stopped for a few photos before heading back for our final dinner.

We had decided to try one final, short night drive at around 21:30, so we made our way across the riverbed to the open areas but it was very quiet. We had a brief sighting of a black rhino, but as soon as the light hit it, it retreated into the bushes and up the hill.



Thursday 30 October 2025

Day 10:

This morning, we left for our final morning drive, crossing the river to the open plains to see what we could find. There were several giraffe and zebra around the Serengeti area, but otherwise it was quite quiet. We watched a Burchell's coucal calling and stopped for coffee in a stunning area with lots of greenery. It's not common to see male bushbucks, but one was eating happily in an open area, wary but relaxed. It looked quite old, but had obviously survived well, despite predators being nearby. We also found a large herd of elephants hiding in a forest area – very hard to see them but incredible to be surrounded by such a large herd.



After our coffee stop and on our way back, we spotted a young female black rhino, known as Natalie. She was very chill in the bad heat haze, so chill that she even acted like a model, posing for various positions, right up close to the vehicle.





Sign up to our e-news

Sign up to our e-news to find out more about our tours, events, late availability, offers and tour reports at <https://www.wildlifeworldwide.com/subscribe>