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Tour Report
Heart of the Delta Photo Safari
16 – 25 March 2026

Leopard



Zebra



Lions



African wild dog



Compiled by Emma Healey

Tour Leaders: Emma Healey
Local guide: Kelvin and Mwamo
Trackers: Ibe and KB
Photos by Emma Healey

Monday/Tuesday 16 & 17 March 2026

Days 1–2:

Most of the group met at the gate on Monday evening at Heathrow, ready to board our flight to Johannesburg, then on to Botswana. We picked up the final member of the group in Johannesburg, and we were off. Once we arrived in Maun, we were whisked through arrivals and on to our short 25-minute charter flight to the Delta. The views were incredible as they had the heaviest rains in over 50 years, so dry land was covered in water, some of it the size of a lake, and rivers were overflowing. As we flew over some of the islands, with the afternoon sun lighting our way, we spotted some large elephant herds making the most of the extensive waterways and some hippos yawning, ready to make their way out of the water. This was really the Delta as it was written about many years ago. What a fantastic view!

We were met at the airstrip by our two guides, Kelvin and Mwamo, and our trackers, Ibe and KB. The drive to camp was due to be around one hour, so we got our cameras ready, just in case we spotted anything on the way. Always good to be prepared! The concession covers 175,000 hectares but only about 30% of it is used, as a lot is woodland. It's a huge area, which provides some good shelter for the wildlife if they don't want to be seen, so we were ready for the challenge!

The landscape was very green, and the water was plentiful here too. One of the lovely things about this time of year is the various flowers, adding some colour to the verdant greens. The drive was quite bumpy as the water was deep in some areas, so it took us almost two hours by the time we arrived at camp. On the way, we were treated to our first sightings of lilac-breasted roller, ostrich, impala, red lechwe, vervet monkeys and saddle-billed stork, as well as a number of dragonflies and butterflies.





Our home for the next week was Splash Enclave, a slightly separated part of Splash camp, with our own lounge/dining area and campfire.

We were shown to our rooms to change, shower and settle in before making our way back up to the dining area for sundowners and then dinner – a lovely three-course meal, which was much needed after our long journey. We were all quite tired though, so we peeled off to our rooms fairly quickly, to prepare for the early start tomorrow.

For a few of us, our first sighting was as part of the walk home, as there was a beautiful flap-necked chameleon resting on a branch, right outside one of our rooms. I didn't expect the macro lens to come out so quickly, but I couldn't resist. We got a few shots, so as not to disturb it too much with the light and then left it to start hunting.



Wednesday 18 March 2026

Day 3:

We left this morning for our first drive as the sun was starting to come over the horizon. Driving past 'Splash Lagoon', we saw a large herd of red lechwe walking through the knee-deep water. We stopped for a few minutes to see if they would perhaps run through the water, and some of the group were able to capture some jumping as they retreated, whereas others were happy with some lovely reflections.



We heard that a small pride of lions had made a kill, so we drove around the area and lo and behold, there was a group of five young lions tucking into a large male kudu kill.





We spent over an hour with them, mostly on our own, photographing them from various positions as they ate, lay down resting their full bellies and drank from the small pool of water. Gradually, as the sun rose higher, they moved the carcass further towards a large bush to keep it fresh, had a bit of a play fight, then lay down again to rest.





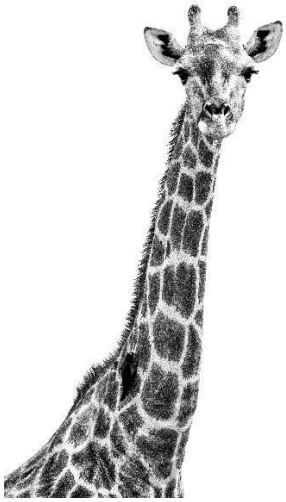
As we sat watching them, a grey-headed kingfisher flew in for a quick visit and soon after we got a call to say there was a sighting of a cheetah about an hour away. We all agreed that we'd like to go, so we battened down the hatches and drove quickly to where it had been seen. As we arrived at the 'marking post' tree, a beautiful male cheetah was lying in the grass. He was very relaxed, rolling around, scent-marking. The tree is known as the marking post as they tend to use it as their passing point, where they leave their scent for other cheetahs who may be looking for a partner.

He obviously wasn't hungry as a couple of warthogs passed by, and he watched them but didn't move towards them. In the end, we left him there as we had to get back because we were already running late. We made a quick stop by a gulley, which was full of water and provided some beautiful reflections, to grab some drinks to have on the way back, and we made sure coffee and breakfast would be waiting for us on our arrival back to camp.





One group had a sighting of a couple of black-backed jackals on the way back, whereas the other stopped for a small giraffe family, but we were able to practice the merits of black and white techniques in strong light.



This afternoon began with some more of the red lechwe jumping across the river. We went across to a couple of different herds in the hope that they might jump, and luckily one herd crossed the river so a couple of them jumped and then the whole herd returned to the other side, so we had a number of them jumping all at once, which was fabulous to see.





We returned to the lion kill, where they were still gorging themselves on the kudu carcass. There were a couple of white-backed and hooded vultures watching and waiting for their turn from the trees nearby.





After some time, the lions were not moving much and were mostly inside the bushes, so after watching some playful interactions, we moved towards the lagoon. The first vehicle came across another lion walking along the edge of the lagoon and soon after, we spotted another – it was a mating pair. We watched them for some time, walking down the road, him following her and tried to get ahead of them to get some front-on images.




After a while, they got to the edge of the water, and the only way for them to cross was to go through it, so we sat and waited in case they made the jump, which luckily she decided to do. Unfortunately, he walked through but still gave us some lovely reflections.




They came to rest on the edge of the road by the water and lay there for some time before mating and then walking off into the bushes at sunset. As we tried to go around to see them one last time, we came across two side-striped jackals.




One raced into the grass, and we lost it, but the other was slower to go and gave us a couple of nice opportunities before it disappeared. The guides were very happy to see them and said they were rare to see, especially after half the group had seen the black-backed jackal earlier today.



We were considering whether to stop for sundowners, but as we looked towards the direction of camp we saw that there was a huge black cloud and some lightning, which made us return to camp quickly as it was clear. There was a big storm coming. We raced back and made it just as the rain started, but luckily we managed to escape the worst of it, and the storm let rip while we were having a well-needed gin and tonic or similar in the shelter of the enclave. We had a slightly earlier than normal dinner and then retired to bed to try and process all the things that we'd managed to see on our first day.

Thursday 19 March 2026

Day 4:

We decided to make our way to the kudu kill first thing to see if the lions had left and let any other predators in, such as hyenas. Going through one of the smaller puddles, our guide spotted a very small baby crocodile sitting at the edge – it moved too quickly for any good photos but was lovely to see. When we arrived at the kill site, the lions were still there so they were clearly getting the most out of their efforts. When we arrived, three were around the water drinking, one was fast asleep, and one was still eating.





We spent some time with them, but one dragged the remains further into the bush, so we left them to rest.



We made our way through the forest to a scrub area with lots of fallen trees and flowers. Passing an impala, we soon came upon a lioness sitting quietly observing her territory. She seemed to be alone at first, but then started quietly contact calling. She walked off through the grasses and was reunited with her sister on the road by our vehicles, where they greeted each other and walked into the bushes.







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Driving out onto the open plains, we were hoping the lionesses would move in that direction, but we were distracted by some movement around one of the termite mounds and came upon a mongoose family running in and out of their holes in the base. There were at least four young ones and their mother, but there were quite a few popping in and out, so it was hard to keep track!

As they disappeared into the undergrowth, we heard the lions' contact calling and went over to find one of the females on a termite mound calling to the other female a little further on. They met up, played a little and walked into the open - posing on mounds and continuing to call. Kelvin thought it was likely that they were part of a pride of six that were well-known in the area and they were trying to reunite. They are all still young and not resident, so were likely to have been split up overnight.





We spent a bit of time looking around for the rest of the pride but came across a huge troop of baboons playing in the trees, so we stopped for a while to watch them.



As we were watching, we then had a call that the cheetah from yesterday had been seen mating with a female, so we left the baboons and sped over to just past the marking post tree in an area known as 'Bat Eared Fox'. We found them lying down and after a couple of minutes they moved into the shade of the bush. There were some rumbling noises, him trying to initiate mating, but she was resting and clearly wanted a break, so they lay for a while, then moved further into the bush to escape the heat. We decided to have a coffee stop nearby.




During our coffee stop, we saw a number of tracks in the mud, including wild dog, hyena and wild cat, so we searched the area in the vehicle afterwards, but there was no sign. We did see a vulture flying around, so we thought there may be dogs, but it didn't lead us to anything. After one more check on the cheetahs, who had moved but still no action, we made our way back towards camp, passing a couple of tawny eagles on the way. Over lunch, a few of us explored the path around the lodge with our macro lenses, before we were forced to go inside due to a huge storm and lots of rain. There was a spotted bush snake outside one of the rooms.




This afternoon, we went out as the rain eased and found a huge group of Marabou storks standing around some water close to the lodge. A family of two adults and one juvenile side-striped jackals were playing nearby and running past the storks and our vehicles. When they went off down the road, we could hear some parrots calling, so we went to a nearby tree and were able to watch a young parrot being groomed by one of its parents. As we left, we passed a red-necked spurfowl observing the situation before we continued with our drive.




We drove past a huge troop of chacma baboons playing, grooming and resting and a large herd of wildebeest, as well as magpie shrikes and guineafowl.





We then came upon three ground hornbills feeding in the grass. One was throwing a mantis back into its mouth as we watched, and we played with settings to get the best shots of these prehistoric-looking birds.





The rain started again, so we all grabbed ponchos and protected ourselves. As it started to ease a bit, we stopped for sundowners close to a herd of elephants. We would've got a bit closer, but there was too much water for us to pass one of the roads, so unfortunately we had to watch from afar.



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A lot of them were hiding in the forested area behind the area we could see, but it was lovely to see some of them enjoying the large amounts of water available to them.

After dinner, we went out on a night drive to see if we could find some interesting nocturnal species. As usual with the warm roads, there were a couple of nightjars resting and soaking up the warmth, and a black-backed jackal was seen by one vehicle, enabling the others to try a bit of side lighting. We drove towards the kill site in case any hyenas were making their way closer. There was one nearby that we had a brief glimpse of, but then the lions were contact calling and walking away from the area.

The spotters found a couple of flap-necked chameleons in the bushes, a white-tailed mongoose and a very patient Verreaux's eagle owl. As we photographed the Verreaux's, we could also hear a scops owl, so we went around the tree but could not see it in the dense branches. A serval was seen briefly before running into the bushes, and we passed a steenbok right by the vehicle on the way back to camp.

Friday 20 March 2026

Day 5:

Soon after leaving camp, a serval (likely the same one as last night) was spotted at the edge of the plains. We watched it sit for a while before disappearing into the tall grasses. The sunrise was beautiful, and we spent some time around the water at Splash Lagoon watching yellow-billed storks foraging in the water.





We managed to capture some reflections of the sunrise in the lagoon before the sun came up and everything started to move. One vehicle found a silhouetted owl in a tree against the lovely sunrise.



Moving out onto Impala Pan, we came across a male lion – about 12 years old – mating with a female.





We stayed with them for a while, as they rested in the early morning sun and mated again. After some time, we decided to make a move past the large, one-tusked male elephant on the edge of the plains.



After passing two more lions and spending some time watching a troop of baboons chasing each other, particularly the younger ones, we stopped for coffee on the open plains.





Stopping on the way back at the pools, we watched a black heron, the yellow-billed storks and sacred ibis looking for food. The light by this point was too bright for any good images, but it was lovely to sit and watch them.

On the way back to camp we came across a herd of giraffes (one sleeping) and a few zebras with oxpeckers. Slightly further on, there was an almost perfect tower of giraffes. We willed the one on the right to turn, but even with a small anomaly, the symmetry was great to observe.



During the lunch break, a few of us explored the paths around the rooms for the smaller species and found a lovely selection of macro subjects, including a wonderful mantis and jumping spider.







After a rest, our plan this afternoon was to go and search for lechwe around the water to see if we could focus on some running, jumping and splashing. We stopped initially for a very obliging warthog and a large group of marabou storks with the troop of baboons playing nearby. As we were photographing a lilac-breasted roller close to a family of tsessebes, we got a call from Kelvin that he had seen a leopard, so we went over as fast as we could.





It was a large male sleeping in a tree. Initially he was comfortably lying on the low branches and we were optimistic as the light would be good a little later, but in true leopard style he moved up into the dense branches until all we could see was his front paws. We decided to wait until sunset to see if he came down again, which he obviously did about 15 minutes after the sun had set so the light was very poor.





We saw our first Bradfield's hornbill, which landed above him as we waited, but otherwise it was quiet. We watched him stretch, yawn, come down from the tree and walk off into the bushes, so at that point we left him and drove with a spotlight on our way back to camp, but nothing of note to see.

Saturday 21 March 2026

Day 6:

After such a lovely sunrise yesterday, it was cloudy this morning, but we'd had a lovely wake-up call from the lions, starting at around 04:00. We went out to where they had been calling and found the two males. How Kelvin spotted them in the virtual darkness was incredible – it's like he has a homing device. Lucky for us, soon after we arrived they yawned, stretched, got up and started to walk, so we followed them all the way to the hippo pools, where we left them to it.





They were clearly tracking female scents, but we couldn't see any in the area. We had a brief view of a side-striped jackal, but he saw the lions and ran away.




We drove towards hippo pools and, despite one vehicle getting stuck briefly in the deep water and having to be rescued by the other before the two lions arrived, we managed to get further away and get some lovely shots of the two brothers together.




We went to look for the leopard as we were in the same area we'd seen him last night, but we couldn't see any sign. We saw a bearded woodpecker flying between a couple of trees, so some of us got out of the vehicle to try and get closer. While we were there, we found a striped kingfisher, so we photographed both of them before they continued on with their day.




There was a call over the radio that there were two lionesses with around seven cubs (around 6-9 months) an hour or so away, close to the Bat-eared Fox area so we decided to head over and risk the chance of them disappearing before we arrived. Thankfully, we managed to find them, but they were within a dense area of trees with lots of leaves. One group stopped for a herd of zebra and kudu on the way, while we tried to find the best angles. We managed to get a few shots, but there were a lot of leaves around them. Sometimes this can add some interest, but often it just gets in the way!





One of the lionesses moved away from the cubs to have a rest in the shade nearby, but the others stayed and the cubs moved a lot inside the bushes but stayed in the safety of the shelter. We spent around an hour watching them play and snooze.

On our way back to camp, we stopped briefly at a lagoon, full of bright green Salvinia molesta (an invasive pond weed). We were watching the Egyptian geese and white-faced whistling ducks, which kept taking off and returning with their distinctive whistle. All of a sudden, as we stopped, the surface moved, and there were a couple of hippos enjoying the cooling benefits of the vegetation.





We continued on to camp, seeing a few more species on the way, including an African hawk-eagle, fish eagle, pied kingfishers, egrets, red lechwe and a coucal with a frog for lunch!




We were back late for brunch, but luckily we had a good lion cub-shaped excuse.

During the lunch break, we had planned to explore the paths, where there were a number of camaropteras and a crested barbet, but unfortunately the wind picked up too much to do too much macro. There were a couple of things on leaves that weren't being blown around, so we managed a few.




After that, we decided to focus on some of the bigger birds and mammals (squirrels!) and then rest instead.





This afternoon, we met for coffee, and we all had first-hand evidence of why the wind had picked up so much. It was very rainy! We put on our ponchos, put waterproof covers over our cameras and out we went. We had some fun with various shutter speeds and the rain, practising on baboons, tsessebes, zebras and wildebeest. A lot of things were sheltering, particularly the birds, so we didn't see much, but we had some fun with what we did find.




The big herd of zebra and wildebeest were spending time together, for safety, and were surrounded by a number of cattle egrets, so we captured some lovely portraits and watched their interactions and behaviour.




On our way back to camp, we had some soggy sundowners by the lagoon after a quick stop for the young side-striped jackal that was lying down enjoying the coolness of the rain and then got up to have a wander into the bushes.




After a beautiful sunset, we used the spotlights, getting a brief glimpse of a white-tailed mongoose and a chameleon, but everything seemed to have hunkered down to shelter from the rain, so we called it a day.

Sunday 22 March 2026

Day 7:

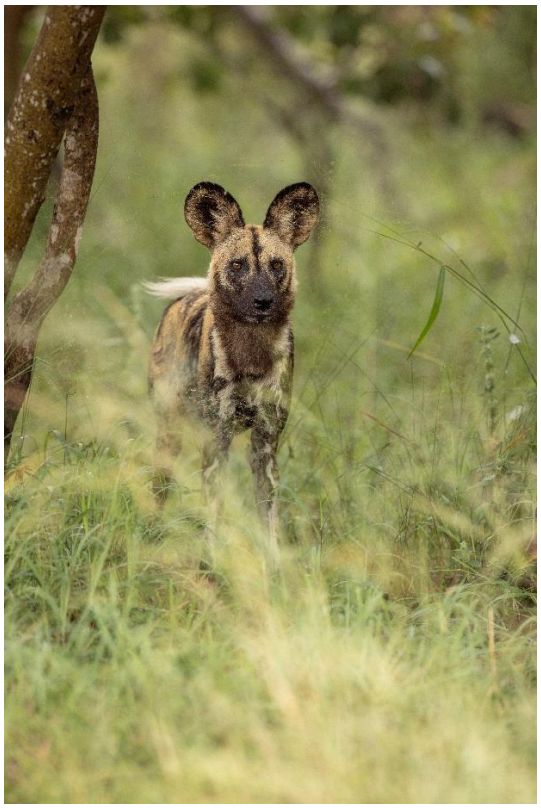
This morning it was thankfully clearer but still quite cloudy. The birds were more active, making the most of the clearer skies, and we watched a crested barbet catching insects and found a Verreaux's eagle owl looking down warily at us.

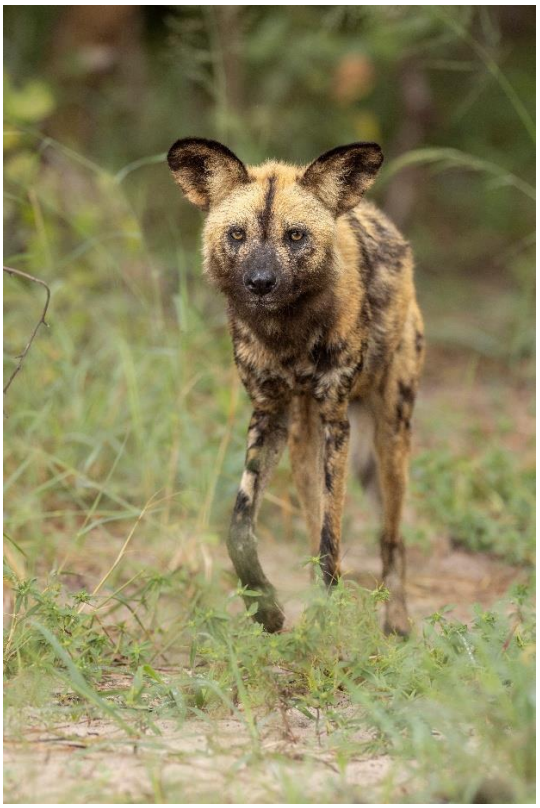




We spotted some lion tracks, but we lost them as we passed the lagoon, so we continued as we could hear some baboons' alarm calls. We saw three jackals playing, so we watched them, and as we sat there, Ibe spotted two male lions lying under a tree, next to what turned out to be a zebra kill. That explained the alarms and noise! It looked like they'd killed it overnight (or stolen it from some females who had) and they'd had their fill.

We could hear a large group of monkeys calling in the distance, so we made our way over as they famously don't like leopards, so it was worth a try. Unfortunately, the rain started again, and there was no sign of any cats, so we went on to Tsessebe pan, where we found a herd of zebra, wildebeest, a family of ground hornbills and had a brief view of a black-backed jackal in the road before it disappeared.





A call came through to us that someone had found a pack of wild dogs at Willy's Valley, so we raced towards it. They were apparently hunting, so we knew it may be tricky, but it's always worth a try. By the time we arrived, the rain was heavy, so they were sheltering under bushes. We went a short distance away to let another vehicle in and to have a quick break, and then we heard that they were on the move, so we jumped in and made our way round the corner, running right into them as they emerged from the bushes!

We were able to stay with them, following them as they moved through the bush for over half an hour. They traversed open plains and a mopani-filled pan, giving us a few lovely photo opportunities and enabling us to enjoy observing their behaviour. We would have happily stayed with them for longer, but the mopani was getting thicker and harder for us to navigate, and the ground was wet, so it was too much of a risk.





We made our way back past the green lagoon with the hippos for some more opportunities, as well as a flock of knob-billed ducks that were enjoying the newly wet ground. Mwamo's vehicle also saw a lone male lion walking along the road.





Over lunch, we discovered a reed frog that must have got confused with the rain, resting in a leaf outside the main shared area of camp. Everyone was able to see it looking very white at the start of our break and then by the time we were heading off for our afternoon drive, it was much darker (below), adapting to the light conditions – it was in the sun early on, and the cloud had covered it by mid-afternoon. Around camp, there was also a small flock of African paradise flycatchers, which were lovely to observe.





Kelvin had heard baboons calling in the distance as we had afternoon tea, so we went to check the area for cats. No sign of anything there unfortunately, so we turned round and went to Tsessebe pan to look for elephants. A family of Egyptian geese were learning how to navigate the shallow ponds with their parents, and we saw another large herd of zebra and wildebeest, including a very young zebra staying very close to mum.




We spent some time by a large lagoon, watching hippos popping up and down, hoping they might play/fight or yawn. As we sat there, we saw a pair of pygmy geese speeding past us. We tried a few times to photograph them and noticed they were going to and from a nest nearby, so we went closer, but it seemed it was too close as they started to avoid the nest, so we moved away as we didn't want to upset them.




As we sat there, we watched a wall of very dramatic dark clouds coming our way, and the guides said it was going to be a huge storm, so we made the decision to go back to camp early to have sundowners there before dinner. What a good decision! Just as we got back, the rain started, and it was incredibly heavy with thunder and lightning, so we were very glad to be safely tucked away in the dining room. We had an early dinner and made our way to bed, but not before some of us were treated to some lovely views of a tree frog and chameleon on the way. There are some benefits to the rain!




Monday 23 March 2026

Day 8:

The rain had cleared again by the morning, so we drove towards the zebra kill to see the lions. The light was stunning, as it often is after a storm, and we were able to photograph a woodland kingfisher and a lioness in some beautiful light.




We found the two young lionesses and the young male looking towards a bush first when suddenly one of the large brothers appeared through the bush and chased them away. The sounds were incredible – the vibrations you could feel when these lions are roaring are something else. The one brother with the scar on his face stayed to guard the rest of the carcass and called to his brother, but he had chased the younger male quite a way away. We drove around looking for them at first, but they had gone too far, so we decided to slow the pace and see what we could find.

We passed a troop of baboons high in the trees and spent some time with a family of ostriches, taking some lovely portraits, close-ups, and even practising some backlit images. We made our way back to Splash Hippo Lagoon to see what the birds were up to. The blacksmith lapwings and yellow-billed storks were making the most of the food that had been unearthed and dislodged by the heavy rains.




As we were watching the birds, the lion brother who had chased the others came around the corner not far from us. He had obviously run a long way, as he was panting and was very hot. He lay for a while in the shade and had a big drink before continuing to walk back towards his brother. Aound the corner, we came across a chameleon, not often seen during the day, so we were able to stop the vehicle and get closer to it, which was a real treat.




We stopped for a morning coffee in Impala Pan, close to the green lagoon, where there was a large troop of baboons, a herd of impala, and the hippos were yawning! The sun and heat haze made photography a little tricky, but it was lovely to watch everything enjoying the sunshine. On our way back past the main pools, we found a fish eagle with a huge tilapia. It kept stopping to eat some, then flying on to find a new perch. Incredible to see the size of fish that these birds can carry.




With there being less wind today, we decided to look for some macro subjects during the break. We had a good selection of lizards, skinks, planthoppers and jumping spiders.





This afternoon, we had some lovely opportunities with a small herd of lechwe, posing amidst the water lilies. Around the area were a number of birds and amphibians, enjoying the water. A red-billed hornbill was looking for food, and a reed frog was trying to blend in to make sure it didn't become lunch!




As we moved into an area of denser vegetation, we came upon a large elephant herd, with a male in musth and a very small baby. We kept our distance so as not to interfere or get too close to the male, but some of them walked quite close to us. The herd was doing a fantastic job of guarding the baby, which is something elephants are so good at. We were able to find a place to sit, watching them pass, go in and out of the trees while they ate and played.





We left them as they disappeared more into the thick mopani and made our way through the ever-deepening water on the roads, back to Splash Hippo Pools for our last sundowners. As we were spotlighting on the way back, we passed a nightjar in the road and then came upon a young pair of lions, and we were able to use the two lights to get some interesting shots, with the light picking out various features of the lions. We didn't do it for too long as we didn't want to disturb them with the lights, and going a little further along the road, we saw a couple of spring hares bounding around the grass. They are so quick that you rarely get to photograph them, so it's more luck than judgement!

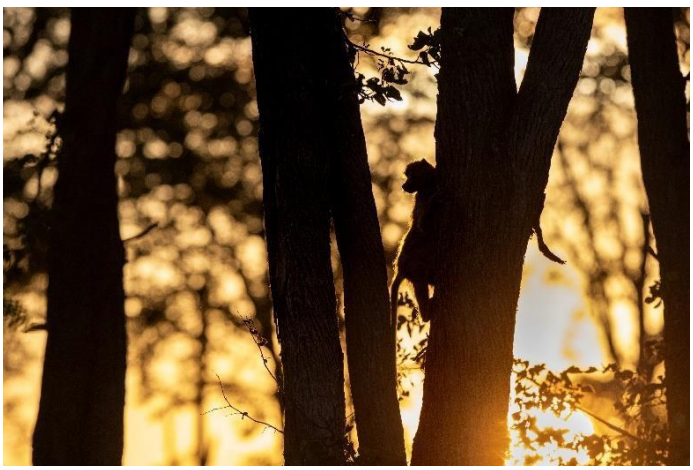



As we returned to camp, we had a lovely surprise as our final dinner was served outside in the fresh air. We put our things in the dining room and then enjoyed a lovely buffet, which had been prepared for us, as we listened to the sounds of the bush.

Tuesday 24 March 2026

Day 9:

We went for our final morning drive and could see the sky was clear, which was a lovely sight. We passed a snake eagle in a tree and looked for silhouette opportunities, but it wasn't quite right. The trackers spotted some lion tracks, so we were following those when some baboons started calling noisily. We went over, as Kelvin was convinced the baboons had seen a leopard from their calls. We looked everywhere, but couldn't see any sign of one. We'd either just missed it or it was hiding away in the bushes. The sun rose as we were searching and the light was stunning, just as we were in hot pursuit, but in the end we decided to return to the baboons and spend time with them, so we stayed for a while and photographed them.




As we turned to head back, a herd of impalas started leaping across the road past us and then went the other way. We turned a corner, and suddenly there was a large male lion in front of us on the road. It was the brother from yesterday who had chased the younger one away. He walked past us on the road, sporting a nasty cut on his lip, which had probably been from yesterday's fight.

We found four ground hornbills; one was in a tree with a large frog in its beak, while the others were still searching for their prize. Two black-backed jackals ran past, as ever, not pausing for long enough for anyone to get a shot.





Returning to camp, we had an early brunch, collected our bags and said goodbye to the camp staff before heading off to the airport. People often want to pack their things away, but it's always worth keeping your camera out until the airstrip, as you never know what we might see on the way. We finally found a troop of vervet monkeys, nonchalantly watching us from the safety of the trees and passed two wattled cranes and a slaty egret very close to the vehicle, trying to fish stealthily in the shallow water.





At the airstrip, we said goodbye to our guides and trackers and took off into the sunny skies – either to start our journey home or continue on, as some were doing.

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