

Tour Report

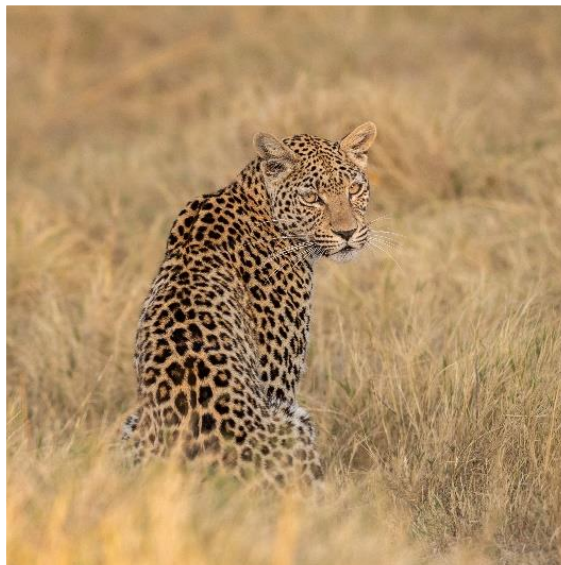
Botswana – Okavango Delta Photo Safari

21 June - 2 July 2023

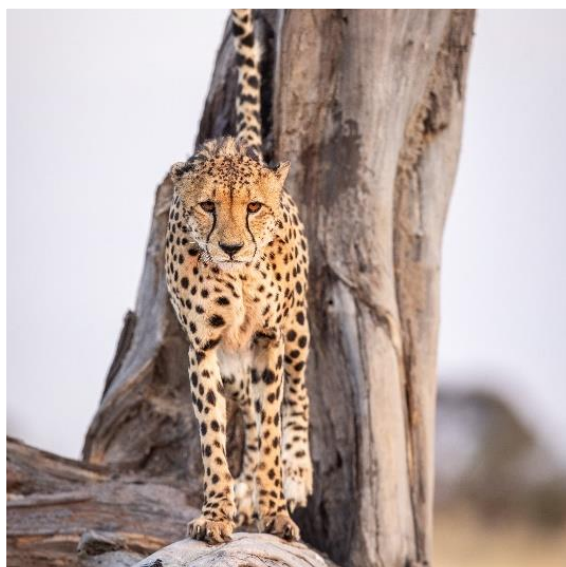
Lion



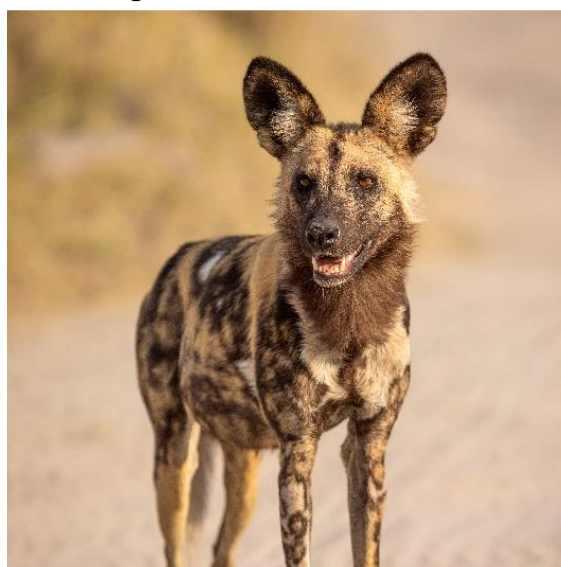
Leopard



Cheetah



Wild dog



Exploring these world-renowned areas of Botswana, with only some canvas between you and the big cats, hippos and other wildlife that calls the area home, is an incredible experience and privilege. June to July is a fantastic time to visit this area; the mornings and evenings are chilly, but it is lovely and warm during the day. This was a trip of cats and dogs, as well as multiple sightings of some smaller stars (and actual stars!) Other memorable moments were some time spent near a hyena den, elephants drinking and bathing in the water, and a huge troop of baboons walking alongside our vehicles.

Day 1: Saturday 21 June 2023

Due to overcrowding at the gate at Heathrow, some of us met before boarding, but we soon found the rest of the group when we arrived at Johannesburg airport and sat down for a coffee and greetings.

Day 2: Sunday 22 June 2023

The group arrived in Maun to the welcoming smiles of Neil (who had flown over a couple of days early), Katembo and Goms. After finishing off some admin at the airport, we set off for our first camp in Khwai. It's a long drive up the main road north, and we passed a number of villages before leaving the tarmac behind at Shorobi. From there, we got our first taste of the dirt roads that would become much more familiar over the next few days, arriving after a while at 'Buffalo Gate', where the dust started to increase and the possibility of wildlife sightings began. It was already noticeable on the drive-up that the water levels were quite a bit lower than last year, both in the rivers we crossed and the roadside lagoons and water holes.

The main wildlife welcoming us along the road was a variety of hornbills (yellow, red and grey) but all was quiet on the mammals front. After sunset, we had brief sightings of hyena and giraffe, then picked up some clear hyena footprints when we stopped by the side of the road. The main attraction, however, was the incredible night sky which was lit up with stars. Having just had a new moon, the moon was in a waxing phase and was not providing a lot of light, so the Milky Way was clearly visible across the sky and it was breath-taking. We tried to grab some quick shots on the way, but we felt we couldn't do it justice, so that moment is consigned to our memories as a huge highlight welcoming us to Botswana.

After a long drive on the main road, we turned off and started to wind our way through a narrow track, passing some waterholes in which hippos were just waking up and starting to come out of the water. We arrived at our camp and were shown to our tents before dinner, then we headed off to bed to prepare for our first drive in the morning.

Day 3: Monday 23 June 2023

Compiled by Emma Healey

After breakfast and much-needed coffee in the dark by the campfire, we wrapped up (it was a cold one) and left the camp, heading out into the darkness to see what we could find. Everyone had had their first night of the sounds of the bush, including lions calling, crickets, cicadas and other insects making themselves heard. As the sun rose, the sounds changed to morning bird calls, in particular, the red-billed spurfowl were making everyone aware of their presence. We came across a common reedbuck enjoying the peace in the reeds, and we stopped for a while with a mother and baby hippo who were relaxing in the river. They seemed as interested in us as we were in them.

We continued away from the river into the bush and came across a troop of baboons and two bull elephants, who were shaking the camel thorn trees in an attempt to make the pods drop off. This also helps the baboons, as they can feast on the leftovers without having to work too hard to get them from the high branches.

It was quite quiet as far as predators went, so we spent our time getting to know the birds and herbivores in the area. The lilac-breasted rollers were, as ever, showing off their beautiful colours as they flew up and down from the branches to catch insects on the ground. We had our first sighting of a large group of guinea fowl and came across a herd of 11 waterbucks, which was quite surprising as they are normally found in smaller family groups.

Our first coffee stop was at a lagoon, where a number of hippos were dutifully yawning for the photographers who had positioned themselves on the ground by the edge of the water! After a cold start, the sun was starting to provide some heat, so everyone started to shed some layers and enjoy the African sunshine. There were elephant footprints along the road, and one had obviously been a big bull as the tracks were very large!



We dragged ourselves away from the hippos – and some pied kingfishers which were hovering and diving – and started to drive back in the direction of the camp. We drove across an open plain with many dead trees, which suggested that elephants had knocked them down when looking for food. A couple of large bull elephants crossed our path, heading towards the river, and a black jackal ran through the grass while being observed by a tawny eagle and a brown snake eagle soaring in the sky.

As we left the plains, we met the river and came across more elephants who were enjoying the refreshing water and cooling off in the now much warmer sunshine. We returned to camp, which was our first time seeing it in daylight, and received a lovely welcome. We were staying at Sable Alley, a beautiful camping site with tents overlooking the river, inhabited by hippos and many other visitors (more on that later).

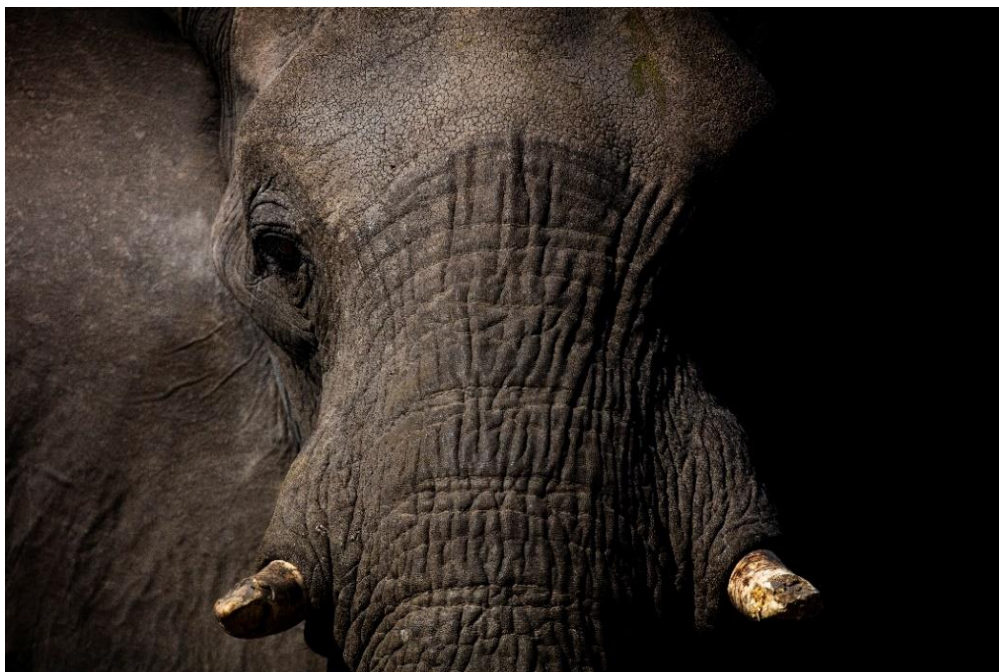


Image by Neil Aldridge

On arrival, we were met by one guest who had unfortunately been feeling unwell, so had stayed back in camp. He excitedly told us that while resting, he had been woken by a commotion outside his tent. Looking out of the door, he saw a small pack of three wild dogs hunting an impala right outside! Unfortunately, by the time we returned, they had gone to find some shade to rest in and had left very little behind, but what a fantastic experience! It seems the dogs had learnt that if they chase their prey

towards the river, they can block it and catch it as it slows, which obviously worked well for them today.



We had some lunch and then some time to relax and refresh ourselves with a shower provided by the team. Due to the lovely position of the camp, there was plenty to see during our free time, for those who decided not to rest. Little bee-eaters were perching and hunting on the small dead trees by the water and a small herd of elephants aggravated a group of hippos with a young one. The hippos had been resting on the side of the river in the shade, so there was a bit of a tussle before the elephants went back into the bushes.

This afternoon, we made our way to a hyena den, which the guides knew about. It was back out onto the main road, but thankfully the road was less dusty today, as the wind was blowing the dust to the side. We drove towards the den site, passing a couple of vehicles en route, as well as a small bachelor herd of buffalo. When we reached the den, there were already two vehicles there and we found our spot and waited... after some time, thankfully, we were rewarded with movement. There were two older pups, around 18 months old, and one very young one who was only around one month old and was only just starting to leave the den. The two older pups came out as the sun was starting to disappear, and they were quickly joined by around five adults. The adults then spent some time around the edge of the den, greeting the cubs and relaxing. After some time, unfortunately after it got quite dark, the youngest pup came out to the edge of the den to suckle from its mother. We watched the group for a while before heading off to an open area for sundowners. We could still hear the hyenas calling while we had our drinks.



After a quick break, the spotlights came out and it was time to focus on the nocturnal residents of the area. We drove back past the den, where a couple of the adult hyenas were still resting, but the two older pups were playing with some skin/fur from a previous kill, so we watched for a few minutes before continuing on. On our way back to camp, we spotted two scrub hares and a spring hare. We also spent some time watching lesser bush babies jumping around the trees.

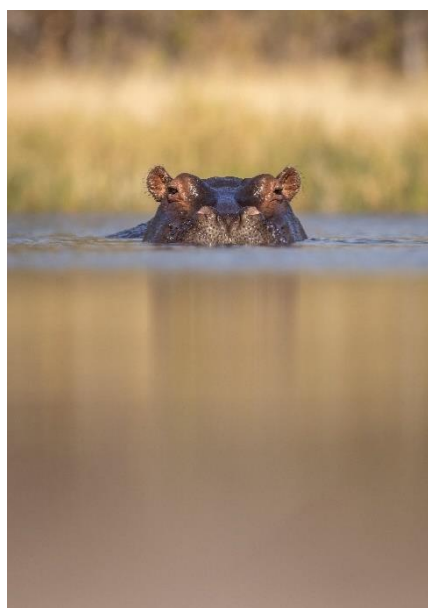
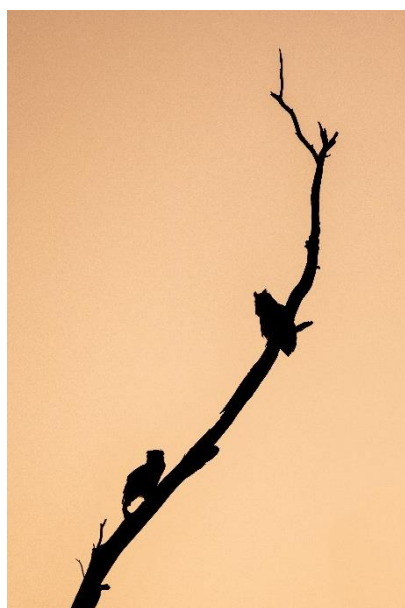
Returning to camp, we greeted the final member of our group, who had made it after a flight delay, and we all sat down to dinner to reflect on our busy first day. It was one of the group's birthdays, so she was treated to a homemade cake and some lovely dancing and singing by the camp crew. There was the opportunity to go out for a night drive, but everyone was quite tired, so we decided to get an early night and head out again early in the morning.

Day 4: Tuesday 24 June 2023

As we left camp this morning and drove along the edge of the river, the hippos were heading back into the safety of the water. We could hear the calls of Verreaux's Eagle Owls, so we drove towards the sound and found them sitting on a tall, dead tree. We stopped for a while as the sky turned red and then orange, taking some silhouettes, then we went around to the other side to try and get some shots from the front, but the light wasn't quite good enough yet, so we carried on. Katembo spotted some leopard tracks on the road – both male and female. We followed the tracks for a while, but unfortunately couldn't find the cats. We spotted a barred owl high up in a tree, so stopped briefly to photograph it before continuing our search. There was still no sign of the leopards, but we did have some nice views of tsessebe and wildebeest walking across the dead tree plains.



The morning was quite quiet for sightings, so we positioned ourselves by the river for a coffee stop. There was a sandy beach leading up to the water, which meant people could get down low to photograph the yawning hippos. Some of the group spent their time waiting for the hippos to yawn, while others enjoyed the view with a coffee and snack by the vehicles. When the heat intensified, we drove back to camp for a break.



Over lunch, Neil told us that he had set up his camera trap in the morning (while we were out) and that the dogs had returned to camp at about 09:00. Unfortunately, the one member of the group who had stayed behind due to illness hadn't seen them, and of course, they were long gone by the time we returned.

During our break, we made the most of the campsite's riverside location. Many of the group sat outside their tents on camping chairs to enjoy the view while downloading their images. Some were out with cameras, capturing the hippos, southern ground hornbills, greater kudu, little bee-eaters and

various species of butterfly (mostly African Monarch), and we even got a brief glimpse of an otter, which was a real surprise!

After lunch, we decided to go out the other way from camp in the direction the dogs had gone. We passed lechwe and kudu, they were keeping close to the cooling water, but just far enough away from the edge to avoid crocodiles. We passed a saddle-billed stork, which was standing a fair distance away from us in some long grasses, then we noticed a nest high up in the trees. We didn't locate the dogs, unfortunately, but did come across a very handsome male waterbuck with only one horn, which we thought gave him character. He would obviously have some good stories to tell around the campfire.



As the drive remained quite quiet, we returned to camp at around 19:00, had some dinner and then went out for a night drive. We watched some scrub hares and spring hares hopping ahead of the spotlight and we also saw a large porcupine who scrambled up a sandy bank into the undergrowth. We were hoping for some headshots, but as usual, we were presented mostly with its rear end!

We didn't find anything else of note, so we returned to camp to get some sleep and pack up our things.

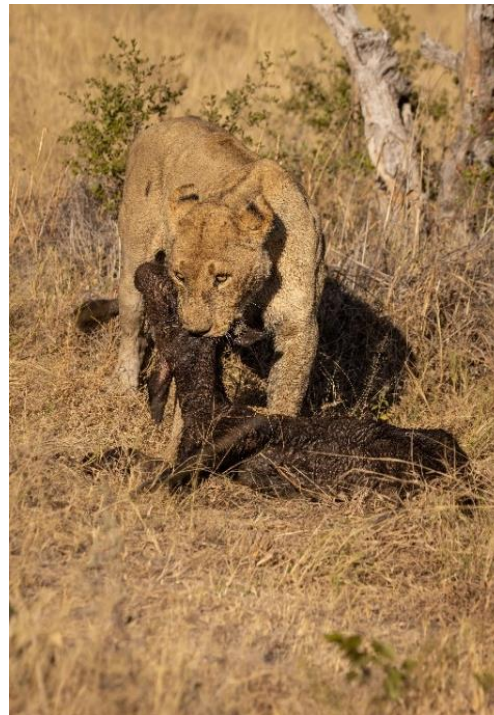
Day 5: Wednesday 25 June 2023

Today was moving day, so it was time to leave our beautiful camp at Sable Alley, with our lovely view of the river. We were up and out of the tents by 06:00 so that the tents could be dismantled, relocated and put up again in time for our arrival at our next destination that evening. This is a big undertaking and as soon as we were out of the tents, the team was in there working hard.

We started our drive heading towards the water holes nearby and came across four lionesses lying in the grass, enjoying the cool morning air. After we had spent a few minutes watching them, three of the lionesses got up and began moving slowly through the grasses, away from the water. After stopping briefly to mark a termite mound, they continued on through the bush. We followed, but they continued walking with purpose into dense bush, so we decided to head back and see why the fourth hadn't joined them.



As we approached the spot where the foursome had been lying, we saw a huge cloud of dust. We sped up and as we arrived, we saw the lioness with her jaws around the neck of a very young buffalo. Both of them were quite wet, so clearly the buffalo herd had come to drink at the water's edge and the lioness had pounced. The buffalos had just retreated (hence the cloud of dust!) and she was left with her prize. After dragging it around (it was unfortunately still alive when we arrived) she moved into the shelter of a dense bush to enjoy her breakfast. We could hear the buffalo's plaintive cries, but unfortunately, it wasn't getting away. We left her in there and went off to find a spot for coffee, passing an alert waterbuck.



On the way, we found the buffalo herd hiding in the bushes looking understandably nervous. We approached the river to stop for a break and as we arrived, we watched an elephant cross the water, who was, in turn, being watched by two fish eagles who then treated us to a morning chorus.



During the coffee break, Neil treated us to a talk on Botswana, including some of the history of the wildlife, parks and waterways – he explained how the flood makes its way into the Delta, and that where we were standing would be covered in water in a matter of weeks.

We drove back past the lioness, who had finished eating and was relaxing in the shade. A slender mongoose also came out of the bushes while we were watching two elephants bathe.



The sun was high by now, so we made our way to the main road to head towards our next location – Moremi. We had some lovely sightings of crimson-breasted shrike and ground scraper thrush en route. As we approached our lunch stop at a beautiful lake, we passed a number of mammals, including buffalo and wildebeest, hiding from the heat in the shade of the trees.

The lake is a wildlife haven and as we had our lunch, we were treated to sightings of black-winged stilts, slaty egret, grey heron, great white egret, Maeve's starlings, a crocodile, and a number of other bird species. A pied kingfisher was hovering close to us, looking for a target in the water. After a few failed attempts, it caught one and sat on a branch very close to where many of the group were sitting, then spent about 10 minutes hitting its prize against the branch, before finally eating it, providing the group with lots of lovely opportunities for a portrait. At the same time, Neil came across a flower mantis on his shirt, so Emma and some of the group grabbed some macro shots of it, although it was a little too windy to get any good shots once it had returned to the bush.



Katembo and Goms had to drag us away from the edge of the lake, as it was time to continue with our journey. We passed by a couple of areas along the lake edge known locally as 'hippo bedrooms' – an area where hippos come out of the lake and lie together under the shelter of the trees. As we drove up, around 10 hippos stood up in one 'bedroom' and made their way to the water – it was incredible how many managed to fit in the small area. We left them to sleep and made our way to the park gate and through the other side. As we came down a tree-lined road, we spotted an elephant up ahead drinking and playing in the water. We sat for a while and watched as it sprayed itself to cool off and drank from the pool. Another elephant was doing similar things in the background, seemingly enjoying not being watched.

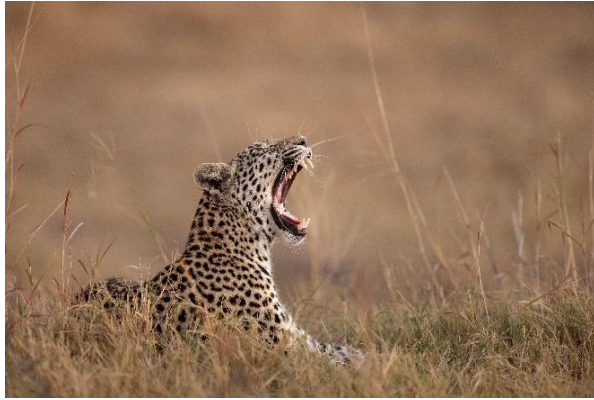


While we were sitting there, a fork-tailed drongo came close to the vehicle. It felt as though the animal was watching us inquisitively, as robins do in the UK. We briefly saw some wattled cranes in the lagoon, although they were far away and unfortunately walked away from where we could get a better look at them. A cloud of dust up ahead suggested something was on the move, so we left the elephant to its bath and soon came across a herd of buffalo in the trees with a beautiful sunset behind. They were slightly too far back for good photos, but the light through the trees was beautiful.

After another five minutes, we arrived at our new camp just as the sun was setting. Our new home had a circular format - keeping everyone in sight of the main area. We settled in, had a couple of drinks around the campfire before dinner, a review of the day's sightings, and then went to bed!

Day 6: Monday 26 June 2023

This morning we headed west under cover of darkness to try and find a female leopard we had heard about from another vehicle on our way into camp. She had been spotted with a kill the night before, so we knew the area she was in and this gave us a good place to start. After some amazing spotting by our guides, we saw her. She was sitting on top of a small termite mound, relaxing, yawning and washing herself. We got closer and sat watching her, but she didn't seem at all bothered by our presence.



After a while, the sun came up and she stretched, then started walking across the plain. We were not the only ones following her movements, as she was also being closely watched by fish eagles and a brown snake eagle. The leopard spotted a small herd of impala through the scrub and suddenly disappeared into the tall grasses. Based on her stealthy movements, we could tell she was trying to hunt, so we hung back to give her space. After waiting for a while, however, she was spotted by the impala who started alarm calling, so she decided to retreat. We followed her for a few minutes, thinking she might go up a tree, but after resting for a while, she continued walking through scrub and tall grass. We decided to carry on and leave her to it.

We came upon a big herd of zebra enjoying an algae-filled lagoon, so we stopped for a while to take it all in. The lagoon was filled with a huge variety of birds, including squacco heron, saddle-billed storks, hammerkop, sacred ibis and African jacana. The crocodiles hiding under the surface popped their heads up occasionally - one with a mouthful of catfish for breakfast. After a while, we continued on with our journey, as we were on our way to a boat ride, but we had time to stop briefly to photograph a monitor lizard hidden in plain sight on the edge of a tree, and again at another lagoon with waterbuck, open-billed stork and four southern ground hornbills on the other side.

Driving towards the boat jetty, we passed a few groups of banded mongooses, which were busily digging in the soil for food.



After all of these sightings, we arrived at the boat a little late, but luckily all was fine to head out into the riverways. Floating along the reed-lined channels, we were surprised by a red lechwe enjoying a morning snack. A number of birds were flying overhead, including fish eagles, vultures and African darters. As the smaller channels opened up into a main, much wider body of water, we saw some

Pygmy geese in the distance, so we made our way over. This species is often very shy, but a few of the group managed to some shots before they flew away.

Katembo called excitedly from the upper deck that he had spotted two sitatunga quite far back from the edge of the river. We pulled in as close as possible to the edge and took it in turns to head up to the top deck for a better view. After a few minutes, they retreated into the grasses so we moved on and after a short time, we came across another large male much closer to the edge of the river, which was standing still and staring at us. For a while, he stayed there very helpfully posing for us before running very quickly off for some peace and quiet.



It was almost time to head back to the vehicles, but not before we managed to get closer to a mother and baby Pygmy goose and a very relaxed lesser jacana. Everyone managed to get some lovely shots of the lesser jacana among the lily pads. We passed two fish eagles observing the area from their high vantage point in the tree before making it back to land. We then drove a 45-minute journey back to camp. What a morning!

After lunch and a well-earned rest, we left for our afternoon drive, keen to see if we could find a leopard with cubs we had heard about. We passed some wattled cranes and a tree full of yellow-billed storks which were resting in the afternoon sunshine. We came across a big monitor lizard in a hole in the middle of a tree, and as we turned the next corner, we saw a group of vehicles. They had clearly located the female leopard and her two cubs. The vehicles were already crowding her, so we decided not to approach and went to photograph an elephant in the middle of the long grass who was having a dust bath.



After the vehicles left, we made our way over to the leopard. Unfortunately, by that point, the babies were back in the safety of their den under a tree trunk, but Mum was resting on a curved branch and very happy to pose while she rested. We moved around to a couple of different positions and got some lovely portrait shots of her as the light was fading. She stayed in the tree until the sun completely set and then walked off through the grass on the hunt for some dinner.



Day 7: Tuesday 27 June 2023

Leaving the camp this morning, we went back to where we had seen the mother leopard. The chances were that she would have moved on due to the disturbance from the vehicles, which looked to be the case when we arrived. Perhaps she had caught something last night and taken the cubs with her to another location, away from the busy tree. We drove around the area in the hope that we might see her and came across some lovely residents enjoying the early morning sunshine, including some red lechwe, a Goliath heron and an open-billed stork in a shallow marsh area.

We couldn't find any predators so we decided to drive to Third Bridge and there we came across a trio of male lions - brothers who are part of a larger pride in the area. They were asleep next to the sage bushes and quite out in the open. At this time the sun was quite strong, so we didn't have the best light conditions for photography. Two of the brothers were fast asleep, but one was restless and as we sat close to him in the vehicle, he got up, stretched and walked straight past us. No matter how many times these encounters happen, they still take your breath away. He passed his brothers and went to lie down between the sage bushes and mostly out of sight, so we continued our journey towards the bridge.



We found a beautiful lagoon with a flock of white pelicans huddled together, as well as some Hottentot teal ducks. We grabbed a couple of shots, but the light was very bright. Slightly further on, we passed some lilac-breasted rollers which swooped across the sand and came to rest on the dead trees, then we came across a Verreaux's eagle owl in the low branches of a tree, which was making the most of the shade the tree offered.



We crossed over the Third Bridge and came into an area of more open plains. After passing a number of herbivores including red lechwe, wildebeest, zebra and a couple of black-backed jackals, we continued on for a while. We found a couple of lions who looked like they were about to mate. It seems that the male was ready, but the female was making him wait to test his patience. It was very hot by this point and the sun was strong, so they were both ready for a rest. He tried his luck a few times before giving up and going to sleep alongside her until she decided she was ready. We waited a while, but eventually, we decided it was time to head back to camp for lunch.

During our time at the camp, some of us explored the bushes and discovered a lovely flower mantis and a jumping spider. The group then spent some time with their macro lenses photographing them.



After a break, we made our way to Paradise Pool. We had heard that a pack of wild dogs had been seen there yesterday, so we wanted to try this area first in case they were still there. We saw a small troop of vervet monkeys, our first sighting of these, and as we went through the South Gate and alongside the old runway, we came upon a huge troop of baboons crossing the road. We stopped and waited for them to pass, counting more than 30 individuals. We drove alongside them for a while before they climbed some trees for food and shelter.



Paradise Pools is a stunning area comprising trees, lagoons of various sizes and some beautiful dead trees. At the Pools, we saw a couple of new bird species including a starling, a sandpiper and a greater painted snipe. The red lechwe were enjoying their surroundings and Meyer's parrots were scouring the ground for snacks. We heard a striped kingfisher calling and about five minutes later, Katembo saw one in a low branch so we stopped for a quick photo.



We went back to the lagoon where we had seen the pelicans and luckily they were still there. The sun was setting as we arrived, so the light was lovely. In addition to the pelicans, we saw an egret close by and some stilts and skimmers flying overhead. After the sun set, the nightjars and bats started to fly over the surface of the water collecting the insects. It was a lovely spot to finish our time with Bushlark. Tomorrow it was off to pastures new.



Day 7: Wednesday 28 June 2023

After packing up our things and waving goodbye to the camp crew, we had one last look for the mother leopard and her cubs and then decided to return to Paradise Pools. It was looking fairly quiet, but on our way, we received a tip-off that some dogs had been spotted close to some campsites not far from where we had boarded our boat a couple of days before. We drove there and lo and behold - there they were. A pack of five African wild dogs were on the move, seemingly looking for prey. They were moving quite fast, so we followed them for a while through the long grass and along the road, where we were able to grab a few images before they disappeared into the long grass.



As Paradise Pools was on our way, we stopped there for coffee before leaving Moremi. We arrived to see a red lechwe limping - he had lost his foot, potentially to a crocodile. Sad to see, but also a positive story of overcoming adversity. We enjoyed our morning coffee surrounded by hippos, lechwe, blacksmith plovers and more.

Even on our bathroom break at the gate, we were treated to the wonderful sight of some common slit-faced bats roosting above the door of the toilet block. Something a bit different!



We drove south from the gate, as it was approaching our meeting time to switch over to the Mma Dinare crew. At Buffalo Gate, we said goodbye to Katembo and Goms and were greeted by Chris, Edwin and the rest of our new team. We drove straight to camp, as everyone was ready for lunch, then had our welcome talk over a lovely buffet and some afternoon tea.

Onks (the camp manager) gave us a welcome talk and assigned everyone to their tents, then there was a short time to settle in before heading out for an afternoon drive. We passed giraffe and

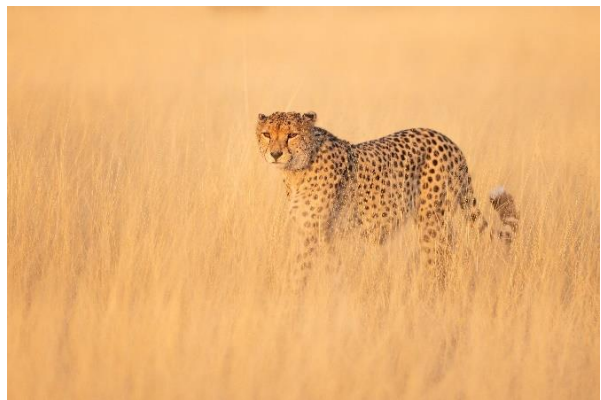
elephant, who were not keen to pose, then some dwarf and slender mongooses. We also had a brief glimpse of an African hawk eagle, that landed in a tree.



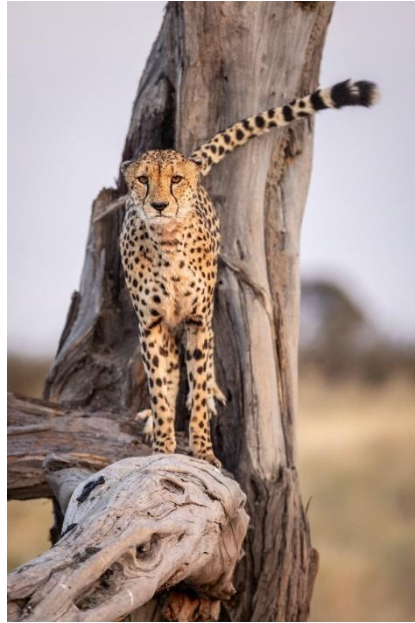
We stopped for some sundowners, enjoying our first sunset in our new surroundings. On our way back, we had a quick sighting of a honey badger on the road, but it quickly disappeared into the scrub.

Day 9: Thursday 28 June 2023

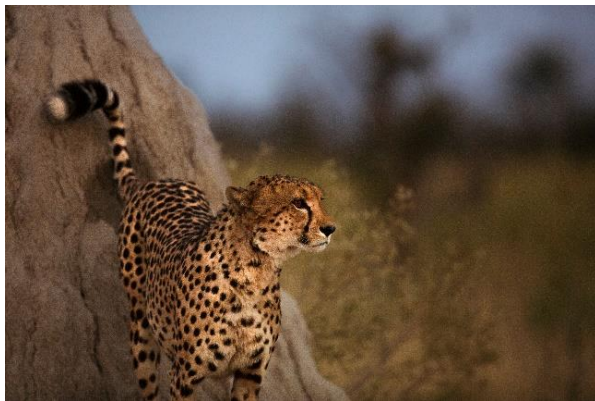
Overnight we were treated to a chorus of lion calls, which most of the group heard, so we headed out in search of the noisy cats! We split into three vehicles this morning - one for those more keen on seeing birds, one for those more interested in mammals (cats and dogs particularly!), and one to go off on a game drive and then a short mokoro trip. Typically, the call about the cheetahs came over the radio from Edwin, Neil and the vehicle focusing on birds - they had found the four cheetah brothers we were looking for. Everyone raced across the plains and through the dense sage scrub as the huge red sun rose through the clouds. Finally, we spotted Edwin's vehicle and the four magnificent cats walking through the long grasses in the lovely golden morning light.



We spent a long time following their route through the grasses. They were marking their territory on trees and termite mounds, which gave us some nice photo opportunities.



The cheetahs noticed a wildebeest feeding in the long grass and they briefly considered hunting but decided against it. They rested for a while near some zebra but again decided this wasn't the time. They looked like they had eaten fairly recently, and although it wouldn't be long before they would hunt again, they were more interested in avoiding the rapidly increasing heat for now, so we decided to leave them as more vehicles had arrived.



Images by Neil Aldridge

When passing a termite mound, we disturbed a crowned lapwing sitting on its nest and Chris pointed out the two eggs it had been sheltering. She clearly wasn't keen on us being there and tried to divert our attention. What she didn't realise was that we had actually saved her eggs (for now) as two nearby jackals were watching and waiting for an opportunity.

As we had given their game away, they ran off into the grass to find another target. Another call came over the radio that a large male lion had been located in the area we had started in, so we made our way back there, stopping en route to take a few portraits of some large male buffalo.



After some searching, we found the male lion exhibiting the Flehmen response after sniffing the urine of a lioness. He lifted his head and made a grimace, which always makes this process quite interesting and amusing to watch. Cats have an organ that enables them to 'test' the chemical content of the urine left behind by a female to determine whether she is entering an oestrous cycle and is ready to mate. We were not able to photograph his behaviour, as the sun was very bright and he was in an area of quite dense trees, but it was very interesting to watch.

One vehicle had found a huge flock of vultures on a kill earlier in the day and we came across some of them resting in a dead tree nearby, sated from their feast of a dead tsessebe.



After lunch, it was back out again to see what the afternoon had in store. We watched a group of non-breeding southern-masked weavers flying between bushes for a while, then spent some time watching and learning about a trio of Southern ground hornbills, which were eating insects from the ground. Although they live for 40 years, they only breed every four to five years.

We drove past the marshy area and watched some wattled cranes and coppery coucal eating and enjoying the cool waters. As we were watching them, we noticed three lionesses across the water on a small island. Unfortunately they were quite far away and seemed very relaxed so were not making any attempts to come towards us. We watched them for a while but they were resting in some tall grass, so we turned our attention to a giraffe which was approaching the water for a drink. Then we went to meet the rest of the group for sundowners near some hippos who were enjoying the sunset as well.



Image by Neil Aldridge

On our way back to camp, we used the spotlight to catch a glimpse of a wild cat in the tall grass. Then all of the vehicles noticed a group of honey badgers digging for food on the edge of the road, close to camp. Some saw one or two, but one vehicle saw four honey badgers!



As we returned to camp, we were greeted by Jon from Botswana Predator Conservation Trust, who works on researching and protecting the wild dog population in the area.

After dinner, Jon talked us through the important work done by the Trust, including their work educating local communities. He also gave us some information about the 12 packs of dogs that the Trust was researching.

Dog pups only have a fifty per cent survival rate, so when any reach adulthood it is a great achievement. The dogs tend to have an average of eight to ten pups in each litter. Generally, they have a minimum of four pups but a maximum of 19 has been recorded. They den for three months after giving birth and then the pups start to emerge and get to know their new surroundings. New collars register the movement of dogs and their behaviour, so the researchers can monitor their behaviour without interfering.

There are some exciting new projects, including creating bio boundaries on the edge of villages to prevent human-dog conflict. A recent study was carried out testing the efficacy of painting eyes on either flank of a cow's bottom, which had a one hundred per cent success rate in preventing predation on those cows.

The Trust is continuing to develop a unique data set documenting the life histories and behaviour of local wildlife, not only of the wild dog packs in the study area, but also the lions, leopards, cheetahs and spotted hyenas.

Their website is <https://www.bpctrust.org/> and they are always very happy to receive any donations to help their work. We donate a portion of the profits from this trip to the Trust. They also have social media accounts, so you can keep up to date with their activities.

Day 10: Friday 30 June 2023

The excitement was palpable this morning as we left camp, with a number of the group never having seen African wild dogs and Jon assuring us that today was the day. The dogs hunt overnight, so we drove slowly towards a known den location, keeping a lookout for wildlife on the way.

Passing a shy genet on its way to bed, we came across a tower of giraffes - including one that was only three or four days old and still had wobbly knees. We were lucky with the light and as we sat there, the warm red sun lit their lovely patterns. Some others saw hyena and lion en route as well.

We continued on for a while, arriving at the wild dog den to find the four adult dogs alert around the border. Some lion tracks had been spotted nearby, so our theory was that the dogs had been spooked by them. The eight young pups came out to suckle very briefly and then went back into the den and unfortunately, we didn't see them again. The pups were only just over three months old, so still building up their courage. It was incredible to see them and to watch the behaviour of the adults guarding the den. Jon predicted that they would move the pups as they were obviously quite agitated, so we left them to give them some space.



On our way back to camp, we stopped off briefly at another den, with a pack of nine dogs. Their pups were still too young to be out, but the dogs had clearly had a good feed and were lying in the shade, so we carried on and left them to sleep.

It was quite a long drive so we arrived back a little later than usual, but instead of returning to the camp, we were taken to the riverside to a fabulous outdoor brunch. On arrival, we were greeted with an array of lovely food dishes and some chilled rosé to enjoy overlooking the river next to us. Bliss!

At the camp there were a lot of bushes, which are home to some lovely birds, so there was always a lot to see for those who didn't want to rest.



After some time to relax, we went out on an afternoon drive. We found a large male lion sleeping by the river with a very full tummy; some of the group had seen him with an impala in the morning. We sat with him for a while, but he was obviously very full and very hot, so he wasn't going to be moving any time soon.

We continued on and after a while, we saw something in the distance moving towards the top of a hill, which the spotter declared to be a roan antelope. This was our first sighting, and this species is usually very shy, so we had a look through the binoculars before agreeing to try and move closer for a better view. As we did so, unsurprisingly the roan retreated, but as it did so, we also saw another two to the right. They were not close enough to capture good images, but lovely to see and a first for this trip.

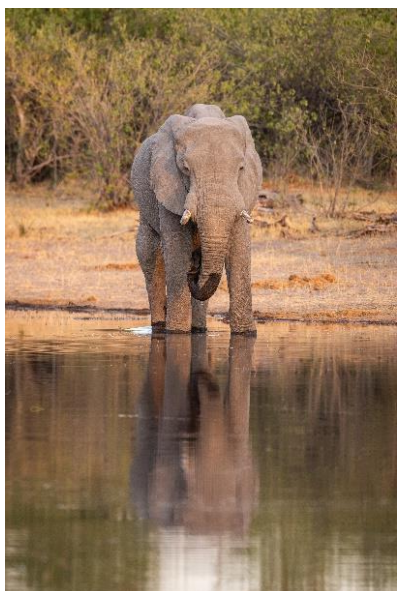
As the sun started to set, the sky turned a beautiful shade of pink and we came upon an elephant in the river having a drink. The water was very low in the river still, so we drove in to try and capture some lovely reflections.

Just as we had positioned ourselves, we got a call over the radio that one of the other vehicles had found a lioness.

We raced over as the sun was fading, just in time for a few shots of her walking across the road, before she went over to Moremi where we couldn't follow. It was a lovely way to end the day, particularly for the vehicle that had found her and had had some time with her as she walked calmly through the scrub.

We stopped in a dry waterhole for our final sundowners and were completely spoilt with some incredible cloud formations in the burning red-pink sky. We spent some time enjoying the clouds and a breeding herd of elephants that passed by as we stood there.





On our way back to camp, we had some lovely views of a Verreaux's eagle owl on the tip of a dead tree trunk, along with a nightjar and two hyenas close to our camp.

Day 11: Saturday 30 June 2023



This morning was our final drive, so we set off early to make the most of our time - especially as we still had to pack. A couple of the group elected to stay behind, but the rest of us went to see what the Delta had in store for our final morning.

Initially, things were quite quiet as we drove through the bush in the cool morning light. We heard a jackal alarm calling, so we decided to investigate what it had seen. Edwin got closer and the jackal was still there, looking pointedly in one direction.

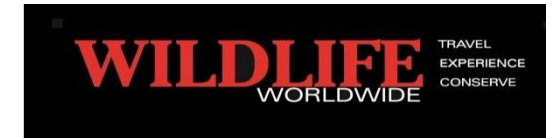
Edwin and the tracker investigated the ground and saw fresh leopard tracks, so we decided to follow them and see if we could track the leopard down. After around 20 minutes of searching through dense bushes, we saw the beautiful female leopard sitting under a sage bush.

As we sat there, the sun hit the bushes around her and she stayed for a few seconds before retreating into the bush again. We lost her for a while, and by the time she reappeared, our other vehicles had arrived, so we retreated to let them try and catch a glimpse of her as well. This was one of our highlights as watching the way Edwin and the tracker followed her tracks was incredible.

What a perfect end to our time in the Okavango!



Checklist for Okavango Delta Photo Safari



	Common name	Scientific name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10
	BIRDS											
1	Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓			
2	Orange River Francolin	<i>Scleroptila gutturalis</i>	✓	✓								
3	Crested Francolin	<i>Dendroperdix sephaena</i>	✓	✓								
4	Red-billed Spurfowl	<i>Pternistis adspersus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Swainson's Spurfowl	<i>Pternistees swainsonii</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Fulvous whistling duck	<i>Dendrocygna bicolor</i>								✓		
7	White-faced Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna viduata</i>					✓		✓		✓	
8	African pygmy goose	<i>Nettapus auratus</i>						✓				
9	Spur-winged Goose	<i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
10	Knob-billed Duck	<i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>								✓		
11	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegyptiaca</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
12	Hottentot Teal	<i>Anas hottentota</i>						✓				
13	Lesser Flamingo	<i>Phoeniconaias minor</i>						✓				
14	Saddle-billed Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus senegal</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
15	Woolly-necked stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	African openbill stork	<i>Anastomus lamelligerus</i>										
17	Marabou Stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumenifer</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
19	African Sacred Ibis	<i>Threskiornis aethiopicus</i>		✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

20	Hadedda Ibis	<i>Bostrychia hagedash</i>		✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	
21	African Spoonbill	<i>Platalea alba</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>					✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
23	Goliath Heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>						✓		✓	✓	✓
24	Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>					✓	✓			✓	
25	Rufus-bellied Heron	<i>Ardeola rufiventris</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
26	Western Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
27	Black Heron	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>								✓		
28	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>			✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
29	Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>						✓				
30	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
31	Black egret	<i>Egretta ardesiaca</i>									✓	
32	Slaty Egret	<i>Egretta vinaceigula</i>				✓	✓					
33	Reed Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo africanus</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
34	African Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
35	Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>						✓				
36	Common Ostrich	<i>Struthio camelus</i>							✓	✓		
37	Hooded Vulture	<i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Cape Vulture	<i>Gyps coprotheres</i>		✓	✓		✓					
39	White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>			✓					✓	✓	✓
40	Lappet-faced Vulture	<i>Torgos tracheliotos</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
41	African Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
42	Martial eagle	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>									✓	
43	Tawny Eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>			✓	✓	✓					
44	African Hawk-Eagle	<i>Aquila spilogaster</i>		✓	✓				✓		✓	

45	Black-chested Snake Eagle	<i>Circaetus pectoralis</i>		✓								
46	Brown Snake-eagle	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				
47	Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
48	African Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus ranivorus</i>						✓				
49	Pale chanting Goshawk	<i>Melierax canorus</i>							✓			✓
50	Gabar Goshawk	<i>Micronisus tachiro</i>				✓				✓	✓	
51	Shikra	<i>Accipter badius</i>		✓	✓			✓				
52	Dickinson's Kestel	<i>Falco dickinsoni</i>									✓	
53	Kori Bustard	<i>Ardeotis kori</i>		✓	✓						✓	
54	Red-crested Korhaan	<i>Lophotis ruficrista</i>		✓	✓					✓	✓	
55	Wattled Crane	<i>Grus carunculata</i>				✓		✓		✓	✓	✓
56	Black Crake	<i>Amaurornis flavirostra</i>					✓					
57	Water Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>					✓	✓				
58	Spotted Thick-knee	<i>Burhinus capensis</i>									✓	
59	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓			
60	Long-toed Lapwing	<i>Vanellus crassirostris</i>					✓			✓	✓	✓
61	Blacksmith Lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
62	Crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
63	Kittlitz's Plover	<i>Charadrius pecuarius</i>						✓				
64	Chestnut-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius pallidus</i>						✓				
65	Greater Painted Snipe	<i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>					✓	✓				
66	African Jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Lesser Jacana	<i>Microparra capensis</i>					✓					
68	Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebulariar</i>						✓	✓			
69	Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>					✓					

70	Double-banded Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles bicinctus</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Red-eyed Dove	<i>Streptopelia semitorquata</i>					✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
72	Cape turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
73	Emerald-spotted wood dove	<i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
74	Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>			✓					✓	✓	✓
75	Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>									✓	✓
76	Grey-go-away-bird	<i>Corythaixoides concolor</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
77	Coppery-tailed Coucal	<i>Centropus cupreicaudus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
78	African Barred Owlet	<i>Glaucidium capense</i>			✓							
79	Pearl-spotted Owlet	<i>Glaucidium perlatum</i>		✓						H		
80	Verreaux's Eagle-owl	<i>Bubo lacyeus</i>			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
81	African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>						✓	✓			
82	Red-faced Mousebird	<i>Urocolius indicus</i>					✓	✓	✓			
83	Lilac-breasted Roller	<i>Coracias caudatus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
84	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
85	Striped Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon chelicuti</i>					✓	✓	✓			
86	Little Bee-eater	<i>Merops pusillus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
87	Swallow-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops hirundineus</i>				✓		✓				✓
88	African Hoopoe	<i>Upupa africana</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓			
89	Green Wood Hoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
90	Common Scimitarbill	<i>Rhinopomastus cyanomelas</i>		✓								
91	Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus leucomelas</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
92	Southern Red-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus rufirostris</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
93	Bradfield's Hornbill	<i>Tockus branfieldi</i>			✓			✓				
94	African Grey Hornbill	<i>Tockus nasutus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

95	Southern Ground Hornbill	<i>Bucorvus leadbeateri</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓			
96	Acacia Pied Barbet	<i>Tricholaema leucomelas</i>						✓				
97	Crested Barbet	<i>Trachyphonus vaillantii</i>							✓	✓	✓	✓
98	Bennett's Woodpecker	<i>Campethera bennettii</i>		✓							✓	
99	Meyer's Parrot	<i>Poicephalus meyeri</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
100	Chinspot Batis	<i>Batis molitor</i>							✓			
101	White-crested Helmetshrike	<i>Prionops plumatus</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓	
102	Retz's Helmetshrike	<i>Prionops retzii</i>				✓						
103	Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegalus</i>			✓					✓	✓	
104	Brown-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra australis</i>									✓	
105	Black-backed Puffback	<i>Dryoscopus cubla</i>									✓	
106	Swamp Boubou	<i>Laniarius bicolor</i>			✓	✓			✓		✓	
107	Crimson-breasted Shrike	<i>Laniarius atrococcineus</i>				✓			✓	✓	✓	
108	Long-tailed / Magpie Shrike	<i>Corvinelle melanoleuca</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
109	Fork-tailed drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
110	Southern White-crowned Shrike	<i>Eurocephalus anguitimens</i>		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
111	Southern Black Tit	<i>Melaniparus niger</i>		✓	✓				✓			
112	Dark-capped Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus tricolor</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
113	Brown-throated Martin	<i>Riparia palydicola</i>					✓					
114	Lesser-striped Swallow	<i>Cecropis abyssinica</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	
115	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>				✓						
116	Rattling Cisticola	<i>Cisticola chiniana</i>								✓	✓	
117	Grey-backed Camaroptera	<i>Camaroptera bevicaudata</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	
118	Tawny-flanked Prinia	<i>Prinia subflava</i>			✓		✓					
119	Arrow-marked Babbler	<i>Turdoides jardineii</i>									✓	
120	Hartlaub's Babbler	<i>Turdoides hartlaubii</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
121	Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>							✓	✓	✓	✓
122	Greater Blue-eared Starling	<i>Lamprotornis chalybaeus</i>					✓	✓	✓			

123	Meves's Starling	<i>Lamprotornis mevesii</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
124	Burchell's starling	<i>Lamprotornis australis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
125	Yellow-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus africanus</i>			✓				✓	✓	✓	✓
126	Red-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus erythrorhynchus</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
127	Groundscraper Thrush	<i>Turdus litsitsirupa</i>				✓						
128	Arnot's Chat	<i>Myrmecocichla arnotti</i>				✓			✓			
129	African Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquatus</i>					✓		✓			
130	Marico Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis mariquensis</i>					✓					
131	Marico Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris mariquensis</i>						✓				
132	White-bellied Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris talatala</i>			✓				✓			
133	White-browed Sparrow-weaver	<i>Plocepasser mahali</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
134	Southern Masked Weaver	<i>Ploceus velatus</i>								✓		
135	Village Weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>					✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
136	Southern Brown-throated Weaver	<i>Ploceus xanthopterus</i>									✓	✓
137	Red-billed Buffalo Weaver	<i>Bubalornis niger</i>	✓	✓		✓						
138	Red-billed Quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>									✓	
139	Jameson's Firefinch	<i>Lagonosticta rhodopareia</i>			✓					✓	✓	
140	Blue Waxbill	<i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i>		✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
141	Plain-backed Pipit	<i>Anthus leucophrys</i>						✓				
142	African Pipit	<i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i>					✓					
143	White headed vulture											✓
	MAMMALS											
1	Chacma baboon	<i>Papio ursinus</i>					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Vervet monkey	<i>Chlorocebus pygerythrus</i>		✓					✓	✓		
3	Southern lesser galago	<i>Galago moholi</i>						✓				
4	Scrub hare	<i>Lepus saxatilis</i>		✓					✓	✓	✓	✓
5	Smith's tree squirrel	<i>Paraxerus cepapi</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	South African springhare	<i>Pedetes capensis</i>		✓	✓					✓		
7	Cape porcupine	<i>Hystrix africaeaustralis</i>	✓		✓							

8	Bat-eared fox	<i>Otocyon megalotis</i>									✓	
9	Black-backed jackal	<i>Canis mesomelas</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
10	African wild dog	<i>Lycaon pictus</i>		✓					✓		✓	
11	Honey badger	<i>Mellivora capensis</i>							✓	✓	✓	
12	Banded mongoose	<i>Mungos mungo</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
13	Slender mongoose	<i>Galerella sanguinea</i>				✓	✓			✓	✓	
14	Yellow mongoose	<i>Cynictis penicillata</i>					✓					
15	Common dwarf mongoose	<i>Helogale parvula</i>		✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
16	Small-spotted genet	<i>Genetta genetta</i>									✓	
17	African civet	<i>Civettictis civetta</i>		✓	✓				✓			
18	Spotted hyena	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>		✓	✓						✓	✓
19	African wild cat	<i>Felis lybica</i>							✓	✓	✓	
20	Cheetah	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>								✓		
21	Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
22	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus</i>					✓	✓				✓
23	Elephant	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
24	Burchell's zebra	<i>Equus quagga burchellii</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
25	Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
26	Common Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus africanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Angolan giraffe	<i>Giraffa camelopardis</i>	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
28	African buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>				✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
29	Greater kudu	<i>Tragelaphus strepsiceros</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
30	Roan antelope	<i>Hippotragus equinus</i>									✓	
31	Red lechwe	<i>Kobus leche</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
32	common waterbuck	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
33	Southern reedbuck	<i>Redunca arundinum</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
34	Tsessebe	<i>Damaliscus lunatus</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓			✓	
35	Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
36	Blue wildebeest	<i>Connocheates taurinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	

37	Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓	
38	Common bushbuck	<i>Tragelaphus sylvaticus</i>								✓	✓	
39	Sitatunga					✓						
40	Otter				✓							
41	Common slit faced bat								✓			