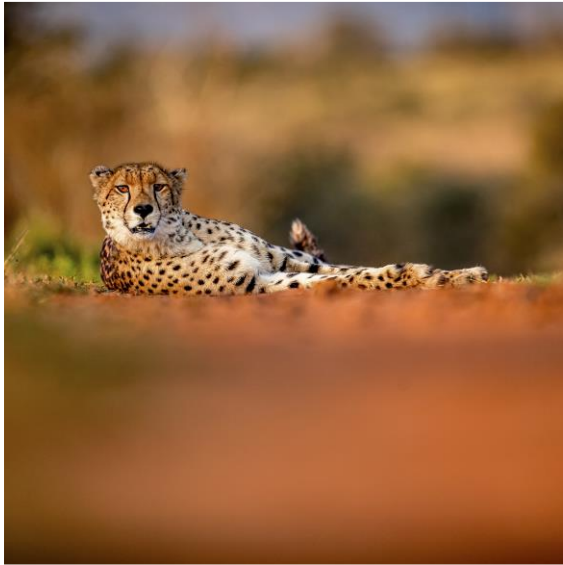


Tour Report

Zimanga – Wildlife and Night Sky Photography

11 – 18 July 2022

Cheetah



Rhino



Elephant



Lion



Compiled by Sean Weekly

Tour Leader: Sean Weekly

Day 1: London Heathrow to Durban International

Monday 11 July 2022

Weather: 21°C, sunny

I was waiting at Durban Airport for the arrival of the Wildlife Worldwide group who were coming from Johannesburg after a long night flight from Heathrow. Once everyone had safely arrived it was time to meet up with our driver from the tour company. It was a 4-hour drive by road to Zimanga Private Game Reserve, and everyone was in really good spirits and was looking forward to an exciting week ahead.

We finally arrived at Zimanga Lodge at 18:20 and we all settled into our rooms, then proceeded to the lounge for a fantastic dinner before heading to bed ready for our early start in the morning.

Day 2: Scavenger Hide and Game drive

Tuesday 12 July 2022

Weather: 16°C, cloudy

I split the group into two groups as some of the activities had limited spaces in the hides. I joined the first group this morning in the Scavenger Hide, which was an exceptional hide with a fantastic view, elevated above the Doornhoek Valley, and the sweeping view from the top serves as a backdrop to this vulture restaurant. By feeding the scavengers, and most importantly the critically endangered white-backed vultures which breed nearby, they are kept within officially protected areas, limiting the exposure to vulture poisoning incidents which is the biggest threat to these magnificent but declining species. The hide was extremely comfortable, seated four guests, and each station is supplied with a Manfrotto Tripod and Benro head.

It was around 06:30 and we already had our first sighting of a black-backed jackal, then it was not too long before we had our first sighting of a white-backed vulture that came into feed. There was lots of action during the four hours in the hide, with two vultures and two jackals. The vultures would often scarp with each other over the food which made for some great images, whilst the jackals would also chase the vultures away from the food which again made for some really good action. It was a fantastic morning with some great photo opportunities.

The second group had their first game drive with our ranger Hendri, and they had an incredible morning with some superb sightings including zebra, giraffe, wildebeest herds, elephant, lots of warthogs, male kudu, Ngala, black-shouldered kite, European rollers, vervet monkeys and yellow-billed hornbill.

They also had a great encounter with a lion family. as a male lion walked across to sniff one of the younger male lions, however, the older female didn't like this and growled at him. Another young female then jumped up and put her paws up on the back of the adult male which made for some nice images.

We then all returned to the lodge mid-morning around 10:30 and we enjoyed a late breakfast and discussed the encounters that we had all had in the morning. Soon after lunch one of the cleaners spotted a puff adder right outside the lodge and alerted one of the rangers to its location. A ranger called Jonno went to relocate the snake and remove it outside of our lodge area, however, before he moved it he placed it in an open area for us all to photograph it at a safe distance. It was a fantastic encounter and gave us some incredible images that otherwise would have been impossible without a trained specialist around.

In the afternoon I joined the first group on our first game drive. It was an incredible afternoon with so many photo opportunities it was difficult to know what to photograph at times as there was so much happening. Our guide tried to locate black rhino and the lion family with the tracker with very little success sadly. We turned our attention to a small family of leopards in the area, one female with two 14-month-old cubs. Sadly, we didn't see the mum but we had a fabulous encounter with one of the cubs resting in a tree. We

Find out more about our [Zimanga Wildlife and Night Sky Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

spent a good 45 minutes with it whilst it was relaxed in our presence and gave us some fantastic photos - it was fairly low down in a dead tree almost eye level to the vehicle so the pictures that we were able to get are very striking - definitely an incredible encounter.

Finally, the cub moved on and so did we. We headed deeper into the reserve to locate a small cheetah family and it didn't take long before we received a radio call from another ranger saying he had found them a short drive away from where we were. Once we arrived our ranger said it was safe for us to get out of the vehicle and approach the cheetah at a safe distance, and it was a breathtaking experience being that close to them. There were four cheetahs in total, mum with her three cubs all just over a year old. After spending sunset with the cheetah, we returned to the dead tree to find the leopard again. On arrival two of the cubs were feeding on an impala kill that their mum must have killed and placed in the tree for them. It was dark at this point, so we spotlighted them from the vehicle and watched them feed for a while before heading back to the lodge. Sightings for the rest of the game drive included impala, Ngala, white rhino, giraffe, leopard, cheetah, black-shouldered kite, waterbuck, Cape buffalo and wildebeest. All in all, it was a fantastic first day here in Zimanga.

Group two spent the afternoon and evening in the Umgodi hide. Umgodi is a unique hide concept pioneered on Zimanga in which up to four photographers can be accommodated and sleepover in the air-conditioned hide, built into a waterhole with a large window opening up a few centimetres above water level. Animals that visit the waterhole drink only a few metres from your bed, the drinking edge is four metres from the photographers' chairs and the unit consists of a custom-built metal hide with chairs and camping-style bunk beds, built adjacent to a small and well-equipped kitchenette to store and warm up food or make a steaming cup of coffee to keep you awake during the long hours of the night.

In the afternoon they had one warthog visit that stayed for around ten minutes to drink. They had lots of visits from superb starlings, wood doves and oxpeckers all bathing and drinking throughout the afternoon. Around 16:00 they photographed two Nyala, one female and calf and a little later they had a visit from four males. Lots of visits from warthogs throughout the afternoon, and lots more birds coming to drink including various wax bill species.

Later in the afternoon, they had a visit from one male buffalo and some more warthogs. Later in the afternoon, 14 buffalos came in to drink in alternating drinking positions. After this, throughout the evening there were lots of visits from Cape buffalos. It was dark by this point, so the spotlights had come on and produced some lovely lit photographs. Throughout the night and early hours in the morning had lots of visits from buffalo. At first light, there were lots of little birds including blue waxbill, southern yellow-billed hornbill, common myna, laughing dove, green-winged pytilia, emerald spotted wood dove, fire finch, cape bulbul and golden-breasted bunting.

Day 3: Game drive

Wednesday 13 July 2022

Weather: 16°C, cloudy

It was another morning game drive this morning and we enjoyed a brief sighting of a male lion before sunrise. He walked across the track we were driving on and continued walking in the bush, roaring which was quite a spectacular scene to start the game drive. We tried to follow him into the bush but sadly it was just too dense, and we lost sight of him fairly quickly.

There were lots of giraffes around and we had a sighting of a little striped kingfisher which was nice. Our ranger tried to track the cheetah family for quite some time, but we sadly had no luck at first. We continued driving for a while and soon heard some impala alarm calls which then led us to the cheetahs! We spent a while photographing them as they were grooming each other which made for some lovely photos.

A bit later on we drove to the river and found a male rhino on the opposite side of the river. Sadly, he was

Find out more about our [Zimanga Wildlife and Night Sky Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

not in a great position and was also a bit too far away for any nice photos. We decided to stay near the river for a while in the hopes we would get some animals crossing. It didn't take too long when we had a giraffe cross, however, it was quite heavily backlit in harsh light so good photos were tricky. We decided to wait a bit longer and were glad we did as a bull elephant around 30 years old crossed the river and also stopped for a drink. What a fantastic finish to the morning game drive!

In the afternoon, I joined the two ladies for their game drive, our first location was the last known area of the leopard sighting, and we were hoping for another good encounter like the other day. We located one of the leopard cubs but it was laying in some long grass, so we decided to move on and explore some more. We found the cheetah family again, however, they were resting in the shade under the tree. We spent a little while with them getting some portraits whilst they were sleeping.

A short drive to get to the reservoir and a black mamba shot across the track in front of us. It was huge and our guide said he rarely sees them that size! We arrived at the reservoir and soon found three young crocodiles on the bank and a young adult crocodile which gave us some nice shots. We tried to get closer, but they quickly made it to the safety of the water.

The sun was getting lower as we were coming nearer to sunset, so we decided to head to a location that was good for vervet monkeys. We spent some time with the monkeys concentrating on backlit images of them running across the reservoir bank and it was great fun watching them go about their business. It was then time to head back to the lodge as the sun set, and on our way back we were treated to a male giraffe drinking from the reservoir. We got some fantastic backlit and silhouette shots of the giraffe whilst he was drinking, which was a great end to a fantastic day.

Two guests spent the night in the overnight hide. They had a successful night with lots of visits from buffalo, white rhino, warthog, zebra, a hyena under the full moon, Ngala, kudu and impala.

Day 4: Morning game drive

Thursday 14 July 2022

Weather: 9°C, sunny

It was another early morning game drive to start the cold day. As usual, it didn't take long until we got a radio call from another ranger telling us about two lioness sisters that were resting on a nearby track. After a short time of waiting the two females were on the move for their morning hunt. We followed them for a good hour or so through various tracks whilst they were on the move, providing us with some great head-on walking shots in various conditions.

After some time, the females stopped at a crossroads and sat down. One female stayed sitting and picked up a scent and view of three nearby kudu not far up the track, and this was going to be their attempt at getting a meal. We gave them space in the vehicle whilst the two lionesses stalked the kudu through some thick bushes. Eventually, they were within a good hunting distance of the kudu. Our driver positioned our vehicle in the open where the kudu were grazing, giving us the best opportunity for photos if the hunt were to happen. To the lionesses' disappointment, a small herd of impala had spotted the females giving out some loud alarm calls that alerted the kudu, who ran off to live another day.

We had a great morning with the lionesses, after the unsuccessful hunt they moved on down various tracks and our driver did an incredible job reversing most of the way around the tracks keeping us in front of the lionesses to give us lots of front-on photo opportunities. Eventually, the females moved on and so did we.

A short drive later we found two southern yellow-billed hornbills sitting in a tree and found some nice white-fronted bee-eaters posing for us on a nice perch. On our way back to the lodge we stopped by the same river as yesterday in the hopes of another animal crossing. On arrival, there was a giraffe near the river but sadly after we waited a while it never crossed the river. It was worth the try though.

Find out more about our [Zimanga Wildlife and Night Sky Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

In the afternoon I joined two of the guests in the Lagoon Hide. The mostly shallow waters of the lagoon draw in a variety of waterbirds, from tiny plovers and sandpipers to large birds like herons, storks and fish eagles. In the summer months, crocodiles are regular visitors with large specimens basking on the shoreline and smaller growing crocs actively catching fish at night. The hide itself is an engineering marvel, as 24 tonnes of water is displaced to keep the hide at the level it is without floating. It was truly an impressive hide. We had a great afternoon with lots of visits from two pied kingfishers and sightings of a banded plover, African jacana and two African fish eagles.

Two of the group spent the afternoon on a game drive and had an incredible session with a large herd of elephants (around 14) including lots of young ones. One calf was younger than a year and was pretty small, whilst there were also lots of suckling calves, dust baths and adolescents ripping trees and pushing each other around. They then headed back to the vervet monkey location to concentrate on some backlit photos at sunset and also got some lovely backlit shots of the local cheetah family.

Day 5: Morning game drive

Friday 15 July 2022

Weather: 12°C, sunny

It was another early start for another game drive, and we were excited about what the morning would bring. It was a very quiet morning with not much activity anywhere. We drove around for a good hour or so checking all the good hot spots from the few days before but still unfortunately it was one of those mornings. Eventually, our ranger managed to get a signal on two male cheetah brothers, it took quite some time to find them and when we finally did they were both sleeping with full bellies. We assume they had made a successful kill during the night and were now sleeping it off. Although not a lot of photo opportunities it was still amazing to be able to walk straight up to them and watch them peacefully.

We drove on further to the river where we saw a family of vervet monkeys sitting and resting on the trees which made for some lovely photos. Shortly after we drove into a wooded area and heard lots of alarm calls from more vervet monkeys, we think they saw a leopard but sadly we couldn't find one anywhere. It was a slow morning but considering the activity we had over the last few days everyone was still in great spirits. It's how it goes with wildlife no matter where you are in the world. We slowly headed back to the lodge for our late breakfast and spotted a family of banded mongoose running across the track.

After a delicious lunch, it was time for another game drive in the afternoon, and we were all hoping for a better afternoon with more sightings. It certainly didn't disappoint, after around 20 minutes of driving, we came across a huge group of around 20 Southern giraffe. It was an amazing sight and the biggest that our ranger Hendri had seen on the reserve before.

For the rest of the game drive, we decided to head on a 30-minute or so drive to a dam known as Blakey Dam to look for hippos. After arriving it didn't take long until we saw them. We had about eight hippos on the water at a safe distance away. One bull hippo gave us an awesome yawn producing some lovely shots. We spent around 20 minutes with the hippos before driving back into the reserve to hopefully get some lion sightings before sunset.

Once back in the reserve we found the female cheetah with cubs and watched her hunt impala but sadly it was unsuccessful. At last light, we had a leopard sighting sitting in long grass on the bank. It was too dense for any good photos, but it certainly was a great end to the day.

Day 6: Game drive

Saturday 16 July 2022

Weather: 13°C, cloudy

Find out more about our [Zimanga Wildlife and Night Sky Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

The morning felt quite cold and breezy, but I had a good feeling about this morning's game drive. It didn't take long until we had tracked down a family of lions during sunrise, comprising one adult male, two females and two young male cubs. We spent a good while concentrating on some nice backlit golden hour portraits of the lions. Eventually one of the females spotted a Cape buffalo in the bush and she ran after it, a bit of an optimistic hunt as she was by herself, and as expected the buffalo got away.

Around 15 minutes later the female stood up again on the track as something had caught her attention, it was a warthog that had just come out of its burrow. The female ran after it and within seconds she had it by the throat and it was over in seconds for the young warthog. The female then let her two cubs enjoy breakfast. Soon the male came in, growled and took away the rest of the warthog to enjoy it by himself. It was an incredible moment and it happened just metres away from our vehicle. After a great action-packed morning of great portrait images of the lions at sunrise, we left them alone and moved on.

In the afternoon we headed back to the river and found the female cheetah family again, it was a picture-perfect scene as they were laying on the sand. Sadly, the light was a bit too harsh for any amazing images but it was another incredible and enjoyable moment to see them. We also got a radio call from another ranger about a leopard sighting sitting in a tree. We decided to go to the location and spent a good 45 minutes waiting with the leopard in the hope it was going to turn around and face us so we could get some photos. Eventually, a large male warthog walked past at the bottom of the tree which caught the attention of the leopard and she eventually turned around to give us some lovely portraits.

That evening back at the lodge it was a beautiful clear night. Moonrise was around an hour and a half later, so we had a lovely opportunity to photograph the gorgeous milky way from right outside the main lodge. I was showing everyone the basic settings for astrophotography, and everyone got some lovely pictures for their first attempt at night photography.

Day 7: Game Drive

Sunday 18 July 2022

Weather: 14°C, cloudy

Another 06:00 start for our last morning game drive here in Zimanga started great with a nice serval sighting around 06:20, but sadly the cat was in long grass so we couldn't take any photos. Nevertheless, it was the group's first serval sighting so it was a great encounter. It was a very quiet morning again with not much happening. We had a very brief encounter with a female black rhino, she was in very dense bushland so again sadly no images of her. We then headed to the reservoir on the reserve and watched some hippos on the water with some mist hovering around them, it was very atmospheric. To finish the morning we had a surprise encounter with a female white rhino and her young calf.

In the afternoon session, we were in the Tamboti Hide which is a true masterpiece comprising a full kitchen, toilet, seating/editing area, bunk beds, WiFi, and a phone to the main lodge. It is truly the best hide I have ever been in. Lateral lighting is provided by industry-leading fixtures, providing true-to-life colour without colour casts usually associated with LED lighting and which are easily picked up by digital camera sensors, especially when photographing in combination with natural light. These floodlights illuminate the large open clearing in front of the hide from where anything can appear from the darkness, with a passive infrared beam network keeping a permanent lookout, assisting in alerting you about approaching subjects and often detecting these long before photographers do. The hide is east-facing, meaning a session starts in the late afternoon hours followed by floodlight-illuminated night photography with the early morning sun rising in front of you the next morning. We had an incredible time in this hide, and it was a great way to end our time here in Zimanga. Some species photographed included, firefinch, blue waxbill, orange-breasted waxbill, dark-capped bulbul, cap turtle dove, cape bunting, crested barbet, kurrichane thrush, yellow-fronted canary, crested franklin and warthogs.

Just before sunset, we had around 50 cape buffalo come in to drink and it was an incredible sight watching

Find out more about our [Zimanga Wildlife and Night Sky Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

them all pushing to get the best drinking spot.

Eventually, after lots of waiting, we had two rhinos come in to drink with the most glorious night sky behind them. It was such a special moment to shoot the Milky Way behind them whilst they were drinking. Around four hours later of waiting we then had the most amazing bull elephant come in to drink, again under a sky full of stars. It was an incredible end to our time here at Zimanga Private Game Reserve.

It was soon morning and time for us to be collected to have our breakfast and then depart to Durban Airport for our long flight back to Heathrow.

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>

Find out more about our [Zimanga Wildlife and Night Sky Photography](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com