

SOUTH AFRICA PHOTO CUSTOM TOUR: DIFFICULT MAMMALS AND BIRDS OF THE NORTHERN CAPE

TRIP REPORT 7-16 NOVEMBER 2017

By Jason Boyce



A majestic male **Lion** – the Kgalagadi is truly the most astounding place to get Lion sightings and photographic opportunities that will blow you away!



TOUR ITINERARY

Overnight

Day 1 – The Kimberley area	Marrick Safari, Kimberley
Day 2 – Mokala National Park, Kimberley	Marrick Safari, Kimberley

Day 3 – Kimberley to Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Day 4 – Full Day in the Twee Rivieren area

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Day 4 – Full Day in the Twee Rivieren area

Day 5 – Twee Rivieren to Nossob

Day 6 – Full Day in the Nossob area

Nossob

Day 7 – Nossob to Mata Mata

Day 8 – Full day in the Mata Mata area

Day 9 – Final day in the Kgalagadi

Near Upington

OVERVIEW

This tour was a private photography trip for two clients with a particular interest in the smaller mammals of South Africa. However, the larger mammals and birds were also thoroughly enjoyed! We started the trip in the Kalahari 'flatlands' of South Africa in the Kimberley area, where we spent two nights. Thereafter we traveled north-west and spent six nights in the magnificent Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – two nights at each main camp. We made the most of our time in the evenings by taking night drives every evening of the tour and therefore really gave ourselves great opportunities to see the very best mammals that Southern Africa has to offer! We did exceptionally well and recorded 40 species of mammals on the tour – the most that I personally have recorded in the time of 10 days. November is a fantastic time of year for birding as well, and we managed to record 161 species (including 62 families).

Day 1 – Marrick Safari and Kimberley surrounds

We kicked things off with a morning drive around the Marrick Safari property. The dominant habitat on the farm is grasslands, but some areas are scattered with acacia thornveld trees, and there are some small, rocky, vegetated ridges to the south. The birds were incredibly active, and immediately there was bird song all around us and many swallows and swifts cruising over the fields. Barn Swallows, Greater Striped Swallows, and White-rumped and Little Swifts were all actively feeding. Some of the first grassland species that made it onto our list were larks. We picked up Eastern Clapper, Sabota, Fawn-colored, and Spike-heeled Larks that morning, most calling and displaying. A pair of Blue Cranes was spotted out in the lower-lying grasslands, while small groups of Grey-backed Sparrow-Larks were joining flocks of Yellow Canary, Red-billed Quelea, and Scaly-feathered Finch. There were also a number of cisticolas and prinias, namely Zitting and Desert Cisticolas as well as Neddicky and Black-chested **Prinia**. Mammals on the game farm are plentiful – the first few small mammals were a stunning family of Meerkats as well as a few Yellow Mongooses. After a quick lunch we headed to some of the surrounding Kimberley areas, including Kamfers Dam, where we picked up a good number of aquatic species. Kamfers Dam is home to large numbers of Greater and Lesser Flamingos that breed there every year. We also found good numbers of waterfowl and shorebirds. Some of the highlights were Black-winged Stilt, Common Ringed Plover, Ruff Kittlitz's Plover, and Spotted Thick-knee. Waterfowl included Cape Teal and South African Shelduck. Squacco Heron, African Fish Eagle, and Grey-headed Gulls made numerous



flybys. As we were leaving we picked up Karoo Thrush, Kalahari Scrub Robin, and Whitebacked Mousebird. A very successful day one with a night drive to come, of course.



White-rumped Swifts were cruising around the Kimberley area with the likes of Greater Striped Swallows, a good flight photography test.

Our night drive produced! We recorded three different Aardwolves, Aardvark (which unfortunately didn't show very well), Cape Porcupine, Cape Hare, Spring Hare, African Wildcat, and a lovely Rufous-cheeked Nightjar.

Day 2 – Mokala National Park

Mokala National Park is a hidden gem in South Africa, a park with loads of potential that always seems to produce something special. We thoroughly enjoyed the plentiful Ground Squirrels. Birding-wise we were happy to see both Sociable Weaver and the tiny Pygmy Falcon hanging around a large acacia tree, where the weavers were breeding. Short-toed Rock Thrush was a highlight as usual, and a single Buffy Pipit posed very well in front of our lenses. Some flight photography at the Mokala reception and in the restaurant area was fun, with White-rumped Swift and Greater Striped Swallow our two targets.

There also were lots of big animals on show at Mokala. Common Ostrich was seen readily, and then we encountered Red Hartebeest, Common Eland, Greater Kudu, Plains Zebra, Black Wildebeest, Waterbuck, Common Warthog, and Gemsbok, many of which came to drink at the waterhole to the east.

Other avian finds during the day included Blue, Black-faced, and Violet-eared Waxbills, Redbreasted Swallow, Familiar Chat, Yellow-bellied Eremomela, Rufous-eared Warbler, and Three-banded Plover.

Our night drive yielded Bat-eared Fox (which was to be one of the most common nocturnal mammals on the whole trip), Striped Polecat (the mammal highlight of the evening), Southern African Hedgehog (two separate individuals), Cape Porcupine, African Wildcat, Common Genet, Cape Hare, Black-backed Jackal, Western Barn Owl, and a single Double-banded **Courser** in one of the overgrazed patches of veld.





Southern African Hedgehog



Striped Polecat with reptilian prey

Day 3 – Travel to Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

With a lot of travel ahead of us today we obviously didn't focus too much on fauna. We stopped in Upington to pick up some supplies and fuel for the road ahead. We did manage a few species here and there; they included a lovely pair of **Secretarybirds**, a few **Orange Fiver Francolins**, and **Alpine Swifts** overhead. We arrived in a very warm Twee Rivieren, and our clients joined a sunset drive straight after an early dinner. They were rewarded with a magnificent **Leopard** sighting as well as **Verreaux's** and **Spotted Eagle-Owls**, **Bat-eared Fox**, **African Wild Cat**, and **Common Genet**.





A young male Leopard seen on the first night drive in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (photo Rune Bjoernstad)

Day 4 - Full day in the Twee Rivieren area

Being diligent once again we made sure to head out before the sun was up in order to catch all the early-morning rays of light possible. Photography to this point had gone well – this could easily be seen by looking at Rune's back of his camera for shots that he was getting. Today we encountered many of the Kalahari mammals; we enjoyed seeing Blue Wildebeest, many Gemsbok, and Springbok (which are abundant). Birding was rewarding, and we found our first sandgrouse of the trip, Namaqua as well as Burchell's Sandgrouse. We stopped at a small waterhole, where we spotted a Lanner Falcon in a nearby dead tree and where a couple of animals were coming in to drink. We anticipated the falcon to perhaps hunt some of the smaller birds, but instead it was a 'Ninja-like' Black-headed Heron who decided breakfast was to be Sociable Weaver and Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark. We watched for over an hour as the heron stood in the waterhole and nipped off a few unsuspecting passerines. A truly incredible sight! Even though the area is fairly dry and numbers of species recorded in this part of South Africa are low, the diversity is certainly enjoyable; Swallow-tailed Bee-eater is the resident bee-eater, while the likes of Common Scimitarbill, African Hoopoe, Fork-tailed Drongo, Chestnutvented Warbler, Marico Flycatcher, and the stunning Crimson-breasted Shrike were all seen almost daily. Rock Martin was also a fairly common sight, and so were Cape and Southern Grey-headed Sparrows as well as the terrestrial Northern Black Korhaan.





Black-headed Heron



It was incredible to witness it hunting for a good hour and a half before it pushed off due to a herd of Blue Wildebeest coming to drink at the waterhole.

On the Twee Rivieren sunset drive once again we picked up multiple **Bat-eared Foxes**, and our first **Cape Fox** sightings were had. Other animals on tonight's drive were **Common Genet**, **Spring Hare**, **Scrub Hare**, two **Cape Porcupines** up on the hillside, and finally the star, a big **Brown Hyaena**!

Day 5 – Twee Rivieren to Nossob

Raptors are a special feature of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park; one can easily see eight to ten species of raptor in a day. Today we picked up our first **Martial Eagle** as well as our first **Bateleur** sightings, the latter becoming more and more common as we spent time in the central and northern parts of the park. Other raptors included **Gabar Goshawk**, many **Pale Chanting**



Goshawks, and both Tawny and Wahlberg's Eagles. South African Ground Squirrel, Brant's Whistling Rat, and Four-striped Grass Mouse were some of the smaller mammals that kept us entertained. Getting pictures of the smaller rodents, however, proved tricky today. Birds that we enjoyed photographing today were Burchell's Starling, White-browed Sparrow-Weaver, Shaft-tailed Whydah, Cape Crow, and Crimson-breasted Shrike. Beautiful light fell nicely onto a mother Cape Fox and her two cubs – we spent a good 45 minutes with them. It was very enjoyable watching the youngsters playing around the bushes and 'attacking' the poor mother.



Cape Fox and her two cubs

One of the most beautiful sunsets that I have ever experienced in the African bush was on tonight's Nossob sunset drive. A quick stop in the Nossob riverbed on the border of Botswana (where there are, of course, no fences) was just what we needed to truly take the moment in. Not long after that a kilometer down the way we encountered five majestic **Cheetahs** heading out for their evening hunt. We also saw **Spotted Hyaena**, **Steenbok**, **Spring Hare**, **Bat-eared Fox**, and **African Wild Cat**.

Day 6 – Full day in the Nossob Area

Nossob is well known for the impressive male lions and general lion numbers in the area, and we surely experienced exactly that during our time here. Before sunrise we were out and headed south to do the Marie se Draai loop. Suddenly from around the corner we saw two cracking male Lions (complete with black manes) walking down the road towards us, a sight that I don't think any of us will forget in a hurry. We followed them for a while and must have filled a couple of memory cards just on these big boys. We then headed north to a waterhole nearby, hoping to get some Lanner Falcon and sandgrouse action. We did see both Burchell's and Namaqua Sandgrouse coming in to drink, but the Lanner Falcons that were hanging around didn't hunt that morning. We did enjoy Yellow Canary, Kalahari Scrub Robin, South African Cliff Swallow, Cape Glossy Starling, and Ring-necked and Namaqua Doves. Red-necked Falcon



was one of the highlights of the day as well. That afternoon we found a pride of about six **Lions** (five lionesses and a male); they were being observed at a distance by a few curious **Black-backed Jackals**.

Our drive this evening did begin quite late. This played into our hands as the pride of **Lions** that we had seen earlier in the afternoon were starting to move late that evening. We saw them walk along the riverbed for quite some time, a beautiful male and about four lionesses. We also saw a single female **Cheetah** that evening lazing about in the coolness of the evening. In between these fantastic sightings we also saw **Spring Hare**, **Scrub Hare**, **Common Genet**, **African Wildcat**, and **Bat-eared** and **Cape Foxes**.

Day 7 - Nossob to Mata Mata

We were once again treated to a beautiful sunrise around Nossob. The first waterhole we stopped at had a single **Lioness** drinking, along with a **Gabar Goshawk** perched up on a acacia tree, overlooking the situation. What we didn't know at the time was that there were four male **Lions** also looking on from a distance. When we noticed them we observed some strange behavior: The males looked like they were going to approach but then suddenly started all running in the opposite direction with some serious intent.

The larger terrestrial birds were on show today: **Western Ostrich**, **Secretarybird**, and both **Kori** and **Ludwig's Bustards**. Kori Bustard is quite a bit larger than its relative, Ludwig's Bustard, and is widely accepted to be the heaviest flying bird in the world. A surprise sighting was **Capped Wheatear** in the riverbed near Nossob. We also thoroughly enjoyed finally seeing our first snake of the trip, a hefty **Cape Cobra** that after some time crossed the road in front of us.

Mata Mata is also situated along a river bed, but it is on the Namibian border to the west and definitely holds a larger number of acacia species. Some of these that we saw here today were Green-winged Pytilia, Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Chestnut-vented Warbler, Groundscraper Thrush, Cardinal Woodpecker, and Lilac-breasted Roller.



Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill

At Mata Mata we enjoyed another exciting sunset drive; **Black-backed Jackal** with two cubs were adorable, a **Lanner Falcon** was out on an evening hunt, and a few pairs of **Bat-eared** and **Cape Foxes** were out at dusk. We also found **African Wild Cat**, **Common Genet**, **Cape**



Porcupine, Spring Hare, and Gray African Climbing Mouse. Rufous-cheeked Nightjar singing on an open branch was excellent, and we also picked up four owl species: Spotted Eagle-Owl, Western Barn Owl, Southern White-faced Owl, and Pearl-spotted Owlet.

Day 8 – Full Day in the Mata Mata area

It was an early morning once again, and we headed south. Our final full day in the park was made 'complete' early on with another fantastic male **Lion** strolling down the river bed, roaring. He proceeded to go and have a lie-down atop a small sand dune, overlooking the situation.



Lion

On the birding front we picked up many species that we had already encountered but did manage great photographs of some of them; these included Common Scimitarbill, Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill, Swallow-tailed Bee-eater, Lilac-breasted Roller, Cape Crow, and Kori and Ludwig's Bustards. We added a new species too, Red-headed Finch.

That afternoon we once again picked up a few nice raptors. Lanner Falcon, Gabar Goshawk, Bateleur, Tawny Eagle, and Secretarybird were seen for the last time on the trip. It had been a relaxing day, and there was one more night drive to come.





Tawny Eagle

At Mata Mata our clients enjoyed the last night drive of the tour and connected with **Brown Hyaena**, both **Bat-eared** and **Cape Foxes** as usual, **Black-backed Jackal**, **Common Genet**, and amazing close-up sightings of **African Wild Cat**.

Day 9 – Final morning in the Kgalagadi

One final early morning in this exciting park! What a week it had been in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park – a true gem of a park to visit! Really excellent mammal and bird sightings were had and even better photo opportunities. Our last day was fairly relaxed; we spent time around Mata Mata and then slowly made our way south to Twee Rivieren, where we had lunch before starting the drive back to Upington.

SOUTH AFRICA: THE NOTHERN CAPE BIRD LIST, November 2017		
Common name	Scientific name	Trip
	STRUTHIONIFORMES	
Ostriches	Struthionidae	
Common Ostrich	Struthio camelus	1
	ANSERIFORMES	
Ducks, Geese and Swans	Anatidae	
Egyptian Goose	Alopochen aegyptiaca	1
South African Shelduck	Tadorna cana	1
Cape Teal	Anas capensis	1
	GALLIFORMES	
Guineafowl	Numididae	





Wahlberg's Eagle	Hieraaetus wahlbergi	1
Booted Eagle	Hieraaetus pennatus	1
Tawny Eagle	Aquila rapax	1
Gabar Goshawk	Micronisus gabar	1
Pale Chanting Goshawk	Melierax canorus	1
African Fish Eagle	Haliaeetus vocifer	1
Common Buzzard	Buteo buteo	1
Jackal Buzzard	Buteo rufofuscus	1
	OTIDIFORMES	
Bustards	Otididae	
Kori Bustard	Ardeotis kori	1
Ludwig's Bustard	Neotis ludwigii	1
Red-crested Korhaan	Lophotis ruficrista	1
Northern Black Korhaan	Afrotis afraoides	1
	GRUIFORMES	
Rails, Crakes and Coots	Rallidae	
Common Moorhen	Gallinula chloropus	1
Red-knobbed Coot	Fulica cristata	1
Cranes	Gruidae	
Blue Crane	Grus paradisea	1
	CHARADRIIFORMES	
Stone-curlews, Thick-knees	Burhinidae	
Spotted Thick-knee	Burhinus capensis	1
Stilts, Avocets	Recurvirostridae	
Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus	1
Plovers	Charadriidae	
Blacksmith Lapwing	Vanellus armatus	1
Crowned Lapwing	Vanellus coronatus	1
Common Ringed Plover	Charadrius hiaticula	1
Kittlitz's Plover	Charadrius pecuarius	1
Three-banded Plover	Charadrius tricollaris	1
Sandpipers, Snipes	Scolopacidae	
Ruff	Calidris pugnax	1
Little Stint	Calidris minuta	1
Common Greenshank	Tringa nebularia	1
Coursers, Pratincoles	Glareolidae	
Double-banded Courser	Rhinoptilus africanus	1
Gulls, Terns and Skimmers	Laridae	
Grey-headed Gull	Chroicocephalus cirrocephalus	1







Larks	Alaudidae	
Spike-heeled Lark	Chersomanes albofasciata	1
Grey-backed Sparrow-Lark	Eremopterix verticalis	1
Sabota Lark	Calendulauda sabota	1
Fawn-colored Lark	Calendulauda africanoides	1
Eastern Clapper Lark	Mirafra fasciolata	1
Bulbuls	Pycnonotidae	
African Red-eyed Bulbul	Pycnonotus nigricans	1
Swallows , Martins	Hirundinidae	
Brown-throated Martin	Riparia paludicola	1
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica	1
White-throated Swallow	Hirundo albigularis	1
Pearl-breasted Swallow	Hirundo dimidiata	1
Rock Martin	Ptyonoprogne fuligula	1
Greater Striped Swallow	Cecropis cucullata	1
Red-breasted Swallow	Cecropis semirufa	1
South African Cliff Swallow	Petrochelidon spilodera	1
Crombecs, African Warblers	Macrosphenidae	
Long-billed Crombec	Sylvietta rufescens	1
Reed Warblers and allies	Acrocephalidae	
Lesser Swamp Warbler	Acrocephalus gracilirostris	1
African Reed Warbler	Acrocephalus baeticatus	1
Cisticolas and allies	Cisticolidae	
Levaillant's Cisticola	Cisticola tinniens	1
Neddicky	Cisticola fulvicapilla	1
Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis	1
Desert Cisticola	Cisticola aridulus	1
Cloud Cisticola	Cisticola textrix	1
Black-chested Prinia	Prinia flavicans	1
Namaqua Warbler	Phragmacia substriata	1
Rufous-eared Warbler	Malcorus pectoralis	1
Yellow-bellied Eremomela	Eremomela icteropygialis	1
Sylviid Babblers	Sylviidae	
Chestnut-vented Warbler	Sylvia subcoerulea	1
White-eyes	Zosteropidae	
Orange River White-eye	Zosterops pallidus	1
Starlings, Rhabdornis	Sturnidae	
	Sturnidae Creatophora cinerea	1



Burchell's Starling	Lamprotornis australis	1
Thrushes	Turdidae	
Groundscraper Thrush	Turdus litsitsirupa	1
Karoo Thrush	Turdus smithi	1
Chats, Old World Flycatchers	Muscicapidae	
Kalahari Scrub Robin	Cercotrichas paena	1
Chat Flycatcher	Melaenornis infuscatus	1
Marico Flycatcher	Melaenornis mariquensis	1
Fiscal Flycatcher	Melaenornis silens	1
Cape Robin-Chat	Cossypha caffra	1
Short-toed Rock Thrush	Monticola brevipes	1
African Stonechat	Saxicola torquatus	1
Ant-eating Chat	Myrmecocichla formicivora	1
Capped Wheatear	Oenanthe pileata	1
Familiar Chat	Oenanthe familiaris	1
Old World Sparrows, Snowfinches	Passeridae	
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus	1
Cape Sparrow	Passer melanurus	1
Southern Grey-headed Sparrow	Passer diffusus	1
Weavers, Widowbirds	Ploceidae	
White-browed Sparrow-Weaver	Plocepasser mahali	1
Sociable Weaver	Philetairus socius	1
Scaly-feathered Weaver	Sporopipes squamifrons	1
Southern Masked Weaver	Ploceus velatus	1
Red-billed Quelea	Quelea quelea	1
Southern Red Bishop	Euplectes orix	1
Waxbills, Munias and allies	Estrildidae	
Green-winged Pytilia	Pytilia melba	1
Red-headed Finch	Amadina erythrocephala	1
Blue Waxbill	Uraeginthus angolensis	1
Violet-eared Waxbill	Uraeginthus granatinus	1
Black-faced Waxbill	Estrilda erythronotos	1
Indigobirds, Whydahs	Viduidae	
Shaft-tailed Whydah	Vidua regia	1
Wagtails, Pipits	Motacillidae	
Cape Wagtail	Motacilla capensis	1
African Pipit	Anthus cinnamomeus	1
Buffy Pipit	Anthus vaalensis	1
Finches	Fringillidae	



SOUTH AFRICA: THE NOTHERN CAPE MAMMAL LIST. November 2017 **Common Name Scientific Name** Trip **RODENTIA** Muridae Brant's Whistling Rat Parotomys brantsii 1 1 Four-striped Grass Mouse Rhabdomys pumilio Nesomvidae Gray African Climbing Mouse Dendromus melanotis 1 Hystricidae Cape Porcupine Hystrix africaeaustralis 1 Sciuridae 1 South African Ground Squirrel Xerus inauris **Pedetidae** Pedetes capensis 1 Spring Hare **MACROSCELIDEA** Macroscelididae Bushveld Elephant-shrew Elephantulus intufi 1 **LAGOMORPHA** Leporidae Cape Hare Lepus capensis 1 Scrub Hare Lepus saxatilis 1 **CARNIVORA** Felidae Lion Panthera leo 1 1 Leopard Panthera pardus Cheetah 1 Acinonyx jubatus African Wild Cat 1 Felis silvestris lybica Hyaenidae Spotted Hyaena Crocuta crocuta 1 Brown Hyaena Parahyaena brunnea 1 Aardwolf Proteles cristatus 1 Canidae



Black-backed Jackal	Canis mesomelas	1
Cape Fox	Vulpes chama	1
Bat-eared Fox	Otocyon megalotis	1
	Mustelidae	
Striped Polecat	Ictonyx striatus	1
	Viverridae	
Common Genet	Genetta genetta	1
	Herpestidae	
Meerkat	Suricata suricatta	1
Yellow Mongoose	Cynictis penicillata	1
Common Slender Mongoose	Herpestes sanguineus	1
	TUBULIDENTATA	
	Orycteropodidae	
Aardvark	Orycteropus afer	1
	PERISSODACTYLA	
	Equidae	
Plains Zebra	Equus quagga	1
	CETARTIODACTYLA	
	Suidae	
Common Warthog	Phacochoerus africanus	1
	Bovidae	
Red Hartebeest	Alcelaphus buselaphus caama	1
Blesbok	Damaliscus pygargus phillipsi	1
Sable Antelope	Hippotragus niger	1
Blue Wildebeest	Connochaetes taurinus taurinus	1
Black Wildebeest	Connochaetes gnou	1
Gemsbok	Oryx gazella	1
Springbok	Antidorcas marsupialis	1
Impala	Aepyceros melampus	1
Steenbok	Raphicerus campestris	1
Greater Kudu	Tragelaphus strepsiceros	1
Common Eland	Tragelaphus oryx	1
Waterbuck	Kobus ellipsiprymnus	1
	Giraffidae	
Giraffe	Giraffa camelopardalis	1
TOTAL		40

