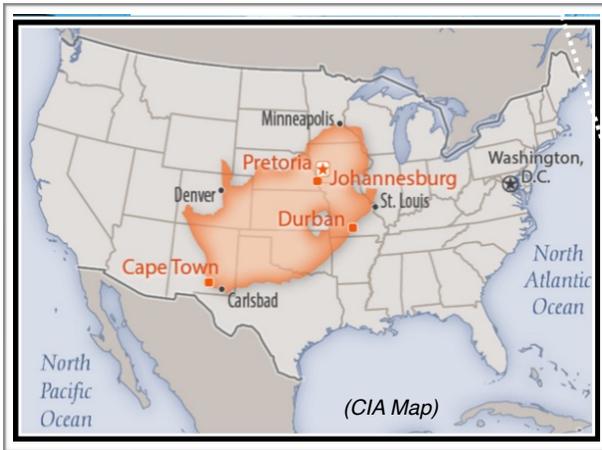


## South Africa

11 November - 1 December, 2016



*South Africa - a land I knew only from a map.  
Africa - a continent I'd never visited. This trip  
is one of a life time. And so it begins.*

### **Departing** 11-12 November, Friday-Saturday

Typical. Leaving NY turned out to be an ordeal. The plane change at JFK allowed only an hour between Jet Blue landing and South African airways boarding, which included changing terminals in a strange airport, and going through security again - hardly enough time at an empty airport, much less at one of the busiest in the world. Spending the night in Boston and getting an earlier Jet Blue flight was in order. I went to Logan the night before to change the flight, which is where the ordeal begins - waiting at Jet Blue full service desk, then more waiting while the agent called higher ups to see about changing, then good news that the flight could be changed, then bad news - because it was a South African Airways ticket, Jet Blue couldn't do it, then more waiting to check again, then good news that it was all set, then more waiting for the ticket to be into the system to print the boarding pass, then more waiting when it didn't happen, then more waiting to recall and check, then more waiting to determine it couldn't be done (can only change tickets on the day of the flight, not within 24 hours!), then bad news because my original ticket had been cancelled, then more waiting to call South African airways to reissue the boarding pass, then more waiting to refund the \$50 for a ticket change. Joseph the agent was a saint, even if it turned out my request couldn't be done. He was going off duty at 9:00 p.m. only to be back at work at 4:00 a.m., including driving back and forth to his home in New Hampshire. That's some dedication. How often do these snafu's happen? I have a new appreciation for customer service agents.

Bottom line was to show up at the airport at 3:30 a.m. on the 12th, when full service opened, to do the "same day" change on the actual same day. Bleary eyed the next morning, I made my way back and got the ticket changed to the 5:40 flight, re-paid the \$50 change fee, and felt much better. I got to be one of the first in line for the TSA check to open (how often does that happen?). There was no problem getting to JFK in plenty of time, not only to make the flight but totally confirm that all the walking, air train, and more walking, took much more than the hour originally planned that never would have worked.

About an hour before leaving JFK, Joanna showed up after her red-eye flight from Portland. My woes were certainly minor compared to her red eye followed by a 14 hour flight to J'burg.

### **Arrival in Cape Town** 13 November, Sunday,

Fourteen hours is a l o n g flight. We leave in mid morning from New York, fly east back into the night and continue through the night, until we again cross back into sunshine for an early next-day arrival in Johannesburg. We found our way to the domestic departures and Mango air (bright orange planes!), checked in, and slept for the last two hours to Cape Town.

The Braeside B&B was an incredibly welcome site when we arrived early afternoon, located in a comfortable residential neighborhood on a hill where each house has only a very narrow passage along its side between it and its neighbor, very much in keeping with the extremely narrow streets. After “freshening up” (as much as one can in our sleep deprived condition), we hiked down to the Green Point park at the base of the hill. The strong wind made the ocean rollers loud and large, with lots of spray. Some hardy souls were surfing. On a beautiful sunny Sunday afternoon, the park was full of people, with or without dogs, and lots of kids. We saw some birds - a something lapwing, an Egyptian Goose, and some sort of coot with a red spot on its beak, also two baby coots. A boat resembling the ilk of Christopher Columbus’ boat bobbed along like a cork just outside the surf zone, rolling and pitching, clearly a head boat, and later identified in the harbor as the Jolly Roger, complete with old tars wearing patches on one eye, singing chanties, and making much of the pirate life. Fun (ha!) ride for the uninitiated.

A short stroll to the marine/harbor area had lots of sights and sounds. The bars were full of people, packed outside and inside in the late afternoon with animated conversation. After some trouble making a decision (seems to be a Hutchinson trait), we settled on a restaurant overlooking the harbor with outside seating, somewhat out of the wind gusts. The beer sat very well, as did the warm dinner meal, and we even received blankets to ward off the cold as the sun sank in the sky. We got back to Braeside close to 7:30 p.m., close to sunset, where showering, unpacking, and pushing bed until maybe 9:00 might help with the time adjustment.

### **Table Mountain** 14 November, Monday

Nothing like a good night’s sleep to refresh the mind and body. I slept soundly, waking up close to 7:30, more sleep than I’m used to. When it was clear there was no more sleep to be had, I read until Joanna woke up, then up for a leisurely breakfast. The winds were still gusting high (I would judge >30 kts). Our hostess Catherine confirmed the cable cars were not running and tried to see if we could get a guide/driver for the afternoon to head south to the Cape of Good Hope, or Cape Point as it is locally known. No luck, though we arranged a guide/driver for the morning on Tuesday. With that settled, we headed down to the Hop On/Hop Off bus to ride the loop to Table Mountain, where we had decided to hike. The bus is double decker with an open top, affording great views. The driver gives each rider a small set of ear buds, to be used in each seat to listen to the narration about what the bus is driving through. Lots of history about Christian Barnard (led the team that did the first heart transplant), Nelson Mandela, the Bo-Kaap district (colorfully painted houses done after the end of Apartheid in response to the pre-Apartheid mandate that blacks only use muted brown-tan-white colors), etc.

Catherine had warned us that the Platteklip trail was steep - an understatement. Because we missed the signs for the contour trail at the lower cable car station, we followed the road to the trail head, and headed up the path. An incredibly steep stairway, in which some of the stairs have 2-3 foot rises, brought a new meaning to arduous. On the lower part of the trail, there are some reasonably “flat” breaks between the zig zags - good places to enjoy the views northwards over Cape Town. Higher up, the zig zags eventually collapse into one steep path that seems vertical. We played hopscotch with several couples. Sometimes we passed others,

others passed us, and, incredibly, several people jogged past us. Elevation at the road is ~400 m, at the crossing with the contour path is ~500 m, and at the top of the mountain is ~1080 M, so almost a full 1100 m vertical on a difficult trail. Probably near 3/4 of the way up, I headed on alone, leaving Jo to catch her breath and energy. The last part to the top is through a narrow cleft in the rock walls, only about twice the width of the path, which is dark and limits the view, and then poof, out into the open and incredible expansive views. All kinds of trails criss-cross the top of the mountain. For no particular reason, I headed towards the upper cable car station, soaking up the stunning views of the Atlantic. The wind was actually easier to manage because it was steady at the top, not gusty, as it had been walking up the trail. Because I didn't want to leave Jo for too long, I had a short rest with water and a granola bar before heading back down. Although Joanna had continued on, and wasn't more than 100-200 m from the top, she was happy to turn around and not push.

Having gravity working with you rather than against you is a welcome change. We made better time heading down, though we still stopped and rested to give Jo's legs a chance to recharge. The views were just as spectacular, and we took more time to enjoy the brown winged starlings and lush purple and yellow carpets of wildflowers. This time, the contour trail offered some relief from the endless steep trail by providing a long sort-of flat walk before the last descent beneath the cable cars. Sitting on the lower deck of the Hop On/Hop Off bus was in order for our tired legs. While we had thought of walking back to the harbor to eat, we decided to find the first restaurant we could along the main drag, a very nice bar pub, where a meal of wraps and a salad absolutely hit the spot. Joanna even made it up the stairs to the front entrance of the B&B without help!

### **Cape of Good Hope and Wine Tasting** 15 November, Tuesday

Breakfast starts at 7:30 at the B&B, which gave us time for a leisurely breakfast before the 8:30 pick-up by the driver. Breakfasts at the B&B are exceptional. Regular fare is a big assortment of good food - fruit, yogurt, bread, jams, meats, cheeses, cereals. The specials of the day are a hot dish, one day french toast with melted mozzarella cheese, a butternut squash-goat cheese frittata, and the last day a tomato tort. The hearty breakfasts are actually welcome - with activities going through the mid-day, a big breakfast followed by dinner is all we need for sustenance.

Gerald picked us up promptly. He quickly totally entertained us with his stories and knowledge. He grew up in Cape Town, spent his life in this part of South Africa, and, after two retirements, loves doing guiding because it keeps him busy, lets him exercise his gift of talk, keeps him out of the house, and earns some money. We really only had three priorities - to see the penguins, to visit the light house, and to drive the scenic drive on the west side of the peninsula. He assured us we would see and do much, much more.

First was a visit to the penguin colony on False Bay on the east side of the peninsula, near the Boulders beach. These tuxedo creatures were all over the large boulders, mostly just resting in the sun. There was no wind to speak of, so a picture perfect day (when the cable cars would have been running at Table Mountain!). Jo and I hiked a trail which parallels the beach and saw many penguins, kelp beds, large rocks, and other birds. This was not the usual tour bus stop, so very secluded, quiet, and undisturbed beneath a row of houses.

Upon leaving the beach, about half a dozen baboons were along both sides of the road, one a mother with a baby clinging to her. We slowed for a few pictures through the windows, including

a great one where one of the baboons climbed a large shrub full of flowers, poked its head out, and began eating the large buds.

The light house was much more commercial, with the usual tourist shops, restaurant, lines, and trails around the property. The "Flying Dutchman" tram way/cable can be taken to just below the level of the light house (which we took, thinking better of our recuperating legs), rather than hiking up. On this clear, windy day (though not as windy as yesterday), we took in the 360° view with everyone else. Bellows Rock, the large rock west of the Cape was resplendent in spray. Two power boats were making their way past the lighthouse headed south - hardy souls, that's into the Southern Ocean!

A very large baboon appeared along the rock wall surrounding the light house and settled in for the tourist entertainment. He sat down next to a lady who was leaning against the wall, but looking the other way, and therefore unaware who was next to her. Everyone crowded around to take the baboon's picture, which made the lady finally look up - and jump back in total shock. Despite the beautiful view, the baboon took the prize for entertainment.

The history of the light house is retold in the shop - the number of ship wrecks is sadly large. The South Africans, and particularly the Cape of Good Hope played a huge role in the second world war by being such a good place to identify (and deter) German U-boats. Radar deployed from the Cape was instrumental. The legend of the "Flying Dutchman" trying to get around the Cape, originates from the currents and strong winds of the area. Even though the light house is high above sea level, on cloudy days (and stormy days, when the light house is most needed), clouds obscure the light, defeating the purpose of having a light house. After finishing our walk through the small shop, Joanna and I hiked down to the car, having decided that we would take up Gerald's offer for a wine tour afternoon. Gerald seemed delighted with our decision (how could we refuse his bargain price?). Off we went to see the west coast on our way to wine country.

First stop was the beach-side "hippy" community just north of the Cape, along the western coast, where Gerald stopped to buy fresh honey from Mo, who ran a ramshackle, off-the-beaten-path knick-knack shop. The next set of stops were along the scenic drive up the west coast, where the road is etched into the steep mountain slopes with incredibly steep drop-offs but also incredibly breath-taking scenery. We heard much about Cecil Rhodes, Zuma (current president), and South African history. Not only does Gerald know everything about the history, he also seems to know all the roads, short cuts, and multiple ways to avoid traffic. The drive went through Cape Town towards eastern and southeastern portions of the city.

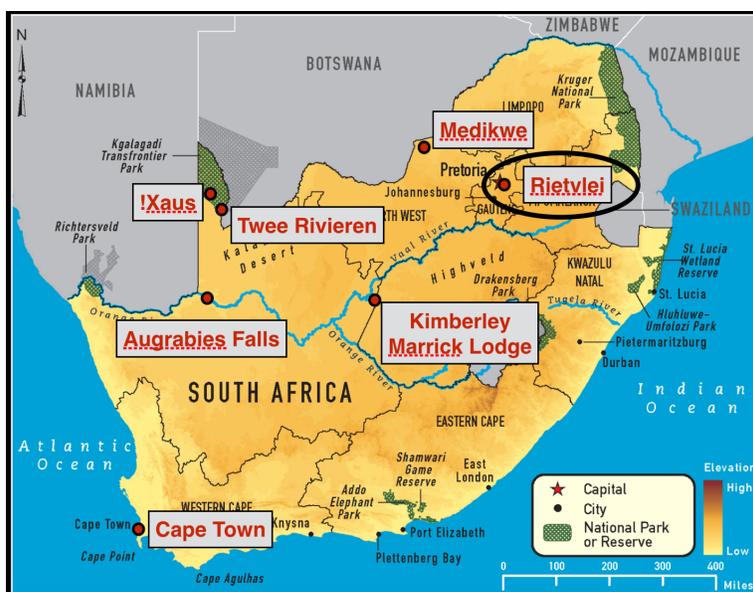
Gerald brought us to Anura winery, Anura is the latin name for frog. He particularly liked the staff here; the lady taking us around showed great enthusiasm without being overbearing during the tour. Because it was late in the day, we were the only ones there. We saw the crusher, the filterer, the steel drums to mix the wine, the pump machine to get the wine into the smaller oak barrels to age. Lots of different kinds of grapes go into the mix, all grown on the farm. The wine tasting is for six wines paired with six kinds of cheese, also all made on premises. For us Frog Hill Brut (sparkling wine from Chenin Blanc grapes) paired with Marish Plain cheese. Then Chardonnay (2 months in the barrel) paired with plain brie (the cheese was to die for), then Rose (from Merlot grapes, straight from the vat to the bottle) paired with Cambebert cheese, followed by Pinotage (Pinot Noir and Hermitage grapes, Reserve aged 16 months). The guidance on cheese was that any cheese goes with the reds. The final two were Malbec (which

Gerald agreed was not as good as the South American Malbecs), and Syrah Limited Release (same grape as Shiraz, but aged 20-24 months). The final three cheeses we had were Brie with green fig, Marisch Bella (cajun spiced), and Swiss Mountain plain. And, I had to take notes during the tasting to remember all that.

Even though the day should have been done, Gerald wanted us to visit one last winery, this one called Vrede en Lust (Pease and Delight). This was a high end winery with a fancy restaurant, manicured gardens, sculptures and paintings throughout the inside and outside. We used the head, were in awe of the huge yellow diamond on display, and took in a smattering of the large-cat stylized sculptures in the very faded light.

The day ended back at Braeside at about 8:00. Gerald received (and certainly earned) a generous tip. Jo and I opted for tea and cookies (supplied in the room) for dinner rather than going out.

## The Safari Begins



### Night Drive - Pretoria Rietvlei 16 November, Wednesday

After a leisurely breakfast at Braeside, bright orange Mango air brought us from Cape Town back to Johannesburg. Fiona met us coming out of baggage claim, and shepherded us back to the Outlook Lodge and the rest of the group. Following a chicken salad lunch and a brief rest, we piled into the van to go to Rietvlei Nature Reserve in Pretoria. The plan was a 6-8 p.m. night drive to see the animals at sunset.

Andrew, who drove the van to Pretoria, was an accomplished guide of his own, so we used the hour before the 6:00 start to drive the van to see some birds down by the dam - none of which I could identify. The park is unique in being ~8000 acres totally surrounded by suburban Pretoria - perhaps the largest nature preserve in the world in an urban area. Pronounced as writ-vlay, Riet

means reed, and Vlei means wetland, so this park has huge reed wetlands due to the dam and lake behind it, which provides much of the water Pretoria uses. The park also hosts some of the most extensive pristine grass veldt left, a sad testimony to human development that has destroyed the original habitat throughout this part of Africa. Binoculars certainly are the tool of choice, making tiny objects viewable and describable.

Right away, the animal life was plentiful - Blesbok, Red hartebeest, Eland, and, remarkably, white rhino and zebra. Although the light was fading, there was enough for good looks. The various types of antelope were everywhere (Blesbok, Red Hartebeest, Steenbok, Common Duiker, Rhebok, and Waterbuck (not sure I even photographed them, either!)).

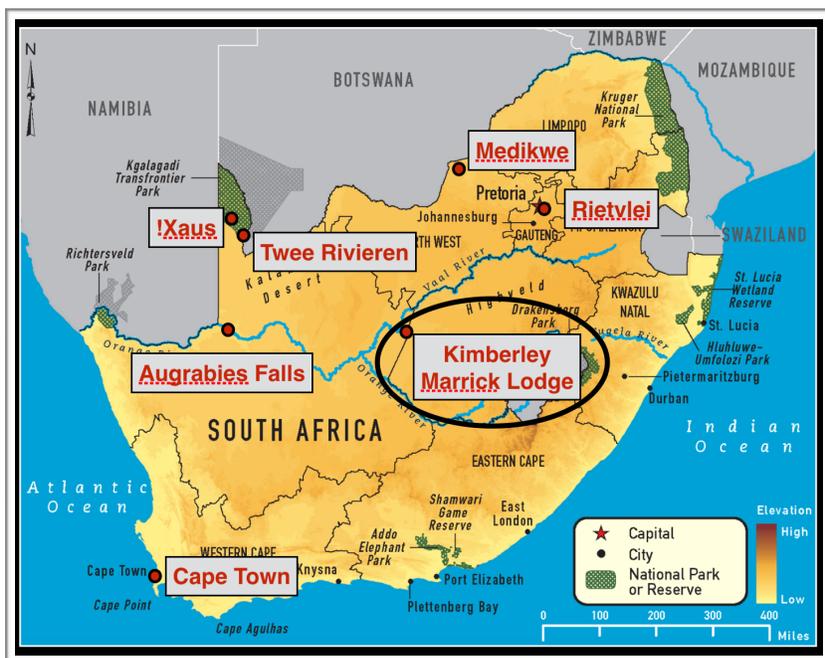
Some of the animals were quite close to the van. Andrew said studies were showing that zebra actually lived in family groups, even though they appear to be in large herds. The zebra we saw in Rietvlei were in small groups, with a stallion, several dams, and perhaps 1-2 offspring. At one point we saw a Blesbok with a wobbly foal that must have been born within the past 24 hours. The mother was chased by a male, leaving the foal, and two zebra started chasing the baby, nipping at it. It was running fast after its mother and fortunately the zebras stopped chasing it and the mother came back, but it was a moment of anxiety for this poor helpless creature. Drama on the veldt.

The rhino were also in groups, one a group of three and the other a mother and calf, though a calf large enough to be at least a second year offspring. Andrew pointed out a small outcrop worn smooth and round at the top as a place where rhino rubbed and scratched its head. All of the rhino in the park have their horns shaved, to discourage poachers, but even removing the horns is sometimes not enough, because the stumps have enough value that poachers had killed two rhinos the previous week. The signs are everywhere to discourage poaching. Apparently, Swaziland, one of South Africa's neighbors, passed a law allowing anyone finding poachers to shoot to kill (the poacher), which has virtually eliminated poaching.

The informal drive with Andrew was enough to be suitably impressed and satisfied, but the best was yet to come. Madeline met us at the main gate with the open vehicle and was our official guide for the evening drive. In addition to the variety of animals we had already seen, as dark descended, we started seeing the nocturnal animals - other varieties of antelope ( ), black wildebeest (disease free in this park), cape buffalo, jackal. After total dark, the spotting lights were used to identify eye shine. One of the first animals we saw with the lights was a cheetah sitting in the grass. Because the cheetah would look towards the light and then away, it was luck to have seen the eyes. As the evening wore on, it was pretty clear Madeline was a very skilled spotter - seeing the tiniest eyes or the tiniest speck of movement that the rest of us still didn't see when we were stopped and were looking for it. The cheetah stayed still long enough that I could finally make out its head (when it moved), but it never showed more of its body, and eventually laid down so we could no longer see it. Madeline speculated that it was a male we were seeing, because the female in the park \*may\* have had kittens. She had been spotted three days in a row in the same part of the park (very unusual), and she had acted very aggressively towards the rangers who tried to get near her to check for kittens. This is apparently the first year a female had been in the park, so the birth of the kittens was a planned and exciting event, if it succeeds.

The driving was on both paved and dirt roads through the reserve. There had been many thunderstorms in the last few days, so lots of high water and flooding. Fiona had asked to sit in

the spotter's seat, on the front hood of the car, to do spotting and hang on through the bumps and jolts. The water was roaring under one of the bridges we crossed, and along the river bank, we caught sight of a water mongoose disappearing into the tall grasses on the river bank. Very cool. Because one of the most desired animals for the rest of the group was the Serval, a small cheetah-like cat, Madeline took us into the nonpublic part of the park that has roads through very wet parts. One of the roads was very much a 4-wheel drive road. At one point we saw a large hippopotamus down in a valley. Because of the bushes, it was hard to see all of him at once, but it was definitely a big, round hippo. Shortly after that sighting on the road, the road was flooded, with a steady stream rushing over one stretch. The willows (or willow like tree fronds) hung so low that most of us had to duck to avoid being scratched, especially Fiona unprotected on the front hood. By this time, most of us were using the blankets supplied by the Reserve to stay warm. Madeline tried hard to find us a Serval cat, but to no avail. Our trip was supposed to be two hours, from 6-8. We didn't end up returning to the main gate until after 10:00! But the long ride was worth it - what an introduction. I didn't even mind that there was no hot water in the bathroom. Just a refreshing cold sponge bath.



**Kimberley Diamond Hole and Marrick Lodge Night Drive** 17 November, Thursday

It was another early morning to get to the airport for the South African Airways Express flight to Kimberley. Fiona was anxious for the final member of our party, Janelle, to meet the group. Janelle had started her trip from Los Angeles, but after a cancelled flight from Atlanta, a 24 hour on-again, off-again delay, and a connection through London, she was due to Johannesburg at 7:20 a.m. Our flight to Kimberley left at 9:00. Her ordeal was definitely worse - and longer - than mine at Logan. She showed up with time to spare!

In Kimberley, John Davies from Lawson Safaris met us with the van for our western trip. First stop was the Big Hole, where De Beer had turned their deepest diamond pit into a tourist

attraction. Mining ended in this pit in 1914, when water could no longer be pumped out of it - and shaft mining began. I think they said the hole was ~200 m deep. We did not go on the underground tour or through the restored town of the turn of the century, and instead ate a modest lunch, then headed to Marrick Lodge, our home for the next three nights.

We took a late afternoon walk down one of the paths around the lodge to look for animals and birds. On one side of the trail was the flat bush veldt, on the other were modest hills that appeared to be volcanic (dark rocks, so rough and cracked on the surface that it was hard to tell if it was outcrop or just lots of rubble). Some geologist I am. Birds are by far more plentiful than animals in the heat of the day - and I am definitely out of my league in seeing half of what the others see. Someone will point out a bird, and John, the Lawson Safaris guide, who has already seen the bird and identified it, will confirm the identification, whether it is adult or juvenile, and point to the other male or female of the species in the area, plus describe what color, shape, size, or sound distinguishes this bird from another it might be mistaken for. Everyone's knowledge is impressive, but John's is the deep knowledge of one who has grown up in the region, studied it hard, and has a love of sharing his knowledge. The treat of the afternoon was seeing a very large Spotted Eagle Owl fly up from the rocks, and a bit further down the trail, see a Spotted Eagle Owl chick on the nest, not too far up the rocks, fluffy with the sun behind it, and watching us the entire time we watched it.

The first of our night expeditions was planned for three hours (8-11), but we didn't start until ~8:30 because dinner was delayed; we didn't return until just after 11:00. The vehicle is a four-wheel drive truck with a four-seat structure sitting on top of the bed, i.e., open seating to see over the cab. Getting in was by ladder. There was no floor between seats, only a bar beneath the seats for your feet, so a bit awkward to get into. Johnny Boy (his name, really) was the spotter, with John our guide, in the first seat. The rest of us piled in behind.

The spotter is amazing. He spots from the open vehicle by shining a bright light back and forth across the savanna - and sees animals by either the eye shine, which can be incredibly fleeting if the animal looks away quickly (which they often do) or by slight movement (which can't be that easy to see with the light moving rather quickly back and forth). Sometimes, I can't even see the animal when the bright spot is on it! Johnny Boy lost no time in seeing animals. The spring hares were everywhere (these hares look like kangaroos when they move, hopping on their hind legs, and leaning forward with their arms up next to their bodies. The fuzzy tail is long behind the body). A few Cape hares and Scrub hares were also out - they look like traditional hares. The animals we saw were Aardvark, Aardwolf (both Aardvark and Aardwolf in the same sighting), Cape Crested Porcupine, the rare and very shy South African Hedgehog (a real cutie), a Bat Eared Fox, a juvenile Giant Bull Frog along the side of the road, lots of birds I can't remember (except maybe the barn owl in the box), and an amazing Black Footed Cat and her two kittens, situated in a trough 10 or 20 m off the road. The mother sat with only her head showing and stared at us the whole time. The kittens, which were 2/3 the size of their mother, so fairly mature, would occasionally pop up and then disappear again. What a show. Later in the evening Johnny Boy also spotted some feral cats, and of course many Springbok and Steenbok and other antelope. We did not dwell on the diurnal animals, which we could photograph during the day. By the end of the night, most of us had all of our layers on in the dropping temperatures.

### **Expeditions at Marrick Lodge and Vaal River** 18 November, Friday

Even though we didn't get in last night until after 11:00, and to bed until closer to midnight, we had to be up at 5:30 for coffee and tea at 5:45, followed by an early morning trip in the open-air truck at 6:00. It was mostly light by the time we got going, and the sun was beginning to warm the chilly air. We circled through many of the same trails we did at night (or so I'm told) - they all looked the same last night, and also looked similar this morning - red dirt trails through the flat veldt, until coming to the volcanic (!) hills. We had a breakfast stop for coffee, tea, and "rusk" (crisp bread crusts, similar to biscotti, but softer and less sweet).

The treat for the morning was seeing Blue Cranes in the distance, obviously a beautiful and large blue bird, even if my binocs were not strong enough to resolve it well. There were lots of birds, and a couple of ground squirrels. The various antelope and wildebeest were moving around, some running, some hopping, many also just milling and eating. Johnny Boy brought us back to the Black Footed cat den (how did he know where to find it?), where John set up a motion camera. He was hoping that the kittens might be curious enough to see what it was, even if the mother might not. We came back at 7:30 to watch Mark, an English bloke, open the rodent traps he had set the previous afternoon. He had a pygmy mouse from a trap set near the cottage where he and his wife Anna were staying. We took pictures of him holding it, but when he put it down - and we thought we might get pictures on the ground - it disappeared faster than lightning. Rather than continue on the truck, we opted to walk back to the hills to watch him recover his other traps (all empty). We then continued on further than we walked yesterday afternoon, coming upon the same eaglet, some unmarked graves (supposedly of the staff who had presumably worked and died at the lodge). Someone spotted a Leopard Tortoise, which we all watched until returning for a late breakfast at 9:30-10:00.

"Quiet" time was between 10 and 2, avoiding the hottest time of day. Although some people napped, many were outside looking at the birds and other creatures, drawing (Dawn), or just walking around to see what there was to see. There's a small pond behind the goose enclosure that had many birds coming for a drink.

At 2:00 we headed off to the Vaal River to find the elusive otters that Phil had spotted the previous day. Phil was yet another guest at Marrick whom Fiona knew. The river and wetlands were spectacular in the variety of water plants, the variety of bushes and trees in the riparian zone, the number of birds, the amazing sounds when one listened, and the different number of pools and flowing water to watch. We were walking along a wide concrete causeway that crossed the river just a few feet above it, created for pedestrians, with the roadway much higher above us. This was an area to "savor the moment." The more one listened, the more one heard. The more one looked, the more one saw. Big and little. Fast and slow. Resting and foraging. Singing and quiet. Flying and standing. There were several different types of kingfishers (finally, a bird I could recognize), huge sacred ibis, yellow-billed ducks, the red crimson capped something, and the yellow weaver busy building nests. Although we didn't see the otters, we dragged our feet leaving this magical area.

A word about our Lawson guide - John. It's becoming clear that he has a sixth sense about the bush and its animals. A quick glance at a silhouette in the trees is all he seems to need for a positive identification of an animal - bird, mammal, reptile or the like. Plus he only knows many of the animals by their latin scientific name. He grew up in the bush near the Krueger Park, where his father worked as a ranger. He loved the animals from an early age and has obviously been a keen observer as well. Plus he's an incredibly cheerful nice guy who loves talking with

us and sharing his knowledge. He's also sensitive to the animals, gently shepherding us away from birds (like the Spotted Eagle Owllet) when he felt we might be disturbing the animals. At his home, he and his girlfriend took to feeding an emaciated pregnant Duiker (small antelope) who eventually gave birth to a young male, whom they have decided is their surrogate child, and whose name is still being decided but will probably be called Sigmund Patsy Davies-Thompson (Sigmund because they like the name, Patsy after Monty Python, and Davies-Thompson as their combined last names!). While both Duiker now forage for themselves now, they stick close by his house. His stories, humor, and positive attitude are part of making this trip so much fun.

The night drive was a bit quieter this night than last night, though still satisfying. Most of us donned an additional layer of clothing compared to last night - the cold is penetrating and arrives quickly. We started with another sighting of an armadillo, mostly its backside. An adult black footed cat didn't stand still long enough for a decent photo plus it was behind bushes. An unexpected treat was three hedgehogs - none which were traumatized like last night's one, so they just went about their business oblivious of us - which was especially good for taking pictures of the one very close to the road. The bat eared fox obliged us with a good look. I didn't see the duiker (small antelope), but I did see the cat well. It had the coloring of a wild cat, but John was skeptical and thought it was better classified as a feral cat. Another late night, getting back at ~11:00, then not to bed until midnight or so.

### **Mokala National Park** 19 November, Saturday

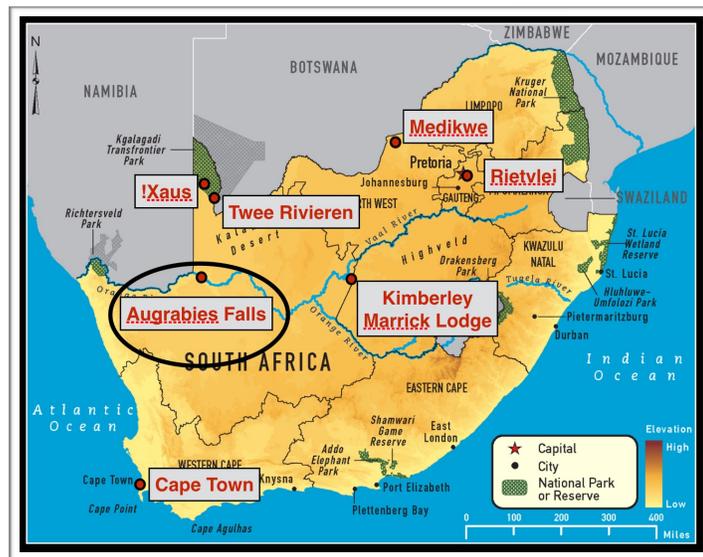
Mokala National Park is one of the series of arid national parks in South Africa, about an hours drive from Marrick. We left Marrick early, after only some tea and coffee, planning a later stop for a packed breakfast. The park is oriented northeast-southwest and we entered in the north at the Lilydale rest camp gate. Right away, we saw animals - Steenbok (pronounce Stee-an Bok), white rhinoceros, Blue Wildebeest (with the black tail), Black Wildebeest (with white tail), Tsessebee, Greater Kudu, Greater Kestrel, warthogs and on and on. This was before the breakfast stop - There was never anything *not* to see. Breakfast was only a few km from the park entrance, at a rest camp with a restaurant and swim pool overlooking a spectacular view of the oasis of greenery along a river down the valley and off in the distance. We ate outside around a table on the lawn. The breakfast sandwiches were nothing to write home about, but we were well entertained by a mother and several young vervet monkeys running around, drinking from the pool, and watching us from the trees.

The animals continued after breakfast as we made our way through the park - chestnut vented warbler, Greater Kudu, yellow mongoose, Orange River Franklin, Meerkat, Springbok, Oryx, lizards, kingfisher and so on. At an almost-dried-up water hole, we stopped and saw Spring Bok, Tsessebe, a warthog, Cape Starling (the iridescent blue), and an Egyptian Goose. At the bird blind, which also had an almost dried up water hole, we saw Spring Bok, an Impala, Starling, and more Vervet monkey. While driving along, we didn't see the carcass, but saw vultures above, then many vultures on the ground (the lighter Cape Vulture) and a much larger White Backed Vulture. No waste there!

Our relaxed lunch was at the Mosu Lodge near the south end of the park, one of the seemingly larger rest camps - lots of cottages, a proper reception area, many walking paths, and of course the restaurant where we ate. We watched some ground squirrels and a leopard tortoise, as well

as three mice under a rock before lunch. Fiona has been crazy to see the small mammals, her specialty, so this made her day. While we saw many other animals after lunch on the short drive to the exit gate, by far the ones we stopped and watched the longest were the giraffes. The first we saw was the biggest of the bunch and terribly thin, but the others didn't look too bad, including an adolescent. They strolled along in their awkward gangly gait, sometimes watching us, sometimes nibbling on leaves from the tall trees, and sometimes just standing next to each other. They mostly just passed leisurely through the area with us as the curious bystanders. They are very big animals.

Back to Marrick for a swim before our usual 7:00 dinner and another night drive. We sang a happy birthday to John, our guide, though we thought better of candles in the marshmallow pie for dessert. John clearly treasured the card on which Fiona had sketched a groundhog, and we all signed. I actually decided against going on the night drive, along with a few others who stayed behind. Time to catch up with the pictures and my log, which I mostly accomplished. It turns out organizing pictures and writing up the days activities actually takes more time than we have allocated each day.



### Drive to Augrabies Falls 20 November, Sunday

A new place to stay tonight - Augrabies Falls. One drives a total of ~530 km, a long ways west, then a short ways north, to this park on the border with Namibia. We said goodby to Marrick at about 8:30 a.m. and settled into the van. Much of the early drive was a long slow uphill in very flat landscape, then a much more rolling countryside with rounded and rugged hills, some distant mesas, and dry, dry, and drier. The soil alternated from deep red to beige, controlled by what appeared to be deep red and light buff sandstones and siltstones of the bedrock. Most of the sedimentary rocks were dipping, so they were deformed at some time in their history. We saw occasional ostrich, though John seemed to think the were farmed ostrich. Sheep and goats were more obvious, i.e., this is farmed land. The bushes are widely spaced, the small plants and grasses have large spaces between them, and the hard rock or soil between plants is the colorful backdrop.

Conversation in the van was lively, no dullards here. John kept us up to date on the temperature, which climbed from 35°C to 40°C as we pulled into Augrabies - that's 104°F. At one point, the topic of bribery came up and someone asked John if he'd been bribed. He answered of course he had, at which point we got three perspectives on bribery. John had never had to pay for a bribe. When stopped and told he had to pay money or remain with the official, he opted to remain with the official. Believing in the goodness of people, he was just a nice guy, reading, engaging in conversation, talking about various things, maybe being a bit of a nuisance. He'd never been detained for more than 2 hours before the official just said "Oh, get going." The second approach came from Fiona, who said the thing to do is to tell the official you wanted to pay him, but insist that it be done at the police station, to have a record of it. After some back and forth, this usually works since the briber knows his illicit actions will be found out at the police station. The final solution to bribing only works in certain countries - to surreptitiously video the bribing encounter, pay the fine, then show the video and reverse bribe the official. So, pay me the same amount (or more) or the video goes to the police. This once resulted in a net profit! The reason one has to be careful with this last approach is to avoid using it in countries where the briber is likely to shoot you.

For some reason, lunch in the very large, imposing, and modern Kalahari mall (at a Mugg and Beans) made many of us soporific, so conversation tailed off after we got back in the van, and many of us took a siesta, heads nodding off in awkward angles. The only one who seemed to be productive was George, working through editing his pictures.

At some point, we saw signs of a river - the Orange River distant in the valley. Like other rivers in desert environments, it was a ribbon of green surrounded by brown. Towns were few and far between, some larger and more prosperous than others. Houses in these towns tended to have satellite TV dishes. One town had a soccer field and stadium at the high school. We had been told in Cape Town that soccer was the sport of the black people, that cricket and rugby were the sport of the white people (from the British influence).

Grapes started appearing in the farms about half way through the trip, never too far from the river. Some were out in the full sun, and some were sheltered under tightly stretched beige nets. John explained that these were grown for the Orange River winery, better known for bulk, inexpensive wine. (The best wines come from the Cape Peninsula area). Just to prove the point, the grape fields started being in farms that had names including "Raisins" - i.e., they were being used to make raisins rather than fine wine.

We pulled into Augrabies Falls at about 4:00. Augrabies is pronounced Oh-**grob**-ees. The falls are where the Orange River tumbles into a large gorge, maybe 100 m down. The gorge is 18 km long, so not real big, but big enough. The rest camp is on the top, with a fenced walkway and lookout points that enable one to see the largest falls at the head, as well as smaller falls and rapids further down and always spectacular views of the gorge. The rock is slightly metamorphosed granite, so it erodes with huge dome-like shapes and large rounded boulders. Water level is low at this time of year, with only one major pathway for the water. Still, it thunders down with lots of mist and spray. The depth of the gorge is enough that cormorants sitting on the rocks below look like tiny dots with the naked eye, and not much bigger in the binoculars. In peak floods, the water cascades from all over the upper part of the wall. The posters give 1988 as the largest flood, and 2010, which was only about 1/4 the size of 1988, the largest in recent history. Along the walkway, the platforms were full of lizards, brightly colored blue, orange, and

yellow males and the much more bland tan females. On some platforms they were everywhere, always in the shade, sometimes fighting, sometimes just darting around.

The double cottages, i.e., one building with two units are our accommodations for the next two nights. These are well equipped, with a refrigerator, two burner stove, microwave, and toaster in the modest kitchen. Best, they are air-conditioned and have LOTS of hot water. The water is drinkable and safe; the beds are comfortable.

The night drive at Augrabies is shorter than that at Marrick, ending closer to 10:00 than 11:00, so more time to maybe catch up on sleep. The trucks are open, but with a cover, and many seats with a good floor! Although anyone staying at the park can go for the night drive, it was just our group that went. Fiona and John did the spotting while Richard, the usual spotter did the driving. Each night drive has different attractions. This one didn't disappoint. It started with no sightings for quite a while, but we ended with a great view of a Distaunts Spiny Agama lizard, a fox, several Klipspringer antelope, two scorpions. Just before the end, we had two water covered stretches of water. In the first, a porcupine was startled and waded across the water in front of us trotting up to the dry area and disappearing in the bushes. It was a great look at the fellow, but only really clear for his behind. In the second, we saw splashing of two African Clawless otters on the side - the smaller one (a young one?) was curious enough to hesitate and look at us, so we could get an amazing picture, showing his clawless paws and cute little head. The night drives can be full of surprises.

#### 21 November, Monday, Augrabies Falls Park

Not to miss anything, the day started with an early morning drive around the park to see what we could see, followed by a mid-day brunch, unscheduled time, a late afternoon drive, dinner, and the night drive.

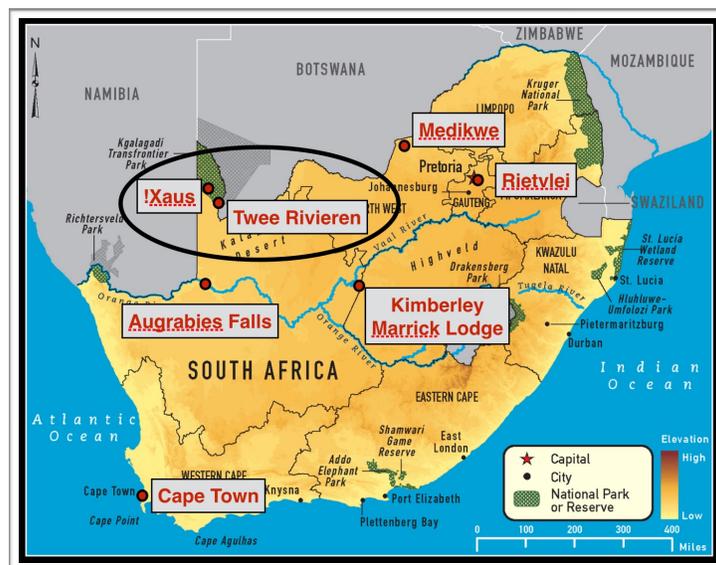
The morning drive made it abundantly clear that the Rock Hyrax are everywhere. Their cute little heads pop up behind the rocks, either identifiable by a short quick movement or poking up from behind a rock to check us out. They pose on top of the rocks. They scamper around together. They are like giant guinea pigs, with longer legs, and fat round bodies. The rock hyrax seem to like both the massive rounded granite outcrops and the large eroded sandstone boulders. At one point, everyone was watching a large Black Eagle perched on top of a small outcrop, and a beautiful and massive Eland walked by on the lower part of the hillside. That's what happens with birders - Keep your eyes to the sky and something big walks by that you miss! A stop for tea, coffee, and rusk was further down the gorge from the rest camp - offering stunning views of the gorge and smaller water falls.

Although Augrabies Falls is in Precambrian metamorphosed granite, the granite is covered by younger (Mesozoic?) sandstone. Dark, presumably volcanic rocks also occur in other areas we drove through. The moon rock is an enormous dome of the granite near the starting point of the drives, not too far from the rest camp. The overlying sandstone is only at the base, so the dome stands boldly out. People climbing on top are just little dots seen from the road. In other areas, much of the unconformity between the sandstone above the granite below is evident from the enormous boulders of the sandstone sitting atop the granite, some which has been eroded into isolated boulders, and some which rolls off to be talus beneath the granite. As one gets further away from the granite of the Falls, the landscape becomes rough and hilly, with the dark (volcanic?) irregular rock with rough edges standing as long hills and isolated mounds

separated by valleys and more lush lowlands, quite a contrast to the smooth granite of the falls. The landscape is a feast for the eyes - variegated, rough, smooth, dark, light, grasses, a few trees - lots of textures.

One of the animals common to the Au-grabies Falls area is the Klipspringer, one of the smaller antelope that love the rocks. They mate for life and have absolutely adorable faces. The males sport short horns whereas the females have no horns. We can get great photos of them silhouetted against the sky, before they scamper off and turn to stare at us. They also walk on the tips of their hoofs. We had hoped to catch sight of the Mountain Zebra, but no luck today. Some other visitors to the park later told us if we had continued further north, we would have seen them.

The night drives have generally revealed the incredible diversity of animal life that transforms the hot day-time desert into a lively, sometimes loud, and totally different night-time desert. Not so tonight. There was hardly any life to be found. Both Joanna and I were seriously nodding off for most of the ride.



### Drive to Twee Rivieren and Rain! 22 November, Tuesday

Today began cloudy and stayed that way for the day. Rain is maybe not the correct technical term, because it didn't actually pour or even drizzle. Throughout the day, the windshield had droplets, and we could feel them when we were out of the car. Only occasionally did John need to use the wipers. This was virgo rain - the rain that looks serious just beneath the clouds (as fibrous gray streaks) but never hits the ground in these arid places. The overcast day meant no searing sun so the temperatures were actually quite pleasant.

This was another transit day, with many hours in the van. We departed Au-grabies at about 9:00. At our first rest-room stop, we had a chance to buy snacks. Then on to the large town (city?) of Uppington for fuel and another rest stop. The store at the gas stations was extremely well stocked - so we were treated to fresh grapes and fresh apricots after leaving the station.

We had a late lunch at Molopo Lodge, set back from the road. It was an eclectic place, with ostrich eggs everywhere - on strings wrapped around the porch posts, lining the garden, hanging in mobiles, used as lamps, and big bin of them stored on the porch. Large and very weathered, gnarled statues of various animals (giraffe, elephant, rhino) were around outside, as were several meter-high busts of bushmen. The lodge had old artifacts (including more sewing machines, porcupine quill lamps and the like). Hanging behind the reception area were many whips, of which the handles were made of the wood of a relative of the olive tree. The fellow managing the reception was cheerful and friendly - I think he's the one that told me that in these remote parts of South Africa, people had to be resourceful. To make the whip handles, the person had scavenged the treadle part of the sewing machine to make a lathe!

Another hour back in the van, and we arrived at Twee Rivieren, pronounced Tween Ree-Fear-en and which my computer keeps autocorrecting to Twin Riviera. The name means two rivers, because it is located at the junction of the Nossob and Aoub rivers. The Nossob river is the border between South Africa and Botswana. The Aoub (pronounce Eh-ub) River is to the west, entirely in South Africa, although it originates in Namibia. Both are dry, flat river beds, bordered by either iron-red vegetated sand dunes or rock cliffs of reddish/beige sandstone. We are only here for one night, then off to the interior Kalahari for two nights, then back here for another night before returning to Johannesburg.

The park is the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, so named because it includes and is jointly managed by both South Africa and Botswana. The booklet I purchased noted that Kgalagadi is the name of the original peoples for whom the name Kalahari derives. The "Kg" and subsequent "g" in the name are pronounced as very guttural "g", coming from the back of the throat. The two countries are very obvious at the entry to the park - the border between South Africa and Botswana is a serious looking barbed wire fence that runs up to the middle of the building with clear separate entries for South Africa and Botswana. Beyond the building, in the park, there is no fence separating the countries, so the animals can roam freely. Small white boxes along the river bed mark the border, and the road sometimes runs across the border, so we actually were technically in Botswana for some of the drives in the park!

This rest camp is outside of the main park (i.e., outside of the fences), meaning we can walk freely around without fear of the large predators. The cottages have thick, thatched roofs, two units to a cottage, and two rooms to each side. I took the "kitchen" room which had its own sink and faced east. Joanna took the other room, facing west, which had few windows because the thatched roof came down almost to the ground. There were separate rooms for the shower and toilet, and the sink was in the main room.

Our group took the night drive, where we saw the kangaroo-like spring hare (actually a rodent, but looks like a kangaroo rabbit), the Cape Hare, a Barn Owl, Spotted Eagle Owl, Bat-eared Fox, Black Back Jackal (laying down), and an African Wild cat. As on the other night drives, the spotter shines a bright light back and forth across the landscape, looking for eye shine - the bright reflection from mammal's eyes. The spring hare generally only shows one bright green reflection in its eye and is therefore easily identified (and just as easily ignored). Because of the hard, mineralized water in the lodge, it was hard to feel clean taking a shower. The water has a slippery feeling, so it seems as though one can't get the soap off.

**!Xaus Lodge** 23 November, Wednesday

Today is our 3-day adventure to !Xaus Lodge in the Kalahari, in the section of the park administered by the bushmen. The “!” is one of the made-up alphabet sounds for the clicks of the bushmen. The sound is not easy to explain - a “click” followed quickly by “khouse” where the “kh” is somewhat guttural. My tongue isn’t coordinated enough to do the click-Xaus in one continuous sound, and instead is two syllables. Most of us have a hard time with the click sounds.

To get to !Xaus Lodge, one drives ~60 km north along the road that follows the Auob River, where one meets the guide from the lodge. The drive is expected to take ~4 hours, not because the road is in bad shape, but because one goes slow to see the animals. Shortly after leaving Twee Rivieren, John pointed out a lioness sleeping under a tree. With the binocs, we could also see another lion with her, perhaps another female or a young male. The female occasionally lifted her head to look around, the other lion remained sleeping, and the grass obscured her/his head. Wow. A lion.

The river bed is teeming with life. Oryx (aka Gemsbok) were either walking or standing (under trees or near water holes). Springbok were abundant, sometimes singly, sometimes in herds of tens of animals. Wildebeest are also abundant, resting under the shade of the Acacia trees. Ostrich offered regular viewing. Surprise, about two hours after seeing the lioness, an odd looking silhouette beneath a tree revealed two cheetahs sleeping/resting. These cats were easier to see because the tree they were under didn’t have much grass around it to obscure them. Another long stop to watch them twitch a tail, lift a head, or just sleep in the rising temperatures of a hot day. Another half hour later, the big surprise was a male lion beneath a tree, also sleeping, though with his head up, so we could easily identify his silhouette and mane. The mane had much dark in it. At !Xaus lodge, the poster on lions of the Bushmen area revealed that this male was named Richard, born in 2006, so now ~10 years old. To the left of the tree was a large rib cage, i.e., the kill. John identified it as a zebra. We stopped for the usual gawking and many, many pictures. These big cats were just beautiful. How cool is that to get lions and cheetahs all in one day!

Among the many birds spotted were Belted Quillia, Spotted Thick-knees, Marshall Eagle, Gabar Goshawk, and a Black Winged Kite.

On the way to our rendezvous point with the !Xaus guide, we stopped at a museum/farm. The farm consists of a stone house restored as a museum of one of the original (Dutch?) farmers, along with several of the stone pens for the animals. The house sits on the rock outcrop well above the river bed. A borehole in the river bed now serves as the modern watering hole, replacing what would have originally been the well. In the farm house, one end was the bed; the other was the kitchen area - spartan and functional. A pied crow kept entertaining us with an amazing variety of sounds, though we didn’t reward him with any of our food.

After transfer, with all our luggage, to a four-wheel drive safari truck, we head southwest across the dunes for another 29 km to the lodge. Koos (pronounce Kwis, similar to Chris), was our Bushman guide/driver. The 29 km drive crosses 92 sand dunes, mostly very soft sand and very bumpy. The people sitting in the way back seat of the truck (Janelle and George) had the most extreme motion - the Kalahari massage, as Koos called it. The ride took about an hour. We saw

Tsamma melons across the flat areas between some of the dunes, lots of trees, grass, and of course, birds.

!Xaus means “heart” and the welcome we got from Anthony and Susan, the lodge managers, was warm. We arrived in the late afternoon, ~4:00 of a very hot day. The lodge is the main building - very open throughout, with a stunning view across a large salt pan. A man-made watering hole is at the base of the dune that the lodge is on, a long ways down. The !Xaus name comes from an indentation in the otherwise mostly round pan that makes the pan look heart-shaped. Nothing is growing in the pan, so its gray and white mottled color, with black animal tracks converging from all directions to the watering hole, is a stark contrast to the red-colored dunes with the mostly beige grasses and scattered trees and bushes.

This lodge is unusual in that there are no protective fences. The rooms are small cottages located to either side of the main lodge in a line, with a raised boardwalk connecting everything. No one is allowed to stray off the boardwalk or around the grounds of the lodge because one never knows when one will meet a large carnivore. Anthony told us the story of getting up early one day just after taking the job at the lodge and standing with his coffee looking at the salt pan. A hyena that had settled down just under the boardwalk to sleep for the day was disturbed by this interloper, gave a hyena yowl immediately below Anthony’s feet, and gave Anthony an adrenalin shock the likes of which he had never had before nor since.

Anthony explained that the bushman culture has awarded this part of the Khalagadi Park for their use, and they are the ones working at the lodge. Most of the bushmen have western ways now, but are working to preserve their original culture so it isn’t lost. Those who work at the lodge live at the lodge for a week at a time, then return to their homes offsite from the park to be with their families during time off.

Dinner is around a large table, one menu, on the deck, but beneath the roof overhang, overlooking the salt pan. Today was George’s Birthday, so we mustered our best voices to sing him Happy Birthday. The staff had not had enough time to make a cake and were most apologetic. The night drive was not particularly productive. The rains have not yet arrived, and so the animals have not moved from the river bed further east into the dunes. Except for the trees, there is not much green. What did stand out from the drive was the wind that just whipped up in an instant. The sky was clear with stars and the temperatures mild when poof, the wind just started blowing, from nothing to about 30 knots with higher gusts. The sand was blowing everywhere. Back at the room, the room was rattling with all the wind coming through the open screens. Joanna and I buttoned up a few of the windows to cut down the noise, but it was a noisy night.

The staff had left a bushman story on each of our beds when we returned, a very nice touch.

### **Walk at !Xaus Lodge** 24 November, Thursday, Thanksgiving

One of the high points of our stay at !Xaus Lodge is the morning walk, a stroll through the dunes around the lodge with Koos and one of the Bushmen, H’Aniboy, who was dressed in traditional Bush dress, i.e., only a loin cloth. While most of us wore long pants and our fleeces in the morning cold, H’Aniboy did not seem uncomfortable in his bare skin and bare feet. Koos described the many things to be seen and known about the dunes, the plants, and animals. He

started by pointing out the call of the Cape Turtle Dove, which he mimicked as being “work harder, work harder” in the morning, and “drink lager, drink lager” later in the day.

We learned about the different grasses that only grow in the lowlands between the dunes, such as the “sour” grass (phonetic), which can only be eaten when it is young, the Na’a grass, which is a source of moisture, another grass with a root that is cooked like a potato and is another source of moisture. Long Bushman grass is taller and only grows at the tops of the dunes. The Shephard Bush has berries that, when ripe are yellow and delicious (we tried some). The Tamma melons we saw on the way in are another source of moisture, the melon will last for about two years on the ground, providing moisture (animals know this, too). The Shephard Tree is so-named because the shepherds would use it for shade during the day. Koos dug up the root of the !Hop plant, maybe a foot long, and very skinny, and explained how it was ground up and prepared as a medicine for sickness.

While at the first stop of the walk, a young Cape Fox was curiously watching us from maybe 20 m away. He would sit and watch, then pop down into the den, then come back up and sit to observe. He was an adolescent, nearly full grown by his size, and very light in color. This was a much better look at him and his behavior than we’ve had on the night drives.

Another fascinating tree is the Camelthorn, which we had seen at Twee Rivieren. It stands reasonably tall and green in the desert - its roots extend ~120 m to water table. Koos showed us part of a root exposed in the dunes. Its gnarled form was much wider than what is exposed above ground, truly an ice-berg of a tree, where much more is below ground. In the dried river beds, water table is only 30-40 m down, so a big difference from the dunes.

Koos explained to us that the dunes are the Bushman’s newspaper. The Bushman can read the tracks to know what animals have passed in the night. He pointed out the beetle track that just ended where the beetle burrowed underground. There was old Brown Hyena scat that weathers white like chalk because of all the bones eaten. Who but our group of crazy birders/ mammalogists, and artists would get excited about hyena poop, and later in the day use it to draw sidewalk animals back at the lodge on the tiles. Koos also pointed out the trap-door spider hideout, in which the spider digs a burrow underground, but spins a web in the sand to hold it together as a trap door for entry and exit.

Near the end of the walk were the bleached bones of an Eland, left from a lion kill in 2012, less than 40 m from the boardwalk of the lodge. Another good reminder not to venture off the boardwalk.

From there, we walked down to the “village,” a display village about bushman life, where some of the bushman are dressed in traditional wear (mostly loin cloths for the men with jewelry, and colorful wraps for the women). They demonstrated their craft skills for using ostrich eggs, porcupine quills, and the skin of Springbok to make items that are for sale in the small enclosure called the shop. Shelley was using a hot stick (hot from fire) to drill holes in black seeds of the Camelthorn tree, another was using a hardwood drill with a great string device for rotating to drill holes in the Ostrich egg fragments. The skin of the Springbok was cut into very thin strips and rolled in one’s hands to form the string leather used to make the jewelry/crafts.

Four of the men finished the time there with a traditional dance, in which they made rhythmic movements with their feet (rattles on their ankles) and arms while moving in a circle. The

women sang and made the music for the dance. The rattles were the pods of the Camelthorn tree filled with small pebbles.

I later asked Koos to give me the names of the Bushmen at the village. Here they are phonetically:

Eesak - the eldest of the bushmen. His name means "porcupine" because, in order to win the heart of his wife, as a young man, he was challenged to bring back a porcupine. No one bothered to tell him the porcupine could be killed, so he managed to bring back a live porcupine, much to everyone's surprise. Hence he became known as Porcupine. He is one of the bushmen who still knows the click language and culture of the bushman before significant western influence.

Kalai - older woman, mother of the baby

Whoorah - baby

H'Aniboy - came with us on the morning walk

Shelley - drilling holes in the Camelthorn seeds (also works at the lodge)

Makai - one of the dancers, with the skin of the cow

Gavin - one of the craftsman and dancers (he made the necklace I purchased)

Habu - had rattles on his ankles for the dance

Koos - the most important (which I added when he said he didn't see his name on the list!).

While we had a day drive (and some interesting birds - Kori Bustard, Flycatcher Chat, Sociable weaver - and animals - black backed jackal at the water hole with the Oryx), the other highlight of our stay was the Sundowner sunset drive.

Earlier in the day, Koos had taken our orders for drink, so we set off to see another part of the desert. We drove down and along the salt pan once removed from the lodge, Loretta pan, only this pan is primarily fresh water, not salt. Loretta pan is named for the lady who farmed that part of the desert. The stop for drinks was at the far side of the pan where we had a panoramic view of the !Xaus lodge in the deep and rapidly fading sunlight. The colors got deeper as the sky turned a brilliant pink and yellow.

To make up for not having a birthday cake for George yesterday, the staff had cooked one today and sent it along. By the time we opened the container, the icing was totally melted and pooled along the edges. We cut the cake and toasted George (again) as well as wished everyone a Happy Thanksgiving. The binocular tree was a new discovery. The temperature was cooling and very comfortable.

At the end of the day, we felt we had eaten like Thanksgiving, especially the amazing cheese cake for dessert (not that any of us needed a dessert after George's sundowner cake).

What a bookend day!

### **Back to Twee Rivieren** 25 November, Friday

I don't think any of us thought we could surpass yesterday for a memorable experience. The night made us change our minds. Some time in the wee hours of the morning, hyena calls woke me up. From the deck overlooking the salt pan, I could see Gwen and George were already awake (using their headlamps to scan across the dune) and another headlamp was at work from a cabin in the other direction (Janell?). The calls were loud and close, first towards the pan,

then on the other side. After some time when they were louder, then further away, they then became really loud. Joanna and I walked out to the boardwalk side (where most every else seemed to already be) and at least five hyenas ran by in the pre-dawn light, probably no more than 10 m from where we were standing. They were big, muscular animals. Their calls (eeeeee-up, with the "up" being higher note and higher emphasis) was enough to send shivers up one's spine at such close range. Awesome. An incredible experience with only my memory to relive it - no pictures at this hour of the day. And, an appreciation for what Anthony had gone through.

We went back to sleep, however briefly, before getting up to greet the day. John wanted to take a 6:00 a.m. walk back to see the fox we'd seen on yesterday's walk. All of us came (none of us want to miss anything). There were actually at least three foxes, two adolescent pups and a shy adult. The pups were more playful and inquisitive and provided some great photo opportunities. The adult, not so much. A Greater Kestrel silhouetted against the morning sun in a nearby tree also provided a great photo opportunity, although the lighting wasn't perfect.

Amazingly, Gwen found her contact lens in the sand between her room and the boardwalk. She had knocked it out when putting her camera to her eye the night before. Because the wind had blown so hard the previous night, she hadn't tried to look, with so much swirling sand. And the contact would be much harder to find in the day, without the help of the head light to show its shine. However, she and George were on their hands and knees looking, she spotted a glint, and there it was, seemingly undamaged, and perfectly wearable after a good cleaning. There's some luck to that find!

After settling our drink bills, our store purchase, and our tips, we headed back for the Kalahari massage trip back to our van. Nothing too eventful, and no stopping for pictures. I sat in the way back of the truck - and got the full bounce effect. I left Koos one of my doo-dahs as a thank you.

Back on the road, we actually headed north for two waterholes to see if there might be sign of Cheetahs. Another couple at !Xaus Lodge had seen a cheetah kill near there, a mother with three cubs. It is apparently very unusual for that many cubs to survive, and these were larger sub-adult cubs, so clearly a good mother. No such luck, we didn't see the cheetahs, and after the rest stop (when I put down and forgot the bottom zipped part of my pants), we headed back to Twee Rivieren for another night.

On the drive back, we had the usual large animals (giraffe, wildebeest, springbok) and many birds (Pygmy falcon, an pair of ostrich with babies, a Black Chested Snake Eagle, and others). The road runs along the river bed, and gets graded every few days, so is depressed in the landscape - hard to drive off the road, even when distracted by the animal life. The trip back afforded great views of the dunes encroaching to the top of the sandstone/limestone cliffs along the sides of the river bed.

Back at Twee Rivieren, Joanna and I took a short hike around the grounds. A talkative couple at one of the cabins pointed out a Pygmy Pearl Spotted Owl in the tree - hard to see because of the dense foliage, but it had beautiful eyes. On the night drive, we were treated to good looks at a zorilla (pole cat), a wild cat, and a genet running along parallel to the truck.

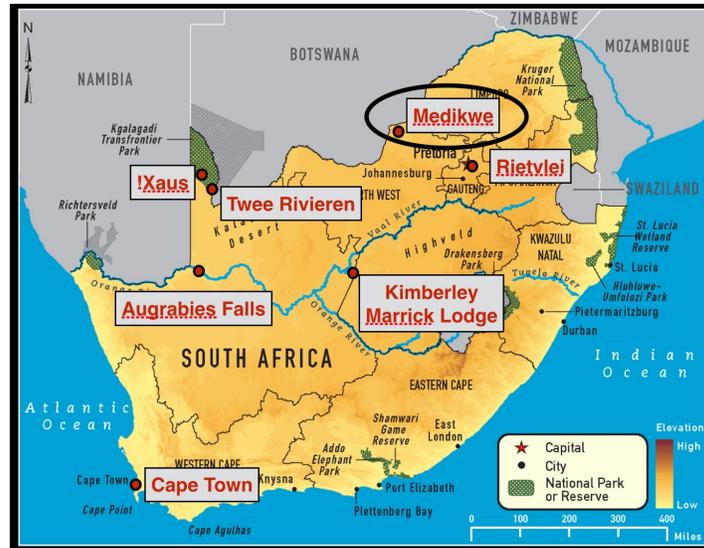
**Back to Uppington and Johannesburg** 26 November, Saturday

A sad day - the Kalahari part of our trip ends with the flight back to Johannesburg from Uppington, and we need to bid goodbye to our incredibly knowledgeable and personable guide, John. We made a pit stop back at the same lodge, Molopo, where we had previously had lunch on our way up to the Transfrontier Park. At Uppington, we had our long goodbyes to John with many many thanks for all he'd done, all he'd shown us, and all he'd taught us. I managed to get a recommendation for good South African music. He recommended Johnny Clegg.

The hustle and bustle at Johannesburg airport was a bit of a transition to stomach, but we were soon back at Outlook Lodge with a warm welcome from Francois. Cause for celebration - Janell's box of lost books was sitting on the counter when we came in. She promptly started signing them for each of us. How generous she is. After our incredible hyena experience of the previous morning, I chose Pindalu, about the young hyena who learns to like himself despite what other animals say about him. Awesome story. Joanna chose Stella Luna, her all time favorite about bats.

Janell and Fiona are continuing the trip after the rest of us leave, in order to find the fruit bat upon which Stella Luna is based. They'll travel to Krueger National Park and environs to find the bats (and other animals that happen to be there). They'll leave some of Janell's books at Park education centers for the children to learn from, as well as leaving some with groups involved in bat conservation and education in South Africa. It's the 25th publication year for Stella Luna - and a special 25th anniversary edition may be issued. Pretty cool.

To finish the day, Joanna, Gwen, George, and I took a walk to the Korsman Nature Conservancy wetlands, a few blocks from Outlook Lodge. A large fence keeps people, dogs, and presumably cats out of the sanctuary, so it looks pristine and hosts an incredible array of wetland birds, which we didn't see too much of in the desert - African Spoonbill (I could recognize that one), Southern Red Bishop (which I could also now recognize!), Greater Flamingo (larger with the pink beak), Lesser Flamingo (smaller with the dark beak), and the three Ibis - Hadada, Glossy, and Sacred. I liked the Moor Hen, too.



### To Madikwe Game Reserve 27 November, Sunday

Breakfast at Outlook Lodge was typical of our meals. A starter of fruit, yogurt, granola, cheese and bread was followed by eggs cooked however you wanted, stewed tomato, and toast. Big and filling, enough to get us through the day on the 5+ hour drive to Madikwe. Madikwe is the last of the places we're staying, for three nights to hopefully see the big 5, elephants and leopards being the two of the big 5 we have yet to see (the others being rhino, lion, and buffalo). Madikwe is considered to be on the boundary between grassland Savanna and treed Bushveld, so a variety of open space, low bushes and thicker tree growth.

Natasha, our driver, was great - full of information about South Africa, about the drive, about the weather, about all sorts of things. She pointed out Diamond Hill, the last diamond mine in South Africa that De Beers finally sold, i.e., no longer doing diamonds in South Africa. The company that purchased the mine subsequently found a stunning large green diamond, the value of which was enough to pay off the purchase price of the mine! This diamond now supposedly is safe with the crown jewels of England. Gold is now primarily mined through the tailings. The mines are more than 3 miles down, and too deep to be economical. Platinum is the next big commodity, and we drove through a region called Platinum Reef, notable for huge tailings and structures for the platinum mining. One of the only metals that South Africa does not have is copper.

We learned that the provinces of South Africa are like states, but are tribal in their make up. Each state has different tribal origins, and many are using schools to now teach English, the native tribal language, and lastly Afrikans. Afrikans may be language that dies in the future. And, outside of Johannesburg, using the rest rooms costs 2 rand (all of about a quarter).

When we finally reached Madikwe, we discovered the signage to our lodge was less than perfect. Once around the block, we ended up at the airfield, and at a gate that ended up being south of the one we first entered. But, we'd seen lots of elephants. We then returned to our original gate to try again. The map we were given was laughable. We ended up taking a game road, with lots of bumps, and a certain rock that left the van high and dry. Getting the folks in the

middle seat out allowed enough clearance for Natasha to move the van off the rock. Obviously it wasn't the correct road, but we were all happy to reach Motswiri Lodge and a welcome that included cold wash cloths to wipe off the dirt from the drive.

Our room here (#5) is, like others on the trip, a separate cottage. The Lodge grounds are isolated by barbed wire, and therefore safe to walk around. The deck of our room extends over the wire and into the Reserve, with a path in front of us, and a partial view of the watering hole in front of the main lodge. Our twin beds are encased in mosquito netting. There are two sinks, a separate water closet (that stank despite the staff's best efforts to deodorize it with chlorox). Best of all, the shower was an outdoor one on a patio looking into the reserve, with only the electric fence separating you in the buff from potential large animals.

The night drive is actually a sundown drive here, from 4:30 to 7:30-8:00, with a stop for a drink. Before leaving, the chef came out in his white coat to ask our preference for the main meal, usually vegetarian or meat options. Our guide, Andre, was a cheerful sort, with an interest in birds, though I'm not sure he was used to having a group of bird enthusiasts with sharp spotting eyes. The mother and daughter, guests from Belgium, had one desire on the trip, to see a male lion. Our goals were much more diverse - wild dogs, black rhino, leopard, and hyena (as well as any birds that happen to be there).

We were rewarded right away with elephant and white rhino. The lone elephants are usually bulls, either old or young. Most of the lone elephants have broken tusks from fighting. Elephants can live to 65+ years, which means some of the males will spend many years on their own. At one of the watering holes where we stopped, they were spraying mud over their bodies, swinging their trunks in large arcs to reach most areas of their bodies. Two of the males walked towards each other face to face and intertwined their trunks, holding the pose for maybe a minute. Andre speculated that these elephants knew each other and may have come from the same family group. The trunk can hold ~50 l of water at one shot. An adult elephant can drink 150 l at a water hole stop.

Elephants have been incredibly successful at Madikwe - the reserve population target is about 700 elephants total, but now there are close the 1300. Their success is evident from the wide spread level height of all the bushes, browsed to more or less the same level by the elephants. Many of the bushes are either dead or of sparse vegetation. Elephant poaching is not so much a problem as rhino poaching here.

A little further on, we stopped to watch four white rhino eating, mostly ignoring us. This group consisted of a female, a young rhino, and two males, called a crash of rhinos. The white rhinos are generally social beasts, with the females staying in groups that wander amongst the different territories of the males. They grow to three tons. The black rhinos are more solitary, more skittish, and have an attitude - to either charge the truck or run. Black rhinos are also smaller and browse on leaves, not eating grass. The age of the young animals is approximated by size and horn. The horn appears at about 2 years, after which weaning begins because nursing is a problem with the horn. The baby in this group knelt on his/her knees at was obviously nursing for a while. The tragedy of the rhino is the poaching. The horn sells for \$60,000 per pound. The horn weighs about 2 kg. In Krueger Park, we were told a rhino a day is poached. At Madikwe, two were killed in the last two weeks. The math is pretty grim - at this rate rhinos in South Africa will be extinct within two to three years.

There was clear wariness and pecking order at the water hole where we watched the elephants and rhinos. The rhinos stood clear of the elephants and remained far away from them. The two kudus which came to drink were much more bold in where they went to drink (near the elephants) but much more cautious, pausing to look up and around frequently.

Further on we saw a Red Hartebeest, which turns out to be the fastest antelope of the lot, being able to run up to 75 km/hr. It was a short sunset stop. We were greeted back at the Lodge with hot wash cloths and glasses of sherry to warm us, though the temperatures were not that chilly.

### **Madikwe Game Reserve** 28 November, Monday

The morning drive at Madikwe is early, 5:00 - 8:00 a.m. That makes for a short night, with dinner not until 8:30, lasting until 9:30, back to the room or walk around, not to bed until 10:30 or 11:00, and up at 4:30 to be ready for a 5:00 departure. The flip side is a long break from after breakfast to lunch at 2:00 and the sundown drive at 4:30.

We drove around seeing zebra and impala. Interestingly, Impala actually groom each other, and we saw them doing that in the morning light, nibbling each others backs.

Andre drove to where a lioness and her three cubs were chewing on the remains of a zebra carcass, the last bits of a kill from two days ago. Sergio, another guest in the truck, had seen the lions feeding yesterday, when it was still half a carcass. Today, there were only bones left. The mother and two of the cubs were gnawing the ribs, the third cub was gnawing on a part of the head. Andre estimated that the cubs were about 10 months old, two males and a female. They looked large, but still had spots and looked adolescent. At one point, one of the cubs flopped down in the shade panting, his belly distended and obviously very full. At another point, this cub got up to see what was going on with the head. The cub gnawing on the head made a stand, with all his might growling and tugging and eventually winning the stand off.

When we inquired, Andre reported that the father of the cubs had been killed in a fight with another male, and the lioness had left so that the cubs would not be killed by the new male. Young cubs are the most vulnerable to being killed, but these were still young enough to be targets. One of the reasons the male kills the cubs is that the female can come into estrus sooner than she would if continuing to nurse the cubs. The three cubs we saw needed a few more months before they would be big enough that the new male would probably not try to kill them (or so said Andre). At two years, the cubs begin to join in the hunt. The life expectancy of the male lion is about 10 years, that of the female about 15. We watched the lions for a long time.

A number of other fascinating sights awaited. We had been giving George grief about dung beetles, because every time he met a new person (e.g., Sergio, Andre), he told his dung beetle joke (What did the dung beetle say when he walked into the bar? Is this stool taken?). Then, someone spotted a dung beetle on the ground rolling a round dung ball up a short incline. The male makes the ball, finds a female (or she finds the ball?). He rolls it to a suitable place, where she will lay eggs inside of it, he will bury it, to await the new eggs to hatch and begin the cycle again. He valiantly rolled it up the incline, and then it rolled and rolled and rolled down the other side, with both beetles clinging on for the bouncy tumble. And off he went again, rolling haphazardly through the grass. We didn't wait to see the burial.

When we next saw zebra, Andre asked why the zebra has black stripes. It turns out to be a non-trivial question, with no known definitive answer, like lots of other strange things in nature. The three most likely answers are (1) that the black and white confuses the tse-tse fly, which seeks solid colors, protecting the zebra from the mosquito bites; (2) predators have trouble picking out an individual during the hunt; and (3) that the black and white stripes are alternately hotter and cooler in the sun, which sets up an airflow that helps cool the zebra. Interesting. It could be that all three are correct.

The variety of birds today was large - Monotonous Lark, Yellow Billed Kite, Go Away Bird, Lesser Striped Swallow, Lilac Breasted Roller (a beautiful colored bird, so named because of its rolling antics when it flies) and many others. George is approaching his goal of getting 200 species, and photographing as many of them as possible. I'm totally dependent on others for spotting and identification - how to feel out of one's league. But watching for birds has made me appreciate the richness of life in one spot, and how to start seeing that richness when one stops to look.

The afternoon drive held more surprises. While seeing a white rhinoceros is a thrill, we've seen so many that they if there's something else, we might move on. But, Andre stopped to point out a particular white rhinoceros off the road, pointing out that this normally mind-its-own-business grazer was not to be disturbed. Its curled tail was a sign of stress. We kept driving.

Then Andre took us to another pride of lionesses, this time with two young cubs. It looked like one adult female, several adolescent females, and the cubs. Most were sleeping or being lazy, other than one of the cubs, which really wanted to play, including with its mother's tail.

We were introduced to the yellow blooming tree, called a Weeping Wattle. Andre stopped at a bush along the road and pulled off a branch for us to touch its incredibly softness - a reliable bush to use as toilet paper if in a pinch. The leadwood tree, when some part of it (ash?) is mixed with milk is good for tooth paste. A leadwood tree is one of the ones that pokes through the deck at the main lodge.

During the afternoon drive, Andre listed some of the more interested groupings - a clash of rhino, a parade of elephants, a dazzle of zebra, a gaggle of baboons, a tower of giraffes when they are still, a journey of giraffes when they are moving. The closest relative of the elephant is the manatee and the dugong. The odd-toed animals are all related (zebra, rhino, tapirs). The even-toed animals, those with cloven hoofs (deer, antelope, cows) are most closely related to whales by their ankle and toe structures. Fascinating evolution, this.

Another incredible sight greeted us when we stopped to watch some white rhinos graze. A few elephants started coming in the distance, in the background, in a line. Then, they just kept coming and coming, some at a trot, some large, some small. We interrupted our rhino watching to head to the nearby water hole that Andre was sure they were headed towards. Someone said they counted 35 elephants total!

We have adopted Sergio as a family member of our group. He is a Spaniard living in Sweden working in IT for sustainability. And, he has a great sense of humor. He came to Motswiri from a conference in Johannesburg with only his iPhone for memories. We loaned him binoculars and made him into a budding birder, with promises of sending him pictures. Janell signed and gave

him one of her books. He could laugh with us about being a younger intruder infringing on George's status as head of the harem (ha!). He got our jokes about mandentification (a man assuming his identification of the birds - or animals - was correct when there were other experts like those in our group); mansplaining (ditto on explanations); manterruption (ditto on interruptions) and manspreading (which Dawn enlightened us as being when a particularly overweight man takes up two seats on the NY subway system).

Joanna and I had gone back to our room after dinner when we heard that a leopard was around drinking at the water hole. We scurried back to get the best view of the water hole at the lodge, where one of the staff said he expected it to come back because the lights from spotting and taking pictures had probably scared it off. Sure enough, it reappeared shortly thereafter for another drink - not long, but enough to see its shape, and when the staff shown the flashlight, to see its clear muscular body and spots. Wow, a leopard. An excellent end to an excellent day.

### **29 November, Tuesday Madikwe Reserve, continued.**

The morning is clearly an excellent time to see birds. In addition to many of the birds we've already seen, we saw a Black Throated Canary, more of the Cape Sparrow with its iridescent colors, a Purple Roller, a Pied Barber, a yellow Hornbill, and the beautiful Blue Waxbill taking a bath at one of the bird baths at the lodge. Animals for the morning were a giraffe at sunrise, the hyena we saw in the distance which holed up in the culvert under the airport runway, a fleeting view of the slender mongoose, and warthog.

Because of new guests, Zede (pronounced Zah-ee Dah) - the manager of the lodge, was the driver for our group while Andre took the other guests. Fiona had requested that we leave later, 5:00-ish, and stay out later, maybe to 8:30 or 9:00 to see more of the night animals. The Park is officially closed at 9:00, so that's a drop dead time to be back at the lodge. It was immediately evident that Zede had experience and love of animals in the reserve. He spotted so much more along the road, especially in the birds, and didn't try to second guess Fiona's, George's, or Gwen's identifications. He had his iPad and bird App and would look it up and discuss (and he was rarely wrong). He even would play some of the calls of particular birds to to entice them closer.

We had two sightings of note. First was the wild dogs. These are amongst the most endangered species in the Reserve. It's a single pack of 14 individuals. There are about 450 remaining wild dogs in South Africa, so these 14 represent a significant enough part of the total population. Park rules are that only three vehicles can watch any of the animals at a time, and we were number three in the waiting line, driving around near the area, watching for other birds and animals until we could be cleared to see the dogs. Wow. These animals are hard to see. They are all different patterns of gray and blue and tan or white blotches, which makes them virtually impossible to see when they are laying in the grasses under the filtered sunlight of the trees. Like so many other animals late in the day, they were just sleeping when we got there - either individually or in several different groups, tails twitching, the occasional head lifting to look around. After the other vehicle that was there left, we moved around for a better view. We were only several feet from the closest animals.

Without warning, one of the dogs jumped up and gave its high-pitched barking sound, and several others jumped up. Like howling coyotes from home, the ones that were up kept vocalizing and started running around, playing, jumping, talking, running on either side of the

truck, oblivious of us. This kept up for a short time, as other of the dogs joined in. What a scene, to be a fly on the wall for the antics. Zede commented that these displays are part of the bonding rituals of the pack, keeping them together as a group. He knew that there were four adult males and only one adult female. The rest were adolescents, hence the playfulness.

We noticed one of the dogs seemed not to be moving quite right, but it and the others lay down again, so we couldn't really tell. Just as quickly, the pack then arose again, running around a bit and then taking off across the road in a purposeful manner. The dog that didn't seem to be moving quite right was definitely not moving correctly, and staggered towards the road, then totally collapsed. In a second, the rest of the dogs were around it whining. Some then took off, the ailing individual being still in the grass. The rest took off, sometimes looking back as if to encourage it to come. One of the larger dogs (adult?) walked over nudging it over and over. It too finally left, leaving the dog still in the grass.

Our thoughts as we drove off were whether the dog had rabies (though it wasn't foaming at the mouth and Zede said the dogs are inoculated against rabies as part of managing their endangered status). We also thought inbreeding and maybe a seizure. Or it could be suffering from a snake bite. But, of course we didn't know. The ecologist of the reserve had been called on the radio and would be coming to check out the dog. Some time later in the drive, Zede heard on the radio that another of the vehicles watching had seen the ailing individual jump up and run off in the direction of the pack with no obvious ill effects. That made us think of the video of the honey badger Sergio had shown us, in which the badger gets bitten by a cobra but still manages to kill it, then slowly falls down on its back, seemingly suffering the effects of the bite, then shortly gets up as if unaffected and proceeds to eat the cobra. Who knows?

The second sighting of note was of a large bull elephant. This one was strolling down the middle of the dirt road towards us as we were driving up the dirt road. Zede actually drove quite near it before stopping the truck and turning off the engine. Now, most of the elephants we've seen have been docile enough, mostly paying no attention to us. This one seemed to be doing the same, taking a few steps closer to us, then nonchalantly stepping to our left to pass us by. This guy was close, not exactly on the road, but not far off of it. In a few steps, his body was even with the length of the truck, he stopped, stared at us, flared his ears a few times, held his trunk up, and looked not too friendly. Dede immediately turned the engine on, which startled the elephant, and before he could do anything, we drove on ahead. Dawn, in the back seat, was convinced he was looking at her. I was on the left side just in front of her, and he sure looked like he had me singled out - not a good feeling. But, he then kept walking, we kept driving, and that was the end of it.

The water hole back at the lodge continues to be a source of wonder. Another elephant graced us with its presence at the Lodge, coming to the water hole for a drink, in broad daylight. The night brings out the frogs at the water hole. They make a racket, like a "sawing" sound. If an animal comes, they will go silent - which is the clue that an animal is there.

### **End of the Trip** 30 November, Wednesday

Hard to believe that we'll be headed back to Johannesburg and flights home today. We can savor our last morning at Madikwe - and savor we did. Joanna and I were up by 4:15 to be ready for our (last) morning drive. I went outside to do my stretching and heard nothing amiss,

but when Jo went out shortly thereafter to do her stretching, she came back in saying something large growled nearby.

We were the first to arrive at the main lodge at about 4:45, and immediately went to look at the water hole. In the growing grayness of the morning, something large was coming down one of the wider paths, in fact several somethings large. It was the pride of lions with three young lionesses, the adult female and the two small cubs coming for a drink. We had seen them the other day, mostly asleep on one of the afternoon safaris. They huddled pushing next to each other while crouched drinking, with one of the cubs safely in the middle. The other cub was behind the mother, but didn't seem interested in a drink. This pride was probably the source of the growl Jo heard!

The morning safari was in a new direction and ended up near the wetlands to the north of the lodges, in search of a final few birds for George. Early on, a spotted hyena crossed the road not too far in front of us, so we got a good look at it (better than the one huddled in the culvert beneath the airstrip). In the large animal department we saw Kudu, Giraffe, and White Rhino.

At the wetlands, an array of new animals was there. These particular wetlands are adjacent to one of the larger lodges, and are created by recycling of gray water from the lodge. Five crocodiles inhabit the pond - we actually saw two of them looking like logs near the shoreline. Among the birds were the lovely African Spoonbill, Whistling Duck, and Dieterich's Cuckoo. One of the last birds we spotted en route back to the lodge was the Red Billed Hoopoe, up in a tree at the base of one of the rocky hills in this part of the reserve.

The washcloths and breakfast awaiting us at the lodge were both welcome and sad - welcome for the reminder of a fabulous visit, and sad because it meant Natasha and the van to take us back to Johannesburg was coming imminently.

Madikwe certainly has been a high point of the trip - not only for seeing the elephants (the last of the Big Five to see), but because of the close looks at all the animals. The close looks are one of the major advantages of the private game reserves. Several of the local guides have noted that the large national parks (such as the Transfrontier, where we went, or Kruger, where we didn't go, don't allow off road driving). Both Andre and Zede would drive off road to get closer to an animal that we were watching (such as the wild dogs). Still, Madikwe has its rules, such as no more than three vehicles at a site at a time - which is good.

*This is now the trip of memories! South Africa is so much more than a place on a map; it's a place in my mind, full of life, sights, sounds, laughing, wonderful people, and awesome animals.*