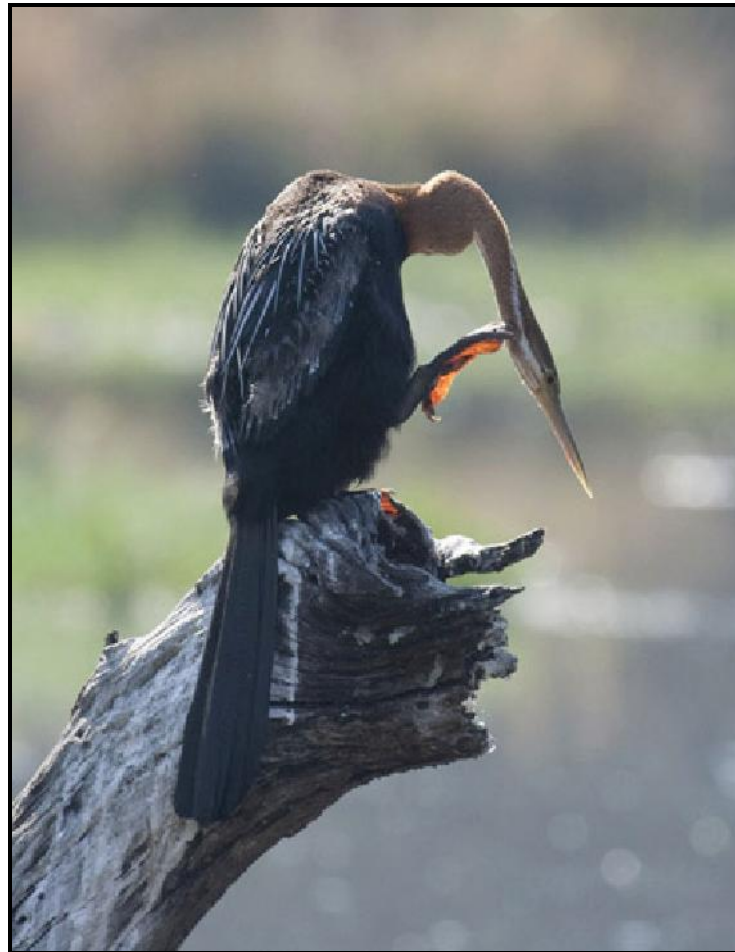


Blyde River Canyon and Greater Kruger National Park

20th – 26th June 2010

Trip Report



Above: African Darter, Lake Panic Bird Hide.

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Tour Summary

Tour Participants: Terry Lunn and Robert Bethel

Photo acknowledgements: Leon Marais

Temperature Range: 3 - 28 Degrees Celsius

Total Birds Seen: 150

Total Mammals Seen: 22

Bird of the Trip:

Trip Report Compiled By:
Leon Marais

Trip Breakdown

Day 1: Sunday, 20th June 2010 – Otter's Den

Route: White River to Otter's Den.

Weather: clear and mild.

Temperature range: 17 - 25°C.

Day 2: Monday, 21st June 2010 – Mohlabetsi Safari Lodge

Route: Otter's Den to Balule Nature Reserve via the Abel Erasmus Pass.

Weather: cold to start warming up during the day, clear sky.

Temperature range: 3 - 26°C.

Day 3: Tuesday, 22nd June 2010 ~ Mohlabetsi Safari Lodge

Route: Mohlabetsi to Kruger National Park via Orpen Gate.

Weather: cold to start warming up during the day, clear sky.

Temperature range: 5 - 27°C.

Day 4: Wednesday, 23rd June 2010 ~ Nkorho Bush Lodge

Route: Morning birding at Mohlabetsi; Sabi Sand Game Reserve via the Blydepoort Dam.

Weather: cold to start warming up during the day, clear sky.

Temperature range: 6 - 27°C.

Day 5: Thursday, 24th June 2010 ~ Nkorho Bush Lodge

Route: Nkorho to Kruger National Park via Orpen Gate.

Weather: cold to start warming up during the day, clear sky.

Temperature range: 6 - 28°C.

Day 6: Friday, 25th June 2010 ~ Nkorho Bush Lodge

Route: Nkorho to Hazyview; Kruger National Park via Phabeni Gate.

Weather: cold to start warming up during the day, clear sky.

Temperature range: 6 - 28°C.

Day 7: Saturday, 26th June 2010 ~ Gecko Lodge, Hazyview

Route: Hazyview to Kruger / Mpumalanga International Airport.

Weather: cold to start warming up during the day, clear sky.

Temperature range: 4 - 26°C.

DAILY REPORT

Day 1: Sunday, 20th June 2010 – Otter's Den

I met up with Terry and Robert at Kruger / Mpumalanga International Airport amid a throng of eager Italian and New Zealand soccer fans and soon we had the vehicle loaded and were on our way northwards via the R40 to Otter's Den on the Blyde River. We had a refreshment stop en-route and also pulled over near the Moholoholo Animal Rehabilitation centre where a vulture restaurant attracts scavenging birds and we recorded Cape Vulture and Marabou Stork as some of the first birds of the trip (Cattle Egret, Long-crested Eagle and African Hawk Eagle being the first three to be exact). We arrived at Otter's Den in the mid-afternoon and recorded Collared Sunbird while ferrying our things across the suspension bridge over the Blyde River. Shortly afterwards, while Terry and Robert were having a refreshing beer, I spotted a male African Finfoot from the bridge and called them over for a look at this elusive and sought-after species. Later on we went for a walk in the riverine forest but it was rather unproductive, with only fleeting glimpses of Sombre Greenbul, Green-backed Cameroptera, Southern Boubou and Black-backed Puffback. We then had some time to relax in our rooms before dinner. After dark the forest came alive with the duetting calls of African Wood Owls and the wail of Thick-tailed Bushbabies and we were treated to a view of a pair of Wood Owls in the large tree in front of the lodge.

Bird of the Day: Long-crested Eagle

Day 2: Monday, 21st June 2010 – Mohlabetsi Safari Lodge

After a cold night we met up at around 7:00 AM for a birding walk before breakfast. The forested section heading downstream from the lodge was once again rather quite in terms of birds but

when we emerged into the sun in the open areas adjacent to the forest we started to rack up the birds in quick succession. Species recorded included Brown-hooded Kingfisher, Speckled and Red-faced Mousebirds, Black-collared Barbet, Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird, Brown-backed Honeybird, Black-headed Oriole, White-throated Robin-Chat, Yellow-breasted Apalis, Long-billed Crombec, Yellow-throated Longclaw, Blue Waxbill, Cape White-eye, Spectacled Weaver, Red-billed Quelea, White-winged Widowbird (non-breeding plumage), African and Red-billed Firefinches



and others. With the day warming up nicely after the cold start we headed back for a wonderful breakfast at Otter's Den and then packed, trekked back across the suspension bridge and headed on up the Abel Erasmus Pass to meet up with Michael, the falcon man, who pointed out the male Taita Falcon high up on the cliff face. Other birds seen at the stop were Cape Vulture, Mocking Cliff-Chat, Red-winged Starling and Rock Martin. After viewing the falcon we headed back down the pass, through the town of Hoedspruit and on to Mohlabetsi Safari Lodge in the Balule Nature Reserve. After arriving we had lunch and then Terry and Robert elected to spend the afternoon in camp, birding and watching the soccer on TV. In the evening we met up and had a great dinner around the open fire while making plans for some intense birding the following day. Other species recorded for the day included some typical 'bushveld' birds such as Southern White-crowned Shrike, Lilac-breasted Roller, Burchell's Starling, Red-billed, African Grey and Southern Yellow-billed Hornbills, Helmeted Guineafowl and others.

Bird of the Day: Black-collared Barbet.

Day 3: Tuesday, 22nd June 2010 ~ Mohlalabetsi Safari Lodge

In order to maximise the birding we decided to head into the Kruger National Park via Orpen Gate for a day of birding. We arrived at the gate as the sun was breaking over the eastern horizon and were soon birding our way through the vast Kruger National Park. We took the long dirt road route via Talamati Bush Camp to the Muzandzeni Picnic Site where we had some coffee and breakfast before continuing on to Satara Rest Camp for lunch. Birds recorded for the day included Tawny and Martial Eagles, Bateleur, Brown Snake-Eagle, White-backed and Lappet-faced Vultures, Crested and Natal Francolins, Swainson's Spurfowl, Red-crested Korhaan, Double-banded Sandgrouse, African Green Pigeon, Brown-headed Parrot, Burchell's Coucal, Pearl-spotted Owlet, Striped Kingfisher, Little Bee-eater, Crested Barbet, Sabota Lark, Arrow-marked Babbler, African Stonechat, White-browed Scrub-Robin, Magpie Shrike, Brubru, Red-billed Oxpecker, Golden-breasted Bunting and many others. Animals however were rather scarce in these broad-leaved areas and we only managed to record one old buffalo bull and an elephant (in addition to the usual plethora of herbivores such as Giraffe, Impala, Burchell's Zebra and others). After a late lunch at Satara we headed back to camp and arrived in the late afternoon, with time to unwind before dinner around the fire once again. Bird of the Day: Crested Barbet (above right in photograph).



Day 4: Wednesday, 23rd June 2010 ~ Nkorho Bush Lodge

Our morning activity at Mohlalabetsi consisted of a dedicated birding drive in an open Land Rover with lodge manager Tony Williamson. We headed out early under cool and fresh conditions and spent the next three and a half hours driving around slowly and recorded species such as Purple Roller, Green Wood-hoopoe, Common Scimitarbill, African Hoopoe, Namaqua Dove, Fiscal Flycatcher (a first record of this species on the property for Tony), Marico Flycatcher, Pale Flycatcher, Southern Black Flycatcher, Cardinal and Bearded Woodpecker, Emerald-spotted Wood Dove, Southern Black Tit, Red-billed Buffalo Weaver and others. We had a wonderful coffee stop with the entire northern arm of the Drakensberg lying crystal clear to the south-west and the sun providing a nice warm glow. We then headed back to the lodge for a hearty breakfast and then got ready to depart for our next port-of-call in the Sabie Sand Game Reserve. We left in the late morning and took a detour via the Blydepoort Dam, spotting a female African Finfoot on one of the river crossings. Bird-wise it was quiet however and we headed on for a lunch stop at a small pub near Klaserie before heading on to the lodge. We arrived in the late afternoon and had time to relax and enjoy the peaceful surrounds, with a quartet of Black-backed Jackals baying across the clearing in front of camp as the light began to fade, and later on met up at the bar for a drink before dinner in the boma around a roaring log fire.



Bird of the Day: Purple Roller (above right in photograph).

Day 5: Thursday, 24th June 2010 ~ Nkorho Bush Lodge

We made plans for an early departure from Nkorho on another day trip into Kruger, and the pre-dawn darkness saw us loaded up and on our way to Orpen Gate. This time we headed straight in

to Satara, seeing a Tawny Eagle and African Hawk-Eagle in a tree next to the road and a male Cheetah not long afterwards before arriving in camp for a bite to eat. We then headed on to the dry plains to the north-east of camp. New birds seen included Black Crake, African Mourning Dove, African Scops Owl, Fiery-necked Nightjar, Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark, Burnt-necked Eremomela, Desert Cisticola, African Pipit, Wattled Starling, Cape Glossy Starling, Green-winged Pytilia, Spurwing Goose and others. At Gudzani Dam we saw large pods of Hippopotami sunning themselves on the mud banks side by side with large Nile Crocodiles, several Elephant bulls and a single Lioness. We road back along the Nwanetsi creek produced several herds of Elephant and a single Spotted Hyena who came tearing across the road in front of us, the reason for his haste not clear to us. Once again we arrived back at camp in the late afternoon and had it to ourselves while the other guests were out on safari. With slightly warmer evenings we enjoyed a superb dinner around the fire before retiring in anticipation of our final full day of birding (and a good one it was to be).

Bird of the Day: African Hawk-Eagle

Day 6: Friday, 25th June 2010 ~ Nkorho Bush Lodge

Once again we were up early and left the Sabi Sand Game Reserve with all our luggage and drove on to Hazyview, where we dropped off the trailer and luggage and promptly headed into the



Kruger National Park via Phabeni Gate. The habitat here is slightly different to that we'd explored around Satara and we hoped to rack up a last few species for the final day of the tour. We birded our way eastwards towards Skukuza, stopping off at Nyamundwa Dam where we recorded our first water birds of the tour including White-breasted Cormorant, African Darter, Grey Heron, Pied Kingfisher and African Spoonbill. Later on we stopped off at the Lake Panic bird hide, which was very productive as usual. New species seen and photographed included African Jacana, Purple, Grey and Goliath Herons, Pied Kingfisher, African Darter, Water Thick-knee and several Hippopotami. With stomachs rumbling we headed on to the Skukuza Gold Club for breakfast, where we saw species such as Scarlet-chested Sunbird, Ashy Flycatcher, White-fronted Bee-eater, Black Crake, African Jacana, Golden-tailed Woodpecker

and others while we waited for our meal. Afterwards we took a short drive along the Sabie River before turning around and heading back out via Phabeni Gate and on to Gecko Lodge in Hazyview to unwind a bit before dinner. New raptors for the day included Dark-chanting Goshawk, Lizard Buzzard and Gabar Goshawk.

Bird of the Day: White-fronted Bee-eater (above left in photograph).

Day 7: Saturday, 36th June 2010 ~ Gecko Lodge, Hazyview

As Terry and Robert had an early flight out of KMIA we didn't have much time for birding on this last morning (though there was a Giant Kingfisher perched over a small pond near the parking lot) and after packing the vehicle and having breakfast we left and drove straight on to the airport where they caught a flight on to Bloemfontein for one of the WC Soccer matches.

Note:

The species mentioned in the report are only some of the species seen at each locality. Please refer to detailed checklists at end of the report for all species seen on this specific tour.

Bird List

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME
55	White-breasted Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax lucidus</i>
60	African Darter	<i>Anhinga rufa</i>
62	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
64	Goliath Heron	<i>Ardea goliath</i>
65	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
71	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
74	Green-backed Heron	<i>Butorides striatus</i>
81	Hamerkop	<i>Scopus umbretta</i>
89	Marabou Stork	<i>Leptoptilos crumeniferus</i>
90	Yellow-billed Stork	<i>Mycteria ibis</i>
94	Hadedda Ibis	<i>Bostrychia ha gedash</i>
95	African Spoonbill	<i>Platalea alba</i>
102	Egyptian Goose	<i>Alopochen aegypti acus</i>
116	Spur-winged Goose	<i>Plectropterus gambensis</i>
121	Hooded Vulture	<i>Necrosyrtes monachus</i>
122	Cape Vulture (E)	<i>Gyps coprotheres</i>
123	White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps africanus</i>
124	Lappet-faced Vulture	<i>Torgos tracheliotus</i>
127	Black-shouldered Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>
132	Tawny Eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>
137	African Hawk-Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>
139	Long-crested Eagle	<i>Lophaetus occipitalis</i>
140	Martial Eagle	<i>Polemaetus bellicosus</i>
142	Brown Snake-Eagle	<i>Circaetus cinereus</i>
146	Bateleur	<i>Terathopius ecaudatus</i>
148	African Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus vocifer</i>
154	Lizard Buzzard	<i>Kaupifalco monogrammicus</i>
161	Gabari Goshawk	<i>Micronisus gabar</i>
163	Dark Chanting Goshawk	<i>Melierax metabates</i>
176	Taita Falcon	<i>Falco fasciatus</i>
189	Crested Francolin	<i>Peliperdix sephaena</i>
196	Natal Francolin (NE)	<i>Pternistes natalensis</i>
199	Swainson's Spurfowl (NE)	<i>Pternistes swainsonii</i>
203	Helmeted Guineafowl	<i>Numida meleagris</i>
213	Black Crake	<i>Amaurornis flavirostris</i>
229	African Finfoot	<i>Podiceps negalensis</i>
237	Red-crested Korhaan	<i>Eupodotis ruficrista</i>
240	African Jacana	<i>Actophilornis africanus</i>
249	Three-banded Plover	<i>Charadrius tricollaris</i>
255	Crowned Lapwing	<i>Vanellus coronatus</i>
258	Blacksmith Lapwing	<i>Vanellus armatus</i>
298	Water Thick-Knee	<i>Burhinus vermiculatus</i>
347	Double-banded Sandgrouse (NE)	<i>Pterocles bicinctus</i>
348	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>
353	African Mourning Dove	<i>Streptopelia decipiens</i>
354	Cape Turtle-Dove	<i>Streptopelia capicola</i>

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME
355	Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>
356	Namaqua Dove	<i>Oena capensis</i>
358	Emerald-spotted Wood-Dove	<i>Turtur chalcospilos</i>
361	African Green-Pigeon	<i>Treron calva</i>
363	Brown-headed Parrot	<i>Poicephalus cryptoxanthus</i>
373	Grey Go-away-bird	<i>Corythaixoides concolor</i>
391a	Burchell's Coucal (NE)	<i>Centropus burchellii</i>
394	African Wood Owl	<i>Strix woodfordii</i>
396	African Scops-Owl	<i>Otus senegalensis</i>
398	Pearl-spotted Owl	<i>Glaucidium perlatum</i>
409	Fiery-necked Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus pectoralis</i>
421	African Palm Swift	<i>Cypsiurus parvus</i>
424	Speckled Mousebird	<i>Colius striatus</i>
426	Red-faced Mousebird	<i>Urocolius indicus</i>
428	Pied Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>
429	Giant Kingfisher	<i>Ceryle maxima</i>
435	Brown-hooded Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon albiventris</i>
437	Striped Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon chelicuti</i>
443	White-fronted Bee-eater	<i>Merops bullockoides</i>
444	Little Bee-eater	<i>Merops pusillus</i>
447	Lilac-breasted Roller	<i>Coracias caudata</i>
449	Purple Roller	<i>Coracias naevia</i>
451	African Hoopoe	<i>Upupa africana</i>
452	Green Wood-Hoopoe	<i>Phoeniculus purpureus</i>
454	Common Scimitarbill	<i>Rhinopomastus cyanomelas</i>
457	African Grey Hornbill	<i>Tockus nasutus</i>
458	Red-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus erythrorhynchus</i>
459	Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill	<i>Tockus leucomelas</i>
464	Black-collared Barbet	<i>Lybius torquatus</i>
470	Yellow-fronted Tinkerbird	<i>Pogoniulus chrysoconus</i>
473	Crested Barbet	<i>Trachyhonus vaillantii</i>
478	Brown-backed Honeybird	<i>Prodotiscus regulus</i>
483	Golden-tailed Woodpecker	<i>Campethera abingoni</i>
486	Cardinal Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicos fuscescens</i>
487	Bearded Woodpecker	<i>Dendropicos namaquus</i>
498	Sabota Lark (NE)	<i>Mirafra sabota</i>
515	Chestnut-backed Sparrowlark	<i>Eremopterix leucotis</i>
522	Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>
529	Rock Martin	<i>Hirundo fuligula</i>
533	Brown-throated Martin	<i>Riparia paludicola</i>
541	Fork-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>
545	Black-headed Oriole	<i>Oriolus larvatus</i>
548	Pied Crow	<i>Corvus albus</i>
554	Southern Black Tit	<i>Parus niger</i>
560	Arrow-marked Abbler	<i>Turdoides jardineii</i>
568	Dark-capped Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus barbatus</i>
572	Sombre Greenbul	<i>Andropadus imperator</i>
593	Mocking Cliff-Chat	<i>Thamnodon cineromegaleus</i>

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME
596	African Stone chat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>
602	White-throated Robin-Chat (E)	<i>Cossypha humeralis</i>
613	White-browed Scrub-Robin	<i>Erythropygia leucophris</i>
648	Yellow-breasted Apalis	<i>Apalis flavida</i>
651	Long-billed Crombec	<i>Sylvietta rufescens</i>
656	Burnt-necked Eremomela	<i>Eremomela usticollis</i>
657a	Green-backed Camaroptera	<i>Camaroptera brachyura</i>
665	Desert Cisticola	<i>Cisticola aridulus</i>
672	Rattling Cisticola	<i>Cisticola chiniana</i>
674	Red-faced Cisticola	<i>Cisticola erythrops</i>
683	Tawny-flanked Prinia	<i>Prinia subflava</i>
681	Ashy Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa caerulescens</i>
694	Southern Black Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis pammelaina</i>
695	Marico Flycatcher (NE)	<i>Melaenornis maricensis</i>
696	Pale Flycatcher	<i>Melaenornis pallidus</i>
698	Fiscal Flycatcher (E)	<i>Sigelus silens</i>
701	Chin-spot Batis	<i>Batis molitor</i>
711	African Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
716	African Pipit	<i>Anthus cinnamomeus</i>
728	Yellow-throated Longclaw	<i>Macronyx croceus</i>
732	Common Fiscal	<i>Lanius collaris</i>
735	Magpie Shrike	<i>Lanius souzai</i>
736	Southern Boubou (E)	<i>Laniarius ferrugineus</i>
740	Black-backed Puffback	<i>Dryoscopus cubla</i>
741	Brubru	<i>Nilaus afer</i>
744	Black-crowned Tchagra	<i>Tchagra senegalensis</i>
748	Orange-breasted Bush-Shrike	<i>Telophorus sulfureopectus</i>
753	White-crested Helmet-Shrike	<i>Prionops plumatus</i>
756	Stern White-crowned Shrike (NE)	<i>Eurocephalus anguitimens</i>
760	Wattled Starling	<i>Creatophora cinerea</i>
762	Burchell's Starling (NE)	<i>Lamprolanius australis</i>
764	Cape Glossy Starling	<i>Lamprolanius nitens</i>
765	Greater Blue-eared Starling	<i>Lamprolanius chalybeatus</i>
769	Red-winged Starling	<i>Onychognathus morio</i>
772	Red-billed Oxpecker	<i>Buphagus erythrorhynchus</i>
787	White-bellied Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia talatala</i>
791	Scarlet-chested Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia senegalensis</i>
792	Amethyst Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia amethystina</i>
793	Collared Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes collaris</i>
796	Cape White-eye (E)	<i>Zosterops pallidus</i>
798	Red-billed Buffalo-Weaver	<i>Bubalornis niger</i>
801	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
804	Southern Grey-headed Sparrow	<i>Passer diffusus</i>
810	Spectacled Weaver	<i>Ploceus ocularis</i>
811	Village Weaver	<i>Ploceus cucullatus</i>
815	Lesser Masked-Weaver	<i>Ploceus intermedius</i>
821	Red-billed Quelea	<i>Quelea quelea</i>
829	White-winged Widowbird	<i>Euplectes albonotatus</i>

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME
834	Green-winged Pytilia	<i>Pytilia melba</i>
840	African Firefinch	<i>Lagnostica rubricata</i>
842	Red-billed Firefinch	<i>Lagnostica senegalensis</i>
844	Blue Waxbill	<i>Uraeginthus angolensis</i>
846	Common Waxbill	<i>Estrilda astrild</i>
857	Bronze Mannikin	<i>Spermestes cucullatus</i>
869	Yellow-fronted Canary	<i>Serinus mozambicus</i>
884	Golden-breasted Bunting	<i>Emberiza flaviventris</i>

Mammal List

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME
1	Baboon, Chacma	<i>Papio ursinus</i>
2	Buffalo	<i>Syncerus caffer</i>
3	Cheetah	<i>Acinonyx jubatus</i>
4	Duiker, Common	<i>Sylvicapra grimmia</i>
5	Elephant, African	<i>Loxodonta africana</i>
6	Giraffe, Southern	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis</i>
7	Hare, Scrub	<i>Lepus saxatilis</i>
8	Hippopotamus	<i>Hippopotamus amphibius</i>
9	Hyaena, Spotted	<i>Crocuta crocuta</i>
10	Impala	<i>Aepyceros melampus</i>
11	Jackal, Black-backed	<i>Canis mesomelas</i>
12	Lion	<i>Panthera leo</i>
13	Mongoose, Dwarf	<i>Helogale parvula</i>
14	Mongoose, Slender	<i>Galerella sanguinea</i>
15	Monkey, Vervet	<i>Cercopithecus aethiops</i>
16	Nyala	<i>Tragelaphus angasi</i>
17	Squirrel, Tree	<i>Paraxerus cepapi</i>
18	Steenbok	<i>Raphicerus campestris</i>
19	Warthog	<i>Phacochoerus aethiopicus</i>
20	Waterbuck, Common	<i>Kobus ellipsiprymnus</i>
21	Wildebeest, Blue	<i>Connochaetes taurinus</i>
22	Zebra, Burchell's	<i>Equus burchelli</i>



Clockwise from top left : Fork-tailed Drongo; Lilac-breasted Roller; Cheetah; Southern Yellow-billed Hornbill