

Nambia and little bits of Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, July-August 2018

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In 1994, my wife Elke and I did our first joint trip to Namibia, spending 3 weeks mainly in the arid western parts of the country and seeing such goodies as Brown Hyena, Caracal, Black Mongoose, Honey Badger, 3 species of sengis, and Southern African Porcupine. In 2010, we made our first family trip to Africa to KwaZulu Natal, seeing much of the large game. So now we decided to return to Namibia with the family, with the aim of exploring some new areas and searching out the less easily seen species. Time and budget limited the trip to about 2½ weeks and after some deliberation, we settled on the following sites: Sesriem + Sossusvlei for the dunes; Walvisbay for Heaviside's Dolphin + *Welwitschia*; Erindi for African Wild Dog and the other game; Toko Lodge for the night drives, especially for Aardvark; Etosha only briefly for the amazing wildlife spectacle; Mahango for the Okavango specials (birds and mammals); and Victoria Falls for, well, the falls. This resulted in the following

Itinerary:

25.7: Left Zurich in the evening, arriving on

26.7.: am in Jo'burg, followed by a connecting flight to Windhoek where we picked up the rental car, did some grocery shopping, and fell into our beds at Arebusch Lodge on the southern outskirts of the city.

27.7.: Long drive to Desert Homestead Lodge at Sesriem.

28.7.: am: visit to Sossusvlei; pm: Cessna flight over the dunes, followed by a night drive back to the lodge, seeing some Bat-eared Foxes.

29.7.: Long drive to Walvisbay.

30.7.: am: boat tour in Walvisbay; pm: drive to the dunes south of the city.

31.7.: Long drive to Camp Elephant at Erindi via the *Welwitschia* plain; a short game drive in the evening.

1.8.: am: guided private game drive to look for African Wild Dog (very successful, also seeing Brown hyena, Honey Badger, etc.): pm: self-drive game drive.

2.8.: am: pre-dawn self-driven game drive, followed by more self-driving; pm: guided telemetry drive for Ground Pangolin (found deep underground... aarghhh).

3.8.: Long drive to Toko Lodge; night drive (8:30-10:30 pm; highlights being Serval, probable Small Spotted Cat, Springhares).

4.8.: R&R day at Toko Lodge; night drive (8:00-11:30 pm; the highlight being an Aardwolf but no Aardvark).

5.8.: am: Early departure for Etosha, spending the morning in the park, arriving early pm at Halali camp for the night; late pm: game drive around Halali.

6.8.: am: drive through Etosha to the eastern gate, followed by long drive to Rundu.

7.8.: am: leisurly departure, followed by short drive to Popa Falls; pm: floodplain loop in Mahango.

8.8.: am: floodplain and western loops in Mahango; pm: return to the western loop specifically to look for Roan (1 seen) and Sable (none); night drive (19:00-22:00; highlights being Aardvark, lots of Springhare, 3 African Wild Cats, Southern African Galago).

9.8.: am: Boat trip on Okavango River for otters (Spotted-necked seen), followed by drive to Katima Mulilo.

10.8.: Returned our rental car at KM airport, followed by a tedious transfer to Livingstone, Zambia, via Botswana (Chobe NP) and Zimbabwe (Zambesi NP).

11.8.: am: visit to the Zambian side of Victoria Falls; pm: helicopter flight over the falls.

12.8.: Flight from Livingstone to Jo'burg, followed by connection to Zurich, arriving

13.8.: in early am.

Some notes on the sites:

Sesriem: We stayed at the very nice Desert Homestead Lodge about 30 minutes south of Sesriem proper.

Walvisbay: We took the boat tour with Mola Mola and although we were successful in finding cetaceans, the whole trip was too touristy for us (hand feeding seals and pelicans, slurping oysters) and driving around all those moored ships in the harbour is hardly a nature experience.

Erindi: Great place, although not as natural as Etosha. We stayed at self-catering Camp Elephant rather than at the expensive lodge. One can do self-drive game drives in the northern third of the reserve, which gave us some good sightings (Hook-lipped Rhino with baby, Bat-eared Foxes, African Wild Cat, etc.). However, we also took two private game drives (as opposed to the general game drives where you are together with other tourists and get shown what the driver decides). On the first one, our target were the Wild Dogs, which we easily found, supplemented by Brown Hyena and Honey Badger. On the second one, we took a telemetry drive, with the aim of finding Ground Pangolin. For monitoring, recovering escaped animals, and for tracking them down for the guests, many animals at Erindi are equipped with radio collars. At the time of our visit, there were still 2 pangolins with radio collars (out of 5 originally collared) and we tracked down one of them, but it was deep in a warthog hole and had not come out when we had to leave at sunset. Our guide even climbed headfirst into the hole trying to glimpse it, but no luck. So I can say that I was 2 m above a pangolin... one of the most frustrating experiences I've had in mammal watching. Anyhow, if you are happy with counting radio-collared animals, Erindi is the place for pangolin. Give it 2-3 afternoons, and you should see it. Winter is the best time of the year because they often emerge in late afternoon. In summer, they also offer night drives at Erindi where they often see Aardvark and even Striped Polecat, but winter is too cold. However, Camp Elephant opens the gates at 6:00 am while dawn was around at 7:00, so one morning we took a pre-dawn drive around the lodge, finding an African Wild Cat.

Oh, and by the way, Erindi is on the market. For 130 million \$, you can get 700 km² choked full of wildlife (26 lions, 800 giraffe, 2 radio-collared pangolin, etc.), two lodges, several hundred employees, and lots of headaches.

Toko Lodge: The night drives were ok, but Aardvark played hard to get. We spent 6 hours on two night drives trying to find it without success. According to the local guides, they are hard to find when there is no moon and easy at full moon.

Rundu: We stayed at Tambuti Lodge on the outskirts of town, which was not too good for mammals, but the food was excellent.

Popa Falls: We stayed at Popa Falls Resort, which was ok but not too great, but they offer night drives into Mahango (19:00-22:00, actually inside the park 19:30-21:30). The drive was really quite good and they even used a red light for spotlighting.

Katima Mulilo: We stayed at Caprivi Riverside Lodge, which was beautiful, had excellent food and some mammals: Malbrouk Monkey on the grounds, Spotted-necked Otter in the river, and Greater Cane Rats in the marsh behind the lodge. The owners also said that sengis (which species?) occur and sometimes drown in the pool, but I did not see any (all drowned?). The marsh should also have some other interesting rodents.

Victoria Falls: We stayed at Victoria Waterfront Lodge, which was overpriced (but that seems to be epidemic at this site), slightly run down, and much too rowdy for our taste. However, they allowed rodent trapping and the lodge grounds had some artificial pools surrounded by dense vegetation and this is where I found Water Mongoose and Greater Bushbaby at night.

Rodents and bats:

I took 10 Sherman traps, with good overall success. Specifically, these were the trapping rates: Desert Homestead (5%, 1 species); Erindi (70%, 5 species; I closed the traps at 21:00 pm because they were already so full and because we left early in the mornings); Toko Lodge (60%, 3 species); Caprivi Riverfront (20%, 1 species); Victoria Waterfront (10%, 1 species). Trapping was not allowed at Etosha and Popa Falls.

I also took my new bat detector (Echo Meter Touch 2), which includes a beta version for South African bats and it worked really well. While of course I cannot vouch for the identifications, I purposefully did not restrict the list of potential species to those within the ranges of which we were, to see how many out-of-range identifications I would get and was surprised that about 80% of the suggested species were actually within their ranges. Whenever possible, I also tried to shine the lamp on the bats to see if size and flight patterns would fit with the identifications, and that mostly fit as well. Of course, there are many recordings that went unidentified, so there were even more species around and maybe these can be identified in the future.

I also took a mistnet, but often we were not allowed to put it up, or it was too late, or we had a night drive, or the location was not suitable. So I only ended up setting it up at Caprivi Riverfront, catching nothing.

General comments:

Overall, the trip was highly successful, although the pangolin still hurts and I would have liked to see Sable and Golden Mole. However, the schedule was quite tight and we were all very tired towards the end. Especially the long drives taxed the girls. With more time, it would have been great to include a night at Spitzkoppe, another night at Erindi, another night at Etosha, and perhaps a night at Mudumu NP. Although, knowing myself, I would probably have tried to go on even further afield to another park in Zambia...

Species list:

Bushveld Sengi (*Elephantulus intufi*): 1 at Toko Lodge.

Peter's Epauletted Fruit-bat (*Epomophorus crypturus*): Several flying around and feeding in trees at night at Popa Falls Resort.

Egyptian Slit-faced Bat (*Nycteris thebaica*): Bat-detected at Arebbusch Lodge in Windhoek.

Dent's Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophis denti*): 1 at Toko Lodge; bat-detected at Popa Falls Resort.

Lander's Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus landeri*): Bat-detected at Victoria Waterfront Lodge.

Hildebrandt's Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus hildebrandti*): Bat-detected at Victoria Waterfront Lodge.

Natal Long-fingered Bat (*Miniopterus natalensis*): Bat-detected at Victoria Waterfront Lodge.

Long-tailed Serotine Bat (*Eptesicus hottentotus*): Bat-detected at Arebbusch Lodge in Windhoek.

Cape Serotine Bat (*Neoromicia capensis*): Common everywhere except Walvisbay; nicely seen catching insects at the floodlights at the waterhole at Camp Elephant, Erindi.

Banana Bat (*Neoromicia nanus*): Bat-detected at Victoria Waterfront Lodge.

Rusty Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus rusticus*): Bat-detected at Popa Falls Resort.

African Yellow Bat (*Scotophilus dinganii*): Commonly bat-detected at Arebbusch Lodge, Toko Lodge, and Victoria Waterfront Lodge.

White-bellied House-Bat (*Scotophilus leucogaster*): Bat-detected at Popa Falls Resort.

Robert's Flat-headed Bat (*Sauromys petrophilus*): Bat-detected at Arebbusch Lodge, Desert Homestead Lodge, and Toko Lodge.

Egyptian Free-tailed Bat (*Tadarida aegyptiaca*): Common everywhere except Walvisbay.

Nigerian Free-tailed Bat (*Chaerophon nigeriae*): Bat-detected at Popa Falls Resort and Victoria Waterfront Lodge.

White-bellied Free-tailed Bat (*Mops niveiventer*): Bat-detected at Popa Falls Resort and Victoria Waterfront Lodge.

(Plus many unidentified bats seen and bat-detected...)

Chacma Baboon (*Papio ursinus*): A few near Windhoek, at Erindi, Toko Lodge, and Etosha, common around Victoria Falls.

Malbrouk Monkey (*Chlorocebus cynosurus*): 2 groups on the floodplain at Mahango; tame troops at Caprivi Riverfront Lodge and Victoria Waterfront Lodge.



Thick-tailed Greater Galago (*Otolemus crassicaudatus*): 1 in the dense trees around the ponds at Victoria Waterfront Lodge.

Southern Lesser Galago (*Galago moheli*): 1 at Popa Falls Resort; 2 during the night drive in Mahango.

Scrub Hare (*Lepus saxatilis*): A few in early morning and evening at Erindi and on night drives at Toko Lodge; common on night drive in Mahango.

Jameson's Red Rock Rabbit (*Pronolagus randensis*): 1 flushed at dawn on the rocky ridge above Toko Lodge when checking my rodent traps.

Southern African Ground Squirrel (*Xerus inauris*): A few at Erindi and Etosha.

Damara Ground Squirrel (*Xerus princeps*): 1 on rocky ground about 20 km NE of Toko Lodge on the road to Etosha.

Striped Tree Squirrel (*Funisciurus congicus*): Seen twice fleetingly at the bird feeders at Toko Lodge. The feeders were not being used and the squirrels were not as easy to see as I had expected from other trip reports.

Tree Squirrel (*Paraxerus cepapi*): Common at Halali Camp in Etosha; 1 at Caprivi Riverfront Lodge.

Southern African Springhare (*Pedetes capensis*): A few on both night drives at Toko Lodge; common on the night drive in Mahango.



Greater Cane Rat (*Thryonomys swinderianus*): 3-4 in the marsh behind Caprivi Riverfront Lodge.

Fat Mouse (*Steatomys pratensis*): 1 trapped at Erindi.

Gray Climbing Mouse (*Dendromus melanotis*): 1 trapped at Toko Lodge.

Cape Short-tailed Gerbil (*Desmodillus auricularis*): 1 trapped at Erindi.

Pygmy Hairy-footed Gerbil (*Gerbillurus paeba*): The small gerbils seen on the night drive at Toko Lodge were presumably this species.

Dune Hairy-footed Gerbil (*Gerbillurus tytonis*): 1 at night on the dunes south of Walvisbay.

Bushveld Gerbil (*Gerbilliscus leucogaster*): The large gerbils seen on the night drive at Toko Lodge were presumably this species.

Namaqua Rock Mouse (*Micaelamys namaquensis*): Commonly trapped on the rocky ridge behind Toko Lodge.

Red Veld Rat (*Aethomys chrysophilus*): Commonly trapped at Erindi.



Angolan Water Rat (*Dasymys nudipes*): 1 seen at dusk on the Mahango floodplain.

West-Central South African Four-striped Grass Rat (*Rhabdomys bechuanae*): 1 seen during a game drive at Erindi.

Desert Pygmy Mouse (*Mus indutus*): 1 trapped at Erindi.

African Pygmy Mouse (*Mus minutoides*): 1 trapped at Victoria Waterfront Lodge, Zambia.

Acacia Rat (*Thyllomys paedulcus*): Several late at night at Tambuti Lodge, Rundu.

Natal Multimammate Mouse (*Mastomys natalensis*): 1 of presumably this species trapped at Toko Lodge.

Southern Multimammate Mouse (*Mastomys coucha*): 2 of presumably this species trapped at Erindi.

Shortridge's Multimammate Mouse (*Mastomys shortridgei*): 2 of presumably this species trapped around the marsh behind Caprivi Riverfront Lodge.

Littleday's Whistling Rat (*Parotomys littledalei*): 1 seen in the Kuiseb Valley south of Walvisbay.

Pygmy Rock Mouse (*Petromyscus collinus*): 1 trapped at Desert Homestead Lodge.



Cape Fur Seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus*): Many at Walvisbay, including a few jumping into the boat to be fed and petted.

Bat-eared Fox (*Otocyon megalotis*): A few seen in the late evening between Sesriem and Desert Homestead Lodge; a few before dawn and after dusk at Erindi.

Black-backed Jackal (*Canis mesomelas*): Quite a few early and late around Sesriem; many at Erindi; only 1 at Etosha.

African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*): A wonderful 45 minutes with the pack of 15 individuals including 4 puppies at very close range next to Old Traders Lodge in Erindi; later on, a surprise encounter with 3 on the main road across Mahango.



Spotted-necked Otter (*Hydrictis maculicollis*): 1 on the boat ride at Popa Falls; a group of 5-6 at Caprivi Riverside Lodge; 1 from the bridge between Namibia and Botswana into Chobe NP.



Honey Badger (*Mellivora capensis*): 2 singles during game drives at Erindi.

Banded Mongoose (*Mungos mungo*): A large troop at Erindi; another one on the drive between Erindi and Toko Lodge.



Slender Mongoose (*Galerella sanguinea*): Singles at Arebbusch Lodge in Windhoek, at Erindi, in Etosha, and in Mahango.

Water Mongoose (*Atilax paludinosus*): 1 at night around the ponds at Victoria Waterfront Lodge.

Yellow Mongoose (*Cynictis penicillata*): 1 at Arebbusch Lodge; 2 at Erindi.

Suricate (*Suricata suricatta*): 2 groups on the road between Rehoboth and Klein Aub.

Feline Genet (*Genetta felina*): Well, who understands genet taxonomy? I presume that the genet seen at Erindi was this species.

Common Genet (*Genetta genetta*): 1 and 2, respectively, on the two night drives at Toko Lodge.

Spotted Hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*): 1 bathing in a waterhole at Etosha.



Brown Hyena (*Hyaena brunea*): We were taken to a den of this species near Old Trader's Lodge at Erindi where we saw 1 individual slowly disappear into its hole.



Aardwolf (*Proteles cristatus*): 1 seen very well on the second night drive at Toko Lodge.

African Wild Cat (*Felis lybica*): 2 at Erindi; 3 at Toko Lodge; 2 at Mahango; all at night.

Small Spotted Cat (*Felis nigripes*): Very far away, but a small (smaller than African Wild Cat), spotted cat on the first night drive at Toko Lodge was presumably this species.

Serval (*Leptailurus serval*): 1 seen well on the first night drive at Toko Lodge.

Cheetah (*Acononyx jubatus*): We spent half an hour with a mother and her 3 cubs at Erindi. She was one of the radio-collared individuals and hence very relaxed around people, but we found her without telemetry.



Lion (*Panthera leo*): 2 males (brothers) at Erindi; a pair at Etosha.

Aardvark (*Orycteropus afer*): 1 seen on the night drive in Mahango. Isn't this a great photo?



African Bush Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*): Many at Erindi, Etosha, and Mahango. Also a few in Chobe NP, Zambesi NP, and right next to Victoria Waterfront Lodge. And seen from the helicopter on the flight over the Victoria Falls (below).



Rock Dassie (*Procavia capensis*): Numerous on the rocky hills at Erindi.

Kaokoveld Rock Dassie (*Procavia welwitschii*): A few on the rocky hills around Toko Lodge.

Mountain Zebra (*Equus zebra*): Quite a few around Sesriem and on the drive from Sesriem to Walvisbay, but mostly very distant; one herd at Erindi.

Plains Zebra (*Equus quagga*): Many at Erindi and Etosha. Fewer at Mahango and Chobe.

Hook-lipped Rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*): A single and a mother plus calf at Erindi; 3 at Etosha.



Square-lipped Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*): 2 at Etosha.

Hippopotamus (*Hippopotamus amphibius*): A few at each water hole at Erindi, outside of their native range; many at Popa Falls, Mahango, and around Victoria Falls.

Common Warthog (*Phacochoerus africanus*): Common from Erindi onwards.

Southern African Giraffe (*Giraffa giraffa*): Many at Erindi and Etosha; fewer at Toko Lodge (at night), Mahango, and Zambesis NP.

African Savanna Buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*): Many on the Mahango floodplains; a few seen from the helicopter on the flight over the Victoria Falls.

Common Eland (*Taurotragus oryx*): A group of about 20 at Kalkheuveld waterhole in Etosha.



Greater Kudu (*Tragelaphus strepsiceros*): A few at Erindi and during the night drive at Toko Lodge; many at Etosha and Mahango; also a few during drives between sites.



Nyala (*Tragelaphus angasii*): A group of 6 within the fenced area of Camp Elephant at Erindi, where introduced.

Sitatunga (*Tragelaphus spekii*): 1 in the evening on the edge of papyrus on the Mahango floodplain.

Bushbuck (*Tragelaphus sylvaticus*): Quite common in Mahango.

Roan Antelope (*Hippotragus equinus*): After a lot of searching, a single on the northern road to the waterhole in Mahango.



Gemsbok (*Oryx gazella*): Numerous at Sesriem, between Sesriem and Walvisbay, at Erindi, and at Etosha.

Waterbuck (*Kobus ellipsiprymnus*): Quite a few at Erindi, outside of their native range; 4 at Mahango; about 20 from the bridge between Namibia and Botswana into Chobe.

Red Lechwe (*Kobus leche*): Hundreds on the Mahango floodplains.



Southern Reedbuck (*Redunca arundinum*): A few at Mahango.

Black Wildebeest (*Connochaetes gnou*): Quite common at Erindi, far outside of the native range.

Blue Wildebeest (*Connochaetes taurinus*): Common at Erindi and Etosha, less so at Mahango.

Red Hartebeest (*Alcelaphus caama*): 3 encounters at Erindi, 1 at Etosha.

Blesbok (*Damaliscus phillipsi*): A few between Windhoek and Sesriem on game farms.

Tsessebe (*Damaliscus lunatus*): A few at Mahango.

Common Impala (*Aepyceros melampus*): Common at Erindi (outside of the native range, I assume) and at Mahango.

Black-faced Impala (*Aepyceros petersi*): Common at Etosha.

Springbok (*Antidorcas marsupialis*): Common at Sesriem, Erindi, and at Etosha.

Damara Dik-dik (*Madoqua damarensis*): A very tame pair within the fenced area of Camp Elephant at Erindi; 1 at Etosha between Namutoni and the eastern gate.

Klipspringer (*Oreotragus oreotragus*): 1 on Dolomite Ridge near Toko Lodge.

Steenbok (*Raphiceros campestris*): 1 near Desert Homestead; quite a few at Erindi, Toko Lodge (at night), and Etosha; a few at Mahango.



Common Duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia*): Only 1 at Mahango.

Bryde's Whale (*Balaenoptera edeni*): A baleen whale scoped from the coast south of Swakopmund was possibly this species, less likely Sei Whale, but certainly not Blue or Fin Whale.

Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*): 2 singles during the boat trip at Walvisbay.

Heaviside's Dolphin (*Cephalorhynchus heavisidii*): A frustratingly brief encounter on the boat trip at Walvisbay: they rode the wake of the boat for 2 seconds and then vanished. Also, a small pod seen from shore south of Swakopmund.

Common Bottlenosed Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*): A pod on the Walvisbay boat trip.

And some other cool animals:

Mola Mola: 1 during the boat trip.



Namaqualand Chamaeleon: 1 between Sesriem and Walvisbay.



And Rock Python (Mahango), some cool geckos, and lots of birds...