



Safari Trip Report May 2022

Description

Highlights and Images from my small group safaris to South Africa May 2022

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Elephant family grazes in Kruger

This Trip Report for May 2022 would not be possible if my wonderful guests had not persevered through continued travel difficulties and uncertainties lingering from the pandemic. I thank them and feel they were rewarded with stellar wildlife encounters, beautiful weather, and many special surprising moments. I have hosted this same itinerary for over 15 years and the wildlife never disappoints and arguably has gotten better over the years and conservation efforts in the area give the wildlife protection and more space to roam. Please enjoy this report as attempt to describe what it is like to go on safari with me.

[See our 2023 Safari Schedule](#)



Getting up close to elephants for magic moments

After a brief stop in town, our guests arrive to beautiful, sunny, and warm weather. We give them an orientation to the tree house lodge and things to know about living among the African wildlife roaming without fences through the resort.



A baby giraffe does not like the oxpecker bird

The next morning we are up early to go to Kruger National Park. We arrive at the park entrance just at opening time. Barely a minute into the park we spot a large animal wandering just to the side of the road. From the swagger of the walk we know it is a very young adult male lion. Mere feet from our vehicle it stops to make small roar check calls to the rest of its pride. The horizon is colored by the sunrise and perfectly tints our lion images in a warm glow. Not long after we stop to photograph the giant orange ball of the sunrise on the vast open horizon. This is the start to a wonderful day in the park. We pass a hyena den with one individual in attendance then some giraffe standing still with the sunrise sky as a backdrop. The morning continues with sightings of key antelope species such as waterbuck, wildebeest, and the large herds of impala gathered into groups for mating season. Not leaving out small species we stop to watch dwarf mongoose emerge from their den in an old termite mound and our guide discusses the life cycle of termite mounds and all the species that make use of them through their lifespan. We have more close encounters with giraffes and spot some rare and large Kori Bustard birds and some black backed jackals. We stop for a picnic brunch then our afternoon is filled with close encounters with elephants in family herds, bachelor herds and some solo individuals. as they graze and make their way to the rivers and water sources. By now the sun is high and it is a warm but comfortable day. On our way out in the late afternoon we watched a mother and baby giraffe, more elephants and an encounter with 4 male lions some of which displayed the recessive white lion trait. Back at the lodge, we had a wonderful and relaxing meal under the stars and a restful sleep.



A baby elephant does more playing than eating

The next day was spent enjoying more of the natural wonders near to our tree house lodge. We had a breakfast then took a boat ride through the scenic Blyde Canyon. Our pontoon boat took us past rock formations with waterfalls and rare plants. In one area we watched hippos in the water. This spot is known as a breeding area and nursery. On the sunny side of the canyon the crocodiles were out getting sun. Following a short stop at a scenic fast flowing river and the observation area high above with a panoramic view of the canyon waters, we had a nice lunch at a restaurant then on to the Moholoholo Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre. Their guides and volunteers gave a presentation detailing the conservation challenges and efforts for this specific area. It is essential to hear this directly from the people who are fighting the problems and administering the actions as you will not get this level of honesty and detail without being here. They then lead us around the centre to hear the stories of each animal ambassador and their role in the conservation efforts and their journey to recovery and possible rerelease. They are constantly taking in new cases so we never know what we may see when we visit.

[Moholoholo Facebook link](#)



Giraffes interrupt breakfast at the tree house lodge

Soon it was time to leave for the Sabi Sands Reserve. A late breakfast on the deck overlooking the watering hole turned into a special treat when several giraffe came very close to feed on the trees and get a drink. I would like to say I arranged this perfect photo op, but this is just the wildlife going about their lives in front of and despite us.



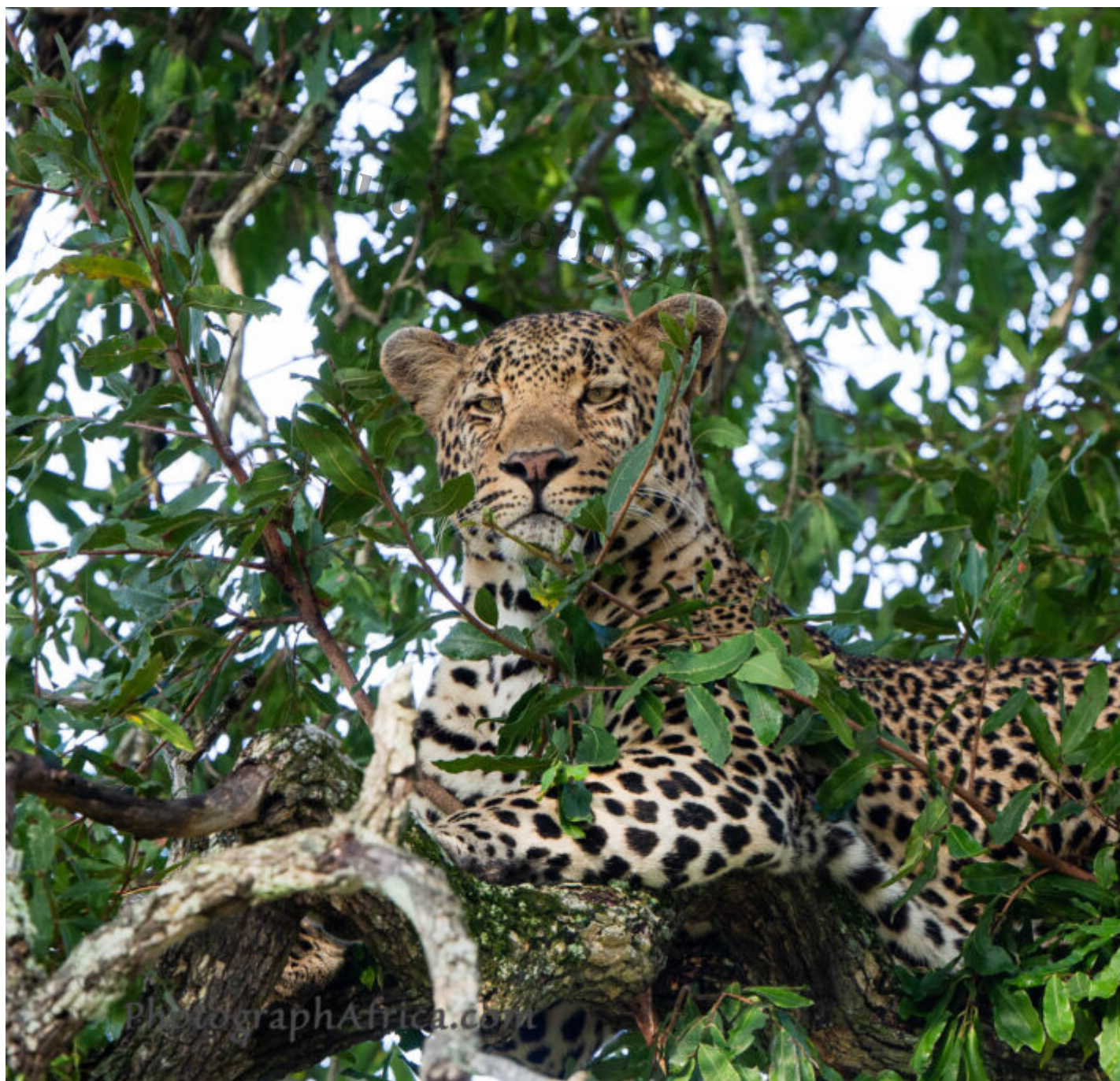
dwarf mongoose have a nest in a termite mound

We made the short-distance transfer to Sabi Sands and had time to settle in our rooms and a meal before it was time for what we looked forward to all day: our first evening game drive.



A leopard rests in a tree with his carcass nearby

Sabi sands is famous for its leopards who love the rivers and large trees as their hunting grounds. Our drive started with an elephant family followed by what we all hoped for: a leopard relaxing in a tree. Later we encountered a very large male lion who roared as the sun set. Another leopard spied tree and as it was now dark, we photographed it using either strobes or with the help of our guide and his spot lights to aide focus. Our driver and guide are very highly skilled and very used to working with photographers. Many of them are accomplished photographers who no doubt have learned much from the many guests. We learned heaps from them about the wildlife and how the leopards come and go from their territories: They know each and get excited to see individuals come back to the area or show up with cubs.



We see many leopards up in trees while in Sabi Sands



We spend some time with young lions on a morning game drive

The next morning we encountered rhinos. Sabi is private land, but they have dropped all fences between their lands and Kruger Park so the wildlife including wild rhinos have more area to roam. Our encounter was followed by finding a pride of lions sitting and lying on a termite mound. The morning “golden light” and the lions gazing across the open area made for brilliant photos. We then check back an area where the guides had seen a mother and cub previous days. Happily, they were there and we had the rest of the morning following and watching the two play, check their kill stashed up the tree, and rest. They would lay down so close to us we could take detail images of their spots, tail, and what one of our guests called “passport portraits” of their faces . All too soon it was time for our

last morning drive. We had enjoyed 3 nights with beautiful meals and time to relax at the bar or watch the watering hole while downloading our photos.



the wild dog pack bursts from the trees and come toward us

Our last morning drive brought us 5 white rhinos in a herd. It is very special to see this vanishing species in multiples: so many are poached or moved to protected zoo type facilities. These are wild

and free and it is very special to see them. Another special encounter that was on our guestsâ€™ wish list was the wild dogs. They are a conservation success story, and their numbers are increasing. We now have 2 or 3 wild herds in our Greater Kruger Region. We encountered them this morning on an airstrip where they had a face off with a large male wart hog. These smart animals knew this was a fight they would lose even though they numbered 10. Still, they took their time to test the warthog. They are always on the move so we stayed with them most of the morning. At times they would stop to wait for the return of a separated member. They might have been staying in the area because of the lions with the fresh giraffe kill, patiently waiting for a chance at the carcass. Wild dogs are excellent and successful hunters and can catch their own but do not pass up a free meal if they can get it.



The leopard cub likes to lounge on a termite mound

Our last encounter was a cute leopard cub sitting on a very small termite cone. Leopards are the reason we come here, but in between the wonderful encounters we are dazzled by the interesting birds, antelope, vultures, and all the other wildlife who are all part of the ecosystem. As a whole, it makes this such a great environment for leopards and other predators. Combining these lands with Kruger only a few years ago has made the wildlife encounters even better and it is heartening to see and enjoy one of these conservation success stories.



Dining under the stars and around a fire



Saddle Billed Stork

Our last days were spent at a place I have added to the itinerary; a photography hide at a watering hole, also in the Greater Kruger Region. This was our first visit with guests to the water wildlife observation hide and the hide, the experience and the wildlife encounters all exceeded every expectation. We had a visit almost immediately upon arrival of a solo male elephant. Not long after we had the whole breeding herd. We were able to stay in the hide all night if we wished to catch the nocturnal wildlife. Our days were full of visits by birds, antelope, and more elephants. Our most special encounter was when 7 giraffes came to drink. There were tense moments of “will they or won’t they” but in the end we had images looking up at them as they drank taken from the perspective of the water.



I am very excited to share the relaxing and wondrous experience of being in the hide with my guests in 2023. As always I am in awe of how many species and quality encounters we have and the wonderful memories and images my guests take home with them. This Kruger region of South Africa is a treasure and I always look forward to introducing guests to its magic and welcoming back those who have heard the call to come back.



See our safari schedule for 2023 on our website: <https://photographafrica.com/>

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