

4.1.2020 Sabie

In the morning the sun is up and we finally get a glimpse of the entire Middelburg Dam. We continue our trip towards Kruger Nationalpark; it's a beautiful route that leads, among other places, through Dullstroom, Mashishing (Lydenburg) and Sabie.

Dullstroom is a quaint little town not only with a supermarket and a fuel station but it also hosts a cheesery, a pub, several restaurants and even a craft brewery. Since it is still too early for a longer break, we stop in Sabie for a short but refreshing beer at the Sabie Brewery.

For the night we find a spot at a log storage and handling place in the middle of the forest and remain totally undisturbed. Not one single vehicle is passing by. A small antelope is grazing at the edge of the forest, from far it looks like a deer, we feel like back in Germany.



5.1.2020 Satara, Kruger National Park

At noon we reach the Orpen Gate of the Kruger National Park, from here it is another 90km to our Satara Rest Camp. Shortly before reaching the Camp an oncoming car gestures us to stop and asks whether we have seen the lions at one of the back roads where we came from. Unfortunately, we haven't seen any lions.



However, we turn around and follow the family, because while we were talking, the father had received updated information on his phone. The lions should be about 10km away. We try to follow his description and indeed are able to find the lions! Of the four male lions one is even white. We spend the whole afternoon observing the lions, although they hardly move.



Unfortunately, we finally have to leave for the Satara Rest Camp as the gates will close at 6:30pm and we haven't even checked-in, yet. How lucky we are, that by chance we heard about the lions just when we entered the park.

On the way we see a large flock of Red Billed Quelea birds. The mass of these small birds is impressive. The Quelea form flocks of up to two million birds. Because of their mass, they are feared and hated by the farmers. Such a large colony can eat up to 20 tons of grain from a field in one day; they are like feathered locusts. People try to limit their numbers, but they are very agile, have hardly any natural enemies and breed extremely fast. They lay an average of three eggs per clutch up to three times a year. As migratory birds, they travel throughout southern Africa.



Just outside the camp gates we encounter the relatively rare Southern Ground Hornbills, the largest species of hornbill in the world and one of only two ground hornbill species found in Africa. They live up to 70 years and only start breeding when they are

around ten years old! They live on insects that they peck out of the ground; are slow, hunted, their habitat is constantly shrinking and therefore they are unfortunately threatened with extinction. What a contrast to the Red Billed Quelea.



6.1.2020 Satara, Kruger Nationalpark

The alarm clock rings at 4:30 a.m., it's time for a game drive, we see elephants, giraffes, zebras... Not far from the S100 road, which is known for lion sightings, we stop at the Gudzani Dam and spot two lions through the binoculars! However, nothing much is happening, after a short while the two males get up and disappear into the thicket.

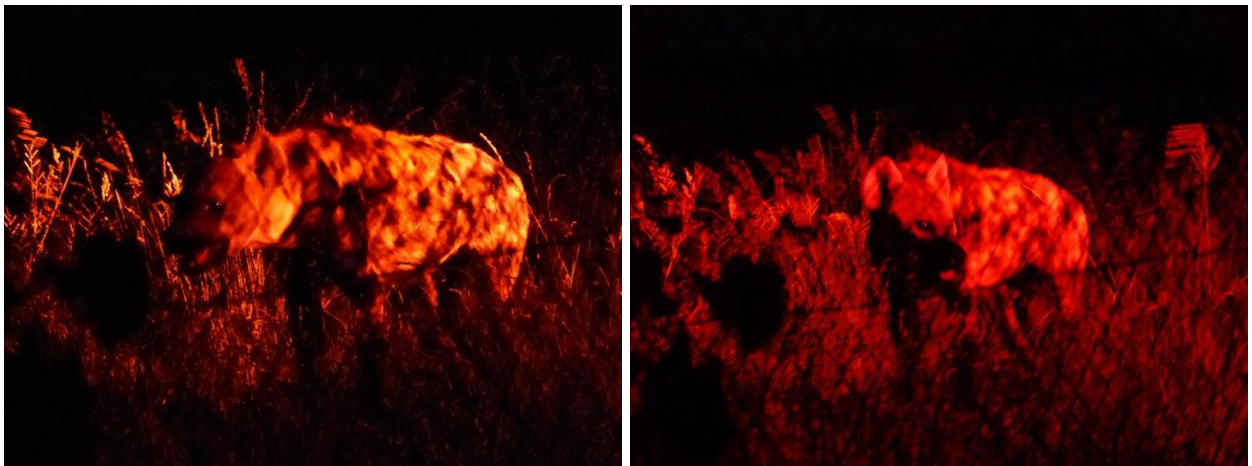


On the late afternoon game drive we see a huge herd of buffalos before we have to rush back to the gate – like all the other visitors as well – because the closing times must be strictly adhered to. Traffic jam in the national park...



During our evening barbecue, a hyena comes to visit and roams along the fence the whole time; you can always hear her rustling. Surely, there is a treat for her falling over the fence every now and then. Is this the same hyena we saw in the afternoon? She walked towards the camp...

We haven't been this close to a hyena before, she doesn't look very friendly; her teeth are impressive. Hopefully she isn't very hungry and hopefully this thin chain link fence will hold...



7.1.2020 Skukuza, Kruger Nationalpark

The alarm clock rings again at 4:30 a.m. and we set off to the morning game drive, which will also take us to our next camp Skukuza. Skukuza is the founding site of the Kruger Park and the very first camp was built here. We don't like the camp that much because it's quite narrow and the motorhomes have to stand relatively close together. The few roads don't offer much choice for game drives either.

We see many young animals again and can observe a herd of elephants having a lot of fun with their mud bath. One elephant in particular wallows extensively and repeatedly throws itself into the mud.

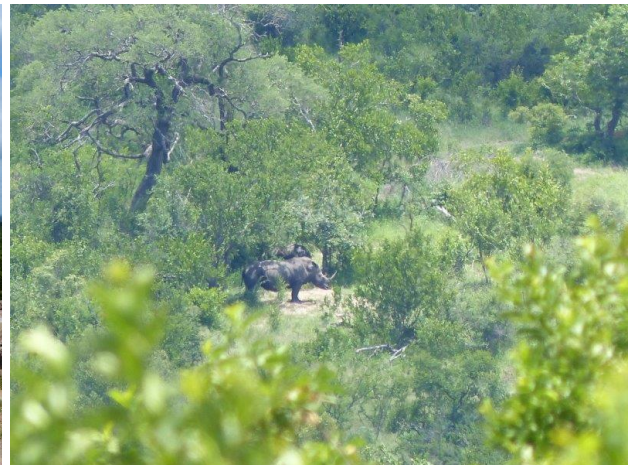




8.1.2020 Berg-en-Dal, Kruger National Park

Today we do not set off quite so early. It is only 72km to the next rest camp Berg-en-Dal. The name says it all, it is a bit hilly here.

At the Mathekenyane view point we spot two rhinos in the distance at the steep loop. We would not have expected rhinos to be found in hilly terrain, but we learned that they like to trek to higher altitudes to cool off.





9.1.2020 Berg-en-Dal, Kruger Nationalpark

At the Berg-en-Dal Restcamp you can take a short hike on the newly created “Rhino Trail Walk”. You walk about 3km along the fence and through the camp. There are informative explanations on display boards, so you can even learn something while you have the opportunity to get some exercise.



On our evening game drive we are rewarded with sightings of two rhinos and a giraffe babies. It was very humid all day, and the expected thunderstorm came at night.



10.1.2020 Barberton, Josefsdal

When we wake up in the morning it is still raining, so we forego our morning game drive and leave the Kruger National Park late in the morning through the southern Malelane Gate. From now on our destination is East Coast.

Soon we find ourselves in the fruit growing area, we are surrounded by mango, papaya and banana plantations.

In Barberton we stop for our lunch break. The former gold mining town has its origins in 1884, and many older villas from that time have survived. Our route takes us around Swaziland, we first take the R40 towards the Josefsdal border crossing and turn onto the 'scenic route' R541, which turns out to be a gravel road. The road spirals up to unexpected heights, suddenly we reach the cloud line at 1300 meters, and at the highest point we are over 1600 meters above sea level.



At this altitude the temperatures are more bearable and we look for a suitable place to spend the night. An open clearing is ideal; at night it cools down to a pleasant 22C. What a relief to not have to sweat.



11.1.2020 Amsterdam, Piet Retief, Pongola

Today we have to cover some distance, there is still a lot of uphill and downhill driving and we are in average between 1300m and 1600 meters in altitude. Due to the heavy rain yesterday, some of the route has turned into a muddy track.



We pass through Dundonald, Amsterdam and Piet Retrief. The route is lengthy and due to the road conditions we are making slower progress than expected. There are always obstacles along the way and many heavily loaded trucks that need to be overtaken somehow.



It's time to look for a place to park for the night, but the area is heavily populated and there is no tourist infrastructure aka campsites. At 5:00 p.m. we are in Pongola and we have no other choice but to stay at the local gas station. The background noise is loud, there are many trucks around us that are constantly reversing with loud beeping.



An empty parking space immediately fills with a new truck. Unexpectedly, after a while a friendly gas station attendant comes up to us and says that we could park next to his office as it would be a little quieter there. How thoughtful of him! At the office we are closer to the public gas pumps, but the reversing trucks no longer beep so loudly and incessantly right next to us. Either way, it's going to be a restless night.

12.1.2020 St. Lucia

Around midday we reach St Lucia at the southern end of the so-called “Elephant Coast” of the KwaZulu-Natal province. The “Elephant Coast” stretches from here north to the Mozambican border.

St. Lucia is known for the hippos that roam freely around the city. Sure enough, we are duly welcomed. A hippo is walking along the side of the road in the middle of broad daylight, it looks as if it wants to go shopping at Shoprite! We can't believe our eyes. Leopards are also said to be walking through the city...



We stay at Sugarloaf Camp, which is managed by KZN Wildlife. It is a beautiful, quite large area, with tall shady trees, but there are many very aggressive mosquitoes that

attack even during the day. A few mosquito bites right on arrival as a welcome – that takes a little away from the joy of this nice campsite.



The sea can be reached via a wooden boardwalk that leads over the lagoon (where all the mosquitoes live). 'Unfortunately' we don't get to see a crocodile.

