

A Day Safari in Kruger - by Peter Winhall (Bushwise Safaris)

We had left our Lodge on the banks of the Crocodile River overlooking Kruger in our open-safari vehicle, and after an exciting morning with our guests, with great sightings of elephant, lion and giraffe, and one of the biggest herds of buffalo I have seen, we stopped to relax during the midday heat to have lunch overlooking the Sabi River, where we watched a pod of hippo cavorting at close range.

By mid afternoon, we had seen many more species of game and the guests' check list registered some 15 species of mammal. We stopped on numerous occasions to identify birds, with some great sightings of Vultures, both white-backed and lappet-faced as well as a beautiful pair of bateleur eagles in a dead leadwood tree close to the road. Herds of elephant slowed our progress to such an extent that the sun was beginning to dip fast in the west and I had to make the gate by 6.00 pm. to exit the Park and make my way back to the Lodge

I was travelling at the maximum speed limit looking at my watch, when a movement to the right caught my eye. I reversed back to a clearing and there not 40 meters away were a pack of wild dogs(pictus) tearing at the last remnants of an impala they had just killed. What a sighting! To just see these beautiful endangered creatures in the wild is special, but to witness them on a kill, their tails swishing from side to side as they gorge themselves to take the food back to their pups at their den is quite amazing.

The west sky was glowing red, and photography was difficult so we set off for the gate. En- route I explained to my guests that even in my teenage days, wild dogs were considered vermin because of the clash between them and livestock farmers. They were shot on sight and even a bounty of five shillings would be paid out for each tail. My guests were shocked! I went on to explain that although this practice has stopped, the wild dog's main predator is still man, but in many parts of Southern Africa, it is the tribesman now and not the stockman who is the main problem. The reason? "Muti" !! (sort of medicine or talisman). The wild dog is a very successful hunter. It is said that when they go out for a hunt they have (in good conditions) a 95% chance of success. A leopard's success is usually put at about 60% and a lion's at 30 !! Ironically, it is the wild dog's very success that is its downfall. ...It is in demand byor medicine men will sell a dog's foot, ear or some other body part as a charm, ear