South Africa – Kruger Wildlife Safari

Day 1
24th August 2014

I met Van Harris and his group at the Hoedspruit airport, near the world famous Kruger National Park in South Africa’s warm east. It was great to see Van again, as we had travelled to Botswana together last year, also for an epic safari experience with his colleagues from the Memphis Zoo.
The group consisted mainly of Dosents from the Zoo, as well as a few good friends from other circles. Janet, Chad, Bill, Laura and Mark were all very excited to be on the trip.

We headed straight for camp and a sumptuous lunch, before heading on our first wildlife safari, where the belligerent Cape buffalo seemed to prevail, as we saw groups of cranky bulls and also a huge herd of several hundred, which were tracked by Grant and Selby, our personal guide and tracker combination from the Kings Camp.

After seeing a magnificent sunset we headed back to camp for some supper, and were treated to an amazing meal by our private chef, Liesl.

Day 2
25th August 2014

The next morning was rather chilly, so we loaded up lots of warm blankets to break the wind, and headed out. We had a quiet few minutes in the beginning of the drive, but then the bush really began to offer up some wonderful sightings! We started with a herd of beautiful giraffes, which were browsing peacefully in the thornveld areas. They were suddenly joined by a dazzle of zebra which made for interesting pictures, and a very African scene. Then, all of a sudden a spotted hyena came tearing out of the bush, straight between us and another vehicle, adding the element of surprise to the day’s game viewing. Selby then headed out on foot to try and track a white rhinoceros which had been feeding in the area.

I managed to capture an interesting image of Selby walking past a tall giraffe whilst tracking and the giraffe looked down on him rather contemptuously!

The afternoon drive was also amazing, with some spectacular creatures obliging us with some of their time, such as a pack of wild dogs which arrived in the area. Grant was quick to capitalise on this opportunity to see one of Africa’s rarest carnivores. Apparently we were very close to a den site, but the pups chose to remain underground in the safety of their den. However, the adult dogs were out an about, and our first sight of one standing on the side of a termite mound was a very memorable experience. The wild dog was standing in the afternoon sun, and made for a wonderful picture moment. We also saw a beautiful herd of African elephants, which came extremely close to the car, and browsed peacefully on the thorn trees around us. Many calves were there too, in amongst their
mothers legs. An amazing and emotional sighting for the group, many of whom had only ever seen these creatures in a captive environment. White rhino’s also appeared on the scene, with some very close up views of these creatures. In spite of the terrible plight of these animals due to the poaching crisis we are experiencing at present, we were fortunate enough to see a small group, which was much appreciated by all.

Day 3

26th August 2014

This morning was to be a highlight for the group, even beyond the amazing days we had had so far. A beautiful leopard was on our menu for the morning, with an impala she had killed. We spend over an hour with her on our own, but this was not all. She had a lovely 4 month old cub with her too, and all the while we were there, she played within a few yards of our vehicle. She climbed trees, attacked her mom, rolled and cavorted...all for our exclusive benefit! I don’t think anyone could have expected such an amazing sighting, and we all agreed afterwards that it was one of the most amazing wildlife experiences we had ever had!

The morning also included zebra sightings, southern white-crowned shrike’s forming a sort of bird pyramid to keep warm, some giraffes and plenty of antelope varieties such as blue wildebeest, impala, waterbuck and steenbok.

The afternoon also made for a wonderful time with more buffalos, baby hyenas, giraffe, some more rhinoceros, beautiful, large tusked elephant bulls, a sleeping leopardeness and of course a wonderful sunset.

The hyena den we visited had at least four different age groups of cubs, with curious creatures wandering out to see the vehicle and its occupants from a very close range. Their near-insatiable curiosity certainly entertained us, with close up views and much fun, as the young ones chased and chewed one another.

A truly spectacular day of game viewing was closed with a veritable feast of food, and excellent service around the lodge.

Day 4

27th August 2014

During the morning drive we managed to find a pair of nomadic four year old male lions, who gave us a wonderful display of behaviour, furtively moving through the bush around us, cautiously watching out for other resident lions, who may potentially threaten their very lives! They rested in some dense Mopani thickets but we had reasonable views as they walked and rested.

We also saw some a rhinoceros in the afternoon, elephants and giraffes too! Then to round off the afternoon we paid a visit to the wild dog den we had heard of the other day, which resulted in some views of the puppies
as they played outside the den, more than rounding off a spectacular afternoon of game viewing! Wow, what a treat this was. They are very active at this cool time of the day, playing, chasing and pestering the adult dogs for food, which in this species is regurgitated by full-tummied adults as they return from their hunts.

Day 5

28th August 2014

Our final morning of game drive was superb, with a visit to a deep pool where some hippopotamus lived. Then, we had a final leopard sighting, topping off the trip, watching a beautiful female as she roamed along a deep river bed toward our camp. She finally crossed the dry stream, which was too deep and sandy for us to cross in our game viewer, and headed off to hunt. She treated us to several exhilarating views, leaping up onto logs, appearing through bushes, and also being watched closely by several curious giraffe, which towered over her as she walked by!

We also saw zebra, steenbok and many other beautiful creatures, which really finished off the final day just perfectly.

Then after yet another delicious breakfast we headed off to the airport for the beginning of the next leg of their adventure which was in Cape Town, more than a thousand kilometres to the south west!

All in all, a wonderful trip, with many special moments which will never be forgotten by the visitors from Memphis.