



The Photographic Big 5

Buffalo, Elephant, Leopard, Lion, and Rhino, were considered by the early settlers to be the five **most dangerous** animals to hunt. Very crafty and ultimate survivors with few natural enemies, they are not easy to track and are lethal if wounded or cornered. Visitors to Africa's game parks have therefore become obsessed with sightings of these so-called "**Big 5**" yet, photographically, not all of them are a challenge to photograph while on safari.

Lions, as an example, are very easy to see no matter which game reserve one visits. We have had 126 lion sightings in 15 years - this total is not individual animals but single sightings of either lone lions or family prides.

Each game reserve, however, has its own '**Photographic Big 5**' that were to us a challenge to firstly find and then to photograph. Buffalo, for example are very easy to see in the Kruger but extremely difficult to find in the Pilanesberg.

We have kept a record of the number of our 'Photographic Big 5' animal sightings that were the most challenging to find & photograph in each game reserve as follows:

20 Black Rhino – 4 in the Kruger, 5 in the Pilanesberg and 11 in Etosha of which just 5 allowed good photos. 90% of our black rhino sightings in Etosha happen at night at the Okaukuejo and Halali waterholes.



Black Rhinoceros mother and calf who charged our vehicle on the S30 Salitje road in Southern [Kruger Park](#).



8 Brown Hyena – 4 in the Kalahari and 4 in the Pilanesberg of which only 3 presented good photo opportunities.



Brown Hyena drinking early in the morning at Ratlhogo waterhole in the [Pilanesberg](#) Game Park in the North West Province.

The brown hyena is mainly nocturnal so is therefore difficult to find. We have seen them by day in the Pilanesberg either early in the morning or late in the afternoon and mainly at night in the Kgalagadi.

In the Kgalagadi we see them drinking at the waterholes at the wilderness camps such as Urikaruus and Kielie Krankie. This is where our Lightforce spotlight comes in very handy!



29 Cheetah – 15 in the Kruger, 3 in the Pilanesberg, 1 in Etosha and 10 in the Kalahari of which 7 allowed good photographs.



Cheetah cub drinking in the morning at Urikaruus in the [Kgalagadi](#) Transfrontier Park.

Of the Africa's [super-seven](#) animals, cheetahs and wild dogs have been the most difficult for us to find.

Most of our cheetah photographs have been of the cheetahs on termite mounds, road signs, or logs as they climb up to these high points to scan for prey.

This Cheetah cub was photographed right outside our dune cabin at Urikaruus! We woke up late the one morning (07h00) and when we looked out our window we saw this cub and her mother at the waterhole drinking.

We had been looking for them for the past few days as they were seen by other people nearly every day hunting in the Auob riverbed but here the cheetahs came to us! That is why we say [patience](#), one of the five "Ps", is so important in photography.

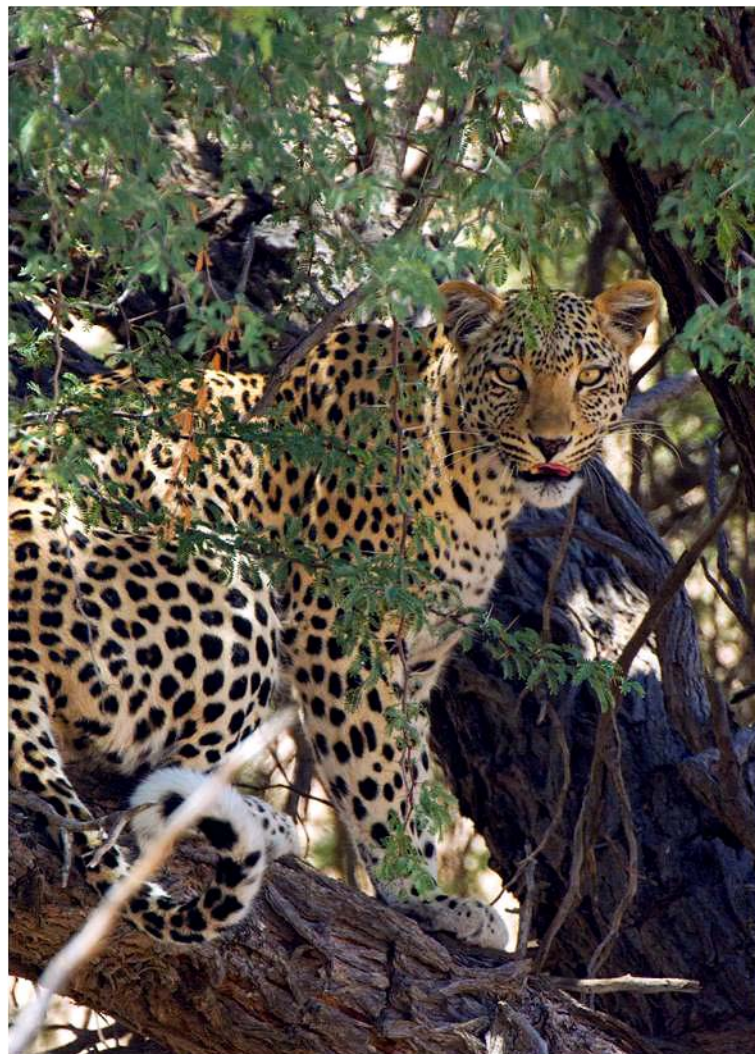
After they had drunk they chased some wildebeest and then moved further down the Auob riverbed where they caught a springbok!



35 Leopard – 29 in the Kruger, 1 in the Pilanesberg, 3 in the Kalahari and 2 in Etosha of which 8 presented us with good photo opportunities.

In our first 5 years we saw no leopards and one of the reasons was the fact that we would race around the parks looking for leopards and we then realised that most of our predator sightings occurred when we had stopped to look at something else.

Our strategy then changed and we would stop to watch birds, insects and even Impala and our Leopard sightings increased dramatically!

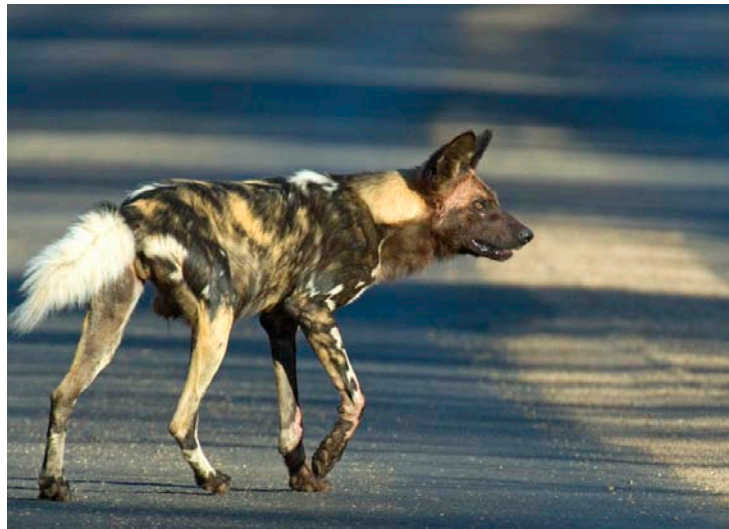


This leopard was sighted in a tree near Halali camp in [Etosha](#).

To us Halali camp is the leopard hotspot as we have seen all our Etosha leopards in the vicinity of this camp. It was midday so fortunately the leopard was in the tree otherwise the harsh sun would have spoilt the resulting photographs.



11 Wild Dog – 9 in the Kruger and 2 in the Pilanesberg of which only 4 sightings resulted in good photographs.



We watched a pack of wild dog hunting along the H13-1 main road near Punda Maria Camp in the far north of the Kruger Park.

Most of the above sightings were fleeting – cheetah running away from a kill as cars stopped to photograph them, a leopard's tail disappearing into the bush, a black rhino stopping to look at us for just a second before sprinting off into the bush and so on.

The trick is to know where and when to look for certain species. Check the sighting boards in the camps and speak to the game rangers. Choose your route and then to drive slowly, watching the behaviour of birds and other animals, which will let you know when they have sensed a predator nearby!

Once you have spotted your subject position your vehicle in the best position in order to eliminate twigs in front of your subject & to ensure the background is not cluttered. Take a few photographs as soon as you see the animal, in case it disappears, and then gradually move closer taking photos each time you move. This will provide maximum opportunities and allow you to work within the animal's comfort zone.

Spend as much time with the subject as you can as this will provide opportunities to take photographs of different behaviours and to ensure a good number of photographs to choose from.

We cannot believe how many people just drive past us – they see us looking at a bird or springbok so they just keep driving, as they are looking for only the Big 5. And even when we have stopped to photograph a stalking Cheetah, for example, that is in full view; many people will pull up take one or two photos and then speed off. These same people complain that their photographs are not good and blame their cameras!



So if you see Black Rhino, Brown Hyena, Cheetah, Leopard, or Wild Dog in the wild, consider yourself fortunate indeed!

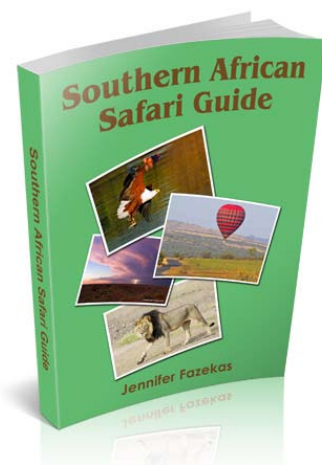
But despite wanting to get away from the constant focus on the original Big-5 it can't be denied that lion sightings are always impressive and this animal's majestic combination of beauty and power always stirs up excited conversation around the evening campfires!

We have had 85 lion sightings in the Kruger Park, 11 in the Pilanesberg, 13 in Etosha and 17 in the Kgalagadi, **126 Lion sightings** in total.



We watched this magnificent male lion walk to a termite mound stand on it and roar for a few minutes and then he sat down and glared at us.

This sighting was at the H 13-1 and H 13-2 main road intersection near Punda Maria camp. This is the far north of the Kruger Park where it's rumoured by some people that there are 'no animals'!



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