

# Africa's Cat Hotspots

*One of the most frequent questions our Africa specialists are asked is where to find Africa's cats. From the large cats such as lion, leopard and cheetah to the smaller and more elusive servals, wildcats and caracals, seeing a cat is always a highlight of a safari. Having travelled all over Africa with a keen eye on the wildlife, our specialists are cat experts. The flick of a leopard's tail, a black-maned lion or a cheetah cub can never be guaranteed. That said, we have a pretty good idea of where to find them...*



Leopard

## Lion

The lion's roar across the African bush is an unforgettable sound and one that literally sends shivers down your spine. Lions are relatively easy to find in Africa but there are a few places that stand out as being exceptional. These include the Busanga Plains in Zambia's Kafue National Park and the Duba Plains of Botswana's Okavango Delta. The Busanga Plains are a great expanse of grasslands under an empty sky. Young shoots attract large numbers of puku, zebra, roan and sable antelope – rich pickings for lions. From about August onwards the lions take to the big fig trees to snooze and we have seen prides of up to 25 lions in a single tree (including cubs). Having seen the lions in the day you can sit at the campfire at night and listen to the different prides call across the plains.

For those people wanting to see a lion kill then the best place to head for is the Duba Plains. From May to November these eerie plains are home to several thousand buffalo which are stalked by lions every day. Head out with Duba's guides who know the prides by name – the Tsaro, the Skimmer and the Pantry Pride as well as the Duba Boys and more. The guides are adept at predicting the lions' movements in a hunt and will keep you close to the action, so close that you can see the muscles of the lions working and the sweat glinting on the buffalos' noses.



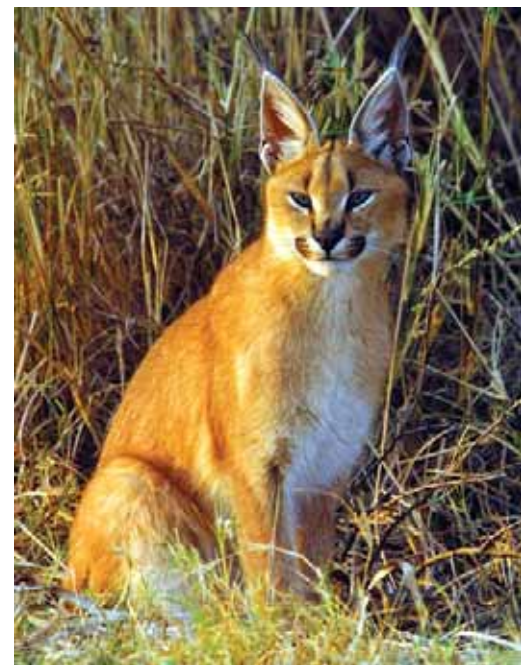
Cheetah on the Serengeti

## Leopard

Leopards are one of Africa's more elusive cats, although if you know where to go they can certainly be found. Zambia's South Luangwa is the place to focus on and we particularly recommend exploring with Brian Jackson from Tafika Lodge or Dean McGregor at Kapamba Bushcamp. You head out from camp in the evening and spend a few hours' game viewing in the late afternoon sunlight when Luangwa is at its most beautiful, with warm dusty air and birds flying to their roosts. After sunset the park is black, save the glow of the spotlight, picking eyes out of the darkness. Brian Jackson knows exactly where to look, and there is a particular grove of ebony trees where a female leopard is often found. Dean also knows the leopard territories well, and always has his last resort called 'Sneaky Road' – barely a path through dense trees that always seems to uncover a leopard slinking through the undergrowth. For leopards at very close quarters then a trip to the Sabi Sand Game Reserve in the Greater Kruger Park is recommended. The leopards here allow you to approach closely and obtain excellent photographs.

## Cheetah

Cheetahs prefer dry open ground and therefore you often find them in quite specific areas of Africa. The Serengeti plains are one of the best areas to spot a cheetah with wide open savannah broken by rock kopjes providing the perfect landscape for hunting. Another place to target is Namibia's Etosha National Park. Take a picnic and drive



Caracal in the grass

to Salvadoria waterhole. This attracts hundreds of springbok, zebra and gemsbok and is the perfect hunting ground for cheetah. Watching them move into view against the backdrop of the silver pan, shimmering in the heat, is not a sight you forget.

## Wildcats, Servals and Caracals

Secretive, shy and diminutive in size, the smaller cats of Africa such as serval, caracal and African wildcat are always fairly elusive. They are best found at night when hunting and you catch their eyes glowing in the spotlight. For wildcat we recommend heading to the Kwando Concession in Botswana's Linyanti Swamp. Keep your eyes on the long grass and gullies on night drives and you may well spot a head, alert to your presence. With servals and caracals there is always luck involved. The guides at Shompole Lodge in Kenya's Lake Mgadi see servals frequently, as have our team members who have been there. Finally, caracals are the hardest of them all. Two of the Africa team have seen them – Heather in the Kalahari and Roger behind a bush in Botswana. The only problem is Roger can't remember where the bush was!

## FACT FILE

Prices for safaris vary considerably by country, type of accommodation and season. Please call our Africa specialists on 01993 838 500 to discuss options.

