



Rhino beetle



Lioness



Cheetah eyeing her prey



Elephant and buffalo



White rhino, Kruger National Park

South Africa

by Numbers

For many, a trip to South Africa will culminate with a magical few nights in the bush on safari. And more often than not, preconceived criteria for a successful safari will be based upon the likelihood of seeing 'The Big Five' - lion, rhinoceros, elephant, leopard and buffalo. However, Marilyn Tromp takes an alternative approach to viewing the country's intriguing wildlife.

The Big Five' - the phrase comes from the game hunting era and refers to the animals that are most dangerous to hunt and which retaliate aggressively with tusk, claw, tooth or horn. So naturally, the term does not translate perfectly to describe the hallmark of a great photographic safari experience today. While these game species certainly make for great sightings, they are collectively, and arguably, not the most beautiful animals. Furthermore, the best areas for spotting 'The Big Five' differ from animal to animal so it is best to decide which species interests you most before deciding where to safari.

The Madikwe in the North West Province is a wonderful place to watch large herds of elephants and their fascinating family dynamics, as is the Addo Elephant National Park on the Eastern Cape. The rhinoceros is one of South Africa's great natural success stories. Hluhluwe-Umfolozi Game Reserve in KwaZulu-Natal has been at the forefront of the rhino's rehabilitation and remains a prime location to see them, including the still very rare black rhino. The white rhino's population

has spread to other reserves across South Africa (together with opportunities to track on foot). Buffalo can be seen across South Africa and the Kruger and the Madikwe game reserves have strong herds. While the large herds of this huge bovine may appear to be extremely intimidating, it is actually the lone 'dagga boy' buffalo bull which should be feared the most. Big cats are always a highlight of any safari - leopard sightings in the Sabi Sands area of the Greater Kruger are legendary. Lion can be seen in strong prides in both the Kruger area and the Madikwe, as well as smaller densities in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern and Northern Capes.

'The Big Five' is a little limiting and if you were to stretch the title to the 'Super Seven' this would allow for a couple of worthy additions. Take the cheetah for instance. The smallest of the big cats, cheetahs are prone to predators and loss of cubs so their numbers are few. They are the speed demons of the bush, capable of reaching sprinting speeds of more than 100 kilometres per hour. The majority of the population is confined to the



Wild dog in the Madikwe



Leopard, Sabi Sands



Elephant, Kruger National Park

far north, while some reserves on the Eastern Cape and in KwaZulu-Natal are concentrating efforts on their conservation.

The wild dog should get the final vote for membership of our 'Super Seven'. One of the most endangered mammals in Africa, the wild dog demonstrates amazing family behaviour, hunting in close knit packs over several hundred square kilometres. One of the best places to see these is the Madikwe Reserve, while sightings in the Kruger and in KwaZulu-Natal are becoming more frequent.

At the other end of the scale, a very challenging mission would be to try to spot South Africa's 'Little Five'. These fine little creatures all take their titles from their larger namesakes and keeping a look out for them encourages visitors to look at the smaller intricacies of the bush, as well as the large, more obvious spectacles. The elephant shrew, rhino beetle, buffalo weaver, ant lion and leopard tortoise are found over most of the country so make a wonderful added dimension to any safari.

The Big and Little Five are fun for list ticking, and the former can be used as a loose base for identifying reserves which may offer the chance of great sightings. However, the true success of a safari is not down to a small, discriminative list, but learning about all aspects of the bush from 'The Big Five' to 'The Little Five' and all the other wonderful game species such as giraffe, hippo, zebra and antelope as well as the plants, birds and insects.

Marilyn Tromp
South Africa Specialist



Buffalo, Kruger National Park

FACT FILE

A 14 night tour of South Africa including three nights on safari in the Sabi Sands staying at Little Bush would start from £2,800 per person. For further details please call Sarah, Marilyn, Pete, Rachel, Arista, Sam or Charlotte on 01993 838 550.

