



# Madikwe moments

**The Madikwe Game Reserve in South Africa offers a more personal kind of safari, as Charlotte Mellor discovered.**



In October I spent eleven nights on safari in the Madikwe, a 60,000-hectare game reserve in the stunning African bushveld. Bordering Botswana, the unique landscapes and habitats give a safari flavour you will not find elsewhere in South Africa. The reserve is also renowned for its wild dog population – a rare sighting in South Africa. I arrived after a one-hour light-aircraft flight from Johannesburg, in the east of the reserve and the first thing that struck me was the stunning red dusty earth contrasted with the bright green grasses and African trees. This was clearly a photographer's oasis. The western side, in contrast, has rocky and mountainous terrain making views from the lofty lodges spectacular, often with vistas across into Botswana.

My favourite experience during my stay in Madikwe was a night drive at Madikwe Safari Lodge I took in the company of two bird enthusiasts.

The knowledge of the rangers was unbelievable as Madikwe has around 300 bird species, and one evening after our sumptuous supper under the stars we set off to experience the bush at night. I have been on night drives in other reserves before but this one was different – the fact that Madikwe has placed a cap on the number of lodges in the reserve means that it really is a wild experience as you can drive without passing another vehicle for hours, and with no other lodges' lights visible in the distance it's just you and the bush beneath a blanket of stars.

The smell hit me first, wafting in pockets of air as we drove down a track. The ranger explained that they knew of a buffalo carcass guarded by two male lion siblings. He explained that the cooler night is the best time for lions to feed on a kill and that he hoped we would be able to locate these lions to watch them feeding, although he feared they would be



Wild dog



Spotted hyena

Kudu



well hidden in the thick of the bush. Part of me hoped that they would be as I wasn't sure my post-supper stomach was up for the smells and sights of lions feeding, but lo and behold as we headed off-road in the open jeep we spotted the flash of cats' eyes in the dark just 100 metres into the thick bush.

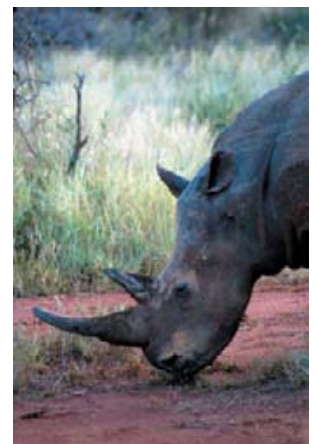
The thickness of the bush made the approach difficult but eventually we got into a fantastic spot to watch the feeding, and with food on their minds the lions didn't seem too bothered with us. Our ranger explained as he set up that they use a red cap over flashlights when watching predators at night to avoid damaging their eyes. The noise was fantastic – growling, crunching bones, flesh tearing and then something different – the call of a hyena. As the ranger shone the spotlight around the surrounding area there was another flash of eyes, and another, and another.

The hyenas approached carefully using the vehicle as cover to get closer to the carcass and we realised that the spotted hyena were accompanied by two brown hyena, a rare find. In twenty years of safari this was my first sighting of brown hyena. With the hyenas came the jackals. They went straight up to the carcass trying to steal any easy bits to pull off and then would run quickly back into the cover of the bush. We sat for around an hour watching this interesting hierarchy of animals under the stillness of the night. Eventually the lions rolled over and slept with their bellies full and the hyenas had their chance to feed. We left them in peace and headed back to the lodge. It felt like we'd sneaked out and experienced a secret of the bush. It was wonderful and I fell asleep excited about what sights the morning drive would bring.

**Charlotte Mellor**  
South Africa Specialist

## FACT FILE

A two-week trip to South Africa including visits to Madikwe, the Cape and the Garden Route starts from £3,200 per person. For further details please call our South Africa specialists on 01993 838 550.



White rhino

Madikwe Hills Safari Lodge

