



Bats in Southern Africa

Joan Childs has been on her travels again

I've just returned from two and half weeks in Botswana's Okavango and South Africa's Kruger National Park. As you can imagine, I was keeping a weather eye out for any bats that I might encounter.

In Botswana, there were quite a few bats flying around at dusk and dawn, but none that I could identify. In South Africa, bats were much more evident. Practically every bridge we drove over was accompanied by a strong batty ammonia smell. We just had a hire car, and you aren't allowed out of the confines of the camps at night, except on an organised night drive, so we didn't have much opportunity to see if bats were flying around. We did go out on one of these night drives and saw a few bats, particularly around a small herd of elephants (if you've had a close up encounter with elephant dung and its insect biodiversity you would realise why elephant herds are so good for bats!)



times before landing back in the adjacent trees as a day roost.

I came across these bats again in Skukusa Camp. I saw one bat flying into a circular, thatched (but otherwise open) eating area. When I looked up into the pointed roof, I recognised the 50 or so bats hanging there as the same ones that I'd seen in Satara. To my surprise, there was a notice up about the bats that roosted there and in an adjacent, identical structure. These bats were Peter's and Wahlberg's epauletted fruit bats. They were doing a marking project on them and some were meant to be wearing necklaces with uniquely coloured beads on for individual identification (though none of the bats we saw were so adorned). My mammal field guide said that the

of the bats had large babies cuddled up inside their wings. All the tables in these eating areas had been moved to the perimeter of the structures, presumably to avoid too many bat droppings in coffees. Many people sat under the shelter without noticing the bats dangling above their heads, but anyone who did notice (usually only because we looking up at them or taking photos) seemed very positive about them.



One morning, up at 4.30 am birding in Kruger's Satara Camp, I noticed a large bat flying into a tree. When I walked under the tree to try to locate it, I disturbed about 100 bats, which flew around the tree a couple of

two species could only be reliably identified from each other by counting the ridges on their palates. Needless to say I didn't do that, but the book also said that Wahlberg's was slightly smaller and greyer than Peter's, and based on that there did seem to be two different kinds. Many

At Berg en Dal camp, we had bats in the thatched roof of our hut (we could smell them and hear them, but didn't see them) and there were instructions about how to remove any bats that strayed inside! There were



also several free-standing US style bat houses in various places, and large bat houses on many of the buildings. I'm not sure if they were there because of a positive attitude to bats or in an attempt to relocate them outside the buildings.

black wildebeest, blue wildebeest, springbok, blesbok, reedbuck, oribi, meercat, white-tailed mongoose, dwarf mongoose, slender mongoose, warthog, hyaena, side-striped jackal, black-backed jackal, scrub hare and spring hare.



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It was really nice to be able to identify some of the bats that we saw, among the other non-Chiropteran highlights (386 bird species and 49 mammal species). Other mammal highlights were African wild dog (1), leopard (4), lion, serval, African wild cat, genet, elephant, zebra, giraffe, white rhino, hippo, kudu, nyala, impala,