

Johnny Birks (Principal Ecologist at Swift Ecology): Three Boys out in the Bush – a Mammal-watching trip to Southern Africa

In June 2017 Johnny Birks and two friends went to Botswana, Namibia and Zambia to see how many mammals they could record in a month. They travelled over 1000 miles in a 4x4, camping in remote places (sometimes at considerable risk) and setting camera traps to record the amazing wildlife. All three countries have fabulous National Parks and rely heavily on ecotourism for their national income. The travellers were especially impressed with Botswana where the low population and a recent ban on recreational shooting mean that the animals can live in relative peace. Having said that, the white rhino has to be fenced in and under constant armed guard because of the danger of poaching. Unfortunately the Asian market for animal parts especially rhino horn, continues unabated.

Many tourists go to Africa for the “Big Five” but Johnny and his friends very much enjoyed the smaller species, which are an important part of the ecosystem. They saw many beautiful species of antelope and gazelle, jackals, foxes, bats, mongoose and baboons, to name but a few. Their camera trap caught nocturnal pictures of species most tourists never see: an aardvark, a brown hyena, a honey badger, a porcupine, a wildcat, a civet and a genet. Lions roared and an elephant passed within a few metres of their tent while they slept.



White rhino in Namibia