

Seconds from missing it all

Have you ever had one of those moments in the bush where everything changes in an instant? One minute, you're enjoying the calm of the African wilderness, and the next, you're right in the middle of something unforgettable. That's exactly what happened to us one afternoon in Kruger National Park.

We had set out from camp for a relaxed afternoon drive. Our plan was simple: head to the Matambeni hide, enjoy the peace and quiet, and see what we could spot. We were in two cars, taking our time and soaking in the scenery. When we arrived at the hide, we were welcomed by the striking sight of a fish eagle perched on a rock, wings outstretched as it dried them in the afternoon sun. It was the kind of moment you hope for on a drive—calm, majestic, and picture-perfect.

As we sat quietly, enjoying the moment and snapping a few photos, Dad came rushing in, clearly excited. "Guys! We've got wild dogs up the road!" he said, breathless. And just like that, the atmosphere shifted. We grabbed our things and hurried back to the cars, hoping we weren't too late.

Thankfully, the wild dogs were still there. The pack was stretched out across a wide area, trying to find any patch of shade they could in the harsh January heat. Some were lying in the shallow stream below, cooling themselves in puddles. Others were sprawled out on the sand, panting in the sun. We knew we were lucky to have found them, even if they weren't doing much.

Still, wild dogs are known for being most active early in the morning or late in the afternoon when it cools down. After watching them for a while, it became clear that they had no plans to move anytime soon. So we, in the one vehicle, made the call to leave and head to the Letaba Bridge for sundowners. We radioed the other car and arranged for a few drinks to be passed over once we got to their car.

As we were getting into position to receive our drinks, dad raised the alarm, "The wild dogs are on the move!" he shouted in a low tone. Of course, they were—just as we were about to leave them. By now, the other cars were already lined up. We didn't want to get in anyone's way, so we reversed back up a little way, hoping we might get another view if they moved further. What happened next was completely unexpected.

The pack, which had been heading in the opposite direction, suddenly changed course. A soft call, likely from the alpha female, seemed to signal a new plan. One by one, the wild dogs turned and began to move—not away from us, but straight toward us.

We quickly realised we needed to move. With hearts racing, we turned the car around just in time. Moments later, the bush opened up and the pack spilled onto the road, completely surrounding our vehicle. The first few dogs held back, almost as if they were waiting for the rest of the pack to join them. We sat frozen, watching in awe as the dogs moved around us.

And then—of course—disaster struck. CARD FULL. My camera blinked its warning at the worst possible moment. I scrambled to find another card, fumbling through my camera bag.

Luckily, Mom offered me hers, and I swapped them quickly. We managed to snap a few pictures just in time as the dogs bunched up together, clearly ready to hunt.

As quickly as they'd appeared, they moved off up the road in formation. We sat for a moment, stunned by what had just happened. Of all the cars at the sighting, we'd somehow ended up right in the middle of the action.

Later, as we finally enjoyed our sundowners on the Letaba Bridge, our drinks a little warm and our snacks a bit forgotten, we couldn't stop talking about it. Just two minutes earlier, and we would have missed it all.

That's the thing about nature—it never runs on a schedule. You never know when something incredible is about to happen. Sometimes, it's just about being in the right place at the right time... and not giving up too soon. I'm so glad we stayed those extra moments. Now we have an unforgettable memory to share, and a story that will be told for years to come.