Wildlife Campus

LEARN PROTECT SAVE

20 YEARS ANNIVERSARY

Magazine

Origin story:
"Would a Zippo help?"

Stiletto snakes by ASI

Course spotlight: Anti-Poaching

I found a fossil!
What to do now?

Buy a course package and support a rhino sanctuary

WildlifeCampus Magazine - July 2020 - Volume 4 - FREE

Would WildlifeCampus A Zippo help?

WildlifeCampus CEO
Todd Kaplan

In the mid-90s as a post-graduate student, I was deployed, by The Centre of Wildlife Management, a division of the Wildlife and Agricultural Faculty at the University of Pretoria, to a private reserve in very rural Northern Kwa-Zulu Natal. I was to conduct a preliminary two-week assessment ahead of a team who would spend months completing a comprehensive Wildlife Management Plan for the game reserve.

I met the reserve owners at their home in the leafy suburbs of Johannesburg to get an idea of the facilities, accommodations, on-site staff, precise location and to collect keys to entrance.

Enthused with the knowledge that an off-road vehicle would be available, that the guest tents with hot water would be open, and that a caretaker would be on site to assist; I set off on what would be a seven-hour drive.

Arriving at the reserve in late afternoon, I found vehicles but no keys, the guest tents but no electricity, and absolutely no sign of the caretaker. Fortunately, the reserve was small, ± 1200 ha (3Km x 4Km), small enough to survey on foot and not resident to any dangerous game.

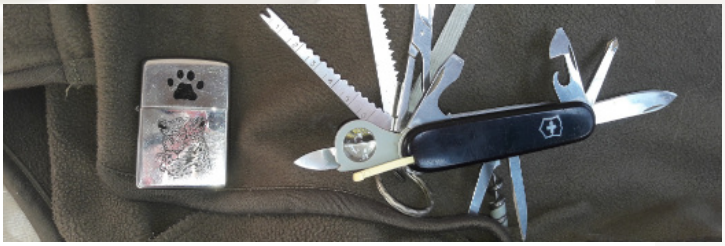
Preparation work for this initial evaluation included reviews of aerial, stereoscopic and topographical maps to accurately determine the reserve boundaries. The next step would be a comprehensive vegetation study with the goal of dividing the property into homogeneous vegetation units from which browsing and grazing capacities would eventually be calculated. A great way to begin this task is to get a bird's-eye view if possible, as it fills in the real detail that maps and photographs can't provide. Fortuitously, this reserve was roughly rectangular with a koppie or small hill on one corner. The following morning, I took a small backpack with provisions together with a sketchpad and began the hike to the summit of the elevation. On the way I encountered various herds of plains game, some belligerent wildebeest and a more curious than aggressive ostrich. Both can become dangerous if poorly negotiated, but some patience on both sides was sufficient for an uneventful traverse.

The hill was not particularly high (although it might get higher each time I recall the story), and it was not a difficult or technical climb either, but fairly steep; rising to perhaps 40m on a well vegetated slope strewn with boulders and rocky outcrops. Within 20 minutes I was not quite at the top, but rather at what I imagined would have been the reserve boundary, although no fencing was evident. I settled down on a flattish area and began to survey the reserve with a fairly decent pair of Bushnell's.

I wasn't there for long when I heard a low growl, behind me and to the right. I stayed completely still and listened hard, it growled again, louder and closer. Now I could hear what sounded like a swish of a tail, a long tail. Best outcome: a fairly large lost tabby. Opposite extreme: a hungry, old and injured leopard. Being mostly unarmed, the choices of action are particularly limited. My defensive inventory included a bristling Swiss Army pocket-knife (black, 26 tools, none useful), a comprehensive Leatherman knockoff (silver, 12 tools, none useful) and a genuine Zippo (embossed with a picture of a leopard, low on lighter fluid).

Stay? Move? I did both, in the sense that with glacial movements I swivelled my neck to peer behind me and to the right. Two meters away revealed not the tabby but rather a juvenile leopard peering back. Never turn your back on a wild cat and never run is the advice I'd read often in multiple Wilbur Smith novels. 40m up a steep koppie running was never really an option anyway. We studied each other for a while, I have no idea for how long and without looking away I simply stood up and edged away at a pace matching continental drift. I kept going backwards and downwards until the cat was lost from sight. It never moved. I never saw it again. I still have the pocket-knife and the Zippo.

Todd



In this *Magazine*

Study Upskill & Contribute!

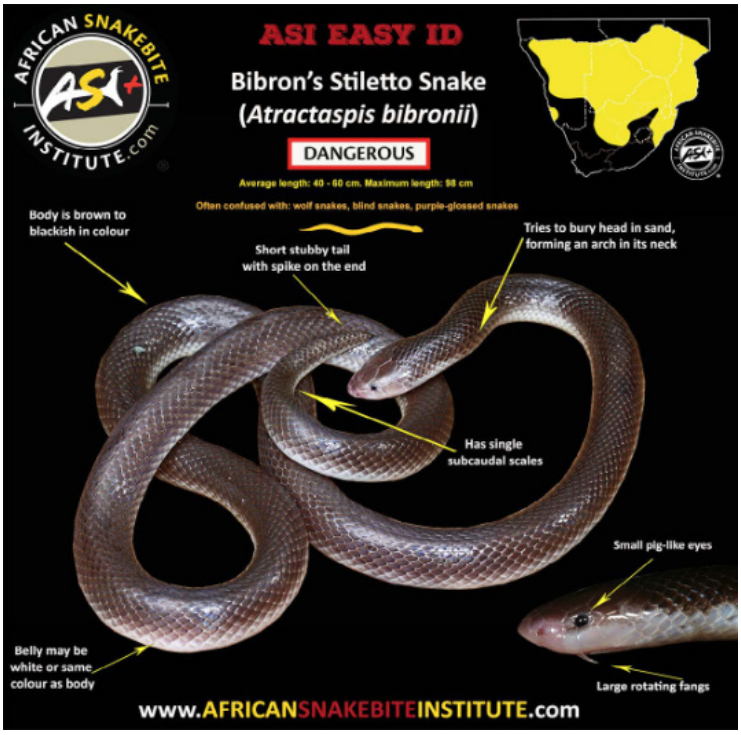
INTRODUCING THE STILETTO SNAKE

Snake identification is a vast topic and there are many varying things to look out for when it comes to identifying snakes.
Even the experts sometimes get identification wrong, and it can have dire consequences.

One of the most important things we teach our delegates and members of the public, is not to pick up snakes whose identity you do not now.
Unless absolutely, 100% sure that the snake is harmless, or mildly venomous, do not pick it up.
We see far too many people who think that a small black snake found outside a chalet at night, is a harmless Wolf Snake, only to find out when picking it up by hand, that it's actually a venomous Bibron's Stiletto Snake (Actractaspis bibronii).

Stiletto Snakes, also known as the Sypikslang (and previously known as the Mole Adder, Moladder or Burrowing Asp) account for a large number of bad bites every summer in Southern Africa. They are secretive snakes and are often quite small in size, usually around 30 – 40 cm in length. They spend most of their time underground where they hunt for snakes and lizards, but may also eat small rodents as well as reptile eggs.
On hot summer nights, especially after good rain, they come up to the surface and this is when people are at risk. These dark snakes are often confused with harmless-looking snakes and a large number of people are bitten when picking them up with their bare hands.

This snake is quite difficult to identify but there are a few features one can look out for. They have small, pig-like eyes. The body is usually brown to black in colour, and the belly may be the same colour, but in many areas the belly can be white.



When on the surface, the snake will often try to escape by digging it's head into the sand and this will result in an arch being formed in the neck region. They also tend to thrash around with jerky movements when threatened.

Another important feature of this snake is the relatively short stubby tail which tapers into a spike at the end.

For their size, they have large fangs that rotate and the snake is capable of letting a fang protrude beyond the jaw while the mouth is closed and may use it in a stabbing fashion.

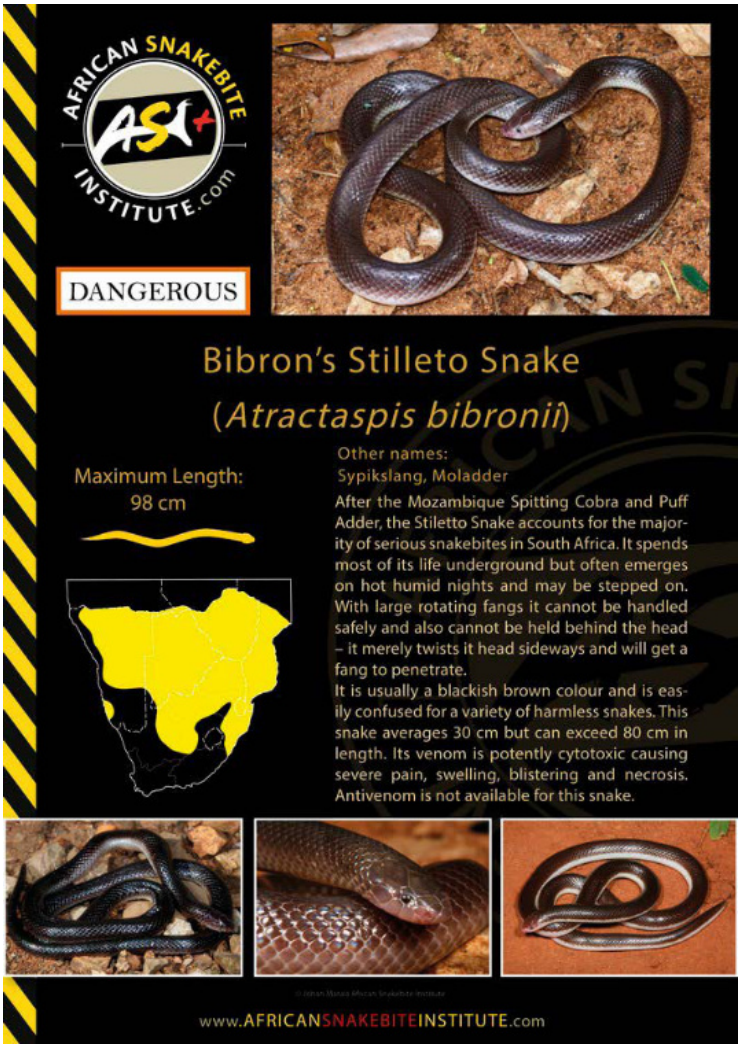
Unfortunately, it is also one of few snakes that cannot be held safely in any manner. If gripped behind the neck, as snake handlers often do, the snake protrudes a fang and twists its neck, always getting at least one finger. Some handlers are bitten two or three times before they release the snake.

Stiletto snake venom is potently cytotoxic and causes immediate pain and swelling. As the swelling spreads, blisters may form, and this invariably results in some tissue damage.

A bite on a finger is particularly bad as the local tissue damage often results in a finger or part of it being amputated.

To date we have not had any fatal bites in South Africa but elsewhere in Africa a number of fatalities have been recorded from the larger Stiletto species.

As there is no antivenom for the bite of this snake, doctors may find a bite difficult to treat and other than pain killers and keeping the bitten area slightly elevated and clean, there is very little that can be done. Early surgical intervention is seldom advised.



We generally recommend a hands- off approach when it comes to handling snakes, but what ever you do, do not pick up small dark snakes with your hands, unless you're 100% sure of it's identity.

Course Spotlight

Anti-Poaching

Written and updated in collaboration with KaiNav Conservation Africa, our Anti-Poaching Course is based upon extensive direct counter-poaching experience.

It provides a theoretical, detailed background to the prevention of poaching, theft, and mutilation of game animals, from a game reserve perspective. We explore what poaching and anti-poaching are and the 3 levels of poaching. We discuss the anti-poaching unit, how to set one up and the two main options to counter poaching: active and passive prevention.

Examine poaching methods and the economics of poaching, anti-poaching equipment, and the various anti-poaching action plans together with the legalities of anti-poaching.

If you are a reserve owner, conservancy, wildlife or game farm manager; game ranger, game guide, game guard, trails guide, field guide or merely have an interest in this field, this course is for you.

Did you know?

Who you support?

For every Online Anti-Poaching Course sold
WildlifeCampus pays 10% of the course fee directly to
KaiNav Conservation Africa

Practical Training

For Anti-Poaching Practical Training, WildlifeCampus highly recommends GameWays. For more information, please visit www.gameways-npo.org

Buy the online Anti-Poaching, Wildlife Management and Capture, Care & Management of Wildlife courses
for the combination price of **R 4,000.00**
See **page 4 of this magazine**

We have an entire website dedicated to this specific subject. For full info, visit:
www.antipoachingcourse.com

WildlifeCampus

Full Online Course Listing

Course	Components	Price
Field Guiding / Game Ranging	82	R 5,500.00
Wildlife Management	42	R 3,600.00
Behaviour Guide to Mammals of RSA Lowveld	73	R 2,950.00
Behaviour Guide to African Herbivores	63	R 2,600.00
Animal Tracks & Signs of Africa	36	R 2,500.00
Capture & Care and management of Wildlife	27	R 2,400.00
Game Lodge Management	23	R 2,200.00
Intensive Wildlife Production	18	R 1,950.00
Marine Biology for Guides, Divers & Enthusiasts	39	R 1,850.00
Survival	44	R 1,800.00
Behaviour Guide to African Carnivores	38	R 1,550.00
Cultural Guiding: Eastern Cape Province	16	R 1,550.00
Cultural Guiding: Free State Province	14	R 1,550.00
Cultural Guiding: Gauteng Province	17	R 1,550.00
Cultural Guiding: Kwa-Zulu Natal Province	20	R 1,550.00
Cultural Guiding: Limpopo Province	9	R 1,550.00
Cultural Guiding: Mpumalanga Province	13	R 1,550.00
Cultural Guiding: North-West Province	10	R 1,550.00
Cultural Guiding: Northern Cape Province	17	R 1,550.00
Cultural Guiding: Western Cape Province	22	R 1,550.00
Geology, Palaeontology Evolution	21	R 1,500.00
Anti-Poaching	18	R 1,500.00
Digital Wildlife Photography	18	R 1,250.00
Guides Guide to Guiding	16	R 1,250.00
Trails Guide	16	R 1,100.00
Game Guard Management	12	R 850.00
FGASA Exam Preparation	30	R 800.00
Snakes & Reptiles of the Lowveld	17	R 700.00
Human - Wildlife Conflict	12	R 700.00
Game Ranch Economics	9	R 700.00
Behaviour Guide to African Primates	14	R 600.00
Wilderness Navigation	12	R 500.00

Click on the name of a course to view its summary

Student Spotlight

WildlifeCampus

In this edition, we introduce WildlifeCampus Student Graeme Mitchley from South Africa. He has been a WildlifeCampus student since 2017 and completed our Field Guiding/Game Ranging course.

Graeme is 48, a teacher at Hurlyvale Primary school and forms a wonderful team with his wife Angela. Their lives are ruled by 4 very spoilt furbabies, 2 daschunds and 2 cats. Unconditional support from his wife gives him the time to pursue his hobby, photographing wildlife.

He recently took a sabbatical for 6 months and is now back at Hurlyvale as a teacher. Previously, he had been teaching for 21 years of which he was deputy principal for 8 years.

The time off gave him the opportunity to recharge batteries, but also made him realise teaching is what he really enjoys. It opens up an opportunity to make young minds aware of the issues facing our planet.

Previous sport and work commitments always kept him away from the bush, until his wife suggested in September 2012, that they spend a long weekend in Hazyview and visit the Kruger National Park. Now, Graeme is completely hooked and goes to the Kruger whenever he can. Photography became a hobby and he tries to improve each time he visits.

In 2015, in conjunction with his passion for photography, he started a Facebookpage **("Graeme Mitchley – Amateur Wildlife Photographer")** to showcase his photographs to nature enthusiasts all over the world.

Graeme's special love is rhinos. He has been involved in rhino conservation for many years as it breaks his heart to think that rhinos might not be around for much longer. Raising funds and creating awareness has been his primary focus, while getting a tremendous amount of support from family, colleagues, friends, learners and especially the Hurlyvale community. Over the years, money was donated to the Pilanesberg Game Reserve, Rietvlei Nature Reserve, The Rhino Orphanage and Hoedspruit Endangered Species Centre. He was invited to attend the Rhino Conservation Awards in 2015 and 2016. In 2019, he raised R 20 000 for his birthday to donate to Care for Wild Rhino Sanctuary. He also manages an extra Facebookpage totally dedicated to rhinos called **"A Celebration of Rhinos"**.

Please show your support by visiting his Facebook pages.

The world of fossils & Fossil preparation

by Adelheid Bechtold Celliers

This article provides a short insight and general resource on fossils and preparation for enthusiasts of paleontology and fossils. From amateurs to school and university students.

South Africa has a rich fossil record of animals, plants, sea life and hominins, which lived millions of years ago. The Karoo region of South Africa is an example of a large, shallow inland sea, which slowly dried up and eventually became a desert containing rich fossil deposits.

Visiting the Kitching Fossil Exploration Centre, Nieu Bethesda in the Karoo, I joined a tour viewing fossils in situ in a river bed and fossil preparation, an experience which I recommend to all fossil enthusiasts.

Gorgonopsian fossils have been found throughout southern Africa, but they are by far best known from the Karoo Basin, and the region surrounding Nieu Bethesda and Graaff-Reinet is particularly well-known for its rich, gorgonopsian-bearing fossil beds.

Many of the gorgonopsian fossils found around Nieu Bethesda were discovered by members of the Kitching family. Among these fossils are giant skulls from the largest type of African gorgonopsians: rubidgeines (named after another family of collectors in the area: the first representative of this group, Rubidgea atrox, was discovered by Dr. Sidney Rubidge of Wellwood).

Paleontology and Fossils

The study of fossils is called Palaeontology. Palae meaning “really old” and ontology the study of ”existence” of extinct organisms, as revealed by their remains. Fossils are discovered when exposed at the Earth's surface as a result of weathering by wind and water, at which point they can be excavated and brought back to a museum or other collection.

Geologists measure the changes in rocks to date it with the younger layers on top and the older ones at the bottom. The age of a rock in years is called “absolute age”, which is measured by small amounts of radioactive elements in the rock called uranium. As the rock ages, the uranium loses its radioactivity and changes into lead, which can be measured accurately to one of the geological time periods.

Fossil specimens are the remains of organisms, fragments and impressions of life preserved in rock having gone through a process of complete or partial replacement of organic material by inorganic material.

The author of this article would like to thank:

Prof. Ian Mckay & Marina Rubidge: Kitching Fossil Resource Centre

The Paleontology Portal: http://preparation.paleo.amnh.org

Fossil Photographs: Dr Roger Smith (www.psp.org.za)

The world of fossils & Fossil preparation

by Adelheid Bechtold Celliers

Safe collection of fossils

Collecting methods employed by vertebrate paleontologists can be grouped according to the size of the specimen being collected. It is vital to remember that the safe collection of the specimen is paramount, and that specimens collected in the field must later be prepared in the laboratory. If you are unfamiliar with appropriate excavation techniques you can damage the fossil and the site where it was found as well as lose vital information. Contact a museum to get aid or advice from an experienced field collector in vertebrate palaeontology, who will have the appropriate permission and permits to look for, and/or collect fossils, be they on private or public lands. In South Africa, permission and permits are obtained for the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA).

No fossil should be collected without good data; these typically include GPS coordinates, digital photographs of both the specimen and the site, and field notes about stratigraphic placement and taphonomic information.

Microfauna sorting/collecting

The tiniest specimens, such as early mammal teeth and jaws, can be smaller than a grain of sand and difficult to see without the aid of a microscope.

For work in the field, the preparator should have knowledge of both geology and sedimentology so that the best methods of discovering fossils and then removing them from various rock types could be used. Dry sieving utilises screens of progressively smaller mesh size to sieve out the smallest specimen. This method is useful for the smallest fossils (such as tiny teeth in very loose, sandy sediment); it can also be used to find fragments of bone that have weathered out on to the surface surrounding a larger fossil.

The material is placed into, and gently run through, sieves of progressively smaller mesh size to isolate the fossils. After initial sieving in the field to remove most of the matrix the samples can be shipped back to the laboratory, where the fossils can be sorted with the aid of a microscope.

The world of fossils & Fossil preparation

by Adelheid Bechtold Celliers

Isolated specimens or fragments of bone that are called “float” are often found on the surface of outcrops. All float fragments associated with a find should be collected. This is done by tracing fragments back up the slope to determine the highest level of the bone. Even small pieces are worth collecting, as they can be informative fragments of a larger bone.

Excavating larger bones or an articulated specimen is complicated and paleontologists are often constrained by time, money and manpower. In addition, it is often difficult and (and may even be dangerous) to attempt to “field prepare” or extract bones from the matrix in field conditions. Instead the excavators extract the specimen and some of the surrounding matrix as a block. This block is then transported back to the lab where it can be prepared under controlled conditions.

Plaster jackets must be built strong enough to protect the specimen during transport but should also come apart in layers and separate easily from the specimen when back in the lab. It is usually a good idea to work with a preparator in the field or, if that is not possible, discussing the process of jacketing with a preparator beforehand.

Body fossils and trace fossils

Body fossils form when the hard parts of dead plant or animal are buried by sediment such as mud or sand. The bones and teeth of the animal and the tough parts of the plant slowly get replaced, by rock minerals (silica) and this is called mineralisation. Body fossils tell us about the structure of the plant or animal body.

Trace fossils are the fossilised remains of anything left behind by an animal, such as fossilised nest or eggs, animal droppings and footprints.

Establishing Communication

Fossil preparation is an essential element in the field of paleontology; preparators work in close collaboration with researchers to reveal crucial details of the fossil for further study.

Preparation is the process of removing a fossil specimen from the surrounding matrix in which it is embedded. Poor preparation can permanently damage or even destroy a fossil. As a result, preparation should only be conducted by someone who understands the specimen, the materials they are working with, and the range of techniques available to them

Preparation is normally done with a specific aim in mind e.g., identification, research, or display. The goal of preparation should be clear to both the requester (i.e., researcher, exhibits team) and the preparator. Preparation is time consuming and is best done with a specific aim in mind. The preparator should understand what data is most relevant and what the researcher is hoping to be able to investigate through examination of the specimen.

Be sure to keep an eye out for next month’s issue where Adelheid digs deeper into the full process of fossil preparation!

Online Anti-Poaching Workshop

Would you like to learn more about the intricacies of Poaching and Wildlife Crime?

Delve deeper into this interesting subject during a **live online presentation** by conservation biologist Kailen Padayachee.

Everyone can attend from the comfort of their own home and no prior knowledge is required.

This **live online workshop** is an excellent starting point, or addition, to the WildlifeCampus Anti-Poaching course.

Participants of the workshop will receive a R300.00 voucher towards the purchase of an online Anti-Poaching course!

Duration: 1 hour 30 min

Price: R 279.00/pp

Limit: 10 participants

Contact: + 27 82 770 56 23

info@kainavconservation.org

Next Workshop:

23rd July 2020 19:00 SAST

KaiNav Conservation Foundation

www.kainavconservation.org

WildlifeCampus

LEARN PROTECT SAVE

I was not *Alone*

By David Batzofin

Like all good anecdotes, this one starts with “Once upon a time”...

My day started like any other in the African bush, an early morning game drive followed by a scrumptious, if somewhat leisurely, breakfast served on the deck attached to the main lodge.

Once the table had been cleared, I was left alone and I decided to use the time to start writing an article on my experiences at the camp.

Little did I realise that the article would encompass a plot twist I was not expecting.

Did I say that I was alone?

Well, I thought I was and then I heard the large front door slam. I peered around the partition that separated where I was working from the dining room and stared straight into the face of a VERY large male baboon that had wandered in and had closed the door behind him!

He and I took a moment to realise that we were now sharing the space before the adrenaline kicked in for both of us. We reacted in different ways; I looked for a weapon or a phone to call for help, while the baboon took off doing circuits of the dining room, bouncing off the walls and the furniture in a vain attempt to find an escape route.

Heart pumping, I could only stare and hope that this animal would not come into the lounge, which is where I found myself, as the only weapon I could find was an umbrella. Not a great defense against the huge incisors of an animal that was getting more frenetic by the minute.

Interestingly, on more than one occasion, we both took a ‘time-out’ to stare at each other before the madness continued in the dining room.

At some point, the baboon realised that the door to the kitchen swung inwards and possibly thinking he could get out, he barged through like a gunslinger in a Wild West saloon. From the clattering and crashing of pots and pans, I figured that he was taking out his frustrations on as many of the kitchen utensils as possible.

I took the opportunity to scurry into the dining room and open the sliding doors that lead out onto the deck and freedom for the baboon, should he realise that it offered him an escape route. For me, it was not an option as it was a sheer drop from the deck to the valley floor below.

I was not *Alone*

By David Batzofin

Much like a fly that can find its way into a room but then is seemingly unable to find its way out, even if you leave the windows open, this baboon was so stressed that he returned from the kitchen to bounce on the dining room table and chairs without realising that the road to freedom was right in front of him.

The noise in the kitchen finally alerted the staff who came to find out what was going on. The external kitchen door opened outwards, and I could hear the shrieks of the staff as the baboon bounded to freedom.

Some rather scared faces peered into the dining room and I had to warn them that it was me and not another member of the troop in the lounge.

After we had all taken the time to calm down, several interesting facts were discovered.

- The baboon was able to open the rather heavy front door.
- The emergency phone was in the kitchen and the cabling had been ripped up earlier that morning by a wandering elephant.
- The lunch menu would have to be started from scratch as certain of the required appliances had been smashed and were unusable.

At the end of this interaction, one of my first thoughts was “If only I had had my camera with me”... it turns out that it had been on the desk next to my laptop all along.

I still wonder, when the baboon recounted his side of the story to the rest of the troop, if he mentioned me in a favourable light.

Facebook Competition *Winner*

During the month of June, a competition was held on the **WildlifeCampus Facebook group**.

Photography enthusiasts could submit their pictures to stand a chance of winning an online course of their choice.

The winning picture (determined by most likes) was submitted by **Carla Morris**.

Congratulations Carla, enjoy your course!