



# Wildlife Campus

20  
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# Magazine

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“The Genet and  
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# WildlifeCampus Courting Disaster

The origin story



WildlifeCampus CEO  
Todd Kaplan

After about a week, with the rancid remains of several goats in its wake, the fully grown male lion was spotted wandering through the orchards of a local farmer. A nearby veterinarian, with game capture experience, drugs, and equipment was quickly summoned and the felonious feline was successfully darted and tranquillised.

The reserve was contacted and it would despatch a game capture recovery team. Unfortunately, the team would be delayed by several hours so the farmer and on-site vet were asked if they could “put the lion somewhere?”, where it could be safely monitored and re-darted, if necessary, should the lion start to wake up. The farmer thoughtfully recommended his enclosed tennis court.



Moving an immobilised adult male lion is a difficult and interesting task, weighing in at somewhere between 180kg and 220kg and without convenient handholds, it is no

The physical aspects of wildlife management may at times be exhilarating, exhausting, difficult, and dangerous, even occasionally comical, the reader will decide on how this anecdote compares.

Our story begins with a lion escaping the comfy confines of a private reserve in Limpopo, in the north-east of South Africa. It is not a particularly uncommon occurrence. The surrounding community was quickly notified and asked to be on the lookout and to report any sightings to the reserve.

simple matter. In this case, a wooden pallet and handy forklift did a respectable job with the hesitant help of several farmworkers. Getting the lion into the tennis court involved tipping it onto a section of the tennis net and dragging the animal inside through the half-size gate and then shading it with a beach umbrella.

While by no means a suitable enclosure for an awake and active lion, the tennis court was fully fenced to a height of 3.6m and would serve as its home while sedated. The cat could be easily monitored and if it began to wake, simply be re-darted from a short, unobscured, and safe distance.

When the recovery team arrived several hours later, the wildlife veterinarian of the group examined the slumbering feline, gave it a booster shot of sedative and performed a health examination. He then invited onlookers to come into the court to see the animal up close. News had travelled rapidly and there was a fairly large crowd of people gathered to see the spectacle. Warily at first, and then in a flood, the tennis court was soon packed with people. Posing for photos with the lion, (not selfies, since this was long before mobile phones had cameras), petting it, lying down beside it, lifting a paw - quite a carnival atmosphere until the lion breathed in deeply and let out an ear-splitting, spine-chilling roar!

# WildlifeCampus Courting Disaster

Pandemonium!

It is not uncommon that lions under the effects of Carfentanil, fully sedated, can still roar. While not measured that day, with a roar that can exceed 100 decibels and be heard over a 5km distance, for those



standing next to it, surprise is probably an understatement!

The 20 to 30 people inside with the (still heavily somnambulant) cat fled in every direction, then realised that they too were in a type of cage and, mainly (manely?) changed direction and headed toward the pint-sized gate or climbed the fence. Those in the know thought this quite amusing, humour is after all, about perspective. Fortunately, no one was hurt, although some clothing might have needed changing.

The lion was duly repatriated, and next woke up in the reserve it had briefly absconded from, none the wiser of the starring role it played on a centre court.

Todd

## Did you know?

For every online Game Lodge Management Course (written in collaboration with Wilderness Safaris) sold, WildlifeCampus pays 25% of the course fee directly to the Wilderness Wildlife Trust?

WildlifeCampus is proud to have contributed **R 84,000** towards Wilderness Wildlife Trust in 2020.



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# NEW Front of House Course Student Feedback

*"Very informative and interesting!"*

*"Very tricky questions  
but an insightful program."*

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and to the point."*

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a lot of fun and exciting."*

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# THE MAJESTIC CAPE COBRA



One of the most notable cobra species in Southern Africa is the Cape Cobra (*Naja nivea*) – often referred to as a “Geelslang” (which translates to yellow snake) or “Koperkapel”.

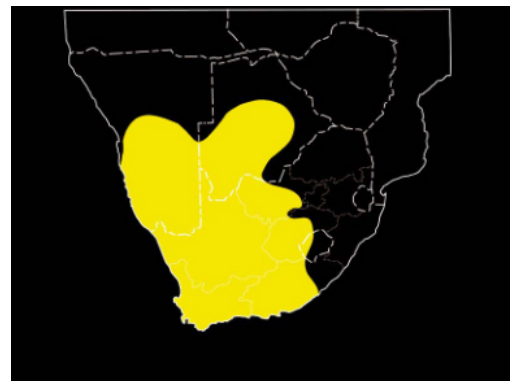
The Cape Cobra varies in colour across its range, often being mistaken for the non-venomous and abundant Mole Snake - both being common and quite large. It varies in colour from near black to dark or light brown, beige, yellow, yellow-orange and sometimes with darker or lighter speckling. Cape Cobras have smooth shiny dorsal scales and the tail tip is usually very dark. The juveniles have one or two dark bands on the throat.

This snake is nervous and will avoid confrontation if possible, but if threatened may be quick to form an impressive hood and will bite readily. It cannot spit its venom.

Largely active during the day, this snake is also known to forage for food in the evenings. It is well known for raiding Sociable Weavers nests where it preys on fledglings and eggs, especially in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park.

The Cape cobra has relatively small short fangs (under 5 mm) that are situated in the front of the mouth and they are fixed, unlike the moveable fangs of the Puff Adder. They can be seen when the snake opens its mouth. Fangs are replaced periodically and should a fang break off another one will come forward and replace it.

It occurs largely in the Cape provinces but extends into the Free State, Northwest, southern Botswana and Namibia to just north of Windhoek.







It is by far our most dangerous cobra and with the Black Mamba it accounts for the majority of fatal snake bites in Southern Africa.

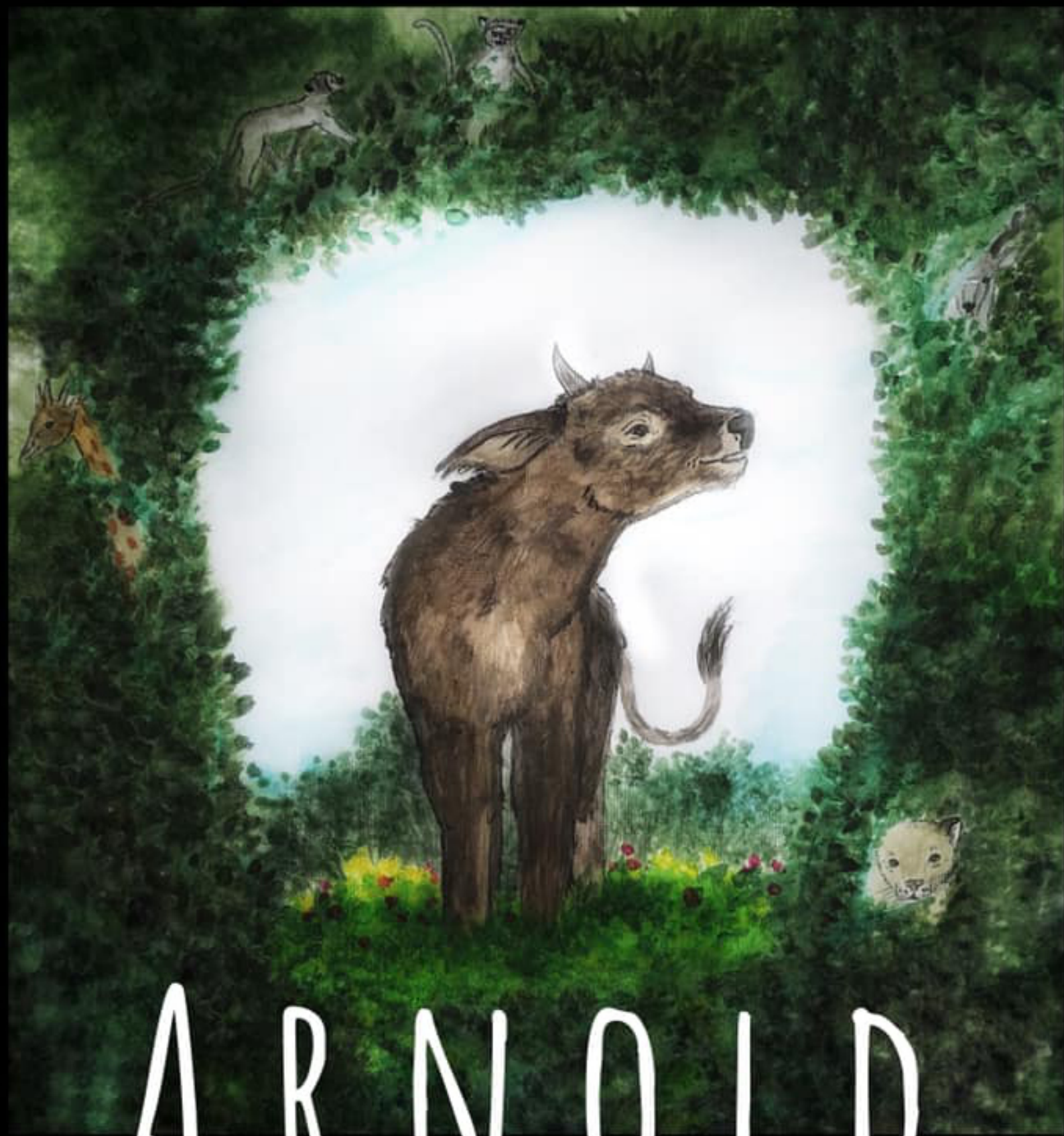
The venom of these two species is predominantly neurotoxic and spreads quickly, causing paralysis and rapidly affects breathing, resulting in drooping eyelids, excessive salivation and sweating; victims often experience a metallic taste and progressive weakness. In serious bites the patient may experience difficulty with breathing in less than half an hour. Victims need urgent hospitalisation as they may need to be ventilated. In a severe bite antivenom is essential. Polyvalent antivenom is effective against the venom of Cape Cobra bites.

Cape Cobra and Black Mamba venom may cause paralysis and in Cape Cobra bites is a major problem. Adequate dosages of polyvalent antivenom will reverse the effects of paralysis in both these snakes but more rapidly in Black Mamba bites. In Cape Cobra bites the antivenom may take 12 - 18 hours to reverse paralysis. Without antivenom it could take several days with the patient on a ventilator before recovery. Antivenom is a far better choice than several days on a ventilator.





SAVANNAH WILLIAMS



ARNOLD

THE AFRICAN BUFFALO



# Student Spotlight

## WildlifeCampus

WildlifeCampus is proud of our student Savannah Williams for releasing her first childrens book "Arnold The African Buffalo" (now available on Amazon).

The true story of a young buffalo named Arnold, who lost his herd in Africa, was rescued and raised by humans, and then made an incredible return to the wild!

This story is told from Arnold's perspective, and shows how his unique personality helped him make friends with many species, from human to giraffe. It also teaches the importance of being brave, never giving up, and always staying positive in any situation.

### About Savannah

*"My entire life I have been passionate about wildlife. I have travelled the world, and worked in many places across the planet, meeting many amazing individuals, both people and animals.*

*The last 8 years I have been dedicated to Africa and the conservation of its wildlife.*

*I've worked as a field guide, photographer, lodge assistant manager, wildlife tracker, and my most recent employment, wildlife monitor for cheetah conservation.*



*It is my hope to share the groundbreaking discoveries I've made in animal behaviour, while working in the field, with all conservationists. Because I believe, we are all in this TOGETHER.*

*It is my goal to give my all for the better of wildlife conservation and the world. So that through my years of dedication to wildlife, the rest of the world may also come to learn and put to practice what I have lived."*

### Follow Savannah on Instagram:

<https://www.instagram.com/savannah.on.the.savanna/>

Or check out her Blog: <https://savannahsafrica.com/>



# Miniature Dragons

*Article and photos by:  
Warren Schmidt*





# Miniature Dragons

By Warren Schmidt

Warren holds a Master of Science degree in Ecological Sciences awarded by the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

He has three decades of experience in ecology, conservation science, invasion biology and herpetology. He has worked as a journalist, magazine editor, and lecturer, and has presented talks, seminars, and lectures.



In the forests and kloofs of South Africa, there be miniature dragons. A slow, careful, forward gait with feet clasp thin twigs, and eyes scanning in two different directions, a small, drab little reptile suddenly freezes, its eyes now focused intently forward. The mouth opens slightly and within a split second, a long projectile tongue shoots out, ensnaring a fly on the moist bulbous tip and instantly retracts back into the mouth.

The first species to be described from South Africa was the Cape Dwarf Chameleon, described by Daudin in 1802. In 1943, renowned South African herpetologist and former director of the Transvaal Museum, Dr Vivian F. FitzSimons, included 10 taxa in his monograph *The Lizards of South Africa* under the genus *Microsaura*. In 1976, a KwaZulu-Natal-based herpetologist, Lynn Raw, resurrected the genus *Bradypodion* and described three new species. 55 years later, herpetologist William R. Branch of the Port Elizabeth Museum included 15 described species in his 1998 Field Guide to the Snake and other Reptiles of southern Africa. Currently, there are 17 described species with at least five more awaiting formal scientific description. The Ngome Dwarf Chameleon was only described in 2009, the Umlalazi Dwarf Chameleon in 2008 and the Swartberg Dwarf Chameleon in 2006.



*Bradypodion caeruleogula*

In 2004 Krystal Tolley and colleagues published the first phylogenetic study on South African dwarf chameleons using two gene sequences – 16S ribosomal RNA and ND2. This gave a clearer picture of the evolutionary relationships between dwarf chameleons indicating the presence of probable cryptic species within the genus. This study contributed towards the three newly described species mentioned above.

Several chameleon species, notably some of the Madagascan species, exhibit spectacular and vivid colour displays, particularly males during courtship. These colours may be bright red, turquoise green, electric blue and bright yellow. Research undertaken by Jérémie Teyssier and colleagues from the University of Geneva demonstrated how Madagascan panther chameleons can shift colour through active tuning of a triangular lattice of guanine nanocrystals within the superficial layer of dermal iridophores.



# Miniature Dragons

By Warren Schmidt

A deeper cluster of iridophores with larger crystals reflect a substantial amount of sunlight. Within dwarf chameleons, those that live in dense forest appear to exhibit much brighter and vivid colour patterning and may have similar mechanisms at work. Those that live in more open savanna, karoo or fynbos biomes are drab with browns and greys. Melanophores in the skin produce the dark pigment. The green colourations is caused by chromatophores and the yellows by xanthophore pigments.

Many chameleon species, including dwarf chameleons, have pale or white lateral lines. These have been shown to serve some form of predator avoidance. When a threat is detected, the chameleon will angle its body in such a way that the lateral lines cause a disruption of the body form confusing the predator. In many chameleons, but not dwarf chameleons, they have a white ventral (belly) stripe which they angle towards the perceived threat. This stripe may disrupt the outline of the chameleon's body, making it harder to detect, but the results in these studies were not conclusive, and more research is required.

A recent exciting discovery is that some chameleons can produce fluorescence which illuminates under the ultra-violet spectrum and is produced from bone just underneath a superficial layer of skin. This has been discovered in several chameleon lineages including the dwarf chameleons. This aids chameleons living in shaded forests in mate and conspecific recognition. Research has demonstrated that fluorescence emits strongly in the spectrum of around 430 nm (nanometers) in a blue colour which contrasts vividly against the green and brown background of forest habitats.



*Bradypodion nemorale*

Research by Devi Stuart-Fox and colleagues demonstrated the ultraviolet spectrum is used in visual display for conspecifics to detect one another against the dark forest environment, whilst at the same time remaining cryptically concealed from potential predators.

Dwarf chameleons are viviparous giving birth to live young. This is an unusual method of reproduction in chameleons as most lineages (genera) lay eggs, the only other exception being certain members of the *Trioceros* genus from East and Central Africa. These live-bearing chameleons are however found at high altitudes, sometimes above the frost line, so viviparity is advantageous in that the females can thermoregulate efficiently while the embryos develop. As with South African dwarf chameleons, they tend to be smaller than their egg-laying counterparts. *Bradypodion* is thought to have radiated around 14 million years ago during a very cool period. Forest refugia was believed to offer a stable climate, but dwarf chameleons would have had to resort to viviparity in order to successfully reproduce.

Dwarf chameleons are a highly threatened family of reptiles. Under the latest IUCN Red List threat classification, there are currently three species listed as endangered. These include the Umlalazi Dwarf Chameleon, the Pondo Dwarf Chameleon and the Midlands Dwarf Chameleon.



# Miniature Dragons

By Warren Schmidt



*Bradypodion ventrale*

As tempting as it may be to snatch a dwarf chameleon for your garden, these beautiful lizards should never be translocated. There are currently several introduced populations of dwarf chameleons in various parts of South Africa, including Eastern Cape Dwarf Chameleons in Johannesburg! By all means, encourage chameleons to naturally colonise your garden from surrounding areas by planting indigenous vegetation and avoiding the use of herbicides and pesticides.

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# The Genet

## and the snack platter

By David Batzofin



One of the perks of being a working travel writer is arriving at your destination and finding a well-stocked snack platter.

I have to say that these platters can often lead to a variety of wildlife interactions, some slightly more nerve-racking than others.

Picture this, I arrive at my destination to find a delicious platter of snacks comprising both sweet and savory bite-size pieces. While I settle in, I nibbled a handful... for research purposes of course, and then left on a game drive.

Having forgotten to cover the delicacies, I return to find that ants have overrun the plate, making the food inedible. Score 1-0 to the insects.

Now fast forward several months to a different camp on the same reserve. Do you think that I had learned my lesson about covering platters? Turns out I had not.

In this particular instance, I was staying in a tent and the aforementioned platter had been left, carefully wrapped, on a table on the deck outside.



Remembering the incident with the ants, I checked the plate on my return from the game drive... all clean, so I indulged in some of the biltong and dried wors before heading for dinner.

On my return, the platter was brought into the tent, and I zipped up the fly-screen for the night. As I settled down to do some work, my attention was distracted by scrabbling at the netting...and there, trying to gain access was a small-spotted genet! For those who don't know what a genet is, it is "... a lithe catlike omnivorous mammal, which has an elongated body, is short-legged, with a long tapering tail, pointed nose, large rounded ears, and retractile claws".

A loud "Get away"( or words to that effect) from me, caused said predator to leave the deck. I am uncertain if I would have been that brave or that effective had my nocturnal visitor been a leopard or a lion. Score 1-0 to the human...

But, dear reader, it did not end there. Little did I know that was not the end of the interaction.

Innocently, I switched off my light and fell into a deep sleep that only the bush can provide. As a result, I did not hear the first scampering of tiny clawed feet across the wooden floor of the tent.

What did wake me was the lip-smacking noise that was emanating from INSIDE the corner of my tent.



# The Genet

## and the snack platter

By David Batzofin

I grabbed my torch, and in the powerful beam who should I discover snacking away heartily? You guessed it, the genet that had visited earlier. Seeing it was 02h00 in the morning, I am uncertain who was more surprised but suffice to say we both reacted in diametrically opposed ways. I stayed on the bed while the genet headed for the bathroom, only to return a split-second later with what I suppose could be viewed as panic in its eyes.

It subsequently turned out that it was able to get in but was unable to find an escape route and was therefore dashing back and forth getting more and more agitated with each pass.

All I had to protect myself was my pillow and a Leatherman multi-tool...if it came to hand-to-claw combat.

As it headed off to the bathroom, I unzipped the tent flap, and on its return, it made its escape out into the night. No doubt to tell its side of the story to family and friends.

I did inform the staff in the morning, and their maintenance staff found a hole in the roof of the tent where the critter had entered. I mentioned to the housekeeping staff that the contents of my platter had been decimated by said genet and they were most apologetic...but none of the snacks were replenished!

Lesson learned and I now make certain that I either eat my snacks on arrival, or I lock them away so that they do not attract animals with teeth and claws.



## Junior Anti-Poaching Course

[Click here to try out a free component of this course](#)

For Juniors aged 10-15 years old, this course aims to provide you with the necessary skills and knowledge to help eradicate poaching, even at a young age. We explain poaching and anti-poaching, some of the different types of poaching and the ways we can help prevent it from happening. If you are a young conservationist who is keen to learn and make a difference, this course is for you! As a young person, you hold the key to positive conservation change, for future generations!