



**Wildlife Campus**

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# Magazine



## Hippos

By Amy Holt

## Arabian Tahr

By Stuart on Nature

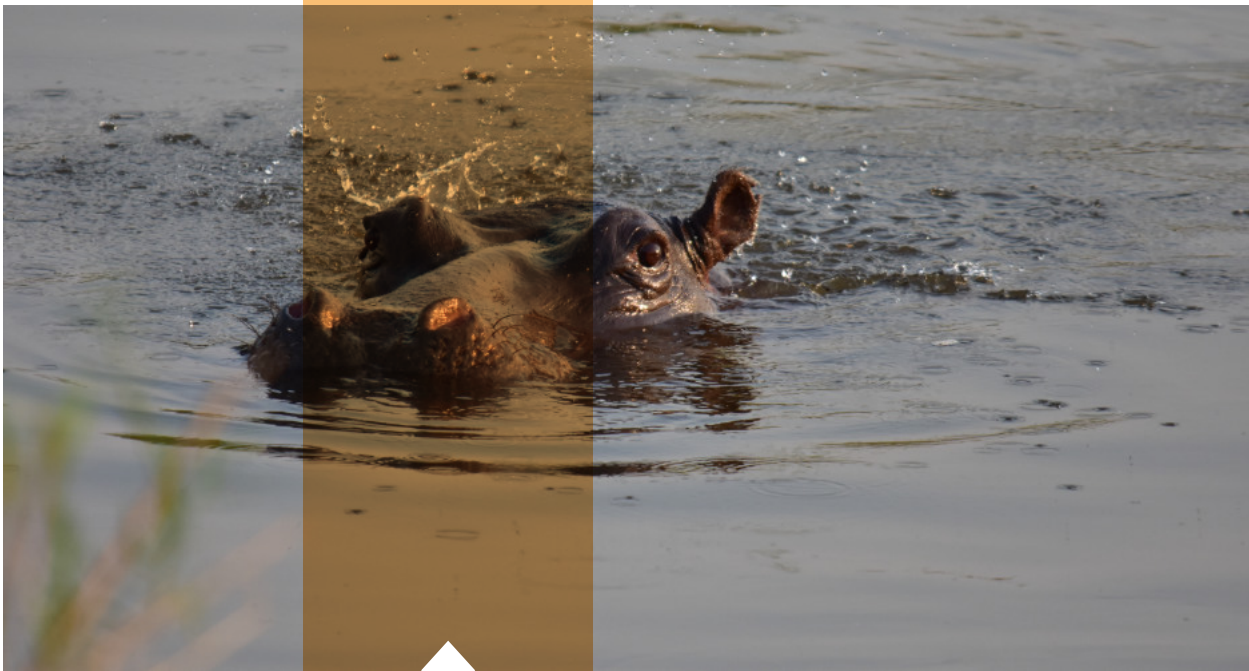
## New tenants moving in

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Hippos, Africa’s river giants

WildlifeCampus student Amy Holt takes a closer look at Earths’ third-largest land mammal. Spending about 16 hours a day in water yet, unable to swim... everyone knows hippos. But do we know their true importance for our eco-systems?

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**Start 2023 by subscribing to any 4 WildlifeCampus courses!**

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Illusive/elusive Arabian tahr

Read in this article how Chris and Mathilde, from Stuart on Nature, travelled in the mid-1990s to the United Arab Emirates to undertake a leopard survey.

It turned out to be a longer-than-expected journey with some once-in-a-lifetime discoveries!

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Chris and Mathilde Stuart have written a short Wildlife Diary. What events occur this time of year? And were there any significant moments during February throughout history?

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Vegan options on your menu?

Why add vegan options to your menu? And where to put them on the menu? Hayley from Wild Dreams Hospitality gives us some good pointers. Hayley is offering 30-minute free consultations to lodges, hotels and restaurants.

**Find out more on page 21!**

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New tenants moving in

In this edition David takes us on a drive in one of the many reserves around South Africa where lodges and camps were closed for the duration of those lost years in tourism, 2020 and 2021.

He even discovers that new tenants are trying to move in to one of the lodges.

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# The show must go on!

## The origin story of WildlifeCampus

# 01

By co-founder of  
WildlifeCampus and  
Anchor CEO

Peter Armitage



Missed the previous parts of this story? [Click here](#) to open the WildlifeCampus magazine where this exciting journey starts.

“The Tuli elephants” - August 1999

My first content experience was the “Tuli elephants”. The public was first made aware of the saga on August 20 1998, when Radio 702’s anchor, Jenny Crwys-Williams, hosted a show dedicated to the issue. In the studio with her were Gareth Patterson and Dr Andrew McKenzie of the Rhino and Elephant Foundation. Listeners of the program were horrified as Gareth explained the situation that the young elephants found themselves in since their relocation to South Africa.

The animals were being kept in a warehouse type building, where they were chained and hobbled for most of the day. Some of the youngsters had been subjected to a specific type of “subduing” called Mahout training. This type of training is a method that dates back to the 14th century, its object being to break the elephant’s spirit, and thus be handleable by man.

The owner of the elephants and the accused culprit, Mr Riccardo Ghiazza suggested erecting a web camera, or webcam, at his elephant facility at African Game Services, so that people could witness that nothing untoward was happening to the elephants.

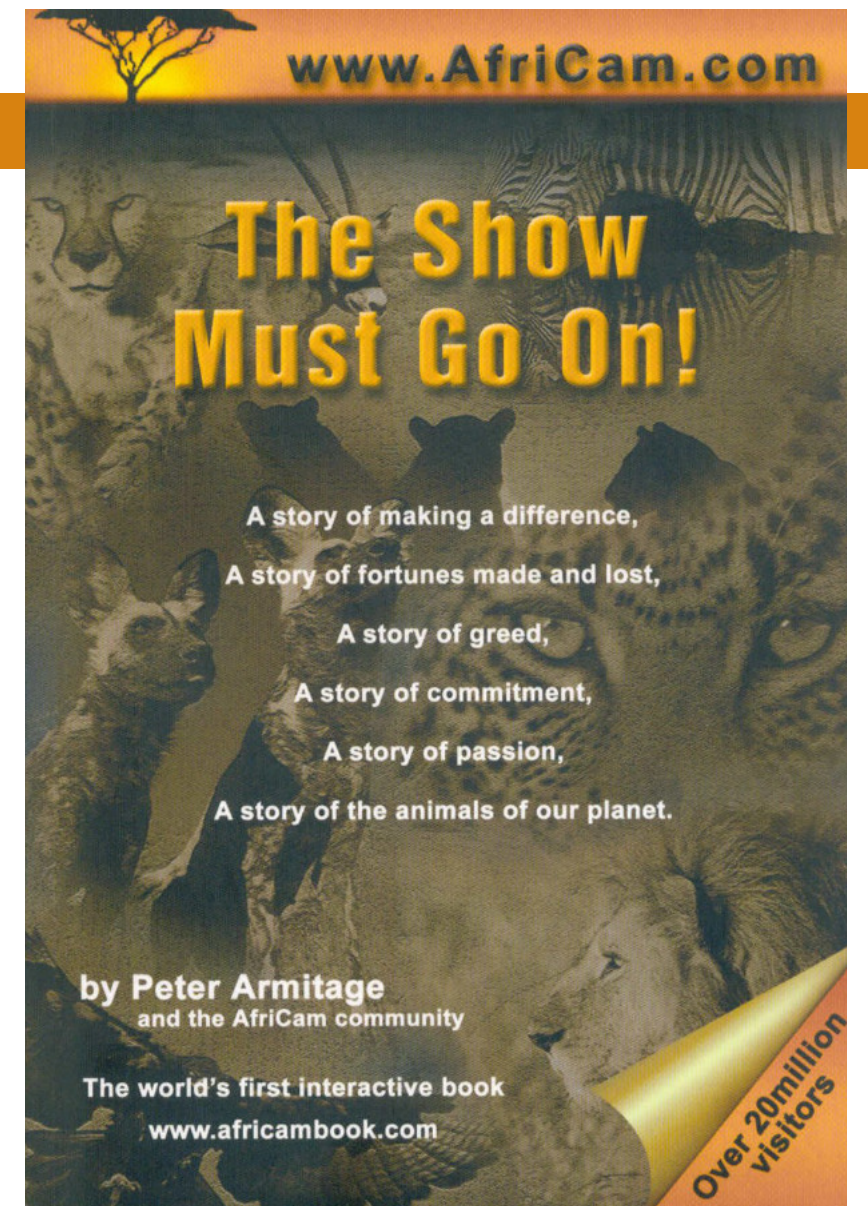


The first group that attempted this was the Rhino and Elephant Foundation, on a site called [www.wildcam.net](#). They proudly trumpeted in a press release that: “As from 13 December 1998, people from around the world are now able to see the young Tuli elephants at African Game Services for themselves via the internet. What is more, they will also be able to learn all about the issues surrounding these elephants. And the cherry on the cake is that they will actually be able to feed the elephants online!”

The Foundation failed horribly in its attempt to broadcast the elephants live and the project faded away. This was a pattern that was repeated many times over the next 24 months. AfriCam seemed to have an uncanny knack of getting the technology right. Many individuals and companies attempted to replicate AfriCam, because of its success and phenomenal traffic, but to this day nobody else has managed to reliably broadcast wildlife from the wild on the internet. There are numerous sites broadcasting from zoos, but history shows that the viewer is quickly bored.

Paul and his intrepid team set off for Brits and installed cameras on the Tuli elephants. A number of cameras were installed and a V-Sat was rented from Telkom. The elephants at this stage were under the supervision of the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals). AfriCam managed to get three cameras working and the world was able to witness the elephants live with a 30-second refreshing image.

The project was costing AfriCam about R50 000 a month and I urged Shannon to try and secure a sponsor. She made numerous phone calls and eventually managed to convince Vodacom (SA’s biggest cellular phone company) and 3M to sponsor the cameras for an



“The Show Must Go On by Peter Armitage and the AfriCam community.”

unprecedented R50 000 each per month. This early advertising success was the first sign that AfriCam could secure meaningful revenues.

But we learnt numerous lessons from those Tuli Elephants. First, AfriCam was unable to guarantee uptime. At this stage of its development, AfriCam was still learning and the cameras were not reliable. In this particular instance, the Telkom V-Sat was very unreliable and South Africa’s monopoly telephone operator was renowned for its poor and unreliable service.

“They are threatening to pull,” said Shannon in desperation. If Vodacom pulled out, she would lose her 20% commission.

“They have to understand that we cannot promise 100% uptime,” Graham replied.

“Well 10% uptime would be nice,” Shannon hit back.

“Shannon!”

“Well I promised them 80% uptime.”

“They are getting more coverage than they could possibly want for their R50 000,” Graham defended.





“They just do not want to be associated with something that does not work. They are a technology company, for God’s sake.”

Sure enough, Vodacom pulled out and the Vodacom representative swore never to advertise on AfriCam again. AfriCam’s revenues halved. It got increasingly difficult for AfriCam to secure South African advertising revenues and Shannon got increasingly desperate over the ensuing months.

But we learnt an even bigger lesson from the Tuli elephants. We learnt about the behaviour of our viewers. The traffic to the Tuli elephant cameras spiked and then dropped off to less than 5% of the total traffic to the site.

The AfriCam community wanted to see live wildlife on its terms. If they clicked on the Tuli elephant camera they knew what they were going to see: elephants in an enclosure. This was very different to the rest of the site. The viewer would rather click on another camera in the wild, not knowing what they were going to see. It was all about anticipation and they were happier to see nothing in the wild than a guaranteed sighting of a wild animal in captivity.

Never again would AfriCam deviate from the slogan it later adopted: “Always live, always wild.”

#### “The shark cam” - Late 1999

One of the next overly ambitious projects that AfriCam undertook was “Shark Cam”. Every year at Aliwal Shoal, Umkomaas on the south coast of Natal, ragged-tooth sharks (*Carcharias Taurus*) gather in a “bedroom” five kilometres out to sea.

These sharks appear to use the Shoal as part of their mating grounds en route a breeding migration undertaken by the females. The importance of the Aliwal Shoal in the reproductive success of ragged-tooth sharks is unknown; however, it is one of only two known inshore reefs exhibiting such shark gatherings during this time of year. The sharks aggregate on the Shoal in particular sites, usually in natural recesses in the reef, leading to these sites being subjected to intense diver pressure during the winter and spring months. As many as 30 sharks may be present at each of these popular dive sites.

The opportunity arose to broadcast these sharks live on the internet.

“It is impossible,” I told the AfriCam weekly meeting we had huddled into one of our small offices.

The word impossible always sparked a specific part of Graham’s brain. “That is why we are going to do it,” he ventured defiantly.

“The costing shows R300 000 of capex,” I said nervously.

“The benefit will be 100 times that,” said Graham, visibly frustrated at the prospect of not being able to embark on what seemed a dream project, especially since we now had our capital.

“It cannot be measured in monetary terms. This will get us exposure all over the world.”

Andy agreed: “Look at Discovery. There are always sharks on

the programme. Humans have a fascination with sharks and being able to see them live will blow people away.”

Paul was just as defiant: “It will be a true world first.”

“There has got to be hundreds of companies that will be prepared to sponsor it,” Graham insisted.

“I will get on the blower,” said Shannon.

We collectively decided to embark on a project that would produce some of AfriCam’s most phenomenal content, but also cause some of our biggest headaches. A few months later in a Board meeting, one of the directors referred to Shark Cam as “a hole in the ocean that we pour money into”.

We obtained all the requisite permissions and planned mission impossible. What follows is unedited extracts from the AfriCam website, providing a journal of the adventures that followed:

#### “Journal 1 – testing at the aquarium”

Alex Will writes:

The first stage came with a splash in the shark tank at the Seaworld Aquarium in Durban. After setting up the equipment, we waited for night time overlooking a shimmering pink Indian Ocean.

“Power, camera, lights ... and computer” was the next step. Overcoming a few minor technical problems, we placed the camera inside the shark tank among a frenzy of Zambezi sharks, raggies and a huge swordfish.

After a few moments, the sharks became aware of the new addition to their tank (possibly knowing that they were going to be featured on the world wide web), but according to the Seaworld behaviourist, they showed no stress-related behaviour towards the equipment.

We then turned the lights on, experimenting with different colours and filters, and still got no reaction from the sharks. (good sign!)

Day-two saw us hauling all our equipment to Mark and Michelle Addison's home in Umkomaas to set up a temporary base. This took up a lot of time and certainly constituted hard labour and we all had to put muscle to work in order to off-load approximately 800kg of mooring, our specially designed (rather oddly shaped it is) buoy, the little white and green space ship, aka our camera, the computers and stacks of cable, wire and tools.

We next had to cast the cement base around the tripod, where good old cement and shovel did the trick. Meanwhile the other half of the team went out to Cathedral on Aliwal Shoal for the final assessment of the exact spot for the camera. Late evening we dragged our weary bones back to the hotel for a hot shower, and we managed to solve the small problems over a couple of beers and some pizzas. At last we are ready to test out the rough seas and we took the equipment for a dive. Easier said than done as we soon found out.

Mid-morning found us loading all the mooring chain links on to Mark’s rubberduck and we headed out for Cathedral. A flying fish joined us for the ride out.

First we had to get our buoy in the water at the exact spot (a 20l plastic jerry can tied to 3mm stainless steel table had to do), but luck wasn't on our side. The cable was ripped out of place three times. An albatross, Cape ganet and big turtle popped in (or is it out?) to catch a glimpse of all the action. With the fairly strong current our skipper had a tedious task in keeping us on the spot, but we did manage to get the heavy links of mooring into the water.

After quite a few hours of battling against current, extended periods on the bottom and many hours in the sun, we finally made our way back to shore against a typical African sunset.







# Hippos

## Africa's river giants

Africa's river giants are unmistakable thanks to their bulky barrel-shaped body, short legs and wide-opening mouths with incredibly large canine teeth. They are the third-largest land mammal, after elephants and white rhinos. Hippos once ranged from the Nile Delta to the Cape, but now they are mostly confined to protected areas. Why is one of Africa's most dangerous animals vulnerable to extinction? Hippos may be unpredictable and aggressive by nature, but they certainly are not as deadly as us, humans.

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By WildlifeCampus student

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Amy Holt

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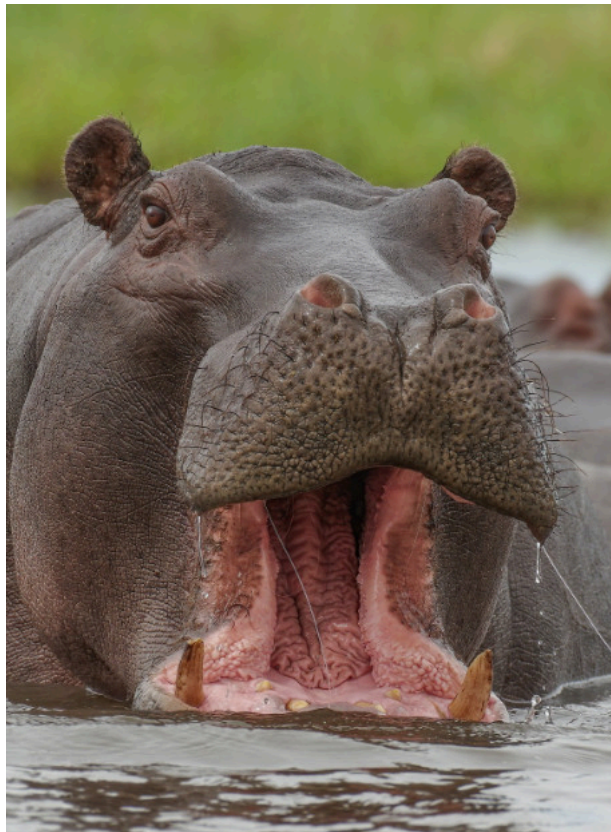
Growing human populations continue to encroach on hippo habitat, increasing human-hippo conflict. As humans build new settlements, increase agricultural production and construct new roads, hippos are forced to occupy the same area. This increases the probability of hippos encountering people, crop-raiding farms, and the retaliation killing of hippos by people. Hippos can be deterred by placing ditches and low fences around farms. Furthermore, growing human populations are placing a huge strain on water supplies. As rainfall patterns shift globally due to climate change, water is increasingly becoming an uncertain resource. Hippos and local communities are dependent on a very fragile resource, leading to conflict. Buffer zones around rivers would help conserve hippos and reduce conflict with humans.

Humanity's insatiable demand for ivory is escalating the poaching of hippos. A hippo's incisors and canines are made from ivory and is used as an alternative to elephant ivory. International trade in elephant ivory is banned. However, hippo teeth have been excluded from many of these ivory bans. This increases the risk of hippos being poached. Awareness and education can help reduce demand. An international ban on trading hippo teeth is required. While, community-based conservation schemes which promote photographic tourism are essential.

Not only is tourism vital to local communities and conservation, you can learn about the hippo's unique adaptations. The hippo spends about 16 hours a day in water yet, surprisingly, it cannot swim. Instead, their dense bones and low centre of gravity allows them to sink and walk along the bottom of the river bed.

02





Their short legs provide powerful propulsion through water. Hippos cannot breathe underwater but can hold their breath for up to five minutes at a time. Therefore, all the sense organs are located at the top of the head. This allows them to hear, see and breathe above water while, the rest of the body is submerged underwater. Both the ears and nostrils are watertight and can be closed when underwater.



Hippos spend the majority of their lives in water so it is no surprise that they sleep, mate, give birth and suckle their young underwater. A subconscious reflex allows hippos to bob up, take a breath, and sink back down without waking up. Hippos can regulate their buoyancy by controlling their breath. They can create a negative buoyancy by breathing out, allowing them to sink quicker.

Hippos require water deep enough to cover their body entirely because the outer thin epidermal skin layer is vulnerable to being burnt and dried out by the harsh African sun. Also, hippos lack sweat glands and so are exposed to rapid dehydration out of the water. Instead of sweating, they secrete a viscous fluid from their skin. This substance contains hipposudoric acid and norhipposudoric acid which, acts as a sunscreen by absorbing ultraviolet rays and has antibiotics properties. Due to its colour, it is often referred to as 'blood sweat' but, it is neither blood or sweat. The fluid is colourless then changes to a red-orange hue when exposed to the sun, after a few hours it turns brown.

At night, hippos leave the water to graze for about five hours and can cover up to eight kilometres. Each of the four toes is connected with a thin membrane. This helps them distribute their weight properly and supports movement on land. Hippos have developed broad mouths and thick lips for grazing on grass. The grass is then ground down with the molars. Hippos are pseudo-ruminants meaning they have a digestive system similar to a ruminant, except they do not chew the cud. Their three chambered stomach is composed of the parietal blind sac, the stomach and the glandular

stomach. In the parietal blind sac, the digestive enzyme cellulase is produced to break down the cellulose in the grass. The stomach is where foregut fermentation occurs. Finally, the glandular stomach (known as the true stomach) secretes hydrochloric acid, pepsin and other gastric acids for digestion to occur. This is a long and efficient process.

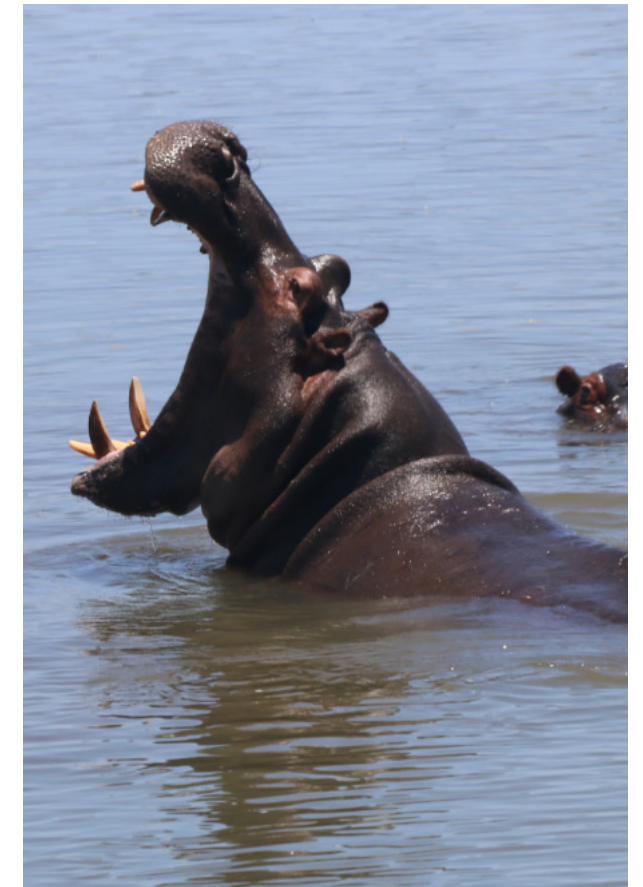
Hippos have a flexible social structure. They live in mixed groups of 20 to 100 individuals which is led by one territorial bull. Hippos vocally communicate with laugh-like grunts, wheeze-honks and even amphibious calls. A hippo is able to make sounds both in the air and underwater. The sound heard above the surface comes from the hippo's nostrils but, is made in the larynx underwater. Hippos have a large fat layer across the larynx that vibrates when the vocalisation is made, sending sound throughout the water. Underwater vibrations shake jaw tissues connected to the skull and ear of other hippos, transmitting the sound. This is similar to the high-pitched calls produced by whales (hippos are closely related to whales).

The 'wheeze-honk' is the signature vocal call of hippos. Hippos can differentiate a familiar hippo from a stranger by the sound of their 'wheeze-honk'. An unfamiliar hippo's call can provoke dung spraying. The hippo has a flat, paddle-like tail that is used to fling their faeces around. This is done to mark their territory.

Visual communication includes 'yawning' where the mouth is opened wide to show off their remarkably long, sharp teeth. This behaviour is territorial and used to demonstrate dominance. The jaw hinge is located at the back of the mouth and it allows the hippo's powerful jaws to open up to 180 degrees. Hippos have one of the world's strongest bite forces. Males begin competing for dominance once they reach sexual maturity, this is when they are about seven years. The lower canines are used as weapons for defence and attack.

Hippos have a low birth rate producing only one baby every two years. This makes them susceptible to overexploitation leading to population declines. The situation is worsened by environmental conditions, such as droughts. A baby hippo is born with a sterile intestine that doesn't contain any of the necessary bacteria. Therefore, they must eat their mother's faeces to build up an intestinal flora that contains the right microbiome. Hippo calves can suckle underwater by closing their ears and nostrils. A newborn hippo can hold its breath for 40 seconds at a time.

Hippos have a disproportionate influence on their environment. The excrements of hippos play an important role in the ecosystem of African rivers and lakes. Hippo dung is rich in nutrients. When a hippo defecates in the water it



supports fish, insects, fish-eating birds, and human populations that rely on fish for essential protein. These nutrients can determine the entire river community composition. Hence, the decline of hippos will be felt across entire food webs and disrupt the function of whole ecosystems. However, too much hippo dung can cause problems. If water levels drop due to drought or water being channeled for irrigation, a large hippo population can result in the water becoming overfertilised. This would trigger an algae bloom. The dying algae sink and decompose. Eventually, all the oxygen is consumed and the water turns black. Only a few species are able to withstand such conditions.

By walking along the bottom of rivers, hippos play a critical role in keeping slow-moving waterways open. They move a lot of soil and vegetation around with their sheer size. This creates channels in the water and paths on the land that redirect the water. Also, through their movement, they create new habitats for smaller species.

It is clear to see how hippos are adapted to life in the water. But, as this limited resource becomes more scarce, there is less room for hippos to roam and increased conflict. However, this is not just a hippo problem. This is a worldwide problem where humanity continues to encroach on wild spaces, pushing species to the brink of extinction.

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# Illusive/Elusive Arabian Tahr

Arabian Tahr female and young, the first confirmation  
of their occurrence in the UAE for decades. (1995)



In the mid-1990's we were asked if we would be willing to undertake a Leopard survey in the United Arab Emirates, and over a period of three years this grew into a biodiversity survey, the delineating of five potential national parks (at that point there were none) and providing the educational material for the Sharjah breeding centre for endangered Arabian wildlife. It was an interesting and often frustrating journey.



Wadi Ziqt viewed from the helicopter

Up until the discovery of oil in 1958 the Emirates did not exist but was a cluster of tribal entities often in conflict. The modern cities of today, such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi, were little more than large sand-blown villages relying on the pearling industry, fishing and subsistence livestock farming to keep things afloat. The British were the controlling authority here until six of the seven emirates agreed to independence, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Fujairah and Umm Al Quwain, with Ras Al Khaimah joining in the following year. Since that time the UAE has developed beyond recognition, with real conservation having had to take a back seat.

But we digress and return to the Emirates of the 1990's. The UAE is bordered by the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf, and sandwiched between Oman and Saudi Arabia. To the south and west of Abu Dhabi is the vast sand sea that merges with the Rub al-Khali (the legendary Empty Quarter) of Saudi Arabia. The Western Hajar Mountains (Jibal Al-Hajar Al-Gharbi) rise in places to 1,500m asl and separate the narrow coastal plain from the rest of the UAE. The northernmost tip is in fact part of Oman, rising to the Persian Gulf and is known as Ras Musandam. This is all rugged, broken country, with deep, steep-banked wadis that at that stage were mainly accessible on foot or by helicopter.



Wadi near Jebel Haffit

Although we covered extensive areas of the UAE mountains on foot, dropped off by air force helicopter gunships with our gear and supplies (no beer allowed!), in the end we came to the conclusion that Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) if they still survived they were rare individuals that entered the country from Oman, that also had few remaining, except far to the south. We walked hundreds of kilometres of trails and tracks, accessed where we could by vehicle, interviewed farmers and villagers. As far as we could establish the last Leopard in the UAE was shot and wounded near Shimal, in Ras al Khaimah, in August 1995. If a remnant population survives, but unlikely, it would be in the Omani Musandam Peninsula. A more recent development has been the breeding of Arabian Leopards (*Panthera pardus nimr*) at the Sharjah centre but in our opinion this has little, if any, conservation value. Where could you release them, and what would they hunt, domestic stock, so the vicious cycle returns. Unfortunately, the Striped Hyaena (*Hyaena hyaena*) and the Arabian Wolf (*Canis lupus arabs*) no longer pace the mountain or sand deserts of the UAE and are unlikely to ever do so again!

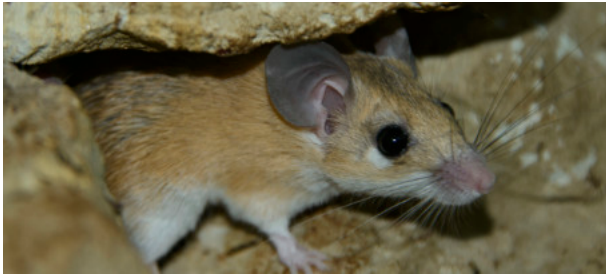
But there were a few consolation prizes! The Arabian Tahr (*Arabitragus jayakari*), a member of the goat family, once roamed widely in the mountains of southern Arabia, but at that time they were only known to survive in in the Al Hajar Mountains within Omani territory and the Omani sector of Jabal Hafeet bordering on Al Ain. Whilst on the Leopard survey we were camped in the rugged Wadi Wurayah in the Al Hajar (one of the parks we were to delineate later) and had been hiking all day in tremendous heat. Before climbing out of the wadi to our camp we rested under a shady overhang next to a clear pool. We had been there perhaps ten minutes and suddenly a snort and a hoof stomp- we looked at each other, cautiously ventured out and looked up. A female Arabian Tahr with a fawn. A quick photo and we left them to come down to drink. This was the first confirmed record that this ungulate still survived in the UAE for decades. The latest information is that only 30-50 mature Tahr continue to cling on in the UAE, possibly fewer.

Then came the first discovery of Blanford's Fox (*Vulpes cana*) for the UAE, and they just kept on coming! They were certainly not newcomers to the area but quite simply nobody had bothered to set box traps in the wadis and mountains to see what was there. Our first live captures were in Wadi Ziqt in the Al Hajar range, followed by Wadi Wureyah in the same mountains, then Jabal Haffit, Al Ain. Since our work there they have been found throughout the mountainous areas of the UAE, extending up to the Omani Musandam. These tiny foxes tip the scales at no more than 1.5kg have dense, soft coats, very bushy tails and large ears. This is the only fox in the region that has semi-retractile claws that are curved, sharp and cat-like and is an adaptation to climbing in the steep, rock wadis and climbing trees to access wild fruits that form an important part of their diet at certain times of the year.



Another discovery: Blanford's Fox

Then of course there was excitement on the even smaller front, in part once again because of lack of trapping and slogging into areas of difficult access. The Arabian Spiny Mouse (*Acomys dimidiatus*) was known to occur widely in Oman, Yemen and Saudi Arabia but had not been recorded from the mountains of the UAE. In most mountainous areas where we set box traps we caught them. They are social animals, inhabiting rock crevices in groups, females cooperating in raising young, and their partially spiny dorsal hair is presumably an aid in putting off some potential predators.



Discovery of the Arabian Spiny Mouse



And we were told that Brandt's Hedgehogs (*Paraechinus hypomelas*) are very rare, really! This is a very dark coloured hedgehog and feisty, no rolling up in a ball but lots of upward thrusting of the spines making it difficult to handle. We caught several in traps baited for Blanford's Foxes at a number of locations, but one stood out, Wadi Shawka, which to us became known as Hedgehog Valley. They were often encountered at night walking along dirt tracks and we were impressed by the way they "pulled up their skirts" and took a runner.



The delightful Brandt's Hedgehog

And then there were the new and interesting birds, rare reptiles...

Would we return to the UAE-unlikely! The level of development since our surveys indicates there will not be much to find, places we knew are under concrete, paved highways and building development. Those Mouse-tailed Bat caverns have been concreted over, a huge hotel dominates the southern point of Jebel Haffit in Al Ain. Barbary Sheep have been added to the Arabian Tahr mix on the same jebel, and on top of it they are fed. It was a great time and a special time but not for us!

Make sure to subscribe to the Stuart on Nature YouTube channel for more interesting news, videos and adventures!

Click the YouTube image below to visit their channel.



# February Wildlife Diary

By



- It was a sad day indeed when, at a meeting held in Tunisia in February 1998, the Scimitar-horned Oryx (*Oryx dammah*) was declared extinct in the wild. This oryx once occurred across a great swathe of dry savanna country from Mauritania in the west to Sudan in the east, and northwards across parts of the Sahara Desert. It is believed that the last wild stock was shot in Chad in the late 1980's. The last sighting in Mali was of two individuals seen in 1986, and in the same year the last remnants were shot in Niger. There are large numbers in captivity and semi-captivity that have been used to establish new populations in Tunisia, Morocco and Chad.



Scimitar-horned Oryx, extinct in the wild, but captive populations are being used for reintroductions into their former range.

- One of the last sightings of African Wild Dog (*Lycaon pictus*) south of the Orange River, South Africa, was in February 1925 of two individuals. It is believed these two animals were shot at Gray's Halt, Amabele, in the Eastern Cape.
- In February 1919 James Stevenson-Hamilton observed Plains Zebra (*Equus quagga*) to the east of the Bahr-el-Jebel (White Nile) in Sudan. They were recorded as the most northerly ever recorded for this species.
- Mombasa low - Where the summer-rainfall regime prevails, in the southern savanna parts of the continent, there are still substantial showers. But at Mombasa on the coast of Kenya, more or less where the northern and southern savannas meet, the lowest rainfall of the year will be recorded this month - a meagre 20mm.



Black and White casqued hornbill

- On the short grass plains of Serengeti-Ngorongoro the last White-bearded Wildebeest (*Connochaetes taurinus*) calves of the season will be dropped early in February. By the end of the month the herds will be moving slowly towards the Western Corridor.
- From now until April the Large-leaved Dragon Tree (*Dracaena aletriformis*) a species of coastal bush and evergreen montane forest from Kenya to South Africa's Eastern Cape, will be bearing fruit. The small, red or orange berries provide a feast for African Green Pigeons (*Treron calvus*), African Olive Pigeons (*Columba arquatrix*), Knysna Turacos (*Tauraco corythaix*) and Purple-crested Turacos (*Tauraco porphyreolophus*), amongst others.

- A number of hornbill species are hard at work incubating and raising their young across sub-Saharan Africa. In the DRC and parts of western East Africa the female Black & White Casqued Hornbill (*Bycanistes subcylindricus*) is sealed in her tree cavity. She will remain there for 115-132 days, until the fledgling is quite large and then she breaks out and aids the male in feeding the hungry chick.



Horned Adders are starting to breed in this month

- The Horned Adder (*Bitis caudalis*) births are peaking now in arid parts of southern Africa, with females giving birth to between four and 19 live young. The Plain Mountain Adder (*Bitis inornata*) occurring from the Cedarberg to the Sneeuwberg in South Africa is also birthing from February into March, females giving birth to six to eight live young.
- In South Africa's succulent Karoo, female Armadillo Girdled Lizards (*Ouroborus cataphractus*) are producing one or two large young, at this time. Unusually for lizards, these appealing, heavily armoured reptiles live in groups, inhabiting crevices in their rocky habitats. When they are threatened and cannot make it to the safety of their rock crevice homes, they roll up and bite on to their tail, thus presenting a ball of tough, thorny scales to an attacker.



Armadillo Girdled Lizard in defensive posture



# Welcome Gameways students!



WildlifeCampus is proud to welcome the Gameways students for 2023.

Since 2018, we have welcomed over 100 Gameways students, who have found that the WildlifeCampus online theory courses greatly enhanced their practical training experience with Gameways.

WildlifeCampus would like to sincerely thank the Gameways staff for the remarkable collaboration. We look forward to many more years of synergetic training!



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*Have an incredible year!*



# Where to put the vegan options on your menu?

By Hayley Cooper

Decisions, decisions, decisions... now you've created your plant-based dishes and they are ready to go onto the menu – great! But where exactly on the menu should they go? (Luckily these decisions don't have to be made when you transform your entire menu into a plant-based one!)

## It depends...

As with many things in life this is dependent upon other factors such as your menu structure up until now, the type of food you are offering, how many vegan dishes you are adding and the preferences of your guests.



**In general there are three different options:** either you make a completely separate vegan menu on an extra page with starters, mains and desserts, you can also simply add the vegan option into every section and label them as vegan or, and this is most often done when the menu is already split into meat / fish / vegetarian, you add the vegan dishes in the vegetarian section. In this article we will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each option and under which circumstances you should opt for which type.

### Separate vegan menu (additional page / additional flyer)

Displaying the new vegan food items on a separate vegan menu, like, for example, a new page or an additional flyer, is a popular option, especially when testing out the new dishes without making changes to the regular menu. However, we would only recommend this option if you are adding at least 2 to 3 dishes per category as otherwise the page or flyer would look too empty and imply that there aren't enough choices (unless you are working with a promotional flyer rather than a menu style with pictures and further information).

Another thing to remember is that, especially when having another flyer or separate menu card, the menu always needs to be available, and staff need to ensure that customers can easily find it.

This is not our favourite approach because plant-based food is being excluded from the other food, which does not help to normalise vegan food or inspire non-vegans to try it.



### Vegan options within the menu

Simply adding the new plant-based food items onto the menu wherever they fit best (e.g. under 'salads', 'mains') is a great method. By doing so, one prevents giving vegan food a special status, it makes it seem more 'normal' and encourages non-vegans to give it a try (as they probably wouldn't be looking for food on a separate menu). This also works very well with seasonally changing menus as they will get an update regularly anyway and dishes that are not popular can be adjusted and new 'trendy' or seasonal dishes can be added.

There are so many people who identify as "flexitarian" that will not actively seek out a vegan menu but once they see that there are options they will be excited to try them. One thing that is crucial here is the labelling of the dishes. Vegan, vegetarian and even gluten-free dishes should be clearly labelled by either adding the allergens or creating a label that clearly indicates what type of dish it is. Make sure to add the key of the labels to the menu for ease of use. It can be highly frustrating to see a V on the menu and not know if this means vegetarian or vegan.

### Vegan options in the vegetarian section

Some dining venues operate with a menu that is split into different meat/fish/vegetarian sections (this is often the case in the Asian cuisine). In this case it is easiest and probably most logical for the customer to add the fully plant-based options in the vegetarian section and adding either a label to

the vegan dishes, adding the allergens or simply using the word 'vegan'/'plant-based' in the name of the dish. The latter is a popular option. However, it has both its pros and cons: on the one hand, vegan dishes are easily identified by people looking for them when they have it in their name; on the other hand, this might again have a negative effect on non-vegans trying these dishes as they might immediately incorrectly associate them with bland, low-calorie and low-protein food.

In the end, it is totally up to you how you want to approach the launch of plant-based food at your business. Just know that copying what your neighbouring restaurant is doing is not always the smartest strategy. Do not hesitate to contact us if we can have a look over your menu or you have any specific open questions/comments on this!

Congratulations on adding vegan options to your menu! Do not forget to ensure the labelling is clear on your website/ social media pages so that you are attracting vegans to come and dine with you and enjoy all of the new business this brings, not only from vegans themselves but also their friends, family and colleagues that they bring with them!

### FREE CONSULTATION ON VEGANISM FOR YOUR BUSINESS

*Veganism is booming! Studies show a 700% increase in the last 3 years alone.*

*Hayley is offering 30-minute free consultations to lodges, hotels and restaurants.*

*Interested? [Fill out the form at the bottom of the webpage \(click here\)](#) and I will get back to you.*

*Many of your guests/customers will be vegan and I am sure as a hospitality business owner or manager, this is a request that is becoming more common and if it is not, then it may be due to what you are currently offering (or not!)*

*It is so important to move with the times and give your guests/ customers what they want.*

*Word of mouth among the community is very important so if a vegan guest is blown away they will tell EVERYONE!*



# When new tenants move in

2022 is merely a faded memory and the first month of 2023 has already come and gone, now is the time to move home or seek pastures new.

New beginnings can be traumatic for some, while others seem to take something as emotional as moving home in their stride.

By David Batzofin



Covid-19 taught us to be resilient and adaptable in almost everything that we do and nowhere is that more obvious than in the many reserves around South Africa where lodges and camps were closed or at least boarded up for the duration of those lost years in tourism, 2020 and 2021.

However, one man's trash is another's treasure and this fact was brought home in spectacular fashion during a recent visit to a reserve where one of the



David is an award-winning blogger whose work can be found at [www.travelandthings.co.za](http://www.travelandthings.co.za)



self-catering camp owners literally closed up and walked away.

As any real estate agent will tell you that when you look for a property it is all about 'location, location, location' and this seems to be relevant for the animal kingdom as well.

The abandoned buildings in this instance were near a waterhole which would have attracted prey species, so why should a pair of lions NOT choose to make this their new holiday home?

If left to their own devices, buildings will either crumble and vanish or deteriorate so that human habitation becomes impossible, and other species can try to move in and repurpose the dwelling.

It seems that this was the case with this duo of lions that were looking to set up home in what seemed to be a disused game lodge that we came across during a drive recently. I don't believe that we humans appreciate how big lions, full-grown lions, both male and female, actually are until we have a situation where we can compare them to a structure whose size we can understand and comprehend.

So, it was interesting for me as our vehicle rolled to a halt close to the building to find these two lying in the shade near an outdoor fireplace.

The male seemed to be very relaxed and the female was being coquettish and playful, possibly as foreplay to mating or post-coitus...we never actually were able to confirm either of those activities.

The guide did tell us that the camp had been vacant for almost the whole of lockdown and the lions certainly looked like they could have been there for some while.

Unlike bears, who will tear into an abandoned cabin that is not properly protected, lions have no such capability and the male purposefully strolled around the building trying to peer into the windows and perhaps looking for an entry point (and luckily for the owners of this property there are no bears in South Africa).

The female, on the other hand, chose to leave him to his own devices and sauntered towards our vehicle and proceeded to flop down in the soft sand close to where we were parked. After looking at us with the feline version of 'bedroom eyes' she decided that a nap was an option and soon her soft rhythmic breathing could clearly be heard as she lay dozing near our front wheel.

The male, possibly upset at not being able to gain access to any of the buildings came to join her and he too decided that as we did not pose a threat, sleep was an alternative to constant vigilance.

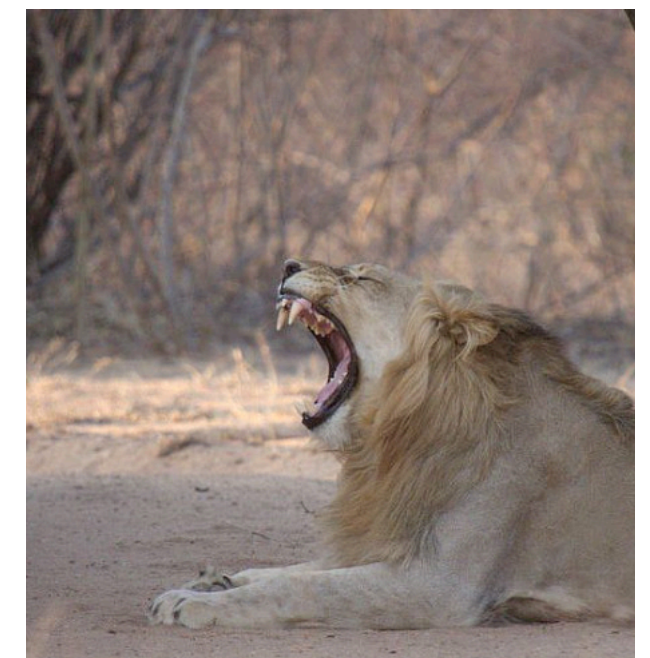
We continued to sit for a while, watching the sleeping pair until we noticed that we had been joined, at a safe distance, by a tower of inquisitive giraffes.

They watched the lions while we watched both species wondering if the status quo would be broken and, if so, by whom.

The light was fading and it was decided to leave them to their own devices and go off in search of a spot for sundowners.

I have not been able to discover if the camp has re-opened or if the lions eventually gained entry or not.

But none of that is really important, as for all of us, humans in the vehicle and the animals we were watching, it was just another day in Africa.





# Photography competition



## Photography competition winner February

**Young cheetah at sunrise - Savannah Scheepers - South Africa**

*"My entire life I have had a love for wildlife and always felt I was naturally gifted in reading animal behaviour. I worked as a wildlife monitor in South Africa and had the privilege to learn about the wild animals of the bush, and found myself inspired daily by the wildlife I observed.*

*It was such a magical morning when I took this picture. I spotted this young cheetah staring out in the warm glow of the morning, glistening amongst the dewy grass, watching me. She was calm yet ready. But I could feel she was happy."*