



Wildlife Campus

20
YEARS
ANNIVERSARY

LEARN PROTECT SAVE

Magazine

Another
NEW COURSE!



A New Year gift idea

The Gaboon adder
by ASI

"Trapped"
by D. Batzofin

**Pangolins
&
Poaching**

A start to a career in guiding Part 2

WildlifeCampus

An inauspicious start to a career in guiding



WildlifeCampus CEO
Todd Kaplan

Continuation from [our December issue](#)

... Now on this particular drive

The first important piece of information is that back then, SanParks was experimenting with electric vehicles. These vehicles were built on the same chassis as the previous and current vehicles, the large 23-seaters but entirely electric.

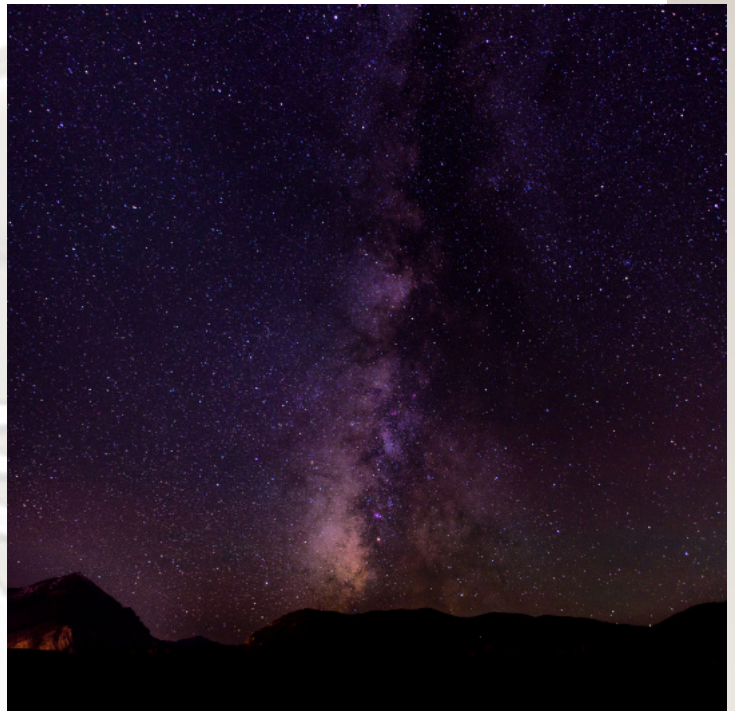
This brings with it many welcome advantages. First, they were quiet, really quiet, especially compared to the lumbering diesels mostly used today. If you've not experienced a game drive in an electric vehicle, it really is sublime and you frequently catch game unawares or they remain unaware of you.

They are kind-of eco-friendly, while you're not burning fossil fuels as your drive, the vast battery packs needed to be charged somewhere and, in this case, the nearest coal-fired power station provided the electricity. The vehicles were all automatic transmission, much easier to drive and much easier to pass the Code-10 licence required to drive them, a perpetual problem with many of the students.

They did have one drawback though, they were electric...

Now on this particular drive, perhaps two hours into the three-hour drive, the vehicle simply shuts down. No warning, no stuttering of the engine, it simply stops. Dead. What also stops, it being an electric vehicle are all the lights, spotlights, interior lights, headlights, we're left in complete darkness. If you've not guessed it already, what also stops is the shortwave radio.

At this time, mobile phone usage is just getting started in South Africa, there is limited coverage in Skukuza, but nothing at all five kilometres out the gate.



Let me recap, we're at least an hour's drive from the camp, in a broken-down vehicle, without lights, without any form of communication, conveniently, we also happen to be down one of those "no-entry" dirt service roads so unlikely to encounter any random traffic (the main tar roads actually do have quite a bit of traffic after the tourists are locked into the camps after sundown) and the guide "kind of"/ "maybe" thinks he knows where we might be, but can't be sure. Also it's quite likely that no one on the vehicle is at all competent with the rifle (see the *December issue*).

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An inauspicious start to a career in guiding

There are protocols in place for this scenario. First, wait to be missed. Each night drive is expected to last about three hours. Those waiting up for the vehicles to return will give it at least an hour's leeway (great sighting, flat tire, minor breakdown) before becoming concerned and sending out a search party. The earliest this would happen would be two hours from now. The search would follow the same route as we did, so we might be found four hours from now, back at camp in five hours. We're not in any particular danger, but bathroom breaks are going to become interesting as the night wears on.

Option # 2 is for one guide to walk back to camp alone and the other to stay with the guests and vehicle, not something you want to try at night.

Option # 3, fix the problem.

Taking my 4-Cell Mag-light, I hopped off the vehicle to look at the battery packs on the side of vehicle, hoping to find a large "ON / OFF" switch, while being "covered" by the guide, who I also hoped wouldn't try to actually learn how the weapon works (*December issue*). Not finding anything especially useful, it was time to update the 23, somewhat apprehensive people, in the back.

When in doubt, go with the truth. I informed those assembled that we had lost all power (I'm not sure this was a necessary announcement) and asked if anyone had any experience with electric vehicles or would like to have a go at fixing one, preferably now!

I'm not sure what the odds might have been to have an electrical engineer on board that night, all I know is that it took him about four minutes to bypass something and connect power back to the electric motors. Super easy, barely an inconvenience.

The "fix" gave us back engine power, but still no lights or radio, so by the beams of our collective torches we very slowly made our way back to camp, arriving quite late, they were considering sending out the search party. These vehicles were subsequently replaced with what's in use today, the electric versions simply proving unreliable. They are, however, coming back with private reserves leading the way and vastly improving the game drive experience.

Todd



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Discover our **NEW** course!

Front of House Lodge Operations Course



This course discusses every detail involved in running successful FOH operations. We learn about understanding other departments, presentation and etiquette, what to do before guests arrive, when they arrive and how to host the most memorable experiences at your lodge or venue. This course includes a component on Food and Beverage (F&B) which highlights the importance of knowing your guests diet requirements and what they mean.

This course is perfect for owners, managers and staff at lodges, hotels, restaurants, cafés, cruise ships/yachts, bars, airlines, catering/event venues, resorts or clubs. If you are looking to enter the hospitality industry, brush up your current and/or staff skills or merely have an interest in the subject, this course is for you!

This online course is available now for the introductory price of **R 1,500.00**



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THE CRYPTIC GABOON ADDER



© Johan Marais
AFRICAN SNAKEBITE INSTITUTE

The Gaboon Adder (*Bitis gabonica*) is a large, robust, cryptically coloured snake that averages around 1 meter in length, but large specimens may reach a maximum of 1.75 m. They occur in savanna, coastal and montane forest areas from Kwa-Zulu Natal in South Africa all the way to West and Central Africa.

The body is beautifully coloured in various shades of dark and light brown, buff, purple and pink. A broad buff coloured vertebral stripe is broken up by dark hour-glass markings. The broad triangular head is buff to chestnut in colour with a darker central line and two dark brown triangles extend from the eye to the upper lip.





These slow moving snakes are mainly active at night, but are fond of basking on the fringes of forests during the day. Their diet includes rodents, hares, ground birds and toads.

If disturbed, they may emit a series of long, drawn-out hisses with the forepart of the body elevated if threatened. But they are reluctant to strike. Bites are rare and are virtually unheard of in South Africa but workers on tea plantations in Zimbabwe do occasionally get bitten.

With a reported maximum venom yield of 600 mg and fangs that may exceed 40 mm in length, a bite from this snake may be very serious and require urgent hospitalization. Although predominantly cytotoxic, its venom also contains cardiotoxic and hypotensive factors as well as haemorrhagic activities and toxins affecting metabolism.

Symptoms may include shock, severe pain, swelling, blistering, bleeding and necrosis. The polyvalent antivenom manufactured by the South African Vaccine Producers is effective against the venom of this snake.

In certain areas of their range, these snakes are listed as Near Threatened, as habitat destruction, collection for the pet and muti trade and road mortality take a huge toll on their population.



New Course

Arrival

Anti-Poaching Junior Course

The WildlifeCampus Anti-Poaching Junior Course is the newest addition to our selection of online courses.

For **juniors aged 10 to 15** this course aims to provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge to help eradicate poaching, even at a young age. We explain poaching and anti-poaching, the different types of poaching and the ways we can help prevent poaching from happening.

WildlifeCampus is convinced that the younger generation holds the key to positive conservation change, for future generations!

*If you are a young conservationist
who is keen to learn and make a difference,
this course is for you!*

More information on this course?

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Visit: www.wildlifecampus.com

New Year Gift Idea



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Gift voucher

The value of R 1 700,00

OR

1 Online course
Anti-Poaching

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Whether you are serious, curious, career-orientated or a wildlife enthusiast, we have something for everyone at WildlifeCampus.

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Pangolins

And pangolin poaching

By KaiNav Conservation Foundation



© D. Batzofin

When threatened, pangolins curl up into a ball with their head tucked away safely beneath these protective scales.

Four species of African pangolin:

- **The Temminck's ground pangolin**, which is the most widespread of the African pangolins. It is the **second-largest** African Pangolin species and inhabits **primarily arid habitats**.
- **The giant ground pangolin** is the **largest** of the African pangolins. These pangolins inhabit mainly forest habitats in west and central Africa.
- **The white-bellied pangolin**, unlike the Temminck's and Giant Pangolins, they are **arboreal**. Like the Giant pangolin, this species inhabits forest habitats and are found predominantly in west and central Africa.
- **The black-bellied pangolin** is the **smallest** of Africa's pangolins. This small pangolin species is **strongly arboreal**, frequenting tropical riverine and swamp forests of west and central Africa.



African pangolin

© D. Batzofin

Pangolins are a group of African and Asian mammals which survive entirely on ants, termites and larvae. With no teeth, they collect their preferred food with an incredibly long, sticky tongue. They are the only mammals on earth that are completely covered in scales. These scales, made of keratin, are extremely hard.

Four species of Asian pangolin:

- **The Chinese pangolin** is a **fossorial** (burrowing) species and in China, their distribution is believed to be closely correlated with two termite species (*Coptotermes formosanus* and *Termes formosanus*). This species is considered **critically endangered** and found throughout Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Hong Kong, India, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Taiwan, Province of China, Thailand and Vietnam.
- **The Indian pangolin**, like the Chinese pangolin, is **predominantly fossorial** and their scales are the **largest of the Asian species**. Also **critically endangered**, they have the most western distribution of all Asian species, occurring throughout Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.
- **The Philippines pangolin**, as its name suggests, is **restricted to four islands** of The Philippines. They too are considered **critically endangered**. One of the smallest Asian pangolin species, we know relatively little about its ecology and reproduction. This species was only recently described as a separate species to the Sunda pangolin.

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- **The Sunda pangolin** has the **largest distribution** of the south-east Asian pangolins. They have a long history of being traded internationally and, while regarded as the most commonly found mammal in the illicit wildlife trade in Asia, they too are **critically endangered**.



Chinese pangolin - Leipzig zoo

Threats to pangolins

Dubbed the most trafficked mammal in the world, the pangolin's greatest threat comes from **poaching**.

An extremely shy and slow-moving animal, pangolins, when found, are simply picked up and placed in a bag by poachers.

Between the year 2000 and 2019, it is estimated that **895 000 pangolins were trafficked globally**. These animals are highly sought after for their **scales** and **meat**, with the bulk of the poached pangolins being trafficked to east and south-east Asia. The demand for these scales as an ingredient in **traditional medicine** made primarily in China and Vietnam has seen the four Asian pangolin species becoming **critically endangered**.

Their scales are believed to have a myriad of medicinal properties and are used to treat everything from heart disease to cancer and

are even thought to help lactating women produce milk. However, like rhino horn and human fingernails, pangolin scales are made from **keratin** and there has been **no scientific evidence** to prove its medical efficacy.

The use of these animals in traditional medicine, however, is not restricted to Asia. Pangolins in west and central Africa have been used for generations in the "muti" or African traditional medicine trade. Similar to the scales, **pangolin meat** has been utilised by indigenous people throughout their geographic ranges as a source of protein for generations. While the meat today is regarded as a rare, luxury product in east and south-east Asia, pangolins are continuously poached for bushmeat in Africa, specifically west and central Africa.

This rare, delicacy status attributed to pangolin meat, particularly in Asia, has resulted in a **high economic value** and an increased demand for these animals. Due to the significant reduction in Asian pangolin populations, poaching of the African species has steadily increased since 2008.

Since 2016, **all pangolin species** have been placed on the CITES Appendix I list, banning the commercial trade in wild-caught pangolins and their derivatives internationally.

Despite this **international ban**, pangolin scales and meat continue to be confiscated by customs authorities globally as populations of these shy creatures continue to dwindle. In January 2019, **8 tonnes** of pangolin scales - estimated to come from more than **14,000 pangolins** - were confiscated at a Hong Kong customs facility, along with other illicit wildlife products. The contraband was uncovered on a cargo ship originating from Nigeria, destined for Vietnam. The illicit shipment was valued at almost US\$ 8million and was the

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largest wildlife product seizure ever in Hong Kong. Just three months later, in April 2019, nearly **12 tonnes** of pangolin scales were seized in Singapore - representing **36,000 pangolins**. The 40-foot container was yet again, on its way to Vietnam from Nigeria when it was intercepted by Singapore customs. The scales were packed in 230 bags alongside almost 400 pounds of carved elephant ivory. The total shipment was worth an estimated **US\$ 38.7 million**.

Conserving Africa's pangolins

Pangolins are **notoriously difficult to find** and are significantly impacted by poaching throughout their ranges. These challenges often impede effective and efficient conservation action of these species. The enormous lack of knowledge and need for focused conservation intervention has resulted in many pangolin monitoring programs, **anti-poaching campaigns** and **rehabilitation operations** throughout the world. Monitoring programmes focus on providing data on numbers and distribution of existing individuals as well as assist in understanding pangolin populations and the impact unsustainable utilisation of these animals has on the population and ecosystem as a whole.



**IUCN SSC PANGOLIN
SPECIALIST GROUP**

An interactive map of pangolin centred conservation projects and **IUCN SSC Pangolin Specialist Group Members** can be found on: www.pangolinsg.org

The African Pangolin Working Group has developed the **Pangolin K9 Unit**, which is a **counter-poaching unit** dedicated to the protection and conservation of **all African Pangolins**.



This specialised unit utilises specially trained canines to detect the scent of **all four species** of African Pangolin. They are deployed throughout South Africa to assist the South African Police Service, Department of Environmental Affairs Law enforcement (Green Scorpions) and many other anti-poaching and law enforcement agencies in the detection of poached and smuggled pangolins.

The African Pangolin Working Group is also significantly involved in educating various national agencies including the **South African Police** (the Hawks), **anti-poaching units**, **Department of Environmental Affairs - Green Scorpions**, **prosecutors**, **magistrates** and **customs** (SARS) ports authorities regarding pangolins and pangolin conservation.

These efforts paved the way for the **first-ever successful prosecution** of a suspect in a pangolin poaching case in South Africa. In October 2016, the magistrate in Mankweng regional court sentenced an accused pangolin poacher to a jail term of three years.

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In January 2017, a Zimbabwe national was sentenced to a term of **seven years**, setting a landmark precedent for pangolin poaching in South Africa. Since the first jail sentence, there have been further jail terms handed down, including three to seven years each.

Despite all the education and law enforcement campaigns, pangolins continue to be targeted by poachers throughout Southern Africa. This has led to multiple pangolins being smuggled throughout South Africa and globally. This necessitated the need for a rehabilitation programme dedicated to treating and releasing pangolins rescued from smugglers back to the wild.

The African Pangolin Working Group has also been tasked with ensuring rescued pangolins are hospitalised, treated and released back into the wild efficiently and effectively. Once the pangolins have been treated, they are usually monitored by dedicated staff members for a period of time to ensure they are able to forage on their own. Once deemed ready for release, tracking equipment is usually attached to each individual and they are released into undisclosed natural areas, safe from poachers.

Resources and information:

- IUCN SSC Pangolin Specialist Group: <https://www.pangolinsg.org/pangolins/threats/>
- African Pangolin Working Group: <https://africanpangolin.org>
- African Wildlife Foundation: <https://www.awf.org/blog/27-million-pangolinsarepoached-every-year-scales-and-meat>
- African Pangolin Working Group: <https://africanpangolin.org/conservation/lawenforcement/>

This article is an excerpt from our newly updated Anti-Poaching course

More information on this course?

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



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“Trapped”

By David Batzofin

A trapdoor spider story



Visiting a "Big-Five" reserve should not always be about being on a game drive vehicle searching for iconic species.

Often more interesting sightings are made while on foot when out on a guided walk, as was the case in this instance.

With both the early morning drive as well as breakfast completed, I was asked if I would like to head out on a short walk to see the reserve from a different perspective. My answer was a not unqualified "YES" as it would be my final activity before taking the long road home.

After a safety briefing, I ventured out with not one but two armed trail guides keeping me company.

Unlike a game drive, where there is often constant chatter, walks, for obvious reasons are conducted in silence unless the guide wants to show and explain what you are

groups watching our progress with a bored almost disdainful interest (for those who are wondering about 'confusion' and 'dazzle', they are the collective nouns for those specific animals).

We had also stopped to chat about the uses of a variety of plant species as well as scattered dung that told tales of passing animals.

The female and baby white rhino allowed us to get relatively (safely) close before trundling off to feed quietly within the shade of a nearby Tamboti forest.

"But what has any of this got to do with the spider in the title?"

Scene setting, that's what.

We were heading back to the vehicle when the lead guide raised a hand for us to stop... "Wait here" he said, before walking off to collect a long grass stem. "There is a living creature very close to where you are standing," said the remaining guide and it was at that moment that I spotted the almost invisible, closed lid of the trapdoor, blending seamlessly into the surrounding vegetation on the forest floor.

Tentatively, using the grass stalk, the guide teased a beautiful male Trapdoor spider out of its perfectly constructed nest. Unlike most spiders, this one does not construct a web but has a silk-lined burrow instead. It has tripwires that let the spider know when the prey has become entangled and it will then



seeing...or in the case of this elusive arachnid, not seeing.

We had walked past a confusion of wildebeest and a dazzle of zebra, both

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pop the lid, grab the prey, and vanish back into the burrow... all within the blink of an eye.

I am fearful of spiders, having been bitten by a sac spider many years ago and I still have scars to prove it, however, this specimen was spectacular.

The trapdoor spider is utterly beautiful and it looks as if it has been dipped in varnish, with the majority of the thorax and legs glossy and shiny.

Having latched onto the grass stalk with its large front jaws it was intent on engaging in a tug of war if a meal was not on the cards.

The spider is venomous, although scientists are uncertain what effect it has on humans. None of us were taking chances and once looked at, and photographed from many angles, we let it slip back into its burrow and close the door behind it. Before leaving we made certain that we left the area

undisturbed so as not to alert potential prey after we had departed.

It might not have been one of the larger dangerous game species, but it certainly was a learning opportunity me for and one which I gratefully accepted.



To all our partners, affiliates,
students and followers.
A prosperous, healthy, safe
and educational 2021!



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