



Wildlife Campus

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Magazine

**WildlifeCampus
Youth**
Emma-Lee Kidd

**What type of guide
will you be?**
Part #2

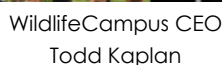
**A very special
Elephant interaction**
By David Batzofin

**Snake
Identification**
by ASI

Ulovane
Practical training
In the heart of nature



Part #2



Guiding attracts a wide, diverse and interesting group of people, those that have been in the industry for some time can quickly place guides into a number of different categories. We continue this roll-call with...

These guides learn most of what they know from books, not through time spent observing in the field.

Alternatively, they will repeat word-for-word what they may have learnt from other guides. They will stop at a baobab tree and reel off, in parrot fashion, all the scientific information that they memorised from the tree book.

While watching a herd of blue wildebeest, they will recite the exact number of days of the gestation period, the animal's height at the shoulder in centimetres, its weight down to the last kilogram. They will tell their guests about their taxonomy, different names in several languages, social structure, rutting and territorial behaviour, reproduction, diet, longevity, record auction price and longest horn length. They might expand to their specific ecological role in the reserve and pontificate on their population numbers, trends and health across seasonal variations and periodic droughts and floods.

There is nothing wrong with knowing these facts, figures, details, data, and statistics; indeed if any of these questions are specifically asked by a client it is fairly awkward not knowing the answer. However, when reeled off in a dull monotone, without feeling or enthusiasm, the whole experience

is cheapened and your guests are no better than having a trip to a zoo with its info sheet. In the context of a safari there is little less appealing than a boring lecture. It is like the transfer of the notes of the guide to the notes of the client without passing through the minds of either.



What type of guide Will you be? Part #2

Such guides are also called 'Wind-up Guides' – someone who resembles a spring-loaded wind-up toy. These guides are *wound up* before leaving on a game drive or bush walk. They then beetle down the same pattern of roads and trails, stopping at the same tree, beehive, bird's nest, termite mound, and old lion kill and give the same spiel at each place of diminishing interest.

Clients soon realise they are with someone akin to a disillusioned bus driver who has driven the same route for the past twenty years. They were expecting a keen naturalist dedicated to the wild haven he or she is so fortunate to live and work in, bursting with energy and enthusiasm to show and interpret the fascinating creatures that inhabit their magical and mysterious place of work.

You may frequently be guiding tourists that don't speak your language. Try and watch a television programme in a language you do not understand without subtitles, unless it is Rowan Atkinson's Mr. Bean, it is not likely to be very engaging. Guests crave an original and individual experience, give them what

they came for. Silence at a sighting can be more fulfilling than the best nature series. Be personable, not plodding and pedantic.

Your guests want more than they can read from a book, television documentary, or a computer. They will soak up the first-hand information that you obtained through your own personal experience and observations. Don not forget that the only way to accumulate these is by spending maximum time in the field, with all your senses wide open to everything that is going on around you.

A wind-up parrot... Is this the type of guide you want to be?

Garth Thompson is one of the world's foremost field guides; author of the must-read Guides Guide to Guiding.

In this Magazine

A meerkat is the central focus of the cover, standing upright on a large, weathered log. It is looking slightly to the right with a curious expression. The background is a soft-focus natural environment with various plants, including aloe vera leaves in the foreground and some tall, thin stalks on the right. The overall tone is naturalistic and serene.

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With 176 different species and subspecies of snakes in southern Africa, snake identification can be a tricky subject. Spending hours paging through a field guide trying to find something similar to what you saw, although fun, can sometimes be a bit frustrating.

Several snakes, like Cape Cobras and Mole Snakes make this task even trickier, as they occur in a wide array of colour forms, which might not always be depicted in a field guide or online image library.

Below are a few tips to keep in mind when trying to identify snakes.

Location, location, location.

At the African Snakebite Institute, we get hundreds of requests to identify snakes on daily basis. One of the most important factors to help narrow down the identification, if it is not immediately obvious, is location. Where was the snake seen?

Several snakes in Africa have a limited distribution, and once you know what area the animal occurs in (or doesn't occur in), you can remove a number of possibilities from your list.

It is very rare for a snake to be found in an area that it does not naturally occur in, but occasionally we do see "hitchhikers".

Length

Length is a difficult thing for many people to judge, but when identifying a snake from a picture, it is helpful to have a rough estimate of length. If the snake is as long as a brick or if it is just under 2 m, makes a big difference. When looking at photos, we often try and see something relative in the picture, in order to help gauge the length.

Thickness

People are often far better at judging thickness, as opposed to length, and knowing if the snake was as thick as a finger, a broomstick or a wrist can be helpful.

Colour

Colour can play an important part in snake identification. Some snakes are extremely variable in colour – like the Cape Cobra, which occurs in a huge variety of colours, from butter yellow, to orange, to brown and even blackish.



Colour variation in Cape Cobras (*Naja nivea*)

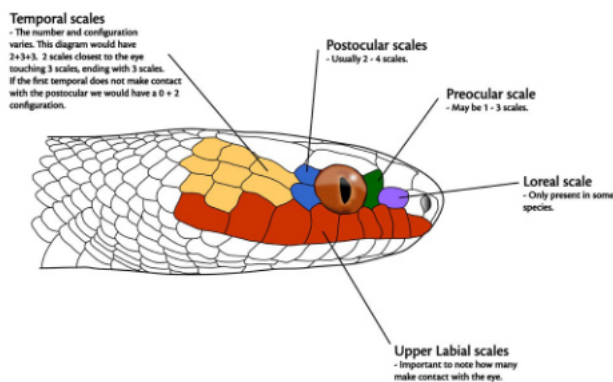
But other snakes like the Herald Snake (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*) which may not always have the orange lip (it can be yellow or white) nearly always have the darker temples and small white speckles down the length of the body.



Colour variation of the upper lip of Herald Snakes (*Crotaphopeltis hotamboeia*)

Scales

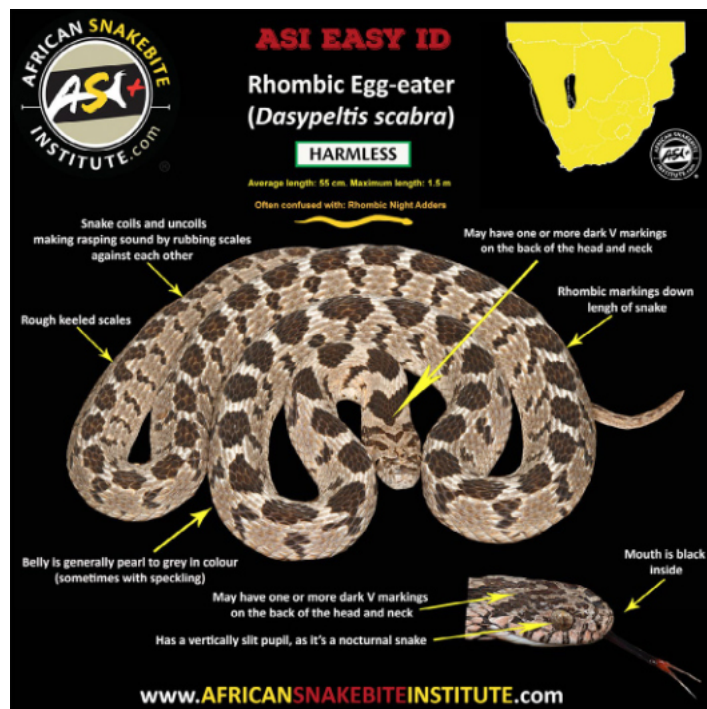
Learning a bit about scales is a great bonus to identification. It might seem silly thing to think of when you just want to ID a snake that quickly slithered off the path. But was the snake smooth and shiny, or was it rough and camouflaged? Those with a rough and camouflaged appearance have keeled scales – these are scales with a raised ridge running down the centre. Keeled scales help break up the snakes' pattern and help it to remain undetected. All the adders of the genus *Bitis* have keeled scales. On the rare occasions when you can get a closer view of the snake, without putting yourself in harms way, there are a number of scales (mostly around the head) that often play an important role in identification.



Head scalation on snakes

Behaviour

Knowing how certain species behave often helps with identification. For instance, most cobra species will raise the front third of their body off the ground when threatened and form a defensive hood. Slug-eaters like to curl up into tight balls when threatened, to protect themselves and Rhombic Egg-eaters put up quite a defensive display by coiling and uncoiling and rubbing their roughly keeled scales, which produces a rasping sound, and striking out towards the attacker.



Learn the snakes of your area

The best way to increase your snake identification abilities is to familiarise yourself with the snakes that occur in your area. Those you might meet sunning themselves in the garden or bump into whilst cleaning out the back of the garage. Once you have mastered those in your area, it's fun to learn about others. There are a number of platforms on social media where you can brush up on your identification knowledge (we have a Facebook page called Snakes of Southern Africa) and it is quite a good learning exercise to try and guess the identity of the snakes posted before checking the experts confirmation.

We have over 150 free snake posters on the African Snakebite Institute website, which you can download in high resolution and print. They include posters for countries in Africa, provinces, nature reserves, as well as scorpions and spiders – and a number of them are available in multiple languages.

WildlifeCampus Youth

Serious about conservation



The WildlifeCampus team recently met up with one of our youngest students, Emma-Lee Kidd, at Kloofendal Nature Reserve in Gauteng.

Emma is seven years old and has completed two WildlifeCampus Courses.

We asked WildlifeCampus student Alexis Bushell to interview Emma and ask her ten questions. This is what Emma had to say!

What is your favourite animal?

My favourite animal is the black footed cat.

How do you feel about the plastic problem?

The plastic problem is one of the threats to our wildlife and their habitats. More needs to be done to create awareness. I don't think the current solutions are enough – more people need to be aware of the problem and aware of alternatives to plastic. Ask the question – Do I really need this? Choose the planet's future over convenience. Companies that produce plastic should look at better options and be involved in solutions.

Do you have any pets?

Yes, I have 2 dogs. I will be getting another dog and hamster soon.

What is your favourite outdoor activity?

I really enjoy being outdoors, going for walks and climbing trees. I like looking out for animals and tracks. There is so much to see in nature, even in your back yard.



Emma and her mom Kim, a Wildlife Management graduate with WildlifeCampus

Have you ever gone on safari?

Yes, I love the Kruger National Park.

What is your favourite book?

A life on our planet – by Sir David Attenborough (Even though my Mom has to explain some of it to me).

WildlifeCampus Youth

Serious about conservation

What do you want to be when you grow up?

I would like to follow in the footsteps of Sir David Attenborough and I would also like to open up my own Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre.

Do you like snakes?

Yes I do. I need to learn a lot more about them though.

Which WildlifeCampus Course was your favourite so far?

The Anti Poaching Course – It really showed the problems that poaching is causing and the reasons behind poaching. I liked the information on what is being put in place to try and stop poaching and even how we as individuals can help.

What would you like to tell other kids about our environment and our future?

Each person needs to be aware of the current problems facing the Earth. Education is the most important thing.

*The way humans are living at the moment is not sustainable. We all need to understand that we are **part** of nature and not **separated** from nature. What we do now will eventually affect all of us. We are seeing the effects already. Once people understand this, we can all do our bit to help save the earth – there is still time.*



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Living an untroubled, exciting life close to wild animals in the heart of nature



Having lunch and a nap under a tree on a hot day. Somehow this sounds strange in these crazy times but believe me, it is possible. Here at Ulovane the experiences are unforgettable and you learn the most interesting things about our planet and our natural environment, so that the whole corona stress was getting yesterdays news directly after the first few days.

Now already four weeks have passed and it is very difficult for me to make a summary of the best experiences we had so far because every day in the bush is different and every adventure is marvellous in its own way.

In the third week, for example, we had an incredible sighting with a whole herd of elephants. All together they were at a water hole and it was amazing to watch how they cooled themselves to endure the heat.



When the elephants approached our vehicle, we wanted to get on our way in order not to disturb them. But the problem was that the engine of our car suddenly stopped. Therefore, we could not do anything but sit still and wait until the animals passed by. To be honest, my pulse went up a bit when suddenly an elephant was five metres away from us, but they were all very calm and relaxed. After these lovely animals passed, we had to jump-start our vehicle. Luckily, we discussed the procedures two weeks before in one of our lectures.

In the same week, we had a similar experience with a huge group of giraffes. We were on an afternoon game drive and suddenly without seeing the animals from a distance we were located between more than 20 giraffes: some of them were busy eating, others played with each other, or watched us and our vehicle. At this moment I really thought I was watching a movie, but it was reality: the whole scenery with the sun going down in the background was just incredible and I think it was one of my favourite sightings so far, having these pretty animals directly next to you.

Living an untroubled, exciting life close to wild animals in the heart of nature



This week I thought it could not get any better, but the fourth week proved me wrong.

We had the opportunity to be part of the darting and the surgery of a lioness on Amakhala Game Reserve. We started our trip early morning and made our way to the lioness. The reserve's ecologist had been watching the lioness all morning and kept us informed on her location. Actually, we should have hurried, but on the way to the lioness, we happened to meet two male lions and a large group of otters.

Fortunately, the darting team waited for us, and we finally made our way to the lioness. The darting itself went very quickly, but then we had to wait for the anesthetic to take effect and the lioness to fall asleep. When that happened, we were able to carry the lioness onto a vehicle and finally bring her to an enclosure on the reserve.



There she was operated on a gallery and we could watch everything from beginning to end.

Normally, I am not good at seeing things like this, but at that moment it was different. I can say that this was the most interesting thing I have ever experienced in my life and I think these opportunities you will not get as a normal tourist.

Not only do our game drives make the time at Ulovane exciting and interesting, also the lectures are fascinating and you really learn a lot about different things. In the third week, for example, we looked at the history of humanity, especially on Amakhala Game Reserve where you can find lots of devices of former human activities. It is just incredible to touch stone tools that were used in the Stone Age for survival purposes or to stand next to a grave of a proper Bushman.



Living an untroubled, exciting life close to wild animals in the heart of nature



All the things we learn in the lectures as well as on game drives show me how vulnerable our planet actually is and how we, as humans, influence our environment, mostly in a negative way. This also makes me appreciate the little things in nature, such as insects and plants, and I am becoming more and more interested in things that are not usually noticed. I never thought I would develop such a great interest in those.

This is only a short summary of the last few weeks, there were of course so much more experiences, sightings, and information that will never be forgotten.

After finishing school, I really thought a lot about how I can broaden my horizons, learn something for my entire future life, and have some nice experiences and I definitively think that Ulovane is one of the best places to satisfy these aspects. That, is why I am happy and thankful to be here, and I can only advise everyone to leave the Corona stress behind, be open-minded, and spend a few weeks in the bush here at Ulovane.

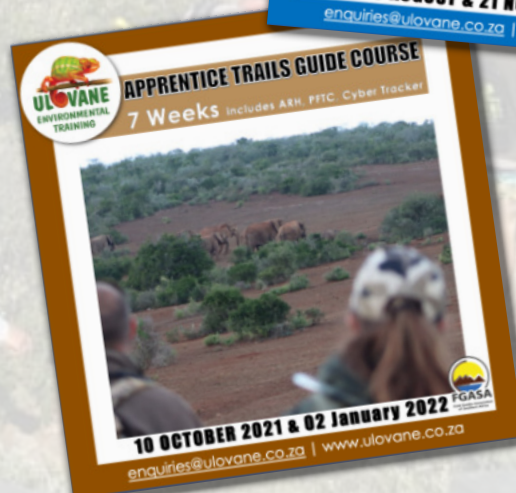
Jonas

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These are the courses available for the rest of 2021.

More info:

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A very special

Elephant interaction

By David Batzofin



My recent birthday was spent at a reserve that has gained fame for its herd of 28 very special elephants.

Each has a name and the hierarchy is well documented, both locally and internationally. They have been the subject of numerous books and television documentaries, but it was my interaction with them over two days that reinforced just how extraordinary this herd is.

But, a word of warning, not all elephants will act in this manner around humans so caution is the watchword when interacting with any elephants, either as individuals or in herds.

What makes these elephants special? On a game drive, you do not have to look for them. If they feel like interacting, they will find you! And once found they will get close to the vehicle, to the point where, on our first drive, one particular youngster ended up chewing

on the corner of the canopy of the game viewer.

What sets them apart is the fact that at no time did I feel in danger or threatened. Even when two of the largest elephants I have ever encountered walked within touching distance, and I was not the only one who wanted to reach out a finger or a hand. It turned out that other guests on the vehicle were having the same experience. However, it is by treating these individuals with respect during such interactions that guests, like me, can experience elephants as they should be, without fear or aggression. And given the roots of this particular herd, it is hard to believe that they have this much trust in us as a species.

There are two distinct groups and interestingly enough when the matriarch recently died of liver failure there is one particular individual that was being 'groomed' by her peers to take over the herd. Seeing that she is relatively inexperienced in the gigantic task of being a leader, she is being watched and carefully corrected by the more experienced elephants in the group.

Not that she is not allowed to make mistakes, she is, but just as long as they do not place the herd in danger.

What were my overriding feelings about the interactions that I shared? It is the sense of calm and the total lack of malice that they exuded when we were sitting in the middle of the herd.



A very special Elephant interaction

By David Batzofin

I have been in similar situations where I have been on edge or extremely nervous as to what the outcome might be (I have been seriously charged on two separate occasions). But here, in the lush KZN vegetation, I was able to relax, exhale, and enjoy watching the herd interact with each other as well as our vehicle, which, our guide explained, is seen as a family member.

Reciprocity is a two-way street and as respectful as we were, it was reflected by the individual elephants as they peered into our vehicle with deep-set eyes that engendered knowledge and an innate sadness, or so it seemed to me. They know and have seen things that we as humans will never understand. Yet, even as I spent time with them, I could not help but wonder why there are humans that would still kill for a set of tusks?

The owner of the property shared stories of guests who have arrived terrified of elephants and within a single encounter have replaced that fear with adulation and excitement.

At the end of each of the encounters that I shared with the herd, it was almost always them that moved off, rather than our vehicle leaving the sighting.

And at the end of the day, it is THAT differential that separates this property from all of the others that I have visited. Here the guides do work in African time and that includes just sitting and being in the moment with these very special pachyderms.

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