



Wildlife Campus

20
YEARS
ANNIVERSARY

LEARN PROTECT SAVE

Magazine

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Spiders

Free
Courses!

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Anti-Poaching

Bergplaas
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Programme

Accommodating
vegan guests
by Hayley Cooper

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WildlifeCampus

Firestarter

The origin story



WildlifeCampus CEO
Todd Kaplan

“We’ll be conducting some block-burning today” said the section ranger over a breakfast of coffee and rusks. “Great day for it, cool, overcast, gentle and a steady breeze.”

Rotational burning was instituted in the Kruger National Park soon after the establishment of the Sabi Game Reserve in 1895. Over the next century, a wide variety of formalised burn programmes were adopted and adapted. From every two years to every five then to three. From 1926 to 1934, none at all due to a severe drought.

From late spring to mid-summer to mid-winter and autumn, almost all combinations of intervals and seasons were tried.

W.P.D Gertenbach’s research paper notes that in 1954, the Kruger National Park (KNP) was divided into sections, which were separated by properly constructed firebreaks. All old and long grass was burnt every three years on the understanding that only one-third of each section would be burnt annually and as late as possible in spring after the first rains. Hundreds of kilometres of firebreaks were constructed and the area was divided into ± 400 blocks. Each of these blocks was burnt every three years in spring in such a way that the burnt areas were scattered over the whole KNP. This triennial rotational burning programme lasted until 1975.

In the mid-1990s, 24 post-graduate wildlife management students were driven deep into the reserve, well away from any public roads to the selected block, a rough rectangle some 200m wide and 350m long. Under the guidance of a ranger and his team of armed men, the first step was to try to flush all animals and birds from the block. Forming a skirmish line we noisily walked through the block attempting to disturb any mammals, birds and reptiles. Tortoises were removed to the adjacent blocks. After several run-throughs, the burning could commence.

Ironically, old converted fire extinguishers were used. Containing a petrol/diesel mix, they functioned as a kind of watering-can, except that once the spouts were lit, they dribbled fire. The fire-starters then walked two sides of the block, ensuring that the wind was taking the fire through the block. With a steady breeze driving the fire rapidly through the block, this is known as a cool burn. This is aimed at removing the moribund and dead grasses, small shrubs and sapling trees, but does not harm mature trees. Once the fire had taken hold and the direction of the fire lines were established, the fire starters started on two new lines along the opposite block boundaries. These are fire lines burning slowly into the wind, they are back-burns and are intensely hot. The point is not the destruction of the vegetation, but rather to create a burnt-border for the rushing cool-burn to burn into.



WildlifeCampus Firestarter

During the burn, all the students were placed around the perimeter, armed with stout broom handles to which strips of old car tyres were attached; acting as beaters should any burning cinders be blown into adjacent blocks. None were needed, but quite a few caught glimpses of snakes as they slithered out of the singed landscape.

Timing is of course paramount and the old pros did so to perfection, the back burn was 5m – 10 m into the block when the cool burn fire line reached it. This culminated into a very brief impressive conflagration and then the fire was out, all the fuel spent.

The fire management system for the KNP was revised in the early 2000s to satisfy the parks revamped ecosystem objectives, which stresses biodiversity. Many areas of the park were losing their open grasslands, these areas gradually becoming dominated by thicket. This has severe biodiversity, tourist and ecological consequences.

Keeping in line with a natural process, the regimented philosophy of structured block burning was replaced with a point-burn viewpoint, a single point of ignition usually by lightning. These fires were then left to burn as the wind and fuel took them, only being halted to avoid loss of property or if considered dangerous to people. However, instead of the intended lightning-driven system, most point-ignition fires were found to have been caused by illegal immigrants or poachers within the park.

The KNP continues to conduct fire research and differential block burnings. For those interested, [here's an article from the SanParks Koedoe Journal published in 2020.](#)

Todd

Did you know?

*Upon registration as a WildlifeCampus Online student, you'll immediately be assigned **13 FREE courses** to your “**My Courses**” page*

We encourage you to try all the complimentary content, this will give you a clear idea on our mode of course delivery and assessment. This provides you with an excellent opportunity to fully experience WildlifeCampus, prior to making any purchase decision. If required, a certificate for a completed course may be redeemed at a cost of R 250 each.

Find out more about which courses are free and how to register on page 15 of this magazine.



WildlifeCampus

LEARN PROTECT SAVE

In this *Magazine*

A large elephant is the central focus of the image, standing in a savanna landscape. The elephant's head and trunk are prominent, and it is looking towards the camera. The background shows a dry, open landscape with a dead, gnarled tree on the right and some low-lying bushes. The overall tone is sepia or light brown.

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Field Insight

WildlifeCampus is excited to see that the students are doing extremely well during their practical training at GameWays. They all completed the WildlifeCampus Anti-Poaching online course, and are now putting theory to practice in the field.

For more information on this excellent training programme, please [click here](#).



VENOMOUS SPIDERS OF SOUTHERN AFRICA



With around 2200 known species of spiders in Southern Africa, we're bound to occasionally encounter these creatures in our gardens and homes and when out in the bush. Most common spiders are harmless and are a great addition to any garden for their pest control abilities.

Spider bites are not as common as they are made out to be and in Africa we have no way of diagnosing a bite based on a wound. Spiders are often incorrectly blamed for wounds caused by ingrown hairs, scratched mosquito and other invertebrate bites and bacterial infections like MRSA.

However, there are 5 spiders which are of medical importance, and although their bites are not considered deadly, they can be severe and should be treated by medical professionals.



Black Button Spider (Genus: *Latrodectus*)

A widespread spider across much of South Africa. These spiders usually stay away from human dwellings and are found in natural habitats where they hide under rocks, in logs and bushes. They build a messy web where they often have one or two large white egg sacs. The egg sacs are smooth and about the size of a pea.

These spiders are dark brown to pitch black, often with red or purple on the back of the abdomen.

The abdomen is large and has a red or purple infusion above the spinneret – not under like the Brown Button Spider. They are inoffensive and when disturbed, drop to the floor in a tight ball with the legs tucked in.

Bites are rare and usually occur to farm workers, especially in the vineyards of the Cape, where the workers are putting their hands into the thick vegetation and squashing the spiders accidentally.

The venom is highly neurotoxic and causes pain, sweating, nausea, disorientation and shortness of the breath. A bite from a Black Button Spider is treatable and antivenom is available. Although no deaths from Black Button Spider have been documented in recent times, accounts by various authors, before the mid-1960s report a mortality rate of 1 - 6%.



Brown Button Spider (Genus: *Latrodectus*)

These common spiders are often found around human dwellings – in the garage, under windowsills, or in the swimming pool pump box. They build a messy web and have large white to light brown spiky egg sacs. These spiders are usually a brown colour with darker bands on the joints of each leg. The abdomen is grey to white often with a series of dots. The characteristic hourglass shape under the abdomen is orange to red.

They are inoffensive and when disturbed, drop to the floor in a tight ball with the legs tucked in.

Bites are rare and usually occur when the spiders are squashed by accident in clothes or when lifting an item and trapping the spider with your fingers.

The venom is neurotoxic and causes pain, sweating, nausea, disorientation and shortness of the breath. A bite from a Brown Button Spider is unpleasant, but easily treatable and no deaths have been recorded.



Sac Spider (Genus: *Cheiracanthium*)

These are free living spiders often found in plants and in houses where they build a silk sac, under which they hide or lay eggs. They are a cream-white to pale yellow or reddish-brown in colour with distinct dark mouth pieces.

Despite disputes, this species appears to possess a cytotoxic venom and bites can result in tissue damage and should be treated as an open wound. If the wound goes septic or necrotic it is best to get to doctor who may recommend a course of prophylactic antibiotics. Wound care is very important in Sac Spider bites. No deaths have been recorded from bites of this spider.



Violin Spider (Genus: *Loxosceles*)

These are free living spiders that don't build webs. They are common in caves and under rocks, logs and in dark areas.

They occur in houses and garages but are generally very shy of humans and scuttle off as soon as they see you.

They are similar in appearance to Daddy-Long-legs, although the legs are not as long or thin and are often confused with the Brown Recluse of America (and introduced to ports in Australia), a spider that also has a violin shape on the body.

The South African Violin spiders are brown or grey and have spots or markings on the abdomen. This species possesses a cytotoxic venom and bites can result in tissue damage and should be treated as an open wound. If the wound goes septic or necrotic it is best to get to a doctor who may place the victim on a course of prophylactic antibiotics. There are no deaths recorded from these spiders.



Six-eyed Sand Spider (Genus: *Sicarius*)

The Six-eyed Sand Spider is a relative of the Violin Spider and lives in arid regions of Southern Africa. They are highly adapted to living in sandy habitats where they will bury themselves just below the sand and wait for passing insects to prey on.

There is a lot of confusion about whether these spiders are dangerous to humans or not. There has never been a recorded bite from one of these spiders, but laboratory tests with rodents found the venom to be highly potent.

However, these spiders are reluctant to bite, even under extreme provocation. They also rarely come into contact with people because of their lifestyle and specific habitat requirements, and so although still considered of medical importance, they are of little threat to humans.



In the event of a bite from any of the medically significant species:

Try get a photo of the spider (this can be sent to free ASI for identification via the ASI Snakes app)

Immobilize the affected limb to slow the spread of venom.

Call the Poison Information Centre helpline 0861 555 777

Get the victim to a medical doctor.

Proper wound care is vital for cytotoxic spider bites in order to avoid infection.

DO NOT:

- ✗ Apply a tourniquet
- ✗ Cut or suck the wound
- ✗ Use ice or very hot water
- ✗ Give the victim anything to eat or drink (especially not alcohol)
- ✗ Apply electric shock
- ✗ Inject antivenom randomly (antivenom, if required, must be administered by trained medical professionals)

How to avoid spider bites:

Most spider bites occur in bed at night when they are squashed by humans.

Keep your bedroom clean and clear of clutter and places for spiders to hide.

Check curtains and bed frills for sac spiders – they often hide on fabric behind their own silky sacs.

Places like behind picture frames form ideal hiding places.

Shake out shoes if left outside.

Be cautious when collecting firewood as many species hide under branches or bark.

Use a torch when in garden sheds and avoid putting your hands where you can't see.

Partner Spotlight

WildlifeCampus



Spirit of the Wild

THE RESERVE

The 5000-hectare Bergplaas Nature Reserve neighbours the iconic Compassberg in the Sneeuwberg mountains of the Great Karoo. Its altitude ranges from 1400m to 1800m and it serves as a key water catchment for the Karoo and the Eastern Cape.

Originally comprising three livestock farms, the internal fences and livestock were removed, and the wildlife that historically roamed this area was reintroduced. Gazetted as a Protected Area - Nature Reserve status through Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency, through its Biodiversity Stewardship Programme.

Bergplaas has a population of approximately 900 large mammals, including eland, kudu, red hartebeest, plains zebra, springbuck and black wildebeest. Approximately 25 small mammals have been recorded in the region. Small carnivores include caracal, black-backed jackal, small-spotted genet, bat-eared fox, african clawless otter and the cape-, grey- and marsh mongoose.

There are 133 bird species in the region, including the Secretary bird, black harrier, lanner falcon and blue crane.

When Princess Irene invested in Bergplaas in 1998, she spent extended periods alone on the reserve. She walked the land, climbed the mountains and explored the streams. "It brought me back to my own silence and connectedness with the natural world," she explains.

From within this silence she contemplated the contribution she felt called upon to make in this world. Thus, in 2006 the *Spirit of the Wild Programme* was thus conceived.



THE SPIRIT OF THE WILD

The Spirit of the Wild Programme or Spirit of the Wild offers a one-to-three-week wildlife, guiding and leadership experience that awakens each participant's pathways of knowledge, belonging and purpose. It is a profound personal and leadership skills development journey that reconnects people from all backgrounds with the natural environment. In the 21st century, many of us have lost this connection, which is the lifeline to our shared humanity, our collective well-being and the achievement of our full potential.

In 2012 the Field Guides Association of Southern Africa (FGASA) endorsed Spirit of the Wild as a specialist training provider and certificate programme. The range of graduates is remarkable: from young people who grew up in squatter camps with no previous experience of the natural environment to the chief executive officer of the FGASA.

Partner Spotlight

WildlifeCampus

Participants from financially disadvantaged programmes can apply to attend at no cost. Bergplaas' international partners are highly supportive of this.

15 YEARS OF GRADUATE SUCCESS

In 2021, Spirit of the Wild celebrates its 15th anniversary. The programme accommodates groups of up to 18 participants at a time, either for the one-week programme or for the three-week certificate programme, completed in three one-week sessions over the course of a year.

The diverse range of participants includes:

- Young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in South Africa's urban and rural areas;
- Young people from the South African government's job creation initiatives in the conservation sector;
- University and College Students;

PARTICIPANTS:

THE EXPERIENCE AND GAINS

The wildlife and personal development skills that participants gain through the programme and the inner and outer journey they experience on Bergplaas Nature Reserve, include:

- A deepening of your understanding of wildlife and wilderness;
- Growth in your awareness of being part of the natural environment;
- Advancement of your communication and guiding skills; and
- An awakening of your vital force and life purpose.

This triggers a growing connection with self, a trust in self, a confidence in and acceptance of self, which, in turn, nurtures the ability to lead and share the knowledge, relationship- and communication skills they have gained.

All participants on the Spirit of the Wild Certificate Programme experience these gains.

MORE INFORMATION?

info@bergplaas.com

OR

www.bergplaas.com



How to guide With vegan guests

By Hayley Cooper



So, you are a qualified, experienced guide, ready to share the natural world with guests who may be experiencing Africa for the first and possibly only time.

For many guests this is a 'once in a lifetime trip' and I know for a fact that going on safari can actually change your life as it literally changed mine.

But enough about me, let's talk about vegan guests.....

Many lodges are still challenged by serving vegan guests as they simply aren't sure what or how to serve them and this feeling can run right from the manager to the chef, the waiter and through to the guide.

If you have vegan guests on your vehicle there are some important aspects that you need to think about to create an amazing and inclusive experience for them.

Of course, the food is the first thing that you think of! Now you are probably around food and your guests a few times in a day and it may look something like this...

- Morning coffee pre-drive
- Coffee stops on drive
- Afternoon coffee pre-drive (Wow... it's a lot of coffee)
- Afternoon sundowners on drive
- Bush set ups & events
- Hosting drinks and dinner in the evening

It just as important for you, as their guide to understand their diet requirements, just as much as it is for the chef.

Why?

You are their go-to person to ask questions about not only animals and nature, but everything lodge related. You are also their host for their stay so should be making sure you know what their preferences are and although you don't have to know everything about them, you want to make sure they have an enjoyable stay as much as possible, so being on top of their wants and needs is critical.

So now let's talk about what vegans want and expect from their guide.

Vegans don't consume dairy, so this includes milk that is put out with the coffee and tea selection.



Make sure you know what their preference for non-dairy milk is, of course there won't be expectations to have every single non-dairy milk possible, as there are literally hundreds (yep, there is!) but know what your lodge stocks as standard and ask your guests their preference out of these.

How to guide With vegan guests

By Hayley Cooper

If you have a guest relations person, or a head chef who will know this already from correspondence from the guest prior to booking or on arrival you can ask them first but then just double check with your guests by saying "I believe unsweetened almond milk is your preference, is this correct and if so we shall make sure it is available for you at coffee as well as on game drive."

Remember to know in advance about any other allergies they may have too, you don't want to serve almond milk to a guest who has a nut allergy and don't want to serve soy milk to a guest who has a soy allergy so make sure you know what is what and have this ready and waiting for them so they don't have to ask.

Some examples of vegan milks are:

- Almond
- Soy
- Oat
- Hemp
- Hazelnut
- Coconut
- Flax
- Pea
- Quinoa
- Cashew
- Macadamian
- Rice
- Peanut



So as you can see, the list is endless! I would recommend that a lodge has a minimum of 2 options (and they can even make their own).

You need to make sure you also have this milk in your vehicle as you won't be able to 'milk any almonds' while out on game drive!

Non-dairy milk should be stored cold just like dairy milk and typical used within around 5-7 days after opening so I suggest writing on a new bottle with a marker pen, when it was opened. If your lodge makes homemade non-dairy milk, then you would be looking at more like 3-4 days in the fridge.

Typically, between your morning coffee, coffee on drive and in the afternoon, there may be options of **muffin, cookies, biscuits or similar baked goods**. As often these contain eggs, butter and sometimes milk you will need to make sure you have vegan cookies from the chef, and you know which ones are which.

It is important to remember than your vegan guests are paying just as much money as your non-vegan guests so they should be getting the same experience, and not only in accommodation, safari but in food too, so if you have 2 different cookies for your non-vegan guests then ask the chef for 2 different cookies for your vegan guests OR suggest they make them all vegan. This is something that many chefs don't think of, but it's a wonderful solution, minimizing waste, cost and keeping everyone happy.

Sundowner snacks will be the same, there are many typical sundowner snacks that are vegan already such as dried fruit & nuts but again, just make sure you have a variety for your vegan guests.



How to guide With vegan guests

By Hayley Cooper

If you have a tracker its important that they are also aware of having vegan guests as they will be assisting with packing snacks and serving them during the bush "stops".

Something which you may not be familiar with is that **not all drinks are vegan**, this includes wine, gin and beer which are probably the sort of drinks you will be serving while out at your sundowner spot as well as around the fire later and during dinner service.



Not all wine is vegan for example as sometimes as part of the fining process animal based products are used such as egg whites, fish bladders, & gelatine. (Yep... pretty gross and actually this would mean that most of these wines aren't also suitable for vegetarians either)

"Your guests will be highly impressed if you know not only about vegan food but also drinks too."

This shows that you and your lodge are offering a high level of service and staff are trained & competent. 5 star service should always be offered, regardless if your lodge has an official "star grading" and this is all part of it!

About Hayley Cooper

Hayley is the author of WildlifeCampus' very popular **Front of House Lodge Operations Course** and a certified vegan hospitality consultant.

Part of Hayley's services include staff training, this is done for all relevant departments from FOH/service staff, the kitchen, housekeepers & of course the guides!

If you are interested training or consulting, contact: hayley@wilddreams.co.za



Elephant Tales

By David Batzofin



It is said that an elephant never forgets. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for me as I have been in three elephant-related situations that could have ended in tragedy, yet here I am to tell the tales.

The first incident took place as we were leaving a lodge via a very narrow access road. We were the second vehicle in a two-vehicle convoy that was heading out on a morning drive. The road takes a sharp bend at one point, around which the lead vehicle disappeared. The radio did not even crackle as we heard the guide in the first vehicle scream "REVERSE"! Our guide slammed into reverse and the vehicle virtually leaped back down the track and into the camp parking lot. The lead vehicle took off for the delivery entrance while the now screaming elephant could be heard accelerating up the road. Our guide leaped out to put the electric fence in place as the elephant came to a screeching halt on the other side of this single strand of wire that separated us. She looked at us, we looked at her, hearts pounding. There was lots of head tossing and ear-flapping before she strolled off down the path, with seemingly not a care in the world. It was a while before we headed out, only to find her eating peacefully on the side of the road. This time we passed her without incident...

Fast forward a few years to a different reserve, this time with a group of students out on an assessment drive. Fun and frivolity while listening to them sharing their newfound knowledge with me. We came across a breeding herd of elephants feeding on both sides of the road and we stopped a respectful distance away to give them enough room to cross back and forth without feeling under threat. We sat quietly, again sharing elephant facts until we felt that we (and the herd) were



ready to move on. We drove past without any interference, but no sooner had we cleared the last pachyderm than an enraged mother came hurtling through the bushes on the side of the road. And she was totally focused on getting to us as quickly as possible. Calm chaos reigned within the vehicle with the driver trying to coax as much power from an engine not designed to emulate the 0-100kph capabilities of a Ferrari.

This was not a mock charge and we quickly realised that if we were unable to outrun her, there was going to be a huge problem. I think that all of us had our right feet flat on the floorboards to 'assist' the young driver. Fortunately for us, at a particular point, and believing that she had made her point the female gave up, turned around, and swaggered back to the herd as if to say "See I told you I could get rid of them"

Elephant Tales

By David Batzofin

The final encounter proved that if you sit quietly and are not perceived as a threat, then even the largest elephant is inclined to ignore you rather than interact...

Another reserve, and another group of students. This time we were sitting outside a tented classroom watching a herd of elephants feeding on the far side of a large dam. A picture-perfect scene of a morning in the African bush.

Slowly we realise that the herd is on their way around the dam as the foliage on the trees near us seems to be attracting them. Before we knew it the large matriarch was eating less than 5m from where I and the students were seated "Stay calm and stay quiet" was the command from one of the instructors.

We all sat in awe and watched as this huge animal ate contentedly while ignoring us totally. It eventually moved off and wandered through the camp before it, and the rest of the herd, disappeared back into the bush.

Have I finally learned my lesson...not really as the most recent interaction saw a young bull come within 1 m of my vehicle as it sauntered past on his way to a nearby stream. Another close encounter and I am certain that there will be more in the future.

And I am still here to share these tales. Unscathed, but wiser.



FREE COURSES?

Upon registration as online student, you'll instantly have access to the following FREE courses on your "My Courses" page:

- African Folklore by Credo Mutwa
- Astronomy
- Big 5 Course
- Big 5 Kids Course (Dutch version available as well)
- Birding by habitat
- Cultural Astronomy - Beliefs & Customs
- Cultural Guiding - South Africa
- Elephants: Facts & Fables
- Hunting - A Balanced Perspective
- Mountain Guiding
- Predator Management on Livestock Farms
- Snakes and Reptiles of the Lowveld

Register as online student by [clicking here.](#)



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