



Wildlife Campus

LEARN PROTECT SAVE

Magazine

Whales

by Amy Holt

**Cats, more than
lions or leopards**

**New Field Guide
To scorpions of
South Africa**

**May
Wildlife Diary**

**Tips for your
job interview**

The importance of snakes

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The origins of WildlifeCampus

“The show must go on”, a book written by Peter Armitage tells the birth story of a company called AfriCam. Read with us as the story unfolds, AfriCam grows and eventually, WildlifeCampus finds its origin.

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Whales facing threats

WildlifeCampus student, Amy Holt, highlights the myriad of threats whales are facing. A world without whales spells disaster for humans as the oceans are the life support system of our planet.

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Snakes, vital predators

One of the most misunderstood and feared creatures on our planet, yet so vital for our ecosystem. In this article WildlifeCampus shines a light on the importance of snakes.

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Field guide to scorpions

An invaluable tool for students, researchers, academics and hikers. The "Field Guide to Scorpions of South Africa" by Ian Engelbrecht has arrived!

Tip: Have a look on our Facebook group where you can win this book + a UV scorpion torch

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Cats, more than lions

Chris and Mathilde from Stuart on Nature shows us that cats are more than lions and leopards. We certainly know more about the big cats than we do about the smaller species but they are no less interesting.

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May Wildlife Diary

This month's Wildlife Diaries, by Stuart on Nature, starts off in May 1644, however, instantly we get to realise that when it comes to wildlife, May 2023 might still have the same annual events occurring.

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Job interview tips

Amore van Wyk from Wild Dreams Hospitality gives some tips and tricks for job seekers on how to shift your mindset for a job interview. The article also contains an important list on what items you should bring to your interview!

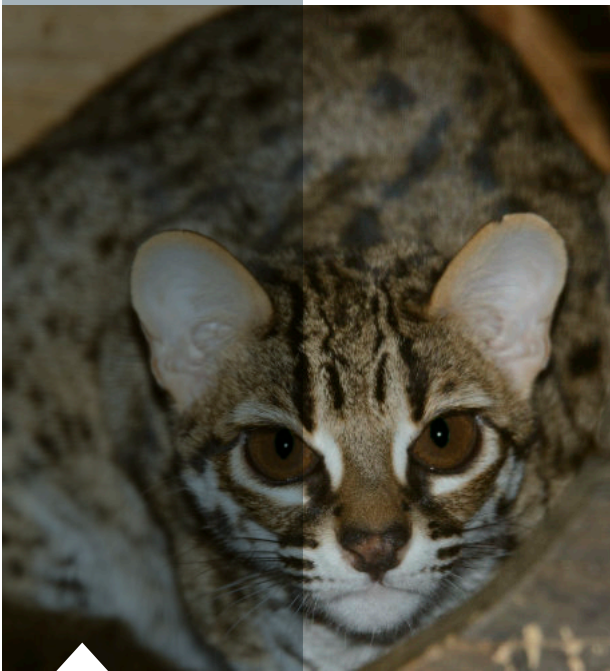
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Ants in my pants

In this edition, David is out in the bush, at a practical training provider, battling an army of ants. This swiftly leads us to one of his next adventures where he goes scorpion hunting with the head instructor.

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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.

In South Africa we were heroes. We were considered South Africa's only business that was capable of participating in the Nasdaq boom, with our predominantly international viewer base. A Business Day headline boasted that "AfriCam game-park website rakes in 45% of SA internet traffic". That of course included the international component of our traffic, which was about 75% at that stage.

By this stage we had started hiring more people and one of our best acquisitions was Ilana Stein. A highly religious Jewish female, Ilana was a very positive breath of fresh air and a committed follower of wildlife. She took over as editor and her October 1999 AfriNews had the following report on the cameras (abridged):

"Blame it on the rain! Yes, the rain finally arrived in the Lowveld at least, and made viewing slightly more... abstract. But despite rain and heat, the Cam Roundup is as varied and interesting as ever. Read on...

Gowrie Cam: There's been excitement aplenty as huge herd buffalo descend on the waterhole - watching a herd in action is truly an amazing sight.

Djuma Virtual Game Drive Cam: There were some truly fascinating sights to be

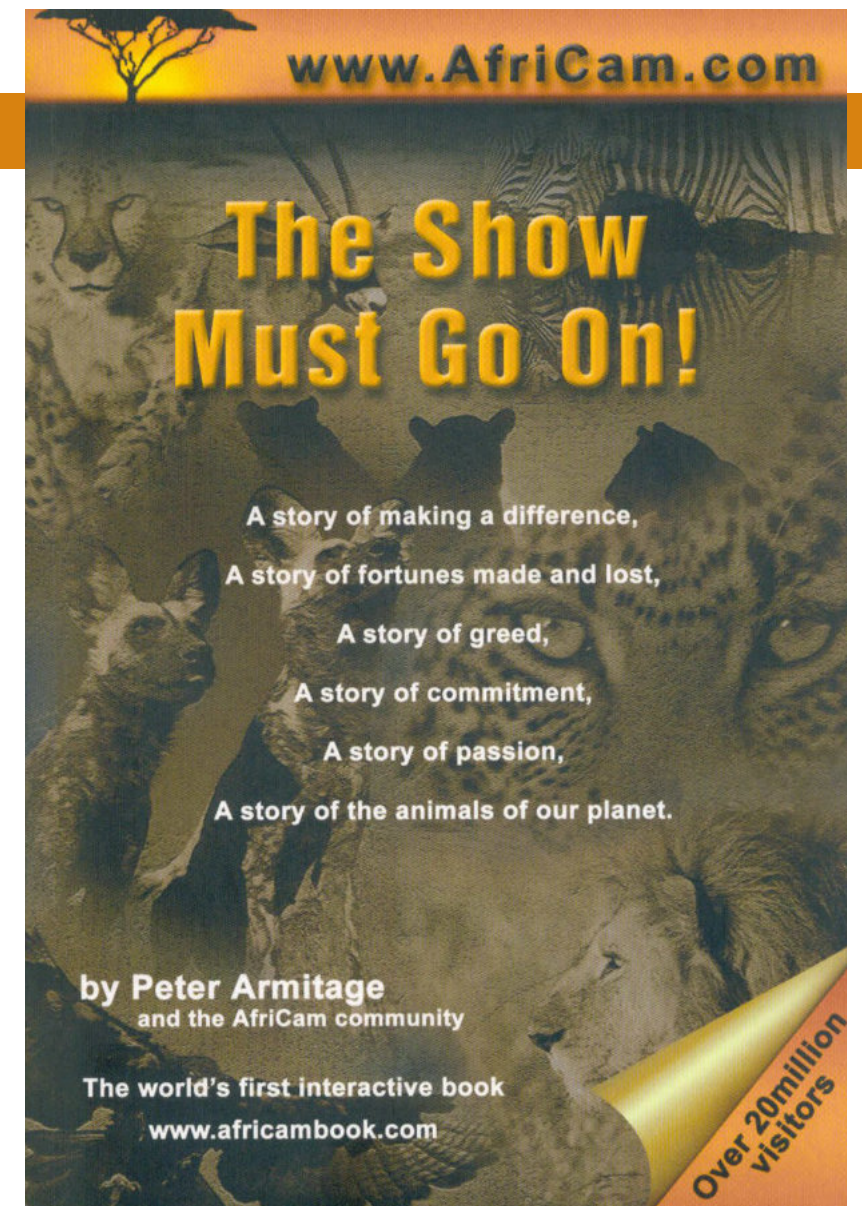
seen courtesy of the Djuma VGD - including leopard, a symphony of lion and vultures, and a variety of birds. The beauty of the VGD is that it can zoom in on the small things that one might miss, and the last two weeks we had some real first-timers in the form of snails, dung beetles and scorpions. Good thing it was virtual, because that last one certainly sent shivers down the spine! We even had some flowers making their appearance. And who could forget those charming jackal and hyaena pups!

Djuma Mobile Cam: Lot of elephants lately at this Cam, have you noticed? In fact, quite a sight was that of the elephant almost completely submerged in the dam - in this heat who could blame him? Then there were the buffalo, one choosing the mud wallow over the swimming option.

Orpen Cam: The word is obviously out amongst the giraffe that this is the spot to be, and boy, a lot of them have arrived. One might be forgiven for thinking that the waterhole is tiny, but seeing one of these lanky beasts drinking there, it puts it all into perspective - it's quite a size.

Sabi Cam: Despite the rains, we're still seeing quite a lot of traffic at this waterhole, particularly those clowns of the bush, the baboons, and of course the ubiquitous, yet beautiful impala. A great catch was the sight of a white-tailed mongoose scurrying past the cam in the dead of night.

Sabi Mobile Cam: A big excitement here was that zebra kill. The tawny colouring of the lions showed up strikingly against the black and white stripes of the zebra's skin - effective, if a little sad. And from the haunting to the real cute, we've been treated to great pics of a tree squirrel popping in and out of his den in a gnarled tree-trunk.



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

Bush Sounds: Watching the cams and listening to the sounds at the same time - it's one more step towards actually being there...

Kwa Maritane Cam: Kwa Maritane continues hot and dry, at least by 3 November, as the warthog bathing in the water aptly reflected (no pun intended). Animal interactions at a waterhole are always fascinating, and the sight of a baby zebra about to receive a kick from its elder showed that personal space is definitely an issue out in the bush! On October 24 we were treated to our first sighting of sacred ibis; a treat since it is hard to see birds at the waterholes without a zoom facility.

SharkCam: Some lovely shots once again from SharkCam - but all is transient, including the battery...





“An uneasy feeling allayed” - October 1999

Even at this stage I had an uneasy feeling in my stomach. I had analysed businesses for the last eight years and the key determinant of value was revenue and bottom line earnings. AfriCam had little revenue to speak of and the losses were increasing on a monthly basis. And it was not immediately clear how we could address this in the short term, let alone the long term.

A trip to the US partially allayed my concerns. The Streaming Media West conference was in San Jose and Graham, Paul and myself attended. Paul’s other business, RTTC, serviced the airline industry and he had managed to secure a good deal on “around-the-world” first class air tickets. We always joked at AfriCam that we had a right to “turn left at the top of the stairs” when we boarded an aircraft. After all, we were paper millionaires. And in dollar terms at that.

The conference itself was amazing. Most of the participants had launched entertainment businesses on the internet, most of them using streaming media. We were still refreshing our images every 30 seconds and this was the next step for our business. There were numerous radio stations on the web. Quincy.com was a popular one, launched by Quincy Jones himself.

A collection of dotcom entrepreneurs were spreading the gospel and internet entertainment looked to have a healthy future. Billions of dollars had clearly been invested in the

businesses which were on show. This was particularly so for the infrastructure players. Huge amounts were being invested in companies which would provide services to players such as ourselves. These companies included Akamai, Intervu (which was eventually bought out by Akamai), Digital Planet, Real Networks and iBeam (which eventually went bust).

Bill Gates himself opened the conference and spoke confidently about the future of the internet. A part of his speech astounded Graham, Paul and myself:

“Ladies and gentlemen, let me show you what is happening on the internet around the world,” he declared as a slide of North America appeared on the screen. Nobody blinked, except for us three South Africans. Suddenly we realised that this entire audience was quite comfortable with the notion that North America was, for all practical purposes, the economic or internet world.

Directly after the conference we went to meet the folks at NBCi. This was the internet arm of the NBC television and media enterprise. They had taken over Xoom.com, with whom we had concluded our advertising deal.

NBCi had ballooned from 10 to 900 employees in just 24 months and was now a major player in the internet space. They were the number two site in the world in terms of internet traffic. Parked in the reception of NBCi’s flashy offices in San Francisco was a Porsche Boxster, which at first we believed was an advertising promotion. We were startled to find out that they gave away one of these every month to one of their employees.

Staff in this industry were now so hard to find that if an existing employee introduced a new employee to NBCi, their names were put in a draw. On a monthly basis one of these names was drawn and the lucky winner drove home that night in the deep blue sports car.

At NBCi we met with some members of their team and we firmed up our agreement that we would get paid US\$2 for every 1000 page impressions that they served. In addition, they hosted our site. NBCi had a number of syndicate sites like ourselves and they sold advertising as “run-of-site” to US advertisers. In other words, advertisers were paying for a volume of banners across numerous sites, with no particular targeting. Our mole at NBCi led us to believe that we constituted 15% of the NBCi traffic, which they counted as their own. It was the time of smoke and mirrors and traffic meant everything. But this also meant that we were a very important affiliate of NBCi.

The November 1999 Media Metrix report showed Real.com as the biggest entertainment website, with 70m unique visitors. Second was NBCi, with 11m which implied that AfriCam had well over 1.5m unique users for the month, which would have made us the number 35 website in the world. CDNow.com was number five at that stage and filed for liquidation less than 24 months later.

US\$2 CPM was a trifling amount to receive for banner advertising in the US, but with our volumes, this amounted to a fair amount of cash for our business. Other targeted sites, such as The Wall Street Journal were receiving as much as a US\$70 CPM (cost per thousand). NBCi promised they would also try and sell some of our banners for targeted advertising at higher prices, as much as US\$28 CPM. This whet our appetite and we were greatly encouraged. If we sold just 10% at the higher levels, this would make our business very profitable.

We also met with Real Media in the US (not Real Networks, the streaming service provider). They also offered to sell our advertising at higher rates on a targeted basis. In other words we could provide them with as much inventory as they could sell and NBCi could keep the rest. They got the go-ahead from us and they promised big revenues. We were desperate for revenues and did sums in our head as they made their big promises.

Another key meeting, or so we thought at the time, was with ex-South African Les Edelstein of Zapship.com. E-Commerce, in other words the sale of physical goods had been puzzling

us. Fingershopper did not sound like the solution and when we offered Africa curios and T-shirts etc on the website we sold 50 a month at the most. It was clear that the US consumer did not wish to purchase a physical product from a company on the tip of Africa. Zapship.com was the internet offshoot of Moteng, which was a US catalogue seller of camping and other equipment. They would provide a service to our site where Americans could be comfortable that they were buying products from Americans.

It was 10am the next morning when Paul’s phone rang. Paul was the only one of us that had organised a tri-band mobile phone for the trip, which meant that he could receive calls in the US. I had walked through the revolving door before Paul, when he pressed “Answer” on his Nokia.

He quickly nudged his way through the Sheraton Hotel doors, yelling, “Peter, Peter it is CNN on the line for you”. He thrust the phone in my direction as I arranged for a TV interview with CNN.

We could have frozen that moment in time. Only three months ago I was churning out analyst reports, now I was being tracked down by CNN to discuss our great internet success. Two months later they broadcast a three-minute feature on CNN, the day after which we recorded a record 2 million page impressions on the website. It was great content and for the next year we received e-mails from people all over the world telling us they had seen the AfriCam insert on CNN. We flew back to SA confident of our future. First class.



Whales

Facing a myriad of threats



© A. Lynn

By WildlifeCampus student

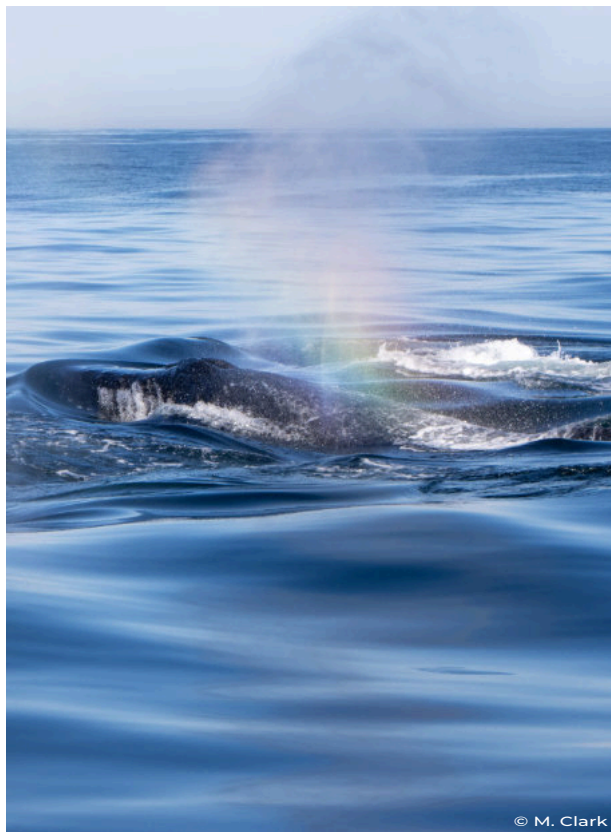
Amy Holt

At the top of the food chain, whales play an important role in the overall health of our oceans. However, humanity threatens the very existence of whales. Whales face a myriad of threats including habitat loss, plastic pollution, noise pollution and shipping strikes. A world without whales spells disaster for humans since the oceans are the life support system of our planet.

Whaling has been a traditional activity among indigenous communities all over the world for thousands of years. Large scale commercial whaling lasted from the early 17th century to 1986. It decimated whale populations, with many still trying to recover. Whaling is the hunting of whales for their meat and blubber, which can be turned into a type of oil. Whale oil was used for lighting lamps, as a lubricant, and in margarine and soap. Sperm oil was more valuable than other whale oils because it burned without an odour, had less smoke, and burnt more brightly. During the late 18th century, whaling began to have a more significant impact on global whale populations. This was mainly due to the Industrial Revolution. In the 19th century, technological advances, such as steam-powered ships, meant richer whaling grounds could be exploited. By the mid-20th century, most large whale species were being pushed towards extinction. A ban on commercial whaling came into effect in 1986. However, Norway, Iceland and Japan continue this barbaric tradition. In February 2022, Iceland announced that it would stop its commercial whaling practices by 2024. Whale watching helps raise awareness about whale conservation and provides an alternative source of income for communities.

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges of our time. It affects whales in various ways. First, rising sea levels lead to an increased loss of polar habitat. This would decimate narwhal, bowhead, and beluga whale populations who inhabit Arctic waters year-round. Increases in sea temperatures affect the timing and ranges of whale migration, which disrupts their ability to reproduce. Finally, a combination of climate change and over-fishing leads to greater competition for diminishing food sources. Overfishing is when vessels catch fish faster than stocks can replenish.

02



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Climate change is causing ocean acidification. More carbon dioxide in the atmosphere means the oceans have more carbon dioxide to absorb. This causes the oceans to become acidic and certain chemical reactions become unbalanced. These changes are harmful to organisms (e.g., phytoplankton, mollusks, crustaceans) that have to synthesise calcium carbonate shells or skeletons. This impacts the entire food chain because many whales depend on these organisms for their food. Beaching is a phenomenon where whales strand themselves on beaches. These whales may have problems with their navigation skills, be chasing prey in too shallow waters, or be diseased or injured. Climate change causes unusual winds, changes tidal patterns, and alters ocean currents. Therefore, the number of beached whales will increase as climate change worsens.

Invented over 110 years ago, plastic is now everywhere, widely used and never really goes away. Humans have created 8300 million metric tons of plastic in the last 60 years. It has polluted every corner of the world's oceans. Between 4.8 million and 12.7 million tons of plastic leak into the oceans every year. That is more than the combined weight of every single blue whale on Earth. Plastic bags can look like squid to sperm whales. Once consumed, whales face excruciating deaths when the plastic blocks their breathing passages and stomachs. Baleen whales could be the most vulnerable marine species to plastic pollution. When baleen whales, such as blue whales, gulp huge

amounts of seawater, the comb-like baleen filters the food from the water. The whale accidentally consumes microplastics at the same time. Microplastics are plastic pieces of five millimetres or less and they can leach toxic chemicals. By reducing your plastic footprint, we can protect our oceans, fight climate change, and alter our negative impact on whales for future generations.

Entanglement and bycatch is the biggest threat to whales, with over 300,000 dying each year. Fishing gear was once made of biodegradable wood and ropes. Now, it is predominantly made of synthetic materials, like plastic. Entanglement in fishing gear causes starvation, drowning, infections from cuts and deeper lacerations, increases the risk of ship strikes, and limits a female whale's ability to birth young. In the 1980s, female right whales were giving birth every three years but, now they give birth every nine years. This is likely influenced by entanglement as well as other stressors. Bycatch is the incidental capture and mortality of non-targeted marine species in fishing gear. Modern fishing gear is very efficient and often covers an extensive area, meaning it will catch anything in its path. Longlines, trawling and the use of gillnets most commonly result in bycatch. These are all difficult for whales to detect by echolocation. The bycatch of whales is increasing in intensity and frequency due to rising demand for marine food.

The volume of shipping traffic worldwide poses a serious threat to whales. It increased by 300% between 1992 and 2013, and continues to increase at a rate of 2-3% per year. Shipping strikes is one of the leading causes of death for endangered and vulnerable whale populations, including the critically endangered North Atlantic right whales (with fewer than 250 mature individuals left). North Atlantic right whales are especially vulnerable to ship strikes because, their habitat and migration routes are close to major ports and often overlap with shipping lanes. The most effective way to reduce collisions between whales and ships is to separate them. When this can't be done, slow the vessel down to a speed of ten knots or less. However, shipping companies are under pressure to deliver goods as quickly and cheaply as possible. This leads to a high risk of collisions.

Whales live in a world of sound, with their primary sense being hearing. Human activities including loud underwater seismic surveys to locate oil and gas, military exercises using powerful underwater sonar, and increasing levels of boat activity result in the oceans becoming louder and louder. This creates an ocean habitat which is difficult for many whale species to survive in. Water is a much denser medium than air. As water molecules are clustered more tightly together than the gases in air, sound can travel more rapidly and over great distances. Ships' engines are responsible for a doubling in background noise levels underwater during

every decade over the last 50 years. A large ship creates a 'bow null effect' by blocking the engine noise by the bow. This creates a quiet zone in front of the vessel, and leaves a whale unaware of the pending threat. Noise pollution stops whales from being able to communicate with each other, and can interfere with their navigation. Prolonged exposure to loud sounds may result in hearing loss or injury. Further, the buildup of stress is linked to growth suppression, lower fertility and poor immune system function. 2020 was the year of the quiet ocean, where there was an unprecedented pause in ocean noise. The pandemic provided a unique opportunity to explore how a sudden reduction in human activities, followed by global economic slowdown, affects levels of ocean noise. The International Quiet Ocean Experiment will continue until the end of 2025. It is designed to increase knowledge of sound in the ocean and its effects on marine organisms. Noise pollution is yet another reminder of the impact humanity is having on our natural world.

Whales play a critical role in capturing carbon from the atmosphere which, helps fight climate change. Each great whale sequesters about 33 tons of carbon dioxide, taking carbon out of the atmosphere for centuries. A tree absorbs only up to 48 pounds of carbon dioxide per year. Areas where whales are frequent, have high populations of phytoplankton. Phytoplankton is microscopic marine algae. They contribute at least 50% of all oxygen to our atmosphere and capture about 37 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide (an estimated 40% of all carbon dioxide produced). To put this into perspective, it is equivalent to the amount of carbon

dioxide captured by 1.70 billion trees (four Amazon forests' worth of trees). Increasing whale populations, increases phytoplankton which means more carbon capture.

Whale waste products contain iron and nitrogen, which phytoplankton need to grow. All whales dive underwater to feed and return to the surface to breathe, and here they release buoyant fecal plumes. This process is known as a whale pump. Many whales migrate from nutrient-rich feeding grounds to nutrient-poor breeding grounds. At the breeding grounds, whales release nitrogen-rich urea that stimulates phytoplankton growth. This process is known as the great whale conveyor belt.

All living things are made of carbon and thus serve as carbon reservoirs throughout their lifespans — the larger and more long-lived the animal, the more carbon is stored. When large marine vertebrates die, their carcasses sink to the seafloor. The carbon inside their carcass can support deep-sea ecosystems and be incorporated into marine sediments.

Undoubtedly, whales are incredibly important for our fight against climate change and keeping our oceans healthy for generations to come. Therefore, we all have a part to play in protecting our oceans and the creatures that call it home.



© T. Cravens



The importance of snakes

Vital predators of our ecosystem

Snakes are one of the most misunderstood and feared creatures on the planet. They are often portrayed as dangerous and deadly predators that pose a threat to humans and other animals. However, the reality is that they are an essential part of our ecosystem, and their decline can have severe consequences. In this article, we will explore the importance of snake conservation and how one could contribute towards it.

Snake conservation could be described as “the practice of protecting snake populations and their habitats to ensure their survival”. It involves various measures such as habitat restoration, captive breeding projects, and education to promote public awareness. Snakes are a vital part of our ecosystem, and their conservation is essential to maintain a balance in nature. Unfortunately, many snake populations are declining due to habitat loss, climate change and poaching (for meat or illegal markets).

Snakes play a crucial role in our ecosystem as both predators and prey. They help control rodent populations, which can cause significant damage to crops and spread diseases. Snakes also serve as a food source for many other animals, including birds of prey, mammals, and even other reptiles. Without snakes, the ecosystem would be thrown out of balance, and the consequences could be catastrophic.

Without snakes, rodent populations could get out of control rapidly, leading to the destruction of crops and the spread of diseases. This would ultimately lead to the decline of other species and a severe disruption of the food chain.

One of the main misconceptions about snakes is that they are dangerous and should be killed on sight. However, the reality is that most snake species are harmless and pose no threat to humans. Even venomous snakes, some considered to be extremely dangerous, are not naturally aggressive and will usually slither off when confronted by humans. In most cases, venomous snakes will only bite humans when they feel threatened or provoked. This is why it is crucial to give snakes plenty of space and avoid any unnecessary interactions with them. Another common misconception is that snake conservation is unnecessary since they are considered pests. However, this is not true, and as we have seen, they do fulfil a vital part in our ecosystem.



Community involvement is crucial in snake conservation. It is essential to educate the public about the importance of snakes. This can be achieved through various means, such as educational programmes, workshops, and even social media coverage. Other levels where a community could be involved are habitat restoration projects or even captive breeding programmes.

Snake safety is essential when dealing with these creatures. If you encounter a snake, it is essential to keep a safe distance and avoid provoking it. If you need to relocate a snake, it is recommended to contact a professional.



Attempting to relocate a snake on your own can be dangerous and should be avoided. It is also essential to remember that all our indigenous snakes are protected by law, and killing them can result in fines or even jail time.

There are various ways to support snake conservation efforts. You can donate to organisations that work towards snake preservation, volunteer your time in habitat restoration projects (even better, help prevent habitat destruction) or educate others about the importance of snake conservation. By supporting these efforts, we hope to ensure the continued survival of these misunderstood scaly creatures.

There have been many success stories in snake conservation. One of the most notable in South Africa would be the story of the Albany adder (*Bitis albanica*). This species is endemic to the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. These extremely range-restricted dwarf vipers are likely to be the country's most threatened snake species. Different organisations joined efforts and negotiated with private landowners and companies to preserve this species' habitat located within the Port Elizabeth Complex Key Biodiversity Area.



To repeat ourselves one last time: snakes play a crucial role in the ecosystem by controlling rodent populations and serving as a food source for other animals. Moreover, many species of snakes are endangered due to habitat loss, climate change, and human activities like hunting and poaching. Protecting snakes is essential to promote good biodiversity and maintaining a healthy ecosystem. Raising public awareness about the importance of protecting snakes can help to dispel myths or misconceptions and can encourage people to coexist with them peacefully. Just remember: should you come across a snake in an unwanted location, it is recommended that you contact your local snake catcher to ensure the safety of both yourself and the snake.

FIRST GUIDE TO ALL KNOWN SCORPIONS IN SA

Field Guide to Scorpions of South Africa

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Field Guide to Scorpions of South Africa



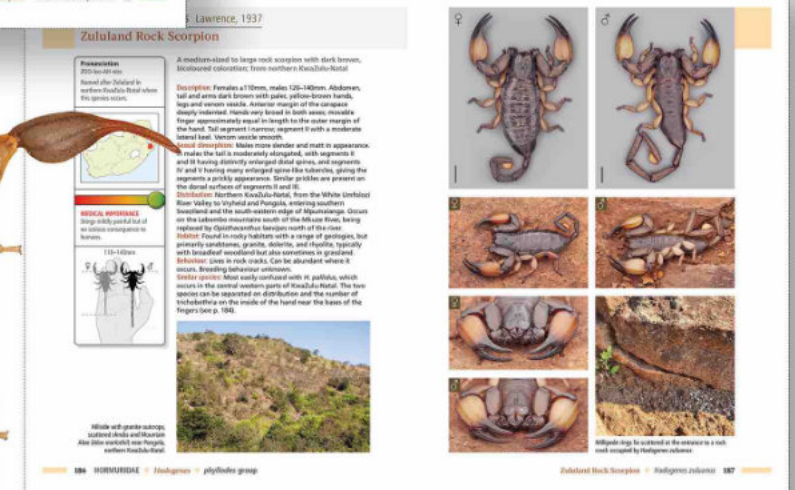
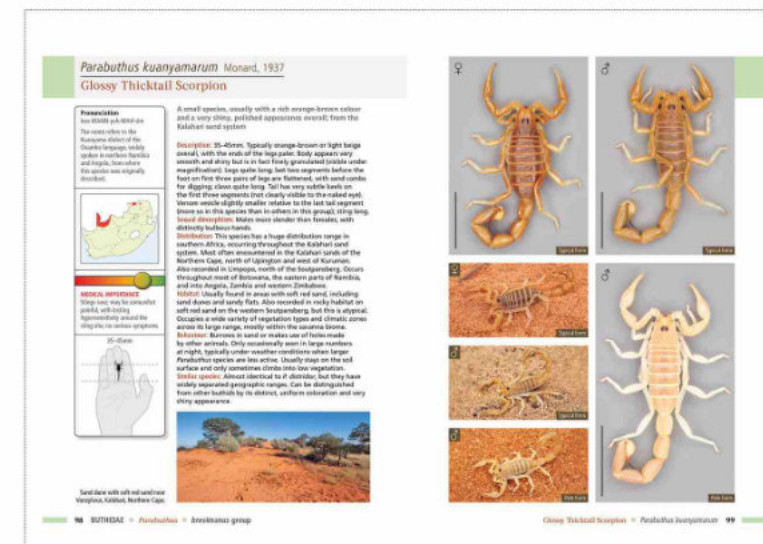
Ian Engelbrecht

Scorpions have been around for 420 million years and are among the world's most remarkable living fossils. South Africa is home to an astonishing variety, with 108 species in three families spanning almost all of the country's biomes, from desert and grassland to fynbos, savanna and forest. Scorpions are even found in urban gardens.

Field Guide to Scorpions of South Africa is the first comprehensive guide to describe and illustrate all known species in the country. The clear, detailed species accounts cover appearance, habitat and behaviour, and discuss the variation within species according to region. Up-to-date distribution maps are included for all species and exceptional photographs, carefully worked to show astounding detail, bring to life the intricate patterning and colours of different species. Both males and females are presented, as well as a variety of colour forms, facilitating accurate identification in the field.

The introduction discusses scorpion classification, anatomy, biology, behaviour and habitat, as well as venom potency and the treatment of stings. Tips on how and where to find scorpions and how to contribute to their conservation as a citizen scientist are also included.

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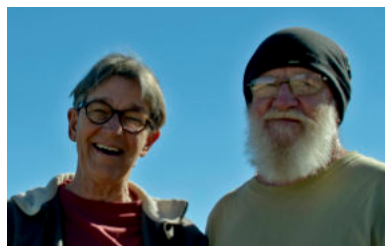
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Cats

More than Lions and leopards

Caracal



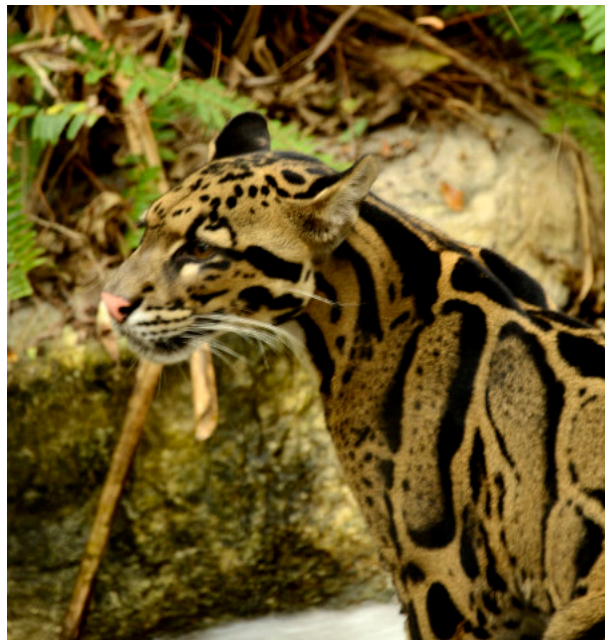
By



Most people when asked to name wild cat species will rattle off Lion, Leopard, Cheetah, Tiger, Jaguar and perhaps Snow Leopard, but there are currently 41 recognized species of wild cat, in 14 genera and with numerous accepted and dubious subspecies. We certainly know more about the big cats than we do about the smaller species but they are no less interesting. In part, researchers are drawn to the big cats because they attract more funding, which is fair enough. Trying to obtain research funding for the smaller, more obscure, species is generally an exercise in frustration, although there are some exceptions, such as the Small Spotted (Black-footed) Cat (*Felis nigripes*) in southern Africa, and the Iberian Lynx (*Lynx pardinus*) in Spain and Portugal.

Firstly, let us look at what makes a cat a cat! Cats have retractile claws (only semi-retractile in the Cheetah), the posterior edge of the main foot pads (plantar) have three-lobed cushions that leave distinctive marks in the tracks, all have lithe and relatively slender bodies, they have 30 teeth with the upper third premolar and lower molar acting as “shears” or “scissors” to cut and tear flesh, the skull is relatively short with large orbits, the upper surface of the tongue has horny papillae that are used to rasp meat from bone. Their fur and coat pattern are diverse, with some species having mainly plain coloured coats Lion (*Panthera leo*); Caracal (*Caracal caracal*); Puma (*Puma concolor*), many others with simple, or intricate, patterns and spotting. Just

think of the rosettes of the Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) and Jaguar (*Panthera onca*), the striping of the Tiger (*Panthera tigris*), and in our view amongst the most attractive of all the two species of Clouded Leopard (*Neofelis spp.*). But then of course there is that Asian beauty, the Snow Leopard (*Panthera uncia*) and what about the small but long-haired Pallas’s Cat (*Otocolobus manul*).



Bornean Clouded Leopard



Manul or Pallas Cat

So, what are the origins and evolution of the Felidae? It seems that they began to evolve and diversify from 50.6 to 35 million years before present but the first recognizable cat form probably appeared about 35 million years ago, and the first fossil records for North America come from around 18.5 million years before present. Modern wisdom indicates that all living members of the Felidae descended from a common ancestor that had its origins in Asia and spread to other continents in migration waves over a period of some 11 million years- a mere blink of an eyelid! They were able to spread across the continents as land bridges came and went, glaciers and ice sheets melted and refroze. Some of these now extinct large cats were impressive, the sabre-toothed cats (*Smilodon spp.*) with their very long, dagger-like canine teeth that had their origins in Africa but migrated to other continents.

The cats of today range in size from the diminutive Rusty-spotted Cat (*Prionailurus rubiginosus*) of South-East Asia at up to 1.6kg but closely contested by the Small Spotted, or Black-footed, Cat (*Felis nigripes*) at around 2kg; then the Sand Cat (*Felis margarita*) from the Sahara might object as it is a close contender as it rarely reaches 3kg, often barely 2kg. Then the heavy weight shows up, the Siberian race of the Tiger (*Panthera tigris*) that can tip the scale at more than 300kg, the largest cat that has ever lived. But then if one looks at the Tigers of the Sunda Islands they rarely exceed a maximum weight of 142kg. One finds a similar disparity in size of Leopards from different regions. This is the most widespread of the big cats occurring widely in Africa and throughout Asia from Yemen in Arabia, to China. Males can range from 20-90kg and females 17-48kg with mountain and desert forms tending to be smallest, with those in the Western Cape mountains of South Africa and the south-western desert massifs of Oman being equal contenders.

Most cats are solitary, only coming together to mate, or when a female has young but as with all things there is an exception, the Lion. This cat is highly social with a complex hierarchy and occurs in diminishing numbers in sub-Saharan

Africa and the Gir Forest region of north-west India close to the Pakistan border. They live in groups, or prides, of variable size and vigorously defend group territories. The Asian Lion once occurred from eastern Turkey, widely in Arabia and through Iran to central India, and was brought to the brink of extinction but against all odds numbers are increasing in India.

The cats are active hunters and in most cases take living prey but some, especially the Lion, Leopard, Tiger and a few others are not averse to chasing other carnivores from their kills, and a rotting carcass is often not to be turned down. Mammals and birds are in most cases the most important prey but some will opportunistically take insects, fish, reptiles and amphibians, including the Leopard. Then there is the Fishing Cat (*Prionailurus viverrinus*) of South and South-East Asia, a rarity in the cat world that can swim long distances, including under water, and its primary diet, as its name implies, is fish. In Bengali this cat is known as *mach-baghrol* – fish tiger. The smaller cats, in South America, Asia and Africa are poorly known and understood but as we have said if you are not a Tiger or a Lion your chances of getting studied are not very good. Or, perhaps it is better to just leave them alone?

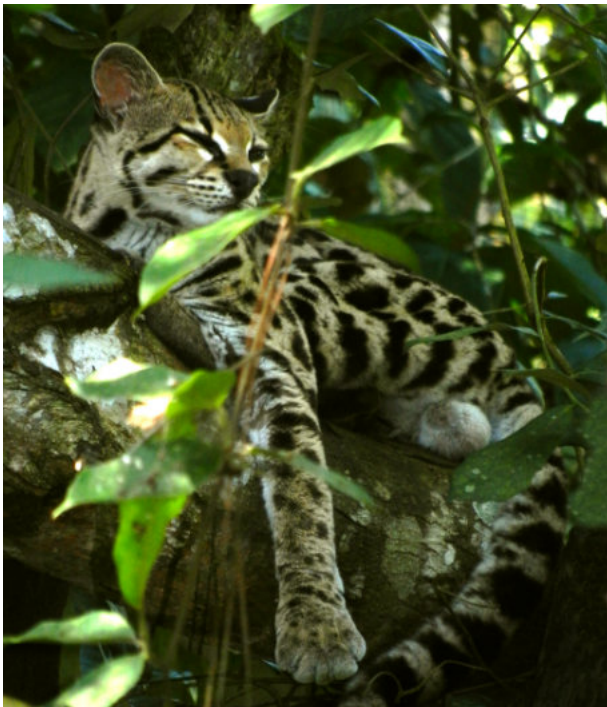


European Wild Cat

Some of the most widespread cats include the Puma, Leopard and Caracal. The Puma, or Cougar, occurs from southern-most Yukon in Canada, southwards in a near continuous belt through Central and South America, to Patagonia in Chile and Argentina. Not only does it have a massive range but it occurs in all major habitats, desert to tropical rainforest, mountains to sea level. Previously wiped out from much of northern and central North America it is slowly reoccupying some of its former range. The Caracal has a wide range across Africa, the Middle East and extending as far east as India, and as far north as the north-east shore of the Caspian Sea. Yet, the only other member of the *Caracal* genus, the African Golden Cat (*Caracal aurata*) is largely restricted to the forests of the Congo Basin and West Africa, with a few isolated outliers in the mountain forests of Kenya and Uganda.

Unlike the fairly well studied Caracal we know very little about the Golden Cat, the rain forest equivalent.

The small cats of South America, some eight species if one follows one line of taxonomic thought, or 13 species according to other taxonomists, although this latter has not been fully accepted by the scientific world. We know very little about these cats, in part because of the hostile environments in which many live, and again the difficulty in obtaining research funding. The same applies to the 12 small cat species that occur in Asia, particularly those in South-East Asia. Again, the number of species is disputed by taxonomists, some claiming that more should be recognized. As with other parts of the world, the cats, especially in South-East Asia, are threatened by habitat loss and modification, as well as direct persecution.



Margay on tree

May Wildlife Diary

By



- On 21 May 1644, an employee of the Dutch East India Company resident at the Cape of Good Hope wrote in his journal, “This morning two leopards, the worst destroyers of sheep, were shot and brought to the fort.” Today Leopards (*Panthera pardus*) still prowl the mountains within 30km of Cape Town.
- A British administrative officer on patrol in May 1949 in the Kale-Waka-Lima area of Uganda reported seeing at least 20 groups of Square-lipped (White) Rhinoceros (*Ceratotherium simum*). At that time these rhino were considered to be particularly common in the area. Today this northern species is all but extinct.
- The Aberdares in Kenya can expect an average rainfall of 230mm this month, amongst the heaviest falls of the year, with Mombasa receiving an average of 320mm this month.



Bearded Vulture

- The White-bearded Wildebeest (*Connochaetes taurinus*) in the Serengeti ecosystem are now usually concentrated in the “mouth” of the Western Corridor, still feeding on the abundant grasses in the woodlands.
- Klipspringer (*Oreotragus oreotragus*) ewes in the harsh Simien Mountains of Ethiopia are dropping their last kids of the season. All are born in a limited season spanning April and May.
- In Zimbabwe, most young of the Short-snouted Sengi (*Elephantulus brachyrhynchus*) are born in May. The young are well developed and can run around soon after birth.
- In Uganda, Woodland Thicket Rat (*Grammomys dolichurus*) births are peaking now. The females bear litters of two to four naked and helpless young.
- One of Africa’s strangest rodents, the Naked Mole-rat (*Heterocephalus glaber*), begins breeding in May. Adapted exclusively to living in arid areas with sandy soils in East Africa, these are highly social animals. Individuals in a colony collaborate in the excavation of their extensive burrow systems, and in doing so throw up volcano-shaped mounds that cannot be mistaken for those pushed by any other species.
- The first pairs of the southern populations of the rare Bearded Vultures (*Gypaetus barbatus*) are starting up their spartan nests in hollows in on steep cliff faces in the Drakensberg mountains of South Africa and Lesotho.
- White-tailed Laurel Pigeons (*Columba junoniae*) on the Canary Islands have begun constructing their flimsy nest platforms and laying eggs. The small population of Black-crowned Night Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) is laying in its limited Moroccan range. In Kenya colonies of Yellow-billed Storks (*Mycteria ibis*) are constructing nests and starting to lay.



Black-backed Jackal



Short-snouted Sengi

- Over much of southern Africa, Black-backed Jackals (*Lupulella mesomelas*) are in full mating tempo. They are calling more frequently, the testes of the males have increased significantly in size, and the females have started to come into oestrus. These jackals form monogamous pairs that mate for life.
- This month, migratory populations of Straw-coloured Fruit-bats (*Eidolon helvum*) are leaving the Niger River basin, where they have been since January, and flying southwards to the tropical wet forests of the Ivory Coast.
- Although there are very few breeding pairs left of the elegant Demoiselle Crane (*Anthropoides virgo*) in northern Morocco and Tunisia, they nest from May to July in the Middle Atlas and on the Plateau of Shotts in Algeria. Females lay two eggs that hatch after 25-30 days.
- The almost one metre long African Softshell Turtle (*Trionyx triunguis*) occurs widely in the river and marsh systems of Africa, extending into Palestine, Syria and Turkey. Nesting peaks in May over wide areas of its range, with each female laying between 25 and 100 brittle-shelled eggs in a hole excavated in a sand or earth-bank.
- A North African land tortoise, the Egyptian Tortoise (*Testudo kleinmanni*), begins mating and egg-laying in May, extending through to July.
- The Waboom (*Protea nitida*) is in full flower over much of its Cape heathland range. Its wood was once used to make the felloes, or rims, of wagon wheels, hence the common name given to it, “wagon tree.” A solution made up of its crushed leaves in water is said to have made a useable substitute for ink.
- The Ana Tree (*Faidherbia albida*), which is widespread through Africa, starts to flower from this month in the south of its range. The flowers, and later the pods, are eagerly sought after by herbivores, from weevils to elephants.



How to change your mindset for a job interview?

By Amore van Wyk

When it comes to the job search process, many job seekers approach it with the mindset of being tested. They feel as though they are being judged and evaluated based solely on their skills and qualifications. However, this mindset can be limiting and ultimately hinder a person's chances of landing their dream job. Instead, job seekers should shift their mindset to one of having a discussion about their compatibility with the job.

The traditional job interview often follows a structured format where the interviewer asks a series of questions to determine if the candidate is qualified for the position. However, this approach can feel like an interrogation for the job seeker, causing them to feel nervous, defensive, or even discouraged if they don't have an answer to every question.

By changing their mindset from being tested to having a discussion, job seekers can approach the interview as a two-way conversation. Rather than trying to impress the interviewer with rehearsed responses, job seekers can focus on showing their personality, values, and work style. This allows both parties to assess if there is a compatibility between the job requirements and the job seeker's personality and strengths.

Here are some tips on how to approach job interviews as a discussion about compatibility:

- **Research the company culture and values** – Before the interview, research the company's culture and values to understand if they align with your own. This will help you determine if the company is a good fit for you and help you better articulate your compatibility with the company during the interview.
- **Prepare questions** – Come prepared with thoughtful questions about the company and the role. This will show the interviewer that you are genuinely interested in the position and eager to learn more about the company. It will also help you assess if the job is a good fit for you.
- **Share your work style** – During the interview, share examples of how you work and communicate with others. This will give the interviewer an idea of how you would fit into the company culture and work environment.
- **Be honest** – Don't be afraid to be honest about your strengths and weaknesses. This will show the interviewer that you are self-aware and willing to work on improving your skills. It will also help them assess if you are a good fit for the job requirements.
- **Follow up** – After the interview, follow up with a thank you email to reiterate your interest in the position and express your appreciation for the opportunity to have a discussion about your compatibility with the job.

In conclusion, job seekers should shift their mindset from being tested to having a discussion about compatibility with the job. By approaching the interview as a two-way conversation, job seekers can show their personality, values, and work style and determine if the job is a good fit for them.

Remember to research the company culture and values, prepare thoughtful questions, share your work style, and be honest about your strengths and weaknesses. Be curious and authentic. Remember, both parties are evaluating each other to determine if there is a good match. With this mindset, job seekers can increase their chances of landing their dream job.

What to bring with for a job interview?

- Other than a cell phone and some cash you should also have your ID with you.
- The place where you are interviewing will already have a copy of your CV, if you would like to bring a copy with you, then you can, but this isn't essential.
- If you have certificates related to the position, then you can bring these if you would like.
- If you are a Chef, you will probably of already submitted a food portfolio, but you could also bring some food images as a portfolio with you.
- If you are a guide who has photographic abilities and have a wildlife images portfolio you could bring this as well.
- If bringing documents, then make sure you have them well presented in a flip file or similar.
- If you have any images/certificates/reference letters that may not have been submitted already but you think they may be asked for or may help your interview then you can also put these onto a USB stick and have this with you, if the employer asks or you feel it's worth mentioning then they can use the stick to view the images or documents on their computers.
- Bring a notebook with any questions you have prepared.
- If you know you have a long distance to travel to the interview, make sure you bring some food and water so that you aren't so hungry on arrival that your stomach growls throughout the interview process.

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Ants in my pants

Often it is not the large mammals with teeth and claws that cause me issues in the bush. Instead, tiny creatures often appear out of the darkness or under bedding when you least expect it.

A case in point was an incident that occurred when I visited a training provider camp some years ago. Usually, these facilities have limited accommodation, and I often had to share with one of the lecturers.



By David Batzofin



But on this particular occasion, I was offered my own accommodation by two trainees who were prepared to give up their room for me to stay in.

At first glance the room looked very nice and comfortable but the real reason for their move only became apparent once I turned off the light. No sooner had I settled down for the night than it felt as if the entire bed was moving and not in a good way either.

I lay in the darkness trying to figure out what exactly was causing the disturbance.

When I turned on my torch I realised that both the bed and me were covered in thousands of tiny red ants! Luckily these were not fire ants, that I have had the misfortune to have experienced previously, as their bite can be particularly uncomfortable and painful.

Being an eco-friendly camp there was not a single can of insect spray to be seen and Peaceful Sleep was no defence against this invading horde. Suffice to say that I did not have a good night that night or for the rest of my stay in this particular camp. But that is all part of the experience that eventually becomes a story like this.

When I questioned the trainee guides at breakfast, they told me, between guffaws of laughter, that the ants had arrived the day before my arrival, hence them being so eager to move. And as they would be there for several months after I left, I did not begrudge them their opportunity to move.

For those who are interested, diluted dish-washing liquid did reduce the ant problem without seemingly killing them. And as if the ants were not enough, there have been more creepies to keep me on my toes.

Cut to the same training provider, but a different camp a few months later.

This time it was just going to be an overnight stay, and before heading off to supper, I did a perimeter check for ants and snakes. Luckily, neither were to be found.

Dinner, as always in these camps was held outdoors and some distance from the tents.

Before heading off to bed, I had stopped at the outdoor shower block to my nightly ablutions. On my way back to my tent I bumped into the head instructor who was wandering around the part of camp that I had just left. "What are you looking for?" was my question. "Scorpions" was the swift response.

What I know about scorpions can be written on the head of a pin. But I do know that large pincers and a small stinger is what you want to find if one does appear in your sleeping bag.

As I had not encountered any on my walk around the camp earlier, I asked if there were any ... "Follow me" was the reply. So with a blacklight torch in hand, he took me back to the basin where I had just brushed my teeth, and lifting the soap dish, he lit up a small specimen with his torch!



This was something I had never seen before, the entire scorpion glows blue and not even the scientists know why. I have realised that just because you cannot see it does not mean it cannot cause problems after the lights go out.



And don't get me started on spiders...

Although both incidents ended without harm to any of the participants, it did prove that being vigilant pays dividends.



David is an award-winning blogger whose work can be found at www.travelandthings.co.za



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