



Wildlife Campus

LEARN PROTECT SAVE

Magazine

**Natural
Phenomena**
By Amy Holt

**Course
special**

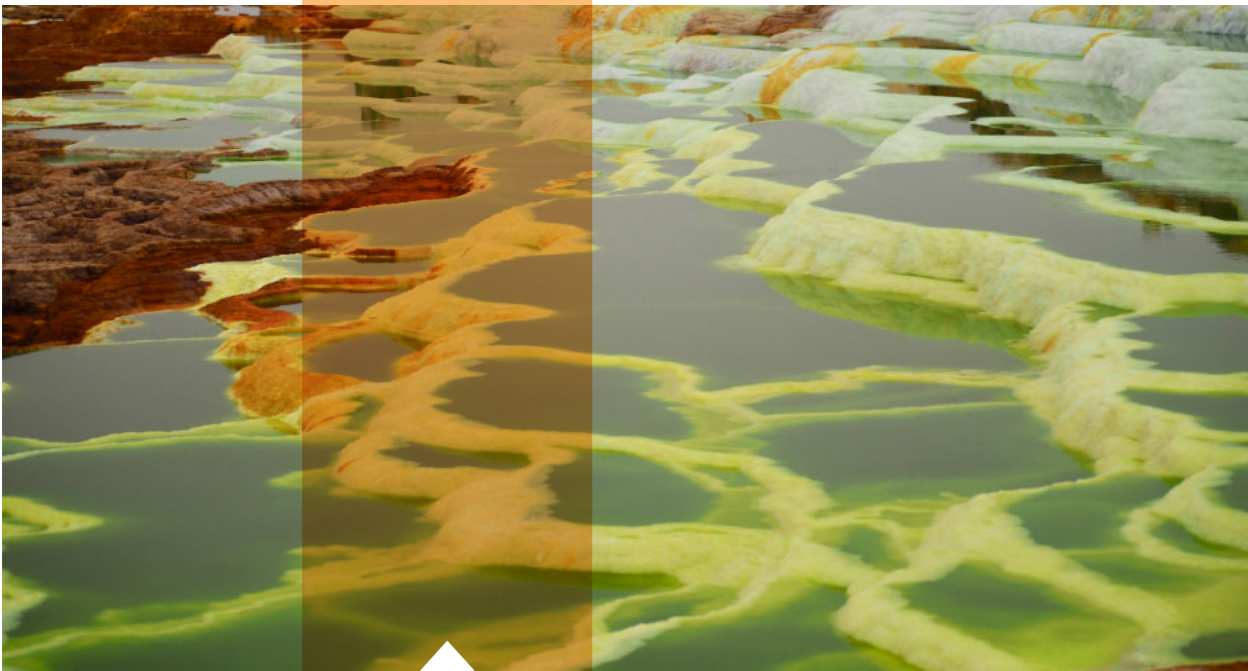
**The African
Baobab**
New Struik book

**Intro to K9
Anti-Poaching**

In the dark of the night
By David Batzofin

**Free course and
Vacancies**
By Wild Dreams Hospitality

CONTENT



01

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.

Part 27

PAGE 4

02

Natural
phenomena of
Africa

This month, WildlifeCampus student Amy Holt takes us on a jaw-dropping trip throughout Africa, showcasing some different natural phenomena .

Buckle up and prepare to be amazed!

PAGE 8

03

The African
Baobab

Join Rupert Watson in exploring the life and times of the majestic baobab, an ancient tree that has outlasted every plant and animal around it.

PAGE 12

04

K-9 Anti-
Poaching

Meet the author of our "Introduction to K9 Anti-Poaching" course, Robynne Wasas. Learn all about her journey and her career in nature conservation and get to know how her company Luna Hounds contributes to safeguarding our precious wildlife.

PAGE 14



05

A career in
hospitality?

You have always dreamed of working in the hospitality industry and would like to spice up your CV with some industry recognised certificates?

Go to page 16 and find 2 of our top-rated courses combined for 1 unbeatable price!

PAGE 16

06

Free course
and vacancies

Wild Dreams Hospitality's free course “Get clear on your dream career” is now available on the WildlifeCampus website.

Also make sure to check their vacancies page!

PAGE 18



07

Mobile apps for
nature
explorers

Struik Nature has a wide selection of mobile apps bringing books to life with sounds, videos, interactive elements and more. Perfect for people on the go, they're always in your pocket, don't weigh a thing, and contain all the information from the Field Guide they are based on, just ... better!

PAGE 20

08

In the dark of
the night

David tells us the story of an opportunity to be immersed in nature when he was invited to spend time at a 3-guest walking camp that was being tested by a lodge in one of South Africa's largest reserves.

PAGE 22

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.

Keith forwarded this e-mail to the rest of management in AfriCam and it seemed like the Third World War had just begun. This time we did not need Graham to convince any of us. We were all incensed and action needed to be taken right away. “These guys have no idea. What is this KimKam bullshit,” I said. “We are in this project because we want the traffic from Kim’s content and now he is promoting another site. He has never even discussed this with us.”

“Besides it being against the terms of agreement, KimKam sounds like a porno site. These guys are idiots,” Paul added.

“And spelling Cam with a ‘K’ must rank as one of the most stupid internet ideas I have ever heard of,” said Keith. “90% of viewers will immediately type in KimCam and not get to the site.”

“We must pull it,” Graham suggested.

“Well let’s talk to him first,” I ventured.

“We have done enough talking already. He is not good for us. We negotiated a ridiculous deal and now he is screwing us. This whole project has taken up more emotional energy than I can handle,” Graham replied.



Andy nodded in agreement. “The relationship just does not work.”

“The only way I am prepared for this to go forward is if Kim personally apologises to me and we set out the parameters of our relationship very clearly. We have put two years into building this site. Kim can either follow our rules or fuck off.”

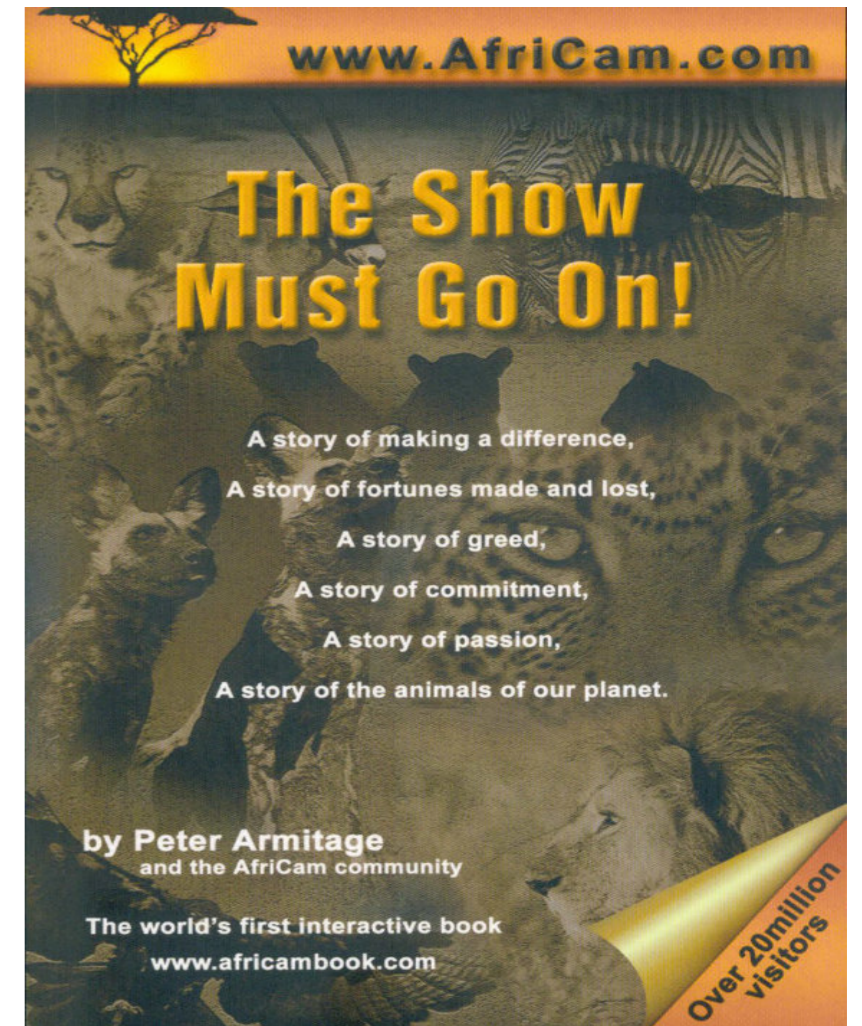
Alpha Management also failed to realise that there is no such thing as 100% uptime for the kind of webcam we were doing. You can guarantee 100% uptime for a camera on a pigeon’s nest in a city. It is fixed, hard-wired and near a reliable telephone line. But when you broadcast a live image from a moving vehicle, in a remote location, in a third world country, things go wrong.

Some of them are out of your control (lighting, telephones lines going down etc.) and some are within your control (system failure, equipment breaking down etc). But, even then it can take a day or two to fix. We could not have a fulltime repairman based at Mala Mala. Not only could we not afford this, we were not even allowed to venture on to the Mala Mala land!

A heated conversation followed and there was a great deal of animosity developing between Kim and Graham. Kim believed that his content was so valuable to AfriCam that there was no way we would ever pull his camera off site. He was surprised to learn differently.

Kim was asked to apologise and the new terms of the relationship were that:

- KimKam be discontinued immediately.
- LeopardCam be integrated into the AfriCam site.
- All marketing of AfriCam and LeopardCam would be done exclusively by AfriCam and that Cindy Castano plays no further role.



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

- Any marketing be approved by Keith Wallington.
- Kim would not dictate any conditions to AfriCam.
- Any technical problems would be dealt with by Alex Wills directly. Kim was not allowed to contact other members of staff.

Kim agreed and apologised, largely because he had no choice. He was offered the opportunity of pursuing his own internet opportunity and camera, but nobody else could do what we did.

Kim eventually concluded an agreement with National Geographic and his documentary was broadcast on National Geographic. It was called Stalking Leopards and Tjololo even featured on the front page of the National Geographic magazine. It was a superb piece of film-making, but nowhere in any articles or promotional material was the webcam or the name AfriCam ever mentioned. The marriage of convenience ended when he had finished filming.



“Goodbye DiData, hello Aqua” - September 2000

In August 2000 the AfriCam traffic reached a new high of 38 million page impressions. The traffic had continued to increase at 10% per month for the past 10 months and we felt good about that. The financial performance did not match and hence we tended to measure the business more by traffic than by money.

After all, the business was not being valued on financial performance. If it was, the valuations to which we had become accustomed would have been closer to US\$1m than US\$100m. This was one of the biggest mistakes we made in running AfriCam. We never faced the reality that we were running a business that was financially flawed and we believed the hype.

In the second quarter of 2000 we were overtaken as the biggest website in South Africa, by MTNSMS.com. This was a site run by one of South Africa’s two cellphone operators (MTN) and they were boasting traffic of over 50million page impressions per month. Its site enabled global users to send free SMS’s and the SMS concept was just starting to take off.

The main reason they were successful was that they were offering a free service, while all the competitors were charging. They eventually peaked at over 100m page impressions per month, but closed down in late 2001, claiming that “it was an experiment all along”.

It was not what MTN said at the height of its success. We were still battling to increase our US advertising revenue. The site had now been operational for 2 years and we were yet to sell an advertisement outside of the NBCi deal.

We also had a great deal of hope for the subsidiary businesses, but none of them had yet launched. Dimension Data’s technology platform was a disaster. Because the Dynamo application was new to South Africa, nobody besides them knew how to develop on this system. There was nothing we could do to speed up the development. We were completely in their hands and they were not delivering.

We had in the meantime been approached by Mark Berman, a senior business development manager from Microsoft. He was a friend of Keith’s and had been urging us to use a Microsoft solution for a quite some time.

We presented our situation to him and he came back with a Microsoft-driven deal. Hewlett-Packard would provide R1m of free hardware, Aqua Online would provide discounted development and Microsoft would not charge us licence fees for the first two years. AfriCam was a very high profile site and these partners could justify these “contributions” based on the marketing benefit they would derive from being associated with the AfriCam success story. A joint PR campaign was all part of the deal.

We were concerned that our camera content and traffic would be too much for the platform that they proposed, but it was an attractive way to get out of the Dimension Data stranglehold. The Microsoft platform was not famous for reliably handling high-traffic sites.

We halted payments to Dimension Data, informing them that we were dissatisfied with their service and solution. We were firm in our communication, indicating that they had jeopardised our entire listing process and we could potentially hold them responsible.

Not wanting bad publicity, we were able to reach agreement fairly easily and they accepted that they were no longer our IT partners. Part of our settlement with Dimension Data was that we could hire Linda Misauer, the Dimension Data project manager. We respected her skills and she had almost become part of our team. They agreed and a month later Linda was working for us. In addition, Dimension Data would get certain sites (WildlifeCampus and WildFocus) that were nearing completion up and running in return for a reduced, negotiated payment.

Aqua Online began development right away. Paul Clifford and Paul Cammidge, who are proponents of Linux, the Microsoft freeware competitor, did not like what they heard,

but we were ultimately making a financial decision. We could no longer afford paying Dimension Data the fees they were charging, the system looked months away from completion and the Microsoft proposal eased the financial burden.

I recalled Paul’s reservations about Dimension Data when we first signed them on, but he very politely resisted the temptation of saying “I told you so”. Ironically, we were again making a development decision with which he did not agree. We were all exhausted at the thought of starting redevelopment of the site, after working on the Dimension Data solution for 9 months. The existing site would now stay frozen, with no new changes for around 4 months while the new version was created.

But this was the only way that we would have a subscription service running within a reasonable time period. We swallowed hard and started again.

“Still waiting” - September 2000

With the payments to Dimension Data and our new commitment to Aqua Online, the AfriCam coffers were starting to dry up. Peter Henderson made his first significant transfer of GBP362 000 on 4 September 2000, but this was clearly earmarked for the “television part” of the business.

JB was travelling to the UK that week and we asked him to meet with Michael Middlemas. It was over six months since the deal was signed and we still did not have our cash. We had started to make other plans, but the peculiar thing was that he kept in contact with us, constantly reassuring us that the funds were imminent.

Almost every week we would get a call from Michael or a visit from Martin Steer, ensuring us that the transfer of the funds was imminent. We were not sure whether he was afraid of being sued by us, his cash was really coming and he did not want to lose the opportunity, or he was mad. We were starting to fear the latter.

If Middlemas or Steer had told us that the deal was off, we would probably have just walked away. But he kept us on tenterhooks. In June 2000 I had even cancelled a booked and paid for trip to the US for a holiday with my wife, because we had a final date for the Middlemas payment (Sorry Diane, I still owe you).

Because they kept making promises, we suspended our disbelief. The latest story was that Middlemas’ money was about to be received, but it needed sign-off from the highest authority, and we were told in dulcid tones that the initials of the highest authority were BC. Bill Clinton, we presumed. We felt like we were in a spy novel.

To his credit, Martin Steer was always honest with us and even he started admitting to doubts about Middlemas, despite having seen all the mysterious documentation.

Middlemas agreed to meet with JB and the meeting did not take too long.

“Mr Middlemas, you have concluded an agreement with my company which you have not fulfilled. What are your intentions?” JB asked.

Middlemas talked about his intentions, his relationship with Donald Gordon and the fact that the money was on its way. Apparently BC’s signature had now been secured.

“Don’t you have any funds of your own? I tell you what,” JB probed, “If you are what you say you are and you are going to deliver, put 1000 pounds on the table. Show us that you are prepared to take a risk. Show us some commitment. ” The statement was more symbolic than literal.

“That is preposterous,” Middlemas objected, “What will that prove?”

“It will put you in a position where you have something to lose. At the moment only we have something to lose.”
“No, I am not prepared to do that, but I will give you a date. By 30 September you will have your cash, guaranteed.”

This was about as much as JB was going to achieve and he left the premises.

That night JB phoned Donald Gordon, who he knew through business circles. JB enquired about Michael Middlemas and the conversation was a short one: “Yes, he did work for me, but I am afraid I am not prepared to say anything more about the man.”

Enough said.



Natural phenomena of Africa

By WildlifeCampus student

Amy Holt

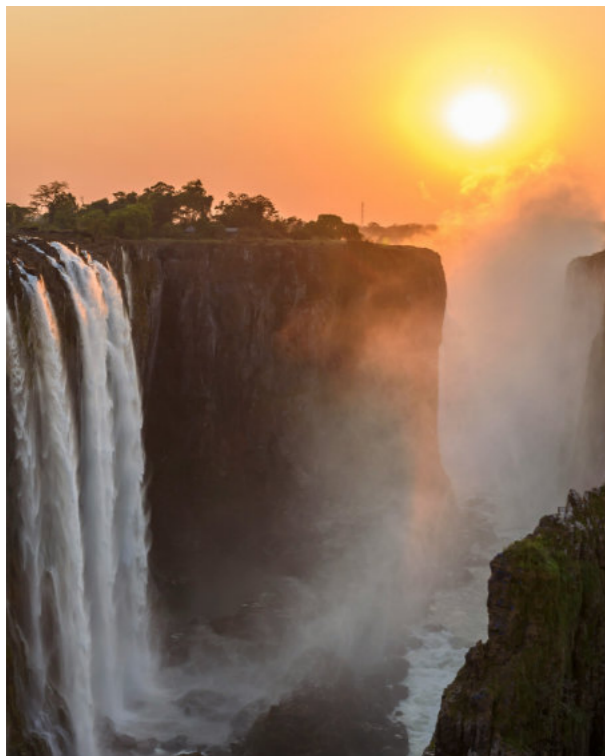
Many of us are drawn to Africa for its remarkable wildlife sightings. However, Africa is also full of spectacular natural phenomena.

A natural phenomenon is an observable event that is not man-made, for example a rainbow. They are often awe-inspiring with an intriguing history and science behind them.

02

Namibia is well known for its iconic dunes, diverse wildlife, and expansive landscapes. It is also home to the oldest desert in the world, the Namib desert. Here, you can find the strange phenomenon known as fairy circles. The eerily perfect circles are barren of plants and dotted through the Namib desert landscape. They appear to be evenly spaced and sized but never overlap. These mysterious fairy circles have puzzled scientists for years. The grass evolution theory suggests plants steal water from their neighbours, leaving a bare circle. Research showed water from within the circles was depleted quickly despite no grass growing there. The grasses surrounding the circles had evolved a vacuum system around their roots that drew any water towards them. But why are these barren areas circle-shaped? A circle has a small circumference-to-area ratio, which limits the number of surrounding plants and boosts the amount of water available to those plants. Whereas a square shape would mean more plants would have to share the same amount of water.

Cape Town is home to iconic mountain ranges, ocean vistas, and UFO sightings. These UFOs are actually stationary, disc-shaped clouds known as lenticular clouds. The distinct appearance of lenticular clouds is one of the most common explanations for UFO sightings worldwide. It is thanks to the unique topography of Cape Town that this unusual and rare cloud formation can be spotted. They are formed when strong, moist winds blow over rough terrain, such as Table Mountain. The air rises and falls in a wave-like pattern on the leeward side of the mountain. As the air rises and meets a layer of moist air, the air condenses and forms a cloud. Pilots avoid these ominous-looking clouds as they are associated with turbulence.



South Africa is also home to an incredible floral phenomenon. From August to September, the arid landscape of Namaqualand transforms into a sea of vibrant colours. This impressive wildflower display is known as a superbloom. A superbloom is defined as an unusually large amount of wildflowers blooming simultaneously. It requires the right combination of rainfall, temperature, pollination,

and sunlight. South Africa's superbloom is one of the most consistent and diverse blooms in the world. After winter rains, colourful daisies and over 3000 other species of wildflowers come into bloom. This mesmerising colourful phenomenon can be witnessed along the 500 mile wildflower route through the Western Cape and Northern Cape.

The world's largest waterfall, Victoria Falls, forms a natural border between Zambia and Zimbabwe. It is also the only place in Africa where you can have reliable sightings of moonbows. This rare phenomenon is similar to rainbows, but requires very specific conditions to appear. The moon needs to be nearly full and low, the sky must be dark, and the rain or spray from Victoria Falls must fall opposite the moon. A moonbow forms when light from the moon is reflected and refracted through water droplets in the air. Moonbows tend to be a lot fainter than rainbows, often appearing white rather than multi-coloured. To be in with a chance to glimpse a moonbow, visit Victoria Falls between February and August during the high water period.

Tanzania may be famous for being home to the highest mountain in Africa, Mount Kilimanjaro, and the wildebeest migration. But, situated within the East African Rift Valley and at the foot of an active volcano, you'll find a unique phenomenon—a blood-red lake. The surreal and deadly landscape of Lake Natron can reach temperatures of 60 degrees celsius and often has pH levels that exceed 10.



This creates an extremely hostile environment where few creatures can survive. Lesser flamingos use this lake as their primary breeding ground in Africa—in fact, 75% of the world's lesser flamingo population were born at Lake Natron. These flamingos are specially adapted to the high alkaline levels of this lake. They have tough, leathery skin on their legs to prevent burns from the water. Furthermore, they can drink the salty, alkaline water thanks to glands in their heads, which filter out the excess minerals through the nasal cavity and pass clean water to the rest of the body. The distinctive red colour of the lake is due to a flourishing community of red algae that love alkaline water. Lake Natron consists mainly of sodium carbonate, hence the name. It is highly alkaline due to being a volcano-fed lake. Ol Doinyo Lengai is the only volcano in the world known to erupt carbonatite lava, a rare type of volcanic rock that is rich in sodium and potassium carbonates.

Danakil Depression in Ethiopia is known as the gateway to hell and is one of the most tectonically active areas on Earth. This geological phenomenon is part of the larger Afar Triangle—a region where three tectonic plates under Africa and Asia moved apart, creating a rift valley system. The movement of these tectonic plates has led to the uplifting of salt-rich sediments from the Red Sea, resulting in the deposition of salt deposits in the Danakil Depression. These salt deposits have been exposed to weathering and erosion, forming extensive salt flats and unique geological structures. Danakil Depression is surrounded by several active volcanoes, with Erta Ale being one of the most active lava lakes in the world. When the salt from the sea reacts with the minerals in the magma, it creates a kaleidoscopic display of acidic hot springs. The bright yellow develops through reactions with sulphur in the hottest pools. Meanwhile, the greens and blues form from copper salts in the cooler pools. This otherworldly landscape is extraordinarily beautiful but deadly.

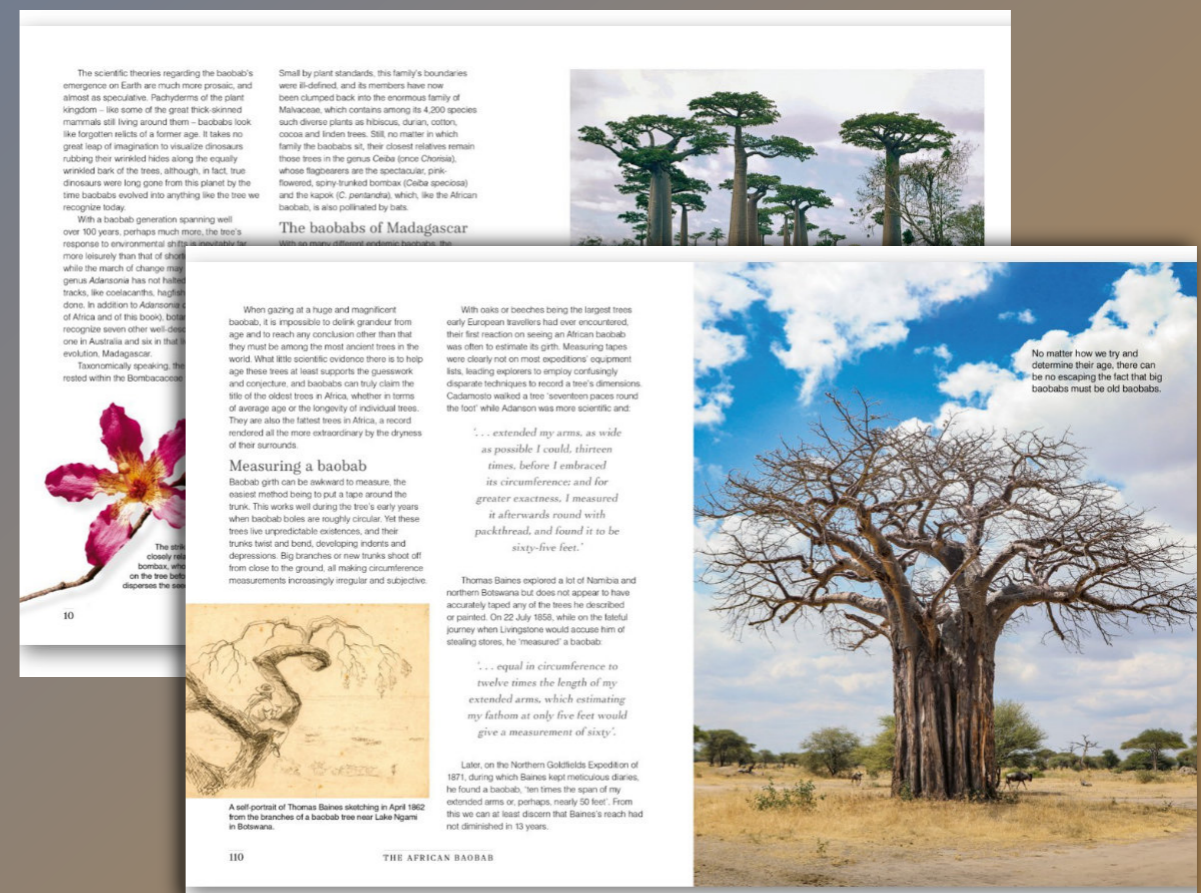
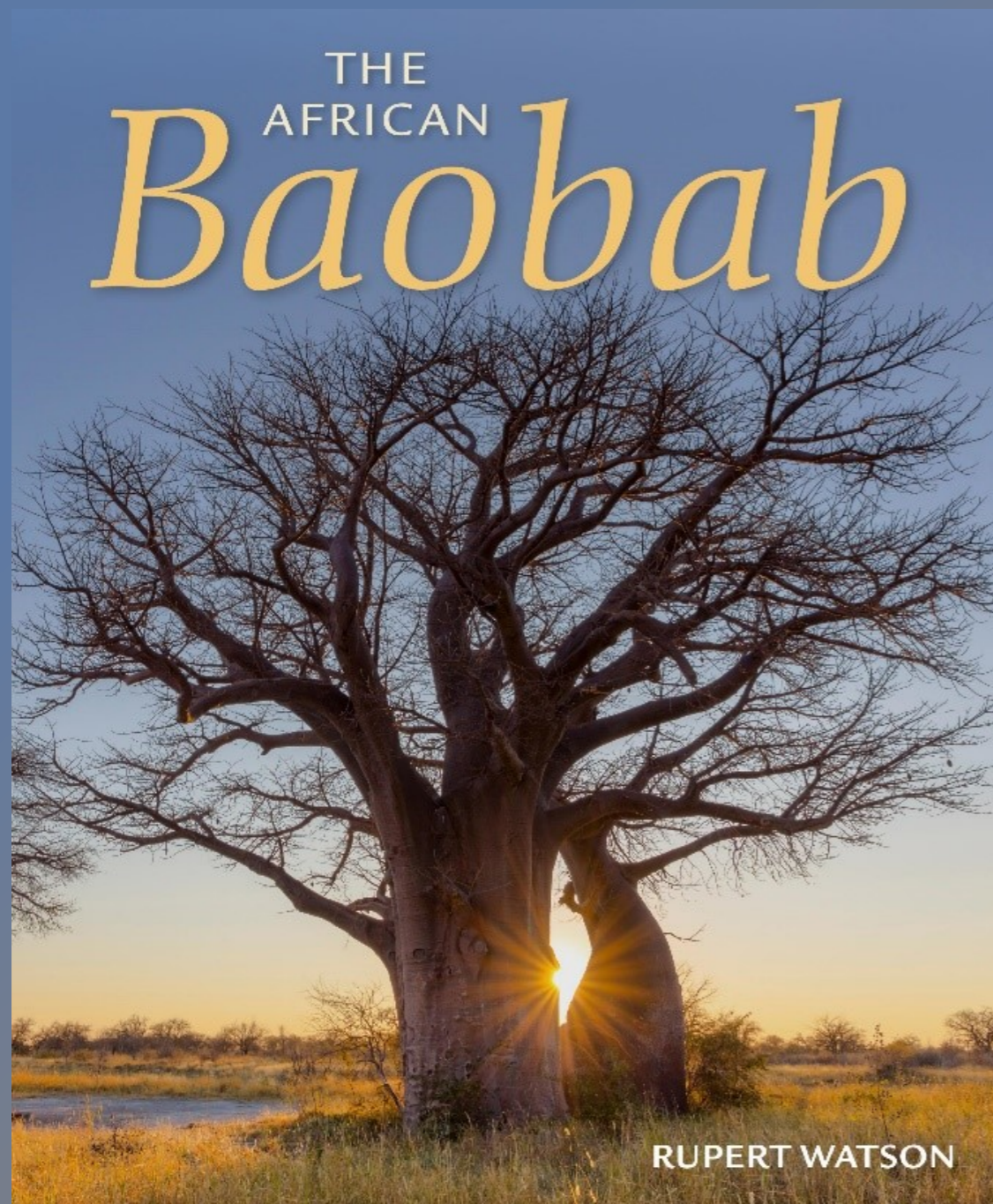
Mauritius is a sub-tropical island known for its white, sandy beaches and crystal clear water with different shades of blue and green. By taking a seaplane or helicopter flight over the

south-west coast of Mauritius, you can be captivated by the underwater waterfall. From an aerial perspective, this natural phenomenon may appear as though there is a waterfall cascading into the ocean's depths, but it is actually an optical illusion. Formed around eight million years ago, Mauritius sits on an ocean shelf (Mascarene Plateau) which is no deeper than 150 metres below sea level. However, the drop-off of this shelf's edge plunges to depths of over 4000 metres into the abyss. The underwater waterfall is formed when different coloured sands are forced off the plateau by ocean currents and flow down the steep underwater slope. This creates a mesmerising visual effect that resembles a waterfall cascading into the depths.

Madagascar is a renowned wildlife destination, famous for its high diversity of chameleons, lemurs, and distinctively shaped baobabs. The picture-perfect phenomenon of Baobab Avenue is located in western Madagascar. Here, rows of Grandidier's Baobabs tower over a red dirt road. These uniquely shaped trees grace the landscape and are a lasting legacy of the dense tropical forests that once thrived in Madagascar. A lesser-known natural phenomenon in Madagascar is Tsingy de Bemaraha, also known as the Forest of Knives. This forest is unlike any other, as razor-sharp limestone pinnacles and maze-like caves characterise it. These limestone formations have created microclimates and diverse ecosystems, which have led to the evolution of unique flora and fauna. For example, the Tsingy Wood Rail, a rare and elusive bird, is endemic to this region. The labyrinthine landscape of Tsingy has been sculpted by erosion and weathering over 200 million years. Groundwater from heavy rainfall entered the porous limestone, creating caves and tunnels. The roofs of these caves eventually collapsed, leaving the giant, rocky towers to emerge.

These natural phenomena in Africa are a testament to the enduring forces of nature's creativity.





In this absorbing and inspired account of one of the continent's oldest botanical wonders, Rupert Watson explores the life and times of the majestic baobab, an ancient tree that has outlasted every plant and animal around it.

The narrative, supported by exquisite photography, effortlessly blends natural history and personal observation, while also drawing on extracts from the journals of early explorers. There are intriguing accounts of the baobab's eccentric growth and reproductive habits, its present-day distribution, and its wide impact on everyday African life. Watson also takes a close look at the relationship between humans and baobabs, and the tree's myriad uses over the ages, from shelters to medicinal and spiritual applications.

The African Baobab is a revised and expanded edition of the original book, published in 2007.

After qualifying in the United Kingdom as a lawyer, Rupert Watson moved to Kenya, where he has lived and worked for the past 45 years. A passionate writer, he has written on natural history and travel for a wide range of publications including New Scientist, The Independent and The Times. Early 2020 saw the publication of his book Peacocks & Picathartes: Reflections on Africa's birdlife, with Struik Nature. He maintains an active interest in conservation and is Chair of the East African Natural History Society.



**"Life is
undeniably
better with a
dog by your
side."**

Introduction to K9 Anti-Poaching Course

About the author

"In 2012, I embarked on my career in nature conservation during my final year of school. I began as a part-time ranger in training, driven by my childhood dream of becoming a dedicated Anti-Poaching woman, making a tangible impact on the frontlines. Despite facing obstacles, completing my Level 2 Field Guide courses and obtaining incredible experience on the ground working with the Big 5, I eventually secured a spot as one of the sixteen men on a ground-breaking course offered by one of South Africa's first Anti-Poaching Training providers that welcomed women."

Within this field, I thrived and soon secured a position as a Detection K9 Handler in the Timbavati region. Immersed in the company of exceptional trainers in South Africa, I embraced every moment to expand my knowledge and skill set. As my journey progressed, I transitioned to the Southern African Wildlife College, assuming the Operational Manager and Trainer roles at the esteemed K9 Unit. During this time, my abilities as a trainer were refined, and I gained a profound understanding of the significant impact that K9s have in the fight against poaching."

Motivated by my vision, I embarked on creating Luna Hounds, a company dedicated to harnessing the natural instincts of our K9 companions to enhance wildlife protection efforts. This venture allowed me to establish my own path and contribute to safeguarding our precious wildlife. Through the utilisation of working K9s, I have been granted the opportunity to become a relentless advocate and protector for these voiceless beings. Each day, as I witness these incredible dogs' profound impact on our mission, my commitment to their cause deepens."

-Robynne Wasas

This course will delve into fundamental knowledge necessary for entering the K9 industry.

We aim to provide individuals from diverse backgrounds with enough information to make an educated decision about pursuing this career path and to start this journey a foot ahead of the rest in their knowledge base.



A career in hospitality?

Look no further!

WildlifeCampus offers a comprehensive suite of courses tailored for individuals either already engaged in the hospitality industry or those contemplating a career change. These courses are designed to enhance your CV and equip you with the essential knowledge required to excel confidently in your role.

Our **Game Lodge Management Course** is perfect for individuals looking to enter the exciting world of lodge management, as well as for established safari companies seeking to learn from the success of one of the most renowned lodge groups in the world. The certificate is widely recognised as the best and accepted within the industry, providing students with a strong foundation and credibility when dealing with applications and permits, particularly when working with local African governments.

The **Front Of House Lodge Operations Course** is written by hospitality industry expert Hayley Cooper of Wild Dreams Hospitality and forms an excellent addition to the Game Lodge management course.

Take advantage of combining the two courses and get a **15% discount!**

Combination price:

R 3 867,50

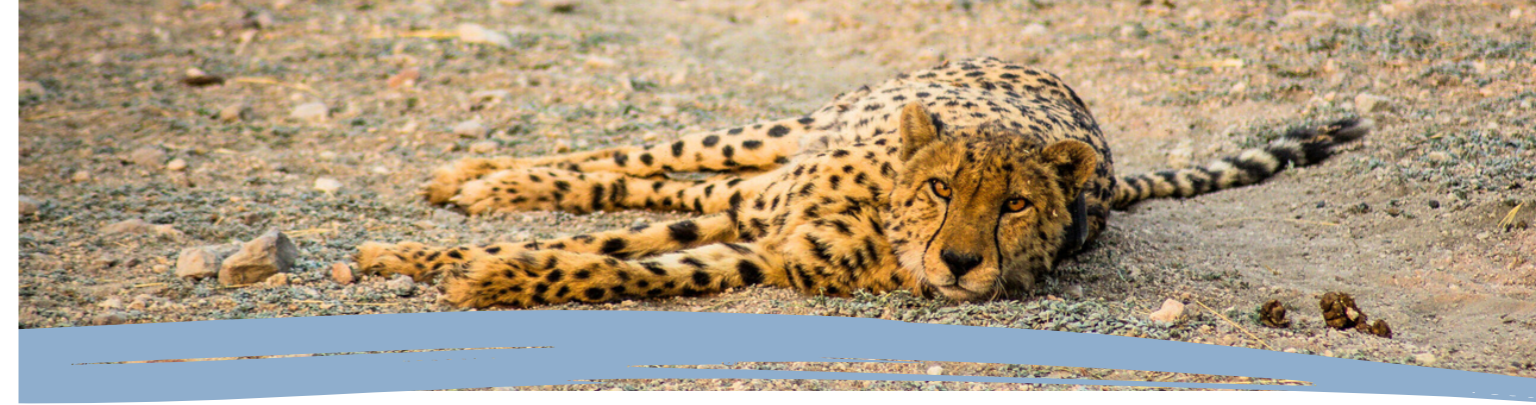
(regular price: R 4 550)

Email info@wildlifecampus.com for more info!

Get clear on your dream career



Free course available on the WildlifeCampus website!



WILD DREAMS JOB VACANCIES

Wild Dreams is a prominent company in the hospitality industry, specialising in recruitment and consultancy. We mainly focus on the safari lodge sector, as evident from our clientele. Our clients range from small lodges that accommodate only a few individuals to well-known large lodge groups with properties scattered throughout Africa.

At Wild Dreams, we are always on the lookout for field guides with various levels of experience. Additionally, we have positions where guiding knowledge is required, but the role is more focused on front of house or management responsibilities.

As a company, we prioritise conservation and actively support wildlife sanctuaries. We are deeply involved in community work and collaborate with numerous non-profit organisations in the wildlife and conservation field.

While we believe that most of you may find the aforementioned positions interesting, we also have constant vacancies in areas such as reservations, maintenance, and chef roles. To access these job opportunities, you can scan the provided QR code to visit our main jobs page. If you come across a job that catches your interest, you can submit your application online. However, if you don't find a suitable job at the moment, you can still upload your application directly into our database.

Furthermore, we have dedicated pages offering interview advice and CV tips. We even provide a free CV template that you can download. Our founder, who is a certified career coach, is deeply passionate about assisting individuals in finding their dream jobs.

Wishing you a successful job search!
The Wild Dreams team.

www.wilddreams.co.za



EXPLORE THE NATURAL WORLD WITH STRUIK NATURE MOBILE APPS

Explore, learn and ID using Struik Nature's wide selection of mobile apps. Our apps bring books to life with sounds, videos, interactive elements and more. Perfect for people on the go, they're always in your pocket, don't weigh a thing, and contain all the information from the Field Guide they are based on, just ... better!

The Stuarts' Tracks & Scats of Southern Africa mobile app is a handy tool for deciphering the tracks, trails, droppings, bird pellets and other signs left by more than 250 mammals, birds and reptiles passing through the African bush. Based on the latest edition of the highly successful book, Stuarts' Field Guide to the Tracks & Signs of Southern, Central & East African Wildlife, it covers ten countries, from South Africa through to Zambia.

The app includes highly accurate track and scat drawings, detailed species descriptions, multiple photographs and videos to give a comprehensive visual account of each animal's tracks and signs. Additional smart search filters, including search-by-region functionality, and shortcut keys to tracks and scats allow for more accurate identification of spoor to family and species level. Easy to navigate and covering both commonly found and more retiring species, this app is sure to become the go-to field aid for students, scientists and all nature lovers.



In the dark of the night

By David Batzofin



As a travel writer who tends to specialise in wildlife, I often get invited to visit camps and lodges, many times before they are opened to the public.

One such opportunity to be immersed in nature occurred when I was invited to spend time at a three-guest walking camp that was being tested by a lodge in South Africa's largest reserve.

The camp consisted of several tents for both guests and staff and was certainly well away from the nearest civilisation.

For the first night, I was to be the only guest in camp and as such, once the staff had moved to their 'side' of the camp, I would be all alone.

Not that I was bothered by that as I had been in similar situations before. After lunch the trackers asked if I wanted to do a



short walk, seeing that was specifically what the camp was set up for. I like afternoon walks as they are finite. The guides also wanted everyone back in camp before it got too dark, especially seeing that this mobile camp was in a Big 5 area and did not have a permanent security fence. While on foot, we found a white rhino and stood in awe as a small breeding herd of elephants passed relatively close by. For those who have never been on a bush walk, the object is to get in and out of sightings without the animals changing their behaviour. It is a profoundly moving experience to be so close to wildlife on their terms and without the safety of a vehicle.

Back at camp, dinner had been prepared, and shortly after that, it was time for bed, as bush air made me sleepy.

As I settled into my tent, the guide in charge let me know that they would be putting up a three-strand temporary electric fence to keep unwanted intruders out. But he did say that a hyena pup had got entangled the night before I arrived and guests awoke in the middle of the night to its screams. The fence was turned off and the animal was safely released. Would the same thing happen on the evenings I was going to be in camp? I was to find out sooner rather than later. Have you ever had one of those dreams where you are engaged in an activity so real that it wakes you? I don't recall exactly WHAT I was dreaming about, but what I do know is that the

sound that propelled me from deep sleep to wide awake was coming from the other side of the thin canvas side of my tent.

And it was not part of the dream; it was real. It took me a moment to identify the sawing grunt...leopard! And right outside. What to do? I figured calling out would not be helpful, and it might just embarrass me if the animal turned out harmless. Did I have a weapon handy? If you count a multi-tool with a small blade as a weapon, then yes, I was armed. But would that be sufficient against a predator as capable of killing as a leopard? I seriously doubted that I would stand a chance. I could hear the leopard grunting as it walked outside the tent while I wondered if it was looking for a way in.

I decided that less was more...and safer...so I lay still and hoped it would eventually get bored and wander off, which is precisely what it did. Crisis averted...

In the morning, together with the head guide, we were able to follow the tracks around my tent. We also found where it had crossed a nearby river bed to see what had popped up in its territory. Did I learn from the interaction? I certainly did. When we are in a reserve, we are the visitors, and as such, we have to treat the wildlife with the respect they deserve.



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

WildlifeCampus Magazine
- 23 -