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Magazine

What type of guide
will you be?
Part #5

Timbavati Traverse
45 km with wildlife
For wildlife

Lion around...
By David Batzofin

Snake Myths
by ASI

Birds,
Nature's clean-up crew
By Amy Holt

WildlifeCampus

What type of guide

Will you be? Part #5



WildlifeCampus CEO
Todd Kaplan

In this feature, Garth Thompson explores types of guides.

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

The Prima Donna Guide

This is often the worst type of guide with which a poor, unsuspecting tourist can be lumbered! They are often burnt-out, opinionated, 'has-been' guides. They may well have been keenly sought after years ago when at the top of their game; with a bus schedule of return clients, often the rich and famous.

They may have become well known in guiding circles owing to a number of factors. They were possibly authorities in a particular field, be it ornithology, wildlife art, photography, journalism, elephant studies, lion research, or a hundred other disciplines. They may have then turned to guiding because of personal circumstances. Their name and reputation was made by well-known celebrities and globetrotting billionaires - those who rank highly in social circles and have active social media.

Because of their "celebrity status" or even the celebrity-association they may have come to enjoy; some become self-opinionated and will bore countless guests around the campfire each night with 'has-been' stories of 'when I guided the "The Red-Carpet set"', or when I studied the White Lions of the Timbavati, shot the man-eaters of Tsavo and saved all the animals in Operation Noah', and so on and on and on and on....

There have been a number of such guides whose pinnacle in life has been an event in the past. If burdened with what they perceive to be a 'common tourist' this type of guide can often be temperamental, unaccommodating, rude, sullen, aggressive, single-minded and generally unpleasant. Guests are then far better off with the lowliest apprentice guide in camp, who might not know a great deal, but is bright-eyed and deeply enthusiastic, strives continually to please and, above all, still feels privileged to be there!

I once asked a 'celebrity guide' who had hired me to give his young new guides a training course, why he did not teach them himself? He replied 'I have not spent a lifetime of learning the secrets of the wilds to now feed it out as strawberries to swine!'



What type of guide Will you be? Part #5

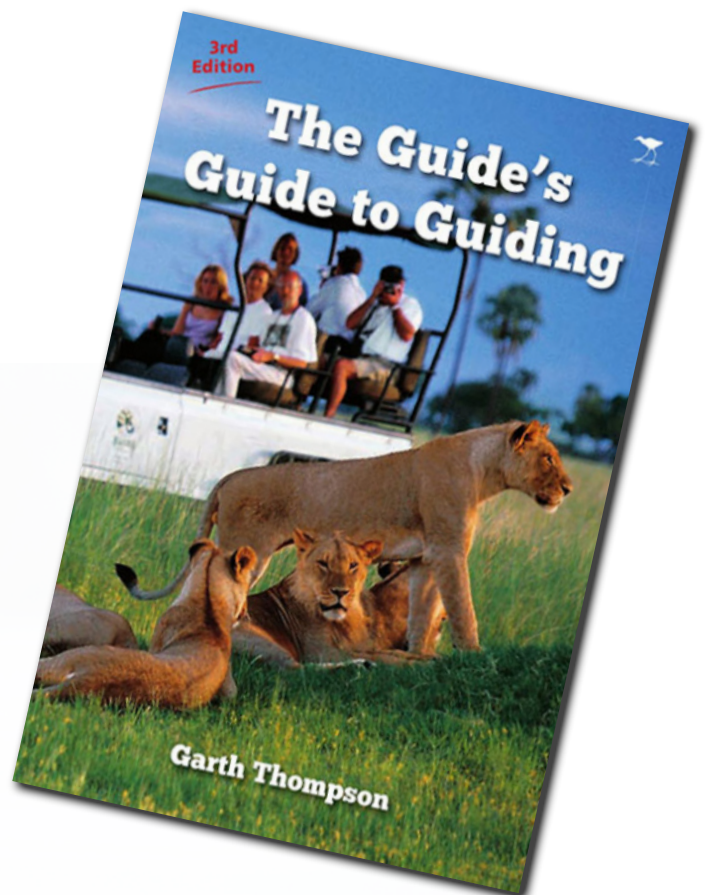
These 'Prima Donna guides' often find it 'below them' to pour tea for their clients, load the cooler box, clean out their safari vehicle and do a hundred other vital, but so-called menial, chores. At the dining table, they seek out the company of those whom they perceive to have the highest social media rank with the most Twitter or Instagram followers. For these guides it has become a game of what the guest might be able to do for them, rather than the other way round. Because of their aloof and curt behaviour, they can destroy a safari for some average soul who has come to Africa for a special experience.

Should you be fortunate to make a name in guiding, never forget your modest beginnings or those 'common' clients that assisted you in getting there. Continue to share all that you have been privileged to learn with everyone that has an appetite to appreciate it.

Do not forget, their money is the same. Often the 'average' tourist will give back so much in excitement and thrill at what you have shown them. Prima donnas do not belong to a world of nature and simplicity.

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

Editor's note: We have received some feedback as to why all these articles may sound negative; rest assured, the positive guides begin in the next edition.



[Click the book to try the
FREE component of the WildlifeCampus
Guide's Guide to Guiding course!](#)

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Winner

announcement



To celebrate World Rhino Day 2021, Wild Dreams Hospitality ran a giveaway on social media. The prize - A WildlifeCampus Anti-Poaching Course.

Congratulations to the winners!

Chantell Swanepoel

Charles Truter

We hope you enjoy your courses!

Follow our social media and magazines for more exciting competitions or giveaways!

Front of House Lodge operations course

Try the free component of this course by clicking the picture. This course is highly recommended and a great addition to your CV!



SNAKE MYTHS



Africa is a land filled with folk stories of mythical beasts. From Nyami-nyami, the Zambezi River God, to the mischievous Tokoloshe.

Sadly, reptiles have a long history of bad press and stigma surrounding them and many are killed needlessly due to cultural beliefs and lack of education.

Crocodile brain is used to poison one's enemy. Reportedly, geckos are poisonous, and a whole family died after a gecko fell into their evening dinner and poisoned their food. Chameleons too are not trustworthy, as one cannot trust anything whose eyes can focus on two points at the same time. It is also believed that chameleons can spit venom into one's eyes, turning the eyes to liquid. All of these stories are completely untrue, and one wonders where these myths originate from.

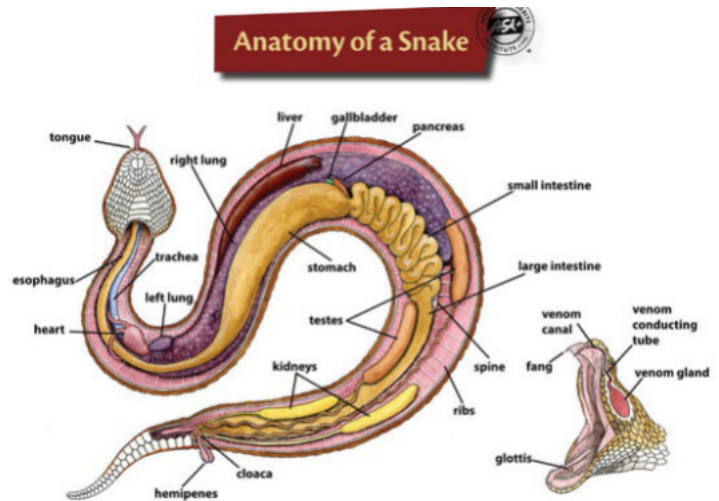


Of all reptiles, snakes probably have the worst reputation. But less than twenty percent of snake species in Africa are highly venomous and yet they are all feared.

Many stories have been created about the anatomy of snakes. It is believed that the tail has venom and can inflict a bite or stab you. Bizarre!

The tongue is also believed to envenomate you if it pokes you. The heart of the snake is thought to be situated in either the head or the tail and as a result, many people beat the tail senselessly trying to kill a snake. A snake's heart is about a third of the way down the body. Lastly, it is alleged that the bones of a snake skeleton contain venom and if trodden on with bare feet will kill a person.

Venom is stored in the venom glands in the cheeks of the snake and there is no venom in the bones. Venom also soon breaks down if exposed to sunlight.



A classic idea shared by many Africans across ethnic groups is that if a snake is killed, the mate will come looking for revenge and that the body must be burned. Snakes, for the most part, are solitary animals, only pairing up briefly to mate or, occasionally, one species may hunt another snake species. The chances of seeing two snakes together are very slim and they certainly do not move around in pairs.

We have been asked if baby Puff Adders eat their way out of their mothers' womb, killing her in the process. A rather strange question, we thought.

Puff Adders are known to give birth to between ten and fifty live young at a time. After giving birth, the female moves off and, like other snakes, does not care for the young. The only logical explanation to the origin of this belief would be if a gravid female Puff Adder is hit by a car whilst crossing the road and the babies may have been squished out the side, giving the impression that they have eaten their way out the mother and killed her.



Many people are interested in the idea of eating snakes, and some people do eat snakes. Snakes can be eaten as the venom is not stored in the flesh. However, there is not much meat on most snakes, and they very often have parasitic worms. Snakes such as the Southern African Python (*Python natalensis*) are protected in South Africa and may not be killed or eaten. Being caught with a python or any python product (meat, skin, fat or eggs) can result in a serious fine and legal implications. Some people believe that if you eat snake meat, it will ward off all snakes in the future. Having eaten Puff Adder, Rattlesnake and a few others myself, I can say for certain that I still find as many snakes as before, and this theory holds no truth.



A common story is that of snakes near rivers. Many people believe that if you are bitten by a snake near a river, you must get to the water and drink water before the snake does. If the snake beats you to the water, it's tickets for you! In West Africa, we were told a similar story of green snakes in trees: If you are bitten in a tree and the snake beats you to the ground, you're dead, unless you make it down first, then you'll survive. Another very strange concept, and a trend with these theories – they're illogical and unrealistic.

There are three well-known traditional snakes: Ivusamanzi, Inkanyamba and Indlondlo. Ivusamanzi is a water snake believed by the Zulus to be seriously venomous. A bite from this snake will kill you in a few steps. Strangely enough, it actually refers to a harmless Brown Water Snake (*Lycodonomorphus rufulus*).



Inkanyamba is a seven-headed snake that lives in lakes and rivers. During thunderstorms, this animal flies in the clouds and if you have a tin roof that is not painted, it will think it is water and dive into your house, blowing the roof off. It is also said to drown people in dams, pulling them under the water. It apparently won't touch police divers as they are wearing rubber. No one has ever seen the snake, but many people believe the myth and fear it intensely.



Indlondlo is a mythical animal found in Zululand. It is said to be a large Black Mamba that moves with such speed, it can move on top of the sugarcane plants. It is reported to have a large feather on its head, creating a whistling sound as it moves. It then hides in bushes and cries like a baby or a distressed goat, and attacks and kills anyone who investigates. The Zambians have a similar animal that is supposed to smell like rice and attacks people by biting them on the top of the head. It calls like a rooster. So, if you are out in the bush and hear the call of a rooster or smell cooked rice, you need to get to safety!



Of course, none of these stories hold any truth, but they form part of many cultures and often spread the fear of snakes.



On 18 September 2021, at 6am, 22 runners set off for the first-ever Timbavati Traverse, a 45km ultra marathon event through the Timbavati. The run was off to a great start with the group seeing a herd of giraffe almost immediately after starting.

A report by **Hayley Cooper**

Timbavati Traverse Committee Member/CEO Wild Dreams Hospitality

It was a lovely cool morning, so lots of animals were about. At one point, the runners who were upfront came around a corner and spotted a large male lion that made a speedy getaway. Luckily not in the direction of the group; he was just shocked to see them.

The runners had 4 cyclists with them on the route, 2 in the front and 2 in the back with 2 vehicles, including medical support at the very back as safety was our main priority.

The route was beautiful, and at every waterhole, a water station was set up with refreshments and snacks.



There were many exciting animal sightings over the 45km distance, including ostrich, honey badgers, zebra, wildebeest, steenbok, some very relaxed elephant bulls. Then, what the entire event was in aid of, a rhino! This was a very special moment for everyone involved.



All proceeds from the event, including the runners' entry fees, the money raised in raffle prizes and all donations will go towards protecting our rhinos.

We have received fantastic feedback on the event from the runners, with all of them wanting to return next year. We do believe there will be a Timbavati Traverse next year and that it will become a prestigious annual event. The runners were not the only ones who had a great experience. Back at the Timbavati headquarters venue, we had museum tours, a snake presentation, a K9 dog presentation and some excellent food and drink stalls.

Finally, we would like to thank every sponsor who helped make this event possible! If you would like to find out more about the event and what we have planned for next year, be sure to keep an eye on the [Timbavati Traverse Facebook page](#).

Birds, nature's clean-up crew

by Amy Holt
WLC Student

In desperate need of protection



Birds have been highly valued throughout history, from being depicted on cave walls to being valuable symbols for ancient civilisations such as the Egyptians, Romans and Greeks. They symbolise the very essence of freedom. But birds are also an intricate component of ecosystems, which we need for our own survival. Simply put, a world without birds would be chaos, what we take for granted is often fundamental to our way of life.

Of the ten thousand bird species on Earth, 1226 are listed as critically endangered, endangered or vulnerable. Forty of these occur in South Africa and of these, twenty are endemic. Southern Africa has such a high bird diversity because of its climatic and topographical diversity. However, climate change, habitat loss, and traditional beliefs are having a negative impact on South Africa's birds.

Endemic birds typically favour cooler habitats and it is these species that appear to be more vulnerable to climate change rather than non-endemic birds. The Fynbos biome is likely to be the most vulnerable to climate change due, to its high levels of endemism—80% of species found in the Fynbos biome are endemic. Endemic species are geographically constrained to one particular place on the planet. The Fynbos biome is home to six endemic bird species: Orange-breasted Sunbird, Cape Sugarbird, Cape Siskin, Protea Canary (near threatened), Victorin's Warbler, and Cape Rockjumper (near threatened). Fynbos birds live in an area that has been extremely climatically stable for a very long time, therefore, changes in the climate are not something they are used to. If we lose the endemic birds of the Fynbos biome, then we lose them altogether.

Seabirds make up one-third of the birds in South Africa which are threatened or near threatened. This mirrors a worldwide trend,



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where seabirds are declining faster than any other comparable group.

One reason for this is that seabirds are particularly vulnerable to human interference. Human-induced climate change has caused, and will continue to cause, changes to the world's oceans. This includes disruption of the complex oceanographic cycles that govern marine ecosystems and, changing the timing or reliability of food sources for apex predators, like seabirds. Also, seabird species breed almost exclusively on islands, which means they are behaviourally poorly equipped to deal with disturbances. Plastic is a huge problem in the oceans - 90% of all seabirds have consumed plastic, in 1960 it was less than 5%.

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South Africa has a high diversity of raptors, with more than a quarter now considered threatened. Raptors are apex predators and strong indicators for functioning trophic levels. A small and highly specialised bird-hunting raptor, the Taita Falcon, is sparsely and patchily distributed down the eastern side of Sub-Saharan Africa. In South Africa, this species is regarded as one of the country's rarest breeding birds and is listed as regionally critically endangered—with fewer than fifty birds remaining and only eight or nine known nest sites. More research is needed to understand the threats faced by the Taita Falcon but, it is thought to be threatened by habitat loss through the clearing of woodland (they are largely restricted to well-wooded habitats), and poisoning by pesticides, especially where chemicals are sprayed to control numbers of queleas, one of the falcon's major sources of food.

The Cape Parrot, a forest specialist, is mainly restricted to patches in a mosaic of Afromontane southern mistbelt forests from Hogsback in the Eastern Cape through to Balgowan and Karkloof areas of KwaZulu-Natal, with a disjunctive population in the Magoebaskloof region of the Limpopo Province. Hogsback State Forest is a haven for yellowwood, South Africa's national tree.



© Brad Louwrens

Logging companies favour the tall evergreen for furniture, and since the late-1800s they have completely destroyed 60% of the country's yellowwood forests.

The widespread loss of these native trees has had dire consequences for South Africa's only native parrot, the Cape Parrot, which relies on yellowwood trees for food and nesting cavities. The Eastern Cape harbours 46% of South Africa's limited remaining natural forest cover and, where forest birds are the most affected. The persistence of bird diversity is critical for the functioning and regeneration of forest systems. South African forest dwelling birds may require special protection as they continue to lose habitat.



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The vultures in South Africa are under threat from poisoning, either deliberately or accidentally. Vultures' extremely well developed eyesight allows them to spot a carcass from four kilometres away when soaring high in the sky. Their ability has led to the cultural misconception that vultures can 'see into the future,' causing the birds to be persecuted for their body parts, due to the belief that by possessing part of a vulture, one can share in the bird's supernatural abilities.

Birds, nature's clean-up crew

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In desperate need of protection

Other uses of vultures include, the use of their bones during circumcision ceremonies, their talons to treat fevers, their feathers for decorations, and their beak for protection. Also, vultures die when they inadvertently ingest poison that farmers have placed into carcasses in an attempt to drive hyenas or lions from their properties. Some poachers employ poison in a deliberate attempt to kill vultures, since they do not want park rangers to spot the birds circling over the carcasses of illegally killed animals. The situation is not helped by a lack of appreciation of the importance of vultures, or the bad press they have got ever since Disney's *Lion King*. As scavengers who live on carrion, their name serves as a metaphor for a person who preys on the weak. They are not the prettiest birds in the sky either. Yet, the loss of the vulture could have far-reaching ecological consequences, and it should be taken very seriously. Conservation of these birds will only be successful, if the focus is on providing education for farmers and local communities.

Birds are important to us and nature for a variety of reasons. They control pests—birds eat four-hundred to five-hundred million tonnes of insects per year. In South Africa, nearly a quarter of *Salvia* species are bird-pollinated. Such flowers are lacking in scent, since birds favour sight over smell. Around 5% of the plants humans use for food or medicine are pollinated by birds. Birds are nature's clean-up crew. Vultures are efficient scavengers, both their speed of arrival, typically within an hour of death, and their thoroughness makes them so valuable. They can quickly devour large amounts of flesh and their stomach acids neutralise pathogens, and so, vultures may help limit the spread of harmful diseases such as tuberculosis and rabies. Furthermore, birds spread seeds—when birds travel, they take the seeds they have eaten with them and disperse them through their droppings.



© Donovan Hulett

Inspiration is the gift birds have given us from the start. The woodpecker's head inspires shock absorbers. Certain portions of the bird's multi-layered beak and skull are soft and absorbent, which allows them to dilute energy before any harm comes to their brains. Birds have lifted our eyes to the skies. Engineers used the shape of birds as inspiration to model planes. Most aeroplanes have a streamlined shape, like birds, so that they do not face air resistance when they are in motion. Leonardo da Vinci studied the flight of birds, as well as, their structure. At around 1485 he drew detailed plans for a human-powered ornithopter. Ostriches walk on two legs, making them a perfect case study in how to navigate through obstacles and rough terrain. Cassie the bipedal robot has been developed with similar leg posture to ostriches, that allow for high speeds while maintaining balance. Japanese bullet trains move so quickly that entering a tunnel creates a phenomenon known as 'tunnel boom' as the air pressure suddenly increases. The train's nose was remodelled to better resemble a kingfisher's narrowing beak, thereby reducing air resistance and improving energy efficiency by 13%.

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It is clear to see how nature has inspired advancements in technology, and the importance of continuing exploration of these wonderful natural systems on Earth. As Nancy Newhall said: 'the wilderness holds answers to questions we have not yet learned to ask'.



Birding tourism contributes between R927 million and R1.73 billion per year to the South African economy. Birding tourists have higher-than-average income levels, longer trip lengths and a greater tendency to visit multiple provinces than mainstream tourists. By promoting bird tourism, it ensures that a value is placed on birds and, more specifically, on the habitats on which they depend.

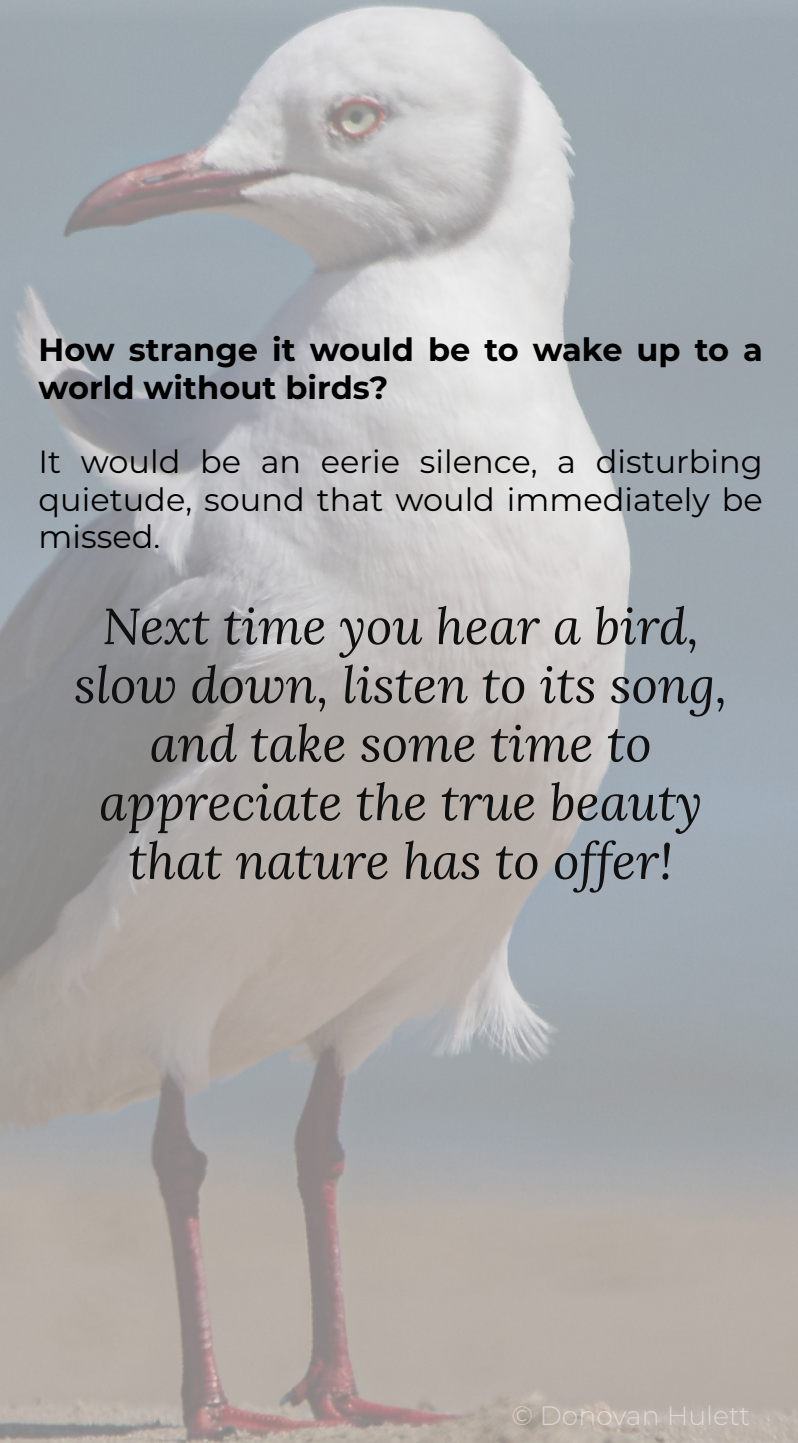
Native plants are those that occur naturally in a region in which they evolved. They are the ecological basis upon which life depends, including birds and people. Without native plants and the insects that co-evolved with them, local birds cannot survive. Landscaping choices have meaningful effects on the populations of birds and the insects they need to survive. Homeowners, landscapers, and local policymakers can benefit birds and other wildlife by simply selecting native plants when making landscaping decisions.

Education is vital to increase people's awareness and concern for the environment. That way, they can make conscious, sustainable choices that reduce their impact on the environment and helps protect threatened species.

How strange it would be to wake up to a world without birds?

It would be an eerie silence, a disturbing quietude, sound that would immediately be missed.

*Next time you hear a bird,
slow down, listen to its song,
and take some time to
appreciate the true beauty
that nature has to offer!*



Lion around...

By David Batzofin



Do you ever have a craving for a certain snack and when you go looking for it, it is unavailable? You are salivating for something sweet and all you can find in your pantry is decidedly savoury? You have to change your entire mindset to accommodate that sensation to enjoy what you have, rather than what you wished for.

I found myself in a similar situation recently when I headed off to a private reserve well-known for its leopard sightings. On previous visits to the area, these elusive predators were falling out of the trees in front of my lens.

But on this trip... not a single sighting! So, much like my sweet/savoury snack analogy, I had to enjoy what I did get to see rather than what I had been hoping for.

Luckily, it was a large pride of lions that captured my attention and I was even more grateful to spent time with them over 3 days of game drives.

My most recent lion sightings have either involved single animals or, at the very most, a limited number of individuals, seen sleeping under bushes or trees. But this pride consisted of 11 cubs and youngsters, ranging in age from 3 to 7 months. 3 enormous females, who were the birth mothers of the cubs, as well as 3 males, who between them, had fathered the 11.



My field guide and tracker first found the pride on a fresh buffalo carcass and with so many mouths to feed, it had to be that large as an impala would not have been sufficient or worth the effort.

The cries of the smaller cubs mixed with the grunts and snarls of the older youngsters and the adults as they fought and squabbled over the best parts of the carcass. As the kill was still fresh, there was still more than enough to go round and the individuals would eat and then stagger off with tummies full to lie in the nearby shade. Of course, the tiniest of the cubs were supplementing the solid food with milk from the mothers who were not happy at being constantly disturbed by being nudged, none too gently, by eager mouths looking for a nipple to latch onto.

It was only a matter of time before at least one got annoyed enough to let her true feelings be known and got up to try and find a cub-free area.



Lion around...

By David Batzofin



We left the pride all panting heavily with swollen bellies, lying in the shade of a thicket not too far from where the buffalo was lying.

We returned to the carcass later that afternoon and, like the lazy cats that they are, the pride was still almost exactly where we had left them. The only difference was that there was less of the buffalo and what remained of the carcass had been dragged closer to where they were lying.

To get the images that I was looking for, our vehicle was between the sleeping pride and their food, which caused one of the males to saunter over to investigate us and then plonk himself down under our rear tyre. Being that close to a large male is intimidating and we all hoped that he would not stay there for the rest of the day. Luckily for us, his full stomach made him restless and he only had time to show us his teeth before moving off to snack on the buffalo remains.

On our final visit to the carcass, we found that the pride had departed and a flock of vultures had moved in and were busy picking the remnants of the meat of the rib cage.

We headed off and before long we found the 3 males lying out on an open plain, still with large bellies, but without the females or the cubs to irritate and annoy them. Time out after being such good providers I suppose?

But, as they say in TV adverts, "That's not all". Low and behold, we came around a corner and found the rest of the pride heading for a nearby waterhole.

Now that their hunger issues had been resolved, the mood between the females and the cubs was far more relaxed and playful.

We followed them for a short while until they crossed a road that took them into another property where we were unable to follow.

It was an exciting extended series of sightings that I will remember for a long time. I do hope that all of the youngsters survive and go on to become healthy adults with families of their own.

And the leopards? There will be another time for them, I hope...

