



Wildlife Campus

LEARN PROTECT SAVE

Magazine



**Debunking 20
snake myths!**

Moths matter

Hospitality Vacancies

**Herpetofauna
in our ecosystems**

Titanohyrax to humble Dassie

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a plane?!**

**October
Wildlife Diary**

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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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Importance of herpetofauna

In this article, WildlifeCampus student, Amy Holt, raises awareness on some ‘slimy’, ‘creepy’, ‘disgusting’ and ‘ugly’ creatures that have been associated with witchcraft and portrayed as evil.

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10 reasons why moths matter

Coming from the new book by Struik "Southern African Moths & their Caterpillars". Dive into the world of these remarkable insects and gain a deeper understanding of their crucial role in our ecosystem.

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Stuart on Nature explores humble yet fascinating dassies sharing ancestry with elephants, manatees, aardvarks, tenrecs, sengis and golden moles.

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October Wildlife Diary

Chris and Mathilde Stuart open their Wildlife Diaries for us. With spring having started in the Southern hemisphere there is plenty of action this month. Southern Carmine Bee-eaters, lemurs and Cape geckos are all having a peak month when it comes to reproduction.

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Snake myths debunked

“If you find one snake, it’s mate is nearby.” “A snake’s tongue can sting you.” “Snakes won’t bite babies, breast-feeding women, or pregnant women.” These are just 3 out of the 20 snake myths African Snakebite Institute debunked for us.

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During a recent visit to a lodge in the Sabi Sands, David was presented with not one snake, but two. A pair of Boomslang that had taken up residence in hollow trees near the reception area. David lets the snakes tell us their story.

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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.

“The bookings for the party were initially very disappointing, only one couple from Holland had booked, from the web page and nobody knew them as they didn't participate much in the Boma and not at all in chat. Eventually, Leon booked, as well as Alan and Sandy and that was it. Naomi kept saying in chat how she'd love to go, but had no money, but would work if needed to be there, so Pip engaged her and a friend to come along and serve at the bar in return for bed and board.

“I had been itching to go, but just could not afford it at that time, even at the special rates. I had also just started a new company and money was very tight just then. I said as much to Pip in chat one evening and she said, just come up anyway, you should be here ... and offered me the spare room at her house. Whew! I was taken aback at the generosity shown, even though we'd never met, we'd already become friends on chat and I was delighted to accept the offer and headed North on the appointed weekend.”

Eventually there was close to a full house for the party and this was the first of many AfriCam “meets”. Roughly once a month, a group of avid AfriCammers gather somewhere in the world to meet in the flesh. The current meets can be seen on AfriCam website under the heading “AfriMeets”. The AfriCam Book website visitors



voted the following as the “Best Community Meets”:

1. London 2000 Swann Party.
2. London, June 20003.
3. The Olive Grove.
4. Boston Meet, June 2000.
5. WLC 1st Birthday Meet - Brussels, November 2001.
6. Niagara Falls Meet #1.
7. Lonehill.
8. First birthday party at Djuma.
9. Second birthday party at Djuma
10. Harley Meet / Cape Town May 2000.
11. WLC meet, Bournemouth, UK.
12. Belgium/Holland/UK meet April-May 2001.

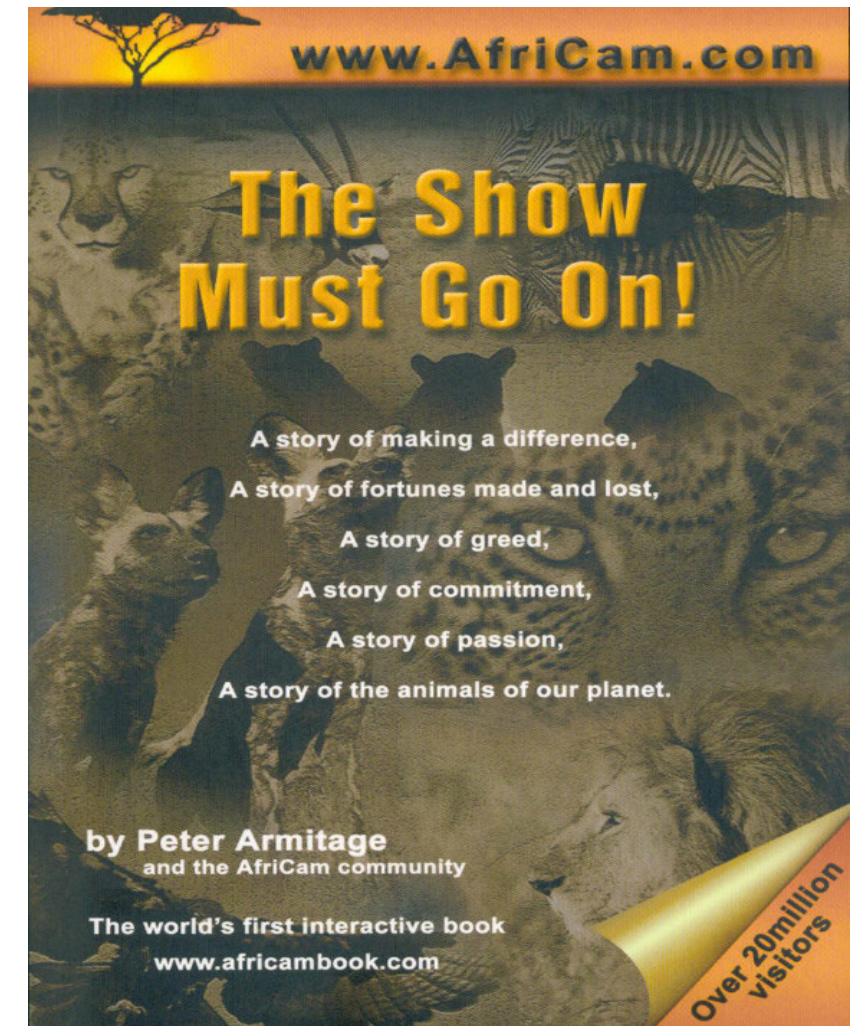
A tradition at the larger AfriCam “meets” is a dung-spitting competition. This is the practice of seeing how far a participant can spit hard impala dung. This is a time-honoured practice in the African bush. The second time AfriCam made it on to CNN was when at a London “meet”, the Cammers were having one of their dung-spitting competitions next to the River Thames.

A camera crew arrived and the next day on CNN, one of the Cammers was shown running in slow-motion, “Baywatch-style”, thrusting her neck back and spitting the Impala dung as far as she could. Not exactly the kind of coverage to enthuse investors, but good for viewership.

As Cammer Kathy/Va puts it “Only the truly dedicated would willingly put impala dung in their mouths and spit it across a public sidewalk.”

“Cammers’ perspective”

AfriCam means different things to different people. RebeccaCA/barkley waxes lyrical about her connection with the site: “Almost anything I say about my love and appreciation of AfriCam and the community of people who



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

embrace the site, and each other, would be an understatement. I am not the same person who first logged on in October 1998 to see animals live from Africa in their natural habitat.

“AfriCam changed my life in profound ways. It gave me countless hours of observing the most incredible animals on earth. AfriCam was a great teacher...I learned so much! AfriCam instilled in me a deep longing to visit this place that had so captured my imagination. I grew to know and love many people from around the world who shared this passion with me. AfriCammers are amazing. We aren't passive viewers. We got involved with the project and with each other. We laughed and cried together.

“Many of us have travelled long distances to meet. It was at such a meet that I met Mamasafari who gave me the opportunity to realize my dream...AFRICA! After spending a month in the Masai Mara, I am forever changed. I not only love Africa, but it will always be a part of me. I live to return one day.



I would love to visit South Africa and see in person what I've spent 3 years watching on cam! LONG LIVE AFRICAM!"

AfriCam also plays a didactic role and many teachers make use of the site for educational purposes. WyLandyRancher had the following to say: "Thank you for opening Africa to my geography students in Casper, Wyoming. For broadening their horizons! I've been with you from the beginning!"

These sentiments are mirrored by Mrs Chisholm, who recites: "I want to thank you for becoming a part of our 3rd grade classroom. My students and I want to thank you for all your efforts, so that people like us can learn about the world around us!! We have enjoyed our tours through Africa. Mrs. Chisholm and my 3rd Grade class in Pelham, N.H. We salute you!!"

But the secret of the success of AfriCam is telepresence. This is well explained in a message from Matthijs, who lives in the Netherlands, "The cams of africam give you the best view of wildlife its much more realistic than all the wildlife tv shows because the animals you see are live and not filmed some weeks before you see them. There is one thing i never forget and that is the moment I saw two lions on the mobile cam, a cam witch is going on safari in the morning and evening. The lions looked right in the cam, that moment I thought i was in the car next to the lions but they where just on the cam. So that's why the cams are more realistic as every wildlive show on tv."

Gordon from the UK adds, "Better entertainment than British TV, the sooner you get more web cams on line the better," and Nelak confirmed, "Ever since I've heard about this site, I've been coming on here a lot. The animals, they are so beautiful. It's great to see them live, not on T.V. You learn the way they live, and what they habitat is like. Thank you so much. The pictures that I've seen are very unique. They go from cute to gross... we get to see what they eat. I find that fascinating. Thank you again! I'm very glad that Africam has made such a great website for all! I will be on here forever! Thanks!"

Stormy, from the US, is one of AfriCam's staunchest supporters and she reminisces about her unique contribution to the site: "in September 1998 while watching a program on ZDTV...towards the end of each program they would describe "hot sites to visit". "AfriCam...Live images are captured every 30 seconds from our cameras located at two waterholes in the Djuma Game Reserve". i could not get out of my chair fast enough to logon ...

"... i watched for days...then at the crib my first animal...a waterbuck...followed by giraffes and elephants...YES...i was hooked...if that was not enough...i clicked on something called "boma"...another whole world opened up...members of this "community" were from all over the planet...and the one common bond... "to be able to view animals in their natural environment" for a short time...i was in the "silent majority" as it was called... until i had a conversation with Leon/CTSA...we would e-mail each other...attach images we captured on the cams...until the day i received an e-mail from Leon telling me that he was to be an invited guest of AfriCam to attend the "Djuma Meet"

"...i was so excited for Leon that i had to telephone him...my first hurdle...his accent...all this time i have been reading his e-mails...in my very own "bawstin accent" after several telephone conversations...i asked Leon if he would be my "liaison" with AfriCam as i wanted to donate a cam.

"...Leon agreed to have a conversation with Paul and Graham at the Djuma Meet...i was very excited to think i could have the possibility of giving the "community" another cam to view...i waited for Leon to return from the Djuma Meet...and when he telephoned me the answer was...YES...and Leon my friend...I cannot begin to thank you enough for all your help...with the "Orpen Cam"... first you have no idea what AfriCam must endure to place a cam at a waterhole...lets just leave it at...lots of red tape.

"... however...on February 17th 1999 Orpen made its debut...this was just "magic"...did i think i would view "the big five" on this cam...NO...but much to my surprise...YES...Orpen without all the bell and whistles delivered...i hope you enjoyed viewing "Orpen" as much as i did... the

memories...the friendships have been very special...and i thank you AfriCam for that...and wish you all the best in the future... happy camming...stormy/usa."

AnnieCat is another happy Cammer, "Sitting at my computer one cold damp night in the UK in 1998 I tried out a site that was listed in a magazine. That night my life changed forever to a world that embraces Africam and all of the joys and sadness that have unfolded over the years ... I have made a dream reality by visiting Africa which would not have been possible without Africam My life will never be the same, it has been truly enriched, thank you Africam."

"Healing properties"

But perhaps the most inspiring messages come from some of the Cammers who needed AfriCam the most. Deborah Gillham writes, "In 1998 I was the victim of a medical error and spent a month in the hospital and a month at home. I had 4 subsequent surgeries over the next 24 months each requiring 6 weeks off work. I spent many hours on Africam watching the beautiful images. Now it is 2002 and I have the opportunity to visit Djuma in August. I am looking forward to thanking all the people who help make this site such a wonderful place with healing properties.

Robin recites: "I will probably never get to visit Africa but through Africam I feel as if I am there every day. I have a chronic illness that makes life difficult at times but when i log in on Africam and get to see all the wonders of African wildlife I forget about how lousy i feel.

"It has helped me to appreciate the world around me and even inspired me to make a trip to the Florida Everglades recently to experience seeing wildlife in person. I have also become involved in conservation efforts and have Africam to thank for literally opening up a whole new world for me. Blessings to all involved in running this wonderful site."

For Diane AfriCam meant something really special, "When my son died in January, 1999, I was beyond sorrow, beyond pain. I "lived" in a horrible place in my heart. Africam gave me a sweet place to "live"...a place with good people, beautiful scenery and majestic creatures. This was the only place I could go, and for hours, immerse myself in something other than my own pain. I will be eternally grateful for that. It literally was a life saver. Thank you." Likewise for K. Pannell, "All the sleepless nights I have from a disability and you were there. Thank you for all the great cams!"

"Africam has played a crucial part in my life," writes JoeTX, "Not only has it brought many hours of enjoyment and wonder, it became a close companion during a dark and

scary time. Back in May of 2000 I was diagnosed with CNS Lymphoma with involvement in the brain, the eyes, and the spinal cord.

"This required several week long stays in the hospital for high dose chemotherapy and this in turn changed my once robust physical ability to get out and enjoy nature into a very limited one. Not being able to work or to physically get out and do the things I had once been able to do was really tough for me to deal with mentally.

"With my wife at work and the children at school I began to surf the internet for nature sites and that is when I stumbled on www.africam.com. My first encounter was with a rhino at one of the night time waterholes. I was hooked!!! I now had a companion and the wilds of Africa were brought into my own living room. No longer did I feel alone nor deprived from nature. Here it was live and with all its splendour.

"My thoughts shifted from worries about health to excitement about what critter I would see next. I truly believe Africam helped me through all of my difficult treatments and helped me keep a positive attitude. I now had a goal and a dream I had to pursue. I just had to visit South Africa and the places I had seen on the cams. Since the little wife works for American Airlines, this trip is in the planning stages and as soon as my health allows, we are on our way. Once again I would like to thank Africam for the companionship and the therapy through some difficult times. Hope to see you soon." JoeTx





Herpetofauna

Fundamental role players in maintaining our ecosystems

By WildlifeCampus student

Amy Holt

Being overlooked is nothing new for amphibians and reptiles. These 'slimy', 'creepy', 'disgusting' and 'ugly' creatures have been associated with witchcraft and portrayed as evil. Even their collective name, herps, comes from the Greek term meaning 'creeping things'.

02

This bad reputation and lack of appreciation have come at a cost. Amphibians and reptiles represent some of the most rapidly disappearing species on Earth. Over 40% of amphibian species and over 20% of reptile species are at risk of extinction.

There are over 8,000 species of amphibians, and they are found on every continent except Antarctica. Amphibians represent a crucial evolutionary step between water-dwelling fish, land-dwelling mammals, and reptiles. As they use aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems during their life, they are important indicators of ecosystem health. Amphibians breathe through their skin and are extremely sensitive to toxins in their environment, especially in water. Thus, the presence or absence of amphibians in a pond or stream is an excellent indicator of its water quality.

Glass frogs are among the most fascinating amphibians on our planet. They are recognisable for their translucent skin, which makes their bones, intestines, beating heart and other organs all visible through their underbelly. Glass frogs can achieve this remarkable transparency by packing 89% of their red blood cells into their liver. The liver is coated in reflective, mirror-like crystals and grows by about 40% daily. Red blood cells are responsible for delivering oxygen to the body's tissues. Some scientists believe the frogs enter a hibernation state requiring less oxygen. Studying the glass frog's unique ability to pack almost 90% of its red blood cells into its tiny liver without experiencing a blood clot could be revolutionary for human blood clot research.



The legs of a glass frog are more translucent than the body. This muddles the outline of a still frog, creating diffuse edges that predators are less likely to recognise. The edges of the frog blend in with the relative brightness or darkness of its surroundings. This phenomenon, known as edge diffusion, softens the line separating the colour of the frog's skin from the colour of the background.

Of the 158 known species of glass frogs, 50% are threatened with extinction. The strange beauty of the glass frog has made it vulnerable to being exploited in the illegal pet trade. As of November 2022, international leaders agreed to increased protection for glass frogs and placed them on CITES Appendix II.

Hairy frogs have modified gills, known as papillae, that project from the body into a structure that resembles hairs. Hence, its name. However, only the males have them and they are only present during the breeding season. The males stay with their underwater egg broods for an extended period of time after they have been laid by the females. The papillae increase the normal surface area of the skin, thus increasing oxygen intake. This means the males don't need to leave their eggs to get some air from the surface.

Hairy frogs are also known as horror frogs due to a bizarre adaptation—they can break their own bones to make sharp claws. When threatened, the frog contracts the muscles in its feet, causing the bones to break and push through the skin, forming sharp claws. This effective defence mechanism against predators showcases the ingenuity of nature.

Reptiles are one of the most diverse groups of vertebrates with approximately 10,000 species of them. They can fly, swim, burrow and climb, and live on every continent except

Antarctica. A thriving community of reptiles indicates a healthy environment. As ectothermic creatures, they depend on external heat sources to warm up. Rising temperatures, because of climate change, is seeing them more frequently retreat to find shade to cool down. This affects their ability to hunt.

Endemic to central Africa, the spiny bush viper is deadly but beautiful. The highly distinctive scales are the most noteworthy feature of this reptile. Its vibrant colours are used as a warning to potential predators that the snake is venomous. Like all snakes, they shed their skin. Ecdysis allows for growth and helps maintain their vibrant appearance. The spiny scales enable the snake to camouflage among the branches and leaves of trees. Spiny bush vipers have prehensile tails, allowing them to navigate their arboreal habitat easily. As ambush predators, they control populations of small mammals and birds. This contributes to the overall health and stability of the ecosystem. Unlike many other snake species, the spiny bush viper gives birth to live young (ovoviviparous). The young emerge from their mother fully formed and equipped with venom glands. This means they are independent enough to hunt for small prey.

Malagasy leaf-nosed snakes are an excellent example of sexual dimorphism. The males and females are so different from one another that they could easily be confused for an entirely different species. Males are dorsally brown and ventrally yellow with a long, spear-like snout. While, females are mottled grey with a flattened, leaf-shaped snout. The snake's distinctive nose projection is still a mystery to scientists, who are still trying to work out what it is used for. Madagascar's wildlife has evolved in complete geographic isolation for more than 80 million years. Due to this, Madagascar is home to incredibly high endemism, including this snake.



Despite their name, flying snakes don't actually fly but glide through the air. It is thought they use these flying abilities to escape predators, hunt for prey, and move from tree to tree. Flying snakes can climb trees using their belly scales to grab bark and other rough surfaces on the trunk. In preparation for flight, the snake slips the upper half of its body off the tree branch. The snake jumps into the air using powerful muscles in the lower half of its body. Upon lift off, the snake stretches out its ribs, flattening its body. This makes the snake more aerodynamic as it enlarges its surface area and increases air resistance. While in flight, the snake wiggles its body from side to side to catch air drafts and glide further. The wiggling provides a low-pressure region above the snake's back and a high-pressure region beneath the belly. This is similar to the airflow mechanisms used by a frisbee.

One of the largest freshwater turtles, the mata mata turtle inhabits swamps and rivers of South America. Although turtles are known to be outstanding swimmers, mata mata turtles are not well adapted for swimming in open waters. Instead, they are better suited for walking the muddy beds of shallow pools of water. They have a long, tubular snout used like a snorkel so they can breathe from beneath the water's surface. The matamata turtle's shell is rough, knobby and resembles a piece of bark with spiky, ridged scales. Skin flaps extend from their triangular head and neck. These skin flaps help camouflage the turtle and contain sensory nerves, which pick up vibrations and sense the direction of water flow. This is a helpful adaptation for hunting. As carnivorous bottom feeders, the turtle's wide mouth opens with a strong vacuum-like force that sucks in water and prey. Mata mata turtles play a crucial role in controlling fish and invertebrate populations. Thus, their presence in the ecosystem can influence the composition of aquatic communities.

Endemic to South Africa, the armadillo girdled lizard demonstrates unusual lizard behaviour. These lizards are extremely sociable and will form communal groups of up to 60 lizards at a time. They primarily feed on termites and during the winter, the lizards will reduce their termite

consumption to decrease competition for food between group members. The armadillo girdled lizard is one of a few lizards that does not lay eggs. Instead, it is ovoviviparous and can give birth to one or two live young. This lizard is unmistakable thanks to the hard, spiny scales which cover its body from head to tail. Much like an armadillo does when threatened, the armadillo girdled lizard will roll into a ball and takes its tail in its mouth.

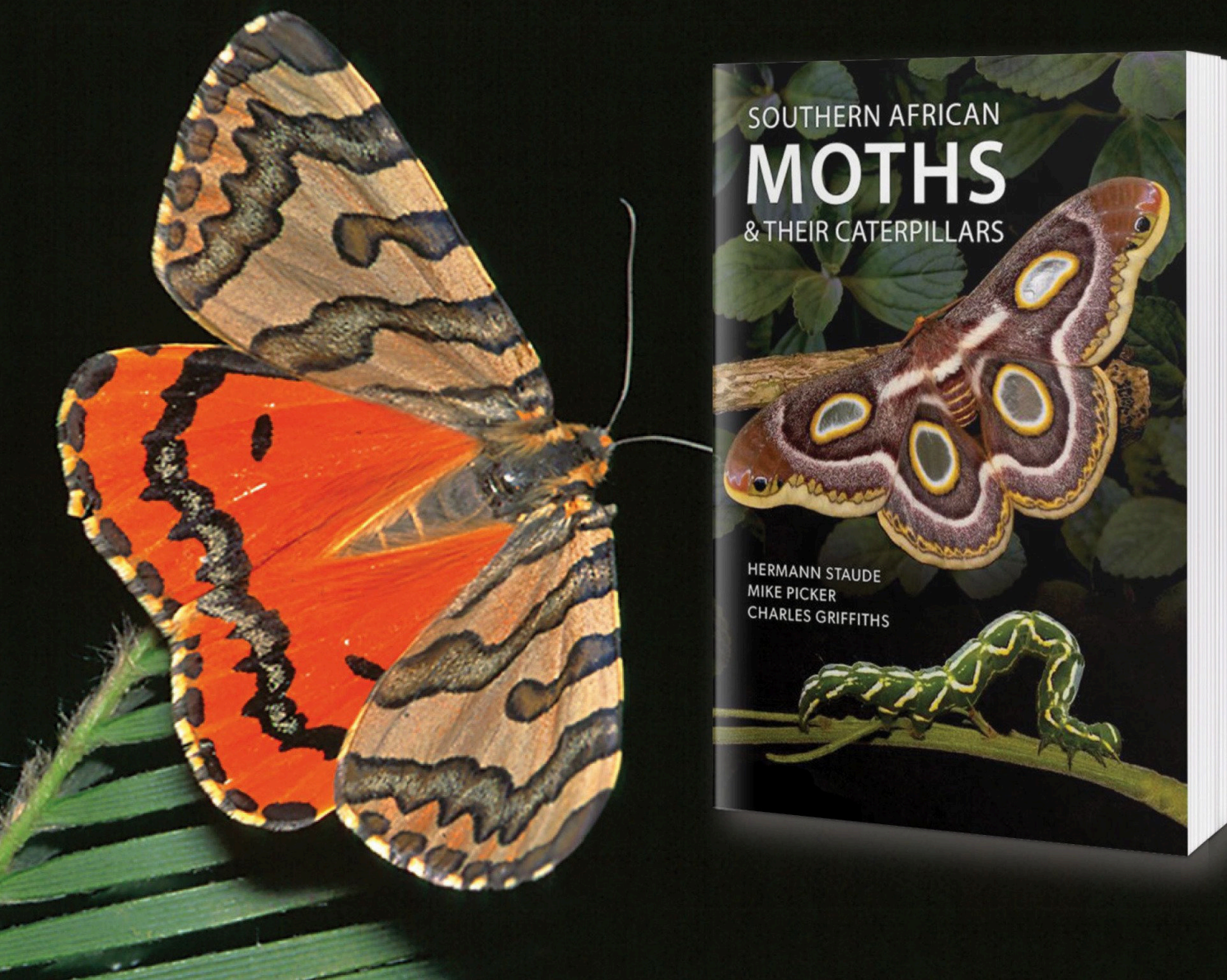
Amphibians and reptiles shouldn't be hated...if you are only perceiving them as 'ugly' or 'disgusting,' you are failing to see the bigger picture. Herpetofauna undoubtedly play a fundamental role in maintaining aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Also, they add extraordinary diversity to our planet and have some fascinating adaptations. Spend some time learning and observing amphibians and reptiles, so you can fully understand their beauty, uniqueness and value.



All images for this article were provided by Reptiles4All, [click through to their Facebook page](#) for more amazing pictures!



WHY ARE **MOTHS** IMPORTANT?



10 REASONS WHY MOTHS **MATTER**

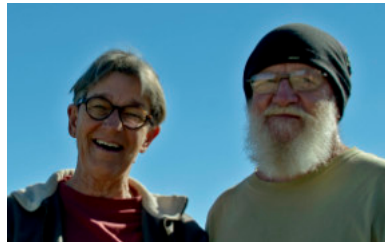
1. **Pollinators:** Moths play a crucial role in pollinating night-blooming flowers and crops, ensuring the reproduction of many plants.
2. **Biodiversity:** With thousands of species worldwide, moths contribute to the incredible diversity of life on Earth.
3. **Food Source:** Moth caterpillars are essential food for various animals, including birds, bats, and other insects.
4. **Ecosystem Health:** Certain moth species act as indicators of environmental health and ecosystem balance.
5. **Decomposers:** Moth larvae help break down organic matter, contributing to nutrient cycling and soil health.
6. **Ecological Role:** Moths play an important role in maintaining ecological balance. For instance, when this equilibrium is disrupted, such as when plants are transported to a different continent, they can become invasive. This is because the moths that typically help regulate their populations are not transported along with the plants.
7. **Nocturnal Predators:** Moths are a vital food source for many nocturnal predators like bats and some birds.
8. **Economic Impact:** Moths play significant economic roles within ecosystems. Among them, many moths contribute to the control of invasive alien weeds, possibly outnumbering those that eat crops. Moreover, their feeding habits typically focus on leaves rather than the actual crop. Numerous studies have demonstrated that leaf herbivory can stimulate fruiting responses in plants. Therefore, reducing the use of herbicides that harm these herbivores might lead to increased crop yields.
9. **Mimicry and Defence:** Moths have fascinating defensive mechanisms, such as mimicry, which contribute to the study of evolution.
10. **Research and Education:** Studying moths provides insights into broader ecological processes and helps raise awareness about the significance of insects in our world.

From Titanohyrax



To humble Dassie

Rock Hyrax youngsters crop of the season



By



The ancestral hyraxes, or dassies, started to evolve in the Middle East about 37 million years BP, and that beast went by the name *Dimaitherium*. Many more species evolved than exist today and most were far larger, and it has been estimated that *Titanohyrax* tipped the scales at between 600-1,300kg, with *Megalohyrax* the size of a modern day tapir, up to 300kg. With the arrival of many competing herbivores during the Miocene era the hyracoids were pushed into marginal niches, the rocky hills and forests, and today they range from 2- 6kg, but nevertheless they are still a very successful group of mammals.

The modern hyraxes belong to the mammal group, the afrotherians, with shared ancestry with the elephants, manatees, dugong, armadillo, tenrecs, sengis and golden moles. In their similarity to the elephants the upper incisors continue to grow throughout their lifetime, just as the tusks of the pachyderms, and they share other anatomical features, the testicles of the male lie inside the body and not in a scrotum externally.

The current taxonomy of the hyraxes remains in dispute, they are afrotherians but how many species should we recognize? Over the decades more than 50 species and subspecies have been described, as we write only 6 species are recognized BUT... These six species are the very widespread Rock Hyrax (*Procavia capensis*), fairly widespread Yellow-spotted Rock

Hyrax (*Heterohyrax brucei*) and four species of tree hyrax, Southern Tree Hyrax (*Dendrohyrax arboreus*), Eastern Tree Hyrax (*Dendrohyrax validus*), Benin Tree Hyrax (*Dendrohyrax interfluvialis*) and the Western Tree Hyrax (*Dendrohyrax dorsalis*), restricted to dense bush and forest areas.



This is a Yellow-spotted Rock Hyrax skull, but all hyrax skulls are very similar



Yellow-spotted Rock Hyrax

However, this is simplistic and based on calls (tree hyraxes) and genetic work (rock hyraxes) it is almost certain that there are more species hiding out there in plain sight! In South Africa genetic research has shown that there are two species of Rock Hyrax but they cannot be separated in the field.

The Rock Hyrax is the most widespread of extant hyraxes, occurring from South Africa to Angola, and eastwards to Tanzania, then in a broad belt from the Horn of Africa and throughout West Africa to the Atlantic coast with isolated populations on the massifs of the Sahara. It extends into Egypt along the Red Sea hills and then through western Arabia to Yemen and the Dhofar region of Oman. Given its vast range it is likely that a complex of species is involved. If we take a look at a subspecies, Welwitsch's Rock Hyrax, that occurs in north-west Namibia and adjacent Angola, in appearance it is similar to the Yellow-spotted Rock Hyrax with a white-haired dorsal patch and pale eyebrow stripes.

The Yellow-spotted Rock Hyrax is mainly restricted to eastern Africa from northern South Africa to the Red Sea hills of Sudan but isolated populations occur in south-west Angola and western DR Congo.



Rock Hyrax feeding

Where ranges overlap, this hyrax and the Rock Hyrax frequently share the same rocky habitat, sun bask together, retreat to the same crevices, use the same dung middens but diet differs somewhat thus reducing feeding competition. Nor can they interbreed, as penis positions restrict mating to their own species. It is a rarity in nature to have such close bonded species sharing shelter and social time. In colonies the young of both species form into mixed nursery groups.

Unusually, for such small mammals, they have a long gestation period, some 7.5 months, and the new born young are fully haired, with eyes open, and are soon able to move around after birth.



Eastern Tree Hyrax on Unguja

So, we have the two rock-dwelling species but then we have the mysterious tree-dwellers, Southern Tree Hyrax (*Dendrohyrax arboreus*) of southern and East Africa, the Western Tree Hyrax (*Dendrohyrax dorsalis*) that occurs across the Congo Basin into West Africa, with the newly described Benin Tree Hyrax (*Dendrohyrax interfluvialis*) which occupies forests between the Niger and Volta rivers in West Africa, and the Eastern Tree Hyrax (*Dendrohyrax validus*) that occupies a few isolated forest pockets in Tanzania, Kenya and the islands Pemba and Unguja, Zanzibar Archipelago. They differ from the rock-dwellers by being mainly night active, are largely arboreal but will descend to the ground and live in tree holes and each has its own distinct territorial call range, with males having the most powerful calls. To the uninitiated, their loud rattling and screaming calls can be unnerving. Surprisingly, the Southern Tree Hyrax in the Rwenzoris at about 3,900m above sea level has taken to ground living and dens down amongst rocks and boulder clusters and is more social than the tree-dwellers. As an adaptation to the cold high altitudes of the Rwenzoris they grow unusually long, shaggy, coats.

Rock and Yellow-spotted hyraxes are not infrequently mistaken for tree hyraxes as they readily climb into trees to feed, especially the latter species. But they do this in the day and rarely climb into smooth-barked trees.

October Wildlife Diary



Lions once roamed the vicinity of present day Cape Town, but sadly no longer.

- On the 12th October 1663 a lion and lioness (*Panthera leo*) killed a plough-ox at Bosheuwel, today the upmarket Cape Town suburb of Bishopscourt.
- On the 18th October 1779 Lieutenant William Paterson observed six Giraffe (*Giraffa camelopardalis*), and shot one fine bull, some 30km south-east of Warmbad in southern Namibia. Between Warmbad and the Great Karas Mountains he also saw unidentified rhinoceros, Plains Zebra (*Equus quagga*) and Greater Kudu (*Tragelaphus strepsiceros*), with only the latter occurring naturally in the area today.
- On the 16th October 1971 a lone Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) was shot just a few kilometres from the town of Mafikeng (Mahikeng) in northern South Africa. It had already spent some time in the area, but conservation authorities ordered it killed as, in their eyes, it posed a threat to life and property. Elephant had not been known in this area for almost 100 years.

- The great herds of White-bearded Wildebeest (*Connochaetes taurinus*) and other migrant species are once again on the move, making their way south-eastwards away from the Maasai Mara to the short-grass plains of Serengeti and Ngorongoro. The first light rain showers should start to fall by the end of this month.
- Bohor Reedbuck (*Redunca redunca*) are at the peak of their birthing season now in parts of their East African and West African ranges. In Zambia, Southern Bushbuck (*Tragelaphus sylvaticus*) births reach a peak at this time, just before the onset of the rains, although fawns have been recorded throughout the year.



Bohor Reedbuck ewe



Female Black Lemur, but only the male is black.

- In Madagascar, two lemur species are in procreation mode this month. Coquerel's Dwarf Lemurs (*Microcebus coquereli*) are mating in the drier forests in the west and north-west of the island, whilst the Black Lemur (*Eulemur macaco*) females are at the height of their birthing season, which started in September and will extend into November. Both of these lemur species are classified as endangered.
- This is the driest time of the year over much of the savanna of southern Africa and game viewing is generally at its best. Vegetation is sparse and low, and many game species are concentrated around the diminishing sources of water.
- October is one of the most important months in the breeding cycle of the Southern Carmine Bee-eater (*Merops nubicoides*), as these birds return to their traditional nesting sites. They form large breeding

colonies with burrows in sand- and mud banks, and sometimes in flat sandy areas.

- Cape Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax capensis*) have been recorded breeding throughout the year but there is a distinct peak in September and October. They nest in dense colonies, each sitting bird being just out of pecking distance of its neighbours. Great skeins of these cormorants are often seen flying just above the sea surface between their fishing grounds and nesting colonies on Africa's south-west coastline.
- In Ethiopia, Somalia, Uganda and western Kenya, Marabou Storks (*Leptoptilos crumeniferus*) are starting to court and lay their eggs, and will continue to do so into December.
- Most Palearctic bird migrants have now returned to their African over-wintering grounds and African species have left their tropical breeding areas. The first Common Buzzards (*Buteo buteo*) are arriving in southern Africa, some having travelled as far as 12,000km from Russia and its former territories.
- October is the peak month in the laying period for the Cape Gecko (*Pachydactylus capensis*); each female produces just two eggs at a time.
- Candle-pod Thorns (*Vachellia hebeclada*) are starting to produce new, erect pods, even though the pods from the previous season may remain on the tree for many months.
- In the Richtersveld and adjacent areas of South Africa and Namibia, yellow flowers now adorn the large, tree-like Giant Quiver Tree (*Aloidendron pillansii*), hanging in clusters below the "leaf stars".



Southern Carmine Bee-eater

Debunking Snake myths



There are a lot of stories and myths about snakes. It seems that because these animals are often poorly understood people frequently believe they are malicious, looking for people to bite. The truth is that snakes are nervous animals and attempt to escape and flee given the opportunity. They will defend themselves if attacked and often attempt to intimidate and frighten off attackers and may appear aggressive until the attacker leaves them alone. Below are a selection of common myths and stories around snakes.

Myth 1: All snakes are venomous.

Fact: This is a common belief and is not the case. In southern Africa we have 176 different snakes species – only 20 of them are highly venomous and 30 of them are considered venomous – this leaves 126 species that are mildly venomous or non-venomous.

Myth 2: Snakebites should be cut and sucked.

Fact: A common story and one we often see in Hollywood movies too. It is a natural reaction if you are stung or bitten by a venomous animal to suck at the wound. Unfortunately, once venom is injected under the skin, it moves quickly through the tissue, attacking cells or nerves. As venoms are made up of proteins and enzymes, they cannot easily be sucked out of the tissue. In tests on rabbits, radio charged venom particles were injected into rabbits and after applying suction mechanisms it was found that less than 1% of the particles were removed. The other problem is that once you cut open skin, you increase the chances of getting bacteria into the wound and causing infections. This could cause complications to the bite.

Myth 3: Snakes are aggressive.

Fact: Most snakes try and avoid human encounters at all costs – but if they are cornered, they do defend themselves. This includes making themselves look larger (by making a hood, inflating their neck, or flattening themselves) hissing, striking out. Some snakes, like Cape Cobras and Rinkhals, will do mock-charges if harassed – coming a meter forward at speed before turning to flee. Usually “aggressive” actions from snakes are reactions to the person/threat. If you grab a Black Mamba by its tail, the first thing it does is spin around with the mouth open and lunges at the person. This is not aggression, this is defence. If you grab a feral cat by the tail they do the same thing.

Myth 4: Snakes chase people

Fact: A popular story told around campfires is about people being chased by snakes. Most notably, Black Mambas have a bad reputation for chasing people. The truth is far less exciting and of the hundreds of mambas our team has caught and dealt with over the years, we’ve never had a mamba chase us. In fact, it would be easier to catch them if they did chase you. What we find is that mambas are nervous, shy snakes that move off at the first signs of people

approaching. They usually move off into thick bush, down a hole or into a rock crevice. However, if cornered and there is no way of escaping, mambas are dangerous and may strike out rapidly if approached. They usually open the mouth, showing the black lining and hiss as a warning first, before biting. We also find that mambas are often residential and will live in the same hole or rock crevice for a number of years if not disturbed. If approached, they are quick to retreat to their hole. If a person is in the way, the snake will come directly at the person in attempt to get to the cover behind the person. This may feel like the snake is chasing you but they are actually trying to get past the person, to safety.

Myth 5: Jumping out of trees

Fact: Snakes don’t jump or fly out of trees in southern Africa. They occasionally slip and fall out of trees or rafters. This usually happens when someone approaches the snake and it gets a fright and panics. But they aren’t waiting for people to walk below to jump and attack them. When we do snake removals, a snake in a tree is always a tough catch as the snakes usually move right up to the top of the tree to get away from the snake remover.

Myth 6: Snakes travel in pairs

Fact: Snakes live solitary lives. Occasionally we’ll see snakes, sometimes from different species, sharing the same hole or hollow in a tree trunk. This is usually competition for a good hiding spot. The only time we see snakes together is in the breeding season where males will be following females or sometimes when males fight each other for females. They do not move around in pairs or hunt together.

Myth 7: If you find one snake, its mate is nearby.

Fact: Snakes are solitary creatures, and unless it’s mating season or one snake is hunting the other, you very seldom find two snakes together. Some species may share a hideout in the cooler months. In the breeding season, the female snake releases pheromones (like a perfume) that attracts males. If a single female puff adder is found in the garden



during the mating season, it is possible that one to a few males may appear over the next few days, all following the scent of the female.

Myth 8: A snake will avenge the death of its mate.

Fact: An interesting story, many people believe that if you kill a snake, the mate will come back and seek revenge. Snakes are largely instinctual animals and don’t really display emotion. Snakes also do not mate for life. Each mating season a female will mate with multiple males to ensure the offspring have variable genetics. Some people will even burn dead snakes as they are scared of the mate coming to avenge the death, and they believe that by burning the dead snake it takes away chances of the mate finding it.

Myth 9: If you see a baby snake, the mother is close by.

Fact: The majority of our snakes in southern Africa lay eggs. With the exception of Southern African Pythons and the Spotted Skaapsteker, the rest of the snakes lay eggs and leave. The eggs are usually laid underground, under a rock or in leaf litter, somewhere where the eggs are safe, warm and won’t dry out. The mother provides no maternal care like birds or mammals. The baby snakes will hatch between 70-90 days later and have to find food, water and fend for

themselves immediately. This means that if you find one baby, you may find other babies in the area, but you won't find the mother. Some snakes do give live birth like Rinkhals, Mole Snakes, Common Slug-eaters and most adders. These snakes drop live babies and move off. So you may find the mother nearby for these snakes, but she does not look after her babies.

Myth 10. Baby snakes are more dangerous than adults

Fact: This is a popular myth spread around on TV shows. The reality is that juvenile snakes have a much smaller venom quantity. Juveniles may be more nervous and often more likely to bite if harassed or stepped on, but the bites are usually mild compared to an adult. There are still ongoing studies on to see if the venom composition changes in snakes as they grow from juvenile into adults. Juvenile snakes often have a different selection of prey (for example eating frogs as juveniles and eating rats as adults) and the venom may change as the snake ages. But this requires more research.

Myth 11: Snakes are deaf.

Fact: As snakes don't have any ear openings, they do not hear airborne sounds well. They do however have an inner ear and can pick up and translate some vibrations from the lower jaw bone to the inner ear. So if you shout or whistle at a snake they will not react, but if you stomp around or create



noises that release vibrations, they may move off. If you watch videos of snakes "dancing" to men playing flutes in India, it is a trick. The snakes are defensive and face the threat (flute player). They will often follow the movement of the threat or object and so sway from side to side following the movement of the flute and appear to be "dancing".

Myth 12: Snakes are blind.

Fact: Many people believe snakes are blind. Most snakes can see quite well although often it is movement-based. As soon as a prey item keeps still, the snake may struggle to see it well. They have other features, like a great sense of taste, which help them track down food or avoid predators. Some of the snakes that live underground, like the thread snakes or beaked blind snakes, have a large scale covering the eye making their vision greatly reduced, usually allowing them to sense light and dark.

Myth 13: A snake's heart is in its tail.

Fact: A popular story, especially in areas like Limpopo. We suspect the story originates from the fact that many snakes (and other reptiles) will wiggle the tail to distract attackers into attacking the tail and leaving the sensitive head. If a snake has recently been killed (we see it often with roadkill) the tail will writhe back and forth. The truth is that a snake's anatomy is very similar to most other animals and the heart is about a third of the way down the body. The tail section just has some vertebrate bones.

Myth 14: Snakes are slimy.

Fact: Snakes are covered in hard, dry scales which protect them whilst they slither through bush and over rocks and other rough surfaces. Many species have glossy or shiny scales which may give the appearance of it being wet or slimy.

Myth 15: The tongue can sting you

Fact: Snakes use their tongues to pick up scent particles in the air. The tongue is then brought inside the mouth and placed onto the Jacobsen Organ and the particles are tasted. This allows the snakes to work out if there is food, water, predators or mates in the area. As the tongue is forked, the snake can work out the direction in which the scent particle came from, which allows them to track the smell. The tongue cannot cause any harm.

Myth 16: Snakes dislocate their jaw to eat larger prey.

Fact: Snakes can eat prey items up to around three times as wide as the head. Where humans and other mammals have a single jawbone, snakes have two separate jaw bones, connected with a stretchy ligament. This allows them to stretch the lower jaw over the large meal but without dislocating any joints.

Myth 17: The skeleton of a snake is venomous.

Fact: Some people believe the skeleton of a snake contains toxins and if you stand on the bones barefoot and the bones pierce the skin, they will envenomate you. Venom is only stored in the venom glands in the cheek region of most snakes. The bones are not venomous. Additionally, most venoms will decompose rapidly in the sun and a skeleton will no longer have viable venom. However, many bones and skeletons contain bacteria and some diseases and if you stood on a skeleton and the bones pierce the skin, it is possible the area could become infected.

Myth 18: Puff adders only bite the second person if there are several hikers walking past.

Fact: Studies from Wits University showed that when puff adders are concealed and in "camouflage mode" they are very unlikely to bite people, even if stood on. If a group of hikers walked past a concealed puff adder, it is unlikely to bite out.

However, if puff adders are basking on a path and are exposed, they often feel vulnerable and may strike out if a threat appeared. They would bite the closest threat whether that was the first or last hiker.

Myth 19: If you are bitten by a snake you need to get to a river and drink water before the snake.

Fact: A popular story throughout Africa. The idea is that if you get down to the river and drink water after being bitten, you will be safe, but if the snake gets there first and drinks water, the venom takes effect, and you fall over dead. It is of course not true, and venom cannot be turned on or off by drinking water. A similar story applies to getting bitten by a snake in a tree where the victim must get out of the tree before the snake does so the venom doesn't take effect.

Myth 20: Snakes won't bite babies, breast-feeding women, or pregnant women.

Fact: Snakes can't tell if a woman is pregnant, or if a child is breastfeeding and many babies are bitten by snakes every year. Snakes defend themselves and will bite anyone who is a threat or hurting the snake. In a case study in northern KwaZulu-Natal, around a quarter of all patients hospitalised after a snakebite were young children.

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Career coaching Testimonials

"This was a real eye-opener. I wasn't sure about attending at first but I'm so glad that I did. Hayley suggested a few things that I have previously thought about in a different way. I now feel like I should be focusing on the present and seizing the opportunities instead of stressing about my future. She has given me a fresh perspective and I can't express my gratitude enough. I would highly recommend this for anyone struggling – no matter your age!"

"Thanks to Hayley for her guidance. She has rejuvenated my spirit and courage to move forward in my career. I found the coaching to be beyond value for money – highly recommended."



"After being in the lodge industry for many years, I decided to make a change and move to the city but with the excitement came an overwhelming sense of uncertainty on what to do next. I have followed Wild Dreams for a few years and knew that booking a career coaching session was exactly what I needed to do. I needed someone to talk to about my future and someone to relate to. The session was awesome, not only did I learn about options that I did not consider before but most importantly I learnt about myself and what I want to do, the session activities is something I will always refer back to now. I am so happy that I decided to take part in a coaching session, the fears and uncertainty from the change became irrelevant and I am so grateful for the advice and help, during and after that I received from Hayley."

"Having followed Wild Dreams for a while I grabbed the chance to do a call with Hayley. From our 1st point of contact to the follow up emails, checking on my post call to-do list I found Hayley not only highly professional but also so compassionate.

As a middle-aged lady looking for a career change, I was very unsure of myself and of the way forward. After chatting through the options Hayley suggested on the call, I now have a clear plan of action. I know that making small tweaks to my CV as well as updating my LinkedIn profile is going to give me the best possible first impression with an employer.

I would highly recommend to anyone who is a little unsure of how to proceed in their career within the industry to make an appointment with Hayley to get clarity on your options."



Vacancies

Wild Dreams Hospitality is currently recruiting for the following positions.

Job Title	Location	Salary
Apprentice Trails Guides	Gauteng	Neg DOE
Assistant GM	Kenya	\$2,800
Assistant Head Guide (L2/Lead)	Kruger Park	R13kpm neg DOE
Assistant Lodge Manager	KZN	R15-17kpm
Assistant Lodge Manager/Res Couple	Northern Cape	R20kpm
Assistant Managers	Namibia	N15kpm
Camp Manager	Limpopo	R12-15kpm
Chef trainer	Namibia	N\$20k
Concession Manager/Guide Trainer	Uganda	\$1500 nett neg
F&B Manager	Namibia	N\$17kpm CTC
F&B Manager	Limpopo	R25-28kpm
Field Guide	Limpopo	R6-7kpm
Field Guide (Apprentice Trails)	Limpopo	Neg DOE
Field Guide (vehicle)	Limpopo	R7kpm
Fleet Manager	Botswana	BWP3500-00
GM Couple	Costa Rica	USD7000-10000
General Manager/Couple	Sabi Sands	R40-48kpm - R60-70kpm
Guide Trainer	Limpopo	R21-28kpm
Guide/Admin Couple	Balule	R18-25kpm combined
Hospitality Manager	Sabi Sands	R18kpm
Hospitality Manager	Tanzania	\$3500 nett
Hospitality Manager	Tanzania	\$3000-4000

Host	Klaserie	R15-17kpm
Junior Guide (L1)	EC	R10-12kpm
Junior Guide (L1)	Limpopo	Market related
Junior Guide (L1)	Limpopo	R7-10kpm + meals and uniform
L2/Lead Trails Guides	Limpopo	R12-15kpm
Lead Trails Guide (own rifle)	MP	Neg DOE
Lodge Guide	Namibia	Neg DOE
Lodge Manager	KZN	R25kpm + benefits
Lodge Manager	KZN	R12-15kpm
Lodge Manager	Namibia	N\$27k
Lodge Manager	KZN	R20-25kpm
Lodge Managers	Uganda	\$2-2,5kpm Gross + Benefits
Maintenance Assistant	Sabi Sands	Neg DOE
Maintenance Manager	Botswana	BWP25000
Maintenance Supervisor	Stellenbosch	R25-28kpm
Management Couple	Limpopo	R45kpm
Relief GM	Limpopo	R20-22kpm
Trails Guide (L2/Lead)	Madikwe	R8,5kpm - R11kpm DOE
Trails Guide (Lead)	Klaserie	R15-17kpm
Trails Guide / possible Res couple	Northern Cape	R8-12,5kpm neg DOE
Trails Guide/Res couple or just Guide	Northern Limpopo	Neg, DOE

To view these vacancies, the requirements, packages and how to apply, visit our website: www.wilddreams.co.za and click on recruitment/jobs or scan the barcode below.

Make sure you submit everything as per the job advert and state the title of the position you are applying for. If you need assistance with your CV, use our free CV template on our CV advice page.



Snakes on a plane?

No, in a tree!

I have often wondered what snakes and spiders I think about the fact that they are often the lead characters in nightmares and horror stories.

During a recent visit to a lodge in the Sabi Sands, I was presented with not one snake, but two. A pair of Boomslang that had taken up residence in hollow trees near the reception area.



By David Batzofin



Normally my stories are first-person accounts of what happened to me, but I wanted to try and tell this tale from the perspective of the snake, so here goes.

In the sun-kissed land of South Africa, where shadows whisper tales of old, I, the enigmatic Boomslang, slither silently through the lush greenery.

My species has been the subject of fear and loathing throughout the ages, yet there is so much more to our story than meets the eye. Today, I shall take you on a journey through the intricacies of my existence, shedding light on why we are so feared and what we endeavour to change these unwarranted perceptions.

I possess potent venom, but my nature is far from that of an evil villain. My venom is not meant for malicious intent but is a tool for survival and securing prey. I do not seek conflict with humans, but when threatened, my instinctual response is to defend myself. Our venom is a means of survival in a world where we are hunters and hunted.



The infamous tales that shroud my existence in dread are often riddled with misconceptions and exaggerations. My species does not go out seeking human confrontation. In fact, I am a rather shy and elusive creature, preferring to remain hidden away from prying eyes. My cryptic colouration allows me to blend seamlessly into my environment, further contributing to the mystery surrounding my presence.

Alas, our small size and agile form have often been misconstrued as signs of deceit and malevolence. Yet, these attributes are merely adaptations that allow us to manoeuvre through the dense foliage of our habitat with ease. I am not a creature of malice, but one of survival in the delicate balance of nature.

Our species has come to realise that the key to dispelling fear lies in fostering understanding and education. We are committed to changing perceptions and promoting coexistence with humans. As ambassadors of our kind, we strive to educate the world about the vital role we play in the ecosystem.

One way we are working towards this goal is by participating in research initiatives. Scientists and herpetologists study our behaviour, venom, and habitat, aiming to unravel the complexities of our existence. By gaining a deeper understanding of our species, misconceptions can be

replaced with knowledge, and fear with appreciation for the intricacies of life.

Furthermore, we endeavour to raise awareness about responsible encounters with wildlife. We do not wish harm upon humans but we implore them to respect our space and recognise our value in maintaining the ecological balance. Through this understanding, we hope to pave the way for harmonious coexistence.

Our notoriety as one of the most feared venomous snakes in South Africa has painted an incomplete picture of who we truly are. Beneath the surface of this stigma lies a shy and elusive creature, intricately woven into the tapestry of nature's grand design. Through education, research, and storytelling, we strive to dispel fear and foster understanding, paving the way for a future where humans and Boomslang can coexist in harmony.

The power of storytelling can change hearts and minds, and we have embraced this approach in our quest for acceptance. Tales of our enigmatic lives, filled with wonders and challenges, can bridge the gap between fear and admiration. Our stories are woven into the rich tapestry of South Africa's cultural heritage, and we aim to show that we are as much a part of this beautiful land as any other creature.

Together, we can embrace the marvels of South Africa's wildlife and build a world where fear is replaced with appreciation, respect, and awe for all creatures, big and small.

I hope that I have told their tale fittingly and respectfully. And next time you come across a snake in the wild, remember that they have a place in the unique tapestry that is South Africa.



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

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