



WildlifeCampus

Nature Calls

Freshwater fishes

A new Struik guide

The African bush: sound

By Amy Holt

**Hospitality
jobs**

**Travel Buggz
Adventures**

**Meet our
COO**

**African
Folklore**

**Water off a
duck's back**

By David Batzofin

**Our updated
price list**

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Cover image: Mushrooms on moss-covered tree by Pascal Weerden

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Updated price
list (price drop!)

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About us



WildlifeCampus is a world-renowned online nature school. We are **FGASA recognised**. With over 23 years of experience in the online space, we have successfully trained more than 30,000 students from 161 countries.

Our courses are considered to be the most comprehensive in the online space.

We take pride in being **leaders in online wildlife education**, offering an authentic and unique E-learning experience, high-quality content, value for money, and exceptional service.

There are no barriers to entry, course deadlines, or set semesters. Students can register and begin any course at any time. Those who have completed our courses have reported that the knowledge gained has significantly enhanced their careers and enjoyment of the bush.

Many of our students are now employed in the wildlife, hospitality, and tourism industry.



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You Tube



TikTok



WildlifeCampus Study Options

FEATURES	PURCHASE COURSES	MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION	LIFETIME SUBSCRIPTION
COURSE ACCESS	UNLIMITED ACCESS TO THE COURSE/S YOU PURCHASE FOR LIFE.	ACCESS TO ALL OUR COURSES WHILE SUBSCRIBED.	UNLIMITED ACCESS TO ALL OUR COURSES FOR LIFE.
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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.

I lost patience: “Colin, don’t march into our office without the proper facts and try and change our business. Half of the costs you are talking about are Peter Henderson’s costs ...”

“Bullshit, I am giving ...,” Colin interrupted.

“Whoaaa,” Graham shouted and I was stunned. Graham is an emotional guy, but I had never heard him shout. However, he realised it was the only way to keep Colin quiet. He was sitting next to Colin and the sight of him lambasting Colin was somewhat comical.

“Colin, we are quite prepared to discuss anything you wish about this business,” Graham blared at a well-above average volume. “But if you barge in here and insult us and SHOUT AT US,” Graham declared with his face 30cm from that at Colin’s, “We are not going to listen to a thing you say. So wind down and let’s have a rational discussion.”

Colin was overwhelmed. He was a wealthy man as a result of the Peregrine listing and took advantage of all the “respect” that money brings.



WildlifeCampus Magazine

He had never seen a response like this and immediately quietened down and a fairly rational discussion followed.

Colin was right in many respects and perhaps a more rational approach would have had different results. He did not have all the answers, but he could identify the problems. We were emotionally attached to this business. There was a natural inclination to defend the business and we believed steadfastly that we would survive, whatever the odds.

**“WildlifeCampus launches” -
November 2000**

Dimension Data had put a great deal of effort into WildlifeCampus and towards the end of 2000 the site approached launch date. Todd Kaplan had a scare a few weeks before launch when a server crash resulted in over 15 000 highlight images being lost.

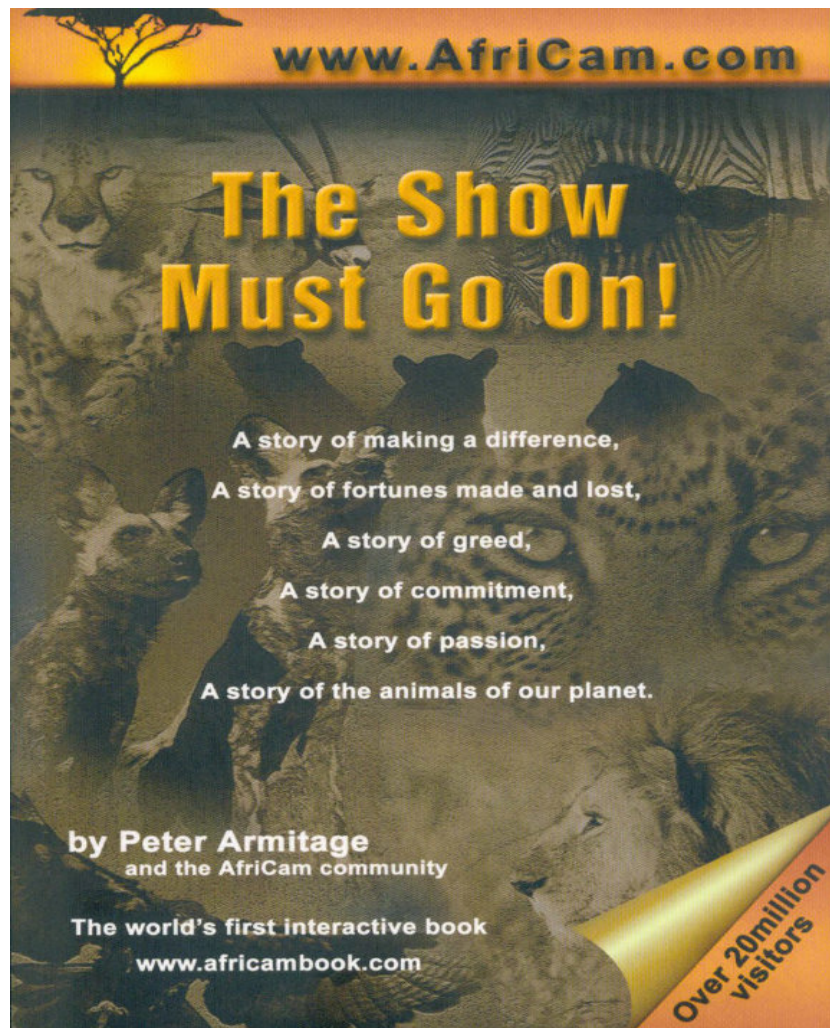
The community, Pippa and the game rangers rallied to Todd’s assistance in an amazing fashion. Todd composed a list of the lost images and within weeks they had all been replaced.

WildlifeCampus soft launched on the 21st of November 2000 and got its hyperlink from the AfriCam homepage (the full launch) on 1 December 2000.

Todd recalls that “A year previously six individuals had met and agreed that an internet game ranging site was a viable idea. During that period hundreds of thousands of Rands and countless hours of work had been put in to bring the dream to life. At that point we would find out whether anybody else cared.

“It took a few minutes for my slow brain to register that there was a new link on the Africam site – ‘WildlifeCampus.’”

Cammer Tabatha recalls that “I went



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

straight to the site and could not believe what I was seeing – an online course for wannabe Game rangers? Could it be? How did they know? After registering I took the free Elephant test – this looked like it could be a lot of fun! After all, if I could get 80% on my first test after reading the component through just once, there must be hope for me. Little did I know how much fun it would be (or how ‘tricky’ some of the future test questions, or that the ‘tricky’ questions would lead eventually to the build up of a wonderful community of students).

“I was hooked. I bought the course as soon as I could, to find out from Todd later that I was in fact, the first student to actually purchase the whole course – I am still trying to work out if that was good fortune or a big mistake on my part!”

As the above exert suggests, WildlifeCampus was pretty much an instant success. This was due to two main reasons. Firstly we had produced the right product. It was unparalleled, unique, cheap and had a very wide appeal. Secondly and equally importantly we had AfriCam which provided up with an instant core community of wildlife enthusiasts and a passing traffic of millions.



WildlifeCampus achieved a remarkable feat in that it was cash positive (generating income to cover monthly expenses) from its first month of operation. This appears to be the biggest opportunity on the internet at present – selling digital products which have a low cost of sales and do not have the complication of delivery.

“Improper Thawtes” - November 2000

We desperately needed to find another investor to replace Middlemas and I had approached Mark Shuttleworth, the now famous AfroNaut (he subsequently became the second “space tourist”) and entrepreneur.

26-year-old Shuttleworth had swapped his Thawte digital certification business earlier in the year for US\$550m worth of Verisign shares. He was the South African success story of the internet. His Cape Town-based business was relatively small, with 21 employees but Verisign, the market leader in this industry, wanted to buy him out to give themselves more pricing power.

The primary secret behind Shuttleworth’s business success was timing; he was able to take advantage of the internet boom before it fizzled out.

Rumour has it that in the prior year, Thawte had generated R19m in turnover and had made a small loss. But Nasdaq-listed Verisign was trading at enormous multiples and only needed to issue 2% of its shares to buy its biggest competitor,

which was how Verisign viewed the purchase. The income statement of Shuttleworth’s business did not really matter. JB had ironically made an offer for R100m (2% of the eventual selling price) for the business a few months earlier, which had been rejected.

This is an indication of the irrational nature of valuations in this era. What was worth US\$10m to one investor was worth US\$550m to another investor a few months later.

The Thawte sale was the only real taste that South Africa had of internet mania and the extent thereof. There were many transactions similar to that of Thawte in the US and many new dollar millionaires emerged.

Because of its international audience, it could have been possible for AfriCam to participate in this mania, but we were too late. By the time AfriCam was having its first discussions with Merrill Lynch, Shuttleworth had already sold and cashed in. But there was a crazy time where these valuations really were achieved.

Shuttleworth got the sale right in many respects and the South African exchange control regulations worked heavily in his favour. The South African authorities ruled that he had to bring all of the money back to South Africa and this meant that he could insist that there were no regulations on him selling his Verisign shares. It is standard practice in this type of transaction for the seller to be forced to retain the majority of his or her shares for a two or three year period.

Shuttleworth was able to sell his shares and sell them he did. Within a few months he had realised close to US\$550m in hard cash, which he brought back to South Africa. With the subsequent decline of the Nasdaq, which Verisign followed, if Shuttleworth had been forced to keep his shares they would have been worth US\$50m at the end of 2002.

Money makes people jump to conclusions and both Graham and I were expecting Mark Shuttleworth to be arrogant about his success. I am not really sure why, perhaps there is an element of jealousy, perhaps it is just human nature.

“I bet you he burns at least half of his money within months,” I said to Graham, bearing in mind a story that I had recently read about him buying his own jet. “Here you have a guy who got the timing right and he knows nothing about financial markets or private equity. He is going to make some big mistakes.”

I could not have been more wrong. Mark was intelligent, personable, cautious, honest and down-to-earth.

"I guess Thawte was not that different from AfriCam, I just got lucky with the buyer," Mark said modestly.

Some observers dismiss the business he created, but it was not all about timing. There was also a very successful, innovative and entrepreneurial business.

We explained the AfriCam story to Mark and explained that we were looking for an investor for about R15m (US\$1.5m). He seemed to be intrigued with our business, but he did not seem to have a fascination with wildlife.

I found his caution impressive as he explained that "I know nothing about investing and the last thing I am going to do is start investing willy-nilly.

"I have got some professional advisers in place and want to make sure that I do not burn money on irrational investments like many people do when they first make money," Mark said, directly contradicting all the things I had said to Graham before the meeting.

Mark did not eventually invest. He was not making private equity investments and was funding businesses that were being developed under his wing at his premises in Cape Town. But that was fine. I was happy for him that he was so sensible and he will die a rich man. And that is not only because it is extremely difficult to spend US\$550m. (He called this business Here Be Dragons, or HBD: www.hbd.com).

That day was a day for meeting with the rich and famous and we made our way to Stellenbosch after the Shuttleworth meeting, for an appointment with tobacco billionaire, Anton Rupert.

First we stopped at the Rembrandt offices, where Venfin is situated. Venfin had made us a provisional offer to invest in AfriCam. Mark Taylor was our main contact and conducted the relationship with a great degree of professionalism. While at Venfin I noticed a rather shoddily framed picture in the reception. When we arrived at Rupert's offices there was a book on the reception table with that very same picture on the cover. It was entitled "The Works of Pierneef" and our host told us the picture was worth around US\$1m.

We met with Rupert and the WWF (World Wildlife Fund) executive committee at their offices. Anton Rupert controlled the tobacco empire of Rembrandt (which was subsequently sold to British American Tobacco) and the luxury goods business of Richemont, which includes brands such as Dunhill and Cartier. Some analysts estimate his family wealth at over R30bn (US\$3bn).

The purpose of the meeting was to get WWF support for our lottery initiative and we eagerly presented our plan to the committee. I was sitting next to Anton Rupert and was surprised to see that his notes were bigger than those of all the other attendees. I glanced over to see that his A4 page had been enlarged to A3 so that his ageing eyes could read the page.

I also learnt another lesson for life at this meeting: If you are a billionaire, all your jokes are funny. Rupert cracked three rather weak jokes during the course of the meeting and they were all met with raucous laughter.

In essence the laughter was a sign of respect for a man who had achieved as much as any other South African in a lifetime. His commitment to conservation was profound, and besides being a strong patron of the WWF he, even more significantly, the founder of the Peace Parks Foundation.

The mission of the Peace Parks Foundation is "To facilitate the establishment of Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs), supporting sustainable economic development, the conservation of biodiversity, and regional peace and stability."

The Peace Parks Foundation website (www.peaceparks.org) explains that "on 27 May 1990, Dr Anton Rupert, the President of WWF (South Africa) met with Mozambique's President Joaquim Chissano to discuss the possibility of a permanent link being established between some of the protected areas in southern Mozambique and their adjacent counterparts in South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

"If successfully implemented, it would create the world's greatest animal kingdom ... Following another meeting between Dr Rupert and Pres Chissano in 1996, it became clear that interest in the peace park concept was not only growing within Mozambique and South Africa, but also in the other neighbouring states, and that a separate neutral body was needed to co-ordinate and drive the process of Peace Parks establishment and funding. Accordingly, the Peace Parks Foundation was established on 1 February 1997."

The best publicised success of the Foundation is the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park which, through a series of land corridors links Mozambique's Limpopo National Park, South Africa's Kruger National Park and Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou National Park.

The Board was suitably impressed with our presentation and was very keen to work with AfriCam. Agreements followed, which cemented the relationship.

Meet the team



Eloise Acx

COO

Eloise started with WildlifeCampus in 2013 and has headed the company for the past 11 years. Her job involves research, editing, course updates, creating new content, and much more.

"I am passionate about my job. I love being a part of something so meaningful. Education is a never-ending journey, and I'm excited to take that adventure with our students." Eloise

02



The African bush: Sound

By WildlifeCampus student

Amy Holt

Slow down, pay attention, and listen as you become more in tune with nature. Sound has the power to add depth to our lives. We have the ability to pick up many different sounds all at once. From the manic giggles of a spotted hyena to the snorting of impala. Through sound, we can gain a deeper understanding of the African bush.

03



At the crack of dawn, a combination of chirps, whistles, and sing-song calls awakens the African bush. These sounds can give away the species and its location. The African hoopoe is named after its distinctive call. During the mating season, the males make a series of mellow, flat 'hoo-poo' or 'hoo-poo-poo' notes. One of the most distinctive bird sounds of Africa is the haunting calls of the African fish eagle. The 'wheeee-ah-kleeuw-kleeuw-kluuu' call is often made while the African fish eagle is flying. As the name suggests, these birds feed primarily on fish. They snatch up fish with their large, clawed talons, and the spicules on their toes help them grasp the slippery prey. If the fish is too heavy, the African fish eagle will drop into the water and paddle to the nearest shore with its wings. African fish eagles mate for life and will make loud duetting calls to reinforce their bond.

Up in the trees, the vervet monkeys make a deep, snorting bark to indicate an eagle is nearby. Vervet monkeys are excellent communicators and have a complex system of predator-specific alarm calls. A gurgling chatter indicates a snake, and a loud staccato bark indicates a leopard. Each specific call helps them to determine where the danger is and how to escape. Chacma baboons have a strict hierarchal structure, with each call reflecting the rank of each member of the troop. The double bark 'bokkum' is given only by high-ranking males when there is aggression between troops or within a troop. Lower-ranking males use a shrill single bark as an alarm call. Female baboons in oestrus use a muffled growl or grunt during copulation to indicate desire. While infants use deceitful calls by screaming in alarm to get their mothers' attention to attack another female who has food that the infant wants.



As you continue further into the African bush, there is a low rumble as the engine tyres crunch on the sand. The high-pitched bark sound reveals that the zebras are greeting each other. While the snorting of impala announces the start of rutting season. Males snort to establish their dominance. The snorting and grunting sounds stem from their nasal cavity and are accompanied by the sound of clashing horns. Once a male has taken over a territory, he then mates with as many females as possible. It is rare for a male to hold onto a group of females for more than a week. The offspring of a herd will have several different fathers, which increases the genetic diversity.

At the watering hole, the grunts and groans of hippos catch your attention. Hippos are very noisy animals, with a group of hippos reaching 115 decibels. As semi-aquatic animals, hippos can communicate above and below the water's surface at the same time. The noise above the surface of the water comes from their nostrils. Underwater, hippos make a clicking sound that is very similar to the clicks used by dolphins, who are distant relatives of hippos. Hippos can recognise the calls of their own pod members and will respond less aggressively to them.

As the day heats up, the loud buzzing of cicadas overwhelms your senses. African cicadas are almost as loud as a chainsaw—107 decibels loud. The intensity and frequency depend on the species, temperature, and time of day. Despite producing the loudest insect sound, cicadas have no vocal cords and no lungs. A special organ, the tymbal, which is a pair of ribbed membranes at the base of the abdomen, is used to produce the sound. The tymbal contains a series of ribs that buckle one after the other when the cicada flexes its muscles; this produces sound waves that create the loud songs. Males use the loud buzzing sound to attract females for mating.

The eerie wailing of black-backed jackals heightens your senses. This high-pitched whining howl is often given in chorus, as individuals jackals respond when they hear the call of another pack member. Black-backed jackals will howl in response to a lion roaring or the whoops of a spotted hyena. Another eerie sound of the African bush is the iconic laugh of the spotted hyena. They make this high-pitched giggle when excited or nervous. A giggling hyena announces its personal identity, age, and social status to the rest of the clan. Older hyenas laugh in a lower pitch. More dominant hyenas produce a more orderly and reserved laugh. While subordinate hyenas produce a maniac laugh.





Spotted hyenas make whooping calls over long distances to communicate with each other. The whoop sound is used to find cubs, claim territory, or bring the clan together.

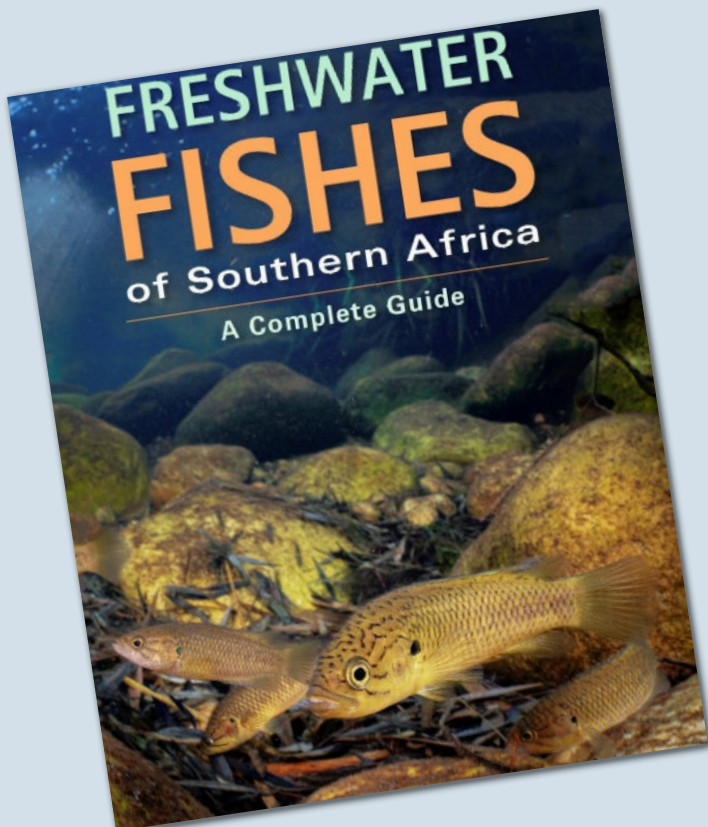
The deafening clap of thunder startles you as a thunderstorm engulfs the African bush. Thunder is the sound lightning makes. A loud clap indicates the storm is close by, while a rumble is further away. A boom sound indicates a lightning strike reaching the ground. In a fraction of a second, lightning heats the air to 30,000 degrees Celsius. This sudden heating causes the air to rapidly expand outward into the cooler air surrounding it, generating the acoustic sound waves. The thunderstorm starts and finishes within an instant.

As the stillness of the night floods through the African bush, the deep rumble of a lion roaring sends shivers down your spine. This raw power of nature can be heard from eight kilometres away. Lions are social big cats that use their roars to demonstrate ownership of a territory or to locate a distant pride member. They often call late at night when the air is cool, allowing sound to travel further. From a roar, a lion can pinpoint the exact location of that lion, and whether male, female, friendly, or hostile. The voice of any animal is produced by air from the lungs flowing past the vocal folds (also known as vocal cords). This causes the vocal folds to vibrate, breaking up the airflow and producing sound. The roar is produced because of the square-shaped vocal folds, floating hyoid bone, and a specially adapted larynx. Most animals have triangular vocal folds, but in the genus *Panthera* they have square-shaped vocal folds.

High fat depositions deep within the vocal fold ligament create the square shape. The square-shaped vocal folds can stretch, which allows lions to roar louder at less lung pressure. The suspensorium in the genus *Panthera* is lacking bone and is elastic. This allows the larynx to move freely, resulting in vocalisations that are much louder.

Nature is raw and unfiltered, with each sound telling a unique story. Be in the moment and tune in, as the sounds of the African bush become forever imprinted in your memory.



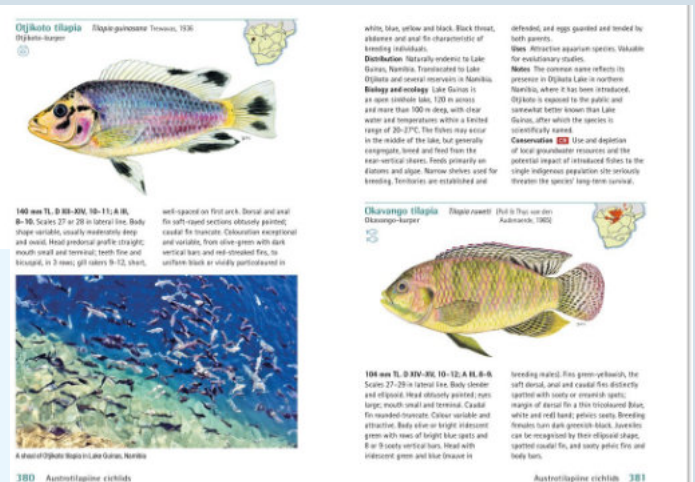


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Well over 300 freshwater fish species found in the region's rivers, lakes and dams feature in this fully revised third edition of Freshwater Fishes of Southern Africa. Updated and expanded, this definitive guide includes newly described species, the latest taxonomic changes, new photographs and full-colour illustrations, and up-to-date distribution maps.

An in-depth introduction, supported by explanatory illustrations and photographs, covers:

- a short history of fish science in the region
- ecoregions in which species occur
- anatomy, biology and ecology
- human impacts on fishes
- conservation status
- new understanding of evolutionary relationships between fish groups.

The book also includes:

- detailed species accounts (size, diagnostic features, biology, ecology, conservation, and uses by humans)
- succinct descriptions of large taxonomic groups of fish, with global distribution charts.

The Travel Buggz Adventures

It's the Travel Buggz Last day in the Kruger - what adventure will they go on next ?

"That evening they take a stroll around the camp, torches searching like strobe lights while the moon shines down to light their way. The fresh bushveld smell wafts through the air.

Hoot. Hoot. An owl peers down at them. "It's a Barn Owl," Aiden informs them.

"Pan your torch into the trees, you'll see spiders shining in the light."

"Let's lie on our backs and look up at the stars. See the Southern Cross," Bella Butterfly shows them.

"Pack the car neatly. Don't leave anything behind. Check in the cupboard and under the bed. Switch off the lights, close the door.

We have our last drive through the park to Malelane gate before our journey home," Bella says.

The car is filled with petrol, dust washed from the windows, Lucy's job is to drop the bungalow keys in the wooden box at the gate.

Their Kruger Park holiday is over.



All Travel Buggz story books are available in Afrikaans and Kruger is available in iSizulu.

The Travel Buggz Go to the Seaside

Bella Butterfly, Aiden Ant and Lucy Ladybug are heading off for a summer seaside holiday where there is plenty to see, do and learn.



"We're all going on a summer holiday, No more working for a week or two. Fun and laughter on our summer holiday, No more worries for me or you," Lucy Ladybug is packing her suitcase, singing merrily to the famous song.

"I can't wait to feel the sand in my toes and frothy white waves swishing over my feet," she joyfully helps pack the car for their holiday to Umhlanga Rocks in Durban.

"I spy with my little eye", Bella starts the game. "Something beginning with X..."

"An 'X'" cries Lucy. "What would start with an 'X' all the way out here?" She questions.

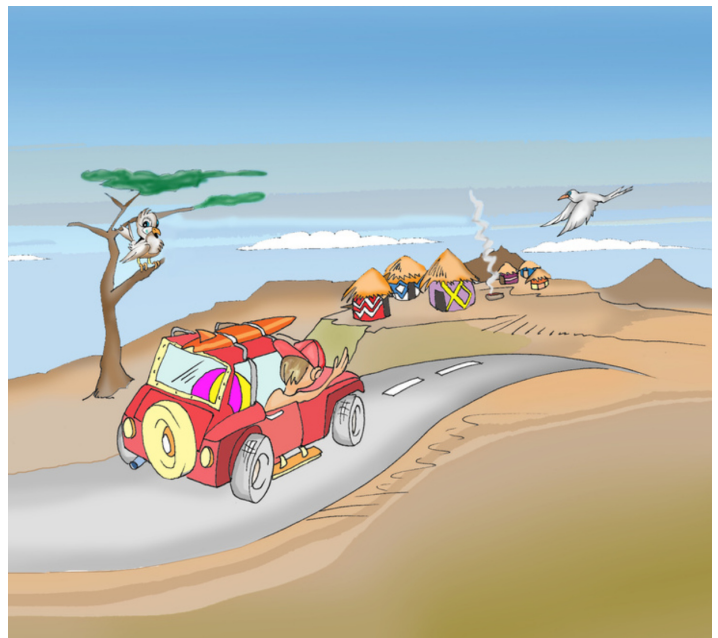
"All I see are hills and huts," Aiden Ant points out.

"Yes, and who lives in those huts?" asks Bella.

"The Xhosa people."

"But, that's spelled with a 'K'", complains Lucy.

"Not!" Aiden laughs at Lucy's bad spelling.



The Travel Buggz stories are a series of children's story books about the adventures of the author and her two children. If you would like copies of any of the nine titles of books, contact : sandy@travelbuggz.co.za

More stories in the collection:

The Travel Buggz visit Wild Horses in Kaapsehoop

The Travel Buggz help save the Rhinos

The Travel Buggz must stay Home

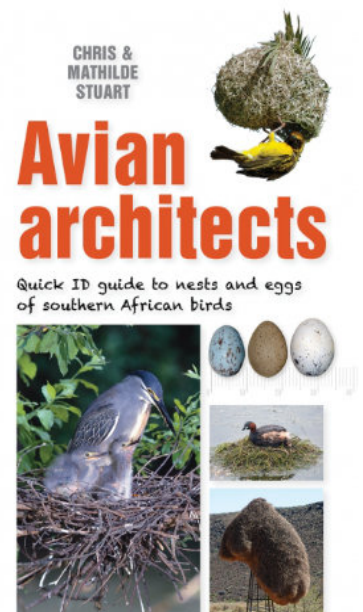
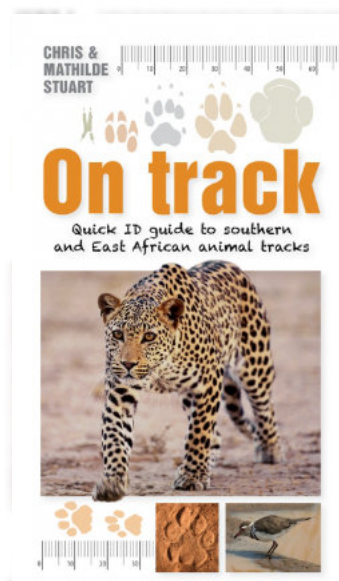
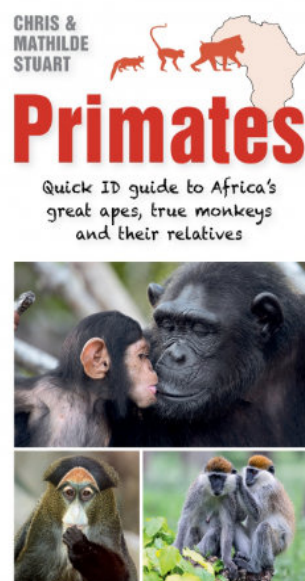
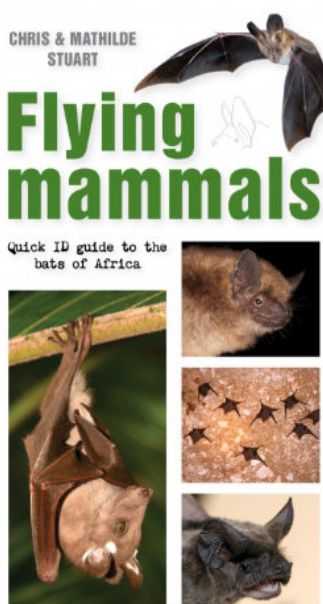
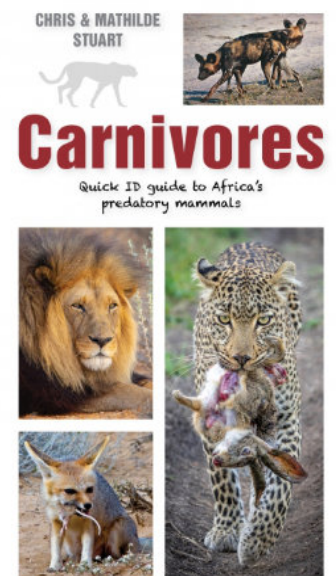
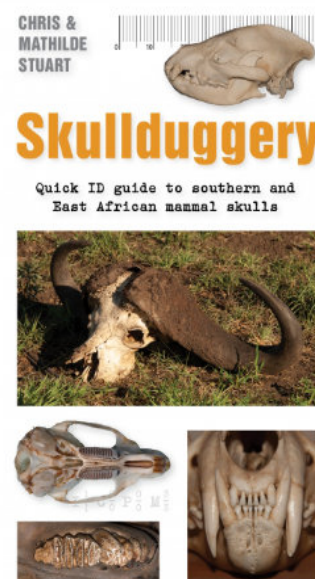
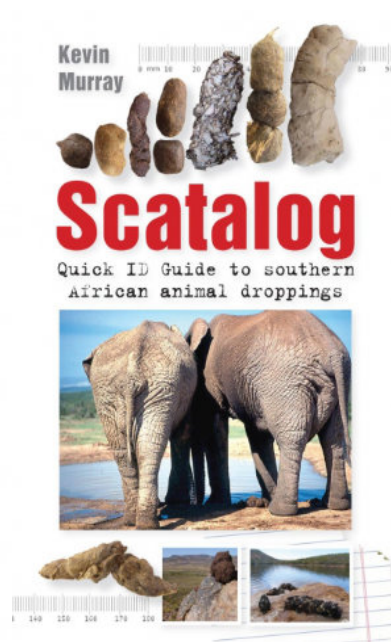
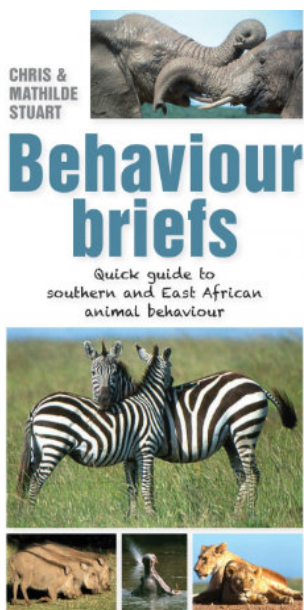
The Travel Buggz go Digging for Dinosaurs

Highly recommended field guides by



Highly recommended Quick ID Guide Series by Chris and Mathilde Stuart of Stuart On Nature! These compact guides will fit perfectly in your backpack. A must for every nature guide, explorer and wildlife enthusiast!

Most of their books are available online through Amazon, Loot.co.za, Readerswarehouse.co.za and Takealot.com (and, of course, in your favourite bookstore).





African Folklore

Listen to the Earth and Stars

By Credo Mutwa

The content that follows is written from transcribed tapes recorded by the late Credo Mutwa, one of Southern Africa's most celebrated Sangomas. The content therefore is not scientific but rather represent the feelings, beliefs and experiences of this exceptional man.

These stories are written in precisely the same way that Credo Mutwa tells them, with all their original colloquialisms and styles.

07

This is what I call a very special story, which is made in humble dedication to my late wife Cecilia Mutwa who used to love and adore the subject, discussed here.

The title of this story is: listen to the earth, listen to the stars.

First and foremost, our people believed that the earth was a living thing, that the earth was not just a thing of rocks, of rivers, of mountains, valleys, plains and seas.

The earth was something which was alive. The great thinkers of our people used to have a saying, which goes okupilayo kuweza okupilayo. And this saying in the Zulu language means that which is alive brings forth that which is alive. In old Africa our people were obsessed with the belief that the earth was a living entity, that it felt pain, that it felt joy, that it could also feel deadly anger.

So ingrained within the African soul was this belief, that Africans used to do a strange thing that was not done, as far as I know, by any other people anywhere in the world, even in ancient times. When Africans needed metal of any kind, metal such as copper, tin, silver, gold and even iron, they used to create mines, some of them of at a very great depth. They used to work these mines until the metal was almost, but not quite, exhausted.

Then there would come a day, which was known as the healing of the mother, ukulapa unina. This was an important day in which feasting was mingled with weeping. This was the day when hundreds of men and women would assemble from all over the land, regardless of tribe and they would perform an extremely amazing task - the closing of the mine. When white prospectors travelled through South Africa, they came across ancient mines which Africans had worked, and all these mines had either been partially or completely refilled. The refilling of a mineshaft was a task that used to take several months.

During that time, intertribal hostility and inter-clan feuding and quarrelling was strictly forbidden. Everybody had to perform the strange task of healing the earth mother of the injury that human beings in their greed and their need had inflicted upon her. Before the mine was closed, volunteers used to go down the mine and await their death, a horrible death of being crushed by falling stones.

They would sit there and their brothers and sisters on the surface would push large quantities of loose earth and rock upon them, refilling the mine. That is why in many instances when archaeologists reopened some of the ancient mines in South Africa, they used to find skeletons at the bottom of the mine.

These were people, men and women, who sacrificed themselves in order to placate the great earth mother. After the mine had been refilled, a white cow was sacrificed on top of the site.

And then the people went away. If there was a river nearby, the people, young and old, male and female, used to go into the river and bathed there, cleansing the dust away from themselves and then with songs and with drumming return back to their homes and resume their daily lives. What South African archaeologists do not know is this: whenever the archaeologists came across an ancient mine, which had not been refilled, that mine had not been created by black people, but by foreigners; Phoenicians, Arabs and other people who came to South Africa and other parts of Africa in search of gold. There was more to this obsessive worshipping of the earth, much more. When a tribe was settled in a place, there were men and women who were known as the listeners to the earth, they who listened to the earth. These were men and women, usually families and generations of people doing one thing over many years and their task was to observe very, very carefully what was happening in the environment in the tribe's territory.

They used to observe which trees were becoming extinct in the area; which plants, bulbs, roots or whatever was no longer in existence. If it was found that many plants, which had been growing in the area that the tribe had settled in, in early times, were now no longer in existence, then the tribe had to prepare to move in order to give the earth a rest. It was one of the duties of an African King to travel through each part of his empire, eating wild plants, tasting whatever fruits the land provided and drinking water from all the streams that flowed through the empire. A king had to know the taste of every river that flowed through his land, every stream, every pool and every lake, he had to ritually taste the water from there. One day at the height of his rule, King Shaka travelled the length and the breadth of the former Natal Province and wherever he went he ritually tasted the water that is to be found in that place. He did it exactly as a wine taster does.

First a clean calabash was given to the king and the water from a stream was scooped into this calabash and the king had to smell the water. And then the king had to sip the water and keep it in his mouth, savouring it and even listening spiritually to it. Should the king find a strange taste in the stream, a taste which was not there before, a deep investigation had to be launched to find out why this stream now tasted as it was now tasting.

Shaka travelled from the North of Zululand right down the map. It was a journey, which took him almost a whole year accompanied by his attendance and his warriors. He ritually tasted the water of every river that flowed through the land of the Zulus until he came to a place where the water tasted amazingly good; the water was so pure. It was like music against the great king's pallet.

Shaka called that place amanzimtoti, a name, which the place still bears to this day, the land of the pure, good tasting waters.

Then he came to another place where there was a river but where there was so much mud that the hooves of the king's cattle were often sucked deep into the mud with the result that the beasts had to struggle to free themselves of the clinging mud. King Shaka named this place ixobo, which is a word imitative of the sound that a cow's leg makes as it frees itself from the mud.

It was very, very important to listen to the earth, to observe any change in the environment, however small. Our people believed that if you see a small change in the environment, if you see one or two plants which used to grow there, no longer growing there, you must know that there is a big evil spirit at large in the land and you mustn't just say that the loss of those plants is a small thing. Our people used to say nothing is small in the chest of the earth mother, everything is important.

There is overwhelming evidence that in the last sixty years or so, the environment in southern Africa has undergone a definite change and this change is extremely complex, deep-rooted and dangerous.

Firstly, it has been noticeable during the lifetime of a person of my age, that the rainfall pattern in South Africa has definitely undergone a change.

Rains used to fall in the month of July in this country, which is why our people had a name for July, which means the month of the first rains. Today the rains have become later and later and later, and sometimes freak weather storms occur throughout South Africa. Some years ago, we had a heavy snowfall in South Africa during the month of October, which is the month of deep summer, the month in which our people used to celebrate the first harvest. We have had strange heat waves and these heat waves have wrought dramatic changes in animal as well as human behaviour. During these heat waves I have noticed, crime increases dramatically in South Africa, crime of violence, murder, rape and other forms of negative behaviour.

Drivers become more aggressive on the roads. Criminals become more vicious and more pitiless towards their victims. There is definitely something in the air.

But let me tell you more.

Amongst the people who were known as the watchers of the earth were men and women with good memories who used to listen to the thunder during a thunderstorm and imitate its sound accurately. These people, one of whom is my aunt Mina, who is a hundred and three years old, angrily confirm that the sound of thunder in today's thunderstorms is totally different from the sound of thunder for example during the 1930's.



My aunt, Mina, says that there is now an angry sound to the thunder of today's thunderstorms, an electric sound, which was not there before. And when she imitates the thunder that she knew as a girl and imitates today's thunder it is a wonder to listen to her. She says that the thunder of olden times, in the 1930's and the 20's, had a fertile sound to it, a pregnant hollow sound. And this what she says it sounded like: Du-du-du-du-whaaa. But she says that today the thunder is different. It has a snarling quality to it and this is how she imitates it: Ka-ka-ka-ka-ka-whaaa. And she is right, she is quite right.

Africans have strange ways of dealing with strange things. When a child or a highly strung man or woman shows a natural fear of thunder and lightning and becomes a nervous wreck during a thunderstorm, then our people treat this person in an interesting way. They take an empty, clean basin (in ancient times it used to be a bowl made of clay) and they put it outside during a thunderstorm. On the following day, the basin full of rainwater, is taken to the person who is afraid of the thunder and they are ordered to drink.

This is called drinking the thunder, drinking the lightning.

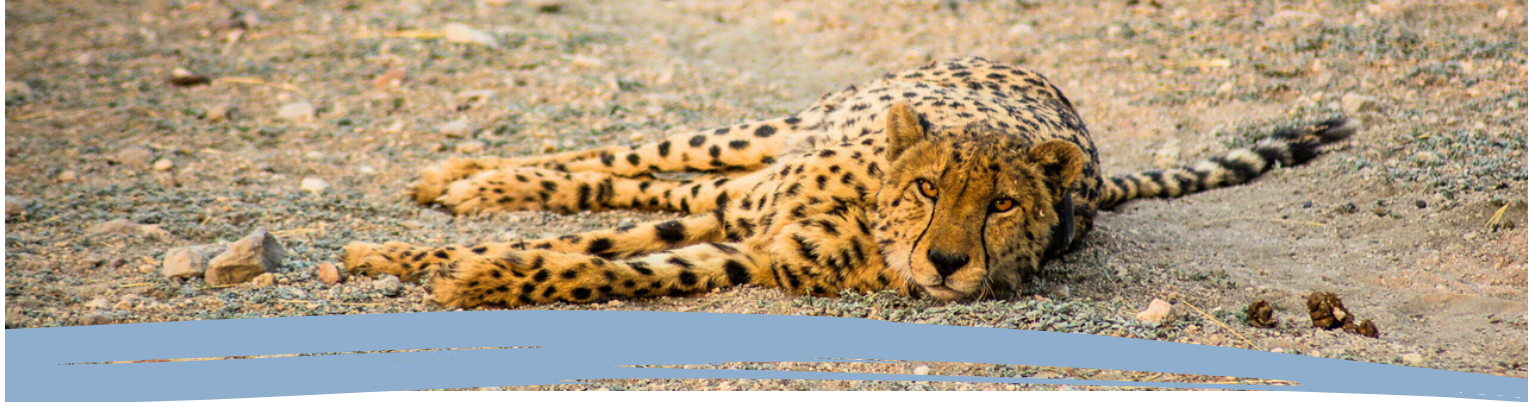
We believe that if somebody ingests something he becomes less afraid of it. So, if a nervous person drinks rainwater, which has come as a result of a thunderstorm, then that person will become less afraid of the thunderstorm. For many years my aunt Mina was such a person. As a child she had seen relatives of hers killed when lightning struck a hut and that trauma filled her with fear of thunderstorms for many years. So, over the years she fought to rid herself of this fear by drinking water from a thunderstorm.

Mina says, and I fully agree with her, that the taste of rainwater has changed in the last fifty years or so. She says that rainwater now has a strange bitter taste upon the pallet.

She has an old dish of clay with which she receives rainwater at nearly every thunderstorm. She puts this dish outside, covered with a cloth to ensure that no dirt should enter with the rainwater and the rainwater filters through this cloth. When she drinks the water, she says in strange Zulu that the water tastes of motorcar and she calls it the urine of the motorcar. A taste, which was not there before, and many old people of her age agree with her that the taste of the rain of our country has altered. Furthermore, the same kind of change is found when these old people eat snow from some of our country's highest mountains, for example the Drakensberg Mountains. They all say that the water in the snow as well as the rainwater has changed in taste.

Mina also says that some of our rivers, such as the Tugela River and especially the Msoendusi River, taste of dirty oil and dirt metal. I fully agree with these old people. Our country has undergone a dangerous change climatically and something must be done about this immediately. I wish that those of our country in authority would speak to these ancient people whose duty was to taste the rain, to listen to the thunder, to listen to the earth and to listen to the stars.





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Like water off a duck

By David Batzofin



This adage was brought home when I recently found myself at a birding destination where I spent a weekend trying to up-skill my bird photography.

It was sort of the “Quest for the Perfect Duck Shot”.

I had read about a bird photographer, who over 6 years, took 72000 images of a Kingfisher, trying to get the perfect shot. He eventually did, but it cost him his marriage. I was not prepared to go to those lengths and I only had 48 hours.



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



It was a crisp Saturday morning, the kind of day that promised adventure, camaraderie, and more duck photos than any birder could ever need.

I was awake early and I made my way to a pond on the property that I had been shown on the afternoon of my arrival.

With bird photography, as with any wildlife image, it is all about the light, therefore early mornings or late afternoons are the best times.

I settled down in the above-ground platform and waited for the ducks to perform for me.

But it turns out it was not going to be as simple as I thought.

I would focus on a duck and out of the corner of my eye I would see another doing what I wanted to capture.

Thus began a game of “watch the birdie” not too dissimilar to a tennis match, trying to preempt which duck would perform. As I said, not as easy as it seemed, but my enthusiasm was matched only by my lack of experience in this field of photography.

Being higher than the dam, I was unable to crouch behind

any of the water plants or vegetation, hence me sitting like a sniper with my lens balanced on a beanbag for stability.

The thing about ducks I thought to myself, is they have a mind of their own. Just when I was certain that I had got the perfect shot—poof—they dive under, leaving nothing but a ripple.

My camera sounded like a machine gun as I fired off numerous shots in excitement, but each was a blurry mess of wings and not much more.

Shot after shot of empty water with ripples and a single floating feather.

I was getting frustrated and impatient. But as I was to discover, bird photography is about patience...and that and not the image was the lesson that I learned.

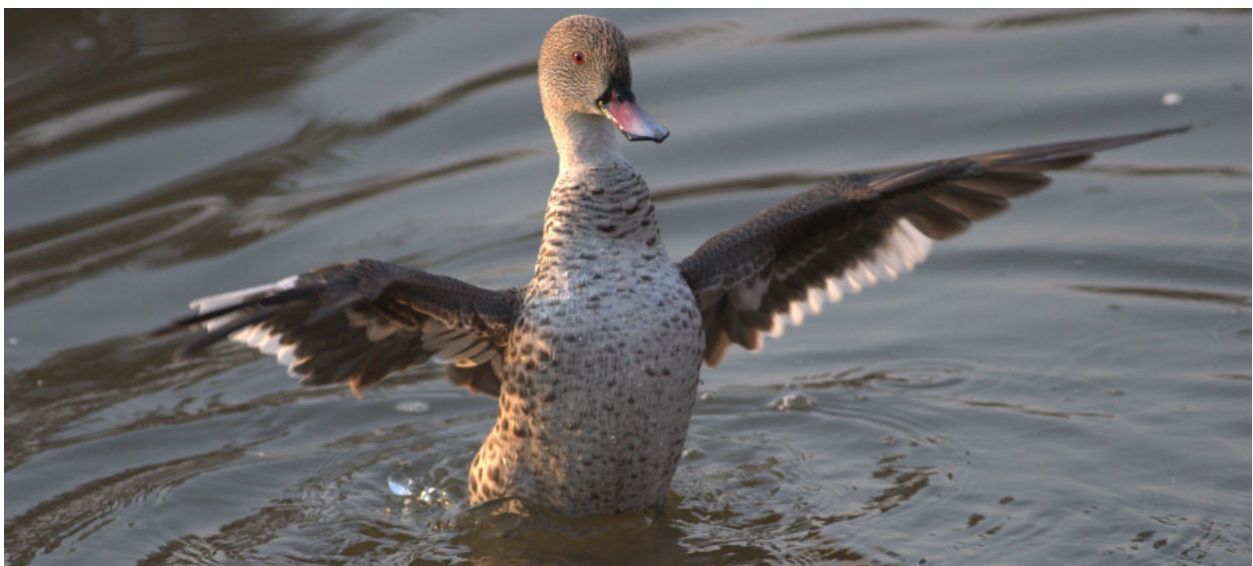
Finally, the shots weren't blurry, the light was perfect, and the water looked like liquid diamonds cascading off the Cape Teal's smooth feathers.

Eventually, I got the series of shots that I had spent most of the morning waiting for.

And all it took was a few hours of patience, about 2 hundred and fifty bad shots, and a sore back from crouching over my camera.

During that weekend I was to discover that patience and persistence will provide.

And if not tomorrow is another day and there is always another perfect shot waiting.



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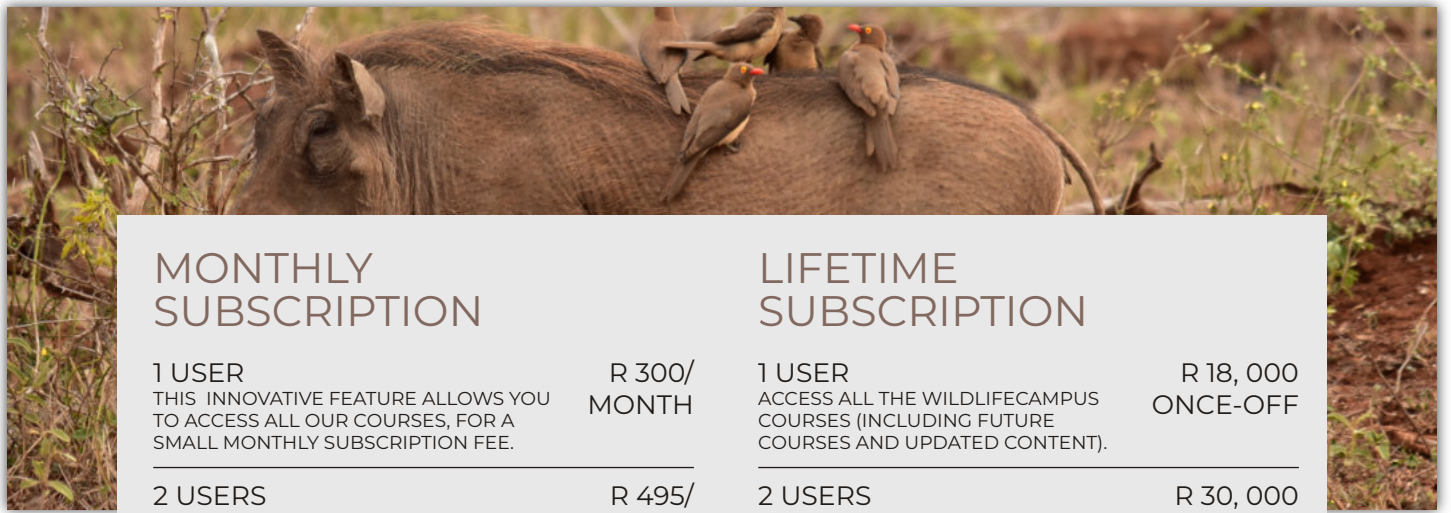
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