



# Wildlife Campus

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# Magazine

What type of guide  
will you be?

Part #4

My Rhino,  
By Ochre  
Art supporting  
conservation

Just another day  
in Africa  
By David Batzofin

Fossorial snakes  
by ASI

Cheetah,  
Racing towards extinction?  
By Amy Holt



# WildlifeCampus

## What type of guide

## Will you be? Part #4



WildlifeCampus CEO  
Todd Kaplan

In this feature, Garth Thompson explores types of guides.

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

### The genuine bush lover, but anti-people guide

There are a number of guides who really enjoy all that the wilderness has to offer. They are often exceptionally knowledgeable in certain fields, on plants, birds, butterflies, etc. They are at their happiest when walking for days on end alone in the bush, being at one with nature, living simply, with time of no importance, and pursuing their special interests.

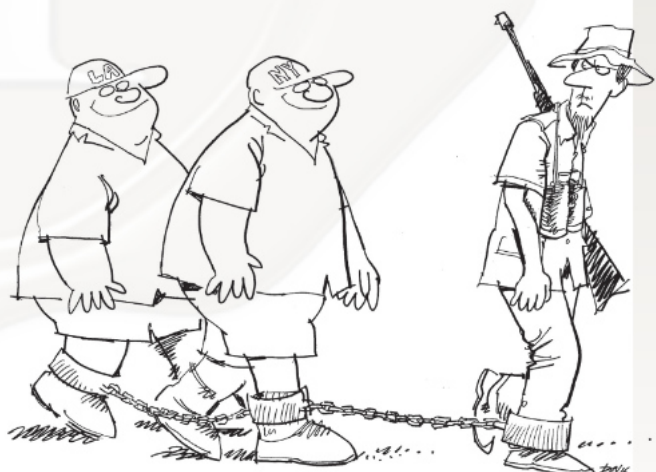
These guides are often former national park wardens, rangers, research officers or museum curators, who have spent most of their working lives dedicated to the protection and research of an ecosystem where tourists are not on the indigenous species list!

They were often very poorly paid in these government jobs. Many left the National Parks, and here we are talking about the National Parks Departments across Sub-Saharan Africa, because of government bureaucracy, corruption, or politics. Many begrudgingly join the commercial wildlife sector as guides or hunters. It enables them to continue a life in the bush, which has always been their place of employment and enjoyment, often even since leaving school. Most genuinely love and appreciate the outdoor life. Putting up with tourists is often the price they have to pay.

If such a guide meets a client who shares the same interest, be it birds or plants, he or she will excel as a guide, so pleased to find someone who appreciates the smaller things in the bush instead of hankering after big game. Such a person will often end up giving this type of tourist the trip of a lifetime.

Unfortunately, the 'average' tourist wants a maximum and diverse wildlife experience in minimum time, so there are not many folk who find a place on his checklist of enlightened people.

This type of guide will therefore give a mediocre safari to the 'average' client. They will not go out of their way to try and satisfy the client's dreams and desires.





# What type of guide Will you be? Part #4

They will give just enough to ensure the client returns from the safari without a complaint, but will not form firm friendships or be requested as a guide again.

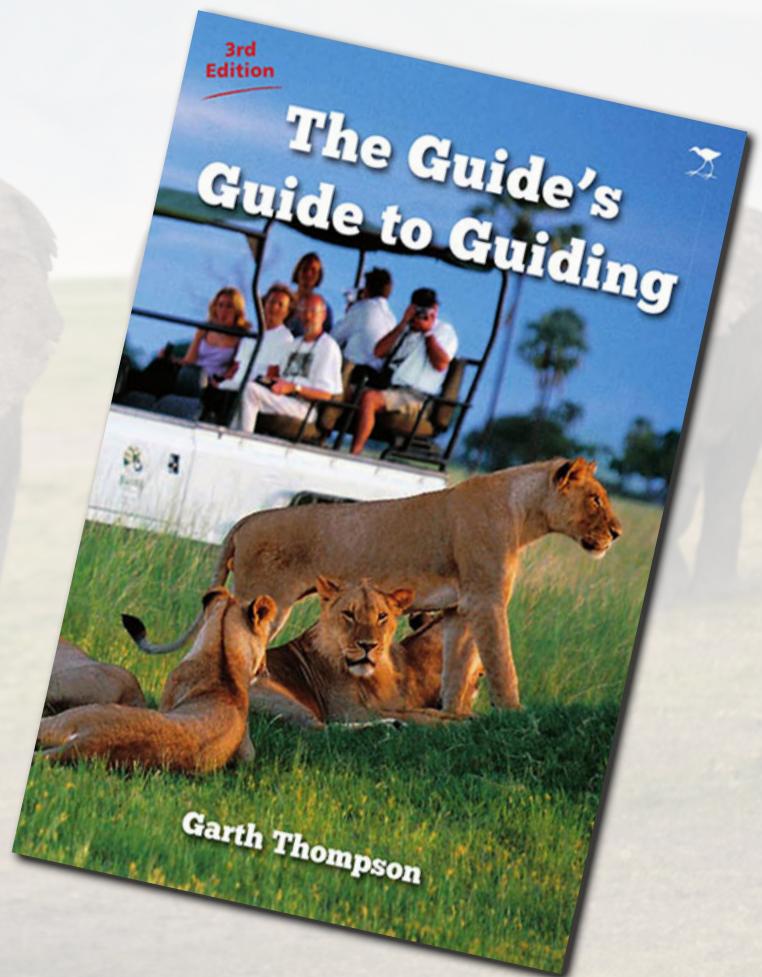
Often, when asking clients a few weeks later who their guide was at a particular safari camp, they will struggle to recall his or her name and describe him as the 'plant person', or the guy who studied vultures for 25 years, or the woman who used to be the curator of the insect department in the regional museum.

How would you feel as a guide, if your clients could not remember your name a week after you had taken them on safari? Did you give them the best of your knowledge, show them your area and its contents to the best of your ability, or did you just drive around pointing out the obvious?

**Click the book to try the  
FREE component of the WildlifeCampus  
Guide's Guide to Guiding course!**

Every job will have its share of tedium and repetitiveness, but guiding should have less than most. When you find that you are just "going through the motions", that is the time to re-evaluate whether you are in the right career.

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





# In this Magazine

**Editorial: “What type of guide will you be?” Part #4** 2

**Fossorial snakes by ASI** 6

**My Rhino by Ochre** 8

**Cheetah, racing towards extinction by Amy Holt** 10

**“Just another day in Africa” by D. Batzofin** 14

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# FOSSORIAL SNAKES



The word fossorial comes from the Latin word “fossor”, which means “digger”. Fossorial snakes are snakes that have adapted to life underground - spending most of their time hunting and mating beneath the surface in loose sand or burrows. These snakes usually have some adaptation for life underground, often having small heads and large rostral shields (scale on the nose), enabling them to push through the soil. They do occasionally move to the surface, usually after heavy rains when the soil and burrows may be flooded, and sometimes in search of mates and food.

There are a variety of snakes that are truly fossorial and many others that will move underground when conditions above ground are unfavourable.



## Thread Snakes and Worm Snakes

These snakes are truly fossorial, spending their lives underground, feeding, mating and moving through loose soils or in tunnels made by insects such as ants and termites. They feed almost exclusively on the larvae and eggs of ants and termites and are often found under rocks with ant or termite colonies. These snakes often move to the surface on warm nights after rain and can be seen crossing the road, found in swimming pools or coming into houses occasionally.



## Shovel-snouts

The Shovel-snout snakes are often found under rocks, but may come to the surface at night to seek reptile eggs in the cracks of rocks and logs as well as leaf-litter. They use the large, pointed rostral scale on their nose to bulldoze through the soil and leaf-litter. They are also at home in old termite mounds, where a host of other reptiles may lay eggs.



## File Snakes

File Snakes are large snakes that spend most of their time underground where they may hunt other snakes and nesting rodents.

One animal, fitted with a tracking unit and followed by researchers at Wits University, spent eleven months underground, only surfacing after the first summer rains. These snakes can exceed 1.5 meters in length and are often associated with large termite mounds with extensive tunnel systems.



## Mole Snakes

These large snakes follow their favourite prey items, Mole Rats. Mole snakes spend a large part of their lives underground in rodent burrows. They are often seen basking near an open Mole Rat burrow and quickly disappear down the burrow when approached. On the west coast of South Africa, they can reach up to two meters, and although they possess no venom, they can inflict a painful bite that may require medical attention and even stitches.



## Harlequin Snakes

These are beautifully marked snakes with orange, red, yellow, black, and white patterns or stripes. They are small snakes seldom exceeding 50 cm. These snakes live underground and feed on other snakes and legless lizards. They have small heads with small black eyes.





### **Purple-glossed Snakes, Natal Black Snakes and Stiletto Snakes**

These shiny black snakes can be tricky to tell apart, all being robust with shiny scales and blunt heads. They all live underground and hunt other snakes, legless lizards and other vertebrates.

They can be found on the surface after heavy rains. The Purple-glossed Snake and Natal Black Snake are quite docile, and we have very few documented bites from these two species.

The Stiletto snake on the other hand accounts for around 10-12 bites a week in the rainy season. It is a slender blackish snake that bites readily if handled. They have large fangs which can protrude sideways and stab prey. This means they cannot be held safely in any manner. They use these large fangs to hunt in the confines of burrows where there is limited space to strike at prey.



### **Centipede-eaters**

There are four species of centipede-eaters in southern Africa. These are slender snakes, seldom reaching 50 cm in length. They are secretive snakes that live under rocks and logs and underground. They feed exclusively on centipedes and have a mild venom that has little effect on humans.



### **Shield-nosed Snakes**

There are five species/sub-species in southern Africa. These medium sized stocky snakes have a pronounced scale on the nose, which is used to push through soil. In captivity we have seen these snakes using the head and neck to dig in soft sand. They are nocturnal and very rarely seen during the day as they find shelter underground or burrow under large rocks. On warm and rainy nights, they will actively hunt frogs and toads.



### **Quill-snout Snakes**

The Quill-snout Snakes are well built for a life underground. They are elongate snakes with a pointed nose. These snakes are hardly seen except after heavy rains where they may be on the surface. Researchers working on meerkats in the Kalahari report the Meerkats digging these snakes up from the roots of bushes and eating them.

Most snakes will make use of burrows and holes to hide or escape from threats like predators.

Rinkhals and many of the cobras will utilise a hole in a rockery or termite mound or those made by rodents. Pythons are also well known for using old aardvark or porcupine burrows for laying eggs. Even Puff Adders and Boomslang have been seen using holes to escape from predators. These snakes, however, are not truly fossorial and are more opportunistic.

Truly fossorial snakes spend most of their time underground, often feeding and breeding in underground chambers and burrows.



# My Rhino by Ochre

## Colourful rhinos supporting conservation



**M**y Rhino was originally started in 2012 primarily as a conservation initiative by Nicholas J Snaith.

What started out as a one-man initiative, quickly increased to a business of 26 people and became a true skill-training and development programme.

Over the course of the past 9 years, we have put a lot of time in developing comprehensive training and development leadership programmes.

My Rhino falls under the main brand of OCHRE.

### Who are we?

Ochre is a luxury brand inspired by the South African landscape and its cultural heritage.

### Why the name Ochre?

The name, 'Ochre', derives from the soil and the distinct range of pigmentation which is created when iron-rich minerals are oxidised.

The resultant clay soils form a warm array of yellow-golds, rusty reds and rich browns that have been used for cultural expression and creative pursuits for millennia.

### History of Ochre

Much of the rock art of the early San, Khoi and Bantu peoples in South Africa was created through the use of ochre pigments. Scattered throughout South Africa, these paintings tell the story of the landscape and the physical and spiritual lives of its inhabitants.

The soil for these artists was their means of expression and sheltered rock faces formed their canvas. These sites and artworks evoke and preserve traditions, cultures and lifestyles that would otherwise be lost - a rich narrative of the people of Africa.

Ochre pigments are also used in the adornment of the human body. The Xhosa people or amaXhosa of the Cape region use ochre pigments or imbola for the expression of beauty, health and culture.



*Famous Irish actor, film producer and environmental activist Pierce Brosnan holding his My Rhino.*



# My Rhino by Ochre

## Colourful rhinos supporting conservation

Decorative dots in white and yellow ochres are an ornamental feature painted on women's faces. Red and white ochres are used to paint the body in the performance of initiation rituals that mark the transition from boyhood to manhood.

Various shades of red ochre were used to dye the blankets that were customarily worn by the amaXhosa, which led to their name, the Red Blanket People.

The Ndebele people or amaNdebele of the northernmost regions of South Africa, traditionally used ochre pigments in their geometric designs and art. These iconic patterns include colourful geometric shapes outlined by white ochre and black lines of charcoal. The patterns form murals that adorn the outer walls of the traditional round houses of the Ndebele.

The soil is, quite literally, a part of the culture, creativity and art of South Africa. It is this expression and tradition that Ochre wishes to emulate.

Our pieces are of the soil. They adorn bodies, tables and otherwise vacant spaces in an expression of South African culture, art, spirit, and design.

### Our designs



Ochre seeks to use traditional designs, motifs, and depictions of endemic flora and fauna to inspire our pieces.

Naturally occurring materials like clay, leather and gold are favoured in their creation.

### Why support Ochre?

Our 'Proudly South African' philosophy drives us to support conservation, skills development and small businesses in the creation of each piece we curate.

We seek to ensure that we utilise and appreciate every resource our beautiful landscape and people have to offer. We thus ensure that the Ochre customer is in possession of a unique piece of South African creativity.

**More information?**

**Feel free to visit [ochreza.com](http://ochreza.com)**

**Or the [My Rhino Facebookpage](#)**



# Cheetah, fastest land animal

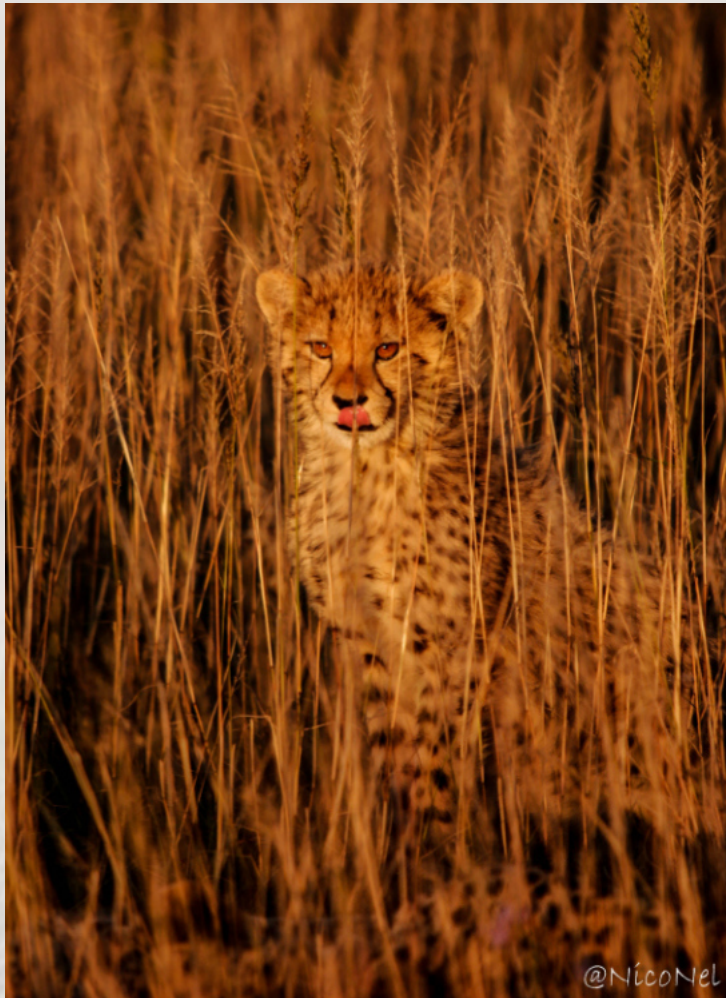
by Amy Holt  
WLC Student

## Racing towards extinction?



***The fastest land animal on the planet, the cheetah, is quickly heading for extinction because of us, humans! From cubs traded in the illegal pet trade, to unregulated captive breeding, to persecution from farmers. With only 7,100 cheetahs left in the wild, we must do more to conserve and coexist with this graceful animal.***

Historically, cheetahs were widely distributed throughout Africa in all suitable habitats from the Cape of Good Hope to the Mediterranean. Today, that picture is vastly different—the cheetah has lost 91% of its historic habitat. The largest population is sparsely distributed over Angola, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa and Zambia.



In South Africa, there are about 1,326 cheetahs of which approximately 500 are free roaming in unprotected areas, 412 are in the Kruger National Park, 80 are in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, and, 334 are in small fenced parks and private reserves. Human populations on the borders of parks are increasing rapidly which puts pressure on parks for resources and increases conflict between humans and wildlife on park boundaries. Generally, South Africa's national parks have increased in size over the past 15 years and, will probably increase in the future too. As Sir David Attenborough said: 'it is, surely, our responsibility to do everything within our power to create a planet that provides a home not just for us, but for all life on Earth.' Coexistence is the only way to ensure our species survives, as we rely on nature far more than it does on us.

People have kept exotic pets throughout history—emperors, kings and pharaohs kept cheetahs as a symbol of wealth. Akbar, a Mughal ruler of the sixteenth century modern-day India, was said to have owned 9,000 cheetahs over 49 years. Unlike other big cats, cheetahs are relatively docile and do not present a threat to the life of adult humans, making them a highly prized pet. Demand has exploded in recent years, with its graceful beauty and astonishing speed, the cheetah has become a status symbol, especially among young wealthy people.



# Cheetah, fastest land animal

by Amy Holt  
WLC Student

## Racing towards extinction?

Cheetahs once roamed areas of the Arabian Peninsula—the centuries-old tradition, along with a solid economy throughout the region, has supported a high demand for cheetahs and other exotic animals among the region's affluent population. Social media websites have provided people with the opportunity to easily advertise the sale of live animals. Instagram, in particular, is a major facilitator for the illegal wildlife trade in the Arabian Peninsula; with 135 in Saudi Arabia, 119 in Kuwait, 77 in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), 34 in Qatar, and 1 in Bahrain. Prices asked online range between US\$ 5,000 and US\$ 15,000 for individual cheetahs.

The illegal pet trade is decimating cheetah populations that are already small and nearly unsustainable. The Horn of Africa is the region where illegal trade is likely having the greatest impact on wild cheetah populations. Cheetahs are usually taken from the wild because it can be difficult to breed cheetah in captivity and cheetahs have high infant mortality rates. Therefore, it is unlikely that private facilities are successfully breeding cheetahs to meet demand. In the war-torn country, Somalia, up to 300 cheetahs are smuggled out of the country every year. The number is likely higher, as black market transactions are largely hidden and undocumented. High levels of poverty, corruption, weak legislation, and inadequate



enforcement are some of the main drivers of illegal wildlife trafficking in supply countries. In January 2017, the UAE set harsh penalties for owning or trading cheetahs and other big cats - fines of up to US \$136,000 and jail time up to six months. However, in spite of the UAE's tough stance, the trade persists—investigations have recorded more than fifty social media accounts within the UAE selling cheetah cubs. To act as a sufficient deterrent, penalties should reflect international recommendations to consider wildlife crime as a serious transnational crime on par with drugs and human trafficking. Monetary fines should be above the retail value of the animal on the international market.





# Cheetah, fastest land animal

by Amy Holt  
WLC Student

## Racing towards extinction?

The illegal wildlife economy operates by the laws of supply and demand. If demand continues, so will supply. A combination of fashion, technology and greed has contributed to a rise in trade of cheetah cubs. To reduce demand, we need to modify behaviour - cheetahs should no longer be regarded as a symbol of wealth and power. Cheetahs are wild animals, that belong in the wild and would never naturally interact with humans.

In South Africa, more than 500 cheetahs are kept in captive breeding facilities. During the past seven years, 27% of cheetah moved off game reserves were sold into captivity. Many are bred and hand-reared to be used as 'ambassador cheetahs' for organisations which claim they are used for an educational role. They are used for petting, walking with cheetahs, and as photo props from a few weeks old until fully grown adults. Once cubs outgrow the petting facilities, they are often sold to zoos worldwide or traded in the Middle East where they become exotic pets.

This is not conservation, it is not preventing the extinction of the cheetah in the wild, nor contributing to a healthy, sustainable captive population. It is purely for financial gain. The main aim of breeding facilities should be that of conserving the cheetah's population and, not of exploiting it for financial gain. This excessive captive breeding is not the answer for the plight of cheetahs in the wild. Captive cheetahs, wherever possible, should be re-wilded because it can and is successful in supporting the genetic diversity of cheetahs. Breeding facilities should be regulated and reviewed to ensure that they are not just exploiting cheetahs for their monetary value, under the pretext of doing so to support conservation.

During the last Ice Age, the world's population of cheetahs plummeted to just a handful. This event caused an extreme reduction of the cheetah's genetic diversity, known as population bottleneck. Suitable levels of genetic diversity are vital to any population's ability to adapt and overcome environmental changes and unexpected disasters. Unsustainable human expansion and irresponsible consumption can cause pressure on ecosystems worldwide. When habitat is destroyed and populations become fragmented and isolated, the rate of inbreeding increases and the genetic diversity declines.



In 2011, the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) launched its Cheetah Conservation Project, which includes a metapopulation approach. A metapopulation is a group of smaller population of the same species that are separated by distance, yet still interact as individual members and are moved from one population to another, in order to strengthen and diversify the gene pools. This prevents inbreeding and ensures the long-term viability of cheetahs in small fenced reserves. Fencing has its limitations. The main problem is that it impairs natural gene flow, which is especially problematic for low-density species, like the cheetah. Currently, there are 53 metapopulation reserves in South Africa.



# Cheetah, fastest land animal

by Amy Holt  
WLC Student

## Racing towards extinction?

Each reserve on its own cannot sustain a viable population of cheetahs, thus these animals have to be managed through a well-managed metapopulation approach using human-mediated translocations to ensure genetic and demographic integrity of the group as a whole.



Presently, the genetic diversity of the metapopulation managed across small reserves is more diverse than that of the free-roaming population. For example, Amakhala Game Reserve became home to a captive-born cheetah in September 2019, as part of the Wilding and Release Project jointly set up by Ashia and Kuzuko Lodge. Conservation projects like this, are only possible due to funding which comes from the presence of tourism. Just like in an ecosystem, everything plays a role in maintaining that environment and, would become unsustainable if a part was missing.

As the farming industry grows, farmland continues to encroach onto the cheetah's habitat. Farmers believe cheetahs are a threat to their livestock, so often kill them. Cheetahs will instinctually prey on wild game over livestock. Livestock is only targeted as a last resort, this is why maintaining healthy ecosystems is essential. Roughly, 90% of

cheetahs in Africa live outside of protected areas and, thus often come into conflict with people. Many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) run innovative conservation projects with farmers, in which both the farmer's livestock and the cheetah can be protected. Turkish Anatolian Shepherd puppies are raised with the herd, from about six to eight weeks of age, and will aggressively confront any intruders or threats, such as cheetahs, leopards, etc. Dogs are frequently trained to be used in conservation initiatives, including anti-poaching.

Unlike other big cats and pack predators, cheetahs do not do well in wildlife reserves—lions, leopards, hyenas compete with cheetahs for prey and will even kill cheetahs given the opportunity (cheetahs lose approximately 10-15% of their kills to them). The cheetah's unique morphology and physiology allow it to attain the extreme speeds (70mph in just three-seconds) for which it is famous. It has evolved for speed and is not built to fight other predators.

The cheetah is an indicator species of a functional ecosystem of medium-sized herbivores and can be used to demonstrate good management and a healthy biodiversity area. They are not just 'nice-to-haves', but fundamental requirements for the survival of our own species. If humans do not learn to coexist with Africa's most threatened big cat, it will soon be extinct in the wild.

It took four million years of evolution to produce this incredible predator and, only one-hundred to place it on the edge of extinction. Nature is quick to damage but, slow to fix. This is why nature is so precious!

So I ask you, are you going to allow the cheetah to continue its race to extinction?



# Just another day in Africa?

By David Batzofin



Well, it certainly started that way. Leaving the lodge in the early morning light, the stunning sunrise was like many others that I had experienced on previous visits to this game reserve. However, none of us on the game drive vehicle had any idea what awaited us, just a few kilometers away.

Our field guide was alerted to a disturbance a short distance off our chosen route by an unexpected dust cloud hanging in the still morning air. “Let’s go and investigate” were Kevin’s words as we turned left and headed towards the yelps and bellowing that we could now hear emanating from the cloud.

The first inkling of what could be happening was when we found a distressed female buffalo. Standing just off the small gravel road, she was wide-eyed and lowing frantically, it was her that alerted us to what we were about to experience.

What we discovered as we came around a corner was a pack of wild dog pups, that had brought down a 4-month-old buffalo calf right in the middle of a side road. This was the pack’s first kill and although the adults were standing close by, none of them stepped in to help the youngsters complete the kill successfully.



Did you know that an adult wild dog pack can strip a fully grown wildebeest to hooves, skin, and horns in under 10 minutes? Their Latin name, *Lycaon pictus*, means ‘painted wolf’. And much like the wolves in Europe and the USA, they are amongst the fastest eaters in the wild.

Although the buffalo remained close by, she never tried to rescue the calf. Neither did the large herd, of which she was a part, come back to help. Post the event, two scenarios were proposed. As the pair were walking at the back of the herd, the calf could have either been injured or ill. Youngsters with females are usually found in the middle of a herd where they can be protected by adult males and females. This was not the case here. Neither did the female make a concerted effort to rescue the calf. It only took one or two of the pups to keep her at bay.

The bellowing of the dying calf was not easy to listen to. I was able to almost block the sound out as I recorded the 20-minute incident and my first kill from start to finish. The other guests on the vehicle did not have any distractions and, as such, it became an emotional and immersive experience for them. It is not easy to witness a violent death, as this one was, however, it was a teaching outing for these pups who had to learn how to kill to survive into adulthood.



# Just another day in Africa?

By David Batzofin

Unlike the adults in the pack that understand how to kill quickly, here it was a struggle to subdue their prey and kill it efficiently. The nose was one of the first parts that were attacked as it was an easy target, but although it looked bloody, the wound was not fatal.

With so much blood around, I was amazed that the pups' teeth remained almost a pristine white. Ripping into the flesh left the dogs with bloody fur but their teeth were unsullied by the carnage that they wrecked on their meal.

Eventually, it seemed that the dogs started to understand what they needed to do to subdue and finally end the life of this calf. At this point, there was still intermittent noise from the calf as it struggled in vain to escape the attackers.

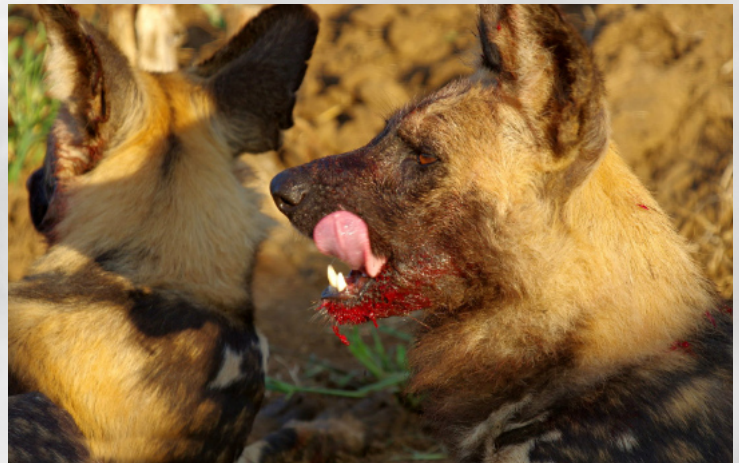
I believe that it was for that reason that the female still waited off to one side. Perhaps at some visceral level, she thought that there was still a chance of survival for her offspring? However, she eventually realised the inevitability of the outcome and moved off to rejoin the herd that had kept walking during this interaction.

Finally, the pups seemed to have gained the upper hand and the violence of the actual act had made way for the noise of feeding.

Unlike many predators who will squabble over prey, wild dogs will share the spoils and even take food back to their den for the elderly, the infirmed and the youngsters who are not yet old enough to partake in a hunt.

Lesson learned? One of the pups took a moment to raise its head to survey the surrounding bush for the adults of the pack. Was it looking for validation of a job well done?

To anthropomorphise this event and the effect that it had on me and the other guests on the vehicle would be a disservice to this pack. What I did discover, after waiting for more than 4 decades to experience an event like this, was that every day is a constant battle that plays out between predator and prey. For one to survive, another must die. In the African bush, that is the natural ebb and flow of life and death. It is not like being a witness to murder as in instances like this, it is done for sustenance and not for sport or pleasure.



Finally, after the bellowing had stopped, the air fell silent and with full tummies and their first successful kill, the entire pack moved off. We sat for a long while, internalising what we had just witnessed. And, although we were saddened by the loss of life, lessons had been learned and the pups would be able to hunt on their own in future. This was an expensive breakfast as far as the reserve was concerned. The buffalo here are BTB (Bovine Tuberculosis) free and as such can be worth up to R1mn each.

**Postscript:** *This entire pack later died of rabies, brought into the park via domestic animals that had infiltrated from nearby settlements. A truly sad and unnecessary ending to these endangered animals.*