



Wildlife Campus

LEARN PROTECT SAVE

Magazine



Trees

By Amy Holt

Course special!
3 courses 1 price

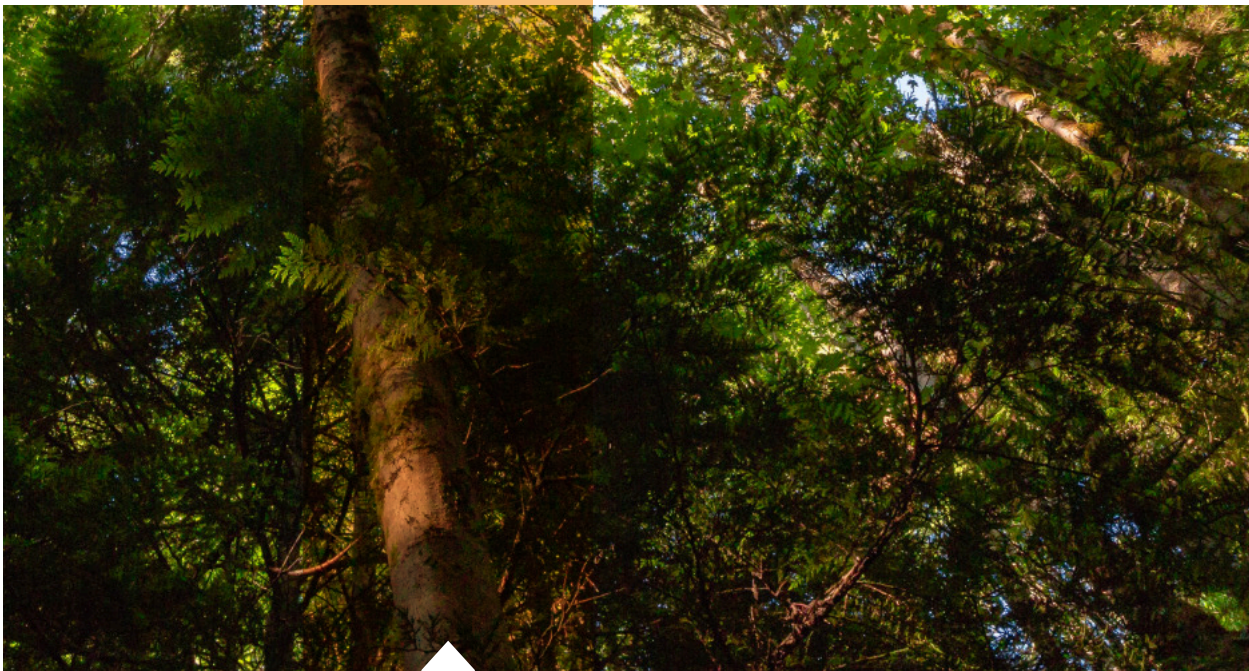
Fire and water

By Stuart on Nature

Hiding in plain(s) sight

By David Batzofin

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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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Click on any course in the list to try a free component of the course!

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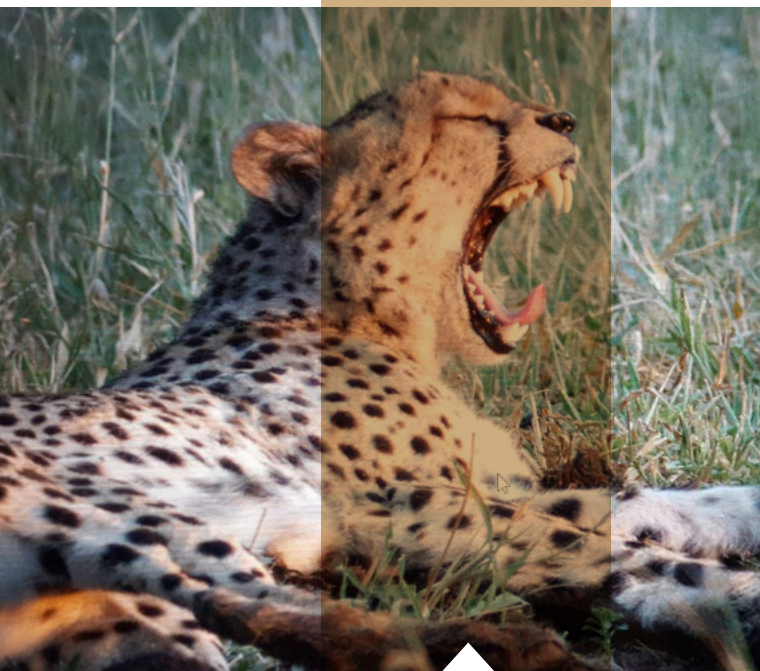


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In this article, Chris and Mathilde Stuart point out that fire and water are finite commodities. Especially with ever-growing human populations they will need to be managed carefully.

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David Batzofin shows us the importance of scanning the area around your vehicle before leaving it.

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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 the WildlifeCampus magazine where this exciting journey starts.

“Almost kissed by the Thatcher Foundation”- February 1999

“Now here is a joker,” Paul chuckled to Graham, reading a mail from somebody who wanted to invest in the business.

“Maybe he is serious, who is it?” questioned Graham.

“Mark Thatcher.”

“Who?”

“Mark Thatcher.”

“Isn’t that Maggie’s son?”

“It’s got to be a joker!”

“Send a mail back asking about Maggie,” insisted Graham.

Paul tapped his keyboard: “Dear Mark, Thank you very much for your enquiry. Yes, AfriCam is for sale for tens of millions of dollars. Oh, and by the way, are you Margaret Thatcher’s son?”

Paul was even more surprised when he received a reply from Mark a few hours later, very politely acknowledging his descent and asking for a meeting.



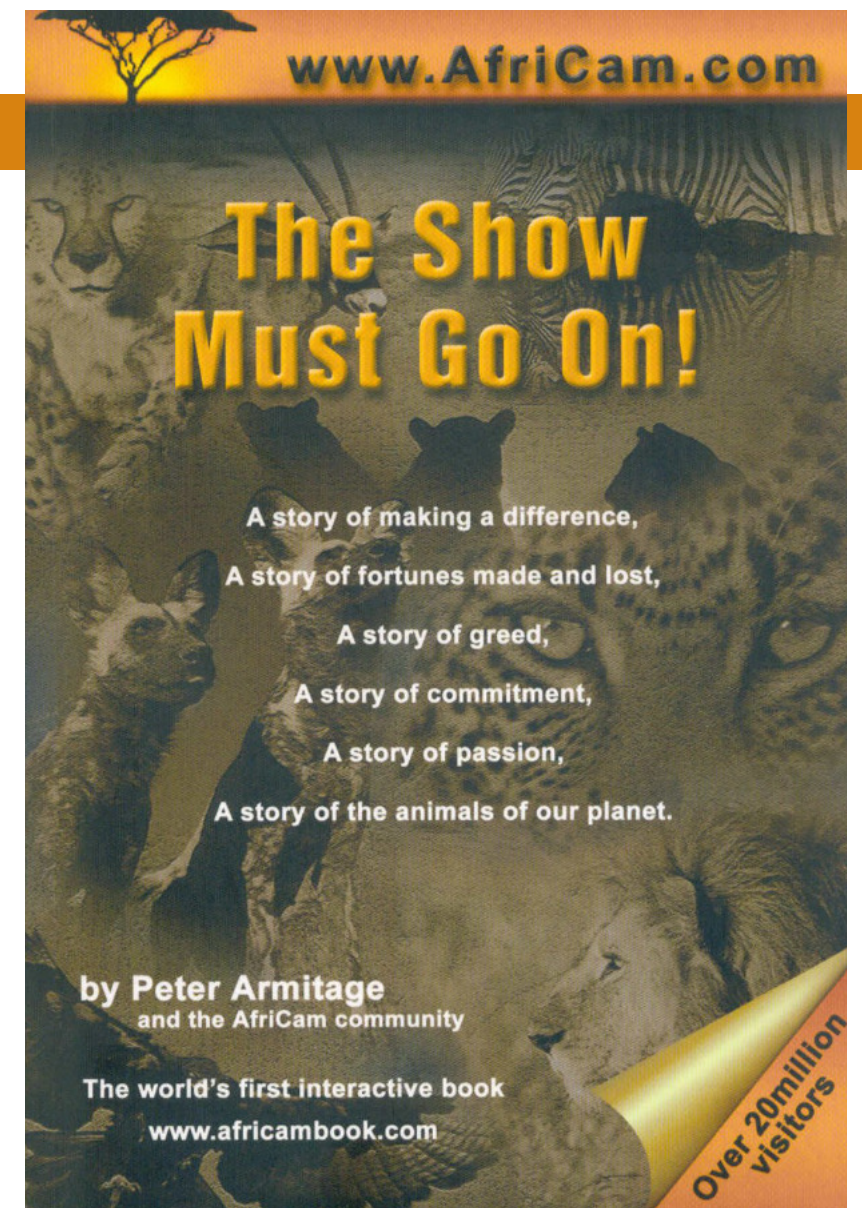
Three days later Paul and Graham met Mark Thatcher at the Hyatt Hotel in Johannesburg, which would become the meeting place for many such summits in the coming months.

Not knowing quite what to expect, they sat in wait. Paul was dressed in jeans and a T-shirt and Graham in a T-shirt and camouflage pants. They immediately recognised Mark when he entered the lounge. Mark, in full suit and tie, was a little taken aback at what he saw. Initially Paul and Graham sensed that he viewed their casual attire as a lack of respect, but Mark soon became comfortable with the idea that internet entrepreneurs were allowed to be non-conventional and he warmed to the South African and the Brit.

It became obvious to Paul and Graham within minutes that Mark was not their cup of tea. He sweated a great deal in his monogrammed cotton shirt, and Paul could not help noticing the hole in his shirt under his armpit.

If nothing else, he was an interesting individual to meet. Graham had searched for “Mark Thatcher” on search engine, google.com, and it had thrown up some interesting facts. Firstly he discovered that when his father Dennis dies, Mark would become a Sir. Of even more interest, was the link to arms deals where commissions to the tune of £12m were bandied about, by none other than Harrod’s Mohamed Al Fayed. “Well it seems only right that he should want to invest in something more wholesome,” thought Graham.

Mark, who was living in Cape Town at this stage, was typically British and dropped all the right names in his very proper accent. He even offered to introduce Paul and Graham to Maggie. He also had an unnerving manner and never looked Paul or Graham in the eye. This did not endear him to the AfriCam founders.



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

One of the things Graham is particularly good at is enthusing people about anything that inspires him. Mark was fascinated and after an hour of general chit-chat they agreed to meet for dinner at the Hyatt some nights later with a loud Texan friend, who owned an ISP in America.

Graham and Paul had decided, after a bit of surfing on the internet that afternoon, that the value they would place on AfriCam was US\$10m. After all, they did not really want to sell a stake in AfriCam, but everything has a price.

Graham was not schooled in valuation techniques, but he astutely observed that no theory or historical valuation techniques were relevant. So he developed his own theory for valuing AfriCam when questioned as to the value: Look the person who asked the question directly in the eye and think of the highest number you can say without flinching. This was probably about as effective as the new-fangled valuation parameters that the Wall St analysts were inventing to value these companies. With the benefit of hindsight, they all had no foundation whatsoever.

“Oh, and by the way, are you Margaret Thatcher’s son?”



“Usko makes ‘paltry’ offer” - February 1999

Within a few days of Mark Thatcher making contact, Paul and Graham were contacted by Paul Wootten, who was in charge of operations for Usko. Johannesburg Stock Exchange listed Usko was one of the high-flying IT shares in South Africa at the time.

Usko previously had mainly industrial interests, but John Beck had been hired to adapt the company into an IT concern. The market loved the story and the share price had been racing upwards, anticipating strong earnings growth. Beck was the golden boy, having led highly successful cellular network MTN, as CEO, for the previous few years.

Paul Wootten, who was Beck’s right-hand man, had been instrumental in purchasing Global Internet Access (GIA) a few months earlier. GIA was at the time one of South Africa’s biggest internet service providers. The acquisition of a stake in AfriCam would make great synergistic sense and probably more importantly, the stock market would love the move.

Graham’s technique was employed that evening, when Mark asked about the valuation of AfriCam. “US\$10m,” Graham said without flinching. Mark indicated he was comfortable with the figure, but he requested some justification.

Paul pointed out the high cost of bandwidth and they banded about the concept of using Iridium, a low orbit satellite network that had data capabilities. Mark then ventured a suggestion, which was one of the most patronising things Paul and Graham had ever heard: “What happens if I get the Thatcher Foundation to kiss Iridium?”

There was a pregnant silence before Paul and the Texan broke into mocking laughter. And when Paul laughed, his prolonged guffaw sounded like an hyaena at night. Mark couldn’t understand why his offer was so poorly received. Graham rescued an embarrassing moment by suggesting that another bottle of Rust-en-Vrede was in order.

Was the Thatcher Foundation part of some global world order? Did the Thatcher Foundation’s “kiss” change commercial business relationships?

After dinner, they never made contact again.



Paul and Graham met with Paul Wootten and the head of GIA and it appeared that there was a potential deal on the table. The GIA boss spoke a big story and the company could obviously solve many of AfriCam’s bandwidth issues.

Both parties seemed enthused and they met again a few days later when the GIA boss dropped his bombshell: “We want 50% of AfriCam in return for loaning the business R500 000 (about US\$50 000), which will give it the capital you require to grow.”

Paul Clifford was offended by this offer and was obviously angry. Graham again assumed the role of peacemaker and took over negotiations from that point. They agreed that they would sleep on it and come back to Usko. They never made contact again.

In retrospect, Usko was not far off the mark. If measured by traditional parameters, a value of US\$100 000 for AfriCam at this time was appropriate. Paul Wootten and his team were not prepared to factor in any of the irrational hype.

Ironically, while Usko made the most sensible offer at that point in time, they made numerous other foolhardy acquisitions and the company all but collapsed a few years later. It was later taken over by the Altron group and today trades under the name Byte Technology Group (BTG).



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www.wildlifecampus.com



Trees

Supporting all life on Earth

By WildlifeCampus student

Amy Holt

Trees are invaluable to our environment and to human well-being. As the biggest plants on the planet, they give us oxygen, store carbon, conserve water, stabilise the soil and support the world's wildlife. Native trees are especially important as they maintain the local ecosystem, are home to high biodiversity, require far less water, and preserve the country's heritage. However, indigenous forests are threatened by plantations of invasive alien tree species. Indigenous forests now only cover 21% of the Earth's land surface.

South Africa has one of the largest problems of invasive alien plants in the world with the forest sector being one of the country's major sources of infestation. Natural forests in South Africa are the smallest forest type category, occupying less than half a million hectares, but boost the highest biodiversity per unit area. All natural forests in South Africa are protected in terms of the National Forests Act of 1998. In general, the South African landscape is characterised by open woodlands, rather than closed-canopy forest. In a forest, the crowns of individual trees touch to form a single canopy. While in a woodland, trees grow far apart so that the canopy is open.

It is estimated South Africa uses 1.5 million hectares of land for commercial forestry, mostly composed of pine (57%), eucalyptus (35%) and wattle (8%) plantations. Forests are complex, self-regenerating natural ecosystems rich in biodiversity, whereas, plantations are artificial plantings of a tree crop.

Most plantation trees used in South Africa are invasive and in the case of eucalyptus and wattle, particularly difficult to eradicate. The plantation industry appears unwilling or unable to manage the spread of invasive plants in the area where they are active. Many alien species bear fruit that is attractive to wild birds, and this, together with, wind and water, results in them spreading into the most isolated, sensitive natural areas. If invasive trees are left unchecked, they could threaten up to one-third of the water supply to cities such as Cape Town and consume up to 5% of South Africa's mean annual rainfall runoff.

02



Eucalyptus is the most widely planted hardwood genus in the world, covering more than 19 million hectares. South Africa relies heavily on plantations of exotic forestry species, particularly eucalyptus, to meet its timber need. Invasive eucalyptus species account for 16% of the 1444 million cubic metres of water resources that South Africa loses every year due to invasive plants. River red gum became popular after its introduction to South Africa around 1870. This was because it was useful for a variety of products and services.

Over the past two decades, the South African government has spent more than R400 million trying to clear eucalyptus. Lack of knowledge about its exact abundance, the specific environmental conditions which trigger its invasion, and how associated pests and diseases might influence its future success as an invader, hinders the development of effective and sustainable management options. Management approaches have mostly followed a ‘one-size-fits-all’ philosophy and proved in several cases inefficient. Most approaches in invaded riparian areas entail the removal of all woody invasive plants with the assumption that the ecosystem will recover by itself. Instead, trees should be replaced over time rather than simply cleared away. This is a much more sustainable way of approaching the problem, particularly where the restoration of the natural riparian forest vegetation is the end goal.

The complete removal of eucalyptus species would be detrimental to honey bee populations in South Africa. Eucalypts provide 60-80% of bee forage in the Western Cape. The Department of Agriculture estimates that there are 80,000 registered colonies managed by beekeepers in South Africa. The Eastern and Northern Cape provinces have a heavy dependence on indigenous forage for their bees. Beekeepers in the other seven provinces rely mostly on exotics like eucalyptus species, agricultural crops, weeds and suburban plantings. Eucalypts are essential to the beekeeping industry because, they flower at various times of the year, providing a constant and reliable flow of nectar and a source of pollen. More than fifty different crops in South Africa are reliant on the existence and work of the honey bee. The deciduous fruit industry has an annual turnover of more than R13 billion and creates over 180,000 job opportunities. In the Western Cape alone, it is estimated about 60,000 hives are required to service the numerous deciduous fruit and seed crops. The value added to the country by honey bee pollination is approximately R10 billion per annum, and half of that is in the Western Cape.

Thus, eucalypts in the correct place in the landscape are critical to honey bees. Simply put, fewer honey bees could mean fewer crops, limited food choices, more expensive food and fewer agricultural jobs. Therefore, it is essential that farmers collaborate with beekeepers, by avoiding application of insecticides during flowering and bee flight. Also, farmers should maintain natural vegetation and encourage the flowering of wild plants near crop lands. The general public should be encouraged to plant indigenous and bee-friendly plants, similar to what is done during National Arbor Week, but with the focus on increasing forage for bees. If all the bees went extinct, it would destroy the delicate balance of the Earth’s ecosystem and affect global food supplies.

The black wattle is native to Australia, and was imported to South Africa in the mid-nineteenth century. It has been widely planted in South Africa, and now forms the basis of a small but significant industry—its tannin-rich bark is used in the tanning process, and the wood chips are exported. However, the species is highly invasive and has spread over an area of almost 2.5 million hectares. In the Western Cape and the Eastern Cape in particular, black wattle is not intensively farmed and huge populations of wild trees have become established in native vegetation communities. The black wattle has significant negative impacts on water resources, biodiversity, and, the stability and integrity of riparian ecosystems. Further, it has increased river bank erosion because it is poorly adapted to flash floods compared to native plants. This invasive tree costs the South African economy about US\$440 million per year, as it depletes water supplies and takes over vast tracts of land.

The planting of non-native conifers species in South Africa commenced with European colonisation in the mid-seventeenth century, and was pursued amongst others to ensure a steady supply of timber. Pine trees in the Western Cape Province have spread beyond forestry plantations and invaded native Fynbos habitat. The Fynbos is the most invaded biome, with 5.8% of plantations occurring here—often in areas of exceptional biological diversity that are vital for water production and conservation. If the current rate of pine invasion continues over the next one hundred years, Cape Town will lose 30% of its water supply through a loss of runoff to its storage dams. Pine plantation and invasion management in the Fynbos biome should aim to fell pines before the trees are 40 to 50 years old. This will help to maintain the native seed bank and the recovery potential of fynbos.

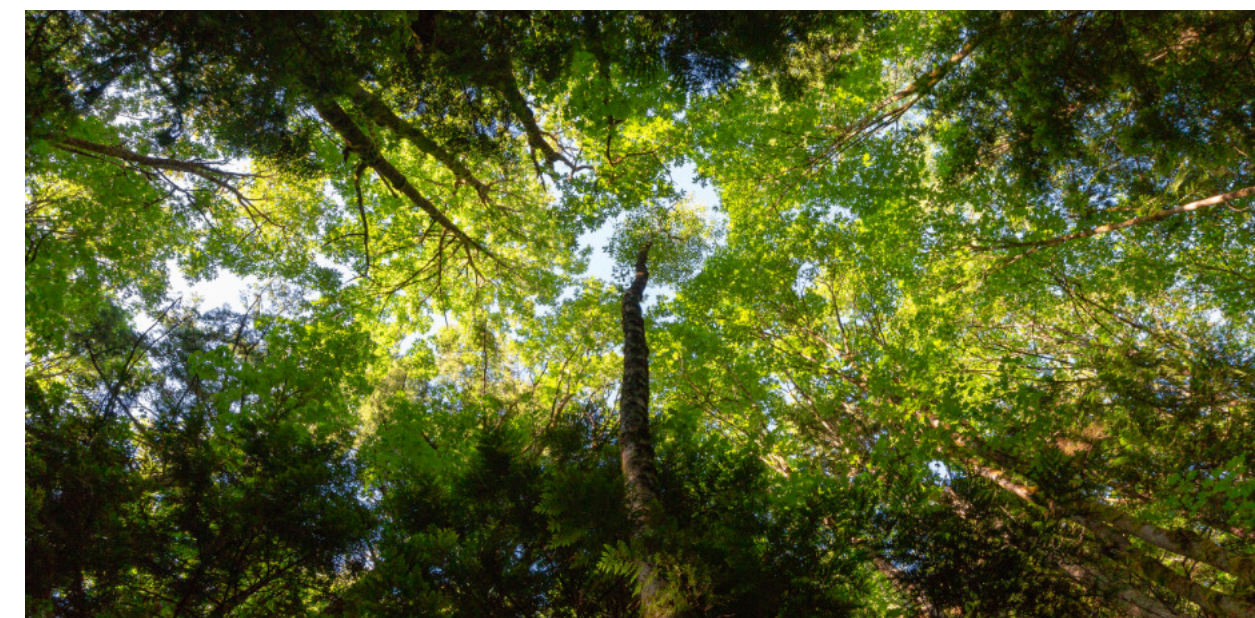
For thousands of years, trees and humans have maintained an intimate connection. The tree is seen as a sacred symbol, which carries significant meanings in both religious and spiritual philosophies. They have played a role in our existence since the beginning of humankind and provide life and a place to live for many creatures. A single mature tree is estimated to produce one day’s supply of oxygen for anywhere from two to ten people. After oceans, forests are the world’s largest storehouses of carbon. Trees help control the level of water in the atmosphere by helping regulate the water cycle. Also, trees help the land to retain water and topsoil, which provides the rich nutrients to sustain additional forest life. Without forest, the soil erodes and washes away—this barren land that is left behind, is then more susceptible to flooding.

As Mahatma Gandhi said: ‘what we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to

ourselves and to one another’. Through our destructive habits to overexploit nature, we are undoing almost 400 million years of evolution. Deforestation is the second-leading cause of climate change and accounts for nearly 20% of all greenhouse gas emissions. Through deforestation, more problems are created than solutions are found.

South Africa has many initiatives that promote the importance of indigenous trees and increase public awareness about protecting them. National Arbor Week is celebrated annually around the first week of September, to encourage the planting and maintenance of indigenous trees. It highlights the opportunities for sustainable economic development, community participation, poverty alleviation and job creations in forestry. ‘Tree of the Year’ is a government initiative to raise awareness about the need to value and protect indigenous trees and, to educate the public about South African trees. The Champion Tree Project aims to identify and protect trees that are of national importance and worthy of special protection, due to their remarkable size, age, or aesthetic, cultural, historic or tourism value. More than seventy trees and groups of trees, for example, the Post Office Milkwood Tree of Mossel Bay, have been declared by the department as champion trees. These trees are all protected under the National Forests Act of 1998.

Trees, with such a luxury of time on their hands can afford to take things at a leisurely pace. Yet we, humans, have taken away such luxury. Large tree-covered areas of plantations rather than old-growth forests are becoming the new norm of today’s world. Plant an indigenous tree today, appreciate its slow pace of life and allow future generations to marvel at the graceful beauty of native forests.





03

Thank you Danny!

At the beginning of 2022, WildlifeCampus launched the **newly updated** Field Guiding/Game Ranging course.

The massive update of this the content was done in collaboration with a Field Guides Association of Southern Africa z (FGASA) assessor.

However, this update would not have been possible without the valuable photographic contribution of our students and partners.



In this edition, WildlifeCampus would like to thank **Danny Breetveld** for his amazing photographic contribution towards our courses.

Danny is from the Netherlands and has a great passion for venomous snakes. Having visited South Africa numerous times, Danny is looking forward to another visit later this month.

Thank you Danny! We look forward to our students seeing your incredible work throughout the Field Guiding/ Game Ranging course.

To try the free component of our recently updated Field Guiding/Game Ranging course, [CLICK HERE](#).



3 courses 1 price

Field Guiding
Anti-Poaching

+ any other
WildlifeCampus course

R 5 999.00

Special ends 14/10/2022

Email info@wildlifecampus.com

No monthly payment options are available for discounted course packages



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Wildlife Management Course

Our wildlife management course was originally written by WildlifeCampus CEO Todd Kaplan. This course is by far one of our most highly rated and popular courses. It is based on the University of Pretoria's Centre for Wildlife Management's Honours degree programme, but has been re-written so that no prior learning is required.

This is the perfect course for those who need to understand the ecological management of game farms and reserves.

Email info@wildlifecampus.com with the code
"Discount_WLM" and get R 500.00 off *
(Normal price: R 4 500.00)

Click the picture to try out a free component of this course.



*Special ends 30/09/2022

No monthly payment options are available for discounted courses

WildlifeCampus Magazine

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WildlifeCampus course listing

Field guiding / game ranging	R 6, 500	Intensive wildlife production	R 950
Wildlife management	R 4, 500	Marine biology	R 950
Animal tracks and signs of Africa	R 2, 800	Game guard management	R 900
Game lodge management	R 2, 800	FGASA exam preparation practice questions	R 850
Capture, care and management of wildlife	R 2, 500	Human-wildlife conflict	R 850
Behaviour guide to mammals of RSA lowveld	R 2, 500	Game ranch economics	R 850
Behaviour guide to African herbivores	R 2, 500	Behaviour guide to African primates	R 800
Anti-poaching	R 1, 950	Survival	R 750
Explore the Eastern Cape Province	R 1, 800	Wilderness navigation	R 700
Explore the Free State Province	R 1, 800	Anti-poaching junior	R 550
Explore the Gauteng Province	R 1, 800		
Explore the Kwa-Zulu Natal Province	R 1, 800		
Explore the Limpopo Province	R 1, 800		
Explore the Mpumalanga Province	R 1, 800		
Explore the North West Province	R 1, 800		
Explore the Northern Cape Province	R 1, 800		
Explore the Western Cape Province	R 1, 800		
Front of house lodge operations	R 1, 750		
Behaviour guide to African carnivores	R 1, 600		
Geology, palaeontology and evolution	R 1, 500		
Guides' guide to guiding	R 1, 350		
Birding	R 1, 250		
Digital wildlife photography	R 1, 250		
Trails guide	R 1, 200		

Free Components

Upon registration as an online student, you will immediately be assigned FREE components to your "my courses" page, one from each course on offer.

The objective of the free components is to allow students to try all the various online courses available. You are welcome to complete as many of these free components as you like. **No certificates are issued for completing free components.**

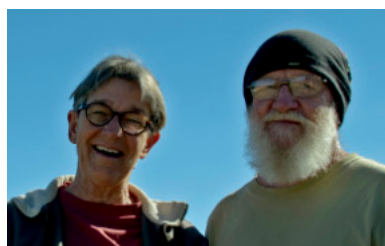
Click any course to try a free component!

Getting started? Email info@wildlifecampus.com



Fire and water

Timber ready for the charcoal burners, Zambia



By



Africa has many problems and to name but two, a lack of a sustainable (and functioning) power and low and often poorly managed water resources.

Two of the things that have shocked us in recent years on our African travels, the vast loss of woodland to timber extraction, clearing for agriculture and charcoal production, and especially in South Africa, the proliferation and expansion of irrigation schemes, even in the most arid areas.

First, let us take a look at charcoal, “black gold!” Power production over much of Africa has not kept pace with population growth, maintenance of power production systems has been largely lacking, and if you want to cook or heat you have to look for an alternative. The answer - cut down the woodlands and produce charcoal. Every year, vast tracts of woodland in countries such as Zambia, Tanzania and Somalia, are cleared to produce charcoal for heating and cooking. Timber harvesting (often illegal) and charcoal production encroach on unprotected and conservation areas alike. Kilns are usually built close to where the trees are felled to reduce transport costs. Some 90% of Zambian households use charcoal and an estimated area of 197.4 square kilometres is lost to charcoal production every year (this is likely to be an underestimate) and this mainly to supply power starved Zambians in Lusaka and on the Copperbelt. In Zimbabwe, where timber harvesting for commercial charcoal

production is illegal (sadly on paper but not in practice), it has been estimated that as much as 330,000ha of woodlands is lost annually.

The real problem has arisen because it is no longer just poor villagers producing charcoal for their own use but poverty has driven many to produce charcoal for sale, much of which goes to the power-starved towns and cities. Drive the African back roads and you encounter sacks packed with charcoal waiting for customers, or lorries, to transport it to bigger centres for sale!



Charcoal on its way to Lusaka, Zambia



Irrigation Vredendal, West Coast, SA

In Namibia, charcoal production is apparently well regulated and some 700 producers are registered. Exotic trees are harvested in the south of the country but in the north indigenous trees, mainly Blackthorn, which officials argue needs to be thinned because of poor grazing practices in the past. However, we have observed that this is not strictly the case and other indigenous trees are included in the mix! Namibia exported 200,000 tons of charcoal in 2020.

To sum up - In sub-Saharan Africa fuel wood and charcoal consumption has doubled since 1990. Today, charcoal is the main cooking source for 80% of the population in 21 countries to the south of the Sahara.

And then comes the water... As human populations grow the demand for water, of course, increases. Without freshwater life becomes unsustainable.

In South Africa irrigated crops consume 62% of all available freshwater, to produce about 30% of all products that go to market. What has shocked us in recent years is how rapidly new irrigated plantings have been established. Travel along both banks of the Orange River to the west of Vioolsdrif through desert and vast areas are planted to grapes. Then travel eastwards along the Orange River to the Lesotho border and note how much water is being drawn off to the expanding plantings. In fact there are few areas where something is not being grown under irrigation. And it is not only coming out of rivers and impoundments, but from diminishing underground sources. Much of South Africa is drought risk and more efficient use of these resources needs to be found. There have been some efforts here but innovation and change can be expensive.

Previously, many river irrigation projects were along the floodplains but increasingly new plantings extend on to the surrounding hillslopes, just a few examples, the Breede and Olifants rivers in the Western Cape, the Sunday's River irrigation scheme in the Eastern Cape, the vicinity of Ohrigstad and Luvubu in Limpopo Province. There are many more examples but that will suffice.

So, next time you are travelling around South Africa and see the expanding irrigation projects, ponder that our population is growing, more food will be needed to feed our population and for export to generate foreign exchange, therefore irrigation systems must become much more efficient and the need to develop crops that require less water, some of which already exist but receive little attention.

When you are motoring around to the north take note of the disappearing woodland, the bicycles and lorries transporting charcoal to the main centres. Human populations continue to grow rapidly in such countries as Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania and Mozambique, so the demand for fuel will grow.

Fire and water are finite commodities.



Vineyards on the north bank of the Orange River in Namibia.

Front Of House Lodge Operations Course



To view and
try the free component,
[click here](#)

This **excellent** and **highly rated** course was written for WildlifeCampus by Hayley Cooper, of **Wild Dreams Hospitality**. Her passion for creating the best guest experience, as well as staff training and development, compelled her to write this course and share her enthusiasm for hospitality with others.

In this course, we discuss every detail involved in running successful FOH operations. We learn about understanding other departments, presentation and etiquette (including interpersonal skills), what to do before guests arrive, when they arrive and how to host the most memorable experiences at your lodge or venue.

This course includes a component on Food and Beverage (F&B) which highlights the importance of knowing your guest's diet requirements (and what they mean). Tourism trends are also covered and information is regularly updated.

This course is perfect for owners, managers and staff at lodges, hotels, restaurants, cafés, cruise ships/yachts, bars, airlines, catering/event venues, resorts or clubs.

If you are looking to enter the hospitality industry, brush up your current and/or staff skills or merely have an interest in the subject, this course is perfect for you!

Vacancies



Wild Dreams Hospitality is currently recruiting for some exciting positions within the hospitality and tourism industry within Africa.

To highlight just a few:

- Lodge Managers - singles/couples
- Field Guides - all levels
- Spa Therapists
- Chefs - all levels
- Guide Instructors
- FOH - Anchors/Hosts/Guest relations
- Travel Specialists
- Financial Managers
- HR Managers
- Reservationists
- IT Specialists

- Admin positions
 - Housekeeping Managers
- To get all of the details of these vacancies and more, visit:

www.wilddreams.co.za/job/

It's well worth going through their entire website, as they have numerous dedicated pages to help job seekers including:

- Cv advice & free template
- Interview advice & practice questions
- Career advice (page & sessions)
- Monthly blogs

And much more!

Hiding in plain(s) sight

Most visitors to game reserves, me included, never get to see cheetahs running at full tilt chasing prey.

Most of those that I have encountered are either on a kill already or hanging around looking bored as they survey the open plains they frequent, searching for possible prey species.



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

By David Batzofin



Their entire structure is designed like that of a ballet dancer rather than a weight lifter, with grace and agility outweighing the need for brute strength.

With their long legs and body, claws that have evolved to give extra traction and a long tail for balance, cheetahs are the epitome of speed.



Given the fact that they can run at between 80-130km/h, this is not an animal that you would want chasing you. And for the record, cheetahs are capable of doing the 100m sprint in around 6 seconds, leaving Usain Bolt's world record of 9:58sec looking like he was jogging.

That being said, there has never been a recorded incident of a cheetah attacking a human in the wild. Most of the attacks have been in petting zoos or at facilities where humans and cheetahs interact in an unnatural setting. But this story is not about their agility and speed, it is about how they can lead you on a merry dance, should they feel like it.

Most game reserves will often refer to the fact that they are home to the BIG 5, and that always gets guests excited. Seeing lions, buffalo, leopards, rhinos and elephants in their natural environment is always an exciting experience. This has now been taken a step further in a bid to lure potential guests, the Magnificent 7...and not the movie cast either. These are reserves that offer the added possibility of wild dog and cheetah sightings as well. Wild dogs always get my heart racing, but that is a tale for another article.

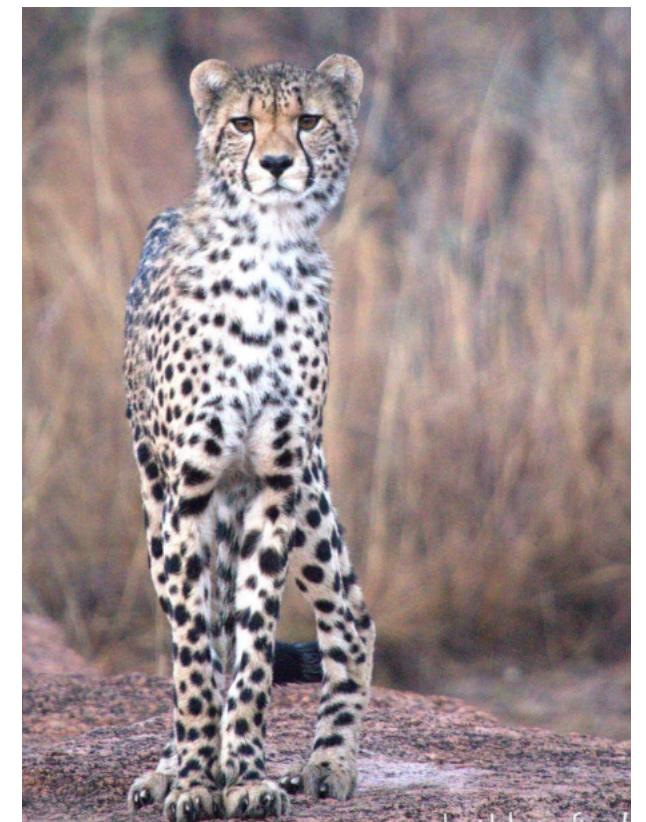
On a visit to a reserve on the Botswana border, we were headed back to our lodge after a successful morning drive, when our guide stopped to check some tracks that he was uncertain about. He hopped out of the driver's side and squatted down in the sand to get a closer look at what seemed to be a series of fresh prints. "These could be hyena or they could be cheetah", he proclaimed with a quizzical look on his face. "They are cheetah", I replied from the safety of the vehicle. "How can you be so certain while sitting so far away?"

"Because two cheetahs are sitting in the grass on the passenger side of the vehicle", was my response. And, sure enough, there were two brothers semi-concealed in the grass, not 20m from where our vehicle had stopped. It was a sort of "was my face red" moment for the guide but it did allow us to spend time with them as they ignored us and played with each other. Darting through the grass and scrambling under and over fallen tree trunks which were the predominant feature of the landscape where we were parked.

Although a predator, cheetahs do not exude the raw power of a lion nor do they have the eye contact of a leopard that seems to be able to see deep into your soul. However, if you, like me have a hankering for speed, then they, as the fastest land mammal, can achieve speeds that we can only achieve in a supercar. As such, they hold that crown that neither of the other predators nor we humans possess.

The brothers accompanied us almost back to the lodge, turning off the road at the last moment to vanish into the foliage. An interaction that will remain with all those on the vehicle for the longest time.

And I am certain that the guide concerned will, in future, check around his vehicle, before making any track identification.





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