



WildlifeCampus

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Magazine

**Crazy Spring
Special**

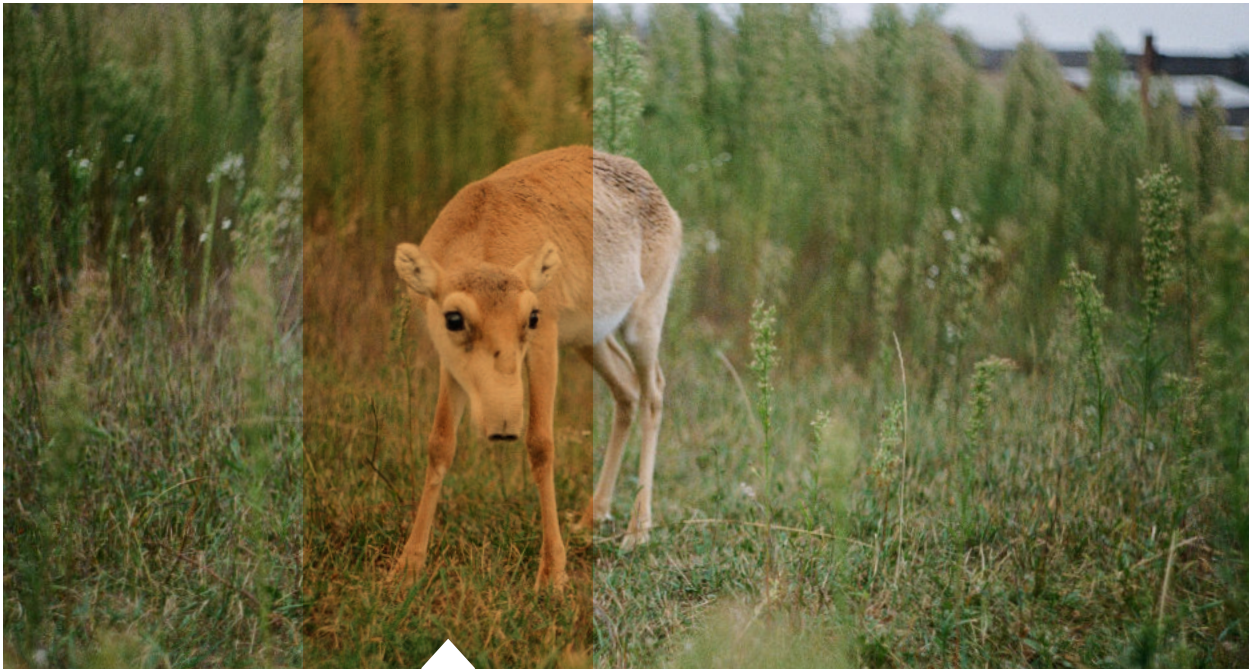
Weird mammals
by Amy Holt

**September
Wildlife Diary**

Big 5 Bouncers
By David Batzofin

Arabia Felix
By Stuart on Nature

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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.

Part 20

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Weird mammals

WildlifeCampus student, Amy Holt, takes a look at some of the "weird animals" our natural world has to offer. Platypuses, echidnas, proboscis monkeys, saigas and even pink fairy armadillos are on her list.

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Crazy Spring Special!

Are you ready to learn more about animal behaviour and combine 4 online courses for 1 unbeatable price?!

Take advantage of our Spring Special! Scroll to page 14 and find out more.

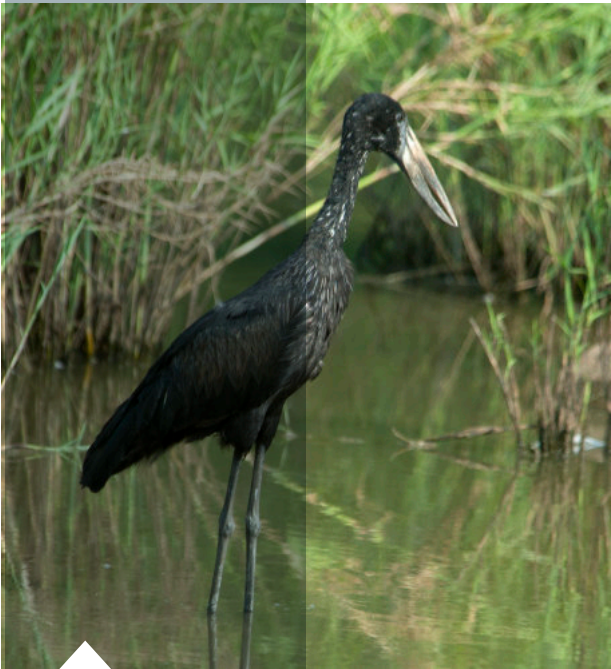
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September Wildlife Diary

Stuart on Nature’s September “wildlife diary” definitely shows us spring is in the air. Breeding and birthing are peaking for some species like common warthog, crowned lemur and the Namaqua day gecko amongst many others.

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Student feedback

Are you curious to know how others experience an online course with WildlifeCampus?

Find out what feedback students have on our courses.

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Interview with Mirriam

Job hunting can be difficult till you land the job where you find your happy place.

In this edition, an interview with Mirriam, who has been working her entire (25 years) career at Kings Camp in the Timbavati.

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Big 5 bouncers

In this story David is at a game lodge with his wife to celebrate their wedding anniversary.

As usual, he had a stroke of brilliance, or so he thought, and organised a bush walk followed by a picnic...

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“So, whilst the Boma filled a great need in us all to communicate, many of us felt that it could be taken to the next step too. We had a lot of discussion on just this, in the early days of the Boma and several of us swapped ideas on where we could set up a room, if AfriCam didn't have the capability, which they didn't in those far off days.”

“We all looked at chat server set ups and how to join in on existing chat structures, but the answer was a lot easier. Chucky (Chuck Rolland) had a friend who was an admin on one of the main chat server groups and this friend set up, at Chucky's request, a room on their server for AfriCam. The post was on the Boma shortly thereafter, within a few days of AfriCam starting and a few Bomites joined in there, including Paul Clifford.”

“Paul obviously saw the opportunity, but said it would need to be linked to the main site somehow. He went off and talked to M-Web, who were handling all the traffic and they, in turn, talked to the people who ran their Dalnet server, linked world wide on IRC chat. The end result was that we had a chat room opened for us on the Dalnet server attached to M-Web, with a java client program linked on the web page, so chat was now only a click away for anyone.”

“Those who already used IRC chats, of course, simply put in the new address in their favourite program, usually mIRC and we were off and running. This was near the end of September 1998.”

“The live chat was an immediate success, especially as a

number of the chatters had a fair bit of experience in this new world and were able to help the others along.”

“The chat room had an automatic program, commonly known in IRC speak as a bot (short for robot), which showed itself as a chatter :-))) this called itself afribot and was, quite literally, a robot moderator, who would automatically kick out any chatter for using foul language, or for “flooding” the chat room with a lot of messages.”

“This last was a bit frustrating, as it kicked you out if you posted four messages in a row, without another chatter responding or posting in between. It caught us all when the room was quiet :-))) When we started making real live ops (moderators) they, inevitably, became known also as bots.”

“We had some very different responses from AfriCammers at this stage. Most who came in the chat were delighted to meet each other and get to know everyone and the chat became the sort of place where you would hear talk amongst people straight off a game drive at Djuma.”

“We met new chatters for the first time. It was a mixture of talking about what had been seen on the cams and finding out about each other tactfully. Great people AfriCammers, they set the tone for what would become renowned around the world as the best chat site ever set up, which it still is by far!”

“However, not everyone liked this very casual chat, there were some really dedicated Bomites who came in once, listened to the chat for five minutes and said it was far too light hearted and they had expected a more serious chat, dedicated to wildlife (this would become a major talking point over the next couple of years, until we actually set up a room especially for the more serious stuff, which was not popular).”

“Ton was the first to do so and he was to stay out of chat for a very long time, only coming in at New Year, when he sent pics too! In more recent times, Ton has joined us in chat and many of us have enjoyed his and Herma's (his wife) company at meets, including here in South Africa. Leon was the other, I remember, who was quite outspoken in his condemnation of chat as a viable offering. Leon left quickly and stayed on the Boma for a long time after that.”

He did emerge eventually on chat, under the now famous name Chameleon, deliberately showing how he can change his colours to suit a new background and has remained one of the most popular chatters ever since.

“There were many others who joined us in those very early days and I'm hesitant to give a list, or even say the others I

remember, as I'm sure to leave some out. Alan was one of the most vocal, as we've all come to know of course, and he shows no signs of slowing down yet!”

“Pippa was also one of the early chatters and somehow the subject of us getting together for a party arose. I have no idea who started that thread, it seemed to be one of those things that just happen in chat, maybe a response to a joking suggestion, who knows?”

“But, Pippa was certainly there, so a party chat was inevitable, I suppose. Anyway, the idea of a get-together sounded good to all of us, but money was the big problem, where could we meet? We all agreed it should be in Africa and Pippa suggested she might be able to give out some kind of special deal for Djuma and even get the AfriCam guys to advertise it on their web page.”

“This is exactly how it transpired, of course, Africam advertising and all of us frantically trying to find funds for a trip to Djuma, only a month away. Yes, we were by then in October and the Djuma party was set for the end of November. The chat certainly reflected our desire to be at that party.”

“Those who could not make it vowed to be in the chat room for the whole party and demanded that we also be on chat at the same time. This sounded fair as we couldn't leave everyone out, just because they couldn't get to the venue. Wasn't that what AfriCam was about anyway?”

“Pip and Jurie and AfriCam all agreed that the mobile cam would be on the party too, so AfriCammers could join us in chat and see us on the cam too and really join in. This was to be a huge part of being an Africammer, as everyone online was actually at that party too.”

“Although I'm giving a chat history here, let's not forget that as much activity, interest and excitement was going on in the Boma, one leading Bomite was certainly going to be at the party, one who did not endorse chat ... at that time...”





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Weird Mammals

By WildlifeCampus student

Amy Holt

The natural world is often admired for its charismatic animals, but what harm does this cause to the species we overlook? Their unique appearances and bizarre features can distinguish weird animals. Each odd feature has a specific role in the behaviour and ecology of that species. There are about 6,400 mammal species on Earth, with many striking and unusual features.

Australia is home to some of the world’s weirdest mammals. The platypus looks like a mixture of several different species. It has a duck’s bill, a beaver’s tail and a furry otter-like body. However, each of these different looks serves a purpose. The bill is covered in tiny pores, electroreceptors, that allow the platypus to navigate underwater without sight. As a bottom-feeder, the platypus uses its beaver-like tail to steer and its webbed feet to propel itself through the water while hunting for insects, worms and shellfish. The streamlined body and flexibility allow for swift changes in direction and deep dives in search of prey.

Platypuses are far stranger than they look. They lay eggs like a bird or a reptile but feed milk to their young like a mammal. This makes them one of only five living monotreme species (the other four are species of echidnas). Platypuses have one vitellogenin gene, which is essential for producing egg yolks. It is thanks to this gene that they continue to lay eggs. They also have casein genes, which are responsible for producing casein protein—a major component in mammalian milk. This makes the composition of platypus milk quite similar to that of cows and humans.

Despite producing milk for their young, like mammals, female platypuses lack nipples. Instead, they sweat milk. The milk pools on the surface of their bellies and the babies lap up this vital nourishment from the thick fur.

The platypus is one of the most evolutionary distinct animals on Earth. They offer an incredible and valuable insight into the evolutionary history of mammals.

02



Monotremes broke off from other mammals about 166 million years ago. This is why platypuses display early mammalian features similar to reptilian physiology and, thus, reflect all mammals' common evolutionary origin in reptiles.

Platypuses are one of the world's only venomous mammals. The males have a pair of venomous spurs on their hind feet. These deliver venom when the platypus feels threatened or when competing with other males during mating season. Mating increases venom production. To add to their weirdness, they have no teeth, no stomach and glow under UV light. Instead of teeth, platypuses have two grinding plates to mash food. Baby platypuses are born with teeth, but weirdly they fall out and are replaced with the grinding plates. Instead of a stomach, the oesophagus connects directly to the intestines. The brown fur of a platypus reflects a blue-green colour when placed under UV light. Although biofluorescence is widespread in fish, amphibians, birds and reptiles, it is a rare trait in mammals.

The platypus proves to be weirder than anyone could imagine, but it faces an uncertain future. This unique creature is listed as endangered in South Australia, as it continues to be threatened by habitat loss. Platypuses need intact riverbanks to burrow and nest, but these are being lost and degraded due to urbanisation and agricultural developments.

Like platypuses, echidnas are monotreme mammals and have no nipples and no teeth. This odd mammal has spines like a porcupine, a beak like a bird and a pouch like a kangaroo. The spines are modified hairs that will curl up into a ball to protect themselves. The echidna is often called a spiny anteater due to the way it catches its prey.

They use their powerful claws to dig their prey out and their long, sticky tongue to scoop them up. Electoreceptors in the skin help sense electrical signals produced by the muscles of ants and termites.

The beak is a bald tubular nose ending with a tiny, toothless mouth. They breathe and eat through the 'beak'. Scientists have discovered that echidnas blow snot bubbles to cool down. When the snot bubble bursts, it wets the tip of the snout, then evaporates and cools the blood just under the skin. That cooler blood is pumped around the body, cooling the animal down. However, that is not their only weird behaviour to cool down. Echidnas can belly flop to cool down. Their bellies and legs don't have any spines so they can press them against cooler surfaces. The blood on the skin's surface cools and is then pumped around to cool the rest of the body.

Female echidnas don't have permanent pouches like kangaroos. Instead, during her 22-day pregnancy, their mammalian glands swell, and the extra tissue creates a rearward-facing 'pouch' of skin on her belly. Here, she will lay her single egg directly into the 'pouch' and once hatched, the baby will be carried in the 'pouch' for three months. As they don't have nipples, they use special glands in their 'pouch' to secrete milk, which the baby laps up.

Echidnas are known for their weird mating ritual. During the breeding season, they form mating 'trains'. The female heads the 'train' followed by up to ten males. A smaller, younger male is often at the rear of the line. The males follow the female long distances until she is ready to mate. Once ready, she lies relaxed and flat on her belly while the males dig a circular trench around her. Eventually, the largest male pushes the competing rivals out of the mating rut so he can mate with the female. Sometimes, the males swap lines and follow a different female.



Of the four species of echidnas, two are critically endangered, one is vulnerable and one is of least concern. Echidnas face many threats, including habitat loss and fragmentation, overhunting, and fatal collisions with cars.

Islands make up a sixth of all land on Earth and they give rise to unusual species. Isolated from the mainland, a new island often provides a unique habitat where life can evolve differently. Endemic to the island of Borneo, proboscis monkeys have a striking feature, an unusually large nose. These big noses may not help them win any beauty pageants, but are important for attracting females. Scientists believe these oversized noses create an echo chamber that amplifies the monkey's call. This impresses females and intimidates rival males.



Another weird feature of the proboscis monkey is the protruding belly. Their swollen bellies are made up of sacculated chambers that contain a special cellulose-digesting bacteria that breaks down complex leaf matter. As their digestive system is so specialised, they are restricted in what they can eat. Foods high in sugar content, such as ripe pulpy fruits, can cause rapid fermentation and bloating, which can be fatal.

Proboscis monkeys rarely venture too far away from a water body and so, have evolved partially webbed feet and hands. They are the primate world's most prolific swimmers and have been observed swimming fully submerged for 20 metres. They can also walk upright in water. Despite this, they are mostly arboreal and spend their lives in trees. However if threatened, they will make a comical belly flop into the water below to escape predators, such as cloud leopards.

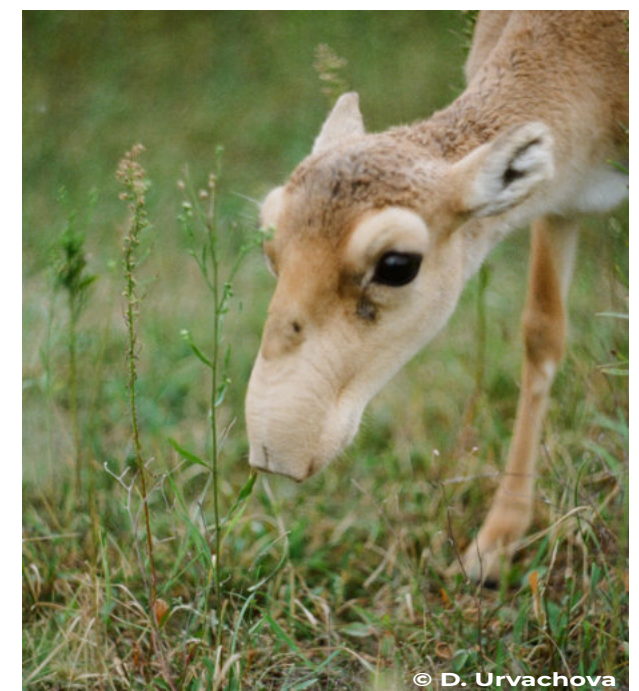
Proboscis monkeys are endangered primates that are threatened by habitat loss. This is due to Borneo's landscape continuing to change from intact forests to palm oil plantations.

The saiga is the world's weirdest antelope. They are recognisable for their distinctively large, swollen noses with downward-directed nostrils. Despite its odd appearance, the swollen nose has a vital function. The nose helps filter out dust in the dry summer and warms and moistens the cold air inhaled in winter.

As migrating herbivores, they feed on over 100 different plant species, including some that are poisonous to other animals. The saiga plays a vital role in seed dispersal. As they migrate, they eat these not-so-tasty plants and deposit the seeds in their dung. They then trample the dung with their hooves and push the seeds into the soil. Nutrients from their dung add organic matter to the soil, which aids in germinating the seeds. The continuous grazing of the saiga antelopes helps keep the plains open for other species, such as wolves and migratory birds. Agricultural developments and settlements now impede and change these lengthy migration routes.

Saiga antelopes are one of the oldest living representatives of the mammoth fauna. They once roamed the whole Eurasian continent. Today, 98% of the world's remaining population can be found in Kazakhstan. In the last few decades, there has been a 95% decline in the number of saiga, which is one of the fastest recorded declines for a mammal.

These weird antelopes are critically endangered. They have





proven to endure the extremes of nature but not the increasing threat from human activities. In the 1990s, saiga horns were promoted as an alternative to rhino horns in traditional Chinese medicine. This led to saiga antelopes being poached to near extinction—by 2003, fewer than 30,000 individuals remained in Russia and Kazakhstan, which previously had a population of over one million. In 2015, about 200,000 saiga antelopes were wiped out by a disease. However, despite many plummets in their population levels, saiga antelopes are once again thriving thanks to conservation efforts.

Endemic to Argentina, the pink fairy armadillo is the smallest armadillo species in the world. The unusual pink colour in its shell comes from the high density of blood vessels close to the surface. Unlike other armadillos, the pink fairy armadillo's outer shell is not fully attached to its body, nor is the shell hard. Instead, the shell is relatively fragile and flexible. These traits, along with the density of blood vessels under the shell, led scientists to believe the pink fairy armadillo uses its shell for thermoregulation. In hot weather, the armadillo flushes its shell with blood, radiating heat and cooling down its core body temperature.

As a desert-adapted mammal, the pink fairy armadillo

burrows through sandy soil using its massive claws to look for worms and insects. As they dig, they use their armoured butt plate to compact the soil and prevent their tunnels from collapsing around them.

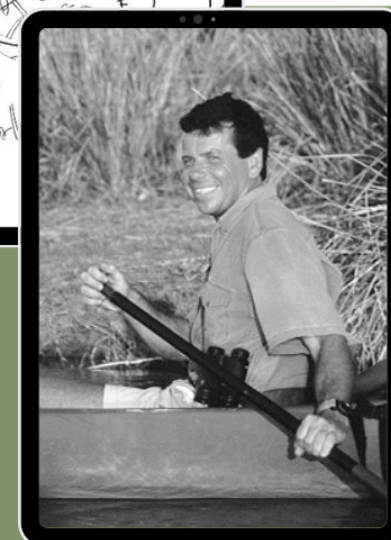
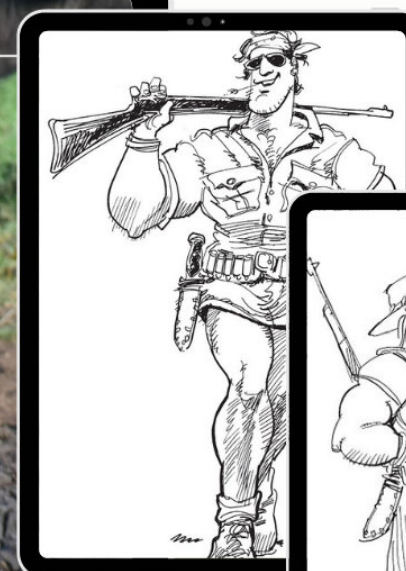
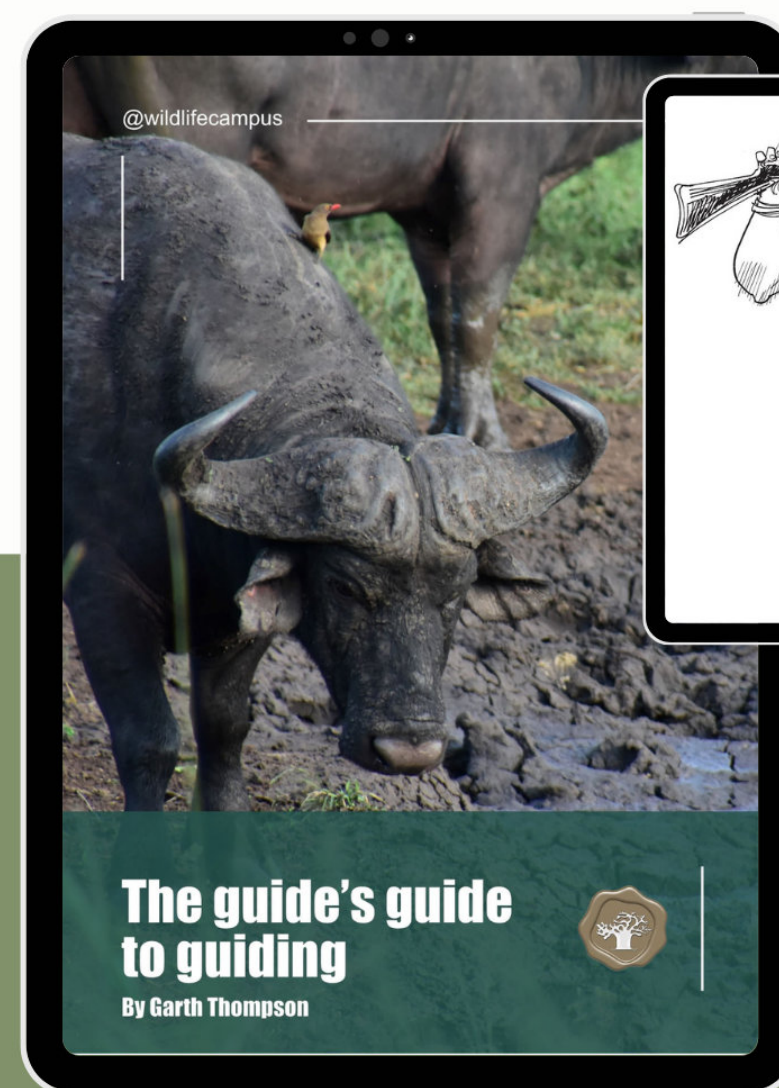
The pink fairy armadillo is as mysterious as the name suggests, and because of this, its conservation status is uncertain. It could be on the brink of extinction or have stable population numbers. However, these animals are susceptible to changes in environmental conditions, such as changes in soil temperature. As they store very little body fat, a change in soil temperature may significantly impact their thermoregulation ability.

These are just a few of nature's weird mammals whose oddities should be celebrated. They represent a unique and irreplaceable part of our planet's biodiversity. To lose them would cause a large part of evolutionary history to be lost forever. But, as conservation continues to prioritise charismatic species, like elephants and tigers, can we save nature's weirdness?

The guide's guide to guiding

By Garth Thompson

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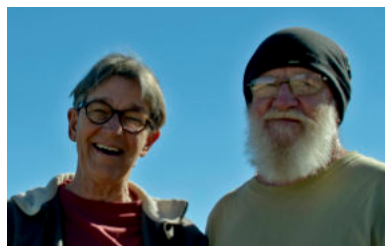
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Arabia Felix - Happy Arabia (perhaps not)



The more fertile areas of Yemen are heavily cultivated.



By



It is more than 20 years ago that we (with the support of the Arabian Leopard Trust, based in the UAE) undertook a feasibility journey into the mysterious country of Yemen to see whether a biodiversity survey could be safely undertaken. Our conclusion, it couldn't be done- we are not averse to taking calculated risks but this was madness.

Yemen, at the south-west corner of the Arabian Peninsula, extends over 555,000 square kilometres, has a 2,000km long coastline, and for much of its human existence has known warfare and conflict, and of course nothing has changed to the present day! Yemen is separated from Africa by the "gate of tears", the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb, the 32km wide channel that is the vital link between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. It is not long ago, in geological terms, that Arabia and Africa were one but faulting and the movement of tectonic plates caused the Arabian landmass to slide to the north-east. The western Yemeni highlands, with their relatively high rainfall and abundant vegetation, slid off the surface and left in their place on the African continent one of the harshest landscapes on earth, the Danakil Depression.

Yemen has Arabia's greatest plant and animal diversity and it is one of the main centres of succulent plant distribution. The vegetation is a blend of species from the tropical African Sudanian region and that of the extra-tropical Saharo-Arabian region. Thousands of years of human settlement has

resulted in considerable modification of the natural vegetation over much of the country by cultivation and overgrazing there is still much of interest. Apart from >3,000 plant species, there are at least 85 mammals, 400 birds, 109 reptiles and numerous but undocumented fish species.

Our visit was to see whether a long-term zoological survey would be practical. For us, one of the main attractions was to see a blending of African and Arabian wildlife, as well as to assess whether a conservation plan would work in this troubled and disturbed land. Probably the two most significant impressions we came away with, firstly, the high human population density, particularly in the better watered highlands and on the Tihama coastal plain, with its attendant cultivations often on seemingly impossibly steep slopes. Secondly, the fact that virtually every male over the age of 14, in the highlands and eastwards through the Hadramawt was armed with a semi-automatic weapon and the traditional jambiyah, as well as the obligate need to chew the leaves of Khat (*Catha edulis*), a mild stimulant. Khat is so popular in Yemen that it is cultivated on even the steepest slopes and consumes more than 40% of the country's water supply! It has no nutritional attributes.

Firearm proliferation, combined with a burgeoning human population, has led to massive pressures on wildlife, with ungulates and large predators (Leopard, Arabian Wolf and



Egyptian Spiny Mouse - *Acomys caharinus*

Striped Hyaena) virtually wiped out, or at best greatly reduced in numbers. On top of this are packs of domesticated and feral dogs. Apart from domestic livestock we saw no wild ungulates, nor any sign of them, even though we travelled in the most likely places. The closest we came to wild ungulates were through the memories of villagers who pointed to the high mountain ridges and explained that everything except the Hamadryas Baboons (*Papio hamadryas*), Rock Hyrax (*Procavia capensis jayakari*) and the Cape Hare (*Lepus capensis*) had been hunted to extinction. On the corners of some village houses we saw horns of long ago shot and eaten Nubian Ibex (*Capra nubiana*), the last Arabian Oryx (*Oryx leucoryx*) were said to have roamed the Wadi Jauf into the 1960's. A handful of Leopards (*Panthera pardus nimr*) survived into the 1990's but these were almost certainly hunting domestic livestock. Most of the Leopards trapped and killed (two were held captive in the capital San'a' at the time of our visit) were said to have come out of the vast, rugged Wadah area to the north of Raydah, which we visited but our time was too limited to do anything meaningful. So, we never did return and as far as we are aware no in depth wildlife surveys have been undertaken- understandable-although some camera-trapping has been undertaken proving that a few Leopards still survive.



Skittering Frog

Our total non- domestic- mammal haul included troops of Hamadryas Baboons (*Papio hamadryas*) in Wadi Mawr and Wadi Taran in the Ma'rib, Henley's Gerbil (*Gerbillus henleyi*) caught in a live trap, Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes arabs*) were fairly common throughout, as were Cape Hares, the latter especially on the Tihama coastal plain and Rock Hyrax in a few locations in the highlands. We had road kills of White-tailed Mongoose (*Ichneumia albicauda*) and Small Spotted Genet (*Genetta genetta*). One of the highlights for us was the sighting of the large, almost black, rodents, the King Jirds (*Meriones rex*) in the mountains around Juban, but despite our best efforts we couldn't persuade them to enter our live traps.



Griffon Vultures strangely are protected, because they clean up animal carcasses around villages and towns.

The overall picture for birds is a happier one, with large flocks of Griffon Vultures (*Gyps fulvus*) seen as "health inspectors" with dead livestock put at specific sites to serve as "vulture restaurants" with a purpose, and not for tourist cameras! We saw several Bearded Vultures (*Gypaetus barbatus*) in the highlands but we were told that their numbers had declined. At village rubbish dumps there were always plenty of Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) and large flocks of Fan-tailed Ravens (*Corvus rhipidurus*). Bruce's Green Pigeons (*Treron waalia*) feeding in Wadi Taran. And of course the Skittering Frog (*Rana ehrenbergi*), we wondered why it has this name- we found out, as it took us almost an hour to catch one for the cameras in a nameless wadi near Hajjah. A highlight was watching a spawning migration of thousands of small minnows (*Garra sp*) swimming upstream in Wadi Tuban. The vast numbers of ghost crabs that invaded our beach camp at Bi'r Tha'lan will not be forgotten. Yes, there is still much to ponder over the biodiversity of Yemen. So, why did we decide not to go back?

Arabia Felix is not an easy land to travel around and for the first time ever, or since, we agreed to have a driver/translator, we are glad we did! Apart from the current civil war, Yemen is controlled by tribal and clan warlords, each with their own roadblocks and requiring a specific “permit”, our driver knew which to show from his pack between the front seats. In the north towards the Saudi Arabian border our driver negotiated our way out of a threatening situation, lots of shouting, flailing firearms. It later turned out that we had entered a tribal territory hostile to the government of the time. Our hosts in Sa’na’ insisted we talk to the secret service operative at the British Embassy, as it turned out we were the first known Europeans to have entered that area for decades.

Ignorance is bliss! Could it get worse? On an off day Chris volunteered to mark out a trail for a “fun run” held each year by the embassy. I was dropped off and wound my way up a trail covering some 5km, had my first sighting of the very localized Philby’s Partridge (*Alectoris philbyi*), a true highlight. Then came the lowlight when I descended to a village and was informed that I had just walked through an active minefield laid by the Egyptian army in the 1960’s. That year the “fun run” was cancelled!

September Wildlife Diary

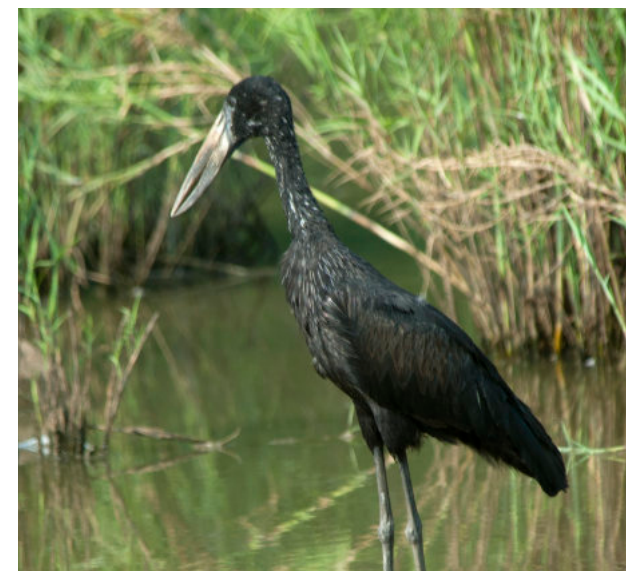
By



- Cape Fur Seals (*Arctocephalus pusillus*) off the south-western coast of South Africa played a role in augmenting the income of early Dutch colonists. In a document dated 16 September 1654 it was recorded: “As the sealskins fetch 26 stivers per piece in Holland we intend zealously to recommence operations. It is likely that 60,000 to 70,000 will be ready for the return fleet...” Seal hunting operations were halted when the price fell, but resumed as soon as it became viable again.
- In September 1685 Simon van der Stel, the commander of the Dutch East India Company colony at the southern tip of Africa, was leading an expedition northwards from Cape Town into Namaqualand. By the 11th of the month the party had crossed the Olifants River near its estuary and had reached Langvlei, about 30km south-east of present-day Lambert’s Bay. According to Francois Valentyn, chronicling the events some 40 years later, “A large elephant appeared, fleeing from us because of the great noise we made... We camped at a place well provided with grass, water, and firewood. While there another elephant came, at which His Excellency ordered the trumpet blown and the drum beaten to make him turn back... It did.”



Cape Fur Seal cows and pups



African Openbill Stork

- In September 1779 Colonel Robert James Gordon saw 50 elephants just west of Augrabies Falls on the Orange River, South Africa. He noted: “Within an arc of a semicircle at one sighting 12 giraffes, 50 elephants, five rhinoceroses, a troop of 20 ostriches, a troop of 13 kudu, one large troop of zebras, with hippos playing about in the river below.” Within a few years all were gone!
- The last Cheetah (*Acinonyx jubatus*) known to have been killed in South Africa’s Eastern Cape was shot on 12th September 1889. A certain Mr Whitfield found the cat 25km west of King William’s Town and shot it. Two Cheetahs had been shot the previous year 35km north of Grahamstown.
- In East and Central Africa, Common Warthog (*Phacochoerus africanus*) births take place from September to December, as the dry season is coming to an end and the rainy season is beginning.
- The birthing season of the Crowned Lemur (*Eulemur coronatus*) extends from mid-September into October. Occurring only in the extreme north of Madagascar, this endangered species is active both day and night.
- In Zimbabwe, the African Open-billed Stork (*Anastomus lamelligerus*) breeds mainly in September, as it also does in Chad. On Lake Tana in Ethiopia it lays eggs from August into September. A strange looking bird with an obvious beak gap, this denizen of larger inland waters and marshy areas feeds mainly on snails and mussels.
- The Red-necked Falcon (*Falco chicquera*) is widely distributed south of the Sahara, occurring in sparsely vegetated habitats and often along seasonal water

courses. In southern Africa, particularly the Kalahari, and in Zambia, breeding peaks in August and September. The eggs, usually three, are mostly laid in the old nests of crows and other raptors.

- The Namaqua Day Gecko (*Rhoptropella ocellata*) lays its one or two eggs in September, concealing them under a flake of exfoliating rock. It may lay more clutches as the season progresses. This highly active little lizard is endemic to north-west Namaqualand and adjacent area of Namibia.
- A mayfly known as the September Brown (*Adenophlebia peringueyella*) takes its name from the fact that there is a major emergence of these insects during September. Although the adults, being unable to feed, live for only a short time, the nymphs spend about six months in the mountain streams of South Africa’s Western Cape.
- September and October are the flowering months for the Borassus Palm (*Borassus aethiopium*) in Zambia. As the fruits take some 12 months to mature, many palms carry fruits and flowers at the same time. This is a large species, reaching up to 24 metres in height, with the leaf fibres used to make woven mats, fish traps and nets.



Borassus Palm

Student feedback

No one better than our own students to give us feedback on our courses.

Would you like to share your feedback on our courses, magazine, social media?

Do not hesitate to pop us an email (info@wildlifecampus.com), make a post on (y)our social media or send us a WhatsApp (+27 69 177 9345).

"Thank you for your excellent service, now I know my studies are in good hands and I have made the correct choice to study with WildlifeCampus!"

"These courses are excellent. Well put together, very interesting, and the "test as you go" mechanism is very good at embedding learning. I'll be doing a few more over the next while."

"The course was great, it certainly had me using my brain and I had to repeat many of the tests, but I learnt a great deal and thoroughly enjoyed it. Thanks to you all!"

"I really enjoyed the Game Lodge Management course, the way that the questions were framed forced one to think properly, and your systems all worked and flowed beautifully."

"Thank you so much. We are very pleased with the courses and what our students have learnt."

"Appreciate it and thank you for all the opportunities to date. I have truly learnt a lot and have enjoyed it."

"I am so excited to start this course and many others. What you guys have set up is amazing!"



At Wild Dreams, we often talk about it being the time to find a new job. Many people have worked for multiple companies, often in different industries, and it might be time for them to start looking for another job once again. However, others find their happy place at work, and before they know it, they have been working at the same place for 25 years and are still loving it!

That is the case for Mirriam, who has been working at Kings Camp in the Timbavati for her entire career and is still going strong. She shares some wise words in this interview.

25 years is quite an achievement! Was Kings Camp your first job or did you work before you started at the lodge?

Kings Camp was my first job, before I accepted the position, I was doing a pre-school childcare course because I love children and at the time, I was considering opening a creche when I had the funds to do so.

What year did you start at Kings Camp, if you can remember that far back!

It was 1997.

How did you get the job?

I found out from a friend who was working at the lodge that they were hiring and I told her I was interested so she suggested I send through my CV. I was then contacted by the manager, who was and still is the manager today! She asked me to come for an interview. The interview went well and I got the job and started the very next day, I didn't even go home in-between!

What was your first position when you started?

I was mostly working as a housekeeper, however back then all of the staff worked in all departments so although this was my main role I would also work in the bar and dining room often and do whatever was needed.

What do you remember about your first experience of working life?

I had a wonderful housekeeping manager who really mentored me, her name was Laetitia and she really motivated me to better myself. At the time I wasn't sure why she kept telling me to prove myself, I thought maybe I wasn't doing the job well but then I realised that if I really worked hard I could move forward in my career quickly and she used to always say "Gijima" which means "you should run/get moving/be quick" in Zulu, so I always had this in my mind and would try and go above and beyond in everything I did and even though I was just a housekeeper I would often do the work of a supervisor and support her which helped me to learn quickly but also get noticed.

How did your career progress while at working at the lodge?

After being in housekeeping I was offered a position by management in the bar, we had people come to give us training and I did this job for about 1,5 years and I then found out that our then head of housekeeping was leaving so I had decided to apply for this, I wrote an application letter but I didn't get the chance to give it to Warren and Lisha, the managers because they called me in for a meeting and said that they felt I may be able to do the job and asked me if I would be willing to do it for a three-month trial period to see how it went. I accepted and after just 1,5 months they confirmed I would stay in this role, so I was now the head of housekeeping which is the job I am still in now.

How many staff do you manage?

The most I have managed was 13, it is currently 12 housekeepers that report to me.

There must be too many to count, but what is your happiest memory of being at Kings Camp so far?

Both times I was promoted were really happy memories for me, especially because they had been unexpected and showed me that I was being noticed for my hard work.

I also have a clear memory of being recognised for my work, I can even recall that it was a really hot day. I was working in the bar at the time and our owners were sitting on our viewing deck which overlooks the lodge. I noticed a guest coming from a room who was carrying 2 bags of laundry. I ran over to the guest and asked if I could help them and confirmed that they were taking them to be washed. The guest was really grateful. What I didn't realise was that our owner was watching me and shortly after this the managers called me to ask if the guest had called me over or if I had seen the guest and gone over myself, so I explained I had assisted her as I saw she needed help and they thanked me on behalf of them and the owner and said that this is the exactly what they needed from the staff.

Do you have any advice for people who are hoping to get promoted?

Always go the extra mile, act on things before you are asked to do them and always try your best and Gijima!

Do you have advice for anyone who would like to start working within the hospitality industry?

This advice is really relevant for any industry but to me it's really important to know what you want and to do what you love. So many people only work because they want to get money and although this is important you should do your job because you love it first and foremost.

Why do you love working in the industry?

I love being in the bush, I like the animals and the peace and quiet. I also love meeting people from all over the world.

Thank you, Mirriam, its been a pleasure hearing about your hospitality journey and here's to many more years!

Would a career in the hospitality industry be something for you?

Then our online Front of House Lodge Operations course by Wild Dreams Hospitality will definitely be a nice addition to your CV!

[Click here to try a free component!](#)



Wild Dreams Hospitality Pty Ltd

Wild Dreams Hospitality is currently recruiting for the following positions.

Job Title	Location	Salary
Assistant General Manager	Kenya	Market Related
Assistant Head Guide	KNP	R13kpm
Assistant Lodge Manager	North West	R10kpm
Assistant Lodge Manager	KZN	R12kpm
Assistant Lodge Manager	KZN	R15-17kpm
Assistant Lodge Manager/Res Couple	Northern Cape	R20kpm
Assistant Maintenance Manager	Cape Winelands	R15k
Assistant Managers	Namibia	N15kpm
Camp Manager	Limpopo	R12-15kpm
Camp Manager/Res Couple	Northern Cape	R30kpm
Clinic Supervisor	Northern Cape	Neg
Concession Manager/Guide Trainer	Uganda	\$1500 neg
Conservation Manager	Okavango/Chobe Region	BWP25000
F&B Manager	Namibia	N\$17kpm CTC
F&B Manager	Limpopo	R25-28kpm
Field guide (ideally Trails)	Balule	R10-12kpm
Field Guides	Gauteng	Neg
Field Guides / Res	Northern Cape	R8-12,5kpm neg DOE
Fleet Manager	Botswana	BWP3500-00
General Management Couple	Costa Rica	USD7000-10000
General Manager	Tanzania	\$3500-\$4500 DOE
General Manager/Couple	Sabi Sands	R40-48kpm / R60-70kpm
Guide	Balule	R5-8kpm
Guide	Eastern Cape	R10-12kpm
Guide Trainer	Hoedspruit	R21-28kpm
Host	Klaserie	R15-17kpm
Deputy General Manager	Cape Town	R60k
Housekeeper	Thornybush	R5 900
Junior Chef	Sabi Sands	R5 500
Junior Guide	North West	Market related
Junior Guide	Northern Limpopo	R7000 +
Junior Guide	Hoedspruit	R5000-R5500
Junior Guide	Limpopo	Market related
Junior Guide	Limpopo	R7-10kpm + meals and uniform
Junior Management Couple	Klaserie	Neg
Lead Trails Guide	Mpumalanga	Neg

Lodge Anchor/FOH	Sabi Sands	R8,5kpm
Lodge Guide	Namibia	
Lodge Manager	KZN	R25kpm + 3 meals and uniform
Lodge Manager	Tanzania	\$2,200
Lodge Managers	Uganda	\$2-2,5kpm
Maintenance Assistant	Timbavati	R5,5-6,5kpm
Maintenance Manager	Okavango/Chobe Region	BWP25000
Maintenance/Security Manager	KZN	R25kpm + 3 meals and uniform
PA	Hoedspruit	Neg
Pastry Chef (CDP Level)	Sabi Sands	R6,7-8kpm
Reception Admin & Service Coordinator	Limpopo	R16,5kpm
Relief FOH	Limpopo	
Sales and Support Assistant	Hoedspruit	R7kpm + commission
Safari Host	KZN	R8-10kpm
Senior Guide	Limpopo	R12-15kpm
Senior Guide	Northern Limpopo	R10000 +
Service Supervisor	Sabi Sands	R13,5kpm
Student Coordinator	Hoedspruit	R6000-7000
Trails Guide	Klaserie	R15-17kpm
Trails Guide (possibly couple)	Limpopo	R12,5kpm
Training Facilitator	Cape Town	R33-36kpm

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Big 5 bouncers

By David Batzofin



To paraphrase the immortal words of the legendary Scottish poet Robbie Burns, "The plans of mice and men tend to do the cha-cha slide of chaos." I mean, isn't that just the perfect way to say, "Well, that escalated quickly"?

I was recently at a well-known game lodge with my wife to celebrate our wedding anniversary and I had a stroke of brilliance, or so I thought.

I decided, in all my romantic splendour, to organise a bush walk followed by a picnic breakfast in some secluded, picturesque spot. Smooth, right?



Led by an experienced trail guide, we charted our path and settled on the perfect breakfast rendezvous not too far away. And off we went on the big day, like a trio of adventurers out to conquer the wilds. We were basically a Disney movie in the making.

Now, let's get one thing straight – bush walks are like the cool, rebellious cousin of those standard game drives. You're not lounging in a vehicle; you're out on foot, taking in nature like a true explorer. All the rules were in place: single-file walking, no chit-chatting, and a firm eye on our surroundings. Safety first, folks!



But, you know how it goes. As we meandered along, the rules started feeling a bit like New Year's resolutions – great in theory, but in reality, they never last very long. This led us, oh-so-gently, to the brink of a buffalo buffet. A whole herd of them just munching away, and we were about to crash their party.

Thankfully, we saw them before they noticed us. Talk about a lucky escape! Hearts pounding like the bass at a rock concert, we dodged potential trouble and survived to continue our perambulation, but in the opposite direction.

But wait, there's more! Our route was a loop around the lodge, culminating in a bush breakfast that was (supposedly) being set up while we were walking. All good in theory until the universe decided, "Let's spice things up."

We watched in disbelief as our precious breakfast zoomed off in the wrong direction, determined to explore the wild unknown without us. Radio calls were met with cricket noises, and there we stood, with our dreams of breakfast sausages and bacon evaporating into thin air. So, dejectedly, we trudged back to the lodge, silently cursing fate and the unreliable radio.

As if the cosmic stand-up comedian hadn't had enough laughs at our expense, a trio of buffalo bulls (also known as dagga boys) decided to make a surprise guest appearance.

These cantankerous fellows were living it up, wallowing in mud and clearly playing bodyguards for the road ahead. It's like they'd watched one too many gangster movies and decided they were the buffalo mafia.

You might think, "Why not just call for help?" Great question, my friend. We would've, except our trusty radio turned out to be a fancy paperweight. So, there we were, face to face with the bovine bouncers, protected by our guide and his rifle, who had placed himself between us and the trio.

With our hearts doing a conga line, we did the only sensible thing: tiptoeing past these furry bouncers like our lives depended on it – which, incidentally, they kinda did. Believe it or not, we managed to pull off this near-Olympic feat of stealth without the buffaloes batting an eyelid.

Mission: Buffalo dodge – accomplished!

And what about the breakfast, you ask? Oh, it's a classic comedy of errors. As it turns out, the kitchen crew had a little chit-chat mishap, and they set up a whole breakfast extravaganza at the wrong location. So, while we were risking our lives with possibly the most dangerous of the Big 5 species, they were waiting for the no-show party guests at the wrong location.

And that, my friends, is how our grand anniversary escapade turned into a symphony of slapstick misadventures.

Remember, life's just a wild safari of surprises, so buckle up and keep your sense of humour handy – you never know when you might need it!



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

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Photography competition



Photography competition winner September

Female leopard - Sheldon Victor - Chobe, Botswana

"My wife and I were in Chobe, doing a self-drive on the riverfront route, going towards Ihaha. On one of the loops, my wife, who was scanning the tree tops for leopard, spotted an impala kill in a tree. We spent a couple of hours looking for the elusive cat, but we were unlucky.

The following morning we decided to go back and see if we could spot the leopard. To our utter disbelief, we found two cubs feeding on the impala kill. Then, as I prepared to take a couple of photographs of the cubs, the mother appeared from out of nowhere and sat next to the tree where the cubs were feeding. She just looked so elegant that I had to take a photograph of her instead of the cubs."

Submit your entry and stand a chance to see your picture featured on the backpage of our magazine!

Send your picture with relevant story, location and credits to info@wildlifecampus.com

If your picture gets chosen you win 1 month of WildlifeCampus subscription. During this month you will be able to access ALL WildlifeCampus online courses! (T's and C's apply)