

WILD ZULULAND

Digital Magazine

*Manyoni Ridge
Safari Lodge*

*A Luxury bush retreat,
coming soon*

*Luleka never
disappoints!*

*Luleka in Manyoni Private
Game Reserve showcases
their leopard sightings.*

**WE CELEBRATE WOMEN
IN THE WILD**

**THE COST OF OVER-
HABITUATION OF
LEOPARDS**

**Discover Safari
items that you need
this Winter**

**IT'S CHEETAH
CUB SEASON!**

PLAN A TRIP TO GIANTS CASTLE

**COVER IMAGE: ZANDER AND
STEFNI RAUTENBACH
WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY**

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Issue 5

YOUR GUIDE INTO THE WILD

Photo credit
Brenda Haynes

Contents

Leopards of Luleka	04
Travel: Wild Escapes	12
Sunset Safari Camp	15
Beyond Zululand	16
Habituation of Leopards	21
Women in the Wild	31
Recipe: Impala stew	34

We're back & *wilder* than ever.

After a season of quiet in the bush, Wild Zululand is returning, reimagined, refreshed, and more passionate than ever about the places and creatures that make the world so extraordinary. You'll notice a new logo. A brand-new blog to dig deeper into the stories that matter. But beneath the fresh coat of paint, the mission remains exactly the same, to celebrate the wildlife, landscapes, and conservation work of Zululand and beyond and to help you make the most of your time in the bush.

This issue is one to savour. We're bringing you educational reads alongside the kind of travel inspiration that makes you want to pack a bag immediately. Whether you're planning your first safari or searching for your next off-the-beaten-track escape, we've got your next adventure covered.



BOOK NOW

Shenay

Editor-in-Chief





Zululand
Conservation Trust

MAKE AN IMPACT TODAY



JOIN THE ZULULAND CONSERVATION TRUST AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Volunteers at ZCT support vital community and conservation projects, assisting staff with daily tasks and behind-the-scenes efforts. Can't join in person? You can still help by donating or spreading the word. Every contribution counts toward creating lasting change.

DONATE



Photo credit
Brenda Haynes

WILDLIFE & PHOTOGRAPHY

The Leopards of *Luleka*

We take a look into the leopard sightings at Luleka and how conservation efforts in Zululand are making a difference.



Photo credit
Brenda Haynes

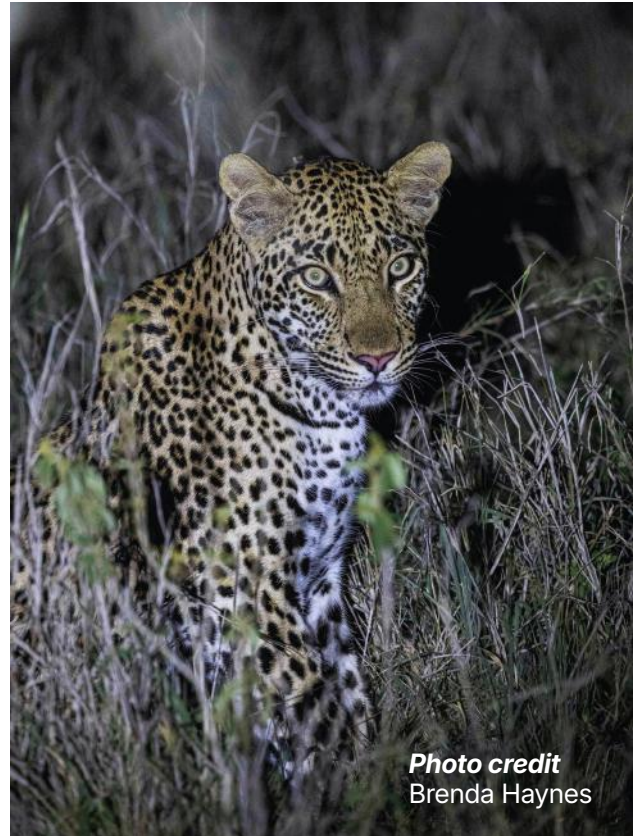
Not only on International Leopard Day should we raise awareness for leopards, it should be an everyday effort. These magnificent animals need our support year-round to help protect their future and the ecosystems they call home. Every sighting is a special one, leaving people in awe. Some are once in a lifetime, while others are lucky enough to catch a glimpse more than once. Leopards in Zululand are elusive and while people regard all leopards as elusive, the Zululand leopards like to truly earn that title. But one lodge in Manyoni Private Game Reserve seems to be having the best luck with

leopards. Luleka Homestead, perfectly positioned with stunning accommodation and offering daily game drives, has consistently given its guests incredible leopard encounters. One of their guides, Wonderboy, whom many have come to fondly call "Ingwe Man", has an exceptional talent for finding them. Some guests even spot different leopards throughout their stay. How's that for luck? From leopards in trees, to crossing the road, walking across the river, casually scent marking, and showing up under the cover of night, the sightings are never disappointing.

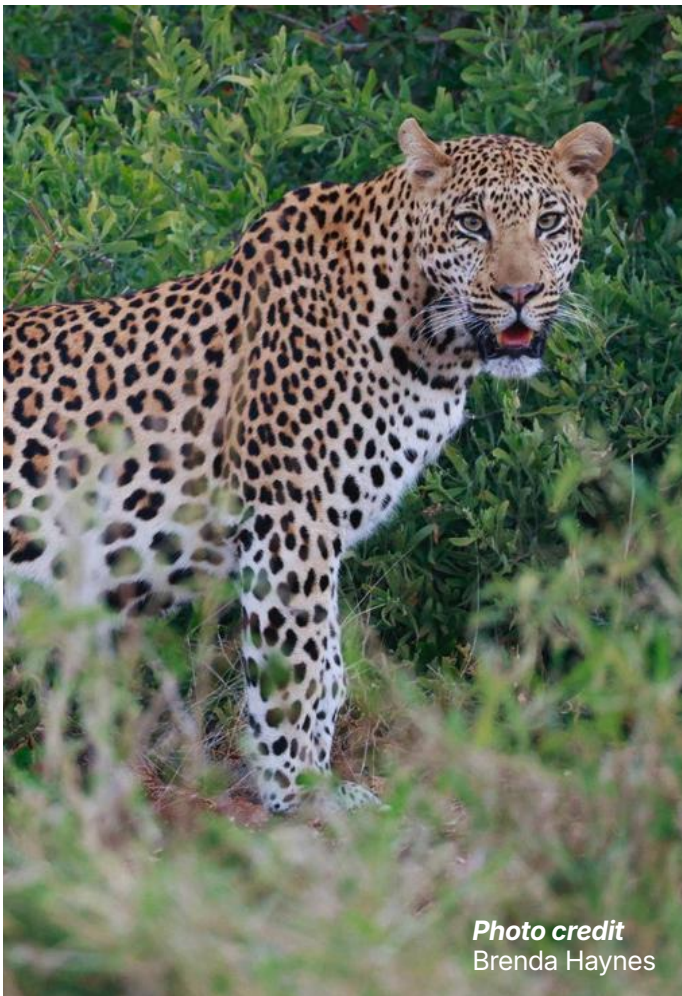


LULEKA NEVER DISAPPOINTS.

The Luleka family has a saying, "Luleka never disappoints" and we couldn't agree more. Whether you stay at the Homestead or join a day visit from outside the reserve, there is always something to look forward to, and leopards are certainly one of them, amongst the other Big 5. The Zululand Conservation Trust also has an active Leopard Camera Project,



with efforts being made to track leopards and camera traps being set up across their territories. By creating a consistent cycle of exposure, they hope to habituate the leopards to human presence.



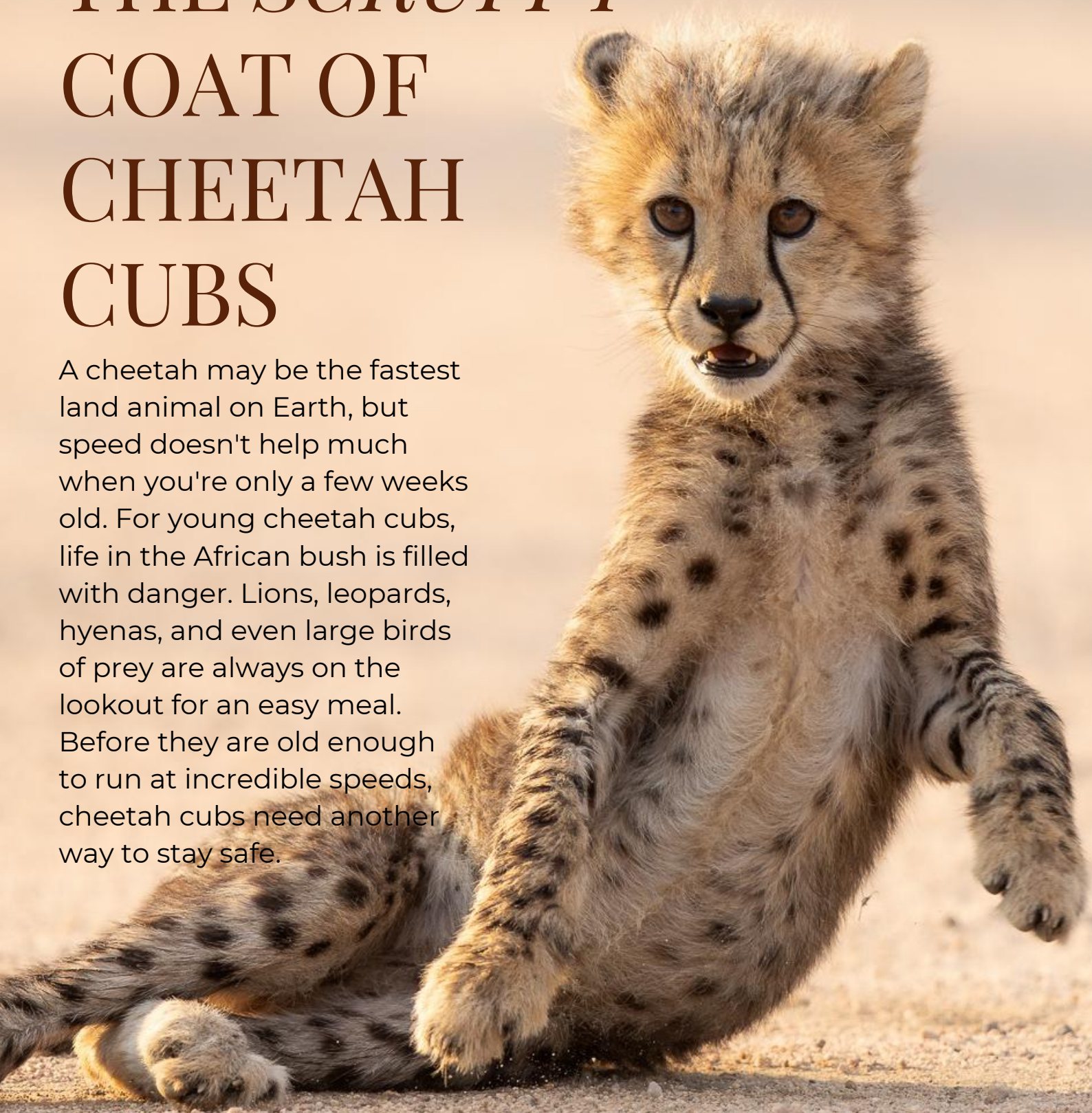
With reduced vegetation during the dry season, it becomes prime time to spot leopards on an early morning or late evening game drive. Being only 3.5 hours from Durban, Luleka is the perfect getaway. We recommend staying at the Homestead, an exclusive-use, self-catering lodge sleeping up to 10 guests, making it ideal for a trip with friends or family. Catering can be arranged on request, and with both morning and evening game drives on offer, your chances of spotting leopards are greatly increased. Spending a few days is ideal, giving the reserve time to reveal its magic.

All images used are photographed by Brenda Haynes, whose incredible eye for wildlife photography captures the very essence of every sighting and the leopards, as always, make the perfect subject.



THE *SCRUFFY* COAT OF CHEETAH CUBS

A cheetah may be the fastest land animal on Earth, but speed doesn't help much when you're only a few weeks old. For young cheetah cubs, life in the African bush is filled with danger. Lions, leopards, hyenas, and even large birds of prey are always on the lookout for an easy meal. Before they are old enough to run at incredible speeds, cheetah cubs need another way to stay safe.



That's where their unusual appearance comes in. Unlike the sleek, spotted cats we are familiar with, cheetah cubs are born with a long, shaggy grey mantle running down their backs. This fluffy coat makes them look very different from the adults they will eventually become. Many researchers believe this appearance may help cubs resemble a honey badger, an animal well known for its fearless nature and ability to defend itself.

Predators that spot a cub in the grass may think twice before approaching, giving the youngster a better chance of escaping unnoticed. This is known as Batesian mimicry, where one species benefits by resembling another that predators prefer to avoid. Whether predators truly mistake cheetah cubs for honey badgers is still debated, but even a moment of hesitation

can make a difference in the wild. Not all scientists agree that mimicry is the reason for the cubs' distinctive coat. Some suggest the shaggy mantle acts as camouflage, helping the cub blend into the surrounding grasslands. Others believe it may help protect young cubs from the sun or assist with temperature regulation.

As cheetahs grow older, their survival strategy changes. The shaggy mantle gradually disappears, revealing the sleek, spotted coat we associate with adult cheetahs. By then, they are developing the speed and agility that will help them survive on their own.

Whether it's camouflage, mimicry, or a combination of both, one thing is certain, before a cheetah earns its title as the world's fastest land animal, it relies on a clever set of natural defences to make it through its most vulnerable stage of life.



Photo credit
Zelda Harmse

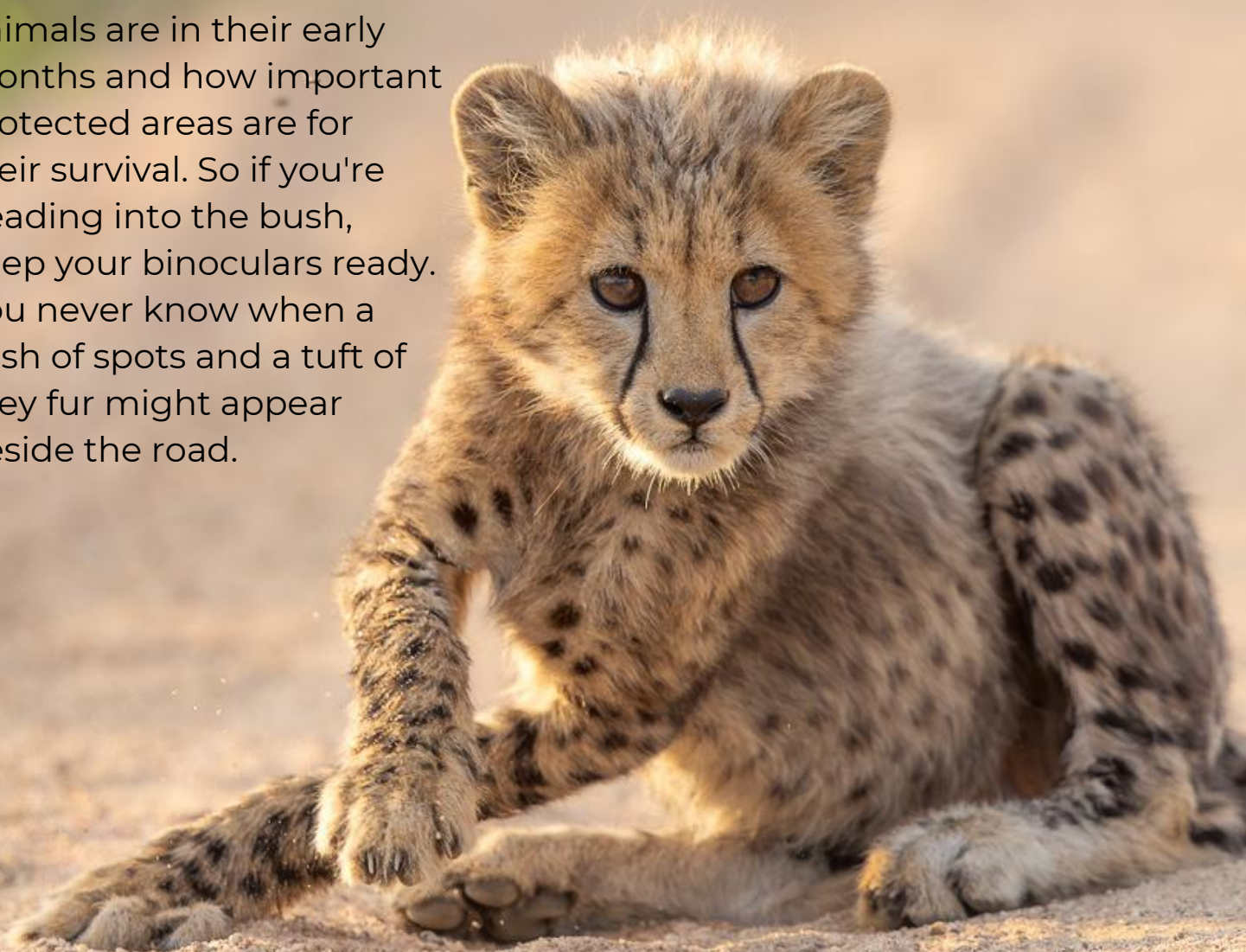
IT'S CUB SEASON

If you're lucky enough to be out on safari at the moment, keep an eye out for one of the bush's cutest sightings, cheetah cubs. Recently, at Kruger National Park, we have been treated to some incredible sightings, including a cheetah mother and her cubs crossing the road near Berg-en-Dal Rest Camp.

Watching these little ones dart through the grass is always a special experience. Please keep a safe distance and give them plenty of space. As a mother, she is naturally protective and may feel threatened if people get too close to her cubs. Stay in your vehicle at all times. Seeing them and capturing photos can be an incredible experience, but no picture is worth causing stress or making her or her cubs feel unsafe.



Cheetah cub sightings have also been reported in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. Keep an eye out around Windy Gap near Hilltop Camp, as well as along the 1H-4H Mngqabatheki area, where these young cats have recently been seen. For many visitors, seeing a cheetah is memorable. Seeing a mother with cubs is something even more special. It's a reminder of just how vulnerable these animals are in their early months and how important protected areas are for their survival. So if you're heading into the bush, keep your binoculars ready. You never know when a flash of spots and a tuft of grey fur might appear beside the road.



TRAVEL

A large, dark silhouette of an acacia tree dominates the left side of the frame. The background is a warm, golden sunset sky. In the distance, a tent structure is visible on the right, and a few small figures can be seen near it. The overall scene is a serene savanna landscape.

Wild Escapes

From luxury stays in Manyoni Private Game Reserve to a newly revamped self-catering safari retreat overlooking the Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, we bring you the best in travel.



Photo credit
Noel Otto

A New Era of *Luxury Safari* *Living*

Tucked away in the heart of Manyoni Private Game Reserve, something extraordinary is taking shape. Manyoni Ridge Safari Lodge is currently being built and it promises to be bigger, bolder, and more luxurious than anyone could imagine. Designed as a private sanctuary within one of South Africa's most celebrated reserves, the lodge will offer just nine exclusive suites, ensuring every guest enjoys an intimate and highly personalised safari experience.

Whether you're seeking a romantic escape in a one-bedroom suite or a spacious two-bedroom family suite, every stay will be fully inclusive and thoughtfully curated. Guests can expect immersive luxury safari experiences that connect them deeply with the reserve and its conservation efforts. From game drives and guided walking safaris to rhino orphanage visits, every day offers something thrilling. Conservation enthusiasts will also have the opportunity to witness possible rhino horn trimming, experience rare pangolin conservation up close, and even observe K9 training in action.

Photo credit
Manyoni Ridge Safari Lodge

And then, there's the ultimate luxury...

The main lodge will feature a beautifully designed lounge area with panoramic views across the reserve, alongside a sophisticated bar, multiple dining spaces, a stargazing terrace, entertainment areas, a spa, sauna, and plunge pool. Every detail has been carefully considered to create an atmosphere of comfort, exclusivity, and relaxation between safari adventures.

Whether you're the kind of traveller who enjoys reading beside the pool while distant lion roars echo through the bushveld, or someone who finds peace in the quiet luxury of a spa treatment, Manyoni Ridge Safari Lodge is being created with every personality in mind.

At its core, the lodge is about offering guests a deeper form of relaxation, one that goes beyond luxury and leaves visitors feeling fully immersed in both nature and tranquillity. While the lodge is still under construction, its journey is already inspiring excitement. Follow along as this dream destination comes to life in the wild beauty of Manyoni Private Game Reserve.





SELF CATERING CHALETS / SAFARI TENTS

Each air-conditioned unit includes a private bathroom, kitchenette and outdoor braai area, private dining at your unit or communal dining facility for groups, free Wi-Fi and secure parking.

Game view from your private patio! Private open Safari vehicles available onsite for our guests.

Next to the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Game Park – one of Africa's oldest wildlife reserves known for Big Five game viewing.



BOOK NOW

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BEYOND ZULULAND

Journey into the wild

Beyond Zululand is your guide to discovering unique destinations and experiences on your journey to Zululand, and even a little beyond if you are looking for a refreshing change of scenery.

Photo credit
EKZN Wildlife



GIANTS CASTLE

Set in the heart of the Maloti-Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site, Giant's Castle is a popular mountain getaway known for its beautiful scenery and peaceful surroundings. About six hours from Johannesburg and three hours from Durban, it offers visitors a chance to enjoy the natural beauty of the Drakensberg. Often called the "Flower of the Drakensberg," the area is filled with rolling hills, rocky cliffs, and colourful wildflowers, especially during spring when agapanthus and red-hot poker are in bloom.



There are several marked trails for walking and hiking, ranging from easy riverside paths to routes leading into the mountains. The area is also well known for birdwatching, with the Vulture Hide giving visitors the opportunity to spot species such as the bearded vulture, Cape vulture, and Verreaux's eagle. Guests can also enjoy meals at the fully licensed Izimbali Restaurant, which overlooks the Bushman's River and offers both buffet and à la carte options. With its mix of nature, outdoor activities, and quiet surroundings, Giant's Castle is an ideal escape for anyone wanting to experience the Drakensberg



WILD STYLE

Sash lives life, *on Safari*

Sashena served major safari-chic inspiration on a recent visit to Nambiti Private Game Reserve, with a look that was effortlessly Pinterest-worthy.



Min Min Gold Metal Geometric Sunglasses

Beatrice Intarsia Knitwear Dress, Poetry Stores

Coach Willow Tote Bag



DRESSED FOR AN ADVENTURE

Sporting natural tones, earthy greens, warm browns, and a touch of animal print for a stylish pop, you can turn a simple safari outfit into a fashion-inspired statement. Because who said the bush has to be boring? Safari style is all about blending comfort, practicality, and a little flair while embracing the beauty of the wild.

CONSERVATION

Learning to Protect

From understanding the habits of leopards to learning about the unique coat patterns of the African wild dog, awareness plays a vital role in conservation.



Photo credit
Sean de la Harpe-Parker

OVER-HABITUATION

The hidden cost of close encounters with Leopards and other wildlife

by Sean de la Harpe-Parker

 @sean_de_la_harpe 

In the heart of Africa's wild spaces, few moments compare to the thrill of spotting a leopard in its natural habitat. These powerful and elusive cats are icons of the safari experience, and over time, many have become accustomed to the presence of safari vehicles. This process, known as habituation, allows for extraordinary wildlife viewing but it's a double-edged sword. As leopards and other animals become increasingly comfortable around humans, we must ask, at what point does habituation become over-habituation? And what are the consequences, not just for us, but for them?

A leopard cub is perched on a thick, textured tree branch. The cub is looking towards the left of the frame with a focused expression. Its fur is covered in dark, irregular spots on a lighter tan background. The background is a clear, bright blue sky. The tree branch is dark brown and shows signs of weathering and cracking.

A Necessary Tool With Ethical Boundaries

Habituation is a process through which wild animals gradually reduce their fear response to repeated, non-threatening exposure to humans or vehicles. When done responsibly, this allows for exceptional wildlife sightings and contributes to research, tourism, and conservation funding. However, there is a line and when crossed, it can lead to over-habituation, where the animal begins to alter its natural behavior, loses its fear, or worse, starts interacting with people or vehicles in inappropriate or dangerous ways.



“
Guides, trackers, and lodge teams must deeply understand the principles of operant conditioning and habituation. While getting close to a relaxed leopard may thrill guests, it's critical that the animal doesn't change its behavior in response to the presence of humans. If a leopard starts to show interest in a vehicle, approaches too closely, or displays signs of association between humans and positive experiences, it's a signal that the habituation process has gone too far.

The Dangerous Path of Over-Habituation

While a relaxed leopard next to a vehicle may seem like the pinnacle of a safari moment, such tolerance can be catastrophic outside controlled settings. When wild animals lose their innate fear of humans, the risks grow exponentially especially when they encounter people on foot or in rural dwellings. In some areas, leopards that are accustomed to being tracked on foot have become increasingly accepting of human presence even without a vehicle. This tradition, while revered, may need reassessment, especially when new cubs are being introduced to such behavior.



Photo credit
Sean de la Harpe-Parker



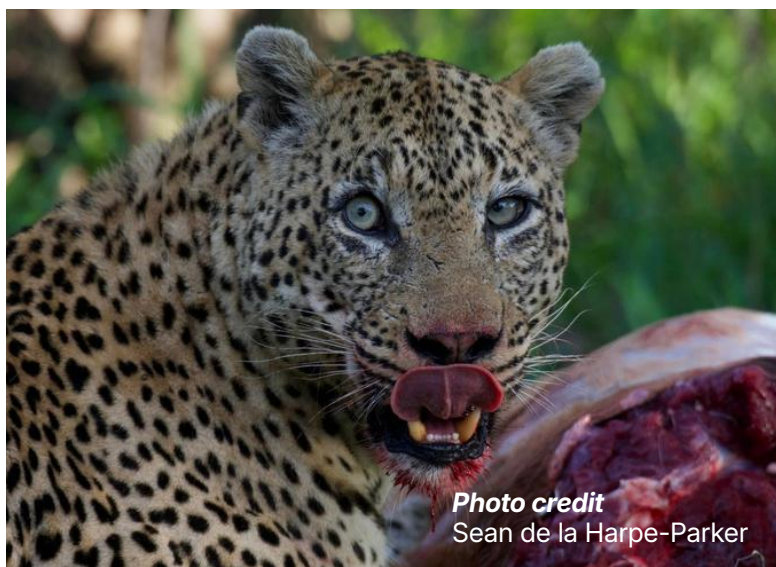
Cubs learn by observing adults, and if those adults show little to no fear of humans, the next generation may be even bolder. It is during this critical learning phase that responsible guides can and must set boundaries. Gentle, aversive stimuli, loud noises, raised voices, or backing off with intent can be used to ensure cubs understand that humans on foot are not to be approached. Let us be clear, under no circumstances should a wild animal show interest in or attempt to interact with a vehicle or its occupants. Allowing such behavior, whether through passive tolerance or the misguided pursuit of a viral photo puts everyone at risk. It also places that animal on a path toward inevitable conflict and likely destruction.

Lines must be drawn by Lodges

There is a growing need for lodges and safari operators to adopt clear procedures for managing interactions with overly habituated animals. Leopards wandering through camp, particularly at night, are not unusual. But how a lodge responds makes all the difference. When a leopard enters camp, especially during hours of guest activity, staff should quietly but firmly direct guests to their rooms and assess the situation.

In some cases, using an aversive may be appropriate. If a kill has been made in the camp, darting and moving the animal and its kill may be the safest and most humane option for all involved. Lodges may also look at how to prevent leopard and other wildlife from entering their grounds. This could be achieved by placing a predator proof fence around the property but in reality, most leopard can figure a way over the fences and the fences also take away from that incredible wild safari feel one can get from an unfenced camp.

Importantly, lodges should resist the temptation to publicize such moments on social media. Images or videos of leopards in camp or on vehicles send the wrong message and can create false expectations. They also dangerously misrepresent the true nature and the potential threat of wild animals. As custodians of the wild, safari operators have a responsibility to celebrate these creatures in ways that honor their wildness, not diminish it.



Ethical Safari Practices for a Sustainable Future

We must always remember: the goal of ethical wildlife viewing is to observe animals behaving naturally, not reacting to us. Every guide and tracker carries the responsibility to maintain this boundary. That means backing off the moment an animal shows awareness of your presence during a walk, and never attempting to provoke a response for guest entertainment or photo opportunities. Habituation is inevitable to some degree.

But how we manage it is everything. Through responsible practices, we can continue to enjoy close-up, incredible encounters while ensuring that wildlife retains the instincts necessary for survival in a world increasingly shaped by human presence. Because when the line between wild and tame is blurred, it is the animals who suffer most. They become victims of our curiosity, our carelessness, and our desire for that perfect shot. Let us choose instead to be guardians of their wildness understanding, respecting, and protecting it at every step.

”



The Art of Doing *Nothing*

Have you ever been on a safari and someone calls out "Leopard..." followed by "tortoise"? Everyone goes quiet because it's like their brains are trained to only hear the leopard part, as if leopard tortoises aren't still a great sighting. Somehow the tourists in the game viewer are then disappointed to find out it's a tortoise. But they are fascinating. Sure, they take a long time to cross the road, but after all it's their home, so who are we to rush them?



With the temperature dropping and grasses drying out, not much rain, winter is where they are able to do nothing and still survive. They go into brumation, it's like when reptiles hibernate, but it's more of a slowing down in this instance. Their metabolism slows down, which reduces the need for food and water, and they become less active.



Now their secret weapon is that they have fat stored from the summer, so that fuels them for winter and they can do what we all need to do sometimes, nothing. They need to conserve their energy and stay warm, so they chill around rocks, sheltered spots and shrubs, and they let time pass. Hydration comes from their ability to retain moisture, their kidneys produce concentrated urine to minimise water loss, so their body can hold onto every drop of moisture. In places where it's very dry or there's less rain, it's more common for them to go into brumation. It's incredible how their body is suited to survive.



Photo credit
Chris Fearnough

A LIVING WORK OF ART IN THE WILD

The Coat of an African Wild Dog

Have you seen an African wild dog up close? Really seen them, as they emerge quietly from the bush, or when they suddenly appear on the road ahead of your vehicle, trotting across without a second thought. Sometimes

they're in motion, chasing prey with that unmistakable urgency of a coordinated pack. Other times, they're completely at ease, stretched out and resting in the open, as if the wild belongs entirely to them.

A UNIQUE NATURAL CAMOUFLAGE



It's in those moments that you notice their coats, a mix of black, brown, white, yellow, and orange tones in some individuals, scattered across the body like paint flicked by nature itself. Yet what makes it even more fascinating is that no two individuals are ever alike. The painted wolf, or African wild dog, carries one of the most distinctive coat patterns in the animal kingdom.

Each animal has a unique arrangement of markings, almost like a natural fingerprint. Within a pack, these patterns are thought to help individuals recognise one another quickly, an advantage in a species that relies so heavily on cooperation and coordination. Beyond identification, the coat may also serve a practical purpose in the wild. The mottled pattern helps break up their outline in grasslands, savannahs, and woodland, offering a form of natural camouflage as they move through changing light and vegetation.

The African wild dog coat consists entirely of stiff, bristle-like hairs with virtually no soft undercoat.

Across regions, subtle differences appear too, East African wild dogs tend to show darker coats with smaller patches of lighter colour, while Southern African populations often display a more varied blend of brown, black, and white. Scientists are still working to fully understand why such striking variation exists. Genetic studies have shown that specific genes influence coat colour, suggesting the pattern is deeply rooted in their biology. Some researchers propose it may aid communication or thermoregulation, while others suggest it could be a by-product of genetic variation rather than direct natural selection.

One consistent feature, however, is that their coats remain largely unchanged throughout their lives. As they age, some individuals may develop thinner fur or small patches of bare skin, but the overall pattern stays recognisable. Interestingly, the markings on the left and right sides of the body are not perfectly symmetrical, adding to their unique, irregular beauty.

Next time you spot them, take a moment to really look at their coats and take in the beauty. After all, it may be the very detail that helps you recognise a specific individual from the pack the next time you visit.





WOMEN IN THE *WILD*

[▶ READ MORE](#)

Get to know Thobile

Thobile connects people to nature, culture and community.

I was *inspired* to become a guide because of my love for nature and meeting people from different countries. I really enjoy guiding for Shoreline Boat Safaris, especially spending time with the hippos. I see them every day, but I never get tired of them, every day brings something new. Being a woman in tourism makes me proud. I feel like I'm showing that women can do this job just as well, especially when it's done with love and passion. My advice to young women is to follow your heart, stay positive and always do your best. When I guide visitors in Zululand, I like to share the real lifestyle of the people here.

I talk about how we use nature, like harvesting different types of reeds and what they mean in our culture. It helps visitors connect with the place in a deeper way. One moment I'll never forget was seeing a hippo fight. It doesn't happen often, and it was a little scary, but also very exciting. Of course, there are challenges too. Sometimes guests get too excited when they see animals for the first time, and it can lead to risky behavior. But with the right training, I've learned how to handle these situations well.

Guiding hasn't changed me, it's helped me find where I belong. I've always wanted to do this, and now I feel proud to show that women can do it and do it perfectly. ”



Photo credit
Heritage Tours & Safaris



Photo credit
Heritage Tours & Safaris

Meet Phindy

I am inspired by a deep desire to share my knowledge and passion for wildlife and birdlife, creating meaningful and positive experiences for every visitor. I truly enjoy interacting with people from diverse backgrounds and personalities, bringing them together around a shared appreciation for nature. As a woman in this field, I feel grateful for the opportunity to break down stereotypes and encourage other women to pursue their passions, regardless of gender.

My advice to others is to be brave, believe in yourself, and embrace your story with confidence. Don't hesitate to seek guidance from experienced mentors along the way. I especially love sharing stories about local culture, the history of animals, trees, and birds, connecting people to the natural world, both from ancient times and today.



Photo credit
Heritage Tours & Safaris



Photo credit
Heritage Tours & Safaris



PREP TIME
**20-30
MINUTES**



COOK TIME
**ABOUT 2½-
3 HOURS**



SERVINGS
4-6 PEOPLE

Succulent **IMPALA STEW**

Ingredients

- 50 ml olive/sunflower oil
- 1 onion, peeled and diced
- Mixed herbs
- 1 kg impala meat, diced
- 2 carrots, peeled and diced
- 1 teaspoon ginger and garlic paste
- Baby potatoes
- 2 bay leaves (dried)
- salt and pepper to taste
- Chicken stock
- A dash of paprika
- Corn (optional)

Instructions

- Marinate the impala meat with salt, pepper, paprika, and mixed herbs.
- Heat the potjie over medium coals on a braai or on medium heat on a gas stove.
- Add the oil to the potjie.
- Add the meat and fry until nicely browned on all sides.
- Remove the meat from the pot and set aside.
- Add the carrots and onions to the pot and cook until the onions become soft and translucent.
- Stir in the ginger and garlic paste together with the bay leaves.
- Cook for 1 minute until fragrant.
- Add the meat back into the pot.
- Pour in enough chicken stock to cover the meat.
- Place the lid on the potjie and allow to simmer on low heat for about 2½ hours, or until the meat is soft and tender.
- Add the baby potatoes and optional corn during the last 45 minutes of cooking.
- Taste and adjust seasoning if needed.
- Serve hot with pap, rice, or fresh bread.



SAFARI MUST-HAVES

Winter Edition



*Bata Safari Mens
Odyssey Boot
R 899, Bata Online*



*K-Way Unisex Chill Beanie
R 179, Cape Union Mart*



*MANGO Girls Trenchcoat
saharab - medium green
R 629, Superbalist*



SUPPORTS CONSERVATION

*3 Lads and a Toucan City Roast
R 100 - R 310, 3 Lads and a
Toucan Online Store*



*Ladies Knit Cuff Zip Detail
Lace-up Ankle Boots
R 799, Woolworths*

*Stanley Classic Vacuum Flask - 1L
R 999, Trappers*




Photo credit

Zander and Stefani Rautenbach

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**NATURE CAN BE BEAUTIFUL,
RAW, AND UNFORGIVING ALL
AT ONCE.**

An unforgettable and intense moment in the wild, captured by Zander and Stefani Rautenbach at Zebra Hills Safari Lodge, nestled within the Manyoni Private Game Reserve. Nature at its most powerful, showcasing both the beauty and unpredictability of life in the bush.

 @zr4_photography



STAY WILD



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