

DISCOVERING ETHIOPIA

issue
250

Friday, 12 April 2019

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GEOGRAPHIC
STORIES

Image © Christian Boix

A VISUAL JOURNEY OF
ETHIOPIA THROUGH THE
EYES OF A PHOTOGRAPHER

africa
GEOGRAPHIC
STORIES

by

Lex van Uught

Friday, 12 April 2019





Ethiopia is a fascinating country. Rapidly recovering since 1991 from the ravages of Marxism, and only relatively recently discovered by cultural and wildlife tourists, it is one of three countries in the world that has never been colonised.

It is the second most populous country in Africa, after Nigeria, with 105 million people, comprising 80 ethnic groups, speaking 80 languages and a further 200 dialects. Their alphabet has 270 letters. And whilst on numbers, Ethiopia boasts 900 bird species, of which 55 are endemics or near-endemics.



An Ethiopian wolf – Africa's most endangered carnivore and the world's rarest canid © Lex van Vught

So here I was, in Ethiopia with Christian Boix from Africa Geographic, ready to embark on a 9-day bird, primate, and wolf-watching photographic safari through the rugged lands of this extraordinary country in the Horn of Africa.

I knew I was in for something special when I was shown three 'lifers' – Tacazze sunbird, baglafecht weaver, Swainson's sparrow – in the scrawny hedge between the terminal building and car park on arrival at Addis Ababa.

This was shortly followed an hour later by six more 'lifers': the African thrush, Rüppell's robin-chat, brown-rumped seedeater, streaky seedeater, white-

collared pigeon, and the red-cheeked cordon-bleu, all spotted in the vacant lot next to our hotel.



Clockwise from left: 1) A priest on the road to Mulketeri and Debre Libanos, north of Addis Ababa © Christian Boix; 2) A priest holds open a page from a bible © Christian Boix; 3) The Debre Birhan Selassie Church in Gondar © Christian Boix; 4) A devout trio leaving the Debre Libanos monastery © Christian Boix



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Clockwise from top left: 1) *A grivet, also known as African green monkey* © Lex van Vught; 2) *A boy swims the river at the Sof Omar caves* © Christian Boix; 3) *The view while driving along the Sanetti Plateau in Bale Mountains National Park* © Christian Boix; 4) *Camels are the most adapted species to the harsh conditions of arid rangelands of Ethiopia* © Christian Boix; 5) *“The locals were charming, humble and helpful”* © Christian Boix

It was an early start the next morning as we set out north across the Sululta Plains. In my mind I was imagining I would see an arid, famine-ridden country, but instead I was delighted to find us travelling through verdant fields, rolling hills, and found myself spell-bound as I gazed upon the stunning Jemmu escarpment.

The colourfully dressed people, villages and the many markets we encountered throughout the trip are a travel and street photographer’s dream. Although still a dismally poor country, there was little squalor and a pastoral life seems to adequately sustain the typically large families.

A girl with her younger sibling and friend smiles for the camera © Christian Boix





En route to Fiche – picking up amongst others wattled ibis, moorland chat, Botta’s wheatear, thick-billed raven, blue-winged goose, and the Abyssinian longclaw – we sat next to a large troupe of geladas (sometimes called the bleeding-heart monkey or the gelada “baboon”), the only grass-eating primate and the male of which is nothing short of spectacular!

Birding at the Debre Libanos Monastery and the Portuguese Bridge was brilliant! We saw white-cheeked turaco, Egyptian vulture, white-billed starling, fan-tailed raven, Rüppell’s black chat, Hemprich’s hornbill, Bruce’s green pigeon, Abyssinian slaty flycatcher and banded and double-toothed barbets.

Birding at the monastery in this devout country held further interest for the camera: large numbers of colourful pilgrims, roadside markets, ubiquitous donkey water-carriers and other beasts of burden.





Clockwise from top left: 1) *A young girl outside her home in Awasa* © Christian Boix; 2) *Geladas are mostly grass-eaters and are the last surviving species of ancient grazing primates* © Christian Boix; 3) *An impressive Bale Mountain landscape with torch lilies (*Kniphofia foliosa*)* © Lex van Vught; 4) *“The colourfully dressed people, villages and the many markets we encountered throughout the trip are a travel and street photographer’s dream”* © Lex van Vught; 5) *Geladas are also known as bleeding-heart monkeys due to their bald chests which expose a distinctive heart-shaped red patch of skin* © Christian Boix



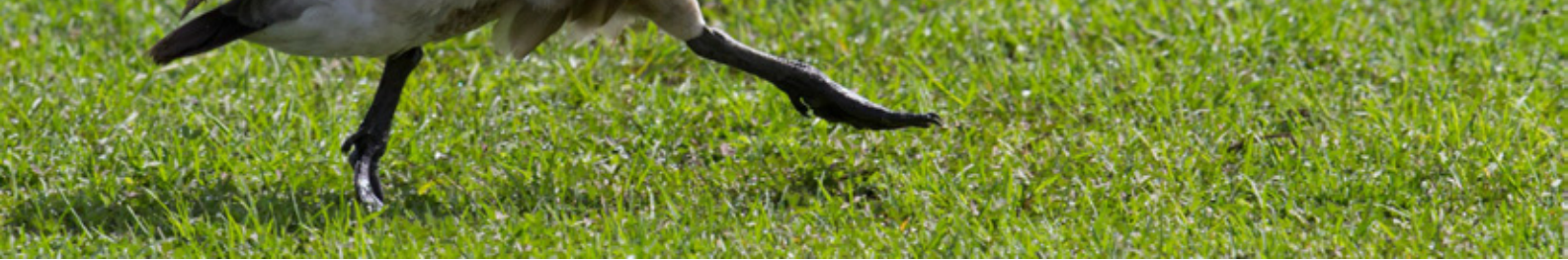


Clockwise from left: 1) *Woman on their way to the market* © Christian Boix; 2) *Woman separating wheat grains by hand* © Christian Boix; 3) *Various religious items for sale alongside the road* © Christian Boix

A charming feature throughout the trip was seeing and photographing Ethiopians going about their daily lives. We saw almost medieval methods of threshing teff, using oxen to trample, and wheat being separated by hand.

The roads were always bustling with livestock herds, shepherds, brightly-dressed women, and smiling urchins appearing out of nowhere in numbers.





A blue-winged goose © Lex van Vught

The next day we ventured south and stayed at Lake Langano en route to the Bale Mountains National Park. Birding was excellent and the list grew rapidly with the Abyssinian ground-hornbill, bare-faced go-away-bird, Rüppell's starling, blue-breasted bee-eater, African citril, white-winged tit, and black-billed wood-hoopoe amongst others. A highlight was getting within metres of a flock of 200+ great white pelicans.

And so it continued... Wonderful scenery, continuous photo stops, lots of hopeful children and many more lifers on the scenic Sanetti Plateau: Rouget's rail, spot-breasted lapwing, chestnut-naped spurfowl, Thekla's lark, Ethiopian siskin and red-billed chough.





Clockwise from top left: 1) *Abyssinian ground hornbill* © Christian Boix; 2) *Bruce's green pigeon* © Lex van Vught; 3) *White-cheeked turaco* © Lex van Vught; 4) *Blue-breasted bee-eater* © Oz Pfenninger; 5) *Cape eagle-owl* © Lex van Vught

On this 4,000-metre-high plateau we were very fortunate to see the Ethiopian wolf, the globe's most endangered canine, with a population of around 400. They feed exclusively on the abundant giant-mole and Blix's grass rats.

The variety of fauna and flora at this altitude was amazing and the giant lobelia, which flowers once and then dies, was photographed from every angle. Returning to Bale the mammal list grew with Starke's hare, Melenik's reedbuck, mountain nyala, klipspringer, duiker, warthog and bushbuck – the last four all slightly different from their southern races.



A mountain nyala, also known as a balbok, spotted in Bale Mountains National Park © Christian Boix



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Caption: *The Sof Omar Cave is the longest cave in Ethiopia at 15.1 kilometres long. Formed by the Weib River through erosion, these caves are of particular significance to Muslim pilgrims, as Sheikh Sof Ahmed was said to have taken refuge here during the 11th century. All photos © Christian Boix*

A day excursion to the historic Sof Omar Caves and surrounds yielded amongst others: Brown-tailed rock-chat, bristle-crowned starling, slate-coloured boubou, rosy-patched bushshrike, crimson-rumped waxbill and white-bellied go-away-bird, as well as hamadryas baboons and camels.

Before I knew it we were heading back to Addis Ababa, with stops at one of the famous rock-hewn churches, the Adadi Mariam, and a visit to the Tiya stelae field. Ethiopia is richly endowed with historical and cultural sites.





Clockwise from left: 1) *Stairs to Adadi Mariam church* © Vob08/Wikimedia Commons; 2) *The Tiya stelae is among the most important of the roughly 160 archaeological sites discovered so far in the Soddo region, south of Addis Ababa. They are the remains of an ancient Ethiopian culture whose age has not yet been precisely determined* © Christian Boix; 3) *A curious Egyptian vulture* © Christian Boix

We also stopped at Lake Awasa for the fish market and ate freshly prepared sushi right next to hundreds of marabou storks. Close to our hotel we added to the list a beautiful sunbird, white-rumped babbler, northern grosbeak-canary and a blue-headed coucal.



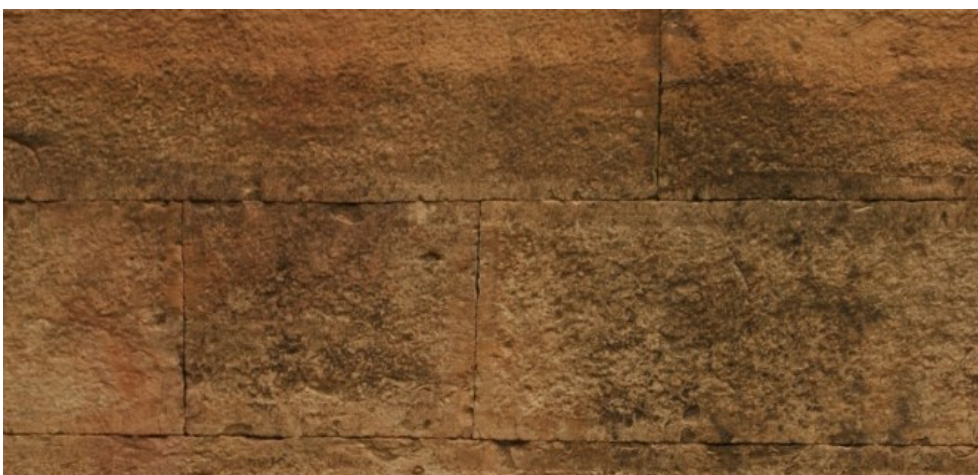




Clockwise from top left: 1) *Colourful fruit and vegetables for sale alongside the road* © Lex van Vught; 2) *A woman walks along an old mountain path* © Christian Boix; 3) *A dead giant lobelia lies fallen in Bale Mountains National Park* © Christian Boix; 4) *The Tiya stelae site contains 36 monuments, including 32 carved stelae covered with symbols, most of which are difficult to decipher* © Christian Boix; 5) *Worshippers leaving the Debre Libanos monastery* © Lex van Vught

The Ethiopian adventure ended with a stroll through the capital's Merkato. The market is one of the largest in Africa and is a noisy, impenetrable mass of teeming people and products, and exotic odours. Exhausting, claustrophobic yet exhilarating – something definitely not to be missed as our senses were assaulted.

The food on the trip was great, especially the wat (spicy stew) with the staple injero, siga tibs (spicy strips of meat) and the tere sega (steak tartare, sort of). The hotel accommodation, like the roads, was, how should I say, variable. The locals were charming, humble and helpful. We did feel very safe throughout.







Clockwise from top left: 1) *An old man rests after prayers* © Christian Boix; 2) & 3) *The Addis merkato is one of the largest in Africa, and is a noisy, impenetrable mass of teeming people and products, and exotic odours* © Lex van Vught; 4) *Prayers being held outside under the shade of a tree* © Christian Boix; 5) *These guys in Sululta were offering their sewing skills for quick fixes and took commissions as well* © Christian Boix

Christian's knowledge of the world's birds, photography and many other topics and sciences was only exceeded by his enthusiasm. Bebeté was our skilled driver, considerate, courteous and professional.

In total we chalked up 260 bird species in five days – 80 lifers for me, and that was out of season by necessity. But, most memorably, I discovered Ethiopia.



A stunning capture of Ethiopia's landscape with wheat fields © Christian Boix

TRAVEL TO ETHIOPIA WITH AFRICA GEOGRAPHIC

Have a look at our bucket-list safaris below:

- Ethiopia, the cradle of humankind – 8 days

- Ethiopia's Omo Tribes – 10 days

Travel in Africa is about knowing when and where to go, and with whom. A few weeks too early / late and a few kilometres off course and you could miss the greatest show on Earth. And wouldn't that be a pity? Search for [your ideal safari here](#), or contact [an Africa Geographic safari consultant](#) to plan your dream vacation.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR, LEX VAN VUGHT



Lex van Vught is a retired businessman. He is a travel and wildlife enthusiast, avid birder, and bridge addict. He publishes an annual calendar based on his photography to raise funds for vulnerable children (see www.thecharitycalendar.org) . His bucket list continues to grow....

PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR 2019

WEEKLY SELECTION
WEEK 19: 12 April 2019
GALLERY 1

© Artur Stankelewicz



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THE BEST PHOTOS OF THE WEEK

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Read about the safari enjoyed by the 2018 winners here.

Get your entries in now and join us in celebrating Africa! **Click here for more details about how to enter.**

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A lion walks in the evening rain in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, South Africa © Hesté de Beer



Close up of an



elephant's trunk
while drinking water
in Manyeleti Private
Game Reserve, South
Africa © Armand
Grobler



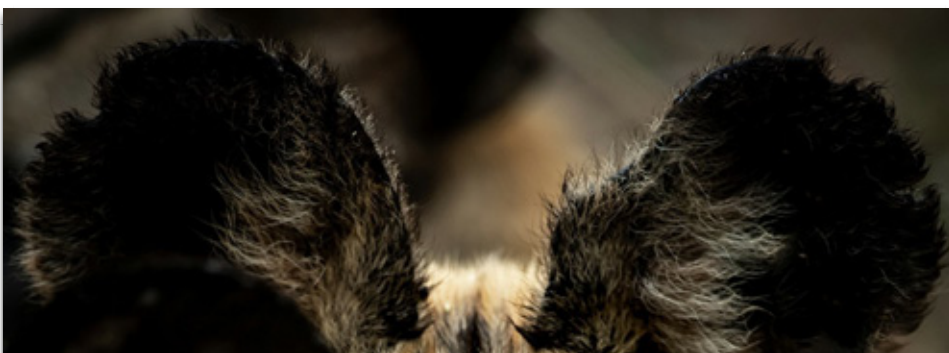
A chimpanzee
grooms a youngster
in Kibale National
Park, Uganda © Artur
Stankiewicz



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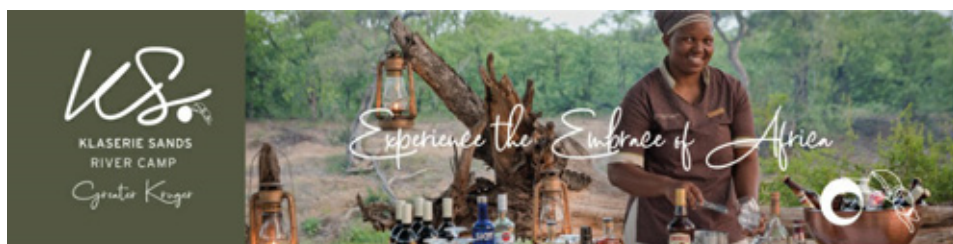

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"The wolf amongst
the sheep" – a
painted wolf (African
wild dog) with its
pack in Sabi Sands
Private Game
Reserve, South Africa
© Ross Couper

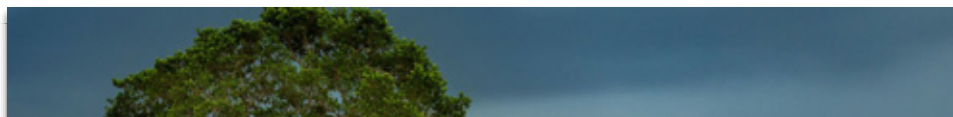




A baby vervet monkey hides in a tree during a heavy rain shower in Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park, South Africa © Alice van Kempen



"King on his throne!" - a lion sits atop a rocky outcrop in





Rugendo, a dominant
male silverback
mountain gorilla,
with his family in
Virunga National
Park, Democratic
Republic of the Congo
© Dale Davis



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"Leading the herd" –
an elephant herd
head for the swamps
after feeding all
morning in Amboseli
National Park, Kenya
© Tim Nicklin



A bateleur in
Kgalagadi



Transfrontier Park,
South Africa ©
Charlie Lynam



An elephant up close
in Marakele National
Park, South Africa ©
Matthew Parvin



"Monkey submarine"
– a juvenile vervet
monkey plays in a



puddle of rainwater
in Kruger National
Park, South Africa ©
Ernest Porter

A photograph of a large, ancient stone structure, likely a church or temple, built into a hillside in Ethiopia. The structure is made of large, rectangular stone blocks and has a series of steps leading up to it. In the background, there are more hills and some people walking on a path.

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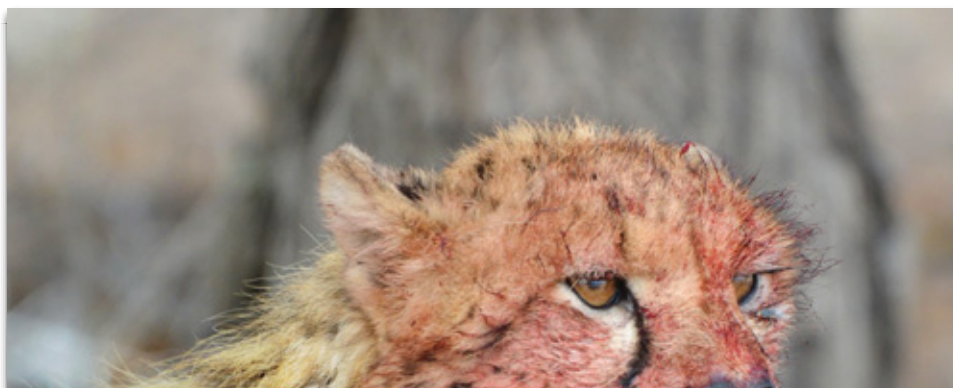
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"Peeping Tom" - a
lion peers through a
gap in the trees in
Okavango Delta,
Botswana © Derryn
Nash



A cheetah while
feeding on a kill in
Kgalagadi
Transfrontier Park,
South Africa ©
Charmane Baleiza





Giraffes at sunset,
Central Kalahari
Game Reserve,
Botswana © Charlie
Lynam



A springbok
welcomes her
newborn on the red
sands of the
Kgalagadi
Transfrontier Park,
South Africa © Karen
Blackwood



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"Spots and stripes" - brilliant abstract patterns in blue, black and white of a vulturine guineafowl in Tsavo East National Park, Kenya
© Steve Holroyd



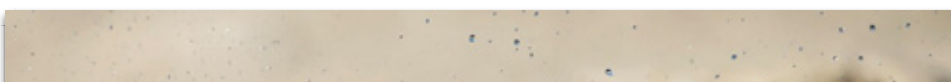
Up close and personal with meerkats in Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park, South Africa © Howard Patrick



Young elephants jostle in Dzanga-Sangha National Park, Central African Republic © Gary Krosin



A black-backed jackal attempts to



catch a Burchell's
sandgrouse in
Kgalagadi
Transfrontier Park,
South Africa ©
Margie Botha



Giraffes make a run
for it in Serengeti
National Park,
Tanzania © Patrice
Quillard



A shoebill patiently
hunts for prey in
Mabamba Swamps,
Uganda © Patrice
Quillard



A lion walks through
golden grass in
Okavango Delta,
Botswana © Charlie
Lynam





PHOTOGRAPHER OF THE YEAR 2019

WEEKLY SELECTION
WEEK 19: 12 April 2019
GALLERY 2



THE BEST PHOTOS OF THE WEEK

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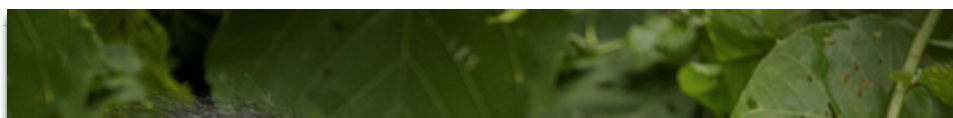
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"These two nomadic brothers tried to take over a pride, however they were completely overpowered by the lioness who chased these intruders away from her pride" -
Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya © Magal Sanjeev



A mountain gorilla eats in Virunga National Park,



Democratic Republic
of the Congo © Hesté
de Beer



Close up of a lioness
yawning in
Kgalagadi
Transfrontier Park,
South Africa © Ernest
Porter



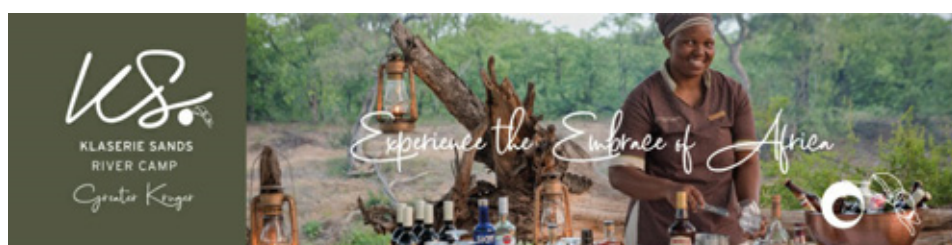
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"Ghosts of Etosha" –
three large elephant
bulls converge at a
waterhole in Etosha
National Park,
Namibia © Mari van
Bosch



A tinker reed frog is discovered while exploring the undergrowth in the Umtamvuna Nature Reserve, South Africa
© Ingrid Sellschop



A colourful blue-headed agama takes a minute to pose in Kruger National Park, South Africa © Alice van Kempen



A painted wolf (African wild dog)



with an unusually
beautiful coat in
Okavango Delta,
Botswana © Anthony
Goldman



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A lion with a short
mane slinks around
the territory of
another male in
Okavango Delta,
Botswana © Beth
Stewart



Greater flamingos at
Lake Ndutu in

Ngorongoro
Conservation Area,
Tanzania © Patrice
Quillard



A lioness strolls by at
sunset in Maasai
Mara National
Reserve, Kenya ©
Ramachandiran
Govinaraj



A regal lion spotted in
Kgalagadi
Transfrontier Park,
South Africa ©
Charlie Lynam



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"After the rains" –
Sehlabathebe
National Park,
Lesotho © Koos
Fourie



An elephant walks
down a dirt road in
Makgadikgadi Pans
National Park,
Botswana © Charlie
Lynam



An African wildcat
spotted at night in
Tuli Block, Botswana
© Eddie Coombes





A Nile crocodile
catches a large
catfish in Okavango
Delta, Botswana ©
Tim Driman



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A 'meditating' ring-
tailed lemur in the
morning sun in
Berenty Reserve,
Madagascar © Gary
Krosin





A white rhino takes a mud bath in Kruger National Park, South Africa © Ernest Porter



A leopard sits on a fallen tree in Ingwelala Private Nature Reserve, South Africa © Charlie Lynam



Cheetahs feed on a



springbok in
Kgalagadi
Transfrontier Park,
South Africa ©
Charmane Baleiza



A grey heron with an
itch in Kruger
National Park, South
Africa © Carol Barry



A leopard carries his
kill in Maasai Mara
National Reserve,
Kenya © Patrice
Quillard





A lioness stalks a
wildebeest calf in the
pouring rain,
Madikwe Game
Reserve, South Africa
© Stephanie-Emmy
Klarmann



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"Hippo explosion" - a yellow-billed oxpecker gets a surprise as a large hippo bull erupts in a threat display towards another bull who ventured too close in Okavango Delta, Botswana © Beth Stewart





A young mountain gorilla from the Nkuringo family group waits out the rain shower in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda © Bruce Miller



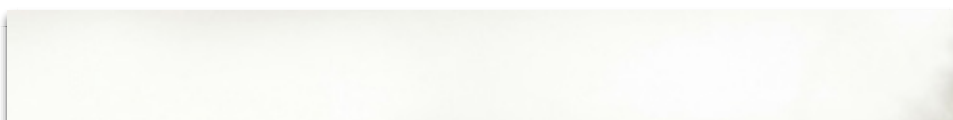
"A special moment when an elephant makes eye contact" – Okavango Delta, Botswana © Stephanie-Emmy Klarmann



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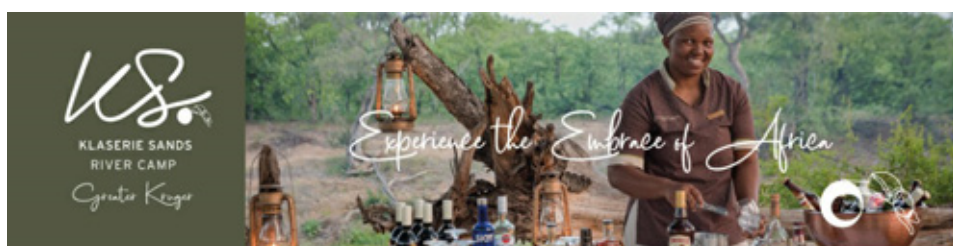
A stunning black-maned lion walks towards the



photographer in a
spectacular dust
storm in Kgalagadi
Transfrontier Park,
South Africa © Ernest
Porter

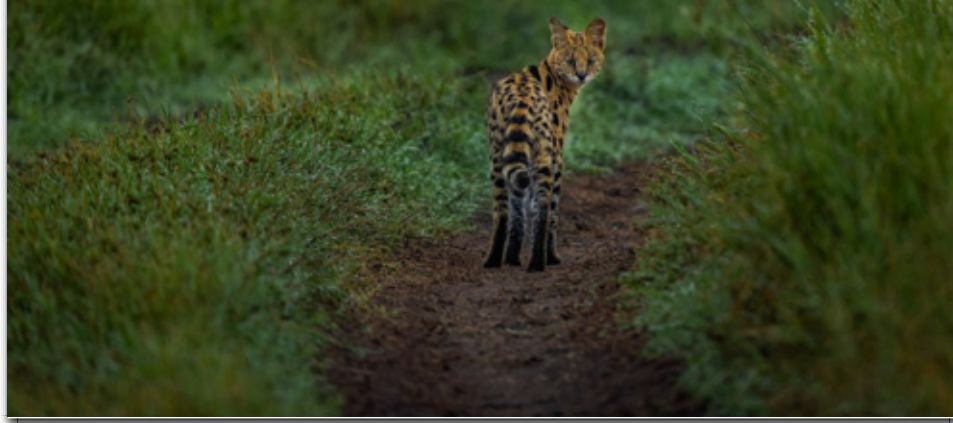


A Natal tree frog sits
on a leaf at a banana
farm in KwaZulu-
Natal, South Africa ©
Ingrid Sellschop



A serval walks along
the road on a wet
morning in Serengeti
National Park,
Tanzania © Magal
Sanjeev





Close up of greater
flamingos at Lake
Ndotu in Ngorongoro
Conservation Area,
Tanzania © Patrice
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A giraffe against a
clear sky in Maasai
Mara National
Reserve, Kenya ©
Simon Withyman



A young leopard joins
his mother out in the
open in Maasai Mara
National Reserve,
Kenya © Patrice
Quillard



A young baboon
rides on his mother's
back at Indlovu River
Lodge, South Africa ©
Margie Botha



Wildebeests and dust
at sunset in
Kgalagadi
Transfrontier Park,
South Africa ©
Charlie Lynam





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A close up of an
elephant bull's head
in Savuti, Botswana

© Fred von
Winckelmann



A lone cheetah sits
on a mound while a

large herd of
wildebeest graze in
the background in
Serengeti National
Park, Tanzania ©
Tara-ann Chimenti



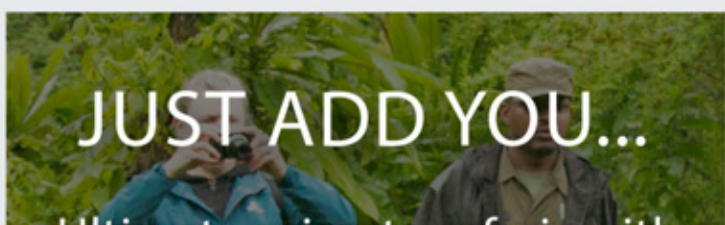
Two male ostriches
get into a fight in
Kgalagadi
Transfrontier Park,
South Africa ©
Charlie Lynam



Seven white-crested
helmetshrikes sit
close together on a
branch to protect
them from the cold of
the Lowveld night in
Sabi Sands Private
Game Reserve, South
Africa © Gideon
Malherbe



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"A young cheetah
startles at something.

He's too young to
know what should
scare him or not, so
everything is scary"

– Kgalagadi

Transfrontier Park,
South Africa © Karen
Blackwood



A cattle egret
searches for prey
amongst the
flowering meadow in
Namaqualand, South
Africa © Vittorio Ricci



A subadult secretary
bird spotted in
Kruger National Park,
South Africa © Carol
Barry





A baboon with an antelope calf that it killed in Maasai Mara National Reserve, Kenya © Patrice Quillard



Just two of the thousands of red toads that gather together to mate in the waters of the Roodekrans Ridge in Walter Sisulu Botanical Gardens, South Africa © Wilmari Porter



A lioness peers through the golden grass in the early



morning in
Okavango Delta,
Botswana © Charlie
Lynam



Hippo bulls fight in
the Chobe River,
Botswana © Hilda le
Roux

