



# SafariTELEGRAPH



**ROB DISCOVERS**

## AFRICA'S SECRETIVE PREDATOR... ...or perhaps not

**I** can see the ears', whispered a voice behind me excitedly. 'It's sitting motionless in the grass just over there', he said, pointing to the scrub hare.

'She can see it too' said our guide, 'look at her tail twitch and how focused she is now'. We all watched in anticipation as the leopard bided her time and chose her moment.

Watching a leopard hunt is a rare privilege. Usually a nocturnal hunter, they are however opportunists and, occasionally, you might find yourself in the right place at the right time. The relaxed female in my view finder had been taking an afternoon stroll through the northern Sabi Sands Game Reserve in South Africa when she unwittingly disturbed an unlucky scrub hare. Now

a 'cat and mouse' battle of wits and agility was unfolding before our eyes.

Leopards seem to be thriving across Africa. Perhaps they always have, and it is just years of good safari and conservation management which is now leading to better sightings. Earlier in the year I enjoyed three fantastic sightings in northern Kenya: lounging in a tree in Samburu, dragging a kill across a plain on Lewa, and (unsuccessfully) stalking dik dik at Sarara in the Mathews Range. In early October, I was lucky to see five different leopards in Botswana. One sighting in particular was very special, with over an hour spent with a beautiful female as she patrolled her territory in a relaxed manner, obviously at ease with our presence.

Now here I was in the Kruger region of South

Africa, arguably the most guaranteed place in Africa to see leopards. More than anywhere else, the leopards of Sabi Sands and the nearby private reserves bordering the Kruger National Park, have grown up with human presence, mostly in the form of noisy, log-crunching safari vehicles. Nonchalance is an understatement for some of these spotted cats, 'posing and parading' perhaps closer to the mark.

Yet when it comes to hunting, the glamour show must end. Natural instinct takes over and if they wish to, a cunning leopard can lose a cumbersome safari vehicle in an instant. Today, however, the leopardess kept her audience, and while it may be rare to see a leopard hunting, it is much rarer still to actually witness a kill. It felt a little predictable as we watched a rather impatient stalking attempt >>>

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and lazy chase. Usually a leopard relies on stealth and surprise rather than prolonged speed or effort, but here in broad daylight, and with the target fully alert to a predator's presence, you always sensed the scrub hare had the advantage. Nevertheless, it was an incredible experience; just the way a leopard moves is a joy to behold, and not to mention the photographic opportunities such a viewing affords. At the end of the day, who really wants to see the demise of a gentle scrub hare? Certainly not one without a little more effort, planning and execution on the part of the hunter!

As with many of the more challenging species to see in Africa, good leopard sightings always rely on a healthy dose of good luck. Some people witness a leopard kill on their first safari, while others who have spent their whole lives in Africa may never have seen one in the wild. For anyone who is as mesmerised by these beautiful creatures as I am, there are several regions you can visit where your chances are really good. The private reserves near the Kruger are certainly top of the list, but both Zambia (Luangwa Valley and Lower Zambezi) and Botswana (Linyanti, Savuti and Okavango Delta) are offering amazing sightings these days. East Africa tends to offer slightly fewer guaranteed viewings, especially where night drives are not permitted, but most of the key safari regions produce good sightings. In Kenya, Nakuru and Samburu have always been particularly good spots to find them and while, technically, the open grassland plains of the Masai Mara and Tanzania's Serengeti may not be perfect leopard habitat, if you know where to look, there are plenty of these secretive, enigmatic, and graceful creatures to seek out.

## Website

After several years of planning, and what feels like an eternity spent writing pages and sourcing pictures, we were very pleased to finally go live with our new website at the end of May last year. It is always difficult to know exactly what is required from a website, perhaps because every individual user has different needs. However, we are hoping that anyone browsing the site will find it inspiring, informative and easy to navigate – that was the aim! Whether you travel to Africa regularly, and are always looking for a little inspiration, or haven't visited for many years and would be interested to update yourself on what Africa offers, please do take a look at [www.safari-consultants.co.uk](http://www.safari-consultants.co.uk)



# NEW DAWN IN AFRICA

**Once again, we will all start the year full of vigour, vitality and optimism, a bit like Spring in Africa when the first rains arrive after the long dry season and that first flush of green accompanies the many newly born. This year, travel in Africa has at least one 'new born' in the opening up of the Republic of Congo, and possibly another as the newest country of South Sudan begins its own life.**

**The Republic of Congo**, sandwiched between the Democratic Republic of Congo to the south and east, and Cameroon, Gabon and the Central African Republic to the north and west, is sparsely populated and covers an area roughly one and a half times the size of the UK. It straddles the equator and is relatively flat (the highest point is just 900 metres above sea level). Half the country is dominated by equatorial

rainforest within which lies the Odzala-Kokoua National Park. It is here that the largest population of the Western Lowland gorilla is found including seven habituated family groups, totalling over 100 individuals. June 2012 sees the opening up of two small 12 bed camps by Wilderness Safaris, in partnership with African Parks who are managing the area. The first of these, Ngaga Camp, will focus on the gorillas. The other camp, Lango, will focus on guided walks, game drives, boat excursions along the rivers, hides overlooking the bais (swampy grassy areas dotted across the rainforest), and canoeing.

Other primates to be seen include Guereza colobus, grey-cheeked and agile mangabeys, De Brazza's monkey, Allen's swamp monkey, the putty-nosed monkey and the moustached monkey. Chimpanzee are heard, but are not habituated and seldom seen. Herbivores include

forest buffalo and forest elephant, the rare bongo, sitatunga, and black fronted duiker, while carnivores (which are also rather elusive) include spotted hyaena, leopard, golden cat and African wild cat. Bird species are said to number over 430.

Visiting here won't be cheap, but it will be pioneering and certainly interesting. Six night packages out of Brazzaville (three in each camp), including all internal flights, accommodation, meals, game-viewing, and gorilla trekking will cost around £3900 per person (US\$6000). International flights are on top but the country is served by Kenya Airways so a very reasonable add-on could include the famous Masai Mara, particularly during the wildebeest migration (August and September). A night is required in Brazzaville, either before or after the package (depending on the airline used).

**South Sudan** was 'born' on the 09th July when the country seceded from Sudan itself. This is an area which has suffered hugely from civil war, unrest and drought over the last 30 years or so. During this time many conservationists dreaded what impact this disruption was having on its wildlife and wilderness. Since 2007, the Wildlife

Conservation Society has done a lot of work in finding out exactly what the situation is. They have invested heavily on game monitoring and trying to get a good idea of what is happening on the ground. Aerial surveys over that period have produced some promising results in areas such as Boma National Park – elephant, lion, buffalo, giraffe, eland, roan, beisa oryx, leopard, Grant's gazelle and the endemic Nile lechwe were all encountered. Other areas such as the Southern National Park were less encouraging – buffalo for example had declined from an estimated 60 000 in 1981 to no sightings at all, and only one elephant herd was seen.

However, although not yet 'open for business', South Sudan has the ability to become one of Africa's finest wildlife destinations. Certainly, the extent of the vast Sudd (one of the world's largest wetlands covering about 100 000 sq.kms. in full flood) could easily rival the Okavango Delta, and the migrations of white-eared kob (estimated population over 800 000), tiang (160 000) and mongalla gazelle (250 000) through Boma National Park and the Jonglei region give some competition to the more famous Serengeti wildebeest. South Sudan, an area worth keeping an eye on.



## REPUBLIC OF CONGO FACTFILE

**Capital:** Brazzaville  
**Population:** 4 million (2011), half of whom live in the capital  
**Resources:** timber, minerals including gold and uranium, natural gas, hydropower and petroleum  
**Coastline:** roughly 170 kms  
**Best season:** May to September



## SOUTH SUDAN FACTFILE

**Size:** 645 000 sq.kms. (three times UK)  
**Population:** 8.2 million (2008)  
**Threats:** continuing unrest, uncontrolled mining, oil exploration and logging  
**Best season:** November to April

**Main:** An aerial view of the rainforest in the Odzala-Kokoua National Park

## SAFARI SNIPPETS

Some interesting wildlife observations as recorded in 'Window onto Wilderness' by Anthony Cullen which were taken from a number of archives across East Africa.

A hyaena was seen to harass eight ostrich chicks who went into a huddle guarded by the male bird. The female then attacked the hyaena and chased it for nearly a mile across the plains  
– *Tanzania Parks, 1955*



A secretary bird moving peacefully over a small short-grass plain suddenly interrupted his stroll to pursue a yellow butterfly. The bird senselessly gyrated round after this butterfly for several minutes – *Anthony Cullen*

Jackals found marabou storks easy prey in the Rukwa, when the birds were so full of locusts that they could not leave the ground  
– *Tanzania Game 1953*



One evening, a pack of 16 wild dogs formed up on two male warthogs. The pigs stood their ground and it was the dogs that had to give way  
– *Kenya Parks 1961*

An old buffalo bull came in peacefully to have a drink at a waterhole, and soon afterwards an elephant decided to do the same. A dispute arose and finally the elephant charged and drove his tusk right through this unfortunate buffalo – *Kenya Parks 1960*



## 2011 EXPLORATIONS

Once again, all members of the sales team travelled extensively to improve our knowledge. We've covered Kenya (the north, the Masai Mara and the coast), Tanzania (the north and Zanzibar), Rwanda (PNV, Lake Kivu and Nyungwe), Uganda (Queen Elizabeth, Bwindi and Mt Gahinga), South Africa (Kruger and surrounding reserves), Botswana (Chobe, Okavango, Tsodilo, Kalahari, Makgadigadi), Namibia (the Namib, Swakopmund, Damaraland, Etosha and the central region), and Mozambique (Gorongosa and most of the coast). All our trip reports can be read on our website.

In the coming year, we're planning to visit Madagascar, Zambia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi, Botswana, and South Africa, and no doubt something else will crop up (like Zimbabwe on which we are keeping an eye).

## SEE US IN 2012

This year we'll have stands at the following shows. Please do come and visit us.

Destinations: 2-5 February (Earls Court, London) – please contact us if you require any tickets.

London Wild Bird Watch: 20-22 April (London Wetland Centre)

Suffolk Show: 7+8 June (Showground, Ipswich)

British Bird Fair: 17-19 August (Rutland Water)

## NEW YEAR'S GREETING

Once again, we saved a few pennies over the year and rather than sending out Christmas cards donated the money to the Microloan Foundation which does such good work in Malawi – see [www.microloantfoundation.org.uk](http://www.microloantfoundation.org.uk) for more information. Best wishes to everyone for 2012.

Bill, Rob, Mary, Michele, Michaela, Josie and Jane

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