



THIR visitors took a sip from the pool, scratched their backsides and kept up into a tree. Stub is the abn and flow of life at a game lodge. Captains of industry one day, a different troop of primates the next. The venue for all this activity was Kirkman's Kamp in the Sabi Sands, a private reserve adjoining the southern end of the Kruger National Park.

Perched on a hill above the Sand River, Kirkman's dates back to the 1920s, when the original owner tried to farm cattle and slaughtered 300 lions in the process. You'll be glad to know his cattle venture failed and the bones is now a 1920s-style lodge.

I was here on a four-day safari to learn more about photography. I had always had a rather casual relationship with the camera. F-stop, shutter speed, aperture... these were concepts for technicians. But when the opportunity to learn more about talking pictures in this setting arose, I kept at it like a hungry predator on a three-legged wheel: the Sabi Sands has the reputation for being the best place in Africa to see leopard.

I don't know how familiar you are with leopards, but they are about as difficult to spot as a mother superior at a Berkshire hang-bong bash. They are solitary, except when mating or looking after their cubs. Nobody would really care about these Greta Garbo preferences if leopard looked like King Kong, but they are like the most good-looking of creatures: The Rumpelstiltskin of the bush.

This safari was run by photographer Ute Sonnenberg, who saw her first leopard in the wild only six years ago. This inspired her to check her life in Holland, move to Jozi and run photo safaris to some of the best wildlife destinations in Africa.

Working both back and forth helped

them to see to greenery around the lodge while baboons and vultures monkeys did as much on the rooftop. It was time for afternoon tea and my travel before the first game drive.

She drew an analogy between the camera and the way the eye functions. I was hugely relieved to discover that her explanation was on the artistic and intuitive as part. This was designed to be an inspirational journey. And all that shutter and aperture stuff was also starting to make more sense.

These five opened with the first spring rain soon after we set off. Newly irrigated lawns and fields and little brown stars marked in the sky in their Alexander McQueen plumage. The

shimmering foliage would have inspired Gainsborough to land on his paintbrush.

We watched a herd of 30 elephant and their young drink with some urgency, then set off up a hill with great intent. Please to see. Trees to flatter.

Before our game drive, she set me an assignment. Back at the lodge, we would review the results. I had embarked on a journey of discovery: like learning to read and write in a new language, I was seeing sights I had seen a thousand times before through the lens, but with new eyes. The strip colours of the eye's iris, its pale as common as or else in the landscape, but exquisite like a single in their own right. You can't be a bush lodge regular

## SPOTTING



### IF YOU GO ...

**WHAT YOU'LL GET:** A decent camera and lens. All level of photographers are welcome. **WHAT'S A:** A four-day photographic safari to the Sabi Sands to see leopard cats at R50 000, which includes accommodation, meals and all activities as a luxury game lodge plus photographic tuition. **CONTACT:** Ute Sonnenberg at Roho Ya Chui (which means "the soul of the leopard" in Swahili), tel 076 504 9650, e-mail ute@rohoiachui.com or see www.rohoiachui.com

**A FRESH EYE** Left, the male leopard in H's Drive, ruler of all he surveys and an elephant, often having a hotly drink before setting off to flatter in a few trees. **Picture: NADINE DREYER**

## THE CAT

**Nadine Dreyer** joins a photographic safari in the Sabi Sands

without sparing a thought for the ranger. You might think the only thing these guys need to worry about is not forgetting the toilet for sundowners, but I've seen the job is more demanding than advertised.

There's the CEO who has forked out mega-dollars to experience Africa. He has seen Africa through. He has seen the ivory. All he is seeing now are warbling and Sylvia CEO do not come to Africa to observe war and ivory in their natural habitat. They want out. Out with spots.

But a couple that a skates a creature never get the office memo on punctuality. After several game drives we had seen spotted hawk, spotted hawk, spotted hawk, spotted hawk... but no spotted cat.

Ranger Lennox Mathibela was a natural comic. "Why do you want to see the short-necked giraffe," he joked, "when you can see the long-necked leopard?" Ranger spoke each other for slighting updates, speaking in code so guests can't follow. I have never understood why that's necessary, but I guess it has something to do with a short-necked CEO and the tendency to those CEO might around.

But you don't have to be Aristotle to calculate that if the ranger puts on a dash of speed worthy of the Paris to Dakar, there's something worth seeing at the end of the race.

"Hold on," ordered Lennox, as we hurtled down a sandy track, did around a corner,

ducking to miss branches.

Then, there she was... a female leopard sprouted on a branch, full and lay after a kill. She ignored us the way a Prius might dismiss an apprentice hot-rod.

It's all very well practicing ISO and aperture on impala, but this was different. My hand went into automatic shutter mode and I dived away although my life depended on it.

Fronted the point, leopard are the strongest of the cats and can haul prey aim as equal to their weight up a tree. The remains of a waterbuck were hoisted on a branch. Her cub, a big-eyed juvenile of about seven months, an eyed from a thicket before disappearing again. Men

closed her eyes for a moment.

Well, you know what they say: it never rains but it pours. There had been another great sighting. How did we know? We were off in Paris to Dakar mode again.

Then Lennox slowed down and pointed to a massive, bare-branched tree. At the top lay another leopard, this time on a limb, he sat upright. The light, ruler of all he surveys.

Ask Alessandro what the chance are of two different leopard in two different trees on one game drive. Berlusconi and his hang-bong boys have better odds on winning a rugby world cup. — Dreyer was a guest of Kirkman's Kamp and Roho Ya Chui photographic safari.