



GUIDING LIGHTS

Have you ever met a guide who doesn't love his or her job? These hugely knowledgeable experts unlock the natural world for us, enriching our safaris beyond measure. In saluting their essential role, we asked a selection of guides to share their passion with us.

A QUESTION OF PRIDE

Calvet Nkomo | Head guide, Somalisa Camp, Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe

I never tire of showing clients the lion pride that lives on the Somalisa concession. Not only is it special to me, but this pride also has a rather famous father and grandfather: Cecil. Although Cecil's fame came from an incredibly sad tale, his legacy provides an interesting and positive story.

Nature always has a way of controlling itself and lions manage their pride and territory with fine detail. When the young males mature, the father chases them away to avoid inbreeding. When I first met Cecil in 2012 he was fighting rival males Bush and Bhubesi for territory. Supported by his son Zanda and the lionesses, he was able to stand his ground. But when Zanda gained maturity and left the pride, Bush and Bhubesi forced Cecil out.

Alone, he wandered into Somalisa concession, where he encountered the resident male, Kakore. Although he tried, he was not accepted by Kakore, so he went west of Somalisa where he formed a coalition with Jericho. Together, these two big males made a strong team, and were able to displace Kakore, regain Cecil's pride and take over the area.

Cecil became like a friend to us guides. He was proud, playful and a success story for anyone who has had to get back on their feet, showing how teamwork can help us achieve our goals.

He and Jericho were later joined by three lionesses we called The Spice Girls. In October 2014 they gave birth to seven cubs. Cecil, dominant to Jericho,

is believed to have been the father. Around that time, Cecil and Jericho would occasionally wander outside of their territory to meet with Cathy, a lone lioness. It was on one of these trips, in July 2015, when Cecil was killed. Jericho never returned to the pride at Somalisa, but stayed with Cathy and later was joined by two lionesses. We were pleased to see him settle and expand his own pride.

Later that year, Bhubesi came to Somalisa but was only accepted by Cecil's family in late 2016. He mated with all three of The Spice Girls, but only three cubs survived. The pride was disturbed in May 2018 by two males, Humba and Nestai, who are now 'married' to Cecil's daughters.

Today we have a pride of more than 20 lions on Somalisa and I am sure things will continue to change. The area is prime lion territory. Cecil has provided an excellent gene pool: the lions are exceptionally good hunters. He lives in them all.

Top: Calvet Nkomo in his element, explaining Cecil's family tree

Right: An aardvark uses its ribbon-like 30cm-long tongue to gather up to 50,000 ants in a single night



ADELE OUTLER



Geoff Mayes

TREASURED MOMENTS

Geoff Mayes | Private guide, Amazing Africa, Kenya

Night drives and bush walks are two of my favourite activities. I love showing guests termite mounds, ant lions, whistling thorns and so many other things you miss on a drive. Mostly I want guests to experience the sounds and smells of nature, and to get involved in trying to decipher footprints, feel animal rubbing posts, discover 'the toothbrush bush' and get down to ground level to watch dung beetles going about their business. I can sit for hours watching elephants interact, observing their detailed social behaviour. Also dwarf mongooses - hilarious critters that can provide hours of entertainment.

One of the mammals least likely to be seen is the aardvark. In my first 30 years



GEOFF MAYES

of guiding across southern and East Africa I only ever saw one aardvark, in the Lower Zambezi National Park in Zambia. But since I started guiding at Oserengoni Wildlife Sanctuary in Naivasha in Kenya, we see them two or three times a week. On one night I managed to see five.

These strange creatures normally come out only late at night but, especially after the first rains, they will sometimes emerge as early as 5pm. Due to their massive ears and incredible sense of hearing, it is difficult to get close to an aardvark unless the wind is strong enough to hide any noises you make.

Aardvarks have a cool design feature which allows them to close their nostrils when burrowing, thus providing protection from soil, dust and attacks from termites, their favourite food.

In captivity they can live well over 20 years but in the wild they are relatively easy prey for big cats and so don't tend to live longer than 9-12 years. Generally they have a massive home range, but at Oserengoni the same individuals are seen regularly in certain areas, suggesting that they are pretty adaptable.

LAND OF PLENTY

Marie-Antoinette 'Beanie' Hoffmann | Chameleon Holidays, Namibia

Guiding is a lifestyle, not a job. There is no such thing as a bad day - challenging, perhaps, which makes for more adventure. You have the opportunity to create lots of special moments, and are constantly learning. It's awesome. In Namibia we are blessed with some truly fascinating things to share with guests, such as:

Fairy circles. It's impressive to see these magical circles scattered across the desert. There have been numerous theories as to how they were caused. Recently it was published that they are result of a euphorbia plant which poisons the soil, preventing anything else growing.

Sociable weavers' nests: These massive structures hang in the tree like a dead bear. Some are so heavy the tree can't support the weight.

Desert creatures: Walking in the dunes we look out for shovel-snouted lizards, which dance from foot to foot to prevent their feet from burning. When it gets too hot, they burrow into the sand to stay cool. We might be lucky to find a buckspoor spider

nest, which looks like a footprint of an animal. Here, the spider waits underneath its door for an ant to fall victim. Many beetles scurry across the dunes, some which elevate their body to keep their temperature down. The headstanding beetle puts its bum in the air in the fog, to collect droplets of water which run down into its mouth.

Lichen: We have several species of lichen, and the coastline between Swakopmund and Cape Cross is one of the largest lichen fields in the world. Lichens are important as they are your first indicators of air pollution: should they die, we should be worried.

Buffalo thorn (*Ziziphus mucronata*): There are so many intriguing trees here, but my favourite is the buffalo thorn, the 'tree of life'. It's branches are zig-zagged, not straight, and there are two types of thorn - straight and hooked. Life is never straightforward, hence the zig-zag branches. The straight thorn represents our future and the hooked our past, reminding us to look to the future but not forget the past.

Namaqua sandgrouse: With densely-packed belly features modified for collecting and retaining water, the male will wade into the shallows raise the feathers to soak up water. When he returns to the nest, the chicks drink directly from his feathers.



Beanie Hoffmann



Hang out at my place: Huge sociable weaver nests act like apartment buildings for the birds, with many entrances on the underside.