



GRAHAM LOVE

Point proved

The Ngorongoro Conservation Area in Tanzania was lush and green at the end of March this year. Heavy spells of rain had persuaded the mixed herds of wildebeest and zebras to delay their migration north. The grazing was the best for years and the low hills and savanna plains were covered with animals and their newly born young.

The rain had also turned most of the tracks into skid pans and my guide Emmanuel and I found our vehicle going sideways a lot of the time. Three cheetahs had been reported near Ndutu and as the rain eased and the sun came out we started quartering the area where they had last been seen. After some hours of fruitless searching, we saw on the distant horizon a yellow 4x4 we recognised as belonging to a cheetah research group. As we made our way towards the vehicle, three cheetahs crossed our path. Then a

strange thing happened – strange to me, that is.

On my first visit to Africa, the guide had asked me what I most wanted to photograph. ‘A cheetah up a tree,’ I’d replied. ‘Good luck, mate,’ he laughed. ‘It’s leopards that climb trees, not cheetahs.’ Red face for me.

Now, as the cheetahs passed a dead tree, one of them climbed into its branches. It scanned to the south, then turned north and gazed intently at a wildebeest herd. Turning towards me, it stared defiantly into my lens as the camera shutter fired. For 15 minutes it was ‘my’ cheetah, the one up a tree I’d dreamed of. Eventually it proved the first guide right and fell out of the branches, all elegance gone.

As we left, I told Emmanuel about how I’d confused leopards and cheetahs on my first visit. ‘Wasn’t that just fantastic?’ I enthused about the sighting. ‘Mmm,’ he replied. ‘No termite mounds for cheetahs to see from.’ And he drove on. *Graham Love, via e-mail*

Elephant answers

The elephant with the short trunk that featured in ‘Viewpoint’ in the May 2010 issue was seen regularly by guides and guests at Xakanaxa Camp in Moremi Game Reserve, Botswana. Our guides thought the shortened trunk was due to a

birth defect, rather than it having been bitten off, as the end of it looks normal. Unfortunately we have not seen this little elephant for a long time and are not sure if it is still alive. *Nini Baxter-Burre, Moremi, Botswana*

Dr Kate Evans, elephant researcher and founder and director of Elephants For Africa (www.elephantsforafrica.org), comments: Although deformities in elephants are relatively uncommon, they do occur and, depending on the type and severity, will affect the individual to a varying degree. The highly social hierarchical structure of a herd means that it will generally take care of a youngster born with deformities, slowing down to its pace or helping it with feeding.

It is difficult to tell from the photograph whether this calf was born like this or it sustained the injuries later, but as both the tail and part of the trunk are missing I think it is more likely that it survived an attack by a lion or a pack of ▶



KEVIN BOTHA & JACQUI ROWLANDS

spotted hyaenas. Unlike the other elephants in the herd, it is covered in scratches, which it may have incurred from the predators or from running through spiky bush in its bid to escape.

Animals not for show

The death of a trainer at SeaWorld, Orlando, in Florida, US, in February is yet another wake-up call that large and highly intelligent animals such as orcas (in this case) should not be kept in captivity for human entertainment. In southern Africa alone, at least five incidents in the past year have involved tourists or handlers being injured by elephants in elephant-back safari operations.

The larger and more intelligent mammals cannot be given quality of life in a captive situation; their size, intellect, range requirements and social and biological behaviour make it impossible to duplicate a suitable environment for them. To then tame, train and discipline these animals and expect them to perform on command can only lead to frustration and suffering for them and a risk to human life. What educational or conservation value is there in riding an elephant or killer whale? There are other ways in which humans can learn about the natural world. *Karen Trendler, 'Working Wild', South Africa*

Kruger's wild dogs

The article 'Dogs of Mercury' in the April 2010 issue unfortunately contains a number of incorrect statements with respect to the Kruger

National Park. The African wild dog population in the park is monitored every few years by ecologists, not veterinarians. Moreover, contrary to the author's suggestions that the population had been cut down by other predators, that the original numbers had been overestimated or that no one knows what happened, there is good evidence that the recent decline in the wild dog population in Kruger was the result of a prolonged period of high rainfall.

In a scientific paper published in the *Journal of Zoology*, my colleagues and I show a strong negative correlation between rainfall and wild dog pup survival and population trends. We argue that because of the wild dogs' highly selective hunting methods (they catch mainly animals in poor condition) and their inordinately high energy expenditure, during high rainfall years when their targets are generally in good condition, wild dogs are unable to catch enough prey to meet their energy needs and also raise pups. Perhaps what the Kruger Park dogs need is a drought. There hasn't been one there since 1991. *Gus Mills, former co-ordinator of the Kruger Park Wild Dog Project, South Africa*

Baboon at work

When my wife and I were in the Kruger National Park recently, we noticed that some of the secondary roads were in a pretty poor state. Then we came across a few maintenance vehicles and realised what may be at least part of the problem: SANParks appears to have taken on some cheap labour! *Charlie Johnson, via e-mail*



Write to Viewpoint and you could win a two-night stay for two at Machampane Camp in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, Mozambique, valued at R7 000. The prize includes transfers from Letaba restcamp in the Kruger National Park.

For each of three months, we select a winning letter and at the end of that time an overall winner will be drawn. The finalist for the first month is Charlie Johnson.

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CHARLIE JOHNSON