

On Safari at Notten’s Bush Camp



PHOTOS BY DAVE GIBSON

Abundant wildlife
Top, left; An elephant sniffs the air to better identify us. Top, middle; A yellow-eyed oxpecker flies from a giraffe’s neck. Top, right, A brown-headed parrot emerges from its nesting cavity. Above, left; a lilac-breasted roller. Above, right. A dwarf mongoose. Above, bottom; A vultures silhouette. Bottom, left; A white rhinoceros. Bottom, middle; A chameleon spotted on a night drive. Middle, left; A vervet monkey clings to a branch.

Dave Gibson
South Africa

It was 18 years ago that I went on my first safari in Africa. Fancying myself as a wildlife photographer, I visited seven parks or game reserves in Kenya and Tanzania. While at Masai Mara National Reserve, Kenya, I witnessed crocodiles slaughter a dozen Thompson’s gazelle crossing the Mara River. It was at that point I was hooked. Once you’ve caught the safari bug, the only way to treat the malady is by going on more safaris. This was to be my eighth safari and second time to South Africa. I would be visiting Sabi Sand Game Reserve in the northeastern part of the country.

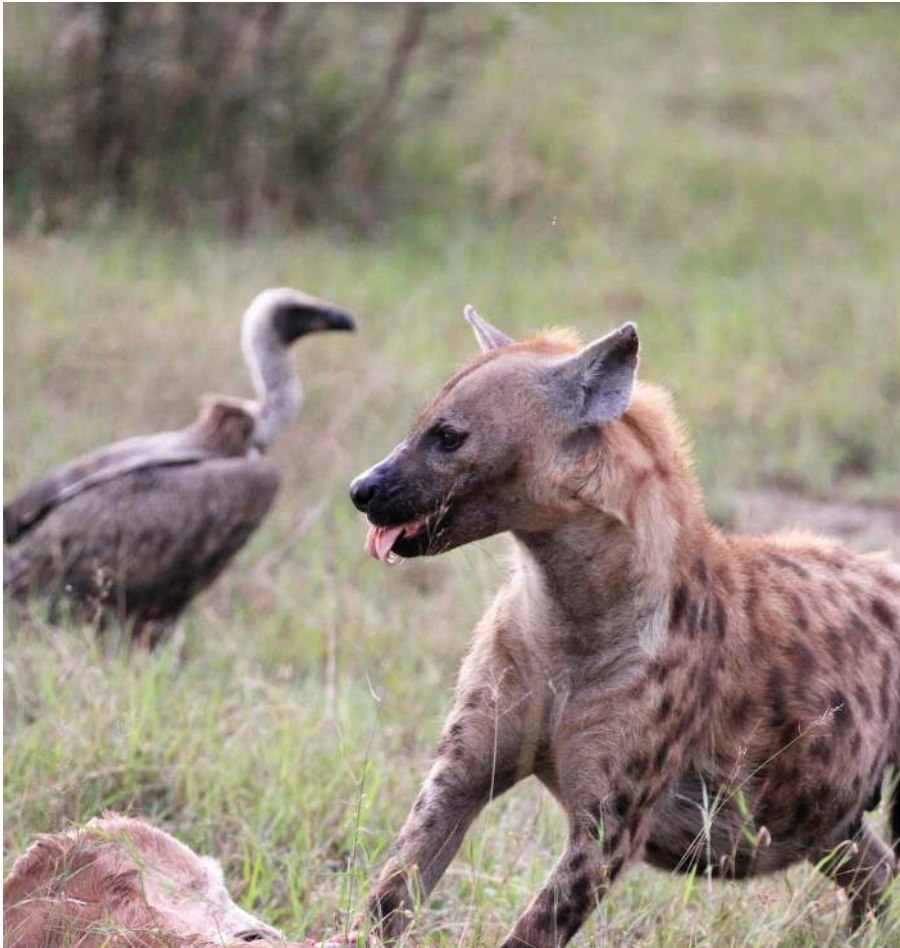
Named after the Sabi and Sand Rivers that run through the area, the land was used for cattle ranching until 1948 when

Sabi Sand Game Reserve was formed. Having long since returned to its natural state, the 240 square mile reserve shares an unfenced 31-mile border with the much larger Kruger National Park. Sabi Sand is the more exclusive of the two, filled with luxury camps and lodges that allow off-roading in open air safari vehicles to better view its world-renowned leopard population.

Starting at \$450 per night, Notten’s Bush Camp is in the southern section reached via Skukuza Airport and accessed through the Shaws Gate. Lodging, meals, drinks, laundry, and two game drives each day are included. Family owned and operated, Notten’s is a bit older than some of the other more expensive options but charmingly intimate with

Continued on page 19

On Safari at Notten’s Bush Camp



PHOTOS BY DAVE GIBSON

In Sabi Sand Game Reserve

Top, left; One of Sabi Sand’s many leopards. Top, right; Looking for any opening, a vulture keeps a close eye on a hyena kill. Middle, right; Making off with some meat. Bottom, right, A beautifully striped nyala. Bottom, middle; A yawning leopard. Bottom, left; The steenbok is one of Africa’s smallest antelopes.

Continued from page 18

great attention paid to detail and their guests. Many visitors return year after year. Each bungalow had both indoor and outdoor bathtubs and showers. One of the owners, named Jane, is a master chef. Her meals were a culinary delight.

Upon arriving from Johannesburg in early afternoon, I settled in awaiting my first game drive at 3:30 p.m. It didn’t take long before we came upon a spotted hyena devouring an impala carcass. The head had been decapitated and eaten first since the brain contains the most fat on the lean antelope. Tearing into its flesh, the sound of crunching bones filled the air. Lappet-faced and white-backed vultures patiently waited their turn for the scraps. On the way back to camp in the dark, our tracker espied a chameleon with his spotlight.

Returning from dinner, I noticed something next to the threshold of the sliding glass door of my suite. Initially, I thought it was a crab. Upon further investigation, it turned out to be a rather sizable tarantula. Normally something I would want to get a picture of, I didn’t

dare open the door to get my camera lest it scamper inside and crawl under my covers. Nudging it a few times with my lantern, it sped away.

The next morning, awaiting our Land Cruiser, a woman with her face buried in her cellphone walked back to her room to presumably grab something she’d forgotten. Two minutes later a couple of hyenas rounded a corner and raced out of camp down the same pathway she had been on. If her timing were slightly different, she would have received the thrill of a lifetime with the hyenas most likely just brushing past or knocking her down.

Five minutes into our drive, we came upon a leopard hunting. The herd of impala was keenly aware of its presence. With their ears cocked straight in the air looking in its direction, they emitted a grunting warning call. Rather than flee the vicinity, their strategy was to follow the leopard to keep tabs on it. At breakfast in the open dining room, a vervet monkey stole my toast while my back was turned. A staff member grabbed a paintball gun which even by rattling the ammo inside sent the monkeys scurrying having felt its

sting before.

Other highlights of the day included sightings of elephant, rhino, lion, nyala, steenbok, kudu, and a praying mantis that had landed in our vehicle as we swept through the brush. A troop of dwarf mongoose darted in and out of a rotting log. That evening an Australian safari mate shared the pointer stars to the Southern Cross and the nearby False Cross which I had mistook as the Southern Cross in previous trips below the equator.

A hearty breakfast of eggs Benedict, lox, caviar, fruit, juice, and milk fueled the next drive. Just awakening, a two-year-old male leopard yawned mightily. An impala ram tended to his harem of 40 ewes. A demure duiker darted away when we caught its attention. Massive buffalo weaver nests clung to dead tree branches. Dinner was served al fresco in the boma around a fire pit. A genet hunted beside the deck by which we were seated.

As one game drive melded into another, we’d see Cape buffalo, hippo, giraffe, zebra, wildebeest, and a good number of bird species including: martial eagle, tawny eagle, bateleur eagle, francolin, lilac-breasted roller, crested barbet, brown-headed parrot, and three types of hornbill. A young elephant false-charged our Land Cruiser coming within feet of the person in the seat between me and the perturbed pachyderm.

In all, we would see leopard on six of the eight game drives. As good as advertised for the generally elusive cat, having elapsed all too quickly, my stay at Notten’s had come to an end. It was time to move on to the next stop on my itinerary at Arathusa Safari Lodge in the northern part of Sabi Sand.

For more information about Notten’s Bush Camp, go to www.nottens.com.

To view past articles and photos, see www.davegibsonimages.com.