



THE visitors took a dip from the pool, stretched their backsides and kept up into a tree. Stub is the abb and flow of life at a game lodge. Captains of industry one day, a different troop of pots and 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 house is now a 19th-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 taking pictures in this setting arose, I leapt 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 bungee-bungee bash. They are solitary, except when mating or looking after their cubs. Nobody would really care about these Gotta Getta prefer some leopard looked like they looked, but they are also the most good-looking of cats. The Bungalow 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 Ireland, move to Jozi and run photo safaris to some of the best wildlife destinations in Africa. Warning, bush bums and ticks helped

themselves to greenery around the lodge while humans and wolverine monkeys did assemble on the rooftop. It was time for afternoon tea and my tutorial 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 no sense.

Then we opened with the first spring rain soon after we set off. Newly long grasses like bread and rolls and little brown seeds swirled in the sky in their Alexander McQueen plumes. The

shimmering foliage would have inspired Gainsborough to land on his paintbrush. We watched a herd of 30 elephants and their young drink with some urgency, then set off up a hill with great intent. Please to see. Trees to flatter.

Before our 4 pm 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 colour of the opal's sun. Its pale, as common as or scale. In the lightness, but exquisite little shingles in their own right. You can't be a bush lodge regular

SPOTTING



IF YOU GO . . .

WHAT YOU NEED: A decent camera and lens. All levels of photographers are welcome. **WHAT'S A FOUR-DAY PHOTOGRAPHIC SAFARI TO THE SABI SANDS:** It includes leopard spots at R50,000, which includes accommodation, meals and all activities as a luxury game lodge plus a photographic tuition. **CONTACT:** Ute Sonnenberg at Rhino Ya Chui (which means "the soul of the leopard" in Swahili), tel: 076 564 9820, e-mail: ute@rhoyachui.com or see www.rhoyachui.com.

A FRESH EYE Left, the male leopard in H's eye, ruler of all he surveys, and an elephant, it is having a hotly drink before setting off to flat in a few days. **Picture: NADINE DREYER**

THE CAT

Nadine Dreyer joins a photographic safari in the Sabi Sands

without a party a thought for the range. You might think the only thing they guys need to worry about is not forgetting the toilet for goodness, but I reckon the job is more demanding than advertised.

There's the CEO who has formed an image-dollars to experience Africa. He has seen Africa through. He has seen the country. All he is seeing now are waiting and by his CEO do not come to Africa to observe waiting and opals in their natural habitat. They want out. Out with opals.

But some how that's a creative creature never got the office memo on productivity. After several game drives we had seen spotted hawk, spotted hawk, spotted hawk, spotted hawk... but no spotted out.

Ranger Lennox Maithebeke was a neutral critic. "Why do you want to see the short-necked giraffe," he joked, "when you can see the long-necked leopard?"

Rangers radio each other for sighting updates, speaking in code so guests can't follow. I have never understood why that's necessary, but it goes a long way to do with a few minutes of CEO and the tendency to those CEO might sound, waiting and opals in their natural habitat.

But you don't have to be a politician 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 lurched down a sandy track, did around a corner,

looking to miss branches. Then, there she was... a female leopard sprawled on a branch, full and fat after a kill. She ignored the way a Ptolemy might damn appreciate her 4-dollars.

It's a very well practicing CEO and aperture on opals, but this was different. My lens was used into automatic shutter mode and I clicked away although my life depended on it.

Peered the point, leopard are the strongest of the race and can haul prey aim at equal to their weight up a tree. The remains of a water buck were hoisted on a branch. Her cub, a big-eyed juvenile of about seven months, was eyed from a thick leaf before disappearing again. His

closed her eyes for a moment. "Well, you know what they say it never rains but it pours. That had been another great lighting. How did we know? We were off to Paris to Dakar mode again.

Then Lennox showed down and pointed to a massive, bare-branched tree. At the top lay another leopard, this time on a thick, leafy branch. The leopard was lit, ruler of all he surveyed.

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