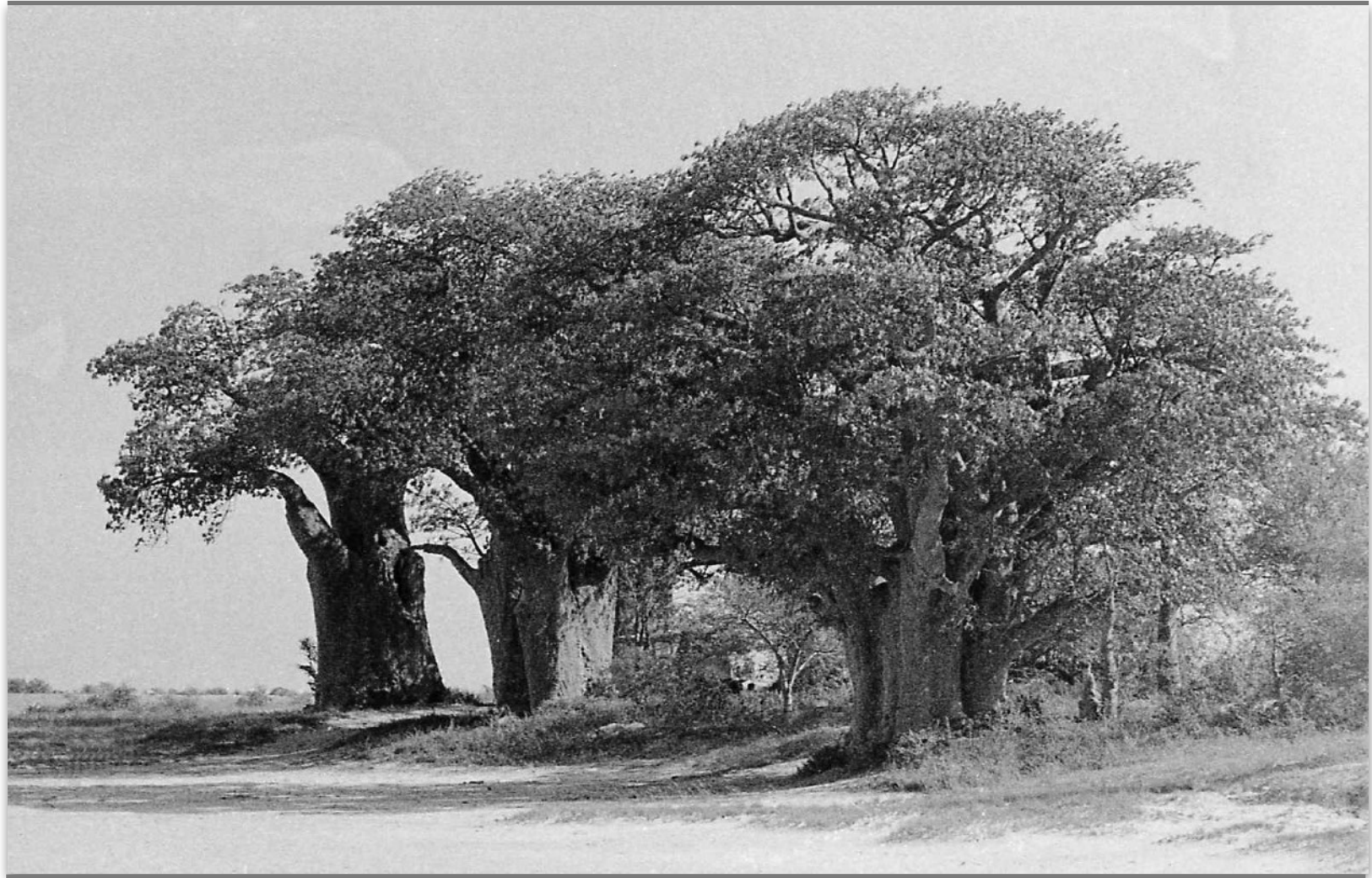


Journey into Africa



A celebration of Africa's disappearing spaces and disappearing species by Steve Shelley

Journey into Africa

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Foreword

This virtual African safari comprises a collection of photos taken by the author during his travels across Africa in the 1980s, digitised from the original negatives and transparencies. It's a celebration of a natural wilderness that is fast disappearing but which, especially in this era of climate change adjustment, we need to find ways to retain.

Steve spent two years travelling from the UK to Cape Town in South Africa, covering 44,000 miles and making 130 visits to 40 parks and reserves in 17 African countries. He established a safari business accompanying clients into the Okavango Delta before settling in Kenya where, amongst other things, he carried out strategic planning assignments for the national parks and wildlife authorities of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. He was one of the founders of the Ecotourism Society of Kenya (now Ecotourism Kenya).

The cover image shows 'Baines Baobabs', a Kalahari tree island located in Nxai Pan National Park, Botswana. It was made famous in a painting by Thomas Baines who accompanied David Livingstone on his 1851 expedition from Mafeking to Linyanti. The black and white negative shows some age stains, coming as it does from a roll of Ilford HP5 film which lay undeveloped for some months before being processed in the bush.

This is a book of photographs. For more stories and some of Steve's writing about Africa, click the link here: thelonepenguin.com/africa.



Introduction

Large mammals disappeared long ago in many parts of the world when humans migrated into their territories and turned them into farms and settlements. But in Africa, people and wildlife evolved together and for thousands of years co-existed in harmony.

Africa's extraordinary diversity of wildlife is a reflection of the continent's great diversity of climatic zones and habitats, in turn manifested as stunning scenic variety. But it's under threat.

A long path of decline can be attributed almost precisely to aristocratic Victorian adventurers setting out into the world with precision engineered rifles. They funded their expeditions with ivory and they fed their guides and porters with buffalo meat. So plentiful were the vast herds that it quickly became 'sport' to hunt the 'game'. Set-piece hunts staged for royal princes claimed the lives of thousands of animals.

Africa south of the Limpopo was cleared of large mammals in the half century up to 1890. They were simply worked out like a mineral seam to be exploited. What saved them in the tropical parts of Africa – at least into present times –

was disease. Malaria and sleeping sickness meant that Europeans could not comfortably survive for very long here. Evolution had provided indigenous Africans with a degree of resistance. In the Americas, on the other hand, it was the indigenous peoples who succumbed to the invaders' germs, enabling the sad annihilation of both people and wildlife.

In our own time, climate change and viral pandemics have brought human interaction with wild places under the spotlight. Deforestation, habitat loss, poaching, and an international trade in wildlife each play a role in what are now recognised as existential threats to our own survival.

The colonial era export of industrial technology and the lure of a consumer lifestyle led to a burgeoning population, a hunger for land, and a political mindset that equates development with destruction.

But we need the wilderness. We need biodiversity. We need to know that birds and beasts are alive and well.

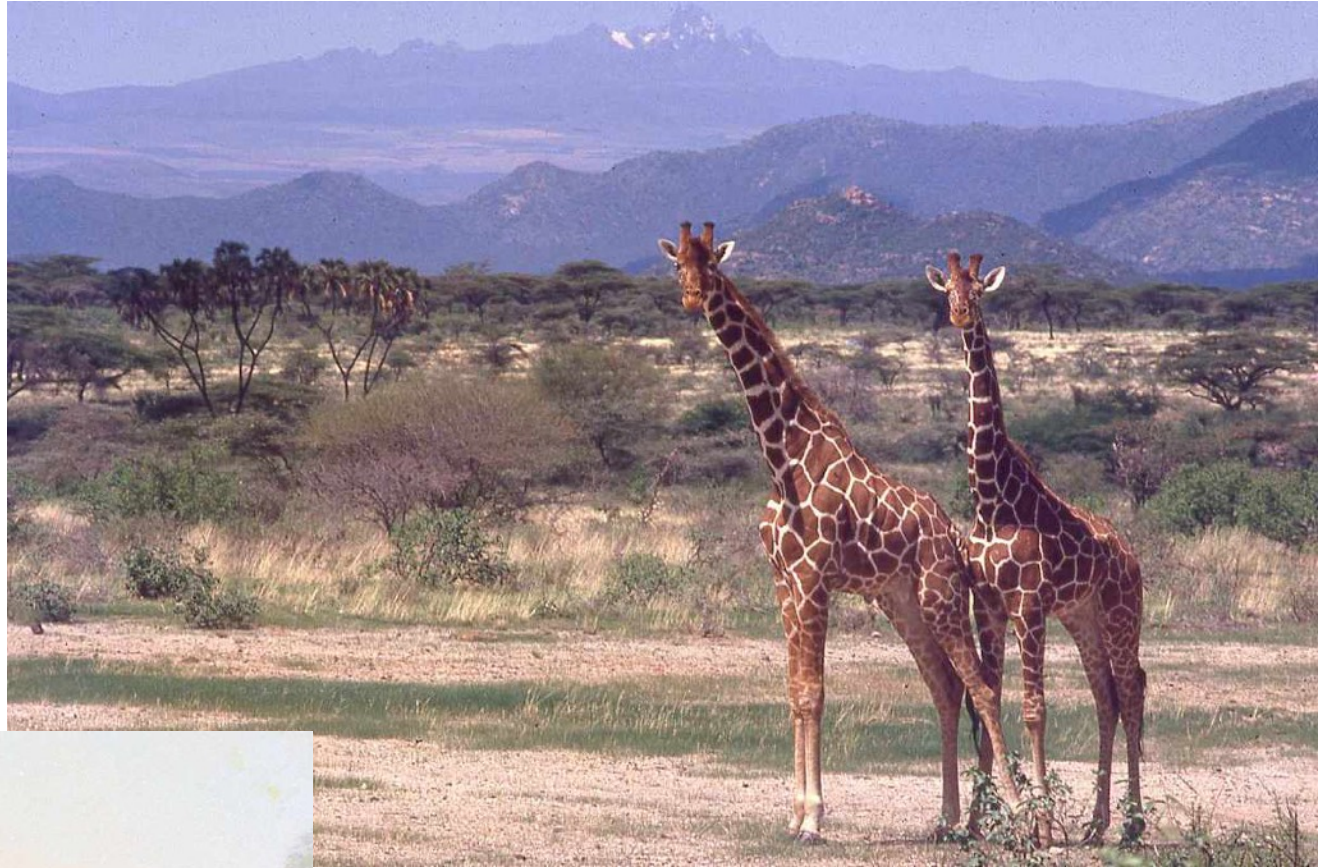
Reversing the trend will be challenging. The images included in this book are a powerful reminder of what we stand to lose.



Amazing spaces, amazing species

In East Africa, diversity is at its greatest, with habitats ranging from coral reefs and white sand beaches through the great savanna plains to high altitude mountain moorlands. Many of the images in this book come from East Africa: Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. But equally impressive is the wildlife of countries further south where there is a different spectrum of habitats including deciduous woodlands, harsh deserts and inland waterways.

Images from Botswana and Namibia are also included here.



Reticulated giraffe pose against the equatorial snowcap of Mt Kenya in a Laikipia reserve.



Chapman's zebra stir up the dust at a waterhole in the Etosha National Park, Namibia.



The Great Rift Valley is dotted with characteristic lakes. Here is Lake Bogoria, in Kenya, often home to vast flocks of flamingoes. Steaming hot springs play testimony to underlying volcanic activity.

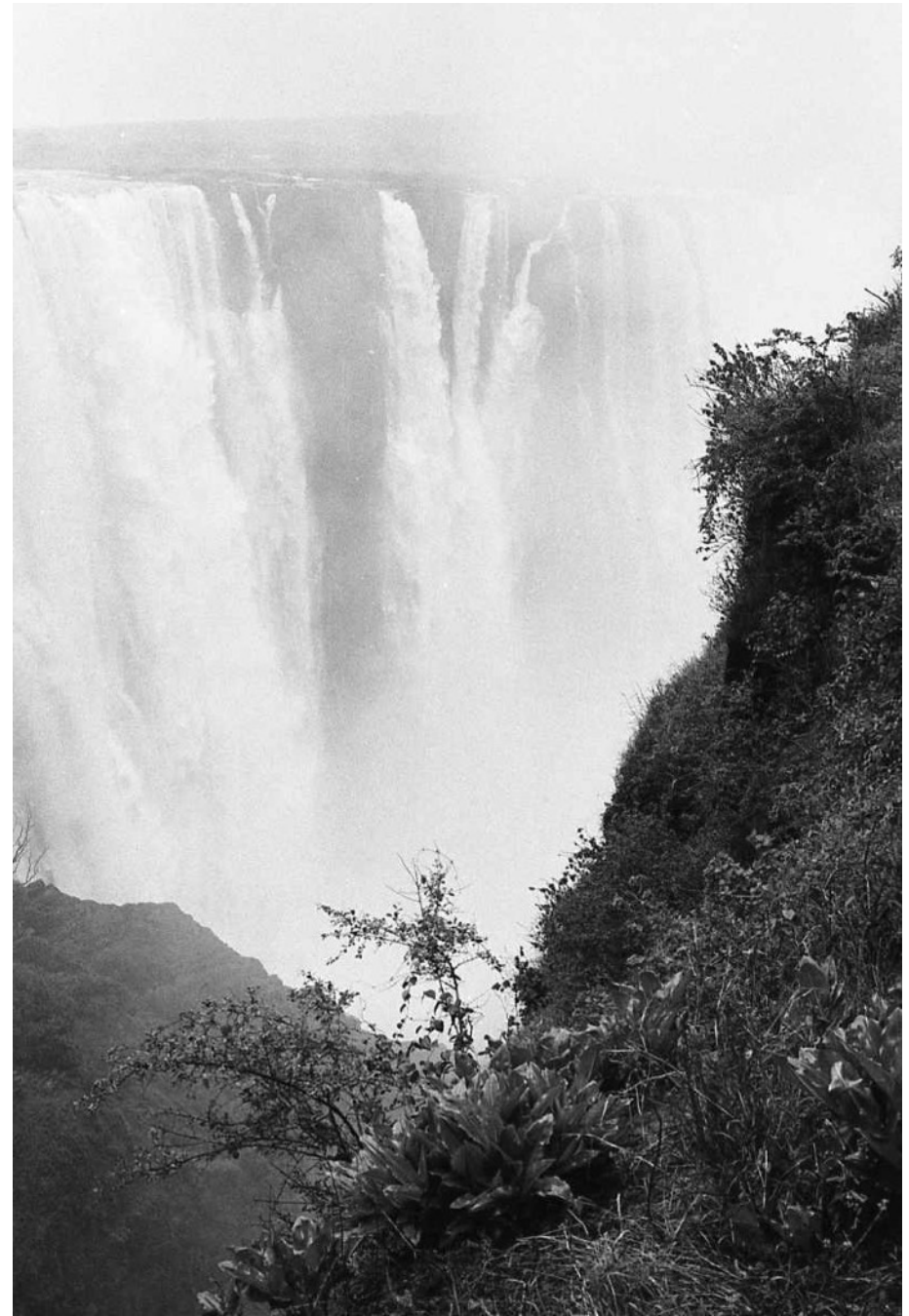
The following page shows the fairytale grotto behind one of the delightful waterfalls in the Aberdares National Park.





Below is another of the picturesque waterfalls in the Aberdares.

On the right is the magnificent Victoria Falls on the Zambezi between Zambia and Zimbabwe. You can see why it's called Mosi-o-tunyu – the smoke that thunders.



Paint it black (and white)

Black and white – monochrome – photography is not only reminiscent of a bygone age, but also an art form in its own right.

While some photos 'pop' with colour, others lend themselves to a display of tone and texture, and of shapes in shades of grey.

In the days before digital, I used Ilford FP4 film which I developed myself on the road, and Kodachrome for slides which had to be posted off to Switzerland. It was all 35mm, shot for the most part on various Nikon SLRs with fixed focal length lenses. That was the height of technology before smart phones and software did it all for you. It was also before high definition screens and scanners – we had to print our own with an enlarger and baths of chemicals in a darkroom.

What's so special about the old days? Much about life looks better through the lens of hindsight. But that's partly because some of it really was better. Admittedly we didn't have the use of GPS navigation or mobile phones, but there were fewer people and far fewer restrictions. On safari, these things matter! There was the freedom to go – and to set up camp – pretty much anywhere, the wilder the better, and safer too. Park entry fees were far lower than they are today. Twenty five cents covered your entire stay, compared to a daily rate of \$75 now. There were no \$50 visa fees throughout the whole of East and Southern Africa.

Throughout recorded history, visitors to Africa have told of vast herds of wild animals roaming free in areas that today are fenced into ranches and built into cities. The spaces that remain for them have been continually eroding. For wildlife, the old days really were much better.



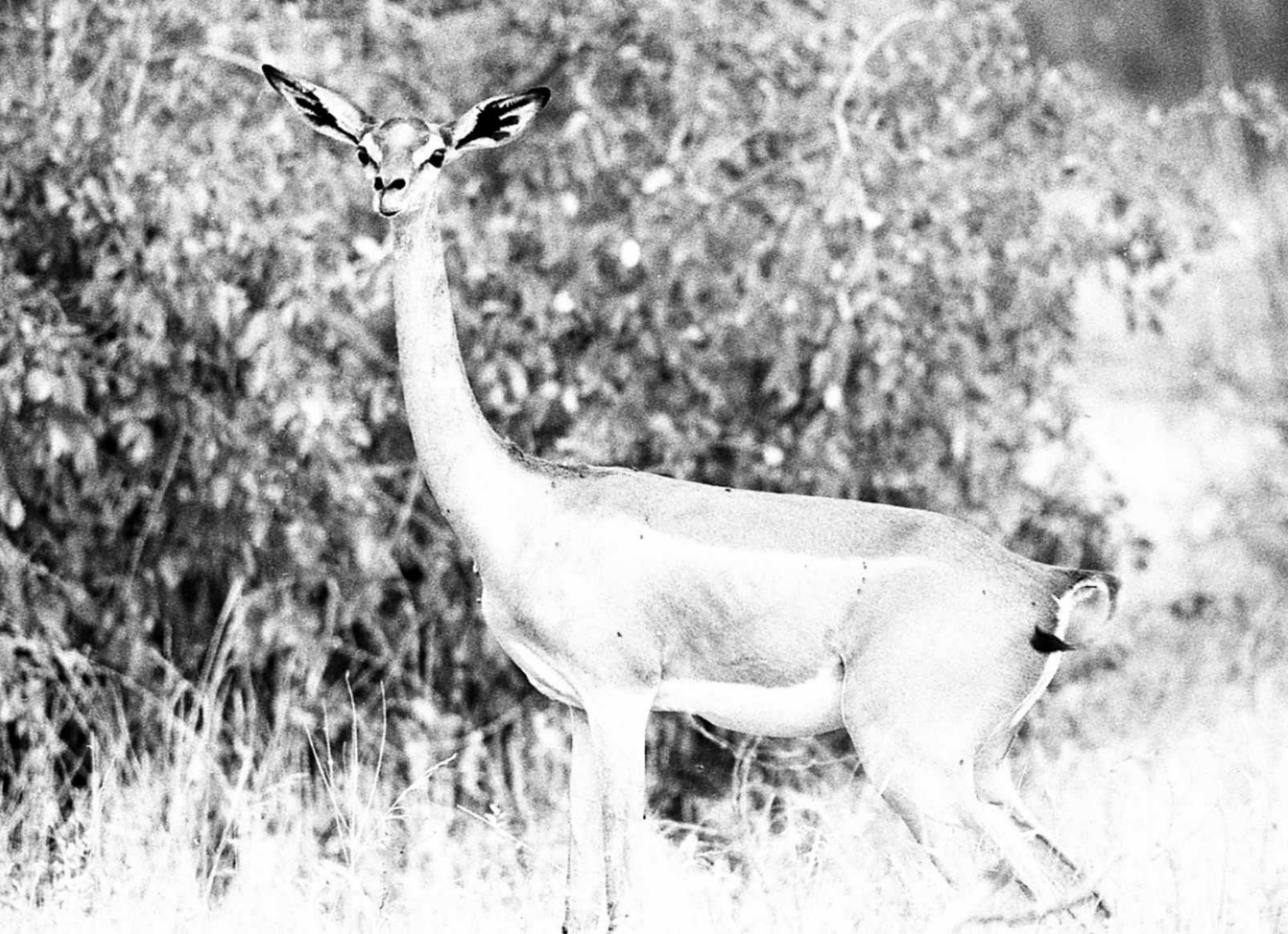
Monochrome works well for the rhino and calf on the right as a study in tone, texture and shadow. This was taken in Amboseli National Park, Kenya.

The impala below offers both shape and movement. Safari photographers learn quickly to shoot first and make adjustments later, otherwise back views are all you get.

On the next page is a striking image of a gerenuk from Samburu, Kenya. The patterns of the head and ears stand out more dramatically without the distraction of a natural coloured background.



The following pages show an oryx in Samburu, a wild dog in Moremi, Botswana, a group of elephants marching across Kenya's Tsavo West National Park, an elephant calf suckling, and a magnificent sable antelope with his harem in Shimba Hills.









Aerial jewellery



Africa's colourful bird life is if anything even more spectacular than its big mammals. Again the diversity of habitats ensures such a diversity of species that Kenya is second only to Peru in numbers.

Here we have several different types of bee eater. Above is a carmine bee eater on the Chobe River in Botswana, and a picture of a little bee eater taken near Agadez in Niger.

To the right is a cinnamon chested bee eater in Arusha National Park, Tanzania.



Below is a kori bustard and to the right a lilac breasted roller.

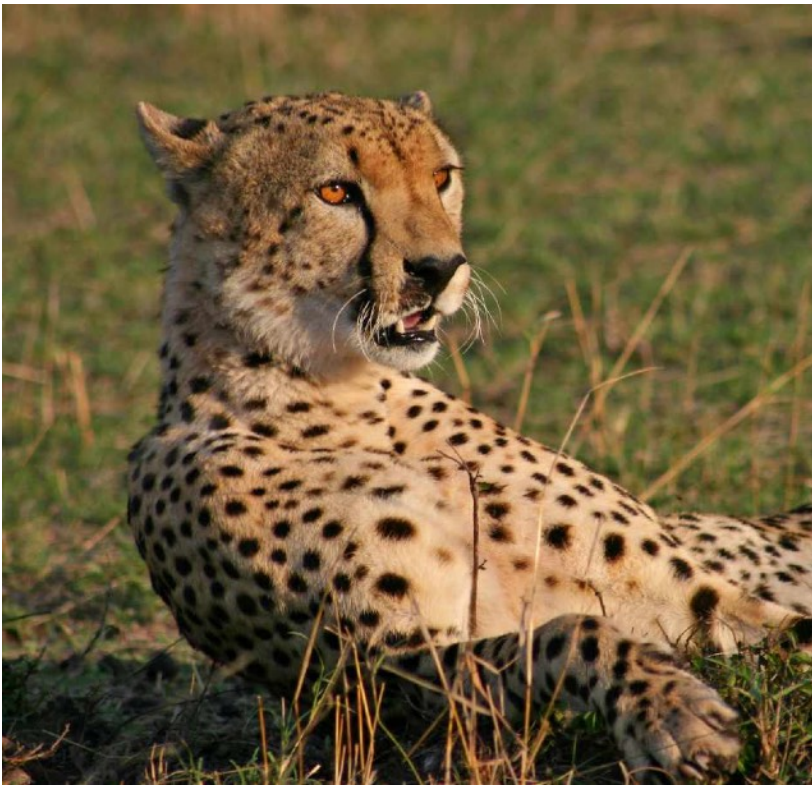




A red billed and a yellow billed hornbill.

The call of the wild

Being out in the wild, especially sleeping under canvas and cooking on an open fire, is a wonderful way to reconnect with our real roots. Senses are heightened. Horizons are far. A scent of rain in the air. Sounds unfamiliar. Crickets chirruping at dusk. Doves at dawn. A frisson of fear as a hyena whoops nearby, the gruff of a lion on the prowl. Paw prints in the ashes in the morning. There is nothing alien about this. It's where we came into the world. Our human species evolved in Africa before we set out on our long migration to occupy the planet. Amid the lakes and valleys, the hills and savanna, this is humankind's home. We grew up here. Quite literally, we all have a bit of Africa in us.



The cheetah and lions are all from the Masai Mara.



More shots from the Mara. The zebra and the giraffe nicely play out in black and white. Unbelievably this common, or Masai, sub-species of giraffe has been declared endangered due to a form of commercialised hunting sometimes wrongly referred to as 'subsistence'.

The genet below is quite common around tourist lodges.





A nice juxtaposition of kongoni, or Coke's hartebeest, in a herd of common, or Burchell's, zebra.

Below is a group of Grevy's zebra with their much narrower stripes. These are still reasonably common, though confined to a small range in northern Kenya.



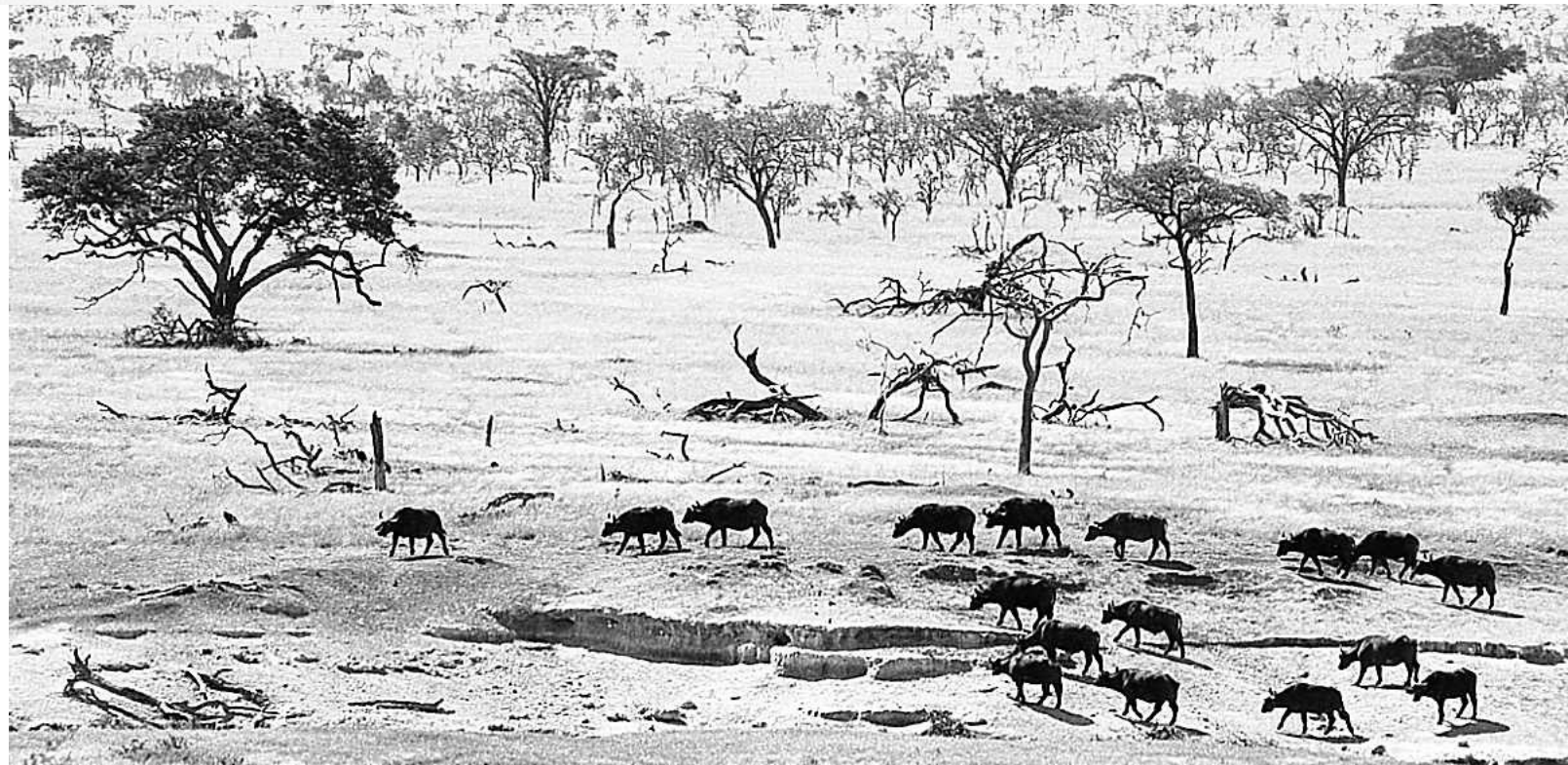
The rain forests of central Africa are not so easy to penetrate as the wide open spaces of the savanna. But there are rewards. Here is a male mountain gorilla photographed on the slopes of the volcanoes on the Congo/Rwanda border country. They're rare and still threatened, but can also be seen in the nearby forests of south west Uganda.

Below is a nursing youngster nestled down in the giant forest bamboo.





These buffalo were searching for water in Tanzania's Serengeti National Park. Vultures circling in the sky often indicate a carcass on the ground.



Big sky country

Humans cannot exist without other life forms. And yet throughout our history, we've gone to great lengths to exploit and eliminate many other species.

The word 'vermin' has been applied to bison, pigeons, springbok, elephant, foxes, badgers, wolves and many other animals. But the truth is that the only real vermin is us. There are too many of us, and we are a real and present danger to each other, to the planet, and to all its other occupants.

This accelerating loss of species is being called the Sixth Great Extinction. Earlier extinctions were due to volcanic eruptions and to asteroid collisions. This one is all down to us.

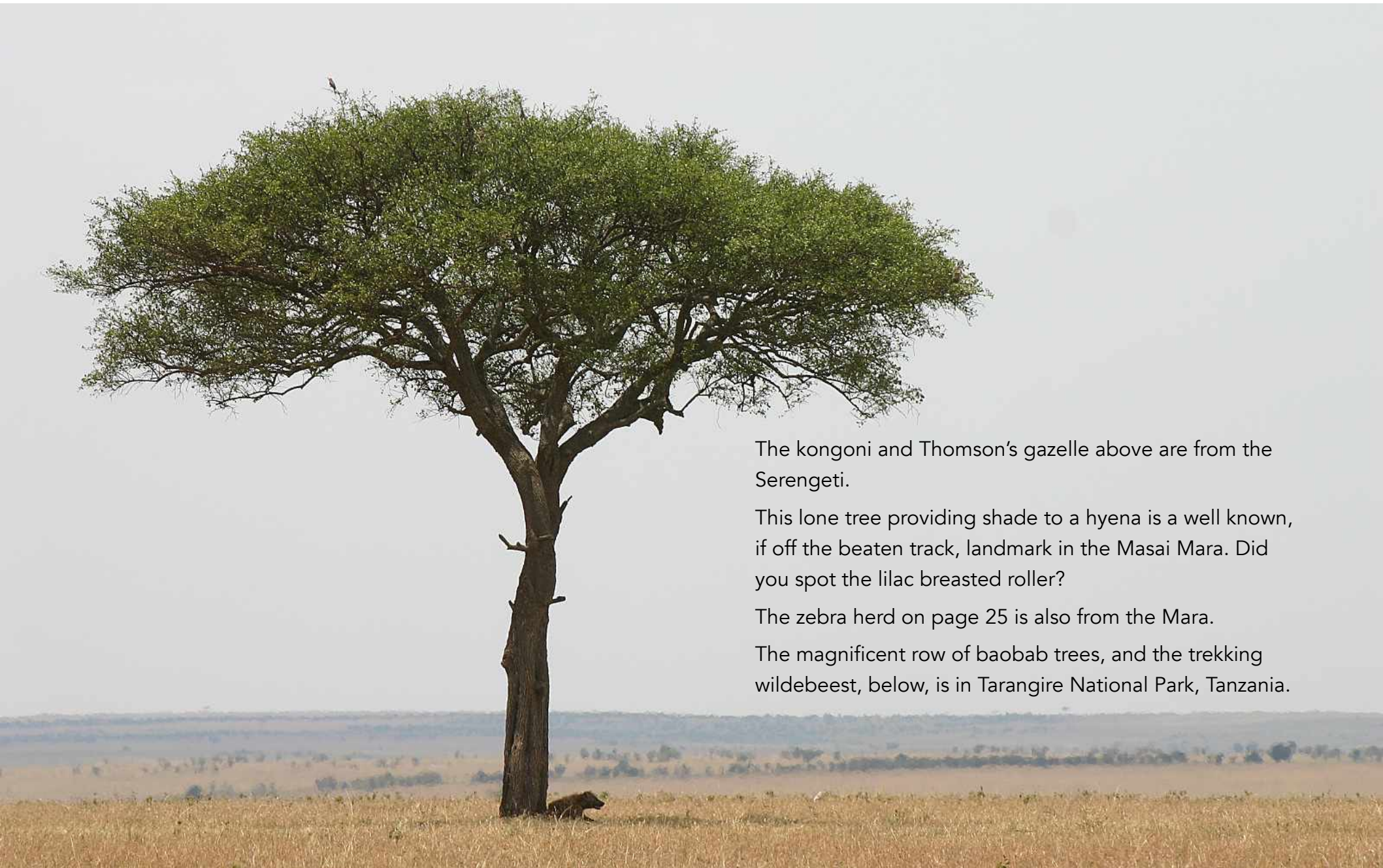
What is the chance we might halt it?

Never in human history has our custodianship of the planet been so important – and so called into account. We've messed it up even as we thought we were doing the right things to improve our lives. But it turns out we cannot continue to grow richer and fatter at the expense of the planet and its other inhabitants.

Favouring ourselves in the short term has not favoured us for the long term. We've now reached the long term. We could have seen it coming. Now we must change. It demands a strong vision and concerted action.

The big vistas and cloudscares of the African savanna give us a useful metaphor for what's needed: far-sightedness, inspiration, diversity, inclusion and humility.



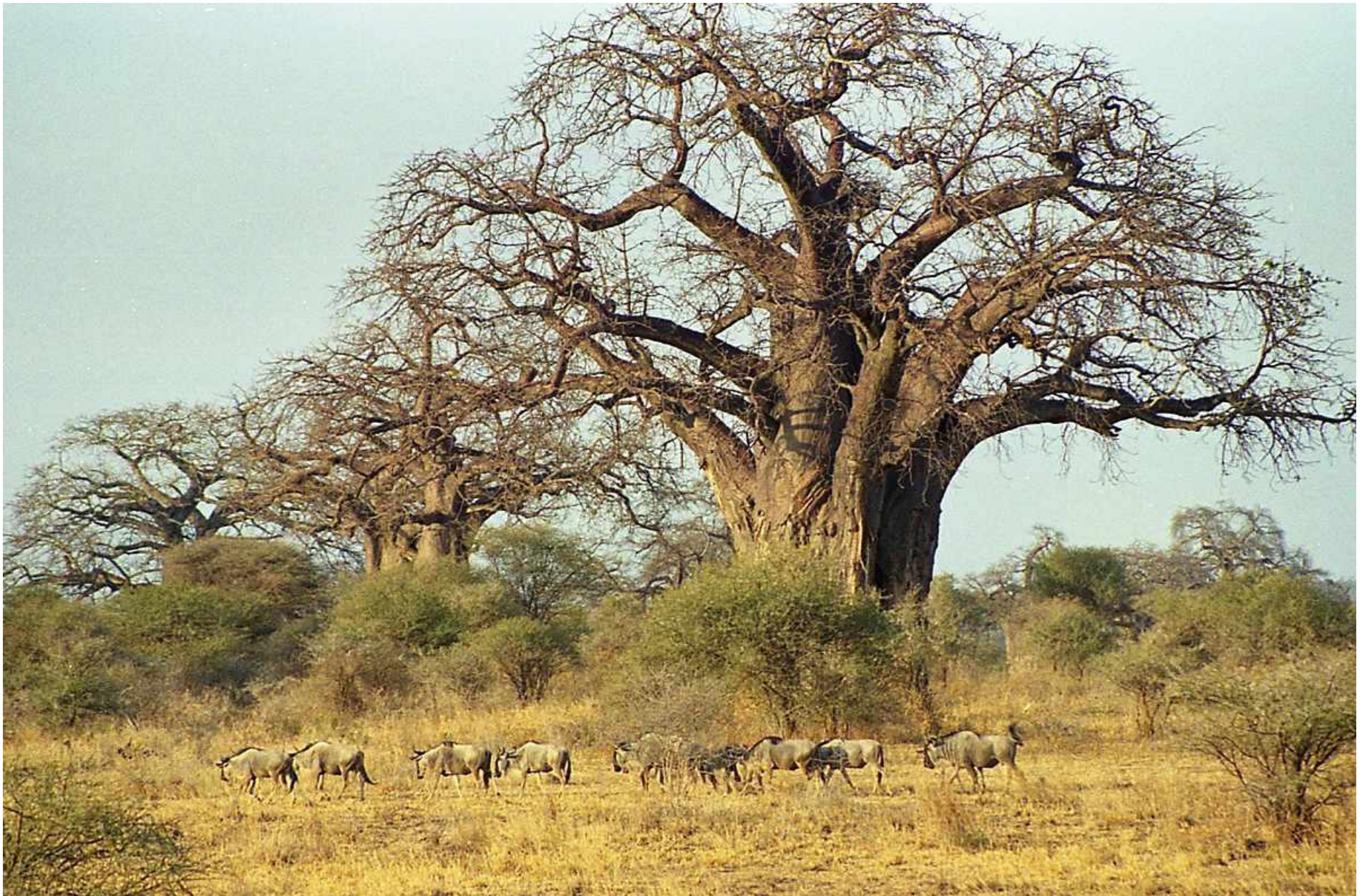


The kongoni and Thomson's gazelle above are from the Serengeti.

This lone tree providing shade to a hyena is a well known, if off the beaten track, landmark in the Masai Mara. Did you spot the lilac breasted roller?

The zebra herd on page 25 is also from the Mara.

The magnificent row of baobab trees, and the trekking wildebeest, below, is in Tarangire National Park, Tanzania.



Conservation hasn't worked. In spite of some dedicated effort and a great deal of money, the trend towards destruction and extinction continues. We need a new paradigm which does not continually place the interests of human beings as the primary reference point. Quite the opposite: the perils of climate change, and the social and economic disruption of viral pandemics, teach us that it is essential – even for our own well-being – to consciously maintain a balanced and healthy biodiverse global ecosystem.

The dilemma we face is due to a failure in policy and imagination, and to a failure to create and support the kind of global systems and institutions that could and should override parochial and narrow political interests.

Conservation agencies have allowed themselves to become distracted by complex zero sum debates about human rights, land ownership, and the consumptive or non-

consumptive exploitation of wildlife.

Well-intended scientists argue about the kind of management interventions most likely to preserve or restore natural habitats. Some argue in favour of burning or culling.

In the UK, it's still legal to set snares for rabbits and foxes, even inside national parks. It's done by 'gamekeepers' whose entire purpose is to ensure their aristocratic land-owning employers can bring their friends and clients to shoot grouse.

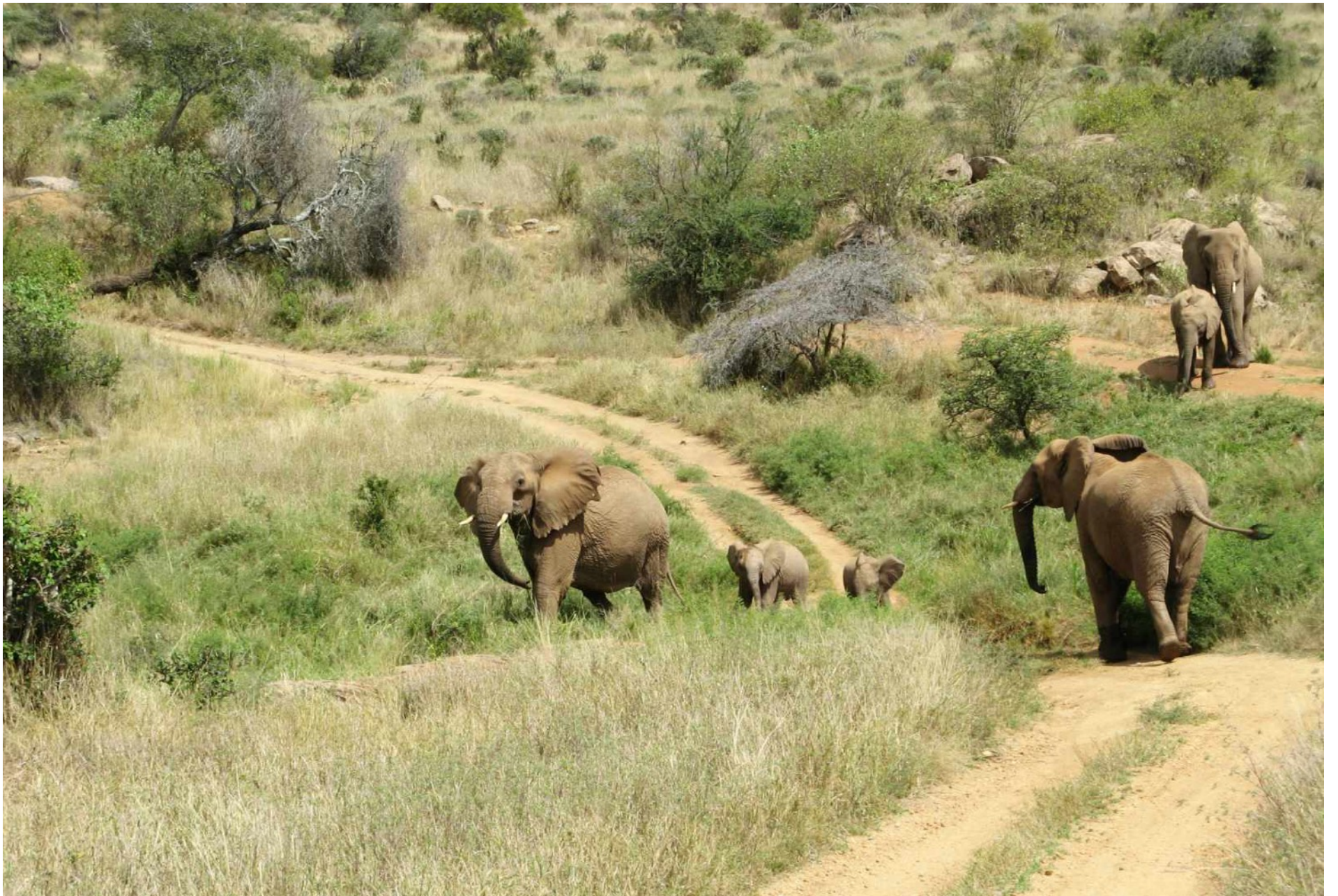
In much of Africa, it's still legal to kill animals that damage your crops. NGOs compete for funds to subsidise indigenous communities and encourage them to preserve wildlife. But when those funds pay for fencing and farms, it can be seen to have achieved the exact opposite.

We need a 180° shift in attitude and perception to preserve the wild world. But how on earth can we persuade policy makers, politicians and ordinary people to simply LEAVE IT ALONE?



Roads less travelled







When I set out to cross Africa, it was a conscious choice that a bank balance only has value when you exchange it for experiences. When you see these images, the attractions of a road less travelled are pretty obvious. It's not an easy option for everyone. But it's good for our souls to know that these kind of places still exist.

Above: the rainbow over the LandRover is in the Masai Mara.

The elephants are in Loisaba, in Kenya's Laikipia District.



The lions on this page were blocking the road from Moremi north to the Chobe National Park in Botswana.

And the elephants were coming from their daily bathe in the Chobe River.

Some more off the beaten track. This image shows the pink soda crust on Lake Magadi on the Kenya/Tanzania border. It's an intriguing area that seems to have been by-passed by modernity.

Even now it remains a wilderness where indigenous Masai graze their cattle in a nomadic pattern amongst what's left of the wildlife: wildebeest, antelopes and giraffe.



The Nguruman Escarpment in the background of the picture forms the eastern edge of the Loita Hills, illustrated below.



Disappearing faces



Masai traditions are alive and well. They don't spear lions so often these days but the boy's headdress is made from dozens of small birds.



These pictures were taken at the southern edge of the Sahara Desert in Niger where the predominant people are Tuareg. Note the leather water pouch and brass bowl on the camel, and the sword sheathed around the man's belt.



Left: a traditional Njemps fisherman in a papyrus canoe on Lake Baringo, Kenya.

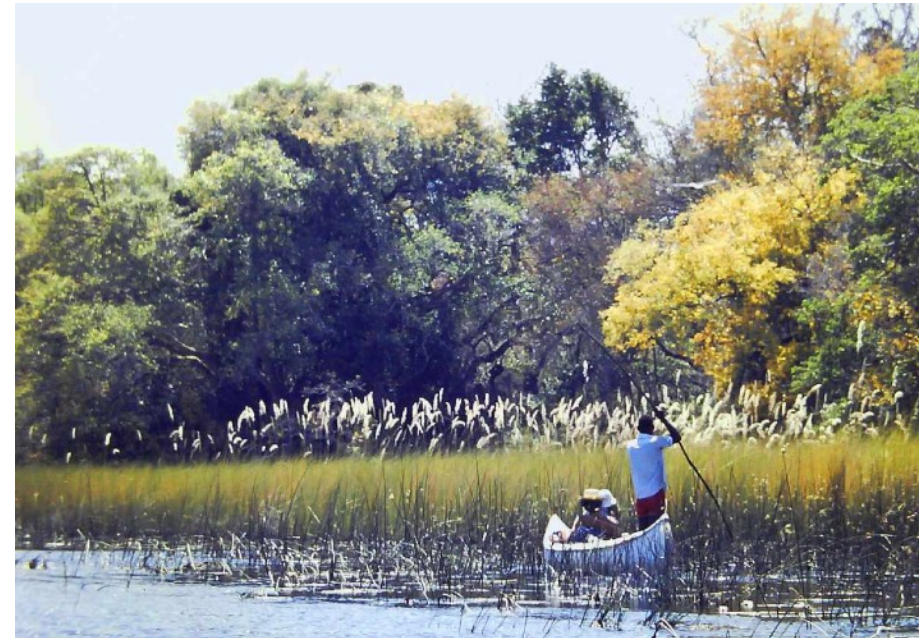
Below: a band of San 'bushmen' near Ghanzi in the Kalahari Desert. These people have been largely eliminated from the ancestral homelands just like the animals.



Land of water

Starting far away as the Red Sea, the Great Valley Rift slashes across Africa between steep escarpments which are visible from space. But here at the edge of the Kalahari Desert, it peters out as a modest ten foot sand dune. But it's no less remarkable, because this is what holds back the waters of the Cubango River which, rising in the highlands of Angola, now becomes the great inland delta called Okavango. It's a pristine wetland paradise which abuts cheek by jowl the arid desert salt flats of the Makgadikgadi. For centuries, this part of Africa was hard to reach, left out of the clutches of the colonial powers and known only to intrepid hunters. Its vast display of wildlife shows the benefit of a prolonged absence of too much human interference.

We ventured out into the delta fully self sufficient for days on end in canoes. Hippos and crocodiles were everywhere, though more heard than seen. Elephants waded through the streams between the islands. The exquisite birdlife included such delights as malachite kingfishers, jacanas, black herons, wattled cranes and fish eagles.



Part of the delta is protected as the Moremi wildlife reserve where, according to the pattern of seasonal floods, it's possible to venture by four wheel drive vehicle.

Seasonal pools slowly dry out (below), leaving a mass of catfish which attracts a great variety of waterbirds such as yellow billed storks, spoonbills and ibises.

A highlight is the lechwe antelope, bottom right, whose splayed hooves are adapted to the aquatic habitat around the delta up as far as the Chobe River.



In spite of my fondness for the parks and reserves of East Africa, I've had more intense wildlife encounters in and around the Okavango. On one trip, we encountered a migration of zebra as big as any on the East African wildebeest migrations.

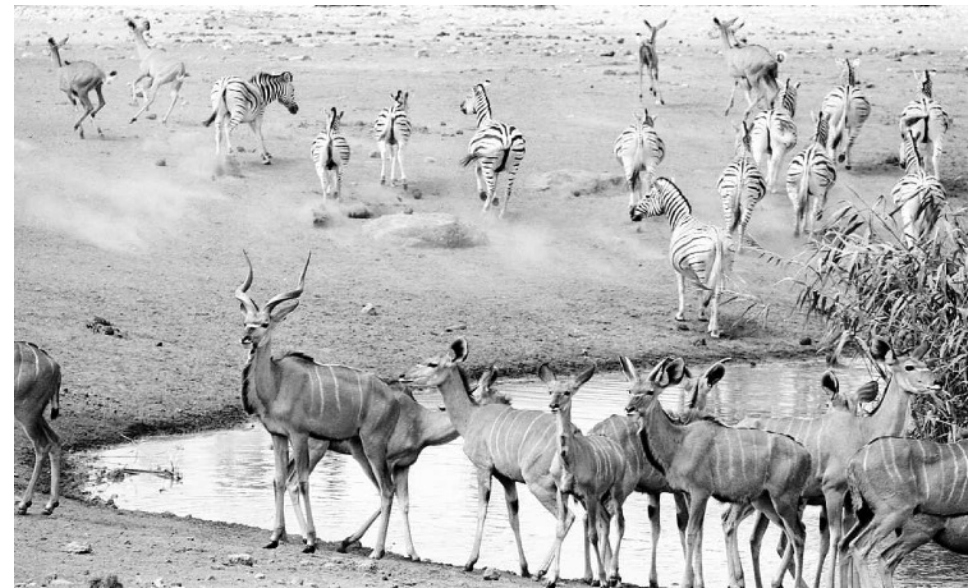
Camping wild in the vast expanses of Chobe National Park, we've been chased up a tree by a herd of elephants, watched jumping hares by torchlight, come face to face across the campfire with a hyena, found lion spoor right next to the tent canvas in the morning and watched as a hyena marched off carrying our fridge in its jaws.

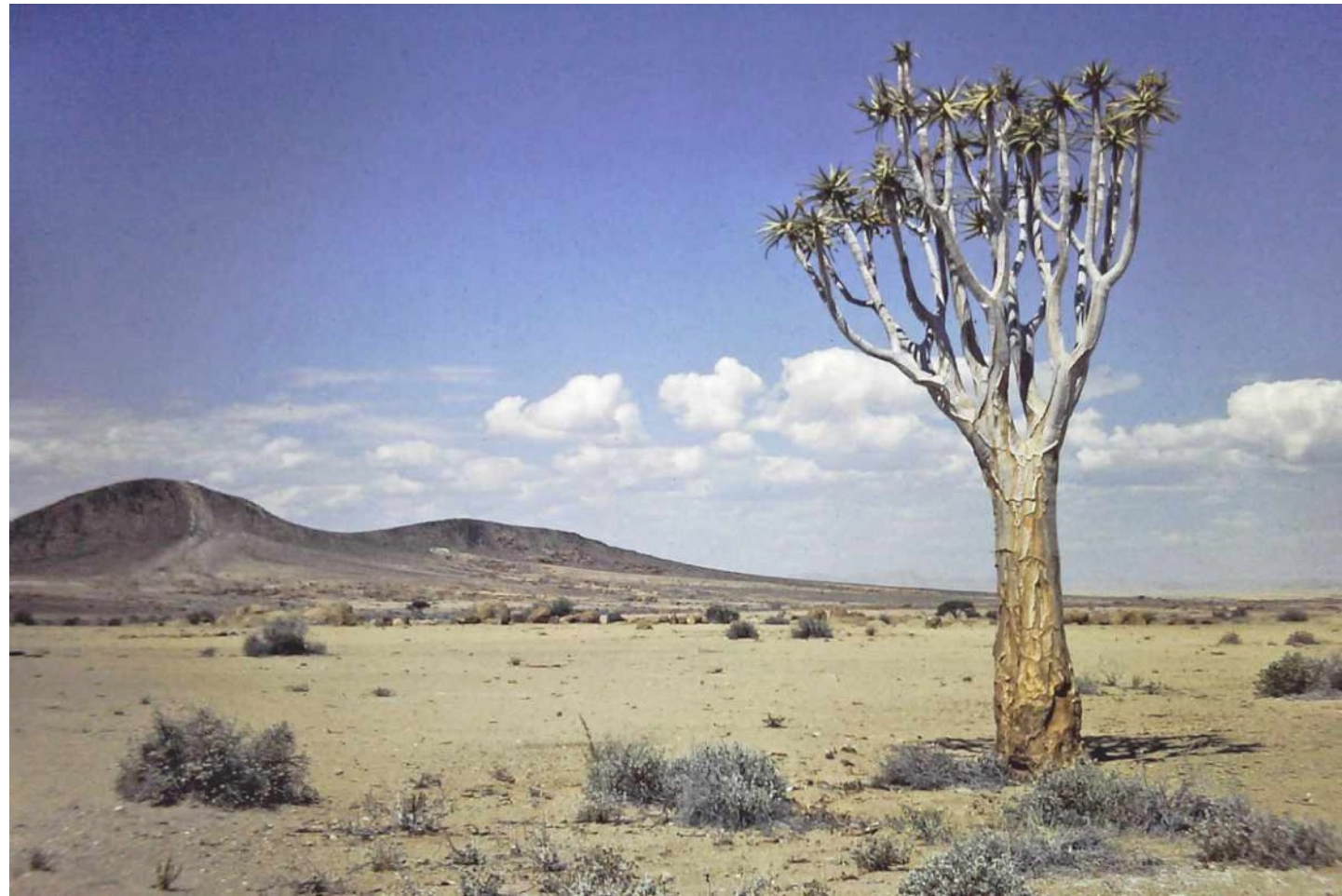


Namibia

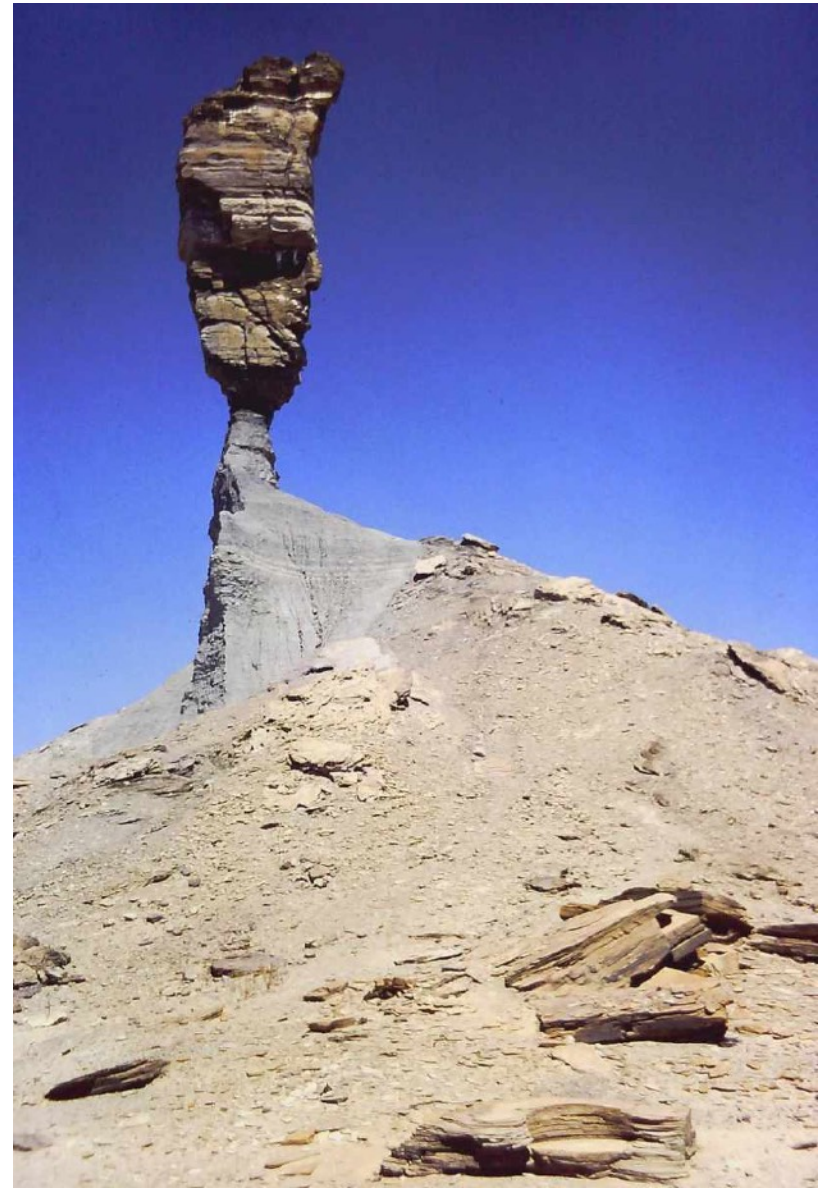
Namibia, formerly known as South West Africa (South West to its friends), is a vast, scenic and extremely photogenic country.

Here are some shots from the Etosha National Park in the north of the country where waterholes are dotted around the edge of vast salt flats. To the right is a diminutive steenbok. Lower right, greater kudu and Chapman's zebra. The springbok below deserve a story. The springbok is the emblem of South Africa's national sports teams. Springbok herds used to be very common in South Africa. They erupted from time to time in enormous migrations numbering millions of animals. The last great trek occurred in 1896 and was estimated to cover an area of 2,000 square miles. Hundreds of thousands were shot by white farmers, and that was that for the big herds of springbok south of the Orange River.





Where the Namib Desert meets the cold waters of the South Atlantic ocean, it causes fogs to roll in daily which provide sufficient moisture to nurture strange and prehistoric plants such as the welwitschia (above left) and the kokerboom (above right).





Rippling dunes to match any of those in the Sahara, seen here along the coast between Swakopmund and Walvis Bay.

Next page: a classic Kalahari sunset.





Meet the author

I'd always been a traveller. But when the opportunity arose to fly long haul to Kenya, and head out naively on safari in a rented car, I was hooked. I promptly bought a LandRover and set out to do it properly.

I expected to be away for a year, but I stayed for more than thirty. Many things happened alongside my travels around the continent. I started my first business, taking clients into the Okavango Delta in the days before lodges and airstrips. I published my first book, a wildlife safari guide. And I built my own home.

Leaving to return to the UK should have been a wrench, but it wasn't. Africa had changed. This isn't the place to explain how and why. Suffice it to say that while my second book 'Doing Business in Africa' celebrated how easy it was to exploit the enormous opportunities available, it was no longer the case. Regulation, bureaucracy, insecurity, corruption, unconstrained 'development' and a growing xenophobia slowly turned the story on its head.

Nowadays, I'm based in England's Peak District, a national park almost completely devoid of wildlife (at least compared with Africa). Here, their idea of traditions worth preserving are sheep farms and dry stone walls. Britain has been described as the world's most wildlife depleted country.

The author leading clients on a safari into the Okavango Delta.



Afterword

Which is the 'real Africa'? This one of wild spaces and wild species? Or the concrete jungle and human chicken coops called cities? As Joni Mitchell once said: "They paved paradise and put up a parking lot". In many African countries – as indeed elsewhere – the pace of habitat loss, deforestation, population growth and urbanisation has gone too far. It's out of control.

Debates around human development and wildlife conservation have long been polarised and emotional. I've been involved for more than thirty years, and it just seems to go round in circles. The need to adjust to the threat of climate change, coupled with the lockdown experience of the 2020 pandemic, suggests it's time for a new approach that recognises that wilderness, biodiversity and a balanced global ecosystem are essential human needs and not just some preservationist dream.

We need some more compassionate language to describe it too. Just as we shouldn't be talking about human 'resources', neither is it appropriate to describe birds and mammals as 'game' and their habitats as 'reserves' and 'parks'.

I don't have an answer, but here's a first thought: allocate 50-70% of the planet as Nature Zones, free of habitation, free from exploitation, with no mass access.

I'm happy to join those ready to talk about it, and to do things differently. For the sake of the planet, for the sake of wildlife, and for the sake of humanity.

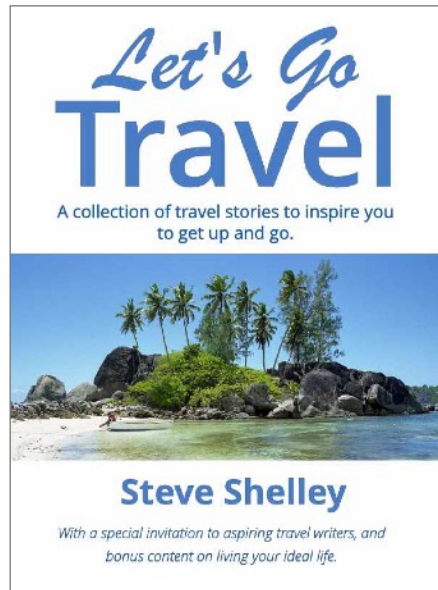


These Jackass Penguins, from Boulders Beach on the Cape Peninsula, formed the inspiration for my LonePenguin publishing imprint.



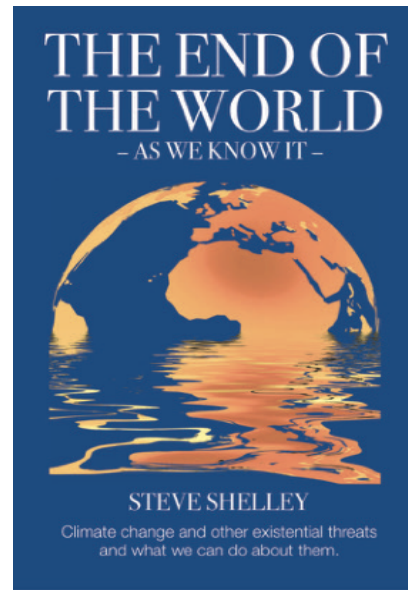
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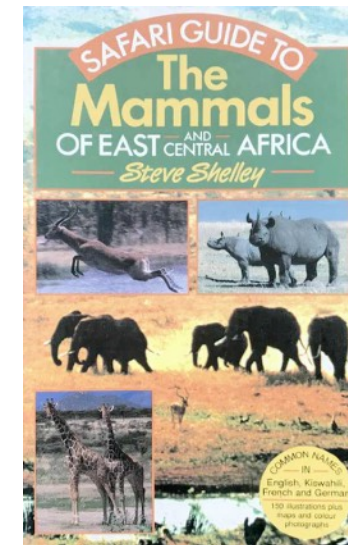
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Now out of print, but I'm working on a revised digital edition.

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