

# RANGER SEAN'S BUSHVELD DIARIES

## DAY 1

### THE CHEETAH CHASE

They were on an early morning stroll, casually walking across the road and into the bush. They gave a gaping morning yawn and took a quick sit down for observation and to gather their thoughts, then the brothers got on their feet again. These two cheetahs had enjoyed a restful evening now they were on the prowl to find some breakfast.

We drove around a bend as we tried to keep up with the fast-moving felines and suddenly we found them, looking up a tree, as if they wanted to climb it. It's very unusual to see a cheetah in a tree, never mind climbing it. These cats are not adapted like leopards to climb trees effectively; instead they are more suited for open plains where they use speeds of up to 114 km/h to catch their prey and avoid competitive predators.

We could not yet see what they had set their sights on, so we slowly rolled forward to get a better view. Then, behind the trees in the distance, we spotted some zebra grazing. This must be what the brothers had set their gaze upon.

We watched silently as, over the next 40 minutes, they played an incredible game of patience, creeping forward until they had moved from 70 metres away from the zebra, to a mere 20 metres, without drawing any attention to themselves. Then we realised that the cheetah had a dilemma. Their extracted claws were now making more sound as they moved through the bush and the zebra had detected it.

They stood dead still, not moving a muscle. The cheetah were also frozen in their steps. It was a standoff. The brothers gently stepped forward and, noticing the sound, the zebra spotted the two cats and immediately galloped off in various directions. The cheetahs had not been in a prime position to launch their attack and now they had to accept the fact that their breakfast had just escaped.



We were amazed to have experienced the thrill of the stalk. Lost for words, we returned to the lodge for a sumptuous breakfast that hopefully wouldn't escape. It was an absolutely satisfying way to start the day.

### QUIZ

- 1) What is the maximum speed a cheetah can reach to catch prey and evade predators?
- 2) Which animals are better adapted than cheetahs to climb trees?
- 3) How far forward did the cheetah brothers manage to travel in 40 minutes?
- 4) How did the zebra first notice the cheetahs near them?
- 5) Who broke the cheetah-zebra standoff first?