

# RANGER SEAN'S BUSHVELD DIARIES

DAY 5

## AN AWESOME FIND

It can sometimes be quite a challenge to wake up in the early hours, but going on safari in the game reserve always makes it worthwhile. One morning, my guests and I woke especially early and plotted our route in the hope of spotting a leopard: one of the rarest sightings which only about 10% of visitors to Africa are lucky enough to see.

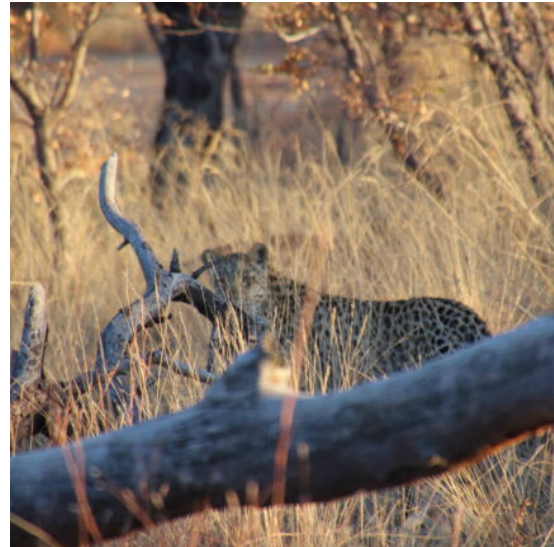
There was a chilly breeze in the air as we drove along, spotting some kudu and warthogs. As we came down one hilly area, I suddenly saw something sitting in the road a distance ahead of us. From its posture and the fact I could now see it licking its paw, I explained to my guests that the mysterious animal was most probably a hyena.

As we came closer, the animal grew more wary of us and started moving into the grass. By now we were all on the edge of our seats, eyes focused, and as we came around a bend in the road I noticed the twitch of an ear and spotted it hiding behind a log 20 metres away. "Leopard!" I whispered.

Held in awe, we sat silently as the young female leopard looked straight at us, believing herself to be hidden in the long grass. As I tried reaching for my camera, she realised she had been seen and jogged off in zigzag form towards the next bend in the road.

We trailed behind at a distance as the shy and skittish cat tried to work out what to make of the peculiar thing following her. As she looked back, I managed to catch one beautiful picture of her.

Leopards are usually nocturnal so we were extremely lucky to see one at that time of day. Elusive masters of camouflage, they use stealth to catch their prey. They walk with their claws retracted to make as little sound as possible as they approach their victim, before launching their attack at up to 60 kms/hr. By the time the prey notices the leopard, it's usually too late!



We followed her a short distance before she disappeared down the gorge and we smiled at our great fortune. Sometimes, luck appears the most unlikely of places - you just have to look!

## QUIZ

- 1) How many visitors to Africa are usually lucky enough to spot a leopard?
- 2) At what time of day are leopards most active?
- 3) How did the leopard try to avoid being followed when she knew she had been seen?
- 4) What do leopards do so that their prey cannot hear them approach?
- 5) How fast can leopards travel when launching their attack on prey?