

From sunset to sunrise

It's 7.20 pm and the camp gates in the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park are about to close. Dust, luminous orange against the setting sun, hangs in the air as visitors head back to the promise of a campfire and a G&T. It's the closest you'll ever get to gridlock in this part of the world.

Avoiding the traffic and heading in the opposite direction is veteran wildlife photographer Hannes Lochner. He has spent the past year at Twee Rivieren – part of a planned two-and-a-half-year stint in the park – and this time he's only taking pictures at night, for a book called *The Dark Side of the Kalahari* which will hit the shelves in 2013.

Anyone who has been to the Kgalagadi knows that it's a magical place at any time of the day, but at night it comes into its own. "Once the sun goes down it's just me, the animals and their secrets," Hannes says.

Getting a sharp image in the dark is a technical challenge, but it's not just the photography that's difficult.

"I try to get about four hours' sleep during the day – not easy in a canvas tent when temperatures are hitting 45 °C," Hannes says. "I'm not used to getting so little sleep and I doubt I ever will be."

The Kalahari is a harsh place to live and work (the past year has seen temperatures ranging from -13 °C to 50 °C) but Hannes is inspired by it: "You can't capture the essence of this place in a week or two. You have to experience all its seasons: the cold and the unbelievable heat; the dramatic skies; the good years and the drought years."

Hannes still has a long way to go with his project, so if you're in the park and you see an open vehicle heading out as you're hurrying back to camp, wave and wish him luck!



HANNES LOCHNER
Next to my sleeping bag: *Shades of Nature* by Heinrich van den Berg
iPod playlist: "iPod? I much prefer the owls hooting."

GEKKO IN THE LIMELIGHT

"Sometimes you need to look past the lions, leopards and other big predators, and try to see the little things. I took this picture of a giant ground gecko (*Chondrodactylus angulifer*) against the disc of the setting sun – it looks like he's about to walk down the red carpet to the screams of adoring fans!

"A giant ground gecko is strictly nocturnal and although it looks cute enough to cuddle, it can lunge and bite if threatened."

HOW? Nikon D3S, 300 mm lens, shutter speed 1/2 500 second, aperture f2.8, ISO 200, manual mode.



♥ KING OF THE DUNE

"During a project of this length, you get to know the animals you photograph and you become a part of their lives. Each night you need to observe their routine, their relationships with the other animals they interact with, and try to guess when they will do something spontaneous. Anyone who looks at the pictures afterwards needs to be able to feel that bond between animal and photographer.

"I like the dramatic mood in this photo and the way the lion, lit by a spotlight, is giving me a gentle reminder that he knows exactly what I'm up to!"

HOW? Nikon D3S, 70–200 mm lens, shutter speed 1/200 second, aperture f2.8, ISO 320, manual mode.



♥ LUNA'S LOSS

"I have been following a female leopard called Luna for the past year. This photo was taken a few months after she gave birth to two cubs. Sadly, the cubs seemed to have moved off and their whereabouts are unknown. I see Luna less and less, too. I've seen her spoor a few times, but always alone, without those of her cubs. A male leopard has moved into the vicinity, which isn't good news as rival males are known to kill cubs if they find them.

"I won't give up looking for the cubs, but I'm not holding out much hope of seeing them again."

HOW? Nikon D3S, 600 mm lens, shutter speed 1/4 000 second, aperture f11, ISO 125, aperture priority mode.





🦉 OWL ON THE HUNT

“Summertime is owl time in the Kgalagadi. The rains bring insects and small reptiles and the owls have a field day. Once the tourists are back in the camps at night, owls – like this spotted eagle-owl – use the deserted roads as their hunting grounds.

“With massive, forward-facing eyes and lightning-fast reflexes, owls are magnificent nocturnal predators. I took this picture using a flash, after waiting patiently until both bird and bug were in the frame.”

HOW? Nikon D3S, 600 mm lens, shutter speed 1/1 000 second, aperture f4, ISO 1600, flash, aperture priority mode.

🐝 ATTACK OF THE BEE

“Lions: when they’re not out hunting, they’re just as lazy at night as they are during the day! To take a picture that says something new, you have to have a whole lot of patience and a desire to tell a story.

“The sun had just set and this bee was buzzing around and irritating the lions. I waited with my finger on the shutter button for the moment when one of the lions would react.”

HOW? Nikon D3S, 600 mm lens, shutter speed 1/500 second, aperture f4, ISO 400, aperture priority mode.



▶ PRETTY IN PURPLE

"I followed Luna the leopard for some time before I named her. One freezing winter night (-10 °C) I watched her fight with a brown hyena over a springbok carcass. Backing out of the fight, she moved off to sit on a rock a short distance away, with the moon rising behind her. That's why I chose her name.

"This is one of my favourite portraits of her. It was a summer evening and the sky was ablaze with colour. She paused against the technicolour backdrop and looked my way for a brief moment. Luckily I was ready and waiting with my camera.

"It was a sad day when Luna's cubs disappeared and although I rarely see her anymore, I always look out for her on my nightly forays into the bush."

HOW? Nikon D3S, 600 mm lens, shutter speed 1/125 second, aperture f4, ISO 3 200, aperture priority mode.

Visit www.lochnerphoto.com to see more of Hannes's work.

