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Open Spaces and Predators of the Mystical Kalahari

BY [GUEST PHOTOGRAPHER](#) - [HANNES LOCHNER](#) | FRI, APR 4, 2014 AT 6:37 AM |

1 COMMENT

Open spaces, thousands of antelope and abundant predators are what the Kalahari desert (Kgalagadi National Park) is all about! In addition to the quadrupeds, the birdlife is also spectacular. The smell of the first rains, the flowers after the rainy season, the birth of hundreds of springbok and, of course, seeing a big black-maned lion against the backdrop of a red dune. The Kalahari is like a lost world tucked into the furthest corner of South Africa and it always delivers. There are no words that fully describe what an exceptional place it is. These are just a few features that draw one to this arid landscape, and for photographers this place is hot, sweaty, but with enough patience, heaven on earth!



King of the Kalahari, regardless the enormous lightning storm in the background, this lion is oblivious to the noise and thunder.

In 1995 I saw a photograph taken by [Chris Johns](#) of a big black-maned lion in a dust storm, and I was immediately hooked onto this place and dreamed about becoming a full-time wildlife photographer. This only realized a decade later, but the memory of that photograph inspires me to this day to uncover more photographic stories in the Kalahari, forcing me to return ever so often.

I have always been fascinated by the arid regions of Southern Africa, and the Kalahari is at the top of my

list. Six years ago I grabbed my equipment and tent, excited to capture this amazing place, but instead of two years I stayed for five years. An adventure of a lifetime! My first project was called “[Colours of the Kalahari](#)” during which time I tried to capture the essence of the place. Then about two and a half years ago, I started on “[The Dark Side of the Kalahari](#)”, documenting the life of a leopard called Luna, as well as the nightlife that surrounded her.

I adore leopards. Although you have to work really hard to find one, this wildlife park probably houses the most beautiful specimens. They are still very skittish, which makes them even more spectacular and impressive. The Southern region of the Kalahari has the highest density of leopards (in my view) in the park, in addition to plenty of cheetahs and lions.

I have been privileged to spend time at twelve different leopard den sites, watching the little ones grow up and seeing how their different personalities develop. It is sad to see the cubs getting killed by other predators, but it is part of a story, a tale being played out in nature. The most remarkable observation was to see how the mother went about rearing her next litter to adulthood, despite such an ordeal.

Initially I kept to normal Park gate hours, seven days a week, but during the last two years, I focused on night photography, going out at 4 pm and returning at 10 am. That meant I had to sleep in a hot tent during the day (up to 40 degrees Celsius in the shade during the summer), which is basically impossible, except during the winter months, so I was always tired! During my stay I drove 220 000 km and went through 16 tyres. Life in the Kalahari also got less lonely, after my wildlife filming partner, Noa Köfler joined me for the last two years, capturing the 'behind the scenes footage' for promoting [our new App](#).



Luna, the main character of the book, 'dark side of the Kalahari' is keeping her eye on us before she disappears into the bushes to join her cubs at her den.

The dry period (May to September) is the best season for lots of action. Then everything revolves around the waterholes where all living things intermingle and if you are patient, you will get great results.

The winter months offer gorgeous sunshine, but the riverbeds are very cold so that the predators tend to stay in the dunes, as it is a few degrees warmer up there.

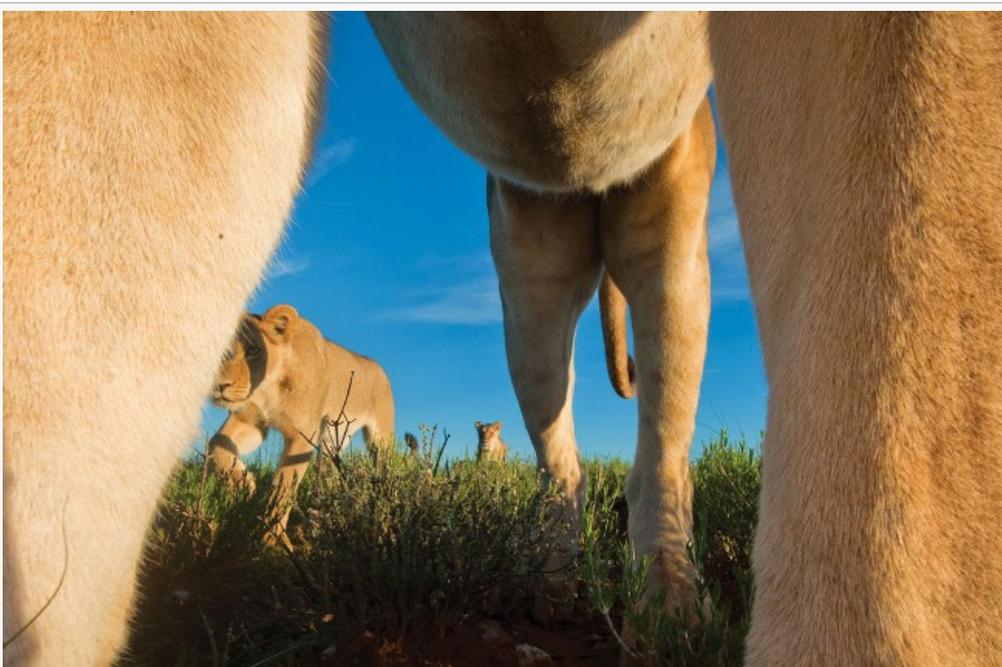
In the last project when working at night, a telephoto lens became unhandy, so I relied on my shorter lenses. In addition I also set up a remote system, attaching cameras in and around my vehicle to capture interesting angles. Lions are always curious and they never let you down, especially the younger ones. When one stops at a pride of youngsters, they will always run towards the vehicle and chew on everything, nibbling on the bullbar and wheels. Consequently it was essential to protect your cameras from such unwanted attention.



Young Pride of the Kalahari

This whole project was not for the faint-hearted, working in this environment is very challenging, staying in a hot tent that gets up to +40 degrees Celsius, -12 degrees Celsius in the winter on an open safari vehicle, surrounded by scorpions, snakes and waking up sometimes with a sniffing sound around your tent. Hyenas trying to eat everything in your camp, even your tyres, jackal and lion running away with pots and pans. Being stalked by young lions and dealing with millions of bugs at night in the rainy season. Tasting almost every bug the Kalahari has to offer while photographing with spotlights.

The interaction between different animals and species is one of the most amazing things to observe and photograph in the Kalahari. Every living thing is out to survive in this arid landscape and the motto, "eat or be eaten", is a stark reality. This place is magical!



Remote photography is a great tool for interesting angles. Here is a photograph taken through a lions legs with a remote from my vehicle.

Now this publication, "[The Dark Side of the Kalahari](#)", is available in an interactive form. Made for iPad and iPad mini and with gorgeous retina graphics. You can carry this publication with you wherever you go. The publication has been enriched with videos, interactive maps, slideshows and Wikipedia information, and the entire publication can be switched between the English and Afrikaans languages.

A behind the scenes section will show you what working in the Kalahari is like through several videos and

slideshows. Dynamic slideshows illustrating different groups of animals can be generated to use your iPad as a photo frame. For your information all camera settings have been included for the main publication's photos and as you can bookmark these pages you are interested in you can easily locate and consult this information for your learning and photographic improvement. Also an extra 360 unpublished bonus photos have been included for your enjoyment.

"The young pride in the south has 6 cubs and a mounted camera on my bull-bar gets a do-over, while i sit from the safety of the inside of my vehicle with a remote trigger" – Hannes Lochner

Photo Credits

All Photographs Are © Hannes Lochner

Hannes Lochner Photographer Bio



Hannes Lochner was born and raised near Cape Town, South Africa. From an early age on he has visited almost every game reserve in Southern Africa, accompanying his parents. A passion was born, which was to become his life's labour. His family, mom and dad (both professors), two sisters and a brother, are all involved in the medical sciences. Hannes had a different calling and after completing the compulsory one year stint in the armed forces, he signed up for something more creative and spent the next few years engulfed in the art of graphic design at the University of Stellenbosch.

Following the successful completion of his studies, Hannes decided to return to his roots as a naturalist and became a fulltime river guide in Namibia. After a few years, he embarked upon traveling the globe and kayaked her rivers extensively, also meeting her people while crossing her continents. He started a rafting company on his return to Southern Africa and acted as a river and field guide on the Orange and Kunene Rivers.

Cape Town called and he returned once more as freelance wildlife photographer, graphic designer and river guide. His love for the fauna of Africa triumphed in the end and in 2007 he became a full-time wildlife photographer. The idea about producing a debut publication, "[Colours of Southern Africa](#)", was born while enjoying the enchanting flames of a bushveld fire, a "rum and Tab, with a dash of lemon" in hand and the enthusiastic ear of a best friend of many years.

For the last four and a half years he has been working on further Kalahari projects, firstly "[Colours of the Kalahari](#)", and his latest story about a leopard, called Luna, and her struggle to raise cubs in this extremely harsh environment. This publication is called '[The Dark Side of the Kalahari](#)', and was released in July 2013.

Noa Köfler, his partner, joined him in 2010 to do all the film work on the "[Dark Side of the Kalahari](#)" project, for example "[A day in a Wildlife Photographer s Life](#)" & the Promo video of the third publication. All the clips can be seen on the [Apps](#) alongside the new publication in July 2013.

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Gil Namur says

April 8, 2014 at 10:16 pm

Hannes ...

Thank you for sharing these amazing images with us!

As I was born in Africa, they certainly resonate with me 😊

Cheers,

Gil

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