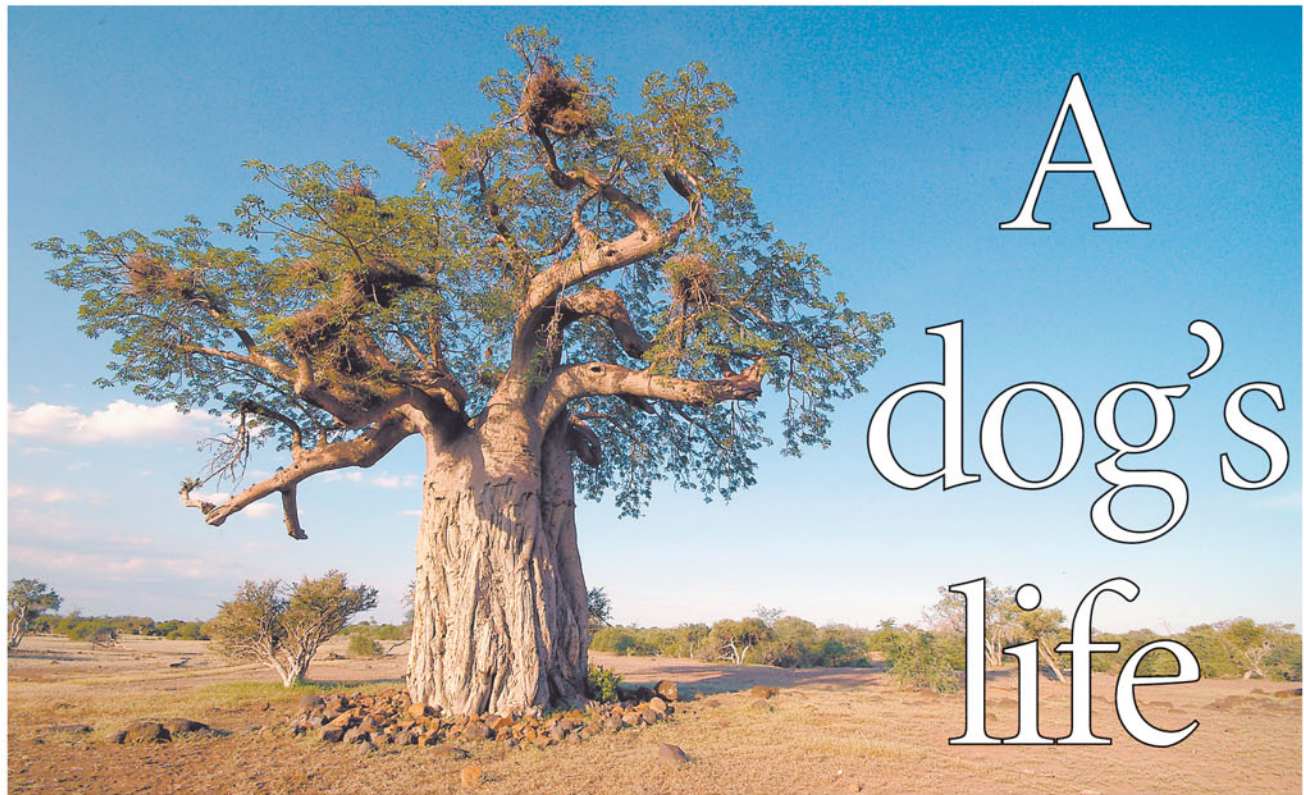


TRAVEL

CitiVibe 5



A beautiful setting helps highlight a dire situation

NATALIE BOSMAN

CROSS over the border into Botswana and switch off.

Literally, because even international roaming is sporadic, but also because the way blonde grass presents a landscape that lures all your attention away from the "real" world.

As our local guide Edward astutely pointed out, the impala eyes that are eerily reflected at night "like the Joburg lights" are the closest thing to city life for hundreds of kilometres.

Just what the doctor ordered, if you ask me, but actually, quite apart from fleeing the confines of urban living, the real reason behind being treated to this slice of escapism was something far more important and worthy: the launch of *In Search Of The African Wild Dog*. Roger and Pat de la Harpe's latest book.

It's photographically breathtaking, but the book also exists to generate awareness about the wild dog's plight through delving into the its history, habitat and the measures needed to be taken to ensure its future existence (only an estimated 3 000 – 5 000 wild dogs are left in the whole of Africa).

For the next four days, we were to call Mashatu Game Reserve's Main Camp home.

Located in the Northern Tuli Game Reserve (NTGR), bordering SA, it was the perfect

location for the launch of this book because in November 2007, 18 wild dogs were relocated to there and released in 2008 with the goal of establishing a resident pack.

The pack has already successfully raised 12 pups, and we were privileged to see a new litter of energetic young ones enjoying the home comforts of den life.

Knowing that there might be future generations of people who will never see a wild dog in its natural environment made it quite an emotional sighting, but soon the silence was replaced by stifled giggles and "ooohs" and "ahhhs" as the pups touselled with each other and raced towards their regurgitated meals with delighted squeaking sounds.

Having had problems in the past with packs of wild dogs moving through the NTGR and

not becoming "residents", these wild dogs are special for yet another reason – they have remained in the reserve for more than a year, not due to fences but rather due to a "BioBoundary".

The concept is the brainchild of Dr Tico McNutt of the Botswana Predator Conservation Project, and as the De la Harpes explain in their book, it essentially involves using scent marking and scats from other wild dogs and distributing them along the perimeter of the reserve to simulate the territorial markings of another wild dog pack.

"In theory, the released dogs would pick up on the chemical stimuli or 'messages' in the scats and not stray beyond the confines of the reserve into community lands where they could be killed," they write.

Headed up at Mashatu by project manager Craig Jackson from the Mammal Research Institute of the University of Pretoria, the wild dog project looks very promising.

These magnificent animals will stand an even greater chance when the Limpopo/Shashe Transfrontier Conservation Area comes into effect, as the area will incorporate more than 5 000 sq km of ground for packs moving between Botswana, Zimbabwe and the northern Kruger Park area.

Exhausted after a long morning of feeding and playing, the pups finally decided that it's siesta time and found themselves a shady spot, out of our line of sight. Many of the adults decided the same, so it's back to the Main Camp for a little time out.

What can I say? It's a dog's life.

**snip** For more information about Mashatu Game Reserve and its ongoing research projects, visit [www.mashatu.com](http://www.mashatu.com).

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**The Citizen**



ROGER DE LA HARPE