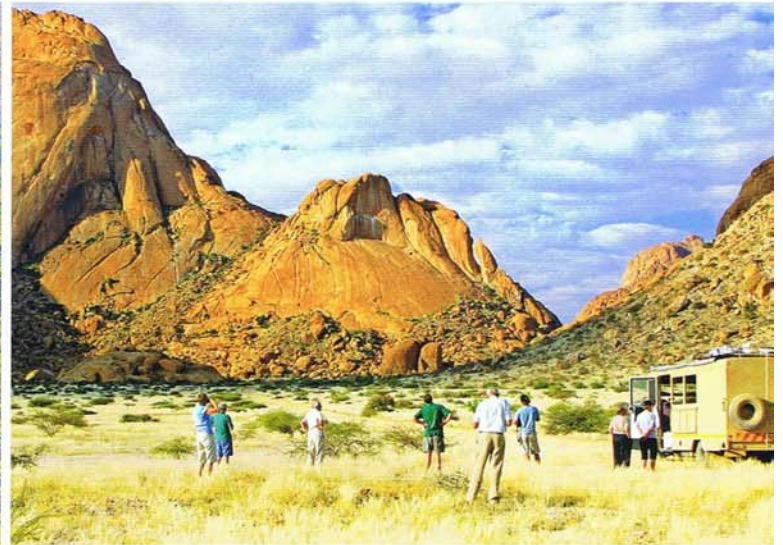






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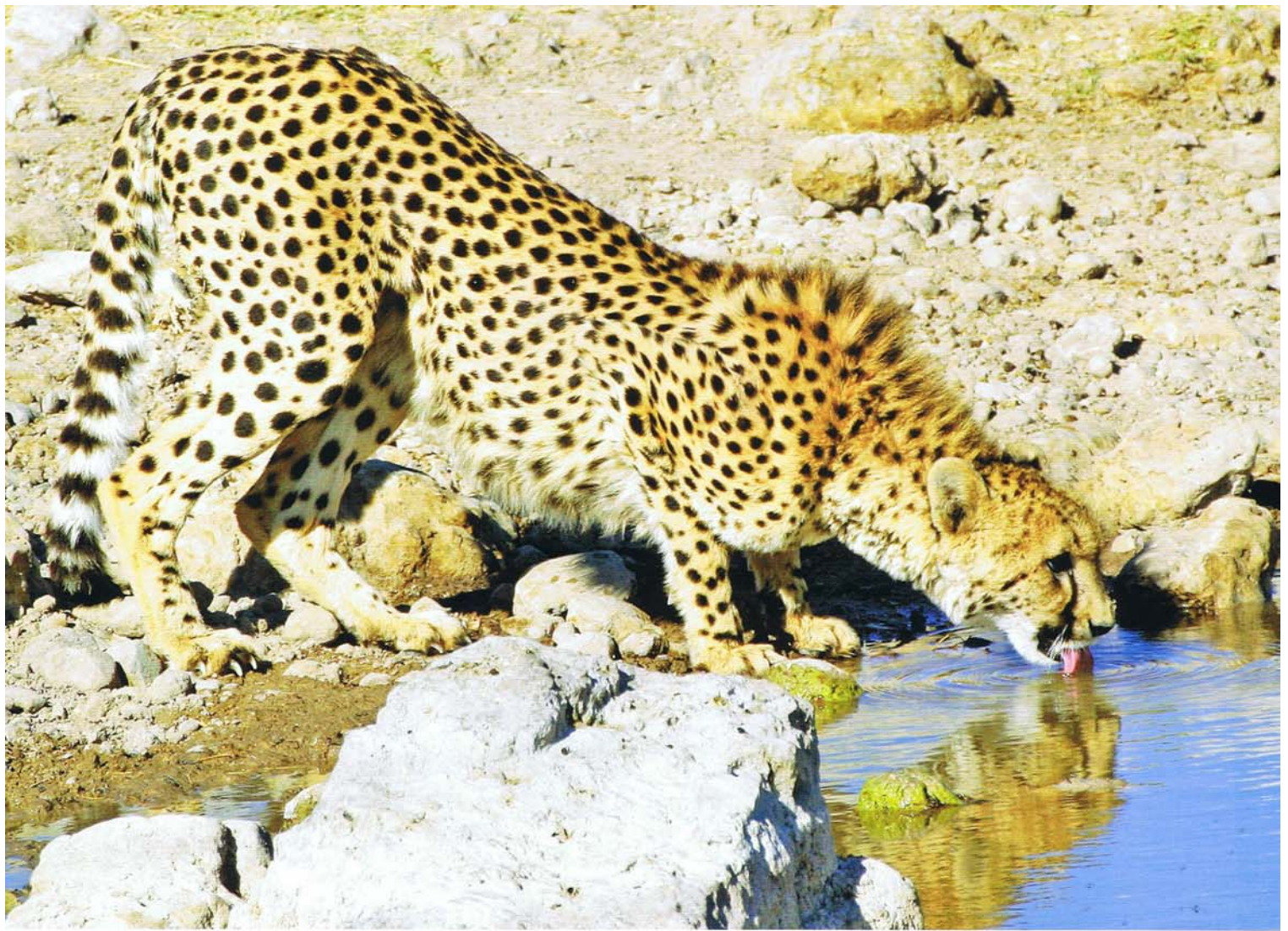
series, which covers mammals, reptiles, invertebrates and spiders, is richly photographed and jam-packed with information for seven-to eight year-olds. Future editions will cover birds. Claire says she enjoys interacting with her readers and visits schools as part of the NZ Book Council project encouraging children to meet writers. 'They are always so enthusiastic!' she says.

on safari

While photographing animals is a good enough excuse for Claire to return to Africa, she has taken her interest a step further with the development of a safari tour business. The experience of being in the wild is so dramatically different to visiting a zoo, she says, and each visit to Africa still blows her away. 'I really wanted to share the first-hand experience of this wildlife with other people.'

Now, once a year, Claire takes small groups (no more than 10 people) on 26- or 27-day safaris. Their route through Namibia and Botswana, touching on Victoria Falls, is one she's familiar with. The tour camps at various national parks and game reserves where a plethora of wildlife can be viewed, sometimes at night thanks to floodlit watering holes.

On her last tour, Claire says the group spotted two lionesses with five young cubs, which is very unusual, as cubs are usually well hidden for the first six months of their lives. They also watched a cheetah chasing a springbok. Happily, the springbok didn't end up as supper for the cat, but provided a spectacular demonstration of agility and speed. 'Often you see the results of the kill, but not always



the action,' says Claire. 'And what you see on TV can take a very long time to film.'

But her safaris are not just about animal spotting. 'Looking for wildlife involves driving around slowly and frequently stopping to let animals come closer. Often people are surprised by the small things – such as the sheer variety of birds there.'

Wild herbs and plants are another source of intrigue, she says, and add a further dimension to the sensory overload involved in the trip.

Game drives take part early in the morning and late in the afternoon, and each game drive is different. 'You never know what will happen,' says Claire. And the possibility of an adventure even more special than last time is what keeps calling her back to Africa.

'I love Africa. And I wish I could take all of New Zealand there so everyone could see the sharp contrast with our way of life. It's so humbling.'



animal favourites

Claire says lions in the wild behave much like domestic cats. 'They mark their territory and endlessly groom their coats in that laid-back, vain way cats have. Before settling, they turn in tight circles, just like Fluffy does at home on the couch. And once they're really comfortable, they'll lie on their backs.'

Claire says her favourite animal is the elephant. 'They're so gentle and social and communicate in a way that is inaudible to us. And they're very sensitive.' And there's an estimated 70,000 elephants in the north of Botswana – an ideal place to go if you share Claire's enthusiasm for these gentle giants.

