

# A marriage of adventure

Chris and Monique Fallows are a husband and wife team who have pioneered research into the breaching of great white sharks in False Bay. Their photographs have appeared on the covers of international wildlife magazines, and they have assisted in numerous National Geographic film productions. But they are also enthusiasts about the region's game parks.

Scott Ramsay caught up with them...

Photography: Chris and Monique Fallows

## Which are your three favourite national parks or wildlife regions in Africa?

**Chris Fallows:** First, I would say Etosha National Park in Namibia. Even though it's very much a commercial park with a lot of people, I've been going there since I was two. I've been there more than 20 times.

The incredible waterholes attract a lot of game, and at night they are very special. From a photographic point of view, the waterholes are spectacular. The chalky stones and the dry areas that surround them give the impression of an oasis. When scores of animals descend on the pools, creating clouds of dust, there is a sense of drama that you find in few other wildlife reserves.

The volume of game at Etosha's waterholes is almost unsurpassed anywhere. You can get a thousand zebra at a time, and herds of more than a hundred elephants. There may be hundreds of springbok, with everything interacting together. Then you can get lions sitting at the waterhole, putting pressure on the game, so there is incredible tension.

There are very few places in southern

Africa – or Africa for that matter – where I've seen such beautiful waterholes.

**Monique Fallows:** At Halali in Etosha we've stayed up until midnight when 150 elephants have come down to drink. We are not usually night people, but one of the reasons we go to Etosha is for the night experiences at the waterholes.

**Chris:** Next, I'd say the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in Botswana. Of all the southern African destinations we've been to, it's the wildest. You feel remote and you don't see people for days at a time.

**Monique:** The great thing about Central Kalahari is that you have to be self-sufficient. You have to plan your water, fuel and food, but it's a rewarding experience. It's awesome to be in a situation where you are so aware of your basic needs.

**Chris:** Central Kalahari doesn't have huge densities of game like Etosha or Serengeti, and it doesn't have any elephants, buffaloes, crocodiles or hippos, but it's got an allure all of its own. You can sit with a herd of several hundred springbok for hours at a time. It's great for cheetahs, lions and honey badgers.



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There are huge open areas, and you can get out of your vehicle. It's just a special place.

But our favourite place of all is Seal Island in False Bay. I've spent my adult life working there with the great white sharks, doing more than 2000 trips to watch them, photograph them and study them.

In wildlife circles – certainly marine circles – the breaching of great whites as they attack the seals is a phenomenon to match the beach hunting by orcas in Patagonia. The flying great whites of False Bay are as famous as any wildlife spectacle.

### Which are your top three wildlife experiences?

**Chris:** The most memorable wildlife experience we have had was in June 2000, when we watched a minimum of 28 different great white sharks feed on a Bryde's whale carcass right next to our boat, stretching over 18 hours.

It was the greatest collection of great

white sharks ever witnessed. There was some unbelievable interaction between them.

They usually don't like each other's company, but because of the whale carcass, the social structures were ignored. The size of the sharks was phenomenal.

**Monique:** Then, on our last trip to Mana Pools National Park in Zimbabwe, we saw three different packs of wild dogs over 13 days. We had an amazing time with them, but the highlight was the last afternoon.

We were walking, as one can do in Mana, and we tracked a pack of 32 wild dogs. We managed to find them in the late afternoon, which is when the pack starts waking up and playing with each other. The whole pack was getting ready to go hunting.

There is this very clear signal from the alpha dogs, and they just go! They really move, so it's difficult to keep up with them.

We followed them for a while, and eventually they stopped and settled down in an open area. The light was fading so we just

sat some distance away and watched them.

Three pups came right up to us. They looked straight into Chris's lens. Eventually the whole pack came and surrounded us, before peeling off into the dusk.

**Chris:** Another special experience for me was in the Central Kalahari. I do a lot of photography lying close to the ground. That's why we often choose locations where you are allowed out of your vehicle.

I could see three lionesses approaching from a long way off, so I positioned myself so that they could choose whether to come towards me or not.

I was lying on the ground, shooting with a big lens, and they came closer and closer. They eventually filled the viewfinder of one lens, so I grabbed another camera with a wider-angle lens. They came to within about 15 metres of me.

I couldn't move, because I didn't want to startle them. I just had to keep my position, with these three huge lionesses with amber

eyes focused on me. I was looking through the lens, well aware that things could go horribly wrong. My heart felt as though it was going to explode out of my chest. Then two of them walked past me on one side, and the third one went the other way.

### Who are some of the people that have inspired you in your work and your love for the African wilderness and wildlife?

**Chris:** First, Mark and Delia Owens, who wrote *Cry of the Kalahari*. That book made me believe I could go to wild places and experience the wilderness like they did. What was it like to wake up among a pride of lions, or have hyenas in your kitchen?

The second person would be Harry Wolhuter, who wrote *Memories of a Game Ranger*. That was another book that really spurred my interest in wildlife. As a young boy, how can you not be inspired by a guy who got dragged by a lion from a horse,

## UNDER THE BAOBAB

managed to kill the lion and then climb a tree to survive the night? Not that I want to kill a lion, of course!

**Monique:** Another person who inspires us is John Stevens of Mana Pools National Park. He used to be the head warden and now he's a safari guide, and has been for the last 20 years. He knows that place like nobody else.

Once we were sitting with wild dogs early one morning, and we saw this guy creeping up to us. We thought he was going to tell us we had to move, but he was very polite and asked if we would mind if his guests could come and watch the dogs, too. We didn't know who he was at the time.

John has done so many special things for Mana, but he's very humble.

### What do you love about the African wilderness?

**Monique:** One of the best things is that I can leave the phones, laptops and things like Facebook at home. When I go to places like Mana or Etosha, I feel as though I'm entering the real world. That's where I truly feel alive. It's all about what you're seeing, what you're hearing, what the bush smells like... the night sky. That is the real world.

**Chris:** So-called progress is often regress. For me, Africa is a sensory experience. It's not always about just seeing the Big Five. It's more about the smells, the sounds, the feel of open spaces and just engaging all your senses.

Also, it's the intimacy of getting close to animals that have been around for thousands of years. There's nowhere else on the planet that you can do that. But above all, I think the solitude of wide open spaces is what I love the most. **LW**

Chris and Monique's Apex Predator shark tours to Seal Island are renowned among wildlife photographers and travellers, but they have also travelled extensively in Africa's wilderness areas. For more information about them, go to [www.apexpredators.com](http://www.apexpredators.com).



### Scott Ramsay

Scott Ramsay is a photo-journalist focusing on national parks and nature reserves in Africa. He is supported by Cape Union Mart as a K-Way ambassador, and also by Ford, Goodyear Wrangler, Safari Centre Cape Town, Hetzner, Outdoor Photo and Tracks4Africa.

For more information, go to [www.LoveWildAfrica.com](http://www.LoveWildAfrica.com), or [www.facebook.com/LoveWildAfrica](https://www.facebook.com/LoveWildAfrica) and @love\_wild\_africa on Instagram.



## Nerolite two-man tent

K-Way/Cape Union Mart gear review

I recently spent six days hiking in the northern Drakensberg, with friends and guide Caiphus Mthabela. We walked about 100km from the Amphitheatre to Cathedral Peak. Check out [www.LoveWildAfrica.com](http://www.LoveWildAfrica.com) for the full story.

A good tent is non-negotiable for an adventure like this. Hikers have to be totally self-sufficient, and although there are caves, you would be crazy not to take a good tent. And in the Drakensberg you are assured of a campsite with some of the most amazing views in southern Africa.

I used a K-Way Nerolite two-man tent for the second time in the mountains. Actually, it is not a two-man tent – more a big one-man tent, unless your partner is VERY small!

I am just over 6ft tall and weigh about 80kg, so I'm not the biggest man out there, yet my feet always seemed to be touching the end of the tent. It's a little too short for my liking. This is important, because when it's frosty and cold, no matter how warm your sleeping bag is, your feet will get cold if they are touching the tent.



And this tent just isn't wide enough for two people, especially if you have to store gear as well. I stored all my gear in the tent at night, and I was comfortable, but there's no way that two people could do the same.

The tent is easy to set up, and the flysheet provides good protection from moisture and frost. The flysheet has a waterhead of 2000mm, which is adequate for light showers, but not strong thunderstorms, for which one should aim for a waterhead of about 3000mm.

One evening there was a small thunderstorm and it rained for about half-an-hour. The tent remained dry inside, but I'd like to test it in more demanding conditions.

The tent doesn't come with a groundsheet, so buy one separately. A groundsheet makes a big

difference because it provides another layer of insulation, and takes the edge off the cold ground.

The tent weighs 2,9kg, including poles and pins and costs R1999. Go to [www.capeunionmart.co.za](http://www.capeunionmart.co.za).