

Splendours of the Little Karoo

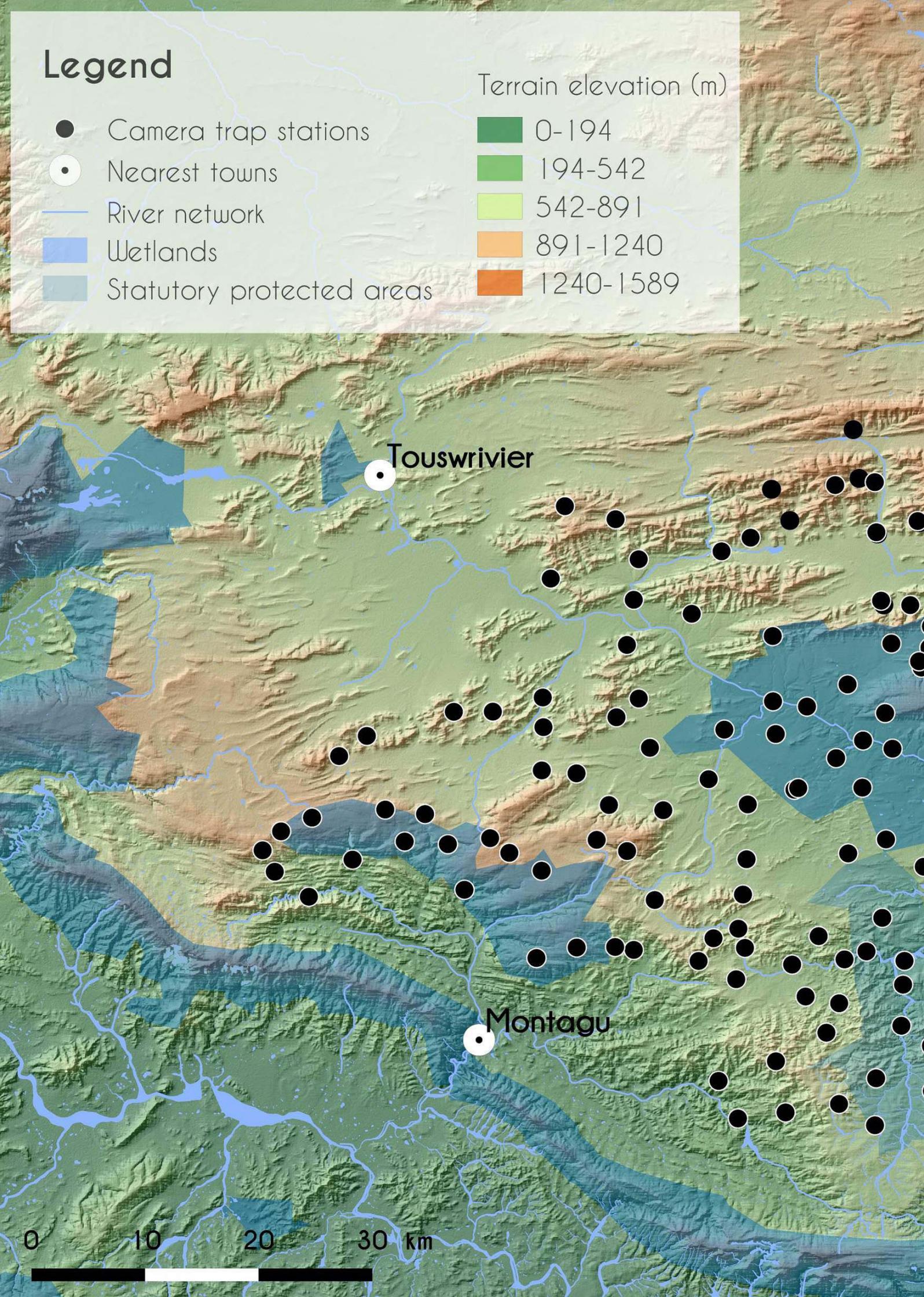
Photos: Elsa Bussière

Legend

- Camera trap stations
- Nearest towns
- River network
- Wetlands
- Statutory protected areas

Terrain elevation (m)

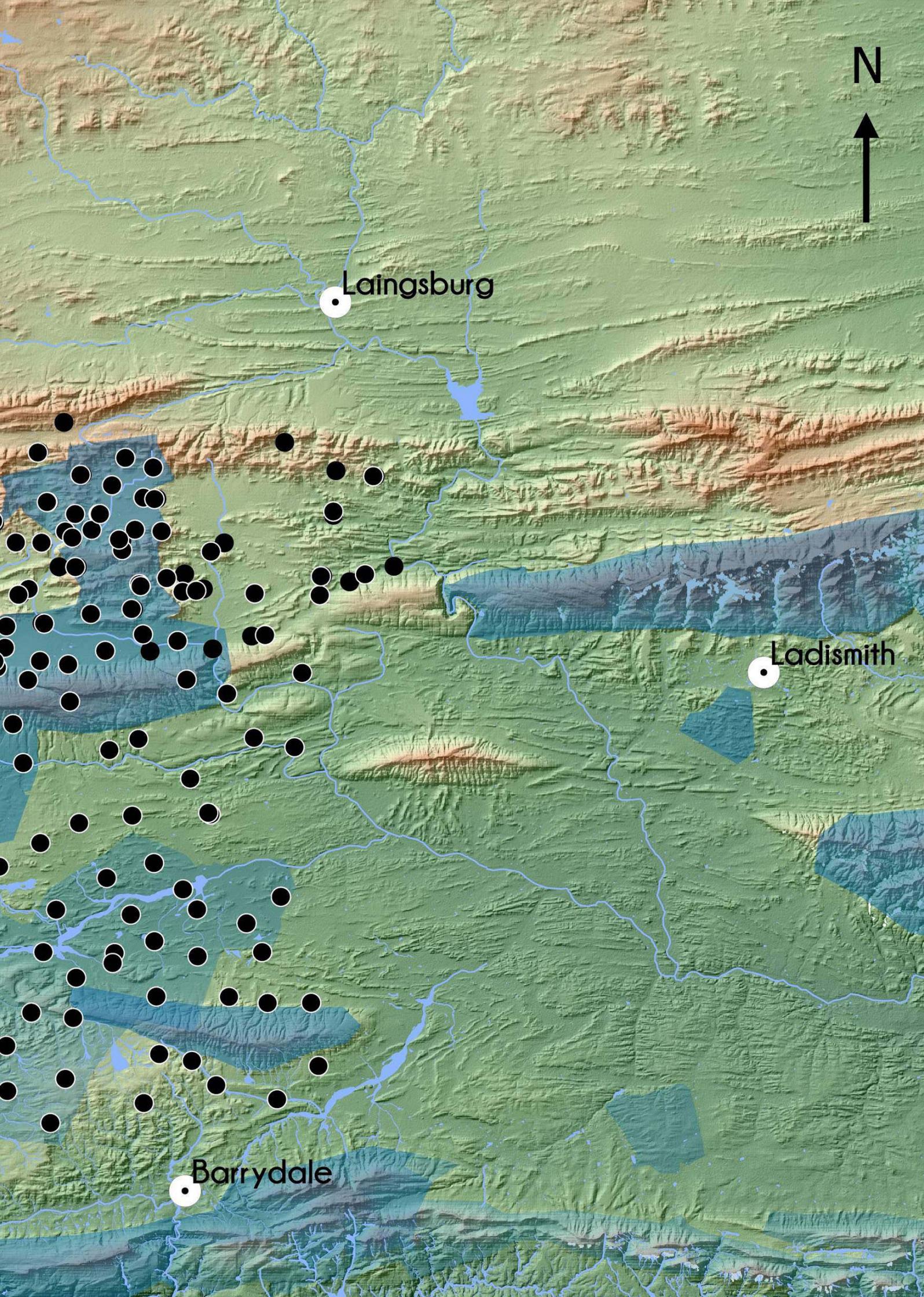
- 0-194
- 194-542
- 542-891
- 891-1240
- 1240-1589



Touswriever

Montagu

0 10 20 30 km



Laingsburg

Ladismith

Barrydale









Two fluffy black ears are sticking out a thorny bush. I have been looking for you, caracal, gorgeous desert lynx. I imagine your mesmerizing eyes staring at me through the twigs. I am calling you. Please join me; I long to see you leap across the arid and hostile landscape as if it was the most exceptional playground one could possibly dream of. I miss the sound of your purr, the dynamism of your youth, and the ravishing colours of your coat. Go tear-up my landy leather seats; I know you cannot help it. Jump and catch my long tangled hair locks; it makes me laugh. Anything you want, but please, take me with you along the riverline, to your favourite spots, show me the shady places where you rest, and the pools where you drink. Let me be a caracal too, a creature of the Little Karoo, help me forget the void of my human life and find comfort in being part of the wilderness.











Imagine a creature which neither the shape, the traits nor the calls bring any familiarity to your world. Fear is innate to all novelty, but so is curiosity. To many, brown hyenas ought to be little more than a chimera, the result of a wildly implausible mind, an omen for calamity. To me, brown hyenas help reconnect with the child within oneself by triggering the first and fundamental emotion which we discover in the human intellect: curiosity. An emotion that keeps us moving forward and opening new doors leading down new paths. Hand in hand with imagination, curiosity is a powerful driving force: the cradle of creativity.



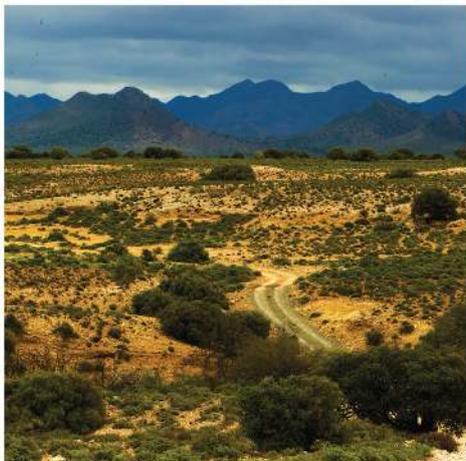
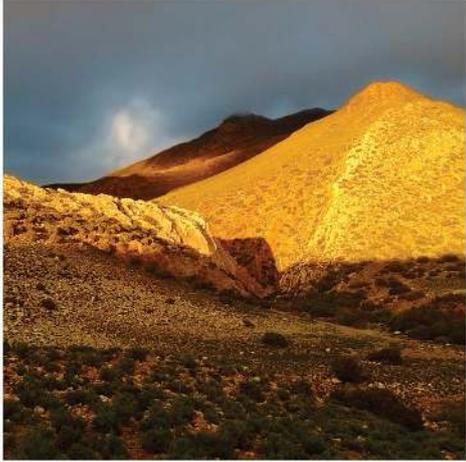








On a scorching hot summer day in the Little Karoo, sitting at the top of a rugged and red koppie, I wipe the sweat off my face. The hostility of this arid region is getting under my skin now that I am found alone surrounded by elemental divinities: wind, sun and mountains. I hear nothing but the silence of a no man's land, smashing all routines, shattering all rituals of my capitalist existence and throwing me out of my bourgeois security. It would be futile to attempt building ramparts against the desert, because right here, nothing can subdue awareness of my human condition. I am left pondering unanswerable questions, on a wandering planet.



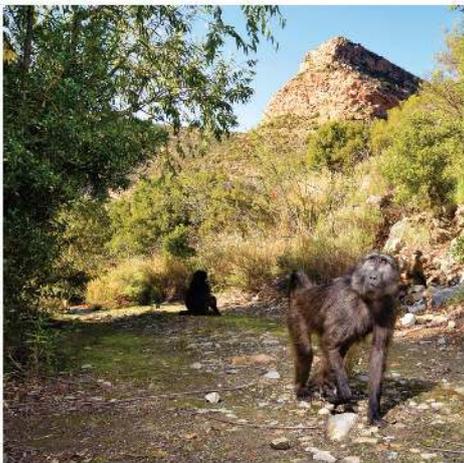








Quickly! My camera is out and the chargers plugged-in. Porcupine quills, cobra's hood, gemsbok's horns and kestrel's talons, I have got you all in my lens' view. Cheeky you, unobtrusive Little Karoo, complotting against me so that I would miss your treasures... got you! My photographs will adorn my desk and walls; I will carry them in my pocket and display them to one and all. They will help me take a little time everyday to reminisce of yesterday. With time, they will eventually become worn and ragged images, yet the lasting love deep in my heart will be what they leave behind.











Many species of the mammal kingdom owe their beauty to their fur, this prodigious coat occasionally printed with aesthetic graphic designs. Spotted, striped – or showing more complex patterns with rosettes and other odd shapes – these magnificent artistic creations are the results of millions of years of natural selection. Somehow, these sophisticated outfits provided a natural advantage to their owners: camouflage. A game of hind and seek begins where both predator and prey merge with their habitat. Those that excel in the art of blending in take advantage over others, pressuring the natural world's stylist to continuously become more creative. Nature is harsh, rules are strict and punishments are often deadly. Every wild creation must be efficient; no extra energy can be spent on useless artifices. These designs play a key role in the lives of these animals and even though fur patterns seem to be highly regular; they are in fact – for some species – extremely variable. Every leopard, brown hyena or aardwolf has got its own personalised version, each being a Pop Art masterpiece. The patterns work like human fingerprints and can be used for individual identification. Spots, stripes and other shapes make an important contribution to science, offering new opportunities to study and preserve those that need it the most: cryptic and invisible creatures, shadows in the landscape. But these stylish Cape mammals are presenting themselves in the flickering of camera trap flashes; so let's attend the greatest Haute Couture Fashion Show this wild world has to offer!

