

NG KiDS gets up close to some extraordinary animals on an action-packed drive around Etosha National Park in Namibia...

Namibia Safari!

Plains zebra

A herd of zebras appears on the horizon as a fuzzy haze. There are around 40,000 plains zebras here in Namibia, which live in harems of one male, up to six females and their young. Some scientists believe they group together as protection from predators, their stripes making it difficult for lions to tell individual animals apart. But other experts now think the markings may prevent them being bitten by horse-flies, their stripes confusing the bitty blighters who are usually attracted to large areas of single-coloured fur. Neat!

DON'T WORRY, THEY CAN'T SEE US!

No two zebras have the same stripe patterns!

Plains zebras also have faint brown stripes in-between their black ones

Gemsbok

A group of grazing gemsbok raise their heads to inspect us as we drive by. The powerful antelope's horns, which grow up to 1.5-m in length, are used by mothers to protect their young from predators such as lions and leopards. Male gemsboks use them to defend their territories from rivals. Youch! Incredibly, their impressive headgear were sold in medieval England as 'unicorn horns'! Gemsbok spend early morning and late evening munching grass, getting most of the water they need from their food! During droughts they use their hooves to dig up succulent roots to eat. Yum!

Gemsbok are part of the oryx family

Male gemsbok horns are shorter and sturdier than females!

DON'T MESS WITH THESE HORNS!



Rangers are doing everything they can to help protect black rhinos like Matthew

MUD, MUD, GLORIOUS MUD...

Namibia was the first country to use dehorning to protect rhinos from poaching

Black rhino

In the distance, a magnificent black rhino trundles across the scrubby landscape. "Look, it's Matthew!" exclaims our delighted guide, Otto Haneb. As we approach, we notice his horn is missing (see pic, above). "It was removed by park rangers to stop poachers killing him and taking it," Otto explains. Sadly, the number of black rhinos in the wild has declined by more than 97% since 1960 and they are now critically endangered. Watching Matthew as he uses his pointed lips to pluck fruit from bushes, we notice that the mighty mammal is covered in mud. "The muck works as a simple sunscreen to protect skin from the boiling sun," says Otto. Clever!

HEY, WHAT'S THE RUSH?

These tortoises have excellent eyesight and a good sense of smell

Leopard tortoise shells can grow up to 75cm in length - making them one of the world's largest species!

Leopard tortoise

Our driver brakes to avoid crushing a spotted leopard tortoise that's slowly ambling across the road. The most common tortoise in Namibia, these dawdling dudes can live for up to 100 years. No wonder this one isn't in a rush to get anywhere! But while they may be slow and steady, leopard tortoises have a special trick up their shells - they're the only members of the tortoise family that can swim! Incredibly, the spotty reptiles can stay underwater for up to ten minutes. Wow!