

# Game Ranger

The game ranger or field guide is the most important person in your safari experience. While soft beds, good food and wines make for additional enjoyment the real test of a successful safari is what you see and share outside your camp during game drives and on nature walks. This is where the ranger or field guide shows his or her worth.

Some game rangers seem to prefer being called field guides to prevent confusion. Most national parks have rangers patrolling and policing the area to prevent poaching and unlawful conduct. We prefer to stay with the original nomenclature as it has long been associated with the profession. And professionals, they are, in every sense of the word.



## Rigorous training

A game ranger's job encompasses much more than simply guiding you to where the animals are. They are there to entertain, instruct, protect and educate you.

Regardless whether they came to the profession as former hunters or college graduates, and are young or middle aged, they all share an avid interest in nature and conservation. They have to go through rigorous training and tough examinations before they qualify as fully accredited game rangers.

Practical and theoretical courses range from bush skills such as 4X4 driving over rough terrain, handling of firearms, bird, tree and animal identification and description, animal behavior and tracking, first aid treatment, bush fire control, game capture, anti-poaching and snare identification, handling of injured, sick or pregnant game, and rehabilitation of game and birds. Add to this a thorough knowledge of astronomy to be able to identify and explain the southern skies to visitors from the northern hemisphere. Quite often the ranger is also an expert wildlife photographer able to advise and assist guests in taking good pictures.

A ranger is expected to be a walking encyclopedia, a sharp-shooting bodyguard (if the need should ever arise), a raconteur and a splendid host at the dinner table with a good knowledge of local foods and wines—an altogether nice person. Obviously rangers come with different strengths. The one common denominator is their obvious love for animals and their liking for people.

They also play host in the wild when you stop onbetween game viewing sorties for a coffee break or sundowner for drinks and hors d'oeuvres.

## Tracking

In South Africa's private game reserves rangers usually work in tandem with trackers sitting in the high seat at the front of the vehicle for easier game spotting. In most other areas rangers operate solo. Rangers (and trackers) are capable to trace



animals to their hideouts by following their “spoor” (tracks). Baffling to the uninitiated is this ability to tell from faint spoor with precision when and what moved and in which direction. It is a science, not tea-leaf reading. (See [Tracking](#)). Dung is another clue. (Read also [Decoding Dung](#))

### Questions

Rangers welcome questions during the drive, at coffee breaks in the veld, at sundowners and over

the dinner table. Give them the opportunity and they will fill you with fascinating detail about creatures, trees and plants and explain the wonders of the bright-lit universe on your way back to the lodge.

There is no doubt that rangers and trackers are the essence of a good safari. With this realization it is not surprising that safari operators go after the very best when it comes to recruiting and appointing field guides.

