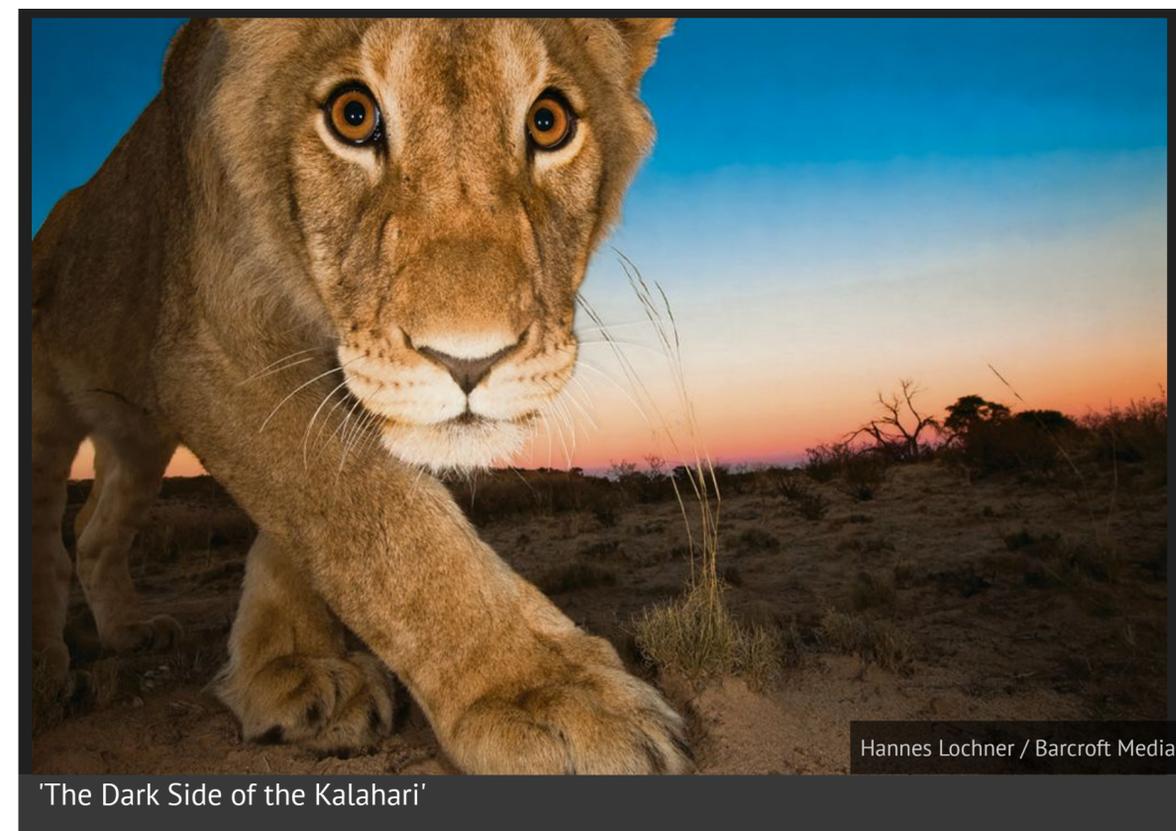


Dark Side of the Kalahari: Book features incredible wildlife images from world's most inhospitable desert

Photographer Hannes Lochner spent 750 days chronicling the life of a female leopard and her struggle to raise her cubs

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A close up of a beady-eyed lioness, a group of jackals fighting over a carcass and a pair of owls looking for their next meal are among the breathtaking photographs to feature in a new book about one of the most inhospitable places on earth.

The images were captured by South African wildlife photographer Hannes Lochner, who spent 750 days in the harsh surroundings of the Kalahari Desert to chronicle the life of a female leopard and her struggle to raise her cubs.

The 41-year-old travelled a staggering 100,000km during his time at the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park on the border of South Africa and Botswana and hopes that his book, entitled 'The Dark Side of the Kalahari', will help to illustrate the beauty and breathtaking diversity of life in the region.

Shooting mostly at night, the Cape Town-born snapper had to brave night-time temperatures of -13 degrees in the winter, while trying to sleep in sweltering 40 degree daytime heat.

"I have always been fascinated by leopards, and my dream was to follow and document a leopard raising cubs in this Kalahari hostile

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environment," Mr Lochner said.

"There are few female leopards in the south of the park, and we started tracking one with a cub of 12 months old.

"She was not very accommodating, and took us at least three months to get used to us.

"She didn't have a tracking device so we had to track her the hard way - lots of hours in the bush!"

The leopard, named Luna, had to protect her cubs from lions, cheetah, spotted hyenas, brown hyenas and jackals, all of whom have been known to kill cubs on sight.

The leopardess had three litters during the two years and three months she was trailed by Lochner.

Her middle two cubs were killed by a brown hyena, but she later gave birth to another two which survived.

Also, unusually for leopards, she was regularly joined by "family man" Oscar, the father of all three litters.

Lochner was accompanied by his partner Noa Koepler, who did all the film work for the project.

Her video clips can be seen on the App that will be released at the end October to accompany Lochner's images.

Asked to nominate his favourite moment from his two years in the Kalahari, Lochner goes for his time photographing Luna's cubs.

"They are amazing animals and incredible to photograph," he said.

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