

# In Search of the Lost Leopard



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**I**t is a well-known fact that the Samburu National Reserve is one of the best places in Kenya to spot a leopard in the wild. While this feline is shy and elusive, the semi-arid landscape of Samburu, coupled with its relatively high density of leopards partly explain the well-known fact.

I would like to add some experience-based opinion on top of that fact and share the ups and downs of leopard spotting in Samburu and in general.

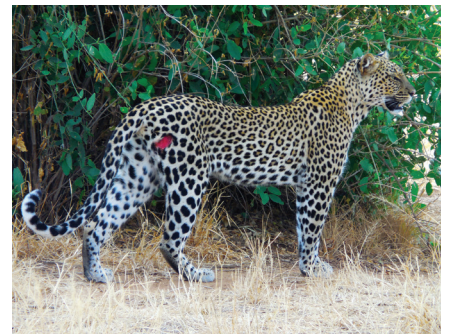
I went to Samburu for the fourth time in August 2018. I stayed at the Ashnil Samburu Lodge on the banks of Ewaso Ng'iro in Buffalo Springs National Reserve. In my previous visits to the Samburu-Buffero ecosystem, I had been lucky when it came to leopard spotting. Shukri (Ashnil's driver) and I agreed that we would pursue only the shyest feline -- my favorite animal.

It is quite something to spend three days in search of something and ... not



find it. You learn a lot: patience, focus, concentration. You are reminded that safari is for real: there is no guarantee that you will find what you are looking for. In other words, a national park is nothing like a zoo!

Finally, it is worthwhile to try to go about safari without the help of technology -- such as radio, cellphone and other gadgets -- just like Shukri and I in those days in Samburu and Buffalo Springs. It was a fascinating endeavour.



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I learned how to distinguish animal tracks and where to look for the beast.

At just one point did we betray our disconnected policy and ironically (or maybe I should say rightly so) our betrayal did not pay off. We received a call from another driver. He was five minutes away from us, facing a tree on whose branches a leopard was resting.

Shukri took it easy and we drove casually towards the tree. An instant before we arrived the leopard leapt down and vanished into the tall grass. We stayed, alert, for a few minutes, but the animal was not to be seen again. Was I unhappy? There was surely an instinctive reaction of disappointment. But at the same time, had I seen that leopard I would not have been willing to count it as the lost leopard I was in search of. ●