

ETOSHA NATIONAL PARK - THE DRY SEASON

THE GREAT THIRST

Exploring Namibia's legendary wildlife photography destination during its harshest and most demanding time

An endless expanse of dusty white rocks under an impossibly blue sky

A typical Etosha landscape during the dry season. On the opening spread, a lioness Panthera leo waits for thirsty Springbok Antidorcas marsupialis and a lone Wildebeest Connochaetes taurinus to approach a waterhole.



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*O*ne of Africa's - and indeed the whole world's - most famous protected areas looks at first sight like a parched, blinding landscape from an alien desert world. The bright blue canopy of the sky stretching above, unmarred; the flat, cracked, dust-white soil fading into the trembling horizon, shimmering with scorching heatwaves; bright white, ashy dry bushes and small trees, clawing at nothing with their skeletal branches everywhere. And yet, there is an impossible beauty in this forbidding

landscape, this land of extremes, this bone-dry bowl of sand and dust - the land of the great thirst, Namibia's legendary National Park during the dry and rainless season, Etosha. It lies in northwestern Namibia, spanning over an area of 22,270 square kilometres (8,600 sq mi), and it gets its name from the large Etosha pan (a salty, desert-like featureless depression, almost devoid of animal life), which is almost entirely within the Park. The name Etosha comes from Oshindonga

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Elephants ■
Loxodonta africana
in Etosha get their
unmistakable whitish
shade from the dust
which permeates
everything during
the dry season.



Plains or Burchell's zebra *Equus quagga*, formerly *Equus burchellii*, two stags fighting at a waterhole.

word meaning "Great White Place" referring to the Etosha pan, which with its 4,760 square kilometres (1,840 sq mi) covers 23% of the area of the total area of the Etosha National Park. The Park is a spectacular home to hundreds of species of mammals, birds and reptiles, including several threatened and severely endangered species such as the Black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis*. The Park is located in the Kunene region, and shares boundaries with the regions of Oshana, Oshikoto and Otjozondjupa. Etosha has a savanna desert climate, with an annual mean average temperature of 26 °C.

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Ostrich Struthio camelus and Springbok Antidorca marsupialis in a typically scorchingly hot and arid Etosha landscape.



Etosha is one of the last strongholds of the severely threatened Black rhinoceros or Hook-lipped rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis*. Here a beautiful male sprays a bush with urine to mark its territory.

Male
African lion
Panthera leo

In winter, the mean low temperatures are in the 6 °C neighborhood, but in summer they can exceed 45 °C. There is a huge daily thermal variation, and in some years, and in some places, there is no rain at all. When there is rain, however, dry rivers quickly come to life. The Park has about 114 mammal species, 340 bird species, 110 reptile species, 16 amphibian species and 1 species of fish (the number however rockets up to 49 species of fish during floods). The salt pans are the most noticeable geological features in the Etosha National Park. The main depression - the legendary Etosha pan - is roughly 130 km (81 mi) long and as wide as 50 km (31 mi) in places. The hypersaline conditions of the pan limit the species that can permanently inhabit the pan itself; occurrences of extremophile micro-organisms are present, which species can tolerate

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Etosha National Park is very rich in bird species. Left, Northern black korhaan *Afrotis afraoides*; top right, Red-billed spurfowl or Red-billed francolin *Pternistis adspersus*; bottom right, Swainson's Francolin *Pternistis swainsonii*.





Two lionesses Panthera leo and their cubs bask in the early morning sun with the endless expanse of the legendary Etosha pan stretching across the horizon in the background.

■ A beautiful male
Greater Kudu
Tragelaphus
strepsiceros.



the hypersaline conditions. The salt pan is usually dry, but it fills with water briefly in the summer, attracting pelicans and flamingos in particular. During the dry season, winds blowing across the salt pan pick up saline dust and carry it across the country and out over the southern Atlantic. This salt enrichment provides minerals to the soil downwind of the pan, on which some wildlife depends. The dolomite hills on the southern border of the park near the Andersson entrance gate are called

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■ Left, Southern yellow-billed hornbill *Tockus leucomelas*. Right, Cape starling, Red-shouldered glossy-starling or Cape glossy starling *Lamprotornis nitens*.





■ Covered in caked mud and dust, two African elephants *Loxodonta africana* show the stunted, broken tusks carried by the species in Etosha and due to a calcium deficiency in their diet.



Far left,
Pied crow
Corvus albus.
Left, Red
hartebeest
*Alcelaphus
buselaphus
caama*.

Ondundozonananandana, meaning "place where young boy herding cattle went to never return", suggesting a high density of predators like leopards in the hills, giving the mountains its English name of Leopard Hills. The Halali area is also home to dolomite hills within the park, with one hill inside the camp and the nearby Twee Koppies. Western Etosha is also dominated by dolomite hills, which is the only place in the park that has Mountain zebra.

A LITTLE BIT OF HISTORY

Explorers Charles John Andersson and Francis Galton were the first Europeans to record the existence of the Etosha pan on 29 May 1851. The explorers were traveling with Ovambo copper ore traders when they arrived at Omutjamatunda (now known as Namutoni). The Etosha pan was discovered when they traveled north upon leaving Namutoni. In those times areas north of the Etosha pan were inhabited by Ovambo people, while various Otjiherero-speaking groups lived immediately outside the current park boundaries. The areas inside the park close to the Etosha pan had Khoisan-speaking Hai//om people. In 1885, entrepreneur William Worthington Jordan bought a huge tract of land from Ovambo chief

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Kori bustard Ardeotis kori, a common and impressive inhabitant of the grassy savanna environment.



■ At the apex of the dry season in Etosha the waterholes are where the action is. Here a lioness *Panthera leo*, a lone Black-backed jackal *Canis mesomelas* and a herd of Springbok *Antidorcas marsupialis* nervously share the access to water for a few precious minutes.



■ Top left, Red-billed teal
Anas erythrorhynchos;
top right, Sociable weaver
Philetairus socius.
Bottom left, Egyptian goose
Alopochen aegyptiaca;
bottom right, Blacksmith lapwing
or Blacksmith plover
Vanellus armatus.





A female African lion ■
Panthera leo - still bloodied
from her previous night
feeding - clearly shows her
displeasure at being
approached.

Two bone-white African elephants *Loxodonta africana* feed on dry grass under a sullen grey sky - a squall is approaching.

Bone-white giants standing in a surrealistic endless landscape





■ Top left, European bee-eater *Merops apiaster*, a seasonal migrant; top right, Spotted hyena *Crocuta crocuta*. Bottom left, Southern Pale chanting goshawk *Melierax canorus*; bottom right, Steenbok *Raphicerus campestris*.



■ The graceful Southern Pale chanting goshawk *Melierax canorus* is one of Etosha's most commonly seen raptors.

Kambonde. The land spanned nearly 170 kilometres (110 mi) from Okaukuejo in the west to Fischer's Pan in the east. The price for the land was £300 sterling, paid for by 25 firearms, one salted horse and a cask of brandy. Dorstland Trekkers first traveled through the park between 1876 and 1879 on their way to Angola. The trekkers returned in 1885 and settled on 2,500-hectare (6,200-acre) farms given to them at no charge by Jordan. The trekkers named the area Upingtonia after the Prime Minister of the Cape Colony. The settlement had to be abandoned in 1886 after clashes with the Hai||om and defeat by Chief Nehale Mpingana. The German Reich ordered troops to occupy the Okaukuejo, Namutoni and Sesfontein in 1886 in order to kill migrating wildlife to stop spread of rinderpest to cattle. A fort was built by the German cavalry in 1889 at the site of the Namutoni spring. On 28 January 1904, 500 men under Nehale Mpingana attacked Imperial Germany's Schutztruppe at Fort Namutoni and completely destroyed it, driving out the colonial forces and

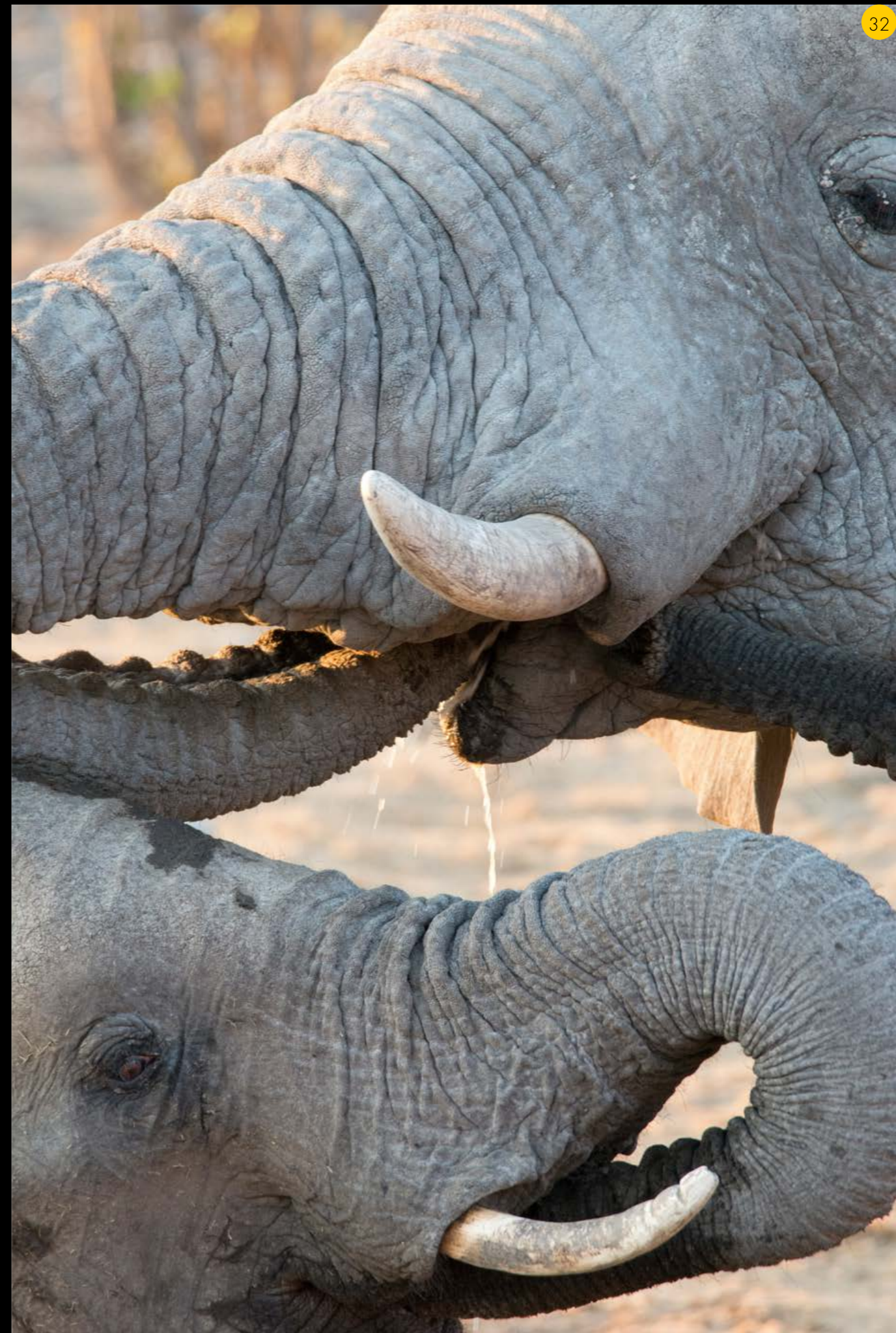


African elephant
Loxodonta africana.

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■ The “white” elephants of Etosha are desperately dependant on water during the dry season, and will often approach waterholes at a joyful trot, with young ones especially charged with expectation.



An overcast sky -
a welcome harbinger
of the approaching
rainy season - casts
its dramatic shadow
over the arid,
parched plains
of Etosha.





■ Left, a female Angolan or Namibian giraffe *Giraffa camelopardalis angolensis* with her day-old baby; right, Greater Kudu *Tragelaphus strepsiceros* and Impala *Aepyceros melampus*.



■ A roving troop of Banded mongoose *Mungos mungo*.



taking over their horses and cattle. The fort was rebuilt and troops stationed once again when the area was declared a game reserve in 1907; Lieutenant Adolf Fischer of Fort Namutoni then became its first "game warden". The Park was proclaimed a game reserve on March 22, 1907 in Ordinance 88 by the Governor of German South West Africa, Dr. Friedrich von Lindequist. It was designated as Wildschutzgebiet Nr. 2 which means Game Reserve Number 2, in numerical order after West Caprivi (Game Reserve No. 1) and preceding Namib Game Reserve (No. 3). In 1958, Game Reserve No. 2 became Etosha Game Park and was finally elevated to status of National Park in 1967 by an Act of Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, which then administered South-West Africa.

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Top left, Springbok ■
Antidorcas marsupialis;
 top right,
 Wildebeest
Connochaetes taurinus.
 Bottom left, Black-
 backed jackal
Canis mesomelas;
 bottom right, Puff adder
Bitis arietans.



*A faraway sound of thunder
heralds the coming of the rains*

An overcast sky carrying rain-laden, dark clouds looms over the arid landscape of Etosha National Park as the dry season comes to an end.



Plains or Burchell's zebra *Equus quagga*, formerly *Equus burchellii*, in the first rain of the season; right, a stunning adult male Greater Kudu *Tragelaphus strepsiceros*.





African elephants
Loxodonta africana
congregate
at waterholes
in the day's fading
light at sunset.



Left, two female African lion *Panthera leo* in the midday heat; right, the dust-caked countenance - note the typically stunted, splintered tusks - of an Etosha African elephant *Loxodonta africana*.

AN AFRICAN EDEN FOR WILDLIFE PHOTOGRAPHY

Simply put, as a wildlife photography destination Etosha is unique. During the dry season its landscape offers spectacular chromatic contrasts, with its endless emptiness being a main asset, the lack of water forcing wildlife to crowd all day long - but especially during early morning and in the evening - at the waterholes which dot the savanna, mostly now artificial but quite unobtrusive. Spending a few hours at each in patient wait will always prove exceedingly productive, as interactions between predator and prey often occur. Accommodation and roads are excellent, and the only difficulty is that one has to basically book one year in advance given the reduced capacity of the camps (another great plus - one can drive for hours without meeting another soul!). And yet, Etosha has a few more surprises up its sleeve - we have visited it during the wet season too (something which very few people do) and that will be the subject of another, future feature on it. You'll be surprised! ●



■ Plains or Burchell's zebra *Equus quagga*, formerly *Equus burchellii*, quench their thirst at a waterhole.



Gemsbok *Oryx gazella*
and Plains or Burchell's zebra
Equus quagga.



*Bathed in the golden light of the coming sunset, a herd of thirsty African elephant *Loxodonta africana* hurriedly approaches Halai's waterhole.*



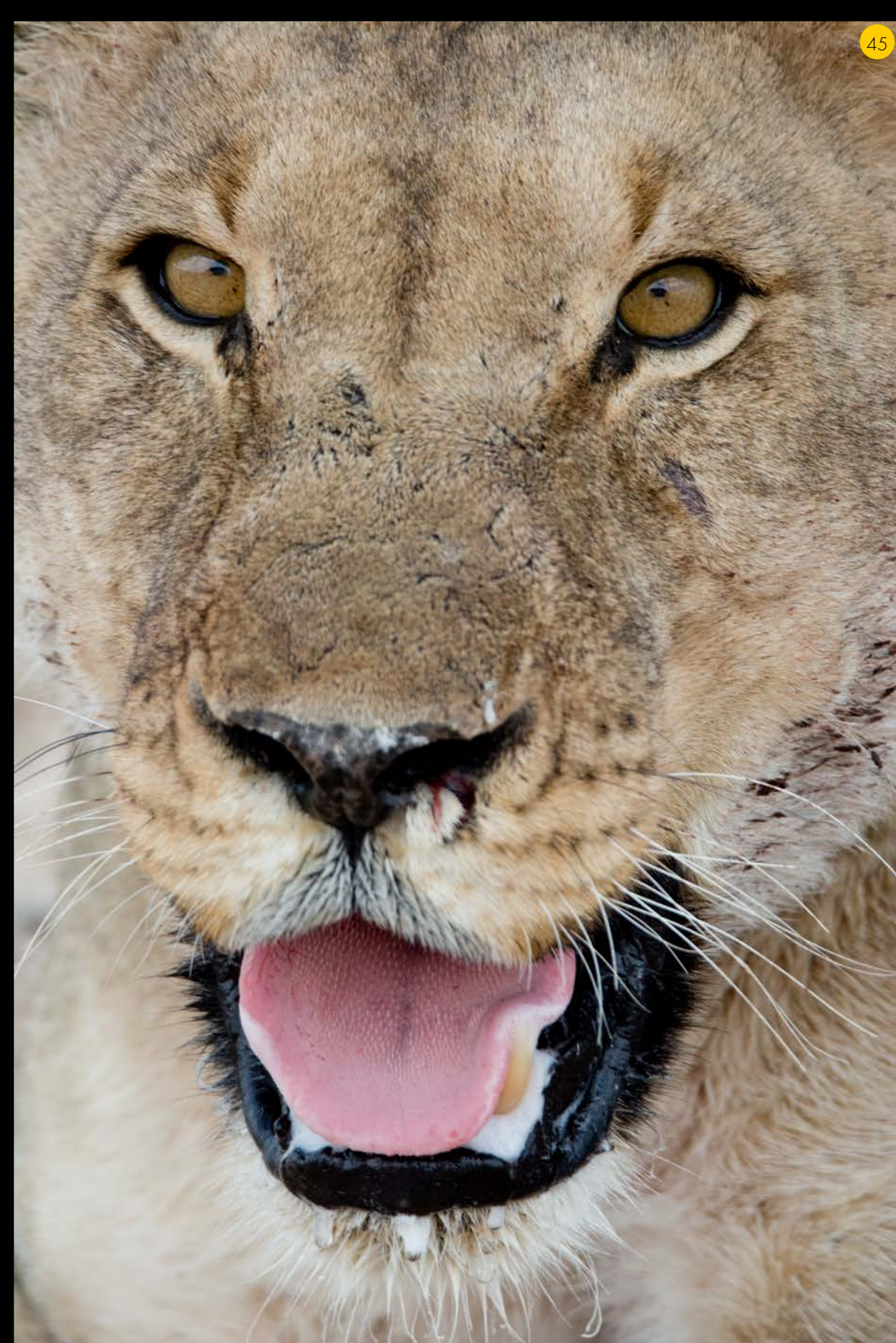


■ *Left, African elephant
Loxodonta
africana; right, the
severely threatened
Black rhinoceros
Diceros bicornis.*





■ *Left, African elephant *Loxodonta africana* at one of Etosha's waterholes; right, close-up portrait of an African lion *Panthera leo*.*



A rare lighter moment in the sun-baked plains of Etosha



■ Elephants love to play in frolick in water wherever it is available.

*Etosha National Park at its
dry-season best - parched
plains, endless skies, a lone
lioness, a herd of Springbok
and a dust devil twisting
silently on the horizon.*





■ *Two Black rhinos
Diceros bicornis -
threatened
with man-made
extinction all over
their range in
Africa - get their
evening drink at
Halali's waterhole.*



A group of well-fed female African lion Panthera leo relax in the shade after having feasted on a unfortunate zebra the night before.

A group of Plains or ■
Burchell's zebra
Equus quagga
run and jostle
at a waterhole.



■ *Left, rainbow over the Etosha plains after a late afternoon drizzle; right, two female African lion Panthera leo and their cubs sit by the edge of the endless Etosha pan.*

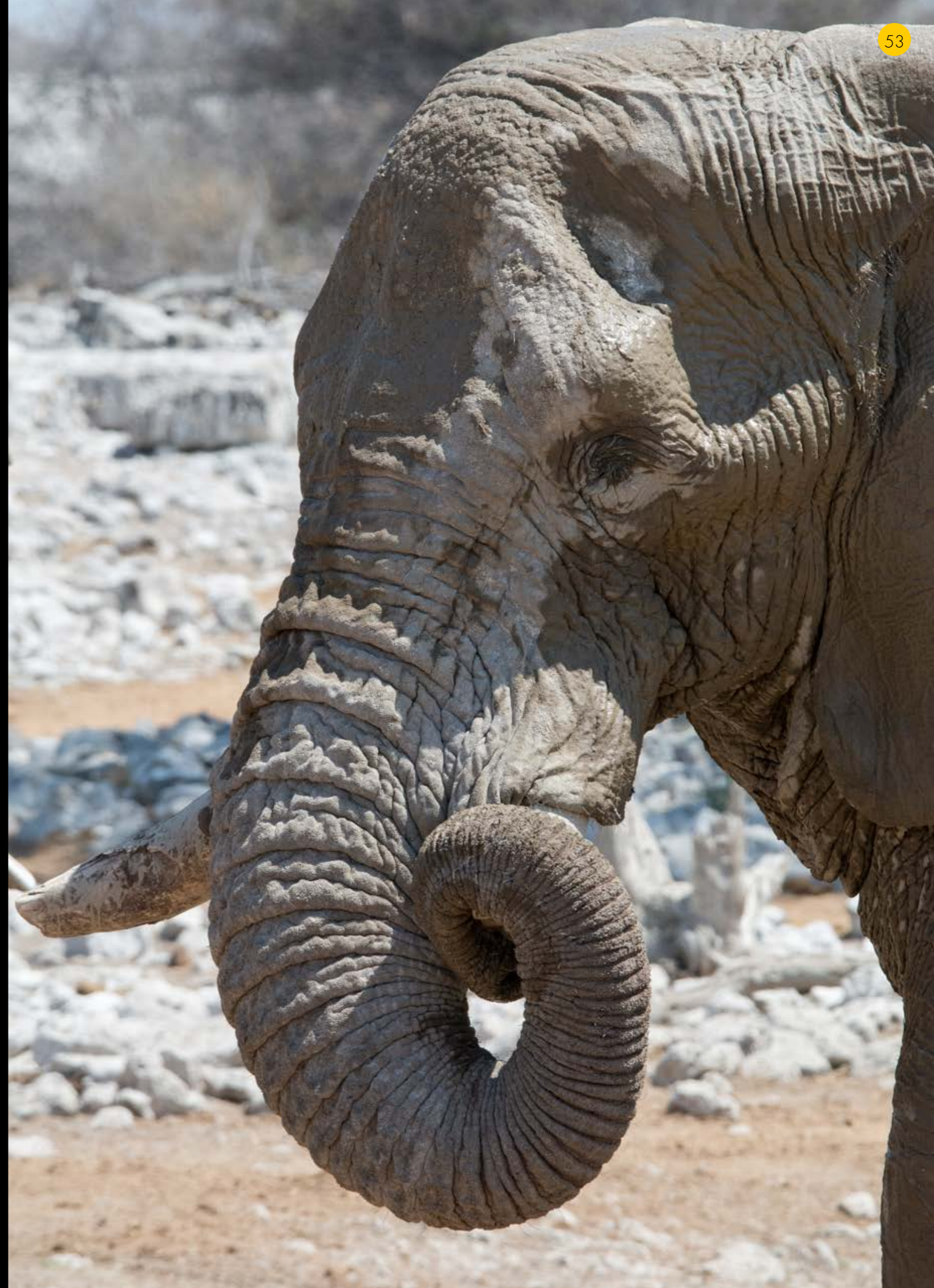




A herd of Springbok Antidorca marsupialis keep a wary eye on a prowling lioness Panthera leo. This female is either pregnant or well fed from the previous night.



Left, Red hartebeest *Alcelaphus buselaphus caama*; right, African elephant *Loxodonta africana*.





Angolan ■
or Namibian giraffe
Giraffa camelopardalis
angolensis drinking at a
pool in the typical spread-
legged posture.

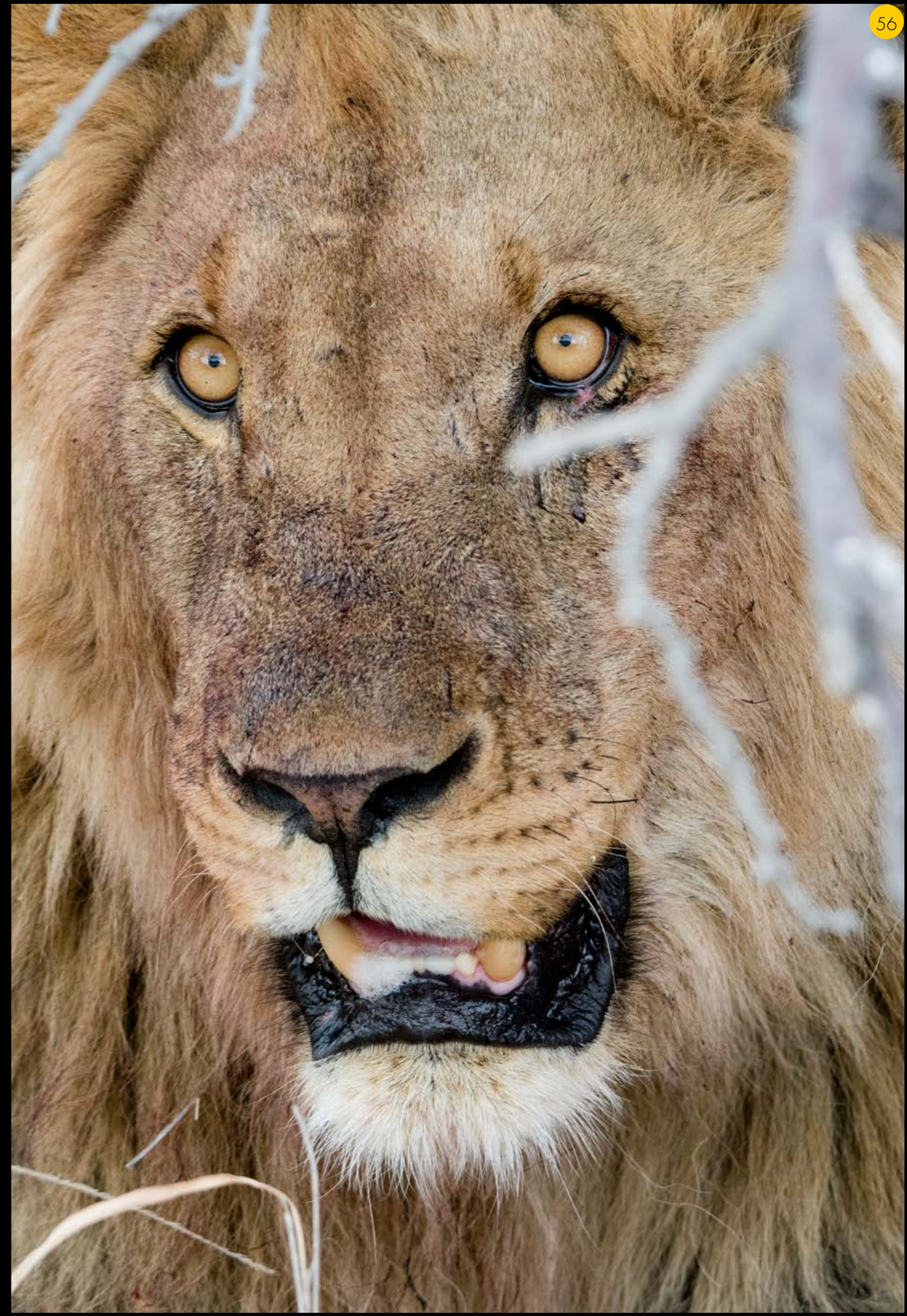
Twilight - a brief time of truces for survival's sake



A belligerent Black rhinoceros *Diceros bicornis* as it approaches Halali's waterhole at dusk.



■ Left, Plains or Burchell's zebra *Equus quagga*; right, portrait of a male African lion *Panthera leo*.





A Black rhinoceros *Diceros* ■ *bicornis* at dusk at Halali's camp waterhole. Etosha's harsh light and parched environment offer interesting opportunities for black-and-white photography.

Left, a trio of Gemsbok *Oryx gazella*; center, Kori bustard *Ardeotis kori*; right, male Greater Kudu *Tragelaphus strepsiceros*.



■ A herd of African elephant *Loxodonta africana* gathers for a drink at Halali's waterhole after sunset. Waterholes at the camps in Etosha are often lit all night long with floodlights, offering unique opportunities to witness interaction among - and the behavior of - many visiting animals.

