

# OF MISPLACED WOLVES

Dale R Morris ventures out into the untouched Highlands of Ethiopia in search of its rare wildlife.



I'm up in the Bale Mountains of southern Ethiopia, and I can't feel my fingers for the cold. Freezing snow covers my hiking boots, sleet stings my face like little wasps, and my nose feels as if it's been turned to ice. Despite the uncomfortable temperatures, I'm in raptures. Just 20 metres from where I sit, crouched behind a heather bush, there are a pair of wolves. African wolves!

The closest one is stalking like a leopard, its body held low, ears flattened back. The other is standing bolt upright, further away, but clearly visible to its target: a rabbit. My heart is pounding now, partly because here on the Sanetti Plateau I'm at 4000 metres above sea level and the air is so thin that the slightest exertion is exhausting. Mostly though, it's because of the hunt.

Wolf A, a beautiful rusty red creature with glistening eyes, backs away from the rabbit, pretending she

hasn't seen it. She is lying, of course, but the rabbit, as still as the rock against which it believes it is concealed, doesn't know this. He thinks as long as he keeps still, he'll go unnoticed.

But that's the ruse, and as fast as lightning Wolf B springs up from beneath a shrub. The rabbit, caught off guard, bolts without thinking; right into Wolf A's jaws.

"Wow! Great teamwork," my guide, Sultan Kaedir, says from our 4x4 vehicle. He is parked just a few metres away on the only road in the Bale Mountains, smiling warmly from behind his woollen balaclava.

The wolves are now gone. They vanished within seconds of devouring their food, leaving me standing breathless, shivering and awed.

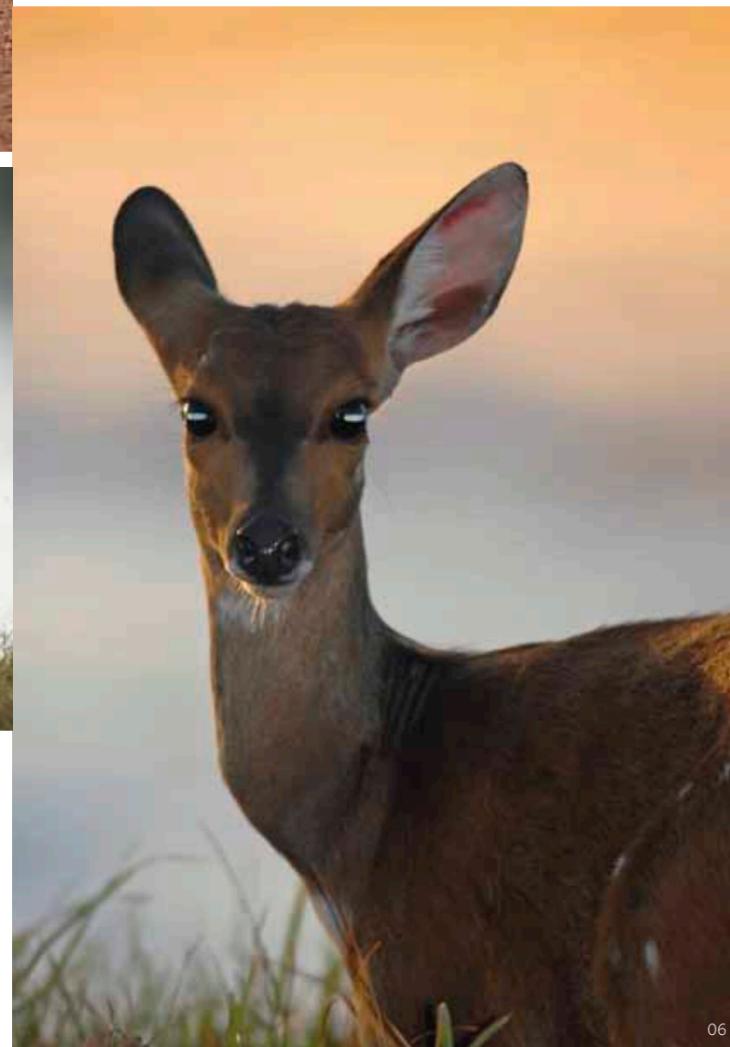
It's hard for me to reconcile the sights, sounds and ambience of this place with the fact that I am in Africa. Africa does not have meadows of snow, right? It isn't freezing and, what's more, there are no wolves.



05 The endemic blue-winged goose  
 06 A Menelik's bushbuck  
 07 A bearded vulture patrols the skies  
 08 Giant Lobelia plants take many years to reach adulthood, flower once and then die.



01 The rare and endangered Ethiopian wolf  
 02 A troop of colobus monkeys in the rainforests of the lowlands  
 03 Wolf on the prowl along the only road on top of Bale Mountain  
 04 Baboons seen in the low-lying areas of the National Park



That's for Yellowstone or Russia or Canada. But this is Africa. An Africa of lofty heights and billowing clouds and unbelievable beauty. It's an Africa few of us have ever heard of, let alone visited, despite the stunning scenery and high numbers of endemic wildlife.

And why is that? Well, until recently, accommodation options have been of a low standard, thin on the ground, and many hours' drive away. But the recent opening of Bale Mountain Lodge has changed all that; it's an all-inclusive upmarket establishment conveniently placed in the foothills of this breathtaking location. At last, Ethiopia's Bale Mountains have been made accessible, comfortable and easy.

Like most high mountain ranges, Bale is stratified with an array of startlingly different habitats, all of which are magical in their own right. The lowlands, where the lodge is situated, are carpeted in tall rainforests where black leopards have been seen, and endemic Bale monkeys share their treetop domain with tropical birds, such as parrots and hornbills. Higher up, you pass through a belt of moss and mist-



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07 The plateau atop Bale Mountain  
08 Red hot-poker flowers  
09 Sultan: guide and wolf-researcher  
10 Admiring a huge arch-rooted tree  
11 The view from Bale Mountain Lodge  
12 A rainforest cottage  
All images © Dale R Morris

shrouded woodland called the Juniper forests where gnarled trees conjure up childhood memories of dark fairytales. Further up still is a heather-like habitat, and then, above 3500 metres, you’ll find a beautiful plateau of Afro-Alpine Mooreland ... and wolves, one of the rarest animals on earth.

But a trip to Bale is not only about seeing these unique canids (although that’s a big drawback). The range’s low-lying rainforests are so mysterious and unknown that whenever a science team goes in there, they invariably come out clutching a list of brand-new species. Huge trees, encrusted with mosses and ferns, and flush with tropical birds, throw their shade over a spidery network of hiking trails. There are waterfalls and mountain viewpoints to walk to, and quite a few avian endemics to find.

After lunching in the lodge’s restaurant, I hike with my guide for a few hours beneath the towering rainforest canopy, spying Colobus monkeys with their broom-like tails, and baboons playing like naughty children among the boughs.

But then, as late afternoon approaches, the sound of thunder echoes off the surrounding landscapes,

and Sultan suggests we head in.

“Mountains are always places of extreme weather. Up at the top you will be cold. Down here in the lowlands you will be hot... but also very wet if you stay out during one of our storms.”

And that’s where a stay at the Bale Mountain Lodge really pays dividends.

The forests, the alpine meadows, the wolves and the waterfalls are all within easy access, and one rarely has to suffer indignity at the hands of inclement weather. And so, as I watch the sun go down from the verandah of my rainforest cottage, I look forward to another early morning drive up to the plateau to once again feel the chill of ice and excitement at seeing the Bale Mountain wolves. ♦

**Travel file**

**Accommodation**  
[www.balemountainlodge.com](http://www.balemountainlodge.com)

**Experience**  
Photographic expeditions to Bale (and the equally unique Simian Mountains) are conducted by [www.oryxphotography.com](http://www.oryxphotography.com)  
Abercrombie & Kent offers private and group hosted tours of Ethiopia. [www.abercrombiekent.com.au](http://www.abercrombiekent.com.au)

**Information**  
Find out more about Ethiopia’s endangered wolves. [www.ethiopianwolf.org](http://www.ethiopianwolf.org)