

Pangolin & Aardvark sighting

On a recent visit to a private game reserve in the Alldays area of the Limpopo province, we came upon two sightings of a lifetime; a Pangolin and some Aardvark foraging in broad daylight! Due to the severe drought in the Northern parts of the province and subsequent lack of food for the animals, one can obviously expect this unfamiliar behaviour from animals.

While we were out on a walk through the bush, we came across this amazing little creature. It was slowly walking on its hind legs between clumps of dry bushes and little anthills. It was the first time in my life that I've seen this weird, alien-like animal, let alone a wild one and within its natural habitat. The late evening light was perfect and I was able to get quite a few great shots in.

I also got the rare opportunity to photograph a pair of Aardvark in midday, and got within a few meters of this one while it was digging up some lunch! They were not fazed by my approach at all and gave the termites all their attention. I followed them for about two hours and even found their burrow nearby. I truly believe seeing these animals in broad daylight is quite rare and would like to find out whether there could be other reasons, apart from the drought, for this unusual behaviour? Both these species were seen in reasonably close (1.5km) proximity – do they compete directly for the same food source and can this result in the stronger one killing the other?

Kind regards
Karen Swanepoel

Response:

We are currently undertaking a study at Tswalu Game Reserve (www.tswalu.com) to investigate the relationship between aardvark activity and environmental and physiological variables. In most of their range, aardvark are active mainly at night. However, in southern African countries, they are commonly seen in the late afternoon during winter, and occasionally at midday. This pattern is not necessarily due to severe drought but may reflect a natural seasonal shift of the activity rhythm. However, Karen is right in the sense that such diurnal behavior in winter is likely to be related to environmental constraints. Among these, the ambient temperature may well be an important factor driving the behaviour of aardvark. Indeed, because aardvark lack an efficient insulating fur coat and have a low metabolic rate, foraging during the warmer day-time period reduces energy expenditure associated with thermoregulation, and the risk of hypothermia on cold, clear nights. It is also likely that seasonal fluctuations of temperature and water affect prey availability and prey quality, which in turn could influence aardvark feeding behaviour toward more diurnal activity during the winter.

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