

The Giants of Mashatu

The African Elephant



Elephants, Africa's largest mammals, live in herds of 10 to over 50. Bulls have larger tusks and a rounded forehead compared to females. Their tusks, modified incisor teeth, serve as tools for food and defense. Notably, elephants have large ears that help regulate their temperature by flapping, thanks to numerous blood capillaries. Their trunk, with 55,000 muscles, is sensitive and versatile, used for drinking, feeding, and locating food. Losing their trunk can be fatal; however, some elephants in Mashatu survived with 'stump trunks.' These intelligent creatures often assist disabled herd members.

The Lion



The lion is Africa's largest cat. Lions are nocturnal and therefore most active at night, when it is cooler. They are highly social animals and are found in small prides of up to twenty individuals. A pride consists of related females and their cubs and they reside in a home range or territory. The males are nomads and gain custody of a pride through competition with other males. The mane of the lion is used as protection and to give an impression of increased proportions. Sometimes male lions will form a coalition; two or more males will group together to defend a pride. Hunting is done communally, often using driving and ambushing techniques.

The Giraffe



Africa's tallest mammals are gregarious animals with a keen sense of smell, hearing and sight. They move at speeds of up to 50 km/h. Both the male and female of the species have horns and their tongues can reach up to 45 cm in length. Giraffes have blotchy yellow and black or brown coats and each has a pattern unique to the individual.

Females and their young live in maternal herds, while males separate from their mothers in about their third year, initially joining a bachelor herd, before gradually becoming solitary as they mature.

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The Baobab Tree



The baobab tree, akin to the elephant in longevity, can grow up to 25 meters tall and live for thousands of years. Leafless for about nine months annually, it bears 12-18 cm flowers with five white petals and purplish stamens. Legend has it that the hyena, receiving the baobab tree last in line when seeds were distributed by the gods, planted it upside down in frustration.

The Eland



Africa's largest antelope is a largely shy and peaceable animal although at Mashatu they are docile and very often viewed at close range. This excellent jumper stands almost 1.8 m tall and may weigh up to 910 kg. Its ox-like body is light brown with a few narrow white stripes running across the back and down the sides. It has a hump between the shoulders, a short, erect black mane and a long tail with a short, black tuft on the end.

The Ostrich



The largest bird in Africa, the ostrich, is widespread in Southern Africa, from the bushveld in the east to the Atlantic coast dunes in the west. Running with outstretched wings at high speeds, it possesses a formidable kicking ability. Its inner toe bears most of the weight. Both male and female ostriches have sparsely feathered heads, necks, and thighs. Males, glossy black with long white plumes on wings and tail, are polygamous and typically have two to six females in their group, while females are dull grayish brown in colour.

The Kori Bustard



The kori bustard, Africa's heaviest flying bird, weighs around 20 kg and is protected due to illegal hunting. Found in woodlands, grassy plains, and Kalahari scrub, it's often seen alone, in pairs, or groups. Despite being a strong flier, it walks slowly with deliberate strides. When flying, it takes off with heavy wing beats but moves swiftly once airborne. In groups, they roam the veld in search of food. Culturally significant in Botswana, it's believed that only chiefs are allowed to consume this bird.