

Meet the gentle and endangered Pangolin, a living dinosaur



Tips from the Posse

By Mark Rackay

One of the best things about traveling to different lands is the chance to encounter wildlife that you have never seen before. Admittedly, all the animals I saw in Africa, I had not seen before except behind bars in a stateside zoo.

With that thought, everything I saw was exciting, even the critters that don't bite back.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) monitors animals worldwide that are listed on an endangered species list. It's really exciting to see an animal so listed, but even more so, when you never knew it existed in the first place.

On a trip to Zimbabwe, we were riding along in the hunting car, looking for the elusive Kudu, who is not endangered but you sure could have fooled me when I was hunting one. All hades broke loose when our trackers, who were seated on top of the hunting car, began shouting haka.

I assumed they were suffering the symptoms of a chest cold, or similar malady, until our guide slammed on the brakes and joined in the shouting. When he made it clear the boys were not suffering chest congestion, we understood they had seen some type of

animal, called a haka in Shona, their native language.

The animal, in English, goes by the name pangolin.

The ground pangolin, one of four species that live in Africa, goes by the street name of Smutsia temmincki, in case you were wondering. There are eight species of Pangolin worldwide, with the rest living in Asia.

I had never seen, nor heard of a pangolin before this encounter, and admittedly, did not have any clue as what it was when I finally spotted it. This strange looking beast looked akin to a dinosaur, up to 40 inches long to the tip of the tail and tipping the scales at around seven pounds.

Speaking of scales, that is his crowning feature, as he is covered in silver dollar sized, or larger, scales. He also has long claws on his feet and sports a tongue longer than his body, reaching 28 inches.

The name pangolin comes from the word penggulung, which is the Malay word for roller. A startled pangolin will cover its head with its front legs and roll into a ball. This action exposes those large scales to the predators.

Daunting as this character may look, they are actually very gentle, shy and rarely seen. Our Professional Hunter, Lance Nesbitt, said this was the first time he had ever seen one in the wild, after 28 years of guiding in the African bushveld.

Pangolins play an important role in the ecosystems by feeding on the insects that keep soils aerated and fertile. Their main food source is the termite. A single pangolin eats around 70

million termites a year. Without the pangolin, the termites would overrun the African landscape. Termite mounds, often reaching 10 feet above the ground, are found throughout the African bushveld.

While pangolins are sometimes referred to as "scaly anteaters," that is just a physical description. Pangolins are smaller than anteaters and covered in thick, scaly skin while anteaters are covered in hair. The DNA of a pangolin is closer to dogs and cats.

Pangolins are truly a one-of-a-kind critter as they are the only mammal on earth with scales. Because they are mammals, they deliver their young through live birth, and a baby is called a pangopup. The pups are born covered in soft, white scales that harden after a couple days. The pangopup will ride on it's mother's tail by clinging to her scales.

The scales are the dominant feature of the pangolin and have been for quite some time. These critters have called earth home for some 80 million years, making them living dinosaurs. These same dominant scales may also serve to be the downfall of the pangolin.

Pangolins have the distinction of being known as the most heavily trafficked mammal on the planet. Each year, worldwide, some 300 pangolin are poached from the wild across Africa and Asia. While technically a protected species in China, the black market there continues to lead the demand for pangolin meat, scales, and body parts. Pangolin meat is considered a rare delicacy and their scales and various body parts



This is the pangolin we saw in Africa. The top half is mostly scales, and we did not touch him, not wanting to disturb him, just bothered him long enough for a picture. (Mark Rackay/Special to the MDP)

touted as powerful components of traditional medicines.

Even though it is widely understood that because scales are made of keratin, same as your fingernails and toenails, they offer no medical benefit. These scales bring as much as \$3,000 a kilogram on the black market. As an aside, the Rhino horn, which is also heavily sought on the black market, is also made of keratin.

Aside from the IUCN, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, C.I.T.E.S., classifies the pangolin

as critically endangered, however, very little seems to be working in terms of protecting them. Estimates place the numbers around 50,000 left in the wild of all eight species combined, and those numbers continue to decline.

The poor pangolin is at risk of becoming completely extinct from a world he has called home for 80 million years, before most people have even heard of him. I was blessed to see one, but it seems unlikely I will ever see another unless something is done, and soon.

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Remaining big game hunting licenses go on sale August 6



Leftover big game licenses go on sale Aug. 6. (Wayne D. Lewis/CPW)

SPECIAL TO THE MDP

Big game hunting licenses remaining after the primary and secondary draws will go on sale Aug. 6 and there are a lot of hunting opportunities still available.

Remaining licenses for 2024 have been placed on the leftover list and will become available for purchase on August 6 at 9 a.m. Mountain Time. Over-the-counter licenses for elk, bear, archery pronghorn, and whitetail deer will go on sale at the same time.

Licenses go on sale online, over the phone at 1-800-244-5613, and

in-person at CPW offices and sales locations all at once. This is the first opportunity to get a limited big game hunting license outside of the draw process.

Licenses that will become available include: Limited licenses leftover after the primary and secondary draws for elk, deer, pronghorn and bear; Limited elk, deer, pronghorn, and bear licenses that someone drew but surrendered or did not pay for during the secondary draw that took fewer than five resident preference points;

Limited licenses that were returned for

refund/preference point restoration since the opening of the secondary draw but prior to July 29 and took fewer than five resident preference points to draw;

Over-the-counter (OTC) licenses for elk, archery pronghorn, whitetail deer, and bear.

Preparing for sales day

CPW locations and sales agents will be very busy that morning, so try to get prepared ahead of time.

See LICENSES page B3

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