



# THROUGH MY EYES: JOURNEY OF A WILDLIFE VETERINARIAN

By Dr Michael D Kock (self-published)

When we hear about wildlife translocations, conservation research, dehorning and such intriguing activities, do we ever actually consider who performs this work and what exactly is involved?

Who are these people, and how did they end up in that position? For many people, the idea of working with wildlife, with the sun on our back and dust on our faces, may be a romantic ideal, fueled by our all-too-infrequent forays on safari.

Over the years, I have been able to gain some insight to the role that wildlife veterinarians play in maintaining and protecting our wildlife. They are, like many others, unsung heroes of the conservation effort, often working in difficult, stressful conditions and relying on a great deal of scientific and technical expertise.

Without question, it is very hard, physical work. And because of its nature, wildlife vets are called into every nook and cranny of Africa's wilderness areas, giving them access to some of our most extraordinary landscapes and the rare opportunity to get hands-on, protecting our rarest and most vulnerable creatures.

So, when Dr Michael Kock's enormous tome, *Through My Eyes: Journey of a Wildlife Veterinarian*, landed with a thud on my desk, I was enthralled. Dr Kock is one of Africa's most experienced wildlife vets, working on projects in most southern and East African countries, Cameroon, the tropical forests

of central West Africa and South Sudan over a 39-year period.

His memoir takes you deep into these territories, revealing aspects of their politics, their people and their conservation pressures from a unique perspective. He is a natural storyteller, giving insights to the challenges, adventures and misadventures, wildlife encounters and friendships forged along the way.

"I can spin a good yarn," he admits in his introduction, "even better when it is based on real events in some remote location in Africa. This journey of mine deals with some deadly serious issues, blood and gore, but equally is laced with plenty of humour."

Kock has illustrated his story with a whopping 1400 photos. Like his text, they are a combination of personal, work and destination images, neither personally indulgent nor too heavy on science and policy, though important concerns are discussed. You get to know Kock the man, his working life and conservation challenges in the places he worked, without any of those facets dominating. I was particularly drawn to shots of close-up work with wildlife and to those of places I know little about, like the beautiful and surprising landscapes of Sudan.

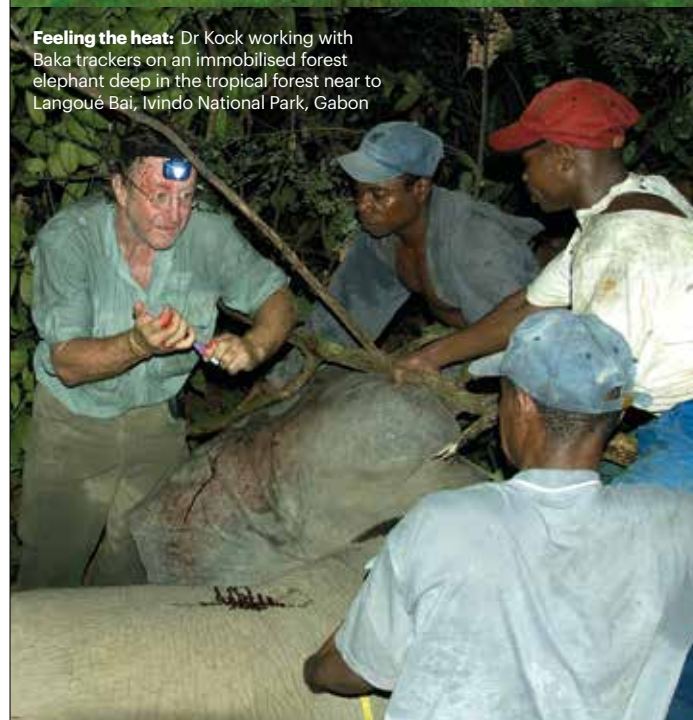
*Through My Eyes* will surely enthral anyone with an interest in African travel, wildlife and conservation. At 600 pages, it'll hold a very prominent place on the coffee table.

BY CRAIG RIX

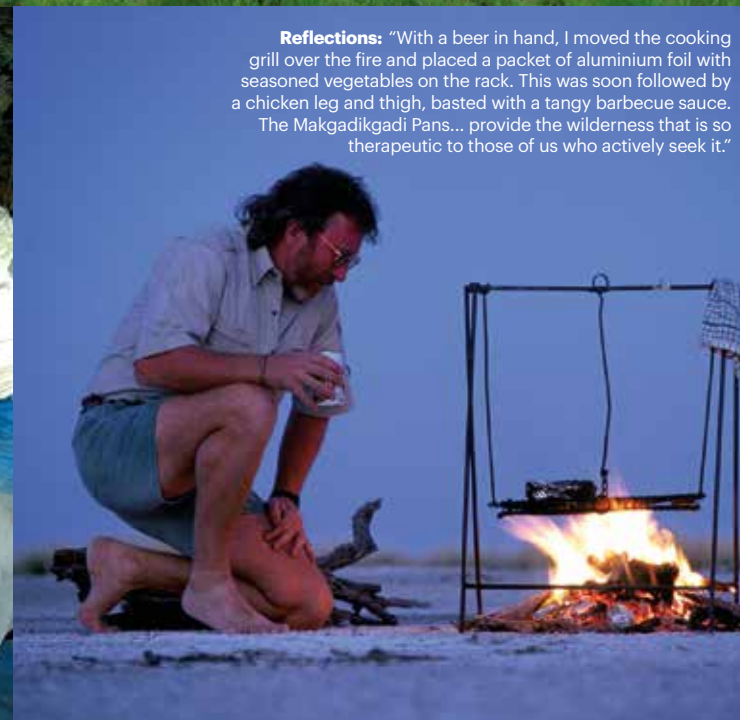
Learn more at [www.through-my-eyes.co.za](http://www.through-my-eyes.co.za)



**On the move:** Tens of thousands of tiang on the grasslands south of the Sudd, South Sudan. Dr Kock was part of the team which, between 2009 and 2016, fitted GPS collars to help track their migratory path, with similar work on kob, and savannah elephants



**Feeling the heat:** Dr Kock working with Baka trackers on an immobilised forest elephant deep in the tropical forest near to Langoué Bai, Ivindo National Park, Gabon

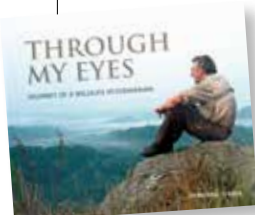


**Reflections:** "With a beer in hand, I moved the cooking grill over the fire and placed a packet of aluminium foil with seasoned vegetables on the rack. This was soon followed by a chicken leg and thigh, basted with a tangy barbecue sauce. The Makgadikgadi Pans... provide the wilderness that is so therapeutic to those of us who actively seek it."



**Flight risk:** Working on a dehorning and radio-collaring exercise in Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park, the author had to manually tackle and sedate this baby black rhino and, with the help of the scouts, it was loaded into the front seat of the R22 helicopter and flown to reunite with its mother.

<READING MATTERS>



ALL PICTURES COURTESY MICHAEL D KOCK