

Cunning Killers

“Fisi, the hyena, hermaphroditic self-eating devourer of the dead, trailer of calving cows, ham-stringer, potential biter-off of your face at night while you slept, sad yowler, camp-follower, stinking, foul, with jaws that crack the bones the lion leaves, belly dragging, loping away on the brown plain ...”

Ernest Hemingway, Green Hills of Africa

Underdog of the African bush, the hyena remains one of our favourite of all beasts during our expedition.

Hyenas are more than the carrion-eating villains of The Lion King.

Here are some things we may wish we never knew about this unlikely creature:





- Hyena are cannibals and will attack and eat other hyena, including their young.
- The female hyena is actually dominant, larger in size and more aggressive than the male.
- Hyena are believed to be even more intelligent than chimpanzees, and studies show a large frontal cortex of the brain, with a wily problem-solving ability. Even more amazing is that during the study, the hyenas solved all the problems in silence, using only non-verbal signals for communication.
- One of the most dangerous sounds you might hear in the bush is laughter – the hyena laughs to signal excitement that it has found food. The pitch of their laugh can indicate their status in the pack.



- The reputation of the hyena as a coward is unfounded and hyenas are aggressive competitors in the bush, not only scavenging on the kills of other animals as it is often believed. They kill and eat baby lion, leopard and other predators. About 95% of their diet comes from their own kills, which take place in packs of up to 80 hyenas. A group of hyenas can devour an entire zebra, leaving no leftovers – not even the bones – in under half an hour. However, this feeding frenzy comes at a cost; hyenas rip, claw, and fight with one another over the remains of their meal.
- Hyenas and lions often fight over the same territories and hunt the same prey. This leads to fierce competition between the two animals. They steal each other's food and kill off the young of their enemies.
- While looking dog-like, hyenas bear no formal relation to the dog species. In fact they are more closely genetically related to cats.

