BOTSWANA NIGHT CAMP & PREDATOR RISK ASSESSMENT

Lions • Leopards • Hyenas • Unfenced Wilderness Camps

Briefing aid for overlanding groups in northern Botswana
Prepared for trip leaders Angus Wingfield and Haley Dahl – co-leaders

CORE SAFETY PRINCIPLE

At night, the safest person in an unfenced wildlife camp is usually the person who is inside a properly closed tent or vehicle and who does not create food, movement or curiosity that attracts wildlife. We do not go looking for predators. If predators enter camp, we give them space, stay calm and allow them to move through.

Briefing purpose

This assessment is designed for wilderness camps in Botswana where lions, leopards, spotted or brown hyenas and other wildlife may move through camp after dark. It is a practical participant briefing and leader checklist, not a substitute for instructions from wildlife officers, campsite staff or qualified local guides.

Ten rules everyone remembers

- After dark, nobody leaves camp or walks away from the tents alone.
- Always sleep inside a fully closed tent, roof tent or vehicle – never in the open.
- No food, rubbish or strongly scented waste is left around tents or the communal area overnight.
- Never approach, follow, spotlight for fun, feed or attempt to photograph a predator on foot.
- If a predator enters camp, stay calm and stay inside your tent or vehicle unless a leader directs otherwise.
- Do not run from a predator. If unexpectedly caught outside, stay together and move calmly towards the nearest secure vehicle or shelter.
- Keep torches/head torches accessible before darkness; do not rely on phone lights.
- Use the agreed night-toilet procedure. Do not wander off because you think the area is clear.
- Children or vulnerable participants, if present, are never left unsupervised in an unfenced camp.
- If in doubt, stop moving, alert Angus or Haley, and wait for instruction.

1. Risk Management Overview

Residual risk assumes all controls in this document are followed. Predator behaviour is variable; prevention, space and disciplined camp routines are more reliable than trying to interpret an individual animal at close range.

Hazard	Primary risk	Key controls	Initial	Residual
Lion in/near camp	Attack/injury	Remain in tent/vehicle; no walking out to view; no running; leaders control response; keep group together if outside.	High	Med
Leopard in/near camp	Ambush/close encounter	Minimise solo movement; scan before leaving shelter; no following into cover; remain inside if animal is close.	High	Med
Hyena attracted to camp	Bite/injury/property damage	Secure food/rubbish; no food in tents; no feeding; do not corner; stay inside and allow route through.	High	Low-Med
Night toilet movement	Surprise encounter	Pre-agreed area; torch; buddy/leader awareness; scan first; minimise distance and time outside shelter.	High	Med
Food/waste smells	Wildlife attraction	Pack food, scraps and waste securely; clean cooking area; no leftovers around tents; remove rubbish.	High	Low
Participant panic	Running/separation	Brief before dark; clear leader authority; simple stop/stay/return procedure; radios/whistles where appropriate.	High	Low-Med
Poor visibility	Trip/fall/animal surprise	Head torch ready; designated paths; no wandering; slow movement; footwear on.	Med	Low
Tent left open	Wildlife entry/exposure	Zip tents fully every time; no limbs outside; inspect closure before sleep.	High	Low
Late camp setup	Higher exposure after dark	Arrive/set up before dark where possible; lights/torches ready first; rapid organised camp routine.	Med	Low

NIGHT STOP RULE

After dark, any participant who is unsure about a noise, animal, toilet movement or route through camp should stay where they are and call Angus or Haley. Curiosity is never a reason to leave a tent.

2. Camp Arrival – Set Up for the Night Before Darkness

- Angus and Haley assess the campsite before everyone disperses, looking for fresh animal activity, obvious game paths, dense cover, water edges and places where visibility is poor.
- Position the three vehicles first so the camp has one organised footprint, a clear vehicle exit and easy access between tents and vehicles.
- Keep tents reasonably grouped rather than scattering people around a large campsite.
- Establish one communal cooking/eating area away from sleeping entrances where practical.
- Agree where food, rubbish, water, chairs and cooking equipment will be stored overnight.
- Agree the night-toilet arrangement before dark.
- Identify safe routes between tents, vehicles and the toilet area; remove avoidable trip hazards.
- Everyone locates shoes, head torch and essential medication before getting into bed.
- If a campsite operator or wildlife officer gives local instructions, those instructions take priority.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Botswana Tourism Organisation states that campsites inside game reserves and national parks are usually unfenced. Its guidance is to sleep in a tent, roof tent or vehicle, ensure tents zip properly, never leave arms or legs protruding, supervise children continuously, and avoid walking in the bush without a qualified guide.

3. After-Dark Camp Routine

- Once darkness falls, movement is reduced to what is necessary.
- Nobody leaves the immediate camp area alone.
- Use a head torch or strong torch for every movement outside tents, even for a few metres.
- Pause and scan before stepping out of a tent or moving around a vehicle. Look and listen before moving.
- Do not use headphones or anything that removes awareness of sounds around camp.
- Keep conversation and camp activity controlled; avoid creating unnecessary commotion if wildlife is close.
- If eyeshine, movement, growling, whooping, roaring or other predator activity is detected close to camp, alert the leaders and reduce movement.
- Never walk towards a sound to identify it.
- If wildlife is between you and your tent/vehicle, do not try to squeeze past. Stay in the safest available position and call the leaders.

4. Lions – Night Camp Controls

Lions may pass through or rest near unfenced camps. A lion seen or heard near camp is not an invitation to go outside and look for it. Our management strategy is avoidance, calm behaviour and secure shelter.

If lions are heard or seen near camp

- Remain inside a closed tent, roof tent or vehicle.
- Do not unzip a tent for a better look or photograph.
- Do not walk out with a torch to locate the pride.
- Allow lions a clear route through or around camp; do not use vehicles or people to box them in.
- If everyone is already safely sheltered, stay sheltered until the leaders are satisfied the area is clear.
- If you are unexpectedly outside, do not run. Stay together, remain upright and move calmly towards the nearest secure vehicle or shelter if there is a clear route.
- If a lion blocks the route to your tent, do not approach it. Use the nearest safe vehicle/shelter and wait.

LION BRIEFING LINE

“If we hear lions tonight, enjoy the sound from inside your tent. Do not go looking for them. The safest sighting after dark is one we do not create.”

5. Leopards – Night Camp Controls

Leopards are generally solitary and can move quietly through dense cover. The main operational risk is a close surprise encounter caused by unnecessary walking, poor visibility or following an animal into vegetation.

- Keep night movement to a minimum and avoid dense cover or vegetation edges.

- Never follow a leopard on foot or try to relocate it after it disappears into cover.
- If a leopard is seen close to camp, remain inside and give it time and space to leave.
- If unexpectedly outside and a leopard is present, do not run. Keep the group together and move calmly towards secure shelter when the route is clear.
- Do not crouch down for photographs or approach for a clearer view.
- Keep tents closed and sleeping areas free of food and waste.

6. Hyenas – Food, Curiosity & Camp Discipline

Hyenas may investigate camps and are especially likely to exploit easy food opportunities. Good housekeeping is one of our most effective controls.

- Never feed a hyena – deliberately or through careless food storage.
- Put food, scraps, rubbish and cooking waste away before bed.
- Do not leave dirty plates, meat scraps, bones or food packaging around camp overnight.
- Do not take food into sleeping tents unless leaders have specifically approved how it is stored.
- Keep shoes and loose items inside or secured; curious animals may investigate camp equipment.
- If a hyena enters camp while everyone is sheltered, remain sheltered and allow it to move through.
- Do not corner, chase or surround a hyena.
- If unexpectedly outside, do not run. Stay upright, keep together and move calmly towards a vehicle or secure shelter when safe to do so.

7. Food, Kitchen & Waste Controls

- One defined kitchen and eating area for the group.
- All food containers closed immediately after use.
- Cooking scraps collected – never thrown into surrounding bush.
- Rubbish bagged and stored securely; where no receptacle exists, it travels with us to the next suitable disposal point.
- Cooking surfaces wiped down and obvious food spills cleaned before bed.
- No food left on tables or chairs overnight.
- Cool boxes/fridges and food boxes secured in vehicles or other agreed secure storage.
- No feeding wildlife under any circumstances.
- If an animal becomes habituated to food around people, that creates a risk for future campers as well as for the animal.

8. Night-Toilet Procedure

SIMPLE RULE

Nobody wanders off alone at night. The night toilet area and procedure are agreed before darkness.

- Use the closest appropriate pre agreed toilet; do not walk deep into the bush for privacy.
- Take a proper torch/head torch and wear shoes.
- Before leaving the tent, listen and scan the immediate area.
- Let your tent partner, Angus or Haley know you are moving if the camp situation requires it.

- Where visibility is poor or predator activity has been heard, use a buddy/leader-controlled movement rather than going alone.
- Keep the movement short and purposeful; return directly to the tent.
- If you see or hear a large animal or predator, stop and return to shelter if it is safe to do so. Do not investigate.
- If a predator is between you and shelter, do not run past it. Stay calm, maintain distance and alert the leaders.

9. Tent & Sleeping Safety

- Always sleep inside the tent, roof tent or vehicle – never on the ground in the open.
- Zip every tent fully closed every time you enter or leave.
- Never sleep with hands, feet or other limbs protruding from a tent.
- Keep a head torch, shoes and essential medication immediately accessible inside.
- Do not store open food or rubbish in sleeping areas.
- Do not leave tent doors open "for air" while sleeping.
- If an animal is directly outside the tent, stay quiet, remain inside and alert the leaders if possible. Do not unzip the tent to identify it.
- Do not assume a campfire, vehicle or human smell will keep predators away.

10. Unexpected Predator Encounter While Outside

The primary control is prevention. However, if somebody is unexpectedly outside when a lion, leopard or hyena is close:

- DO NOT RUN.
- Do not split up. Stay with the people immediately around you.
- Remain upright and calm; avoid crouching or turning the situation into a chase.
- Do not approach the animal or block its route.
- Move slowly towards the nearest secure vehicle, building or tent only if the route is clear and doing so does not take you closer to the animal.
- Follow Angus or Haley's instructions immediately.
- If movement would take you towards the predator, hold position in the safest available place and wait for the situation to change.
- Once secure, account for every participant before anyone moves again.

IMPORTANT

This section is intentionally simple. Participants are not expected to identify predator intent or test whether an animal is "serious". The aim is to avoid triggering pursuit, avoid crowding the animal, stay together and regain secure shelter.

11. Predator-in-Camp Response

- Leader call: "PREDATOR IN CAMP – STAY IN YOUR TENTS/VEHICLES."
- Everyone confirms their own tent/vehicle occupants are accounted for; do not leave shelter to check other tents unless directed in a genuine emergency.
- Angus and Haley establish where the animal is from the safest available position without approaching it.

- No one surrounds, follows or attempts to drive the predator out on foot.
- If movement of a vehicle is genuinely necessary, it is done deliberately and only by a leader/competent driver when the route is clear.
- Wait for the animal to leave and allow additional quiet time before declaring the camp clear.
- After the incident, re-check food/waste controls and identify why the animal may have approached, if relevant.
- Any injury, bite, scratch or suspected contact is treated as a medical incident and escalated promptly.

12. Leader Nightly Checklist

- ☐ Campsite assessed for animal paths, cover, water-edge risk and local wildlife advice.
- ☐ Vehicles positioned and keys controlled/accessible.
- ☐ Tents correctly erected and grouped sensibly.
- ☐ Night-toilet procedure briefed.
- ☐ Food and waste storage location agreed.
- ☐ Cooking area cleaned and food secured before bed.
- ☐ Head torches checked and with each participant.
- ☐ All participants understand: no walking away from camp alone after dark.
- ☐ All participants understand: if predators are heard/seen, remain inside and call leaders.
- ☐ Everyone accounted for before leaders retire.
- ☐ Emergency communications and first-aid kit accessible.

13. Short Spoken Briefing

“Tonight we are camping in an unfenced wildlife area. Lions, leopards and hyenas may move through or around camp, and that is normal. The safest thing we can do is make our camp uninteresting to them and minimise unnecessary movement after dark. Food and rubbish are put away, tents stay zipped, nobody walks away from camp alone, and we use the agreed toilet routine. If you hear or see a predator, do not go looking for it – stay in your tent or vehicle and let Haley or me know. If you are unexpectedly outside, do not run; stay together and move calmly to secure shelter only when the route is clear. Our aim is not to control the wildlife. It is to give it space, stay predictable and let it pass.”

Reference & operational note

Botswana Tourism Organisation advises that campsites within game reserves and national parks are usually unfenced; campers should use designated campsites, sleep in tents/roof tents/vehicles with tents properly zipped, keep limbs inside, supervise children, avoid straying from camp or walking in the bush without a qualified guide, and carry away rubbish where receptacles are unavailable. Local wildlife officers, campsite staff and concession rules should always be followed.

Operational document: review before each trip and whenever campsite, season, participant group or local wildlife conditions change.