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0 / individually, but as long as we staged still and seator want to threaten us. There were usually between four add six of us in the jeep, along with Lucky, our ranger, who drove it, and fulfele seat in front and would suddenly point to the left or right, directing our points other or right, directing our points other with the seator of the seator noticed otherwise. Both were externed viceoleabable notiust Madikwe: where the 'Ugly Five' wereborn remely knowledgeable, not just but the four-legged animals but about the four tegged animate but about the birds - was delighted by And what birds - was delighted by Starlings, carries - global birds starlings, carries - best bee-eaters, yellow weater birds - while testing that the birds were truly free-nulike the unwinged creatures who, were never the birds were truly free. We can be the birds were truly free. We can be the birds were truly free. One of the best moments of each obset and the would pad around top and chartle would pad around

Julia Donaldson, author of The Gruf alo', explains how the least likely animalsatagame reserve in South Africainspired her latest book

here can't be a Botswanan border, for f ve days o writer who hasn't been asked "Where do you ge your ideas?" and experienced an inward groan. My usual (and ach day. truthful) reply is in the bath", but at last I am able to icte in this article an actual place on the map: the Madik we Game Reserve in South Africa. In South Africa. One of the perks of going on an overseas book tour is being able to tack a holiday on to the end of it. That's what I did last year when I was lia Donaldson ric erforming stories and signing books n Cape Town and I ohannesburg, with characters, top, fro my guitar-playing thespian husband, Malcolm, in tow.

As soon as our events had f nished,

we headed north towards the



African animals to track on foot: lion, eopard, rhino, buf alo and elephant. top and Charlie would pad around he back and lift af ap to reveal a oncealed bar. In the mornings, we We did have one quite scary ephant encounter. Whereas th emales and juveniles go about in nerds, the older males are mainly Irank hot chocolate, laced with a queur called Amarula: in the olitary. Usually if we saw one it woul nings we would stretch our legs be by the side of a path, munching leaves and taking little notice of us. But as we drove along a wide pat as the sun went down on our G&T There was a certain amount of rivalry at meal times of rivalry at meal times between the passengers of the dif erent Jeeps: "We got really close to a couple of cheetahs today." "Oh, really? We saw some lion cubs and a are kind of mongoose." Some people were very keen to tick of sightings of the Big Five, a term coined

v hunters referring to



ephant guickening its pace. A hange of tactics was called for. Lucky drove forwards once more, and when the creature continued to advance, the two men started to shout and hoot like wild animals themselves, and to thump loudly on the outside of the J eep. At the last minute, the elephant ered of the path and into the bush. A hundred yards further on, Charlie got down and scooped some vegetation from the ground. "Elephant Vegetation from the ground. Elephant testosterone," he said, and gave it to us to smell (it was reminiscent of a herd of goals: pungent and unpleasant). The animal had been in a state of sexual arousal in which he was trying to establish dominance over possible ivals - and over us, too. We did see the other members of the Big Five, but they were not the ones to sow the seeds of my story. The moment of inspiration came the day

ve saw a herd of wildebeest. My READER OFFE usband remarked that, despite their escorted tour escorrea tour taking in Victorii Falls, Botswana and Cape Town. Includes return f ight, accommodation and touring programme, from £2,799 per ucky replied. "I'm sor this, Malcolm, but the v one of the Ugly Five." The Ugly Five! And w were the others? "The s hyena, the lappet-faced the warthog and the ma stork." Immediately, a w person via Riviera Travel story came into my m with the twist at the end hardly ever happens: us to wrestle with storylin (0333 414 2850 telegraph.co.uk tt-botswana). fore I can sit down to We did get to see a sp umpy and muddy wart about in a watering hole caught a glimpse of a sh The two ugly birds elud our laptop conf rmed th

Fleven day

igainly proporti ons, he thought ey were rather noble-

eligible members of the quintet: the Get close to nature at Luangwa Safari bald vulture has wrinkled pink f aps use above

No the los

each side of its face, and the marabou stork is hunched and gangly with a dangling throat pouch. There was actually time to do some riting on the holiday, as there were even free hours between the orning and the evening safaris. The eather was so hot that we could only it out on our private terrace for sho pells; most of the time we lounged ound in air-conditioned luxury dozing, sorting out the morning's photos, reading and – in my case – beginning to write the story of The Ugly Five.

The Ugly Five, a picture book by Julia Donaldson and Axel Schef er, is ailable from Alison Green Boo ooks.telegraph.co.uk; £12.99)

FOUR GREAT FAMILY SAFARIS

outh Africa ne Kwandwe Private G eserve in the Eastern Cape a 54,000-acre haven for he Big Five – and its Ecca odge (right) has a great rogramme for kids: famil uites come with a plunge suites come with a plunge pool plus private ranger, tracker and vehicle. The ranger's "bug hunts" and "pooh patrols" will keep children amused. Then you'll head to Tsala Treetop Lodge, one of South Africa's most spartary lar holes.

Animalsand beaches

signic one of South Africa's soft spectacular hotels, not spectacular hotels, nith treehouse villas and uites high in the sistikamma forest canopy. Lust six miles from Afettneberg Bay, Tsala is ideally situated for the hiking, scuba diving, cyclin and beaches, though the hotel is only suitable for children aged eight and cider.

A seven-night family safari and beach adventure over rebruary half-term costs from 64,198 per person based on a amily of four. The price inclu ree nights in a family suite a andwe Ecca Lodge on a fully clusive basis, four nights in a

vo-bed villa at Tswalu Treetop odge on a B&B basis, all mational and domestic ights, private road transfer t wandwe and f ve-day car ntal (bestofsouth icatravel.com) Celebrations

mbia bas luxurious

vate houses of great

Luangwa Safari House, which overlooks a



under-Bs, costs from £5,546 per adult and £4,188 per child/ teenager. Children under 12 cannot go on walking safaris o canoe trips, though younger children can go on short wanders in the vicinity of charm, which work well as a camp, searching for tracks (expertafrica.com). e for groups with Idren. You have your owr Active Namibia space and guide, set your space and guide, set your own schedule, and the lodge if is in around you. Expert Africa will help choose child-focused guides who know how to bring young people into the safari. Start with four nights at Lucenews Forder Howen This comprehensive self-drive trip around Namibia, which is ideal for October or June half-term,

ncludes the country's mai highlights but is tailored fo families: Namibia works well because the most

waterhole, where animal ometo drink. Next, you'

spend three nights at the stylish Chongwe Safari House (below left), by a gentle river that's ideal for conceing and includer.

canoeing - and includes walking safaris, and day and

Waiking salaris, and day and night game drives. A seven-night trip, including all fights, meals and activities, for four adults and four under-IBs, costs from £5,546

South African private game reserve the size of Lincolnshire. Base yourself at LelapaL odge (below) in a family suite with its own plunge pool. There is no age limit and children will enjoy the special activities – including making pizzas, star gazing and games nights – as much as the thrill of going on game drives in search of the Big Five. A f ve-night safari for a family of four costs from £1949 for two adults and to children. The price includes ights and is based on a ecember 2017 departure inholidays.co.uk) SallyPeck

sit and watch the wildlife

Low-stress **Aadikwe**

afaris are expe Safaris are expensive: there's no two ways about that. But for families dreaming of taking their children to Africa, this is a relatively budget conscious way to see animals in the wild. Leave your malaria pills at home when you visit. Madikwe, a South African private ame reserve the size of