CONNECT NOW Technology can help you appreciate the natural world as long as you keep a sense of balance.
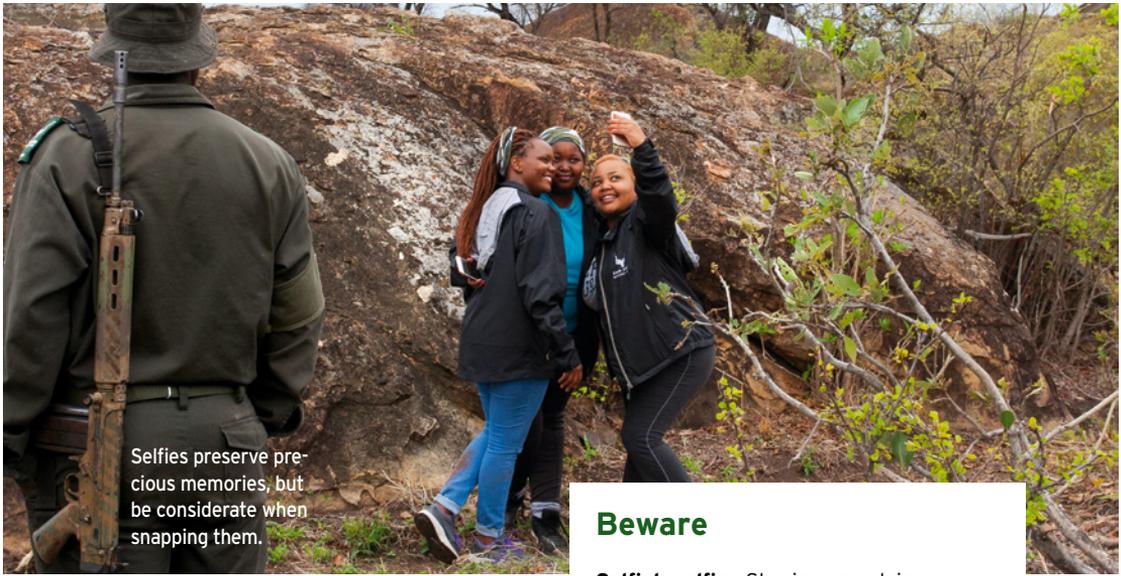

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Keep a check on TECH

Technology isn't inherently good or bad. It's both, and everyone needs to find their own balance. **By Morgan Trimble**

Screen addicts can squander an entire holiday without embracing a single moment in nature. Brandishing a selfie stick, buzzing phone and Bluetooth speaker, they can easily ruin the experience for others, too. But purists who demand we forgo tech entirely are out of touch. In decades past, Luddites also argued against tarred roads, electricity and hot water showers in national parks. And few technophobes today would disparage hi-tech innovations such as binoculars.

Advancing technology gives conservationists an unprecedented understanding of the natural world and how to protect it. Tech also makes it easier than ever to plan and book a trip, get there, understand what we see, and later share our experience with others around the world. The tips on the following page could help you keep tech in check.

Selfies preserve precious memories, but be considerate when snapping them.

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Embrace

Mobile booking and customer support
Most *Wild Card* parks offer handy online bookings to check availability in real time as well as reserve and pay for accommodation. You can even book a day visit to Kruger in advance online, which is recommended during busy holiday weekends. Problems? Representatives at *Wild*'s call-centre (0861 GO WILD) are waiting to help with *Wild Card* queries.

Connect and plan On sanparks.org's busy forums you can connect with nature lovers, get advice and learn more about park experiences. While you're there, check the webcams for waterhole action around the country and listen to the growing selection of podcasts.

Guide book apps Now that many field guides come in app form, it's possible to carry an entire library in your pocket. My favourites include *Sasol eBirds, eFrogs, eSnakes and eTrees of Southern Africa, Stuarts' SA Mammals, Woodhall's Butterflies RSA* and *Insects of South Africa. Roberts VII Multimedia Birds of Southern Africa* presents the information from the 1296-page, 5 kg reference book at the swipe of a finger. Besides the content from the paper books, apps offer handy features such as filtering species by GPS location or physical features, audio playback of calls, photographs, videos and digital checklists. Apps can be cheaper than books, and your back will thank you.

Beware

Selfish selfies Sharing your trip through social media helps build appreciation for our parks. But people can get carried away in pursuit of 'likes'. Instagram is fighting the disturbing trend of taking selfies with wildlife or captive animals. Hashtags such as #lionselfie and #cheetahcuddles now trigger a warning about wildlife exploitation. Even seasoned wildlife photographers need the occasional reminder to think twice about pursuing that perfect picture, to never trample or endanger plants or animals or annoy fellow visitors. And remember, drones are strictly forbidden inside and over national parks.

Geotagging Remember to turn off geotagging on your phone or camera when sharing photos of species valuable to poachers such as rhinos, elephant and cycads. Some devices and apps embed the exact location where a photo was taken, which is passed along through social media. Apps like iSpot and iNaturalist are fantastic for learning about nature and sharing observations. But even these could lead criminal collectors to rare and endangered species.

Live sightings reports It's tempting to check live sightings reports through apps or social media to head straight for the action on a game drive. But SANParks advises against it, citing increased reports of speeding, road kills and road rage. Rather take a leisurely drive instead to enjoy the thrill, spontaneity and sense of discovery in finding your own sightings. 🐾