



What are they Thinking?

(It's now evening, and today has been an 'office' day for Dave. The stack of prints he worked on all during the past week is done, but before starting the next batch he had a lot of delayed desk work that had to be taken care of - mail to be answered, bookkeeping to be done, and some new 'Story A Week' stories to be prepared. So he has been sitting in front of the computer all day. It hasn't been all work though ... Let's pick up the story as Boots the Cat strolls into the room ...)

Boots: Good grief Dave, are you still staring at that screen? That's what you were doing when I dropped by early this morning, and you're still sitting in exactly the same position!

Dave: Hey, I did go for a morning swim just before lunch! And anyway, I can't help it; these jobs have to be done soon, and it's better to lump them all together into an 'office marathon' and get them out of the way before resuming printmaking work.

(Boots sits beside Dave, and looks up at the computer monitor. She's not interested in the spreadsheet that fills most of the screen, but up in one corner something is moving ... a video is playing ...)

Boots: Aha ... you can't fool me! You're not working at all; you're watching that African Webcam again!

Dave: Well ... ummm ... yes, for a little bit. I keep it there visible while I work on other things. Sometimes an hour or so goes by with nothing happening, but at other times, many animals come into view. It's very interesting. Look at those birds for example; do you know what those are?

Boots: Birds? Those huge things are birds?

Dave: Yes, it's called an ostrich. It's a kind of bird that can't fly actually.

(Boots' eyes are big and round as she stares at the screen in fascination. A big juicy fat bird ... that can't fly away ...)

Dave: Boots! Don't even think about hunting one of those; if you tried, you would probably get kicked into orbit! Anyway you can forget it, there are no ostriches in our neighbourhood! I've been watching these for quite a while. They came down to the pond for a drink, but since then have just been standing there doing nothing. I wonder what they are thinking about?

Boots: Why should they be thinking of anything?

Dave: Well as I watch these animals, I want to understand what they are doing, and try and get a feeling for what their life is like. Some of them seem to be easier to comprehend than others; that group of impala for example - they came for a drink, chewed at some of the short grass over at that side of the pond, and are now resting in the shade under the trees. I can understand all that, and could even imagine myself doing that sort of thing.

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Then earlier today, an elephant family came by: a large bull, a slightly smaller one I assume is his mate, a middle-size one that looked for all the world like a teenager, and then a baby. They drank while the old guy watched over them, the two kids played in the water for a while, and the family then strolled off. That too, seems very understandable to me ... almost human, even.

But that ostrich just stands there with a blank look on its face. Every few minutes he takes a step, but then just stands there. What is going on in his mind?

Boots: Maybe that's the safest way for him to rest, out in the open, and ready to run. I ... ahem ... know something about that sort of thing, and I can tell you that it would be very difficult to sneak up on him, standing out there in that exposed place.

Dave: Perhaps you're right. I guess it's just that compared to those other animals I mentioned - which are mammals after all, and thus not too 'far away' from me - this ostrich is such a strange creature, it seems impossible to imagine what his thoughts might be.

(Boots starts to lose interest in such a ridiculous conversation, and jumps up onto the bookshelf next to Dave. From there she will leap up onto a high ledge and sneak through a small opening into the top cupboard, her favourite place for a nap on the piles of washi offcuts that are stored there.)

Boots: Anyway it's nap time; I'll talk to you later ...

Dave: OK see you later. I can guess what your dreams are going to be about ... You going to try catching this guy?

Boots: Well I'm sure not going to waste any time wondering what he is thinking about, just whether or not he has noticed me creeping closer!