

# The Tail of Two

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The ground pangolin spends most of its life in solitude, partnering up once a year in an attempt to produce the next generation. Tswalu Kalahari Reserve gives ground pangolins the opportunity to establish home ranges that often overlap. Overlapping home ranges means that male individuals are bound to bump into one another at some point, but there are no records of interactions in the wild. I was lucky enough to witness one of these rare events. Using radio-telemetry, I tracked and located a male pangolin in the early morning light, just before sunrise. To my surprise, I noticed not one, but two male pangolins intertwined on the surface of the red Kalahari sand. The events that followed can perhaps be described as a 'dominance display'. The bigger of the two pangolins (named P4) walked circles around the smaller one (P6), breathing in and out so deeply that it sounded like what one could almost describe as hissing. P6 behaved in a submissive manner, staying curled up in a ball for as long as P4 was around. On the occasion that P4 walked a few metres away, P6 took the opportunity to make a break for it, only to be stopped in his tracks by P4 who returned and continued the 'hissing' and circling. P6 bowed his head and curled up once more in submissiveness. After several minutes, the display ended when P4 walked his final circle and climbed on top of P6, occasionally lifting the scales of P6 and flicking his tongue between them to snatch some ants that had been lodged in between the brown plates of armour. The deep breathing subsided, and P4 peacefully closed his eyes and fell asleep on top of P6. The two lay there for several minutes before P4 got up and ventured down a nearby burrow, giving P6 the chance to walk off into the Kalahari sunrise heading to his own burrow. I wonder if P6 was as perplexed as I was.

