



Monday, June 14, 2010

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1. Shenton Safaris - Newsletters

1.1. August 2006

1.2. Greetings all

Greetings from the bush. The last few months since we opened camps have been busy as usual. Apart from getting the camps up and running - which in the case of Mwamba requires a complete re-build each year - we also grade all the roads from Mfuwe up to Kaingo, including the game-viewing loops north of the Luwi River. Our tractor and tow grader have worked over-time, but the end result is that we have the smoothest roads and most comprehensive system of game-viewing loops in the valley. We have also recently put in a track to the famed Mwamba Sands and Baobab Forest, in order to assist ZAWA and SLCS in tackling the poaching in this previously inaccessible area.

June and July have been excellent for game-viewing with the majority of our guests enjoying the specialities of this area – the big cats, Thornicrofts Giraffe and Cooksons Wildebeeste. The sheer concentration of plains game in the area including the many herds of buffalo, elephant, zebra, impala, puku, waterbuck and kudu never fails to put a busy mind at ease and we have had some very relaxed guests leaving camp recently. There have been excellent sightings too, of the 50 strong eland herd that moves between Mwamba plains and Lion Plain. A special treat for Mwamba Camp has been some close up encounters with a pack of 12 wild dog which seem to be about to den not far from the camp; on a couple of occasions last week they even ran right through camp chasing an antelope. We've also enjoyed the company of a lone hyena cub at a den situated in between the two camps.

I took a party of four on a “camp-out” recently to a place I call "Kalalmpanga lagoon", which is about 8km in-land from Kaingo and Mwamba Camps. As we approached with our porters we had to split a 400 strong herd of buffalo, which were grazing on the rich dambo grass; it was classic Africa – the herd kicking up dust as every individual wheeled around to watch us through golden afternoon sunlight.



Camp-outs are back-to-the-wilds camping – with just a net between you and the stars. Sitting around the camp-fire we were visited by a 3m python which just continued cruising harmlessly between bedrolls. A good night's sleep lying close to the earth is always punctuated by rustles in the grass, hyenas howling and in this case some excited wild dogs close to camp. The long night was also filled with lions calling between their respective prides and also between individuals within the prides. We were well and truly in the Mwamba pride's territory, which we now know has increased to 10 females, 20 cubs of various ages (3 to 18 months) and two strong Luangwa males. This pride splinters into 3 groups presumably to cover more ground; with so many mouths to feed they need to be hunting almost continuously.



The hides are all up except for the Carmine bee-eater hide which is awaiting the next colony. The last waterhole hide at Mwamba is in position and just beginning to yield results. The hippo hide, once again expertly rebuilt by Patrick is a winner. The 200 or so hippos congregated on this corner as usual provide close-up opportunities for guests doing a mid-day activity from one of the camps. The elephant hide has been busy with starlit sleep-outs. It only sleeps two, and we've had a number of parent/child combinations as well as couples electing to choose this option.

Finally we have found time to grade a track out to the Mwamba Sands area (an area far inland where this tributary changes from a sand river to a mud river after disappearing for a few kilometres). On the way there one crosses a vast plain and then come to the amazing baobab forest. It's an interesting piece of bush and yields good birds, eland and even roan antelope. This road also provides the South Luangwa Conservation Society and ZAWA road access to undertake anti-poaching activities.

Leopard sightings recently have been exceptional. Jules and I spent an hour with Goldie's Son – the

Kaingo male yesterday evening. He was lying very calmly on a big curved branch of a rain tree and was not at all concerned about us. Just the night before we had watched a female hunting baboons high up in the ebony trees along Acacia loop. A week ago Ian, who was guiding at Mwamba, watched a female leopard leap 5m to the next tree after she became stranded very high up a tree in pursuit of guinea fowl - not to mention the four in a tree which were the subject of Jules' last newsletter (click [here](#) to see Leopard Interlude images). Leopards clearly do well in the areas immediately around Kaingo and Mwamba – and so they should with all this game around.



Working with us a caterer this year is Ally Blakey . She is Australian born, but has spent the last few years working in this part of Africa. Assisting myself, Ian and Patrick on the guiding front is Innocent Tembo who spent the last few years at Lion Camp which is not operating this year.

It's election year in Zambia. Finally a date has been set so far for polling (28th of Sept) and we should get the inside story shortly from my elder brother Rolf, who is standing for Member of Parliament in the Mwambeshi constituency outside Lusaka. His previous 4 year term as MP was marked by his tireless energy for reform and his input will be invaluable in the new government that needs to consolidate the country's economic growth and address the perennial issues of poverty, education, employment, and the HIV epidemic. Rolf's special focus is in making the country's natural resources sustainable alongside human development.

To close I have added a photo of a very rare bird: a leucistic guinea fowl - which is part of a flock on Guinea fowl plain close to Kaingo Camp.

1.3. Hope to see you out here. In the mean time “ salani bwino” – stay well.

1.4. Derek Shenton



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