



Monday, June 14, 2010

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1. Shenton Safaris - Newsletters

1.1. January 2008

1.2. Greetings all

1.3. I know its been a while since my last newsletter – please accept my apologies it has been a very busy year.

1.4. This newsletter is dedicated to my late father, John Barry
Shenton, 30/04/29 – 21/03/2007



1.5.

1.6.

A brief biography of Barry's life and times can be found [here](#)

2007 Floods

The rains that fell on the Luangwa Valley river system between November 2006 and April 2007 were the

highest recorded in 30 years; there was considerable flooding when the Luangwa and its tributaries overflowed their banks causing a lot of erosion and silting. Local people and camps in the valley were all affected as was the wildlife. Kaingo Camp was flooded – see photos, but fortunately the camp escaped serious damage. Most of the game simply moved 5km further inland from the flood line so did not seem to be too affected. Smaller ground dwellers like porcupine and aardvark did struggle a bit, especially if they left it too late on an island before making a break for higher ground. In fact on one of my trips up to camp I discovered a porcupine living inside the main open dining area hiding behind the bar freezer; it was alive but weak, having plenty to drink but nothing to eat. Sadly we came back to the camp in early May to find it had not survived.

After the floods it became apparent that at least along the high water line, grass would be a problem in later months as whole areas had been washed over or covered in silt – and many grass seeds scoured out. This was a problem in the latter part of the dry season especially for specialist grazers such as puku and zebra. It wasn't so much of a problem for mixed feeders (like impala and buffalo) and browsers (kudu and giraffe for example) who had plenty of bushes and trees to feed on. The trees and bushes benefited the most from this cycle of nature.



Flood victims making the most of their situation with a positive attitude (Mfuwe).



The Luangwa Bridge (water level 2ms from bridge base)



The river meets the Kaingo Chitenge: bricking up the doorway (Jan 2007)



Guests would get very wet feet if trying to jump on vehicles here as normal

Looking from the Kaingo Chitenge down to chalet 3 (Jan 2007)



Concrete table at staff quarters; Kaingo

Looking out onto Lion plain - we found hippos surfing here!



Mwamba's tea terrace - completely submerged. You can just make out the roof of the guide's chalet in the distance (left)

2007 Safari Season

We kicked off in mid May after some frantic camp cleaning, re-building and road grading. Kaingo was given a makeover in the form of outdoor baths for four of its chalets (the remaining two will get theirs' this coming year), a big new deck and also a new elephant hide. The deck over the river is now big enough to accommodate the whole camp for lunches and makes good use of the cool breezes and eye-level panoramic views of the wildlife in and alongside the Luangwa River.

The 2007 safari season was our busiest so far and at times became a logistical chessboard with all the inter-camp and airport transfers involved. We made it through without a hitch thanks to our hard working staff at both camps and all our guests left far more relaxed than when they arrived having enjoyed a wonderful safari; which of course is one of our primary goals.

Wildlife sightings

We had some excellent sightings throughout the season including lots of predator action and species interaction. The big cats as usual did not fail us and this special area lived up to its reputation of exciting and captivating for all those who experienced it.

Our local Thornicroft giraffe families thrived on all the new arboreal foliage and the large numbers of waterbuck suggested they were also doing very well post the floods. By mid season there were hundreds of zebra being drawn to the yellow "wild-rice" grass that covers the top end of Lion plain between Kaingo and Mwamba.

The “Mwamba pride” of lions had swelled to 34 but was split into two and sometimes three groups. There were plenty of cubs of varying ages and lots of lion action from this pride right up until we closed camp at the end of October.

The “Hollywood pride” unfortunately lost their beautiful male - Long Face - after the Mwamba males beat him up and took over his territory. This has left the Mwamba males with a huge area to patrol. They are excellent breeders however, and did mate with the Hollywood females giving us 9 more cubs to photograph.

I wouldn't expect the Mwamba males to hold on to both prides for another season but we'll just have to wait and see who's in charge next May.

There were lions everywhere this year and one day Ian – one of our senior guides -counted over 56 different individuals during the course of the day just on game drives from Kaingo. At Mwamba bush camp, apart from the nightly visits by elephants, guests very often had lions nearby – either drinking from the waterhole in camp or passing through. More than once after dinner coffee round the fire had to be cancelled due to the lions getting there first!

We had good sightings of Cookson's Wildebeeste all through the season and it looks like our local herd based around Mwamba is still increasing in number and migrating towards the river earlier each season. From July onwards we had a nice little group permanently on Lion plain which was great. The buffalo herds were huge as usual and we had good sighting of eland on and off during the season and even roan antelope a couple of times.

Our new elephant hide worked out really well and we have more and more guests opting to add an elephant hide sleep out to their itineraries. Some of our guests even managed to photograph a bull mating with a young cow on the edge of the river (during a visit to the hide at midday) which is highly unusual. Another guest opted to remain in the hide after a sleep out rather than going on her morning activity and was thrilled to watch a pride of lions crossing the River underneath her.

The carmine bee-eaters were difficult to get close to at first and kept moving their colony, but finally we found a suitable nesting site in the riverbank and most visitors to the hide got some great photographic opportunities of these colourful migrants.

We had plenty of dedicated wildlife photographers through the camps this year ending up with a BBC film team using the hippo hide to get footage of fighting hippos; they were not disappointed.



Using my farm John Deere tractor to grade access and loop roads right from Mfuwe and around our camps meant that we could achieve extremely smooth low-impact roads whilst at the same time helping National Parks with their heavy schedule in making the park accessible. We also graded out towards the fascinating Baobab Forest along the upper reaches of the Mwamba river and also “discovered” a secret lagoon way out in the bush which waters hundreds of animals including a huge herd of buffalo. I would like to use this beautiful spot for camp-outs and picnics next season.

Below I have attached a few photos taken over the course of last season which represent glimpses through our window into nature’s cycle.















For more wildlife images from last season [click here](#) to see Jules' photographic newsletters

I wrote some leopard tales recently and we will post these in the next month or so, so you have something else to keep you going through our long rains.





Hanada Orphanage

Early in 2007 we became involved with the building of Mfuwe's first children's orphanage - the Hanada Orphanage. We are working together with the local Zambian's women's group who initially set up the Hanada Trust and were based at some rented offices near Mfuwe airport. We have now secured a much larger piece of land from our local chief Hon. Chief Mnkahnya and have so far made a well and are in the process of building the main centre.

The Hanada Trust currently assists in excess of 260 orphans via supporting their extended families, however approximately 70 children of these children are in need of housing and full orphanage care.

Jules and I are currently solely funding this initiative with the support of guest donations, but we also hope to get some donor support after we have built the original structures. I have attached a couple of photos of the work in the early stages. Please do get in touch if you have any ideas regarding raising additional funds.



Digging the well



The finished well with hand pump



Initial laying of foundations for the main office/kitchen block



The building team.

Packing up

Having packed up camp in early November, we spent another month at our base “plot” (where we grow all our fruit and veg for the camp) near Mfuwe airport consolidating things for the long off-season. Most of our local staff go back to their homes and villages for a season of farming – maize, millet and rice mainly and only return back to work in mid April for the next season’s camp building. We leave three camp watchmen up at Kaingo who care-take the camp for the six month off season. This is so the condition of the camp buildings and equipment does not deteriorate over the long rains which so far are quite heavy – hopefully they will not cause the river system to break its banks again this year!

Anti-poaching

As usual during the rains we sponsor anti-poaching fly-camps in our area of the Park in conjunction with ZAWA (National Parks Service) and SLCS (South Luangwa Conservation Society). These patrols have had a very positive effect over the last few years in off-setting the impact that poaching gangs have on the wildlife, which is mainly for supplying the bush-meat industry in the major cities of Zambia.

The SLCS is a registered non-profit society with charitable status and a binding constitution formed by stakeholders in the tourism industry. Its aims are designed to support law enforcement with ZAWA, and also strives to mitigate human-animal conflict in the game management areas. If you are interested in finding out more about SLCS and /or are in a position to assist their activities please check out their very informative website : www.slcs-zambia.org

2008

After a brief trip to across Zambia to Livingstone to see my mother and sister, Jules and I flew off to Sydney, Australia to await the arrival of our first born in late Feb.

Just before we left camp, Zamtel, our national phone company arrived with a new radio phone to install. Surprise, surprise, as we had been hoping to get such a phone for camp for the last couple of years. Anyway it works perfectly meaning I can stay in touch with the watchmen at Kaingo – deep in the bush all the way from Sydney! So far all is good and the Luangwa River is rising normally and vegetation is growing well.

I would like to thank all those who joined us on safari in 2007 and look forward to sharing the abundance of Luangwa Valley with you in the near future.

Until later then, salani bwino (stay well) and best wishes for2008!

Derek Shenton

1.7.





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