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March 2003

Greetings from a lush green Luangwa Valley! Everywhere there is growth as the rains continue to bring moisture and life to this part of the rift valley. Impalas that were born in December are already half grown. Birds that nest during the wet season such as Yellow billed stork and seed-eaters such as the weavers and fire-crowned bishop are at the peak of their breeding cycle; one can also see plenty of guinea fowl chicks and Egyptian geese.



On a recent trip up the river by boat to Kaingo I saw a very nice herd of eland near the ebony forest behind Kaingo Camp. They are often found here seen during the rains and move back toward the plains and woodlands close to Mwamba Camp for the dry season. This is in contrast to the local herd of Cooksons Wildebeeste which normally come down towards the Luangwa river late in the dry season in search of water.

On my trip there was plenty of lion and hyena activity around both camps. Cruising by boat up the Mwamba river at this time of year is so different to the walking safaris we conduct over the same ground starting just two months later in May/June; there are hippo and crocs on every corner and the unusual sight of hippos sunbathing right out on Lion Plain which of course is more of a swamp. One evening I caught a glimpse of two leopards calling to each other close to our hippo hide/blind close to Kaingo. This used to be part of "Goldie's" territory but since she disappeared last year, surprisingly there has been no new female leopard to take her place. However now this looks to change and it seems we have a new tenant for the Kaingo area!

Also around camp was a huge elephant bull with some of the biggest tusks I have seen in years. This was encouraging, as we have been sponsoring anti-poaching patrols in the area between the two camps during the rains when commercial poaching is most active. Hopefully the presence of scouts has worked in making 'safe haven' within this area of the park. While on the subject of elephant, the latest figures released by the National Parks

(ZAWA) suggest there are approximately 6000 in the South Luangwa and probably 8000 in the whole valley. The population is fairly static and always under threat from man's greed for land, meat and ivory. Tourism however definitely makes a difference by generating revenues and creating a presence so please keep coming to what used to be known in the 70's as "The Valley of the Elephants".

At the moment we are preparing for the forthcoming season; our vegetable farm near the airport is all planted up but we are having problems with giant snails which breed at this time of year: it is hard to kill them knowing they live as long as 15 years and that they mate only once in a lifetime!

For senior staff this year we have Deb Tittle, one of the best guides in the valley who returns to Kaingo

after a break of a year. She will be joined by Patrick Njobvu, Kerri Rademeyer (one of the most improved guides of 2002) and Sadie Barber who will be catering at Kaingo. I will also be around of course and am looking forward to celebrating Kaingo's 10th anniversary in August.

During last December/January I traveled to Argentina and Brazil for a quick look at that continent. I was amazed by rivers like the Parana and in particular the Amazon with its huge volume and 300km wide mouth. These awesome sights were complimented by the huge variety of flora and fauna in the jungle. Equally inspiring were the glaciers down in Patagonia, which come off the Andes. The people in both countries were very friendly and exhibit a huge range of cultures - the main one seeming to be how to party! Some words I picked up which might be useful to any travelers planning to go over there while the exchange rates are good include the following:

Spanish: '*parrilla*' means barbecue while '*chica linda*' means pretty girl

Portuguese: '*flo-dental*' means swimming thong (dental floss)!

Africa still has it for me though; I cannot live without its savannahs and big game. Plus - Zambia is one of the safest destinations on the planet at the moment. Until the next time we meet,

Salani bwino

Derek Shenton

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