



Monday, June 14, 2010

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1. Shenton Safaris - Newsletters

1.1. October 2009

1.2. Greetings all

Amazingly, almost another season has passed us by and there is only 4 weeks to go now till we close camp. We opened on 25 May and although it was fairly quiet for the first two months in terms of bookings, it has picked up hugely from August onwards so hopefully the global recession will be a thing of the past by next year.

Our bank protection work along the river bank adjacent to the main chitenge worked well this last rains, which turned out to be normal, but with most of the precipitation falling late in March/April. This meant there was a lot of water inland in the pans and pools which has been a nice change from other years when important lagoons dry up early. Consequently, we spread out our game-viewing by using more of the productive area around our bush camp – Mwamba . This has paid off in terms of some great game sightings all the way through the season.

Lions:

The three young males that took over “Hollywood” pride and territory seem to have won the five females over and have consolidated their position. The biggest male – approx 210kg – unfortunately killed the previous pride male’s sub-adult cub of about three years who was foolishly still hanging around on the fringes of the territory. There have been three cubs since June and we have been lucky enough to enjoy watching them grow up – they are surely what he was protecting.

The Mwamba pride split up from its epic 36 of the previous year and half of the group (18) moved down to the Mfuwe bridge area where they are doing well and delighting the crowds. The other young ones of the group have mostly dispersed leaving the original core group of 7 females which

are covered by three new males – two dark brothers of about 6 years old and one younger lighter coloured male. However there is another off-shoot of the Mwamba clan which numbers 18 living out at Kapanda lagoon close to the baobab forest – approx 10km NW of Mwamba camp(inland).

Leopards: Though we might not have had quite so many sightings as usual this year , the quality of the sightings has been aweome. The relaxed young female with two cubs based around Mwamba has been a winner; she has made quite a few daylight kills and always brought in the cubs to share the spoils.The other females in the game-viewing area have been caught on camera plenty of times too – prowling, marking, stalking and killing.

Recently the resident Kaingo male has been mating with TWO females at one time. This is almost unheard of and certainly means a) he’s a strong guy and b)we will have more spotted cubs next season.

Wild dog: we have had some good sightings over the season although we are still none the wiser to exactly where the Kaingo pack are denning. According to the researchers, one thing for sure is that numbers are going up in the valley year by year which is great news.

Hippo: we have a new extension to the ever popular hippo hide which allows guests to get safely within 5 m or less of these fascinating animals. The hide is constructed from solid steel railway track so offers the maximum protection from any collateral bumping from boisterous males. The photos that have been coming back have been top quality.

Carmines: The boat hide has been in since 25 august when the first of these pretty migrant bee-eaters appeared. The colony has now grown to over 3000 birds and is a must see for all our guests at this time of year. The site is particularly pleasing as there are plenty of overhanging roots which make ideal perches.

Guides: This year Mayam Njobvu who started with us last season (after 6 years as a guide in the southern end of the park) has really matured as a guide and has spent most of his time at Mwamba- to the delight of all the guests. Mayam is a solid guy and his general knowledge of the bush together with his natural skills. Patrick Njobvu, myself and Freya Reder have been covering mostly Kaingo. Both Freya and Patrick have also been getting rave reviews all season for their guiding – each has their own specialities and each getting great results. We also have a new driving guide – Gondwe. Gondwe is in the second year of his guiding career and whilst he has mostly been doing transfers and midday activities with us so far, he is showing great promise. He is being carefully tutored by Patrick, myself and Freya in the nuances of good photographic guiding.

For the first time ever we employed male caterer/hosts at each of our two camps and so far have not been disappointed with their application and organising skills. Tom from Belgium, and Josh from UK have both demonstrated that it is not only women who can excel in this field.

Alison Cockerell still does an amazing job at keeping it all together – not only organising everyone's bookings, flights and movements but also running the day to day logistics within the camp – we are truly very fortunate to have her skills on board.

Although my dear wife Jules has not been able to come out on many drives due to holding the fort with daughter Sapphire – the photos she still manages to take astonish one and all with their clarity and interpretation of our local wildlife; you only have to look over her monthly newsletters since she first arrived to see what a gift she has. You can see her newsletters [here](#)

Meanwhile Sapphire has been loving her first "walking" year in the bush and is already chatting to the animals that pass her play-cage/pen in front of our house. At one and a half she already has names for the important big and small ones and loves coming out on short excursions. She is a joy to have around and makes us laugh all the time. Needless to say she has me wrapped around her little finger!

Below a few words baby language words from our 18 month safari guide:

Bucky = any kind of antelope; ele = elephant; ka ka = bird; BAoo = baboon; Bobo (with a few head bobs) = monkey; Beh = buffalo; cwoc = croc; LaLa = lion; Miaow = leopard; woo-woo = hyena or wild dog; Zzzzzzzzz – DIE = tsetse fly (she definitely expresses a commonly held sentiment in this house!); doyo = insect

Finally thank you to all our guests and friends who braved the global recession (locally just known as "grobal"), swine flu and huge distances to have visited, returned or referred others on to us this year – we hope you and yours have enjoyed the stay with us and that the safari experience was one to remember.

A selection of drives and walks over the last week as follows:

14 August – 5.30 am: This morning I wanted to show my three guests this morning something of the area inland and away from the main Luangwa river. They had been staying at Kaingo for a several days already and had already had some great game-viewing by vehicle including following the "Hollywood" lion pride on a night kill up on the "shelf" – a large grassy dambo area on a series of hugley game-rich ox-bow lagoons some 6 km north of Kaingo Camp.

Driving out up the "geo-source" track we passed a large dry lagoon called Saddle billed stork lagoon and watched as a massive herd of buffalo made their way across it towards the Mwamba River to drink. The buffalo just kept coming in a long straight line – head to tail – walking straight into the rising sun –gold-tinted dust kicking up they silently marched – what a sight!

Due to late rains this last wet season there has been plenty of water inland in pans and pools which has meant the big herds had little need to come all the way to the Luangwa River and its adjacent lagoons to drink.

A couple of miles further on as we entered mature mopane woodland . This is a great area to see Cookson's Wildebeest as they prefer the short grass that carpets the area. After parking L/Cruiser we set off on our walking safari. This is also the territory of the Mwamba Pride of lion whose numbers have temporarily reduced since their all-time high of 36 two years ago. That said they're such good breeders we expect them to be back up there again in the next few years. Last year the two original males were booted out by a coalition of three -two dark maned brothers of about 6 years and a lighter 5 year old.

This particular morning we spotted one of the dark maned brothers and five females waiting in ambush at Numbu lagoon – an open dambo/plain of about 40 hectares within the mopane. They were cunningly laid up on a thicketed ant-hill and because of this allowed us to get a good look at them without bolting. This is always satisfying as I hate flushing game from their camouflage on walks.

The early light is always great on the big yellow open grasslands and we finished off the walk with some great woodland birding and a good sighting of a group of Cookson's.

A few days later the same group of lions brought down a buffalo behind the ebony forest close to Kaingo – making it their closest kill to the Luangwa river this season.

24 September – 5.30am: A drive with 4 guests up river past Acacia loop yielded Thornicroft giraffe, a fishing party of Yellow Billed storks at Fish Eagle lagoon , various other birds and small game at Pelican lagoon and an hour with the three lion cubs close to Elephant bend.

The mid day activity (about an hour and a half) was taken at the hippo hide. The extension which allows one to be at water level within a few metres of these fantastic animals was a hit with Kaingo guests as not only did they get to photograph hippo , a small group of elephants crossed over the river right in front of them.

The afternoon/night drive out of both Kaingo and Mwamba came back with good results and excited guests after lion hunting and leopard-on-a-kill sightings.

A few days later wild dog are spotted – both on an airport transfer up to camp and also a separate pair close to “long-cut” about 4km from Kaingo.

26 September- 5.30am: after a quick cup of tea we set off for a trip to the carmine bee-eaters. I set this hide up in late August as a colony takes hold along straight section of the Luangwa river. The hide consists of a canvas blind structure erected onto a flat-bottomed river boat which is anchored a few meters from the nesting birds. This year the site chosen by these beautiful and noisy birds has proved to be a good one and after an initial few hundred birds it has grown in size to approximately 3000. The carmine trip involves a short canoe trip from the beach opposite to the hide. Everyone who has been to see the carmines cannot fail to be impressed with the colour, flying skills and nest building techniques.

Midday – a quick outing to the elephant hide to photograph the river crossing from the Nsefu sector of the Park to “our” side – the west bank. This is an exciting way to observe these giants as they take a mud-bath followed by a dusting over.

Back in camp- we found more elephants all around making it very interesting getting all the guests down to the deck for their midday meal. This year due to the heavy crop of ebony berries, we have had elephants in camp virtually every day and night – spending hours picking up these small bush sweets.

4.00pm – the afternoon drive goes out and reports back at 8 pm for dinner after watching yet another lion kill – this time the Hollywood females bringing down an impala . Also – a leopard is seen close to camp in the ebony forest.

1.3. Until next time – take care!

1.4. Salani bwino

1.5. Derek Shenton

1.6. To read back issues of Derek's newsletters, [click here](#)



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