



Thursday, May 27, 2010

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1.1. Rains 2006 Issue (January - March)



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The Luangwa is famous for supporting more hippos and Nile crocodiles than you can poke a stick at; of the former, at least 50 per kilometre of river. Of the latter, enough to make shish kebab out of me in about 2 seconds flat.



Swimming in the Luangwa is a “pleasure” I reserve for ‘suicide month’ - also known as October. The threat of crocodiles pales when stacked against the October heat, and the river levels are low enough that you’d see them coming in time to make a plan. I’ve been taught the one-two eye jab, and the ‘If it bites your arm or leg DON’T try and pull it out – shove it further in and push the valve at the back of its throat – it’ll choke on water’ approach- uhuh - hope the first bite's not a clean one!

I’ll wade knee and sometimes up to thigh deep through the river regularly during September and October. In the company of Derek, an armed scout and intrepid guests, I’ll do all this just to get to the Carmine Hide. I love it, the guests love it and, with the exception of Derek and the scout to whom this is tame entertainment indeed, we return to breakfast feeling like heroes. We’ll have taken some spectacular shots of Carmine Bee Eaters to boot.



HOWEVER, unlike Derek, his father Barry, brother Rolf, cousin Lester and other madcap companions in the fabled River Trips of years gone by, I do not think it's a fantastic idea to swim across tributaries in full flood, chock-a-block with snapping jaws; not with a rifle held above my head, not even with a grenade tucked into my hair band.

It was with this opinion firmly reiterated (and the reminder that we now have a boat which removes the necessity of using the body as a flotation device) that we embarked on our trip to Kaingo.



This year the rains have been late and plentiful. Whilst the river had dropped approximately 1.5 metres from its high point about 10 days prior there was still plenty of flood water. We journeyed by boat deep into the Kaingo ebony grove, and up various other tributaries I'm used to traversing on foot during the dry months.









The valley is a magical otherworld during the rains. It's almost easier to believe that you've stumbled upon a mysterious land at the back of a cupboard, than to believe it's the same valley we left last November, as parched and cracked as the leavings of a century dry well.







The charms of a river trip are utterly different to that of the peak season. Typically you do not expect to see big game along the banks. Prey animals tend to retreat from the riverine areas to dryer ground and of course the predators follow. Stumbling across three leopards on our second afternoon was a most unexpected treat.



The alert impala who tipped us off to the presence of a predator



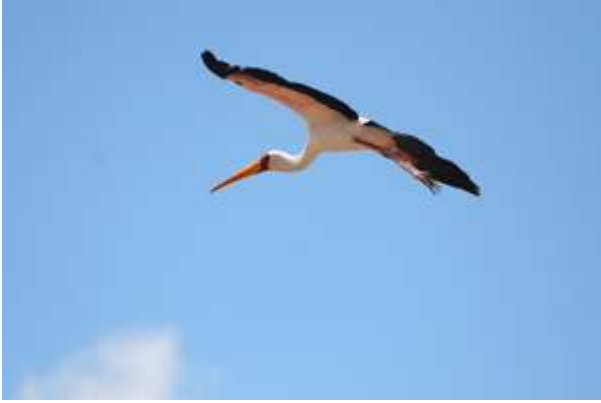
A female in estrous attracted a male on both sides of the bank, much good it did the male on the Nsefu side of the river. Whilst leopards will swim, the Luangwa in flood is a daunting prospect... for leopards that is. For my husband, waiting for the female to come down out of the tree was a perfect excuse for a swim. It was only my fascination with leopards that kept me eagle eyed on the bow of the boat with my binoculars, rather than hovering anxiously over Derek with an oar ready to clock a croc.



The beauty of the rains is undeniable with the dramatic skies and unbelievable lushness of the vegetation. However, this trip reminded me to appreciate the smallest thing, the things that are forgotten in the face of the lion cubs and leopard kills of our dry season.

As we whizzed along the river in the boat I 'wowed' out loud as pieces of the bank scuttled sideways and a troop of baboons emerged, exactly the colour of the earth beneath them and invisible until we disturbed them. Startled crocs slithered into the river with a slinky splash, a flock of Pratincoles wheeled, African Skimmers skimmed, Weavers made their nests and a huge flock of Yellow Billed Storks gathered to wash and preen their pink tinged, breeding plumage. I think my favourite moment was being eyed up by a crocodile hatchling who ducked back to the safety of the murky depths as soon as I turned in its direction.













The next two photos show our camps during the rains. Kaingo from the river with chalet 2 just visible behind the foliage and the remnants of Mwamba (the two staff chalets) from the air. We rebuild Mwamba each season, which takes an entire month. It's beautiful to see the area reclaimed by the bush, to see the the proof of the minimal impact we have during our occupancy in the dry season.



We spent the last night of our trip with our friends the Coppingers. John took me on a stunning microlight flight the next morning. The morning was slightly overcast and I'm certainly no expert at maneuvering that huge lens whilst hurtling through the air at height and speed, but the following images show the valley both from a macro scale and different vantage point.





We predominantly focussed our flight over the Mwamba area. It was very satisfying to see game in abundance. This area has traditionally been a huge target for poachers in the bush meat and ivory trades. For the past six years we have been privately funding anti-poaching patrols to complement ZAWAs anti-poaching efforts, and we are definitely getting positive results.







There was so much I didn't manage to capture on film, the hatchling crocodile, an enormous catfish snapping its jaws shut on a Mchenja berry, the pining male leopard backlit by the setting sun on the Nsefu bank, but hopefully the above selection gave you an impression of the Luangwa river during the rains.

I have a few more sets of piccies from our rains for you. The first are from New Year's Eve. We took a quick trip back to celebrate the coming of the new year with our valley pals. These elephant photos are taken at that time and you'll notice how low the river still was at that point.





Next we have a batch of photos of Sable, a stunning and rare antelope extremely difficult to find in South Luangwa. There is a large wild herd near our farm in Mkushi.





Finally I'll leave you with a couple of pictures from our visit to Chimfunshi Chimpanzee orphanage. Sheila Siddle and her family have been rescuing mistreated chimps from all round the world for over 20 years. They currently have 111 chimpanzees and operate solely on donation.

For more information on Chimfunshi and how you can donate go to: <http://www.chimfunshi.org.za/pages/adopt.html>







These two flower shots were also taken at Chimfunshi...



So, you may have noticed we've just redesigned the website. It's still in the process of development and I have yet to fully load the e-card galleries. If you see any photo on the website you'd like to be able to send as an e-card do let me know and if it's at all possible I'll load it into the galleries.

All this work on the website has meant I'm not QUITE up to date with my newsletters. I am yet to do October's from 2005 and they were the BEST piccies. Keep your eyes out over the next few weeks.

This year I'll endeavour to do my newsletters in a more timely fashion and also to get Derek to do more than one a season – he's a man of the land and loathes the confines of the office, but I'll do my best.

1.4. Until May then

1.5. Jules

1.6. Previous Issues

- [September 2005 Newsletter](#)
- [August 2005 Newsletter](#)
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