



MESSAGE STICK

April 2010

Easter is here already and I am dazed at the speed at which the year is passing - it must be because we are having a lot of fun with Destinations Africa and enjoying the great feedback that we receive from our clients on returning from their safaris!

I am busy planning my next visit to Africa in May. I am going to try out the new Virgin Premium Economy flights that depart from Melbourne. It is a longer trip than the Qantas flight from Sydney but we have many clients that travel from Melbourne so I shall report on it later. Each year the Indaba Travel Expo is held at this time in Durban to showcase the African tourism industry and it is a great opportunity for me to learn about new places, activities and services that are being offered by the industry. It is also a lovely chance to make new friends, meet old friends and renew acquaintances. I am going to make this a quick visit as we are visiting East Africa and Southern Africa later in the year. More about the Indaba when I get back.

June and July will be quiet months for us insofar as travel to South Africa is concerned due to the previously mentioned price gouging by many hotels. However we have many people going to East Africa instead for their Safaris. This has also resulted in an unprecedented number of bookings during August, September and October to Southern Africa. As this is such a lovely time to view wildlife it is no wonder that most lodges are full.

Rainfall seems to have been plentiful at most of our destinations this season and the Zambezi river is very high - Lake Kariba has had some of the sluice gates opened and the lower Zambezi is well up. The newsletter from Chiawa that follows will give you some idea. The Sabi Sands too have had a good rainy season that augurs well for the animals this winter as there will be plenty of grass.

News from Savanna Private Game Reserve

(With thanks and acknowledgement to Savanna and Paddy Hagelthorne)

We have had an amazing summer, with rain on a regular basis, which has made the growth of grass on our properties phenomenal. Whilst this has made game viewing a little more difficult, and the rangers have had to work a bit harder, we have still had some incredible viewing!

Since our last newsletter where I said that there wasn't much chance of the Ximungwe cub surviving as a lone cub, having to move with its mother and the pride from an early age, this cub has proved me wrong! Against all odds it has survived, and is doing extremely well. It has also been accepted by the adult males, who allow it to play with them and climb all over them, pulling ears and tails!



Two of the other Ximungwe females have also produced cubs. The one has only shown us a brief visual of a cub in a thicket, while we have only seen the other cub on one occasion. We are afraid that this cub might have died, as the mother was not sure what to do with it, and left it out in the open while she went off to join the rest of the pride. However, she might well have come back and moved it while we were not there.

The four big males that frequent our area have been camped in the south for the past few months, and we have had regular viewing of these magnificent animals!



The Ottawa pride continues to frequent the northern part of our concession, and the four young cubs are doing exceptionally well. What is interesting is that, on a number of occasions, a couple of the sub-adults from the previous litter have been left to babysit the younger cubs, while the rest of the pride go off hunting. I have never seen this happen before.



The leopards have been a little scarce of late by our standards: instead of seeing six or seven leopards on a three-night stay, we are only seeing two or three. The reason is that the Makubela female has two cubs, which we have only seen briefly, as she has kept them well hidden just outside our concession. They are getting to an age now where she will be taking them to kills, as they are over eight weeks old, and will have started eating meat. This will increase our chances of seeing them more regularly.



We are also very pleased to tell you that the Hlabankunzi female also has cubs which she is hiding in some rocks in the central part of our concession. She seems to be a very attentive mother and doesn't wander far from her den site when hunting, so this also restricts our viewing of her. We believe that the Metsi female has had a litter of cubs, but seems to have lost them already. We found her lactating, but two weeks later the milk supply had dried up, which is a sure sign that she has lost her cubs. She also is moving long distances in very thick areas, making it hard for us to find her!

Mambiri and her cub have been our saviours from a leopard-viewing point of view. The cub is eleven months old now and is spending a lot more time on her own, while Mambiri goes off hunting.



The Lisbon male has made a couple of appearances near Savanna Camp. This male is becoming increasingly relaxed each time we see him. He is a huge male and we only hope that he will extend his territorial boundaries further into our area. From the photo below, you will see that he is very dark and the size of his head and neck is an indication of how powerful and strong this male actually is.



We have been very fortunate for the past three months to have had wild dogs permanently on our concession. This pack of six dogs has been utilising our whole driving

area, probably because our hyena populations are lower than normal, and the dogs are finding it a suitable place to be without this competition. This is a highly efficient pack which has been seen killing up to three impala in a morning. We are very privileged to have these rare animals frequenting our concession on such a regular basis. I have known people that have been visiting the game reserves for 20 years without ever seeing a wild dog.



The cheetah has again been making frequent visits into our areas, but it has been difficult to find him owing to the long grass. However, he did extend his stay in our area for over a week on one occasion.



Our rhino viewing has been exceptional, and a few days ago we were delighted to see that the female with the very long horn has moved back into our area. Her calf is now quite big and she has probably conceived again, which usually happens when the calf is approximately a year old. Their gestation is 16 months, so it will be around two and a half years that this current calf will be made independent, and is likely to join up with other sub-adult rhino in the area, whilst the mother goes off to produce her new calf.



The herds of buffalo have been making regular inroads into our open areas, and there is something very impressive about seeing a herd of 500 - 600 buffalo coming down to a waterhole to drink.

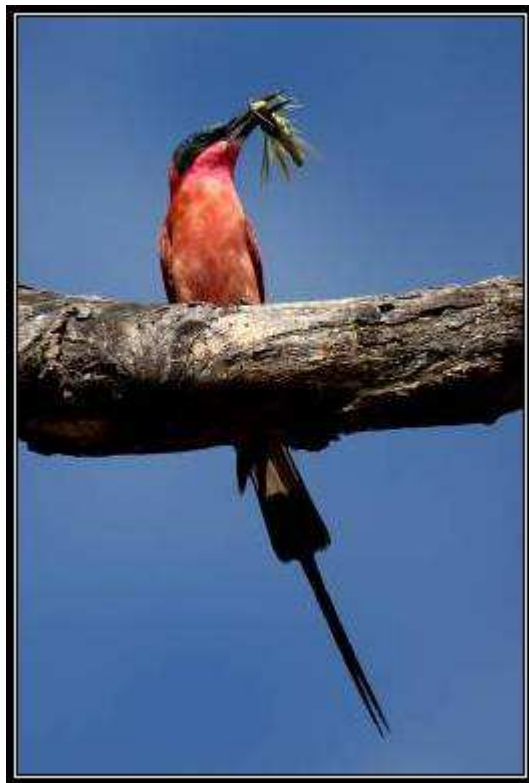


What has been evident this year has been the large herd of zebra and wildebeest that have been camped on our open areas. Normally, we don't have large herds of these herbivores, but this year has been an exception! Herds of up to 30 zebra and 20-30

wildebeest have been viewed on a regular basis. On a couple of occasions we have had up to four different species all grazing together on the same clearing! A few days ago we had buffalo, wildebeest, zebra, impala and rhino in one sighting!



Summer also brings in the migratory birds that are very often incredibly beautiful. Some of the most beautiful of these are the bee-eaters, of which two species, the European and the Carmine Bee-eater, have been in abundance this year.



News from Chiawa and Old Mondoro - Zambia - Lower Zambezi
(With thanks and acknowledgement to Grant Cumings, Chiawa and Old Mondoro)

A long overdue newsletter coming at you but I beg forgiveness having been to'ing and fro'ing between camps and settling in our two new fabulous management couples into Chiawa Camp and Old Mondoro.

So without further ado let me introduce Steve and Lynn Boyd who are already well settled into life at Chiawa and being kept busy with getting our new Honeymoon Tent ready in time for our first safari - a fabulous wedding party. Steve and Lynn hail from Australia and come to us with varied and relevant experience having worked together at two high end safari camps in Tanzania before joining us here - Zambia's gain is Tanzania's loss. We are certain that they will help Chiawa Camp continue to maintain its position at the very top of the



heap and keep improving standards and setting new benchmarks of service at one of Africa's finest safari camps. Chiawa's guiding team for 2010 is its strongest yet, headed up by the now ubiquitous Paul Grobler supported by Boaz Chizuwa, Daniel Susiku, Dispenser Chizuwa, Sebastian Sakala and joining us from Old Mondoro is John Pereira. A formidable team and yet again almost certainly Africa's finest. That's 6 pro guides for 16 guests!



Moving downstream to Old Mondoro I would like to introduce Etienne and Leana Oosthuizen, he from Zimbabwe and she from South Africa but both having spent the last 6 years working and managing at some of South Africa's best safari lodges. They have settled into being in the "real" bush with gusto and their immediate task is to ensure that the new rooms at Old Mondoro are ready with their new tweaks as promised for May. After which guests will also get to enjoy fabulous service and hospitality in this

finest of bush camps.

Of course Levy Farao and Morat Madzwanya have made their return and who together with Etienne will make up yet another fabulous team of guides. That's 3 pro guides for just 8 guests.

For those of you who don't know, Old Mondoro for 2010 will be offering catch & release fishing along with the full range of safari activities - here's to a fabulous year at Old Mondoro. Indeed bookings are very much on the up and up for Old Mondoro with a 25% increase in bookings so far compared to last year!



Some of you may know that due to all the flooding this year, despite a bone dry January it then decided to rain incessantly for 6 weeks, the authorities have had to open 3 flood gates on Kariba Dam.



Fortunately each gate is only half way open so the river has not come up as high as we expected, but enough to cover our dock, creep up onto Chiawa's front lawn and up to the fire place. That's about as high as we would want, take a look at the temporary harbour we have had to build!

You can imagine the look on my face though as we headed down the Zambezi in our boat, loaded to the hilt with supplies, when I got a message that they had opened 5 flood gates completely - luckily that was just a bad rumour but it didn't stop me parking the boat close to a large hill until we got good info!!



The good news is that the channels are all being flushed out so we look forward to seeing some waterholes this year instead of weed filled depressions and which should be great for the water fowl.

At Chiawa Camp the Zambezi has backed up along the dry riverbed which has attracted some nice bream which I am thinking of throwing a fly line at when I am back in camp.

Speaking of which we have had lions calling most nights just behind camp, competing with the lions singing from across the Zambezi and some spectacular old ele bulls in camp, checking up on our progress and helping with the pruning of errant bushes.

I hope you enjoy the photos of camp as it is this time of year, complete with high water, including



this beauty of a huge bull ele with his reflection in the water.



Thanks to Anne Sophie from Switzerland who has sent us this great photo of a Chiawa Camp water bottle, seemingly misplaced in the snow but NO, it's doing its good work even overseas - saving Africa and everywhere else too from plastic in its landfills. A seemingly small gesture in the middle of Africa has saved on about 3,000 water bottles in Zambia alone yet reaches out globally and saves on plastic bottles everywhere - can anyone top this photo with their "misplaced" water bottles?

The next time I write both camps should be open and I hope to have photos of the new rooms at Old Mondoro as well as the new honeymoon tent at Chiawa. But before I go I am proud to say that Chiawa Camp has again been nominated for some fabulous awards this year; Best Safari Camp in Africa, Best Guiding Team in Africa, Best Eco Camp in Africa, Best for Cuisine in Africa - all under the *Good Safari Guide* Banner. Chiawa Camp has also been nominated in the World Travel Awards for the third year running as Africa's Leading Safari Lodge - maybe third time lucky.

I shall leave you with that, the knowledge that I am very much hoping for no more rain and of course for great results in this year's awards.

Sad News from Rekeru - Kenya

Somewhere out on the Musiara plain one can normally find, with the right help, the Marsh Lions. This particular group has for the last thirty years been the regular subject of researchers, authors and TV crews, all of whom have recorded the changing dynamics of various generations. The Marsh pride numbers around 24 in total and if nothing else is the single most talked about pride in the Mara. With more than their fair share of characters, this unit has a fascinating operating system and is a hunting force that can and does take on just about anything. This past week saw the closing of yet another significant chapter in their great history.

Until just a few days ago the most ruthless and efficient of them all was a lioness called Red who along with her sister Bibi dominated these plains. Jackson has spent much of the last few days trying to locate Red who he had identified as missing some days earlier. He has now sadly concluded that her time has indeed come and that she is no longer with us. The reasons are not yet clear but as Jackson says it is just another part of life out here. Her passing will bring little respite for those that she would normally prey on, for she leaves behind a family who have been taught well.

So despite the inevitable sadness, with Bibi now at the helm, one thing we can be confident of is that a whole new hunting dynasty will be born.

Botswana news

URGENT ANNOUNCEMENT

Recently it was announced during the opening of Botswana's Parliament and Budget speech, that the country's VAT (Valued Added Tax) will be increased from 10% to 12%, as from the 1st of April 2010.

This is unfortunately a tax beyond our control and we regret to advise that our Botswana rates will be surcharged by this additional 2% for all bookings (new and existing) travelling as from the 1st of April 2010.

Thank you for your support and understanding.

Close

That's it for another month. I look forward to seeing you on safari soon!

Happy Safaris!

John

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