



## ***MESSAGE STICK***

### **January 2011**

#### **JMA's Rant!**

Since our return from Africa early in November it has been somewhat hectic around Destinations Africa! Sandie took it upon herself to take off to Fiji with her family just before Hilary and I left for Africa and we had one day to hand over! Then on our return we only had a few days before she then left with hubby Bruce on her two weeks educational trip to Kenya and Tanzania. Would you just know it but on her return she gave us her feedback and then dashed off camping with her family - really hard to get reliable people is it not??!! This was, of course, all pre planned as Hilary and I had decided that we would be home over the whole Christmas period and so I was able to keep things going in her absence.

Don't tell her but it is at times like these that one really understands and appreciates just how important having great staff like Sandie is to a business. Faye also played a huge part in covering the gap and I am sure we would not have coped were it not for her help - and she had family from South Africa visiting.

We have enjoyed finalising plans for a number of people and also had a good number in Africa over the last couple of months. The feedback from every one without exception has been nothing short of phenomenal. Savanna keeps coming up as the highlight of their safari so you will all understand why we always recommend a stay here, at the end of any safari, before returning home. They just keep on improving and it is the amazing staff that David and his partners have in place that make the difference. After Hilary and I returned from our trip it was once again reinforced that by far the most important factor to ensure that our clients have a life changing memorable safari is the quality of the guides, trackers and lodge staff. You can forgive almost any other shortcoming if these people are as good as you will find at Savanna.

We have just finalised our new 2011/12 DVD that now includes a full description of Kenya and Tanzania lodges as well as refreshing much of the other material. New video

has been infused throughout. If you would like a copy please contact us and we mail one to you smartly!

We are all excited about 2011. So many people are taking advantage of the current strong A\$ that in fact means that safaris paid for now are in effect showing a discount in A\$ terms of about 15% - well worth taking advantage of.

This month we have focussed on news of two of my favourite places in Africa - Savanna and Chiawa on the Lower Zambezi River in Zambia. I have always loved the Zambezi (I guess being a Zimbabwean expat I show a little bias?) but is a truly lovely part of the world that offers so much!

### **Some Comments from Sandie.**

Wow! Two weeks in Kenya and Tanzania and I honestly can say that my husband, Bruce, and I have DONE the Great East African Safari! From Nairobi to Amboseli (even if Kilimanjaro refused to come out from behind the clouds!), across the border into Tanzania to Arusha and on to the beautiful Swala Camp in Tarangire National Park - the Tsetse flies gave us a run for our money, but the fantastic game-viewing made it truly worthwhile. We then drove up the escarpment to the absolutely mind-blowing Ngorongoro Crater - it's a 'must do'! From the Crater we briefly visited Olduvai Gorge, a fascinating piece of human history, and on to the great expanse of the Serengeti. We had a night of absolute indulgence at Faru Faru in the Singita Grumeti Reserve - and as luck would have it, thanks to the quirks of Mother Nature, we very unexpectedly managed to catch part of the migration - about 500,000 wildebeest and zebra spread as far as the eye could see. From here we overnighted at Lukuba Island on Lake Victoria - a highly entertaining and completely different experience! On to the border with Kenya - might I add that all Customs and Immigration formalities were carried out without any complications, by friendly and helpful officials. We experience the 'interesting' (i.e. long & bumpy!) road to the magnificent Masai Mara - another WOW! Karen Blixen camp was wonderful, and our stay in the Mara was completed with a surprise Balloon Safari - with a sighting of a family of three rhino, amazing! Then back to Nairobi for our final night at the luxurious House of Waine, with a visit to Giraffe Manor and the Daphne Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage. Incredible what can be achieved in 10 days!

### **News from Savanna.**

#### **With acknowledgement and thanks to Paddy Hagelthorn and the Savanna Team**

The summer rains continue to be good for us at Savanna. The bush is looking absolutely beautiful and this has brought out a few interesting animals that we don't normally see. The brown-backed tree frog is often heard, but very seldom seen. One of these came out in a heavy storm and we were lucky to be able to take some good photographs.



For the last few newsletters, we have mentioned the number of kills that we have seen of late. This has been the case again this month. The Ottawa pride killed a buffalo north of the river and the Mapogo, of which there are only four left, have also made a number of buffalo kills. However, the Mapogo also killed a young hippo, which provided us with fantastic interaction and viewing.



The Ottawa pride also made an excursion into the south of our property, which is way out of their territory; they made a buffalo kill whilst they were down here and spent a few days in this area before returning to their normal territory in the north.



The Mapogo have remained on our property the whole of this month. They have not ventured too far from the central part of our property and we believe this is because they know the threat that is coming from the east from the new coalition of males.

The Ximungwe pride lost another two cubs and, although we didn't see it happen, we believe this was the Mapogo male that returned from the east and is still killing cubs. However, there is one female with two small cubs and so far she has escaped detection by the males. On the rare occasions that we have seen them, they have provided us with wonderful viewing.





The other Ximungwe females are continuing to mate with the Mapogo but as far as we can ascertain, they have not conceived - maybe the females sense the imminent ousting of these four males.

Early in the month, we had frequent visits from a male cheetah who killed an impala in front of our vehicles, but for some reason took a long time to strangle it. This female impala made seven gallant attempts to escape, but finally succumbed to the cheetah's power.



The cheetah stayed on our property for almost ten days, where it feasted on the new impala baby flush that was happening all around it. Since then, however, the cheetah has moved back east and we have not seen it for nearly three weeks.



Most of the impala and warthog have now given birth and the wildebeest have started dropping their calves in earnest. This is actually a wonderful time to be in the bush, to witness this new life that is being presented to us.



With all these baby animals, however, the carnage that takes place is deeply disturbing from the parents' point of view. The wild dog have been on our property a number of times this month and they are having a feast on the young impala. In two days, the wild dog killed eight impala lambs and stole another impala from a leopard. Fortunately, the wild dog do not stay in one particular area for too long, so their decimation of impala lambs in a particular area is not too serious.



The wild dog also chased a young nyala bull into one of the dams and then proceeded to run around the dam in the hope that the young nyala would drown itself. What was extremely interesting, though, was that when the wild dogs eventually moved off, two hippos ushered the young nyala to the bank where they waited until the nyala had moved out of the water and settled down in the bush to get its breath back. This sort of behavior has been recorded before, but it is always wonderful to see animals helping each other out in the wild.



The big buffalo heard returned to Savanna property for about a week and in fact we had two or three herds on occasion join up together, which gave us one massive herd of about 1500 buffalo. It was an amazing sight to see so many buffalo together, especially as at least twice a day, they could be found drinking at one of the waterholes. They have now moved off and we await their return in the near future.



As usual, the leopards have provided us with outstanding viewing and it is confirmed that Mambiri has now left her cub and has been seen with the new Kushane male, obviously

trying to mate. The cub, who we have now named Tlangisa ('playful') has remained on Savanna's property and we hope that Mambiri will move a little further east and leave this cub to take over some of her area in the south of our traversing area. On one occasion, Mambiri fetched her cub and took her to her kill, but when they got there she became extremely aggressive and would not let the cub eat. One can only imagine how confused the cub was. Since then, as far as we know, they have not met up again.



Metsi still has her two cubs and the difference in character between these two is really marked. The one cub is extremely relaxed with the vehicles and pays no attention to us being there, whilst the other cub is extremely aggressive and it is quite amusing to see this cub snarling and charging the vehicles for no apparent reason. The mother takes no notice of these antics.



Hlabakunzi still has her cubs and they are doing extremely well, although Hlabankuzi is displaying some unusual behaviour by moving way out of her territory. It was lucky she did not encounter other dominant females. We believe this is happening because she is getting pressure from the Metsi female and possibly the Hippo Dam female within her territory.



The young Xinzele male is growing up fast and is still mating with the Xikavi female, but with no success as yet. There is talk of the Xikavi female being barren and unable to produce cubs, as she is over five years old now. However, she may yet prove us wrong!



As mentioned in previous months, the bird life at this time of year is phenomenal. With most of the migrants back, we have been seeing some unusual birds. One was the emerald cuckoo that we have been unable to photograph, but as far as we know it is the first time it has been recorded in the Sabi Sands. Another is the collared pratincole, also recorded for the first time in the Sabi Sands, and luckily we were able to get photographs of this bird and its chicks. Of course, the woodland kingfishers are back and everybody took bets as to their day of arrival. The first ones were recorded on the 8th November. Another very interesting bird one seldom sees is the pennant-winged nightjar. We are seeing this beautiful bird on a daily basis at one particular dam on Savanna's property.





The river has come into flood a couple of times and it has been interesting to watch the crocodiles fishing in the flood waters, waiting for the fish to swim into their mouths.

## **News Snippets**

### **Air Botswana**

Excellent news: After successful negotiations between the governments of South Africa and Botswana, we are pleased to advise that the direct flight between Johannesburg and Maun has been reintroduced. With effect from 5th November the flight with a technical stop in Gaborone has been discontinued.

### **Vumbura Plains North**

Further to a previous communique about the fire damage at Vumbura Plains North we are delighted to advise that the rebuild is scheduled to be completed by 31 January 2011. In the meantime the Vumbura Plains South kitchen and main area are being used for guests from both North and South camps. The camp will manage the placements, providing private dinners, bush dinners, and picnic brunches etc. where appropriate. Vumbura Plains South main area can easily accommodate 26 guests and the camp staff are doing everything possible to ensure all guests are comfortable.

### **Selinda Reserve**

There is plenty of surface water in the Selinda Reserve at the moment so both Selinda and Zarafa camps are able to offer boating activities this summer. At Zarafa Camp, guests are enjoying excursions on the *HMS Zib* - a pontoon styled boat on the Zibalianja Lagoon, and at Selinda Camp there is a smaller, more conventional boat for trips up and down the Selinda Spillway.

### **New Zambian 'Security Tax'**

The Zambian Department of Aviation have announced that a new Security Tax will be introduced from 1 January 2011. This additional tax of US\$ 5.00 per person for international flights and US\$ 3.00 per person for domestic flights must be paid on departure at the relevant Zambia airports. This is over and above the existing Departure Taxes.

### **News From Chiawa Camp - Zambia**

**With thanks and acknowledgement to Grant Cumings and the Chiawa Team**

I am typing as I watch the sun rise over the Zambezi, perfectly calm after what was the most powerful wind and electric storm yesterday afternoon on this, my last morning in camp this season. Flocks of storks are gathering for the breeding season and time of plenty, indeed the first newborn impala has arrived, whilst we prepare to pack and go.



Our last guests of 2010 left Chiawa Camp yesterday (and those from Old Mondoro 10 days sooner) having had the most amazing safari - a pride of 12 roaring lions in surround sound, three leopard sightings like this one previously snapped by John, for good measure a few hefty tigerfish caught and released, a Livingstone's flycatcher and "lifer" for the well respected Lex Hes (one of the best birders I have had the pleasure of being in the bush with) and hundreds of elephants. Literally hundreds of them, everywhere on every drive ... and walk!

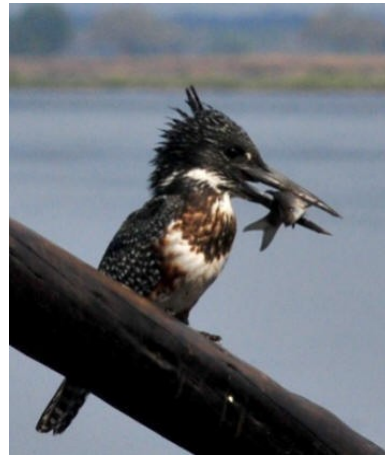


This has to be one of the busiest year's for elephant sightings in my memory, most of them very close to camp in those magical winter thorn woodlands, one fondly named the "enchanted forest" with its greenery, water holes (4 Pels fishing owls spotted there this season) and amazing light making for just the best photos. Simply magical, huge bulls gently browsing on fallen pods, or not so gently shaking trees that dwarf their massive frames, families with the youngest of calves, some still unsteady on their little feet, others a little older and trying to

master the use of their trunks which seem to at that age have a mind of their own. A couple of weeks ago I remember stopping in the shade, surrounded by these incredible creatures watching them interact, not only with the each other and their forage but also with other creatures like the impala, waterbuck, warthogs, a lioness (who was ignored, unlike in my previous newsletter where a lone bull scattered an entire pride) and a huge herd of buffalo.



Some interesting sightings that I enjoyed over the past month included finding a young python strangling a squacco heron whilst dangling from a branch over the Zambezi,



and from camp two superb kingfisher sightings, one of a sub-adult Malachite at breakfast time showing off for us and the second of a Giant Kingfisher proudly showing off his catch at the dock, not as impressive as the huge tigerfish and vundu's we have seen caught and released this year but certainly hard earned!



A more static scene but noteworthy is this image of a termite mound that I took shortly after the flood waters receded, leaving a very clear sign of how high the water rose this year - none of that for next year please Mr Nyaminyami!

What has been noteworthy this year, aside from all the elephants, is the big increase in number of kudu and bushpig sightings around camp. In the past we might see a bushpig every year or so, this year we had about a dozen sightings with sounders in excess of 15 members occasionally. The kudu were also much more apparent this year, big bulls, family herds, even a female in



camp the other day. You might ask what the correlation is and my guess would be that both these creatures are typically thicket dwelling animals and would be more vulnerable to falling victim to poacher's snares than others - CLZ and ZAWA have had some excellent success this year, attributed to hard work and the funding increase to CLZ when I appealed to all the safari operators earlier this year and set an example by committing guaranteed significant monthly funding from both Chiawa Camp and Old Mondoro - the other operators thankfully followed suit. As a consequence, whilst poaching figures are dropping significantly in the Lower Zambezi NP other parts of the country are having a tough time of it.

Last week I spent a couple of days at Old Mondoro, also enjoying the last night of the season there, and went out on a night drive. We were not disappointed, 4 leopards including a cub, hyena, civets, genets, wildcat - well we were genuinely disappointed to not have got an armadillo as Old Mondoro recorded 15 such sightings this year - not sure what other camp in Zambia can make such a boast?



And the leopards, well it is rare that guests at Old Mondoro don't see a leopard as they are spotted on most night drives and usually it's a couple of leopards on each night drive - surely Old Mondoro is one of the very best places in Africa to see the Prince of the jungle. The next morning we went out on a short game drive through Old Mondoro's spectacular woodlands - this habitat is remarkable and again we weren't disappointed by herds of buff, herds of ele, herds, of zebra, herds of kudu, and it was whilst watching a flock of ground hornbills performing that Levy's sharp eyes spotted the King and Queen, a lioness and magnificent maned lion walking in the background. Bonus, a mating pair which between sessions of amour, gnawed on the hindleg from an impala they had killed the previous night, whilst a younger male lion waited, presumably in the naïve hope of a little of either the impala or lioness. As expected he got nothing!



It is evident that the little upgrades and our personal attention at Old Mondoro have made a huge difference, its occupancy this year was 50% up on last year and 35% up on where it's ever been; and next year if the forward trend is anything to go by will be even busier. It's a small camp and a short season so if you want to visit Old Mondoro next year, and why wouldn't you (?), book now!



This was also one of Chiawa's busiest seasons on record with the recession in our rear view mirror, long may that last. Chiawa's commitment to giving its guests a high degree of comfort and some luxury whilst still keeping it all about the wildlife, the bush, the river, the varied and flexible activities and of course, the superb guiding makes it a must-do for any Zambian safari. That said, the best can always be better and we will be making sure exactly that happens next year with lots of important touches and tweaks planned so here's to 2011.

All of us at Destinations Africa wish you a truly Happy, Healthy and successful New Year.

Happy safaris.

John

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