



MESSAGE STICK

June 2010

Indaba 2010

I returned from attending the 2010 Indaba Travel Expo in Durban, South Africa having had the most successful Indaba to date. There were hundreds of new and exciting destinations, products and services to learn about. I came away with some great new contracts that will deliver ever more interesting and exciting safaris to you, our clients.

I decided to try our V Australia (Virgin's recently introduced service to Johannesburg). I booked Premium Economy as I need plenty of leg space to fit mine into. (Economy is fine for local flights but I simply go nuts after a few hours of being cramped up). This meant flying into Melbourne but this does not add to the fare as the quotes for all East Coast fares are the same as from Melbourne. It did mean an overnight because, unlike Sydney, we have no flights that leave early enough in the morning from Newcastle. This gave me the opportunity to stay with my son and visit the grandkids!

The seats were remarkably comfortable, food perfectly adequate, free drinks, great entertainment (I got through 4 movies on the way over!) and the service was simply outstanding. It is a long flight - up to 16 hours - but we arrived about an hour early. The entire flight takes place in daylight so I don't sleep but on arrival crash for 10 hours and awake with no jet lag and in the right time zone!

I took the opportunity to check out Business Class and Economy. The Business Class seats turn into flat beds - not inclined at 10 degrees and have you sliding down - and are very comfortable. I could even lie sideways in comfort. Economy had more leg room than I had expected and the people that I spoke to were impressed. So there we have it, an alternative direct flight to Joburg. I recommend it!

I was inundated with meetings at Indaba. Every day was packed to the last minute from 0800 to 1800. I renewed many of our contacts, made some excellent new ones and arranged new contracts in both Southern Africa and East Africa. I spent a deal of time with Justin Grammaticas, owner of the Governors Camps in Kenya as well as Martin Sonderby Nielson from Karen Blixen and the guys from Albatros over dinner. What

exciting forward programmes they have for their beautiful camps. I also spent time with Claudia Stuart of Bushtops Mara and Bushtops Serengeti. Truly amazing camps and we will be introducing them to you in this issue.

Importantly I have come to an arrangement with Ulusaba - Richard Branson's lodge in the Sabi Sands - and V Australia to be included in our Pink Diamond Safaris. More about this lodge and the arrangement later. Vanessa Hartmann has been fantastic in helping us get a handle on and promote Ulusaba and V Australia.

Mike Davies, one of the owners of Savanna, was someone that, as would be expected, I spent some time with. It is always enjoyable to see him and get the latest thinking on this piece of heaven - one of our favourite South African lodges - and just the very best people you could ever wish to find.

Of course there was much more but I could take up this whole issue talking about them so it will suffice to say that we will be introducing new destinations on our web site shortly. We will also have an introductory special offer for Ulusaba that you may wish to take advantage of.

World Cup is on everyone's lips. Great excitement but as you may know we are left unhappy at the blatant price gouging from some hotels. The months after the World Cup are very heavily booked and we have many clients travelling during this time. It seems that many others felt as we do and delayed sending the clients until after the games!

Next Africa Visit

Hilary and I will be going to Kenya as guests of Karen Blixen, Governors and Bushtops Mara and Bushtops Tanzania as well as many other camps in the Mara and Amboseli and South Africa in October as will Sandie in November so will keep you informed of what we find!

New Consultants Join DA Team

We are delighted to welcome two new members to the Destinations Africa team.

Craig Parker hails from Queensland and we will now have a local presence. Craig will be concentrating on developing business relationships with business partners and Travel Agents - Australia wide.

Craig grew up in the Australian bush and developed a love for nature and wildlife at a very early age. After visiting Africa some years ago on his honeymoon, Craig developed a keen interest in Africa's wildlife and natural habitats. Craig loves the fact that each day African safaris hold unique and unexpected experiences. He will bring his enthusiasm and passion for African wildlife and natural landscapes to his role of developing and fostering relationships with our key business partners. He is also very excited about having the opportunity to share his passion for African wildlife by promoting travel to the many varied and wonderful locations throughout Africa.

We welcomed Craig to our team in May 2010.



Kim Good has joined the Nelson Bay team and lives just around the corner. She was born in Zimbabwe and went to school in South Africa. After spending much time in the hospitality industry in Zimbabwe, South Africa and UK she moved to Australia three years ago. She has just become a citizen! She has spent too much time telling her friends about Africa and its wildlife so has now decided to do so professionally. Kim will add support to our office with special focus on Travel Agents. We welcome her to her our team of working mums in the Bay!



News from Savanna Private Game Reserve

(With thanks and acknowledgement to Savanna Owners, Paddy Hagelthorne and Neil Whyte)

April has been an unusual month this year, as it is usually regarded as our autumn month and, once May has started, we have truly moved into winter. However, this April has brought an enormous amount of rain, so the bush has been rejuvenated and is extremely green when it would normally have been dying back, revealing all the greys and browns of our winter bush. Even though we have had some tricky days for game drives with all the rain, the game viewing has been absolutely outstanding. The Sand River has been in flood and never before have we seen it so high at this time of the year.



Firstly, the Ximungwe pride has given us wonderful viewing with the three cubs that we mentioned last month. The two smaller cubs are not growing as quickly as they should and, although I have always felt that they are a little under-developed, they seem to be holding their own. We have seen them on a number of kills with their mothers. The single cub, which is now about six months old, is doing extremely well and is still quite a phenomenon in surviving for five months on its own with its mother.





A new set of Ximungwe cubs has also arrived and one of the mothers that had disappeared for a few weeks was found a few days ago, with four cubs of about four to five weeks old. These cubs are still hidden in the den and have not been brought out to the rest of the pride. We are all hoping that these cubs survive to boost our lion numbers and help us replace the Sand River pride. We did see the fourth female of the Ximungwe pride who is also lactating, but from the suckling marks on the teats we estimate that she only has one or two cubs. These cubs have not yet been seen.



Whilst on a hunting sortie, the two Ximungwe females with one of the Mapogo were looking for waterbuck on Mackenzie airstrip when they were suddenly diverted by a sound that they had heard and dashed off into the bush. When the game drives arrived, the Mapogo had a live impala in his mouth and Mambiri, the female leopard, was sitting in a tree above him. Mambiri had obviously caught the impala and, when the lions had heard this, they rushed in and stole the kill. It was amazing viewing to watch this male trying to keep the females away while he dragged the live impala into a nearby bush.





Mambiri and her cub, however, have had a very successful month and have provided excellent viewing for us all. The cub made two kills on two consecutive days, right in front of the Land Rover. The first was a scrub hare that she caught all by herself, even though mother was present. The second kill was a banded mongoose which she killed whilst she was waiting for her mother to return from a hunting adventure. It was delightful to watch her playing with the dead banded mongoose and her acrobatic antics were quite remarkable.





On an early morning drive, Mambiri was seen hunting impala on Nkombi Dam clearing. She made several attempts at catching impala that were being distracted by the impala rut that is in full swing at the moment. However, she was unsuccessful and was left lying in a thicket late in the morning. That afternoon, when the rangers went back to Nkombi Dam, they found her on an impala kill that she had just made. She dragged the kill approximately 500 metres across the clearing into the bush before she started to eat. That evening, she returned to the cub and brought it back to the kill. Unfortunately, during the next day, one of the Ximungwe lionesses found the kill and stole it from the two of them.



The Hlabakunzi female has brought her cubs out again and there is nothing better than viewing small leopard cubs. She had them stashed in a small rocky outcrop for three days

and we were able to get the most fantastic viewing of these cubs frolicking on the rocks. The cubs are now approximately three and a half months old and it is amazing how they have adapted to having the Land Rovers in close proximity.

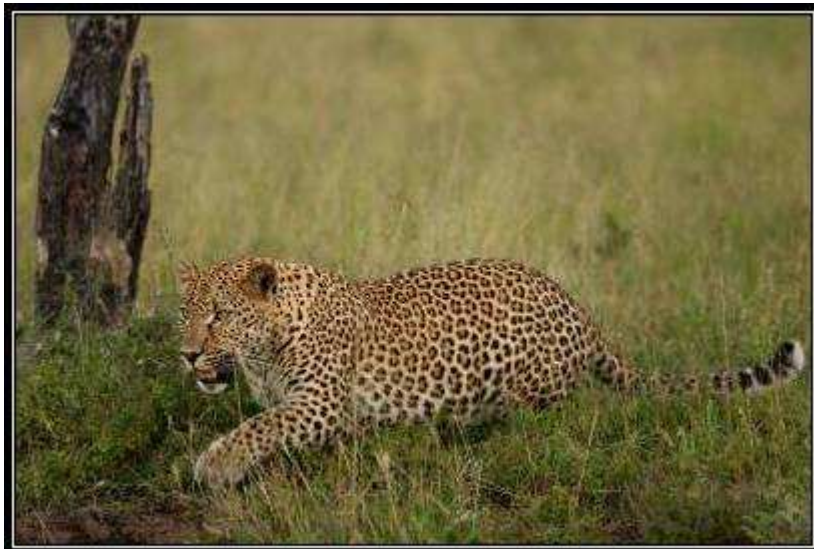


As if this didn't provide enough cub viewing for the month, the Makubela female leopard was also found a few days ago with her two five-month old cubs on an impala kill. These cubs have only been seen on a few occasions. As a result, they were very skittish when first located. However, after two days of viewing them, with different Land Rovers coming in and out and Makubela showing no concern for the presence of the vehicles, these cubs have become totally relaxed with the cars and in fact will now venture close to the car to satisfy their curiosity. We are pretty sure that these two cubs are one male and one female.





A new, relaxed young male leopard has moved into our area and we think that he stole a kill from Hlabankunzi. While this leopard is by no means old enough to contest for territory, he could still be a danger to the new Hlabankunzi and Makubela cubs, because if he finds these cubs, he is likely to destroy them. We can easily identify him by the triangular four-three whisker patterns that he has.



The light, the sunsets and the sunrises are quite spectacular, as we now enter the winter months. The game viewing is equally unbeatable and we look forward to seeing many of you returning to Savanna in the next few months. To those who have already been back this year, thank you for your support and we look forward to your next visit.



**News from Governors Camp - Masai Mara Kenya
(With thanks to the Management of Governor's Camps)**

Governors' Camp April Game Report, Masai Mara

April has been an interesting month, with heavy down pours, stunning cloud formations and thunderous outbursts all creating fascinating changes in the scenery.

All these rain storms meant that the Mara River became a roaring torrent for three days, rising around 14 feet. This deluge of water was a spectacular sight and hippos were seen scuttling for small pockets of calmer waters under the river banks. As well as enjoying the spectacle of the raging Mara River our guests also enjoyed some wonderful wildlife sightings.

The forests plants are now a deep rich green and we look forward with excited anticipation to the imminent blooming of the Mara wildflowers adding colour to the plains, forests and riverbanks.



In the forests around the camps the African Greenheart trees (*Warburgia Ugandensis*) are fruiting and these fruits now cover the forest floor. The Warburgia fruit is an

elephant's favourite entrée and the fruiting has meant that we received regular visits from large bull elephants wandering into camp to feast on these hot fruit. Excited guests retreated to the safety of their tents, whilst the elephant feasted. Interestingly the leaves from the Green Heart are often used in place of hot chillies in cooking. Perhaps these fruits are eaten for medicinal purposes by the elephant, who knows?

The Musiara Marsh is full of elephant families with counts of at least 100 individuals. This is always a delight to see and an exciting start to our guest's game drives. The elephant families include small feisty 3 month old calves to the old matriarchs. On the ground between the elephants legs cattle egrets busily feast off the rich pickings of insects disturbed by the elephants mighty round feet as they trudge along the marsh edges and grassy plains.



The long grass has caused the Bila Shaka / Marsh Pride of lions to split up and roam their vast territory in search prey; they are feeding on a lot of warthog at the moment and the occasional zebra which provides a more substantial meal. Two large black mane lions have been hovering on the edge of the Bila Shaka / Marsh Prides territory in anticipation of finding a weakness to exploit in the resident male kingdom, so perhaps this will be an exciting few months ahead as they build up their nerve to tackle the prestigious dominant Bila Shaka males and win control of the pride and their important territory.



The Paradise Pride comprises of Notch the old Bila Shaka pride male. He was forced out of the Bila Shaka pride by the current two black maned lions and he started a coalition

with 5 of his male cubs, which is now the Paradise Pride. Normally a male lion does not tolerate his male offspring and at around two years of age they are usually banished by the male from the pride, the scientific reason for this is to prevent inbreeding by the sons mating with their mothers, aunts and sisters. However in this case Notch and his male cubs moved prides so there is no close relationship with the females in the pride and also perhaps if Notch was to assert his dominance over his 5 male offspring he would be ousted himself. What this has created is possibly the most impressive lion family we have ever seen in the Mara - and at the moment there are 6 Blacked maned lions in this pride. Many of our clients in February were lucky enough to see the entire pride of 22 individuals feeding on a hippo over several days. On one occasion a young male and female from the Ridge Pride ventured too close into the Paradise Pride's territory. The 6 black maned lions were feeding on the hippo and must have caught a whiff on the wind of the intruders and sprang up, and despite their distended full bellies, raced across the plains towards the young male and female. All 6 were roaring and running across the plains - one of the most incredible sights and sounds in Africa. Needless to say the two Ridge Pride lions ran for their lives. Each of the 6 Paradise Pride males took up a position on the plains and roared. Notch epitomises what we think a black maned lion should look like and his sons carry the genes. In April the paradise pride, 'Notch' and his boys have surprised us all, by *swimming* across the river, repeatedly! Two of the paradise females have been spotted with 6-8month old cubs and recently with a topi kill.



Some of our clients also had an interesting sighting on a game drive over Easter, when they came across two male lions up on Rhino Ride. The young male lions encountered a large herd of buffalo, and being young and a little reckless the lions decided to hang around the buffalo herd. The buffalo took exception to this and chased the two, one of whom ended up halfway up a tree waiting for the angry herd to pass! Many thanks to Mike Robinson for providing the photos.



The *three cheetah brothers* have been regularly seen roaming the plains, including some fast action as they brought down their prey and eating quickly before any other large predator slipped in for the feast. Hyenas' too have been surprising us here and have figured out how to capture sleeping topi and feasting. There is also a den of little playful black balls of uncoordinated hyena cubs below '*Bila shaka*'.

There have been numerous sightings of various leopards and in particular a beautiful female, recognizable by a split on the top of her left ear, which has been seen at regular intervals. Recently we have had wonderful sighting of her and her kills in the tree close to Little Governors, also elegantly traipsed over a dead log near the marsh, delighting many a visitor.



Due to the long grass the normal plains game have been scarce, preferring the short grass plains they have mostly moved into these areas and have been seen regularly on our bush walks with close encounters with snorting wildebeest, zebra, eland, giraffe, Thompson gazelle and impala. We have also been enjoying all the smaller insects and animals of the Mara ecosystem on our walks, including the industrious Dung beetles who have been busy burying copious amounts of elephant dung! The colours of the dung beetles never cease to amaze us from bright green to shiny black, some with large horns to wide scoops. They are amazing creatures and 1 dung beetle is capable of burying one metric ton of dung in a hectare in a year!

Introducing - Mara Bushtops.

We have great pleasure in introducing you to this delightful and beautiful camp on a concession bordering the Masai Mara. Is it not simply amazing?





Discover the magic of Safari at Mara Bushtops

The unmissable Masai Mara

Without doubt one of the world's most spectacular game reserves, Kenya's treasured National Park - the Masai Mara - provides a breathtaking backdrop to the ultimate Safari experience.

Taking its name from the regions vast 'dotted plains', the landscape is a constantly moving tableau, literally teeming with an endless variety of wildlife. In this magnificent wilderness you can immerse yourself in myriad new sensations; waking to the call of lions and buffalo, thrilling at the closeness of wildebeest, zebras and gazelles, basking in the glow of a crackling camp fire at twilight, and dreaming under a dazzling night-canopy of stars.

Nestled on the edge of this intoxicating scene, we've created an oasis of five star luxury for serious Safari seekers. Within the 200-acre ranch of Mara Bushtops camp, you'll find an exciting blend of tranquillity and adventure where you can relax in first class comfort surrounded by one of nature's living masterpieces.

A stunning location

Set amid the Mara Bushtops private Conservancy and bordering the 60,000 hectares Mara Siana Wildlife Conservancy, bordering the Masai Mara itself, Mara Bushtops boasts a sensational location. Perched on top of a hill with a scenic valley to one side, the camp lies just ten minutes' drive from the main gate of the National Park and within striking distance of the beautiful Mara River where the famous river crossing of wildebeest and zebras takes place during the migration. Although in the heart of the wilderness, this Safari paradise is surprisingly accessible, with two nearby airstrips at Siana Springs and Keekorok - just 10 minutes and only a game drive away from the camp - and a choice of direct flights arriving daily from Malindi, Mombasa, Diani or Nairobi.

Experience 'civilised' wilderness living, in inimitable style

Freedom, comfort and breathtaking views

At Mara Bushtops, you step into a world where nature and contemporary comfort blend into one. Wander through a timeless space where natural wooden decking links the sun-drenched outdoors to cool interiors; where fine furnishings reflect the elegance of African culture; and where your luxury tent affords utter privacy, as close to nature as you can get.

Contact John for additional information on this stunning Pink Diamond location.

Introducing - Richard Branson's "Ulusaba"

Ulusaba Private Game Reserve is situated in the famous Sabi Sand Game Reserve, one of South Africa's finest Big Five safari destinations, adjacent to the Kruger Park. The breathtaking Rock Lodge, built on a rocky outcrop eight hundred feet above the Sabi Sands bush lands, offers guests the ultimate in luxury and service excellence - from the Pan African décor throughout the lodge and the gardens to the swimming pool with cascading waterfall. Guests can relax in the Aroma Boma, work out in the gymnasium or enjoy a game of tennis. With a maximum of twenty two guests, exclusivity is assured in eight luxury rooms and two suites, all with private viewing decks.



"Rock Lodge"

Early morning and evening safaris with armed rangers and trackers in open four wheel drive vehicles provide the excitement of viewing game at close quarters. Walking safaris are also offered for those who prefer to get close to nature. End the day under a star studded sky with the sounds of the wild.



"Safari Lodge"

TEMPTING OFFERS 2010

ULUSABA PRIVATE GAME RESERVE - South Africa

ONE NIGHT FREE

Spend 4 nights on safari at Ulusaba for the price of 3! Or, stay a little longer and spend 5 nights at Ulusaba for the price of 4! Or, stay even longer and spend 7 nights at Ulusaba for the price of 6!

When is the offer available?

For arrivals until 30th September 2010

How much?

Prices include all your meals and drinks, together with twice daily game drives in search of the Big Five! Call us for details as prices are season dependent.

Terms and Conditions • Stays can be split between Safari Lodge and Rock Lodge; the last night of your stay will be complimentary • Offer is subject to availability and applies to any new bookings made for arrivals until 30th September 2010 • Offer available for selected dates during this period. Black out dates may apply • All our normal booking terms and conditions apply • Offer can be combined with other packages and offers

KIDS GO FREE

Kids (otherwise known as Cubs) can stay at Ulusaba's Rock Lodge for free, a saving of up to ZAR 2,000 per child per night!

When is the offer available?

Until 31st December 2010

Cub's Club

We tailor fantastic programmes for the little ones at our Cub's Club and we have rooms especially designed for families.

Terms and Conditions • Offer is subject to availability and applies to new bookings made until 31st December 2010 • Up to 2 children aged between 0-11 years can be accommodated free-of-charge at Rock Lodge in the same room as their parents. Children over the age of 6 can join game drives • All our normal booking terms and conditions apply • Black out dates may apply • Offer can be combined with other packages and offers

AIR CHARTER SUBSIDY

Stay at Ulusaba for 3 nights or more and we'll contribute ZAR 1,000 per person to your roundtrip Internal Charter Flights from Johannesburg to Ulusaba's private air strip!

When is the subsidy offer available?

For arrivals until 30th September 2010

Terms and conditions • Offer is valid for new bookings made for arrivals until 30th September 2010 and applies to two adults sharing one room • Black out dates apply • Offer cannot be combined with other packages and offers • Normal booking terms and conditions apply.

Close

That is enough for now. I will be updating the web site with some more of the new destinations and will give more in the next Message Stick.

Contact me if you want any more information on the Ulusaba special offer.

Love life and go on a Safari!

John

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