



## ***MESSAGE STICK***

### **May 2010**

I leave for South Africa on 3<sup>rd</sup> May and return on 13<sup>th</sup> for a quick visit to the huge Travel Expo - Indaba - in Durban. This is always a great opportunity to renew old friendships and contacts and make new ones. It gives me a super opportunity to see what is new on the market and to make plans to visit new lodges that I have not been to previously. The office will be in the capable hands of Hilary and our staff so I go off without any concerns that all will be well here.

Bookings for August through to Christmas are becoming harder to get as it appears that many other agents and operators have done as we did and avoided the World Cup time with all the concomitant price gouging that took place (many places are now regretting it as people have simply stayed away!!). This has resulted in many people travelling after the event.

I have, regrettably, had to cancel the proposed Invitation Group Tour for next year as we have not been able to get the minimum number of people to express an interest. To those of you who responded - thank you very much. I will revisit this again in the future as I am certain that we could arrange an amazing trip.

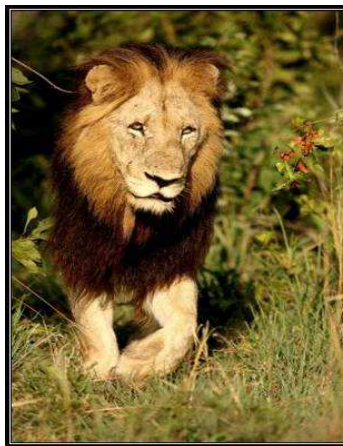
We will very shortly be introducing a new superior product that we are calling our "**Pink Diamond Safaris**". These safaris are intended to specifically meet the needs and desires of those who want only the very best. The itineraries will still be individually planned for each party but will include a selection of the very best lodges, game viewing and activities available in Africa. I am having discussions at Indaba next month with some of the places that we will utilise to arrange rates and other details to ensure that our clients receive the best possible value as well as the appropriate luxury that will be demanded. We will also use charter aircraft extensively as this maximises the time at lodges and minimises long road trips - especially in East Africa. See our web site for early details! We will add more detailed information later.

## News from Savanna Private Game Reserve

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

Already in March one can see the seasons changing, as the nights get longer and the days substantially shorter. This has been offset by some very warm weather and some late rains which have kept the bush incredibly green. Whilst the growth of the grass has diminished because of the reduction in daylight hours, the whole area is still remarkably green, compared to other years where we would have seen the grasses starting to go brown by this time.

Although the bush is very thick, this has not detracted from the wonderful game viewing we are experiencing. The four male lions, the Mapogo, have been on our property virtually for the whole month, so there has been no shortage of male lion viewing.



Having said in our last newsletter how well the Ottawa pride was doing, they moved off our property to the east for a couple of days and unfortunately a hyena came in and killed one of the four cubs. What was interesting was the fact that, when the mother returned soon after the cub was killed and chased the hyena off, she picked up the dead cub, took it to the other cubs and they all ate the dead cub. Whilst there have been records of lion eating lion, this is not the norm. Since then, the other three cubs have been doing well and are growing vigorously, even though they have joined the rest of the pride and there is a lot of competition at the kills.



One of the females from the Ximungwe pride has brought out another litter of cubs. She has two tiny cubs that have already become so used to the vehicles that they ignore them whenever they are being viewed. I am a little worried about these cubs, as they don't seem to be as developed as they should be at eight weeks, which is our estimate of their age. Time will tell whether these two will survive. The one five-month old cub is still doing exceptionally well and is enjoying the fact that he now has two mates to play with and bully.



The leopards have not disappointed us this month and there has been one brief sighting of Makubela's two cubs. These cubs are still very nervous and need to get accustomed to the Land Rovers. Unfortunately, she has been keeping them in an inaccessible area so we will have to wait for her to start bringing them to kills where they will be exposed to vehicle movement.

Mambiri and her cub have given us the bulk of the viewing this month and it is always a delight to view this cub, as she is at an age where she is constantly into everything. Her antics range from chasing squirrels in trees to trying to catch guinea fowl and all are exceptionally amusing.



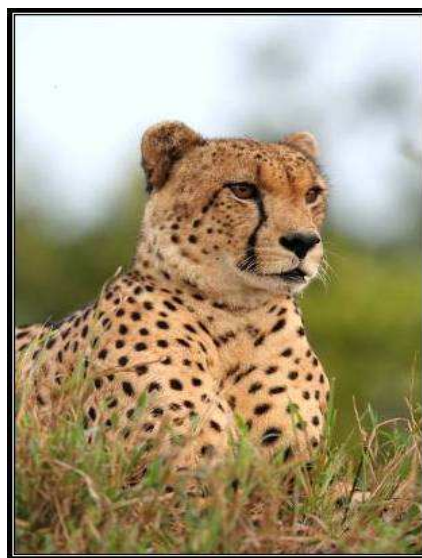
Hlabankunzi has now brought her cubs out, but unfortunately we have not seen them yet; we have just followed the tracks to different den sites. They too should be starting to eat meat in the near future and this will make them accessible to viewing when the mother takes them to various kills. It is believed that Hlabankunzi has two cubs and we are all waiting in anticipation to see them.



We have been fortunate that, for most of this month, we have had the wild dogs on Savanna's traversing area. The alpha female is heavily pregnant and we are expecting her to have her pups within the next couple of weeks. The pack has been investigating den sites in our area and we are all hoping that they choose our traversing area to have their pups this time. Unfortunately, they crossed the river a few days ago and, as a result of the heavy rain on the escarpment, the river is flooding and it will be difficult for the dogs to cross the river and return to their den site until it subsides.



The cheetah has been over a couple of times but hasn't visited us as frequently as he normally does. This is probably due to the number of lions we have in our area. We know that, in the east of our traversing area, there has been a shortage of lion viewing and the cheetah has probably felt safer in these areas.



We have been fortunate in having some large herds of zebra and wildebeest frequenting our open areas. Zebras are always a popular sighting for our overseas guests. Herds of up to thirty have been seen on a regular basis. As mentioned in the last newsletter, the buffalo have stayed on Savanna property and it is very impressive to see a herd of 600 - 700 buffalo coming down to the water to drink.



## News from Classic Safari Company



### EXCITING NEW DEVELOPMENTS AT THE BUSHCAMP COMPANY

#### South Luangwa National Park, Zambia

The Bushcamp Company consists of 6 remote and beautiful camps in Zambia's South Luangwa Valley. Extensive developments will be undertaken in 2010, including an airstrip between Chindeni and Kapamba camps and 50 km of all weather roads. All camps will also undergo a soft refurbishment and will receive new vehicles as well as solar geysers, fridges and lights.



## **NEW MANAGEMENT AT THE ISLANDS OF SIANKABA**

### **Livingstone, Zambia**

Siankaba welcomes new management couple Peter Bartosz and Jennifer Kenney this month. Pete was born and raised in Lusaka. He has a profound interest in and knowledge of the wildlife that occurs in Southern Africa. Jen was born and lived in the Livingstone/ Mulobezi area. She has worked in many top lodges in Southern and East Africa and has a flair for interior design and innovative food. They are delighted to return to Zambia and are looking forward to further improving the high standards at Islands of Siankaba.



## **WORKING WITH THE WESTGATE WARRIORS**

### **Samburu, Northern Frontier, Kenya**

Sasaab lodge in Kenya's Samburu region is supporting a project to assist the local Westgate warriors. The recent drought in 2009 put a great deal of pressure on wildlife, livestock and humans alike. The warriors of the area, whose primary role is to herd livestock, have greatly suffered as a result. A community project has been established to assist them in earning income from making and selling rungus (clubs), spears and (fly) whisks. Proceeds go directly to the warrior concerned.



## **CELEBRATE THE BEST OF BOTH AT CHIAWA & OLD MONDORO**

### **Lower Zambezi, Zambia**

A special offer has been introduced to celebrate Chiawa Camp and Old Mondoro's inaugural year together - 'The Best Of Both Worlds'. This entails any 7 night combination of Chiawa Camp and Old Mondoro for the price of 5 nights, minimum 2 nights stay at each camp. The offer features the ultimate Lower Zambezi safari, showcasing two superb but very different camps in two wildlife rich but very different eco-systems, linked by a spectacular one hour motor boat transfer.

## News from Governors Camp - Masai Mara Kenya

### Governors' Camp Game Report, Masai Mara

The average temperatures dropped to about 28 C in March after a fairly hot February. This was due mostly to the amazing rains that we received during the month, amounting to 741mm (3 inches). We have had a very good rainy season so far with only a few weeks break since December last year, and the Kenya Meteorological Dept is predicting plenty more to come, which is welcome news after the long drought that Kenya has endured. During March we enjoyed a mixture of weather, some good storms coming in after sunny mornings, a couple of rainy mornings and some cloudy days. The storms have brought stunning cloud formations all of which have made for some stunning photographic moments. All the rain and sunshine has meant fabulous growing weather in the Mara. The grassland plains are extremely lush, high and seeding. Animals such as warthog, hyena, bat-eared fox and aardvark have been plentiful. It has been a quiet month in the Mara, giving our guests that great feeling of the huge open expanse that only the Mara can give you. The BBC have been back at Governors' camp filming the cat activity in the area and have given us some valued information over the past few weeks



Photos Courtesy of Chala Cadot

We continue to have incredible amounts of elephants through the *Warburgia* forest along the Mara River and into the Musiara Marsh. There has been an increase in the number of elephant bulls in the area, with a fair few in musth, following up herds of females which may be in oestrus. Our guides have to approach a little more carefully these days, as males in musth have high levels of testosterone and can be a little aggressive.

We heard an amazing story from one of the BBC vehicles; whilst out filming on the boundary of Maasailand near the Marsh a massive elephant bull took exception to a Masai cow passing by and attacked it, tusking it and severely wounding the animal. The Maasai herdsman saw this at a distance and requested the BBC vehicles help, which they gave. However the Marsh Pride of lions had seen all the commotion and as the Maasai had mysteriously disappeared into the steel box (BBC car), they took advantage of their absence and raced over towards the injured cow. The scene was a large number of lions including cubs and a vehicle with irate Maasai herdsman all converging on the poor Maasai cow. The vehicle did however beat the lions to it with one of the Maasai launching out to protect his beloved cow. This scared the lions off and they retreated, the cow did not fare so well though.



Photos courtesy of Samuel Kiplangat and Chala Cadot

The same large herd of about 400 buffalo have been moving through the long grass plains between the marsh and over to rhino ridge.

We have had plenty of giraffe about the forest line mostly eating on *Teclea*, they have been grouping into herds of up to 30 individuals. A great scene when they all move on to the plains.

A Marshal Eagle was seen taking a Banded Mongoose off the ground and flying off with it, must have been very difficult to contend with in the air.

A large pack of 30 hyena were found hunting topi up on Rhino ridge, they managed to take a young one down. Whilst a single hyena had managed to kill a young impala by its self near the Mara River, it is likely the impala was ill as they are normally much quicker than a hyena.

The Marsh Pride of lions now has a new 3 week old cub from 'Bibi'. The total number of lions in this pride is now 26. The pride splitting into three distinct groups as hunting becomes more difficult in the long grass. 'Lispy' had moved off with the sub adults, 'White-eye' and 'Bibi' with their cubs and the two males 'Romeo' and 'Claude' are spending most of their time with the three *Graces* and their cubs. On the 25<sup>th</sup> 21 of them all came together to spend some time as a pride and bond. They have not been very successful hunting, with many relieved warthogs managing to out run and out maneuver their attacks. They have been seen hunting and killing a reedbuck, a few small warthogs and a couple of young waterbucks.





Photos courtesy of Chala Cadot

The Paradise Pride of lions is still living up to their formidable reputation of hunting hippo. The 5 younger male lions have apparently killed about 10 so far, Notch reportedly not involved. No one has actually witnessed the event, but it is assumed that the lions follow a hippo out far enough away from the water, so as they cannot make a quick escape. They then hamstring the animal to immobilise it and the long process of killing the poor animal begins. 3 females and 7 cubs have been seen regularly with Notch, but less so with the younger males. Besides the hippo feasts they are at times fortunate enough to have, there is a little more plains game available to them than the Marsh Pride.

The Ridge Pride are still the same two males seen with a few females, two of whom we have always known about. One of which is not in such good condition. The males have also been sighted consorting with a couple of lionesses from the Marsh Pride, resulting in a small scrap and the lionesses moving on.

There have been some good sightings of leopard this month. On a fairly regular basis, our leopardess in the local area between Governors' Camp, Il Moran and the marsh forest 'lake Nakuru'. She was sighted with a young waterbuck kill in the marsh area.

A huge male was seen up a green-heart tree with an impala kill near the Mara River.

Also Olive has been hunting along the croton thickets near the River, unsuccessfully, a hard task during daylight hours.

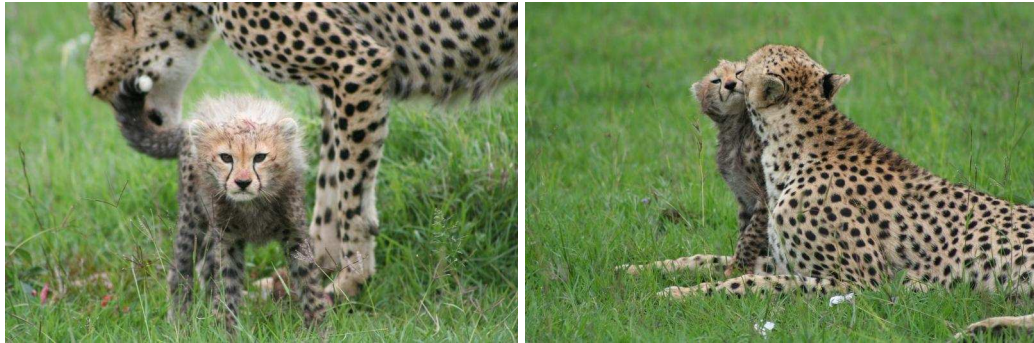
At the beginning of the month a male leopard was in Olive's territory and they had a heated encounter. He was in search of a female in season, which she was obviously not as she has young cubs that are still dependant. She acted submissively rolling on her back, but growling aggressively forcing the male to move on.

There have also been the odd brief sightings of other unknown leopard along the river-line.

The three boys have been the most active cheetah in the area. They have made numerous kills, a couple of which were stolen by hyena which have been unrelenting in these lean times.

The female cheetah and her cub have so far beaten the odds and are making a good

living and staying out of harms way.



Photos courtesy of Chala Cadot

Shakira is still on the Transmara side of the river, with very little news of her activity.

We had a different female cheetah in the area, which was seen hunting a gazelle which she missed. However 5 minutes later whilst resting, a male gazelle went running right by without noticing her crouching in the grass - she got that one!

Altogether we have had a wonderful month of game viewing and we look forward to the promise of more rain in April.

We hope to share the magic of our corner of the Mara with you sometime soon.



### **Conservation News** (Thanks to Wilderness Safaris)

#### **Wild Dog Movement Study in Selinda and Linyanti Concessions**

A study run by Wilderness Safaris Botswana's Environmental Team to determine wild dog energetics has collared three wild dog packs in the Vumbura, Linyanti and Selinda Concessions. Some interesting preliminary findings in the last three months as to their movements have resulted.

The Vumbura Pack has shown a general fidelity to the concession and used mopane

woodland extensively while occasionally visiting the floodplain. The DumaTau Pack has moved across the floodplains of the Selinda and Linyanti Concessions around Selinda, Zarafa and DumaTau camps, and has even overlapped with the neighbouring Linyanti Pack which has covered the northern half of this concession around DumaTau and Kings Pool camps. Below are the range movements of the Vumbura Pack (2009.11.29 - 2010.03.14, left) and the DumaTau and Linyanti packs (2009.12.01 - 2010.03.09, right) respectively. The DumaTau pack is represented in green and the Linyanti pack in pink.

**Close**

That is it for now. I look forward to bringing you news of Indaba next month.

Love life and go on a Safari!

John

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