



MESSAGE STICK **January 2012**

JMA's Musings!

Another New Year already! Here is wishing all our readers a year filled with love, health, happiness and great safaris in Africa. May all the wonderful animals that we so love also find more compassion in their human counterparts and see the final end to such atrocities as Rhino's killed cruelly for their horn by misguided people. Degradation of animal habitat in Africa is a colossal problem with numbers of many species being rapidly eroded. The cats, in particular, are vulnerable and the African Lion population is diminishing at a truly alarming rate. At the current rate of loss there could be no Lions found in their natural habitat within as few as 15 years.

I have mentioned previously that the newly appointed President of Zambia recently disbanded the country's wild life authority and questioned why wild life was protected ahead of human interests. He then promptly released a large number of prisoners including many poachers and invited them to continue this activity. This blatant disregard for the wild life in his country simply reflects the silent position in many other parts of Africa. Will our grand children experience the thrill of seeing the big 5 as well as the myriad other threatened species that we so enjoy?

I believe very strongly that the more people from around the globe that we send to experience Africa the better the chance the wild life has of surviving. Some amazing acts of generosity and support have appeared from all quarters as a consequence of people experiencing Africa first hand. The Gorongosa Park in Mozambique is a prime example. Having lost almost every living creature that was edible during the horrific civil war before independence from Portugal this truly lovely wilderness is being restocked and Elephants have been relocated from South Africa. The cats are returning, buffalo

that used to roam in herds numbering 1000's as well as a variety of antelope are also now to be found in some reasonable numbers. Lodges are slowly developing and tourists will soon be able to experience this true wilderness again soon.

It is a long time since I was last there! Not since the 1970's! I clearly remember flying my light aircraft over this area and the Zambezi delta when working in Mozambique and keeping very low to see huge herds of Buffalo and Elephants. They were all massacred! However I can scarcely contain my enthusiasm for the rehabilitation of the park and I will certainly be visiting it as soon as it is deemed appropriate to do so and then will do my best to get tourists there again!

I look forward to sending many of you on a true experience of a lifetime this year. DO IT while you can and spread the word to your friends and families. Believe me when I tell you that Africa is addictive! More and more of our clients are now doing repeat trips. One has even done 4 in the last 4 years!! Now that's a love of Africa for you!

Let's start by tempting you with one of my favourite wild life areas in Africa!

Botswana

Was an area ever less accurately named than the Okavango Swamps? Probably not. It may well be watery, but the word swamp has distinctly negative connotations and nothing could be further from the truth in the Okavango. Okay, we'll call it a delta, then. Problem is, most people think a delta is the rather uninteresting part of a river just before it disappears into an ocean. Hmmmm, none of the above seem to work too well. Let's just call it the Okavango. Right. Let there be nothing to detract from the miracle of nature that is the Okavango, from the clear and pristine character of this most unusual phenomenon of nature: a system of seasonal waterways alive with rich and varied wildlife in the midst of a semi-arid country called Botswana.

So what exactly is it that makes the Okavango so special in terms of a safari experience? Well, it's this. It's the sensation, the feel of it. You see, there isn't anywhere else where you can sit back in a mokoro, which is what the locals call their dug-out canoes, and hear Africa. There's no engine running; no sound of footsteps or panting; your guide gently, quietly steers and poles you through the crystal water of the channels. You hear the birds, the crickets, the gentle breeze in the grasses. You hear and feel the rhythm of Africa and it is sensational. Literally.

To maintain this rare and distilled pleasure the safari operators of Botswana aimed almost exclusively at high-end tourism for decades, wanting to keep the lid on this peaceful region and touch as lightly as possible on this Okavango paradise. But this approach is slowly easing up, and some comfortably rustic camps now operate at a more competitive price level. Botswana has another big wow safari factor, namely the Kalahari Desert. It's not a desert in the Sahara sense; in fact it's quite green at times. But it has that same atmosphere, that openness, the feeling that you can see forever because the horizons are so wide, that feeling of vastness. The air is clean and sweet and the light is a photographer's dream come true. Both areas - the desert and the delta - are abundant with big game, and logistically it's quite easy to move from one to the other, so a combination of these two experiences in one safari is pretty perfect.

A quick word on Botswana is warranted ... though it deserves so much more; it's a safari pick well worth investigating. It sits on South Africa's northern border and yes, it's the setting for the popular 'No 1 Ladies Detective Agency' series. [The Last Lions](#) was shot here, and its wilderness lodges and camps are numerous and diverse. The Chobe reserve in the north has long been 'the' place to see vast elephant herds and it still holds true today. In the south, the Tuli area is a well-established safari hot spot that's popular with South Africans. The whole country, roughly the size of France, holds a mere 2 million people and it's a very homogeneous society, all of which makes for great stability politically, which in turn makes it highly desirable for tourism.

In short, Botswana is an over-flowing wildlife eden with a block-buster double-feature combining an unusual inland delta and the famed Kalahari desert, both of which are must-haves for lovers of Africa. It's a match made in heaven.

May 2012 be the year of the African Safari.

News from Savanna.

With thanks and acknowledgement to the management, Paddy, Neil, Patrick, James, David and Greg at the lodge.

The pack of wild dog returned at the beginning of the week and spent a lot of time on Savanna property. This enabled us to view them extensively over the last week and we were fortunate enough to witness a few kills. As with the rest of the predators, their main target seemed to be the impala herds, as the youngsters in the herds provide easier prey at this time of the year, but basically anything that moved in front of them was chased! They managed to catch at least two young impalas, one adult female impala and one young bushbuck over two days. In this time we also witnessed some interesting interaction between the pack and other animals, the first of which was the Day One male leopard. The pack came across him with a fresh kudu kill and wasted no time in chasing him up a tree and stealing most of the carcass for themselves.



The next day they came across a female rhino and calf and spent about 20 minutes 'playing' with them. The dogs would rush at the calf, which startled the youngster at first but the young rhino eventually gained in confidence after a few interventions by its mother, and actually started chasing the dogs itself! For a look at the video, [click here](#).



Not long after meeting the rhinos, the pack came across the large herd of buffalo and startled the herd which stampeded away. The herd however soon realised that it was not lions but only wild dogs that were chasing them and they turned on the pack which made a quick retreat.

The Mapogo brothers returned after a long absence from the western sector and immediately picked up the scent for the fourth lioness in the Ximungwe pride that recently lost her cubs. She was once again abducted by one of the males and left his two brothers to defend the territory, but then rejoined them again as they all met up with the whole Ximungwe pride north of the Sand river. The following morning we were very surprised to find two of the males, having traversed way down south, with a young buffalo kill in the clearings south of Main Mac. Two hyena pitched up having followed the scent, but were soon chased off by the oldest male. They then decided it was time to drag the carcass into some shade, as the heat of the day approached.



It just so happened that the four Southern Pride Males were also in this area near Savanna at the same time! As we left the lodge one morning drive we were surprised to find a young male lion perched on top of a termite mound just outside the lodge. We were not immediately sure of who he was, but as we approached we discovered there were in fact three more male lions behind the mound! It became evident then that it was the four young males from the Southern pride who, after last being seen here six months ago, have grown up a lot and are looking like real contenders for a territory.

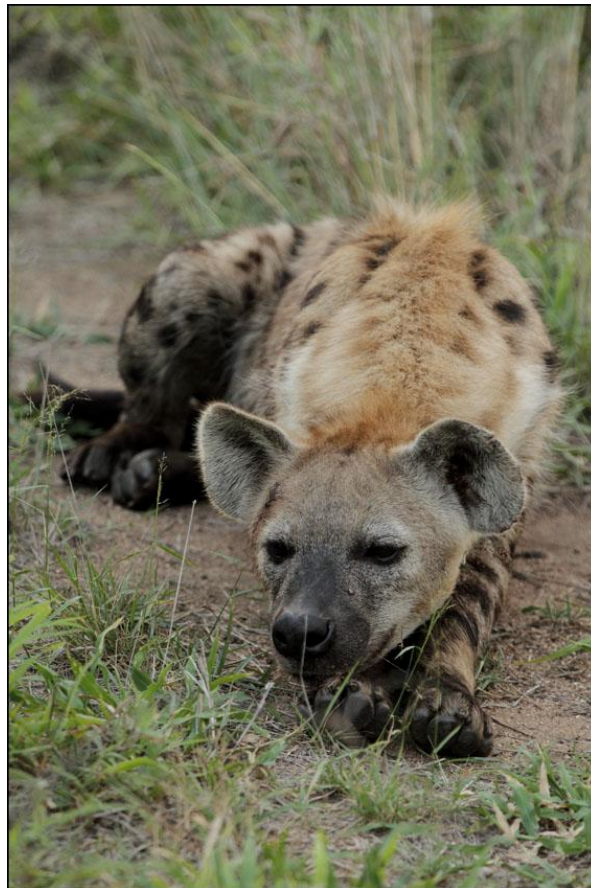


They still seemed wary of being in Mapogo territory but that did not stop them taking down an adult buffalo just outside our eastern border. They fed leisurely until the next day when distant roaring announced the imminent arrival of two of the Mapogo brothers. It is not certain if the Mapogo detected the presence of the younger males from up near the river but the young coalition was not going to stick around to find out. They abandoned the carcass and put a good few kilometres between themselves and the older males as quickly as possible. So while it was exciting to see the young coalition looking to investigate the west, it is evident that they are not confident enough yet to take on even just two of the Mapogo, never mind all three!

The Ximungwe pride is looking a lot more stable and the three mothers have been constantly together with their various cubs. The fourth lioness also joined the pride after courting with the Mapogo males and the pride seemed content to laze around in the very north-west corner of the concession. Recent prolific rainfall has seen the Sand river rising however, which means the pride will be confined the northern parts of the concession until the water level drops again, but hopefully we will still be able to cross the river ourselves to continue viewing them. For a video of the swollen river, [click here](#).

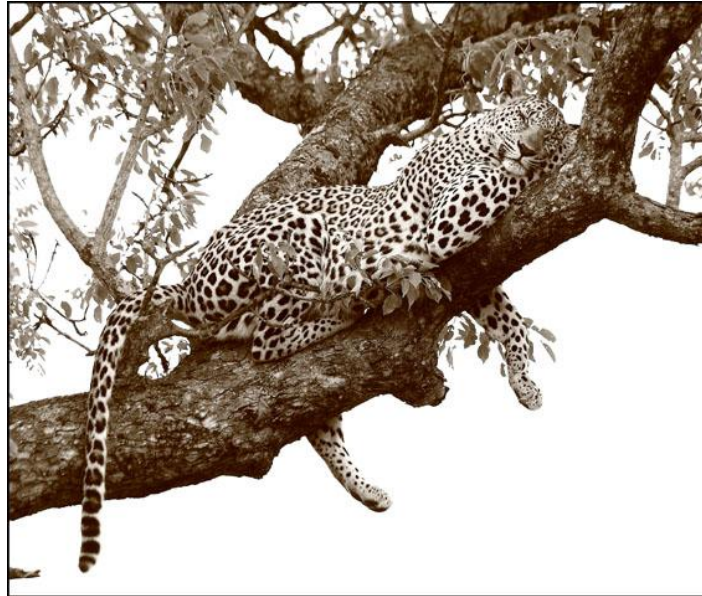


Kashane was in an out of his western territory a few times again, but this time he did catch an impala near Marula Dam which provided us with a more stable sighting of him. The kill was hoisted in a Jackalberry tree and so the sighting also gave us good viewing of two hyena waiting patiently for some scraps to fall. The kill did not last long though, as it was fairly small and he was on his way again, travelling steadily to cover his massive territory.



The Xinzele male was very elusive this last week and was only seen twice. On the one occasion we followed him, as he seemed to be on the scent of something which he just could not find, as the rain had dampened the scent. Another vehicle stumbled across Tlangisa with an impala kill nearby and it seems that this is what Xinzele was after. Lucky for the female leopard though he was unable to find her and he eventually gave up and continued his patrols.

Tlangisa was again providing some good viewing in trees and as with a number of the other leopards she was also seen with a kill, this time an adult female impala. After narrowly escaping detection by Xinzele she did lose the kill during the night to what was probably a hyena.

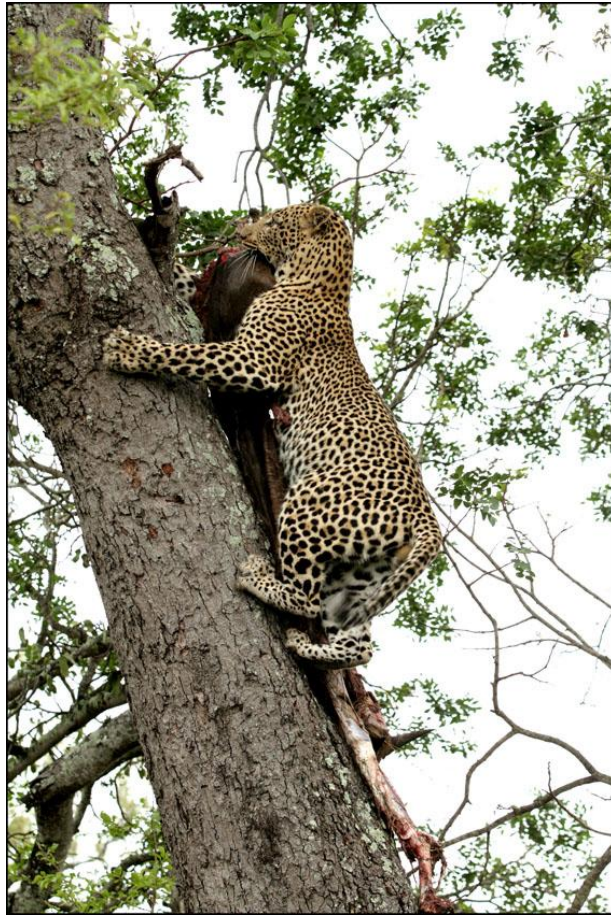


The Day One male was very active this past week and it all started when, after having gorged himself on the young hippo carcass from the week before, we found him lazing at a waterhole in the afternoon heat. Unknown to him there was an impala ram coming down to drink and only at the last second did he notice it. He made an attempt to stalk the antelope but the wind eventually gave his position away and the impala sounded the alarm which prompted the leopard into roaring his frustration.

Not long after this failed hunting attempt he retired to a termite mound, but this time it was a group of rhino's that interrupted his rest. He kept his head down to avoid detection and the beasts passed not even two meters from him.

As mentioned earlier, towards the end of the week he did manage to catch a young kudu, but before he could drag it up a tree he was interrupted by the wild dog pack that chased him up a tree and stole most of his kill. He looked on until the pack left and then returned to the kill to salvage what he could. He immediately decided to tree the kill this time and we had good viewing of him as he finished off the scant remains.





The big news is that Hlabankunzi has probably given birth to her cubs! She was seen looking notably thinner and returning repeatedly to a rocky outcrop in the middle of the concession. This is very exciting and we are all waiting with bated breath to catch a glimpse of the cubs. This may only be in a few weeks however, as the cubs must literally be a few days old. Prior to the big event she was also seen a few times, one of which she had just killed a young warthog. We followed her as she went in search of a drink and sat just meters away as she drank thirstily from a small pool of water before returning to her meal.



Metsi was typically elusive and if it wasn't for the eagle eye of one of the trackers we would not have seen her at all this last week. She was spotted late in the afternoon as she surveyed her surroundings from the top of a termite mound which provided some good opportunities to get some black and white photos before she decided to get moving and disappeared into a drainage line.



Elephant and rhino viewing has continued to be good and once again one of the highlights from an elephant perspective, was a great view of them swimming.



We also have two sets of jackal pups on our property which are providing great viewing. One set of pups is a litter of four just outside Paddy's house, so we are getting constant viewing of them on our way back to camp.



This time of the year is also the time for insects to proliferate. Dung beetles, butterflies, moths and the winged aletes (reproductives) of termites are plentiful. We have also seen Mopani worms, which are not all that common, as they are found more often (for obvious reasons) on the Mopani trees, which are not found in our area. These are a huge source of protein in the local culture... perhaps we should consider putting these delicacies on our menu...



The End!

Finally can you please like www.facebook.com/destinationsafrica so you can learn about our great company!

We hope to see you travelling on safari this year. *Get your bookings in now!*

Cheers.

John

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