



MESSAGE STICK

October 2010

September certainly turned out to be both interesting and very busy. We have a large number of clients travelling at the moment - all the postponements from the World Cup blockage - and this has kept the office staff extremely busy. We have also had an increase in the number of people wanting to plan their trips into next year. Some have taken advantage of the very strong A\$ against the US\$ and the SA Rand and have paid well in advance!

As is often the case we have had to deal with some unexpected happenings in Africa. Air Botswana decided to cancel all direct flights from Johannesburg to Maun and return and route via the capital Gaborone! This has added both time and inconvenience to the trip as the flight from Maun to Joburg now leaves at about 0900 and this means guests must leave the Okavango lodges very early in order to make this connection. Of course the airline has not considered this. Unfortunately for us there is no competitor airline to and from Maun so we simply have to live with it. As it is said TAB - "That's Africa Baby!!"

Our plans for some very exciting safaris starting in September next year are advancing very positively. Without giving too much away at this early stage, we have lined up some sporting greats from Formula 1, Cricket, Tennis and Basketball to join us as hosts on 14 day Pink Diamond Safaris. We will give people the opportunity to spend 14 days with these sporting icons in a safari environment. It will be a top drawer safari and the guests will have the opportunity to get to know the personalities very well. As it is exclusive and we will be taking over entire lodges, only seven couples will be able to join each safari. We will keep you well informed and when we have finalised arrangements we will open up for bookings. We intend to run about four a year.

Hilary and I leave at the end of next week for our next trip to check out both new and some well known lodges in South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania. Next months Message Stick will be delayed as we don't get back until the 8th November - but it will have up to date news of Africa!!

As we have had so many clients travel in August and September I have enclosed just a tiny sample of their comments on returning. We are delighted that they have all returned with such exciting accounts of their experiences.

Some Comments from Recent Returnees from Safari

1). Hi John

Christine and I just wanted to drop you a line to thank you and the Team (Sandy and Faye) for the fantastic African experience you arranged for us. We had a great adventure and a wonderful holiday.

Your itinerary gave us a very special insight into the wonders of Southern Africa and we feel very privileged to have the opportunity to have seen so much in such a short period of time. The Big 7 in one morning game drive in Sabi Sands was something very special and will be a treasured memory.

A BIG THANK YOU for a job very well done.

Cheers Mark & Christine

2). Returning to some normality...haven't had rain for 3weeks, just hot African sun...what have you done????

We are planning our next trip already...in 3 years to Botswana and Vic Falls...the Wilsons want to come as well.....so diarise 2013 for Masson/Wilson trip!!!

We really enjoyed our holiday and want to thank you for all the organising you did to make it a success and so enjoyable....I could die and be left at Selous forever!!!

Regards,
Trish

3). Just a quick email to say thank you for your assistance and expertise in organising our African Adventure!

My 12 year old son and I had a fantastic time and saw everything we wanted to see. We felt safe and well looked after at each stage. Exactly what I was after!

Both Kapama and Motswari were spectacular and unique! The staff were very friendly and helpful. The food and settings were magnificent - and we made friends around the world with other guests from Germany, America, England and Brazil.

We got up close and personal with the big five and more! It was wonderful to see the Lions on the hunt (catching and killing) and the Leopards! We saw a big cat every day! This for us, far outweighed the many other magnificent animals we saw - Elephant, Rhino, Hippo, Giraffe and Zebra. We even glimpsed the very rare spotted Civet along with some endangered wild dogs in the Timbavati!

The visit to the Endangered Species Centre was well worth it and so much value for money! A "furry feel good" for the trip! Although we did not glimpse the Cheetah in the wild - the experience here made up for it!

The highlight of the trip would have to be the last day when we stopped to re-visit some male lions on a kill from the previous day. As we stopped to take photos a large male leopard came wandering up on the other side of the vehicle - he sat about 2 meters away from the car and looked at us - then he saw the Lion on the other side of the vehicle - it was amazing to watch these two magnificent animals stare off at each other!

I was able to relax to the full not having to worry about the details. All the transfers worked wonderfully and I did not have to worry about anything!

I will send you some snaps when I have worked my way through the 1500+ photos we took during our ten day adventure!

I have to say it is not the easiest thing for a mother to relax when travelling with her precious child to a country such as South Africa! But thanks to you I was able to do it!

Many thanks

Kylie

News from Savanna Private Game Reserve

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

True to form for August, the winds started early in the month and the bush is awash with the old dried leaves of the previous year. The grass is now brown and short and many of the animals are concentrated around the water holes during the heat of the day. It is not uncommon to find the elephants swimming in the dams at this time of the year, even though the larger herds are concentrated around the still lush riverine areas.



This time of year is generally good for witnessing the predators making kills and this year has been no exception. There have been many kills witnessed by the rangers over the last few weeks, the most dramatic being the Kashane male leopard catching a warthog in its hole at 7.00 in the morning. This was captured on video and has been posted onto Youtube, so if anybody would like to see this, please go onto <http://www.youtube.com/user/SavannaLodge#p/u/6/8qCGgZ5gtJA> This was the kind of dramatic kill that is very seldom seen and we were then able to watch him feed off this carcass for the next two days.





Hlabankunzi has also made a number of kills this month and a dramatic kill of a steenbuck was also witnessed by the rangers. I am pleased to say that she still has both her cubs and this has provided us with some exceptional viewing this month. The older these cubs get, the greater chance they have of survival. I have only ever known one leopard that has managed to bring her first litter of cubs to independence and that was Mambiri when she brought up Metsi. So we are hoping that Hlabankunzi will be the next one to do this.





Mambiri still has her cub, even though we have not seen much of them this month. I keep saying this, but we think that the cub will be made independent soon. She is catching a lot of small prey on her own and I am sure it won't be too long before Mambiri starts mating again.



We had the first clear viewing of Metsi and her two cubs at the beginning of this month, but it now seems that she has lost one of these cubs. The one left behind is a young male and it is incredible how quickly this cub has become used to the vehicles and is allowing us to view it from close quarters.



It is with great sadness that we can confirm that the Ximungwe pride have lost all their cubs. As far as we know, all of these seven cubs have succumbed to the Mapogo male that came back from the east. There is a lot of mating going on with the Ximungwe pride, but even if these females have another set of cubs, I don't think the Mapogo will be able to hold territory long enough for these cubs to become independent. We have had reports that the four new males that came from the Manyilethi in the north have ensconced themselves on the property east of our boundary. We think that it is only going to be a matter of time before they make a bid for the territory in our area.



The Ottawa pride have also moved further into our area and are establishing themselves predominantly north of the river. This is taking over the area left vacant by the Sand River pride. However, the two young males within the Ottawa pride are coming under enormous pressure as they are over three years old now and are becoming sexually active, so they will not be tolerated by the Mapogo who chase them off every time they see them.



The Salala pride, which is a pride from the east, has also been seen regularly on our territory. They have moved further west because of the influence of the four new males.

The two male cheetah that we see in our area have been very conspicuous this month and a very graphic kill was witnessed by our guests when the male cheetah took down a fully-grown impala ewe. It is still the intention of the Sabi Sands to look at re-introducing cheetah from other areas. Our cheetah population for the past few years has decreased dramatically and this could be due to a disease called feline aids which has been evident in autopsies of some of the cheetah we have lost. However, more research needs to be done on this matter.



As the months go by, we seem to be getting more and more of our hyena back. This is a good thing, as we have been short of hyena on our traversing area for some time now.

There are reports of huge concentrations of hyena outside our traversing area and it is only a matter of time before this spills over onto our area again.



There is great concern at the amount of rhino poaching that is happening within South Africa. The authorities are going to have to get a grip on this, as the escalation in the trade of rhino horn is getting out of control. There is a huge drive by the South African media and conservationists to raise money to help with the anti-poaching of rhino. If you would like to pledge your support, log onto www.stoprhinopoaching.com.



As the year rambles into summer, so more and more of our migratory birds are being seen. They too are benefitting from the sparse foliage conditions in their hunting endeavours. This lizard buzzard which is not migratory was seen killing a fairly large snake. Even though it was difficult to identify the snake it had caught, as the head had

already been eaten, we think that it was an olive grass snake, certainly a fairly large one for a bird of this size.



News from Wilderness Safaris

Camp News

BOTSWANA

Banoka Bush Camp

The camp construction is going according to plan and will be open as per its opening date: 20th September 2010. The camp has been built along the tree line which overlooks a lagoon and comprises a main area with five rooms on either side. The equipment for activities went up to camp this week and include two motorised Delta swamp boats, four traditional mekoro and four 4x4 game viewing vehicles. This will allow morning, afternoon and evening game drives, and water activities all year round - water level dependent of course. Like Kalahari Plains, Banoka Bush Camp will be 100% solar powered but has a backup generator in place should it be required. The word on the ground is that Banoka Bush Camp already has a great atmosphere - along with five hippo floating in the lagoon, unperturbed by the building - and with the planning and support structures already in place, this promises to be an outstanding addition to Safari Adventure Company's suite of camps.

Jao Camp

A reminder about the platform Hide on the Jao floodplain (about 20 minutes from Jao) which can be used for sleep-outs for guests who stay three nights or longer in the

concession. It sleeps maximum four guests and has bed rolls, mosquito nets and long-drop facilities. Generally guests are transferred to the Hide after dinner, staying overnight on the Hide platform with their guide, a radio, torch and a flask of tea/coffee! They return to camp in the morning in time for breakfast. It is possible that dinner can be arranged at the Hide also if requested in advance.

Some good news from Zimbabwe.





Elephants saved from snares in Hwange

This week we found two elephants that had picked up snares. One of them, a young bull, had caught his foot in the wire and it was digging hideously into his skin. A slightly older bull had somehow managed to ensnare his trunk. The snares were set by poachers probably hoping to catch some meat for the pot - for some the only way to add meagre protein to their diets.

The National Parks Capture Unit was called in and after two days of patient waiting at Back Pans, the young bull arrived and he was quickly darted. We removed the terrible leg snare from him and injected him with long-lasting antibiotics. He seemed to be alright when he rose from the anaesthetic and we will monitor his progress very carefully as the wound on his leg was cut right through the flesh almost to the bone.

We then found the older bull at Scot's Pan and once again the capture team was highly efficient. He was darted, the snare cut and medicines applied, all in a matter of minutes.

We were very impressed with the Capture Team from Zimbabwe National Parks. They were willing, helpful and efficient and we are grateful for the effort they made to come here and help.

We are hoping to obtain permission to be able to dart without the capture unit, in this way being able to help the wildlife of Hwange in a timely manner.

Something Different!!

Wildlife of Africa



A plump, barrel chested antelope with a short neck and a long face, the Sable has ringed horns that rise vertically and sweep back in a pronounced curve.

Plants of Africa



One of South Africa's most beautiful trees, the Acacia Karoo (Sweet Thorn) has long white thorns and fluffy yellow flowers, attracting a variety of insects.

Birds of Africa



Kamfers Dam near Kimberley is the only nesting site for lesser flamingos in the country. This wetland hosts 50% of the South African lesser flamingo population.

Drinks of Africa



Maas is a typical sour milk drink of the indigenous people of Southern Africa. It was originally made in clay pots, but nowadays it is factory made and readily available in supermarkets.

Foods of Africa



A traditional South African pastry, Vetkoek is a yeast dough, which is deep-fried in cooking oil and eaten with anything from apricot jam to cooked, curried ground beef. Try it and you will love it.

Culture & Art of Africa



Situated next to the Big Hole, the open-air Kimberley Mine Museum houses the first recorded diamond discovered in South Africa and original buildings such as a bank, doctor's room and pub.

News from Zambezi Safari Company

"Green" times in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana

There are lots of reasons to go on safari during the 'green' or 'emerald' period.

For old safari hands it offers the option of seeing a completely different side to Africa - lush green bush, excellent birding and animals in their prime. This is also the best time to make your money go further (thanks to reduced rates) and enjoy the top camps in the company of Africa's finest Professional Safari Guides.

So why go during this "shoulder" spell?

It's an excellent time of year for taking photos with less dust, dramatic skies, spectacular clouds and light. And there's great birding with the return of the migrant species and the bright colours of breeding plumage. You can witness simultaneous births and nursery herds of young whilst the bush is green, beautiful and lush.

What's more, there're fewer people around and with reduced rates you can stretch the budget for that once in a lifetime experience. **Ask us about the latest specials.**

The 'green' typically runs from November to April in Southern Africa and throughout November and December (short rains) or April to May (long rains) in East Africa.

Speak to us about where's ripe right now - whether that's Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana or Tanzania and Kenya.

News from Kenya

Governors' Camp August Game Report, Masai Mara

The first couple of weeks of August were fairly hot, dry and dusty. We were lucky enough to receive 78mm of rain mid month quenching the brown, dry grasslands. The plains were transformed in a matter of days, the shorter grass that had already been grazed turning to an emerald green. This brought about a change in the zebra and wildebeest behaviour, with the herds of the wildebeest migration coming together and moving north towards Rhino Ridge, Musiara Marsh and on to our walking area in Koiyaki.

We have been treated to the most amazing sight having these dense herds of animals covering the plains from Governors' Camp for as far as the eye can see! We even had to clear the airstrip for aeroplanes to land. The grass is still plentiful even with the enormous numbers of animals on it, this bodes well for September. We have the good rains we received at the first half of the year to thank for that.

The Wildebeest Migration:

At the beginning of the month the herds of wildebeest and zebra were in fairly large groups with trails moving to and fro from area to area without obvious direction. Some wildebeest were still to be seen in the Northern part of the Serengeti and in the southern part of the Masai Mara around the Sand River and in the Trans-Mara areas. With the Masai Mara having some decent rain and reportedly the Serengeti remaining mostly dry, the Wildebeest Migration ventured north to our area of the Masai Mara where greener pastures and brought them together in huge numbers. We have seen many Mara River crossings this month some with a few animals crossing and some with thousands of wildebeest crossing. And we have not even had to leave camp to catch the action with wildebeest crossing the Mara River in front of Governors' Camp on two different occasions last week! The wildebeest have mostly done well, crossing the river with minor casualties even though the river has come up a meter or so. There have been a few devastating crossings where hundreds have drowned as they had chosen a steep exit, littering the river with carcasses and providing a feast for the already gorged crocodiles, catfish and vultures.



Photos of wildebeest crossing the Mara River in front of Governors' Camp courtesy of Gwen and Kevin Schutt

The Quinine trees (*Rauvofia caffra*) after losing their leaves, regenerated new ones together with their flowers and fruit. The Black and White Hornbills after a short absence are back and spending much of their time up in the Quinine trees, as are the Turacos, Double-toothed barbets and Olive pigeons feeding on the fruit. The African Green heart tree, the most prominent large tree in the area known for its medicinal cures for stomach aches and malaria as well as the Masai toothbrush has continued to fruit. The elephant have stood under these trees eating its peppery fruit for some time now, they more than likely receive some kind of medicinal properties from this too. They do get a little feisty from the spiciness and could account for the amount of damage done to the trees and poles in the camps.

We have enjoyed some lovely sightings of the water birds in the marsh now that it has receded and the elephant and waterbuck have eaten the sedge down including Saddle-billed Storks, Yellow-billed Storks, a variety of Plovers and Lapwings, Sacred Ibis and the first of the Spoon-billed storks.

A Martial eagle was sighted with a banded mongoose kill up in a tree. Four Fish eagles and a Bateleur eagle were seen feeding on a young gazelle, we are unsure if one of the fish eagles actually killed it or it had died of natural causes.

There are three ostrich nesting sites out on the plains, one unfortunately was ransacked by hyena and all the eggs eaten and destroyed.

The large herd of buffalo numbering around 400 individuals continue to frequent the marsh to drink and eat the thicker course grass that grows beside it. They have calved recently and have many young varying slightly in age and colour. They are born jet black, changing to a rusty brown as their coat grows out and returning to black again, all in a couple of months. The breeding males stay with the herd and the young to help protect them from predators which they are fierce at. The older pride male of the marsh pride was chased up into the top of a small bush at the end of August by some very unhappy buffalo! The bachelor males, the young and old mostly, still remain in their small groups along the rivers edge, not moving far at all during the day.

The impala, waterbuck, hartebeest and topi maintain their territories along the marsh and riverine forest undisturbed as the wildebeest migration moves through and encompasses them. The warthogs are mostly breathing a sigh of relief as they have been given a

reprieve by the lions as the wildebeest take their place as the staple food group. ____



Photos courtesy of Tom Shorricks and Lin Rankin

Giraffe come and go in smaller herds, sometimes not seeing any for days. They seem to go across into the *Acacia* woodlands for a slightly different diet and then back to us for the *Teclia* and wild cocoa bushes.

The Marsh Pride of lions, have been very prominent around the marsh this month, at a stretch moving up to the Mbila Shaka river line a kilometre away. They have had no need to move as the wildebeest migration has come to them. On a couple of occasions wildebeest have sunk in the mud and trapped themselves, leaving the lions very little to.

The pride has been hunting wildebeest on a daily basis, there are so many wildebeest in their territory that one day they killed five wildebeest and only ate two leaving the rest to the hyenas. The older pride male is still in bad shape, he has come in closer to the rest of the pride but remains apart. He has a serious limp and cannot run as he used to, hence his predicament with the buffalo mentioned earlier. One of the younger lionesses has become more marginalized too, we are unsure why but there is always the possibility she may be expectant. The rest of the pride is fat and happy! The three youngest cubs have come into the fold of the pride and are far more adventurous and playful, the older cubs making sure they grow up tough. The first litter of cubs are mostly with one of the lionesses, away from the core pride and new litter.

With the wildebeest migration on their doorstep The Ridge Pride have maintained their abundant hunting grounds up on Rhino Ridge, not moving very far at all but less accessible in their rocky terrain.



Photos courtesy of Anthony Park and Tom Shorricks

The Paradise Pride having positioned themselves around and near the main crossing sites on the Mara River are not short of food either. This area naturally channels the wildebeest and zebra into a couple of small valleys into the open areas of the river where they mostly cross over. The pride males continue to move back and forth across the river, moonlighting between their two prides of lionesses.

We have seen many different cheetah this month, most of all the three boys. They have been moving between Governors and the Talek river. They have developed a very clever hunting tactic of divide and conquer - the lead male will concentrate his attention on a young wildebeest calf whilst the other two distract and push the mother and the rest of the herd away.

The mother cheetah and the cub with the bad eye have not been seen much at all this month, spending her time out of the reserve in the Koiyaki area. The other female with her grown cub was up near double crossing and also moving into the Koiyaki area. The female with her three almost grown cubs has been seen intermittently up on Topi plains. She had killed a young wildebeest, which is a tall task for a single mother as she risks confrontation from the mother wildebeest. She does have three other mouths to feed, so needs must. The single female has been seen up on Rhino ridge, no confirmed reports on whether she is pregnant yet. She is the same one that was mating with the three boys months ago.



Photo courtesy of Anthony Park

Shadow / Zawadi the leopard, whom we have not seen for an age made an appearance near the windmill at the marsh mid month. The female Il Moran leopard has been seen but less so this month. We think she has retreated more into the forest as the lions presence in the marsh has been so constant. She was however spotted catching cat fish out of a small pool at the marsh. The very large male leopard has been at the rocky, croton area near the River.

Olive and her two cubs maintain their celebrity status on the Olare Orok river, she is seen most days seemingly not minding the being photographed. Olive's previous male cub who is now an adult seems to share part of her territory along the river. He has been seen less regularly, this is normal as males tend to be more secretive. The other female leopard and her two younger cubs on the Ntiakitiak river are also flourishing. Although she managed to kill a young wildebeest, she unfortunately lost it to lions whilst feeding on the ground.



Photos courtesy of Lin Rankin and Anthony Park

With so much game around the hyenas have had their fill, leaving half eaten carcasses and hunting more for sport. There is still a den sight close to our airstrip where the cubs are growing up fast and will soon move on.

There are also two jackal den sites further up on the plains, the pups are still very small and remain mostly in hiding.

Now that the grass has been mowed down in many areas we have had some great sightings of Serval cats and Bat-eared foxes. They are less camouflaged in the shorter, now greener grass.

Conclusion

Some more very happy clients! Cheers to you all for another month.

Happy safaris!

John

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