



MESSAGE STICK

September 2010

August proved to be an interesting month. During the World Cup we had no travellers in South Africa for reasons previously discussed however this month has resulted in a decided increase in activity - both new requests for travel as well as clients making their safari come to life!

We would like to congratulate Bruce Masson and Chris Wilson on summiting Mt Kilimanjaro last week. Whilst the boys were climbing Kili the girls were relaxing, eating lobster, drinking good wine and snorkelling on a Mozambique Quirimbas island - Matemo! They have now all met up in Southern Tanzania for the start of their safari in Ruaha. I will endeavour to get an article on the Kili climb for next months Message Stick.

Howard Knaap and his wife, Michelle, have also just returned from a super safari that covered both East Africa and Southern Africa. He reports that he had a totally amazing time and everything was as good as or better than expected. They were fortunate enough to see a Cheetah hunt and kill in the Masai Mara, saw the migrating Wildebeest, loved the Ngorongoro Crater, saw Leopards at Savanna and over ate the good food! Paddy Hagelthorne at Savanna was singled out as a "consummate professional" and Howard described his experience as overwhelming! How delightful it is to have our guests come home and be so complimentary about their trip! Michelle is a city lady but she had a fabulous time and loved her safari - another convert!!

September will see a number of other travellers depart on their safaris. When are you going to go on yours?

News from Savanna Private Game Reserve

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

The temperatures are starting to rise and we have already seen signs of summer starting. It is a little early to say that winter is over, though, because a cold spell often

comes back to bite us. However, we have started recording some of the migratory birds returning to their summer breeding areas. The Wahlberg's eagles have been seen a few times and the yellow-billed kite should be arriving shortly. These are some of the inter-Africa migrants that always arrive early. With the warm days, crisp mornings and evening game drives giving us a bit more light, this is an ideal time to be on Safari.



The predatory sagas continue where they left off last month. In the last newsletter, we mentioned about the one Mapogo male lion coming back from the east. Well, he has decided to stay on the western side, but what was exceptionally interesting was that the other Mapogo based on the west of our property suddenly all went east, obviously to challenge the intruders that had moved in there. How would they know to do this without there being some kind of communication between them? The four intruders have set themselves up and are causing havoc in the east and north-east of the Sabi Sands. As a result of their arrival, we now have prides of lions from the east intruding on the western territories. Prides that we seldom see are now venturing onto our property on a regular basis. This could provide very interesting viewing in the next month or so, as there will undoubtedly be disputes on territorial boundaries by the females of the various prides.



The bad news is that the one Mapogo from the east has continued to kill a large number of cubs. Unfortunately the cub that was nicknamed 'Supercub' was killed by this Mapogo a few days after it had been mauled last month. The other cub with 'Supercub' has also been killed, as well as one of the smaller cubs. This leaves three small cubs with the Ximungwe pride. The Ximungwe females are often together now and this is probably due to the infiltration of the strange prides from the east.

As a result of this new male's insistence on killing cubs, there has been a great deal of conflict between the Mapogos themselves and they are already starting to look scarred and battered.

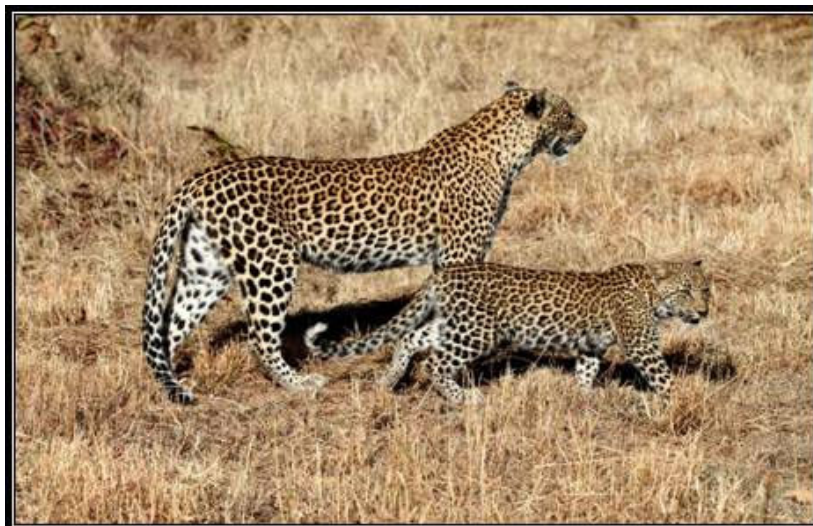
Despite all this conflict, however, they are still able to undertake a kill and another large buffalo bull was despatched along the river.



We normally give our leopards names corresponding to areas that they often frequent - for instance, Makubela was given that name because her territory was along the Makubela drainage line. Unfortunately, the Lisbon male came from a farm in the south of the Sabi Sands called Lisbon - hence his name - but a number of guests have asked us whether he is an import from Portugal, so we have decided to change his name to the Kashane male, which is also the name of a drainage line that he frequents. The Kashane male is definitely making inroads into our driving area, as he endeavours to increase his territorial size. As mentioned in a previous newsletter, this male is a magnificent specimen and the more he ventures into our driving area, the better!



Hlabankunzi and her two cubs are doing extremely well, even though this month they had a close shave with a lioness and one of the Mapogos who stole their kill and trapped the three leopards in a tree for 24 hours. Whilst this is very tense from our human point of view, it is a very good learning curve for the cubs to know what to do when they find themselves in this kind of situation. As these two cubs grow, so Hlabankunzi is bringing them further afield, which is making our viewing a lot easier. Hopefully, we will be able to give monthly reports on this little family.





Mambiri and her cub have made a number of kills this month and she continues to bring this large cub along to her kills. It should only be a few months before this cub is made independent and has to establish her own territory.



We had a few days when the wild dog brought their pups into our area and set up a den. There were a total of seven pups and for only a few days we had exceptional viewing of these pups around the den. Then, unfortunately, the Ottawa lion pride located the den

and killed two of the pups. The den was subsequently moved back out of our area and we now only see the dogs occasionally when they come into our domain on hunting forays. As far as we know, the remaining five pups are doing well.



Good news is that the hyena populations have started to come back to the west, after a long period of absence. This will obviously put more pressure on wild dog pups and the leopard cubs, so the parents will need to be far more vigilant than they were in the past. We are now seeing hyena almost on a daily basis and we can only hope that they will den in our area again soon.

As usual, our rhino populations are really flourishing and on a number of occasions we have featured a particular female with a very long horn that is just under a metre long. She and her calf have linked up with another two youngsters and are being seen regularly on our property.



This dry time of year is a very good time for elephant viewing and this year has been no exception. The congregation of elephant around the riverine area is enormous. One always feels that the damage that they cause is excessive because of the dry winter conditions. However, when the summer rains come and everything becomes lush and green, one hardly notices where these elephant have been.



It is at this time of the year when everything seems brown and drab that one can find the small, beautiful, colourful aspects of the bush. Take the impala lilies, for instance - exquisitely coloured plants that are now flowering in all their glory. The aloes that also flower profusely at this time provide much nectar for the different insects and numerous birds. Some of these birds are spectacular, although rarely concentrated upon during our summer period. The Scarlet-chested Sunbird and the Collared Sunbird are regular visitors to these beautiful aloes and provide spectacular photographic opportunities. These are the little things I enjoy about winter, besides the light being so fantastic and the sunrises and sunsets quite out of this world. This is a really good time to be in the bush. I know many of you are visiting us again this year and I look forward to welcoming you back, so that we can all share some more great bush adventures!





News of the Kenya Migration

The rain in the four areas of the Mara has led to the distribution of the wildebeest and the zebra in them.



The group southeast of Keekorok is now heading west towards the Mara Bridge along Sand River.



Another herd in the Mara Triangle is starting to cross Paradise Crossing and Shamarta and in to the eastern side. A big section of the Mara Triangle has been burnt leaving only a small section with grass for the wildebeest. This has forced the wildebeest to look for greener pastures.

The wildebeest crossing to the eastern side are congregating on Topi hill.



There are wildebeest along the border of the Reserve and the Mara West Conservancy, northwest of Mara Intrepids Camp.



News from Tanzania

What's happening at Ndutu?

It's that time of year again when I've been roped into writing the newsletter. Since May we have had little rain but due to an above average rain fall in the wet season we still have a large lake in front of the lodge attracting flocks of flamingos to feed on the algae giving some great photographic opportunities.



One afternoon our outside crew had taken the biodegradable waste to the cage, as they were preparing to offload, one of the guys noticed a leopard lying on top of the cage.

As you can imagine there was a dash to get back into the car! They very kindly returned to the lodge and informed us and the other driver guides giving many people a chance to catch a glimpse of the leopard, it turned out to be a young female who was unusually unfazed by all the attention. No doubt her mother was close by?

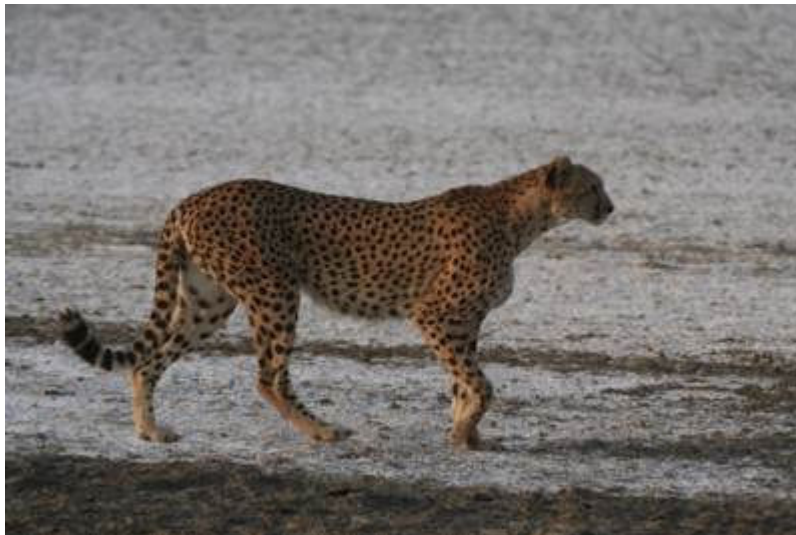
A few days later as I drove out of the lodge there was a larger leopard in a tree not far from the entrance. I returned to alert other driver guides of her presence and this allowed for some further good photo opportunities. The following morning some lucky clients were able to view this mother and cub before she slunk off into the bushes.



Our cheetahs have not been easy to spot recently as the "cordifolia" (the tall shrub) has been exceptionally successful this year following the rain, which makes it hard to sight and follow cheetah. There has been however two mothers with cubs in the marsh who have been given a reprieve when the marsh lion pride left and moved towards twin hills.

Laura "cheetah project" has confirmed that both these cheetahs are first time mothers, one of whom is the female cub of the legendary Eleanor and known to the cheetah project now as Aretha. Aretha was first sighted with four cubs out in the open in July. Fingers crossed she will be just as successful at raising them as her mother was. The other is Rosalind who has one cub.

On an afternoon game drive a couple of weeks ago, I was lucky to come across "Saffron" and her year old male cub, whom I seem to have a knack of finding around Ndutu. I last sighted them at twin hills back in March, they hadn't been sighted by the cheetah project for almost two years, but they have very definitely moved into Ndutu. They were walking on the lake shore at sunset. One of the advantages of this time of year is that you can be the only vehicle at a sighting and on this occasion I was.



At this time of year, having fewer guests around, we try to move out the bees that have made homes in the attic of the rooms. This year we had a large hive in room number 2 which gave enough honey for all of the staff.



We have amongst our crew some very seasoned bee handlers who can get up into the attic after dark in a pair of shorts and remove 20kg of honey without even batting an eye lid. So some fine Ndotu acacia honey on the breakfast tables.

The lions around Ndotu have caused much speculation as to whether they are one pride or multiple prides. This week we had an incident where the lionesses from the marsh who are three plus their nine-eighteen month old cubs were sighted within 100 meters of the Masek lionesses with the two males (half tail and his brother) present. I am no biologist but I believe this almost confirms that they are of one pride.

The marsh lionesses have managed to bring up nine cubs through the whole of last years drought and are now a lovely pride of lions to watch as they lounge under the trees during the day. The Masek lionesses have another six cubs of about 6 months old, and the three 9 month old cubs are doing well.



So, as you can see we have plenty of lion viewing at Ndotu.

Our elephant families are around again and the marsh area being the best place to sight them as they come down in the middle of the day for a drink. Our favourite troublesome tembo "DT" has unfortunately not been sighted for nearly a year, as it was a year ago since he terrorized the lodge's water supply.

I hope all the attempts to keep him away from the water tanks have not put him off Ndotu totally. I miss his antics.



On an environmental angle the lodge has now added additional bulk gas storage which means we will not need to rely on the gas lorry trying to get to Ndotu during the rains and will also minimize the amount of fire wood we use in the Kitchens. We have also just ordered our last three solar water heating units to install which will make all our hot water 100% solar (as long as the sun shines), we still have our old fire wood boilers as a back up, so rest assured, hot showers on rainy days too!

Last but not least our genets continue to be the centre of attention with many photographers queuing up to get a snap of them up on their beam. Recently we had a presumably new mother with three kittens who all fell off the roof. She quickly picked one up, and scampered back up the wall into the roof to place her kitten in safety. By the time she had collected her second kitten to be brought back to the roof the first one had jumped back out to join its sibling on the floor. Mum looked a little miffed when she returned for what she thought was her last trip only to find two of them. As she collected one of the two, and headed off, the kitten in the roof appeared ready to jump. We had to stand, waving our arms to try and prevent them from jumping until mum had collected the last kitten, and calmness resumed.

Wilderness Safari News

Conservation News

Rhino Relocation - Namibia

The Kunene rhino translocation took place in July and an intensive monitoring phase is about to be implemented to assess the wellbeing of the rhino in their new areas in the Palmwag Concession. The operation was essentially an airborne exercise - one with rhinos being located by a spotter aircraft which acted as an overall coordinator for calling in the darting helicopter and the larger Huey helicopter which then transported the animals out of the extremely rough terrain. The animals had a transmitter implanted in the horn, were notched, measured and loaded into a crate for road transfer to areas close to the release sites. The animals were again tranquilised and taken by the Huey to the release sites. Post-release aerial tracking has already commenced and one animal has been recorded moving more than 100km in four days. The critical monitoring phase will

continue for some time for the animals in their new areas. The operation was a huge coordinated effort with personnel from multiple organisations, including SRT, MET, Wilderness Safaris and IRDNC. There have been no mortalities amongst the rhino which is a testament to the expertise and skill of the people involved in the operation.

Desert Lion Conservation - Namibia

Lionesses Tawny and Morada moved deeper into the sanctum of Skeleton Coast Park, recently observed catching an Oryx 4km from the mouth of the Hoarusib River. This bodes well for them as it reduces the possibility of human/predator conflict in the local Himba village, Puros, which borders the Skeleton Coast Park. Dr. Flip Stander of the Desert Lion Conservation organisation will be monitoring their movements in the area in the coming weeks to determine whether they remain in this vicinity. Seeing the arid-adapted lions with more frequency in the Skeleton Coast is an exciting experience to any Skeleton Coast safari.

Conclusion

That's it for another month folks! Next month Hilary and I are off to Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa to check out some new lodges as well as visit some old favourites. More about that next month.

Happy safaris!

John

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