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December 2004

Greetings! My sincere apologies for length of time since my last update on Kaingo and Mwamba Camps. We had an extremely busy 2004 from the time we opened in late May, right through to the end of October. The game-viewing was spectacular as usual and our guests recorded many special wildlife moments. This year we saw a record number of guests booking our two camps in combination - a typical stay being a 3-4 nights at Kaingo followed by 3 nights at Mwamba.



We had several journalists and photographers stay with us over the course of the season including Sankha Guha who presents for BBC Holiday program, and writes for both the Independent and the Financial Times in the UK. We also had Owen Promm, a wildlife filmmaker for Discovery Channel; Alexandra Fuller (author of "Don't Let's Go To The Dogs Tonight" and "Scribbling the Cat"); plus Lynn Johnson and Frans and Christine Lanting from National Geographic magazine (the edition they are working on will be out in September/October 2005), stay with us. Another wildlife filmmaker - Peter Lambertini completed his film "The Golden Baboon", which was filmed in the area around Kaingo Camp.

Game-viewing:

Leopard: we had one of our best ever leopard years in 2004, with practically all guests having multiple leopard sightings during their stay. A female leopard we've named "Lacy" has firmly established herself as "Goldie's" successor in the area around Kaingo camp. Lacy has a one year old cub, and they both became very relaxed around us as the season progressed. Mother and cub were often seen together, even during daylight. Goldie's son, a big, beautiful male, is the father of this cub and was often seen close to Kaingo Camp. Goldie's son seems to have taken on some of the remarkable attributes of his mother and is frequently seen spending time with Lacy and their cub; this is most unusual behaviour for these most solitary of cats.

In the area around Mwamba camp we have a small, pale coloured female leopard and a large male, both of whom gave us great viewing with kills right in close to the camp and, later in the season, mating.

We estimate that there are at least 8 leopards based within the areas we conduct drives and walking safaris - the high number reflecting the good concentrations of puku and impala antelope.

Lion: most commonly seen was the "Lion" pride north of Kaingo; the 5 females and 3 males were often hunting or on a kill and provided many thrilling sightings. The "Mwamba" pride, which is bigger due to there being 3 year- old cubs in addition to the four females and two males, were also the subject of hundreds of photos.

Buffalo: the Lion plain herd grew to 1000 in late August before splitting into 3 smaller herds. We witnessed some classic buffalo "kills" by the lions including one just behind the ebony grove at Kaingo.

Late in the season when the river was very dry, a herd of more than 1000 came to drink directly opposite Kaingo, making for phenomenal viewing.

Elephant: the hide overlooking the elephant crossing point on the Luangwa was very popular with our guests. From a photographic point of view, it is fantastic - especially when there is more than one group in the water below. From this platform we watch the elephants drinking, bathing, socialising and mudding themselves. [Click here to see photos of our elephant hide and the elephants.](#)

On most mornings there were at least fifty elephant on Lion Plain. On 18 October at 05.00 in the morning, a baby elephant joined the world very close to Kaingo. For the next few days the proud mother - who is the matriarch to the local clan - showed it off to us close to camp. [Click here to see the baby elephant less than 12 hours after its birth.](#)

Hippo: the Luangwa river was quite low this year, which resulted in the hippos being even more concentrated around our hippo hide giving us some great photographic opportunities. [Click here to see photos of our hippo hide and the hippos.](#)

There were a few hippo kills during the season - one in June was particularly spectacular in that it took place right in front of Kaingo and attracted close to 200 crocodiles. Amazing sights and sounds from our "deck" on the river as the crocs set about disposing of it.

Bird parties: the stork/pelican fishing parties were spectacular (July onwards) as were the Carmine bee-eater colonies that came in, in August to nest along the riverbanks. We had a mobile hide on our boat that allowed us to get within metres of the colonies. [Click here to see photos of the carmines and our carmine hide.](#)

In general the game was as plentiful as ever around the two camps, giraffe, zebra, puku, impala, Cookson's wildebeest, kudu and bushbuck all within sight of the camps (particularly exciting at Mwamba which is such an "open" camp). The deck at Kaingo provided some great leopard and lion sightings along the beach opposite.

I opened some new loops with our tractor grader early in the season, which proved to be great for viewing. Next season I plan to open a small track up to the "Mwamba Sands " area, north of Mwamba Camp. In this area the Mwamba River actually disappears from sight and flows underground for about 5 km before resurfacing, it also has some interesting vegetation including a Baobab forest .

Game - viewing highlights

- leopard feeding on impala in a tree almost within Mwamba camp (purring distance)
- zebra mating (my first time to witness stripes upon stripes)
- lion kills- on puku/impala/buffalo(breathtaking stuff both on the night drives and the walks)
- hour old baby elephant that was born behind Kaingo at 05.00 on 18/10, mother disposing of afterbirth (wobbly and wet /relieved mother)
- 4.5 m long African Rock Python slithering across the road  heading towards her nesting site (no rush)
- leopard killing baby warthog (fast food)
- 24 Thornicroft giraffe in one group (nice legs)
- over 1000 buffalo on Lion plain (vintage Africa)
- excellent sightings of Pels Fishing owls and also Bat Hawk (common residents)
- young bull elephant picking up and throwing small clods of earth towards the vehicle, twice (cheeky)
- two miniature porcupines following their mother (prickly duo)

- tree-climbing elephant: bull with both front feet half-way up a tree trunk (most peculiar)
- a pair of lions walking past the dinner table at Kaingo while we were having main course (close shave)
- a leopard with a crocodile kill up a tree (scaly feast)

We are looking forward to a busy 2005 safari season; Zambia is one of the safest places to travel and flights to and from and within are getting easier all the time. In the meantime, we are closed for the rains, which have started well (the Luangwa River is already flowing strongly). As usual we have privately sponsored a group of scouts to be based for patrols between Mwamba and Kaingo throughout the rains. I feel this has helped over the last few years in protecting the game in the area; the small herd of Cookson's Wildebeest is my barometer and they are going from strength to strength (110 last count). The elephant also seem more relaxed in the area to the north of Mwamba.

The staff all do their own thing during the rains. Most, like Patrick, farm their plots close to their villages. Ian has gone for travels in the UK; Cameron is in South Africa ,Emma home in the UK and Jules back in Australia. I am soon on my way to see her and the land of wallabies. I am really looking forward to exploring the wildlife and marine life in Australia.

In the meantime have a great Christmas and New Year and we look forward to sharing some of the natural wonders of the Luangwa Valley with you next year.

Salani bwino (stay well)

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