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January 2002

Season's greetings from the valley.

Almost the end of January already and another safari season just around the corner! After a couple of months of farming and maize planting, we are back in the valley to embrace the rains.

After a late start they are here and have begun replenishing the Luangwa river system; vegetation everywhere is luxuriant and green with plant growth at an optimum. At the moment there is an abundance of reptile, insect, and bird life as many populations reach their maximum number. Cuckoos, kingfishers, ducks, geese, waders and weavers seem to be everywhere while certain species, such as the storks and queleas are starting to congregate into large breeding colonies.



The Luangwa river flows even more brown in the rains with all its silt and alluvial deposits in suspension; at the moment it is only a meter or so from the top of its banks, filling its lagoons and tributaries. The hippo population has spread out from the Luangwa into these quieter waters. One of my favorite sights at this time of year is to see hippos in the flooded ebony grove behind Kaingo-only a couple of months ago it was dry and dusty and used by buffalo and elephant for shade. Crocodile hatchlings take shelter amongst the ebony roots, which also provide excellent cover for the adults to re-establish wet season territories.

Having just acquired a new 8 seater 'swamp cruiser' boat from Botswana, we are opening Kaingo in February/March and early April for limited river safaris (maximum 6 persons/trip), which include 3 or 4 nights at the camp and exploring the surrounding area by day. The aim is to offer guests an opportunity to experience the Luangwa's 'green season' and period of intense growth and replenishment. Activities include river cruising/ game-viewing by boat, birding (especially stork and quelea colonies), and short walking safaris across the more open areas around Kaingo and Mwamba camps, which is where game collects at this time of year. Line fishing is spectacular in the lagoons and river inlets. Picnics and day excursions further up-river are also exciting. As always the lions call around the camp at night and are often spotted on the river banks.

One of the other uses for the new boat is to take anti-poaching scouts up and down the river; poaching for meat is always a problem at this time of year.

Recently, I was sent the "Lakes and Rivers" film produced by Pip Lawson and Richard Kirby of BBC's Wild Africa series, part of which is about the Luangwa River. In it I found incredible footage of a buffalo being attacked by a huge croc. They shot this footage from our hippo hide at the mouth of the Mwamba River, just up the Luangwa from Kaingo.

Finally, for Zambia's recent peaceful multiparty elections are proof that this great country is as stable as ever and remains a best kept secret as far as big game-safaris are concerned, particularly in this ancient rift valley.

Till next time, Salani bwino

Derek Shenton

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