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Monday, June 14, 2010

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## Shenton Safaris - Newsletter archive

### July 2003

Greetings! Our "winter" or cool season is nearly over, though it has been a mild one as usual. The rains in this part of Zambia ended on time in April and were generally good all round - farmers have been able to harvest good crops of maize and millet. We opened Kaingo Camp as usual on 24 May and have been busy ever since.



Mwamba Camp, which takes a little more work to get ready due to the high quantities of thatching grass needed for fences etc, was opened around mid-June. The camp looks great and the walks and drives from there have so far been spectacular; we have been seeing good lion, leopard, buffalo, eland and Cookson's Wildebeeste and a family of three elephants are always close to camp. This is one of those years when the ebony trees fruit very heavily, which is good news for elephants, antelope, baboons, monkeys and birds. The small green berries are fleshy and sweet, tasty even to us humans.

Our elephant hide or blind is up and running. It consists of a large platform 5m off the ground between some sturdy trees overlooking a regular elephant crossing point across the Luangwa River. It is proving to be very productive and offers guests a new game-viewing experience. The elephants tend to gather at the same point around mid-day in preparation for the crossing, which normally involves a long drink, a mud-bath and a dusting. Watching the young ones hold onto their mother's tails is quite a sight. There are of course still the daily visits to the hippo hide and ebony forest close to Kaingo Camp.

Recent game viewing highlights:

Brown snake-eagle killing and eating a black mamba snake (one the deadliest of snakes in Africa). Regular Marsh owl and Black-Shouldered Kite sightings on Lion Plain / over 100 Cookson's Wildebeeste around Mwamba Camp / regular Serval cat sightings / watching as 6 lionesses hunted a group of buffalo which had to cross a crocodile infested lagoon in order to escape / 4 separate leopards sighted on one night-drive.

Big cat diary: The two lion prides - 'Lion' and 'Mwamba' have been very vocal so far this season suggesting strains on old pride boundaries that have to be patrolled constantly. The males in both prides all look in excellent condition. My favorites are the two old 'Mwamba' pride males, with their rich dark manes and yellow eyes that stare straight through you.

There is a very easy-going female leopard with cub towards 'elephant bend'. Goldie's son - four years old now and seems as big as a small lioness - and is also regularly on the prowl after dark. Then there are the camp leopards, one at Mwamba, and the one at Kaingo, which hunts the ebony forest area. The big male opposite camp also regularly struts along the river-bank opposite Kaingo. We have had great views of him

from our 'deck' which is the platform built into the riverbank.

In an effort to see aardvark whose burrows we have identified, we have made a small bush track so that we can park up in the dead of night and wait for them to become active. So far - nothing - but aardvarks are elusive and we will keep you posted on results!

On 01 August 1993 after rushing to finish building Kaingo we opened to receive our first visitors. For me it has been an incredible experience to guide and explore in this special section of the South Luangwa National Park.

Over the years I have had some amazing opportunities to witness nature at work and have always been surprised at how adaptable and resilient wildlife is. But what still amazes me is how so many and varied creatures can survive under such competitive conditions - each niche is thoroughly utilised, from the crepuscular Bat-hawk which only hunts bats at sunrise/sunset, the metallic spider hunting wasp which lays its eggs in the body of a spider it has dragged into a specially prepared hole, to the cat-fish which undergoes estivation - 'hibernating' deep in the mud of the dried up lagoons waiting for the rains. Certainly, operating the camps has been an easier existence! I am always aware and grateful for that.

We recently had a wedding in Kaingo's ebony forest for David and Sarah Norr from the US. Their families had visited us on two previous occasions and decided the ebony 'Cathedral' was the best place for tying the knot - congratulations!

Deb, Kerri, Patrick and Sadie are all doing such a great job guiding and hosting this year - creating a wonderfully efficient and friendly atmosphere in camps.

May I take this opportunity to thank all the guests who have shared with us at Kaingo and Mwamba, over the years.

Wishing you the best of the remainder of the Northern summer or Southern winter. Mwende bwino (go well) Derek Shenton

**Salani bwino**

**Derek Shenton**

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