



On Foot with Shangani Trails In the Makuleke Concession!!



Newsletter August 2012

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Elephant on the Luvuvhu River. Photo Dana Allen

Update for 2012

The Makuleke Concession

Unlike the past three years, The Concession didn't enjoy the best of rainfall seasons this year and the late rains that were so much in evidence in recent years unfortunately did not materialize when we needed them most. As a result, the Limpopo River dried up in April and the various pans around the Concession have been placed under a great deal of pressure with a few, like Makwadzi Pan, drying up much sooner than last year. The perennial pans on the Limpopo Floodplain, such as Hlangaluwe and Chichacha, are, however, still in good shape making this magnificent Fever Tree Forest area a magnet for large volumes of buffalo and elephant.

With Reedbuckvlei having dried up early (we sorely missed all the waterbirds this year) and Nwambe Pan now down to pools, the ever flowing picturesque Luvuvhu River has made for some wonderful watering sightings of elephant and buffalo while the high volume of general game hanging around the river has also ensured a great deal of Lion and Leopard activity. The natural springs have also provided a great deal of value to our trails with guests having had

some magnificent encounters with buffalo at Mashashiti and Rhino at Palm Springs. The Concession is now very dry but great for walking with the bush being so open and the high volumes of Big 5 activity.

Guest Mix

While I have had the privilege of guiding many South Africans over the years, I am pleased to say that, despite the world-wide economic woes, guests from afar have joined us in numbers this year with warm welcomes having been extended to many Swiss, UK, USA, Australian, Canadian, Dutch, Italian and German guests. It has been a great pleasure to guide all of you and we sincerely thank you for all your support.

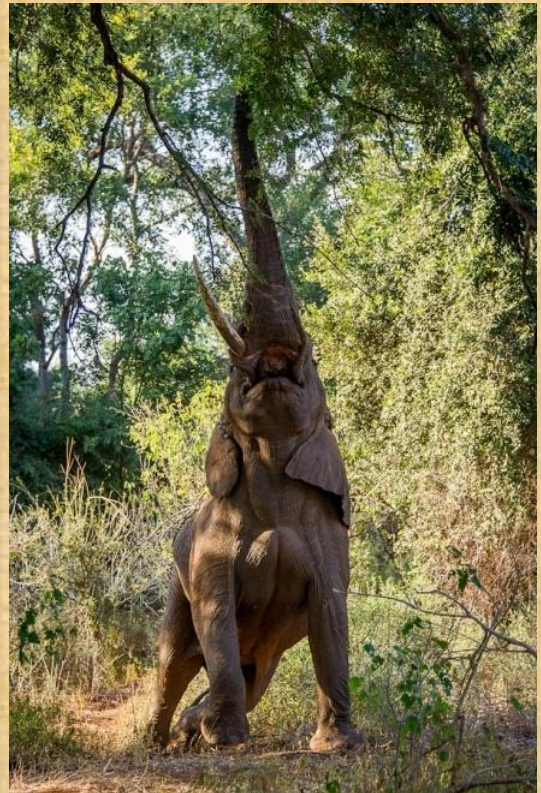
I have also been able to learn a great deal more of the art of wildlife photography while guiding Dana Allen a renowned wildlife photographer with whom I spent a week while he shot a portfolio for The Outpost Lodge. The intricacies of the combinations of position and light now mean a great deal more to me than before.

Thank you Dana for all your unselfish input and patience with this well known philistine of photography!!

See www.photosafari-africa.net for a look at some of Dana's work.

Elephant Bull reaching for Nyala Berries. Makuleke Concession.

Photo Dana Allen



The PafuriWalking Trail

This trail operating out of the Pafuri tented camp in the Luvuvhu West area has proven to have been very successful this season. It is rustic and simple but gives the guest an amazing bush experience. We have had leopard in around the camp virtually every night, elephant constantly around the camp, day and night, while we even returned from a walk to find them inside the camp!! The eerie nightly calls of the hyena are a given while the roar of the transient lions sound as if they are right next to your tent!! The best of all though is the soothing call

of the many Wood Owls in the big Ana Trees under which the camp is situated. Put it in your diary for next year, it will be well worth your while.

Freelance Capers

A Drive to end all Drives

It is not often I write about Game Drives in my newsletters with my usual interpretation of a Game Drive being the use of the vehicle as a means of transport to get us to the spot from where we are going to walk!! However, while freelancing for Wilderness- Pafuri Camp in the Concession, I conducted an afternoon drive down Luvuvhu East for a party of friends and family from South Africa and the USA led by Dalene and Rob Quayle. We had split the large group between Godfrey and myself and with Lions having been spotted in the Luvuvhu East area that mid-morning Godfrey said he would scout ahead and let us know what he found.

We had just entered the Riverine Forest heading east when Godfrey called he was off-road following the lion tracks, we agreed to carry on. We had not gone far when we saw a breeding herd of elephants off to our right and crossing the road in front of us. Turning around I picked up a few nervous faces in the seats to my rear which turned to some relief when I indicated that I would not be sticking around with the breeding herds being a bit nervous in this area. I was then informed that the Group had had a rather bad meeting with elephant at Madikwe earlier in the week and they would not be too concerned if we moved on. Further down the road we came across some elephant bulls off to our right. While cameras clicked away, the Bulls appeared quite relaxed except one youngster, who had a hole in his trunk, who was a little ruffled.

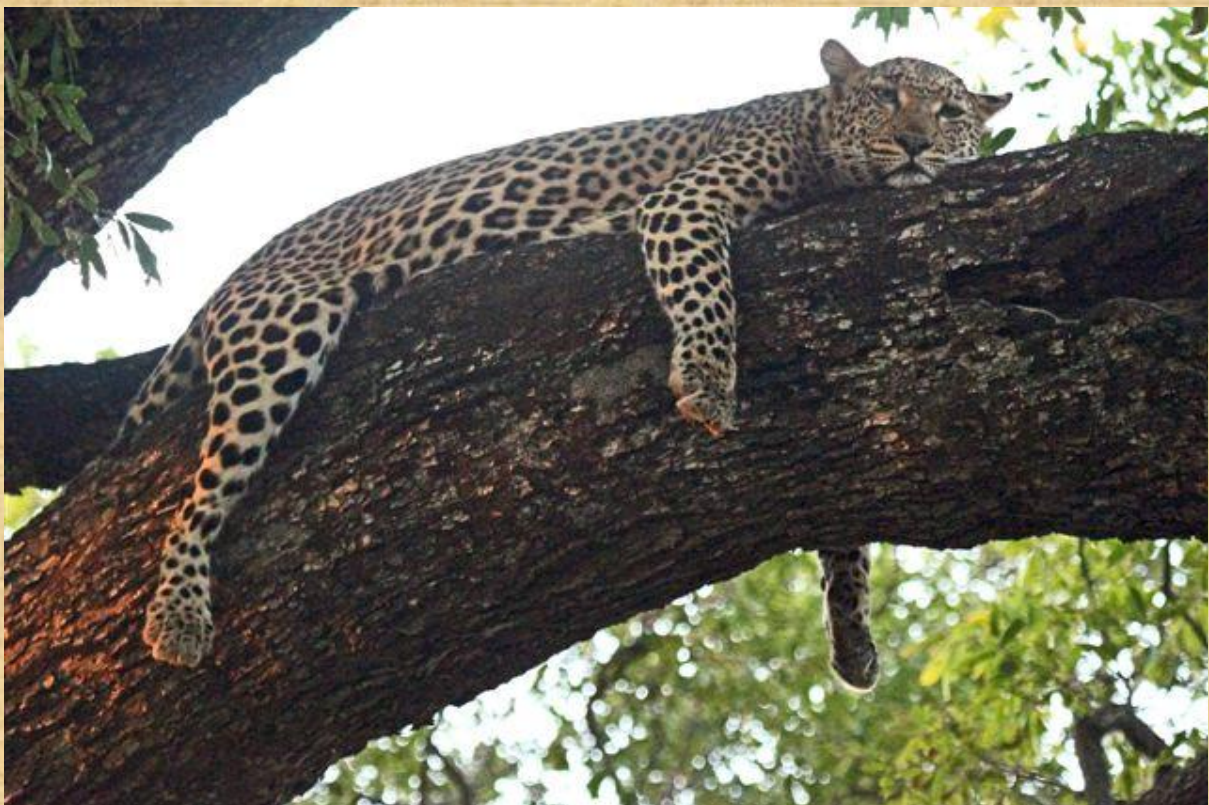


The Elephant Bulls, Makuleke Concession. Photo courtesy of Rob Quayle.

He stood tall, ears out and shook his head, more out of bravado than anything, but it was enough to generate some rumblings from the rear seats and I lingered only a bit longer to ensure all had a good view then moved on down the road.

Just then the radio crackled to life and Godfrey confirmed that he had the lions visual and that we should join them. I did a quick u-turn and went off road after seeing what I thought to be Godfrey's tracks going south towards the river. We had gone about 100m in when I heard an exclamation of "It's a cat!!"

.Thinking we had stumbled on the lions I stopped and turned to ask their whereabouts, when I followed the outstretched arms and saw the Leopard in the big Jackal Berry tree about 60m off. Cameras were already clicking when a second exclamation of "There're two" rang out. Trying to keep the noise and movement down to a minimum, I reversed until all had a good view. The second leopard then dismounted from the Jackal Berry and disappeared at its base. The first was, however, going nowhere, lying lazily spread-eagled across the big branch in a classic leopard pose!!



The first leopard lazing unconcerned in the Jackal Berry tree. Photo Rob Quayle.

I called Godfrey to join me. We enjoyed the sighting while we waited for him and his group, then following him closer to the Jackal Berry, with the lazy leopard totally unfazed by this intrusion in his day. Godfrey then pointed to

the base of the tree and there was the second leopard we had seen earlier, feasting on an Impala kill!! Not one leopard, but two and on a kill, it could not get any better! The guests did not know where to look, up the tree or on the ground, what a choice!!



The second Leopard feeding on the Impala Kill. Luvuvhu East Makuleke Concession. Photo courtesy of Rob Quayle.

The lions forgotten, we switched off the engine and just enjoyed this once in a lifetime sighting!!

Eventually, with the light fading and other vehicles arriving it was time to move and think about sundowners!! Godfrey had already moved off, parked and walked up a ridge next to the road, beckoning us to join him to watch the sun go down with the advantage of height. Another tough day in Africa!!



The Group on the ridge for sundowners. Photo Rob Quayle.

Evening Walk- Chichacha Pan- Limpopo Floodplain

The Pafuri Camp Guests from the USA were keen on an afternoon walk so needing very little persuasion, I headed off to the Limpopo floodplain via Mangeba road with the aim of parking just off the road near Chichacha Pan and then walk into the pan itself.

It was a beautiful afternoon as we grouped next to the vehicle for the walk safety brief before quietly setting off towards the pan. The area was full of Elephant tracks, quite fresh too, so I was hopeful something may be around the pan area. We passed by the huge Baobabs on the ridge that guarded the pan and were nearing the floodplain grass when the unmistakable low bellow of buffalo came to my ears. My clenched fist came up immediately as I searched the area to my front and towards the fever trees to our right. Movement beneath the fever trees confirmed the presence of the buffalo breeding herd and I indicated to the group to keep as quiet as possible and to keep close together.



The Buffalo Herd at Chichacha Pan viewed from the ridge overlooking the Pan. Photo Harry Bevington.

As we walked further, more and more buffalo started to appear about 80m off to our right and accordingly, to get a better idea of the size and spread of the herd, I started up the adjacent ridge overlooking the pan a little earlier than I had wanted but we needed a better overall picture and an indication of wind

direction. With the advantage of height, the extent of the herd became very clear, it was large to say the least and they were undoubtedly heading towards the pan to water, great for the guests, least not the guide!!

With the herd bustling and jostling each other to get to the water, we stayed put until all had settled and I was comfortable that the relatively strong wind was in our favour. The hippo in the pan then became aware of our presence and started curiously towards the bank. I got the group together and indicated to Harry Bevington, the designated photographer, to come up to me as we went down towards the hippo for a better view.

I was conscious of the buffalo not 60m to our right but with the wind I was comfortable with the position. The hippo bull decided to give us a few grunts and open mouth displays which Harry captured excellently.



The Hippo Bull at Chichacha Pan showing us who's the boss!! Photo courtesy of Harry Bevington.

The hippo were comfortable with us as I continuously kept an eye on the movement of the buffalo to our right. It was clear they were coming closer to drink but were still very unaware of our presence, no doubt, it was time to move back up to the safer height from where we had originally viewed the buffalo. I indicated to Harry to lead the group up the bank while I stayed back to keep myself between the buffalo and the last guest.

The buffalo herd was much closer now and when I counted over a hundred, I gave up counting, no doubt a substantial herd. The colours of the clear winter evening were amazing as I quietly led the group off the ridge keeping a wary eye on the buffalo now on our left as we re-traced our steps to the vehicle. Once I was satisfied that we were clear of the buffalo I struck out towards the east to the big Nyala Berry tree that always indicated the position of the two elephant which had died in the area the previous year. The sheer size of the skeletons and the bones always have a sobering effect on people and my American guests were no exception as we walked through the area, noting the large and numerous elephant droppings indicating they regularly came back to the site to pay their respects to their dead.

With the sunfading fast in the west it was time to head back to the vehicle for sundowners, a great short walk enjoyed by all.

Pafuri Walking Trail-Morning Walk- Hlangaluwe Pan Area

The wood-sawing grunts of the leopards and the soft calls of the Wood Owl around the tented camp had hardly faded into the morning sunrise when we drove out of Camp, blankets liberally used to ward off the early chill.

We crested the ridge on the Limpopo River escarpment to look over the floodplain laid out far before us. A great sight so early in the morning with the Valley wrapped tightly in its winter colours but with the Riverine forest starkly green and so vividly clear in the early morning sunlight.

The Limpopo Valley from the top of the Escarpment. Zimbabwe in the background.



Anna Karlsson, our camp hostess, dropped us off at Palm Vlei lookout with the promise to pick us up later at Chichacha Pan. Our cosmopolitan group of British, Australian, Canadian and German guests all shivered slightly as Dan Fincham, my back-up rifle for the walk, gave the safety briefing to remind everyone of the fact we were walking in Big 5 territory, their backyard and not ours, we were only visitors playing in their garden!

We set off for the Hlangaluwe Pan only some 200 metres off the road with the intention of crossing over to the Northern Bank onto the kopje to enjoy the great views both east and west from the high vantage point. Fresh elephant and buffalo tracks were all around us and I silently used my rifle barrel to indicate to Dan the tiny elephant calf tracks in and amongst those of the adults. "Breeding Herd", he mouthed quietly back to me!!

We continued up the slope through the lala palms and mighty baobab trees noting the hyena tracks also fresh over that of the elephants'. I glanced to my left through the mopane leaves into the flood plain itself and unmistakably picked out the gentle flapping of some very large grey ears! My clenched fist immediately went up to signal the sighting and for everyone to stand still and be quiet. The early morning chill now forgotten and using hand signals I motioned to Dan to stay with the group while I gained some height to look over into the pan. Reaching the crest of the kopje I waived the group forward, what a wonderful sight to greet us on that early morning, an elephant breeding herd of

about 30 strong were finishing watering at the pan.

We moved into a good viewing position to watch the herd some 100m in front of us, with the safety of height, very little wind and our position in the shade, the herd had no idea we were watching them.



The Group watch the herd from the safety of the kopje. Photo Laura Kilner Hamilton

Smiles from everyone as the beauty of the sighting was slowly absorbed, a big herd of elephants doing what they do naturally and not being disturbed by our intervention.



The herd slowly moves away to the Fever Tree Forest in the background. Photo Laura Kilner Hamilton

The noise and movement discipline of the guests was great even with cameras clicking away. After a while the herd started to move off away from us towards the Fever Tree forest to continue their day, the calves protectively huddled under the cows' feet as they slowly made their way across the flood plain. As they moved off, I signalled to the group to remain quiet as a herd of impala and zebra made their way into the pan as well, dutifully having given way to the elephant herd and waited their turn.

Another wonderful early morning sighting in an area that has yet to let me down!!

To learn more about Shangani Trails and our products go to:

www.shanganitrails.co.za ; e-mail rhodes@shanganitrails.co.za or contact Rhodes Bezuidenhout on 083 7071329.