



On Foot with Shangani Trails!!

Newsletter September 2014

In this issue:

- *Spring in The Makuleke!!*
- *Highlights of a Pafuri Walking Trail*
- *News from our Trails!!*

Breakfast for a Yellow Bill Hornbill! Not great for the Locust!!

Photo: Y. Malay Kentucky USA



Spring in the Makuleke!!

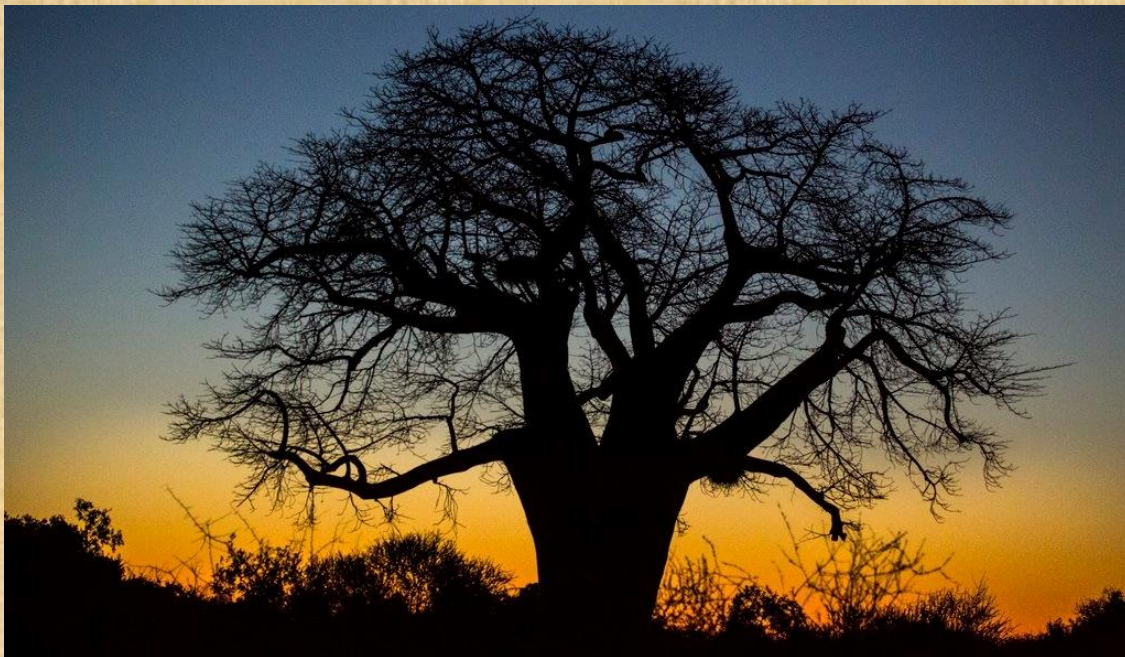
It is hard to believe that we are already in September with the end of the Year already in sight!! We have enjoyed an exceptional Trails Season this year with The Makuleke Concession really having shown the benefits of the January 2013 floods. Rejuvenated grass and foliage cover in the floodplains, Acacia and Mopane belts has drawn large herds of Buffalo and plains game with Zebra and Kudu in particular having done exceptionally well. One of the big changes we have seen is the arrival of the large herds of Eland. Separate herds of 30 plus of these majestic animals have been seen on an ongoing basis in the Rhino Boma, Reedbuck Vlei and Hutwini Areas, all with many calves at foot.

The Elephant numbers have also increased with the more than adequate food reserves while the pan systems and natural springs have retained their water

levels with ease. We have continued to pay a great deal of respect to the Elephant Breeding Herds on foot but have had some unbelievable interactions with them in and around the unfenced Pafuri Walking Trail tented Trails Camp near the Luvuvhu River. The Bulls have tended to cluster in bachelor herds roaming most the Concession while the Fever Tree forest, Nwambe Pan and Rhino Boma areas have remained good bets for exciting single Bull encounters.

Leopard sightings have been frequent and more often than not of the highest quality, with many occurring during the daylight hours and happily some on foot!! Lion continue to be scarce and hard to find, a great deal of tracks but they remain quite transient. As previously mentioned, large herds of Buffalo continue to benefit from large expanses of grass and more than adequate water. Close up encounters with the many solitary old Bulls, the Dagga Boys, always providing us with a few interesting moments!!

Putting the exciting interactions with the animals aside, we have just been privileged to walk in an area of great diversity and consequent beauty that often takes our breath away, the viewpoints of the Hutwini ridgeline and gorge, walking the Limpopo Floodplains, Riverine and Baobab forests, the mystical Fever Tree forests in the early mornings or late afternoons, the natural springs and pan systems. Our proverbial cup does, indeed, overflow in the Makuleke and long may it do so!



The ancient Baobab in the evening twilight, Makuleke Concession. Photo: Mike Visagie, Houghton, Jhb.

Some Highlights of a Pafuri Walking Trail: First Afternoon Day 1

As everybody was sorting themselves out after arriving, we received a report of a big male Leopard on a kill a short way down Luvuvhu West right on the road, under a big Natal Mahogany. We wasted little time in heading off to see if he was still there. The report had the Leopard in the Mahogany with the kill but as soon as we arrived, Francois spotted him on the ground still feeding in the shade in quite thick undergrowth. Nico Cookson, my Back-Up for the Trail, and I manoeuvred the vehicle so that everybody on the back had a good view, little did we know what a view they had!!



Left, as we first saw him and below, when he came into the clear and started to clean himself! What a privilege to see this beautiful cat in the day!! Photos: Francois Duvenage, Pretoria.

The sounds of him feeding carried audibly to the vehicle as well as a few low growls of warning to keep our distance. He was indeed a very big male with an enormous head and a crumpled left ear, no doubt the souvenir of territorial skirmish!! Then through the foliage at his rear we saw movement!!

A female was lurking in the undergrowth but staying tantalizingly just out of sight! He growled at her presence to confirm ownership of the kill and



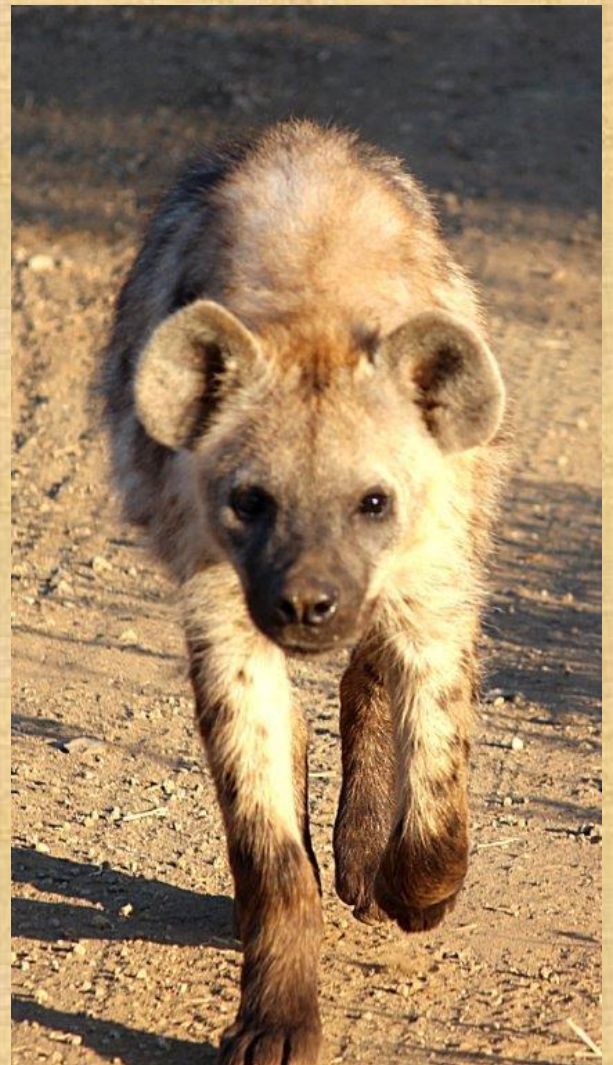
continued to feed! Finally he moved into the clear and judging by the whirr of cameras, the Group had a good view!! From Nico's and my obscured position in the front of the vehicle, we could not see him cleaning himself after his meal and was now, seemingly, unconcerned with our presence. With the female still a shadowy figure in the background, he rose, turned away and disappeared into the thick needlebush. What a way to start the Trail!!

Day 2 Morning Walk

Our objective this morning was Nwambe Pan, a magnificent long pan well known for its Elephant Bulls and Buffalo herds. The morning dawned cold but clear and driving east on Rhino Boma road to our jump-off point, we neared the area where an elephant carcass had been attracting a great deal of attention. Above the noise of the engine, we heard Black-Backed Jackals calling then as we rounded the bend two came into view trotting in their familiar easy gait. Then a shout of "Hyena!!" from the back turned our attention to our right just behind the Jackals, a lone Spotted Hyena! We reversed quickly to keep him in sight and he obliged by walking close to the vehicle coming forward every now and again in an inquisitive manner. A great sighting!

The young Spotted Hyena approaches the vehicle with some curiosity! Photo: Francois Duvenage, Pretoria

After seeing a big herd of Buffalo and a brief sighting of a Kori Bustard, we finally got onto the ground walking by four big Baobabs then onto Nwambe. Scanning from higher ground, we picked up an Elephant Bull off to our west walking in towards Nwambe, still far but closing. Without further ado we made directly for the pan, picking up more Bulls and some Buffalo moving out of the pan as we neared. By the time we arrived at the northern bank, the first Bull we had seen came in on the opposite side of the pan in the full sunlight!

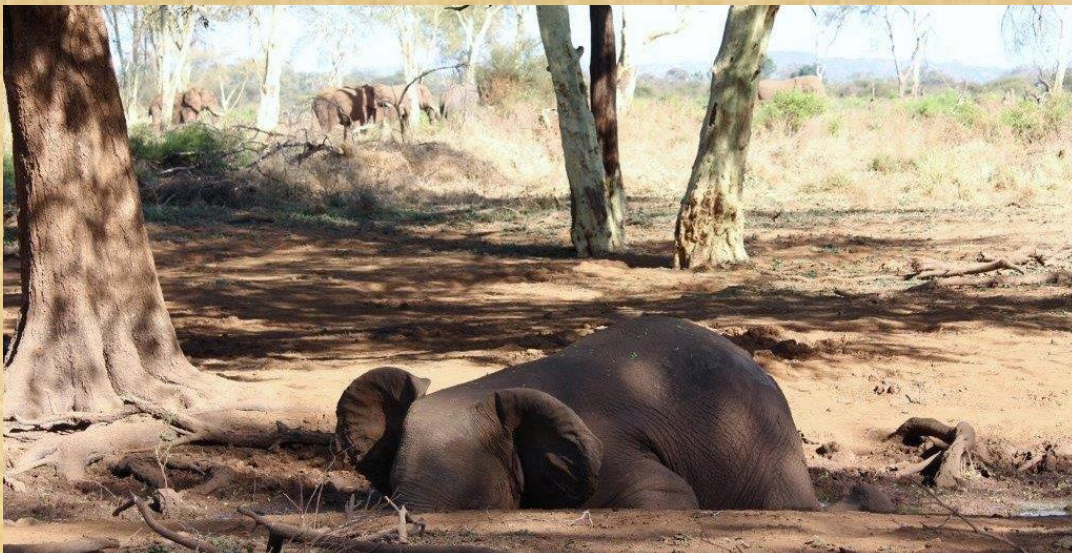


We sat down in the shade to enjoy the sighting with the Bull drinking then appearing to doze, standing in the warm sunlight with his trunk resting on his right tusk!



The Bull dozes while we watch, trunk resting on his sizable tusk. Photo: Francois Duvenage, Pretoria

Just then Nico caught my attention pointing towards the western tip of the pan, an elephant lying down, not moving, only the top of his back visible to us at that moment. With the dozing bull finally making his way out of the pan to the west, it gave us the opportunity to move off and check out the Elephant on the ground. Moving slowly because of the presence of an unknown number of Bulls just to our south west on the other side of the pan, we approached in the morning silence to find a young Bull collapsed head down in the mud, clearly dead. I motioned to Nico to stay with the Group, so that I could take a closer look while also confirming the exact position of the other Bulls we had seen earlier.



The dead young Elephant Bull. Note the other Bulls milling around in the background. Photo: Francois Duvenage, Pretoria

There was no sign of foul play with the dead bull, lying face down, trunk and tusks immersed in the mud. Extraordinarily, the other Bulls were clustered and huddled around each other some 100m from the dead Elephant, not feeding at all, just standing, as if paying their respects to the young deceased Bull. Having done the same, I headed for the high ground we had left a short while earlier to regroup and digest what we had just seen.

With everybody OK, we made our way back to the pan and spent some time with the resident Hippos before moving off to the east up the northern bank of Nwambe.

After resting at the eastern tip of the pan, we turned west once again to make our way back to the vehicle. We had just moved out of the dense needle bush thickets when an Elephant Bull appeared off to our right emerging from a small forest of large Fever Berries. Stopping to assess the encounter, we were treated to a further two Bulls following behind the first. The wind was in our favour as was the late morning sun, so we sat down in some convenient shade and watched the Bulls slowly move across our front moving towards the pan to water.

The Elephants were not, however, finished with us yet. On the drive back to Camp we came across a Bull having a swim and wallow in the Luvuvhu River. He was wet from head to toe and seemed intent on piling on a layer of mud as he used his front legs to stir up the water and scrape the sand off the bank to fill his mudbath!!

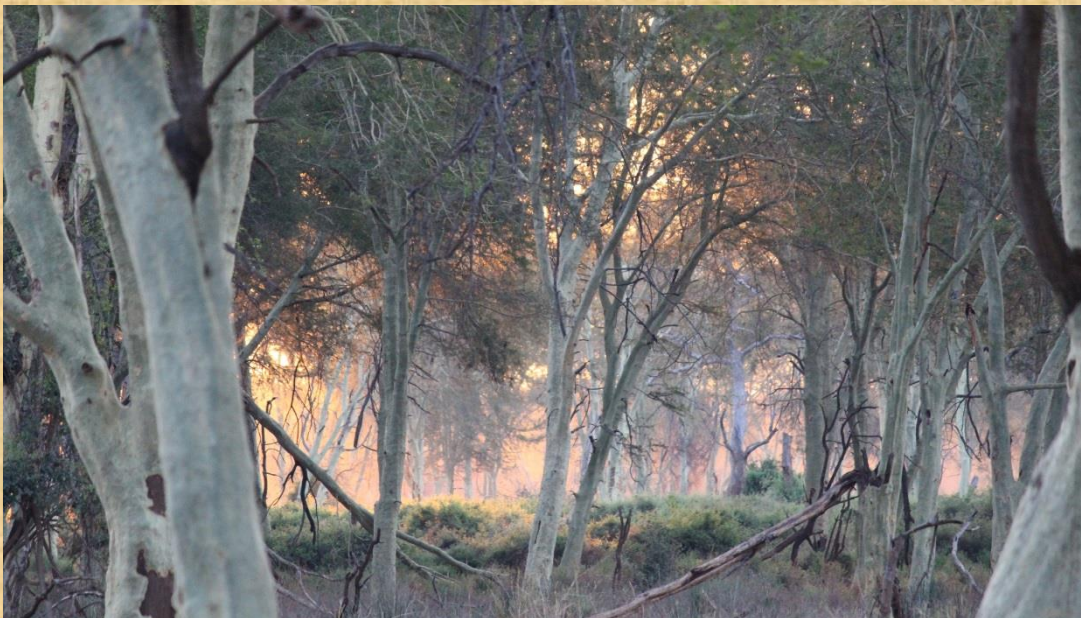


The Elephant Bull getting down and dirty on the banks of the Luvuvhu!! Photo: Francois Duvenage, Pretoria

Brunch was calling at the Camp but seeing the wallowing Bull was a great way to end off a rather eventful morning tinged, however, with a hint of sadness for the fallen young Bull.

Day 3- Afternoon Walk

The afternoon was clear and warm as we parked on Middle Road next to a magnificent “Gnome-Like” Baobab at the most southern end of Reedbuck Vlei, a beautiful shallow, wetland area well known for its many waterbirds. The objective was to walk into the Fever Tree forest then loop back to Reedbuck Vlei in the late evening. As we rounded the ridge into the Fever Tree forest, it was bathed in the golden late afternoon sunlight creating a fantasy-like atmosphere against the backdrop of the green Fever Trees. An amazing setting for a walk!!



The Fever Tree forest in the late afternoon sunlight. Truly spectacular!! Photo: Francois Duvenage

As we continued in a south-westerly direction, Nico whispered in my ear, “Elephant at nine o’clock.” A big Bull was feeding happily off the Fever Trees some 200m away, reaching up with his trunk to break off the higher branches. With the wind and sun in our favour and his relaxed demeanour, he was going nowhere and I estimated we still had adequate time to continue with our loop into the forest and still be able to approach the Bull. We had walked a little further when Stefan attracted our attention, pointing out another Bull to our south some 300 metres away, too far away for us with the first Bull that much closer and all the elements in our favour.

We turned back towards the ridge and quietly approached the feeding Bull. He was now mobile roughly in our direction at about 50 metres and I requested the Group to sit down comfortably, be as quiet as possible as I was certain he would walk very close. Cameras clicked away merrily but then tailored off as the Bull closed in on our position, looming large in front of us, indeed a privilege to see this magnificent animal at such close quarters! He had a large slit in his right ear and the edge of the right tusk was well worn in comparison to the other! Amazing the detail you see when the distance is closing!!



The Elephant Bull approaches our position. What a picture!! Photo: Francois Duvenage, Pretoria

As he continued his approach, I requested Stefan and Nico on my left to come a bit closer to the main Group and earmarked a spot in my mind at about 15 metres to which I would let him reach before letting the Bull know we were there. He appeared very relaxed, his behaviour showing no malice, when I quietly spoke to him.

He stopped, head up, ears out, a little startled and turned away to his right. Not wanting to place too much pressure on him, I took the Group up the nearby ridge gaining some height, while still keeping an eye on the Bull who had now stopped and resumed feeding on the Fever Trees. Still on the ridge, we turned north again giving him a wide berth, descending down to a convenient game path and headed to Reedbuck Vlei.

What a great experience for the Group, yet alone the Guides!!

News from our Trails

Once again the diverse range of accommodation for our Trails has proved popular with our Guests from all over the world.

The Outpost Lodge on the Limpopo Trail continues to provide such a high level of service and hospitality to our Groups. Unlike many luxury lodges, The Outpost is always flexible in terms of meal times and guaranteed, the Shangani



Trails Groups are always going to be late for Brunch, while the views from the rooms are just the thing to lie back and enjoy after a long morning's walk!

Birthday Cake at The Outpost for Tim Jackson from Nelson, British Columbia, Canada

The Pafuri Walking Trail's unfenced tented camp continues to prove a popular choice with Guests. Situated right in the middle of a Big 5 highway to the



Luvuvhu River, anything goes at any time in this Camp! Incidents of a Buffalo Bull feeding happily on the grass outside your shower, while you're in it!! or An Elephant Bull feeding off the Large Fever Berry tree above your head while you're on the loo in your tent's ensuite toilet!! Both recent happenings on this Trail!!

Extra Guests popping in for tea!! Photo: Lyn Thomson, Hoedspruit

The Wilderness Skills Backpacking Trails have also proven to be popular with those whose fitness regime may be a little more intense than others!! Walking fair distances every day, sleeping under the stars, carrying your life on your back for 4 or so days and looking after your companions as you keep watch around the small fire as they sleep, are typical of this Trail's daily activities. You will, however, live, eat and sleep the bush as few people ever have before!!



Dawn on the Limpopo River, Wilderness Skills Trail. Coffee on the go!! Photo: Shangani Trails

No matter which Trail you choose, come and experience this magical, unspoilt Wilderness Area ...On Foot... with Shangani Trails in the Makuleke Concession, Northern Kruger National Park.

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