



November 2011



# ***On Foot with Shangani Trails!!***

Welcome to our final Newsletter for 2011!!

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- Some sighting highlights of the year.

## ***A Big Thank You to You All***

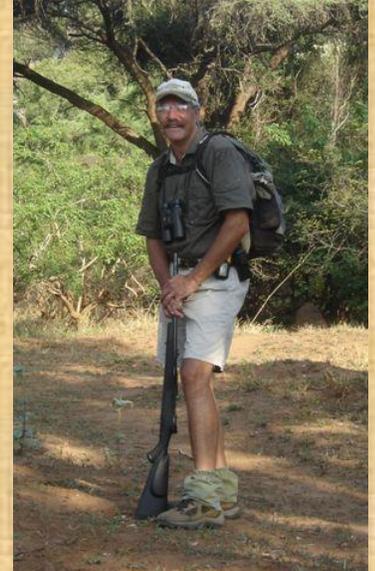
With the last 12 months having gone by in a flash and a blur, I would like to extend a sincere thanks to all those who have shared our trails this year, your support has been really appreciated and we trust that you all enjoyed the Trails as much as we did!!

We have come up close and personal with all of the Big 5, had some magnificent sightings in some amazing settings, walked in areas that took our collective breath away, froze our @#!&%’s off in arctic weather in the North West and generally melted in perfect unison in typical hot summer conditions in the Limpopo Valley!!

(Photo courtesy of Jack and Alvina MacMurray, British Columbia Canada)

Further thanks need to be extended to the hardworking staff at The Outpost Lodge who, despite our early departures and very “flexible” return times, always produced good early morning coffee, smiling faces, excellent food and the famed Makuleke hospitality. Thanks to Thomas, Charmaine and all the staff!!

Happy Xmas to all and we look forward to staying in touch with you in 2012. When the itch and urge to walk in the bush starts to grow again, you know where to find us... On foot in the magnificent African Bush!!



## ***Elephants, Elephants and more Elephants – Makuleke Concession KNP***

With Martin and Gilly Steer on the seat behind me, we sighted the first 20 plus elephant breeding herd from the vehicle on the floodplain just to the north of Hlangahlue Pan, our intended walking area. With a good thick belt of Mopane trees protecting the pan, we decided discretion to be the better part of valour and moved on to Manqeba Windmill further down the floodplain. Debussing, we walked eastwards towards the Limpopo River, using the ridge at the water trough to scan the floodplain before moving off.

Halfway across the floodplain, the grey hulks of the second breeding herd began emerging from the Riverine Forest about 150m to our right. Luckily the wind was in our favour and we had time to view the herd before heading back to the safety of the ridge we had just left. Once there we counted at least 30 in the herd including many calves who along with the adults were proceeding to sand bath in numbers! They were going nowhere in a hurry and with our way to the river and Chichacha Pan now blocked, it was time to change the plan again. Returning to the vehicle after having a good view of the elephants, we drove back to Lala Palm windmill to walk into the Fever Tree forest.

This is always a great walk through the floodplain to the Fever Trees and mindful of the rising temperature, we followed the myriad of paths through the Lala Palm thickets and



up to the drainage line which links all the pans in the area. We came across a dead buffalo in the mud, no visible indication of cause of death, likely old age. Moving on to the forest I was hoping to stop and show Martin and Gilly the magnificent huge old Sycamore Fig not far into the forest treeline. Fresh elephant breeding herd tracks littered the paths in front of us however, and we had just entered the cool shade of the forest proper when a hiss from Martin behind me confirmed the jumbos were once again up ahead! The calf and mother were clearly visible and with the certainty of others to be around, I indicated to Martin to back track with Gilly to the last clump of lala palms just outside the forest while I brought up the rear. Three breeding herds in one walk!!

After putting some distance between ourselves and the herd, we then looked to cut north to another pan not far from us but with time and the temperature against us, we began the loop back across the plain only for the second hiss to emanate from Martin indicating an elephant bull at our 3 o'clock about 100m off. Asking Martin and Gilly to standby, and using the lala palm

thickets for cover I approached to within 50m and saw the bull was quite chilled and feeding. Gesturing to my guests to join me, we viewed the bull from good cover and a friendly wind.

That afternoon we left the lodge a little early to get to Reedbuckvlei with the aim of a short walk to view the water birds still in situ on the vlei. Looping to the left from the vehicle through the Fever Trees, the two elephant bulls came into view in the middle of the vlei. With the sun and wind in our favour, we made the good cover available on the ridge overlooking the vlei. The vlei was alive with eland, warthogs, impala and waterbuck while yellow-bill, saddle-bill and marabou storks milled around in the shallows along with grey and goliath herons. With the whole vlei now visible, we were able



to see a further 3 elephant bulls ambling into this magnificent picture and within the next 5 minutes, we had 6 bulls wallowing and bathing not 100m from us in our ideal viewing position. (Photo courtesy Gilly Steer)

The sundowner enjoyed that evening was used to toast an extraordinary day dominated by elephant sightings that were truly memorable to all of us who had the privilege of being there. (Photo Courtesy Gilly Steer, Sunninghill Johannesburg)



The elephants were, however, not finished with Martin and Gilly Steer on this trail. On our last walk from Palm Springs to the Luvuvhu River and then back to the lodge, we visited an elephant carcass on the ridge overlooking the river and then walking along the very picturesque last leg back to The Outpost along the narrow northern bank of the Luvuvhu, we came face to face with an elephant bull coming towards us. We back tracked to give him

some room, whereupon he decided to descend the bank and feed on the succulent grasses on an island in the middle of the shallow river. This allowed us to slowly and

silently walk past him on the high bank. We couldn't have been more than 30m away as we passed him from the safety of our elevated position. A great sighting to end the Trail.  
***Some Sighting Highlights of the Year!!***



Leopard sightings are always great no matter how brief they may be but when you are treated to over ten minutes of a female pacing around the vehicle looking and calling for her cubs then you know it really is special. This took place at Makalali Game Reserve, what a treat!! (Photo courtesy of Corie Robertson, Colorado USA)

Leopard at the Makuleke Concession are invariably very wild and sightings are consequently often very brief. We were, however, very privileged to have a relatively extended sighting of a big male on the way to Lanner Gorge one afternoon. This was a great sighting for my guests from Australia with some excellent photos being taken even though he was always skulking in the longer vegetation. The haughty, disdainful look on his face says it all!!



(Photo courtesy of Aaron Day, Western Australia)

The best sighting of the year must, however, go to the interaction between the Bull Elephant and Lioness at Rondavel Dam at Madikwe Conservancy. The loud shrill of the bull as he charged the thicket and the burst of speed of the lioness out of said thicket was

indeed a sight to behold. You could almost hear the bull grumbling to himself as he checked out the thicket with some gusto. (Photos courtesy of Nikki Lowe, Dainfern, Johannesburg)

