

Shangani Trails

OUR DREAM,
YOUR EXPERIENCE

On Foot with Shangani Trails!!

November 2018

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Bateleur Eagle, Berg-en-Dal, Kruger National Park

Photo: Shangani Trails



2018 Trails Season in Review

With February and March bringing late rains to the Concession, the Trails Season kicked off with the Limpopo and Luvuvhu Rivers flowing strongly while Mayangane, Hlangaluwe and Nwambe Pans filled to capacity, all once more attracting sizable pods of Hippos from the Luvuvhu River.

The good rainfall brought lush grasses to the floodplains attracting Buffalo and Elephant Bulls alike in the early part of the season, particularly around the Mayangane Pan where many walks resulted in multiple encounters in often wet and muddy conditions. The Elephant Breeding Herds followed soon after as the season progressed and water resources diminished to the east in Zimbabwe and the Kruger National Park in the south.

From August through to October, the influx of Elephant and Buffalo onto the Luvuvhu River was phenomenal with one amazing sighting being enjoyed of a herd in excess of 150 Elephant moving north from the bridge over the Luvuvhu. Ambush Alley on Luvuvhu West certainly lived up to its name during this period with one memorable October morning drive to our walk drop-off point on the Hutwini Floodplain, taking in excess of two hours to travel only two kilometres!!

The 2018 Trails Season saw many positive improvements in the Trails Camps with the comfortable and spacious tents now being erected on firm wooden platforms, luggage storage space added while small battery operated lights are now being placed in the tents in the evenings. The “lounge” area received a makeover while the bucket shower pully system was upgraded to make our job of filling them so much easier!! Many thanks to Godfrey Baloyi and his team!!



With both Trails Camps being situated on the river, we continued to enjoy frequent afternoon visits from rather large, grey individuals and groups intent on taking advantage of our inviting tree foliage and shade within the camp.

One of the visitors to Pafuri Trails Camp!! Photo: Kathy Letham, Nelson, British Columbia, Canada

Other more memorable sightings that spring to mind, include large flocks of Steppe and Lesser Spotted Eagles feeding on Termites after a sudden widespread eruption, a Honey Badger pulling a full

grown African Rock Python across the Airstrip, a juvenile Crowned Eagle in the Fever Tree Forest and visiting some areas I had never seen before on the Luvuvhu River upstream of Lanner Gorge on a Wilderness Trail.

A Typical Day in the Trails Camps

With a Leopard being heard calling around camp during the night in addition to a nocturnal visit by a Buffalo Bull along with the requisite patty deposit, we drove out of camp with the sun still in its infancy, intending to head to the Fever Tree Graveyard near Crooks' Corner. We were delayed somewhat, however, by the quality of tracks we found on the road outside camp with two sets of Leopard tracks, Genet, Ground Beetles and tracks of three Porcupines, their multiple pads and quill drag marks showing up clearly in the soft substrate.



The Porcupine Tracks showing the partial register of the back foot onto the front, multiple back pads while note the quill marks left in the sand just below the left end of the marker stick. Photo: Dr Hubert Planton, Saint Hilaire du Touvet, France

A call over the radio from another vehicle then indicated a Zebra carcass just east of where we had encountered so many Buffalo the evening before, attracting Vultures, Hyenas and Jackals. Changing my route and walking area to Nwambe Pan to take in the carcass, we then came across two large old Buffalo Bulls (aka Dagga Boys) and a Tawny Eagle atop a nearby Baobab tree. Kudu Bulls, Warthog, Zebra, Baboons and the beautiful Nyala kept us company while a herd of Buffalo was seen in the Mopane Trees just off Rhino Boma Road.

Turning off at Mayangani Link, we followed the many White Backed Vultures in the trees towards the carcass with two Maribou Storks being seen in a drying drainage line near the road.



The Two Maribou Storks patrolling the shallows of the drying drainage line. Photo: Dr Hubert Planton

Unfortunately, no Hyenas were seen but two Black Backed Jackals were dozing lazily in the shade while many Vultures were still scavenging on the ground. No Lappett Faced Vultures were initially seen but as we backtracked to Rhino Boma Road, two Lappetts came into view in the Apple Leaf trees to our left along with a juvenile Bateleur Eagle.

Turning back onto Rhino Boma Road, we came across four Elephant Bulls, having to play some cat and mouse games with them to get some clear views. Our patience was finally rewarded by one crossing the road in front of us.



One of the Bulls crosses the road in front of the vehicle. Photo: Dr Hubert Planton.

We were then treated to a young Spotted Hyena lying down right next to the road, appearing very comfortable with our close proximity.



The young Hyena at the roadside. Photo: Shangani Trails

We stayed with the Hyena for some time before continuing to our jump-off point for Nwambe Pan during which time a small herd of Blue Wildebeest and a Brown Snake Eagle were observed.

Walking into Nwambe pan the unmistakable drone of a Spider Hunting Wasp in its characteristic “legs down” flight pattern, allowed us to discuss its unusual breeding habits while the vocalisation of the resident Hippos led us further east to find these large aquatic-living mammals. It was gratifying to see the pod had increased in size to some 19 animals including some small calves, no doubt comfortable with the elevated levels of water in the pan.

With Open Bill Storks patrolling the banks of the pan, seemingly oblivious to the threat of the very large patrolling Crocodiles, Buffalo appeared on the opposite bank making their way down to drink.



Part of the Buffalo Herd at Nwambe Pan. Photo: Shangani Trails

With more coming into view all the time, I hurriedly indicated to the Group to sit down, thus reducing our profile to ensure we did not disturb the herd at this important time of the day. The herd was at least thirty strong, allowing us to enjoy an unusual sighting of Hippo in the pan and directly behind, the Buffalo on the opposite bank.

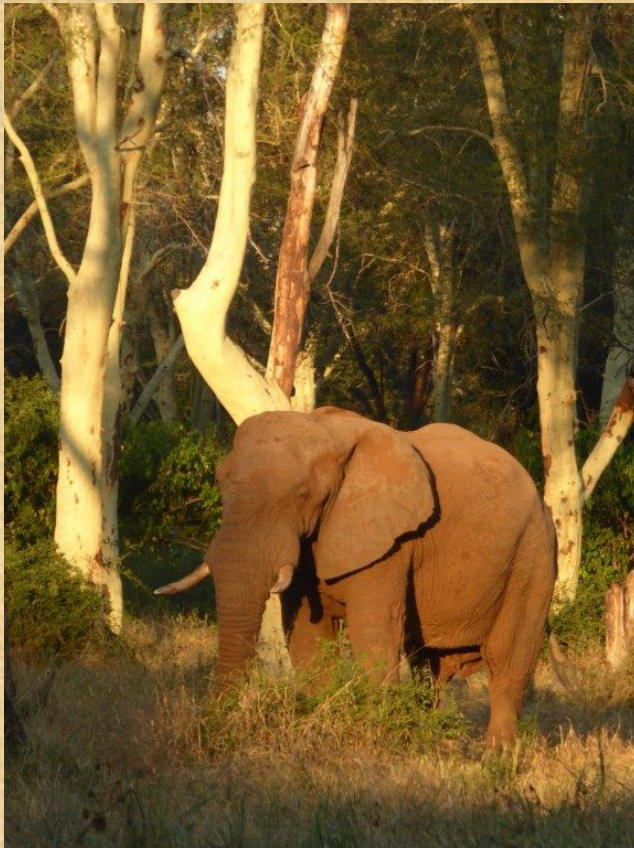
With the Buffalo finally drifting away, and our thoughts drifting towards brunch, we silently exited the sighting heading back north to the vehicle, enjoying the comic antics of some Dung Beetles along the way.

The drive back to camp proved to be busy with Phanny spotting a large Hyena in the shade of a Narrow-Leafed Mustard Bush while near the Luvuvhu River a Juvenile Marshall Eagle allowed us a brief glimpse before hauling his bulk into the air away to the Baobabs to our north. The White Fronted Bee Eaters proved to be far more accommodating, hawking busily from the waterside Large Leaf Fever Berry branches.

Afternoon Walk: Fever Tree Forest

During the afternoon break, some of the Group and I slipped down to the river which, although quiet, allowed us to see a male Collared Sunbird, its yellow and green iridescence very vivid in the afternoon sunlight.

We drove downstream on the Luvuvhu River with the usual Zebra, Kudu and Warthog keeping us company. We were also happy to see a Four Toed Elephant Shrew scamper across the road while we were able to add the Little Bee Eater to our list of birds seen, once again the colours of this family of birds never ceasing to amaze us. No matter how often you see the Fever Tree Forest, it never fails to take your breath away, the gregarious green trunks being bathed in the dappled afternoon sunlight!



However, all thoughts of a walk through this magnificent forest disappeared with the great sighting of six Elephant Bulls feeding contentedly in the forest, providing us with a wonderful view these amazing animals in a stunning setting

One of the Bulls in the Fever Trees, the light was perfect! Photo: Shangani Trails

With the sun commencing its inevitable dip towards the horizon, I decided to drive on to Reedbuck Vlei which, although dry, still provided a magical sundowner spot.

Leaving the Fever Tree Forest, we entered into a corridor of Baobab Trees, the icons of the Lowveld, now devoid of their summer canopies, their root-like branches reaching high into the air giving substance to the Bushman belief that they did indeed fall from the sky in an upside-down position!!



The Baobabs on the way to Reedbuck Vlei. Photo: Dr Hubert Planton

Just before Reedbuck Vlei, another Elephant Bull appeared on the ridge to our left while we were able to enjoy sundowners watching four Eland, Zebra and Impala in the dried wetland area below us. The night drive back to the camp revealed a good sighting of a Large Spotted Genet while we also pointed out the small but numerous nests of the Red Billed Queleas in the acacias on Rhino Boma Road.

Dinner was enjoyed amidst the calls of Wood Owls, the haunting cries of the Hyenas and the loud trumpeting of some very upset Elephants very close by.

2019 Trails Season

The Pafuri and Hutwini Walking Trails Tented Camps are both situated within one of most scenic landscape areas of the Makuleke Concession. Enjoy imposing sandstone ridges and exquisite Riverine Forest while being in the middle of some very busy Big 5 routes with the Luvuvhu River being on your doorstep. The walking trails run seasonally from 1 April to 31 October usually on a 4-day, 3-night basis with no set departure dates.

Accommodation is in spacious walk in, two-person tents with en-suite, enclosed toilets (porta-loos as provided in caravans or boats). spring beds and warm bedding are provided.



Four bucket type hot water showers, available twice a day, are provided to wash the days' dust away. All meals are prepared on site in a gas driven kitchen including a hearty "Brunch" on return from the morning walk and a sumptuous three course dinner to end the day after the afternoon activity and night drive back to Camp.

Our flagship product offers a complete bush experience covering on foot views of incredible diverse landscapes, tracks and sign, birding while the Big Five are, of course, never far away! In fact, rather closer than you think...!!



The Pafuri Camp Lodge offers a *Luxury Walking Trail* using the lodge and all its trimmings as a base. Accommodation is in luxury tents on platforms each with a river front view while other amenities include swimming pool, bar and three high class lodge meals a day.

As with the tented camp option, a game drive vehicle would be dedicated to the Trail to drive to and from the area in which you would be walking. The duration of the Trail would normally follow the tried and tested 3 nights/4 days but having no set departure dates it would allow one to extend or reduce this to your own requirements



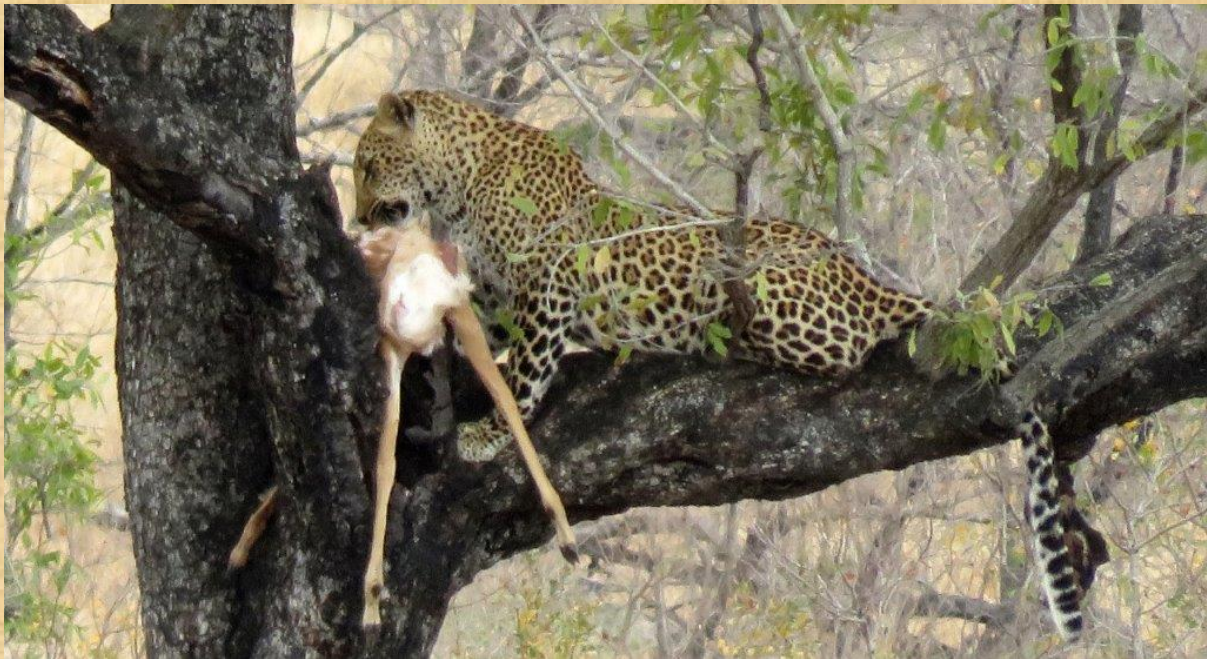
The Wilderness Back-Packing Trails offer between 3-5 nights sleeping under the stars, carrying your world on your back for the duration. You will not get closer to Mother Nature than this, experiencing amazing topography and wildlife while immersing yourself in the spirituality of the African Bush.



A Wilderness Trail skirts Nwambe Pan. Photo: Arthur Davies, Johannesburg, South Africa

***Baobab Hill House** offers a self-catering, fully fenced and serviced 4-bedroomed house with all amenities including solar power and back-up generator, swimming pool, fully fitted kitchen, outside lapa and braai area.*

2018 also saw Shangani Trails conduct three very successful, privately driven safaris in the southern regions of Kruger National Park, principally in the Lower Sabie and Berg-en-Dal areas. Accommodation is either in the Kruger National Park Rest Camps or a very comfortable resort at Crocodile Bridge just outside the Park. These trips will only be conducted outside the School or Public Holiday periods.



Leopard Kill, Berg-en-Dal, Kruger National Park, August 2018 Photo Shangani Trails

Shangani Trails wishes you a very successful 2019 and we look forward to you joining us.....;

On Foot... with Shangani Trails in the Makuleke Concession, Northern Kruger National Park

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