

## Kwihala Chronicle January 2010

### The beauty of the rains

It doesn't matter how you call this part of the year, rainy season, green season, emerald season, what matters is how stunning the park is now.

The grass is tall, bearing its heavy load of seeds; the bush willows are full of leaves granting kudus and giraffes easy meals. The rivers are flowing, all of them have been flowing since mid December which is quite unusual, one day their bed is half full the next day they are almost flooding depending on the rain up the escarpment.



Everyday we go out and everyday something different is waiting us.

Hundreds of elegant grasshoppers feeding on *Calotropis Gigantea* around the small streams of the old airstrip are giving us a demonstration of how insects can be a great sighting.

Hundreds of thousand of Alate Termites flying out from the safety of the mound to face their destiny, often decided by one of their many predators. Eagles, kites, rollers, swifts but even guinea fowls and baboons are feeding on them.

Terrapins, frogs and even catfish are magically appearing from the muddy waterholes by the side of the road.

Hummingbird moths busy hovering around the thousands of *Cleome's* blossoming now, and talking of blossoming, one of the most stunning is the *Oncoba fragrans* that makes the drive along Kimilamatonge an incredible trip through white clouds of flowers.



Huge flocks of Amur Falcons are migrating through the park, with the dark males and the paler females storming through the combretum woodland hunting locusts and other insects.

Tiny leopard tortoise walking along the road looking for a place to hide and watching this new world.

Knob billed ducks landing into newly formed ponds, monitor lizards climbing the branches of big trees, beautiful dung beetles rolling their balls and so many other pretty insects coming into life Jacobin and Levaillant, Diederik and Klaas, Great spotted, Eurasian and African cuckoos perching and flying, making any effort to take a decent picture almost heroic. Some of them are just here to feed some others are busy trying to fool other birds laying eggs in their nest.

And again Southern red bishop, White winged widowbird and Cardinal Queleas moulting from the dull normality to the stunning colours of their breeding plumage.



These are just some examples of what someone who has never been here in the wet season is missing.

But there is much more, lion sightings have been a constant blessing in these last 2 months, other cats have been rarer but they are around, elephants have been a joy for the eyes and general game abundant as usual.

The females of the Mbagi pride have been busy with small cubs, 5 of them that were first seen when they were a little less than one month old.

Just recently we had 5 lions sightings in one single day and amongst them we saw a couple mating and two lionesses chasing zebras at close quarter followed by their half grown cubs.



We had great fun with a male lion in the Msembe area that was so fed with the zebra he killed in the night that he was not able to sleep properly, his belly was way too full.

4 times lions were seen in camp, once from our dinner table the guests had the privilege to see 5 lionesses walking on the edge of the bushes.

The dominant males of the prides of this area have been roaring every night while they patrol their territory around camp.

Small cubs were playing just on the shore of the flowing river, too close to the raging water for the mother who kept calling and moving them back for an hour with the restless and stubborn cubs that were always standing and walking back to the edge.

Big prides of more than 20, single lions as well as coalitions of 2 or 3 males have blessed us almost every day.



Cheetahs were also seen twice and even a big Serval was spotted walking in the open areas of the river drive amongst the wild lavender.

Black backed jackals are everywhere and also the funny bat eared fox is often spotted hunting insects in the grass.



Elephants come and go, looking for higher ground when the lower areas are too muddy and coming back when the soil gets dryer.

Probably the best sighting for me has been with elephants, one week ago we drove towards the open plains of little Serengeti and just before getting there half in the lush bushland, half in the open grasslands we saw the biggest herd of elephants I have ever driven through. More than 300 elephants were moving around us giving out an unbelievable concert of trumpeting and rumbling. A stunning experience, something that neither my guests nor me would easily forget.



Elephants also dotted the open area of Msembe, some day plenty of them some day few, we counted 97 the other day and 0 yesterday. Amongst them the last few days a calf has been seen that is probably not older than 2 weeks.

African rock python was spotted trying to eat an impala that eventually was too big for its stretched big jaws.



Zebras, impalas and giraffes are always around, with a multitude of calves. We were honoured to witness the first steps of a newly born giraffe calf, it was so small that the hooves were still white and soft and for at least 15 minutes he couldn't stand at all.

This is the wet season, a season of small surprises and great gifts.