

## The beginning of the dry season.

The dry season is at least one month early, there is still a good quantity of water both in the Great Ruaha and in the various sand rivers, but all around there is no water at all. Most of the animals are slowly heading towards the areas where they can find water, the time of abundance for the herbivores is finished and now is the time for carnivores. Every drive is such a surprise, often lions, always elephants, kudus on a daily basis not counting all the impalas, giraffes, gazelles etc.



There are at least three huge herds of buffalos counting between 400 and 700 each, they come down to drink, stay along the rivers two or three days and then disappear again into the hills.



More and more breeding herds of elephants are coming down every afternoon to dig in the sand rivers getting nice sand filtered water, big bulls roam from herd to herd testing the females. The herds are quite relaxed and we spend hours watching them, they are incredible, always busy, always doing something, drinking, feeding, shaking palms and always checking us out with the corner of their eye.



Right now the lion population is very stable, each pride is ruled by either two or three big males thus giving good chances of survival to the cubs. Of the 8 prides we see most, many increased in size since last year, the average number being about 16 individuals each. They often split in to smaller groups, which normally happens at the beginning of the dry season, the abundance of prey in the months to come will bring them permanently together soon.



Just the other day we were blessed by three new cubs, less than one month old, they belong to a female of the smallest pride of the park numbering only three cats. The mother was moving towards safer ground bringing them further away from the border of the closest pride's territory. They walked for a couple of kilometers on the road, so small but so tenacious, they went on and on, their wobbly legs pacing through hard soil, their big feet marching behind the female. The mother stopped often in the bit of shade available in order to give them a rest and then she would urge them to move again. It was wonderful.



Spotted cats are around; both cheetahs and leopards are seen even if not as often as their bigger cousins. Cheetahs being diurnal hunters give us good shows, always moving through the bush looking for impalas and gazelles. Their lean silhouette against the yellow grass is always promising some action. Leopards more nocturnal are mostly seen dozing on trees or moving in crepuscular hours. Both these two cats have a difficult life in a place like this with a high concentration of lions like here, but they do well, some time ago we got 18 lions under a big baobab tree and a big leopard male up on one big branch having a lazy nap after finishing his impala meal hanging from the nearby fork, the lions

kept lurking at him but the tomcat was completely relaxed way out of their reach, just a demonstration of how the spotted cats can cope with the unspotted ones.



One of the other big carnivores is giving us great satisfaction, spotted hyenas are being seen quite often thanks to two den sites, one in particular has two small puppies, still completely black.



It has already been a great month and a half, and we are still at the beginning of the season, we cannot wait to see what is waiting us behind the next corner.

