

Shangani Trails

OUR DREAM,
YOUR EXPERIENCE

On Foot with Shangani Trails!!

January 2017

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Male Double Banded Sandgrouse

Photo: Y. Malay Kentucky USA

Trails Update

Thankfully the first rains have fallen in the Makuleke after a very long hot, dry winter and early summer. We now look forward to the follow-up soaking downpours in January and February that will fill the beautiful pans and produce the lush vegetation usually so characteristic for this time of year!

The 2016 Trails season certainly produced many memorable moments for both Guides and Guests alike. I would like to thank everyone who joined Shangani Trails to walk our very special Concession this last year where, once again, we were blessed with visitors from the UK, USA, Brazil, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, The Netherlands and Southern Africa from where we welcomed guests from Zimbabwe and, of course, South Africa from which a great deal of repeat business was enjoyed. My appreciative thanks once again to all!

Hutwini Produces Again!

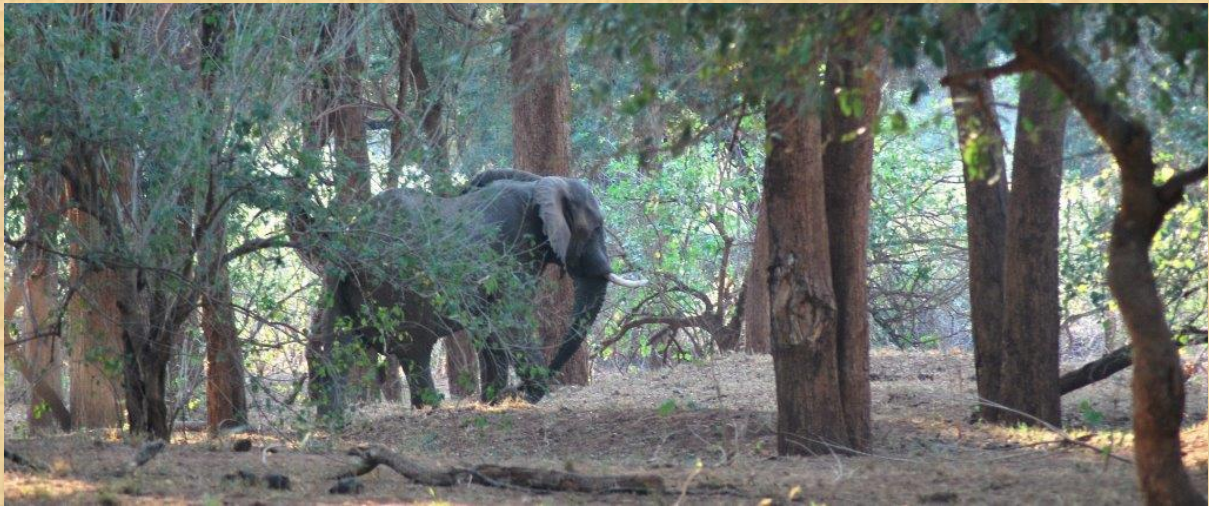
With the last haunting calls of the Hyenas fading and the often hysterical territorial screams of the Thick Tailed Bushbabies now silent, the morning dawned bright and clear but cool as the early wake-up was completed, the all-important first cup of coffee consumed and Mama Flora's hot oats enjoyed.

Guiding Leon van Rensburg from Hopefield in the Western Cape along with his group of family and friends, our destination for the morning was to walk the Luvuvhu River floodplain and Hutwini Gorge, driving only a short distance upstream of the river to park at the "Golf Course", an old oxbow lake riverbed where the grass is normally quite lush. We conducted the walk safety brief and moved off through the adjacent Ana Tree following the very busy paths. We had not gone far when I heard the characteristic "mumbling" call of the Verreaux Eagle Owl (old name - Giant Eagle Owl) somewhere in the Ana Trees to our front. There appeared to be two Owls calling, close together, one, unusually, with a very deep base tone to the call! We moved on through the forest, following the sound of the frequent calls to isolate the tree(s?) where they were roosting. We slowed our pace as we neared the source of the calls, trying to maintain the right balance between searching the high branches while also keeping a good look-out for the owners of the very large and fresh tracks we could see on the paths around us! Suddenly one of the Owls launched itself from an Ana Tree to our left, its silent flight taking it across our front seeking refuge high up in the canopies a short distance away!



The Verreaux Eagle Owl looks down warily with some disdain! Photo: Leon van Rensburg

We followed in a short loop to our right, almost immediately spotting the large Owl who was warily scowling down at us under the hoods of its pink eyelids! Not wanting to flush the bird again, we let everyone have a good look and photos to be taken before edging closer for a better view! However, with this voracious predatory bird having once again taken flight, we turned away to the north to continue our walk. “Elephant Bull!!!”hissed Calvin de la Rey, my Back-Up Guide for the Trail. Elephant indeed, not one but two moving quietly and feeding occasionally in the light gloom of the forest. With the wind in our favour, we found a good position and watched as they slowly made their way towards the river. Such a great setting for the encounter with the Bulls finally disappearing into the riverine thickets to our right.



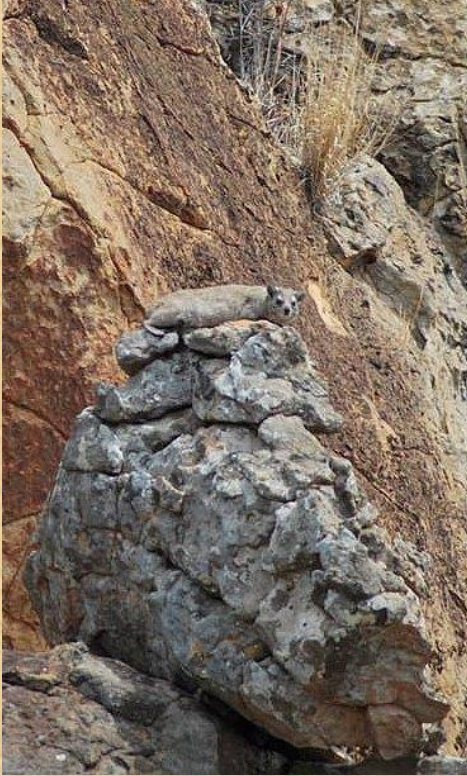
One of the Bulls in the Ana Tree Forest heads away towards the river. Photo: Leon van Rensburg

Once more we turned north, heading across the floodplain to a drainage line which we would follow east/west in the shadow of the impressive sandstone Hutwini ridgeline.



Picking up the wide game paths, we were lucky enough to see a Kudu Bull standing on the slopes of the ridge while three Klipspringers bounded effortlessly up the sheer rock faces, alerted by our presence.

The Kudu Bull on the ridgeline. Photo Leon van Rensburg



We had been admiring the many Large Leafed Rock figs cascading their long pale roots down the faces of the ridge while also taking in the many Ana Trees, Apple Leafs, Fever Trees and beautiful Nyala Berries along the way. I specifically wanted to show the Group a Sycamore Fig and Natal Mahogany where, over time, the fig had grown around the trunk of the Mahogany and was slowly engulfing the Mahogany's circumference. An interesting battle for survival would no doubt unfold in time!

*One of the Dassies taking advantage of the morning sunshine!
Photo: Leon van Rensburg*

Further along Rock Hyrax (Dassies) were seen scrambling up and down the outcrops trying to find a sunny spot to warm up in the cool morning. An added bonus was to hear the call of the Mocking Cliff Chat which allowed us to spot the mating pair flying in and amongst the crevices looking for breakfast.

We walked through the forbidding but beautiful Hutwini Gorge before climbing up and out onto the Baobab dotted plateau, then looped back southwards to a look-out point with a great view of the floodplain beyond. We enjoyed tea, coffee and rusks before spotting a herd of Buffalo far below on the fringes of the Ana Trees. With brunch beckoning, we picked our way down the rocky path onto the floodplain to make our way back to the vehicle, having to bear in mind the Buffalo now in close proximity to our transport back to Camp!

With the temperatures starting to rise, we headed south east, stopping frequently in the shade of the available Nyala Berries before moving on cautiously as we neared the Ana Tree forest. Sure enough we soon picked up the Buffalo herd we had seen from the look-out, off to our right, lying down in the shade of the forest right on the game paths we had walked earlier when we had first heard the Verreaux Eagle Owl! With Buffalo now between us and vehicle, we had to ascertain how many and how far eastwards the herd actually extended!! What wind there was would be against us the further east we moved as we tried to manoeuvre around the Buffalo.

Remaining on the fringe of the forest with the open floodplain to our left, we continued eastwards keeping the herd visual while all the time looking for the opportunity to cut in towards the river once we were clear of the Buffalo.

Keeping a picture of where the vehicle was in relation to our position, I requested the Group to keep as quiet as possible and the line tight as I turned into the forest looking for the more open areas and hoping the wind did not gust! Two Buffalo appeared to our front moving west to join the herd, forcing us to extend our loop further east and into some thicker vegetation but with the road now close I agreed with Calvin that we should press on. Gradually I veered west back towards the vehicle, hoping my loop had been wide enough! Again I picked up the Buffalo through the trees to our right with us now being on their opposite side to when we had first seen them! They were now aware of us and, as Buffalo are wont to do, they edged forward, noses and heads up.....curious!! Not good for the heart!!



The Buffalo just before we reached the road, staring at us intently from within the Ana Tree forest!!
Photo: Leon van Rensburg

Finally, we reached the road with the vehicle only fifty metres away but equally the Buffalo being the same distance to our right. I asked Calvin to lead the Group back to the vehicle slowly while I dropped to the back to keep an eye on the herd! Thankfully, the Buffalo remained unmoved and we reached the vehicle without mishap! A great morning's walk in such a beautiful area.

An Afternoon to Remember!

Guiding Carolin Helmreich and Ingo Plagmann from Cologne in Germany, we were looking to walk through the Luvuvhu East Fever Tree Forest, an unbelievably beautiful area, particularly in the late afternoon. However, after brunch we all took a short wander down to the Luvuvhu River, encountering a small family of Nyala just outside the camp showers. They allowed us to get quite close to them before running off. From the cover of the Ana trees, we watched two Elephant Bulls, one being very large and mature, feeding off the grass on a sandbank in the river, with the wind coming from the east in our favour we edged in closer enjoying some good views of the Bulls feeding.



The larger Bull feeding on the sandbank! Photo: Ingo Plagmann

While we were watching them, Buffalo were continually coming in from the Kruger bank and

making their way, out of sight, to the area downstream of Pump House lookout. No doubt we would see them later! With afternoon refreshments enjoyed, we drove out of camp up to Pump House lookout where we came across two very different Elephant Bulls climbing up the bank, crossing in front of us!



One of the new pair of Bulls climbing up the bank in front of us!! One of the original pair is in the background! Photo: Ingo Plagmann

From our vantage point, we could see the first two Bulls we had seen earlier still in the River, slowly making their way towards us. They stayed in the riverbed, drinking every now and again or throwing water over themselves. Once they had moved past us it appeared as if they were looking to exit the river through a nearby drainage line, so we drove further downstream following their progress.

They looked, unsuccessfully, for any fallen Ana Tree pods (a favoured Elephant snack) in the riverbed before climbing up the bank, pausing to throw sand over themselves and to give us a wary look before moving away and across the road.



The Bulls make their way up the bank, the large herd of Buffalo in the background! Photo: Ingo Plagmann

By this time we had seen the large herd of Buffalo downstream and made our way towards them. Conservatively, we estimated the herd to be over a hundred strong, some feeding on the sandbanks, others lying in the water cooling off! Another large Bull Elephant was also seen in the water in and amongst the Buffalo, he was, however, rather grumpy giving us a headshake as we drove past!



The last Bull and the Buffalo in the river as we drove past! Photo: Ingo Plagmann

All in all, it took us forty-five minutes to cover about two kilometres from the camp to the main tar road, but a forty-five minutes packed with memories! Time on the ground in the Fever Tree forest was, as a result, limited but it took nothing away from the beauty of the walk in the Fever Trees in the fading sunlight! We walked north along a drainage line with a large ridgeline on our right and the Fever Trees off to our left, reaching a large open, but now dry, marsh area called Reedbuck Vlei, a beautiful wetland when full of shallow water, attracting many different species of bird, insect and mammal life. The closer we walked to the vlei, Zebra, Warthog, Impala and, happily, a large herd of Eland emerged from the golden early evening sunlight covering the area. A great sighting with a few large grey Bulls in evidence. Off to our far right Denis, my Back-Up Guide, indicated a very large Elephant Bull ambling away from us towards the ridges, such an active area at this time of day!



The Eland in Reedbuck Vlei, always great to see these large antelope! Photo: Ingo Plagmann

With the light starting to fade rapidly, we reluctantly turned back towards the river, enjoying every last minute in this fairy tale forest! Returning to the vehicle we drove a short way further, finding a good spot for sundowners!

During the night drive back to camp, we picked up a few Lesser Bush Babies in the spotlight but undoubtedly the highlight was being able to see the rare Pels Fishing Owl out in the open in the Luvuvhu River just upstream from the Pafuri Bridge! However, it wasn't enough merely to see this much sought after Owl but also we had the good fortune to see it launch itself into the water to catch a fish! This was indeed a very rare sighting not only for Carolin and Ingo but also the guides! What a way to end one of the most amazing afternoons in the Makuleke!

Into 2017- Trails on Offer

The Pafuri Walking Trails Tented Camp is situated within one of most scenic landscape areas with imposing sandstone ridges and exquisite Riverine Forest. It is also in the middle of some very busy Big 5 routes with the Luvuvhu River being so close by. The Pafuri Walking Trails run seasonally from 1 April to 31 October and on a 4 day, 3 night basis commencing either on a Friday or Monday afternoon.



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.





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. The house sleeps 8 with two of the 4 rooms being ensuite, an

allocated Game Drive vehicle and extra Guide. A fully catered option is also available at an extra charge. There are no set departure dates and the duration of your stay is as per your requirements.

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



With over 400 avian species currently having been identified on the Concession, we will also be running dedicated Birding Trails during the course of 2017 using any of the above accommodation. Details of dates and costs will be advised in due course.

Talking of Birds.....Our Parting Shot.....:



*African Fish Eagle in full flight, Hlangaluwe Pan, Makuleke Concession.
Photo: Erik Radix, The Netherlands*

Shangani Trails wishes you a very successful 2017 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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Rhodes Bezuidenhout

Shangani Trails

