

Shangani Trails

OUR DREAM,
YOUR EXPERIENCE

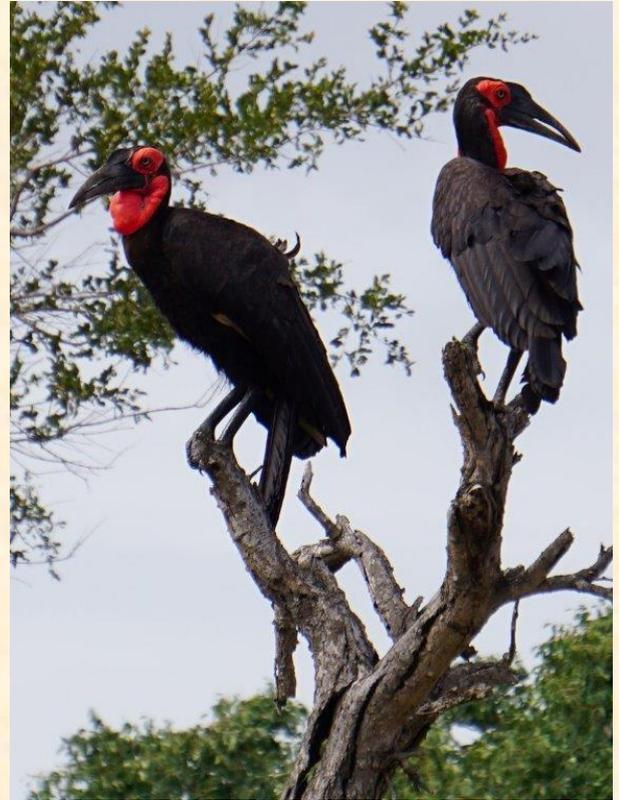
On Foot with Shangani Trails!!

10 April 2020

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Southern Ground Hornbills in an unusual pose, Berg-en-Dal, Southern Kruger National Park. Photo: Mary Haskin, Washington DC, USA



Shangani Trails: Update

Only three weeks ago I went from a three night Wilderness Trail in the Makuleke Concession and then virtually straight into guiding two international guests around Southern and Central Kruger National Park, largely unaware of how rapidly the Covid-19 Crisis had been accelerating both locally and internationally. Our focus was on some amazing sightings and interactions with Elephant, Lions, Rhino and Leopard which changed very quickly as we exited the Kruger via the Phalaborwa Gate. Suddenly, we realized that holidays were going to have be cut short and flights home arranged without delay! Fortunately, the next day my guests were on one of the last international flights out of OR Tambo Airport with only a two week self-isolation period in their hometown to look forward to!

This was, undoubtedly, a scenario that was being played out in many places not only in South Africa but all over the world, effectively, and quite rightly so, placing the Tourism Industry in shutdown on a worldwide basis. The Makuleke Concession, Kruger National Park has not escaped the subsequent South African mandatory lockdown with the Pafuri Camp Lodge, the two Trails Camps and Baobab Hill House being closed for the period indicated by the South African Government in an effort to stem the tide of the Covid-19 Virus.

Unfortunately, when the camps will become available once more is dependent on whether the spread of the Virus can be curtailed not only locally in Southern Africa but also internationally thus allowing freedom of movement to recommence into what will, no doubt, be a very, very different world in which we will have to live. I have been in contact with all those Groups who had already booked Trails in 2020 and have agreed postponements to either later in the year or to 2021 at the same pricing originally quoted and accepted. There are Trails Groups who had booked for much later in the year which are in a “wait and see” mode with the same postponement scenario available to them.

On a happier note, in terms of the Makuleke Concession itself, our representations to Mujaji, the Shangaan Rain Goddess, have indeed proved to have been persuasive with heavy rains falling in late February resulting in the Pafuri Camp Lodge being placed on flood alert as the levels of the Luvuvhu River rose alarmingly. Most of the pans are now full, including Reedbuck Vlei (do I hear the Birders cheering?), the Limpopo River is flowing strongly and the grass coverage across the Concession is improving on a daily basis!

Driving Southern Kruger National Park- Lower Sabie Area

Notwithstanding an agreed wake-up call at 05h00, the Guests were awake and dressed even before I could knock on the door! A light breakfast of yoghurt, fruit and muesli along with the all-important cup of coffee was enjoyed before we drove the short distance to the SanParks Crocodile Bridge gate to commence the day’s game viewing.

Impala, Wildebeest and Giraffe were once again seen in abundance with the Giraffe in particular being viewed very close to the road. We drove north along the tar road, the H4-2, with a cluster of vehicles soon becoming visible ahead of us, a sure sign of a lucrative sighting! Lucrative it indeed proved to be, Lions!

At first a large Lioness came into view but after quickly finding a clear vantage point, juveniles were seen feeding on the remains of a Wildebeest while three large mature black-maned male Lions were ambling away to the north. Another large female was soon visual walking after the males!



The Lioness as we first saw her! Photo: Mary Haskin

We watched fascinated by these amazing cats and their social interactions, particularly when the two females became interested in a prowling Black Backed Jackal who was, no doubt investigating the possibility of a discarded tasty morsel or two! The Jackal must have ventured too close for the Lions' liking and a sudden rush from both sent the young Canine scurrying for cover and away between the vehicles on the road's verge! We briefly changed position to follow two of the males as they walked towards the drainage line, no doubt to find a shady spot under which to spend the day doing what Lions do best! Sleep!



One of the mature Male Lions joins the Lioness, a great sighting! Photo: Mary Haskin

We back tracked to our original position but the sighting was rapidly winding down with the felines disappearing to snooze the hours of daylight away! With a comfort break having been requested and with the Crocodile Bridge gate still only a short distance away, we decided to quickly return to the Gate.

As it turned out, however, any comfort break would have wait a little longer, as not long after we had left the Lions, I noticed two large shapes off to our right. White Rhino! Our first in the Park! They were covered in dried mud, giving them a distinct brown colour as they slowly ambled parallel to us grazing as they walked.



The two White Rhino, the lush grass not doing the camera any favours! Photo: Mary Haskin

They eventually turned to the west and away from us giving me the opportunity to complete the short distance to the Crocodile Bridge gate and being able to deposit the guests outside the requisite ablution block!

Driving the Kruger National Park Berg-en-Dal Area

Having enjoyed an excellent packed lunch and coffee at Afsaal Picnic Site, we drove back onto the tar road only to be confronted almost immediately by another phalanx of vehicles. We couldn't see what everyone was looking at until a helpful driver pointed up and into the Apple Leaf tree next to the road and said "Leopard Kill!" Leopard Kill indeed, an Impala Ram hoisted up into the fork of the tree and judging by the bright red flesh on the ribs, a fresh kill as well, very probably early that morning!

We changed the position of the vehicle to get a better view before leaving the kill comforted in the knowledge that with the number vehicles jockeying to get a good view, there was little chance of the Leopard returning before nightfall! Continuing on towards the Malelane Gate, we spotted a herd of Buffalo to our left but they were too far away to enjoy a clear visual. I was very pleased to then come across a herd of Kudu, an antelope we had yet to see on our journey! There was a mixture of calves, cows and juvenile males, their horns just commencing the first twist into adulthood! We travelled a bit further and were again rewarded with a mature Kudu Bull crossing a grassy floodplain, his horns well into their third twist! An excellent follow-up to seeing the herd just beforehand!

Once more the stationary vehicles then drew our attention to a sighting ahead of us! This time we followed the pointed fingers and cameras to a Knob Thorn tree, not far from the road, the beautifully rosetted body and long tail hanging straight down left us in no doubt as to the focus of attention, Leopard! The dainty female's head and front legs were wedged between the fork of two branches with the back legs invisible but presumably standing or resting on another branch behind!



The female Leopard as we first saw her, note her tail to the right partially obscured by branches. Photo: Mary Haskin.

She was quite chilled, not all phased by the attention of the many observers on the road! Surprisingly, we found an excellent viewpoint and sat back to savour the wonderful sighting of this amazing cat! We didn't notice time slipping by but it was indeed well spent with this very often elusive and shy feline particularly as she suddenly became very interested in something to our left.

She stirred, carefully emerging from the fork of the Apple Leaf coming into full view for the first time! She stood with her front feet on one branch and those of her hind on another, never taking her focus off whatever had caught her interest! Eventually she turned and made her way down the tree into the grass but still fully visible.



The Leopard stands up after something piqued her interest. Photo: Mary Haskin

We followed her for a short distance before losing her in the long grass, but what a sighting for the Guests...and of course the Guide!

We will keep you updated as to the situation with the Makuleke Concession re-opening and when our trails will be recommencing. In the interim, Shangani Trails wishes you a safe and healthy remainder of 2020 and we look forward to you once again joining us.....,

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

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