

Shangani Trails

OUR DREAM,

YOUR EXPERIENCE

On Foot with Shangani Trails!!

February 2019

In this Issue:

- *Shangani Trails Update*
- *Into the Fever Trees!!*
- *Shangani Trails in the Southern Kruger!!*
- *Shangani Trails Launches New Website!!*

European Roller, Makuleke Concession KNP. Photo: Shangani Trails



Shangani Trails Update

With the 2018 Trails Season hardly having been put to bed, we are already seeing the start of the 2019 Walking Season a mere six weeks away. Shangani Trails will once again be focussing principally on the Pafuri and Hutwini Trails Camps on the Luvuvhu River. These tented, rustic, unfenced but comfortable Camps will continue to provide a unique wildlife experience for guests and guides alike, walking in one of the most diverse wilderness areas in the Kruger National Park, the Makuleke Concession.

The Wilderness Backpack Trails are becoming increasingly popular with participants being able to blend easily into the nuances of the bush, savouring the thrill of be able to immerse themselves into Mother Nature the deeper into the Trail they progress.

Trails walking out of Baobab Hill House and Pafuri Camp Lodge will continue to be offered in 2019, depending on the guests' accommodation preferences. In addition, after some very successful debut trips in 2018, Privately Guided Safari tours will be offered as a fully-fledged product in, initially, the southern areas of the Kruger National Park, concentrating around the Lower Sabie and Berg-en-Dal regions.

Into the Fever Trees- October 2018

With the guttural barking of a Nyala alarming at a nearby unknown threat, I completed the wake-up at 05h00, the imminent sunrise promising another sweltering day for the inhabitants of the Makuleke to endure, the anticipated December rains seemingly very distant indeed! The stuttering calls of a flock of Crested Guineafowl, a very special cousin of the more abundant Helmeted Guineafowl, were still ringing out as we drove out of camp with the idea of walking the Fever Tree Forest then on to the eastern tip of Nwambe Pan to view the Hippos! However, our progress was delayed somewhat by the delivery of the morning newspaper, literally on our access road!

The sandy soil revealed tracks of Hyena, Genet, the Crested Guineafowl, a Four Toed Elephant Shrew, Ground Beetles and very clear Porcupine tracks, the multiple hind pads prominent as well as the dragging quill striations!



Same newspaper, different edition!! The Group gets to grips with the tracks from the previous night!
Photo: Kathy Letham, Nelson, British Columbia, Canada



All the time we were discussing the tracks, two Trumpeter Hornbills viewed us curiously from their lofty perch above our position! The drive along Luvuvhu East was initially very quiet until Hannu spotted a beautiful mature Bateleur Eagle perched high up in a Fever Tree off to our left. The red face and legs were very visible as this regal short tailed raptor patiently waited for the warm thermals that would soon be produced by the rising morning sun, thus allowing the Bateleur to easily climb above its fruitful hunting grounds.

The Bateleur Eagle. A Female because of the distinctive white band at the bottom of the wings. Photo: Kathy Letham

We parked in the Fever Tree forest with the early morning sunlight reaching gingerly through the canopies to the forest floor below, creating a dappled effect as we walked silently through this green wonderland!

We briefly stopped to identify the shrill call of the Scaly Throated Honeyguide before discussing the basic characteristics of the Fever Trees themselves. Quietly moving on, a sharp exclamation from Hannu at the rear of the line indicated an Elephant Breeding herd approaching from behind and slightly to our right. We all turned as one to view the herd moving steadfastly towards us, as yet, unaware of our presence. With the wind against us in our present position, I led the Group in a loop back the way we had come and into a relatively safe position behind a fallen Fever Tree where we could view the herd as they walked past us about fifty metres away, the wind now in our favour!

The Breeding Herd numbered about thirty with many young calves, an excellent sighting for the Group in a beautiful setting amongst the Fever Trees. Once they had passed our position, I warned the Group to look out for the inevitable stragglers and true to form, a lone Cow was trailing the herd. She did not appear to be in any distress nor showed any sign of injury so her being so far behind the herd was indeed intriguing. We still had visual of the main herd and the trailing cow when a second straggler, this time a young Bull, appeared on the herd's tracks. This was not surprising as it was likely a Bull that had reached sexual maturity and had been ejected from the herd.

Following the herd by these young bulls is not uncommon behaviour, with them holding onto the slim hope of once again being accepted into the herd.

We allowed him to pass by before resuming our walk into the eastern tip of Nwambe Pan, which was indeed beautiful bathed in the early morning sunlight. A lone Hippo Bull was visible from where we stood, taking in this tranquil scene. He became aware of us as we walked along the northern bank, standing up in the shallow water and eying us warily.

I led the Group up onto a high bank to view the Bull from a position of safety who was now showing signs of agitation at our presence.



The Hippo Bull rises out of the water, staring with some intent! Photo: Kathy Letham

Amid some loud vocalization from the irritated Bull, we looped away from the pan thus avoiding the thick Needle Bush lining the northern bank before easing our way back to the bank under a large Nyala Berry where I estimated the rest of the large pod would be found. Loud grunts confirmed my suspicions as the wallowing Hippos came into view, all turning as one to face us from the sanctuary of their watery haven.

With time moving on, we picked up the clear paths heading west searching for the shade of a magnificent Natal Mahogany overlooking the western tip of the pan where we would enjoy tea, coffee and rusks. With the temperatures rising as mid-morning approached, we packed away our flasks and headed east once more to find the paths leading back to the vehicle. Reaching the eastern tip, an Elephant Bull came into view at the water's edge, very likely the same one that we had seen earlier trailing the breeding herd. We gave him plenty of space taking a wider loop before straightening south through the Fever trees.

Unbeknown to the Group, Godfrey Boloyi, the Pafuri Camp Lodge General Manager had informed me the previous evening that he planned a Bush Breakfast in the Fever Trees for the Group.

There were a few surprised faces as we neared the “bush loo” and the tables all set out for us! We all enjoyed a great breakfast in an amazing setting, a bottle of bubbly adding to the occasion!



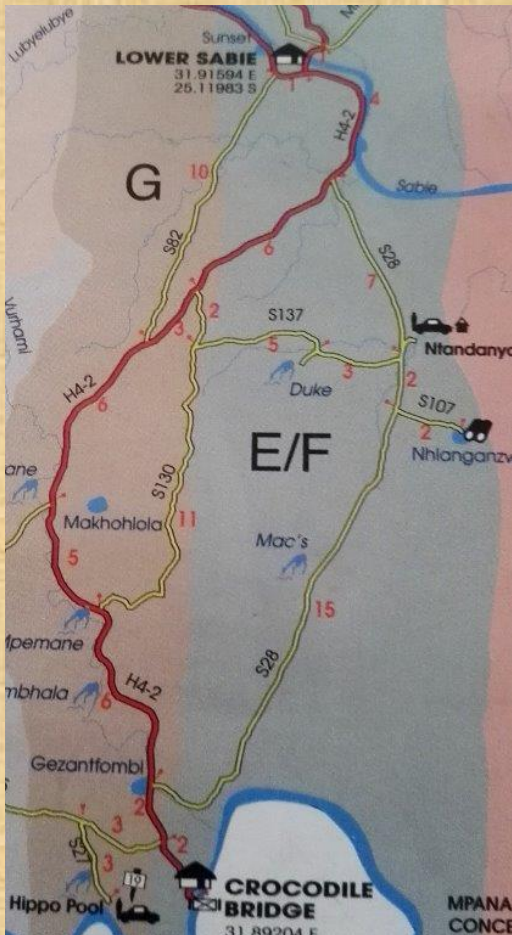
Kathy and Brad enjoy breakfast in the Fever Tree Forest.

Photo: Kathy Letham

A wonderful surprise and experience for the Group, including a small party of Warthogs which approached the breakfast tables with some curiosity before turning on their heels in a hasty retreat!

Shangani Trails in the Southern Kruger

With a final stop in Malelane to purchase last minute essentials, we arrived at the Elephant Walk Retreat Cottages without mishap, unloaded all the provisions, enjoyed lunch and a short rest before heading out for our first foray into the Kruger National Park through Crocodile Bridge Gate. With the paperwork complete at the gate, we stopped to check out the Sightings Board which indicated that Lions had been seen in the area that morning!



Driving north on the H4-2, Impala, Wildebeest and Warthogs greeted us, the latter down on their knees, snouts probing for grass, roots and bulbs.

A Swainson's Spurfowl was seen scratching in the grass for seeds, this ground bird's red face very evident allowing easy identification. As we passed over the bridge at Gezantfombi Pan, I spotted a Bush Buck Ram, a shy antelope, rarely seen away from the riverine thickets.

The Lower Sabie area explored with the Hadley's on the first afternoon and the next day. Our base being The Elephant Walk Retreat situated on the Crocodile River and a stone's throw away from the KNP, Crocodile Bridge Gate.



Soon thereafter, we were treated to a view of arguably the world's heaviest flying bird, the Kori Bustard. It flirted with us, in and out of the acacia thickets but eventually, we managed to enjoy a clear sighting.

The Kori Bustard finally caught by the lens! Photo: David Hadley, Bath, United Kingdom

Our first sighting of a Lilac Breasted Roller then allowed David and Pippa a clear view of this strikingly beautiful bird. With time moving on, I decided to turn around to take the road (R28) on which the Lions had been seen earlier in the day, banking that they would be doing what Lions normally do on a hot day...sleep in the nearest shady thicket!!

Wildebeest and Impala were nibbling the newly-sprouted short green grass but alas sign of Lion there was not, forcing us to ask the Dutch occupants of an oncoming vehicle if they had seen anything remotely feline! No Cats but Elephant had been on the road about ten kilometres back, unfortunately too far for us in the time available before the gate closed! The best chance to see anything was then to head to the Crocodile River at Hippo Pools!

We were about to turn around when a Black Backed Jackal trotted out of the Bush in front of us, no doubt in the early stages of its evening hunting expedition!



The Jackal goes about its business!! Photo: David Hadley

Unconcerned at our presence, the Jackal trotted right past the vehicle crossing the road onto the wide path behind us!

Hurriedly turning the vehicle about, we followed its progress before it crossed the road again into the thickets! A great sighting early on for the Hadleys.

Further on we came across a female Steenbok, her lack of horns confirming her gender. I also mentioned the fact that Steenbok were water independent, obtaining all the moisture they require from their diet while they were also one of the few antelope that buried their dung after defecation! With Zebra being seen nearby the Steenbok, we drove the S27 down towards the river with ample time left before the gates closed to explore a little further! We had been seeing the beautiful Magpie Shrike consistently since we had commenced the drive but then I picked up their excited call right above us. I stopped and located the source of the raucous calling, seeing two of these beautiful long-tailed birds displaying. Closer inspection revealed the male with a scorpion in its claws proffering the morsel to the female as the mating display dictates.



The pair of Magpie Shrikes. The Scorpion is clearly seen in the Male's beak. Photo: David Hadley

An amazing avian behavioural display to see, a first for the Guide!! A bird of prey then caught my attention off to the right, its size, head shape and white chest identifying it unmistakably as a Juvenile Martial Eagle, the largest Eagle in Southern Africa! As we were viewing the beautiful Eagle, movement on the other side of the road caught my eye.



Hyena cubs, three of them playing together outside their den, which appeared to be an abandoned Warthog hole.

The Hyena Cubs. Photo: David Hadley

Notwithstanding the thickets around the den's entrances, we still had an excellent view of them as they jostled with each other in and out of the holes! A large Warthog then appeared, walking slowly to the one hole and easing himself backwards, as they are wont to do, into the one entrance to the den with the cubs still seemingly inside! Just then the same Dutch tourist who told us that he seen no Lions earlier drove by saying that there were Elephant at the river!

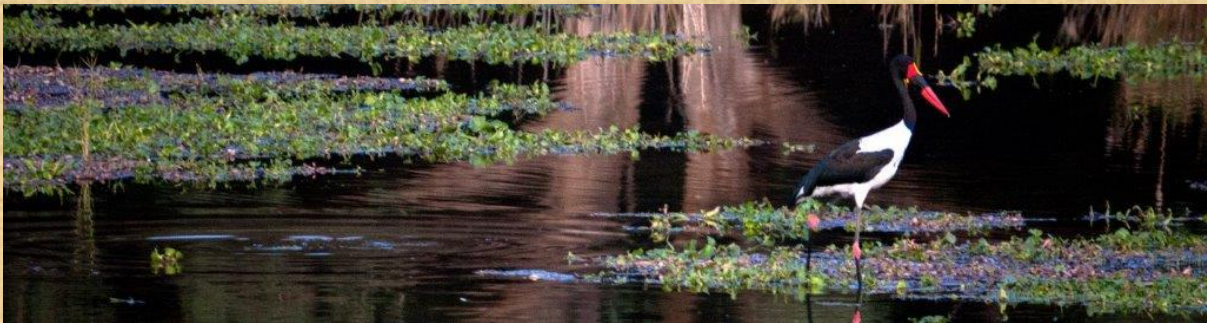
With no cubs now visible, we wasted little time in heading to the Crocodile River for our first sighting of these gentle but formidable giants. Two Bulls in the water and feeding on the green reeds, one a large mature Bull and the second a youngster no doubt attached to the wise old hand, learning how to be an Elephant!!



The two Bulls at Hippo Pools. Note the Cattle Egrets at their feet, eagerly awaiting the insects disturbed by the Elephants as they walk and feed. Photo: David Hadley

Two other vehicles headed out of the sighting leaving the Bulls to ourselves to enjoy! Both started to move out of the water and up the bank towards us, the youngster peering inquisitively around a large bush at the vehicle! The big Bull came up onto the road in front of us pulling up tufts of grass by the roots, shaking them against his leg to get the dust off before placing them deftly into his mouth with his trunk. He padded silently towards the vehicle, the occupants thereof no doubt now collectively holding their breath, slowly passing by my window within touching distance. His subtle glance in our direction revealed soft eyes with no hint of malice! A wonderful first experience for David and

Pippa!! With both Bulls now behind us and the sun dipping dangerously towards the horizon, we agreed it was time to head back to the gate, stopping once more to look at the Hyena den where the adult female was now lying down outside an entrance, the cubs still playing around her! There was no sign of the big Warthog, who had no doubt settled in nicely for the night in the communal den! We made the gate well in time before closure, stopping on the narrow access bridge to view a Saddle Bill Stork making the most of the remaining light to top up its evening meal!



The Saddle Bill Stork in a beautiful evening setting in the Crocodile River. Photo: David Hadley

Shangani Trails Launches its New Website!!

Shangani Trails has re-developed its Website and we invite you to visit www.shanganitrails.co.za . The site will outline our principal products, what we do and how we do it with feedback from our local and international Guests.

Please have a play of our new promotional video on the Home Page, it really does capture the beauty and spirituality of the Makuleke Concession.

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

Don't hesitate to contact us at:

027 83 7071329 ...or.... rhodes@shanganitrails.co.za ...

alternatively visit.....www.shanganitrails.co.za

Rhodes Bezuidenhout, Shangani Trails

