



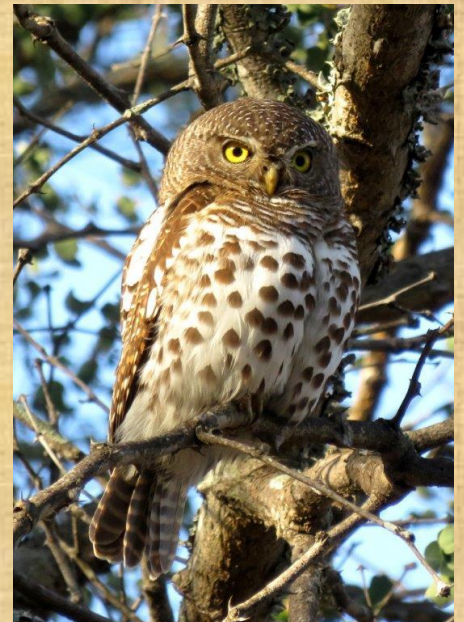
## ***On Foot with Shangani Trails!!***

***January 2020***

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*The African Barred Owlet, historically not a regular to see in the Makuleke Concession but 2019 proved us wrong with some clear sightings in the Riverine Forests on the Limpopo River! Photo: Shangani Trails*



### ***Shangani Trails: Makuleke Concession Update***

*Once again another trails season has gone by in a flash and what a season 2019 was with some great trails being conducted for Guests from all the world including Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, France, Switzerland, The UK, Canada, USA and of course South Africa, thank you to all for your support, it is very much appreciated!*

*The Rain Gods weren't that kind to the Makuleke in the 2019 rainy season with below average falls being recorded. However, what rain did fall, fell in the right places filling most of the pans and Reedbuck Vlei, although the latter probably only 75% full. This being said, the lack of rain was felt the most in the vegetation with grass coverage becoming exceptionally scarce as the dry season progressed, placing the bulk grazers, Buffalo and Zebra, plus the Warthogs under a great deal of pressure in October/November 2019.*



*I frequently mentioned to many guests in June/July that the landscape they were looking at was what we would normally see in October! Early rains in December 19 have, however, brought some relief, refilling the pans and stimulating grass growth much to everyone's relief. Lines of communication have since been opened directly with Mujaji, the Rain Goddess, to ensure the good start to the rains continues into 2020!*

*The dry conditions did, however, have its advantages as the Luvuvhu River became a magnet for this game-rich Concession. Large herds of Buffalo, Elephant, Impala, Nyala, Kudu and Eland were frequently encountered on our walks with the Trails Camps having a front row seat in view of their location on the Luvuvhu's banks. Frequent visits to the camps by Elephant Bulls in particular were enjoyed as they sought the lush green leaves of the Large Leafed Fever Berries that surround the Trails Camps.*



*Visitors often dropped in for lunch!! Photo: Erich Niederdorfer, Frankfurt, Germany*

### ***Post Brunch Encounters – Pafuri Trails Camp, September 2019***

*Erich and Sam had requested a short walk down to the river after brunch and having heard some Buffalo activity while filling showers, I gathered them up and cautiously made our way out of camp. As we cleared the beautiful large Ana trees, we saw an Elephant Bull just finishing his mud bath, throwing the last sods of greasy goo over his back before making his way slowly up the opposite bank.*



*A small herd of Buffalo then started to come down to drink from the same area forcing us to keep to the higher ground at the edge of the Large Fever Berries so that we would not disturb them at this important time of the day.*

*We followed the bend in the river to the west, heading upstream picking up the paths on the high bank. The Luvuvhu River, as always, was beautiful even in the heat of the day, blue and tranquil with Pied Kingfishers hovering, expectant of the next meal below, White Crowned Lapwings protecting their territories vigorously from intruders of all kinds while Nyala, Zebra and Kudu drank warily upstream of our position, always conscious of the very real reptilian threat from the river! We crested the high lip of the bank only to be confronted by a large Elephant Bull quietly destroying a branch of the Nyala Berry tree from which he was feeding! He was not 30m away from us and I motioned for Erich and Sam to come in behind me. We viewed the Bull for a short while before backing out slowly from the encounter and retracing our steps, avoiding the thick Croton where more Bulls may have been lurking!*

*We once again rounded the river bend only to see the lead elements of an Elephant Breeding Herd emerging from the forest on the opposite bank. Very small calves were in and amongst the cows all eager to reach the water, spreading out across the water's edge, trunks dipping greedily into the clear water.*



*Part of the Breeding Herd on the Luvuvhu River. Photo: Erich Niederdorfer, Frankfurt, Germany*

*The wind was generally in our favour, swirling and gusting but with our elevated position, I was hoping our scent wouldn't reach the herd! With some individuals looking as if they wanted to cross over to our side of the river, I silently indicated to Erich and Manfred to follow me closer to the Ana trees and into the shade from where we would have a better view.*

*We stayed with the herd until elements began to move up the Kruger bank and away into the Riverine Forest, some finding convenient trees for rubbing posts!*



### ***Morning Walk- Baobab Hill House, September 2019***

*I didn't have to bang hard on too many doors as the Group were up and about early getting ready for the morning's walk into the spiritual Hutwini Gorge. We enjoyed a light breakfast before holding the safety brief in the car park as we intended to walk from the House, then head roughly north to pick up the paths that would take us behind the Hutwini Ridgeline before looping west to the northern entrance of Hutwini Gorge. Walking down to the gate we spied tracks of a Four Toed Elephant Shrew and those of a Scorpion, a gentle reminder to wear closed shoes when walking around at night!*

*We had just walked out of the gate when a herd of Buffalo came into view forcing us to hug the House's fenceline to avoid their attentions! We kept to the high ground watching the Buffalo slowly walk west before reaching a small ridge that allowed a clear view down into the drainage line and a small Ana Tree (Winter Thorn) forest. As we crested the ridge, two Eland and a small herd of Kudu were seen with the Buffalo still in the picture as well! Amazing to see on foot!*

*We descended into the drainage line and turning to my left I saw an Elephant Bull moving slowly towards us, picking up the pods of the Ana trees with his trunk as he did so. James and I checked the wind, immediately turning to follow the drainage line to approach him from a downwind position. He was about 60m away, aware of us but comfortable with our presence at that distance.*



*He stood tall once, ears out looking directly at us but realizing there was no threat he dismissed us and carried on feeding! A great start to the walk for the Group with Buffalo, Kudu, Eland and Elephant within 500m of the House.*

***The Elephant Bull in the Ana Trees, aware of us but chilled! Photo: Shangani Trails***

*We picked up the rocky paths that would lead us to the back of the Hutwini Ridgeline with James and I both looking down with a wry smile at the more than numerous fresh Buffalo and Elephant tracks strewn around us!*



*Along the way we also identified tracks of Porcupine, Hyena, Jackal, Leopard and the skull of an Elephant with a lower jaw without any teeth at all, the jawbones being smooth with just one hole where the last set of teeth had been worn away. This was definitely an old Elephant who had seen 6 sets of teeth ground away over a lifetime, resulting ultimately in its death as a likely result of malnutrition!*

*We finally found a shady but open spot with good views of the Gorge and the paths leading in from the north to enjoy tea/coffee and rusks before holding a short safety and historical brief of the Gorge. The initial relatively open entrance soon gave way to narrow looming sandstone side walls on either side. Almost immediately we had sightings of Rock Hyrax (Dassie) and a family of Klipspringer, an antelope that has evolved to thrive in a mountainous habitat with specially adapted hooves to easily handle their rocky environment.*



*The family of Klipspringers on the Gorge's walls! Photo: Nadine Jackson, Johannesburg, RSA*

*The Gorge was quiet but we were pleased to see the usually shy but vocal White Browed Robin Chat and a special sighting of a Mocking Cliff Chat, a bird that has made a rocky, mountainous habitat its own! We emerged from the Gorge into the broad leafed woodland of the Luvuvhu floodplain, admiring the large mud-coated rock faces that guard the southern entrance to Hutwini, smoothed by centuries of constant rubbing by Elephant, Buffalo, Rhino and Warthog! We swung east finding the paths that would take us back to the House where brunch was shouting quiet loudly! However, thoughts of food would have to wait as we almost immediately came across a herd of Eland who, on picking up our wind, ran off to the east where we would run into them again later!*



*As we passed an old Elephant Carcass, a very live Bull appeared off to our right! Once again, James and I checked the wind and moved the Group to a side-on position as the Bull began to feed on a Nyala Berry Tree, reaching up with his trunk to break off branches.*



*The Elephant Bull reaches up to feed off the Nyala Berry Tree! Photo: Nadine Jackson, Johannesburg, RSA*

*We enjoyed the sighting but with time moving on, we broke away from the encounter only to meet up with the same Eland herd we had seen earlier. We counted eight of these animals, the largest antelope in Southern Africa, including a large grey Bull who proved a trifle elusive to view clearly. Buffalo also started to appear the nearer we got to the House forcing us to keep to the drainage line, taking a wider loop to use much the same route in as we took out from the gate earlier that morning.*

*We successfully skirted the Buffalo and reached the gate safely with the thoughts of brunch very much now to the fore! An amazing walk with great encounters and picturesque scenery to enjoy! Very seldom does Hutwini Gorge let you down!*



### *Into the 2020 Trails Season*

*Both the Pafuri Trails and the Hutwini Trails Camps were fully operational during 2019 with further improvements being fully flushing toilets installed in each tent with its own bucket shower attached. The dining Gazebos have also been enlarged with drop down sides to combat whatever the elements may throw at us! Notwithstanding the aforementioned improvements, the Trails Camps remain rustic, the Wildlife literally on your doorstep with frequent daily visits by Nyala, Elephant and Buffalo while the territorial grunts of Leopard, the languid calls of the Spotted Hyena and Black Backed Jackal are frequently heard throughout the night! Sitting around the fire with an ice cold drink at the end of the day, you will also be kept company by the duets of the Wood Owls and the grumpy mumbles of the Verreaux Eagle Owl!*

*There was a great deal of interest shown in the Wilderness Backpack Trails in 2019 with anything between 3-5 nights being spent under the stars as we traversed the diverse landscapes of the Concession on foot with our lives carried on our backs!*



*The diversity of the scenery on the Wilderness Trails is breathtaking! Photo: Shangani Trails*

*A number of Trails were also successfully conducted out of the Baobab Hill House, the self-catering lodge not far from the airstrip! This luxury accommodation option was particularly popular with large Groups looking for the not so rustic option!*



*Shangani Trails entertained several Groups walking out of the Pafuri Camp Lodge where all the trimmings of a highly starred luxury lodge are enjoyed! Whichever accommodation type you choose, the walks in this amazing Concession will take you into the heart of the African Bush and keep you coming back time and time again!*



*Sunset on the Limpopo River Floodplain. Photo: Shangani Trails*

*Shangani Trails wishes you a very successful 2020 and we look forward to you joining us.....;*

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

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