

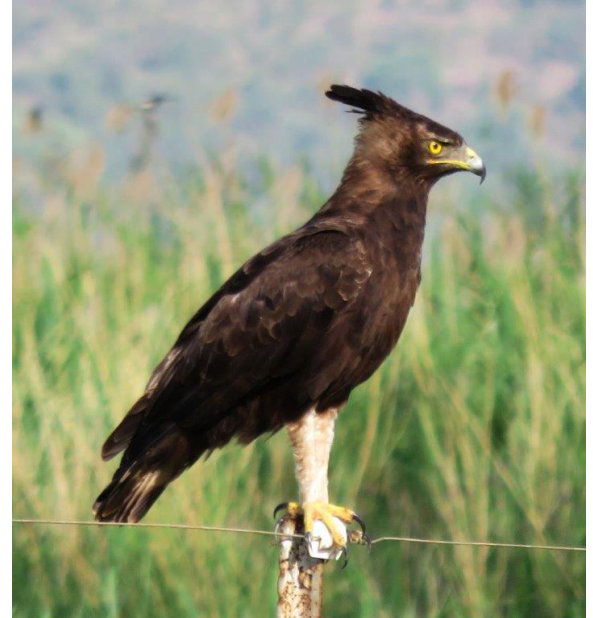


On Foot with Shangani Trails!! December 2020

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Long Crested Eagle, Crocodile Bridge Gate, Kruger National Park, November 2020 Photo: Shangani Trails



Shangani Trails Covid19 Update

After many months of frustration for the Tourism Industry as a whole in South Africa, the movement to Covid19 Level 2 Lockdown Restrictions meant a welcome lifting of the ban on Inter-Provincial movement for leisure purposes, thus allowing Shangani Trails to host our first Trail of the walking season for South African Guests...in late August!!

The South African Government then went further to announce a lowering of the Lockdown Restrictions to Level 1 from 21 September 2020 including, most importantly, the re-opening of South African international borders for incoming tourism travel from the 1st October 2020! There were, however, several underlying conditions ranging from stringent prior to arrival Covid19 testing regulations for foreign tourists to a "Country Blacklist" indicating which countries were, at the time, considered too Covid19 high risk by South Africa to accept their travellers into this country.

Under considerable pressure, the South African Government then finally scrapped the “Blacklist”, thus opening international travel to and from all countries no matter the level of Covid19 risk, subject obviously to certain Covid protocols be satisfied by the travellers.

With Europe, The UK and the United States now firmly in the grip of the Covid19 Second Wave, South Africa is fast following suit with the Eastern and Western Cape case count reaching levels only previously experienced in May/June/July earlier this year! At the time of writing, the Eastern Cape and the Garden Route have been declared “Hotspots” with certain restrictions but with the Festive Season looming and local travel volumes increasing, we can only wait and see as to whether the new Covid19 case count increases further!

Into the Southern Kruger!

With the Trails Season sadly coming to a close at the end of October, we were, however, still able to conduct a few Privately Guided Safaris through the Southern Kruger for South African Guests. These safaris have indeed proved to be highly successful with some outstanding sightings to savour during our drives in the Lower Sabie and Berg-en-Dal areas. And so it proved on one particular Sunday in November this year....

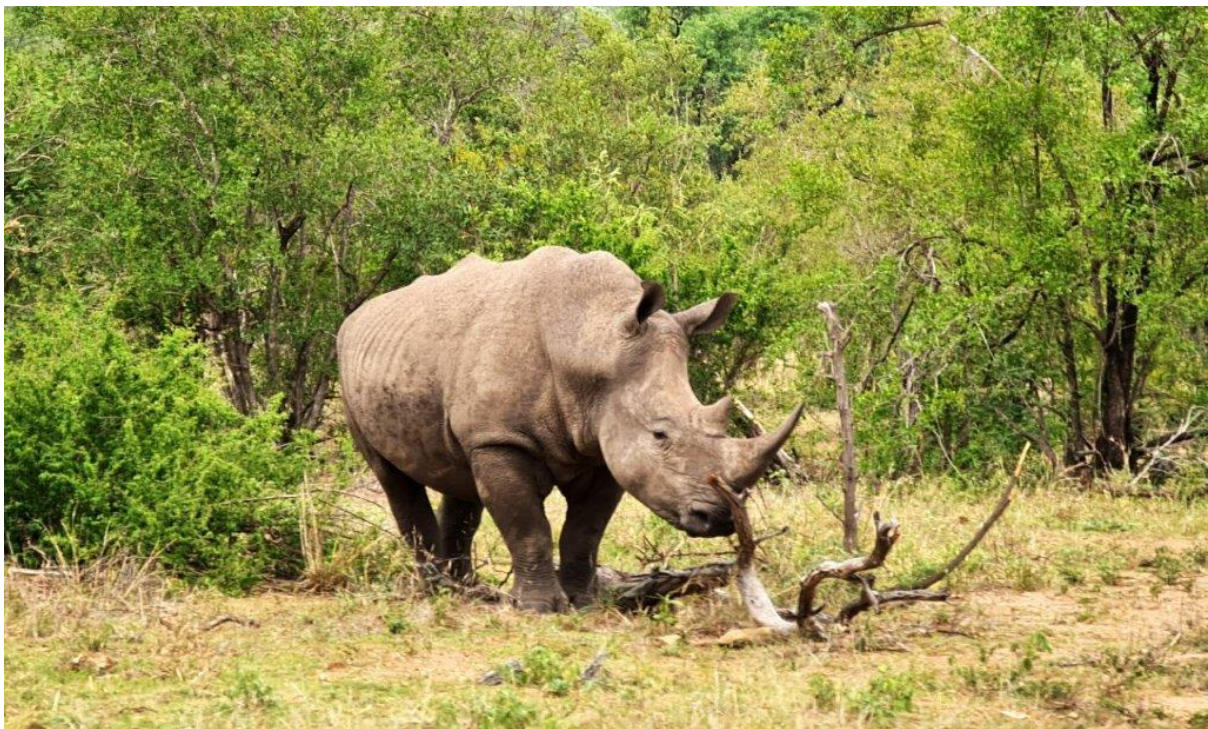
Under grey overcast and often windy conditions, we cleared the KNP Malelane Gate looking to do an initial loop past the Berg-en-Dal Rest Camp to an active waterhole before making our way back to the main tar road through the beautiful granite kopjes that are so characteristic of this region of Southern Kruger.



Part of the Berg-en-Dal area in which we were driving! Photo: Shangani Trails

My fears that the inclement weather conditions would hamper our viewing efforts appeared to be well founded as even the usually bustling waterhole proved to be eerily quiet as a slight drizzle spotted the windscreen! We were, however, lucky to spot a pair of Wahlberg's Eagles atop an Apple Leaf tree! These medium size birds of prey are migrants having arrived from north-east Africa in August and are now looking to breed as the summer progresses.

Picking up the dirt road that had been particularly successful for me in the past, we wound our way through the valleys until the unmistakable grey rump of a White Rhino Bull appeared off to our right. Breathing a sigh of relief at this the first Rhino sighting for the Group, we followed the large Bull for a while as he walked and grazed on the fresh green grass shoots. He then, obligingly, stopped in full view at a fallen tree stump to rub his rather ample front horn against a convenient woody protrusion.



The White Rhino Bull rubs his horn against the dead branch. Photo: Shangani Trails

As he did so, our attention switched to a family of Southern Ground Hornbills emerging from the Red Bushwillow thickets behind the Bull. One adult was busy grappling with a Giant Land Snail in its beak, eventually dropping said snail onto the ground before spearing it through the shell and deftly removing the contents from its not so protective shattered housing! A great sighting for the Group and Guides alike particularly in the midst of an excellent Rhino sighting! With the Bull having chosen to turn and meander slowly away into the thickets, we continued on our way, somewhat awed by what we had just witnessed!



Not far along, I pointed out a beautiful Leopard Orchid, in full bloom, nestling in the fork of a dead Leadwood tree! Leaving the orchid, we turned the corner only to see five formidable looking Dagga Boys (Buffalo Bulls) lying down in the grass their backs to the wind, nonchalantly chewing their cud!

One of the large Dagga Boys lying down! Photo: Shangani Trails

Observing the size of these Dagga Boys' horns and their respective Boss', I mentioned to the Guests that I was feeling particularly grateful that we weren't on foot at that moment in time!

We finally reached the tar road turning north with the idea of stopping for some welcome coffee and rusks at the Afsaal Picnic area. The coffee would, however, have to wait as a stationery vehicle up ahead caught our attention! We slowed to see what the occupants were looking at when, as if on queue, a big male Leopard emerged from the bush on our right in front of the vehicle ahead of us. He appeared unfazed by the attention as he sauntered across the road in full, beautiful view before walking south not far from the road but in and out of the vegetation. I hurriedly turned the vehicle around to follow, tracking the odd scarcely visible rosette and glimpse of a white tipped tail held characteristically high as he walked!



A herd of Impala, having picked up his approach, began alarm calling immediately, their nasal snorts easily audible above the noise of the engine! The big Cat, ignoring the Impala, then once more crossed the road to our front, pausing in a ditch before moving on to choose a comfortable spot, right out in the open on our left, to lie down and survey the scene around him.

The Leopard lying down in the open! Photo: Shangani Trails

With the sighting rapidly drawing interest from passing vehicles, we enjoyed the company of the Cat for a short while longer before handing over our ideal position to another vehicle! Once again the vagaries of my, happily, chosen line of work were once again highlighted by being in the right place at the right time!

Continuing north towards Afsaal, a herd of Impala revealed a small kindergarten of newly born lambs, their shiny black noses, twitching constantly, identifying unfamiliar scents abounding in their new surroundings! A large Elephant Bull made an appearance off to our right but he continued on his way and out of sight not pausing for us to enjoy an adequate view! Nearing the Afsaal picnic spot, the terrain quickly changed from the granite strewn Kopjes to wide open plains allowing us visuals of Wildebeest and Zebra in some numbers before, once more, the stationary vehicles drew our attention!



We approached with some caution so as not to disturb the sighting, one departing vehicle indicating a lone Lioness off to our left lying under what had to be the only Apple Leaf tree on the plain! She was some way off but rose for a second revealing a swollen abdomen which, in addition to her being on her own, might have been an indication of her waiting to give birth!

The Lioness rests far from the madding crowd. Photo: Shangani Trails

She almost immediately lay down again seemingly content to stay out of the limelight at a distance from the whirring cameras!

Coffee, tea and snacks were indeed well enjoyed at Afsaal, the Guests excitedly recalling the quality of the sightings we had been privy to thus far during the morning.

Little did we know what awaited us on our return loop back to Malelane Gate over the course of the oncoming afternoon drive! That is, however, a story to be told in Shangani Trails' next newsletter, don't miss it!

Looking to 2021

Annus Horribilis is the only way to describe 2020 for everyone throughout the world but let's hope we can now look forward to 2021 being a year of regeneration and living successfully within the demands of the new normal!

In terms of Shangani Trails and the Makuleke Concession, the two Trails Camps are now closed for the season although we were lucky enough to conduct three trails between late August and the end of October 2020 for South African Residents. The Trails Camps will once again open on 1 April 2021 with the season running through to 31 October 2021. However, the luxury Pafuri Camp Lodge and the Self-Catering Baobab Hill House remain open throughout the Festive Season and into 2021 to cater for any Walking Trails that may be required in this interim period.

The majority of guests who booked for trails in 2020 chose to postpone to 2021 rather than cancel and, for this, Shangani Trails is extremely grateful! We look forward to those trails and I will be in contact shortly with these Groups to discuss any changes that may be necessary.



***Walking the mystical
Fever Tree Forest,
Makuleke Concession,
Kruger National Park.***

***Photo: Glenda Neill, Cape
Town.***

As indicated earlier, any Covid19 resurgences aside, both the Trails Camps will re-open on 1 April 2021 to 31 October 2021 with bookings now being taken! In conjunction with Return Africa, we will be offering discounted prices on all 3 forms of accommodation available on the Concession, Pafuri Camp Lodge, Baobab Hill House and both the Pafuri Walking Trails' tented camps, until the end of March 2022.

Remember, that Shangani has conducted many a successful Walking Trail out of the Pafuri Camp Lodge and Baobab Hill House throughout the year! Please feel free to phone, email or go through the website to request quotes and availability details at any time.

Alternatively, don't forget that Shangani Trails is highly active on FaceBook and now also on Instagram," @shanganitrails_", so if you are on any of these Social Media platforms please look us up and like/follow using the link below! Many thanks!

In addition, Shangani Trails is also now active in the Southern and Central Kruger National Park conducting Privately Guided Safaris by vehicle through these areas for those who may not want to be as close to Mother Nature as we would be on foot or to even perhaps link these with the Walking Trails in The Makuleke by gradually winding our way from south to the north through the Kruger.

These Safaris have proved to be extremely successful in 2019 and the early part of 2020 prior to the Lockdown while further ventures into Southern Kruger have luckily been conducted in November of this year. Please see the website and/or contact us for more details if you are interested in these amazing Kruger National Park adventures.

Shangani Trails wishes you a safe and healthy 2020 Festive Season 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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