



# AFRICAN SAFARI UPDATE

ISSUE 11, SUMMER, 1998

## Safari Includes History, Wildlife

By Lillian Stoner

My African trip was the culmination of eight months of intensive planning since neither my regular traveling buddy Gayle Lycos nor I could find a package that covered everything we wanted to do. We consulted at length with Fish Eagle Safaris, whom I located in my web-surfing. After much tweaking of dates, places and routings, we left for Cape Town on October 31.

We spent the first few days in Cape Town getting used to the eagerness of Capetonians (and most other South Africans) to hear our impressions of their country after international sanctions had cut them off for so many years. Some might be surprised at my decision to make South Africa a major part of the itinerary given my long vocal and financial opposition to apartheid. Gayle and I talked about it and decided that

since recent changes have brought the dismantling of most forms of apartheid, and since the people we support (the ANC) are now in control, it was time to support those changes with tourist dollars.

Our first Cape Town priority was Robben Island where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for nearly 20 years. I volunteered to be in line for the tickets by 6:30 am. Robben Island began as a provisioning outpost for early explorers and has, at various times, been a leper colony, a military base, and a very unpleasant prison. It was a moving experience to visit there. Other Cape Town highlights included a trip to the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve with a stop to see a delightfully comic collection of jackass penguins. We also began to understand how seriously South Africans take their wine!

### First Safari

From Cape Town's rugged beauty, which reminded me of a cross between San Francisco and

Sydney, Australia, we flew to Windhoek, Namibia, and began our first safari. For this segment, the major focus was on unusual geology and natural history. We saw the Sesriem Canyon, over 200,000 seals at the Cape Cross Colony near the Skeleton Coast, and the incredible 400 meter high red dunes at Sossusvlei in the Great Namib Desert. It was a wonderful time to visit the dunes because this year saw the most significant rainfall in nearly thirty years. This resulted in plant and animal life truly seen once in a lifetime. Our adventures included a long (unplanned) walk in the desert when our four

wheel drive got stuck in the sand during which time I suffered flashbacks to scenes from *The English Patient*.

From there it was off to Okonjima, home of the Africat Foundation, which was recently

featured in a special on the Discovery Channel. The owners of Okonjima, Wayne and Lisa Hanssen, are gracious hosts and tireless workers on behalf of the Big Cats. Many orphaned leopards, cheetahs and lions live at Okonjima while they heal, and while new habitats are found for them. The stars at the farm are three house-Cheetahs who come out every day for tea. (Well, tea for us; a big snack of raw meat for them.) We were able to get very up close and personal and have some wonderful photographs and video.

I lost my heart to the less dramatic residents. We met a banded mongoose with a hurt leg who loved to be carried in a tee shirt pouch on someone's tummy. We also met Shinge, a caracal or African lynx, and her 12 week old, hell-on-wheels son, Max. Shinge behaves like any cat who has adopted a house and its resident people. One morning when I acci-



### INSIDE

Camping Safari —A Great Family Holiday p. 3

January Safari Offers Varied Wildlife p. 4

Turtles at Rocktail Bay p. 8

See "Custom Safari, page 10

# AFRICAN SAFARI UPDATE

## ISSUE 11

Published by  
Fish Eagle Safaris  
11191 Westheimer #349  
Houston, TX 77042  
Tel 800/513-5222 (North  
America)  
Tel 713/467-5222  
Fax 713/467-3208  
E-mail: [exafrica@aol.com](mailto:exafrica@aol.com)  
[www.gorp.com/fisheagle](http://www.gorp.com/fisheagle)

*All photographs taken by members of the  
Botswana Camping Safari (p. 3).*

## WRITE FOR FREE TOUR BROCHURE

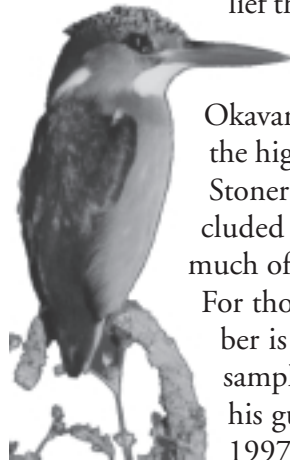
Write or call for a free brochure which contains details of many nature tours to Botswana, Malawi, Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. A separate lodge brochure is also now available. My *African Field Guide Review*, which reviews 100 bird, mammal & other field guides and travel guides, is also available free on request.

*ExAfrica: From the Editor's Desk*

## No Off-Season in Southern Africa

My first ever visit to Botswana was in the month of February, several years ago. It wasn't exceedingly hot, there was lots of game—I had my best-ever sighting of leopard near Tsaro Lodge—and the bird-watching was excellent. Apart from one brief yet violent rain-storm over Maun just as I arrived, the weather was dry and uneventful. Over the years, I have also been in Namibia in May and Zimbabwe in December—the wrong time of year for both. I returned from both journeys with nothing but wonderful memories.

All of which goes to prove that, whatever the conventional wisdom, July through September are not the only months to travel in Southern Africa. Lately, I have seen several reports which underscore my own long-held belief



that off-season travel in southern African can be very rewarding. In this issue of our newsletter, Colin Bell reports on the excellent game-viewing in the Okavango Delta in early January; Ginger Hill writes about the highlights of a December trip to Namibia, and Lillian Stoner shares her memories of a November trip which included parts of both Botswana and Namibia, as well as much of South Africa.

For those of you who are still not convinced that December is a good time to go on safari to Botswana, here is a sampling of what one Wilderness Safaris tour guide and his guests saw on one of the Jacana safaris in December 1997:

- Six lion stalk and kill a male Kudu;
- Hundreds of elephant and buffalo;
- 25 lions and three male cheetah on Christmas Day around the waterhole;
- Pel's Fishing Owl;
- Both male and female Sitatunga very close to camp;
- Two wild dog kills (lechwe & warthog); two cheetah kills (impala), plus four leopards and 15 other lions.
- Fantastic general game and birding throughout.

Bert du Plessis  
Houston  
May 1998

# Camping Safari—A Great Family Holiday

*By Bert du Plessis of Fish Eagle Safaris*

Last June I signed up for a cross-country Mopane Safari with Wilderness Safaris from Victoria Falls to Maun. It was a family vacation for my wife and I, our two boys aged 12 and 13, and our Houston neighbors, the Woods, with their two boys who were then 13 and 15. To keep costs within reasonable limits, we opted for a participation safari, which means you pitch your own tent (it's quite easy), help with the cooking, and collect some firewood during game drives.

The 12-day Mopane Safaris operate between Victoria Falls and Maun, in either direction. On the first day we drove from Vic Falls to Chobe, picking up supplies in Kasane along the way. For the first few days we camped near the banks of the Chobe River, enjoying good views of elephant, buffalo and the very local puku.

## Elephant

Our best sighting in Chobe was of a group of elephants swimming to an island in the Chobe River. It was an amazing sight: they were almost totally submerged with only the tips of their trunks visible, and the cows were propping up the little ones along the way, so you'd see a youngster bob up every now and then. A real National Geographic moment!

Amongst the birding highlights were close-up views of Whitecrowned Plover, a breeding colony of Whitefronted Bee-eaters and several Pied Kingfishers. Lasting impressions of the Chobe stay were of big blue skies, quiet and peaceful evenings. I also finally found a bird which had eluded me for years, the Bronzewing Courser.

On our last night a pride of lions roared all around our campsites, the sound cutting through our tents and causing a few tense moments. Some groups actually have lions walk through the camp sites, and this is why many people opt for a camping trip like the Mopane: it gets you very close to nature. The game drives in Chobe were too uneventful for our liking, but things would improve shortly.

## On to Savuti

Our next campsite was in Savuti, on the banks of the now bone-dry Savuti Chan-

nel. It was a long drive from Chobe—some 6 hours—and some exceptionally cold weather kept us hunkered down in the vehicle pretty much all the way. We did manage to spot a rare bird, the Threebanded Courser, for which there are only a handful of confirmed sightings in Botswana. En route to Savuti we stopped at a local village to purchase some of the intricately woven reed baskets. We would not have as good an opportunity to buy quality baskets at good prices again.

In Savuti, we experienced excellent game-viewing, coming across a big pride



*Permanent tented camps in Botswana have laundry facilities, but on a participation camping safari, as Fish Eagle Safaris' owner Bert du Plessis quickly learned, it is do-it-yourself.*

of lions, with 6 lionesses, two of which had young ones. The Satara pride is known for the huge size and fierceness of the females, as well as for being habituated to vehicles, as they have starred in several wildlife documentaries. Our Savuti campsite did not make a great first impression, but it turned out to be okay, with quite a bit of wildlife in and around the camp.

A morning game drive on the Savuti Marsh (the dry stumps of drowned trees being the only clue that this was a marsh not too long ago) produced sightings of tsessebe, zebra, blue wildebeest, ostrich

and many Kori bustards. We also spotted a cheetah, and even though it was rather distant, it was nevertheless a good find. Another game drive along the Savuti Channel resulted in a close encounter with an elephant, our camera motor drives working over-time as the animal stopped, wheeled and trundled off. In this same area there were some huge baobab trees which were rather easier to frame. Many of our photographs, by the way, were somewhat washed out due to the very bright, almost harsh light. It is best to take the majority of one's photographs in the softer morning and late afternoon light.

## Moremi

By May 30 we were on our way to Moremi. Heidi Dednam, our very capable guide, amazed us all with her ability to guide the heavily-laden vehicle and trailer through some thick sand with hardly a hiccup. There was not much to be seen along the way—it was just cold. At a coffee stop by a waterhole we notched up several more bird species for our trip list, including Burchells Sandgrouse, Blackcheeked Waxbill, Yellowthroated Sparrow and Crimson Boubou.

On the way to Moremi we drove through an area which we all fondly recall as 'Giraffic Park'—there were giraffes *everywhere!* Near North Gate, outside the reserve, we came across a dead elephant guarded by a female lion. Later that afternoon we saw them again; the elephant still very much dead, just smellier, and this time there were three lions in attendance. In the Moremi area, we entered a water-rich habitat for the first time so it was no surprise to find red lechwe and common reedbuck. The Moremi site, where we pitched our tents on the banks of the Khwai River more or less opposite Tsaro Camp, was our favorite campsite by far.

The first day in the Moremi area was a bit slow, but by the time we headed out to Maun three days later we had seen a tremendous variety of wildlife, including our first view of honey badger—which we saw on two consecutive days. One day we drove to a beautiful area (aptly named Paradise) near Xakanaxa for a picnic. It

*See "Camping," page 11*



# January Safari Offers Varied Wildlife

by Colin Bell of *Wilderness Safaris*

This is a trip report from my five days/ four nights holiday in the Okavango over New Year, to give you an idea what it is like travelling during the summer months—and what nature viewing you can enjoy in the camps at this time of year.

We stayed two nights at Chitabe and two nights at Mombo. We travelled from the 31st December to the 4th January.



**Overall Impressions:** This was a great trip and a great time of year to travel. The wildlife we saw was outstanding.

**Temperature:** It never went above 30° C (86° F).

**Rain:** We had one night of rain while everyone was asleep and one thunder-shower on a game drive.

**Game viewing:** Stunning—guests were extending their stay at Mombo.

## Chitabe Camp

This was the first time that I had holidays and relaxed at Chitabe Camp. I was very impressed with the overall feel and atmosphere of the camp. The decor, too, was outstanding. The views over the flood

plains from the elevated rooms are stunning, and the camp has great ambiance. The elevated board walks are great. They give lots of atmosphere while providing a feeling of safety for our guests.

Chitabe Trails Camp, too, is wonderful and offers small camp intimacy. Now that the decking has been altered and the gap between the dining room and lounge decked in, the camp has a great feel.

Helene Heldring has done a great job in designing, building and furnishing both the camps. A few small issues need to be sorted out, but these will be done in early 1998 while we are relatively quiet. Things like headboards on the beds and an extra vehicle for airport runs are all being arranged. The new airfield is working well, and now that the first rains have come, the scars caused by building an airfield are disappearing as new grass grows over the graded areas alongside the airfield.

The day before we arrived they had good rains at Chitabe and throughout most of northern Botswana. The pans in the area filled up for the first time this summer and the area was looking

stunning. On our first game drive we went out into the forest areas to the east of Chitabe and came across a breeding herd of about 30 elephants with their youngsters. The air was fresh, the vegetation was lush, and there was ample water everywhere. With the onset of rains after a long dry winter, the elephants were the most relaxed I have seen for a long long time. They walked right to us from about 500m away and came to within 15m of the vehicle and never once even raised their trunks or trumpeted even though there were a couple of newly born youngsters in the herd. There was no sign of aggression towards us, and they calmly moved on their way. Normally a group like this

in a dry winter would have been giving us the right royal send-off from miles away.

That night the frogs came out with gusto. The frog symphony was the loudest I can ever recall. Just sitting next to a newly filled pan watching the sun go down and listening to the variety of frog chirps and calls was sensational. We had a couple from Italy who were only interested in cats and the “big game” but were visibly moved by the scene and the sounds.

That night on the way home, we came across two aardwolves who were nibbling away at termites on an open plain. Apparently these two are becoming a regular feature of Chitabe night drives. We had our spotlight on them and this attracted termites in huge masses. In no time at all we were engulfed with termites and we ended up with a patch of about 4 metres x 4 metres x 15cm high of termites. The two aardwolves heard all the insects flapping at our patch and came right up to the vehicles. They were under my feet at one stage. We spent an hour with them and then left them to their feast. It was the finest aardwolf sighting I have ever had.

We had gentle rain that night and woke up on New Years Day with the sound of baboons being hassled by leopard—and the roaring of the lion. What a way to start 1998! I missed the day's game drive as I had to catch up with the lodge managers. But guests saw lion, leopard, elephant et al!

On that afternoon's drive, we saw painted snipe, black egret fishing with their characteristic umbrellas; red-crested korhaans with their unique mating display as they fall out of the sky in a spectacular but untidy bundle. We went back to the lions—22 of them with cubs and two big males. They were stalking impala, with one lioness travelling out in a massive arc trying to force the impala herd onto her pride. Unfortunately for the lions the youngsters in the pride were too inexperienced and kept on raising their heads and the impala picked up the trap—followed by much snorting.

We got a call that another Chitabe vehicle had picked up a pack of wild dog which was about to start hunting. We had

a Japanese guest who had not seen wild dogs on eight previous African trips, and who came to Chitabe especially for the dogs. So off we went and had a fantastic two hours following the dogs, watching the meeting rituals, watching them hunt and seeing them regurgitate to their puppies! Our Japanese guest thought he was in heaven!

### Duba Plains, Little Vumbura and Mombo

The new Duba Plains will be stunning and will have a lot more atmosphere and ambiance than the old. It will remain as a 10-bedded camp. Even in the short while we were there, a group of sable strolled past the front of the camp and more were seen at the back of the camp. Lion had brought down a buffalo a kilometre or so away and the vultures had started to descend for their pluckings. The staff there are doing night drives and are seeing leopard just about every drive! The area is superb.

Little Vumbura's location is one of the most spectacular we have ever seen. It is situated in some of the largest, shadiest and coolest mangosteen forests imaginable and overlooks a couple of wonderful plains with water available all year. The main emphasis will be on game drives, night drives and walks—but we will also be able to offer superb mokoro trips in wonderful open flood plains from about March to November each year. Game viewing is superb with lots of everything! Looking out onto the floodplain we saw lechwe, impala, waterbuck and great birds. Our staff know the area's game and lion, leopard, elephant, giraffe, buffalo and all the rest are resident in good numbers.

From Duba, we flew to Mombo for our last two nights. The game at Mombo just seems to get better and better each year. There is no question that the game viewing has been better this year than at any other time since Mombo opened up. It was a pleasure to be on holiday and not to have to lurk behind the scenes all the time—and to enjoy the full pleasure of what Mombo has to offer. Those stunning open plains with palm-lined fringes, packed with game, make Mombo a virtual Garden of Eden. That afternoon we found the pack of 12 wild dog—and saw them cause mayhem on the plains of

Mombo later on as they hunted. Impala were scattering everywhere and one was brought down just before we came around the corner. Being able to watch the initial snoozing, then the bonding ritual before the hunt, followed by the hunt and then the regurgitation to the younger members of the pack who had missed out was a wonderful sight. Again we had guests who had dogs on the top of their shopping list and were ecstatic at the dog sighting.

No sooner had the dogs devoured the impala than four lions pitched up at the scene of the kill and took whatever bone scraps they could find. They walked right past the vehicle in the twilight and we had a couple of very nervous guests—whose adrenaline rush gave them a thrill of a lifetime. We saw honey badger, genets and springhare on the way back to camp.

Next morning we were woken up at 0500 and had coffee and a light breakfast snack at 0530 before hitting the trail again. We were just onto the open plains when we saw hyenas converging on a palm island followed by a gut wrenching bellow from the tall grass next to the island. A massive female buffalo came bounding out of the palm island desperately trying to fend off about 10 hyena. The bellowing came from her and her newly born calf which the hyenas had caught and were in the process of devouring. The mother nearly came victim to the hyenas, but managed to charge off across the plains—only to return to try and defend her dying calf! She nearly got caught again as hyenas gave chase again. On the radios we gathered that all the vehicles had action—lion, leopard, cheetahs. We did not know what to do, so we elected to see out the buffalo encounter.

A few kilometres down the way, after meandering past about 1000 buffalo, we came across the three Boro male lions who rule the roost south of Mombo. These brothers and half brothers form a formidable team and will be the bosses of that piece of prime real

estate for some time to come. The next morning one of the other groups saw this pride stalk and catch a warthog.

Others that morning in a different part of Mombo saw the dogs hunting in an area of Mombo which hosts large numbers of lechwe. On three separate occasions, these guests saw the chase in open plains—only to see the lechwe being trapped against water and choosing to dive into the water rather than face the dogs. All three lechwe were taken by crocodiles! One of the lechwe was caught in shallow water and the monster croc could not drown the lechwe and lay onto top of the lechwe until its head finally went below the water and it drowned. Again lion, leopard and cheetah were seen by others on different vehicles in different parts of Mombo. Another amazing morning at Mombo!

That afternoon we had requests from an Italian couple in our vehicle who wanted to see cheetah and leopard. So off we went for cheetah, and found the two male “steroid Boys”—so called because of their incredible strength. They have been seen bringing down animals like tsessebe and zebra. That evening they stalked a group of zebra and nearly caught one—before it managed to get to the edge of the floodplain and escape. We watched them for an hour or two and the Italian chap relaxed. The cheetahs moved onto another floodplain and we watched them stalk wildebeest, flush a serval who took off across the plains—but they stopped in their tracks when they spotted a pride of lion on the edge of the floodplain. Two females with three tiny cubs were out

*Continued on page 12*



# Tok-Tokkie Safari Offers Beauty, Variety

by Ginger Hill

*Editor's Note: Ginger Hill, who directs Wilderness Safaris' Cross-country Safari Division, had the pleasure of traveling on a Tok-Tokkie Safari in Namibia in December 1997. This was the last 16-day Namibia safari, as Wilderness has now shortened and improved the Toktokkie to 13 days for 1998 and beyond. Here are a few of Ginger's impressions:*

**Wolwedans Camp:** What a wonderful place! The Namib Rand is truly spectacular, and I am so pleased that we are spending two nights at Wolwedans in 1998. One night just wasn't enough. Spending two nights here will allow guests one full day to experience the Namib Rand, and therefore they will be able to see much more of the area. The camp in itself is lovely, with the new tents and facilities on raised decks, and a lovely intimate dining area. The food was also very good!

The most common large game to be found in this arid region are oryx, springbok and ostrich. When good grazing is available on Namib Rand the oryx will concentrate in this area and there are then often thousands of them around. One can regularly see bat-eared fox and jackal as well as the tracks of spotted hyena and aardwolf but the creatures themselves are not often seen.

This region never the less becomes most interesting when you start looking for the smaller creatures such as the various types of geckos and lizards, and the ever-active beetles scurrying over the sand. At the granite outcrops along your route you can find rock hyrax as well as dassie rats living on the rocks.

The birdlife is good. Some of the interesting species include lappetfaced and whitebacked vulture, blackbreasted snake eagle, pale chanting goshawk, Ludwig's bustard, Rupell's korhaan and mountain chat.

**Sossusvlei and Kulala:** This was quite an exciting day. Imagine our surprise when we arrived at Sossusvlei and there was still water in the vlei! It filled up early

last year for the first time since 1988, but I never expected to see any left in December. The rains in Namibia have been very good this season, so guests might still be able to see water in the vlei in 1998. Really a stunning sight. Imagine being able to tell your friends you went swimming in the middle of the Namib desert.

In this sea of sand one will still find oryx, springbok and ostrich walking about. In the early morning or late afternoon jackal will start becoming active again. The same small creatures and birds mentioned for Wolwedans will also be found in the Sossusvlei and Kulala area.

We did not have much time to spend at Kulala, as we only arrived in late after-



noon and had to leave early the next morning. However, the tented accommodation is very nice, with lovely en suite facilities. After a long hot day in Sossusvlei climbing around on the dunes, it is probably one of the best showers I have ever had! There is also a stunning view of the dunes at sunset from the bar/lounge area.

**Swakopmund:** I have always enjoyed this lovely little town, and my opinion of it has not changed. It is still a charmer. We were able to stop and see the famous Welwitchia plants on the way into town, so we had a blissful and much appreciated sleep-in the next morning. The first few days of the safari have some long drives, so a free morning was very welcome. One can spend the time wandering around town to the banks, bookstores or beach. There is a small museum on the beach for

anyone who wants to bone up on their Namibian history, or a new Aquarium for those who are interested in the sea. All of these activities can be fitted into one morning, as some of our group did just that!

We spent the afternoon on a drive to Walvis Bay to do some birding, and also to visit and learn a bit about the salt works found there. During the summer months when the migratory birds are in our region this spot is a birder's paradise. At this time of the year there are some 42 species to be found. All in all, a very pleasant day, finished off with a great dinner at the Swakopmund Hotel. Kuckis (my favourite bar/restaurant in Swakopmund) was unfortunately fully booked due to it being the holidays, but we did stop in there for a drink.

**Terrace Bay:** What can I say about this place, except that it has mercifully been cut from our 1998 itinerary? The appeal of Terrace Bay on a Namibian itinerary has always been its location on the Skeleton Coast. Most folks coming to Namibia have heard all about the Skeleton Coast and want to stay there. However, it is very basic and rather dismal National Parks accommodation set on one of the most desolate stretches of beach in

the world, and is not the ideal place to spend Christmas Eve. Most folks are disappointed when they arrive, and wonder why in the world they are there at all. The most interesting part of our stay there was that the president of Namibia, Mr Sam Nujoma, was in residence (he has a house there) for his Christmas fishing holiday. We caught a glimpse of him amongst all his bodyguards on Christmas morning trekking off to the dunes for some exercise.

The drive up the coast was good. The group leaves Swakopmund after breakfast, and stops at Cape Cross for an hour or so to view the Seal Colony. I found it quite interesting this time because of all the baby seals at this time of year. There are several hours more of driving along the coast and into Skeleton Coast National



Park, stopping at the one remaining shipwreck site which still has something worth seeing, and you have a packed lunch on the beach. We will continue to do this drive up the coast in 1998 and still include all the positive aspects of the Skeleton Coast, but instead of sleeping at Terrace Bay, we will turn off to Damaraland instead. So guests will have plenty of Skeleton Coast to see and enjoy.

**Damaraland Camp:** Once we arrived here I felt immediately "at home". It's great to be in a Wilderness camp, and this one certainly lives up to our reputation. The tented accommodation is lovely, the food is great, and the scenery is spectacular. The group enjoyed a superb Christmas dinner here the first night, and we had terrific sightings of desert elephant the next morning. Guests can relax at the rock pool in the heat of mid-afternoon, take a nature walk in the cooler late afternoon, and then enjoy sundowners back in camp before dinner.

In the Damaraland Camp area there are two distinct habitat types: the rocky desert with hills and plains and the dry river bed system. Outside the river bed you will again find the common dry-area adapted species like oryx, springbok and ostrich but it is when you enter the dry river bed system that you find numerous new species to add to your list.

The species one will mainly be looking for is the desert-adapted elephant which is regularly found in the dry season. During the wet period (depending on the rain) the elephant often move out of the river bed and to the east and are then difficult to find.

The rhino that live in this area are extremely difficult to find although the tracks are often seen. Apart from this you can find numerous other species in the river bed. These again include the oryx, springbok and ostrich as well as kudu, steenbok, common duiker and baboon.

Birding is very good especially in summer. Some of the new species you can find here are rollers, bee-eaters, pearlspotted owl, african hawk eagle, batis, hornbill and many more.

**Etosha:** I won't say too much about Etosha National Park. We stayed at Okaukuejo on the western side, and that

camp is still suffering the after effects of the fire that destroyed the restaurant and shop area. Our groups in 1998 will be staying at Ongava Tented Camp, which of course will be 100% better than any National Parks accommodation, and afford guests the opportunity of night drives and walks on the private Ongava Reserve. Game drives into Etosha will still be done in the morning. Tok-Tokkie groups in 1998 will be spending one night at Namutoni Camp, on the eastern side of the park, and this is probably the best camp that National Parks runs. The camp is set scenically around the old fort, and the pool area and restaurant are very nice.

The common game species found in both Etosha and the Ongava area are



Oryx, springbok, kudu, black faced impala, steenbok, common duiker, red hartebeest, blue wildebeest, Burchell's Zebra, eland (not that common in Etosha), giraffe, warthog, ground squirrel and a variety of mongoose.

On Ongava you can see white rhino that have been re-introduced into the reserve as well as a good population of waterbuck. There is also a small group of young elephant that are regularly seen. Ongava have some resident lion which are regularly seen, as are spotted hyena. Leopard are there but seldom seen while cheetah seldom enter the Ongava reserve.

In Etosha you have a better chance of seeing black rhino, especially early morning or late afternoon. The Etosha authorities have re-introduced some white rhino but the 15 they have are difficult to find.

The Etosha elephant are plentiful in the dry season but when the rains come they move north and out of the park and only a small number remain behind.

Lion and spotted hyena are regularly seen, although in summer when the game disperses the lion are more difficult to find. Cheetah have a difficult time competing with the high populations of other large predators and thus do not occur in large numbers. They are nevertheless still often seen. Both cape fox and honey badger are also often seen.

In parts of Etosha—especially the Bloubokdraai loop near Namuton—you can also find Damara dik dik.

Over 300 species of birds have been recorded for this region, and especially in summer this is a very good birding spot.

Okonjima was closed for the holidays, and will unfortunately continue to close over Christmas and New Year in years to come. Our group stayed in National Parks accommodation at Waterberg National Park. Although Waterberg National Park is well worth visiting, the accommodation in the camp is not the greatest. We will be looking for an alternative to Okonjima for the Christmas trip, and will most probably book a game lodge in the same area.

Okonjima is happily still our last night stop on all other Tok-Tokkie Safaris, and is sure to remain a favourite with our guests. While driving on Okonjima you will also see other game like oryx, kudu, steenbok, ground squirrel and baboon. At the night hide you will also have an opportunity to see porcupine and sometimes also caracal. This area also offers good birding and a birding hide is available.

It was really wonderful to be able to experience this safari first hand. I am convinced that the changes we have made to the Tok-Tokkie Safari in 1998 will make it a better safari than ever before. Excellent accommodation, superb guiding, and a fantastic new 8-seater extended Landrover with pop-top for game viewing all combine to make this an incredible Namibian experience. □

# Turtles are Treasures at Rocktail Bay

By Carol Lazar

The batch of tiny loggerhead turtles shot towards the sea, their flippers whirring at an almost impossibly fast speed for such tiny creatures, who just a short while back, had hatched from their eggs high on the beach. It was that soft time of the night, around 11pm, when the moon was climbing the sky and the stars blinked their hard white light in the dark.

A small group, we stood silently on the beach at Rocktail Bay, watching the moving scene unfold. I looked up and saw tears in my daughter's eyes and I understood how she felt for mine were watering too.

This was the culmination of a remarkable few days. Our adventure began in Johannesburg two days before, when we'd set off in a small plane piloted by Mike Myers, guide and African wildlife specialist extraordinaire. The journey, just under two hours, had taken us from the open rolling hills of Gauteng to the Maputaland Coastal Forest Reserve in northern Natal, just below Kosi Bay and the border of Mozambique.

Here, Rocktail Bay curves widely around. Mike flew low in Florence Baby, his valiant Cessna, and we saw water as turquoise as you could imagine, a deserted gold beach and a carpet of variegated greens. The prestigious American magazine, *Outside Magazine's Travel Guide*, recently rated Rocktail Bay the finest beach in the world. It's obvious why.

Behind the first dune nestles Rocktail Bay Lodge, a piece of heaven in the form of 10 stilted wood, reed and thatch huts blending with the forest. Understated but quietly elegant, they offer every comfort without disturbing the environment. Run by wild, woolly and wonderful Andy Coetzee, the country's foremost salt-water flyfisherman, and his partner Belinda Sainsbury, Rocktail offers nature lovers a unique experience. For nowhere else will you find beaches so wild yet gentle, sand so clean, rock-pools so rich in marine life, the sea filled with king and other fish which swim almost to shore.

While the land here is forest reserve,

the edging sea is the Maputaland Marine Reserve, which means visitors are lucky to be in a pristine and totally protected environment. A place where turtles come to lay their precious eggs, where fish are caught for sport, then tagged and released. A place where everything can be observed, but nothing spoiled or desecrated.

Belinda, normally in charge of catering, was away on a diving course. Nevertheless, we lunched splendidly on the open deck beneath a giant Natal mahogany tree among whose leaves hid a shy tweeting and chirping twispot. In fact, all meals, organised by Andy and executed by his excellent staff, were *al fresco* masterpieces.

I should probably explain a little about Rocktail Bay Lodge. It is one of the small,



*Kathleen and Jason du Plessis enjoying a mokoro outing near Zepa Trails Camp in the Okavango Delta.*

unique lodges or tented camps owned and managed by Wilderness Safaris. Now ecotourism is one of those words that is bandied around, often by people and companies who can't even spell it, let alone understand the meaning.

Wilderness Safaris is a company that understands and practises ecotourism. In Maputaland, it has formed a trust with the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service (previously the KwaZulu Department of Nature Conservation and the Natal Parks Board), and the local Mqobela community as equal participants. Careful management ensures the wilderness areas are preserved while being utilised as prime ecotourist areas.

Everyone benefits, including the rural communities. The following stories demonstrate how the system works.

Some of the many residents of the re-

serve are grand hippos, who wallow in the winding rivers and even sometimes enjoy a frolic in the sea (Andy had seen one in the surf a few days ago). Naturally, they're a great tourist attraction.

Local villagers had for years complained about the hippos, which they said, destroyed their crops. They wanted them killed, they said.

The Mqobela Tourism Development Trust was formed with the community as a fully fledged partner. Financially, they benefitted. Then came a drought and the green grass dried and the hippos' dining opportunities were severely diminished.

The villagers, now aware of the hippos' importance as a tourist attraction, gathered their resources and scoured the surrounding hills for grass, thereby saving the hippos from possible starvation. Today, everyone's happy. The hippos, the tourists and the villagers.

The second story was told to me by Siphwe Ngubane, a conservation officer with Nature Conservation. When he was young, he said, turtle eggs were dug up and used by the villagers as food for their chickens. So were turtle populations destroyed. Today, because his community is able to see what an important tourist attraction the turtles are, as

well as derive financial benefit from it, it works with the authorities to safeguard these precious creatures.

Siphwe, like several of his peers, has a promising future in conservation, whereas before, there was no conservation and no jobs.

The days at Rocktail were filled in wonder. We drove through the reserve, thick with species endemic to the area. Through rolling grasslands, Natal cycad-filled valleys, thick coastal forests. And between them, Andy Coetzee and Mike Myers knew the name of each grass, tree, animal, bird or insect.

We met cocktail ants, called this because they cock their tails, not because they enjoy a tippie and glimpsed rare, endemic birds such as the pink-throated longclaw with its screechy call and the purple-crested lourie.



From Black Rock, seven kilometres along the beach towards Mozambique, we saw a large leatherback turtle in the sea below. A few weeks before, there had been whales and dolphins leaping in their marine dance. Then we walked along the beach, home to Rocktail.

That first night, after a long, lazy dinner under the trees, we walked along the starlit beach, watching for a sign of turtles. But the sands were still.

During the day, marine biologist and guide Conrad Hennig, led us into the water, a snorkelling paradise. We swam among reef fish, watched a fat-cheeked moray eel peer from its hole and saw an electric eel discharging its strong underwater currents. With Conrad, we explored crevasses, found flat worms and gazed upon but avoided a glorious but treacherous lion fish.

We beach-bummed while Andy and Mike cast their flies and caught, then released king fish. On the morning we departed, Andy caught a 47kg, 1.2 metre long giant kingfish (*Caranx Ignoblis*) on a surf rod—not his fly rod, while a friend caught a 9.5kg kingfish on his fly rod. To describe their delight as orgasmic would not be an overstatement.

Then came the long night of the turtles.

We'd enjoyed a picnic under the stars, set up in a forest clearing, a short walk from what was called the Natal Parks Board turtle research centre (before the parks boards of KwaZulu and Natal amalgamated).

Then came a walk along the beach accompanied by turtle guide Sipiwe Ngubane. We walked almost silently along the silvery beach, watching for the tracks made by a leatherback or loggerhead turtle as she came up to lay her clutch of eggs.

The Parks Board has been researching turtles in the area since 1964, and has built up an impressive turtle information dossier.

The remarkable thing about turtles, other than their strange prehistoric shape, is that they always return to the beach on which they were born to lay their own eggs. It may be 10 or 20 years later, but, with an inbuilt instinct, they come back to the same spot.

Of the 100 or so turtle eggs laid then hatched from each clutch, only one will

survive and grow to successful adulthood. If predators (humans, genets, crabs) don't get them on shore, then sharks and other aqualine predators will.

Our walk yielded no turtles, so we retraced our steps to the modest turtle centre.

The latest turtle research involves attaching a satellite transponder to the back of a female turtle. With this cunning little machine, it is possible to trace the movements of the turtle and see exactly where she goes. Each transponder costs \$6500, which in anyone's language, is big bucks.

Rocktail Bay Lodge, as part of its strong and active conservation ethos, has negotiated with the KwaZulu-Natal Conservation Service to allow guests to visit the turtle centre and watch the different turtle activities (laying, tagging etc).

Rocktail will charge their visitors R150 for this optional tour, and 90% of this goes directly to the KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Service towards the purchase of satellite transponders.

We waited for the conservation rangers to return with some hatchlings which were being tagged. Just then, I felt something on my bare foot. A frog, I thought to myself.

It was a baby turtle, who, attracted by the lights of the room, had wandered in. If you've never had a turtle wander over your toes, you just haven't lived.

The moon and stars shine on the sea and this creates the light which the baby turtles then scurry towards immediately they hatch.

Later, we watched rangers tag 200 turtles (from two clutches) then accompanied them down the beach to the spot they'd hatched from. We watched them gently placed on the sand and their fast and furious scurry down to the water's edge. Meanwhile, a little way along a dignified loggerhead mother had crawled up, dug a large hole in the sand, and was quietly laying her eggs.

If it's a five-star air-conditioned glitzy kind of lodge you're looking for, then Rocktail is not for you. But if you want to escape to a delightfully unique lodge in beautiful surroundings on South Africa's finest beach, with the plus that it's run by some of the most knowledgeable and classy people around, then you cannot do better than spend time at Rocktail Bay Lodge. □

## TRAVEL BYTES

### Houseboat Trips in the Okavango Delta

Wilderness Safaris recently bought the Kubu Queen and are operating it from Jedibe. The Kubu Queen is a superb and luxuriously appointed house boat which sleeps a maximum of four guests in two double bedded rooms with all the facilities on board.

The boat will be moored in the huge lagoons to the east of Jedibe. Guests will land at Jedibe and be picked up in a small boat. They will have about a 30 minute boat trip to meet up with the Kubu Queen.

They then cruise the Okavango, travelling up into the main Okavango river mooring alongside scenic islands en-route. The Kubu Queen is one of the most luxuriously appointed boats we have ever seen, with superb attention to detail by the boat builder.

### 1997 'Game Drive of the Year'

A lucky few guests at a Wilderness Safaris camp on Chief's Island in the Moremi Wildlife Reserve in northern Botswana experienced the 'game drive of the year' in early September last year. Wilderness Safaris associate Tracy Shapiro described the day's activities as follows:

"This must rate as one of the best game drives of the year. One vehicle in one day had this experience. During the morning drive they saw five different leopards before 07h30. They then saw a lion kill a buffalo and continued on to see wild dog hunting. During the afternoon game drive they saw a huge breeding herd of elephant & then saw a cheetah kill an impala. They also viewed buffalo and all the plains game. After their game drive while sitting at the bar in camp they saw two wild dog packs fighting in camp and then both packs fighting hyena. The guests had an unbelievable time!"

### Wilderness Safaris to Open New Lodge in Seychelles

Mahe, Seychelles. Cousine, a privately owned island in the Seychelles group, will be open to small groups of visitors for seven months of the year from May 1998.

*Continued on page 12*

## Custom Safari, from page 1

dently sat in her leather chair, she tried leaning against my legs and purring. When that didn't work, she simply jumped into my lap and made herself at home. A 50-pound lynx in the lap is guaranteed to jump-start the heart more effectively than any amount of caffeine.

## Horns and Hooves

From Okonjima we went north to the world renowned Etosha National Park for another safari, this one with all sorts of horned and hoofed creatures: eland, impala, oryx, springbok, steenbok, zebra, gemsbok, giraffe, etc. We had our first experience with night drives where spotting of nocturnal animals is done by a team of very impressive trackers and drivers. We also began to understand the rhythm of life and death by observing hyenas, vultures, jackals and other scavengers. We saw so many unusual and different birds, we gave up trying to keep a list.

We returned to Windhoek for a little gemstone shopping. Some of the finest tourmalines in the world are mined in Namibia and several of them now have new homes in the US. From Windhoek we rented a car and tried our hands at right hand steering wheels and driving on the left as we made our way into the Kalahari Desert. We had two objectives. One was to learn more about the Bushman Project in which some South African anthropologists are trying to preserve Bushman folklore, traditions and culture. The other was to see meercats.

We did well with the Bushman. We did not do well with the meercats since, on the day we arrived, there was a major sandstorm and the temperature dropped into the high 40s. All smart little meercats were snuggled in their burrows waiting for things to warm up. (I do, however, have one of the largest collections of photographs of meercat burrows in the world!)

## Victoria Falls and Botswana

After two weeks we left Namibia for Zimbabwe to make a short stop at Victoria Falls. Although people had warned us that the falls were down to a trickle we were very impressed! Actually we got a much better view of them with the low water levels, since at the height of the Zambezi flooding the spray is so thick,

it is almost impossible to see through the rain and fog. We very much enjoyed our first-ever helicopter ride over the falls.

Then it was on to Botswana and a tented safari at Savuti Camp near the Okavango Delta and Chobe National Park. It was another real highlight since our tent looked right out over a water hole which was heavily used and our bathroom only had three walls. We were able to view animals no matter where we sat!

Chobe is famous for its heavy concentrations of elephants, and we were not disappointed. Since it was spring in the southern hemisphere, we saw lots of ba-



bies. Some, our tracker told us, would have been less than a week old. We had lovely times watching lion prides—some with sisters sharing nursing responsibilities for a combined litter of cubs—and hippo families lounging in the rivers. Most exciting of all, we had two sightings of the most endangered of all African animals, the African wild dog. Once we came on two with a fresh kill (impala) and on our last day we found a large pack (16) who seemed unusually relaxed. The adults were willing to share the morning sun with us while the teenagers and young pups dashed madly about in what appeared to be a wild dog version of tag.

## Back to South Africa

We hated to leave Botswana, but needed to move on to the east coast of

South Africa. We flew to Johannesburg and toured Soweto, seeing the parts that never appeared on TV—the upper and middle class residential areas. At the other end of the economic spectrum of Soweto, we refreshed ourselves on the student uprising of 1976 at a moving display of photographs. We also took a quick trip to the Cullinan Mine to see the home of the world's largest diamond.

Our cultural experiences intensified with a stay at Lesedi, a village formed by four tribes to introduce tourists to the similarities and differences of the people of the old Natal Region, the Zulu home-

lands. We stayed with the Peti (porcupine) people who use quills in much of their art work. The next day we flew to the coast to be met for a three hour drive north almost to the Mozambique border to a resort called Rocktail Bay in the Maputaland Coastal Reserve. The only real scare of the trip occurred on that transfer when our driver lost control of the van in the sand on a really rutted road and skidded off the side. Luckily, we landed in the top of a small palm tree in a very deep ditch and no one was hurt. We were all a little bruised and sore for a couple of days, but it could have been much worse. Helpful locals turned up almost immediately, pulled us out with a tow rope, changed the tire and had us on our way after a mere 35 minutes delay. Needless

to say, we really enjoyed the two days of beach time to relax, heal and regroup.

### Zulu Stories, Cape Town Wine

Before we left the area we did get a chance to stay with the Zulus at Simunye Pioneer Settlement in a wonderful lodge built into the walls of a rocky gorge. We got rid of the last of the aches and pains from the automobile accident there with a wonderful steaming bath in the rock hot tub in our little hut before we had a special evening of Zulu dance, song and story telling.

After nearly four weeks we returned to Cape Town where we concluded our trip with several very different experiences. One was a two day trip through the posh, but lovely Cape Winelands. We sampled at several vineyards and stayed at the quaint historic town of Stellenbosch. Back in Cape Town, we also arranged to meet with the staff of SADTU (The South African Teachers Union)—the people who do what we do. They took us to the poorer sections of Cape Town to visit schools and talk with teachers. Problems there are more severe, but many issues are the same ones we face: inadequate supplies and facilities, overcrowded classes and underpaid teachers. The day we were in the Union office, the Ministry of Education announced the layoff of over 5,000 teachers out of a work force of just over 40,000. The resulting flurry of press releases, telephone call and conferences reminded me of a day at my office!

We also toured the sections of Cape Town settled by the Cape Muslims, many of whom came as craftsman and workers from Malaysia and Indonesia in the 1800s. We had a marvelous traditional lunch with a family and learned that Muslim religious leaders were imprisoned on Robben Island years before the political prisoners who fought apartheid were sent there. We were very glad that our pre-trip reading had included *The Covenant*, by James Michener and Nelson Mandela's autobiography, *A Long Walk to Freedom*. Too soon it was November 30 and time to return home. We said goodbye to South Africa from the Table Mountain Cable Car. □

**BOOK TODAY**  
1-800-513-5222

### Camping, from page 3

was an idyllic spot and even though there wasn't much in the way of mammals, we had a lovely time. The bird of the day was certainly the rare and endangered wattled crane, which are relatively common in this area. That evening, back in camp, we heard the sound made by buffalo in distress, followed by lion growling in what struck me as a contented fashion.

The next morning, we happened upon the scene of the previous night's ruckus: yet another dead buffalo more or less surrounded by sleepy, well-fed lions. There were two young males and two female lions, and later that day one of the males flipped the buffalo from one side to the other, with much pulling, clawing and rippling of muscles. The performance vividly demonstrated the awesome power of the King of the Jungle.

### Zepa Trails Camp

Our last few days were spent in the heart of the Okavango Delta at Zepa Trails Camp. Its large, comfortable walk-in tents complete with private bathrooms were quite luxurious compared with the mobile tents, and we were glad that this came at the end of the trip. The activities centered mainly around mokoro trips in a spectacularly beautiful water environment, gliding past papyrus groves, reedbeds and densely overgrown islands. Our Bayei polers knew the area well and soon found us a magnificent Pel's Fishing Owl, as well as the elusive Sitatunga, the next day.

Overall, the safari met our every expectation with a very accomplished and knowledgeable guide (Heidi Dednam), good camp sites, good fresh food and first-class equipment. We would have liked to have seen leopard and wild dogs, but we will just have to return for those some

other time. Although we had a few unexpectedly slow days, the game-viewing was more than adequate both in variety and numbers of animals seen. The birdlife was excellent and we notched up more than 150 species.

The most notable thing was the almost complete absence of other visitors. We were there out of season, so naturally that made a difference, but it was still very much a thrill to discover a lion kill and observe it all by ourselves for several hours, before even one other vehicle came from a nearby camp. The most vehicles we saw in one spot at one time was three at the big pride of lions in Savuti.

In the campsites we were invariably the only group. To me, that is what makes Botswana special and worth the extra cost: it is not overrun with other visitors. Our teenage children had the time of their life, perched on top of the vehicle during game drives.

The Mopane Safaris are wonderful, but they are not for everyone: you have to help with camp chores such as cooking, pitching tents and collecting firewood (on the way back to camp after game drives), and facilities are not luxu-

rious. You sleep in a sleeping bag on a foam mattress, and the toilet is a rather basic portable bush toilet. You do have a hot bush shower available every day, though, and wholesome, fresh ingredients for meals. Long drives between the various areas (Chobe to Savuti; Savuti to

Moremi and Moremi to Maun) take up quite a bit of time and can be arduous, cold in winter. However, the price of the safari reflects this, and it is much less expensive than a full-service trip of approximately the same duration.

The safari appeals to the younger, somewhat more adventurous traveler, but we have many older persons (please note age limit 12 minimum, 65 maximum), single persons and honeymoon couples





---

taking it too. By and large, I'd say the trip is ideal for someone who does not mind a bit of dust but who really wants to get out into the bush. At night in the unfenced camp sites you *know* that you are in Africa! Although it is not a luxury trip, it is still a good quality trip with a very small group (many similar safaris have 10 or more participants in a similar-size vehicle) and an excellent guide, together with a camp hand.

What the safari lacks in luxury, it makes up for in experience: you get really up close and personal with the wilderness, see few other people, and get a first hand look at some of the most spectacular parts of Botswana, including Chobe, Savuti, the Moremi and the Okavango Delta. The vehicle—a modified Landrover with excellent visibility—is first class with ample seating, the guides amongst the best in the business. □

### January, from page 5

looking at the action and the cheetah called it a day. The one female is a bit of an oddity in that she has a full mane of a

lion of about three years old which is growing all the time.

The next morning we were up early again and saw the finest leopard sightings I have seen. Two leopard had brought down an impala in the middle of the flood plains and had attracted the interests of a small clan of hyena who managed to take the kill from the leopards. It was a cool, overcast morning and the leopards did not want to give up their hard earned kill and constantly harried the hyenas to see what they could reclaim.

Another pride of lion we had not seen was in the process of evicting a young male from the pride just around the other side of the island. The females in this pride had ganged up on this male and terrible fights had taken place.

A wonderful holiday and a wonderful time of year! □

**BOOK YOUR SAFARI  
NOW.  
1-800-513-5222**

### Travel Bytes, from page 9

The Seychelles is a collection of 115 islands in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa.

Wilderness Safaris will manage this exclusive tourist experience which is limited to eight guests. Activities include beach, watersports, and unusual wildlife encounters. Birding is spectacular as one can get real close to several rare and endangered species. The Island has its own "Big Five"—turtles, [which come ashore to lay their eggs], the very rare magpie robin, and nesting noddy terns, as well as manta rays and whale sharks offshore, offering remarkable dive experiences.

Accommodation is in chalets with en-suite facilities. There is a central pavilion with pool, lounge and dining area—all 'island style'.

Cousine is accessible by helicopter—a 25 minute ride from Mahe—or a two hour boat trip. Rates are US\$540.00 per person sharing per night, fully inclusive. For further information and a free brochure, please contact Fish Eagle Safaris.

---

### FISH EAGLE SAFARIS

11191 Westheimer #349

Houston, TX 77042