

WILDLIFE TRAVEL

Botswana 2026



LIST OF TRAVELLERS

Leader

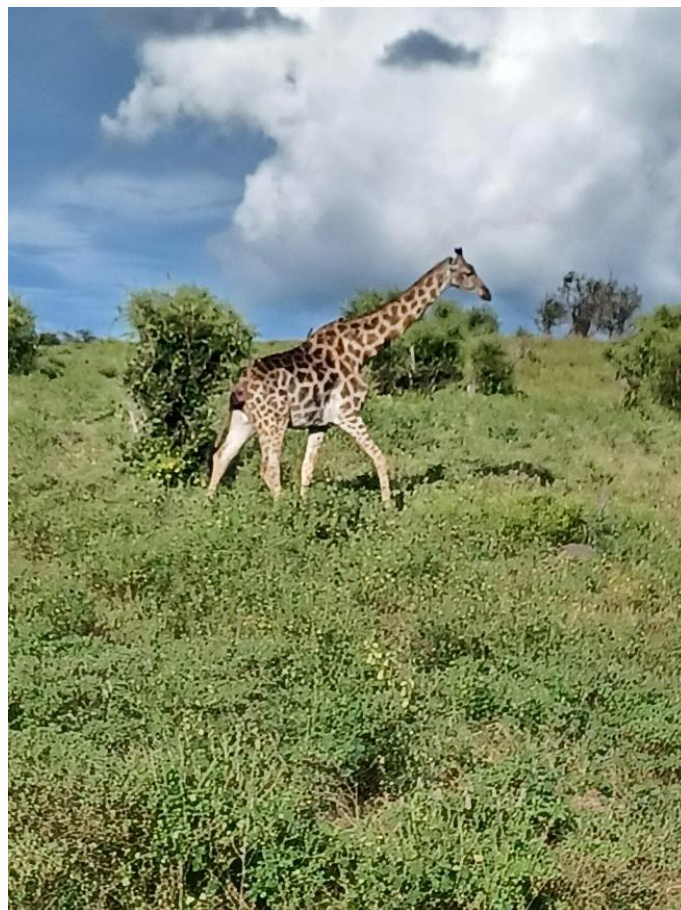
Mike Russell

Sussex

Day One: 18th March.

After a smooth but very tedious overnight flight from London Heathrow to Johannesburg, the assembled company gathered in the terminal for the much shorter flight to Kasane Airport where the wildlife watching began on arrival. As we waited to collect our luggage, half a dozen **Southern Carmine Bee-eaters** were performing their acrobatic flights over the runway, setting the bar really high for Sue who especially liked pretty birds! We were met outside by a very smiley Philip who whisked us off to Chobe Elephant Camp stopping on the way to have a closer look at a **Yellow-billed Kite** and **Tawny Eagle**.

On arrival at Chobe Elephant Camp, the staff assembled at the front of the lodge and greeted us with song, a lovely tradition and set the tone for the rest of the trip in terms of accommodation and the wonderful staff we encountered throughout the trip. After a very welcome drink and lunch, we settled very quickly into our rooms before setting off for a late afternoon safari with our two excellent driver/guides Jeremy and Archie. As a short introduction to African wildlife these 2 hours couldn't have gone any better. On entering Chobe National Park, we were soon enjoying fantastic close views of **African Savanna Elephants** and **Southern Giraffes**, including some young. Four species of 'ruminants' were seen including a **Steenbok**, our only sighting, and also an **Ellipsen Waterbuck**.



Above: Southern Giraffe.

There had been extensive flooding in Botswana before our arrival and it was very noticeable how high the level of the Chobe River was. This had brought in a number of wildfowl and there were good numbers of **White-faced Whistling Duck**, **Spur-winged** and **Egyptian Geese** and **Knob-billed Duck**, all

commonly seen throughout the trip while a **Greenshank** reminded us of birds we can see at home. On our way into the park, Lucy spotted a **Striped Kingfisher** on a wire, our only sighting of this species of the trip.

Back to camp for a wonderful meal and rest while looking forward to what awaited us the following day.

Day Two: 19th March.

My rather scribbled diary entry for this day started with “Astounding day, one of the best wildlife days ever!” While waiting at the Chobe National Park entrance for the guides to sort out the permits, a **Kurrichane Thrush** was busily feeding on the ground beside the vehicles. Within 10 minutes of entering the park, we saw a herd of **Common Impala** behaving nervously and soon saw why when we drew alongside a young male **Lion** lying on the track. While we were there, he made a lot of low growling calls that were still loud enough to send tingles down your spine. Just beyond the Lion was a troupe of **Chacma Baboons** keeping a watchful eye out while some young ones felt safe enough to play with whoever was nearby enough to annoy.



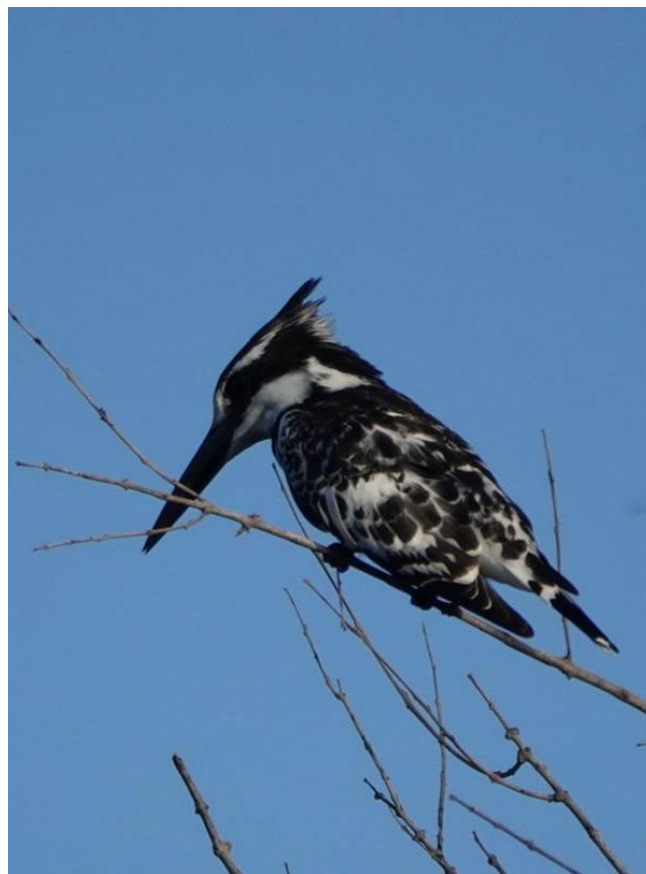
Above: Lion.

This wasn't the end of the Lion action though, as a bit further down the track was a pair of Lions, where another young male had amorous intentions. The female, reluctant at first, eventually yielded, and mating took place in front of a respectful audience that breached the 9.00am watershed let alone the 9.00pm one!

Leaving the Lions, we went further into the park heading towards the swollen river we passed many Elephants and Giraffes, more Impala the most common of the antelopes while **Plains Zebras** were grazing in good numbers. We also came across **Common Warthogs** as well, all the groups having young with them.

There were a number of raptors recorded in a short time here, perhaps the most spectacular one being a **Martial Eagle** landing in a nearby tree. Another striking bird that took a bit of working out was a **Black-chested Snake-eagle** our only sighting of this species as was a **Black-winged Kite** looking splendid in the morning sunshine. We had seen glimpses of them before but here we had great views of the magnificent **African Fish Eagle**, a species we would see many times over the week. We also encountered a pair of **Lesser Kestrels**, surprisingly our only falcons of the trip.

A coffee break at the edge of the water introduced us to a pair of **Pied Kingfishers** fishing from a jetty; the most commonly seen Kingfisher during the trip. So many birds here, too numerous to mention all but stand-out ones included a few **Red-backed Shrikes** perched on top of bushes while two very spectacular species, the **Eastern Paradise-Whydah** and a **Shaft-tailed Whydah** suddenly put in an appearance.



Above: African Fish Eagle; Pied Kingfisher.

In the afternoon we headed back to Kasane for a boat trip on the Zambezi, which again was at a very high level, and meant that animals, particularly Elephants, weren't coming to the water to drink. There still a number of **Hippopotamuses** though observing us as were **Nile Crocodiles**, both species of which we saw plenty throughout the trip.



Top to bottom: Hippo and calf; Water Thick-knee.

Along the bank there were a number of **Water Thick-knees** and also **White-crowned Lapwing**, while in the reeds we saw both **Senegal** and **Coppery-tailed Coucals**. We had already seen **Little** and **European Bee-eaters** but from the boat we also added the very striking **Blue-cheeked Bee-eater**. It was great to see a **Black Heron**, doing what Black Herons do, mantling over the reeds as it fished, not a common bird by any means. Along the bank we picked out a very large and striking **Water Monitor** lying along a low branch.

We managed to get off the boat before the rains came but didn't manage to get to the jeeps before the heavens opened and before we had time to get our rather fetching ponchos on! By the time we got back to the camp the rain had stopped and our soaking was rewarded by seeing a **Cape Buffalo** emerge from the bushes by the side of the road, and we were also impelled to stop to admire a very impressive **Wahlberg's Eagle** perched in a nearby tree. So ended an absolutely brilliant day, full of amazing wildlife and culminating in a wonderful meal back at Chobe Elephant Camp.

Day 3: 20th March.

Sadly, we had to move on today, with the feeling that our time was too short here, something we felt at the end of all the lodges we stayed at! Just as I was leaving my room, there was a scurrying along a rafter and I looked up and saw a pair of big eyes looking down at me which belonged to a charming **Spectacled Dormouse**. Our great guides Archie and Jeremy drove us back to Kasane Airport where along the way a couple of **Banded Mongooses** ran across the road. A very smooth hour-long flight in a very small aircraft passing over a complete wilderness followed, with not a single building in sight until we arrived at Kwhai Airstrip where we met by our equally great driver/guides Jacks and Eddie.



Above: Hammerkop.

Botswana and Zambia trip report, 17th to 28th March 2026

We soon realised as we made our way to Sango Camp that this part of the trip was going to be an adventure as the track was about 50% underwater as a result of the extensive rainfall prior to our arrival. On the way though we did see a small party of **Hammerkop** that seemed put out by our passing though. We eventually arrived at Sango Camp to another very warm welcome and everyone settled into their very comfortable tents. There was a technical issue with my guide room insofar that it was underwater so I was billeted in a room at Kwhai Lodge just on the main road, which meant that Jacks had to ferry me backwards and forwards down to the camp along a track where the water got progressively deeper, as did the mud, during our stay.

Before we set off for the afternoon safari, Rob watched an **African Pygmy Goose** fly past the camp as did a **Rufous-bellied Heron**. Sadly, Annette wasn't feeling well enough to come out but being confined to camp, she was rewarded with the only sighting of an **African Swampphen** of the trip. Both **Grey-headed** and **Woodland Kingfishers** were noted around the village and then off road we came across a party of **Southern Ground Hornbills** and some **White-crested Helmetshrikes** with the males looking like they wear bicycle crash helmets!

Also, there great views of a very striking **Dwarf Bittern**. We were heading off to see something special but before we got there, Jacks managed to get his vehicle stuck but these guys are very resourceful although we were a little alarmed when he suddenly disappeared in a very deep puddle but came up smiling and between him and Eddie they pulled the jeep free. I thought the occupants of Eddie's vehicle were looking a little smug but the roles were reversed when Eddie got stuck!

While the guys were sorting this out, we were able to enjoy watching a number of birds seeking food on a muddy area, these included a lone **African Spoonbill**, a very splendid looking **Three-banded Plover**, a more familiar **Wood Sandpiper** and the by now ubiquitous **Blacksmith Lapwing**.

Within ten minutes of becoming 'unstuck' we were looking at that something special that we set out for and spent a wonderful half hour in the company of a female **Leopard** and her cub, both completely unconcerned about being in the proximity of a few jeeps. We witnessed the female climbing a tree where she had stored an Impala, what an absolute privilege to be in their presence.

Reluctantly, we left them and went for the next special moment and an essential requirement of the trip, the safari sundowner! Overlooking a wetland as the sun decided to put in a very late appearance and we all enjoyed the view accompanied by gin and tonics, wine, beer or sodas, what a lovely experience it was to be there.

Darkness loomed so we set off back to Sango but the wows didn't stop as we stopped at a den from which the cubs of **Spotted Hyenas** had just emerged and were exploring their surroundings again not bothered by our presence. There was one more great sighting on the way back when an **African Barred Owlet** in a trackside bush. An end to another brilliant wildlife day.



Top to bottom: Three-banded Plover; Leopard and cub.



Above: Spotted Hyena cubs

Day 4: 21st March.

The extensive flooding meant that we were not able to access the Moremi Game reserve so we headed back to the Kwhai Community Concession. Having negotiated the track from the camp again we went back the same area, picking up some new birds on the way. We crossed the bridge where **Lesser Striped Swallows** were busy feeding, and obviously had nests underneath, with them becoming firm favourites with everyone. The rain created temporary wetlands, which attracted a number of **Marabou Storks** to search for food, along with an **African Openbill**. A **Red-crested Bustard** running in front of the vehicle was a nice bird to see, as were the three **Double-banded Sandgrouse**.

Another highlight of the whole trip occurred next when we came across a wonderful pride of female **Lions** with cubs, numbering about thirteen in total. Again, being in the presence of the beautiful animals was just such a privilege, watching the youngest cub hell bent on playing and annoying his older siblings. A celebratory coffee followed as we left the Lions, overlooking a wetland area again containing a wealth of birds, including our own **Barn Swallows**. It was here that we saw the first **Bateleur Eagle** of the trip while **Woolly-necked** and **Yellow-billed Storks** along with an **African Sacred Ibis** were all feeding in the shallow waters.

It was then back to the Lodge for an excellent lunch again and a siesta, but a couple of us were awake enough to see a **Little Bittern** and **Purple Heron** fly over the camp, while a **Lesser Moorhen**, quite a rare sighting here apparently, busied itself amongst the reeds. Our excellent guide Eddie left us at this point and summer arrived early in the guise of July a very experienced and equally impressive driver/guide. While back in camp, Beth showed a picture she had taken which, on consulting books

and apps, we came to the conclusion was a **Green-backed Cameroptera**, an exclusive sighting for Beth!



Above: Lions.

In the afternoon it was back to look for Leopards via the same route and with a little amount of trepidation, we approached the area where the vehicles got stuck yesterday but this time all was negotiated successfully, and we had time to admire a **Greater Painted Snipe** feeding on the mud while three **Wattled Cranes** flew in, a little distance away.

We found the **Leopards** and again were absorbed by being in the presence of these beautiful animals.. That wasn't our only encounter in the evening as a few minutes later a very impressive male **Spotted Hyena** crossed in front of our vehicle, as did a bull **Elephant** who was a bit upset with this sudden confrontation.



Top to bottom: Greater Painted Snipe; African Elephant.

There was still enough light to enjoy a sundowner overlooking yet another large pool still busy with activity, and a chance to add new birds to the trip list, which included a couple of familiar birds to us, **Western Cattle Egret** and a **Little Grebe**, while a couple of **Black-crowned Night Herons** patiently waited for a fish to pass them by. As we left the site, a large outline of a bird was sitting on top of a low bush, which turned out to be a **Verreaux's Eagle Owl**, an excellent bird to bring another brilliant day's wildlife watching to a close.

Day 5: 22nd March.

A new day and new adventures, with the weather looking distinctly unpromising. We headed back into the Kwhai Community Concession stopping to admire a pair of **Bennett's Woodpeckers**, and at one point to identify yet another raptor, this time settling on a **Lesser Spotted Eagle**. We ended up at another brilliant wetland site which was teeming with life, and was full of Herons, Egrets Storks and raptors: it was hard to know where to look!

At one point, three **Bateleurs** were circling above us and both **White-headed** and a **Hooded Vulture** were picked out sitting on a tree. July's crew saw three **Meyer's Parrots** flying around, while everyone got good views of the **Little Bee-eaters**. Driving around the area we put up a pair of **Red-billed Teal** and came across a couple of **Pink-backed Pelicans**. There were four species of white egrets at the site, **Western Cattle**, **Great White**, **Little** and **Yellow-billed Egrets**, the latter formerly known as a subspecies of Intermediate Egret, but now separated out as its own species: as Gary said, it was probably fed up being thought of as average! On the mammal front, a single **Tsessebe** put in an appearance, a very impressive looking ungulate.



Above: Flap-necked Chameleon.

Botswana and Zambia trip report, 17th to 28th March 2026

On the drive back to camp our jeeps were halted to allow a splendid **Flap-necked Chameleon** to sedately make its way across the track, one of the sightings of the trip for me!

While back at lunch, it was touch and go whether we would be able to go ahead with the planned mokoro trips for the afternoon and thankfully the rain relented enough for them to go ahead. On arriving at the site, we were all assigned a mokoro, a dug-out punt, and a punter who all expertly navigated us through the lily-filled and reed channels, a very liberating experience, just listening to the sound of swishing water, birds and for me, my punter giving me an extremely detailed account of the life cycle of termite!

All the punts were stopped so we could admire the tiny **Angolan Painted Reed Frogs**, the noise that may have kept some of you awake at night. A bright bird spotted at the top a tree turned out to be a **Yellow Canary**.



Above: Angolan Painted Reed-frog; Mokoro veterans!

Stopping for a sundowner with the sun being replaced by very dark clouds and thunder, our serene journey through the reeds was replaced by the punters rowing back at Olympic speeds to get back to the vehicles before the heavens opened. Despite heroic efforts they didn't quite make it so during transfer from boat to jeep, we all got an absolute soaking. Over dinner, Marcus and Clive were looking at their weather apps and assuring us that the storm would pass and tomorrow would be a fine day!

Day 6: 23rd March.

Well, they were right about tomorrow being a fine day but not after the most almighty, biblical storm overnight the like of which I and most of us I think, had never experienced before! I was pretty anxious that we might be marooned at Sango after so much overnight rain as we were transferring to Setari Camp. However, our brilliant drivers Jacks and July managed to load the luggage and ourselves, and got us through the track and the lake that had formed outside the Khwai Camp, stopping on the way to admire a **Saddled-billed Stork**. Eventually, they got us safely to the Khwai Airstrip for our 45-minute flight to Jedibe Airstrip, where we were met by Super and Titi, our guides that were to take us to Setari Camp, our destination for the next two nights.

Over the next couple of days, we enjoyed the real Okavango Delta experience as all activities were boat based and our hour-long journey to the camp through **Papyrus** fringed banks was an indication of what we might experience over the next 48 hours. We had only been a going a few minutes when we are able to get both boats so close to that jewel-like bird that is a **Malachite Kingfisher**. We had seen them before but never in such a close proximity. Another new bird as we made our way to camp was a **Fan-tailed Widowbird** of which we saw many while we were here.

Arriving at Setari Camp to the usual welcome from the staff we were all delighted to be told that we wouldn't need to be escorted to our lodges by guides as the whole elevated nature of the camp meant that we were unlikely to bump into Hippos, Crocodiles or Elephants! It was soon very obvious however that we did share the camp with a noisy troupe of **Vervet Monkeys**.

After a very nice lunch and settling in time, we were back in the boats and drifting through the reeds again, passing by **Nile Crocodiles** just about visible through the Lillies. We added some striking **White-fronted Bee-eaters** that were flitting along the reeds and then a pigeon that saved the reputation of the pigeon family, when a beautiful **African Green Pigeon** feeding on water berries captured everyone's interest. The call of the **Ringed-necked Doves** had been the background of the whole trip and was frequently joined by the **Red-eyed Dove** that constantly called its own name, while the other dove that we recorded frequently was the diminutive **Emerald-spotted Wood-dove**. A party of **Southern Brown-throated Weavers** flew back and forth across the channel in front of us

As ever, sundowners were enjoyed, this time in a lovely sunset landscape after which we made our way back to camp where we enjoyed our pre-meal drinks round a camp fire before being summoned to our evening meal by an exuberant staff choir!



Top to bottom: Malachite Kingfisher; White-fronted Bee-eaters; African Green Pigeons.

Day 7: 24th March.

A whole day experiencing the Delta at its best as both morning and afternoon water safaris produced some great wildlife for us to enjoy. In amongst a small herd of **Common Impala** we found a couple of **Red Lechwe** and all the time travelling serenely through the reeds, three types of **Bee-eaters**, **Little, White-fronted** and **Blue-cheeked** fed energetically over the reeds. Coming to a more open area that gave us a greater viewing area, we immediately came across **Long-toed Lapwings**, new for the trip, and then a couple of very close views of **Yellow-billed Storks**.

An **Allen's Gallinule** came into view and then we were then lucky enough to note a large beak amongst the reeds that slowly revealed itself to be a **Goliath Heron**. A very familiar couple of birds appeared on top of some bushes that certainly resembled our Stonechat but were in fact **African Stonechats**, a separate species but to be honest, I couldn't make out any differences at all! During the morning, there were lots of swallows and martins feeding over the water, mainly **Barn Swallows** but one perched on a stick allowed us to see it was a **Banded Martin**. Meanwhile, **Sedge Warblers** were singing from the bankside vegetation but remained unseen.

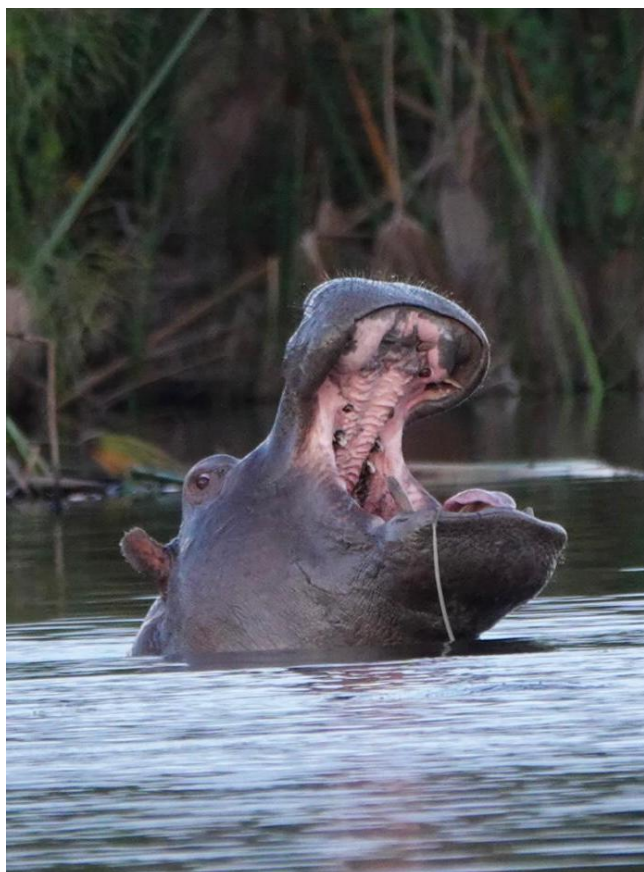


Above: Goliath Heron

Back to camp for lunch and a siesta before setting out for the afternoon activities where we were offered a choice. Half us chose to go out on another Delta exploration while the rest decided to have a go at fishing. Undoubtedly the highlight of the afternoon cruise was to come across ten **Hippos** in a lagoon that seemed to take an interest in us. There was lots of loud grunting, snorting and farting

that could be heard a long way away. Another lovely Sighting was an **African Jacana** with chicks, watching them feeding and the adult sheltering them when there was any sign of danger. Other new birds not seen before were a **Swamp Boubou** and **Village Weavers**.

Meanwhile, the fishing group joined us watching the Hippos for sundowners and regaled us with tales of successful catches of **Tiger Fish** and that the queen of the fishing trip was Simone who caught the biggest and best fish! It was a beautiful evening and sunset and a wonderful place to finish our time in the Okavango Delta.



Above: Hippo warning!; catch of the day!

Day 8: 25th March

It was time move on, yet again all too early from such an excellent camp, so our guides serenely took us back down the river, avoiding big floating islands of Papyrus, back to the Jedibe Airstrip from where we flew back to Kasane Airport where the beautiful **Southern Carmine Bee-eaters** were still in evidence. On arrival we were met by Wild Horizons representative who guided us to our minibus where the driver, who's name escapes me, took us to the Zambian border, saw us through passport control and immigration without a hitch and then passed us on to our new Zambian driver who said, as I remember, his name was James Bond! As with all the travel arrangements for the whole trip, everything just went so smoothly.

After about an hour or so, we arrived at the wonderful Waterberry Lodge overlooking the Zambezi River and what a place it was too. After yet another lovely lunch, there was a time to settle into the accommodation before setting off for a sunset cruise on the river. Our guides and pilot soon headed

out to an island in the river where the trees contained both **Reed** and **Great Cormorants** plus assorted egrets and herons. Soon after that an **Osprey** was espied in a tree, while along the shoreline, more **Water Thick-knees** were noted plus **Wattled Lapwings**, a new species for the trip. A number of **Pied Kingfishers** were looking for a late evening meal while a difficult to say **Black-backed Puffback** was sitting on the top of a tree. There were a few Hippos and Crocodiles in the water or lying on the bank.

The sunset was glorious and as the sundowners appeared the engines were switched off and we just drifted slowly down the river, enjoying just the natural sounds enveloped by a beautiful coloured sky, as a big flock of **Western Cattle Egrets** flew over our heads looking to roost somewhere. An absolutely perfect end to the day.



Above: Osprey.

Day 9: 26th March

What a great last day of the trip this turned out to be! After breakfast, we headed out to the Mosi-oa-Tunya National Park and our camp drivers, although it was only Thursday, took us to meet Friday who was head of the ranger team and who was going to take us around the Park. On the drive around the park, it was nice to catch up with a range of mammals again. as there were plenty of **Elephants** and **Southern Giraffes**, as well as a very close family of **Common Warthogs** being attended to by some **Red-billed Oxpeckers**. An open area contained a number of different species including **Plains Zebras**, the ubiquitous **Common Impala** and the very impressive **Greater Kudu**. But best of all it was really nice to see a small herd of **Blue Wildebeest**, a species we had yet to see. Half the group came across a **Common Slender Mongoose** as well, while everyone enjoyed being back in the company of a family of **Chacma Baboons** again.



Top to bottom: Common Warthog; Chacma Baboons.



Above: Blue Wildebeest; Greater Kudu.

There were no new species of birds recorded but it was nice to catch up with the beautiful **Lilac-breasted Rollers**, which hadn't been seen for few days. Some of us missed out on the **Meyer's Parrot** a few days ago but caught up with a pair inspecting a nesting hole in a tree next to the River. At one point, vultures were starting to rise in the thermals that, as far as we could see, were all **White-backed Vultures**. As with other places we had visited the splendid **African Fish Eagle** was present.

As yet, we hadn't looked for the Park's 'speciality' but a drink and comfort break were called for before the staff took us to this special area where it was hoped the 'speciality' might be. We were advised that it might require a walk to find them and indeed it did, all of 50 metres, our longest walk of the trip! We were soon in the presence of five **White Rhino's**, a fantastic sight and thanks to the work of the guards and their anti-poaching work this majestic animal is slowly recovering. There is a population of nine in the park, and they had just transferred two to another National Park in Zambia. A real privilege to be in their presence.



Above: White Rhino.

On leaving the National Park, we headed into Livingstone and to the world-renowned Victoria Falls. The excessive rain meant that the Falls were in full flow and the word mighty didn't really do them justice. Our drivers provided us with ponchos, which despite a valiant effort, didn't keep us that dry, but it was really worth the drenching to get close to the Falls, and it seemed that everyone enjoyed the whole experience.



Above: Victoria Falls drenching

There was no hesitation in taking the opportunity to do another sunset cruise as our final activity of the trip and within a few minutes our guide found us a new species, a **Half-collared Kingfisher**. After seeing this Lucy boldly claimed that she really wanted to see a **Giant Kingfisher** and within about ten minutes, her wish had been granted! A magnificent bird indeed and our eighth species of kingfisher for the trip. It was also fun to see the **Wire-tailed Swallows** hitching a ride on the boats. On the bank there was probably the largest **Nile Crocodile** of the trip while there was an equally impressive large **Water Monitor** stretched out on a low branch. An **Osprey** was still around as well.

Another beautiful sunset to enjoy before our last dinner, which was interrupted by the crashing of a Hippo in the pool next to where we were dining. As I was being driven back to my tent in the wood, a very large Hippo passed in front of the vehicle reminding me why we had to be escorted back to our accommodations at night!

Day 10: 27th March

A very relaxed morning which even allowed time to visit the camp shop before we had to leave the wonderful Waterberry Lodge and head to Livingstone Airport to start the long journey home. Everyone will have their own memories but the overall impression was that it was a brilliant ten days, with fantastic wildlife, wonderful accommodation, food and people in all the camps and some real adventures and I have to say with a lovely group of people as well.

Thanks to you all for providing the excellent photographs and videos for the trip
Mike Russell, Wildlife Travel. April 2026.



Top to bottom: Giant Kingfisher; giant Nile Crocodile!



Top to bottom: Zambezi sunset; Lion.

thank you for travelling with us

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