



## **GOLIATH SAFARIS**

*January 2010*

Once in a blue moon

As the sun set on the year 2009, the blue moon rose in all its solar-reflected glory in the east. It's spectacular and partially eclipsed appearance on New Year's Eve did much to silence some of the lingering and discordant notes of the year past. Global warming, financial crises and fallen golf idols were relegated to the shadows of our minds as for a moment in time we were bathed in nature's brilliance. Even Stretch, who has seen many moons and howled at a few, had to agree that this one was special. Hopefully it'll continue to symbolically shine down on us all in general and Mana in particular.

We certainly look set for another great season. The rains have set in and although not as prolific or protracted as last year, they've been sufficient to coax and nurture every seed to maturity, covering the floodplain with a dense and verdant carpet. The cassia and indigophra will soon be knee-high to Stretch and waist-high to you and I. The mahoganys have taken over the podding fest whilst the albidas rest in anticipation of their lonely and arduous end of season duties. From elephants to impala they are their only sustenance in the dry times.

Our visit to the park in December gladdened our hearts. Hundreds of newly hatched impala lambs were the golden highlights, the one surviving Nyamepi cub seemed in good health and our favourite elephant bull Slot and his cohorts were still hanging

about. The freshly painted dogs, now a healthy pack of twenty-one lounged around next to the road, the new big lion pride stretched out at Mana Mouth and all seemed right in the Mana milieu. Bruce was still guarding the channel in front of camp and greeted us with a chorus of grunts. Stretch laughed in reply.

The transformation of the park at this time of year never ceases to amaze us. At the end of October the parched floodplain greets every sunset with a sigh of relief, and the earth being the mother that she is, seems to stretch her arms up to the sky in a vain attempt to gather up the wispy clouds.

November however brings with it an annual sense of rejuvenation. A dark sky in the north and the provocative essence of an approaching thunderstorm stirs all primal hearts. The antelope drop their young with military precision and the predators realize their hunting tactics must change. Paradoxically, the metre high ground cover helps them with the element of surprise whilst also helping nurture the alertness of their prey. No longer weakened by the incessant heat and lack of nourishment the antelope are now no sitting buck.

January through to April is a time of plenty. Plenty of grass and water and plenty of insects!

The big elephant and buffalo herds are no longer reliant on the river and perhaps needing a change of scenery head inland to the pans, leaving the old bulls behind. Conversely, the predators stay mainly on the plain - the lion sits at the head of the floodplain feeding table, swiping a paw at any wandering mitts whilst the leopard sits to his right, his silence broken occasionally by a rasping cough. The hyena are seated at the bottom end, their squabbling and hysterical laughter an irritant to all and the wild dog with their capacity for continuous motion, don't sit for long.

Soon, presiding over all of this, with a glass of his finest and most sensitive red in his hand will be Stretch.



The wet season will draw to a close towards the end of March, which is about when he rises from his off-season squash and social slumber. Along with the tents, vehicles and assorted supplies, we dust him off and spruce him up for the season ahead. It doesn't take long for him to start to twitch at the thought of all the paw-prints out there just waiting to be tracked and translated.

Finally, in anticipation of another exciting and adventure – packed season, we'd like to send you a few photographs of our special moments last year. Stretch as usual got to share the limelight with the animals and his time and knowledge with our treasured guests. He introduced children to his favourite elephant bulls, held the trembling hands of ladies as they tracked the lions and challenged every man to taste his chillie mix.



Pressed for a choice though, I'm sure we'd all agree that the highlight of our season was witnessing from start to finish a lion kill right in camp. We watched as the lioness swam across the channel to stalk and hunt down an impala ram trapped between the river's edge and steep bank. As it tried desperately to leap vertically up the bank, the lioness was waiting at the top to snatch it. We sat just metres away watching it all. As she, her mother and her cub hadn't eaten for days, we were overjoyed to see her finally have a successful hunt.



And on that spectacular note we like to end off with an ' aah sweet ' moment.



Wherever you are and whatever you're doing, take special care. Dust off your boots, bird books and binoculars. Slow down your brain and get those walking muscles trained. We'll see you all soon

Kindest regards  
Stretch, Flo and all at Goliath

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