



## **Goliath Safaris**

**March 2010**

### **Bird-brains and fresh manes**

A drive back into the park after any length of time is always a cleansing experience for us. Urban stress gradually washes away to be replaced by a sense of peace and well-being. It's a philosophical journey that has over the years reaffirmed our belief that the animals are the ones who've got it right. They have no reason to remember the future; it just happens and tomorrow always becomes yesterday. Their innate understanding of what's needed to survive requires no expensive education and on the pyramid of needs they have not moved beyond that of food and shelter. They've kept their fur coats and thick skins and they've fully developed the right senses. A beautiful canopy of trees or a warren of warm ant-bear holes provide them with shelter and the view from their back or front-yard surpasses that of even the richest man. They have no planes or trains to catch, no deadlines to meet and no dishes to wash. We humans with our large brains and small minds have ensured that our continued existence requires expensively clothed bodies, extravagant shelters and an endless quest for outside stimulation. In short, somewhere along the evolutionary line, we backed the wrong pair of genes. Which is why, when we accuse Stretch of being an animal he takes it as a compliment.

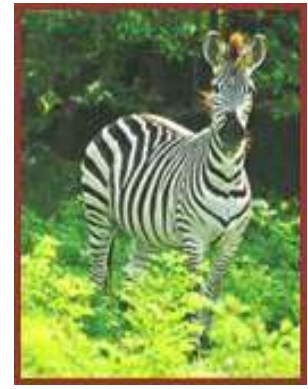
Our recent trips into the valley to begin setting up of camp have reaffirmed our belief that we have another bumper season ahead. Knee-high grass, overflowing pans and the multicoloured wildflowers dotted along the edge of the road have turned the mopanies and baobabs green with envy. The coats of the antelopes have been freshly laundered by the rains, and the impala in particular provide splashes of copper and gold, while dazzles of zebra make any freshly painted Kenyan safari minibus look positively dull. In order to fit in with all this brilliance Stretch is contemplating a new wardrobe, so any contributions will be greatly appreciated; remembering of course girls, that pink is his favourite colour.



In the pink



Splashes of gold



Bedazzled

The antelopes are definitely stealing the show at the moment with their gleaming coats and shiny horns. The lambs, calves and foals are now wary sub-adults and are no longer under the constant surveillance of their mothers. The large dark eyes of the females no longer wear a look of wariness as they can now enjoy a brief hiatus between the stress of motherhood and the tension of the male rut which will start soon. The males are eying each other out and sizing each other up in preparation for this exhausting show of force and fight for territory. Kudu males are starting to isolate themselves, causing the dissolution of the bachelor groups while the bigger impala rams are snorting and strutting around, chasing out the juvenile males and starting to break down the cohesion of the breeding herds. Their incongruous roars will soon be heard late into the night as they passively fight to defend their territories and keep their females penned in. All this hormonal activity will hopefully culminate in a successful breeding season with the lambs and calves being dropped towards the end of the year just as the rain sets in and the grass grows long.

On the predator front, Stretch is extremely excited about the appearance of the new pride of eleven lions in the area. Some suspect they may be part of the Nyamatuse pride that has wandered over but most in the know feel that they are the pride from Chitake that has moved onto the floodplain. Either way they seem to have usurped the reign of the disintegrated Nyamepi pride. Stretch is chomping at his bit, or anyone's close to him, at the thought of getting his tail in the air and his nose to the ground to track and work out this new order. Has the Mane-Man gone back to the Jesse, unable to fend off a coalition of males on his own? What has happened to the Backstreet boys and the Spice girls? The two Backstreet brothers courted the four Spice Girl sisters throughout the last two months of the season and so surely between them they must have a cub or four hidden away from the new intruders. Our main concern though is whether the sole surviving Nyamepi cub from last year's crop is still alive. He was incredibly wary and timid and this may have been his saving grace.

This season hopefully may see stability in the lion population and bring back the true sense of their collective noun: they've had a hard year past and so will surely welcome it. The floodplain with its lack of cover and plethora of baboons as lookouts has never been an easy place to rule with ease.



Sole-surviving cub



Mum

The big pug marks of our resident male leopard were a pleasure to see behind camp early in the morning on our last trip in. He seemed in a hurry and was obviously walking with purpose. Was he late getting back to the dappled sunlight of his favourite grove behind camp where his tapestry of rosettes is so hard to spot, or was he just on a set hunt. Tracking him this year is high on Stretch's bucket-list.

In the interim however, the dogs have not let the cats steal the limelight and the big pack now numbers twenty. Their high pup survival rate last year must surely be attributed to the disarray amongst the lions. Jesse the alpha female will soon start looking for a place to den down; will she choose the same site as last year, which was so cleverly thought out? Will some of the females now feel the urge and move off and join a new pack; Zero's little group of six must surely be an attraction for them. He is a beautiful specimen of a dog, with genes just crying out to be passed on. Another fuzzy puzzle and flea in Stretch's beard and ear to attend to as the season unfolds.



The pack of twenty



Zero, king of the six-pack

On the elephant front, the big bulls have used their well-developed brains again and hang around on the soggy floodplain for the rainy season. Their huge footprints have left deep ruts that would suffice as suburban fish-ponds, and as we know they're not always easy to navigate when trying to keep up with Stretch on one of his tracking forays. The main cow herds have not come back down from inland but a few stragglers have started to arrive. We await with baited breath the arrival of Stumpy-tail and new little calf that was born just as we left last season. Does Stretch have a godson or goddaughter to shake down pods for? Her first-born calf, Equinox, is now four years old and judging by his body size and temperament will no doubt be one of Mana's bigger breeding bulls in the times of our grandchildren. With a bit of luck we'll be at his 21<sup>st</sup>.



The road less-travelled

Moving onto smaller creatures, the shorter days and cooler temperatures will soon stir something within the minds of the migratory birds. At a signal unbeknown to the greatest of human minds, they'll pack up their bags, hitch up their feathers and set off for their summer homes to the north. No GPS, 747 auto-pilot or blonde could or should ever hope to compete with a bird-brain. We always eagerly await the return of the migrants in summer but in the meantime we have the deep whooping and mud-sucking calls of the snipes on the island to lull us to sleep, offset perfectly by the reed frogs' tenor clinks that bounce off the stars of the clear winter nights.

And on that sleepy note we'd like to end off by sending you our best Mana wishes, warmly wrapped up in the scent of wild basil and the arms of an old baobab tree.

Wherever you are on our planet, and whether you're an immigrant, emigrant or just locally occurring, please take special care.

As a very final note, should you have 5 minutes to spare, please have a look at our great new website at [www.goliathsafaris.com](http://www.goliathsafaris.com). Designed by our colleagues who are younger than our vehicles, it is just the lift we techno-phobes needed. We ask that you follow the link to Facebook to become a Goliath friend; even Stretch is currently undergoing extensive lessons on how to turn his computer on and do the same. See you all soon

Kind regards  
Flo Coughlan

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