

## **Zambia's South Luangwa Trip Report. Fred & Elizabeth Hodgson.**

**December 5<sup>th</sup> 2007 – January 6<sup>th</sup> 2008**

### **Preliminary information etc.**

This was to be our 8<sup>th</sup> visit to Zambia and the wild South Luangwa National Park. We have been to North Luangwa and Luambwe but access is difficult in 'Green' season so we stay in "South Park" around the village of Mfuwe.

**Zambia** is two hours ahead of GMT. In the austral summer there is a slight lengthening of daylight hours giving maybe first light at 05.00 and dark at 18.45. The sun is virtually overhead at this time so it can be very hot and precautions against heatstroke or burning are necessary. This is also the wet/green season which can make for interesting driving. Happily the rain comes in bursts and the tracks soon dry out when the sun returns.

**Entry requirements:** - Zambian Immigration only recognises short stay visitors as "Bona fide" tourists so anyone staying over 14 days needs a Visa which costs US\$60. The Waiver form no longer applies.

**Local currency** is the Kwacha (ZKw) Import/Export not allowed but £ & US\$ readily exchangeable. I will give prices where appropriate in US\$. No idea on Exchange rate as it is rare to require local currency. Most Tourist Lodges etc., quote in \$ anyway. We carried folding money with only a small reserve in T/Chqs.

**Getting there, back and around.** The Capital city is Lusaka which is a typical Ex Colonial African city complete with skyscrapers and green parks etc., We rarely visit such places. Seen one, seen em all! Lusaka is the main port of entry but there are International flights to Livingstone, Ndola and Mfuwe. Lusaka is of course the most popular with flights to/from several European and African Hubs. South Luangwa is served by Mfuwe International which does have flights to Dar es Salaam (Tz) and Lilongwe in Malawi. Because of the state of the roads in Zambia it is sometimes easier to fly into Lilongwe and then drive the six hours into South Luangwa rather than drive from Lusaka. We have done this in the past as well as charter a small plane for the hop over the border. However with increased flights into Lusaka and convenient internal connections we now come by that airport. Zambian Airways connects and the trip takes about an hour. Due to problems with BA at the time of booking we flew LHR to Nairobi and on to Lusaka with Kenyan Airways. Total time is a bit longer than the direct BA flight but the same very comfortable Boeing 777. The FAs and food were excellent and compensated for having to endure Nairobi.

**Food & Drink.** The local Beer is 'Mosi' named after Mosi a Tunya (Victoria Falls to Europeans). This was retailing at the lodge for \$2.50, soft drinks, Fanta, Coke etc., \$1.50. A reasonable bottle of Red wine was \$25 depending on the establishment. Bottled Water cost around \$1.50 but we were provided with freebies in our Lodge rooms.

**Bugs, n Bowels. Peel it, boil it or forget it is the golden rule here.** Malaria is a problem so Prophylactics are mandatory as is the use of a net if the room/tent is not screened. Being the wet season there were enough insects to satisfy the most ardent entomologist. Beautiful Butterflies and Moths too. Tap water is a no no in most areas but bore hole water is quite safe. (We actually drank fresh from the river bed on a previous visit but this is not recommended.)

**Accommodations.** We were mainly centred at Kafunta River Lodge which you will not be surprised to learn is situated on the river bank. The Kafunta river is a small tributary to the Luangwa. This lodge ([www.luangwa.com](http://www.luangwa.com)) is well known to us from our 8 visits and comprises 8 wood and thatch chalets, 2 Suite bungalows and a 'family house'. Guest numbers are therefore always going to be less than 20. Cuisine is excellent and staff friendly and accommodating.



**Daily Routine.** The routine here is rise at 5.15 for a cup of tea and toast before going on a drive into the park for about four hours or so before returning for Brunch at around 11.00. Then rest, swim in the small pool or hot tub, or lounge about reading or animal watching. Elephants are regular visitors to the Lodge grounds and with the National Park just over the river anything can and often does wander by. The birding in the lodge area is superb from Turaco to Twin spot. At 15.30 more tea and cake before another drive which continues after dark to enable you to see creatures of the night such as Leopard, Civets and other nocturnal mammals and birds. South Luangwa is world renowned for its friendly leopards.

**Kit carried.** I carried my faithful Fuji S5000 complete with 3 sets of re-chargeable batteries and one set of ordinary just in case. I took a battery charger. Zambia is on 'British' Square sockets. Most lodges had reliable power sources but I remain wary of Generator spikes. Minox 10x42 binos but no telescope.

**Books?** Zambia is a bit of an ornithological oddity being neither South nor East Africa so you get spill over from both areas. No Regional Bird book fully covers the country. I carried "Birds of Africa, south of the Sahara" by Sinclair and Ryan and the driver/guide has SASOL Birds of Southern Africa. This latter was not really appropriate as several species are omitted and of course the 'Range location maps' stop at the Zambezi. As we were not touring I dispensed with a guide book.

**The trip:-** Check in Online opens at ETD-30 hours so this was done from home. This is a very useful tool and thoroughly recommended. (Even if running late, they know you are coming.)

**5<sup>th</sup> December 2007.** Taxi to Ronaldsway for the afternoon flight and an on time(ish) arrival at Gatwick. Then the usual shuttle to Heathrow. Nice timings meant a short wait before boarding and we were on our way.

**6<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> December 2007.** A reasonable nights sleep saw us in Nairobi at 6.30 with a 3 hour lay over for the connection to Lusaka. The connecting flight left an hour late and it was actually the same plane, and we were in the same seats, that we had come from London in. Hmm! Anyway, into Lusaka and after forking out US\$120 for Visas and being reunited with our luggage we met our driver for Chaminuka. **Chaminuka** ([www.chaminuka.com](http://www.chaminuka.com)) is the nice place we often stay at when connections do not work out on the return leg. This time they did not fit the outward leg either but rather than a simple overnight we booked for two days here as it is a very nice place and worth a short visit in its own right. There are animals around and lots of birds too. As if this was not sufficient reason the drinks are free as well. Do you need any more reasons?? Fred occupied himself playing with the ellies and starting the tick list with a nice Rufous Bellied Heron. We know the place quite well and are able to wander at will but a game drive was provided to go further afield. Our 2<sup>nd</sup> driver, Charles, got quite excited at being shown the birdlife. There are three large lakes as a change to Miombo forest. Cuisine is excellent and being a Game Farm there is often Kudu or Impala on the menu. There may be a Veggie menu too but I have never asked.

**8<sup>th</sup> December -4<sup>th</sup> January 2008.** At a decent hour we returned to Lusaka for the short flight to Mfuwe. As mentioned above we were staying at Kafunta for all this time so it would bore me, and you, if I recounted a day by day diary. We renewed lots of old friends, Rocky, Duncan and the lesser spotted Julius and even got hailed by a Frenchman who remembered us from last time. Oh, and we met the President who comes to Luangwa for the same reasons we do. We were driven mainly by Kennedy and sometimes by Josephat. We shared the car from time to time with other people but mainly had the place to ourselves. We did a side trip down to Chipembele ([www.chipembele.org](http://www.chipembele.org)) which is an animal sanctuary and Education centre about 15 km south and worth a visit. We also use the opportunity to see other parts of the area by taking a picnic lunch too.

We had a possible 56 Game drives and only lost maybe 3 due to weather. Lots of elephant moments including a memorable sundowner stop when we were joined by two quite large family groups who were heading across the river just where we had stopped. We did not bother them and they paid us little heed. Indeed some of them lay down and had a dust bath and sleep right by us. Even an old Hippo got in on the act. Leopards were harder to come by but we had several meetings in both day and night conditions. One lady was quite laid back despite having a young cub nearby. When it was time to go hunting she went off into the grass to scat, came back and licked herself clean just like a Fireside moggie, and then went off to kill something for tea. The cub was then called over to join in. The bush was beautiful and fresh after the rains and flowers were springing up everywhere. Lots of young animals were being born and birds getting into breeding colours which made things a little easier. Total count was 238 but 10 were new to my list. Maybe I am just looking harder? We also saw the biggest crocodile I have ever seen. It was massive with a head the size of a Hippo. A truly monstrous beast. All to soon it was time to start the journey back. This started with the short connecting flight to Lusaka and another night at Chaminuka. How we must suffer for our holidays.



**5<sup>th</sup> January 2008.** Early morning bird walk got a few more including Yellow White-eye and Schalow's Turaco. This was a clear close view, crest and all, but I was foiled in a foto attempt. Just as I was setting up a burning sensation in my trousers indicated I was being attacked by Ants. This necessitated a quick return to the bungalow to get the blighters off.

I could hear the Turaco chuckling away. Next time! Then off to the airport for our flight to Nairobi. In flight we had good views of Lake Manyara, Empakai and Ol donyo Lengai in Tanzania.



Empakai in the Crater Highlands of Ngorongoro.



Ol donyo Lengai. Maasai Mountain of God.

The wait was a bit long in Nairobi and we took off an hour or so late. This was to cause problems.

**6<sup>th</sup> January.** We slept well and made up some time and arrived over London only 30 minutes later than our scheduled time of **6.45**. Then the stack claimed us for a while and we landed about an hour late and our connection to Gatwick was still possible, just! The baggage took an hour to arrive at **8.35** and hopes of getting to Gatwick faded. We had 1 hour and ten minutes to make a **9.45** take off, let alone check in. Our pre arranged driver drove at some impossible/illegal speeds and got us to Gatwick at **9.14.5**. We threw ourselves at check in as a merciful lady called Lorraine closed the Gate (behind us.) Security did their best to foil us and we ended up running in stocking feet whilst being urged by tannoy to get to Gate 6 NOW! We did! The rest of the trip was an anti climax really!