

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

February 18th to 27th.

Because of (or should that be 'in spite of') the success of my solo trip to South Luangwa in 1999 with Naturetrek it was decided that we would go again in 2000 with our friends Hilary and Chris Towers.

So the booking was made by them. We did ask for confirmation that we would again be stopping at Kafunta but they could not guarantee that but I knew it was highly likely. We also knew that part of the 10 day trip would be spent getting to and from Lilongwe in Malawi due to poor road conditions between South Luangwa and Lusaka the capital of Zambia. This was no real hardship as the drive itself is very interesting as is the night stop in Lilongwe.

Whilst I had upgraded my Camera to a Minolta 9000 this was still a roll film device so exposures were rationed by both conditions and cost. This means that only a few photos will be used in this report.

So to the report:-

We flew from Isle of Man to Luton and made our way to Heathrow where we met up with Hilary and Chris and joined others at the Ethiopian Airways check in desk for the flight to Lilongwe via Addis Ababa. All proceeded well and we arrived at Lilongwe on time where we were met by "Land And Lakes" and transferred to the Heuglin's Robin Guest House for the night. After a nice dinner at 19.00 most of us retired to catch up on our lost sleep.

Next day we were off in good time and happened to share the Land Rover with Mr and Mrs Fletcher from Wolverhampton. After the border formalities and a picnic lunch by the roadside we arrived at Kafunta at around 15.00 and settled in to our cabins. Surprisingly a night drive had been arranged for us so it was a quick splash and dash to be presentable. After the usual sundowners we lit the Spotlight and had hardly commenced the drive when a lovely female leopard appeared on the track, drunk from a pool and then calmly stalked right by the car. Happily on my side so I got a couple of photos a copy of which still hangs in our hall.



Not a bad start to our trip. The other Land Rover arrived in order to share the sightings.

Genets, Hares, Porcupines and a Pel's Owl made up other sightings.



The daily routine was roughly the same for the extent of our trip and our car was relatively good natured but the other group tended to be more 'competitive and assertive' which was a pity. So much so that they could be quite argumentative at the evening checklist completion. One day they kept their driver out all day just to try and find a Saddle-billed Stork that we had reported the evening before.

We would often stop for a coffee break in the mornings and "Big Baobab" was a favourite location for this as it was popular with ellies and sometimes lion. Nevertheless we could get out of the car to stretch our legs after a good look around. Here is Elizabeth with her coffee with some of her companions.



On one occasion my Minolta developed a fault so Hilary kindly lent me her spare body in order that I could capture a nice pair of displaying Rollers. This also hangs in our hall.



The days passed quite quickly with the bird list growing quite nicely as we settled into a routine. We often encountered elephant groups and we eventually got the driver, Josephat, not to move off immediately in order that we could enjoy the ellies more. Evidently Hilary liked to get closer rather than 'shoot and scoot!'

We saw lots of birds, as did the other team one of whom had the front of the car to himself so he could mount a tripod and huge lens all the time. We were glad we were not sharing with him. He once asked if we could swap and the response was quite immediate from all in our car.

The weather was not perfect by any means as there were heavy downpours around which often led us to terminate the drives to avoid a soaking and in any case the animals looked damp and dejected and not particularly photogenic. One memory we have is of a huge thunder storm as we finished our sundowner. We could hear it approaching and even hear the noise of the rain as it swept towards us over the savannah. We fled for home with our waterproof capes, provided, as the rain lashed down and visibility was zero. We could see the lightning through the cape and at one point I looked out just in time to see a huge lion close by on the roadside in a really bad mood. Glad we did not stop. How our driver coped I just do not know.

Our last day in South Luangwa was very memorable. It was dry and sunny and in the afternoon we encountered a large group of elephant. Due to Hilary's wishes, Josephat took us really close and one of the young bulls threw a massive tantrum with mock charges etc., Our laughter seemed to enrage him even further and he came right at the car. There is a voice on Clive's video saying "I know I wanted them to be close but I did not mean this close!" Hilary's first real "elephant moment." We left the elephants and drove on to an open plain and were delighted to find a pack of around 10 wild dogs. They were not hunting and the half grown pups were having fun with their reflections in the puddles of rain.

We had over half an hour in their company and watched them see off two Hyena before the adults headed off into thicker cover to look for something for tea.



An excellent end to our trip. It truly rained "Cats AND Dogs." for us.

And so we packed and left Kafunta River Lodge for the last time but I for one know Elizabeth loved the place and there is a good chance we will be back in future years.

Back in the cars for Lilongwe the other 'team' caused problems at the border into Malawi as they were insisting their passports were issued in 'London' whereas the Malawians wanted them to write "UK". Some people really should not be allowed out of the country!

A shopping trip in Lilongwe during which nothing was purchased, after which we had a subdued dinner and retired to bed early as it was 'early doors' tomorrow at 3am for a 6 am flight. This time direct to Addis and a relatively smooth change for the London plane where we landed at 20.25 after holding for 20 minutes.



Said our good byes to Hilary, Lynn and Chris and Clive who were all heading home whereas we were stopping the night in Euston Travel Inn with a plane home in the morning. Even this close to home we had problems when a broken down train at Blackfriars caused our train to take a roundabout route to Luton. We arrived back on IOM at 15.20 and took our photos straight to the chemist to see what we had got. Then we had tea.