



# Gavin Blair Safaris

Adventures Through Africa

May 2009 Newsletter

Gavin Blair Safaris

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## Latest safari news from Gavin and Marjorie

We set off into the bush again with our next group, who altogether represented a three generation family. The grandparents, who have been coming out on safari with us for over eighteen years, have over these many years made us part of their family, so making it a one big happy family safari, while at the same time initiating the youngest generation to the call of Africa. We have had many great experiences, and have many memories to share, from the years the grandparents have travelled with us, and so not surprisingly the members of the family new to the safari experience arrived with very high expectations. Despite having seen hundreds of previous safari photos and listened to many a safari tale, there was no dampening of their enthusiasm and excitement in being out in Africa and at the sight of their first elephant.



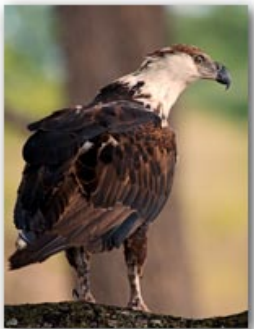
The first few hours of any safari are typically full of great moments. Every bird, animal and the overall scenery, sounds and smells are all new - but to start out by viewing a pack of five wild dogs in a playful mood

was extra special. By the end of the day we had already recorded for posterity a good checklist of the various animals, birds, plants and bugs we had seen, but it was hard to choose the days highlight between the wild dogs or the eight month old hyena pup, that had been peering out from its hideaway while its mother was off looking for food. Over the next few days the hyena pup displayed varying degrees of boldness, sometimes allowing us brief glimpses as he peered out from the darkness of the den site, while at other times the pup would be out and



about chewing on a stick or investigating his surroundings, but never seemingly being aware of us or ever acknowledging our presence. Early one morning we came across four adult hyenas that appeared to be running about without any reason, as they were not chasing anything or being chased - perhaps one was the mother of the pup, letting her hair down from parenting chores and simply having fun? Each day fresh hyena spoor was visible in the dirt along the track heading both into and away from the den site, although we never got to see any other hyenas at the den itself,

but as the pup looked in good condition it was obviously being well fed and cared for, most likely on young impala or young warthogs. The lioness we found was feeding on a male impala who perhaps had not been paying enough attention to danger, having been too busy charging around and chasing rivals, an activity that many other male impalas in the area were also engaged in.



Out on a boat along the Chobe River there were many hippo pods to keep an eye out for, while they in turn seemed to keep a pretty good watch on us as we drifted by on the current, as did the darters who were perched out on stumps protruding from under the water - relics of trees now submerged due to the water levels having changed over time. Along the shoreline a good number of crocodiles of various lengths were out sunbathing, while herds of impala made their way along the shoreline nibbling on grass shoots - but at the same time showing sensible behavior by skirting further inland around the seemingly docile reptiles lying

motionless at the waters edge. Later on a large troop of baboons began to come down to the waters edge, the youngsters running about chasing and teasing each other, and jumping into

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and out of the springy branches of the bushes dotted along the riverbank. A large male kudu with a huge set of spiral horns followed on after the baboons but in a more regal manner, and then after the kudu and ignoring all the baboons antics came a family of banded mongooses, busily digging away in the soil for insects. Watching from above while perched on one of the massive branches of a huge ebony tree - one of the many along this section of the river whose roots anchor the soil from the eroding currents of the Chobe River - was an immature fish eagle, dressed in its scruffy transitional feathers. All this, along with the lechwe and buffalo grazing out on the islands and the herds of elephant coming down to drink, made for a tranquil and enjoyable afternoons wildlife viewing.



Our next stop on the safari trail was on an island in the Okavango Delta, where we went out in canoes, drifting in and out of the winding channels and across expanses of water covered with various types of water lilies.



There were lots of red lechwe about, plodding through the shallow water to reach the newest shoots of grass and sedges that were pushing up through the water. In one shallow lagoon spur winged geese, yellow billed ducks, ruff, glossy ibis, greenshanks, lots of spoonbills and many of the rare and endangered wattled cranes were feeding - each bird prodding, probing or sifting, feeding in each of their varied ways and seeking out the tiny morsels of food in these rich shallow waters. As the sun sunk lower squadrons of the large spur winged geese came flying in to the lagoon in formation, executing coordinated landings on the already crowded lagoon. Due to the overcast conditions we were able to easily find a number of painted reed frogs and long nosed reed frogs that would

normally have been hiding in the deep shade. Another bonus was that the Lotus Lilies (night lilies) - whose flowers are always closed up tightly during the day - had begun to open, thus revealing their huge and beautiful white flowers to us.

The next morning we traded our water transport for the old fashioned mode of getting about, and so set out on foot across one of the nearby islands, where fresh tracks of buffalo gave us the direction to head. Soon we picked up the spoor of lions following over those of the buffalo, so upping the anticipation and excitement of the family. Soon the chattering alarm calls of the oxpeckers rising into the sky in the distance warned that we were closing in on the buffalo herd - and the lions! Crossing an open grassy floodplain to the next tree line we begun to hear the sounds of bellowing buffalos and the drumming sound of their heavy bodies running ahead. Once on the other side of the small treed island, and looking out across the grassy floodplain, we could see the herd of buffalo some distance ahead stop and look back in our direction.



After a brief pause the herd turned and lumbered on, moving off behind another treed island. Shortly thereafter we saw the first lion, emerging from the wavy tall brown grass to stand on the slightly higher ground of the treed island. Then as we ourselves moved onto the floodplain to follow another lion appeared, stopped briefly to look back at us and then moved on past the trees and out of sight. With hearts beating fast we made our way across the grassy floodplain in pursuit of the buffalo and the two lions. Imagine therefore the thrill and excitement when we reached the trees and saw not only the buffalo, albeit disappearing across a distant floodplain and towards the next treed island, but a pride of 18 lions! The lions had obviously given up on securing a buffalo for lunch and were moving off to rest up under a small clump of trees closer to the waters edge. We walked to an adjacent tree line a short distance away,

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from where we had a great view across the grassy floodplain of the whole pride. The two male lions soon decided we were not much of a threat and led their females and cubs on to a shadier spot on the next treed island, so we headed back to the boats and camp with a spring in our steps, and a great experience to share around the fireside that night.

Our good luck with lion sightings continued, as on arriving in the Moremi Game Reserve we found a heap of 12 sleeping lions. Over the next few days we watched the same lions feeding on a hippo carcass, until all that was left was the skull and bones and a few disappointed vultures. Our luck continued, as just when it was getting dark at the end of an already eventful day, we found a cheetah - and were then lucky enough to see it again the next day, this time feeding on a young impala it had caught earlier. In one of the lagoons a hippo had given birth to a baby that was



either stillborn or had died soon after birth. The scene had attracted a number of crocodiles that were patiently waiting for the distressed mother to abandon her dead offspring. When not watching the predators there were a good number of colourful and interesting birds to observe, as well as enjoying many of the various antelope and plains game species, including the antics of a herd of wildebeest, prancing about and stirring up the impalas and zebras while two of the male wildebeest

began sparring, dropping onto their knees as they pushed and shoved, back and forth over some unknown issue. We were also fortunate to spot a large rock python, about 8 feet long, moving through the grass and heading up into the branches of a low bush, perhaps to sleep off the meal it had just had. The python was looking in good condition, shiny and pristine, having probably recently shed its skin.

Savuti also proved to be good for predators both big and small - a jumping spider catching a praying mantid while stopped for a tea break, then at another tea break while scanning around I spotted a male lion resting under a bush. After quickly packing up we drove over to find not one male lion but two, along with a lioness. The males, being new in the area, had been in a skirmish with the three regular male lions of the area and were still showing a few signs of the battle that they had evidently won, being as they were now relaxing, unconcerned by our presence, in a slice of the previous



prides territory. Another unusual predator we found was a huge Mozambique spitting cobra, who on realizing it had been seen disappeared into the foliage of a bush. As the cobra seemed not too happy at my initial attempts to take its photo, we moved on to look for something photogenic elsewhere. Three ground hornbills flew



ahead of us as we travelled up the dry Savuti Channel, eventually flying up into a tree to then serenade us with their rhythmic hooting booming calls, while a few trees further on we saw a recently killed young impala draped over a branch indicating the presence of a leopard. After much scanning about with binoculars, and sitting patiently on and off over the next few days near the kill in the tree, we finally found the leopard resting deep in the shade,

under a croton bush further up the channel on our last morning in the Savuti area. In a way the constant searching and anticipation made the sighting all the more rewarding, as well as bringing home the point that this was no zoo with guaranteed sightings, even if one had such a

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good indication of the leopards presence in the form of its kill up a tree. Savuti also provided us with a lot of other great animal sightings, including three different mongooses, lots of giraffe, elephants, impalas, zebra and tsessebe, as well as many good bird sightings including several ostrich striding out on the old marsh - but it will be that last half hour of the last morning drive that the family will remember the most, when after many hours of patience and searching we finally found that male leopard under the bushes - a great end to another eventful safari.

Until next month...

Gavin & Marjorie  
[www.gavinblairsafaris.com](http://www.gavinblairsafaris.com)