

Gone fishing at Malilangwe

Malilangwe Hills, home to many species of flora and fauna

PRIVATE WILDLIFE RESERVE THAT HAS IT ALL

ZIMBABWE WILDLIFE Editor, Stephen Mavuto Karindawaro, travelled to Malilangwe Conservation Trust in the Lowveld. The private wildlife reserve has it all for posterity.

IT IS only when you venture into the wild, as I did at Malilangwe Conservation Trust, that you really see that birds are international. And unlike you and me, they need no passport, no visa and no customs bureaucratic clearance. Yes, I saw a Redbacked Shrike, that flew some 10 000 km from Russia to Chiredzi in the lowveld, escaping the freezing cold winter in the Russian Federation.

We, that is my wife, Glennis and I, packed our bags and piled them into the boot of my Toyota Cressida to signal the start of the long drive to Africa's largest private wildlife estate. Destination : Pamushana and Nduna Safari Lodges.

A few kilometres after we left the Chiredzi River on our way to the Nduna Lodge turn off, I had to brake suddenly to give way to two adult guinea fowl which were leading about 20 chicks! I stopped and watched as the chicks and mothers rushed across.

I drove 600 km, had a puncture once and as a result arrived late to the warm welcome of Shadreck, who drove us, uphill in the golf cart to Pamushana. Since I was so tired after the long drive, I shuddered at the thought of negotiating that hill on foot. But then Malilangwe proved what their brochures mean when they say "exclusive" by cartwheeling us up the stiff incline to the reception area where we received ice cold drinks. "Welcome to Pamushana", said Shadreck, adding with a rather shy smile, "We are glad that at last some indigenous people have come to enjoy the fun and adventure here".

Immediately after we had taken a breather, we were taken on a tour of the lodge. What stands out at Pamushana is the well-equipped gym, with work out equipment I have only seen in the movies. I attend what is known as the "best gym" in Harare but their equipment falls far short in comparison.

There is also a curio shop with a difference. Yes, unlike most you have been to, this one contains artifacts and various paraphernalia from all the countries in Africa, hence its name, the Africa Collection.

There are six lodges open to the public, all with a view to the Malilangwe dam and hills. All are equipped with telescopic sights and my wife and I feasted our eyes on the wildlife in the dam. It was gratifying to see lichens growing a distance away, being brought nearer. I could even count the teeth of a huge hippo that spent the best part of 3 minutes with its mouth agape.

If you are used to visiting game sanctuaries or game lodges you tend to have this feeling that when you see one; you have seen them all. Well this adage is proved wrong at Malilangwe. If you have not been there, you are still to see the best that will make you forget the rest.

I spent an hour in the gym to prepare myself for the game drive and evening guided game walk. After the workout, (I particularly enjoyed running on that "running belt" that left me feeling strong enough to climb Mount Kilimanjaro). I then joined Vicky Arkell for a game drive.

Expecting to see the usual Landrover 4x4, I received my first shock when it turned out that it had no windscreen "for unimpaired vision and easy access when taking photographs" Vicky told me. And how very right as we found out in the two-hour long game drive that started at 4.30 pm. When we started Vicky advised me to please wrap myself with my blanket "when it gets chilly". I tried to assert my masculinity in the presence of a lady by holding onto my LEAP T-shirt as we drove along the many roads, twists and turns in the over 100 000 acres of land.

During the drive, two things came to my environmentally conscious mind: First, the rains had caused the Landrover vehicles to dig noticeable marks on the roads. Early signs of environmental degradation accelerated by the drives and at times the forcible removal of the car from the muddy roads, could be seen.

A thought crossed my mind that we might get stuck while out there, I voiced my fear to Vicky, and our Landrover became stuck an hour later. To her credit, Vicky did not panic. She engaged the 4-wheel drive gears, while I piled some branches and logs on the back wheels for easy suction grip and off we went.

Malilangwe proved that it has many numbers of wildlife. We saw a loan bull white rhino that we all mistook for an elephant because it was so huge. It dawned on us when we drew nearer that this was in fact a rhino.

You have seen or probably heard of elephant destruction but have you seen rhino one? Well, visit Pamushana, where we saw several telephone poles that had been brought down by a rhino. It did not need an ecologist to guess that the bull responsible was busy rubbing its body against the poles. Just as I was about to say this to Vicky, we saw the rhino busy "massaging" its body against a telephone pole.

While we were savouring the huge specimen with a horn that could weigh over 50 kg, sounds of lion on a kill could be heard.

"You missed lion collaring conducted last night. It was scary", confessed Vicky.

A few minutes into musasa woodland and a hillock area we saw two Klipspringer, a monogamous animal. Its feet are made in such a way that it can move in a hilly or rocky area and not easily in sandy loams. The Klipspringer is the best example of an animal that respects a partner; to them it is strictly no infidelity nor casual sex.

We saw other animals like the giraffe, which goes for the most succulent part of a tree. In one area where the tree cover was patchy, we saw two giraffe bending 2-metres down to eat. I thought they only did that while drinking!

Continued on page 27

Glennis Karindawaro and daughter, Yvette, views wildlife from the verandah of Pamushana Lodge at Malilangwe





Prizes for Best Article

WSZ branches should capitalise on the "Best Article" competition to be run by Zimbabwe Wildlife.

Yes, to reward branches for their contributions, your magazine will soon run a competition for Best Article and Best Pictures. Various cash prizes will be on offer. There might even be a trip for two to a local or regional tourist destination!

Negotiations for prizes have been opened with various reputable potential sponsors. So get your pen and paper and start sending those articles chronicling the branch activities to us - Editor.

THIS AND THAT IN THE BRANCHES

MAKONDE

The Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management has not issued the permit for the annual Mana Pools game count, an event most members look forward to.

WSZ Makonde branch chairperson, Mrs Anne-Marie Bone said although an application was sent "months ago" as yet no permit had been issued.

Although the branch had requested Nyamepi, the Lodges, various pans and camps for the static and walking counts, National Parks only responded by confirming a booking for 30 camps in Nyamepi only.

"We understand all the other pans, camps and lodges have been put out for tender by National Parks or are up for privatisation. This does not amuse the branch," she said.

A branch committee team had been appointed to speak with top National Parks officials in an effort to ensure that the traditional Mana Pools game count gets off the ground.

HEAL was set to conduct its second Science Exposition at Karoi School on July 21. All schools had been asked to submit items and projects to the judges.

KARIBA

This branch still faces a serious financial crisis following the problems with the lease of the Kuburi Wilderness. However, assistance has been forthcoming to enable WSZ Kariba to meet its commitments during March and April.

Branch chairman, Mr Peter Ranger said although the salary of the PEAK environment education officer was assured for the rest of the year, other areas of the outreach programme would suffer. "Revenue accruing to the Branch from its own endeavours will never be sufficient to sustain PEAK. We anxiously await the long talked about donor funding," said Mr Ranger. The branch

had agreed to host the Annual General meeting of the WSZ to be held in August.

MASHONALAND

WSZ Mashonaland is set to take over running of the Mukuvisi Woodlands Nature Reserve. This will, in the long term, emerge as the branch's main project. Up until now, the WSZ's largest branch had no "official" project.

"We are adopting Mukuvisi Woodlands as our project. We are assisting them with salaries for the manager and bus driver and will have a representative on their committee," said branch chairman, Mr Shingi Maswaure.

A white bus to ferry school pupils to the Mukuvisi Woodlands Nature reserve was recently bought by both the Mukuvisi Woodland Association and WSZ Mashonaland.

The bus will soon have WSZ and Mukuvisi Woodland logos and colours on each side. This will help market the WSZ.

CHIPINGE

Two students from the Student Partnership Worldwide were working with communities around the Chipinge Safari Area. The other two, who were scheduled to jet in on May 21 would work in Haroni and Rusitu Forests.

This branch secured funding for the Chimanimani Arboretum, to be funded by the Kellogg Foundation to the tune of millions.

MANICALAND

Translocation of three rhinos to join the Cecil Kop Nature Reserve's white rhino, Daisy, will be done soon. WSZ Manicaland vice chairman, Mr Richard Chinheya said however, that National Parks had given no dates yet.

"We are just waiting for National Parks to translocate the rhinos as promised," said Mr Chinheya.

The branch successfully renewed its lease of Cecil Kop for another 99 years.

Gone fishing ...

Continued from page 25

It was while I was pondering on this, that I heard a sweet cry that reminded me of Brian Ferry and Roxy Music.

"It's the Trumpeter Hornbill. Let's see if we can find it," said Vicky. We did locate it, perched in a thorn tree, known locally as mupangara. It is not only that long reddish bill that distinguishes it, but also the mellow music that comes from the bird's throat.

Malilangwe is one game sanctuary where you will see the Big Five and the Little Five. Plus more. The bio-diversity is still healthy, as your smaller mammals, the birds (over 400 recorded species) and some rare tree species like the now protected acacia woodland, are there in large numbers.

Even if you have a tight schedule, never go away from Malilangwe without going out fishing in the company of the Pamushana general manager, Terry Ryan. In the dam are a variety of fish including bass and bream. But then their bream never grow bigger than what fishermen call the "five finger level".

"A team of scientists came recently to look at why our bream never grow bigger. The results should be out soon," said Terry while he was fighting to remove a large bass.

There are canoeing safaris, but I must confess I am not the Bunny Hugger type and I asked for a "reprieve" on that.

But remember no children under-12 at Malilangwe. I went with one and that spoiled the adventure for my wife because she had to nurse our three-year old, Yvette.

I proved one set of people wrong, the motor industry. I drove all the way to Malilangwe in my Toyota Cressida GL, Station Wagon. Trundled along in those bad Gonarezhou roads. So don't let the make of your car discourage you from visiting places like Malilangwe. Before I forget, there is good news for those who enjoy flying (not me by the way). A new charter airline, Air Zambezi, has started flying directly to Malilangwe. Book with your travel agent and enjoy the pristine wildlife at Malilangwe, which means "the cry of the leopard", in the Shangani dialect.

And while you pay the bill, just remember that this private wildlife reserve helps the impoverished Chiredzi community in outreach programmes.

It gave out about \$7 million for community development projects for 1998. It is now part of LEAP! That's a dollar put to good use, Eh!