

## Tour Report South Luangwa Photo Safari 28 May – 6 June 2025

Leopard



Elephant



Little bee-eater



Lion



Compiled by Sean Weekly

Wednesday 28 May 2025

## Day 1

Kicking off Safari season

Today was a busy day travelling to Heathrow in preparation for a long flight. But it will all be worth it because I'm heading back to the magical South Luangwa National Park in Zambia to guide this year's very first winter safari.

My journey began at Heathrow, where the usual airport craziness was happening in the background. But just as I was adjusting to the usual travel mode, I had a lovely surprise: I bumped into one of my returning guests! He had joined me on the Luangwa safari last November and clearly got hooked, because here he is again, just six months later, ready for round two. We caught up over coffee and shared some good laughs (mostly about warthogs and missed alarm calls in the bush).

As we made our way to the gate, we met up with another guest joining this year's crew. The tribe slowly gathered and we were excited about the week ahead.

Now the best part so far was our flight to Dubai was *so* empty, it felt like we'd scored ourselves a private jet. Legroom for days, rows to ourselves, and that rare sense of peace you don't usually get at 30,000 feet on a long-haul flight. Honestly, it was the perfect way to start what promises to be an unforgettable journey back into the wilds of Zambia.

South Luangwa, we're coming for you!

Thursday 29 May 2025

## Day 2

From Skyscrapers to Safari – The Journey to Luangwa

Our flight touched down in Dubai right on schedule. It was a smooth flight. With about three hours to kill before our next leg, two of the guests and I made a beeline for the nearest coffee shop. There's something about airports that brings out the best travel stories, and with the safari trip officially underway, it was nice to sit and enjoy a coffee and catch up.

Next up: Lusaka. The flight was full but uneventful, and we landed right on time again. The landscape below was already starting to change, flatter and wilder. You could feel the bush within touching distance.

But the real magic began with our final flight, the short flight to Mfuwe, the official gateway to South Luangwa National Park. Mfuwe might be a small airport, but it's booming with character.

This is where travellers shed their "airport mode" and slip fully into safari mode. It's the first taste of the bush, and you can feel the energy shift the moment you step off the plane, despite the serious jet lag. The aircraft was tiny, just a quick 40-minute "up and down", but it delivered us right on time. And waiting there in the small arrivals hall was our good friend and brilliant safari guide, Yotam. Warm smile, expert tracker, wildlife extraordinaire, and all-around amazing person. Yotam helped us with our bags and whisked us off in our trusty minibus.

The road to camp was short but scenic, about 30 to 40 minutes, and each turn brought us closer to our final destination.

Soon, we rolled into Flatdogs Camp, our home for the week. Tucked just outside the park gates, Flatdogs is a gem, comfortable, authentic, and teeming with life. The staff welcomed us with beaming smiles, cool towels, and the kind of greeting that makes you feel like you've never left. It's one of those special places where everyone remembers your name, your drink order, and your favourite animal too!

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After a smooth check-in, we settled into our tents, spacious and cosy. Before long, we gathered for our first dinner under the stars. I gave the group a quick briefing about the exciting days ahead, then we tucked into a delicious meal that hit just right after 24 hours of travel.

Bellies full, spirits high, and eyelids heavy, it was time to retreat to our tents and let the sounds of Africa lull us to sleep. Tomorrow, the real adventure begins.

**Friday 30 May 2025**

### **Day 3**

Leopards, Lions & a Little Bit of Magic

There's something unmistakably thrilling about the first proper game drive of a safari. You wake up with that childlike anticipation, knowing that anything literally anything could happen. And South Luangwa does not disappoint.

We hadn't even cleared the entrance gate when a troop of yellow baboons welcomed us to the morning, putting on their antics. Just above them, sat a lizard buzzard, surveying the ground below.

Moments later, things took a wild turn. A martial eagle, Africa's most powerful bird of prey, was on the ground perhaps seconds after a failed attempt at taking down a helmeted guinea fowl. Whatever had just happened, it looked intense. And then whoosh!

The eagle took off, flying straight toward us with its impressive wingspan cutting through the air. A front-row seat. It flew so close past us.



The action continued with a sweet intermission from a little bee-eater, who posed perfectly in golden morning light. It's always tricky to approach these birds sometimes so it was great to be able to get close!



Then came the moment we'd hoped for: nestled in a dense grove of trees, we found a pack of seven wild dogs snoozing in the shade. With the temperatures starting to rise, they were happily static so sadly no photos, but still a phenomenal first-day find.

After an epic morning, it was back to camp for some well-earned breakfast. By 3:30 pm, we were back in the vehicle and headed back into the park. On route, we were greeted by a graceful tower of giraffes as we rolled out of camp.

The afternoon drive took us west of the main gate in search of the elusive Mfuwe Pride, a powerhouse lion pride of 16 individuals, last seen vanishing into the thickets that morning. We scanned, looped, and listened. Nothing. For nearly 90 minutes, we tracked them, but they'd seemingly vanished into the dense bush.

We decided to pause and regroup with a sundowner stop overlooking the Luangwa River. As the sun dipped low and we sipped our drinks, the distant movement caught our eyes, a small pack of four wild dogs on the opposite side of the river, hot on the heels of a group of impalas. The chase was just a blur across the horizon, and though they didn't make a kill, it was a thrilling moment to witness, even from



afar.

With dusk settling in, it was time to begin our night drive. Spotlights at the ready, we scanned for that signature eye-shine glinting through the darkness. And just when we thought we might be wrapping the day quietly... Boom, there they were.

The Mfuwe Pride, in all their golden glory, had emerged from the bush. On the move, alert, in sync, like a tactical hunting unit. The sight of all those lions moving through the shadows, coordinated and confident, was nothing short of epic! A few even padded right past our vehicle, their eyes glinting red under the filtered spotlights.

We joined a respectful viewing distance with other vehicles, all of us switching to red light mode to preserve the cats' night vision and not interfere with their hunt. The Milky Way hung above us, bright and bold, as the lions disappeared into the darkness, stalking the night.

It was one of those rare safari moments where time slows down and nature takes your breath away. What an awesome end to the day! We returned to camp under a canopy of stars, wide-eyed and full of stories of our encounter over another gorgeous dinner.



**Saturday 31 May 2025**

#### **Day 4**

Portraits in the Wild & Big Cats

Another day, another adventure in the wilds of South Luangwa and what a beautifully golden morning it was.

Our first sighting came quietly, a spotted hyena, slinking through the shadows of the bush. These misunderstood creatures often get a bad rap, but up close, there's something deeply compelling about them. I think they're beautiful animals.. A great way to kick things off.



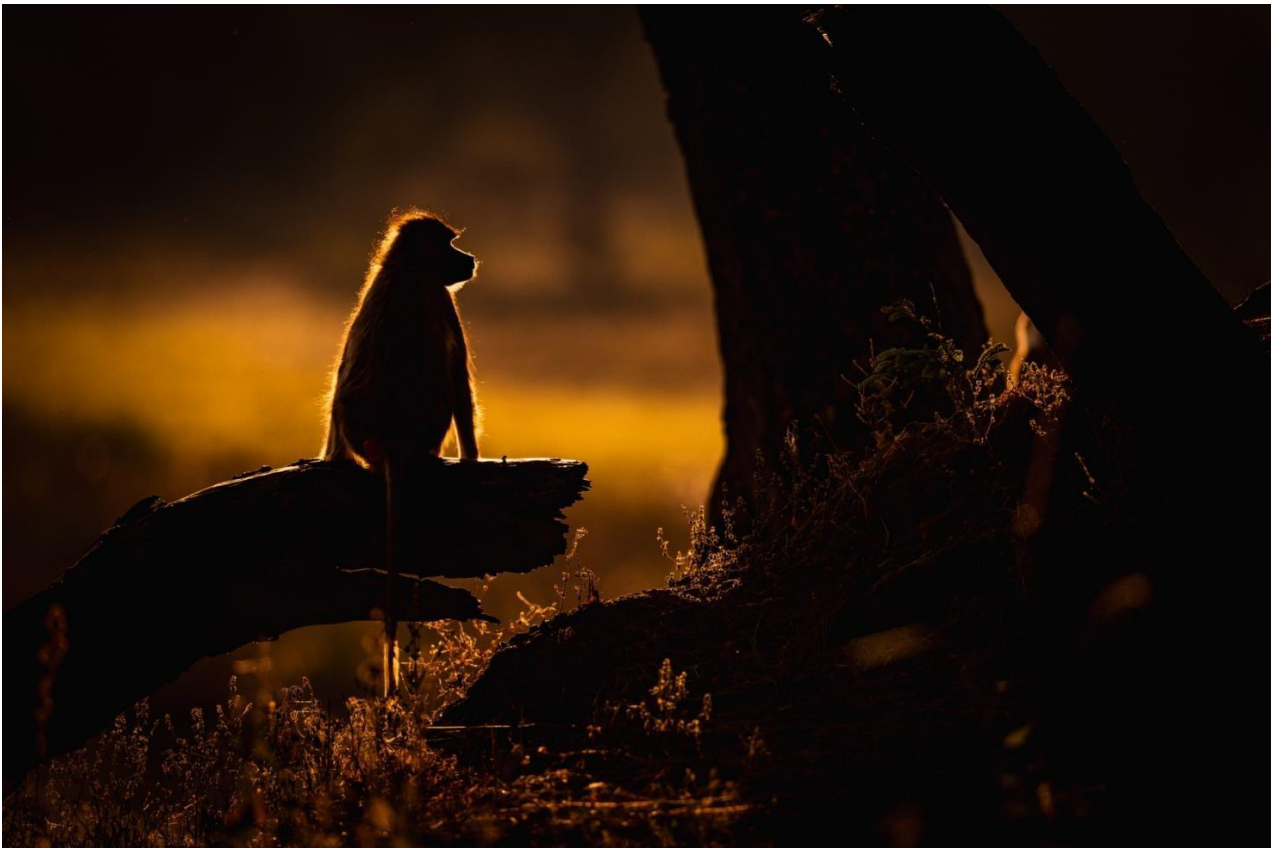
Next, we were treated to a gorgeous scene of a female waterbuck and her young calf bathed in soft, early morning light. The calf was still incredibly fluffy and the light brought out every little texture in its coat. Waterbucks are usually on the shyer side, often ducking into the brush before you can lift your lens, but this pair held their ground just long enough for a few quiet, beautiful frames.



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Then came another special moment: a troop of yellow baboons, playfully bouncing around in perfect backlight, their fur glowing with that rim-lit halo effect photographers love!



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We meandered our way toward the Wafwa area, taking the scenic route via Mushroom Lagoon, where the landscape always offers a surprise or two. Sure enough, we spotted a pair of bateleur eagles perched distantly. Seeing a male and female together is always special; they're such charismatic raptors, with those short tails and bright red faces. Nearby, our first glimpse of a decent herd of zebras kept us entertained.

Then, a buzz came through on the radio: The Mfuwe Pride had reappeared in Wamilombe, just 20 minutes away. We didn't need much convincing.

When we arrived, the scene was textbook lion behaviour: flat cats everywhere, all stretched out in the shade like oversized house cats. Judging by the size of their bellies, it was clear they had made a successful kill the night before. A couple of lions perhaps remained upright, lounging regally on a small ridge. Their poses, paired with the light, made for some beautiful portrait opportunities. It's always surreal to be so close to these apex predators, even when they're at their laziest.



On the way back to camp, we made one more detour, a quick check-in on our young leopard cub. Still hiding out in the long grass, the little one wasn't making our job easy. But just as we were about to move on, he stood, stretched, and shifted positions, offering a fleeting moment of visibility. A few shots later and just like that, he vanished into the undergrowth again. A short but sweet reward for our patience.



Back at camp, it was time to recharge (and possibly relive the day over a coffee or two and breakfast). We planned to revisit the Mfuwe Pride later this afternoon, fingers crossed they'd be up and on the move again. With bellies full, they might just head to the river for a drink... and we'll be waiting.

Refreshed after lunch and a little downtime at camp, we headed back out for the afternoon game drive. There were whispers of leopard activity, and that was enough to send us off toward the Bangula area with purpose.

Our first real lead came courtesy of a vervet monkey alarm chorus, a sure-fire sign that something was lurking nearby. We parked, listened, scanned... but whatever had caused the primate panic was either long gone or frustratingly well-hidden. That's the bush for you, equal parts thrill and tease.

We did, however, spot a striking African harrier-hawk perched up on a branch, devouring something unidentifiable but clearly delicious (if you're a raptor). These birds are always a joy to see with their weirdly flexible joints and menacing yellow faces. They somehow manage to look elegant and evil all at once.

Again, we got another tip-off that the Mfuwe Pride had been seen again, this time closer to the river, just as we had hoped. The only problem? They had made their move while we were back at camp, shifting from their shaded siesta spot to the riverbank around 11 am. That's right, cats with no regard for our schedule!

Still, we made our way down, determined to catch whatever was left of the moment. When we arrived, the scene was both glorious and frustrating, all 16 lions sprawled along the riverbank, basking in the late afternoon glow. The light? Utterly magical, the problem? Every. Single. One. Had their backs to us! Why? Because a cool breeze was blowing off the water and the lions, in true cat fashion, had positioned themselves to enjoy a refreshing facial breeze. Great for them, slightly annoying for us photographers. Still, patience paid off (as it so often does out here). One beautiful female turned to look at us just for a moment and with the sun glowing behind her, it made for an unforgettable shot. Not the wide-angle lion spectacular we'd hoped for, but sometimes it's the quiet portraits that stay with you the longest.



As darkness fell, we swapped daylight for red filters and spotlights, beginning our night drive. The stars blinked to life, and the bush began to stir in that nocturnal way.

Not long into the drive, a female leopard emerged, calling softly, stopping to listen. She was searching for her cubs, moving with purpose but without panic. We followed her for a while, respectful not to get too close. Eventually, she melted into the darkness, her silhouette disappearing into the long grass. The rest of the night delivered some of South Luangwa's smaller, secretive residents: Genets, a four-toed elephant shrew, and the elusive bushy-tailed mongoose, caught mid-prowl in our spotlight.

It was the perfect contrast to the drama of the lions which was intimate, subtle, and totally magical in its own way. Another full, beautiful day in the valley came to a close. As we headed back to camp beneath a sky lit with stars, I couldn't help but feel grateful for today's sightings. Even when the animals don't "cooperate," they still manage to leave you in awe.

Sunday 1 June 2025

## Day 5

### Lions, Leopards & Waterholes

Another early morning alarm call and the morning air was crisp, our morning toast and fruit freshly made. After last night's brief encounter, we set off with one goal in mind: to find that female leopard again. The morning light was perfect, casting a soft golden haze across the landscape, ideal conditions for spotting a spotted cat.

But she remained elusive. We searched patiently, scanning tree limbs and termite mounds, but the queen of stealth had slipped away. As frustrating as it is at times, this is the safari game. Sometimes the chase itself is the reward.

Not long after, we caught a glimpse of an African harrier hawk, soaring past us just as the rising sun lit its wings. The light shimmered off its feathers in all the right ways, Nature's version of a flyby salute.

We soon arrived at the Mfuwe Pride, still camped out along the riverbank, but this time, with a bit more energy. After a day of digestion and general laziness, the younger lions were feeling a little feisty. We watched as siblings pawed and pounced at one another, and a few of the adults even lifted their heads long enough to give us some perfect portrait moments. Between yawns, stretches, and a few flicks of their tails, the lions reminded us why they're so captivating, even when they're mostly horizontal.



After spending a while with the pride, we decided to change things up and headed north, toward an area known as the Big Baobab Tree, a place as scenic as it sounds. Post tea and biscuits break (biscuits seem to taste twice as good here), we made our way toward a nearby watering hole in hopes of catching something special.



And did we ever.

Just as we arrived, a beautiful family of elephants strolled into a nearby watering hole, matriarch, calves, and all to drink, splash, and cool off. The scene was pure magic: trunks dipping, ears flapping, the young calf practising his trunk skills. There's something deeply peaceful about watching elephants drink; it's like being let in on a sacred ritual.

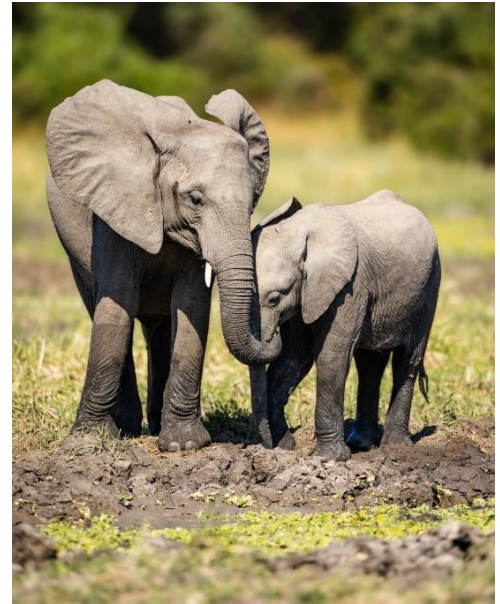
To top it off, three old buffalo bulls ambled in shortly after, all muscle and mud, adding that classic "African triad" feel to the morning. It was the kind of sighting that feels almost scripted—only better, because it's real.



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As we began the slow drive back to camp, still glowing from the waterhole scene, the bush had one more surprise in store: a female leopard, perfectly poised, stalking a group of impala through the undergrowth. We killed the engine and watched in total silence, breath held as she moved with absolute precision, low, silent, and beautifully focused. Though we didn't witness a full hunt, the intensity of the moment was epic. It's these silent, tension-filled moments that often leave the deepest impressions.



By the time we rolled back into camp, breakfast was well received as always. The morning had been packed with some of the best safari encounters, lions, elephants, buffalo, and not one, but two leopard encounters with golden light as a bonus.

South Luangwa, you're on fire!

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The afternoon began slowly, the kind of drive where the heat lingers a little longer, and the wildlife seems to have collectively agreed to stay hidden. While we did spot the occasional antelope and a few birds, the bush had quieted right down.

Still, we stayed positive, so we pushed further north, winding our way toward one of the more remote boreholes. These water sources can be great for wildlife, especially in the drier months, but this time, it seemed only the birds had RSVP'd. We waited, scanned, sipped some water, and then decided to change tactics.

We meandered back through the Wafwa lagoon and surrounding forest, taking in the scenery and listening out for signs, calls, alarm barks, anything. Sometimes the silence of the bush is just as striking as its action.

With the light beginning to soften, we made a call, headed back to the Mfuwe Pride of Lions. We'd seen them that morning, well-fed and lazy, but we had a feeling that tonight, they might get moving.

We were right!

After a peaceful sundowner stop, drinks in hand overlooking the river, the air began to shift. The lions one by one rose from the sand, stretched, yawned, and began moving along the top of the riverbank, silhouetted by the last glow of twilight.

By the time we had them in view, darkness had fallen, and it was time for the spotlights. Bathed in soft, warm light, the pride looked awesome, eyes glinting and paws padding silently across the sand bank. The kind of scene you can't photograph fast enough, but also want to pause and remember it.



At one point, they passed just feet from our vehicle, completely unfazed by our presence. The only sounds were their low grumbles and the gentle rustle of dry grass beneath their paws. It was the kind of encounter that makes every quiet hour earlier in the day worth it.



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Our night drive that followed was a gentle wind-down, a few hungry hippos, out of the water and snuffling around for fallen sausage tree fruit. No predators, no drama, just a fairly quiet drive.

So while the afternoon had started slowly, it ended in classic Luangwa fashion, unexpected, intimate, and absolutely unforgettable.

**Monday 2 June 2025**

## **Day 6**

### **A Leap of Leopard Luck**

Today was a day of big plans. We packed up early with the intention of heading deep into the northern reaches of the park, not planning to return until mid-afternoon. The idea? Explore less-travelled corners of South Luangwa and see what secrets the wilderness would share with us. We were heading North to an area known as 'Lion Plains'.

Before heading north, we took a quick detour to check in on the local female leopard's territory, a sleek and elusive local we'd been hoping to glimpse again. No sign of her this morning, sadly, but the bush had other plans for us, a gorgeous bull elephant, calmly feeding in the morning light. Majestic, steady, and totally unbothered by our presence, he reminded us how quickly things can change out here. You spend time looking for one thing and find something else completely.



Just ten minutes down the road, we bumped into the Mfuwe Pride again, this time very close to Mfuwe Lodge. Word on the radio was they'd taken down a warthog earlier that morning. By the time we arrived, all that was left were a few lion snoozes and some satisfied bellies. Still, we managed a few lovely frames of the pride lounging under the trees before continuing north into new terrain.



Passing through the Wafwa area, we entered the leadwood forest, where a herd of seven elephants caught our attention. The setting was straight from a postcard: ancient trees, soft light, and a 6-month-old elephant calf trotting beside its mother. We held our distance and fired off the shots. To top it off, a lone Thornicroft giraffe strolled into the scene, gracefully weaving between the trees. A stunning moment, perfectly framed.





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Further along, we passed a lone bull buffalo munching quietly, followed by a male waterbuck who, with his shaggy coat and spiral horns, struck a regal pose right in the middle of the savannah. The bush may have been spread out today, but it was putting on a show for those who kept looking.



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Then came the moment of the day, maybe the moment of the trip....

As we rolled into the Lion Plains area, one of the guests was eagle-eyed and spotted something that made our week: a female leopard, perched elegantly on a low branch in a dark ebony forest. She was pure and beautiful, draped over the branch like she owned it (because, let's be honest, she probably did).



We watched quietly, cameras clicking softly, as she eventually climbed down and began to move across the forest floor. Her body language changed subtly, slower steps, quiet grunts. She was looking for someone. We had a feeling... and then it was confirmed.

Another vehicle told us this leopard had killed a yellow baboon earlier in the day and was now searching for her cub, a single young one around 2-3 months old, hidden somewhere nearby.

Whilst she was searching for her cub, she was marking her territory and even decided to stop at a small stream for a quick drink before moving on.

Our hearts raced as we followed her at a respectful distance through the forest. Eventually, she slipped into a thicket and after a few tense minutes, reunited with her cub. Tiny, shy, and barely visible, the cub peeked out through the thick underbrush. It was a fleeting glimpse, but awesome nonetheless. Watching the interaction between mother and cub, even through the dense bush, felt intimate, like we'd been given a glimpse into their world without any other vehicle around.

We quietly backed away, returning to the



spot where we'd first seen her, hoping she might bring the cub out into the open. An hour passed, filled with hope. And then, just as we were beginning to wonder if it would happen, she appeared again with the cub in tow.

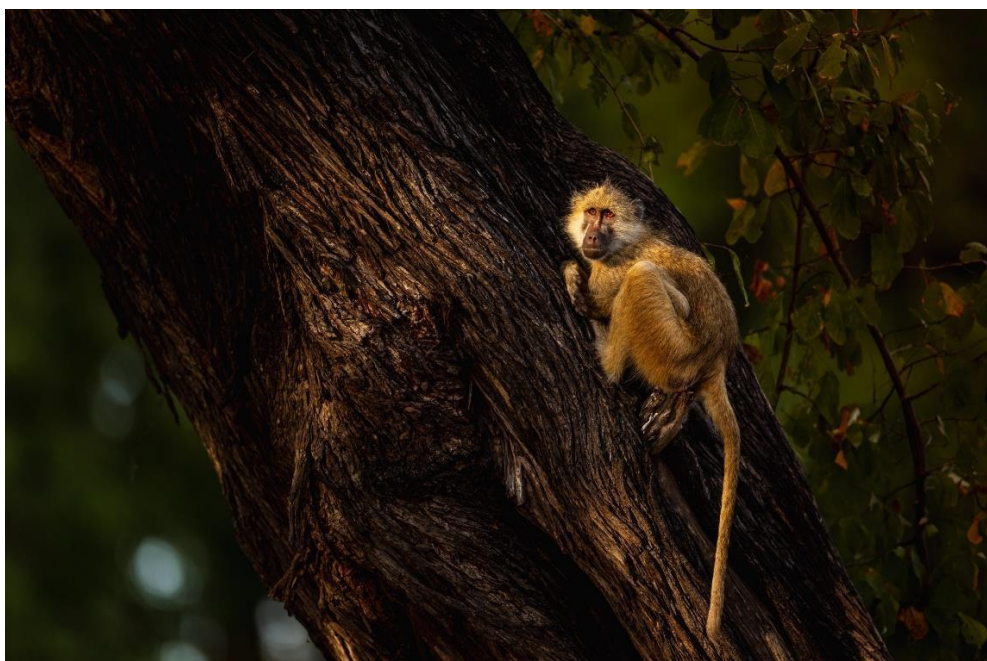
But the moment was short-lived. The cub, startled by our vehicle, froze, and the mother, sensing her cub's nerves, gently turned and disappeared back into the forest. It was the right moment to let them be. We moved on for a well-deserved lunch stop, still glowing from what we'd witnessed.



By the time we wrapped up our incredible leopard sighting and stopped for lunch, we'd already been out in the park for around nine hours on a proper full-day safari mission. But spirits were still high, we pushed on for a quick drink stop and a much-needed bush loo break before heading into the final stretch of the day.

Good thing we did because things were about to get good again.

As the sun began to sink lower in the sky, the shadows grew longer and the bush transformed with gorgeous light, first up a yellow baboon, perfectly posed in a pool of dappled light and shadow. It held still just long enough for us to get creative low-key compositions, moody framing, and a bit of experimentation that only works when the light and subject both cooperate.



Next, we found a Zebra, standing right on the edge of light and dark.

Conditions that I always look out for. Its contrasting stripes against the patchy light gave us the chance to play with more low-key photography, pulling the drama out of a simple, otherwise quiet scene.



But the real highlight of the afternoon came a little later, as we drifted into the Mushroom Lagoon forest. There, in a magical pocket of golden light, we found another troop of baboons.

This time, leaping, playing, feeding, and interacting among the trees. The setting couldn't have been

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better: sunlight filtering through the canopy, catching on fur, leaves, and dust in a way that made everything glow. We shifted from backlighting to front lighting, experimenting with angles and exposures, capturing moments.

One young baboon, clearly just as curious about us as we were about him, sat watching intently, tilting his head and studying our every move, as if trying to figure out what kind of strange troop we belonged to.



It was the perfect way to close out a long, exhilarating day in the bush, a creative finale to a safari that had already given us more than we could've asked for.

By the time we finally turned the vehicle toward camp, the sky was glowing orange and pink, and the forest was slowly slipping into silence. All of us were exhausted, memory cards full, so we headed back to camp for dinner.

**Tuesday 3 June 2025**

## **Day 7**

### **Coffee with Giants & Lions on the Hunt**

The morning began with a mission, heading toward the Chichele area to follow up on a lead about the wild dogs. Moods were high, as always when dogs are involved, but the route started rather quietly. That said, the bush always has its small treasures, and today it came in the form of a crowned hornbill, delicately plucking fruit from a tree, its curved beak silhouetted perfectly against the morning light.

As we pushed further along the track, the silence gave way to the movement of a series of elephant herds spread out across an open plain, munching on patches of fresh, green grass. Among them were some playful youngsters, ears flapping and trunks swinging as they were still trying to figure out how to use them.

We paused for our morning coffee stop, set up near a water source, and couldn't have asked for better company. In the distance, another herd of elephants slowly made their way toward us. With steaming coffee in one hand and a shortbread biscuit in the other, we stood quietly, soaking in the scene. There's something utterly magical about being on foot, watching elephants approach with nothing but the sounds of birds and crunching branches as they made their way in our direction.





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For the afternoon drive, we decided to explore further north, heading toward the boreholes we hadn't yet visited. The drive started slowly, a lilac-breasted roller added a splash of colour to the otherwise quiet bush, but overall sightings were sparse.



Borehole number two offered little, just an empty water pan. But borehole number one had a handful of saddle-billed storks, striking as ever with their vibrant beaks and statuesque presence. Still, it was clear the big action would need to be found elsewhere.



So we made the call to return to the Wafwa area to search for the Mfuwe Pride. Initially, we only located a single lion disinterested and half-asleep, tucked under a bush. But something told us the rest of the pride wasn't far. We circled the dense thicket, and just as we rounded a bend, boom, four lions emerged, almost right in front of us.





They strolled along the track, and we quickly repositioned to get ahead of them for some head-on walking shots. Unfortunately, the lions weren't reading the script. They veered off the road and flopped into another bush, ignoring the cameras and our carefully laid plans.

But Plan B was set into motion, we manoeuvred behind the bushy thicket, anticipating they might cross into a small clearing behind. The gamble paid off, with tight headshots in golden light, moments of social bonding, and quiet interactions between the lions as they reaffirmed their relationships with gentle nuzzles and tail flicks.



And then, like clockwork, they returned to the track, this time coming straight at us. We overtook them again, and it was worth every bump in the road. One young male stopped dead-centre in the road, bathed in the last soft glow of the day, striking a perfect pose. The kind of shot you dream of. A superb ending to what had started as a tricky, patience-testing afternoon.



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But the lions weren't finished.

As darkness fell, we stuck with pride two females and two younger males, now fully alert and picking up the scent of a nearby lone bull buffalo. What followed was nothing short of thrilling. We watched in near silence as the lions fanned out and charged, flushing the buffalo from the thickets and driving him into the open.

The lions lunged, circled, and tried to bring him down, but four just wasn't enough. The buffalo held his ground, fought back with determination, and eventually forced the lions to retreat.

Had the full pride been there, the outcome would likely have been different. But tonight, the buffalo lived to fight another day.

We made our way back to Flatdogs Camp, spotlighting our surroundings as we went. The return drive was mostly quiet, just a few hippos lumbering along the roadside and a couple of genets darting through the trees.

After such an adrenaline-fueled evening, we couldn't have asked for a better story to end the day on!

**Wednesday 4 June 2025**

## **Day 8**

Patience, Portraits & a Lion Finale

We set out at first light, making a wide loop through a known female leopard's territory, hoping for a glimpse of her or her elusive cubs. But today, she kept well-hidden.

Just as we were adjusting to the idea of a quiet morning, we stumbled upon a cool little scene, a group of roosting little bee-eaters, huddled together, waiting patiently for the morning sun to warm their wings. Their stillness, paired with the soft early light, made for some lovely, intimate photographs.





Afterwards, we swung by Tribal Textiles, a local shop to admire some of the region's stunning artisan work, and of course, made a quick stop at the quirky and charming Mulberry Mongoose for a bit of local craft shopping. Even the most seasoned wildlife photographers love a good handmade bracelet, especially when it is made from rescued poaching materials!

The afternoon drive began as the morning had been quiet. Our plan was to follow up on reports of a female leopard with two cubs, but once again, the cats stayed hidden in the dense bush. So we pivoted and headed toward the boreholes, where the Mfuwe pride had apparently been spotted that morning. And this is where the day completely turned around.

It didn't take long to find the lions, basking in the last warmth of the sun. As they began to stir, the classic lion behaviour started, grooming sessions, gentle face licks, lazy yawns that looked like roars.



We had a hunch they'd move to drink from the borehole as the temperature dropped, and like clockwork, that's exactly what they did. We had placed ourselves in the perfect position and watched in awe as the lions began emerging from the bush one by one, walking straight toward us.

Heads high, manes catching the low light, these were the money shots, the kind of images that do not come around often at all. It was a breathtaking moment, watching this pride move just meters from our vehicle.

What started as a quiet day ended in pure magic!



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Back at Flatdogs Camp, the evening took on a more relaxed vibe. We arrived early and gathered for a farewell sundowner around the campfire, cold drinks in hand, surrounded by good laughs, crackling logs, and stories from the week of some of our awesome sightings. I cannot believe it has all come to an end so fast!

The lions had given us a parting gift. Tomorrow will be our final full day in the Luangwa... but what a trip it has been so far.

**Thursday 5 June 2025**

## **Day 9**

### **Full Circle and The Final Encounters**

Our final full day in the Luangwa began with setting out once more through the territory of the local female leopard and her two mischievous male cubs. They had gone quiet recently, and we were keen to be the lucky ones to spot them reappear. But as it often goes with leopards, especially when they don't want to be found, they vanish!

Despite the elusive cats, the morning wasn't without its fun. We had some lovely encounters with a few feathered friends, a Marabou stork, a red-billed hornbill, and a crowned hornbill, all gave us moments of calm beauty and some great photographic opportunities.





With the leopard trail running cold, we decided to change our plan and head toward the boreholes, hoping to pick up the trail of the Mfuwe pride after last night's dramatic hunting attempt.

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No lions this time, but the fresh tracks in the dust let us know they hadn't gone far. Just when we thought our luck might be running out, the magic of the Luangwa struck one last time.

There, tucked into the shade of a thicket, were the same seven wild dogs we saw on our very first morning. It felt like the story had come full circle, as if the park was giving us one last wild wave goodbye. The dogs were initially fast asleep in the heat of the morning, but soon, they began to stir. One by one, they stretched, yawned, and ambled over to a nearby tree, seeking deeper shade and cooler ground. It wasn't a frenzied hunt or dramatic chase, but instead, a soft, subtle moment that felt just right to end our safari on.

A quiet final sighting... but rewarding nonetheless.



Friday 6 June 2025

## Day 10

### A Week in Wildlife Paradise

What an unforgettable adventure it's been here in South Luangwa National Park, a place that never fails to inspire and leave me speechless.

We began this tour with excitement, flying into the heart of Zambia's wilderness. From the moment we arrived at Flatdogs Camp, we were greeted by familiar smiles and warm welcomes. It didn't take long before we were tracking lions, scanning the treetops for leopards, and sipping morning coffees in the presence of elephants.

Across nine incredible days, we experienced the raw beauty and drama that this place has to offer. The legendary Mfuwe pride kept us on our toes with multiple sightings, sometimes dozing in beautiful light, sometimes on the hunt, and once even attempting to bring down a buffalo right in front of us!

Leopards, as elusive as ever, teased us all week, from a protective mother and her shy cub up north, to brief but memorable sightings in thick grass.

Elephant encounters were a daily treat, from playful calves to massive bulls, with one particularly magical coffee stop spent quietly observing a herd by the water whilst we were on foot.

And who could forget the wild dog sightings, finishing the trip with appearances on the first and last days, like it were supposed to have been the ending.

We also explored beyond the animals,

A heartfelt village visit allowed us to connect with the local community and share in the joy of photography with the local children.

A stop at Tribal Textiles and Mulberry Mongoose let us experience the creative heartbeat of the region, bringing a different kind of experience to the group and showing how much the local shops do for wildlife conservation in the area.

Photographically, the week was bursting with golden backlight, moody shadows, dramatic rim lighting, and those iconic wide-angle shots of wildlife against the landscape. Whether it was experimenting with low-key baboon portraits or capturing lions bathed in decent light, everyone had the chance to stretch their creative eye.

The trip wasn't always about high drama, there were quiet, calm moments too, the stillness of morning mist, the glow of a campfire sundowner, and the laughs we had all brought together by this photography tour.

And so, we zipped up our bags and said farewell to the Luangwa, heading off to Mfuwe airport to start our long journey back home.

Until next time, South Luangwa, thanks for the magic.



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