

Tour Report

Zambia – South Luangwa Photo Safari

6 – 14 November 2021

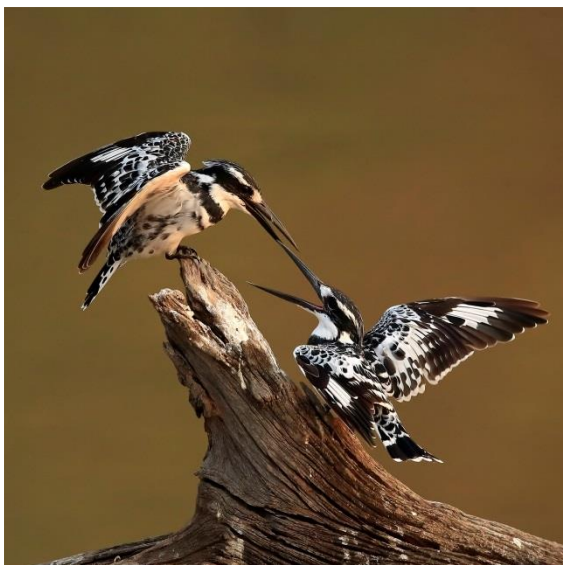
Male lion



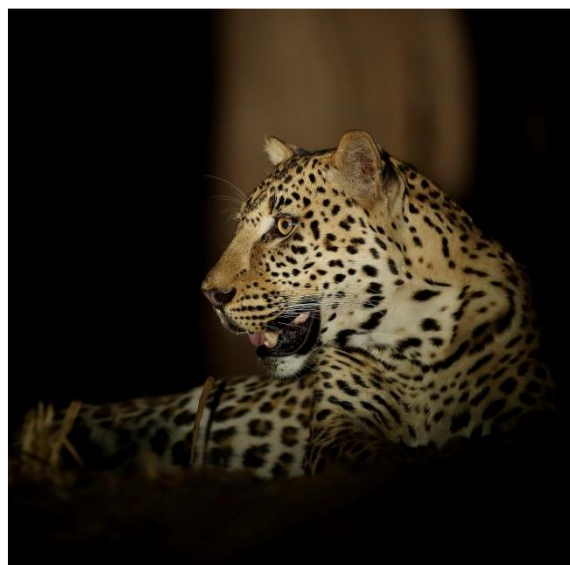
Yellow-billed stork with catfish



Squabbling pied kingfishers



Leopard



Compiled by Bret Charman

Tour Leader: Bret Charman

We had an incredible week in the stunning surrounds of Zambia's South Luangwa National Park. As well as countless lion encounters, we were privileged enough to see and photograph the African wild dogs on numerous occasions and leopard too. Furthermore the generic watching of both mammals and birds were exceptional and the photography opportunities throughout on offer were fantastic.

Days 1-2: UK to South Luangwa National Park

Saturday 6 & Sunday 7 November 2021

Some of us met at check-in and we caught up with the rest of the group at the departure gate. The group left the UK from both Manchester and London Heathrow on overnight flights and met one another at Lusaka before our onwards flight to Mfuwe. Due to a late departure from Dubai and some missing luggage we had a tight turn around before our flight to Mfuwe. Upon arrival at Mfuwe we were met by our guide for the week – Bwalya.

We drove the 40 minutes back to the warm welcome of Lydia at Flatdogs Camp before being shown to our safari tents and chalets. After a quick shower, we reconvened for our first starlit dinner and talked about what we could expect for our week in South Luangwa National Park.

Day 3: South Luangwa National Park

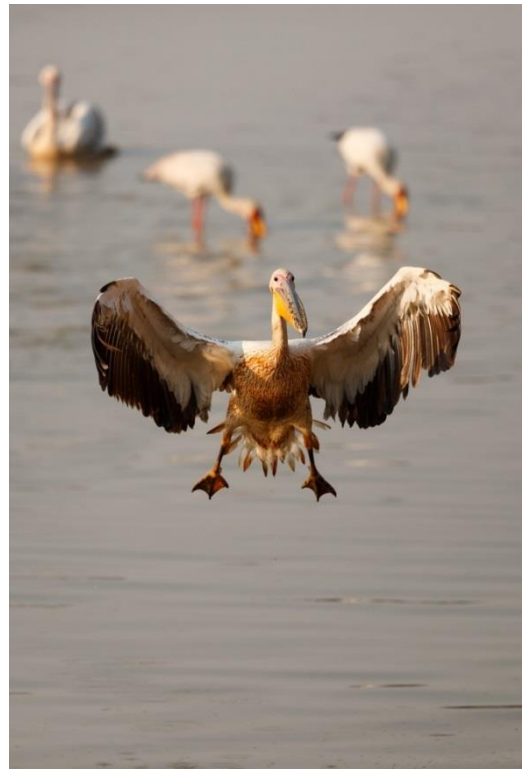
Monday 8 November 2021

As we sat for our early breakfast a family of Thornicroft giraffes moved past at high speed – an amazing start to the day.

It was our first day in the park and we headed across the bridge, wondering what may be in store for us. We were treated to our first hippos as they wallowed in the waters of the river far below, while a group of yellow baboons greeted us at the gate. As we approached Mfuwe Lodge we came across a lagoon filled with crocodiles, saddle-billed and yellow storks, water thick-knee and African jacana. Further on we saw a bearded woodpecker, Jamieson's fire-finch, blue waxbill and countless Cape turtle doves.

We moved on and saw plenty of impala, a few waterbuck, puku and our first Crawshay's zebra. Bwalya and I were commenting that we hadn't seen any elephant when a small group were only round the next bend. Continuing on to Wafwa lagoon we were treated to hundreds of great white pelicans, maribou and yellow-billed storks, as well as African spoonbill and a grumpy hippo.

As we started to make our way back, a lone impala ran past at high speed and Bwalya suggested that the wild dog might be about. However, we didn't see them and stopped, looking across the river only to see a yellow-billed kite land on a scrap of a carcass – then suddenly a hooded vulture appeared, then another and another. Before long a white-headed vulture and white-backed vultures were appearing all around us. It was a wild dog kill that we had only missed by a few minutes. We heard they were back the way we had come, so off we went to find them. We caught up with them – 21 dogs, including 6 pups, were chattering and resting. With the temperature already well above 30°C we decided to leave them in peace and head back for brunch. On our way we stopped for a posing lilac-breasted roller, trying to capture images of it as it took off in search of food.



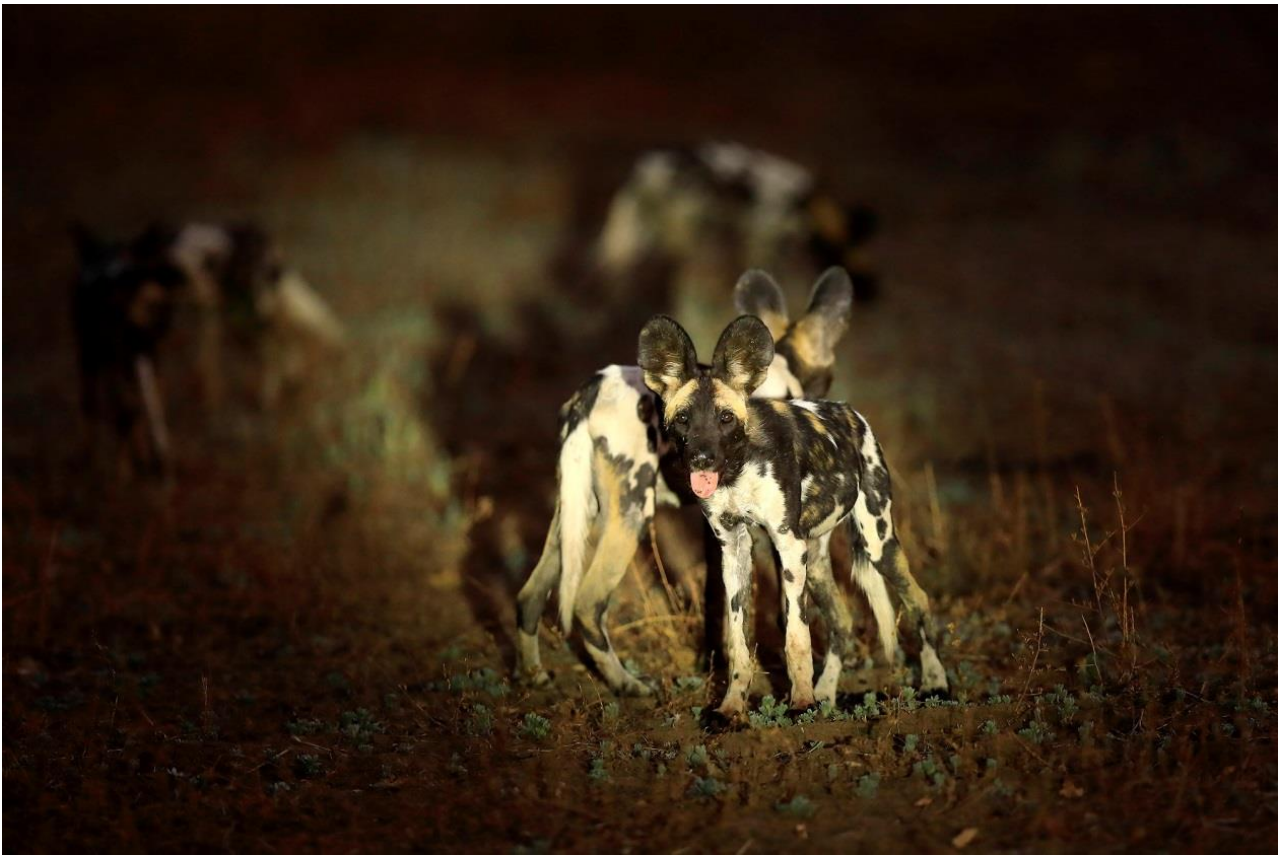
**Find out more about our [South Luangwa Photo Safari trip](#) or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com**

We arrived back at camp and settled down for our brunch, before returning to our tents for an escape from the midday sun.

This afternoon we headed out in search of two lions that had been seen mating earlier in the day, only to discover they were resting in the shade a fair distance from the track. After watching and waiting, hoping for some interaction (without success) we headed off towards where we left the dogs. However, on our way, we got side-tracked and stopped at the lagoon once more by Mfuwe Lodge. Here we saw a spectacular long-crested eagle sat on the ground, albeit at a fair distance and enjoyed seeing this striking bird of prey. There was a young crocodile sat on the bank in front of us and two beautiful malachite kingfishers decided to put in appearance. These were closely followed by our first water monitor as a saddle-billed stork fished in the shallow waters and water thick-knee called in alarm at the presence of our reptilian friend.

We finally moved onwards and as we approached the other side of Wafwa Lagoon – where we last saw the wild dogs, impala and puku ran in panic. Bwalya and I knew the dogs must be nearby and had likely made a kill. We drove on, following the gaze of the impala and suddenly heard the commotion of wild dogs feeding. We turned up to find the adults feeding on an impala foetus, and the pups feeding on the dead mother. We could only see half the pack though as they had seemingly made another kill a hundred yards or so away in the bush. It was an incredible encounter, without any other vehicles in sight. As the dogs moved off, another vehicle arrived and we swiftly moved on for our sundowners – they turned out to be more like moon-uppers though as we sat under the stars enjoyed an ice-cold gin and tonic, or soft drink for the rest of us.





We then slowly headed back towards camp, spotlighting and searching for any nocturnal species. As we passed through the thick bush and passed oxbow lagoons, we saw numerous hippos and 6 different genet.

We returned to camp after a long day in the field, an excellent introduction to South Luangwa National Park. A fantastic meal was enjoyed by all the group before we retired to our tents for a well-deserved rest.

Day 4: South Luangwa National Park

Tuesday 9 November 2021

Today started a little cooler than the day before and we were in the park just after 5.30 am. We headed to where we saw the lions the afternoon before, but they seemed to have gone deeper into the bush. We continued onwards towards the river and spent some time with a colony of carmine bee-eaters. Whilst photographing the bee-eaters Bwalya heard the tell-tale call of a Pel's fishing owl. There was only one thing for it – to see if we could find it. Sure enough within 5 minutes we had views through the thick canopy. A juvenile bird was calling to an adult, but on our arrival the adult fell silent and the youngster tried its best to remain out of sight. As we watched it in a second tree, a family of warthogs appeared in front of us before quickly disappearing again.

The predators remained elusive until we came across a lone hyena resting in the sand of a dry river bed. She moved into the shade, had a quick drink before making her exit. We moved on to the banks of the Luangwa once more, stopping for tea and watching some baboons work their way along the bank and an African skimmer making a fly-past. Bateleur eagles appeared overhead and a small snake posed nicely for the group. As we headed back to camp we came across the lioness that we saw the day before. Moments later, she was joined by another lioness and then the male came and sat right next to the vehicle. It was a great end to a quiet morning with some excellent photo opportunities too.

**Find out more about our [South Luangwa Photo Safari trip](#) or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com**



We headed out in to the park once more, first in and last out is usually our approach when staying in Flatdogs. We had heard that there was a female leopard with a kill close to Wafwa Lagoon, so we slowly made our way there. Upon arrival we found an impala carcass which had been cached 2 metres off the ground, not nearly enough to keep it out of reach of potential thieves. The leopard had already come down the tree, but we couldn't see her. Then within a few minutes, a spotted cat appeared around a hundred yards away, but quickly disappeared into a thicket. We waited for some time, hoping to catch a glimpse of the leopard. However, on this occasion she managed to elude us. The rest of the drive consisted of sightings of waterbuck, impala and puku. We continued northwards to the next lagoon where we enjoyed our sundowners watching hippos and a number of waders along the shoreline. After our relaxed drinks we headed back down along the river and explored some of the scrub habitat away from the river. We saw our first four-toed elephant shrew, numerous genets and even our first civet of the trip.

We enjoyed the area all to ourselves, before heading back to the spot where we last saw the leopard. Upon arrival, we quickly realised that the hyenas had stolen her kill and then with a huge amount of luck, she appeared on the bank in front of us. Surrounded by the hyenas, she decided to lay down and watch them feed on the last scraps of her kill. She posed perfectly in the spotlight, allowing the whole group to get a number of photos.

**Find out more about our [South Luangwa Photo Safari trip](#) or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com**



With that fantastic encounter, we headed back to camp on a high, and with time running out before the park shut. We made it through the gate with a minute to spare, returning to camp shortly after for a well-deserved dinner.

Day 5: South Luangwa National Park

Wednesday 10 November 2021

This morning we went out in search of the lions we had seen the day before. As we neared the area we heard the alarm calls of impala and found a whole pride sat in the morning sun. Within moments of arriving at the scene, a lioness got up and started to walk towards the river. With Bwalya's great skill we manoeuvred ahead of them and watched as they walked one-by-one, right past us to have a drink. We moved to the river bank to watch them drink when the large male sat atop of the bank. After quenching her thirst, another lioness settled further along the bank and sunned herself – proving to be the perfect photography subject. We then returned to the male, as the light wasn't yet too harsh. After a few moments, yet another lioness jumped up the bank to greet him. She tried to seduce him, but to no avail. Instead we watched as she circled trying to entice him to action. We were able to capture some fantastic images.



We then moved on, back to the north and stopped on the shore of Mushroom Lagoon. On our way we bumped into a large herd of buffalo, perhaps more than 300 individuals. At the lagoon we watched the hippos, African jacanas, egrets, geese, crocodiles and elephants in the waters covered with Nile cabbage. It is a beautiful spot and the perfect place to enjoy a tea or coffee and a home-made biscuit.

Before long, it was time to head back to camp. On our way we heard that the wild dogs had crossed the road only moments before, settling in the shade of Mfuwe Lodge, in the bed of the dry lagoon. We returned for breakfast, hoping we may catch a glimpse of the dogs in the afternoon.

Afternoon tea was quickly followed by our second game drive of the day. We headed to the area between the two lagoons, hoping to intercept the dogs or at least find where they had escaped the heat of the midday sun. We had no luck in finding them so instead spent some time photographing hippos feeding on Nile cabbage. We continued northwards along the river bank until we ended up near Chikunto. On our way we stopped to photograph some black-headed herons in fantastic light and saw our first African cuckoo. Hoping to photograph a colony of carmine bee-eaters, we stopped on the edge of the river, looking to enjoy our sundowners at the same time. As we started to climb off the vehicle, Bwalya spotted a lone male lion only a few hundred yards further upstream. We quickly hopped back on the landcruiser and made our way to where the lion was sunning himself. As we arrived, positioning ourselves to make the most of the warm even light, he decided to have a siesta. With no sign of any movement, we headed back downstream for our sundowners, watching herons fish and skimmers glide above the water's surface. The male lion didn't stir until after the sun had set and then called out for the rest of his pride. With no response he started to wander, most likely in the direction he last saw them heading. We briefly followed him before continuing on with our night drive back down towards the main gate. We came across a three-banded courser and young, a first for me and the group, before continuing onwards.

**Find out more about our [South Luangwa Photo Safari trip](#) or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com**



It was a relatively quiet night drive, with only a few genets making an appearance. That was until we got to Wafwa Lagoon. With the spotlight I noticed a hyena. Then I noticed a second hyena and a buffalo stuck in the mud. The hyenas started to circle, but didn't commit to any sort of attack. As we started to move away, we heard an almighty bellow, only to discover the hyenas had started to feed on the rump of the buffalo while it was still alive. We didn't stay long, the sight of an animal in such pain was too much and we quickly made our exit.

On our return to camp, we were treated to another fabulous dinner. The team at Flatdogs really are exceptional.

Day 6: South Luangwa National Park

Thursday 11 November 2021

We had heard of the lions we saw yesterday on a zebra kill, so this morning we headed back to see what we could find. We were one of the first in the park once again and were at the site while the sun was still low in the sky. We arrived to find the lions, but no sign of any kill. There were plenty of hooded vultures around, so there must have been a carcass nearby – it could have been cleaned up by a clan of hyenas in the night. We watched as Stumpy Tail (a very recognisable individual) repeatedly try to stir the rest of the pride into action. We then heard the alarm calls of baboon and hoped that Lucy – a habituated leopard – had wandered close by. There was no sign, so we returned to the lions to see if there had been any movement. Once again Stumpy Tail was striding away from the pride, half-heartedly stalking a bushbuck and some impala. After her failed attempt she settled in the shade and the rest of the pride decided to follow, walking within a few metres of our vehicle.

It was time to move on and we went to see what was left of the buffalo after the previous night's drama. Astonishingly, there was only the head and the ribs left, the rest of the carcass had been feasted upon by hyenas and vultures alike. In fact, one hyena, with a hugely distended belly, decided it could feed a little more and push its head through the chest cavity and out the other side. As the sun was starting to warm we drove along the lagoon to the river, where we hoped to find shady spot. On our way we came across a tiny impala calf, hiding beneath a tree. We only hope her mother wasn't too far away and she would be

Find out more about our [South Luangwa Photo Safari trip](#) or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

looked after. We enjoyed our teas and coffees with some yellow baboons and a couple of elephants for company, overlooking the meandering Luangwa.



After another excellent morning in South Luangwa and upon our return to camp, the group were treated to another fantastic brunch.

Meeting at our usual time of 3pm, it was time to head into the park once more. We had heard that where we stopped for tea this morning was very close to where the wild dogs had been spotted. So we headed around Mushroom Lodge and along the river bank to the well-known elephant crossing point. We searched for the dogs, but couldn't see them. We were about to give up when another vehicle told us they were last seen laying underneath the river bank in the dry river bed below. Sure enough, there they were. The whole pack was resting in the damp sand, trying to keep cool in the heat of the day. There were thunderstorms and rain showers nearby. The sun had been diffused and the worst of the day's heat had seemed to pass. We decided to stick tight and wait for the dogs to get up, or for the elephants to arrive at the crossing point and force them to move. A few vehicles came and then quickly moved on, seemingly losing interest as the dogs slept.

As the light began to fade, a loud rumble echoed through the trees. We had positioned the vehicle so we could watch the dogs, any elephants that may arrive and ensured we weren't in the way. A herd of elephants arrived and we knew the dogs would have to wake from their slumber. At first the elephants were nervous and unhappy with another vehicle that was blocking their path. However, once the vehicle moved away, the herd started to descend the steep sandy banks and down on to the drying river bed. As the elephants tentatively moved forwards, the dogs had already woken and were now playing together on the large sandy beach that lay before us. What happened next was really magical. There ended up being over 70 elephants and least 20 large bulls – some of which decided to chase and move the dogs away from the rest of the herd. We were blown away for around 45 minutes as elephants kept on appearing in front of us, while a few bulls continued to harass the wild dogs. It was among one of the most remarkable pieces of behaviour I have witnessed in the Luangwa Valley and it was all thanks to the patience and positioning by our guide Bwalya.

**Find out more about our [South Luangwa Photo Safari trip](#) or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com**



After such an adrenaline rush, we enjoyed a windswept sundowner overlooking the Luangwa River, marvelling at what had just happened. It is not often someone gets to experience something so magical on safari and it was still on everyone's minds when we continued on for our night drive. For the most part the night drive was quiet, except for numerous genets and one individual being particularly compliant. As we neared the park exit we spotted our first white-tailed mongoose, but that was soon trumped by a wonderful view of a Pel's fishing owl and its reflection in a small pool. It was then time to return to the lodge for another wonderful meal, discussing the magical encounters we experienced.

Day 7: South Luangwa National Park

Friday 12 November 2021

It felt hotter again this morning and today we were heading further south than we had been – right down to the plains in front of Puku Ridge. As we moved through the leopard known as Lucy's territory, we stumbled across the mating male and female lions. In fact, only moments after we arrived the two had an intimate moment together, right in front of our vehicle. They quickly moved back into the shade, and we decided that we would move on hoping to see a leopard. We actually heard numerous squirrels making repeated alarm calls – a good sign a leopard was on patrol – but no matter how hard we tried, we were unable to spot her. We moved on, heading further south and stopped on the river's edge, only to see a pack of nine African wild dog on the other bank. This was a different pack to the one we had already encountered. The sighting was distant but excellent none the less. We moved on once more, following the course of the river, searching for leopard. As the sun was climbing ever higher in the sky, so the heat started to build and before long we needed to find some shade and enjoy our morning teas and coffees. We stopped by a huge pod of hippo and enjoyed a number of little bee-eaters as they posed on the branches along the river bank.

We had a fair journey back to camp and after stopping to photograph a baby giraffe and a beautiful carmine bee-eater, we bumped into another vehicle. A leopard had been spotted back the way we came. After a quick U-turn, we arrived at the location only to see a leopard climbing down the tree and off into the thick scrub. We were unable to follow and started to make our way back north and towards our waiting brunch. On our way back we saw numerous elephants feeding under wild mango trees and enjoyed the

Find out more about our [South Luangwa Photo Safari](#) trip or [contact us](#)

01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

majestic giant baobabs found up above the flood plain. There were a couple of bateleur eagles that added an extra element to what was another fantastic morning in the park.

We regrouped for afternoon tea, with our game drive departing just before 3.30pm. We drove across the bridge as usual and went with the hope of searching for leopard. We arrived at one of the remnant lagoons, covered in Nile cabbage, where a large bull elephant was stood in the shallow water and we decided to stop and watch. It was absolutely magical. Sat under the shade of an ebony tree, parked on the edge of the lagoon, we were able to observe the elephant as it drank, plucked some cabbage from the water's surface and snoozed in the shade. All around us was a wealth of birdlife, including a fabulous yellow-billed stork, African jacana, sacred ibis, wood and common sandpiper and saddle-billed stork. Later we were joined by some Egyptian geese and across the water were puku and waterbuck. The bull elephant eventually left the water and started to stretch high up to the canopy of a tamarind tree, pulling down some leaves for an afternoon snack.



No leopard showed itself, and after searching some regular haunts, we were still unable to find our spotted quarry. Instead we headed towards Mfuwe Lagoon where an African fish eagle was perched on a branch and a monitor lizard was on the water's edge. Then we noticed a couple of perched pied kingfishers, which we spent a prolonged period photographing. The group captured images as the kingfishers squabbled and perched on a prominent log.



We were then joined by another kingfisher species – the malachite kingfisher. This diminutive species was not so easily photographed, but a welcome addition none the less. We moved onwards, heading to the river for sundowners and hoping a leopard showed along the way. Sadly no leopards emerged, so instead we made do with hippos, African skimmers and Nile crocodiles as we watched the sun disappear behind the clouds. Our night drive was fairly quiet, with only a few genets making an appearance. We returned to Flatdogs for a well-deserved dinner and enjoyed the cooling delights of a passing shower.

Day 8: South Luangwa National Park

Saturday 13 November 2021

It was noticeably cooler this morning and we were determined to find a leopard and hoped that Lucy may be the cat to deliver. We explored most of her territory, searching high and low in trees and on the ground, but to no avail. Instead we enjoyed a really charming scene as a group of warthog were unearthing roots, accompanied throughout by a number of Egyptian geese. The warthogs would launch sand into the air, disturbing the geese and creating some fabulous photography opportunities. After half an hour or so, we left them to carry on feeding and continued our search for leopards. Unfortunately we had no luck again this morning. However, we spent some time watching a timid family of elephants excavate from a salt lick and noticed one of the younger individuals had actually lost the majority of its trunk. It seemed as if it had grown up with the impairment as it was fit and healthy. It coped extraordinarily well when drinking from one of the spring's muddy pools. Our search continued in vain and we stopped in the shade of a sausage tree for tea and coffee before slowly making our way to Project Luangwa and Tribal Textiles in Mfuwe. After a little drama with a flat tyre, it was time to return to camp for brunch.

**Find out more about our [South Luangwa Photo Safari](#) trip or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com**



There was news that two male lions, accompanied by some females had brought down a buffalo up north in the park and we decided it was worth a visit. The light this afternoon was promising to be excellent and as we reached the area we saw a lioness panting in the shade. As we moved closer we realised there were another two females and a large male next to the carcass of the buffalo. The male took a disliking to a younger female, aggressively forcing her to move away and back into the thicket. Then the older lioness, which had been feed half-heartedly on the kill, started to move away from the kill, with the male quickly following suit.

They settled in the shade of another thicket where the male decided to make a large deposit before engaging in a spot of romance with the female. Another of the females started to move towards the river and it was apparent she was going for a drink. As this was going on, a group of hooded vultures were fighting over the scraps within the faeces of the male lion and dozens of black-headed herons flew overhead to roost. We moved to the river bank to watch and photograph the female quenching her thirst.



As more vehicles started to arrive, and the sun starting to set, we moved towards a spot to enjoy our last sundowners. On the way we watched a Wahlberg's eagle perched on a dead tree with the sun setting behind. It was another relatively quiet night drive with genets proving to be the highlight once more.

Find out more about our [South Luangwa Photo Safari trip](#) or [contact us](#)
01962 302086 sales@wildlifeworldwide.com www.wildlifeworldwide.com

It was our last morning in South Luangwa as a group and we went out to see if we could find a leopard. However, we had heard that a couple of lions had made a kill to the west of Mfuwe Lagoon and so we went to see it for ourselves. We arrived to find two small hyenas, most likely males watching a lioness from a distance. Moving closer to the kill, a young male lion was by the carcass, trying to move it into the shade and feeding on it too. After a fair bit of time, with the warmth of the sun slowly building, he decided to move into the shade and join the lioness. We decided to move on and head back towards prime leopard territory, in the hope that we may get lucky. As it happened we couldn't find any sign of Lucy or any other leopard, but we enjoyed some birding, including a handsome African goshawk. We moved back towards the bridge, stopping on the plains to photograph a number of red-billed oxpeckers feeding on the limbs and torso of a Thornicroft's giraffe. It was then time to stop for a cup of tea or coffee.



We started to make our way back to camp when we found a lone lioness under the shade of a tree. After a couple of minutes a warthog appeared only 20 yards away, but luckily it sensed she was there and made a hasty retreat. We returned to camp for another well-deserved brunch, before returning to our rooms as we prepared to make our departure. We met back up for afternoon tea, where two of the group were heading out on a private safari with Geoffrey, while the rest of us were waiting for our trip to Mfuwe Airport. The journey to the airport was smooth and comfortable and within minutes the rest of the group were checking in for their flight to Livingstone. It had been an incredible week in South Luangwa, filled with excellent sightings and some wonderful photography opportunities.

As I was leading more photography safaris in the Luangwa Valley, I stayed on at Mfuwe Airport, waiting for my next group to arrive and for yet another amazing week in Zambia's South Luangwa National Park.

Sign up to our e-news

Sign up to our e-news to find out more about our tours, events, late availability, offers and tour reports at <https://www.wildlifeworldwide.com/subscribe>