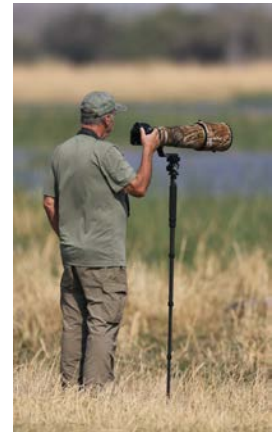
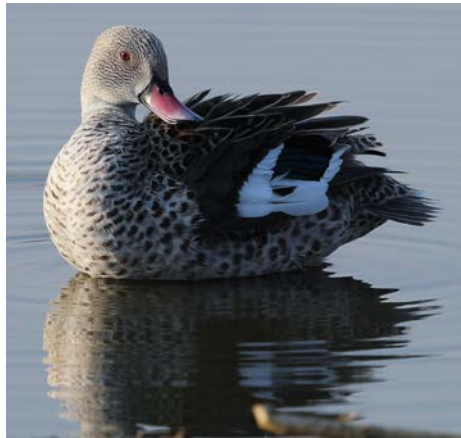


# Ultimate Botswana | Trip Report

September 6 – 22, 2019 | Written by Peg Abbott



**Guides Ewan Masson, Killor Serapelane, other local guides at lodges, Fabian on our cruise, with Peg Abbott of Naturalist Journeys and participants, Jan, Randall, Tina, Dennis, Bob, Marsha, Tim, Mary, Greg, Colin, and Elizabeth**





## **Friday, Sept. 6 Arrival in Maun | Botswana**

Our group arrived either earlier in the week or on two flights today. Veronica from Royal Tree Inn was waiting with a big smile to direct us to our drivers and soon we were underway to Royal Tree Lodge, a special place just outside Maun, a green and peaceful oasis.

The lodge has a large deck at the back, with tables and chairs in the shade, welcoming us to gather for birding. A White-browed Robin Chat joined a noisy batch of Hartlaub's Babbler and a lone Holub's Golden Weaver.

It was too hot to walk for long, so we took a short walk to a nearby pan holding water on the lodge's Yellow Trail. The walk was a great introduction to castle-like tall termite mounds, a variety of forest birds, and we had good views at a troop of Vervet Monkeys.

Dinner was hosted by the manager of the lodge, graciously welcoming us to share steak with veggies, and peach melba for dessert.

## **Saturday, Sept. 7 Royal Tree River Walk | Flight to Nxai Pan National Park**

We had the morning free in Maun, and Peg led a walk on the River Trail at Royal Tree. Despite there being almost no water in the river, we saw over fifty species of birds, many new for the group. A bird party, with Yellow-breasted Apalis, Green-backed Camaroptera, Pririt Batis, and a Fork-tailed Drongo which was mimicking a Pearl-spotted Owlet.

Dennis was kind enough to bring a mix of reading glasses and an eye-test chart. He helped them select the right strength for their eyes, all very well received by the staff who tried them on, leaving with glasses and a big smile. What a great idea!

At 11:15 a.m., we met our flight on Moremi Air, three small planes took us aloft over a dry forest expanse to touch down on the dust of Kalahari at Nxai Pan. Upon landing, two land cruisers were waiting as we arrived to the smiles of our guide teams: KB and Kaizer, Shoes, and Elvis.



At the lodge we were welcomed with cool towels to wash our dusty faces and offered a cold drink, before a briefing to the camp and time to settle into our casitas for some rest. Our rooms were simply gorgeous, spacious with high ceilings, a living room, open bedroom and shower area all with big glass doors opening to a deck – all facing the waterhole. You could see Elephants with babies at the waterhole, from our beds!

This afternoon we enjoyed a game drive, staying locally around camp and the close-in waterhole. It was great to just park and watch the behavior of our first Elephants, giants drinking and mud-bathing with smaller Warthog braving the maze of legs to get a drink. A pair of Tawny Eagle patrolled the area and Helmeted Guineafowl were there by the score.

Dinner was served with lovely presentation after cocktails around the campfire, a beef tip sliced and tender, chicken, vegetables, and other dishes. We did not linger long, wanting some rest after an exciting day.



## Sunday, Sept. 8 Morning and Afternoon Game Drives from Nxai Pan

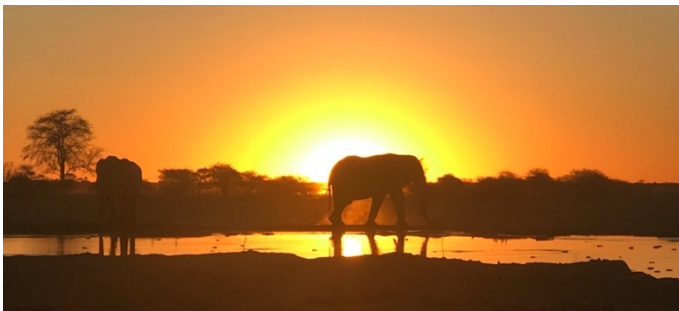
An early wakeup call was in order as this was the Kalahari Desert, important to be out before it got too hot. The only crux was it was cold, seriously cold, at dawn in the vehicles. Peg asked for extra blankets so in addition to our fleeces we could bundle up.

Breakfast was served by the campfire, with cereal, oatmeal, delicious homemade muffins and toast. We had a view of the waterhole by camp, and we spied a lone Spotted Hyena as the sun rose.

Our plan was to drive direct to the larger waterhole about 12 kilometers away, but the plan ended soon as there was just too much to see! For many of our group it was a first day in Africa, first Giraffe, first Zebra, Ostrich and more. Even for the veterans it was just too much fun to view such life amid what seemed like a very parched environment.

The waterhole held a scene almost unimaginable, beauty defined by the multitude of species, Kudu, Zebra, Springbok, and Ostrich, then Giraffe. It was as if you layered the patterns and those wed to their cameras could not stop clicking. On top of the beauty of layers, there were perfect reflections of those at the water's edge. Jan loved the face patterns of Springbok. We all marveled at the three Giraffes drinking, stretching their legs out in yoga-like positions, two at a time, but leaving one to keep an eye.

Our poor guides kept suggesting we might like to return for brunch, finally they had to insist. En route we saw an Impala with one horn, hanging out with a small band of Springbok. They explained it probably had locked horns in a male to male battle, the break likely saved its life but cut its future breeding tenure short. Lunch was quite a spread, with a typed-up menu to tell us about all the dishes. Cold drinks and time to relax was most welcome. After lunch there was a shopping frenzy for warm clothes – fleeces, hats and scarves!





At 3:30 p.m. we met for tea, though after a huge and late brunch we mostly ignored the lovely cakes.

The afternoon highlights were many. Characteristic of the arid Kalahari, we found White-quilled Bustards - two black males in a group of females, and again we tallied over a dozen Kori Bustard. We enjoyed sunset with elephants and three Giraffe, elegantly walking in a line, their time for water.

Back at camp we made ourselves at home, helping ourselves to sundowners, and sitting by a cheery campfire with Jan asking highlights of our day, there were many!

Dinner was Thai chicken curry, steamed broccoli, butternut squash, and for dessert, bread pudding – yum!

## **Monday, Sept. 9 Morning and Afternoon Game Drives from Nxai Pan Camp**

Yesterday was such an amazing day that we elected to skip what sounded like a long drive, with current rutted road conditions to the Baines Baobab scenic area and to stay locally, looking for more birds and other wildlife. The morning passed all too quickly. We met at sunrise for breakfast around the campfire, that first cup of good, strong coffee or tea most welcome in the morning chill. Two Spotted Hyena were at the water hole as first light let us see, as well as a pair of Black-backed Jackal which had woken many of us this morning with their yapping.

We aimed for the waterhole, hoping to check for Lion activity, but once again got involved in various wildlife sightings before even getting there. We had a great pair of Bat-eared Foxes, not close, but curled up with each other in what looked like a possible den-site, KB had seen them digging as we first arrived. They looked like they would lie there for some time, so we moved off, finding jackals and Springbok, Wildebeest.

Near the waterhole we found a big group of Impala, fifty or more with a big male. Our guides had heard their alarm calls as the male Lion moved through, but they were relaxed by the time we arrived.

Many birds were about, often we stopped to scan, or to study the smaller species. Our morning rest stop was again very productive, with Bradfield's Hornbill and Pearl-spotted Owlet being sighted again, along with a pair of beautiful Green-winged Pytilla. We parked and served tea, finding small birds like Brubru and Southern Cordonblue.

The waterhole was as active as it was yesterday, but with a different mix of species. Three giraffe, one very big male, and two younger and smaller females were there, making all the other species look so small. There were male Kudu, two magnificent spiral antlered individuals joining several females. Duos of mother and good-sized young Zebra had perfect reflections as they drank from the shore. Wildebeest got on their knees to lean down,





while Springbok seemed to choose locations, they could lean in to drink. There was constant motion, interwoven with the dust-mop flapping feathers of the ostrich.

Driving back in, Kaizer spotted a Secretary Bird and we watched it strut down a road running parallel to us. We tried to position over to that one for a closer look, but it veered off, staying about 300 meters off but in plain view, we enjoyed watching how easily it covered ground.

Back at the camp, Scaly Weaver and Kalahari Scrub Robins fed close to our cottages, finding abundant seed. Peg had a Scimitarbill show up to pick insects from the bark of the tree over her outside shower. There were thirty or more Elephants at any one time at the waterhole, groups and individuals came and went, one with a very small baby. It was like having an outside lawn party always in view, this one a brown and dusty scene with some Elephants pasted in chocolate coats of mud. Young ones sparred and squealed, we could hear splashing and an occasional short trumpet. A lone Warthog trotted up and down busily as if inspecting the herd, while Zebra waited on the sidelines, hoping for a break to come in.

## **Tuesday, Sept. 10 Final morning in Nxai Pan | Flight to Maun**

This morning several of our group did a walk with two of the staff that demonstrated survival skills of the Bushman. The walk took place in the general area of camp, and one side-highlight was seeing a Honey Badger back by the staff area, scavenging. Dennis told about the Wild Sage use as a scent they would apply to not be detected when hunting. They found Cheetah and Spotted Hyena, recent tracks, leaving the camp. Shoes and his nephew opened up a bag of tools and talked about the function of each, including how they poison the arrow tips. The arrow is a shaft with no feathers to be used at close range, a slow working toxin so hunters must track and follow the animal. Shoes told the myth of how fire was given to the people from the Ostrich. They lit a fire just using sticks rubbed together. In his culture, if you can't light a fire with sticks, even today you won't get a wife. They sang to ancestors as they spun the wood fibers.

We had a few under the weather that had to rest, but six of the group went out on a game drive, back at the same waterhole but on a big loop. Almost immediately they found two Bat-eared Fox at closer range than before, making the photographers happy. Again, they saw about 15 different Kori Bustards, and a few other birds we'd see in far fewer number in Moremi, Scaly Weaver, Sabota Lark, and Capped Wheatear. Bob spied a Golden-tailed Woodpecker, and several of the group were able to get good views!

At the waterhole it was originally pretty quiet, six big Ostrich moving about with Black-backed Jackals nearby. Tim cried out, "they are running" as he spotted a big herd of Wildebeest coming at speed. In a chaotic procession of dust, legs, and hooves they got to the edge, dropping to their knees to drink. Others pushed right on through. If the scent of Lion from the night previous was there, it did not distract their mission to drink. They filed through and after some minutes ran back where they'd come from, less urgently but still making good

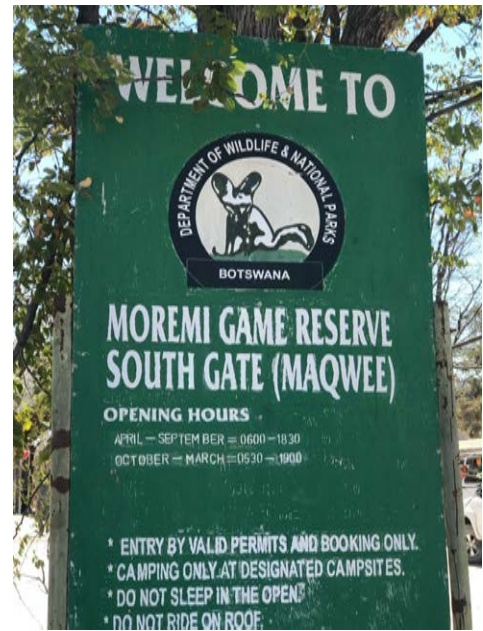


time. Springbok came in to take their place. We had to tear ourselves away from this beautiful spot, for we had a plane to catch.

Back to the lodge, time to eat brunch and thank the gracious and lovely staff that had made our time very special. The chef was of high-quality and the food variety fantastic. Teddy the manager had to chase off Elephants from drinking from the swimming pool (and busting up the deck in the process) between greeting guests and guiding various activities, he did it with ease. Our guides and trackers were four: Elvis and Shoes one team, and KB and Kaizer the other. Keen-eyed and eager to share information, they made our time enjoyable and were responsive to our wishes to maximize wildlife sightings. Even en route to the airstrip they were spotting birds, and as our plane glided aloft (the BIG plane came for us, a Mack Air 12-seater, pretty deluxe!) they grinned and waved us goodbye.

We landed in Maun and scattered to the pharmacy, the ATM and back to our lodge. Located on the river, there were shade trees but no water in the river, one African Openbill clung to a small puddle in hopes of finding crabs. We took advantage of Wi-Fi, repacked for the main safari, and enjoyed drinks on the deck.





## Wednesday, Sept. 11 Maun to Moremi National Park

We left Maun at 8 a.m., loading our gear into the Land Rover and Land Cruiser that we would use as our safari vehicles for the week ahead. Our guides Ewan Masson and Killor Serapelane greeted us. The first hour we traveled was on paved road, and we made good time up to the Buffalo Fence. This demarcation between wild land and agricultural zones, controversial, is deemed necessary by the Botswana government to protect the export status (Hoof and Mouth disease free) for beef in a country wanting a more diversified economy. We had seen Elephants shy of the fence and learned that in their present high numbers they are breaching it and breaking through, other animals following. Challenges of living with large and dangerous wild animals are many. But we were off to be among the animals, leaving all cell signals and Wi-Fi behind, we would have six nights of camping in Moremi Game Reserve, one of Africa's most significant parks.

We saw Giraffe, Zebra, and Steenbok, also a troop of Vervet Monkeys. The South Gate had new signage about the conservation initiatives of all countries surrounding the Okavango Delta that must work together in concert, both on water and wildlife migration issues. The headwaters are in Angola, and flow through Namibia en route to Botswana. There were signs asking us to report and contribute photographs to the ongoing Wild Dog studies. A sightings board report Leopard at two locations, all good ways to spur our excitement and curiosity.

We made a direct beeline up to Khwai, stopping for a picnic at the gate. Mary picked out a lovely basket for sale here, made by local people. Our first Red Lechwe came into view as we found water. The drought here is serious, no rains since March and little flow from Angola in the vitally important summer months of July and August as usual. Okavango depends on both rain and a slow, extended flow (much like that of the Everglades), to keep its systems in harmony. We would find concentrations of animals at each water feature visited.

Our vehicles split up to get to camp, one following the river and the other heading inland. The inland crew found fresh sign of Leopard activity, a Warthog draped over a tree branch at least 20 feet high, wow! The river crew spotted our first Pied Kingfisher among other species. We reached camp, settled into our tents, had a quick tea and coffee, and went back to the nearby Hippo Pools to watch sunset and wildlife. We were parked, combing through various wading and shorebirds, Pink-backed Pelican and listening to the chortles of grunting Hippos, ready for those perfect shots when Patrick's voice called to Ewan, "Dad, Dad, Dad – Wild Dogs just came through

camp and are headed your way”. Twelve of us quickly got into vehicles and went off with hopes – success! We were both able to see a big group with 13 puppies. We were able to watch the adults come in belly-full of meat. They would bend and relinquish it to the twittering calls of this happy, youthful mob still sustained by adult’s regurgitation. It was great fun to watch them try to corral the happy pups. In the fading twilight we followed them just a bit, at one point one ran right past the car. A magical start to our time in Moremi!

## **Thursday, Sept. 12 Khwai Camp Moremi National Park**

We woke to the sounds of Spotted Hyena just outside camp, and over breakfast compared notes on what else was heard in the night. Greg had Hippo right next to his tent, two males unhappy with each other’s company at a grazing spot. Trina reported Lion sounds. After a quick breakfast and tea and coffee, out we went.

We headed in the general direction we’d left the Wild Dogs last night, but their tracks pointed to dispersal back inland. With nothing obvious, we instead followed recent sign of a very fresh large male lion. We found him regally resting on a grassy mound, his two companions nearby. Ewan told us that male coalitions like this were the main social pattern for males in Botswana, females and young were visited but males stayed off on their own, not bonding with females as they do in other parts of Africa. These three clearly bonded and Ewan said they had followed them since they were cubs. Now 8 or 9 years old, they were in their prime. One had scars on his rear, another a healed eye wound, but otherwise they were fat, and lazy. Like cats they made exaggerated yawns and stretches, sitting up just before cozing into the best, prone position. Mary described two as spooning, one draping its big leg and paw over the other as they slept. They were absolutely stunning in the dawn light and for some time we had them all to ourselves. Ewan likes to camp far from the main gate so by camping we get out early and this was a fine example as to why that pays off. In the background of this scene were Red Lechwe, a water feature with Gray Heron, Black-necked Stilt, Blacksmith Plover and Wood Sandpiper. A Maribou Stork stood steadfast like a respectful undertaker, doing little but watching.





We moved on to see what else might be out there as watching sleeping lions was making us want to join them for a nap. Not very far there was intense action, a Leopard had just killed an Impala. The first vehicle at the scene watched it haul the carcass up into the base of a termite mound and shade tree. It seemed shy when the second vehicle came, moving off to seek security and shade, not so far away that we could not see its blood-strewn face. It licked and licked, rested until we moved off and then returned to its kill. Wanting to let it feed, we moved off and would return to check it later.

The rest of the morning we drove in and out of small water areas, then out to parched and dry forest adjacent to it, also grassy plains. We saw Tsessebe, Greater Kudu, and numerous Warthogs. Two Warthogs were totally engrossed in wallowing, coming out of the dense mud we named them “Chocolate Warthogs” as they did look dipped. Elephants were around as well, family groups, some two-toned showing they had also been in the water. Birding highlights included a Black Crake and Squacco Heron at our tea break, White-bellied Sunbird, White-headed Black (Arnot’s) Chat and a pair of Bennett’s Woodpecker. We came into a small flock of about a dozen Carmine Bee-eater, their magenta and turquoise colors something to behold.

Back at camp we had lunch (pasta, meatballs, fresh salad and homemade bread, warm out of the dutch oven) and did our checklist. Some read, others made notes, took showers or naps. Bob spied a Gabar Goshawk passing on the edge of the clearing, not far from our table.

At 3 p.m., tea and coffee was served, and 30 minutes later, we were out again. Tim kept our track each outing on his GPS app on the phone, it was fascinating to trace our wanderings, not unlike those of the animals we were hoping to see. We found a herd of Zebra quite close by on the open plain we’d crossed several times. They were feeding on the coarse grasses and we could study the wide variation in coat pattern, narrow to wide, brown to black striping, each one unique. Several had grooming buddies and stood nose to tail nibbling each other’s spines.

This part of the Khwai River system is a matrix of green and brown, with wet patches now concentrating a host of species. African Sacred Ibis joined stately Saddle-billed Storks to dig in thick mud, alongside African Openbill





looking for crabs and frogs. Little Bee-eaters lined up two by two on stems of the small shrubs that dot the plains. There were herds of Lechwe, and being afternoon Impala poured out of the woods, heading to drink at the pools or the main channel of the river. Elephant families did the same, one group had many young babies. One matriarch was unhappy about Killor's vehicle and stared it down. He tried to respectfully pass, and it gave forth a loud trumpet, heard by the other van and for those close by, impressive! Satisfied the threat was gone, this big female went back to feeding among her clan.

We saw several Slaty Egrets, a specialty of the area. African Jacana waded about on impossibly long feet and the largest member of the coucal family here, the Coppery-tailed, put on a good show feeding in the marshy area in full sunlight. A highlight for many this afternoon was time to watch a pair of Wattled Crane, an endangered species emblematic of the Okavango. They could be seen a long way away, but we made our stay closer to park across from them, watching the probe sweet tubers to feed on. They often walked in unison, choreographed motion like a dance – Beautiful!

En route back, we found a pair of Groundscraper Thrush, helping us to id the beautiful call we'd heard at dawn in camp earlier in the day. We were admiring their spotted breasts when we heard the vehicle ahead had once again spotted Wild Dogs! It was the same pack, this time only the adults, at least ten of them fanning out across the open plains, on the move and hunting. We watched Kudu go into full alert, then a group of Impala, but the dogs stayed spread out, moving quickly. It was remarkable to watch them fill the grassland space, so determined, so attentive to one another. Several had collars,

part of the Wild Dog project, one a satellite collar. We felt abundantly fortunate to encounter them two days in a row, today getting the wide view of their behavior at a distance, so at home in this broad, open landscape, working the edge of savanna and forest.

We could not eek another hour of daylight out of this grand day. Home to dinner, an absolutely delicious one-pot lamb stew, fresh carrots and cauliflower, potatoes and more. Ewan poured the wine and conversation flowed – though few lingered by the fire afterwards, tucking in after a very full day.

## **Friday, Sept. 13 Moremi National Park | Khwai River**

We set out early, first marveling at a setting full moon and then a blood red sunrise. Such riches to start the day! Again, we were the first vehicles out, and in almost no time we found the Lion trio we'd seen the previous day and heard about 3 of them passing right by our camp. Their big broad footprints led the way. We had golden light on their black and tan manes for some time while they were alert. Having been on patrol of their territory



all night they were ready to sleep. There was no visible sign that they had fed, but with prey so abundant here it would not be difficult for them.

Next up was a surprise and a thrill, a female leopard we encountered on a road, that had an interest in a small group of Tsessebe feeding across from her. She was well hidden in tall grass and just sat down, totally attentive to them. She stayed alert but also groomed, perhaps displacement for the waiting she'd have to do. This group however, unaware of her, moved off in the wrong direction, out into open terrain where she could not hide. She gave up on those and threaded through a small maze of vehicles that had gathered, remarkably unconcerned. At one point she came straight towards our vehicle, Peg caught it on video and many on cameras – it was a National Geographic moment indeed. We watched her walk up to a termite mound to scan the surrounding plains, then in no hurry she looped back to the way she'd first headed, and for us was gone out of sight.

We continued on, finding all three species of francolins: Red-billed, Swainson's and a lone Crested. Magpie Shrikes called from the trees, and common, Lilac-breasted Rollers in flight caused everyone to admire them. We found both Little and Carmine Bee-eaters with ease.

Ewan headed over to a campsite to pour tea and coffee, but as the second vehicle headed that way, Killor spied another Leopard! We could not believe it, another female, this one larger than the last. Right behind her, a second – a very large male. We think she may have been on a kill and got frightened off, while he was tolerant, she was shy. She made a huge circle, a half mile or more, around us, we watched them all the way. He kept her scent in the tall grass, occasionally she'd pause to look back. Now the mystery of how that first Warthog we'd seen pulled up into the tree was eaten in entirety in only 2 hours – likely it had fed two, not one lone cat. Passing around by that kill (by now we'd missed tea...) we found a Tawny Eagle and an immature Bateleur, feeding on the only part remaining, the head with tusks, down on the ground.



Ewan's van had some birding highlights as we cat-watched, a Verreaux's Eagle Owl, and a Red-headed Weaver, a bright male, in the same tree! We all got to see Hamerkop, the first of the trip, surprising for the number of huge stick nests we had seen. We had a second pass by the Wattled Cranes as we were in the neighborhood and found with them male and female Saddle-billed Storks. Elephants feeding and drinking were common throughout the day.

Back in camp Black-collared Barbets and Arrow-marked Babblers hung about the kitchen area, hoping for some scraps. We took turns taking individual showers, as these proved to be such a refreshing boost to the day. There were two shower tents, and for each new round the guys hung up a fresh bucket of water, with a control spigot on it, giving plenty enough even for our long-haired ladies to rinse with ease.

We had lunch – today a variety of sausages, pickles, potatoes and fruit. Time for naps, a few did hand-laundry, others read or caught up on trip notes. Peg did the trip list each day at this time with those that wanted to participate.

This afternoon was a more mellow drive, local to the camp, passing by Hippo Pools to sort out and admire the birds and then into the woods to where we found a resting male Lion, and for one vehicle, a lone Wild Dog. Still predators every day!

The Hippo Pools held a good variety of species and the afternoon light seemed to make them glow. Yellow-billed Storks showed the pink coloration they get in breeding season. African Skimmers fed by skimming the water. Along the shoreline we sorted out Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper, Ruff, Water Thick-knee, a Marsh Sandpiper and Common Greenshank. Later in the day Ewan's vehicle added two plovers to that list, Kittlitz and Chestnut-banded, the latter a very local species and not one easy to find.

We came and went via the wet margin of the river, where two regal Saddle-billed Stork fed at close range. Back to camp, where we enjoyed Chicken Schnitzel, cooked carrots and other vegetables for our dinner, after we had fun conversation and libations by the fire. Off to bed under the Full Moon, lots of light to see around camp. We slept well and later learned a Leopard had come through in the night!

## **Saturday, Sept. 14 Moving Day to Khwai with Boat Trip at Xakanaxa**

This would be the longest day of our trip but one so rich in wildlife no one minded time spent. We packed up and left camp early, stopping to glance at waterfowl at the Hippo Pools. Some giant Nile Crocodiles lined up on the shore, while Hippos sounded off spraying water like the blow holes of whales in the middle of our view.



We drove through the Mopane, some very old trees giving the landscape an ambiance some described as feeling similar to that of an eastern US oak forest. The patterns of shade and the open understory were park-like. At Paradise Pool the water table had flooded into the forest, and here in quiet water we found Marsh and Wood Sandpiper, African Spoonbill, and our first Malachite Kingfisher – so colorful, Peg described it as jewelry on the wing, sharp-eyed Greg found this one. We could barely tear ourselves away from here but later found out that Killor’s vehicle had also had a treat and they spent the time with a Spotted Hyena. He made sounds that attracted it, stopping it in its tracks as it moved away. It looked around and he explained to all, “I’m telling it I’ve found some food”. We had heard hyenas often at night in camp, but this was the first daylight sighting.

Our two vehicles met back up at the boat dock, but first along the way those in Ewan’s vehicle watched a remarkable scene where two persons were stuck in fear in their small camper truck, not acting to drive away as an Elephant approached. It was a big bull and he walked right into their camp, crunched through some boxes and crushed furniture they had left outside, sniffing a bit at the table. It then approached the truck, sniffing, then with its tusks actually tearing off the roof rack! We could hear it tear as he lifted it up and could only imagine what the two inside were feeling. Not finding anything immediately edible, it sauntered off, two of our group caught the whole thing on video.





By 9 a.m. we were gliding up the channel, a true river of grass like our Everglades. On either side, marsh dry grasses and reeds were above our heads, and soon clumps of tassel-headed Papyrus made for green contrast. One of the first species we found were Chirping Cisticola, Peg urged it out of the dense vegetation by playing with its song, and it perched well for us to view. We'd see four or five others in this habitat they call home. We also saw two early migrants, with a little luck, seeing them well and hearing them call, two Common Whitethroat. There were Coppery-tailed Coucals shining in the sun, almost the same color as the back of African Pygmy Goose, several pair of which we saw in the first area that had blooming water lilies. African Darter were common, as were Long-tailed (Reed) Cormorant.

A big memory of the day for all were face to face views of Elephants, in our water channel. Some gave way readily, but two actually challenged us. For the big one, our skilled driver and guide, John, backed up and gave way. The other was a youngster, which flapped its ears and bellowed at us from a distance while safely tucking between two big matriarchs. They looked so content, cool in the water, feeding on grass tops and water lily tubers. We passed quite a few, always at eye level watching them move and feed.

We went a long way, perhaps 15 km or so, taking a break on an island for a picnic lunch. They set out several luscious cheeses, fig and cheddar, brie and stilton, crackers, seeded bread and meats to make sandwiches, even horseradish – very satisfying. Peg enticed some birds and we were happy to find Greater Honeyguide, a Gabon (Swamp) Boubou, numerous babblers, a White-browed Robin-Chat, and one pair of Terrestrial Brownbul. We looked for Pel's Fishing Owl, seen at this spot this very week, but found only whitewash at its favorite perches. This is one elusive species!

Photos of Xanakaxa boat trip, there are many – group members at lunch on an island and elephants in water channel Maribou stork on roost, Chirping Cisticola, Long-tailed Cormorant with fish, group on the boats

At an adjacent lagoon we watched Maribou Stork greeting, carrying nest material, and courting as they commenced the rookery's breeding season. A few Hadada Ibis joined them. As we navigated the channel back, this time going with the current, there were fewer Elephants and we made good time. We had excellent looks at



a male Common Reedbuck, and a thrill was seeing a very elusive and local mammal, the aquatic antelope Sitatunga. This was Peg’s first in four trips to Botswana and we had good looks at its coarse, rich brown coat, a female.

Ewan was waiting for us at the dock having stayed with all our gear. We continued driving to our second camp, passing around Fourth Bridge which is no longer functional. We passed Third Bridge (passable) and then Second, laughing at the “No Speeding, 5T limit” sign as its quite a wreck. There was water all through here, and we had fun checking some of the pools. We found Cape Teal (out of range but present in most years of our trips), Hottentot Teal and White-faced Whistling Ducks. Driving past a junction, Bob and Peg noticed two ears sticking out of a den-like mound – Stop! We backed up and kept getting only peeks, finally had two looks at the full face – an Ardwolf! A very shy, normally nocturnal termite feeder, this was a lucky find.

Patrick was there to greet us at camp. Everything was ready for us and in just minutes we were around the fire with gin and tonics, wine or sodas, talking about our day. Peg carefully tallied the extensive bird list before cocktails as we’d not caught this up until lunch the next day when we had more light.

For dinner we had a beef stew and an alternate vegetable choice, over a local starchy dish, fresh salad and cooked fresh squashes. For dessert, very fresh papaya, yum!

## **Sunday, Sept. 15 Moremi National Park | Mboma Island Camp**

We settled into this new camp quickly. Our “morning, morning” wakeup call found many still sleeping soundly. Fiery-necked Nightjars serenaded us just outside camp. Soon we were in the vehicles and out for sunrise, today a gorgeous red due to smoke in the air – fires in the distance somewhere.

Close to our camp was a series of grassy open areas we nicknamed the Cheetah Plains, as habitat looked just perfect for this cat we hoped to see. We scanned repeatedly, but also noticed prey was slim. While we saw Swainson's Francolins, Zebra stallions calling, and some lovely male Kudu feeding on Kalahari Apple trees, we did not find any cats, or any predator larger than Black-backed Jackals today. We did however have a 75 + species bird-rich day, and we enjoyed getting to know this new area. There were well-watered sections acting as oasis, just teeming with life. Red Lechwe gathered in number, and in time we had Zebra, Impala and Elephants all coming into drink. One rogue young male Elephant fanned his ears and chased most of the other mammals away.

The variety of birds was terrific, and over the time we had drinking coffee and tea here, we found several new species. Peg got very excited to find Lesser Jacana, having bruised her eyeballs looking at so much suitable habitat yesterday on the boat trip with no success. Here in this small permanent water oasis there were two. We watched them feed and fly and even got some nice photographs. Looking across the pond she also noticed a heron "tenting", our first Black Heron of the trip was mantling its wings as it fished. Greg spied the world's tallest heron, the Goliath and we all admired this giant as it stood taller than the antelopes near it and then took flight. All around us Carmine Bee-eaters flew like swallows, landing at times close to our vehicles on small shrubs or even Elephant turds. The color show was something else, especially when joined by Lilac-breasted Roller. We could compare Great, Intermediate and Little Egrets, Slaty Egrets, and Sacred Ibis appeared as well. Dennis and Tina pointed out a very regal African Fish Eagle perched majestically on a dead snag in the middle. An African Darter (*Anhinga rufa*) fanned its wings atop a small termite tower, stunning in the sun. Several kept saying, 'This is an African scene I have only imagined before', so full of birds and mammals, abundant life.

In-between these oases the habitat was parched, dusty and barren, animal trails radiated between small shrubs. In one barren area a Dickinson's Kestrel held court giving us really nice views. One vehicle saw an African Harrier-Hawk on the wing, while the other had a Shikra hunting.

The morning passed quickly. We returned about 11:30 a.m. and enjoyed time to do laundry, nap, and relax after yesterday's moving day.





At 3 p.m., Ewan served tea and coffee and off we went, fanning out across the open plains and flood plains. We were hoping to see Cheetah, but no luck there. We found Ostrich, many ungulates, then as we crossed by Second Bridge, Jan spied a mature male Leopard asleep in a lush sausage tree right adjacent to the road. It was sacked out, head tilted to our side and all four limbs and the tail hanging down. It would make small movements to be even more comfortable. The spots of sun and shade coming through the trees were similar to its own broken pattern. We had time to see that the body spots were one color rimmed by small black spots, then solid black spots covered the flank, legs and tail. We watched for some time, then moved off a bit hoping it might be inspired to get up. We had a second grand actor for this show though, a big Hippo not all that happy we parked there. He opened his jaws in a huge gaping show of teeth, then sunk into the water to eye us. We left them both alone, with plans to return after seeing what else was about.

We found a troop of Vervet Monkeys, a nice mixed flock of birds, and then returned to the Leopard spot. It was still in the tree, moving little since we left. We parked and the grumpy Hippo gave us three good shows of its massive open gape, then seemed to settle in to put up with us. The Leopard would twitch a paw or fan its tail, finally it got up, we held our breath in hopes of seeing it descend but and it plopped right back down, just getting more comfortable. Finally, it lifted its head and gave a good big yawn. Then it scratched the bark of the tree all while prone, just like a house cat. Peg had just said, “to move it has to pull up its back feet” when it did. We watched it slowly navigate headfirst down the tree, then land with a pounce and head to the water. By now there was golden light as dusk was approaching, making for the most beautiful scene. There were only our two vehicles and one other, a couple that had quietly watched alongside us earlier in the day. The leopard made its way up the side of the pool towards Second Bridge. By driving around, we were able to get it in view again. It sat quietly preening, licking its paws, legs and torso. Finally, it got up and walked into the brush. The show was over, and we were due back into camp. A grand finale, the second vehicle had a huge Verreaux’s Eagle Owl fly over it



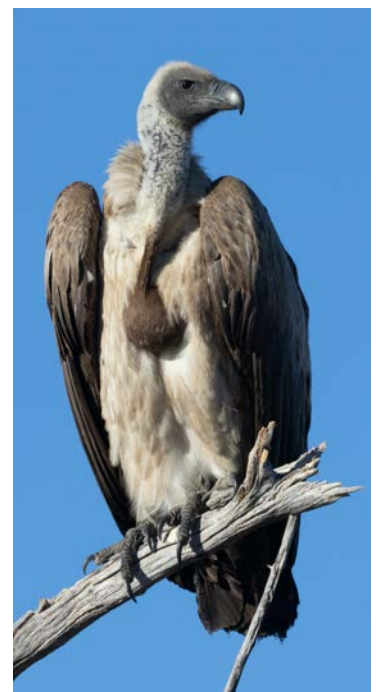
while driving back. Dinner was pork steak with mashed potatoes, a shredded carrot salad and custard for dessert. We had quite a night as Elephants came into camp, seven in total, we could see their huge forms from our tents, as Marsha said, one blackened out the moon it was so close. They crunched leaves and twigs and had a merry time feeding. Our hearts raced a little, but they behaved themselves and in time we all got to sleep. We heard a Leopard come through some time around dawn, but only our guide was alert enough to know this.

### **Monday, Sept. 16 Moremi Mboma Camp to Third Bridge and return**

As we were putting our gear into the vehicles, some still in tents brushing their teeth, Patrick called from the kitchen, “Wild Dogs!” They were RIGHT outside our camp; indeed, the pack made a running circle around the whole perimeter. By

watching one spot, you could see dog after dog, and once facing the open area just beyond us they really put on the gas. We then heard a hooved mammal give a short, loud, scream. It was an Impala, and in the very few minutes it took us to load and drive a couple of hundred yards out of camp, it was dead and more than half consumed.

This was a big pack (20 or more in total) and as we drove in and parked, we were surrounded. They paid little attention to us at all, various little groups yipped and pulled at various animal parts, a leg bone had two on either end in a tug of war. A couple of big adults left with big chunks of meat to lie in the sunlit grass (the sunrise was happening as all this was going on) and chew. There was just one pup left, our previous group had seen two, and earlier in the year there were three. Hyenas likely were to blame, taking the vulnerable young ones that stayed longer on a kill. This one seemed deemed to be a survivor – it was SO scrappy. It dove under the legs of the larger dogs to get to the meat, and several times scooted out of the wrestling pile victorious. We were watching, photographing, taking video on cameras and iPhones. For fifteen minutes the world was only here, watching this pack of Wild Dogs and all their antics – Bob captured a lot of this on video. They left rather quickly, the alphas deciding it was time to go, heading out towards water. One of the alphas stayed behind to eat, the beta male came back to check on it and was sent away. Not one minute after they were headed out, two, then three Spotted Hyenas came in. They had smelt the blood and came in to get what they could. Few scraps remained, but they finished off with ease.





We continued on, content to watch whatever we encountered. Ewan's van found a good number of birds, Greg hit number 200 for his list, with a sighting of White-browed Coucal. Killor's vehicle stopped to watch an aggregation of Giraffes, two females with young, one about 6 months old and the other eight. At one time the young one moved to its mother to nurse, but she had no part of it, likely soon to be weaning time. We watched them nibble acacia leaves, seemingly so tiny for their massive long tongues. A Red-necked Falcon on a lone Baobab tree by Third Bridge was another highlight.

Back to camp to rest up after a big lunch of tuna casserole, beets, fresh tomatoes, homemade rolls and little chili biscuits lightly fried, a treat.

The afternoon was pleasant with a breeze blowing in. We had Banded Martin, Barn Swallow, and House Martin join African Palm Swift in what seemed like an aerial bird party above the grassland. Try as we might we could not find a Cheetah, but we did find an Elephant group with a 3-month old baby, a Giraffe group with five youngsters in a creche with their lone adult babysitter. We had some good water birds, a Black-backed Jackal and a Kori Bustard here for our Moremi sightings.

We had such an amazing time here that the last campfire cocktail hour seemed a little bittersweet as we'd fly on to Chobe the following day. Being so remote, in a wilderness setting so close to nature was renewing. No news, no phones, just wild Africa in its most authentic form.

We thanked our crew of four Camp Staff and our great guides, Peg gave a bit of a briefing for what to expect with our flight the next day and the final chapter of our Ultimate tour, off to Chobe National Park and the well-watered Chobe area.

## **Tuesday, Sept. 17 Final Morning Moremi Game Reserve | Flight to Kasane | Chobe River Boat Trip**

We stayed on our normal schedule, departing by sunrise to drive to the South Gate, completing the drivable circle of Moremi Game Reserve. To go any further, we'd need a boat or plane. The road was rough with deep sand pockets, and Ewan kept up a good pace as we had a flight to catch, so it was a bumpy ride. It was so dry in this section of the park we saw little until we reached the Xini area, one we'd camped at on previous trips. Herds of Impala and Zebra indicated there must be water nearby. We found Elephant and Kudu, Steenbok and our usual array of birds. Rounding a corner, Peg spotted two large animals and asked for a stop as they were not



right for Elephant – we found White Rhino! Two magnificent beasts were grazing in a mixed herd with Wildebeest. The Wildebeest were frisky, two younger ones chasing each other at high speed and back, just to stir the dust it seemed. The rhinos trotted off but gave us fantastic views.

So new is the Moremi restoration program that for Killor, our guide, it was a first sighting. They are only seen a few times a month, so we were lucky indeed. We needed to move on, so we turned away, rounding a corner to – TWO more White Rhino, a mother and an 8 or 10-month-old calf, a big butterball that seemed to be so vulnerable despite its fairly large size. We got wonderful views and felt quite satisfied with finding them as we navigated the Mopane woodland and sandy trail outward to the gate.

But the show was not over yet! Our birders got a treat as a parade of raptors ensued. First up was a perched Dark-chanting Goshawk, next a Brown Snake Eagle, White-backed, Hooded, and two Lappet-faced Vultures and then at the airstrip, a Black-chested Snake Eagle – Wow!

We had the same big Mack Airplane (a 12-seater) to take us to Kasane in comfort, just an hour flight with this larger engine. It was the same pilot we had from Nxai Pan; we were beginning to feel at home!

Arrival at Kasane was a bit of a shock, a modern international airport, with rental counters, a restaurant, and large parking area. A major tourist area for Botswana and busy. But our smiling guides from Pangolin waited for us and soon we were on the paved highway into town. The lodge could not have been more welcoming, set in a residential area on the hill with a fine view of the river, the architecture is modern, spacious with creative use of





space. A second-floor bar was a fun area to meet up in, and all drinks were included, so it was a merry time as people tried local brews and South African wines. With only about 15 rooms it was just perfect for our stay.

We arrived in time for a light lunch and a chance to settle in. Then it was off on the river, with just half the group going as some were ready to chill or explore into town. We went with guide Danny, a photographer keen to give us tips. All got to try big Nikon cameras with long lenses and had fun getting shots of water birds, Elephants, Hippos out of the water, and more.

Dinner was served on an open-air patio, a barbecue with chicken, pork ribs, and lamb, plus a delicious butternut squash soup, fresh salad and cooked vegetables. Brownies and ice-cream for dessert, no longer camping all these luxuries seemed anew! We took advantage of Wi-Fi to connect with home or upload photos.

## **Wednesday, Sept. 18 Chobe National Park Game Drive | Pangolin Voyager Houseboat**

Nothing like a visit to Chobe National Park to help us understand how special the remote camping in Moremi was, where often we were the only vehicles at wildlife stops and we had time to watch at leisure. By 6 a.m., there were thirty or more vehicles checking into the park, roaring off to be the first in. We were about 6<sup>th</sup> or so in line, Danny said we'd travel on through to leave the crowd, but that plan evaporated instantly when a big female lioness and her three, almost year-old cubs, were found walking parallel to the road. They gave us fine views, in lovely morning light. The female kept up a good place while the three youngsters stopped in long grass to play, we caught a few leaps and frolics. They finally got up to follow her scent trail, the male cub leading and periodically giving calls. They did not go far before they did what Lions do best, lie down to lick, groom, and sleep.

So off we went, following the course of the river on a road beside it. We found African Spoonbill, a variety of shorebirds, and then a huge pile of enormous Hippos that seemed more like giant rocks than bodies, covered in mud and without motion. In contrast their five youngsters were up on the riverbank above them chewing on each other and moving around, wrestling a bit, the energy of youth so apparent. We saw an Elephant carcass



with vultures and a Black (Yellow-billed) Kite working it over. There were herds of Impala, a lone Puku, and several Warthogs.

Turning inland, we went up on a hill with a view of the floodplains and took a break for tea and coffee, real filtered coffee, and butter-rich shortbread cookies - the Pangolin team has style! Word came to our driver a Leopard had been seen so we high-tailed it in that direction. It was definitely worth going to check it out – perched on an elegant limb below the road but above the floodplain, a male in his prime. We learned he was three years old, a tolerant ambassador for the species that did not mind being photographed by admiring crowds. It had the perch of a dream shot, with blue and green light behind produced by bands of the river. We were able to see it from two angles, despite a few pesky branches we had wonderful views and it faced us at times, then put its head down to rest in true cat style, WOW! After this we passed a troop of Baboon, one female with a youngster on its back, riding jockey style. A very full and rewarding morning!



We came back to a terrific brunch, creative egg dishes, an apple salad with raisins, delicious carrot bread, cheeses – the works. The group was glad to realize that we'd return here for a final night before leaving.



On to the river via Namibia! The houseboats on the Chobe River are permitted only on the Namibia side, so we had two stops to make to do necessary paperwork, both super simple and quick, no fees for entry and we were on our way. We took the skiff boats to the bigger houseboat, where we settled into our cabins and met at 4 p.m. for tea. We were still with our Pangolin hosts, so we were



assured that all would go well, and we would be well cared for. This was our first taste of Chef Sabrina’s baking and we knew our waistlines were now threatened further. Four meals a day lay ahead of us, early breakfast, brunch, high tea and dinner. Plus, all drinks included, such a life....

Our first afternoon outing was short but gave us a great taste of what we might see in days to come. We saw a number of water bird species, but the most memorable was parking at a riverbank amphitheater and sandbank on the river, where many animals gathered at days end. We had scores of Chacma Baboon and Impala which seemed to get along just fine, the groups totally intermingled. Impala were splaying their legs like Giraffes to negotiate the steep drop to water, very mindful of the threat from the Nile Crocodile and from the land, Lions and Leopards. Kudu came down, as did large groups of Helmeted Guineafowl. The baby baboons kept up a show hard to imagine, inventing jumping and running games as kids would do on a summer afternoon. Parents largely ignored them until a scream got to high caliber ranking. It was mesmerizing, and we stayed until sunset light signaled, then we were to be back at base.

Dinner was delicious chicken with rice and vegetables, a caramel custard for dessert. Peg did the list with those tallying their sightings – day 14, hard to believe! Colin went up on deck to admire the stars – dark skies here with the moon rising late was just perfect, and something to behold.

## **Thursday, Sept. 19 Chobe River Boat Cruise | Morning and Afternoon River Outings**

This morning Fabian wanted to show us some special birds, and this required going back downriver towards Kasane. As large trees line the banks in front of several resorts, we worked this area slowly. We had super looks at White-browed Robin-Chat and Holub’s Golden Weaver, but the real thrill for us was finding a difficult one, three White-backed Night-Herons. Though in thick vegetation with some patience we got very good looks. Colin got a stunning photo, not an easy task with this species. Nearby there were a dozen Black-crowned Night-Heron, too.





We motored up into a smaller channel, and soon found Purple Heron, one of the most beautiful of that elegant family. Turning into a cove, we encountered another realm, thick water lilies all in bloom. The colors of the round, scalloped edged pads were all shades of purples, greens and browns, contrasting the lily blooms of pure white to dark purple as they aged. Among them were equally colorful birds. We saw numerous African Pygmy Geese, African Swamphen, Allen's Gallinule, and a host of Lesser Masked Weavers. Walking on the lilies and feeding on insects and seeds from their blooms, were African Jacanas. They came so close to the boat we could have picked them up, indeed we thought one would hop right up on the rail. Watching their huge feet navigate the moving lily pads was great fun. Some lilies had real draw and we watched clusters of five or six jacanas at a time, all poking and probing and feeding with abandon. Not in a hurry, we took all this in, and also found Brown-throated Weaver females and Malachite Kingfisher.



We returned for brunch and a break, already feeling the relaxing nature of river boat travel. Natural breezes came through the large windows and doors of the upper floor dining room. Our rooms were screened for natural air, or had AC, mighty nice for that post lunch nap...

In the afternoon we stayed fairly close and took time to enjoy the birds of the area, then motored to another amphitheater area to watch the evening mammal show. A huge group of Elephants came in the sunset light and were lovely to watch. We interpreted the way they would pick up their stride to the water's edge as joy – oh for that cool drink of water!

### **Friday, Sept. 20 Chobe River Boat Cruise | Morning and Afternoon River Outings**

During the night, sounds of two male Lions roaring were loud enough and close enough to wake us several times. The Chacma Baboon troop we'd



admired, chose a tree just across from the boat and turned out not to be fine neighbors as they rallied to call out a noisy answer to some perceived threat at about 5 a.m. Peg also heard the long-repeated monotonous call of Square-tailed Nightjar, and went up on to the deck to try to lure one in while enjoying her coffee. The Milky Way seemed so thick with stars, this dark sky viewing was beautiful, including the constellation Scorpio that seemed upside down. She played one call on her iPod and zoom, a nightjar flew in, almost landing on her! As most set an alarm for 5:30 a.m., she was able to gather a few others awake and show them this little gem. We also heard Swamp (Natal) Nightjar out at a distance in the tall grass, but it would not come in. Still, as Greg said, a life-bird is a good way to start the day.

We were in the tender boat and ready to go by 6:30 a.m. We crossed the river to watch the Chacma Baboons at play. Tim commented that play seemed to be what the young ones did best, relentlessly pursuing various games of chasing, grabbing, and particularly fun for us to watch, jumping off ledges of the chalky river cliffs. Not far upriver we got into a pocket of birds and sorted out African Greenbul, African Yellow White-eye, two new sunbirds: Amethyst and Scarlet-bellied males, a Tropical Boubou and a pair of Black-backed Puffbacks on display, fascinating to watch.

Three tall tree species were dominant here, Natal Mahogany, Jackalberry, and Sycamore Fig. They had huge branches fanned out over the river, on which we found numerous perching birds from African Darter to Brown-hooded Kingfisher, and a lovely-patterned immature African Fish Eagle. The Brown-hooded Kingfisher seemed faithful to this stretch of river and this morning we found our way as it dove into a nest hole in the bank.

We continued up the river, on our right the tall trees gave way to a sandy beach of fine white sand. On it were at least 80 Blacksmith Plover. A Shikra came through and blew them into a swirling cloud of wings, but soon they settled down again. We had a grand time watching about 16 Grey Go-Away-Birds drinking water, just a few feet away as Fabian had edged the boat up to the shore. They would fan their crests and as the Shikra came through one gave an alarm call causing an immediate response of flight. We watched this show for a while, the cast then flew off to go west to see a new stretch of river. Several of our group wanted to visit a Namibian village today, so we turned into a side bend of the river to get there, stopping first in a quiet small cove. Fabian turned to show us a nesting colony of White-throated Bee-eaters with twenty or more holes in the bank being attended by the



adults. There was an entry perch they seemed to favor, as many as three at a time would stage there, obviously excited by their meals to deliver – we saw dragonflies, butterflies, and bees.

The village walk was very much appreciated. A female guide, Lucinda, greeted the boat and walked them into the village, explaining the school system, the logistics of getting fresh water, how they make money (cattle and fishing, farming chickens), gardening, medical needs and even a discussion of how to meet a wife. There was a chance for some one on one as Randall spoke with an elder man about his way of life, whilst the ladies enjoyed a bit of shopping for handicrafts. While the walk went on, our keen birders kept at their task and boated off to find a Rufous-bellied Heron and a Luapula Cisticola.

It was time to return to our most enjoyable brunch, we ordered from a menu and enjoyed conversation as they cooked our dishes. Today's was largely about the village visit, while yesterday we tried to sort out Brexit and just what was going on in Britain, interesting perspectives from our two clients of UK affinity we all wanted to hear. We had all agreed not to mention our USA politics and, so far, we'd been good about that.

Our houseboat was already motoring up the Chobe and we continued to watch wildlife as it went. We passed huge groups of Elephants coming down to the water, many with youngsters, and then the usual mix of Kudu, Puku, Impala, Warthog, pairs of African Fish Eagles we never tired of seeing, and water birds galore.

Randall kept tabs on our little Wire-tailed Swallows that had a nest above the door of room 3. They seemed to stay with us down river for some time, but eventually abandoned their quest. We were gone a full night, but once we returned to the first mooring, bingo, there they were! We did not peer into the delicate mud construction to see if there were eggs, not wanting to disturb them. But we had our doubts they could pull this off once chicks were hatched and begging.

Peg kept watch for possible Sable Antelope, but so far, we were not in luck. For the afternoon outing once moored back at our first site, Fabian wanted to show us the area around his village, the river matrix that ties the Zambesi and Chobe together. This gave us another chance to spend time in a lily-clad quiet backwater. We were not able to find Lesser Jacana here, but we had loads of





African Jacana, Allen's Gallinule, African Swamphen, Common Moorhen, and African Pygmy Geese. Elizabeth remarked on the textile-like beauty of the colors of the lilies in all stages of growth. Their leaves were green, yellow, maroon and brown, their flowers white, pink, and purple depending on age.

This lagoon was more expansive than the first lagoon we visited, and being totally within Namibia, has working farms around it. We saw men working from their mokoros, fishing and others cutting papyrus and planting crops. Fabian said they grew squashes and melons, greens and more. We watched his cousin from a distance, walking his pigs back towards sunset. How wonderful to have this very personal look into life on the river, and for those that had gone to the village the previous day all the more so.

We got good looks at Purple Heron and Goliath Heron. Bingo – everyone then got great views of Black-headed Heron and later Striated, giving us the full run on herons for our trip, 15 species in total. Each channel we navigated after leaving the lily lagoon got wider and wider, until we came to the junction of the Zambezi River, the widest of all (third largest river in all of Africa, Greg reminded us). All this water in such contrast to the arid surroundings! We were about 80 kilometers upstream of Victoria Falls, and we were looking off to Zambia. Africa's "Four Corners", the four-way border of Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe were just a few kilometers away. Somehow even living this geography puzzle did not readily make it all clear! We were in a maze of papyrus, cane, river grasses, and sky.

Luckily Fabian knew the channels well and we made good time back, watching beautiful sunlight on the scene. We passed resting African Skimmer, Water Thick-knee, and a beautiful lit Wattled Lapwing.

Dinner was a local specialty, fresh Bream, an Okavango regional fish, quite delicious. Sabrina did her training at culinary school in Namibia's capital of Windhoek, and she provided for us so well! The crew had gone out for fresh supplies, and it was so nice to have fresh and healthy food here.

We tried to gather up on deck to watch the stars and birds, but wind had picked up, so nightjars were not calling or flying. Tim had a star app and showed us a few constellations. All so magical it was hard to go to bed, but with all this adventure behind us we needed the rest.





## **Saturday, Sept. 21 Chobe River Departures**

Today was the last full day of our tour, by morning some went off to Victoria Falls, some did another game drive in Chobe, then boarded planes in the afternoon for Johannesburg. Peg stayed on the boat to greet Bob and Marsha rejoining us, so after our morning outing and brunch, we said our goodbyes.

Fabian took us on one last cruise, telling us about Nile Crocodile and how they tend their eggs and nests. He was a good source of information and delivered it in such a nice way. We watched nervous Impala drink, sorted out a few shorebirds, and motored down a channel where a pair of African Fish Eagle posed regally on a picturesque stump. This was our first morning that we found nothing new, but we still savored the time on the river, the motion and all the action going on.

The top action we'd seen at the start, the pride of Lion we had seen days before, had made a kill right down by the river, in view of our breakfast table. We saw seven in total, at quite a distance but we could make out blood-red muzzles. Peg spied a patient jackal yet unable to come in for a meal. Game drive vehicles were piling up like dominos, but the Lions paid little attention until an open boat pulled up beside us, people with large cameras caused a bit of a spook yet they quickly returned to their task!

When we came back to the boat for brunch, we watched from the second-floor deck which gave us some height. At least four of the seven were still feeding, surrounded by well over 100 vultures, mostly Hooded and White-backed, Maribou Stork, and at least two big Lappet-faced attending. As the scene progressed, this all happened to be in the path of a group of Elephants pouring out of the woodland to come for a drink. They paid no attention to the line of vehicles, the lions, the vultures or anything else, and simply kept going on their chosen course, settling into a mud-bathe and to drink perhaps a quarter mile away.

Learning the rhythms of animal life, the reality of prey and predation, and the challenge of a century-level, record breaking drought, had all been part of our journey in Botswana. It was an animal immersion, something out of a film but for us for this time it was real. Now, it was time for the tour to end, with one final night still at the most-comfortable Pangolin Lodge. Peg stayed on the houseboat to meet up with group members Bob and Marsha who had diverted to Pom Pom Lodge, and they would spend two additional nights on the river. Five of our group were bound for either a day trip or overnight at Victoria Falls. They had a good visit, with time to view the falls, find Shalow's Turaco, Red-winged Starling and Trumpeter Hornbill, and have tea at the grand old hotel. As our herd dispersed, we hoped to meet up again, such a companionable group for a grand exploration. Until the next adventure!



**Photo Credits: All photos by Peg Abbott unless stated otherwise.**

Sunset; Cape Teal; Bob at work; African Samphen; African Spoonbill; Elephants in a line; Vervet Monkey; Dennis and guides at Royal Tree; Rooms at the lodge; Elephant drinking; Feet up at the Casa; Marsha bundled up; Campfire breakfast with sunrise, Elephants with sunset; Springbok at the watering hole; Male White-quilled Bustard; Ostrich with Wildebeest at the watering hole; Zebra at the watering hole; Bat-eared Fox; Bradfield's Hornbill; Burchell's Sandgrouse flying; Lilac-breasted Roller; Desert Cisticola; Kori Bustard; Capped Wheatear; Black-backed Jackal w Elephants; Group at Moremi; Moremi National Park sign; Male Lion; Squacco Heron; Carmine Bee-eaters; Camp; group of Zebra; Saddle-billed Stork; Red Lechwe and Egrets; African Openbill; Wattled Crane; Groundscraper Thrush; Kudu feeding; family of Elephants; Tina taking notes; Little Bee-eater; Arrow-marked Babbler; Group eating lunch; Hamerkop; Three-banded Plover; Nile Crocodile; Hippo gape; Ardwolf ears; Lesser Jacana; Goliath Heron; African Darter; Birding group; Leopard in the tree; Wild Dogs with prey; Verreaux's Eagle Owl; Aggregate of Giraffe; Hyena with bone; Red-billed Hornbill; Yellow-billed Hornbill; Driving!; White-backed Vulture; White Rhino males; Wildebeest feeding; Dark-chanting Goshawk; Hooded Vultures on elephant bones; Pangolin boat panoramic; Lunch table on the boat; Yellow-billed Oxpecker on Hippo; Puku; Photographing on the boat; Sunset from the boat; Baboons and Impala, salt lick; White-backed Night-Heron by Colin White; Brown-hooded Kingfisher; African Jacana; Lily Pads; Yellow-bellied Greenbul; Young Baboon; Grey go-away-bird; Rufous-bellied Heron; Purple Heron; Birding on the boat; Lunch on the boat; African Fish Eagles; Leopard on termite mound; Leopard in the grass; Leopard in the Sausage tree.