

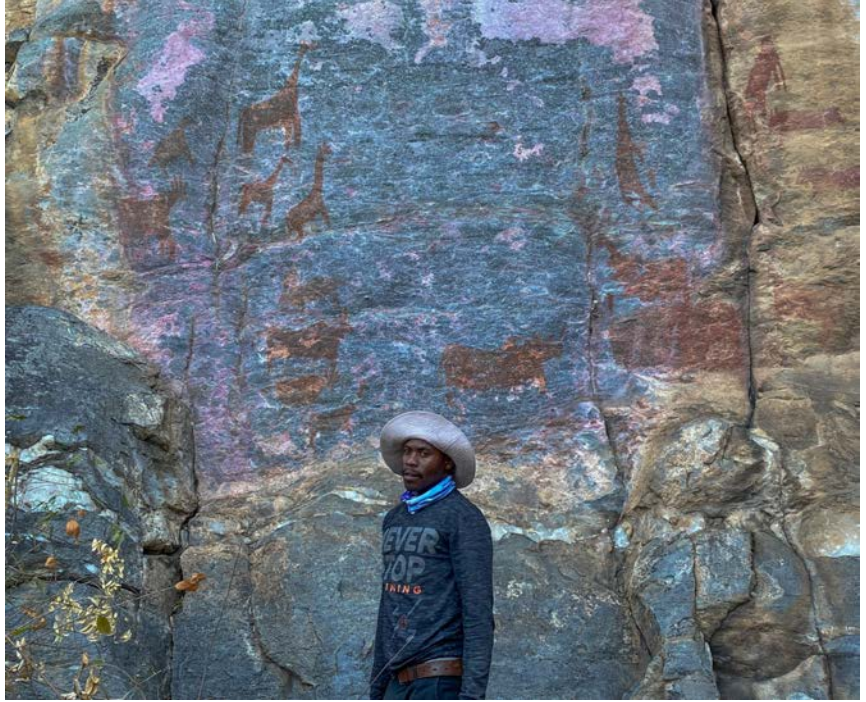
Ultimate Botswana | Trip Report | Sept. 10 – Oct. 3, 2021 | By Peg Abbott



With guide, Peg Abbott and participants Alan, Brenda, Dee, Dylan, Jim, and Nina.



After being locked down for over a year and a half, the pleasure of waking up to the sound of African birds brought profound pleasure. Our visit meant so much to the safari camps we visited, all struggling to make it through from last March and all the changes that ensued from the sudden upheaval of the Covid pandemic. We felt so welcome, so well cared for, and we felt very much that we were out of harm's way so far from any civilization. The simple rhythm of safari life took over quickly, our bush news was written in animal tracks and our concerns were for bird wings, leopard spots and being in the right place for elephant bath time. For a few short weeks the world seemed put back together again. We saw a spectacular array of wildlife and had no crowds to share it with. Most memorable was waiting for a leopard male in his prime to stand up from its perch on a perfect spreading tree limb, a National Geographic moment for sure as it did so and then descend the tree.



Fri. & Sat. Sept., 10 - 11 Xaro Lodge | Okavango Delta

Our group met up in Maun, and as intrepid travelers, the group went on comfortably, taking a short flight from Maun to the Shakawe airstrip, providing a grand overview of the Okavango Delta with views down onto palm islands and finally the river itself. Xaro Lodge is on an island the river near the head of the Delta, so it provides a super introduction to the watery realm of this famous delta. Goliath Heron and Pel's Fishing Owl were to highlights for the group, shown by Thomas a local guide. Brenda posted a Facebook photo of cocktails with the river and its tall papyrus in view at sunset, hats off as a great adventure begins!

Sun. Sept., 12 Tsidilo Hills World Heritage Site | Drive to Maun

After birding on the lodge grounds and breakfast, our group packed up and headed out this morning to walk and experience the extraordinary rock art at the Tsidilo Hills, one of the few elevated areas of Botswana, erosional remnants of ancient rock that hold spiritual significance to the local people and for many of the visitors that make the journey here. It is a remote site, evidenced by the 5-hour drive back to Maun. The rock art is complex, representing many of the local animals. At a picnic lunch, Meyer's Parrots were coming to drink at the picnic area, affording everyone some good views. Our hosts for the next week, Ewan and Sallie Masson met the tired crew at an appointed spot and whisked them off to the farm, where all could relax with the birds and enjoy drinks, conversation and a dinner cooked outside. Few were up for watching for night animals after the long day, but Ewan had a spotlight on the waterhole just in case...

Mon. Sept., 13 ESP (Ewan, Sallie and Patrick) Farm | Thamalakane River, Maun

This morning Ewan showed local species to everyone on a walk at the farm. Then Judy asked them over to her patio to watch birds coming into the feeders, Violet-eared and Black-faced Waxbills, Southern Cordon-blue (Blue Waxbill) and Green-winged Pytila all came in showing off their colors – like winged jewelry. This was a joyful day for Peg as she caught up to the group mid-day. Sallie picked her up at the airport and headed right out to the



farm, in time for tea and goodies and an afternoon drive along the Thamalakane River. This year this riverine corridor was lush and green with a steady flow of water and there were big numbers of birds present. A major surprise was seeing several groups of White-backed Duck, never recorded on our August or September safaris before. We also had superlative views, and photos, of Lesser Jacana in a lovely area of water lilies. Then, several Slaty Egrets, another regional specialty – the birding was off to a great start! We also found an African Snipe and near to it, a Painted Snipe, also new for the list.

Tues. Sept., 14 Early Morning at the Farm | Safari Begins - Off to Moremi Game Reserve!

We had a pleasant breakfast at the farm, with Red-billed Hornbills calling as we dined on fresh fruit and cereals, yoghurt, and toast. Ewan and Patrick packed up our gear to take us on safari, and Sallie would remain on the farm; she was seen in the rearview mirror coddling some new baby goats as we drove away – many farm chores would be on her agenda this day.

We drove through town, ticking off Pied Crow that were common there, and up the road away we stopped at Shorobi Baskets, an artisan cooperative from the village north of Maun. We were not sure it would be open but were happy to contribute to the local artisans if we could. A smiling young woman greeted us, and we had genuine fun learning more about how the baskets were made (from palm fibers) and what the origin of the colors are. We were also pleased that during the pandemic they had started a palm plantation here to make finding the fiber easier as encouragement for the weavers. Trucking along in the Land Rover we were on pavement until we passed the livestock fence which separates the wild Moremi Game Reserve from agricultural lands to the south. We were at the Southern Gate to Moremi late morning where Ewan did the paperwork, and we took a pit stop, had lunch and did a map orientation as a family group of Arrow-marked Babblers looked on. Our field lunch was very fresh with cut-up vegetables, various cheeses and dips, and beef slices of local sourcing in Maun.



We went quite a way on thick sand and dirt roads of this dry country, seeing only a few species, then suddenly there was life, so much life, with abundant herds of impala, wildebeest, lechwe and tsessebe. The magic was water, lots of it, in pools and channels with greenery for grazing aligned. Dinner is cooked by Vindy and Patrick working over a fire in a huge Dutch oven pot, tonight we had Chicken a la King with a lovely sauce and fresh salad, and potatoes.

Wed. Sept., 15 Xini Lagoons Moremi Game Reserve

Heading out of camp we welcomed a beautiful red sunrise as we drove around the margin of the wetlands by camp, eyes open for action of predators. We all slept well, no visits by big mammals, just the steady sound of hippos chortling in the distance, and early morning, a loud male lion patrolling. We were surrounded by birds of many species.

It was a lovely morning with cool temperatures, our route passed through dry mopane woodlands and next to lush wetlands and lagoons. We stayed in the general Xini area, driving roads toward the general direction of Budumatau Lagoon, but we hit water, too much water to pass. This was in response to a combination of good solid rains and the underground Okavango flow from Angola, creeping its way downstream. Coffee break was at a lagoon and oh what a show! Yellow-billed Stork, Sacred Ibis, Gray Heron, Hamerkop and Maribou all streamed in together going after small fish concentrated as the water level was receding. For lunch, we had a nice fresh salad, a variety of sausages including vegetarian, with grated carrots, beans, and lovely homemade bread baked in the Dutch oven over the fire.

We lounged about camp mid-day, taking cooling showers, catching up on journal notes, napping or photographing birds in the flowering Sausage tree at the entrance to camp. The tree held Red-headed Weaver, Black-backed Puffback, African Hoopoe, and Crested Barbet. A Brown Snake Eagle flew overhead, and one of the early arriving Black Kites did so as well. We had a crew of three taking exceptionally diligent care of us in



addition to Ewan. After a chance to freshen up we would gather around a small campfire. There were nice South African wines, and for those that wished, a group favorite - Gin and Tonics. Dinner tonight was roast leg of goat from the ESP farm, with luscious, mashed potatoes and other fixings.

Thurs. Sept., 16 Moremi Game Reserve | Xini Lagoons South | Black Pools

We woke early, had coffee, tea, and breakfast and were out of camp as the sun rose red against a smoky sky, with no wind and a large fire somewhere to the northeast of us it was noticeably hazier today. We left with a sense of adventure, having heard lions in the night calling, and spotted hyena. In the beautiful light of the morning, it was hard to pass the wetlands without stopping, two regal Goliath Herons called our attention as they were illuminated with full reflections. African Spoonbill were feeding vigorously in the dry-down pools where fish concentrated. We saw two large groups of frisky male impalas, chasing each other, butting horns, and pushing and shoving until one would run, tail up – at times a full stoat with four legs off the ground. The lechwe were calmer, several males were sitting quiet on mounds of grass in the wet zone they frequented, also lit well by morning sun. We passed elephants, waterbuck, kudu, and a couple small bands of tsessebe which shone bronzy in the morning glow.

Ewan turned into one little secret wetland valley after another, tracing a maze of tracks he knows so well we bumped along with eyes alert. Coming into a clearing with a particularly wide view, we scanned and found one of the few other vehicles we'd see this day or in days ahead, near to it a pride of lions! It was quickly obvious that this was the large group that frequented the Xini Lagoon area, at one time 22 strong, and still a big group with at least five big females, two different aged groups of cubs and one large male at the rear. After giving us a



moment to take it all in and snap some shots, Ewan move the vehicle so the cats would come by us, he intuitively read where they would go, as the cool of morning waned and they sought shade. We lined up with three females bedded in a small patch of shade. We looked up to see, winding down to them through lovely tan and brown grasses, at least 9 cubs one by one, on arrival they began piling on the females' uttering growls and caterwauling as they vied for a place at the feline dairy bar. The big females were tolerant of the mob but not yet settled for the morning, soon one led off to a better shade patch. The male was always behind, coming along at his own pace, mane flowing as he moved. This was a big male, a brother of the lone male we'd seen yesterday afternoon. We had at least forty-five minutes with them all to ourselves, then the car we'd seen at the start joined us, and Ewan greeted a known film maker that spends quite a bit of time in Botswana. The guides exchanged notes and information while we enjoyed wrestling and tussles of the young ones. We watched the male arrive and greet the females, take his place in the pile, choosing to lie just off the main pile of cubs. In the bush above them a Green-backed Camaroptera and a Yellow-breasted Apalis gave our birders a bit of a challenge; in a nearby pond African Spoonbill and Red-billed Teal were feeding.

The lions finally all flopped down flat out and sleeping, something lions do well, so we moved on. It was our hope to find the group of white rhino introduced into the park several years ago, in the vicinity of the Black Pools to the south. It was quite a drive down there, bumping along though at times very deep sand, dodging branches as Ewan called out "sorry, sorry" but roared right on. En route we enjoyed time at several lagoons where we watched hippos, elephants, and a host of water birds. Brenda spotted our first Kori Bustard, and we found first one and then a larger group of Great White Pelican. Crested and Swainson's Francolins were fun to



spy among the more abundant, Red-billed Francolins. We returned for lunch, mincemeat over rice and some fresh vegetables and homemade bread, and a rest. Back out at 3:30 PM, we made a loop of the local lagoons, trolling areas that could be home to leopards, servals and a host of antelopes. Dylan spotted the first of two Bateleur, an adult flying above us. We then saw an immature perched where we could get excellent looks. Everyone was getting comfortable sorting out the varied species of antelopes and we had fun watching a troop of Baboons. Dinner was a roast filet of local beef with vegetables and a three-bean salad. The stars were bright as we turned in for the night.

Fri. Sept., 17 Southern Moremi Game Reserve Across | Khwai River

We got our belongings organized the night before as tomorrow was moving camp day, and we wanted to keep on our schedule of the Land Rover heading out at dawn to see the animals when particularly predators are most active. Our normal route of the last few years over to the Xakanaxa area and then east was not possible due to both very high water levels near Bodumatau and the bridge being out at Third Bridge, so our revised plan was to return to the South Gate, where we would meet Sallie who was bringing us supplies (lemons for the gin and tonics, more bubbly water, baked goods, fresh fruit and vegetables...) and then take the center road up through dry mopane forests to the Khwai Gate and then out along the river to Khwai #1 Campsite. Going this way, we passed through some older stands of Mopane woodland spotting Striped Kingfisher, the only sighting of the trip, and Arnot's Chat on this long but fulfilling day.

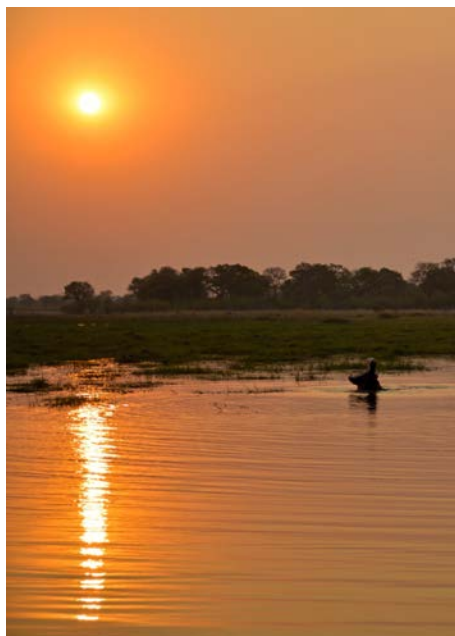
We enjoyed the morning between Camp and the gate, having time to watch an absolute feeding frenzy at one of the dry-down lagoons where 50+ Great White Pelicans were joined by Yellow-billed Stork, Black-winged Stilt and African Spoonbill to enjoy the feast. Watching so many beaks and wings and the cacophony of movement and sound was memorable. We bid good-bye to places that had once been just a spot on the map but now held our memories. The leopard's drinking spot for us was now Leopard Lagoon – perhaps one of the most memorable times of the trip. We then passed through the Mopane woodland, where almost immediately we found a regional specialty, the Arnot's Chat. We also found three lovely sable antelope and Brenda pointed out a bedded steenbok close to the track.



Ewan set out lunch in the picnic area by the Khwai Gate while we walked out on the bridge, a rickety construction of logs that has held for many years though one wonders just how. Peg asked at the office if any of the local women had baskets for sale and a woman was called who brought some over – a chance of us to collect some treasures and I’m sure after a long spell of few visitors due to Covid-19 pandemic, some welcome cash for the artists. We loved the patterns, shapes and feel of the palm fiber creations. We were also able to get maps of the park which will be nice to refer to later as we recall events of the trip.

Highlights of the afternoon roaming were several. Near the top was a small herd of Roan antelope with a mature male in all his splendor, several females and a few teenagers, coming out of the forest to drink. We were just in the right spot at the right time. This is not a common antelope in the region. Then a true highlight, something one comes to Botswana with hope to see – wild dogs. As Ewan had not been in the game reserve since the fall of 2019, we were pioneers again on knowing where they might be, what their numbers were, the Bush information network had been disrupted and will just now start to repair. We saw at most 2-3 other vehicles on any drive, sometime in the distance, but always with a welcoming hello as the guides reconnected after not working. Our first hint that something interesting was up in seeing vultures, both White-backed and Hooded, over a half-dozen on the ground and in adjacent tall trees. We also scented something dead but despite driving a circle around the “vulture” trees we were left with no real hint of what went on. But rounding a corner, we found four Wild Dogs, mud-caked and resting, one with blood on its face from this day’s feeding. These four were alert, but still relaxed, bedded by the cooling water, in the foreground to a herd of female and young elephants that gave them no mind. We got wonderful photos, each dog with a unique coat pattern, and we watched them until they headed inland for more shade. A rest back at camp was most welcome, we had enough time for naps, some hand laundry, journaling, and for some, backing up photos. Ewan set up a charging station on the Land Rover inverter, so that all our phones and cameras were primed and ready to go.

We went back out at 5PM, a bit concerned as big wildfires across the river were bringing smoke. It seemed eerily quiet but at short range the river area was cloaked in lovely golden light. So, we decided to just park by elephants and watch their feeding, both in the water and in the mopane. Along the Khwai there were many BIG bulls, here to indulge in soft abundant feed, they did not range far. By their reactions to us and our vehicle we could tell they had not had all that many visits of late, they seemed a bit indignant to have once again to share the terrain. Several big males challenged us (we waited) with ears flapping, feet pawing, then brusquely moving away.



For dinner we enjoyed a tender beef stroganoff, cooked vegetables and the ever-present homemade bread. No losing weight on safari! Off to our tents, the night sounds were relatively few, there was a Pearl-spotted Owlet calling often, soft snores from a few tents, a distant spotted hyena and over our circle of tents a nearly full moon casting its magic between branches of the Mopane.

Sat. Sept., 18 Exploring the Khwai River | Botswana's Moremi Game Reserve

We left camp early, watching a red ball of sun rise over the Mopane woodlands and adjacent plains. We watched numerous water birds including White-faced Whistling Duck, Knob-billed Duck, Egyptian Goose, Spur-winged Goose, and a mix of herons and lapwings. Over the open water and short grass section we spied Collared Pratincole by their acrobatic flight pattern. We worked the edge of the woodland, stopping for views and photos of sunlit impala herds, waterbuck and lechwe. Perched high in a tree was a new species for us, Wahlberg's Eagle.

Inspired by Nina's enthusiasm, our photographers scored great flight shots of Lilac-breasted Roller taking off from a termite mound perch. Back at camp, at lunch, a pair of Bearded Woodpecker called and flew from tree to tree. We watched an incredibly old female elephant slowly walk from the lush green of the river into the Mopane by herself. It seemed a little poignant (elephant females are highly social) and Ewan said she just had a few months left and would spend it like some of the exceptionally large bulls, localized here. The afternoon was pleasant and quiet, we saw a lot of antelope species and birds. At sunset we parked by a pod of hippos that entertained us with their antics and chortling, and then in turning back to home at dusk, we unexpectedly encountered the four wild dogs again, this time inland, coming from the river and going to who knows where. They used the main deep sand road to ease movement and we followed their fluid trot as they rounded several bends. They then stopped suddenly, lifted ears in an attentive stance and then veered off into the bush, never missing a beat in their steady, ground-cover gait.



It was getting dark, and we found a Scrub Hare, and while stopped to spotlight this we heard calling African Barred Owl. We had time to listen as we had also hit a definite road closed situation – a tight knot of female elephants with young calves, right on the road. There were elephants to the only side we might have diverted, so we revved the engines a bit, then cut them, preparing to wait. As so often with elephants, in their own time they decided to give way and move on towards the rest of the herd, no quick decisions for them but given a chance, avoiding conflict. It would have been a long way around in darkness had they not done so. Dinner tonight was particularly good, roasted chicken and potatoes, vegetables, and then meringues (made by Sallie) with fruit for dessert. We relaxed with enjoyable conversation, and some took showers by starlight ahead of turning in.

This night was one of the loudest of the trip, trumpeting elephants were disturbed by something and called for a good hour or more as we went to bed. Perhaps the two lionesses we had seen sign of coming home were the source, but we'd never know. About 3 PM we were awoken by an extremely near and loud call of spotted hyena that Ewan thought perhaps had made a kill of Scrub Hare or something small en route to check out our camp.

Sun. Sept., 19

Khwai River Day 2 | Moremi Game Reserve

We left at 6:20 once again, now used to our routine and eager to start the day. We wound our way through mature Mopane woodland to a river view vantage point where we parked and scanned, seeing Lechwe, various water birds, but no sign of predators. We then worked our way around a shrub peninsula and right on the barely discernable two track road we found three of the four wild dogs we had seen previously. How incredible to see them daily over a relatively large area. We checked around the corner for the fourth dog to no avail, then returned to watch the three trot down the road, surveying a herd of very wary Lechwe, then disappear into the shrub edge of the river margin. Each one had a unique coat pattern, and one female was collared so it was easy to recognize them as individuals. They were totally unconcerned about our presence, acclimated while still young to the sound of vehicles. They rolled, scratched, and watched the Lechwe but made no move to hunt at



this time. While we were watching we heard the distinctive call of Gabon (Swamp) Boubou and got good looks at a duetting pair. We could not help ourselves for worrying about the missing fourth.

Morning sun painted all the species we saw with beauty. African Jacanas shone a rich chestnut color and an African Fish Eagle perched down on the river grasses was brightly lit. Two Pied Kingfishers chirped to each other, we figured out this duo was an adult and youngster when the smaller of the two lifted its beak to beg, quite sweet. There were huge Spur-winged Goose gleaming iridescent, and both Purple and Gray Herons. We spied several large crocodiles basking, and watched Lechwe navigate the river channels, at times running and splashing their way across the lush scene. We went as far as the Khwai gate, then turned to the inland road that at times seemed like a super-highway. This smooth riding was welcomed but short-lived, as Ewan soon turned out on a maze of two-tracks where sand created some raucous bumps – the sway and jump of the Land Rover providing our everyday African massage as we explored once again.

Back at camp lunch was waiting, and we enjoyed some down time for naps, showers, and various pursuits. A pair of African Barred Owls started calling and Patrick found them, called us over and we enjoyed fabulous looks at this small owl species right in our camp! By 3:30PM we gathered for tea and set off again by 4PM. The afternoon light was glowing by 5 PM and everywhere we looked was lovely. Soft light playing on the big bull elephants, the shining backs of Hippos, the gleaming pose of a Lilac-breasted Roller. Jim kept an eye out for raptors and today we found a well-lit Tawny Eagle perched high in one of the rain trees. We spied a Black-backed Jackal in the distance and were able to get closer – though we'd see many in future days in Nxai Pan this was our only sighting in Moremi. As dusk approached, we started back, and watched to the left when a lone female wild dog made a sudden appearance – this one was larger, more patterned than the group of four. She was alert and appeared to be on a mission, coming to the road ahead of us, trotting along it a short way then bolting with speed back along a line of trees. It was nothing of our presence that interested her, just her extremely keen senses telling her about prey or pack members or other things our dulled human senses could not reveal. We wondered if our missing fourth had joined the bulk of a larger group she was connected to. These are the issues of our days in Africa... We gathered for cocktails around the fire for our last evening of the mobile safari. Peg thanked Ewan for hauling out all the gear and revving up again just for US – so much behind the scenes work is needed to create our life in the bush in remote Moremi that had been so rewarding. We would continue to lodges and more creature comforts but would never be as close to nature and far from our daily



lives as here. Our final dinner was a Botswana traditional meal, a corn-based starch popular throughout all Southern and Central Africa, finely shredded beef cooked long and slow in a pot with seasonings, and cooked vegetables. As always, they had a vegetarian option to the meats and dessert. We could hear elephants around the camp, and the bark of a leopard even before going to bed. We watched the shadowy forms of elephants in the moonlight before drifting off to sleep, Peg reminding all to remain still and quiet if they approached the tents. Dylan, Dee, and Alan described one remarkably close to their tents in the middle of the night, but on the move and not lingering long to feed there. Still a close encounter is enough to get some hearts pumping fast!

Mon. Sept., 20 Drive to Khwai Airstrip | Aloft to Nxai Pan | Desert Game Drive

We were up early, packed up and headed out to see what we could find in the hours ahead of our flight, which we had time confirmation by satellite phone of 9:45 across the river on the air strip at Khwai Village. Botswana works on the pulse of these small planes. Their pilots are young and sharp, many trained in South Africa, and they are consummate professionals. Having a pilot among us (Jim) we felt good that he was impressed with the aircraft and their attention to detail. A leopard had left tracks around the camp, but we could not find it, so we continued down to the river, taking up viewpoints from which to scan. Along the way Ewan spied a new bird species we'd missed on earlier days, Bradfield's Hornbill. It obligingly called as we watched it, and soon after we saw Red-billed, Yellow-billed and finally Gray Hornbill, a nice foursome for the day. Along the river Peg spied a Malachite Kingfisher on a papyrus reed near the edge of the road, its colors gleaming in the sun.

We got to the airstrip in time for tea, coffee and conversation, then our plane arrived, a new caravan style that would hold us all, a beautiful airplane. With a twenty-knot tail wind, Jim calculated we had a speed of about 200



miles an hour at 7500 feet, a very smooth ride. We watched the vegetation change to one with fewer trees – Kalahari scrub, the habitat of Central Botswana and a new one for us to explore. Guides Myezi and TT were waiting for us at the airstrip and soon we entered the gracious space of Nxai Pan Lodge. The lodge leaves a noticeably light footprint on the landscape, in soft desert tones with a thatched roof. It has a great room feel that extends to dining on one side and a bar and small plunge pool on the other, with big chairs facing out to a water hole in the middle. All this space! We enjoyed a welcome drink, the manager Kedu gave us an orientation and we settled into our rooms, the only guests at the lodge. Nina asked how what the occupancy numbers were for the company, curious about the effect of the pandemic, and we found out 12% - how glad we were to be among those willing to come and keep a thread of precious safari life working so it would be here in the future. Indeed quite a few lodges and companies had folded, some having just purchased new vehicles or other investments ahead of the pandemic plunged many into chaos quickly.

But all that pandemic turmoil was behind us here, and for a time our focus was on this place and its brilliant animal life. On the surface Nxai Pan seems parched, unable to sustain life but the first drive dispelled that quickly! One of our first birds was a Temminck's Courser, a lovely elegant arid-land creature not seen before on our tours here. We parked out closer to the waterhole where the giant elephants ignored us and where against the backdrop of their legs and trunks, we found Capped Wheatear and Yellow Canaries. We watched the antics of Yellow-billed Hornbills coming through the plentiful elephant dung piles and watched as a trio of Black-backed Jackals made a run at the many Helmeted Guineafowl which took off for the trees.

We stopped for several small birds, Scaly Weaver, White-crowed Shrike, Desert and Rattling Cisticolas – the latter we checked by call. We worked out a crisp plumaged Sabota Lark and looked at the nests and inhabitants of White-browed Sparrow Weavers, hanging like messy ornaments from the trees. Myezi explained the disheveled appearance helps to distract nest predators, his knowledge of the Kalahari ecosystem was most promising to us for some good days ahead. Then not far away at all, tucked under some shaded shrubs – two bat eared fox! They were bedded with Myezi spotted them but got up so we could really see their shape and form, and intense little faces staring at us. This pair of bat-eared fox went slowly into the shrubs, but we were most happy with this find! White-quilled Bustard (formerly Southern Black Korhan) was a bit hit, quite close to the



road and croaking out as if to start a display, its pattern so striking. We could see a female across the road as the source of inspiration. We were reveling in this special find when a group of Helmeted Guineafowl uttered a loud alarm call in unison, and we swung our binoculars over to scan. Several of us at once, said, “cat!” It was a small Wild Cat, not much larger than a house cat but with fancy leg stripping and long legs. Normally very elusive, we were delighted to get splendid views and photos of this one. The Helmeted Guineafowl formed a tight knit group to forcefully escort it out of their area, at some invisible line they gave up and returned to feeding. The cat then sat as if nothing had happened under a bush, then bedded down, getting up in true cat fashion to lick and groom. We let it be, but what a sighting! TT had previously spotted a group of common ostrich in the distance and as we wanted to see them as well, so we made our way up there to find a male, three large females, and at least seven small chicks. It was so great to see the vast size difference as they scurried between the giant legs, necks and beaks of the adults. As we started our way back, catching glimpses of the pink rising full moon over a hazy horizon a chorus of Black-backed Jackals erupted at moonrise. A magical afternoon for sure! In the park we must be back at the lodge by sunset, so it was a bit of a scramble after all these good sightings. A lovely campfire and drinks (included) awaited us after time to freshen up. Dinner was beautifully served, and we enjoyed that each night some of the guides and staff ate with us so we could engage them in conversation.

Tues. Sept., 21 Nxai Pan National Park

A wonderful day began before dawn, gathering by the fire in the cool morning for a light breakfast, homemade muffins, oatmeal, yoghurt, fruit and cereals and delicious fresh coffee. We wanted to get out into the park as it opened at 6 AM to find whatever we could. We made a stop by the camp waterhole where Yellow-billed Hornbills sorted through elephant dung, and some Black-backed Jackals were on patrol. We wound our way through the thornscrub, finding Magpie Shrike, Violet-eared Waxbill and various small birds. We were watching three Pale Chanting Goshawks intent on something in a small shrub when Dee said urgently, I have an owl. Not one, but four Southern White-faced Owls! This was quite a find and we all enjoyed studying their details. A trip highlight for sure.



We then headed out onto the open plains where we saw over a half dozen Kori Bustards with no trouble at all. We also found Red-crested and White-quilled Bustards, obviously now in their arid realm. It was not long until we saw a few other vehicles ahead, parked at the waterhole and very attentive – indeed, a male and female lion were lounging on the shore in proximity. Myezi pieced the story told by tracks near camp of one lone male (normally with his brother) to this couple (brother now busy) that he described as in their “honeymoon phase”. Likely they would have stayed at the waterhole some time, and even mated there had one of the self-drive vehicle drivers not gotten out of his car! We backed up to tell him to get back in, and there he was, lighting a cigarette and trying to take a video of them on his iPhone. Sigh, people! The lions simply got up and moved away. This was a relief to all the other species lined up to get in and get their morning drink, but it was still disappointing to us see these lions now only at a distance.

But we were resilient, and our spirits were soon lifted by the parade of animals coming in. First it was Springbok, then five stately ostriches, then Impala, all stretching down to get a drink, often lined up harmoniously as if posing for our stunning photos. Around them were Black-backed Jackals, Helmeted Guineafowl, Ring-necked Doves, Burchell’s Sandgrouse and a host of smaller birds in time we worked out to be Yellow Canary, Red-capped Lark, Fawn-breasted Lark, and both Gray-headed and Chestnut-backed Sparrow Larks. Lines of zebra came in, then some female kudu – it was all mesmerizing.

In time we pottered along looking for other species and making our way to the Southern Campground where we had a nice coffee with cookies and time to use the restroom and do some birding. Two Cape Crombec put on a good show, alongside Black-backed Puffback and a brilliantly colored Mariqua Sunbird. Winding our way back we found a lone male Lion at the waterhole, trailing the couple we’d observed hours earlier. He was angled down to drink, quite something to watch as he was very thirsty and drank for some time. When he rose the animals scattered like billiard balls. He strode off in time, just as two huge bull elephant came in. Around them all a big Lappet-faced Vulture flew back and forth, striding about as if the boss, indeed at one time chasing both



Zebra and Impala. Likely their nerves were on high alert from the Lion, but it was almost comical to see the impact of this large, lumbering vulture on their presence. En route home Peg spied a Double-banded Courser, a lovely sand-colored species with an intricate pattern that just stayed put for our close inspection. Brunch was ready, with a chicken or vegetarian pie in a lovely crust, fresh fruits, or custom-made omelets, yum! The staff was busy in the afternoon unpacking new goods for their little shop. We all spread out, returning to our spacious rooms for a rest or to catch up on writing, backing up photos or just to relax. On our PM drive we watched mom and baby elephants at the waterhole, all lined up with ears full out to block our passing, very protective of their young. We passed again the same Temminck's courser pair, and this time went in quietly past the Bat-eared Fox, which we found resting again, and we were able to watch they spy us and stand up, move out pausing several times to give us a full view. Wow! The drive produced sightings of several Kori Bustard, White-quilled Bustard were a hit at our sundowner's spot as we had a flyby of two and then one of the males displaying. Weather was changing, rains in the air. We returned to a windy campfire and dinner of Pork tenderloin roasted potatoes and green beans. The staff sang to us to thank us for coming. While we were not ready for song to utter back, we were touched deeply.

Wed. Sept., 22 Nxai Pan National Park

At breakfast by campfire, we spied a spotted hyena at the waterhole, one that had serenaded us during the night. A call from camp alerted us to a memorable sighting as from our angle we were missing them. Lionesses had come in and were leaving waterhole, our guides quickly positioned the vehicles and we watched them passing close by our in an even line. We figured out it was two lionesses with four big male cubs now almost adults but with no sign yet of a mane. Oh, there will be some interesting dynamics here in the future with this many dispersing males! It was hard to get far from camp! An elegant ostrich looked to us like a fashion model on the runway strutting cautiously as it approached the waterhole for a drink. We had quick views of the same two Bat-eared foxes, we passed Steenbok and spied Spotted Thick-knees – two at first spotted by Nina then a group near the campground resting. At the campground break we found a respectable number of birds including Cardinal Woodpecker, Cape Crombec and Scimitar bill in a little bird party going on there. We made our way to the more distant second waterhole, where male Kudu showed off their spiral horns, and Springbok crowded in,



their reflections beautiful for the parallel symmetry of their drinking. Returning to camp, we spied Jackals resting among scattered elephant bones, one in shade of a skull. Capped Wheatear also seemed to pose perched on the bones. At the Camp waterhole, two male Kudus seemed very regal. Lunch was fresh salads with avocados, quiche, fruit salad, and a cheese plate. The camp does laundry and we returned to fresh folded piles on our beds – heavenly to have clean clothes! The PM drive gave us views of many of the same species and a few new ones, plus a lovely sundowner site. We were getting into the groove of safari life for sure.

Thurs. Sept., 23 Nxai Pan National Park

We heard lions all night, an amorous pair that did not give up. Indeed, starting out from the lodge, these lions were mating practically outside our door, blocking other species path to waterhole and in no hurry to move. We watched several rounds, in sunrise glow with termite mounds in the background, more National Geographic moments for our memories for sure. One last pass, hoping and YES - Bat eared fox again! Close to them, we spied a pair of Lanner Falcons perched elegantly in a tree giving us superlative views. This was a good raptor morning, as coming back from the waterhole, we found a Gabar Goshawk trying to grab White Helmet-shrikes in an acacia shrub, showing us agility galore! No catch, phew.

Today was our flight to Kasane, we said good-bye to our wonderful guides at the airstrip and boarded the same excellent Caravan plane. On the other end, we were met by a Pangolin team member who does the airport pickups, Steve, who Peg remembered and was so glad to see. Far away in Portal she'd worried for a year and a half about these good friends – so happy to find them here. We arrived at the lodge and dove right in to sample a new beer, Okavango – a hand-crafted brand brewed in Maun, here a selection of a lager, an IPA and English-style Pale Ale. This all seemed so civilized! Indeed, the Pangolin hotel is, so modern in its design which incorporates the arching back of a Pangolin. We enjoyed a gallery of photos, art, and a sense of welcome here. We also had WIFI, a real luxury as we'd had none since leaving the farm.



We settled into our rooms, then got ready for an afternoon boat trip on the Chobe River, a great intro to cameras with Danielle and captain Dan. Dan has positioning down to a science, an art so important to getting good images. Danielle is quick and patient, skipping around to each of us at varied skill level and accommodating our obsession with birds as well as the showy mammals. The boats have stable camera mounts, one for each person, and from them we trained our sites on crocodiles, kudus, elephants, hippos and very challenging fast-moving African Skimmers. We got close to hippo kids playing, we bumped our boat into the side of an island to watch the elephants and stayed their silent as they came to us, moving awfully close to our boat, just amazing to be so close to them, all the sounds, subtle behaviors. Nina and Peg were in the front of the boat and practically held their breath. From elephants on edge of river we progressed to elephant sunset – how wonderful to be so immersed. Dinner was fun, served on the patio in perfect temperature air, we enjoyed fresh pizza from the wood-fired oven and a variety of fresh salads. How could refuse berry crumble with ice cream for dessert.

Fri. Sept., 24 Chobe National Park | A Day with Elephants and Lions

We got a bit of a late start with a detour to town for tire fill, but Jim found the bright side on a quest to photograph urban warthogs milling about the station. As luck would have it, our timing turned out to be exactly right. We drove through the entrance gate, filling out our paperwork, and proceeded into Chobe NP, our first time in the Zambezi teak forest habitat. Crested Francolin and Red-faced Mousebirds were among our first birds. We paused for a great vista of the river and a herd of female kudu came into the photo to frame it, lovely! We spied so many Impalas along the river, near to them we found two lionesses with four cubs, hard to see in the brush but so cute, we stayed some time simply happy to get glimpses. Moving along the river, in the many small ponds and depressions we found lots of birds African Openbill, African Spoonbill, Three-banded Plover, Black-



winged Stilts, and then Blacksmith Plovers. These fierce adults put on a show, defending chicks from African Spoonbill and then Baboons, giving us lots of camera action. Coffee break was held in a safe spot up on the hill with tea and fresh brewed coffee, for a genuinely nice break. As we drove out, we encountered groups of elephants – a young one pushed out his ears as if a bluff charge, then changed its mind and ran to mom. One huge lone male stood close to the road not moving as we passed by. After an exciting morning we returned for a hot brunch at the lodge – and found the works! Waffles, eggs, fruits, pastries... It was time for a rest. At 1:30, for those interested, Danielle helped us with some basic photo workflow in a session in the lodges processing room.

We then headed out for the afternoon boat – and got into it right away. Dan positioned us for a nest of Lilac breasted Rollers to watch them come and go, then we watched overhead a huge flock of African Openbill. We worked on several almost tame Malachite Kingfishers but then looked in the distance and revved our engines as the Lions were on the beach with a fresh kill. There was so much action, though distant, we could not leave. It was 2 males, not budging, and lots of females trying to get their share, then from the area we had seen the cubs, five more females and juveniles (not the cubs) joined. This was a lot of lions to view! One scrappy braved the jaws of the big males and managed to take off with a limb. There was lots of jostling and positioning. One male rested in shade of safari truck parked on the path we'd driven that morning. Dinner tonight was again on the lovely patio, we had our choice of vegetarian, or stuffed chicken or fish, which was fresh bream from the Chobe. Yum!

Sat. Sept., 25 Kasane Sewage Treatment Lagoons | Racket-tailed Rollers | Return to the River

Peg had arranged a bird walk with Charles Mutumba to the Kasane Sewage Ponds and then a drive through Kasane Game Reserve, an area of more mature Zambezi teak than we'd seen in the park. We'd not done this before and it proved to be a nice change for us, walking, and it netted a good number of species. We started with a host of waterbirds at the ponds, including a lot of Little Grebe in breeding plumage, many Black-necked Stilts and among them, one Pied Avocet, an uncommon find.



Peg had sent Charles a 'wish list' and on it was Stierling's Wren Warbler. He knew right where to find them where there was an ample grassy understory to the forest. We stopped and heard them calling and invited them in, with luck they came, and we got stellar views. Moving on was a long-shot species on the wish list, Racket-tailed Roller! Nina spied this one sitting and Charles took one look at its aqua breast and said, Racket-tailed! We hopped out, and for at least 15 minutes watched three of them move about the tall trees. Wow! We then went to areas we had walked in previous years, tall trees along the river at Mowana Lodge. With ease and safety from predators we could move around grounds and river edge, enjoying a sizable number of species in this lush and green oasis. We returned for brunch and rest, and then went down to the dock area of Immigration to get our Covid test so we could cross to Namibia. Botswana was super organized to make this happen, and we were impressed. Thankfully all negative too. On this PM boat trip, we headed down river where we watched a lot of elephants, this afternoon taking a swim in the river. One young male put on quite a show, heaving himself about splashing and lurching out of the water as if a breaching whale. A real highlight of the afternoon was seeing a pair of Crowned Cranes on one of the river islands. This is not at all a common species in Botswana, and they were close and put on a quite a show. The Chobe was good to us this year!

Sun. Sept., 26 Morning Boat Cruise | Crossing to Namibia | Houseboat Adventure Begins

This morning we ventured out on a Chobe River boat cruise, and with Sarah worked on high contrast black and white elephant pix. We'd steer the boat to get them lined up against a clean background and overexpose them for some striking results. We worked our way along the riverbank and found Half-collared Kingfisher and White-backed Night Heron, both very exciting birds. The route was up the shoreline by resorts with huge spreading trees, so we got peaks at orioles and e checked out of Botswana and then into Namibia at their small immigration building, first boating about the rocks and rapids to look at Rock Pratincoles and the multi-species



heron rookery. Black-headed Heron was common here – nice! We took a small skiff down river to meet up with the houseboat, passing many baby elephants in the huge herds congregating on green feed of the river margin. We found white fronted bee-eaters catching insects
Dinner –a delicious eggplant starter, lemon chicken, poached pears in wine sauce. No pounds lost on this venture.

Mon. Sept., 27 Kasai Channel | Sable Antelope

Morning boat ride up to the Kasai channel, replete with papyrus and reeds, expansive views, waterbirds. We entered a magical cove full of water lilies and watched African Jacanas walking on their huge feet between the pads and blooms. Brenda spied our first Allen’s Gallinule and Laxley found the African Swamphen. A Squacco heron was lit up as if by a torch, and Jim found a Little Bittern as we were studying two Gabon Boubous. Peg was keen on us finding some of the smaller specialties of this habitat and with some patience and a little playback to encourage them we got looks at Lesser Swamp Warbler and Little Rush Warbler, two skulkers of the reeds.

Southern Masked Weavers were feeding in the lily flowers, and we found the odd-shaped nest with a female present of Thick-billed Weaver. Southern Brown Weavers were present, and we found one perfectly assembled nest, hanging low over the water like an ornament. We parked in a quiet patch where Carmine bee-eaters were busy overhead to have tea and coffee, then went farther up the channel, wind in our hair for some mid-morning air conditioning. We had time to work on photography of both Pied and Malachite Kingfishers, nice! We had to



make a stop back at the Botswana side once again, this time for our Covid test to get back into Botswana in a few days. Regular monitoring seemed like a small price to pay for our travels here, and it went smoothly, soon we were back on the river, thousands of miles away from the cares of the world other than how to avoid elephants cavorting now as the day heated up in the river where we had to pass them.

We returned for brunch, and veered off as Peg called out excitedly, sable antelope! There was a large group of them across from our boat, in the general area we'd watched a lion kill the day before, and they were bunched up and wary but wanting water and grazing. This species was high on Alan's wanted list, and we were happy to sit and watch them for some time. Brunch was calling us, so we let them be, and as we sat down, the houseboat unmoored and started to amble down river, wildlife along the way plentiful. It was wonderful to pass herd after herd of elephant, impala, kudu, baboons and other species. Waterbirds were regularly spaced, and elegant African skimmers worked the sandbars, some protective of chicks. We went out in the afternoon for another cycle of wildlife viewing – this could get habit-forming. Based from the boat, we had a chorus of White-faced Whistling Duck, good looks at Spur-winged Goose, an Allen's Gallinule spied by Brenda, an African Swamphen as we turned the corner of the river, 3 Black Crike, many African Jacana to photograph at close range, and a thrill for those that caught it perched and then in flight – Jim spied a Little Bittern in the reeds.

A couple of Malachite Kingfisher posed for our lenses, two Gabon Boubou called loudly from the bank, and Peg enticed views of Rattling Cisticola, Lesser Swamp Warbler and a Little Rush Warbler – nice! We did find one Southern Brown-throated Weaver feeding on a lily and saw a Grosbeak Weaver visiting and fussing with material of an old nest. These birds were in a lagoon on the Namibia side, a quiet lovely place to explore. Dinner – diced peppers, tomatoes, and chickpea were a nice salad to accompany beef stew (goulash) and mashed potatoes, followed by spiced cake with whipping cream. We eat together at a table surrounded by glass, fresh air pouring in, sounds of the night.



Tues. Sept., 28 Quiet Peace on the Serondela Section of Chobe

We woke to lovely pink light, taking our coffee on the houseboat top deck. We got out early to enjoy a full morning on the Serondela Section of Chobe River. Here we found loads of birds, 88 species in total! Working the bank of trees, Jackalberry, Floodplain Acacia, Figs and Milkberry was fun. We found a feisty family of Giant Kingfisher with demanding young to be a highlight among the many sightings. Other highlights included seeing a Purple Heron, finding Malachite Kingfisher, watching villagers on the Namibia side waving as they put out fishing nets and tended their cattle. Strange to have a wild national park on one side (Botswana) and regular life on the other with Elephants freely passing across the river between them. We went as far as we could until rocks block boats from further travel, then made a pass back to look for Wattled Plover, a species we'd not yet seen, and with Laxley's keen eye we found them. Back to the boat, we dined on brunch as we once again unmoored and started the trip back upriver. The houseboat moves at a slow pace, good for wildlife viewing and we saw loads of elephants along the way, and tsessebe, and sabal antelope.

Wed. Sept., 29 Morning on the River | Flight to Selinda

We started out early on the river as we had a ten am time to be at the airport for our 11AM flight on Mack Air to Selinda airstrip for the final leg of our grand adventure. Right across from the boat we had a lovely view of Wattled Crane, a lone individual in soft light. It was on a small peninsula and shone in the early glow, its elegant bustle of dark feathers trailing as it strutted about. It stretched its wings a few times and then took to the air, a lovely bird of this region. The temperature was delightful, the movement of the boat creating air conditioning as we sped up towards immigration. We checked out of the Namibian side, where the ferry was docked, and a few supplies were being off-loaded. We went slowly down the Botswana side bank looking for kingfishers and herons and made it to immigration by 8AM. While in line Peg spied a Collared Sunbird, new for the trip and Nina grabbed some shots of a tame Yellow-breasted Greenbul. Carmine Bee-eaters danced on the wind overhead.

We had asked for our back at Pangolin lodge, internet being a rare thing on this trip, and several wanted to check in, post photos, or download some reading. The time passed quickly, soon we were through the check-in



process at the modern Kasane airport and up into the sky, again in a small Caravan prop plane, heading for the Great Plains camp at Selinda. Smiling faces of Parks, Joshua and XX were waiting for us in open air vehicles at the airstrip, but evidence we'd made a jump up were there in a tented "waiting lounge" where we had a flush loo and a round of cold drinks for our briefing. A Desert Cisticola sang overhead. We had about an hour to the camp, warm at mid-day, but the vehicles did the work of chugging along the deep sand. We passed through open grassland and then into Mopane woodland, interspersed with water channels of the Okavango Delta. Birds were familiar to us now – Red-billed hornbill, Lilac-breasted Roller, Arrow-marked Babblers and Little Bee-eaters. We saw tsessebe and impala and came around a corner to find a sleeping male lion, his buddy nearby up and drinking. We saw in total four of six brothers in a coalition ruling this area, what an impressive lot! Philip, BJ and Cessie gave us a warm greeting at this lovely camp, where spacious tents are open to the fresh air breezes but provide creature comforts. They decorated with Persian rugs, heavy wood furniture, African fabrics and old travel trunks, very appealing. There was a bar and dining tent and a lounging tent with a table we could meet around. We enjoyed lunch with very fresh veggies and chicken – we were hungry and made a good dent in it.

Thurs. Sept., 30 Leopard Spotting! | Celebrating Botswana's 55th Independence Day

We drove about looking for leopard, with fresh tracks and sign but no luck this morning We did have fun venturing out and were surprised to find a small group of migrant Caspian Plover. A hit of the day however was seeing two Secretary birds working on a nest. But then came the call! We don't use radios much, but this was one from a driver heading north to alert us there was a leopard working the river not all that far from our camp and route home off we sped and found...leopard! Not a one of us will ever forget those moments, parked under a huge spreading tree with this glorious animal relaxing, oblivious to us. It groomed, moved a bit to get comfortable and remained on its lofty perch. Suddenly there was a tail twitch, then so cat-like, a stretch and up



it stood. It came headfirst down the tree and a few of our photographers caught the moment. WOW. We were able to follow it for a time, watching it move through the tall shrubs and forest, at one point tail-twitching and watching prey, but we also wanted to give it space and we let it go off on its own. You can't top that, so we went back for a nice rest, time to charge up batteries, those of our cameras and of our own energies, as this was now our 20th day of safari. The camp has a plunge pool, outside lounge, and quiet spaces so we all fanned out and enjoyed some quiet time. Peg spied a Broad-billed Roller near her tent and luckily it stayed for much of the afternoon so she could show the others, this is a migrant species just arriving and its showy in its agile flight and brilliant colors.

Tea was fun, for today was Botswana's Independence Day (55 years) and the staff made us a cake in the colors of the flag. They sang the national anthem, and we share the cake and congratulations all around. We set out for the afternoon with no specific plan, following the riverine area and taking in views of tsessebe, a long wildebeest among a large herd of Impala, and lovely light on the landscape and a variety of birds. We found Plain-backed Pipit and had a quick sighting of Red-crested Korhan displaying, plus several "bird parties" including a Brown-crowned Tchagra. Three adult Bateleur perched together was a treat to find and riding back we had a Verreaux's Eagle Owl again in the spotlight. The highlight was finding the group of male Lions lounging in shade, one alert and sitting upright, putting on a good show. Sarah our photo guide worked us through changing apertures to create varied effects as our subject was so obliging. She laughed and said, "you will hear the voice of this annoying English girl for many years ahead". But as with all the Pangolin Photo staff, she worked out a set of tools we will always have at the ready and we have made a step up in our photography thanks to her coaching and the varied subjects to work on.

Then what better for an Independence Day dinner than a Braai (BBQ) of outlandish proportion, grilled meats of every kind and side dishes of lovely vegetables. The meat was perfectly marinated and just melted in our mouths. Spinach, pumpkin, mushrooms and beets made for a lot of color and flavorful treat.



Nina had brought a camera set up with her to photograph the milky Way, so after dinner the vans headed out to a dark patch for the best viewing. October brings some bluster with it as by the end of the month rains will hopefully start. Tonight, there were some clouds but overall, it was inspiring. Some stayed back and enjoyed conversation with our Botswanan hosts about the work of the Great Plains Foundation, owners of the lodge, and the conservation and community work they do. They work closely with five rural villages promoting education and solar energy, including extensive training in India for two women from each of five villages in solar energy technology and application. These educated “Solar Mamas” will go on to lead their communities to greater self-sufficiency and prosperity. In a troubled world, Botswana is still an uncrowded and hopeful place!

Fri. Oct., 1 Hints of Rain | An Elegant Breakfast | Eagle-Owl Nest

While our friends from home are posting photos of leaves changing color, we are in a time warp when it comes to seasonality. It is the end of the dry season, trees are mostly bare, the grasses brown, but there are hints of coming rain, green leaves of the Kalahari Apple trees and purple blossoms of Rain Trees. We have taken on the rhythm of safari life, untethered to the news or Internet, into the rhythm of early rising, mid-day rest and afternoon game drives with sundowners in some lovely spot ahead of an evening campfire gathering and dinner. It takes a village to make this all happen and this morning we came round the corner thinking we’d have a breakfast at the airstrip only to find a lovely table set up in view of a waterhole, with the camp chef magically grilling bacon and sausage and a table out with pastries and compotes, oatmeal and yoghurt, ahead of mushroom and cheddar scrambled eggs. Such a lovely gracious gesture for us – we felt very touched and spoiled!

Ahead of the brunch surprise we wound our way through the Mopane and then more open terrain, finding a new bird still this late in the trip – a lone Curlew Sandpiper, another migrant just arriving. We found two Verreaux’s Eagle Owl in a grove of trees calling to each other uncharacteristically in the daylight hours, a fresh catch of a Red-billed Francolin the cause of the excitement. Further down the road we found another on a nest –



using the platform of Red-billed Buffalo Weavers work – and Nina described holding up her camera to focus when the head of a little chick popped up – fun!

We next found a group of four Southern Ground Hornbill, so much fun to watch feeding. They ply their strong beaks into the duff like repeating water pistons, up and down, and come up from time to time with some large white tubers or grubs – hard to tell as they gulp them down with relish quickly. They are so prehistoric looking it was hard to ply ourselves away, but our other vehicle was at the elephant carcass from several days ago and said there was a lot of action. And there was – hundreds of vultures, mostly White-backed with a few Hooded and a few huge Lappet-faced. Maribou Storks strutted about picking up scraps and a very wary hyena came in, pulling and ripping to get some of the feast, but always keeping an eye out for the lions that had been there in the hour previous. This was a group of lionesses and we caught up to them before long, lounging and grooming in the shade. They paid us almost no mind, the young male still traveling with them was so full he breathed heavily and could not get comfortable around his overstuffed belly. Driving back, we found an elegant pair of Kori Bustards and two Slaty Egret, our first for each of these species in the Selinda area. Our lovely camp awaited our return, and we had an enjoyable evening dining on barbecue around the fire on tables set out by the river. Community and conservation are so intricately entwined here that it seems imperative to find a way to continue. We surely hated to go!

Sat. Oct., 2 Hornbills and Songbirds en route to the Airstrip | Brew Pub in Maun

Nina and Dylan had international flights out today, while the rest of us spent a night in Maun to go out fresh the next day. We were thrilled with our adventures, but tired, and a bit sad to go. Green Woodhoopoes came out, seven of these long-tailed “giggling ladies” on our route back. We wove our way through Lilac-breasted Rollers



and both Red and Yellow-billed Hornbills in good number. Goodbye Little Bee-eater and Fork-tailed Drongo, now familiar friends. We went to the airstrip and in minutes were aloft over the Okavango Delta. Renewed, inspired. Africa! Sallie and Ewan were kind enough to fetch us at the airport, bring in our gear we'd stored there and listen to our tales. We all went to the new local watering hole, which was delightful, can you believe a brewpub in Maun! Okavango Craft Brewery gave us shade, tasty food and tables set out in the garden. A perfect end to our day. We turned in early, wrestled a bit with packing but got ready to go.

Sun. Oct., 3 Walk to the Thamalakane River | Departures

Dee and Peg enjoyed a final morning walk and were able to get wonderful views of African Pygmy Goose, one Dee had hoped to see better. We grinned at Red-faced Mousebird antics and found some close, Black-collared Barbet and Bearded Woodpecker. Noisy Meyer's Parrots flew overhead. At the airport Jim helped Peg pack up a HUGE basket we wrapped in burlap and checked as a suitcase – it was artful. Our flock then dispersed in Johannesburg, Peg flying back through Qatar and the others going via Johannesburg.

A fabulous, truly ULTIMATE Botswana trip was done.

Photo credits: Group Photo (Nina Hale - NH), Violet-eared Waxbill (NH), Blue Waxbill (NH), Rock Art (Alan Gertler - AG), Lesser Jacana (NH), Farm Scenic (AG), Shrobe basket shopping (Peg Abbott - PA), Leopard (AG), Southern Ground Hornbill (NH), Lunch in Moremi (PA), Female lions with cub (AG), Lechwe (NH), Impalas (NH), Zebras, Saddle-billed Stork (NH), Striped Kingfisher (NH), Baboon with young (NH), Coucal with Antelope (NH), Wild Dogs (NH), Hippo at Sunset (NH), Group in Jeep (NH), Southern Carmine Bee-Eater (NH), African Barred Owlet (NH), Violet-breasted Roller (NH), Egrets (NH), Bradfield' Hornbill (NH) African wildcat (AG), Nxai Pan Lodge photos (PA), Air Strip (PA), Bat-eared Foxes (NH), Elephants B&W (NH), Ostrich with chicks (NH), Zebras drinking (AG), Red-crested Bustard (NH), Group at tree (AG), Nxai Pan Sundowners (PA), Close-up (PA), Spotted Thick-knees (NH), Steenbok (NH), Elephant with lions (NH), Group birding (PA), Black backed jackal under elephant skull (NH), Road Block (PA), Capped Wheatear (NH), Lions (AG), Gray Go-away-bird (PA), White-crested Helmetshrike (NH), Crocodile (NH), Hippos (NH), Elephant silhouettes (NH), Group Photo (AG), Gray Crowned Cranes (NH), River photography (PA), Birding (AG), Lions with kill (AG), Elephants drinking (PA), Squacco heron (NH), Malachite Kingfisher (NH), Elephant pair (PA), African Darter (PA), Houseboat (AG), Elephant in the mud (AG), Kudu (PA), Giant Kingfisher (NH), Lilies (AG), River group (PA), Leopard (PA), Leopard full body (!), Camp group (PA), Wattled Crane and Egyptian Geese (NH), Lion male (PA), Photographer (AG), Group Shot (AG), Hyena (PA), Brenda & Jim (PA), Oxpeckers on giraffe (NH), Lion by bridge (PA), Kori Bustard (PA), Baboons (AG)