

# GilpinCountyNews

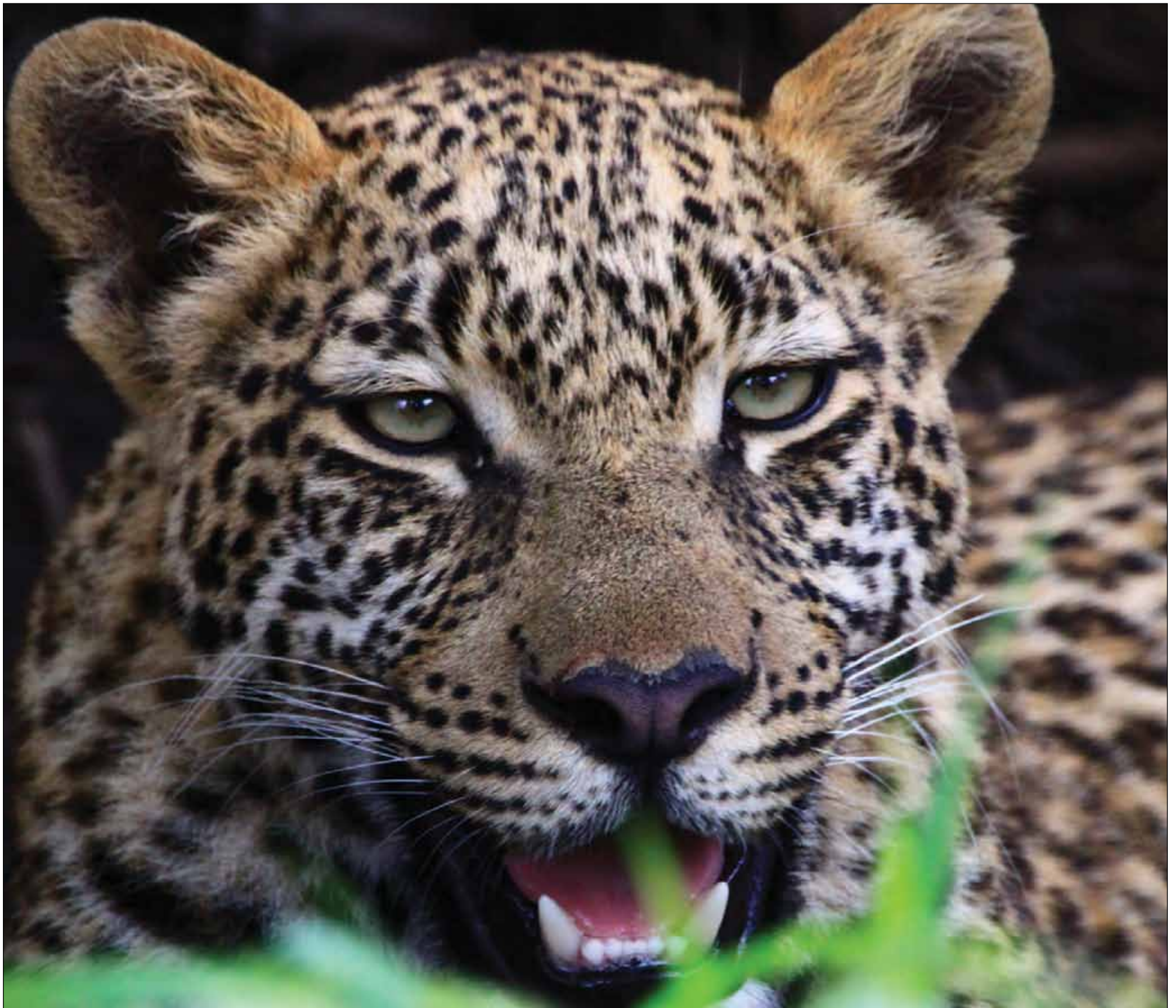
COLORADO: BLACK HAWK • CENTRAL CITY • ROLLINSVILLE • NEDERLAND • THURSDAY, APRIL 2, 2009 • 75 CENTS

New business to open in Black Hawk. **CITY p2**

Commissioners revise ambulance funding agreement. **HEALTH p3**

Gilpin School begins search for new superintendent. **EDUCATION p6**

Combined efforts of community firefighters saves Gilpin home. **FIRE p7**



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**This Kwetsani leopard** is probably wondering if the safari photographer is worth the effort for his next meal. **p10-11**

# Kwetsani Camp

## African Safari Part 2

by Dave Gibson

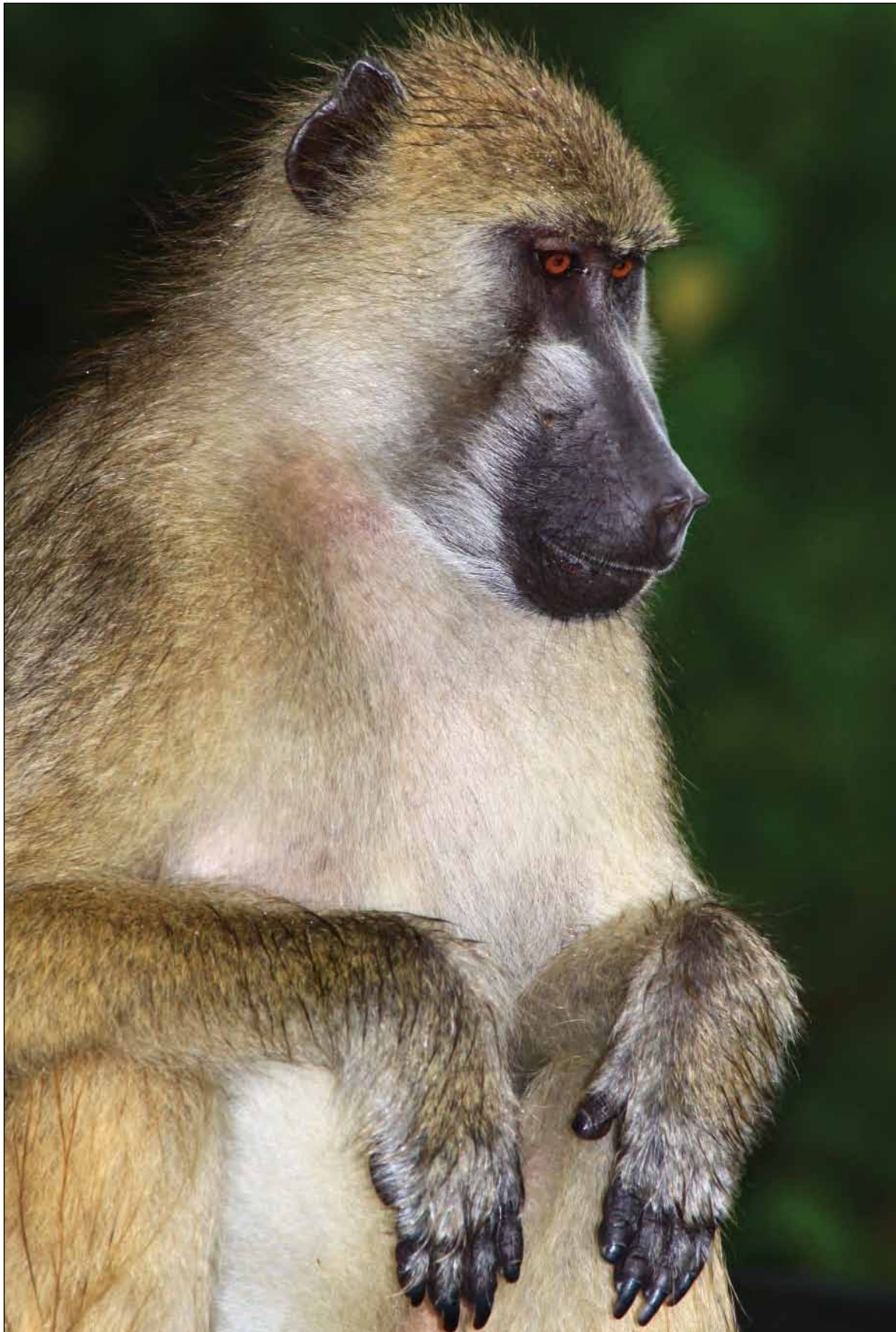
Kwetsani Camp is found in the southwestern part of Botswana's Okavango Delta. Rains from Angola take months to reach the area, sometime during March when the delta is magically transformed into a marshy oasis. At this time Kwetsani becomes a "water camp" wherein boat safaris,

fishing, and bird-watching are emphasized. My visit coincides with the arrival of the floodwaters.

I land at the Jao Concession airstrip on a clear warm afternoon. Puddles on the landing strip splatter our aircraft with walls of muddy water. While waiting for another airplane holding my safari companions, my newly met guide starts up the engine of the Land Rover to scare off an elephant that has drifted too close to the runway. On our way to camp vast herds of red lechwe line

either side of the vehicle. They are a large antelope that tends to carry its ebony horns low when running, possibly because of its bulky neck.

We approach a group of them crossing a wet patch in the road. One by one twenty of them leap over the water. Closer to camp three lazy lions block the road lounging in the cool sandy ruts. Their bellies are empty, but we only warrant an occasional glance during their stretching exercises. Greeted at the lodge by singing as is the custom,



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a 15 foot high boardwalk leads to my thatched tent. Elephants are discouraged from scratching themselves on the boardwalk's timbers. Baboons climb on the roof while eating "sausages" from a sausage tree. Pulpy two feet long fruit that resemble sausages and weigh up to eight pounds, they are like coconuts when falling and have been known to kill people. The dangers in Africa are many and not always obvious! At the next camp my driver will show me a tree from which a "sausage" fell and killed a guide.

On our first game drive we find that the lions have moved a relatively short distance into the tall grass. A young male and two females, we pull up within ten feet of them. Wide awake, they are lying down with their heads up. Several yawns later, they stir a bit with the male abruptly sitting up. At a leisurely pace he walks to the road

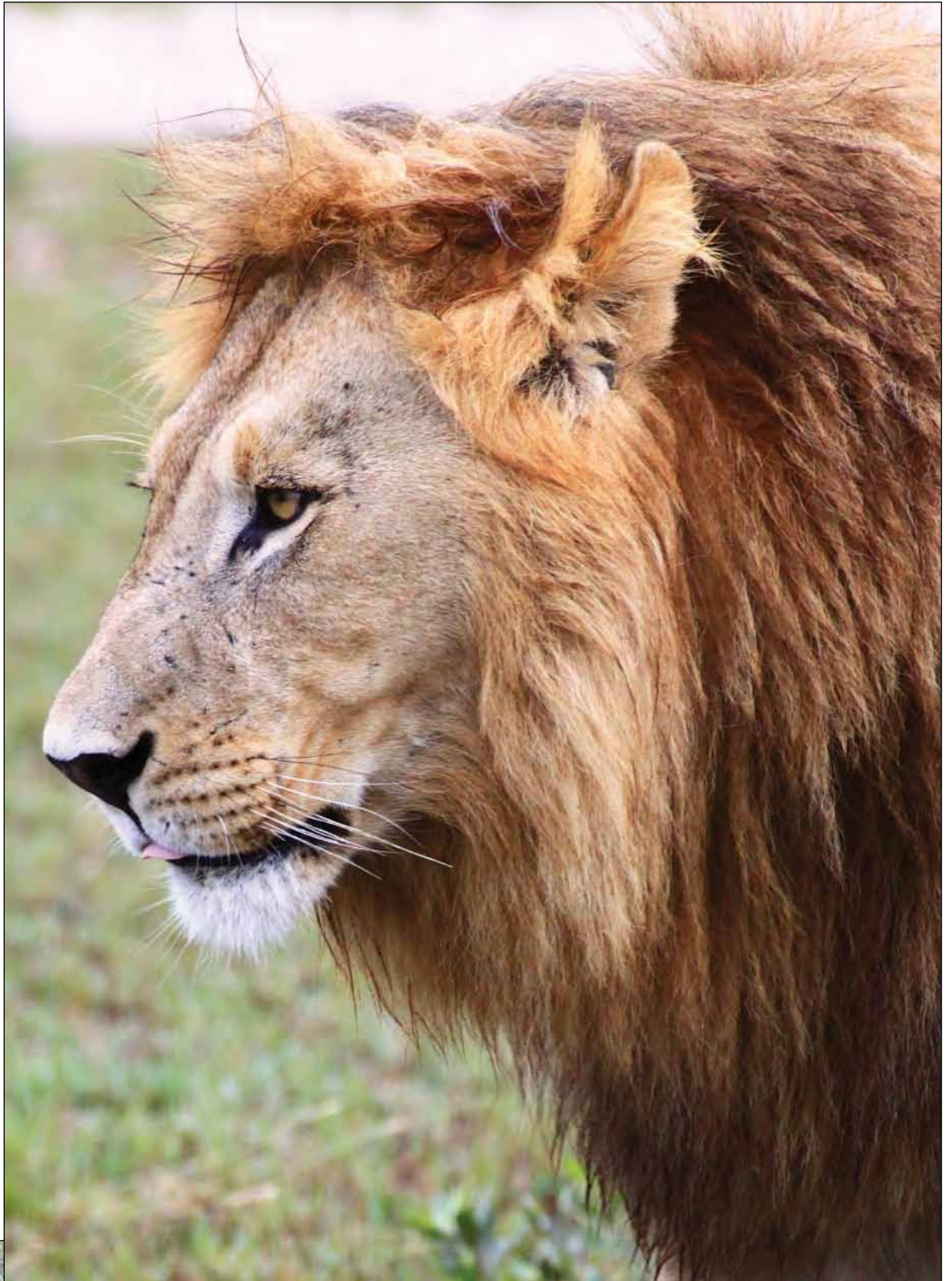
which is filled with water for a drink. Still having not eaten, the females follow and they are away into soggy ground on their first hunt of the day. We drive over a dyke where monitor lizards and herons mix. A fish eagle is off to the side feeding on catfish scraps. Defiantly but somewhat foolishly, in the middle of the road stands a chameleon. Our guide Lesh picks him up with a stick after being snapped at. He puts the lizard on his coat whence the chameleon matches its color perfectly. For the next hour we drive through dense scrub with only a few antelope and bird sightings. Near Jao Camp, one of only two other camps in the concession, I can't believe my eyes when we come upon a leopard! He is sitting on the roadway eyes fixed straight ahead on some impala. Walking towards us, he turns and heads into the seemingly impenetrable brush. We take an alternate route crash-

ing through scrub palm arriving right next to the big cat. Sprawled under a tree we stare each other down for ten minutes. By now our guide has radioed other safari vehicles in the vicinity and they begin to arrive. This is how it works on safari as all the guides share special sightings with one another so that everyone can enjoy them. At first feeling selfish with our find, I learn later the value of the system when we are included in a kill. After an afternoon break and tea, we head for a leopard kill. The same young male leopard that we saw earlier and its mother have stashed a lifeless adolescent red lechwe under a brokendown old tree. The male gnaws at the lechwe's muzzle while the satiated mother naps on a horizontal branch. Smacking of gums and scraping noises come from the leopard's mouth! Long slabs of fresh meat are torn from the carcass. After getting his fill, he joins his mother in the tree to sleep it off.

The next day we drive through ever-rising waters. Parts of the roads that were dry yesterday are now overtaken by lakes. At times water rushes over our hood and catfish jump in the wake of our Land Rover! Maribou and saddlebilled storks wade around us. Sacred and glossy ibises are abundant. Crocodiles bask contentedly while hamerkops fly ahead of us. We now go for a mokoro ride in a traditional dug-out canoe. The couple in the other mokoro jokingly accuse our poleman Nelson of making hippo noises. The hippo sounds that we hear are from real hippos and we are in their undisputable domain! After a peaceful and non-eventful cruise of the pond, we continue our game drive. Cape buffalo are near the

leopard kill site with no leopards to be seen. Hyenas likely made off with the remains.

A massive male lion has entered the concession and is loudly announcing his presence to females and potential male rivals. The other animals acutely know that he is here also as wildebeest scatter in front of him. Every eye of an impala herd is trained on the roaring beast. We catch up to the lion a few times and let him pass. Heavily muscled, his aura is surly and deliberate. Closer to camp, our guide Lesh notices lion tracks. Very fresh, we follow them to a point where some grass has been knocked down. Off-road, Lesh follows the signs to the edge of an overgrown hummock. A mature male lion lie feasting on a putrid antelope. Judging by other tracks that we've seen, our guide thinks that he stole it from a leopard who now sits across the road in another leafy stand. On my way to the airstrip only a few hours later, we check the site again only to find that the lion has devoured his meal and moved on. Next time: Chitabe Lediba.



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