

GilpinCountyNews

COLORADO: BLACK HAWK • CENTRAL CITY • ROLLINSVILLE • NEDERLAND • THURSDAY, APRIL 9, 2009 • 75 CENTS

Gilpin Commissioners recognize outstanding local teens. [COUNTY p2, 6](#)

Central City amends parking requirement calculations for casinos. [CITY p3](#)

Higher county vehicle registrations and late penalties coming soon. [STATE p8](#)

African Safari continues and completes in Chitabe Lediba. [TRAVEL p10-11](#)



COURTESY TIMBERLINE FIRE AUTHORITY

Gilpin's "Timberline" firefighters responded to a structure fire in the Nederland Big Springs subdivision on Saturday, April 4th, after receiving a call for mutual aid from the Nederland Fire Protection District. [p9](#)

Chitabe Lediba

African Safari Part 3

by Dave Gibson

I get word that the airstrip at my final lodge is being regraded. The transfer to my last safari camp will be by helicopter. Having never been in one before, I am almost as excited about the helicopter ride as I am about my next destination. Flying at 400 feet and looking down through plexyglass at elephants and giraffes, a marshall eagle passes below. We touch down at Chitabe Lediba, in the southeastern part of Botswana's Okavango Delta. Surrounded on three sides by the Moremi Game Reserve, it and its sister camp Chitabe are known for leopards. They are also famous for their part in the Botswana Predator Conservation Trust (BPCT). Founded as the Botswana Wild Dog Research Project by Dr. Tico McNutt in 1989, its research now includes the study of other large carnivores as well. The twelve packs of African wild dogs totaling 160 animals in the area may represent the densest dog concentration in all of Africa. The African wild dog or "painted dog" is the second most endangered predator on the continent with a remaining population estimated at only three thousand. Only

the Ethiopian wolf is rarer. University of Montana graduate students, Botswana national students, and local staff comprise BPCT's field team monitoring animal populations, distribution, behavior, and livestock conflict management. The dogs here were featured in the May 1999 National Geographic and BBC's 2002 film "A Wild Dog's Story." The book "Running Wild - Dispelling the Myths of the African Wild Dog" was written and photographed by the owners of Chitabe Lediba.

On our first game drive, francolins, or "chitabe chickens" as my guide calls them, run ahead on the road flying off at the last second before being hit. A big truck carrying supplies to Maun is heavily mired by the log bridge that we take. Four men who are waist deep in water pry at the tires, only to succeed in freeing the vehicle the following day. Chitabe Lediba is a mixture of wetlands, dry acacia, and savanna woodland. We plow through a pond that has a "hippo trail" leading from it. Wattled cranes, kori bustards, fish eagles, crested barbets, little bee-eaters, malachite and woodland kingfishers are all seen. Two red-billed oxpeckers climb around a giraffe's neck in search of insects. A bull elephant crashes through the woods. Antelope of varied kinds



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graze with the zebra. We come across a blacksmith plover that is only hours old. Still hardly able to walk let alone fly, the white, brown, and black camouflage is its only real defense. It scrambles a couple of feet and lies down in the sand while its parents circle and squawk loudly. I can't help but wonder

how long this helpless creature can last in the African bush. After experiencing a few game drives, a person learns that the encounters that capture

one's attention the most involve predators. Speeding to a leopard sighting, my guide O.T. is my craziest driver yet! Holding on to my camera with one hand and a metal bar to keep myself onboard with the other, we quickly arrive at the siting area of the female leopard. She is on the move. Roaring as she goes, she is searching for a male to breed with. Doubling back into the dead trees that the elephants have knocked down, she continues her roars and comes to rest on a fallen tree trunk. It's getting darker now, and a spotted hyena appears and approaches the leopard. She is in no mood for his antics and backs him off with a swipe of the paw and a snarl. After a good leopard viewing and photo session, it is pitch black when we stop for our "sundowner." I wonder where the hyena went, when O.T. shines his spotlight to the side of the Land Rover. At only ten feet away, the beast is getting a good whiff of our food! He slinks off, returning twice when we finally scare him off for good. We continue our game drive into the Botswana night. I get fleeting glances of "bush babies," a small primate, as they whip through the branches. After photographing a giant eagle owl, my guide can't start the engine. The



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spotlight that he was using may have drained the battery. Different rules apply after the sun goes down and with our hyena encounter fresh in my mind, I ask my guide about the danger that they might present. He tells me, "It's not the hyenas that you have to worry about - it is the lions and leopards!" This is of little reassurance as a sense of vulnerability overtakes me. Fortunately there is enough power to radio camp and someone should be here in fifteen minutes. O.T. juggles some wires and miraculously the Land Rover starts! Four hundred

feet away from where we were stranded, a spotted hyena lopes by our headlights with a meaty bone in his mouth. I fall asleep in my tent that night to a chorus of reedfrogs. They sound like a thousand bamboo wind chimes.

The next morning before dawn, we set out and find vervet monkeys. Eating as they work their way through a tree, they number about twelve with a few babies among them. An African wild cat streaks across the road so fast that he is but a blur. A male and female ostrich trot away from us. Spoiled by large predators, game viewing seems a little slow today, and I resign myself to photographing mostly birds. A lilac-breasted roller poses for a while as does a magpie shrike. My guide is anxious to leave and I put him off for a few more shots. He has heard a lion, one of two large males that have entered the concession from the Moremi Reserve in search of females. In tire tracks that we laid down only minutes before

are hyena spoor. We get closer to the lion roars and see dog tracks in the road. O.T. shouts "Dog!" I see two darting through the trees. We go off-road in pursuit of them. A pack of thirteen, they are moving fast and on a hunt. My guide knows the dogs and roads well and finds them sprawled resting in a grassy opening. The alpha male and female of the wild dogs are wearing radio collars and are part of BPCT's research project. With the dogs quiet and pictures taken, we drive a short distance for a bathroom break. Gone for only a couple of minutes, the dogs have vanished. Holding on tightly, we race around some more when we see the lions coming towards us. Even my guide considers these lions dangerous. We stop and let them pass.

I've almost lost hope of seeing the wild dogs again, when we spot them. Wild dogs cover vast tracks of land as they push their prey along. While hunting, they can burn twice as much energy as a border collie. Their pace is relentless, and kill success rate high at 80 percent. Feeding mostly on medium-sized ungulates, wild dogs also sometimes kill larger prey

such as zebra or wildebeest. With one grabbing the tail and another latching on to the victim's upper lip, the rest of the pack will disembowel their prey. Admittedly gruesome, it is an efficient killing technique quicker than the lion, leopard, or cheetah's method of suffocation. It appears to be a learned behavior particular to certain populations. Along on their hunt, my driver does a remarkable job of keeping up with them. After losing the dogs several times, sometimes he would stop, listen, and point to where the dogs were. We pause in the middle of the pack that is chasing a herd of impala into a thicket. The animals disappear with some rustling when the Impala bounds from the brush

toward our vehicle. A dog just misses the impala by a few feet! The dogs run past us also, leaping in the air to get above the grass for a better look at their quarry.

Three more leopard sightings filled other days. One was of a male leopard on a kill, with a smaller unrelated male waiting for a chance at some leftovers. The Okavango Delta's wildlife is rich and diversified. It has been an amazing journey. With the runway still not finished, I depart by chopper flying over a herd of 120 elephants.



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