

Close Encounters of the Endangered Kind



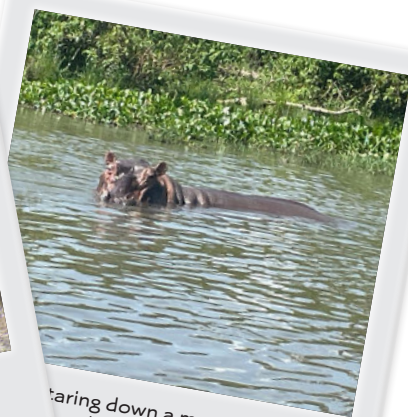
Episode VII: Oh No! Hippos and Musth Bulls, Again!! by Tricia Berry

Our last morning in Zambia saw us up before dark enjoying a fire pit-cooked breakfast before taking off down the Zambezi River. We were on our way by boat to meet Sam and his vehicle in LZNP. He was as invested as we were in finding the wild dog pack. We hoped they would be out hunting on the lands we would be visiting today.

Our boat captain provided flannel-lined hooded body blankets to protect us from the chilly pre-dawn wind as our boat zipped past a plethora of peaceful hippo pods - or "bloats" as they're also called. A bit of an unkind designation, I thought, but not inappropriate. We slowed to watch a tiny newborn elephant playing with its mother's tail while they waited for daylight on the riverbank. I melted every time we were lucky enough to see baby animals and their families.



Even newborn elephants give their mothers headaches sometimes.



Chomping down a member of the hippo bloat.

As we zoomed on the Zambezi, our boat got stuck on a sand bar. Luckily the boat captain was able to maneuver us off so we could keep going to meet Sam. Unbeknownst to Joe and myself, Debbie was aware that every minute on that sand bar put us at risk of having a hippo pop up from the shallow water, open its huge mouth and threaten the boat and us. Both Joe and I were oblivious. We were glad we did not see all the online videos of hippos attacking boats until we returned to the States.

When we met up with Sam, he took us to a part of the Park we hadn't visited previously. We saw many Cape buffalo, zebras, and an old crocodile on land munching on an impala leg left behind by some night predator. We also spotted a colony of Marabou Storks, vulture-like scavengers that have the widest wingspan of any land bird - ranging from 8.5 to 10 feet. We were thrilled to see many multi-generational elephant herds indicating a healthy and growing population.



A menacing crocodile finishing his mid-day impala meal.

We were not so thrilled to encounter yet another large male elephant in musth pulling down branches of a tree. After the experience of yesterday we knew to give him a wide berth. Upon noticing us crossing the invisible line marking his personal space which only he knew about, he started to approach with intent.

We did not plan to stick around, but the dirt track we were on was one-way down a hill and there was a safari vehicle full of about a dozen tourists coming up it. They were heading straight into the territory of the bull we were leaving. We needed to be going down that hill before the bull escalated his approach to a charge. With our anxiety levels peaking, the road was finally clear enough for us to start our rapid descent. As we went down the hill, Debbie looked back and saw the bull charge the other tourist vehicle. Luckily, the driver quickly stepped on the gas pedal and safely scooted away.

Although we traversed many miles and covered a lot of different types of landscapes, we never ran into the wild dog pack. When we got back to camp, we heard from staff that this was the morning the wild dogs had decided to wander through the grounds of our Lodge! Those who'd stayed behind got to see those colorful canines.

We would be sad to leave LNZN and CLZ, but our next task was to pack for our small plane hop over to Lusaka Airport and then take a commercial jet to Nairobi. From there we'd motor on to Tsavo Trust in Kenya.



A mother kudu nursing her calf



Warthog on the move with her egret pal

Next Episode:

Land of the Giant Tuskers

Large tuskers, male and female, used to be a common sight in Africa in the early 1900's. With unregulated hunting for trophies and ivory, and then the huge crisis in poaching, few big tuskers now remain.

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