

There's an inherent problem with the Luangwa Valley. In fact, come to think of it, there's a problem with Kafue National Park, the Lower Zambezi and Kasanka as well – and, of course, Livingstone and the Victoria Falls. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that there is a real problem with Zambia as a whole. It's just so good.

It's quite reasonable to ask why this is a problem, and the answer is simply that once you've been, you'll compare everywhere else to Zambia. It will become the standard from which all other cloth is cut - the accommodation, the guiding, the wildlife, the birds... And, you will want to keep on going back, again and again until you get it out of your system. But you will never get it out of your system - it is an itch that will never go away.

Take Kasanka for example, a small park in the north-east of the country and one that I have been visiting for nearly 30 years now - it is a biodiversity hotspot that is literally 'living on the edge'. At the crossroads of the southern African and East African 'eco-systems', and close to central Africa's rainforests, it is a place to see many of southern Africa's mammals such as impala, puku, zebra and elephant, but also some of east Africa's wonders including yellow-backed duiker, blue monkey and sitatunga (in staggering numbers!). If you were to visit sometime in November then you will witness the greatest mammal migration on earth - the arrival of some 12 million straw-coloured fruit bats that descend on the park from all over Africa to feed on its rich fruits.

If your interest is bent towards the avian world then you will find such delights as Anchieta's barbet, red and blue sunbird and Bohm's bee-eater. And, Kasanka combines perfectly with the Bangweulu Swamps where you will not only find tens of thousands of black lechwe, but also harriers, ducks, geese, more waders than you can shake a stick at, and of course shoebill - the 'holy grail' for many a birder!

Kafue National Park is one of the biggest national parks in the world - a breathtaking 22,400 square kilometres - and it is now really easy to combine it with other parks in the country. The camps here are getting better and better and the wildlife is really wild. On the Busanga Plains in the north there are huge numbers of lechwe, as well as Defassa waterbuck, cheetah, and tree-climbing lions. And further south, at certain times of year, there are staggering numbers of elephants. I was there towards the end of last year I was privy to an elephant sighting to end all others when a herd of over 350 casually made their way across the verdant plains. Silently, quietly, gently, gracefully.

And the great Luangwa Valley - where should I begin? Should I tell you about the grazing lawns between the Luangwa River and its ox-bow lagoons that support a great population of small and medium-sized antelope and in turn the most visible population of leopards in Africa. Or would you like to hear about beautiful bush camps that can only sleep six to eight people? No, maybe its the night-time safaris to look for owls, civets, genets, mongooses and of course hunting predators I should be introducing to you, or the classic walking safaris for which the Luangwa is enviously famous... Or perhaps you should just go there and see for yourself why, in my view, this is the best safari destination in Africa.

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