



One Year Old Today!

Yes, it is officially our first birthday and what better way to celebrate than by sharing with you what has gone on in 2016 and what is planned for the coming year. This, our first of hopefully many newsletters, is our way to drop both safari and recent conservation news in your lap.

The First Expedition

May is our favourite time in Botswana. It is “Goldilocks weather” and the bush is looking at its best after the rains’ subsidence. Contrary to popular belief, the lush conditions do little to impede wildlife viewing, and the many temporary water holes add a rewarding dimension to the experience.

Into this setting we dropped our very first travellers. René, Isabelle, Urs & Lia opted for a slightly modified Africa’s Giants Expedition that had them gazing at the majesty of Victoria Falls; boating on the Chobe River with its mega herds of elephant; ‘glamping’ on the Savuti with a luxury mobile safari; discovering the wild dog of Selinda; chasing the lion/buffalo action of Duba, & being showered with leopards in Khwai. With Grant tagging along, the additional guiding experience proved to be a huge bonus. On arrival at Selinda the group was surprised by the welcoming party of two old friends. Margrith & Erika have been coming to Botswana since the early 90’s and are two of Grant’s earliest safari ‘victims’. A closely guarded secret, their appearance on a dusty airstrip in deepest Africa produced the desired effect and for the next two days mirth and G&T’s flowed with equal measure.

By all accounts the entire expedition was a success (cue huge sigh of relief!) with some of the highlights being:

- a sundowner surrounded, & trumpeted at, by a family of elephants;
- René eventually getting to see his wild dog after 30 trips to Africa;
- the antics of an army of lion cubs;
- that BIG male lion;
- Mating elephants;
- Leopards plural;
- a surprise bush lunch extraordinaire.

Despite our confidence in what Botswana has to offer, Last Chance Safaris could not have dreamt that our first Expedition would have gone so well and that the wildlife viewing would exceed everyone’s expectations. With more Expeditions set to depart in 2017 we hope they have equal success (see [Africa’s Giants Expedition](#) for more info)



G'day from Phil



Crikey mate! What's a true blue Aussie doing selling safaris in Africa? Croc Dundee stereotype aside - even though I actually have been bitten by a croc - my family & I feel that Africa is home. Took us a while to discover that, but now there is no other place we would rather be. Fair dinkum!

When I read Doug Adams' & Mark Carwadine's book, *'Last Chance to See'*, something resonated within me; perhaps spurred on by being a new father. The thought that two of the rare animals the authors tracked down in the '80's were extinct before the arrival of the twins is sad & deeply disturbing. So about 18 months ago, whilst out enjoying the back country trails on our mountain bikes amongst antelope, elephants and buffalo, I floated the idea to Grant about starting a safari company with a slight difference. One that genuinely gives back to wildlife conservation through a medium we are both so familiar with - tourism. Last Chance Safaris is now a year old and the idea has materialised into reality.

What's the difference you may ask? Well it can be summed up by our slogan 'Experience - Awareness - Conservation'. The aim is to give safari travellers a wildlife experience that leaves an indelible impression. Couple that impression to interactions with experts and dedicated conservationists, & we can create a tangible awareness to the plight of endangered wildlife and ecosystems. If we do it right, this awareness will stimulate philanthropy, spur commitment and influence the influential for wildlife and wilderness conservation.

Last Chance Safaris is not about giving up on endangered wildlife and seeing them before it's too late. It is about giving iconic animals a chance of making it back from the brink for future generations, like my twins' twins (perish the thought!), to enjoy as I do now when I pedal around the bush or head out on a game drive.

In the interim I am personally trying to see some of those endangered animals for myself. Gorillas? Check. Tigers? Check. Rhinos? Check. Great migration? Check. Anyone interested in joining us? Have a look at some of our proposed [Expeditions](#) and maybe you too can be part of the conservation efforts.

Phil's Foibles

Apart from Last Chance Safaris, mountain biking and being a dad, Phil wears several hats which keep him out of trouble ... for the most part. To pay the bills he runs a successful mobile safari company with Jen, his wife, and her brother Clive. Currently based in Kasane, the company will be moving to Maun in 2017 to facilitate its growth. This will have no impact on Phil's commitment to Last Chance Safaris as he and Grant will continue to run things as they are now - through the internet. All things being equal, the two guys will still get together regularly to make sure the vision stays on track and our travellers are well looked after. If anything, it allows us to manage our travellers' affairs better through both wilderness gateways of Kasane and Maun.



Phil is also a very active member of the NGO Enviro911. This not-for-profit gets involved with the community to gather information on environmental issues, from ivory poaching to overflowing sewers, and helps the government authorities to address them. One of his pet projects is the monthly community 'snare sweep'. This cruel method of bushmeat poaching is a constant threat, but since Phil initiated the program two years ago, the incidence of snares and snaring has plummeted.



In between all this Phil travels wherever he and the family can. Zimbabwe, Mozambique & Scotland were on the 2016 calendar. Uganda & South Africa's Cape are planned for 2017 so far.

Dumela from Grant



When guiding I am often asked where I come from. “Botswana, by way of South Africa and Namibia with my first squawks ringing out in Zimbabwe” is my standard answer. “No, where do you originate from?”. I think the answer they seek is my ancestral origins. Well, my answer to that is Africa! By way of somewhere in Europe. You see, about 3,500 generations ago my early ancestors walked out of Africa across the Red Sea isthmus and colonised the rest of the world. Then some 450 years ago one Guillaume Néel returned my genes to Africa at the newly settled Cape of Good Hope and today the ‘Nel’ clan is spread across a large swathe of south and central Africa. I consider myself truly African and have little doubt that Guillaume and his descendants mixed their absentee genes with some of the resident genes over the centuries leading up to my birth.

Although my heart belongs to Africa, its wild places and diverse life, I find myself increasingly concerned about what our species is doing on a global scale. Like Phil, I was inspired by *‘Last Chance to See’*, but more recently I draw my motivation from Ronald Wright’s *‘A Short History of Progress’*. The consumption of resources required by 7.5 billion people is staggering. Using Wright’s apt analogy, our successes as a civilization means our consumption has become a runaway train and without global changes to the way we behave, this civilization will fall like a house of cards. Loss of biodiversity is the current collateral damage for our behaviour and without biodiversity, our species courts disaster. By focussing Last Chance Safaris’ expeditions on seeing endangered wildlife species, we provide an economic impetus to conserve those animals. The upshot of that is by conserving these animals, whole ecosystems and habitats are conserved and therefore biodiversity is protected.

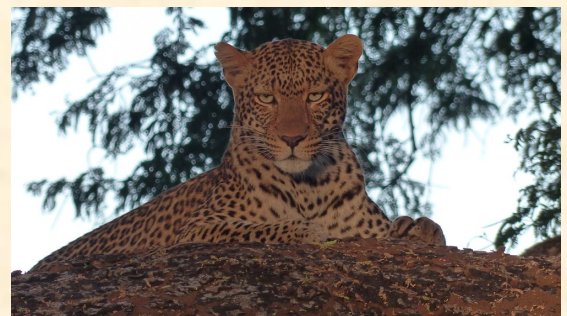
Eternal optimism drives my desire to be part of the solution, no matter how small, to change how we behave as a species. It’s not too late, but for many ecosystems the chances of recovery are running out. Watch a gorilla mother quietly playing with her baby, or the silhouette of a Rhino striding across the savannah and what we stand to lose becomes all too clear. See who we partner with in our [conservation](#) efforts.

Grant’s Gallivants

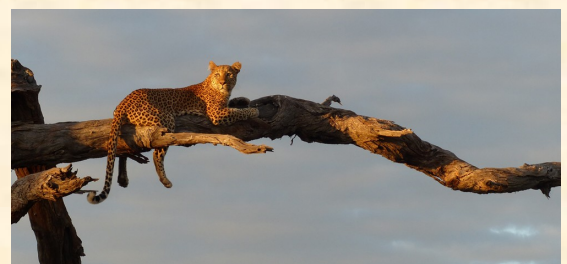
To say that Grant has travelled this year is an understatement. Apart from his usual guiding activities in Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Tanzania, Grant ‘cracked the nod’ to join a the attached naturalist expert. By his own account all expectations were exceeded. It also appears to have galvanised his efforts to influence decision makers to sit up and take note of what we are doing to the planet.



Grant’s other, more ‘mundane’, guiding activities have certainly produced some memorable moments in 2016, not the least of which was one of the highlights from our first expedition. Stopping for the obligatory G&T sundowner and leg-stretch one evening, Grant selected a site he knew well as an elephant mineral lick. Soon some 20 jumbo surrounded everyone and the vehicle. Unperturbed, Grant had everyone stand still, even when one vocal bull gave a full ‘I’m the boss’ demonstration.



But it is the leopard sightings that have stolen the show this year, as these pics are testament to.



Grant will be spreading his wings again in March when he leads another Smithsonian group to Australia & New Zealand.

Last Chance Feature Creature

What walks on two legs, has no teeth, yet can defend itself from nearly all-comers, hunts at night, & devours its prey by the thousands? Of course we are talking about the Pangolin.

Rhinos, tigers, gorillas, orangutans, elephants, whales are all animals that have the conservation spotlight firmly on them most of the time. However this strange, but remarkable animal doesn't get quite the same airtime, yet its existence is as threatened as the rhinos'. Perhaps even more so. Globally this is the most trafficked mammal with over a million individuals having been illegally traded over the last decade – a million! In August this year an Indonesian man was arrested with 650 pangolins in his freezer, & in April 2013 ten tons (!) of pangolin meat was seized from a Chinese vessel in the Philippines. What is the perceived value of this harmless, easily captured animal? Its meat is considered a delicacy in southern China & Vietnam, and its scales are considered to have medicinal properties both in eastern Asia & in Africa. The scales are nothing more than highly adapted hairs, so have as much medicinal value as a barber's clippings! All eight species, that range from Africa's southern Cape to eastern Asia are listed by CITES as Appendix I animals meaning any trade is illegal. The IUCN have listed 6 species as endangered & 2 as critically endangered. Earlier this year one of our conservation partners here in Botswana, Enviro911, was instrumental in collaring two people who were trading pangolin with a 'foreigner' in Zambia. Evidence suggests that the poor live pangolin they were caught red-handed with was not their first! Sadly, despite the best efforts of CARACAL, another of our conservation partners, the little fella didn't make it. Like for so many other trafficked species the answer lies in quashing the market, stepping up law enforcement to apprehend the syndicate 'capos', and increased sentences for the convicted.

WHAT'S A PANGOLIN WORTH? (PER KILO)

TO A HUNTER	\$22.5
TO A LOW-LEVEL TRADER	\$45
TO A MID-LEVEL TRADER	\$80
TO A HIGH-LEVEL TRADER	\$265
TO A RESTAURANT IN VIETNAM	\$350



Ten Interesting Pangolin Facts

1. "Pangolin", is derived from the Malay word "pengguling". Loosely translating as "something that rolls up".
2. Their large, curved claws are used for excavating ant and termite nests, and ripping bark off trees.
3. Pangolins' scales are made of keratin, the same protein that makes up our own hair and nails, rhino horns, whale baleen, and the claws of bears – all animals trafficked for these products.
- 4 The scales cover the entire body, except for their undersides, which are covered with a few sparse hairs.
5. When threatened, pangolins curl up into a tight, almost impenetrable ball to protect their tender undersides.
6. Because the scales have sharp edges, they can slice the skin of a predator by sliding the curled tail about.
7. When fully extended the tongue is longer than the body & is anchored to the lower sternum.
8. With no teeth, food is ground up with small pebbles & the lower stomach is lined with spine-like protrusions.
9. A single pangolin consumes more than 70 million insects per year.
10. Baby pangolins travel around with their mothers by riding on the base of her tail.



Conservation Snippets

* When Grant & Phil were called to the scene of a poached buffalo in August, a second snared buffalo was discovered. Vets, NGO's and law enforcement quickly stepped in and firstly the snared buffalo was successfully sedated, freed and released. Then law enforcement put their dogs on the scent and within a short time 3 culprits were apprehended – caught red-handed with the meat of the slaughtered animal. As a second offender the ring leader is looking at a lengthy prison term as well as a crippling fine.

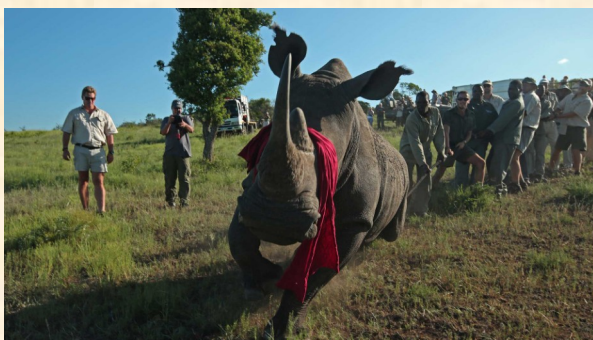


* At the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change 22nd Conference of Parties in Marrakech in November, it was successfully demonstrated that the implementation of the Paris Agreement is underway and the constructive spirit of multilateral cooperation on climate change continues.

* A new global warming threat emerged in Siberia this August when previously permafrost-entombed reindeer that had died of anthrax 75yrs ago became exposed. Result? 24 known human casualties, relocation and quarantine of thousands more and an anthrax outbreak resulting in the death and/or extermination of 2300 reindeer! One more concern to add to the growing list attributable to human induced climate change.

* For the first time in a century, wild tiger numbers have increased in 2016! This is largely thanks to tireless efforts from a multitude of conservationists and government lobbyists. However, the highly lucrative trafficking of tiger body parts (and lion parts!) remains a serious threat to a continued population rebound.

* 2016 was a great year for Rhinos in Botswana! In a daunting project to reintroduce a 100 rhinos back to their traditional home of the Okavango Delta, more than 25 now roam areas that have been devoid of these amazing animals for decades. This has been made possible by Rhinos Without Borders – one of the organisations that benefits from Last Chance Safaris' travellers.



* A new mountain gorilla census for Uganda's Bwindi Impenetrable Forest was started in September this year. The last census in 2010 showed that at 400 individuals, Mountain Gorilla numbers were on the rise. With another 480 individuals split between Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda and Virunga National Park in the DRC, Uganda's census will be a critical indicator for the state of the species' fight back.



Expedition Brief

News from our Expedition Partners

* With effect from 01 July 2016, the Government of Uganda has introduced an online visa application system. Travellers to Uganda are required to apply and obtain a visa online. The decision taken on the application will be sent electronically via the email address provided by the applicant. More info is available at <https://visas.immigration.go.ug/>.

* Botswana's Savute channel may be dry once again but all this does is intensify the action. Lion & elephant are crossing swords again and we expect this to continue well into 2017. To understand why Last Chance Safaris rates this destination so highly in our [Africa's Giants Expedition](#), watch [National Geographic's 'Savage Kingdom'](#).



* Zimbabwe's wild dogs are about to get some incredible exposure. Twenty years after a group of schoolboys raised nearly \$50,000 for wild dogs by running 1000km across the country, these men will now lead a new generation of young students on the same route with the same intention. It is because of these kinds of efforts that Zimbabwe's wild dogs are doing better than most of the other populations across their range, and why Last Chance Safaris supports them with our [Painted Wolf Expedition](#).

* What better way to spend the evening after a day of tracking Black Rhino on foot in the Matusadona National Park than a sumptuous meal, under the stars, on a floating pontoon, on Lake Kariba. Fine wine and honking hippos are an excellent accompaniment to this unique bush cuisine and just one of the possible experiences on a Last Chance Safaris [Rhino Expedition](#).

* The Semliki ecosystem in Uganda, is somewhat unique in that it is the only African rainforest to have survived the last ice age. Consequently the biodiversity is exceptional. Although tracking down one of the family of chimps may be the focus of our [Great Apes Expedition](#), it is in fact the incredible variety of birds, primates and 'unusuals' like forest elephant and Shoebill Stork that make this a must-see destination.



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