

We visited many countries in Southern Africa over the past years so the list of new destinations is becoming shorter and Zambia naturally appeared in our to do list, especially considering all the good reports I could read here and there about this country and its national parks like South Luangwa notably.

We organized this trip to Zambia with a local travel agency called "Hors Pistes" who has offices in Livingstone and Geneva-Switzerland. They were very open to accommodate all our requests on what we wanted to see and do in Zambia and efficient in responding to emails. They took care of all the lodges / camps booking and found us the guides/drivers for some parks. It was a 21-day trip with the following itinerary: North Kafue/Busanga Plains – Kasanka – Bengweulu Plains – Lower Zambezi and South Luangwa. We booked on our side the international flights from France to Lusaka and one return flight between Lusaka and South Luangwa with ProFlight. Everything went smooth except for our checked-in luggage missing when we arrived in Lusaka due to a last minute cancellation and rebooking to another flight between Nairobi to Lusaka through Harare (why make things simple when they can be complicated ☺). We had to wait 2 days before our luggage reached our camp in Busanga Plains...

Except for a major disappointment and a big frustration that I will explain later on, I must say that Zambia was a great country to visit: there are several beautiful national parks and the local people are very friendly, which was very enjoyable. Indeed, all the lodge staff, guides or rangers we discussed with were very nice and helpful and never acted like if they were waiting something in return.

Our first impression upon arrival at the surprisingly small international airport in Lusaka was very positive: going through immigration was very simple and efficient, the city is quite clean and well developed compared to other African capital cities we visited. What struck me is that China is investing a lot there! We saw many companies with Chinese writing and names, and they are building a brand new and much larger international airport that should open in a few months. Hard to say if such Chinese investment will be positive or not for the local population but some of our local drivers had some doubts...

Another but less positive thing that bothered me during our trip to Zambia is that they are literally burning their country. I can understand the benefit of agricultural burning for soil fertilization but when it is done out of control contrary to what they say and in period far from the rainy season, I don't get the point. We could see fires from the plane all the way from Lusaka to South Luangwa; there was a huge fire in the distance when we were in Busanga Plains; we had a small forest fire inside the park when we visited Kasanka and we saw burnt landscapes along most of the roads we took. Such fires were the cause of the main disappointment of this trip while visiting North Kafue in the vicinity of Mukambi Lodge where we stayed for a couple of nights. Indeed, an important fire occurred a few weeks before we arrived and as a consequence, all the area usually covered for game drives was heavily burnt (we could still even smell it). Not only the landscape was desolated but also all the animals were mostly gone. I might be over reacting but this is a very concerning situation to me.

I also found Zambia very expensive to visit. Many lodges inside the parks are super expensive and usually reachable through fly-in safari, which adds to the cost. It was not that easy to find options for budget accommodation like in other African countries we visited. They clearly favor luxury tourism. In order to save cost, we had to book lodges/camps outside of the parks, which prevented us from being in the core areas for game viewing during the best hours of the day. This was the case for Lower Zambezi or Bangweulu but on the other hand, this turned out not to be a problem in South Luangwa. Because we tried to avoid expensive internal flights as much as possible, we also lost quite some time to drive between parks or to reach some of the remote camps like in Busanga Plains or Bangweulu. Having said that, what we noticed probably due to such high safari cost is that there were not so many visitors in any of the parks we visited in Zambia, which was very positive. Indeed, we were often alone during game drives and this is great since you really have the feeling to have the entire bush just for you. We barely saw more than a couple of other cars during our entire stay in Busanga Plains. We only saw one other group in Kasanka and even in South Luangwa where the frequentation within the Mfuwe area is quite important, it was very easy to get out of the main roads and be quickly alone given the size of the park. Being alone during game drives has pros and cons though. It is for sure very enjoyable to observe leopards, lion prides or rare mammals with only one car but on the other hand, it is also more difficult to find animals since our guide/driver couldn't communicate so easily and share sightings with other cars. I also understood they were not allowed to communicate between each other through radio.

Now let's dive into the details for every park we visited during that Zambian trip.

North Kafue

We stayed at the Mukambi Safari Lodge, a very nice place with large, beautiful and comfortable chalets. There is a good restaurant serving food in front of the Kafue river and a very friendly staff: they provided us sleeves for the game drives and other stuff while we were waiting for our missing luggage! As I wrote earlier, the wildlife watching there was very disappointing due to the fact that the area was heavily burnt and as a result, except for a big herd of buffalos, pukus and a few elephants we barely saw nothing during 4 game drives done there. I must admit though that we saw one serval at night and a leopard pretty well in a tree nearby the lodge but outside of the game drives thanks again to the wonderful staff who proposed to bring us there by boat while we were waiting for our room to be ready upon arrival !

Busanga Plains

This place is gorgeous! We stayed at the Busanga Camp owned by the Mukambi Lodge. This was probably one of the most beautiful camp we've ever been in Africa and we visited many places in Africa! This small camp is ideally situated nearby marshes full of birds, lechwes and pukus, literally thousands of them! Lions are also very much present; a pride

even crossed the camp one night and we could hear them walking by our tent. The tents were quite luxurious, with a very nice dining place overlooking the marshes and even a small swimming pool to rest between the game drives. We loved that camp and we wished we could stay there longer. Busanga was a great experience: a place full of wildlife with lots of interesting observations made during the 3 days / 6 game drives we did there. We were alone most of the time. Even the other guests we were sharing the car with did not make all the game drives so we enjoyed private safari at no cost ☺ Beside the wildlife, the plains are also very scenic with all those marshes, large palm trees and... no other cars. The sunrises and sundowners in this remote and pristine place were simply magic, especially during the evening pause with a Savanna Dry in hands ☺. On the negative side, poaching seems to remain a problem there. Our guide told us that park officials are estimating that over 5000 poachers still actively hunt in the entire Kafue park. As a matter of fact, on the day we arrived at the camp, the rangers had just arrested a poacher who killed a leopard and they were transferring him to Lusaka. Another sad story...

Kasanka

I liked this little park very much. We only stayed 2 nights and 1 full day there. We were originally booked at the Wasa lodge but at the last minute this was cancelled because they were revamping the entire lodge and therefore put us in their other Luwombwa lodge located deeper inside the park along a small river. The chalets were basics but very clean and comfortable and the situation along the river was very nice. The staff was once again very friendly so I think this was actually a better option for us than the Wasa lodge. I wanted to visit Kasanka for sitatunga (and Bohm's bee-eater) and we were spoiled. Kasanka is definitely THE place to go if you want to see this elusive ungulate as they are plenty in the park and fairly easy to see thanks to some nice hides built near the papyrus places. We even saw one elephant! On the other hand, beside sitatungas, pukus and yellow baboons, we did not see much. We did 2 canoe tours on the small river, which was good for bird watching: we even saw a Pel's fishing owl and several blue monkeys high in the trees. One day was definitely too short to really discover all the potential of this park and I'd recommend to stay longer to enjoy it better.

Bangweulu wetlands

We wanted to go there to see black Lechwe and here also, we were not disappointed as we saw thousands of them very easily. We knew August was not the best period to visit the swamps for shoebills as they are mostly dry but we could anyway see one shoebill during a 3-4h long walking safari in the mud and remaining pools! Interesting experience I must say ☺. Besides the wetlands, there are other mammals we can see in the plains. However, our guide was not very good and since we were staying at the Nkondo Safari camp that was quite far from the core zone for mammal watching, we could not be there at the best time of the day to see interesting stuff like bush pigs or tsessebes. We managed however to see a couple of white-striped jackals and a few plain zebras. Regarding lodging, I don't recommend the Nkondo camp. Although being booked well in advance, we were not expected when we arrived. The staff (not local Zambian people to be clear) wasn't so friendly, the food was average and worst of all, the tents were in bad shapes with dirty beds and linen. Very surprising to me and unacceptable knowing that this camp belongs to African Parks. I thought they were more serious than that...

Lower Zambezi

Vladimir Dinets mentioned in one of his report that sane people go to Lower Zambezi by boat or plane since the roads to get there are horrible. He was damned right ☺! We took the road from Lusaka through the escarpment and although tared for the first 50km and then very scenic when you go down the escarpment, the dirt road there was one of the most horrible and dangerous road we ever did in Africa! At some point, it took us about 2 hours to make only 20km! I was glad I was not the driver. On the other hand, the dirt road from Chirundu has been revamped. It is flat and in good shape all the way to the park entrance gate except for the last 2 km where you would need a 4x4 car but nothing dramatic. We stayed at the Mvu Lodge which is outside of the national park in the Chiawa conservation area. It is situated in a stretch of forest next to the mighty Zambezi river. This was another very nice lodge with great en-suite chalets, a good restaurant and many animals that were roaming in the garden. We booked with them an afternoon boat cruise on the Zambezi river and this was a great experience. Highly recommended! The national park itself is very scenic and enjoyable to roam in with a fairly good density of wildlife. The number of ungulates and elephants was quite impressive but seeing cats was quite a challenge: we only saw 1 leopard briefly in a tree and no lions at all during 2 full days of game drives. I found Lower Zambezi quite interesting overall but I don't think that staying more than 2-3 full days there is needed.

South Luangwa

Taking into account everything I read while preparing this trip, I decided to finish our itinerary in Zambia with South Luangwa and to stay there a long period of time: 6 days in total. To make a long story short, I LOVED this park. Everything there is great: the landscape is diversified with plains, forests and swamps. Watching the sundowners over the Luangwa river was a great and picturesque moment. This river is by the way full of hippos and crocodiles, and the elephants are crossing it every day, which led to many great observations. The quantity and diversity of animals - including big cats - is quite impressive and an extra good thing in this park are the night drives that I always found very rich (unless we were lucky since we saw honey badgers, bush pigs, porcupines, elephant shrews, white tailed and bushy tailed mongooses to name a few). I did not regret a second we stayed that long in South Luangwa in order to enjoy as much as possible such a beautiful park. We had lions and leopards every day and we were lucky enough to even see twice in a day a pack of 13 wild dogs! Besides mammals, birding is also quite good there. We stayed at the Thornicroft Lodge just outside of the main park gate in the Mfuwe sector. This wasn't actually a problem at all since the lodge is just 2km from the gate and our guide knew the

rangers / staff quite well, which allowed us to enter and leave the park at the best hours. I'm not sure we would have seen more animals while staying inside the park. The main advantage of this lodge was its very reasonable price, which allowed us to spend the money saved on accommodations to book a private car/guide for our entire stay and this was a really good choice. Although being cheap, the lodge was pretty nice overlooking the Luangwa river and our chalet was nice, comfortable and clean. All the staff was once again very friendly and helpful. The food cooked by the chef was tasty and diversified every day, actually the best food we had during this Zambian trip. I'd definitely recommend this lodge.

To conclude, we liked our trip to Zambia and we don't regret any of the parks we visited during our itinerary. The place we've been in North Kafue was disappointing only because of the forest fire and I imagine other areas in the large North Kafue area must be much richer in wildlife, like what we saw in Busanga Plains. South Luangwa is a must and clearly a park to visit for any African wildlife lovers. We saw many mammals and new species during this Zambian trip like Lichtenstein's hartebeests, Thornicroft giraffes, wild pigs, sitatunga or black lechwes and we had some very cool sighting like an elephant charging wild dogs, crocs eating a dead hippo on the Luangwa river, a cute honey badger couple grooming together or a lone male lion close to the car roaring at me (which scared me to be honest). All this was great but I had one main frustration though. Indeed, and although we did 11 night drives during this trip, we could not see a single African civet! It was one of the main reason why we decided to visit Zambia so this was clearly a big miss, quite incredible to me since I thought such a mammal would be easier to see based on all the reports I could read about Zambia. Well that's wildlife and it gives us a good excuse to go back to Zambia and most likely to South Luangwa ☺

Below is the list of mammals observed during this trip in Zambia (lifers in red):

Mammals with photos or well seen				
Species	Espèces	Latin Name	Where seen	Pic
Spotted hyena	Hyène tachetée	Crocuta crocuta	A few seen in South Luangwa and only one in lower Zambezi	x
Side-striped jackal	Chacal à flanc rayé	Canis adustus	Pairs observed in Bangweulu and Lower Zambezi	x
Leopard	Léopard	Panthera pardus	6 different individuals seen various times in South Luangwa including a mother and 2 grown cubs + 2 briefly seen in lower Zambezi + 1 seen well in a tree from the river during a boat cruise	x
Lion	Lion	Panthera Leo	Several seen in Busanga Plains and South Luangwa including cubs	x
African Wild dog	Lycaon	Canis pictus	Superb observation of a pack of 13 animals seen twice on the same day in South Luangwa	x
Large-spotted genet	Genette à grandes taches	Genetta maculata	Many spotted at night in South Luangwa	x
Banded mongoose	Mangouste rayée	Mungos mungo	2 groups observed in South Luangwa and few others briefly observed in Lower Zambezi	x
Slender mongoose	Mangouste rouge	Herpestes sanguineus	Observed 3 times in South Luangwa	x
White-tailed mongoose	Mangouste à queue blanche	Ichneumia albicauda	Several spotted at night in Busanga Plains and South Luangwa	x
Bushy tailed mongoose	Mangouste à queue touffue	Bdeogale crassicauda	Only 1 spotted at night in South Luangwa	x
Cape Buffalo	Buffle du Cap	Syncerus caffer	Large herds and lone bulls observed in Busanga Plains, Kafue, Lower Zambezi and South Luangwa	x
Bushbuck	Guib harnaché	Tragelaphus scriptus	Common in Kafue and South Luangwa	x
Common duiker	Céphalophe couronné	Sylvicapra grimmia	2 briefly seen during the road transfer between our lodges in Kafue and Busanga Plains	
Elephant	Eléphant d'Afrique	Loxodonta Africana	Common in Kafue, South Luangwa and Lower Zambezi. Even 1 seen in Kasanka	x
Lichtenstein's hartebeest	Bubale de Lichtenstein	Alcephalus busephalus lichtensteinii	A few seen in Kafue and Busanga Plains	x
Hippopotamus	Hippopotame	Hippopotamus amphibius	Common everywhere and huge numbers seen in the South Luangwa river !	x
Impala	Impala	Aepyceros melampus	Fairly common in Lower Zambezi and South Luangwa	x
Greater Kudu	Grand koudou	Tragelaphus strepsiceros	A few seen in Busanga Plains, Lower Zambezi and South Luangwa	x
Red lechwe (Kafue)	Lechwe de Kafue	Kobus leche kafuensis	Big numbers observed in Busanga Plains	x
Black lechwe	Lechwe noir	Kobus leche smithemani	Literally thousands observed in Bangweulu !	x
Puku	Puku	Kobus vardonii	Very common everywhere	x
Warthog	Phacochère commun	Phacochoerus africanus	Very common everywhere	x
Defassa waterbuck	Cobe Defassa	Kobus defassa	A few seen in Busanga Plains	x
Common waterbuck	Cobe à croissant	Kobus ellipsiprymnus	Several observed in Lower Zambezi and South Luangwa	x
Plain zebra	Zèbre de Crawshai	Equus quagga crawshaii	Several seen everywhere but never in big numbers	x
Yellow baboon	Cynocéphale	Papio cynocephalus	Very common everywhere	x
Lesser bushbaby	Galago moholi	Galago moholi	A few observed at night in Kafue	x
Vervet monkey	Vervet bleu	Cercopithecus pygerythrus	Quite common everywhere	x
Scrub Hare	Lièvre des buissons	Lepus saxatilis	Several spotted at night in Busanga Plains and South Luangwa	x

Cape porcupine	Porc-épic du Cap	<i>Hystrix africaeaustralis</i>	3 individuals spotted at night in South Luangwa	x
Tree squirrel	Ecureuil de brousse de Smith	<i>Paraxerus cepapi</i>	Several observed in Kafue, Lower Zambezi and South Luangwa	x
Bush pig	Potamochère	<i>Potamochoerus larvatus</i>	3 beautiful guys spotted at night in South Luangwa	x
Honey badger	Ratel	<i>Mellivora capensis</i>	A marvelous and long observation of a cute couple during spotlighting in South Luangwa	x
Yellow-spotted hyrax	Daman des steppes	<i>Heterohyrax brucei</i>	1 individual seen in Lower Zambezi	x
Oribi	Ourébi	<i>Ourebia ourebi</i>	3 individuals seen in far distance in Busanga Plains	
Reedbuck	Cobe des roseaux	<i>Redunca arundinum</i>	2 seen during the road transfer between our lodges in Kafue and Busanga Plains	x
Roan antelope	Antilope Rouanne	<i>Hippotragus equinus</i>	2 herds seen in Busanga Plains	x
Serval	Serval	<i>Leptailurus serval</i>	2 individuals seen at night in Kafue and Busanga Plains	x
Sitatunga	Sitatunga	<i>Tragelaphus spekii</i>	Several observed very well in hides in Kasanka	x
Blue wildebeest	Gnou bleu	<i>Connochaetes taurinus taurinus</i>	A few observed in Busanga Plains	x
Cookson wildebeest	Gnou de Cookson	<i>Connochaetes taurinus cooksoni</i>	Only 1 observed in South Luangwa but we finally saw it after long hours of searching!	x
Greater cane rat	Grand Aulacode	<i>Thryonomys swinderianus</i>	One briefly seen crossing the road in front of our car in South Luangwa	
Four-toed elephant shrew	Rat à trompe tétradactyle	<i>Petrodromus tetradactylus</i>	Several observed at night in South Luangwa	x
Sun squirrel	Héliosciure variable	<i>Heliosciurus gambianus</i>	Several observed in South Luangwa	x
Blue Monkey (Moloney)	Cercopitheque de Moloney	<i>Cercopithecus mitis moloneyi</i>	A few observed in Kasanka and Lower Zambezi, most often high in the trees	x
Thornicroft Giraffe	Girafe de Thornicroft	<i>Giraffa camelopardalis giraffa</i>	Several nice observations of this beautiful giraffe subspecies in South Luangwa	x
Total Species Recorded = 46				

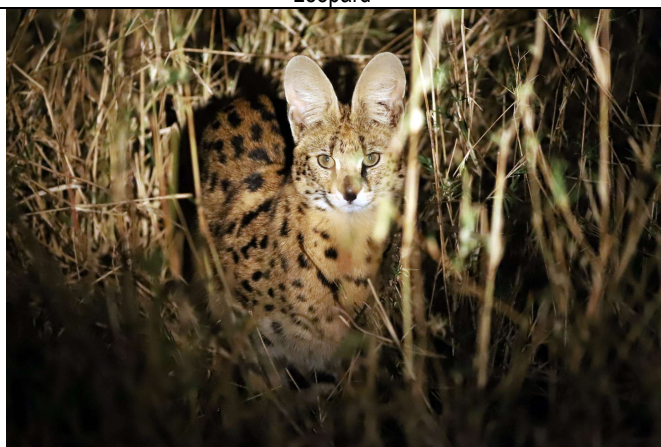
I'm adding to this report some pictures of the most iconic species we observed during that trip and/or those new to me:



Leopard



Lion



Serval



Wild dog



Large spotted genet



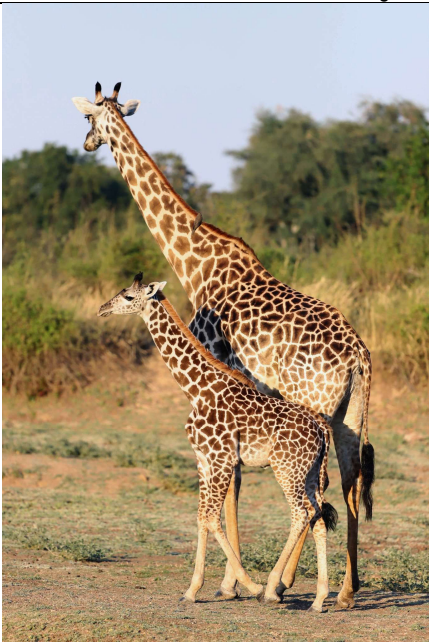
Slender mongoose



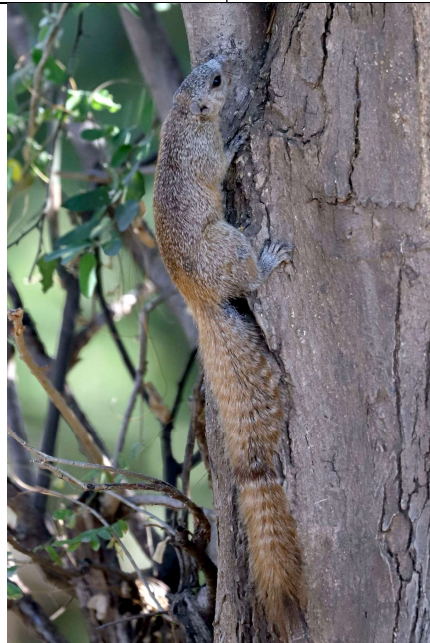
White-tailed mongoose



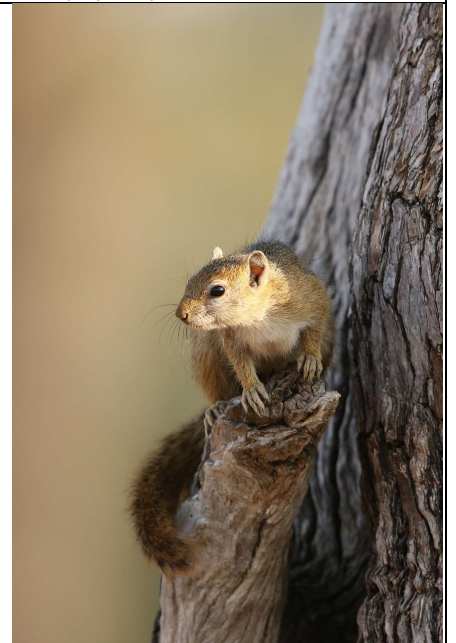
Cape porcupine



Thornicroft giraffe



Tree squirrel



Sun squirrel



Lichtenstein's hartebeest



Elephants



Side-striped jackal



Blue Monkey (Moloney)



Red lechwe (Kafue)



Black lechwe



Bush pig



Four-toed elephant shrew



Sitatunga



Cookson wildebeest



Honey badgers