

## Nature Notes 10: "Out of Africa"



*The Great Ruaha river flowing through the Ruaha National Park*

Hippopotami are particularly strongly affected by these changes as they not only need water to drink but also to regulate their temperature by convective cooling in pools deep enough for them to submerge in. As the rivers dry up they crowd more and more densely into the remaining pools, becoming progressively more aggressive towards each other and exhibiting less courtship and mating behaviours so breeding success declines.

The trip was a real African experience. I saw giraffes, elephants, hyena, zebra, impala and greater kudu from the window of the house in which I was staying, while



*A juvenile black mamba*

the house next door had an unexpected visitor which curled up under a foam cushion on a wicker arm chair. It was a pretty little brown patterned snake that was very reluctant to leave, climbing rapidly back up when it was gently hinted that it might like to go for a stroll outside. The "black" of "black mamba" seems to be something of a misnomer, perhaps it would be more appropriate to call them "pretty little brown patterned mamba"!!!!. I am very glad I did not sit down in that chair because juvenile black mambas are every bit as venomous as the adults and survival time for humans without an anti-venom injection is typically only 10-12h, sometimes as little as 45 minutes.

A walking safari, accompanied by two armed guards, was a wonderful opportunity to feel completely at one with some of the most charismatic animals in the world in their natural surroundings. Feelings of being at one with the animals is all well and good but there can also be some feelings of trepidation, as when we walked within about 100 metres of a group of elephants. Suddenly the huge matriarch swung to face us with ears at right angles to her body, a clear warning signal that a charge may be imminent. What we had missed was that just behind her was a tiny 2-3 day old calf hidden within the legs of a group of tightly encircling protective adults very gently shepherding it off in the opposite direction. "Phew! Please can I breathe again now"?

During the summer I was invited by the Tanzanian National Parks Authority to advise on conservation management of some of the Tanzanian National Parks. Intensification of agriculture upstream has led to the rivers, on which animals in the parks depend, drying up altogether during the dry season. I was based in Ruaha National Park. At 22,300 km<sup>2</sup> it is the largest National Park in Tanzania, bigger than the whole of Wales and 83,000 x larger than Upgate Common!!!. Sitting in the co-pilot's seat of a four seater Cessna, soaring up above the vast rolling African landscape was very reminiscent of scenes from the film "Out of Africa"



*Hippopotami taking a nap on a sandbank*



*The matriarch of this herd of elephants warns us not to approach any closer*

**Mark** (August 2017)