

Wildlife of special interest

By Britta Meyer

Elephants (kis: Tembo) – *Loxodonta africana* In November and December they tend to gather in huge herds of 300 to 500 individuals, feeding on the nutrient rich fresh grasses in the plains. Tusk less individuals can be observed frequently as herd leaders (matriarch). Poaching of elephants has recently increased strongly.

Plains or Common Zebra, subspecies Grants Zebra (kis: Punda milia) – *Equus burchellii boehmi* The legs are stripped to the hooves. It does not have substripes between the black stripes and is clearly and broadly striped white and black, not gray or cream like the *E. q. burchellii* can be. The races *E. q. crawshayi* and *E. q. boehmi*, have the legs stripped to the hooves. It is smaller than *E. grevyi*, not territorial, harem (6–12) animals. It prefers open plains, esp. in the dry season and makes use of grassed woodlands. In the peak of the dry season hundreds of zebras and topis can be seen moving daily to the springs at Katuma Valley and Kasima springs at the eastern Katisunga plains. It is a non-selective grazer, drinks daily mainly at night. Associated with a number of species, often seen with Waterbuck, impalas and topis (polyspecific associations). When the herd is running away the stallion usually is the last and looks back before he follows. When drinking he will always be the first.

Deffasa Waterbuck (kis: Kuro) – *Kobus ellipsiprymnus defassa* A race of Waterbuck with a white patch at the back, not a ring, as their southern relative. They are territorial and live near open water. They can be observed nicely along the Lake Katavi shore and often stand totally still in woods as if frozen. Their coat is thick and longer than with most other grazers and browsers and they seem almost *alien* considering the hot climate of tropical Africa.

Cape Buffalo (kis: Nyati) – *Syncerus caffer caffer* There are four subspecies in Africa. The one encountered in Rukwa is the Cape Buffalo which is the largest by far. It can be observed in huge breeding herds of more than 1000 individuals in Katavi's plains. They tend to gather in the plains to escape the tsetse flies, but also rest during the heat of midday in the shade of trees along the plains. Males are often seen in small herds of 2 to 15 taking a bath in Lake Katavi. When they get old they get slower and their coat becomes scruffy. Some individuals have very large horns and a great boss. Buffaloes need to drink every day once or twice depending on the forage situation which makes them vulnerable to drought as they have to move far from grazing to drinking spots.

Puku (kis: Puku) – *Kobus vardonii* An extremely tame animal with a naturally small flight distance. It is a relative to the waterbuck which is obvious when one sees their faces closely. It is found only at Lake Rukwa and in the Kilombero Valley in Tanzania, but it is very abundant in the Zambian and Congolese wetlands. Its range has been reduced enormously in the last decades. In RGR their habitat is disturbed by the fishermen who are allowed to camp along the shoreline. Up to 2001 it was also threatened by the Sukuma tribe, recent immigrants from Mwanza/Shinyanga and agropastoralists, who illegally used the plains inside RGR for their large cattle herds.

Hartebeest (kis: Kongoni) – *Alcelaphus buselaphus (inc. lichtensteinii)* In Katavi Rukwa it occurs to have a reddish-tannin coloration. It is a different subspecies than in the Serengeti (*A. b. cokei*). This antelope has been observed to decline heavily where ever there is competition from cattle keeping. Droughts and diseases can reduce the populations rapidly. Males are territorial during the mating season. Males and females

are difficult to distinguish and therefore hunting is a threat to this species. Other subspecies of the kongoni are already extinct (bubal in Sudan) or locally extinct (korkay in Somalia). This may act as a warning to the vulnerability of the species. In KNP it can be observed at the edges of woodlands close to grassy drainage lines or plains. Kafirula and the woods between Katisunga and Lake Katavi are places where it can be seen, also at Wamweru, Mbuga ya Duma, Kapapa, Mlele, Mbuga Nyeupe, Mabombani it is likely to spot them. It is more abundant in RGR than in KNP.

Sable antelope (kis: Palahala) – *Hippotragus niger kirkii* To be observed rarely in the wooded elevated areas of Katavi's extension near Chorangwa and along the eastern Mlele road. They are more abundant in the Miombo woodlands of RGR, but may shift to the plains and water courses of the Rukwa Valley in dry years. They prefer dry ground and therefore appear more frequently in the woods. The old males become almost black and their coat is shiny. Their horns become very large and are bend backwards in an almost perfect half circle. May that be a subjective statement, but they are the most beautiful and elegant antelope! When becoming subadults they develop a white mask in their faces similar to the roan.

Roan antelope (kis: Korongo) – *Hippotragus equinus langheldi* A species to be found at the plains of Katavi in the dry season, but preferring the well-drained woods in the wet times of the year. Roan can be seen in the southern Katisunga plain, Kataukasi, Kakonje, Mongwe, Magogo. It is more abundant in Rukwa. In comparison to the sable it prefers the habitats which are closer to the drainage lines and are less wooded. Remarkable is that they tend to stay in areas where no or few other antelopes are found. They avoid areas with a high carnivore density. They are threatened by cattle keeping due to habitat destruction.

Hippos (kis: Kiboko) – *Hippopotamus amphibius* They occur in huge aggregations at Ikuu and other areas with springs in the dry season. The males have huge teeth (incisors teeth and canines) and display them with a wide open mouth when feeling threatened. Hippos are dependent on water deep enough to submerge in order to protect their delicate skin. They have glands which produce a fluid which can look like blood. The function of this "flexible varnish" is not yet fully known, but may protect their skin for a limited time from sunburn. They graze at night and rest the day in the water. But in some places in Katavi they can be seen grazing during the daytime, due to the assured security.

Usually they form groups of 10 to 15 with a dominant male and groups are separated by 50 to 500 yards along the river or lake shore.

They are extremely threatened by the illegal damming of Katuma River outside the NP. The district authorities together with the park are currently discouraging the damming. The removal of the blockages will improve the life of the hippos again.

Their distribution is shrinking immensely as their habitats, bigger rivers, are populated more and more by humans. They are hunted for their meat and for the damage they can cause to agriculture.

Wild Dog (kis: Mbwa mwitu) – *Lycaon pictus lupinus* It is occasionally seen at Lake Katavi in packs of 4-8 individuals. They prefer the short grass along the lake Katavi in the wet season, when most other areas are covered with up to 3 meter tall grasses. They have been seen chasing a male lion up a tree! Nonetheless in Ikuu area, where the lion population is very high, no packs have ever been sighted. They are more frequently seen in the extension of KNP and in RGR. They hunt during the day, e.g. waterbuck and Impala.

The wild dog is listed as endangered/vulnerable everywhere. Their home range is very large (200–2000 km²) which makes them very vulnerable as humans are encroaching everywhere and either destroying their habitat, their prey animals or kill them deliberately, when they are seen hunting cattle. They are also very threatened by rabies which can easily be transmitted from local dogs.

Cheetah (kis: Duma) – *Acinonyx jubatus* Long doubted to occur in Katavi, has recently been photographed at the Katisunga Plains. A female with cubs has been sighted several times in the Mbuga ya Duma.

Blue monkey – *Cercopithecus mitis* Found in Mlele escarpment in the dense riverine forests along the escarpment of the Rukwa Rift Valley. Recorded also in the remains of the riverine vegetation along Katuma river near Sibwesa village together with red colobus and redbelt monkeys.

Chimpanzees (kis: Sokwe mtu) – *Pan troglodytes schweinfurthii* They occur in the nearby Mahale NP and have been recorded in the wooded hills close to the village of Sibwesa North of KNP. They have never been sighted inside the park, probably because they need dense forest patches with sufficient water and food resources during the dry season for their nests and special fruiting trees which do not occur inside the park. The chimpanzee can have a huge home range in forest-woodland mosaics (between 5 to 400 km²).

Chimpanzees are listed in IUCN as endangered and therefore the area around Sibwesa will be part of a Wildlife Management Area and will be used for photographic tourism.

Central African Red Colobus – *Procolobus rufomitratus* Group of eighteen has been recorded with Blue monkeys and Redbelts in remains of riverine vegetation along the Katuma river near Sibwesa just North of the park.

Redbelt Monkey – *Cercopithecis ascanius* Six individuals with Red Colobus and Blue Monkeys at Katuma River near Sibwesa outside the park.