

Bev & PC – 2012 Africa Safari 8

Gorongozo

A good meal at Cua Cua Lodge and we left next morning (our 62nd day on the road and just over 11 000kms driven) for Gorongozo National Park, crossed the magnificent new bridge over the Zambezi (M100 toll fee), refueled in Caia just other side the bridge and filled jerry cans as the next reliable fueling point is Inchope just south of the Gorongozo NP. The ATM was not working, so we pushed on (fortunately they accept credit cards in GNP, so a potential crisis was averted). The road is a mixed bag of potholed and good sections. You pass through some magnificent forested areas. The big worry is seeing these truck loads (often overloaded) of logs heading to Beira – we'd also seen similar scenes further north with trucks heading to Nacala. I spoke to a guide at Gorongozo about this – he said all the hard wood is off to China. We stopped at a roadside market to buy vegetables and fruit before turning off the EN1 onto a badly corrugated (but no worse than the roads in Kgalagadi) to Chitengo Camp. There is a filling station in Gorongozo village, but I did not see any vehicles refueling.



Gorongozo is a mixture of dense bush and vast flood plains – dry at this time of the year (Aug/Sept) but are under water for a good part of the year. The park is closed from December to March as it is only around 20-50m above sea level. On the plains there are vast numbers of waterbuck and warthog. We also saw sable, oribi, reedbuck, impala, Lichtenstein hartebeest, bushbuck, greater kudu, baboons and the birding is really good. We did not see any of the big 5, but there is evidence of elephant, and there is a programme to reintroduce game whose numbers were depleted during the years of the civil war. Judging by some of the derelict

buildings one can see evidence that this once was a park that rivaled Serengeti in terms volume of game as it was a very popular tourist destination – up to 50 000 visitors a year. The campsite is pleasant, with clean ablutions and was pretty full – mainly South Africans. However, eating and drinking in Chitengo is expensive (M120 for a beer). The fees structure is geared to encourage visitors to use park guides on game drives – using your own vehicle is M1 200/day – in addition to the park fees. We ate in the restaurant on our fourth and final night and the buffet was good, but at M700/pp, probably not worth it.



I decided to try my luck with the green headed oriole – endemic to the rain forest area on Mt Gorongoza by taking the trip to the waterfall on the mountain. The bird is sometimes seen in the wooded area around the waterfall. It's a three hour drive (M1 900 plus M150 community fee includes lunch) to get to the starting point, then around 1.5hr walk up the mountain. Pretty strenuous, but really worth it when you get to your destination and have a swim in the rock pools. Unfortunately, no luck with the oriole. It will have to go onto the bucket list as the walk further up the mountain requires a bit more planning.



On our last game drive we revisited a drying pool of water in one river in the park. On our previous visit we'd had what we thought was quite a unique situation with marabou storks, a

hamerkop and a fish eagle side-by-side at the water's edge. Well we now know why, as the water had dried up to the point where the fish were clearly seen flapping about and the birds simply biding their time to go in for the kill.





Gorongosa is certainly unique in terms of habitat and volumes of waterbuck, warthog and variety of birds. In terms of habitat, closest comparison would be Selous Game Reserve in southern Tanzania, but without the vast flood plains. Gorongosa is well worth visiting.