



The cheetah brothers

# Wild & Sage Paw Prints

*Heather Tyrrell, Audley's Africa & Indian Ocean Programme Manager, explains why the Selinda Reserve is her favourite corner of Botswana.*

Over the last ten years I have explored almost every national park and game reserve in Botswana. I have stayed in lodges and tree camps and spent days exploring by 4WD, on foot and in boats, eyes glued to the wildlife. I'm frequently asked where I would go for my ultimate safari holiday. And in Botswana, there is no doubt where my first stop would be – the Selinda Reserve.

The Selinda Reserve is located north east of the Okavango Delta, fringing the Linyanti Wetlands. The first time I went there I flew in on a Cessna 206. Tucked up in the cockpit I could barely wait to get on the ground. Huge yellow plains stretched below and in the distance I could see the glittering waters of the Linyanti Lagoon. Finally, stepping onto the grass runway I knew that this was the place for

me. The scent of wild sage filled the air, a jackal loped off into the grass and in the distance a family of giraffe watched us, big blue eyes blinking in the sun.

*My favourite time was sitting at night listening to two elephant drink from the waterhole.*

Covering an area of 1,350 square kilometres, there are vast floodplains interspersed with small islands of wild date and ilala palm. Cutting across the plains, the Selinda Spillway is a long deep channel that fills with water after the rains and can flow both ways. The Linyanti Lagoon is one of my favourite spots as the

waters seem always to twinkle in the sun. A pod of resident hippos lumber about and for birders it is heaven. Pink-backed pelicans, white faced ducks, spoonbills, black winged stilts and many more are always in sight. It's the perfect place for a picnic.

One of highlights of the reserve for me is the big cats. There are several prides of lion in the area, the most notable being the dominant Selinda Pride. Currently numbering about 20, these cats have learnt to hunt hippo - ten lion on a hippos back is not a sight I will forget. Towards the end of the dry season they change tack and lie in wait by the Linyanti Lagoon to ambush animals, making up to five kills a day. Perhaps my favourite cats though are three cheetah brothers. I woke one morning and stumbled out to the campfire. It was not quite dawn, the light was dim and I couldn't see the nearby waterhole. As the sun came up the sight of the three beautiful brothers drinking appeared. Bush-tea, toast and three cheetah was a pretty good start to the day.

Aside from the cats, the game at Selinda is endless. It is one of the best reserves to see wild dog with two packs, the Selinda pack and the Kwando pack, frequently passing through. There are good densities of antelope (roan, sable, impala, kudu, tsessebe, reedbuck, red lechwe and steenbok) and in June large herds of zebra and wildebeest migrate in to the reserve. Finally, from June onwards large herds of elephant and buffalo arrive, attracted by the Linyanti River's permanent water.



Lions on kill

So, add all this to my favourite camp in Botswana and you have my ultimate destination. There are two sister camps in the reserve, Selinda Camp (twelve tents) and Zibadianja Camp with just three. For me, Zibadianja will always be my top camp. It is tiny, situated under ilala palms and rain trees and overlooking endless plains. Baboons love to sit in the trees eating the palm nuts and it was at this waterhole that I first saw the cheetah brothers. But perhaps my favourite time was sitting at night listening to two elephants drink from the waterhole. As I sipped my beer the elephants slurped away (rather more noisily than me I might add). With a clear sky above and miles of wilderness around, I thought this is the place for me.



Giraffe

Zibadianja Camp

## Travel file

A 13-night safari to Botswana, including three nights in the Selinda Reserve costs from £2,280 per person based on twin share (price includes international flights, all transfers, meals and game viewing activities). Botswana combines well with a trip to the Victoria Falls or time relaxing on the beach in Mozambique. For further details please call Marilyn or Heather on 01869 276 250.

