



Spirit of cooperation

Jane Goodfellow reports on a mutually beneficial arrangement between two game reserves in the Limpopo province's Waterberg Biosphere

The crisp, early morning bushveld chill was shattered by loud shouts of "Hey – hey – Hey!" followed by the angry snarl of an irritated lion.

"What's happening?" a guest seated behind me on the open game-viewing vehicle asked anxiously.

I'd never noticed before just how vulnerable one is in these vehicles; it took just one little grumble from a large cat to make us all aware we were a few short, unprotected paces away from being juicy, easy-to-catch lion food.

"They've chanced upon the un-darted

lion and are trying to chase him off," Hannes, our ranger, replied.

Two minutes before this we'd watched a very courageous vet and two rangers walk off – rifles at the ready – into the bush in front of us, in pursuit of a large lion they'd darted with a fast-acting anaesthetic. He should have been about ready to lie down, problem being he was in the company of a lion and lioness that hadn't been darted, and the presence of people and vehicles in their vicinity was annoying them. They were no doubt also a bit puzzled by their companion's by now wavering gait.

And the shouting, one may ask? The

rangers had just about walked into the other male lion, and he wasn't pleased to see them. To avoid having to fire a warning shot, they made a lot of assertive noise in an attempt to move him away, and fortunately he decided to take his displeasure elsewhere.

The darted and by now unconscious lion they were looking for was found a few yards away and transported back to where we were waiting to observe his check-up and the fitting of a radio collar.

Half an hour later and with new collar in place, a fast-acting antidote to the anaesthetic was administered. We lost no



time in hotfooting it back to our vehicles, where we watched him wake up from a safer distance.

We were on Ka'Ingo, a luxury private game reserve in the Waterberg Biosphere in Limpopo province, roughly three and a half hours' drive – or a short flight in a small plane; Ka'Ingo has its own airstrip – northwest of Johannesburg, near to the Botswana border.

It's in an area of great scenic beauty, interesting cultural history, as evidenced in the plentiful rock art and abundant wildlife.

Activities for guests include rock art viewing, sites by arrangement, participation in conservation projects and farm activities, excursions to neighbouring farms for hunting and elephant rides. Also explore conservation and community-based projects and arts and crafts on the Waterberg Meander a short drive away.

This lion-collaring exercise is the kind of unique experience that guests at the luxurious Ka'Ingo Private Game Reserve may be fortunate enough to enjoy; they are welcome to join in with any game farm



activities – conservation or maintenance – that may be taking place during their stay, guaranteeing them a very real, unique and absolutely unforgettable experience in the wilds of Africa. For example, an ongoing leopard conservation project uses Ka'Ingo as a base, and visitors have the opportunity to see one of these magnificent beasts up close and personal, albeit asleep!

This is what the beautiful reserve is all about – not just taking guests on yet another sunset game drive, but making them a part of an all-encompassing wilds-of-Africa experience, the memories of which will have them counting the days until their return.

The lion collaring was just one of several highlights of my visit. Another huge one, the chief reason for my being there, was to witness an historic event – the joining of two individually owned neighbouring game reserves and the cutting of the fences that divide them.

Ka'Ingo has the Big Five, and the appetites of their large predators were starting to



Photo: Eject



Photo: Jane Goodfellow

valuable, disease-free baby buffalo and giraffe calves to lions.

Just across the Mokolo River lies the Mokolo River Nature Reserve with an abundance of hoofstock, which increasingly require more grazing land. But here there are no large predators.

The solution? In an amazing spirit of trust and cooperation, and after much careful negotiation, these neighbours agreed to remove their fencing on either side of the river to allow their animals access to the river and to each other's properties, giving them more space to forage, hunt and have access to new genes in their respective breeding seasons.

There was barely a dry eye at the very moving fence-cutting ceremony which heralded the birth of the Greater Mokolo Nature Reserve, which, so far 40 000 acres in extent, straddles eight kilometres of the clear, sparkling Mokolo River. I say so far because several neighbouring reserves are interested in joining this initiative; they all share a common dream of creating a huge reserve in the Waterberg that will rival Kruger National Park in extent, where animals will roam free, and guests can enjoy nature in a malaria-free environment.



Photo: Jane Goodfellow

The new combined Ka'Ingo-Mokolo area is also free from the hordes of game viewing vehicles, all jostling for the best camera angles around a lion kill, typical of large reserves like Kruger. At 7 500 acres per vehicle, guests are ensured a peaceful game drive amongst undisturbed wildlife.

I felt honoured to have borne witness to this momentous event and would have loved to have camped out next to the opening in the fence to watch the first animals become aware of their new expanse as they stepped through the gap into new terrain.

My visit had so many memorable moments, from the fresh kudu and wild cat spoor right outside my room one morning; from the convivial staff of Mokolo and Ka'Ingo, dancing in celebration of the fence removal, to the timelessness of the rock art, the heart-stopping sound of a lion's roar, and the spectacular sunset we watched from a viewing platform on Ka'Ingo's sister reserve, Dinkweng Safari Camp.

Ka'Ingo Main Lodge

Ka'Ingo Main Lodge's five-star accommodation is air-conditioned, en suite, fully catered and is either in rondavels

or suites, with private decks. Mini-bars, TVs, safes, telephones and other comforts are all come part and parcel.

A central entertainment area houses the restaurant, bush bar, pool, fire deck, TV room, coffee bar, and conference facilities. If you need a little pampering, the magical hands of the Zorgvliet Spa therapist with her aromatic herbs and lotions will restore you.

And mention must be made of the bushveld cuisine, accompanied by award-winning Zorgvliet wines. My jaded city-girl palate was treated to the novelties of game wots, blou wildebees potjie and impala sosaties, but I drew the line at skilpaadjies, rich servings of minced liver wrapped in bacon.

Dinkweng Safari Camp

Dinkweng is linked to Ka'Ingo by a sinuous 4x4 track winding down into a deep valley, across a tranquil stream, and up the other side to the gate in Ka'Ingo's fence.

This peaceful, family-friendly reserve is fenced to keep lions and elephants out, so while Ka'Ingo's guests may happen upon big scares on game drives, families at Dinkweng can stroll the hiking paths or enjoy exploring on mountain bikes without any danger of becoming kitty



food. Dinkweng's kudu, zebra, blue wildebeest and giraffe are bound to put in an appearance during your stay, with the odd shy leopard also spotted in the area.

Accommodation is in luxurious, spacious self-catering lodges, each with three en suite bedrooms, an open-plan lounge, dining room, kitchen, braai facilities, viewing deck with splash pool, TV and Internet accessibility.

Polaris 4x4 game-viewing vehicles are available for rent on the reserve, or you can hire a vehicle and a friendly ranger.

If you're keen, there's a communal lapa area (meals by arrangement) with pool, bar, and a shop. Other facilities include a tennis court, walking trails, business centre, children's play area, gym, and for some mind, body and soul restoration, a Zorgvliet Spa.

Visitors can fly into Ka'Ingo's landing strip, and transfers to Dinkweng will be arranged.

Contacts

Ka'Ingo Private Reserve & Spa

Dinkweng Safari Camp

Central bookings: Tel 0861 967 485

Email bookings: reservations1@zorgvliet.com