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#### **Kenya News**

#### **KENYA AIRWAYS TO COMMENCE FLIGHTS TO LIVINGSTONE**



News are coming out of Nairobi that *The Pride of Africa* will launch flights to Livingstone / Zambia in June, then routing on to Harare / Zimbabwe. The available schedule information pegs the operations between 02<sup>nd</sup> of June until initially 25<sup>th</sup> October, but if successful might extend further beyond that date. The aircraft on the route will be an Embraer 190E, which increasingly has turned into the domestic and regional work horse aircraft for Kenya Airways, as more of these sleep birds await delivery in coming months.

Livingstone and Victoria Falls on the other side of the Zambezi River will jointly host the UNWTO General Assembly this year and as a result expect hugely raised publicity for the two destinations and the national parks in both countries, resulting in greater demand from tourists keen on seeing the Zambian wilderness areas or Zimbabwe's ancient ruins.

Watch this space for breaking and regular news updates from East Africa's vibrant aviation scene.

#### **LIKE FATHER LIKE SON – KENYATTA BECOMES KENYA'S FOURTH PRESIDENT**



The declaration of the final results in the presidential elections in Kenya has just been made, at shortly after 14.40 pm on Saturday, March 09<sup>th</sup> of 2013, 5 days after the landmark elections on Monday. The trend visible since the early provisional results were announced during Monday night and early Tuesday morning and the lead taken by Uhuru Kenyatta over his closest rival Raila Odinga progressively opened up to around 600.000 before at one time leaping to the near one million mark before reducing again, leaving the outcome a nail biter hard to even be scripted by Hollywood writers. The digital vote count, after reaching a combined 4+ million, collapsed due to various factors including server overload and the vote count had to be restarted manually, relying on the key documents signed by the returning officers in each and every of the 291 constituencies, brought to Nairobi by the men and women

concerned in a major logistical race against time. It was a race right down to the wire, as only when the very last constituency results was announced, did Uhuru Kenyatta finally cross the magic 50 percent plus one vote margin, by just over 4.100 votes in the end from a confirmed 12.338.667 votes cast.

Now, finally, the race is over, the unsavoury scenario of a runoff election out of the way, which could have paralyzed Kenya for another month and dented economic growth as well as given rise to anxiety and fear of what the camp on the losing end of the race might do to reverse their flagging fortunes, had Uhuru Kenyatta and his running mate William Ruto failed to secure an outright first round victory. Kenya has a new president elect, named Uhuru Kenyatta and the region will be collectively breathing out with relief, the nail biter finally over and everyone being able to settle back and down to business as usual.

Dubbed '*The Battle of the Sons*' by this correspondent in various pre-election commentaries, the outcome, like in the early days of Independence, is a repetition of Kenyatta senior taking centre stage after independence and Odinga senior ending up as eternal second.

For one of the main protagonists, there will be no opportunity now to 'revenge' and do all the things the father failed to accomplish and for the other there will be plenty of opportunity to show he holds no grudges and is president of all Kenyans. A president who brings those parts of the country which voted for his opponent into the fold and be their president too, Western Kenya and the coastal areas among others. A president who reaches out to the entire nation and helps build a prosperous future for all with equitable resource allocation and attention to the needs of every part of the country, not just areas which voted him into office.

Let's hope this will be the start of a new Kenya, under a second Kenyatta president, not a time to settle scores but a time to set things right and give the opposition a sense of belonging, a sense of co-owning and a sense of ownership of the new republic, a republic reborn, the Second Republic of Kenya as the new constitution is now taking full effect after these elections were concluded. It is time that '*Tribe Kenya*' takes to the forefront for the better of the country while all other 'tribes' take a step back and make way to '*One Kenya – One Tribe*'. Kenya does so for major sporting events, when the country stands united behind their Rugby 7 team, their football team and their track athletes when they compete in major international events.

There is of course the matter of the trial for the winning team at the International Criminal Court at the Hague, already postponed to later this year, where their legal teams are hard at work to have the committal for trial squashed after a key witness, on whom the pre trial chamber relied heavily in their decision to have Kenyatta, Ruto and two others confirmed for a full trial, admitted to having lied – under oath of course – robbing the prosecutors of a cornerstone of their case.

That however will be resolved, or not, in coming weeks as the case either continues, or may be dismissed after all, but for certain it would be a novelty to have a sitting head of state and his vice president stand trial over allegations of masterminding the post 2007 election violence which spread across Kenya 5 years ago.

Kenyans have spoken, that scenario clearly written on the wall, in part for being fed up of being told by Western powers of what to do, and in the face of the utterances of several Western diplomats and foreign affairs offices overseas in past weeks which have only served to have Kenyans dig in and show the ICC and the West what many of them think of the ICC case and of the supposedly friendly nations whom many a friend in Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa have been calling '*wolves in sheep skins*'. The announcement just now has both sorted this all out as well as opened a totally new can of worms, should the trial indeed go ahead but that will be a story for another day.

Congratulations to the Jubilee Alliance, which will be celebrating Kenya's 50<sup>th</sup> independence jubilee later this year in power and congratulations too to those candidates which in a sign of political maturity have already conceded their defeat at the polls and who perhaps will try in a few years again, if they still have the taste for it.

For now, Kenya's hotly contested race to the State House is over and East Africa can go on with the task of nation and region building, with the economic locomotive, as Kenya is perceived in Eastern Africa, having been refueled and ready to resume what will hopefully turn into a prolonged bull run driven by oil and gas exploration, major infrastructure projects including railways, new highways, refineries and pipelines, manufacturing and last but not least of course tourism, which remains firmly at the top of the region's economic activities after tea but before

coffee exports. It was my wish and prediction to see peace prevail and a largely matured Kenyan population has delivered exactly that, peaceful polls, peaceful counts and is now set for a peaceful transition.

## **THE BATTLE OF THE SONS RELOADED 50 YEARS DOWN THE LINE - IN PEACE THIS TIME**



Kenya's long awaited general election of the 04<sup>th</sup> March is now underway and while there are 6 levels of elected offices to decide about, all eyes are today on the two main protagonists, who renew the battle of their late fathers who on independence strove for political supremacy.

Back then it was Jomo Kenyatta who carried the day, leaving left leaning Jaramogi Oginga Odinga in the political cold and then literally shunned Nyanza Province after a shooting incident in Kisumu which saw him rushed away by his body guards in an incident described by his camp at the time as an assassination attempt. This event and its aftermath did for decades mark a political divide which evolved into an economic divide too, as that beautiful part of Kenya, bordering Lake Victoria, was in the eyes of many left behind when it came to resource allocation and infrastructure development, leave alone political influence.

Odinga senior, who found himself politically relegated into the lower basements as KANU subsequently stayed in power throughout the Kenyatta years and in fact until 2002 when Kenya's second president Daniel arap Moi had to step down, stood for the presidency once again late in his life. At the time he made a spectacle of himself when with a tearful face he begged Kenyans to give him just one day in State House, a wish never fulfilled in his lifetime but clearly spurring on his son who is today standing for a second time to capture Kenya's top political prize after losing 5 years ago to President Mwai Kibaki, which led to wide spread violence as his supporters took to the streets, throwing Kenya into turmoil until former UN Supremo Kofi Annan moderated a political powersharing deal. In contrast is Uhuru Kenyatta, who grew up in State House as the son born that year and named after Independence Day aiming to return to the place of his youth and carry on his late father's legacy in a second Kenyatta presidency, 50 years down the line.

Most Kenyans voting today are too young to remember those days though and will only have heard about these stories from their elders. Subsequently they will look at the 8 presidential candidates today from a different perspective, one where their own economic circumstances matter as they cast their votes today for the man, or woman of their choice whom they think can deliver a better future for them, and the entire country.

The new constitution of two years ago is also coming into full effect today as the new devolved system of governance comes into its own and the counties elect their governors and senators for the second tier of parliament, leaving the old provincial and district administrations from post independence days behind once and for all.

From the lessons learned in early 2008, when the country erupted in political violence as one camp disputed the outcome of the end December 2007 elections while the other was swift to put paid to speculations with a hasty swearing in ceremony, this year security is out in force with enough reserves reportedly held back to intervene at the first signs of trouble emerging once the trend of the results, drawn from exit polls and the gradual release of results for local, parliamentary, senate and governors' elections becomes known. The region, after extensive consultations on governmental levels with their Kenyan counterparts, is cautiously optimistic that the chaos of 5 years ago was a one off event and will not be repeated as Kenyans, from the look of things, have a taste for peace and development rather than for a return to those dark days in early 2008, which set the country back for years.

All candidates in TV commercials pledged themselves to a peaceful conduct, unprecedented in this form in Kenya until now, and urged their supporters to also accept the outcome of the polls and seek and any redress in court and not on the streets of Kenya's cities and towns.

A pointer towards that were news on Saturday that after the final rallies of the two key protagonists, opposing camp supporters, who streamed away from their venues, met in the streets and hugged and laughed rather than resorting to stones and sticks, a sign of remarkable maturity displayed and a disappointment for those foreign media sharks who came to Kenya to show their viewers back home pictures of chaos and strife. I, as do many of my friends in Kenya and the region, hope they will have to go back home with their tails between their legs, denied the doomsday scenarios they came – perhaps in some cases prewritten and prepared to file off the shelf from their luxury hotels in Nairobi – beaten by the Kenyan voters who will embrace peace and tolerance rather than violence and strife.

Hundreds of thousands of voters started queuing in the deep of the night, according to reports from several sources in Kenya and now two hours into the voting, which will end at 6 pm unless extended to cater for those already in the queues, making way for the all important vote count.

And regardless of my own preference of candidate and parties, my one and only wish is for Kenya to make yet more history today in this watershed elections, as it did when in an African first they staged two presidential debates on national TV. The signs are positive for sure, and a peaceful Kenya will be a prosperous Kenya from which the entire hinterland region comprising Uganda, South Sudan, Eastern Congo, Rwanda and Burundi will benefit.

As one of my sources said in a call at 7 am sharp, when his polling station opened ***‘Let’s do this and show the world what Kenya is truly made of’***.

Tourism sources, who marched and advocated for peace in recent weeks, overwhelmingly endorsed the view that the elections will unfold in relative peace and that the results will not provoke the backlash of 5 years ago, which had wiped the fortunes of record performances out in one fell swoop and set the industry back by several years. ***‘Yes, occupancies are down right now, considerably in fact, but we hope that if we have a winner today things will be back to normal in days and Easter will bring full house across our resorts and hotels and safari lodges. Overseas tour operators were overly cautious but will be back promoting us when we meet them at ITB later this week and show them evidence that all is well back home’*** said one Nairobi based source in a message, who will be departing for Berlin and the ITB tonight.

Watch this space for updates as and when available and the results, as they are released by the IEBC as the only authoritative source of election result data in the country.

## **Tanzania News**

### **TANZANIA LISTED ALONGSIDE CHINA, VIETNAM AND THAILAND FOR *IVORY SANCTIONS***



It was learned overnight through communications from sources attending the CITES Conference in Bangkok / Thailand that the global anger and outrage over the steady flow of blood ivory from Africa to Asia is now finally turning into some action, as CITES has threatened China, Vietnam, Thailand and Tanzania, among others, to either pull up their socks in the fight against the criminal trade or else face a ban from trading as part of an extensive sanctions regime which would come into force in a year if no improvements are seen.

The countries named will have to produce, on the fast track, a new management plan how they intend to combat poaching and smuggling and if targets set by March next year are not met face major sanctions.

Tanzania’s own parliament last year received an undisputed report that nearly 30 elephant a day were killed in the country, largely in the little guarded Selous and Ruaha, though later reports seen earlier this year put the figure substantially higher.

Poaching of elephant for their ivory has in 2012 reached a new all time high, as did incidentally also the poaching of rhinos, especially in Southern Africa where well over 600 rhinos were killed last year for their horn, then sold at prices dearer than gold to make aphrodisiacs in spite of the zero medicinal value of the horn’s contents.

Tanzania had in a change of heart withdrawn the application to sell about 100 tons of so called legal ivory, something the disgraced former tourism minister Ezekiel Maige had stubbornly insisted on bringing Tanzania’s conservation efforts to global disrepute at the time. It is understood that the turnabout was initiated by current tourism minister Amb. Khamis Kageshaki, who is generally seen as more enlightened and open to logical argument compared to his hapless predecessor and who upon realizing the scale of the slaughter of elephant in Tanzania raised the alarm himself. Sackings and demotions at the Wildlife Department of his ministry also made way for new more dedicated officials, lending credibility to the minister’s pledge to combat poaching and ending the menace.

Watch this space for more information coming from the CITES meetings or else visit [www.cites.org](http://www.cites.org)

## **Rwanda News**

### **RWANDAIR – WHERE DREAM HAS TURNED INTO REALITY**



While in Rwanda last week news emerged from the corridors of RwandAir, that Accra / Ghana will become the airline's 15<sup>th</sup> destination by latest June this year, adding yet another West African gateway to Lagos, Libreville and Brazzaville. The move shows that the expansion drive of Rwanda's national airline is continuing unabated, buoyed no doubt by the government's commitment to throw its full support behind it, budgetary constraints notwithstanding. RwandAir's CEO John Mirenge is also on record that during the remainder of the year additional destinations will be launched, among them Juba, Zanzibar and either Lusaka or Harare or perhaps even both combined. In the latest edition of *INZOZI*, RwandAir's inflight magazine, he says: ***'We are the fastest growing airline in Africa. It is both challenging and exciting. The challenge is that we are joining long serving giants in the market. The exciting part is that we are doing so really fast. We are happy to begin 2013 with bilateral agreements signed with Kenya Airways to join our efforts in a number of areas of our operations on short and long term basis'***.

The ambitious growth plans will be further aided when in April this year the airline's two B737-500 will be returned to the lessors GECAS at the end of the lease agreement and be substituted against two more recently built B737-700ER's, acquired from Germany's TUIfly.

The change will not only add a few more much needed seats but primarily extends the operational range as the two older Boeings faced limitations on the longer routes for instance to Dubai, Johannesburg or Lagos while the much younger B737-700's can fly these routes with full passenger and cargo load.

Further expansion of destinations and frequencies is envisaged for 2014 when very likely the two options for another two Bombardier CRJ900NextGen will be turned into firm orders, ahead of the delivery of two B787's due by 2015 and 2016.

President Paul Kagame himself reiterated his government's commitment to RwandAir when he answered a question by this correspondent last Wednesday at his monthly 'meet the media' session. He outlined that Rwanda would in due course seek a strategic investor in RwandAir to spread the financial exposure wider through a public private partnership and then allow freed funds to be used for other, equally important infrastructure projects like the new Bugesera airport and the railway link from Kigali to Tanzania's Isaka.

With this level of support from the highest office in the land, it is no wonder that RwandAir's top management oozes confidence and can honestly say that the dreams of the past have now been turned into the reality of the present, also ably expressed in the upcoming change of the tagline from ***'Fly our Dream to the Heart of Africa'*** to soon read ***'From the Heart of Africa'***. Watch this space for regular updates from East Africa's vibrant aviation scene.

## **Ethiopia News**

### **ETHIOPIAN ADDS NDOLA AND BLANTYRE**



Information was received from a source in Addis Ababa that Ethiopian Airlines will launch 3 times a week flights to Ndola / Zambia combined with Blantyre / Malawi, effective March 31<sup>st</sup>.

The addition of the two Southern African destinations will cement Ethiopian's present lead over closest continental rival, in terms of African destinations, Kenya Airways, as both airlines pursue their strategy of connecting the entire continent through their respective hubs of Addis Ababa and Nairobi.

Kenya Airways in turn has stuck to plans to connect every political and commercial capital on the African continent by the end of 2014 as both airlines are taking delivery of more aircraft allowing them to accomplish their goals.

The two national airlines are also both keenly looking at airport developments, with Addis Ababa getting a new airport able to handle considerably more traffic of their own and that of their Star Alliance partners while Kenya has launched Project Greenfield, where construction will commence soon as Terminal 4 is under construction and hopefully ready by sometime in mid 2014, then permitting a full overhaul and refurbishment of the existing Terminals 1 – 3. Watch this space for regular and breaking news from East Africa's vibrant aviation scene.

## **ANOTHER PLANE CRASH IN GOMA SHAKES CONGO TRAVELERS**





A Fokker 50 aircraft, owned and operated by Congolese private airline CAA – Compagnie Africaine d’Aviation crashed this afternoon while attempting to land in Goma after failing to make it to the runway, killing 36 crew and passengers on board with four seriously injured pulled from the wreckage.

According to a source in Gisenyi / Rwanda, the weather was bad at the time the plane attempted to land and later saw a column of smoke rise from within Goma city, only to learn from friends across the border that indeed a plane had crashed in Goma itself. This correspondent was only days ago in Gisenyi and at the border to the DRC and witnessed the violent thunderstorms which lashed the twin towns of Goma and Gisenyi every day.

CAA according to available records was established in 1992 and has also been operating regular flights to and from Entebbe / Uganda, though the stricken flights originated from Lodja in Eastern Province. The airline operated 4 Fokker 50 turboprop aircraft, one of which crashed today, 1 Fokker 100 and 4 Airbus A320.

In 2009 the same airline also suffered another crash in Goma, when an MD 82 failed to come to a halt before the end of the shortened runway and crashed into a lava field which until today covers part of the airport including an end section of the runway, making landing heavy a tricky effort due to the shortened runway length. Only weeks later did a B727 freighter of the same airline crash in Kinshasa. The 2002 eruption of Mt. Nyiragongo devastated wide sections of Goma itself and rendered the only airport in Goma unserviceable until part of the lava at least was removed to allow larger jet aircraft to land again.

The Congo DR has one of the world’s worst aviation records and authorities in Kinshasa are regularly blamed for their lax oversight and poor enforcement of ICAO’s aviation safety standards, which led to the blacklisting of all DRC airlines from European airspace. Condolences are expressed to the families and friends of those who perished in the crash.

## **Sudan News**

### **SUDAN AIRWAYS LOSS OF HEATHROW SLOTS PROMPTS UPROAR IN KHARTOUM**



Sudanese regime leader Bashir was quoted in local media reports in Khartoum, demanding the slots previously held by Sudan Airways at London’s Heathrow airport to be either returned to the airline or else the airline be given the money from the apparent sale of these valuable assets, after news emerged that the slots had been sold to British airline BMI some years ago. This reportedly comes after a comprehensive report into the transaction and the airline itself was produced by a probe team put in place to find out the true state of financial and operational affairs at Sudan Airways. The individuals allegedly involved are now under reported investigation to establish where the money paid actually went, as records – according to the probe report – within the airline do not reflect such payments at the time.

When Sudan got hit by global sanctions the slots, while still held by Sudan Airways, were reportedly first ‘leased out’ before eventually sold, allegedly while the airline was under the management of Kuwait’s Arif Investment Group, which has since left as the airline reverted to state management last year. The Kuwaiti group though, according to a source in Khartoum, denied any involvement in the deal, claiming it was done prior to their arrival in 2007 when they acquired 49 percent of the airline and management rights, and laid the blame squarely at the local management in place at the time when the transaction was sealed.

Operating a fleet of aged aircraft national airline Sudan Airways in past years suffered several setbacks, caused by civil aviation regulators flight bans following several crashes and is struggling to maintain an orderly domestic and regional schedule to where the airline can still fly. The airline, according to other sources, has presently only 6 operational aircraft including two A300’s, one A320 and three F50’s with 3 more aircraft ‘stored’, in other words unserviceable due to lack of spare parts or other unresolved technical issues. During its history since the formation of the airline in 1946 the company recorded 21 accidents, 7 of them with fatalities.

Watch this space for regular and breaking aviation news from the wider Eastern African region.

## **Mauritius News**

### **MAURITIUS TOURISM MINISTER GETS THE PARTY STICK WHILE AT ITB**



Information from Port Louis indicates that while the Mauritius Tourism Minister Michael Sik Yuen is out of country to attend the world's leading tourism fair, ITB in Berlin, at the home front dark clouds are now hanging over him as his party has installed a new party leader in the Curepipe area of the island, where Yuen was elected to parliament. One Richard Duval was apparently installed by the PMSD Party, of which Yuen is still a member, in what several sources described as the ***'inevitable backlash for sacking Robert Desvaux a few weeks ago as chairman of MTPA even though he is a very close confidante of the party leader and Deputy Prime Minister'***.

Wrote one source: ***'Yuen did a sneaky on his party leader. His action disrespected the Deputy PM. This is the answer, while he is away, to show him who is who in the party. Of course there is a lot of speculation over his future and time will tell. But such behaviour has to get a fitting answer and the party has now put a leash on him in his own backyard. To your other question, the tourism industry is awash with rumours of a major change at MTPA and as you know, I personally think it is very long overdue. They could probably not do so before ITB but then, perhaps they should have sent in a new fresh team and not those with such a bad reputation'***.

The development further blurs and clouds the situation surrounding the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority, where no new chair has been appointed since Robert Desvaux's surprise sacking, while he himself is on record of having stated he has no interest to return to the position – no wonder adds this correspondent as MTPA seems to have become a regular snake pit.

One member of the Mauritius delegation presently in Berlin for ITB and in regular contact with this correspondent tried to play down the impact of the political change brought by the PMSD, saying in a mail: ***'This week we must stand together to promote Mauritius. We did not have a good year. Arrivals were literally the same as in 2011. The Maldives have overtaken us with the most arrivals. We cannot let personal issues overshadow our common objective to market our island. Everything else we shall sort out when we get back home'***.

Mauritius is competing for tourists with other destinations in the Indian Ocean region off the African mainland alongside La Reunion, a re-emerging Madagascar and a rampant Seychelles while further into the Indian Ocean the Maldives and Sri Lanka too are working the market vying for more visitors and their all important tourism-dollars. Watch this space.

## **SACKING OF MTPA CHAIRMAN CALLED 'MISBEHAVIOUR' BY MINISTER'S PARTY**



The recent sacking of Robert Desvaux from his position as Chairman of the Mauritius Tourism Promotion Authority by the island's Minister of Tourism Michael Sik Yuen has been described by the party spokesperson as the minister having ***'misbehaved [but] after presenting his excuses everything has come back to normal within the PMSD party'***.

The sacking has left many tourism observers and stakeholders in Mauritius puzzled as Desvaux is known to enjoy the close confidence of his party leader, Xavier Luc-Duval, who is also the Deputy Prime Minister in the coalition government and a sharper reaction was expected by the party over the clearly unilateral and apparently uncoordinated action taken by Yuen.

The announcement a few days ago that the country's tourism arrival figures have in 2012 only grown by the most meager of margins, namely 0.1 percent, and failed to reach the 1 million mark, leaving Mauritius trailing in the wake of the Maldives which took over the leadership in terms of tourism arrivals for the Indian Ocean islands, had many wondering if not demanding that deeper cuts and changes are now needed, clearly aimed at embattled Karl Mootoosamy who is the CEO of MTPA and now often referred to as the '*Copy/Paste Karl*' after several attempts to ultimately unsuccessfully copycat Seychelles's festivals of Carnival and SUBIOS and throw spanners in the works of the Vanilla Island cooperation between the other Indian Ocean islands of La Reunion, Madagascar, Mayotte and the Comoros with Seychelles. A source in Port Louis hinted there may be changes on the way no matter how desperately Mr. Mootoosamy is clinging to his job but not expected to take place before the upcoming ITB in Berlin. Watch this space.

## MAURITIUS TOURISM ARRIVALS FOR 2012 DESCRIBED AS 'FLAT'



Unfavourable market conditions in the main producer markets of France, Italy, the UK and Germany were cited as reasons for the flat performance in terms of tourism arrivals, as Mauritius announced the 2012 end year figures yesterday.

Arrival grew by a token 0.1 percent from 964,642 in 2011 to 965,411 in 2012 in the face of a 24.1% reduction in arrivals from Italy, 13.2 % reduction from France and 2.0 % and 0.6 % reduction from Germany and the UK respectively. The '*saviours*' for Mauritius tourism proved to be the emerging markets of Russia and China with growth rates of 58.9 % and 38% respectively.

Revenues from the tourism industry, according to figures related from a source in Port Louis, grew from 42.7 billion Mauritius Rupees in 2011 to 44.3 billion Mauritius Rupees in 2012.

The source however called the contention into question that the traditional markets in Europe were generally soft, citing the Seychelles arrival figures which showed sustained growth from the German market in particular, saying: *'We need to look for reasons within our marketing establishment, not just blame our traditional markets. Our marketing needs a new push, a new vision. We lost the number one spot in arrivals for the Indian Ocean islands to the Maldives in a year when they had a lot of political troubles but still they beat us. Sri Lanka has caught up with us also. We are waiting for changes at MTPA because they can no longer give the tourism industry what the tourism industry needs in today's environment. At least we have not seen our arrival numbers reduce like we feared for a long time but a 0.1 percent rise is nothing in the great scheme of things. Our resorts need higher occupancies and those come from inspired marketing, not from what we got from MTPA right now'*.

Watch this space for regular tourism updates from the Indian Ocean islands off the African coastline.

## Seychelles News

### AIR SEYCHELLES TURNS A MILLION DOLLAR PROFIT



Air Seychelles CEO Cramer Ball used the opportunity, when President James Alix Michel officially commissioned the national airline's second Airbus A330-200 earlier in the week, to announce the airline's financial results had dramatically improved, turning a million US Dollar profit, compared to the life threatening losses the airline made before partner Etihad came on board 15 months ago, acquired a 40 percent stake and injected a 20 million US Dollar working capital into the company, besides seconding senior management in an overhaul at the top.

The airline will now commence flights to Hong Kong, via Abu Dhabi, initially 3 times a week, in a full code share with Etihad Airways, which does not operate flights to HKG, and the second Airbus now available will also allow to add more frequencies to Johannesburg, Mauritius and Abu Dhabi.

According to a source close to the airline there are no immediate plans to resume any nonstop flights to Europe but Air Seychelles will continue to concentrate on partnerships, like the recently entered codeshare agreements with Germany's second largest airline Air Berlin, to receive additional traffic at their 'second hub' in Abu Dhabi and then bring tourists and business visitors from there to the archipelago. *'The financial turnaround has been achieved by*



*cutting cost. Dropping European destinations was necessary to accomplish that. The 6 weekly flights from Paris had a very good load factor but the fares were not good enough to make profit on that route. Now, Etihad is flying to several French destinations beyond Paris and Seychelles can be marketed by flying tourists from there to Abu Dhabi and then on our national airline to Mahe. In the past these tourists all needed to go to Paris first, now they can fly from an airport much nearer to them. And while the French market has dropped, for initially this but also many other reasons, similar circumstances in Germany have helped to increase traffic to the Seychelles via flights by Etihad and now also with Air Berlin via Abu Dhabi. There are of course sentiments to bring back the nonstop flights to Paris but financially speaking, it would be the wrong move for the airline. Our partners in the tourism industry here in the Seychelles need to understand that. I think recent meetings between the airline and the trade have highlighted on such issues and created better understanding. We need to fly where we turn profits and compared to say 2 years ago, when under the former CEO Air Seychelles was destined for very difficult times when routes and cost were cut, now there is a future for our airline. So in balance, I think the tourism stakeholders will begin to understand that there can be wishes but those can only become reality if the financials add up'* said the source.

Watch this space for regular and breaking aviation news from Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean region.

### **PRASLIN HOTEL FIRE PUT OUT WITH HELP OF AIRPORT FIRE BRIGADE**



Information was received from the Seychellois island of Praslin, that an accidental fire, caused reportedly by a neighbour of the Laurier Hotel who carelessly burned rubbish in his back yard, seriously damaged 6 of the hotel's cottages. As luck in this misfortune had it did the nearby Praslin airport fire brigade rush to the scene to assist the staff of the hotel and their colleagues from the nearby Paradise Sun Hotel to put the fire out before it could cause greater damage to the hotel or spread to other resorts close by.

Fire fighting is one of the elements regularly trained among hotel staff across the Seychelles islands and has born fruits in past fires on the main island of Mahe, where such preparedness as well as an almost instant reaction from the fire brigade helped to limit damage to resorts when fires broke out. The Thursday afternoon blaze was brought under control within the hour according to the source but the hotel will need to assess the damage first before rebuilding and reopening the affected cottages. No one was injured in the fire and no property of guests was lost or damaged according to the information obtained since the first report was received yesterday.

### **NEW AIR NAVIGATION EQUIPMENT GOES OPERATIONAL ON PRASLIN**



Seychelles second airport on the island of Praslin, destination for dozens of flights from the main island of Mahe every week by twin engined turboprop aircraft, has now received brand new navigation equipment, which recently went operational, identical to new equipment also now in use at the Mahe International Airport.

Seychelles Civil Aviation Authority installed a DVOR system, aka Doppler Omni Directional Range, which is now guiding aircraft into the two airports but also serves for aircraft in overflight mode to give them location data.

The upgrades are in line with modernizing air traffic control and introducing state of the art navigational equipment as recommended by ICAO to member countries.

Air Seychelles operates multiple daily flights between Mahe and Praslin besides which charters by Zil Air's fixed wing and rotor aircraft are taking tourists to the archipelago's second largest island, home of the UNESCO World Heritage Site Vallee de Mai, after which the national airline's second Airbus A330-200 was named yesterday.

Watch this space for news updates from the Seychelles on all matters of aviation, tourism and conservation.

### **A330-200 'VALLEE DE MAI' MAKES MAIDEN ARRIVAL AT MAHE INTERNATIONAL**

All eyes went skyward on the Seychelles' main island of Mahe yesterday around 13.30 local time as Air Seychelles' second Airbus A330-200, named Vallee de Mai after the most visited tourism site on the islands, overflowed the island from several directions before finally landing at the international airport. The sistership, already in service since 2012, is aptly named 'Aldabra' after the Seychelles' second UNESCO World Heritage Site, carrying the message of conservation to wherever the airline flies to.

While the country's tourism who is who is marketing the archipelago at the ongoing ITB tourism fair in Berlin / Germany, the national airline received the new bird in preparation of launching flights to Hong Kong later in March, a route which will initially see three flights per week operated in full code share with partner Etihad via Abu Dhabi. China has over the past years seen a significant rise in arrival numbers for the Seychelles and the launch of flights to Hong Kong is seen as a key to further opening up what is fast becoming the world's most important outbound market. Until now only flights with other airlines connected China to the Seychelles but the launch of flights by national airline Air Seychelles will mark a new opportunity to reach the Creole paradise islands.

The aircraft, originally flown by a leading Indian private airline, was prepared at Etihad's maintenance base in Abu Dhabi where it was painted in the new livery of Air Seychelles and the cabin refurbished to match the two class layout and appearance of the airline's first A 330 which has been in service since last year.

Welcome home and Happy Landings to the 'new bird', the crews and all the passengers flying the 'Creole Dream' to the Seychelles.

## **SEYCHELLES TOTAL POPULATION NOW TOUCHES 91.000**



The Seychelles' last population census figures released a few days ago confirmed that the overall population now stands at nearly 91.000, a figure small in global comparison where most towns are larger than the archipelago's entire population.

Victoria, one of the world's smallest capital cities, often appears to visitors from abroad like plucked from the past, though traffic jams too have made their way into the daily routine of the people living on the main island of Mahe, who have to commute to work over winding narrow roads.

With visitor arrivals last year well over 200.000, that also means that the archipelago now receives more than twice as many visitors compared to the entire population of the 115 islands. Tourism is now the mainstay of the Seychelles' economy, ahead of fishing and trading, and as such gained in recent years added importance as the main provider of new jobs, investment and foreign exchange earnings.

## **INTERVIEW WITH SEYCHELLES' MINISTER FOR TOURISM AND CULTURE ALAIN ST. ANGE**

Published here is an interview held with the Minister at his offices in Victoria, the answers fresh off the press:



Dear Minister St. Ange,  
good day and congratulations on a job superbly done at the recent Carnaval de Carnivals in Victoria. Thank you for taking the time so shortly before you depart for ITB in Berlin, to answer my questions:

1) It is now nearly a year since President Michel appointed you as Minister for Tourism and Culture. Tell us about your successes and

challenges you faced during the past nearly 12 months.

*One year has gone fast and I can say that I am satisfied with my achievements to date. My first challenge was to put into place a mechanism to work with the Tourism Board to continue to consolidate the Seychelles tourism industry. We needed to work together to remain innovative, to continue to act with intelligence and to continue to use all the resources at our disposal. We needed to ensure that the annual marketing meeting, where public and private sector meet to pan out the strategy for the following year was maintained and strengthened. We needed to accommodate the creation of a Ministry whilst having a semi-autonomous Tourism Board. Twelve months later all is working and the proof of the pudding which is in the eating, is showing continued growth in visitor arrival numbers when other destinations are feeling the pinch and losing ground.*

2) The Seychelles have for 2012 once again established a new visitor record in the face of your core markets in Europe going softer. What is the secret of the Seychelles' success?

*Seychelles has been proactive and Seychelles continues to look at its tourism industry with a fresh pair of eyes. This has helped us to continuously reposition our country and it has kept us relevant as a tourism destination. We had lost ground in our core markets of Europe, but we diversified fast, finding new potential markets as we worked harder on our core markets to find a solution to the challenges we faced since losing direct [and] non-stop flights. Our success is due to us winning the battle of relevance.*

3) What new initiatives have you planned for 2013 and beyond, considering you held a marketing strategy conference in January. What new ideas will the team around Elsia Grandcourt at the STB come up with?

*The world tourism industry for long haul destinations is facing strong challenges. It is like being in a sail boat with strong head winds. Seychelles is realistic that it cannot change the prevailing wind and that it cannot fight the wind. But we also know that we cannot ignore the wind of the day, so we become responsive to change. As economies converge we realize that a greater variety of people will travel. This gets us to look continuously at probabilities of potential markets instead of dreaming of the possibilities that existed in the past. We have embarked at determining what motivates and what impresses the market and at the same time be updated on what confuses, disappoints and frustrates the markets. As we remain practical and innovative we know that we need to get onboard faster in the existing needed shelf in technology. We will leave no stones unturned as we work our markets and claim our fair share of these markets. Seychelles will nevertheless maintain its personalized tourism approach and will continue to say no to mass tourism. This is the Seychelles Brand of Tourism that President James Michel launched some two years ago. This is the base of our industry and this we shall defend as it is the only way to implicate our people into the industry and they then fell part of it and will defend it in the same way we do it at the Ministry level.*

4) Since your appointment as Minister there have been allegations of

'green washing' in sections of the local media. What is the 'truth' about the Seychelles commitment to remaining green and meeting global best standards?

*Seychelles is not green washing. We know that we need to be good custodians of what was handed to us as unique selling points. The commitment is displayed by us putting our money where our mouth is. As a small country we have now declared over 50% of our total land area as protected natural reserves. Our chosen path is not new, we have been going down the path of protecting our natural assets way before the buzz word of eco came about. We are an example and one we are happy for the world at large to visit and appreciate.*

5) The recent freak weather has done some significant damage to roads and beaches I visited showed signs of erosion. Tell us what the Seychelles government is doing to help affected people whose houses have suffered damage or were destroyed and how beach conservation and restoration is being handled.

*The change in weather patterns is a direct result of the climate change phenomenon. In January we were hit by a freak torrential rain fall. We were not equipped to deal with such an extraordinary situation and we some of our districts get affected with floodings, landslides and other associated difficulties. The Government of Seychelles immediately moved to assist its people. A Relief Disaster Fund was immediately set up to raise funds to assist those most affected. Seychelles is happy to say that many a friendly country of ours have come forward with different forms of assistance.*

[adds this correspondent that the Seychelles tourism private sector has also generously donated in cash and kind to the relief fund]

6) The Seychelles Tourism Academy is building a new campus and while a little behind schedule, it is clearly set to become Africa's top rated hospitality and tourism training institute. STA has been signing MoU's with Shanghai, Oman and Malta - where do you want to see this institution go and what role is it to play to get every willing young Seychellois started with a career in tourism

*Yes the Seychelles Tourism Academy is being rebuilt as new. It will be a purpose built Academy to train firstly the young people of our country to enter the workforce in the pillar of our economy - tourism. This was an important step that needed to be done. The long term success of our tourism industry is to have our people trained to be better prepared to play their part in their industry. We are today working with many hospitality and tourism training institutions in different parts of the world and this increases staff and student exchange programs. We know that this Tourism Academy in Seychelles will be a great institution. We shall open our doors to take students from Africa, Asia and the Indian Ocean Islands wanting to study in French and English languages and to do their practical in a country dependent on tourism.*

7) The Vanilla island initiative has been given a boost by the EU with funding to expand the concept of inter island cooperation. What are your main challenges, as after all you were and remain the driving spirit

behind the Vanilla islands.

*The Indian Ocean Vanilla Islands Regional Organisation is a grouping of those islands of the Indian Ocean wanting to work together for the consolidation of their own and for the region's tourism industry. We are having the support from the European Union as this is a regional organization working for the wellbeing of a group of islands with a rich cultural heritage, and one vulnerable to climate change. The main challenge facing the organization remains the commitment by all the six islands to be 100% behind the partnership. This grouping makes the strengths[of one] become the strengths of the rest and it dilutes the weaknesses of individual members of the alliance. The region needs to be more visible and better known. This will ensure that all the islands are then seen as being close and this will increase the possibilities for twin or three island holidays. In the longer term it will also become an inviting region for cruise ship tourism because the diversity of this region is unrivalled. The Indian Ocean region could also be home for smaller cruise ships which are today having difficulty to finding an adequate and a suitable region to be based.*

8) You once upon a time were nominated by SHTA to become the Director of Tourism Marketing, the private sector 'implant' into the 'old' STB and then transformed the institution to what STB is today. How are your relations today with your erstwhile colleagues in the private sector, now that you have 'crossed the lines' and are now a government minister.

*The Seychelles Tourism Industry, this is the private sector component of our country's tourism players remain the backbone of this vital industry that is today more than ever before regarded as the pillar of the Seychelles economy. Some two years ago it is indeed the private sector body that nominated me to head the Marketing Department of the old Tourism Board. They are the front line team of our industry and they need more than any Civil Servant for the industry to work. I have maintained an open line of communication with the Association and I make it a point to attend personally their General meetings. I would say without any reservations that I have a good relationship with the private sector.*

9) There was talk sometime last year, opposed by key stakeholders in the private sector, that the STB overseas offices were to move together with Air Seychelles / Etihad. That partnership, while turning the airline around, has raised concerns among private sector stakeholders over the lack of nonstop flights from for instance Paris. How do you in government reconcile such demands with the airline's dictates on reaching profitability again and keeping an eye on their bottom line?

*The positioning of the Tourism Board's Overseas Offices in joint Offices with Air Seychelles and Etihad was but a proposition that had come up to help in streamlining of our operation. This proposition was contested by the Private Sector and it did not take place because Government heard the reasoning being put forward. The airline side of your question is more complex. Air Seychelles, as every other small regional airline faced economic difficulties and needed to find a strategic partner. Air Seychelles and Etihad joined forces together and today Air Seychelles is seeing the benefits of this approach. But it is important to note that Air*



*Seychelles is today being managed as an airline and as such needs to be profitable. The door of Seychelles remains open for other airlines to come forward and operate flights to the region or nonstop direct services to Europe. Seychelles is operating an open sky policy and with this policy as the modus operandi the doors are wide open.*

10) You are literally everywhere, making it appear at times to have a clone or two out there. How do you manage to fly on overdrive all the time. And how do you relax, and where as there seems not a week over the past year you were not out in the wide world promoting the new Brand Seychelles.

*When I joined Government some three years ago this month I was mandated to turn the turn the industry around. Then as CEO of Seychelles Tourism I was expected to consolidate the achievements made by the Tourism Board. As Minister I have the overall responsibility to ensure that we have a tourism industry that is managed on a secured footing for the long term. Key to our success is visibility and this I cannot achieve by sitting in an office. I need to find opportunities to be present at, and then turn these opportunities into avenues to work with the press. Seychelles has no budget to buy space in the press in the four corners of the world, but meeting the press is free, and this you can only do when you know the press and when you have a message to give to the press. So far it has worked for me as the head of Seychelles Tourism. Yes this approach makes me travel, but I can assure you that each of the trips I undertake I bring positive results for Seychelles. The second area that gets us coverage is to be accepted as a Speaker on the Industry's Circuit. Today I am invited to address many tourism forums, and in so doing I spread in the most positive means possible the word Seychelles. I do relax, of course I do, I enjoy writing and I am working on a few books to document the history of our islands. This is relaxation for me.*

11) When ITB kicks off you will mark your first full year in office - what are your plans, and challenges, for the second year. I know Seychelles is lobbying to be elected a member of the UNWTO Executive Council and you have applied to UNESCO to grant the Mission Lodge WHS status. What else of notable importance is on your agenda.

*Yes it was at ITB last year that news about my appointment as Minister for Tourism and Culture broke. It will be a year soon and the time to consolidate the achievements to date is now upon me. The Ministry of Tourism is now being remodeled to be more in line with what the private sector trade have requested and at the same time to ensure that marketing of Seychelles remains a key function of what we need to be concentrating on. We have the product because Seychelles is a destination that still rings the holiday of a lifetime note. But we need increase ways and means to be more visible still, because as times get harder in the market place, we need to be present, be seen and to remain relevant as a tourism destination. We need to increase the visibility of our region and of our continent, as we get but a pitiful number of visitor arrival on a global scale. This is one of the reasons that has prompted us to put Seychelles as a candidate for the Executive Council Member of the UNWTO. We need to work to get Africa greater visibility and then to be more in demand for the would be traveler. For this bid we count on Africa to support us because we are*

*a serious player in the field of tourism, and I hope that it is accepted that what will be good for Seychelles tourism will be good for Africa. On the question of trying to get our Slave Ruins of Mission Lodge to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site we are doing that because we believe in protecting where we come from for us to know as a Nation where we are and where we are going. Seychelles has shown that it is a serious partner of the UNESCO because we have invested and continue to invest in our existing two sites, the Vallee de Mai of Praslin and the Aldabra Atoll. But often the procedures are procedures instead of jumping to grab a proposal and protect, like in our case, what Africa is trying to protect from its history and this site is unique as it is the remains when young slaves lived as they were liberated. It is a project with meaning and with deep historical value. What else is on our agenda, well firstly to work with South Africa, the Kingdom of Swaziland and Mozambique on their East 3 Route project, to get the region to be the cruise destination where Africa, Asia, India and the Vanilla Islands all pull together to offer a cruise route that stands out by itself. After that it is just wait and see.*

12) and in closing, cruise tourism, will it come back to the archipelago in the former big way?

*Yes with the Somali bandits falling into line because of the overwhelming support of the Community of Nations the sea routes off the coast of Africa are becoming safe again. We will now be working together all the countries of the region to reposition ourselves at Cruise Ship Fairs as a region that wants cruise ship business and that will work with cruise ship companies to get our region included on their routes.*

Thank you for your time Minister and for speaking with eTN.

## SEYCHELLES TOURISM BOARD AND AIR SEYCHELLES SIGN MOU



Last Friday saw the long in the making signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding between the Seychelles Tourism Board and national airline Air Seychelles. CEO's Mrs. Elsie Grandcourt and Cramer Ball put pen to paper to ink the most extensive agreement signed to date between the two industry partners, aimed to make use of synergies abroad when promoting the country as a destination and flying with '*The Creole Spirit*' when coming to the islands.

Present at the signing were Minister for Tourism and Culture Alain St. Ange and his Home Affairs and Transport counterpart Joel Morgan. Under the new agreement, both parties will jointly explore ways to work together to promote Seychelles around the world, providing more opportunities for visiting journalists, travel agents, and tour operators. Mrs. Grandcourt, the STB CEO, said after the signing: ***'I am grateful we have been able to sign this MOU today which reaffirms our engagement with the national carrier in promoting the Seychelles destination. We have already been working very closely together and I believe with this signing today, we can only look at more positive things in the future'***. Cramer Ball in response was quoted saying the airline's expanding international schedule and partnership strategy will be a key enabler of boosting tourism and contributing to the growing diversification of visitors arriving to Seychelles. ***'This is an exciting time for Air Seychelles. We have had an incredible year. We took delivery of our first Airbus A330-200 last year, and next week we will welcome our second. We are looking to expand our network to over 750 destinations weekly to and from Seychelles. We see great opportunities in markets like Hong Kong, Greater China, Europe, South East Asia, Eastern Europe and Africa. Throughout the year we will be expanding our airline partnerships and expanding our links to these destinations. The signing of this MOU, our partnership with STB, is fundamental to the future of how we***

***promote Seychelles around the world. This new bond is a big part of the future of Air Seychelles and we're delighted'.***

Tourism and Culture Minister Alain St. Ange also used the opportunity to state that: ***'The Ministry of Tourism and STB have always been committed to the national airline and formalising this agreement today ties our two organisations together and gives us a solid way forward to work together. We are enthusiastic of the support being offered by the Air Seychelles in the marketing of the destination, which remains the core role of the STB. We will work hand in hand with the new Air Seychelles and its partners, such as airberlin, and those to come, who are opening up new avenues and opportunities for Seychelles, as the World continues to diversify'.***



(Cramer Ball, CEO of Air Seychelles seen here signing the MoU with Elsia Grandcourt, CEO of the Seychelles Tourism Board)

In a related development it was also learned from a source on the main island of Mahe, that Air Seychelles management and board were joined in a top strategy session by key personnel from the Seychelles Tourism Board and the Seychelles Civil Aviation Authority, aimed to map out a joint way forward in how to best use available resources to promote the Seychelles abroad, and perhaps also to take on board past criticism voiced from sections of the private sector over the lack of nonstop flights to such places like Paris and fare pricing on the domestic network. Notably was James Hogan, President and CEO of Etihad Airways present with a team of top executives from Abu Dhabi, clearly a sign of how highly rated this meeting was seen in the top floors of both airlines and their partners present. Hogan was quoted as saying: ***'Partnership is at the heart of the Etihad Airways business strategy. In all areas of our business we work with like-minded companies and individuals, who share our vision, to drive and support growth and development. We are already seeing the benefits of increased collaboration in the growing numbers of tourists to the Seychelles fed through the joint Etihad-Air Seychelles network, which is the result of our equity partnership'.***

Cramer Ball of Air Seychelles was quoted adding: ***'The tourism board and civil aviation authority have done an impressive job creating demand for travel to the Seychelles through focused marketing initiatives and a liberal air transport policy. By collaborating we will achieve a much better result for Seychelles tourism'.***

Participants at the meeting reportedly analyzed opportunities for future growth and examined the many attributes of the destination and their strong appeal to an ever widening demographic of visitor. The forum also discussed the challenges facing Seychelles' tourism industry and how these could be tackled in a measured and collectively-supported strategy.

Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism and Culture Sherin Naiken concluded: ***'In the forum we witnessed the emergence of new working relationships between tourism, civil aviation and the airlines. I am confident this new relationship will achieve great results for our Islands' tourism industry. We are all winning together for Seychelles'.***

A regular private sector source, while appreciating the high level meeting between STB, SCAA, Air Seychelles and Etihad expressed some level of concern for not having been able to give the private sector input to the deliberations which was termed; ***'... an unbiased view from our side of the aisle. We interact regularly with our minister and the STB staff but when we learn of such a meeting we would have liked an opportunity to give input. It is important what we have to say and while we had recent interaction with Air Seychelles' top management, maybe this was a lost opportunity by only choosing public sector and the airline partners to sit in the room and strategize over our common future. After all it is our future, the future of Seychelles tourism'.***

Only in the Seychelles, clearly *Another World*.

**AND** in closing some worthwhile reads from ‘*further down south*’, taken from Gill Staden’s *The Livingstone Weekly*:

## From BirdWatch Zambia

### WATERBIRD COUNT ON THE KAFUE FLATS by Chaona Phiri & Griffin Shanungu

During the last week of January 2013, a combined team of ZAWA and BirdWatch Zambia staff undertook a trip to the Kafue flats to conduct the January waterbird count. During this time of the year, birding and water bird counting in the wetlands is extremely challenging - given the extra wet conditions of the floodplains – but it is also very exciting. We counted in Lochinvar National Park and the Blue Lagoon National Park. These are the two places where BWZ and ZAWA have established permanent counting transects and counts have been conducted here consistently since 2006. In both these places permanent line transects on the shorelines of major water bodies have been established. In Lochinvar, transects on the shore lines of the Chunga Lagoon all the way up to the Kafue River have been established. This transect is mainly covered by boat and this gives an exciting twist to bird counting as we not only see many waterbirds on the shoreline, but also get treated to various sightings of hippos and lechwes! Elsewhere, we have also established other counting points along permanent transects.

Back to the waterbird counting - we arrived in Lochinvar NP on the 29th of January late in the afternoon and set up camp at one of the staff houses. Normally we would be camping right at Chunga lagoon but given recent heavy downpours, the prospect of having to stay in a nice cosy home was too good to be overlooked.

Counting of birds started the day following our arrival at Lochinvar. The road leading up to Chunga lagoon we found was a great transect to start out counting. This route was filled with Spur-winged Geese (nesting in the flooded mixture of extensive grass and tall trees), African Rails and the Woolly-necked Storks which seemed to just be enjoying walking along the relatively dry gravel road. The Napongwé floodplain – a small floodplain along the road to the Chunga lagoon - was just starting to flood, and as such, it’s a very conducive habitat for several waterbirds ranging from the Cranes, Ducks, Bitterns and several Waders like the Black-tailed Godwit, a variety of Sandpipers and Ruff.



A boat ride on the Chunga Lagoon towards Mulindi tree plane led the team to over 2000 African Skimmers;

skimming over the water as the Lechwe feed on quack grass(*Panicum repens*) and run through the water.

Quack grass is thriving around this part of the flats; this could be due to the extensive tilling by Lechwe movements and fertilization.



This grass also hosts several Crake species and hundreds of Ruff. In addition to that, there were juveniles of a lot of species among them Fish Eagles, Saddle-billed Storks, Goliath Herons, Yellow-billed Storks, Woollynecked Storks, Black-winged Stilts and Grey-headed Gulls. In general we encountered 87 species



of waterbirds with a total number of approximately 24 000 individuals, with the Spur-winged Geese being the most widely distributed species.

The Causeway in Blue Lagoon is much grassier than the route to Chunga and offers a rather different spectrum of species. Hundreds of African Open-bills were found colouring the trees in which they were roosting. In addition to that, Rufous bellied Herons also seemed to be at their peak along the Causeway as almost a hundred were recorded. Like in Lochinvar, the Spur-winged Geese were in great numbers in the flooded grass, most likely nesting there as there are quite a number of tall trees there too; This is a rather risky site to nest in as the snakes are also in there in numbers. Other than the usual Pythons, a number of Boomslangs and Vipers were also recorded just along the Causeway!

Away from the Causeway and down to Shamikobo and Chisenga Plain, we had an uncomfortable three-hour ride in a man-powered banana boat. Several species were recorded but the most breath taking and memorable sighting was that of well over two hundred Wattled Cranes and about fifty Grey-crowned Cranes across a crocodile and hippo infested open water lagoon. This site is also considered part of the Chisenga plain but it's more of an Island well separated from the extensively flooded plain. This is the highest number of Wattled Cranes ever recorded from one site in Blue Lagoon NP. Although, the team couldn't get very close even if an alternative route was used. The patrol scouts informed the team that the cranes actually nest in the small swampy area adjacent to this Island. Namucheche, Musozia, Naminyona and Muswenge, fishing





camps on the the western wide of the park, all on the shoreline of the Lubwato stream, are also prime birding sites where more Wattled cranes were recorded and were seen to be flying towards Naminyona fishing camp which is more on the far west of the park. The total number of waterbird species counted in Blue Lagoon was 75 adding up to almost 15000 individuals. The African Openbills and Little Egrets were observed to be the most widely distributed waterbird species in the Blue Lagoon.

In comparison to the July waterbird count, the total numbers of individuals (32 000 in July and 24 000 in January in Lochinvar and 18 000 in July and 15 000 in Blue Lagoon) are not very impressive but in terms of diversity a higher number of species is recorded and this is largely attributed to the presence of migratory

waterbird species which winter in the Southern Hemisphere, mostly between October and April, (57 species in July and 87 in January in Lochinvar and 43 in July and 75 in January in Blue Lagoon).

From our field observations during bird counting in these two important sites, we noticed that there seems to be an increase in the rate of spread of *Mimosa pigra* in the areas that were previously cleared. In the areas that were not cleared, *Mimosa* seems to be expanding its range and gaining a lot of ground in the floodplains of Lochinvar and also in the Blue Lagoon National Parks. As if that is not enough, we noticed that water hyacinth and mats of floating vegetation comprising Papyrus and Typha are fast spreading and covering much of the open waters on the shorelines of Chunga lagoon in Lochinvar. The spread of the undesirable species is obviously taking away valuable habitat from waterbirds and also from the Kafue Lechwe that depend on the floodplains for their survival. The diversity and abundance of waterbirds on the Kafue flats are still very impressive but the spread of **undesirable plants currently spreading in the floodplains needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency**. If not we risk losing vast areas of habitat for waterbirds and are faced with the prospect of seeing the disappearance of many important bird species under our watch.



**INTERESTING FINDING; Scouts at Chunga in Lochinvar and Mafuta in the Blue Lagoon informed theteam that the notorious Army worm had actually reached the Kafue flats area but it was excellent food for the African Open-bills, which feasted on them until they were no more!**

**This is the beauty of birds...**

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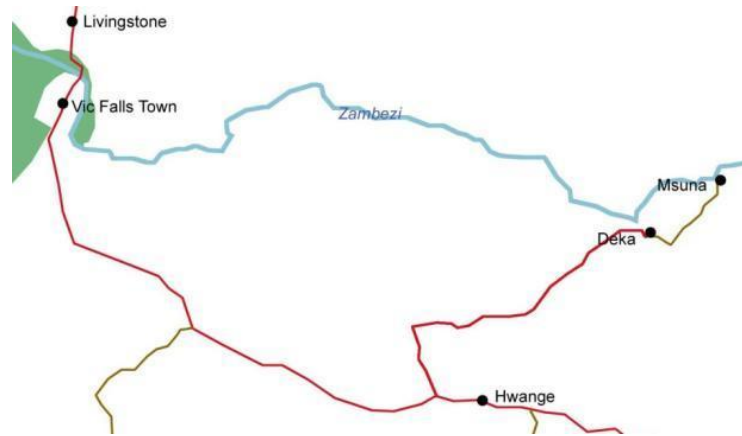
## ZIMBABWE

### Msuna Island Lodge

I gave you a map last week on how to get to Msuna Island Lodge. Sonja emailed me to say that the road via Deka is good and quicker. So here is a bit of a map:

Take a turning just before Hwange and follow it to Deka. Sonja says this is tar and fine, as is the last 15 km on dirt.

Sorry for that.



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### Vic Falls Helipad

There is a helipad next to Elephant Hills Resort. Helicopters take off and land with regularity and there have been complaints over the years about the noise. Now it seems that this helipad is to be closed and moved to another location.

According to the report, the land is owned by Victoria Falls Town Council who has given the helicopter company until 31 March to vacate the premises.

There are feelings being put forward that the notice to quit has something to do with the UNWTO and that the land will be used for an exhibition park, but no-one is really quite sure.

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### International Drivers Licence for South Africa

From a Zimbabwe newsletter

It has just been confirmed with the Automobile Association in Harare that it is now a requirement by the South African Authorities, for all foreigners to hold a valid International Driver's Licence to drive in South Africa. Failure to produce one if stopped by the Authorities will result in a fine or worse.

You can buy an International drivers' licence from your nearest AA with a current photo of yourself, copy of your original driver's licence.

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### **Victoria Falls – Johannesburg Flights**

According to a report, Air Zimbabwe will re-introduce the Vic Falls to Johannesburg route in April as part of the preparations for the UNWTO. We were not told how this is to be achieved as Air Zim is in debt to the tune of US\$188million, most of it to creditors in foreign Airports. In December 2011 one plane was seized in London in lieu of the debt by Air Zim. Planes have been held in Johannesburg too because of debt.

We wait for developments ...

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