

## NEWSLETTER FROM CATHY BUCKLE IN ZIMBABWE



### Orange Eyes at Night

16 May 2024



Dear Family and Friends

As darkness falls over the wilderness the noises of the day gradually slip away. It's winter in Zimbabwe, temperatures drop by 16 degrees overnight here and the cold is biting at night. Sitting with a friend I pull my jacket tighter around me, fold my collar up, wind my scarf around my neck and wait quietly for the secrets of the night to be revealed. It won't be long. There is no moon, the first stars have begun to emerge and we stare up at the magnificence of the night sky.

How much we need this distraction of the wild for a brief moment in time as we try and make sense of events in Zimbabwe. At the moment our story here is still all about the ZiG, our new but largely elusive currency because of the very limited number of bank notes that have been released.

Economist Gift Mugano said this week 'We do not have enough ZiG from the Central Bank. The size of the money supply is about ZiG 90 million whereas the size of our economy is about ZiG 20 billion.' Mugano described the cash shortage as a 'serious incompetence on behalf of the Central Bank.'

But it's not just the lack of bank notes that's causing a crisis, it's also the ZiG denominations. For millions of Zimbabweans who rely on public transport, the ZiG has caused a massive crisis. A standard kombi fare from suburbs to town is 50 cents and before the ZiG you could pay with US\$1 and get your 50 cents change in Zimbabwe Bond dollars. The denominations of the ZiG bank notes however have made it impossible to change a dollar so kombi drivers tell customers to either pair with someone else and sort the change out between themselves or the fare is a flat US\$1, take it or walk. Commuting costs for millions of people have effectively doubled in a fortnight.

My thoughts are interrupted because suddenly there's a rustling in the darkness. Something is out there in the dry and crackly bush. Grunts, low snorts, the sound of sticks breaking, feet moving through shallow water. A quick flash of the spotlight shows orange eyes. Left and right I shine the torch and try and count the orange eyes but soon there are too many of them. The rustling grows louder, gets closer, it's a big herd of buffalo and they are moving into the camp now. The grass in camp is thick and green, an oasis of life in this dry, dusty place where the rains barely came last season. A long hard winter and spring will take its toll on the wildlife over the coming six months until the next rains arrive but this oasis will keep many alive and that knowledge gives hope.

The buffalo move through the camp, at least fifty or sixty of them and then disappear into the darkness. A while later three security guards approach from the left, one is armed with a rifle. 'Watch out for buffalo' my friend calls out to the guards, pointing to where we last saw the orange eyes but they have seen the buffalo long before us. 'Are they still around?' my friend asks the guards to which the reply is: 'they are still available.'

That phrase raises a smile and we sit and watch and I can't help but be amazed by how these remote wilderness camps continue to function. How have they survived repeated currency changes, devaluations and inflation? How will they survive the ZIG? How do you budget when things you bought three months ago now have to be sold at less than you paid for them? How do you survive when suddenly your staff need double the amount of money just to get to and from work?

The next morning at dawn I walk out looking for the story of the night before. It is almost sunrise and I am alert, eyes continually scanning the bush. The leaf litter here is thick on the ground: brown, fawn, yellow, russet. Dark brown, shiny cow pats left by the buffalo are everywhere, on the paths and in the thick grass, down by the river and deep into the thick wooded groves.

A flock of Guinea Fowl roosting on a low branch are alarmed at my approach and rise up fluttering, clattering and screeching; it's hard at that moment to decide who gets the bigger fright, me or the birds. This is wild Zimbabwe at her best and we thank the dedicated men and women in Zimbabwe who work in this industry and keep these beautiful wild places for us all and for the generations yet to come.

My letter today is for them, in recognition of their love and care for the wild heart of Zimbabwe, a heart that beats across our land beckoning people from far and wide to come and see the amazing diversity and to find solace here.

There is no charge for this Letter From Zimbabwe but if you would like to donate please visit my website. Until next time, thanks for reading this Letter From Zimbabwe now in its 24th year, and my books about life in Zimbabwe, a country in waiting.

Ndini shamwari yenyu (I am your friend)

Love Cathy 16 May 2024. Copyright © Cathy Buckle <https://cathybuckle.co.zw/>

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