

BOONE SAFARIS



CREATING SAFARI MEMORIES SINCE 2019

IMAGES AND TEXT BY BOONE

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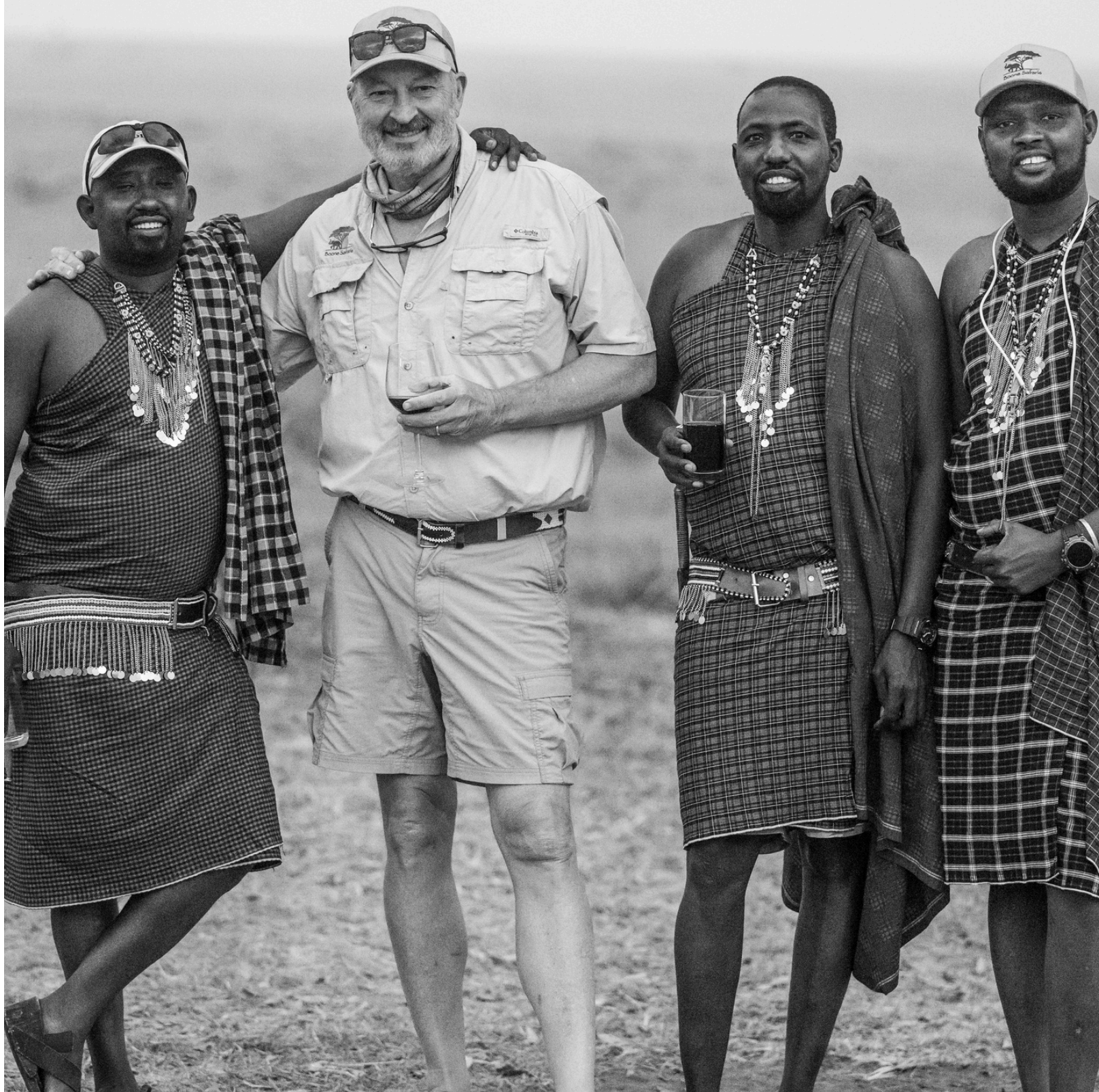
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WHAT'S NEXT

COVER: PAULA THOMSON, LINDSEY LANDRUM,
AND ANGELA HOOVER

MESSAGE FROM BOONE



WHAT A YEAR

I'm back home in the Blue Ridge Mountains after spending half of July and all of August in Kenya and Uganda. It's crazy to think about how much my life has changed in just one year.

I travelled to Africa for the first time in 2015 on a photo safari. Four years later I recruited a group of friends to join me. I was happy just to get a free trip out of it. One group turned into two groups and soon I was taking four groups. A good friend and life coach encouraged me to make it a career. So in January of 2024 I closed my executive recruiting business and set out to build a safari business.

Although I'm an avid photographer and love teaching, I chose not to lead photographic safaris. There are many outstanding photographers already guiding in that space. Instead, I decided my market would be people who simply want to enjoy an African safari. Most of my clients are married couples who have recently retired or become empty nesters. This year, sixty-eight people joined me on safaris to Kenya for the Migration and to Uganda for gorilla and chimpanzee treks!

What humbles me most is how these travelers have found Boone Safaris. I haven't spent a dime on advertising. Nearly all of our bookings have come through word of mouth. Friends who traveled with me in previous years came home and shared their stories. For that, I am forever grateful — without your referrals, I would not be living my dream.

People often ask, "What do you do when you're not leading safaris?" Many assume I only work six weeks a year. The truth is, when I'm back home in North Carolina, I'm busy working the business: emailing and talking with prospective guests, piecing together itineraries, reserving camps and hotels, arranging flights, and — even though I don't love it — posting daily on social media. Many new clients have reached out after following me on Facebook.

This year, I've also focused on designing tailor-made safaris for travelers who can't join our small groups. I'm proud to now partner with andBeyond, which operates some of Africa's most beautiful high-end properties. My relationship with the Wilder Group has never been stronger, and I remain deeply loyal to Azim and his team, whose exceptional care for my guests makes me unwilling to consider other camps in the Maasai Mara.

Of course, there's also time to enjoy life at home in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Most days I take workout and yoga classes. I hike the trails in our neighborhood every week (training for those gorilla treks!) and spend time photographing waterfalls and mountain vistas.

MOUNTAIN LIFE



PAULA AND BOONE IN THE MOUNTAINHOOD AND PAULA WITH JACKSON RAKWA AT OUR HOME LAST MAY



2025 MIGRATION



Well, they did it again. Just as they have for thousands of years, the wildebeests and zebras moved into the Maasai Mara from the Serengeti. Our first group arrived in the Mara on July 19, just after some of the herds had crossed the Sand River from Tanzania. True to form, the zebras led the way.

Instead of moving west toward the Mara Triangle as they often do, this year the mega herds pushed north and lingered on the eastern side of the Mara near the Talek Gate. Because of this unusual pattern, our best chance of seeing a crossing was along the Sand River. We joined a long line of vehicles as thousands of wildebeests gathered on the riverbank. After about an hour of anticipation, they began to step into the water. It would have been incredible to witness thousands streaming across in front of us.

But then it happened — someone blew a Land Cruiser's horn. Startled, the wildebeests spun back toward Tanzania. I was furious at the unthinkable behavior... until I discovered the culprit was none other than my own cousin, Gardner Lee. Jamlick, our guide, had kindly moved Gardner into his seat for a better view, cautioning, "Whatever you do, don't touch the steering wheel." When Gardner twisted around to catch sight of wildebeests crossing behind him, his knee hit the horn.

After that incident, we didn't see another crossing that week. The migration is more than just river crossings. We spent many days in the middle of thousands of wildebeests and zebras — a sight in itself.

The next three groups had better luck, each witnessing at least one major river crossing. But wildebeests remain as unpredictable as ever. Our final group missed a crossing because a crocodile tread water right where the herds wanted to pass. Instead of hiding upstream to catch a meal, he blocked the crossing entirely. That same group later saw a different kind of crossing — a family of elephants, complete with babies, wading through the river, only to be challenged by a not-so-welcoming elephant family on the opposite bank. All in all, the sightings this year were as remarkable as ever. We enjoyed more lion cub encounters than in any year I can remember, spent time with Luluka and her grown cub, and even opened a new camp in Paradise. Keep reading for those stories.



DRAMATIC CROSSINGS

The sun was setting when we arrived at the Mara River crossing point. The wildebeests were exiting the river bank on the other side. I saw the line of gnus suddenly shift to the left. The light was low so it was not easy to see. Suddenly I heard Jamlick, our guide, say "lion." I stopped shooting the wide angle lens and grabbed the long lens in time to capture the lioness taking down her prey. It wasn't until I saw the images on the computer that I realized the lion was in the scene I was shooting with the wide angle lens. This was the second wildebeest she killed in a matter of minutes.

2025 GREAT MIGRATION



Heavy rains had swollen the Mara River, turning it into a torrent of fast-moving water. A herd of wildebeests — with one lone zebra among them — approached the river near the Serena pump house. Below our vantage point, a raft of hippos floated in the churning current. When the wildebeests leapt into the river, the current swept them downstream, carrying them straight toward the hippos. Though hippos are herbivores, they are notoriously aggressive and will attack if they feel threatened. One massive hippo, clearly irritated by the sudden commotion, lunged at a gnu that drifted too close.





2025 GREAT MIGRATION

A “LUCKY” LEOPARD

This is the story of a little leopard cub and his mother.



Luluka is a female leopard who lives in the Maasai Mara. When I visited the Mara last season, Luluka had two tiny cubs — one male and one female. About a week after I photographed them together, sad news spread: the female cub had been killed by hyenas. When rangers arrived, they found the surviving male cub clinging to a small tree. Against all odds, he had made it through the night. Guides and rangers gave him the name Olomunyak, which means “the lucky one” in the local Maa language.



With his mother’s protection, Olomunyak has grown into a strong, confident leopard. I was able to see him again — now larger than his mother. Then, while I was still in the Mara, I came across a post describing how Olomunyak had killed a hyena.

The little cub who once lost his sister to hyenas had, in a way, taken his revenge.

UGANDA TRIP REPORT



I took twelve adventurous friends to Uganda after spending my first three weeks in the Maasai Mara. We flew from Nairobi to Entebbe and spent our first night on the shores of Lake Victoria. The next morning, we flew to Kisasi. That afternoon we toured the swamp before settling in at the beautiful Chimpanzee Lodge. The following morning, we drove to Kibale National Forest. It didn't take long to find the chimpanzees — we heard their calls as soon as we parked the vehicle. After just a short walk, we were in the middle of a noisy, energetic family. It was a wonderful morning spent with our closest relatives.

That afternoon, we took a long drive to Queen Elizabeth National Park. As the sun set, we found lions draped across tree branches, resting in the fading light. The next day, despite the rain, we enjoyed game drives in the park, spotting Uganda Kob and an array of beautiful birds.

From there, we continued on to Bwindi. The drive is beautiful — lush landscapes and endless smiles along the way. Our arms grew tired from waving to the children who ran out to greet us. For a moment, we had a small taste of what it must feel like to be movie stars. The children don't often see muzungus, and their excitement was contagious.

Our team split into smaller groups for the gorilla trek, as each group is limited to eight people. My group faced a strenuous hike to reach our gorilla family, but it was well worth the effort. High in the canopy, we found them feeding on fruit. The rangers generously allowed us more than an hour with the gorillas, not even counting the first stretch of time we spent watching them. The family included a massive silverback, several females, and — the star of the show — a playful young baby. He kept us entertained by climbing trees and swinging from branches like a little acrobat.

As our visit was winding down, the family began moving down the mountain toward a creek. Suddenly, the silverback veered in my direction. To my shock, he reached out and grabbed the inside of my leg as he passed. At 400 pounds of pure strength, there was nothing I could do. I was scared to death but tried to stay calm as he dragged me a short distance before letting go. It was a heart-pounding moment I'll never forget — the ultimate adrenaline rush.

That afternoon, still buzzing from the encounter, we stopped by the local bar and shared laughs with the villagers — including the Batwa chief we had met the day before. It was the perfect ending to an unforgettable day.



THE SILVERBACK THAT GRABBED BOONE



MOTHER AND BABY



CHIMPANZEE ADOLESCENT



DAVID, BRETT, AND TANYA



GIVING BACK

Boone Safaris is blessed with amazing clients and friends who are making a lasting impact on the communities we visit — and on conservation.

Last year, David and Deanna Argo visited the Talek School and asked its founder, Jackson Rakwa, a simple question: "What else do you need?" Without hesitation, Jackson shared that a girls' dormitory was the greatest need. Just as quickly, David responded that he and Deanna would fund it.

This August, the Argos returned to Talek to see the completed dormitory — and immediately committed to funding a boys' dorm as well.

They are not alone. The Rotary Club of Franklin stepped in to fund a seventh-grade classroom at Talek, while many of our safari guests have generously donated for school uniforms and teacher salaries.

The Talek School, started by Jackson and his brother, began as a single building serving a handful of children. Local Maasai kids once had to walk long distances to reach the nearest school — a hardship that led many to forgo education altogether. Today, the school has grown to serve more than 400 children.

But challenges remain. Teachers in Kenya earn about \$1,000 per month, making it difficult to attract and retain talent. Our next goal is to raise funds to increase teacher pay and provide housing for teachers and their families — ensuring that the school not only continues to grow, but thrives.



PRESCHOOL CHILDREN AT TALEK SCHOOL



DEANNA ARGO WITH MAASAI STUDENTS



NEW GIRL'S DORM



SEVENTH GRADE CLASSROOM



ENDANGERED

PAINTED DOGS

In addition to our work with the Maasai school, Boone Safaris is proud to partner with the Painted Dog Research Trust (PDRT) in Zimbabwe.

Paula and I first met Dr. Greg Rasmussen at a local brewery in Victoria Falls. At first glance, we thought he was a sanitation worker — only to discover that he holds a PhD from Oxford and is the world's foremost expert on Painted Dogs (also known as African Wild Dogs). Shortly after, we sent our daughter to Zimbabwe to work with his team. Since then, we've hosted events for Greg in Franklin and Huntsville, raising thousands of dollars to support his work with PDRT. We are committed to continuing to raise both funds and awareness for the incredible work being done.

Painted dogs are among the most endangered animals in the world. Their numbers have plummeted due to habitat loss, road kills, and disturbance of dens by tourists and photographers. For decades, they were also persecuted by ranchers who mistakenly believed they were killing livestock. Dr. Greg's groundbreaking research proved otherwise, and through his efforts, he educated ranchers and stopped the shootings.

Beyond his research, Dr. Greg has dedicated himself to conservation education. He has taught hundreds of local children about the importance of protecting wildlife, and mentored many young men and women who have gone on to pursue careers in conservation themselves. His impact extends far beyond the Painted Dogs — he's building a legacy of knowledge and stewardship for the future.

CAMP SPOTLIGHT - PARADISE PLAINS

The Wilder Group opened Paradise Plains Camp on August 15, and Boone Safaris guests were the very first to stay at the Maasai Mara's newest luxury camp.

The camp is set in one of the most pristine and wild locations in the Mara, perched on the banks of the Mara River with sweeping views of the Paradise Plains. It's an ideal setting — remote, beautiful, and filled with wildlife.

Serena Mason has done a remarkable job with the design. The camp is elegant yet never ostentatious, blending luxury with a sense of place. Each guest enjoys three tents connected by a deck. The main tent is spacious, featuring one of the most comfortable beds and finest bedding I've ever experienced. The shower is beautifully designed, with excellent water pressure and reliable hot water.

One adjoining tent holds a striking copper bathtub, while the other serves as a sitting area, complete with a coffee maker and a fridge stocked with drinks and snacks. It's a thoughtful design that balances comfort and style — a perfect base for exploring the Mara.

GUEST TENT







LOCATION SPOTLIGHT

VICTORIA FALLS

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

One of our favorite places to take clients is Victoria Falls — a UNESCO World Heritage Site and truly one of the natural wonders of the world. The falls straddle two countries, Zimbabwe and Zambia, but I prefer to stay in the town of Victoria Falls on the Zimbabwe side.

Our top choice for accommodations is Ilala Lodge. From here, you can walk to the falls and even see the “smoke” rising from the gorge right from the veranda. The on-site restaurant is five-star, and their sister property, the Palm River Lodge, is also an excellent option.

Ilala’s activities desk can arrange an endless variety of excursions, both adrenaline-filled and relaxed. For a bird’s-eye view, take a 15-minute helicopter ride over the falls — at \$150, it’s well worth it. Thrill-seekers can bungee jump from the Victoria Falls Bridge into the gorge below (though only two of my guests have ever been brave enough to try!). Depending on the season, you can even swim to the edge of the falls at Devil’s Pool.

A favorite for many of our guests is the sunset cruise on the Zambezi River. From the deck of the boat, you’ll watch elephants and hippos along the riverbanks while sipping a gin and tonic as the sun sinks below the horizon. After dark, I always recommend a stop at River Brewing Co. for craft beer and live local music — I’ve heard some incredible talent there. If time allows, make sure to visit Dr. Greg Rasmussen at the Painted Dog Research Trust campus. There you can learn about their conservation programs, children’s education initiatives, and sustainability efforts.

Victoria Falls has it all: natural wonder, adventure, culture, and conservation — it’s always a highlight of our safaris.



THE BOONE TREE

There is a magnificent tree in the Maasai Mara, not far from Entim Camp, that holds a very special place in my heart. It's the tree where I want my ashes spread when I die. You can spot it from miles away, and when guests travel with Boone Safaris, they'll almost certainly hear about what we affectionately call the Boone Tree. On our final night at Entim, we always gather beneath it for sundowners.

The Boone Tree earned its name after a photograph I took there won an international photography award. That picture was captured on the last afternoon game drive of 2021. As we set out from Entim and approached the great fig tree — estimated to be around 200 years old — we were surprised to find a massive bull elephant scratching against its trunk. As we drew closer, the elephant stretched its trunk high into the branches, reaching for leaves nearly 40 feet above the ground.

The moment was made even more dramatic by the skies. A storm was rolling in behind the tree, while sunshine still lit the scene from the opposite direction. The contrast of light and shadow brought the landscape to life in a way I will never forget.

Since that day, I've passed by the Boone Tree hundreds of times, and yet that was the only time I've seen an elephant there. The image, the elephant, and the tree together created a once-in-a-lifetime moment — one that has made the Boone Tree a symbol of my connection to the Mara.



I'M 6'2" AND FAR BELOW THE LOWEST BRANCH



SUNDOWNERS UNDER THE BOONE TREE



MUST SEE PLACES

THE OKAVANGO DELTA

It's probably no surprise how deeply I love the Maasai Mara. The wide-open vistas and sheer abundance of wildlife make it, in my mind, the premier game reserve in the world. Yet, if there is one place that can rival the Mara for natural beauty and prolific wildlife, it's the Okavango Delta in Botswana.

Botswana is, at its core, a desert nation — the Kalahari covers roughly 75% of the country. And yet, in the far north lies one of the most extraordinary landscapes on earth: the Okavango Delta, a vast inland oasis where desert meets river.

Here, the Okavango River flows down from the highlands of Angola into the Kalahari Basin, spreading across a great tectonic trough. With no outlet to the sea, the water fans out and slowly evaporates, creating a shifting patchwork of channels, lagoons, and islands. Seasonal floods and subtle variations in topography shape the land into an ever-changing mosaic: permanent swamps, seasonal floodplains, dry woodland islands, and desert fringe.

This incredible diversity of habitats supports some of the highest wildlife densities in Africa. Elephants, buffalo, big cats, antelope, and an astonishing variety of birds all thrive in this watery wilderness — making the Okavango Delta a true counterpart to the Maasai Mara's grandeur.

IMAGES FROM THE DELTA



SABLE ANTELOPE



CHEETAH



KUDU



LEOPARD



WATERBUCK



PAINTED DOG



2026 AND BEYOND

WHAT'S NEXT?

For 2026, we have eight departures for the Great Migration, each with 12 guests. All but one departure is already full, so if you're considering joining us next year, please check in soon to secure a spot.

Our Uganda trip still has plenty of availability. While I won't be personally leading that safari, our trusted local guides will take excellent care of you. Looking further ahead, we plan to return to Uganda in 2027, and also to Botswana. That journey will include Victoria Falls, the Chobe River, and the Okavango Delta, with an optional extension to Cape Town and South Africa's wine region — a perfect way to round out the adventure.

A quick tip: I recommend reserving your safari spots at least 18 months in advance, as departures fill quickly. And remember, we can also design custom safaris to any destination in Africa, tailored to your budget and timeframe.

A FEW MORE IMAGES FROM 2025 GREAT MIGRATION





BULL ELEPHANT AT SUNRISE



SUNRISE OVER PARADISE PLAINS



WATERBUCK AT SUNSET



OXPECKER ON AFRICAN BUFFALO