

NEWSLETTER FROM CATHY BUCKLE IN ZIMBABWE



The Time Before the Rain

19 September 2024



Dear Family and Friends

In the blistering September heat in the midst of a devastating drought in Zimbabwe, I thought it was going to be hard to find the beauty in our country on a recent visit to the wild, but it just needed a bit more patience and a closer look.

It's that harsh, hungry time of year when there seems to be nothing at all to sustain life without intervention. The grass has all but gone, confined to the odd patch of bleached scratchy stems or simply nothing left at all above ground, everything picked clean by animals and then armies of termites have cleared up the scraps. There is an unceasing thin dust out in the wilderness this September, a dust that thickens your hair, stings your eyes and coats everything in fine powder.

These last two months before the rains come in Zimbabwe are hot, dry and unforgiving. Everything is harsh, hard and dusty and mirages shimmer in the far distance on those long straight roads that mark your trail through the wilderness. The predominant colour here is sepia and your brain has to refocus, to look for tints and shades, tones and shadows. Trees are not brown bark and green leaves in early September, they are grey and black, etched and wrinkled, leafless and gasping, waiting for new leaves, new buds and always for moisture. Suddenly three towering giraffes appear from nowhere, their camouflage hiding them until the last minute and then they are gone again, slipping away between stunted, blackened droughted trees.

Again and again, we cross huge river beds which are dry, vast, sandy stretches littered with big balls of fibrous, brown elephant droppings. Everywhere there are signs of excavations where animals have scratched, scraped and dug down into the thick deep sand digging for water. Waterholes and pans are dry, lined with big cracked squares of hard mud. Every now and again there is a little silver strand of water or a little stagnant pool and at one of these a Bateleur Eagle stands cooling its feet, bending to drink again and again, its bright red beak and feet startling and stunning against the dusty September background.

Out on the flatlands a sudden small movement, the flick of a little tail gives hope, and you catch a glimpse of a squirrel disappearing into a hole in a tree or a dwarf mongoose dropping into an anthill. The anthills here are baked hard as rock and seemingly devoid of life, but wait, sit and watch for a little while. In and out of an ochre yellow or dusty red anthill warthogs disappear or emerge, running from one big round hole to the next, fat grey bodies, menacing tusks, thin tails tipped with bristles which they hold straight up like aerials and away they rush through the dust and scrub. Always on the run the warthogs are much sought after by predators so there's never time to hang around.

This Zimbabwe is as familiar to all of us who live here as it is to people who have visited our country; it is raw, wild and beautiful, steeped in history and mystery, filled with legends and ancient tales.

I am delighted to announce that my fourth annual collection of photographs and evocative stories from wild and beautiful places around Zimbabwe is now available in my book "Zimbabwe's Timeless Beauty The 2024 Collection." This book and my Beautiful Zimbabwe Calendar for 2025 have just been published and are both available internationally. Please visit my website for further details or to order your copy <https://cathybuckle.co.zw/>

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.

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