

THE WINTER THORN DRAWS AN ABUNDANCE OF WILDLIFE TO THE LOWER ZAMBEZI FLOODPLAINS PROVIDING SUSTENANCE DURING THE DRY SEASON WHEN THE LAND BECOMES PARCHED AND THIRSTY.

These open floodplains flank the iconic Zambezi River host to one of Africa's greatest concentrations of hippopotamus, crocodile and tiger fish.

The river is only interrupted by wooded islands where you may find shy elephant or be fortunate enough to spot the rare Pel's fishing owl - *Glaucidium perlatum* on a night time boat cruise. A hem of emerald riverine forest adds to the wild beauty of the Lower Zambezi Valley, guarded by distant blue-grey mountains. Within the forest it's bursting with life, filled with the sound of birds, and providing food and shelter to the animals.

Here, at Chikwenya Safari Lodge, situated at the confluence of the Sapi River and the Zambezi River, on the eastern border of Mana Pools National Park, Zimbabwe, you are absorbed into this spectacular wildlife setting. We'd arrived at the tail end of winter, dubbed suicide month, because of the searing temperatures that gallop to 45 degrees Celsius. However, in the same way that you become immersed in the drama of the wildlife, the heat seems to seep into you as opposed to grasp at you. It's a dry heat, and the anticipation of rain at the end of a long dry winter dangles in the air like the oversized fruits of the sausage trees.

Ancient Baobabs

The edge of the riverine forest is deceiving though, boasting its emerald green colour, because the forest stretches back into the interior, away from the river, thins out and becomes dehydrated and devoid of greenery. Water holes have become dust

