



Around the waterhole

A waterhole at Ivory Lodge in Hwange is an idyllic spot from which to watch the Presidential Elephants.

When travelling between Victoria Falls and Bulawayo, you reach a turn-off to Hwange National Park's main camp. Along this tranquil stretch of wilderness is an entrance to Ivory Lodge, 'place of elephants'.

This is unfenced land where the Presidential Elephants roam. And Ivory's waterhole is one of their favourite playgrounds.

Here, a low electric fence discreetly separates man and beast. I've known Ivory's guide for many years. We speak with guests staying in rustic treehouses or the pleasant campground about who's who and what's going on within the elephant families. These elephants are busy charming visitors from around the world.

The 'S' family appears – splashing, rolling and rumbling – in front of us. Matriarch



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Skew Tusk – easily identified by her peculiar right tusk that twists under her trunk – has been known since the 1970s. She's one of the original 22 elephants that formed the nucleus of what eventually became the Presidential Elephants of Zimbabwe. Now in her mid-50s, she has expertly led her family through many seasons.

May is a particularly amorous month in the Hwange veld. Impalas, kudus, waterbuck, sables and warthogs mate amid a backdrop of Zambezi teak trees flaunting striking autumn colours. June signals the beginning of the long, dry winter months. In the warmth of still, cloudless days, the elephants skilfully shake *Acacia eriolobas* for the last of the velvety grey seed pods they love to devour.

The enchanting sights and sounds of my elephant friends – such as Misty and Whosit with baby Wish, who materialised in February, an adorable wee girl – frolicking around waterholes are now much more familiar to me than, say, people on public transport engrossed in pages of world news. And it's infinitely more soothing to be at one with the giants of the wild. I highly recommend you try it some time.



■ TOP: The Presidential Elephants regularly visit the waterhole at Ivory Lodge. ABOVE: Misty approaches Ivory's safari vehicle.



■ You can help keep the pumps going to fill Hwange National Park's water pans. Deposit your donation into the Save Hwange Trust account, 6209-3759-086, First National Bank, Sea Point, branch number 201809. For more information, tel 0861-312-312, web www.flameofafrica.com.