



Trumpets and roars

A camping excursion to Hwange National Park yields a spectacular display by elephants and lions.

Inside Hwange National Park, 58 kilometres southeast of Main Camp, is a wildlife-packed area called Ngweshla. There's a picnic site where you can camp cheaply overnight. I did just that during the last wet season, curious to see if any Presidential Elephants wandered this far (not too far, as the crow flies, from Hwange Estate).

I didn't meet any of my usual ele-friends but the park's elephants put on an impressive show nonetheless. Their floppy-eared runs to the pan of pumped water and prolonged, shrill trumpets as they chased lions throughout the night were so familiar.

Two huge tawny cats – well-known to the lion researchers – passed so closely under



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star-laden skies that I could hear their footfalls; their deafening, persistent calls are not for the faint-hearted.

With just tent-netting and a low, dilapidated wire fence separating us, it was about as close as you can get to wild Africa. Here, with elephants rumbling and screaming dramatically among an impressive assortment of animal and bird life, all mundane worries could be temporarily forgotten.

Back on Hwange Estate, my 30-year-old 4x4 had been regularly giving me grief. I'd been checking on the wellbeing of the 'M' family and recorded new additions. Favourites Misty and Mertle had delighted me with cheerful greetings. Then it refused to start.

Fortunately, a vehicle from nearby Ivory Lodge materialised and I was soon up and running again, thanks to a push-start from

the safari guide and his vehicle full of amused male guests. I pointed out Misty, standing by some trees. Was she shaking her head at me? 'You really have to do something about getting a replacement vehicle,' I thought I heard her say.

Somewhere in the distance, a lion called. Lions may be the voice of Africa, but while sitting close enough to marvel at blood coursing through giant pachyderm ears, I'm convinced that serene elephants are the true pulse of the African bush. ■



■ **TOP:** The flapping of ears cools blood pulsing through the surface veins, which keeps elephants as chilled as any other bush creature. **ABOVE:** Misty is easily identified by the notches in her right ear.



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