

# CHIAWA CAMP & OLD MONDORO

## Spotlight / Photography Policy for Night Game Drives

### Why do we offer night game drives?

It is a privilege for safari camps in Zambia to be permitted to conduct night drives in National Parks, as these are not permitted everywhere because they are considered by many authorities to be too invasive. Yet, if conducted responsibly and sensitively, they can afford an excellent opportunity and perspective in which to view predators and the secretive nocturnal animals that one seldom sees in daylight. Not only are these animals out and about at night, but they are usually much easier to find than they would be in daylight, simply by using the reflection from their eyes. We have developed a unique spotlight protocol, practiced only at Chiawa Camp & Old Mondoro, that offers our guests the opportunity to observe these creatures behaving naturally and to take natural looking photographs without compromising the same creatures' behaviour and well being.

### Is there a problem with the white spot lights and, if so, why do other camps still use them?

Shining a powerful white spot-light on animals at night is hugely disruptive to the animal's behaviour and hence, ultimately, its well-being. Additionally, using a white spot-light when animals are hunting will inevitably interfere with the outcome. Either the hunter will be revealed to its prey and the hunt ruined, or its task will be made unnaturally easy. Not all camps care about the wildlife like we do, and many can't or won't innovate or lead. We continue to lead, innovate, educate and lobby for improved practices in the safari industry.

### How do we know there's a problem - is there any science and/or experience to prove this?

There are two types of light-receptor cells in an eye: rods, which are light-sensitive, and cones, which are colour sensitive. Most mammals have many more rods and less cones than humans do, making their eyes more sensitive to light and allowing them to see better in low light conditions. The eye normally protects itself against bright light by automatically reducing the size of the pupil in bright conditions to limit the amount of light coming in, and opening it up when it is dark, just as adjusting a camera aperture prevents over-exposure. Natural light changes gradually so the pupil has plenty of time to adjust to the change, but thoughtless humans with instantaneous artificial lights throw a spanner in the works – with no time for the pupil to adjust it gets hit with a million-candlepower white light and instantly the animal is effectively blind, vulnerable and unable to function properly. Experiments have shown that cats' eyes take 35 minutes to recover fully after only 60 seconds exposure to bright light. It is quite common to see a leopard which was walking purposefully along when first spotted stop and lie down when a white spot-light is put on it; this is not because it doesn't care about the light, it is because it can't see anything and it is waiting for you to go away so its eyes can recover. Impala are so disorientated by white light that when game capture was in its infancy the standard way to catch impala was to dazzle them with a spotlight and physically tackle them: the expression "like a deer in the headlights" is used internationally to describe someone helpless and unable to protect themselves.

### So how does a red light help?

Red lights are standard on the bridges of ships because it has long been known that they do not affect one's night vision in the way that white light does. Many mammals simply do not see the red spotlight at all. This means we can bathe a leopard in red light and the animals it is stalking cannot see it any better than they can in the natural ambient light, and vice-versa. The animals continue to go about their business as if the light was not there, because as far as they are concerned it isn't. Hence, at Chiawa Camp & Old Mondoro, we only use filtered spot lights and headlamps on our vehicles, and prohibit the use of camera flashes on our night game drives.

### But what about my photographs, won't the red filter and lack of flash ruin them?

We use two spotlights on our night drives, a red one for "spotting" and then a very diffuse natural filter used intermittently just for photographs. Repeated field trials have demonstrated that these filtered lights, developed in 2013 by Grant & his team in response to the unwelcome effect of the red filters on photographs, do not have the detrimental effect of bright unfiltered lights, i.e. no confused or dazzled creatures and yet these allow us to take natural looking photographs, with the added bonus of no "hot spot", albeit at ranges of less than 20 meters.

### How do I set my camera for this?

Increase the ISO setting to at least 1600; increase your aperture to maximum setting, preferably 2.8 or 4.0; shutter speed 1/40, switch flash OFF - these two images of the same subject were taken without flash and are untouched.

Taken with red filter



Taken with diffuse filter



We hope you understand and appreciate how these measures will maximize your enjoyment and photo opportunities on a night safari whilst minimizing the intrusion on the very creatures we cherish and respect.

Thanking you for your understanding and co-operation!

The Cumings Family and the Chiawa Camp & Old Mondoro Teams