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like daughter**

South Luangwa calls

SOUTH AFRICA

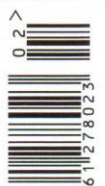
**Bike the
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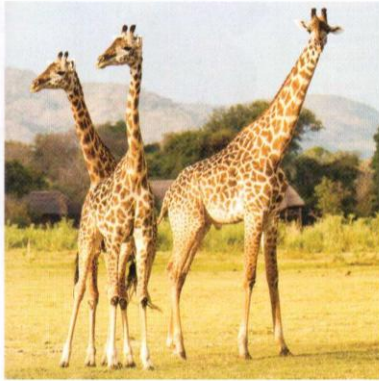
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MARKETING EXCEPTIONAL TRAVEL EXPERIENCES

Long time coming

Although the Bushcamp Company's **Phil Berry** has been taking notes on South Luangwa's Thornicroft's giraffe for 33-years, he never imagined they'd form the basis of a scientific paper.

The "tons" of data collected on Thornicroft's giraffe by the long-time naturalist, who first started working in the park as a ranger in the late 1970s, proved to be a treasure trove for Fred Bercovitch, a professor from the Primate Research Institute and Wildlife



Research Centre, Kyoto University, Japan.

Professor Bercovitch, having long hoped to produce a life-history profile for this sub-species of giraffe, was able to use Berry's copious notes to write a scientific paper on the colouration changes in their coats. Previously, it had been widely known that the brown blotches on the coats of all giraffe species darken with age, but nobody had been able to link these changes to specific times in the life of the animals. Commenting on the paper, which was recently published in the *Journal of Zoology*, Prof Bercovitch noted: "The main

contribution of our work is that we could attach specific ages to coat colour changes, which provides something of a 'biomarker' of aging in giraffe."

Berry's detailed notes had documented the first change in the colouration of the males' coat patterns – from brown to almost black within the space of two years – typically began when the giraffe was seven to eight years of age. Prof Bercovitch suggests that the darkening could be associated with the rise in testosterone during puberty, which occurs at this time in their life cycle.

"I suspect that the blackening of the blotches is a public announcement to the other giraffe that a male is going through puberty: something like adolescent boys flexing their muscles to impress the opposite sex," said Prof Bercovitch.

One of nine recognised sub-species of giraffe, Thornicroft's is found only the South Luangwa Valley. □