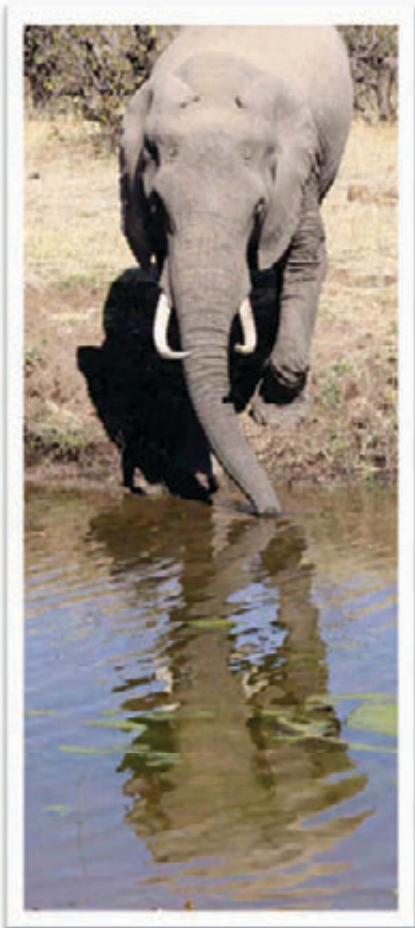




Central Limpopo River Valley Elephant Research Project

JULY 2009



It's getting drier, but still there have been a few very good elephant sightings this month, including a sighting of roughly 500 elephants in one area, a truly fantastic one! The Tuli elephants have been on the move this month, with lowering temperatures and increasingly cold winds making a sighting of elephants moving across an open area at high speed to the safer confines of a thicket not uncommon.

One thing a person gets to realize is that the term safety in numbers is far from a cliché. After watching a herd of elephants for roughly half an hour, they turned and charged into the bush, all moving at pace for a particular location. After following for about one kilometer, it sounded like world war three had erupted in the vicinity. I was just in time to see one incredibly unimpressed pride of lions leaving the

area at a trot, after being moved by the elephants. After that, the elephants calmed down. It was a fantastic example of elephants behaving in a coordinated manner to protect each other against potential danger.

Another great sighting this month was a contest between a herd of elephants and a pack of wild dogs. The dogs seemed to really enjoy themselves as they toyed with the herd. The herd bunched up in a typical guarding fashion, with the younger individuals in the middle and the adults on the perimeter, with an occasional adult charging out to try and get at the meddlesome dogs. The dogs kept at it for roughly half an hour, darting in, before being chased away by the elephants, until eventually losing interest and moving off to carry on with their hunt.

Background to the CLRV Elephant Project

The project was initiated in August 1999 to determine the status of the Central Limpopo Valley elephant population and the impact the elephant population had on their natural habitat within the Tuli.

The broad objective of this study is to determine how various factors influence movements, occupancy rates in different parts of the home range, social dynamics and conception and survival of elephant groups in the Central Limpopo River Valley. In order to meet the objectives, data will be gathered through field observations of the various herds within the study area, concentrating within the Northern Tuli Game Reserve. Satellite data on the movements of the various herds collared, weather data from various stations within the study area, vegetation data on the phenology of various plant species as well as long term vegetation change in the Northern Tuli Game Reserve will be measured.



Ivory drives



There have been plenty of Ivory Drives this month and we seem to have spotted almost as many leopards as we have elephants. One great sighting was a young male leopard that came down from his sleeping tree at dusk, and proceeded to try and stalk a four month old elephant. Whether he was seriously trying to get a chance at the youngster or he was just

playing around is another question, but he was certainly discouraged after being chased away by the youngsters mom the third time she spotted him, and he headed off to try and find easier prey.

We had a fantastic experience this month with a young elephant bull of about eight years old. The young boy was absolutely fascinated by the land cruiser we were driving around in, and continuously walked up to the vehicle, almost as if he was trying to judge how hard of an adversary it was by trying to hit it with his trunk. He also seemed to try and kick the vehicle repeatedly, but it was almost as if he was too scared to get close enough to do so. Eventually he slowly approached





the front of the vehicle and edged closer and closer to the bull-bar, until he could feel it with the tip of his tusk. After trying to move it a bit with his tusk, he realized that we were slightly tougher than he originally thought and moved off to rejoin his mothers herd.

Young boys are always throwing their weight around. This was the case when we came upon a herd calmly feeding under a Mashatu tree together with a herd of impala. Both elephant and impala were reaping the spoils of the baboons that were eating selected fruit from the tree and discarding the rest on the ground below. But the proximity of the impala was way too much for a young bull in the herd, who kept on charging around, trying to chase the impala away from the tree, with little effect. As soon as he was on the one side of the tree, impala would move in on the other side of the tree, and vice versa. This eventually got the better of him and he charged off after his herd, because he could just not win while trying to get rid of so many adversaries.

Warm elephant greetings

Mark Hardon



SPECIAL REQUESTS

Climate data

Climate data in any reserve is extremely important to establish trends. Within the NTGR rainfall is generally very patchy and this can have a huge effect on the distribution and movements of wildlife on the reserve. We are looking for reliable daily rainfall and temperature records from as many locations as possible. Anyone who would like to contribute can contact me at mashatu.research@telkomsa.net. Datasheets are also available.

Mortalities

I am trying to keep track of all the mortalities (natural or otherwise) of elephants within the region. This data is extremely important in understanding the population dynamics of the Tuli elephants and to ultimately assist in the management of these amazing creatures. Would anyone who has any historical data or come across any dead animal (of the specific species) please contact me.

Identification kits

Anyone who would like to participate in identifying or who has come to know a specific elephant well on their property assist me in sending identification photographs. For more information on how to go about this please contact me.

Newsletter

We would like to hear from you in our newsletter. Any contributions towards sightings on the reserve or interesting stories on elephants are welcome and would be appreciated.

Donations and Contributions

Research would not be a reality if we do not have the amazing support from so many organizations and individuals who obviously share our love for nature and the vision to conserve our magnificent heritage. Thank you to each and every person who has made a contribution, in whichever way, to the project! Anyone interested in donating towards the elephant research project can contact me at Mashatu.research@telkomsa.net for more information.

