



### RESEARCH



## CENTRAL LIMPOPO VALLEY ELEPHANT RESEARCH PROJECT

*Jeanetta Selier*

During the month 18 different known herds were observed with a total of 40 hours of field observations. The largest group observed during the month was approximately 90 elephants together consisting of the groups of Therese, Ilze and Funny Face. The majority of the groups were encountered along the Matabole and Majale Rivers. Early morning several groups could be observed slowly moving down along the riverine of the Matabole River eventually ending up in the Acacia veld between the Majale and Matabole rivers near Well-shaped Mashatu. Even though large groups were observed during the month the average group size was 26 elephants per group, while the median for the month was not very different at 20 elephants per group. The majority of the bulls have left the central area of the reserve and few lone bulls were observed during the month. A young male elephant of approximately 15 years died near the confluence of the Majale and Limpopo rivers. Cause of death could not be established. The lions wasted no time and were there within a day of the young males death. Within days the lions, vultures and hyenas removed any trace of the young male.



There was not only elephant watching this month. The research volunteers also assisted in the collection and analysis of 21 phenology plots studying the change in browse and graze available within the reserve on a monthly basis.

Movement patterns this month has changed dramatically from May. During May most of the known herds were spending time along the Majale River drinking frequently at Dispute Corner and Crocodile Pool. This month the movements have changed with the majority of the herds moving up and down the Matabole and Nyaswe rivers with some of the herds utilizing the Pitsane River. All of these rivers still have pools of water and elephants were observed on several occasions digging for water in the dry riverbeds.





Apart from Rocky, who's home range this month was more or a less in the same area as last month but slightly smaller most of the collared groups core areas have shifted. One of the core areas for herd PA remained the same (areas below Mashatu Main Camp) but the herd concentrated mainly along the northern section of the Pitsane River and a small section along the confluence of the Majale and Pitsane Rivers, moving up and down the Pitsane River on a daily basis. Herd AG continued to move up and down the central Majale River area but also extended her range to the area around the confluence of the Nyaswe and Matabole rivers. Herd CHR's core area shifted completely. Where she was focusing her movements during May around Naledi and Fika Futi the herd mainly concentrated around the confluences of the Majale and Matabole rivers and the Majale and Pitsane rivers and high up along the Pitsane River.

### Ivory Drives

During the month a total of 25 guests from the Main and Tented camp joined me on an Ivory experience. As always we had great sightings of some of the known herds on the reserve. The old lady (Hestelle), as she is fondly known was a welcome visitor and on several drives we spend the entire morning with her herd. Within the herd there has been 5 new additions with most of the adult females (excluding Hestelle, off course) giving birth early in the year. All the babies seemed to have adopted the Old Lady as their favourite aunt or grandmother and were often seen suckling from her to the distress of her seven year old boy, Henry. Charge and her family was also frequently encountered and interestingly more often than not with the family of Therese. During the month Broken Tusk also supplanted Ilze, the matriarch of another family, showing the dominance of Charge's herd. Therese, however, does not seem to be intimidated by Charge or her family, showing Therese's dominance over herd CH.

