

Mashatu



Research
Botswana

Central Limpopo River Valley Elephant Research Project

JUNE 2009



It has been a good month for elephants with a few large groups having been spotted throughout the month. With the dry season coming up and the weather having turned a bit, the elephants have been concentrated around what natural water remains, with many of the sightings being along the rivers, both for the water and to get away from the cold wind.

There were a few fantastic sightings at the spring just north of main camp. On one occasion almost 120 elephants were seen moving north, stopping to drink at the waterhole just in front of main camp, before moving up to the spring for a well deserved wallow. A young bull was incredibly rowdy and had to be chased off repeatedly by an old cow before he finally settled down and was allowed to return and have a good mud bath.

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.

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There have been a few new arrivals this month, I was lucky enough to see one of the youngsters a few hours after birth walking along with mom, a cow from Liz's herd, still trying to find his feet.

Another thing I realized this month is that size isn't everything. A large herd of elephant was drinking from a pool in the Majale River and slowly started to move up the bank to start browsing. The last elephant at the water, a 10 year old bull was still enjoying himself in the water when a large flock of red-billed queleas started moving towards the water to drink, after having waited patiently in a tree overlooking the water for the elephants to move off. The poor youngster almost had a heart attack, and to make things worse, when he looked around and found that mom wasn't there, he rushed off into the bush, after having been 'bullied' by the tiny birds.



Ivory drives

We started doing a bit of radio tracking on the Ivory drives this month, with varying degrees of success. Our main target has been the matriarch Agatha, but unfortunately for us, she didn't always seem to appreciate all of the attention, and on two occasions she was just too far for us to be able

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to catch up with her. She did send us on a few good chases and on one occasion we found her upstream just off the Majale River, on the western side of camp, far from where we expected her to be.

We did however have some fantastic sightings on the Ivory Drives though, one of these drives we saw about 120 elephants on the banks of the Pitsane River with Charge, Agatha, Dorothy, Hestelle, and Kolobje all making appearances with their respective families.

We also had a great time with a herd of again around 120 moving down the Matabole River from the confluence with the Nyaswe River south past Disappointment Koppie to feed on some Umbrella Thorns in the area.

Another great experience was watching the young bulls clowning around and mock fighting. They take great pleasure in throwing their weight around and trying to figure out who's the strongest among themselves and were continually tussling with each other, as young boys will do.



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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.

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