



## Central Limpopo River Valley Elephant Research Project

MAY 2009



Yet another month has come to an end and for me the last month of field work for two months! I will be leaving for the USA early in June and will only return to the reserve in August. I have been selected on the Kinship Conservation Fellows Program and will be on the course for the duration of July in Bellingham, Washington State.

A young student from the Tswane University of Technology, Mark Hardon has been employed as a field assistant in the Elephant research project. He will be responsible for the field data collection focusing on the identification of the various herds and the feeding behaviour within the herds.

### 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.

# Mashatu



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Mark Hardon is an enthusiastic young man who hopes to complete both his BTech and MTech degrees on the population dynamics, movement patterns and feeding behaviour of the Tuli Elephants. Mark has experience in both managing captive wild animals as well as wildlife management and is an exciting new addition to the project. Mark will also be responsible for conducting the Ivory drives, in my absence and looking forward meeting people and sharing his knowledge on the Tuli elephants.

During the month 12 of the known herds were observed frequently on the reserve. Most of the breeding herds were still high up on the reserve and were often seen walking along the Nyaswe and Matabole Rivers. Very few elephants were noticed along the Limpopo River during the month and it is only towards the end of the month that breeding herds were observed spending time along the Limpopo River.

The average group size for the month is still fairly large (50 elephants per group) and large congregations of elephants were seen frequently. During the month the herds of CH; CHR; DOR; HE; FUN and later ILZ were frequently seen together. With the large congregations of breeding herds several bulls joined up with the breeding herds.



A few females are still giving birth and this included Dorethee, the matriarch of a small family of ten. Dorethee and her family are closely related to that of Charge.



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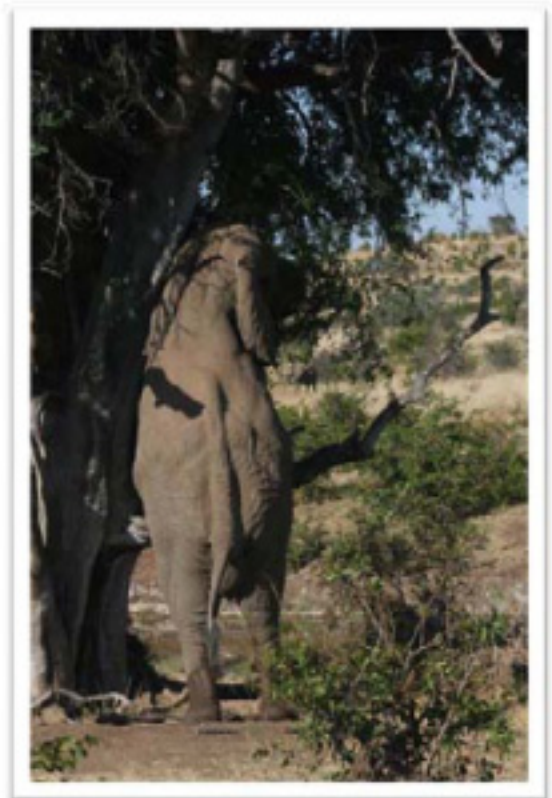
No mortalities were reported or encountered during the month. As the reserve started drying out the elephants started feeding more and more on the mopane trees in the central section of the reserve. Soraya and her family were seen for several days around the Main Camp. Towards the end of the month Hestelle's family also made their way towards the Main Camp. One tusk, a young female in HE's herd was seen followed by a big musth bull for several days. Even though no mating was observed it is very possible that one tusk has been in estrus over this period.

I was asked to participate in a fund raiser for an Old Age home in Lydenburg and on the evening of the 4<sup>th</sup> of June I presented a talk on the Tuli elephants as part of a cheese and wine evening. It was an extremely rewarding evening. The following morning I did a talk only for the old age residents, a task I thoroughly enjoyed. It was extremely rewarding participating in these events and in a small way assists in contributing to a good cause.

### **Ivory drives**

During the month 40 guests participated in the Ivory Experience. Not only did we have great elephant viewing on all the Ivory drives we also managed to track down the pride of lions with the two cubs and the big male lion.

As always Hestelle's herd made for excellent viewing with us being able to get up close and personal with her family. On one of the Ivory drives we came across a big musth bull standing on his back legs to get to a Mashatu branch he wanted. What a sight!



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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](mailto: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 organisations 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](mailto:Mashatu.research@telkomsa.net) for more information.

### Project Sponsors



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