



September 2010

September was a fantastic month for elephants in Mashatu. With most of the pools along the rivers drying up, there has been a trend for the elephants to move south and spend time either at the Vlei or along the Limpopo River. Almost every day there have been elephants at the Vlei, with some fantastic sightings most mornings. It has not been uncommon for sightings of 50 to 100 elephants or more on any particular morning. Another area favoured by the elephants this month has been Nel's Windmill and Majale Island. The large trees near Nel's Windmill create a perfect area to rest during the heat of the day, while the green grass on Majale Island still attract the elephants, even this late into the dry season.



The temperatures are increasing, which leads to more sightings of elephants mud-bathing, and where they can find enough water, swimming. The Vlei seems to be the chosen place to engage in these activities, and on several hot days, I found the elephants, especially the youngsters cavorting in the water, rolling around and splashing themselves.

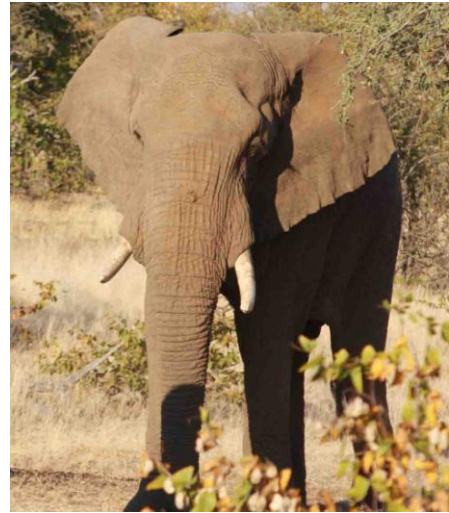
During this month, we also conducted the aerial count of the elephants in the Central Limpopo Valley. This involved us flying over the reserve as well as the neighbouring areas to count the number of elephants in the area.





Ivory Drives

We had some great Ivory Drives this month, and one of the highlights of the drives this month was seeing a mating taking place while we were having our midmorning coffee break along the banks of the Majale River. We had followed the cow for some time that morning (The cow in question is the matriarch of her herd - B 01), while she was being followed by a large bull. There were several occasions when we thought we might see them mate, but eventually decided to leave them be and to head off to have our coffee break. They continued moving towards us and eventually mated roughly 50 m from where we were standing.



On other Ivory drives this month, we also encountered Funny-face, Hestelle and Charge, and also some nice close up experiences with elephants. On one particular drive we had three teenage boys that could not decide who they wanted to challenge, the vehicle or each other. In the end they were content to fight with each other and left us alone.



There was one particular experience this month that was truly gratifying. One morning, while out on an Ivory Drive, we came across a small herd of cows. One of the calves in the herd had an old cut at the bottom of the trunk, and after consulting with the ranger Elvis, he informed me that she had had a snare some time ago and that they had darted her and removed the snare. It was truly amazing how she approached the vehicle and investigated us, coming to within a metre of the vehicle. It

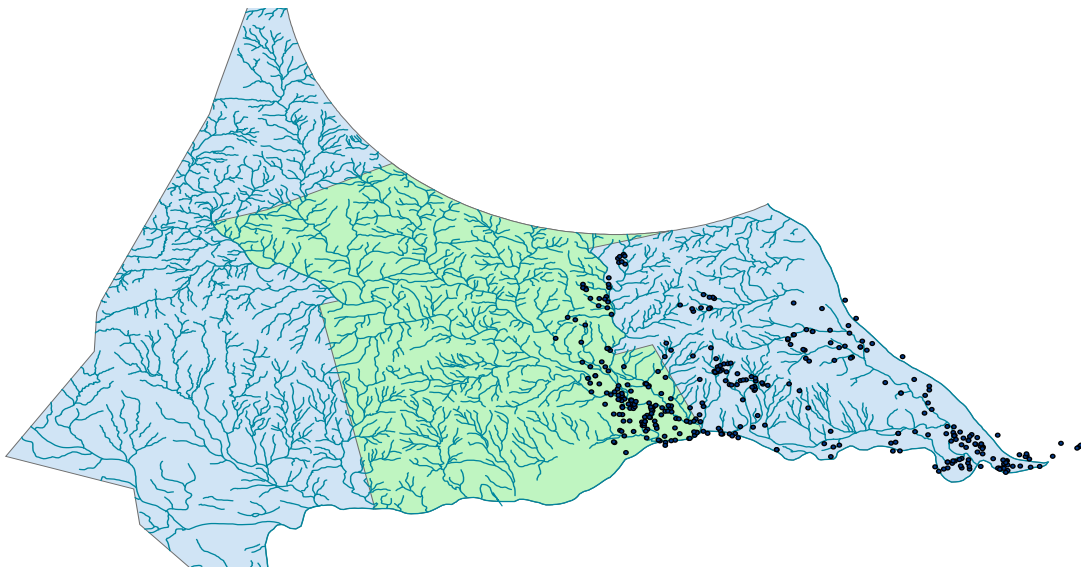


seemed like she was watching us as avidly as we were watching her.



Collared Elephants

Christina's herd seems to have spent most of the month on the Southern side of the reserve, spending a lot of time around the Vlei and the confluence of the Majale and Limpopo Rivers. When we look at her movements this month, we can see that most of her movements were confined to rivers, including the upper Pitsane, the lower Majale, and also the Limpopo River.





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.

