

GAME SIGHTINGS UPDATE JUNE 2009

We are now well into mid winter and different species of mammals utilize different habitats depending on their feeding requirements. The kudu and the impalas now specialize on the highly nutritious acacia pods from different acacia tree species. These pods are a delicacy to the antelope family. As these antelope converge under these acacia trees in large numbers, predators like the leopard take advantage to lay ambush near such trees.

On the 10th June 2009 on an afternoon game drive along the Majale River, our ranger Fish picked up a signal from the barking kudu roughly a kilometer away, and drove straight in the direction of the noise until he found the disturbed animals. Excitement was paramount as the guest's anticipated a special sighting. After much searching one of our guests spotted the elusive leopard on an impala kill.

The Majale River now flows underground, but pools of water are dotted along the river providing animals with a lot of water for drinking and mud wallowing. Temperatures range between five and ten degrees in the morning, but sunny averages of 25 can be expected during the day. A few cloudy days were experienced with brief rainstorms early on in the month.

CHEETAH

Cheetahs were seldom seen during the month of June, possible due to the dry conditions. Many natural water ponds are dry and this encourages all animals to drink water along the Majale River. Trees are shedding, making spotting these animals even easier. The cheetah has the reputation of being the fastest mammal in southern Africa. It is a fairly specialized hunter, and requires a considerable open area in which it can sprint to catch its prey.

SPOTTED HYENA & BROWN HYENAS

Rather usually, spotted hyenas were seen almost every day and heard every night. Their stunning unmistakable whooping calls are not liked by communal folks as they associate them with witchcraft. Sightings of these awesome scavengers/hunters varied, with them commonly being seen just lying under a tree where a leopard has hung its prey – hoping that by chance the kill might conveniently drop for them.

LIONS

In a very unusual behavioral display by lions, one of our local lionesses with two three month old cubs was seen initiating courtship with one of the big male lion- with the cubs literally lying under her feet. The female invited copulation by crouching in front of the male. The male also demonstrated to the female with a ritual snarl, wrinkling his nose and retracting his lips to expose the canine teeth in the act of flehmen. Although at this time proximity of the two cubs was

tolerated, the strange process continued resulting in a successful copulation. It is noted that the majority of mating does not result in pregnancy, though the level of nutrition of the female influences her fertility. It is in our hope that the mating does not result in pregnancy and that she remains separated from the male until the cubs are old enough to fend for themselves.

THE TULI ELEPHANTS.

Elephant viewing is still the best this time when herds are concentrating around the Majale River for water. Observing the feeding behavior of these animals gives a clue as to why they are as mobile as a herd, and that they are most viewed animals in the Tuli region. The arrival of winter rains has also contributed immensely, as it encourages herds of elephants to come together.

BIRDS

THE KORI BUSTARD

The Kori Bustard is a fairly common sighting in the dry thornveld and grassland of the Tuli region. This bird is also considered to have 'royal' status among the local tribes. The reason being, when one of these birds is hunted or killed, it must be presented to the local chief - only chiefs may dine on the enormous bird. This also gives the Kori Bustard some degree of protection in the area. It is also the national bird of Botswana.