

Game sighting update July 2009
(All photo's courtesy of Mark Hardon)

Weather and vegetation.

The winter rains have arrived and what a difference recorded between locations. This is very typical of the region with large fluctuations even between areas that are only a few kilometers apart. The winter rains made a big difference and shortly after the rains the acacia trees started flowering and all species of the antelope family and the giraffes can be seen feeding on the flowers from these acacia trees. The mopane trees still have green leaves but Terminalias and combretums have shaded. The Majale and Matobole Rivers have turned into large pools of water from the previous rains and have not dried up and big herds of elephants can be seen, especially on morning drives herding towards these pools for a drink and wallow.

Predator Sightings

Leopards

Completing a wildlife checklist can be more than just an exercise to tick off species. It is a lesson in observation and as always this month was filled with spectacular leopard sightings. A female with her two male offspring was seen very frequently, our valued guests had very good opportunities to photograph them ranging from drinking to feeding on an impala carcass that had been hung on an acacia tree along the Majale river near Crocodile Pool. She has also been seen hunting birds with her offspring. Several other leopards were seen near the airfield hunting different animal species.



SPOTTED HYENA & BROWN HYENAS

Spotted hyenas den in disused ant bear holes which they adjust to their own requirements. The dens may have many entrances and are usually situated on slightly raised ground, chosen by the original initiator to avoid flooding. On one morning game drive a clan of hyenas was seen heading off with a particular goal in mind, and our alert rangers followed in anticipation. Three cubs with soft brownish-black hair were seen as



the clan arrived at the den from a night hunt. They were very playful, always running and chasing each other and pestering the adults by climbing over them and biting them. Although hyenas have a reputation of being scavengers, which is unquestionably true, they are also active predators. As such it is to their advantage to live in open country where there is plentiful prey, including many species of antelope, especially kudu and impalas. Within a clan the females, which are larger than males, are usually dominant and large sized individuals dominate smaller, the cubs being last in the order. They are predominantly nocturnal.

LIONS

Lion sightings were great especially during mid-morning as lions spend the early hours of the morning hiding in thickets as it is very cold and only come out to hunt as it warms up.



The Tuli Elephants.

Elephant viewing is fantastic this time of year when herds are concentrating around the Majale River for water. The arrival of winter rains has also contributed immensely as it encourages herds of elephants to come together as the bush still provides enough for them. Groups of between 150 and 200 elephants were seen along the Vlei feeding on the green grass as it is still very wet.



Birds

The Hammerkop is a very vocal bird especially when gathered in groups. The Majale River is a special home for these birds as there are big pools of water and huge trees in which the hamerkops make huge oven-shaped nests made of sticks, reeds and any other materials that are available. Traditional healers and fortune tellers view hamerkop's nest with particular interest as it is believed to bring good fortune. Different materials, clothes and sometimes even paper money, and roots of unknown trees picked along the river seem to make the grade. The hammerkop's nest is often preyed on by predators like the African Python, the Giant eagle owl and venomous snakes like the black mamba. In the northern part of Botswana, people believe that the hammerkop keeps dangerous snakes for its protection as you could easily find these snakes in these huge nests. They also believe that the nest can be used for witchcraft rituals.