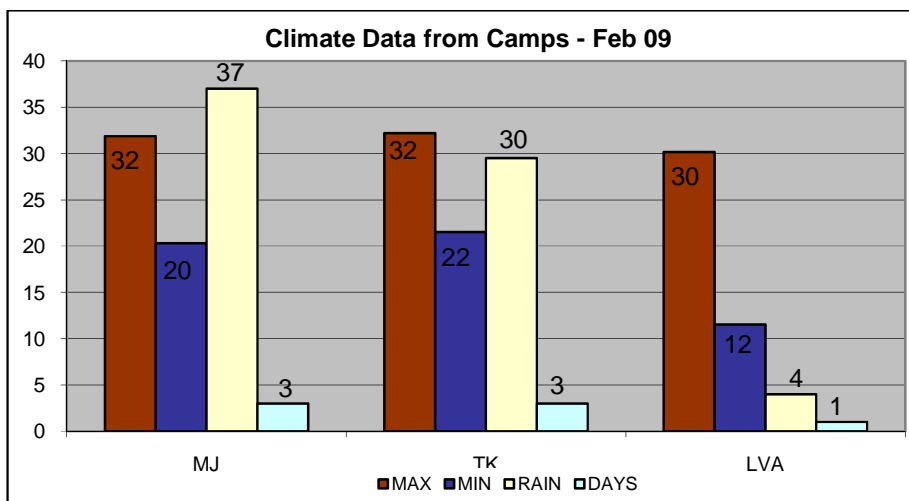
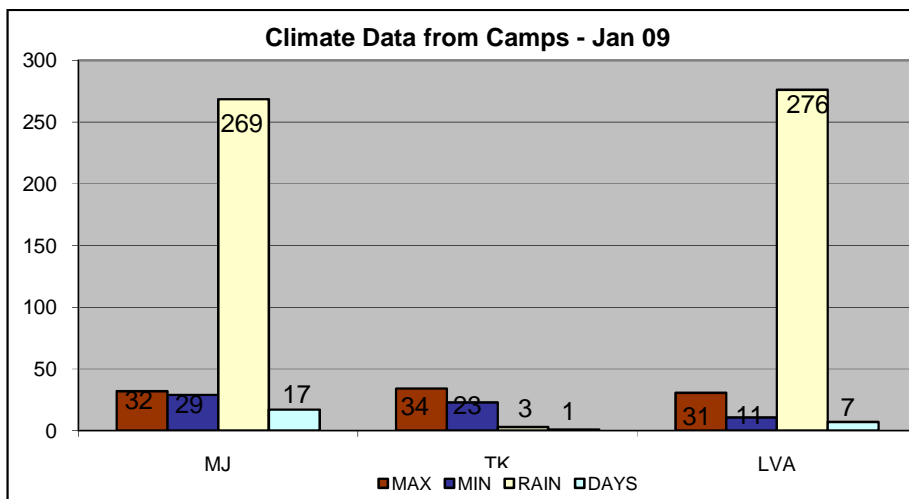




GAME SIGHTINGS UPDATE

JANUARY & FEBRUARY 2009

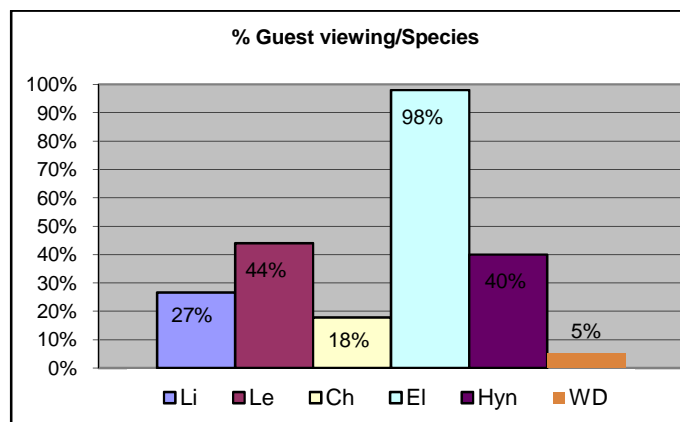
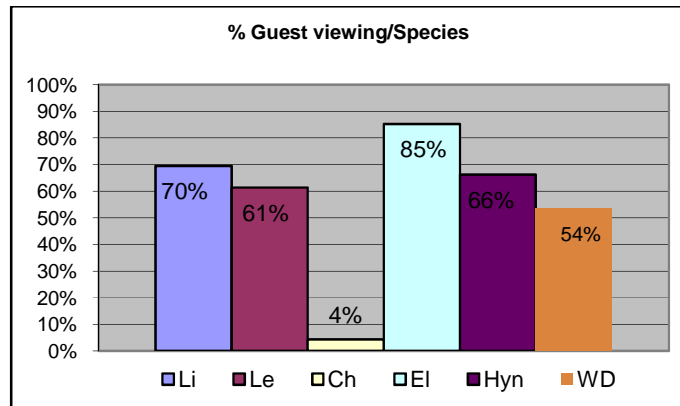
Weather & Vegetation Report



It has been an amazing season so far with the average rainfall since the start of the season at the end of February at 546 mm as measured at the Main Camp. The climate figures for the Tented camp for January is inaccurate as the camp was closed for most of the month and for the first week in February. During the month of February all the rivers came down in force with the Matabole River reaching the highest level in over a hundred years, flooding Eagle's Nest in the process.



Game sightings during January & February



Predators

Leopards

January proved to be a quite month regarding leopard sightings. There were a few sightings of sub-adult males. Although they were very relaxed towards the presence of the vehicle, it was extremely hard to follow them as they went about their normal leopard business, due to the dense vegetation and tall grass. On another occasion a large male leopard was seen along the Jwala River, but he soon disappeared in the tall grass. A leopard kill was seen close to Frazier Jones' Weir, but the leopard was never seen. All this good rain brought forth excellent growth amongst the vegetation and visibility is limited – especially when looking for the prince-of-stealth - and camouflage himself...

Lions

The two pride males were seen most often and they were accompanied by their sister. They spent most of their time close to Cheetah's Koppie and Baboons Bedroom. The two females with their





cubs have not been seen that much and they are believed to be around the Majale Island as always. With all the baby impalas and other youngsters such as wildebeest and kudu, the lions are looking in excellent condition and seem to be making frequent kills. If these kills are not found quickly, it is seldom ever seen since the lions consume almost everything and in a short period of time.



Female yawning – brother sleepy in background

Cheetahs

February was the month of cheetah! Three males were seen on a few occasions along the northern parts of Mashatu. They were also seen feeding on a juvenile impala and within 10 minutes there was almost nothing left. This illustrates not only how most predators are in a time of feast with all the young animals around, but also how easily these small kills are missed if not found immediately. These three males are known to frequently move around Mashatu and although they have not been seen for a while it's still good to know that they are still around and doing well. Unfortunately on the first day of seeing the cheetah males, one had a nasty snare around his neck. It looked to be an old snare since the skin had grown over the wire as it cut into the flesh. Management was alerted and the cheetah male was soon darted and the wounds treated. The male was seen a week later and seems to be doing fine.





Some play-fighting amongst the brothers

Spotted & Brown Hyena

Even with all the rain and dense vegetation spotted hyenas are still seen and heard almost every day. They are also making use of the opportunity presented by the abundance of small antelope. On female and two males was seen one morning running along the Majale river and then across an open area. They were apparently not hunting but responding to the calls of other hyenas in the distance. Whether it was their own clan members calling or perhaps a rival clan – we can only speculate. Guests following the running hyenas in their game viewing vehicle were very excited with the 'chase'.

The Tuli Elephants

Elephant viewing during both January and February were great with herd sizes averaging over 60 elephants per group. After the great rains received elephants were frequently seen swimming and mud wallowing in the Majale River near Crocodile pool and Dispute Corner. Several bulls visited the reserve with huge musth bulls walking tall amongst the females. Fighting amongst the bulls was observed on occasions during the rangers some fights more serious than others. Far fewer births have been recorded over the two months compared to last year over the same time period.

Birding

During February close to 200 different bird species were recorded on Mashatu. Sightings of Lesser spotted Eagle were common and so were sightings of several of the stork species including the Abdim's stork. The Common quail chicks hatched during January and February and the hooting sounds of the adults could be heard late into the night. Some rare bird sightings during the month were a sighting of a Thrush nightingale at Pete's Pond.