

**MASHATU
GAME REPORT OCTOBER 2009
WEATHER AND VEGETATION**

At last the rains have come. We enjoyed 8mm early in the month, with light showers at the end of the month. The trees have been waiting for the first drop of this precious liquid. In many of the slow growing trees, the production of tough, leathery leaves is a significant defense mechanism against browsing. Acacias are particularly well known for their production of thorns. In the early stages of growth of the plant, much energy is channeled into the production of large thorns which protect the vulnerable younger and older plants which are easily in reach of most of the mammalian browsers. The mopane trees produce tough leathery leaves with lignin – another defense mechanism against browsing.



GAME SIGHTING DURING OCTOBER

LEOPARDS

In areas where shade is scarce (like the Tuli Block in Botswana) leopards will use holes in the ground for cover against the harsh rays of the sun - usually unused anteater burrows. In the morning they have the habit of lying out in the sun on vantage points such as rocks and rocky ledges which give them a wide view of the surrounding terrain.

The river Majale is no longer flowing, but has instead moved underground. The elephants excavate the sand to reach the sub-level water, thereby providing water for all species of the antelope family. Leopards take advantage of this situation to ambush animals that come to drink from these dug out holes.

During one particular morning game drive, a leopard was seen strangling a fully grown male impala in the middle of the river. After killing its prey, the leopard first caught it in its

powerful jaws and dragged it to the nearest big tree - about two hundred meters away. This is one of the best sightings of the month!

LIONS

The pride (comprising of four mature females, a male and six cubs of different ages) is seen on most of the game drives. They are usually hunting (and often enjoying a substantial meal of eland!) Fascinating behavior is that the lion always remains with the three sets of cubs, while the females go out to hunt....

CHEETAH

Cheetah sightings have been very good. Two coalitions – one of three males, and another of two males - were often seen during game drives. They were seen hunting and killing different antelope species.

These predominantly diurnal animals have very large home ranges, with peaks of activity around sunrise and sunset.

ELEPHANTS

Elephant sightings were also great this month. Guests had the privilege of seeing lots of baby elephants - ranging in age from a day to a week old. Some of these baby elephants still had pink ears, and could not even walk up straight.

The small amount of rain earlier in the month has initiated much greenery - this encourages herds of different elephant family groups to come together. Excitement is very high, as often we have young males mock charging game drive vehicles. Very entertaining indeed!

BIRDING

As the summer season progresses, we have intra-African migrant birds returning for the wet season. Around Main Camp, the southern Diederik cuckoos can be heard calling all day long.

At the crocodile pond the southern masked weavers have started nesting. The cuckoos are known to lay their eggs on the weaver's nests and to let the weavers incubate and raise their chicks.