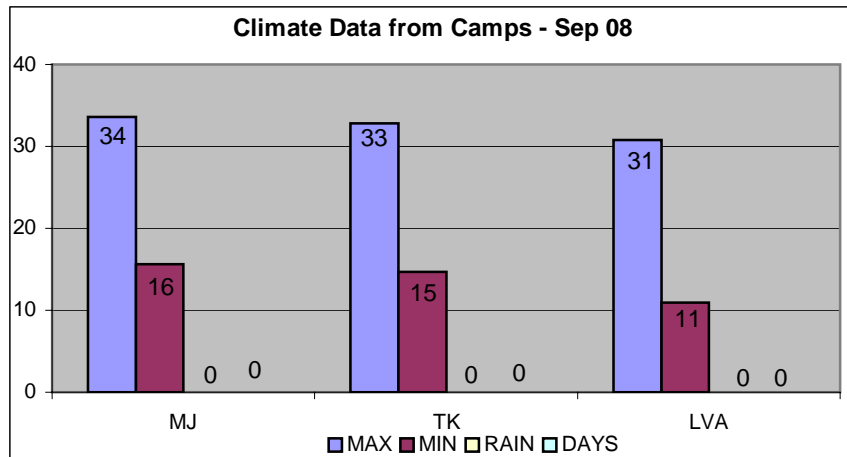




Game Sightings Update

September 2008

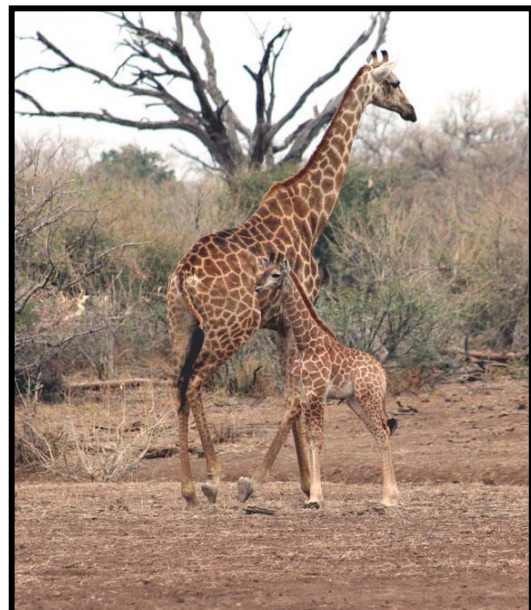
Weather and vegetation report

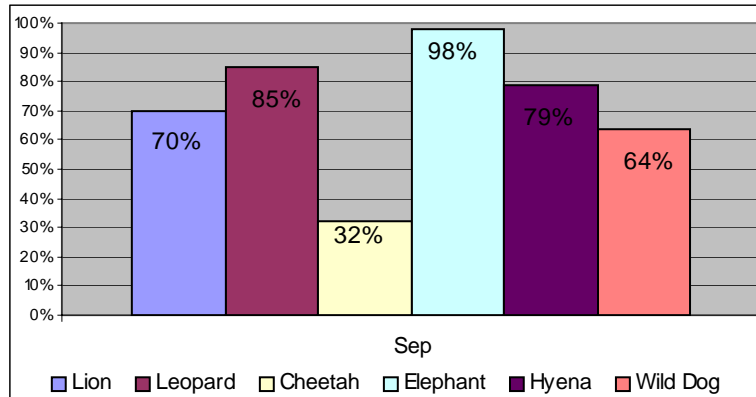


Spring has arrived and the majority of the trees are in flower, making driving through the reserve a medley of smells from the very sweet Stink shepherds tree (*Boscia foetida*) to the mild scented Knobby creeper (*Combretum mossambicense*). Large pools of water can still be found along the Majale, Jwala, Pitsane and Limpopo rivers, some up to 300m long. The majority of the pools however were located in the north of the reserve with the last pools in the Majale near Kanda and then again at the confluence of the Majale/Limpopo confluence. Grass cover is still good for this time of the year and for the first time in many years a veld fire reported near Jwala.

Game sightings during September

Game sightings this month was very similar to that recorded in September 2007. There was a great improvement in lion and wild dog viewing this month compared to August, with slight increases in leopard and hyena viewing. Elephant and cheetah viewing is slightly lower compared to August. The wild dogs were as always a highlight with frequent kills and interesting interactions. Giraffes were also frequently seen and several young calves were observed during the month.

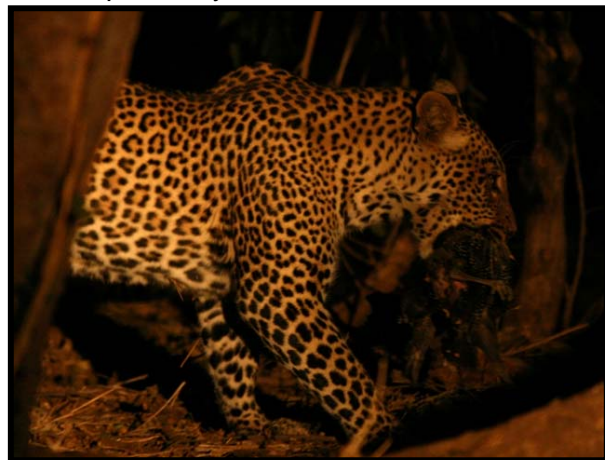




Predator Sightings

Leopards

July proved to be a great month for leopard sightings. On numerous occasions were a mother leopard seen with her male cub. The female made an impala kill, but the adult impala was just too heavy for the mother to get into a Mashatu tree, so she had to 'stash' the kill in thick bush. Luckily for those spotted hyenas did not catch scent of the kill and they could eat at their leisure. The young male leopard, which lives around Crock pool and Hammerkop crossing, was also seen frequently. He mostly kills Guinea fowl but was seen with a few impala kills during the last few weeks of the month. As leopards grow bigger and older, they start learning the finer skills of making big kills, which might be harder to catch, suppose to birds and hares, but are much more rewarding at the end.



The young male leopard with a guinea fowl he caught

Lions

Our New Pride was seen almost every day and they still seem to spend most of their time around Long grass in the south. They were seen on a few eland kills this month, but during the last few weeks they have split into their two separate sub-prides again. The two brothers and their sister was seen moving up the Majale and Matabole Rivers and the other three females, some which are pregnant, are still around the southern areas of Mashatu. One of the three females at Long grass was reported to have given birth and with other females pregnant our lion population might increase very soon! We still don't know how many cubs and what the sex ratio is of the first lioness who gave birth. Lionesses tend to hide their cubs for the first few weeks and only later introduce them to the rest of the pride once they are more mobile.



One of the male lions yawning – impressive teeth!

Cheetahs

Two different groups of cheetah were seen frequently around Mashatu this month. A male and female, presumably brother and sister, was seen hunting and playing around Pole hill, while another groups was seen moving around at the Vlei. They are very relaxed towards game viewing vehicles and once tracked-down; they present guests with the most wonderful photographic opportunities.

Spotted & Brown Hyena

This month, apart from the numerous and amazing spotted hyena sightings – ranging from hyenas killing a small warthog to just resting in pockets of waters in the riverbeds. We were also very lucky to see five different sightings of the more elusive and solitary Brown hyena! On two occasions did the same individual come and visit Pete's Pond. It's wonderful to see them again – for they exist at much lower densities in this reserve and with a high spotted hyena density brown hyenas are easily out-competed by their spotted cousins.



The Tuli Elephants

Elephants were seen 29 out of the 30 days on Mashatu Game Reserve. The total number of sightings as well as the average group size however was significantly lower compared to August. The majority of the groups were seen along the Limpopo River and lower Pitsane and Majale regions, with a few





sightings in the Croton belt along the Matabole River.

Birding

Dopotta reported a sighting of a tagged vulture on their property feeding on a zebra carcass. The information was passed on to Andre Botha, manager of the Bird's of Prey Working Group at EWT. The bird observed is one of Kerri Wolter's birds that were tagged at the Rhino & Lion Nature Reserve in Gauteng in late November 2007. This is the first re-sighting of one of the **Cape vultures** tagged at R&L. Only 5 were wild caught and tagged, all first year birds.

We did not get to the vulture survey this year for many reasons but are working closely with Birdlife Botswana and hope to conduct the survey between July and September next year. Any information on vulture nests or tagged vultures will be greatly appreciated. My thanks to everyone whom has already contributed in this regard. The information needed in both cases is the location (preferably a GPS coordinate), number of birds, age and sex of tagged individual and activity. For nesting sites we also need a GPS coordinate, whether there is chicks in the nest (now is a really good time to look for this), and what tree species the nest is situated in.