

# The Northern Tuli Predator Project

## 2008 Review

This year was quite a busy year, but looking back now also very rewarding. With regards to my leopard project, which is a build-up for my PhD, things have really improved and expanded in the last few months. This year I manage to capture and collar another beautiful male leopard called Thunzi – meaning ‘ghost’. And believe me, that is what he is! He lives in the north-west and is the neighboring male to Skebengwa, which is the well known large male living in the central area of Mashatu. I also managed to capture and collar three sub-adult males, all living in the western parts of Mashatu. The main goal for this stage of my project is to try and capture a few large male leopards with the additional three sub-adults – all living in close proximity to each other. With the new GPS radio collars I was given by my supervisor, Dr. Paul Funston, bought from a German company called Vectronics, I now have the opportunity to collect extremely accurate and comprehensive data sets from the collared leopards. The reason I want all my study leopards to be in close proximity to each other, is to monitor their movements and behavior in relation to one another. This will enable me to properly research these elusive cats, which is renowned for their cunning behavior, cold calculations and secretive lifestyles. Two of my female leopards had cubs this year, but both of them lost their offspring. Their collars will be removed, since my project is now going to focus primarily on males.



Re-sizing the GPS collar of Matswane

The most interesting part of this year was the expansion of my lion project. Two male lions were collared with GPS radio collars. The reason for collaring males in particular is to monitor their movements. In the Northern Tuli Game Reserve there is a huge lack of adult male lions, which is a result from years of lions being shot, poisoned, snared and hunted all around the reserve. By collaring some males we have the opportunity and ability to understand where these lions are going; where they are coming from and what happens to them wherever they go. Soon after I manage to collar a large male lion in the far south western parts of the Northern Tuli Game Reserve, one which was born and raised in Mashatu, did it move across the border to South Africa and is still living and roaming on private property to this day. This male was believed to have been killed – for it has not been seen for almost a year, but from previous photographic records I was able to identify the male lion as one from the Elephant Valley Pride. A pride which fragmented over the last few years. The other male lion, one from the New Pride living in the central parts of Mashatu, was monitored moving into the Tuli Circle, Zimbabwe, which is a hunting area adjacent to the Northern Tuli Game Reserve in the North. Since May this year I have collected some invaluable data regarding the movements of lions, all of which will contribute to the better understanding and ultimate conservation of Africa's most charismatic large carnivores.



Matswane at sunset

## **Predator Drives**

For 2008 I had 379 guests join me on a predator drive, consisting of 90 drives in total. These drives are normally focused on finding the ever elusive ghosts of the bush – leopards. About 9 out of the 10 times we will successfully track one of my study leopards by means of radio telemetry. Leopards are very territorial animals and after one has figured out the boundaries of the specific individual leopard, it can be tracked with fair confidence. The only factor that normally inhibits us from seeing the leopard is the terrain in which it lives. Leopards live in almost any habitat ranging from deserts to forests to the snowy mountains in Russia. And here in Mashatu there is a wide diversity of awesome habitat for them to live in. As we track these elusive animals I inform guests all about my research project and how I go about researching these. The focus of the drive is not necessarily the sighting of the leopard, which is supposed to be the high-light, but it is mostly about the tracking experience and why conservations of this species is so important.

Predator regards

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