

The Northern Tuli Predator Project

All is going well for the NTPP - the five male leopards and two male lions are tracked on a regular basis and seem to be doing fine. There is, however, one concern with regards to our large territorial male leopard – Skebengwa. This leopard got a nasty scratch on his eye September last year. Most likely from female leopards' claw. After nearly eight months this scratch got infected and is taking its toll. I was able to monitor throughout the last couple of months this 'injured' leopard and although his wound does look painful and he seems to be moving less at night, he none the less still makes regular kills and looks in good condition. From numerous sightings, especially in Kruger National Park, of spotted hyenas, lions and leopards with only one eye, it would appear that it's not that uncommon to find a predator with only one good eye.

What is very interesting for this study is the movement of this particular individual before and after the onset of this wound. What will happen if this territorial male doesn't get round to patrolling his territory boundary, due to decreasing body condition? Will he be displaced by another male? If so, what male and could it be one of his sons? Would he perhaps decrease his size of his territory and only maintain a core area? These are only a few questions I would like to ask and the only way to answer these questions is to let nature take its course without intervening. If this injury was human-induced, like a snare for instance, then I would have done everything in my power to treat and 'save' the individual, but since this is all natural I have decided not to intervene.

Maybe this icon of Mashatu leopards will recover, maybe he doesn't – who knows? Only time will tell.

April '09 Predator Sightings

Pictures by Andrei Snyman

Leopards

Now that winter is approaching and the bush is opening up more, leopard sightings are increasing every month. This month was no exception. There were numerous leopards seen throughout Mashatu, ranging from the rocky western parts to the flat eastern areas. There were three leopards seen in less than a few kilometers from each other. It was most likely that the individuals did not know of the others' presence, but it was quite spectacular to see three different leopards in such a small area. Some sightings were that of a glimpse, while other was up close and personal.



Lions

The pride of lions living in the east was seen more often this month and it seems that one of the adult females has a very swollen front leg. Not only does the lioness look in poor condition, but her two dependant cubs are also missing. The most likely cause of this injury and the fact that her cubs are nowhere to be found, might indicate that of a snake-bite. Luckily for the lioness, she has other females who are doing the hunting so she can rest and recover from her injuries – perks of living in a pride? The male and two females living in the far south-western parts were also seen on a couple of occasions. This male, however, called Mokwepa (spitting cobra – ironic...), is not as timid as the other two younger males living in the east and one stare from those dark yellow eyes is something that no words can describe. It's a look of fire and passion that seems to just look right into the depths of one's soul. Only something a lion can offer.



Cheetahs

For the month of April there were no cheetah sightings, although spoor was seen in and around the northern part of Mashatu close to the Tuli Circle.

Spotted & Brown Hyena

In relation to rest of the year, this month was fairly quiet regarding spotted hyena sightings. Sightings of these awesome predators were still frequent and some nights there were even a spotted hyena in camp! Their white fecal matter (due to the high calcium content in their diet) can be seen all across Mashatu and their unmistakable calls still fill the evening skies. No brown hyenas were seen this month.



A spotted hyena chewing an impala horn

Predator Drives

For the month of April I had 24 guests in total joining me for 6 predator drives. On all but one occasion did we not see the tracked individual. It sometimes happens that although we track down the collared leopard, we just can't get the vehicle into the rocky ridge or drainage line where the prince-of-stealth is resting.

The star of this month was Kakanyo. This young male leopard use to spend most of his time in a very rocky area in the west of Mashatu, but recently moved all the way to the eastern side, where the terrain is much more forgiving in terms of driving off-road. It was great to be able again to follow this male as he moved around at night. Hopefully he will stay out of the rocky areas so we can bear witness to how stunning these leopards really are. Kakanyo is the most relaxed of my study animals and always a pleasure to track down and follow.



Kakanyo hunting



An uncollared female we found opportunistically