

May - 2008



## THE NORTHERN TULI PREDATOR PROJECT

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This month was as usual very busy, but also very exciting. Apart from tracking my leopards and male lion, I conducted a spotted hyena survey in order to determine the estimate abundance and density of these amazing predators. Across the whole reserve one would see spoor, scat and hear the unmistakable whooping call of spotted hyenas. Spotted hyenas are a very important component of my predator research project, since they are a major force to reckon with if you're a lion. Spotted

hyenas are very opportunistic scavengers, but they are just as successful hunters. The method I used was first used and designed by Dr. Gus Mills who did an extensive spotted hyena survey in Kruger National Park in the early 1990's. The method is specifically calibrated for hyenas, but lions, leopards, jackal and even cheetah can be encountered. A set of large speakers are mounted on a tri-pod and with the use of an amplifier and MP3 player, sounds of a buffalo calf in distress, spotted hyenas squabbling over a kill and a dying wildebeest calf is broadcast for a total of 30min. The speakers are rotated 90° every 5 min so a circular area can be covered by the sound. I'm currently in the process of analysing the results, but for now all I can say is that the census was a success and there might be more spotted hyenas than what people thought there might be.

I would like to thank Craig, Guy, Paul and Rex for their invaluable assistance in this census. Without their help the census could not have been done.



### Predator Drives

During the month of May I did 11 predator drives with a total of 35 guests. On one particular drive we were tracking the young male leopard Kakanyo. He was located in a thicket along the Majale River and we could not see him, so I decided to go onto a hill and have sundowners and wait for darkness. Leopards tend to stay hidden during the day, especially if you were trying to find them, and by sunset they become active and start moving. So after the sundowners we followed him moving up the Majale River and he lead us to an impala kill hanging in a large Mashatu tree. Much to our surprise we saw another young male leopard feeding on the kill and our Kakanyo was waiting at the base of the tree for his turn. What we did not know was that neither of the two males made the kill, for it was Kgwedi (my female leopard who normally hangs around that area) who made the kill. She was also there but just out of view. Not only did we see two leopards and knowing there's a third just on the hill, but around our vehicle were 6 spotted hyenas waiting for scraps to fall from the feeding leopard. Needless to say the guests were very happy about the sighting.