



## Predator Report - March 2008



### **THE NORTHERN TULI PREDATOR PROJECT**

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This month was great regarding my leopard project. I found my study leopards almost everyday and what made this month even more interesting was the fact that I caught the notorious male leopard, Mathata, again! This old male leopard use to live just west of Main Camp, but after a couple of months he 'disappeared' and I was battling to find him. Eventually he was found living along the Limpopo River, ranging from the Vlei in the east to the vet-gate in the west. I hardly ever found this male leopard due to the difficult and rocky terrain he lives in. It was then decided to re-capture him and take my radio-collar off, since it doesn't contribute to my research at all.

After a few days of intense tracking (on foot and from a vehicle), I finally got a signal coming from The Vlei. Later that afternoon we headed out with one mission in mind – retrieve the collar!

To be quite honest, I did not expect that things would turn out the way it did...for we had a perfect night! We found Mathata (which means 'Problem') lying in the tall grass just watching us. As we got closer he calmly got up and slowly just walked away, hardly looking back at us following him. I was just waiting for the right moment to dart him and luckily I did not had to wait very long. As we weaved through the bush following him, he suddenly froze and looked at something that caught his attention. That gave me just the 'gap' I was looking for and as the dart struck his shoulder muscle, he looked at it, pulled it out and gave it a few good bites before walking on! Not realizing that he will fall asleep soon...



After waiting 10 minutes we came around a dense bush and there he was...fast asleep!

We removed the radio collar and took measurements of his teeth, body and paws. After taking some great pictures with probably the most elusive & beautiful cat species in the world, we laid him down in an open are so we can keep watch over him until he wakes up.



After about 3 hours he was awake enough for us to let him be and go back home – mission accomplished.

### Predator Drives

For the month of March I did 11 predator drives with a total of 53 guests. On one particular night we were tracking my favourite female leopard – Lesedi. AS we got closer and closer to the area

where the radio-collar signal was coming from, I could see the excitement on the faces of my guests as they were scanning every bush and tree in search of the leopard. We found Lesedi with a freshly killed juvenile impala. It looked like she had the carcass in a Leadwood tree, but it fell out. As we were watching her lying on the ground, gracefully cleaning herself, a spotted hyena came running in and took claim to whatever scraps were left-over. At first Lesedi went up a tree, away from the hyena, but later realizing that she was safe, she silently climbed down and we watched the sneak into the night almost unnoticed.