

**Due to Internet dis-connectivity we were only able to receive one diary.**

### **Mashatu Game Sightings 20 - 26 April 2008**



#### **Sunday, 20 April**

What a morning! As we set out to the west of the Main camp we encountered nearly every variety of predator on the reserve near the water tanks. The lions were feeding on an unfortunate eland while a large number of hyenas were patiently waiting in the background for their turn. Not far from the lions a lone male leopard was on the move. What a magnificent creature! The elephants were also out and about with several herds all around Mashatu. Once again we drove to the west to visit with the lions. The lion pride was where we left them this morning, but by now there was a lot less left of the eland than previously. The hyenas were still waiting on the sidelines but getting more and more impatient, brave jackals attempting a snack every now and again, when the lions are not watching. East of Pole Hill we tracked the one cat we did not see on the morning drive; namely the cheetah. It was actually family of three cheetahs; a mother with two sub adults. They were peacefully resting on a small hill, surveying the area. After sunset we set out with a spot light and once again we encountered a magnificent male leopard, this time near Nel's Windmill. The male was on the move and we only got a glimpse of him as he moved through the undergrowth.

#### **Monday, 21 April**

This morning we set out with Jeanetta, the elephant scientist, in search of her study animals. We encountered several different herds during the morning including the family of one of the oldest matriarchs of Mashatu, namely Hestelle. Five different females gave birth this year and the tiny babies were full of energy this morning, playing and pushing each other around. We spent most of the morning with the herd learning more about their behaviours and habits. The cheetahs were still close to Pole Hill so we set out to spend some time with them. Arriving we watched as the cheetahs saw a lone male impala in the distance. Immediately the tranquil atmosphere changed. Unfortunately the male impala also noticed the cheetahs and took off.

A very chilly and windy afternoon as we set out once more on a game drive. Not far from the Main camp we came across a small family of zebras with two tiny foals. A lone giraffe was browsing on one of the riverine trees near the Majale River, close to Kanda we came across a herd of approximately 100 impalas feeding peacefully across the open plains. The three cheetahs were still in the vicinity of Pole Hill not having moved much from the previous day. As we left the cheetahs we came across a family of bat eared foxes foraging along the slopes of Pole Hill. During our night drive back to camp we encountered an illusive African wild cat on the hunt, appearing and disappearing in the long grass.

#### **Tuesday, 22 April**

The temperatures have definitely dropped and this morning we were all wrapped up in scarves and blankets for the morning drive, but it was all worth it. The lions have moved away from their kill and off course now is the time for the scavengers to finish off whatever was left over from the kill. We tracked the lions down along the Majale River near an old hunting camp where the entire pride was fast asleep in the early morning sun. Near Pole Hill we once again met up with the cheetah family of three and not far from them a male leopard was making his way through the nearby Acacia trees. Elephants were also out in large numbers and we sat watching nearly 150 elephants coming down to Dispute Corner on the Majale River for a drink. Jeanetta, the elephant specialist joined us on our drive this morning and she was able to identify the majority of the herds coming in for a drink. We stopped for our morning coffee break on the banks of the Majale River looking down on the elephants enjoying their morning drink. A quiet evening drive with a total of 150 elephants ambling and browsing amongst the Mopane trees near White Cliffs but alas no cats for the evening. We

however spotted a giant eagle owl after dark and a small spotted genet in an Acacia tree.

### **Wednesday, 23 April**

This morning we once more spend time with the cheetahs and this time both of us were rewarded as they spotted a big impala ram and started stalking it. We watched with bated breath as the cheetahs got closer and closer to the impala ram. At last the cheetahs made their move and within seconds it was all over. The speed and accuracy of the cheetahs were spectacular.

This evening we set in search of the lions and eventually tracked them down in Uitspan. The five sub adults were together but the adult lioness was nowhere to be seen. The two males are still mating with the lionesses – quite an exhausting affair! We stopped for our sundowner drinks on top of a magnificent hill overlooking the Majale River and while enjoying a welcome gin and tonic we watched a lone hyena making his way across the dry riverbed of the Majale River. A herd of about 30 elephants could also be seen from on top of the hill browsing on the plentiful Mopane trees. Another group of close to 75 elephants were seen crossing the main road towards the rest, with several small babies within the group.

### **Thursday, 24 April**

Another exciting morning! We were observing a pride of lions when a large herd of elephants came upon them and ourselves. In a flash chaos broke out with the elephants trumpeting and charging the lions in all directions. Luckily we were not the focus of the elephant's aggression and could watch in awe as the lions and the elephants have it out. Not far from the lions and elephants we spotted a lone female hyena on the move, staying well clear of all the commotion. This was not the only great sighting for the morning; we also came across a female leopard and her tiny little cub near Beacon Hill.

Luckily it was a much warmer afternoon as we set out from camp. Once more we tracked down the lions this time near the confluence of the Matabole and Nyaswe rivers. The lions were doing what lions do best – sleep! And not even the approaching vehicle could get a stir out of any of them. At Well-shaped Mashatu we came across a herd of approximately 50 elephants. At least they were more active than the lions. In this group there were several new babies who are by now a few months old and fantastic to watch. Another great sighting for the afternoon was that of a family of Bat-eared foxes. What pretty looking creatures with their huge ears!

### **Friday, 25 April**

No cats this morning but what a magnificent morning. We stopped for everything; observing large herds of impalas, spending time with some crazy wildebeests running in circles and watching a male giraffe feeding on the top branches of a thorn tree, picking the tiny leaves with its long tongue from amongst the huge white thorns. The birds were also plentiful and in a tiny pool in the Majale River we watched two saddle-billed storks fishing together with a scared ibis and several Hammerkops. The Lilac-breasted roller is always a sight to see and this morning we stopped to watch one of these amazingly colourful birds perched on a branch no more than a few meters from the vehicle. The elephants as always were out and about in large numbers. We watched two different groups at two different locations going about their daily activities from browsing on thorny Acacia trees, to resting on their long trunks with the sun shining on their huge backs to small calves playing around the feet of their baby sitters.

This evening we set out once more on our afternoon game drive driving along the many windy tracks of Mashatu. On one such a track our progress was halted due to a log pushed over the road by a herd of elephants long passed. As the tracker removed the branch from the road our ranger, Fish spotted an African wild cat fast asleep on top of a termite mound. Fish pointed to the little cat and told the tracker to quietly put down the branch and to retreat to the vehicle as not to disturb it. The late afternoon sun was shining directly onto its shiny back, no wonder it was fast asleep! We also had a magnificent view of a female leopard near the confluence of the Nyaswe and Matabole rivers.

### **Saturday, 26 April**

What an amazing sunrise this morning as we set out on our morning drive. Once more we spotted the female leopard near the confluence of the Matabole and Nyaswe rivers on this occasion she had her male cub with her. During the drive we came across several large herds of impala and also spotted several huge eland bulls. Listening to them walking clicking away as they go along was amazing. Is it the slipping tendon or the hooves that make the clicking noise? No one seems to know... Yet another leopard was found this afternoon near Beacon Hill. We watched the female for sometime moving quietly between the mopane bushes and when she had enough of our presence she simply disappeared! We found some lion spoor (tracks) and tried until sunset to locate them but alas this round was theirs, but tomorrow is another day and maybe we will be able to pin them down then.