

Mashatu Game Sightings 27 July - 02 August 2008



Sunday 27 July 2008

We started our week with a great sighting of a lone cheetah female near Three Mashatu Dam, followed by two lions fast asleep near Longrass, & of course what would a game drive be on without elephants? We spotted a herd of close to 60 elephants nearby; we watched as they curled their trunks around the tops of the dry grass, with their front toes they held the earth in place as the grass was ripped out by its roots. Then the grass gets vigorously shaken getting rid of all the soil before the elephant eventually stuffs the clump of grass into its mouth. What an amazing way to start the week!

The afternoon game drive was as eventful with four cheetahs resting in the late afternoon sun near Hamerkop crossing. The group consisted of a mother and her three sub adult youngsters. Just after sunset we came across a sub adult male leopard on the prowl. We followed him for some time before he disappeared amongst the thick riverine bush along the Majale River. The lions have not moved an inch since this morning and we once more visited them near Majale Island. This time they were a lot more active, more interested in each other than the amazed guests. Another pair of cats was spotted near White Cliffs, this time a male and female leopard and again they were mating. A lone hyena was making her way across the open plains near Rock Camp as we started our drive back to camp.

Monday 28 July 2008

Early in the morning drive monkeys chattering warned us of the presence of a predator. Not long after we spotted the four cheetahs near Kanda Hill. As we watched a leopard spooked the cheetahs causing them to run in opposite directions. Again we tracked them down and this time we had a great sighting of all four cheetahs walking right past the vehicle. The mating pair of lions split up and we encountered first the male and much later the lioness fast asleep in the winter's morning sun, both recovering from their earlier escapades. Near McNeil's Pool we came across six hyenas resting, each in his own impala midden, its much warmer in the midden, or so they say..... The elephants were also out in large numbers and we sat amongst a herd of nearly a 100 elephants as they walked right past us following an age-old pathway along the Nyaswe River. On our afternoon drive we once more visited the male lion, and then a magnificent male leopard on the prowl near Crocodile pool. A lone hyena was following at a safe distance. Maybe tonight she will get lucky and share in the leopard's success.

Tuesday 29 July 2008

Another exciting day with large herds of elephants on both the morning and afternoon drives. A big bull elephant walking purposefully near Moddergat and again the mating lions near Majale Island. At Crocodile pool we once more encountered the male leopard and he did get lucky. We spotted him high up in a tree feeding on an unfortunate impala caught in the early morning hours. General game has also been great with amazing sightings of huge eland bulls, large herds of wildebeest and zebra and off course lots and lots of impalas.

Wednesday 30 July 2008

Guests out in the early morning, witnessed a procession of close to 75 elephants crossing the Matabole River and watched baboons and impala sharing one of the waterholes that remained in the dry river bed. Infant baboons tumbled playfully while older ones groomed themselves or each other. Two female lions, a male leopard and a browsing group of elephants were seen in the afternoon. Back at Main Camp guests having dinner in the boma, were able to see elephants coming in twos and threes to drink at the pool. They could be heard in the darkness for the next hour or so, communicating with loud trumpeting and deep rumbling as they fed on the vegetation around the Main Camp area.

Thursday 31 July 2008

Thursday was a quiet day and quite cool in spite of clear skies. Two cheetahs were warming themselves in the morning sunshine not far from Pete's Pond and two groups of about thirty elephants moved slowly among the bushes browsing peacefully. In the afternoon eles were browsing and sleeping in the Vlei area and toward sunset four of the wild dogs caught and fed on an impala. Wildebeest, giraffe, eland, kudu, impala and warthogs are seen on most drives with steenbok, grey duiker, zebra, jackals, kori bustards, bat-eared foxes and hyenas being seen frequently. On one of the drives there was an unusual sighting of a bush baby as well as an African wild cat. Back at camp, hyenas could be heard throughout the night.

Friday 1 August 2008

Bat-eared foxes were out searching for insects in the predawn light and about 50 elephants were browsing among the croton trees. Lionesses were feeding on their eland carcass and near the airfield two cheetahs had also made a kill. The wild dog pups can finally be seen outside the den and their boisterous feeding and playing behaviors have provided some wonderful moments for lucky guests. Some people also witnessed some of the wild dogs chase, kill and devour an impala in the incredible time of 10 minutes from beginning to end. After playing in the riverbed for a while they returned to the den to regurgitate food for the pups and their mother.

Later in the day, the lions had not moved much since being seen in the morning and could barely raise their heads to look at the vehicle before flopping down again to continue digesting their meal. An elephant bull feeding alone, two hyenas purposefully going somewhere, fleeing eland, curious kudu and tiny steenbok were all there to be enjoyed as the sun set. On the return journey in the darkness the lights gave a fleeting glimpse of the very rarely seen brown hyena as it left the road and disappeared among the bushes.

Saturday 2 August 2008

The morning was very cold with gusty winds and a dust haze as the annual aerial count of the elephants on the reserve got under way. Guests on the dawn drive were delighted to see a group of about 10 giraffe peering down from their vantage point on a high ridge and later were able to watch them as they loped off in their unique rocking manner, long necks out-stretched. A herd of usually skittish wildebeest stayed around long enough to be photographed as the blood red sun showed above the horizon behind them. Two young male lions were guarding the remains of the kill from yesterday while the three lionesses were resting nearby. There was little left of the eland and jackals and vultures were hanging around waiting for their turn at the leftovers. Guests with the National Geographic group had a very unusual sighting of a honey badger on their evening drive.

Mashatu Game Sightings 10 - 16 August 2008



Sunday 10th of August

The female leopard that had killed an impala a few days earlier was spotted once again around Fraser Jones Weir. Recently, sightings of her had become a relatively common occurrence, however sometimes they were mere fleeting glimpses. Many of the guests out on game drives today were able to spend a fair amount of time with the wild dogs and their pups, making for some excellent photographic opportunities. There are not many places left in southern Africa today where one is able to return to camp having seen both leopard and wild dogs in the same day!

Monday 11th of August

It was yet again an extremely windy day at Mashatu hence making game viewing rather challenging. Despite this, guests were fortunate to spot two hyenas making their way towards the Matabole River very early in the morning. As the sun continued to rise above the horizon, several different herds of general game were seen grazing and browsing throughout the course of the drive. Just before returning to camp for brunch, a group of elephants were found feeding beneath a Mashatu tree.

Tuesday 12th of August

By the end of the day; guests were able to reflect on some fantastic sightings of both cheetah and leopard. The cheetah was spotted in the morning near Pole Hill while the leopard was spotted in the evening close to Cheetah Koppie. Hyenas were also seen on two separate occasions, once at McNeil's Pool and the other at Crocodile Pool. Three separate herds of elephants were seen during the day, with some around 30 strong and they included several youngsters.



Wednesday 13 Aug

Today, some of the volunteers were fortunate to witness a cheetah kill. An adult female was spotted searching for a potential meal on a small embankment to the north of the Vlei area. Suddenly, she disappeared into thick scrub and minutes later two unsuspecting impala ewes walked straight into her ambush. The cheetah raced out and clutched its victim, bringing it down in a matter of seconds. She rested for a while and then began to feed on her kill. Not long afterwards, two jackals arrived on the scene and tried to thief on some of her meal. While this was obviously the highlight of the day, there were other enjoyable sightings of elephant, giraffe, kudu, eland and hyena.

Thursday 14 August

Sightings were relatively quiet in comparison to the start of the week. A lone female hyena was seen near the Upper Matabole early in the morning followed by two separate elephant sightings. The first took place at Baboon's Bedroom, a herd consisting of between 11 to 15 individuals. The other sighting was at Agate Koppie, a smaller herd of five individuals. The day ended on a high when a female leopard was spotted sitting in a tree before beginning her evening hunt.

Friday 15th August

The day brought about two very rare sightings. The first transpired thanks to the incessant alarm calls of three tree squirrels drawing attention to the presence of a Mozambique spitting cobra close to the wild dog's den. Two of the dogs then decided to keep a close eye on the snake, following behind it, until it had left the area. Not long afterwards, everyone was surprised to catch sight of a group of eight rarely seen bush pigs in the area north east of Pete's Pond.

Saturday 16th August

Impala and kudu came in to drink at the Main Camp pond early this morning, after the pre-dawn hyena serenade, followed by a bush buck, more impala, baboons and a warthog family. In the heat and stillness of the early afternoon a large bull elephant appeared, took a brief drink and a trunk-full of dust before moving into the bushes where he could be heard feeding. It was however the afternoon game drives that had everybody enthused. Lion, cheetah and leopard were seen within a relatively short period of about an hour either side of dusk.

Mashatu Game Sightings 17 - 23 August 2008



Sunday 17th August

Sunday was a cool, blustery, cloudy day. In the morning a sub-adult male leopard was active near the Majale Crocodile Pool. At Wildebeest Koppie a single hyena walked around looking for a good spot to rest up in for the day while a family unit of elephants browsed on the scant remains of the dwindling croton' trees at Majale Crossing. The afternoon was quiet, with most of the animals having had enough of the wind. Twenty elephants were seen taking shelter and browsing in the thick flood terrace forest at Dead Croton however, and a solitary bull was seen walking below Beacon Hill heading north.



Monday 18th August

Temperatures became more extreme on Monday, with the morning colder and the midday hotter than the day before. It was still overcast however, and a moderate breeze kept most people and animal's heads down. Despite this an adult female leopard was discovered on her impala kill near Braai Koppie in the morning. She was crunching away on the bones of the legs and ribs throughout the day it seems as the situation had not changed when the game drives returned after midday. A herd of around fifty elephants browsed in the riverine thickets around Baboons' Bedroom while duiker and bat-eared foxes were spotted during the morning drives. The wind did not deter the afternoon drives either, and they were rewarded with a sighting of three cheetah resting in the lee of a shepherd's bush on the open rolling plains of Quelia Colony. Further south a very large mixed herd of elephants was found browsing on the edges of the Vlei. On the night drives home both an African wild cat and a pair of bat-eared foxes were spotted going about their evening hunts for insects, rodents and other nocturnal morsels.

Tuesday 19th August

Although the wind started easing off on Tuesday the clouds only burned off in the late morning. Seventy five elephants were encountered as they walked south past Frazer-Jones Weir in characteristic single-file manner. Amongst the general game the baboons retained their position as one of the favorites thanks to their shenanigans and high-jinx which never fail to entertain. In the evening a male leopard was found resting in thick cover on the bank overlooking the confluence of the Matobole and Nyaswe rivers. Part of the large elephant herd seen in the morning was discovered still walking, albeit a little slower, past Figtree Crossing on their way to water. After darkness fell guests were lucky enough to snatch a glimpse of a lesser bush baby as it hopped prodigiously from tree to tree in the thick croton' forests along the Majale River.

Wednesday 20th August

The weather finally cleared on Wednesday, giving in to typical Botswana winter weather; light air, crystal clear sky and balmy sunshine. Three lionesses were out enjoying the rays in languid fashion on Majale Island, seemingly oblivious of the fifty elephants which browsed on the acacia trees around them. In the afternoon a male leopard was found resting in the shade of a shepherd's bush very close to Main Camp. A large aggregation of elephants was later found slaking their sun-induced thirst at Dispute Corner. An African Python and a Mozambican Spitting Cobra were also spotted on the afternoon drive. The moon, despite its relative fullness, is rising a few hours late at the moment so guests were treated to the enormity and depth of a truly clear, starry sky replete with glowing Milky Way on their evening drives back home.



Thursday 21st August

The good weather continued into Thursday and provided delightful light for the morning sighting of a solitary female cheetah slinking about on the open plains near Braai Koppie. Nearby a herd of nearly fifty elephants walked past on their winter schedule to find enough food to sustain their enormous bulks. Unusually, a large civet was also seen running off into the bush near Main Camp in the morning. These nocturnal insectivores are difficult to see at the best of times, but this one seemed to have missed the bus!

At the confluence of the Matobole and Nyaswe rivers a conglomeration of around seventy-five elephants seemed to have found what they were looking for as they browsed heartily on twiggy terminalia and mopane bushes.

Friday 22nd August

Guests were treated to two separate leopard sightings on the game drives today. The first was of an adult female that was resting at Well-Shaped Mashatu while the other was of an adult male walking in the vicinity of Crocodile Pool. Both occasions provided for some fantastic photographic opportunities. A herd of 15 elephants was also seen at Braai Koppie. The drive back to camp in the early evening provided a couple of fantastic sightings of hyena as they began their nightly custom searching for an easy meal.

Saturday 23rd August

The highlight for many that went out on game drives today was being able to spend quite some time amid 6 lions. For many, it was a sighting that will be etched in their memories forever! Another fantastic feature from the day's activities was the amount of giraffes seen throughout the reserve. These creatures are favourites amongst Mashatu's guests and they captivated many while spending time in the African bushveld.

Mashatu Game Sightings 24 - 31 August 2008



Sunday the 24th

Once more, the six lions were seen on both the morning and afternoon game drives. The highlight whilst spending time with these big cats was having one of the lionesses, which was standing near to the vehicle, calling to the rest of the pride. Another extremely memorable sighting for the day took place in the vicinity of Old Rock Camp, with guests being able to watch a herd of elephant and giraffe in close proximity to each other, quietly ambling along towards the west. They were in no hurry and as such, provided some amazing opportunities to capture photographs of these two gentle giants side by side. Last, but definitely not least, Skebengwa (the big male leopard collared for the research program), was seen just before returning to camp at White Cliffs, mating with an unknown female.



Monday the 25th

After yet another spectacular sunrise and sunset in Africa, the main talking point at the Gin Trap with regards to sightings during the day, was that of cheetah and hyena. Both were found on the morning drive. A number of large kudu bulls, eland and elephant were also seen. Then just after sunset, a herd of giraffe was found standing in just the correct position to provide a beautiful silhouette against the setting sun.

Tuesday the 26th

Today brought about a sighting that even almost puzzled the rangers! A leopard kill was spotted in a Shepherd's Tree from quite a distance. Upon closer inspection with binoculars, it appeared as if the prey had six legs. The last time anyone checked, there was no mammal on Mashatu that met this criterion! It was then decided to move closer to investigate the scene and the puzzle was solved. There were two young impala placed next to each other in the same tree. This was obviously one very hungry leopard!

Wednesday the 27th

During the night the weather changed quite considerably. As guests made their way to the terrace for breakfast, they encountered strong gusts of wind and overcast conditions. As always, this can make game viewing extremely challenging. However, no one told the hyenas that they should go and hide in the thick scrub! The morning drives had just begun when five of them were spotted at McNeils Pool. One particular individual decided that he needed to walk straight up to the vehicle to inspect its inhabitants while another was just standing in the pool of water. Not too long afterwards, two elephants were seen sleeping against the side of a steep riverbank. The drive also brought about two rather uncommon sightings. A young elephant carcass was found near Nel's Dam. It was clear that lions had been

feeding on it during the night due to the presence of their tracks in the area. The other was of a particularly large Mozambique Spitting Cobra right next to the road, meaning summer is nearly upon us!



Thursday the 28th

Fortunately, the inclement weather did not stay for long. Today, there was not a cloud in the sky and only a very gentle breeze. Some guests were extremely fortunate to have a fantastic sighting of the wild dogs today. Upon arrival at their den, all the pups and some of the adults were enjoying the warmth of the sun. After watching some playful behaviour for approximately five minutes, a few of the other wild dogs arrived back following a successful hunt. They then proceeded to regurgitate a portion of their meal to the youngsters, causing great excitement among them. It was a sighting many people spend countless years travelling to Africa in search of!

Friday the 29th

The fantastic sightings for the week continued as several guests were privileged to watch a young male leopard hunting guinea fowl. This sight took place at Dispute Corner and even though he ended up being unsuccessful with his quest, it provided some brilliant photographic opportunities. Once again, the wild dogs were found at the den with the pups being particularly playful. The day also brought about a number of sightings of both elephant and giraffe, making for two very memorable game drives.

Saturday the 30th

Setting out this morning the objective was to find some elephants, and so we did. We followed a small herd of about 10 elephants for sometime. Then suddenly our ranger spotted two Tawny eagles hunting a lone guinea fowl. We stopped and forgot completely of the herd of elephants passing by the vehicle. The Tawny eagles were chasing the guinea fowl this way and then that way. Every time the guinea fowl finds a new bush one of the Tawny eagles will walk into the bush while the other one patiently waits in a nearby tree. Their efforts were at long last rewarded when for the utmost time the guinea fowl tried to dash to another shrubby bush. One of the eagle's swooped down on it and that was it. We watched in awe as the whole drama unfolded in front of us, listening to trumpets and rumbles of elephants far in the background. During the afternoon drive two different male leopards were seen on Majale Island on the prowl.

