



Mashatu Game Sightings December 2007



1st December 2007

Morning drive

The fresh morning air filled our senses - as we tracked through Mopane thickets a troop of baboons were lazily making their way down one of the massive Mashatu trees after a peaceful nights sleep. The baboons were also joined by a herd of impala and kudu who were eagerly awaiting another day in Africa. As we travelled further we came across a large herd of elephants, around 50 individuals at Crocodile Gate. The young elephants were playing around in the water whilst the adults were enjoying a good drink. After lots of photo opportunities our hungry stomachs led us back to camp for breakfast after an eventful morning.

Afternoon drive

During the afternoon drive our guide Joe illustrated his incredible tracking skills by following the signs that are invisible to the normal eye and found three lions feeding on an eland carcass. It was a lioness and male and female sub-adults which we couldn't get close to. There were also a lot of jackals in the area but they couldn't get close to the carcass. Later on we heard the jackals calling and Joe explained to us that they are trying to attract hyenas so that they could get the lions away from the carcass to feed. We also saw several white backed vultures in the nearby trees waiting for their share. After the great excitement of watching the lions feeding we moved off to enjoy the sunset.

2nd December 2007

Morning drive

The morning drive started off with common sightings of impala, warthog, kudu and zebra. As the day progressed things got a bit more exciting as a herd of fifteen elephants made an appearance at Lucindas crossing. We enjoyed watching these magnificent beasts as they made their way through the Mopane thickets towards the river. The three cheetahs that have been spotted on numerous occasions, an adult

females and two sub-adult males, were once again seen at Majale Crossing. They were busy hunting but due to the inexperience of the two sub-adults they failed miserably in their hunt. As the heat intensified we headed off to cool down in the camp swimming pool.

Afternoon drive

This afternoon's drive began with the spectacular sighting of a herd of around 20 elephants busy browsing. They are such endearing and interesting creatures and we could have watched them for hours. There were youngsters fighting in one corner, older females bathing and feeding in the river nearby. As we left the elephants to continue their afternoon activities we drove past a large troop of baboons making a racket in the impressive Mashatu trees. As evening fell our guide Joe noticed some leopard tracks along the riverbed. We began tracking and not more than a few minutes later we discovered a young male leopard sitting peacefully under a bush. It was a wonderful sighting even though he didn't hang around too long for us to watch him. We made our way back to camp excited and full of anticipation at what we would find on our next drive.

3rd December 2007

Morning drive

This morning we headed off on a Predator Drive accompanied by Andre our resident leopard researcher at Mashatu. There are currently four leopards collared on the reserve, two males and two females. We drove up to a koppie to get a good signal in order to determine which direction to start tracking the leopard. We got a good signal for one of the females so we started out trying to locate her. Typically for leopards she was in a thick bushy area on the riverbank but on seeing us immediately took off into even thicker vegetation. Next we set out to track one of the males who was not far away. As the signal became louder we knew he was close. Suddenly we stumbled across four hyena who were lying underneath a large tree and Andre knew instinctively that something was going on. We looked up in the tree and there sat not one, but two leopards protecting a rather large warthog kill from the hungry hyena. What a wonderful sighting!

Afternoon drive

This afternoon we made our way back to the leopard sighting where the same two adult males were still in the tree surrounded by five hyena. Things got very exciting as part of the warthog fell from the tree. One leopard tried desperately to cling to this edible morsel, however, one hyena also saw his opportunity to gain free food and in the end the hyena won. He ran around proudly displaying his prize while the other hyenas tried to steal it from him. The leopard on the other hand couldn't do much and stared on aggressively as the hyenas enjoyed their feast below. On the way back to camp we also had a wonderful sighting of around twenty elephants silhouetted against the night sky.

4th December 2007

Morning drive

We ventured out to a magnificent sunrise and encountered the same two leopards in the tree but the warthog was fast becoming skin and bone. However, there were now six hyena who were actively moving about looking for morsels of warthog. As we left the leopard and hyena we made our way to Braai koppie where we saw around one hundred and fifty elephants quenching their thirst in the Majale River. There are fifty thousand muscles in an elephant's trunk which are very sensitive and can pick up numerous sized objects ranging from large tree stumps to small tiny flowers. A single adult elephant will drink up to two hundred litres of water in one session.....amazing!

Afternoon drive

Much to our delight the same two male leopards were seen, however this time they were on the ground whilst the hyena had seemingly left the area. The young male gave us lots of photo opportunities as he lay in an open area on the riverbank. This was such an amazing sighting as we don't always get the chance to view leopards out in open areas. As we moved on from the leopards we came across a large herd of eland. Eland are the largest antelope in southern Africa and can weigh up to 900kgs. They can surprisingly jump two metre fences with great ease. We were also fortunate enough to see a herd of twenty elephants along with the common sightings of zebra, impala, and warthog.

5th December 2007

Morning drive

This morning, to our disappointment, the leopards had moved off, however we found three hyena still scavenging for some leftovers but there were none to be had so they also made a short appearance and left. As we continued on our trip we encountered a large group of giraffe. Giraffe are the tallest antelope in the world with males reaching a height of 5 meters and females a height of 4.5 meters. Giraffe also feed on acacia trees and have well developed tongues that allow them to strip the leaves off the branches while avoiding the numerous sharp thorns. The morning drive ended on a high note as we spotted a massive herd of about 200 elephants, which were peacefully grazing.

Afternoon drive

As we headed off on another game drive, keen to see what awaited us in the unknown African plains we came across another large herd of about 100 elephants. The elephants were enjoying a leisurely stroll down the river, with the young teenagers putting up a great show by having play fights, splashing about in the river and generally just fooling around, while the adults tried their best to ignore this behaviour. As the sun was setting behind the horizon we saw a single adult female hyena. Hyena clans are led by a dominant female who often carries large quantities of male hormones, which results in them developing or mimicking male reproductive organs. On average the dominant female give birth to 1-2 cubs. These cubs are surprisingly aggressive towards each other from the start and this often leads to siblicide (where one cub kills the other).

6th December 2007

Morning drive

The morning drive turned out to be relatively quiet as no predators were seen, however another large herd of elephants, about 150, was seen at Braai Koppie, which were enjoying a quiet breakfast of leaves, flowers, and twigs. After a while the elephants were joined by a massive herd of eland, also about 150, and we sat enjoying every second of the amazing sight. As we ventured along we came across the rare sighting of waterbuck. Waterbuck are fairly easy to identify since they have a distinct white ring on their rump. According to myth this is because the waterbuck promptly sat on a freshly painted toilet seat. On the way back to camp we passed numerous zebra, wildebeest, impala, giraffe, and steenbok as the sun was rising higher in the African sky, accompanied by the steady rise in temperature, proving to be another hot day.

Afternoon drive

The temperature had cooled down a bit as we left main camp with Fish at the wheel and Edward as our spotter. The first animal we came across was the ever-present "MacDonald" of the bush, a herd of impala. As we left the impala to get on with business, Edward spotted a lone impala female standing on her own and on further investigation we spotted the tiny form of a newly born fawn, perfectly camouflaged in the bush it was lying in. Further on in the drive we came across kudu, more impala, a group of giraffe, more impala, the shy common duiker, and more impala. One of the guests, to our excitement, spotted a pair of bat-eared foxes lying in the shade of a bush, however they did not enjoy the presence of the game vehicle and soon ran off. Fish then showed us his skills at tracking elephants and soon found a herd of around 20, which gracefully walked past our vehicle as the sun set in the background. The weather was starting to get bad as strong winds were beginning to increase in strength so we headed back. The trip back, however, turned out to be quite entertaining as Fish and Edward proved that they could make a very efficient pit team in a land-cruiser formula one, as they made quick work of a flat tyre we received.

7th December 2007

Morning drive

This morning some of our guests set out on an Ivory Drive with Jeanetta our elephant researcher here at Mashatu. Jeanetta has been researching the elephant population at Mashatu for around eight years and her Ivory Drives give an informative insight into elephants and their behaviour. Knowing the reserve so well Jeanetta and Fish know instinctively where to start searching for elephants on any given day, taking into account factors such as temperature, time of day and time of year. This morning was relatively cool and overcast and as such we found our first herd of elephants out in the open space feeding on trees and

grasses. Had it been a hot day, it would not have been usual to find the elephants in such open spaces as they would seek more shaded areas to keep themselves cooler. We spotted two young babies who could not have been more than a week or so old, their mothers protectively shielding them from any danger they may sense, although our vehicle did not cause them any concern whatsoever. Further down towards the riverbed we spotted a young male who had come across an elephant skull belonging to an elephant that had died from natural causes some time ago. We watching intently as he used his trunk to sniff and touch the skull, he also used his feet to try and gently move it around. This was fascinating behaviour to watch – did he remember this elephant? What emotions could he have been feeling? One thing is for sure elephants really are the most extraordinary creatures.

Afternoon drive

The cloudy sky was just beginning to dissipate as we ventured out to see what lay in store for us on this game drive. With Fish as our guide and Edward as our spotter, and storyteller, we soon spotted our first sighting, which were a pair of white-backed vultures accompanied by a lone lappet-faced vulture that were gazing over the horizon in search of a carcass. We then drove into a riverbed and the sharp eyes of Fish identified the shape of a male leopard lying on a rock crevice. This leopard proved to be very photogenic and was soon striking different poses for the cameras. The leopard then got a bit fed up with all the fuss he was causing and gradually disappeared over one of the hills and into the mopane thickets. As we continued on our drive we stumbled across another newly born baby impala and Fish informed us that it was probably only a few hours old. We also had two very rare sightings that consisted of three honey badgers, two adults carrying a baby, and two bushpigs.

8th December 2007

Morning drive

Our morning drive with Elvis and Bashi turned out to be quite eventful as we spotted a male leopard near Braai Koppie. After watching this magnificent cat for a couple of minutes, the cat moved off into dense bush where we could not see him anymore and so we decided to move on to see what awaited us further on into the bush. We drove around for a while and suddenly found ourselves surrounded by over 200 elephants! It is always amazing to watch these gentle giants and their relationships with each other. It is commonly found among elephants that they have very intimate relationships with their family members and will do anything to protect each other. It was such an incredible experience to just spend a couple of minutes with these amazing creatures. As we were driving back to camp for a delicious breakfast we stumbled upon 3 female hyenas resting after a night spent patrolling their territory. A magnificent start to our day in Africa!

Afternoon drive

This afternoon's drive with Joe started with the beautiful sighting of a lone eland bull; this impressive creature stood calmly watching us as our guests took their treasured photographs. As we moved on we heard that a very large herd of elephant had been spotted out in the vlei and so we made our way over to see if we could find them. Sure enough after a short drive, during which we spotted some of Africa's finest bird life, we stumbled across a herd of 100 or so elephants. The gigantesque silhouettes of the elephants made for the most amazing and dramatic backdrop with the dark grey rain clouds and the abundance of fresh green grass.

The elephants seemed in heaven with so much fresh grass to get their trunks into!

Andrei, our leopard researcher, also took some of our guests on a Predator Drive this afternoon where they set about tracking a young female leopard. The leopard was found fairly easily but evaded them as they tried to follow her through the thickets. They decided to go back after dark when hopefully she would be more comfortable with the vehicle. After dark they found the female again but this time she was very alert and set her eyes on a herd of impala that was standing close-by. "It was fantastic to watch the leopard stalk her prey but as we did not see her actually catch an impala it is very interesting to observe the amazing patience of the leopard as she waits for the perfect moment to pounce!" was the guest's reply when they returned from the drive.

09th December 2007

Leaving Main Camp guided by Joe anticipation surrounded the entire vehicle as there were prospects of a leopard sighting. Little did we all know what a great morning it would turn out to be! Not too long into the

journey we came across a peaceful and inquisitive herd consisting of eland, impala and zebra all waiting to get their photographs taken, with the sight of dust being kicked up by warthog in the background. Approaching Baboons Bedroom Joe raised his hand to settle us all and waiting in front of us was the beautiful male leopard in all his elegance, feasting upon a baboon caught only minutes before our arrival. At this time it was not only the leopard that was hungry and we could all smell what was being prepared back at main camp so we made our retreat.

All well rested and cooled it was time to head off on the afternoon drive. Immediately we came across a large herd of running wildebeest, which had no time for us and carried off over the ridge. Shortly after crossing the fairly wet Majale, there stood before us a herd of elephant gracefully picking berries off the ground that had fallen from the Mashatu tree, with the sounds of impala males rutting in the background. Not soon after did we see what is known amongst the locals as to be the most peaceful and spiritual of all the antelope, the duiker. While driving slowly and being accompanied by giraffe alongside us, with the noise of the "Piet-My-Vrou" (Red-chested cuckoo) in the background, we were stopped by the presence of a female black backed jackal, nursing her pup under a Mopane tree. On the way back to camp, passing through Gabions, a female leopard ran quickly over the rise surprised by the mumbling of the vehicle. Yet another adventure under the African sky.

10 th December 2007

With coffee and muffins filling our morning stomachs and the fresh morning air keeping our eyes from closing we found ourselves viewing a male leopard with the previous kill of a baboon located on a branch in a massive Mashatu tree. Echoing in the background was the chilling laughter of the hyena, and it was only minutes until they were in sight waiting for any scraps that the leopard would leave behind. Leaving the leopard to finish his breakfast we moved on. Driving an area called Long Grass we found ourselves staring at what Fisch, our guide, informed us to be over 100 elephant. From calves playing with each other and cows warning us not too get too close, it was time for our departure. Sending us on our way was a herd of zebra, wildebeest and eland grazing off the fresh morning grass. Back at Main Camp during the reflective brunch a pair of bushbuck drinking at the camps local watering hole accompanied us.

The afternoon/evening game drive started off with a beautiful sighting of a large herd of "the last dinosaurs" the giraffe, picking off untouched leaves found at the top of Acacia trees, with Vervet monkeys making a racket in the background. Driving through the Motobole Weir Edward the tracker brought Fish our guide to an immediate stop. It was a mother spotted Hyena with 2 baby pups using her as shield against the unknown. Not too far ahead was a beautiful male leopard under the night sky and seemed to be contacted by the National Geographic magazine, as he was not shy at all. He gave us a full stretch, gave us a look at his intimidating fangs followed a brief grooming session. We soon decided that we must leave him to continue getting ready for a night out. Before the journey came to an end we were overwhelmed by a herd of large elephant.

11 December 2007

Another day dawned in Africa as the vehicle kicked up dust and we made our way through the bush with our ranger, Fish, and we soon encountered a herd of impala. Soon we saw there were some heavily pregnant females and the keen eyes of Fish suddenly spotted the tiny head of a baby impala lying hidden in the grass. We were told that over the next couple of days most of the impala females will give birth to coincide this with the rainy season and abundance of food. Over the tops of the trees the tall forms of a couple of giraffes were seen as they silently contemplated whether or not the vehicle was a threat to them. The cherry on top of the cake for the morning drive was when we encountered about 100 elephants grazing at Clive's road.

After a delicious cheese cake at high tea we set off through the bush on another African adventure. Responding to the loud calls of baboons we spotted to our delight, two leopards! There was an adult female and a sub adult male, which looked as if they were on a hunting spree so we did not want to disturb them too much, so we left them and headed off to the vle. Here we encountered yet more elephants grazing and browsing as the frogs started their evening calls and we enjoyed a lovely sundowner on a hill as the sun was setting in the west.

12 December 2007

The sun rose illuminating what appeared to be a slightly overcast day. The lions have not been spotted for several days so our ranger, Joe, set about to track the king of the beasts. The drive started off as we

encountered the normal game species but also the elusive bushbuck. On our lion tracking expedition, we came across some elephants, but these were not lions, so we let them be. Eventually after many U-turns and three-point turns and bundu bashing, we finally found two adult lions, one male, one female that were resting, and seemed to be fairly content with life, while lazily swatting the mopane flies away from their bodies. As the clouds parted away to our dismay, we left the lions and headed back to camp for brunch.

Since we knew where the lion were last spotted we headed straight back to try and see them again. They were found not that far from the last sighting. This time they were found near Nel's vlei and showing the tough life of a lion which involves sleeping for about 20 hours a day, and spending only about 4 hours being active. And sure enough, these two were sleeping!! After taking loads of photographs we headed off to find numerous herds of elephants, seeing more than 150 elephants. As it was getting dark, our luck seemed to improve even more as we saw the very unusual sight of a honey badger drinking, and a porcupine foraging on roots and bulbs. We then headed back to camp with much satisfaction.

13 December 2007

We again woke up to an overcast day but with an adventurous spirit we none-the-less set off to see what the African bushveld has in store for us on this day. We soon followed the whooping call of a spotted hyena and found an adult female at Majale Island. She was very active and we assumed she just came from a night's hunting spree. Further down we encountered a hyena den and three curious faces greeted us, which belonged to 2 males and one female hyena pup. The elephants once again proved to be very 'elusive' creatures as we encountered over 200 of the gentle giants. As we made our way back to camp we got a slight glimpse of two running bush pigs, a rare sighting indeed.

This afternoon drive proved that you could never stop being amazed at the African bush. We found two leopards, a male, which was walking around and attempting to look busy as we looked at him. Further on we found a female leopard that successfully killed an impala and was feeding contentedly. After enjoying this very rare sight, we were battered by a flash rain shower, which accounted for us getting a tad wet, although it didn't last very long. So we continued on the drive and came across an adult male hyena, which was trying to dry off in the sun which now had appeared again. On our way back, we saw the silhouettes of about 30 elephants against the sunset in the distance.

14 December 2007

The weather was still fairly overcast but that didn't stop us heading out into the bush with an adventurous spirit. We soon came across two ground hornbills, which are a rare sighting in this area, and we sat and enjoyed these two magnificent birds for some time before heading off to see what else was waiting around the next corner. As we approached Jackals koppie, our guide Elvis spotted a male leopard, which did not hang around for long and soon disappeared into the thicket. We however soon came across another leopard, this one being a sub-adult male, which was resting lazily in a Mashatu tree. Once again we encountered numerous elephant herds as we trekked across the wilderness and also saw an adult female hyena accompanied by her small pup, which was a male. As we headed back to camp to enjoy another wonderful brunch, we viewed another adult female hyena, a perfect end to a wonderful mornings drive.

Storm clouds were steadily rolling in across the sky as we headed out on another safari into the African bush. The prospect of getting wet was soon very high as lightning flashed across our heads and thunder echoed in the distance. The clouds then opened and in no time at all we where all soaked to the bone. Since we all were already wet we decided to continue on the drive, which proved to be relatively quiet since many of the animals were seeking cover from the rain, however we did come across zebra, wildebeest, impala, giraffe, and a group of elephants. One of the bull elephants did show some interesting behaviour by picking grass and twisting it and turning it and wiping it on his trunk. Elvis, our guide, told us they do this to remove the loose soil and mud. They also avoid eating the roots and by doing this prevent their teeth from wearing out faster. The trip back proved to be very fun as we skidded along in the mud and we were greeted by the awesome sight of the Majale River coming down in full flood.

15 December 2007

We woke up with sound of a soft drizzle falling outside and after a warm cup of coffee we set off, with our guide Paul, on a morning walk. The vast knowledge of Paul soon had us in awe as he pointed out the small and relatively un-noticed creatures and vegetation. He showed us numerous veld and wild flowers, all of which had their own distinct shape and colour, the most interesting flower being the "Yellow mouse whiskers". He also pointed out numerous tree species and told us some interesting facts about the

Leadwood tree. As we were plodding along in the mud we saw the beautiful form of a fish eagle sitting in one of the trees. We also encountered a Yellow-bellied sand snake that was strangely enough in a tree. The walk opened our eyes to the vast and fascinating world of insects, birds, and trees, the things, which we so often ignore when out looking for the “big” animals of the bush.



Over the weekend the long promised rain started and for the entire week we had cloudy rainy weather. That, however, did not deter our guests from venturing out on the reserve in search of whatever animals they could find out there. Often the game viewers had to return early from drives due to heavy rain, and many a day the Majale River came down in full flood. By the end of the week the Majale River flowed continuously and several of the other rivers including the Pitsane and Matabole rivers came down at least once during the week.

This did not mean that guests did not see anything over the week, on the contrary elephants were spotted on several occasions. Early in the week we noted the unusual movement of elephants to the west of the reserve literally “heading for the hills”. The rangers commented that big rains must be coming if the elephants are heading to higher ground, and so it did. On most of the drives general game was plentiful with great sightings of zebras, wildebeest, large herds of impalas with several babies in these herds. Birding is also fantastic at the moment with all the migratory bird species currently on the reserve. On one of the morning drives a pair of white-faced ducks was seen, European bee eaters, broad-billed rollers, and the ground hornbills.

On the **morning of the 16th** a very large male leopard was spotted near the Nyaswe Baobab on the move and not far from there at the Moddergat den a lone female hyena was seen. Another hyena was seen on the evening drive near Naledi dam, also walking at a steady pace. Nearly a 100 elephants were also seen on this drive near Kudugat to the west of the Main Camp.

On the **morning of the 17th** Nkoko, the grandmother of the Majale Island pride, was seen resting and calling to the rest of her pride near Mc Kenzie Koppie, while a herd of about 30 elephants was seen along the Matabole River. During the afternoon drive the weather improved a bit and for most of the drive everybody stayed dry. During the drive a magnificent female leopard was spotted with several baby impala kills up a tree.

On the **18th** a herd of elephants was seen near the Water tanks and a herd of over 200 eland was seen to the west of the reserve near Loensa. Most of the vehicles, however, had to return to camp early due to heavy rains and during the day Main Camp received over 25mm of rain.

On **Wednesday** evening we set out with Andrei, our predator researcher, in search of one of his collared leopards. It was still drizzling as we left the Main Camp and after having to get out of a very muddy patch to the west of the Main Camp, Andrei manage to locate Lesedi, one of the collared females. She was on a hunt and they were able to track her for some time as she stalked a herd of impalas.

On **Thursday** morning we set out with Jeanetta on an Ivory drive learning more about the elephants of the Tuli, a cloudy morning but for once no rain. Near Cheetah’s Koppie we came across a group of about 30 elephants. Jeanetta identified two of the females as Triangle and Siami, both tuskless females. We spent the

morning tracking and watching the different groups in the area and having to manoeuvre through some very muddy patches, but Fish's expert 4x4 driving abilities were amazing.

Tonight we went out on a Predator drive with Andrei. While driving around looking for a signal from some of Andrei's study leopards, he explained to us the interesting background regarding the importance of predator research and how he goes about tracking and monitoring these magnificent big cats. Not long into our drive, Andrei got a clear signal of one of his female leopards. As the signal got louder and clearer, we knew we were getting closer and closer. We then found the most beautiful female leopard. She was hunting impala and apart from glancing back at us, she hardly took any interest in us. The impala then suddenly got scent of danger and ran away. The leopard did not catch one while we were watching, but after that attempt we followed her for the rest of our drive and watched in amazement as she went about her leopard-business. It was truly a great night out!

On **Friday** afternoon we came across a python in the progress of constricting a baby impala. The rest of the herd stood watching nearby, powerless. It was amazing to see how the python curled around the baby slowly constricting it. Later in the evening drive we returned. By now the python had swallowed half of the baby.

Some of the guests opted for a predator drive with Mashatu's predator researcher, Andrei. We were searching for the dominant male leopard called Skebengwa. It means 'Fearsome'. It was not all that clear to us why they have named this male leopard that name, but we were soon given good reason to believe and understand why he was called Skebengwa. We finally found the male leopard lying in a small bush, but he was hardly concealed. What happened next I will never forget. In a flash that 'seemingly' relaxed leopard came charging out of the bush roaring and growling in full glory! He veered-off just in front of us and casually then walked away into the bush as if to say "stay where you are and don't follow me". Well, we were very awake and energetic after that amazing leopard mock charge and we could see why this animal was part of the Big Five. We got some stunning photos of this male and would certainly not forget that drive.

On **Saturday** morning we set out again with Jeanetta in search of her charges. Near Braai Koppie we came across a small family of elephants which Jeanetta pointed out as herd AG. Agatha, the matriarch in this herd was one of her collared animals. A small family of 10 very quickly turned into a large congregation of over a 100 elephants all grazing peacefully amongst the tall grass. Suddenly an alarm call of a baby impala was heard, followed by laughing hyenas – the hyenas must have killed a baby impala! But even before we could react, the elephants did and rumbling and trumpeting they bunched together and charged upon the two hyenas with the baby. Both hyenas scattered crossing the Majale River to the safety of the other bank. What an amazing sight! On yet another location Joe and his guests were following the sub adult brother and sister of the Majale island pride, when the young male lion spotted a baby impala and set off after it. It caught the poor youngster and immediately started eating. In the process his sister lost sight of him and could be heard calling to him, but he remained quiet until nothing was left of his kill before he made a grunt in his sister's direction.



Sunday, 23rd December

A wonderful sunny morning as we set out on our morning game drive. Close to Hamerkop crossing along the Majale River we came across the two sub adult youngsters of the Majale Island pride resting in the early morning sun. After the plentiful rains we have had last week the reserve looks amazing with green flush everywhere and lots and lots of baby impalas. Not far from the two lions, a young male leopard was resting

high up in a Mashatu tree and was not bothered by our presence in the least bit. Three hyenas were also relaxing after a busy evening near Fraser Jones weir.

During the evening drive we came across a male leopard near the hyena den on the Nyaswe River, while near Moddergat a lone hyena was fast asleep. The two sub adult lions had moved all the way down to Quelea Colony and were doing what lions do best – sleeping!

Monday, 24th December

Elephants this morning were abundant with a large herd of over 50 elephants grazing near Clive's road. An impressive crocodile was seen sunbathing near Dispute Corner in the Majale River, no wonder the impalas were barking and looking nervous around the waterhole. At the hyena den on the banks of the Matabole River we came across no less than 11 hyenas of all ages including 5 babies! These curious little ones came right up to the vehicle for a closer inspection of the tyres and the ranger's shoes!

Christmas eve and we set out on an afternoon drive after a delicious high tea with amazing snacks to celebrate the start of Christmas. On the drive we came across several herds of elephants with one young bull showing off by trumpeting and mock charging the vehicle from a safe distance. We visited the hyena den again and this time only 7 of the hyenas were present, the rest most likely out on a hunt. General game was plentiful with great sightings of wildebeests, zebras, a large herd of eland and on route back to camp, a small spotted genet. We returned to camp for a delicious Christmas dinner, with Christmas carols and singing and dancing from the Main Camp staff. A Merry Christmas to everyone!

Tuesday, 25th December

After an all round "Merry Christmas" to everyone at breakfast we set out to see what presents might be hiding for us in the African bush. We were not disappointed. Near Braai koppie we came across a male and female leopard enjoying an early Christmas meal, while near Wallow we had the opportunity to watch 50 elephants browsing and playing, some going deep into the mud for a good mud wallow. General game was plentiful with by now hundreds of baby impalas running around, some wildebeest babies and even some giraffe babies near the airstrip.

Our afternoon drive was as adventurous as the morning drive with lots and lots of elephants all round, three hyenas at the hyena den and then two lions of the Majale Island pride walking near Nel's Windmill. The young male gingerly hobbled after his sister. A previous injury to the left front paw of this young male is still bothering him, and every step seems to be a very painful one, but as long as he sticks close to his sister he will always have something to eat. Near Elephant Lookout on the western side of the reserve Bashi and his guests came across a family of ostriches. Both the male and female ostrich was staking care of no less than 12 chicks!

Wednesday, 26th December

On our morning drive we spotted two leopards feeding on an unfortunate impala caught the day before. The male and female leopards feeding on the carcass are most likely a mating pair.

During the evening drive we visited the two leopards again. Both were still in the same tree, fast asleep. On our drive back to camp we spotted a pair of large eyes moving from one tree to the next. In the light of the spot light we spotted a bush baby jumping amazing distances between the trees. What a brilliant little creature.

Thursday, 27th December

It was along drive to Majale Island where we at long last came across some of the members of the Majale Island pride, including Nkoko and the two sub adult lions. Along the way we came across a group of about 10 eland bulls, all lying down, content with all the food around at the moment. Large herds of impalas with little "bambi's" could be seen everywhere, not to mention the amazing bird life at the moment. Two large herds of elephants were seen and a visit to the hyena den delivered 4 hyenas fast asleep around the den. During the evening drive back to camp our tracker spotted a pair of eyes in a nearby bush, at closer inspection it turned out to be a small spotted genet.

Friday, 28th December

A cloudy drizzling morning as we left camp on our morning game drive, but this did not deter us in any way of exploring the wonderful scenes and scenery of the Tuli. At the hyena den along the Matabole River we spotted three adult hyenas resting outside of the den. Near Well-shaped Mashatu a male leopard was found walking amongst the tall grass. Several herds of elephants were seen, a small family of 15 along the Matabole River between Tent Camp and Main Camp, while two much bigger herds of 50 each were seen near Crocodile Pool in the Majale River and to the west of Uitspan. Large numbers of general game were observed on the drive including large herds of wildebeest with several young calves, giraffes and large eland bulls.

On the evening drive several more herds of elephants were seen, but this time we were lucky enough to watch a mating ceremony. First the bull elephant chased the young female and as soon as he caught up with her, he placed his trunk on her back as a cue to stop. The female stopped and as the bull mounted her she backed into him. As soon as the bull mated her, the female rumbled announcing to the rest of her herd that it has been a successful mating. The whole family rushed across rumbling and trumpeting touching the bull and the cow in celebration. What an amazing way to end the afternoon.

Saturday, 29th December

This morning we set out with the elephant researcher, Jeanetta, to learn more about the elephants of the Tuli. We came across Sofie and her family close to Old Rock Camp grazing on the variety of grasses, herbs and wild flowers in the area. The new baby elephant in the family is growing up quickly and has learned that all the other bigger calves in the family are there for his amusement. We followed the family as they slowly moved along the banks of the Majale River. Not long after, Even Tusk, one of the dominant cows of Charge's herd joined Sofie and her family and a whole greeting ceremony took place. Close by several young bulls were play fighting, pushing and shoving each other and sometimes a small tree as well. There was huge excitement in the air as the elephants enjoyed the cooler weather and the huge amount of food. Several more herds were seen on the drive but the next destination was the two sub adults of the Majale Island pride, walking and stalking, unsuccessfully, a few impalas. On route back to camp Bashi and his guests spotted an illusive leopard near Eric's Donga. The female seen was one of Andrei's collared females names Lesedi.



Sunday, 30th December

A cool overcast morning as we set out on a morning drive. It was a quiet morning out in the bush but there was lots of general game to be seen and this morning we also stopped to learn a little bit more about the amazingly colourful birds in Mashatu. Our ranger pointed out the Lilac breasted roller, the carmine bee-eater, Woodland kingfisher, Temericks courser, several of the stork species including the amazing coloured saddle billed stork. Near Eric's Donga we had a glimpse of a young male leopard as he made his way up the White Cliffs, while the baboons in the area shouted out a warning to everything that would listen. At Crocodile pool in the Majale River we were surrounded by nearly 200 elephants as they came down from all directions to converge on the pool for a morning drink.

Our afternoon drive delivered again several herds of elephants and two different groups of hyenas. The highlight and most unusual sighting in a while was that of a lone gemsbok spotted by Richard and his guests

at the Tented Camp. Another great sighting on route back to camp was a porcupine scurrying across the road in front of the game viewer.

Monday, 31st December

A beautiful, sunny morning as we set out with Jeanetta, an elephant researcher in the Tuli to find and learn more about her research project and the elephants she studies. Leaving from the Tented Camp our ranger pointed out two small raptors sitting high up in a Leadwood tree. They were two tiny little owls named Pearl Spotted Owls. Close to the Nyaswe borehole we spotted yet another raptor, this time a Brown Snake Eagle. We met up with the elephants along the Majale River near Hamerkop Crossing as they were scooping up bundles of devil's thorn flowers. There was probably close to a 100 elephants in the area with different herds moving in different directions with some unsure of where they would like to go. Amongst the herds were the small family of Diana and the much larger group of Pond. On the opposite side of the Majale River, near Braai Koppie, we came across one of Jeanetta's collared females, a 40-year-old cow named Agatha. Close to her family was the family of Charge, a well-known cow. During the morning we watched the young bulls play fight, the babies chasing each other and sometimes mock charging the vehicle. Near Eric's Donga two hyenas were spotted on route to the hyena den along the Matabole River.

Hyenas and more hyenas! Near Moddergat we came across no less than 8 hyenas feeding on an unfortunate zebra, while at Beacon Hill another four hyenas were heading in the direction of Moddergat most likely to join up with the rest of the group already feeding. Again we saw elephants, a small group drinking at Fraser Jones weir on the Matabole River and a much larger group walking up the Matabole River near Beacon Hill. General game was amazing with a great sighting of a few jackal pups, honey badger on route back to camp and a bush baby to end off the evening's entertainment.

