

GAME SIGHTING REPORT – February 2008

Friday, 1 February

Leopard, hyena, elephants and lots and lots of magnificent birds were the highlights of this morning's drive. We found a young male leopard resting near the confluence of the Matabole and Nyaswe rivers while at the hyena den we were lucky enough to see 8 hyenas including the three little cubs playing outside. As per normal elephants were plentiful and we watched a herd of 50 elephants walking and grazing near Moddergat. Some of the young bulls were testing their strength against each other, pushing and head butting each other.

Once again we visited the young male leopard along the Nyaswe River and found him in the same area as during the morning drive. In the late afternoon light the coat of the leopard lights up enhancing the warm yellow and brown colours. Near Jackal's Koppie a herd of 75 elephants was making their way towards Charter, slowly feeding as they moved along. After sunset we came across a small family of Bat eared foxes and not far from camp we had a glimpse of a honey badger before it disappeared in the tall grass.

Saturday, 2 February

Once again we set out with Jeanetta to learn more about her elephants. We met up with the first herd as we approached the Majale River. Just below Disappointment Koppie, we met up with Diana's herd grazing out in the open. Within the herd there was a brand new baby and some of the young females were very protective of the little one. A low rumble from Diana told the herd it was time to start moving. As the herd moved towards the Majale River we drove around to meet up with them at the river. Arriving at the Majale River there were several other herds drinking in the river. While we watched the elephants we heard the mating rumbles of yet another female on the banks of the Majale River. Below Braai Koppie we met up with Ilze and her herd. One of the young females in the herd has been in oestrus and most likely one that has been mated by a big bull in the herd. We spent a long time with the herd watching them feeding on the green grass. We stopped on the banks of the Majale River watching elephants drinking in the river. A young bull was swimming and even long after the herd has left the young bull was still swimming. As we watched, Diana and her herd also came down for a drink and soon some of the young bulls joined in on the swimming. Reluctantly we left the elephants at the water to return home.

The male leopard we had been seeing for, for the last few days on a on and off basis, caught a warthog during the day and by the afternoon drive was found feeding on the carcass near the Crocodile pool in the Majale River. Sitting under a big Mashatu tree listening to the crushing of bones made us realise just how powerful this predator is. The young male could not be bothered about our presence and we watched him feed and clean himself for most of the afternoon. Nearby we spotted a large group of giraffe while a mixed group of eland, wildebeest and zebra were feeding on the open plains along the Majale River.

Sunday 3 February

Today was yet another beautiful day with perfect morning temperatures. Our first "big" sighting was that of the new pride of lions to the north of Cheetahs Koppie. There were a total of six lions - four lionesses and two male lions. At first the lions were relaxed until a herd of about twenty elephants moved in and startled the lions which immediately hid behind the thickets. Another herd of twenty elephants was spotted drinking water at Hammerkop Crossing. At Bryce's Store a female leopard was seen with a cub at the base of a Mashatu tree.

In the afternoon a male leopard was watched as he stalked a herd of impalas at Majale Crossing. The leopard crept closer and closer when suddenly a male impala spotted him and snorted an alarm call, warning the rest of the herd, and the hunt was over. Three lions were spotted at the Moddergat cutline heading east. We had excellent sightings of the general game seen on Mashatu, including zebras, wildebeests, warthogs, steenbok, monkeys, kudus, jackals, impalas, giraffes, elands and baboons.

Monday 4 February

Each day we experience great sightings especially when it is babies with their mothers. We spotted wildebeests with grey young ones, zebras with the tiny stripy babies and impala calves pronging here and there. A herd of eighty elephants was seen wandering whilst browsing. At Old Rock camp we spotted a male hyena, but we only managed a glimpse of it before he moved off in to the bush.

The main focus of our afternoon drive was to spot the cats seen at Mashatu. As we drove past Majale Crossing ranger Dan spotted an African wild cat an excellent start but the guests were now hoping for the "big" cats. Fortunately three lions were spotted a short while later to the north of Cheetahs Koppie. The lions were relaxed, as usual, and we managed to take some stunning pictures. Other sightings included a large herd of elephants at Disappointment Koppie, bat-eared fox, baboon, honey badger, black-backed jackal and steenbok.

Tuesday 5 February

This morning a light breakfast was enjoyed on the terrace with the rays of the sun shining down and two jackals drinking water from the Main Camp waterhole. It turned out to be a great day for lions! The new pride of three lions was spotted at Old Rock camp - the older female with her two sub adult females. A herd of one hundred elephants was seen walking in a single file at Crocodile Pool (always amazing to witness) while the young calves moved in and out of the line to grab leaves as they passed the trees by. In the evening we had a magnificent view of a hyena swimming at Main Camp waterhole!

Wednesday 6 February

This afternoon the Mansen Party staying at Main Camp had asked Eric, their ranger, if they could drive to the western regions of the reserve. A herd of impalas were the first animals to be seen - the young impalas born just a few months ago have grown so big and the ewes are looking beautiful with shining coats. Driving towards the MMBA ridge a herd of about thirty elephants walked past the vehicle. To our fascination Eric noticed that one of the elephants had just had a baby!!! The placenta was still visible and attached to the mother. Eric immediately switched off the engine the elephant with the placenta walked towards a tiny calf and helped it to stand up. Another elephant came forward to help the mother. The baby elephant walked so softly and was very timid about the process of walking for the first time.

Friday 8 February

While enjoying an early breakfast we heard the calls of hyena in the distance. Driving from Main Camp we headed towards the Matobole hyena den where we found one hyena. The hyena walked out of the den and paused magnificently for a photo shoot. As we drove away from this lone hyena two other hyenas came running in with a fresh carcass. The lone hyena was very pleased to see his companions bringing "breakfast" home. He dashed towards to the two hyena and was able to grab a piece of the carcass. The two hyenas, with the third following, ran towards Frazer Jones weir. Here we watched the three hyenas drooling over a leopard's kill that was in the Shepard tree. An elegant male leopard had killed an impala and the hyenas must have managed to steal a piece of the carcass before the leopard treed the kill. To end off a spectacular drive a herd of one hundred elephants was seen drinking water at Dispute Corner.

The leopard with the kill had not moved an inch from where it was seen in the morning. Unfortunately the kill had dropped to the ground and the male hyena was feasting on the impala carcass under the tree. A herd of about two hundred elephants was found meandering through Elephant Valley.

Saturday 9 February

It was a cloudy morning with a fresh cool breeze blowing. Driving from Main Camp we had great sighting of impalas pronging in the open areas. Heading east, at Agates Koppie, a lone

female hyena was spotted resting. At the Vlei an active male leopard was seen for about two minutes before he disappeared in the long grass. A herd of forty elephants was found walking and enjoying the greens at Crocodile Pool. Another herd of forty elephants was seen at Mc Kenzie Koppie as well as a herd of twenty elephants at Matobole Cocktail spot.

10 February

On our morning drive we saw a big male leopard resting along a riverbed. As soon as we arrived he moved into tall grass and we lost sight of him. Driving through the beautiful landscape we also saw herds of impala, zebra, wildebeest and giraffe. By the time we came back to camp we had also seen a total of 100 elephants.

Our evening drive was filled with a wide variety of game such as wildebeest, zebra and lots of impala. We went back to the area where we found the leopard, and instead of finding the same male, we found a beautiful female. She too walked into tall riverine grass and we lost sight of her. We spent a long time with a big herd of elephants playing in a mud pool.

11 February

The morning drive was started with a great sighting of a young lioness. We found her tracks crossing a road and proceeded to follow her. Not long after we found her resting in the shade. She looked to be around 2 years old and our ranger said that it is unusual to find such a young lioness all by her self. Apart from seeing a big troop of baboons, we also saw zebra, giraffe, wildebeest, impala and plenty of bird species.

Our evening drive was fairly quite compared to other nights. Our ranger and tracker found it very difficult to spot the ever elusive leopard in such dense vegetation, although they did find the tracks of some individuals. We saw an amazing sighting of a large herd of elephants drinking at a water pool in the riverbed; with the setting sun behind them.

12 February

Early on our morning drive we found the young lioness again. She looked to be in great condition, but it was apparent that she hadn't eaten for a few days. Hopefully she will find a good meal soon. We were taught a lot about birds by our ranger and soon we were more interested in searching for 'new' bird species than looking for big animals. A sighting of a big herd of elephants ended our morning drive and we sat and watched as they interacted.

On our evening drive we found 3 lions. It was an adult female with her 2 sub adult male offspring. They were very relaxed and we were able to take some stunning pictures of them as they were starting to stretch and move off to go hunting. We also found 3 herds of elephants followed by zebra, wildebeest, giraffe, impala, kudu, warthog and even an albino porcupine!

13 February

For the first time this week we found hyenas. They were resting along a riverbed and it looked like they had a large meal the night before, since they had very large bellies. Black backed jackals were seen close to the clan of hyenas. They were more skittish and ran off. We later found another big herd of elephants followed by giraffe, monkeys, baboons, kudu and warthogs.

On our evening drive we were lucky to see a female leopard with her small cub. The adult female quickly disappeared into the dense vegetation, but the cub continued playing around and we could take some great pictures. Zebra, giraffe, wildebeest and various other game species were seen later in the evening.

14 February

This morning's drive was filled with plenty of game species, but what made it special was the big herd of elephants we saw moving towards a water pool. We sat and watched as the elephants quenched their thirst and played in the mud.

15 February

On our morning drive we saw yet another big herd of elephants followed by kudu, warthogs, jackal, baboons, monkeys, impala, wildebeest and zebra. We did not see any cats on this drive, but all the other sightings this morning made up for that.

We found a pride of 5 lions on our evening drive, but what made this sighting even more special was the fact that 2 of the lions were mating! They were not bothered by our presence and we could take some stunning pictures. Later we found a few hyenas walking along the road.

16 February

Early in our morning drive we again found the 5 lions and it looked like they had caught a baby zebra the previous night. We could only see a part of the carcass. The female leopard with her cub was also seen again, and this time we got a better look at them since the bush wasn't so dense. After the 2 amazing cat sightings, we found 2 cheetahs! They were merely resting in the shade and hopefully we will see them later on our evening drive.

As was predicted, but with luck, we found the 2 cheetahs walking across a large open area. They were fairly skittish and soon moved into an area that made it hard for us to follow and we lost sight of them. The lions were also found again and they were very relaxed towards our presence - making it wonderful to take pictures of these magnificent cats.

Sunday 24 February

Afternoon drive

It was a warm sunny day today. We had a wonderful high tea and left for the drive after that. As we drove out the Mashatu Main Camp gate we saw a large family group of baboon. They were feeding and resting and some females had little baby's with them.

We drove through the MJ / M1 crossing and found a leopard there. She was walking in the riverbed and we watched her for a few minutes before she disappeared into the bush.

Then, at Kanda Waterhole, we saw many, many elephants. There must have been at least 200 of them. They were spread out in family herds and all were grazing. It was an amazing sight.

At Brian's Store we saw the new pride of lions - two males and two females. They were feeding on a warthog kill.

Monday 25 February

Afternoon drive

Near one of the small dry rivers we saw an impressive eland bull today. He was very large and had that wonderful blue-grey colour. He was resting in the shade.

Along a small dirt road we found a pair of steenbok. They looked at us for a few seconds, ran away, stopped behind a bush close by and looked at us again. They are very elegant animals.

Not far from Mashatu Main Camp we found a female cheetah resting under a bush. It was amazing that our ranger saw it, because it was very well camouflaged.

Near Disappointment Koppie a male leopard was on his way to go hunting. He stalked an impala, but was spotted. They gave their alarm calls so he gave up and walked on.

At the Matabole/Nyaswe Confluence we found elephants and hyena's. The elephants were grazing and drinking while slowly walking on and didn't seem to be too worried about the hyena's that were resting under a bush.

Tuesday 26 February

Morning drive

We found a pride of 6 lions this morning - two males and four females. They were walking along the riverbed at Brian's Store. What a sight!

Not far from Matabole we saw a female hyena with 4 sub adults. They were resting under some bushes.

We spotted a group of 6 giraffes browsing along a dirt road. A jackal passed by and for some reason that startled the giraffes and a few of them ran off a short distance. It is an amazing sight to see those animals run. They are fast, but it looks like they are running in slow motion.

Afternoon drive

This afternoon we drove through the Majale River bed not far from Mashatu Main Camp. At White Cliffs we found a female leopard resting on a rock. Every now and then she would lift her head and have a quick look at us, but she was very relaxed. We heard a sound high up on the cliffs and saw a klipspringer near the top. It looked down on us for a while and then started browsing.

Near Disappointment Koppie we met a family herd of elephants. There were ten elephants in total and one of them was a tiny calf that was having fun sliding down a little slope and quickly lying down to rub his head in the sand. He was flapping his ears at high speed, almost as if he was trying to fly! It was great to watch him having such fun.

Wednesday 27 February

Morning drive

Today we found the Majale Island pride's grandmother at Lucenda Crossing. She was resting under a beautiful Mashatu tree, overlooking the river.

On the open area not too far from there we found a herd of Blue wildebeest and a few zebra's. Both species had youngsters with them.

A family of warthogs got startled when we drove past. The male, female and their four piglets ran away, all with the thin tails straight up in the air.

At Dispute Corner we found a large herd of 75 elephants. We watched them while they were taking turns drinking at the puddles of water or digging little holes for themselves to drink the fresh clean water that collected.

Afternoon drive

At Hamerkop Crossing we found two females of the new pride of lions. They were resting under a bush and were very hard to spot. But when we moved closer we had a great view of them. We could see the golden colour of their eyes and the markings on their faces.

Just when the sun was setting, we saw four large kudu bulls. They looked beautiful in the golden light and their horns were huge.

We found a pair of jackals walking along through the bush, probably on their way to go hunting.

Close to Mashatu Main Camp we found a small group of zebra's resting. The young ones were lying down, but the adults were still very alert.

Thursday 28 February

Morning drive

Today we found the two females of the new pride of lions at White Cliffs, not far from Mashatu Main Camp. They were resting under a tree and we could have a good look at them.

At Beacon Hill we had an exciting sighting. We found a female leopard with a tiny little male cub! It was very special to see.

Along the dirt road we found a large male giraffe and he looked a very old age. He was browsing and not in the least worried about us watching him.

Near the water tanks we watched as large herd of 175 elephants slowly moving on while grazing. Everywhere you looked you could see elephants. A wonderful sight!

Afternoon drive

The two females of the new pride of lions were still at White Cliffs. This time we watched them as they slowly walked along the riverbed before settling down in the shade under a bush.

In and around a huge Mashatu tree we found a large group of baboons. We watched them feed, rest and play for a while, there were a few small baby's too.

At the Kanda Waterhole we found a herd of around 75 elephants. They were slowly walking and it is amazing how silently these huge animals can walk. A few young bulls were sparring and one of them showed off by kicking some sand towards the vehicle before he quickly walked off.

Friday 29 February

Morning drive

During the drive we saw steenbok, zebra, wildebeest and many more animals, but we unfortunately also found the old male giraffe once again and he had died. 16 Hyena's were feeding on the carcass, and many vultures waiting nearby.