



FEBRUARY 2007



Thursday 01

The Elephant Valley Pride was still in the area of Crocodile Pool this morning. The lions were in a good position to ambush animals as they came down to drink at the pool. This morning the impalas were the victims. As a herd of thirty impalas were busy quenching their thirst the lionesses attacked and two impalas were taken down!! A female leopard was spotted resting to the north of where the lions were now with their kill. Four active cheetahs were spotted at Khanda waterhole. A herd of fifteen elephants was seen wandering along the Majale River at Dispute Corner.

Friday 02

This afternoon the Elephant Valley Pride had moved towards Dispute Corner where the cubs were chasing each other around and about. Two hyenas were seen at the Nyaswe River and driving along this river we bumped in to a lone juvenile leopard that froze for a while giving us time to take a picture before it ran off. A brown hyena was also spotted at Clive's road, a very rare sighting at Mashatu!

Saturday 03

The morning was amazing with lots of bird sightings. We spotted a grey hornbill holding a big mopane moth in its mouth. Mpho described that it was a male hornbill - when hornbills breed the females feathers are plucked out and the male seals the female in a hole in a tree. A small opening is left through which the male feeds the female. The female stays in the hideaway until the chicks hatch and develop some feathers. The male will have to be responsible for the entire period, as he has to bring food home.

At Speed Corner the Elephant Valley Pride lioness was found sleeping until a huge herd of fifty elephants came across the river to drink water and browse. The mother and the sub adult lions lay quietly but the cubs were petrified and ran and hid under the mopane tree nearby. At Fig Tree crossing a leopard was spotted drinking water. Three-sub adult cheetahs were spotted stalking a herd of impala at Scrapper. The cheetahs

managed to get kill two baby impalas and they sat there and feasted on their meal.

During the afternoon drive the Majale Island lioness and her four cubs were found at the confluence of the Majale and Matobole Rivers. The Elephant Valley Pride was seen resting at Dispute Corner, keeping to the shade as it was a very hot day. We had three hyena sightings - a lone hyena was spotted resting at the Y-junction, two hyenas were seen drinking water at Frazer Jones Weir and three others were spotted at the Nyaswe borehole. We had a brilliant view of six bat eared foxes at Scrapper to end off a wonderful game drive.

Sunday & Monday

(No guests in camp)

Tuesday 13 February

Our main focus for the day revolved around the massive young Majale Island lioness and her four cubs. In the morning they were found in a thicket of crotons near Graham's Tree and it was no surprise when we found them in exactly the same location later in the afternoon. Large cats seldom move far on hot summer days and today was definitely on the upper end of the temperature scale! The cubs are not as relaxed as the Elephant Valley Pride's juveniles, but they still provided us with more than an hour of entertainment both in the morning and late afternoon... Other sightings included a large herd of elephants drinking at Croc Pool in the morning and an impressive hyaena female bathing in a pool at Frazer Jones Weir just before sunset. Smaller mammals sighted throughout the day include bat-eared fox, baboon, honey badger, black-backed jackal and steenbok!

Wednesday 14 February

Where are the lions? This question would only be answered in the afternoon, but in the mean time we managed to find a majestic male leopard just north of Nel's Windmill! We were in the vicinity of the old borehole to search for the Majale Island Pride when our tracker, Aaron, showed why he should be called Eagle-eye Aaron! The large male was about 100 meters away at this stage and sitting up behind a large acacia tree. Although he was relatively nervous we were able to creep up on him to a point where we could get some awesome photographs! From there we headed north-west to Clive's Road and came across a small herd of 15 elephants grazing on the little grass available on the side of the road. We also saw duiker, steenbok, warthog and giraffe.

The Elephant Valley Lion Pride was eventually found at Croc Pool late in the afternoon. The youngsters were feeding on an eland. It was amazing to see nine spotted hyaenas in the vicinity, all waiting for some scraps. Never before have I seen so many hyaenas in this specific area! The highlight of the drive was a large leopard male feeding on a young zebra which it had hoisted into a large tree on the bank of the Majale River near Main Camp.

Thursday 15 February

Wow! Mashatu delivers yet again!! Four large predator species in one morning's drive - lions, leopard, cheetah and spotted hyaena! The Elephant Valley Pride was resting at Croc Pool where they had killed and eaten an eland the previous day. A leopard female was found near Naledi and a male cheetah rested in the shade of a Shepherd's Tree near Cheetah's Koppie. Finally, a spotted hyaena was found below the White Cliffs in the Majale River. A massive herd of elephants was also seen this morning in the aptly named Elephant Valley. The amazing sightings continued in the afternoon as we watched the Elephant Valley Pride interact with each other on the bank of the Majale. Most of our time was spent with leopards, however! First we found the massive male near Main Camp again and to our surprise he had caught another young zebra! Not far from there we found two leopard cubs playing on the rocks next to the White Cliffs. Their mother was nowhere to be found. She may have gone off to hunt, or she was close by but too shy to show herself. The cubs were approximately six months old.

Friday 16 February

I love leopards! I also love seeing three different adult leopards on one drive!! The first was a large male which was also seen the previous night. He was still feeding on the zebra carcass near Main Camp. The second was an adult female crossing the riverbed at Fig Tree. She was a little bit shy, but we still had a

decent sighting. The third one was another female resting in a massive Mashatu Tree at Three Mashatus. On top of that we also saw the Elephant Valley Pride and five spotted hyaenas at Croc Pool. We actually witnessed a kill!! The unlucky target was a warthog which fell prey to the lions. Other sightings included wildebeest, eland, giraffe and eland. The lions were still feeding on bits and pieces of the warthog in the afternoon and had obviously not allowed the hyaenas close enough to steal part of it. We saw one of the leopards again and also spent more than 30 minutes with a herd of elephants bathing at a pool in the riverbed. After dark we spotted porcupine and genet.

Saturday 17 February

It is amazing how a very productive day can be followed by a very quiet day. This morning was quiet, but we worked hard and eventually found two spotted hyaenas resting at McNeil's Pool. They were not bothered by our vehicle at all and allowed us to pull up right next to them! After some more tracking we finally found a herd of 50 elephants in the Majale River. We decided to stay with them for most of the morning since they were very entertaining – playing in the water and throwing sand all over the place. My personal highlight was three bat-eared foxes close to our vehicle near Beacon Hill! We also saw impala, kudu, giraffe and warthog, amongst others.

This afternoon we joined Villiers, the leopard researcher, on Predator Drive. Previously he used to track a specific female, the White Cliffs Female, on the drives, but unfortunately she died earlier in 2007. This afternoon we decided to track the latest introduction to his study leopards – a female named Shashi. Villiers made it clear that she is very shy and that chances were small to actually see her. It was so interesting to learn about the leopard research and to see Villiers track his study female in action! The signal took us from the Majale Cocktail Spot towards the old hunting camp and eventually we found her location at the base of a large hill west of Main Camp. To everyone's surprise we didn't just see her – we had an amazing visual of her!! She was stalking a kudu cow which made it clear that she was very unhappy with the leopard's intentions. Elsewhere in the reserve two more leopards were seen.



Sunday 18 February

After having a short quiet spell in terms of cheetah sightings, we finally found a mother with three youngsters this morning. This was thanks to our ranger Diks's unbelievable tracking and spotting ability! He followed the tracks all the way from Old Rock Camp to Braai Koppie where the four spotted cats rested under a Shepherd's Tree. They were inactive and all had full bellies. We didn't find the other large cats on this drive, but we did enjoy the antics of a large herd of 50 elephants drinking at Dispute Corner in the Majale River. They filled their massive stomachs with water before taking dust and mud baths and rubbing their backsides on the riverbank. We also saw bat-eared fox, dassie, kudu, warthog and black-backed jackal amongst others.

The four cheetahs were able to kill a kudu calf some time during the day and we sat watching them feeding in the afternoon, still near Braai Koppie. Far from there, in the east, we came across the Majale Island Lioness and her four small cubs. They were feeding on an impala carcass, probably scavenged from a leopard, in the Long Grass area. At the Nyaswe-Matabole confluence we found a male leopard strolling down the road in the direction of Frazer Jones. He was a real poser and allowed us to get some stunning photographs! On the way back to Main Camp we spotted an African wild cat.

Monday 19 February

Our morning drive started with a bang as we found the Elephant Valley Pride not even 15 minutes from camp. All five individuals were present where they lay on the bank of the Majale River. Not far from there at Dispute Corner a female leopard disappeared up the bank of the river. We were able to find her in amongst the croton trees after a few minutes of searching – the squirrels are always a great help as they give their familiar warning calls from the treetops. General game was plentiful as we passed herds of wildebeest, kudu, impala, zebra and giraffe along the way... My personal highlight was a sighting of nine spotted hyaenas at McNeil's Pool in the Majale River!

The large group of hyaenas had left McNeil's Pool by the time we passed there in the afternoon, but along that particular stretch of river we did see four klipspringers, a few dassies and many kudus. The adult female leopard was still near Dispute Corner, but this time resting high up in a massive Mashatu tree. The Elephant Valley Pride also stayed in the vicinity of Croc Pool where we found them early this morning. This afternoon's drive also produced sightings of elephant, baboons, duiker, steenbok and eland.

Tuesday 20 February

What an unbelievable morning!! We had the privileged to see two leopards, a pride of lions, and spotted hyaenas on one drive! The Elephant Valley Pride had not moved far from Croc Pool where they spent most of yesterday. Our first leopard sighting was at the MJ water tanks and the second was a large male at Lucinda Crossing. The hyaenas were found close to Main Camp along the Majale River. One of the most spectacular snakes in Africa, the rock python, was also seen this morning. The massive snake of almost four meters crossed the riverbed at Figtree Crossing and we had front row seats to watch this amazing creature going up the bank.

The midday temperature skyrocketed to 44 degrees Celsius and the result was a relatively quiet afternoon as most of the animals had disappeared into the thickets to get some respite from the scorching sun. We did find a large herd of eland and a few small herds of giraffe. The lions were also seen at Croc Pool again. After dark we found genet cat and porcupine, two creatures which one seldom sees during the day!

Wednesday 21 February

We decided to do a drive through the western regions of the reserve this morning, just to see some different landscapes. Game numbers are not quite as high as in the Central Area, but one wouldn't say that if you take what we saw this morning. We must have passed five different herds of giraffes and zebra along the way! Blue wildebeest were also plentiful and we saw lots of calves with the adults. We also saw kudus, eland, steenbok and impalas throughout the drive. At Kudugat we found all these species gathering at the same spot – a spectacular sight! Birding highlights included a woolly-necked stork and kori bustard. The afternoon drive was dominated by elephants which were found in great numbers all along the Majale River. Our sundowners were taken on Disappointment Koppie from where we watched the most spectacular African sunset imaginable...

Thursday 22 February

Yes!! Four out of four! Lions, leopards, cheetah and spotted hyaena on one drive! The highlight was finding the Majale Island lioness and her four small cubs feeding on a wildebeest at Jackal's Koppie...with the large adult male lion! The father of the cubs was with them and even played with the cubs – an unforgettable sight! Frazer Jones produced both hyaena and leopard sightings. A female hyaena was following a male leopard along the Matabole River's edge and fortunately for us they concentrated so much on each other that they allowed us to drive right next to them. Three male cheetahs were found at Pitsani Koppie. They are most likely brothers which will stay together for the rest of their life... The rest of the day also produced elephant, kudu, eland, baboons and vervet monkeys amongst others.

Friday 23 February

The magic of yesterday continued today as we again found all four large predator species on one drive. The Majale Island Pride was still feeding on the wildebeest carcass in the far east; whilst we found a single male cheetah at Mc Kenzie's Koppie. The leopard sighting was of a young male at Moddergat and Frazer Jones again produced spotted hyaenas. In this case four of these spotted creatures were feasting on an impala in

the riverbed. In the afternoon our cheetah tally went up to five for the day as we found four more feeding on an impala at Mc Kenzie's Koppie! Two more leopards were seen – one at Baboon's Bedroom and one at Dispute Corner. Lions, hyaenas, elephant and eland were again seen on the afternoon drive. The last two days have been unforgettable!!

Saturday 24 February

Although we found them once again, the focus was completely taken off the Majale Island lions by three hyaenas which were found at the Nyaswe-Matabole Confluence. We saw something that very few people have ever seen before – hyaenas mating!! The male mounted the female soon after we arrived and the process of mating continued for almost an hour! The third hyaena was also a male and did not partake in the mating, but he did make some very interesting sounds. We spent most of the morning with these spotties, but also found herds of giraffe, kudu and zebra amongst others. Birds included tawny eagle, saddle-billed stork and ostrich.

This afternoon we joined Villiers, the local leopard researcher, on his research drive – the Predator Drive. After the loss of the White Cliffs Female, his main study female, the drive has changed slightly as it has become a bit more structured. We first passed one of his motion-sensor camera traps, used to count leopards in his study area, before passing the capture cage to learn more about the difficulties and dangers of leopard collaring. We finally tracked Shashi, the latest addition to his study animals, but she unfortunately walked off the property before we could catch up with her. We learnt an astonishing amount about leopard research and ecology!

Sunday 25 February

Sunday afternoon was amazing with two cheetahs seen at Scrapper and three sightings of leopards. A male leopard was lying in a Mashatu tree at Dispute Corner while an active leopard was spotted stalking impala. We heard guinea fowls calling out, warning all prey species that there was a predator in the area and the leopard unfortunately lost out! A juvenile leopard was also seen walking along near Frazer Jones weir. A lone hyena was seen wandering along at Cheetah's Koppie and we also had wonderful general game sightings of impalas, baboons, jackals, zebras, wildebeests, warthogs, steenbok, kudus, elands, bat eared fox and the small spotted genet. A herd of twenty elephants was found browsing on mopane trees at Mashatu Tent Camp while a huge herd of ninety elephants was seen drinking and walking at Dispute Corner.

Monday 26

The guests had planned to start off with a morning walk, and then as the day heated up would jump into the vehicles. The grass has dried up but the trees are still green and the breeze blowing felt magnificent. While on the walk we learnt a lot of things about the tracks of animals, animal droppings and their marking signs. It's amazing how everything in nature has a role to play: the termite mounds, lichens, birds nests, very old logs etc.

It was a productive days game viewing with a male and a female leopard seen walking at the Nyaswe/Matobole confluence. A lone cheetah was also found resting under the Shepard tree at Scrapper.

In the afternoon the cheetah that was seen in the morning had been joined by a juvenile female. The two cats were still taking it easy giving us a great opportunity to take pictures. A beautiful female leopard was spotted at Long Grass feasting on an impala. A herd of twenty elephant was found eating at Moddergat while another herd was seen at Jackal's Koppie walking in a single file line headed to the east.

Tuesday 27

All the guest were on the terrace by 5:15, and while eating breakfast a herd of about twenty elephants came to quench their thirst at the waterhole. Everyone was looking forward to the drive as the day had already started off so well. The yellow-billed hornbills were seen straight away, flying just like the movie star "zhazhu", and there were bird choruses everywhere. At Frazer Jones weir we found a pack of three hyenas that we had heard calling from all the way back at camp. At the Uitspan windmill the Elephant Valley Pride was seen stalking a zebra, but were not seen to succeed. The cubs have grown so big and they are looking as beautiful as ever.

On the afternoon drive, Mpho took five guests to the Mmamakwa ruins where we explored the area and learnt all about the inhabitants from thousands of years ago. There are pottery pieces that can be seen and whole pottery containers at the edge of the donga. Sundowners were enjoyed at Cecil Rhodes baobab. While enjoying drinks about seven hyenas were seen emerging from the Split Rock site. Driving back to camp we spotted an aardwolf in a burrow and a springhare. A beautiful female leopard was spotted feasting on an impala ram - it was one of the collared leopards that Villiers studies for his predator research.

Wednesday 28

Our resident elephant researcher, Jeanetta Selier, took guests on an Ivory drive this morning. However, we didn't have to go far before the lesson started as while having breakfast we were joined once again by five elephants drinking at the waterhole. A total of two hundred elephant were seen on the drive. We were even lucky to see one of the collared female elephants that Jeanetta studies.

During the afternoon there were more elephant sightings in store for us. At the Main camp waterhole herd of fifty elephants arrived to drink the fresh water. In this herd there was a collared female elephant. The calves were bathing in the water while other drank and splashed one other like kids playing in a pool. Three cheetahs were spotted walking gracefully through the veld and as they saw the vehicle they paused a while before walking away. The Elephant Valley Pride was seen at the Uitspan windmill once again where the big cats were drinking water and the cubs were on guard watching who was around.

