



Mashatu Game Sightings June 2007



Friday 1 June

It was the first day of a new month and an unforgettable morning with the Majale Island Lion Pride. We found them on the island after which they were named before the sun even had time to warm us up completely. The young adult lioness and her four cubs were accompanied by her grandmother and we were treated to a morning of fun and games as the little ones played with each other, their mother's tail, with granny's paws and anything else they could find in the vicinity of the Shepherd's Tree under which they were resting. Pitsani Koppie produced a view which included more than 50 giraffe! In the east of the reserve we also came across baboons, jackals, eland, wildebeest and giraffe. To really make an amazing morning spectacular, we found a herd of about 45 elephants drinking at the Main Camp waterhole at brunch time!

The afternoon was much quieter, but we did catch up with the elephant herd at the White Cliffs. It seemed like they were back on their way towards Croc Pool, or maybe Elephant Valley. The stretch of river along the White Cliffs is so beautiful and productive that we decided to spend some time with the elephants, despite the fact that we were less than 10 minutes from Main Camp. In the riverine thickets we heard green pigeons and woodpeckers and saw a pair of crested barbets. The rocks also produced klipspringers and dassies, along with a herd of kudus. Further downstream we enjoyed the antics of a group of vervet monkeys in a Mashatu tree. On our way back to camp we saw genet and porcupine.

Saturday 2 June

For the first time in a while we found eight members of the Majale Island Pride in one morning! The two sub-adults (a male and female) were found in the Vlei itself, whilst the rest of the pride (granny, mother and four cubs) were found at the Vlei Cocktail Spot. These lions have spent most of 2007 in the vicinity of the Vlei, making it rather difficult to find them from time to time, because of all the thickets along the Limpopo River and the tall grass in the Vlei. Leopards eluded us, but at Croc Pool we came across a herd of 50-odd elephants drinking in the Majale River. They were probably the ones which quenched their thirst at Main Camp the day before! Small creatures like steenbok and duiker were seen in the croton thickets and on the plains were zebras, impalas, wildebeest and eland. In the afternoon we had a full house – lion, leopard, hyaena and cheetah! The lions were still near the Vlei, whilst a leopard male was seen crossing the riverbed at Figtree Crossing. A sub-adult hyaena was found at old Rock Camp and a mother cheetah with three cubs was seen just west of Pole Hill. It was one of those afternoons where everything just seemed to come to the party!

Sunday 3 June

The morning was extremely beautiful with mist covering the low-lying areas and giving the veld an eerie feel to it. There was a little bit of drizzle at about 08:00, but not enough to make us wet. The damp drive started off slowly, but picked up when we reached the Majale at Hamerkop Crossing. Here we found the local baboon troop on their way out to forage in the open areas. We continued south-east and found a male leopard feeding on an impala carcass near Figtree Crossing. His stomach was already bulging and therefore we assumed he had killed the impala early the previous evening. Not far from there we found the same cheetah family we had seen the previous day at Pole Hill. This morning they were at Quelea Colony and making their way north. More than 100 elephants gathered in the hills around Agate's Koppie – what a sight! From on top of the view point we could see all the way to South Africa, but rather watched the massive grey beasts feeding silently below us.

Three different cheetahs, all males, were seen drinking at Pete's Pond in the afternoon. That made it seven different cheetahs in one day! The leopard male was finishing off the impala carcass near Figtree and at the new hyaena den we found a total of eight spotted hyaenas, including a number of youngsters. One of the other special afternoon sightings was a small family of bat-eared foxes near Lucinda Crossing.

Monday 4 June

It was again a drizzly morning full of elephants! They had not moved far from Agate's Koppie and seemed to be slowly on their way to Main Camp. There were more than 75 individuals. The three cheetah brothers were again found near Pete's Pond – this time in the Vlei. They were active and making their way towards the airfield. We were surprised to find the male leopard still feeding on some impala scraps at Figtree Crossing. There certainly wasn't much left of the two day-old impala! He stayed the whole day and was again seen in the afternoon. So were the three cheetah brothers next to the Vlei. The elephants didn't move south, but rather gathered north of the Matabole River downstream from Eagle's Nest. There were many babies and even a couple of big bulls present! On our way to the Vlei we came across three more cheetahs! A mother and three sub-adult youngsters, who seemed very nervous, east of Pole Hill. We gave them some time to get used to the vehicle and before long we were parked no more than 20 yards from them. Something may have spooked them earlier, because they seemed very tense and ready to run at any stage. They eventually moved towards the Majale River. At the Nyaswe Hyaena den we found three of the cubs next to the main entrance, but two disappeared immediately as we arrived. One, however, was inquisitive enough to stay at the top for another minute or so. There were no adults around, so we assumed the little ones would stay in the hole until the larger hyaenas returned.

Tuesday 5 June

Lions and cheetahs made our morning very special! A lioness with four cubs was found near the Limpopo River and allowed us within 10 meters from them. Three cheetahs were found roaming the edges of the airstrip at LVA and seemed unconcerned about our presence. More than 150 elephants were found close to Main Camp at Frazer Jones Weir and slowly made their way down to the Matabole/ Nyaswe Confluence. Other creatures sighted on the morning drive included bat-eared fox, baboons and warthog. The lions had moved to Nel's Windmill in the afternoon and this time granny was nowhere to be seen. She had spent the morning with the young mother and her four cubs, but must have stayed close to the river when the rest of the pride moved north. More elephants were found close to Main Camp and also in the vicinity of the Vlei. After dark we saw African wild cat!

Wednesday 6 June

After having had exceptional lion sightings the previous day, we were adamant to find leopard this morning. It didn't take us long to find tracks near Kudu Corner, but the spotted cat eluded us. Perseverance paid off though when we found an adult female leopard near Scraper in the fringe vegetation next to the open plains. Eland, kudus, impalas and zebras were seen throughout the drive. Giraffe were seen at Eagle's Nest and a honey badger near Horse Safaris. In the afternoon we were fortunate enough to pick up a mother cheetah with two sub-adults near Pete's Pond. They were very relaxed and extremely photogenic in the late-afternoon sun! We took a slow drive up along the Majale River and found a small herd of elephants drinking at McNeil's Pool. After dark we found porcupine, black-backed jackals and an African wild cat.

Wednesday 7 June

Back down to the Vlei area in search of lions...and there they were! The Majale Island Pride has been using the vlei extensively this year and it's a safe bet that they are in the vicinity of the open area on most days. It

seemed like they were rather hungry and no carcass could be seen or smelt close by. Maybe they would hunt tonight? A huge herd of elephants was grazing behind the lions, which they could obviously not see, and included many cows with young calves. The White Cliffs area also proved to be productive with another herd of 50-plus elephants as well as a pair of klipspringers and a family of rock dassies seen. The same stretch of river produced a sighting of a massive male leopard in the early evening as he headed downstream towards McNeil's Pool. Ten spotted hyaenas were found at the Nyaswe den – remarkable! The night was ended with a sighting of a honey badger pair running along the Matabole River towards Eagle's Nest.

Thursday 8 June

Although many impalas, wildebeest, kudu and baboons were seen this morning, carnivores ruled the drive! One adult male lion was seen at Jackal's Koppie in the early morning hours where he rested under a shepherd's tree. A male leopard patrolled the banks of the Matabole River at Moddergat and three cheetahs were found at Cheetah's Koppie of all places! We were able to get very close to all but the leopard, which seemed a little bit nervous in our presence. The cheetahs had not moved when we returned in the afternoon, but were becoming active just as we arrived. The mother led the way and her cubs followed her to where they investigated a herd of impalas. We were hoping for a chase, but were not that fortunate. We headed for a high spot to drink some sundowners before heading towards Elephant Valley where we saw over 50 elephants! Eland, giraffe, and kori bustard were also seen on the drive.

Friday 9 June

This would be a day to remember, not for the chilly morning temperatures or the large herd of 100 elephants found at M1-crossing, but for the **seven** different leopards we saw in one day!! In the morning we found a mother with two cubs close to Main Camp at the White Cliffs. This is where she raised them as tiny little leopard cubs and now that they are slightly older she often returns them to this rocky haven. The other four leopards were seen in the afternoon. First, a young, very relaxed male near Moddergat, followed by an adult female in the same area – probably his mother. Further into the Central Area we came across what seemed like a mating pair of leopards. The male was in hot pursuit of the female, but she didn't seem too interested in his advances. All of the leopards were close enough to photograph!! How many places in the world can offer such fantastic leopard sightings??! On top of this we also found honey badgers, giraffe and two genet cats after dark!

Saturday 10 June

This morning was mostly spent with elephants. Two big herds were found near Kudu Corner and kept playing in front of us as they dug their way deeper into the Majale riverbed in search of fresh water. An even larger herd was found at Croc Pool and we continued to enjoy the antics of these massive beasts. The rest of the drive produced excellent sightings of plains game like zebra, wildebeest and impalas, along with giraffes, kudus and the seldom seen waterbuck, at least in this area. The afternoon drive was done more towards the western boundary of Mashatu where hundreds of vultures were seen perched in a variety of large trees. They must have eaten close by, but the carcass could not be found. They were mostly white-backed vultures, but I could also see at least one pair of lapped-faced vultures in amongst the others. Spotted hyaenas were later heard calling from the Jwala River and probably joined in the fun. The highlight, however, was a sighting of a monster male leopard which stalked a small herd of impalas near Frazer Jones Weir. He was gigantic and, after giving up on the stalk, allowed us to drive within 10 meters of him! He then got up and walked a further six or seven meters closer to us! Exceptional!! After missing a few heartbeats, we headed back home for a delicious supper...and with memories of a lion-like leopard fresh in our minds!

