

Mashatu Game Sightings 02 - 08 June 2008



02 June 2008

An adventurous group of guests took off on foot with Eric on this nippy winter's morning. They were rewarded with an amiable escort in the form of a herd of elephants whom accompanied them from Main Camp all the way to Beacon Hill. There the herd left the walkers panting in the shade whilst they ambled on towards the river bed for a long, well deserved drink. It was a good day for elephant and general game, with sightings of klipspringer, duiker, eland and kudu to name but a few. Sadly the cats did not come out to play, but this did not deter those happy enough to enjoy the majesty of this beautiful landscape, at such a marvellous time of year.

03 June 2008

A slightly warmer morning provided a number of lion sightings for patient guests prepared to wait. Moddergat and the Dead Croton area yielded small groups of these big cats prowling about in the gusting wind. They may have been trying to take advantage of the extra cover afforded by the noisy bustling of trees, which can confuse prey species. The ivory drivers witnessed some elephant politics as an elderly matriarch with a short temper attempted to put an insolent teenaged bull in his place. Even repeated sharp and decisive slaps on the head with a trunk seemed to fail in preventing the persistent tyke from standing where he was not welcome and drinking from a forbidden hole. Has the social decay of the 21st century spread to the Tuli elephant population too, we ask ourselves? Unlikely. The bull eventually backed down, discretion definitely being the better part of valour where grumpy adult elephant cows are concerned!

04 June 2008

A slow morning was made up for by one lucky guest who joined the horse safari team for an afternoon hack along the Limpopo. After a short canter on their way home, the small group of equestrians noticed their horses feeling a little antsy. Upon looking behind them they discovered why; a pack of 12 wild dogs had come to investigate the sounds of running herbivores, and perhaps to test the possibility of an easy meal. The extremely inquisitive canines came to within 5 meters of the riders, whom used their calm horses to ward the dogs off by simply turning to face them. The dogs eventually lost interest in the obviously street-wise horses and melted into the thick riverine bush. Both the guest and the guides were left with an image of satellite dish ears, mottled sinuous bodies, white tufted tails, and a few goosebumps!

05 June 2008

Early morning saw the volunteers meeting with Jeanetta, before driving out to check on some elephants. The herd were found feeding and strolling along the banks of the Majale River near Moddergat. The eles didn't seem to mind the intrusion of the vehicle during their morning meal, enabling the volunteers to join the family and enjoy an intimate encounter amongst them. In the afternoon one of the vehicles was caught in traffic, they had to wait for hundreds of guinea fowl, blocking the road near Nel's Vlei and Pete's Pond, to move on. It was a bit like afternoon rush hour, African style. One of the giants, living in this Land of the Giants, was spotted near the Limpopo Valley Airfield. The heaviest flying bird, the kori bustard was seen strutting its stuff amongst the mopane bushes.



06 June 2008

TESTOSTERONE DAY! An impressive bull elephant in full must rumbled his way along the M1, leaving a trail of urine whilst in search of a suitable mate. A small group of females was spotted not far away in, the

appropriately named, Elephant Valley. The bull soon got wind of them and strode purposefully in their direction. They were last seen following the handsome male over the ridge and into the privacy of the dense foliage. Further down the road near the Limpopo Valley Airfield, a pair of rutting Impala rams dramatically clashed horns. Later that evening, on the way back to Main Camp, an Eland bull was observed clicking his way up the hillside, just before the guests' vehicle narrowly missed running into the rear of an Elephant that was standing perilously close to the dark road.

07 June 2008

A veritable treasure trove of Hoodia plants were found to the south of Main Camp, much to the delight of Guy Williams and his volunteers, on their way to, what the volunteers have named, Giraffe Valley. Once there, Giraffe Valley lived up to its name, and fourteen of the graceful, statuesque monoliths were spotted browsing and necking amongst the lush trees. After watching the giraffes for a while, the volunteers made their way to Dispute Corner where they came upon 30 or so elephants enjoying a morning drink. The volunteers tried to determine the age and sex of the elephants and found out that it is a lot harder than one would think. Two or three of the young males were testing their skills by confronting and pushing each other around. Also seen was a herd of 5 kudu bulls, a couple of steenbok, impala, and some baboons with some very young babies riding on their mother's backs.

08 June 2008

A chilly morning walk really got the blood pumping today. The route followed the Limpopo and then the Matlotse rivers upstream to Solomon's Wall, and then traversed the sandstone hills surrounding the Mmamagwa archaeological sites. Impala were plentiful along the dry sandy bed of the Matlotse, while numerous tracks and spoor along the banks of the still flowing Limpopo told of the activity of elephant, kudu, bushbuck and many more. A large herd of wildebeest and their ever-present black and white striped entourage (zebras) was spotted gambolling about on the rocky outcrops. An extra special surprise was a charming run-in with a pair of dwarf mongoose. These inquisitive, fearless red characters had no qualms about approaching the large, intrusive bipedal apes, and grilling them about their presence with little chirps and squeaks.

Mashatu Game Sightings 09 - 14 June 2008



09 June 2008

This Monday morning was unusually warm, thanks to the thick blanket of cloud which covered the reserve during the night. The warmth turned out to be illusionary however, as a buffeting easterly picked up with the sunrise and persisted, like the cloud, throughout the day. A pair of lionesses was found taking refuge from the wind amongst the mashatu trees at Baboons' Bedroom. Another two lionesses accompanied by a pair of males were discovered relaxing along Quelia Colony Road. Just a little way off a herd of around 70 elephants browsed in the relative calm of the large fever berry tree thickets along the Matabole river. Also taking cover as best they could, a large group of over fifteen giraffe was spotted in the lea of Beacon Hill. In the afternoon the lion groups had joined up on Majale island where they rested before heading off after sunset. In the Dead Croton area a female leopard and her juvenile cub were found finishing off the remains of a kill in the shade of a tree. As a final treat a serval was seen hunting on the way back to Main Camp.

10 June 2008

The cloud and wind continued to dampen spirits in the morning, though a sighting of four cheetah stalking about around Pole Hill served to remedy this. Closer to home, a trio of hyena was found wandering around the White Cliffs area, taking advantage of the cool weather to remain active during daylight hours. General game including Zebra remains abundant throughout the reserve, while a group of 20 elephants was seen drinking at Dispute Corner. Even the little guys were represented in the morning as a baby puff-adder was discovered in the Tent Camp car park. The cheetahs were joined near Pole Hill by a pair of adult female hyenas and a juvenile but seemed unperturbed by them as they rested. Nearby a herd of 50 elephants grazed and browsed contentedly amongst the umbrella thorns. On the way home a number of Genets and a group of Bat-eared foxes were sighted beginning their evening hunts for insects and other small prey.



11 June 2008

The excitement at Pole Hill escalated as the weather finally began to clear in the late morning. The cheetah family attempted to bring down an unseasonably young eland calf but were chased off by its very protective and aggressive mother. A hyena female that had stayed with the cheetahs from the day before then caught the brunt of the cats' irritation as it was chased away by a fiercely spitting and hissing kitty. Thirty elephant strolled about on Majale Island, coming very close to the vehicle in their slow, quiet ramblings in search of food. Klipspringer antelope were seen skipping across the rocky outcrops of White Cliffs and a Gymnogene was observed investigating the nests of Buffalo Weavers in a large baobab tree south of Main Camp. The lioness pair was spotted resting in the Dead Crotons area in the early afternoon. They were seen later that evening when they came to investigate a female leopard in a nearby mashatu tree. The duo circled the tree, looking up at the terrified leopard for over half an hour. It seems they may have taken advantage of her carelessly leaving a kill on the ground for them to scavenge. The smaller nocturnal predators were once again in attendance after sundown with sightings of Bat-eared foxes and a Genet. The unusual abundance of small rodents and other mammals at this time of year may be increasing sightings of these shy creatures.

12 June 2008

The morning drives were fairly uneventful apart from the beautiful crystal clear scenery and a variety of general game. Numerous groups of various antelope, giraffe, monkeys, jackal, warthog and even bat-eared foxes were seen. The afternoon really made up for the morning however. Less than 15 minutes out a trio of lions was discovered resting in the riverbed near Frazer Jones weir. The cats were not going anywhere this early in the afternoon so the drive continued down the Matabole river past Beacon Hill. It was here that a young male leopard rushed across the river in front of the vehicle and headed up the rocky slope of Beacon Hill. The sparkling clean spotted marvel stopped for a few minutes to survey the area and assess the guests in the vehicle before disappearing into the rocks and trees further up hill. Further south near the eastern cocktail spot the four cheetah were found once again, resting beside an open vleis area. Two female hyenas were also present, obviously hopeful that the speedsters would provide them with an easy meal.

13 June 2008

Camp was quiet in the morning and no drives took place before tea time, leaving the rangers to enjoy the brisk, clear, breezy morning at home. In the afternoon Eric discovered a pair of lions from the New Pride resting near the Matabole river near Hammerkop crossing. Downriver a herd of 20 or so elephants drank their fill at Dispute Corner and began to head for the hills in the late afternoon, perhaps seeking their relative warmth over that of the floodplains at night. Eland, wildebeest, giraffe and zebra remain abundant and are seen on almost every drive; today was no exception.

14 June 2008

A lion kill was discovered early in the morning and remained a highlight throughout the day. A pair of male lions and their sister had taken down a large male eland not 200m from the M1. There they lay all day feeding on the enormous bulk and then resting in the meagre shade offered by some small shepherd's bushes. Around 30 white backed vultures stood on standby on the branches of a dead leadwood tree nearby, and nearly 20 jackals skulked beneath bushes surrounding the kill. These wily scavengers were tenacious enough to snatch a few scraps from the jealously guarded kill just after sunset despite the best efforts of the male lions. Hyenas were heard gathering their troops in the evening chill, but the lions warned them off for the night with a few meaningful roars aimed in their direction.

Mashatu Game Sightings 16 - 22 June 2008



Monday 16 June

Monday was a beautiful day in Mashatu. The sky was clear and there was a gentle breeze to keep a person cool in the hot sun of midday. Lions were spotted by the Pitsane River as well as in the area of Bryce's Store. The hyena den was active that afternoon with two adults, one juvenile and two cubs all out enjoying the sunshine. The juvenile, being a typical teenager, had a glint of mischief in his eye as he ambled quietly over to one of the vehicles watching him. After a quick glance back towards his mother, he promptly began to chew on the front right tire of the vehicle. It must have been at least a bit tasty because he worked at it for about 10 minutes with the occupants of the vehicle watching him avidly. Also seen that day were 2 leopards, bat eared fox, jackals, zebra, eland, kudu, steenbok and warthog, to mention a few.

Tuesday 17 June

Tuesday was very different to the previous day. It was cloudy and overcast and a formidable wind was endured throughout the day. The animals took cover in the thick vegetation but we went about our day as usual. We weren't going to let anything as insignificant as a little wind dictate our day. Three cheetahs were seen wandering around Jackal's Koppie and a female leopard with a female juvenile at her side was seen feeding on an eland carcass near the Majale-Limpopo confluence. An eland is much too large an animal for a leopard to kill, but a leopard will take a free meal when she finds one. Usually hyenas will devour a carcass before a leopard has a chance, nevertheless for whatever unknown reason, the hyenas were absent and the leopards were having a good meal.



Wednesday 18 June

Wednesday again dawned overcast and windy, however the sun was trying to break through the clouds by late morning. It was only moderately successful and the clouds hung around most of the day. Four lions were seen on Majale Island and a leopard was hunting around Cheetah's Koppie. The lions, of course, were resting and sleeping, because that's what lions do. They rest and sleep and rest some more, but they are magnificent animals and when they hunt there is nothing more breath taking to watch. Giraffe were also seen darting across the land in that smooth graceful gallop that is all their own. Watching a journey of giraffes move together as one is a sight to behold.

Thursday 19 June

Clouds again covered the sky in the morning but by the early afternoon the sky was clear and the sun was shining in all its glory. Elephants were prevalent in large numbers near Disappointment Koppie, Pole Hill and Well-Shaped Mashatu. They could be seen browsing acacias over a wide area in groups of 30 or more. The small elephant calves can always be counted on for great entertainment by getting into mischief as their mothers are feeding, as well as the adolescent males sparring with each other to see who is the biggest and the strongest. Also seen that day were hyena, duiker, wildebeest, baboons, vervet monkeys, and warthog.



Friday 20 June

Friday dawned cool and clear, but by midday we were thankful for the gentle breeze in the air to alleviate the hot afternoon sun. Elephants were again prevalent in the area of Well-Shaped Mashatu. One could turn 360° and see elephants any which way they looked. Being as the elephant is the predominant animal in the land it kind of makes one feel small and insignificant. Again the young calves stole the show as they darted in and out and under their mother's feet, with their ears flapping and their trunks waving. We all laughed as every now and again the mothers would rumble a warning and the little ones would rush to their mothers side and

behave, if only for a few minutes. Four hyena were seen at the den as well as 2 lion at Pitsane Koppie and a leopard at Gabions.

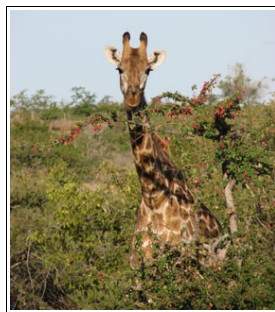
Saturday 21 June

On a sad note today, an elephant carcass was discovered at the confluence of the Majale and Limpopo rivers. It appears to be a young bull but it is not known how or why it died. However, nothing goes to waste and as the saying goes 'One man's feast is another man's famine.' This is true with animals as well, especially in Africa. Two male lions and one female were there to feed on the free meal. Several black-backed jackals and lappet-faced and white backed vultures were also in attendance waiting their turn to reap the rewards. On the lighter side today, a male leopard was seen in the morning near Agate's Koppie, and elephant, eland, kudu, impala, wildebeest, zebra, steenbok, baboons, warthog, and giraffe were all seen throughout the day.

Sunday 22 June

The lions were still hanging around the area of the elephant carcass on Sunday morning, unwilling to depart before extracting the maximum benefit from the unexpected free food. The jackals were sneaking in to grab a small bite and racing off before the lions had anything to say about it. The majestic profile of a juvenile martial eagle was viewed as it sat atop the branches of a tall tree, and the flight of a fish eagle with its broad wingspan and distinctive white and brown colouring was also witnessed. Elephants were seen in the area of Disappointment Koppie and Dispute corner, with several families dining on acacia and mopane trees. Big eland bulls, with their large horns and varying shades of grey were observed trotting across the tundra, with their heads held high and the clicking sound of their movement ever present. Giraffe, impala, wildebeest, kudu and steenbok, completed the picture of a perfect day in the African wilderness.

Mashatu Game Sightings 22 - 28 June 2008



Monday, 23rd June

An amazing day filled with large herds of elephants along the Majale River. After a chilly start we came across several herds of elephants making their way towards the Majale River. We sat amongst the elephants as group after group filed past us. Within the groups were several new babies born only a few months ago. Reaching the Majale Riverine area the elephants spread out and started feeding on the variety of Acacia trees. We watched as a large female broke a branch from a big Umbrella thorn and slowly but meticulously stripped the branch from all its bark and very carefully chewed the rest of the twigs including the long white thorns. Early evening we set out to the hyena den west of the Main Camp. Here we came across several of the females and two little cubs playing outside the den. One of the large females was keeping a watchful eye on us and the little ones. One of the cubs very curious about the vehicle came right up to investigate the vehicle and more specifically the front tyre, gently chewing on the rubber.

Tuesday, 24th June

Yet again ... elephants and more elephants! A large herd of nearly 50 came walking from Cheetahs Koppie towards the Matabole River and we followed. But this morning we also spend some time looking for different bird species and set out towards the Limpopo River where, unusual for this time of the year, the river is still flowing. During the morning our ranger located and identified several amazing and colourful birds to us including the Lilac breasted roller, crested barbet, Ibis, a black stork, white fronted bee eater and many more. A lone waterbuck was feeding in the Limpopo Riverine area, while a pair of black backed jackals tried their best to catch a guinea fowl but the guinea fowls escaped by scattering in completely different directions.

Wednesday, 25th June

After a long search we eventually tracked down four cheetahs feeding on an unfortunate impala. What amazing creatures these cats are! The female and her three cubs fed hastily while a group jackals tried several times to steal bits and pieces of the kill. Near Y-junction we came across 3 hyenas on the move, what funny looking creatures they are!

Thursday, 26th June

During the night the lions killed a kudu very close to the Main Camp but by the morning they were gone. We set out tracking them and followed their spoor all the way to the Jwala River but alas no sign of the lions. Close to the Main Camp we spotted a lone male hyena while yet another female hyena was on the move lower down along the Majale River. On the hills along the Matabole River we spotted a large group of giraffes. The group was scattered along the ridge and within the group three very young calves. We watched them feed from the top branches of the mopane trees for some time, one of the giraffe stopped feeding for a while and looked down at us with his long eye lashes while chewing slowly on a few leaves. Elephants were also plentiful and we spotted several herds during the morning and evening drive.

This afternoon we set out again towards the Limpopo River where we met up with Craig the wild dog researcher and the pack of wild dogs. We were fortunate to find them out in the open not far from their den site. The dogs were on a hunt but long before they could track down something to eat they ran into a herd of elephants. The elephants suddenly bunched together with the tiny babies in the middle and trumpeted and charged the dogs sending them running in all directions. The night drive back to camp was as exciting as the rest of the drive with first a rare sighting of two Civets and then an African Wild cat feeding on an unfortunate guinea fowl!



Friday, 27th June

At last after a few days of tracking the lions we located them near Gabions. The two males and one of the females were fast asleep in the morning sun while yet 3 more females were resting not too far from the first group near Lucenda along the Majale River. In total we came across close to 50 elephants during our morning drive, one group was drinking from holes they dug in the Matabole River near Fraser Jones weir while another group were hungrily eating from the large feverberry trees near Clive's Road. On our evening drive we once more visited the two groups of lions, neither of which ave moved an inch since this morning but tonight maybe they will set out to hunt. On our drive back we spotted in the bright light of the spot light first an aardwolf and later in our drive an Aardvark, both very rare and unusual sightings.

Saturday, 28th June

This morning we could only locate two of the lionesses we spotted the night before. A female hyena was on her way back to the hyena den when we encountered her near the Main Camp. Along the Majale River near Three Mashatu Dam we watched over 50 elephants feeding hungrily from the plentiful Acacia trees in the area. A troop of baboons was feeding nearby and a young baboon became the target for a bored young elephant. The young bull walked head held high towards the baboon threatening it to no avail. It was only when the young bull charged the baboon that it ran off a short distance out of reach of the young elephant, who bravely strutted back to his mother for a well deserved suckle. On our evening drive we had two different sightings of leopard. One of the leopards had just killed a guinea fowl and had the bird in his mouth when we came across him. Another young male was playing with a porcupine, not a good playmate but sometimes you have to learn the hard way! On route back to camp our tracker excitedly exclaimed bush pig! And there it was in the light of the spotlight a lone bush pig foraging under a huge Mashatu tree.

