

## Game Sighting yearly report – March 2008

1 March 2008

Afternoon drive

The grandmother of the Majale Island pride of lions was found at Sesana Motswiri. She was resting in the shade of a bush and very hard to spot.

At Quelea Colony we spotted a male leopard. He was feeding on a kudu calf he had killed and took it up a tree. We watched as he plucked the fur off before he started to eat.

A female and 2 baby hyena's were found resting at Long Grass. The little ones are still very small and almost black in colour.

A herd of elephants walked past us at Agatha Koppie. A young bull was a little behind and when he realised he started running after the family, trumpeting and kicking up dust in the light of the setting sun. It was a lovely sight.

2 March 2008

Morning drive

This morning we saw a herd of eland, including calves. The calves were all together in one large group while a few females watched over them.

At Moddergat we watched as a herd of 150 elephants slowly walked past us. They drank, grazed, browsed and some rested in the shade under a tree. It is amazing to see so many elephants in one place.

In a dry riverbed we saw a duiker. It didn't stay long, but we had a good look at it at least before it disappeared.

On a hillside we found a group of giraffe. There were at least 12 of them and they were browsing while two young ones rested. Their long legs folded under their bodies and they lay down with their necks still straight up.

### Sunday, 2 March

It's been very hot in the Northern Tuli Game Reserve lately with thick clouds promising rain but not delivering any. We set out early on our drive to make the most of the coolest part of the morning. As we drove through the reserve we saw magnificently coloured birds and our ranger pointed them out naming them as we went along. A large herd of impala was peacefully grazing on an open plain with a large group of youngsters feeding together in the middle of the herd. Along the river we spotted a magnificent kudu bull with long spiral horns walking proudly amongst the mopane trees. Close to Moddergat a group of nearly 150 elephants were making their way towards the Matabole River and we stopped along one of the elephant paths watching the elephants walking past so quietly with only the odd rumble here and there. A lone jackal was already seeking out the shade of a small shrubby bush and only just looked in our direction as we drove past. By 9 O' clock most of the animals were already seeking shade and we made our way back to camp, for the comfort of the air-conditioned rooms at the Main Camp.

An amazing afternoon for predators! Near Long Grass we encountered a lone lioness fast asleep in the late afternoon sun. As we approached she hardly lifted her head. What a magnificent creature with such huge paws! Not far from the lioness we visited the hyena den and were lucky enough to find one of the females with a young juvenile still at the den. Elephants were out in large numbers and we spotted two large herds with over 50 elephants in each herd on our drive. After sunset and some drinks on a nearby Koppie we set off again

with the aid of a bright spotlight. Below the Main camp along the Majale River our ranger tracked down two leopards feeding on an unfortunate warthog. Definitely the high light of the evening drive!

#### Monday, 3 March

Not far from the Main Camp a very old giraffe bull died a few days ago and it did not take the hyenas and vultures long to discover the carcass. This morning we saw a total of 7 hyenas feeding on the carcass with dozens of vultures waiting patiently for them to finish. The lioness we spotted the previous day did not move far from where we saw her but now had a partner. A young male joined up with her and both were resting when we came upon them. At the vlei, while enjoying our morning tea we watched a herd of elephants walking into the vlei and feeding steadily on the vlei grass as they moved through the vlei towards Pete's Pond.

A great afternoon drive with two baby hyenas at the den on the Matabole River, two different sightings of leopards, two large herds of elephants and then on our night drive back to camp a magnificent porcupine scurrying across the road.

#### Tuesday, 4 March

Today was an elephant morning with Jeanetta, the elephant researcher in the Tuli. A wonderful cool, slightly windy morning as we set out to find the famous elephants of the Tuli. The morning started off slowly with a few sightings of general game and then a big musth bull elephant right next to the road. We watched him for a while, with Jeanetta explaining to us what musth means and how to distinguish between bulls and cows. We continued our drive and not long after found one, and then two and then several herds of elephants walking out into a clearing not far from Cheetahs Koppie. Jeanetta identified the herds as they moved past us, pointing out a baby that was born just over a week ago. In total we saw more than 70 elephants during the morning.

#### Wednesday, 5 March

It started as a cloudy morning with threatening rain clouds. As we set out on our morning we came across the new pride of lions once more not far from the Main Camp. The young males were once more at it – mating with two of the young females.

The rain held until we safely returned to camp before a quick rain burst came down, just enough to wet everything before it disappeared again. By the time we set out on our afternoon drive the sun was shining and there was little sign of the previous burst of rain. The lions were still just below the Main Camp and after this morning's activity completely exhausted and fast asleep. A group of wildebeests were cautiously grazing nearby keeping a weary eye on the sleeping lions. Amongst the Acacia trees near the Majale River we came across a small group of giraffes expertly picking the leaves from amongst the tall white thorns with their long tongues. Other game we saw this afternoon also included baboons, zebras and group of big eland bulls and a family of black backed jackals. Of course the elephants were out and about as well and we watched a small family of elephants feeding peacefully as the sun set.

#### Thursday, 6 March

The lions moved quite a distance over night and after a long tracking session we located them along the Nyaswe River near an old weir. The whole pride of 6 lions was present and again we watched the two young males mating with the lionesses. General game was plentiful and sitting on the banks of the Majale River we watched groups of animals coming down to drink, this included a herd of impalas, some kudus, a big bull eland and lots and lots of guinea fowls. Elephants were scarce this morning but there were plenty of other things to entertain us out on the reserve. Heading back to camp we drove past the giraffe carcass, encountering 12 hyenas feeding and squabbling over the remains.

Leaving the Main Camp on our afternoon drive we came across a small family of elephants close to McNiels Pool feeding along the river. The pride of 6 lions was still along the Nyaswe River when we visited them on the afternoon drive. Driving along the river our rangers spotted fresh leopard spoor and the tracking started, through this bush and under those but alas the sun set and tracking became impossible. Our ranger drove us up a nearby hill where we had

an amazing vista of the African plains all round. Our night drive back to camp delivered some of the smaller nocturnal creatures including an African wild cat, a small spotted genet and a nightjar on the road.

#### Friday, 7 March

Our first stop this morning was to the west of the Main Camp where a bull giraffe died several days ago. By now there was little left, but still the hyenas, vultures and Maribu storks were around cleaning up the last of the remains. This morning we saw close to 10 hyenas still feeding with vultures picking on bones and skin a safe distance from the hyenas. A small family of elephants was making their way towards the Majale River near Lucinda crossing when we came across them. There were several youngsters in this group and one of the young bulls trumpeted at us as we drove past. A large group of wildebeest intermixed with a small family of zebras were grazing on the open plains below Disappointment Koppie. A troop of baboons was slowly making their way through a grass patch collecting seeds and fruits grunting to each other as they went a long.

Again we set out on our leopard hunt, looking for fresh leopard tracks, but in the thick vegetation it is hard to locate these illusive creatures even if they are only a few feet away. Instead we found a family of about 20 elephants feeding just below Braai Koppie and spent our afternoon watching their antics. On top of Braai Koppie, with an amazing vista all around we watched the sun go down, and shortly after set out again in search of some of the more illusive creatures of the night. A porcupine was first on the list. These creatures are a lot bigger in real life and those quills look formidable.

#### Saturday, 8 March

A magnificent sunrise as we set out on our morning drive. The lions were located near the Tented Camp and we headed north towards where they had been spotted earlier. Three lionesses were fast asleep as we approached and barely lifted their heads. The two males and one of the sub adult lionesses were not present. Driving towards the Majale River we came across a large group of giraffes feeding on the top leaves of some of the shepherd's trees in the area. A group of about 20 elephants was drinking near Three Mashatu Dam in the Majale River. With the pools becoming stagnant again some of the elephants prefer to dig their own waterholes rather than drinking from the river. Driving along we gave a male ostrich a fright and saw him running off at full speed – never thought ostriches could run that fast! In the process the ostrich scared a small steenbok from its hiding place below a shrubby bush sending it running which in turn gave fright to a family of warthogs sending them running too. What a funny sight to watch!

Sunday 09-03-2008

Afternoon drive

When we drove near Nells Dam we saw three cheetahs. They were resting in the shade and we could watch them for quite a while.

At Pole Hill we found a leopard female. She was feeding on an impala kill up in a tree. We drove through the dry riverbed and when we came up and drove towards Well shaped Mashatu, we saw 10 elephants there. They were quietly browsing and we could get quite close to watch them.

On our way back to camp we saw an African Wild cat. It looked like it was hunting. Three different species of cats on one drive. Not bad!

Monday 10-03-2008

Morning drive

We found the three cheetahs again, but this time at Pole Hill. They were hunting impala, but when we came back a bit later to have another look, they were feeding on a small kudu. Two hyena's were circling around them. What an exciting sight!

When we drove down from Pole Hill, we watched 35 elephants slowly moving on while browsing. We watched them and listened to their rumbling for a while. Wonderful!

#### Afternoon drive

The cheetahs were still at Pole Hill, feeding on a kudu kill. We didn't see any hyena's so the cheetahs could feed in peace.

Near the M1 Crossing we found 50 elephants. They were everywhere! They were grazing and browsing and most of them were quiet except for a few young bulls. They were sparring, pushing each other and one even threw a stick with its trunk!

We found a herd of wildebeest and a small group of zebra not far from camp and as we drove in to camp, we saw and heard a jackal.

Tuesday 11-03-2008

#### Morning drive

We started off with a sighting of 75 elephants around the M1 Crossing. We watched them drinking, browsing, grazing and interacting. They were quiet but sometimes we heard them rumbling as a group moved on. A lovely sound.

At the Jwala Broken Weir we found the new pride of lions. Two males and four females. Two of them were mating while the others were resting close by.

Close to the MJ watertanks we found seven hyena's. When you have a closer look at them they are actually beautiful and impressive animals.

Close to camp we saw a large herd of impala. Most of the young ones are almost as big as the adults now, but we found a tiny one in this herd as well, all legs and ears.

#### Afternoon drive

The lions were still at Jwala Broken Weir, but we could only see four of them this time. Two of them were mating.

We saw a lot of elephants. At the M1 Crossing, at White Cliffs and at Croc Pool. In total we saw more than 150 elephants!

At White Cliffs we also found two leopards. One of them walked in the dry riverbed and the other one was walking in the bush. Both were in great condition.

When we were driving back, we found a hyena at the MJ/TK Junktion. It was feeding on a dove! A small snack for a hyena.

Wednesday 12-03-2008

#### Morning drive

As we left camp we saw a large troop of baboons. They were basking in the light of the rising sun and the little ones were playing in a tree.

At White Cliffs, Croc Pool and Dispute Corner we saw elephants. Drinking, grazing, browsing and taking a mud bath. There must have been more than 200 in total and we had a wonderful time watching them.

Almost on top of Wildebeest Koppie we saw a leopard resting in the shade. When they rest like that, it is very hard to see them, but our ranger still spotted him. It was such a pleasure to watch this beautiful cat.

#### Afternoon drive

We saw a herd of eland this afternoon - a few females and one huge grey bull. What an impressive animal!

At Elephant Valley we saw a large herd of 100 elephants browsing, grazing and slowly moving on. The view was stunning and after a while we drove down to have a closer look at the elephants. There was a young elephant baby that couldn't have been older than a few days.

When we were about to leave Elephant Valley we saw a leopard walking in the bush. It looked like it was on it's way to go hunting. We followed it for a while, but lost sight of it eventually.

Thursday 13-03-2008

Morning drive

Not far from camp we saw a steenbok female. We looked around to see if we could spot the male as well, but couldn't find it (these little creatures mate for life).

Close to Majale Cocktail Spot we found 4 lions of the new pride again. Two were resting and two were mating.

At Croc Pool we watched a herd of 50 elephants grazing, browsing and drinking. A little baby seemed to be very tired. Every time it's mother stopped, it would quickly lie down.

As we drove past a burrow a warthog came running out, dust flying all over! We had a bit of a giggle and were about to drive on when five little ones and another adult shot out of the same burrow. Warthogs go in to the burrow tail end first and we saw why... to be able to leave and run quickly!

Afternoon drive

We found a group of giraffe browsing in the golden afternoon light. Wonderful!

Close to Majale Cocktail Spot we found four of the new pride of lions. Two of them were mating.

Not far from there we saw 15 elephants browsing. The only thing we could hear was the chewing, stripping off leaves, breaking off branches and a rumble every now and then.

Close to Croc Pool we found a leopard. It was resting under a tree.

Friday 14-03-2008

Morning drive

Elephants everywhere this morning! At White Cliffs, Pole Hill, Disappointment Koppie, Croc Pool and Nels Dam. We saw more than 200 of them.

But that wasn't all. At Khanda Waterhole we found a lioness feeding on a wildebeest kill.

Three hyena's were resting close by.

And at the Matabole/Nyaswe Confluence we found a leopard cub resting! We didn't see the mother. She was probably out hunting.

Afternoon drive

This time we found two male lions at Khanda Waterhole feeding on the wildebeest kill. We watched them for quite a while, listening to the sounds of feeding lions.

There were five hyena's resting around them, waiting for a chance to get some of the kill.

While we drove in a dry riverbed, we saw a duiker. We only saw it for a few seconds, but it was great to see it as they aren't often seen.

Then, at McNeils Pool, we saw a huge herd of elephant. There were more than 150 of them.

Family group by family group they walked past, drank and walked on. Each family waiting for it's turn at the waterhole.

Saturday 15-03-2008

Morning drive

When we went to Khanda Waterhole, we found 15 hyena's feeding on the wildebeest kill! We found all six of the new lion pride a bit later, at Croc Pool. They were resting in the shade after a good meal.

Not far from the lions we saw a herd of 50 elephants drinking. They quietly came in, drank and walked on.

From the top of a koppie we watched a mixed herd of zebra and wildebeest down in the Valley. A wonderful sight.

#### Afternoon drive

Three lions of the new pride, a female and two males, were still resting at Croc Pool. We didn't see the others.

At White Cliffs and Fig Tree Crossing we watched elephants drink and feed. There were in total around 80 of them.

But the most exciting thing we saw this afternoon was an African Rock Python feeding on a small vervet monkey at Braai Koppie! What a special sighting that was, except for the porridge monkey!

Sunday 16-03-2008

#### Morning drive

We found the new pride of lions, all six of them, again at Croc Pool. They were resting in the shade still looking full.

Not far from the lions we watched a herd of elephants drinking. There must have been at least 50 of them.

At Kanda Waterhole we found an old lioness. She was resting too.

We saw dassies this morning. They were trying to get warm, but it was a cool, windy and overcast day, so there was no sun for them to bask.

We saw a group of about 15 giraffe browsing close to the dirt road. Two of them were startled by our arrival and ran for a few meters. Quite an impressive sight. It almost looks like slow motion, but they move very fast!

#### Sunday, 16 March

We set out with a cool morning breeze against our faces as we drove through the game reserve. Many animals were already out and about and not far from camp we came across a herd of wildebeests moving through the grass. At Crocodile pool the new pride of lions was found fast asleep. It is amazing to see how quickly these lions accepted the vehicles. Another lioness, most likely a female from the Majale Island pride, was seen close by at Kanda waterhole also resting in the early morning sun. A herd of nearly 50 elephants came down to Crocodile pool while we were there for a drink and suddenly the lions were far more wary and rather nervous of so many elephants.

We met up again with the four lions near Crocodile pool along the Majale River on our afternoon drive. This time the two males were once again mating with the two lionesses. The highlight of the evening, however, was a sighting of a magnificent female leopard just after sunset. She was on the prowl and we followed her for sometime as she moved along the Majale River near White Cliffs.

#### Monday, 17 March

A cloudy, cold morning as we set out on our drive. The lions had moved towards the water tanks where we tracked them down. The older lioness had once more joined the group and all were fast asleep when we arrived. At Crocodile pool, along the Majale River, we came across a young male leopard on the move. As he moved along the riverbank a troop of baboons barked at his movement, warning every animal that would listen that there was a predator around. A herd of elephants was also on their way towards the Majale River and we waited along one of the elephant paths for them. Not long after the whole herd walked right past our vehicle. What an amazing experience!

It was a brilliant afternoon drive with lions, leopard and hyenas seen and most of it before the sun set.

#### Tuesday, 18 March

It is still very chilly and overcast but it was a great morning to be out in the African bush. This morning on the drive we had a great sighting of a herd of giraffes feeding next to the road.

One of the big males literally looked down on us as we passed him on the road. A family of bat eared foxes was a definite highlight. We also had great sightings of all the general game on offer at Mashatu from herds and herds of impala to families of zebras and herds of wildebeest. Near Dispute Corner we met up with a herd of about 15 elephants drinking in the river. Our next visit was to the Long Grass hyena den. Here we found a total of 8 hyenas including a few of the sub adults all resting outside the den.

This afternoon was still cold and windy but this did not deter us from exploring the reserve. High up in the reserve near the Tuli Circle we found a lone cheetah feeding on her impala kill. Elephants were also out and about and we spent some time with a large herd of about 50 elephants near Majale Cocktail spot. Our night drive back to camp was as exciting with a good sighting of an African wildcat hunting in the long grass and a large spotted genet in an Acacia tree.

#### Wednesday, 19 March

What an amazing morning. We set out with Jeanetta, the elephant scientist, in search of her study animals. To the west of Main Camp we came across a group of elephants walking through the thick mopane thicket. We stopped ahead of them and slowly the herd moved past us. Jeanetta identified the herd as that of Charge. One of the dominant cows walked right past the back of the vehicle and fell asleep no more than a few meters from the vehicle. While watching the herd a lone hyena strolled past in the distance. The next herd was seen along the banks of the Majale River. This was the herd of Funny Face. As we approached the herd two hyenas came running towards us, spooking the herd just a little bit. We watched this herd for sometime, watching the two new babies in the herd playing with each other. While watching the elephants a big male leopard climbed up a tree with a leg of a baby kudu in his jaws. We abandoned the elephants for a while and set off after the leopard which had by now moved into the long grass. After some spectacular off road driving by our ranger we found the male leopard again crunching on the bones not in the least bit bothered by our driving. A highlight this morning was three cheetahs playing.

This evening we tracked down the lions near the old Jwala weir after a long intense tracking session following fresh tracks this way and then that way. The young male leopard we saw on the morning drive was still in the vicinity and we had a great sighting of him feeding on the kudu calf he caught in the morning.

#### Thursday, 20 March

As we set out on our morning drive we watched the sun rise and with not a cloud in the sky today will be a hot day. We found the lions again this morning, this time near Hamerkop Crossing along the Majale River. But this morning we also spent time on the little things, learning more about the amazing bird life in the reserve and even looking at a few of the critters on the ground. Our ranger pointed out all the colourful birds for us and we learnt how to distinguish some of the birdcalls. Zebras and wildebeest were plentiful and along the bank of the Majale River near McNiels pool we found three big eland bulls feeding on the lush riverine vegetation.

#### Friday, 21 March

Today started off overcast and drizzly as we set out on our drive. It has been promising to rain for a few days now and maybe today we would receive some. But alas by the end of the morning drive the weather started clearing and even though it remained cloudy for most of the day we received no rain. The lions had moved once more and this time we found them lower down on the Majale River near Church Mashatu. The baboons alerted us to the presence of the lions with their continuous warning barks. Another great sighting this morning was that of a giant eagle owl high up in a Mashatu tree. Elephants were everywhere and we drove through several herds during our game drive.

What an exciting afternoon drive we had. We found the three cheetahs again and watched them kill an unfortunate impala, while the lions in the mean time had killed a warthog. While watching a herd of elephants one of the young babies got a piece of stick stuck in its mouth. It went crazy and immediately elephants from all over rushed to the young baby in a panic. Elephants were trumpeting, milling around and eventually the stick was dislodged and all

returned too normal. Near Kanda Rock camp we spotted an illusive leopard walking through the thick undergrowth along the river and we only had a quick glimpse of her before she disappeared.

#### Saturday, 22 March

This morning we once more set out with Jeanetta, the elephant scientist. Not far from the Main Camp we located our first elephant herd for the morning. It was the herd of Ilze. She had given birth a week or two ago to a little male and this morning we had a great view of mom and baby. Ilze and her tiny baby walked right past our vehicle with the whole herd in tow. We followed the herd for the morning all the way to the Majale River where they stopped for a drink before continuing towards the lower part of the river and the thick riverine where they spent the rest of the morning. Near the Majale River we also encountered yet another herd. This was the small family of Diana walking and feeding along the river's edge as they went along.