



Mashatu Game Sightings May 2007



Sunday 29 April

The day was filled with sightings of impalas, kudus, warthogs, wildebeests, zebras, jackals, steenbok, and baboons as well as two leopards!!

It was at the Majale crossing when ranger Fish spotted the first leopard. It was a juvenile leopard walking in the Majale Riverbed but as the vehicle got closer the timid leopard ran into the mopane trees for cover. Driving up the river we saw our second leopard hidden behind a termite mound.

A herd of forty elephants was seen wandering at Hammerkop Crossing. There were a few young ones that were drinking water and splashing each other. It was wonderful to see these calves being so playful. The bigger elephants were browsing nearby in the mopane trees and paid little attention to their young elephants or to us.

Sundowners were enjoyed with great sightings of bushbabies. Driving back to camp we also saw a small spotted genet and an African wild cat.

Monday 30 April

The early morning started off a bit chilly but as soon as the sun had risen it got very warm very quickly! The highlight of today was seeing a brown hyena and it was also our first sighting of the day. Brown hyenas are rare to see at Mashatu but amazingly this one was found walking straight towards Main camp. The hyena had an old carcass in its mouth that looked like the backbone of a giraffe. After spotting the hyena all the guests were excited and on a mission to spot lots of game.

At Crocodile Pool we spotted a herd of twenty elephants. The huge grays were having an early morning browse and the leaves were fresh and moist. At Braai Kopppie there was another herd of twenty elephants seen wandering through the bush. A third herd of thirty elephants was found drinking water at Dispute Corner. To our disbelief another brown hyena was spotted at Pole Hill to end off a wonderful morning's drive.

The afternoon drive was for big cats. The rangers tried their best and at the Limpopo Airfield a leopard was

seen stalking duiker. The duiker had seen the leopard and it ran away and finally hid in an abandoned burrow. We were all worried about the duiker's choice of refuge, but the leopard moved on and the duiker finally came out of the burrow quite safe. Another glimpse of a female leopard was had near the horse safari operation where the rangers were tracking lion spoor. It was here they eventually also spotted the Majale Island Pride of lions walking toward the Limpopo River.

Tuesday 01 May

It was yet another wonderful day at Mashatu! Game sighting were plentiful and included baboons, bat eared fox, bushbucks, duikers, small spotted genet, elands, giraffes, impalas, jackals, kudus, vervet monkey, steenbok, warthogs, wildebeest and zebras!!

An elegance of four cheetahs was spotted hunting at Pole hill this morning. A cheetah's body is slender and meant for speed. Unlike other cats they have non-retractable claws that help them to grip when involved in a high speed chase. The impalas saw the cats heading towards them and made good their escape. The cheetah's left the impalas to flee and continued on their way. A herd of seventy-five elephant was seen wandering along at Crocodile pool.

Wednesday 02 May

Guests set off an afternoon drive and were thrilled to find a herd of about one hundred elands with zebras and wildebeest all in one spot. It was an amazing thing to watch as the animals congregated in the one area.

Although none of the big cats were spotted we were able to enjoy sightings of numerous other species such as the bat eared fox, baboons, rock dassies, civet cat, elands, small spotted genet, giraffes, impalas, jackals, kudus, monkeys steenboks, warthog and the African wild cat.

A herd of fifty elephants was seen at Crocodile pool, they were drinking while others were browsing the surrounding trees.

Thursday 03 May

It has been a bit cold in the early mornings since the beginning of the week but today there was no chill in the air and by 5.30am the guests were already on the terrace enjoying breakfast. Beautiful choruses came from the birds, jackals could be heard calling in the distance and the laugh of the hyena was also heard.

It was a day planned for elephants and at Majale Island there a herd of seventy-five elephants was found while another herd of twenty elephants was seen at Dispute corner drinking water. Much time was spent following the herds and watching them go about their daily routine.

The guests opted for a cycle safari from the camp in the afternoon - Paul led the group out to enjoy the Mashatu experience from the back of a bike rather than a landrover!

Friday 04 May

This morning our guests were once again rearing to go and they were not disappointed - at Jackals koppie there was an elegance of three cheetahs seen taking it easy. The mother was lying down while the three cubs were full of energy and playing with each other as well as climbing all over their mother! The guests were thrilled and were able to take dozens of pictures.

An active leopard was spotted at Old rock camp. While watching the male leopard three hyenas were seen busy feasting on a carcass nearby. The kill could have been made by the leopard and then stolen away by the cheeky hyenas...

Sunday 13 May

It had been a great week at Mashatu Tent Camp. The "Pondies" had occupied the camp - each year a web camera runs at Pete's pond and there are numerous avid supporters and bloggers who frequent the website. Marian, a-k-a Mama Africa, organized a trip to Tent Camp for some of the die hard supporters. In the afternoon the guests headed to Pete's pond where they had cocktails and a crocodile showed up. Impalas, guinea fowls

warthogs also passed by the pond to check out the "Pondies". Dinner was enjoyed at Pete's Pond next to the hide. Guests got the chance to man the camera aided by Pete. After dinner a huge herd of elephant came down to drink, exactly what the guests have been waiting and hoping for!



Monday 14

Yet another wonderful day! The guests had decided to sleep in this morning and the afternoon was planned for some fun time at the local village. The Noakes party wanted to experience more than the African safari experience and we arranged for them to meet the villagers and see them in their day-to-day lives.

Driving along the M1, at Nyaswe, a female hyena was spotted on the road. The highlight of the village trip was visiting a primary school where the pupils were practicing traditional dance. They also visited the basket-weaving site. Driving from the village we then headed to the Mmamkwa ruins where we had sundowners at Cecil Rhodes baobab.

Tuesday 15

The afternoon drive was amazing. We had not see leopard for two days but today we found a beautiful female leopard walking along the river at Fig tree Crossing. As the leopard saw us it paused and then we watched as it gracefully walked away. At Elephant Valley a herd of about twenty elephants was seen. The elephants were spread out all through the valley. General game sightings included zebras, wildebeests, waterbuck, warthogs, steenboks, monkeys, kudus, jackals, impalas, giraffes, elands, bushbuck, bat eared fox and baboons.

The highlight of the drive was spotting a honey badger and bushbabies. At the Nyaswe/Olifant confluence five hyenas were found feasting on a carcass of an impala. We also had another two sightings of a male hyena and a herd of ten elephants at Frazer Jones weir.

Wednesday 16

The early mornings are very cold now but as the sun rose it warmed up quickly. While enjoying breakfast on the terrace we watched two jackals drinking at the waterhole. Driving out of Mashatu Main Camp we came across impalas just at the entrance and we had to wait for them to walk away before passing by. A herd of twenty elephants was wandering along near Braai Koppie eating the moist mopane leaves.

The afternoon was planned for elephants. While enjoying high tea at Main camp a herd of ten elephants came down to the waterhole to drink water. They gulped the water then sprayed it over their big bodies. Another herd of fifteen elephants was seen at Jwala Broken weir where they were feasting while strolling along and a third herd of elephants was spotted wandering at Braai Koppie.

Thursday 17

This was one of the best mornings ever in Mashatu. We were following lion's tracks in the Uitspan area when we saw a lone giraffe. Driving closer to the giraffe we saw that it had a tiny baby giraffe with it and the mother was busy licking the little creature. The baby was just a few hours old!!!!!! We watched this for an hour when

finally the baby giraffe stood up and walked a few steps. The mother walked slowly with the young one following.

Moving on we found the Majale Island Pride at the vlei outline where the six lions were resting in the long grass. Along the M1 crossing we spotted an active hyena walking towards the White Cliffs.

Friday 18

This afternoon the guests decided to start off with a walk from camp then a game drive back to camp after sundowners. By walking the guests got to see new things closer up not generally seen whilst on the vehicles. Fresh animal tracks were distinguished from each other as well as the different animal droppings.

Guests that were on the game drive already saw the Majale island pride that was still around the vlei area. The lions were stalking impalas but did not manage to catch one. A female leopard was spotted at Old rock camp resting in the mopane trees.

Saturday 19

The Elephant Valley Pride is back and the two cubs are looking big and strong. This pride was found at Dispute corner where the mother and her two sub adults were sleeping and the two cubs were walking from site to site watchful of the nearby impalas. At Moddegat three leopards were found among the mopane trees and two hyenas were spotted resting. At the Nyaswe/Olifant confluence a pack of five hyenas were found also resting. Along the Nyaswe River was a herd of thirty elephants that grazed, browsed and walked through the mopane trees.

This afternoon the lions seen in the morning had not moved an inch and we had a good sighting of them once again. At Moddegat there were two leopards spotted – a male leopard with a sub adult resting in a Mashatu tree. The hyenas that were seen in the morning had not moved either and we had another wonderful view of them.

Sunday 20 May

The morning was warm though the breeze was cool - winter will be here very soon. Despite this the guests, not bothered at all, set off on game drive. The Elephant Valley Pride was once again found on the Mashatu reserve - it was great to see the lions strolling gracefully along at Fig Tree Crossing. At Pole Hill there was an elegance of four cheetahs spotted. The mother cheetah was with her three juvenile cubs walking. Cheetahs are diurnal animals meaning they are active during the day. You can never confuse the "crying cats" with leopard as they have black tear marks. Another spotted creature was seen at Braai Koppie - it was a male hyena lying just by the road. Seventy-five elephants were found at Jackals Koppie where they browsed and grazed.

In the afternoon the Elephant Valley Pride was still in the same position and so were the cheetahs. It was at Nyaswe den where we saw five hyenas. There were three adult hyenas and two tiny cubs that were about a month old. The hyena cubs were calling out and full of life. To the east of Tent Camp there was a herd of thirty elephants. Amongst this herd two bulls were seen play fighting against the mopane tree.

Monday 21 May

We had a wonderful start to the morning drive with great sighting of baboons, duikers, elands, giraffes, impalas, jackals, kudus, monkeys, steenboks, warthogs, wildebeests and zebras. Eventually we found the Elephant Valley lions walking at Crocodile Pool headed to the west. The male sub-adult walked just like you would imagine the King of the Jungle would – with elegance and power. At Frazer Jones Weir twenty elephants were spotted walking along the weir. Another herd was spotted at Tent Camp while a third herd was seen at Eagles Nest.

The cheetah that had been seen at Pole hill yesterday had moved to Kanda Corner where we were able to get some lovely photos. To the west of Main Camp a lone hyena was spotted while five hyenas were seen at the Nyaswe/Olifant confluence. At Fig Tree Crossing we found two active porcupines walking along the river.

Tuesday 22 May

There was a lot going on at last night - hyenas were calling, so were jackals, and we heard the call of an African fish eagle at first light. As we enjoyed breakfast we heard a lion roar from the west of Main camp. Driving from Main camp we had great sighting of impalas, elands, kudus, zebras, wildebeests, steenboks and baboons. At the water tanks we found three cheetahs and on the other side of the water tanks we saw the lions! It was the Elephant Valley pride and the lions were relaxed.

The hyenas at the Olifant/Nyaswe confluence have made a den and they have cubs. We were blessed to see two tiny cubs with two adult hyenas. The hyena cubs looked tiny and so sweet. A total of one hundred elephants were seen on the morning drive as well today!

It was yet another breathtaking afternoon in Mashatu! Less than a kilometer away from the Tented camp was a leopard with an impala kill. The female leopard was at the top of a Shephard tree feasting and a lone male hyena was underneath the tree, drooling and hoping that the leopard would drop the carcass. The hyenas that were seen at Olifant/Nyaswe confluence were still there with their cubs running around the den.

Thursday 24 May

The temperatures had changed dramatically from the previous day. The morning was very cold. While drinking coffee on the terrace a hyena came to the water hole. The hyena was next to the resident crocodile that lying extremely still, but didn't bother the hyena while it drank. The day was planned for elephants and at Scrapper seventy-five elephants were found meandering through the veld. Another herd of fifty elephants was found strolling at Old Rock camp.

In the afternoon we had a cheetah sighting At Fika futi. The "crying cats" were walking gracefully, giving us the opportunity to take amazing pictures. There were two leopards found at Cheetah Koppie and less than a kilometer away from them were two hyenas that were lying in the road and didn't move an inch as we passed by. A herd of seventy elephants was spotted eating the vegetation found at Cheetahs Koppie.

Friday 25 May

The afternoon drive was amazing as we have two unusual sightings - we saw two bushbabies and a salu mongoose. The mongoose was full of zip at Majale Island and as we followed it we saw two bushbabies on the other side of the Island. The Majale Island pride lioness was spotted at Long Grass. At first when we saw the lioness we could not see the cubs then we drove away to have sundowners. While enjoying sundowners there was a leopard call not far from us and a hyena call. We drove back to go and find the lioness but she had moved on. We followed her tracks found not only lioness but her four lovely cubs as well walking in the open savanna.

While enjoying dinner at Main Camp a herd of about thirty elephants came to the water hole. They drank and also splashed water over themselves. As the elephants walked away from the waterhole two hyenas showed up and as they were about to drink the water a juvenile elephant raced towards the hyenas trumpeting. The entire herd then trumpeted and chased the hyenas away!! An incredible end to a wonderful day!

Saturday 26 May

The temperatures today were still low, but despite the cool weather our guest headed out on the early morning drive. The trackers always offer our guests hot water bottles, and as the sun rose we were once again nice and warm. A female leopard was spotted at Majale Island, and nearby the Majale Island Pride was found sleeping. To the south of Pole Hill we spotted an elegance of four cheetahs. We visited the Nyaswe/Olifant hyena den and were lucky enough to find seven hyenas resting. Elephants were also seen moving from Jackals Koppie towards Pitsane koppie. A total count of one hundred and fifty elephants was made!

Sunday 27 May

Today was a relatively quiet day in terms of game viewing. The animals probably decided to take a rest day as well...but our patience was rewarded with sightings of two small herds of elephants in the morning and five spotted hyenas in the late afternoon. Two adult spotted hyenas were resting at the Nyaswe den entrance whilst three small pups played all around them. The one pup was notably larger than the other two, which seemed to be siblings. The adults were so relaxed and unconcerned about the little ones running not only around, but also over them! We did find a number of spectacular birds throughout the day, including Verreaux's eagle-owl, lanner falcon and black-headed oriole. Two other memorable sightings for the day were bat-eared foxes near Scrapper and a porcupine near Main Camp.

Monday 28 May

Sightings picked up on what was a very cold Monday. Pete's Pond produced a wonderful sighting of 50 elephants drinking and playing in the fresh water. Because the waterhole is fed with fresh water every day, it attracts huge quantities of animals every day! A patient observer at Pete's Pond could easily be rewarded with

sightings of elephants, zebra, wildebeest, eland, impala, baboons, and even lions on a good morning! Speaking of which – the Majale Island Pride was found not far from the pond at Rock Camp. Only the two sub-adults, a male and female, were seen. There was no sign of the daughter, her four tiny cubs and her granny. She has been spending a lot of time in and around the Vlei lately – an area which makes it very difficult to locate her. Other memorable sightings included a family of six black-backed jackals, a big group of ostriches, a group of banded mongoose, and a massive old giraffe bull drinking water at Tent Camp's waterhole.

Tuesday 29 May

The cold weather certainly seemed to influence morning time game viewing. Animals were hiding in the thickets where it was probably a bit warmer than the open plains. We did find a herd of 40 elephants along the Matabole River, but then it's difficult to hide 40 massive four-ton pachyderms, even in the thickest of terrain! Although it was a quiet morning, we did have an unforgettable sighting at Beacon Hill: below us, on the banks of the river and beyond we counted what must have been close to 70 giraffe! Necks were sticking out behind every bush. Bulls, cows, tiny calves – they were all present in great numbers! The Giraffes seemed to have scattered in the afternoon, but it must be said that we didn't search for the herd for too long. Other creatures were keeping us busy: A slow drive along the Majale Island produced two young leopard cubs lying on the bank of the river near Croc Pool. They were extremely relaxed! As we called in another vehicle, the call came over the radio that they had also found a leopard, a young male, not even 500 meters away! It was making its way towards us and before we knew it, the three leopards were all within a 100 meter radius. A spotted hyaena even made a short appearance. As if it hadn't been enough – a family of three cheetahs surprised us at the Nyaswe-Matabole confluence where they had killed a large impala ram. What an unforgettable evening!

Wednesday 30 May

The morning started off on a high as we watched five adult spotted hyaenas at Frazer Jones Weir where they were drinking. From there they moved north into terrain which didn't allow us to keep up. Elephants were plentiful in the same area – maybe 20 or more individuals – but the best elly sighting was at Croc Pool where we found nearly 70 of them! General game was seen throughout the drive – baboons, vervet monkeys, eland, and impala seemed to be around every corner. In the evening we headed to where a young elephant calf was found dead. It probably died of poor health and the Majale Island Pride were busy feeding on it at Jackal's Koppie. Granny, the daughter and her four cubs were all present! The sighting was amazing, but the stench was just enough for us to call it a night after about ten minutes. On the way back to camp we came across genet, African wild cat and a porcupine family.

Thursday 31 May

Again we started the morning with spotted hyaenas. This time two adults were found at Old Rock Camp crossing in the Majale riverbed. Not far from there lay three cheetahs – a mother and two sub-adults. They tried to capture an impala, but were not successful. It was an impressive attempt, however, and we decided to spend the rest of the morning with them in the hope of seeing a kill. It never happened. After some deliberation we eventually decided to spend the rest of the day with them – patience certainly would increase our chances of seeing the action! We had a quick brunch at Main Camp before heading out again. They had moved southwest, but Bashi, our ranger quickly tracked them down successfully by following their pug marks. The skill was impressive! From there the three spotted cats moved further south to where we were not allowed to follow them any more – they had left the boundaries of the reserve. A herd of elephants were on their heels. Bashi took us back down to the Majale River and before we knew it we were parked four meters from an extremely relaxed leopard male! Not even a honey badger could distract him as it crossed the riverbed about 100 meters from the young leopard.

