

## **Mashatu Game Sightings 2nd - 29th November 2008**



### **Sunday 2 November, 2008**

What a morning for predators! We encountered two big male lions fast asleep in an open patch in the Longgrass area. Not far from here one of the lionesses had her cubs. A magnificent female leopard and her male cub were spotted resting in a big Mashatu tree near the confluence of the Matabole and Majale rivers. Both were draped over a branch with all four paws hanging down limply. Nearby, we watched a small family of elephants feeding on the dried leaves of the Mashatu tree. The hyenas were also out and about in large numbers with seven hyenas all around McNiel's Pool, and yet another four walking near Braai Koppie.

Again leopards and lions on our evening drive, with a visit from a small herd of elephants over dinnertime at the Main Camp waterhole. What a way to end the evening!

### **Monday 3 November, 2008**

A great morning out on the reserve! Once again we came across a pride of lions. The New Pride, as they are called, was all fast asleep when we tracked them down near Scrapper. Not far from the lions, the beautiful female leopard and her young male cub were spotted also fast asleep high up in a Mashatu tree. Near Nel's Windmill we came across a large herd of elephants with several young babies. While the babies were playing and pushing each other around, the mothers were walking from tree to tree, sampling thorny twigs as they moved along.

The afternoon drive was as eventful, with another visit to the lions and leopards. There were also great sightings of Bat-Eared foxes and a Giant Spotted eagle owl. Not far from camp we came across an African wild cat hidden under a shrubby Mopane bush.



### **Tuesday 4 November, 2008**

The temperatures have dropped slightly. As we set out this morning, dark clouds shadowed the reserve. Two lionesses from the Majale Island pride were tracked down near the vlei and Majale Island respectively. Elephants were also out and about, and on both the morning and evening drives several herds were located. During our drives we also spotted a group of magnificent eland bulls walking together. A small family of zebras was feeding on what remained of the grass along the Matabole River, while a lone wildebeest bull stood silently under a shady Shepherd's tree.

While socialising in the bar just before dinner, we watched as a lone porcupine made its way along the waterhole's edge.

### **Wednesday 5 November, 2008**

The wild dogs are back in Botswana, and this morning the rangers located them close to the Limpopo River. They watched in astonishment as the dogs took down a pretty large eland calf. In no time at all there was nothing left of the poor animal. It was not only the wild dogs that were enjoying eland this morning. One of the male lions was spotted near Bryce's store near the Pitsane River feeding on an old eland bull. None of the pride members were seen anywhere nearby. It was only the elephants that seem to be sticking near to the trees, and we watched a group of about 30 elephants feeding hungrily on the numerous Acacia trees.



### **Thursday 6 November, 2008**

This morning we set out with Jeanetta (the elephant researcher) in search of elephants - we were not disappointed! Along the Majale River we came across the first of the herds of the morning, and were introduced to Ilze and her family. Ilze is a big female with two beautiful tusks - her baby only a few months old. We watched in awe as the females in the herd picked off one thorny twig after another from the many Umbrella thorn trees in the area. The next herd was that of Sofie. Jeanetta told us about the ordeal one of the young females went through a month or so ago, and watched as she carelessly walked passed our vehicle swinging her healing trunk. One of the babies, tired of walking, fell asleep next to his mother's feet. The last herd for the morning was that of Therese. We found several of the females all feeding on one big Umbrella thorn. We wondered what was different about this tree to all the other Umbrella thorns in the vicinity. By 10h00 it was warming up quite nicely and soon the herd moved towards the big shady Mashatu trees for their midday siesta.

In the evening the wild dogs made yet another kill - this time not just one eland calf, but three young calves all at once. What an incredible sighting! A herd of elephants were also making their way to the Main Camp, and were drinking at the waterhole as everyone arrived for pre-dinner drinks at the Gin Trap bar.

### **Friday 7 November, 2008**

A wonderful morning drive with a visit to the two male lions and their sister close to Scrapper. We then moved off to the three lionesses fast asleep near Longgrass. At Baboons Bedroom a female leopard was draped over a big Mashatu branch, fast asleep. It was only the two hyenas at Hamerkop Crossing that seemed to be on the move, as well as a beautiful group of elephants feeding on the moribund grass on Majale Island.

As everyone gathered on the terrace for high tea, the wind starting picking up and soon thunder could be heard. The temperatures dropped and several parts of the reserve received rain. We set out on our afternoon drive, and were rewarded with a magnificent sighting of a female leopard feeding on the remains of an earlier kill. At sunset we watched the lightning dance across the African skies and listened to the distant thunder. It was time to return home - and not a minute too soon!



## **Saturday 8 November, 2008**

A glorious overcast morning as we set out on our morning drive - with 7 mm of rain recorded at the Main Camp the night before. Our objective was to find the Tuli elephants. As we drove we could smell the wet soil, and everything looked clean and fresh. En route we watched a lovely herd of kudu, several giraffes (including a huge big bull) browsing on an Umbrella thorn. At last we located a group of elephants and as we watched them, the group got bigger and bigger. Jeanetta introduced us to the matriarch of the group, Terese, and explained that this is one of the more dominant groups in the area, numbering close to 40 animals. As we watched the elephants, our ranger Maifala pointed towards the Majale riverbank to a magnificent female lion lying on the bank of the river. As we drove closer, she got up, stretched and walked to a nearby tree where she scratched her claws before slowly winding through the bushes calling softly as she went a long.

The evening drive was eventful with a magnificent leopard feeding on a kudu, and loads of general game. En route to camp, our ranger Elvis spotted an Aardvark – a very rare sighting indeed!



## **Sunday 9 November, 2008**

Sunday morning was overcast and relatively cool for this time of year in the Northern Tuli Game Reserve. A sub adult female cheetah was spotted on the flats around Braai Koppie taking advantage of the mild weather to hunt. Nearby, four hyenas rested and a herd of around twenty elephants fed on the move.

Afternoon game viewers came across a female leopard and her juvenile cub at Baboons' Bedroom, and a herd of elephants feeding in the thick riverine woodland nearby. Further up-river, another leopardess was spotted on the confluence of the Nyaswe and Matobole rivers.

### **Monday 10 November, 2008**

Another relatively cool, cloudy day in the land of Mashatu, which ended with a lovely long, soaking bout of light rain. The New Pride lion trio was tracked to their resting spot on the Pitsane River in the morning. The female leopard and her cub were sought out at Baboons' Bedroom once again, where they were found alternately feeding on a kill and resting in the boughs of a great Mashatu tree. The surroundings apparently remain a hotspot for the elephants, as a large group was seen taking advantage of the emerging greenery in the same area. As the sun was going down over Kudugat Pool far to the west, along the Majale River, a massive male leopard was seen mating with a female. The courtship ritual was breathtaking to see, if a little violent for the uninitiated!

### **Tuesday 11 November, 2008**

Tuesday was hot, humid and overcast. Little was seen in the way of predators, but elephants and general game were in abundance.

### **Wednesday 12 November, 2008**

The weather continued to be hot and humid on Wednesday, with a low of 22°C during the early hours of the morning. The New Pride lion trio, consisting of two young adult males and their sister, were found feeding on an eland at Scrapper. As game viewers looked on, a herd of twenty elephants came across the kill scene and reacted as only elephants can; they showed the lions what they thought of them and tried to drive the lions off the kill. The lions evaded the elephant charges and went back to feeding as soon as the elephants had passed. Further north at Well-shaped Mashatu an adult female leopard was found resting in the shade, obviously lethargic in the heavy afternoon heat. Later in the evening a long soaking drizzle fell over the reserve, preparing the soil and plants for greater things to come, and cooling the night air.

### **Thursday 13 November, 2008**

The sun was obviously still beating down on Mashatu from above the clouds on Thursday as temperatures quickly soared to 30°C and the humidity climbed due to the previous night's rain. The lions were found still feeding on the eland at Scrapper in the morning. Up on the Matobole River, five hyenas fed on a kudu carcass at Frazer-Jones Weir, with thirty elephants browsing nearby. Twenty elephants were seen drinking at Majale Crocodile Pool which had swollen back to pool status after the rain.

The lions remained at their eland feast in the afternoon, clearly not about to go anywhere in a hurry. A solitary hyena remained resting near the kudu at Frazer-Jones Weir and the elephants came down to drink at the re-filled weir. All this was seen within the first hour of the afternoon game drive, as by five o'clock the heavens had opened in an almighty downpour, dousing any hopes for a longer drive - but invigorating this arid landscape. The Majale River filled to flowing point in front of Main Camp in under 15 minutes – a true African spectacle!

### **Friday 14 November, 2008**

The clouds seemed to be clearing on Friday, although temperatures and humidity remained high. The New Pride lions had still not budged from their dwindling, watery carcass in the

morning. An adult leopardess and her large male offspring were active in the Well-shaped Mashatu area, allowing a characteristically relaxed, close-up view of these two gorgeous cats. The pair are often seen here and are apparently completely undisturbed by the game viewers. Thirty elephants browsed at Lucenda Crossing, while down to the south-west the entire pack of 25 African wild dogs was sighted on the move near Pete's Pond. These charismatic animals have been traveling far and wide recently, and it is great to see them back on the reserve.

In the afternoon a dead kudu was found in Eric's Donga, presumably a victim of starvation, exhaustion and finally a flash flood during the previous day's deluge. The carcass was being cleaned up in classic bush style with over thirty White-backed vultures, six Cape vultures and a pair of hyenas in attendance. The lions remained with their eland kill for the third day running, although the carcass was clearly coming to the end of its use to them. The pair of leopards seen in the morning was still in the same area, apparently in no hurry to move before darkness fell.

### **Saturday 15 November, 2008**

A relatively quiet, warm morning drive saw six hyenas moving along the Majale River at Lucenda Crossing, while scattered around the whole area around fifty elephants fed while on the move. The wild dog pack was located once again, this time resting at Nel's Dam.

In the afternoon general game were found aplenty, while the highlight was undoubtedly a sighting of a lioness with two young cubs suckling near Nel's Windmill.



### **Sunday 16 November, 2008**

Sunday morning started off quietly over Mashatu, with some cloud and a moderate breeze. Game viewers were overwhelmed by elephants as these giants seemed to be everywhere – over a hundred scattered between Gabions and Lucenda, thirty at Nel's Windmill and another herd of over thirty below Jackal's Koppie. All were focused on either eating or getting to food. A special treat was a sighting of seventeen newly hatched ostrich chicks all running in formation behind their mother.

The afternoon was generous, with a wonderful view of the entire pack of African wild dogs down in the south east of the reserve, near the confluence of the Pitsane and Limpopo rivers. The dogs were playful and active as usual, which allowed interesting, if blurry, photographs to be taken by all. A couple of hyenas were seen out and about near Pole hill and Sesana se Motha, while nearly 50 elephants browsed on acacia trees at Nel's Windmill. Late in the afternoon heavy rain began to fall and rain ponchos were the order of the day. This much-needed moisture cooled everything down but reduced chances of seeing game for the rest of the drive.

### **Monday 17 November, 2008**

Monday was overcast and relatively cool. A single hyena was seen on the way out of Main Camp as the vehicles headed south. Around 120 elephants were seen moving, feeding and drinking near Jackal's Koppie. This large number was made up of a number of large family units numbering between 20 and 40, and indicates that the elephants are beginning to take advantage of the abundances of the rainy season to get some missed social interaction. There was a highly unusual day sighting of the nocturnal African civet in the Moddergat area, as well bat-eared foxes near Cheetah's Koppie.

The afternoon saw a pair of leopards feeding on an impala near the airfield, and around a hundred elephants spread out in the open acacia woodland near Jackal's Koppie. After sunset some guests glimpsed a spotted genet hunting a scrub hare, and shortly afterwards a porcupine shuffled across the road on its nightly search for food.

### **Tuesday 18 November, 2008**

A warm, humid and cloudy day was the result of all the moisture in the air from previous rainfall events. The morning began cool however, and some predators were clearly taking advantage of this pleasant start to the day. Two lionesses accompanied by a pigeon pair of lion cubs were found resting in the open near Jackal's Koppie. Three adult, and two sub-adult hyenas were spotted resting in the middle of an open plain near Eric's Donga. Nearly 150 elephants were spread out amongst the pools and woodland beneath Jackal's Koppie where they took advantage of the clouds to do some midday feeding. A male grey duiker was spotted in the riverine woodland at Hamerkop Crossing, where he seems to have taken up residence.

In the afternoon the New Pride lion trio was discovered in a resting spot in the Scrapper area, not far from the remains of the eland carcass from a few days before. Elephants seemed to be swarming this area, and could readily be seen feeding in family groups. A female leopard and her sub-adult male cub were active in the Dead Croton area and three hyenas were on the prowl on the Cheetahs Koppie flats after dark.

### **Wednesday 19 November, 2008**

The humidity finally broke on Wednesday, with a steady fine drizzle helping to cool the air all day. The two New Pride male lions and their sister were active at Scrapper, where they had evidently been waiting for the cooler weather to move in. The leopardess and large male cub were still resting at Dead Croton, close to where they were seen the evening before. The elephant hordes were also still in much the same location as they had been the previous afternoon.

In the damp afternoon a single lioness with her two cubs was found resting near Jackal's Koppie, while a small group of around 15 elephants browsed nearby below Cheetah's Koppie. On the smaller side, guests saw bat-eared fox, duiker, klipspringer and both small and large spotted genets on the drives too.



#### **Thursday 20 November, 2008**

Thursday was another damp day with 5ml of drizzle falling throughout the course of the day. In the freshness of the morning a new born wildebeest calf was encountered; the first of many on the reserve. Three lionesses with two cubs were found resting in the open amongst shepherd's bushes near Jackal's Koppie. Close by, at Cheetahs' Koppie three adult lions fed on a freshly killed wildebeest. Further south at Graham's Tree, three hyenas were seen, and around twenty elephants browsed on the move near Pole Hill. The spectacle of a pair of Southern Ground Hornbills mating in a tree was enjoyed by guests, as well as a third hornbill who looked on from a nearby branch.

In the afternoon the lions were still feeding on the wildebeest, while another lioness and her two cubs joined the other females near Jackal's Koppie. Not far away, in the Scrapper area, thirty elephants browsed contentedly.

#### **Friday 21 November, 2008**

Friday morning continued the trend with a cool, damp morning with steady drizzle lasting almost the entire drive. Despite the difficult conditions, the guides were able to locate around fifty elephants from two known herds walking and feeding on umbrella thorn trees to the north east of Pole Hill. These groups appeared to be moving in the direction of Figtree Crossing with the matriarch Hestelle uncharacteristically in the lead.

Although there were no big predator sightings, plenty of other animals were seen. Baboons, giraffe, eland, kudu, wildebeest, zebra, jackal and klipspringer were all seen, along with a rare sighting of the indomitable honey badger.

The afternoon followed a similar pattern with the plains game and small mammals out and about enjoying the fresh grass and foliage which has sprung up on every inch of the reserve.

#### **Saturday 22 November, 2008**

Saturday was cool and overcast, but dry. Two female lions were discovered resting at Longgrass, but no cubs were evident. Over one hundred elephants were encountered as they

walked through the Dead Croton area. A bat-eared fox den was spotted near Cheetahs' Koppie, and it seems that there were pups hidden down the hole.

After tea, the lionesses were relocated, and this time three of the known four cubs allowed themselves to be seen as the adults rested. A single hyena was active at Scrapper and an African wild cat was seen after dark. An albino porcupine surprised some as it scuttled across the road near the M1 Majale crossing.



### **Sunday 23rd November**

A clear, warm day kicked off this week in Mashatu. On the early morning game drive, guests encountered a pair of lionesses stretched out and resting in the Longgrass area. A female leopard and her juvenile male cub were found feeding on an impala kill on the edge of the Dead Croton clearing. In the Gabions area, a number of elephant herds (around one hundred individuals in total) walked and fed among the croton and acacia trees.

In the afternoon the lionesses had become active and were discovered moving with purpose in the open savannah below Jackal's Koppie. The pair of leopards was content to remain with their kill at Dead Croton, while a lone leopardess was scouting for prey along the Matobole River near Frazer Jones Wier. Yet another female leopard was discovered feeding on a freshly killed impala near Tent Camp. A herd of elephants opted for refreshment at Dispute Corner, where they were seen drinking and resting.



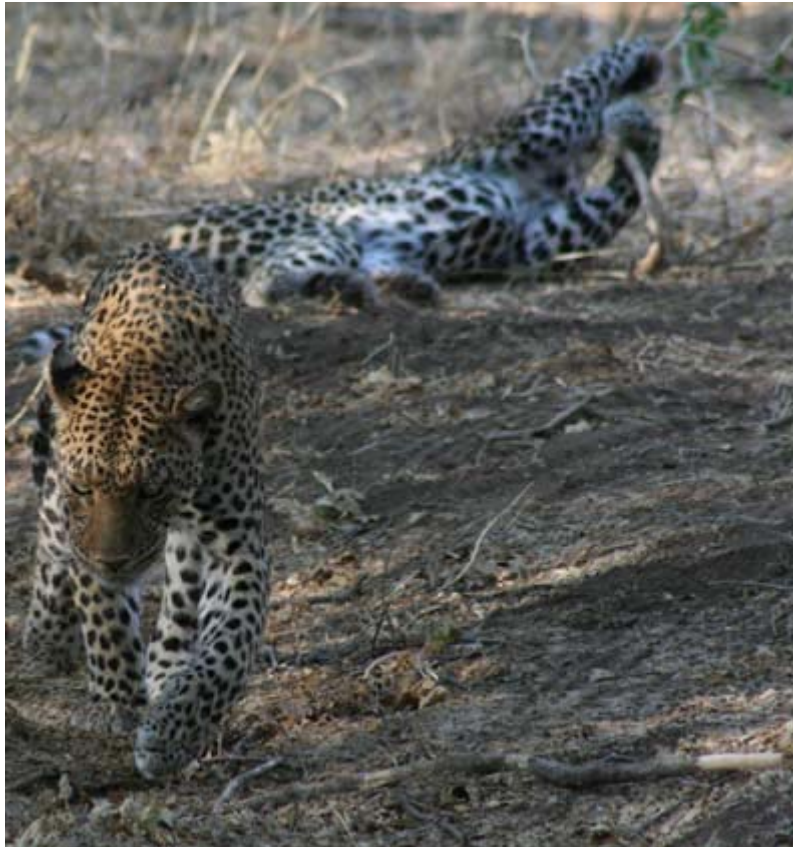
### **Monday 24th November**

Monday morning was warm, with some clouds in the air. The humidity rose slightly as the day progressed, and the temperature rose to a moderate 34°C. The lioness pair was rediscovered close to Jackal's Koppie, apparently unsuccessful with the previous night's hunt. The conglomerated elephant herds were once again found capitalizing on early leaves in the Gabions area.

In the afternoon the lions were found again, this time with three cubs (now around three months old and still suckling). A female leopard was discovered feeding on an impala beside McKenzie Koppie later in the afternoon. On the smaller side, leopard tortoises seemed to be coming out of the woodwork; at least four individuals were seen by one vehicle as they plodded along with purpose in the short new grass.

### **Tuesday 25th November**

A hot day with little air movement dawned, and the game drives left early to avoid the heat of mid-morning. An entire clan of thirteen hyenas was discovered feeding frantically on the remains of a massive elephant bull near the confluence of the Fika Futi and Matobole rivers. As many as fifty vultures were also at this spectacular scene, including Cape, Lappet Faced, White Backed and Brown Headed vultures. No other predator activity was seen in the morning, although potential prey species were evidently in abundance. The entire New Pride - consisting of a pair of brothers and three lionesses - was found resting in the Longgrass region. It was good to see these lions together since they are usually encountered separately. The African wild dog pack, now numbering twenty-three - was found resting near the waterhole in the Pitsane River at Bryce's Store.



### **Wednesday 26th November**

All remnants of cloud had been scorched from the sky by Wednesday morning, leaving Mashatu open to the full heat of the summer sun. An adult female leopard and her large male cub were once again found at Dead Croton where they rested peacefully in the shade. Further south, a group of nearly fifty elephants walked past Graham's Tree on their way to a preferred feeding ground. Nearby, the wild dogs were located and guests on one vehicle witnessed them hunt and kill an impala. The speed with which the event occurred was breathtaking, and stands testament to the efficiency of these running hunters.

The leopards remained at Dead Croton in the afternoon, apparently in no hurry to get up and hunt. The wild dogs were followed from their midday resting place as they moved north towards Well-shaped Mashatu through the croton thickets. Just south of this, the pack encountered a large herd of impala which was apparently unaware of the dogs' hunting reputation. Showing their inexperience, the impalas simply alarm called and watched the dogs as they would with a leopard – apparently expecting them to give up once they were spotted. Unlike their feline competitors however, the dogs simply pressed the attack and within a few minutes had downed five impalas in an area the size of a football pitch. The feeding frenzy was witnessed from multiple vehicles by breathless onlookers until the light failed and they headed home in the dark.

### **Thursday 27th November**

Another clear and hot day saw the thermometer climb further into the high thirties. The leopard mother and son had had a successful evening, and were found resting near an impala carcass just west of Cheetah's Koppie. The wild dogs were too full to hunt again and were found resting near the site of the previous evening's successes. Despite the lethargy of the

older dogs, the younger ones were still full of beans and played incessantly. Herds of elephants were encountered as they fed on acacia trees at Lucenda and east of Majale Island.

In the afternoon, the leopards resumed feeding on their spoils at their kill site. The lionesses were found resting with their restless cubs near Jackal's Koppie. The wild dogs were on the hunt yet again, and found success in the Well-shaped Mashatu croton forests where they killed another two impalas. Elephants were seen drinking and mud bathing at Wallow, and then later on over dinner at the Main Camp waterhole.

### **Friday 28th November**

A lioness was found resting in the shade with her two young cubs near Jackal's Koppie on Friday morning. The leopard and her cub were still to be found resting up below Cheetah's Koppie while a small herd of elephants grazed nearby. Other elephants were on the move along the Nyaswe River.

In the afternoon the leopards were found once again, still content to nibble on the dwindling remains of the impala kill.

### **Saturday 29th November**

Saturday was extremely hot, but despite this, fantastic game viewing was had by all. A hyena was found sniffing around the leopards which were still with their much reduced impala carcass below Cheetah's Koppie. Another three hyenas were active along the Majale River at McNiel's Pools. Many, many elephants were seen near Nel's Windmill, Majale Island, Lucenda Crossing and Main Camp. A total of approximately four hundred were seen throughout the morning.

In the afternoon, the leopard pair had finally moved off their kill and were discovered moving back into the Dead Croton area where shade is plentiful. A hyena was found resting just north of Well-shaped Mashatu, seemingly well fed on leftovers from the recent wild dog kills in the area. The New Pride male lions and two females were active way down south in the grass thickets of the confluence of the Limpopo and Pitsane rivers. A lone hyena was seen scouting around the Crocodile Pool on the Majale, and two groups of elephants (numbering around one hundred and twenty each) were encountered in the Moddergat and McKenzie Koppie areas.