



### **Mashatu Game Sightings October 2007**



#### **Monday 1 October 2007**

It started off a cloudy day, but no rain. It is amazing to see how quickly the bush recovers after a good rainstorm. As far as we drove through the reserve the green shoots were coming up and certain areas in the reserve were already green. This morning we saw a wide variety of general game including the largest antelope in Africa namely the eland, also the largest bird (the ostrich of course) and the heaviest bird in the world - the Cori bustard, a protected bird in Botswana. Near Three Mashatu's we watched a family of elephants browsing away on the new green shoots on the Acacia trees. At Quelea Colony we came across two hyenas feeding on an unfortunate impala.

This afternoon was nice and warm and when we arrived at Wildebeest Koppie, we saw a female leopard walking through the bushes. Our guide and tracker did a great job spotting her as she was hard to see. Leopards are very well camouflaged and our untrained eyes had trouble picking her up when she didn't move. Not far from where we saw the female leopard, we found a female hyena resting under a small tree. She was snoozing and it seemed like she was looking right through us. The vehicle didn't seem to bother her at all. When we drove past the water tanks we saw another female leopard. She was feeding on an impala kill high up on a large branch of a tree. Leopards like to take their kills up in trees because that prevents the kill from being stolen by other predators. At Graham's Tree we watched a large herd of about 75 elephants slowly moving along and browsing off the trees and bushes. It seemed there were elephants everywhere and yet it was still very quiet except for the odd snapping of a branch and a soft rumble.

#### **Tuesday 2 October 2007**

Today we saw a bit of sun! The bush looks very different after the rains and there is a thin film of green on the soil from the grass and other plants that are already starting to grow and the trees and bushes are also already starting to show new leaves. It is quite amazing how fast nature can change! We found one of the lionesses of the Elephant Valley Pride this morning. We spotted her near the Tuli cutline where she was feeding on an eland calf. She seems to be doing quite well for herself on her own. At Graham's Tree we watched elephants walking past. It looked like they were on their way somewhere,

they didn't stop to feed but kept moving. On our way back to camp we saw a group of 5 giraffes. They were browsing and had to bend down to get to the leaves they wanted. Giraffes shape trees and bushes by browsing from above. We also saw a small mixed group of zebra and wildebeest resting in the shade under trees. Some of them were lying down, but the male zebra was very alert and kept an eye on us.

This evening it started raining again. Not as much as a few days ago, but the thunder and lightening, to the west was impressive and beautiful. This did not deter us from going out and on our drive and we spotted no less than two different leopards and a hyena lurking around one of the leopards which was hunting.

### **Wednesday 3 October 2007**

When we woke up this morning we could hear the Majale River again! Our guide and tracker went out and found that the Majale River had come down with force again that night, but was already down to almost the same level as the day before. The water level that night had been even higher than a few days ago! The rain the previous evening and the Majale River coming down made driving this morning quite a challenge. This did not stop the elephants and near Mc Kenzie Kopie we watched over a hundred elephants walking towards the many mudwallows along the Majale and Matabole Rivers. Sitting amongst these giants was amazing, there were elephants everywhere, lots of babies and a lot of noise as different herds greeted each other.



On our afternoon drive we saw giraffe, impala, kudu, vervet monkey, warthog, wildebeest and zebra. The bush was still very wet and slippery, but it was wonderful to be out there and see the changes, the river and the animals.

### **Thursday, 4 October 2007**

Today was an elephant day and both during the morning and afternoon drives we watched numerous herds throughout the reserve. Several herds are coming back into the Majale section of the reserve and as these herds arrive back greeting rumbles can be heard and greeting ceremonies witnessed as the herds merge into large bond groups of up to a 100- 150 individuals.

### **Friday, 5 October 2007**

Today we set out to find some of the cats and were not disappointed. During the morning drive we tracked down the Majale Island pride near Nel's windmill. This pride consists of two adult lionesses and now 2 male and two female juveniles. The pride was fast asleep in the early morning sun as we approached. Later on as we watched, the cubs started playing and chasing each other around. Later on in the morning drive we visited the hyena den near Long Grass where we came across 5 hyenas, 4 adult females fast asleep and one very active little baby that had no intention of sleeping just yet. Herds of elephants, of course, were also to be seen in large numbers along the Majale River.

On our afternoon drive we searched for one of the more illusive cats, and came across an amazing sighting. Near White Cliffs the Skabengwa male leopard was seen mating with a female leopard namely Lesedi (both of these leopards are apart of a study program being conducted by the predator researcher Andrei Snyman). Yet another leopard, this time a young male, was seen near Fraser Jones weir. A much smaller cat was pointed out by our tracker en route back to camp, it was an African Wildcat! While enjoying a delicious dinner at camp we watched a lone hyena strolling past the waterhole.

### **Saturday, 6 October 2007**

Great sightings of leopard, hyenas and large herds of elephants ended this week's game viewing. The rains have stayed away for most of the week, but the dark clouds and cool temperatures are a promise of more rain to come. By now the reserve is beautifully green, elephants are enjoying their frequent mud wallows and so are the warthogs. The vlei near the Limpopo River is full and this is of course attracting a large variety of bird species. Soon the Devil's thorn will start flowering and turn the entire reserve bright yellow. What a sight that will be!



### **Sunday, 7 October**

Elephants and more elephants! After the lovely rains there are numerous elephant herds around, with numbers reaching up to 150 elephants! As we drove out of Mashatu Tent Camp we encountered our first herd of elephants. Yet another herd was seen walking along the Matabole River near Beacon Hill. While watching the elephants our ranger pointed out 4 hyenas on the move. The hyena's heads were down and they were walking pretty fast. The ranger informed us that they were probably on their way to their den where they would spend the day resting after the nights hunt. South of Majale Island we tracked down the Majale Island pride lying around peacefully amongst the long grass.

On the afternoon drive a female cheetah was spotted on an impala kill just outside of Mashatu Main Camp. We went to see if the lions were still there and they were exactly where we left them in the morning, reaffirming that lions sleep for nearly 20 hours in a 24 hour period. On the night drive back to camp we spotted hyenas on two separate occasions.

### **Monday, 8 October**

This morning we set out with the elephant researcher, Jeanetta, to learn more about her research and elephants in general. First we sought out the cheetah of the previous evening and found her not far from Mashatu Main Camp with a very full belly. With the good rains the elephant herds are merging and this morning we encountered a group that Jeanetta believes to be from Mapungubwe National Park in South Africa. Amongst the group was the bull elephant named Rocky collared by Jeanetta. Yet another collared herd was seen nearby with a huge bull in their midst. This was the herd of Christina. As we watched the large group of elephants scattered throughout the Acacia veld we learned more about Jeanetta's project and what she hopes to learn from the collared elephants. Some of the elephants were mud-wallowing, while others were browsing on the very thorny Acacia trees and some of the younger ones were already lying down fast asleep.

Tonight turned out to be a fabulous night out in the African bush. Andrei, who is doing his Masters Degree on lions and leopards, was our guide on the Predator Drive and he explained the whole background for his study during the last daylight hours as we tracked his radio collared leopards. Just after sunset we found two leopards - a big male and female. What made this sighting so spectacular was the fact that these 2 leopards were mating – and we had the opportunity to witness this rare sighting right next to our vehicle! We were on a ridge and when the leopards moved down to the riverbed, we followed. When we met up with the 2 leopards we were amazed to see that another female leopard had also moved closer to the mating pair. It is believed that this 'new' female is the sister of the mating female. 3 Leopards at one site – how great is that?! It was truly an amazing time seeing these secretive cats and listening to Andrei explained how leopards exist in the wild.

### **Tuesday, 9 October**

The reserve is turning greener by the day. Driving out of Mashatu Main Camp we came across a large herd of impala spread out over the plains along the Majale River enjoying the new green shoots. North of Kanda a lone hyena was making his way back to the den, while a pair of Black back jackals were curled up in an impala midden, fast asleep. Another hyena was seen

near Fraser Jones weir. Elephants were everywhere and we came across two especially large herds on Majale Island and near Three Mashatu Dam.

This afternoon, as we drove down the Matabole River, we met up with a herd of 30 elephants walking slowly up the Matabole River, feeding on the new Mopane leaves as they went along. After a long time of tracking lion spoor we eventually caught up with the Elephant Valley lioness near Well-shaped Mashatu, resting in the late afternoon sun. After sunset drinks we set out with the spotlight to see whether we could track down some of the more illusive predators on the reserve. We were not disappointed as our ranger spotted a beautiful female leopard just north of the Vlei cocktail spot. A brief sighting of an African wildcat en route to camp ended our evening drive on a high note.

### **Wednesday, 10 October**

It was a quiet morning for the cats but with all the elephants around it was definitely not a boring morning drive. We sat and watched the elephants for hours along the Majale River where they were feeding, drinking and playing. Little ones were sliding down the steep Majale riverbank and playing in the many waterholes and mud wallows while the older females patiently plucked at the small shoots of grass. The baboons were doing the same, stuffing one hand and then the other in their mouths.

Tonight was yet another special night. On our Predator Drive with the cat specialist Andrei, we radio tracked the big male leopard, known as Skebengwa. As we followed his signal across mountainous terrain and down into a riverbed we stopped to marvel at a great herd of elephants crossing our path. Our attention was quickly reverted back to leopards when we heard the alarm call of baboons and kudu down in the riverbed. They must have spotted the leopard we were after? As we continued tracking, Andrei found the signal of one of his other collared leopards – it was a female and she was close! Not 10 minutes later we saw the beautiful adult female leopard called Lesedi. We followed her as she walked along the bank of the river looking for a potential meal.



Lesedi - photograph taken by Andrei

### **Thursday, 11 October**

It was a cloudy and cold morning as we set out with the resident elephant researcher, Jeanetta on an Ivory Drive. Close to Eric's Donga in the Majale River we came across 6 hyenas feeding on the old remains of a giraffe that died nearly a month ago. The giraffe died in the dry riverbed and with the recent rains was washed down the river and half buried in the sand. One of the hyenas was digging at the carcass trying to expose more of it. Near Gabions, heading towards the Majale River, we encountered a large group of elephants. Jeanetta identified the groups of that of Therese and Ilze. In total there were more than 75 elephants in the area. As we watched the elephants going about their business Jeanetta explained more about elephant behaviour. We watched babies suckling from their mothers and a youngster that had temporarily "lost" its mother and was calling out frantically for her. Later we heard two females rumbling at each other from a distance and then witnessed the whole greeting ceremony as the two females met up again. Another spectacular sighting was had of three ground hornbills along the Matabole River. These are highly endangered birds and seeing them is really something special.

### **Friday, 12 October**

Although this morning was cold again, it was an exciting morning with two different leopard sightings and two hyena sightings. At the M1 Majale Crossing a few hyenas were still feeding on the remains of a giraffe that died about a month ago. Near the Nyaswe borehole we came across the first leopard for the morning, just a glimpse though as the leopard was on the move. In Elephant Valley we spotted another female leopard with two adult sons feeding on an unfortunate impala. What an amazing sighting seeing three leopards together! Once again it was a wonderful morning for elephants and while we were enjoying our morning coffee on top of Beacon Hill we had a view of over a hundred elephants walking along the Matabole River crossing towards Baboons Bedroom. Amongst these elephants were one of our favourite groups namely Stella, the old female.

### **Saturday, 13 October**

This morning we set out again with the elephant researcher, Jeanetta, on an Ivory Drive to track some of her charges. We did not have to venture far before we found a small family of elephants crossing the M1. Jeanetta identified the group as the family of Segole and pointed out a large one tusk female with a clubfoot out to us. Near Crocodile Pool, feeding on the many Acacia trees, Jeanetta introduced us to one of her collared elephants – Clotilda. Several of the females in this herd are known to Jeanetta who gave us a quick family history of the group while we watched them break one twig after the other stuffing long white thorns into their mouths. Not far from this group was yet another collared herd, also a one tusk named Agatha. Several groups were making their way to the Majale River and we watched as one after the other the elephants came down for a drink. As the morning progressed the temperature rose and by late morning the sun was out in full force and all the warm layers were discarded.

This afternoon was a long drive but eventually we met up with the Majale Island pride. The one lioness and her four juvenile cubs were resting near the Vlei all the way down at the Limpopo River. The cubs have grown so much over the past few months, but this does not prevent them from playing and pretending to stalk each other and sometimes an imaginary prey. A big male leopard was seen in Elephant Valley seeking his next victim, with a large herd of elephants not far away walking amongst the green mopane.



### **Sunday, 14 October**

We awakened Sunday morning to clear skies, the beginning of a very warm day that would see temperatures rise into the high 30's. The morning drives did not turn up any of the large predators, though several herds of impala and kudu were seen, along with eland, wildebeest and giraffe.

The afternoon was much different, however. A lioness was seen resting at the Vlei, along with four cubs. In Elephant Valley we tracked a male leopard as he began his evening hunt. Hyenas were spotted near Old Rock Camp. A large herd of some 50 elephants were observed walking and browsing at the M1 Crossing.

### **Monday, 15 October**

A bright, sunny morning started out with a bang when we saw three cheetahs together at Mc Kenzie Koppie. It appeared to be a mother with two adolescent cubs who were taking it easy, resting in the grass. Then near Rock Camp, we saw two hyenas romping while a herd of elephants grazed with their young. And to top it all off we saw an amazing total of five

leopards. At Elephant Valley we saw a male and female together with two juvenile cats and we saw another male in a tree near the Motloutse riverbed.

It was still warm and clear for our afternoon drive, which began with a visit to the Kanda watering hole. We came across a large herd of about 60 elephants drinking and playing together in the water. Shortly afterwards, we saw a Martial eagle take flight with an agama clutched in its talons. The martial eagle is one of the 13 birds included in the threatened or endangered species list for Botswana. We continued the drive seeing lots of eland and springbok, zebras and a number of beautiful giraffes, including one juvenile giraffe struggling to reach for tree branches. Just as we were about to break for sundowners, we came across the three cheetahs we had seen in the morning. Initially, they were all just relaxing until mom decided it was time to teach her two sons how to hunt. We watched her as she stalked a herd of impala. When the herd finally took notice of her, a male buck moved to the front. He charged forward at the cheetah but she quickly took off after him, but to no avail. The impala escaped and the cheetahs were left without their dinner.

### **Tuesday, 16 October**

On Tuesday we set off under a cloudy sky and quickly came across a family of hyenas at the Long Grass den. The group included 2 adult females and a male adult along with two cubs and an older adolescent. It is the female hyena that dominates the family grouping referred to as a clan. Hyenas can be surprisingly fierce and fearless and even compete successfully against lions for food. Back on the drive we observed a group of 20 elephants grazing together at Majale Island. And finally near the White Cliffs area, we saw a beautiful female leopard lounging in a tree with her limbs dangling while she rested her head on the branch.

It was a very exciting afternoon drive with great sightings of all the large predators and of course a herd of elephants to finish the drive. Near the Vlei we visited the Majale Island pride once more where they were resting in the late afternoon sun. A female cheetah and her two sub adult offspring were seen near Cheetah's Koppie followed closely by a lone hyena. Yet another hyena was seen on the move near Eric's Donga long after sunset. No less than four leopards were seen on the drive including a mating couple.



### **Wednesday, 17 October**

Our drive this morning left everyone breathless when we witnessed a female leopard attack and kill a young impala before our eyes. She then proceeded to drag the kill up into a tree where she carefully removed the fur and began to feed. We tracked down the cheetah female and her sub adults near the Pitsane weir high up along the Pitsane River. A large herd of elephants was seen at Dead Croton feeding on the many yellow flowers of the Devil's thorn.

### **Thursday, 18 October**

This morning we tracked the Majale Island pride to Pole Hill where they had killed a young ostrich. By the time we arrived Nkoko, the grandmother, was feeding alone on the remains of the carcass. A large number of vultures, including a few Lappedfaced vultures, had already arrived on the scene and were patiently waiting for their turn. The jackals were not so patient and one of the males stole a large bone still with a fair amount of meat on it from the kill. At Moddergat we visited the leopard that caught an impala the day before. The kill was high up in a big Mashatu tree and so was the leopard. Not far from

the Main and Tented camps at the broken weir in the Matabole River we saw no less than 10 hyenas, all resting in the warm riverbed. Elephants as per normal this week were all over. By the end of the drive we had the opportunity to watch a group come down to the river for a swim. What a delightful sight!

The days have really started to warm up and by the time we set out on our afternoon drive it was still very hot. The elephants were still out and about and we found a herd of over 50 elephants near Dispute Corner. Near Moddergat we watched two male kudu horns entwined in a struggle for dominance. A group of zebras were enjoying the nearly green areas along the Majale River, while a small herd of giraffe was feeding on the Shepherd trees near Tent camp. There were several youngsters in this group. The lions were still near Pole Hill, now with full stomachs, lying on their backs in the late afternoon sun. Our leopard with his kill was also still around, but by now little was left of the impala.

### **Friday, 19 October**

Elephants, elephants and more elephants. Large herds of elephants could be seen all along the Majale River, and several of the females have had babies in the last few days. The tiny unbalanced youngsters were walking or rather running to keep up with their mothers never straying far from their mothers. By late morning most of the elephants had moved down towards the Majale River and were drinking at Crocodile pool, some of the younger elephants used this opportunity to get right into the water and were rolling about splashing themselves and everyone else with water. The Majale Island pride was still where we left them the previous evening, content with their kill from a few days ago. The young leopard at Moddergat also has not moved much from the previous evening and was fast asleep as we came around for a visit.

By this afternoon the Majale island pride had moved closer to the Majale River and was spotted near Speed Corner, but still doing what lions do best – sleeping! A magnificent female leopard was seen after sunset near Well-shaped Mashatu on the move, most likely hunting. Elephants were also on the menu and a group of about 20 elephants was seen crossing Elephant Valley to the west. On our night drive back to camp we spotted an African wildcat, but as quickly as we spotted it, it disappeared into the undergrowth.

### **Saturday, 20 October**

A warm morning as we set out and this time we came across another pride called the Elephant Valley pride. Two of the lionesses were present and the 2 female juveniles. The pride was fast asleep at Wildebeest Koppie and hardly stirred as we approached them. Our famous young male leopard was seen once more at Hamerkop Crossing, giving everyone brilliant photo opportunities. Close to where we watched the lions a large herd of elephants came by. Luckily for the lions they went unnoticed and the elephants walked past without a second glance in the direction of the lions lying quietly under a large tree.

Once again we visited the Elephant Valley pride near Braai Koppie. The youngsters this afternoon were a little more active playing and stalking imaginary impalas with the two lionesses keeping a watchful eye on the youngsters. After sunset we set out once more, this time with the powerful spotlight in search of those creatures only seen at night. One of these is the small spotted genet, a small cat or mongoose like creature with a beautiful coat of black and white spots and a very long striped tail. A porcupine scurrying off in search of food was another highlight this evening.



### **Sunday 28 October 2007**

Afternoon drive - As we left camp we saw a large group of baboons. The big male barked an alarm, but we couldn't see why, it must have been us! At Hamerkop Crossing we found an adult male leopard. He was walking among the bushes and sniffed

the ground a few times, twitching the tip of his tail. It must have been an interesting smell he picked up. We had sundowners at the Vlei, watching a large herd of around 75 elephants. The view was stunning! Lots of green vegetation, water, birds and the elephants... wonderful. And to top it all off we found a male and a female lion at the Majale /Pitsani confluence!

### **Monday 29 October 2007**

Morning drive - We had quite an unusual sighting this morning. At Three Mashatus we found three bushpigs foraging! They are very different from the warthogs we often see and it was a pleasure to spend some time with these elusive creatures. Between Main Camp and Tent Camp we saw 2 hyena's. They were walking around and then lay down to rest. We had another great sighting at Well shaped Mashatu - a huge herd of 100 Elephants. They were browsing, walking slowly and taking turns drinking one family at a time.

Afternoon drive - At Jwala Broken Weir we saw a beautiful female leopard. She was resting under a tree and after a while got up and walked away. When we checked at the Matabole Hyena den, we found the two baby's out and resting! On our way back, at the Matabole/Nyaswe confluence, we saw around 75 elephants slowly walking amongst the bushes, browsing. It is amazing how an elephant can completely disappear behind a small bush!

### **Tuesday 30 October 2007**

Morning drive - A wonderful sunrise and a nice sunny morning. Just North of Nels Windmill we found the Majale Island pride of Lions. The two females (grandmother and granddaughter) were resting, but the four cubs (about a year old now) were playing. Such fun to watch! As we drove on we saw a large herd of eland. There were lots of females, a few bulls and a nursery group of a few females with lots of calves! East of Majale Island we saw 75 elephants walking, browsing, drinking and... bathing! They seemed to enjoy being in the water, especially the young ones who were reluctant to get out when their family herd moved on.

Afternoon drive - We found the Majale Island pride of lions near Majale Island! They were all resting in the shade of the trees and didn't pay any attention to the vehicle. While driving through the bush we saw a pair of Bat-eared Foxes, beautiful creatures with the big ears and a fluffy tail. At Cheetah's Koppie we watched a herd of 75 elephants browse. There was a tiny calf with them and we watched it walk underneath its' mother's bellie.

### **Wednesday 31 October 2007**

Morning drive - At Broken Mill Matabole we saw two adult Hyena's and four pups. They were resting, with the little ones trying to suckle. The mother didn't turn on her side so the baby's went back to sleep. We saw 30 elephants at Well Shaped Mashatu (a perfect specimen of a Mashatu Tree). We found the Majale Island pride of lions at Mabua Masetha. The grandmother was resting a little way away from the others.

Afternoon drive - At Moddergat we saw an adult female leopard. She walked around the big Mashatu tree and headed off in to the bush. The four Majale Island lion cubs were found at Mabua Masetha, without the two adult females. The cubs were resting and we assumed the two females were out hunting. As evening drew closer and it grew darker we saw a lot of Scrub Hares.

