



Mashatu Game Sightings 1 Feb – 28 Feb 2009



Sunday 1 February, 2009

On our morning drive we started off spending some time with a large herd of about 70 elephants grazing along the Matabole riverbed. A large variety of birds, such as the intra-African migrant Woodland Kingfisher, were seen and heard. Warm coffee and tea was served on a high hill from where we could still see the herd of elephants grazing below. We also found numerous herds of zebra, giraffe, wildebeest and the ever-present impala.

During the evening drive we saw a porcupine mother with her youngster. They were rattling as they went running along the Majale riverbed thickets. Banded mongoose and large flocks of storks were also seen.

Monday 2 February, 2009

This morning we found some cats. Four lions were found resting in an open area - completely oblivious to our presence. The group comprised two large males and two adult females. The early morning African sun made for some excellent photography! We later moved on to about 150 elephants at Braai Koppie. Leopard tracks were seen, but despite some searching, we did not find any of these elusive and beautiful creatures.

Our afternoon drive started off with the same four lions from earlier in the day. We followed them for a while during the evening. They seemed interested in hunting, but the impala they were after were too quick.... Off raced their potential meals...

Tuesday 3 February 2009

This morning proved to be a leopard morning! We found two stunning leopards, independently - both were males. The one male we found was close to Frazer Jones' Weir, and he is the dominant male leopard of the area. He is massive with a thick neck and large paws. Truly an amazing creature. The other younger male was seen at Well Shaped Mashatu. He was simply resting in a tree. Apart from zebra, wildebeest, eland and giraffe there were the usual impala and elephants to see. During our evening drive, dark rain clouds were forming. We decided to rather head back to camp before we got wet. This proved to be a wise decision, as it poured down in buckets later on...

Wednesday 4 February 2009

A female hyena at Croc Pool was seen walking along the Majale River. She looked like she had a good recent meal as her stomach was nicely rounded. We followed her to a shady spot where she decided to rest for the rest of the day. We also saw about 150 elephants at Croc Pool as they were mud wallowing and playing in the water. Some of the adult elephants were feeding along the lush vegetation of the riverbank.

Our evening drive was filled with bat-eared foxes! We probably saw three different families of these creatures - all out foraging and feeding on the abundant arthropods in the area. Kudu, steenbok, eland, giraffe, zebra and impala was also seen on a few occasions.

Thursday 5 February 2009

At Old Rock Camp we found three spotted hyenas. They were very relaxed as we approached them, and did not even look at us while we stopped right next to them to take pictures. We passed by one of the bat-eared foxes den sites, and were lucky to get perfect late afternoon sunlight on them as they were moving about. This also made for some great photography. Large herds of impala and wildebeest were seen feeding together, with the odd zebra and warthog in between.

Friday 6 February 2009

During our morning drive, apart from the excellent coffee and rusks we had on a high hill, we also saw about 50 elephants at Scrapper. We were actually searching for lions, but did not find any. Fresh tracks led us to the site. We spend some time with the herd of elephants and watched them as they were feeding in the open. Large flocks of storks, such as the White stork and Abdim Stork, were also seen.

During our evening drive we found large herds of wildebeest and zebra in the open. Sitting almost in the middle of them, it was a memorable experience to listen to all the young wildebeest calves calling for their mothers as they moved across the open. Two black-backed jackals were seen walking among a herd of impala. The two of them were obviously looking to see if they could perhaps catch a young impala lamb, but unfortunately for them they did not succeed.



Sunday, 8 February

On a beautiful Sunday morning we went out to experience the African bush. We saw numerous herds of zebra and wildebeest, with the odd eland standing among them. Warthogs were seen wallowing in the mud - playful as always. We later found a herd of 30 elephants at Well-Shaped Mashatu. Bat eared foxes was seen at their den site. Only the adults were seen - the pups must have been inside the den.

On our evening drive we saw two spotted hyenas walking along the Majale River.

Monday, 9 February

This morning we spent some time with a herd of 60 elephants. They were grazing in an open area close to Jackal Koppie. From the hill we had coffee. From this point, we could still watch the herd, but also saw zebra, giraffe and kudu and impala. Among the tall grass we also saw a steenbok. With the grass this high, you really have to keep your eyes extra sharp – otherwise you never know what you might miss.

Later on during our evening drive, we followed another large herd of elephants. Bushbuck, kudu and giraffe were seen on a couple of occasions - but from a predators perspective, the evening drive was quiet.



Tuesday, 10 February

A large troop of baboons was seen just as we left camp. It's really amazing how much the playful youngsters resemble human babies in their behaviour. Herds of elephants were seen throughout the morning, along with zebra, giraffe, kudu, wildebeest, impala, eland, steenbok, duiker, and warthog. Dassies playing around Whitecliffs were seen scattering in all directions as two African Hawk Eagles came swooping through the tree canopies.

During our evening drive, we were very pleased to see three cheetahs! They were walking in fairly open terrain close to the Tuli Circle boundary. We spent the whole drive following them. Later they found a resting spot and stayed put.

Wednesday, 11 February

Our morning drive kicked off with herds of impala and wildebeest. Later we also spent some time with a herd of giraffe. Whenever they run they look as if they are going in slow motion with those long legs - but they are actually deceptively fast! Kudu along the Majale River were plentiful, and zebra were seen grazing in the open areas. We also saw plenty of bird species - especially black-breasted snake eagle, African fish eagle, little sparrow hawk and the large kori bustard.

During our evening drive we watched a large herd of elephants drinking and playing in the water at Dispute Corner.



It's been a great week for elephants with great sightings of huge herds throughout the week. **Sunday**, during the evening drive we came across a magnificent young male leopard walking near the Tented Camp, while the lioness with her two cubs were seen fast asleep near Dispute Corner. Five ground hornbills were also seen near the Cocktail Spot. The lioness and her two cubs were still near Dispute Corner on **Monday** morning. The cubs have grown up so much over the past few months. We watched the two youngsters as they chased and bullied each other while mom was fast asleep. During the evening drive we came across a magnificent male leopard on the prowl near Pole Hill, not far from the male four hyenas were following at a safe distance.

On **Tuesday** morning we set out on an Ivory drive with the elephant researcher, Jeanetta, to learn more about her research and the elephants in general. We encountered Floppy Bull in full musth near Kanda Camp on route to the Majale River. At Dispute Corner in the Majale River we came across close to a hundred elephants drinking and playing in the water. We stopped on top of the riverbank and for the rest of the drive watched the elephants drink

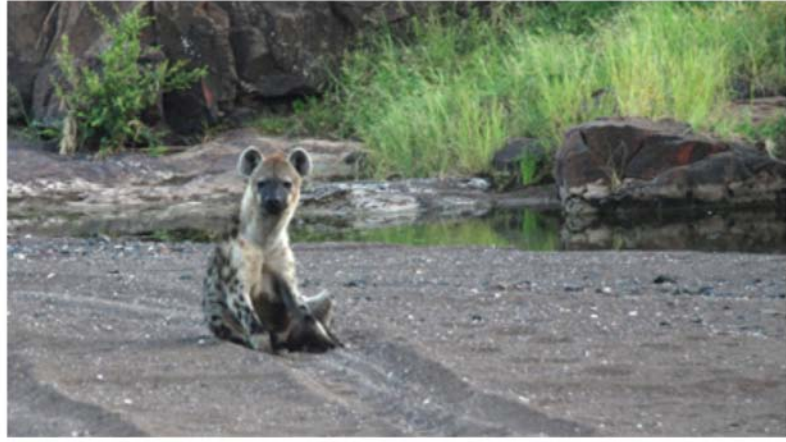
from and swim in the river. A group of young bulls refused to leave the water even after the matriarch of their herd rumbled several times. We watched the young bulls climbed on top of each other pushing each other under water splashing and just having a great time. This was the trend for the rest of the rest of the week.

Wednesday morning was again an elephant morning with close to 150 elephants spending time all around Dispute Corner along the Majale River. Somewhere enjoying the cool water, while others were feeding on the plentiful grass in the area. At 16h00 we set out on yet another exciting drive. Below Disappointment Koppie we watched a large herd of wildebeest and zebra grazing along, while several big eland bulls were walking past in the distance their knees clicking away as they moved along. A special sighting was that of two porcupines walking along before sunset. One of the porcupines at spotting us ran into a thicket but its mate sat down out in the open watching us clicking away with our cameras. We stopped for sunset drinks at the Vlei cocktail spot and as we enjoyed the sunset and the amazing water birds we heard the rasping sounds of two leopards calling in the distance. On our way back to camp we came across a lone hyena was on the hunt near the Main camp along the Majale River.

On **Thursday** morning at last we located one of the lionesses of the New Pride. We found her new Speed Corner feeding on a zebra she killed during the evening. A herd of about 40 elephants were undisturbed scooping up bunch after bunch of the fresh green grass. During the evening drive we once more visited the single lioness where she was still feeding on the remains of her zebra kill. The wild dogs also moved into the area and we located the pack of now 16 after seven dogs split away early in January near Pole Hill.

Birding has been fantastic the last few weeks and this morning our objective was just that. Along the vlei several of the water bird species including several of the storks can be seen, frogs are also numerous and you can listen for hours to the different calls coming from the Vlei. In the woodland the calls of the Woodland Kingfisher, monotonous lark and many others could be heard. Various Eagles preying on termites, the red-billed quelea and small rodents can be seen perched on trees throughout the reserve, while the bea eaters swoop low in front of the vehicle catching insects disturbed by the vehicle. While sitting at Crocodile pool in the Majale River we spotted two honey badgers in broad daylight scurrying along. The highlight on the afternoon drive was a great sighting of an African wild cat on the hunt weaving through the tall grass with little interest in us.

Leopard at last! With the tall green grass in the reserve it has become nearly impossible tracking down these illusive cats. But this morning we were lucky and located a magnificent male leopard along the Matabole River. It was on the move and we only had a brief sighting of him but long enough to take a few pictures before he disappeared amongst the undergrowth. Elephants off course could also be seen in large numbers across the reserve. The day only got better with another great sighting of the male leopard on the move and then a sighting of two female cheetahs resting out in the open near the Majale Crossing!



Sunday, 22 Feb

A wonderful sunny day with great sightings of elephants and hyenas. Two hyenas, a male and a female, were seen close to Crocodile Pool on Majale River. The two hyenas were on the move, and we followed them for a while as they moved along an animal path. Elephants were seen all over, with great sightings of them drinking and swimming in the Majale River during the morning drive.

Monday, 23 Feb

An amazing day for leopards, with two great sightings both during the morning and afternoon drives. During the morning drive we came across a big male leopard on the move near Quelea Colony. It was hard to keep up with this elusive cat as it weaved among the thick vegetation. A female leopard was more relaxed near Moddergat, and we watched as she was resting on a big branch of a Leadwood tree - draping her body over the branch with her four paws hanging over either side. During the morning drive, a small herd of elephants were spotted near Cheetah's Koppie scooping mouthfuls of grass up in their trunks. Young babies were chasing the Wattled starlings all over the show. During the evening drive the same herd was seen walking northwards along the Matabole River close to Modergat.

Tuesday, 24 Feb

Another elephant day with great sightings of large herds all around. During the morning drive we came across a herd of close to 50 elephants walking along MMBA ridge - browsing on the green Mopane trees in the area. There were several babies in the group. We watched for some time as they played with each other, climbing on top one another and pushing and shuffling to see who was the strongest. Early in the afternoon drive we encountered yet another group - this time at Dispute Corner where they were mud wallowing in a big pool created along the bank of the river. A family of jackals was getting ready for the evening just below Disappointment Koppie, while a few impala rams were testing their strength against each other.

Wednesday, 25 Feb

Early on our morning drive we came across a female jackal greeting one of her pups, and regurgitating food for it. Close to Wallow we spotted a family of warthogs covered from head to toe in mud. They were walking on their front knees, uprooting the Devils thorn as they moved along. The male impalas have started their rutting season early this year, and

the sound of them barking at each other can be heard for miles. Stopping to watch a herd of zebras, we heard the deep rumbles of elephants nearby. We set out in search of the massive pachyderms and found them near Kanda corner - walking in single file towards the Majale River. In no time they were at the river, and filed down the bank towards Croc Pool for a refreshing drink from the cool flowing water.

Thursday, 26 Feb

After a long tracking period we eventually found a young male leopard feeding on an unfortunate impala high up in a tree along the Matabole River. A troop of baboons was foraging close by - showing little interest in the predator. At last we located two lionesses in Elephant Valley. The Elephant Valley lioness and her daughter were fast asleep when we came across them. Later on during the evening drive, we spotted a porcupine in a hurry. It scurried away as soon as our tracker spotted it in the beam of his light. An African Wildcat was on the hunt for small rodents pouncing through the long grass, while not far off a large spotted genet was climbing among the branches of a Mopane tree.

Friday, 27 Feb

This morning we set out with the elephant researcher in search of her "subjects". Before we got to the elephants, we came across a magnificent male leopard walking up a rocky hill - close to where he had a well hidden impala kill. We followed the cat up and down the hill as he moved along, getting a glimpse of him every now and then through the long grass. During the morning we came across several herds of elephants, and spend some time with the Christina and Diana's groups. Sitting in the Majale River we had a great "up close and personal experience" with a huge musth bull drinking and walking right past our vehicle. During the evening drive, we were lucky enough to come across the male leopard once more - and this time out in the open and resting. Another great sighting was that of an adult hyena and its young cub on the move. The highlight of the evening drive, however, was the near-miraculous find of a chameleon on a Mopane branch as we headed back to camp.

Saturday, 28 Feb

Once more we set out in search of the Tuli elephants. This morning it took us some time to locate them, but while searching for the elephants we had an excellent time spotting and identifying the most amazing bird species. There were also fantastic sightings of eland, zebras, wildebeest and big herds of giraffes.