

GAME SIGHTINGS UPDATE APRIL 2009



All photographs for this newsletter was taken by ranger Bashi Patane

Weather & Vegetation Report

AT LAST WINTER!

Winter has struck and different species of mammals utilize different habitats depending upon their feeding requirement. This is particularly true of antelopes. Trees are shedding and everywhere you look; you see a golden yellow colour with greenery here and there from the Mopane trees. The Majale and the Matabole Rivers are no longer flowing but large pools of water along the river provide elephants and 2

all other animals with plentiful water for drinking and mud wallowing. The temperatures have definitely dropped during the month and the mornings have been cold, but the days sunny and warm. A few cloudy days were experienced with a brief rainstorm early in the month.

Game sightings during April



Elephant viewing has been fantastic this month with elephants seen every day of the month. Leopard viewing increased and the change in the vegetation thickness assisted in the spotting of these illusive cats. Wild dog and lion viewing were slightly lower compared with the previous month.

Predators

LIONS

The third week of April saw a nomadic male lion wander onto the Mashatu property, the home range to our local pride of lions. This pride, a lioness and her three year old sub-adult daughter have two cubs each. The nomadic monster tracked down the lionesses and killed two of the cubs while one other was badly injured. It is common practice amongst male lions to kill cubs that are not their offspring. Hope the remaining two will make it to adulthood.



LEOPARDS

Start to end of April was filled with real spectacular leopard sighting. First week of the month saw one of young male leopards kill an Impala and a Baboon and hung the two animals on the same tree. From the look of things the primate's meat seemed to be the best. The cat consumed the baboon meat to the last bit before touching that of an Impala. During that same week another leopard with two weeks old cubs was spotted on an Impala kill. A third one was seen with a kill with hungry hyenas waiting under the tree in anticipation while the leopard was on a high branch in the tree. One of the hyenas climbed the tree but it could not get to the kill as the branches were small.

CHEETAHS

No cheetahs were seen on the Mashatu property this month. Several cheetah sightings however were reported from outside the Northern Tuli Game Reserve amongst the villages surrounding the reserve.

SPOTTED & BROWN HYENA

Usually hyenas are seen almost every day and heard almost every night. Their call which in African culture is associated with witchcraft fills the African skies with their unmistakable stunning whooping calls. These awesome predators are often seen on carcasses and at waterholes.

WILD DOGS

During the early part of the month the pack of wild dogs were frequently seen around the Main Camp. Guests watched the wild dogs hunt, mate and two males fight for dominance of the pack. During the month the pack split and a new male took over dominance of the pack mating with the alpha female. The pack also visited their previous den site during the month.





BLACK-BACKED JACKAL

This is the smaller of two species of jackals, the other being the side- striped jackal. These animals are opportunistic feeders and will take insects, rodents, ground-dwelling birds, reptiles and of course, carrions when ever available. When threatened, jackals give a barking call to warn of the presence of any other predator. Rangers often take advantage of their call to locate an elusive leopard or maybe a shy cheetah.

The Tuli Elephants

The most well known of all the African mammals. The dry season (winter) is still the best time to see elephant in Mashatu when the herds are concentrating around the main muddy waters along the Majale River. Different species of mammals utilize different habitats depending upon their feeding requirements. Nutrient value of the vegetation at different times of the year varies and the observation for most of rangers is that elephants are taking a lot of mopane trees which is their favored tree species. The feeding behaviour of the elephants reflects the protein condition of the vegetation at different times of the year. Grasses are dry now and deciduous trees are shedding.



Unusual Sightings

Baboons and Vervet monkey

They are only two species of large diurnal primates in this area the Chacma baboon and the vervet monkey. The vervet monkey is the more arboreal of the two. Look in to trees in heavily wooded areas to sight these monkeys. The structural features of the baboon and monkey allow them to be classified as primates along with man. On one of the morning game drives a male vervet monkey was seen eating a tree squirrel and this is quite a rare sighting. Normally this act is practiced by male baboons as they have big canines to bite and kill their prey.

Birding

Bird watching is an enjoyable past-time which can be undertaken anywhere. Mashatu boast a species list of migrants to the area and several resident species. Some migrate to other parts of Africa while others migrate to part of Europe. Below is a list of some of the more common species and the habitats in which these birds were sighted.

OPEN GRASSLAND

Ground hornbill
Secretary bird
Swainson's francolin
Rufousnaped lark
Grassveld pipit

FRINGES OF THE VLEI

Blue waxbill Violet-eared waxbill
Bleating warbler
Lilac-breasted roller
Arnot chat
Crimson-breasted shrike

WOODLAND

Crested Francolin
White helmet shrike
Red-billed wood hoopoe
Grey hornbill

WATERHOLES AND SURROUNDING AREAS

Egyptian goose
Blacksmith plover
Long-Tailed shrike
Pied babbler
Yellow-billed hornbill

