



Posted 20 April 2009, for the period 1st – 15th April 2009

Greetings from Arathusa!



Winter is starting to creep its cool fingers into the Lowveld here at Arathusa Safari Lodge. We have extended our morning game drive departure time a half an hour later due to the sun rising later at about 05:50am. The bush is morphing from lush green to pale brown, and all the smaller pools have dried, or are in the process of drying up. We are therefore seeing more game at the waterhole in front of the camp. As I sit here and write this latest update, there are warthogs, impala, zebra, hippo and waterbuck all spending their time at the dam. The sightings out in the bush have been really good over the past few days too.

One of the sightings that stands out started when Rifos (my tracker) and I spotted movement in the road far ahead of us. I stopped the vehicle to have a good look through my binoculars, and saw what I first thought were baboons with youngsters. On closer inspection though, I saw the distinct profile of a leopard, with small ones too. I still was not convinced of the species, and took a quick dash in the vehicle towards the animals. On arrival, we saw to our delight that that the subject of our interest was indeed a leopard with cubs.

The leopard was a female we call Ntima ("dark" or "black" in Shangaan, the local language) due to her dark coloration. She was with two of her 3 1/2 month old cubs. There should be three, and judging by Ntima's behavior (looking back and calling), I am sure the third one was close by.

The two cubs were running all over the road and playing tag with each other and Ntima. They also seemed to be very interested in us and our big, still unfamiliar vehicle. They would get as close as they felt safe, and then dash to the safety of mom or the bush at the slightest hint of movement. The two youngsters also seem to love being moved by their mother: leopard mothers will leave the cubs in a safe spot while they go off hunting for the next meal. The cubs will stay at the den until the return of their mother, who will either take them to their next meal (when they are older than 3 months) or will move them to a new den. All of this excitement must have had the youngsters' minds racing.

Other than the usual great leopard sightings we have enjoyed in the Arathusa concession, we have had fantastic elephant activity in the area too. Big herds of approximately 30 have been coming through, with many very cheeky and inquisitive calves. We have also had a very big and old bull elephant with massive tusks making appearances while out on drive, as well as at the dam in front of Arathusa Safari Lodge. We also had a wild dog sighting - our first in almost a year. Towards the end of last month we saw a beautiful cheetah as well. There has also been a crash of 7 white rhinos making very frequent appearances.

And for the rest, life carries on and nature's cycle continues...

Warm regards

Andre and Rifos; Jason and Roy; Ryan and Maurice; and the rest of the Arathusa Team.