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Greetings from Arathusa!

The dry winds of August prevail over the lowveld bush, sending dust high in the sky creating spectacular crimson-red sunsets almost every late afternoon.

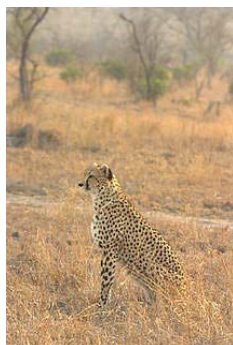
Greetings from all of us at Arathusa Safari Lodge. Once again time for our newsletter and certainly lots to report! As we are into our late winter/early spring, it is quite interesting watching the herbivores adjust to the fact that there are very few trees with leaves. The deciduous Acacia and Combretum tree species stand bare with little to feed on, but resilient as always, these animals have to survive. Observations of giraffe, kudu and impala antelope go from tree to tree hoping to source any nutrient from a fallen leaf to a piece of bark. Their movements seem somewhat sporadic as they zigzag through the bush! Competition is rife as all the browsers are still healthy, but surely they cannot wait until the rains come....which will in turn transform the African bush into a lush green mecca of foliage!



We are pleased to announce that the super lion pride (The Kahuma pride) which frequents the extreme north-eastern corner of the Sabi Sand Wildtuin are doing well. We have been lucky enough to witness them a few times in the past couple of days. Even more interesting is that they have been making some good kills lately as it is clear and evident in observing the full bellies of the cubs which are growing up so fast. We saw at least 6 male cubs around 7 months old now. In the not too distant future those cubs should eventually be forced out of the group by resident males to hopefully one day form a super strong coalition themselves. The 5 Mapogo male lions beware!!

The leopard sightings have also been truly memorable. Safari, our resident 15 year-old female's "cub" (Matimba) is coming close to three years old and we had amazing days with him. Matimba, which in Shangaan means "power", certainly showed why he is so named: he had killed a full grown impala ram and pulled it up an awkwardly shaped Jackalberry tree. In human terms that would be dragging a 60 kg sack of potatoes with horns on it - a most difficult task especially when there are branches and leaves in your face! None the less, leopards are amazingly adapted predators, and up in the tree Matimba lay eating and "playing" with his trophy! Leopards take

their kills up into the trees to keep it out of reach of other predators that may try to steal it. Last night when we saw Matimba feeding off the last scraps of impala ram, there was a hyena lying under the tree hoping that gravity would deliver something tasty to eat. Eventually the hyena got his wish as a leg of impala with scrapings of meat came tumbling down. It was almost like this proud young leopard male had pity on the hyena and "helped him out". Matimba waited for the hyena to melt away into the darkness and eventually, full bellied, climbed down the Jackalberry tree to have a good "lick and clean up" session-in true cat style!



We stayed with him and watched him clean & groom himself. He then stood up and walked away. We were absolutely astounded to witness this satiated, young leopard demonstrate how opportunistic these cats are, how agile and quick they can be when potential food presents itself. Darting like a bullet, a scrub hare came across Matimba's path and the end result was a tasty scrub hare for dessert. It just goes to show, these creatures of instinct never know when the next meal is coming so they will take almost any available opportunity to work hard and make a kill.

Coming back from a morning game drive, we had heard that Mafufunyane, the resident male leopard of the area, was spotted snoozing the warm morning away high up in the shade of a weeping boer-bean tree. We went to investigate and found him doing exactly that, passed out. One never knows what the African bush has in store and to our amazement and excitement, along came the resident old leopard female (Safari). She was on a mission, and it was clear she was obviously coming into oestrus (a fertile time). As she climbed the tree she was trying to entice this lazy male by flicking her tail in his face. Four days have passed and we have been having tremendous sightings of this pair mating. Safari has done such a good job of raising Matimba, who is in the process of "moving" out of his old mom's territory. We look forward to seeing her doing an equally good job of raising new cubs!

We still look forward to the near future and hope the promise of rains will yield water to quench the thirsty bush. Till then, we continue to enjoy the massive obstinacies of Cape buffalo, parades of elephants and all the creatures big and small in the lowveld bush.

'Til next time

Best regards

The Arathusa Rangers

