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Greetings from Arathusa.



The past fortnight's greatest sighting had to involve one of the stars of the show here at Arathusa Safari Lodge..... The Safari leopard female.

It all started just before we were ready to go back to the lodge: we had in fact actually already called in our ETA (estimated time of arrival) and were just minutes away. We first "bumped" into a rhino on the airstrip about 2 minutes out of the lodge (which was a nice enough surprise especially as one of our guests was desperate to see Rhino). Just as we left the rhino to head back to camp, we found Safari - the territorial female leopard.

After we had followed her for a while, we could see that her teats were swollen. This could mean that she was pregnant again. There were a bunch of impala on the airstrip close by, and it looked like she was heading in that direction. The moon was very bright and the impala were out on the open so we thought she was wasting her time. To top it off, the impala were on the wrong side of the open airstrip meaning that she would have to cross unnoticed (which would be difficult) over it to get to within striking distance.

We were right behind Safari when she came onto the airstrip into the open. She lay at the edge of the open clearing and just suddenly exploded in leaps and bounds across the runway towards the impala. It looked like she was going to go for one of the newborn lambs, but she changed her mind as she saw a bigger adult, the lambs mother, within striking distance. The leopard and adult impala went down hard in a cloud of dust, and the old female killed the impala surprisingly quickly. We thought she had probably broken its neck.

It was amazing to see the kill itself and now the feast began. The other impala were making a huge noise, and we thought this would surely attract the hyenas or maybe even lions close by. This meant she would have to get her kill into a tree where her competition couldn't access it. The impala was a bit too big for the old female, and she was also very tired after the kill. She did not take it up a tree. Now she had to eat as much impala as possible to make sure she had not wasted her energy for nothing.

When we left her that night she was still feeding on the buck with no signs of hyena in the area. We were anxious to get back in the morning to see what would happen.



When we did go back there the next day we found her lying close to where we left her the previous evening, but with no sign of the kill. Later as we left the sighting we saw a hyena go to where the kill had been, and pick up the lower jaw of the impala. This probably meant that the rest of his clan had got the rest of it earlier.

Safari did however catch the lamb of the mother she had caught as well, and managed to get it into a tree away from the hyenas where she could feed in peace.

As the year draws to a close, we are all looking forward to Christmas here in the bush and to celebrating this wonderful & Blessed time of year. For those of you joining us for Christmas – safe travels & see you soon!!!

