



Posted June 21, 2008 for the period 1 – 14 June

Greetings from Arathusa.



The last two weeks out here have been exceptionally difficult for us, and for the animals. With the low rainfall of last season, the bush has dried up a lot quicker than we expected and tough times have kicked in. We have to work a lot harder to find the animals and the animals have to work a lot harder to survive. It has been difficult for the herbivores, especially for the big herds of game, and the larger animals such as rhino and elephant.

Interactions with both of the spotted cats have been good though – we have had our usual awesome leopard sightings AND a few cheetah sightings! Lions have been a bit hard to come by of late, but we have still seen the Mapogos and the Styx ladies now and again.

We had another incredible sighting of the female cheetah and her cub a few days ago. They killed a young impala ewe and we watched as the female dragged it under the cover of some low vegetation to keep it out of view of vultures. We then watched as both cheetah fed together, both taking turns watching for other predators that could steal the kill away from them. We have also seen the single male a few times and it is always great following him as he is so relaxed with the vehicles.

One of the leopard sightings that stood out recently was with Safari, our old female that is blind in one eye. We got to her not long after she had killed an impala ewe. We weren't the only ones to arrive on the scene - a hyena did too. It chased Safari away from the kill and then took a good couple of minutes to find it again. We watched as Safari stayed out of reach of the hyena, but never strayed too far. The hyena gorged itself on the impala, and it wasn't long before it could not eat anymore. We could see that the scavenger needed water. Once the hyena had moved off a short distance, Safari ran in and hoisted what was left of the kill up into a tree. The hyena was not too impressed with this, but there was not much he could do as both leopard and impala were well out of his reach. The next morning we found that Matimba, Safari's son, had joined her at the kill. Poor old girl first has to deal with a hyena, and then her fast-growing son.



On another morning we found a drag mark going straight through the lodge. After following it for a short time, we found Matimba, the young male leopard, with a young bushbuck kill very close to the staff camp. That afternoon we went back to see what was happening, but there was no sign of either leopard or kill. We tracked him down into a riverine not too far away and found he had moved the kill down there. He had a large porcupine kill there too. Unfortunately it was very thick bush and we didn't get to see him feeding on either of the kills very often. But it does show he is coming of age, getting smarter and taking his chances where he can find them.

We can only hope that things get better soon and that we miraculously get some late rains to revive some of the vegetation and fill up the dams a little.

Regards from the Arathusa Rangers
Ryan, Andre and Jason