



Posted July 15th, 2008 for the period 15 - 30 June

Greetings from Arathusa.



The best morning drive we have had in a long time started off as being the mistiest morning so far this year. The mist was so dense that we could not see more than 20 meters away. After we were out in the bush for about 30 minutes or so we had seen no animals at all and it did not seem as if things were going to improve. Just then we made out a strange shape at Ingwe Pan. Rifos, one of our trackers, had his spotlight (a high powered torch) affixed to the object at the waterhole and we could only just make out that it was a big male lion at 15 meters distance!!! We were thrilled as we had been looking for lions for a long time.

After spending some time with him we were able to identify him as "Mr. T", one of the Mapogo coalition males (a group of 6 male lions). We followed him in a westerly direction for a short while before he started roaring right next to the vehicle. A really impressive sound - so loud it made the car shake, our arm hairs tingle and our chests vibrate. This immense sound can be heard by the human ear up to 8 kilometres away and by other lions a staggering 18 kilometres away! What a fantastic way to start the day.

Shortly after Mr. T finished his tremendous bout of vocalisation everything else was quiet, as often happens after lions roar. Picture it - sitting in the open safari vehicle in the early morning darkness (the sun had not yet risen) in a blanket of cool mist, listening to the soul touching silence of the South African dawn watching a lion dozing only 5 meters away from us. It was then that we heard a familiar sound from not too far away. The first time we heard it we were not too sure what it was, but it sounded again. As if to concur with us, the big male lion now also had his head up looking in the direction the sound had come from.

Our suspicions confirmed - definitely the sound of lions feeding. How could there be a kill so close by without Mr. T knowing about it? We headed off in the direction of the sounds through the dense mist stopping once in a while to gain bearing on the growling and hissing sounds.

Eventually we came across the sight, and what a sight it was. There, right in front of us, was a lioness up in tree (a rare occurrence) whose attention was focused on the above branches. I had to reposition the vehicle to get a view of the upper limbs of the tree. Once in the new spot the whole story unfolded. In the top of the tree was our dominant male leopard, Mafufunyane (affectionately called Jan by the guides), with an impala kill. The lioness was trying her best to get to the meat, but old Jan the leopard has been faced with this problem before. He took his meal to the thinner branches that can't support the lioness's weight. All the noise we had heard was the lion and leopard fighting over the leopard's hard-earned meal. After some time, the lions gave up and went off on their own way to earn a meal rather than take the "easy" way out.

Other fantastic highlights have been the cheetahs for sure. They have shown themselves a whole lot more lately than they normally do.

Leopard sightings have been great (as always), and the rhino have been abundant too. In general, sightings have been really good. The buffalo herds are also starting their annual return to the Arathusa Safari Lodge waterhole. We have already shared many a lunch with the massive herds (up to 400).

As we head deeper into the dry, cold season we have noticed the remarkable change in the environment again. It seems to catch us by surprise every year without fail. The winter and summer bush conditions are like chalk and cheese, but both beautiful in their own way. In winter the stars are amazing and we often spend a bunch of time just gazing at the heavens above.

If you are joining us soon we look forward to meeting you!

Kind regards from the Arathusa Safari Lodge guiding team.

Andre and Rifos, Jason and Roy, Ryan and Maurice.

