

Greetings from Arathusa!



Winter has arrived here in the Sabi Sands Game Reserve: mornings are nice and chilly when we start off and you can feel the temperature dropping drastically after sunset. With winter comes the dry season, and game viewing is better & easier as the bush is not as dense.

General game has been good as usual, and it has been good to see the smaller species again, especially animals like Grey Duiker and Steenbok which were both difficult to see in the long grass. A few of the herbivores have been a little bit scarcer as they are wandering larger areas in search of good fodder and water.

Large herds of buffalo have started frequenting the area again, along with the usual old males we see around. There has been a lot of elephant activity, especially the males. It has been easy to find them... we just head towards a Greenthorn Tree, which is in fruit at the moment, and there is a good chance of finding at least one bull elephant close to it! The other day while sitting watching an elephant bull feeding on the fruits, he shook the tree and we were pelted by them falling down! I suppose it's the closest one will get to having a food fight with a wild elephant. Rhino have also been good and one of the females that had a calf our side last year and then disappeared for summer, is back, and it's good to see the little guy is still doing well and growing quickly.

We have still been very lucky with our lion sightings over the past two weeks, seeing both the Styx pride and the Mapogo's on a regular basis. One sighting that stands out was seeing the 4 of the Styx lionesses with 6 of the cubs killing and fighting over a male warthog. We didn't get there until just after they had caught it, but it was still alive and we watched as two of the lionesses finished it off. The audio was brilliant, first of the squealing and killing and then of the pride fighting over the kill. Unfortunately since then they have lost another cub and there are only 4 young females and a young male left. News on the other two missing lionesses is that they are doing okay for the moment with their two smaller cubs, but they need to join up with the rest of the pride soon for extra protection. The Mapogo males move in every now and then for a day or two, just to make sure that everything is still the way they like it and that no competition has tried to move in and take over.

We have really been spoilt by our female leopards the last few weeks as a few of them have started sharing their cubs with us. First Karula's cubs are still doing fine, both of them have successfully reached 6 months and are both still looking strong. We watched the other day and she walked with them, scent marking as she went. Both of the little guys were really keen to see what she was doing and paid a lot of attention to what she was doing, smelling where she scented and rubbing themselves in the scent. Ntima has unfortunately lost two of her original 3 cubs, but the single cub is looking strong and healthy, and although it may sound harsh, it does

give the remaining cub a better chance of survival. A big highlight for us was when Salayexe introduced us to her two new cubs. We found her with an impala kill, and it wasn't long after being there that she decided to call the little ones out. We averaged them at about two and a half months old. Like their mother was when she was a cub, they paid very little attention to the vehicle and they went about as if we weren't even there. We watched as both cubs suckled from the female and then we were lucky enough to see one of the little guys go up the tree with the carcass in and feed, surely one of the first times they have fed on meat. Otherwise all the other leopards have been doing well, except for old Mafufenyane who is still slowly but surely being pushed out, poor guy just won't give up, although he is still managing to give the youngsters a bit of a hard time & run for their money.

The pack of three wild dogs has shown up every now and then which is great to see, although it does look like the female is no longer pregnant, and so she must have lost the puppies as they would not be moving around as much as they are now if they had a den site.

And so winter will continue for a little bit longer, and we can expect it to get a little bit colder over the next month. But we are approaching the winter solstice (21 June), which is the longest night of the year, but from then on we can start looking forward to warmth.

kindest regards from the African bush  
Andre & Rifos, Ryan & Maurice, Jason & Roy