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Greetings from Arathusa!

A long and dusty dry season has finally ended. The late afternoon sky reveals cumulonimbus clouds once again, like fluffy white pillows piled up kilometres high and drenching the once parched earth! Summer's beauty has been revealed... transforming the harsh African lowveld bush into a lush paradise.

Greeting from all of us at Arathusa Safari Lodge. This newsletter is dedicated to the abundant green bush that we and the indigenous wildlife find ourselves surrounded by. The Acacia, Combetum and Marula trees are laced with sweet new leaves on which the browsing game are absolutely feasting! No longer do the giraffe, kudu, impala and many more linger and wander searching for sustenance. To them it must be similar to a vegetarian finding himself in a salad bowl the size of a small country! Even the bad-tempered Cape buffalo (which is primarily a grazing animal eating grass) have been seen on numerous game drives turning to the new leaves growing on the low hung branches and small bushes. This is an enjoyable sight as they wrap their long tongues around the branches, imitating their very long-necked giraffe counterparts. The parades of African elephant seem to be more relaxed by the abundance of growth everywhere, as we watch the gentle giants feeding meters away from the safety of the game drive vehicles - their attention fixated purely on the selection at the salad bar! We cannot express our joy and enthusiasm enough at the swift change from dry to wet.

And with the wet comes one of the most important and influential periods in the African bush...the lambing season of the impala antelope! The local Shangaan people here call the month of December in Shangaan "N'wanzemala!"...meaning "the time/coming of Impala." This is the season where female impalas drop their lambs in an environment where there is excellent cover to hide the little ones from the many predators here - such as the Hyena, Cape hunting dog, Cheetah, Leopard, Lion and many more. It is

even a time where an “unlikely” predator preys on the Impala lambs – this unlikely predator in the form of the Chacma baboon.

This delicate antelope is a very important key to the delicate balance of the myriad of ecosystems in the different forms of Savannah...and this is the time the depleted numbers replenish their stock. As I type this, only this morning we saw the first lamb of the season. Our guests were ecstatic, as in the past few days we had been driving “very slowly” past the numerous ranks of Impala, hoping our eyes would lock on to a new baby buck. And then this morning, before our eyes, there it was. A tiny mirrored replica of mom was being licked and sniffed by the other somewhat curious members of the Impala rank. A warm and wonderful reminder that summer is here to stay...watch this space!

An interesting sighting happened the other night. Mvhula (the 3-4 year-old male leopard which has been making his territory in the northern Sabi Sand Reserve) came a bit further south one fine night, and killed a large female kudu not too far from the lodge. The prize he had caught was a little too big to hoist up a Marula or Jackalberry tree (this is the “norm” in the leopard kingdom, to get their food away from the clutches of hyena, which cannot climb). So instead he tucked the carcass under a foliage-rich bush to conceal the large antelope. To his amazement and shock, there came Safari strolling past and marking her territory – she is our old female leopard, and queen cat of the area! Relatively unknown to the young male leopard whose ego was now inflated after making such a big kill – he got the fright of his life, and took no time in chasing her into a nearby Marula tree. She snarled, spat and growled at the young leopard waiting at the base of the tree. Humiliating time for Safari passed, and eventually the young prince climbed the tree. A fight ensued on an upper-horizontal branch - growls, claws and leopard tails thrashing above ended up with a 7-meter fall to the earth. The 15 year-old Safari ran away, and left Mvhula to his precious kudu. We saw Safari last night on territory patrol once more, with a minor gash on her left shoulder (which should heal very quickly). We are watching her very closely, as we hope that she is one month pregnant after mating with Mafufunyane - the dominant male leopard territorial holder - a few weeks back.

And so we leave you with the hope & promise of more rain and new life.

We hope this finds our regular & new readers all very well.

Best Regards

The Arathusa Safari Lodge Team