



Warm Greetings from Arathusa!

Another thrilling couple of weeks in the bush. I hope you enjoy the first hand account below of what we have experienced over the last two weeks.

We continue to have very warm weather in the midst of African summer with little rain.

We hope to welcome you to our piece of Africa soon, and to share the magic of the Arathusa safari experience with you.

Andre

15 January 2007

Today started off a little quiet with sightings of general game only. But in true "bush" fashion, our luck changed. Some of the other rangers had come upon a pair of cheetah not far from where we were. I raced off in the direction of where these fast and elusive cats were spotted. It wasn't long before we were in view of the sighting. Two beautiful big males. They were very relaxed and simply sat calmly right next to the vehicle. Many great photographs were captured by our very lucky and excited guests.

Later on we found a young male leopard in a tree. I parked the vehicle almost under the marvellous creature - yet again the camera shutters were firing away behind me like World War III.

This young animal is the son of Whitecloth, a female leopard which is seen in the eastern area of our concession close to the Kruger National Park. She probably left him there to go hunting, as he is still too young to join her on the prowl.

After spending a great deal of time with this young fellow, it was time to move on.

Just down the road there was a group of giraffe (linguistically correct version is a "tower" or a "journey" of giraffe). In this 'tower' of giraffe there were three males that were fighting. My tracker (Rifos) and I presumed that there must be an oestrous female in the group (meaning she is ready to mate - hence the males jostling for mating rights. They do so by swinging their massive long necks into one another, jabbing the opponent in the neck with their short stubby horns. An awesome spectacle to witness and a fairly rare sighting.)

19 January 2007

Cheetah, cheetah and more cheetah. We have been very lucky of late with these fantastic cats. Another one was spotted on our airstrip - a two minute drive (at a fairly fast pace) from the lodge. Cheetah like the open areas to hunt for animals such as impala and antelope.

We found another of the spotted cats, the leopard - and a big male at that. We have named him Mafufunyane. This guy is our resident dominant male, and the father of Matimba (Safaris

youngest cub). It is always a pleasure and an honour to see this "Ingwe" (local Shangaan dialect meaning leopard). Mafufunyane means "to be angry or grumpy". He will often hiss at the vehicle, providing great photographic opportunities.

Right in front of the camp on the opposite side of the dam we came across a herd of about 10 elephant. They are wonderful to view - especially breeding herds such as this one. There are always young "cheeky" ones which pretend to charge the game drive vehicle (mock charge) and then turn away, tail between the legs running off to the safety of mother's side.

Just down the road there were four white rhinos – a member of the Big Five. Once very endangered and close to extinction, these prehistoric looking animals are commonly spotted in our "neck of the woods".

20 January 2007

There was another big male elephant in front of the camp today at the dam. We love our dam! It always has something to offer, be it hippos, the crocodile, or any of the other animals in our area.



We headed to the east today to find a rather large herd of buffalo (approximately 200 animals). An awesome spectacle to witness – seeing the young, the mature and the old all moving together (we could surely learn a little from them!). Herds of up to 400 have been spotted at Arathusa – with up to 800 being found in the areas surrounding Arathusa.

2 large male lions were spotted close to the buffalo herd, hunting them without success.

Whitecloth and her cub were seen together. It is great to view the leopard mother- cub interactions.

Later on, during the afternoon safari, Salahexe, a local female leopard to the west, was found with a kill in a tree. More awesome photos.

23 January 2007

We started off with a bang this afternoon. 5 minutes into the safari we heard vervet monkeys alarm calling very close to the camp. They only call this way when there is a leopard in the vicinity (here in the bush we often make use of other animals to "tell" us where the predators are). We headed off in the general direction of the calls. And low and behold – there we found Safari and her cub Matimba (two of our local leopards.)

We proceeded to follow the cats for about 30 minutes as we had a hunch that Safari might have made a kill for Matimba. We were right. They led us right to a young impala antelope that Safari must have caught earlier that day for Matimba.

This was only the beginning! During this drive the Arathusa team also spotted 3 of the other big 5; buffalo, elephant and rhino. Other sightings were zebra, gnu and various other smaller "critters".



24 January 2007

All of the big 5 were found on the morning drive alone! In the afternoon we came upon a pride of 7 lions (The Stix pride). And Safaris cub, Matimba.

25 January 2007

A nice big herd off elephant (more than 30) and buffalo (more than 300)

26 January 2007

Today - Leopard, rhino, buffalo, elephant and another cheetah.

27 January 2007

We were very lucky today with two wild dog showing up in the open area in front of the lodge. A male and a female (they are technically a "pack", since wild dog split off in same sex groups when they are old enough to leave the pack if they ever do). The male had a big scar on his side, perhaps from an encounter with lion. He is lucky to be alive.

Wilddogs are the second most endangered carnivore in Africa, after the Ethiopian Wolf. It has been said that there are only around 200 left in Greater Kruger National Park.

28 January 2007

Two of our guests got to see cheetah 2 minutes after landing on our airstrip. Welcome to Arathusa!

They also later saw buffalo, elephant and a young leopard, Matimba.

29 January 2007

Elephant were found all over the place again!

Salahexe and her father Mafufunyane also made an appearance, as well as a rhino bull.



30 January 2007

Today was a day for leopards. We found 3 leopards in one sighting. Safari and her cub Matimba and Matimba's father Mafufunyane. They were all feasting on a young kudu antelope. We presume Safari had caught the animal and then put it up into a tree for safe keeping from the marauding hyenas. She would then have gone to fetch Matimba where she had him hidden to come and join the feast.

In the meantime Mafufunyane must have "caught wind" of the kill and come to rather unfairly claim his share.

There were also the scavenging hyenas lurking around for a titbit of dropped meat or perhaps, sometimes, when they get lucky, a clumsy, inexperienced cub dropping the whole kill.

An unusual sighting, and very intriguing to watch.