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Greetings from Arathusa.

The crisp cool wind was blowing in our faces like a sea breeze off the Atlantic Ocean. It is winter time and the nights are cold. Wrapped up in blankets and traveling through the African bush in our open game vehicles, we were looking for a meeting with a leopard...



One of our territorial female leopards (Ntima) that frequents the south-eastern domain of our traversing area, is quite a special leopard as she is the proud mother to a 1 year old cub. As you can imagine, being a mother to a young leopard has its challenges: in the form of male lions and hyenas who would "snap" up any opportunity to extinguish the life of the little one (as it will mature one day and prove to be competition to other predators!)

We were searching for tracks or any signs here, there and everywhere until the keen eyes of Roy (one of our highly experienced trackers) spotted her coming down the road a far distance away.

We moved the vehicle just off to the side to allow this spectacularly stealthy predator to walk right by us, allowing us to enjoy her sheer prowess and beauty. Ntima was merely on a stroll in the dark, scent marking along her way. Female leopards, like their male counterparts, are also territorial (5-30 square km) although their territory is not as large as the males. We followed her down the two-track road and enjoyed the sight of her standing on her hind legs to get to a branch out of her reach so that she could smear her face (which has sebaceous gland for scent marking purposes) against it.



All of a sudden she cocked her ears. Motionless...she stood...peering through the bush at a small rank of impala antelope. As any highly experienced leopard mother would do, she quickly shifted into hunting mode. She carefully stepped softly, landing each hind foot where the front pad stood so as not to stand on any leaves or branches that would crack and alert the impala in the dead still night that a predator was near. It is always so amazing to see leopards hunting; due to the fact that they are solitary (except mating or with cubs) they have to make sure they hunt carefully as they can't rely on allies like a pride of lions would. In absolutely no time at all, she encircled the highly alert antelope only to have her cover blown by one of the impala who sharply let out an alarm call, alerting the other impala that danger was present!! Panic struck and one could hear the impala jumping away - except for one female that ran straight into the stealthy cat! The suffering was over instantly as Ntima had a classic throat grip, suffocating her victim quickly and painlessly. We were absolutely amazed as she stood there with the spotlight now shining on her - revealing her prize that we knew would also go to her cub, ensuring valuable nutrients a leopard cub needs.

To our surprise, on our right hand side, out of the darkness, the enemy of the leopard...a spotted hyena who was obviously excited by the alarm-calling impala, came wandering by. We immediately put the spotlight off Ntima so as not to show the hyena exactly where she stood. Remember, spotted hyena have an advanced sense of smell and can even locate carcasses 4km away. The hyena approached, Ntima hissed, took a quick swipe at the hyena and ran off, leaving a very happy hyena with dinner for the night! Defending her hard-earned prize against the spotted hyena would certainly be an injury risk - not a wise move for any solitary hunter, and mother. She melted away into the darkness as easily as we found her that cold winter's night.



We stayed with the very excited hyena giggling at the prospect of having a tasty impala for dinner until another hyena came by. In front of our eyes, there stood two hyenas fighting, nipping and yelping at each other over the meal until they realized that there was more than enough for the two of them...which they finished in ten minutes flat. Surreal experiences and interactions like this remain in the memory bank for a life time!

A spectacularly rare sighting of mating white rhinoceros was seen on an afternoon's game drive as well. What an opportunity to witness this! The incredible act of copulation (which could last for an incredible 40 minutes) was observed in close proximity by all on the drive. Imagine a 2.3 ton rhinoceros bull mounting a 1.8 ton rhinoceros cow! We hope to see a cute 40 kg rhinoceros calf walking around in 16 months time!

Other highlights have really been focused around our water hole! The bush is dry and the water hole accommodates plenty of animal traffic coming through. It is almost a daily occurrence to see zebra, Cape buffalo, blue wildebeest, warthog, impala, waterbuck, giraffe and hippo in the front of the lodge. The bird life time and time again is prolific and will more than satisfy any "twitcher" (bird enthusiast) that comes our way looking for a "lifer" on their bird life list!



We find ourselves enjoying the last few weeks of a very dry winter and look forward to the rainy season to quench this parched African bush.

Warmest regards

The Arathusa Safari Rangers
Ryan & Maurice, Andre & Rifos and Jason & Roy