



Posted June 02, 2008 for the first two weeks of May

Greetings from the African bush!

The onset of winter has certainly made her entrance as lions lie in deep slumber surrounded by golden-yellow grass and the deciduous trees lose their summer foliage.

What an amazing past couple of days it has been at Arathusa Safari Lodge! We regularly see huge parades of elephant that come down to the waterhole in front of the lodge for a thirst quencher. Giraffe, warthogs, implala ,kudu, nyala and a host of other herbivores and omnivores enjoy the open area in front of the lodge.



We had quite a welcome visitor two nights ago. We were standing on the pool deck after dinner and enjoying the sights and sounds of the African bush in the night when a huge elephant bull in his prime made his way towards the pool deck! His tracks were nicely visible on the dew-covered grass which magically held the imprint of each footprint as he moved across the lawn. We stood motionless as eventually we were eye level with this grey gentle giant. Completely ignoring us he made his way to a fig tree right by our bar area. He looked at us and realized we were not at all interested in "his" tree and continued to feed. We watched in delight as he carefully picked the fallen fruit off the ground one by one till he was so engulfed in the tree he majestically snapped off huge branches to get to the leaves and the fruits. Eventually he had his fill, fed a bit more on the surrounding foliage and disappeared into the darkness – as silently as he had come.



Mafufunyane, our resident male leopard, was spotted a “stones throw away” from the lodge one chilly evening. We followed him as he marked his territory along the way until he noticed a rank of impala, standing motionless in the thick darkness. Ever the opportunist, this leopard moved swiftly in the darkness as stealthily as a stealth bomber, creeping low as to avoid being detected by the sharp senses of the impala antelope. We followed him through the bush keeping a good distance away so as to not interfere with nature’s course. His steel eyes locked onto his target, a 5-month old impala lamb that was in the vicinity and safety of the other impalas who were keeping a good lookout for any potential threat. Mafufunyane launched himself into an explosion of speed and hunting agility as he took the young impala down. The other impalas darted left and right and were frantically alarm-calling like rifle shots erupting. The dust settled, the air was still, a scops owl called as the spotlights revealed a now content leopard male with his prize. The leopard was panting and regaining his breath as he lay on the ground with a motionless impala lamb. We were treated to an amazing sight as he dragged the impala to the base of a tree. He peered up and obviously decided that it was a suitable tree as he clambered up the trunk with the antelope in his mouth, losing his footing in the process. Every muscle in his forequarters was flexed as he quickly regained his footing and gently secured the young antelope so that it was out of reach from the ever-alert hyena! We left Mafufunyane to enjoy his quarry as we all left with wonderful memories of witnessing the brute power of the leopard male.



A warthog

The male coalition, “The Mapogo Pride”, has been quite active recently. These five big males have been showing us that they are majestic as ever as they have been roaming the northern Sabi Sand Game Reserve as usual, roaring in full force communicating to other male lions in the area that this is “Mapogo Territory!” One night we were following four of the brothers who had joined a female from a surrounding pride. The lioness and one of the brothers split off and left the other three in a deep sleep. The silence of the night was broken by the sound of an impala alarm call! The three brothers promptly woke up and headed off in the direction of the antelope. We followed the three massive males as they quickened their pace. They came across quite a sight, as it turned out; the lioness had brought down an adult impala ram! A feeding frenzy ensued as the poor lioness was promptly chased off her kill which was pounced on by three hungry male lions! The sounds alone were incredible as the air was filled with loud growling and rumbles coming from the three lions that were fighting to get a position on the impala!

They literally finished off the impala in a matter of minutes much to the disappointment of the lioness whose hard work was expropriated so swiftly.

Life, it seems, is even convoluted in the harsh simplicity of the African bush!

Until Next Time,
Warmest Regards

