



Posted 1st October 2008, for the period 15 – 30 September 2008

Greetings from Arathusa!

The weather is getting hotter, but still we are waiting for our first rains. The only water left for the animals is in the bigger dams, and so animals are congregating around these areas. Because of this, sightings have been intense and we are seeing some unusual behaviour.

Large herds of elephants have been making their way through the area, doing a lot of damage to the few green trees that are left. They have also been targeting the Apple-leaf Trees and Large-fruited Bushwillows a lot more than usual, chewing off all the dead bark to reach the cambium layer (inner bark), which is rich in nutrients and vitamins.

Buffalo have not been as plentiful, with most of the herds moving to the South down towards the Sand River. We are still however seeing the old bulls around as they are not strong enough to follow the others. Rhino have been a bit quieter lately but the female with her young calf are still around and it has been awesome to watch the little guy come through his first 6 weeks safely. He now looks more like a rhino than a little warthog.



The new hyena den has been more and more active over the last few weeks, with the little cubs getting more used to the vehicles. They still don't venture out of the den when mom is not around, but when she is they have a lot of confidence and they are starting to explore their surroundings, including the vehicles.

We have seen cheetah a few times, with some great interactions between a male cheetah and Mafufenyane, our dominant male leopard. The cheetah managed to kill a young waterbuck early one morning, and while we watched him feed, Mafufenyane showed up. The cheetah tried his best to intimidate the leopard, hissing and even charging him, but the size difference was too great and the leopard easily displaced the cheetah from his prize.

Leopards have been great - while most other animals appear to be taking strain - they carry on, proving just how adaptable they are. Both Matimba and Mvhula (young male leopards) are doing well, both making kills on a regular basis. Safari (old

female) is doing well and we are hoping that her mating with Mafufenyane was successful and that we will have little ones running around in the area soon. Ntima's cub that has been missing for the last few weeks showed up the other day with a large female impala kill, evidence that she is looking after herself more and more. One of the more interesting sightings we have had is the confrontation between Karula's two cubs, Thandi and Shadow. Thandi has proven to be the more dominant of the two, chasing Shadow up a tree and keeping her there for quite some time. She also scent marks wherever she sees Shadow laying down or urinating. It's going to be interesting to see how it pans out over the next few weeks.



Lions have been awesome of late, with regular sightings of the Mapogos, Styx and Kahuma prides. Three of the Mapogos killed a male buffalo not too long ago, and so we watched for four days as the three males gorged themselves on the kill. We have also seen two of the males mating with one of the Styx ladies for the last 5 days. This is great as she is the only one of two lionesses in the pride that doesn't have cubs at the moment.

So for now the days pass and beautiful life carries on as we all wait for the rain to come and settle the dust, fill up our pans and dams and turn the bush back into a green paradise.

Kind regards
Andre, Ryan and Jason