



### **Weekly Cyberdiary Update 21 - 27 June 2009**



Elephant Drinking - Image By Matt Meyer

#### **Ngoboswan female leopard - 21 June 2009**

Tracks lead rangers through the Kapen River and into some very thick bush. In the centre of the thicket lay the Ngoboswan female, and beside her lay the carcass of a freshly killed juvenile waterbuck. With the animal still fully intact, the leopard must have just killed it. Resting in the shade she caught her breath before commencing feeding, and having safely tucked the kill in the thicket she had time to pluck the thick fur off the waterbuck before opening a small hole in the rear. She remained in the same thicket for the entire day and fed off the carcass at will.

#### **No id young male leopard – 21 June 2009**

A young male leopard was spotted in the early afternoon crossing the Kapen River. This male has been seen a few times in the recent past and is quite relaxed around vehicles. The leopard walked along a drainage line for some time before quickly crossing through the open area. Ducking back into the thicker bush, he continued southwest - crossing Baby Elephant Walk. He was left to himself, still wondering eastern Flockfield. During the sighting he did not

scent mark, nor did he roar - but with the Emsagwen male leopard vacating this area for the more attractive Mlowathi, he hopefully will take the gap and try set up a territory.

### **Styx pride and cubs – 22 June 2009**

After tracking lions around West Street, the Styx pride was found close to Princess Alice Pans. They were all looking nervous, and the cubs stayed in the thick bush. While tracking the lions, rangers found many male lion tracks in the area but were only able to locate the Styx pride. Once the pride settled down to rest out the heat of the day, an accurate count was conducted. All nine members were present - none with any visible wounds. This is now the fourth day the bulk of the pride has been seen, and with the single lioness and four cubs still missing, things do not look good. Lets hope the others are safe to the north of the property - but only time will tell.



Ostrich Koppies Cub and Duiker Kill - Image By Matt Meyer

### **Ostrich Koppies female leopard and cub – 22 June 2009**

The Ostrich Koppies female was found going east along Tlebe Rocks Road. She then turned south and headed for the donga. As the cat approached a rocky section, she started calling for her cubs - shortly thereafter one of the cubs appeared. The single cub came to greet its mother, and the two of them reunited before breaking into a game of tag. The mother called for the second cub but got no response - throughout the sighting she continued to call, but with no success. The single cub seemed not to notice its sibling missing as it played and fed from mom. As the sun set, mom moved the cub back into the rocks and rangers left the area. The second cub was not found - one wonders where it could be. Hopefully it's still alive.

### **African wild dogs – 22 June 2009**

Looking at some general game in Matshipiri open area, a ranger noticed six sets of ears flicking away flies. Driving up to investigate, he found six wild dogs resting in the shade of a guarrie tree. The six dogs were part of the pack of nine denning close by, and must have been hunting in the area during the morning. As the heat settled, the dogs got active and started moving towards their den site. A nosey hyaena on the lookout for an easy meal got a rude awakening when the dogs noticed him and gave chase. The hyaena tucked tail and made for the thick bush. The dogs then came upon the large herd of buffalo. With the odds stacked severely against them, the dogs approached with caution - sniffing around the edges looking

for a way though the sea of beasts. Some of the buffalo bulls on the flanks of the herd noticed the dogs, but instead of blindly charging like they would with lion and leopard, the bulls stood curiously watching the diminutive carnivores. The wild dogs managed to find a hole in the herd and headed for it. Some of the watching bulls half-heartedly charged the dogs - trying to scare them off, but the dogs (as full of mischief as always) charged back. The bulls took off running, and the dogs gave chase. Wild dogs often take on much bigger prey like zebra, giraffe and Dugga boys (buffalo). Not hoping for a kill, they are simply out to have fun. The pack of six wild dogs got the whole herd into a panic, and all six hundred buffalo blindly stampeded northwards - trailed by the African wild dogs.

### **Kapen female leopard – 23 June 2009**

Early during the afternoon drive, this leopard was found walking along Flockfield Lookout. As rangers spotted her, she instantly turned into one of her infamous bad moods and began hissing at the cars. She then climbed a tree - still put out at being spotted - and looked to settle down, possibly hoping rangers would leave her alone. She then noticed movement to her west, and sprinted down the tree. As she ran for the river, rangers lost her. Getting down the bank, rangers found a business of banded mongoose sprinting in all directions. Following the direction in which they were coming, rangers found the Kapen female shaking the life out of one of the poor mongooses. Once the unlucky victim had died, the leopard started feeding - taking no time in finishing off the tiny kill, she eventually moved south along the riverbank.

### **African wild dogs – 23 June 2009**

Early in the drive rangers found the pack of wild dogs close to Rattray's Camp. This time there were eight members - with the Alfa female still missing. The bulk of the pack was found jogging south towards their den site, with some of them still feeding on the remains a freshly killed female impala. All dogs soon left the property, but not before another female impala carcass was discovered.

### **Newington female leopard – 23 June 2009**

Once the flurry of action with the wild dogs had settled down, this old female was found snooping around the kill sites. With her advanced age, she has probably become dependant on scavenging for food, as her reflexes and speed will be dwindling. She found one of the female impalas and began feeding. Most of the meat was torn off the skeleton, and the head was all that was left, but this would be more than enough for a morning meal for the old leopard. Cleaning up the carcass, she left nothing behind, and once she had finished she found a nice shady tree under which to rest.

### **Ostrich Koppies female leopard and cubs – 24 June 2009**

Having discovered Ostrich Koppies female's new den site, rangers were eager to find out the fate of the second cub. Had the cub indeed died, and was it possibly from the infection it had on its back a few weeks back? Driving down into the donga, rangers found no sign of any leopard, but when they started searching the banks they found the female and one cub returning to the den site. Still with only one cub in tow, the leopard led it to the safety of the den before resting and letting it drink. Once the cub had finished feeding, it began to play with its mother and both leopards chased each other around. Having burnt off her excess energy, the mother began calling for her second cub. Wandering along the ridgeline, she called and called. Suddenly from behind the watching vehicles came a cub. But looking forward, the first cub had disappeared. Was this the second cub, or the same one circling

around. The mother greeted the cub and started to lead it back to the den. From under the bushes close by came an ambush. It was the first cub hiding in wait for its mother and sibling. Both cubs had been found and both in good condition.



MalaMala Vehicle and Eyrefield Male Lion - Image By Matt Meyer

### **Eyrefield pride – 24 June 2009**

Tracks led rangers on a merry-go-round for most of the morning, before finally leading them to Lion Loop and the Eyrefield pride. All eleven members were accounted for, but the Rollercoaster male was still missing. The pride rested up for most of the day but then got active well before sunset. They headed straight for the Sand River, and a fantastic nights' viewing. As the pride approached the river, the herd of buffalo was leaving. The lions watched the buffalo with killer intent as they slowly meandered west - away from the water. Slowly the predators crossed the river - heading straight for the herd. Rangers moved around, and found the pride moving in the dust of the herd .... slowly stalking closer. As the sun set the cats narrowed the gap. But as they closed in on the stragglers, the lions were spotted by some of the rear guard bulls, and the alarm went up. Three of the large male buffalo detached themselves from the herd, and turned to face to oncoming lion attack head on! The pride ran tantalisingly close to the bulls - inviting them to charge blindly into the night, and in-so-doing wearing down their energy levels. The bulls didn't disappoint, and charged at the lions which seemed to vanish in front of them just as another appeared from behind. Turning to face the new threat, the bulls ran in circles - thrashing bushes and bellowing out their war cry. But all this time they were running out of energy ... just what the lions wanted. But this night was to end as one of missed opportunity as the buffalo bulls wised up and returned to the herd. Closing up ranks the buffalo stared into the night, waiting for the next attack. The lions circled south and east looking for a weak spot. But finding none, they charged the herd causing the buffalo to stampede. With this strategy, the older buffalo would fall to the back giving the lions an easier target. But with luck not favouring the Eyrefield pride, no stragglers were left behind as the herd quickly moved north - with the rear heavily guarded by the bulls. The pride gave up the hunt after about two hours and regrouped. Grooming each other they rested – probably thinking about what might have been.

### **Son of the Dudley female – 25 June 2009**

This young male leopard was found close to Rattray's Camp in the early morning. He soon found a nice sunny spot and curled up into a ball, falling fast asleep. As the day heated up he

got active. As he moved east towards the river, two hyaena confronted him. Any single hyaena might think twice about taking on an adult male leopard, but the male is only three years old and there were two hyaena. With the odds stacked against him, the cat made a dash for the nearest tree - with the two hyaenas in hot pursuit. Making it safely into the tree, the leopard hurled all manner of insults at the hyaenas as they circled the base of the tree. Finding nothing to eat in the area, the hyaena scavengers soon moved off leaving the leopard to slowly descend and make a graceful exit .... stage right.

### **Eyrefield pride – 25 June 2009**

With the Eyrefield pride in action the night before, rangers were eager to see if they had gone back to the buffalo herd, or if they had made any other kill during the night. Tracking them south past Rattray's Camp and across the river, rangers eventually found them in the Tamboti thickets fast asleep. The pride looked lean, and so more than likely didn't catch anything during the night. Around midday, reports came from guests of lions in front of Rattray's Camp, and when rangers went to follow up in the afternoon they found tracks of the pride crossing back over the river and off the property.



Styx Lioness and Eyrefield Male Lion - Image By Matt Meyer

### **Styx lionesses and Eyrefield male – 26 June 2009**

Around breakfast time, roaring was heard coming from both sides of Main Camp. Finishing breakfast, rangers went to find out what was happening. Leaving the camp, vehicles soon came across three Styx lionesses moving quickly south towards the old airstrip. Trying to keep up with these lions, rangers found one of the Eyrefield males accompanied by the oldest Styx lioness. These two lions were hot on the trail of the other three. The two lions moved onto the old airstrip, still in search of the other three. Finding nothing they came to rest and began roaring. Rangers leaving the two-lion sighting found the three lionesses not more than two hundred meters further down the road, looking over their shoulder and quickly moving in the other direction. The three lionesses then circled back north in the Sand River, giving the Eyrefield males a wide berth as they headed back from where we think they came. The two lions on the old airstrip roared for most of the morning - many of their roars responded to by another lion further south .... presumably the second Eyrefield male. What more than likely happened during the night was that the two Eyrefield males had come across the bulk of the Styx pride, and had more than likely attacked them trying to kill the cubs. The three females had probably tried to lead the males away from the cubs, while the fourth female would have tried to lead them to safety. The oldest lioness - siding with the males - was more than likely

with the male lions at the time of the attack. Whether the attack was successful or not we are not sure, as none of the pride was found again.

### **Rollercoaster male – 26 June 2009**

Late in the evening this old magician was found alive and healthy close to West Street. Having seemingly appeared from thin air, the lion slept off the early part of the evening. Rangers were glad to see him alive, and wondered where he had come from and why he was not with the Eyrefield pride. The following morning he had vanished again, leaving not a trace.

### **Son of the Kikilezi female leopard – 26 June 2009**

With three leopards being found within five minutes out of Main Camp during the evening, this one provided the most interesting sighting. He was found walking along the road leading into the main rotunda of the camp. As he approached the main gate, he stopped and stared into the camp, and after the longest time he entered the camp. Striding confidently up past the curio shop, he stopped and stared at his own picture hanging on the wall outside the rangers' room. Having sniffed around the rotunda he then casually strolled through the camp - passing the boma en route to the main deck. Walking past the deck he descended the stairs leading to the swimming pool and strode off into the darkness of the moonless night.

### **Styx lioness and cubs – 27 June 2009**

A ranger driving around Stwise heard the soft calls of a lion cub. Looking around the rocks, he caught sight of a young lion high up on a rocky outcrop. Another ranger coming to the sighting "bumped" into a Styx lioness wondering the rocky area, calling softly for her cubs. Soon the second of the youngest Styx cubs appeared and both started calling for the female. As she got within audio, the cubs descended the rock and headed for her. Waiting under a guarrie tree until they were sure it was their mother, the cubs rushed her and, happy to be reunited, they clambered for her attention - each one trying to outdo the other. The lioness led them off a short distance before resting in the shade of a large rock, and allowed them to feed.

### **Matshipiri female leopard – 27 June 2009**

Found striding off Emsagwen, the leopard was followed. She has not been seen for some time, and rangers were relieved to see her alive and well. Looking for prey, she weaved through the combretum thickets leading rangers on a merry chase. Coming across some giraffe she suddenly became interested. Amazed that she even took note of the huge animal, rangers watched as she stalked their way. Then out of the tall grass popped a newborn giraffe, the target of the attack. The leopard got to within striking distance and charged the young giraffe. But with having a long neck and legs comes a great viewing platform - and the adult spotted the leopard and took off running, baby in tow. Not perturbed by the missed opportunity, the leopard carried on with its hunt and was eventually lost still looking for an evening meal.



African Wild Dogs - Image By Matt Meyer

### **African wild dogs – 27 June 2009**

The third sighting of the pack this week proved to be the best. They were found fast asleep on the eastern bank of the Sand River, still only eight strong. The pack got active in the early evening and headed east. Moving through the combretum thickets around New Firebreak, the pack found no suitable prey. Turning their attention to the open areas around Ostrich Koppies, the dogs came across an impala herd. Running in on the herd, they left rangers trying to navigate through the rocky terrain, and when rangers regained the pack it looked as though the hunt had been unsuccessful. Moving further north, the pack suddenly gave chase. Trying to keep up, rangers witnessed a steenbok darting through the grass just in front of the dogs. It didn't take long for the pack to catch the doomed antelope, and they promptly tore it apart. With most of the tiny steenbok disappearing in the first few minutes, the pack regrouped and continued on their way in search of a more substantial meal.