

MALAMALA GAME RESERVE GAME REPORT – September 2011

AREAS COVERED: MARTHLY / EYREFIELD / MALAMALA / FLOCKFIELD / CHARLESTON.

WEATHER SUMMARY

	September-11
Maximum temperature (°C)	35°C
Minimum temperature (°C)	10°C
Mean maximum (°C)	30.1°C
Mean minimum (°C)	15°C
Rainfall (mm)	3mm
Days of rain	2

*AGES ARE APPROXIMATIONS AS AT END OF SEPTEMBER 2011

LIONS

STYX PRIDE = 10

1 ADULT FEMALES	16 YEARS
1 ADULT FEMALE	9 YEARS 7 MONTHS
1 ADULT FEMALE	7 YEARS 11 MONTHS
1 SUB FEMALE	3 YEARS 8 MONTHS
4 CUBS	8 MONTHS
1 CUB	2 MONTH
MARTHLY, MALA MALA, EYREFIELD (24 sightings)	

We had a whopping 23 sightings of the Styx pride during the month. This pride certainly has regained their title as ‘the pride of MalaMala’. It is almost difficult to believe that two years ago the pride was just a shadow of its former size. There was one month when they were not even seen at all. This was back when the Mlowathi males were making their way into the reserve, and disturbing the lion population dynamics in the process. But now that the pride is under the control of the Manyelethi males it has really flourished. The eight-month-old cubs have done really well this month, and their mother has done some splendid hunting with the rest of the lionesses in the pride, but also by herself, to ensure that her little ones have had consistently full bellies. At one sighting she even took on a herd of buffalo by herself, and managed to bring a calf down. The start of the report period also saw the old lioness leading her two cubs to a waterbuck kill, even though the youngsters were too small to eat meat. After that initial sighting the cubs were not seen again for many days. Once again rumours began to surface in the rangers’ room that the little ones were dead. It was nearly three weeks before we saw one of the cubs again. This time our hypothesizing turned out to be half true, as the sighting with the single cub and the pride lasted all day, with no sign of the second cub. So by the end of the report period the numbers were standing at four lionesses, four eight month old cubs, and one two month old cub.

EYREFIELD PRIDE = 5

1 ADULT FEMALE	12 YEARS 11 MONTHS
1 ADULT FEMALE	9 YEARS 10 MONTHS
2 ADULT FEMALE	4 YEARS 3 MONTHS
1 ADULT FEMALE	4 YEARS 2 MONTH
MALA MALA, FLOCKFIELD (14 sightings)	

We had an average amount of sightings for this pride during the report period. Interestingly, the lionesses were with the Manyelethi males for the majority of those sightings. Although as often as they were seen together, it was only on a few occasions that we saw them mating. An interesting development in the pride is that the old lioness with no hair on the tip of her tail is lactating. We suspect that she may have given birth in the Sand River south of Rattrays Camp, where there is a large thicket of Bush willows. As of yet no cubs have been spotted though. Working in conjunction with the Manyelethi males, the pride managed to bring down several buffalo during the month, which gave us loads of good feeding activity to view. The pride's three males that have since gone off on their own were not seen at all during the report period. The last time we saw them was on Charleston and Flockfield, where they were effectively sandwiched between the Manyelethi and Kruger National Park males' respective territories. They have quite possibly shifted across to the Kruger National Park in a bid to make a clean start.

FOURWAYS PRIDE = 5

2 ADULT FEMALES

3 CUBS

EASTERN MALA MALA, EASTERN EYREFIELD

(6 sightings)

UNKNOWN AGES

15 MONTHS

An average number of sightings of this pride again this month. The young male we saw with the pride last month was not seen again. We have no idea what's become of him. The older lioness sustained quite a bad injury on her back. It took the form of a single puncture wound right next to her spine and midway along her back. Possibly sustained during their fight with the Styx lionesses, we suspect it's a claw wound because if it had been a bite mark there would have been a second hole from the opposing canine. The three cubs are still doing well, and always appear to be well fed.

SELATI PRIDE = 13

1 ADULT FEMALES

2 ADULT FEMALES

2 ADULT FEMALES

2 SUB ADULTS

4 SUB ADULTS

2 SUB ADULTS

WESTERN CHARLESTON

(0 sightings)

12 YEARS 10 MONTHS

8 YEARS 9 MONTHS

8 YEARS 7 MONTHS

3 YEARS 7 MONTHS

3 YEARS 6 MONTHS

3 YEARS 3 MONTHS

There were no sightings of this pride this month.

CHARLESTON PRIDE = 7

1 ADULT FEMALES

1 ADULT FEMALES

1 ADULT FEMALE

1 SUB ADULT FEMALE

3 CUBS

SOUTHERN CHARLESTON

(0 sightings)

15 YEARS 1MONTH

7 YEARS 3 MONTHS

6 YEARS 8 MONTHS

1 YEAR 11 MONTHS

5 MONTHS

There were no sightings of this pride for the month.

MARTHLY PRIDE = 15

3 ADULT FEMALE

4 SUB FEMALES

4 CUBS

4 CUBS

MARTHLY

(0 sightings)

UNKNOWN AGES

2 YEARS 6 MONTHS

8 MONTHS

4 MONTHS

There were no sightings of this pride for the month.

MANYELETHI MALES = 4

MARTHLY, EYREFIELD, MALA MALA, NORTHERN FLOCKFIELD

DOMINANT OVER THE STYX, EYREFIELD, FOURWAYS AND MARTHLY PRIDES

(19 sightings)

+/- 6 YEARS 11 MONTHS

We enjoyed a very good month of sightings for this coalition, although most of the time the four was not together. The majority of the sightings placed them with the Eyrefield lionesses, feeding off the kills that they made. The furthest south they were seen was around Rattrays Camp, while they covered and scent marked the northern part of the reserve with intent. We had an interesting sighting involving two of the Manyelethi males, the Styx pride, and two lionesses from the Fourways pride. The Fourways pride lionesses had killed a buffalo with one of the Manyelethi males. The Styx pride then happened upon the scene with another Manyelethi male, and of course wanted in on the kill. They then tried to chase the Fourways females away. As each group of lionesses attacked the other, so the Manyelethi males would then defend 'their' females. At no point did the males have a go at each other, although one of the Styx lionesses did find herself been manhandled by the Manyelethi male defending the Fourways lionesses. For the time being this coalition seems to be largely in charge, but with younger coalitions around, it's only a matter of time before the lion dynamics go full circle again.

TOULON MALES = 3 **+/- 7 YEARS 4 MONTH**
 SOUTHERN CHARLESTON
 NOMADIC
 (0 sightings)

There were no sightings of these males during the month.

SUB ADULT MALES FROM THE EYREFIELD PRIDE = 3
1 MALE **4 YEARS 3 MONTHS**
1 MALE **4 YEARS 2 MONTH**
MARTHLY MALE **6 YEARS 3 MONTHS**
 NOMADIC
 (0 sightings)

There were no sightings of these males during the month.

Other lions encountered during September 2011

- **Two unidentified males:** (1 sighting)
 On the last day of the report period these two males - approximately five years of age - were found on Matshipiri Dam road. Where they came from, or where they subsequently went, we have no idea. Both of them were in beautiful condition, with big bodies, but undeveloped manes. One wonders if these two males could be the catalyst for the downfall of the Manyelethi coalition?

ESTIMATE OF NUMBER OF DIFFERENT LIONS ENCOUNTERED (approximate)

September	25
-----------	----

LEOPARDS:

BICYCLE CROSSING MALE **9 YEARS 6 MONTHS**
 WESTERN MALAMALA, WESTERN FLOCKFIELD, WESTERN CHARLESTON
 (3 sightings)

Not a bad month of sightings for the Bicycle Crossing male, especially considering that in recent months he has not been seen at all. Twice he was seen mating with the Dudley female, and on another occasion we saw him chase a young male leopard up a tree. Although this ended with him being chased up a tree a few moments later by an irate Eyrefield lioness. Whether this male chooses to stay in the south or regain his former northern territories remains to be seen.

EMSAGWEN MALE **+/- 8 YEARS 3 MONTHS**
 EYREFIELD, EASTERN MALA MALA, EASTERN FLOCKFIELD, MARTHLY
 (0 sightings)

There were no sightings of this male for the month.

GOWRIE MALE

NORTHWESTERN EYREFIELD

(1 sighting)

12 YEARS 5 MONTHS

Even with the disappearance of the Emsagwen male, we only spotted the Gowrie male once during the report period. It was right at the beginning of the month, when he was in the vicinity of the Ostrich Koppies female and her cub on an impala kill. Whether or not he will try and shift his territory southwards in order to claim what the Emsagwen male has left behind, is a question that will only be answered as time passes.

AIRSTRIP MALE

WESTERN MALA MALA, WESTERN FLOCKFIELD

(16 sightings)

5 YEARS 3 MONTHS

This male is certainly capitalizing on the disappearance of the Emsagwen male at the moment. Mating with at least three different females during the month, and at the same time covering vast stretches of ground that include not only his own territory, but exploring those areas where the Emsagwen male once roamed as well. His split lip had no sooner healed up, when he got himself into another fight. This time he managed to get bitten right on the corner of his left eye. A few inches across and he would more than likely have lost vision in that eye. For now at least, he appears to be the dominant male in the region. Will the Emsagwen male come back and chase this youngster away, or is he here to stay? Only time will tell.

KIKELEZI FEMAE

WESTERN MALA MALA, MARTHLY

(6 sightings)

9 YEARS 11 MONTHS

A significant drop in sightings of this female compared to this time last year. It may be that she has shifted her territory out of the area, and the places that we have been seeing her most frequently - which is Marthly - are just the fringe of her new territory. If this indeed the case, then it looks like she has shifted north and west.

JAKKALSDRAAI FEMALE

CENTRAL & WESTERN CHARLESTON, EAST OF THE SAND RIVER

(1 sighting of cub alone)

11 YEARS 10 MONTHS

Two sightings of a small cub on the Charleston River rocks were an exciting conclusion to hours of searching for, and then following, the Jakkalsdraai female, who we'd observed to be lactating. We only saw one cub, which looks to be about two months old. This is exciting news for a female we seldom get to see anymore.

CAMPBELL KOPPIES FEMALE

WESTERN EYREFIELD

(1 sighting)

11 YEARS 11 MONTHS

The one and only sighting we had of this female was when we found her mating with the Airstrip male one morning close to camp. Their territories don't overlap, so it's possible that she was drawn into the area after hearing the Airstrip male doing some territorial calling.

OSTRICH KOPPIES FEMALE**1 FEMALE CUB**

EYREFIELD

(1 sighting of female, 5 sightings of female and cub, 3 sightings of cub alone).

6 YEARS 11 MONTHS**1 YEAR 1MONTH**

A good month of sightings for this duo. It is really fantastic that the cub is now over a year old. With each passing day she is becoming more bush smart and aware of her surroundings, which can only improve her chances of survival. And then hopefully one day she'll raise some cubs of her own. The two have spotted from the Mlowathi River, all the way east across to the Matshipiri River on the northern part of the reserve. For the past eighteen months this female's territory has been fairly consistent, and has not shifted all that much. As the rainy season approaches, the cub will begin entering its last six months of dependency on its mom. It will be interesting to see how the Ostrich Koppies female's behaviour changes when it does finally happens, and of equal interest will be which male she chooses to sire her next litter.

MATSHIPIRI FEMALE

10 YEARS 11 MONTHS

EASTERN MALA MALA, EASTERN EYREFIELD
(3 sightings)

Usually this time of year has always been the most productive month of sightings of this female. Her most favourite haunts in the past have been around the Emsagwen waterhole. The waterhole has had good sightings of prey species and rhino, but very little in the way of predators. The three sightings we had of her were along the Matshipiri River, but where she is spending most of her time is not known.

DUDLEY FEMALE

13 YEARS

WESTERN FLOCKFIELD
(2 sightings)

With her son fully independent, this female is trying to have another litter of cubs. The two sightings that we had of her, she was mating with the Bicycle Crossing male leopard close to Rattrays Camp. If she does manage to, it would most probably be her last litter. She would 15 by the next time she could mate again, which would be too old.

FLOCKFIELD FEMALE

7 YEARS 5 MONTH

CENTRAL & EASTERN FLOCKFIELD, NORTHERN CHARLESTON
(1 sighting of cub alone)

Late one evening drive we found a single cub close to Kapen Rocks, although it quickly scampered off into some thick vegetation. The only female leopard that lives in those parts is the Flockfield female. Hopefully the coming months will show whether it is a single cub, or if there are more. Hopefully the female will bring them out more often.

TAMBOTI FEMALE

3 YEARS 11 MONTHS

WESTERN FLOCKFIELD
(13 sightings)

This month the Tamboti was second only to the Airstrip male in terms of number of sightings. The beginning of the month saw her mating with the Airstrip male again. When she will conceive is unknown, but she is still a young leopard (she only turns four in November). Nevertheless, having the Ngoboswan female's genes in her, she will no doubt want to breed and raise as many cubs as possible. She seems to have spent most of the month north of West Street, although she occasionally ventured southwards on the western bank. It has been a while since she has visited her usual haunts around the Tamboti thickets and the Matshipiri River however.

SPARTA FEMALE

13 YEARS 9 MONTHS

WESTERN MALA MALA
(0 sightings)

Other leopards encountered during September 2011

- **Son of the Matshipiri female:** (3 years 1 month) (2 sightings)
Only two confirmed sightings of this nervous youngster. There were many sightings of unidentified young males during the month, which could have easily been him. Often though, these sightings are just fleeting glimpses at night when an identification is almost impossible. It is possible though, that within the next few months sightings of this male may dwindle down to zero as he has to leave his natal area.
- **Daughter of the Kikilezi female:** (1 year 9 months) (5 sightings)
Still doing very well in her newly found independence from her mother. On one occasion she discovered a kill belong to her mother and tried to share it, much to the older female's annoyance. With her mother having shifted territory, it may come that she sets up house in the very area that she grew up in.
- **Son of the Dudley female:** (2 years 2 month) (0 sightings)
- **Son of the Sparta female:** (5 years 6 months) (1 sighting)
A single sighting of this beautiful young male. We saw him on the very western edge of Marthly, where he caught, killed and then ate a Civet cat. He may also end up being a male we see more of in the future.
- **Young male leopard:** (7 sightings)
This refers to the young male that has been seen frequently around the West Street bridge area. He was seen more frequently at the beginning of the report period, but towards the end sightings slowed down. Perhaps with the Airstrip male around so much he has felt the pressure, and is beginning to move off.
- **Vomba female:** (0 sighting)
- **Marthly male:** (2 sightings)
This seldom seen male has proven to be a tough opponent for the Airstrip male, and has given him many wounds across his face to make him sit up and take note. Marthly is the very eastern section of his territory, so he may spend a lot more time here than we realise. The difficult terrain makes the tracks of leopards are hard to follow though.
- **Large male leopard from Sparta:** (1 sightings)
Seen close to the son of the Sparta female when he was feeding off his Civet kill, he merely growled at the younger male and then moved on. That was the first and last we saw of him for the month.
- **Discoloured iris female:** (0 sightings)
- **Daughter of the Campbell Koppies female and cub:** (2 sightings)
The third month in a row now with sightings of these two leopards. With the bush having dried up, this young female and her son have been seen coming south towards Mlowathi Dam to drink, and also to look for hunting opportunities.
- **No id leopards:** (24 sightings)
Many of these sightings have been of the same individuals, but always just fleeting glimpses in the dark, which makes it difficult to identify them.
- **Rollercoaster female:** (1 sighting)
It's been a long time since we've seen this female. She was seen in the Sand River around Rocky crossing, albeit from a long way off.

NUMBER OF DIFFERENT LEOPARDS ENCOUNTERED (approximate)

September	21
-----------	----

CHEETAH

Only five sightings of cheetah for the month. Last month the coalition of four was reduced to three, and now this month there are only two brothers left. What has happened to the other two is anyone's guess. The pair was seen killing an impala around Fourways open area, which they fed off for a few hours. Affording us some great viewing in the process. The quantity of sightings for cheetah has probably dropped off because there is no water in Clarendon Dam, which is what usually attracts them to the area.

NUMBER OF DIFFERENT CHEETAH ENCOUNTERED

September	2
-----------	---

CAPE HUNTING DOGS

Success! We had a great sighting of a pack of ten dogs - seven adults and three pups - on the airstrip. We found them early morning with full bellies, playing and sleeping. After a little while they got up and trotted northwards past a herd of impala, which quickly vacated the area. The dogs showed no interest in them however.

NUMBER OF DIFFERENT WILD DOGS ENCOUNTERED

September	10
-----------	----

CAPE BUFFALO

Only up by three sightings from last month, but even so. There were some great buffalo seen during September, with many herd sightings and many 'dagga boy' sightings around the causeway area. The lions, of course, have had a great time filling their bellies up on buffalo meat. With the rains around the corner, the grass will become abundant, and the lion pressure will ease off slightly until next winter.

RHINO

We enjoyed a fantastic month of rhino sightings, with an increase of fourteen sightings from August. Most of the sightings have been along the Sand River, as well as a number of the waterholes. Except for the Emsagwen waterhole that is, which usually offers up a great many rhino sightings at this time of year. There have been some large crashes around, but mostly it's just groups of up to six or so.

ELEPHANTS

Elephant sightings are slightly down from last month, but that said, we've still enjoyed some good quality time with these large herbivores. The many herds around also have an abundance of calves, providing some excellent viewing and photographic opportunities. The albino calf we saw last month was not seen again. Whether or not it has survived the harsh African sun remains to be seen. Most of the elephant sightings are still centred along the Sand River, with sightings usually increasing from midday onwards when the herds come down to drink.

TOTAL SIGHTINGS FOR SEPTEMBER 2011

Lions: 57
Leopards: 96
Elephant: 128
Rhino: 101
Buffalo: 66
Cheetah: 5
Wild Dog: 1

OTHER SIGHTINGS OF INTEREST FOR SEPTEMBER 2011:

- African Wild Cat
- Black rhino
- Honey badgers