



Newsletter December 2009



Birders Paradise...

It has been an exceptionally good month for bird enthusiasts. 24 African Openbills (previous known as Open-billed Storks) have, for the very first time, been seen standing in the shallow water at Woodlands Dam. African Openbills are resident but may make local seasonal movements in response to conditions and to find scattered, but rich beds of snails.

They are best-known (hence the name) for their specialised bill, which has a gap between the mandibles when they are closed. This is an adaptation to their exploitation of primarily freshwater snails and occasionally mussels. The reasons for this unique design are as follows. Firstly, it enables the upper and lower parts of the bill to be manipulated like fingers to hold and extract slimy and well-concealed prey from its protective shell. Secondly, it provides a space generating enough leverage and pressure in which to crush the shells of prey (large land snails) too large to manage with the bill-tips.

Other birds seen during this month include: Woolly-necked storks, White storks, Blue Cranes, African Fish-Eagles, Red-Chested Cuckoos, Giant Kingfishers, Pied Kingfishers, Cape Longclaws, to name but a few. A comprehensive bird list will be available at the lodge as from January 2010.



White Stork



Pied Kingfisher



Red-Chested Cuckoo



Blue Crane



Cape Longclaw



Surprise visitor...

While out on game drive, this Green Lynx spider made a sudden appearance inside the game vehicle. Their common name is indicative of their cat-like behaviour of stalking and jumping at prey and this is probably how it came about. However this small, harmless spider was a bit over eager going for guests onboard. These spiders can be immediately recognized by the numerous spines standing out at right angles on their legs, and in some species by their bright colours.

Hide and Seek...

This funny looking head sticking out just above the water surface (barely noticeable at first glance) is better known as a Marsh Terrapin. It was found in a puddle of water in the middle of the road. These terrapins inhabit a wide variety of temporary and permanent water bodies and will move considerable distances from one water body to the next during wet weather. Please be cautious and observant when driving around, even though these creatures are the most widespread and common species of terrapin found in southern Africa, they sure deserve to live and be admired.



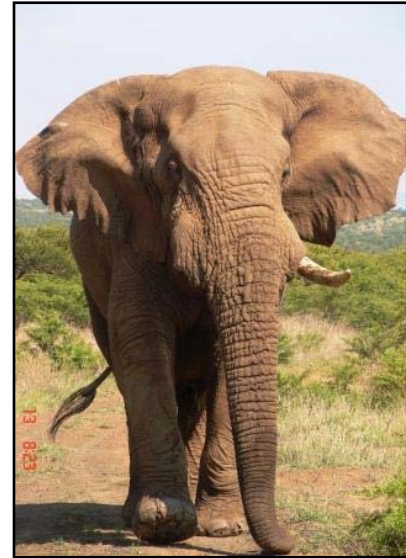
Hyrales, commonly known as Rock Dassies, are very shy and inconspicuous creatures and with the slightest disturbance will retreat to their rocky shelters. See if you can spot one! A good indication of their presence is usually the white and brown urine streaks left behind on the rocks. They are predominantly diurnal and only become active after sunrise.

General...

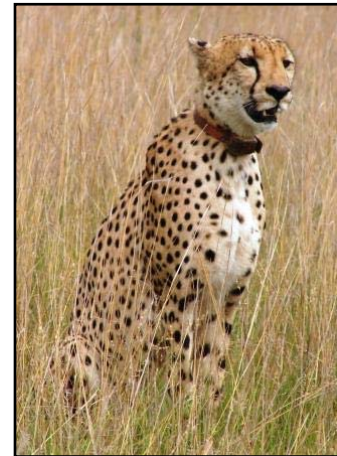
Sightings of the elusive Nambiti lions have been frequent during this month, considering how unpredictable their movements have been...being in the north today and seen in the south tomorrow. They have frequently visited Nambiti Plains, which made for excellent sightings and photo opportunities.



Elephant sightings have been numerous and close encounters with BFE have been far too many. He still enjoys getting up, close and personal, giving guests heart palpitations. BFE is out of musth but this doesn't give reason to be less alert of this 6ton mammal! The breeding herd of elephants have moved as far north as Nambiti Plains Lodge for a day and headed south again the next morning. They are very mobile thus making sightings more frequent.

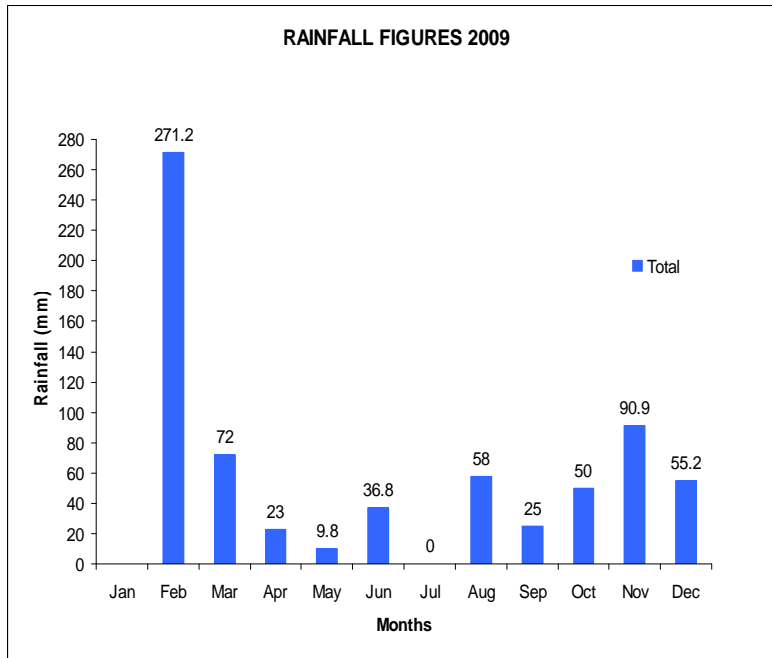


Cheetah sightings have also been good, although it is only the Phinda trio and the Braakfontein males that make themselves visible. The Phinda mother and cubs haven't been seen anywhere. Nambiti reserve management reported that the young Phinda female was sadly killed by Hyaena. Fortunately, if it wasn't for the VHF radio collar, they would never have found her. What truly happened will always be a mystery but signs indicated that she was attacked while feeding from a carcass.



Rhino sightings have been plentiful and predictable. Rhinos can frequently be seen on Nambiti Plains and luckily for us at Idwala sometimes even from the lodge.

Weather report...



For the year 2009 (as measured from February 2009) we had 691.9mm of rain in total. The average annual rainfall for the Ladysmith area is about 650mm, therefore we had above average rainfall. Ladysmith is also known for its floods and the majority of these floods occur in February. As seen on the chart, February 2009 has been one of those exceptionally wet months and the river constantly pushed over its banks.

Average minimum temperature: 18.8°C

Average maximum temperature: 29°C

TO EVERYONE A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!

Greetings
Lourette Bredenkamp
General Manager

Telephone: 078 803 5545

Fax to Email: 086 567 6578

Email: gm@idwalalodge.co.za

Website: www.idwalalodge.co.za