



Newsletter March 2009

Curiosity...



On the 1st of March we had an exceptional sighting of three Hyaena, the matriarch and her two eighteen month old cubs. No they weren't on a kill or doing something out of the ordinary; they just came right up to the game viewer within touching distance. At first when spotted they were hardly noticeable

from the driver's seat, luckily the cubs couldn't withhold their curiosity and came to say hallo! The matriarch wasn't concerned with her cubs (left hand side) approaching us and eventually she (right hand side) joined them. It was an amazing experience for all onboard the game viewer and it was even more amazing how everyone, even the children, kept absolutely motionless and in awe.

Being such an awesome sighting a lot of photos were taken and in one of them I noticed that the one cub had something hanging between its legs. It could be that one of the cubs is a male. It is very hard to tell as females mimic the external genitalia of males in the possession of a penis-like and highly erectile clitoris and a false scrotum. BUT as siblicidal aggression is common among twin spotted Hyaena, neonates start fighting (born with deciduous canines and fully erupted incisors) immediately after birth and when twins are of the same sex, one invariably dies.

Close encounters...

Since the collared bull Elephant was first seen coming into musth (February) he has been seen more regularly and covering a lot of ground actively seeking out the breeding herd. The collared bull Elephant (\pm 31years old) is younger than BFE (\pm 41years old) and less dominant; this makes him very dangerous and aggressive when in musth. Unfortunately we had some close encounters being unaware of his whereabouts. This elephant should not be taken lightly, he means business!





The Buffalo herd has also been seen frequently and appear to be relaxed for the moment. On the 30th of March, however, we came across a lone buffalo bull on Southern Plains. He acted very strangely, came right up to the game viewer sniffing and showing us his gums. Then suddenly as if he was possessed (or maybe he just had too much malpitte-poisonous seeds from the Common Thorn Apple) he started ramming the game viewer. Please, be very careful of this lone buffalo and keep your distance.

Weird and wonderful...

Water monitor...

There are two species of monitors that occur in southern Africa, these are Water monitors and Rock monitors. Of these two species the Water monitor is the largest species of lizard in southern Africa, reaching a body length just short of a meter. The tail is about 1.5 times the length of the body. They are terrestrial, semi-aquatic lizards that are usually found close to water. On several occasions water monitors have been seen lying stretched out on the Sunday's River Bridge. They are not to be messed around with as they defend themselves vigorously by biting and scratching as well as lashing with their tails



European Roller...

The European Roller is the only member of the roller family of birds to breed in Europe. It is a long-distance migrant and common summer visitor in South Africa. They have been seen fairly often as their strikingly blue body colour makes them very conspicuous as they perch prominently on trees, posts or overhead wires whilst watching for large insects, lizards and frogs. This roller differs from the Lilac-breasted and Racket-tailed rollers in having an all-blue head and a square-ended tail. Sexes are similar, but the juvenile is a drabber version of the adult and is more olive-green in colour. The display of this bird is lapwing-like, with the twists and turns giving this species its English name. A decline in the European population has resulted in this species being listed as Near Threatened. Threats include persecution on migration as hundreds are shot for food. The use of pesticides reduces food availability and they are sensitive to changing farming and forestry practices.



New releases...

About 615 Impala and 70 Blue Wildebeest were released on the reserve during this month. These Impala and Wildebeest have been coming from all over KwaZulu-Natal and it was a privilege to see about 80 Impala taking their first leap onto unknown Nambiti ground after traveling for some distance!

Other news...

Sightings of the male and female Lions have been scarce. This is mostly due to inaccessible roads caused by the amount of rainfall in February. The lionesses were once found on an eland kill close to the Sunday's River Bridge. The sighting was however of short duration as the kill was right next to the road. They got disturb by game viewers driving up and down next to them and there was no cover for them to hide the kill. The male lions were nicely tucked away on Python Lane and only a few feet away they also had an eland kill.



The 6 Cheetahs from the Zolo Boma have been spending a lot of time on the southern side of the reserve. On the 25th of March we spotted them on the Southern Plains. They were nicely lined up under a small Acacia tree even though there was barely enough shade for all of them.

The Braakfontein sub-adult bull Rhino, the newly released cow and her calf, have been a reliable sighting as they spend most of their time on the western side of the Braakfontein Plains.



BFE has been seen frequently in the northern side of the reserve and more specifically in the area of the Sunday's River. Amazingly he disappears like a needle in a haystack when the collared bull Elephant makes his appearance. BFE is very relaxed and seem unaware of vehicles coming and going. He has been pushing down a lot of trees evident in what now looks like a graveyard for trees.

The breeding herd of Elephants has been seen more frequently this month as they have been spending more time on the northern side of the reserve. On the morning of the 28th the breeding herd was seen in the clump of trees just outside the Idwala Gate.

Sad...



I'm very sad to inform you that during this month a baby Porcupine and a baby Puffadder were ran over by a vehicle on Idwala Access. All creatures create, small, venomous are unique and needs our protection!

Weather Report...

Rainfall – 72mm

Minimum temperature – 16°C

Maximum temperature – 32°C

Cosmos flowers have made their appearance – autumn is in our mitts.

A FESTIVE EASTER HOLIDAY FOR ALL!

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