



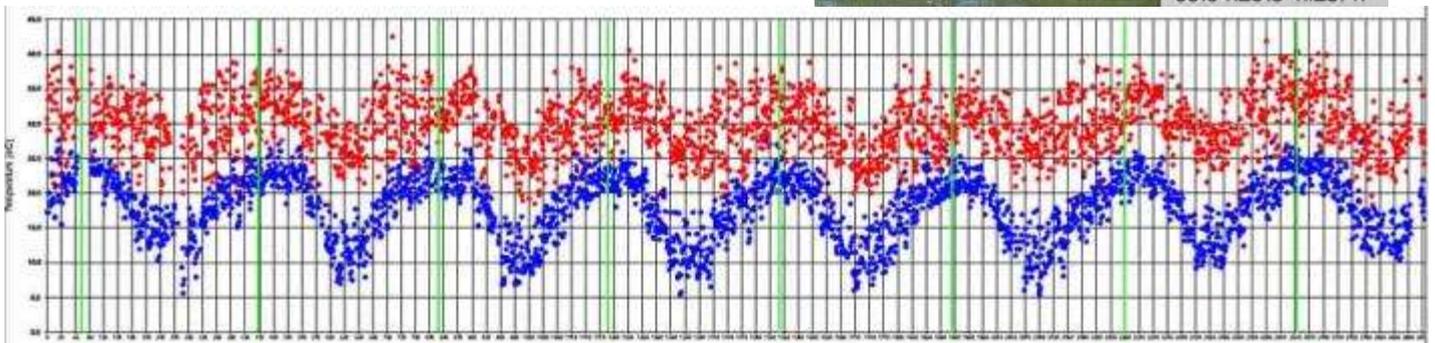
Leopard's View Newsletter – July 2016

April 14

It was a treat to see this huge herd of buffalo on our evening game drive last night, at least 150 individuals with a lot of small calves. Normally grazers, but with our somewhat limited amount of grass available at the moment they will eat any green plant they can, as this adult buffalo is doing in the photograph.



It has been a long, dry and unusually hot winter. We had no late rain and 18.5 mm in late July was too little and at the wrong time of year – plants do not grow in July! Temperatures were higher than normal with the night time minimums being on average 2 degrees above the usual. The graph below shows this clearly: look at the last two winter dips in the blue minimum temperature band and they are nowhere near as low as the previous years. What remnants of grazing that were left after the poor summer rains have all but vanished and the bush is very open. The tree browse remained adequate but our bulk grazers (buffalo, white rhino and hippo) have been under great stress. The waterbuck took to eating the weed in the waterhole.



While the herbivores struggle during times of drought the carnivores traditionally prosper. We have had plenty of good carnivore sightings with nine visits by lions to the Lodge. Our local pride, the Takazile pride, was taken over by two new males that moved into the area: the previous pride male disappeared, presumably killed. We have also recorded hyenas on nine occasions and have heard hyenas calling far more frequently than ever before. The waterhole camera trap took some excellent shots of leopard and cheetah and there have been many jackal visits, especially during the night.

The best sighting was on the 29th April and for us and our guests was definitely one to remember: the local pride killed a wildebeest very close by, affording us front row seats as it were.



May 1

A very exciting lion sighting on Friday night (29th April). At about 8.00pm, during dinner with our guests, we heard several zebra alarm calls close by and then 30 minutes later the distinctive sounds of lions on a kill. We immediately drove out to investigate, thinking we would be lucky to find anything, but not far from the lodge, and 80 m from our house, we came across 9 lions on a wildebeest kill, 6 sub-adults and 3 females. We went back to the lodge, collected our guests and then returned to the sighting. We experienced amazing sights and sounds as they fed and then began to fight over the remains of the carcass. Soon there were only scraps left and the jackals began to circle, giving their eerie call, ready to take their turn. We got back to the lodge at around 10.15 pm, very excited at what we had seen. Later on, returning to our house, we found one of the females with the wildebeest skull by our stoep and minutes later the male, whom we had not seen at the kill, rushed past to join her, and then gave a magnificent roar. From the shape of his belly we guessed that he had fed and moved off to the waterhole before we arrived on the scene. Looking at the pictures on the house camera trap the following morning, we found that 7 lions had been drinking at the house birdpool about 10.30 pm, while we were at the lodge having a delayed post-prandial coffee. Certainly an evening to remember! The pride spent the rest of the night some 100m from the lodge gate before moving off soon after sunrise.



The "Takazile" lion pride at our waterhole



May 27

A visit to our waterhole by the local lion pride. The late afternoon sun makes for a beautiful picture. They stayed around until darkness fell and our guests were able to watch them from the decks, illuminated by the spotlight. They have been very vocal over the past week - a wonderful sound to hear in the now, cold night air.

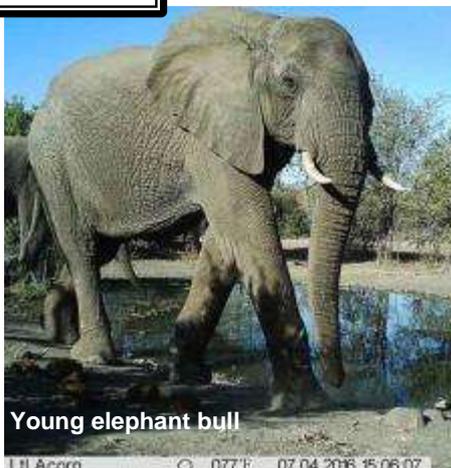
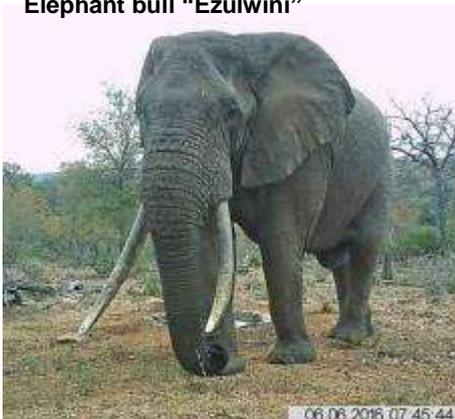


June 5

The elephants are back on the block with lots of excellent sightings over the past week. Ezulwini, our magnificent big tusker bull (2nd from the left in the picture), has a group of younger bulls with him, known as an 'askaris'. Good news, as he'll be passing on his wealth of knowledge and generally keeping them in order.



Elephant bull "Ezulwini"



June 12

May and June has seen the annual impala rut in full tilt. Males vie for supremacy and the right to collect as many females as possible to make up their 'harem'. For the male it is an endless task of keeping an eye on what can be 30+ females. He is continuously herding them together, chasing them around and announcing his status with a very loud grunting which goes on day and night! Guests are amazed when we tell them the noise comes from the normally placid impala, not a lion! Those males not yet old enough to breed or unlucky enough not to collect any females gang up together in a kind of boy's only club and practise their sparring techniques ready for next season. The end result will be the birth of many young impalas at the end of November.



June 16

This African Hawk Eagle was seen in the beautiful early morning light a few days ago. An unusual sighting for us.



July 23

Away for a few days and on looking at the camera trap pictures we had a wonderful surprise - this magnificent leopard at the waterhole at 4.00 pm in the afternoon; silently passing by with just the eye of the camera to catch its presence.



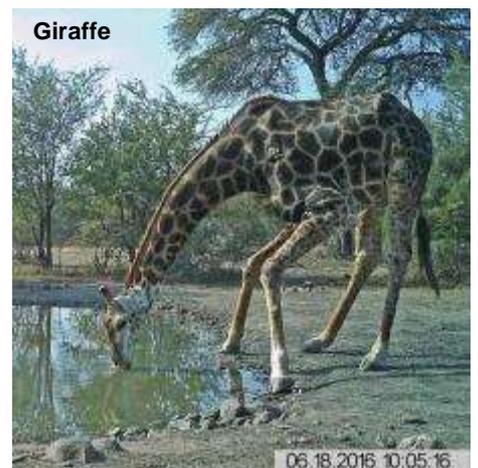
As you would expect during a drought, the waterhole has seen many visiting animals and birds – a selection below.....



Impala herd



Zebra family



Giraffe



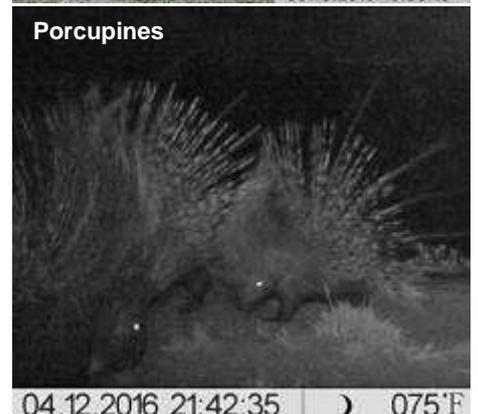
Young waterbuck investigates the camera trap



Kudu female



Wallowing warthogs



Porcupines

July 27

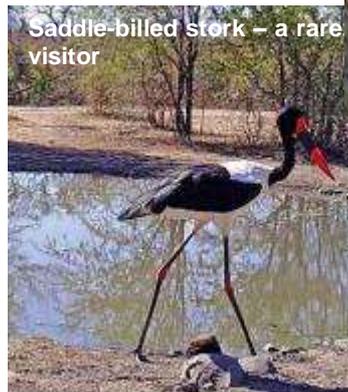
A very welcome, but unexpected 18mm of rain last night which has refreshed everything and settled the dust for the next few months. The aloes in the lodge gardens have been glorious again this winter, even with the drought conditions. Weather over the last few days has been cold, cloudy and windy but today the sun has returned and the sun birds have been flitting around continuously with me trying, unsuccessfully as yet, to get a photograph showing off their beautiful iridescent plumage. I shall continue and hopefully have a picture to share with the next post.



White-bellied sunbird feeding on the aloes



Crested barbet



Saddle-billed stork – a rare visitor

0300 08/31/2016 10:4



African fish eagle

01.2016 16:37:23



African harrier hawk (formerly gymnogene)

04.15.2016 10:4



Lilac-breasted roller



07.03.2016 15:57:53

This group of young elephants pulled a camera trap pole out of the ground and are seen here walking off with it – the camera was found many metres away and suffered much damage.

May 7

Afternoon tea is one of the favourite traditions for our guests here at Leopard's View; and what better way to enjoy it than with a full-on cream tea! Delicious!



Thatchers working on the kitchen/office roof

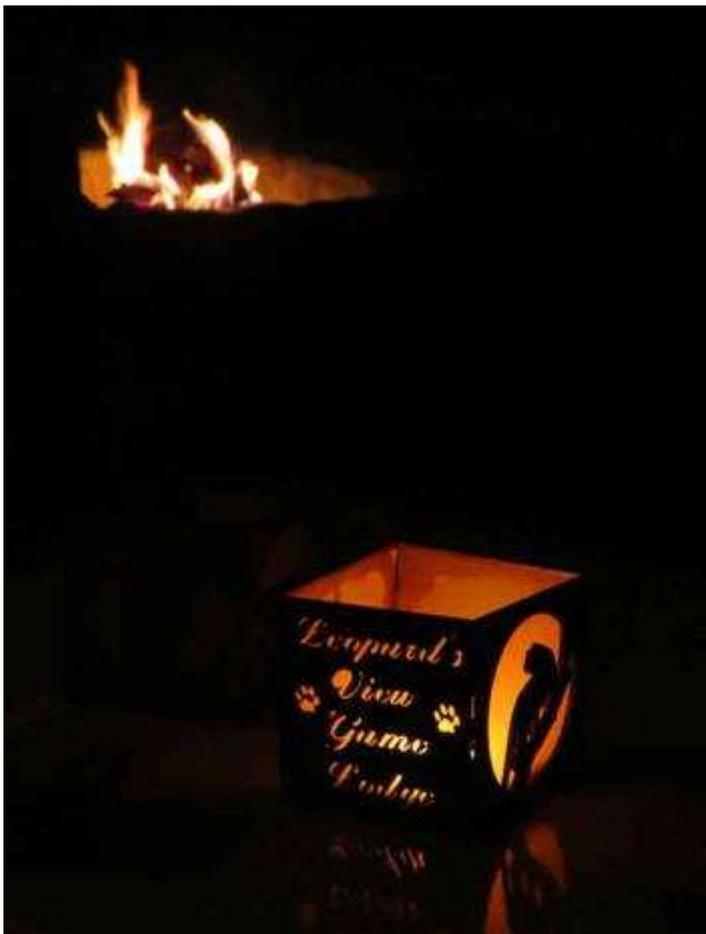
We are always doing some form of maintenance and this winter it has been the thatched roofs or at least some of them – we will phase the work over two years. It's a specialist job, hot dusty and messy but it extends the life of the thatch considerably, especially where there are trees close to a roof.



Caterpillar – the hairs cause irritation if touched



Smaller things are often as interesting or entertaining as the bigger ones, whether it's a hairy caterpillar or dwarf mongooses poking their noses out of a hole in a termite mound.



Full moon, 21st April

Best wishes to all our newsletter readers,

Neil & Ann