One of the leopards spotted on Mabula Private Game Reserve by our research project. Andrew Clark and Jappie Bradley have started the Leopard Project with the aim of identifying leopards that are currently coming in and out of Mabula Private Game reserve.
Wow!!!!!!!!!!!!

The festive season is upon us, and this year has flown by a rapid rate. Many will be packing their cars and hopping on the next available flight in search of winding down and taking a much-needed break.

Christmas is a time of celebration; it brings friends and family together during the festive season. As the entire year has come and gone and it seems as if it was a short while ago that the festive season of 2015 had been with us.

For many is it the only time of the year they get to see their loved ones, and muse over past traditions and childhood memories, for me it will be the memories made with our guests, who supported us throughout the year.

I will never forget the smiles on all our guests faces, those priceless moments of joy and happiness, is something I will treasure forever.

Enjoy reading the last month of 2016 in Pictures and News!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Last month’s guide’s news, I touched on the way the bush has undergone major transformation over the last little while. The recent rains have turned a dry, dust-filled landscape into a vibrant green oasis.

We are hopeful for more rain throughout the season, as we continue to appreciate the onset of new grass growth, fresh green leaves, as well as rising watering holes and mud wallows. The bush is buzzing with energy, and alive with the choruses of beetles, frogs and migrant birds.

The famous English idiom “a picture is worth a thousand words” refers to the notion that the meaning, or essence of a subject, can be accurately conveyed within a single still image. I hope that by sharing these pictures and information, I am able to instil similar emotions to those felt at the time.

WWW.MABULA.COM
A male cheetah periodically scans his surrounds whilst resting...

The three cubs and the mother are doing wonderfully well and growing big, this is the first sighting by the guides since they were born.

We are all crossing fingers that they all survive; we hope that there are female amongst them.
One of the cheetah cubs looking at the mother trying to go at an impala on Mannekamp Main road. They look so cute, my first sighting since they were born. Was very lucky to find them walking on the road.

Play time. Cubs were chasing each other on the road, while the mother watching them carefully that something doesn’t happen to them.
Digging for roots in the sunset. Elephants will use their feet and even their tusk to loosen the soil around roots and tug the plant out the ground using their trunks, attempting to get to the rich nutrient store held below the ground.

Such an incredibly tender and powerful moment, beautifully captured, a dominant male watching his brother closely, that he doesn’t approach his female.
What Do We Learn from Fauna and Flora?

The concept of Ubuntu lies at the very core of the first cultures to establish themselves in Southern Africa, referring to humanity and how one person is because of someone else or a group.

Working in the bush I’ve learnt so many lessons from nature, some of which are extremely evident, whilst others require one to look a little deeper to see what’s being taught. One of the lessons I’ve learnt and been exposed to on a daily basis is the spirit of Ubuntu.

I see Ubuntu in many different things out in the bush, from the simplicity of an elephant eating a tree and then transporting some of the seeds to a new destination through its dung, to the more intricate fig wasp, which is the size of a match head, being the only pollinator of a massive fig tree.

All these things need each other to exist, being completely reliant on the existence of the other to survive, and therefore are because of each other.

There are more than likely hundreds more examples that I can rattle off about but there is one in particular that I always love to see…

Red-billed oxpeckers feed on ticks on the neck of a giraffe. The oxpeckers feast on the blood-filled ticks for nourishment and inadvertently help the giraffe by removing the bothersome parasites.

Watching a dazzle of zebra or a journey of giraffe, which is quite spectacular on its own, there is also often something else interesting going on which tends to go unnoticed by us observers.

If you look carefully you’ll notice at any given time there is usually a little bird, or group of birds, sitting on the animals. This bird is the oxpeckers. Often laughed at and thought to be catching a free ride, these birds are doing so much more than just this.
What the bird is actually doing is cleaning the animal of the parasites that are living off of it. Most times their main targets are the ticks that have made their way onto the hides of the unsuspecting animal.

One may say that the bird has no clue how much it is helping the giraffe or zebra and that it is merely just feeding itself but nevertheless it is helping to perform some very important functions.

By pulling the parasites off they’re helping to clean the animals, often in places they can’t reach themselves and more than likely preventing them from picking up diseases that these ticks may carry.

Most of an oxpeckers diet is made up of ticks (primarily the blood found in the ticks), and therefore relies on the animals to feed. Without the animal hosting the tick, the oxpeckers would have to hunt for its food, more than likely not being as successful and possibly affecting the success of the species as a whole.

The parasite carrying animal on the other hand also has no idea of the important function it’s serving for the birds, when it actual fact it is behaving like a sort of mobile buffet.

Although this giraffe doesn’t seem too perturbed by all the oxpeckers feeding off his neck, they can get a bit agitated at times. This tends to happen when the oxpeckers try to feed in the ears or drink fluid from the nostrils or eyes.

One may argue that these animals have no idea what effect they have on each other, and you’re probably right, but the way I see it just by these animals being themselves and behaving in the manner most natural to them, they end up working together and essentially strengthening the survival of the system as a whole.

Everything is connected and when you tug at a single thing in the universe, you find it is attached to everything else.
The elusive Aardwolf on Mabula Game Reserve

If you were an ant or termite, you certainly wouldn’t want to be around when there’s a hungry Aardwolf (Proteles cristatus) on the prowl. These shy, nocturnal creatures may be small – with adults averaging around 10kgs – but they have an appetite second to none. In fact, a single Aardwolf can consume up to 400 000 ants and termites in a single evening, scraping at the nests and using their rough tongues to lick up piles of the hapless insects.

Interestingly, the papillae on the Aardwolf’s tongue face backwards, which means it can snag plenty of its favourite morsels before they scurry back underground.

Despite feasting predominantly on small insect, the Aardwolf has very large canine teeth. Rather than using these to tear up meat, they are primarily a defence mechanism and come in very handy when the Aardwolf finds itself under attack.

This shy aardwolf was captured in the act of returning to his den for a rest before he set out again to forage for some yummy termites.

In addition to having some impressive teeth to flash around, the Aardwolf is a very attractive animal with its yellowish-brown fur and striking black stripes along its shoulders, back and hips. They use burrows to shelter and raise their young, and prefer sandy habitats where food is readily available, so spotting one is considered a fairly rare treat by game viewers.

If you are going to enjoy such an experience, however, one of the best, and most likely, places to do so is on a night drive through the fantastic Mabula Private Game Reserve.
Leopards on Mabula Private Game Reserve

Any sighting of a leopard is an incredible and breath-taking experience as these animals live such secretive lives.

Mabula Leopard feeding on a warthog carcass, the main aim is to habituate them and make them take Mabula as their permanent home, once they are habituated to the vehicles it will make for beautiful sightings for our guests.

For the most part they are solitary creatures and prefer dense vegetation where they can utilize their stealth, camouflage and ambush hunting techniques to sneak up on their prey.
For me one of the most rewarding parts of being a guide is getting to witness incredible sightings such as these above, but it’s made even better by the fact that I get to share and experience it with guests from all over the world. This was a sighting we will all remember for a very long time; a truly special morning for all.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Andrew and Japie for taking this project serious, this is going to build a long-lasting sighting of leopards on Mabula Private Game Reserve. Keep up the good work guys.

This buffalo enjoyed scratching herself on a Wild Seringa tree on Mannekamp Main road close to Ngorongoro plains.
Can Impala Really Delay Their Births?

The bush has become transformed, with green shoots emerging from seeds which have lain dormant in anticipation of rain. In turn, antelope have been in anticipation of the green shoots and now have access to high quality food, improving their condition and we are expecting impalas to drop their lambs relatively soon.

Young impala lambs are hidden away for the first two weeks after being born. It is most likely that during years where the rainfall is late, these young impala lambs are aborted or abandoned, and are never seen.

Animals are very much creatures of habit and it is the interface between animals and their environment that will often determine their behavior. Impala are synchronous breeders. Simply put, they usually breed at a certain time of the year. As the summer begins to come to an end, around May at Mabula, the days become shorter and trigger an increase in the testosterone of the rams and they begin to fight for ewes.

The males set up small territories and defend them by thrashing bushes with their horns and making use of specific piles of dropping. At the same time, they utter loud snorts and roaring sounds, which, when heard for the first time can be rather terrifying. All of this is part of a concerted effort to find females, court them and mate with them.

With synchronized breeding comes synchronized births. Young impala lambs are usually born around early-mid November, which usually coincides with the start of the wet season. The surplus of good forage is great for the impala ewes, keeping them well fed and able to produce milk for their lambs. But what happens if the rains don’t come, or comes late? For if I can remember, I have heard people speak about the ability of impala to delay giving birth for up to a month until the first rains arrive.
This widely held belief is most likely a fallacy as impala don’t always get it right. Despite low rainfall, impala lambs are often born into sparse bushveld that leads to a high mortality rate for the youngsters.

The lambs seen later in the season, are most likely those that were conceived later in the breeding season. This may have given rise to the widespread belief that impalas can delay their births to coincide with impending rain.

Late rains may also affect the condition of the ewes and poor conditions may cause them to reabsorb or abandon the fetus, or they may simply be eaten by predators.

Together with the fact that they are often hidden very well, it is most likely that these young lambs born early in the season are never seen. The young lambs that are seen and successfully raised later in the season, after the first rains, were probably those conceived later in the breeding season.

This may give the impression that females have delayed their births in response to the late onset of the rain. Impala do also give birth prematurely in response to early rain, but this is most likely due to the ample supply of food which may facilitate the development of the fetus.

It seems evident that impalas are certainly susceptible to changes in their environment, as are most animals. However, impalas most likely do not have as much control over their physiology as we may think, and are unlikely to delay their birth in anticipation of impending rain. Late rains may result in a slight delay in lambing because of poor nutritional conditions, just as optimal conditions may result in slightly earlier lambing. To cope with poor conditions, impalas can better deal with these by abandoning or aborting their young rather than risk their own lives to look after a lamb whose likelihood of survival is marginal at best.
I would like to take this moment to thank you for the support you gave us here at Mabula Game Lodge throughout the 2016, it has been a busy and wonderful year, we met different people from all over the world, we made friends. Without your visit, we wouldn’t be where we are today. A big thank you.

I would also want to thank all the Guides who will be working over the festive season and cannot be with their loved ones, carry on giving our guests the best experience and memorable safari experience ever.

That is all I have for you this month, see you in 2017!

From Isaiah & Wildlife team

Bushveld greetings