



*Above: Batia C in the front and V at the back
Photo by: G. Marcus*

Inside this issue:

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| EDITORIAL | 2 |
| LETTERS | 2 |
| THE BATIAS - TSAMAYANG SENTLE BO-RRA | 3 |
| | |

EDITORIAL

This edition of Lentswe is dedicated to say farewell to two lions that has become legends in Madikwe. Every guest to Madikwe or staff member that ever worked in Madikwe has got a Batia story or know at least who we are talking about.

At least one of the Batias has gone out the way they have lived there lives in Madikwe: Recklessly proud ...Taking on that one last Buffalo because he can— and then...having lost the battle; still managing to kill it in the process.

I have come to know these lions as relatively strong, well conditioned 12 year olds. They still managed to stand there ground against other males and sowed their seed vigorously.

They ended up being two scruffy not so big looking animals that lived out there days in Madikwe.

So this edition is filled with Bartia memories. With the risk of being labeled as sentimental I would still like to say to them:

When we hear the roar of lions in Madikwe we will think of the legends of Madikwe, and if by sunset we look up in the sky we might see a glimpse of a shadow, a proud creature stalking in those big hunting fields in the sky. Happy hunting fellows!

The Editor

PS: All the technological breakdowns in Madikwe has been sorted and you can look forward to receiving Lentswe la Madikwe on time from next month!

LETTERS

A huge Thank you from Alex and Rob to all Madikwe field guides, Lodge and park personnel who between them donated R9800 to the jackal project at the last MFGA meeting. Every single guide in Madikwe contributed to this donation effort spearheaded by Carlien Esterhuizen which is really fantastic and a first ever for Madikwe. It really makes us feel like the early morning lion sighting / lion kill "call ins" by us for the guides and lodges has really been appreciated. Thank you

All.



Above: MFGA members at the presentation of the donation to the Predator Biodiversity Project.

THE BATIAS - TSAMAYANG SENTLE BO-RRRA

Article by Declan Hofmeyr with thanks to Carmen van den Berg, Markus Hofmeyr, Neal Fischer, Greg Lederle, Gerry van der Walt and Grant Marcus.

On the afternoon of the 13th of December 2008 I was walking in the hills to the south of Wonderboom road when I heard Neal Fischer of Kukama Lodge announce that he had found one of the Batia lions dead next to a buffalo carcass north of Wonderboom road and just east of the Wonderboom Springs. I responded and following the smell of rotting carcasses I came upon a scene that suggested the romance of the Batia story had played out right to the very end. The remains of Batia V (identified by his teeth because most of the skin had rotted off and no brands could be seen) lay under a small sickle bush not too far from the carcass of a buffalo bull, no doubt his last kill. It bears testament to the character of the Batias that even in old age and by himself Batia V's swan song was the hunting and killing of arguably the toughest prey animal in the African bush.

Greg Lederle of Molori visited the carcass the next day and in true CSI Madikwe style has put forward a theory as to what he thinks happened when these two magnificent animals met for this final clash:

"He was found after rain and we couldn't see any fresh tracks of what had happened so obviously it can't be confirmed, but this is my theory: I think this Batia took on the younger buffalo and was doing well until the bull managed to break the Batia's front right leg very badly (Greg didn't mention it but several of the ribs on his right hand side had also been crushed - Declan). Because of the noise and sounds of the battle between the old boy and the buff, hyenas would have been attracted to the area. I think that they finished the injured and wounded buff off and began to feed on it. The Batia was unable to move off and so lay next to where the buff died and either died by himself or was killed by the hyenas in his weakened state -

I reckon he was finished by the hyenas judging by the fact that his rear end was a little eaten or opened up?!?!"

Both the buff and the Batia were dragged from where they died as the rumen from the buff and the hair from the Batia's mane were lying away from where we found them both - they probably died about 2 meters from each other (When I visited the carcass the day before Greg they were still next to each other, so presumably hyenas had been back to the kill after I left and before Greg arrived - Declan). We have however all been expecting this day for about 3 years and at least we were able to find him. He went out in a fitting and fighting way - the way we would have expected him to."



Above: Batia V in death as he was found...
Photo by D. Hofmeyr

THE BATIAS - TSAMAYANG SENTLE BO-RRRA

Sometimes I have to make hard decisions when it comes to animal management; there are no room for sentiment and as a result, I distance myself from the emotions associated with wildlife deaths. But still I had a slight lump in my throat and, admittedly even a tear in my eye, as I stood there by myself in the early evening light looking down on the remains of a Madikwe icon; displayed as if he had been posed... as if after a long fight with the buffalo he had lain down for a quick rest, his back legs pulled under his stomach, one front leg stretched out in front, badly broken and no doubt extremely painful, with his head resting on the other paw under his chin, a big sigh and maybe a low contact call to his missing sibling coming out of his lungs into the evening stillness, wincing from the pain of shattered ribs as his eyes closed for the last time...

Coincidentally it was at almost the same time on the same day when I was standing with Batia V, that his brother, Batia C, was seen alive for the last time 28 kilometers away on Krokodildrift.

Welcome to Madikwe guys!

I first met the Batias in 1997 but their story goes back much further than that and involves dozens of people from two countries,

two conservation organizations, three national parks, one provincial game reserve and the South African Air Force. They were both born in Etosha National Park in Namibia sometime in 1993 and it's thanks to a massive combined effort between staff of the North West Parks and Tourism Board (then still known as Bop Parks) and Etosha National Park that at Batia pan between Numatoni and Halali in Etosha, hence the name, just after 1 AM on the morning of the 28th of November the two young lions, with one older male called Scarface, were successfully darted and loaded up in a South African Air Force Hercules C-130 to be flown back to Batavia Air Base outside Madikwe. A little known fact is that there were originally three Batia lions darted but because of two dart failures and the arrival of older males (Scarface's coalition) at the capture sight only two of the males were caught in the end. Both the Batias (referred to in reports from the time as simply: "younger males") almost died on the flight back from Namibia. They (along with two lionesses) had been recorded as having killed and eaten 1 gemsbok, 2 blue wildebeest and 1 springbuck in the previous two days and as a result they continually bloated and had to have their stomach pierced with a needle once an

hour to save them. In addition they regurgitated and stomach contents had to be removed from inside their mouths and throats. The report on their translocation even goes on to describe them as "extreme anesthetic risks". Both Dr. Markus Hofmeyr and Rusty Hustler (who traveled with the lions) have subsequently told me what a stressful trip it was.

On arrival in SA at Batavia the two lions were transferred by road to Madikwe and placed in the Elephant Boma where it took them nearly 48 hours to recover. After recovery they adapted well to boma life and fed for the first time on the 30th of November.

They were released into Madikwe on the 9th of January 1996 and initially spent the first two months in the vicinity of the boma.

The Ophir pride (translocated from Pilanesberg) had already been released into Madikwe and were the first lions that the Batias met in their new home, although it can hardly be described as an amicable meeting since the Ophir Brothers chased them from Bosrand to Abjaterskop gate! Welcome to Madikwe guys! After a bit of wandering the boys settled in the area around Abjaterskop and soon started killing regularly with wildebeest and kudu being their first kills. In May 96 they moved north to the vicinity of Tau lodge and in June they met up with

THE BATIAS - TSAMAYANG SENTLE BO-RRRA

Scarface (coincidentally also killed by buffalo a year later) and although no fighting was witnessed it seems that Scarface had chased them across to Tshukudu dam by August where the most famous lions in Madikwe, for the very first time, broke the evening silence with their roaring. The boys were growing up fast in this new land...

In October 96 they went south again and met up with their old nemesis's The Ophir Brothers, only this time the Batias had the upper hand and chased the Ophirs west past Tumuga dam. In December 1996 at the ripe old age of about 3 years they mated in Madikwe for the first time with the Ophir female. This mating resulted in them coming into conflict with the pride male

of the Ophir pride, the Leuwenhoek Male. The Leuwenhoek Male was a huge male who only had one eye. This impediment did nothing to inhibit his abilities as a lion and he chased off both the Batias, badly mauling Batia C in the process. It seems that V had simply run off at the first sign of trouble leaving C with both the girl and her angry boyfriend. Due to the extent of the injury and the importance of the Batias from a genetic and tourism point of view they were both caught and placed back in the Elephant Boma for the treatment of C's foot. They were released two weeks later and although they did meet up with the Leuwenhoek male again it was much more tentatively and they soon moved back north.

Winds of change were starting to blow in Madikwe and on the week of 5 May 1997 the Batia Brothers ousted the Leuwenhoek male completely from his territory aggressively taking the south for themselves. The two Ophir females and the Ophir Males rapidly left the area but the Ophir Daughters stayed with the Batias. They had their first females, their first pride and their first territory. Fourteen months, almost to the day, after first walking out of the Elephant Boma the boys had come of age.



Above: Batias V and C in 1996 Photo By: M Hofmeyr

THE BATIAS - TSAMAYANG SENTLE BO-RRRA

Below: Batia V in his prime in 1999
Photo by: D. Hofmeyr



How big and special can they be?

Throughout the next 11 years they continued to be a dominant force in the lives of more than just the lion population of Madikwe, they have also entertained, awed and even scared thousands of guests and hundreds of Madikwe staff. Anyone who has lived in Madikwe for any length of time has a "Batia story".

Carmen vd Berg of Thakadu River Camp recalls the first time she was introduced to the Batia Brothers as a humbling experience even though they were already past their prime:

"I arrived in Madikwe Game Reserve in early 2005 from the Sabi Sands Game Reserve. I had seen countless lions in my 12 years as a guide, and thought that I had seen the biggest and best.

I quietly thought to myself, "Really now, how big and special can they be?"

I joined a drive on my first night here, and our guide took us to see the famous Batia Brothers who we found sleeping on Lion Boma Cutline and even though they were lying flat, they looked bigger than what I had seen elsewhere. Even then I was not going to concede that these black-manned Kalahari lions were bigger than their Sabi Sands counter parts (not yet anyway!). That was until they finally woke up, got up, stretched and roared. My eyes seemed to stretch as well to try and take them in in their entirety. They were truly the most magnificent males I have ever seen! I had been introduced to the icons of Madikwe that evening.

In the following months and years, I saw them often and each time it was as if I was seeing them for the first time. My dream was to see them up close but because I had never had the opportunity to track them on foot, I could always just wonder at their real size if you were not sitting on a vehicle.

Then one day, my dream came true when I was invited with Declan and Dr. Rambert of Wildlife Translocation Services to replace the radio collar on the one brother. All I can really remember of that day, sitting next to a drugged Batia, was that they were definitely worth their reputation. The sheer size was breath taking."

In their latter years I get the feeling they were starting to tire of the constant harassment they had to put up with as THE Madikwe lions to see and occasionally they gave as good as they took. Neal Fischer of Kukama Lodge recalls the following incident:

"It was a late afternoon in early spring when three brave guides, Gavin, Kevin and I, all eager to please our guests, gathered just east of Mooifontein Lodge to find the Batia brothers. We knew they were in the area because that morning some of the guides had seen them kill a young wildebeest. Well we got... ok some of us... actually I... more than I bargained for..."

THE BATIAS - TSAMAYANG SENTLE BO-RRA

We got off the vehicles and walked into the bush looking under scrub and scanning the distance for the lions. Gavin was on my right hand side and Kevin was on his right, then it happened! One of the old men had had enough of these two legged things and he came at us - more so me than the other two. As I turned to face the bush, it exploded with anger and raw power, my foot got wedged in the dolomite and over I went (all I thought about was to not scratch the new weapon I had just bought and fumbled it into my other hand). I hit the dolomite with a thud, all the while Gavin and Kevin were shouting the most colourful words known to man and beast at the Batia that was coming towards us at pace. Luckily, the old boy must have known that the other two guides meant business and stopped his angry charge. When we got to the vehicle the guests were white and their eyes were like saucers, I had blood dripping from my hands and the guests' ears were ringing from the profanities that had come from Gavin and Kevin. All ended well and the lions were found, but alas, could not be viewed by the guests as they had moved into an area that could not be accessed by vehicle.

*Thanks to Gavin and Kevin for covering my back!
This memory will be with me till I die...*

Below: Batias V and C in 2008, by now the old men of the Madikwe bush Photo by: G. vd. Walt



THE BATIAS - TSAMAYANG SENTLE BO-RRRA

I don't recall the details of the first time I met the Batias (it was as a student in 1997) but I do recall, vividly, the first time I harassed them in name of science. It was Easter weekend in 2000 and back then we still radio collared all our lion prides and coalitions for monitoring purposes. The battery in the collar worn by Batia C had died and the collar needed replacing. In addition we had recently begun gathering tissue samples from our lion population for genetic planning and so both animals would need to be anaesthetised. This is all a fairly standard procedure but through a twist of fate I ended up running the whole capture myself and while I had been on probably a hundred or more captures before, this would be the first one in which I would be darting the lion. My worries were unfounded however and everything went well, with the lions down the samples were taken, the collar was changed and I was well on my way to harassing many more lions in the years following that capture (I did get in a bit of trouble, though, for closing the only lion sighting in the reserve over Easter weekend to do my work... oopsie!).

Their name will echo forever

My most memorable interaction with the Batias came years later as a result of the only time a lion has been snared in Madikwe and if it wasn't for the radio collar (which was severely damaged by the snare) we would have lost Batia C a long time ago. Carmen was with and describes the event...

"They roamed all over Madikwe, claiming their territory and leaving behind plenty of offspring. But unfortunately, this also got them into trouble when one of them walked into a poacher's snare. I was with Declan when the call came through...

"Echo 5, Echo 5 for 27 Lima" Echo 5 was busy watching rugby and, beer in hand, sighed as he answered the call. But as soon as he heard that the Batia was in trouble, and had been found after walking around for days with this snare around his neck, beer, rugby and the time of night were all forgotten. Again I was in the right place at the right time... the "assistant" went with.

The lion was sedated with a dart and before long he was sleeping close to the rest of the pride (his brother, the Dipelos and Tshabalala pride). This made for some interesting maneuvering with the vehicles to give us space to work. As soon as we got to him though, we could see that the situation was more serious than we thought. The snare had wrapped tightly around his

neck and collar (which had been damaged beyond use), and both had to be cut off. The Batia also decided, round about then that it was time to wake up which was just as Declan started cutting through the snare with a rather blunt blade! "Hold his head down" was my instruction from a more 'aggravated than normal' ecologist and I held down with all my might. Every time his huge head lifted off the ground, I strained to push it back. But what strength did I have against this beast? The guides in the other vehicles, kept an eye on the other lions and their guests laughed at my knuckles getting whiter from the pressure I exerted to hold him down. Declan sawed and sawed for what seemed like ages. Finally the collar and snare snapped off and we retreated back to the car after a few very quick photos.

With all the adrenalin of the moment (and after realizing that I had just held down a wild lion's head!) I did not have time to take in what was lying at my feet. It had been a few very tense minutes and I was happy to let him wake up completely with me sitting safely in the car. But when I saw the photos, I realized yet again why they are called king of the beasts.

They are gone now after living for much longer than we ever thought they would, but they will certainly never be forgotten.

Their name will echo along the

THE BATIAS - TSAMAYANG SENTLE BO-RRA

Dwarsberg and the Inselbergs for ever.

And I had the privilege to know them... up close and personal."

At just shy of 16 years of age, and having sired no less than 63 cubs in Madikwe, when they died they were probably among the oldest, if not THE oldest, free roaming lions to still hold a territory in Africa.

As the title of this article says and from all the Madikwe family, permanent and transient: Tsamayang sentle bo-Rra; e nnile tlotlo...

Go well Gentlemen; it has been an honor...

Below: Batia C and Carmen after the snare was removed and he was waking up. Photo by: G. Lederle



Above: It's in the eyes... One of the last photos taken of Batia V. His expression says it all. Photo by G. vd Walt

The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the authors and do not in anyway reflect the official view of the North West Parks and Tourism Board.

Madikwe Game Reserve
PO Box 10
Nietverdiend
2874

Phone: 018-350-9931/2

Fax: 018-350-9933

Email: madikweadmin@telkomsa.net

Remember... all previous issues are available online at
www.madikwe-game-reserve.co.za