



Safari Story: An Afternoon at the Elephant Mud Bath

Description

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We are on a game drive in the Balule Game Reserve in the mid afternoon. We had just left a very nice leopard sighting and we were now in search of our next wildlife encounter. Our driver took us to a favorite spot for rhino, elephants, and buffalo to have a mudbath. Today a family of elephants was enjoying the baths.



The season has become dry early this year so a good water hole and mud have been a rare find for the animals in the area. Here there is a small area where the water is still at the surface, but elephants can find water by digging.



As we arrive, two juvenile elephants are digging in the small pit to enlarge it. Their sides are caked with fresh mud and dried mud covers their faces and trunks. You can see the enjoyment as the two use their front feet to dig deeper and bring up more water which they stir into mud.

Nearby, a mother elephant and her infant calf eat leaves and rest together in the shade.





Now the juveniles have had enough mud and turn their attention to a tree stump which functions as a favorite scratching post. Each has a go at it displaying crazy poses as they maneuver their bulk to reach the short stump. Each has a try at pulling the stump out in hopes of making it taller and a more excellent tool.



Meanwhile, the baby and mother have a go in the mud followed up by their turn at the scratching post. The little elephant is completely covered in mud and very pleased with her adventure in the mud.



The juveniles have gone back to eating and two older males, still juveniles practice some mock sparring. These playful fights and twisting of trunks is also a bonding and an exercise in establishing and acknowledging rank in the group.



The elephants had some good fun, but they never stop eating for long, so soon they return to eating.

We continue on to watch the sunset and prepare for the wildlife action after dark. We had several encounters on our way back in the dark including a bushbaby (a type of subprimate) and a chameleon.

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