

ProjectsAbroad™



The Official Newsletter of Projects Abroad Conservation Botswana

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Sunset view from the heights of the kopjes!

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the July 2013 Botswana Conservation Newsletter!

The winter dry season has seen Motswiri Camp in full swing! We have hit our busiest volunteer period for the year. Currently there are over 20 volunteers in camp, each bringing their own background, interests and contributions to the project. July has also seen the launch of this year's 2 week summer special programs. It has been a most exciting month! As water sources on the reserve dissipate, so too does the camp bore hole diminish, especially with the extra demand from the blossoming camp numbers. It has definitely taught the volunteers to appreciate water as a precious and valuable commodity and one that is definitely not infinite, so must be used sparingly!

As the reserve dries out and vegetation becomes more sparse, the poachers have moved in. Focus has been on removing old and fresh wire snares which have been laid out on our property and the surrounding properties, as well as old wire fencing which is hazardous to the wildlife and provides the material to build snares. The dire need for this has been clearly emphasised by an injured hyena which has lost an entire foot from a wire snare and now relies on meat supplements for survival as it can no longer hunt.

We have had another month of great wildlife sightings, with a couple of ostrich being occasional visitors to the reserve. A very strange but magnificent bird! We have also had an abundance of leopard sightings this month. Again, we have seen the two fast growing cubs with their mother basking majestically and playfully on a koppie by Motswiri, several adults respectively prowling about the reserve on the hunt, another much younger cub dashing to a nearby kill. It is so fantastic to see the leopard population flourishing despite the conflict with nearby farmers. Hopefully the lion population will follow suit!

In this month's edition we hear from Will and Louisa about their experiences at camp on pages 3 and 4. There is an update on the project over the last month on page 6, written by Project Manager David Hancock, and plenty of photos to share on page 8!

Enjoy our month of adventures!

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Projects Abroad Wild at Tuli Conservation Project

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Baobabs and a Bush Sleepout

William Priest, 19 years old, 3 month stay, England

The morning activities today were baobab repair and elephant diet. Luckily for Jayne, Eilidh, Marie and myself, we landed on the baobab repair side of the divide. Led by Tess, we successfully (I think) repaired one baobab which had half its trunk missing, gouged out by elephants. Due to the speed at which we worked, we finished early and then climbed a koppie for tea, coffee and hot chocolate. Unfortunately, the hyena was not spotted in its den, but the morning was nice and relaxing.



Meanwhile, the others, Anne-C, Mijke, Paul and Georges had the pleasure of elephant diet for the first time, Paul the exception. Judging by the smell and their faces as we drove past, I'm not sure how much this was their favourite activity. The new arrivals, Charles and Louisa, were inducted.

The afternoon was a Top Kopje census with AB, who was making his much anticipated return to activities having been guiding for the past few days. So Charles, Louisa, Eilidh, Jayne, Marie and I set off and on the drive there saw 2 ostriches, 3 kori bustards and lots of elephants. During the census, we saw impala, vervet monkeys and a troupe of baboons.



A lovely dahl for supper and after some scare-mongering from Tess and AB, seven of us headed out for our maiden sleepout. Wrapped up in several layers, we set off for Mamatumi hide. I manned the spotlight to start with, as we drove, but after an early drought I was relieved to finally spot a zebra and a brace of steenbok before handing over the reigns to Georges, who picked out zebra, impala, scrub hare, kori bustards and a rather considerable road block in the form of a male elephant.

The first shift of the sleepout was taken by Anne-C and Georges, who saw a couple of springhares. Then Marie and Louisa took over and only saw one mouse which had made it into the hide. Then came the Brits, trying to restore some pride, and doing so in glorious fashion as Jayne spotted two hyenas who went and drank from the waterhole. After the sun rose, Tess found some African Civet tracks by the hide which were more fresh than the hyena tracks. The guilty 'sleeping on shift' party were not found.

Rhino Tracking at Limpopo Lipadi

Louisa Gaertner, 20 years old, Germany, 1 week stay

First of all, the most important thing of the day: it was George's birthday! He is almost an adult now with his sweet 16th!

It was such an exciting day, because we went for a day of rhinoceros tracking at Limpopo Lipadi Game and Wilderness Reserve! Our day started at 4am with an awful two hour drive to the reserve. It was so damn cold and we all felt like ice sculptures. Will took some amazing pictures of us freezing! After a little misunderstanding about the way, we finally found the reserve, thanks AB!

Our expedition started at 7am, with our guide Tips. We drove through the reserve and saw giraffe, impala and wildebeest. No rhinoceros. After a while, we met the anti-poaching team, who helped us to find the rhinoceros. We started walking, in a very strict line with after Tips, and it seemed to us that we would walk forever before finding them. The anti-poaching team were very positive and found rhinoceros track after track. Finally, we found the rhinoceros family, with their two and a half year calf. We were lucky to find them together!



After a thousand pictures we returned to the car, which was fortunately not too far away, and drove to a wonderful lodge near the river, with a beautiful pool and free Wi-Fi of course! The lunch was a dream for all meat lovers, and especially for Georges it was heaven! We relaxed all afternoon at the pool and got a tan. Will and Paul had more fun at the bar with Castle beer and Vodka coke. For the return drive, everyone was so tired, but we all enjoyed seeing a lot of elephants!



Especially for Georges birthday, Tess and Eilidh organised a dinner in the bush. It was beautiful with candles, lanterns, snacks and of course more steak for Georges. He was really happy about the chocolate cake and his present. After this action packed day, everyone fell asleep as soon as we arrived back at the camp. A perfect birthday!

Wild at Tuli Project Update

Tree Sealing

Approximately one year ago we started an experiment to see whether or not applying tree sealant to trees damaged by elephants would increase the chances of the tree recovering by preventing further damage from elephants and infection from termites and disease. We have started to revisit these trees to see if there has been any success. So far we have revisited approximately 20 trees along the river. The majority of these trees have received little or no new damage. However, one large marula was difficult to find because it had been completely destroyed. Further visits will be required to confirm the success or failure of the method.



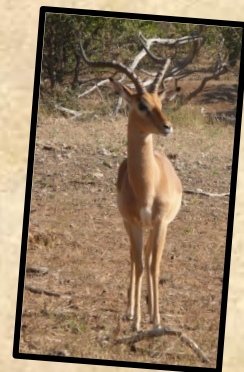
Erosion Control

In previous project updates I have spoken about erosion control in the form of donga repairs. We have now switched focus to preventative methods to reduce the risk of dongas forming in the first place. We have started creating low vegetation-based barriers across rills, small water channels, to reduce the speed of water flowing across the land with the aim of catching sediment, including seeds and other organic matter, to promote growth along the rills. This will reduce the speed at which the water reaches the river bank and existing dongas so slowing the rate of their erosion. Several barriers built before the last rains of the season have already proved successful as fairly large quantities of sediment can be seen backed up against them.



Mammal Road Count

One of the big projects we are endeavouring to proceed upon is the reintroduction of a pack of African Wild Dogs. For this we need to prove to various authorities that the land and the land surrounding us is suitable for this reintroduction. One of the requirements is proof that there are sufficient numbers of prey species available for the wild dogs to hunt. To do this we have been conducting road-based counts of the large mammal species which reside at Wild at Tuli to complement our existing mammal data collected from our observations at waterholes.



Road Maintenance

In the course of building Motswiri camp the road which leads to it changed shape on a regular basis. Now that we have settled on a route to the camp



the old disused roads are now being closed to prevent the summer rains from eroding the bare land. We have been dragging dead wood across the roads in a method similar to that of our main erosion control effort. The dead vegetation will help catch debris flowing down the roads in the rain and should help speed the rehabilitation of the underlying soil.

Bush Memories



From top left: scenic drive to Solomon's Wall; perched on a magnificent termite mound; bachelor elephants enjoy the waterhole; finding water temperature on a crocodile census; a Barn Owl pair has made their home in a Baobab; picture perfect evening; learning to weave palm leaf bracelets in Motlhabeneng





From top left: *Black-backed Jackal take a drink at the waterhole; picnic by the Limpopo River; a Leopard cub basks in the sun; bush sleep out at Mamatumi; spring cleaning the dry waterholes; Klipspringer poised and ready; constructing a natural barrier to protect wildlife from a recently uncovered well*

