



May volunteers enjoy a morning activity on the Limpopo River, at the gushing gorge!

What's Inside

Editor's Note	2
Volunteer Story – Matilde Carnachia	3
Volunteer Story – Lesley van Oostveen	5
Wild at Tuli Project Update	6
Bush Memories	8

Editor's Note

Welcome to the May 2013 Botswana Conservation Newsletter!

The onset of the dry season has enveloped us here at Wild at Tuli. Volunteers are beginning to understand the true meaning of the reserve and its surrounds name sake, Tuli or 'dust.' Trees finally relent to the parched climate, leaves turning a magnificent array of red, orange and yellow hue before they fall gracefully to the ground. Grasslands begin to diminish. It is fantastic, though, to see how well the abundant summer rainfall has set the reserve in good stead for the winter months ahead.

Volunteers have been kept very busy with renovations to our new home at Motswiri, especially improving the aesthetics of the camp. Many hours have been spent constructing slate garden beds around the tent areas and moulding baths and feeders to encourage birds into the camp for some respite. Each day it looks more and more lovely. A lot of work has also gone into ensuring that water will be provided on the reserve into the winter months. This involves expanding and cleaning existing waterholes, building new ones and damming others. The benefits are enjoyed by wildlife and volunteers alike, as animals come down to these new water sources to drink.

We have had some very exciting leopard sightings over the past month. A 3 month old cub, staring wide eyed from the safety of a Shepherd's tree, a young adult stealthily stalking to the waterhole for a drink, another adult seated proudly on a flat rock head. The most exhilarating of all, was watching two young cubs, spend several days playing, tumbling, tussling and sprawling on the same 'mushroom rock' whilst their mother was away hunting. What a once in a lifetime sighting for each volunteer, which they got to experience more than once! It is so satisfying to see these predators flourishing on the reserve. All our efforts at providing a wildlife safe haven are embodied in their survival and propagation.

In this month's edition we hear from Matilde and Lesley about their experiences at camp on pages 3 and 5. 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!

Tess Harris
Project Manager and Social Manager
Projects Abroad Wild at Tuli Conservation Project

teresaharris@projects-abroad.org

For the Love of Knitting

Matilde Carnachia, 24 years old, Italy, 2 week stay

Today I went with Nolwenn, Elodie D, Elodie B and Sakaeo to the 'Top Hide' to do a mammal and bird census. We stayed there for the morning, overlooking the waterhole and waiting for animals to come to drink. We recorded impala, kudu, baboons and birds of many different species, flying around and revealing all their colours to us. While we were driving back home, there was a lovely surprise. A herd of 33 elephants appeared! Adults, males and females with their adorable babies, walking up the drainage line in a single line, just amazing! I've never seen so many elephants together!

After lunch, we went checking the pictures taken by the camera traps that we tactically placed around the reserve a few days before. Unfortunately, there was nothing too exciting on them because they haven't been there for long enough. We walked in front of the cameras, taking photos of us smiling, joking and making love to the camera!



What I enjoyed the most today, was getting back to the camp to knit some squares of wool. The final goal is to sew them all together and make a blanket for the kids in the local school and the hospital. Tess taught us how to do the knitting and it was such fun to look at the guys trying to knit and doing it the wrong way! Ha! I enjoyed it a lot and I decided I shall finish my square before leaving because I truly feel happy when I think I am doing something useful for those kids.



After dinner, a delicious dinner I should say (god bless you Jane!) some of the volunteers went to the sleep-out for the night at 'Top Hide.' I decided to stay in the camp with Lesley, Niklas, Marco and Tess to watch a National Geographic documentary about African Wild Cats. The footage and photography was incredible. While we were watching, some hyena started calling from the bushes around the camp. I felt like I was in a private cinema, with my cup of tea, my friends and in the middle of the wildlife! Nothing compares to that!

At the end of the documentary, the bread that Marco prepared was ready, so we sampled some. Warm, aromatic and tasty. God bless you too!

One last thing before going to sleep, I looked up into the sky, the Milky Way, the stars and constellations, to try and impress in my mind every single thing and its beauty. I will always dream of seeing that sky again, there are no words to describe it! At last, me and my sleeping bag, my book and the will to live another amazing day in Botswana!



Enjoy every single moment you spend in this adventure and stop at nothing! These are my mottos for my stay here!

African Sunrise and Sunset

Lesley van Oostveen, 20 years old, Netherlands, 2 week stay

Today I woke up at 4.30am, so I saw the African sunrise, which was very beautiful! At 5.30am, we took off to Thune Dam for bird spotting. The Thune Dam is a really beautiful place, especially when the sun is coming up from behind the mountains. We went to a few spots around the lake and spotted 22 different bird species in total. Too bad we didn't spot the flamingo this week! It was fun, I learned a lot about birds and how to spot them. Dave is really, really good at it and Marco is also pretty good. Mathilde and I did the best we could! ☺



After we came back, we chilled and ate some lunch. At 2.30pm, Marco and I went for 'road maintenance' with Sakaeo. We worked really hard. After the work we climbed a kopje. We saw a lot of bones and hyena scat. Then all of a sudden, we heard some cracking sounds. Less than 10 metres away, we saw an elephant between the rocks! He did move away though, after he saw and heard us. I think I got some very nice pictures. When we were on top of the kopje, we also saw 2 hyenas walking through the bushes. So cool!

When we returned to camp, we had to pack our stuff for the sleep-out. When we arrived at Mamatumi hide for the sleep-out, we saw one hyena, which came really close to us (we were all sitting on the ground). This was awesome! The rest of the night wasn't too exciting, not too many predators, just a couple more hyenas. In my shift I saw about 5 zebra, which I thought was very cool. But I didn't have to wake the others for zebra. All in all, a pretty cool day!

Wild at Tuli Project Update

Baobab Census

The initial census of all 91 baobabs on the South side of the reserve was completed in April. We have now shifted our attention to 2 different investigations. Firstly, we have started locating, GPSing and photographing the baobabs on the North side of the reserve. So far we have recorded the location of 10 baobabs. These baobabs in time will also be censused using the same techniques as the previous 91 baobabs. Secondly, we have started measuring the distances from the baobabs to their closest permanent and temporary water sources to look for any relationship between proximity to water and extent of elephant utilisation.



Road Clearing

May has seen a lot of physical work for the volunteers. We have continued to maintain the roads on the reserve clearing back some of the excessive summer growth. Since moving to the North side of the reserve we have also been concentrating on re-opening roads which had become severely overgrown so that we have access to as much of the reserve as possible. This is an essential part of the work and is required to facilitate the carrying out of the other projects which we perform and to locate potential sites for waterholes and hides.



Waterhole Work

With the rains finishing and the natural water sources drying up we have focused on preparing for next summer's rain by digging and clearing new and existing waterholes. There are 2 concrete waterholes on the North side of the reserve which were swept clear of dirt and debris to allow all the water that flows into them from the borehole to stay fresh and not turn straight into mud.

One of the waterholes dug by volunteers last year has finally dried up and left an uneven base caused by animals standing in the mud that was the last bit of water. We have cleared the base so when the new rains come the water will also stay on the surface rather than soaking straight into soil.



Finally the construction of a new dam on the drainage line by Top Hide was started with the aim again of keeping as much water at the surface of the ground and on the reserve as possible. The drainage line continues to flow from the rains in January and so capturing this water will help the animals throughout the dry winter to come.

Bush Memories



Clockwise from top left: a Nile crocodile suns itself on the banks of the Limpopo; building erosion control barriers; two leopard cubs romp in wait for their mother; a Spotted Eagle owl stares us down from her perch; bone crunching hyena seen on a sleepout; South Africa's finest travel advice!; bush dinner to celebrate Marco's birthday





Clockwise from top left: deepening an existing waterhole; giraffe sighting on foot; learning to weave bracelets from palm fronds; adding the creative touches to bird baths constructed for Motswiri; bush buddies, zebra and wildebeest; collecting stones to build a dam wall on one of the drainage lines; hippopotamus grazing by the old Koro camp

