



October volunteers pose precariously over crocodile infested waters!

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the October 2013 Botswana Conservation Newsletter!

The frogs, usually the herald of rain to come, have begun their nightly serenade in an attempt to attract female mates; however, the rains still elude us. On several occasions we have excitedly watched the storm clouds gather and stood in hopeful anticipation at the few drops that have fallen. Nature is only taunting us. The current dry and dusty state of the reserve has been fully intensified. The sun is truly scorching and those coming out to join us need to be prepared for the dry heat. Of course, the hottest part of the day is spent in relaxation at the camp, so bring some books to help you unwind.

The Motswiri camp has become increasingly busy after the quietness of September and there are constantly new faces joining the team, keeping the community dynamic colourful. The monitoring activities continue and bird census has become even more exciting as the summer migrant species return and chicks of many species are beginning to get their first glimpses of the world. Focus has been given to a few important physical activities in preparation for the rains. Volunteers have been supporting the walls of several new, currently dry, dams which have recently been built, as well as stepping up soil erosion management work. We have continued repairs of a neighbour's cattle fence to prevent lion from breaking in and immense amounts of wire have been removed from property roads in the Tuli area. Worryingly, a lot of fresh wire snares have been found at the back of our and the neighbour's property, and anti-poaching efforts have been reinforced to try and combat this, most effective now whilst the veld is sparse. It is fantastic that we have spread our aid to other reserves in the area, strengthening the collective endeavour to conserve the Tuli wilderness area and not solely our property.

The wildlife never fails to disappoint the enthusiastic. The dry veld means that visibility through the bush is at its peak and so is wildlife spotting. We have had unbelievable sightings of leopards feasting on kills up a Shepherd's tree or perched on a kopje, and with a fresh kill it means there is action to be seen for several days as all the food chain representatives move in for their share of the loot. Insects are pouring from the woodwork in such an array of colours, shapes, sizes, and each boasts its own weird and wonderful biology. With the help of an insect field guide, volunteers are beginning to uncover this new world!

In this month's edition we hear from Camilla and Gerrit about their experiences at camp on pages 3 and 4. There is an update of the project on page 5, written by Project Manager David Hancock, and plenty of photos to share on page 7!

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A Hyena Afternoon

Camilla Knudson, 23 years old, Denmark, 2 month stay

This morning we split into 2 groups. One group did bird census. The second group, including me, did a baobab census with Dave. We used GPS co-ordinates to find the trees which we should gather information about. These co-ordinates had been recorded by previous volunteers who located each of the trees. The information we recorded included different size measurements, the accessibility of the tree, the extent of elephant utilisation of the tree and the signs of different animals who have also been utilising the tree. It was a really nice activity, doing a lot of walking around the bush.



For lunch, we were all very hungry, and Jane made a really tasty quiche. Very good as always!

For the afternoon, everyone did an anti-poaching walk. We walked in a line around a semi-circle shape (at least we tried to) around the perimeter of some waterholes, looking for snares. We didn't find any, which hopefully means there weren't any. Instead, we found a lot of rubbish which we collected instead. Coming home from the second activity, it was already dark. At the waterhole across the kitchen there was a hyena. We all sat down quietly on the ground and it came closer to investigate us, while the staff observed very closely. Don't try this at home!



During the evening we relaxed around the fire-place. Alice saw a shooting star. Hopefully there will be more! Another great day in the Motswiri camp. Glad I will have many more!

Helping a Neighbour Out

Gerrit Suhlmann, 24 years old, Germany, 1 month stay

The day for me began, like most days, with a beautiful sunrise. It was quite cold compared to the average spring temperature for Botswana. In the afternoon, after an exciting morning crocodile census, we all set off to spend a few days of work at Limpopo River Lodge, which is situated at a reserve very close to our own. After an hour's drive, we arrived at the house and all spread out our mattresses and our luggage, ready to camp on the floor for our stay. During the evening's dinner, we could hear the frogs croaking in the pond and we fell asleep to the sound of the monkeys playing on the roof.



The next morning we drove to a waterhole on the reserve. As the elephants has a keen sense of smell they have been digging around the waterhole in search of water,



destroying the water pipeline which connects the borehole water pump to the waterhole. Our job was to repair the pipeline, removing the damaged one and digging a new trench for the new one. It was very physical work but we had a lot of fun, escalating in a furious mud|battle and after a good morning we had it finished!

Thanks to our great teamwork of the morning, we had time for a different activity in the afternoon. We headed out to collect old wire fencing. This wire lies on both sides of the main road for what seems like kilometres. In addition to that, we collected up any garbage from the side of the road as well. The reason for this is that the animals

might injure themselves on the garbage and wire. A very productive afternoon! In the evening we sat around the fire and had interesting discussions about the differences between our home countries, and many other topics!

The next day, we drove to a cattle kraal on a neighbouring property. Lions have been attacking the cattle at night and if they continue, the farmer will poison the lion. We offered our help and our job was to optimise the protection for the cattle by putting up a better fence around the kraal. We were able to finish all the mesh wire we had brought with us, and the cattle as well as the lion should be better protected. We will be back as soon as we have more wire, to finish the job.



For Saturday, we returned excitedly back to Motswiri and drove to the bar in the next small town for a well-earned beer. As we arrived, there were already several people at the bar. It was a great opportunity to talk to the local people, and also to dance and have a few beers. What I first recognised was that the people in this area of Botswana are very open-minded and just like in Europe they like to sit at the bar, have some beers and watch the soccer.

Over these last few days we have accomplished a lot of good work and had a lot of opportunity to help conserve the wildlife. Thank you for these great experiences!

Wild at Tuli Project Update

Bird Census

October is an exciting month for birding in Southern Africa. This is the time of year that the first of the Palaearctic and intra-African migrants start to arrive back in the region from their winter hideouts in Europe and central Africa. So far Yellow-billed Kites, Barn Swallows and the diminutive Willow Warbler have been observed by

staff around the area but none of these species are yet to be recorded on the bird census. As their numbers increase as we get further towards summer the chances of them being observed will increase and they will be officially recorded as being back in Southern Africa in our databases.



Following our fence repair on the veterinary fence last month we are now focusing a lot of effort on the boundaries between wilderness and community lands in the form of anti-poaching work. We have visited the rear fence on 3 occasions and removed between 15 and 20 snares from the bush along the fence line. We found a seasonally wet area which was clearly frequently used by animals and poachers alike during the summer when water is available there.

We found a number of double stranded snares designed for catching larger mammals such as Eland and Kudu. We also found the remains of a poacher's camp with makeshift drying racks attached to the trees where they would have dried their poached meat before taking it back to their homes for sale. Hopefully with our obvious presence in the area, the poachers will realise they can no longer use this area for their illegal activities and will be discouraged from attempting to poach on our land.



Baobab Census

We have continued our direct baobab observations. All 91 of the baobabs on the southern side of the reserve have been mapped and various parameters recorded. We have now started to visit the baobabs on the Northern side of the reserve and collecting the same information, which includes various size measurements; observations of damage and accessibility; and recording evidence of bird, mammal and reptile species residing in or on the baobabs. So far we have located and visited 13 trees in the new study area.



Bush Memories



Clockwise from top left: *On alert! Building rock barriers to protect the Baobabs from excessive Elephant utilisation; a teenie Elephant infant clamours for attention; a dust red moon dips low on the horizon; erosion work, preparing the reserve for the rain; Impala display pilo-erection on a stormy morning; volunteers perch on an old stone marker, the highest point on the reserve.*





Clockwise from top left: *Rainfrog, one of the bushes less attractive critters; river side bird census; Double banded Sandgrouse chick keeps a low profile; proud of our gabion construction work, preventing collapse of the wall when the river floods; Crocodile basks on the banks of the Limpopo; clearing up the road from Elephant aftermath; glorious*

