

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

For Projects Abroad Botswana 



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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the April 2014 Botswana Conservation Newsletter!

The rains finally seem to be coming to an end after a very wet summer and all the troubles that come with it. These included rescuing one of our cars that started to submerge in rising water after getting stuck in a sandy drainage line, evacuating the commercial lodge of the reserve before it flooded, and saving its bridge from snapping under the strong current and heavy logs that had piled up on it. What a summer! The bush is as green as it can get and the wildlife are blessed with a bounty of food and water. Elephants have been scattered and mammal sightings from hidden observation points have been rare treasures over the past months. Suddenly, at the beginning of April, Monotonous Larks started their incessant calls, which is a sign of the coming dry season. The last few days also showed the slow return of mammals to permanent water sources in the reserve. Elephants, zebra, impala and kudu magically came to drink before volunteers' ecstatic eyes.

This month, with between 5 and 10 volunteers at a time, work has been exceptionally efficient. Volunteers have removed incredible lengths of wire fencing that will be reused to build a "boma" for the reintroduction of wild dogs. We have also created a new road leading to 'Sunset Kopje', on which the group had the magical experience of sleeping outside on the ground! Our roads could finally get repaired after the rains stopped and most major dongas have, to everyone's great relief, already been filled with sand!

Another major happening this month is the discovery of a new leopard cub! At about 3 to 4 months old, this little cat made everyone's heart sing. After a few attempts to find the Kopje of Eden where the cats were reported to be, we finally spotted the stunning mother, well-camouflaged and resting peacefully. Suddenly, to the group's total amazement, a dark, fluffy, miniature version appeared from behind the rocks, joined its mother and gave us a magnificent spectacle by feeding on small kills in front of the red sunset. We cannot wait to watch as this adored young leopard grows!

And finally, we sadly had to say goodbye to Alistair Wilmot who has been a key figure in this project over the last years and who has always created unique and memorable experiences for volunteers. We all wish him a wonderful adventure on his travels and hope to see him here in Motsiri again soon!

In this month's edition, we hear from Julie and Cecilia about their experiences at camp on page 4. There is an update on the project over the last month on page 3, and plenty of photos to share on pages 5 and 6!

Enjoy our month of adventures!

Elsa Stamm
Camp Manager and Social Manager
Projects Abroad Wild at Tuli Conservation Project

PROJECT UPDATES

Fence Removal

This project aims to take down a huge, unused fence and, at a later stage, use this material to build a boma, which is a fenced area that helps to re-introduce wild dogs into the reserve. Wild dogs are the most endangered carnivores in Africa so you can imagine how exciting it is to work towards their introduction here at Wild at Tuli! They will need to acclimatise to their new surroundings in the boma first before being totally set free. The fence we are removing is 30 wires high and covers an area of 2,500 hectares. This fenced area was formerly used to breed exotic antelopes such as Sable and Roan Antelopes, but this activity stopped since the reserve was bought by a new owner. Volunteers have learnt fast and turned into fence removing experts. Volunteer's team up in pairs, one unclipping a strand of wire from the metal poles while the other rolls the wire until it gets too heavy to carry. Only then do we cut the wire so that long lengths are available to use in the future. We have successfully rolled over 8 km of wire so far!



Road Clearing to Sleep-Out Kopje

A new road appeared in the landscape around Motswiri! Volunteers worked hard under the African sun to clear a short but rocky road in only 2 days. The new road, nicknamed "Sunset Boulevard", starts near the famous Mushroom Rock and leads to a kopje further away into the bush. This kopje has a flat centre with rocks surrounding it, giving a wonderful view over the area and onto the ever-stunning sunset. Alistair led the clearing of the new road with lots of machete work to cut trees and clear the sides of the road. Many rocks needed to be removed and some were so big that special jacking and towing was required to get them out of the way. However, our hard work soon paid off. As soon as the road was completed and before the hardworking volunteers left camp, we all enjoyed a magical sleep-out on "Sunset Kopje"! After a nice dinner on our pride rock, everyone slept on the ground with volunteers taking turns to keep watch for any unexpected visitors.



Road Repair

As the rains came to an end and after they eroded the roads and created dongas (aka. holes), it was time to start the much needed job of "Road Repair". As it is also rather uncomfortable to drive on rollercoaster roads and jump out of your seat on countless occasions, it was a relief to start the work! Our focus this month was the repair of the main road from Motswiri Camp to the dirt road that cuts our reserve in two. Volunteers used picks to dig holes in the road and spades and wheelbarrows to get hard sand to fill the dongas. When necessary, a dam of rocks was built on the sides of the road to prevent water from accumulating at that spot again. Volunteers were so dedicated in the task that they even added sand in the original colour to the repaired section as a finishing touch "so it looks beautiful too". The main bumpy areas of the road have been repaired this month and we will continue efforts over the next months for smoother and even more enjoyable drives!



VOLUNTEER STORIES

Sleep-out on Sunset Kopje!

This morning we all woke up very tired. In fact, we spent the night on the kopje that we cleared the day before. It is such a beautiful place! It was really exciting to sleep in the middle of the wilderness! We took it in shifts to stay awake for 2 hours, while others were sleeping to keep guard for what happened around us. So, it was with a cup of tea that Michele and I were watching over the sleeping volunteers, and we had the chance to see two hyenas! At around 5:30 am, we woke up some volunteers to see the sunrise at the top of the kopje. It was gorgeous! When everyone was awake, we packed everything and went back to camp to have our breakfast. After breakfast, it was time to say goodbye to Tim and Anne :(. Then everyone went back to bed to rest after this long night.

In the afternoon, we went to collect all the camera traps to see if there were any good pictures. It was really cool to see elephants, baboons as well as impalas. I am only here for a week but I would really like to stay longer. There is so much to discover!

Julie Suhard, 18 years old, 1 week of stay, France

Moving Mountains

It is time to repair the road! The aim was to repair the end of the road between Motswiri Camp and the big dirt road. We did a really nice job and the crossing is no longer bumpy :). We cut the branches, repaired another bump and, of course, we put a little bit of sand on top of the brown dirt, which we filled the bumps with. So it looked beautiful too. Then we carried on with a very bumpy part and lots of stones. It was a difficult job and when we were finished with removing stones and filling the holes with sand, we went back home totally exhausted.

In the afternoon, we dropped the camera traps at a beautiful place with a spring and kopjes. There were a lot of interesting tracks and we are all very excited for the results of the cameras. There were many baboons too and Alistair tried to copy them. I don't know what was funnier, the confused baboons or Ali! Because it was Ali's last week we went on a very high kopje. The tradition of that kopje was to grab a stone and carry it to the top. Sweaty and breathing heavily, we arrived at a small hill with stones from people before us. The view was absolutely stunning. I had never seen such a red sunset. The nice breeze cooled us down. It was one of the most beautiful moments of my life and I have never had such a wonderful red way back home. Perfect.

Cecilia Zuber, 16 years old, 3 months of stay, Switzerland



BUSH MEMORIES



The beginning of our sleep-out on Sunset Kopje...



... and the end!



Our new gorgeous leopard cub resting beside its mother



Swimming in camp's flowing drainage line



Bush dinner for Renate's birthday!



Mopane worm



Bernadette and her legendary move!



Baboon



Goodbye Alistair!



Cooling down at Solomon's Walls



Carmine Bee-eater



Colorful centipede