

ProjectsAbroad™



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The August team revel at Motswiri Camp!

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Editor's Note

Welcome to the August 2013 Botswana Conservation Newsletter!

The worst of the winter is over here at Motswiri, in terms of the cold. Nights are becoming slightly warmer, with a few very gusty exceptions, and the days are definitely heating up. Volunteers are taking the opportunity to work on their much sought after African tan (ridding themselves of unwanted short and sock tan lines) and the motivation to start building a swimming pool at the camp is becoming more pressing. Volunteer numbers have eased after the peak season and we have said goodbye to the last of our 2 week summer special volunteers. Camp is definitely becoming a little less manic!

Of course, there is still plenty of work to be done. The next few months are the critical part of the year in terms of wildlife survival, as the reserve awaits the first summer rains and the rejuvenation which that brings. Volunteers continue to busily prepare for this, and great effort has been put in to soil erosion work and the soil sampling preparations for the building of a dam on the property. We have also taken the chance, whilst the river levels are low, to carry out anti-poaching and alien plant removal on the many islands which are usually flooded throughout the summer. Keep up the fantastic work!

This month really has been one of the top for exciting wildlife sightings. A young lion cub was intercepted on the way for a border drop off, waddling across the road, no doubt its pride were not far off, watching carefully. This is only the 2nd lion sighting in the history of the project at Wild at Tuli, very promising for the growth of the lion population. Just this morning we had an inquisitive Spotted Hyena pad through the camp investigating clothes, tents, shoes and even the group of volunteers and staff standing by and watching her. Very thrilling!

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

Enjoy our month of adventures!

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Projects Abroad Wild at Tuli Conservation Project

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It's Time for Springcleaning

Sarah Piller, 20 years old, 1 month stay, Switzerland

After some of us came home this morning from a successful sleep-out, the others left for Mathathane village to paint the classroom walls at the primary school. One hour of a windy car ride later, we arrived at the school. The children gave us a warm welcome and we tried our best to make the classrooms look nicer. We sanded the walls, protected the floors and TRIED to paint the walls. The paint didn't always land in quite the right place, and thanks to our little paint fight, we discovered that paint looks quite nice on people too. Furthermore, some of us showed our monster side by chasing after the innocent children. We are not surprised that African people are some of the best marathon runners in the world! A short coke and crisps stop in the shop and we were on our way back home.



The afternoon activity took place in the waterholes. The pump is broken at the moment and so the two waterholes are temporarily empty. Motivated as



always, we took this opportunity to clean them. Thanks to our work, the waterholes won't be filled up with mud when the water comes back on and will be clean for the wildlife to drink. Volunteer activities escalate sooner or later and Tess came up with a poo-spitting competition. We are just too far away from civilization I guess! On the way home we enjoyed a wonderful sunset.

I am now sitting at the fire enjoying the melodious singing of Georges. What a nice ending to another exciting day in the bush!

Adventures in the Bush

Mikkel Beiter, 25 years old, Denmark, 6 week stay

We started the day with some breakfast while watching the sun creep up over the horizon. Quite a nice way to begin the day! At 7:30 we went to do road maintenance with AB. There is a road which runs too near to one of the waterholes and that will disturb the wildlife from coming to drink at the waterhole. Instead, a new road now runs further away from the waterhole. Our job was too close off the old road by dragging dead branches across its length, catching run off sediment and seeds when the summer rains arrive.



After the activities this morning, Max, Michael and I did our first laundry, with great results! For lunch we had pizza and leftovers from last night.

In the afternoon, I went with Mijke, Will, Anne-C and Dave to do a baobab tree census. Currently, we are investigating whether there is a relationship between the extent of elephant damage on a tree, and its proximity to water.



Every baobab tree has been plotted on the GPS. We mapped each of the water lines on the reserve by walking their length and recording the route on the GPS. The GPS can then be used to calculate the distance of the closest water source to each individual tree. It was a really nice walk! On the way back to camp, we enjoyed an African sunset from the car. The sunsets here are just amazing!

Back at the camp, I made a fire for everyone and we had spaghetti bolognaise for dinner. Very nice!

Wild at Tuli Project Update

Soil Sampling

A large development at Wild at Tuli is the proposal to build a large dam that will flood approximately 5 hectares and should provide plenty of water for the animals throughout the year, especially during drought years which are likely to become more common. In order for the dam to be built we must investigate what the soil is like below the surface to see whether the land is suitable to hold the water. This involves digging several holes to a depth of 1.5m to allow an expert to come in and analyse the soil. If the soil is too sandy or gravelly then it will not hold the water, so we are hoping for clay soils all the way to the bottom of the holes.



Crocodile Census

At the beginning of the year, large floods on the Limpopo allowed 15,000 crocodiles to escape from a crocodile farm downstream from Wild at Tuli on the South African side of the river. Several thousand crocodiles were recaptured in the proceeding days but several thousand more made good their escape and have been travelling up and down the river. Our crocodile census has started to record an influx of crocodiles which are almost certainly captive breed, due to their total lack of fear of humans and their habit of swimming towards you because they think they're going to be fed. We will continue the census to see whether these individuals have any kind of impact on the wild crocodiles which still reside in the river alongside them.



Mathathane School Painting

It is the winter school holidays here in Botswana. This has allowed us to get back into the primary school in the local village and continue painting the classrooms which are in need of new coat of paint. We have now painted about half of the classrooms at the school so we still have a way to go but slow progress is better than no progress.



Alien Plant Removal

As the winter has killed off most of the stands of Smelter's Bush which we have been removing since early in the year, our focus for alien plant removal has switched. We have found several prickly pear trees (*Opuntia ficus-indica*) growing along the Limpopo and our aim is to remove these before they begin to bear fruit in the summer, to prevent them from spreading. Removing them involves cutting them down, digging out the roots, leaving the plant to dry in the sun and then burning it to remove all traces and any possibility of it growing back from small cuttings left on the ground.



Bush Memories



Clockwise from top left: Removing wire from the public road; Blue Wildebeest bachelorette; crossing the Limpopo River is no mean feat!; stunning Crimson-breasted Shrike; morning visitor to Motswiri; building erosion control barriers; the perfect end to a day's work.





Clockwise from top left: *Magnificent male Kudu; two Leopard cubs spotted on a koppie; burning alien Prickly Pear cactus; Elephants quench their thirst at the waterhole; an excellent climbing wall for the village children; Klipspringer poised and alert; the finished product of Baobab repair.*