

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

For Projects Abroad Botswana 



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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the November 2014 Botswana Conservation Newsletter!

A few weeks after clouds had started to build up beautifully in the African sky, it finally happened: it rained! The first rains, announcing the beginning of summer, are always awaited with much anticipation as the savanna gets drier and drier, the climate hotter and hotter, and both beasts and humans wish for the return of the 'holy' water. Baobab trees were the first to show new sprouting leaves after the first few droplets. When the real rain fell on Kwa Tuli, it was like an instant, magical change of landscape. In a few days only, the colour green reappeared in the landscape as leaves, grass and flowers came to life. Elephants, which had been concentrating around permanent water sources, suddenly left their much trampled water and went off as if set free, spreading in the green vegetation (food) surrounded by many puddles (drinking water). A happy time in Kwa Tuli!

This month, solidarity was demonstrated as volunteers helped out other nature reserves in need (p. 2). Mammal censuses and inventories throughout the year have allowed us to record a total of 39 different mammal species on Kwa Tuli nature reserve, out of the 55 species possibly found in the area (p. 2). Volunteers have also undertaken a long, hot walk along the reserve's boundaries and removed old fencing wires and poles which could harm the wildlife (p. 2).

Sightings have been great again during the month of November! Our brown hyena mother and her three pups are doing well and giving us a beautiful insight of this elusive species through camera traps, photos and videos. The four lions seen in September, an adult female and three younger males have come back to Kwa Tuli and hunted an eland. If some of the volunteers did not see the lions themselves, they found a spotted hyena and a leopard scavenging leftovers. Last but not least, Dr Helena Fitchat, owner of the reserve, has rescued a young orphaned honey badger. He is being taken care of at the Motswiri Camp and will be released into the reserve shortly. His name is Googly, he is absolutely adorable and he has got some character! Make sure you read the next edition to learn more about him and about the release operation!

On page 3 of this newsletter, read an update on our projects by our Conservation Manager, Sophie Juget and Camp manager, Elsa Stamm. On page 4, we hear from Markus Miller and Erik Mortensen about their experiences in the African bush. And finally, there are plenty of photos to share on pages 5 and 6.

Elsa Stamm
Camp Manager
Projects Abroad Wild at Tuli Conservation Project



PROJECT UPDATES

Helping other nature reserves

Solidarity in the African bush is important and if a neighbouring reserve needs assistance, we are always available to help. This month we helped out twice. Firstly, on a Sunday morning, after a windy night, we were called in the early hours to assist in removing a century tree that had fallen on part of a lodge. Volunteers worked hard, in the dust, to remove the huge trunk and branches. We also packed away all the grass that could be saved from the former thatch roof for later rebuilding. In the end a little jump in the swimming pool made everybody very happy. The following Sunday, a bush fire was detected. Luckily, the trees are bare of leaves at the moment so the fire didn't spread far. The problem was that there was no road access to the fire. However, volunteers stood ready in case their help was needed, next to our 1000 litre water tank. The fire got beaten manually by other brave helpers; volunteers learned about African bush fires and how hard they can be to stop. One of our neighbours remembered a time when a fire went on for two weeks before they were able to stop it.



Mammals Census

A total of 39 species of mammals, out of the 55 species possibly found in the area, have been identified in the reserve during our censuses, spoor identification activities and thanks to our camera traps. A census, or a mammal inventory, is an important activity to know the species that we have in the reserve and their evolution. It also helps to understand the utilization of waterholes throughout the year. We are currently conducting censuses at four different sites, all overlooking a waterhole or a natural spring. Mornings, afternoons, evenings and even through the whole night as volunteers cover all time frames to record all possible mammal species, some with more luck than others!



Wire Removal

In the past, most of the land in this part of Botswana was divided into cattle farms, separated by wire fences. Nowadays, most of them have been converted into wildlife reserves and fences have either fallen down or have been removed and animals can roam freely again. This month, while exploring the reserve, volunteers found some wire on what used to be a fence line between our reserve and the neighbouring one. A huge patrol along the now invisible boundary of the reserve has thus been undertaken with volunteers to find and remove all remaining wire and poles that once used to form the fence. This is important to avoid for animals being caught in the wire or getting injured when walking on a pole. Plus, walking in the African bush is always an adventure loved by all the volunteers. On the ten kilometres of former fence that has been patrolled this month, volunteers have removed around one kilometre of old fencing wire and the metal poles will too be removed soon to complete the job. This patrol will continue until the all of the 5 000-hectare reserve's boundaries are completely checked and safe for the wildlife. Future volunteers, be prepared to walk!



VOLUNTEER STORIES

An adventure that rocks!

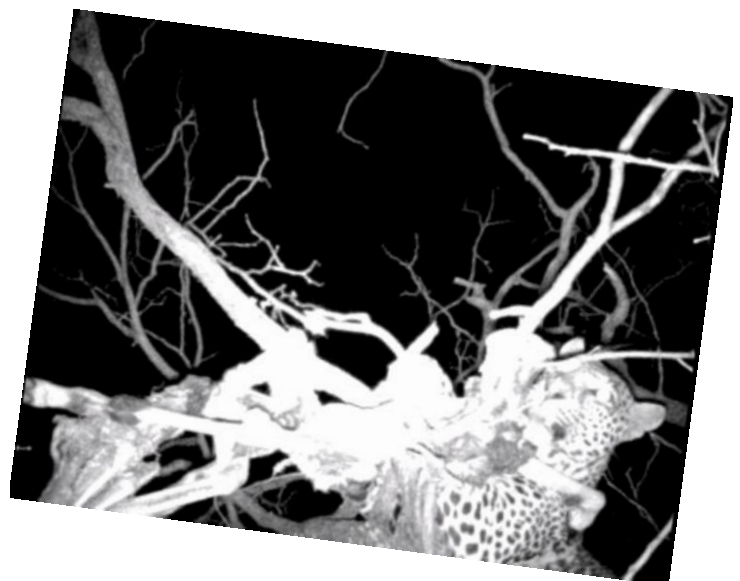
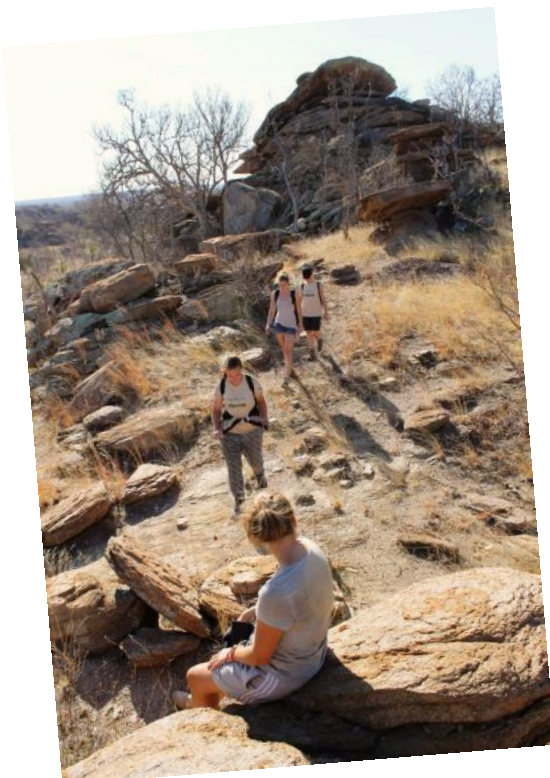
Today we woke up early at 7 am to set out and remove old fences from the boundaries of the reserve. The reason for this is because many animals can get caught in the wire and hurt themselves. Using wire cutters and gloves we untangled the fence, cut the wire and rolled it up to bring back to camp. When we returned there was a nice meal cooked by Jane, the chef. As always it was very good and filled our stomachs nicely. The second activity was an adventure walk with Elsa and Jo, our guides. We climbed rocks, examined wildlife and talked about the reserve. On the way back we saw a massive kudu about twenty meters from camp. Dinner was ready when we returned; being very hungry we all ate very fast. In the evening it was time to play cards and we played a game called Cambio. Finally some of us went and took our bucket shower and we called it a night and went to bed.

Markus Miller, 23 years old, 2 weeks of stay, Canada

Full moon animals

This morning Sophie, the conservation manager, showed us some camera trap footage from the previous night; from a watering hole just a couple of hundred meters from camp. Yesterday evening they had discovered a leopard kill up in a tree and the cameras showed us night time videos of the leopard eating its kill, followed by a brown hyena taking care of the leftovers on the ground – possibly the same hyena that we've previously seen footage of with her three pups. Really cool! Afterwards we left for the day's picnic, where we went to a new spot on the Limpopo River. After eating our lunch we went for a walk along the river. We saw a couple of crocs floating in the murky water as well as a lot of birds and some old hippo tracks. After dinner, as we were playing a game of poker, we suddenly noticed an elephant silhouette against the light of the full moon, standing just five meters outside the open walls of the living room area – where we were. They move so quietly. A very interesting and eventful day!

Erik Mortensen, 20 years old, 8 weeks of stay, Denmark



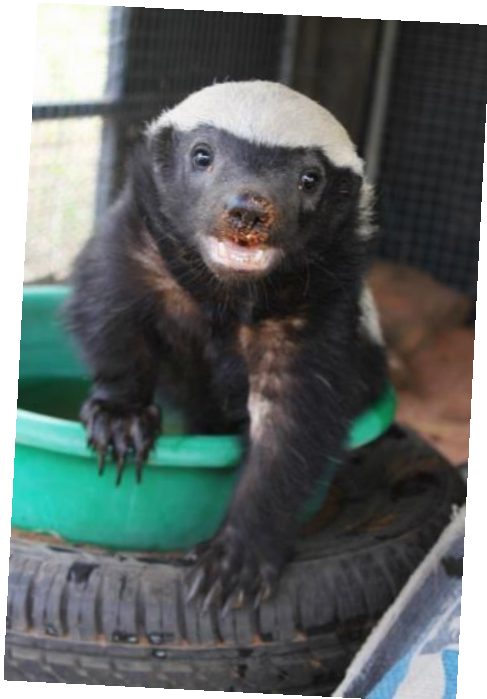
BUSH MEMORIES



Cecilie working on "erosion control"



Brown hyena mother with pups



Googly, the rehabilitated honey badger



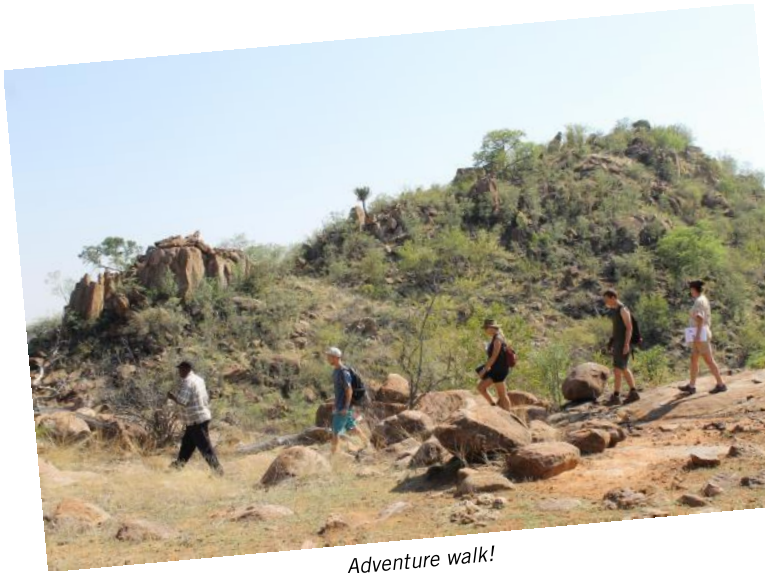
Volunteers spotting the freshly arrived migrant birds!



Erosion Control



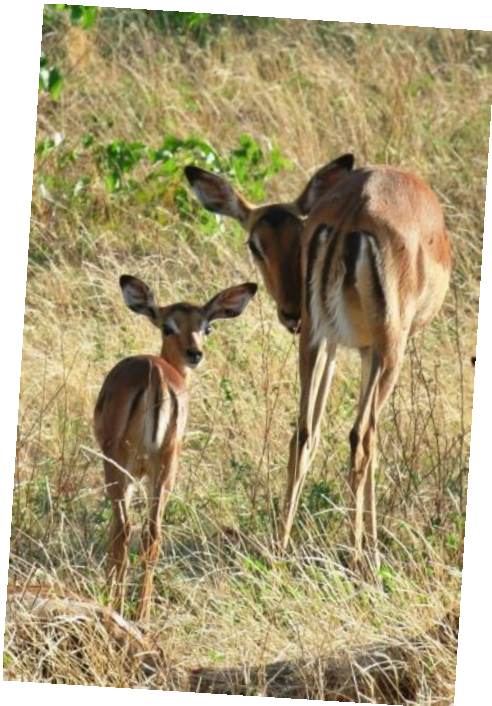
A beautiful leopard sighting



Adventure walk!



Elephant herd with a tiny baby!



First baby impala!



Leopard skull



Malina on "road creation"



The beautiful trumpet thorn flower