

THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER

For Projects Abroad Botswana 



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Projects Abroad

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the October 2014 Botswana Conservation Newsletter!

Botswana has been hot and dry over October, the landscape looking like a typical African documentary. The bush is open, allowing us to spot animals easily. Wildlife pay frequent and regular visits to the reserve's water points. Both animals and volunteers get active early in the morning and late in the afternoon when the temperature is cool.

This month, volunteers have protected two young Baobab trees from the giant elephants in active search of moisture and nutrients from the Baobab's bark (p. 2). They also built a new scenic road in the reserve, winding through kopjes, the small isolated hills characteristic to this area. The works were completed in just one month! (p. 2) Eventually, leopards allowed us to observe them quite a lot over the past month and we were able to identify two new leopards to add to our database of now 14 cats (p. 2).

Not only leopards, but also hyenas, giraffes and of course Tuli's huge herds of elephants made October very special. Leopards and hyenas joined volunteer-sleep-outs for a drink at the waterhole, cunningly visited our camp or happily posed on a rock for volunteers' total excitement. Elephants too gave us memories of a lifetime. A herd of 53 elephants of all sizes crossed our camp in a full moon night. Magical. The following morning, we spotted them again, this time approaching the water to drink and play with mud. An unequalled entertainment for volunteers and elephants! At last, Captain, elephant bull and regular visitor to Motswiri Camp, gave volunteers a sighting of a lifetime. First spotted close to a volunteer's tent, he then approached the bathrooms to drink from the two drums filled with water available for laundry. He continued his show eating from a few trees and making his way towards the tiny bird bath standing only a few steps away from us. A breath-taking, suspending moment that will stay in everyone's mind and heart for a long time.

On page 3 of this newsletter, read an update on our projects by our Conservation Manager, Sophie Juget. On page 4, we hear from Marianne Levy-Devely and Lisa Gettings 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

Baobab Protection

The baobab is an iconic tree of the bushveld, living millions of years, and reaching great width. About 100 baobabs grow on the Kwa Tuli Reserve, the oldest of them being just under 1,000 years old. Despite its massive appearance some trees need a little support from our volunteers to upgrade their protection against thirsty elephants. Two Baobabs were taken care of this month. 40 percent of the wood is made up of water and elephants use it as refresher station during the dry season. They dig and peel the tree to chew the moisture out of the tree. Some trees have been deeply marked by the elephants. While Baobabs are able to survive some level of destruction, they need protection because they wouldn't survive excessive elephant utilization. A simple but effective technique is used: Scattering pointy rocks around the trees. It is a durable technic for the tree, non-invasive or dangerous for animals and environment. The wide distance prevents elephants, who don't like to walk on pointy stones or instable ground, from reaching the bark of the tree. Of course we made sure to leave enough trees in reach for the elephants to quench their thirst. How many rocks we have picked up? We stopped counting...



Road Creating

This month we put much energy and efforts in the creation of a new road on the Northern side of the reserve. This road will make a scenic alternative from the main, well-used road. The new road runs between kopjes and we are hoping the view from above will help us spot rare wildlife such as leopards, brown hyenas, spotted hyenas, rock dassies or hyrax, klipspringers or even African elephants who are pretty good climbers. The view from the road is amazing with kopjes on both sides and a nice view on the surroundings. It was not an easy job! Volunteers had to cut trees and remove stumps and rocks. With the help of our motivated volunteers the 600 meter long road was completed in less than a month. Well done to everyone involved for improving the reserve's game driving paths!



Leopard ID

This month we have been able to identify three new members of the reserve's leopard family. Leopards are amongst the rarest animals in the reserve and go by the nickname "Holy Grail". They are shy, nocturnal animals and difficult to spot. Often confused with the cheetah, the leopard is a powerfully built cat, with rosettes or broken circles of irregular black spots. This cat is built to carry heavy preys up trees with its powerful neck and jaw. They can live in a myriad habitats and feeding on whatever is the most common in the area. In Kwa Tuli the main staple is the impala. To identify a leopard manually is not an easy task. Each leopard has a specific coat with different spots patterns and characteristics (scars, marking on the nose or ears) that make them unique. It is a long and difficult process, with each picture either from a sighting or from a camera trap picture being analysed for identification. At the moment 14 leopards have been identified at Kwa Tuli. Each of them has their own identification kit: spots features, territory, and sightings, all of which are recorded in a file. Our aim is to know the present population, their territory and movements, as well as the population's evolution.



VOLUNTEER STORIES

Exciting exploratory walk

On day 31 we woke up early and left the camp at 6am for an adventure walk with Ali and Elsa, our guides. Best activity ever! We were so excited because we went to a new area, the neighbouring reserve where we will be working, too. We started exploring and found burrows to put camera traps, baobabs to protect, and much more. Our first discovery was a huge, old baobab that was hollow inside: best place to make a honeymoon suite for Ali. Inside, we could see a dead Barn Owl. Just after that we saw an impala drinking in the clearest spring I have ever seen. The best moment of this walk was the leopard tracking. We found very fresh trails which went in the direction of a kopje. Unfortunately, the leopard heard us and left. Luckily a group of about 20 elands passed just in front of us – there is always something to see. Hiding on the kopje we could hear the “click click” of their hooves. On the way back we found a baobab with a hole that had the shape of a heart. We took a few pictures and came back to camp.

Marianne Levy-Devely, 19 years old, 12 weeks of stay, France

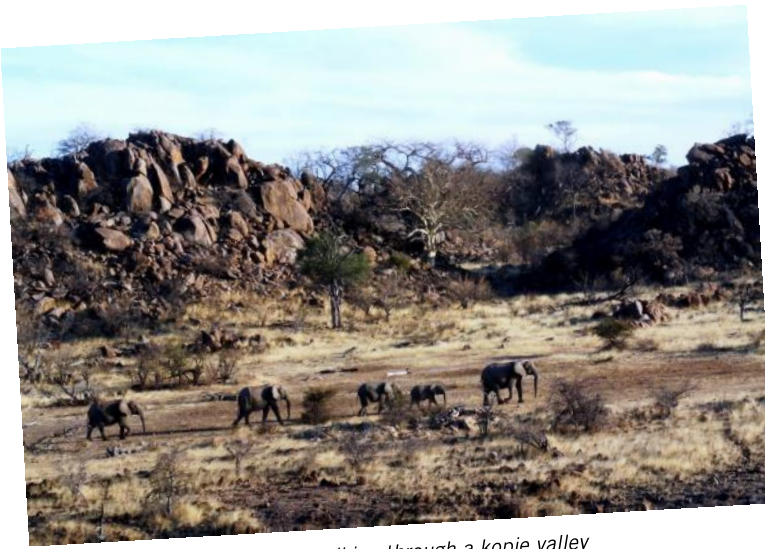
Most special animals, all in one day!

Today was my fifth day in Botswana and we woke up early at Mamatumi, where our group had done a sleep out. It had been a quiet night but we had seen a leopard and also a herd of eland so it had been really successful. It was lovely to sit and watch the sun rise and impalas drinking from the watering hole. I had the morning off as we had done a sleep out so I relaxed, sunbathed, had lunch and then headed off for road building at 3pm. The road is nearly finished and should be completed before I leave here [it is now completed] – we were able to walk to the end of it having finished cutting back trees, digging out stones and stumps. It was hard work but a lot of fun. We also climbed a kopje and the views were amazing. On the way back we saw elephants and zebras. Back at camp, we had dinner and played games. We were about to go to bed when we spotted a hyena in camp!

Lisa Gettings, 43 years old, 4 weeks of stay, UK



BUSH MEMORIES



Elephants walking through a kopje valley



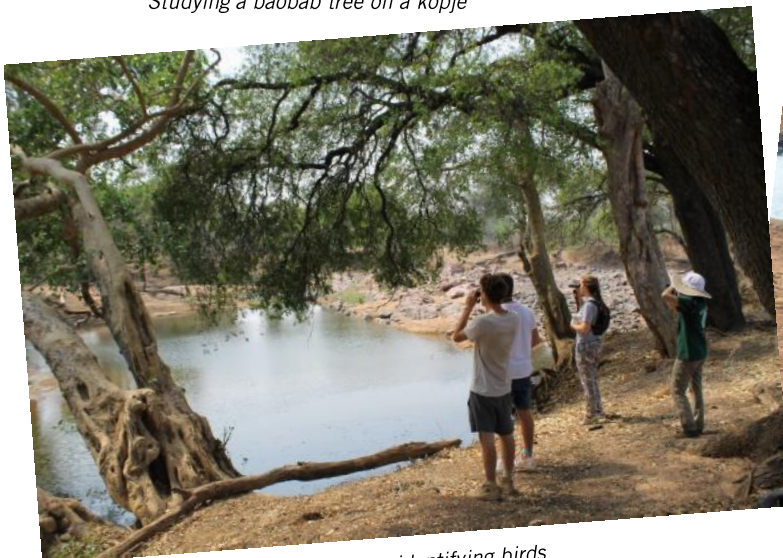
Young leopard tortoise



Studying a baobab tree on a kopje



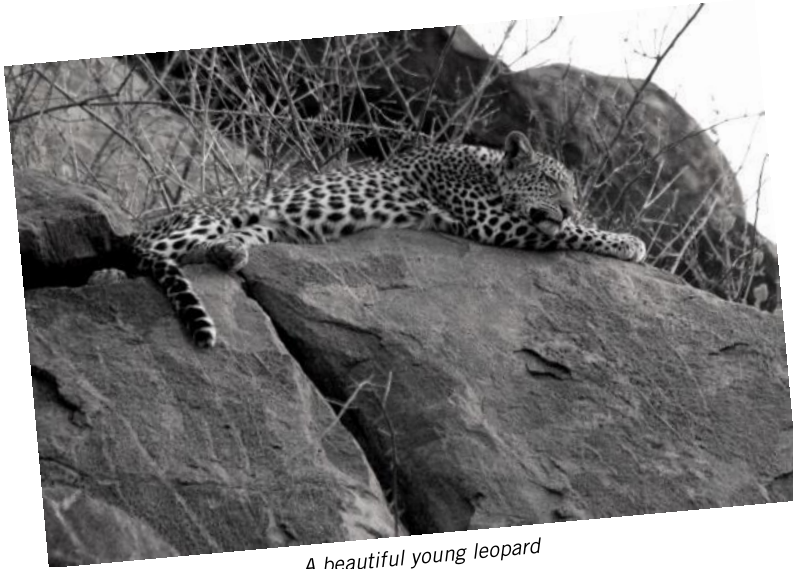
Motswiri Camp's resident frog



Volunteers identifying birds



A spotted hyena drinking during a mammal inventory



A beautiful young leopard



Volunteers measuring a baobab tree



Repairing the veterinary fence



Bull elephant 'Captain' in Motswiri Camp



A rare brown hyena at her den!



Road... Repaired!